

**STRATEGY  
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**CHICKAMAUGA-CHATTANOOGA CAMPAIGN  
AUGUST - NOVEMBER 1863**

**BY**

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**Chickamauga-Chattanooga Campaign August-November 1863**

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## ABSTRACT

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### Abstract

Chattanooga was a western theater decisive point for both the Union and Confederate armies long before and after this strategic campaign. What made Chattanooga a critical location was the extensive rail network. These rail lines of communication connected west to Nashville and Memphis, north to Knoxville and Richmond, and to the heart of the south in Atlanta and Charleston. To the Union, control of Chattanooga would provide a significant presence in the south, split the Confederacy between Tennessee and Georgia and establish a base of operations for future offensive operations in support of the overall national strategy. To the Confederacy, Chattanooga was vital to movement of materiel and soldiers between the eastern and western theaters. The Chattanooga Campaign is more about strategic leadership than tactical, terrain, or force ratio advantage. This paper will examine the strategic importance of the Chattanooga Campaign and the leadership of key commanders to the outcome of this campaign.



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## CHICHAMAUGA-CHATTANOOGA CAMPAIGN AUGUST-NOVEMBER 1863

After the fall of Vicksburg, Chattanooga was a western theater decisive point for both the Union and Confederate armies. What made Chattanooga a critical location was the extensive rail network. These rail lines of communication connected west to Nashville and Memphis, north to Knoxville and Richmond, and to the heart of the south in Atlanta and Charleston. To the Union, control of Chattanooga would provide a significant presence in the south, split the Confederacy between Tennessee and Georgia and establish a base of operations for future offensive operations in support of the overall national strategy. To the Confederacy, Chattanooga was vital to movement of men and materiel between the eastern and western theaters.

Joint Pub 1-02 defines lines of operations as "lines which define the directional orientation of the force in time and space in relation to the enemy. They connect the force with its base of operations and its objectives." Therefore, in the current joint lexicon, to control the lines of operations emanating from Chattanooga was, for the Union, to possess the ability to take the fight to the south, and for the Confederacy, to maintain control of vital lines of communication preventing the Union from penetrating the heart of the Confederacy. Ultimately, there would be two major battles fought for control of this decisive location. First, there was the battle of Chickamauga, 19-20 September 1863, which was a Confederate victory. Then, two months later, the battle of Chattanooga on 23-25 November, was a victory for the Union that won the campaign. This pivotal campaign provided the needed base of operations and set the conditions for General William T. Sherman's "march to the sea." The Chickamauga-Chattanooga Campaign was more about strategic leadership than tactical, terrain, or force ratio advantage. It is this campaign, and the leadership of key commanders that this paper will examine.

### NORTHERN STRATEGY

Early in the Civil War the national strategy postulated by Winfield Scott, General-in-Chief of the United States Army, was to "subject the Southern confederacy to a gigantic siege, employing Union naval power to blockade Southern ports and gradually to strangle the Confederate economy by preventing the export of cotton and the import of industrial products and war material."<sup>1</sup> This would become known as the "Anaconda Plan."

This "gigantic siege" would take considerable time, more than public opinion and the political process would allow. Northern support of a protracted war was fragile and President Lincoln's Republican Party was not strong enough to ensure continued political support for the war effort. Therefore, it was imperative that the Union win the war as quickly as possible. A more aggressive and popular strategy was needed.

To ensure a more agreeable strategy, President Lincoln removed the aged Scott and appointed Major General George McClellan as General-in-Chief. McClellan believed in an eastern theater strategy of maneuver against Lee's entrenchments and fortifications leading to Richmond. This would become known as the "peninsula strategy", which had the support of President Lincoln. However, after the failure

of the Peninsula Campaign, President Lincoln accepted a temporary stalemate in Virginia and planned to "detach sufficient forces to place the opening of the Mississippi beyond doubt."<sup>2</sup> While President Lincoln still believed Richmond must be taken, politically he needed victories in the western theater to sustain public support. Therefore, forces were dispatched on three fronts in support of the new Union strategy:

They soon sent an Army corps from Virginia to Kentucky to operate against East Tennessee in coordination with Rosecrans, and they directed all new troops raised in the West to go to Grant to strengthen his campaign against Vicksburg. This distribution of resources gave the priority to Grant, the second to Rosecrans, the last to the stalemated Virginia front. So, the Union had evolved a strategy well adapted to the operational and political conditions under which it fought an adversary essentially identical in doctrine, equipment, and operational skill.<sup>3</sup>

Also, by the early summer of 1863 the Union began to realize that a combination of military operations--eventually carried out by Grant and Sherman--aimed directly at destroying the Confederacy's armies and its people's will to fight was the only way to win the war.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the western theater was the gateway to the interior of the south and Chattanooga was the key to opening it.

## **SOUTHERN STRATEGY**

Even though President Davis and General Lee had studied Napoleonic strategy at West Point with many of their opponents in the Union army, the political situation in the South shaped a very different grand strategy. "The defense against the Union land offensive against logistically critical areas of the South provide the keystone of rebel military strategy. The Confederacy made its decision on the primacy of territory without reference to the enemy's strategy."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, for the South to succeed it was essential to maintain its territorial integrity through use of a strategic defense. President Davis best explained why this was the best strategy when he wrote: "the evacuation of any portion of territory involves not only the loss of supplies, but in every instance has been attended by a greater loss of troops."<sup>6</sup> Not only was Davis concerned with men and materiel, he also knew that the loss of territory would be a serious blow to Southern morale and confidence in the war effort. The South did use an offensive strategy when conditions and chance for success were favorable.

To enhance the inherent strength of the defense, a strategic counterattack strategy using raids and guerrilla operations was also used. "Raids proved one of the Civil Wars most effective strategies. Essentially, an offensive strategy, the raid could succeed because it avoided the enemy, or at least his main forces."<sup>7</sup> Guerrilla operations were equally successful at avoiding enemy strengths by not only infiltrating and damaging Union logistics bases and lines of communication, but by maintaining southern loyalty through intimidation of Union sympathizers in the more remote western theaters.

To execute this defensive strategy and maintain territorial integrity, the South was divided into three theaters. The Eastern Theater located east of the Appalachian Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean and was always the priority theater. Another, the Trans-Mississippi was the region west of the Mississippi River—one of the breadbaskets of the Confederacy. Finally, the Western Theater consisted of all states

between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River and was another breadbasket of the Confederacy. The campaign of Chickamauga-Chattanooga occurred in this theater.

### **CAMPAIGN LEADERSHIP**

There were numerous key leaders, both good and bad, throughout the Chickamauga-Chattanooga campaign of 1863; too many to adequately cover here. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, I will focus on the three senior commanders of the campaign. First, Major General William S. Rosecrans, the commander the Army of the Cumberland until his relief on 19 October. Second General Ulysses S. Grant, who relieved Rosecrans during the siege of Chattanooga. Finally, Confederate Major General Braxton Bragg, who commanded the Army of the Tennessee.

My intent is not to tell their life stories, but rather, to provide sufficient background to understand the professional development of each commander and the circumstances that brought each to the campaign.

#### **MAJOR GENERAL ROSECRANS**

William Starke Rosecrans commanded the Army of the Cumberland during the Chickamauga-Chattanooga campaign until his relief by General Grant on 19 October 1863. He was a member in high standing of the West Point class of 1842. Graduating with a commission in the Corps of Engineers, he spent twelve years in mostly routine duty assignments until he resigned from the army in 1854. "During his nearly twelve years of military service, Rosecrans and his wife had become increasingly unhappy with his military career. In that time he had been promoted only once and now had four children to raise, and worse – as the couple had concluded – a resourceful mind was going to waste facing a dreary and unpromising future."<sup>8</sup>

During the years between his resignation and the beginning of the war, Rosecrans worked primarily as the head of a company that refined coal oil. When the war began in 1861 there was a renewed national need for military professionals. Rosecrans answered the call and in a matter of months rose through the ranks and "was appointed a brigadier general in the regular army and called to head a brigade by McClellan, who was then commanding in Ohio and preparing for his first campaign."<sup>9</sup> It was during this first campaign, at Rich Mountain, Virginia, that Rosecrans developed and carried out the battle plan thus securing his first major victory. However, McClellan gave no credit to Rosecrans in his reports to Washington prompting Rosecrans request for a transfer to the Western Theater.

By September of 1862, Rosecrans was under Grant's command at Corinth, Mississippi. During the months he commanded in Mississippi his command was very successful and aided in setting the conditions for Grant's ultimate success at Vicksburg the following year.

Rosecrans' reward was a promotion to major general of volunteers and a reassignment to replace Buell, who had failed to defeat Bragg or drive him out of Kentucky and Tennessee. Rosecrans relieved Buell in early November and reorganized the Army of the Cumberland with a total strength of 47,000 divided between three army corps.<sup>10</sup>

The stage was now set for Rosecrans' campaign in Tennessee whose ultimate operational objective was Chattanooga and its rail lines of communication.

To obtain his strategic objective, Rosecrans spent the next several months preparing his army and the required logistics to support his campaign. After repeated attempts by the War Department to get Rosecrans moving, the Army of the Cumberland and Braxton Bragg's Army of the Tennessee finally met 31 December–2 January at Stones River at Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The outcome was "one of the bloodiest and hardest fought battles of the whole war, Rosecrans having taken a total loss of 31 percent against Bragg's casualties of 33 percent."<sup>11</sup> While statistically this appears to be an impasse, the North declared a much-needed victory due to the pace and distance Bragg's army retreated over the next several months.

It was during the Tullahoma campaign between January and September of 1863 that Rosecrans repeatedly displayed outstanding generalship "by his brilliantly conceived and executed strategic maneuvers that resulted in forcing Bragg to withdraw and finally across the Tennessee River and into the key center of Chattanooga."<sup>12</sup>

During this campaign, Rosecrans gained the trust and confidence of his men and was given the nickname "Old Rosy." However, faults that would lead to his downfall were his temper and his inclination to micro-manage the maneuver of units rather than using the chain of command. These faults were never more apparent than at Chickamauga where his untimely direction resulted in a gap in the Union line at the very moment of James Longstreet's attack and resulted in the Confederate victory.

In the aftermath of defeat, Rosecrans fell back into Chattanooga and was besieged by Bragg. Because the President and the Secretary of War were convinced that Rosecrans might lose Chattanooga, he was relieved of command of the Army of the Cumberland on 19 October by General Grant and given command of the Department of Missouri until the end of the war.

#### MAJOR GENERAL GRANT

Ulysses S. Grant graduated from West Point in 1843 and received a commission in the infantry. His early military career was relatively uneventful and his record was average. Moreover, he was never satisfied with a military career and this dissatisfaction became worse with his assignment as Regimental Quartermaster during the Mexican War. On this he wrote: "I am doing the duties of Commissary and Quarter Master so that during the siege I had little to do except to see to having pork and beans rolled out."<sup>13</sup> After the Mexican War, he remained a Quartermaster while serving at various posts on the Pacific Coast until he resigned from the army in 1854.

He returned to his wife and children who had remained on the family farm outside St. Louis during his eleven years of service. He built a house and stocked the farm, but in 1858, it failed due to the high cost of supplies. He then moved into St. Louis and established a partnership in the real estate business but by May of 1860, this too failed. Having no other recourse, he moved to Galena, Illinois and became a clerk in his father's store.<sup>14</sup>

When the Civil War began in 1861 Grant knew he must serve the Union again. When the President called for volunteers, he first served in Galena by assisting in the formation of a state regiment. Later, after taking the regiment to Springfield he met with Governor Yates and "was asked to go into the Adjutant-General's office and render such assistance as I could, the governor saying that my army experience would be a great service there. I accepted the proposition."<sup>15</sup> When the President again called for volunteers, Grant sent a request to the Federal Adjutant General asking to command a regiment. The request received no attention. However, "the 21st regiment of infantry, mustered in by me at Mattoon, refused to go into service with the colonel of their selection in any position. While I was absent Governor Yates appointed me colonel of the latter regiment."<sup>16</sup> The regiment campaigned in Missouri against Confederates for about two months until Grant received an appointment as a brigadier general. "Upon the recommendation of Elihu B. Washburne, an Illinois congressman, President Lincoln appointed Grant a brigadier general in August 1861."<sup>17</sup> So, like Rosecrans, Grant returned to military service and became a brigadier general in only a few months.

Grant's first battle as a general officer was under the command of General Pope and occurred at Belmont Missouri on 7-8 November 1861. This battle is significant as a study of Grant's generalship because it demonstrates his ability as a military leader who learns from his errors and applies the lessons to future operations. Located just across the Mississippi River from Columbus Kentucky, General Pope described this area as "the Gibraltar of the west" and Grant was ordered to "make a demonstration against this place."<sup>18</sup>

The result of the Battle of Belmont was that the Confederate force was driven from Belmont; however, a counterattack forced Grant to leave the field. While Grant's actions were quick and decisive, tactical errors were made. Most significant, he formed no reserve, and he advanced without reconnaissance. So why are these errors significant to Grant's development?

"Such was Grant's first battle, and it cannot be said that his generalship was above that of an amateur, which is exactly what he was."<sup>19</sup> What is important about these errors is their impact on Grant's future as the greatest operational and strategic commander of the war. "The extraordinary thing is that Grant himself discovered them at the time, and through recognizing how faulty had been his generalship greatly improved upon it in his next battle."<sup>20</sup>

As Grant developed his style and strategy, it became clear that the objective in the Western Theater was the reopening of the Mississippi River, which would essentially divide the Confederacy. To accomplish this, a series of campaigns often called "bayou expeditions" were devised which led to the principal Confederate base of operations on the Mississippi, Vicksburg. To get to Vicksburg Grant would achieve an unprecedented series of successes in the Fort Henry Fort-Donelson Campaign of 6-16 February and at Shiloh 6-7 April.

The generalship of Grant would see a marked maturity during the Henry-Donelson Campaign. It is here that Grant demonstrated his innovative mind when he teamed with Admiral Andrew Foote in a joint amphibious operation. "The fires from Foote's Squadron of ironclads overwhelmed Fort Henry. Grant then

moved overland to Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River while the gunboats retraced their route and advanced."<sup>21</sup> This campaign was a tremendous success for Grant and brought him national attention as the hero in the Western Theater. However, this recognition would be threatened at the Battle of Shiloh.

The Confederate forces "made a surprise attack on Grant's inadequately outposted bivouacs in the vicinity of Pittsburg Landing-Shiloh Church, driving the badly shaken Union forces. Grant's vigorous personal efforts to retrieve the day were finally successful at dusk."<sup>22</sup>

After receiving reinforcements and reorganizing his forces during the night of the 6<sup>th</sup>, Grant prepared to assume the offensive. He regained the original position at Shiloh Church, driving the Confederates from the field with heavy losses. However, he failed to pursue and received heavy criticism from Washington. In Grant's defense, and as J.F.C. Fuller in his analysis of Grant's generalship states: "Few problems in war are more difficult than development of pursuit from troops already engaged and few problems are easier when a pursuing force is ready organized and in reverse behind the attacking front."<sup>23</sup> In Grant's own words: "I wanted to pursue, but had not the heart to order men who had fought desperately for two days, lying in the mud and rain whenever not fighting." Therefore, there is strategic level wisdom in keeping focused on the ultimate objective and knowing when to conserve forces to fight another day.

Shiloh ended in near disaster and left Grant with his reputation temporarily tarnished. Nevertheless, he remained focused on the campaign to reopen the Mississippi River and split the Confederacy in two. He would accomplish this objective with victory at Vicksburg, the "Gibraltar of the West" over a year later.

The campaign and siege marked the point in Grant's generalship where he truly mastered the operational art. Again, he masterfully conducted a joint operation to capture a Confederate decisive point. Using Union warships under Admiral David G. Farragut, Grant began the campaign in the summer of 1862 with a naval bombardment. While only moderately successful, it forced the Confederate commander, Pemberton, to concentrate his force at the Vicksburg stronghold rather than maneuver. This was probably due to President Davis' order "to hold Vicksburg at all costs."<sup>24</sup>

Grant's repeated attempts to capture Vicksburg failed. Attempting maneuver south in December he was forced to abandon this effort when Confederate Cavalry captured his base of operations at Holly Springs.<sup>25</sup>

Again calling on the Navy, Grant began to achieve success when "Admiral David D. Porter was able to run the batteries of Vicksburg with warships, supply ships, and troop transports and land Grant's army at Bruinsberg, to the south of Vicksburg on 30 April 1863."<sup>26</sup> Clearly, Grant achieved this success through his vision of jointness in river operations, skillfulness in the operational art, complete trust in his commanders, and common sense approach. He now began to maneuver east to position his force to surround Vicksburg from 7-19 May "Grant had marched 200 miles, living off the country, and defeated detachments of numerically superior enemy in 5 distinct engagements and several skirmishes. He had

inflicted losses of about 8,000 men to himself of less than 4,400 casualties. He had now locked up his principal opponent and some 30,000 men in a fortress."<sup>27</sup>

The conditions for the final blow to the Confederacy on the Mississippi River were set. The siege of Vicksburg began on 19 May and lasted 47 days. "Vicksburg's defenders and the civilian population, burrowing in caves and threatened by starvation, kept up a gallant but hopeless fight, which excited as much admiration in the North as in the South."<sup>28</sup> Pemberton surrendered on 4 July 1863. Now the Union had achieved two major victories, Gettysburg and Vicksburg, in the Eastern and Western Theaters of war. With these victories, Secretary of War Edmond M. Stanton and President Lincoln began to see the strategic importance of Chattanooga to winning the war.

Grant's professional development at this point was clearly poised to transition from master of the operational art to master of the strategic art. This transition would become complete with his victory at Chattanooga in November of 1863 when he would become "the man" in the eyes of President Lincoln and become Commander-in-Chief of all Union forces.

#### GENERAL BRAGG

A study of Braxton Bragg's military career reveals one that begins modestly and routinely accelerates with examples of bravery, leadership and tactical brilliance in the Mexican War then ends in defeat and disgrace in the Civil War. Two factors that impact his generalship and become evident early in his career are his health and his personality.

Bragg's military career begins as Rosecrans' and Grant's had, at West Point. After graduating in 1837 he was assigned to the 3d Artillery Regiment. Serving initially at Fort Monroe, his unit was reassigned in February 1838 to Fort Marion, at St. Augustine, Florida where he saw duty at the end of the Seminole War. While in the mosquito infested swamps of Florida Bragg's health began to deteriorate and he was forced to take three months leave to recover. Health would continue to become a factor in his performance of duty throughout his career.

Following his return to duty, his regiment was transferred to Fort Moultrie, South Carolina. It was there that Bragg's personality and reputation for not being able to get along with others was established.<sup>29</sup> In an incident at the officer's club, his regimental commander stated, "Lieutenant Bragg, a glass of wine with you, sir!" The reply, "Colonel Gates, if you order me to drink a glass of wine with you, I shall have to do it."<sup>30</sup> We will see later in the campaign analysis that his personality would become a significant factor in his inability to lead. Bragg's routine service and garrison duty at Fort Moultrie would end in 1845 with the outbreak of the Mexican War where his career began to accelerate.

With his regiment's assignment to General Zachary Taylor's army, Bragg began to demonstrate his abilities as a tactical commander. "Bragg's gallant conduct at Fort Brown and Monterrey quickly won him brevet promotions. But it was his key role in the battle of Buena Vista that brought him not only recognition of his professional qualities but even national fame."<sup>31</sup>

After a long day's fight and with Santa Anna's numerically superior force closing in, Taylor called to Bragg, "double shot your guns and give them hell."<sup>32</sup> He then positioned his guns at the center and flank. "The combined fire from front and flank was more than the Mexican infantry could stand, and after severe losses, Santa Anna's men broke and fled in wild disorder."<sup>33</sup> Having already received two brevet promotions in Mexico, Bragg received his third to brevet Lieutenant Colonel for his action at Buena Vista. The Mexican War ended in 1849 and he returned to the United States with his regiment.

In June of 1849 Bragg married Elise Ellis, the daughter of a rich Louisiana planter, and they moved with his regiment to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. He was reassigned several times to different frontier posts. Finally, the couple became disenchanted with army life due mainly to harsh conditions on the frontier and a disagreement over assignments with Jefferson Davis. "Finally, a minor difference soon grew to what Bragg considered a major dispute when he took on his friend Jefferson Davis, the Secretary of War, over Bragg's pending transfer from Fort Gibson to Fort Washita. Though he had accumulated a number of annoyances, this disagreement seems to have been the one that forced him to make a career decision."<sup>34</sup> Yet another glimpse at problems his personality caused. In January of 1856 Bragg resigned his commission and left the army to become a planter in Louisiana. He would remain a planter until the outbreak of the war.

Unlike Rosecrans and Grant, Bragg was a southerner and that is where his loyalty would remain. "With the certainty of war growing daily, Bragg was quick to offer his services to the governor of Louisiana, who immediately promoted him to colonel in the state militia and made him his military aide. In short order Bragg was promoted to major general in the militia, and on 23 February 1861 Jefferson Davis signed his commission as a brigadier general in the Confederate States Army."<sup>35</sup>

Bragg's command and staff positions are too numerous to adequately cover here. Suffice to say he served in numerous senior command and staff assignments and rose quickly from Colonel, Louisiana Militia early in 1861 to commander, Army of the Tennessee from 27 June 1862 to December 2, 1863.

As the Union began to recognize the strategic importance of the Western Theater, so did the Confederacy. The staunchest advocate for a concentration in the western theater was General Beauregard one of the most respected southern strategists. "He became both the strategist and publicist of the western concentration bloc, not only because of his extensive overlapping contacts but because he perceived the Tennessee and Kentucky areas as the Union's weak points and he wished to direct a surprise Confederate concentration against Rosecrans' army."<sup>36</sup> This emerging strategy in 1862 would set the stage for Bragg's army to meet Rosecrans in Tennessee.

On 31 December the two armies met at Murfreesboro and for several days attempted to out-manuever one another until in a final meeting engagement Bragg was beaten. "Bragg's last major attack on 2 January suffered such a bloody repulse that he pulled back and that night started his forces in retreat toward Tullahoma thirty-six miles to the south."<sup>37</sup>

History shows that Bragg's ineffective generalship at the operational level, in addition to his health and personality, negatively impacted on this and later battles. "The truth is that Bragg's tactical plan

lacked the subtlety and flexibility so necessary for success; it had within itself all the elements of failure."<sup>38</sup> His lack of ability to manage the stress of combat leadership at the operational level becomes evident at Perryville (a Confederate defeat on 8 October 1862) and Murfreesboro and will prove to be a major factor at Chickamauga-Chattanooga later that year. "Just as at Perryville, Bragg seemed to change under stress from a bold and aggressive attacker to a hesitant and cautious retreat." By the summer of 1863 Rosecrans' continued maneuvers and counter-maneuvers forced Bragg to withdraw across the Tennessee River into Chattanooga.

An examination of Bragg's career reveals one that begins routinely, soars at the tactical level during the Mexican War, then ends in defeat in the Civil War. Clearly, his generalship was shaped by his health and personality; however, it was his inability to lead at the operational level of war that would impact the outcome at Chickamauga and set the conditions for Confederate defeat at Chattanooga.

### **PRELIMINARY MANEUVER**

Rosecrans launched his campaign to take Chattanooga on 16 August 1863. Just as he had done during the Tullahoma Campaign, he displayed outstanding generalship executing operational level maneuver as his army approached the Tennessee River. He sent two corps commanded by Thomas and McCook south of the city and one corps commanded by Crittenden just west of the city. "With Crittenden's corps on the left, Thomas' in the center and McCook's on the right, 50,000 infantryman advanced on a 50 mile front, screened by 9,000 cavalrymen and supported by 200 guns-and Bragg was completely unaware of the approaching Federals."<sup>40</sup>

As a diversion Rosecrans had Crittenden send Wilder's brigade northeast of Chattanooga. On 21 August, Wilder ordered his artillery to shell the city. The shelling further demonstrated that the Union force was within striking distance and unopposed. "With the Confederate attention drawn in this direction, the main body of the Union army effected a crossing of the river at Bridgeport, 30 miles below Chattanooga, between August 29<sup>th</sup> and September 4<sup>th</sup> unmolested."<sup>41</sup>

Even when Bragg learned that the Union main body was to the south of the city he remained focused on Chattanooga, not recognizing the threat. He seemed to vacillate and was unable to make a timely decision. "Three times Bragg started to pull out of Chattanooga, and each time reversed himself."<sup>42</sup> Finally, on 7 September he pulled his units out of Chattanooga and moved to LaFayette, Georgia. Once again Rosecrans outmaneuvered Bragg and in the process took Chattanooga without firing a shot.

Although Bragg faltered, he had a plan to retake Chattanooga that would confuse Rosecrans and nearly trap his army. With a series of deceptive moves Bragg made Rosecrans believe he was in full retreat to protect his lines of communication to Rome Georgia and Atlanta. Rosecrans sent his entire army in an unorganized pursuit allowing it to become divided. He was falling into Bragg's trap.

They had no intentions of retreating. Rosecrans was not aware of the fact that Bragg was not in retreat until September 12. His army was divided into three sections. It was at least 60 miles from the left to right of his troops. Meanwhile Bragg, at La Fayette, was opposite

the Union center and in a position to attack and crush the Union army in detail as they emerged from the mountains.<sup>43</sup>

Upon realizing the threat, Rosecrans ordered his army to concentrate in the vicinity of Lee and Gordon's Mill on Chickamauga Creek. Crittenden's corps was already there, Thomas was about seven miles west at Steven's Gap, but McCook was about thirty miles south. Due to rough terrain it took until 17 September before Rosecrans regained control of his army. The immediate threat was over, but Bragg continued to prepare his offensive.

Since leaving Chattanooga, Bragg was also receiving reinforcements. "In addition to Buckner's men, troops from Johnson had arrived; and a corps under Lee's best commander, Lieutenant General James Longstreet, would be on the scene within a few days."<sup>44</sup> Longstreet's corps was enroute from Virginia by rail through Atlanta. While Rosecrans had out-maneuvered Bragg at Chattanooga, Bragg's strategy had set the conditions for what was to follow at Chickamauga.

## **CHICKAMAUGA**

For over four days Bragg did nothing as Rosecrans concentrated his army. Hoping to initiate an offensive, Rosecrans wisely waited until he gained control of his force. However, Longstreet's first two brigades under Hood began arriving on the 18 September and Bragg now had the strength to counteract Rosecrans' plan.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> Bragg issued the order to attack the next morning without a full understanding of where his opponent was located. He believed that Crittenden's corps was the left of the Union line. However, it was on the right at Lee and Gordon's Mill. His plan called for his units to move north, cross Chickamauga Creek and turn left to flank the Union force. Then, maneuver south along the Chickamauga toward Lee and Gordon's Mill forcing Rosecrans' army into poor terrain at McLemor's Cove. However, his force encountered union cavalry and did not meet their objective. The attack would have to wait.

Looking at the generalship of Rosecrans and Bragg on the eve of battle, we see that both lacked the ability to visualize the situation at hand. This resulted in faulty maneuver and lost opportunities. Moreover, it marked the point in their generalship where each had difficulty crossing from direct to indirect leadership. Both abilities are an absolute must at the operational level of command. "Lieutenant General D. H. Hill later criticized Bragg. Hill felt that there were two problems with Bragg's generalship: first, lack of knowledge of the situation; second, lack of personal supervision of the execution of orders."<sup>45</sup> This was evident by Bragg's lack of vision on the 17<sup>th</sup> and would become a significant factor later in the battle. Rosecrans, lost control of his force and barely achieved concentration in time to prevent Bragg's attempt at a flanking maneuver to cut his line of communication from Chattanooga. Now, he hastily ordered Thomas and McCook to reinforce Crittenden.

Crittenden, whose rear Thomas had crossed in a hurried night march, was in the center and McCook's corps, as it arrived by forced marches, took positions on the right. Because of the staggered arrival of the divisions marching from different positions to the concentration, the three Federal corps did not remain intact on the field. Reinforcements

of divisions and brigades were continually sent to Thomas, who had the initial point of danger on the left, the flank Bragg was trying to turn.<sup>46</sup>

This unorganized maneuver did not prevent Confederate forces from crossing the creek and positioning themselves for the fight. As the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> approached, both commanders were displaying difficulty coping at the operational level, yet they were poised to fight the defining battle of their military careers.

By dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup>, Rosecrans had completed the reinforcement of Crittenden with Thomas' corps now securing the far left of the Union line. Thomas placed his divisions just east of LaFayette Road. This was the main road to Chattanooga, which provided the only access to the Union base of operations. Its protection was critical.

Bragg's forces were west of Chickamauga Creek in thickly wooded terrain that made communication and maneuver difficult. His plan to envelop the Union left flank had not changed, therefore, the bulk of his army, mainly Walker's and Hood's corps, with Forest's cavalry concentrated directly east of Thomas' corps.

During the early morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> (figure 1) Thomas received incorrect intelligence that a Confederate brigade was alone to his front at Reed's Bridge. He could not resist the temptation. "Thomas, at 7:30 A.M. on the 19<sup>th</sup> sent his left division, Brannan's, to pick up this stray brigade and thereby opened the Battle of Chickamauga."<sup>47</sup> By 10:00 A.M. Brannan found the lone brigade, however, it turned out to be Forest's cavalry and a division from Walker's corps. So, while Bragg had the initiative, it was Rosecrans who opened the battle. The strength of Rosecrans' army was approximately 53,900 while Bragg's was about 66,300, mostly concentrated on the right of his line. With Thomas engaged in the north by a far superior force, Rosecrans began sending divisions to reinforce his left flank. "For Thomas, the battle that had begun with his aggressive action turned into one demanding all the defensive action that he and Rosecrans could muster since he had to take the preponderance of the Confederate attacks."<sup>48</sup>

Most of the day consisted of attacks and counterattacks by each side. As Rosecrans sent divisions north to reinforce Thomas, they were making contact on the left of the Confederate units they encountered. "The armies were moving north but the battle was rolling south."<sup>49</sup>

Bragg still believed that the left of the Union line was Crittenden's corps, so he continued to focus on the center unaware of the fierceness of fighting on his right. From the distance of his headquarters and because of the rough terrain, he could not effectively follow the situation. Therefore, he began committing units piecemeal in the center. Yet, it was the battle on his right that demanded his attention. "This was the real opening of the battle of the 19<sup>th</sup>, and it found Bragg unprepared to take

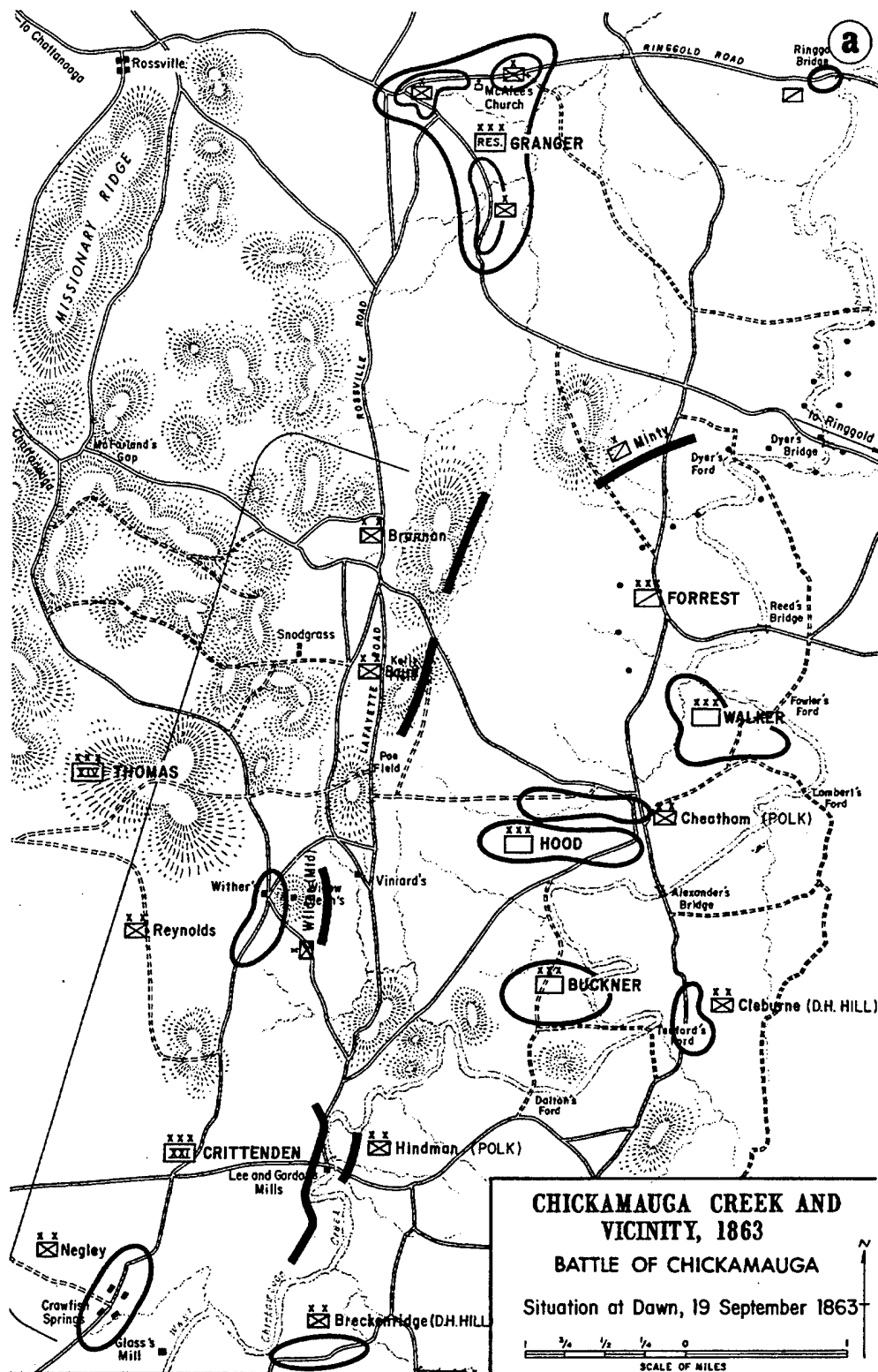


FIGURE 1 - 19 SEPTEMBER, CHICKAMAUGA

decisive action to carry out the basic thrust of his original plan: to get around Rosecrans' left, cut him off from Chattanooga, and finish him off by attacking him simultaneously from flank and front."<sup>50</sup> Perhaps this was because the battle seemed to be "rolling south" toward the center. However, the most likely explanation is again, Bragg's inability to visualize the situation and his difficulty exercising indirect leadership.

Interestingly, it was in the center that Bragg's army had its best success of the 19<sup>th</sup>. At approximately 3:00 P.M. Stewart's division attacked and clashed with Van Cleve's Union division. This turned out to be some of the hardest fighting of the day. Stewart advanced across LaFayette Road penetrating the Union line about half a mile and seized the only road Rosecrans had to reinforce Thomas. In response, Reynolds' division of The Army of the Cumberland employed artillery and counterattacked with Wilder's brigade. "Thomas also played a decisive part by converging Brannan's and Negley's divisions on the critical area; their appearance caused the Confederates to retire east of the road."<sup>51</sup>

During the late afternoon Bragg continued to pressure Thomas with Cleburne's division, but Thomas had wisely been building defensive positions throughout the day and was able to hold off all attacks. As the fighting subsided at dusk,

neither side had gained any worthwhile advantage during this first day of battle, although the Union forces had been driven closer to the main road. The left of the Union line under Thomas was well anchored across the main highway; the center under McCook was just west of the highway, and the right end of the line under Crittenden was still east of the Highway. The Confederate line was very close to the Union line at all points.<sup>52</sup>

During the night both armies prepared for the continuation of battle the next morning.

In preparation for this, both commanders held strategy sessions with their commanders and staff. Rosecrans knew he must continue his defensive strategy and ordered divisions from McCook's corps to support Thomas who would continue to strengthen his defensive positions. Crittenden's corps was moved north and positioned to the rear and center as the army's reserve. Bragg's strategy to envelop the Union left remained the same. However, he ordered a reorganization of the army into two wings. "The right wing consisting of Polk's, Hill's and Walker's corps was to be commanded by Polk; the left, including Hood, Buckner, and Longstreet's arriving forces would be led by General Longstreet-who was rumored to be in the area but had not yet made it to the headquarters."<sup>53</sup> Around 11:00 P.M. on 19 September Longstreet found Bragg's headquarters and was briefed on plans for the next day's battle.

Bragg intended for the battle to begin at dawn. He instructed his commanders to attack in echelon from north to south. When dawn arrived and Bragg heard no sounds of battle he became enraged. After waiting for over an hour he ordered a staff officer to find Polk and determine the problem. "The officer returned to report that he found Polk reading a newspaper and waiting for his breakfast. Bragg, according to one account thereupon, uttered a terrible exclamation, in which Polk, Hill and all his generals were included. Then he personally ordered the battle to begin."<sup>54</sup> Finally, at about 9:30 A.M. Polk ordered his divisions to attack.

As the battle moved from north to south trouble began at 10:00 A.M. when Cleburne's division encountered heavy fires and strong Union defenses at Kelly Field and was driven back. This confused Bragg and he began to alter his plan. "When, after Cleburne's failure, Bragg ordered the rest of his line to attack, he obviously had given up his original plan for envelopment of the Union north flank and, in desperation was resorting to frontal attacks."<sup>55</sup> Longstreet's corps began its attack at 11:00 A.M. (figure 2) just as Rosecrans was about to issue an order that would determine the battle's outcome.

A courier sent to Rosecrans' headquarters by Thomas saw what he believed to be a gap in the Union line on the right of Reynold's division. Actually, Brannan's division, sent the previous day to reinforce Reynolds, was in line but hidden by the heavily wooded terrain. The atmosphere in Rosecrans' headquarters was very busy and confused as would be expected during heavy fighting. When the courier reported the gap, Rosecrans personally dictated an order to his Aide-de-Camp. This was highly unusual because John A. Garfield (a future President of the United States), the Chief of Staff, normally wrote all orders for Rosecrans' approval. The fateful order read: "Headquarters Department of the Cumberland. September 20 10:45 a.m. Brigadier General Wood, Commanding Division: The general commanding directs you to close on Reynolds' as fast as possible, and support him. Respectfully, etc. Frank S. Bond, Major and Aide-de-Camp."<sup>56</sup>

Upon receiving the order, Wood, who had just been reprimanded by Rosecrans for not obeying orders promptly, reacted immediately by ordering his division to the rear and around Brannan's division. This created an actual gap just as Longstreet's corps attacked. As the corps pushed through the gap, Johnson's division turned the flanks of Brannan's and Wood's divisions while Hindman's division caught Davis' and Sheridan's divisions in column marching north to support Thomas. The result was the complete collapse of the right side of the Union line. As Crittenden's and McCook's corps fell back, Thomas corps held its ground. Much of the Union army retreated to Rossville, including Rosecrans, Crittenden and McCook. What remained wheeled to the rear and north to Snodgrass Hill in an attempt to reorganize. "Thus, by 1:00 P.M., Thomas, by default was left in sole command on the battlefield. Soon he received word from Rosecrans to withdraw the troops to Rossville. That day Rosecrans displayed none of the determination and fortitude he had shown at Stone River."<sup>57</sup>

For a time, there was fierce fighting on Snodgrass Hill with primarily what was left of Brannan's and Reynold's divisions. On his own initiative, Gordon Granger, whose corps was in reserve at McAfee's Church, to the north of Thomas, sent Steedman's division to reinforce Thomas. Close fighting continued throughout the afternoon with Longstreet's corps trying several times to collapse the Union right while Polk continued his attacks on the Union left. Each attempt was turned back by Thomas. "Thomas' sterling leadership was a decisive factor in preventing a disastrous Union defeat. Here he earned the title of The Rock of Chichamauga, for, though all troops had fought valiantly, it was Thomas who provided the necessary determination and inspired leadership."<sup>58</sup> Finally, at 4:45 P.M. Rosecrans ordered Thomas to

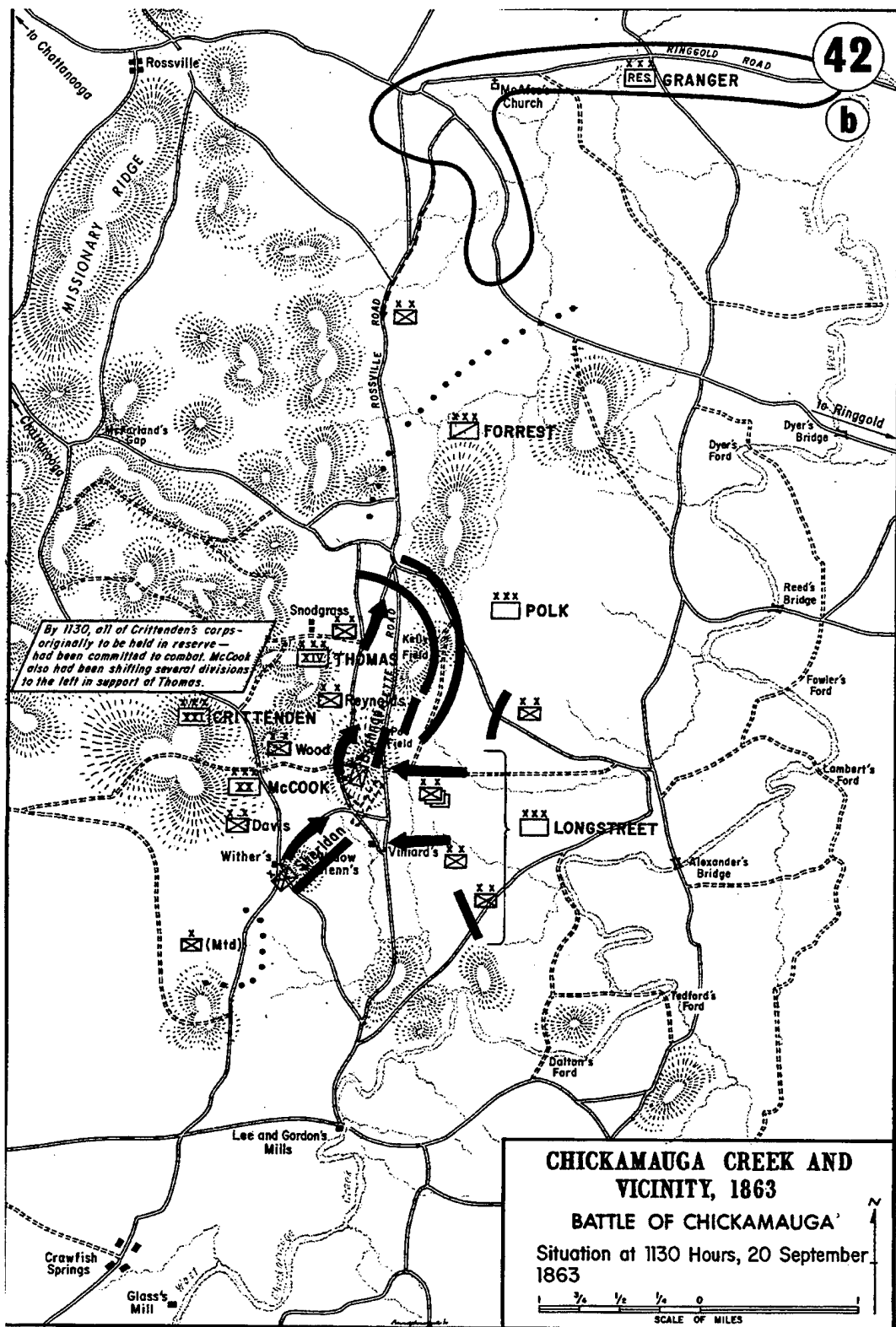


FIGURE 2 – 20 SEPTEMBER, CHICKAMAUGA

withdrawal to Rossville. The battle of Chickamauga was over. Each side had sustained a loss rate of approximately 28%.

As Thomas made his way through Rossville on his way to Chattanooga, Forest, and his cavalry were in pursuit. On the 21<sup>st</sup> Forest sent a message through Polk to Bragg requesting that the army exploit its success and launch a pursuit to drive Rosecrans out of Chattanooga.

We are in a mile of Rossville. Have been on the point of missionary Ridge. Can see Chattanooga and everything around. The enemy's trains are leaving, going around the point of Lookout Mountain. The prisoners captured report two pontoons thrown across the Tennessee River for the purpose of retreating. I think they are evacuating as hard as they can go. They are cutting timber down to obstruct our passage. I think we ought to press forward as rapidly as possible.<sup>59</sup>

Bragg would not continue the fight and all attempts to change his mind failed. Rosecrans did not retreat and dug in at Chattanooga.

Overall, the Confederate army fought well at Chickamauga and won a significant tactical victory that created an opportunity to drive the Union army from Chattanooga and, at least for a while, protect that decisive point that was the "Gateway to the South." With this opportunity the South could have prolonged the war and significantly affected the north's political will to continue. However, due to Bragg's poor generalship, he missed the opportunity to bring the campaign to a successful conclusion and therefore suffered an operational failure that would soon have strategic implications. The siege of Chattanooga had begun.

## **THE SIEGE**

While the Union army was becoming entrenched in Chattanooga, Bragg was concerned that he did not have the strength or logistics required maintain the offensive. Accordingly, he planned to lay siege to the city by controlling key terrain to the south and west of the city. "Disregarding pleas from his subordinates to renew the offensive and attack Chattanooga immediately, Bragg decided instead to starve the Federals out."<sup>60</sup>

He occupied Missionary Ridge and Lookout Mountain and placed outposts along the Tennessee River west to Brown's Ferry. Therefore, he was able to dominate all Union lines of communication into and from the city except the one to Bridgeport, Alabama, a railhead some 60 miles away. This route was over very rough mountainous terrain that was nearly impassable during the autumn rains. While the operational concept would be sound if used only to reorganize in order to resume the offensive at a later date, Bragg had no offensive plan and had lost the confidence of his generals.

Bragg's staunchest opposition did not come from Union army, but from several of his key commanders, including Longstreet. The outcry for Bragg's removal was such that Jefferson Davis visited Bragg's headquarters in October to assess the situation. However, Davis stood by his old friend and Bragg remained in command.

Rosecrans was also having problems in the aftermath of Chickamauga. Understanding the strategic significance of Chattanooga, President Lincoln was becoming increasingly concerned that the

Union commander would lose the city. On 4 October, he telegraphed Rosecrans: "If you can hold Chattanooga and east Tennessee I think the rebellion must dwindle and die. Please relieve my anxiety as to the position and condition of your army up to the latest moment."<sup>61</sup> Rosecrans' response did nothing to encourage Lincoln. "We are about 30,000 brave and determined men; but or fate is in the hands of God, in whom I hope."<sup>62</sup> By mid-October, Lincoln still had not been apprised of Rosecrans' strategy to break the siege and hold Chattanooga. After several attempts to encourage Rosecrans, the responses received by Lincoln showed a commander who had lost his self-confidence and determination to win. "While Rosecrans pondered his next move-a distraught Abraham Lincoln complained that his defeated general was acting confused and stunned, like a duck hit on the head. Union soldiers began turning the sylvan river town into a stark military camp."<sup>63</sup>

Rosecrans' poor leadership was a problem but the siege was becoming a crisis. With the supply lines cut, supplying the army was becoming increasingly difficult. The theater base of operations was at Nashville, some 165 miles away. The route from Chattanooga to Bridgeport was over rugged mountain roads across Walden's Ridge and down the Sequatchie Valley and was so difficult that the packhorses and mules could carry only about what they required to eat. The result was that hundreds of soldiers died and very little supply was getting through. Three weeks into the siege soldiers were on quarter rations and disease was taking its toll. A war correspondent wrote: "I have often seen hundreds of soldiers following behind the wagon trains which had just arrived, picking out of the mud the crumbs of bread, coffee, rice, which were wasted from the boxes and sacks by the rattling of the wagons over the stones."<sup>64</sup> Conditions in Chattanooga were getting worse and Lincoln's concern mounted.

To help alleviate the President's concern and to set the conditions for success, the Secretary of War, Edmund M. Stanton, directed that reinforcements be sent to Rosecrans. Hooker and two corps were detached from the Army of the Potomac and Sherman's corps was detached from the Army of the Tennessee. Both were directed to arrive at Chattanooga as soon as possible. Meanwhile, on 18 October Grant met with Stanton in Louisville where they discussed the need to synchronize the western armies. This marked a transition in warfighting doctrine as the operational level of war began its development. The principle of unity of command was becoming understood. Grant, as the commander of the newly organized Military Division of the Mississippi would exercise this principle.

Grant's Army of the Tennessee, Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland, and Burnside's Army of the Ohio were now to compose a unified western command, with Grant authorized either to retain Rosecrans or place George H. Thomas in command of the Army of the Cumberland. Because Grant and Rosecrans disliked each other, and considering the shadow of defeat under which Rosecrans now labored, in contrast to the heroic stature of "the Rock of Chickamauga," it is difficult to conceive of Grant's retaining Rosecrans for very long under any circumstances-other than a swift and near miraculous triumph.<sup>65</sup>

Even though Rosecrans was having problems, he was busy working to open the supply lines. He directed his chief engineer, Brigadier General William F. Smith, to develop a plan. Knowing that surprise was the key to success due to the commanding positions the Confederates held on Lookout Mountain and

Missionary Ridge, Smith developed a plan calling for a simultaneous river and overland advance. The plan called for pontoon boats to ferry a brigade down the river to Brown's Ferry under the cover of darkness and then use the pontoons as a bridge to connect to Moccasin Point. (figure 3) Meanwhile, Hooker's two corps were to advance from Bridgeport to link up at Brown's Ferry. Rosecrans did not have time to execute the plan. He received word on 19 October that he had been relieved and Thomas was in command. Other command changes were also made. Both McCook and Crittenden were relieved with their two corps consolidated into one under Granger. Grant left Louisville by train for Chattanooga the same day and arrived on 23 October.

With Grant's arrival the momentum to break the siege immediately increased. He knew that his first priority was to open the "cracker line", the Union line of communication required to relieve the siege. He approved Smith's plan and ordered its immediate execution. One brigade departed Chattanooga on foot in the early morning hours, crossed the Tennessee River and made its way across Moccasin Point to the east side of Brown's Ferry and waited. A second brigade moved to Brown's Ferry by boat. "At 3:00 A.M., the improvised flotilla of more than fifty pontoon-transports cast off silently drifting downstream from the Chattanooga wharves. Screened from the light of the moon by a fortunate mist, they depended on the strong current for power; there was no need for oars, except for steering."<sup>66</sup>

By 5:00 A.M. the flotilla began arriving at Brown's Ferry where surprise was achieved and resistance light. Once ashore, they used the pontoons to build a bridge to the east side of the river for the other brigade to cross. The Union now had Brown's Ferry. Meanwhile Hooker's corps was moving east from Bridgeport.

As Hooker moved northeast across Lookout Valley toward a link up at Brown's Ferry, the Confederate leadership fought over what action to take. Longstreet, from his position on Lookout Mountain, believed Hooker's movement was a diversion and "curiously continued to look elsewhere than Brown's Ferry, convinced that the real enemy threat was in another sector."<sup>67</sup> However, Bragg understood that Brown's Ferry was of strategic importance since its loss would open the Union supply line. Bragg was outraged at Longstreet's inaction. "The Confederate commanding general, on October 27, had ordered Longstreet to dislodge the Federals from their bridgehead at Brown's Ferry. Yet the general from Virginia remained inactive all that day and the next."<sup>68</sup> Finally, Longstreet did attempt a counterattack at Wauhatchie but still misunderstood Bragg's intent. It was Brown's Ferry that mattered. Regardless, the counterattack failed and no further attempt was made. On 4 November, thinking his situation was secure, Bragg sent Longstreet with about twenty-five percent of his total force to Knoxville to confront Burnside. Longstreet protested the split of forces at first but was happy to leave Bragg. Once again, it was leadership and not tactical, terrain or strength advantages that mattered most.

Grant now possessed secure lines of communication from Bridgeport by rail and overland between Kelly's Ferry and Brown's Ferry. The siege was over and the "cracker line" open. With supplies coming in and Sherman's corps moving towards Chattanooga, Grant turned his attention to his plan for an attack against the Confederate army on the heights overlooking Chattanooga.

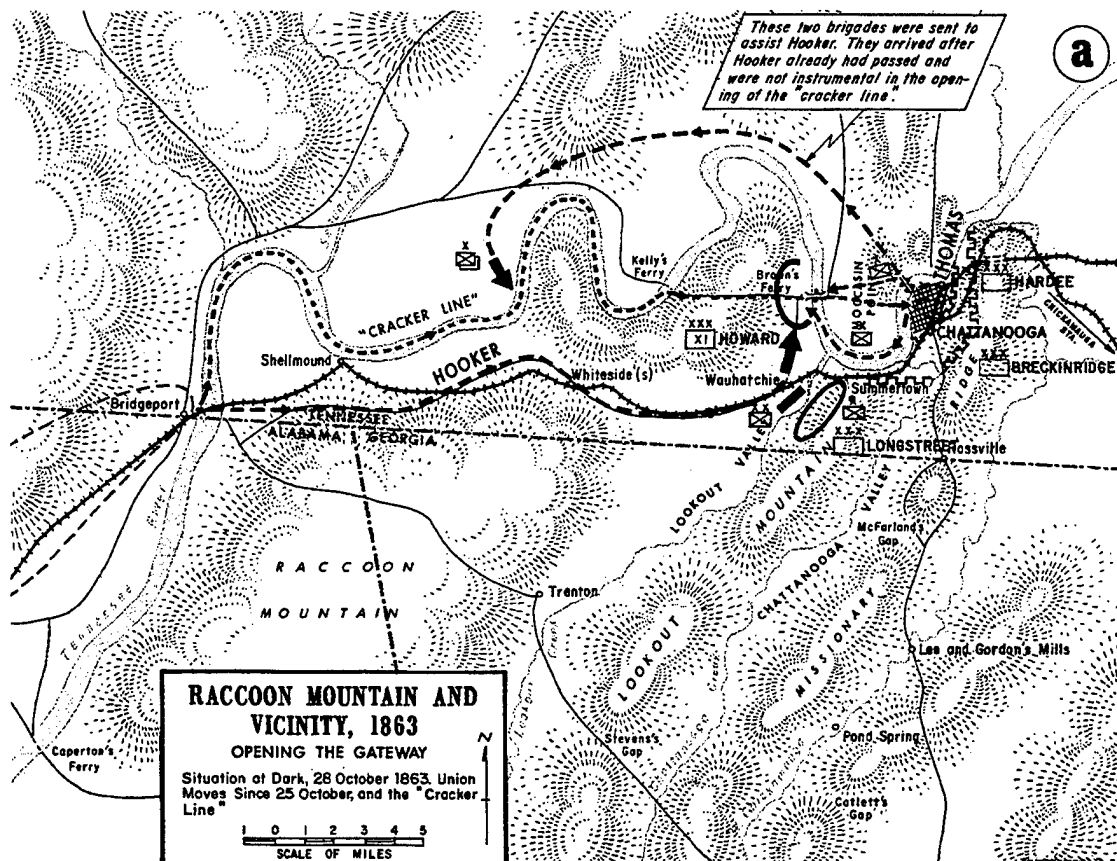


FIGURE 3 - 28 OCTOBER, OPENING THE GATEWAY

### CHATTANOOGA

As Sherman approached, Grant ordered him to move as quickly as possible to Bridgeport to protect the right flank. With Sherman's arrival on 15 November Grant now had the force required to execute his plan. In the preceding weeks he had also built the needed supplies to support the operation. Once at Bridgeport, Grant ordered Sherman to cross the river at Brown's Ferry and move into an attack position north of Chattanooga. "Early on the 21<sup>st</sup>, he was to cross the river and seize Tunnel Hill. Meanwhile, Thomas would advance, initially bearing left, and together they would drive south along Missionary Ridge. Hooker would guard Lookout Valley, and Howard would act as reserve."<sup>69</sup> Heavy rain, problems with the pontoon bridge at Brown's Ferry, and poor roads delayed Sherman and he did not arrive at his designated position until the 23d.

On the 22d Grant received word that Confederate positions on Missionary Ridge were being abandoned. Actually, these were units Bragg ordered to reinforce Longstreet at Knoxville, although Lookout Mountain was still held by Major General Carter L. Stevenson's division. With Grant openly preparing for battle, to move units from Missionary Ridge is yet more evidence of Bragg's inability to command at the operational level. Grant had his opportunity and on the 23d he ordered Thomas to attack

Orchard Knob and Indian Hill. When attacked, the Confederate pickets moved back to the base of Missionary Ridge. Thomas took his objective and Grant moved his headquarters to Orchard Knob.

Late in the evening of the 23d Sherman began crossing the Tennessee River north of the city. When scouts discovered that the only opposition was a thin picket line, a heavy flow of units was initiated. With three divisions across the river by noon on the 24<sup>th</sup>, Sherman pressed the attack toward Tunnel Hill. Again the resistance was light. "According to a Yankee soldier, the Confederates were only 200 or 300 strong and retired hastily and in some disorder."<sup>70</sup> By 3:00 P.M. the corps had seized the high ground and Sherman thought he was on his objective. Actually, he was to the north of it and a valley remained between him and Tunnel Hill.

Bragg was alarmed to learn the Union had taken Orchard Knob and Indian Hill and that his right flank was being threatened. He now believed the Union was preparing to break out of Chattanooga and attack. In response, he halted reinforcements to Longstreet and ordered Cleburne to hold the right "at all hazards". Late on the 23d Cleburne began organizing his units for what Bragg thought would be the Union main effort. Meanwhile, Grant was changing his plan.

Conditions for success seemed to be falling in place, so late on the 23d Grant altered his plan allowing Hooker to attack Lookout Mountain. This was the dominant terrain feature in the area with steep rocky slopes and almost vertical cliffs on the north end. Fighting on this terrain would be extremely difficult. At 8:00 A.M. on the 24<sup>th</sup> (figure 4) Hooker sent his three divisions across Lookout Creek with every available Union battery supporting the advance. The Confederates, ill prepared to defend what they thought was an impregnable position, were clearly taken by surprise. "The battle was underway for a long time before anything resembling a coordinated effort on the part of the Rebel brigades could be achieved. Efficient command control under an energetic division leader was simply nonexistent."<sup>71</sup> Again, Confederate senior leadership failed. Obviously, this hindered the defense, but being outnumbered as much as five to one was the deciding factor in the Union success. The fighting was tough and lasted the entire day and into the night. As the Union soldiers advanced up the slope the Confederate guns could not lower their elevation enough to be effective and rounds were being fired over the heads of the attackers. By noon intense fog was limiting visibility, positions began to weaken, and the defenders were leaving the mountain. Observers call this "the battle above the clouds" due to the fog's impact. After over eighteen hours of intense and often close battle the Confederates left the mountain. "About two o'clock in the morning of November 25, while the brigadiers brooded, all the Confederate forces on Lookout Mountain, as well as those in Chattanooga Valley were withdrawn to defend Missionary Ridge."<sup>72</sup> As Bragg withdrew his forces they burned the bridges across Chickamauga Creek. With Lookout Mountain in his possession, Grant now had freedom of navigation on the Tennessee River as well as open rail lines of communication to and from Chattanooga. Clearly, the Union effort was gaining momentum and Grant's attention turned to Missionary Ridge.

His plan was for Sherman and two corps to be the main effort on the left. Thomas, with two corps in the center and Hooker with three divisions on the right would conduct secondary attacks.

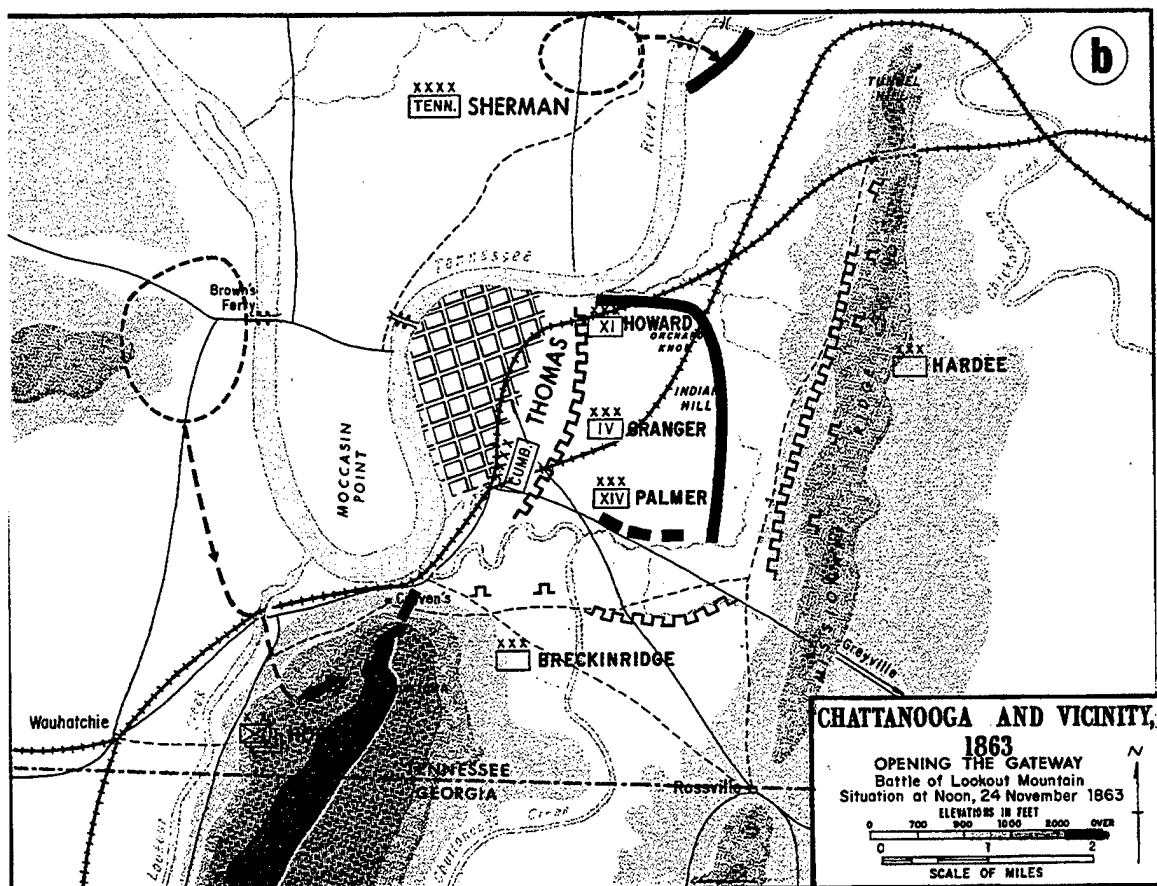


FIGURE 4 - 24 NOVEMBER, LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN

Sherman was to attack Tunnel Hill, then maneuver south along Missionary Ridge while Hooker would move north along the west slope and the top of the ridge into the Confederate left. Thomas was to attack the center as Bragg began to feel threatened on his flanks.

Meanwhile, Bragg arrayed his army with Hardee's corps on the right with Cleburne's division being the main line of defense to hold Tunnel Hill. Breckinridge's three divisions were positioned in the center and left. On center of Missionary Ridge Bragg organized three defensive positions.

First was at the base, consisting of a strong line of rifle pits; another halfway up, much weaker than the first and intended to give security to those who might be forced from the base. The third was at the physical summit, where in most places the ridge is razorback thin, which meant the Confederate army had to hold steady or run down the reverse slope, there being no other place to go, no plateau on which to form again and hold.<sup>73</sup>

Grant's plan for the left did not go as well as he had hoped. At about 7:00 A.M. (figure 5) Sherman began to move his skirmishers forward to draw fire and expose Confederate positions. His main attack began at 10:30 with three brigades. Initially, Cleburne's division wisely held its fire as the Union units crossed an open field at the base of the hill. When they reached the base Cleburne opened devastating fires from both musket and cannon; the Union forces continued to advance. Three times in the course of four hours Sherman attacked, retreated, and counterattacked with far superior numbers but was unable to

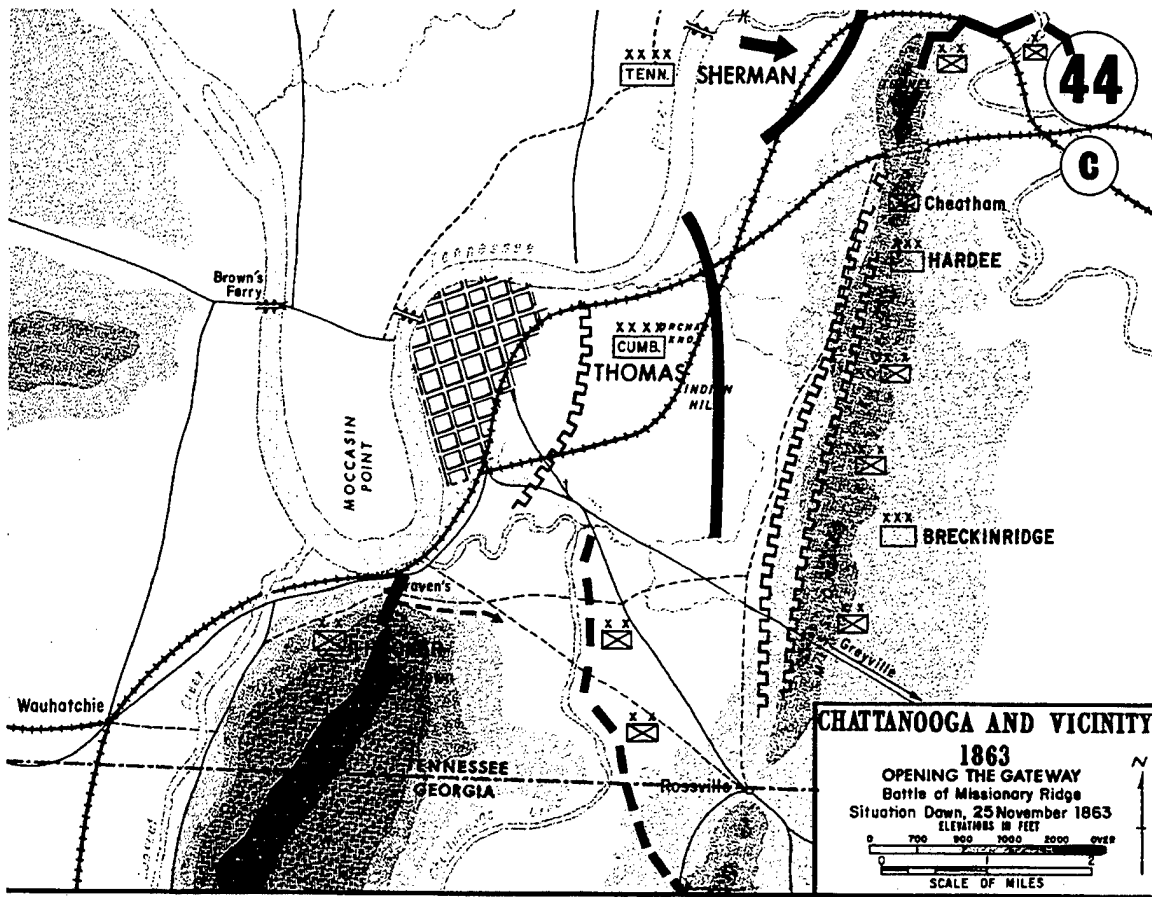


FIGURE 5 -25 NOVEMBER, A.M.

break the Confederate defenses. In each case the fighting was close and often hand to hand.

"Confederates, if not astonished, were surely impressed by the Federals tenacious onslaught."<sup>74</sup> Twice, determined to halt the Union attacks, the Confederates conducted daring bayonet charges chasing Union units off the hill. The fighting for Tunnel Hill continued throughout the day. Sherman continuously probed for the weakest point but Cleburne expertly used his interior lines to reposition forces and could not be moved.

While the Federals had many more troops in the general area of Tunnel Hill than the Confederates, they were never able, at the actual points of fighting, to take advantage of these potentially overpowering numbers. Succinctly put, the ground on the northern end of Missionary Ridge favored the defense if the line was properly positioned. Cleburne had deployed his troops well.<sup>75</sup>

Grant's faith in Sherman's effort was beginning to weaken as his concern that Bragg might counterattack mounted. Something had to be done to gain momentum.

With Sherman being held on the left, and Hooker now applying pressure on the right, Grant's attention turned to the center. His intent now was to assist Sherman by advancing and taking the Confederate rifle pits at the base of the ridge. He never intended for this to be the main effort, only an action to support Sherman's effort. However, it was in the center that the battle for Missionary Ridge would climax and the campaign for Chattanooga would end.

General Grant did not order an assault on the center of Missionary Ridge, and it is to his credit that he did not do so. Grant had no reason to expect the mismanagement of which the Confederate high command had been guilty. Rather, the Union commander's instructions on the afternoon of November 25 were for General Thomas' troops to charge and carry the rifle-pits at the foot of Missionary Ridge. Nothing more was intended.<sup>76</sup>

Grant had no way of knowing that the Confederate center was not as formidable as his intelligence had indicated. Bragg had weakened Breckinridge in the center and placed his defenses in jeopardy by moving forces to Knoxville to reinforce Longstreet. As previously stated, Bragg had ordered a three line of defense strategy in the center with the first line being rifle pits at the base of the ridge. "Then Bragg had issued instructions for the men in the rifle pits, if attacked, to fire one volley and withdraw up the hill—an order that was to have disastrous consequences."<sup>77</sup> At 4:00 P.M. (figure 6) Grant ordered Thomas to assault the rifle pits and hold there. Granger's corps would execute the order.

The Union forces formed with skirmishers in front followed by the main body. As they moved across the field approaching the base of the ridge they held their fire as supporting artillery provided cover. When they were within 200 yards the skirmishers opened fire and began to run for the pits. The Confederates returned accurate and deadly fire but the onslaught continued. As they approached the pits the Confederates began moving up the ridge as instructed.

Granger's corps, led by Wood's and Sheridan's divisions took the rifle pits only to find an untenable and deadly situation. The pits were a death trap. With clear fields for rifle and cannon from the summit the infantryman were being slaughtered outright. Something had to be done quickly. They could stay in the pits and die, retreat exposing their backs as they departed, or assault the ridge. The soldiers made the decision at once; no order was given by any commander.

The common soldier did what Bragg after Chickamauga failed to do. He followed the retreating enemy. Sheridan pulled out his silver whisky flask, waved it at the Confederate gunners and shouted pleasantly, here's to you, and took a swig, only to be acknowledged by a close shell that scattered dirt over his uniform. That's damned ungenerous he again shouted and added that he would retaliate by capturing those guns.<sup>78</sup>

From Orchard Knob Grant was watching as his men began moving out of the pits and up the ridge. He was stunned at first then became angry. "Turning to Thomas, Grant inquired sharply, menacingly: Thomas, who ordered those men up that ridge? Thomas responded: I don't know, I did not. As Grant turned from Thomas, he muttered as several heard him that if the assault failed someone would pay dearly for it."<sup>79</sup> They continued their long and difficult push up the ridge as Sheridan urged the tired soldiers on.

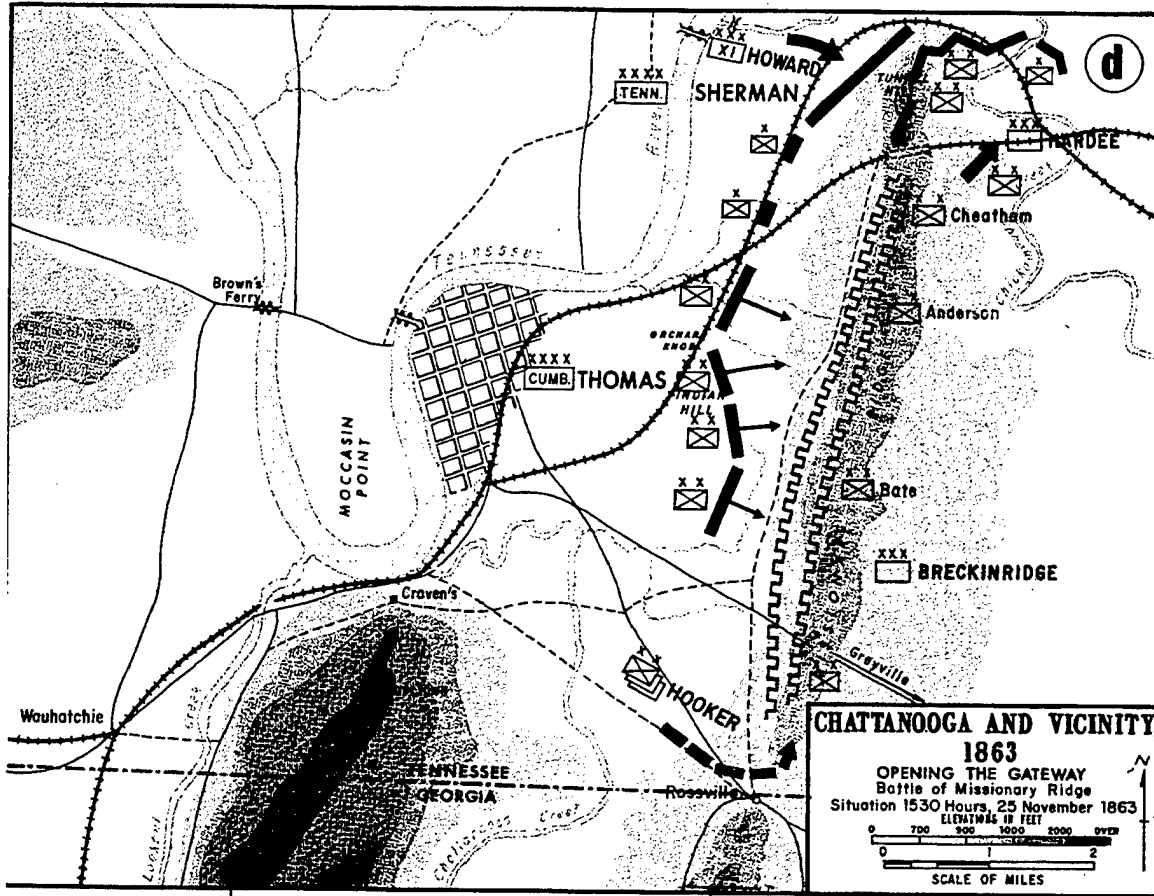


FIGURE 6 - 25 NOVEMBER, P.M.

As the Confederates moved toward the second position the magnitude of Bragg's uncoordinated order and poor planning became evident. The uninformed men in the second position and on the summit thought the first line of defense was in retreat and began leaving their positions causing a disastrous chain reaction. Another factor causing panic and confusion was that Bragg's plan never considered a reserve. "In the event of a Yankee assault, the nature of the terrain dictated several clusters of reserve troop at strategic places. There is no evidence that this problem was considered."<sup>80</sup> All that was left was a thin defensive line on the summit that was so narrow it could not accommodate the retreating units. Consequently, they passed through and ran down the reverse slope causing panic and ultimately a complete abandonment of Missionary Ridge.

Meanwhile, Cleburne was still holding Tunnel Hill. He was not aware of the disaster on Missionary Ridge and thought the battle was going well. Hardee arrived at about 6:00 P.M. with the news that the center had collapsed and directed him to withdraw and deploy a rear guard for the retreating army. "Cleburne's division, the last to retire, sadly withdrew from the ground it had held so gallantly, and brought up the rear of the retiring army."<sup>81</sup> Grant was now in complete control of Chattanooga and the strategic terrain that surrounded the city.

As the southern army retreated through Chickamauga Station Grant ordered Hooker to pursue. Hooker followed the army until 27 November when he encountered the rear guard at Ringgold where Cleburne fought and stopped Hooker's corps allowing Bragg to escape into Georgia. Because he was low on rations and fearing he would overextend his lines of communication Grant broke off the pursuit and ordered his army to consolidate at Chattanooga. The battle for Missionary Ridge was over and the Chattanooga Campaign was won.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The Chattanooga Campaign was the centerpiece of both the Union and Confederate national strategies. The leadership capabilities of Rosecrans, Grant, and Bragg if not a center of gravity surly were decisive factors in the outcome of this crucial campaign. After repeated failures by the Union army in the east, a more aggressive Western Theater strategy aimed directly at destroying the Confederacy's armed forces and its people's will to fight was proven correct at Chattanooga. Union land offensives against strategic logistical centers of the South became a reality after Chattanooga. Southern territorial integrity was lost and the North controlled a base of operations from which would emanate the lines of operation that would be key to the 1864 offensive known as Sherman's "march to the sea."

While it was the national strategies that brought these two great armies together at this decisive location, it was leadership that determined the campaign outcome. Clearly, Rosecrans' ill-fated decision making without an understanding of the situation lost Chickamauga for the Union, and Bragg's inability to lead indirectly and visualize the battlefield lost Chattanooga for the Confederacy. However, it was Grant's grasp of the operational art and his leadership that won the campaign. His ability to develop and communicate a compelling vision for the Military Division of the Mississippi focused the Army's effort and progress toward victory at Chattanooga and set the conditions for future Union successes. On 12 March 1864 he became General-in-Chief of the Armies of the United States. The strategic direction of the war was now in the hands of the man who would lead those Armies to victory.

Word count: 11,671



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Russell F. Weigley, The American Way of War (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1977), 93.

<sup>2</sup> Archer Jones, Civil War Command and Strategy, The Process of Victory and Defeat (New York: New York Free Press, 1992), 136.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 136-137.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>8</sup> W.J. Wood, Civil War Generalship, The Art of Command (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 98.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> John Y. Simon, The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant (London and Amsterdam: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), Vol 1, 129.

<sup>14</sup> The World Book Encyclopedia, 2000 ed., s.v. "Chattanooga, Battle of."

<sup>15</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant, Selected Letters 1839-1865 (New York: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 139.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>17</sup> World Book Millennium 2000, 314.

<sup>18</sup> J.F.C. Fuller, The Generalship of U.S. Grant (New York: Da Capo Press, New York, New York, 1958), 74.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>21</sup> R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor Dupuy, The Encyclopedia of Military History From 3500 B.C. to the Present (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Cambridge, Philadelphia, San Francisco, London, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Singapore, Sidney, 1986), 880.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 881.

<sup>23</sup> Fuller, 115.

<sup>24</sup> David Chandler, The Dictionary of Battles, The Worlds Battles From 405 B.C. to Today (New York: Henry Holt and Company, New York, New York, 1988), 157.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Dupuy and Dupuy, The Harpers Encyclopedia of Military History, 973.

<sup>29</sup> Wood, Civil War Generalship, The Art Of Command, 120.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>38</sup> Grady McWhiney, Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat, Volume 1, Field Command (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969), 363.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 372.

<sup>40</sup> Jerry Korn and the Editors of Time-Life Books, The Fight for Chattanooga, Chickamauga to Missionary Ridge (Alexandria, Virginia: Time-life Books, 1985), 33.

<sup>41</sup> J.L Rogers, The Civil War Battles of Chickamauga and Chattanooga (Chattanooga, Tennessee: Andrews Printing Company, 1942), 7.

<sup>42</sup> Korn, 34.

<sup>43</sup> Rogers, 8.

<sup>44</sup> Korn, 42.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas E. Griess, The West Point Military History Series, The American Civil War (Wayne, New Jersey: Avery Publishing Group, 1987), 177.

<sup>46</sup> Glen Tucker, The Battle of Chickamauga, (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Historical Times, 1991), 20.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Wood, 150.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>51</sup> Tucker, 24.

<sup>52</sup> Wood, 148.

<sup>53</sup> Korn, 53.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>55</sup> Vincent J. Esposito, The West Point Atlas of American Wars, Volume 1, 1689-1900 (New York, Washington, D.C., London: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 114.

<sup>56</sup> Tucker, 31.

<sup>57</sup> Esposito, 114.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> John Bowers, Chickamauga and Chattanooga The Battles That Doomed the Confederacy (New York: Harper-Collins, 1994), 159.

<sup>60</sup> John Wilson, "Valiant Charge Up Missionary Ridge," America's Civil War (March, 2000): 44.

<sup>61</sup> McDonough, 44.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Wilson, 44.

<sup>64</sup> Glen Tucker, The Battles for Chattanooga (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Historical Times, 1991), 8.

<sup>65</sup> McDonough, 49.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>69</sup> Esposito, 116.

<sup>70</sup> McDonough, 120.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>73</sup> Tucker, Chattanooga, 38.

<sup>74</sup> McDonough, 146.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>77</sup> Korn, 143.

<sup>78</sup> Tucker, Chattanooga, 40.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>80</sup> McDonough, 182.

<sup>81</sup> McDonough, 209.

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