

TVCWRT Civil War Tutorial, Part VI: The Military Situation in 1864, by Edwin Kennedy

1863 proved to be a pivotal year in the war. Two of the largest battles fought on the American continent ended with huge losses, one a Union victory, one a Confederate victory. The war not ending soon.

The tempo of the war was increasing and the Confederates were on the strategic defensive after the disasters incurred at Gettysburg and Vicksburg the first week of July 1863. Despite their incredible tactical victory at Chickamauga on 20 September 1863, the Confederates were unable to translate it into an operational-level victory affecting the strategic outcome. Most Confederate leaders realized this. Noted historian, Philip Leigh writes that:

“In his January 1864 ‘Memorial’ urging that the Confederacy enlist blacks as soldiers, Major General Patrick Cleburne wrote: ‘If present conditions continue we must be subjugated. Every man should endeavor to understand the meaning of subjugation before it is too late. It means that the history of this heroic struggle will be written by the enemy; that our youth will be trained by Northern school teachers; will learn from Northern school books their version of the war; will be impressed by all the influences of history and education to regard our gallant dead as traitors, our maimed veterans as fit objects for derision.’”

Cleburne realized that the desperate situation called for politically unpalatable actions if the Confederacy were to survive. The politicians did not see it that way.....at least for another year when the collapse was imminent. Cleburne received censure and was ordered to drop the issue of officially enlisting black soldiers. The reality was that thousands of black Confederate soldiers were already serving *unofficially* but his idea was to grant immediate freedom to those who would enlist in officially sanctioned units. He died on the battlefield at Franklin on 29 November 1864 without seeing the end of the war. His idea was adopted but way-too-late to be of use and less than a battalion of “officially enlisted” black soldiers marched through Richmond in March 1865.

The military situation for the Confederates was desperate. The Union Army was emboldened by their victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg. Having suppressed the draft riots in New York City, the Army of the Potomac was able to launch its campaigns anew. With General Grant now running the operations of the entire Union Army, the strategic direction of the Federals took a very different turn. Finally, the Federals would be working in conjunction at the strategic level to coordinate the efforts of the armies to work together. The “vision” and strategic direction would make a profound impact on military operations. What cannot be underestimated is the profound effect the election of 1864 would make on the Federal’s side. Political implications would influence military decisions.

Along the southeastern seaboard, the Federals attempted to break-out of their bases on the coast. At the same time, the Confederates were trying to find a new way to break the blockade. On 17 February, for the first time in history, a submarine attacked and sank an enemy warship when the H.L. Hunley sank the USS Housatonic off of Charleston harbor. This feat was not repeated for another 50 years when the German’s U-9 sank three British warships in one hour. Because the Hunley was also lost, the Confederates did not follow-up on the submarine concept. The loss of the Housatonic caused temporary panic among the Federal blockading forces but they quickly settled back into normal operations when no other submarines were reported.

The lack of a viable navy did not stop the Confederates from fielding commerce raiders such as the CSS Alabama. Launched in Liverpool in 1862, the Alabama did considerable damage to the finances of the U.S. government. Millions of dollars were lost, shipping disrupted and insurance rates skyrocketed. In 534 days of cruising, never touching a Confederate port, the Alabama captured or burned 65 Union merchant ships without a loss of life to her crew or any of the 2,000 prisoners.

In Jacksonville, Florida, the Federals attempted to cut-off the resources such as beef production, by marching across northern Florida. This movement would potentially coincide with Sherman's move towards Atlanta. Maj Gen Quincy Gilmore, commander of Union forces in Jacksonville, outlined his objectives:

"First: To procure an outlet for cotton, lumber, Timber, Turpentine, and the other products of the State. Second: To cut off one of the enemy's sources of commissary supplies. He now draws largely upon the herds of Florida for his beef... Third: To obtain recruits for my colored regiments...."

Brig Gen Truman Seymour, District of Florida commander, marched on 19 February while the weather was still temperate. With two infantry brigades of white troops and one brigade of black troops (the U.S Army was segregated officially from 1863 through 1948), Seymour moved to reach the Suwanee River and cut the rail lines. On 20 February, Seymour met the Confederates at Pond Spring (Oulustee) where the Federals were dealt a resounding defeat. Seymour was widely criticized for failing to coordinate his actions with other operational commanders such as Admiral Farragut in the Gulf of Mexico.

During March, Lt Gen Grant worked on his still famous order, studied today in military schools, to synchronize the actions of his different field armies. It was published in April.

HEADQUARTERS ARMIES OF THE UNITED STATES,

WASHINGTON, D. C., *April 4, 1864.*

MAJOR-GENERAL W. T. SHERMAN,

Commanding Military Division of the Mississippi.

General: — It is my design, if the enemy keep quiet and allow me to take the initiative in the spring campaign, to work all parts of the army together, and somewhat towards a common centre. For your information I now write you my program, as at present determined upon.

I have sent orders to Banks, by private messenger, to finish up his present expedition against Shreveport with all dispatch; to turn over the defense of Red River to General Steele and the navy, and to return your troops to you and his own to New Orleans; to abandon all of Texas, except the Rio Grande, and to hold that with not to exceed four thousand men; to reduce the number of troops on the Mississippi to the lowest number necessary to hold it, and to collect from his command not less than twenty-five thousand men. To this I will add five thousand men from Missouri. With this force he is to commence operations against Mobile as soon as he can. It will be impossible for him to commence too early.

Gillmore joins Butler with ten thousand men, and the two operate against Richmond from the south side of the James River. This will give Butler thirty-three thousand men to operate with, W. F. Smith commanding the right wing of his forces and Gillmore the left wing. I will

stay with the Army of the Potomac, increased by Burnside's corps of not less than twenty-five thousand effective men, and operate directly against Lee's army, wherever it may be found.

Sigel collects all his available force in two columns, one, under Ord and Averell, to start from Beverly, Virginia, and the other, under Crook, to start from Charleston on the Kanawha, to move against the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad.

Crook will have all cavalry, and will endeavor to get in about Saltville, and move east from there to join Ord. His force will be all cavalry, while Ord will have from ten to twelve thousand men of all arms.

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.

I do not propose to lay down for you a plan of campaign, but simply lay down the work it is desirable to have done and leave you free to execute it in your own way. Submit to me, however, as early as you can, your plan of operations.

As stated, Banks is ordered to commence operations as soon as he can. Gillmore is ordered to report at Fortress Monroe by the 18th inst., or as soon thereafter as practicable. Sigel is concentrating now. None will move from their places of rendezvous until I direct, except Banks. I want to be ready to move by the 25th inst., if possible. But all I can now direct is that you get ready as soon as possible. I know you will have difficulties to encounter in getting through the mountains to where supplies are abundant, but I believe you will accomplish it.

From the expedition from the Department of West Virginia I do not calculate on very great results; but it is the only way I can take troops from there. With the long line of railroad Sigel has to protect, he can spare no troops except to move directly to his front. In this way he must get through to inflict great damage on the enemy, or the enemy must detach from one of his armies a large force to prevent it. In other words, if Sigel can't skin himself he can hold a leg while someone else skins.

I am, general, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
U. S. GRANT,
Lieutenant-General.

In Louisiana, Confederate forces under General Richard Taylor had their hands full as Federals attempted to move upstate along the Red River. On 8 April, Union General Banks was defeated by the Confederate force under Taylor. On the 9th, Taylor attempted to capitalize on his win but was turned-back. Banks decided to withdraw anyway when his supporting force failed to appear.

While the Union Louisiana campaign was occurring, Maj Gen N.B. Forrest was moving back through Tennessee on his raid into Kentucky. With the people in western Tennessee complaining of Union Army depredations, Forrest decided to address the root of the problem. Fort Pillow was involved in illegal cotton speculation and a base for Union troops committing war crimes against the inhabitants of the region. Splitting his force with part making a demonstration towards Memphis, he attacked and captured Ft. Pillow on 12 April. The action has been marred by controversy since. Some of the Confederate troops committed their own war crimes by murdering black troop prisoners

in a convoluted and complex action. Forrest never ordered the murder of any of the garrison troops and stopped them when he became aware. Of note, subsequent Union Army and US Congressional investigations failed to find him culpable of ordering any murders. However, the illegal actions of a few of his soldiers, likely committed out of revenge, caused false allegations against him and stained an otherwise outstanding war record.

Naval actions primarily centered around actions on the Eastern seaboard but occurred all the way to Mexico in the Gulf. In June alone, there were over 35 actions, mainly involving coastal naval actions. The Confederate Navy, for all intents and purposes, was restricted to the coastal waterways and that is where the US Navy had to operate to counter any threats. Shallow draft ironclads, timber-clads, and tin-clads operated in this environment.

The Confederates were unable to directly challenge Union naval power and so their navy resorted to building inter-coastal and river craft. In 1864, the Confederates controlled many of the upper river, inland water-ways with shore batteries. This kept the Union Navy along the coast. In 1863, the ironclad CSS Albemarle's keel was laid and on 19 April 1864, she sortied into Union-held Plymouth to attack the Federal fleet. The gunboat USS Southfield was rammed and sunk while the USS Miami was driven away. The Union Navy returned in two weeks to unsuccessfully engage the Albemarle and recapture Plymouth. The Albemarle was a major threat to the Union Navy operating in the Albemarle Sound as long as it remained.

General Grant, now operating in the Eastern Theater of Virginia had a chance to exercise his particular style of command. The month of May signaled the beginning of what became known as the "Overland Campaign". At the Battle of the Wilderness, Grant tried to present the Confederates with multiple threats on different axes of advance. His aim was to destroy the Army of Northern Virginia and if it did not come in decisive battle, he would grind it down through attrition. Although considered a draw of sorts, Grant lost a substantially larger number of troops at the Wilderness. Completely unlike his predecessors, he did not withdraw to reconstitute but went on the offensive again to outflank Lee's army. The northern press coined the phrase describing Grant: "The Butcher" due to the huge number of casualties.

On 11 May 1864 a massive cavalry battle occurred at Yellow Tavern, Virginia. A 10,000 strong cavalry force under General Sheridan attacked General Jeb Stuart six miles north of Richmond. Stuart's cavalry was dealt a huge blow and Stuart was fatally wounded. This action was not just a blow to Stuart's prestige, it signaled the fact that Union cavalry was a very serious threat.

After shifting south from the Wilderness, Grant again attacked Lee at the battle of Spotsylvania on 10-12 May. Grant was unable to break through and Lee was forced to withdraw to another defensive line. Lee was being made aware that Grant brought a war of attrition to his theater which, as was later described by military historian, Russell Weigley as: "The American Way of War". Grant completely understood the relative strengths of the North vs the South, including the massive manpower differences. The Dix-Hill Cartel regarding POW "exchanges" was officially terminated in 1863, however, regional commanders continued to exchange into 1864. Grant put an end to the unofficial exchanges realizing that the South could not sustain the losses that the Union could due to the massive disparity in populations. While overwhelming manpower reality became an issue denigrated by those who claimed it was not a problem ---- as cited in the "Lost Cause" ---- it was explicitly recognized by Grant as a real issue that he could leverage against the Confederate Army. The North did have a substantially

greater population and it could be used to Grant's advantage. Attrition warfare, therefore, became an American "norm" and Grant practiced it.

General Bragg's constant retreating garnered the attention of President Davis who had seen the command dysfunction in the Army of Tennessee, yet tolerated it due to his friendship with Bragg. Bragg finally requested relief and Davis scrambled to find a suitable replacement. One of the most respected Confederate generals, General Joseph E. Johnston took command and effected a victory at the Battle of Resaca in northern Georgia on 14 May. Sherman's ability to sustain his losses and move on the rail lines gave him options to out-manuever Johnston who had to withdraw again to maintain his line of communication to Atlanta.

Grant's strategic-level plans to keep pressure on the Confederates resulted in another push down the Shenandoah Valley and the Battle of New Market occurred on 15 May with the cadets of VMI making a substantial contribution although General Breckinridge hesitated to use them. The Union forces withdrew thwarting Grant's plan to conduct an operational link-up with his forces in western Virginia with those attacking Richmond. Along with General Butler's rebuff at Drewry's bluff on 16 May, the Union forces were stymied in a breakthrough attempt to get between Petersburg and Richmond.

Grant was undeterred on the week from 20-26 May the Union forces continued on the offense that ended in a draw the North Anna River. Grant now was on the strategic offense and it was less than a year before the war would end although they did not know it at the time. Grant's perseverance would pay dividends although at a very high cost. Attrition warfare has a downside. It affects both sides and Union casualty rolls began to increase exponentially. Grant banked on the fact that with greater resources, he could win just by not quitting and accepting the casualties. It seemed to be working.

In the Western Theater, Sherman continued to march on the rail lines to Atlanta. With a sizeable force able to both fix the Confederates on his front, he was also able to throw his other corps around the flanks of Johnston's defenders who tried to trade space for time ---- a policy inimical to that of Jefferson Davis who saw what the effects of the Union strategy was in dividing the Confederacy and defeating it in detail. In late May, Sherman attacked the Confederate defenses at New Hope Church. It was not a decisive battle but again, forced the Confederates to displace ---- with more losses. Sherman's advance now appeared to be inevitable and Confederate strength was dwindling to the point that successful offensive action was impossible. The best Johnston could hope for was to delay and cause the Union more casualties than they might bear.

Similarly, it was not postwar Southern mythology that attributed defeat in the war to overwhelming resources, it was Grant himself. Three months after Appomattox, Grant wrote War Secretary Stanton: "The resources of the enemy, and his numerical strength, were far inferior to ours. . . I therefore determined . . . to hammer continuously against the armed force of the enemy and his resources, until by mere attrition, if in no other way, there should be nothing left to him but . . . submission. . ." Philip Leigh, Historian In Virginia Grant again attacked. His operational plan was to wear Lee's army down by constantly seeking an open flank but also attacking denying Lee an ability to maneuver. At Cold Harbor on 31 May to 3 June, Grant smashed his forces against Lee's defenses but failed to break Lee's lines.

Early in the morning of 3 June, Confederate Navy officers, Lieutenant Pelot and Pilot Moses Dallas were killed in the attack on the USS Waterwitch near Savannah. Overpowering the crew, the Confederates successfully captured the Waterwitch but Pelot and Dallas were casualties. Dallas, a black Confederate officer, was buried at the cost of \$80 paid by the Confederate government. Unable to move the Waterwitch due

to Union Navy ships in the nearby sound, the Confederates burned the ship. [Note: Until about 2012, a full-scale model of the Waterwitch was located on the grounds of the Civil War Naval Museum in Columbus, Georgia. The wood eventually rotted and the model was removed.]

In June, Maj Gen Franz Sigel was relieved of command after his embarrassing loss at New Market to Confederate forces. His replacement was a much more competent commander and Maj Gen David Hunter, following Grant's orders, again moved down the Shenandoah. Confederate forces were spread thin and constantly shifting and reallocating due to multiple threats, all part of Grant's plans. The Valley was largely undefended when Hunter moved again at the Battle of Piedmont, won a victory over the Confederates who moved out of their defenses to attack the Federals. Hunter largely had unrestricted access to the valley and in retribution for the cadets' participation at New Market, burned VMI and surrounding civilian facilities.

In northern Mississippi, Federal forces in Memphis and Vicksburg moved into the interior of the state to cut rail lines and interdict supplies to the Confederates. Sherman was extremely concerned that his lines would be interdicted from north Georgia back to Nashville. Cavalry raids against the rail lines, a favorite tactic used by both sides, could significantly impact his timeline and offensive towards Atlanta. For this reason, he ordered Maj Gen Samuel Sturgis to go after Maj Gen Nathan Forrest to "fix" (hold him in-place) and defeat his nemesis. Leading a force that outnumbered Forrest's command more than two-to-one, Sturgis moved from Tennessee into north Mississippi. However, Forrest surprised Sturgis at Brice's Crossroad on 10 June. Forrest not only defeated Sturgis' force but attempted to destroy it in a vigorous pursuit, chasing it back to Tennessee in another resounding defeat for Union forces.

On 11 June the CSS Alabama put in to Cherbourg for repairs and provisions. US naval forces were immediately notified and the USS Kearsarge raced to meet the Alabama. The ship's captain, Captain Raphael Semmes wrote:

"We have cruised from the day of commission, August 24, 1862, to June 11, 1864, and during this time have visited two-thirds of the globe, experiencing all vicissitudes of climate and hardships attending constant cruising. We have had from first to last two hundred and thirteen officers and men on our payroll, and have lost not one by disease, and but one by accidental death."

On 19 June the Alabama sallied forth to engage the Kearsarge lying off the mouth of the harbor at Cherbourg. In a little over an hour, the Alabama, outgunned and out-armed, was sinking. The battle win was an enormous morale boost for the Federals. Maj Gen Philip Sheridan's cavalry corps was detached from Grant's army with the intention of linking with Hunter's Valley forces. On 11-12 June at Trevilian Junction, Virginia, the bloodiest cavalry battle of the war was fought against Maj Gen Wade Hampton's cavalry. Considered a draw, it was an indication that the Federals posed a very serious threat to the interior of Virginia. Sheridan's raid withdrew but it cause great consternation to the Confederates.

By 15-18 June Grant had moved to threaten Richmond directly. Attacking at Petersburg, Grant again failed to break Lee's defenses. Both sides settled into a siege --- lasting until April 1865, with Lee fixed in position and unable to maneuver; and Grant fixated on taking Richmond but unable to get around the Confederate flanks. Back in the valley, Hunter was determined to engage the Confederates in the offense. His lines of communications were constantly being cut and interdicted by both Southern

guerillas and Partisan Rangers causing him to both protect his lines with troops and attempt to stockpile supplies for offensive actions, neither of which he could do well with constant interruptions.

In mid-June Hunter crossed the Blue Ridge mountains and attacked the outnumbered Confederates under Maj Gen Jubal Early. Early requested reinforcements and using the rail network, received them faster than Hunter's troops could move on him. On 17 June, Early was pushed back to the town of Lynchburg and hasty defenses. Confederate reinforcements began to arrive and Hunter hesitated, shelling the town instead, conducting probing attacks on the 18th. On the 19th, Early attacked Hunter who had begun to withdraw. A pursuit lasted until 21 June when Early called it off. With Hunter retreating to West Virginia, Early began his invasion of the north, heading to Washington, D.C.

Sherman's inexorable advance continued. Severely outnumbered, Johnston had no real options but to defend. At Kennesaw Mountain, along the rail line to Atlanta, the Confederates established a defense based on strong positions along the base of the mountain with a trench line tied to the terrain. On 27 June Sherman attacked but failed to break the defenses and suffering huge losses. Again, Sherman out-maneuvered the Confederates by bypassing the flanks and causing Johnston to relinquish his strong defenses. The road to Atlanta, 30 miles distant, was open as no other significant terrain features supported the Confederate defenses.

In Virginia, a stalemate of sorts ensued with both armies entrenched. Although Federal attacks would occur, they would be held on the Petersburg lines until 1865. On 9 July 1864 General Early's Army of the Shenandoah Valley consisting of 15,000 troops defeated a scratch Union force north of the Potomac at the Monocacy River, Maryland and headed towards Washington, panicking the capitol. Reaching the outskirts of the US capitol on 11 July, Early's arrival cause Grant to hastily redeploy a large force to defend it.

Again, determined to defeat Forrest, Federals moved on two axes of advance to join in Meridian, Mississippi. One force would move from Tennessee in the north, the other from Vicksburg in the west. On 14 July at Tupelo, Mississippi, a force of 14,000 Union soldiers defeated a Confederate force half their size. Forrest was wounded again. Forrest was fixed in Mississippi while Sherman moved on Atlanta with his supply lines secured. At this very inopportune time, President Davis unwisely relieved General Johnston and replaced him with General Hood on 17 July.

On 20 July, Hood attempted to attack the Union forces in piecemeal before they could cross Peachtree Creek, just north of Atlanta at the time. Roughly equivalent in numbers, this attack was the first of two attempts to defeat Sherman's army. Hood's offensive dispositions could not compensate for poor planning and coordination, nor the lack of necessary numbers to insure success (a force ration of 3:1 is generally required to insure a 50% chance of success). Lacking good intelligence on the dispositions and strengths of Sherman's corps, Lt Gen Hardee was sent into Maj Gen Dodge's corps unexpectedly sited behind Maj Gen McPherson's corps where it was thought no one was located. Instead of getting into the rear of the Union lines, Hardee brought on a day-long battle. The Confederates suffered 2,500 casualties to 1,900 on the Union side. On 22 July, the Battles of Atlanta further weakened the Confederates causing them to abandon Atlanta to Sherman. The Confederates lost 8,000 casualties to the Union's 3,722. These were losses Hood could ill-afford as they could not be replaced.

Although they were working in concert at the operational / strategic level, Union forces could not synchronize as well as they should have. Losing another battle on 23 July at

Kernstown, Virginia in the Valley, the Union Army withdrew over the Potomac. While it was a loss, it kept Confederate forces separated and occupied.

Sherman's attack on Atlanta shifted forces to his right wing and at Ezra Church on 28 July, just to the west of Atlanta. It was a victory that sealed the capture of the city and withdrawal of Hood's army. The Confederates lost not just a moral issue but the major supply center for their army. All they could do is just try and survive as Sherman prepared to launch towards Savannah.

In Virginia, disaster struck when Grant tried to mine underneath the Confederate lines. Senior leaders failed; the carefully thought-out plan went wildly awry and the Union forces faced a self-made disaster at the Battle of the Crater on 30 July. Potentially an excellent idea, it suffered from a number of failings and the Confederate line held with Union forces suffering tremendous losses.

In Mobile Bay, the Union Navy attempted to capture the port and surrounding fortifications. From 3-5 August, the Union Navy neutralized the Confederate fleet and the port was closed to the Confederacy. It set the stage for further land battles.

In order to try and shift Union forces away from Georgia and relieve pressure on Confederate forces in the East, a raid was envisioned for the Trans-Mississippi into Missouri which had been relatively quiet since the huge counter-reaction to the Lawrence raid the previous August. After forcing Quantrill back into Texas, the irregular warfare actions simmered, breaking into sporadic violence but not as bad as the first two years of the war. On 29 August, Confederate Maj Gen Sterling Price, Mexican War hero and former Missouri governor, set-out from northern Arkansas into Missouri with a goal of reaching the US arsenal at Fort Leavenworth. Leading three cavalry divisions, Price struck fear into the Federals in Missouri as he aimed at St Louis and then changed direction to march across the state to Westport (Kansas City).

Sherman's Georgia campaign resumed in August and on the 30th, he engaged Confederate corps under Generals Lee and Hardee attempting to protect the rail line to Macon. On 1 September, Hood evacuated Atlanta and on 2 September General Sherman's army finally entered Atlanta. This event was a morale boost to the Union cause and certainly helped Lincoln in his bid to win reelection against McClellan's peace faction. In an attempt to draw Union forces away from their new base in Atlanta, Hood moved around the city to threaten Sherman's line of communication to Nashville through Chattanooga. Sherman at first took the bait and pursued Hood north, then west into Alabama. However, he quickly returned to his objective of Atlanta.

Sherman was ordered to detach a division of infantry to move to St Louis to help counter Price's raid and he assigned Maj Gen A.J. Smith who embarked his division on trains and steamboats to rush to St Louis. When Price was deterred from attacking St Louis and turned west along the Missouri River, Smith's division, set out in pursuit.

General Sheridan was given orders to devastate the Shenandoah Valley and with his cavalry corps, went to work with a vengeance. Learning that General Early's Confederate forces were weakened with losses, Sheridan attacked on 19 September and at the Battle of Winchester inflicted further losses totaling a quarter of Early's army. Following-up, Sheridan again forced Early to retreat sixty miles after the Battle of Fisher's Hill, Virginia. The loss of the Shenandoah Valley severely hurt the Confederate's ability to sustain its armies in the field. It closed the avenue of approach for Confederate approaches to the north, bottling the Army of Northern Virginia in central Virginia.

On 19 October, Early successfully surprised the Union Army troops but his army lost its disciplined cohesion, pillaging for supplies while Sheridan returned from Washington to organize his forces then inflicting a defeat that effectively destroyed Early's forces.

On 21 to 23 October Lt Gen Price was turned away from Kansas City at the Battle of Westport. He broke contact and raced south as A.J. Smith's division reached Warrensburg, Missouri by rail to east and just behind Price. Smith began a forced march to reach Price. On 25 October, Lt Gen Price's raid culminated at Mine Creek, Kansas where Maj Gen Pleasanton's Provisional Cavalry Division caught Price in the process of crossing Mine Creek. In the largest cavalry battle of the war west of the Mississippi, Pleasanton defeated Price who was sent retreating towards Arkansas and Texas. One of the largest war crimes of the war occurred at Mine Creek where as many as 200 Confederate prisoners were murdered in cold blood.

The US Navy was still held at bay at Albemarle Sound and Plymouth, North Carolina by the threat of the ironclad, CSS Albemarle. Instead of trying to engage the CSS Albemarle in an ironclad "slugfest", LT William B. Cushing volunteered to lead a small boat raid to destroy the ship. On 27 October, Cushing led a force of 15 men in two small boats upriver to reach the Albemarle at its wharf. Using a spar torpedo, Cushing sank the Albemarle leading to the elimination of the threat and the recapture of Plymouth.

After organizing and supplying his army, Sherman marched out of Atlanta on 15 November, leaving Hood behind in Alabama. Hood, perpetually wanting to go on the offensive, aimed towards Nashville to strike Sherman's base of support. Unaware that Sherman was leaving his supply lines of communication, Hood hoped to bring Sherman to a grinding halt by cutting his logistical lines emanating from Nashville. Hood marched along the south bank of the Tennessee River to cross at The Shoals in northwestern Alabama, to the north side of the Tennessee River. His movement caused Union forces to the north side of the river over to Huntsville to evacuate back to Nashville. On 29 November, at Spring Hill, Maj Gen Schofield slipped past the Confederates due to poor command and control by Hood. What should have been a massive win for Hood, turned into an embarrassing disaster at Spring Hill, Tennessee when the Federals slipped by the Confederates who camped only hundreds of yards away. The next day, 30 November, Hood inexplicably bashed his army using unimaginative frontal attack tactics against Schofield's prepared defenses at Franklin. Hood's frontal attack with almost no artillery support was an unmitigated disaster and ruined the Army of Tennessee that suffered tremendous losses to its leadership. Schofield withdrew during the night to march to Nashville unimpeded.

Following the Union forces to Nashville, Bragg entrenched south of the city hoping that he could do to the Union forces what was done to him at Franklin. It didn't work that way and in two days of fighting, outnumbered by three to one odds, Hood lost at Nashville. On the evening of the second day of battle in extremely adverse weather, Hood began a hasty retreat to the Tennessee River. The 40,000 Confederate army eventually returned to Mississippi with less than 20,000 men left. Hood resigned and the army sent troops that were left to Mobile and the rest to North Carolina. The Army of Tennessee was destroyed.

By the end of 1864, Union naval blockade was strangling the Confederacy. The price of goods was skyrocketing due to a shortage of commercial goods run by blockade runners. Little military materiel was making it to Southern ports. The only viable port still open was Wilmington, making it a logical Federal target.

Confederate raiders CSS Chickamauga and Tallahassee were able to slip out of the port and captured or destroyed 40 Northern ships in a period of three months. The Union Army, conducting joint operations with the Navy, attempted to capture Fort Fisher on the Cape Fear River in order to move inland and attack the Confederate defenses from the inland side. On 24 December, a badly coordinated naval bombardment alerted the Confederates to a joint landing and attack at Fort Fisher. An

explosives ship failed to reach the fort and blew-up harmlessly. Union forces would depart and return in a matter of weeks with a different outcome.

1864 was a very busy and active year but is was a terrible one for the Confederates as their war-making resources decreased, their military strength was attrited, and the possibility of a political win evaporated. By the end of 1864, total, un-negotiated surrender was looming as the only logical prospect remaining and it would take another five months of suffering on both sides.