

OPERATIONAL RISK PREPAREDNESS: GENERAL GEORGE H. THOMAS AND THE FRANKLIN- NASHVILLE CAMPAIGN

A Monograph

by

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ABSTRACT

OPERATIONAL RISK PREPAREDNESS: GENERAL GEORGE H. THOMAS AND THE FRANKLIN-NASHVILLE CAMPAIGN, by MAJ David M. Lamborn, United States Army, 68 pages.

Operational risk is often referred to but as yet remains undefined within U.S. Army doctrine. This monograph analyzes and compares thoughts on risk from multiple disciplines and viewpoints to develop a suitable definition and corresponding principles. The proposed definition of operational risk is any friendly decision, enemy action, or environmental change that presents an opportunity or poses a threat, is filled with uncertainty, and requires action. This monograph also proposes the following ten principles of operational risk preparedness; Leadership, Information, Communication, Analytic Process, Time, Capability, Adaptability, Initiative, Agility, and Resilience.

The monograph then applies this definition and corresponding principles to the historic case study of the Franklin-Nashville Campaign where Major General George H. Thomas decisively defeated and effectively destroyed the Confederate Army of Tennessee commanded by General John B. Hood. General Thomas was much more adept at preparing his organization for risk than General Hood, and the result was a resounding Union victory that helped hasten the end of the war. This monograph concludes that operational level commanders should not attempt to manage risk or control uncertainty, but rather should use all available time and resources to continually prepare their organizations for an uncertain future by applying the principles of operational risk preparedness.

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ACRONYMS

| | |
|------|--------------------------------------|
| ADRP | Army Doctrinal Reference Publication |
| COA | Course of Action |
| CRM | Composite Risk Management |
| FM | Field Manual |
| HQ | Headquarters |
| ULO | Unified Land Operations |

ILLUSTRATIONS

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Hence a commander who advances without any thought of winning personal fame and withdraws in spite of certain punishment, whose only concern is to protect his people and promote the interests of his ruler, is the nation's treasure.

—Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

INTRODUCTION

Risk is a significant element of the operational art, but often receives little historical or doctrinal attention due to its conceptual and ambiguous nature. It is part of what the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz would call the realm of “chance and uncertainty” and only properly managed by application of “genius.”¹ Furthermore, current U.S. Army doctrine enjoins commanders to “accept prudent risk” as the last of six components comprising mission command, the U.S. Army’s philosophy of leadership.² Clearly, dealing with risk is a key aspect of command. However, U.S. Army doctrine does not clearly define operational risk.

The Franklin-Nashville Campaign, fought between Union forces commanded by Major General George H. Thomas against Confederate forces commanded by General John B. Hood, provides a window into the handling of risk at the operational level. The Civil War was characterized by indecisive battles—that is, battles that lasted multiple days and destroyed neither opposing army. Thus, campaigns were no longer decided by a single climactic battle and wars were not won in a single campaign. Instead, each battle simply set the stage for the next battle of the campaign, and each campaign led only to the next campaign.³ The one exception to this pattern was the Battle of Nashville, in which General Thomas effectively destroyed the Army of

¹Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 100-12.

²U.S. Department of the Army, Army Doctrinal Publication 6-0: *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, May 2012), 5.

³James J. Schneider, *Vulcan’s Anvil: The American Civil War and the Foundation of the Operational Art*, Theoretical Paper No. 4 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2004), 5, 17.

Tennessee.⁴ General Thomas did this, in part, by carefully setting the conditions before engaging in a general battle. By refusing to act rashly despite considerable pressure and instead prudently accepting risk, General Thomas fought a campaign consisting of two major battles and a pursuit of his defeated foe that ultimately led to a decisive operational victory and thereby achieved the strategic objective within his theater of war. What is most remarkable is that General Thomas did this despite tremendous pressure from the strategic level, a hastily assembled ad hoc force, terrible weather, and a formidable foe with the home ground advantage. Insights gained from a close study of this campaign will undoubtedly be relevant to the army even today.

Methodology

To understand how General Thomas and General Hood dealt with operational risk during the Franklin-Nashville Campaign requires a suitable definition of operational risk. Unfortunately, no such definition exists. A definition must therefore be derived from broad research on the topic. With a viable definition in hand, an overview of the strategic and operational environment will provide the contextual understanding necessary to apply this definition without disregarding the important details that make its lessons useful.

Defining operational risk sounds like a simple task involving no more than a cursory glance at a dictionary or field manual. In fact operational risk is quite difficult to define, much less quantify. The operational level of war is perhaps the most conceptual level of war, and sometimes it eludes precise definitions and clear understanding for even the most astute students of war. Risk is also an intangible concept, dealing in the realm of uncertainty, probability, and even unknown factors. Combining these two hard-to-grasp ideas, therefore, compounds the

⁴Donn Piatt, *General George H. Thomas: A Critical Biography* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke, 1893), 13-21.

problem of adequately defining the term. Perhaps this is why doctrine has not yet defined operational risk.

To come to a proper understanding of operational risk, one must examine existing doctrine that discusses risk, classical military theorists who have written about the subject, as well as academic theorists who study the same topic in non-military arenas. Furthermore, one must examine both the tactical and strategic levels of risk to determine the upper and lower logical boundaries for operational risk. This close examination of the breadth and depth of risk should yield a suitable definition and understanding of operational risk, which can then be applied to this particular case study.

It would be impossible to properly understand the Franklin-Nashville Campaign without having an appreciation of the context within which it was fought. This must include the strategic setting of the war, showing the locations and dispositions of the other Northern and Southern armies, as well as characterizing the political atmosphere of both sides and strategic objectives sought. In the same manner, a brief overview of the entire campaign will ensure that analysis and resulting lessons are not taken out of context. The study will be completed with an analysis of the Franklin-Nashville Campaign as viewed through the lens of the newly established definition of operational risk, bearing in mind the strategic and operational context.

OPERATIONAL RISK

Literature Review

Classical Theorists

While there are many classical military theorists, the two who deal most directly with the subject of risk are Sun Tzu and Carl von Clausewitz. Whereas many of the other classic military theorists ignore the subject or only mention it as an aside, Sun Tzu treats the subject of risk quite directly and it is fair to say that Clausewitz focuses heavily on the role of chance and uncertainty

in war. For this reason, these are the two classical military theorists considered for this paper to the exclusion of others.

Sun Tzu believed that the outcome of a war can be predicted based upon a comparison of five factors. First is leadership, both of the ruler and the general. The others are discipline, training, strength, and relative impacts of environmental conditions.⁵ Similarly, he instructed that victory in battle is also based upon five factors; timing, unity of effort, tactical expertise, training, and leadership. These relative assessments of the combatants are only possible with a great depth of knowledge, better stated by the master himself as "he who knows the enemy and himself will never in a hundred battles be at risk."⁶

Thus Sun Tzu's principles of operational risk are knowledge, timing, capability, and leadership. In this case, knowledge can be broken into three categories—of self, of the enemy, and of the environment. Sun Tzu's principle of timing is best understood in the following passage: "the expert in battle would first make himself invincible and then wait for the enemy to expose his vulnerability."⁷ The definition for capability encompasses strength, training, discipline and leadership, with the special caveat that leadership also ensures unity of effort. These statements seem to imply that commanders can achieve a high level of control over the conduct of war, even as they acknowledge that it is a competition between humans.

Clausewitz's statements about how initial operational risks are calculated sounds similar to Sun Tzu: "from the enemy's character, from his institutions, the state of his affairs and his general situation, each side, using the laws of probability, forms an estimate of its opponent's

⁵Sun-Tzu, *The Art of Warfare: The First English Translation Incorporating the Recently Discovered Yin-ch'üeh-shan Texts*, trans. Roger T. Ames, ed. Robert G. Henricks (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 104.

⁶Ibid., 113.

⁷Ibid., 115.

likely course and acts accordingly."⁸ This obviously rests on the assumption that each side has some level of knowledge or intelligence about its opponent. However, once at war, Clausewitz held a much more skeptical view of man's capability to control war. He defined the climate of war as consisting of "danger, exertion, uncertainty, and chance" and the atmosphere as consisting of "danger, physical exertion, intelligence, and friction."⁹ These two definitions clearly highlight the preeminent role of risk in combat, as well as the need for relevant, reliable information, courage, and strength. Clausewitz recognized both the utter importance and the doubtful nature of intelligence with statements such as "the only situation a commander can know fully is his own; his opponent's he can know only from unreliable intelligence . . . such faulty appreciation is as likely to lead to ill-timed action as to ill-timed inaction."¹⁰ Thus, similar to Sun Tzu, Clausewitz recognized the importance of proper timing.

In Clausewitz's estimation there is only one cure for the dreadful risk imposed by war—brilliant, iron-willed leadership. He believed this quality of leadership springs forth from two characteristics, the first of which is *coup d'oeil*—a keen intellect able to rapidly grasp the reality of any situation. The second is determination, which Clausewitz defined as moral courage.¹¹ Even if Clausewitz's assertion about the criticality of the leader is true, there is certainly no substitute for the physical strength—the manpower—necessary to exert against the enemy. And there is still the matter of proper timing, which is the prerogative of the leader, and which Clausewitz recognized but did not include explicitly as a requisite for brilliant leadership. Perhaps he thought of timing as an inherent component of *coup d'oeil*. Thus, the Clausewitzian principles of operational risk preparedness might be summed up as leadership, knowledge, timing and strength.

⁸Clausewitz, *On War*, 80.

⁹Ibid., 104, 122.

¹⁰Ibid., 84.

¹¹Ibid., 102.

Table 1. Classical Theorists: Principles of Risk Preparedness

| | <u>PRINCIPLES</u> | <u>DEFINITIONS</u> |
|-------------------|-------------------|---|
| Sun Tzu | Knowledge | Know the other, know yourself, and the victory will not be at risk; Know the ground, know the natural conditions, and the victory can be total. |
| | Timing | A commander must select the right moment, once the enemy has shown his vulnerability. |
| | Capability | An army's capabilities are determined by leadership, discipline, training, and strength. |
| | Leadership | The outcome of the battle revolves around the knowledge, character, and actions of the leader. |
| Clausewitz | Leadership | A commander's <i>coup d'oeil</i> (keen intellect), and determination are the only things that can withstand the uncertainty of war. |
| | Knowledge | Reliable intelligence helps to lift the fog of war, reduces friction and facilitates the commander's <i>coup d'oeil</i> . |
| | Timing | A commander must choose the right moment for action when the chances are in his favor. |
| | Strength | The army must have the physical strength, weapons, and most importantly the courage (or will) to fight until victory is achieved. |

Source: Created by author.

Academic Theorists

The spectrum of academic theorists who write about risk ranges from business professors and social scientists, to mathematicians. They relate topics such as leadership, governmental bureaucracy, and statistics to how decisions should be made in the face of uncertainty. Decision-making, even in non-combat environments such as business, government, or even in the casino, is still a human endeavor filled with chance, and thus offers insights for military decision-makers as well.

Kenneth MacCrimmon and Donald Wehrung conducted an in-depth study of decision-making by over 500 business executives and published their findings in *Taking Risks: the Management of Uncertainty*. They defined risk as an exposure to a chance of loss. This implies

two things; a choice, either implicit or explicit; and uncertainty.¹² Furthermore, they identified "three components of risk—the magnitude of loss, the chance of loss, and the exposure to loss."¹³ They also introduced the notion that risk can be characterized as pure threat or pure opportunity, but most commonly is a combination of the two.¹⁴

When faced with a risky situation, leaders initially have two options—opt out or opt in. If they opt out, they maintain the status quo, but by opting in they are exposed to the potential of a gain or a loss. Before making this decision, leaders typically conducted an assessment by identifying and evaluating risk. MacCrimmon and Wehrung asserted that "inherent in all risky situations are three identifiable determinants: lack of control, lack of information, and lack of time." Therefore, after evaluating risk, leaders sought to reduce the risk by gaining control, time, or information. Leaders tended to delay decisions until no further adjustments could be made. The hardest decision was often whether or not to opt in; however, once a leader was in a risky situation, decisions seemed to be made more easily. Furthermore, leaders tended to focus on the most salient information and excluded other information presented to them. The study concluded by stating that "the most successful managers took the most risks."¹⁵

Thus MacCrimmon and Wehrung's principles for operational risk management are clearly control, time, and information. Control implies an increased capability or decision-making authority, which may be enabled by increased preparation time, additional resources, or better situational understanding. Time affects not only control, but also the ability to gather more information. Information enables the leader to gain better understanding and thus make better

¹²Kenneth R MacCrimmon and Donald A. Wehrung, *Taking Risks: The Management of Uncertainty* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 9.

¹³*Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 11, 14, 37, 173, 174, 177, 273.

decisions. Thus, their principles of risk preparedness—control, time, and information—are closely interrelated and mutually dependent.

The No-Risk Society by Yair Aharoni addresses risk decision-making across the breadth of society. It is not limited to profession or social status. He defined risk as the probability that a certain mishap or injury will occur, and goes further to state that he uses the terms "risk" and "uncertainty" interchangeably.¹⁶ He stated that people gauge risk by using their knowledge and experience to determine probabilities for the occurrence of events. He also asserted that people have four options for dealing with risk. They can reduce the probability of occurrence, reduce the magnitude of loss, insure oneself, or to do nothing at all. Furthermore, he explained that "ignorance, or insufficient information, increases uncertainty and encourages caution" and that "greater risks are tolerated if the risk is voluntary, familiar, controllable, and previously known." Another important point Aharoni made was that to reduce risk requires the use of resources, and no resource is free of cost.¹⁷

Aharoni raised several interesting points. The first was his observation that to reduce risk requires the application of resources, which has an inherent cost. One might argue that to understand a situation requires nothing but thought. However, thought requires time, and time is arguably the most precious resources of all. Furthermore, Aharoni mentioned insurance as a means to reduce risk. Insurance is not a military concept. However, the concept of spreading individual or small unit risk over a broader group is directly applicable to the military. After all, any risk that is incurred by a small unit must be underwritten by the parent unit, whether knowingly or not, and this is conceptually the same as insurance. Aharoni's principles of risk preparedness might therefore be summed up as information, resources, and insurance.

¹⁶Yair Aharoni, *The No-risk Society* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1981), 39, 41.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 40, 44-45, 53.

Business Decision Theory by Paul Jedamus and Robert Frame advocates the use of probability and statistics as a tool to support decision-making. Unlike Clausewitz, who believed that information is either sparse or incorrect, this book addressed situations that were rich—perhaps too rich—with information. Jedamus and Frame used examples where all of the possible outcomes were identifiable, but because they numbered in the millions, and because each has only a certain probability of occurrence, rather than a certainty, there was still a great challenge faced by the decision-maker.¹⁸ To overcome this challenge, decision-makers should use analytical structures to assist with decision-making, which mathematically calculate risk versus reward and thus indicate what options constitute good decisions and which are bad.¹⁹

Jedamus and Frame asserted that the best decision is the one that maximizes the average profit or utility over a large number of trials. Included in this definition is the understanding that payoffs must be weighted—that is, that risk must be balanced with reward.²⁰ For example, a payoff that is expected to be \$100 must carry twice the weight as an expected payoff of \$50, if the cost, or risk, associated with both is the same. One must still, of course, compute the probability of each of these outcomes to determine which one is the better choice. They also identified a theoretical best outcome, and show that the difference between this outcome and the status quo represents the opportunity loss of not making any attempt. At the opposite end of the same spectrum they identified the worst outcome, and this they defined as a real loss, or degradation from the status quo.²¹ These two concepts taken together represent respectively the reward and the risk.

¹⁸Paul Jedamus and Robert Frame, *Business Decision Theory* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), 3.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 4.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 13, 24.

²¹*Ibid.*, 21.

Thus for Jedamus and Frame, the information for decision-making is either entirely known or available, but uncertainty still remains because outcomes are probabilistic. The best course of action for a decision-maker to adopt is to apply an analytical structure to this information to calculate the actual risks and rewards that are possible, and then adopt the course of action that statistically provides the best balance between risk and reward. While it would be impossible and perhaps foolhardy to apply a purely mathematical approach to decision-making, it would be doubly foolish to ignore available statistical data or other information that could be used to guide the decision-making process.

Risk and Reason by Cass Sunstein is aimed at improving governmental decision-making. Arguably, military decision-making qualifies as a specialized subset of this class. The main argument of the book is that governmental decision-making could be improved by applying a methodical process to assess the magnitude of the problem to be solved, the tradeoff between the cost of the solution and the benefit to be gained, and thereby identify solutions that are both effective and inexpensive.²² Sunstein's argument is very similar to the one made by Jedamus and Frame—with increased uncertainty the use of an analytic process is all the more important.

Sunstein argued that humans do a poor job of risk assessment when left to their own devices. This is largely because they lack accurate information about the hazard or outcome, and thus rely on mental heuristics that either greatly overestimate or greatly underestimate the actual risk.²³ Furthermore, Sunstein stated that people are much more willing to play it safe and forego a possible gain rather than risk a loss, even when it makes eminent sense to make the attempt.²⁴ Additionally, people tend to view risk as an all or nothing proposition, they merely want to be

²²Cass R Sunstein, *Risk and Reason: Safety, Law, and the Environment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5.

²³*Ibid.*, 29-34.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 265.

told that something is "safe," not be given a lecture on the probability that something bad will happen.²⁵ He also asserted that “the question is not whether risks can be controlled, but how difficult or expensive it is for individuals to control them.”²⁶ Thus, Sunstein’s principles of risk preparedness might be summed up as information, methodical process, and control.

In *Antifragile*, Nassim Taleb addressed risk within an ever-changing environment. He postulated that fragile systems thrive only during periods of stability but are hurt or destroyed by change. Unfortunately, change is inevitable. More importantly, most change is unpredictable, including what he terms "Black Swan" events—catastrophes that do not fit any previous pattern or data. Robust systems are able to weather the changes through brute strength, but do not gain from change, they merely continue to exist. He therefore introduced the term antifragile—a system that improves with volatility. It learns, grows, and adapts because of environmental stress induced by change.²⁷ Antifragile systems are well prepared for risk.

Taleb claimed that fragile systems need to follow a specific and narrow path, and that fragile systems have no flexibility, redundancy or reserve capacity. Antifragile systems, on the other hand, must have some redundant capacity and flexibility built in or they will succumb to unexpected catastrophes, or even minor unexpected variations. To drive this point home, he used the analogy of an animal having fat stores to make it through a famine.²⁸ Taleb also had a very different conceptualization of the need for information from most other academics. An antifragile system does not need much information to proceed confidently into a volatile and uncertain environment. However, the information that it encounters as it progresses through the environment, in either space or time, must be used to make the system better—it must learn from

²⁵Sunstein, *Risk and Reason*, 36.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 37.

²⁷Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *Antifragile: Things that Gain from Disorder* (New York: Random House, 2012), 3-22, 31-33.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 43-48.

its failures. Thus, an antifragile system must have mechanisms to gather information, make sense out of it, and share it throughout the system.²⁹ Taleb tied these two concepts together by asserting that parts of the system, or individuals within the group, must be fragile so that the system itself can be antifragile. Essentially he is saying that the fat cell is destroyed so that the system can continue. Or conversely, the unfortunate souls who die in accidents provide information that can be used to prevent similar accidents in the future.³⁰

In addition, Taleb recognized the impact that time plays in risk, but once again champions a different aspect than do other academics. Time is the mechanism that brings the change, thus those things that have stood the test of time have demonstrated their antifragility regardless of whether a fallible human is able to discern the innate qualities of that stalwart system. In essence, he says not to fix something that time has not broken itself. Those that act too hastily based on flawed understanding often cause fragility.³¹ Taleb ties all of these aspects together with the assertion that antifragile systems must embrace variety and randomness. This helps to create options because the system is not dependent on one activity or resource. This gives the system the best chance of being ready for the unexpected because, in essence, it is living an unexpected life. Furthermore, anyone or anything that is leading a leisurely, stress-free life is probably running a very high level of risk and does not even know it.³²

²⁹Taleb, *Antifragile*, 71-73.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 65-67.

³¹*Ibid.*, 309-11, 316-22, 336-48. Taleb introduces the reader to the term iatrogenics, which means a medical treatment that does more harm than good. He uses it as an analogy for any action within a system that unintentionally does more harm than good, and he advises the reader to let minor problems work themselves out naturally rather than risking greater harm by intervening.

³²*Ibid.*, 36-38. Taleb explains the meaning and ancient practice of hormesis, which is a substance or stressor that causes a system or organism to grow stronger or better in response. Variety and stress are themes throughout his book.

Table 2. Academic Theorists: Principles of Risk Preparedness

| | PRINCIPLES | DEFINITIONS |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| MacCrimmon & Wehrung | Control | Leaders need increased capability or decision-making authority to reduce risk. |
| | Time | Time allows for additional information to be gathered or for more control to be established, and thus reduces risk. |
| | Information | Information enables a leader's understanding, but to prevent overload the information must be focused. |
| Aharoni | Information | Risk determinations are made based on a person's knowledge and experience. A lack of information creates uncertainty, thereby raising risk, as a result most people tend to be more cautious. |
| | Resources | The application of resources reduces either the probability of occurrence or the magnitude of loss, and thereby reduces risk. |
| | Insurance | Insurance spreads the risk across a broader group, essentially passing it up to a higher level that possesses greater resources and potentially more information. |
| Jedamus & Frame | Information | There is ample information available, even near complete information in certain cases, to assist decision-makers. |
| | Uncertainty | Despite near perfect knowledge, the future remains unpredictable and this must be accepted. |
| | Analytic Structure | Using probability and statistics, decision-makers can determine the optimal decision that weighs the cost versus the reward. |
| Sunstein | Information | The right information is invaluable to making the correct decision. |
| | Analytic Process | Human intuition is terrible at making proper risk related decisions. A methodical analytic process will solve this problem. |
| | Control | All risk is controllable, it is only a matter of cost or resources that must be expended. |
| Taleb | Resilience | Any system must have enough reserve capacity to be able to sustain unexpected losses and be able to continue on. |
| | Learning | Unexpected losses must be learned from. |
| | Time | Do not tamper with parts of any system that have withstood the test of time unless it is a clear emergency. |
| | Variety | Build variety, and stress, into the system. This will prepare it for the unexpected, and increase strength and resilience. |

Source: Created by author.

Military and Doctrinal Sources

In *Risks: The Key to Combat Intelligence*, Colonel Elias Townsend directly linked intelligence to risk. Furthermore, he aptly stated that all commanders must think in terms of risk

and make their decisions in those terms, going so far as to say that judgment about risk is the very essence of command.³³ He clarified this by stating that what is unknown poses the real problem. Hazards that are identifiable are easy to figure out and operate around. Furthermore, Colonel Townsend stated that all risks are relative to a commander's place in the chain of command and the resources that he has available. However, Colonel Townsend strictly limited his definition of risk to include only the threat posed by the capability of the enemy. He repeatedly insisted that the enemy's capabilities rested squarely upon only two factors—strength and location. These should be the focus of combat intelligence rather than trying to deduce enemy intentions. He stressed the fact that there should be no such thing as an "intelligence estimate." Rather, there should only be a "commander's estimate" because the commander alone is responsible for making the decisions that are based upon that estimate.³⁴

While he treated the intelligence community rather roughly in his book, Colonel Townsend nonetheless raised some valid points. First is that risk is inherently linked up and down the chain of command, regardless of whether or not the risk is known, understood, or mutually agreed upon. It is best, therefore, that commanders explicitly discuss risk to come to a clear understanding about authorities and responsibilities.³⁵ Additionally, Colonel Townsend's focus on enemy capabilities rather than intentions raises a question about how enemy courses of action are calculated and by whom. He clearly indicated that the commander must be involved in this process. With this said, Colonel Townsend's principles of operational risk preparedness can be summed up as intelligence, capabilities and leadership.

³³Elias Carter Townsend, *Risks: The Key to Combat Intelligence* (Harrisburg, PA: The Military Service Publishing Company, 1955), 9.

³⁴*Ibid.*, x, 4, 10, 19, 26-27.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 12.

The Army's primary doctrine pertaining to risk is Field Manual 5-19 *Composite Risk Management* (CRM). This manual defines CRM as "the Army's primary decision-making process for identifying hazards and controlling risks across the full spectrum of Army missions, functions, operations, and activities."³⁶ CRM establishes a five step process for managing risk—Identify Hazards, Assess Hazards, Develop Controls, Implement Controls, and Supervise.³⁷ Assessment of hazards has two components—probability and severity—which together determine the level of associated risk. The controls that are implemented are designed to reduce one or both of these components and thus reduce the overall risk. The manual offers three primary methods to reduce risk—education to raise awareness, physical measures to lessen the impact or probability, and last is to simply avoid the hazard altogether. This doctrine does specify that CRM is a continual process and depends upon situational awareness to facilitate constant updates to the assessment during the supervision of the operation. Additionally, the doctrine does specify that "all accepted residual risk must be approved at the appropriate level of command,"³⁸ but it stops short of describing what level of risk acceptance is appropriate for what level of command. Moreover, it does not offer advice on how a commander should make this determination.

FM 5-19 could more aptly be called a "safety manual," as it deals almost exclusively in the realm of precautionary actions designed to prevent a loss of combat power. While taking appropriate precautionary measures against loss is laudable, and does indeed form a significant portion of risk, it largely ignores the other side of risk, namely, the potential gains to be realized by seizing an opportunity. True, it does mention that "CRM is a decision-making tool to assist the commander...to make informed decisions that balance risk costs (losses) against mission benefits

³⁶U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 5-19: *Composite Risk Management* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, July 2006), 1-1.

³⁷Ibid., 1-2.

³⁸Ibid., 1-7, 1-9, 1-10.

(potential gains)."³⁹ Unfortunately this is not the definition of CRM nor does this manual provide any method of calculating potential gains in the same manner that it does with assessing hazards. As a more graphic example to demonstrate the focus of this manual consider the fact that the phrase "potential gains" is used three times whereas the word "hazard" is used 148 times. Clearly this doctrine is focused exclusively on reduction of known threats and therefore does not address the full spectrum of risk and opportunity. Additionally, according to the definition of CRM, the process is equally applicable at the tactical, operational, and strategic level of war, with no variation in approach, application, or desired outcome.

Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-37 *Protection* describes how staffs should plan and execute tasks associated with this warfighting function. It states quite clearly that "commanders and leaders charged with providing or ensuring protection must begin with a thorough understanding of the operational environment, the risks and opportunities resident there, and the ways and means available for preserving combat power through protection."⁴⁰ It asserts that potential threats come from hostile action, accidents, or environmental conditions. It provides staffs with a multi-faceted assessment process that covers threats, hazards, vulnerabilities, criticality, and capabilities. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of continuous information collection to improve situational understanding. Perhaps of most importance, ADRP 3-37 recognizes that "commanders must accept risk to exploit time-sensitive opportunities" and asserts that "leaders can continue to act on operational and individual initiative if they make better risk decisions faster than the enemy."⁴¹

³⁹U.S. Department of the Army, FM 5-19, *Composite Risk Management*, 1-2.

⁴⁰U.S. Department of the Army, Army Doctrinal Reference Publication 3-37: *Protection* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 2012), 1-2.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 2-2 through 2-6, 4-1.

This doctrine arguably comes closer to encompassing the entire concept of risk, but due to its very name must take a defensive tone. This tone, in turn, cognitively limits the implications of this doctrine in the same way that Clausewitz describes the defense as having a negative aim—that is, it cannot achieve a decisive result.⁴² Only offensive operations can truly take advantage of opportunities to achieve potential gains, while protection is decidedly geared towards preventing a loss, much like CRM. Nevertheless, ADRP 3-37 seems to offer a more comprehensive approach to preventing losses to friendly forces than does composite risk management.

ADRP 3-0 *Unified Land Operations*, one of the Army's capstone doctrinal manuals, establishes the framework for the conduct of all Army operations. It fully recognizes the fact that war is fundamentally a human interaction and is therefore filled with uncertainty and risk. It states plainly that "risk, uncertainty, and chance are inherent in all military operations. When commanders accept risk, they create opportunities to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative and achieve decisive results."⁴³ Furthermore, it emphasizes the important role that information plays in enabling commanders to make decisions.

Chapter 4, "The Operational Art," gives the most thorough coverage of the concept of risk, but stops short of defining the term. This chapter clearly states that "operational art applies to all aspects of operations and integrates ends, ways, and means, while accounting for risk."⁴⁴ It points out that effective communication, critical analysis, and clearly defined end-states all contribute to risk mitigation. Chapter 4 asserts that operational reach, culminating point, and mutual support all have a bearing on risk.⁴⁵ Additionally it recognizes that periods of change are inherently risky by stating that "successful commanders understand which transitions involve

⁴²Clausewitz, *On War*, 71.

⁴³U.S. Department of the Army, Army Doctrinal Reference Publication 3-0: *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, May 2012), 4-9.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 4-1.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 4-4, 4-5.

risks, how much risk to accept, and where risk is accepted."⁴⁶ Furthermore, it connects boldness and imagination to the ability to understand and manage risk.⁴⁷

ULO clearly recognizes that risk is ever-present. Furthermore, it connects several important aspects to risk, which are either not well presented or not discussed at all in other doctrine. Most importantly, it recognizes that risk and opportunity are inextricably linked. What it lacks is a clear definition of the term as it applies to operational art.

ADRP 6-0 *Mission Command* codifies the Army's philosophy of leadership. Because risk is inherently a commander's decision this topic is discussed extensively. Like ULO, it recognizes that opportunities and risk are simply part of one continuum. It defines prudent risk as "a deliberate exposure to potential injury or loss when the commander judges the outcome in terms of mission accomplishment as worth the cost."⁴⁸ It states that sharing information and ideas enhances situational understanding and thereby reduces risk. It tells commanders to "focus on creating opportunities rather than simply preventing defeat,"⁴⁹ an important departure from the strict focus on prevention established by CRM. It draws the connection between initiative and risk, because taking the initiative is by its nature also accepting risk. Moreover, it identifies that control is related to risk, but not in a linear fashion. At times, tight control is necessary to mitigate risk, while at other times subordinate initiative—that is, decentralized control—is necessary to mitigate risk.⁵⁰ Furthermore, it encourages commanders to use their judgment to select the critical time and place to act, while cautioning them against delaying action in the hope of perfect

⁴⁶U.S. Department of the Army, ADRP 3-0: *Unified Land Operations*, 2-7.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 4-9.

⁴⁸U.S. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0: *Mission Command*, 2-5.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 2-1, 2-5.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 2-15.

intelligence or preparation,⁵¹ thereby recognizing the important relationship between time and risk. Finally, it specifies that commanders at various levels must come to a common understanding on risk acceptance authority.⁵²

The concept of risk is central to the philosophy of mission command. Mission command rests upon six principles—build cohesive teams through mutual trust, create shared understanding, provide a clear commander’s intent, exercise disciplined initiative, use mission orders, and accept prudent risk⁵³—all of which flow logically to the conclusion that the basic function of a commander is to accept prudent risk. To come to this conclusion, it is important to recognize that exercising disciplined initiative is merely the action that follows the decision to accept prudent risk. Mission orders and commander’s intent merely express the decision. Cohesive teams with mutual trust establish an atmosphere that enables shared understanding, which itself is necessary for the use of mission orders. Finally, and most importantly, it must be recognized that the function of a commander is to make decisions. Of the six principles listed only one involves making a decision—accept prudent risk—the others are actions.

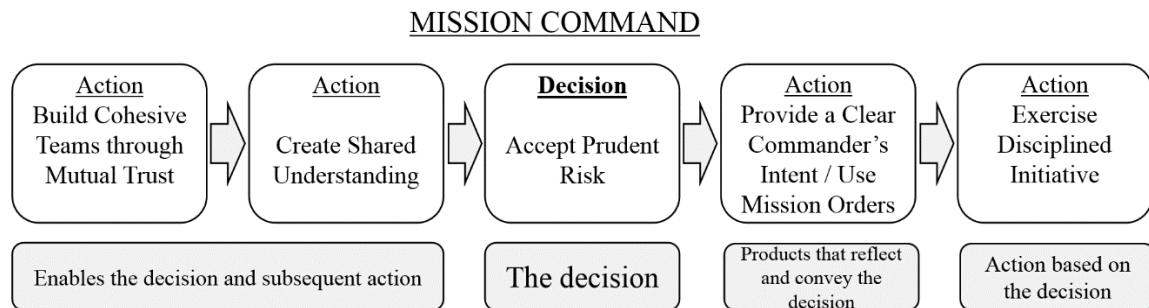


Figure 1. Logical Arrangement of Principles of Mission Command

Source: Created by author.

⁵¹U.S. Department of the Army, ADRP 6-0: *Mission Command*, 2-5.

⁵²Ibid., 2-15.

⁵³Ibid., 2-1.

Table 3. Doctrinal Principles of Risk Preparedness

| | <u>PRINCIPLES</u> | <u>DEFINITIONS</u> |
|------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Townsend | Intelligence | Intelligence should focus on enemy strength and location, which determines their capability. The commander will make the judgment about enemy intentions. |
| | Capabilities | Enemy capability in excess of your own capability constitutes risk. |
| | Leadership | A leader must think in terms of risks and make his decisions in those terms. |
| FM 5-19 | Information | Situational awareness provides the basis for identifying hazards and is a key to reducing the threat that they pose. |
| | Time | Insufficient time for mission preparation often forces commanders to accept greater risk. |
| | Assessment | All hazards must be assessed in terms of their probability and impact to determine if the risk associated with each hazard is acceptable or must be further controlled or avoided. |
| | Control | Physical or educational controls must be implemented and supervised by leaders to reduce risk to an acceptable level. |
| ADRP 3-37 | Information | Situational awareness provides the basis for identifying hazards and is a key to reducing the threat that they pose. |
| | Assessment | Assessments provide understanding that allows for prioritization of resources and must be conducted on threats, hazards, vulnerabilities, criticality, and capabilities. |
| | Control | Physical controls must be implemented to reduce risk to an acceptable level. |
| | Initiative | Commanders must accept risk to exploit time-sensitive opportunities by acting before adversaries discover vulnerabilities. |
| ADRP 3-0 | Information | Information enables commanders at all levels to make informed decisions on how best to apply combat power. |
| | Communication | Effective collaboration facilitates assessment, fosters critical analysis, and anticipates opportunities and risk. |
| | Adaptability | Requires critical thinking, comfort with ambiguity and uncertainty, willingness to accept prudent risk, and the ability to rapidly adjust while continuously assessing the situation. |
| | Initiative | When commanders accept risk, they create opportunities to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative and achieve decisive results. |
| ADRP 6-0 | Initiative | The nature of military operations requires responsibility and decision-making at the point of action to seize unexpected opportunities and contend with unforeseen threats. |
| | Communication | Sharing information helps create and maintain shared understanding, which facilitates decision-making at all levels. |
| | Judgment | Selecting the critical time and place to act, assign missions, manage risk, prioritize effort, allocate resources, and lead soldiers. |
| | Control | They centralize or decentralize control of operations as needed to ensure that units can adapt to changing situations. |

Source: Created by author.

Having examined a broad spectrum of experts in the field of risk it is now possible to compile a comprehensive set of principles which may be applied by a decision-maker to cope more effectively with uncertainty. Examining each author's principles as compared with the entire group will allow similar principles to be merged, thus creating a comprehensive set of principles that also avoids excessive redundancy. Moreover, these principles can be grouped according to whether they are cognitive or physical in nature, as well as whether they are human or technical in nature. The exception to this grouping is leadership, as this must tie all of the domains together. Additionally, the principle of agility is proposed although none of the sources surveyed proposed it themselves. Agility replaces control and strength. Control is often illusory and can easily get commanders in trouble when they believe they have control over complex systems rather than merely influence.⁵⁴ Furthermore, strength does no good if it cannot get to the right place at the right time. Therefore, agility is proposed as a more appropriate principle because it implies both speed and power, similar to the concept of force in the study of physics, which is mass times acceleration—both are necessary to be put to any useful work. This crosswalk is displayed in table 4. The resulting principles and their definitions are displayed in table 5 and their relationships are depicted in figure 2.

⁵⁴Jamshid Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Elsevier, 2006), 32.

Table 4. Crosswalk of Comprehensive Set of Risk Principles

| DIMENSION | REALM | | | | | | | | | | | | PRINCIPLES OF OPERATIONAL RISK PREPAREDNESS | | | | |
|-------------|-------------|----------------------|------------|----------------------|---------|-------------------|----------|-------|----------|---------|-----------|----------|---|----------|--|------------|------------------|
| | | Sun Tzu | Clausewitz | MacCrimmon & Wehrung | Aharoni | Jedamus and Frame | Sunstein | Taleb | Townsend | FM 5-19 | ADRP 3-37 | ADRP 3-0 | | ADRP 6-0 | | | |
| TECHNICAL | COGNITIVE | Knowledge | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | Information |
| | | Information | | | X | X | X | X | | | X | X | X | | | | |
| | | Intelligence | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | |
| | | Communication | | | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | Communication |
| | | Analytical Structure | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | Analytic Process |
| | | Analytic Process | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Learning Process | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | |
| | | Assessment | | | | | | | | | X | X | | | | | |
| PHYSICAL | Time/Timing | X | X | X | | | | | X | | X | | | | | Time | |
| | Capability | X | | | | | | | | X | | | | | | Capability | |
| | Resources | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| HUMAN | PHYSICAL | Control | | | X | | | X | | | X | X | | | | Agility | |
| | | Strength | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Resilience | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | Resilience |
| | COGNITIVE | Adaptability | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | Adaptability |
| | | Variety | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | |
| | | Initiative | | | | | | | | | | X | X | X | | | Initiative |
| | | Insurance | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | Leadership |
| Uncertainty | | | | | X | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Judgment | | | | | | | | | | | | X | | | | | |
| Leadership | X | X | | | | | | | X | | | | | | | | |

Source: Created by author.

Table 5. Principles of Operational Risk Preparedness

| <u>PRINCIPLES</u> | <u>DEFINITIONS</u> |
|--------------------------|---|
| Leadership | The leader's primary function is to exercise sound judgment in application of all other principles. |
| Time | Time is the most precious resources and must never be wasted. All available time should be used to gather information, prepare, or act. |
| Capability | Resources provide the foundation for capabilities. A leader's knowledge, boldness and imagination translate them into capabilities and options. |
| Information | An organization must be knowledgeable and capable of gathering and analyzing large amounts of information. |
| Communication | Shared information creates common understanding which is the framework that allows for disciplined initiative within the commander's intent. |
| Analytic Process | A methodical analytic process aids a leader in understanding the problem and available options to properly weigh risk versus reward. |
| Adaptability | An organization must be able to alter its structure or processes to take full advantage of opportunities presented within a dynamic environment. |
| Initiative | Leaders throughout the organization must be empowered to take the initiative when they sense opportunities or threats to protect the organization and maximize its potential. |
| Agility | An organization's ability to act rapidly with adequate strength can mean the difference between success and failure. |
| Resilience | An organization's ability to continue on despite losses prevents it from ceasing to function in adverse conditions, which allows more time to react. |

Source: Created by author.

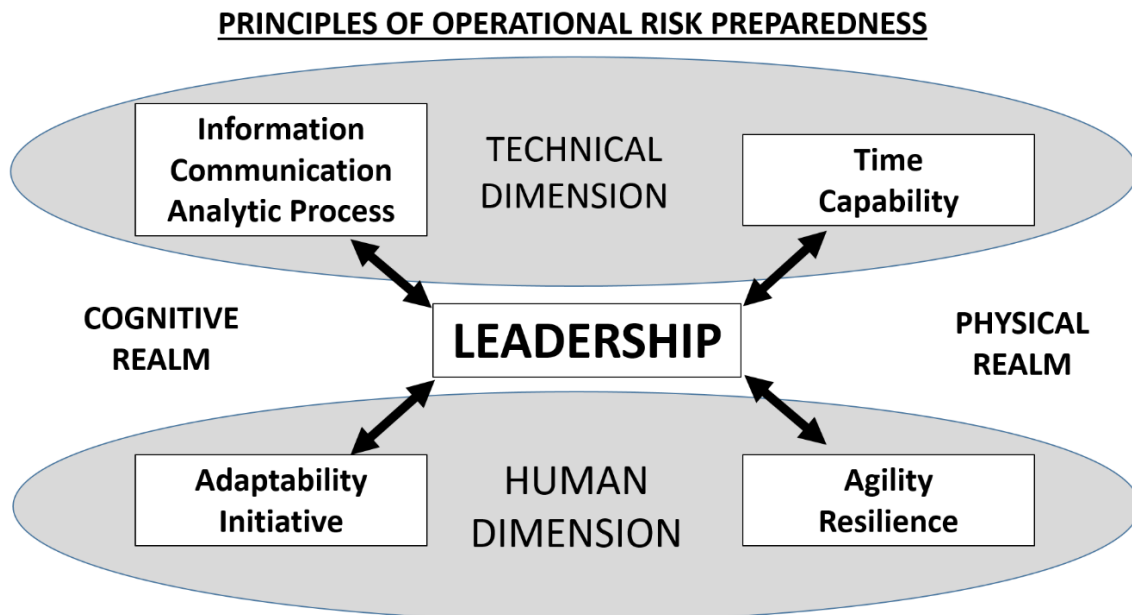


Figure 2. Relationship of Risk Preparedness Principles

Source: Created by author.

Definition of Operational Risk

Before proposing a suitable definition for operational risk, it is still necessary to consider the concepts of tactical and strategic risk so that operational risk may be properly bounded between the two. The best approach to this problem is to apply the dialectic method to fully explore the proper definitions of each and thereby establish the upper and lower bounds for operational risk. Then it is a matter of logically connecting the two, in light of the knowledge about risk gleaned from various expert sources, to ensure that there is no gap between the three levels.

Clausewitz stated clearly that war is an extension of policy,⁵⁵ thus the strategic level is the logical starting point for a discussion about risk. At this level Clausewitz identified a trinity

⁵⁵Clausewitz, *On War*, 87.

composed of the government, the people, and the army. Additionally, Clausewitz discussed the passions of the people and the impact that this has on the conduct of the war⁵⁶—they can either rally behind their government and show massive support for the war effort, or conversely they can withhold their support or even actively oppose it. This thinking points towards the conclusion that the most significant consideration for any government is the will of the people. It is also important to consider that people live finite lives and thus consider time in finite increments. Put more simply—people will make decisions, at least in part, based upon the amount of time a policy is expected to last. The other factor in the peoples’ decision is the amount of resources they are asked to commit to the cause. By putting these two items together it is clear that the willpower of a nation is more accurately described as a composite of resources over time. Therefore, it appears as if strategic risk is centered upon the will of the people to commit resources over some period of time. This qualifies as risk because there is no certainty about the quantity of resources required or the time period necessary to successfully conclude any conflict. Nor would it be possible to accurately forecast what the people would be willing to pay as their passions change with the times.

Perhaps the best method to define *tactical* risk is to develop a Jominian-style scientific checklist. The U.S. Army has already done this in the form of Composite Risk Management with its simple and clear five step process. The checklist starts with identifiable hazards against which resources can be applied to effectively “control” the risk that they pose and thus render any situation safe or at least acceptable. At the tactical level this approach makes eminent sense. Thus, a definition for tactical risk could be identifiable hazards that have some probability of occurrence and magnitude of impact.

Given that tactical risk rests in the realm of known facts and identifiable hazards, and

⁵⁶Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.

strategic risk is concerned with the will of the people, it seems logical that *operational* risk would consist of the great unknown gap filled with uncertainty that exists between these two poles. Clausewitz established the concept of ends, ways, and means.⁵⁷ The ends refer to the strategic aims of the war, and are established by politicians. These politicians then determine the means, or resources, that they are willing to expend to achieve this objective. The military leader is charged with determining in what ways he will employ these resources, or more precisely, in what manner he *intends* to use the means to achieve the desired ends. As Colonel Townsend pointed out, capabilities can only be determined by first knowing strength and location. Thus, in a manner of speaking, the politician has given the military leader capabilities to employ, and the military leader has the intention to employ them. Action resides at the confluence of capability and intention, and it is in this realm of action that lies the “danger, exertion, uncertainty, and chance” that Clausewitz described as the four elements of war.⁵⁸ But as the commander is human it follows that his intentions will vary from time to time given the information he has and the effects of the environment upon him. Furthermore, the capabilities largely consist of soldiers, who are also human, and therefore the capabilities themselves are not static or precisely calculable. Thus, there is a realm bounded at the lower end by conservative estimates of both capability and strength, and at the upper end by bold intentions and strong capabilities, which is depicted graphically in figure 3.

⁵⁷Clausewitz, *On War*, 177.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 104.

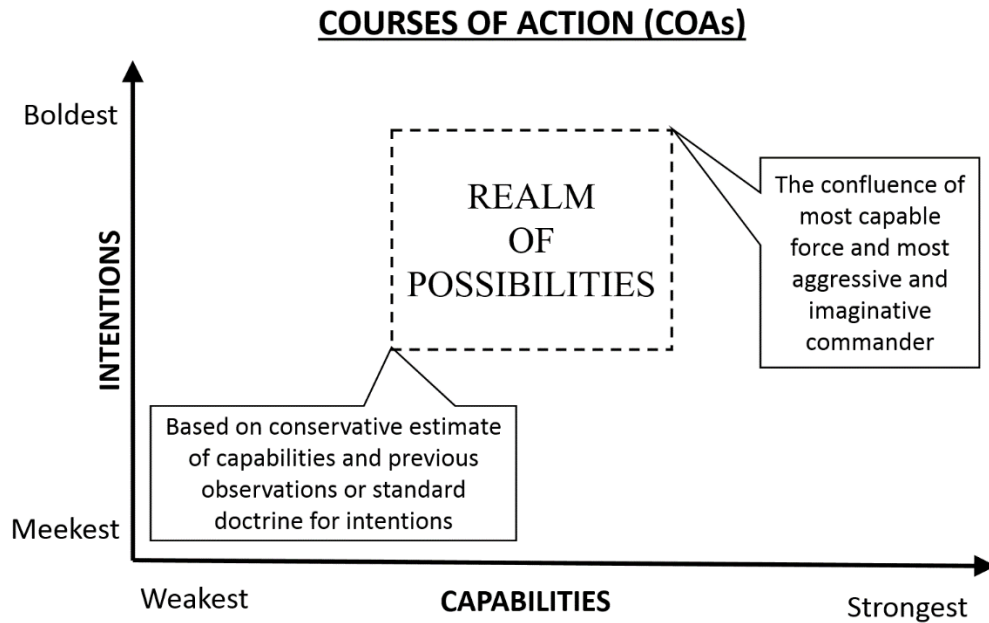


Figure 3. Theoretical Realm of Possible Courses of Action.

Source: Created by author.

Inherent in this realm of capability and intentions, which logically exists for both the friendly and the enemy forces, is the element of the unknown, which was the gap identified earlier between tactical risk and strategic risk. It is therefore logical that operational risk revolves around unknown deficiencies in our own forces and unknown enemy capabilities or intentions. Furthermore, history has plainly instructed time and again that the environmental conditions themselves play a significant role in military operations. Any commander who ignores them would rightly be called a fool. However, since these are not fully predictable, it appears that operational risk must also include unknown or unforeseen environmental hazards.

It seems that any of these unknown elements could be discovered during the course of operations, and once discovered that element would then fall into the realm of *tactical* risk, as it could then be calculated and have resources dedicated against it. Moreover, as Colonel Townsend

aply pointed out “known risks are not a particularly difficult problem.”⁵⁹ Indeed, it would seem quite advantageous to uncover the unknown elements more rapidly than the enemy is able to, thereby reducing one’s own risk relative to the enemy’s level of risk. This relates to an organization’s decision cycle, and it highlights the need for robust information collection capabilities as well as the need for effective intra-organizational communication. More simply put—it is imperative that military units become learning organizations. In fact, it is fair to say that *war at the operational level is a learning competition with risk as the central feature.*

It is also important to recognize that resources have no inherent value to the commander. Rather, the capabilities that these resources make possible that provide value to the commander because they give him options. Capabilities are products not only of resources, but of boldness, imagination, understanding, and training. After all, a tool in an expert’s hand can achieve much more than the exact same tool in a layman’s hand. Additionally, any commander would logically seek to increase or at least preserve his own options while actively seeking to reduce those of his enemy. This could be done by physically reducing the enemy’s resources, or conversely by negatively affecting his cognitive ability regarding boldness, imagination or understanding. In turn, any of these measures would dramatically increase the risk incurred by the enemy commander while simultaneously reducing the risk to the friendly commander.

It is now possible to show how strategic, operational, and tactical risk fit together, and further to demonstrate that they are fully interconnected. Table 6 shows all three levels and proposed actions to take at each level.

⁵⁹Townsend, *Risks*, 10.

Table 6. Risk by Level of War

| Level | Characteristics | Definitions and Appropriate Actions |
|-------------|--|---|
| Strategic | Political Will, Popular Will, National Resources, Prolonged Period | Definition: Balancing ends (political objectives) with means (national resources) over an extended and unknown time period given uncertain popular will. |
| | | Actions: Set achievable aims, commit sufficient resources, and work continuously to bolster public and international support. |
| Operational | Unpredictable: Environmental Conditions, Friendly Shortfalls, Enemy Capabilities | Definition: Any friendly decision, enemy action, or environmental change that presents opportunity or poses a threat, is filled with uncertainty, and requires action. |
| | | Actions: Create a learning organization, maintain a reserve capability, seek to create and preserve friendly options while actively reducing enemy options. |
| Tactical | Identified Hazards, Known Threats, Allotted Resources | Definition: Identifiable hazards and known risks that have some probability of occurrence and calculable magnitude of impact. |
| | | Actions: Conduct assessments to determine known risks and commit sufficient resources to reduce either its probability or its impact to acceptable cost levels. |

Source: Created by author.

Now it is possible to see why the term “operational risk” has not been properly defined, because a definition that rests largely upon unknown factors is at best an unsettling concept to the human mind which by its nature craves certainty. However, there is no denying the fact that operational risk does indeed lie squarely in the realm of unknowns and uncertainty. Therefore, the proposed *definition of operational risk* for this monograph is *any friendly decision, enemy action, or environmental change that presents an opportunity or poses a threat, is filled with uncertainty, and requires action*. This includes situations that warrant action but remain unidentified, which are, perhaps, the most dangerous of all. These related concepts are depicted in figure 4.

Operational risk is the operational level commander’s one and only true dilemma. Furthermore, given that it is futile to believe that one can control the unknown and unpredictable, it is clear that one must instead attempt to prepare for uncertainty rather than manage uncertainty. Thus, *operational level commanders should think in terms of preparedness while tactical*

commanders should think in terms of management. Because of this, the commander at the operational level must structure his force to be a learning organization so that he can gather, interpret, and share information to create shared understanding within his own organization faster than the enemy thereby enabling faster, more appropriate action than the enemy. He must also ensure that his unit is agile enough to act rapidly with sufficient strength when it identifies an opportunity or threat. His organization must be adaptive enough to change its structure or processes to fit the changing circumstances of the operational environment. And he must build a resilient organization which is not reliant on any single person or system. This will ensure that the organization as a whole is capable of continuing the mission in the face of inevitable losses and hardship.

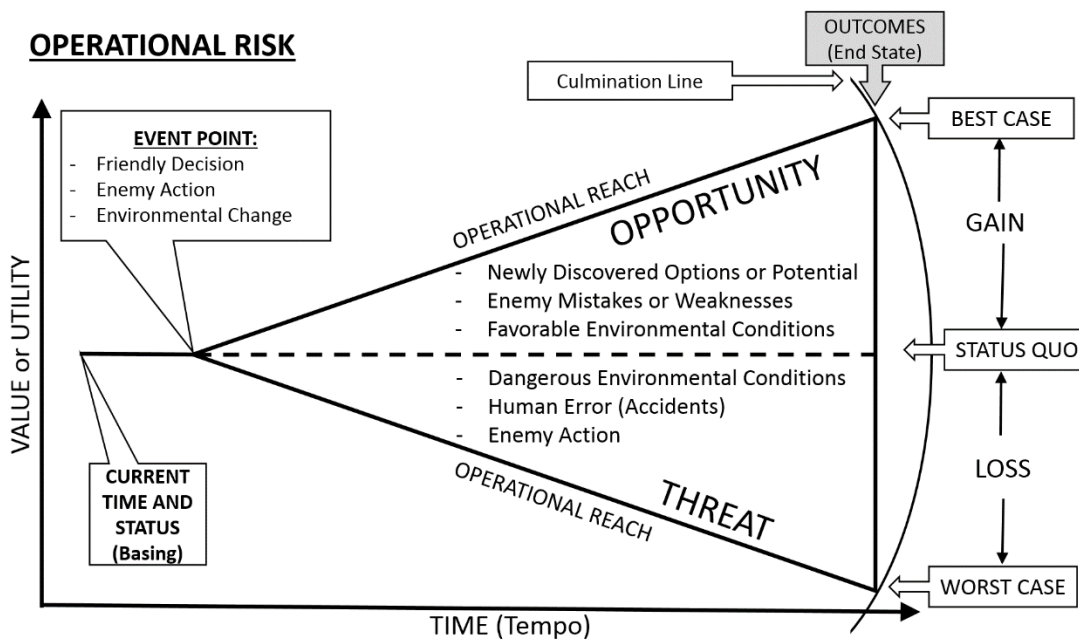


Figure 4. Conceptual Depiction of Operational Risk.

Source: Created by author.

THE FRANKLIN NASHVILLE CAMPAIGN

Strategic Setting

The Franklin-Nashville campaign was fought during the last few months of 1864 over a broad swath of Tennessee and northern Alabama as one of the closing campaigns of the American Civil War. By 1864, the initial positions of each side had evolved, both politically and economically, into their mature states. More precisely stated, each side was fully committed to all-out mobilization of resources, each side was feeling the effects of attrition, and each side was facing exhaustion of one sort or another. The North faced political exhaustion, where the elections of 1864 had been a contest between Peace Democrats supporting George B. McClellan and Republicans supporting Abraham Lincoln. In the South the situation was much more acute economically where the heavy toll on manpower and resources, combined with the U.S.-imposed naval blockade, had ensured that every Southern household was feeling the strain of war by 1864. Both sides were anxious for an end to the war, but whereas the North could sustain the fight for the time being, the South was in a truly desperate position.⁶⁰

There were three theaters of operation in the Civil War—the Trans-Mississippi, the Western, and the Eastern. The Trans-Mississippi, consisting of Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas, was of least concern for the two contending sides. Populations west of the Mississippi were relatively small and economic development was in its infancy there. Thus, throughout the war this theater had little bearing on the overall conflict. Both belligerents considered the Eastern Theater as the main theater of war because it contained the largest population centers, the most vital economic interests, and the capitols for both sides. The Eastern Theater had settled into a virtual stalemate by June 1864 with Union forces under Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant facing Confederate forces under General Robert E. Lee entrenched at

⁶⁰Alan R. Millett, Peter Maslowski, and Willaim B. Feis, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States from 1607 to 2012* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 207-14.

Petersburg. Lee's knew that his force of 52,000 was too weak to challenge its Northern attackers. Furthermore, Lee knew that he would receive no replacements for his losses. Grant's force, in excess of 100,000 soldiers, was incapable of outmaneuvering the Confederates or over-running their defenses, thus the stalemate at Petersburg would last until March of 1865. The sole exception to this Eastern stalemate were the operations of Lieutenant General Jubal Early's corps of Confederates operating in the Shenandoah Valley and threatening Washington. Early was opposed by Major General Philip H. Sheridan.⁶¹

The Western Theater, within which the Franklin-Nashville Campaign was fought, was centered on Middle Tennessee, although at times the fighting spilled over into Kentucky, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. While not the most populous or most economically developed region of the country, the Western Theater did have enough population and development to matter significantly to both belligerents. Both sides had experienced significant victories and defeats within this theater in 1863 and as a result both sides had changed commanders and committed additional troops in a bid for victory there. This was the only theater with the combination of both active movement and important resources. Because of these facts, combined with the Northern election cycle, the Western Theater held great significance during the latter half of 1864.

In 1864, Major General William T. Sherman was the commander of the Department of the Mississippi, which was responsible for this Western theater, and he had three armies under his command totaling more than 100,000 men. From May until September of 1864 he steadily maneuvered his force from Chattanooga to Atlanta. Opposing him was the Confederate Army of Tennessee⁶² commanded by General Joseph E. Johnston, who had approximately 55,000 soldiers.

⁶¹Robert A. Doughty, et al., *Warfare in the Western World*, vol. 1, *Military Operations from 1600 to 1871* (Lexington: DC Heath, 1996), 435-37, 454-55.

General Johnston sought to preserve his force rather than engage in decisive battle with a far superior enemy. Johnston therefore wisely pursued a Fabian strategy trading space for time until he was on the outskirts of Atlanta. This deep penetration into Southern territory greatly alarmed many Southerners because it posed a direct threat to the second largest city in the Confederacy.⁶³

In response, President Jefferson Davis replaced General Johnston with General Hood and gave him a mandate to protect Atlanta and expel the Yankee invaders. Davis compared Sherman's deep thrust into Confederate territory with Napoleon's Russian invasion and envisioned a futile campaign bleeding the Union forces white followed by an ignominious Federal retreat. Davis thought highly of the young Hood and knew him to be a very aggressive and brave commander. However, Hood's appointment could not avert the inevitable and Sherman's vastly superior force captured Atlanta on 2 September 1864. This major victory came just in time to raise flagging Union morale and contributed greatly to Lincoln's reelection two months later.⁶⁴

Capturing Atlanta, however, did not end the war. Hood and his army remained a significant threat. Indeed, the object of Sherman's campaign had not been the capture of Atlanta, but the destruction of the Army of Tennessee.⁶⁵ In early October, while Sherman contemplated his next campaign, Hood attacked Sherman's greatly extended supply lines. Sherman attempted simultaneously to hold Atlanta and engage Hood in battle, but Sherman's force was too large to maneuver rapidly enough to catch the nimble veterans of the Army of Tennessee. Sherman had

⁶²It is important to note that Southern armies were named after states or regions, whereas Northern armies were named after rivers. This is of particular concern in this case because the Southern Army of Tennessee was fighting against the Northern Army of the Tennessee (among other armies) in this theater.

⁶³Doughty, *Warfare in the Western World*, 437-40.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 440-42.

⁶⁵*Memoirs of William T. Sherman* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1957), 2:26. Sherman wrote about the Atlanta campaign that "Neither Atlanta, nor Augusta, nor Savannah, was the objective, but the 'army of Jos. Johnston,' go where it might."

long been pondering a movement through Georgia to the coast, cutting a path of destruction through the South as a means to cripple both the Southern economy and break Southern morale. Frustrated with his inability to catch Hood, Sherman urged Grant to approve his planned March to the Sea, and reasoned that Hood would be forced to chase after him rather than allow Georgia to be burned. Moreover, Sherman promised Grant that he would leave Thomas behind in Tennessee to handle Hood in case Hood moved in that direction.⁶⁶ With this added reassurance, Grant, though skeptical, eventually approved Sherman's plan on 2 November 1864.⁶⁷

On the Southern side, Davis expected some form of offensive action from Hood, though he did not specify where. Hood believed it would be futile for him to attempt to attack Sherman's massive army directly and therefore sought opportunities elsewhere against smaller concentrations of Union forces, particularly in areas that might yield new recruits and supplies. At the same time, Hood sought to create a panic in the North. The obvious solution for him was a campaign in Tennessee and Kentucky, areas friendly to the South that were currently held by the North and contained large supply depots. Hood broached his plan to General P.G.T. Beauregard, commander of the Confederate Department of the West, and received his approval.⁶⁸

Campaign Overview

After capturing Atlanta, Sherman had three armies under his command—the Army of the Cumberland, the Army of the Ohio, and the Army of the Tennessee. Because he would be severing his lines of communication for the duration of the 300 mile March to the Sea, Sherman decided to send back his second-rate troops, as well as the sick and wounded, to Tennessee under

⁶⁶United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, vol. 39, pt. 3 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1892), 576-77. Hereafter cited as *OR*.

⁶⁷Sherman, *Memoirs*, 164-5.

⁶⁸John Bell Hood, *Advance and Retreat: Personal Experiences in the United States and Confederate Armies* (Millwood, NY: Kraus, 1981), 277, 280.

Thomas.⁶⁹ In an ironic twist that highlights the tension between competing strategic and operational objectives, Sherman had also furloughed a large number of soldiers to return home and vote in the late-fall elections.⁷⁰ Initially it appears as if Sherman had no conception of the demands that Thomas would potentially face as a result of his own March to the Sea.

Thomas himself was already in Tennessee because Sherman had sent him there in September to command the defensive forces along the tenuous Union supply line supporting the troops in Atlanta.⁷¹ As early as the 17th of October Sherman had reliable indicators that Hood intended to strike north into Tennessee rather than pursue the main Union force.⁷² However, Sherman either disregarded their veracity or simply wanted to avoid a direct confrontation with Hood because on the 19th of October he firmly decided upon his March to the Sea and sent Thomas a telegram telling him that:

I want you to remain in Tennessee, and take command of all my divisions not actually present with me. Hood's army may be set down at 40,000 of all arms fit for duty. He may follow me or turn against you. If you can defend the line of the Tennessee in my absence of three months, it is all I ask.⁷³

In the same telegram, Sherman requested a report from Thomas on the total strength and disposition of Union forces in Tennessee because he did not have a firm grasp on the numbers. Sherman did not anticipate that Thomas would need any additional infantry divisions. Nor did Sherman envision any need for cavalry in Tennessee because he decided to take all mounted

⁶⁹Thomas B. Van Horne, *History of the Army of the Cumberland; Its Organization, Campaigns, and Battles* (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1988), 180.

⁷⁰Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 8:11.

⁷¹Van Horne, *Army of the Cumberland*, 159.

⁷²Ibid., 179. Major General Slocum had acquired and forwarded a copy of the Montgomery newspaper of 12 October 1864 that had reports of speeches made by Davis and Hood positively indicating that the Army of Tennessee would cross the Tennessee River and head north on the offensive.

⁷³*OR*, vol. 39, pt. 3: 365.

troops along with him on the march, leaving only dismounted cavalry at Thomas' disposal.⁷⁴ Grant, however, was still primarily concerned with Hood's army and was initially very skeptical of Sherman's plan. After some dialogue with Grant, Sherman reconsidered his force allocations and decided to send two infantry corps back to Thomas along with the nascent cavalry corps, without mounts, commanded by Major General James H. Wilson.⁷⁵ In addition, Sherman ordered Major General A.J. Smith in the Trans-Mississippi to reinforce Thomas with two divisions, and Grant ordered raw recruits and newly raised regiments to be diverted to Nashville instead of the Eastern Theater. Thus, by the 1st of November, Thomas assumed command of an ad hoc, ill-equipped force spread out from Atlanta to St. Louis numbering perhaps 70,000 men spread out over an area measuring roughly 50,000 square miles.⁷⁶ His real problem was how to concentrate these forces in time to prevent Hood's impending onslaught.

Thomas, who had up until this time commanded the Army of the Cumberland, pleaded with Sherman to have his old corps, the XIV, assigned under his command because he had built it, trained it and knew he could rely upon it thoroughly in battle. It was this magnificent corps which, under Thomas' command, had averted disaster at Chickamauga in September of 1863.⁷⁷ This corps was highly regarded as a fighting force and had pioneered the use of military topographical sections, trained scout formations, pontoon companies, and the tactical employment of telegraphs.⁷⁸ To this request, Sherman replied "It is too compact and reliable a

⁷⁴*OR*, vol. 39, pt. 3: 365-66.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 576-77. Wilson was a rising star who Grant had selected from rapid promotion based on his demonstrated proficiency and potential. Just after the capture of Atlanta, Grant sent Wilson to the Western theater to assume command of all cavalry there. Up to this point, the Union cavalry formations in the Western theater had been viewed as inept, perhaps because they were fighting against the likes of Forrest.

⁷⁶Stanley F. Horn, *The Army of Tennessee* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), 381-82.

⁷⁷Richard O'Connor, *Thomas: Rock of Chickamauga* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1948), 43-50.

corps for me to leave behind.”⁷⁹ Instead, Sherman left him the IV Corps under Major General David S. Stanley and the XXIII Corps under Major General John M. Schofield.

Hood’s veteran force of some 40,000 men was already concentrated in northern Alabama. It was composed of three infantry corps, commanded by Lieutenant Generals Stephen D. Lee, Frank Cheatham, and Alexander P. Stewart. Additionally, Hood was reinforced by Lieutenant General Nathan B. Forrest’s cavalry corps, estimated at about 8,000 troopers.⁸⁰ Following his attacks against Union supply lines, Hood waited for Sherman to make some move and expose some weakness. When Sherman made preparations to march eastward from Atlanta with 62,000 troops leaving a scattered and weak force guarding Tennessee, Hood saw his opportunity.⁸¹ He knew conditions were ripe when Sherman severed his telegraph lines, burned Atlanta, and began his march eastward on the 15th of November. In his memoir, Sherman ironically noted “it surely was a strange event—two hostile armies marching in opposite directions, each with the full belief that it was achieving a final and conclusive result in a great war.”⁸²

In late October, Hood began his movement westward through northern Alabama to find a suitable place to cross the Tennessee River in conjunction with Forrest’s cavalry. Mangled railroads, bad weather and supply problems plagued his efforts from the outset and cost him precious time.⁸³ Nevertheless, Hood managed to secure crossing sites for his army in the vicinity of Florence, Alabama and succeeded in getting his entire force across the river by the 20th of

⁷⁸Sherman, *Memoirs*, 2:9. Sherman relied heavily on the capabilities that Thomas had created; Van Horne, *History of the Army of the Cumberland*, Appendix A.

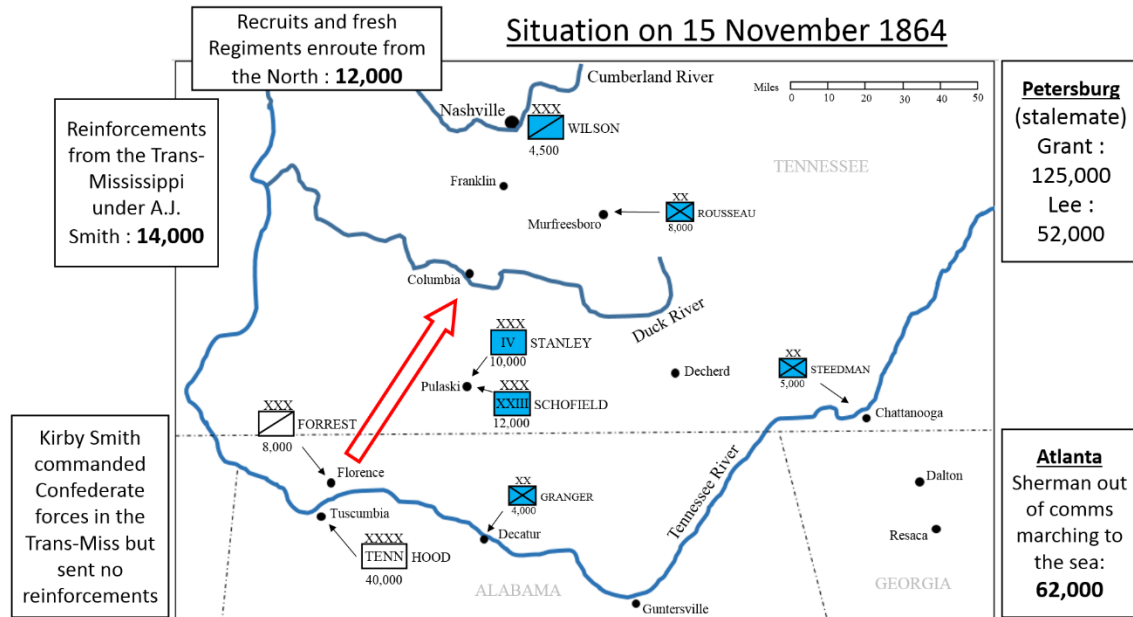
⁷⁹Larry J. Daniel, *Days of Glory: The Army of the Cumberland, 1861-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 430.

⁸⁰Horn, *The Army of Tennessee*, 384.

⁸¹Jack H. Lepa, *Breaking the Confederacy: The Georgia and Tennessee Campaigns of 1864* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 174.

⁸²Sherman, *Memoirs*, 2:170.

⁸³Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 380.



November. Thus, he was finally poised for his strike towards Nashville. Hood determined that his

Figure 5. Campaign Overview Map.

Source: Adapted from Thomas E. Griess, ed., *West Point Atlas for the American Civil War* (Wayne, NJ: Avery, 1986), 50.

initial move would be towards Columbia, Tennessee, where he could get between Thomas’s force at Nashville and Schofield’s force at Pulaski.⁸⁴

Schofield learned of Hood’s movement just in time on the 22nd of November and marched his 23,000 men to Columbia, arriving on the 23rd of November. Hood arrived the next day and began making plans to trap Schofield.⁸⁵ Schofield’s defensive position at Columbia was weak, although he now at least had about 4,500 cavalrymen under Wilson in support.⁸⁶ However, he knew his own force was inferior to Hood’s and that Wilson’s cavalry was no match for

⁸⁴Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 281-82.

⁸⁵Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 384-85.

⁸⁶Lepa, *Breaking the Confederacy*, 176. Schofield had with him the IV Corps under Stanley, Cox’s division, and one and a half cavalry divisions.

Forrest's. Schofield telegraphed Thomas with his concerns and received the reply, "If you cannot hold Columbia, you had better withdraw to the north bank of the river... it is better, of course, to substantially check the enemy than to run the risk of defeat by resisting too much."⁸⁷ Thomas still needed more time to assemble his force, but he knew that at this point the risk of a general engagement between Schofield and Hood ran a high chance of resulting in a catastrophic Union defeat. However, Thomas also knew that Schofield was in the best position to make the decision. Thus, Thomas gave Schofield his intent, some advice, and then allowed him the latitude to make the final decision on the ground based on Schofield's own information and judgment.

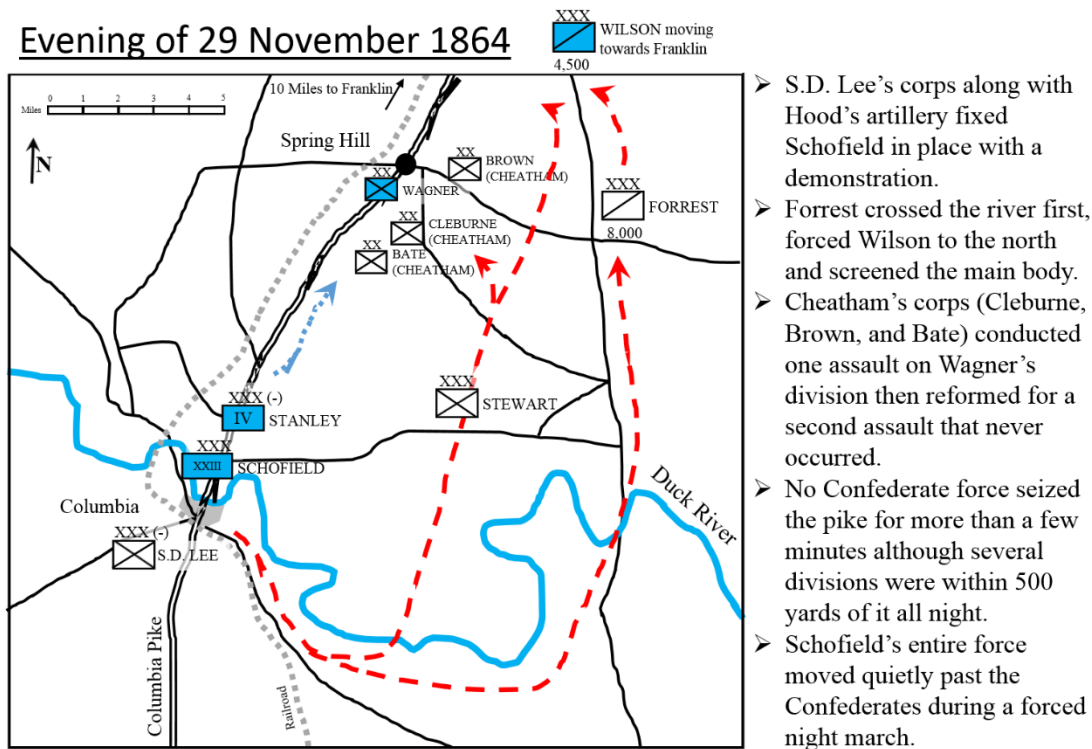


Figure 6. The Incident at Spring Hill.

Source: Adapted from Thomas E. Griess, ed., *West Point Atlas for the American Civil War* (Wayne, NJ: Avery, 1986), 51a.

⁸⁷Van Horne, *Army of the Cumberland*, 212.

Hood sensed the great opportunity that lay before him. He wanted to hold Schofield in place at Columbia while he secretly crossed the Duck River so that he could maneuver onto Schofield's line of retreat towards Franklin. On the night of the 27th, he set his plan in motion by laying a pontoon bridge five miles east of Columbia. Hood left two divisions and the army artillery under the direction of Lee with orders to hold Schofield's attention.

On the morning of the 28th, he sent Forrest's cavalry across the pontoon bridge to disperse Wilson's force and cover the movement of the main body. After Forrest was across, Cheatham's and Stewart's corps crossed at the same site early the next day and were fully crossed by about 4 p.m. on the 29th.⁸⁸ Wilson's force retreated under pressure to the north, but all the while was still gathering information as they captured prisoners. At 1 a.m. on the 29th, Wilson was certain that the bulk of Hood's force was now committed to a flanking maneuver designed to trap Schofield. He immediately sent multiple dispatch riders to inform Schofield of the gravity of the situation and urged him to withdraw immediately. Simultaneously, Wilson sent the same dispatch to Thomas in order to keep him fully apprised of the unfolding events.⁸⁹ Thomas, upon learning of the possible crossing, advised Schofield via telegraph that if the information was true then "you will necessarily have to make preparations to take up a new position at Franklin, behind Harpeth, immediately."⁹⁰ Schofield, completely fooled by Lee's demonstration, remained skeptical about Hood's true intentions. He did take the precaution of sending his trains with one division under Stanley to the town of Spring Hill, about 12 miles to the northeast, but he kept the

⁸⁸Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 385, 387.

⁸⁹James H. Wilson, *Under the Old Flag* (New York: D. Appleton, 1912), 42

⁹⁰United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, vol. 45, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1894), 1108.

bulk of his force at Columbia prepared for a frontal assault.⁹¹ This allowed Hood to maneuver seven division unmolested all day on the 29th towards the one Union division at Spring Hill.⁹²

When Schofield was finally convinced of the large force in his rear, he became exceedingly alarmed. It was not until 3 p.m. that Schofield finally issued orders for a general withdrawal to commence at about 4 p.m.⁹³ He had wasted a full 13 hours since he had first received reliable information about Hood's movement from Wilson. Hood, however, had used the time well and maneuvered his force to an assault position outside of Spring Hill by late afternoon. He ordered Cheatham to assault the town and seize the pike with Cleburne's division in conjunction with one of Forrest's brigades, and then Hood rode off to find a suitably comfortable house to use as a headquarters. At about 4 p.m., the lead division, under Cleburne, commenced the assault on Spring Hill in conjunction with Forrest. They succeeded in driving off two of the Union brigades and seized a portion of the pike just south of town.⁹⁴ However, a battery of Union guns positioned in the town opened fire on Cleburne's flank which compelled Cleburne to withdraw and reform. As Cleburne was about to launch his second assault, orders arrived from Cheatham directing him to hold his position until the other divisions of the corps were in position for a combined assault.⁹⁵

As Hood rode away from Spring Hill, he encountered Major General William B. Bate leading the trail division of Cheatham's corps. At this moment he changed his mind about seizing Spring Hill and decided that all he really needed was a sufficient force to hold the pike for the night and prevent Schofield's withdrawal. Hood therefore ordered Bate to stop marching towards

⁹¹Van Horne, *Army of the Cumberland*, 216-7.

⁹²Howell Purdue and Elizabeth Purdue, *Pat Cleburne: Confederate General* (Hillsboro, TX: Hill Jr. College Press, 1973), 393.

⁹³Van Horne, *Army of the Cumberland*, 217, 219.

⁹⁴Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 387.

⁹⁵Purdue, *Pat Cleburne*, 398.

Spring Hill and march instead directly towards the pike and seize it. Bate immediately reoriented his division and began marching across the fields towards the pike. Hood continued to ride away from the battlefield. Cheatham, whom Hood had not informed, continued to await the arrival of Bate's division so that he could conduct his assault.⁹⁶

Schofield finally began his movement northward around 4 p.m. He and his force fully expected that they would encounter heavy Confederate resistance at or near Spring Hill. As the lead Union division approached Spring Hill, it did indeed encounter a Confederate division marching across fields barely 100 yards from the pike. After a brief skirmish, the Confederate division inexplicably withdrew.⁹⁷ This, in fact, was Bate's division. Bate had been anxious for a fight and was happy to see the approaching Union column. However, just as he began the engagement he received orders from Cheatham to rendezvous outside of Spring Hill. He sent a staff officer to request the orders to be rescinded and allow him to occupy the pike as previously ordered. The reply he received from Cheatham was "join up with Cleburne's division immediately or report to the commanding general under arrest."⁹⁸

To the great astonishment of all Union soldiers plodding northward, they marched almost unmolested throughout the night within clear view of the Confederate campfires which extended to within 200 yards of the turnpike. One Union colonel later wrote that had even a single brigade opposed us along the pike, the panic would have been complete and we would have been destroyed in the morning. Countless Confederate soldiers witnessed the Union forces marching past and even the captains and privates of the Army of Tennessee recognized what should have been done to block Schofield's force, yet no one took the initiative to do so.⁹⁹

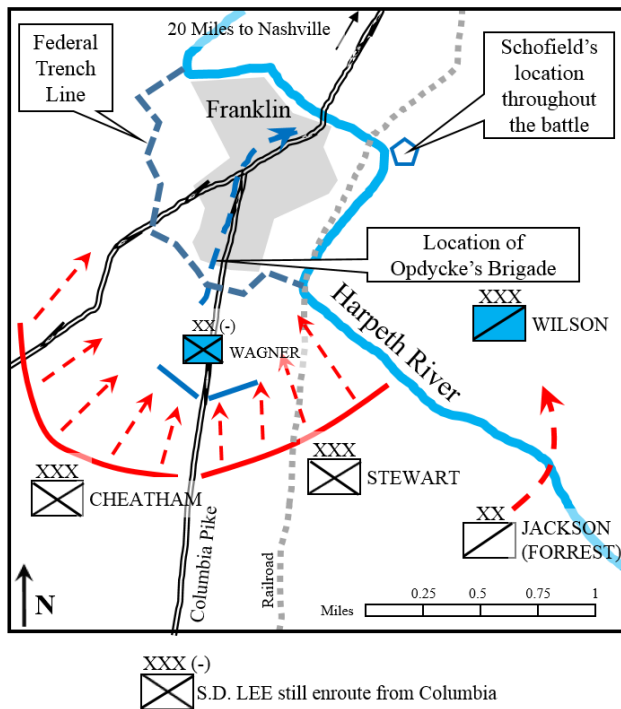
⁹⁶Purdue, *Pat Cleburne*, 399.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 401.

⁹⁸Winston Groom, *Shrouds of Glory* (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 1995), 147.

⁹⁹Lepa, *Breaking the Confederacy*, 178-81.

4 p.m. on 30 November 1864



- Hood immediately ordered an assault without waiting for artillery support or for the remainder of Lee's corps to arrive.
- Forrest pleaded to have two hours and some infantry to conduct a flanking maneuver. Instead, Hood committed two of Forrest's divisions to the assault and only allowed him to flank with one division. Wilson stopped Forrest's flank attack.
- Wagner's division fought too long and fled in panic which allowed Confederate soldiers to occupy a portion of Union trench line.
- Colonel Opdycke immediately counterattacked and restored the line.

When Hood awoke the next morning to discover that his prey had slipped out during the night he was furious. He gathered his generals for breakfast at the home of Major Nat Chair in

Figure 7. The Battle of Franklin

Source: Adapted from Thomas E. Griess, ed., *West Point Atlas for the American Civil War* (Wayne, NJ: Avery, 1986), 51b.

Spring Hill and berated them, placing the full blame for the calamity upon them.¹⁰⁰ As soon as possible the Confederates were up and on the march towards Franklin, their advance elements close behind Schofield's rear guard. The whole army seemed to share in the stunning disappointment of having missed their chance. The last part of Schofield's weary force marched into Franklin in the late morning. By the early afternoon the bulk of Hood's force was drawn up

¹⁰⁰Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 394.

in battle lines south of Franklin.¹⁰¹ The sting of Hood's lost opportunity at Spring Hill prevented him from taking any advice from his subordinates, and he insisted upon attacking immediately. There would be no waiting for his final two divisions to arrive, nor for his artillery to get in position. Thus, the Confederates launched their gallant, if ill-advised, assault at 4 p.m. on November 30th with no artillery support and no reserves.¹⁰² Hood had determined "to drive the enemy from his position into the river *at all hazards* [original emphasis]."¹⁰³

The next two hours were among the bloodiest and most futile ever fought by Confederate soldiers. Schofield had occupied the previously prepared defensive lines around Franklin with the bulk of his force. He had posted two brigades under the command of Major General George D. Wagner in front of the lines as skirmishers with orders to withdraw before becoming heavily pressed. However, these troops were the same ones that had shamefully run when Cleburne assaulted them at Spring Hill so they stubbornly held their ground to prove their courage until finally Cheatham's corps, with fixed bayonets, was almost upon them.¹⁰⁴ At this point they fled panic-stricken and streamed towards the Union trench line. They were so terrified that they leapt over the trenches and continued running into the town. Their panic was so complete that it greatly affected the troops occupying the trench line.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the troops in the trenches were unable to fire upon Cheatham's advancing troops because their fields of fire were obscured by Wagner's fleeing troops. By the time the defenders had a clear shot, Cheatham's men were a mere 100 yards to their front, and they rapidly overran and occupied part of the trench line at a prominent point that threatened the entire Union line and overlooked the Federal line of retreat

¹⁰¹Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 397.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 397-98.

¹⁰³Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 293.

¹⁰⁴Glenn V. Longacre and John E. Hass, ed., *To Battle for God and the Right: The Civil War Letterbooks of Emerson Opdycke* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 248.

¹⁰⁵Van Horne, *Army of the Cumberland*, 220.

back through Franklin and across the Harpeth River.¹⁰⁶ Schofield, across the river in conference with his subordinates, was caught completely off guard and was now in a very bad predicament.¹⁰⁷ Hood's rash and unexpected charge seemed to be paying off.

At this critical moment, Colonel Emerson Opdycke, in command of the third brigade in Wagner's division and positioned behind the Union line, sensed the crisis and immediately counterattacked. This rapid and brazen action, though costly, succeeded in regaining the lost section of trench line and thereby restored the Union defensive position.¹⁰⁸ The now twice-stymied Confederates refused to accept this turn of events. In the waning sunlight they attacked time and again, with some places along the Union line reporting as many as thirteen separate assaults.¹⁰⁹ The fighting slowly tapered off as nighttime settled upon the landscape. All of this bravery was for naught and the price was dreadfully high. The Confederates lost some 6,200 dead and wounded, including twelve general officers, against a Union loss of 2,300.¹¹⁰ Despite the tremendous loss, Hood resolved to attack at first light, this time with artillery support. However, there was no need; Schofield had withdrawn to Nashville during the night.¹¹¹

By day's end on the 1st of December, Thomas finally had the bulk of his forces concentrated at Nashville. The promised divisions from the Trans-Mississippi, which had been greatly delayed in their travels, had finally arrived that morning, and Major General James A.

¹⁰⁶Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 400.

¹⁰⁷Van Horne, *Army of the Cumberland*, 199.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 200-1; Longacre, *To Battle for God and the Right*, 250, 253. Major Arthur MacArthur, one of Opdycke's regimental commanders, was severely wounded during this heroic charge at Franklin, but was able to recover and return to duty after the Battle of Nashville was over.

¹⁰⁹Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 402.

¹¹⁰Thomas Robson Hay, *Hood's Tennessee Campaign* (New York: Walter Neale, 1929), 130. Five Southern generals died on the field, another died of his wounds a few days later. Another five were wounded and could not return to duty and one general was captured.

¹¹¹Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 404.

Steedman arrived with his division from Chattanooga in the evening.¹¹² On the same day, Schofield's exhausted troops streamed into the heavily defended town in the hopes of finally getting some rest.¹¹³ Despite finally having his allotted manpower, Thomas still lacked horses, weapons, and other essential equipment for his cavalry. His greatest concern was his comparative weakness in cavalry, thus he urgently requested to receive the badly needed mounts and carbines so that he could get Wilson's cavalry into fighting shape.¹¹⁴ When he counterattacked, he wanted to make sure his force was fully prepared not only to make the engagement a victory, but to be able to exploit that victory. Besides, he felt confident that Hood could not bypass Nashville as that would necessitate a crossing of the Cumberland River, which was currently being patrolled by Union gunboats.¹¹⁵

Hood continued on to Nashville and arrived opposite Thomas' lines on the 3rd of December. He knew that he did not have enough force to successfully assault Thomas' defensive works, so instead he opted to build his own entrenchments and entice Thomas to assault him. Hood hoped to repel Thomas' assault and then follow on his heels back into Nashville, and if possible continue the advance to the north.¹¹⁶ While the bulk of his troops dug in, Hood dispatched Forrest, reinforced with an infantry division, to attack Murfreesboro about 30 miles to the southeast. Forrest fought a minor battle there on the 6th of December.¹¹⁷ Hood must have felt

¹¹²Van Horne, *Army of the Cumberland*, 251.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 222.

¹¹⁴United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, vol. 45, pt. 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1894), 17-18, 29-30, 70. Thomas explicitly stated his concern and the related facts to Grant in several telegrams.

¹¹⁵Van Horne, *Army of the Cumberland*, 250.

¹¹⁶Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 300.

¹¹⁷Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 409.

confident that his spy network¹¹⁸ would provide him enough forewarning of Federal movements, thus permitting him to detach Forrest for this ancillary mission.

Just as alarm had spread throughout the South when Sherman advanced towards Atlanta, alarm quickly spread in the North as Hood advanced towards Nashville. On the 2nd of December, Grant urged Thomas to attack immediately because he feared that Hood would bypass that place and quickly advance to the Ohio River. Thomas calmly and rationally explained his situation concerning his ad hoc and ill-equipped force. He reassured Grant that Hood was in no position to bypass Union defensive positions and gunboats, and that a premature attack would spell disaster. Furthermore, Thomas assured Grant that he would attack just as soon as he had enough of his cavalry remounted so that it could aid in the attack and lead the pursuit.¹¹⁹ On the 6th of December Grant again urged Thomas to attack. On the 8th he telegraphed Major General Henry W. Halleck in Washington that he was thinking about replacing Thomas with Schofield, and on the 9th he instructed Halleck to draw up orders to that effect.¹²⁰

On the night of the 8th, a terrible sleet storm hit Nashville and blanketed the area with a thick covering of ice.¹²¹ Thomas telegraphed Washington to inform his superiors that an attack under these conditions was suicidal folly and he would not execute it. He told Grant that as soon as the ice melted he would attack, and if that was unacceptable and Grant decided to relieve him that he would “submit without a murmur.”¹²² Grant belayed the order relieving Thomas, but was soon urging Thomas to attack regardless of the continued poor conditions. On the 13th, with the

¹¹⁸Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 300. He wrote in his memoir “I was apprised of each accession to Thomas’s Army.”

¹¹⁹*OR*, vol. 45, pt. 2: 17, 55, 70-71.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 84, 96-97, 114.

¹²¹Stanley F. Horn, *The Decisive Battle of Nashville* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), 43.

¹²²*OR*, vol. 45, pt. 2: 114-15.

ground around Nashville still frozen solid and covered with ice, Grant dispatched Major General John A. Logan from Washington with orders to relieve Thomas and assume command. However, not even this assuaged Grant's anxiety. The next day he left his headquarters at City Point, Virginia, where he had been presiding over the six-month long stand-off with Lee, to assume command at Nashville personally.¹²³

On the 14th of December, the temperature finally rose and the ice began to melt. Thomas determined that the ground was now suitable for an attack and he prepared his men to attack the following day. He telegraphed Washington and advised them of the situation.¹²⁴ His plan of attack was to conduct a feint on the Confederate right and then thrust his main attack upon the Confederate left with enough troops to outflank the enemy position and threaten Hood's rear.¹²⁵ A morning fog developed on the 15th which helped to conceal the Union movements, but also served to disorganize the attack. By noon the fog had lifted and Thomas' forces were engaged in earnest according to plan.¹²⁶

Hood's men fought gallantly but their thin line on the left could only stretch so far until finally Wilson's cavalry had outflanked them. On the Rebel left, several detached and important redoubts held out resolutely against concerted Union artillery fire and infantry assaults until they were finally overwhelmed. The combination of these two efforts caused the Confederate line to collapse and retreat in panic about two miles.¹²⁷ Thomas' forces pursued them and skirmished until darkness settled on the field. The Federal troops then bivouacked in place for the night,

¹²³Horn, *Decisive Battle*, 60.

¹²⁴OR, vol. 45, pt. 2: 180.

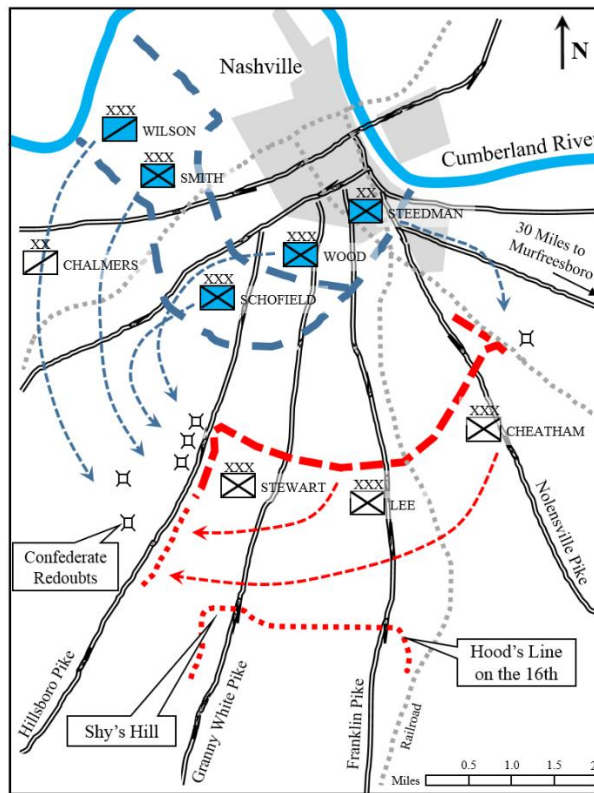
¹²⁵Horn, *Decisive Battle*, 66.

¹²⁶Van Horne, *Army of the Cumberland*, 229-30.

¹²⁷Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 413-15.

ready to resume the attack in the morning or begin a pursuit.¹²⁸

Oddly, both Thomas and Hood felt comfortable about the performance of their armies and confident about the impending battle the next day.¹²⁹ As a precaution, Hood ordered his artillery horses to the rear to keep them out of the line of fire, sent his wagon train further to the



15 – 16 December 1864

- Hood had been digging in since the 3rd of December.
- Hood secured his left flank with five redoubts on hilltops. Each had two to four cannon and about 100 infantrymen.
- Freezing rain blanketed the area in ice from the 8th to the 14th of December.
- Hood had sent Forrest to Murfreesboro with two cavalry and one infantry divisions some 30 miles away.
- As Thomas attacked Hood's left flank, Hood shifted forces from his right.
- At about 4 p.m. Wilson outflanked Cheatham (now on Hood's far left). At this point, Hood's army broke and ran.
- Hood reformed his line, anchored on the left at Shy's Hill.
- The pattern of battle on the 16th was very similar, except this time Hood's army was completely routed.

Figure 8. The Battle of Nashville

Source: Adapted from Thomas E. Griess, ed., *West Point Atlas for the American Civil War* (Wayne, NJ: Avery, 1986), 52.

rear¹³⁰ and alerted Lee's corps that it would act as rear guard in case of defeat.¹³¹ However, Hood

¹²⁸Van Horne, *Army of the Cumberland*, 236.

¹²⁹Horn, *Decisive Battle*, 129.

¹³⁰Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 415.

was confident enough that he did not bother to recall Forrest's detached force. Thomas felt certain that Hood would withdraw in the night, but was prepared either to attack or pursue depending on the circumstances. In the event that Hood remained in place, Thomas planned to execute the same general scheme of maneuver again with his main attack falling on the rebel left with the objective of outflanking them. The only difference from Thomas's previous plan was that the attack on Hood's right would also be made in earnest rather than merely being a feint.¹³²

At daylight the Union skirmishers advanced until they discovered the Confederate lines. At the angle between the Confederate main line facing north and their left flank, Major General John McArthur, a division commander in A.J. Smith's corps, brought up an artillery battery to reduce the enemy parapet on Shy's Hill, which appeared to him to be the key to the main Confederate line. He did this without any explicit orders, but he nevertheless kept his chain of command informed.¹³³ On the Confederate left, Wilson kept expanding his line, forcing Hood to reposition forces thereby continually thin out his main line and right flank. Schofield waited in the center, engaging only with skirmishers and very hesitant to conduct an assault. In the late afternoon, McArthur reported that he had reduced the parapet on Shy's Hill and it was ready to be assaulted.¹³⁴ At about the same time, Wilson rode up to Thomas, who was positioned with Schofield in the center, and informed his commander that he had outflanked the Confederates and the time was ripe for an assault. Thomas calmly scanned the field with his binoculars and then ordered Schofield to assault in conjunction with Wilson.¹³⁵

Feeling confident in the actions of the day, Hood finalized his plans for the next day. He

¹³¹Horn, *Decisive Battle*, 149.

¹³²Van Horne, *Army of the Cumberland*, 236, 238.

¹³³Horn, *Decisive Battle*, 129.

¹³⁴Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 416.

¹³⁵Wilson, *Under the Old Flag*, 116.

would withdraw and regroup in the night and then attack Thomas' exposed right flank during the day. Just at this moment he saw his army flee en masse as Union forces assaulted Shy's Hill and Wilson's cavalry threatened the Granny White Pike. The whole left of his line collapsed in panic and soldiers began streaming back.¹³⁶ The main line under Cheatham, which saw its rear threatened by Wilson and was being pressed by Schofield, also broke and ran. Because Hood had ordered all of his artillery horses to safe positions in the rear these soldiers were forced to abandon their artillery pieces on the field. Only Lee's corps on the Confederate right, astride the Franklin Pike, withdrew with any semblance of order and its' fighting withdrawal prevented the complete encirclement of the now routed Army of Tennessee.¹³⁷

As darkness once again enveloped the battlefield, the Army of Tennessee frantically stampeded back towards Franklin. The Confederate loss of 1,500 in dead and wounded had been comparatively small, but Hood's army also lost another 4,500 captured and some unknown number of demoralized veterans deserted in the days and weeks following this debacle. In addition, the Army of Tennessee lost 54 artillery pieces, about half of their total.¹³⁸ This battle was an unmitigated disaster for the Confederates. Hood described in his memoir that "I beheld for the first and only time a Confederate army abandon the field in confusion,"¹³⁹ or in the words of Private Sam Watkins, "the once proud Army of Tennessee had degenerated to a mob."¹⁴⁰

Congratulatory notes poured into Nashville for Thomas, each extolling their confidence in his ability despite having nearly relieved him only days before. Each telegram also contained

¹³⁶Horn, *Decisive Battle*, 129.

¹³⁷Ibid., 144, 147.

¹³⁸Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 417.

¹³⁹Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 302.

¹⁴⁰Sam R. Watkins, *Company Aytch: A Sideshow of the Big Show* (New York: Collier, 1962), 242.

an exhortation to “hotly pursue” Hood’s army, lest it get away to fight yet another day.¹⁴¹ None, however, mentioned the wisdom of remounting Wilson’s cavalry to enable this “hot” pursuit. Fortunately for the Union high command, Thomas had resolutely insisted on refitting his cavalry prior to seizing the initiative. Now Wilson’s cavalry, at its pinnacle of capability with 12,000 troopers mounted and equipped, was in daily pursuit of Hood’s remnants supported by Brigadier General Thomas J. Wood, now in command of IV Corps.¹⁴²

Hood had sent Forrest off to accomplish various ancillary tasks, and thus his cavalry force was sorely missed during the hour of greatest need. However, Forrest had deduced the gravity of the situation after hearing rumors of the first day’s battle, and without waiting for orders, immediately set out to rejoin Hood. Forrest rejoined Hood at Columbia on the 19th of December and immediately advised Hood to continue to retreat until he was safely behind the Tennessee River, offering at the same time to act as the rear guard if reinforced with a small amount of infantry.¹⁴³ Hood, finally humbled in defeat, followed this advice and the steady retreat continued now protected by Forrest who was daily pressed by Wilson and Wood.¹⁴⁴ Along the way Forrest made sure to burn bridges and otherwise impede the Federal advance, as if the cold, steady rain that turned the roads into mud was not bad enough.¹⁴⁵

On the 23rd of December, Union forces crossed the Duck River after being delayed waiting for pontoons to arrive. On the 24th, they ran into an ambush set by Forrest at Richland Creek, which substantially checked their movement.¹⁴⁶ At this point, Wood’s exhausted infantry

¹⁴¹*OR*, vol. 45, pt. 2: 195, 210.

¹⁴²Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 419. Stanley had been shot in the neck at Franklin and subsequently turned over command of the corps to Wood.

¹⁴³Robert Selph Henry, *First with the Most Forrest* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1944), 410-12.

¹⁴⁴Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 420.

¹⁴⁵Horn, *Decisive Battle*, 162.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 163.

corps paused to reform and recover while Wilson's cavalry continued the pursuit on its own. Meanwhile, Hood's main body crossed the Tennessee River on the 25th and 26th, while Forrest continued his delaying tactics. On the 28th and 29th he too crossed the Tennessee,¹⁴⁷ and at this point Thomas ordered a halt sensing that further pursuit would be extremely difficult and hazardous and would be unlikely to yield any further fruit.¹⁴⁸

Once safely across the Tennessee, Hood sent a carefully worded telegram to Beauregard, who had been hearing steady rumors of disaster in Tennessee. The telegram downplayed Hood's losses and granted some amount of comfort to Beauregard, who nonetheless immediately set out to visit the beleaguered army. The Department Commander finally arrived at the army's camp in Tupelo on the 15th of January and was aghast at what he beheld. Beauregard said of the ragged remains "if not, in the strict sense of the word a disorganized mob, it was no longer an army." On the 20th of January, the army's official muster showed 17,709 soldiers effective, down from nearly 40,000 at the outset of the campaign. The army continued to wither as untold numbers deserted and individual regiments were parceled out for guard duty. General Joseph E. Johnston, who once again took command of the Army of Tennessee, claimed that there were only 5,000 soldiers of the original army left when he marched it into North Carolina during the final days of the war.¹⁴⁹

Analysis

The Battle of Nashville was the last major battle of the Civil War, and was by far the most decisive battle in the most decisive campaign of this great conflict. Yet it has largely been ignored by historians and military institutions. This is most likely because viewed from the

¹⁴⁷Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 420.

¹⁴⁸Horn, *Decisive Battle*, 163.

¹⁴⁹Horn, *Army of Tennessee*, 422.

present, and simply looking at overall numbers, the campaign appears to have been a *fait accompli*. However, the campaign was by no means a certain Northern victory from the outset. It was instead a close contest that presented a tremendous opportunity to the South. In fact, uncertainty for both sides pervaded the entirety of the campaign, yet one army was able to seize opportunities and avert threats while the other was not. What accounted for this lopsided victory?

The Union force, though ad hoc in nature, was better prepared to encounter operational risk because General Thomas's leadership allowed for internal communication and subordinate initiative. Furthermore, he had worked diligently and even delayed action and given up ground to ensure that his force had the right capabilities in the right places at the right time. In most of the other principles of risk preparedness the two armies were comparatively similar.

Risk versus Reward

An investigation into the risk related decisions of the commanding generals in this campaign must start with a holistic view of their overall calculations about what they were risking against what they could expect to gain. At the start of the campaign, the two opposing generals were Sherman and Hood, and since Sherman had the decided advantage in men and material, the first decision was truly his. The next decision was Hood's. By necessity, Thomas's decision was contingent upon the decisions of these other two generals.

It is clear that Sherman's decision to split his forces and abandon his supply lines in enemy territory was tremendously risky. Lincoln was intensely anxious about this move and correctly pointed out that Sherman was indeed risking the loss of his entire 62,000 man army—a loss from which Northern willpower likely would not recover.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, Grant recognized that the risk still posed by Hood's army was serious. Hood's Army of Tennessee was still a

¹⁵⁰Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 8:148, 181.

formidable force and would be left with a free hand.¹⁵¹ Thus, in essence, Sherman's decision was so fraught with operational risk that it clearly posed a strategic risk.

Looking back on the event—and now knowing the outcome—it is easy to say that Sherman made the right decision. Sherman clearly believed that his March to the Sea would be strategically decisive, yet the Southern war effort continued. In fact, one could argue that his actions stiffened the Southern will to fight, while only moderately hampering their capability to do so. Thus, a closer analysis reveals that Sherman was potentially risking the entire Northern war effort without having a clear expectation of crushing the entire Southern war effort, though he himself believed he would do so.

Moreover, the risk posed to the loss of the entire force was palpable. Sherman planned to live off the land, and this was indeed possible. However, it is only possible to forage liberally enough to feed 62,000 men when the army was constantly moving and relatively unopposed. During the march, Sherman's force consumed very little of the ration supply that they carried.¹⁵² However, as soon as they stopped to lay siege to Savannah, they rapidly ate the entirety of their supply and were almost out when they were finally able to get resupplied by sea.¹⁵³ If this same scenario had played out at a land-locked location, Sherman's force could have been starved into submission within two or three weeks. Since they were out of communications, no Northern force would even have known of their plight. Thus, Sherman could only expect to gain moderately with success, but could lose everything through failure, thus constituting a poor decision.

Hood, for his part, was also risking everything. However, his strategic position was much more pressing and warranted the risk. He knew that at the strategic level, time was running out

¹⁵¹*OR*, vol. 39, pt. 3: 576, 594-95. Repeated telegraphs between Grant and Sherman showed how concerned Grant was with Hood's army.

¹⁵²Sherman, *Memoirs*, 2:193, 202.

¹⁵³Lepa, *Breaking the Confederacy*, 166.

for the South. He also knew that the North was politically sensitive to Southern incursions into Northern lands, or even Northern-held lands in the South. Thus, after Sherman made his decision and left the immediate area with the vast majority of the best Northern troops, the opportunity seemed ripe to Hood. Indeed, he knew that at the operational level he had a brief window of opportunity to take his already assembled force and strike against the scattered, second-rate forces left in Tennessee. Thus, he risked the loss of his army, but at the same time he stood to win a strategically important victory, one that might prolong the war in the Western Theater and perhaps even encourage many Northerners to increase their political pressure for peace. Many years after the war Hood expressed just how much he was willing to risk when he said “I was apprised of each accession to Thomas's Army, but was still unwilling to abandon the ground as long as I saw a shadow of probability of assistance from the Trans-Mississippi Department, or of victory in battle.”¹⁵⁴ Hood's risk decision, which was bold to the point of being, was in fact much more balanced than Sherman's.

Thomas was the most astute of all. He knew that in the immediate time period he was at a great disadvantage and that Hood had the initiative of choosing when and where to strike. Therefore, Thomas had to screen southern Tennessee both to delay Hood's approach and to determine Hood's route and objective. He knew that he had to assemble his scattered forces as rapidly as possible to be able to confront Hood's force. Furthermore, he knew that merely stopping Hood would have only immediate operational effect. Thus, what Thomas really needed was a strategic effect and he knew that only the destruction of Hood's army would achieve this. He knew that to destroy Hood's army he would first have to defeat it in battle; then he would have to pursue it. Thus, he set out to prepare his ad hoc force for these tasks, while simultaneously delaying Hood without risking a general engagement that could defeat a portion

¹⁵⁴Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 300.

of his forces. Thomas recognized that an early defeat of a portion of his force would give Hood and the South a great advantage. He therefore deliberately chose to give up terrain to gain the time he needed to prepare. This calculated trade-off between space and time allowed Thomas to shift the balance of risk in his favor.

Leadership

Leadership is the most important aspect of risk preparedness as it effects all other aspects. Leadership has two distinct and equally important impacts on risk preparedness; first, the application of judgment with regards to the other principles, and second, establishing a command climate that enables communication and initiative. While some evidence of the particular incidents during the campaign will be shown in this subsection, much of the discussion here will be oriented on the personalities and propensities of Hood and Thomas that they exhibited throughout their respective careers leading up to the start of this campaign.

While both Thomas and Hood were West Point graduates and Southerners, little else about these two men was similar.¹⁵⁵ Hood's audacious and aggressive style led him to take enormous risks. In addition, his notorious temper and penchant for ignoring advice from subordinates greatly reduced communication and initiative within his organization. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Thomas, "the Rock of Chickamauga", was legendary for his calmness in desperate situations. He encouraged cross-talk and accurate reporting within his organization and he actively solicited input and advice from his subordinates. Moreover, he openly fostered his subordinates' initiative in an era otherwise characterized by tight tactical control and rigid tactics.

Thomas was a long-serving army veteran. While many of his West Point classmates of

¹⁵⁵Thomas was a Virginian and Hood was born and raised in Kentucky, but raised a brigade from Texas at the outset of the war, and later in life he settled in Texas and considered it to be his home. Thomas, for his part, was never welcome in Virginia again and was disowned by his family.

1840, including his roommate Sherman, had left the army to pursue civilian careers, Thomas had soldiered on. He had commanded at all levels, working his way up each rung of the ladder, unlike virtually all other Civil War-era generals. He therefore was equally experienced with tactics as with administration, not to mention his innate skill in both arenas. Thomas was renowned for his self-restraint and calm demeanor.¹⁵⁶ Charles A. Dana, the Assistant Secretary of War, was at Chickamauga in 1863 to inspect the Army of the Cumberland under Major General William S. Rosecrans and witnessed the epic battle. In his memoir, he characterized Thomas as follows:

He was a man of the greatest dignity of character. He had more the character of George Washington than any other man I ever knew. At the same time he was a delightful man to be with; there was no artificial dignity about Thomas. ... He was very set in his opinions, yet he was not impatient with anybody — a noble character.¹⁵⁷

Thomas continually pressed his subordinates for their thoughts and encouraged open and candid communication within his organization.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, his orders clearly communicated that he not only allowed his subordinates latitude in execution, but expected them to apply their judgment within his intent. On the first night of the pursuit, General Wilson recollected, “I had received no orders after parting with him and he had ordered Schofield to move out. Indeed, I needed none.”¹⁵⁹ Thomas had expressed his intent clearly enough, and made his subordinates feel empowered enough, that there was no need to waste precious time seeking further guidance while time mattered so much in the pursuit.

Thomas also took great care in positioning himself on the battlefield so that he could

¹⁵⁶Several biographies of George H. Thomas have been written and all concur with the assessment that Thomas was a man of high character and great self-restraint. Benson Bobrick, *Master of War: The Life of George H. Thomas*, (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2009); Francis F. McKinney, *Education in Violence* (Chicago: Americana House, 1991); O’Connor, *Thomas: Rock of Chickamauga*.

¹⁵⁷Charles A. Dana, *Recollections of the Civil War: With the Leaders at Washington and in the Field in the Sixties* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1909), 124-125.

¹⁵⁸*OR*, vol. 45, pt. 2: 185. On the eve of the Battle of Nashville, Thomas called a conference of his key commanders specifically to get their candid insight on his plan of battle, quite the opposite of Hood.

¹⁵⁹Wilson, *Under the Old Flag*, 125.

understand what was transpiring and influence the decisive points of the battle. This is where Wilson found him on the afternoon of the 16th, positioned behind a small hill with Schofield, calmly watching the battle unfold and waiting for the right moment to initiate Schofield's assault against the Confederate line.¹⁶⁰ He knew that Schofield was his least dependable and most hesitant subordinate. He therefore positioned himself to be able to supervise and motivate him when the time came.

Hood's personality was almost the diametric opposite of Thomas. Hood graduated from West Point in 1853, along with Schofield, and was only 33 years old when he assumed command of the Army of Tennessee. He was well known throughout the Confederacy for his brave and aggressive style of leadership, which had cost him the loss of one leg and the use of one arm. Indeed, Hood was widely regarded in the South as one of the ablest tactical commanders. However, he was also well known for his temper and his fits of rage during which he yelled at, accused, and even threatened his subordinates. He also had several pet-peeves, the most well-known and most tragic of which was his disgust at what he perceived as the hesitancy of Southern soldiers to "accept battle unless under the protection of breastworks."¹⁶¹ It was exactly these traits that stifled proper communication within his organization, prevented subordinates from seizing opportunities, and caused the Army of Tennessee to conduct suicidal attacks at Franklin.

As Confederate forces approached the turnpike at Spring Hill and were within easy reach of achieving their objective of trapping Schofield's force, Hood's leadership style and choices were the critical factor that ultimately prevented this from occurring. His first error was failing to communicate clearly with his key leaders, particularly with Cheatham, Cleburne, and Bate. He gave Cheatham and Cleburne orders to move to Spring Hill, dislodge the relatively small Union

¹⁶⁰Wilson, *Under the Old Flag*, 116.

¹⁶¹Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 290.

force there, and take possession of the turnpike.¹⁶² One hour later, as Bate approached with his division of Cheatham's corps, he told Bate to divert directly to the turnpike and put his force astride it to block the road rather than continue to Spring Hill. However, he did not tell this to Cheatham who was awaiting Bate's division before mounting a second assault on Spring Hill.¹⁶³ Worse still was Cheatham's behavior in preventing Bate from acting independently to achieve the commander's intent. Instead, Cheatham quite literally threatened to arrest his subordinate if he did not do exactly as told.¹⁶⁴ This was the tone that Hood had established and that had pervaded his entire army and it utterly prevented subordinate initiative.

Hood's second error that night was to fail to go to the decisive point, especially after he was given information that the Union forces were escaping his trap. Three times during the night he was told by subordinates that Schofield was escaping along the turnpike, first by Forrest and Lee together at about ten, then by Bate at about eleven,¹⁶⁵ and finally by a barefooted private at about midnight.¹⁶⁶ Each time, Hood had the opportunity to go and see for himself and direct the decisive action, but each time he laid back down in bed. Hood even went so far as to refuse to allow Bate to move forward to seize the turnpike and instead told him that he had better listen to his corps commander.¹⁶⁷ He thus stifled the very subordinate initiative that could have achieved his ultimate goal. Schofield said of his own escape "Hood went to bed that night, while I was in the saddle all night, directing in person all the important movements of my troops."¹⁶⁸ Hood could easily have succeeded in destroying Schofield had he either allowed subordinate initiative within

¹⁶²Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 284.

¹⁶³Purdue, *Pat Cleburne*, 395; Horn, *The Army of Tennessee*, 387.

¹⁶⁴Groom, *Shrouds of Glory*, 147.

¹⁶⁵Purdue, *Pat Cleburne*, 404.

¹⁶⁶Groom, *Shrouds of Glory*, 154.

¹⁶⁷Purdue, *Pat Cleburne*, 404.

¹⁶⁸John M. Schofield, *Forty-six Years in the Army* (New York: Century, 1897), 172.

his intent or had placed himself at the critical place and time to direct the decisive action.

Ultimately, he did neither and it cost him “the best move in [his] career as a soldier.”¹⁶⁹

Hood’s next, and most fatal, mistake was displaying his temper the next morning when he discovered that Schofield’s entire force had escaped and was now moving into strong fortifications at Franklin. He was not only blinded and deafened by his rage, but his very judgment was clouded by his emotions. Hood’s subordinates were unable to impress upon him the foolishness of a frontal assault at Franklin against such strong defenses. Even the highly respected Forrest was unable to persuade Hood to give him so much as two hours to conduct a flanking maneuver.¹⁷⁰ Thus, Hood impetuously hurled his force against the Union entrenchments without even the benefit of artillery support. At Franklin Hood expended the capability within his army and ruined his chance of success in the campaign.

Time and Capability

Both generals understood quite clearly the importance of time and the connection between time and capability, and both knew which side it favored and when. At the outset, Thomas’ force was scattered and of ad hoc composition, including thousands of raw recruits and with the majority of its cavalry dismounted. This stood in stark contrast to Hood’s veteran army which was already assembled and was poised to strike. Both men understood that each day that went by would favor Thomas’ overall numerical superiority and greater supply capacity. Thus, Hood sought a decisive action as quickly as possible whereas Thomas sought to delay the action until the force ratios were decidedly in his favor. Furthermore, Thomas understood what type of capability he would need in order to successfully accomplish his objective, whereas Hood seemed to have been oblivious at times as to the importance of having the right capabilities at the right

¹⁶⁹Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 290.

¹⁷⁰Henry, *First With the Most Forrest*, 397.

time.

Cavalry proved to be a critical capability in this campaign for both sides. Cavalry's high mobility made it ideal to conduct reconnaissance, counter-reconnaissance, security operations, pursuit, or simply to rapidly shift combat power from one part of the battlefield to another. In other words, cavalry was critical to information gathering and agility, which are both key components of operational risk preparedness. Hood was lucky enough to have one of the most experienced cavalry forces of the war commanded by one of the most capable cavalry officers of the war at his disposal. However, he foolishly sent it off so that it was absent during the Battle of Nashville. Moreover, his extensive spy network informed him of the impending Federal attack,¹⁷¹ yet he did not recall Forrest until after he had been fully routed.¹⁷²

The much more perceptive Thomas knew from the outset that cavalry was a critical arm to have. However, few of his cavalymen were equipped or mounted, as he had given all his horses to outfit Sherman's cavalry for the March to the Sea.¹⁷³ Wilson proved to be an energetic and gifted commander, but his organization was built in an ad hoc fashion and rapidly equipped over the course of some three weeks. Wilson had suggested, and Thomas had supported, requesting that the Secretary of War authorize them to requisition horses and equipment from the population. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton consented in early December and issued the necessary order, and this proved critical to building up the capability of Wilson's cavalry within the short time period allotted.¹⁷⁴ Thomas even risked his own professional career and delayed action until this critical arm was fully capable despite numerous and severe criticisms from higher headquarters.

¹⁷¹Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 300; Horn, *Decisive Battle*, 71, 76.

¹⁷²Horn, *Decisive Battle*, 160.

¹⁷³Wilson, *Under the Old Flag*, 31.

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 58.

Information and Communication

Information and communication are inextricably linked. Without good information, communication is merely wasted time, and without good communications, information is useless data. However, when both work in concert within an organization they greatly enhance its ability to deal with risk. In this campaign, Hood had an innate advantage due to the friendly nature of the population, and as a result he had a robust spy network that kept him well informed. In addition, he had General Forrest, widely regarded as the most capable cavalry commander of the Civil War.¹⁷⁵ Thus, he had all the information that he needed in order to be successful. However, he did not cultivate a culture of communication within his organization, but rather his temper tended to inhibit communication within his army.

Thomas, on the other hand, actively encouraged cross-communication within his organization and this in turn led to shared understanding, which allowed subordinates within his force to recognize and capitalize on opportunities. He explicitly ordered Wilson to keep himself and Schofield fully apprised of the situation.¹⁷⁶ Wilson himself proved very adept at both gathering and sharing information. Furthermore, Thomas routinely held counsels of war not to dictate orders or berate subordinates, but to solicit input from his subordinates prior to making important decisions.¹⁷⁷ Even after he found out that Schofield had been secretly communicating with Grant in an effort to undermine him, he remained calm, open, and objective in his dealings with Schofield which allowed for the continued flow of information within his organization.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵Henry, *First With the Most Forrest*, 16. Henry cites both Grant and Sherman. Grant called Forrest “about the ablest cavalry general in the South.” Sherman called him “that devil Forrest” and declared that he should be hunted down even if it “bankrupted the Federal treasury.”

¹⁷⁶Van Horne, *Army of the Cumberland*, 207.

¹⁷⁷Horn, *Decisive Battle*, 54, 62.

¹⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 53.

Agility and Resilience

Both armies proved highly agile and resilient. Thus for this campaign neither side showed a marked advantage over the other within this category. The Army of Tennessee, unencumbered by large amounts of baggage, proved to be too quick and agile for Sherman to catch. Aided by the ever-agile Forrest, the Confederates overcame extreme privation, numerous rivers, horrible weather, and still marched over 180 miles rapidly into Middle Tennessee. Moreover, the Army of Tennessee, despite its extreme suffering, and its brutal and bloody fight at Franklin, was resilient enough to continue the offensive. These feats alone indicate that the Army of Tennessee was one of the most resilient military organizations in the annals of history. However, the Confederates were close to their culmination point, and the second day of the Battle of Nashville proved to be their limit.

The Union forces also proved their agility and resilience. Hood's initial quarry, the IV and XXIII U.S. Corps, proved just agile enough to stay one step ahead of the Confederates, on multiple occasions marching all night just to fight the next day. Additionally, Wilson and Wood's pursuit after the Battle of Nashville was the longest pursuit of the war.¹⁷⁹ Add to this the fact that the pursuit was conducted in the latter half of December during one of the worst winters on record. Truly both of these armies consisted of some of the toughest and most resolute soldiers who fought during the Civil War.

Adaptability and Initiative

Both forces proved adaptable under the trying circumstances of a winter campaign over a vast swath of terrain. Since Thomas' force was of an ad hoc nature, it had more of a challenge to adapt to the circumstances than did Hood's veteran forces. This having been said, there is essentially little basis for comparison and this did not appear to be a decisive element in the

¹⁷⁹Wilson, *Under the Old Flag*, 125.

outcome of this campaign.

Initiative, on the other hand, was a decisive element in this campaign and in this respect the two forces proved to be in stark contrast to one another. There are positive and negative examples of initiative for each army, but ultimately the Union forces under Thomas displayed more of the proper qualities within this domain. Allowing subordinates to take the initiative swayed the balance decidedly in the Union's favor. As commanders, Hood and Thomas had different perspectives on initiative. Hood was very aggressive and sought to seize and maintain the initiative whenever possible. Thomas, on the other hand, preferred to seize the initiative only after conditions were set to exploit the initiative once it was in hand. Although this campaign does not provide conclusive evidence as to which of these two different outlooks is more effective, initiative may be entirely dependent on the situation.

The most important aspect of initiative proved to be the degree to which subordinates were allowed to act on their own judgment within their commander's intent. Within Thomas' force, this was liberally allowed and thus enabled his troops both to avert threats and seize opportunities. The Battle of Franklin provides an example of how allowing subordinate initiative can stymie an emerging threat before it results in catastrophe.

Upon arriving at Franklin, Wagner was ordered by Stanley to establish a blocking position in front of Franklin while the remainder of the Union troops occupied the previously prepared trench line surrounding the town. Wagner took two of his three brigades and posted them astride the turnpike with one on each side. He then told Opdycke, commanding his third brigade, to "fight whenever and where ever you think best."¹⁸⁰ Opdycke promptly identified the most critical point along the Union trench line and posted his men in a position directly behind it. Wagner's other two brigades fought too long and ultimately created the conditions that allowed

¹⁸⁰Longacre, *To Battle*, 249.

the Confederates to seize a critical portion of the Union trench line. However, Opdycke acted immediately and without orders, restored the line and in the process captured many Confederate soldiers. Furthermore, Opdycke had spent his previous time well, training his men for contingencies of this very nature, for as he said in a letter to his wife “the 125th Ohio retook two guns, and worked them without a single artilleryman, I having taught them to load and fire (in anticipation of such an emergency) at this very town of Franklin.”¹⁸¹ In addition, the psychological shock effect of Opdycke’s counterattack on the Confederates proved to be their undoing. Having already missed their opportunity at Spring Hill, and now having been robbed of a brief bit of hope, the frustrated Confederates attempted suicidal frontal attacks over wide-open fields of fire against a heavily entrenched force.

On the Confederate side, subordinate initiative was actively and resolutely denied. Cheatham was the central culprit at Spring Hill. However, Hood not only reinforced this behavior but also established the command climate that made it prevalent. Cheatham foolishly ordered Cleburne and Bates both to remain inactive and even threatened them with severe punishment if they did not obey his order completely.¹⁸² Major General John C. Brown, his other division commander, was supposed to initiate the assault that would trigger Cleburne and Bates to join the attack. However, Brown was concerned with a portion of the Union line that overlapped his flank and requested a delay from Cheatham until more troops could be brought up. Cheatham approved the delay, but did not inform the other division commanders and instead went to Hood’s HQ. It also appears as if Cheatham spent several hours during that critical night at the house of a local socialite.¹⁸³ Brown, seeing darkness descending and knowing fully just how critical control of the pike was, instead chose to stand idle and await further orders. In defense of his inaction, Brown

¹⁸¹Longacre, *To Battle*, 250.

¹⁸²Purdue, *Pat Cleburne*, 401.

¹⁸³Wilson, *Under the Old Flag*, 44; Groom, *Shrouds of Glory*, 149-50.

stated “I received no further orders that evening or during the night to advance or change my position.”¹⁸⁴ Bate knew his commander’s intent and understood that he must seize the pike immediately. For this reason he went to see Hood personally to request permission to move forward and seize the pike. After having this request denied, Bate and Cleburne discussed acquiescing to the earlier stated command of Cheatham by reporting to Hood under arrest. This, Cleburne reasoned, would allow their brigadiers to “whip the Yankee army” while they were gone.¹⁸⁵ The notion was brought up partly in jest, but in hindsight this course of action would indeed have changed the course of the campaign. Had the two generals adopted this course of action any sane commander would have heaped praises upon their heads rather than shackle them in chains. This example demonstrates the antithesis of subordinate initiative.

There was only one instance during this campaign that stands out as a positive example of subordinate initiative on the Confederate side. This was when Forrest was wise enough to sense the impending disaster upon hearing rumors on the 15th of December after the first day of battle. He began moving to rendezvous immediately on his own initiative.¹⁸⁶ He joined Hood on the 19th at Columbia and played a decisive role in preventing the complete destruction of the routed, demoralized remnants of the Army of Tennessee.

Conclusion

By late 1864 the Army of Tennessee was the only Southern army still capable of offensive maneuver, and thus its very existence offered the South some hope that the Confederacy could still achieve its political objectives. However, this faint hope was dashed under the rash and brazen leadership of General John Bell Hood. Hood stifled initiative and

¹⁸⁴Purdue, *Pat Cleburne*, 403.

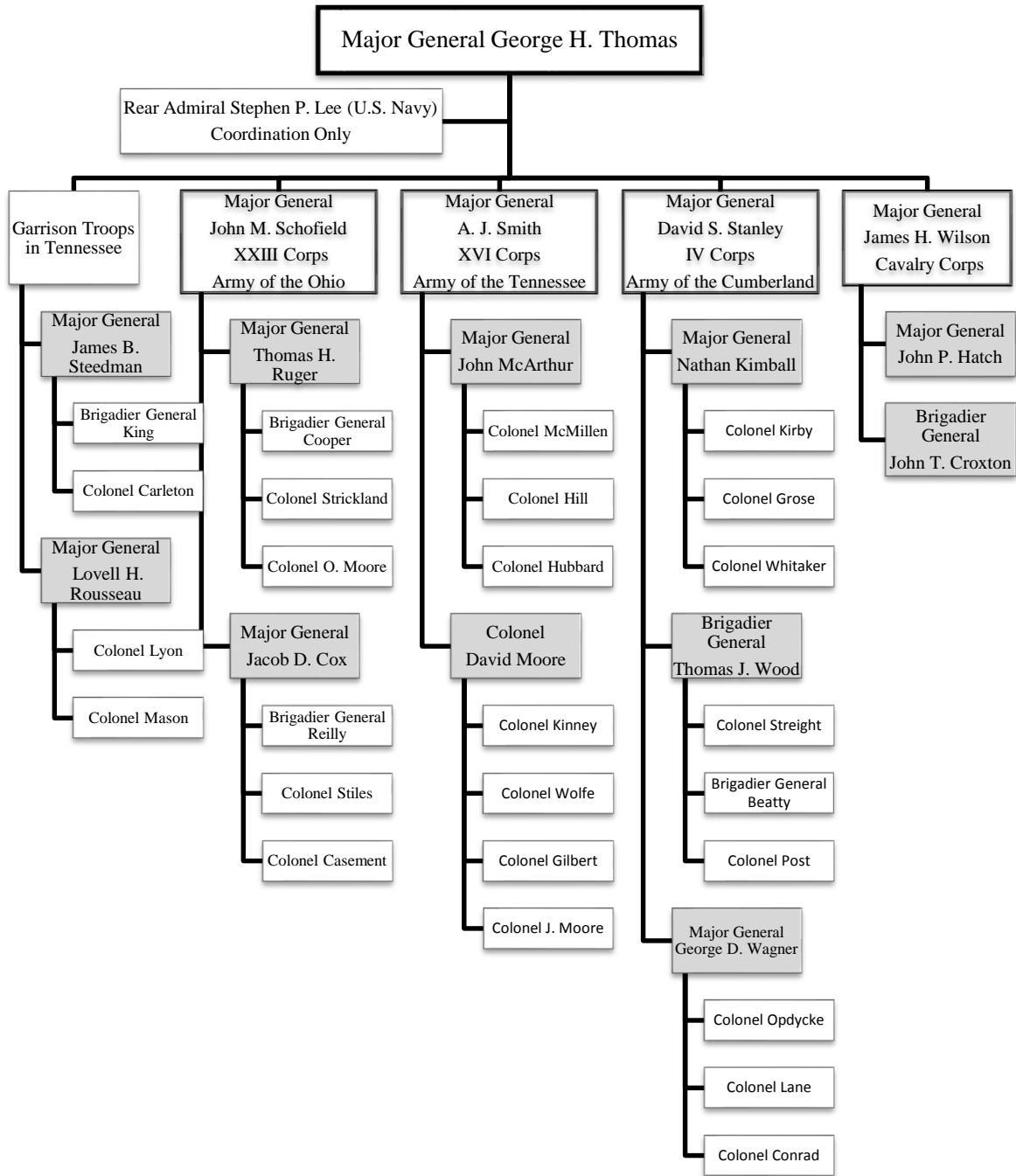
¹⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 404.

¹⁸⁶Henry, *First With the Most Forrest*, 410-11.

communication within his organization, while simultaneously taking huge risks largely based on personal temperament instead of rational calculation. On the Northern side, General George H. Thomas not only applied better risk judgment, but also set the command climate within his organization that allowed subordinates to seize opportunities and avert threats. In the end, this risk preparedness imbalance cost the Confederacy one of its two great armies and extinguished any hopes that the Southerners could achieve any strategic objectives in the Western Theater.

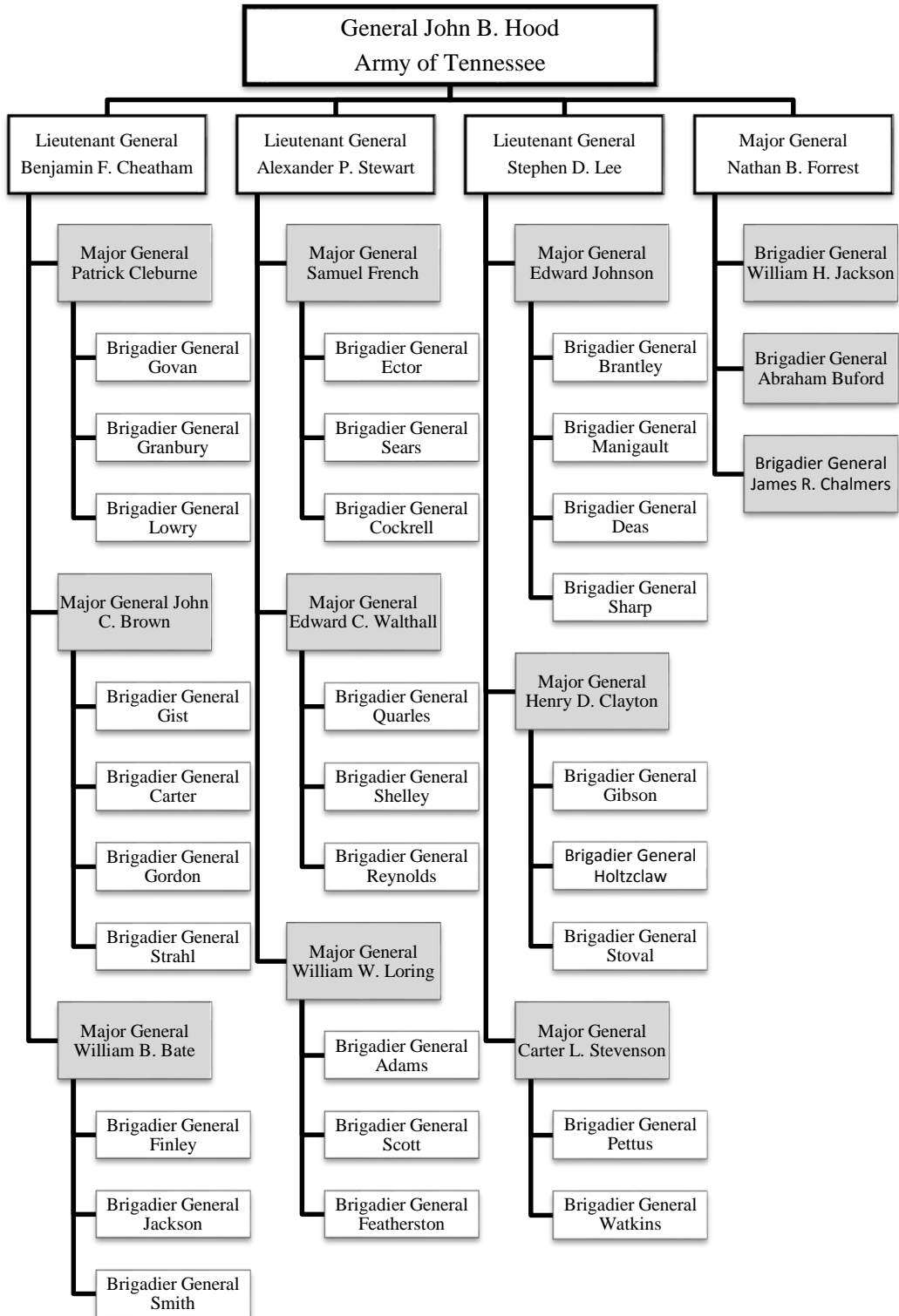
It is imperative that today's operational level commanders do not attempt to predict the future or precisely calculate their risk. Instead, they must focus on preparing their soldiers for the risks that they will inevitably encounter. Critical to this is efficient use of time to prepare men and material for possible events. More importantly, commanders must create learning organizations that are capable of gathering, processing, and sharing information during the course of operations. Finally, after creating an environment of shared understanding, training their subordinates, and providing the necessary resources, commanders must trust them to apply their own judgment in execution. It is only by leveraging the innate capacity of individual judgment that an organization can avert unforeseen threats or seize fleeting opportunities.

APPENDIX A: Union Forces Order of Battle



Source: Adapted from Winston Groom, *Shrouds of Glory* (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 1995) iv.

APPENDIX B: Confederate Forces Order of Battle



Source: Adapted from Winston Groom, *Shrouds of Glory* (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 1995) iii.

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