

# **Transforming Under Fire: The Atlanta Campaign of 1864**

**A Monograph  
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AY 03-04**

**SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES  
MONOGRAPH APPROVAL  
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Title of Monograph: Transforming Under Fire: The Atlanta Campaign of 1864

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| Report Documentation Page                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                | Form Approved<br>OMB No. 0704-0188                          |
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| Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                |                                                             |
| 1. REPORT DATE<br><b>26 MAY 2004</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 2. REPORT TYPE | 3. DATES COVERED<br>-                                       |
| 4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE<br><b>Transforming under fire: the Atlanta Campaign of 1864</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                | 5a. CONTRACT NUMBER                                         |
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| 6. AUTHOR(S)<br><b>Mark Elam</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                | 5d. PROJECT NUMBER                                          |
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| 7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)<br><b>US Army School for Advanced Military Studies, 250 Gibbon Ave, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 66027</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                | 8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER<br><b>ATZL-SWV</b> |
| 9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                | 10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)                            |
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| 12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT<br><b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                |                                                             |
| 13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES<br><b>The original document contains color images.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                |                                                             |
| 14. ABSTRACT<br><b>Many historians give William T. Sherman total credit for the success of the Atlanta Campaign, when in fact it was the success of the Federal team as an institution. Conversely, many blame Joseph Johnston for the Confederate loss in that campaign, when in fact he was only one cog in the Confederate war machine. It was beyond Johnston's ability to adapt if President Jefferson Davis and the rest of the Confederate team failed in fulfilling their duties. More importantly, the Federal team adapted during the middle of the war. In short they were able to transform the way they fought war. The Confederates in the west were never able to do the same. The paradigm of the day was to turn a meeting engagement into a major battle of anywhere from one to three days in length. In a few rare occasions, for example when an enemy retreated into prepared positions, they were cut off and surrounded. If they still refused to surrender then a siege was called for. The Vicksburg Campaign fit this category. Grant maneuvered around the defenses and into the Confederate rear. He then marched toward Vicksburg until he made contact, at Champion Hill, where he fought a major battle. He then invested Vicksburg itself after the Confederates retreated into its defenses. The Atlanta Campaign broke that paradigm. From then on the entire campaign resembled a siege. Now, however, both sides had relatively long Lines of Communication. In other words the battlefield resembled that of today in non-linear non-contiguous warfare. Both sides attempted to raid these LOCs, and both failed to effect the outcome. Had more effort been attempted to break these supply routes the campaign might have looked much different.</b> |                |                                                             |
| 15. SUBJECT TERMS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                |                                                             |

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|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:  |                                    |                                     | 17. LIMITATION OF<br>ABSTRACT<br><b>1</b> | 18. NUMBER<br>OF PAGES<br><b>60</b> | 19a. NAME OF<br>RESPONSIBLE PERSON |
| a. REPORT<br><b>unclassified</b> | b. ABSTRACT<br><b>unclassified</b> | c. THIS PAGE<br><b>unclassified</b> |                                           |                                     |                                    |

## **ABSTRACT**

Many historians give William T. Sherman total credit for the success of the Atlanta Campaign, when in fact it was the success of the Federal team as an institution. Conversely, many blame Joseph Johnston for the Confederate loss in that campaign, when in fact he was only one cog in the Confederate war machine. It was beyond Johnston's ability to adapt if President Jefferson Davis and the rest of the Confederate team failed in fulfilling their duties. More importantly, the Federal team adapted during the middle of the war. In short they were able to transform the way they fought war. The Confederates in the west were never able to do the same.

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## INTRODUCTION

Where does the American Civil War fit into military history? The Civil War describes the dilemma military commanders face when both sides have the same capabilities, structure and technology. Attritional war, using an advantage in railroad and national mobilization of greater resources finally gave the North victory. While important, breech-loading repeaters in limited supply were not decisive. This war occurred at the worst possible time for the Confederacy. The Civil War also occurred prior to smokeless powder, breech-loading repeaters, recoilless artillery, airpower and tanks restoring maneuver as a decisive factor. Yet, it occurred in time for the Northern railroad and telegraph networks to provide a significant advantage. These conditions were significant enough to create a new military environment that heralded modern warfare. The winner would be the side that could transform itself best to meet the new operating environment.

Decisive and innovative adjustments in force structure prior to the Civil War provided the basis under which Civil War armies were organized. In the Napoleonic wars, prior to 1809, the Corps system had proven superior to the system of the old ancien regime. Under Napoleon a French Corps was smaller, and thus more maneuverable, than its allied opponents' army. Yet, it also consisted of all arms and thus employed more firepower. Each corps, though of somewhat limited sustained offensive power, had enough defensive strength to insure it would not be destroyed before another corps could come to its assistance. Meanwhile, the enemy had exhausted himself defeating the first corps and would fall easy prey to the reinforcing ones.

After 1813, Napoleon's enemies successfully copied his system, at least closely enough to negate many of his organizational advantages. But they also inadvertently took another step that not only proved decisive, but also had repercussions on the structure of units in the Civil War. Because the coalitions against Napoleon consisted of numerous countries and nationalities, speaking different languages and coming from different cultures, they organized their corps into

armies. The practical effect of this was to elevate the corps system one level up. Now combined arms organizations were strong enough to fight offensively for a longer period of time and were virtually impossible to totally destroy in one, or even several battles. It is ironic that there was no conscience effort to make this happen. It simply occurred because of the decentralized nature of Europe at the time.

The post-Napoleonic period of the Industrial Revolution allowed the number of armies to increase and equipped them with more lethality as rifled muskets, percussion caps, breech loading repeaters, and rifled artillery became mass-produced. The railroad and the telegraph provided the logistical and command and control enablers for effective employment.

The trend, therefore, was for units of action to get small, faster and more lethal. Tactically, individual soldiers were forced to disperse to an extent previously thought impossible. Today this phenomenon is called the empty battlefield. What is missed by many, however, is that this only occurred at the micro level. At the macro, the national level, the army as a whole grew much larger. The British, in the late Nineteenth century, moved away from this model and paid a near fatal price in World War I when they fought a modern well-equipped competent enemy. After six months of heavy fighting the small, professional British Expeditionary Force was virtually destroyed and was replaced with a mass-produced copy of its fellow combatant neighbors.

The Civil War occurred right in the middle of this time period. During this war the United States Army, though not its Southern opponents, grew from an operationally immature, largely amateur organization into a competent lethal force. Both sides were very good at the tactical level, and by the end of the war the Federals had reached maturity at the strategic level. As an organization, however, our military still had much to learn at the operational level. This barely adequate capability became painfully apparent a generation later when it fought a third rate European power in the Spanish-American War. One can only wonder what the outcome would have been had we fought a truly world class opponent like Britain or Germany by ourselves, or



even Spain, without the benefit of painful lessons in the Civil War. Once again the United States Army fought well at both tactical and strategic levels, but was seriously hamstrung operationally. The best example of operational shortfalls was in the poor showing of logistics and movement into Cuba from Intermediate Staging Bases in Florida. One can only wonder if the outcome of the Spanish-American War, touted as making the United States a world power, would have been different had the painful experience of the Civil War not occurred.

This experience did not begin to coalesce until the last year of the war. The campaign of 1864 began with the Confederacy reeling from stinging defeats in 1863. Lee had been soundly beaten at Gettysburg, a whole army surrendered at Vicksburg, and after losing 18,000 men in a Phryic victory at Chickamauga, Braxton Bragg had seen his army swept from the field at Missionary Ridge. Worse even than the loss of trained manpower was the loss of artillery, rifled muskets and morale.

## **Strategic Setting**

In April 1864, the Union and Confederate Armies left winter quarters and began the decisive campaign of the war. While William T. Sherman drove toward Atlanta, with the mission of cutting the Confederacy in half and destroying Joseph E. Johnston's Army of Tennessee, Ulysses S. Grant marched against Richmond to destroy Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. The plan was to attack both major Confederate field armies at the same time so that neither could reinforce the other.

This was not the first time that either side had attempted coordinated offensives. The Confederate campaigns in 1862, culminating in the battles of Perryville and Antietam, had attempted the same. Poor communications, tactics and staff work, however, resulted in their failure. By 1864, these problems had largely been solved. Staffs had become proficient in their

jobs, and the signal corps had worked out the intricacies of long distance communication. The greatest change, however, was in the field of tactics. The days of stand up battles like Antietam and Shiloh were over, and a new style of warfare emerged.

The Atlanta Campaign, until 17 July 1864 and the relief of Joseph Johnston, can be broken down into four phases. In the first phase Sherman maneuvered Johnston out of a series of naturally strong positions in the mountainous terrain of northwest Georgia. In the second, fought in the relatively open cultivated area between Calhoun and the Etowah River, Johnston offered battle but Sherman refused to order all out assaults, preferring to again move around Johnston's flanks. Once south of the Etowah the terrain again became restricted, this time with heavily forested, hilly terrain in which the fighting was characterized by heavy skirmishing. Then, in the final phase, was fighting in the high ground around Kennesaw Mountain and the Chattahoochee River.

Throughout the entire campaign Johnston stood on the passive defense, in strongly built field fortifications, in the hope that Sherman would decisively blunder by making repeated frontal assaults. Sherman chose, rather, to utilize fortifications of his own, and using his superior numbers move around Johnston's flanks. Johnston would then withdraw to another position further to the rear. This situation repeated itself over and over throughout the course of the campaign until President Jefferson Davis realized that Johnston would never be induced to act aggressively. By the time Davis relieved Johnston on 17 July the army was already in the defenses of Atlanta and the time when maneuver could best be used had passed. The Confederacy's best opportunities to defeat Sherman's advance had been north of Atlanta. How Sherman successfully arrived before the gates of Atlanta, and how Johnston mishandled the campaign, provide a useful case study.

The greatest strategic strength of the Confederacy was also its greatest weakness, namely its tremendous size and lack of communications. Strategically, in 1864 the Confederates in Virginia only had to cover a front of about 100 miles, while the western Confederates had to

cover over 350 miles. The Army of Northern Virginia also had important geographical benefits at the operational level. Namely, the river systems in that theater flow mostly west to east and were perpendicular to Grant's advance. The rivers were also spaced widely enough to provide significant barriers to north-south movement. Also, five of them, the Potomac, Rappahannock, Rapidan, North Anna and James are large enough to require major engineering efforts to cross. They also had few hidden fords because so many people had lived near them for so long. Additionally, high ground on the southern banks usually covered these few crossing points, providing nearly impregnable defensive positions for Lee's army, such as at Fredericksburg.

In the west the rivers worked against the Confederacy. The Mississippi cut the Confederacy in half, and control of it allowed the Federals to land troops anywhere along its length in anything from raids to full-scale invasions. The Cumberland and Tennessee rivers provided deep avenues into Tennessee with near total secure lines of communication. Railroads could be cut, but these rivers were wide enough to render impossible anything other than harassment of boats as they sailed past. Any Confederate attempt to build forts on these rivers could be destroyed by superior firepower from the union navy. At the same time, because these rivers flow generally north to south it required an enormous expenditure of resources to move southern armies east to west if the federals were in possession of them. Therefore, any Confederate plans in the western theater required large numbers of troops in Mississippi to counter federal efforts from the river.

Mountain ranges actually worked in favor of both the Army of Northern Virginia and the Army of Tennessee. In Virginia, the Shenandoah Valley compartmented the area of operations, making it more problematic to defend, but because the mountains ran from northeast to southwest any invading federal army would be moving farther away from Richmond, as well as away from supporting range of other federal armies. The danger in this was that Lee could leave a holding force around Richmond and move overwhelming odds through numerous passes into the Shenandoah and onto the flanks of the now cut off federals in the Valley. Even if the Federals

were able to destroy the bountiful crops in the valley they would not be able to directly support the main effort around Richmond. Indeed, as mentioned the further into the valley they went the farther away from Richmond they would be.

The mountains in the Western Theater, though to a lesser degree, also helped the Confederates. The Appalachian range in eastern Tennessee and northern Georgia protected the eastern flank of the Army of Tennessee all the way to Atlanta. Though they do not extend all the way south to Atlanta, they provided a barrier that made it impossible to supply a drive on Atlanta from the east. Obviously the Federals would either approach from Chattanooga, or less likely, from Alabama.<sup>1</sup>

## **Sherman's Plans**

John Keegan, in the Mask of Command, writes that the study of a General teaches a great deal about the society he comes from and, thus, his approach to war.<sup>2</sup> Joe Johnston, fastidious and proper, always dressed in his best, was more symptomatic of the Napoleonic age than was his opponent. William T. Sherman, like Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, was a more modern type. Both Sherman and Jackson were known to dress in a private’s uniform and would have been indistinguishable from a distance from an ordinary soldier. Their approaches to war were reflected in much the same manner. Johnston, like his Napoleonic predecessors, preferred to fight concentrated. Sherman was of a newer type and was willing to both march and fight in a more dispersed method, utilizing technology and trusting the skills of his subordinates to maintain control and organizational coherence. The differences in the two commanders’ traits more than

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<sup>1</sup> See Map in Appendix C.

<sup>2</sup> John Keegan, The Mask of Command (New York: Penguin Books, 1987).

defined their outlook in life. Sherman's blue-collar approach to life facilitated a blue-collar approach to war.

The Federals had the advantage of working under only one chain of command. President Lincoln allowed relative autonomy to General Grant in the coming campaign, interfering in only a few instances. Grant would come up with the master plan and insure that all worked toward a common goal.

The strategic command structure worked well for the Federals in the west. Gone were the days when several armies operated in the same theater without any common campaign plan. In 1864, when Grant assumed control of all Union armies he placed William Tecumseh Sherman in command from Tennessee to the Mississippi river. Grant also gave him command of three armies and one mission: drive on Atlanta to destroy the Confederate Army of Tennessee. He was free to do it any way he saw fit, without interference from Washington.

The Federals began planning the campaign in December of 1863 when Henry Halleck canvassed the senior federal commanders for their views on how the campaign should be fought. Grant initially believed the best course of action would be to advance from Chattanooga to Mobile, with Atlanta and Montgomery being intermediate objectives. He believed that supply and transport problems would make a winter campaign impossible from Chattanooga before spring, yet he did not want to give the Confederates time to recover their strength from their defeats of the previous year. He proposed using the Mississippi River to mass forces at New Orleans and drive on Mobile from there. He felt it would take only a few months for the city to fall, but if a siege became necessary he would leave a holding force to pin the garrison in the city and take the rest of his men on a huge raid into central Alabama and Georgia. Though Grant sold

Assistant Secretary of War Dana on the idea, Halleck vetoed it because he wanted to do another series of winter offensives.<sup>3</sup>

This plan, though not ultimately chosen, demonstrates Grant's grasp of geography. It was logistically supportable by the Union, utilizing once again their naval preponderance. The climate would be in their favor because of the relatively mild deep-south winter, and they could take enough men to greatly outnumber the Confederates. At the same time, it worked on Confederate weaknesses. Basically, Grant proposed a strategic raid on a huge scale.

The final plan was another of Grant's, though he tasked his subordinates to work out the details. On 18 March 1864 Grant turned over command of the Western armies to General William T. Sherman and went east to assume control of the overall war effort. He told Sherman that the objective of the upcoming campaign would be for Sherman to defeat Joe Johnston's Army of Tennessee at Dalton, Georgia, while Grant defeated Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia behind the Rapidan River.<sup>4</sup> Herein lays a key point of the upcoming campaign. Namely, that Richmond and Atlanta would be the bait, which drew the last two major Confederate armies out so they could be destroyed. In Clausewitzian terms, the Southern armies were the primary targets while the cities were secondary considerations.

In a confidential telegram on 4 April Grant gave Sherman a more detailed plan of attack. He wrote that unless the Confederates stole the initiative he would order General Banks to abandon his unsuccessful campaign up the Red River, and return 10, 000 troops that he had borrowed from Sherman. This would end union offensives west of the Mississippi, but with the river firmly in federal control Confederate troops there could not influence the outcome of the war. Instead, he would reduce the number of troops there to the minimum necessary to hold the

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<sup>3</sup> James A. Huston, The Sinews of War: Army Logistics 1775-1953 (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1966), 233.

river, and mass 30,000 troops under Banks at New Orleans to drive on Mobile. At the same time Gilmore, in Florida, would bring 10,000 men to join Butler, giving that General a total of 33,000 men to operate by sea against Richmond. At the same time Grant would order Burnside's corps of 25,000 to join Meade in Virginia to follow Lee's Army of Northern Virginia wherever it went. Sigel would gather all that he could and move down the Shenandoah Valley. For Sherman, he proposed to combine Schofield's Army for the Ohio, Thomas' Army of the Cumberland and McPherson's Army of the Tennessee, to total over 100,000 men, to pin and destroy Johnston's Army of Tennessee. Grant's exact words were "You I propose to move against Johnston's army, to break it up and to get into the interior of the enemy's country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their war resources." He went on to write that how Sherman chose to do it was up to him. The tentative start date was 25 April, insuring that all started at the same time.<sup>5</sup>

The strength of Grant's plan was that it combined mass with simplicity, unity of effort and unity of command. All available troops would mass on as few enemy targets as possible, while retaining an obtainable number of objectives. At the same time all would be working toward a common goal. As Grant said of Sigel's mission "In other words, if Sigel can't skin himself he can hold a leg while someone else skins."<sup>6</sup>

Grant viewed Sherman's ultimate goal to be to maneuver into Lee's rear, where it was obvious most of the Confederacy's efforts would go. The only constraint placed on Grant was that he had to discard McClellan's water route to Richmond as the major effort against Lee, because the administration was worried that this would leave Washington uncovered.

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<sup>4</sup> William T. Sherman, "The Grand Strategy of the Last Year of the War," In Battles and Leaders of the Civil War (New York: Castle Books, 1956), Vol 4, 247.

<sup>5</sup> United States War Department, The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series 1, volume 23, part 3, 245-246.

<sup>6</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 32, pt 3, 246.

Under this strategic framework Sherman began to do his operational planning. Obviously, Atlanta would have to be the primary goal for the first phase. Grant had already laid some of the groundwork for Sherman. Prior to his being named General-in-Chief he had sent Sherman on a raid to Meridian, Mississippi. This raid, which is relatively unknown, would have a profound impact on the Atlanta Campaign. The goal was to destroy the railroad net of Mississippi so badly that Johnston could receive no reinforcements from there. In so doing it also secured the Federal right flank as they drove south from Chattanooga.

The best offensive weapon remaining to the Confederacy in 1864 was the use of their cavalry to cut federal supply lines. The most likely, and most dangerous, place for these raids to be based from was Mississippi. Sherman's infantry moved from Vicksburg one hundred and fifty miles to Meridian and drew away enough Confederate forces for a Union cavalry force of 7,000 under General W. Sooy Smith to attack south from Memphis and destroy the railroad net in northern Mississippi. Once combined these forces could easily destroy Forrest's forces, which would prevent a Confederate cavalry raid on Memphis or Nashville in the near future. The idea was to live off of the land as much as possible to enhance mobility.<sup>7</sup>

Sherman's part of the plan was the only part successfully carried out. He destroyed much of the railroad net, but did not totally destroy the Confederate's ability to shift troops. It also gave Sherman confidence that he could live off the land without dependence on long supply lines.<sup>8</sup> It also lessened the amount of garrisons needed along the Mississippi River.

Sooy Smith never made the linkup at Meridian. Although his part of the plan depended on using his cavalry's speed and mobility he averaged only 15 miles per day, primarily because he stopped to plunder and burn all along his route. He was also burdened by massive amounts of freed slaves that attached themselves to his column. Finally, he met Forrest in a battle that he lost

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<sup>7</sup> Lloyd Lewis, Sherman: Fighting Prophet (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1932), 332.



disastrously. The two lessons that Sherman drew from Smith's failure were significant ones. First, that Federal cavalry was undependable. He made the statement "It will be a novel thing in war if infantry has to await the motions of cavalry."<sup>9</sup> The other is the sheer encumbrance that the long lines of freed slaves presented to both mobility and supply when he had to feed them. When his infantry column returned to Vicksburg a line of refugeeing slaves ten miles long followed him.<sup>10</sup>

With Sherman's flank clear he turned to planning the campaign itself. He first intended to fight a campaign using widely spread armies attacking on a broad front in independent columns. He planned for Schofield to move from Cleveland to Dalton and link up with Thomas, where the two would threaten Johnston and pin him. Meanwhile McPherson would maneuver by way of Gunter's Landing on Rome and Kingston. This would force Johnston to abandon the defensible mountains of northern Georgia and into the more open area where a major battle could be fought. This plan had to be changed when McPherson's strength was reduced to only 24,000 men when he lost two divisions to Bank's Red River Campaign and veterans left on furlough.<sup>11</sup> Sherman finally adopted an idea submitted by General Thomas.

In February, Thomas had been ordered to perform a reconnaissance in force along Rocky Face Ridge to keep Johnston from sending reinforcements to Meridian. Thomas learned that a little known gap, Snake Creek Gap, was totally undefended. He proposed bluffing at Dalton, as in Sherman's original plan, than making a shallower turning movement thru Snake Creek Gap, to flank Johnston out of Dalton. He further proposed that his larger Army of the Cumberland make the move, because of the added security of larger numbers.

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<sup>8</sup> Jacob Cox, Atlanta (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside, 1987), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis, 336.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis, 334.

<sup>11</sup> Cox, 24.

In a telegram dated 10 April Sherman informed Grant of his operational plans. He had Schofield, with 12,000 men, move to Dalton via Knoxville and Loudon. There he joined with Thomas' 45,000-man army to pin Johnston. The plan called for Thomas to also have two divisions of cavalry to exploit any advantage gained by a Confederate retreat.<sup>12</sup> Sherman was still undecided on how to use McPherson. As of 19 April McPherson is still debating on whether to cross the Tennessee River at Guntersville or Whitesburg, both deep inside Alabama, and well outside of supporting range of the other two Federal armies.<sup>13</sup> Then, five days later on the 24<sup>th</sup> Sherman decided to use Thomas' suggestion about Snake Creek Gap. He would use McPherson's army instead because he feared it too small to use out of supporting range of the other armies. Therefore, he ordered McPherson to move to La Fayette via Lebanon and Summerville. If Johnston turned on McPherson while he was isolated he had two escape routes, one back over the bridge at Larkin's and the other to Chattanooga via Will's Valley. Should this happen, however, Thomas could quickly move into Johnston's now exposed flank and cut him off from Atlanta and his supply base.<sup>14</sup> Finally, on 4 May, Sherman telegraphed Grant that he would begin the invasion the next day.<sup>15</sup>

## The Railroad

The railroad provided a new, technological, means to revolutionize warfare. Trains allowed more cargo and troops to be moved with less effort than previous means. They also proved more reliable. Negatively, with both sides using them, campaigns were prolonged and required battles

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<sup>12</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 32, pt 3, 313.

<sup>13</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 32, pt 3, 410.

<sup>14</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 32, pt 3, 466.

<sup>15</sup> Albert Castel, Decision in the West: The Atlanta Campaign of 1864 (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 125.

to be linked throughout a campaign to be effective. Gone were the days of campaigns lasting only one battle. War now took on the characteristics of exhaustion rather than annihilation. Jomini's stress of the importance of Interior Lines and the Central Position remained important, although temporal characteristics became more important than spatial ones. Under Jomini's theory the Confederates held interior lines throughout the war because of the shorter distance from their eastern theater to their western theater. The railroad, however, changed that. Now, though the Confederates still held the Central Position, the greater efficiency of the Federal rail system insured they would hold Interior lines. The Federal rail system was so much better managed and maintained that they could move troops and equipment faster and more efficiently than the Confederates. Here again the Confederate team failed to measure up to their opponents. By the end of the war the southern rail net was in such disrepair that one used it at his own peril. The northern rail net, however, functioned like a well-oiled machine.

For any offensive to be successful it had to be logistically supportable. Sherman himself coined the phrase "War is Grub and Mules."<sup>16</sup> Here, obviously, the Union forces had the advantage. The reason was that any logistical plan was dependent on the railroad, where the Federals had the undisputed superiority.

So far in the war, however, the Federals only experienced success when operations were near major waterways. Naval use of rivers simply had too many advantages, being more flexible, having more carrying capacity, lower cost and safety from cavalry raids. In the year prior to the Atlanta Campaign the Federals had transported 328,932 troops, of which 135,909 were sent by river. More importantly, twice the tonnage of supplies had gone by river steamer than by rail, 337,912,363 lbs. to 153,102,100 lbs. The reason was carrying capacity. An average steamboat on the Ohio River of 500 tons could carry enough supplies for two days for an army of 40,000

men and 18,000 horses. To supply the same by train required five 10 car trains.<sup>17</sup> The area between Chattanooga and Atlanta, however, had no navigable river under Federal control. The Coosa was navigable as far north as Rome, but it traveled southwest deeper into Confederate territory. Therefore, the next campaign would depend entirely on the railroad.

Railroads did have several advantages. They could be used in any season and were actually faster than river transport. This meant that Sherman could use the railroad during the winter months preceding the opening of the campaign to build up a surplus. He realized that it would be too risky to depend solely on the railroad once the campaign began.

The logistics needed to simply keep his army clothed and fed in garrison were enormous. Jacob Cox in his book Atlanta, estimated that 1300 tons of supplies per day had to reach the army at Chattanooga to keep it ready to fight.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, a surplus needed to be accumulated in case of emergency or a cut in the railroad. Once the army took to the field this number dramatically increased.

The need for food was especially critical. The regulation diet, rarely reached even in good times, was about three pounds of food per person per day: 12 ounces of pork or bacon, or one pound four ounces beef, and one pound six ounces of bread or one pound four ounces of cornbread. This was more than any other army in the world, even the well supplied British and French.<sup>19</sup> Horses consumed huge resources. They required ten times the amount of a person.<sup>20</sup> In an army of more than 110,000 soldiers, 60,000 horses and untold numbers of camp followers and refugees the task was large. Though canned and dehydrated foods had been introduced since

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<sup>16</sup> Archer Jones, Civil War Command and Strategy: The Process of Victory and Defeat (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 95.

<sup>17</sup> Huston, 211.

<sup>18</sup> Cox, 22.

<sup>19</sup> Bell I. Wiley, The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1951), 224.

1857, easing the spoilage problem, the poor quality provided no nutrients and made mandatory the dietary inclusion of at least some fresh food.<sup>21</sup> Clothing was another headache. Shoes wore out about every two months, while uniforms lasted between four to six months.<sup>22</sup>

In Sherman's area of operations he had only the Nashville and Chattanooga railroad to use. At first it was not up to the task. Insufficient supplies got through to either Chattanooga or Knoxville, even though warehouses were full in Nashville and Memphis. The railroad was unable to resupply Knoxville and the troops there were reduced to near starvation. Prior to Sherman taking command Chattanooga, 10,000 horses died of starvation.<sup>23</sup> It was nearly impossible to build up a surplus, or even fairly distribute what did get through because hungry soldiers stole everything edible. One man wrote of a time when a train pulled in at a coal siding and a unit of soldiers forcibly overpowered the guard and ate the contents on the spot.<sup>24</sup> In Knoxville it was even worse. General John M. Schofield, upon taking command there on 9 February described how thousands of horse and mule carcasses were strewn all over the town. Of the 30,000 animals Burnside took with him there only 1,000 remained alive and fit for service. Of the Army of Ohio's 25,000 men only 7,000 were fit for service.<sup>25</sup>

Grant determined to fix the situation as swiftly as possible. Knowing that one rail line was insufficient to supply both Sherman at Chattanooga and Schofield at Knoxville he took the initial steps. He ordered Sherman to have General Grenville Dodge's command of 8,000 men

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Van Creveld, Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton ( New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 111.

<sup>21</sup> Huston, 185.

<sup>22</sup> Allan Nevins, "A Major Result of the Civil War," Civil War History, September 1959, 242 and Jones, 9.

<sup>23</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 52, pt 1, 617 and Huston, 233.

<sup>24</sup> Chesley A. Mosman, The Rough Side of War: The Civil War Journal of Chesley A. Mosman, 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, Company D, 59<sup>th</sup> Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment, ed. Arnold Gates (Garden City, New York: Basin Publishing Co., 1987), 144.

<sup>25</sup> John M. Schofield, Forty-Six Years in the Army (New York: The Century Co., 1897), 113-4.

repair the Tennessee and Alabama railroad from Decatur, Alabama to Nashville, Tennessee. This gave him two rail lines, at least as far as Stevenson. Grant wrote in his Memoirs,

The road from Nashville to Decatur passes over a broken country, cut up with innumerable streams, and many of them of considerable width, and with valleys far below the roadbed. All the bridges over these had been destroyed, and locomotives not carried off had been destroyed as effectually as they knew how to destroy them. All bridges and culverts had been destroyed between Nashville and Decatur, and thence Stevenson, where the Memphis and Charleston and the Nashville and Chattanooga roads unite. The rebuilding of this road would give us two roads as far as Stevenson over which to supply the army. From Bridgeport, a short distance farther east, the river supplements the road.<sup>26</sup>

Sherman took the initiative and moved on his own to improve the performance of the rail system. On 2 April Stanton authorized Sherman to take charge personally of the railroad.<sup>27</sup> Four days later he moved. First, he tackled the problem of getting rid of all excess personnel that ate supplies and gave nothing in return. Also, soldiers returning from leave took much of the rail traffic up. These he made walk from Nashville. He also stopped the use of the railroad by thousands of civilians. These ranged from parents and wives coming to visit soldiers, politicians coming to meddle in army affairs, refugees, preachers, salesmen and many Christian organizations.<sup>28</sup>

He then took it one step further and ordered the army to no longer issue food to civilians in east Tennessee. This created such an uproar from east Tennessee's large unionist population that President Lincoln wrote to him asking him to reconsider. However, Lincoln made it clear that it was only a request and not an order, and that he would not interfere in Sherman's business.<sup>29</sup> Sherman quickly and respectfully replied that feeding the civilians' was detrimental to the army's ability to build up a surplus for the coming campaign and unless the president ordered him to change it the new policy would stand. The civilians would have to transport their

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<sup>26</sup> William T. Sherman, Memoirs of William T. Sherman (New York: The Library of America, 1990), 423.

<sup>27</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 32, pt 3, 220.

<sup>28</sup> Castel, 92.

own food, which Sherman felt they could do.<sup>30</sup> Lincoln, to his credit, did not interfere and Sherman was proven correct that the civilians could find enough food to last until crops were harvested.

He ordered that units coming to the front from Louisville be brought as far as possible by the Cumberland River.<sup>31</sup> The problem with this was that the Cumberland got shallower, especially that far upstream, the closer to summer it became. Obviously, this was only a temporary fix.<sup>32</sup> As a further step Sherman ordered that the massive numbers of cattle being shipped to Chattanooga now be herded overland along the road, and not by rail. Sherman still did not believe this was enough although he wrote in his Memoirs that by now he had doubled the amount getting through.<sup>33</sup>

Sherman ordered his General Superintendent of Railroad Transportation, Lieutenant Colonel Adna Anderson, to seize all engines and cars that came south into Nashville. Though this too created an uproar over the military confiscating civilian property, Sherman's resolve held and soon traffic picked up. In late March and early April only 65-80 cars per day reached Chattanooga, much short of the 145 that Sherman believes the minimum needed.<sup>34</sup> By the end of April Sherman had seized enough engines and cars so that the whole number between Nashville and Chattanooga was 140 engines and 1500 cars.<sup>35</sup> Just two weeks before the campaign opened, on 24 April, Sherman wrote to Grant that the supply situation had increased optimistically. By his estimate he needed 145 cars per day simply to have a day's supply, without adding to a

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<sup>29</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 38, pt 4, 25.

<sup>30</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 38, pt 4, 33-4.

<sup>31</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 38, pt 4, 4.

<sup>32</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 38, pt 4, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Sherman, 468.

<sup>34</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 32, pt 3, 466.

<sup>35</sup> Castel, 92-3.

surplus. The previous day 193 had come in, and then 134, so on the average he was getting enough. Still, supply remained his chief concern.<sup>36</sup>

To understand the scope and scale of the effort required to get a pair of shoes, a bullet or a ration to a soldier we must look at its journey to get there. First, it was made at the factory or taken from the field. Then it was sent by wagon to the depot in the state in which it was made. From there the railroad took it to storage depots in Nashville. The distance from Nashville to Chattanooga was 151 miles, of which 115 miles of new track and sidings had to be laid to replace the old worn out ones, and 45 new water tanks erected, the Confederates having either used or destroyed the previous ones. To provide two-way transportation the Federals built sidings, no more than eight miles apart, capable of holding five to eight freight trains each. Then, at Chattanooga, ten miles of siding was laid to receive the unloading, rather have them wait to be unloaded one at a time.<sup>37</sup> To operate this took 10,805 contract civilians as construction workers, brakemen, firemen, mechanics, laborers, etc.<sup>38</sup>

By 1864 much of the novelty had worn off the use of the railroad for military purposes. Sherman, who himself said after the war that the Atlanta Campaign would have been impossible without the railroad, reaped the benefit of finding receptive ears for his supply needs.<sup>39</sup> Another aid to Sherman was that everyone was still stunned over the record-breaking transfer of Hooker's corps from the Army of the Potomac, in Virginia, to help raise the siege of Chattanooga, after the battle of Chickamauga.

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<sup>36</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 32, pt 3, 466.

<sup>37</sup> OR, Ser 3, vol 5, 584.

<sup>38</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 52, pt 1, 614.

<sup>39</sup> Eva Swantner, "Military Railroads During the Civil War," *The Military Engineer*, Nov-Dec 1929, 310.



## Johnston's Plans

It was obvious that the next campaign would be decisive, either with the Federals suffering enough casualties to end the war in a negotiated peace, or seeing the south destroyed as a nation. Everyone, it seemed had a plan. Even though each side utilized only one plan it is useful to study all of the major ones because they show the objectives and thought processes of the major players. They also demonstrate a remarkable ignorance of the true capabilities of the armies, and the nature of what war had become.

Opposing the federals would be Jefferson Davis' ineffectual command system, which he had divided into geographical departments. While Davis himself acted as commander in chief, he placed senior officers in command of districts. The troops in that district acted as field armies and garrisons and were expected to be self-supporting in supplies and recruiting. This decentralized system, plus states' rights, created numerous problems and brought to light the greatest weakness of Davis' system, namely the division of labor and responsibility among the sub components of the South. Individual States should have shouldered more responsibility for internal defense, including key ports and the raising of partisans to support shadow governments in occupied areas.

Western military thought is that the military should always be subordinated to politics. Yet even Carl von Clausewitz, a primary proponent of this concept, would have been appalled at the Confederate structure. His concept of Center of Gravity and the implied Decisive Point that is usually associated with it, was grossly violated by this departmental system, whereby the Confederacy was unable to identify either its own strong points or to effectively attack its

opponent's.<sup>40</sup> Each was independent of the others and reported only to the president.

Combined with each governor demanding that his own state take priority, the limited resources of the Confederacy were spread too far. This alone made an effective strategy impossible.

Davis's departmental system insured that every department had different aims and contributed little of substance toward the overall goal of independence. Primarily, it insured that there was no way to offset Federal superiority in numbers because when asked to voluntarily send reinforcements to a threatened front each departmental commander would refuse on the grounds that his area should take precedence.

Still, his worked reasonably well early on until federal armies began to coordinate offensives. As long as the south faced only one major offensive at a time troops could be shifted from one district to another to meet the threat. Thus, after Gettysburg, Longstreet's Corps moved to Georgia to participate in the battle of Chickamauga in September, 1863. The problem for the Confederates in 1864 would be that the federals coordinated attacks not only in Virginia and Georgia, but in Florida, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi and Texas as well. Under this pressure Davis' system fell apart.

The only part of Davis' system that did work was in Virginia. Because of the closeness of Richmond to the front every move toward it by the Federals meant that troops would be rushed to its aid. In the more expansive west it was more difficult to speed troops to the area. Also, because of the smallness of the Virginia area, and it being under the command of only one man, Robert E. Lee, decisions were faster.

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<sup>40</sup> Center of Gravity can be defined as the "hub of all power and the movement on which everything depends," and the Decisive Point as "The point in time and space where a decision can be rendered against a center of gravity."

The Atlanta Campaign was affected by this disastrous system. Once the Army of Tennessee was pushed out of Tennessee it took several months to redraw the departmental boundaries. The result was that much of northern Alabama, which it was tasked to defend, was cut off.

Throughout the war Davis did not fight one war, but two. As he continued to pour more and more resources into Virginia the South's western flank crumbled. First Vicksburg fell. Then, the westernmost states fell one by one out of Confederate control.

By the beginning of the 1864 campaign the two armies facing each other were very different. While the soldiers shared similarities, everything else was different; the societies they came from, the organization that supplied and put them into battle, the leaders who led them into battle, and their governments. What separated them was that one side still fought in the old ways, at least above the level of private, while the other side transformed into a ruthlessly efficient combat force.

One problem for the Confederates was Lee having too large an army.<sup>41</sup> By giving Lee the lion's share of men, equipment, and the best officers he was too tempted to fight an active offensive war, when the Confederate's strategy should have been one of defense. Some of these assets could have been better utilized in the western theater.

To counter the Federal invasion there was no shortage of Confederate plans. Every major player had one. Obviously Richmond and Atlanta were threatened. What was not so obvious was that both were threatened at the same time. Jefferson Davis was entrenched in his belief that the Federals only had the capability to make one major push. This faulty assumption hampered operations and further soured relations with commanders until much too late to react.

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<sup>41</sup> This is a recurring theme in Richard McMurray's Two Great Rebel Armies (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) and for a discussion concerning the topic in World War

Conversely, Davis correctly saw the two most important objectives in the west as the protection of Atlanta and the recovery of Tennessee.

Atlanta was vital to southern communications and manufacturing. Indeed, it was the hub of the entire southern railroad network. The Atlanta and West Point Railroad from Mobile and Montgomery, the Macon and Western Railroad from Savannah and Macon, the Georgia Railroad to Richmond by way of Augusta, Charleston, Wilmington and Goldsboro, and the Western and Atlantic Railroad all passed through Atlanta. Therefore, the loss of Atlanta meant the loss of the physical ability to support any major military force in the field, even the Army of Northern Virginia because it remained dependent on supplies from the west.

Atlanta's importance was not only in the railroads, but in its factories. Within the city were a pistol factory, the Novelty Iron Works, the Confederate Arsenal, Winships Foundry, the Atlanta Machine Works, the W.S. Withers and Solomon Foundry, the Atlanta Steam Tannery, the building of John C. Peck and Frances Day, who built "Joe Brown Pikes," the flour mill of Stewart and Austin, and the Hammond Marshall Sword Factory. (Atlanta Hist. Bull 21-24) Additionally there were meat-packing plants within the city.<sup>42</sup>

By giving up northern Georgia the Confederates also lost the saltpeter works in Kingston, and uncovered Rome and Alabama. In Rome, they would lose the Noble Brothers Foundry, which made cannons, the Howe and Rich manufacturing facility, which made cartridge boxes and bayonet scabbards, John O'Neal's bucket factory and H.K. Shackelford who manufactured

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II see William DePuy Generals Balck and von Mellenthin on Tactics: Implications for NATO Military Doctrine (McLean, Virginia: The BDM Corporation, 1980) 47.

<sup>42</sup> Castel, 73.

haversacks and pistol belts.<sup>43</sup> In central Alabama they exposed the huge munitions complex around Selma,<sup>44</sup> and would be cut off from their last major source of coal and iron.<sup>45</sup>

The recovery of Tennessee was also deemed imperative. When Chattanooga and Knoxville fell the south lost its best supply of copper, and the niter beds in east Tennessee supplied two thirds of the Confederacy's gunpowder.<sup>46</sup>

Towards the end of retaking Tennessee Davis and Bragg began to bombard Johnston with advice and their own plans. Johnston turned over command of the Army of Mississippi on 16 December 1863 to General Leonidas Polk. He then traveled to Dalton and assumed command of the Army of Tennessee. He took command at a time when relations were strained between himself and President Davis. Davis blamed him for the loss of Vicksburg, believing that he was excessively secretive and made no serious effort to save the city. Johnston, on the other hand, resented what he viewed as unwanted interference from Richmond and believed they were not serious about helping him.

Davis believed that the Federals could only mount one major offensive at a time and that the offensive would be in Virginia. He believed that the Federals would have to spend longer consolidating their gains in Tennessee and would therefore be dispersed in small garrisons vulnerable to quick thrusts. Therefore, he felt the time was ripe to retake Tennessee. He proposed to do this, in a letter received by Johnston on 18 March, by moving north, crossing the Tennessee River at Kingston, and linking-up with Longstreet, who would move south to form the junction. This would cut off Knoxville, which depended on Chattanooga for supply, and threaten Chattanooga. This would force the federals into the open where a battle could be fought. Should

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<sup>43</sup> William R. Scaife, The Campaign for Atlanta (Saline, Michigan: McNaughton and Gunn, 1993), 9.

<sup>44</sup> Richard McMurry, Two Great Rebel Armies (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 129.

<sup>45</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 32, pt 2, 562.

they remain behind their entrenchments Johnston and Longstreet would move on Nashville via Sparta, and perhaps even into Kentucky.<sup>47</sup> What Davis envisaged for Johnston to do amounted to a strategic raid, because the Confederates by that time did not have the capacity to stay and defend any gained territory. It is interesting to note that all four times the Confederates attempted this, at Sharpsburg, Gettysburg, Perryville, and Nashville all ended in significant Confederate defeat, primarily due to logistics considerations.

To do this Johnston would have 75,000 men. Longstreet would contribute 16,000 men, Polk 5,000, Major General William T. Martin 3,000 cavalry, 10,000 from Beauregard, and Johnston's own army of 41,000. As a supporting attack Confederate cavalry would raid west Tennessee, where they could live off the land.<sup>48</sup> Once the railroad was cut the federals would be scattered and unable to quickly mass.

Longstreet himself submitted a plan. He believed the only reason he had not had much success in Knoxville was that he was detached with too small a force. He thought that 20,000 should have been sent with him rather than the 12,000, which he had: "Twenty thousand men, well handled, could surely have captured Burnside and his forces. Under the present arrangement, however, the lines are to be held as they now are and the detachment is to be of 12,000. We thus expose both to failure, and really take no chance to ourselves of great results."<sup>49</sup> Longstreet proposed on 5 March, to link up with Johnston at Madisonville, before driving into middle Tennessee. Then on 16 March he proposed to link up with Beauregard and move into Kentucky by way of Pound Gap.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Lewis, 305.

<sup>47</sup> General Joseph E. Johnston, Narrative of Military Operations During the Civil War (New York: D. Appleton, 1874), 291-2.

<sup>48</sup> Castel, 75.

<sup>49</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 3: 286.

<sup>50</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 3, pt 3, 586-7 and 637-641.

General Polk at this time proposed a more feasible plan than any others. At the time he first proposed this plan he commanded the Army of Mississippi stationed at Demopolis, Alabama. He wanted Johnston to send him a division, namely Cheatham's Tennessee division of 4,000 men. This division, recruited largely in middle Tennessee would be moving into home territory and could count on recruiting its strength from among family and friends as well as rounding up deserters who had previously served with the unit. This would give him a total of 15,000 infantry to which he would add a column of 15,000 cavalry, giving him a total of 30,000. He proposed to cross the Tennessee River and cut the railroad. If Longstreet did the same thing to the east Sherman would be unable to move.<sup>51</sup>

Against this backdrop of events, or perhaps because of it, everyone anxiously awaited Johnston's plan. Many today are still waiting. Some contend he never had a plan and was content to allow the federals to make the first move, after which he would react. During the war Johnston rarely divulged a detailed plan to anyone, spending most of his time arguing why everyone else's was not feasible. Whether he had a plan and was simply keeping it secret, or had no plan at all is unknown. As late as 14 April 1864, only a week or two before good campaigning weather, Johnston wrote to Richmond: "Assuming offensive must depend on relative forces. I shall be ready to do it whenever they warrant it. It will be a month or six weeks before we can expect the necessary transportation. I cannot foresee what force the enemy may then have. I do not think our present strength sufficient for defensive since Longstreet's withdrawal. No one is more anxious than I for offensive operations by this army. Ask General Bragg enemy's force at Missionary Ridge and his present estimate."<sup>52</sup>

This short paragraph sums up Johnston's thought process. First, he wanted a preponderance of forces, something he would not get. Then he wanted more transportation. This

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<sup>51</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 32, pt 2, 813-4.

would take so long it was obvious the federals would move first, even though Johnston had had six months to prepare. Next, he wrote he did not have enough men to fight even a defensive battle. Any lingering doubts that Johnston had no intention of launching an offensive should have been erased then. What was nearly criminal was that Johnston did not even have a defensive plan, other than some vague idea of fighting on the defense somewhere before launching an offensive later. Anyone familiar with his handling of the retreat up the Peninsula in 1862, or the Vicksburg campaign, would hold serious doubts as to his sincerity. Even Johnston's memoir, A Narrative of Military Operations is surprisingly devoid of offensive plans, and this in an apologetic book written after years in which to formulate the best excuses. Perhaps, however, Johnston was correct in his strategic and operational thinking and took the only course available to him.

At first glance initiative in Johnston's army would seem impossible. Bragg had destroyed the integrity of the army through his numerous reorganizations and countless personality conflicts. Initiative requires limitless trust between subordinate and superior. This type of trust had existed in the Army of Northern Virginia since Lee took command. This philosophy would, a century later, be known by the German word *Auftragstaktik*.<sup>53</sup> This atmosphere was standard procedure in the Army of Northern Virginia. A look at the history of the Army of Northern Virginia shows time and again the successful application of this technique. Lee's greatest victory, Chancellorsville, is an excellent example. It also hearkened back to Napoleon and his distributed maneuver of corps, in which individual commanders sought contact with the enemy on their own initiative with the full knowledge that other corps would come to his aid.

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<sup>52</sup> OR, Ser 1, vol 32, pt 3, 781.

<sup>53</sup> This is translated into English as Mission Type Orders.



One result of this organizational disintegration was that the Army of Tennessee was not capable of distributed maneuver. One of its corps commanders, Hood, did bring on combat numerous times against Johnston's express orders, but initiative in the army as a whole had been severely damaged by Bragg. To his credit Johnston went a long way to remedy Bragg's mistakes when he reorganized the army. However, much damage had already been done. An army, like a soldier recovering from a wound, cannot be expected to recover overnight.

## **Telegraph**

The railroad became a logistics enabler by permitting the efficient supply of large, mobile armies in the field. The telegraph, in turn, provided a new technological command and control enabler. Prior to the telegraph armies in the field depended on messages traveling at the speed of a horse or steamboat. Messages that traveled this way could take weeks to arrive at a destination, and because the signals architecture had not matured couriers had to convince everyone along the route from cavalry patrols and pickets to staff officers the time sensitive nature of his message. The telegraph changed that. Luckily for Civil War commanders the pre-war telegraph infrastructure precluded many of the growing pains it would have suffered. As it was the new technology could be used "off the shelf" for military purposes. The basic structure, both north and south, existed at the beginning of the war. Wire already connected the major cities to the vast interior. Years of usage had shown how far apart relay stations should be and how many employees were required to facilitate usage. Also importantly, it provided a trained manpower pool that became the cadre of the signal corps.

The level of war in which the telegraph had the most impact was the strategic level. The nation's capitol, either Washington or Richmond, could send and receive reports and orders from armies

in the field within a day. Not only could a President or Secretary of War be kept apprised of current events, they could also insure the field armies coordinate their movements.

Depending on importance these messages could be quite long, however, if the message were in code the risk was that it would be garbled in transmission. Both telegrams and letters, if important, would be encoded. A shorter telegram, being transmitted and relayed by numerous operators over many stations, had a higher probability of being garbled in transit than a letter that would be handed directly to its recipient. Throughout the Atlanta Campaign both sides sent short reports to their superiors, and followed up with lengthy explanations via mail and personal couriers. This enabled superiors to be kept informed of events, and within a few days be informed of the minute details contained within a detailed after action report. The simplicity of the system insured fewer mistakes. The strength of the system was that it could be pushed down to lower levels by establishing field telegraph stations. Sherman, during the Atlanta Campaign established field telegraph lines up to six miles from his headquarters, and Grant, at the same time in the east, equipped his brigades with wire-laying mules for direct communication.<sup>54</sup>

Because the Confederacy did not have the industrial capacity to provide this level of equipment they had to depend on couriers at the tactical level. One can only wonder what effect it would have had if they had an equal capability. Lee and Johnston were both maneuvered out of one position after another. Had their communications structure provided better capability they could have received messages from scouts and subordinates, and make counter moves with more rapidity and effectiveness. It is possible they could have stopped the turning movements and forced an even greater battle of attrition.

The practical effect of the telegraph was that it reinforced the difficulty of destroying an army in the field. Assuming one side was able to overcome tactical difficulties and inflict a serious,

catastrophic defeat on its opponent he could be assured that his opponent had already called his government for help. They would then telegraph other commanders and order corps or entire armies to move to the threatened army. The railroad ensured these reinforcements arrived before the enemy could take decisive advantage.

Martin Van Creveld, in Command in War, preaches throughout the book that as warfare becomes more complex so does that of command. One result is that as warfare became more complex there had to be revolutions in command and control to keep pace. The base supposition is that as mobility increases, and forces are dispersed across a broader front, the demands of command increase with it. Communications technologies, primarily the telegraph, filled the void in the Civil War, but in doing so created the challenge of processing a flood of new information. The danger was that the new and untried system would collapse under the weight of data before it could be processed. This necessitated even larger staffs to sift through and analyze the growing mountains of paperwork. It was also extremely vulnerable to enemy actions. A cut telegraph line anywhere along its length, or an operator making a Morse code error, increased the chance of making a wrong decision.

Though Creveld did not write specifically about the Atlanta Campaign it nevertheless reinforces his thesis. He additionally concluded that successful command systems are not over dependent on technology, but they will organize themselves to leverage it through decentralized decision making. This worked well for Sherman, but was disastrous for the Confederates. Johnston continually kept Davis and the Confederate government in the dark. Yet Davis, once the campaign began made only one attempt, other than by telegraph, to divine Johnston's plans. The result of that one attempt was to relieve Johnston of command. Davis should have sent someone, or better yet go himself, to learn first hand the condition of

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<sup>54</sup> Paddy Griffith, Battle in the Civil War (Fieldhead, The Park, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire,

the army. Technology can only be leveraged effectively through decentralization if the organization as a whole is prepared.

During the Civil War the Federals were more likely than their Confederate opponents to effectively use the telegraph and railroad together at the strategic level. The only time the Confederates used the railroad this way was in sending two of Longstreet's divisions to reinforce Bragg before the battle of Chickamauga. This however, was not in response to a serious defeat. It was part of a pre-planned battle. The deployment was also delayed several weeks due to the deteriorating condition of the rail net and the fact that much of the route used different sized rails, necessitating coordinating for different trains to shuttle units from area to area.

Federal actions following that battle provide a clearer example. Beaten badly during the battle they fell back in disarray to Chattanooga and notified Washington of their predicament. Within days Joseph Hooker's Corps, from the Army of the Potomac, was en route to Tennessee before Bragg could achieve a decisive follow up. Used together the telegraph and the railroad continued the model of military units becoming more difficult to destroy, and thus prolonging conflict.

The telegraph was invented in 1844 and had been commercialized in 1847. In 1864, Sherman and Grant were separated by up to 1500 miles, yet the Federal team always knew the whereabouts and status of each other by utilizing it. This technology, though also used by the Confederates was greatly fine tuned by the Federals. Early in the war the telegraph was turned over to the signal corps. When they were found inefficient the Federals re-commercialized it. This demonstrated the flexibility to decentralize, and ironically gained better efficiency by giving up control. Relay stations were needed every 6 miles for field telegraph. Rivers and railroads were used to swiftly bring Federal armies to the battlefield, while the telegraph provided effective command and control.

## The Campaign in Retrospective

The German historian Hans Delbrück postulates that there are two strategic constants in military history. The first is a strategy of annihilation based on fighting a decisive battle. The second is a strategy of exhaustion. Alexander and Napoleon used strategies based on annihilation because of the concentrated nature of war in their times, and the lack of technological means such as the railroad to quickly reinforce threatened areas.

Fighting a war based on annihilation was beyond the south's capabilities. They were forced by default to fight a war of exhaustion. The objective should have been to wear down the federals until they were willing to accept a negotiated settlement. Importantly, Delbrück points out that a defensive strategy is the best means to accomplish exhaustion.

Sherman, however, with greater resources, turned this around during the campaign. Johnston attempted to find impregnable defensive ground to concentrate his army on and wait for Sherman to attack. Sherman, using the initiative, turned his flanks and forced a retreat. He then pressed Johnston from the rear so closely that every straggler was captured and every wagon or cannon that broke down had to be abandoned. These resources were lost to Johnston just as effectively as if lost in battle. In this way Sherman kept casualties roughly equal while not attacking at every opportunity. He thus challenged the paradigm of the day by changing the nature of the campaign. The only realistic way in which Johnston could have forced Sherman back to the paradigm was to use maneuver. Johnston, ever sensitive to criticism, would have said that he did in fact use maneuver, and point to the fact that Sherman never got between him and Atlanta.

A closer look would indicate otherwise. Maneuver can be defined as the use of movement to place oneself in a position of advantage over the enemy. If that is the case then one must ask

what the position of advantage was if Sherman kept moving around his flank at the same time as not uncovering his own rear. In Johnston's case the position of advantage would be somewhere from which Sherman had to fight a major battle on unfavorable terms. One example of such a position was across Sherman's LOC.

Equally important to studying why the North won the Atlanta Campaign is studying why the South lost. If Stephen Davis is correct in his book Atlanta Will Fall then by the time Hood assumed command on 17 July, there was nothing he could have done to save Atlanta. What then did Johnston do that doomed the Confederacy? The answer is that it was not Johnston himself, but rather the Confederate team as a whole that failed. Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, in their book Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War<sup>55</sup>, have the thesis that military defeat many times results from the organizational makeup of an army. They write that there are three types of failures: Failure to Learn, Failure to Anticipate, and Failure to Adapt. They note that it is too tempting, yet also too simplistic, to merely blame one person, even though they might have been a large part of the problem. Their approach depends on "systems theory" in that rather than look at one individual the entire organization should be broken down into its component pieces and study their interaction toward a common goal.

The problem is to find the weak areas, failures, and fix them before they occur. Sherman did this by properly preparing his armies. He stockpiled supplies in case his line of communication was cut. He briefed both Lincoln and Grant about his plans so they could not only help, but so he could work towards their goals as well. He rehearsed his plans with his major subordinates and made sure they followed his guidance, and empowered them to make decisions based on his guidance. Johnston did none of the above.

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<sup>55</sup> Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War (New York: The Free Press, 1990)

Using Cohen and Gooch as a template Johnston was guilty of all three failures. He looked for a battle of his own choosing in which his opponent would not maneuver, but would attack his impregnable entrenchments. Yet, in the recent past, against the same enemy, Sherman had refused to assault him head on and repeatedly flanked him. A year earlier the Army of the Cumberland, then under General Rosecrans, had maneuvered around the flank of the Army of Tennessee in the Tullahoma Campaign, which was how they ended up fighting in northern Georgia in the first place. It should have been no surprise when Sherman resorted to maneuver in front of Dalton.

Johnston also failed to anticipate. He points out in post war memoirs that he was afraid that Sherman would maneuver. If that is the case why did he not prepare for it? The gap, through which Sherman maneuvered into his rear, though within an easy march of his lines, was not even on the map of General Wheeler, his chief of cavalry and primary guarder of his flanks. This even though Johnston was an engineer with cartographic experience and had been in place for half a year.

Lastly, the entire Confederate team failed to adapt as the campaign unfolded. Davis and Bragg withheld reinforcements that were in secondary sectors that could have provided Johnston with much needed aid. Another 10,000 reinforcements would have given Johnston enough men to lengthen his lines to the point it would have been impossible to move safely around his flanks. This could have changed the nature of the campaign and forced a standup battle on Confederate terms, though Johnston probably would have wasted them as well. Once the Federal army reached the half-way point to Atlanta everyone involved should have realized that Johnston would simply continue retreating all the way to Atlanta.

A look at maps in the campaign is demonstrative of another failure. Napoleon could look over the battle area and personally ride it within a short time. By the Civil War, maps, which gave the commander the ability to visualize the terrain without having to physically ride it, were vital. More important maps provide the basis for future events. By reducing vast spaces to a

piece of paper a map brings the unknown to light and replaces assumptions with facts about the environment. Johnston was on the ground he would fight on before Christmas. The formal campaign began in May. No significant maneuver occurred prior to this that would have upset plans. What did he do during this six months concerning mapping? He detailed a cartographer to make maps of his right flank, but did not think to provide an escort. The result was the cartographer, his orders and his maps were captured by the Federals.

Johnston also had detailed maps made of his close vicinity, where he hoped the battle would take place, but these would be useless if he were forced to maneuver away from them. Most telling of all is the fact that Snake Creek Gap, a key piece of terrain, was not even on Wheeler's map. More damning is the fact that it was on Brigadier General Henry D. Clayton's map. Clayton was a brigade commander in Hood's Corps.<sup>56</sup> This clearly shows that the Confederates knew of its existence. Johnston should have, sometime over the preceding months, had his engineers gather every map in the army to check for veracity, fill in gaps where known data existed, and have copies made so everyone had them. A few staff officers could have accomplished this in a few weeks.

Also in the category of failure to anticipate one can wonder why Johnston did not use what maps he had to rehearse possibilities with subordinates. At a minimum this would have shown him where he needed to send his "directed telescope." One of his division commanders, Patrick Cleburne, did just that throughout the winter with his brigade commanders. Davis and Bragg had reinforcements they could have sent to Johnston, but withheld them until he gave them assurances he would use them in an aggressive manner. If they had faith in him they would have given him more aid, but decided that if he would not use them they would be wasted anyway. More troops could have made a difference in the outcome of the campaign. Sherman

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<sup>56</sup> Stephen Davis Atlanta Will Fall (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2001), 43.



was limited by supply to how far he could maneuver from the railroad. If Johnston had enough troops to extend the front farther Sherman could not have made the many shallow envelopments that he did. He would have been forced to either attack head on, what Joe Johnston wanted, or he would have to maneuver away from his supply base on the railroad. This would risk a battle in which, if he lost, Sherman could lose enough men to halt the campaign. Ironically, this was within reach of the Confederates. This strategy was defensive in nature and would have allowed Johnston to stand behind entrenchments until the time he chose to maneuver.

Davis was also at fault for a communications failure. Earlier in the war Johnston had briefed him on his future moves and Davis had made a political speech in which he laid out the plans to the news media. They in turn published it, the Federals read the paper, and made tactical adjustments. Thus, Johnston did have good reason not to trust secrets with the government. Yet these were the very people to whom he depended on resources to fight a successful campaign.

Lee, who worked well with the same government, solved the problem by taking the initiative and insuring he had open and secure communications. At a minimum he proved that Davis could be trusted.

One outcome of the new dispersed warfare was that, even with the telegraph, commanders were forced to decentralize their operations, and thus many of the decisions, to lower echelons. Once again, the Federals were able to leverage this better than their Confederate enemy. Sherman trusted most of his subordinates completely. Indeed, James McPherson was a close personal friend. While Sherman might have thought Thomas a bit plodding, and slow to act, he felt no need to supervise him. When potential problems arose Sherman mitigated them by assigning missions according to personalities. For example, in maneuvering Johnston out of his initial position Sherman assigned the flanking mission through Snake Creek Gap to McPherson, the boldest of his Army commanders, even though the plan was Thomas' idea. To Thomas and Schofield he assigned the pinning mission that more complemented their personalities and capabilities.

Johnston never had the same faith in his commanders. He was more of a Napoleonic era commander, who preferred to fight concentrated and personally make all important decisions. In his defense, however, the case can be made that none of the subordinate Confederate commanders, Hood, Polk, Hardee or Wheeler had the brilliance that Lee depended on from Longstreet, Stuart and Jackson.

If Lee had not continually fine-tuned his organization he would have had the same problems. He, however, had over two years weeded out ineffectual leaders. Johnston had only a few months to restore coherency to his new command. In the case of Polk's Corps he had no time at all because they were fed into battle as soon as they arrived.<sup>57</sup> Thus, he was at the mercy of the organization Bragg had left him.

One significant organizational benefit that is usually overlooked is that Sherman's command consisted of armies, not just corps, as was the case for Johnston. Thus, he utilized organizations that, being larger had a more robust staff and support system. In the Confederate army Johnston sent orders to a corps for implementation. In Sherman's case he sent orders to an army. They, in turn sent it to a corps. At first glance this would seem detrimental, by adding an additional layer of beauraucracy. A closer look, however, shows that the resources at army level provided a more efficient outcome. For example, corps usually had no organic cavalry, which provided many enablers for independent operations. None of the Confederate corps had cavalry. It had to be coordinated at army level through Johnston. This took time that a campaign of maneuver precluded. The Federals continually stole marches on them and kept the initiative throughout the campaign. While the Federals did not give Cavalry to all their Army commanders, Sherman

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<sup>57</sup> It must be remembered, however, that Johnston had commanded this corps prior to Polk and he could have made changes then. If he were dissatisfied with the quality of the corps he had no one to blame but himself. Perhaps that is why he never criticized it even though it had serious shortcomings. Most historians blame its problems on Polk, a non-West Pointer, but Cohen and Gooch would argue otherwise.

made sure they had enough assets to act independently. In short, armies had the resources and staff expertise, whether cavalry, artillery or logistical, to solve problems more efficiently.

## Conclusion

The South did not have the ability to take the strategic offensive at any time during the war. What they attempted was a passive strategic defense, with a few attempts at active operations; Gettysburg, Antietam, Perryville and Washington. Of these, the thrust at Washington in 1864 could be considered only a faint, and thus no serious offensive attempt. The Antietam campaign occurred after a series of battles had seriously depleted the Army of Northern Virginia. Thus, only Gettysburg and Perryville had any chance of success. Of the two Perryville offered the best opportunity. A Southern victory at Gettysburg, while embarrassing for the North, would have left Lee unable to exploit a victory which in itself was bound to be expensive. The Army of the Potomac could have fallen behind impregnable Washington defenses to regroup. Lee, with this threat to both his rear and Richmond, would have been unable to exploit it and occupy parts of Pennsylvania and Maryland. His most likely course of action would have been to lay siege to Washington D.C., but the Federal Navy would have prevented its successful conclusion. In the west, however, by capturing most of Kentucky the Confederates would have gained valuable maneuver room and added depth to a battlefield that at the operational level could have been exploited by use of superior confederate cavalry.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Today this would be called Compound Fortified Warfare, in which regular and irregular forces work in conjunction. The regular forces keep the enemy from dispersing to crush the partisans, while the partisans inflict innumerable small defeats of them.

Virginia, which could be viewed as the frontier of the Confederacy, allowed effective defense at all three levels. Following this strategy Lee's army, rather than being strengthened for what was bound to be indecisive operations in Pennsylvania, should have been weakened by sending reinforcements, including key subordinates such as Jackson or Longstreet, to the west where maneuver room existed. There Confederate forces were seriously outnumbered and where the war was ultimately lost for the confederacy. This is what Confederate strategy should have been, an active strategic defense based on holding in Virginia and maneuvering in the west. What they tried to accomplish was exactly the opposite.

A significant point that is overlooked by historians is that Sherman and the Federal army made mistakes that could have cost them the war had they faced a more professional enemy. Once Hood, aggressive to a fault, took command from Johnston he maneuvered his three corps into a positional advantage numerous times. At Peachtree Creek, the Battle of Atlanta, and Ezra Church he moved the Army of Tennessee into what should have been decisive position. What saved Sherman was that this operational advantage was offset by strategic and tactical considerations. Strategically, the Confederates had so wasted resources, and allowed the Federals to keep the initiative for so long that they fought at a serious disadvantage. Tactically, veteran Federal infantry were able to stall Hood's attacks long enough for overwhelming reinforcements to reach the battlefield.

The Federal Army as a team had by the end of the war mastered the strategic and tactical levels. Sherman and Grant knew exactly how to win the war. A strategy of coordinated offensives against the Confederacy's remaining field armies in a war of attrition finally allowed them to wear down an enemy who was their tactical equal. What is missed is that they had only barely mastered the new operational level of war. Unlike what popular history teaches, Sherman and Grant should not be considered the equals of generals like Alexander or Napoleon. This is clearly seen in their performance at the operational level, and why study of the Civil War should be so important to U.S. military historians. The operational level of war, so important in U.S. doctrine

in the twenty-first century, did not even become doctrine until one hundred and twenty years after the Civil War. The railroad and telegraph gave them the ability to prepare for an upcoming campaign and coordinate it once it began. What they never mastered was finding an operational answer to the tactical stalemate on the battlefield. To say that they won simply because they used greater resources to grind down a vulnerable opponent should not be considered derogatory. The fact that they could not find an operational means to bring the war to culmination does not mean they were ineffectual. After all, they won the war in the end. But then, professional European soldiers, when faced with the same dilemma half a century later, used the same means to win an even bloodier war.

As the U.S. Army enters the twenty-first century it is struggling to transform itself and fight a multi-front war at the same time. One way in which modern military historians can find a study of the Civil War useful is to show how the same U.S. Army, as a learning organization, previously transformed itself while under fire. Edward Smith, in his article entitled Effects-Based Operations: Applying Network-Centric Warfare in Peace, Crisis and War, writes “[The] question is not: how do we use the new technologies to execute our current tactics and doctrine better? It is instead: how might the new technologies enable us to do things differently? This, indeed, is the essence of transformation.”<sup>59</sup>

The Federal Army utilized the railroad and telegraph to revolutionize how Americans fought at the Operational level. By changing the paradigm and leveraging its industrial advantage the Federals forced the Confederacy into a war it could not win. The Confederate forces could still win tactical victories, but these were no longer enough. As the Germans found out in both World Wars tactical victories are meaningless unless linked together into Operational and

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<sup>59</sup> Edward A. Smith, Effects-Based Operations: Applying Network-Centric Warfare in Peace, Crisis and War. CCRP Publications Distribution Ctr.; ISBN: 1893723089; (November 2002). Chapter 2, page 74.

Strategically decisive campaigns. The Transformation process, albeit over a number of years, provided the Federals with just such a linkage. After several years of war the South did not have the capacity to fight effectively at the Operational level of war even if it had commanders capable of thinking in such terms.

## APPENDIX A

The thesis of Atlanta Will Fall is that by the time Hood took command no one could have saved Atlanta, Johnston had so mismanaged the campaign. Hood just took the blame because he was in command when it happened. Yet, while Johnston bears much of the burden, so do Davis, Bragg and the entire Confederate team. Was it a forgone conclusion at the beginning of the campaign that Atlanta would fall?

The South had several options available at the beginning of the war that could have produced independence, or at least worked better than the strategy they choose. They even had opportunities during the early years of the war, but wasted them at places like Forts Donelson and Henry, Shiloh, Antietam, Perryville, Gettysburg and Vicksburg. In doing so they lost the initiative forever. The longer the war lasted there were fewer workable options available. By the Atlanta Campaign, however, the south had seriously reduced its choices and was not ready for the Campaign at any level.

The Confederacy was at a significant disadvantage from the start because it had to practice Coalition warfare. The Confederate government had to treat each state like a nearly autonomous power, and was almost totally dependent on them to provide the resources to build and maintain the army. We have already seen the effects of not having the states provide a better militia force.

Confederate commanders had a readily available manpower source in local slaves. Johnston utilized the services of 20,000 slaves throughout the campaign, but had to deal with each individual owner as an independent power. The main problem with coalitions is not that resources are unavailable, it is the amount of effort in coordinating assets and keeping everyone happy. The strain and additional pressure that this adds to the organization is significantly more than if a country acts unilaterally.

Davis, after seeing Johnston's mishandling of the Vicksburg Campaign should have realized Johnston was not the man for the job. A better option was for him to put aside his dislike of

P.G.T. Beauregard and assign him to command. He had just performed exceedingly well in defending Charleston against a combined naval and land thrust by greatly superior Federal forces. Or, against Lee's objections, he could have named James Longstreet to the command. A Georgian, he would be fighting on home ground and had been tutored by Lee himself for two years. At a minimum Davis should have assigned Nathan Bedford Forrest a role of increased responsibility in the campaign, rather than leave him in a secondary theater.

Davis did correctly identify the proper objective of retaking Tennessee. He deduced that the best way to win the war that late in the war was not to passively wait on the defensive. Harry Summers, in his book On Strategy describes how the United States lost the Vietnam War. In it he describes the violation of the principle of objective by not assuming an active role, even in defense.<sup>60</sup> Passive reaction to North Vietnamese initiatives allowed them to set the pace of operations. Even though we were on the strategic defense we wasted many opportunities by not being operationally aggressive. The same concept applied to the Atlanta Campaign. The South could have remained committed to its stated policy of strategic defense, which was geared toward gaining sympathy from foreign powers, yet still invade Tennessee. It would appear they were simply retaking territory lost in previous campaigns. The main point is the importance of linking Strategic goals to operational ways and means. Neither Davis, nor Johnston, made this linkage. One significant southern error was in not having individual states shoulder more of the defense burden. This would have required establishing a different policy well in advance, possibly from the beginning of the war. Georgia demonstrated how even a few regiments under state control could greatly aid the defense of the entire Confederacy. Using a small brigade of infantry and local cavalry Governor Joseph Brown rounded up several thousand deserters and draft jumpers and sent them back to the field armies. The units also suppressed criminal activity to the point



where Confederate commanders no longer sent regular troops in large numbers to guard supply lines. Had Davis aided governors, rather than continually feud with them over petty matters of authority, they could have provided significant aid. If Mississippi had a better armed, trained and equipped militia the Vicksburg Campaign would have been much more difficult for Grant to win. Raids, such as Grierson's, with only a few thousand men could have been handled by the state. More importantly, Pemberton could have retained his own cavalry, which could have prevented the blundering meeting engagements that cost him the campaign. It would have at least created more problems for Grant in securing his supply lines.

One need only study the correspondence of Joe Brown to see that the feud with Davis resulted in the purposeful exemption of tens of thousands of eligible men from the draft rolls. The central Confederate government had no realistic way to combat the governors, especially while at war, over enforcement of draft laws. Had the governors, especially Joe Brown, been more behind the government they could have made a significant contribution just by taking over defense ports, freeing thousands of reinforcements for the front.

Retaking middle Tennessee meant adopting one of two options. One was to defeat Sherman's army and push it back into Tennessee. After the war this is what Johnston said he intended, although throughout the campaign he continually wrote that it was impossible without overwhelming reinforcements. The second course would be to outmaneuver Sherman and move around him into Tennessee. This would require leaving sufficient force to defend Atlanta. Here is where a stronger militia would have been important. With 10-15,000 men in the trenches around Atlanta, and a comparable force of Alabama militia at Anniston, Sherman would have been unable to move forward. His success in living off the land in the March to the Sea was

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<sup>60</sup> Harry G. Summers, Jr., On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, 1982)

dependent on moving unopposed. Had he been forced to keep concentrated for fear of being attacked he would have given out of supplies.

Another oversight was that Davis never spelled out what to do beyond moving into Tennessee to retake it. An analysis of the state would show that retaking it all in one campaign was beyond his capability. Eastern Tennessee was largely unionist in sympathy and would take unavailable forces to garrison. Seizing middle Tennessee would have cut off the entire area around Knoxville anyway. A large-scale raid of division size would have been enough to disrupt Union political gains until they could be dealt with later.

It was also unfeasible to retake western Tennessee, around Memphis, because of the superiority of the Federal fleet. The same was true of Nashville, located in the northern portion of the state. But by retaking the middle portion of the state, up to around Murfreesboro, the Confederacy would gain a significant amount of maneuver room, and retake an area rich in men, horses and supplies. Also, it would move the lines back to where they had been a year and a half earlier, a significant boost to morale.

In summary, the South faced only two feasible courses of action. One, the most bold, yet most risky, was to seize the initiative and move around Sherman and into Tennessee while leaving a small holding force around Atlanta. This would require moving away from supply lines and living off the land for a time. Hood did this, in the same area, in the fall and winter under harsher conditions than would have been faced in the spring. It would also require the coordination and cooperation of other departments, such as Forrest in Mississippi. Finally, it would mean moving prior to Sherman. This meant moving in March, or April at the latest.

The second course of action would have been to defeat Sherman in northern Georgia and then counterattack into Tennessee. Johnston hoped to defeat Sherman in one huge battle in which Sherman blunted himself attacking strong field works. A more realistic method would have been to string several defensive stands together in a campaign of attrition. Sherman could replace some of his losses, but it would mean weakening his rear. The danger to this course of action was

the risk of giving Sherman the initiative. If he did something unexpected the campaign plan might have to be abandoned.

One strategic policy that would not have worked is dispersing the army and resorting to guerrilla war. Its proponents usually neglect to answer how they could fight a style of war that depended upon the support and good will of the populace. If only one percent of the slave population informed Federal authorities about Confederate operations they would doom them to failure. While many slaves would have remained either loyal or neutral there would undoubtedly be enough to compromise operations. In spite of this the Confederate government did not use irregular warfare enough.

Ironically, the precedent for expanded use of irregulars had occurred in the South. During the Revolution Francis Marion, Thomas Sumter and Andrew Pickens had fought a partisan war while Daniel Morgan and Nathaniel Green fought the conventional campaign. The combination of the two, today called compound fortified warfare, maximized the strengths of each while complimenting the weaknesses. The South, by allowing the nature of the war to be dictated by the Federals as predominantly conventional, played to Federal strength and permitted itself to fight the war at great disadvantage. Had it fought a compound fortified strategy the drain on the north would have greatly increased, and at a minimum would have created a significant drain on federal occupations of such cities as New Orleans. Irregulars could not have won the war on their own, but they could have greatly aided the field armies better than they did.

Johnston, as the operational level commander, had more on his side than he admitted. He had just over 70,000 troops facing around 110,000. This, while not 1:1 odds, could have been further leveraged by other resources. For example, Johnston had a qualitative advantage in cavalry but misused them by assigning them a primarily passive role. When he did use them they were effective. Had he paid more attention to the cavalry during his preparation of the campaign they could have been decisive. Had someone competent replaced Wheeler, or had Wheeler been better coached, the Confederate cavalry could have soundly defeated Sherman's cavalry early.

Sherman would then have to use his infantry for flank security and his intelligence and reconnaissance capabilities would be severely impaired.

In retrospect Sherman was not as transformational as many believe and was certainly vulnerable to a visionary opponent. His maneuvers were not the bold risk taking maneuvers that precursed a return to maneuver and a breaking of the defense. We must look to Grant, in the Overland Campaign, in Virginia for that. Grant truly used what we know today as distributive warfare. He coordinated the movement of Federal forces in the Shenandoah Valley and up the James River, as well as the Army of the Potomac's drive on Richmond and far ranging cavalry raids. He controlled these forces through the telegraph, and used the railroad to keep them resupplied and reinforced.

Sherman played it safer than historians admit. Sherman also lost a great opportunity by not adapting Grant's techniques against an opponent known to be overcautious. No one knows what Grant would have done had he been in command in the west, but we can make an educated guess. Using the Overland Campaign as a template, he would have ordered Thomas and the larger Army of the Cumberland to make a direct assault on Johnston at Dalton. Meanwhile McPherson and the Army of the Tennessee and Schofield's Army of the Ohio would have made a wide march to Rome, Georgia and then eastward to cut the railroad. Thomas would have been ordered to continue attacking to prevent Johnston's retreat. All the cavalry available in all three armies would then swing even farther to the south to cut the railroad just north of Atlanta and to prevent reinforcements from being sent to Johnston. This would have been a bloodier campaign because of the direct assaults on entrenchments but would probably have resulted in Johnston's destruction within the first few weeks and less bloody in the long run. Had Johnston evacuated in time he would probably have fallen all the way back to the Chattahoochee River in one movement, and still lost a significant portion of his army.

In the final analysis what value is there in studying the Atlanta Campaign, especially if neither Sherman nor Johnston made revolutionary changes to doctrine? The answer is in showing the

transformational nature of the Civil War and how the campaign highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the time. Sherman did a masterful job of preparing for the campaign. He laid the logistical groundwork better than any previous American commander, including Grant, ever did. The campaign actually started during the winter when Sherman began gathering supplies for a surplus, in case of emergency. He also fought the Meridian Campaign to help set the conditions for the main campaign later that summer. While Sherman and the Federals prepared Johnston and the Confederates waited passively and lost the campaign. No longer would war be fought solely in the warm months. War would now be fought unrelentingly year-round.

Faulty strategy on the part of the government and the resulting inability to coordinate activities across departmental boundaries hamstrung Johnston from the beginning. Clausewitz wrote: "It is an absurdity to maintain a strategic reserve that is not meant to contribute to the overall decision."<sup>61</sup> Davis would argue that the Confederacy could not afford a strategic reserve, but the result of keeping so many troops defending coastal ports amounted to the same thing. Most Confederate garrisons defending major ports such as Mobile, Wilmington, and Savannah did not see action until near the end of the war. By this time the Federal Navy had long since cut off any usefulness of these ports.

Even so it need not have been decisive. If properly handled Johnston had enough resources to keep Sherman at bay until the November elections, and in doing so inflict horrendous casualties on him. So, what was the Confederacy's failure? The answer is that, as Cohen and Gooch argue, the fault lies not with a single person, but with the whole organization.

What could the Confederates have done differently? First, an increased emphasis on irregulars, not only on immediately threatened fronts, but throughout occupied territory. Lee used John Singleton Mosby very effectively in Virginia. Had organizations such as his hand selected and

well disciplined partisan force been fielded all over occupied territory it would have made the Federal efforts much more difficult. They could not have ignored the hundreds of daily attacks on such vital facilities as the railroad and telegraph, both of which were vulnerable in the extreme.

When these units had set acceptable conditions strategic raids, such as those led by Nathan Bedford Forrest could move temporarily into an area and cause large-scale damage. At a minimum it would cause Sherman to send his already outclassed cavalry to deal with it. Had Forrest put sizable infantry forces across Sherman's lines of communication it would have been decisive. The weakening of Federal cavalry strength would have given Johnston's cavalry, if aggressively used, an advantage and made Sherman's maneuvers more predictable.

If Sherman could no longer turn Johnston's army he would have to fight a major battle, providing the Confederates the opportunity to mass troops from Mobile, Charleston and Mississippi, as at Chickamauga. They already had enough strength to fight at least one offensive battle. The question was when and where to do it.

Johnston had 10,000 reinforcements available within his own army. Hood culled through the army after he took command and replaced many soldiers, such as wagon drivers, with slaves. He further sent any soldier not absolutely necessary for administrative purposes back to combat units. In doing so he sent 10,000 soldiers back into the lines. This number of men alone could have provided the replacements for casualties from a major battle.

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<sup>61</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, On War. ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, New Jersey:

## APPENDIX B

One reason American officers were weak in Operational knowledge was that there were no significant military theoreticians to educate them. The U.S. Army had no Jomini or Clausewitz. The closest we had was an instructor at West Point named Dennis Hart Mahan, though he could be considered more important at the grand tactical level.<sup>62</sup>

As such he had the greatest theoretical impact on American Civil War tactics. As an instructor in the Art of War at West Point, where he taught nearly all the future senior commanders of both sides of the Civil War, he proposed that entrenchments would play a greater role than ever in American tactical thought:

The art of fortification, in its progress, has kept pace with the measures of the attack; its successive changes having been brought about by changes either in the arms used by the assailant or by some new mode of assault. The same causes must continue to produce the same effects. At no past period has mechanical invention, in it's bearing on the military art, been more active than at the present day.... The great destruction of life, in open assaults, by column exposed within so long a range, must give additional value to entrenched fields of battle: and we may again see fieldworks play the part they did in the defense of Sebastopol; and positions so chosen and fortified that not only will the assailant be forced to entrench himself to assail them, but corresponding changes in the defensive dispositions.<sup>63</sup>

Mahan's ideas were not widely used early in the war, nor was he given enough credit once his ideas were adopted later in the war. The case can be made that the failure of commanders to use Mahan's ideas is what led to costly and indecisive early battles, such as Antietam and Shiloh.

One possible reason Mahan was ignored was because of the amateurish nature of the early armies. It took time to properly train both the officers who made the battle plans, and the

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Princeton University Press, 1976), 210-11.

<sup>62</sup> He was also the father of Alfred Thayer Mahan, probably the best American military theoretician prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

<sup>63</sup> Edward Hagerman, The American Civil War and The Origins of Modern Warfare (Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1988), 25.

soldiers who fought the battle by those plans. Had the early war been fought largely on the defense, casualties would have been lower. Unfortunately, most commanders of the time followed Baron Antoine Henri Jomini's offensive theory: "A general who waits for the enemy like an automaton without taking any other part than that of fighting valiantly, will always succumb when he shall be well attacked."<sup>64</sup>

Mahan taught that under most circumstances armies should entrench immediately upon contact with the enemy's main force. He wrote: "The chief objective of entrenchments is to enable the assailed to meet the enemy with success, by first compelling him to approach under every disadvantage of position, and then when he has been cut up, to assume the offensive, and drive him back at the point of a bayonet."<sup>65</sup>

Though largely correct in his assumption, he felt that trenches could still be taken if the attack were pressed home. Mahan was not totally correct, but he came closer than most in predicting the nature of future warfare. His greatest fault was that he still believed in bayonet assaults. Against well dug in riflemen this usually led to disaster.

Another of Mahan's theories was that poorly trained militia, behind trenches, could be the defensive equal of regulars. Mahan even believed that American militia, behind trenches, were the equal of European regulars.<sup>66</sup> Further, he believed that state militia could do greater service behind trenches than anywhere else.<sup>67</sup> The added range of the rifle, over the musket, provided additional advantages to the defender. Subsequently, fewer militia had to be called out. Also, lines could be lengthened to spread out the enemy, making him susceptible to counterattack. Herein lay the strength of the system.

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<sup>64</sup> Grady McWhiney and Perry Jamieson, Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactic and the Southern Heritage (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 41.

<sup>65</sup> Hagerman, 9.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 24.



At the end of the war Mahan's ideas were still not universally accepted. Some generals, like John Bell Hood, believed that fighting from entrenchments destroyed the soldiers' aggressive spirit. After the war Hood wrote: "A soldier cannot fight for a period of one or two months constantly behind breastworks... and then be expected to engage in pitched battle and prove as intrepid and impetuous as his brother who has been taught to rely solely upon his own valor."<sup>68</sup>

It is possible that the failure of entrenchments in the Mexican War to stop American charges had resulted in contempt for them by veterans of that war. This view is complicated by the fact that some of the most successful commanders in the Civil War were not combat veterans of the Mexican War. Sherman is the best example of this group. He recognized early that massed attacks of columns, such as those carried out successfully in Mexico, simply would not work against troops equipped with rifles. Nevertheless, generals like Sherman were in the minority during the early years of the war, and entrenchment was seen as a detriment to offensive spirit.

The soldiers themselves initially harbored a great dislike for digging trenches. In their enthusiasm to fight, they objected to doing manual labor. At first Manassas, in July of 1861, General Pierre Beauregard's army almost mutinied when he entrenched it. His soldiers complained that the nature of the work was undignified. In the end Beauregard was forced to use slave labor from local plantations to finish the work.<sup>69</sup> It is ironic that the soldiers were objecting to something that not only could save their lives, but that they would gladly do if they were still alive in 1864.

Though Mahan's ideas provided a starting point from which commanders educated at West Point could add lessons of their own they did not prepare them for the realities of what war had become. This lack of intellectual rigor prior to the war proved costly once the war began and

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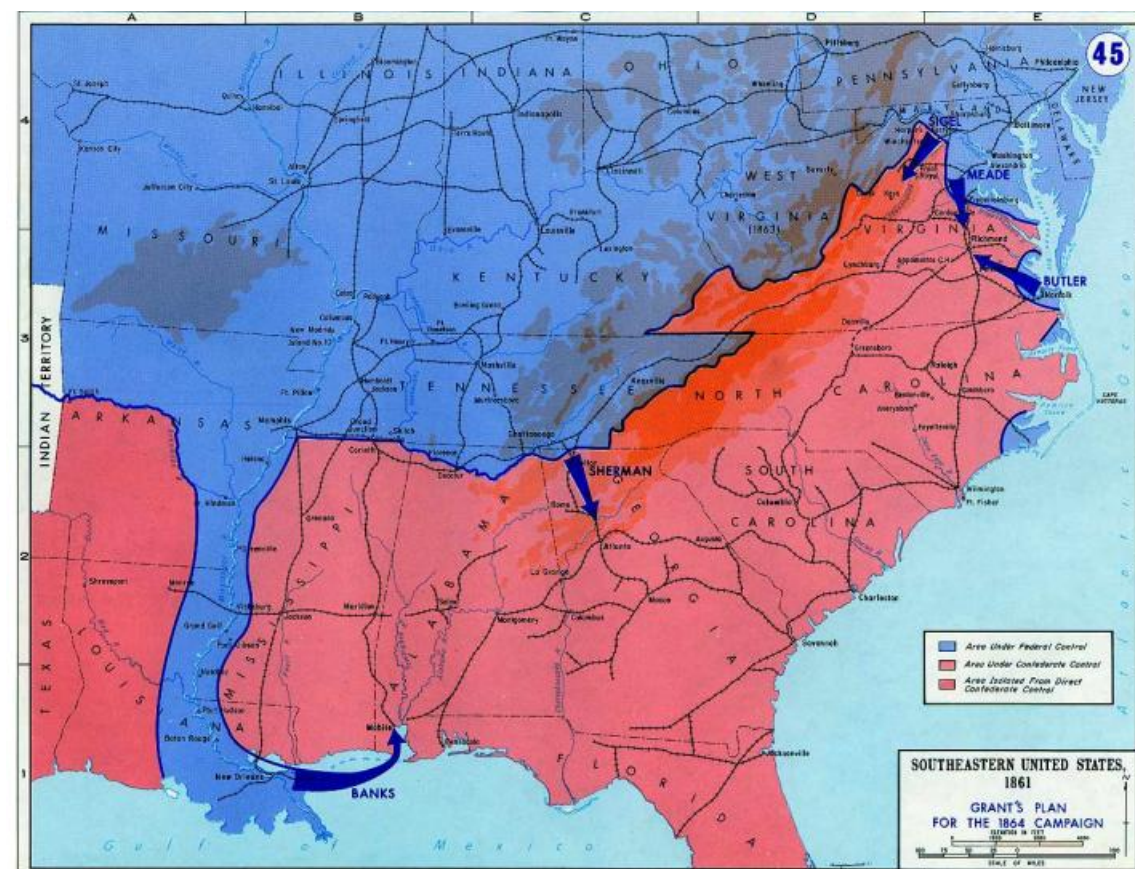
<sup>68</sup> McWhiney, 164.

could only be balanced out by several years' harsh experience in the field. It is a tribute to those Civil War commanders, usually Federal, who learned those lessons and successfully applied them to the Operational level.

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<sup>69</sup> Hagerman, 106.

## APPENDIX C



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<sup>70</sup> Thomas E. Griess, ed., Atlas for the American Civil War, (Avery Publishing Group Inc.: Wayne, New Jersey, 1986), Map 45.

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