

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

All the Fighting They Want: The Atlanta Campaign from Peachtree Creek to the City's Surrender, July 18-September 2, 1864

By Stephen Davis

“Let us give these southern fellows all the fighting they want and when they are tired we can tell them we are just warming to the work.”¹

When General John Bell Hood took command of the Confederate Army of Tennessee, Major General William Tecumseh Sherman's Federal forces were just a few miles outside Atlanta.

By the afternoon of July 18, 1864, when Hood officially took charge of the army, all seven Union infantry corps were well across the Chattahoochee; Major General George Henry Thomas' army was nearing Peachtree Creek. Numbers also told the story; on June 30 Sherman's forces numbered 106,070, while Hood's army returns of July 10 showed 59,196 officers and men present for duty. (The arrival of Major General Gustavus Woodson Smith's Georgia militia added a few thousand more muskets.) Finally, morale also favored the Northerners. “Officers & men evince the utmost confidence,” Sherman wrote his brother-in-law Hugh Ewing on July 13, and indeed they did. “Atlanta is in sight from the trees in our camp,” wrote a soldier in the 2d Massachusetts on July 17; “I wonder how long it will be before we are there.”²

¹ William T. Sherman to Ulysses S. Grant, August 7, 1864 in United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, volume 38, part 5, p. 408 (hereafter cited as *O.R.*, I, 38, pt. 5, 408).

² Brooks D. Simpson and Jean V. Berlin, eds., *Sherman's Civil War: Selected Correspondence of William T. Sherman, 1860-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 665; Lyman Richard Comey, *A Legacy of Valor: The Memoirs and Letters of Captain Henry Newton Comey, 2nd Massachusetts Infantry* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 180.

Sherman, who learned of the Rebels' command-change on the morning of July 19, had already formed his plan for capturing Atlanta. He knew the place was well fortified, and determined not to waste his troops' strength attacking the Confederates in their defenses. "I was willing to meet the enemy in the open country," he later wrote, "but not behind well-constructed parapets." Moreover, despite his numerical superiority, Sherman did not have enough manpower to completely invest the city, which was ringed by nearly twelve miles of entrenchments. Instead, he waged a logistics-based operation, interposing his forces on the several railroads supplying Hood's army in Atlanta (and the several thousand civilians still residing there), cutting them off one by one. When the last railroad was in his hands, Sherman knew that Hood would have to abandon the city.³

Hood got bad news within his first twenty-four hours in command. On July 18, a strong Union cavalry column raiding through east central Alabama fell upon the railroad connecting Atlanta with Montgomery, Alabama. Major General Lovell Harrison Rousseau's horsemen wrecked twenty-six miles of track—damage so extensive it would not be repaired for over a month. That same day Union Brigadier General Kenner Garrard's troopers reached the railroad leading to Augusta a dozen miles east of Atlanta and began tearing it up too. The twin moves meant that Hood had only one railroad left leading south to Macon, the Macon & Western.

Sherman, however, wanted to inflict more damage still to the Augusta rail line, so he directed Major General James Birdseye McPherson's three corps to march toward Decatur, get on the road, and tear it up as they marched west toward the city. Major General John McAllister Schofield's XXIII Corps was to push in from the northeast as Thomas' army began crossing Peachtree Creek.

The situation gave Hood an opportunity to launch an attacking battle against Thomas' army as it crossed the wide, deep-gullied Peachtree Creek. More importantly, a two-mile gap separated Thomas' left flank and Schofield's two divisions. "The Federal commander," Hood wrote in his memoir, "had committed a serious blunder in separating his corps, or Armies by such distance as to allow me to concentrate the main body of our Army upon his right wing." "The situation," he added, "afforded one of the most favorable occasions for complete victory which could have been offered." Afterward, General Joseph Eggleston Johnston claimed that the idea of attacking Thomas at Peachtree Creek was his. Most historians today, however, side with Hood, who asserted that he formed the plan based on Wheeler's reports of the enemy dispositions.⁴

Hood called his corps commanders together to discuss his plan for July 20. Major General Benjamin Franklin Cheatham's corps (formerly Hood's), with Major General

³ William T. Sherman, "The Grand Strategy of the Last Year of the War," in Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 4 vols. (New York: The Century Company, 1887): 4, 253.

⁴ John Bell Hood, *Advance and Retreat. Personal Experiences in the United States and Confederate States Armies* (The Hood Orphan Fund, 1880), 165-6.

Joseph Wheeler's cavalry and G. W. Smith's state militia, would hold back McPherson's army as it neared the city from the east. From their outer defensive line south of Peachtree Creek Lieutenant General William Joseph Hardee's and Lieutenant General Alexander Peter Stewart's corps would advance against Thomas beginning at 1:00 p.m. The attack would be *en echelon* by division from the right, with "everything on our side of the creek to be taken at all hazards." Hood knew that Thomas' infantry had largely gotten across Peachtree Creek, but probably had not had time to fortify themselves. "Should the enemy be found intrenched," General Stewart recorded, "his works were to be carried."⁵

They were not. The attack of Hardee's three divisions, which began around 4:00 p.m., fell mostly on Major General Joseph Hooker's XX Corps. Hardee's rightmost division, that of Major General William Brimage Bate, advanced into the gap in the enemy line and never became fully engaged. The charge of Hardee's other two divisions was not conducted with the ardor which Hood expected; afterward he blamed Hardee for not pressing the assault more vigorously. Stewart's two divisions, Major Generals William Wing Loring's and Edward Cary Walthall's, did better, driving back the enemy at places and making temporary breaks in their lines. But after a few hours all Confederates were repulsed. The Federals had not dug in along much of their line (Hood was right), but the blue-clad veterans' gritty performance, helped by effective use of artillery, gave them a defensive victory at Peachtree Creek. Casualties totaled 1,750-1,800 Northern and 2,300 to 2,500 Southern.

Meanwhile McPherson's three corps marched toward Atlanta from the east, tearing up the Georgia Railroad as they went. Sherman had called for his artillery to begin shelling the city when within range. By noon of July 20 troops of Major General John Alexander Logan's XV Corps had pushed to two and a half miles from the city, close enough for rifled cannon to begin firing a few rounds toward downtown. The Federals' approach, their bombshells and the fighting so close by, impelled a panicky flight by many of Atlanta's citizens. Several thousand would tough it out, of whom dozens would be killed or wounded in Sherman's 37-day bombardment.

Wheeler's cavalry, grossly outnumbered, could only slow McPherson's menacing approach. Hood sent Major General Patrick Ronayne Cleburne's division during the night of July 20-21, but these reinforcements could not prevent the Federals on July 21 from capturing a key bald hill a mile south of the rail line.

Sherman committed his worst blunder of the campaign that day when he ordered Brigadier General Kenner Garrard's cavalry division off to destroy more of the Georgia Railroad. Garrard had been guarding McPherson's left flank; his departure left the Army of the Tennessee vulnerable to a flank attack of the kind that Stonewall Jackson launched the year before at Chancellorsville.

⁵ Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 167; Report of General Stewart, January 12, 1865, in *O.R.*, I, 38, pt. 3, 871.

Which was exactly what Hood planned after Wheeler brought word that the enemy flank was in the air. The Confederates would abandon their outer defensive line, withdrawing during the night of July 21-22 into their main fortified perimeter ringing Atlanta. Stewart's corps would hold the trenches north of town, Cheatham's east. Hardee's corps, with Wheeler's cavalry, would continue marching through the city, and out to its southeast before turning north. Hood's hope was that Hardee could march as far as to get into McPherson's rear before turning and launching a surprise attack early on July 22.

Hardee knew that his troops were being asked to do too much, marching all night for more than a dozen miles, then attacking the enemy's rear. That night, riding past Hood's headquarters, Hardee stopped to ask permission to launch his assault when his troops had found the enemy flank, not rear. Hood later denied that he gave it.

Worse for the Confederates, General McPherson anticipated just such an attack. He issued a warning to Major General Francis Preston Blair, whose XVII Corps held the army's left, to be on the lookout. On the morning of July 22, Union treetop observers spotted dust from enemy marching columns. McPherson responded by sending Brigadier General Thomas William Sweeny's infantry division to the southern end of Blair's line, which anchored on the bald hill taken from Cleburne the preceding day.

Hardee's infantry marched all night with only a few hours' rest. By late morning he was swinging his four divisions—reduced by much straggling—into position to launch his assault. Wheeler rode farther on, aiming to bag McPherson's wagon train parked near Decatur. The Confederates' attack began around noon when they ran directly up against Sweeny's division, providentially placed. The Federals had little difficulty repulsing Major General William B. Bate's and Major General William Henry Talbot Walker's divisions. At the start of the fight General Walker was shot and killed by a Federal sniper.

To the west, south of the bald hill, the attack of Cleburne's division fared better. The Confederates drove back two brigades of Federals and captured a six-gun battery. General McPherson, riding toward the fighting, ran into Confederate skirmishers and was shot from his horse. He died within minutes. Later, members of his staff recovered his body and brought it to Sherman's headquarters. James Birdseye McPherson thus became the tenth Union major general, the only Federal army commander, to die in battle.

Brigadier General George Earl Maney's division came in to support Cleburne, and the Southerners pushed XVII Corps troops back to the bald hill. But the Confederates were not able to take it, despite repeated charges late in the afternoon.

Around 4:00 p.m. Cheatham's infantry advanced eastward from their works and attacked the XV Corps line. They overran the Federal works at points, but General Logan rallied his troops and rushed in reinforcements. The Rebels fell back to their lines. Fighting was largely over by 8:00 p.m.

Northern casualties in the battle fought east of Atlanta totaled 3,722 (430 killed, 1,559 wounded, 1,733 missing). Confederate losses have been put at 5,500, the majority in Hardee's corps.⁶

Hood's attacking battle of July 22 had achieved dramatic tactical successes, even if it was ultimately repulsed. Confederates had captured prisoners and cannon (twelve of them); Hood overstated these numbers so that Southern newspapers initially trumpeted the battle as a victory. But he had been unable to emulate Stonewall Jackson's flank attack at Chancellorsville. McPherson had been alert (even if Sherman had not); the Federals had taken precautions; and they had also been lucky.

To replace McPherson Sherman at first named Major General Logan, but then, July 26, settled on Major General Oliver Otis Howard. Logan was hurt, but determined to stay on as XV Corps commander.

The Confederate abandonment of their outer defensive line allowed Thomas' army to advance closer to the city. His artillery was therefore in range to begin bombarding Atlanta on July 23. Guns from Schofield's and Logan's armies also moved up to lob shells of their own. All of this met with Sherman's approval. "Good batteries will be constructed for the artillery," he ordered, "and a steady fire be kept up on the city of Atlanta."⁷

While his artillery battered the city and its inhabitants, and his infantry dug in north and east of Atlanta, Sherman kept his eyes on the objective: the Macon railroad. To cut it Sherman decided to swing the Army of the Tennessee, his favorite column of maneuver, westward, behind Schofield and Thomas, then marching down west of the city to threaten the railroad near the important depot known as East Point (the eastern terminus of the line to Montgomery).

The movement began early on the morning of July 27. Within hours Hood knew of it, and planned to block the enemy from approaching the railway. That evening he called in Lieutenant General Stephen Dill Lee (who that very day had assumed command of Hood's old corps) and Peter Stewart to explain his plan. While Hardee's corps and the state militia manned the fortifications, Lee was to lead his corps out the next morning, and dig in at a key crossroads on the Lick Skillet road. When the enemy approached, Lee was to hold position. Then, on July 29, Stewart was to lead his corps out, swing behind Lee, and attack the Federals in their right (westernmost) flank.

Unfortunately for the Confederates, Howard expected to be attacked on July 28. Cautiously he deployed his three corps on a north-south ridge three miles west of Atlanta. At the south end of his line, near the Lick Skillet road and a Methodist chapel called Ezra

⁶ Confederate losses have been put at 5,500 by such scholars as Albert Castel, working from Confederate reports. See Albert Castel, *Decision in the West: The Atlanta Campaign of 1864* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992, 412.

⁷ L. M. Dayton, Special Field Order 41, July 22, 1864 in *O.R.*, I, 38, pt. 5, 233.

Church, Howard refused his position to face an assault from the south—the same kind of defensive positions McPherson had arranged six days before. Brushes with Confederate cavalry late that morning confirmed his apprehensions; Howard ordered his men to dig in.

This was not the situation Lee expected; the Federals had gained the crossroads he had been ordered to seize and hold. Told by cavalymen that the enemy ahead were not in heavy force, and suspecting that they had not had time to entrench, Lee determined to launch an attacking battle without sending word back to Hood's headquarters. "I believed," he later wrote, that they "would yield before a vigorous attack." They did not. Lee compounded his mistake by sending in his infantry piecemeal as they came up. The Federals, in position and prepared, had a relatively easy time repulsing the Confederate assaults. Then, when Stewart's troops began to arrive, Lee threw them in, too, with the same result. The battle sputtered out after Lee and Major General William W. Loring were wounded.⁸

The battle of Ezra Church reflected the Civil War's usual five-to-one casualty disproportion between frontal-attacking infantry against entrenched veteran infantry. The Federals lost 632 killed, wounded and missing; Confederates, 600 dead and another 2,200 wounded or missing.

Hood ended up not censuring Lee for breaking orders. Instead he viewed the fight at Ezra Church somewhat favorably: it did, after all, halt for at least a while, the enemy's march on East Point and the Macon road. After Lee's troops withdrew from the battlefield, they took position about a mile and half north of the railroad and began to dig in. The line of works, running southwest of Atlanta parallel to the railway, eventually extended to East Point. Sherman was impressed. He wired Grant on August 4 that Hood "shows a bold front wherever I get at him."⁹

With Hood's railway defense line protecting the railroad to East Point, Sherman decided to strike it well below that depot. He ordered two of his cavalry leaders, Brigadier General Edward Moody McCook and Major General George Stoneman, to lead strong mounted columns to break the Macon & Western around Lovejoy's Station, twenty-two miles south of Atlanta. The two forces would take different routes: McCook's down the Chattahoochee and to Lovejoy's *via* Palmetto; Stoneman's east to Covington, then south. They were to set out early on July 27, rendezvous at Lovejoy's, wreck the road then ride back.

Before setting out, Stoneman asked permission, after the Lovejoy's work, to ride farther on, to Macon. There he hoped to attack a Confederate prison camp for Union officers and liberate them. If successful, Stoneman then wanted to ride farther still, another fifty-five miles, and possibly free the tens of thousands of Northerners confined

⁸ Report of General Lee, January 30, 1865 in *O.R.*, I, 38, pt. 3, 763.

⁹ Sherman to Grant, August 4, 1864 in *O.R.*, I, 38, pt. 5, 350.

at the big Confederate prison camp at Andersonville. Sherman gave his approval, so long as Stoneman kept as his priority the cutting of the Macon road with McCook.

Stoneman did not. Riding out early on July 27 with 2,150 men, he did not even try to ride to Lovejoy's, but headed straight for Macon. Approaching there on the 30th, Stoneman encountered some 2,000-2,500 militia and home guards drawn up to fight him. He gave up on his plan and ordered his column to head back.

The next morning a Confederate column which had been chasing Stoneman caught up with him northeast of Macon at a place called Sunshine Church. Believing he was about to be surrounded, Stoneman ordered most of his men to break out while he and 600 others stayed behind to surrender themselves. George Stoneman thus became the highest-ranking Union general captured during the war.

Ed McCook fared better, at least at first. Setting out early on July 27, McCook's column, 3,000 strong, fell upon a Rebel wagon train south of Palmetto, burned 500 wagons and sabered 800 mules. Then on July 29 McCook's troopers reached Lovejoy's and tore up 2 ½ miles of track. Afterward they headed west to reunite with the army.

Wheeler pursuing, caught up with the raiders near Newnan on July 30. McCook panicked and ordered his men to escape as they could. Hundreds were captured; the rest limped back to Sherman's army.

The McCook-Stoneman raid, largest cavalry operation so far in the campaign, was a miserable failure. Southerners had the rail damage at Lovejoy's repaired in two days. Combined, the two raiding columns lost 2,559 officers and men, half the number who had started out on July 27. General Stoneman wrote his sad campaign report in Macon at the very officer's prison he had hoped to liberate. (He was exchanged two months later.)

Sherman took the news hard. "I can hardly believe it," he lamented to Halleck. He was forced to concede that sending his cavalry out on the raid had been "a military mistake."¹⁰

Sherman returned to the plan of breaking Hood's railroad by extending his infantry lines farther toward East Point. To do so, he had to draw Schofield's army from east of Atlanta, around and behind Thomas and Howard. The movement began August 1. On the next day, Schofield pushed the Federal right a mile or so farther south, almost to Utoy Creek, a stream flowing westward about two miles south of the Lick Skillet road. Hood's troops extended their railway defense line, keeping pace with the enemy's advance. On August 6 Schofield launched a reconnaissance-in-force against the Confederate line at Utoy Creek; it was easily repulsed.

¹⁰ Sherman to Halleck, August 1 and August 7, 1864 in *O.R.*, I, 38, pt. 5, 320, 409.

For the moment, Sherman was stymied. “I do not deem it prudent to extend more to the right,” he admitted to General Halleck on August 7, “but will push forward daily by parallels, and make the inside of Atlanta too hot to be endured.”¹¹

The federal commander’s intent upon bombarding the city with its several thousand inhabitants would reflect questionable judgement were it not military standard practice at the time. Grant’s artillery was just then pounding Petersburg; Union cannon were firing on Charleston. Neither cannonade would force Confederates to give up either city; similarly, Sherman’s shelling failed to faze Hood at Atlanta. On August 9, when Sherman ordered all rifled guns within range of downtown to fire fifty rounds each, Hood’s very headquarters came under fire. “The General and his staff did not seem in the least disturbed,” noted one observer.¹²

The several thousand civilians still in the city also stuck it out, despite occasional casualties. On the night of August 3, for instance, a Northern projectile killed Joseph F. Warner, former superintendent of the city gas works, and his nine-year-old daughter Elizabeth. The precise number of noncombatants killed and wounded during Sherman’s bombardment of Atlanta will never be known. An informed guess puts the toll at perhaps a score of slain, forty to sixty more injured.

The defeat of Sherman’s cavalry raid emboldened General Hood to do something Joe Johnston had been afraid to do, send off half of his own cavalry against the single-track Western & Atlantic Railroad, then bringing the enemy supplies from Chattanooga. “Since our late success over the enemy’s cavalry,” Hood wrote President Davis on August 2, “I hope now to be able, by interrupting Sherman’s communications, either to force him to fight me in position or to retreat.” Davis approved the plan and on August 10 Joe Wheeler rode north with 4,500 to 5,000 horsemen. In the next few days the Confederate raiders struck the W. & A. at a few places north of Big Shanty (Kennesaw). North of Dalton Wheeler hoped to damage the long tunnel under Chetoogeta Mountain—he had brought blasting powder for such work. But the approach of the enemy from Chattanooga forced the Confederates to ride off toward Tennessee after doing a little rail-wrecking at Dalton.¹³

Wheeler’s raid was not so spectacular a failure as McCook’s-Stoneman’s, but it failed just as markedly to achieve the desired effect. Union construction crews had the railroad from Chattanooga working again by August 18.

Wheeler’s departure—riding into Tennessee, he would not return to Hood’s army during the present campaign—led Sherman to give his own cavalry another try. “Wheeler is out of the way,” he wrote; “when shall we use cavalry if not now?” To lead this raid,

¹¹ Sherman to Halleck, August 7, 1864 in *O.R.*, I, 38, pt. 5, 408.

¹² Stephen Davis, *What the Yankees Did to Us: Sherman’s Bombardment and Wrecking of Atlanta* (Macon GA: Mercer University Press 2012), 176.

¹³ Hood to Davis, August 2, 1864 in *O.R.*, I, 38, pt. 5, 940.

he called upon Brigadier General Hugh Judson Kilpatrick whom, Sherman hoped, “could ride right round Atlanta and smash the Macon road all to pieces.”¹⁴

Sherman’s hopes were too high. Riding from Atlanta with 4,700 troopers on August 18, Kilpatrick’s column made it to Jonesboro, fifteen miles south of downtown Atlanta. There they pried up two miles of track (it was raining, so they couldn’t burn the ties or twist the rails). Then they headed back. The Confederates had the road working again within two days.

While his guns banged away at Atlanta, Sherman made no effort in mid-August to stretch his infantry lines toward East Point. Opposing pickets skirmished, artillery of both sides pounded enemy trenches, and casualties occurred. On August 10 Confederate Major General William B. Bate took a ball in the knee and was put out of action for two months. Nine days later Major General Grenville Mellen Dodge was hit in the head by a spent ball. He was sent home, never to return to serve under Sherman.

Finally realizing that a cavalry raid could not break Hood’s last railroad, Sherman devised plans for an infantry raid. While Major General Henry Warner Slocum’s XX Corps withdrew to the Chattahoochee and guarded the bridges, Sherman would take his other six corps in a wide sweep south of Atlanta to cut the Macon & Western and “make the matter certain.”¹⁵

The grand movement began during the night of August 25-26. The XX Corps fell back and the IV, farthest left in the Union line, withdrew and marched west. The Army of the Tennessee and the XIV Corps set into motion the next night.

Confederate pickets early on August 26 reported enemy trenches north of the city to be empty. General Hood and his staff exulted, hoping that this presaged Sherman’s retreat (maybe Wheeler had accomplished something after all). Within hours, however, word came in that the enemy was still in position west of town.

The next day, August 27, Hood learned of the further disappearance of enemy forces. That afternoon Confederate cavalry reported that Union infantry was marching seven miles southwest of Atlanta. In the evening, Hood appraised Richmond of the activity. His chief of staff, Brigadier General Francis Asbury Shoup, recorded in his diary, “the exact intention of the enemy has not been ascertained.”¹⁶

Confederate cavalry, fully, 4,000 troopers under Brigadier General William Hicks “Red” Jackson after Wheeler’s departure, dogged the Federal infantry columns and kept reports streaming into headquarters. Even the Southern press picked up on what was going on. “The enemy disappeared from our entire front last night except on the extreme left,” reported the Confederate Press Association, still in Atlanta, in its telegraphic

¹⁴ Sherman to Thomas, August 16, 1864 in *O.R.*, I, 38, pt..5, 524, 526.

¹⁵ Sherman to Halleck, August 22, 1864 in *O.R.*, I, 38, pt. 5, 628.

¹⁶ Shoup journal, entry of August 27, 1864 in *O.R.*, I, 38, pt. 3, 693.

dispatch of August 27. The *Memphis Appeal*, which kept a skeleton staff in the city issuing a small daily *Extra*, opined, “The probability is that the troops thus withdrawn...will be found extending their lines to their right, in the direction of the West Point and Macon railroads.”¹⁷

So the enemy was marching to break the Army of Tennessee’s last lifeline, but where? On August 28 Hood sent infantry units to East Point, Rough and Ready and Jonesboro. Meanwhile his cavalry kept close to the Federal columns. That day they reported that the Federals were hovering along the Atlanta & West Point Railroad, the Georgia component of the line to Montgomery. Even though it had been out of operation for more than a month, Sherman ordered his troops to wreck it further. The Macon & Western was his true objective; the Federal commander had his men spend all day, August 29, tearing up the A. & W. P.

That evening Hood called his key generals into conference. Hardee wrote his wife Mary the next morning. “We know that five, certainly, perhaps six Corps are on the West Point R. Road,” he explained. “I suppose by tonight we shall know more of his designs.”¹⁸

Hood’s real problem lay not in divining the enemy’s designs—they were pretty much apparent—but in trying to stretch his forces all the way from Atlanta to Jonesboro. He could not. Moreover, once Sherman cut his six corps loose from the rail line to Montgomery on August 30, he kept them fanned out on close to a nine-mile front, all marching east to break the Macon road somewhere.

That evening the XV, XVI and XVII Corps, Howard’s army approached Jonesboro. Hood called in Generals Hardee and Lee and ordered them to move their infantry to the threatened point, attack the enemy on the next day, and drive them back. Lee’s troops, with their farther march, on August 31 did not reach Jonesboro till mid-day. By the time Hardee and Lee deployed their divisions for the attack, it was 3:00 p.m.

The real action, however, was taking place eight miles north of Jonesboro, near a train depot called Quick Station. There elements of the Federal XXIII Corps reached the Macon & Western about 3:00 p.m. and started tearing it up. Confederate cavalry could only look on. When two southbound trains came into view—they were carrying the army’s reserve ordnance stores, which Hood was trying to get out of Atlanta—the troopers warned the engineers that Yankees were ahead. The locomotives switched into reverse and chugged back into Atlanta. Their arrival there, about 5:00 p.m., brought Hood word that the enemy had finally broken his last railroad.

¹⁷ “From Atlanta. Enemy Massing on our Left,” *Augusta Chronicle & Sentinel*, August 28, 1864; “The Immediate Front,” *Memphis Appeal*, August 27, 1864.

¹⁸ Stephen Davis, *Atlanta Will Fall: Sherman, Joe Johnston and the Yankee Heavy Battalions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 179.

Plans for the evacuation of Atlanta had to be made. Even before he learned the outcome of Hardee's and Lee's assault at Jonesboro (it was repulsed), Hood recalled Lee's infantry back toward the city. On September 1 Hood with Stewart's corps and the state militia marched out of Atlanta toward a junction with Lee and ultimately Hardee. The latter held off Federal attacks at Jonesboro on September 1 and was able to slip south that night. As Hood reunited his army in the next few days, Sherman made no attempt to defeat it in detail—a decision widely criticized by military historians.

But Sherman had won Atlanta, the prize he coveted. Explosions during the night of September 1-2 alerted him to the possibility that the Confederates were abandoning the city. The next morning General Slocum sent patrols forward. One, approaching the city's suburbs, encountered Mayor James M. Calhoun, who formally surrendered.

When word got to Sherman, still near Jonesboro, he telegraphed Washington: "So Atlanta is ours and fairly won."¹⁹

President Lincoln was ecstatic. He was worried about his chances for re-election; he was being opposed by General George Brinton McClellan, whose Democratic Party platform contained wording critical of the Union war effort. Now, the capture of Atlanta vastly encouraged Lincoln and his supporters.

Conversely Southerners were depressed. "Atlanta gone," recorded Mary Boykin Chesnut in her diary. "Well—that agony is over."²⁰

Casualties for the two opposing forces in the campaign are surprisingly similar. In his memoir, Sherman put his losses for May-September 1864 at 4,988 killed, 24,827 wounded and 4,708 missing for a total of 34,523 officers and men.

For their parts Johnston and Hood tussled in their postbellum memoirs, disagreeing on a number of points, including casualties. A staff officer for Lieutenant General Hardee, Lieutenant W. L. Trask, apparently worked from army records and entered into his war diary that the Army of Tennessee lost 3,044 killed, 18,962 wounded and 12,983 missing, for a total of 34,989. Historian Richard M. McMurry accepts that Confederate campaign casualties came to "about 35,000," noting that this number "roughly equaled Union losses."²¹

After Union forces entered Atlanta on September 2, they stayed two and a half months. In the very first days of his troops' occupation, General Sherman ordered the expulsion of those civilians still residing in the city. General Hood of course protested, to

¹⁹ Sherman to Halleck September 3, 1864 in *O.R.* I, 38, pt. 5, 777.

²⁰ C. Vann Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 2 vols. (Norwalk, CT: Easton Press), 642.

²¹ Richard M. McMurry, *Atlanta 1864: Last Chance for the Confederacy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 197.

no avail. So did Mayor James M. Calhoun. Sherman's reply to Calhoun was legendary: "War is cruelty and you cannot refine it."²²

Sherman's capture of Atlanta thrilled the North. Before then, President Abraham Lincoln had genuinely worried about his prospects for re-election. After Atlanta, and Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan's victories over Confederate Lt. Gen. Jubal A. Early in the Shenandoah Valley in October 1864, Lincoln's re-election was assured against his Democratic opponent, Union Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan.

Five months after Lincoln's re-election, Lee's army surrendered, and with it the Confederacy's hopes for independence were dashed.

²² Sherman to Calhoun, Rawson and Wells, Sept. 12, 1864, *O.R.*, I, 39, pt. 2, 418.