



George Henry Thomas (July 31, 1816 - March 28, 1870)

"Rock of Chickamauga"

"Sledge of Nashville"

"Slow Trot Thomas"

The City of Fort Thomas was named in honor of Major General George Henry Thomas, who ranks among the top Union Generals of the American Civil War. He was born of Welsh/English and French parents in Virginia on July 31, 1816, and was educated at

Southampton Academy. Prior to his military service Thomas studied law and worked as a law deputy for his uncle, James Rochelle, the Clerk of the County Court before he received an appointment to West Point in 1836. He graduated 12th in his class of 42 in 1840 which William T. Sherman was a classmate.

After receiving his commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the 3rd Artillery Unit, he served the Army well for the next 30 years. He was made 1st Lieutenant for action against the Indians in Florida for his gallantry in action. In the Mexican War, he served under Braxton Bragg in the Artillery and was twice cited for gallantry—once at Monterey and the other at Buena Vista. From 1851-1854 was an instructor of artillery and cavalry at West Point, where he was promoted to Captain. Following his service at Ft. Yuma in the West, he became a Major and joined the 2nd Cavalry at Jefferson Barracks. The Colonel there was Albert Sidney Johnston and Robert E. Lee was the Lt. Colonel. Other officers in this regiment who were to become famous as Generals were George Stoneman, for the Union, and for the CSA, John B. Hood, Kirby Smith, and Fitzhugh Lee. In 1860 while on patrol with the 2nd Cavalry in Texas, Thomas was wounded by an arrow during a skirmish with Comanches.

As the Civil War broke out, he was on a 12-month leave of absence in the East. Although a Southerner by birth, Thomas chose to cast his lot with the Union. In a meteoric rise in rank, he was made Lt. Colonel in April, 1861, full Colonel in May, 1861, and on August 17 of the same year, he was made Brigadier General and was given the command of all volunteers assigned to Kentucky. On January 19, 1862, his troops won the first true victory for Kentucky at Mill Springs, defeating the Confederates under General Zollicoffer, who was killed. His troops then joined Buell's forces and fought at Nashville and Pittsburgh Landing, where in April, 1862, he was made a Major General. His command was of all Volunteers and he commanded the right wing of Halleck's Army in the capture of Corinth. Again, he was reassigned to Buell's Army in Kentucky. Dissatisfaction of the higher-ups with Buell's retreat to Louisville caused them to order Thomas to take over Buell's command, but he declined due to his loyalty. He then served as Buell's second-in-command in the important Battle of Perryville.

Soon after this, General Rosecrans replaced Buell and General Thomas served under him with great respect and loyalty. On September 20, 1863, he showed his real battle genius and earned for himself the accolade for which he will forever be known. General Rosecrans, in an effort to cut off Bragg at Chickamauga, in Tennessee, overextended his troops. General Thomas held the left or northern flank and Bragg, reinforced by Longstreet attacked the Union forces on the 19th of September, cutting the supply lines to Chattanooga. Neither side budged. On the 20th, Bragg, finding a hole in the Union lines on the right, poured through and swept the right center of the Union forces all the way to Chattanooga, but General Thomas—on the left—held firm. His lines were bent horseshoe-shaped but did not break. He held from noon until dark and then withdrew, bloodied but unbeaten. This action earned him the nickname or title of "The Rock of Chickamauga." In addition, he received the permanent rank of Brigadier General. Two months later, he took command of the Army of the Cumberland with an attack on Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge and sent the enemy, under Bragg, reeling. In May, 1864, Gen. Sherman began his march on Atlanta, and was joined by Gen. Thomas and his Army of the Cumberland. They pushed aside all opposition, beat Hood at Peachtree Creek, and received the surrender of Atlanta, being the first troops to enter the city. While Sherman continued his march

through Georgia to the sea, Thomas was ordered to Nashville to organize an army to oppose Hood so he could not attack Sherman from the rear. He began to plan his strategy and get his new troops ready. It was his cavalry under General Wilson that prevented Hood from making a rear guard action or stand. The "Rock of Chickamauga" then became the "Hammer of Nashville." This was called, by many, the Union's victory of victories. It was the only major battle in the entire Civil War in which an army was destroyed. For his action, Gen. Thomas was promoted to Major General and received the thanks of Congress.

After the War, General George H. Thomas served as commander of a number of military districts. By 1869, he had assumed command of the Military Division of the Pacific at San Francisco and he died on March 28, 1870, leaving his widow, Frances Kellogg Thomas. They were married in November, 1852, while he was an instructor at West Point and had no children. He was buried at Troy, New York, the home of his wife. Thomas was a man of fine presence, 6 foot tall and weighing 200 pounds. He was studious in habits, deliberate but decided in action and fastidious to the point of exasperation. He was respected by his superiors and beloved by his subordinates. Another nickname he was given was "Pap Thomas."

When General Sherman decided to relocate the Newport Barracks to the top of the hills overlooking the Ohio River to escape the relentless flooding of the "bottoms", he chose the site that is now Fort Thomas. As was tradition at the time, Forts were named to honor Civil War Generals and thus, Fort Thomas got its name. To the best of our current records, General Thomas never lived nor was he stationed at Fort Thomas, but it is believed that he did visit the site upon several occasions. This is the heritage of Fort Thomas, named for a man who placed honor, duty and country above all else.

*courtesy of fthomas.org
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