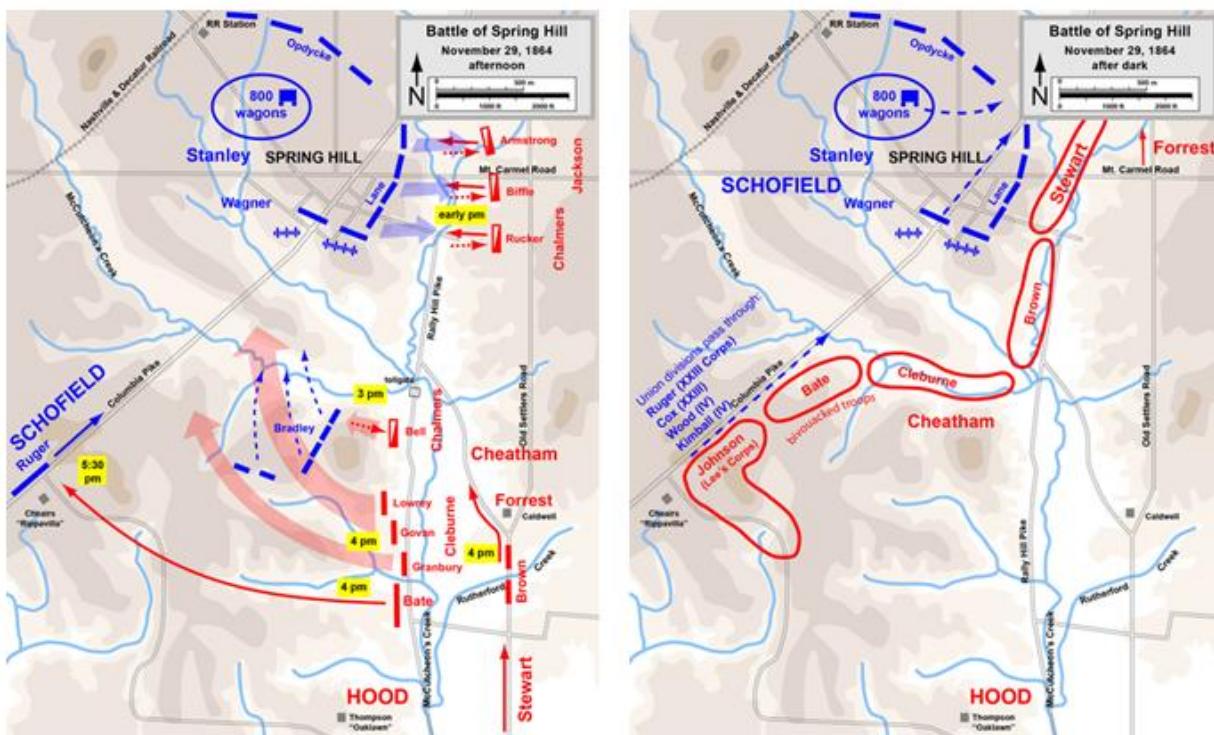


Saturday Morning Tactical: Battle of Spring Hill

Missed opportunities at Spring Hill, the prelude to Franklin, played a significant role in the Battle of Franklin.

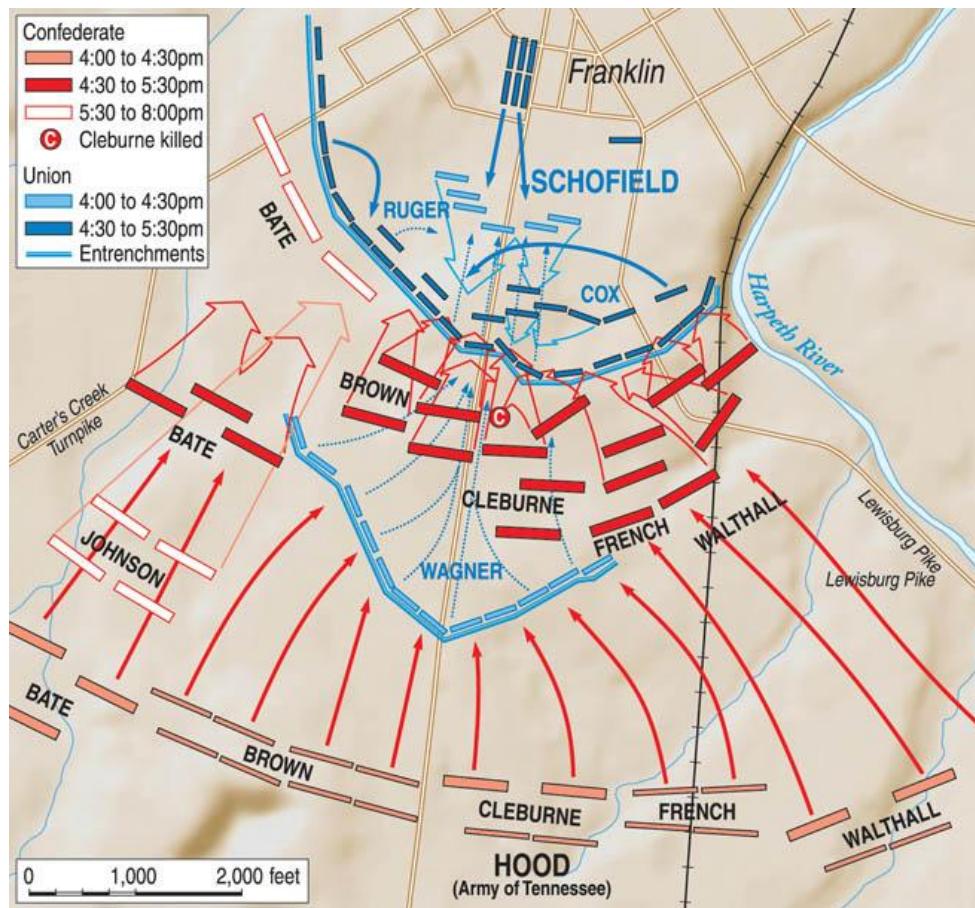
On November 29, 1864, John Schofield was trapped. At Columbia, Tennessee, he had prevented Hood from crossing the Duck River for five days. When Confederates began to assemble for battle on the southern bank of the Duck on the 29th, Schofield felt it was time to withdraw. He sent half of his army twelve miles north to Spring Hill while the other half remained to cover the river crossing. But Schofield had been fooled—the grey mass opposite Columbia was a diversion. While their comrades occupied Schofield's attention, two Confederate divisions crossed at a ford further east and swung around the city to land astride the north-south road connecting Columbia to Spring Hill. The Union force was divided and in grave danger. To Hood's fury, however, Schofield still managed to escape. Command confusion disrupted several Confederate attacks in what became known as the Battle of Spring Hill, preventing a decisive interdiction of the Federal escape route. That night, soldiers and wagons evacuating Columbia passed within earshot of the Confederates encamped along the road, but the attack that might have changed the course of the campaign never came. The next day, Hood, "wrathy as a rattlesnake," accused the Army of Tennessee of cowardice and ordered a pursuit to Franklin. The failure of the day before had prevented a battle to the Southerners' advantage and sealed the violent fate of thousands.



Saturday Afternoon: Battle of Franklin

The Confederate charge at Franklin was larger, longer and deadlier than Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg.

The Army of Tennessee arrived on the Franklin battlefield from the south, in the shadow of Winstead Hill. Schofield had drawn his army up into a three-tiered series of hastily-constructed but formidable breastworks on the outskirts of town, roughly two miles north of the unfolding grey battle line. Over the protests of his lieutenants, Hood ordered a frontal assault on the Federal works. Several elements of the ensuing battle are worthy of comparison with Lee's assault on July 3, 1863. At Gettysburg, 12,000 Confederates attacked over a mile of open ground following a 150-gun bombardment of a Union line protected by a low stone wall. They reached their objective and held out for around thirty minutes before being repulsed, leaving about 1,415 dead or mortally wounded on both sides. At Franklin, 20,000 Confederates, advanced over two miles of open ground and struck a Union line made up of three tiers of sturdy breastworks and abatis that in most places stood about eight feet high. The Army of Tennessee pierced the center of this line and held their position for over three hours, resulting in over 2,000 combined fatalities. Such bravery and ferocity so late in the war shocked and saddened many observers--Private Sam Watkins of the 1st Tennessee called it "the blackest page in the history of the war."



Sunday Afternoon: Battle of Nashville (Shy's Hill)

Tough Odds for Hood's Troops

A heavy day of fighting on Thursday, December 15, 1864, at Nashville saw Confederate forces fall back to the south to an east-west line roughly parallel to the current course of Harding Place in South Nashville. The right flank of the Confederate line was anchored at Peach Orchard Hill to the east, and the left or western flank at Compton's Hill, later to become known for posterity as **Shy's Hill**.

Darkness, battle fatigue and terrain became significant obstacles as Hood's army attempted to re-group to the south. Depletion from casualties resulted in a considerably shorter defensive line. Confederate troops occupying Compton's Hill (Shy's Hill) did so against staggering odds. They were outnumbered by an overwhelming Union force which had surrounded them with infantry to the north and west of the Hill, and with cavalry to the south.

Federal General Thomas renewed the attack on the afternoon of December 16. He followed the pattern of the first day, hoping to pin the Confederate right while smashing the left. This time the diversion was successful. The Southerners defending Peach Orchard Hill repulsed the four-brigade Union attack, but they could not spare any reinforcements.

The Confederate left was anchored on a rise known as Compton's Hill (Shy's Hill.) Union Maj. Gen. John Schofield had been chosen to lead the day's attack. Instead, Schofield delayed. The long-bearded New Yorker was proving to be a less than capable battlefield commander. Finally, with the sun about to set, Brig. Gen. John McArthur, on his own initiative, ordered his three brigades to charge the hill.

McArthur's attack broke the Confederate line and soon threatened to sweep up Hood's whole army. Col. William Shy of the 20th Tennessee Infantry died trying to hold off the Union onslaught—Compton's Hill was renamed Shy's Hill in his honor.

Hood ordered a hasty retreat south along the Granny White and Franklin Pikes. Only a skillful rearguard action allowed the army to escape from the battlefield. Thomas's strategic pursuit over the next two weeks also failed to trap the Confederates, but the damage had been done. In four months of campaigning, the Army of Tennessee had lost nearly 75% of its fighting force. Hood resigned his commission in January and his remaining men were sent to join Gen. Joseph E. Johnston in North Carolina. The Union victory at Nashville effectively ended the war in Tennessee.

