



# William Starke Rosecrans – a presentation to the Peninsula CWRT

Hal Jespersen  
[www.posix.com/CW](http://www.posix.com/CW)  
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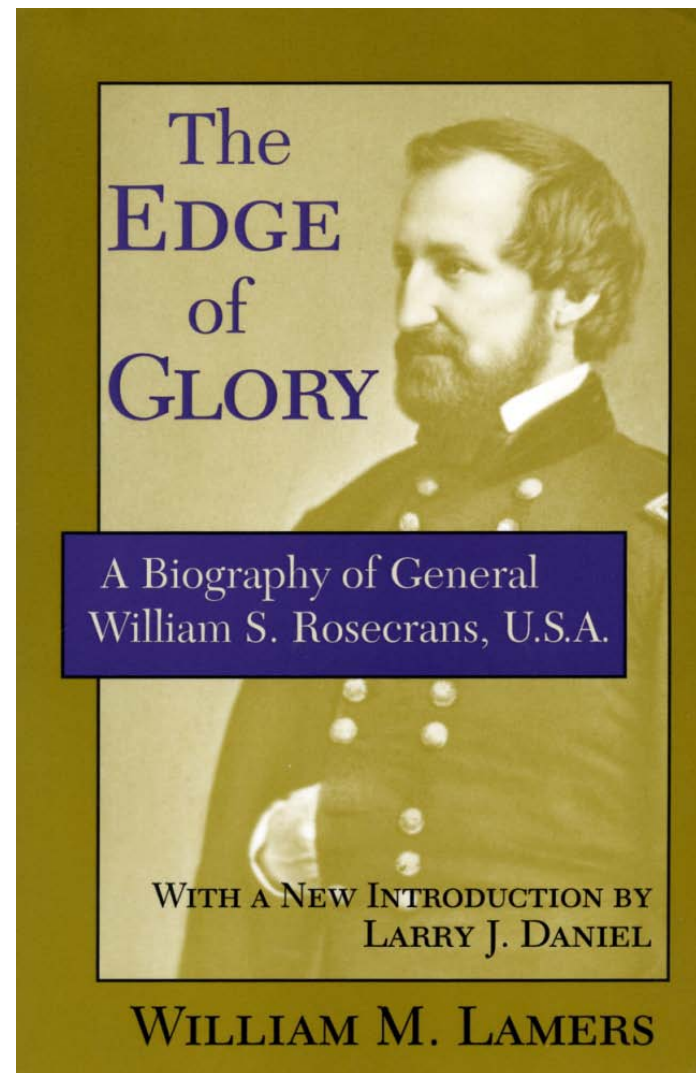


# Outline

- Sources for my talk
- Early life and military career
- West Virginia & The Valley
- Western Theater: Corinth, Iuka, Corinth
- Army of the Cumberland: Stones River, Tullahoma, Chickamauga & Chattanooga
- Missouri and postbellum career

# Sources

- William M. Lamer's 1961 biography is definitive
  - Perhaps overly sympathetic to WSR, antagonistic to US Grant
- Battle studies by Cozzens, Woodworth, Eicher
- Wikipedia articles and maps by Hal Jespersen



# Accomplishments by 1864

- Rosecrans's letter to James A. Garfield, December 30, 1864:
  - Fought the first successful battle involving important results in the War
  - Made the **first successful campaign against Lee**
  - Helped to lay the foundation of the first free State made out of a slave State
  - Invented and had built the first [four-wheeled, light] Army ambulance
  - First suggested and put into operation ... photographed information maps
  - Inspector General system adopted throughout the Army
  - Build up the cavalry of Mississippi, giving Sheridan the opportunity of winning his first star
  - **Won Iuka and Corinth** against great odds
  - Built up the dispirited mounted force of Buell's Army and brought it to be the victorious cavalry of the Army of the Cumberland
  - **Fought Stones River**
  - **Drove Bragg from** Shelbyville, Tullahoma and Chattanooga, wresting from a superior force the keys of **East Tennessee, Georgia** and the center of the Southern Confederacy
  - **Drove Price from Missouri**, and did much to give that state ... freedom
  - An officer of sobriety, morality, industry, abstinence from all intrigues military and political



# So what happened to Old Rosy?



- How did Rosecrans fall from the heights of these accomplishments into relative obscurity?
- Answer:
  - An acerbic tongue that made enemies of at least two powerful men
  - One poorly worded order

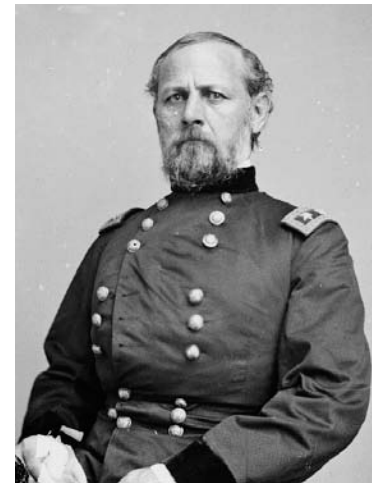
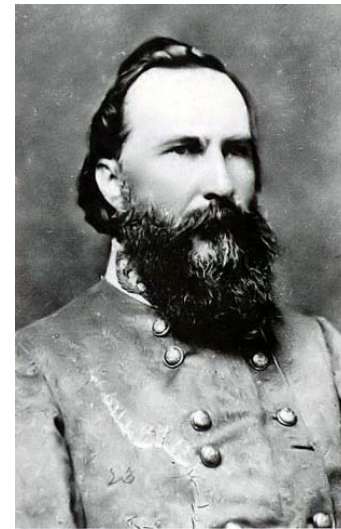
# Birth

- Born September 6, 1819, in Little Taylor Run, Kingston Township, Delaware County, Ohio
- Ancestor: Harmon Henrik Rosenkrantz
  - Arrived in New Amsterdam in 1651
  - Family name spelling changed during the American Revolutionary War
- Second of five sons of Crandall Rosecrans and Jemima Hopkins
  - Crandall was War of 1812 veteran, adjutant to General William Henry Harrison
  - Jemima was the widow of a relative of Stephen Hopkins, a signer of the Declaration of Independence



# Early life and military career

- Little formal education
- At 13, left home to work as a store clerk in Utica and Mansfield, Ohio
- West Point Class of 1842
  - Classmates: James Longstreet, D.H. Hill, Don Carlos Buell, Earl Van Dorn
  - Excelled in mathematics, French, drawing, and English grammar
  - Received his nickname, “Old Rosy”
  - Graduated 5th out of 56 cadets, commissioned in the Corps of Engineers



# Early life and military career

- Met Anna Elizabeth Hegeman of New York City, married on August 24, 1843
- Engineered seawalls in Fort Monroe, Virginia
- Returned to West Point in April 1843
  - First lieutenant, engineering professor, post commissary and quartermaster
  - Converted to Catholicism, inspiring his youngest brother, Sylvester Horton Rosecrans (first bishop of the Diocese of Columbus)
  - Missed Mexican War
- 1847–53: Engineering assignments in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and the Washington Navy Yard
- 1851: Applied unsuccessfully for professorship at VMI



# Civilian life

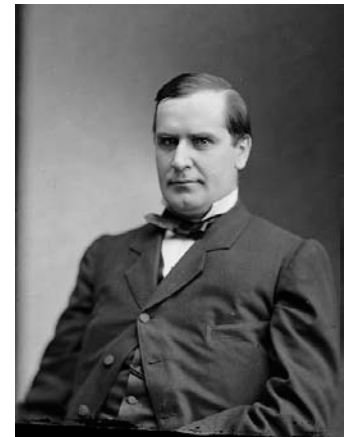
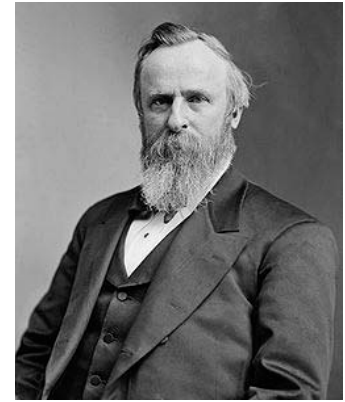
- Failing health, resigned from the Army in 1854
- Took over a coal mining business in West Virginia
- Built an oil refinery in Cincinnati
- President of a coal oil company
- Severely burned by an exploding “safety” lamp in 1859, requiring 18 months to recover
- Patented inventions include
  - First kerosene lamp to burn with a round wick
  - Improved soap manufacturing technique





# West Virginia, 1861

- April 19, offered his services to the Ohio governor
- Volunteer aide to George B. McClellan
- Colonel, 23<sup>rd</sup> Ohio
- Brigadier General, USA (Regular Army), May 16
- Victories at Rich Mountain and Corrick's Ford – McClellan got the credit
- Defeated Robert E. Lee's campaign to recapture West Virginia
- Command of Dept. of Western Virginia





# Shenandoah Valley, 1862



- Rosecrans's plan for a winter campaign to seize Winchester rejected by McClellan
- Mountain Dept. created March 11 from WSR's dept., John C. Frémont commanding
- Ran afoul of Stanton in D.C.
- Transferred to Western Theater

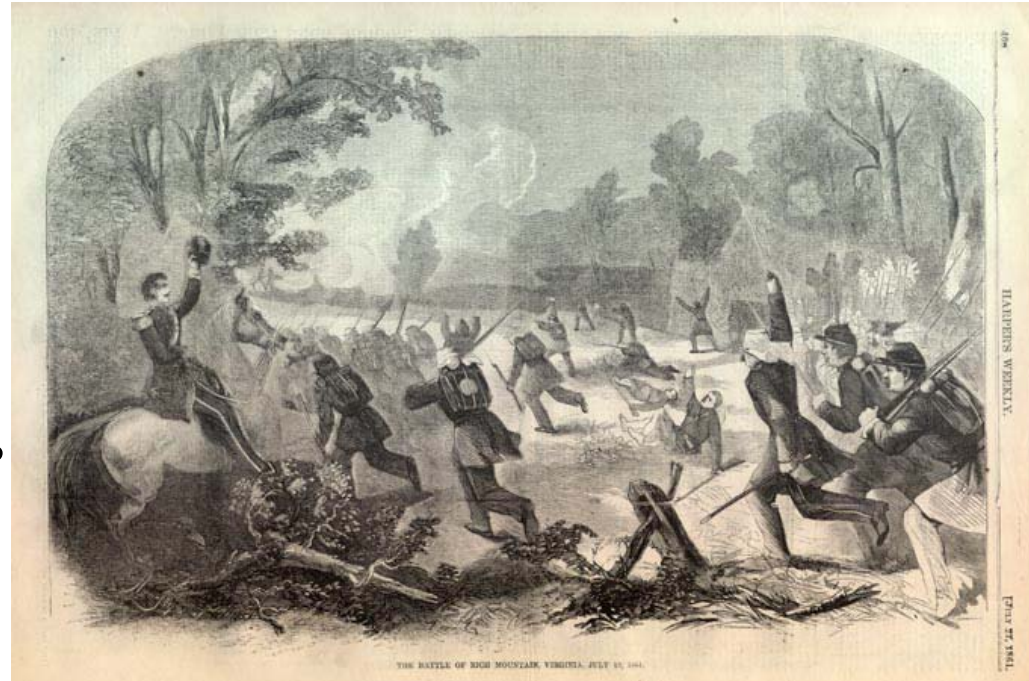
# Southern Respect for Rosecrans

*[Robert E. Lee's Western Virginia campaign], after its plain failure, was virtually abandoned by the Government.*

*Rosecrans was esteemed in the South as one of the best generals the North had in the field. He was declared by military*

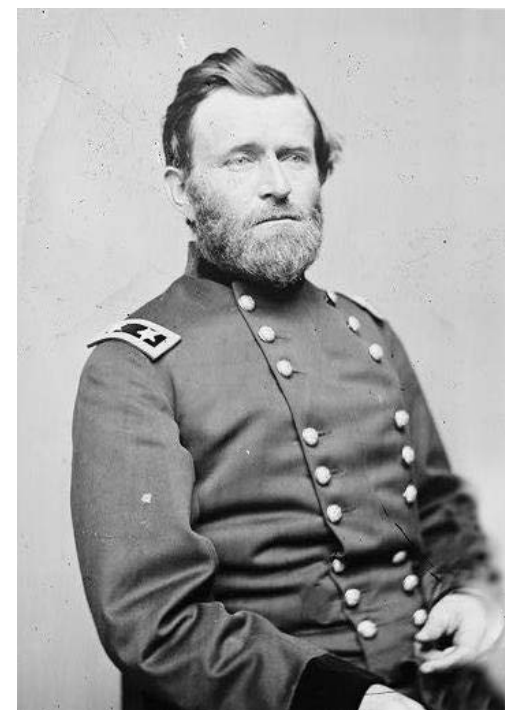
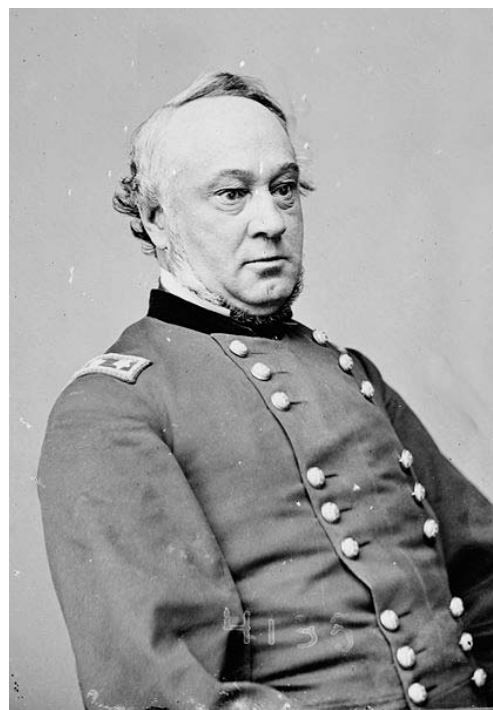
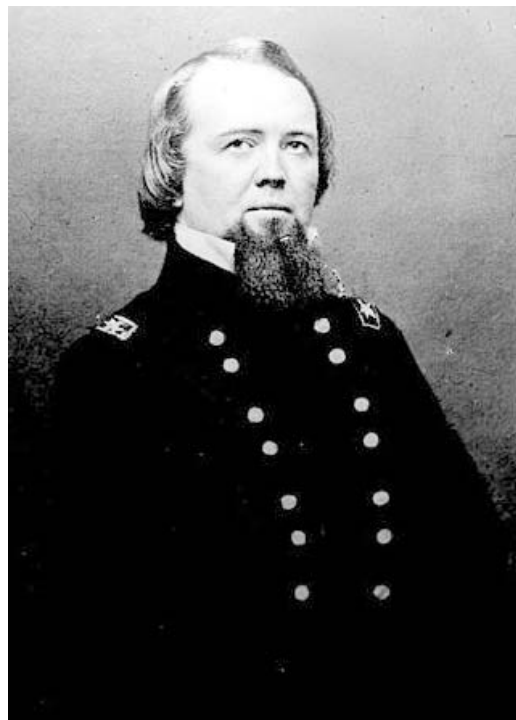
*critics, who could not be accused of partiality, to have **clearly outgeneraled Lee**, who made the entire object of his campaign to “surround the Dutch General.”*

— Edward A. Pollard, *Southern History of the War* (1865)



# Western Theater: Halleck & Grant

- Commanded Right Wing (2 divisions) of John Pope's Army of Mississippi in Henry W. Halleck's Siege of Corinth, May 1862
- Assumed army command June 26, under Grant



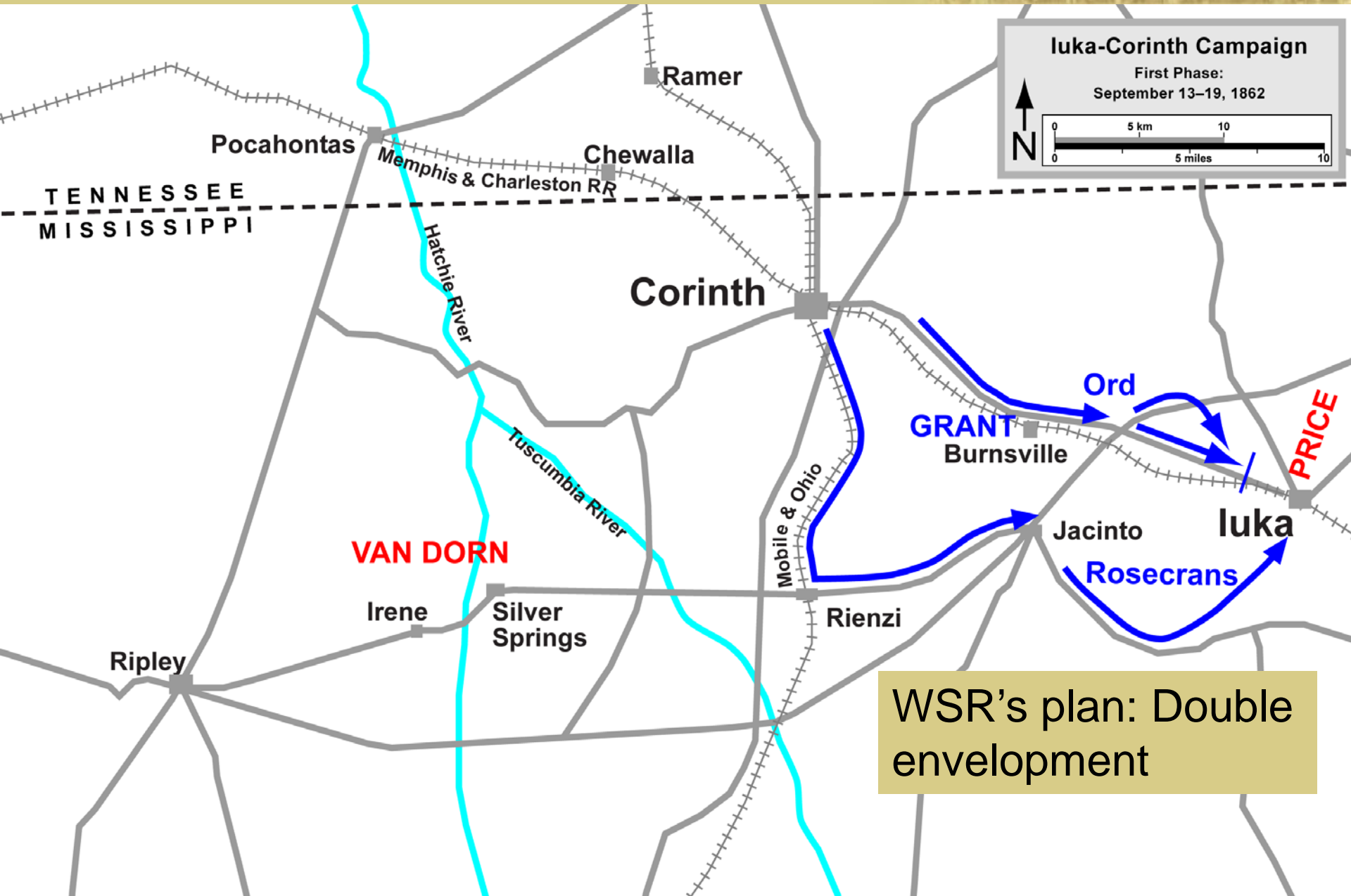


# Under Grant, Fall 1862

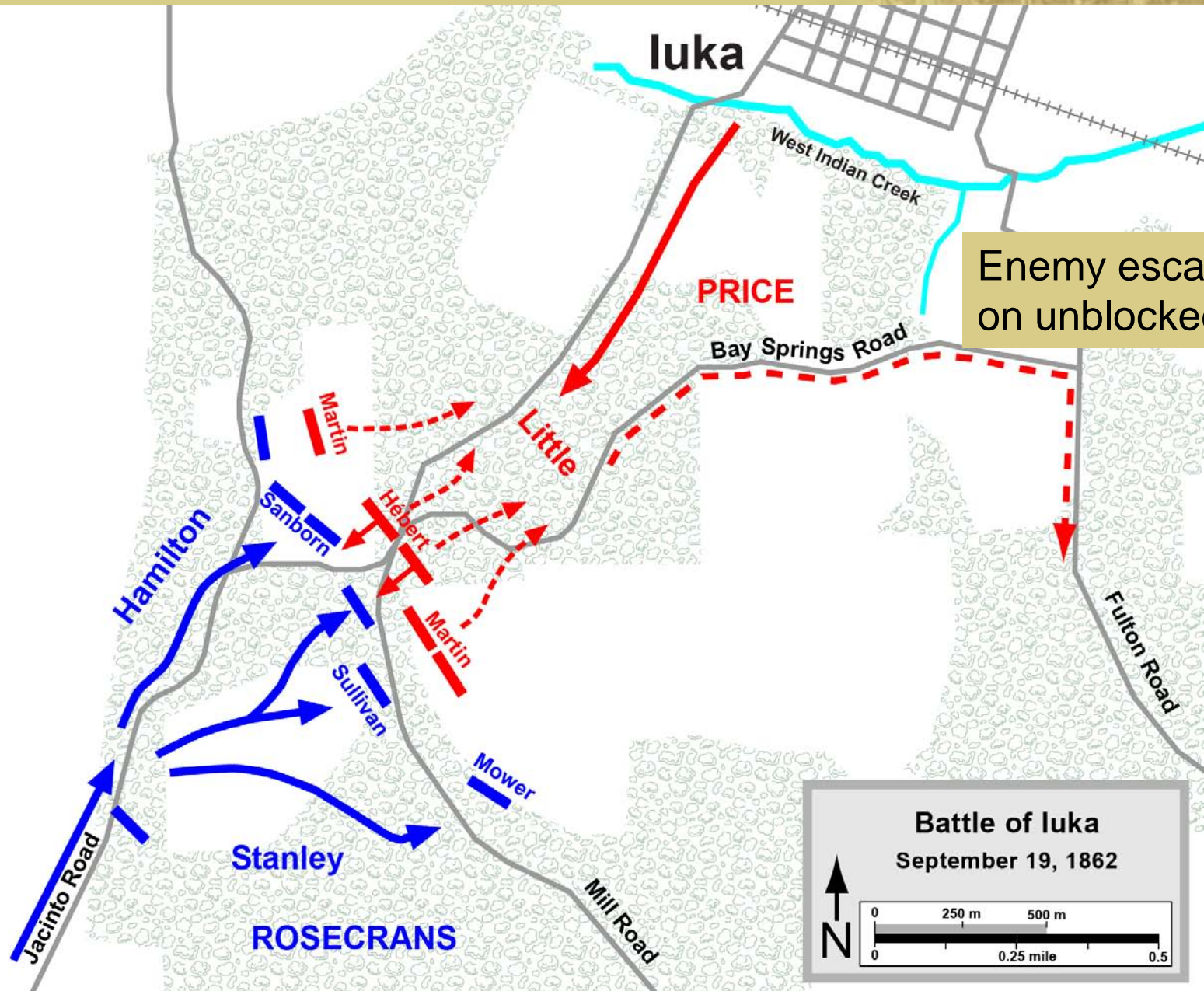
- Mission:
  - Protect the railroad from Corinth to Iuka with about 4,500 men
  - Prevent Confederates from reinforcing Braxton Bragg's Kentucky invasion
- Two Confederate "armies"
  - Sterling Price's Army of the West (3,100)
  - Earl Van Dorn's Army of West Tennessee (7,000)



# Approaches to luka, Sept. 13-18



# Battle of luka, Sept. 19



Enemy escapes on unblocked road

**Battle of luka**  
September 19, 1862

0 250 m 500 m  
0 0.25 mile 0.5



# Iuka Aftermath

- Casualties: Union 790, Confederate 1,516
- Beginning of enmity from Grant: pursuit, publicity, “Hellish whiskey” rumors

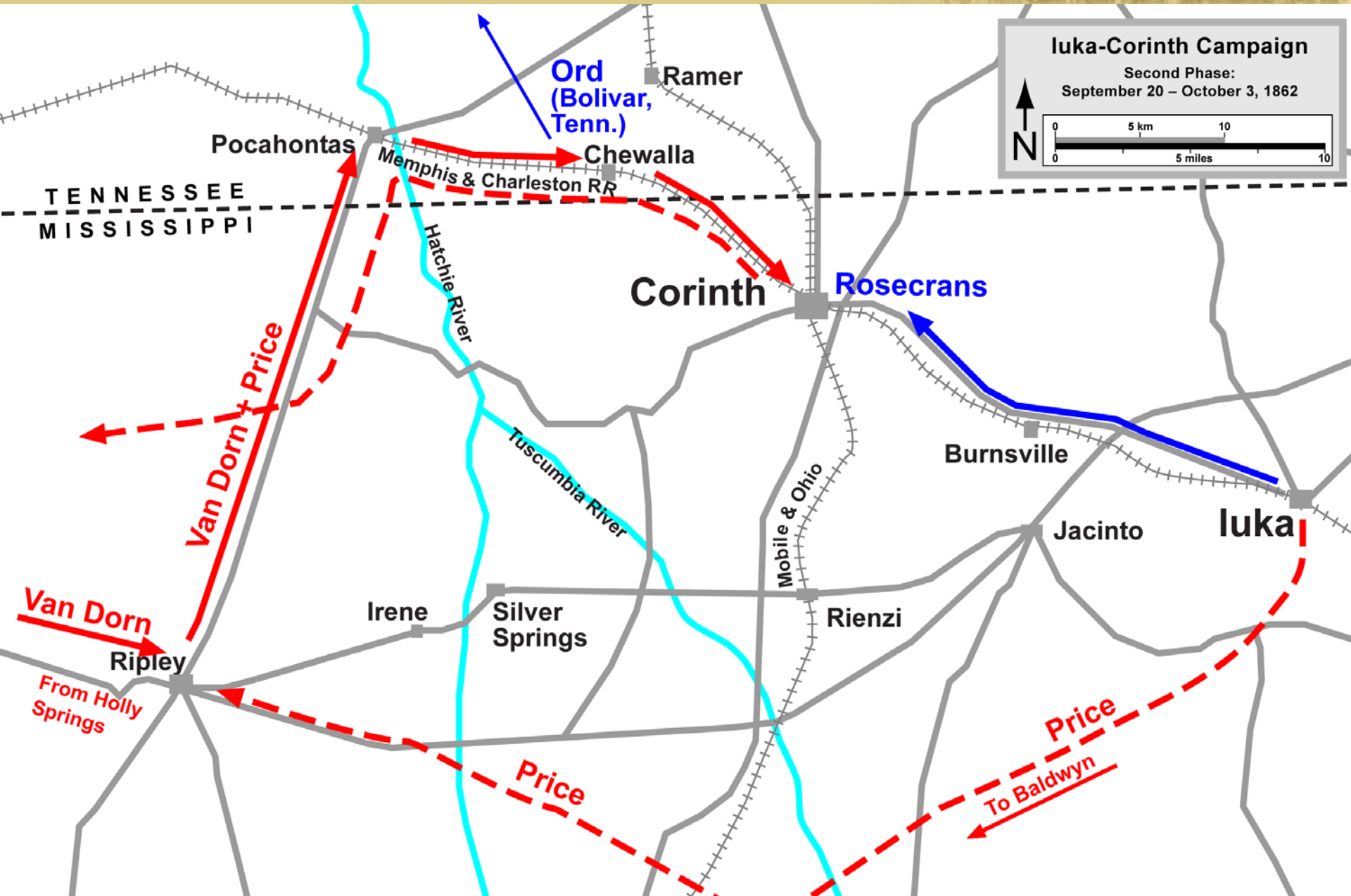
## Grant's first report, September 20

**I cannot speak too highly of the energy and skill displayed by General Rosecrans in the attack**, and of the endurance of the troops under him. General Ord's command showed untiring zeal, but the direction taken by the enemy prevented them from taking the active part they desired.

## Grant's second report, October 22

If it was the object of the enemy to make their way into Kentucky, they were defeated in that... Our only defeat was in not capturing the enemy army or destroying it as I had hoped to do. **It was a part of General Hamilton's command that did the fighting, directed entirely by that cool and deserving officer.**

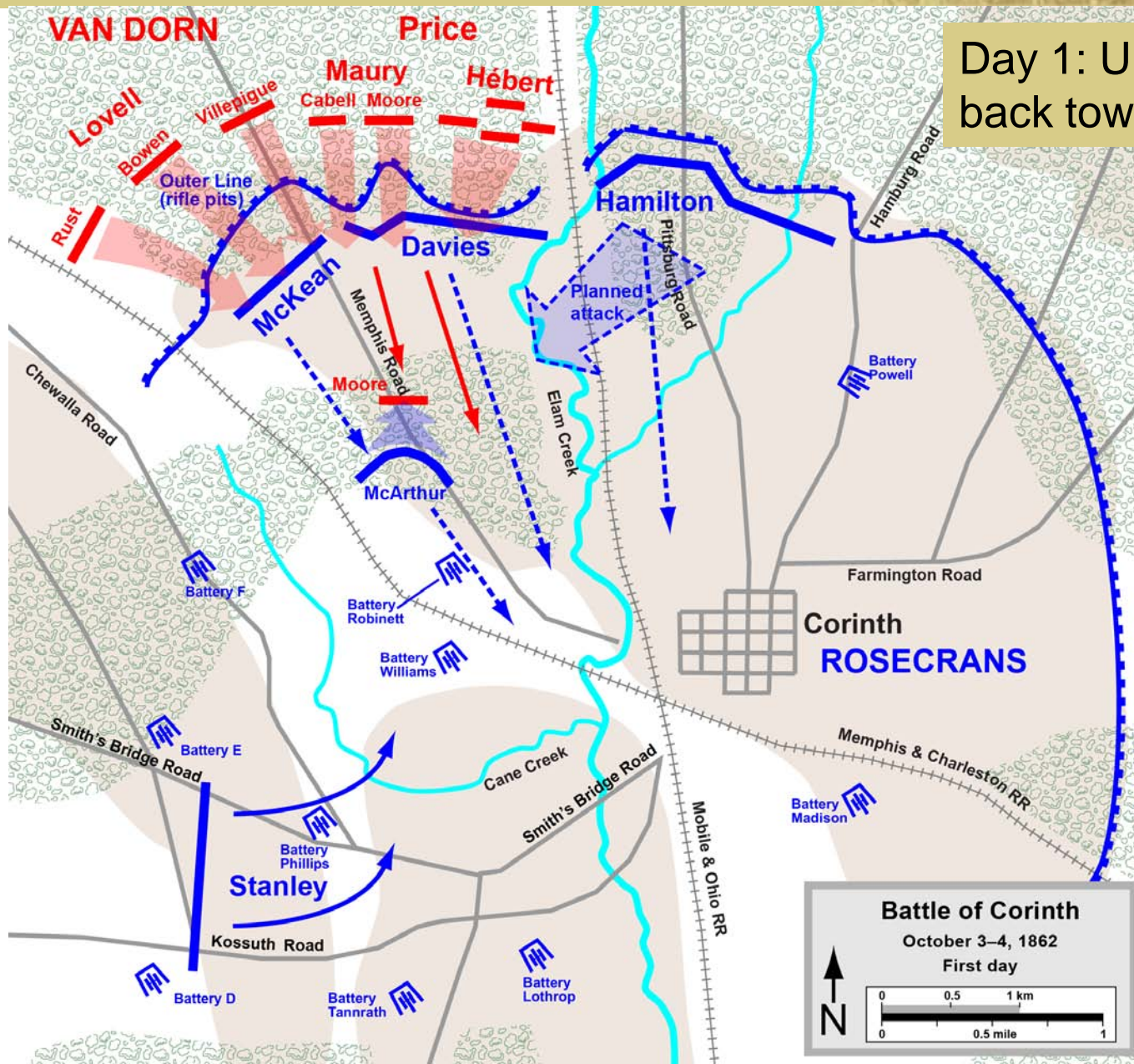
# Approaches to Corinth



# Battle of Corinth, October 3



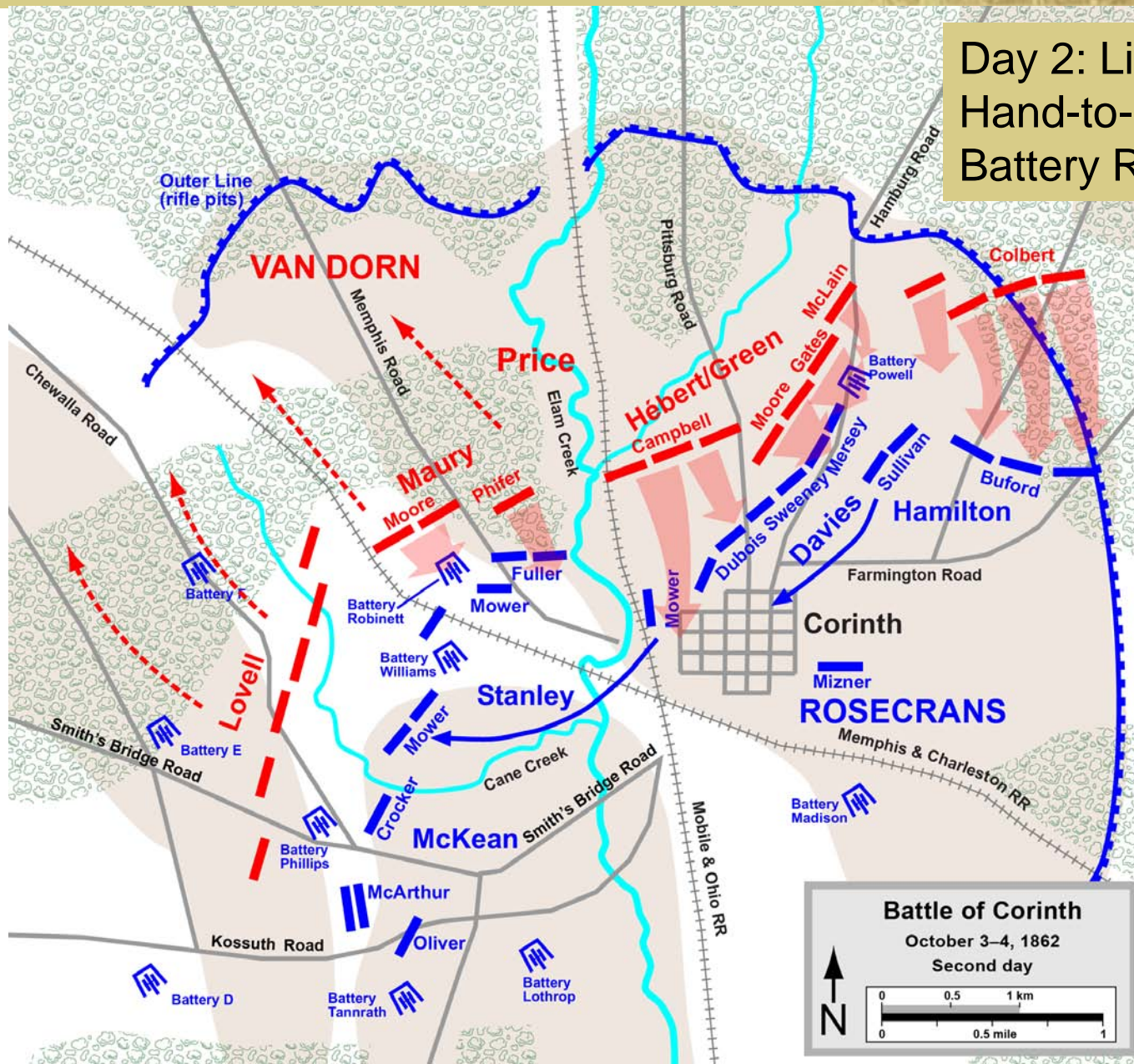
Day 1: Union driven back toward town





# Battle of Corinth, October 4

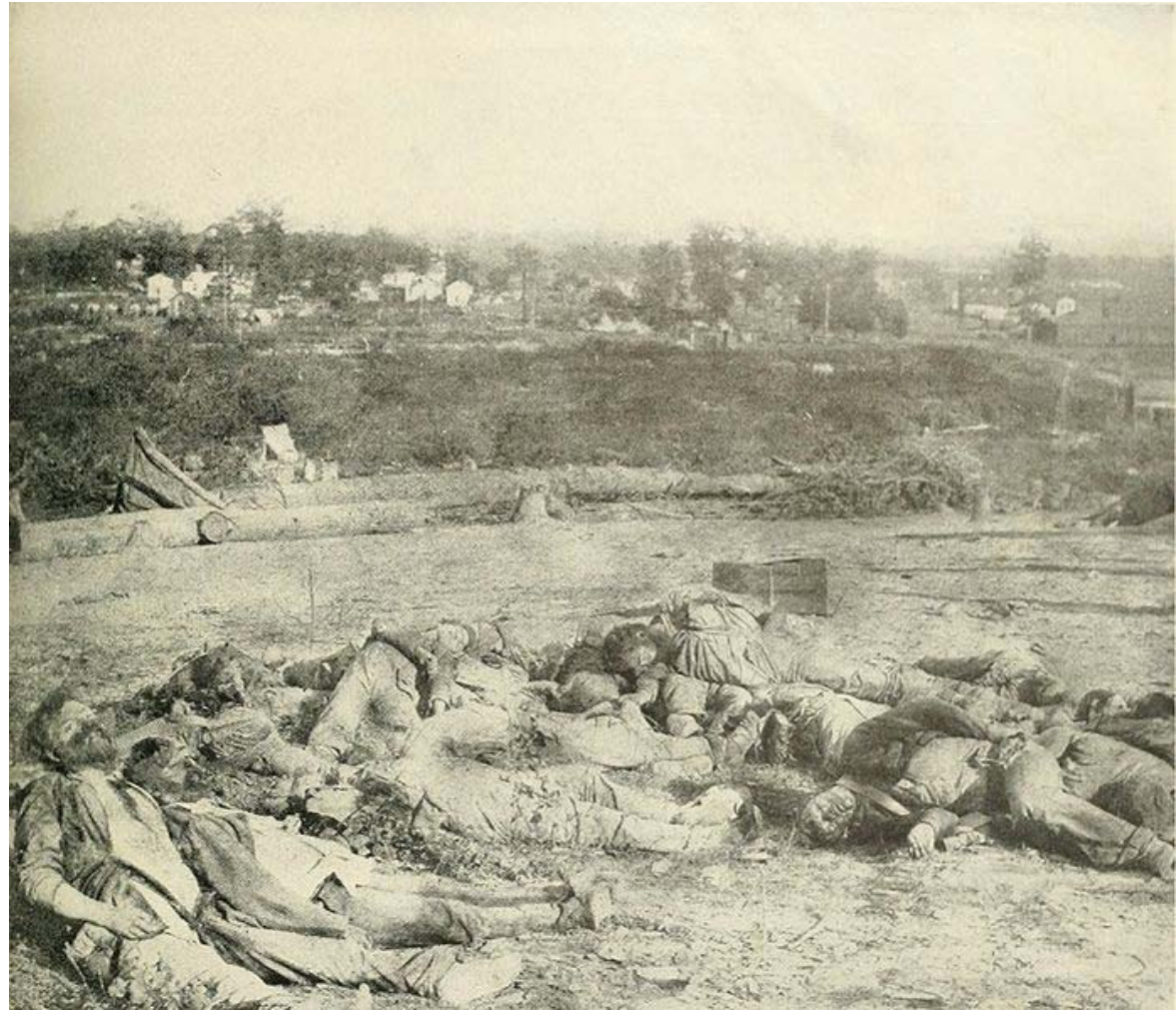
Day 2: Line holds, Hand-to-hand at Battery Robinett





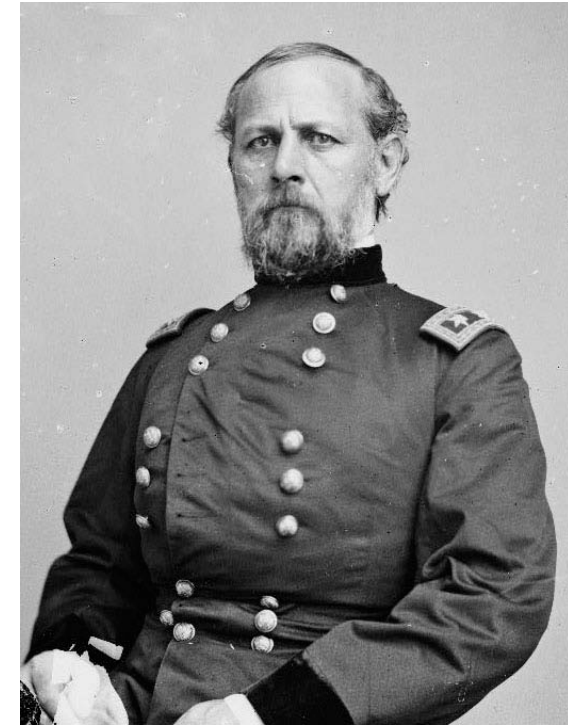
# Corinth Aftermath

- WSR did not pursue until Oct. 5, men exhausted, Grant recalled them
- Real start of Grant/WSR feud, openly quarreling
- End of Confederate triple offensive



# Army of the Cumberland

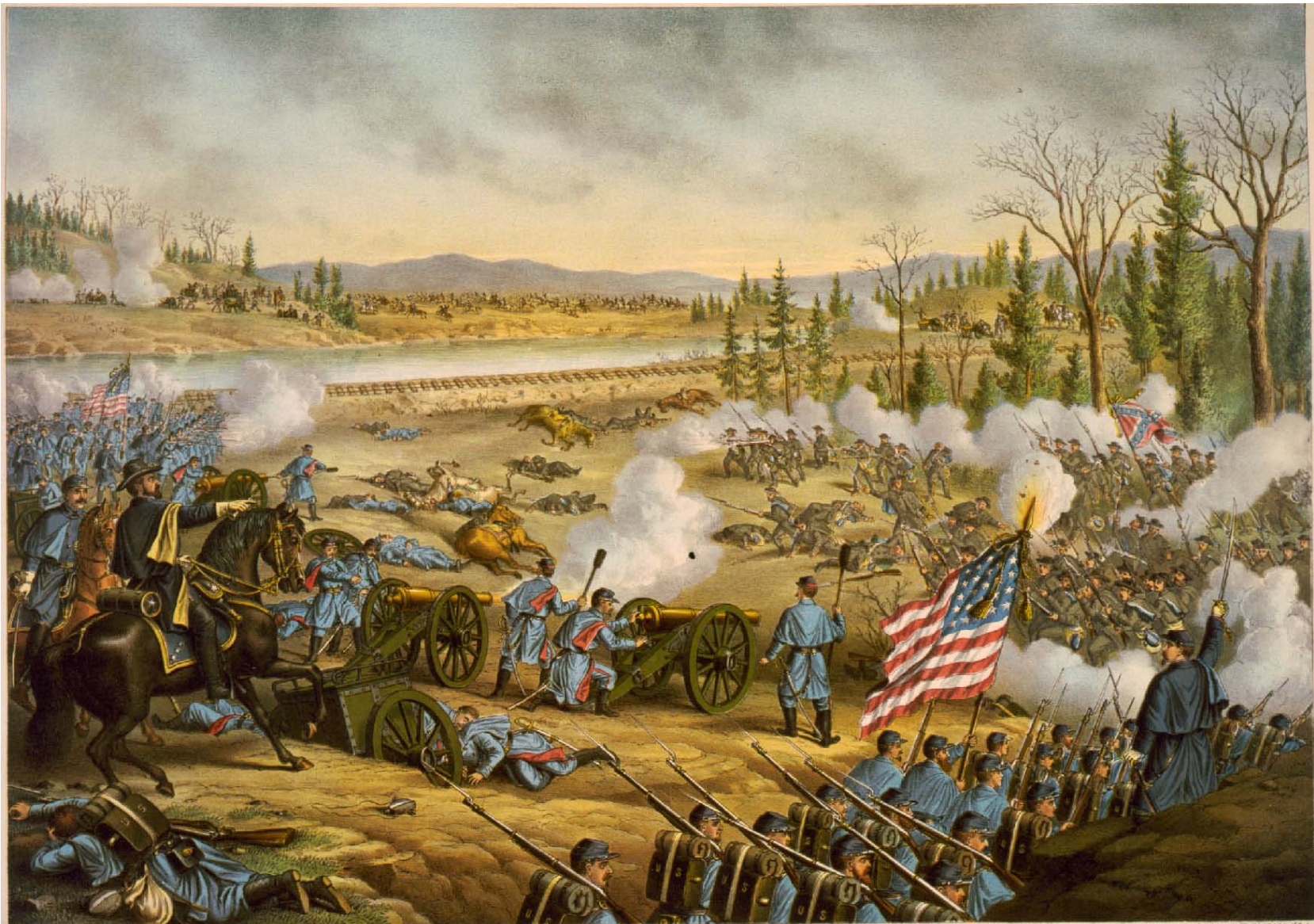
- Public adulation for Rosecrans
- Major General, USV
  - Original DOR: September 17, 1862
  - Lincoln revised to March 21, 1862; now outranks Thomas
- Oct. 24, replaces Don Carlos Buell—command of XIV Corps & Dept. of the Cumberland
- Time to refit and replenish in Nashville, especially the cavalry
- Friction with Halleck and Washington over 46 days:



Halleck:	Rosecrans:
“If you remain one more week in Nashville, I cannot prevent your removal.”	“I need no other stimulus to make me do my duty than the knowledge of what it is. To threats of removal or the like I must be permitted to say that I am insensible.”



# Stones River



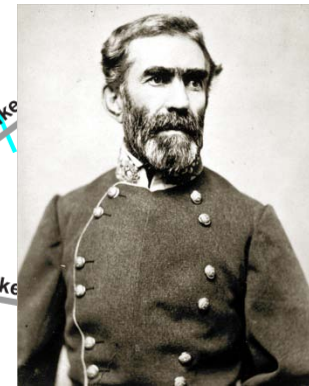
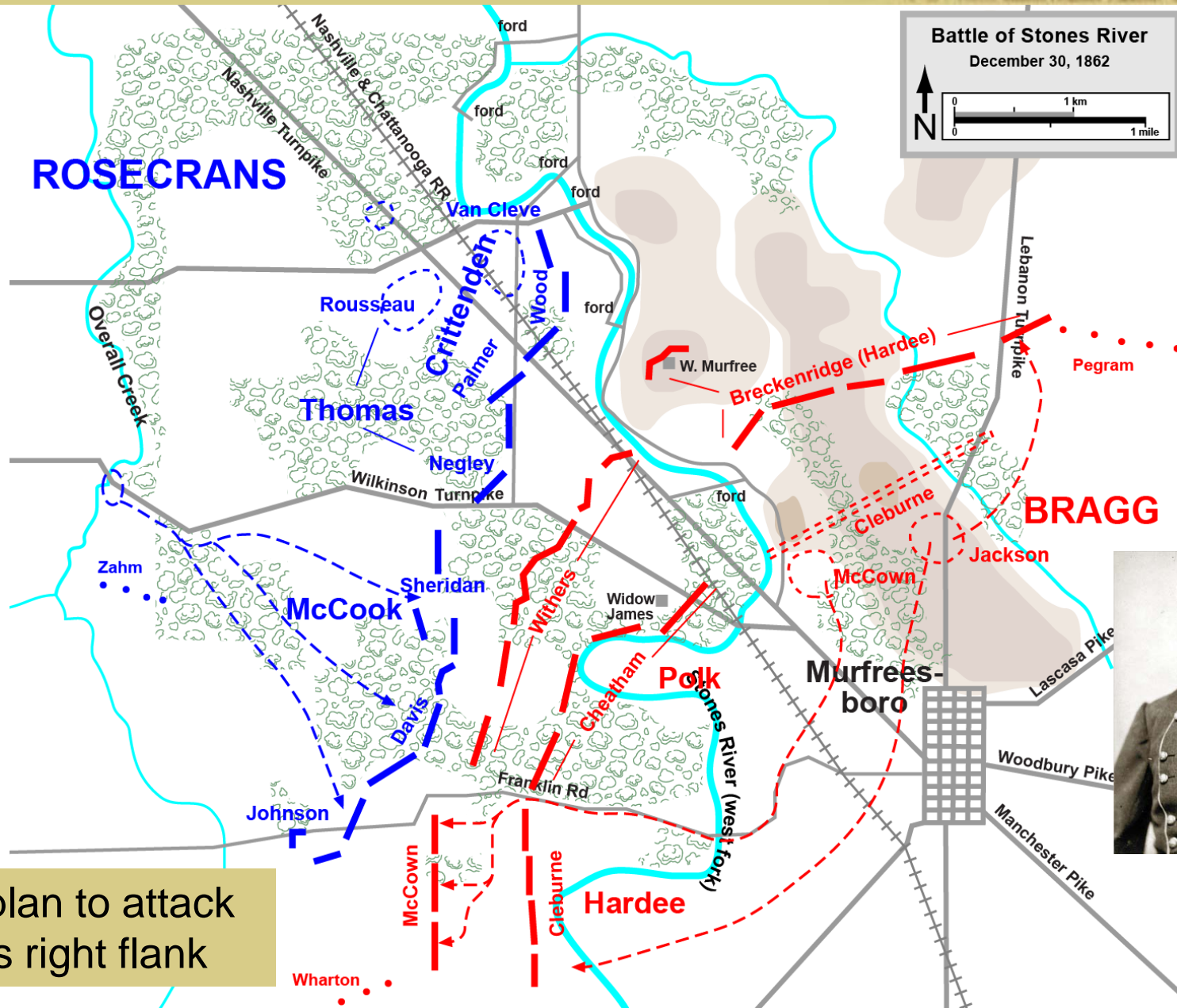
DEC. 31, 62 JAN. 2, 63, 1863. UNION GEN. ROBERT ANDERSON (LEFT) GEN. HILL, 52,000; CONF. GEN. BRAGG, 10,000; LOSS GEN. RAINES & HANSON BY GEN. CHALMERS & ADAMS WHO TOOK 10,000 REG. 4,700 & 4,000.

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BATTLE OF STONES RIVER,  
NEAR MURFREESBOROUGH, TENN.

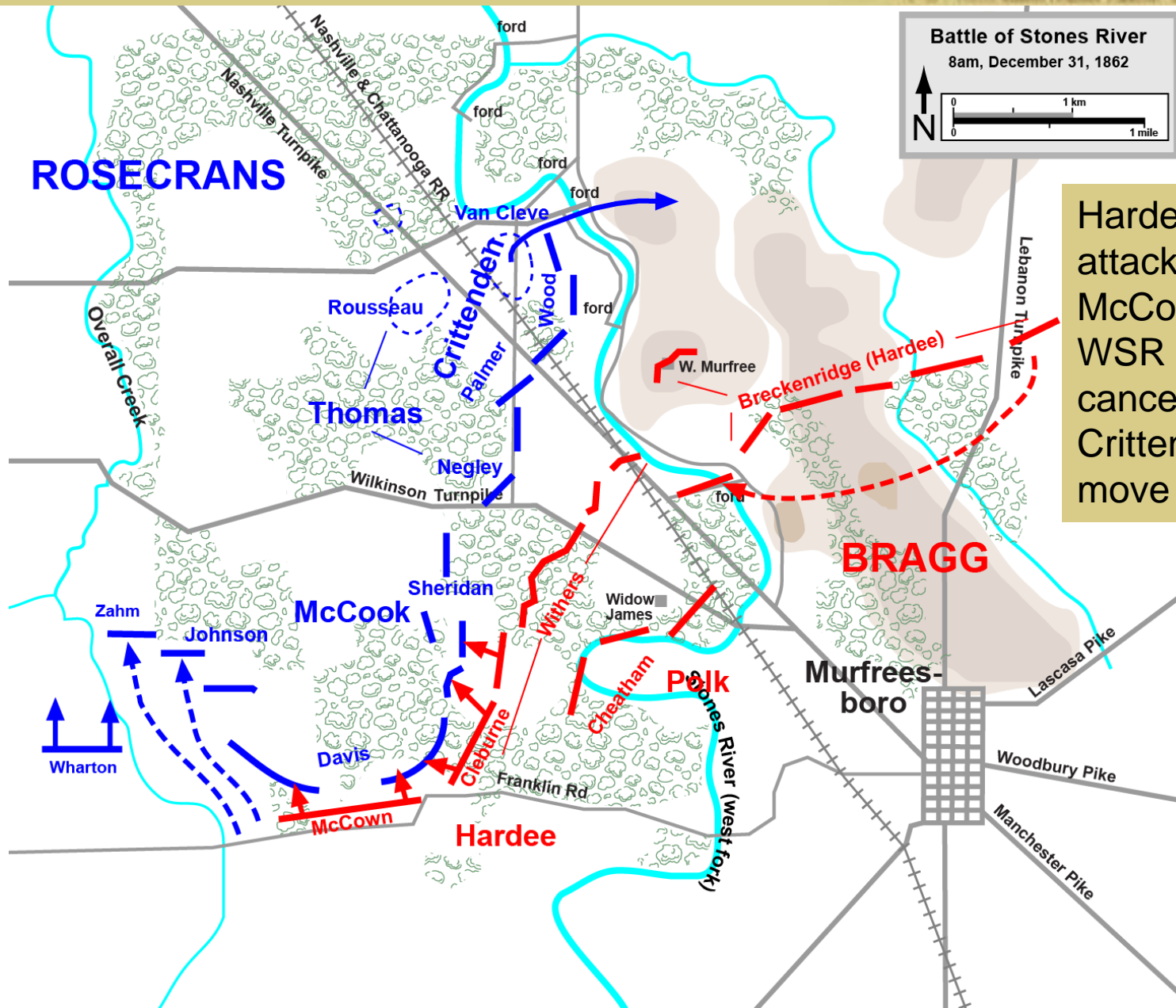


# Stones River, 08:00 December 30



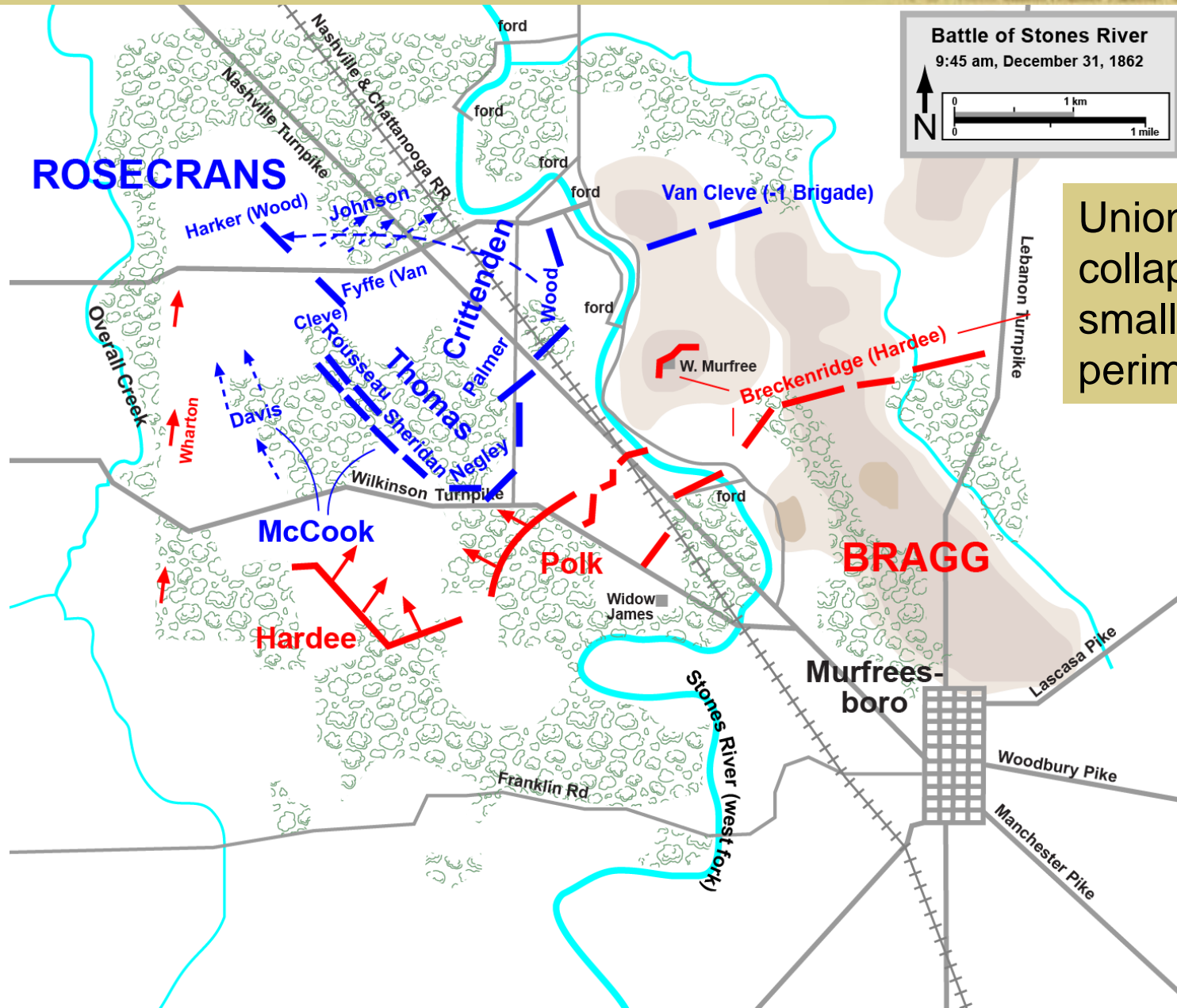
Both plan to attack other's right flank

# Stones River, 08:00 December 31



Hardee's strong attack on McCook, WSR surprised, cancels Crittenden's move

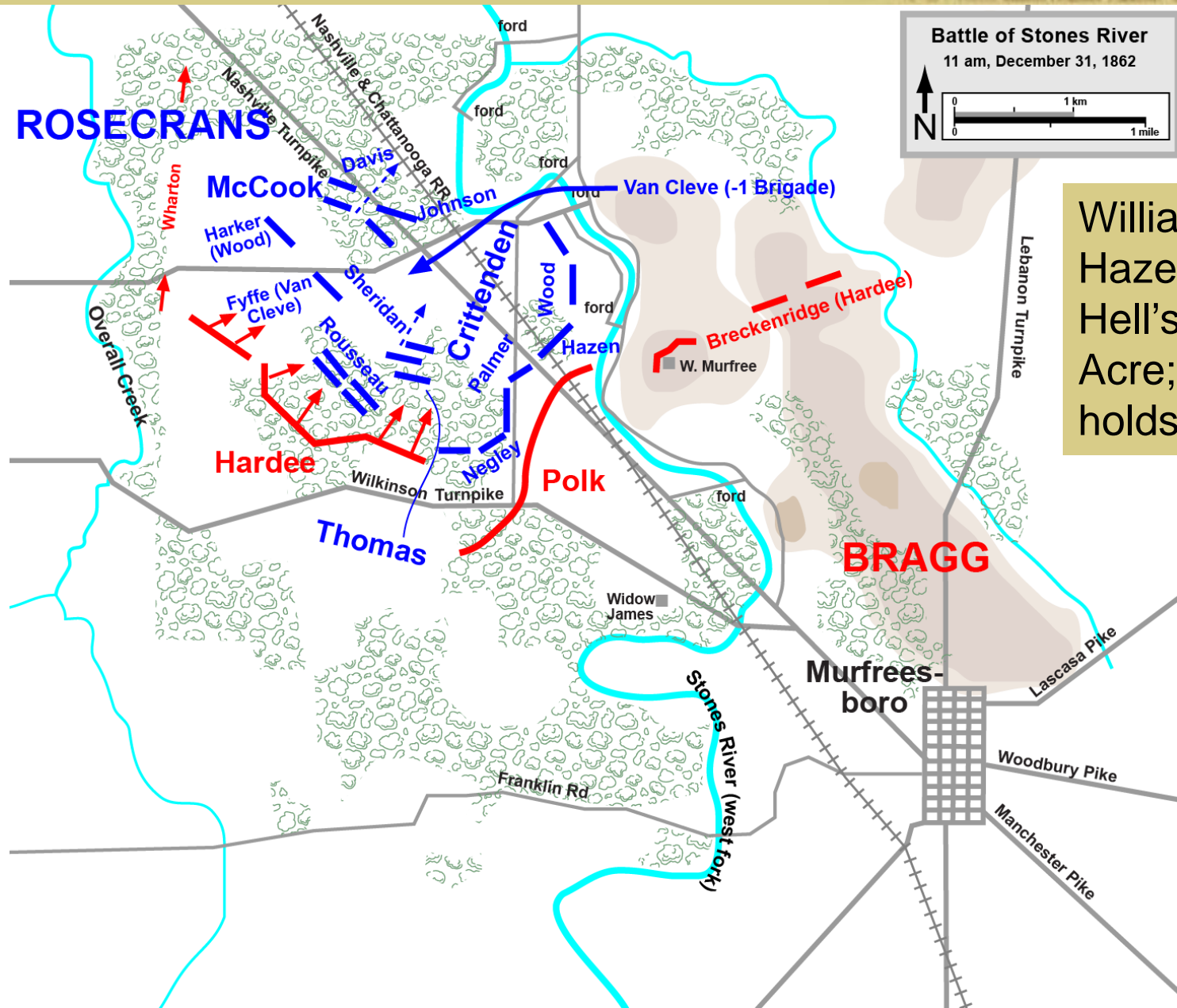
# Stones River, 09:45 December 31



Union line collapsing into small perimeter



# Stones River, 11:00 December 31



**Battle of Stones River**  
11 am, December 31, 1862

William B. Hazen and Hell's Half Acre; Union holds

# Stones River, First Day

- Rosecrans ubiquitous (and sometimes reckless)



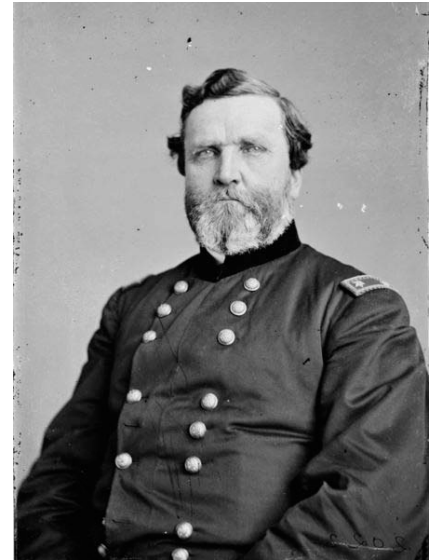
## Whitelaw Reid:

When disaster had enveloped half the army, and from that time to the end, **Rosecrans was magnificent**. Rising superior to the disaster that in a single moment had annihilated his carefully prepared plans, he grasped in his single hands the fortunes of the day. He stemmed the tide of retreat, hurried brigades and divisions to the point of danger, massed artillery, infused into them his own dauntless spirit, and **out of defeat itself, fashioned the weapons of victory**. As at Rich Mountain, Iuka and Corinth, it was his personal presence that magnetized his plans into success.

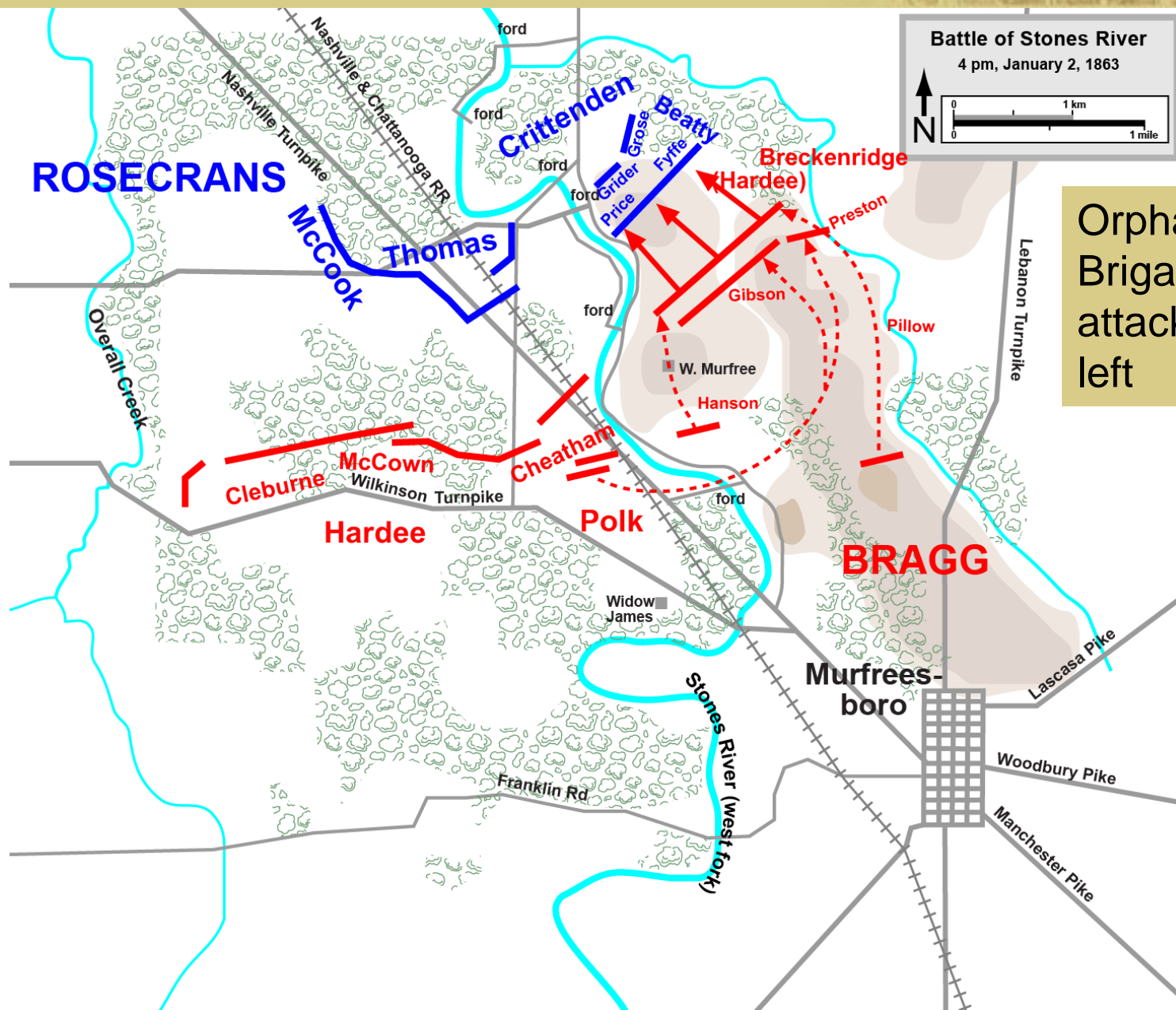


# Stones River, Night of December 31

- Council of War: most of his generals advised retreat to Nashville
  - Thomas awakes: “This army does not retreat.”



# Stones River, 16:00 January 2



**Battle of Stones River**  
4 pm, January 2, 1863

N

0 1 km 1 mile

Orphan  
Brigade  
attacks Union  
left





# Stones River Aftermath

- Tactically inconclusive, but one of the bloodiest battles of the war by % of casualties:
  - Union 13,249 of 43,000
  - Confederate 10,266 of 37,000
  - Similar to Antietam totals, but armies half the size
- Bragg withdrew to behind the Duck River at Tullahoma
- Rosecrans fortified Murfreesboro for the winter

## Lincoln to Rosecrans:

You gave us a hard-earned victory, which had there been a defeat instead, the nation could scarcely have lived over.

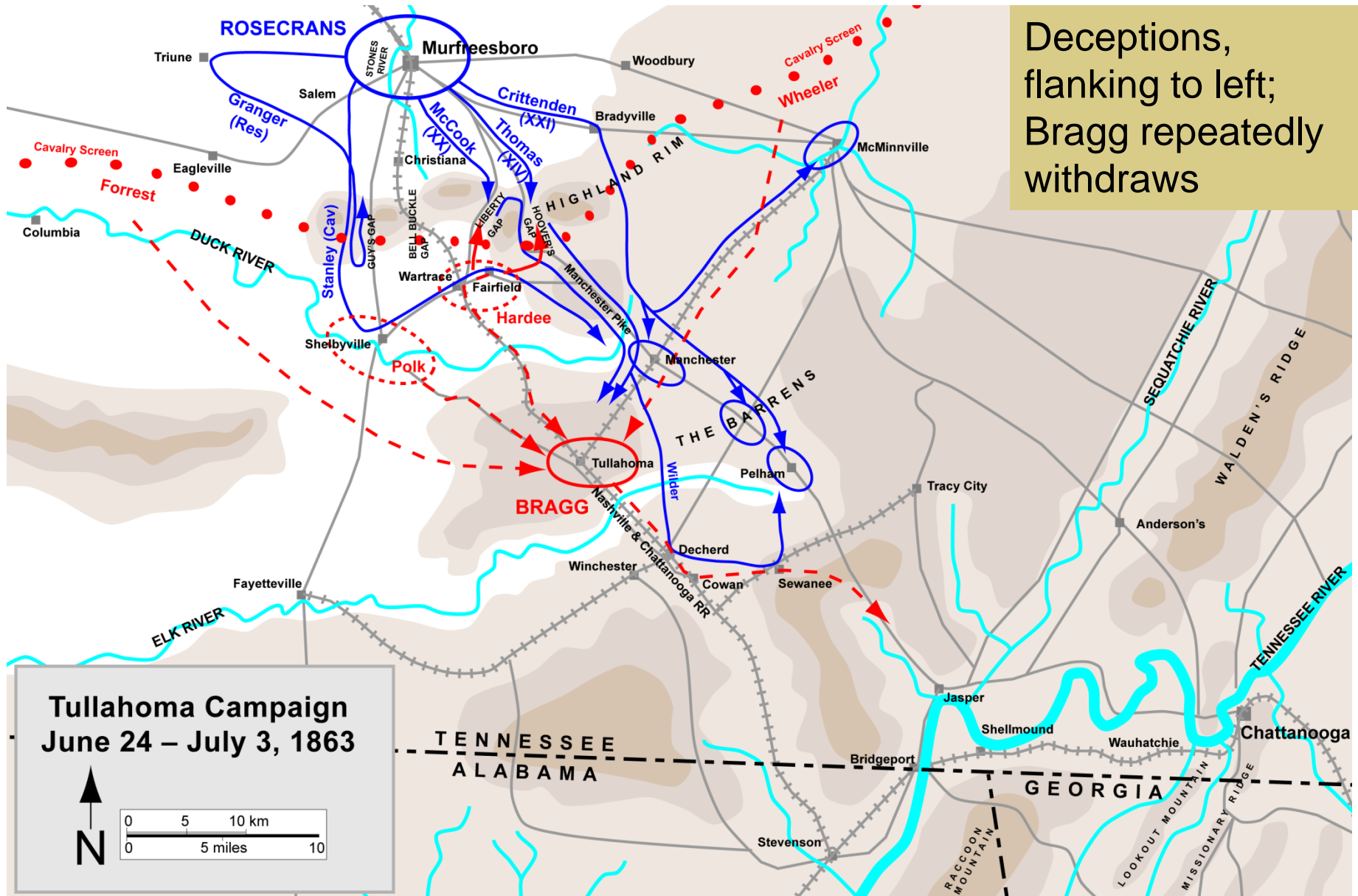
# Spring 1863

- Pressure mounts after six months—move against Bragg or send your troops to aid Grant at Vicksburg
  - Bragg's supply line 1/3 as long, has 2x cavalry
- Halleck offers Major General, USA, promotion to first decisive victor

## Rosecrans to Halleck:

As an officer and a citizen I feel degraded to see such an auctioneering of honor. Have we a general who would fight for his own personal benefit, when he would not for honor and the country?

# Tullahoma Campaign

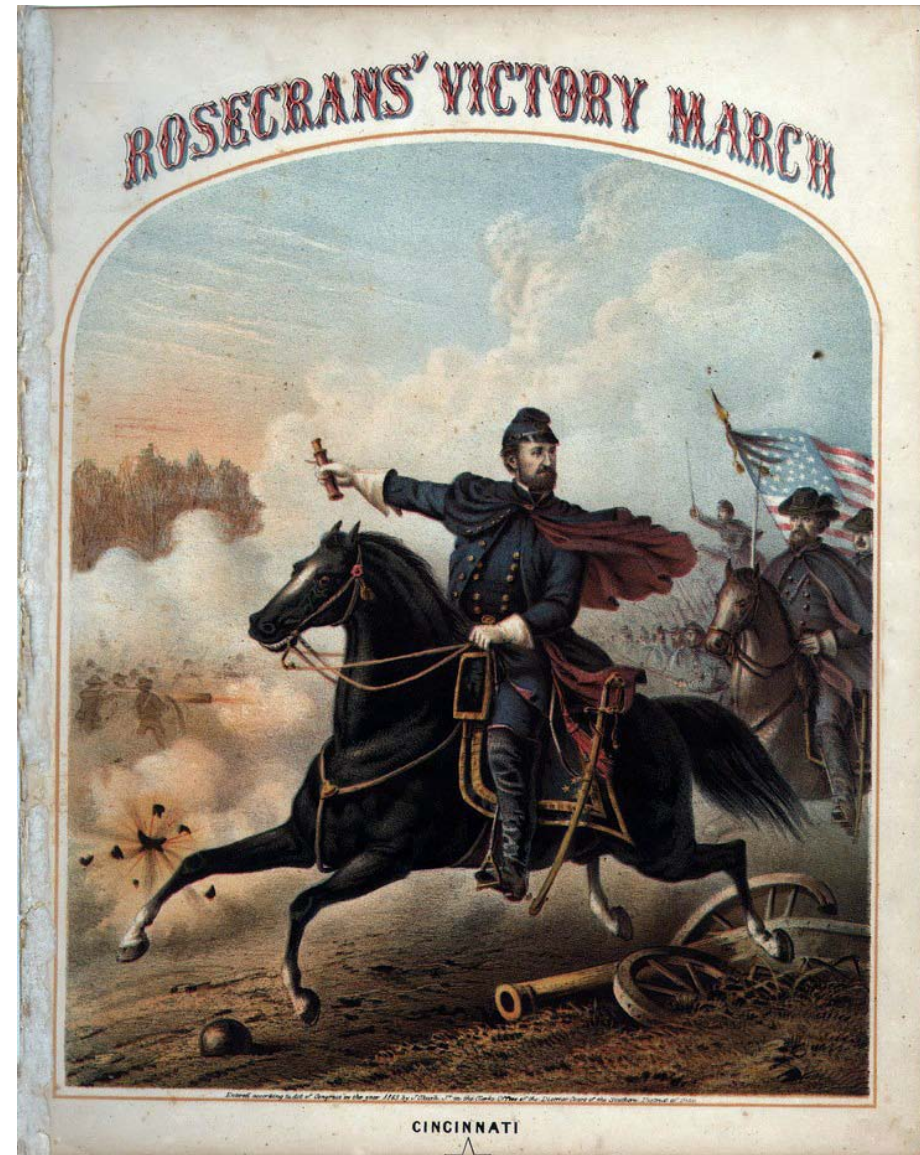


Deceptions,  
flanking to left;  
Bragg repeatedly  
withdraws



# Tullahoma Aftermath

- One of the most brilliant campaigns of the war, drove Bragg from Middle Tenn.
- Union casualties 569, Confederate “trifling”
- Overshadowed by two other campaigns



# Tullahoma Aftermath, II

## Stanton to Rosecrans:

Lee's Army overthrown; Grant victorious. You and your noble army now have a chance to give the finishing blow to the rebellion. Will you neglect the chance?

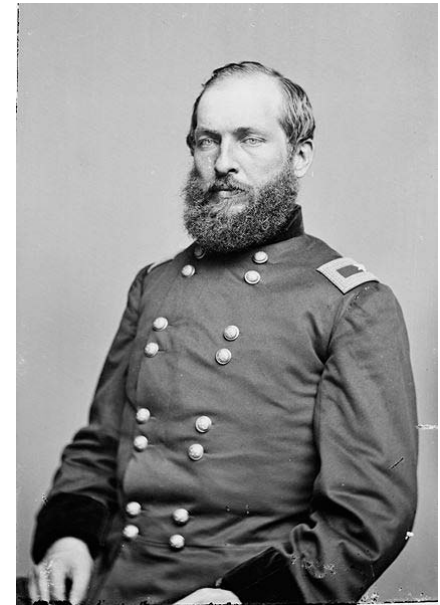
## Rosecrans to Stanton:

Just received your cheering telegram announcing the fall of Vicksburg and confirming the defeat of Lee. You do not appear to observe the fact that this noble army has driven the rebels from middle Tennessee. ... **I beg in behalf of this army that the War Department may not overlook so great an event because it is not written in letters of blood.**

# Advancing to Chattanooga

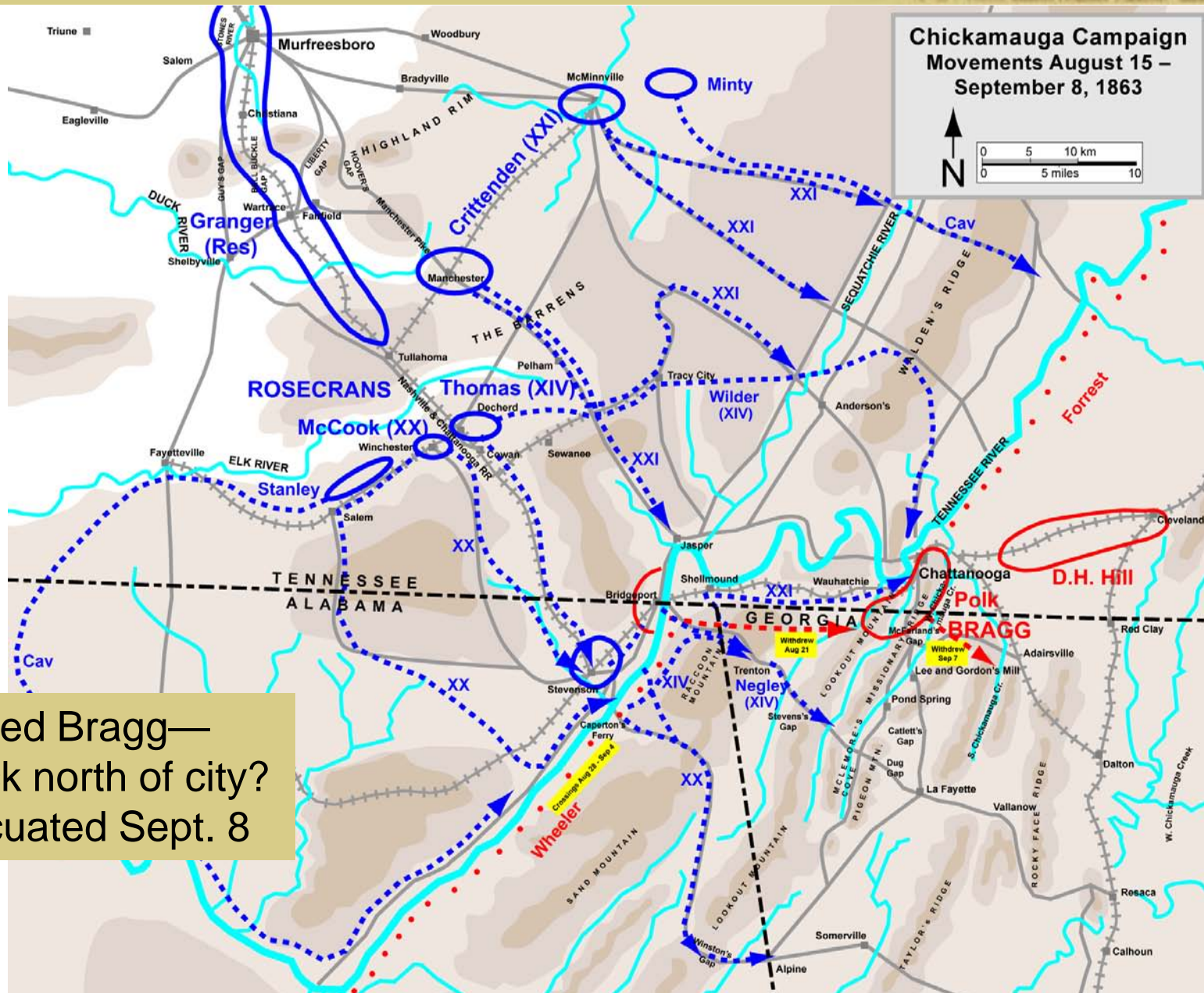
- Enormous logistical challenges: cross 30 miles of rugged, barren terrain, transport all supplies, deal with superior Confederate cavalry
- Pressure again; WSR protests Halleck's order to move immediately: "recklessness, conceit and malice"
- Politicians at HQ:
  - Brig. Gen. James A. Garfield, Chief of Staff
  - War Dept. representative, Charles A. Dana, a "loathsome pimp"\*

\* Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger





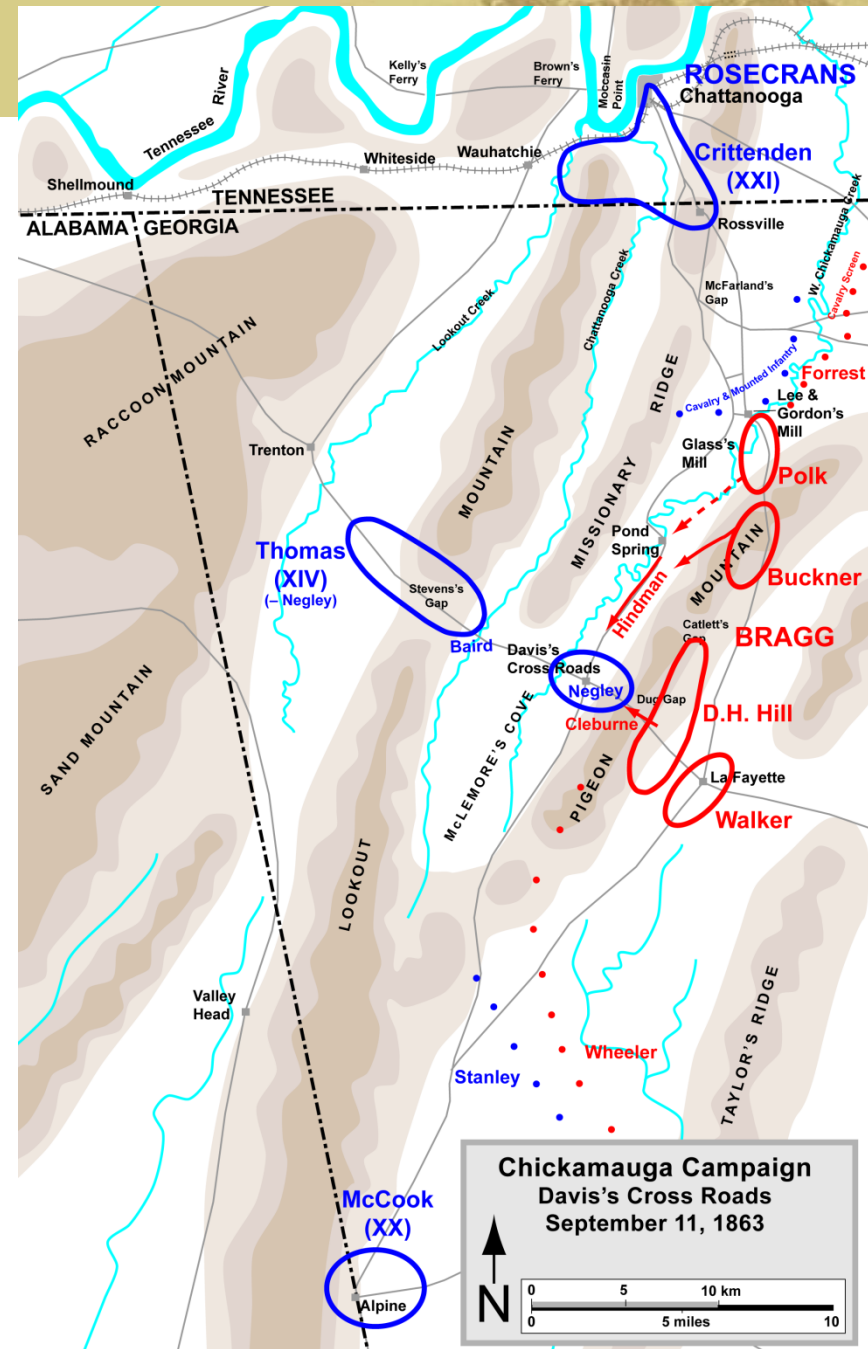
# Capturing Chattanooga



Tricked Bragg—  
attack north of city?  
Evacuated Sept. 8

# Davis's Crossroads

- Consequence of wide front during the “pursuit” of Bragg
- Maj. Gen. James Negley’s division almost trapped in McLemore’s Cove on Sept. 11
- First instance of Bragg’s subordinate problems





# Chickamauga



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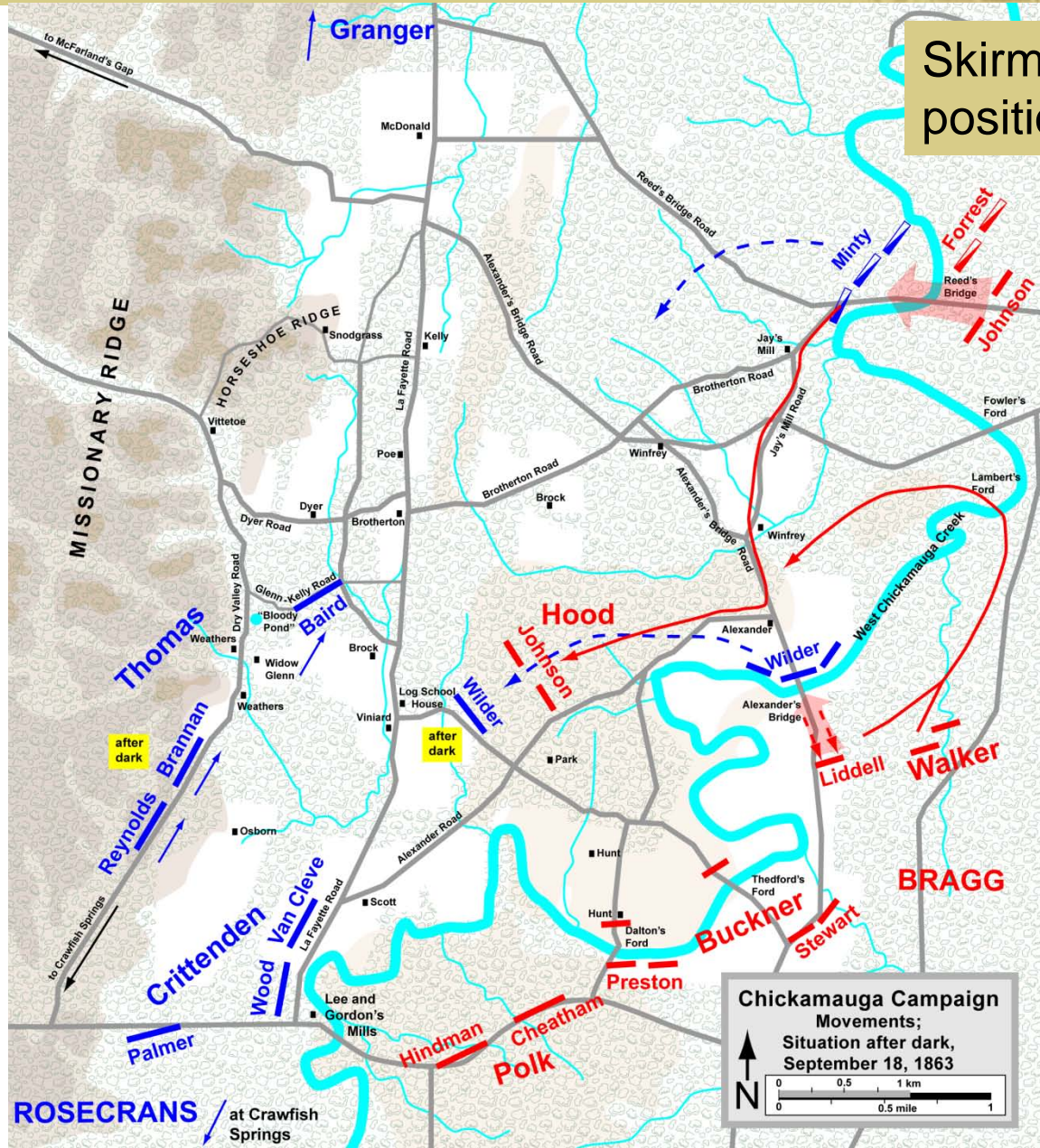
BATTLE OF CHICKAMAUGA.



# Chickamauga, Sept. 18



Skirmishing for position across creek

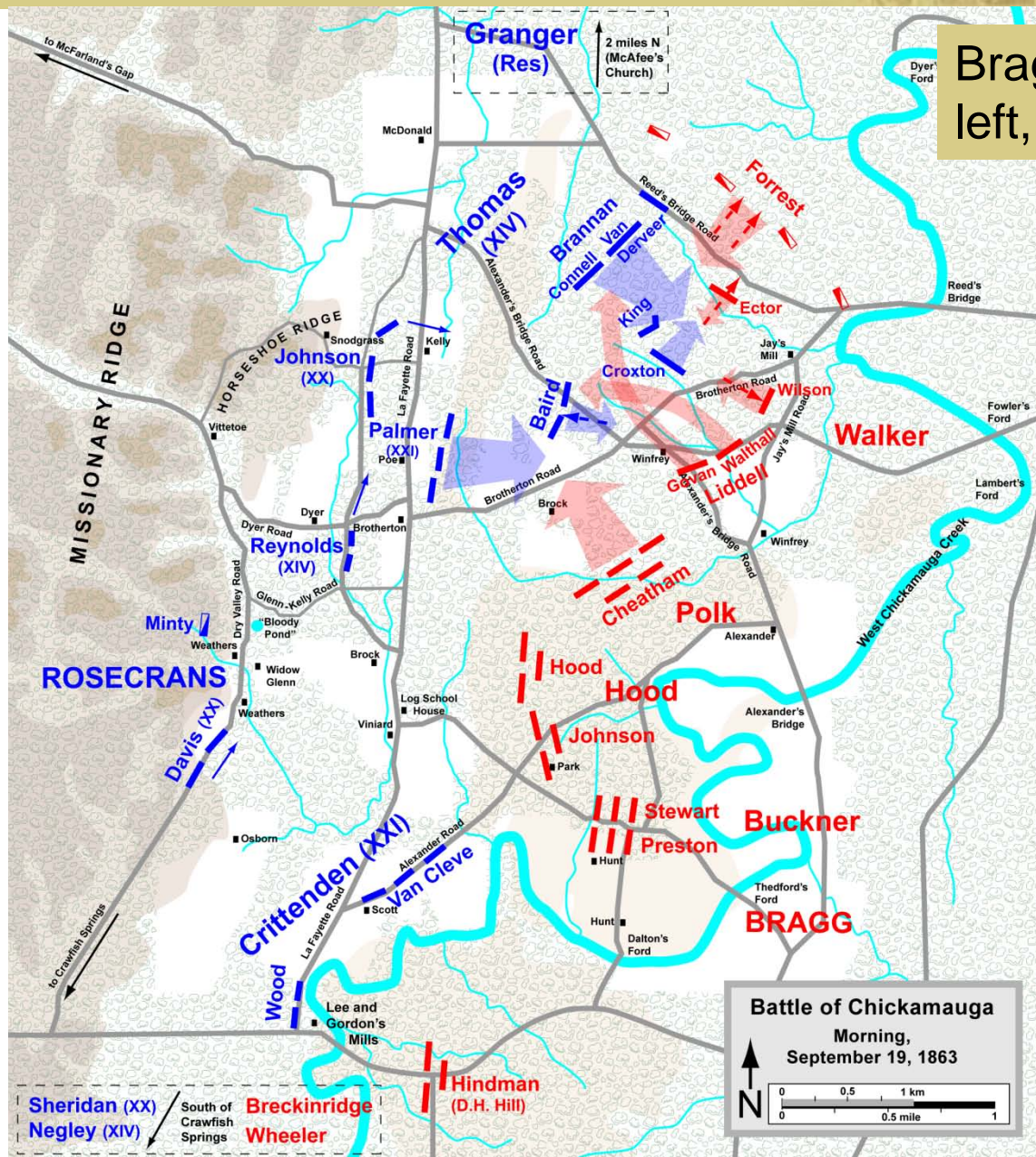


Chickamauga Campaign  
Movements;  
Situation after dark,  
September 18, 1863



# Chickamauga, Sept. 19 morning

Bragg vs. Union  
left, cut off escape



Sheridan (XX)  
Negley (XIV)

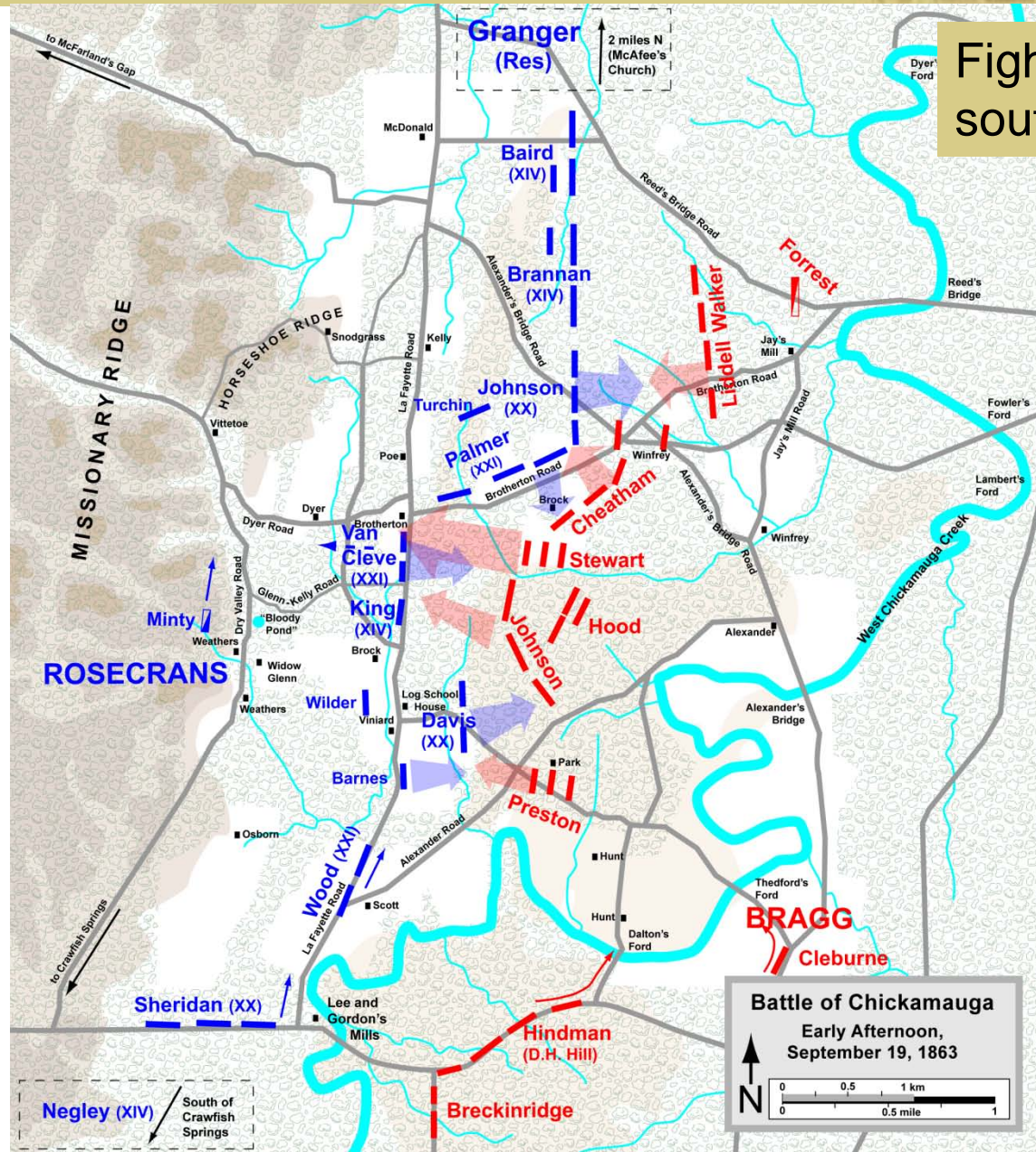
South of Crawfish Springs

Breckinridge  
Wheeler



# Chickamauga, Sept. 19, early pm

Fighting migrates south

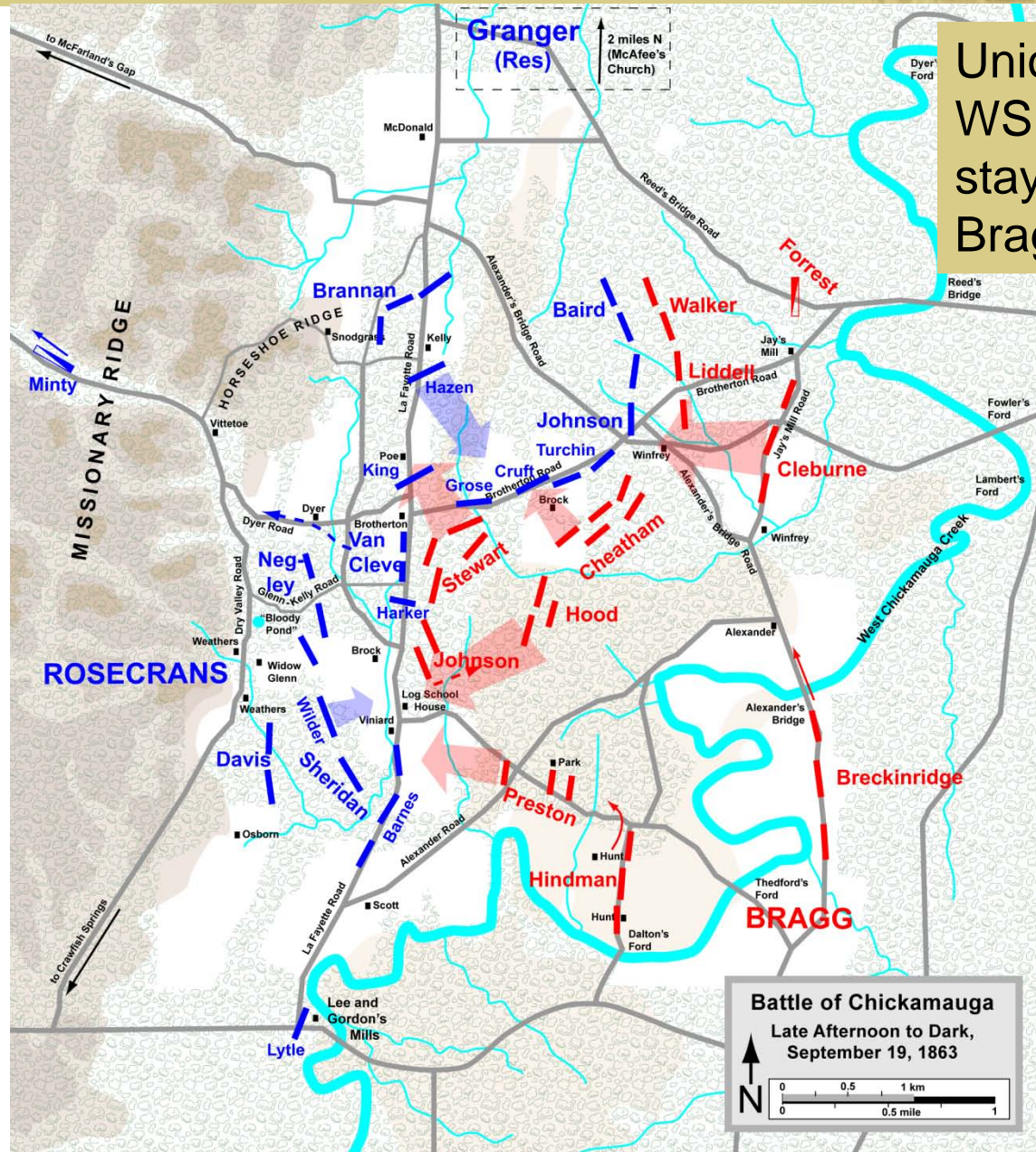




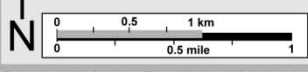
# Chickamauga, Sept. 19, late pm



Union lines hold,  
WSR resolves to  
stay and fight;  
Bragg reorganizes



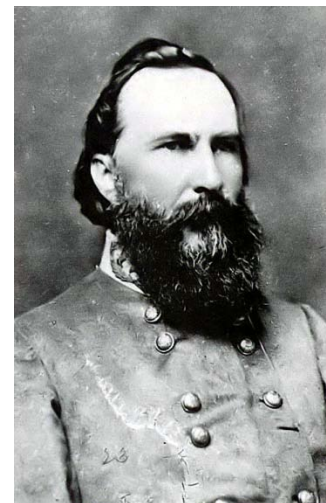
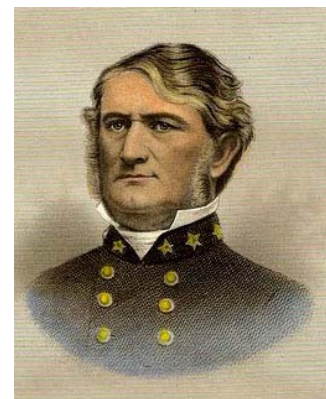
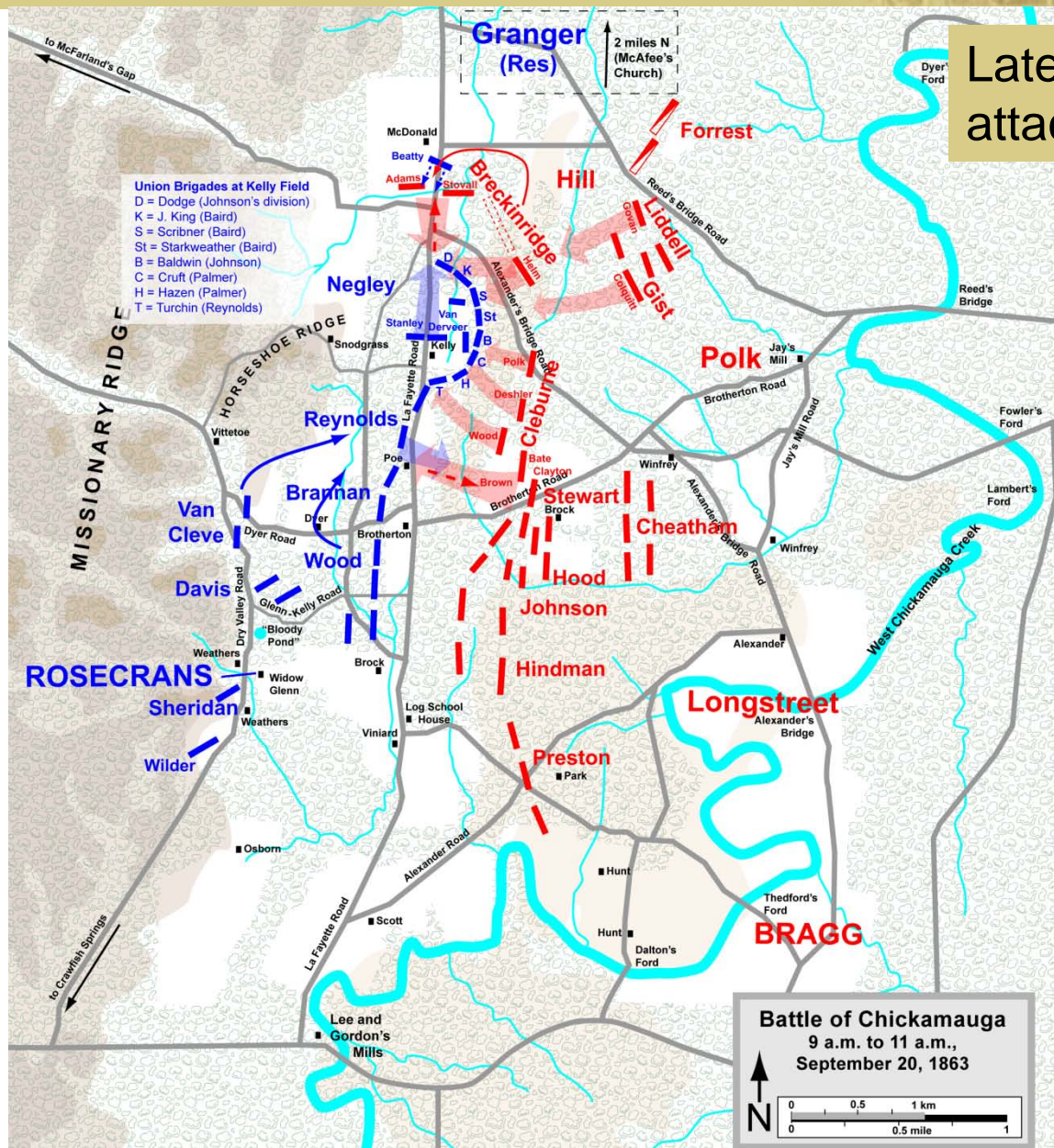
**Battle of Chickamauga**  
Late Afternoon to Dark,  
September 19, 1863





# Chickamauga, Sept. 20, 9-11 am

Late start of Polk's attack



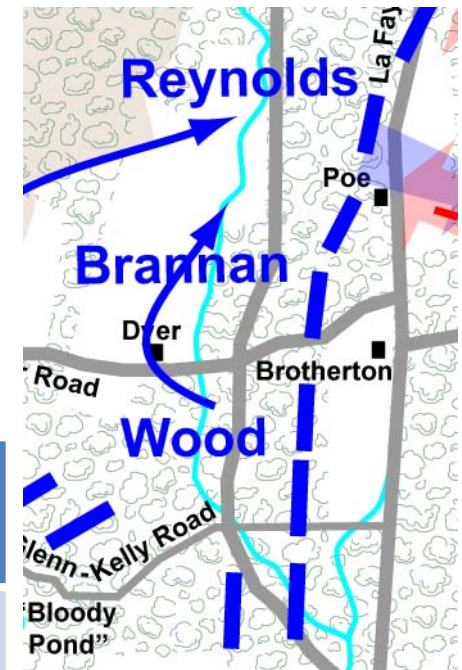
# The Fatal Order

- WSR assumed that Brannan had followed an order to pull out of line to move north and he wanted Brig. Gen. Thomas J. Wood to close the gap on Reynolds's right



Order written for Rosecrans by Maj. Frank Bond:

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



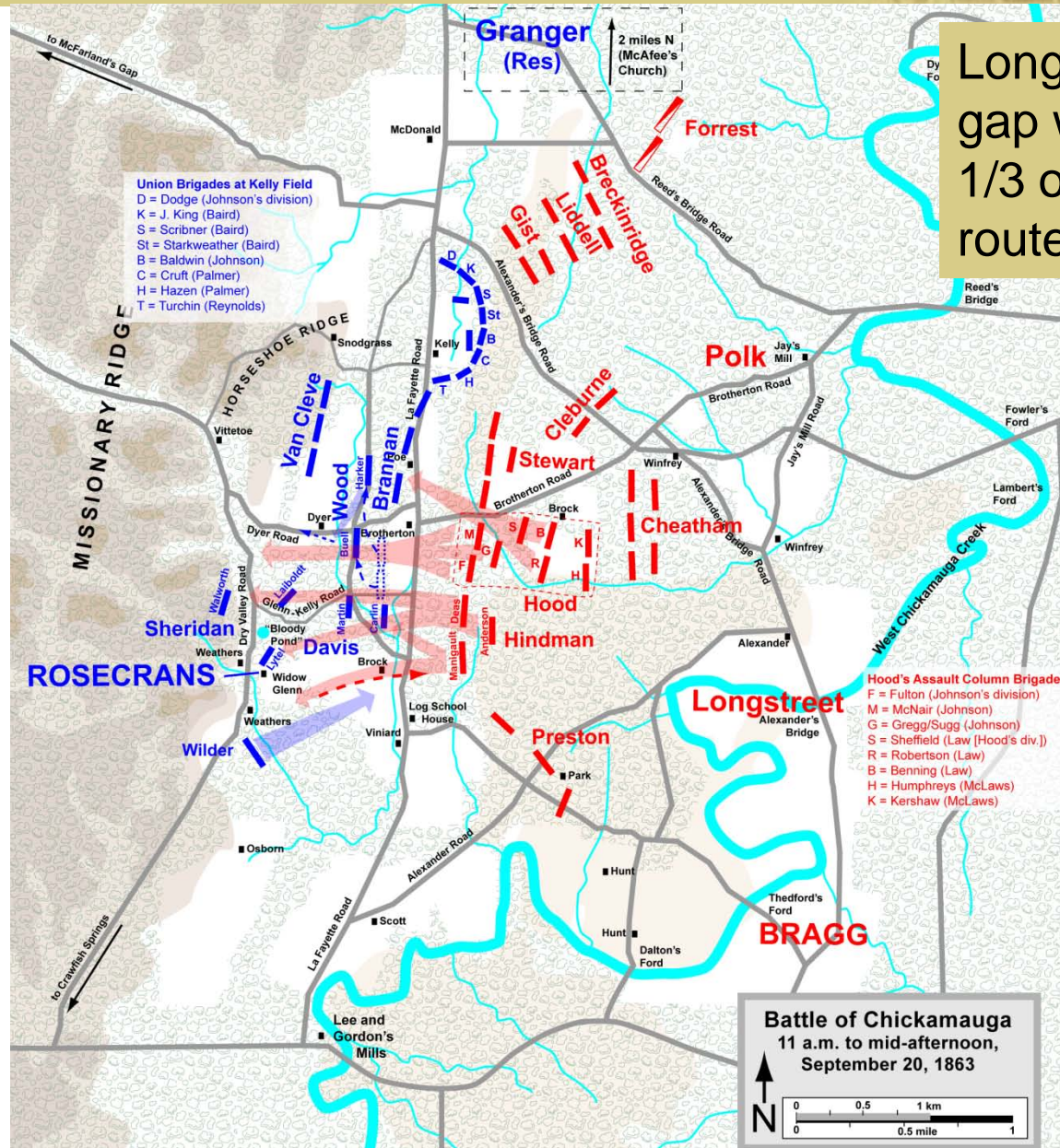
Move adjacent to

Move up behind



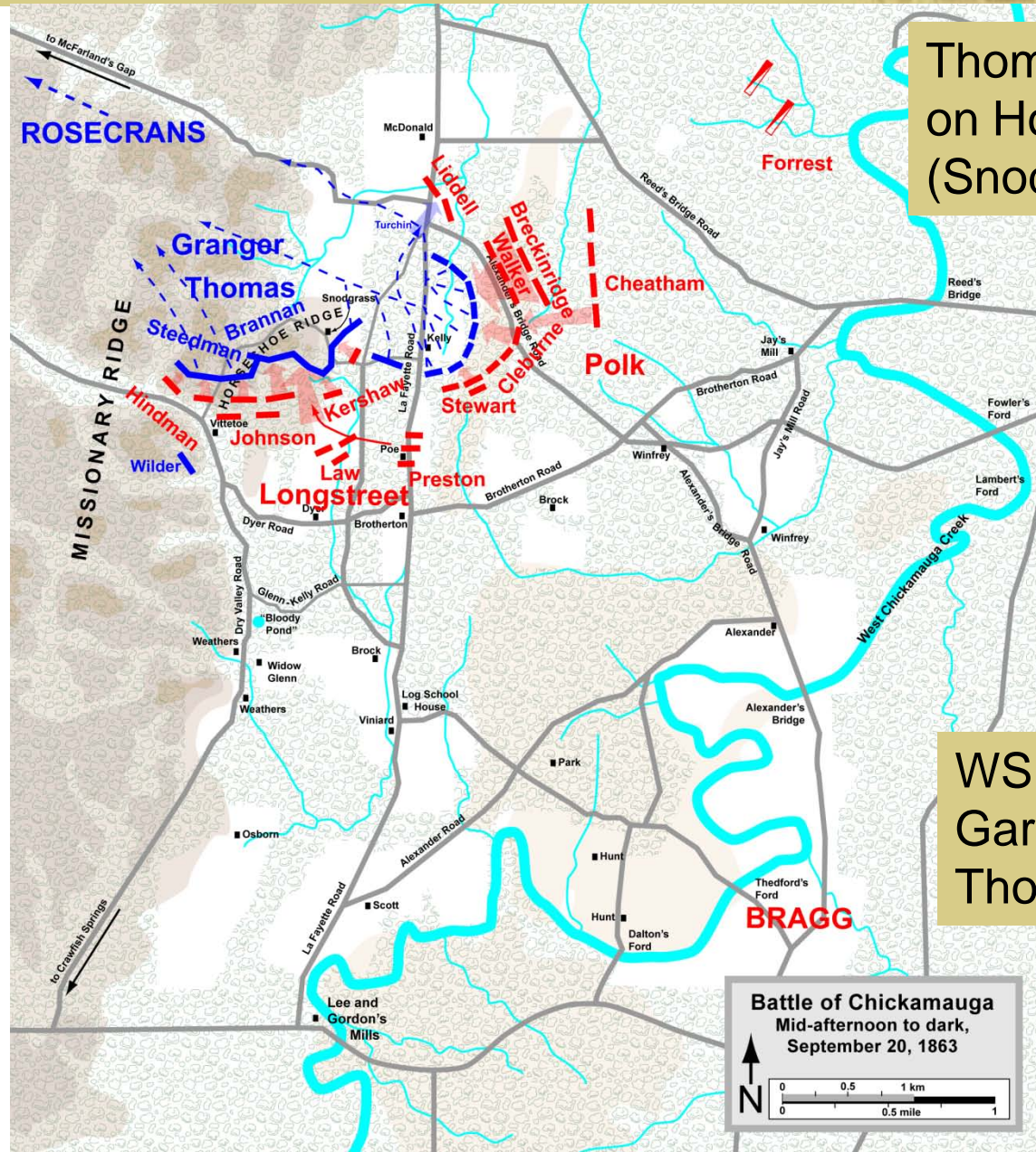
# Chickamauga, Sept. 20, after 11 am

Longstreet exploits gap with 8 brigades, 1/3 of Union army routed

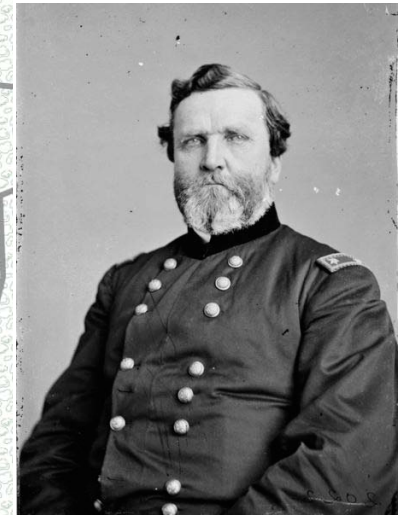




# Chickamauga, Sept. 20, late pm

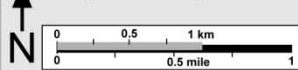


Thomas's defense on Horseshoe Ridge (Snodgrass Hill)



WSR flees, sends Garfield back to Thomas

Battle of Chickamauga  
Mid-afternoon to dark,  
September 20, 1863



# Chickamauga Aftermath

- Casualties: Union 16,170, Confederate 18,454
  - Bloodiest battle in the Western Theater, second bloodiest of the war
  - Worst Union defeat in the West, although Bragg did not achieve his objective
- Army of the Cumberland besieged in Chattanooga
- WSR actively undermined by Garfield and Dana (latter came to light only in *Official Records* of 1890)

## Charles A. Dana Telegram to War Dept., 4 p.m.

My report today is of deplorable importance. Chickamauga is as fatal a name in our history as Bull Run.

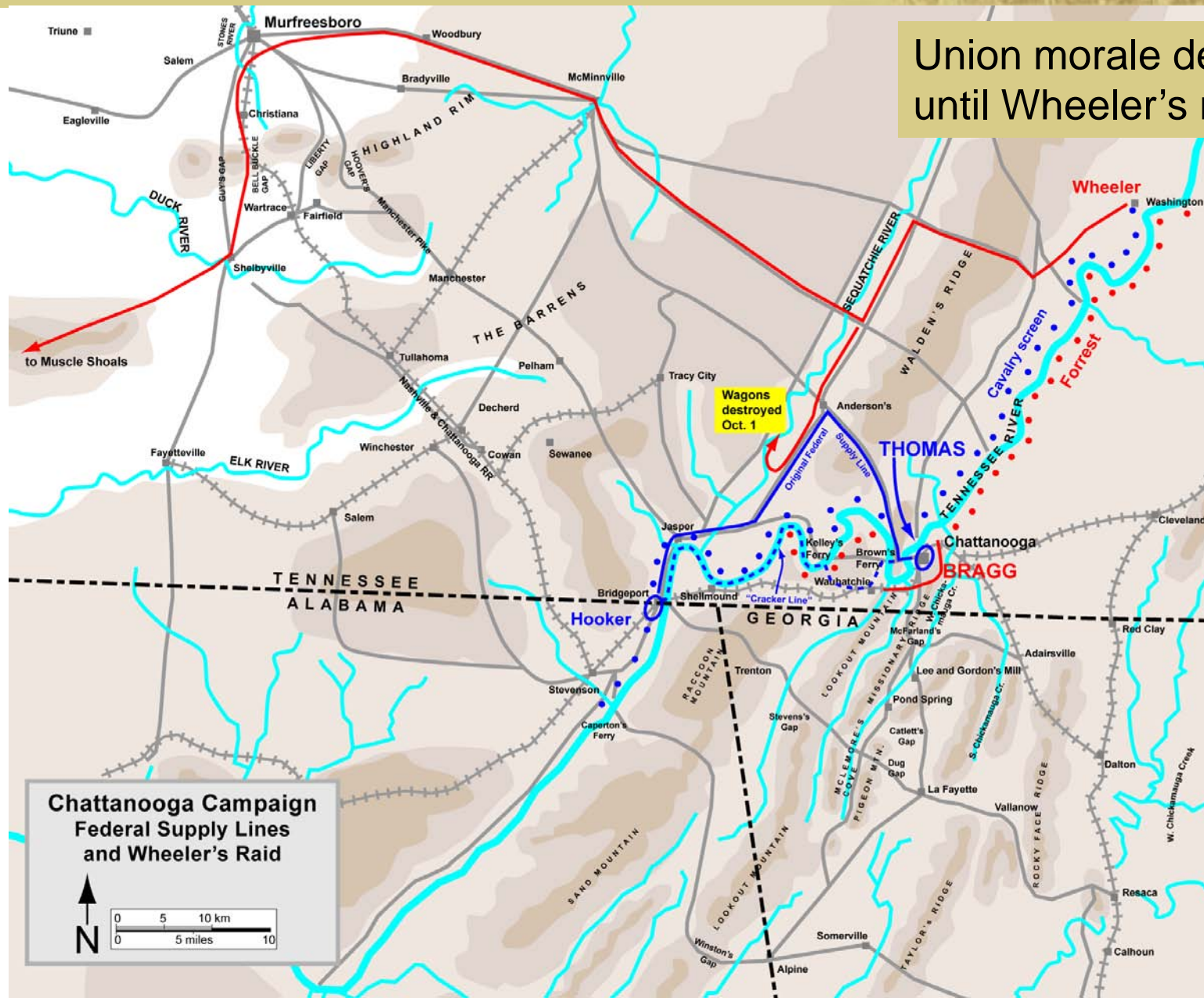
## Lincoln private comments to John Hay:

WSR seemed “confused and stunned like a duck hit on the head”



# Federal Supply lines to Chattanooga

Union morale decent until Wheeler's raid



**Chattanooga Campaign  
Federal Supply Lines  
and Wheeler's Raid**

# Grant Returns

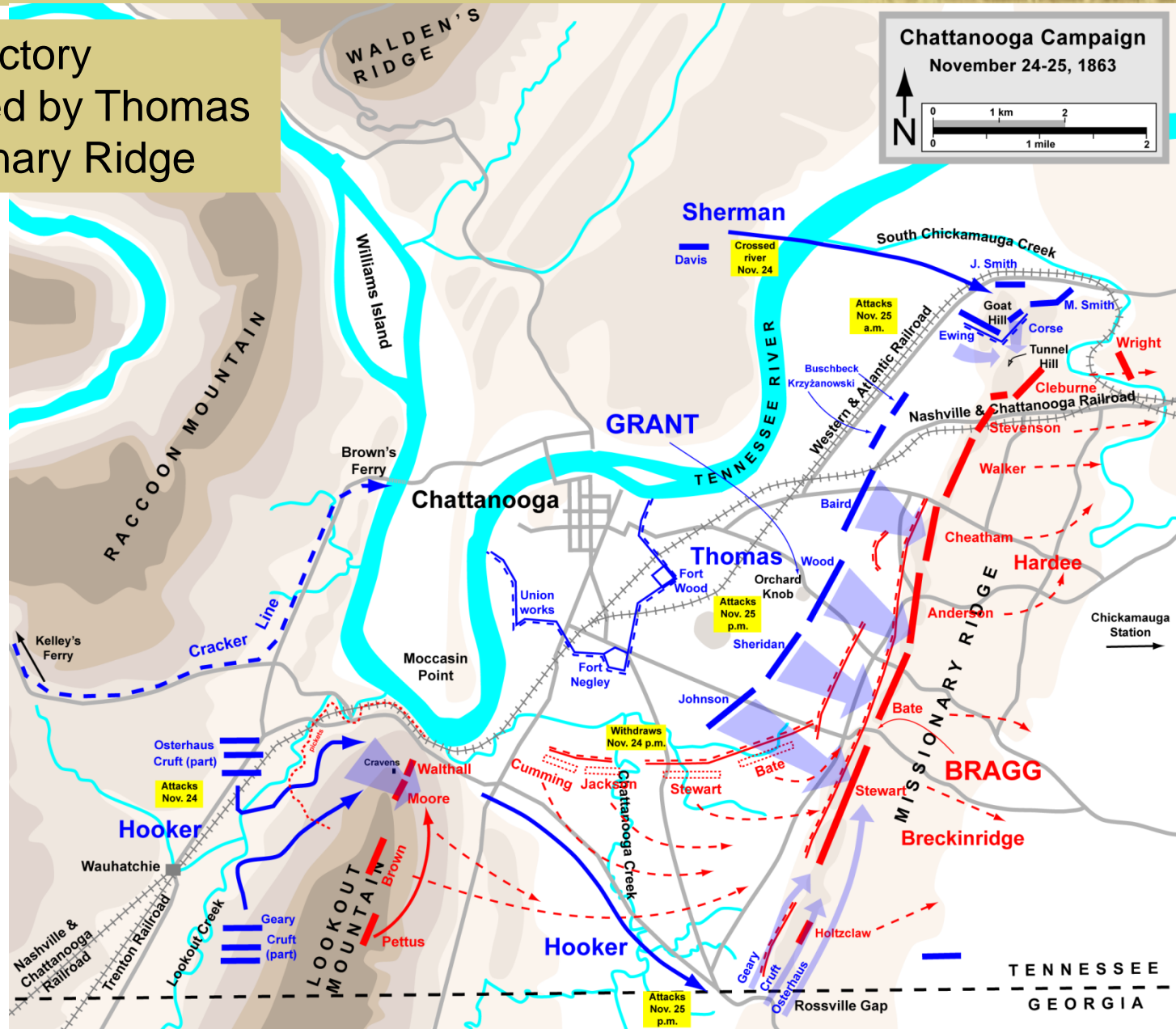


- Ulysses S. Grant named overall commander in the West (Military Division of the Mississippi)
- October 19: WSR replaced by Thomas in command of the Army of the Cumberland
- Reinforcements from Sherman (Army of the Tennessee) and Hooker (Army of the Potomac)
- Grant implements WSR's plan to open the "Cracker line"

# Battles for Chattanooga



Grant's victory highlighted by Thomas at Missionary Ridge





# Missouri

- WSR ordered to Cincinnati, await further assignment
- Commander of the Dept. of Missouri in January 1864, replacing John M. Schofield
- Actively fought bushwhackers and opposed Sterling Price's Missouri Raid
- Grant and Stanton replaced WSR in December by Grenville Dodge

## Grant's reply to Stanton about where to send Rosecrans after Missouri:

Rosecrans will do less harm doing nothing than on duty. I know no department or Army commander deserving such punishment as the infliction of Rosecrans on them.

# End of the War

- James Garfield inquired about WSR's interest to be Abraham Lincoln's vice presidential running mate
- Brevet Major General, USA on March 13, 1865 (for Stones River)
- Resigned from the volunteer service 1866, from the Regular Army 1867

# Politics

- Andrew Johnson's minister to Mexico, replaced after five months by newly elected Pres. US Grant
- Parties unsuccessfully sought WSR for high offices:
  - 1866, Ohio Governor (Union Party)
  - 1868, California Governor (Democrat)
  - 1869, Ohio Governor (Dem.)
  - 1876, Nevada Congressman (Dem.)
- California Congressman 1881–85
  - Opposed 1885 Grant pension bill
- Discussed as Grover Cleveland's Secretary of War, but appointed Registrar of the Treasury, 1885–93





# California

- Bought “Rosecrans Rancho,” 16,000 acres in LA basin, 1869; sold parcels to support a mining business
- Regent of the University of California
- Fort Rosecrans in San Diego



# Death

- Died at the age of 78 on March 11, 1898, in Redondo Beach
- Laid in state at LA City Hall
- Buried in Arlington National Cemetery

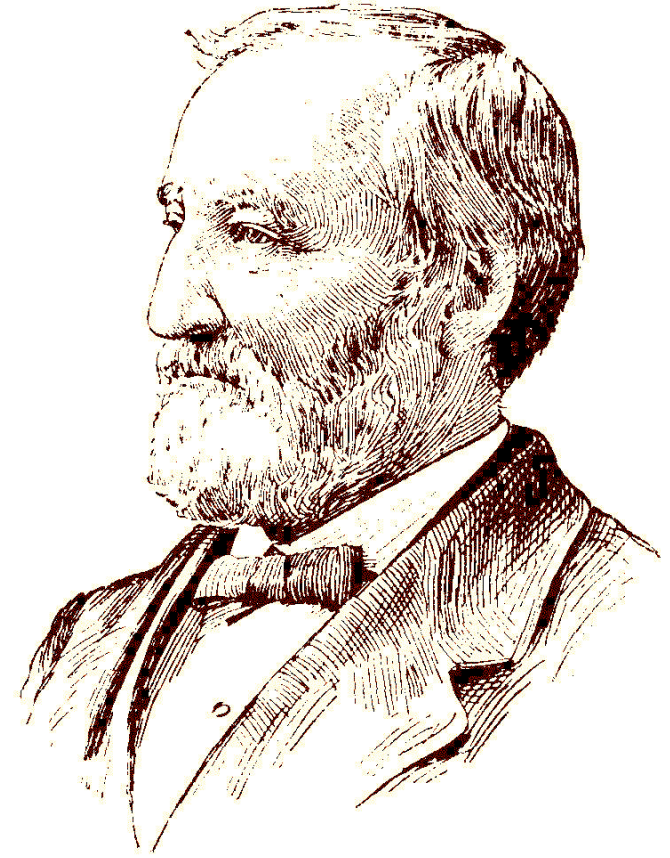
## Pres. William McKinley:

He served his country in its perilous need with fidelity, courage and zest. In that duty he served a higher power.



# William Starke Rosecrans

- Inventor, businessman, politician, and one of the most promising and successful generals of the American Civil War
- Victim of his own sharp tongue and a poorly written, one-sentence order — 17 words that denied him greatness



*W. S. Rosecrans*



# Thank you

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