

THE LIMITS OF OBEDIENCE: BRIGADIER GENERAL THOMAS J. WOOD'S
PERFORMANCE DURING THE BATTLE OF CHICKAMAUGA

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Military History

by

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ABSTRACT

THE LIMITS OF OBEDIENCE: BG THOMAS J. WOOD'S PERFORMANCE
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This thesis is a historical analysis of the order that Brigadier General Thomas J. Wood received from Major General William Rosecrans during the Battle of Chickamauga. There are many questions concerning Wood's actions on 20 September 1863. Wood's obedience to this written order created the gap into which Lieutenant General James Longstreet drove his right wing. This thesis will discuss the circumstances surrounding this order and the effect it had on the battle. It will investigate the limits of obedience and disobedience and will seek to determine if Wood should have disobeyed, or at least questioned, this critical order issued by General Rosecrans.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On 19 and 20 September 1863 one of the bloodiest battles of the American Civil War was fought. In the densely wooded hills of north Georgia, the Union Army of the Cumberland commanded by Major General William Rosecrans and the Confederate Army of Tennessee commanded by General Braxton Bragg fought the Battle of Chickamauga. Though this battle occurred over 140 years ago, its study is significant in that it explores issues that are timeless, to include bravery, duty, and obedience. Military leaders must issue orders that are clear and concise so that subordinates understand them, and should be issued with complete situational awareness if possible. The result of poorly articulated orders is potentially the death of a soldier or soldiers or a lost engagement with potential strategic implications. The very nature of soldiering is to obey orders. How do soldiers and leaders determine if these orders are for the good of the unit and mission? Can they question their orders? If not clear, when is it appropriate to clarify what is meant by their supervisor? The purpose of this thesis is to take a known historical event and dissect it. It will be explored from every possible angle, for the relevance it contains for the modern military leader, and to determine what, as military leaders, our limits of obedience are.

Overview

Months before the actual Battle of Chickamauga was fought, the conditions were being set for it. The Army of the Cumberland had been in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, since January 1863, preparing for its eventual pursuit of the Army of Tennessee. It began

early in the morning of 24 June 1863.¹ Through good intelligence, detailed planning, and flawless execution, the Army of the Cumberland was able to decisively gain favorable ground from the Army of Tennessee.² Pushing his Union forces hard, Major General William Rosecrans forced his opponent, General Braxton Bragg, and his Confederate forces southward toward Chattanooga, Tennessee. Once in Chattanooga, Bragg began to pull in reinforcements and to refit his tired army.

While the Confederate Army occupied Chattanooga, Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland approached from the northwest. Rosecrans was under pressure to engage and defeat the Army of Tennessee. After the Confederate loss at Gettysburg, the Union leadership believed Rosecrans could deliver a crippling, perhaps even decisive blow to the Confederacy. Though Rosecrans had enjoyed success thus far in the campaign, it was a slow and methodical success. His leaders in Washington were hoping for a much more rapid advance than Rosecrans was providing. In an effort to get Rosecrans to move across the Tennessee River, General-in-Chief Henry Halleck gave Rosecrans a peremptory order to move his army immediately and report the movement of each corps until the river was crossed. This caused Rosecrans, hot tempered as he was, to gather his lieutenants and, with their support, he drafted his resignation if the order was not modified. His leaders in Washington conceded to his threat and backed off.³

Finally, in mid-August, General Rosecrans began closing the Army of the Cumberland on Chattanooga. He directed the XXI Corps, under command of Major General Thomas Crittenden, to approach Chattanooga from the northwest. He had the XIV Corps commanded by Major General George Thomas, approach from the south

through Stevens Gap. Even further to the south was the XX Corps, commanded by Major General Alexander McCook, who was moving through Winston's Gap.

Rosecrans directed Crittenden and his XXI Corps, located north of Chattanooga, to conduct a demonstration in an attempt to make Bragg believe that the entire Army of the Cumberland was crossing in that area. The ruse worked and Rosecrans was able to get into Bragg's decision cycle, compelling Bragg to move his army away from the forces to the northwest, and in turn ran right into the rest of the Union forces approaching from the south. This resulted in Bragg turning his army to the southeast.

At this point, Rosecrans was successful. His mission had been to capture Chattanooga and keep the Confederate forces from using it. However, ecstatic that he had the Army of Tennessee on the run, Rosecrans ignored the fact that his Army was spread out and vulnerable. In addition, the enemy that Rosecrans thought was routed, disjuncted and on the run was actually steadily receiving reinforcements from Mississippi, and was preparing for a stand near La Fayette, Georgia. Instead of heeding the advice of his corps commanders and massing his army, Rosecrans, who was normally slow and methodical in his preparation, continued to push his fragmented forces hard in pursuit. This was almost a fatal error, and if not for the dysfunctional leadership of the Army of Tennessee, it would have been.

The Army of Tennessee was plagued with a poor leadership climate that permeated virtually the entire army. Even senior commanders within the army displayed their disdain and lack of respect for Braxton Bragg. This would ultimately cost the Confederates several opportunities to render crushing blows to the Army of the Cumberland. On 9 and 10 September, Lieutenant General D.H. Hill and Major General

Thomas Hindman refused orders by General Bragg and missed an excellent opportunity to defeat Thomas' XIV corps at McLemore's Cove. A near repeat of this missed opportunity happened on 13 September when Lieutenant General Leonidas Polk and Major General Simon Buckner failed to obey Bragg and hence missed the chance to defeat Crittenden's XXI Corps at Lee and Gordon's Mill.⁴

These two incidents were enough for Rosecrans to finally realize that he was stretched too thin and that if he did not want his army to receive a crippling blow, he needed to consolidate. After achieving this task, he began to slowly move toward a more secure area around Chattanooga. Seeing what Rosecrans was doing, Bragg attempted to stop him. The Army of Tennessee was located on the east side of Chickamauga Creek, and Bragg attempted to place it between the Union forces and Chattanooga. Bragg's intent was to push the Army of the Cumberland south into McLemore's Cove, and being there was no easy exit out of this cove, Bragg felt he would be able to easily defeat Rosecrans' forces.

On 18 September a series of delaying actions by the Union succeeded in delaying the Confederate push and more importantly alerted Rosecrans to what the Confederate forces were doing. The Battle of Chickamauga began on 19 September with a meeting engagement between Thomas' XIV Corps and elements of Confederate cavalry. The battle began in the north and, like a crescendo, picked up strength and momentum as it worked its way down the battle lines to the south. The next day, faulty communications within the Confederate ranks turned what was supposed to be a dawn attack into a mid-morning attack. Confusion and the fog of war were everywhere. Rosecrans received an erroneous report of a gap in his lines and consequently, at approximately 1100, gave the

following order to Brigadier General Thomas J. Wood, commander of the 1st Division, XXI Corps,

The general commanding directs that you close up on Reynolds as fast as possible and support him.⁵

The order contradicted itself, and the circumstances surrounding it and its execution are still in contention today. The result of it is not. At precisely the same time as Wood's 1st Division pulled out of the battle lines, Longstreet filled the resulting gap with his Confederate Corps. This penetration fragmented the Union battle lines and ended up routing the Union forces. Even though elements of Thomas' XIV corps, Wood's 1st Division and some other units continued to fight, the battle was lost. Rosecrans pulled his Army back to Chattanooga to regroup.

Historiography

Conventional historiography paints the following picture. Brigadier General Thomas J. Wood was in a fit of pique after Major General Rosecrans rebuked him for being tardy in relieving Major General Negley's Division on the morning of 20 September 1863. Embarrassed, indeed even humiliated, Wood took what he knew to be a poor and potentially disastrous order from Rosecrans and immediately executed it, despite the obvious ramifications to the battle at hand. In addition to his execution of this order, Wood carefully folded up the order itself and tucked it safely away so that he could later prove that he was only following orders. In an attempt to justify his actions, he gained approval from both Major General McCook and Major General Thomas. This was all done to spite Rosecrans, who was responsible for Wood's bruised ego.⁶

Deeper investigation yields a different picture. A little known letter, written by Wood himself provides a different point of view than most contemporary historians share. Within the editorial Wood makes five major points: (1) Rosecrans did not reprimand him that morning. He had a conversation with Rosecrans, but it was not argumentative in nature. (2) Two other brigades of Brigadier General Sheridan's Division had already created a gap in the Union battle lines to his right; the movement of his division was only a widening of the already existing gap. (3) Military precedent precludes any subordinate disobeying or questioning an order during the heat of battle. Anything short of immediate compliance to an order is potentially disastrous. It must be assumed that the commander has better situational awareness and is making decisions based on this awareness. (4) It was required by regulation to maintain a copy of orders as well as being both customary to do so and necessary in order to recreate events for an after-action narrative. In addition to this, Wood's adjutant-general kept the order, not Wood himself. (5) Major General McCook was present when Wood received the order, reinforced it immediately and told Wood he would fill in the area that Wood's 1st Division left. As for Major General George H. Thomas, Wood was to support Reynolds' division, which belonged to Thomas. It was quite natural to inquire as to the nature of the support required by Reynolds and proper for Wood to allow Thomas to change the location that he was most needed.⁷

This thesis is a historical analysis of the order that Brigadier General Thomas J. Wood received from Major General William Rosecrans during the Battle of Chickamauga. It is significant in that it explores issues that are timeless to military leaders. The result of poorly articulated orders is potentially the death of soldiers or a lost

engagement with potential strategic implications. There are many questions concerning Wood's actions on 20 September 1863. Wood's obedience to this written order created the gap into which Lieutenant General James Longstreet drove his Right Wing. This thesis will discuss the circumstances surrounding this order and the effect it had on the battle. It will investigate the limits of obedience and disobedience and will seek to determine if Wood should have disobeyed, or at least questioned, this critical order issued by General Rosecrans.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the topic, and sets the stage for further investigation. Chapter 2 takes a close look at Wood himself, his immediate chain of command, and the units that he commanded. Chapter 3 is a road to war, which traces the 1st Division, XXI Army Corps, Army of the Cumberland from Murfreesboro through the first day of the battle, 19 September 1863. Chapter 4 will look closely at the battle on 20 September, the circumstances surrounding the order, what conventional history says about the order, and what new light is shed based on previously unknown material surrounding the incident. Chapter 5 will tell what conclusions can be drawn from this incident, with an emphasis on relevant information from which today's military leader can learn.

¹Steven E. Woodworth, *Six Armies in Tennessee* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 18.

²*Ibid.*, 26.

³Peter Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound: The Battle of Chickamauga* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 24

⁴Steven E. Woodworth, *Chickamauga: A Battlefield Guide with a Section on Chattanooga* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 5.

⁵Lieutenant Colonel Robert N. Scott, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, vol. 30 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1890), 635.

⁶Cozzens, 363

⁷Brigadier General Thomas J. Wood, "The Gaps at Chickamauga," *New York Times*, 19 November 1882, 4.

CHAPTER 2

THOMAS J. WOOD: THE MAN

To truly understand the question of Brigadier General Thomas J. Wood's obedience to the critical order issued to him by Major General William Rosecrans, it is necessary to set the stage. There are countless issues that could have had an impact on Wood's decision to obey the order. Every man involved in the order and the decision to obey it, and there were many, could have had an effect on it and the subsequent outcome. Of particular concern here is there is no real common story. There are discrepancies laced throughout the entire history of this crucial event, depending on who is doing the telling. One gets the unsettling feeling that the senior officers involved in the battle were doing their best to shift the blame of the Army of the Cumberland's defeat to someone other than themselves. In order to be truly objective in the investigation of the obedience of Wood to Rosecrans, the background of those most intimately involved in the battle will be explored. In addition to this, the history of the regiments within the 1st Division, XXI Corps will be explored to gain an overall feel for the unit and its "personality."

Thomas J. Wood

At the time of the Battle of Chickamauga, Thomas John Wood was 39 years old. He was a small man, with a dark complexion from years in the southwest and on the frontier. Though not much is written about him, it seems that he may have had somewhat of a "Napoleon complex," due to his size.¹

Born in Munford, Kentucky on 25 September 1823, Thomas John Wood was the son of George T. Wood and Elizabeth Helm Wood.² He received all of his early

education from the local village schools in Munford.³ Wood's parents were not politicians nor particularly wealthy, so in this sense, he had no perceived advantage over any other officer. In fact, Wood's second cousin, General Ben Hardin Helm, was an officer in the Confederate Army. This certainly did not lead to any preferential treatment. Wood received an appointment to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point, and was a member of the class of 1845. He was a bright and studious cadet, graduating fifth out of his class of forty-one. This high standing in his class led to an appointment in the Topographical Engineers.⁴

After Wood's commission, he was assigned to Major General Zachary Taylor's Army of Observation in Texas, where he was involved in the Mexican War (see figure 1). After arriving in Texas and working on Zachary Taylor's staff, Wood transferred from the Engineers to the Dragoons on 19 October 1846.⁵ Wood's performance during the Mexican War as a lieutenant was noteworthy, as he fought in multiple battles during this conflict, including the Battle of Palo Alto on 8 May 1846, the Battle of Monterey, 21-23 September 1846 and the Battle of Buena Vista, 22-23 February 1847, where he received a brevet promotion to first lieutenant for "gallant and meritorious conduct." For most of the year in 1847 Wood served in the garrison at New Orleans, Louisiana. From 1851-52 he served on the Rio Grande and was in Austin, Texas, and Fort Croghan, Texas, in 1852. From there he was assigned to Fort Mason, Texas, in 1853 and subsequently back to Austin, Texas, through 1854.



Figure 1. Portrait of Thomas J. Wood

Source: Mikel Uriquen, *The Generals of the American Civil War*, 18 January 2005 [Gallery on-line]; available from <http://www.generalsandbrevets.com>; Internet; accessed 20 February 2005.

Wood served on recruiting service in 1854 and 1855 and was then assigned to Kansas, where he saw frontier duty on the Sioux Expedition in 1855, and was promoted to captain, 1st Cavalry, on 3 March of that same year.⁶ Wood was involved in quelling the Kansas Disturbances in 1856 and 1857 and was responsible for escort duties while patrolling the Kansas boundary. He took part in the Utah Expedition in 1858, and in 1859 took a leave of absence and traveled to Europe, but returned to the United States just prior to the Civil War.⁷

Upon his return from Europe, Wood was promoted to major in the 1st Cavalry in March 1861, but did not remain at this rank very long. About two months later, he was

promoted lieutenant colonel, and was responsible for recruiting troops in Indiana during the summer of 1861. He enjoyed significant success in this endeavor, and was rewarded with a promotion to brigadier general of volunteers in the fall of 1861.⁸

Parallel to his promotion within the volunteers, Wood also saw significant promotion within the regular army. Many officers in the army resigned their commissions and joined the Confederate forces, and due to these resignations, Wood rose from the rank of captain to colonel of the 2nd Cavalry in eight months.⁹

Wood was given command of a brigade of Indiana soldiers in Major General Don Carlos Buell's Army of Ohio in the fall of 1861, and in early 1862 he was given command of a division, with which he took part in the second day of fighting at the Battle of Shiloh and then saw action in May 1862 at Corinth, Mississippi.¹⁰

In September 1862 the Army of the Ohio was renamed the Army of the Cumberland. The Department of Kentucky, which constituted that state within a hundred miles of the Ohio River, was merged in the Department of the Cumberland, comprising the states of Kentucky and Tennessee on 15 August 1861. On 9 November, it was renamed the Department of the Ohio, the States of Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana being added. The troops in this region were now organized into the Army of the Ohio, with Major General Don Carlos Buell in command. The army was organized into three corps in September 1862, but the following month the Department of the Cumberland was recreated to consist of Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia, and the Army of the Ohio, which had operated mostly in that region, now officially became the Army of the Cumberland.¹¹

In November of 1862 Wood was given command of the First Division in the Army of the Cumberland's XXI Corps. While in command of this division, Wood's resolve and character were displayed at the Battle of Stones River, where he shored up the Federal line. The Confederate forces had pushed Major General Alexander McCook's XX Corps and Major General George Thomas's XIV Corps almost to the breaking point, when Wood placed his three brigades in the critical apex of the Union line. This action was instrumental in the Union victory, but Wood was severely wounded during the fighting. Despite his injury, Wood refused to leave the battle until it was over. This action was indicative of Wood's personality and overall character. This is important when examining the personality of T. J. Wood. His actions were not cowardice, and his devotion to duty was obvious.

Due to the wound Wood received at Stones River, he spent the next two months on convalescent leave. He then returned to his division, which he commanded throughout the Tennessee Campaign; the advance on Tullahoma and Chattanooga.¹²

Wood's military record up to this point contains nothing that would indicate anything other than exemplary performance by a brave and dedicated officer. Despite this, historians label Wood as a vindictive, self-serving officer that, in one act of "selfish" obedience, caused the defeat of the Army of the Cumberland at the Battle of Chickamauga. One of the reasons historians paint Wood in this manner is his actions at Stones River and Running Water Canyon. During both of these occasions, Wood questioned the orders of his superiors, and action that would be used against him in the future.

Unfortunately, for history's sake, there is little biographical information on T. J. Wood that refutes his reputation as a vindictive, self-serving officer who gained his revenge on his commanding officer at the cost of the rest of the Army of the Cumberland. The reputation of Wood prior to Running Water Canyon is rarely written about, if at all. History's answer to Wood's actions is simplistic and un-researched, leading to this common historical perspective of Thomas Wood, the man.

Thomas Crittenden

In order to better understand T. J. Wood and his actions at Chickamauga, it is necessary to look at his immediate commander, Major General Thomas Crittenden. This is important because of the role Crittenden played in history's view of Wood. The personality that historians have used to label Wood derives largely because of his somewhat turbulent relationship with Crittenden.

Physically, Crittenden was thin and ram-rod strait, with a dark complexion and dark hair. His posture was excellent, and he carried himself with pride and military bearing.¹³ Unlike Wood, Thomas Crittenden was not a professional soldier. He was born on 15 May 1819 in Russellville, Kentucky, the son of Senator John J. Crittenden. Like Wood, Crittenden was bright and studious. He studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1840. Upon the outbreak of the Mexican War, Crittenden enlisted in the Army. Major General Zachary Taylor learned of his education, and chose him to be one of his aides. Soon after, he was chosen as colonel of the 3rd Kentucky Infantry. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he maintained his loyalty to the Union and was commissioned a brigadier general of volunteers in September 1861. He was given command of the 5th Division of

Don Carlos Buell's Army of the Ohio during the Battle of Shiloh and was subsequently commissioned major general on 17 July 1862 and given command of the XXI Corps.¹⁴

Crittenden was notorious for his profanity, and was thought by most to be conceited. With his limited military experience, it was widely accepted that his rise through the ranks was politically motivated due to his ties to the state of Kentucky, his father's influence and despite his performance as a commander being rather average. It was commonly believed that others made most decisions involving his corps and that Crittenden was mostly a "talking head."¹⁵

There is much evidence to support this notion and little that contradicts it. According to Peter Cozzens, Wood was "considered by many to be the 'military brains' and 'military character' behind Crittenden."¹⁶ Cozzens also states that "Rosecrans had inherited McCook and Crittenden, and he was stuck with them."¹⁷ At Stones River, Rosecrans learned the hard way not to place too much confidence in Crittenden when the Right Wing was almost destroyed due to his performance.¹⁸ William Lamers, the author of Rosecrans' biography, *The Edge of Glory*, criticizes Crittenden and McCook, and says they were "scarcely equal to the command of divisions, excepting when under the eye of a superior officer who could do their thinking for them."¹⁹ Also of interest is Crittenden's apparent use of alcohol. During one episode, a staff officer came across Crittenden and two of his fellow corps commanders. They had all been drinking in excess, but Crittenden had apparently drunk the most and was entertaining those around him by singing "Mary had a Little Lamb."²⁰ Had it not been for Rosecrans' loyalty to his lieutenants, the inept Crittenden probably would have been relieved long before Chickamauga.²¹ Another telling example of Crittenden's poor leadership capabilities comes from historian Peter

Cozzens who says of Crittenden, "...never on the battlefield had an opinion of his own, or ever assumed any responsibility that he could possibly avoid."²²

William Rosecrans

A close look at Major General William Rosecrans, the Commanding General of the Army of the Cumberland is imperative to understanding what happened at Chickamauga between himself and Wood. Rosecrans' peculiar personality and style ultimately led to the issuing of the fatal order and the subsequent defeat of the Army of the Cumberland at Chickamauga.

Rosecrans was born on 6 September 1819 in Delaware County, Ohio. He was an avid reader as a child, and a diligent student. He was accepted to the United States Military Academy at West Point, graduated fifth in his class in 1842, and was commissioned in the prestigious Engineer Corps. Though he was in the military at the time, Rosecrans played no part in the Mexican War, but instead taught engineering at the United States Military Academy.²³ In 1854 he resigned his commission. When the Civil War began, Rosecrans came back into the army as Major General George McClellan's aide with the rank of colonel. He did well and in May 1861 was promoted to brigadier general. In October of 1862 he was promoted to the rank of major general, and took command of the Army of the Cumberland shortly after.²⁴

At the time of the battle, Rosecrans was 43 years old. He was very popular with most of his command, and had been given the nickname "Old Rosy."²⁵ For the most part, he had a pleasant disposition, a kindly face with kind blue eyes, a strong nose and mouth, and a full beard. However, this could all be deceptive as a darker side concealed a quick

temper that would see him flying into a fit of rage and then just as rapidly calming down.²⁶

Like most successful military officers, Rosecrans had an abundance of energy. He worked extremely hard, and drove his staff to do the same. He had a tendency to talk a lot, and had a reputation of keeping his exhausted staff awake for hours into the night, talking to them. This same energy also made him extremely excitable. According to New York Herald correspondent William Shanks, "I have known him . . . to grow so excited, vehement and incoherent as to utterly confound the messenger. In great danger as in small things, this nervousness incapacitated him from the intelligible direction of his officers or effective execution of his plans."²⁷ This is a chilling commentary when, in hindsight, we look at the Battle of Chickamauga, the fatal order, and the circumstances surrounding it. Also of note was Rosecrans' tendency to issue too many orders. During the heat of battle, it was difficult for Rosecrans' commanders, indeed even Rosecrans himself, to keep track of what orders had gone out, and which ones had been executed.²⁸ At Stones River, Rosecrans nervously issued numerous orders to his subordinates, so many in fact, that even his corps commanders felt like there was no way the units in contact could execute them all.²⁹

As history reveals the peculiar personality of William Rosecrans, it becomes evident that it is one of extremes. Certainly there was a great amount of pressure on him, but his actions leave one believing that he was almost bi-polar. Whatever the case, Rosecrans had no problem laying a large amount of the blame for his defeat at Chickamauga on T. J. Wood.

The Brigade Commanders

Though Wood's brigade commanders had no direct impact on his obedience of Rosecrans' order at Chickamauga, to truly understand Wood and the 1st Division, XXI Corps it is important to dissect all levels of his command. Quite often subordinates turn into a reflection of their commander. Different qualities are displayed that may allow a better understanding of the commander himself. Of the three brigade commanders in the 1st Division, only two were present at Chickamauga, the 1st and 3rd Brigades. The 2nd Brigade was left at Chattanooga to assist in its security.

Colonel George Pearson Buell

The 1st Brigade, 1st Division commander was Colonel George Pearson Buell. Buell was born 4 October 1833, in Lawrenceburg, Indiana. He was a first cousin of Major General Don Carlos Buell. Buell graduated from Norwich University in Vermont in 1856, and subsequently worked as a Civil Engineer. In 1861, he entered volunteer service with the 58th Indiana Infantry. He fought in the Battle at Shiloh and was promoted to colonel of the 58th Indiana and was later given command of the 1st Brigade under Wood. Buell was just twenty-nine years old at the time of Chickamauga.³⁰ Of Wood's two brigade commanders present, Buell was the weakest. Not a professional soldier by trade, Buell had been in command of his brigade for only four months, and had yet to be tested under fire. This inexperience showed itself in his ability to command men in combat. Lacking the experience of leading men under fire, Buell required much more guidance than he was getting from Wood at Chickamauga. As a result, he became easily confused and frustrated.³¹ On the other hand, Buell's lack of experience sometimes led to undue enthusiasm. At one time during the battle, "Buell's enthusiasm overruled his better

judgment, and he ordered Captain Estep to accompany him across the road.”³² Another description of Buell saw him “standing atop the barricade, waving his hat and begging his men to stand their ground. Most darted by him and jogged off into the woods.”³³

Colonel Charles G. Harker

In stark contrast to Buell was the 3rd Brigade commander, Colonel Charles G. Harker. From a young age, Harker had overcome much adversity. Orphaned as a child, he didn't have the opportunities that many had experienced. He began working at the age of twelve for a storeowner who had been a congressman. Harker made a favorable impression on him and earned an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point. After receiving his commission in the infantry in 1858, Harker gained significant experience as a soldier and leader. While serving on the Northwest Frontier, Harker was called back to the east when the Civil War started. At the age of 24, he was commissioned Colonel of the 65th Ohio Infantry on 11 November 1861 and was assigned to the 1st Division at the Battle of Shiloh. Soon after Shiloh, Harker was given command of the 3rd Brigade.³⁴

Though more experienced than Buell, Harker was still a young man. During the Civil War, promotion and increased responsibility often came rapidly, sometimes before an officer was ready. This was the case for Harker at Stones River. A new brigade commander at the time, Harker found himself enveloped and under heavy fire and pressure by the much more experienced Confederate commander, Brigadier General Bushrod Johnson. Historian Peter Cozzens relates the following story of Harker at Stones River:

The Warren Light Artillery unlimbered in a cornfield east of the Asbury Church and opened a devastating fire on Harker's flank. Harker panicked. Without consulting Van Cleve or notifying Fyffe, he marched his brigade by the right flank to the northwestern slope of the Window Burris house ridge. 'The position selected proved a most fortunate one,' Harker wrote later. For Harker, perhaps; for Fyffe, it was disastrous. As Vaughan neared his line, Fyffe looked with horror on the gap Harker's rash maneuver had created: if nothing were done to close it, Vaughan's left regiments would march into it and turn his flank. Fyffe hurried three messengers to Harker with the same plea: Close the breach. The Stars and Bars drew nearer. Harker replied merely that he too was threatened on his right and therefore could not return to his earlier position. The enemy was within range. On his own now, Fyffe instructed Lieutenant Colonel George Dick to wheel the Eighty-sixth Indiana to the right to secure the flank. Before Dick could act, Vaughan was on top of him. The fight was brief. As Fyffe had feared, within minutes the Forty-fourth Indiana was outflanked. Moments later the Eighty-sixth fragmented into squads: in their haste to reach the turnpike the Hoosiers abandoned their colors, and ninety-nine men fell prisoner.³⁵

Harker may have made some mistakes based on his inexperience, but his division commander was impressed with him nonetheless. In a report sent from Wood to Crittenden, Wood says, "The arrangements made for the reconnaissance, and the time of its moving were well adjusted, and the reconnaissance itself was most brilliantly and successfully conducted by Colonel Harker. I do not believe that military annals offer an instance of a more daring reconnaissance made by so small a force against an entrenched position, strongly garrisoned, attended with so little loss."³⁶

The Regiments

Also necessary to gain a thorough understanding of Wood and his Division, the individual regiments in the 1st and 3rd Brigades must be examined. Each regiment's date and place of origin and its assignment and battle history up to the Battle of Chickamauga will be examined.

1st Brigade, 1st Division, XXI Corps
100th Illinois Infantry Regiment

The 100th Illinois was organized at Joliet, Illinois, and was mustered on 30 August 1862. The 100th Illinois saw service during the pursuit of General Braxton Bragg into Kentucky during October of 1862. It took part in the Battle of Perryville, Kentucky as the reserve on 8 October. It then fought at Nelson's Cross Roads on 18 October and continued on in the march to Nashville, Tennessee, 18 October – 26 November where it remained until after Christmas. It then advanced to Murfreesboro 26-30 December and took part in the Battle of Stones River on 30 and 31 December 1862 and 1-3 January 1863. It remained at Murfreesboro until June of 1863 and then took part in the Tullahoma Campaign from 24 June to 7 July.³⁷

58th Indiana Infantry Regiment

The 58th Indiana Infantry was organized at Princeton and Indianapolis, Indiana, from 12 November to 22 December 1861. The 58th Indiana participated in the march through Central Kentucky to Nashville, Tennessee, from 10 February through 1 March 1862, after which it marched to Savannah, Tennessee, from 18 March through 6 April. It took part in the Battle of Shiloh on 6 and 7 April and then advanced on and assisted in the siege of Corinth, Mississippi, on 29 April through 30 May. It then took part in the pursuit to Booneville from 31 May through 12 June. It was part of Buell's campaign in northern Alabama and middle Tennessee along the line of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad from June to August. It then went to Little Pond on 30 August and marched to Louisville, Kentucky, in pursuit of Braxton Bragg and the Army of Tennessee from 30 August through 26 September. It continued the pursuit of Bragg to Loudon, Kentucky, on 1-22

October and marched to Nashville, Tennessee, from 22 October through 7 November where it stayed until after Christmas. It advanced to Murfreesboro on 26-30 December during which it participated in the Battle of Stones River from 30 December 1862 through 3 January 1863. It stayed in Murfreesboro until June and then participated in the Tullahoma Campaign from 23 June through 7 July. It occupied middle Tennessee through 16 August and then assisted in the passage of the Cumberland Mountains and the Tennessee River from 16 August through 22 September. It assisted in the expedition from Tracy City to the Tennessee River from 22 through 24 August as a detachment and took part in the occupation of Chattanooga, Tennessee, on 9 September. It was near Lee and Gordon's Mills on 17 and 18 September 1863.³⁸

26th Ohio Infantry Regiment

The 26 Ohio Infantry Regiment was organized at Camp Chase in Columbus, Ohio, from 8 June through 24 July 1861, after which it was ordered to the Kanawha Valley in Virginia on 25 July. The 26th Ohio performed duties in Kanawha Valley, Virginia, from August 1861 to January 1862. It participated in action at Boone Court House in West Virginia on 1 September 1861, and then operations in the Kanawha Valley and New River region from 19 October through 16 November 1861. It was ordered to Kentucky in January 1862 and participated in the advance on Nashville, Tennessee, from 14 through 25 February. It then assisted in the occupation of Nashville from 25 February through 18 March and then took part in the march to Savannah, Tennessee, from 18 March through 6 April. It fought in the Battle of Shiloh on 6 and 7 April and then assisted in the advance upon and siege of Corinth, Mississippi, from 29 April through 30 May. It was part of Buell's Campaign in north Alabama and Middle

Tennessee in June to August and Little Pond on 20 August. Men of the regiment pursued Braxton Bragg and the Army of Tennessee to Louisville, Kentucky, from 30 August through 26 March. They continued this pursuit into Kentucky from 1 through 15 October, and then took part in the Battle of Perryville on 8 October. The regiment marched on to Nashville, Tennessee, from 16 October to 7 November, where it remained through Christmas. It advanced to Murfreesboro from 26 to 30 December during which it participated in the Battle of Stones River from 30 December 1862 through 3 January 1863. It stayed in Murfreesboro until June and then took part in the Tullahoma Campaign 23 June through 7 July. It occupied middle Tennessee through 16 August and then assisted in the passage of the Cumberland Mountains and the Tennessee River from 16 August through 22 September. It assisted in the expedition from Tracy City to the Tennessee River from 22 through 24 August as a detachment and then conducted reconnaissance toward Chattanooga, Tennessee, on 7 November and Lookout Valley on 7 and 8 November. The regiment participated in the occupation of Chattanooga, Tennessee, on 9 September. It was near Lee and Gordon's Mill on 17 and 18 September.³⁹

13th Michigan Infantry Regiment

The 13th Michigan Infantry Regiment was organized at Kalamazoo, Michigan, and mustered in on 17 January 1862. It first saw action in the march from Nashville, Tennessee, to Savannah, Tennessee, from 29 March to 30 May 1862. It then took part in the Battle of Shiloh on 7 April and in the advance on and siege of Corinth, Mississippi, from 29 April through 30 May. It was involved in the pursuit to Booneville from 1 through 12 June and took part in Buell's operations in northern Alabama and middle

Tennessee, June through August. The regiment saw duty at Stevenson, Alabama, from 18 July through 31 August, where it was responsible for building forts and stockades and guarding railroads. It then marched to Louisville, Kentucky, in pursuit of Braxton Bragg and the Army of the Tennessee from 31 August to 26 September and continued this pursuit to Wild Cat, Kentucky from 1 through 16 October. The regiment marched to Nashville, Tennessee, from 22 October through 7 November where it stayed until Christmas. It advanced to Murfreesboro from 26 through 30 December during which it participated in the Battle of Stones River from 30 December 1862 through 3 January 1863. It stayed in Murfreesboro until June and then participated in the Tullahoma Campaign from 23 June through 7 July. It stayed at Hillsboro, Tennessee, until 16 August. The regiment assisted in the passage of the Cumberland Mountains and the Tennessee River from 16 August through 22 September and assisted in the expedition from Tracy City to the Tennessee River from 22 through 24 August as a detachment and then occupied Chattanooga, Tennessee, on 9 September. It was near Lee and Gordon's Mills on 17 and 18 September.⁴⁰

3rd Brigade, 1st Division, XXI Corps
3rd Kentucky Infantry Regiment

The 3rd Kentucky Infantry Regiment was organized at Camp Dick Robinson, Kentucky, on 8 October 1861 and subsequently assigned to 11th Brigade, Army of the Ohio until December 1861. It saw service initially in Lexington, Kentucky, in September and October 1861 and then moved to Camp Dick Robinson, Kentucky, on 1 October. From this location it saw duty at Round Stone Creek, Crab Orchard, Somersett and Columbia until January 1862. It then moved to Renick's Creek on 7 January and to the

mouth of Greasy Creek on 17 January. After this it moved to Nashville, Tennessee, from 18 through 25 March and then to Savannah, Tennessee, and to Shiloh from 29 March through 7 April. It then took part in the advance on and siege of Corinth, Mississippi, from 29 April through 30 May. The regiment was involved in the pursuit to Booneville from 30 May to 6 June and took part in Buell's operations in northern Alabama and middle Tennessee, from June through August. It then marched to Louisville, Kentucky, in pursuit of Braxton Bragg and the Army of the Tennessee from 19 August through 26 September and continued Bragg's pursuit from 1 through 18 October. The regiment took part in the Battle of Perryville on 8 October and then fought on to Nelson's Cross Roads, Kentucky, on 18 October. It marched to Nashville, Tennessee, from 18 October through 7 November where it stayed until Christmas. It advanced to Murfreesboro from 26 through 30 December during which it participated in the Battle of Stewart's Creek on 29 December and the Battle of Stones River from 30 December 1862 through 3 January 1863. It stayed in Murfreesboro until June and conducted reconnaissance to Nolensville and Versailles from 13 through 15 January and then participated in the Tullahoma Campaign from 23 June through 7 July. After this the regiment occupied middle Tennessee until 16 August and assisted in the passage of the Cumberland Mountains and the Tennessee River from 16 August through 22 September. It then conducted reconnaissance toward Chattanooga on 7 September and Lookout Valley on 7 and 8 September. After this it occupied Chattanooga, Tennessee, on 9 September and was near Lee and Gordon's Mills from 11 through 13 September 1863.⁴¹

64th Ohio Infantry Regiment

The 64th Ohio Infantry Regiment was organized at Camp Buckingham in Mansfield, Ohio, and mustered on 9 November 1861, after which it moved to Louisville, Kentucky on 14 December and subsequently to Bardstown, Kentucky, on 25 September. The 64th Ohio saw duty at Danville and Ball's Gap, Kentucky, in January and February 1862 and marched to Munfordville, Kentucky, and then to Nashville, Tennessee, from 7 February through 13 March. After this it went on to Savannah, Tennessee, from 29 March through 6 April. It fought in the Battle at Shiloh, on 6 and 7 April, and then advanced to the siege of Corinth, Mississippi, from 29 April through 30 May. It was involved in the pursuit to Booneville from 1 through 12 June and then performed duties along the Memphis and Charleston Railroad until August. It then marched to Louisville, Kentucky, in pursuit of Braxton Bragg and the Army of the Tennessee from 21 August to 26 September and continued Bragg's pursuit from 1 through 15 October. It moved to Bardstown, Kentucky, on 3 October and took part in the Battle of Perryville on 8 October, and then marched to Nashville, Tennessee, from 16 October through 7 November where it stayed until Christmas. It advanced to Murfreesboro from 26 through 30 December during which it went to Nolensville on 27 December and the Battle of Stones River from 30 December 1862 through 3 January 1863. It stayed in Murfreesboro until June and conducted reconnaissance to Nolensville and Versailles from 13 through 15 January and then participated in the Tullahoma Campaign from 23 June through 7 July. After this the regiment occupied middle Tennessee until 16 August and assisted in the passage of the Cumberland Mountains and the Tennessee River from 16 August through 22 September and then conducted reconnaissance toward Chattanooga on 7

September and Lookout Valley on 7 and 8 September. After this it occupied Chattanooga, Tennessee, on 9 September and was near Lee and Gordon's Mill from 11 through 13 September 1863.⁴²

65th Ohio Infantry Regiment

The 65th Ohio Infantry Regiment was organized at Mansfield, Ohio, on 3 October 1861, and subsequently moved to Louisville, Kentucky, on 18 December 1861 and then to Bardstown and to Hall's Gap, Kentucky, on 13 January 1862. It marched to Munfordville, Kentucky, and then to Nashville, Tennessee, from 7 February through 13 March. After this it went on to Savannah, Tennessee, from 29 March through 6 April. It fought in the Battle at Shiloh, on 6 and 7 April, and then advanced to the siege of Corinth, Mississippi on, from 29 April through 30 May and was involved in the pursuit to Booneville from 1 through 12 June and then performed duties along the Memphis and Charleston Railroad until August. It marched to Louisville, Kentucky, in pursuit of Braxton Bragg and the Army of the Tennessee from 21 August through 26 September and continued Bragg's pursuit from 1 through 15 October. The regiment was the reserve in the Battle of Perryville 8 October, after which it marched to Nashville, Tennessee, from 16 October through 7 November, where it stayed until Christmas. It advanced to Murfreesboro from 26 through 30 December and participated in the Battle of Stones River from December 1862 through 3 January 1863. It stayed in Murfreesboro until June and conducted reconnaissance to Nolensville and Versailles from 13 through 15 January and then participated in the Tullahoma Campaign from 23 June through 7 July, after which it occupied middle Tennessee until 16 August and assisted in the passage of the Cumberland Mountains and the Tennessee River from 16 August through 22 September.

It conducted reconnaissance toward Chattanooga on 7 September and Lookout Valley from 7 through 8 September. After this it occupied Chattanooga, Tennessee, on 9 September and was near Lee and Gordon's Mill from 11 through 13 September 1863.⁴³

125th Ohio Infantry Regiment

The 125th Ohio Infantry Regiment was organized at Camp Taylor in Cleveland, Ohio, on 6 October 1862 and moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, on 3 January 1863. The 125th Ohio saw its first action in Franklin, Tennessee, on 9 March 1863 when it repulsed an enemy attack. From here it moved to Triune on 2 June and then to Murfreesboro, Tennessee. It took part in the Tullahoma Campaign from 23 June through 7 July and then went to Hillsboro from 3 July through 5 August. It conducted the passage of the Cumberland Mountains and Tennessee River from 16 August through 22 September and then assisted in the occupation of Chattanooga on 9 September 1863. The regiment was near Lee and Gordon's Mill from 11 through 13 September 1863.⁴⁴

Conclusion

To gain a true understanding of the events that led up to Chickamauga, and the impact they had on the fatal order issued by Rosecrans to Wood, it is necessary to have a thorough understanding of the men and units that were involved.

Of all the regiments, the average time spent in their brigades prior to the Battle of Chickamauga was six months. The most time that any of the regiments had been with their parent brigade prior to the Battle of Chickamauga was eight months, five regiments being assigned to their brigade in January 1863. The regiment with the least time with its brigade was the 125th Ohio, having only spent two months with the 3rd Brigade at the

time of the Battle of Chickamauga. The careers and personalities of key men have been looked at closely. The subunits under Wood himself have been looked at. By better understanding these men and units, we can better dissect the order and the circumstances around it, and determine if there is, indeed, a limit to obedience.

¹Peter Cozzens, *No Better Place to Die: The Battle of Stones River* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 66.

²David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War: A Political, Social, and Military History*, vol. 4 (Santa Brbra: ABC-CLIO, 2000), 2148.

³Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 569.

⁴Terry L. Jones, *Historical Dictionary of the Civil War* (Lanham, Indiana: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 1605.

⁵John T. Hubbell and James W. Geary, *Biographical Dictionary of the Union: Northern Leaders in the Civil War* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), 600.

⁶George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1891), 211.

⁷*Ibid.*, 212.

⁸Heidler and Heidler.

⁹Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 569.

¹⁰Heidler and Heidler, 2149.

¹¹Dick Weeks, *Army of the Ohio and Army of the Cumberland*, Shotgun's Home of the American Civil War, 7 January 1997. journal on-line. Available from [www.civilwarhome.com /armyohioandcumberland.htm](http://www.civilwarhome.com/armyohioandcumberland.htm). Internet Accessed 20 February 2005.

¹²Cullum, 212.

¹³Glenn Tucker, *Chickamauga: Bloody Battle in the West* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1961), 103.

- ¹⁴Warner, 100.
- ¹⁵Peter Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound: The Battle of Chickamauga* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 10.
- ¹⁶Cozzens, *No Better Place to Die*, 66.
- ¹⁷*Ibid.*, 24.
- ¹⁸*Ibid.*, 180.
- ¹⁹William M. Lamers, *The Edge of Glory, A Biography of General William S. Rosecrans* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), 185.
- ²⁰Cozzens, *No Better Place to Die*, 204.
- ²¹Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 7.
- ²²*Ibid.*, 10.
- ²³Lamers, 16.
- ²⁴Warner, 410.
- ²⁵*Ibid.*
- ²⁶Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 7.
- ²⁷*Ibid.*, 8.
- ²⁸*Ibid.*
- ²⁹Cozzens, *No Better Place to Die*, 129.
- ³⁰Craig Dunn, "George Pearson Buell," Civil War – Indiana, 23 December 2002, Journal on-line. Available from <http://civilwarindiana.com/>. Internet Accessed 20 February 2005.
- ³¹Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 215.
- ³²*Ibid.*, 221.
- ³³*Ibid.*, 224.
- ³⁴Warner, 207.
- ³⁵Cozzens, *No Better Place to Die*, 148.

³⁶U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, vol. 30, part 1. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), 683 (hereafter cited as *OR*).

³⁷Frederick H. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, vol. 3, *Regimental Histories* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, Ltd., 1959), 1089.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 1141.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 1508.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 1287.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 1198.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 1526.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 1527.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 1548.

CHAPTER 3

FROM MURFREESBORO TO DAY ONE OF CHICKAMAUGA

The mistake that historians have made in the analysis of the fatal order given by MG William Rosecrans to BG Thomas J. Wood is that it is examined out of context. The personalities of the key players and the role of events leading up to the Battle of Chickamauga compound things in a manner that is significant for an accurate historical analysis of Wood's obedience to Rosecrans. To completely understand why events unfolded as they did on 20 September 1863, it is important to set the conditions. It is necessary to understand the overarching national strategy that drove the Army of the Cumberland and how this affected the army's commander, William Rosecrans. The pressure that Rosecrans felt, that any commander feels for that matter, impacts on their command. This impact includes the way subordinates act toward their commander and how they lead their own units. This chapter will dissect the Army of the Cumberland's movements beginning at Murfreesboro in June of 1863 until and including 19 September, the first day of the Battle of Chickamauga. It will shed light on Wood's actions and those of his seniors and subordinates in such a way as to make clearer the events on 20 September, as they are examined in the next chapter.

Geography and Weather

The three months that led up to the Battle of Chickamauga were characterized by some of the most challenging movements an army could possibly experience. An army that conducts a majority of its movement on foot is subject to two great influences:

terrain and weather. Both of these factors played a significant role in the Army of the Cumberland's pursuit of the Army of Tennessee.

A majority of the Army of the Cumberland's movement at this time took place in the eastern part of Tennessee. On the eastern edge of the area of operations were the rugged Blue Ridge Mountains. These formidable mountains were a virtual wall to the maneuver of units and equipment and to the logistics required to feed a fighting army. At the western edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains was the Valley of the Appalachians. This valley contains the Tennessee River, which would ultimately have to be crossed by both armies during the pursuit. Northwest of the Valley of the Appalachians is the eastern rim of the Cumberland Plateau. Though not as difficult as the Blue Ridge Mountains, this towering land mass proved to be an incredible challenge. Compounding the difficulties of moving an Army and its equipment across this rugged plateau was its agricultural barrenness. For an army that relied on foraging for much of its food and fodder, the Cumberland Plateau proved to be a challenge. The southern portion of the Plateau is bisected by the Sequatchie Valley, which contains the Sequatchie River. It empties into the Tennessee River in the vicinity of the tri-state border of Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama. Between the Sequatchie Valley and the Tennessee River is a plateau called Walden's Ridge.

The city of Chattanooga lies in the southern portion of Tennessee. West of Chattanooga is the Tennessee River gorge, which separates Walden's Ridge in the north from an impressive geographical feature called Lookout Mountain, a towering land mass that overlooks the city of Chattanooga and the Tennessee River. To the west of Lookout Mountain are Lookout Valley, Sand Mountain, and Raccoon Mountain.¹

As if the rugged terrain that the Army of the Cumberland was forced to traverse was not enough, the army also had to contend with the weather. During the summer of 1863, mid-Tennessee saw one of the wettest periods in living memory at that time.² The armies of the Civil War era were obviously much more susceptible to the difficulties of this rainy spell than today's highly mobile military. In his official report, T. J. Wood himself wrote of the weather, "The rain, which had fallen during the whole of the preceding day and night, was still descending in torrents, flooding the whole country, and rendering the roads well-nigh impassable. . . . As the train dragged its slow length along through the mud and mire, I was able to move only inch by inch."³ This progress, or lack of progress, was compounded by the fact that the draft animals and wagons were also using the roads and trails being used by the individual soldiers. The steep hills and ridges that were being traversed offered significant challenges for all involved. Much of the time the soldiers had to attach ropes to the wagons and assist the draft animals in making the ascent.⁴

The weather and terrain challenged the Army of the Cumberland but it met the challenge readily. As noted by Wood himself in reference to his division, "Although the division had not done any considerable marching since the battle of Stone's River, and had marched over a very rough and trying road, it came into camp well closed up and in good order."⁵

Strategic Needs and the Army of the Cumberland

To fully understand the personality and behavior of MG William Rosecrans, it is necessary to show the pressure that was being placed upon him from his national leaders and the friction that this caused between he and they. This pressure was a continual point

of contention with Rosecrans, and potentially drove him to make decisions that he might not have, if left to his own devices. Though the fatal order that Rosecrans issued Wood on 20 September 1863 was not driven by strategic needs, the culmination of the pressure and friction on Rosecrans certainly had worn him down mentally and physically by that time.

The over-arching desire by the Federal authorities in Washington, President Abraham Lincoln, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and General in Chief Henry W. Halleck, was speed. They most desired their generals to give them quick victories. Only by continual pressure and victories, taking the fight to the enemy with relentless enthusiasm, could decisive victory be attained. The six months that the Union forces spent in Murfreesboro, out of contact with Confederate forces, was especially difficult for Lincoln and his war staff, but the methodical Rosecrans could not be hurried.⁶

If Rosecrans was slow to advance on the enemy, it was in part, due to the confidence he had gained with his victory at Stones River. This was his first major battle as the commander of the army, and though not decisive, it was still a victory, and came at a time when the Union had desperately needed one. The President wrote to Rosecrans after Stones River, "I can never forget, whilst I remember anything, that about the end of last year, and beginning of this, you gave us a hard-earned victory which, had there been a defeat instead, the nation could scarcely have lived over."⁷ This letter gave Rosecrans the confidence he needed to stay his ground and not move his forces until he felt his army was ready.

Also giving Rosecrans confidence to to stay his ground until ready to move was Secretary Stanton, who essentially wrote Rosecrans a blank check to cash, as he saw fit,

for anything the army needed. Rosecrans cheerfully took him up on this offer, and began outfitting his Army for a hard and extended march. The time it took for this logistical build-up was what really irritated Lincoln and his staff. They were impatient for the Army of the Cumberland to move and give them more victories, but the slow and methodical Rosecrans would not be hurried.⁸

The next tactic Lincoln used to get Rosecrans to move was essentially bribery. Victories were needed badly by the Union, so Lincoln authorized Halleck to offer a promotion to major general in the Regular Army to the first general in the field to give him an important victory. Even this tempting offer was not enough to entice Rosecrans to pick up the pace, and he continued to methodically build his army.⁹

Washington's patience began to shorten. On 28 May Lincoln himself wrote to Rosecrans, "I would not push you to any rashness, but I am very anxious that you do your utmost, short of rashness, to keep Bragg from getting off to help Johnston against Grant."¹⁰ Rosecrans was oblivious to this type of pressure and replied to Lincoln that he would "attend to it."¹¹ Subsequently, Halleck telegraphed Rosecrans, threatening to pull units from the Army of the Cumberland and send them to Grant's relief. Rosecrans gave him a pacifying answer and polled his corps and division commanders and sought their views on the matter. They overwhelmingly supported Rosecrans and his continued course of action of building up the army.¹²

The support of his subordinate commanders may have given Rosecrans confidence to stay his course, but it did little to relieve the pressure he was getting from Washington. Halleck wired Rosecrans in early June, "I deem it my duty to repeat to you the great dissatisfaction that is felt here at your inactivity."¹³ Shortly thereafter Rosecrans

received what was essentially an ultimatum, and a few days later, on 24 June, the Army of the Cumberland began to move.

The pressure that Washington wielded on Rosecrans was a constant theme throughout his march through Tennessee. Though he seemed to be virtually immune to it, one can only assume that pressure from the highest authority in the nation began to take its toll on even the most unflappable of commanders.

The Army Moves

After spending almost six months at Murfreesboro, the Army of the Cumberland finally began its movement, and initiated its pursuit of the Army of Tennessee (see figure 2). A glimpse at Rosecrans' operational genius can be obtained in this initial movement. His plan called for a large right wheel maneuver by his army. The plan was bold and ingenious, calling for nearly a quarter of the army to be in contact with the enemy at one time before withdrawing and then moving to the east.¹⁴ The initial destination of Thomas Crittenden and his XXI Army Corps was Manchester.¹⁵ Crittenden was to leave one of his divisions at Murfreesboro and send another to join a division in Bradyville. This served to put the bulk of his corps on the eastern flank of the rest of the Union forces and beyond the eastern flank of the Confederate forces. From this position, he was, on order, to conduct a turning movement against the Army of Tennessee.¹⁶

The first part of the Army of the Cumberland's Tullahoma campaign was a total success, by capturing key terrain and denying the Army of Tennessee good defensive ground. This served to vindicate Rosecrans and his methodical planning and preparation, while pushing the Army of Tennessee, putting them totally on the defense.¹⁷ The Union forces were off to a good start.

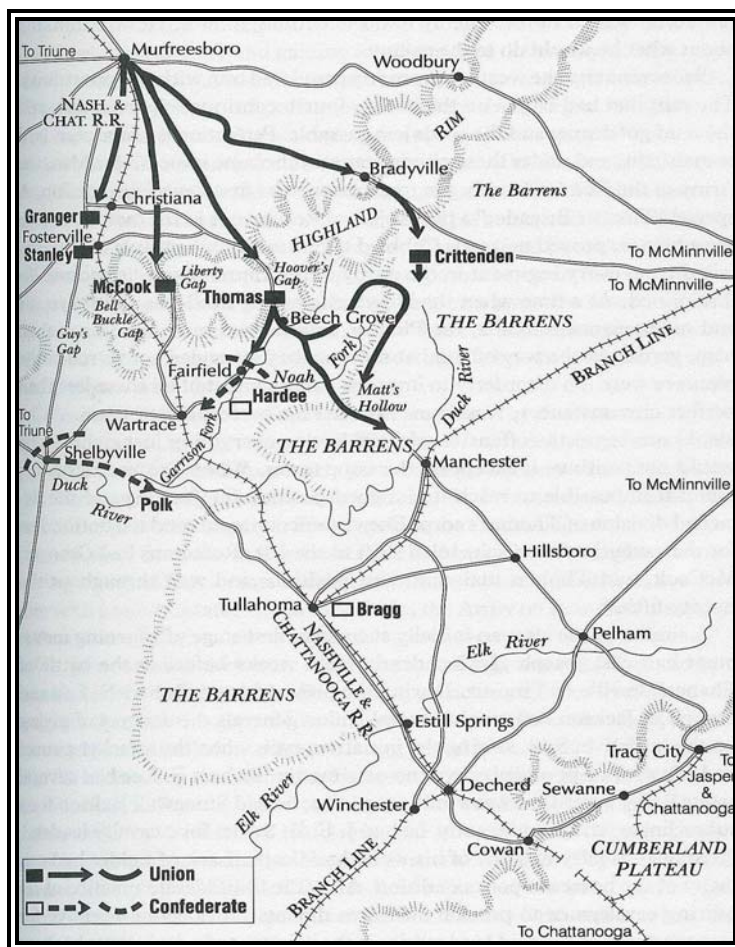


Figure 2. Map of the Tullahoma Campaign
 Source: Steven E. Woodworth, *Six Armies in Tennessee* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 27.

XXI Army Corps and 1st Division during Tullahoma

By 28 June, most of the Army of the Cumberland was gathered in the vicinity of Manchester, but the XXI Corps was struggling. A majority of the corps was knee deep in the mud and muck several miles north of Manchester in the soggy *Barrens*.¹⁸ Despite the adverse conditions, Wood's 1st Division made commendable progress and moved a difficult twelve miles on that day. Much of this accomplishment can be credited to Wood's leadership and experience. For his effort, Wood earned accolades from his corps

commander, who wrote in his official report, “General Wood followed as soon as the road was cleared, and succeeded in getting his command over the hill in eleven hours. In this ascent General Wood’s division reaped the benefit of marching with the least possible transportation, and for this I think the general is entitled to the commendation of the general commanding the department.”¹⁹

Soon after this movement, on 30 June, Wood identified a potentially lucrative target in the railroad bridge crossing the Elk River at Allisona. Wood determined that if it could be destroyed promptly, a good number of Confederate forces might be frustrated in their attempt to escape. The suggestion was received by Rosecrans who, true to his nature, moved too slowly to capitalize on the suggestion.²⁰

On 1 July Wood received orders to move toward the enemy at Tullahoma. In an attempt to move quickly, the overall load for the move was limited to three days of supplies. Like any good commander, Wood took a personal interest in his unit’s logistics, dictating that only one wagon be allowed for his own headquarters and for each of the brigade headquarters and regimental headquarters, for subsistence and for cooking utensils. Also part of the logistical package was the ammunition and ambulance trains. As the division was moving, information was received that the enemy were evacuating their positions at Tullahoma. Wood was given orders by Rosecrans to maneuver his division to Pelham via the Hillsboro road with the intent of intercepting a portion of the retreating enemy. Wood reached his destination that evening, and set up camp. The next day, Wood’s advanced guards made contact with enemy cavalry, and pursued them across the bridge on the Elk River. The Confederate soldiers had set fire to the bridge, but Wood’s soldiers were close enough to them that they were able to extinguish the flames, thus

saving the bridge for Union use. Wood's forces suffered only one casualty during the fight.²¹

The information received concerning the Confederate forces pulling out of Tullahoma was accurate. On the morning of 1 July, Rosecrans finally had his forces postured to his liking, only to find the enemy had left during the night.²² Rosecrans' methodical nature had, essentially, allowed the Confederate forces to escape without a fight. The conditions had been set for what surely would have been a decisive Union victory, but the lack of dogged pursuit and aggressiveness led to a victory without a fight, and failed to take advantage of a potentially disadvantaged enemy.²³ Tullahoma was perhaps best summed up by one of Rosecrans' staff officers, Henry Cist, who said, "Brilliant campaigns without battles do not accomplish the destruction of an army. . . . A campaign like that of Tullahoma always means a battle at some other point."²⁴

Though the Tullahoma campaign contained relatively little fighting, a look at Wood's competent and efficient style of command can be glimpsed. He was intelligent and energetic, and obviously subscribed to the belief that during war, everything is commander's business. He took an especially close look at his division when it came to logistics, and looked with disdain at those who did not. He allowed only 6 to 7 wagons per regiment for the transportation of baggage. Wood noted in his official report,

The neglect of other commanders in this army to conform to this order of preparation and the consequent embarrassment of the movements on the march, and the retardation of the concentration of the troops at Manchester, caused by the immense and overloaded baggage trains which they took with them, called from the commanding general of the army at Manchester, under date of the 28th of June, an order, in which he animadverts with great, but, as I conceive, just severity on the criminal neglect of officers in this respect.²⁵

Crossing the Cumberland Plateau

The next major obstacle for the Army of the Cumberland during their pursuit of the Army of Tennessee was the crossing of the Cumberland Plateau (see figure 3). This obstacle is formidable enough for an individual, but for an entire army and its equipment, it was almost impossible. To compound matters, Rosecrans' routes for his army to use were spread out over a 150-mile front, making command and control especially challenging.²⁶

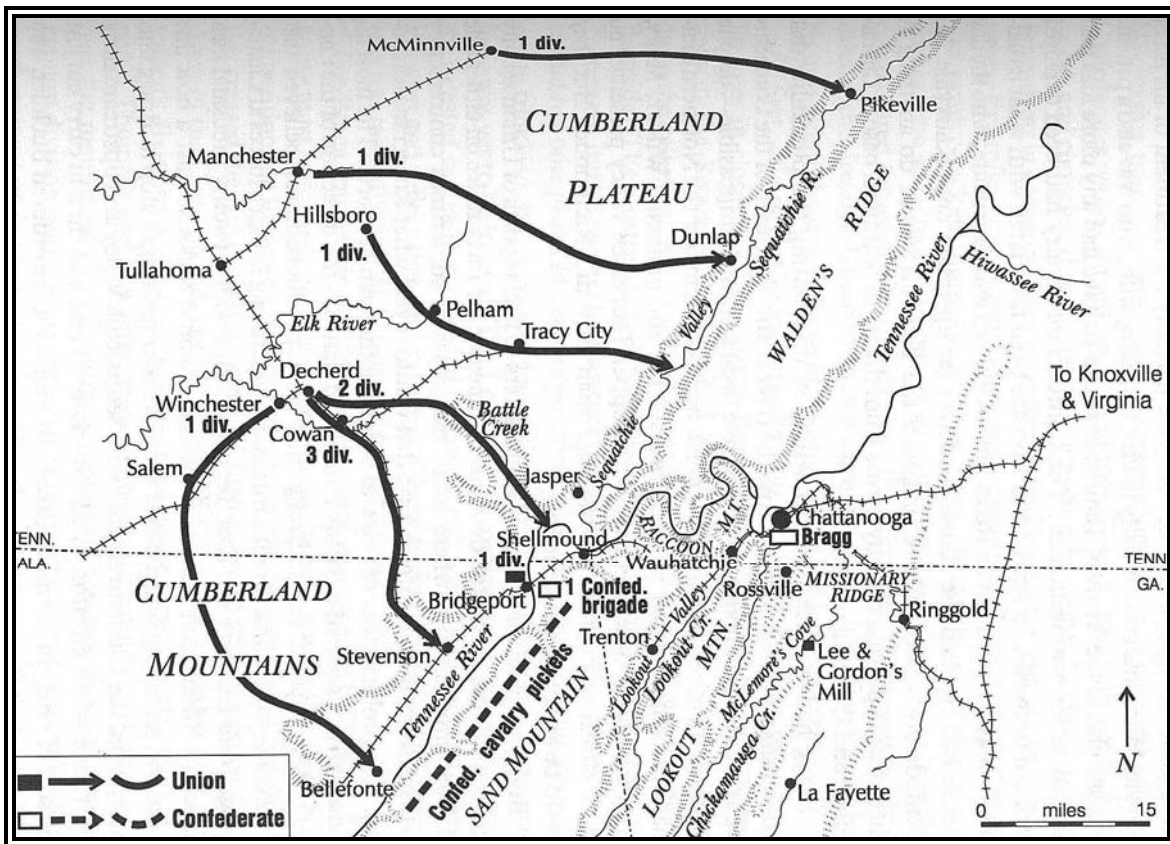


Figure 3. Map of the Army of the Cumberland Crossing the Cumberland Plateau
Source: Steven E. Woodworth, *Six Armies in Tennessee* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 55.

The army began its move on 16 August 1863. True to form, Rosecrans' army was well organized for the march and it stepped off with proficiency. To look at a map, the army's maneuver looked like an infiltration. They began the march from multiple locations, Winchester in the south all the way to McMinnville to the north. There were six distinct routes that the divisions of the army took, making it next to impossible for Bragg to determine where the main Union forces were concentrated. This also served to minimize bottlenecks in the narrow passes and gorges throughout the plateau.²⁷

Crittenden and his XXI Army Corp advanced on the far northern flank of the army, with his three divisions moving on different routes over the plateau and into the Sequatchie Valley, with advanced elements continuing over Walden's Ridge and into the Tennessee Valley. They were part of a larger deception operation designed to deceive Bragg as to the actual point that the Army of the Cumberland would choose to cross the Tennessee River.²⁸

Wood's 1st Division movement originated at Hillsboro, and he was to maneuver his division across the Cumberland Plateau and to the town of Therman in the Sequatchie Valley no later than 19 August. The route for the division was left to Wood's discretion, and he chose to use the Park Road to Tracy City and then through Johnson's to Purdons, and then to the road leading from McMinnville by Altamont to Therman. They moved throughout the day and night of 17 August, and reached the top of the mountains. The division rested until mid-day on 18 August, and then moved on to Tracy City. The second brigade was sent ahead to Therman as an advance party, and set up camp for the remainder of the division. The distance from Tracy City to Therman was twenty-eight miles, which was accomplished in one day.²⁹ On 20 August, Wood sent his second

brigade to the eastern slope of Walden's Ridge, where they were to conduct a show of force, as well as observe and, if possible, engage the enemy.³⁰

Once more, Wood's attention to logistical detail and experience as a war fighter was evident, only this time he chose to increase the recommended load of his division due to the barren nature of the Cumberland Plateau. He had been directed to take ten days of subsistence with him, but chose to instead take twenty-five days for his men and sixteen days of fodder for the animals. Wood mentioned this in his official report, and then went on to say,

I do not mention this fact in a spirit of egotism, but simply to show what can be accomplished by intelligence, good judgment, energy, and a willingness to make some sacrifice of personal comfort by commanders. Every educated and experienced soldier knows that one of the greatest drawbacks on the mobility and activity, and consequently on the offensive power of an army, is to be found in the immense baggage and supply trains which usually accompany its movement; hence, whatever lessens the number of vehicles required for the transportation of baggage and supplies by so much increased the efficiency of the army. I transported all the supplies I took into the Sequatchie Valley in the wagons originally assigned to my division for the transportation of regimental and staff baggage. I was then prepared with my division for a campaign of twenty-five days on full rations, or fifty days on half rations.³¹

Crossing the Tennessee River

Crossing any sizable river during military operations is inherently dangerous. The lack of any cover or concealment makes one susceptible to enemy fire, and it is difficult to mask where the crossing will take place due to the scale of such an operation when an entire army is conducting the operation.

Rosecrans' ability to mask his movement across the Tennessee River was due to the conduct of a very successful deception operation. Bragg, already having reinforced Major General Simon Buckner with a division, began to deploy other forces along the

river at all the potential crossing sites up to Buckner's position (see figure 4). The Confederates were waiting for the Union forces to cross the river, listening to what they thought was the construction of rafts and bridges by Brigadier General William Hazen and his attachments that made up Rosecrans' deception operation. Despite his efforts to ascertain the location the Army of the Cumberland would use to cross the Tennessee River, Bragg was not successful. By 25 August he realized that he not only did not know the crossing site, but had lost Rosecrans.³² Like any good deception operation, the Union forces showed Bragg a picture of what he most feared, a link-up between the Army of the Cumberland and Major General Ambrose Burnside's Army of the Ohio near Knoxville. Any such combining of forces, Bragg thought, would occur to the northeast, up-stream of Chattanooga. This is where a majority of Rosecrans' deception was taking place, validating the picture that Bragg most feared.³³

As Bragg spread his forces thin and began to focus on an up-stream river crossing, Rosecrans began directing his army toward the real crossing site in the vicinity of Bridgeport, Alabama. He accomplished this quickly and efficiently by spreading the movement of his divisions out, some times as much as seventy-five miles, until they converged on the area of the crossing site.³⁴ On 30 August, most of Rosecrans' army was concentrated at the crossing site and he called for Crittenden's XXI Corps to follow the rest of the army across the river, leaving only a small force to keep up the deception operation. The Union forces encountered only meager resistance during the river crossing, and it was easily defeated.³⁵

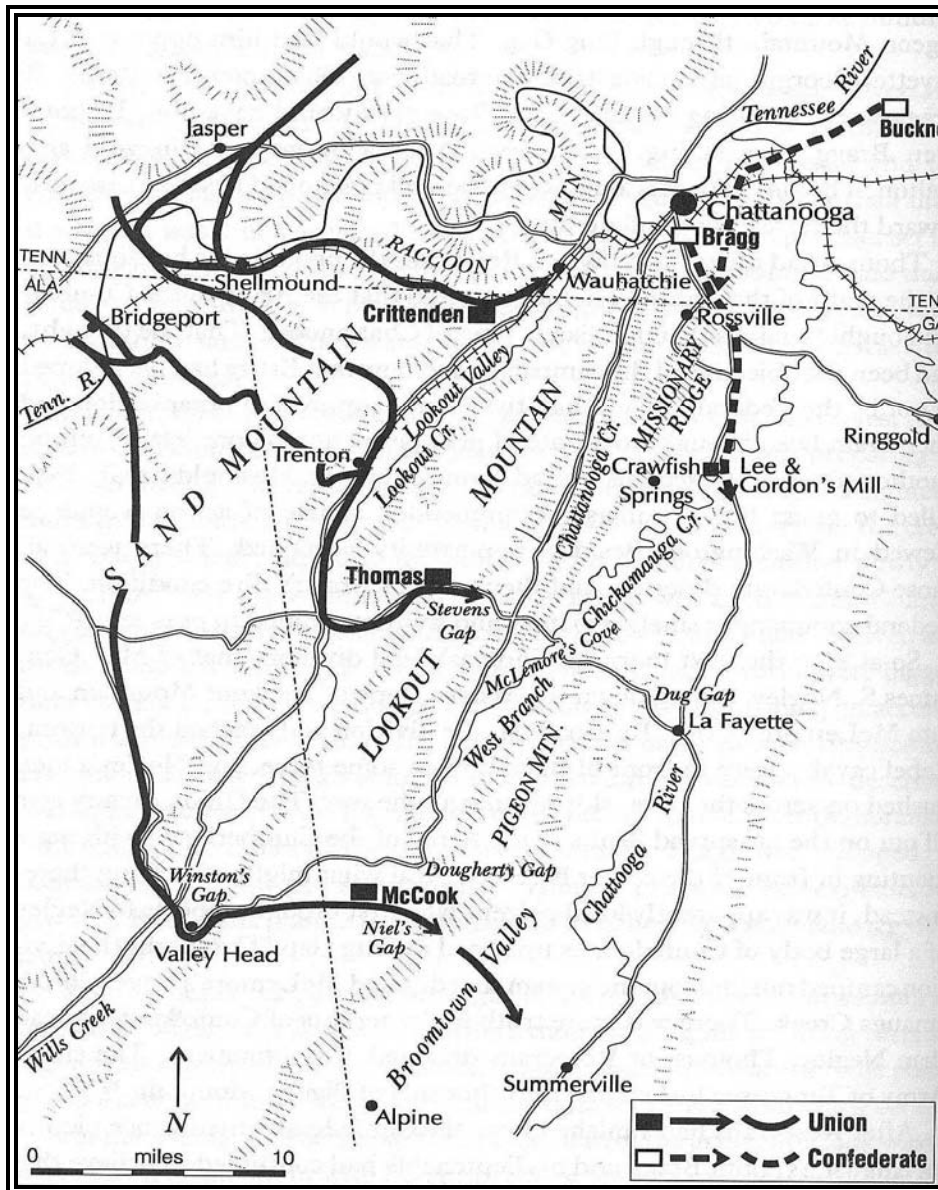


Figure 4. Map of the Army of the Cumberland Crossing the Tennessee River
 Source: Steven E. Woodworth, *Six Armies in Tennessee* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 64.

Wood and his division began crossing the river at Shellmound on 2 September, and by 3 September, he had two of his three brigades across the river, the last brigade having not been relieved of its deception mission as of yet. On 5 September, Wood's

headquarters and his two brigades were encamped at Shellmound waiting for the arrival of their logistical trains that were crossing at Bridgeport.³⁶

On to Chattanooga

Having successfully moved his entire army across the Tennessee River undetected, Rosecrans' next objective was Chattanooga. Bragg was still reacting to Rosecrans' deception operation, and Rosecrans instinctively knew, cautious as he was, that it was time to take the fight to the enemy.

Despite the obvious advantage that Rosecrans enjoyed, he still had a challenge in front of him. Before he reached Bragg's supply line, the Western and Atlantic Railroad, he had to cross several mountainous ridges, Sand Mountain, Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge. Throughout this rugged terrain, there were gaps that the army would be forced to pass through in order to keep its logistical trains caught up with the army.³⁷

The XXI Corps mission for the push to Chattanooga was to follow the railroad past Sand and Raccoon Mountain into the valley to the west of Lookout Mountain³⁸ Wood's part of this mission was to move with two of his brigades to the intersection of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railway and the Trenton and Chattanooga Railroad, in order to observe and engage any enemy forces on the spur of Lookout Mountain. The 1st Division encountered light resistance on the second day of their advance, but easily pushed through it. Once in Lookout Valley, Wood observed that there were enemy signal stations in full view, observing his movement and reporting it. As he approached the intersection, Wood realized that there were enemy pickets within hearing distance. The fact that the enemy had near perfect intelligence on his disposition and the close proximity of the enemy to the intersections, and the open nature of the terrain there,

compelled Wood to decide the position was untenable. Wood informed Crittenden of his decision to pull back a mile or so, to a more tenable position, which he executed later that evening. The next morning, 7 September, Crittenden gave Wood the mission to conduct a reconnaissance in force on the spur of Lookout Mountain.³⁹

During this reconnaissance mission a critical incident occurred between Wood, Crittenden and Rosecrans. Many historians have used this incident to portray Wood in a poor light, but deeper investigation illuminates another story.

Early morning on 7 September, Crittenden received a communication from Rosecrans, directing him to have Wood's 1st Division conduct a reconnaissance in force. Crittenden acknowledged this communication later that same morning.⁴⁰ At this time Wood replied to his corps commander and stated,

All the dangers and difficulties of my position increase as I advance toward the enemy; the valleys widen making it utterly impossible to protect my flank and rear. With them secured I could push boldly up to the enemy's front. I cannot believe General Rosecrans desires such a blind adherence to the mere letter of his order for the general disposition of his forces as naturally jeopardizes the safety of the most salient portions of it, and certainly cripples the force and vigor and accuracy of its reconnaissance. I would, therefore, repeat most earnestly my suggestion to advance General Palmers command to within some 2 miles of me, and if General Crittenden should not feel authorized to make the change, I request he will submit this communication to General Rosecrans for the purpose of obtaining the desired authority.⁴¹

Crittenden wrote a report to Rosecrans, giving him the details of Wood's concerns, highlighting the areas where he felt slighted by Wood. He furnished Wood a copy of the correspondence. The tone of this report was irritable, to say the least, and is indicative of Crittenden's lack of military and command experience. He says of Wood, "He perhaps may question my judgment of the practicability of making such movements, but when he is informed that it is approved, if it does not emanate from the general

commanding the army, I take it to be unmilitary to term such a 'blind obedience to orders', and I think that he has neglected his duty in delaying a reconnaissance the order for which he acknowledges to have received at 7:45 this a.m.”⁴²

Upon receiving his copy of this correspondence, Wood was, as most anyone would be, annoyed. At his point in his life, Wood had been a professional soldier for almost twenty years, and had a spotless record. A professional lawyer only recently turned soldier was now dressing him down in writing to the commanding general. Wood responded with a lengthy rebuttal to army headquarters, that said in part,

In the first place, I will remark that the term “blind adhesion to orders” was not used in any personal or disrespectful sense, but in the enforcement of my suggestion to General Crittenden to move up some of the force immediately with him to my support. The contents of my communication will show that this is the sense in which I used the expression, and had no reference whatever to any specific order, and more especially to the order directing me to make a forced reconnaissance with a part of my force of the enemy’s position on the spur of Lookout Mountain. . . . I respectfully submit that, according to my experience, there is a wide difference in the opinion of military men between the duty of obedience to a specific order and adhesion to the details of a general plan announced in orders, and which admit of latitude and discretion in their execution. It was in this sense that I used the term “ a blind adhesion to orders” and none other.⁴³

This incident is important in the analysis of Rosecrans’ fatal order to Wood, because Rosecrans later used it to insinuate that the circumstances were similar, and that the common factor during the Lookout Mountain spur reconnaissance mission and the fatal order on 20 September, was that “both have the effect of getting his troops out of danger.”⁴⁴ At this point in his career, Wood had been promoted for bravery, been in numerous fights in the Mexican War, the Indian War and the Civil War, and had been wounded at Stones River, yet refused to leave the field until the battle was complete. The one argument that cannot be used to justify Wood’s actions at the Battle of Chickamauga

is that his actions were motivated by cowardice. There is absolutely no evidence to substantiate this argument.

If the nature of an order is not immediate, it is the prerogative, indeed the obligation, of a commander to question or confirm orders, especially if the safety of his command is in jeopardy. On the other hand, in the heat of combat, orders must be obeyed instantly. Only experience can teach a commander when it is proper to clarify orders, or to carry them out immediately. To say that because T. J. Wood questioned his orders on 7 September, so he had a tendency to always question orders is not accurate, and cannot be substantiated.

Once the issue of the order was over, Wood gave the mission of conducting a reconnaissance to Harker and 3rd Brigade. It turned out to be extremely successful according to Wood, who said; "I know no parallel in military history to this reconnaissance."⁴⁵ The reconnaissance gave army troop numbers, disposition and future plans of the Confederate forces that proved to be influential in Rosecrans' future plans.⁴⁶

Pursuit

By 8 September, Crittenden and the other corps commanders had reached their initial objectives for the seizure of Chattanooga. Unlike Tullahoma, however, Rosecrans intended on not only seizing Chattanooga, but also on destroying the Army of Tennessee.⁴⁷ Wood's 2nd Brigade commanded by Colonel Wagner, still north of the river conducting deception operations, reported to Wood that the enemy was evacuating Chattanooga. This was good news indeed, and just what William Rosecrans had been waiting for. He immediately issued orders that took his army from conducting an attack on Chattanooga to a pursuit of the Army of Tennessee.⁴⁸ What Rosecrans did not realize

was that this was exactly what Bragg wanted. The aggressive pursuit was uncharacteristic for the normally methodical Rosecrans, but he smelled victory. To give credibility to his actions, Bragg had several false deserters fall back through the union ranks and give false reports that told of how the Army of Tennessee was on the run and in a state of disarray⁴⁹ What Rosecrans did not realize, was that Bragg was not on the run, but had turned, and was preparing to take advantage of the spread out condition of the Army of the Cumberland.⁵⁰

Wood was given orders to deploy his forces to Chattanooga and prepare to pursue the enemy immediately.⁵¹ He quickly moved toward Chattanooga, encountering only little resistance, which was easily quelled. The afternoon of 9 September saw Wood's last forces, those from the 2nd Brigade, closed on Chattanooga. Wood notes in his official report that the colors of the Ninety-seventh Ohio Infantry Regiment, of his 2nd Brigade, were the first in the army to be planted in Chattanooga. Wood and his division remained in Chattanooga until 10 September, when he received orders to detach one of his brigades to occupy the city, and begin pursuing the enemy with his remaining two brigades immediately.⁵² Wood begin moving that morning, and subsequently began receiving reports of a large Confederate force in the vicinity of Gordon Mills on the Chickamauga Creek where it intersected the Rossville and La Fayette road. Wood was ordered to send a brigade to conduct a reconnaissance in order to determine the accuracy of these reports. Wood assigned this mission to Harker and his 3rd Brigade, who departed on the morning of 11 September. At the same time, Crittenden ordered Wood to take his remaining brigade down the Ringgold road two miles and to await further orders. Later that same day, Wood received orders from Rosecrans to immediately proceed to the Rossville and

La Fayette Road in order to support Colonel Harker, who had been pursuing the enemy all day and was three miles from Gordon's Mill. Wood sent a message to Harker and arranged to link up with him at Gordon's Mill that evening. As it turned out, Harker had been pursuing the rear guard of the entire Army of Tennessee.⁵³

The next day, 12 September, Wood received an order to remain with his division at Gordon's Mill so that the remainder of the XXI Corps could link up with him. They remained quiet on 13 September and that evening, orders were issued to the XXI Corps to leave Wood's Division at Gordon's Mills and to take the other two divisions to Missionary Ridge, where they would link up with the other two corps of the army.

While at Gordon's Mills, Wood was to defend as strongly as possible, but if attacked by vastly superior numbers, to fall back to Rossville, where another division would support him. The 1st Division took advantage of the time and terrain around them, and constructed defensive positions in the vicinity of the creek that allowed them to conduct a stout defense against a superior force. This was accomplished in relative peace until 18 September, when Wood began to receive pressure on his flanks. Wood was able to dissuade the enemy in these attempts, but a short time later he began to get pressure to his immediate front. He directed his artillery into action, and once again quelled the Confederate efforts.⁵⁴

Based on the nature of the enemy activity, Wood believed that the enemy activity was designed to mask their true objective of crossing the Chickamauga Creek with a larger force, further down stream, and cutting Wood off from the rest of the army. Wood reported this belief to Rosecrans in a communication on the evening of 18 September, and it was confirmed early the next morning, 19 September, when Wood heard a large

engagement to the north; the Battle of Chickamauga had begun. Fortunately, Rosecrans had heeded Wood's report, and had moved soldiers to thwart the Confederates. The fight raged on, and Wood's Division remained in place until mid-afternoon, when he received orders from Crittenden to move toward Brigadier General Horatio Van Cleve's Division, and support them on the right. Having observed continued significant enemy movement and presence to his front, Wood sent a communication to Rosecrans to suggest that before he moved, a unit be identified to replace him. This was conducted quickly, and Wood began moving toward Van Cleve.

During his movement, Wood met Brigadier General Jefferson Davis, who informed him that the left of his lines were under tremendous pressure and that he needed assistance. Wood directed Harker to deploy his brigade immediately and engage the Confederates. The ensuing fight was ferocious, with Harker himself having two horses shot out from under him.⁵⁵ Wood held Buell and his 3rd Brigade as a reserve, but soon had to commit them into the fight, in order to hold back the enemy advances in the immediate area. Buell and his brigade were pushed back in the severe fight, and received heavy casualties. Wood himself became engaged in reforming order to Buell's shaken brigade, and then led them himself, to take back the ground they had just lost. During the ensuing fight, Wood's horse was shot twice, forcing him to take one of his orderly's horses. Another heavy push by the enemy was almost successful, but was held off due to assistance received from a brigade from another division. During this portion of the fight, one of Wood's batteries was crippled when its horses were killed. The artillery pieces had to be pulled by men to better cover to the rear. The remainder of the day was quiet with Wood's tired soldiers forming a line and seeking some badly needed rest (see figure 5).⁵⁶

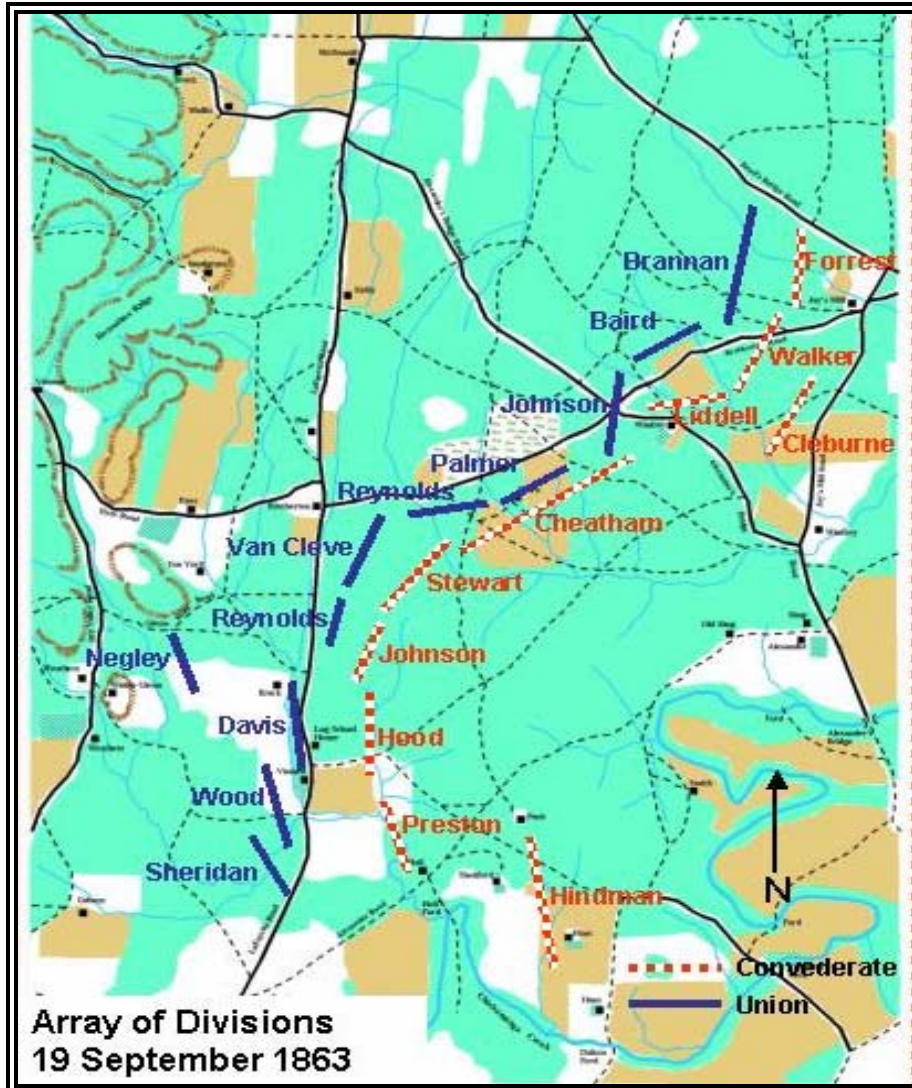


Figure 5. Map of the Array of Divisions on 19 September 1863

Day one of the Battle of Chickamauga was over. For three months, the 1st Division, XXI Corps had contributed significantly to the Army of the Cumberland's efforts. Wood's performance, and that of his division was, though not extraordinary, was certainly noteworthy. At this point in the battle, there was absolutely no indication that Wood or his division was worthy of the criticism that history has given it. In the next

chapter, an in-depth look at every action and report, will analyze and determine if Wood, indeed, surpassed his limits of obedience.

¹Steven E. Woodworth, *Six Armies in Tennessee* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 10.

²*Ibid.*, 30.

³U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), vol. 23, pt. I, 524 (hereafter cited as *OR*).

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*, 523.

⁶Woodworth, 2.

⁷*Ibid.*, 3.

⁸*Ibid.*, 4.

⁹*Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵*OR* 23, pt I, 524.

¹⁶Woodworth, 21.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁹*OR* 23, pt I, 521.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 524.

²¹Ibid., 525.

²²Woodworth, 38.

²³Ibid., 43.

²⁴Henry Martyn Cist, *The Army of the Cumberland* (New York: C.Scribner's Sons, 1882), 170.

²⁵OR 23, pt I, 527.

²⁶Woodworth, 52.

²⁷Ibid., 54.

²⁸Ibid., 54.

²⁹US War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), vol. 30, pt. I, 625.

³⁰Ibid., 626.

³¹Ibid.

³²Woodworth, 57.

³³Ibid., 56.

³⁴Ibid., 57.

³⁵Ibid., 58.

³⁶OR 30, pt I, 626.

³⁷Woodworth, 59.

³⁸Ibid., 60.

³⁹OR 30, pt I, 627.

⁴⁰OR 30, pt III, 414.

⁴¹Ibid., 416.

⁴²Ibid., 415.

⁴³Ibid., 419.

⁴⁴*OR 30, pt I, 103.*

⁴⁵*Ibid., 628.*

⁴⁶*Ibid., 418.*

⁴⁷*Woodworth, 62.*

⁴⁸*Ibid., 62.*

⁴⁹*Ibid., 67.*

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹*OR 30, pt I, 628.*

⁵²*Ibid., 629.*

⁵³*Ibid., 630.*

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵*Ibid., 632.*

⁵⁶*Ibid., 634.*

CHAPTER 4

THE FATAL DAY

The Army of the Cumberland had been moving for weeks over miles of rugged, mountainous terrain, and now found itself, on 20 September 1863, facing the foe it had been so doggedly pursuing. The day would be long, and would ultimately go into the annals of history as one of the great battles of the Civil War. Thomas J. Wood and his 1st Division, XXI Corps played a central role in the battle's outcome. In fact, the role of Wood and his division is said by many historians to be the decisive element in the entire battle. As already stated in previous chapters, Wood's strict adherence to orders poses the essential element in this thesis, and begs the question what is our limit of obedience? The final piece of information needed to answer this question lies in Wood's and his division's actions on this fateful day. The key actions that will be explored are Wood's movement from the reserve to replacing Negley on the line, alleged events that took place during this movement, Rosecrans' "fatal order," and the circumstances that motivated him to issue it, the actual writing of the order and its delivery, Wood's execution of the order, and finally, Wood and his division's actions after the Confederates penetrated the Union lines.

From the Reserve to the Line

After a hard day of fighting on 19 September, Wood and his division found themselves in relative peace as evening arrived. Late that night, Rosecrans had a council of war with his corps commanders so that they could discuss the next day's battle and he could issue orders to his army. Crittenden and his XXI Corps were to occupy, with his

two divisions available, a reserve position near the junction of McCook's and Thomas' lines. Approximately midnight, the meeting adjourned and each corps commander went to his respective unit to issue his orders.¹ Wood received his orders from Crittenden sometime after midnight and began to move the 1st Division into place in the vicinity of the slope of Missionary Ridge (see figure 6).²

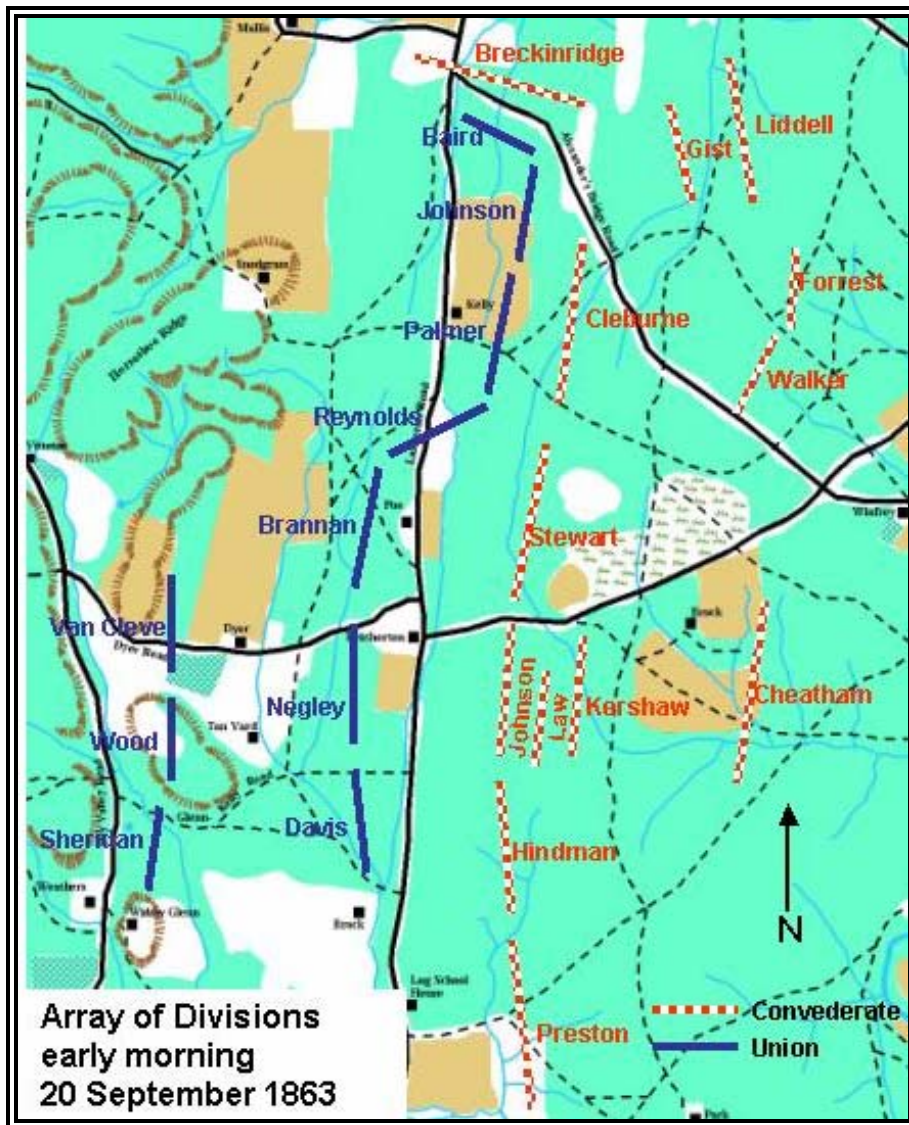


Figure 6. Map of the Array of Divisions on Early Morning of 20 September 1863

While Crittenden was issuing the order that put Wood into the reserve, Major General George Thomas, commander of the XIV Corps, was going back toward his headquarters to issue orders of his own. Despite the late hour, Thomas began inspecting his lines that were on the far left of the Army of the Cumberland battle lines. During his inspection, he was given a report by Brigadier General Absalom Baird, commander of Thomas' 1st Division, that his division could not cover the ground all the way to the Reed's Bridge Road and hold the ground he had in the middle. Thomas had had a hard day of fighting on 19 September, and his instincts told him that the main Confederate assault would focus on his part of the line. This report was all he needed to motivate him to ask Rosecrans for reinforcements. His 2nd Division commander, Brigadier General James Negley, was occupying a part of the line in the vicinity of McCook's Corps. Thomas sent his request to Rosecrans, asking for Negley by name, so that he could occupy the area behind and to the left of Baird, thereby securing the Union left flank. Rosecrans consented to the request immediately, and the order was drafted.³ This was the first of Thomas' two requests to be reinforced on the left by entire divisions. Already within his command were Thomas' three organic divisions, Major General John Palmer's 2nd Division, XXI Corps, and Brigadier General Richard Johnson's 2nd Division, XX Corps.⁴ By granting Thomas' request for Negley, Rosecrans had given him command of three fifths of the Army of the Cumberland.⁵

A gap was created when Rosecrans consented to give Negley to Thomas. Rosecrans joined Thomas on the far left of the Union lines and agreed that the main Confederate effort would be in that vicinity. He gave orders to McCook to relieve Negley, and then rode toward the right to check on Negley's progress, only to be

disappointed because Negley had begun to form his division for the move, but had yet to step off.⁶ In addition, McCook had not sent anyone to relieve him yet. This left only Negley's skirmishers in the gap, who were experiencing slight contact with what would turn out to be elements of James Longstreet's Confederate Left Wing. Negley received a dressing down from Rosecrans for only leaving his skirmishers to fill the gap where his division had been, and was told to put two of his brigades back on the line until properly relieved. Rosecrans himself sent Negley's reserve brigade, commanded by Brigadier John Beatty, to Thomas, to assist in shoring up the left of the Union line. Losing faith that McCook could relieve Negley in a timely fashion, Rosecrans sent orders to Crittenden to have Wood and his division move forward from the reserve position he was occupying to relieve Negley.⁷ Wood received the orders and began to move his division off Missionary Ridge toward the Union Line at approximately 0730.

It was during this movement that the alleged rebuke of Wood by Rosecrans occurred. This is extremely important to analyze thoroughly, as it is the basis of the argument that Wood was motivated by anger and revenge when he obeyed the "fatal order." There are several versions of the alleged dressing down, some being more sympathetic to Wood, while others are not. However, they are all similar in portraying Rosecrans' dressing down of Wood being the deciding factor in Wood's obedience to his orders. Author Glenn Tucker writes,

When Rosecrans found Wood, on whom he appeared to place the principal blame for the slow departure of Negley, he upbraided him severely in the presence of his staff. It proved the most costly reprimand Rosecrans ever delivered. Wood did not repeat the language in his official account, but none had a more caustic tongue than Rosecrans when he became excited and in this instance he was agitated into a fury. "What is the meaning of this, sir?" he shouted to Wood, according to one version of his remarks. "You have disobeyed my specific orders. By your

damnable negligence you are endangering the safety of the entire army, and , by God, I will not tolerate it. Move your division at once, as I have instructed, or the consequences will not be pleasant for yourself.⁸

Virtually all historians agree that there was some form of dressing down of Wood by Rosecrans, yet this author has found no primary source material that substantiates this account. If the references are traced back, in virtually every account, the root source is a book published in 1882 titled *The Army of the Cumberland*, by Henry Cist. Though this book does not relate as vivid an account of Rosecrans' rebuke, it does refer to it. The relevant fact is that neither Cist nor any other author during this time period was compelled to cite or give credit to their source material. Cist himself was in the Army of the Cumberland, but instead of being at Chickamauga, where he may have actually witnessed this rebuke, he was serving in a staff position in Chattanooga at the time of the battle.⁹ He does not say who told him of these events.

However, a primary source that is not often cited is a letter written by T. J. Wood to the editor of the *New York Times* after Cist's book was published. Wood says:

But to return to the question of the reprimand to me by Gen. Rosecrans, as alleged by Gen. Cist, and which is the corner-stone of his theory. At this point of the discussion it is important to note that Gen. Cist was not present at the battle of Chickamauga, and hence when he pretends to give actual occurrences, it is done necessarily on second-hand information, with all the probability of dilution which that method carries along with it. Now, I state positively I was not reprimanded by Gen. Rosecrans on that morning of Sept. 20, 1863, for the tardy movement of my division nor for anything else. I saw Gen. Rosecrans but once on the 20th of September, 1863. The meeting was but for a moment, and occurred as I was moving my division from its position in reserve to relieve Gen. Negley's division on the line of battle. Meeting thus casually, (I think the meeting occurred a little before 8 A.M.) Gen. Rosecrans asked me, without heat of language or manner toward me, so far as I observed, why I had not moved earlier. I replied that I had moved promptly on the receipt of the order. He said the order had been sent some time before. I replied that I knew nothing as to when the order was dispatched from his headquarters, (be it remembered the order reached me through the corps commander,) and reiterated that I had moved promptly on the receipt of the order. Gen. Rosecrans made no further comment on the preceding movement of my

division, and added: "Hurry up and relieve Gen. Negley on the line." This was done. I certainly did not feel that I had been censured by Gen. Rosecrans, and consequently pique, as charged by Gen. Cist, could not have been the motive of my subsequent conduct on the battle-field or elsewhere.¹⁰

Interestingly enough, in the *Official Record*, Rosecrans does not refer to any dressing down involving Wood.¹¹

Once Wood arrived on line, he replaced Negley as ordered (see figure 7). He arrayed his division and "tied" into Brigadier General John Brannan on his left. Wood was given Colonel Sidney Barnes' 3rd Brigade of Brigadier General's Horatio P. Van Cleve's 3rd Division, XXI Corps, giving Wood three complete brigades. Wood placed Barnes' and his brigade on the far left, next to Brannan. In the center he placed Harker and his brigade, and on the far right flank he placed Buell and his brigade. Wood formed his division in "two lines, the front one deployed, the second one in double column closed en masse, with their batteries following and supporting."¹²

As Wood was positioning his skirmishers to his front, the Confederates opened fire on them and a sharp exchange of musket fire ensued. During the exchange one of Wood's regimental commanders, Colonel Frederick A. Bartleson advanced his regiment, the 100th Illinois Infantry, without orders. He was subsequently shot from his horse and seriously wounded.¹³ Once Wood had finished moving his forces into place, they were "tied" in with Brigadier General Jefferson Davis on the right and Brannan on the left.¹⁴

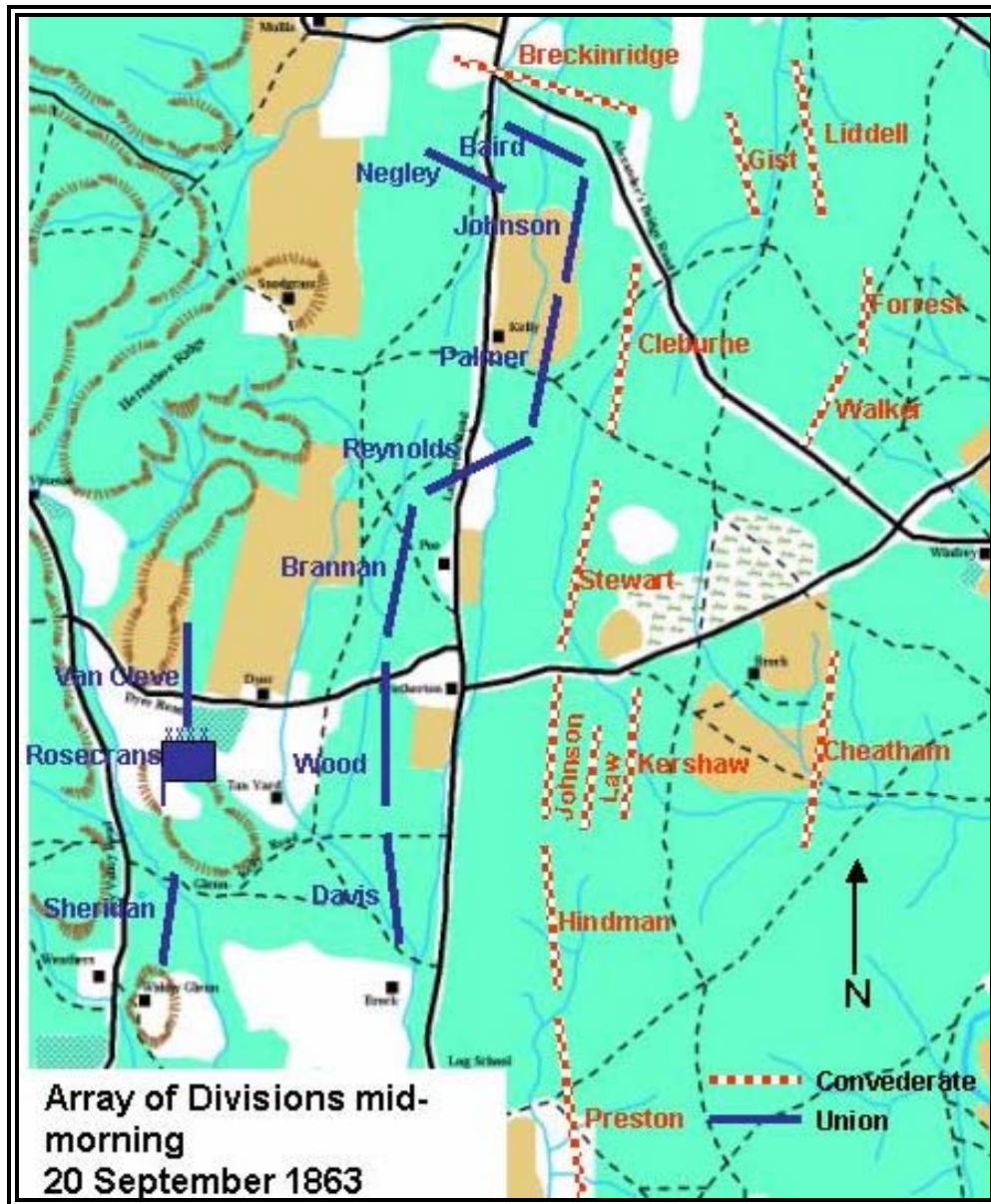


Figure 7. Map of the Array of Divisions on Midmorning of 20 September 1863

Events on the Left: Reynolds, Brannon and Kellogg

As Wood was maneuvering his division forward and placing it in the line, events were taking place to his left that would have a profound effect on the battle that day.

Consistent with his earlier requests, Thomas was once more asking for reinforcements to the left, on his portion of the line. Though he was not pulling from another corps this time, the results would be the same in that it would force the rest of the Union lines to shift to the left in order to close the gap created. Thomas wanted Brigadier General John Brannan and his division. To Thomas' credit, he was still under the assumption that Brannan was in the reserve to the rear of the lines, not realizing that he had been ordered by Rosecrans earlier to fill a gap in the line between Reynolds and Negley.

The time was about 1015 and Thomas sent one of his aides, Captain Sanford Kellogg, to find Brannan and issue the orders bringing him to the left. When Kellogg found Brannan it was relatively calm to his and Reynolds' front. Kellogg explained Thomas' orders to Brannan who, in turn, asked Reynolds if he thought he could maintain without him. Reynolds' lines were angled in such a manner as to perhaps allow him to cover by fire the gap left by Brannan. He told Brannan as much and the decision was made among the three, Brannan, Reynolds and Kellogg, that the order would be obeyed. As Kellogg prepared to leave, Reynolds began to have second thoughts about his ability to cover his right. He was aware that Negley had left, but was not aware that Wood had replaced him. He believed his right would be much more exposed when Brannan left than was actually the case. With these fears surfacing, Reynolds told Kellogg before he left to inform Rosecrans of his exposed right flank, and if possible to send someone to assist him once Brannan left. Kellogg assured him that he would let Rosecrans know of his concerns, and rode off quickly to find him.¹⁵

At this point Brannan made a critical decision that had enormous implications on the outcome of the battle. He decided not to pull out of the lines, but instead stay where

he was. Had Kellogg still been there, no damage would have been done, but the fact that Kellogg now had false information, and was carrying it to Rosecrans, was extremely important. Though not aware of it, Kellogg rendered an erroneous report to Rosecrans at about 1030. He told him that Thomas was being pressured on the left, and that he had requested Brannan to assist him. He told him that Brannan was already on the move, and that Reynolds' right flank was now exposed and that there was now a gap in the lines. Rosecrans assured him that Thomas could have Brannan. "Word was sent to General Thomas that he should be supported, even if it took away the whole corps of Crittenden and McCook."¹⁶ Rosecrans now believed, as did Kellogg, that there was a gap in his lines, but there was no gap, so any course of action Rosecrans decided upon was bound to compound the friction and fog of the current situation.

The Writing of the Fatal Order

Despite Rosecrans' peculiar personality, with the faulty information at hand, Rosecrans can be exonerated for a poor course of action. Rosecrans' state of mind made this almost certain. He had "eaten little and slept less since the army had crossed the Tennessee River,"¹⁷ a few days earlier. His headquarters was buzzing with activity as he was issuing the orders for units to shift to the left in answer to Thomas's requests. Issuing too many orders was a trait peculiar to Rosecrans. He "expected too much to happen in too short a time, and the resultant written orders issued between 10:30 A.M. and 10:45 A.M. were cloudy, complicated, and even contradictory."¹⁸ As one author states, "in his impulsiveness lay a military defect, which was to issue too many orders while his men were fighting."¹⁹ Rosecrans' chief of staff, Brigadier General James Garfield, usually

drafted his orders, but there were far too many for one man to write, so Rosecrans turned to another staff officer, Major Frank Bond, and drafted the following order:

Headquarters Department of Cumberland,

September 20th-1045 A.M.

Brigadier-General Wood, Commanding Division:

The general commanding directs that you close up on Reynolds as fast as possible, and support him. Respectfully, etc.

Frank S. Bond, Major and Aide-de-Camp²⁰

The order ultimately led to Rosecrans' defeat. Had he realized the severity of the outcome, he most certainly would have confirmed that Bond had accurately worded the order before it was sent out. This lapse of judgment was probably due to the near exhausted state he was in.²¹ The order was marked "Gallop". This would tell the recipient that the order was urgent, thereby enforcing even more its need to be executed. Had Rosecrans or Garfield read the order before it was dispatched, they almost certainly would have made it conditional, but they did not, and the order stood as it was. Rosecrans gave the order to Lieutenant Colonel Lynn Starling for delivery to Wood. Crittenden was present at the time, so instead of routing through the corps commander as was normal, it went straight to Wood.²²

Had Rosecrans taken responsibility for the writing of the order and the mistake that it was, perhaps so much would not have come of it, but this was not the case. During the aftermath of Chickamauga, Rosecrans never shouldered any of the blame for the

outcome nor his actions that led to his dismissal. Henry Villard wrote the following of Rosecrans:

He affirmed emphatically that the direct and sole cause of the disaster on the second day was the want of judgment and discretion on the part of General Wood in executing the momentous order 'to close up on Reynolds as fast as possible and support him,' and opening a gap in the line although aware that the enemy was about to attack that part of it. He applied the strongest language to that division commander, and even charged that he withdrew from the line, notwithstanding that Wood, in doubt as to the prudence of moving away, had sought advice of General Thomas, who told him to stay where he was.²³

Rosecrans' denial of any responsibility is seen in the official record when he wrote, "General Wood, overlooking the direction to 'close up' on General Reynolds, supposed he was to support him, by withdrawing from the line and passing to the rear of General Brannan, who, it appears, was not out of line, but was *en echelon*, and slightly in rear of Reynolds right. By this unfortunate mistake a gap was opened in the line of battle, of which the enemy took instant advantage, and striking Davis in flank and rear, as well as in front, threw his whole division in confusion."²⁴

Rosecrans was also criticized by Glenn Tucker:

But how about the general who impetuously issues – through other than his routine staff channels – an order churning up his line of battle on the mere hearsay that there is a gap in it, without any personal inspection of the field? The first fault was Kellogg's but the major fault was of course Rosecrans'. He could have ridden to Wood as quickly as he could send a staff officer. But if he could not go, and there appears to be no reason why he could not, then his proper course was to assign the duty to the corps commander – Crittenden.²⁵

The Delivery of the Order

During the delivery of the order to Wood there is, once more, a debate over the events that transpired and the actions of those present. It is important to note these differences, as they are significant in determining Wood's state of mind and analyzing his

actions at the time. As with the alleged rebuke by Rosecrans to Wood, this popular story surrounding the delivery of the order and Wood's actions saw their origin in Henry Cist's *Army of the Cumberland*. Cist's story contains several points that are contentious and are worth looking at closely. A comparison can then be made between his work, more modern historical works and with the primary sources that were present, to include T. J. Wood.

The points Cist made and that should be scrutinized are as follows:

1. He contended that the wording of the order was such that Wood should have known not to obey it.
2. He argued that Wood knew that the author of the order, Bond, was inexperienced, which should have caused him to confirm the order with Rosecrans.
3. He stated that Wood's motivation for obeying the order was vindictive due to the rebuke he allegedly received from Rosecrans earlier that morning.
4. He contended that Wood's motivation for preserving the actual order was unique to this event, and was done with the knowledge that it would be required as evidence at a later date.
5. He wrote that Wood attempted to shift the responsibility of the movement of his division to McCook and to Thomas.²⁶

Contemporary historians have accepted this story to the extent that it is thought by virtually everyone to be the truth. There are several variations of the delivery of the fatal order, but they are all similar. One popular version by Peter Cozzens is:

The clatter from the skirmish line greeted Lieutenant Colonel Lyne Starling as he approached the rear of Wood's low breastworks. He found the Kentuckian standing beside a tree behind Buell's brigade. General McCook was with him.

Starling leaned over in the saddle and handed Wood the order. It was 11:00 A.M. While Wood read the order, Starling began to explain its intent. Wood interrupted. Brannan was in position, he said, there was no vacancy between Reynold's division and his own. "Then there is no order," retorted Starling.

There the Matter should have ended.

And with anyone but Tom Wood, it most assuredly would have. Rosecrans had upbraided Wood twice for failing to obey orders promptly. First there had been the abortive reconnaissance of Lookout Mountain and the written reprimand sent over the telegraph for all to see. Then there was the dressing down just ninety minutes earlier in front of Wood's entire staff. The barbs of Rosecrans's invective pained the Kentuckian. Anger clouded his reason. No, he told Starling, the order was quite imperative, he would move at once.

Starling was dumbfounded. Could Wood at least wait ten minutes while he relayed the general's concerns to Rosecrans? No, he intended to move. Brannan indeed was in place, but to Wood the meaning of the order "was clear and undoubted. It clearly told me I was to withdraw my division from the line, and passing northward and eastward immediately in rear of the line of battle, to find General Reynolds's position, to close upon him and support him." Remarking that he "was glad the order was in writing, as it was a good thing to have for future reference," Wood carefully placed the order in his pocket notebook. Before he did, some say he waved it before his staff with the words: "Gentlemen, I hold the fatal order of the day in my hand and would not part with it for five thousand dollars."²⁷

As with the reprimand received by Wood earlier, there is no primary source data that supports this version of the delivery of the order. It starts with Henry Cist, who was not present on the battlefield. There are, however, primary sources that have a different version of the story. Major William Richards of McCook's staff, who was present during the delivery of the order, had another version of the delivery of the order:

Wood peered quizzingly at the order, turned to McCook and read it aloud, adding in the familiar vernacular indulged between those two Generals: Mack, I'll move out by the right flank and rear to hide my move from the enemy. No, Tom, said McCook, just march out by the left flank and I'll order Jeff (meaning Jeff Davis) to close your gap. As Brannan's whole division intervened between Wood and Reynolds, whom he had been ordered to support, no one present thought of any other meaning than that taken by Wood.²⁸

In addition to this account, Wood himself, in his letter to the *New York Times*, expounded on his receipt of the order and rebutted several of Cist's accusations surrounding this battle. According to Wood, he recently received a letter from a former member of his staff at Chickamauga, Colonel Bestow. A portion of the letter stated:

The story of the orderly who brought you the order to close up on Reynolds and support him lacks an essential element--it is not true; it is a pure fabrication by somebody. The facts are these: Yourself, myself, and a part of your staff were dismounted, sitting under a tree, in rear of our line. You had stationed an aide to see that no gap occurred between your left and Gen. Brannan's right, as Gen. Rosecrans had expressed some solicitude that no gap should occur between the two divisions. While so situated, Gen. McCook rode by. You hailed him, and asked what was the news along the line. He immediately dismounted and came up to you. At this time not a shot was being fired on our front. While you and Gen. McCook were talking an orderly rode up. I took the communication from him, tore open the envelope, handed the contents to you, gave the orderly a receipt on the envelope, handed it to him, and he immediately rode away. You immediately gave the necessary orders for the movement of the division was required by the order. I carried the order to one of the brigades, and my recollection is that you personally delivered the order to one of the brigades. When I returned to you, you had Gen. Rosecrans's order in your hand, and, as was usual, you handed it to me, and I put it in my saber-tash, that was the invariable custom at your head-quarters in regard to orders. After you had read and digested the orders you received, and issued your orders based on them, you handed the orders to me for preservation, as the official custodian of them. I repeat that the statement laid at the door of the orderly, that you took out your memorandum book and safely deposited the order in it, is a pure fabrication. During four years' intimate association with you, I know you never carried a memorandum book.²⁹

In Wood's letter, he rebutted Cist's allegations himself. In reference to Cist's contentions that Wood should have known to disobey the order because of the wording of it Wood said, "The commander of an army in which such a view of subordination should be dominant could scarcely be envied. . . . On the field of battle the commanding General is not only the possessor of the information of each separate commander, but, by theory, he is the receptacle of the information of all subordinate commanders. Hence, his orders

become the expression of the requirement or exigency of the whole field of battle. On no other theory would success be possible.”³⁰

Cist also contended that the experience of the officer who wrote the order was known and should have compelled Wood to confirm the order with Rosecrans. Of this theory Wood says, “Gen. Cist’s statement that I knew the signer of the order was ignorant of tactical language is erroneous. I had no knowledge as to his tactical acquirements. . . . [o]rders are assumed to express the wishes of the authority issuing them, and any other rule of interpretation would lead to a dead lock to all military operations.”³¹

In response to Cist’s accusation that Wood had purposely obeyed an order that he knew would place the army in peril, in order to obtain revenge on Rosecrans, Wood stated, “When I received it no firing was going on in my front. The roar of battle was borne to me from the left. The order was sent to me direct, not through the corps commander. All these circumstances emphasized immediate and literal obedience to the order. . . . In the name of common sense, and every other sort of sense, how could I support Gen. Reynolds without moving my division to the rear of the position occupied by his division, which was some distance to my left, but how far I did not then know, and, as said above, entirely disconnected from my position?”³²

In response to Cist’s accusation that the preservation of the order was done because Wood knew it would be useful as evidence, Wood said the following: “First, the preservation of orders is a custom as old as the military service; second, such preservation is absolutely necessary that an officer may give as intelligent narrative of his movements, and, third, such preservation of orders is imperatively commanded by the Army regulations.”³³

Lastly, Wood rebutted Cist's accusation that he attempted to shift the blame of his division movement to McCook. "This is a wholly gratuitous fling. . . . What are the facts of the case? Gen. McCook chanced to be with me when I received the order to move my division to the support of Gen. Reynolds. As was most natural, I showed him the order. Furthermore, as Gen. McCook commanded adjacent troops, (Davis's division) military usage and military propriety required that the movement of my division should be communicated to him. He concurred in the interpretation I had placed on the order before showing it to him. He further volunteered to say that the order was so imperative and preemptory that I must obey it immediately and added he would move Davis's division to fill the gap made by the withdrawal of my division."³⁴

It is apparent that there is a significant gap in the preponderance of the story of the fatal order told by Cist and that told by Wood and others who were present during this incident. It is peculiar that the major works written on the Battle of Chickamauga all gravitate to the story that relies on hearsay, and not primary sources.

The Execution of the Order

Despite the debate surrounding the issue of the fatal order, it was in fact issued and ultimately executed by Wood and his division. After his conference with McCook, Wood sent the required orders to his brigade commanders and the movement began. As Brannan was to Wood's immediate left, it was necessary to move his division to his rear.

Wood rode forward to pinpoint Reynolds' location and to coordinate for the arrival of his division. During his search for Reynolds, Wood saw Thomas. He informed Thomas of his orders and asked where he should go to support Reynolds. Thomas informed Wood that Reynolds did not need him, but that he was needed to the far left in

support of Baird. Wood showed him the written order he had and asked if he would take responsibility for changing it. Thomas assured Wood that he would.³⁵

It is at this time that there is, once more, a conflict in conventional historiography and what several eyewitnesses say happened. Virtually every account of Chickamauga state that the Confederates penetrated through the gap left by Wood's division when they pulled out. Author Steven Woodworth says:

At 11:10 A.M., on order from Longstreet, Johnson's Tennesseans started up the east side of the Brotherton ridge to launch the assault. At the foot of the western slope of that ridge, less than two hundred yards away, the Union breastworks were mostly deserted, though at the southern end of the sector, the men of Davis's division were double-quicking by the left flank, trying to fill the gap left by Wood's departure. They were too late. To hold this position they would have had to have blasted the Rebels the moment they came over the ridge, but before Davis's men could take their place the yelling Confederates were upon them. Surprised, outnumbered, and flanked on both sides, Davis's division went to pieces. The rampaging Southerners next caught the trailing brigade of Wood's withdrawing division and wrecked it before it could get clear of the gap it had left."³⁶

In Wood's letter to the *New York Times*, he told a different story.

All of these writers have persistently and falsely represented, and attempted to make the public believe the representation true, that the disaster on the right of the national line of battle at Chickamauga Sept. 20, A.M., 1863, was wholly due to the opening of the line by the withdrawal of my division, utterly suppressing the fact that continuity of the national line of battle had been fatally broken further to the right and rear of the position occupied by my division by the withdrawal, by order of Gen. Rosecrans, of two brigades--Lytle's and Walworth's--of Gen. Sheridan's division. The order for this movement and the movement proceeded a few minutes the order addressed to me and movement of my division. The withdrawal of these two brigades caused an opening in the line of nearly three-fourths of a mile between Gen. Davis's division (which was next, en echelon, on my right) and the remaining brigade, Laibold's, of Gen. Sheridan's division. The all-important fact to be here noted is this: That through the gap thus made in the line, to the right and rear of Gen. Davis's position, the Confederates not only could have passed, but did actually pass and gain the rear of the national line, entirely irrespective of the opening made in the line by the withdrawal of my division. This statement is fully sustained by the fact, first, that Laibold's brigade, which was further to the right and rear than was Gen. Davis's division, was struck by the Confederates before Gen. Davis's division; and, second, by the fact that

Gen. Davis's division was not simply struck by the Confederates--it was almost wholly enveloped by them. An important conclusion, hence, to be noted is that had my division not been withdrawn from the line it would have been absolutely necessary, by reason of the Confederates having gained the rear of the national line through the withdrawal of Lytle's and Walworth's brigades, for my division and Gen. Brannan's to withdraw from the line and take position, as in the end was done, on the crescent-shaped spur which extended from Missionary Ridge to near the right of Gen. Reynolds's division--that crescent-shaped ridge on which the two divisions, gallantly and most effectually sustained later in the afternoon by the two brigades of Steedman's division of the Reserve Corps, made such a glorious defense through all the hours of the long afternoon of Sunday, Sept. 20, 1863.³⁷

That there was any other location of penetration is not a common recounting of the Battle of Chickamauga. This author contends that it should at least be given equal consideration, as there is more than one general officer, physically located on the Federal right flank, who share this perspective with Wood. In fact, the three division commanders on the right flank, Wood, Davis, and Sheridan, all indicate that Longstreet's left wing actually achieved an envelopment of the Federal right, before the penetration of Wood's old location. In the official record, Davis wrote:

Colonel Buell at this time informed me that he had just received orders to move to his left in order to close up with our lines in that direction. Colonel Buell's brigade commenced the movement, and in compliance with order from General McCook, I directed Martin to move his brigade into the position thus being vacated. This brigade moved promptly into position, but had scarcely reached the line when the enemy, advancing in heavy force, opened fire on its and Carlin's front. These brigades received the fire with veteran coolness and returned it with deadly effect for several rounds and in some instances the musket was used in beating back the enemy before the position was yielded. The sudden withdrawal of troops from my left and the absence of any support on my right, just as the attack was being made, made my position little better than an outpost and perfectly untenable against the overwhelming force coming against it. Nothing but precipitate flight could save my command from annihilation or capture. Observing the critical condition of my flanks I rode up to Colonel Laiboldt, commanding one of General Sheridan's brigades posted in an open field a few hundred yards to my rear and right and, informed him that if he was there for the purpose of supporting my troops it must be done immediately. He at once commenced deploying his troops to form line on my right, but before the movement was fully completed his brigade received a heavy attack from that part

of the enemy's line which had passed thus far unopposed around my right flank. My troops were by this time compelled to abandon their position, falling back rapidly. A few hundred yards brought them into the open field and exposed them to the full effect of the pursuing enemy's fire. Laiboldt's brigade did not seem sufficiently strong to check the enemy's advance, and a general rout of our troops on the right was manifest.³⁸

It is evident, based on Davis's report, that though there was pressure to his left where Wood had been, the bulk of the pressure applied by the Confederates was the forces on his right, who advanced unimpeded around his right flank.

Even clearer is Sheridan's report. Also found in the official record, Sheridan says the following of the Confederate rout:

About 11 o'clock the brigade of Colonel Laiboldt, composed of the Second and Fifteenth Missouri, Forty-fourth and Seventy-third Illinois, was directed to move to the left and occupy a portion of the front which had been covered by General Negley. Before getting into this position however, the ground was occupied by Carlin's brigade, of Davis' division, and Laiboldt was directed to take position on a very strong ridge in his rear, with directions to deploy on the ridge and hold it, so as to prevent Davis' flank from being turned. Word was then sent to General McCook of the disposition which had been made, which he approved. Immediately afterward I received orders to support General Thomas with two brigades. I had just abandoned my position, and was moving at a double-quick when the enemy made a furious assault with overwhelming numbers on Davis' front, and, coming up through the unoccupied space between Davis and myself, even covering the front of the position I had just abandoned, Davis was driven from his lines, and Laiboldt, whose brigade was in column of regiments, was ordered by Major-General McCook to charge, deploying to the front.³⁹

Based on these accounts of the battle and how the events unfolded, there is a distinct possibility that the initial penetration of Confederate forces came not through the alleged gap left in the lines when Wood pulled out, but through the right flank of the Federal line. As Sheridan mentioned in his official report, Rosecrans was, once again, answering Thomas's call to strengthen the left. As the results were disastrous, it may even be said that Rosecrans was, at Thomas's request, strengthening the left at the peril of the right. Though this reinforcement was not an entire division this time, it was the

better part of one. Since the sun had come up that morning, Rosecrans had drafted orders to send eight brigades from the right to the left. It can be argued that the success of Longstreet's left wing that day was due to the culminating effect this weakening had on the Federal line.

Wood's Actions After the Penetration

Though the question of Wood's obedience took place during the penetration, it is necessary to look at the rest of the day's battle to gain a complete understanding of his actions and properly analyze them.

After receiving word from Thomas that he would take responsibility for changing his orders, Wood asked Thomas for one of his staff officers to assist him in notifying his command of the change of orders. Thomas consented to this request, and Wood gave the officer instructions to notify Barnes's brigade, attached from Van Cleve's Division, of the changes, while he rode off to notify Harker and Buell.

When Wood arrived at the Brotherton field he found it swarming with enemy soldiers. His far right brigade, Buell's, had been split by the massing Rebel soldiers, leaving Buell with his headquarters and one regiment, the 58th Indiana. Harker's brigade, which had been situated in the middle, was still intact.

Wood realized that moving through the open fields would be perilous, and began leading what was left of his division through the woods toward the left of the Federal line. His two artillery batteries were not able to follow through the thick, wooded terrain and were sent across the Dyer field. One of these batteries was captured by the Confederate forces, but one was able to get over Missionary Ridge and to Rossville.

Wood intuitively realized that the intent of the enemy, having separated a portion of the Union forces on the right from the main body, was to hit them from the rear, cut off their escape route to Chattanooga, and destroy or capture the bulk of the Army of the Cumberland. Wood's remaining forces were on line at the northern portion of Dyer field, facing the enemy to the south. There was a fence stretching across the open field between Wood's division and the approaching Rebels. Realizing that the enemy advance must be stopped, Wood ordered the 125th Ohio, from Buell's brigade, to advance to the fence and seize it.⁴⁰

The 125th Ohio, commanded by Colonel Emerson Opdycke, rushed forward to the fence and opened fire on the advancing enemy. Immediately after this, the 64th Ohio, commanded by Colonel Alexander McIlvain, occupied the fence to the left of the 125th Ohio. Both regiments together were successful in momentarily halting the advance of the Confederate forces. The remainder of Harker's brigade and the 58th Indiana of Buell's brigade occupied the right side of the line on a hill with a clear view of the field to their front.

In an attempt to capitalize on the situation at hand, the 125th Ohio and the 64th Ohio rushed toward the enemy to a small clump of trees in the field. The dust of the field was thick, and momentarily a fear rippled through the Union line that they had been firing on their own forces instead of the enemy. A quick cease-fire was called until the enemy was positively identified. The firing commenced once again.

As the Confederate forces began to advance once more, they angled to their left in an attempt to turn the right flank of Wood's line. Realizing their intent, Wood withdrew his forces under fire to a small spur that was perpendicular to the ridge and to the

Rossville and La Fayette road (see figure 8). According to Wood, it was excellent ground for a defense. “The abruptness of the declivity on either side of it almost gives to this ridge the quality of a natural parapet. Troops holding it could load and fire behind it out of reach of the enemy’s fire, and then advance to the crest of it to deliver a plunging fire on the advancing foe.”⁴¹



Figure 8. Map of Wood’s Division on Horseshoe Ridge

As Wood was falling back toward Snodgrass Hill, Brannan, also pushed from the Federal lines, was fighting toward the same location. He occupied the same ridge to the right of Wood and higher up. According to Wood, the two united lines looked like an

“irregular crescent, with the concavity toward the enemy.”⁴² Wood located himself with Harker’s brigade, and placed Buell and his lone regiment with Brannan’s command. The ground chosen by the Federals to defend could hardly have been better. The nature of the line formed by Wood and Brannan allowed for their fires to converge on the enemy as they approached, making it especially difficult for them to gain ground. The Confederate forces attacked multiple times but were repelled each time. Wood in his official record specifically referenced one of these attacks because of its ferocity.

But I deem it proper to signalize one of these attacks specially. It occurred about 4 o’clock, and lasted about 30 minutes. It was unquestionably the most terrific musketry duel I have ever witnessed. Harker’s brigade was formed in two lines. The regiments were advanced to the crest of the ridge alternate, and delivered their fire by volley at the command, retiring a few paces behind it after firing to reload. The continued roar of the very fiercest musketry fire inspired a sentiment of grandeur in which the awful and the sublime were intermingled. But the enemy was repulsed in this fierce attack, and the crest of the ridge was still in our possession.⁴³

Wood’s division fought steadily through the day. At some point during the afternoon two regiments from Van Cleve’s division, the 17th Kentucky and the 44th Indiana joined them. Wood noted in his official report of how bravely both of these regiments fought.

At approximately 1900 Wood received orders from Thomas to withdraw from the battlefield and to take his division to Rossville. He executed the order without incident. The Battle of Chickamauga was over.⁴⁴

The role that T. J. Wood and his division played in the Battle of Chickamauga was significant and shrouded in controversy. As is all too often the case, when the cost of failure is high and the heavy hand of history is weighing down upon them, there will be those who avoid responsibility and attempt to place blame on others. Wood was

unquestionably a fine officer as his long and gallant career attests. That he would have placed the Army of the Cumberland in peril because of a difference between him and the commanding general seems unlikely. However, with that said, there is still the question of obedience. Assuming that there were no evil intentions on Wood's part, the question still stands, what is our limit of obedience?

¹U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), vol. 30, pt. I, 57 (hereafter cited as *OR*).

²*Ibid.*, 634.

³Glenn Tucker, *Chickamaug: Bloody Battle in the West* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1961), 202.

⁴Steven E. Woodworth, *Six Armies in Tennessee* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 10.

⁵Tucker, 205.

⁶*OR* 30, 58.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸Tucker.

⁹Brigadier Thomas J. Wood, "The Gaps at Chickamauga," *New York Times*, 19 November 1882, 4.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*OR* 30, 58.

¹²*Ibid.*, 634.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 635.

¹⁵Major General Joseph Reynolds, "An Incident of the Second Day at Chickamauga", November 1895, Eyewitness Accounts Folder, Chickamauga-Chattanooga NMP, Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia.

¹⁶OR 30, 59.

¹⁷Woodworth, 114.

¹⁸Cozzens, 357.

¹⁹William M. Lamers, *The Edge of Glory, A Biography of General William S. Rosecrans* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), 344.

²⁰OR 30, 103.

²¹Tucker, 255.

²²Cozzens, 361.

²³Henry Villard, *Memoirs of Henry Villard, Journalist and Financier, 1835-1900* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), 184.

²⁴OR 30, 59.

²⁵Tucker, 258.

²⁶Henry Martyn Cist, *The Army of the Cumberland* (New York: C.Scribner's Sons, 1882), 222.

²⁷Cozzens, 363.

²⁸William F. G. Shanks, *Personal Recollections of Distinguished Generals* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1866), 475.

²⁹Wood, 4.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵OR, 30, 635.

³⁶Woodworth, 117.

³⁷Wood.

³⁸*OR*, 30, 500.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 580.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 636.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 637.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 638.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 639.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Since before written history, men have been involved in conflict with each other. The military organization is ultimately the instrument wielded in this conflict, and within any military organization there are leaders, leaders who issue orders and subordinates who follow orders. The question of obedience to these orders is as old as conflict itself, and a careful analysis of this question is worth studying. The case of T. J. Wood and his obedience to William Rosecrans' fatal order on 20 September 1863 during the Battle of Chickamauga is used in this thesis as a vehicle to analyze this question. Assuming that Wood was not motivated by malice and revenge, as has been proved in the preceding chapter, what then, was his limit of obedience? The question is deceptively simple and the answer is inherently complicated, if there is indeed an answer. There are multiple factors that potentially impact a subordinate's obedience. For the purpose of this thesis, the circumstances surrounding the order will be looked at in order to ascertain the potential or expected outcome, determine what assumptions are made, determine if experience level is a factor and explore the impact of situational awareness of the issuer and recipient of the order.

Circumstances

The circumstances surrounding an order can prove extremely important to the final outcome, and may determine a subordinate's obedience or disobedience, whatever the case may be. There are numerous factors involved in shaping circumstances. Time, for instance, is a factor. Virtually every military leader agrees that time is a resource that

is in critical demand on the battlefield. A lack of time, or even a perceived lack of time, impacts on decisions, potentially resulting in hasty or poor orders being issued, or executed. If for instance, as was the case with T. J. Wood, a subordinate receives an order from his commander that tells him time is critical, his entire thought process, in fact the system used to determine his course of action, will be altered to adjust for the time constraint. Put into this situation, where time is suddenly of vital importance and our immediate action is required, the inherent capability to identify problems with an order is reduced. The “takeaway” from this is the importance that senior leaders must assign to timely and well-planned orders when possible, there by allowing their subordinate leaders time to prepare and plan within appropriate time constraints.

Similar to time constraints is the circumstance of duress. Though time may not necessarily be a factor, if an order is written or received during duress or while in conflict, it may contain elements of this duress that are not applicable. If this is the case, it is difficult for a subordinate leader to ascertain this from their orders. If, while under duress, a commander issues orders to a subordinate and assumes that he too is under the same pressure or contact, this can potentially affect the subordinate leader’s actions, as he may assume that his higher headquarters has information that he does not have.

Similar, and more probable, is the receipt of orders by a subordinate leader that he cannot carry out due to being in contact with the enemy or some other constraining factor. This is the most overt and obvious factor when analyzing our obedience, or disobedience, and is the easiest to justify.

The last circumstance we will look at, and the easiest to understand, is the question of whether an order is lawful. As soldiers, we are expected to obey only lawful orders, and to disobey those orders that are unlawful.

Potential Outcome

Inherent in the question of obedience, and perhaps the most problematic, is the question of the potential outcome. In other words, should my understanding of what I believe my obedience or disobedience will achieve impact on my decision to obey or disobey? Perhaps a simpler question is, does the end justify the means?

This is a complicated and perplexing question. In looking at T. J. Wood's case, he has been berated by historians for obeying an order. One wonders if Wood had disobeyed the fatal order, and the penetration by the Confederates had happened anyway, whom would history have blamed?

By assigning blame to Wood for the penetration of the Union line, historians have told any military leader who cares to read of the Battle of Chickamauga, that obedience should not be carried out lightly or quickly. The outcome is the most important issue at hand, and if you believe the potential outcome is not favorable, disobedience is acceptable. This is, of course, wrong, and those who contend this do not understand the dynamics of the battlefield and the basics of discipline. To go down this road of disobedience, believing that one knows better than his commander what should be done for any given situation, risks putting his entire command in peril. Granted, the battlefield is fluid, and there may be times when leaders intuitively know, without a doubt, that disobedience to a flawed order is their only recourse. These times are the exception. If

military leaders look at every order critically to determine if they are obedience worthy, battles would be lost and lives needlessly put in jeopardy.

Assumptions

Inherent in the military profession are many assumptions. Soldiers assume that their buddy on the left side is covering that area and protecting them from the enemy. The premise of the teamwork found in the military is that teammates are doing their best to achieve victory. Soldiers must also assume that their leaders are capable and dedicated to their profession, and that they have a certain amount of situational awareness.

Situational awareness is a quality that comes with time and experience, particularly the type of situational awareness that senior military leaders must possess. Leaders must assume that their commanders have better situational awareness and understanding than they do. After all, ideally they are being fed information from all areas of their command that their subordinates may or may not be aware of. Subordinates must assume that orders are issued based on this situational understanding and that they are designed for the greater good of the unit.

Indeed, a commander may have to put one unit in jeopardy, sacrificing its safety, in order to achieve an outcome that justifies this sacrifice. The leader of a unit in jeopardy cannot afford to question his orders because he sees that its potential outcome may adversely impact his unit. The assumption must be made that the orders received and carried out are for the greater good and are issued based on better situational awareness. This is the unique nature of the military. If every leader questions his orders and demands an explanation by the issuing authority, the very fiber of the military would break down.

Experience Level

It may be suggested that a commander's experience level should come into play when a subordinate determines whether he should obey an order. After all, as was the case with Rosecrans and Wood, a senior commander may not have as much war fighting experience as the subordinate. If this were the case, a subordinate would look critically at any order received from a less experienced officer to ensure that it was not flawed in some way. Or, as in Wood's case again, when a less experienced officer transmitted the order, and it is supposed that he should have taken this experience into account and questioned the courier. Once more, if leaders subscribe to this type of thinking, they will ultimately make a decision that will jeopardize their unit. The military has many similarities to civilian organizations, but unlike businesses, the result of slowly executed orders or plans altered to suit a personal vision, can result in lost battles and worse, the loss of lives. This is simply not acceptable. This author contends that those who subscribe to this line of thought do not fully understand the nature of the military or the dynamics of war.

Limits of Obedience

What then, are a military leader's limits of obedience? Within the parameters that have been described in this chapter, there are none. Brigadier General Thomas John Wood did the right thing on 20 September 1863. He obeyed the orders of his commander. Major General McCook was present and validated the need to obey the order, which was marked "gallop" to reinforce its urgency. Blame, if blame must be issued, rests squarely upon Major General William Rosecrans. The heavy burden of responsibility is upon leaders at all times, and they must be compelled to carry out this responsibility with as

much knowledge and expertise as possible, utilizing all of the resources at hand and in a totally selfless manner. There is a time and place for speculation and personal opinion. The heat of battle offers many opportunities for leaders to express their creativity, as long as they are obeying their orders. Ultimately, history will judge their actions if the price is large enough, but they cannot afford to think of their duties and obedience in this way. They must rely on the fundamental desire to do the right thing at all times, with the knowledge that they are doing their utmost to obey orders and satisfy the intent of their senior leaders.

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