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The Atlanta Campaign: Principle of the Objective Revisited

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The purpose of this study is to analyze Union offensive operations during the Atlanta Campaign of the American Civil War with respect to the principle of the objective. This highly successful campaign split the Confederacy.

The problem in this study was to determine whether Sherman applied the principle of the objective prior to and subsequent to the capture of Atlanta. The primary source used for the study was the War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Confederate and Union Armies featuring copies of the original telegraph messages and correspondence. Sherman's private correspondence to his wife and to his brother in the U.S. Senate were also examined.

Among the more important conclusions of the thesis are:

1. The Union commander applied the principle of the objective during the campaign pushing the Confederate forces to a town 20 miles south of Atlanta, and forcing Confederate abandonment of Atlanta.
2. Sherman failed to apply the principle of the objective upon the occupation (capture) of Atlanta.
3. Sherman cautiously protected his railroad lifeline to Tennessee until sufficient forces were allocated to Major General George H. Thomas, his subordinate, who was defending Tennessee. Only after receiving authority from General-in-Chief Ulysses S. Grant did Sherman turn away from Hood. Trusting Thomas to protect Tennessee from Hood's army, Sherman concentrated on his new objective of destroying the southern will to fight. Planned destruction of the South's war making resources began with Sherman's subsequent march to the sea.

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THE ATLANTA CAMPAIGN:

PRINCIPLE OF THE OBJECTIVE REVISITED



Fort Leavenworth, Kansas  
1975

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze Union offensive operations during the Atlanta Campaign of the American Civil War with respect to the principle of the objective. Major General William T. Sherman led the Union army to victory over the Confederate army. This highly successful campaign split the Confederacy. The primary source used for the study was the War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Confederate and Union Armies. Conclusions of the thesis are that Sherman applied the principle of the objective until the capture of Atlanta, but thereafter failed to apply the principle until receipt of a change in mission.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze Union offensive operations during the Atlanta Campaign of the American Civil War with respect to the principle of the objective. This highly successful campaign split the Confederacy.

Major General William T. Sherman led the Union army to victory over the Confederate army commanded first by Lieutenant General Joseph E. Johnston and later by Lieutenant General John B. Hood. The conduct of the campaign deep within the South featured herculean logistical achievements as well as brilliant tactics. Timed to coincide with operations in the Eastern theater, Sherman's piecemeal execution of his mission kept maximum pressure on the Confederacy. At no time could Johnston or Hood reinforce Lee in the Eastern theater, nor could Lee reinforce the Confederate army in the Western theater. The campaign ended on November 12, 1864 when Sherman, having pursued the elusive and highly mobile Confederates into Alabama, withdrew from contact.

The problem in this study was to determine whether Sherman applied the principle of the objective prior to and subsequent to the capture of Atlanta. The primary source used for the study was the War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Confederate and Union Armies.



featuring copies of the original telegraph messages and correspondence. Sherman's private correspondence to his wife and to his brother in the U.S. Senate were also examined.

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## PREFACE

In 1970, I was assigned to Headquarters, Third Army at Fort McPherson in the heart of Atlanta, Georgia. My duties required daily contact with the State National Guard offices of the seven southeastern states and their people, both military and civilian. Northern by birth and associations, Army life had served to insulate me from sectionalism. It was a new world for me. Perhaps there was no real difference. It may be that I found only what I wanted to find; a schism rarely discerned today. A feeling of differences of tradition and culture going beyond the distinction between citizen soldier and active duty soldier; differences more subtle than between military and civilian, extending back a hundred years in time to South versus North. Once perceived, the feeling of heritage--a warm personal feeling of finding a tie-in to the past, began to increase. Little things became magnified in significance. Commuting to the Post daily I drove over a superhighway which passed through the site of the Battle of Atlanta, passing the memorial marking the place of death of Union Major General James B. McPherson. I drove past Oakland cemetery filled with Union and Confederate dead, past the Georgia Archives miraculously preserved in the new windowless blockhouse type building, and past the State Capitol. Daily I drove past the tourist attraction, Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama, restored and enshrined in a recreational area named after the Confederate engineer who designed and built the city's defenses, Grant Park. A return by sedan from temporary duty at Fort Stewart, Georgia (near Savannah, Georgia) gave me another view. Along the road ancient crumbling masonry chimneys and fireplaces stood alone like tombstones testifying to the existence of a population long since

migrated to the cities. Or, in reflection, were they "Sherman's Sentinels," the remains of buildings burned by the split wings of Sherman's army to coordinate the forward elements in the march to the sea?

The de facto segregation of the Third Army Headquarters and southern offices with which I coordinated daily, I accepted as normal. In a bigoted way my native Chicago had always shown strict racial boundaries which made Atlanta appear progressive by comparison. What amazed and entertained me was the fact that Atlanta, although burned to the ground by the Union army, had retained innumerable ties to the past. On the other hand, Chicago retained no ties, with the single exception of a water tower, after the great fire of 1871 started ignominiously by a lowly cow. The Chicago "survivor" served more as a monument to a city careless with livestock than a shrine to patriots, whatever their causes and beliefs.

For two years I felt more a part of the events of the past than of the present. What I saw and felt made me ponder over why Sherman marched to the sea instead of pursuing the Confederate army. Prior to my arrival at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College this firm thesis topic was selected, subconsciously, if not consciously.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Principle of the Objective as it is now expressed is broad in scope. It underscores the importance of a clearly defined, decisive and attainable objective for all military operations. It defines the ultimate objective of war as the defeat of the enemy's forces. The principle further emphasizes that each intermediate objective be such that its attainment most directly, quickly and economically contribute to the purpose of the operation.<sup>1</sup> Sherman's abandonment of the pursuit and destruction of the Confederate Army following the capitulation of Atlanta will long be argued by politicians and strategists. His burning of Atlanta and extensive destruction of public and private property along a wide swath through Georgia and the Carolinas proved equally puzzling to Southerners and moralists.

The objective of this study is to examine Union offensive operations during the Atlanta campaign in terms of the Principle of the Objective in an effort to determine whether that principle was applied prior to and subsequent to the capture of Atlanta. Further, to determine other factors which, in addition to the application of

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<sup>1</sup>Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-5, Operation of the Forces in the Field (Washington: Government Printing Office 1960), p. 5-1. "Principle of the Objective. Every military operation must be directed toward a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objective. The ultimate military objective of war is the defeat of the enemy's armed forces. The objective of each operation must contribute to the ultimate objective. Each intermediate objective must be such that its attainment will most directly, quickly, and economically contribute to the purpose of the operation. The selection of an objective based on consideration of the mission, the means available, the enemy and the operational area. Every commander must understand and clearly define his objective and consider each contemplated action in light thereof."

the principle of the objective, assured success.

While it is not possible to divorce completely a military campaign from real world considerations of economics and politics, the scope of this treatise is limited to military aspects only, except where I have found them to be inseparable. Other events of the day played a role but were not researched.

The elements of National power will drive policy and the statements of military objectives in the wars to come, as in the past. However, the student of military science, and more importantly the tactician should review his purpose. It goes beyond taking the next hill or restoring the National boundary penetrated by invasion. This study may serve to reinforce that review by analysis of Sherman's dilemma of the objective in the last century.

## CHAPTER I

### PERSONALITIES, COMMAND STRUCTURE, THE MISSION AND PRELIMINARY LOGISTICS PROBLEMS

The Atlanta Campaign of the American Civil War began in April 1864 and, for the most part, took place in North Georgia. Union Major General William Tecumseh Sherman was confronted by the Confederate Army of the Tennessee, led initially by Lieutenant General Joseph E. Johnston, and, following Johnston's relief, by General John B. Hood. General Sherman's subsequent bold advance into the heartland of the Confederacy won a strategic victory by capturing the Gate City of the South—Atlanta. The seizure of Atlanta, like the seizure of Vicksburg in 1863, further subdivided the southern states. However, the Atlanta victory did not destroy the Confederate army. This Union victory was generally credited with influencing the reelection of Abraham Lincoln (against his former general-in-chief and Democratic opponent, Major General George B. McClellan, ironically running on an anti-war platform).

The town of Atlanta served as a railroad hub with four spokes radiating to the key southern communications centers of Chattanooga; Montgomery; Macon-Savannah; and Augusta-Charleston. To the Confederates, loss of the communications center and arsenal of Atlanta was a hammer blow to the vitals of the Confederacy.

General Sherman, Commander, Military Division of the Mississippi reaped the credit for the capture of Atlanta. He further devastated Confederate morale in the Confederate army through destruction of public and civilian property throughout Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina. The Confederate army was not destroyed until three months



after the capture of Atlanta by Major General George H. Thomas. Sherman, out of communications with his subordinate, Thomas, was unable to support him from Savannah. History only nominally credited Sherman with the final victory over Hood.

General Sherman's plans were approved by General-in-Chief, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant. Although Major General Henry W. Halleck and Mr. Edwin M. Stanton, Chief-of-Staff and Secretary of War respectively, influenced General Grant, only the Commander-in-Chief, Abraham Lincoln, could override Grant.<sup>1</sup> Sherman's loyalty to Grant was consistent in the ever changing scene of Civil War and post-Civil War America. A brief sketch of Grant provides some background which explains the harmony in the Grant-Sherman command relationship.

General Grant was born on April 27, 1822 in Ohio. His father was a farmer. He entered the United States Military Academy in 1835 and graduated four years later, 21st in a graduating class of 39.<sup>2</sup> He was commissioned Second Lieutenant of Infantry. Three years later he saw service in the Mexican War during which he earned brevet rank of captain. A subsequent assignment to California separated him from his family. He resigned in July 1854 at the age of 32. For the next seven years he tried farming near St. Louis. Incapacitated by fever and sickness in 1858 he moved to Galena, Illinois and took a job as a clerk

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<sup>1</sup>T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and His Generals (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1952), p. 302.

<sup>2</sup>James Marshall-Cornwall, Grant as Military Commander (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1970), p. 29.

in a leather store owned by his father.<sup>3</sup> At the outbreak of the war he went to Springfield where, as assistant to the Illinois Adjutant General, his experience and abilities were recognized. He was promoted to colonel of volunteers by the State Governor and given command of the 21st Illinois Regiment. Six months elapsed before the War Department acted on his original request for return to active duty by promoting him to brigadier general. Grant fought along the Mississippi and Tennessee Rivers where tactical successes at Fort's Henry and Donalson led to his selection as Commander, Department of the Mississippi. One of his subordinates during this period was General Sherman. Grant's capture of Vicksburg and opening of the Mississippi River to traffic brought further notice by Lincoln who nine months later selected Grant to replace General Meade as General-in-Chief.<sup>4</sup> The relatively meteoric rise from obscure clerk in an Illinois mining town to the Nation's highest military rank had taken less than four years. After three and a half years of war Lincoln had found a general. Grant had moved his army, conducted joint operations with the navy, fought and defeated a large Confederate force in battle, and captured a key strategic objective. Lincoln's selection criteria was comprehensive. The product was the military leader the nation needed. Lincoln's general was a decisionmaker who thrived on mission-type orders, could accept guidance, and above all accomplish great things with minimum

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<sup>3</sup>Marshall-Cornwall, p.33.

<sup>4</sup>Williams, p. 299.

prodding or supervision.<sup>5</sup>

General Sherman's life was similar, in certain respects, to Grant's. Born February 8, 1820 in Lancaster, Ohio, he was the son of a rising lawyer and circuit judge. Upon his father's death, William Tecumseh, one of eleven Sherman children, was taken in by Thomas Ewing, a lawyer and close friend of his father. From the tender age of nine, "Cump" as he was called by his family, grew to manhood strongly influenced by his stepfather's conservative political views.<sup>6</sup> Two years later Cump's stepfather was to be elected U. S. Senator from Ohio. Tecumseh's younger brother John was adopted by a prosperous merchant and as the years passed became a U.S. Senator. The political thought contained in correspondence between Sherman, his stepfather and his brother John Sherman kept him abreast of happenings on Capitol Hill throughout his long career.

In 1836 Sherman was nominated by his Senator stepfather to West Point. The strong influence of his stepparents toward providing motivation, a sound secondary education, and character development served Cump well. He graduated sixth in a class of forty-three and was commissioned Second Lieutenant of Artillery in June 1840.

Sherman's initial assignment was dictated by his branch selection. Artillery units were engaged fighting the Seminole Indian, so he was posted in Florida. Subsequent assignments to Fort Morgan

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<sup>5</sup>Williams, p. 289.

<sup>6</sup>James M. Merrill, William Tecumseh Sherman (New York: Rand McNally & Co., 1971), pp. 41-42.

(vicinity of Mobile), Alabama, and Fort Moultrie (vicinity of Charleston), South Carolina, were interrupted by temporary duty in Marietta, Georgia, and northern Alabama. Thus, assignments from 1840-1845 provided an appreciation of the terrain, people, and customs that would prove invaluable on battlefields 20 years later.<sup>7</sup> As the Mexican War began Sherman's request to join the forces being sent to the southwest was parried by the Adjutant General Department. A recruiting assignment in Pennsylvania, followed by orders for California, kept him out of the war. His contemporaries gained invaluable wartime experience. Some gained brevet promotion. Promotion to captain did not come until 1850. Low army pay and a desire to strike out on his own in the lucrative banking business in San Francisco caused his resignation from the Army in 1853. With banking failures in San Francisco, Sherman left banking and turned to the practice of law in 1857, as a member of the Kansas Bar at Leavenworth, Kansas. He became a partner of the firm "Sherman, Ewing and McCook." Business went slack. He speculated on a small feed grain business hoping to sell corn to gold rush traffic through Leavenworth and failed again. Selling his Leavenworth property in March 1859, he applied and was accepted for a job as superintendent at a new military institute (now Louisiana State University) being opened in Alexandria, Louisiana.<sup>8</sup> Here, his strong political views were clearly in the minority.

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<sup>7</sup>Merrill, p. 60.

<sup>8</sup>Merrill, pp. 133-134.

Sherman accepted slavery without remorse, but he could not resist the strong antislavery stand of his brother in the Senate and his own strong antiseccessionist beliefs.<sup>9</sup> He resigned from the position of superintendent and moved back to St. Louis and the position of president of a streetcar company. Through his brother John and his brother-in-law and former Leavenworth law partner Tom Ewing, now the U. S. Senator from Kansas, Sherman was reinstated as colonel, 13th U. S. Infantry, a Regular Army unit.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Sherman's life paralleled Grant by State of birth, education, resignation from the Army six years before the war, and subsequent reinstatement.

He was breveted as Brigadier General of Volunteers. On temporary duty at the first battle of Bull Run he commanded a brigade in the Union debacle that followed.<sup>11</sup> His low regard for green volunteers and politicians who spoke of quick victory over the South hardened. After Bull Run, Sherman was assigned duty in the West. His frustrations in Kentucky led to near mental breakdown and further reassignment. General Halleck, Sherman's superior, though skeptical of his actions, was convinced of his abilities and, after a furlough, a

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<sup>9</sup>William T. Sherman to John Sherman, January 16, 1860 and January 16, 1861, William T. Sherman, The Sherman Letters: Correspondence Between General and Senator Sherman from 1837 to 1891, (hereinafter cited as The Sherman Letters) ed. Rachel Sherman Thorndike (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), pp. 79 and 105.

<sup>10</sup>Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army, From Its Organization September 29, 1789 to March 2, 1903 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903 reprinted Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1965), I, p. 882.

<sup>11</sup>Vincent J. Esposito, West Point Atlas of American Wars (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger, 1959), I, Maps 20-24.

new assignment provided the needed opportunity to redeem his reputation. Working for Grant in the West, Sherman's self confidence wended with each success. In the Eastern theater, however, events transpired which would create new opportunities.

President Lincoln grappled with the problem of developing a workable Union strategy. Meade's failure to pursue Lee's beaten army following the battle at Gettysburg typified the failure of the military mind in the Eastern Theater to understand the most important objective-- destruction of the Confederate army. After congratulating his troops for stopping Lee's invading army, Meade displayed his weakness of strategic thought by urging his troops to "drive [the enemy] from our soil" instead of directing the pursuit and destruction of Lee's army.<sup>12</sup> After replacing Meade, Grant's first directive to Sherman in 1864 clearly demonstrated his correction of this fault. As General-in-Chief he wrote to Sherman in Chattanooga, explaining the strategy which he would execute to attack in the eastern and western theaters simultaneously.

You [Sherman] I propose to move against Johnston's army to break it up and get into the interior of the enemy's country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their war resources.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Williams, p. 263.

<sup>13</sup>Ulysses S. Grant to William T. Sherman, April 4, 1864, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. [hereinafter cited as OR], prepared under direction of the Secretary of War pursuant to Act of Congress approved 16 June 1880 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1904), XXXII, Pt. 3, pp. 246-7.

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Grant saw the enemy as the objective, not the terrain. The will of the southern people provided another objective.

Sherman's reply six days later proved that he understood clearly the strategic significance of Grant's order. His first sentence after acknowledgement of his orders read, "That we are now all to act on a common plan, converging on a common centre, looks like enlightened war."<sup>14</sup> He subsequently reiterated his mission as "I will not let side issues draw me off from your main plans in which I am to knock Joseph Johnston, and to do as much damage to the resources of the enemy as possible."<sup>15</sup> After sketching his implementing plan he noted:

. . . but I will ever bear in mind that Johnston is at all times to be kept so busy that he cannot in any event send any part of his command against you . . .<sup>16</sup>

Sherman's objective was the Confederate Army of Tennessee. Prior to embarking on this mission, Sherman gave first priority to logistics.

He calculated the number of men, horses, and guns he would have to support once the difficult task of assembling forces had been completed by his subordinate commanders. Furloughed regiments and divisions would be ordered back to Chattanooga. The shortage of draught animals for wagons and guns could be offset by the railroad line. However, Sherman could not improvise for cavalry. He considered

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<sup>14</sup>William T. Sherman to Ulysses S. Grant, April 10, 1864, OR, XXXII, Pt. 3, p. 312.

<sup>15</sup>Sherman, OR, XXXII, Pt. 3, p. 313.

<sup>16</sup>Sherman, OR, XXXII, Pt. 3, p. 314.

the lack of adequate cavalry mounts a serious weakness based on messages and reports dispatched throughout the campaign.<sup>17</sup> While Sherman considered cavalry to be a weakness, he frequently boasted of his army's logistical strength, its railroad.

The railroad and its accompanying telegraph was to bring about the generalization that the Civil War was the "first of the modern wars."<sup>18</sup> Time and space factors were as radically changed by this technology as the improved musket, rifle and rifled cannon. The effect of fighting the war with the last war's logistics was as self-defeating as fighting with the last war's tactics. Sherman's "hoofed fleet" could not even carry his army to the outskirts of Chattanooga. His gloomy estimate of 30,000 dead animals and its impact upon the proposed campaign weighed heavily upon him. The situation called for centralized military management of the railroad. In a letter to his brother John he foresaw the political impact and settled upon a solution which was to have an adverse effect upon public opinion.

. . . I expect soon to have a new howl against me. The pressures to go in our cars to the front was so great and the difficulty of getting to Chattanooga so momentous, that I ordered absolutely no citizen, private freight, or anything but freight purely military to be taken till the wants of the troops were supplied . . .<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>B. H. Liddell Hart, Sherman, Soldier, Realist, American (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1930). p. 429.

<sup>18</sup>William T. Sherman to John Sherman, April 15, 1864, The Sherman Letters, p. 226.

<sup>19</sup>William T. Sherman to John Sherman, April 11, 1864, The Sherman Letters, p. 227.



Sherman referred to the long haul from his headquarters and supply base at Nashville to his forward supply base at Chattanooga. Sherman was correct, the "howls" reached Washington. Although Lincoln questioned Sherman's regulatory policy, he did not interfere with it. Characteristically, Sherman ordered his army to share with citizens the hardships of meager transportation. While supplies for the military would move by train, beef to feed his armies would be driven on foot. Returning furloughed soldiers were marched to the front. Sherman estimated that 130 cars carrying 10 tons each would have to arrive daily to support his 100,000 man army and 55,000 animals. More cars were urgently needed to augment existing rolling stock from 60 locomotives and 600 cars to 100 locomotives and 1,000 cars.<sup>20</sup>

The Atlanta Campaign began with proven high level Union leaders in command. The close association of these leaders and their military experience assured the complete communication of the campaign's object. Deep penetration into Confederate held territory by a large Union force presented serious logistical problems which were, for the most part, solved.

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<sup>20</sup>William T. Sherman, Memoirs of William T. Sherman (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1875), II, p. 11.

CHAPTER II

THE ADVANCE FROM CHATTANOOGA TO ATLANTA

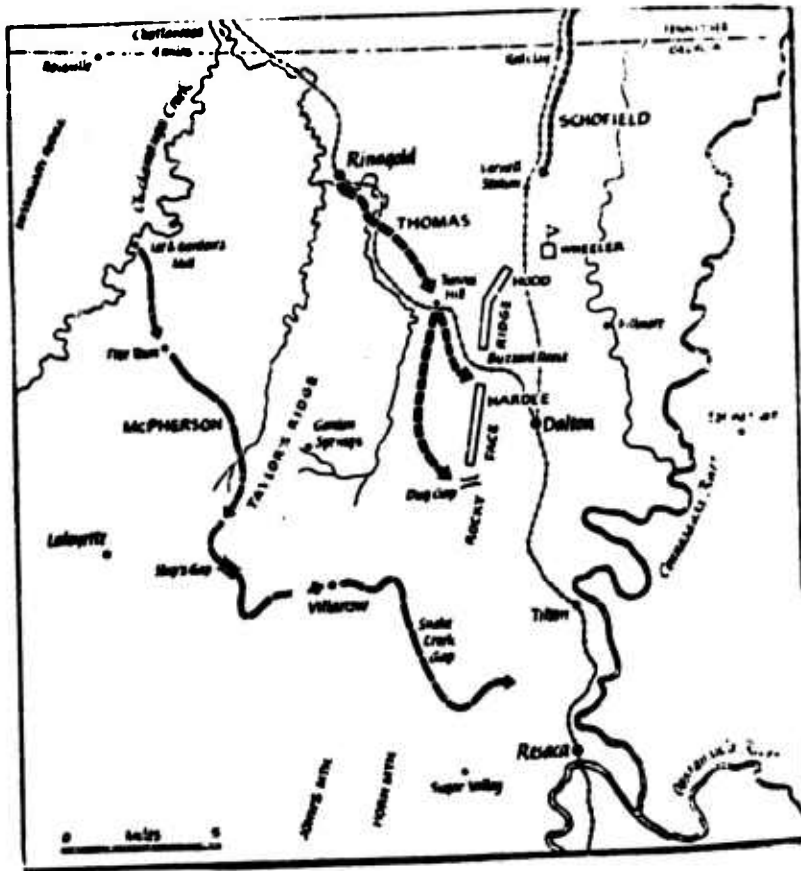
The offensive operations of Sherman's Atlanta Campaign began in May 1864 with a movement to contact at Dalton, Georgia. Reorganization of the command structure within Sherman's Military Division of the Mississippi had been accomplished in April. The three armies of Sherman's force were commanded by military professionals proven in combat. Less effective generals had been banned to western garrisons.<sup>1</sup> Major General John M. Schofield, Commander, Army of the Ohio (12,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry) secured the east flank at Knoxville by destroying bridges and the railroad toward Virginia and joined the Grand Army as its left wing.<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1) Major General George H. Thomas, Commander, Army of the Cumberland (55,000 Infantry and 5,000 Cavalry) constituted Sherman's center.<sup>3</sup> Thomas had garrisoned Chattanooga with his army since its capture by Grant in 1863 and

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<sup>1</sup>Ulysses S. Grant to William T. Sherman, April 9, 1864, The War of the Rebellion: A compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies [hereinafter cited as OR], prepared under direction of the Secretary of War pursuant to Act of Congress approved 16 June 1860 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1904), CXIII, Pt. 3, p. 298; Sherman to Stephen A. Hurlbut, April 11, 1864, pp. 326-7; Grant to Sherman April 15, 1864, p. 366; Sherman to Hurlbut, April 16, 1864, pp. 381-2. Major General S. A. Hurlbut's relief at Memphis for... "marked timidity in the management of affairs since Forrest passed north of Memphis." He was subsequently reassigned to the garrison at Cairo, Illinois.

<sup>2</sup>Report of Effective Strength and Stations, Headquarters, Military Division of the Mississippi, April 24, 1864, OR XXIII, Pt. 3, p. 468.

<sup>3</sup>OR, XXIII, Pt. 3, p. 468.



TURNING MOVEMENT AT DALTON

Figure 1

Source: The Civil War, Shelby Foote. (New York: Random House, 1974), v. 3, p. 324.

secured the railroad running through Chattanooga to Ringold. Thomas was a competent and reliable commander, but was not known for his speed.

Sherman's third trusted lieutenant was young Major General James B. McPherson. McPherson commanded the Department of the Tennessee, Sherman's former command, composed of 30,000 Infantry and 5,000 Cavalry.<sup>4</sup> These strength figures were inflated, however, as two divisions were on veteran furlough and 5,000 were detached to participate in the Red River Campaign. They were to return to McPherson's control by the first of May. McPherson's perception of inadequate strength as a result of these detachments was significant. Sherman later had cause to regret McPherson's timidity at Resaca as a result of low strength. McPherson's army had been operating in northern Alabama and joined the Grand Army as its right flank. It was a lighter force trained to Sherman's austere habits. Sherman favored the Army of the Tennessee over the Army of the Cumberland for rapid moves. Each army commander left troops behind to secure its respective department and logistical facilities.

The terrain between Chattanooga and Atlanta favored defensive operations. Cross-compartments formed by ridgelines and rivers, coupled with densely wooded areas, confronted the attacking forces. Reconnaissance by cavalry and logistical support by wagon train were significantly canalized and restricted by the road net.

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<sup>4</sup>OR, XXXII, Pt. 3, p. 469.

The absence of macadam roads further hampered mobility during extended rainfall and the unimproved roads became a sea of mud bogging down operations. The 138 mile distance between Chattanooga and Atlanta was greater than the distance between Washington and the Confederate capital of Richmond. Sherman and his men drew comparisons between the two theaters in logistics and tactical success achieved. Lack of a strategically assailable flank (by sea) in the Atlanta Campaign created total dependence upon the single railroad linking the Military Division of the Mississippi with its base of supply to the north.

The shortage of mules, draught and riding horses further underscored the importance of rail movement. Sherman's mission demanded mobility. He never gained a relative advantage in mobility over the Confederate army opposing him.

The Confederate defenses of Dalton were strong. However, if there were Confederate weaknesses, they were an extended supply line from Atlanta and reliance on the Western and Atlantic Railroad. Terrain paralleling the railroads proved to be the battleground. Rocky Face Ridge passed roughly perpendicular to the northern axis of advance toward Dalton. Buzzard's Roost, a small community on the road paralleling the railroad between Dalton and Ringold dominated the only pass through the ridgeline. The terrain canalized movement and restricted reconnaissance. The Confederate commander used the terrain to his advantage. Lieutenant General Joseph E. Johnston had assumed command of the Confederate forces at Dalton in 1863 after the

relief of General Braxton Bragg. Dalton was the first of seven Confederate defensive positions to be occupied. It was to be followed in succession by Resaca, Cassville, Allatoona, Kennesaw Mountain, Chattahoochee River, and finally Atlanta. Sherman, aware of the strength of the Rocky Face Ridge defense at Dalton, was determined to avoid a costly assault. He adroitly timed the activities of his three armies to deceive Johnston. Reconnaissance in April had revealed that Sherman could move a portion of his force through Rocky Face Ridge at Snake Creek Gap exiting the ridgeline behind Johnston's army at lightly held Resaca.<sup>5</sup> Sherman had not forgotten his mission of destroying the Confederate army. B. H. Liddle Hart described Sherman's plan as follows:

Sherman's plan at Dalton was to make a neat incision in the base of the tin so that the meat dropped out. He aimed to use the least possible pressure from the top, but to hold Thomas and Schofield "ready to rush in at the first appearance of retreat."<sup>6</sup>

McPherson was to make the incision at Snake Creek Gap. Unhinged and demoralized, the Confederate force retreating along the back roads east of the railroad would be dealt the decisive blow by the remainder of Sherman's armies.

Whether strategy or tactics, the maneuver was brilliantly conceived. In execution, however, it failed. Sherman's trusted protégé, McPherson, urged to move with the speed and boldness required

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<sup>5</sup>William T. Sherman to James B. McPherson, May 5, 1864, OR XXXVIII, Pt. 4, pp. 39-40.

<sup>6</sup>B. H. Liddell Hart, Sherman, Soldier, Realist, American (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1930), p. 243.

by the plan, arrived late at Snake Creek Gap and failed to attack the light force holding Resaca. Sherman was to accept responsibility for this failure:

Troops had to be marched and collected from all parts of the country without attracting attention, and I got McPherson up to Chattanooga and on Johnston's flank before he suspected anything more than a detachment of Thomas' command.<sup>7</sup>

Though one might forgive McPherson for his timidity due to inadequate information of the enemy's strength, his second error was inexcusable. Passing through Snake Creek Gap on 9 May he succeeded in reaching the railroad on the outskirts of Resaca, but failed to destroy the railroad. Sustaining 36 casualties, the Army of the Tennessee withdrew to Snake Creek Gap. Johnston used the railroad to withdraw his Confederate Army from Dalton to Resaca. It would take seven days and 3,375 casualties before Sherman would take a strongly reinforced Resaca.<sup>8</sup> Sherman, after three weeks reflection pinpointed McPherson more accurately.

Had my plans been executed with the vim I contemplated I should have forced Johnston to fight the decisive battle in the Oostenaule Valley between Dalton and Resaca; but McPherson was a little over-cautious.<sup>9</sup>

General McPherson did not fail his commander again. He was to die in

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<sup>7</sup>William T. Sherman to his wife, May 20, 1864, Home Letters of General Sherman, ed. M.A. De Wolf Howe (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 290.

<sup>8</sup>William T. Sherman to Henry W. Halleck, May 16, 1864 OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 4, pp. 201-2.

<sup>9</sup>William T. Sherman to his wife, November 12, 1864, Home Letters of General Sherman, p. 296.

another battle under similar circumstances while protecting an open flank of Sherman's army. The Snake Creek Gap opportunity ended with arrival of Confederate Lieutenant General Leonidas Polk's Corps from Atlanta and the withdrawal of Johnston to Resaca. The Confederate army was growing progressively stronger as it rolled back on its line of communication. The arrival of Polk's Corps brought Johnston's strength to 60,000 troops. However, no major external reinforcement would be provided. Although Sherman had failed to pin down the Confederate force, he had succeeded in turning it out of strong defensive positions. Pushed by an army almost twice its size, the Confederate force traded space for time using the defensive terrain to advantage. Johnston searched for an opportunity to strike at elements of the attacking Union force and destroy them piecemeal.

Resaca offered defensive terrain similar in one respect to Rocky Face Ridge at Dalton. It was protected by an obstacle to the west, a ridgeline and the Costanula River. Earlier in the year, the Costanula River had been favored by Johnston over Dalton as a defensive position. Upon Bragg's relief, however, an investment of Confederate resources had already been expended. Government pressure for a Confederate drive into east Tennessee demanded an advanced base. Johnston reluctantly accepted and defended Dalton. Sherman attacked the Resaca defenses as a diversion while moving a corps south around the Confederate left flank.<sup>10</sup> Johnston's army withdrew the next day.

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<sup>10</sup>Sherman to Halleck, May 11, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, pt. 4, p. 133.



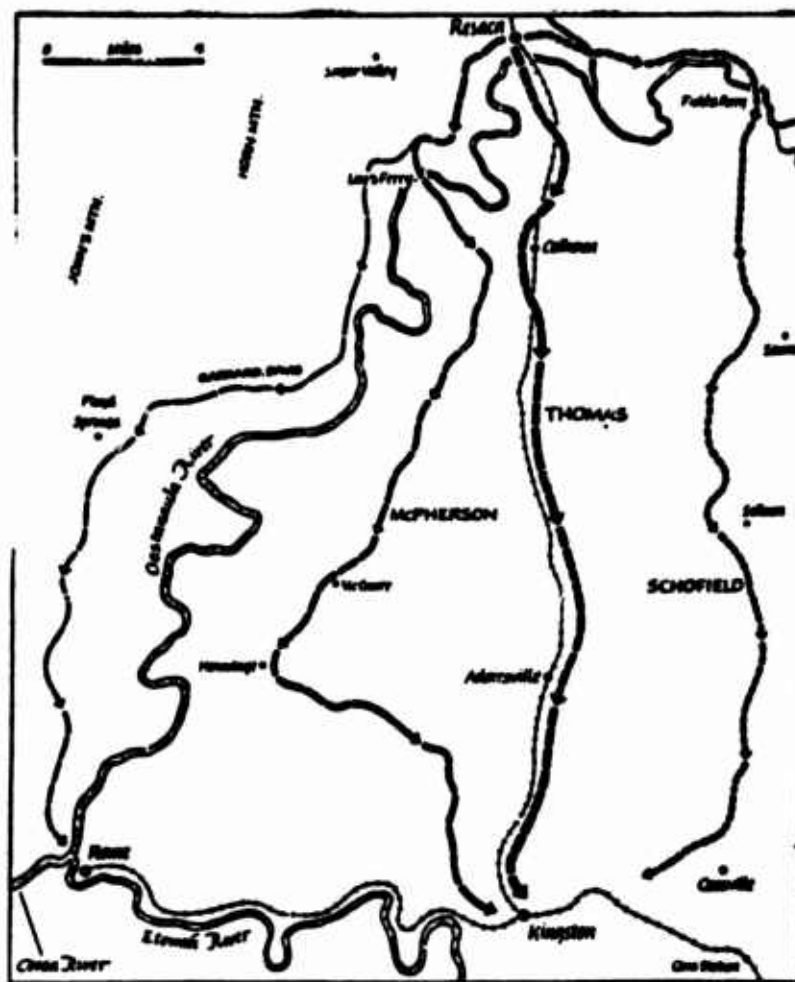
With the Oostanula River-Resaca defenses so easily turned, Sherman advanced. (Figure 2) He was now able to attack along two axis. With cavalry and a small infantry force he captured the important Confederate industrial center at Rome unopposed. Moving along the railroad on a parallel line, the Grand Army closed upon the new Confederate defense position at Cassville.

Johnston viewed the Cassville position as unique. It favored a limited Confederate offensive if Sherman moved toward it as planned. Correctly analyzing terrain, routes of movement and strength of Sherman's three armies, all factors appeared to fit his concept. He planned to destroy Schofield's Army of the Ohio (14,000) and defeat Sherman in detail before he could unite his forces.<sup>11</sup> With the Union armies moving on three separate axis of advance separated by low mountains, Johnston intended to stop or delay the left Union army with Polk's Corps and then destroy it with a flanking attack from the east by Hood's Corps. As Schofield advanced toward Polk in the valley, Hood's troops were improperly positioned for an attack.<sup>12</sup> Time being critical, Johnston cancelled the attack and withdrew to an alternate defense position south of Cassville. Here, Southern generals briefly argued the merits of

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph E. Johnston, "Opposing Sherman's March to the Sea," Battles and Leaders, ed Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (New York: The Century Company, 1834-1887 republished by Thomas Yoseloff, Inc., 1956), IV, p. 268.

<sup>12</sup> Johnston, Battles and Leaders, IV, p. 268.



RESACA TO CASSVILLE

Figure 2

Source: The Civil War, Shelby Foote, (New York: Random House, 1974), v. 3, p. 324.

defending their new position while under fire from Union skirmishers. Then they decided on crossing the Etowah River to defend Allatoona Pass.

Sherman responded by a flanking movement unique in the Atlanta Campaign for its bold movement away from the railroad. (Figure 3) Thomas and McPherson departed Kingston and the railroad, traveling by available country roads almost due south to the Etowah River and beyond to the vicinity of Dallas and New Hope Church. Schofield moved generally parallel, linking up with Thomas and going into position between New Hope Church and Lost Mountain. Union movements were detected on May 22. Johnston's Army countered them by abandoning the Allatoona position for one extending from Dallas to Lost Mountain.

Sherman's strategy had exploited Johnston's timidity, his over dependence upon the railroad, and requirement to defend Atlanta. Rather than attempt the piecemeal destruction of Sherman's armies, beginning with Schofield's nearby smaller force, Johnston again chose to defend. In less than three weeks Sherman had pushed Johnston's army to within twenty miles of Atlanta without a major battle. Sherman's extended line of communications had not been significantly threatened or attacked. He maintained telegraphic communication with his garrisons throughout Tennessee, and the rest of the Union.

Johnston's defense of the Dallas-New Hope Church line stopped the Union advance south. However, Sherman had achieved his purpose. He would not have to assault the strong Confederate position at Allatoona Pass. He could now "leapfrog" his forces to the east and regain the railroad plus twenty miles of track without a fight. A



ETOWAH TO NEW HOPE CHURCH

Figure 3

Source: The Civil War, Shelby Foote. (New York: Random House, 1974), v. 3. p. 346.

strong attack by Union General Hooker's Corps (Thomas' army) at 4:30 P.M., May 25, 1864, had fixed Johnston's force in position.<sup>13</sup> Johnston was aware of Union intentions. He wrote his superior, General Braxton Bragg, three days later: "The Federal army has been approaching the railroad by intrenchments for the last three days at the rate of about a mile a day."<sup>14</sup> Within ten days Polk's Corps was centered on Pine Mountain. He was opposed by Thomas' Army. Hardee, on Polk's left was opposed by Schofield's Army. Hood's Corps, on the right was opposed by McPherson's army. Three weeks followed, during which Sherman attempted to outflank Johnston's left, bowing back his three Corps to a north-south line east of Sandtown Road. The Governor of Georgia raised an additional division for Johnston who used it to guard the Chattahoochee bridges and fords.

Adverse weather slowed all operations. Summer rains began which continued throughout June. Wagon traffic cut road surfaces used in supplying Sherman's armies and Confederate General Wheeler's cavalry raids threatened Sherman's railroad line of communication to Chattanooga. Union Major General Francis P. Blair's Fifteenth Corps, 10,000 strong, which had been on furlough, joined McPherson's Army of the Tennessee. Understandably Sherman's force depended on his line of communications. He looked to his rear, reinforcing his garrisons. Concern for Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest's cavalry operating in West Tennessee required countermeasures from thinly held garrisons and

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<sup>13</sup>Sherman to McPherson, May 25, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, pt. 4, p. 312.

<sup>14</sup>Johnston to Braxton Bragg, May 28, 1864, OR XXXVIII, pt. 4, p. 745

General A. J. Smith's force returning from the Red River Campaign.<sup>15</sup>

Sherman's desire to destroy Johnston's army was being systematically replaced by a pattern of advancing and securing the Union line of communications. Sherman was gaining ground, but not destroying the Confederate force. He kept his three armies within supporting distance of each other and, while the divisions and corps on separate occasions attacked Confederate positions, Sherman's army, as a whole, did not. At Kennesaw Mountain Sherman could advance no further without an all-out attack. (Figure 4) Poor trafficability caused by rains and the extended distance to Schofield's army on the Union right compounded logistic difficulties. Confederate occupation of Kennesaw Mountain provided observation of Sandtown Road which was used for hauling supplies, and its artillery batteries dominated all Union activities within range. Sherman accepted his army commander's implied complaint that they were being overextended in the attempt to outflank the Confederate Kennesaw Mountain defense. His dry sense of humor led him to say to Thomas "I suppose the enemy, with his smaller force, intends to surround us."<sup>16</sup> Whether this was a rebuke of his army commanders or criticism of Confederate tactics is not known, however he intended to capitalize on the Confederate vulnerability it created. "I propose to study the ground well, and the day after tomorrow breakthrough after letting him

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<sup>15</sup>Sherman to George E. Thomas, June 24, 1864, beginning "I am directed...", OR, XXXVIII, pt. 4, p. 582.

<sup>16</sup>Sherman to Thomas, June 24, 1864, beginning "Your note received..." OR, XXXVIII, pt. 4, p. 582.



KENNESAW MOUNTAIN

Figure 4

Source: The Civil War, Shelby Foote. (New York: Random House, 1974), v. 3, p. 396.

develop (overextend) his line as much as possible . . ."<sup>17</sup> His attack order issued on June 24th directed

Thomas will assault the enemy at any point near its center, . . . McPherson will feign by a movement of his cavalry and one division of infantry on his extreme left, approaching Marietta from the north, and using artillery freely but will make his real attack at a point south and west and threaten that flank . . . with artillery and display, but attack some one point of the enemy's line as near the Marietta and Powder Springs road as he can with prospect of success.<sup>18</sup>

To Halleck the day before the attack he wrote:

I am making some changes in the disposition of our men with a view to attack the enemy's left center. I shall aim to make him stretch his line until he weakens it and then break through.<sup>19</sup>

This fine distinction of Sherman's perception of his objective is apparent. In attempting a penetration he was attacking Johnston's army, not maneuvering against his line of communications. Sherman's attack was a frontal assault typical of contemporary tactics. Historians have characterized the Union operation as, ". . . poorly planned. Sherman used no deception to confuse Johnston . . ."<sup>20</sup>

The assault, the only major attack made at the time and place chosen by Sherman, was a tactical failure when measured against its immediate objective. After two hours of fighting, Sherman conferred with his classmate and wise critic, Thomas. The consensus of opinion prevailed.

<sup>17</sup>Sherman, OR, XXXVIII, pt. 4, p. 582.

<sup>18</sup>Special Field Orders No. 28, Headquarters, Military Division of the Mississippi, June 24, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, pt. 4, p. 588.

<sup>19</sup>Special Field Orders No. 28, OR, XXXVIII, pt. 4, p. 589.

<sup>20</sup>Vincent J. Esposito (ed.), West Point Atlas of American Wars (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1959), I, Map 146.



Sherman stopped the attack. No decision was gained over the Confederate Army. Sherman's casualties, killed and wounded, were considerable. Thomas' army lost 2,000, and McPherson's army lost 500. Sherman's report to Washington the next evening listed his losses and rationalized: "The facility with which defensive works of timber and earth are constructed gives the party on the defensive great advantage." He went on with his reason for not using an alternative to the frontal attack:

I cannot well turn the position of the enemy without abandoning my railroad, and we are already so far from our supplies that it is as much as the road can do to feed and supply the army. There are no supplies of any kind here. I can press Johnston and keep him from reinforcing Lee, but to assault him in position will cost us more lives than we can spare . . . I do not suppose we inflicted heavy loss on the enemy, as he kept close behind his parapets.<sup>21</sup>

Sherman reflected philosophically on the Kennesaw battle losses three days later.

It is enough to make the whole world start at the awful moment of death and destruction that now stalks . . . I begin to regard the death and mangling of a couple thousand men as a small affair, a kind of morning dash--and it may be well that we become so hardened.<sup>22</sup>

Sherman became hardened but not insensitive. Close friends of many years fell. Colonel Dan McCook, Leavenworth law partner and pal since youth, was killed while commanding a brigade in the Kennesaw assault.

In communications with Thomas, Sherman struggles to justify the attack from still another view.

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<sup>21</sup>Sherman to Halleck, June 27, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, pt. 4, p. 607.

<sup>22</sup>Sherman to his wife, June 30, 1864, Home Letters of General Sherman, p. 299.

Had we broken the line today it would have been most decisive, but as it is our loss is small, compared with some of those in the East. It should not in the least discourage us. At times assaults are necessary and inevitable.<sup>23</sup>

Apparently despondent over an adverse press on his Kennesaw battle losses twelve days later, he justified his frontal attack with:

I was forced to make the effort and it should have succeeded; but the officers and men have been so used to my avoiding excessive danger and forcing back the enemy by strategy that they hate to assault; [and then realizing the heavy loss of general, field grade officers and men Sherman changed tack . . .] but to assault is sometimes necessary for its effect on the enemy.<sup>24</sup>

Sherman was no stranger to the battlefield by this time. Kennesaw was not his first view of human carnage. He had been a brigade commander at the first Battle of Bull Run (1861) as part of a force sustaining over 2,500 casualties (ironically defeated by General Joseph E. Johnston). He had fought at Vicksburg. It is interesting to note Sherman's varied and changing reactions to the losses in the Kennesaw battle. First, he blamed the strong fortifications; second he declared a frontal attack was necessary to avoid abandoning the railroad; third, "a small affair, a kind of morning dash . . . we become hardened"; fourth, "our loss is small compared with . . . the East"; fifth, "Assaults are necessary . . . for the troops, "i.e., good training; sixth, "but to assault is sometimes necessary for its effect on the enemy." It took Sherman two weeks to mentally find his way back to his objective--the decisive objective of destruction of Johnston's army.

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<sup>23</sup>Sherman to Thomas, June 27, 1864, OR, XXVIII, pt. 4, p. 611.

<sup>24</sup>Sherman to his wife, July 9, 1864, Home Letters of General Sherman, p. 301.

This objective eluded him until it was accomplished by the skill of a subordinate.

Grant, no longer feared Lee's reinforcement by detachments from Johnston's army. A critical shortage of food and forage existed at Richmond. Grant relieved Sherman of the additional burden of separating the two Confederate armies.<sup>25</sup> The effect of this change was minimal. Later events reemphasized the importance of first cutting the Augusta Railroad.

After the Kennesaw battle, dry weather improved the roads. A single recognized gain of the Kennesaw battle was the southern extension of Schofield's line across Olley's Creek (an offshoot from the Chattahoochee River) on the Confederate left flank. (Figure 5) The weakness at this point was exploited. McPherson's army was withdrawn from the line and marched south over the Sandtown Road. Johnston, unable to extend his left flank further to cover McPherson's movement, withdrew to a new defensive position forward of the Chattahoochee River.

Johnston's position west of the Chattahoochee River was made untenable within a week by a demonstration on the Confederate left. Union Brigadier General Kenner Garrard's 2d Cavalry Division crossed the Chattahoochee River at Roswell. Next, Schofield crossed at Soap Creek followed by McPherson's 15th Corps, reinforcing Garrard. Johnston withdrew the Confederate army to the east side of the Chattahoochee.

On July 16, 1864 Sherman was cautioned by Grant that Confederate reinforcements of . . . 25,000 troops may be on the way from Richmond

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<sup>25</sup>Halleck to Sherman, June 18, 1864, OR, XIXVIII, pt. 4, p. 629.



CROSSING THE CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVER

Figure 5

Source: The Civil War, Shelby Foote. (New York: Random House, 1974), v. 3, p. 407.

... " and to take defensive action.<sup>26</sup> Sherman reacted by expediting operations to cut the railroad line entering Atlanta from the east. Each of Sherman's armies had crossed the difficult Chattahoochee River obstacle by the 19th of July. Johnston, at the urging of Braxton Bragg, was relieved for cause on 17 July 1864 and replaced by 33 year old Lieutenant General John Bell Hood.<sup>27</sup> Sherman's new opponent would fight radically different from his predecessor. Many "morning dashes" would follow.

The Atlanta Campaign carried Sherman over favorable defensive terrain to the Chattahoochee River in two months. His objective of breaking up the Confederate army offered him two choices. He could attack strong defensive positions fighting the decisive battle near Chattanooga or, he could outflank the Confederate positions, with an intermediate objective of cutting their communications, and destroying the Confederate army while in retreat. Sherman chose the latter course in each case except Kenesaw Mountain. Sherman's skill at manouevring the Union army was superb. At Atlanta he correctly perceived his opponent would have to stand and fight. Here again, the destruction of railroads became an intermediate objective. In mid-July, no natural obstacles opposed Sherman. The Confederate army stood alone on the outskirts of a heavily fortified city.

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<sup>26</sup> Grant to Sherman, July 16, 1864, OR, XXVIII, pt. 5, p. 149.

<sup>27</sup> Confederate Secretary of War James A. Seddon to Johnston, July 17, 1864, OR, XXVIII, pt. 5, p. 885.

### CHAPTER III

#### CAPTURE OF ATLANTA

General Sherman began a distinctly different phase of the Atlanta Campaign with the crossing of the Chattochee River. He chose to avoid heavy losses by postponing a direct attack on the bristling defenses of Atlanta. His plan was simple in design. Rather than complete encirclement of Atlanta, it sought to isolate the city by cutting its railroad links to the Confederacy. The Confederate Army did not remain passive during this Union maneuver. In rapid succession Hood attacked on July 20th at Peachtree Creek, on July 22d east of Atlanta, and on July 28th at Ezra Church west of Atlanta. Two corps of Hood's army attacked Sherman's advancing columns a month later at Jonesboro. With all four railroads into Atlanta cut, Hood evacuated Atlanta and withdrew his forces south of Lovejoy.

Each of these battles shared several common characteristics. They were planned and initiated by the Confederates. In general, they were fought on terrain chosen by Hood. In each battle Hood's losses were greater than Sherman's. Each battle immediately preceded or followed the Union destruction of a railroad leading into Atlanta. The morale of Hood's army dropped further with each successive engagement. The fourth battle marked the end of the phase. Hood was now free of responsibility for protection of Atlanta. Sherman was in possession of Atlanta. As previously mentioned, the first battle of this phase occurred due north of Atlanta at a tributary of the Chattahoochee River known as Peachtree Creek.

The battle of Peachtree Creek exploited the Confederate advantage of movement on interior lines (Figure 6). It further exploited the inability of the Union force to maintain a united front while conducting its "right wheel" around Atlanta. Anticipation of Confederate offensive action did not slow the Union movement. It appears that Sherman's haste to cut the Georgia railroad, thereby separating Hood from Virginia reinforcements, worked in his favor.<sup>1</sup> In current parlance, Sherman obtained a degree of security through speed of movement.

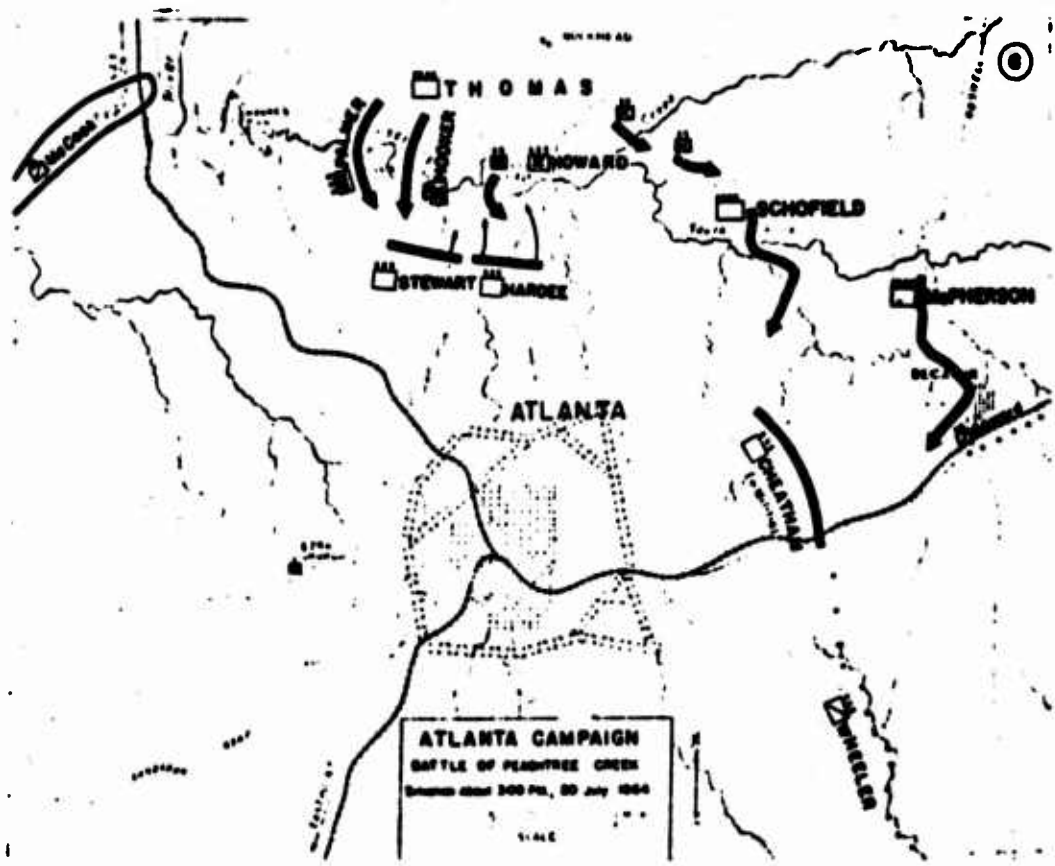
The Battle of Peachtree Creek caught Sherman's army closing in on Atlanta from the north, northeast, and east. The Union order of march was McPherson, Schofield followed by Thomas. Sherman's Special Field Orders No. 39 published on July 19th prescribed operations for July 20th beginning at 5 A.M. "The whole army will move on Atlanta by the most direct roads."<sup>2</sup> Thomas, from Buckhead; Schofield, from Doctor Powell's; McPherson, one or more roads from Decatur, were to converge on Atlanta. Sherman further stipulated "Each army commander will accept battle on anything like fair terms. . ."<sup>3</sup> The publication

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<sup>1</sup>William T. Sherman to George H. Thomas, July 16, 1864, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies ((hereinafter cited as OR)), prepared under direction of the Secretary of War pursuant to Act of Congress approved 16 June 1880 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1904), XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup>Special Field Orders No. 39, Headquarters, Military Division of the Mississippi, July 19, 1864, OR, XXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 193.

<sup>3</sup>Special Field Orders No. 39, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 193.



BATTLE OF PEACHTREE CREEK

Figure 6

Source: The West Point Atlas of American Wars.  
 Editor Colonel Vincent J. Esposito (New York:  
 Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1959), vol. 1, p. 147.  
 map A.



of Sherman's order coincided with the ground reconnaissance of the new Confederate commander. Hood, rapidly locating his three corps, issued the Confederate attack order for July 20th to commence at 1 P.M.<sup>4</sup>

Technically both Union and Confederate armies were attacking each other on July 20th. The Union army attacked first. The Confederate army attacked between 3 and 4 P.M. Popular historical accounts generally credit Hood's army alone as attacking. The fact that Sherman's armies were already in motion accounts for the failure of Hood's two corps, conducting his main attack to the north, to strike the Union force on its center. Hood's center corps (Hardee) displaced his forces to the east before attacking. This maneuver delayed the Confederate attack to the north until late afternoon. Thomas reported the results to Sherman at 6:15 P.M. "The enemy attacked me in full force at about 4 P.M., and has persisted until now, attacking very fiercely, but he was repulsed.."<sup>5</sup> Thomas might have had further losses from renewed attacks by Confederate reserves. However, the Union threat of Schofield and McPherson closing in from the east aborted further confederate attack.<sup>6</sup> With darkness the Confederate army withdrew into the Atlanta defenses. On the 21st the Union armies made little progress, but Sherman reported the results of the previous days battle to Washington:

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<sup>4</sup> John B. Hood to Joseph Wheeler, July 17, 1864, OR, XXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 892.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas to Sherman, July 20, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 197.

<sup>6</sup> Foote, Shelby, The Civil War (New York: Random House, Inc. 1974) III, p. 475.

[the Confederate army] left his dead and many wounded  
in our possession, we retaining undisputed possession of all  
the ground fought over...

Estimates of Peachtree Creek battle casualties vary in detail. Sherman  
later estimated his losses at 1,500 (including killed, wounded, and  
missing), and Hood's losses at no less than 5,000. The greatest Union  
losses were sustained by Hooker's Corps (Thomas) which was caught in the  
open by the Confederate attack.<sup>8</sup>

The Battle of Atlanta followed two days later. It began during  
continuation of the Union advance toward Atlanta from the east (Figure 7).  
McPherson moving along the Georgia railroad with Major General John A.  
Logan's 15th Corps on the right, General Frank P. Blair's 17th Corps on  
the left, trailed with General Grenville M. Dodge's 16th Corps.<sup>9</sup>  
McPherson intended to set up a portion of his artillery on Leggett's  
Hill to shell an Atlanta foundry. At the moment of the Confederate  
attack, McPherson was at Sherman's headquarters at Howard House located  
in McPherson's rear. Unexplained sounds of heavy and intermittent gunfire  
to the southeast and at Decatur concluded the meeting.<sup>10</sup>

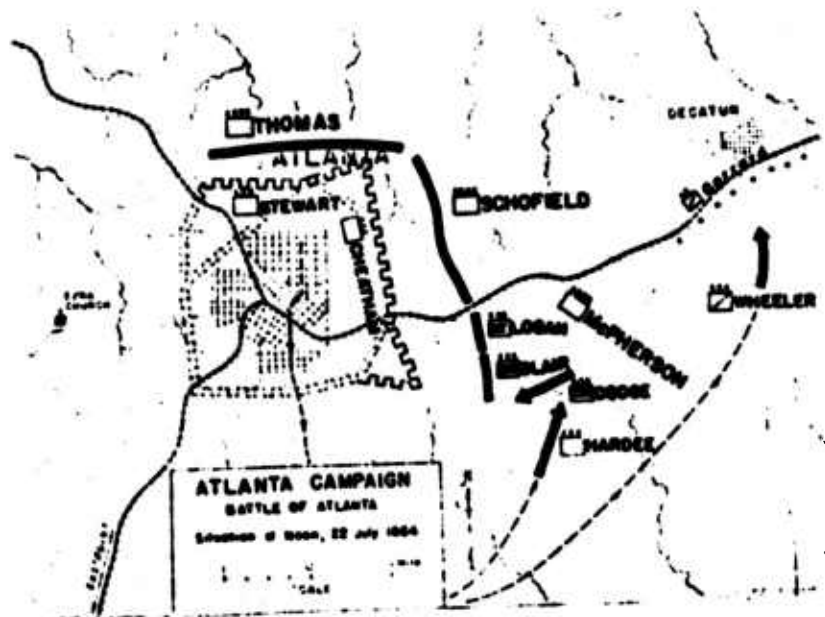
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<sup>7</sup>Sherman to Henry W. Halleck, July 21, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5,  
p. 211.

<sup>8</sup>Sherman to Halleck, September 15, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 1, p. 171

<sup>9</sup>Special Field Orders No. 40, Headquarters, Military Division of the  
Mississippi, July 21, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 222.

<sup>10</sup>William T. Sherman, Memoirs of William T. Sherman (New York:  
D. Appleton and Company, 1875), II, p. 75.



### BATTLE OF ATLANTA

Figure 7

**SOURCE:** The West Point Atlas of American Wars.  
 Editor Colonel Vincent J. Esposito  
 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc.,  
 1959), vol. 1, p. 147, map b.

A Confederate Corps had withdrawn south thru Atlanta's perimeter during the early morning hours and, hooking to the northeast, struck Sherman's left flank. Hood's plan was to roll up Sherman's army from the Union left. Lieutenant General William J. Hardee's Confederate Corps struck Elair's Corps. At the same time Major General Joseph Wheeler's Corps attacked the Union trains parked in the square at Decatur. The fighting began at noon and lasted until dark.<sup>11</sup> The center of the battle, Leggett's Hill, was to be immortalized by the great number of Confederate and Union dead buried later at nearby Oakland Cemetery. The 400 foot three dimensional painting Atlanta Cyclorama was constructed twenty years later to memorialize the event still fresh in the minds of veterans.

General McPherson was killed moments after his meeting with Sherman. McPherson having galloped toward 15th Corps made a quick assessment of the Confederate threat and dispatched his aides with orders to his subordinate commanders. Accompanied by his orderly he was challenged by a Confederate officer to halt. In an effort to escape, he was shot.<sup>12</sup> Sherman grieved the loss of the only U. S. army commander killed in battle.<sup>13</sup>

Cheatham's Confederate Corps defending the eastern perimeter of

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<sup>11</sup>Hood to Confederate Secretary of War James A. Seddon, July 22, 1864, CR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 900

<sup>12</sup>William E. Strong, "The Death of Major General James B. McPherson, July 22, 1864," (Unpublished handwritten account by former Inspector General and Chief-of-Staff, Army of the Tennessee, Chicago: August 25, 1976), p. 41, in personal papers of researcher.

<sup>13</sup>Sherman to his wife, July 29, 1864, Home Letters of General Sherman, ed. H.A. Dewolfe Howe (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 304.

Atlanta attacked Leggett's Hill from the east at 4 P. M. This ill-timed attack was also repulsed by the Army of the Tennessee, but not before scoring gains along the railroad and capturing a four gun battery of twenty pound Parrott guns. By morning the Confederates had withdrawn into Atlanta. Hood's attack, described by Union Corps commander Major General Frank P. Blair as, "...a very bold and a very brilliant one...", had been costly.<sup>14</sup> The Confederate losses totalled 8,000 casualties. The Union lost 3,700 men.<sup>15</sup>

The Union army now closed on the strong Confederate entrenchments surrounding Atlanta. With Thomas and Schofield threatening the north and east sides of the Atlanta perimeter, Sherman made two concentric sweeps around the Confederate city. The cavalry moved on the outer circle in a two pronged pincer maneuver designed to cut the two railroads leading into Atlanta at Palmetto and Lovejoy.<sup>16</sup>

Brigadier General Edward M. McCook led his First Cavalry Division east from the Chattahoochee River to Palmetto Station destroying track on the Montgomery and Atlanta Railroad. Enroute to the designated objective of Lovejoy Station on the Macon railroad, he captured and burned a train of 500 wagons and killed 800 mules. McCook arrived at Lovejoy on time. His commander, Major General George Stoneman and the attached cavalry division commanded by Brigadier General Kenner

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<sup>14</sup>Foots, III, p. 484.

<sup>15</sup>Sherman to Halleck, September 15, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 1, p. 75.

<sup>16</sup>Special Field Orders No. 42, Headquarters, Military Division of the Mississippi, July 15, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 255.

Garrard did not arrive. Stoneman, apparently diverted by a personal ambition to free Union prisoners at Rome and Andersonville (100 miles to the south), failed to linkup with Garrard's cavalry at Flat Rock. Garrard waited two days for Stoneman and was then forced by Wheeler's cavalry to withdraw to the north. McCook outnumbered and unsupported at Lovejoy, fought his way back to the west, rejoining Sherman's army. Stoneman reached Macon with three cavalry brigades. Aware that he was being pursued, he headed north where he was stopped by a Confederate cavalry brigade. Stoneman ordered two of the brigades to break out from what he believed to be a complete encirclement. Stoneman supported the break out with a third brigade of 500 men and then ignominiously surrendered after two hours.<sup>17</sup> The overall effect of the cavalry raid, at a time of great opportunity, was a failure. Sherman could scarcely conceal his scorn, stating "But on the whole the cavalry raid is not deemed a success. . ."<sup>18</sup>

Sherman's nomination of Major General Oliver O. Howard to command McPherson's army was approved by Washington on 26 July.<sup>19</sup> The change of command occurred while on the move, for the Army of the Tennessee had been put in motion around Atlanta to strike the railroad at East Point. Sherman, no believer in the efficiency of cavalry in effectively destroying railroads, had discussed the sweeping maneuver with McPherson

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<sup>17</sup>Colonel Wilbur S. Nye, "Cavalry Operations Around Atlanta", Civil War Times Illustrated, (Gettysburg, PA: Historical Times, Inc., 1964), p. 50.

<sup>18</sup>Sherman to Halleck, September 15, 1864, OR, LXXVIII, Pt. 1, p. 77

<sup>19</sup>Halleck to Sherman, July 26, 1864, OR, XXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 260

before his death.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the third battle for Atlanta began on July 21, 1864 as the Army of the Tennessee, now commanded by Howard, passed around the north side of Atlanta and approached Ezra Church. (Figure 3)

Ezra Church had no particular significance to Hood with the exception that it was located on Lick Skillet Road. This road ran west of Atlanta thru the town of Lick Skillet to a low water ford on the Chattahoochee River. Hood detected the pullback of Union forces east of his perimeter on July 27th and predicted the ultimate destination of the Union force.<sup>21</sup> He sent his old corps, now commanded by Lieutenant General S. D. Lee, to hold the Lick Skillet Road. S. D. Lee's Corps attacked the 15th Corps (Logan) from noon to 4 P.M. and then broke contact. The rapidly constructed fortifications "thrown up" by the Union troops were not penetrated. Sherman characterized the Confederate assault as

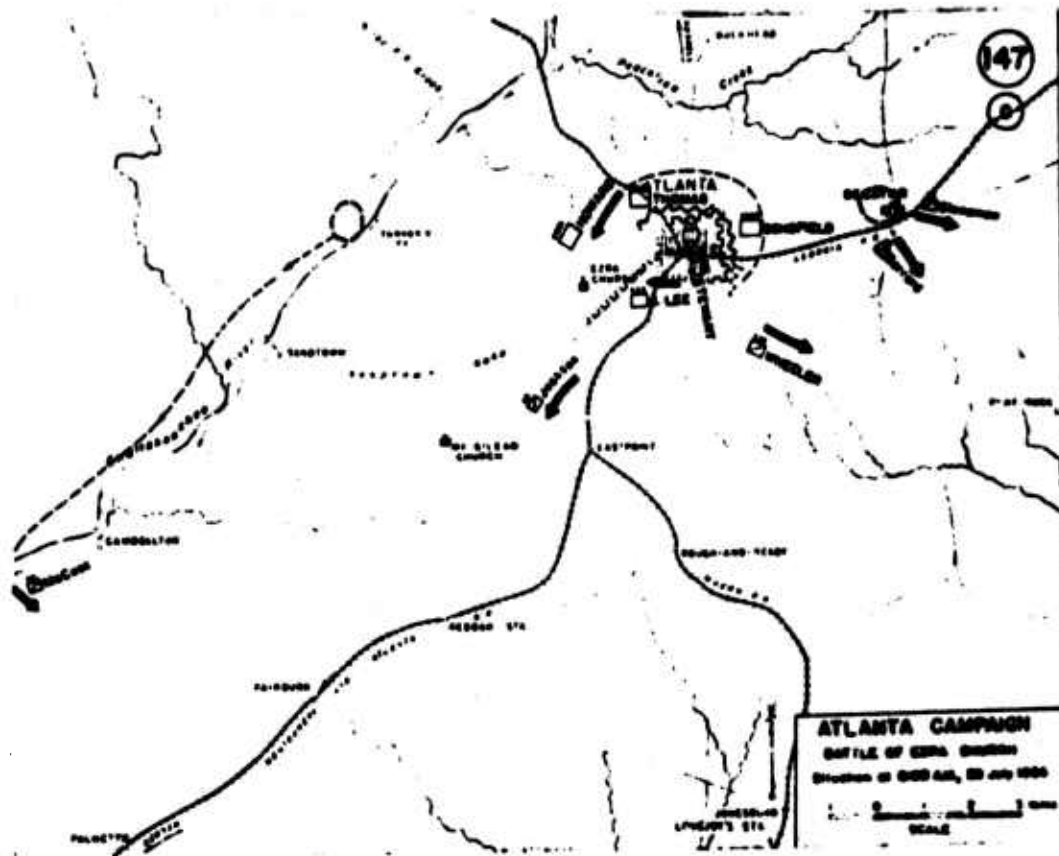
"magnificent. . . his ranks broke. . . But they were rallied again and again as often as six times at some points, and a few of the rebel officers and men reached our line of rail piles only to be killed. . ." <sup>22</sup>

Sherman had praise for their courage but scorn for Confederate tactical judgment. He further commented on his adversary's attack, ". . . founded on an error that cost him sadly, for our men coolly and

<sup>20</sup> Sherman, Memoirs, II, p. 761.

<sup>21</sup> Brigadier General F. A. Shoup (Hood's Chief of Staff) to Lieutenant General Alexander P. Stewart, July 27, 1864, CR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 216.

<sup>22</sup> Sherman to Hallock, September 15, 1864, CR, XXXVIII, Pt. 1, p. 7.



### BATTLE OF EZRA CHURCH

Figure 8

Source: The West Point Atlas of American Wars.  
 Editor Vincent J. Esposito (New York:  
 Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1959), v. 1,  
 p. 147, map c.



deliberately cut down his men, and in spite of the efforts of the rebel officers, his ranks broke and fled. . .<sup>23</sup> Losses incurred by Hood's "third sortie" were reported as not less than 5,000 killed and wounded, whereas Union casualties were not more than 600.<sup>24</sup> Following the battle Hood reported differently to Richmond, "a sharp engagement ensued with no decided advantage to either side. . ."<sup>25</sup>

Hood had initiated three major battles within ten days of assuming command. While casualty figures described a lopsided imbalance in favor of the Union forces, Hood was effective in defending Atlanta. The Ezra Church battle stopped Sherman's flanking movement toward East Point on the Lick Skillet road. The period 28 July to 27 August brought a gradual lengthening of the fortification west of the railroad running south to East Point. Thinning the Atlanta entrenchments Sherman replaced Thomas' Army of the Cumberland southwest of Howard's army. Later Sherman placed Schofield's army next to Thomas' Army. Sherman's perception of Atlanta as one big fort is interesting. To his wife he wrote, "Atlanta is on high ground and the woods extend up to the fort which look strong and encircle the whole town. Most of the people are gone--it is now simply a big fort. . ."<sup>26</sup> To Hood, however, it was more than that, it was a secure base from which to raid.

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<sup>23</sup> Sherman, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 1, p. 78.

<sup>24</sup> Sherman, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 1, p. 78.

<sup>25</sup> Hood to Seddon, July 23, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 917.

<sup>26</sup> Sherman to his wife, August 2, 1864, Home Letters of General Sherman, p. 306.

From the Confederate viewpoint, the time was ripe for offensive action. On August 5th, Hood received approval from Jefferson Davis for his cavalry raid against Sherman's communications.<sup>27</sup> The raid (led by the 28 year old Wheeler,) ranged from Covington, Georgia to Knoxville, Tennessee. The raid drained Hood of his cavalry when most needed. Sherman's dispatches reflected little concern for the damage to his communications caused by Wheeler's cavalry. His reassurances to Thomas and Schofield that the absence of Hood's cavalry furnished a Union opportunity were correct.

While Wheeler raided the Union communications, Brigadier General Judson Kilpatrick was directed to raid Confederate communications. Sherman's objective was to cut the Macon railroad and thereby draw Hood out of Atlanta defenses where he could be defeated. Upon Kilpatrick's return from a west to east sweep below Atlanta on 22 August, he reported destroying 3 miles of railroad. He further estimated that the Confederates would require ten days to repair the track. The next day the error of his assessment was evident. Trains coming from the south again entered Atlanta.<sup>28</sup> Sherman's second attempt to force Hood out of Atlanta by cavalry raids had failed as dismally as Hood's attempt to turn Sherman back by cavalry raids on the Union railroad.

Sherman had lost three weeks time in fruitless efforts to bait Hood out of Atlanta. Union attempts to overextend the Confederate forces

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<sup>27</sup>Confederate President Jefferson Davis to Hood, August 5, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 946.

<sup>28</sup>Sherman, Memoirs, II, p. 103.

by threatening East Point were . . . failure. Other command matters contributed delays. The July reshuffling of corps commanders, occurring as a result of Howard's selection to command McPherson's army was repeated in August. The extended squabble over date of rank between Major General John M. Palmer (Thomas' Army of the Cumberland), who was directed to obey Major General John M. Schofield, contributed to the aura of stalemate. Sherman's mind, ever intent on the attainable objective, revived his old plan for sweeping away the railroad with infantry (Figure 9). On August 25, 1864 Sherman began the final sweep to isolate Atlanta--Howard on the right, Thomas in the center, and Schofield on the left. Kilpatrick's Cavalry Division served as advance guard. To Garrard fell the onerous task of rear guard.<sup>29</sup> The initial withdrawal of Howard's army was quickly detected by the Atlanta defenders.<sup>30</sup> Reported to Hood, the news appeared to be strong evidence that Confederate cavalry raids on Sherman's communications had forced a Union withdrawal. Hood's reports to Richmond, however, accurately tracked Sherman's moves from August 26<sup>th</sup> through the 28<sup>th</sup>.<sup>31</sup> Sherman's plan was executed to perfection.<sup>32</sup> By August 30<sup>th</sup> Hood wired Hardee at his East Point headquarters that he

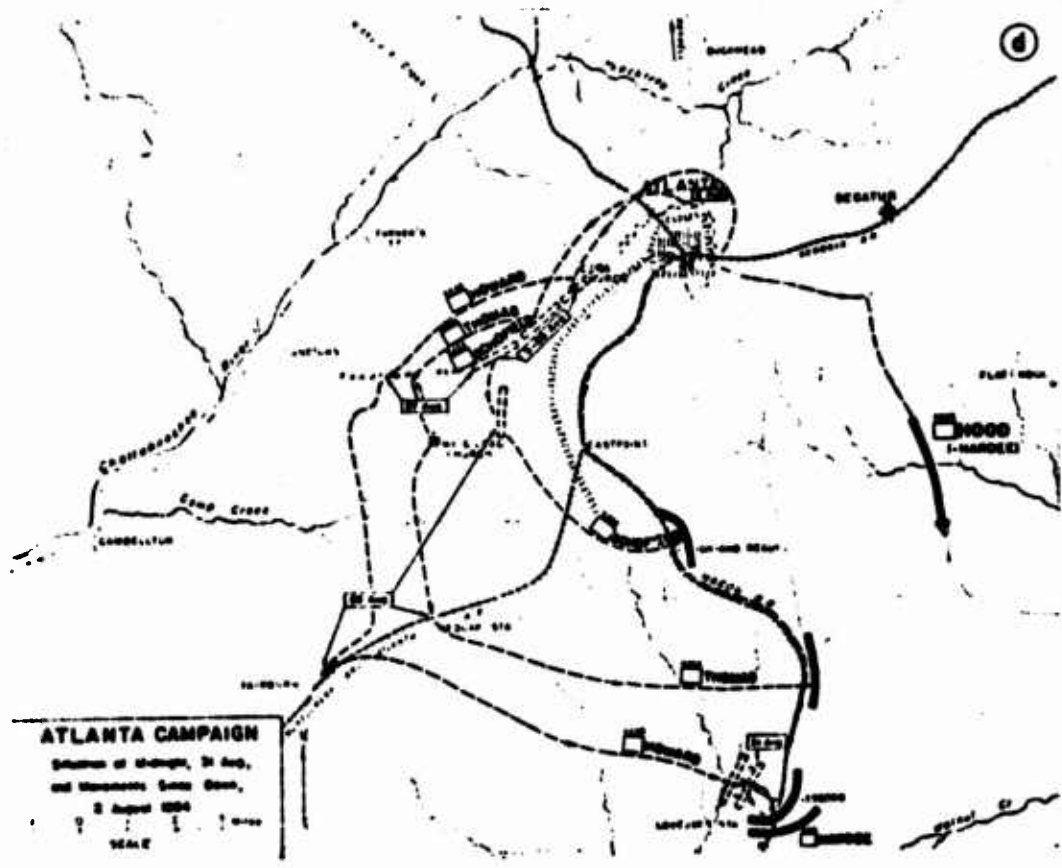
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<sup>29</sup>Special Field Orders No. 57, Headquarters, Military Division of the Mississippi, August 16, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 546.

<sup>30</sup>Hood to Seddon, August 26, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 990.

<sup>31</sup>Hood to Seddon, August 27, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 993; Hood to Seddon, August 28, 1864, OR, , Pt. 5, p. 997.

<sup>32</sup>Sherman to Halleck, August 26, 1864, OR, xxxviii, Pt. 5, p. 669; Sherman to Halleck, August 31, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, pp. 717-3.



BATTLE OF JONESBORO

Figure 9

Source: The West Point Atlas of American Wars.  
Edit Colonel Vincent J. Esposito (New  
York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1959),  
v. 1, p. 147, map d.

(Hood) did "not think the necessity would arise to send any more troops to Jonesborough. . ."<sup>33</sup> Hardee, unconvinced journeyed south to the town of Rough and Ready to see for himself. There he received Hood's second message: "Take whatever measures you may think necessary to prevent the enemy from gaining Jonesborough or Rough and Ready this afternoon . . . He does not think they will attack Jonesborough today . . ."<sup>34</sup> Within the one hour span between these two messages, Hood had directed S. D. Lee to establish his corps headquarters at East Point. By 8:45 P.M. both Hardee and S. D. Lee had been ordered to Jonesborough. The stage had been set for Hood's "fourth sortie" against Sherman's army.

Howard's Army of the Tennessee moved eastward with Logan's 15th Corps leading. By darkness on August 30th Logan was within one mile of Jonesborough, having also secured crossings over the Flint Creek. Sherman understood the tactical situation better than Hood. Knowing Hardee to be separated from Hood's other two corps, Sherman, his armies widely separated, had two tasks: to destroy the Macon railroad or to concentrate on Hardee at Jonesboro and destroy his corps. Sherman, unaware of the locations of Hood's other two corps, elected to first destroy the railroad. On August 31 the bulk of Schofield's and Thomas' armies destroyed the railroad between East Point and Rough and Ready while Howard faced Hardee's corps now reinforced by S. D. Lee's corps. Howard entrenched for Hardee's attack which began at 3:00 P. M. Three

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<sup>33</sup>Shoup to Lieutenant General William J. Hardee, 1 P.M., August 30, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 4, p. 1000.

<sup>34</sup>Shoup to Hardee, 2 P.M., August 30, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 1000.

Confederate assaults fell on Logan's corps and General Corse's division and were repulsed. Hardee, in response to Hood's demands, released S. D. Lee's corps ordering it back to Atlanta by road that night. Hood, expecting Sherman's second shoe to fall on Atlanta, needed S. D. Lee to bolster his thinly held perimeter. S. D. Lee's corps made the night march past Kilpatrick's and Garrard's cavalry around Thomas' corps at Rough and Ready and skirted East Point and entering Atlanta on September 1st. Ironically, a third of Hood's force had marched across the front of a Union army undetected. Ineffective cavalry failed to develop the intelligence needed by Sherman's fast moving force.

Sherman moved to close in on Hardee's corps at Jonesboro with his whole army on September 1st. In planning, the principle of the objective was applied. With Howard holding the west flank, Thomas closing on the center and Schofield crossing over the railroad to move against the east flank, Hardee's future looked dim. However, Sherman's planned destruction of Hardee did not succeed. Major General D. S. Stanley, commanding 4th Corps in Thomas' Army failed to close on the center, and Schofield, having a great distance to travel, arrived too late to join in the Union attack. Hardee's force used its time well by intrenching. Irony appeared again. Sherman's emphasis had been on destruction of the railroad. When the opportunity to destroy a key element of Hood's army occurred, Stanley remained idle on the railroad which had been the Union's objective since the beginning of the Battle of Atlanta.

Initial Union attacks against Hardee on September 1st produced token results. Brevet Major General Jefferson C. Davis' second assault resulted in capture of two batteries of artillery and 200 men.<sup>35</sup> Hardee stood behind his entrenchments. Sherman commented bitterly on the effects of Stanley's tardiness:

had he moved straight on by the flank, or by a slight circuit to his left, he would have inclosed the whole ground occupied by Hardee's corps and that corps could not have escaped us; but night came on, and Hardee did escape.<sup>36</sup>

Sherman's bite extended to sarcasm in rebuking Thomas, Stanley's superior, for the blunder: "In order that no doubt may exist as to future operations, I wish your army to press directly after the enemy. .

.<sup>37</sup> Sherman had missed his second opportunity in two days to destroy a Confederate Corps on the move. The same message to Thomas directed Slocum "to make a dash at Atlanta."<sup>38</sup>

Sherman's message to Howard at 2 P.M. that evening reflected his strong sense of the military objective:

. . . Jonesborough is of no value to us, but we are now to cripple and destroy the army now there . . . If he retreats we will follow without halt or delay, if possible to Griffin. If we remain at Jonesborough we must envelope him and destroy his communications south . . .<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Thomas to Major General Henry W. Slocum, September 1, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 749.

<sup>36</sup>Sherman, H memoirs, II, p. 108.

<sup>37</sup>Sherman to Thomas, September 1, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 746.

<sup>38</sup>Sherman, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 746.

<sup>39</sup>Sherman to Major General Oliver O. Howard, September 1, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 751.

While Hardee withdrew from gradual encirclement at Jonesborough Hood blew up the SI railroad cars loaded with ammunition parked within the Atlanta perimeter. The loud explosion was indistinguishable from that of battle and Sherman worried that Slocum's Corps would be destroyed. Rumors of Confederate evacuation of Atlanta mingled with Sherman's fear of a disaster in his rear. On September 2d as Slocum's column "dashed" toward Atlanta from the northwest, Hood was leaving to the southeast. By 10 P.M. September 2d, Slocum had wired Washington: "General Sherman has taken Atlanta."<sup>40</sup> Unaware that Slocum was in Atlanta Sherman pushed on after Hardee on September 3d overtaking the Confederates at Lovejoy's station. By the morning of September 3d, Slocum's courier reached Sherman with the news of Atlanta's fall. Sherman stated his casualties as less than 1,200 and estimated enemy losses as 300 killed, 250 wounded, and 1,500 "well prisoners."<sup>41</sup> His formal report to Washington that morning ended with this comment.

So Atlanta is ours, and fairly won. I shall not push much further on this raid, but in a day or so will move to Atlanta and give my men some rest. Since May 5 we have been in one constant battle or skirmish, and need rest . . .<sup>42</sup>

Sherman's objective ceased to be the destruction of Hood's army. Never had Hood been so vulnerable, so close, and so divided. At this point Sherman failed to define attainable objectives which would destroy

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<sup>40</sup>Slocum to Union Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, September 2, 1864, OR, XXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 763.

<sup>41</sup>Sherman to Halleck, September 3, 1864, OR, XXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 777.

<sup>42</sup>Sherman, OR, XXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 777.



Hood's army. The principle of the objective was not applied. Rationalizations followed in many forms. Sherman's orders to his command the next day reflected another reason for breaking contact. He wrote,

The Army having accomplished its undertaking in the complete reduction and occupation of Atlanta will occupy the place and the country near it until a new campaign is planned in concert with the other armies of the United States . . . The general-in-chief [Sherman] will . . . afford the army an opportunity to have a full month's rest . . .<sup>43</sup>

Later that morning, Sherman reported to Washington,

The enemy holds a line facing us, with front well covered by parapets . . . His position [Lovejoy] is too strong to attack in front, and to turn it would carry me too far from our base at this time . . .<sup>44</sup>

As if unconvinced himself in this rationale Sherman continued,

"Besides there is no commensurate object, as there is no valuable point to his rear 'till we reach Macon, 103 miles from Atlanta . . ."<sup>45</sup>

Finally Sherman concluded the subject by stating the implied change,

"Atlanta which was and is our grand objective point, already secured .

. . ."<sup>46</sup> But the nagging topic did not go away. Sherman's campaign report prepared eleven days later, gave still another justification,

"it was idle to pursue our enemy in that wooded country with a view to his capture . . ."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Special Field Orders No. 64, Headquarters, Military Division of the Mississippi, September 4, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 801.

<sup>44</sup>Sherman to Halleck, September 4, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 794.

<sup>45</sup>Sherman, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 794.

<sup>46</sup>Sherman, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 794.

<sup>47</sup>Sherman to Halleck, September 15, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 1, p. 82.

#### CHAPTER IV

##### CHANGE IN OBJECTIVE--THE ATLANTA CAMPAIGN AFTER ATLANTA'S CAPTURE

Operations in the Eastern theater had produced little more than heavy casualties and stalemate at Petersburg throughout August 1864. The Republican Party leaders had begun the slow secretive machinery to replace Lincoln in the presidential election.<sup>1</sup> The only hope that the whole war was not stalemated came from the Western theater. Admiral David Farragut's seizure of Mobile Bay (August 5, 1864) was followed by the electrifying news of Sherman's capture of Atlanta. The fall of Atlanta created a sense of euphoria in the North which shielded Sherman from criticism for failing to defeat Hood's army. The exuberant tone of the press and the 100 gun salutes fires throughout the North reinforced the nation's belief that the war should continue. It is possible that the Lincoln administration was coerced by election politics to build-up the achievement.

Sherman's army withdrew from contact with Hood's army at Lovejoy on September 6th. This uncharacteristic Sherman change from the offensive to the defensive is not fully explained. The movement was conducted with due consideration for its psychological effect on Sherman's troops and the enemy. Sherman's withdrawal order reflects his fear that Hood's army might perceive the retirement as a sign of weakness. Sherman directed a deliberately slow retrograde operation. In his words,

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<sup>1</sup>Sandburg, Carl. Abraham Lincoln, The Prairie Years and the War Years (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966), p. 541.

"I shall not push much farther on this raid, but in a day or so will move to Atlanta and give my men some rest..."<sup>2</sup> The following day in another report to General Halleck he remarked,..."I will gradually fall back and occupy Atlanta..."<sup>3</sup> To Howard he quipped, "...I would prefer we should not leave too early, as the enemy would crow over it..."<sup>4</sup>

Sherman's twenty mile retrograde from Lovejoy to the vicinity of Atlanta proceeded without incident. Thomas moved his army into Atlanta and continued to secure the Chattahoochee bridge to the northwest. Schofield moved his army to Decatur. Howard withdrew on the shortest route to East Point.<sup>5</sup>

While Sherman backpeddled to Atlanta, Hood was struggling to consolidate his three corps at Lovejoy. He anticipated that Sherman would continue to press south. From Lovejoy Hood advised Bragg at Richmond of his predicament. He cited the failure of his two corps attack to dislodge the Union force at Jonesboro as the reason for abandoning Atlanta. His report minimized his losses in men and material, but requested more troops in order to change to the offensive. Speaking

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<sup>2</sup>William T. Sherman to Henry W. Halleck September 3, 1864, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies [hereinafter cited as OR], prepared under direction of the Secretary of War pursuant to Act of Congress approved 16 June 1880 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1890-1904), XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 777.

<sup>3</sup>Sherman to Halleck, September 4, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 794.

<sup>4</sup>Sherman to Oliver O. Howard, September 6, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 812; William T. Sherman, Memoirs of William T. Sherman (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1875), II, p. 110.

<sup>5</sup>Special Field Orders No. 63, Headquarters, Military Division of the Mississippi, September 3, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 790.

of the requirement for additional troops in a later message he clearly indicated his perception of Sherman's intentions.

My telegram...is based upon the supposition that the enemy will not content himself with Atlanta, but will continue offensive movements. All the lieutenant generals agree with me.<sup>6</sup>

The irrepressible Hood now found it necessary to add the opinions of his subordinates to bolster his credibility with Richmond.

Irony appeared once again in relation to the similar assessments of Hood and his former commander, Joe Johnston, pertaining to the enlisted prisoner of war camp at Americus (Andersonville). Hood wired Richmond urging "the importance of removing the prisoners from Andersonville."<sup>7</sup> Johnston was relieved seven days after making the same recommendation. And now Hood, having lost the city he was ordered to protect, waited for a similar verdict that never came. As Hood prepared to withdraw further south to Griffin, Sherman tackled his first problem of restoring order in Atlanta.

Hood received Sherman's plan for evacuating all civilians from Atlanta by a personal letter from Sherman. He stated, "I have deemed it to be the interest of the United States that the citizens now residing in Atlanta should remove, those who prefer it to go South and the rest North..."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>John B. Hood to Braxton Bragg, September 3, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 1017.

<sup>7</sup>Hood to Bragg, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 1017.

<sup>8</sup>Sherman to Hood, September 7, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, Pt. 5, p. 922.

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Sherman solved the logistical problem of feeding and administering the population by simply moving it. By the same stroke he set the stage for later abandoning Atlanta. The exchange between both commanders was heated, Hood claiming the forced evacuation to transcend "... in skill and ingenious cruelty, all acts ever before brought to my attention in the dark history of war..."<sup>9</sup> While the evacuation proceeded to reduce the civilian population of Atlanta, another phenomenon reduced the strength of Sherman's army.

The three year veterans, their enlistments up, were returning north to their homes. Sherman's army was shrinking. Sherman's key commanders were also taking brief, and in some cases permanent, trips to the north. Lincoln requested that Sherman release several officers by name who were particularly influential in Indiana. The November election was critical to the administration as well as further prosecution of the war, and Sherman promptly fulfilled Lincoln's wish. While officer shortages were not critical to Sherman, his enlisted shortages were. The September draft of 1864 eliminated the enlisted shortage. While innumerable reasons for postponing the war in Georgia existed, events prevailed upon Sherman.

On September 19th, Hood moved west to Palmetto (a small town on the West Point Railroad). President Jefferson Davis visited the Army to raise morale and devise a new strategy with his evicted commander.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Hood to Sherman, September 9, 1864, Memoirs of W. T. Sherman, II, p. 119.

<sup>10</sup>Message Lieutenant General S. D. Lee's Headquarters to division commanders, September 25, 1864, OR, XXXVIII, pt. 5, p. 872.

Sherman detected Hood's movements. He originally feared a Confederate withdrawal to Macon and further detachment of reinforcements to Richmond.<sup>11</sup> Sherman reported the Confederate president's presence in his theater to Washington on September 25th.<sup>12</sup> Confederate plans began to unfold as a result of cavalry successes.

On September 23d the Union garrison at Athens, Alabama surrendered to General Nathan B. Forrest. The threat to Sherman's line of communications posed by the operations of Forrest and Wheeler became very real. Sherman moved to strengthen security along his line of communications between Decatur and Bridgeport, Alabama. He ordered a division of Thomas' army to Bridgeport.<sup>13</sup> He further ordered Howard to send a division commanded by Brigadier General John M. Corse to Rome to reinforce his Chattanooga-to-Atlanta communications.<sup>14</sup> Forrest moved north on Pulaski, Tennessee on September 23rd. On the following day he reported destruction of the railroad between Decatur and Pulaski, to include five trestle bridges.<sup>15</sup> He further estimated that sixty days would be required by Sherman's forces to repair the damage.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Sherman to Halleck, September 25, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 2, p. 44.

<sup>13</sup>Sherman to Howard, September 24, 1864, beginning, "I have no doubt...", OR, XXXIX, Pt. 2, p. 453.

<sup>14</sup>Sherman to Howard, September 24, 1864, beginning, "You may order General Corse...", OR, XXXIX, Pt. 2, p. 463.

<sup>15</sup>Nathan B. Forrest to R. Taylor, September 25, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 2, p. 874.

<sup>16</sup>Forrest to Taylor, September 27, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 2, p. 873.

of equal importance, Davis announced his plan on high level command changes. The steady hand, General Beauregard, would take overall command of both Hood and Lieutenant General R. Taylor, commander of the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana.<sup>17</sup> Davis sought "...to secure the fullest cooperation of the troops..." This arrangement served to quell the grumbling of his troops as expressed by Hood's generals.<sup>18</sup> While providing a less visible lift to Hood's subordinates, Davis salvaged an aggressive army commander. Hood gained more than this quiet vote of confidence.

Davis granted Hood's wish, relieving Hardee of command and transferring Hardee to the Eastern theater. Hood had long blamed Hardee of purposefully defeating his aggressive attack plans at Peachtree Creek, the Battle of Atlanta on July 22d and at Jonesboro on August 30th. The record reflects Hardee attacked late in each instance. In defense of Hardee however, each attack involved two corps. Hood was absent from the battle, remaining at his headquarters within Atlanta. Hood's presence at the scene of battle might well have served the Confederate cause.

Hood's immediate problem was to capitalize on his mobility, a mobility borne of a short line of communications and the requirement for fewer wagons. He experienced difficulty in recalling Wheeler's cavalry, objecting to Wheeler's consolidation with Forrest for operations outside

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<sup>17</sup> Confederate President Jefferson C. Davis to Hood, September 28, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 2, p. 890.

<sup>18</sup> G. French to Davis, September 14, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 2, p. 836.

his area of responsibility.<sup>19</sup> In the continuing contest with Taylor's adjacent command, Hood sought to gain control of Forrest for operations against the Chattanooga-Atlanta line of communication.<sup>20</sup>

The absence of Wheeler's cavalry did not further delay Hood. On September 29th, Hood crossed the Chattahoochee River with Stewart's and S. D. Lee's Corps on the long delayed attack on Sherman's communications.<sup>21</sup> Sherman directed Howard to follow the movements of Hood's main force. To counter the Confederate cavalry raids against the railroad in Middle Tennessee on September 29th he dispatched Thomas to Nashville to direct operations against Forrest.<sup>22</sup> At 1 p.m. October 1st, Sherman first officially proposed a major change in objective to Grant.

Hood is evidently on the west side of Chattahoochee below Sweet Water. If he tries to get on my road this side of Etowah I shall attack him, but if he goes over to Selma and Tallageda road would it not do for me to leave Tennessee to the force which Thomas has and reserves soon to come to Nashville, and for me to destroying Atlanta, and then march across Georgia to Savannah or Charleston, breaking roads and doing irreparable damage? We cannot remain on the defensive.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph Wheeler to Hood, September 20, 1864, Hood to Wheeler, September 21, 1864, and Hood to Wheeler, September 22, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 2, pp. 849, 861 and 863 respectively.

<sup>20</sup> Bragg to Hood, September 24, 1864, OR XXXIX, Pt. 2, p. 867.

<sup>21</sup> Hood by separate messages to A. F. Stewart and S. D. Lee, September 24, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 2, p. 884; also, Howard to Sherman September 29, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 2, p. 525.

<sup>22</sup> Sherman to J. D. Cox, September 30, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 2, p. 540.

<sup>23</sup> Sherman to Ulysses S. Grant, October 1, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 2, p. 3.



Sherman had by this date concluded that Hood's elusive army could not be caught at a disadvantage sufficient to assure its destruction. Further, Sherman knew that the cavalry skill of Forrest and Wheeler would constantly bleed his combat power, diverting Union offensive resources to defensive purposes.

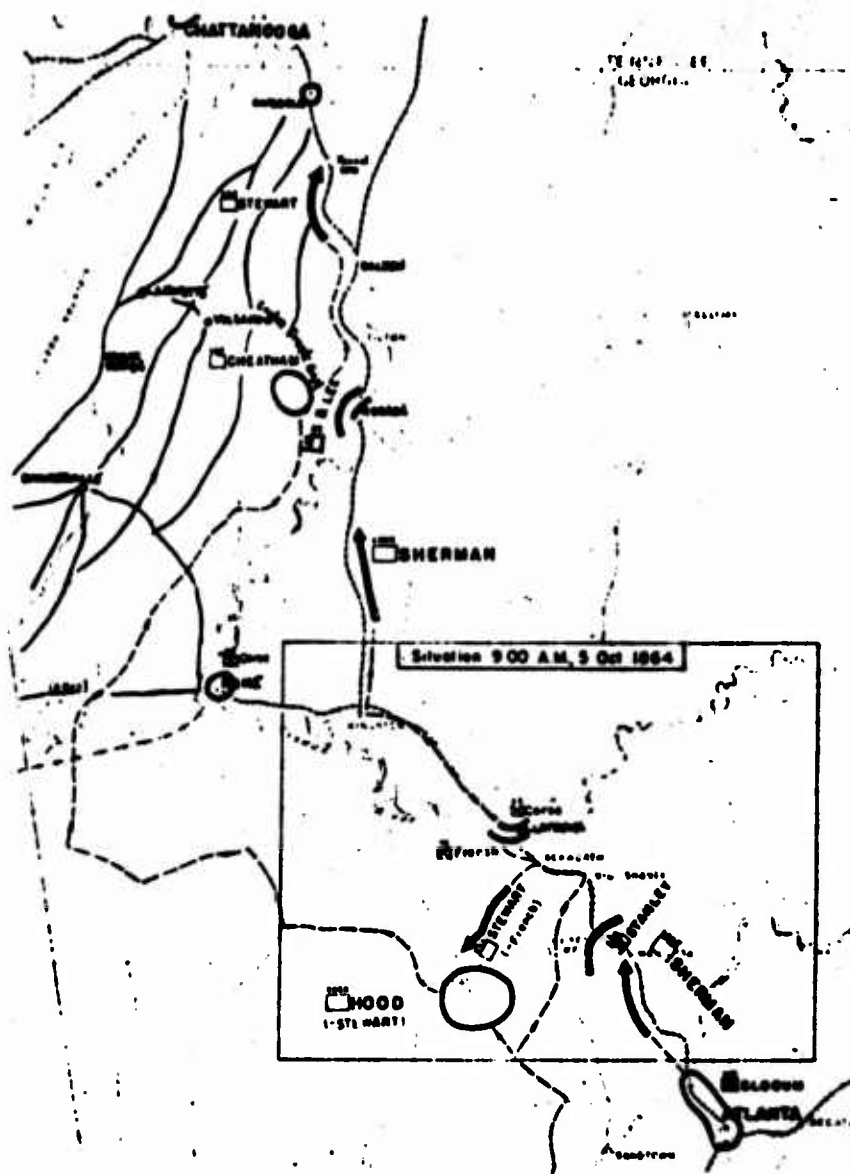
Once again, Sherman was crippled by his cavalry arm. Howard's army lacked cavalry. Kilpatrick proved energetic, but ineffective in locating Hood's army and determining order of battle. Sherman's order on October 3 directed Slocum (20th Corps) to hold Atlanta. (Figure 1C) The full weight of his army was directed northwest to parallel Hood's anticipated movement toward Rome. The Army of the Cumberland in the center commanded by Major General D. S. Stanley, the Army of the Ohio commanded by Brigadier Cox, on the right, and Howard's army on the left moved forward.<sup>24</sup> Sherman was uncertain of Hood's target, but intuition led him to caution the Atlanta garrison commander, "...I want the utmost vigilance there. If he [Hood] goes for Allatoona I want him delayed only long enough for me to reach his rear... If he moves up toward Atlanta I will surely come in force."<sup>25</sup> His guess was correct. Hood stuck with Stewart's corps destroying the railroad from Big Shanty north to Ackworth, then moved north to Allatoona.<sup>26</sup> However, this damage was insufficient

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<sup>24</sup>Special Field Orders No. 83 Headquarters, Military Division of the Mississippi, October 3, 1864, OR XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 43.

<sup>25</sup>Sherman to Commanding Officer, Allatoona, October 3, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 53.

<sup>26</sup>Major General D. S. Stanley to Sherman, October 4, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, pp. 66-67.



BATTLE OF ALLATOONA

Figure 10

Source: Colonel Vincent J. Esposito,  
West Point Atlas of American Wars,  
Vol. 1. (New York:  
Frederick A. Praeger, 1959), Map 149.

to completely isolate Allatoona from reinforcement from the north. Brigadier General J. H. Corse, located at Rome, moved with elements of his division to Allatoona.<sup>27</sup> At 2:00 p.m. and again at 6:30 p.m. Brigadier General William Vandever at Marietta signaled assurances to the Allatoona garrison, "General Sherman says hold fast. We are coming."<sup>28</sup> On October 5th the sounds of the Confederate attack and repulse at Allatoona were heard on Kennesaw Mountain. Sherman hearing the news at Marietta, moved to Kennesaw and observed the visual signals. Corse had arrived in time and Allatoona had survived. Sherman anxious to determine the location of Hood's force, ordered a reconnaissance to Dallas. Sherman's objective remained security of his communications rather than destruction of Hood's army. Ineffective Union cavalry continued to thwart Sherman's intelligence gathering effort. Movements of Hood's army remained unknown. Sherman puzzled over two possible Confederate moves. His suspicions grew that Hood's main army was near Dallas and would either attack the Union army moving toward Allatoona, or swing south and strike weakly defended Atlanta.<sup>29</sup> On the 8th of October Sherman inched forward.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>William Vandever to John H. Corse, October 4, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 75.

<sup>28</sup>Vandever to Commanding Officer, Allatoona, October 4, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 78.

<sup>29</sup>Sherman to H. W. Clausen, October 7, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 125.

<sup>30</sup>Special Field Orders No. 87, Headquarters, Military Division of the Mississippi, October 8, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, pp. 144-5.

Garrard determined Hood's direction of march to be toward the north.<sup>31</sup> By October 9th Sherman gave evidence of his frustration. He approached Grant, "It will be a physical impossibility to protect the roads, now that Hood, Forrest, and Wheeler, and the whole batch of devils, are turned loose without home or habitation...."<sup>32</sup> He reiterated his proposal of a week earlier,

I propose we break up the railroad from Chattanooga, and strike out with wagons for Milledgeville, Millen, and Savannah. Until we repopulate Georgia it is useless to occupy it, but the utter destruction of its roads, houses, and people will cripple their military resources...

October 11th, Grant replied, "...Hood would probably strike for Nashville, thinking by going north he could inflict greater damage upon us than we could upon the rebels by going south. If there is any way of your getting at Hood's army, I would prefer that..."<sup>34</sup> Before receiving Grant's reply Sherman telegraphed again,

"Hood moved his army from Palmetto Station...and is now... south of Rome... I was forced to follow...We cannot remain now on the defensive...I would infinitely prefer to...move through Georgia, smashing things to the sea. Hood may turn into Tennessee and Kentucky but I believe he will be forced to follow me. Instead of being on the defensive I will be on the offensive... Answer quick as I know we will not have the telegraph long."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>X. Garrard to W. L. Elliott, October 8, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 146.

<sup>32</sup>Sherman to Grant, October 9, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 162.

<sup>33</sup>Sherman, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 162.

<sup>34</sup>Grant to Sherman, October 11, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 202.

<sup>35</sup>Sherman to Grant, October 11, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 202.

As if to punctuate the futility of predicting Hood's new movements, Sherman received news that night that Wheeler was preparing to attack Tunnel Hill, west of Dalton.<sup>36</sup>

Sherman received the first indication from Grant on October 12th, that his objective of securing Atlanta and destroying Hood's forces might be changed.<sup>37</sup> While fighting raged at Resaca, Grant discussed Sherman's plan with the Secretary of War, "Thomas could retain force enough to meet Hood by giving up the road from Nashville to Decatur...Such an Army as Sherman has (and with such a commander) is hard to corner or capture."<sup>38</sup> Sherman ordered Howard's army to Resaca. To brigadier General G. B. Raum defending Resaca he signaled "Hold Resaca to the death. I will send you re-enforcements by cars, and will come up."<sup>39</sup> (Figure 11) Sherman was maintaining the best posture for destroying Hc 1's army. To General John E. Smith at Cartersville he confided, "I will keep my army pretty well in hand so as to fight him if I get to him. I am now moving over toward Summerville, Georgia with the Army of the Ohio, and have the Cumberland and Tennessee ready to turn up toward Resaca."<sup>40</sup>

The next railroad town hit by Hood was Dalton. On October 14th

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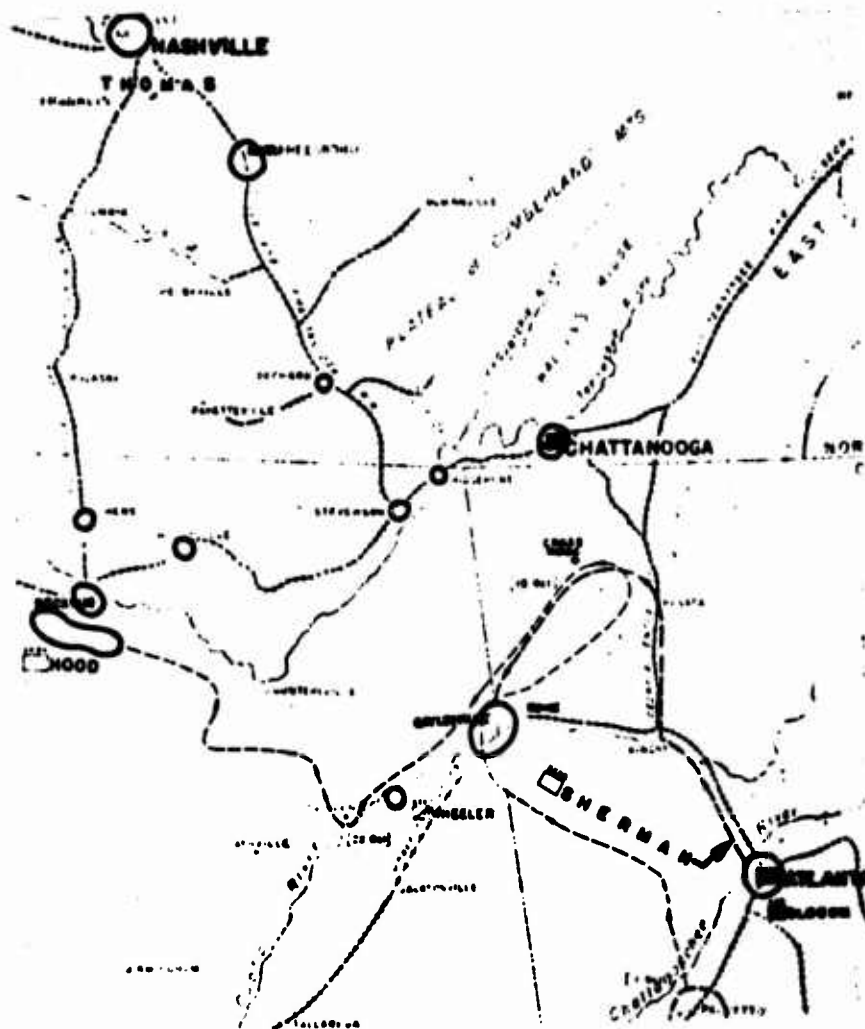
<sup>36</sup>G. D. Wagner to Sherman, October 11, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 214.

<sup>37</sup>Grant to Sherman, October 12, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 222.

<sup>38</sup>Grant to Stanton, October 13, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 237.

<sup>39</sup>Sherman to G. B. Raum, October 13, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 247.

<sup>40</sup>Sherman to J. E. Smith, October 13, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 247.



PURSUIT TO GAYLESVILLE

Figure 11

Source: Colonel Vincent J. Esposito,  
West Point Atlas of American Wars,  
 Vol. 1. (New York:  
 Frederick A. Praeger, 1959),  
 Map 150.

Sherman's aide-de-camp wired General J. E. Smith, "No danger to Resaca, but enemy...have passed Dalton...capturing garrison....Hood's whole army is on the move."<sup>41</sup> Hood had moved swiftly. In the first two weeks of October he had retraced the same route that the two armies had fought over during the months May, June, and July 1864. The next day brought good news to counter the bad.

Sherman received an unintelligible ciphered message from the Secretary of War authorizing the plan proposed to Grant.<sup>42</sup> Elation did not overcome caution. He requested confirmation on his authority to destroy Atlanta and the railroad, and the approved direction of movement (Savannah or Mobile).<sup>43</sup> Sherman had by now succeeded in moving his army to Snake Creek Gap. Hood's army escaped like a wispy cloud before him. Howard reported on October 16th that his skirmishers had encountered a Confederate skirmish line at the summit of Taylors Ridge west of Snake Creek Gap. He credited a Union escaped prisoner with reporting two Confederate corps at LaFayette.<sup>44</sup> The Confederate army had changed course and was now moving west. Reports to Howard were further verified by his signal officer who reported "the smoke and fires apparently of a large force..."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Headquarters, Military Division of the Mississippi to Brigadier General J. E. Smith, October 14, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p.272.

<sup>42</sup>Stanton to Grant, October 13, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 240.

<sup>43</sup>Sherman to Grant, October 16, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, pp. 304-305.

<sup>44</sup>Raum to L. M. Dayton, October 16, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 308.

<sup>45</sup>Howard to Sherman, October 16, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 308.

Sherman reassessed the threat and his capability to defeat Hood. Repair crews had restored Sherman's damaged track and bridges. The tenuous logistical life line of Hood's army was highlighted by the scanty ration of corn fed to his troops.<sup>46</sup> The exhausted condition of Confederate stragglers, some of them barefooted, changed Sherman's defensive attitude.<sup>47</sup> The objective had become defined and attainable. Sherman smelled the blood of his prey and orders reflected he was intent on closing in for the kill.

To Schofield in Chattanooga he directed, "I am pushing straight for Hood wherever he may be; do the same with whatever force you have and let us run him down. I am now on his trail and will follow it..."<sup>48</sup> He directed that repair of the railroad continue. Sherman's order on October 17th committed each army of his Military Division of the Mississippi to concentrating on Hood "...supposed to be at or near Summerville..." Sherman used his cavalry to push from the South destroying Confederate trains while his three armies attacked southwest on parallel roads running thru LaFayette, Summerville, and Villanow.<sup>49</sup> Hood, elusive as ever, was not at Summerville. Moving swiftly, Hood passed by Rome passing through Gaylesville, Alabama and halted at Sadsden, Alabama. The Confederate army had once again escaped the slow

<sup>46</sup>Raum to Dayton, October 16, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 308.

<sup>47</sup>Corse to Sherman, October 16, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 309.

<sup>48</sup>Sherman to Schofield, October 16, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 311.

<sup>49</sup>Special Field Orders No. 94, Headquarters, Military Division of the Mississippi, October 17, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 325.



Union net. The time for change had arrived.

Sherman reported to Washington that he was unable to catch Hood due to superior Confederate mobility. He took solace in the fact that Hood no longer threatened his communications. In broad terms he acknowledged his receipt of full approval to abandon Hood's army and march southeast to the sea. Coupled with this acknowledgment was a request that replacement personnel be diverted to Thomas.<sup>50</sup> While Sherman had given up the thought of catching Hood, he nevertheless temporarily positioned his army to block further attacks on his communications and to keep Hood in doubt as to his intentions. Sherman's army went into bivouac at Gaylesville less than 5 miles from the railroad extension to Rome.<sup>51</sup> Methodical preparation for the march to the sea began in earnest. Sherman evacuated all recoverable equipment and hospitalized or ineffective personnel, from Atlanta and along his line of communications, to Chattanooga. The railroad, now completely repaired, transferred troops and material to secure bases to the north rapidly.

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<sup>50</sup>Sherman to Halleck October 19, 1864, OR, XXIX, Pt. 3, pp. 357-8, gives Sherman's perception of his authority to execute his planned march to the sea. Sherman stated, "We must not remain on the defensive, and I now consider myself authorized to execute my plan to destroy the railroad from Chattanooga to Atlanta including the latter city (modified by General Grant from Dalton, &c), strike out into the heart of Georgia and make for Charleston, Savannah, or the mouth of the Appalachicola....In the meantime I ask that you give to General Thomas [located in Nashville] all the troops you can spare of the new levies that he may hold the line of the Tennessee during my absence of, say ninety days.

<sup>51</sup>Special Field Orders No. 97, Headquarters, Military Division of the Mississippi, October 19, 1864, OR, XXIX, Pt. 3, p. 359.

Support for Sherman's plan, now developed from formerly skeptical subordinates.

Sherman's most trusted commander and tactics critic in Nashville, Thomas, responded to Washington fears and doubts. Thomas had originally cautioned Sherman and Washington against operations deep within enemy territory. He feared overdependence on the single tracked railroad for logistical support. The challenge of defeating Forrest's light cavalry force fascinated Thomas. He could remove this thorn in the Union Western Theater if given troops from his old command. To Halleck he addressed his proposal to act in concert with Sherman. He requested one of his old corps (from the Army of the Cumberland) and the cavalry in Tennessee. With this force, he claimed he could "soon drive Forrest south" and then return to the main army.<sup>52</sup> The concession was timely for on that day Sherman sent a long directive telling Thomas of his role in future operations.

I propose to remain along the Coosa watching Hood until all my preparations are made, viz, I have repaired the railroad, sent back all the surplus men and material, and stripped for work. I will send General Stanley, with the Fourth Corps... to you... I want you to hold Chattanooga and Decatur in force, and on the occasion of my departure...to watch Hood close....I think he will follow me... If however, Hood turns on you, you must act defensively on the line of Tennessee...

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas to Grant, October 20, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, pp. 377-378.

<sup>53</sup> Sherman to Thomas, October 20, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, pp. 377-378.

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By October 23d Thomas, at Nashville, reported the arrival of draft "one year's troops" to Halleck. The same evening, Lincoln, concerned with the adverse effects of military reverses in the field on the eve of the November presidential election, cautioned Thomas:

... there is to be a rebel raid into Western Kentucky, that it is to consist of 4000 infantry and 3000 cavalry, and is to start from Corinth, Miss., on the 4th day of November.<sup>54</sup>

Forrest was at Jackson, Tennessee on October 26th.<sup>55</sup> Hood threatened Decatur on the same date.<sup>56</sup> While the Confederate threat in Tennessee increased, Sherman's army began its planned move toward Atlanta.<sup>57</sup> Sherman aware of the threat to Thomas' forces at Decatur posed by the pressure of Hood, gave assurances. To Thomas October 28th he directed, "I have already sent the Fourth Corps... Use it freely, and I see that Hood crosses the Tennessee River, I will send General Schofield."<sup>58</sup> By October 31st Sherman noted the increasing threat to Thomas at Nashville caused by Hood's movement to Tuscumbia. True to his promise, Sherman released Schofield and the 23d Corps to Thomas at Nashville.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>President Abraham Lincoln to Thomas, October 23, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 407.

<sup>55</sup>J. T. Croxton to Thomas, October 25, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 435.

<sup>56</sup>Sherman to Halleck, October 27, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, pp. 461-462.

<sup>57</sup>Special Field Orders No. 108, Headquarters, Military Division of the Mississippi, October 28, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, pp. 477-478.

<sup>58</sup>Sherman to Thomas, October 28, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 484.

<sup>59</sup>Sherman to L. C. Easton, October 31, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 527.

On the same day Hood's troops crossed the Tennessee River at Florence. Thomas wired Major General William S. Rosecrans at St. Louis to expedite the movement of troops promised by Grant. Two divisions were to be rushed east from Missouri and Kansas to reinforce Thomas.<sup>60</sup> With the increased tempo of Confederate operations against Tennessee came a surprise for Sherman.

Grant reversed his position on Sherman's pending march thru Georgia, November 1st, questioning,

Do you not think it advisable now that Hood has gone so far north to entirely settle him before starting on your proposed campaign?...If you can see the chance for destroying Hood's army, attend to that first and make your other move secondary.<sup>61</sup>

Sherman's response to Grant pleaded his case well. His initial response was written nine hours before Grant's query, reflecting the closeness of thought between the two. Sherman cited the strengths of each element furnished or being furnished to Thomas. He listed garrisons, the two corps, Wilson's cavalry, the Smith and Mower divisions expected from Rosecrans, and the new regiments and conscripts arriving daily at Nashville. He estimated Hood's strength as 30,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry. His estimate for forces furnished Thomas totaled over 50,000 infantry and 4500 cavalry and growing with new regiments and conscripts.<sup>62</sup> Sherman's own force for the march to the sea would total 62,000 men.

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<sup>60</sup>Thomas to William S. Rosecrans, October 31, 1864, CR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 537.

<sup>61</sup>Grant to Sherman, November 1, 1864, CR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 576.

<sup>62</sup>Sherman to Grant, November 1, 1864, CR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 576.

An additional message to Grant followed from Sherman on November 2d. Grant's reply to Sherman's detailed rebuttal was simple and to the point, settling the matter. Grant concluded, "... with the force, however, you have left Thomas, he must be able to take care of Hood and destroy him. I do not really see that you can withdraw from where you are to follow Hood, without giving up all we have gained in territory. I say, then go as you propose."<sup>63</sup> This approval of the march to the sea was final. Sherman's objective became the destruction of the war making resources of the South.

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<sup>63</sup>Grant to Sherman, November 2, 1864, OR, XXXIX, Pt. 3, p. 594.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

General Sherman's six month Atlanta campaign has been summarized in the preceding four chapters. The official records reflect that Sherman's army was an active army. His area of responsibility extended geographically well beyond the concerns of the Chattanooga-Atlanta campaign axis. The Union army faced two critical problems. The logistical problem was solved by intensive management of the railroad and the stockpiling of supplies. The problem of fielding a properly led, trained, and equipped cavalry was never solved. Sherman's use of cavalry for gathering timely intelligence on enemy movements was poor. Excessive use of cavalry for raids and security missions attrited this invaluable arm.

The Confederate army did not lose for lack of aggressiveness or courage. Initially well supplied with men and material, General Johnston attempted to crush a key element of Sherman's army at Cassville. The tactic of constructing hasty entrenchments in the days before effective use of the company mortar and machine gun made attacking costly in terms of casualties. Hood's aggressiveness destroyed the Confederate army against Union entrenchments.

The problem in this thesis was to determine whether Sherman applied the principle of the objective prior to and subsequent to the capture of Atlanta. The remaining paragraphs of this chapter contain this writer's solution to the problem.

Grant's orders to Sherman were clearly defined, decisive, and

attainable. Sherman understood the meaning and intent of his orders. His preparation for the campaign was thorough. Sherman's reports of the tactical situation confronting him were clear and concise. His communication of ideas for future operations was timely, equally understandable, and incisive. Sherman maintained the confidence of his superiors throughout the campaign. The opening move of the campaign toward the Confederate army at Dalton was brilliant. It failed, however, through the error of McPherson, Sherman's subordinate. The Confederate army was neither fixed in place at Dalton nor forced off the rail communications. McPherson's failure to secure Rosaca after passing through Snake Creek Gap is best credited to leader error. McPherson's intermediate objective was clearly defined, decisive, attainable, and oriented on the ultimate objective: the defeat of Johnston's army.

Alerted to Sherman's enveloping tactic, Johnston was never again caught unprepared. His use of deliberate and hastily prepared defenses resulted in lower Confederate casualties. Sherman's attack at Kennew Mountain punctuated this fact. Thereafter, Sherman sought to force the Confederate army to withdraw to protect its communications. To minimize risk of defeat in detail, Sherman always maneuvered his three armies within supporting distance of each other. Sherman's crossing of the Chattahoochee River by feint and demonstration was brilliant. His timing was slow, however, and he failed to get behind the Confederate force defending with its back toward the Chattahoochee obstacle.

The battles that followed were initiated by Sherman's opponent.

Hood. The Battle of Peachtree Creek permitted Sherman to reverse the advantage of hasty entrenchments. By merely defending against Hood's "sortie," Sherman worked swiftly toward his objective of defeating his enemy. The crisis following two days later at the Battle of Atlanta further attrited two of Hood's corps. However, Sherman's failure to employ the Army of the Cumberland, his largest army, against a clearly defined, attainable objective represented a lost opportunity. Thomas' feeble assault against prepared Atlanta defenses were doomed to failure. The route to the southwest around Atlanta, and the West Point railroad, was unprotected and the route vulnerable. Hood's irrepressible style led to further destruction of his troops against Howard's hastily constructed entrenchments at Ezra Church six days later. In the weeks that followed, Sherman turned to his cavalry which had been set in motion to coincide with Howard's "left wheel" around Atlanta's north side.

Union cavalry reverses followed as a result of leader error by Stoneman. However, Sherman's conditional approval of Stoneman's raid to Macon and Andersonville can also be faulted. Release of Union prisoners south of Atlanta did not constitute an intermediate objective contributing to the defeat of Hood. In the delays that followed along Sick Skillet road, a second Union cavalry raid was conducted by Kilpatrick. Its success was marginal. Sherman's late August operations against the West Point and Macon railroads were masterful with the exception of three flaws. In concentrating efforts of subordinate commanders on destruction of railroads (21 August) Sherman neglected an opportunity to defeat a major portion of Hood's army at Lawrence.



Failing to employ cavalry in a sorely needed intelligence gathering effort, Sherman missed the opportunity to defeat G. D. Lee's corps withdrawing after the initial Jonesborough battle. Further, he failed, through his cavalry, to detect that Hardee stood alone and unsupported at Jonesborough on September 1st. Hardee escaped defeat. Sherman's criticism of Stanley is not fully supported by events of the day. Stanley was accepted as Sherman's scapegoat for failing to destroy Hardee. However, other failures occurred. Hood's two corps within Atlanta escaped Atlanta without being detected. To underscore Sherman's breakdown in cavalry in particular and communications in general, one must ask the question, why did it take Sherman (at Lovejoy) nearly twenty-four hours to learn that his forces had already accepted the surrender of, and occupied Atlanta.

September 3rd marked the colossal turning point in Sherman's campaign. Up to this date opportunities to defeat elements of Hood's army had slipped by due to chance more than intent. The "fog of war" aided Hood's escape at every critical movement. Sherman now aided Hood by relieving Union pressure on the Confederate force. He withdrew to Atlanta for rest. Hood's army would have to attack to gain a decision. Sherman's stay in Atlanta was punctuated by many personal claims that he had attained his objective. The administrative burdens of garrison duty closed on Sherman as quickly as national acclaim. Hood regrouped his army and his political base.

Hood next struck north at Sherman's communications reminding Sherman of the vulnerability of his logistical lifeline. Sherman, now believing his only approach to Atlanta was his objective, suffered

for this belief. Atlanta had become a millstone to be defamed. No other attainable objective was visible. Once aware that Hood had crossed the Chattahoochee River and headed north with all three corps, Sherman perceived his true objective once again: to defeat Hood's army. Sherman's pursuit, though slow, was menacing. His instructions to subordinates from Villanow reflected his resolve and determination that he had finally cornered Hood. Sherman's comment, "...let us run him down..." indicated his belief that the advantage in mobility was now his. However, the Confederate force withdrew once again before the cavalry could pin Hood down. Sherman's weakness in cavalry saved Hood from disaster between Lafayette and Summerville.

On the field in mid-October, Sherman's objective continued to be the Confederate army. Message traffic to Washington and City Point, however, proved quite different. Sherman proposed splitting the Military Division of the Mississippi into two commands. Thomas was to have supreme command and defeat the enemy west of the Coosa River while maintaining communications with Washington. Sherman proposed turning his 62,000 man army to the southeast against a less mobile opponent, the State of Georgia. The split of commands was without formal acknowledgement. The end of telegraphic communication between Sherman and Thomas on November 13th effectively severed Sherman from the Union until his December 10th rendezvous at Savannah.

Sherman had in fact applied the principle of the objective until his capture of Atlanta. Deficiencies in cavalry thwarted Union success. Sherman's withdrawal from confrontation with Hood's force concentrating at Lovejoy was a failure in the application of the

principle of the objective. Sherman initially desired to follow Hood's movement north to Tunnel Hill in order to protect his Atlanta-to-Chattanooga communications. However, as the fragile nature of Hood's army became known, Sherman once again concentrated on the attainable.

He sought to defeat Hood near Summerville. Faulty intelligence resulted in Hood's escape once again. The key factor assuring Union success in defeating Hood and raiding thru Georgia to Savannah, was the superior strength of the Union army. Grant fielded two armies for two objectives: one to defeat Hood and one to destroy the southern will to fight. It was a decision at national level.

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