

Storm Clouds

In 1864, Union General William T. Sherman launched a bold plan in an attempt to deliver a fatal blow to the hard fighting Confederate States of America. The now famous "march to the sea" had scorched through Atlanta after three months of struggle and by October of that year was poised for its final thrust deeper into Dixie.

Meanwhile, far behind the front lines, a little known battle was taking place in the North Alabama city of Decatur that would play a pivotal role in deciding the ultimate success of Sherman's campaign and the life of the Confederacy.

On Aug. 31, 1998 the City of Decatur unveiled 11 historic markers along its new Civil War Walking Tour that traces the 1864 clash between Union and Confederate forces at this key transportation point. The 13 block stroll is a free self-guided tour through the Old Decatur Historic District. Similar to markers at national parks, the plaques on the Decatur tour carry the reader through important events of the four day battle and in the overall history of the community.

During the Civil War, Decatur was a strategic location for the South because here the Memphis and Charleston railroad crossed the Tennessee River. While Sherman's juggernaut was driving deep into Georgia in 1864 its lifeline ran back to Nashville, Tenn., where a Union depot supplied all of the ammunition, food, reinforcements and medical supplies for his army.

Confederate General John Bell Hood, known as a hard fighter because of the devastating attacks he delivered, had held Sherman's troops out of the gates of Atlanta for three months before being forced back in September. Hood now felt a strike at Sherman's supply lines would force the federals into retreat.

In a bold plan, the gallant Southern commander believed a quick victory at Nashville could reverse the course of the war for the Confederacy. But to get to the Union depot in the Tennessee capital, Hood would have to cross the Tennessee River. Decatur, Ala., would be the attempted point of that crossing for north of the city was a railroad and the relatively well-maintained National Road (now U.S. Hwy. 31) that would provide a speedy advance.

Large 36-by-24 inch markers tell of Decatur's involvement in this campaign and how Confederate General Hood, wrapped in a fierce four day battle involving mounted troops, gunboats and scores of infantrymen, said Decatur was "a hard nut to crack."

Eventually, Hood was forced to abandon his attempt to forge the shallow waters at Decatur, and instead, moved 45 miles westward to cross the river at Florence, Ala. However, because the river was overflowing at Florence, Hood and his men had to wait three weeks for the water to subside before crossing and marching toward Nashville.

The fateful delay allowed slow moving Union troops to occupy blocking positions in the Franklin area south of Nashville and thus, stop Hood's attempts to destroy Sherman's supply base.



THE 1864 BATTLE for DECATUR ALABAMA

*A Civil War Walking Tour
Through the Old Decatur Historic District*

**Decatur is located on I-65 Mid-Way
Between Nashville, Tenn. & Birmingham, Ala.**

Be Sure to Visit These Other Fine Stops in Decatur!

Old State Bank - Open weekdays 9:30 a.m.-noon, 1:30-4:30 p.m. Corner of Bank St. & Church St. Oldest bank building in Alabama. (256) 350-5060.

Point Mallard Park - Waterpark open Memorial Day thru Labor Day. Indoor Ice Rink, Championship Golf Course and Campground open daily. 1800 Point Mallard Dr. (256) 350-3000.

Cook's Natural Science Museum - Open Mon.-Sat. 9 a.m.-noon, 1-5 p.m., Sun. 2-5 p.m. 412 13th St. S.E. Free admission to 2,000 exhibits. (256) 350-9347.

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge - Open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Oct.-Feb.; Wed. thru Sun.; 10 a.m.-5 p.m. March-Sept. 34,500 acres of preserved woodlands and South's largest educational center. (256) 350-6639.

The Morgan County Archives - Open weekdays 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Located on Bank Street in Decatur. Archival and manuscript materials including marriage records, newspapers, genealogical materials (census, family histories and Bible records), and extensive photography collection dating from the Civil War.

The Princess Theatre - Please call for upcoming events. 112 2nd Ave. N.E. 1919 art deco historic site. (256) 350-1745.



Decatur/Morgan County CVB
719 6th Ave. SE • P. O. Box 2349
Decatur, Alabama 35602
www.decaturcvb.org
(256) 350-2028 / (800) 524-6181



Civil War
Walking Tour

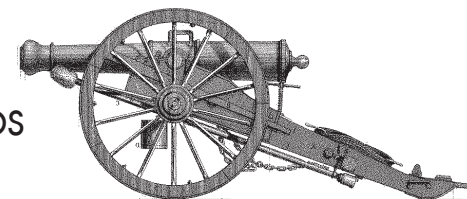


THE 1864 BATTLE for DECATUR ALABAMA



"A Hard Nut to Crack!"

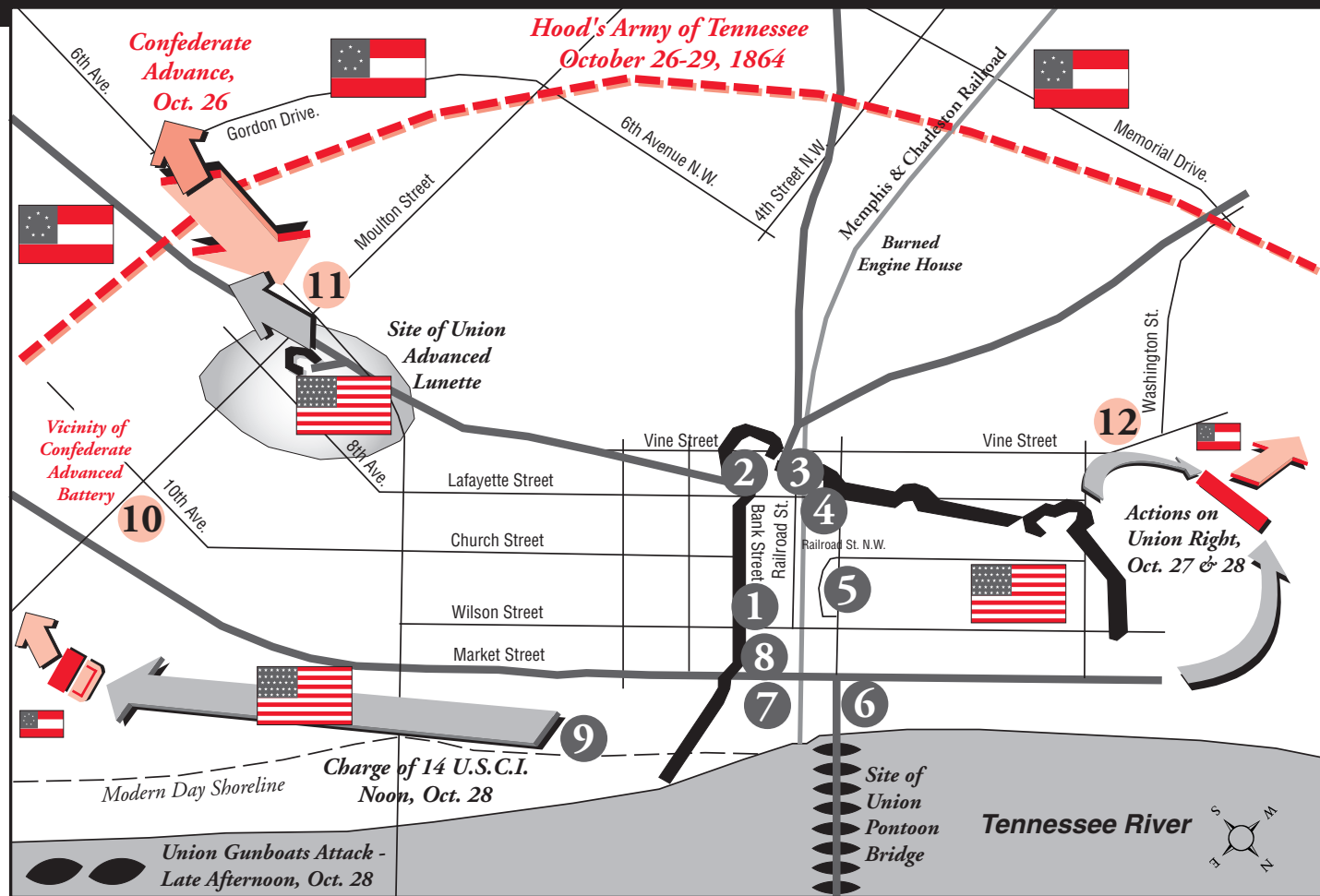
Relive the Four Day Struggle
Between Advancing
Confederates &
Garrisoned
Union Troops



"A Hard Nut to Crack!"

- 1 Old State Bank Building.** Decatur and The Civil War in North Alabama. (2nd Marker) Hood's Middle Tennessee Campaign and The Battle for Decatur.
- 2 Bank & Vine Streets.** "A Hard Nut to Crack." Federal Defenses at Decatur.
- 3 Lafayette Street.** Old City Cemetery. Oldest city cemetery, established 1819.
- 4 Railroad & Lafayette Streets.** "An Affair Most Important to Us." The Federal Right, October 27-28, 1864.
- 5 Sycamore Street.** Dancy-Polk House (circa 1829).
- 6 Sycamore & Market Streets.** Burseson House (circa 1836). (2nd Marker) "A Place of Importance." Union Leadership at Decatur.
- 7 Wilson Street across from the Old State Bank.** Two Bridges Across The Tennessee River.

Indiana Cavalry, possibly the 10th Indiana Cavalry, poses in Bank Street with a battery of artillery in 1864.

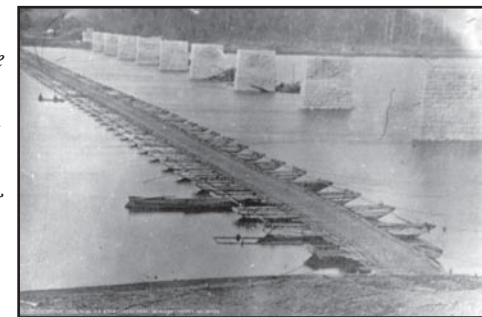


- 8 Harbor View & Market Streets.** Confederate Leadership at Decatur. McCartney Hotel Site.
- 9 Rhodes Ferry Park.** "Captain, we've got it at last." The Charge of the 14th U.S. Colored Infantry.

Extended Driving Tour Stops (No Markers Posted)

- 10** Corner of Moulton Street and 10th Ave. Vicinity of Confederate Advanced Battery.
- 11** Corner of Moulton Street and 6th Avenue. Site of Federal Advanced Lunette and Confederate Advance on Oct. 26, 1864.
- 12** Corner of Vine and Washington Streets. Area of Actions on Union Right, Oct. 27 & 28, 1864.

Union pontoon bridge across the Tennessee River at Decatur next to the burned out Memphis & Charleston Railroad bridge.



Front Cover Photo: Union troops constructing breastworks near the Old State Bank Building, 1864. All photos provided by the Morgan County Archives, 624 Bank Street. Open Monday-Friday 8 a.m.-4 p.m. (256) 351-4726.

September Skirmish Civil War Reenactment held every Labor Day Weekend at Point Mallard featuring Civil War Camps, Crafts & Live Battles. Always Free Admission.