

THE ATLANTA CAMPAIGN

APPROVED:

Jack B. Scroggs
Major Professor

H W Kamp
Minor Professor

Frank H. Gossett
Director of the Department of History

Robert B. Toulouze
Dean of the Graduate School

THE ATLANTA CAMPAIGN

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Donald Lee Swanson, B. A.

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CHAPTER I

THE ATLANTA CAMPAIGN BEGINS

Winter, 1863, found the Confederate Army of Tennessee in an unenviable position. Vicksburg had fallen, opening the Mississippi River to the Union and dividing the Confederacy, and the Confederate forces had just been driven from the heights of Chattanooga. Now only one serious obstacle stood between the North and another outlet to the sea--Atlanta.

Atlanta was a prominent railroad center of Georgia and it was from here that large numbers of supplies were fed to the Army of Northern Virginia.¹ The defense of this vital rail hub rested initially with General Braxton Bragg as he led his beleaguered Confederate Army of Tennessee from Chattanooga to Dalton in northern Georgia. Long the object of criticism, however, Bragg, "both from necessity and also because of his own request was relieved from command of the army and after a brief rest assigned to duty in Richmond as confidential and personal military advisor to

¹Bradley T. Johnson, A Memoir of the Life and Public Service of Joseph E. Johnston (Baltimore, 1894), p. 113.

President Davis."² One of Bragg's corps commanders, General William J. Hardee, was offered the command of the Confederate Army but declined, and General Joseph E. Johnston, in command of Confederate forces in Mississippi, was assigned to command the retreating forces.³

Johnston spent most of the winter improving the training and discipline of his troops. On February 11, 1864, he received word that General William Tecumseh Sherman and 35,000 Federal troops were moving east from Vicksburg, had already crossed the Pearl River, and were moving along a railroad toward Meridian, Mississippi. President Davis advised Johnston to march forth and meet the enemy before he could set up a new base for supplies and obtain reinforcements from the sea. Johnston replied that such an expedition would require two thirds of the Army of Tennessee and would involve the abandonment of the defensive line in northern Georgia.⁴

Three days later Sherman marched into Meridian and was ordered to move against Dalton and to sever the supply lines between Dalton and Confederate General Leonidas Polk

²Thomas R. Hay, "The Atlanta Campaign," Georgia Historical Quarterly, VII (1923), 19."

³Ibid.

⁴Joseph E. Johnston, Narrative of Military Operations, Directed During the Late War Between the States (New York, 1874), pp. 280-281.

in Mississippi.⁵ On February 16, Johnston was ordered by Davis to reinforce Polk, giving him a force large enough to defeat Sherman. The following day he received more specific orders to "dispatch Lieutenant General Hardee to Mississippi with Cheatham's, Cleburne's, and Walker's divisions of his corps with instructions to unite with Lieutenant General Polk as soon as possible."⁶

Sherman, instead of pushing on toward Mobile as President Davis had anticipated, surprised the Confederate forces by pulling out of Meridian and heading back toward Vicksburg on February 20 with his mission only half completed; he had made no effort to cut off Polk's supply routes from Dalton. Sherman hesitated at making an attack on the Confederate forces at Dalton or on the supply routes because 7,000 Federal reinforcements from Memphis had failed to arrive, having been defeated en route to Meridian, and Sherman did not wish to advance without reinforcements.⁷ But while Sherman's army was withdrawing from Meridian, Union forces from Chattanooga began marching southward toward Ringgold, and another body of infantry and artillery, accompanied by a brigade of cavalry, was moving from

⁵Freeman Gleaves, Rock of Chickamauga: The Life of General George H. Thomas (Norman, Oklahoma, 1948), p. 205.

⁶Johnston, Narrative, pp. 281-283.

⁷Gleaves, Rock of Chickamauga, p. 205.

Cleveland to Red Clay. On the 23rd of February, the Confederate troops set up defenses to thwart the Federal drives--Stewart's and Breckenridge's divisions being posted at the eastern outlet of Mill Creek Gap, with Hindman's division in reserve and Stevenson's division on the Cleveland road in front of Dalton.⁸

The two bodies of Federal troops united on the 23rd and drove Confederate forces from the town of Tunnel Hill. The following day the Union army advanced en masse, marching in three columns with the center column directed at General Joseph Wheeler's Confederate cavalry. Wheeler withstood the attack with horse cavalry, but the right and left columns continued to advance and threatened Wheeler's flanks, forcing him to withdraw to Crow Valley, which lies east of Rocky Face Ridge. On February 25, one serious assault was made by Federal troops against Stewart's division at Mill Creek Gap, but was repulsed.⁹ At the same time, General George H. Thomas and his Army of the Cumberland advanced against the Confederate forces at Rocky Face Ridge and Buzzard's Roost. Fortunately for the Southern defenders, the Federal attack was ill timed, for Thomas attacked just in time to meet a portion of Hardee's corps which was returning from its fruitless march to Meridian.

⁸Johnston, Narrative, pp. 281-283.

⁹Ibid., p. 284.

Thomas had four divisions with him, but reported that he faced five Confederate divisions and Wheeler's cavalry. After a day's skirmishing around Rocky Face Ridge, Thomas gave up the task of taking the Southern stronghold and withdrew his forces, returning to Chattanooga.¹⁰

Both Thomas and Sherman forwarded plans to Grant for a general assault on Atlanta in the spring, but Thomas' retreat from Rocky Face Ridge displeased Grant, and when Grant was named commander-in-chief of all Federal forces on March 3, 1864, he summoned Sherman and mulled over plans for an Atlanta campaign with him. Sherman was to have overall command of three armies--the Cumberland, Tennessee, and Ohio. James B. McPherson, who had graduated number one in his class from West Point, succeeded Sherman as commander of the Army of Tennessee; John M. Schofield, former commander of the Army of the Frontier in the Far West, was named to head the Army of the Ohio; and Thomas remained in command of the Army of the Cumberland. The plan of attack called for the Armies of Ohio and Tennessee to form the wings, with the Army of the Cumberland in the center.¹¹

While Sherman was to have top command over Union forces in Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, and Mississippi,

¹⁰Gleaves, Rock of Chickamauga, p. 207.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 207-209.

General Nathaniel P. Banks was to carry on an offensive in the Southwest, and Grant was personally to direct the Federal army in Virginia. It was Grant's plan that all three Federal forces advance simultaneously in the spring--the main objectives being Joseph E. Johnston's army at Dalton and General Robert E. Lee's Confederate army behind the Rapidan River in Virginia. On May 3, Grant crossed the Rapidan, and two days later he attacked Lee. Almost simultaneously, Sherman swung against the Confederate army in Georgia and the united movement to crush the Confederacy was under way.¹²

Sherman had under his command 110,123 troops when the campaign began, compared with 46,219 troops and 7,813 cavalry for Johnston.¹³ Badly outnumbered, it was Johnston's plan to fight a defensive war, and he had thoroughly scouted the mountainous terrain from Chattanooga to Atlanta, carefully selecting the best sites for defensive action against the approaching Federal army. Sherman moved in three columns, with the center column due to meet Johnston in his fortified positions, and the flanking columns pushing ahead. In this manner, Johnston and his Confederate forces would be able to withstand the Federal attack only so long as the Union flankers did not press too far ahead. Even though

¹²John P. Dyer, "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler (Baton Rouge, 1941), p. 161.

¹³Thomas L. Livermore, Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America (Boston, 1901), p. 119.

Johnston might be able to repulse the central attack, eventually he would be forced to pull back to the next defensive position.¹⁴

Wheeler, who had been picketing the area to the front of his army near Tunnel Hill for several days, received the initial impact of Sherman's first serious assault. Sherman's troops arrived in force in front of Wheeler's picket line on May 6, and on the following day the Federal troops advanced. Wheeler stood his ground against the superior Union force for four hours, then was forced to fall back.¹⁵

Wheeler divided his command on the next day, sending a brigade to strengthen the Confederates left at Dug's Gap, while he himself moved with the main force to the right on the Cleveland road, being reinforced by a division from the Confederate forces at Resaca while en route. On May 9, Wheeler encountered a portion of Sherman's cavalry under the command of General McCook at Varnell's Station and instead of waiting for McCook to attack, Wheeler dismounted two brigades and attacked, with two mounted regiments joining in. The maneuver apparently caught McCook

¹⁴Johnson, A Memoir, pp. 114-116.

¹⁵The War of the Rebellion, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1891), Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 3, 944; hereinafter cited as O. R.

off guard, for his troops broke in confusion and about 100 of his men were captured, including the commander of McCook's second brigade, Colonel Oscar H. LaGrange,¹⁶ who commented to Wheeler after his capture: "If my men had fought as well as yours, I would have got the brigadier's commission promised to me this morning by General Sherman if I succeeded."¹⁷

While Wheeler was busy fighting McCook, the brigade which Wheeler had dispatched to Dug's Gap encountered trouble, running into McPherson's Army of Tennessee, which was screened by a corps of the Army of the Cumberland under the command of General Joseph Hooker. The Confederates concluded that Sherman planned to send Hooker into Dug's Gap and if the Federal troops seized that position it would give them good ground from which to cover McPherson's flank. Consequently, Wheeler's detached brigade dug in and withstood Hooker's attack. The Union general, apparently thinking the position was more strongly defended than originally anticipated, withdrew.¹⁸

A report reached Johnston on the night of May 9 that the Federal Army of Tennessee under McPherson's command was advancing on Resaca, and the Confederate commander

¹⁶Dyer, "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler, pp. 162-163.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 163.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 164-165.

immediately rushed aid to the threatened area--sending three divisions under the command of General Joseph B. Hood.¹⁹ The next morning Hood was recalled after reporting that the Federal army was retiring. Hood left two divisions between Resaca and Dalton so that they could be rushed to either place should an attack come.²⁰

On May 10, reinforcements brought Johnston's total effectives to 66,089,²¹ and on the following day Wheeler was ordered to find out the intentions of the Federal army.²² Wheeler, with all his available troops, moved against the enemy at Varnell's Station, driving back Stoneman's cavalry. Not only did Wheeler force Stoneman to burn a large number of wagons, but the Confederate cavalry chief discovered that two enemy divisions were moving in the direction of Resaca.²³ Johnston, upon hearing of the Union advance, elected to withdraw his forces from Dalton and Mill Creek Gap and fall back on Resaca, and at one o'clock on the morning of May 13 the withdrawal began, the infantry and artillery moving out first and the cavalry following as

¹⁹Johnston, Narrative, p. 307.

²⁰Dyer, "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler, p. 165.

²¹Livermore, Numbers, p. 119.

²²Hardee to Wheeler, May 10, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 4, 687.

²³Wheeler report, June 1, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 3, 945.

as rear guard.²⁴ When the Confederate army reached Resaca it found a battle already under way, but Johnston had time to deploy his defense, putting Hardee in the center, Hood on the right, and Polk on the left.²⁵ Had McPherson pushed on with his attack before Johnston had time to deploy, he might have been able to capture Resaca, and he has often been criticized on this score. McPherson felt, however, that he had advanced too far, and he elected to wait for reinforcements.²⁶ There was little explanation for the manner in which McPherson was allowed to pass through Snake Creek Gap unopposed, but General W. W. Mackall, Johnston's chief of staff, charged it was because of disobedience of orders.²⁷

Spirited fighting continued through May 14, with Hood's corps receiving the brunt of the enemy attack. Wheeler suggested that Hood take the offensive, attacking the Union left, and Johnston adhered to Wheeler's suggestion, ordering Hood to advance. The Federal troops were driven back, but Johnston was still not satisfied with the Confederate

²⁴Johnston, Narrative, p. 308.

²⁵Dyer, "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler, pp. 166-167.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Cleburne report, August 16, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 3, 721.

position at Resaca and ordered another of his planned withdrawals, falling back some ten miles to Calhoun.²⁸

Johnston did not stop at Calhoun. Instead, he continued his retreat on toward Atlanta, moving south over comparatively level ground to Adairsville. Here, Sherman caught up, and a sharp engagement developed on May 17, but it was an engagement so inconsequential that it did not interfere with Johnston's plans.²⁹ The Confederate commander planned to administer a crushing blow at Adairsville, and he continued his withdrawal, planning to take the offensive at that point, which was a strategic road center with two roads leading south, one to Cassville and the other to Kingston.³⁰ It was Johnston's plan to place General Polk's corps on the Cassville road, with Hardee guarding the left flank to Kingston and Hood attacking the Federal left flank if it deployed to move against Polk.³¹ Sherman, once he reached Adairsville, divided his army as Johnston had anticipated, sending his troops down both roads. Johnston prepared to deliver his blow at Kingston, where the distance between the two Union columns

²⁸Dyer, "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler, pp. 166-167.

²⁹Ibid., p. 168.

³⁰Hay, "The Atlanta Campaign," p. 23.

³¹Johnston report, October 20, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 3, 616.

was the greatest, but the plan miscarried. Hood was blamed for failure of the plan. One of his staff officers had reported the advance of Federal troops to the right rear of the Confederate position. Hood retreated, only to find the report of his staff officer was in error, but the opportunity for attack had passed and the Confederate retreat continued toward Cassville.³²

Wheeler, after defeating Stoneman's cavalry, also was retreating in the direction of Cassville when he observed a force of Federal cavalry bearing down on him. Once again the Confederate cavalry chief surprised the enemy, for he ordered his troops to meet the Federal cavalry, to wait until the enemy wavered to charge, and then to charge themselves. The maneuver surprised the Federal force, and the Union cavalry broke in confusion. Wheeler described the Confederate counter-attack order as being

magnificently obeyed; the enemy came up in fine style and charged with great ferocity. They were met, however, as directed and driven back in utter confusion. We continued our charge, killing and wounding large numbers of the enemy, and capturing over 100 prisoners.³³

Sherman moved his army south toward Cassville by as many roads as he could find.³⁴ Thomas and the Army of the

³²Ibid., p. 616.

³³Wheeler report, June 1, 1864, O. R., Series I, XXXVIII, Part 3, 947.

³⁴Sherman to Halleck, September 15, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 1, 65.

Cumberland began to encounter strong Confederate resistance north of Dallas, and the Federal troops halted momentarily and waited for reinforcements.³⁵ Hooker's troops were halted northeast of Dallas at an important road junction to New Hope Church, and Sherman, realizing the importance of the position, ordered him to advance and capture the road junction if possible.³⁶ Hooker moved out, but met stiff resistance at the foot of a slope on which the enemy was entrenched and also in the surrounding dense woods. To make Hooker's advance more difficult, a severe thunderstorm broke, and darkness found him still short of the junction. There were 1,389 fewer men who answered roll call in Hooker's Twentieth Corps that night.³⁷ The morning of May 26 found the enemy still strongly entrenched with the "difficult nature of the ground" delaying a Federal attack.³⁸

Sherman attempted to turn the right flank of the Confederate force on May 27, but with no success, and on the following day he tried to turn the left flank which was commanded by Hardee. Once again the Federal forces

³⁵Walter H. Herbert, Fighting Joe Hooker (Indianapolis, 1944), p. 277.

³⁶Sherman to Halleck, September 15, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 1, 66.

³⁷Hooker report, May 20, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 3, 125.

³⁸Herbert, Fighting Joe Hooker, p. 278.

were thwarted and for the time being Sherman's drive was stalled.³⁹ Hooker, angered at the seemingly fruitless maneuvering by Sherman, voiced his disapproval of the way Sherman was handling things.⁴⁰ He wrote Thomas: "Hereafter I request that it the Twentieth Corps may be kept together. I have been supporting everybody and everything."⁴¹ Hooker also complained about errors in the maps he received and about incorrect information sent him, as well as the length of line to which he was assigned.⁴² Thomas ignored Hooker's complaints, however, saying they were not justified.⁴³

Johnston, who had met with his three lieutenant generals on May 27, planned to take the offensive while Sherman was in the midst of his attempted "turning" moves. Hood was ordered to march through the night and attack the enemy's left flank at daybreak on May 28, with the musketry of Hood's corps serving as the signal for Polk and Hardee to join in the battle.⁴⁴ But Johnston's

³⁹ Alfred H. Burne, Lee, Grant and Sherman (New York, 1939), p. 91

⁴⁰ Herbert, Fighting Joe Hooker, p. 278.

⁴¹ Hooker report, June 3, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 4, 395.

⁴² Hooker report, June 6, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 4, 420.

⁴³ Whipple to Hooker, June 6, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 4, 421.

⁴⁴ Johnston, Narrative, p. 334.

efforts were as fruitless as those of Sherman. The Confederate commander described the morning's activity:

We waited next morning for the signal agreed upon . . . from the appointed time until about 10 a.m., when a message from the Lieutenant General Hood was delivered to me by one of his aide-de-camps, to the effect that he had found Johnston's division on the Federal left thrown back almost at right angles to the general line and entrenching; that, under such circumstances, he had thought it inexpedient to attack, and asked for instructions. I supposed, from the terms of this message, that Hood's corps was in the presence of the enemy, and that his movement and position being known to them, they would be prepared to repel his assault as soon as he was to make it, after his aide-de-camp's return. If the attack had been expedient when Lt. General Hood's message was dispatched, the resulting delay, by enabling the enemy to reinforce the threatened point and to complete the entrenchments begun, made it no longer so. He was therefore recalled.⁴⁵

With the failure of Hood to attack at the pre-arranged time, the Confederate troops were forced to resume the defensive maneuver, while the Union troops slowly advanced--tactics which had already proven costly to both sides in man power. The Union estimated its losses for April and May at 10,528 killed and wounded, while Confederate dead and wounded totaled 9,187.⁴⁶ As long as his losses were not more than double that of the enemy, Sherman considered himself in good condition. He explained:

I always estimated my force at about double his Johnston, and could afford to lose two to one without disturbing our relative proportion; but I also

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 334.

⁴⁶Livermore, Numbers, pp. 119-120.

reckoned that, in the natural strength of the country, in the abundance of mountains, streams, and forests he had a fair offset to our numerical superiority, and therefore endeavored to act with reasonable caution while moving on the vigorous "offensive"⁴⁷

On June 1, Sherman began a "side-stepping" move with his army, shifting his troops from their position near New Hope Church across the railroad and parallel to Johnston's army. Sherman and the Federal army were near Ackworth on June 8, and the Union commander still was in his "side-stepping" process. Johnston and the Confederate army were covering the roads to Atlanta, with Hardee's left at Gilgal Church, Polk's right near the Ackworth and Marietta roads, and Hood in reserve.⁴⁸

The next five days saw Johnston continue to pursue his defensive-withdrawing action, with Sherman pushing on. On June 14, Johnston, accompanied by Hardee and Polk, surveyed the situation from atop Pine Mountain, trying to ascertain whether to maintain an outpost there. As the three generals turned to walk away, an outburst from a Union battery splattered the hilltop. Johnston and Hardee raced for cover "but the ponderous Bishop Polk refused to run and

⁴⁷William T. Sherman, Memoirs of Gen. W. T. Sherman (New York, 1892), II, 49.

⁴⁸Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, Battles and Leaders of the Civil War (New York, 1888), IV, 270.

as a result was killed by a shell from the second volley."⁴⁹ The shell which killed Polk struck him in the side, entering his left arm, passing through his body and right arm, and exploded upon striking a tree.⁵⁰ Johnston was moved to tears when he turned to view the mangled body of his corps commander. Johnston tolk Polk's troops:

You are called to mourn your first captain, your oldest companion in lines. Lt. General Polk fell to-day at the outpost of this army--the army he raised and commanded, in all of whose victories he contributed. In this distinguished leader we have lost the most courteous of gentlemen, the most gallant of soldiers. This Christian, patriot, soldier has neither lived nor died in vain. His example is before you: his mantle rests with you.⁵¹

Ultimately, the Confederates elected to give up Pine Mountain because of its position in front of the main lines. And on June 19, they also yielded Lost Mountain without a struggle, as Johnston sought more favorable ground.⁵² However, as Johnston withdrew to safer terrain, the Union Army of the Cumberland attacked. Johnston contracted his lines and the Union Twentieth Corps, commanded by Hooker, was ordered to push forward vigorously in

⁴⁹Liddell Hart and Basil Henry, Sherman, Soldier, Realist, American (New York, 1929), p. 263.

⁵⁰Stanley E. Horn, The Army of Tennessee (Indianapolis, 1941), p. 332.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 332.

⁵²Johnson and Buel, Battles and Leaders, IV, 271.

pursuit.⁵³ The combination of dense woods, rain, and swollen creeks made the advance difficult for Hooker, and by June 22 the Federal troops were still five miles from Marietta on a ridge top. Here, Hooker directed his men to dig in. Prisoners' reports painted a gloomy outlook for Hooker, as they informed the Union general that the whole Confederate Army of Tennessee was marching upon his position.⁵⁴ Hooker became alarmed and appealed to Sherman for reinforcements throughout the afternoon of the 22nd, finally signalling Sherman: "We have repulsed two heavy attacks and feel confident, our only apprehension being from our extreme right flank. Three entire corps are in front of us."⁵⁵

Instead of being reinforced, Hooker was severely reprimanded by Sherman for failure to send his appeals for help through proper channels.⁵⁶ Sherman made much of Hooker's sentence, "Three entire corps are in front of us," because there were only three corps in Johnston's entire army.⁵⁷ The following day, Sherman rode over to Hooker's

⁵³Thomas to Hooker, June 19, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 4, 522.

⁵⁴Thomas to Sherman, June 22, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 4, 559.

⁵⁵Hooker report, June 22, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 4, 558.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Herbert, Fighting Joe Hooker, p. 280.

area and as it started to rain they sought shelter in a nearby church. Hooker was the recipient of a stern lecture from his commanding general for sending false dispatches and was warned that "such a thing must not occur again." Sherman later remarked, "I reproved him more gently than the occasion demanded."⁵⁸

Sherman, disgruntled over the action of some of his subordinate generals and restless for action, drew up a plan of attack on June 26, and on the following day he sent his forces against heavily fortified Kennesaw Mountain. The Union army was aware that the Confederate stronghold was heavily defended, as Thomas had made a reconnaissance prior to the battle and reported:

During that entire search of almost half a day I did not see one place that seemed to me to afford the slightest prospect of success. The place finally selected was chosen more because the enemy's line seemed vulnerable.⁵⁹

Sherman defied the warnings of Thomas, not because he was confident the position could be taken, but because "the enemy and our own officers had settled down into a conviction that I could not assault fortified lines." The Union commander added, "All looked to me to outflank. An army to be efficient must not settle down to a single mode of

⁵⁸Sherman, Memoirs, II, 59.

⁵⁹Military Society of Massachusetts Papers, VIII, 480, as cited in Dyer, Rock of Chickamauga, p. 220.

offense, but must be prepared to execute any plan which promises success."⁶⁰

The battle of Kennesaw Mountain became one of the most bloody of the Civil War. The assault began at 9 a.m., on the 27th of June, and two and one-half hours later Sherman admitted that "the assault was over, and had failed."⁶¹ The Union counted 2,051 casualties among its 14,174 effectives for the day, while the Confederates listed 432 wounded and killed from a force of 17,733.⁶²

One Confederate soldier described the fighting:

The Yankees seemed very obstinate and in no hurry to get away from our front and we had to keep up the firing and shooting then in self defense. They seemed to walk up and take death as coolly as if they were automatic or wooden men It was verily a life and death grapple. We could not be reinforced on account of our position, and we had to stand up to the rack, fodder or no fodder. When the Yankees fell back and the fighting ceased, I never saw so many broken down and exhausted men in my life. I was as sick as a horse and as wet with blood and sweat as I could be; and many of our men were vomiting with excessive fatigue, over-exhaustion and sunstroke. . . .⁶³

On June 29, a truce was called so that the Union could bury its dead,⁶⁴ and on the same day Johnston was reinforced

⁶⁰Sherman to Halleck, September 15, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 1, 68.

⁶¹Johnson and Buel, Battles and Leaders, IV, 272.

⁶²Livermore, Numbers, pp. 120-121.

⁶³Horn, The Army of Tennessee, p. 336.

⁶⁴Sherman, Memoirs, II, 60.

by 3,000 members of the Georgia state troops, commanded by General G. W. Smith.⁶⁵ When fighting resumed, the Federal army hacked at Johnston's flank and swung around Kennesaw Mountain, hoping to cross the rain-swollen Chattahoochee River, but a line of Confederate barricades slowed the Union army at Ruff's Station, halfway between Marietta and the river. Sherman ordered Thomas to pursue closely and capture Johnston before he got across the Chattahoochee River, and Thomas spurred his Army of the Cumberland into heated pursuit, catching the Confederate rear guard below Marietta. The Confederate line was stubborn, however, and Sherman himself rode up and impatiently informed Thomas: "Johnston is crossing the Chattahoochee. There is nothing in front of you but skirmishers."⁶⁶ Meantime, Sherman hurried McPherson and the Army of Tennessee around on a long expedition to Roswell, a factory town which lay about 20 miles northeast of the railroad as the river coursed. At the same time, Thomas threw up breastworks.⁶⁷ But Johnston eluded the pursuing Federal forces, escaped with his army across the

⁶⁵Smith report, September 15, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 3, 970.

⁶⁶Society of the Army of the Cumberland, 1898 Reunion, Report, p. 123, as cited in Dyer, Rock of Chickamauga, p. 226.

⁶⁷Ibid.

Chattahoochee and began mapping strategy for a prolonged defensive war.

The Atlanta campaign up to this point followed a pattern of consistent strategic withdrawals by Johnston and steady pursuit by Sherman. Johnston, his forces outnumbered by those of Sherman, mapped a brilliant defensive campaign. He studied the terrain closely and was familiar with his surroundings, and his method of retreat was a slow, methodical movement. Sherman was forced to resort to "turning movements," forcing the Confederate army to fall back by repeatedly turning its flanks. Thus, a pattern had been set: Johnston retreating slowly and Sherman pushing ahead--a pattern which could result in a prolonged campaign.

CHAPTER II

CONFUSION IN COMMAND

Johnston held the Chattahoochee line for twenty-six days, carefully noting activities of the Union army and waiting for the time when he could act to advantage. Although considerable skirmishing took place during this period, Johnston was unable to take the offensive because of a scarcity of ammunition and his desire to save all his supplies for the critical moment, if and when it arrived.¹

President Davis grew impatient at the delay. Davis, himself a West Point graduate, would much rather have been in Johnston's position than in his own. He had expressed surprise and disappointment when elected to the presidency, saying he felt he was not as well suited for the office as some others and adding, "I thought myself better adapted to command in the field."²

The fact that Johnston believed in fighting a defensive war, while Davis was anxious for action at Chattahoochee was not the first point on which they had disagreed. In

¹Don Seitz, Braxton Bragg: General of the Confederacy, (Columbia, 1924), p. 444.

²Gustavus W. Smith, Confederate War Papers (New York, 1884), pp. 14-15.

October, 1861, Generals Beauregard, G. W. Smith and Johnston voiced their opposition to Davis for his repeated refusal to reinforce the Confederate army. Smith wrote:

When the President had thus clearly and positively stated his inability to put this Army in the condition deemed by the Generals necessary before entering upon an active campaign, it was felt that it might be better to run the risk of almost certain destruction fighting upon the other side of the Potomac, rather than see the gradual dying out and deterioration of this army It was felt that there was no other course left but to take a defensive position and await the enemy.³

On July 15, 1863, Davis reprimanded Johnston for his objection to the inclusion of Mississippi in his command.

Davis wrote:

Your dispatch of the 5th instant, stating that you "considered" your "assignment to the immediate command in Mississippi" as giving you a "new position" and as "limiting your authority," being a repetition of a statement which you were informed was a grave error That there may be no possible room for further mistake in the matter, I am compelled to recapitulate the substance of all orders and instructions given to you, so far as they bear on this question On the 24th November last you were assigned, by Special Order No. 275, to a definite geographical command. The description includes a portion of Western North Carolina, and Northern Georgia, the States of Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi, and that part of the State of Louisiana east of the Mississippi River This command by its terms embraced the armies under command of Gen. Bragg in Tennessee, of Gen. Pemberton at Vicksburg, as well as those at Port Hudson, Mobile, and the forces in Eastern Tennessee⁴

³Ibid., pp. 18-19.

⁴Joseph E. Johnston, Narrative of Military Operations, Directed During the Late War between the States (New York, 1874), pp. 230-241.

Johnston argued that he could not adequately include Mississippi under his command; that the amount of territory assigned was too great for him to command. Johnston took the rebuke from Davis as being "obnoxious" and the Confederate general added: "My belief that he [Davis] was incapable of an absurdity too gross to have been committed by the government of any other civilized nation, certainly should not have brought upon me his harsh censure."⁵

The feud between Johnston and Davis continued on March 18, 1864, when the general wrote the Confederate president:

My department is destitute of mules. I must, therefore depend on the Quartermaster's Department for them There has been unnecessary accumulation of breadstuffs and corn at Mobile--six months' supply for a much larger force than Major General Maury's (commander at Mobile). Half of it will spoil during the summer, if left at Mobile. It would be economical, therefore, as well as convenient, to transfer that portion of it to this army.⁶

Johnston received no reply to his letter and on March 22 he wrote Bragg: "The fact that my letter of the 18th . . . not answered made me apprehend that my correspondence with General Bragg in relation to the spring campaign had not been understood by the President."⁷

⁵Ibid., p. 243.

⁶Ibid., pp. 295-297.

⁷Ibid., p. 299.

At the same time, Hood was adding to Johnston's difficulties with Davis. On March 7, 1864, Hood wrote the President:

I am exceedingly anxious, as I expressed to you before leaving Richmond, to have this Army strengthened, so as to enable us to move to the rear of the enemy and with a certainty of success We should march to the front as soon as possible, so as not to allow the enemy to concentrate and advance upon us I⁸ am eager for us to take the initiative

And on April 13, Hood wrote Bragg:

Sorry to inform you that I have done all in my power to induce General Johnston to accept the proposition you made to move forward. He will not consent, as he desires the troops to be sent here When we are to be in better condition to drive the enemy from our country, I am not able to comprehend.⁹

Hood had formed a somewhat inflated opinion of himself during his winter in Richmond, where he rested from wounds prior to joining Johnston's command. During his stay in the Confederate capital, he was taken into Davis' confidence and often conferred with Bragg. Hood criticized Johnston's defensive campaign from the outset and communicated with Davis and Bragg frequently without traditional regard for military channels. In such manner, the three of them-- Hood, Davis and Bragg--created a situation whereby a corps

⁸Richard O'Connor, Hood: Cavalier General (New York, 1951), p. 188.

⁹Ibid., pp. 188-189.

commander was on more confidential terms with the administration than was his commanding officer.¹⁰

While in Richmond, Hood had cultivated the friendship of Mrs. Mary Chestnut, wife of General James Chestnut of South Carolina, who was "high in the court of Davis"; and Sally Preston, daughter of General Preston, who was a familiar figure at presidential receptions. Thus, Hood had taken special efforts to cultivate friends of Davis.¹¹

He told Mrs. Chestnut one day:

The President was finding fault with some of his officers in command, and I said, "Mr. President, why don't you come and lead us yourself; I would follow you to the death."¹²

The politico-military triangle between Hood, Johnston and Davis, as well as their followers, ended bitterly for all concerned, for by the spring of 1864 it had become a war of attrition. Johnston believed that the Confederacy's only hope of survival was by a defensive war, with retreats and counter-offensives, thus conserving man power and resources; Davis wanted to take the offensive and drive the Union forces back, possibly capturing some northern cities in the process; and Hood, when dispatched to the West from Richmond, was in agreement with the President.¹³

Hood had fought under Johnston as a brigade officer at Yorktown, Eltham's Landing and Seven Pines. When he

¹⁰Ibid., p. 187.

¹¹Ibid., p. 179.

¹²Ibid., p. 180.

¹³Ibid., p. 182.

arrived at Army Headquarters at Dalton to join Johnston's western command, Hood was a different man from the one who had with enthusiasm executed prior orders. "He had been flattered socially; pampered by the Confederate statesmen up to and including Davis; praised for his sacrifices; informed night and day that he was a knight and cavalier such as had not walked the earth since King Arthur's day."¹⁴ Therefore, it was no wonder that he was quick to find fault with Johnston, whose hatred of Davis was described by Mary Chestnut as amounting "to a religion. With him it colors all things. He hates not wisely but too well."¹⁵

As Johnston and the Confederate army sat tight at the Chattahoochee, rumors spread throughout Richmond that he would continue to retreat and abandon Atlanta to its fate. Georgia Governor Joseph E. Brown joined Johnston in urging reinforcements, requesting specifically cavalry to attack Sherman's rear. Davis and Bragg held that the "disparity of force" in Georgia "was less than elsewhere" and so let matters stand yet arguing that localities had to be held. Brown, when getting the negative reply from Davis, promised Johnston he would raise 10,000 men in ten days.¹⁶

¹⁴Ibid., p. 186.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁶Seitz, Bragg, p. 444.

Johnston's following in the Confederate Congress became alarmed at the growing rumors of his possible dismissal and dispatched a committee to visit him, hoping to induce him to act before it was too late. George G. Vest, a senator from Missouri, was one member of the body. He reported the visit to Johnston thus:

The committee informed the general of President Davis' attitude and he became very indignant, "You may tell Mr. Davis," he said, "that it would be folly for me under the circumstances to risk a decisive engagement. My plan is to draw Sherman further and further from his base in the hope of weakening him and by cutting his army in two. That is my only hope of defeating him I know Mr. Davis thinks that he can do a great many things that other men would hesitate to attempt. For instance, he tried to do what God had failed to do. He tried to make a soldier of Braxton Bragg and you know the result. It couldn't be done."¹⁷

While Johnston was talking with the committee, a courier informed him that Sherman's army was crossing the Chattahoochee, with one division across Peach Tree Creek. Johnston rose and said: "Gentlemen, the time has come to strike. Sherman has cut his army into three pieces and I believe now, by rapid movements, I can whip him in detail."¹⁸

Johnston had selected the high ground above Peach Tree Creek as his point of defense, intending to strike Sherman's force as it split to cross the creek,¹⁹ but he never had a chance to put his plan into effect. On July 17 he was

¹⁷Ibid., p. 445.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

relieved of command. Just how much importance a visit from Bragg to Johnston was to the latter's dismissal is undetermined. Bragg, on July 14, 1864, reported to Johnston that he was en route to Lieutenant General S. D. Lee's headquarters and planned to confer with Lieutenant General E. Kirby Smith to see what reinforcements they could offer. "His visit to me was unofficial, he assured me," Johnston wrote. "We had no other conversation concerning the Army of Tennessee."²⁰

Johnston added:

Supposing he had been sent by the President to learn and report upon the condition of military affairs . . . I described them to him briefly . . . and proposed to send for the lieutenant generals, that he might obtain such minute attention from them as he desired. He replied that he would be glad to see those officers as friends, but only in that way He talked much more of military affairs in Virginia than those of Georgia, asserting what I believed, that Sherman's army exceeded Grant's in fighting force; and impressed upon me distinctly that his visit was merely personal.²¹

However, Bragg's statement that the trip was a personal one and that it was unofficial was an evasion, for he was given the following dispatch on July 9, 1864:

Sir: You will proceed to Georgia, confer with General Johnston in relation to military affairs there, and then, as circumstances may indicate, visit the country west or east of Atlanta, with a view to such dispositions and preparations as may best promote the ends and objects which have been discussed between us. It is desirable you should reach Atlanta as soon as practicable. Your movements

²⁰Ibid., pp. 445-446.

²¹Ibid.

thence will be governed by your discretion, remembering, however, that your services here are daily needed, and your return desired at as early a day as public duties elsewhere will permit. Very Respectfully
Yours, Jefferson Davis.²²

Bragg, upon his arrival in Atlanta on July 13, had telegraphed Davis: "Our army all south of the Chattahoochee, and indications seem to favor an entire evacuation of this place." Later on the same day he again telegraphed Davis: "Our army is sadly depleted, and now reports 10,000 less than the returns of the 10th of June. I find but little encouraging."²³

On July 15, after his talk with Johnston, Bragg reported to Davis:

He [Johnston] has not sought my advice, and it was not volunteered. I cannot learn that he has any more plans for the future than he has had in the past. It is expected he will await the enemy on a line some three miles from here, and the impression prevails that he is now more inclined to fight²⁴

Bragg dispatched a messenger to Richmond later in the day in which he reported that no offensive operation appeared to be planned by Johnston; that there was much disappointment and dissatisfaction; that the Union army had taken a great advantage and could possibly destroy Montgomery "with a mere raid"; and that there was only one remedy--offensive action. Bragg also suggested that if a change in commanders should be deemed necessary, "Lieutenant

²²Ibid., pp. 446-447.

²³Ibid., p. 447.

²⁴Ibid.

General Hood would give unlimited satisfaction, and my estimate of him, always high, has been raised by his conduct in this campaign."²⁵

Johnston received notification on July 17, 1864, that he was being relieved of command. The order from S. Cooper, adjutant and inspector general, read:

Lieutenant General J. B. Hood has been commissioned to the temporary rank of general under the late law of Congress. I am directed by the Secretary of War to inform you that as you have failed to arrest the advance of the enemy in the vicinity of Atlanta, far in the interior of Georgia, and express no confidence that you can defeat or repel him, you are hereby relieved of command of the Army and Department of Tennessee, which you will immediately turn over to General Hood.²⁶

Johnston bade farewell to his troops, saying:

I cannot leave this noble army without expressing my admiration of the high military qualities it has displayed. A long and arduous campaign has made conspicuous every soldierly virtue, endurance of toil, obedience to orders, brilliant courage. The enemy has never attacked but to be repulsed and severely punished. You, soldiers, have never argued but from courage, and never counted your foes. No longer your leader, I will still watch your career, and will rejoice in your victories. To one and all I offer assurances of friendship, and bid an affectionate farewell.²⁷

The removal of Johnston from command displeased the troops. When asked what he thought of the change of

²⁵Ibid., pp. 448-449.

²⁶Cooper to Johnston, July 17, 1864, The War of the Rebellion, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1891), Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 885.

²⁷Seitz, Bragg, p. 451.

commanders, one Missouri soldier said, "Oh, Sir, we are mightily cut down about it! The bomb-proofs and the newspapers complain of his retreats. Why, we did not miss a meal from Dalton to Atlanta, and we were always ready for the fight. We never felt we were retreating."²⁸ A soldier from Tennessee said: "I saw, I will say, thousands of men cry like babies--regular, old-fashioned boohoo, boohoo, boohoo."²⁹

Whereas the soldiers respected Johnston, their opinions varied considerably in regard to Hood. A lieutenant from Mississippi wrote: "Hood is the most unpopular General in the army and some of the troops are swearing they will not fight under him . . . all regret that Johnston is gone."³⁰ The change in command pleased Sherman, for the Union general believed "that character of a leader is a large factor in the game of war." Schofield, Hood and McPherson had graduated in the same class from West Point: McPherson number one, Schofield number seven, and Hood number forty-four. Knowing this, Sherman said, "I was pleased at this change" in command.³¹

²⁸Johnson, A Memoir, p. 303.

²⁹Earl Schenck Miers, The General Who Marched to Hell (New York, 1951), p. 127.

³⁰Bell Irwin Wiley, Life of Johnny Reb; the Common Soldier of the Confederacy (New York, 1943), p. 241.

³¹Miers, The General, p. 127.

Among those objecting to Johnston's removal in favor of Hood was Robert E. Lee, in command of Confederate forces in Virginia. When notified by Davis that a change in command was contemplated, Lee warned that a change of command was dangerous, and that "we may lose Atlanta and the army, too We must risk much" Lee added, that if Johnston were to be removed, Hardee might be a more able successor than Hood. "General Hardee has more experience in managing an army . . . ," Lee said.³²

Thus, the die was cast in Georgia and the Confederacy was about to spring from under its cloak of defensive warfare and take the offensive. The Confederacy had elected to dismiss a capable leader in Johnston, replacing him with Hood, a man who had never before commanded an army of this size.

³²O'Connor, Cavalier General, pp. 199-200.

CHAPTER III

BATTLE OF PEACH TREE CREEK

When Johnston turned over command of the Army of Tennessee to Hood, he explained his plans to him. It was Johnston's plan to engage the Union forces while they were split in crossing Peach Tree Creek. If unsuccessful, the divergence of the Federal line of retreat would enable the Confederate forces to secure decisive results; if unsuccessful, Johnston felt he had a safe place of refuge in the nearby Confederate trenches. By holding the ground, Johnston felt he could keep back Sherman's forces until the promised 10,000 men from Governor Brown arrived. Once the Georgian troops arrived, it was Johnston's intention to use those troops to man the works of Atlanta on the side nearest Peach Tree Creek, leisurely falling back into the city with the remainder of his Confederate army. Then, when the Federal army approached Atlanta he would march his Confederate army in force against the enemy, hoping to drive Sherman back to the Chattahoochee where there were no fords, or to the east, cutting the Union forces off from their communications. At worst, the

Confederate army had a secure place of refuge in Atlanta, where Johnston felt he could hold out forever.¹

Peach Tree Creek runs north of Atlanta and was passable by two fords. Hood faithfully tried to carry out Johnston's plan, and attacked Sherman as he split his force to cross the creek. Hood elected to take advantage of a gap between Schofield and Thomas. After attacking and wiping out Thomas' command, he planned to envelop the other two armies in turn. But Sherman had called upon Howard to take two divisions and plug the gap. While crossing Peach Tree Creek, Thomas reported that there was skirmishing to his right and to his front. Hood, hoping to deceive Sherman, had sent Wheeler and 2,500 cavalymen to hold McPherson and Schofield, with Cheatham's corps to be used to widen the gap between the Federal left and right.²

Although delayed by Cheatham getting into position late, Hood launched his attack at 4 p.m. on Thomas' force, the onset of the attack falling mostly on Newton and Hooker. Thomas, upon hearing the attack, rushed forward and directed the defense in person, but the impetus of the Confederate attack could not be halted. Then the

¹ Joseph E. Johnston, Narrative of Military Operations, Directed During the Late War Between the States (New York, 1874), pp. 280-281.

² Freeman Gleaves, Rock of Chickamauga: The Life of General George H. Thomas (Norman, Oklahoma, 1948), p. 229.

Union artillery opened up; Hood retreated, reformed, and attacked again, only to be driven back. The Confederate troops attacked still a third time, Hood feeling out the Federal line for a possible weakness, but the withering cannon fire again drove the rebels back--this time to the trenches prepared by Johnston.³

Hood's initial success in the attack was partially due to the fact that Thomas had been given a bad map, one showing Peach Tree Creek to be shorter than it was. As a result, Thomas' Fourteenth Corps was so far to the right that it was completely out of action. Newton was well forward and on Thomas' left, so the assault hit his rear and left flank. Making matters worse for the Union, all three divisions of the Twentieth Corps were forced to cross by the same bridge and were in the midst of moving across when the attack occurred. These forces scrambled to positions south of the creek and left most of their artillery on the north side of the creek. The determining factor that saved the Union forces from a rout was the fact that Thomas had ridden forward, perceived the situation as "an artillerist's dream," and had poured artillery into the advancing columns in close formation along the valley bottoms. Thomas brought the whole mass of guns into action at once, catching the Confederates in a vicious

³Ibid., pp. 230-231.

cross fire of cannon from ahead and musketry from the flank.⁴

Hood blamed part of his failure on Johnston's departure, claiming that Johnston had left in such a hurry that he was not certain where all his troops were posted.⁵

Hood pulled his forces back to Atlanta, hoping to build new inner defenses against Schofield and Thomas to the north and east of the city. This time, Hood planned to send Hardee's corps on a night march from Atlanta to the Confederate right, while attacking with the main force against McPherson. If successful, Hardee would swing wide, circle the Federal right, and attack McPherson's rear, driving McPherson's troops back on Schofield toward the Confederate defenses to the east of Atlanta. Cheatham, on the right of this new line of defense, was to attack when the Federals were driven in on him, pushing them down Peach Tree Creek on Thomas.⁶

But Hood's well-laid plans went awry, as Hardee was unable to move all his troops out of Atlanta until nearly midnight, and because of the late departure, was forced to

⁴Fletcher Pratt, Eleven Generals (New York, 1949), pp. 203-204.

⁵Earl Schenck Miers, The General Who Marched to Hell (New York, 1951), p. 138.

⁶Hood's report, February 15, 1864, The War of the Rebellion, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1891), Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 3, 631; hereinafter cited as O. R.

take a circuitous route. When he finally made his belated arrival on McPherson's troops he found that McPherson's left was secured by breastworks and abatis. Too, McPherson had, apparently almost by accident, reinforced his left with Grenville M. Dodge's corps.⁷

Thus, when Hardee attacked it was a flank attack, rather than a turning movement. Dodge, who was moving his corps into position, was turned by Hardee's surprise attack. Hardee, suddenly realizing that he was meeting stiffer opposition than expected, rushed a courier to Wheeler at Decatur, requesting him to join the main attack with all speed possible. Wheeler left Decatur, but his cavalry was not enough to give the Confederates a victory and the rebels were driven back.⁸

The battle had taken its toll, though. In addition to heavy casualties on both sides, the Union had lost one of its most capable leaders. McPherson, who had just left a conference with Sherman when the attack took place, hastened to Dodge. Satisfied that Dodge could hold his position, he started to check the rest of his line and galloped off on horseback. He had gone only about 100 yards

⁷Thomas R. Hay, "The Atlanta Campaign," Georgia Historical Quarterly, VII (1923), 40; Dodge's report, November 25, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 3, 384.

⁸John P. Dyer, "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler (Baton Rouge, 1941), pp. 179-180.

when he ran across a skirmish line of Confederates. They loudly demanded his surrender, but the Union general waved his hat in the air and wheeled to gallop away. He was cut down by a volley and mortally wounded. Although his staff had been scattered and he was alone with an orderly, who was captured, news of his death was carried to the Union lines by a wounded Federal soldier who managed to get away and report the Union's great loss. The tide of battle shifted in a matter of moments, McPherson's body was recovered and several of the skirmishers captured. Some of McPherson's equipment was found on the prisoners, including a dispatch from Sherman which detailed the day's plans.⁹

McPherson was replaced by General John A. Logan in the midst of the battle, and there was considerable confusion as Logan took command, but not enough to cause the Union forces to give ground.¹⁰ After the battle subsided, Sherman was urged by President Abraham Lincoln to appoint Hooker commander of the Army of Tennessee, Lincoln being of the belief that Hooker was a more competent and experienced general. However, Sherman declined Lincoln's request, and the Union president repeated the request. Upon Lincoln's second request to name Hooker commander of the Army of

⁹Jacob D. Cox, The Army in the Civil War (New York, 1885), pp. 169-170.

¹⁰Sherman to Halleck, July 25, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 248.

Tennessee, Sherman replied that he would not do so under the threat of resignation. If Hooker were to be given command of the troops formerly commanded by McPherson, Sherman said his resignation was "at the service of the President."¹¹

Thomas did not want to see Logan in permanent command of the Army of Tennessee, feeling that Logan was too theatrical. He described Logan as being "brave enough and a good officer but if he had an army I am afraid he would edge over on both sides and annoy Schofield and me."¹²

The appointment was then given to General O. O. Howard, the first of numerous changes in command to be made by Sherman as the Union army prepared for a long siege of Atlanta.¹³

Hooker, who had voiced dissatisfaction over Howard being given command of the Army of Tennessee when he was the senior of the two, tendered his resignation on the ground that his "rank and service had been ignored." Sherman accepted the resignation, adding that it was "approved and heartily recommended."¹⁴ Sherman had remarked upon naming Howard commander of the Army of Tennessee:

¹¹Walter H. Herbert, Fighting Joe Hooker (Indianapolis, 1944), p. 286.

¹²G. F. Dawson, Life and Services of Gen. John A. Logan (Chicago, 1886), pp. 516-518.

¹³Halleck to Sherman, July 26, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, p. 260.

¹⁴William T. Sherman, Memoirs of Gen. W. T. Sherman (New York, 1892), II, 49.

All are well pleased with General Howard's appointment but Generals Logan and Hooker General Hooker is offended because he thinks he is entitled to the command. I must be honest and say he is not qualified or suited to it. He talks of quitting . . . I shall not object. He is not indispensable to our success. He is welcome to my place if the President awards it, but I cannot name him to so important a command as the Army of the Tennessee.¹⁵

After Hooker departed, Sherman wrote: "He is envious, imperious and a braggart. Self prevailed with him and knowing him intimately I honestly preferred Howard."¹⁶

Sherman often has been criticized because of his actions in the battle of Peach Tree Creek on July 21 because he did not go ahead and enter Atlanta. He had two armies idle that day, the Army of the Cumberland, which was two thirds as large as the Army of Tennessee, and the Army of Ohio, his largest army. Schofield, upon urging Sherman to let him attack, was told by the Union commander: "Let the Army of the Tennessee fight it out this time." Later, in speaking of the battle, Sherman regretted the fact that he did not allow Schofield to attack. Persons close to Sherman felt that the loss of McPherson took the Union general's attention away from everything at the time except the Army of Tennessee.¹⁷

¹⁵Sherman to Halleck, July 27, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 272.

¹⁶Herbert, Fighting Joe Hooker, p. 286.

¹⁷Grenville Dodge, The Battle of Atlanta and Other Campaigns, Addresses, Etc. (Council Bluffs, Iowa, 1910), p. 50.

When Sherman elected to use only one of his armies, it enabled Hood to retreat to the city of Atlanta and dig in intrenchments there. Once Hood was in the city, Sherman saw only one avenue of escape for him, that being the Macon Road. The Union commander was content with keeping Hood in the city and began efforts to cut off his escape to Macon, saying: "I would rather that Hood should fight it out at Atlanta than to retreat farther toward Macon."¹⁸

Sherman planned to move against Atlanta on July 27 after strongly intrenching his front from a hill on the south side of Prector's Creek to the railroad east of the city. He planned to move the Army of the Tennessee to the right, threatening East Point and forcing Hood to abandon Atlanta, or at least allow the Union troops to occupy the railroad south of the city. At the same time, the Union commander planned to send 3,500 cavalry troops under command of General McCook to the right of the city and about 5,000 cavalry troops under the command of General Stoneman to the left. Stoneman was to reach the railroad near Griffin, and, if possible, to proceed to Macon and release the Union prisoners there. After succeeding in his mission to Macon, Stoneman was to advance with about 2,000 men to Andersonville and release prisoners there. Sherman

¹⁸Sherman to Grant, July 25, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 247.

realized that he had outlined a difficult plan for Stoneman, but added:

This is probably more than he can accomplish, but it is worthy of a determined effort. While these are in progress I will, with the main army, give employment to all of the rebel army still in Atlanta.¹⁹

McCook was the first to report trouble once Sherman began to move on Atlanta. At 9 p.m. on July 27, he reported that he had encountered pickets near Campbellton and was unable to cross the river there because the "whole river" was picketed. He stated that he would be delayed in crossing, probably attempting to cross below his present position the next morning.²⁰

At the same time, Kilpatrick and the Third Division of Cavalry pushed ahead with eight artillery pieces and about 4,000 men, breaking through Confederate lines near Fairburn, crossing the West Point Railroad, and, after severe fighting, reaching the Atlanta and Macon Railroad. Kilpatrick managed to destroy much of the railroad track and burn considerable public property before being forced back.²¹

Meanwhile, Sherman was planning to march toward East Point, taking it for granted that Hood would shift his

¹⁹Sherman to Halleck, July 26, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 260-261.

²⁰McCook report, July 27, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 274.

²¹James Moore, Kilpatrick and Our Cavalry (New York, 1865), pp. 166-170.

front to prepare for an attack from that direction. Sherman thought that if he could manage to get Hood to extend his line far enough, he would extend out of Atlanta.²²

However, as Sherman began his move toward East Point, Schofield reported that the Confederate troops were still in force to his front, but that about 500 cavalry troops had moved out in the direction of Decatur.²³

Nevertheless, Sherman continued with his plan, the Army of Tennessee marching around Thomas toward Ezra Church, which was located about four miles west of Atlanta. It was while the Union Army was conducting its "turning movement" that Hood again took the initiative. Hoping to save his rail communications, he ordered Lieutenant General Stephen D. Lee to take Hood's old corps and march directly on Howard. At the same time, Stewart's corps would swing south of Ezra Church and come up on Howard's rear.²⁴

The Confederate attack struck the right of Howard's line about 11:30 a.m. on July 28, the brunt of the attack falling on General Logan and the Fifteenth Corps. Fighting continued for approximately four hours before the

²²Sherman to Schofield, July 27, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 274-275.

²³Schofield to Sherman, July 27, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 275.

²⁴John P. Dyer, The Gallant Hood (Indianapolis, 1950), p. 262.

Confederates retreated.²⁵ Hood had not counted on the stubborn resistance and was forced to alter his plans after the attack began, sending Stewart to Lee's aid and then dispatching Hardee in the afternoon to "ride with all haste to direct Lee and Stewart at Ezra Church." But by the time Hardee arrived, the Confederates already had been beaten back.²⁶

It was Hood's opinion that

One corps struggled nobly, whilst the neighboring corps frustrated its effort by simple inactivity; and whilst the entire Army might fight desperately one day, it would fail in action the following day. Stewart's gallant attack on the twentieth was neutralized by Hardee's inertness on the right; and the failure in the battle of the twenty-second is to be attributed also to the effect of the "timid defensive" policy upon this officer, who, although a brave and gallant soldier, neglected to obey orders . . . and swing away, totally independent of the main body of the Army.²⁷

Hood, therefore, blamed the defeat at Ezra Church on the inability of his troops "in bringing about united action."²⁸ In all, the battles of July 20, 22 and 28 had claimed nearly 22,500 Confederate dead, wounded, and missing. Union losses for the same battles were estimated at 6,200.²⁹

²⁵Howard to Sherman, July 28, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 283.

²⁶Dyer, The Gallant Hood, p. 264.

²⁷Miers, The General, p. 150. ²⁸Ibid., p. 150.

²⁹Benson J. Lossing, Pictorial History of the Civil War in the United States of America (Hartford, 1868), III, 394.

The Ezra Church battle was the first in which Howard had experienced command of the Army of Tennessee, and Sherman was highly pleased with his choice of commanders, saying,

He [Howard] evidently aimed to reconcile Gen. Logan in his disappointment, and to gain the heart of his army, to which he was a stranger. He very properly left Gen. Logan to fight his own corps, but exposed himself freely; and, after the firing had ceased, in the afternoon he walked the lines; the men, as reported to me, gathered about him in the most affectionate way, and he at once gained their respect and confidence. To this fact I at the time attached much importance, for it put me at ease as to the further conduct of that most important army.³⁰

Despite the victory at Ezra Church, Sherman was unable to follow up the advantage because of the Confederate artillery fire and the parapets of Atlanta, which he described as presenting "a well-filled line wherever we approach them." The Union commander sent Thomas on a reconnaissance toward East Point, with Schofield moving to the left. He did not yet know the results of the raids by McCook and Kilpatrick on the Macon and Atlanta Railroad.³¹

Amid rumors of evacuation of Atlanta,³² Sherman received a report of the success of McCook's mission: he

³⁰Sherman, Memoirs, II, 91.

³¹Sherman to Halleck, July 29, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 289.

³²Sherman to Thomas, August 1, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 321.

had destroyed 12 miles of the railroad and a bridge, in addition to 500 wagons.³³ But there was little rejoicing in the Union camp, for at the same time a report drifted back to Sherman that the Confederates had captured Stoneman and 500 of his command, a large portion of whom were officers. It was reported that Stoneman had arrived in front of Macon and was shelling the town when Wheeler attacked from the rear, Stoneman managing to fight his way back 15 miles before being taken prisoner.³⁴

On August 5, reports again reached Sherman that the enemy was evacuating Atlanta. Pickets reported heavy train movements, and rebel skirmishers were extremely active along the line. Although it could be an evacuation of the city, it could also mean that the enemy was preparing to mass its forces for an attack on Schofield.³⁵

At the same time, the Union advance had bogged down completely. Troops which were commanded to carry a point that would control the railroad south of Atlanta had engaged the enemy and had dug in, giving the Confederates time to mass their troops and throw up earthworks, or

³³Thomas to Sherman, August 1, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 321-322.

³⁴Report of the Army of Cumberland, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 347-348.

³⁵Clark to Dodge, August 5, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 387.

evacuate, if they chose.³⁶ There still was no report from Stoneman, and Sherman was now convinced that he had surrendered near Macon. And, despite the work done by McCook and Kilpatrick on the Macon and Atlanta Railroad, the Confederates still were running trains into Atlanta from Macon.³⁷

Despite bogging down, Sherman did not deem it prudent to move to his right, electing instead to "push forward daily by parallels and make the inside of Atlanta too hot to be endured." He sent to Chattanooga for two 30-pound Parrotts, planning to step up the Union shelling of the city, and saying,

I am impatient for a siege, but I do not know but here is as good a place to fight it out as farther inland. One thing is certain, whether we get inside of Atlanta or not, it will be a used-up community by the time we are done with it.³⁸

Within the city, Georgia troops occupied the trenches to the north and northeast side of the city--the 20,000 troops supplied by Governor Brown. The entire Confederate force, estimated at 60,000, was dug in and there was one heavy Confederate gun located in the center of the city. All business in Atlanta had suspended, with the goods being

³⁶Van Duzet message, August 5, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 388.

³⁷Sherman to Halleck, August 6, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 391-392.

³⁸Sherman to Halleck, August 7, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 409.

moved to other parts of the state. All hotels were closed. And, although the Union artillery had been firing into the city since the siege began, most of its shells were striking in the vicinity of the depot, going about 60 feet over the commissary stores. None of the buildings in the city had been burned by the shells.³⁹

Sherman stepped up his shelling, throwing 3,000 solid shot into the city on August 9 and getting four 4 1/2-inch rifled guns from Chattanooga, which he planned to try for effect the following day.⁴⁰

All the while, Hood refused to make a move from the city. He had not attempted to meet the Union forces in battle since the disastrous debacle at Ezra Church. His parapets loomed as a serious threat to Sherman, and the Union commander elected not to try and assault them because of their strength.⁴¹

Thus, Sherman decided to wait for an opportunity. It was Hood himself who gave him the opportunity, for on August 10 the Confederate commander ordered Wheeler and some 4,000 men to swing north and try to cut Union communications from Chattanooga. Wheeler was to cross the

³⁹Statement of W. H. Gates, August 9, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 439-440.

⁴⁰Sherman to Halleck, August 9, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 434.

⁴¹Sherman to Grant, August 10, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 447.

Tennessee River above Chattanooga and then swing westward to Nashville, tearing up the Union railroad as he progressed. Upon completing this task, Wheeler was to leave 1,200 men to guard the destroyed railroad and return with the remainder of his force to Atlanta, destroying the Western and Atlantic Railroad from Chattanooga to Atlanta en route back to rejoin Hood.⁴²

The move was a costly one for Hood, for he had weakened his cavalry force in the presence of the enemy and Sherman was quick to comment: "I could not have asked for anything better, for I had provided well against such a contingency, and this detachment left me superior to the enemy in cavalry."⁴³

Wheeler prepared to march on August 10, but before leaving he issued the following order which was calculated to stop thieving en route:

I. In the march about to commence, no soldier or officer of any grade whatever will be permitted to carry any article of private property, except one single blanket and oil-cloth.

II. The troops will be inspected daily while en route, and any additional article upon the person or horse of any trooper or officer will be immediately destroyed.

⁴²Wheeler report, October 9, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 3, 957.

⁴³Sherman to Halleck, September 15, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 1, 79.

III. The ordnance wagons, ambulances, limber-oxes, and caissons will be inspected twice each day, and the officer controlling them will be arrested, and, if practicable, immediately punished if the smallest article of private property is found being thus transported.⁴⁴

Thus, Wheeler hoped to cut down on the amount of thievery-- and at the same time to be able to travel as light as possible, for he had considerable territory to cover under Hood's orders.

Wheeler first marched on Dalton and ordered its surrender, a request which the Union forces refused. The Confederate cavalry commander then attacked, driving the Union troops out of the town and back to their intrenchments on a nearby small hill. The Confederates failed to find any wagon train, large depot of supplies, or corn for their horses--but they did find some wagons with canned milk, the milk being the first they had had in some time.⁴⁵

About 8 p.m., Wheeler was forced to withdraw from the town when Steedman arrived with Union reinforcements. Wheeler waited outside the town for General William Thompson Martin, who had been ordered to strike Tilton and then ride to join Wheeler in the proposed attack on Dalton. Not only had Martin failed to arrive in time for the attack on

⁴⁴Wheeler circular, August 9, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 953.

⁴⁵Colonel Bernard Laiboldt report, August 18, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 1, 324; Dyer, "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler, pp. 190-191.

Dalton, but it was now nightfall and he still was not present. At dawn, Wheeler learned that his tardy general had decided to camp for the night several miles from Dalton. Wheeler promptly relieved him of command.⁴⁶

Now that Dalton was reinforced by infantry and cavalry, Wheeler prepared to lay siege to the town, and at the same time he began a game of cat and mouse with Steedman. Wheeler made a demonstration toward Chattanooga, drawing Steedman from Dalton in close pursuit; whereupon Wheeler reversed his tracks and again moved toward Dalton, Steedman again in pursuit. This game continued for three days while the Union railroad was left unrepaired. Steedman finally realized Wheeler's purpose, quit the chase, and began repairing the railroad.⁴⁷

Wheeler left about 200 men at Dalton, giving them orders to strike the railroad at several different points every night, and then the Confederate cavalry chief rode to Tennessee. As he was attempting to cross the Little Tennessee River, Wheeler learned that the Union had made extensive arrangements to procure forage for their troops from the country surrounding the Cleveland to Loudon railroad. Hoping to stop this source of supply, Wheeler made a demonstration on Cleveland and destroyed the railroad

⁴⁶Ibid., 324.

⁴⁷Steedman report, September 11, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 2, 496-497.

from Cleveland to Charleston. Then crossing the Hiwassee River, Wheeler struck and captured the town of Athens and tore up the track from Athens to Loudon. This task completed, Wheeler turned toward Tennessee, crossing the Little Tennessee, but when he arrived at the Holston River he found it had risen so that it was impassable and he was compelled to move downstream and cross above Knoxville. Just before Wheeler made his crossing, General John S. Williams requested that he be allowed to take his brigade, plus one other brigade, and destroy the Union garrison and bridge at Strawberry Plains. Wheeler at first refused, but then granted permission. Williams, however, found the garrison at Strawberry Plains too strong to be taken and did not attack. Wheeler, upon crossing the river, waited through the night for Williams to return and when the tardy general had not put in an appearance by daybreak, Wheeler pushed on without him. Hence, he had lost another general and about one third of his entire command.⁴⁸ Williams never rejoined Wheeler, spending the rest of the war fighting in Southwest Virginia and Eastern Tennessee.

Wheeler, with his remaining command, rode through Sparta, and on August 29 they struck Major Shelah Waters' command of about three companies at McMinnville. On the

⁴⁸Dyer, "Fightin' Joe Wheeler", pp. 191-193; Wheeler report, October 9, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 3, 959.

same night, a portion of Wheeler's command cut the telegraph and railroad lines from McMinnville to Murfreesboro.⁴⁹

Wheeler found Nashville too heavily defended to be taken and was forced to turn and start toward Alabama, but before leaving he issued a proclamation to the people of Tennessee in which he urged them to join his command and redeem Tennessee from the Union. As a result of the proclamation, Wheeler was able to report that about 2,000 new recruits and some 800 reinstated "absentees" joined his command, but apparently they were only paper recruits.⁵⁰

Union forces began to pursue Wheeler after his sweep into Tennessee, with Steedman ordered from Chattanooga and Rosseau coming from Nashville. A running battle developed between Wheeler and his pursuants from Nashville to Columbia to Florence, Alabama, but the Confederate cavalry chief eluded the Federal forces, gaining safety on September 2 at Tuscumbia, Alabama. Although Wheeler had led the Union a merry chase, his raid had been of little account; he had torn up some railroad and destroyed some telegraph lines and captured some cattle.⁵¹

⁴⁹Milroy report, September 17, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 2, 490.

⁵⁰John W. Dubose, Wheeler and the Army of Tennessee (New York, 1912), p. 386.

⁵¹Kilpatrick report, September 13, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 2, 859.

Before rejoining Hood in Atlanta, Wheeler suggested that he be allowed to join General Nathan Bedford Forrest so that the combined efforts of these two cavalry commands would be able to strike a more severe blow to the enemy. Wheeler reported that some of his troops still were in Tennessee, that Williams and another portion of his command had been lost, and that he would be able to return with only about 2,000 men.⁵²

Little did Wheeler realize the predicament of his commander. During the month that he had been racing through the states of Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee, Wheeler had been out of contact with Hood and during this time Sherman had been tightening the noose around Hood's position.

On August 10, Sherman declared:

I hear General Brannan's guns and hear the shells burst in Atlanta. The shells that burst near you Howard are from the enemy's big guns, which have been put in the fort at White Hall. Hood is anxious to draw out fire from the town to their fort at White Hall, which is of no value to us. Let us destroy Atlanta and make it a desolation.⁵³

Sherman was anxious to drive Hood from the city or capture him, and on August 11 he announced a plan which would include taking the West Point road. Schofield disagreed with Sherman as to the West Point road, believing

⁵²Wheeler to Hood, September 20, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXIX, Part 2, 849.

⁵³Sherman to Howard, August 10, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 442.

it too hazardous to attack that position which was strongly fortified by the rebels. But Sherman said,

We must act. We cannot sit down and do nothing because it involves risk. Being on the offensive we must risk, and that is the flank on which we calculated to make the risk, indeed, have been maneuvering to that end ever since the Army of the Tennessee shifted from the left to right.⁵⁴

Schofield followed orders and agreed to thin out the Fourteenth Corps of the Army of Ohio so as to capture the West Point road, and the Union troops pressed forward, hoping to cut off Hood's lines of supplies and isolate him in the city.

Meanwhile, the Union artillery continued to pound away within the city. Shells were now passing over Hood's headquarters near where White Hall street intersects Faith's alley. Hood elected not to change any positions of his corps except to strengthen his left by artillery. The rebel commander was using buildings in the fair grounds for hospitals for his wounded. Supply trains belonging to Hardee's corps were camped near the cemetery--an easy target for the batteries of the Union's Fourth Corps.⁵⁵

Thus, the end was growing near for Hood. He did not dare venture from his breastworks, as all previous attacks had proven disastrous. Yet, he did not know how long he

⁵⁴Sherman to Schofield, August 11, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 462-463.

⁵⁵Report of Scout j. Milton Glass, August 12, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 478.

would be able to hold out in the city. Sherman was anxious for a showdown and would destroy Atlanta, if necessary, to defeat and capture Hood's army.

CHAPTER IV

THE FALL OF ATLANTA

Henry O. Dwight, writing for Harper's, noted numerous changes in the two armies since they left Tennessee. The pomp and show of war had become "a matter of poetry rather than of fact," he said, "and the men who now lay siege to Atlanta were dusty, ragged and unshaven." Barricading had become an art. Dwight told his readers that within five minutes after a halt a barricade would be ready which would be "bullet-proof and breast-high" and strong enough to "hold your line against an attack by three times your number." The writer added, explaining how barricades had become an art:

A ditch is speedily made on the inside to stand in. The earth is thrown on the outside of the barricade, and the ditch deepened, so that standing inside, your head will be protected by the parapet . . . with a step inside to stand on when firing, and a ditch to stand in while loading. If you are in the woods you want to give range to your rifles, and have all the thick undergrowth and small trees cut away for fifty paces in front. By felling these all the same way, the busy tops all turning outward, and trimming off the smaller twigs and leaves, and tangling the tops together, you have a formidable abatis, through which it will be next to impossible to advance along, let alone against the showers of bullets from your men at short range¹

¹Earl Schenck Miers, The General Who Marched to Hell (New York, 1951), pp. 151-152.

Dwight described what it was like to attack the enemy behind his breastworks:

You make up your mind to assault the enemy's work. You have formed line of battle, with a second and third line behind you for support. You march forward filled with the determination to accomplish the object, yet feeling the magnitude of the undertaking. Two hundred yards brings you to the picket-line, and here the opposition commences. You dash across the space between the two lines, you lose a few men; and the enemy's pickets, after making as much noise as possible, run back to their main works. By this time the enemy are sure you are really coming, and open on you with artillery, besides a pretty heavy fire of musketry. This artillery throws the shells screaming through your ranks, producing more moral than physical effect, or throws shrapnel which, bursting in front, scatter myriads of small bullets around. You commence to lose men rapidly. The ball is opened. 'Forward, double-quick!' Again; and while the whole line of the enemy open fire from behind their works, your men, mindless of this--mindless of the death intensified, the bullets and the shells, they dash on with wild cheers. The abatis with its tangled intricacy of sharpened branches snares your line. Tripping, falling, rising to fall again, the men struggle through this abatis . . . though the moments are drawn out interminably, and though in each step are left to pay for the ground. You get through a part of you and still rush on: the firing grows more fierce and the men grow more desperate. Your three lines have been reduced to one, and you strike another line of abatis. In his abatis are the palisades, which must be uprooted by force before a man can pass. You stumble, fall, tear your flesh on these stakes, and must stop to pull them up--stop, when everything instant is an hour--stop, when you are already gasping for breath; and here open up the masked batteries, pouring the canister into that writhing, struggling, bleeding mass--so close that the flame scorches, that the smoke blinds from those guns Oftentimes it is preferable to lie down and take the fire . . . until night rather than lose all by falling back under such circumstances!²

²Ibid., pp. 153-154.

This was the type of abatis which Hood had constructed around Atlanta, and Sherman did not wish to try and break through the breastworks. The Union commander planned to bombard the city with artillery, reducing it to ruin if necessary, but this took time and Sherman was getting more irritable as time elapsed. One of his subordinates usually felt the sting of his ire as he sat outside the city, and on August 16 it was General Garrard who drew Sherman's contempt. The Union chief censured Garrard, saying,

General Garrard will not attempt anything if there be a show of resistance. If you Thomas consent, and can give the command of that cavalry to Col. Long, I will put General Garrard on my staff and send him to Nashville to supervise the equipment and arament of our cavalry, the same office held by General W. S. Smith, resigned Saving himself, he sacrifices others operating in conjoint expeditions. I am so thoroughly convinced that if he can see a horseman in the distance with a spy-glass he will turn back, that I cannot again depend on his making an effort³

And while Sherman laid siege to Atlanta, reports drifted back as to the actions of Wheeler. The Union commander felt certain that Wheeler did not have a force large enough to take either Loudon or Knoxville and, although he could hurt some of the minor points, Sherman said, "East Tennessee is a good place for him to break down his horses, and a poor place to steal new ones."⁴

³Sherman to Thomas, August 16, 1864, The War of the Rebellion, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1891), Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 526.

⁴Sherman to Halleck, August 17, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 547.

What did worry Sherman was the fact that he was losing a large number of his troops through the expiration of service and it was his fear that if Hood should hold on within Atlanta that the Confederates would be able to come out victorious, simply through "the superior method they have of recruitment." In the South, all men were soldiers and they were not enlisted for any particular length of time, but for life if the war should last that long. In the North, soldiers enlisted for definite periods of time.⁵

Sherman felt he held the upper hand, however, because of his superior cavalry force, now that Wheeler was in Eastern Tennessee. Here, Hood differed with him, saying,

I had, moreover, become convinced that our cavalry was able to compete successfully with double their number. Our cavalry were not cavalymen proper, but were mounted riflemen, trained to dismount and hold in check or delay the advance of the enemy, and who had learned by experience that they could without much difficulty defeat the Federal cavalry.⁶

Tired of waiting, Sherman on August 23 issued a marching order. He ordered his army to be ready to march on August 26, and for each man to carry nine day's rations in haversacks--and these nine days' rations were to be

⁵Sherman to Halleck, August 20, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 609.

⁶Joseph B. Hood, The Defense of Atlanta, as cited in Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, Battles and Leaders of the Civil War (New York, 1888), IV, 342.

apportioned out over a 20-day period.⁷ It was Sherman's plan to move around Atlanta to the south of the city. He planned to keep open a courier line through Sandtown to the Chattahoochee bridge, himself moving with the main army.⁸ Prior to departing on his swing south of the city, Sherman received reports from Kilpatrick that three miles of railroad near Jonesborough had been destroyed and that portions of that track had been disabled for ten more miles and that two locomotives and trains had been destroyed; also, at least three houses were destroyed by fire in Atlanta on the afternoon of August 24, caused by the heavy bombardment by Union artillery.⁹

On August 25, Sherman began his march, with Howard on the right and Thomas in the center. In three days, they reached the Montgomery railroad, located five to ten miles southeast of East Point. Sherman devoted the remainder of the 28th and part of the 29th days of August to destroying the Montgomery railroad. With the Macon railroad only six miles away and Hood's army sitting serenely in Atlanta, 15 miles to the northeast, it appeared that Sherman would

⁷Special field orders, August 23, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 649.

⁸Sherman to Halleck, August 24, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 649.

⁹Sherman to Halleck, August 22, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 628; Signal Detachment report, August 24, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 651.

be able to cut off the Confederate army from all means of supply, isolating Hood within the city.¹⁰

Hood, who had watched from within the city for one month while Sherman gradually moved toward the Confederates' left on the Macon railroad, noted that on August 25 Sherman withdrew from the immediate front. The Confederate commander received reports the following morning that Sherman was sighted in large force on the West Point road and conceived that the Union commander was going to make an all-out attack on the Macon railroad. As this was his main source of supply, Hood decided that his fate depended on saving the Macon railroad. Hence, he dispatched two brigades to reinforce Jonesborough and ordered that Confederate troops in Opelika should guard their position with renewed vigilance. All surplus property, supplies, and materials were ordered to the rear or to be placed in railway cars so as to be ready to move at the moment that the railroad became endangered. In this manner, if he was not able to hold his railroad, Hood planned to avoid loss or destruction of his supplies by taking them with him as he retreated, should that become necessary.¹¹

Sherman moved toward the Macon railroad and ordered it completely destroyed so that no "rail or tie can be

¹⁰Alfred H. Burne, Lee, Grant and Sherman (New York, 1939), p. 115.

¹¹Hood, The Defense of Atlanta, as cited in Johnson and Buel, Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, IV, 433.

used again." He prescribed how the railroad should be destroyed, saying,

March a regiment to the road, stack arms, loosen two rails opposite the right and two opposite the left of the regiment, then . . . heave the whole track, rails and ties, over, breaking it all to pieces, then pile the ties in the nature of crib work and lay the rails over them, then by means of fence rails make a bonfire, and when the rails are red-hot in the middle let men give the rail a twist, which cannot be straightened without machinery. Also fill up some of the cuts with heavy logs and trunks of trees and branches and cover up and fill with dirt. Please give minute instructions on this subject to-night, and have the work commenced as early in the morning as possible, taking proper precaution also to guard against attack on either the working parties or the general position.¹²

On August 29, their work done on the Montgomery railroad, the Union army began moving out--Howard toward Jonesborough; Thomas via Shoal Creek Church toward Fayetteville. The Army of Ohio was to move via Red Oak and Mims' to Morrow's Mill; the Army of Tennessee from Fairburn to Renfroe Place, near Jonesborough; and the Army of the Cumberland from Red Oak to Couch's.¹³ Thomas encountered little opposition in his initial move, reaching Couch's early in the afternoon of August 29; Schofield, who moved with caution around the enemy at East Point, reached a position near Rough and Ready; and Howard, who encountered

¹²Sherman to Thomas, August 28, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 689.

¹³Sherman to Schofield, August 29, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 705, 708.

cavalry in his wide arc, managed to drive the cavalry off and reached Shoal Creek.¹⁴

Hood, noting that Sherman was marching in the direction of Rough and Ready station and Jonesborough, ordered a portion of one division to take position at Rough and Ready and instructed Hardee, who was at East Point, to take up defense there and to hold his troops ready for march at immediate notice. On the morning of August 30, the Confederate line was further extended, with Hardee in the vicinity of Rough and Ready and Stephen D. Lee's corps on his right near East Point. Sensing that the enemy was about to strike near Jonesborough, Hood prepared to meet the attack. When a Federal corps crossed the Flint River about 6 p.m. on the 30th near Jonesborough, it was driven back. This was the signal for battle, however, and Hardee was ordered to move immediately toward Jonesborough, with Lee to follow during the night. Hardee was ordered to attack in the morning, driving the enemy back into the river, and if successful, Lee and his command would be withdrawn back to Rough and Ready station. Stewart's corps and those of G. W. Smith (state troops) were to form a line of battle to Lee's right near East Point, driving the enemy in the direction of the Flint River and the West Point railroad.

¹⁴S. M. Bowman and R. B. Irwin, Sherman and His Campaigns (Cincinnati, 1865), p. 212.

The Confederate cavalry, in the meantime, was to hold the Federal cavalry, near the mouth of Peach Tree Creek at the railroad bridge across the Chattahoochee. In sizing up his order, Hood said:

I impressed upon General Hardee that the fate of Atlanta rested upon his ability, with the aid of two corps, to drive the Federals across Flint River, at Jonesborough. I also instructed him in the event of failure--which would necessitate the evacuation of the city--to send Lee's corps, at dark, back to or near Rough and Ready, in order to protect our retreat to Lovejoy's Station The attack was not made till about 2 p.m., and then resulted in our inability to dislodge the enemy. The Federals had been allowed time, by the delay, to strongly intrench; whereas had the assault been made at an early hour in the morning the enemy would have been found but partially protected by works.¹⁵

Hood criticized Hardee for his inability to drive back the Federal troops, although Hardee succeeded in gaining part of the Federal works. Had Hardee transmitted an official report of operations during the time, Hood said, the result might have been different.¹⁶

The critical blow had been struck. Hood, faced with either defending Jonesborough and keeping a route to the south open or bottling up his army in Atlanta, had elected the former--and had lost. Hood, in the last days of August and early days of September, was described as being in "a vacillating frame of mind" and "seemed unable to determine

¹⁵Hood, The Defense of Atlanta, as cited in Johnson and Buel, Battles and Leaders, IV, 343.

¹⁶Ibid.

what course to take; was unable to grasp Sherman's intentions. All he knew was that he was damned if he left Atlanta, double-damned if he stayed and submitted to siege."¹⁷

Hardee's corps crumbled before Sherman's attack, and the Confederate general was forced to retreat in the direction of Lovejoy's Station. Hood, seeing that he had to concentrate his force either in Atlanta or Lovejoy's, ordered Lee to join Hardee, with Stewart to follow. Then Hood prepared to abandon Atlanta, blowing up ammunition magazines, storehouses, and ordnance stores on the night of September 1.¹⁸

In the meantime, Schofield struck the railroad below Rough and Ready station. He was ordered to stay there, Sherman saying: "Don't get off the track; hold it fast; we will get our whole army on the railroad as near Jonesboro' as possible and push Hardee and Lee first, and then for Atlanta."¹⁹ Apparently, Sherman had no idea that Hood was about to give up the city at this time. It was his plan to destroy Hardee, then lay siege to the city--attacking if necessary.

¹⁷Richard O'Connor, Hood: Cavalier General (New York, 1952), p. 216.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Sherman to Schofield, August 31, 1864, O. R., Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 733.

The battle of Jonesborough was described by Union Major James Austin Connolly as being "a glorious battle."

He added:

There was no chance for flinching there. Generals, Colonels, Majors, Captains and privates, all had to go forward together over that open field, facing and drawing nearer to death at every step we took, our horses crazy, frantic with the howling shells, the rattling of canister and the whistling of bullets, ourselves delirious with the wild excitement of the moment, and thinking only of getting over those breastworks--great volleys of canister shot sweeping through our lines making huge gaps, but the blue coated boys filled the gaps and still rushed forward right into the jaws of death--we left hundreds of bleeding comrades behind us at every step, but not one instant did that line hesitate--it moved steadily forward to the enemy's work--over the works with a shout--over the cannon--over the Rebels, and then commenced stern work with the bayonet²⁰

The effort by Hardee, described as "disgraceful" by Hood, could not be excused by the Confederate commander. Hardee, however, contended that "troops which for two months had been hurled against breastworks, only to be repulsed or to gain dear-bought and fruitless victories" should be pardoned if they now moved against such obstacles with "reluctance and distrust," and added that if he had not been forced on the defensive he would have renewed the attack "which would probably have resulted bloodily enough to have satisfied even the sanguinary expectations of the Commanding General."²¹

²⁰Miers, The General, pp. 174-175.

²¹Ibid.

At any rate, the defeat at Jonesborough and the increased rumors of a Federal attack on Atlanta itself caused Hood to take action. It was too late to save anything which had not been removed, and he had over 80 railroad cars and six locomotive engines destroyed prior to evacuating the city. About midnight of September 1, the noise of explosions was heard in Atlanta.²²

Hence, with the enemy astride his line of communication and his army split in half, and the enemy in superior force, Hood rode south in an attempt to thread the pieces of his army together. While retreating from the city, Hardee was fighting a delaying action in front of the railroad west of Jonesborough, but it was Sherman who allowed Hood and Hardee to slip out of his grasp. The Union commander, who could have crushed the divided army before him, had heard the rumble of explosions to the north. He had left Slocum and his corps north of the city and wondered now if he had attacked Hood in the city. After a lull in the rumbling thunder, Sherman heard again about 4 a.m. the sound of exploding powder kegs and the crack of artillery shells.²³

Slocum heard the explosions and sent forward detachments of three divisions on a reconnaissance. Finding

²²Jacob D. Cox, The Army in the Civil War (New York, 1885), p. 207.

²³William T. Sherman, Memoirs of Gen. W. T. Sherman (New York, 1892), II, 106-107; John P. Dyer, The Gallant Hood (Indianapolis, 1950), p. 269.

the city deserted by Confederate troops, Slocum marched in, hoisting the Federal flag above the court house. A deputation of city officials surrendered the city to the Union general.²⁴

Sherman was preparing to annihilate Hardee at Lovejoy's when word reached him that Hood had evacuated Atlanta, although it was not until September 4 that word reached him by courier from Slocum that Hood had blown up his magazines, trains, and had destroyed the foundries and workshops before fleeing and that he (Slocum) was now holding the city as a conqueror.²⁵ As Slocum entered the city, he observed "all along the sides of the several railroads, 'bomb proofs,' or gopher holes" which had been dug in the ground by the inhabitants of the city. Many of the holes, he observed, were large enough for a fireplace or stove, or beds and tables. Nearly all the residences were perforated by shells.²⁶

Hood, upon evacuating the city, marched through that night and the remainder of the next day, completely

²⁴George W. Pepper, Personal Recollections of Sherman's Campaigns in Georgia and the Carolinas (Zanesville, Ohio, 1866), pp. 169-170.

²⁵Benson J. Lossing, Pictorial History of the Civil War in the United States of America (Hartford, 1868), III, 394.

²⁶Pepper, Personal Recollections, p. 171.

unmolested, and joined forces with Hardee at McDonough on the night of September 2.²⁷

²⁷Burne, Lee, Grant and Sherman, p. 119.

CHAPTER V

THE AFTERMATH

Life in the city during the last days of Confederate rule was described by a resident,

Homes were to be abandoned and household goods to be left for the enemy or destroyed; and liberty under our own vine and fig tree was to be a thing of the past, and dependence upon strangers a thing of the future.¹

And when the Union troops moved in, the same resident said,

Curses and imprecations too vile to repeat, and boisterous laughter, and vulgar jests resounded through the streets of Atlanta. Federal wagons followed in the tracks of Confederate wagons and after a few light articles were placed in the latter for Southern destination, the former unblushingly moved up to receive pianos and other expensive furniture which found its way into every section of the North. And this highway robbery was permitted by William Tecumseh Sherman, the Grand Mogul of the Army of the Republic²

Hardee's forces now being of secondary importance, Sherman lost no time in turning his main army toward the newly captured city. He took up headquarters in Atlanta;

¹Mary A. H. Gay, Life in Dixie During the War (Atlanta, 1897), p. 169.

²Ibid., p. 180.

Howard was located near West Point; and Schofield was near Decatur. The Union army was going to get a rest.³

Sherman, in reporting the capture of the city, said:

Hood, at Atlanta, finding me on this road, the only one that could supply him, and between him and a considerable part of his army, blew up his magazines in Atlanta and left in the night-time, when the Twentieth Corps, General Slocum, took possession of the place. So Atlanta is ours, and fairly won Our losses will not exceed 1,200, and we have possession of over 300 Rebel dead, 250 wounded and over 1,500 well prisoners.⁴

The news of the capture of Atlanta was greeted by wild celebrations in the North. President Lincoln issued a congratulatory order and recommended that September 11 be observed as a day of thanksgiving to God for the brilliant victory.⁵ Lincoln wrote:

The national thanks are rendered by the President to Major-General W. T. Sherman and the gallant officers and soldiers of his command before Atlanta, for the distinguished ability and perseverance displayed in the campaign in Georgia, which, under Divine favor, has resulted in the capture of Atlanta. The marches, battles, and sieges, and other military operations, that have signalized the campaign, must render it famous in the annals of war, and have entitled those

³George W. Pepper, Personal Recollections of Sherman's Campaigns in Georgia and the Carolinas (Zanesville, Ohio, 1866), p. 171.

⁴The War of the Rebellion, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1891), Series 1, XXXVIII, Part 5, 777; cited hereafter as O. R.

⁵Pepper, Personal Recollections, p. 170.

who have participated therein to the applause and thanks of the nation.⁶

Upon hearing of Sherman's victory, Grant telegraphed him: "I have just received your dispatch announcing the capture of Atlanta. In honor of your great victory I have ordered a salute to be fired with shotted guns from every battery bearing upon the enemy."⁷

Sherman's success came at a time when the Federal government was in desperate need of a victory, for Northern morale was breaking rapidly as the conquest of the Confederacy looked hopeless. Grant appeared stalled at Petersburg and Sherman had looked as if he were going to lay siege to Atlanta indefinitely, turning the war into an intolerable stalemate. Then Sherman struck and was victorious!

Actually, however, neither Hood nor Sherman had too much to boast about in the handling of their armies during the final days prior to the fall of Atlanta. Hood, completely bewildered by Sherman's movements after August 25, did not know where Sherman was and apparently thought he was advancing on Atlanta when he was preparing to attack Jonesborough. Sherman, after gaining a position astride

⁶William T. Sherman, Memoirs of Gen. W. T. Sherman (New York, 1892), II, 110.

⁷Clarence Edward Macartney, Grant and His Generals (New York, 1953), p. 294.

Hood's railroad line, made no effective move to strike Hood's divided force and allowed the Confederate commander to slip out of the city and bring the divided segments of his army together.

Atlanta had been one of the chief objectives of the campaign in the South. The Northern troops had won and it was a serious blow to the Confederacy, both in the loss of materials of war and in prestige. The Union now controlled one of the key cities of the South--a central point as far as communications were concerned, and a gateway to the sea.

Sherman, in a move to completely wipe out Southern opposition in Atlanta, proposed a ten days' truce and ordered the removal of all citizens except those employed by the government and appropriated all necessary materials for military purposes.⁸ Sherman said:

If the people raise a howl against my barbarity and cruelty, I will answer that war is war, and not popularity-seeking. If they want peace, they and their relatives must stop the war.⁹

Hood, who had assembled his broken army near Jonesborough, retreated southwest toward Rome, Georgia, and then thrust quickly northward through Resacca, Georgia, and Chattanooga, Tennessee. On December 15, 1864, Hood's

⁸Benson J. Lossing, Pictorial History of the Civil War in the United States of America (Hartford, 1868), III, 394.

⁹Sherman, Memoirs, II, 111.

army was further destroyed in a battle at Nashville by General Thomas, while Sherman moved with his main force toward the sea.¹⁰

One Union soldier remarked upon leaving Atlanta:

There will not be much of Atlanta left worth having for we have destroyed all the factories and the railroads in every direction While moving out this morning, we saw the lifeless bodies of several citizens swinging from trees with a placard upon each which read: 'This is done in retaliation for the unwarranted attack made upon my foragers yesterday. Any repetition of this offense will be similarly punished; and in addition, all buildings upon 10 square miles of adjacent territory will be destroyed. W. T. Sherman, General Commanding We have utterly destroyed Atlanta. I don't think any people will want to try and live there now. It is pretty tough to rout people out of their homes in this way, but it is war, and General Sherman is credited with saying that 'War is Hell!'¹¹

Sherman later remarked:

We held Atlanta, a city of little value to us, but so important to the enemy that Mr. Davis, the head of the rebellious faction in the South, visited his army near Palmetto, and commanded it to regain it, as well as to ruin and destroy us by a series of measures which he thought would be effectual. That army, by a rapid march, gained our railroad near Big Shanty, and afterwards about Dalton. We pursued it, but it moved so rapidly that we could not overtake it, and General Hood led his army successfully far over towards Mississippi in hopes to decoy us out of Georgia We quietly and deliberately destroyed Atlanta and all the railroad which the enemy had used to carry on war against us, occupied the state capitol, which had been so strongly fortified from the sea as to defy approach from that quarter.¹²

¹⁰Ibid., p. 215.

¹¹Theodore F. Upson, With Sherman to the Sea (Baton Rouge, 1952), pp. 128-133.

¹²Rachel Sherman Thorndike, The Sherman Letters (New York, 1894), pp. 242-243.

Although he had destroyed Atlanta, Sherman had not accomplished all that he had set out to do--Hood's army had evaded capture, although it was a mere shell of its former self. Never again was it able to pose a serious threat to Sherman's Union forces.

The Atlanta campaign had been a long and bloody one. The Union estimated its losses in dead and wounded at 18,659, while the Confederate dead and wounded numbered 27,085 from the time the campaign began until Atlanta fell. Heaviest toll of lives was taken in attacks by Hood on July 22 and July 28, with the Union estimating 2,548 killed and wounded for the two battles and the Confederates counting 11,100 dead and wounded for the same periods.¹³

Had Johnston remained in command of the Southern forces, the result in the end probably would have been the same, but he probably would have been able to hold out a little longer than Hood. He was a wiser, more experienced general--and he was experienced in the methods of defensive warfare, the type of war the South was forced to fight because of fewer men and fewer supplies than the North. Hood, an aggressive general, made two desperate sallies at the North and both ended in failure and in heavy losses to the South. Then, when Sherman began circling the

¹³Thomas L. Livermore, Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America (Boston, 1901), pp. 119-126.

city he became completely bewildered, split his forces and was forced to either give up the city or see his army gradually cut to pieces.

In the end, though, it was just a matter of time-- Sherman had the edge in numbers, supplies, and the North had the factories to produce as many war weapons and supplies as necessary, whereas the South did not.

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