



© Painting by Don Prentiss. "Thunder on Little Kernsaw."

## *The Atlanta campaign May 7 - September 2, 1864*

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### **PRELIMINARIES**

The strategy developed by the Union in Tennessee in 1863 had, slowly but surely, led its armies to the boundaries of Georgia. In the spring of 1864, General Sherman's forces were concentrated around Chattanooga, Tennessee, not far from the border of Georgia and even beyond. Their objective seemed clear: it could only be the forthcoming invasion of that Confederate State.

The reasons were numerous. Georgia was the lifeblood of what remained of the Confederacy in 1864 and its position was vital.<sup>1</sup> It bordered the Atlantic Ocean, the port of Savannah being an important component in the struggle against the naval blockade

<sup>1</sup> From April 1861 to May 1864, the Confederates had lost to the Union: Northern Virginia, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana east of the Mississippi, Tennessee, northern Arkansas, a few bastions in North Carolina, not counting the many bases that the Federals held on the southern coast (Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico) since the beginning of the conflict. Moreover, since the fall of Vicksburg, Mississippi (July 4, 1863), the vast Trans-Mississippi Department (Texas, Louisiana west of the Mississippi, Arkansas, Missouri and Indian Territory) were totally isolated from the rest of the Confederacy.

enforced by the Union since May 1861. The production of canons was only second to that of Virginia. Georgia manufactured vast quantities of commodities needed by the military: firearms, edged weapons, ammunition of all types and calibers, uniforms, leather accoutrements and harnesses, shoes, carts, ambulances and even armor plates for warships. All these goods were dispatched through the huge arsenal of Atlanta. Georgia also participated actively in supplying General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia through the Carolinas. The State railroad network was one of the most developed of the South. Trains circulated everywhere and could reach any point of the Confederacy. General Sherman would soon realize this. According to the census of 1860, Georgia had 1,057,000 inhabitants. Its population ranked third after Virginia and Tennessee. The 592,000 whites provided 100,000 troops to the Southern cause. It is thus no surprise that Washington was eager to conquer this rebel State.

In the spring of 1864, Georgians had only a vague knowledge of the physical reality of war. Indeed, no major campaign had yet taken place on their soil, all the more since, until 1864, no Confederate army was ever stationed in Georgia. Only the northern part of the State had encountered a few minor operations and some Yankee cavalry raids. The local militia had usually been sufficient to effectively counter these threats.

## THE ATLANTA CAMPAIGN

During the winter of 1863-1864, the belligerents had been able to relax and reinforce their armies since the period of the year was traditionally unfavorable for military operations. In spring, hostilities would logically resume. Since the Chattanooga disaster in late November 1863, the Confederate Army of Tennessee had regrouped in the Dalton area of Georgia. It was commanded since December 26, 1863, by General Joseph Eggleston Johnston<sup>2</sup>. The army would start the campaign with seven infantry divisions divided into two corps under William Hardee and John Bell Hood and three cavalry divisions in Joseph *Fighting* Joe Wheeler's Corps.

This force comprised 62,000 men including 8,000 cavalry, supported by 144 guns. On May 12, 1864, General Leonidas Polk's<sup>3</sup> troops arrived by forced march from neighboring Alabama to strengthen Johnston who was then able to organize a third army corps of three divisions. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, General William Hicks Jackson's Cavalry Division also arrived. The Georgia militia provided a further division. Together with various other reinforcements, Johnston finally disposed of nearly 85,000 men, of which 12,000 cavalry, and 187 guns. This was probably the largest army that the Confederates ever assembled.

Since December 1863, President Jefferson Davis had recommended a new offensive in Tennessee, maybe without due consideration. He reiterated his wish in the spring of 1864 but the realistic Johnston knowingly refused. On the contrary, he had built an extensive network of field fortifications in northern Georgia and ordered General Gilmer<sup>4</sup> to transform the quiet town of Atlanta into a fortress. Tens of thousands of slaves were requisitioned to accomplish this titanic task.

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<sup>2</sup> Johnston, an experienced general, had already distinguished himself at 1<sup>st</sup> Manassas, Virginia (July 21, 1862) and during the defense of Richmond (spring 1862). He was in charge of Department Nr 2 in 1863.

<sup>3</sup> General Polk was at the same time the Episcopalian Archbishop of Louisiana and a West Pointer.

<sup>4</sup> Colonel Jeremy Gilmer, commanding the army's engineering corps, had been promoted, directly to the rank of major general, on August 25, 1863

Johnston had good reasons to be proactive. He knew that the enemy would throw colossal resources at him, far superior than his own. These forces belonged to the Military Division of the Mississippi<sup>5</sup> dubbed the “Sherman’s Army Group”. Indeed, to begin the campaign, General William Tecumseh Sherman did not have one but three armies. The largest, the Army of the Cumberland, commanded by George Henry Thomas, consisted of three corps comprising nine divisions or 61,000 men. The Army of Tennessee under James Birdseye McPherson consisted of two army corps lining up five divisions or 25,000 men. Finally came John McAllister Schofield’s small Army of the Ohio with three divisions of the XXIII<sup>rd</sup> Corps with 14,000 men.

Sherman had also at his disposal a cavalry corps of three divisions. His force was impressive: three armies with six infantry and a cavalry corps, comprising seventeen infantry and three cavalry divisions, in all 100,000 men and 254 guns. On May 12, 1864, General George Stoneman’s Cavalry Division was attached to the small Army of the Ohio. Finally, on June 8, the XVII<sup>th</sup> Corps added two additional divisions to the Army of Tennessee. Ultimately, the Union general-in-chief could count on more than 120,000 men. Sherman, a pragmatic soldier, drastically lightened his supply convoys. He was also accompanied by all kinds of specialists, including the Railroad Construction Corps, an imaginative unit that could repair railway tracks as fast as the Confederates could destroy them.

The inevitable and decisive 1864 spring campaign, or Atlanta campaign, would oppose two great American masters of military tactics: Sherman and Johnston. Operations would take place mainly along the Chattanooga-Atlanta railway line, the Western & Atlantic RR, backbone of both armies. Grant’s orders to Sherman, as vague as discretionary, were literally “to move” against Johnston’s army, disperse it, advance as far as possible within the *“enemy country and inflict maximum damage to their war resources.”* Sherman translated this into plain language: seize Atlanta.

Sherman’s advance began on May 7, 1864. The main actions took place at Dalton or Rocky Face Ridge (5-9 May), around Resaca (13-16 May), in Dallas or New Hope Church (25-27 May) and in the Kennesaw Mountain-Marietta area (14-27 June). On June 14, Confederate General Leonidas Polk was killed at Pine Mountain. His corps passed firstly under the orders of General William W. Loring and then of Alexander P. Stewart. On the 27<sup>th</sup>, at Kennesaw Mountain, Sherman ventured for the first time in a frontal assault that was repulsed with huge losses<sup>6</sup>. With flanking movements and strategic withdrawals, he finally forced Johnston to retreat to the north bank of the Chattahoochee River, 5 miles north of Atlanta.

From July 4 to 9, sporadic fighting continued along this river, the last major natural obstacle before the town of Atlanta. On the 9<sup>th</sup>, Sherman’s forces crossed it by surprise at Soap Creek and Roswell<sup>7</sup>, circumventing the enemy’s right flank and forcing a further Confederate retreat, this time into the heart of the city. The Atlanta campaign was over. The siege of “fortress Atlanta” would soon commence. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, Johnston installed his headquarters in the heart of the town. He still hoped to fight individually

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<sup>5</sup> Created on October 16, 1863, it placed under the command of Ulysses S. Grant all Union forces operating between the Mississippi River and the Alleghany Mountains.

<sup>6</sup> Union losses were 2,051 men, the Confederate’s only 442.

<sup>7</sup> For unclear reasons, Sherman moved the population of Roswell to the north. This case of “ethnic cleansing” was not unique. Already in 1863, General Thomas Ewing Junior’s Order Nr. 11 concerning the Confederate irregular bands in Missouri led to the displacement of the population of entire counties. In September 1864, Sherman moved the population of Atlanta and burned what remained of the city in November.

some enemy units scattered around his defenses. However, Sherman would not give him that opportunity

## ATLANTA – A TRANSFORMED CITY

It was not the first time that William Sherman came to Atlanta. In 1844, he had already commanded the town's garrison as a young artillery lieutenant. At that peaceful time, the city had no more than 2,000 inhabitants. Twenty years later, Sherman was back as a major general and his intentions were far more hostile. The city had changed. In 1864, more than 20,000 people lived in Atlanta. Many were refugees from northern Georgia and neighboring States already affected by war. Contrary to what one may think, Atlanta was not the capital of Georgia, which was Milledgeville, located 70 miles further southeast.<sup>8</sup>

It was not Atlanta's demographic features that interested Sherman. It was obviously its strategic and industrial position and its ability to support the Confederate war effort. These were not negligible. Atlanta was the junction of Georgia's four main railway lines. These were the Western & Atlantic RR, the Georgia RR, the Macon & Western RR and further south, the Atlanta & West Point RR. These railroads had their own depots, workshops and foundries. The arsenal with its factories and laboratory were running at full capacity. The navy also had its own laboratory.

The city was protected by three fortified belts composed of artillery batteries, redoubts, trenches and various abattis<sup>9</sup>. The main defensive line was thirteen miles long. These fortification works began in March or April 1864 and lasted until the beginning of the siege. Until then, the peaceful citizens of Georgia and Atlanta in particular did not fully realize that they were at war. Operations were raging in Virginia, along the Mississippi River, in Louisiana, Tennessee, Kentucky and Missouri, in one word, far from home. In May 1864, they were not really alarmed when Sherman's steamroller began to advance. Dalton was far away, in the northern mountains. News were vague and often contradictory, but Georgians put their faith in General Johnston. When cannon fire was heard at Kennesaw Mountain in June and along the Chattahoochee River in July, they had to admit that this time, the front was getting closer.

Half of the population hastily and safely evacuated the city. On July 20, 1864, the first day of the siege, there were only 10,000 civilians left in Atlanta. Northern gun batteries were two miles away from the center of town. From its position east, McPherson's artillery fired the first shell on Atlanta, killing an unfortunate girl walking her dog. The bombardment would last forty long days. The inhabitants took to their cellars where they dug bombproof shelters. As the siege went on, Sherman became impatient. Since he could not seize the fortress by storming it, he declared that he intended to "*render Atlanta's interior too hot to stay there.*" The artillery bombardment escalated. Union batteries began firing new 4 1/2-inch rifled cannon - each weapon firing every five minutes. On August 9, the shelling increased even further, Union gunners firing 5,000 rounds into the city. Hood implored Sherman's compassion for the wounded and non-combatants but his plea fell on deaf ears. The bombardment lasted until September 1, 1864, the fortieth and final day but the unfortunate people of Atlanta were far from the end of their suffering.

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<sup>8</sup> On November 22, 1864, the 107<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry entered without fighting in Milledgeville, during Sherman's "March to the Sea" in Georgia.

<sup>9</sup> A line of defense consisting of a barrier of felled trees or stakes pointed toward the enemy.

## HOOD REPLACES JOHNSTON

July 17, 1864, was a particularly black day for the Confederate Army of Tennessee. Indeed, already poorly rated in Richmond, General Joseph Johnston was accused of lacking fighting spirit. Finding himself sacrificed on the altar of the Southern cause, he resigned his command without further ado.

John Bell said *Sam Hood* was until then a corps commander. He was promoted full general<sup>10</sup> and succeeded Johnston at head of the army. His corps was taken over by Benjamin Cheatham. This opportune advancement was not due solely to *Sam Hood's* military talent of. He had sufficiently intrigued since the beginning of the campaign to achieve his end. Ignoring the very slow chain of command, Hood had not hesitated to send secret reports directly to Richmond, discrediting his superior as much as possible. The strategy apparently succeeded. As a token of appreciation, he promised President Davis to swiftly take the offensive, which was exactly what the Confederate government had wanted to hear for months. So everyone had a reason to be satisfied.

One aspect of Hood's personality, however, would have a disastrous impact on the course of events. Although he actually possessed a more offensive spirit than his predecessor, he had not evolved, militarily speaking. He considered that the army had lost its pugnacity because it had been held in trenches for two months. In reality, this had allowed Johnston to save most of his troops and continue the fighting. Now with Hood in control, things were about to change. However, he still believed he was at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, with Lee's army<sup>11</sup>. That was in July 1863, exactly one year earlier. Since then, fighting techniques had irreversibly changed, notably due to the increase in firepower. Frontal assaults under fire and in the open in a pure Napoleon style were now a thing of the past. In 1864, more and more northern infantry regiments possessed Henry or other repeating rifles, some privately purchased by soldiers<sup>12</sup>. In addition, the Union artillery was overwhelmingly superior in quantity as in quality. Whatever, Hood would keep his head in the sand to the end, remaining constantly in favor of obsolete and suicidal tactics. William Sherman, perfectly informed about the personality of his new foe and his fighting methods, was evidently delighted. He would later say about Hood's promotion: "*The Confederate government provided us with an invaluable service.*"

Now that he was in business, John B. Hood had to keep the promise he made to President Davis. He had to counter attack. As of July 17, some 65,000 Confederates would face 85,000 Northerners.

## THE SIEGE BEGINS

### ***July 20, 1864 – Peach Tree Creek, Hood's first sortie***

On July 19, a real opportunity presented itself. Coming from Decatur, McPherson (Army of Tennessee) progressed on both sides of the Georgia RR. Schofield (Army of

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<sup>10</sup> Hood temporarily resigned on January 10, 1865, after the disastrous Franklin and Nashville campaign, Tennessee (September-December 1864).

<sup>11</sup> Belonging to Longstreet's Corps at Gettysburg, Hood's Division was crushed in the Round Tops sector. Hood lost the use of his right arm. His left leg was amputated at Chickamauga, Georgia, on September 21, 1863. His personal courage was second to none.

<sup>12</sup> Notably the men of the 7<sup>th</sup> Illinois.

the Ohio) was on his right, approaching from the north. Thomas (Army of the Cumberland) extended Schofield's right line, further west and north, between the Chattahoochee River and the Peach Tree Creek. A gap of two to three miles existed between these armies. On the morning of July 20, Hood developed a plan, originally devised by his ousted predecessor. Cheatham's Corps, Wheeler's cavalry and Georgia's militia would be responsible for containing McPherson and Schofield in the center and on the right. Hardee's and Stewart's Corps with seven divisions would attack Thomas when he crossed the Peach Tree Creek. Then, they would move aggressively to the right, cornering Thomas between the Chattahoochee River and Peach Tree Creek. Once Thomas eliminated, Hardee and Stewart would join Cheatham and Wheeler to take care of the rest of the Union Army. On paper, Sherman was fully beaten.

The plan was to unfold on July 20 at noon and orders were given to follow the oblique order<sup>13</sup>. The lining up of troops was slow, too slow, as often with the Confederates. In addition, there was neither serious scouting nor knowledge of the appalling conditions of the terrain: woods, undergrowth, swamps and numerous streams. The attack finally started at 4 PM. It was obviously much too late. The lost time had allowed Thomas' Army of the Cumberland to cross the river without virtually any opposition. Four divisions and a brigade were already on the frontline. They would have to bear the assault of seven Confederate divisions. Twenty thousand men from either side were about to be thrown into battle.

Contrary to the plan and with only two of his three divisions, Stewart's Corps attacked first. However, this task had been clearly assigned to Hardee's Corps. Loring's Division was particularly hit by crossfire. French's third Division proceeded to advance at 6 PM, without much conviction and when all was over.

It is unclear how Hardee's Corps performed. Versions diverge. A full division and a half of another apparently lost their way in the woods without coming in contact with the enemy. In addition, the situation deteriorated when Cleburne's Division was removed from the battlefield for another assignment, at around 6 PM, reducing the strength of Hardee's forces. Ultimately, one division actually attacked the enemy. It is also possible that three of Hardee's four divisions (Bate, Walker and Maney) effectively attacked the enemy's positions, albeit without much success. Indeed, Thomas was able to concentrate numerous artillery batteries against this new assailant. A Federal division of Ward's XX<sup>th</sup> Corps counter attacked and controlled the situation. In any event, everything was over by 6 PM.

What is clear is that the Confederates were blocked everywhere and repulsed with heavy losses amounting to 3,500 or 4,500 men for only 1,700 Union casualties. On the evening of July 20, the battle of Peachtree Creek, also known as "Hood's First Exit" was lost. To shorten their front, the rebels now had to abandon their first fortification line around Atlanta.

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<sup>13</sup> Oblique order is a military tactic whereby an attacking army focuses its forces to attack a single enemy flank. The commander concentrates the majority of his strength on one flank and uses the remainder to fix the enemy line. This allows a commander with weaker or equal forces to achieve a local superiority in numbers. The commander can then try to defeat the enemy in detail. This tactic can only work effectively against an enemy deprived of mobility, which was not the case of the Union armies under the command of Sherman. Many Confederate generals - including Lee - utilized this tactic, often at their own expense.

### ***July 20 and 21, 1864 – Bald Hill***

That same July 20, while Hardee and Stewart were fighting Thomas along the Peach Tree Creek, McPherson's artillery was happily shelling Cheatham's infantry, Wheeler's cavalry dismounted for the occasion and the city of Atlanta itself. Since the Federals increased their pressure on the Confederate right, Cleburne's Division was forced to leave the Peach Tree Creek area around 6 PM. It was ordered to reinforce the Confederate right flank in great danger, weakening even further its left flank.

The next day, the Yankee artillery opened a hellish fire with rare precision. Losses accumulated. A direct hit knocked out seventeen of the eighteen men of a company of the 18<sup>th</sup> Texas Cavalry. After this fierce bombardment, the northern infantry attacked and captured Bald Hill<sup>14</sup> at noon. This was a key position: Atlanta stretched at its feet.

### ***July 22, 1864 – Battle of Atlanta, Hood's second sortie***

Hood did not seem particularly discouraged by the disappointments of the last two days. He planned a new attack, setting his sight on McPherson's forces aligned east of the city. Stewart's Corps, roughly handled on the 20<sup>th</sup> at Peach Tree Creek, would hold the lines facing Thomas. Cheatham's Corps and Georgia's militia would do the same with McPherson and possibly with Schofield's, at their hinge. Hardee's Corps was to circumvent McPherson forces from the south and, at dawn of July 22, attack from behind his left flank allegedly "up in the air"<sup>15</sup>. To complete the encirclement, Wheeler's cavalry would push on to Decatur. At the appropriate time, Cheatham's Corps would come out of Atlanta and frontally attack McPherson's army, which would then collapse under the double shock. Forty thousand Confederates would attack thirty thousand Yankees by surprise.

On July 21, still aligned west of the city, Hardee was to cross the city and undertake a night march of fifteen miles. He started at midnight, recuperating on the way Cleburne's Division near Bald Hill. It was hot and the tired men advanced slowly. The column got lost in the woods southeast of the city. Fortunately, Sherman, temporarily deprived of cavalry, had not detected his movement.

Around noon, the Confederates began to move. Bate's and Walker's Divisions were the first to attack. They were rather surprised to find their way blocked by General Grenville Dodge's XVI<sup>th</sup> Corps. The Confederates were not on McPherson's rear and his left side was not "up in the air". They were repulsed. General Walker was killed in the action. Maney's and Cleburne's Divisions then assaulted the flank and rear of the XVII<sup>th</sup> Corps commanded by General Frank Blair Jr. Bald Hill was retaken. Despite some initial success and following the timely arrival of a brigade of the XV<sup>th</sup> Corps, the Confederates were also blocked in this area. At precisely 2.02 PM (as displayed on his watch that was crushed by the impact of a bullet), Major General McPherson, commanding the Northern Army of Tennessee, was shot by one of Cleburne's scouts while heading towards the positions of the XVII<sup>th</sup> Corps.<sup>16</sup>

Observing the development of the battle from the fortifications of the city, Hood was fuming: Hardee's attack was being stalled.

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<sup>14</sup> So named because all the trees there had been shredded by shrapnel!

<sup>15</sup> Refers to a position, often flanking, which does not lean on any watercourse, natural obstacle, fortification, etc.

<sup>16</sup> McPherson had the sad privilege of being the only Union army commander to be killed on the battlefield during the entire Civil War.

At 3 PM, Cheatham's Corps and Georgia's militia came out of the city and faced General John A. *Black Jack*<sup>17</sup> Logan's XV<sup>th</sup> Corps, who replaced McPherson at the head of the army after his death. The shock was violent and Logan was under pressure. The Army of Tennessee was going to be crushed between Cheatham and Hardee but this outcome would have been too simple. The XV<sup>th</sup> Corps was reinforced by a brigade of the XVI<sup>th</sup>. Sherman now personally led the operations. He concentrated powerful artillery in the threatened sector, weapon that he mastered perfectly. Logan's Corps counter attacked successfully. The stunned Confederates gave ground.

Meanwhile, Wheeler was attacking Decatur. He obtained no better results than his colleagues of the infantry. He was also repulsed.<sup>18</sup>

The battle had been costly. The Federals lost 3,700 men and the Southerners 8,500. The northern artillery and the infantry's repeating rifles had done wonders. The Confederates had failed for a second time at the bloody battle of Atlanta, also called "Hood's Second Sortie".

### ***Federal movement southward***

After the furious engagements of July 20, 21 and 22, 1864, General Sherman had understood that seizing Atlanta would not be easy. Storming the imposing Confederate fortifications would be suicidal and the enemy still showed plenty of spirit. On July 26, he wrote to his wife: "*Those fellows fight like both demons and Indians and drain all my energy.*"

To lay siege to the city in a classic way was not feasible: the defensive perimeter was vast and Sherman did not have enough infantry to enforce a sufficiently hermetic blockade. He then decided to act through maneuvers, which would logically lead to two results: attracting the Confederates from their entrenchments to beat them on open ground and cut off supplies to the besieged by permanently controlling the four railway lines connecting Atlanta with the rest of Confederacy. Both methods could also work together.

The railway lines were already partly under his control. The Western & Atlantic RR originating from Chattanooga was totally in the hands of his troops. The Georgia RR and Atlanta & West Point RR had suffered so much destruction that they were nearly useless. This left the Macon & Western RR, as the last operational rail link. Sherman was about to take care of it.

### ***Ezra Church – July 28, 1864, Hood's third sortie***

As of July 27, the Northern Army of Tennessee had moved from east to west of Atlanta. From this new position, it could begin its great southward encircling movement. This army was now commanded by General Oliver O. Howard. The bypass was complex since Howard's men had to march behind the entire Union Army.

The maneuver did not go unnoticed. Hood ordered out Stewart's and Lee's Corps to intercept Howard. Lieutenant General Stephen D. Lee<sup>19</sup> had recently been dispatched

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<sup>17</sup> James Alexander Logan was so nicknamed for the color of his hair: jay black.

<sup>18</sup> Sprague's Infantry Brigade, responsible for the protection of the army supply train, was strong enough to repel Wheeler's cavalry.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Dill Lee was born in South Carolina with no family relationship with the Lee of Virginia. Although he had an artillery background (Fort Sumter, SC, 1861, Army of Northern Virginia, 1862), he commanded an infantry



from Mississippi to replace Major General Cheatham who did not hold the proper rank for this position.

The clash took place on July 28 at noon, at Ezra Church, two miles west of Atlanta's fortifications. Logan XV<sup>th</sup> Corps, forming the right wing, had to bear alone the entire weight of the Confederate attack. Three out of four divisions were engaged. The Yankee entrenchments and artillery fire made once again the difference and, as always in these cases, the Confederates were repulsed with appalling losses.

At 5 PM, Hood, who was still directing operations from his headquarters in Atlanta and not accompanying his troops on the ground, recalled his two decimated army corps that retreated and returned to town. The rebels had lost 5,000 men while their opponent only 562. Hood suffered a stinging defeat at Ezra Church. His "Third Sortie" was not more successful than the previous two. In ten days, he had lost 18,000 men, that is to say as much as Johnston's losses in ten weeks!

### ***Utoy Creek – August 6, 1864***

Sherman's southern move was building up. Schofield's Army of the Ohio, reinforced by the XIV<sup>th</sup> Corps of the Army of Tennessee, in turn operated a large circular movement from left to right. On August 6, Schofield quietly attacked the enemy in the area of Utoy Creek. A division of Hardee's Corps hurriedly dispatched from Atlanta effectively managed to bar the road and the situation remained stagnant until August 25.

### ***The cavalry***

Unlike the European cavalry, the Civil War cavalry was not a major tool aimed at breaking the enemy front lines. It operated mostly as the dragoons of the Old Continent. One of its assignments included the destruction of communications lines and rear bases of the adversary. It is indeed in that way that it was used during the siege of Atlanta, with rather questionable results on both sides. The Georgia railway infrastructure would be its main victim. The antagonists had four cavalry divisions each, representing some 12,000 horsemen of both sides.

As support to the great movement towards southwest Atlanta, which had been initiated by his infantry on July 26, 1864, Sherman prepared to launch three of his four main cavalry units in two major raids.

### ***McCook's raid – July 26-31, 1864***

On July 26, 1864, General Edward McCook's Division left Sandtown on the Chattahoochee and headed south. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, it reached Lovejoy Station where it was to unite with another northern cavalry outfit led by George Stoneman. Unfortunately, Stoneman was not at the rendezvous. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, while turning back, McCook's found himself encircled at Newman by Wheeler's and W.H. Jackson's Confederate cavalry. The riders in blue narrowly escaped capture and returned to their starting point.

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brigade at Vicksburg (1862-1863), all the cavalry in Mississippi and Alabama (1863) and finally an army corps (1864). His promotion to lieutenant general dated June 23, 1864, was confirmed on February 14, 1865, reconsidered on February 16 and reconfirmed once again on March 16, 1865, at least ... temporarily!

### ***Stoneman's raid – July 27-31, 1864***

On July 27, General George Stoneman<sup>20</sup> left Decatur with his own division and that of General Garrard. Along the way, the group split into two. Garrard's Division, whose mission was to draw the enemy cavalry, continued south. It did not get far since on the next day at Flat Rock Bridge, Wheeler's cavalry forced Garrard to turn back.

Meanwhile, Stoneman's Division had veered east. His ambitious objective was to seize Macon, then release the 30,000 Yankee inmates of the huge prison camp at Andersonville. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, his riders were seriously molested at Macon by local militia and then encircled by Iverson's cavalry of Wheeler's Corps. Stoneman and 700 of his men were forced to surrender. They actually reached Andersonville later, but as prisoners of war. The rest of the division scattered in all directions.

### ***Wheeler's raid – August 10 - September 10, 1864***

The Federal cavalry had been seriously routed and seemed momentarily out of harm's way. It was the perfect opportunity for Hood to pay Sherman back in his own coin. Joseph Wheeler accordingly assembled his cavalry corps in Covington.

On August 10, Wheeler led his cavalry due north. Destroying everything he could on his way, he passed through Marietta, Cassville and Dalton. He then left Georgia, continuing to Knoxville and ended up in Franklin, Tennessee, too far from his base. On September 10, he crossed the Tennessee River at Tuscumbia, Alabama. At that time, the city of Atlanta had fallen ten days ago! Although Wheeler's cavalry had destroyed miles of railroad tracks and captured many prisoners, horses and cattle, the raid had not disrupted Sherman's operations. On the contrary, it had facilitated his maneuver by rendering Hood practically blind.

### ***Kilpatrick's raid – August 18-22, 1864***

As of August 18, taking advantage of the absence of the bulk of enemy cavalry, Sherman sent General Hugh J. Kilpatrick's Cavalry Division on a new raid against Jonesboro. The next day, he was in front of the town. Unfortunately, William H. Jackson's southern cavalry was also there. On the 20<sup>th</sup>, Kilpatrick found himself sandwiched at Lovejoy Station between the Confederate infantry stationed there and W.H. Jackson's cavalry. He painfully evaded capture and rode back to Decatur where he arrived on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. His raid had been unsuccessful like those of his colleagues.

## **THE OUTCOME**

At dawn of August 26, the rebels holding Atlanta's southern outposts could not believe their tired eyes: the Yankees had abandoned their positions north of the city. The reason seemed obvious: Wheeler's cavalry had done so much damage on Sherman's rear that the Union general had been forced to retreat. The siege was lifted and *Sam* Hood had finally won the battle! At least that was his belief. A grand ball was

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<sup>20</sup> George Stoneman, first commander of the Army of the Potomac's Cavalry Corps, was transferred to the West after the relative failure of his raid on Richmond (Chancellorsville, May 1863). In 1864, he was given command of the cavalry division of the Army of the Ohio.

programmed and women were even brought by train from Macon!

Unfortunately, the reality was quite different. In fact, the fruit was ripe. Sherman was going to give the coup de grace. It was now the turn of Thomas' Army of the Cumberland to move south. On August 25, the XX<sup>th</sup> Corps was brought back north, on the Chattahoochee River, to protect the great railway bridge from Wheeler's raids. The XIV<sup>th</sup> Corps was already coordinating its move with Schofield's army west of Atlanta and the IV<sup>th</sup> Corps had joined him there. Sherman now repeated a well-rehearsed maneuver. Thomas' and Howard's armies swiveled behind that of Schofield in a southeasterly direction. Howard marched to the right, advancing on Jonesboro.

On August 30, four days after the start of the northern movement, Hood finally realized how catastrophic the situation was. To counter the threat, he hurriedly let out Lee's and Hardee's Corps, with Hardee in command. Misinformed by his lack of cavalry, Hood erroneously believed he was dealing with two or three enemy corps, at most. In reality, Sherman was sending five corps against Hardee's six divisions.

### ***Jonesboro – August 31 and September 1, 1864***

The final clash actually took place at Jonesboro, a small town about twelve miles south of Atlanta, along the valuable Macon & Western RR. On August 31, 1864, General Howard crossed the Flint River with two of his three corps. He had on hand only 17,000 men and ordered them to carefully entrench rather than continue a dangerous progression.

This time, Hardee had a bigger force than that of the enemy: his six divisions totaled 24,000 soldiers. He was thus ready for the offensive. Unusually, the attack started too early, 2.20 instead of 3 PM. The deployment of the troops was not yet completed and worse, confusing a skirmish with the main attack, Lee prematurely threw his corps in the attack whereas Hardee was programmed for this task. The Yankee fire power was devastating as usual and Lee's men were nailed to the ground.

While Lee's Corps was knocked out, Hardee's Corps temporarily commanded by Irishman Patrick R. Cleburne<sup>21</sup>, attacked the enemy's right flank. Two of his divisions were met by a hail of lead and suffered the same fate as Lee's troops. Cleburne's Division on the right recorded the only, but futile, success of the day. Meanwhile, the arrival of Judson Kilpatrick's Cavalry Division surprised the Confederate attack on its right flank. His horsemen were armed with Spencer repeating carbines and supported by an artillery battery. It was hell again for the Southerners. However, Cleburne's Division did not let up. It counter attacked energetically and forced the enemy to retreat. The Confederates pursued the enemy but while crossing the Flint River, they unfortunately met the XVII<sup>th</sup> Corps that had arrived at the crucial moment. This was too much for Cleburne's Division that had no other choice but to retreat. The Yankees lost 179 men whereas the Confederates deplored 1,725 casualties.

On September 1, Lee's Corps was transferred to Rough & Ready, which was a useless move. Hardee's Corps was left alone in Jonesboro with only 12,000 men while under pressure from Howard's three corps. He would still have to face Thomas's two corps arriving from the north. Sherman obviously wanted to destroy Hardee's Corps. At

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<sup>21</sup> Patrick Ronayne Cleburne, an Irishman established in Arkansas, was nicknamed the "Stonewall Jackson of the West". He was killed at the head of his troops during the suicide attack against Franklin, Tennessee, on November 30, 1864.

5 PM, he ordered the attack. The Confederates fiercely defended their positions. To the south, the XVII<sup>th</sup> Corps moved too late, allowing the rebels to retreat in good order.

### ***Lovejoy Station – September 2-5, 1864***

On September 2, the Confederates were entrenched at Lovejoy Station, 10 miles further south. Sherman ordered an immediate assault by the IV<sup>th</sup> and XXIII<sup>th</sup> Corps. Hardee repulsed the attack with difficulty and at a great cost.

### ***Atlanta – September 1, 1864, last day of the siege***

As planned, Sherman finally controlled all the railways reaching Atlanta. Hood's position soon became untenable. On September 1, while Hardee's troops were being cut to pieces at Jonesboro in general indifference, Hood ordered the evacuation of the city. There was no longer question of a grand liberation ball!

What remained of the Confederate army around Atlanta - Stewart's Corps and Georgia's militia - abandoned the city from the east and moved towards Lovejoy Station via McDonough. Lee's Corps in Jonesboro would cover their right flank at Rough & Ready. The rearguard task was to reduce to ashes vast quantities of equipment and munitions of all kinds. The retreating rebels also blew up five locomotives, 81 railcars and 13 siege guns. The phenomenal explosions that ensued shattered what little was left of the battered city. The Yankees quickly understood the meaning of these colossal detonations. On September 2, 1864, General Henry Slocum and his XX<sup>th</sup> Corps of the Army of Cumberland entered devastated Atlanta without firing a shot. On the 3<sup>rd</sup>, Stewart's and Lee's Corps joined the remainder of Hardee's Corps at Lovejoy Station. The Confederate Army of Tennessee was finally reunited.

Sherman was victorious and Hood established a reputation as the most reckless and aggressive general in the Confederate Army. Casualties for the campaign were roughly equal in absolute numbers: 31,687 Union (4,423 killed, 22,822 wounded, 4,442 missing and/or captured) and 34,979 Confederates (3,044 killed, 18,952 wounded, 12,983 missing and/or captured). Nevertheless, the Confederate losses were proportionally much higher. Hood's army left the campaign with approximately 30,000 men, whereas the Union armies retained 81,000. Although he bitterly regretted not having been able to destroy William Hardee's Corps at Jonesboro, Sherman decided not to push any further. On September 5, he thought best to regroup his exhausted troops in and around Atlanta, where they could enjoy a well deserved break.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The pause was not long. Indeed, as of September 18, 1864, Hood left Lovejoy Station, launching the disastrous Franklin and Nashville campaign in Tennessee. On November 15, definitively leaving Atlanta behind him, Sherman began his "March to the Sea", which was to end in Savannah, Georgia, on December 21, 1864.