



AMERICAN
BATTLEFIELD
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WATKINS

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“It is the blackest page in the history of the war. It was the bloodiest battle of modern times in any war. It was the finishing stroke to the independence of the Southern Confederacy. I was there. I saw it. My flesh trembles, and creeps, and crawls when I think of it today.”

CONFEDERATE PRIVATE SAM WATKINS ON THE BRUTALITY AT THE BATTLE OF FRANKLIN

Dear Loyal Friend and Member,

In November 1864, the Confederate Army of Tennessee found itself in relentless pursuit of a victory.

Abraham Lincoln had just been re-elected president, meaning that the long fight which had already rent and ravaged the nation for nearly four years would continue. General William Tecumseh Sherman had captured Atlanta and was now in the thick of his scorched-earth March to the Sea. The Confederates were running out of options.

The desperation was palpable when Confederate General John Bell Hood attempted to defeat Union forces determined to reach Nashville. About 20 miles south of the Tennessee capital, Hood’s 27,000 soldiers encountered 28,000 Union forces under the command of General John Schofield. What ensued in that small country town on an unseasonably warm and bright afternoon would ultimately become known as “Bloody Franklin.”

For those of you familiar with the history of this pivotal battle, described by some as the “last gasp” of the Confederacy, you’d likely agree that Franklin, Tennessee, was one of the worst places on the planet to be on November 30, 1864. As one soldier recalled years after the battle, “It was as if the Devil had full possession of the Earth.”

Fighting began around 4 o’clock in the afternoon, when the Confederates launched a massive infantry charge against Union forces that had dug in behind well-prepared earthworks and abatis. An astounding force of 20,000 Confederate soldiers charged across nearly two miles of open ground with virtually no artillery support to make a frontal assault on the Union lines. The size of this assault dwarfs the famed “Pickett’s Charge” at Gettysburg by 50 percent.

Battle-hardened Union soldiers (it was 1864, after all) described the charge as the single most incredible thing they had ever seen in their lives.

Southern battalions slammed into the enemy lines and met intense resistance. Chaos and confusion reigned as soldiers on both sides engaged in fierce, often vicious hand-to-hand combat.

“Bloody Franklin” witnessed some of the most brutal fighting of the war, with opposing soldiers often separated only by a few feet of earthworks. Accounts of the battle describe men holding their guns over the tops of the breastworks to fire at their enemies. These works marked the most critical element of the battle — Union Captain James A. Sexton recalled one incident that typifies the day:

“I recollect seeing one man, with the blood streaming down his face from a wound in the head with a pick axe in his hands, rushing into a crowd of the enemy and swinging his pick ... A rebel colonel mounted our breastworks, and ... profanely ... demanded our immediate surrender ... Private Arbridge of Company D, thrust his musket into the abdomen of the rash colonel, and with the exclamation, ‘I guess not’ instantly discharged his weapon. The effect of the shot was horrible and actually let daylight through the victim.”

Beyond the sheer brutality and savagery of the fighting — the Battle of Franklin proved a calamitous defeat for the Confederates. More southern generals became casualties at Franklin than any other single battle of the war — eight were wounded or captured and six were killed, including Patrick Cleburne.

Hardin Figuers, a 15-year-old Franklin citizen, described the carnage:

“... the dead and wounded were so thick upon the ground that it might be said without exaggeration that one could walk upon the dead and never touch the ground.”

Considering the ferocity of the battle and the devastation of its aftermath, it may not be surprising that many of Franklin’s residents wanted the events of that horrific day to fade from memory. The fighting at Franklin lasted six hours, but the fight to preserve this hallowed ground more than a century after the battle has been raging for decades.

Today, Franklin marks the epitome of an American battlefield preservation success story. Though you may already know the tale, let me share it again with you now...

In the early 2000s, the ground that was consecrated with the blood of Union and Confederate soldiers was all but destroyed, desecrated with commercial mini-malls and mixed-use residential properties. If you look at your battle map, you will find the Columbia Turnpike running perpendicular to the main line of combat. A laundry mat, a small market, and two pizza places stood along that road.

During that time the American Battlefield Trust began working with determined state and local preservation groups to reclaim and preserve the Franklin battlefield. The battlefield was, indeed, lost. It was gone. It had been defiled by development. But over two decades, we fought to get it back, half-acre by half-acre.

Today, thanks to the strength of exceptional preservationists and tremendous local groups, we have



The Pizza Hut previously located on hallowed ground in Franklin, TN. ©The Battle of Franklin Trust



Demolition of the Pizza Hut in 2005. ©The Battle of Franklin Trust

clawed this battlefield back into existence. The pizza places are gone. The mini-mall has been demolished. And vast swaths of this hallowed ground have been returned to their original state, appearing as they did on that fateful day in November 1864. What was once almost entirely lost is now one of the most impressive battlefield parks in the country. This national battlefield preservation effort has been nothing less than “a miracle,” and to this day, it marks perhaps the premier battlefield restoration effort in American history.

So, you may be wondering: if the Franklin battlefield is already a success story, why am I writing to you today? It’s because our work at Franklin is not done yet.

There is a key missing piece in the heart of the battlefield: a 0.60-acre tract of land with a single-story, contemporary warehouse, complete with beige aluminum siding (and a true eyesore at that). It is the only obstacle preventing visitors from walking the final quarter mile of the Confederates’ desperate charge against the Union earthworks.

Securing this tract of land, the “hole in the donut,” if you will, is an act that will allow future generations to truly feel a sense of what happened in “Bloody Franklin” on that fateful day, walking on the land that witnessed some of the most desperate hours of the entire Civil War.

The cost of this small Franklin battlefield property is an astonishingly expensive \$5 million. (Don’t get me started on the cost of land these days.) However, thanks to the collective efforts of local preservation organizations, Franklin’s Charge and the Battle of Franklin Trust, and anticipated support from the City of Franklin and the State of Tennessee, this hallowed ground is within reach.

The Trust has committed to providing \$600,000 to help complete this critical purchase. The good news is that we’ve already raised \$500,000, thanks to the incredible generosity of some very dedicated individuals. But that means we still need to raise the final \$100,000. This is where you come in.

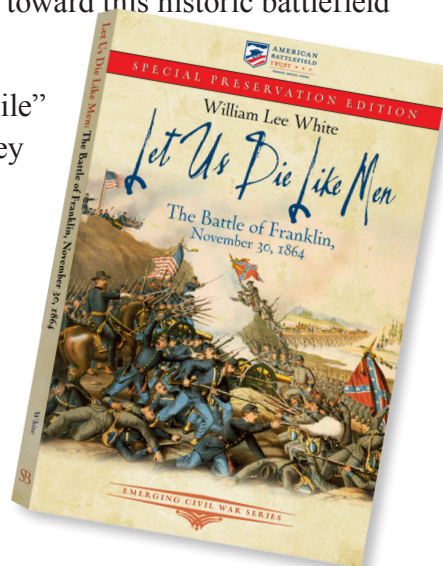
Any amount you can donate to this effort will be matched 50-to-1 toward this historic battlefield completion effort.

I hope I can count on your generosity to help us clear “the final mile” at Franklin. If we are successful, the acquisition and restoration of this key remaining piece will mark the culmination of decades of remarkable and tireless work at this portion of the Franklin battlefield.

If you’re able to make a gift of \$64 or more, as a token of my appreciation, I’ll send you an exclusive Preservation Edition of William Lee White’s book, *Let Us Die Like Men, The Battle of Franklin, November 30, 1864*. This book presents a comprehensive and riveting study of the Battle of Franklin, and I was quite honored to write the foreword for this special edition. White’s 192-page book is considered the penultimate chapter in General Hood and the Army of Tennessee’s story at Franklin, and a perfect addition to your library.



A warehouse currently mars this portion of the battlefield, obstructing the final quarter mile of the Confederates’ desperate charge. ©American Battlefield Trust



The courage with which the soldiers fought amidst the mayhem and savagery of Franklin cannot be overstated. It is up to us to honor their character and commitment by doing our part to see that future generations of Americans can not only hear the story of what happened on these acres on November 30, 1864, but can walk in the footsteps of those soldiers and gain a deeper appreciation of what transpired on this critical hallowed ground.



*A tour group visits the historic Carter House.
© American Battlefield Trust*

Help us secure the last \$100,000 we need today to see this historic land saved for all time. Remember, your gift will be multiplied 50 times in value to nearly complete the once-lost battlefield at Franklin and preserve this hallowed ground forever. For any gift, you'll have my most heartfelt thanks, and if you can be generous enough to send \$64 or more, you will receive the book, *Let Us Die Like Men*.

Please make a generous contribution to our Franklin battlefield preservation campaign today, and let's finally finish what we started.



With most grateful regards,

David N. Duncan

David N. Duncan
President

P.S. We have the chance to finally clear the landscape at Franklin so visitors can walk in the footsteps of the brutal and devastating Confederate charge. **Please help us raise the last \$100,000 and have the value of your gift multiplied 50 times.** As a token of my gratitude for your gift of \$64 or more, I'll send you the exclusive Preservation Edition of *Let Us Die Like Men: The Battle of Franklin, November 30, 1864*. I have been honored to write the foreword in this special Preservation Edition that is only available to Trust members. Please mail your gift today in the envelope provided or donate by visiting battlefields.org/bloody to make your secure gift online.