

TVCWRT Civil War Tutorial, Part VII; Combat Ends, 1865;
Military Operations,
by Ed Kennedy

1864 was the year that made the inertia of events clearly in favor of the Union. The overwhelming manpower, the industrial base, and the cascade of victories wore the Confederacy down. It was, as noted historians like Russell Weigley claimed, the effects of the modern industrialized might and attrition taking its toll on agrarian society that could not compete.

By the fall of 1864, disaster after disaster befell the Confederacy. MajGen Sterling Price's raid with a three division cavalry corps into Missouri and Kansas finished with his force defeated soundly during the battle of Mine Creek, Kansas and dispersed to Texas by December. It redeemed MajGen Rosecrans's reputation on the U.S.'s side. Hood's campaign to capture Nashville was a massive loss, essentially destroying the Army of Tennessee. It retreated and virtually dissolved in Mississippi. The Army of Northern Virginia was fixed in fortifications in Petersburg in a seemingly unending siege. On the seas, the blockade had virtually cut all meaningful commerce to the Confederacy.

The Union had solidified its control over the border states by emplacing pro-Northern politicians, suppressing pro-Southerners through extra-legal methods, and forcing all eligible males to enroll into pro-Union militias. In Missouri, several counties were depopulated and dwellings burned to prevent Partisan Rangers and guerillas from obtaining shelter and support. While this proved to be somewhat effective, it was illegal and non-discriminatory, causing greater resistance from the population. The bad feelings engendered by this treatment lasted for decades. The rampant irregular warfare was virtually over by the end of 1864. With Confederate Partisan Ranger units disbanded by the Confederate government in 1864, only guerillas, some with no particular allegiance to either side and resorting to outlawry, were hunted-down and almost totally eliminated or suppressed.

In the meantime, Savannah's capture by Sherman's army in December 1864 set the stage for the Carolinas campaign in 1865. In January 1865 the war's end was inevitable, but not over. The Confederates in the field were as determined as ever to fight for their freedom from Federal control. Politically, the Confederate search for overseas allies was over. While many in England and France were sympathetic to the Confederacy, they only responded with moral support and limited economic trade as permitted by the blockade. With much of its cotton producing base being captured and the means to move it under Union control, the means to trade for essential war items ground to a bare trickle for the Confederacy. Without the cash produced by cotton, the Confederate treasury lost its ability to generate revenue to purchase needed logistics from Europe. The armies in the field suffered accordingly.

The Union Army faced manpower problems resulting in the institution of the draft in 1863, a year after a draft instituted by the Confederates. The number of foreigners arriving in New York aided tremendously as did the recruitment of black soldiers. The recruiting of black soldiers provided a huge manpower influx to the Union Army resulting in more than one-in-ten men in U.S. uniforms at the end of the war being black. While black soldiers were segregated (many Northerners were anti-slave but not necessarily pro-black), they added a tremendous boost to the Union Army's manpower. Despite the racism in the Union Army, they persevered to earn a place in the post-war Regular Army for the first time in U.S. history. By 1865, black soldiers had developed a battlefield record that earned the respect of the Union military. *[NOTE: Unfortunately, paternalistic racism by the Union Army was maintained for decades after the war by its leaders like Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan who kept the Army segregated by race. This was undone by President Truman (ironically, Truman was a Southern soldier descendent and member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans) in 1948 by Executive Order 9981, which legally desegregated the military.]*

In the realm of field forces, the Confederates were physically divided. The Trans-Mississippi was loosely organized by disparate units spread over a wide area under the command of General Richard Taylor. With Hood's Army of Tennessee defeated, the remnants were sent to Mobile to bolster defenses and the remainder to General Joe Johnston in North Carolina to counter Sherman. General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia was locked in static trench warfare and slowly being decimated by disease, battle casualties and desertions. None of the three major theaters of operations were mutually supporting and all were outnumbered by Union forces who were able to maintain the initiative through offensive actions. The Confederate armies had largely lost their ability to maneuver due to attrition and could not conduct operational-level offensive operations. They could defend and attrit Union Army forces at the tactical level but just defending could never win the war. It became a matter of just surviving.

So, as 1865 opened, the Army of Northern Virginia was invested by an ever increasing Union Army with the ability to resupply itself by sea and rail in Virginia. On the Atlantic coast, Admiral David Porter's fleet attacked Fort Fisher to cut the last viable port used by the Confederates. Working in concert with General Alfred Terry (of later fame during the Indian Wars where he commanded one of the converging columns on the Little Bighorn in the 1876 Centennial Campaign), Fort Fisher was attacked on 13 January in the Second Battle of Fort Fisher. It was a joint amphibious operation. The fort fell after a massive bombardment and infantry assault, effectively assisted in closing the port of Wilmington to Confederate use. It also permitted a large Union force to advance from Wilmington to the interior of North Carolina.

During February the longest siege of the U.S. Army (eventually lasting 292 days) had bottled the Army of Northern Virginia into the city of Petersburg which was only 25 miles south of Richmond. The Confederate defensive works

protected the crossing over the Appomattox River which the trench lines tied-into forming a large salient pointed to the south. With the Confederates in static positions, consuming large quantities of supplies, the Army was suffering from lack of rations due to inability to acquire and move them. Sherman's march through Georgia had disrupted the flow of foodstuff and other supplies north. The Army of Northern Virginia was unable to maneuver as Grant's forces fixed them in-place where they protected the approaches to Richmond.

More than half of the Confederate's 40 locomotives of the Virginia-Tennessee railroad were inoperable by 1865 due to lack of mechanics and repair parts. Rails for the tracks were having to be 'cannibalized' as the Confederacy produced none and imports of rail were totally halted. Confederate soldiers soon learned that they could actually march faster in Virginia than being moved by the dilapidated rail system upon which armies depended. The defense of Petersburg was key as the rail lines from the south and Wilmington ran through Petersburg. The only other rail line connecting Richmond to the south was the Richmond and Danville Railroad which became the primary logistics line for forces in Richmond after the Union Army cut the rails south out of Petersburg. The Lynchburg Railroad was the last direct rail line into Petersburg under Confederate control and ran to the west, then south to North Carolina. Confederate entrenchments ran west (but were oriented to the south) to protect the Lynchburg Railroad which was exposed to raids and attacks on the Confederate's far-right flank. The Army of Northern Virginia would focus on keeping this last line of communications open for its survival.

Generals Beauregard, Smith and Hill met in Augusta on 2 February to plan the defense of the Carolinas. There were too few Confederate forces to go on the offense and the best they could hope for was to delay, perhaps defend against Sherman's march north. Conceptually, they thought that they should gather as many forces as possible in North Carolina and fight to join Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. As we say today, "the enemy has a vote" and Sherman had no intention of letting the Confederates break-away to Virginia.

Beauregard immediately requested troops from North Carolina and Virginia to reinforce his army. General Lee could spare none after already sending General Hoke to Wilmington to help defend it. The next day, on 3 February, President Lincoln met with a delegation of Confederates to explore a peace negotiation, but the Union forces were pressing Southern armies hard and the talks broke-off with no agreement. The Union forces held the upper-hand and could dictate terms. On that same day, Sherman's army, moving north from the Savannah River, engaged the defending Confederates in South Carolina.

General Sherman's army of over 60,000 men crossed the Salkahatchie River in South Carolina on 3 February with the objective of Columbia, S.C. At the site known as River's Bridge, entrenched Confederates under Major General Lafayette McLaws attempted to stop the Union forces in the extensive swamps

bordering the banks of the river. The Confederates number less than 9,000 total effectives, were outflanked by hugely superior Union forces under Major General O.O. Howard. The Confederates were forced to withdraw northward. All they could hope to do is delay the Union Army offensive which was advancing on multiple axes.



*Salkahatchie Swamp
Today*



*Remains of Confederate Trenches at
Rivers Bridge*



*Confederate military cemetery
at Rivers Bridge*

Photos taken in 2005 by author

On 5 February, General Grant belatedly ordered POW exchanges to resume, knowing that the return of Confederate POWs would be of little assistance to the Confederate Army but would burden them by requiring Confederates to care for the returned soldiers. Additionally, an exchange would alleviate the mutual suffering on Union military POWs.

In Virginia south of Petersburg, Union Brigadier General Greg moved to intercept Confederate logistics wagon trains on 5 February. Moving south and then west, Greg took his cavalry past the Union siege lines' far-left flank. Major General Warren's V Corps shifted to its left and extended southwest to take positions over Hatcher's Run. This shifting of Union Army positions further southwest of Petersburg threatened Confederate supply lines running to Danville to the west of Petersburg. General John B. Gordon's Confederates attacked the Union forces right flank positions of Warren's V Corps and were driven back. The next day, 6 February, Confederate Brigadier General Pegram's division attacked the returning Union cavalry raiding force and was itself attacked by elements of Warren's Corps. The Union advance was halted, Pegram was KIA, but the Union forces then held a line extending their left flank to the southwest, about eight miles from Dinwiddie Court House.

On 6 February, President Davis turned command of all Confederate armies over to General Lee. It was too late to be of consequence. And due to communications difficulties with armies in the Trans-Mississippi and Western theaters, it was a hopeless attempt to salvage a quickly deteriorating situation. Essentially, none of the Confederate forces in the three theaters could assist each other at this point and Lee had his hands full trying to conduct operations with the Army of Northern Virginia. His major concern was focused on just keeping the Army of Northern Virginia in the field.

On 11-12 February the Union Army captured Wilmington's port while to the south, General Sherman moved on two major axes of advance due-north. One axis was oriented towards Charleston, the main thrust was towards Columbia however. Union cavalry swung to the west, crossed the Savannah River and attempted to outflank the Confederate lines. On 11 February at the Battle of Aiken, MajGen H. Judson Kilpatrick's cavalry charged the Confederates but was repulsed five miles from Montmorenci by MajGen Joseph Wheeler.

With no substantial forces to defend against Sherman's forces in South Carolina, the Confederates withdrew towards Columbia, trying to slow the Union forces through small actions. It did no good and on 17 February, Sherman reached the capitol of Columbia, shelling the city whose population had more than doubled due to refugees. When Sherman reached Columbia, it triggered the Confederates to abandoned Charleston and escape from being taken from the rear. Charleston had withstood a continuous siege since the beginning of the war but fell from the land side as it had during the Revolutionary War. Those troops in Charleston, largely garrison forces, moved north to join General Joe Johnston in North Carolina.

Enroute to Columbia, many of Sherman's units lost discipline and committed depredations against the population as revenge they deemed to be deserved due to South Carolina's lead in the rebellion. Although Sherman had ordered discipline maintained, he failed to ensure that his subordinates exercised it resulting in wanton burning, looting, and misconduct against civilians and their property. Actions that were clearly war crimes under the provisions of Union Army General Orders 100 (The Lieber Code) were tolerated and, in some cases, encouraged by commanders. The results of these actions are still ingrained in the populace of South Carolina today. When Columbia was burned, it created a controversy as to the origins. Impartial studies have concluded that the fires were the result of both forces which caused the city to burn.

On 21 February, General Bragg, commanding Confederate forces in North Carolina, withdrew from the Wilmington area as Union forces reinforced their units in preparation to march inland. The Confederates were placed in a dire predicament as the Union Army posed multiple threats of converging forces. They were still gathering their forces to attempt to fight on somewhat even terms.

As the Confederate forces begin to unravel in the Carolinas, Sherman's columns continued their march north against only minor resistance. Reaching Cheraw, S.C., Sherman realized that the Confederates knew he was headed towards Goldsboro, N.C. Sherman crossed the North Carolina state line on 7 March and begin to converge on the Confederate forces. General Joe Johnston was recalled to duty to lead the remnants of the Army of Tennessee and assume command of Confederate forces in North Carolina, relieving General Beauregard in Charlotte in an attempt to stem the tide converging on the center of North Carolina.

On 7 March, Major General Schofield, advancing from Wilmington ordered Major General Jacob Cox to orient Union forces from New Bern to Goldsboro. They were stopped on the main road south of Kinston by General Bragg's forces blocking Union Army movement to the west. The resulting battle was at Wyse's Fork, the subject of the February program by COL (ret) Wade Sokolosky. In an attempt to wrest the initiative from the disorganized Union forces, the Confederates made a poorly coordinated attack on Union Army flanks early on 8 March. Bragg's attack stalled due to poor communications and the Union Army was able to reinforce their defense on 9 March and then resume the offensive to drive the Confederates back across the Neuse River.

On 10 March at Monroe's Crossroads (now located on Fort Bragg, N.C.), General Wade Hampton's Confederate cavalry engaged General Kilpatrick's U.S. cavalry in one of the largest cavalry actions of the war. Kilpatrick was initially surprised and barely escaped in his nightclothes. The Union forces rallied and the battle ended in a draw with the Confederates withdrawing. The next day the Union forces occupied Fayetteville. Bragg was unable to stem the Union advance, and Kinston fell on 14 March. The Confederates were now facing a huge Union force joining together in central North Carolina with no prospects of receiving any more Confederate reinforcements.

On 12 March, Beauregard reacted to Sherman's thrust by sending supplies and men by rail to Johnston. They became casualties of the Confederate rail system and got stuck at Salisbury because of the rail gauges, the extreme results of "states rights". The gauge sizes changed and thus prevented the trains from continuing. *[NOTE: 'States Rights' allowed for non-centralized control of the rail system. The Confederates had at least three different rail gauges while the Union forces only had one. The Confederate rail system was grossly inefficient as everything had to be trans-loaded where the gauges changed.]* Trains carrying sick and wounded attempted to make it to Charlotte with their Confederate patients but the breakdown in the rail system had many of them stuck on sidings. The *Western Democrat* newspaper wrote on the 28 March, "The citizens of town are doing what they can towards supplying the wants of the sick soldier, but they have not the means to do much."

In Richmond, the desperation of the situation struck home when President Jefferson Davis finally accepted the inevitable that the Confederate armies were collapsing, and losses could not be sustained. He finally signed a bill allowing the *formal enlistment* of black soldiers two years after the Union Army allowed their enlistment. Although thousands of blacks are serving with the Confederate armies, they were not "*officially enlisted*" and the enlistment bill allowed for manumission for those who volunteered. It was four years too late. Several companies of black Confederates were formed, equipped and drilled but none saw action in combat. Years after the war, the Confederate states provide pensions to black Confederate soldiers despite this, thus recognizing their wartime service. *[NOTE: Distinguished black historian, Dr. Edward C. Smith of American University did tremendous research on black Confederates and*

estimates more than 35,000 served with the Confederate armies. Based on incomplete research, he estimated that as many as 90,000 might have served in a variety of capacities.]

Although General Johnston did not know it, the Army of Northern Virginia had less than a month left. Gathering as many of the forces in North Carolina as he could gather, Johnston prepared to fight Sherman's huge force driving towards him. On 15 March, Johnston gathered the remnants of the Army of Tennessee, Hardee's Corps, Hoke's Division (Army of Northern Virginia) and Wade Hampton's cavalry to forge a force that might successfully counter the Union Army. At Averasborough on 16 March, Union cavalry encountered Hardee's corps. At dawn on 16 March, four infantry divisions of the Union XX Corps attacked. Initially repulsed, the reinforced Union infantry drove the Confederates out of the first two lines of their defense but were again repulsed at the third line. The arrival of XIV Corps (U.S.) caused Hardee to withdraw during the cover of darkness. While the Union Army had been delayed, it had not been stopped.

On 19 March, General Johnston's 21,000 forces had largely consolidated at Bentonville, N.C. Hoping to catch Union corps dispersed, Johnston attacked driving in the lines of the XIV Corps. Union forces' strong counterattacks blunted Johnston's drive and XX Corps arrived to assist in driving the Confederates back. Union Army forces established a hasty defense and five Confederate attacks failed against them. On 20 March, it was Johnston's defense that General Slocum threw his troops against. Sherman was satisfied to let Johnston withdraw but instead, Johnston prepared to continue his defense. Union forces under General Mower's division attempted to get to Johnston's rear and cut the lines of communication of the Confederates, but he was successfully counterattacked. Johnston decided to withdraw that night, covered by General Wheeler's cavalry acting as a rear guard. The Union forces took up a pursuit capturing the bridge at Bentonville. The pursuit was stopped at Hannah's Creek, and Sherman reorganized in order to pursue the Confederates towards Raleigh.

On 23 March, Johnston sent a telegram to General Lee stating the obvious: "Sherman's course cannot be hindered by the small force I have. I can do no more than annoy him."

On the same day Lee received Johnston's telegram, 90,000 Union soldiers reached Goldsboro, a major rail center and Sherman's intermediate objective. President Lincoln arrived at City Point to confer with Union Army commanders, Grant, Sherman and Admiral David Porter regarding surrender terms for the Confederates. Leniency was the key to restoring the Union and the military commanders understood the intent of Lincoln's guidance.

In the Western Theater, Union forces began shifting to the east and 6,000 Union cavalry departed Mossy Creek, Tennessee and headed into Virginia with orders "to destroy, but not to fight battles". They destroyed 150 miles of the Danville-Richmond railroad lines. Union General Stoneman's actions did much

to finalize the defeat of the Army of Northern Virginia by cutting-off all supplies to it by rail. **[NOTE:** *This action was immortalized in the Robbie Robinson song sung by Joan Baez in 1971, "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down". The lyrics: "Virgil Caine is the name, and I served on the Danville train, til Stoneman's cavalry came and tore up the tracks again."*] This was the final line of communication linking Lee with Johnston and its loss was a final blow to their efforts to link forces.

On 25 March, the Union siege line extended from the Appomattox River which runs west-to-east north of Petersburg, around the city and to the southwest. On the far-right of the Union siege line was a fortification, Fort Stedman, overlooking the river and Petersburg / City-Point railroad. The Confederates were outnumbered by approximately 50,000 men to the Union's 125,000. They were severely suffering from lack of supplies, disease and desertion **[NOTE:** *The movie "Cold Mountain" is about a Confederate soldier who deserts Petersburg during the winter of 1864-1865. The opening scene is an excellent portrayal of the Battle of the Crater which occurred at Petersburg in 1864].* Defending General John B. Gordon devised an excellent plan to throw the Union Army besiegers off-balance. He gathered a large force opposite of Fort Stedman and in a pre-dawn attack broke through Union lines. Like so many military operations during the war, the plan suffered from lack of follow-on planning and aggressive leadership on the attackers' part. Union Army initiative was regained by Major General John G. Parke who ordered his reserve division to counterattack and restore the defensive lines. The lead Confederates had become disorganized after their initial success and were then pushed-back with the Union forces restoring the lines. The casualties to the Union side could be absorbed, but the estimated 4,000 KIA / WIA / MIA to the Confederates was unsustainable. Lee faced a crisis due to inability to defend the miles of trenches.

General Grant decided to attack on 29 March, this time attempting to circumvent the open Confederate right flank. Breaking through to the northwest of the siege lines, Grant maneuvered towards open country, away from the prepared defenses of the Confederates. On 1 April at Five Forks (located about six miles past the very extreme right of Lee's army), the Confederates were driven back and defeated, losing the key road intersections. At dawn on 2 April, a major assault on Petersburg defenses finally resulted in a breakthrough. General A.P. Hill was killed while rallying his men. When Union forces temporarily halted to reorganize that afternoon, Lee informed President Davis that further defense of the Richmond-Petersburg line was impossible and that the Confederates had to evacuate in order to save the army, hoping to link-up with General Johnston. The Confederates withdrew out of Richmond and Petersburg that night headed northwest and west into central Virginia.

Union Army forces quickly reorganized and began a pursuit of Lee's army. Using cavalry to interdict lines of communication and pressure the Confederate's rear guard, the end was inevitable. On 9 April, with supply trains captured and cut-off from Johnston's army, Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to General Grant at Appomattox. Final casualties for the siege of Petersburg are estimated to be 42,000 Union soldiers and 28,000 Confederate soldiers.

On 18 April, General Johnston signed an armistice with General Sherman. Sherman, exceeding his authority, granted terms covering issues outside the

scope of what he was able to offer. On 26 April, near Durham, Johnston surrendered what was left of his army to Sherman ending the war in the Eastern Theater.

The Confederate forces in the Trans-Mississippi were the last to surrender having not conducted any significant operations in 1865. Units were widely dispersed and acting almost completely autonomously. General Edmund Kirby Smith commanded the forces west of the Mississippi. In early May, Union General John Pope twice requested the surrender of Smith who was awaiting instructions from Richmond. Not knowing that President Davis had been captured, he delayed and tried to organize what was left of his forces. Sending Lieutenant General Simon B. Buckner to negotiate a surrender with Union Army Major General Canby in New Orleans, Buckner signed the surrender on 26 May without Smith's authorization. Smith later angrily endorsed the surrender on 2 June. Buckner became the first to surrender a Confederate army in the field and the last. Only Brigadier General Stand Watie (a Cherokee commanding forces in what is now Oklahoma) held out longer. He surrendered the last field forces on 23 June. **[NOTE:** *Lieutenant General Buckner's son would reach the rank of US Army lieutenant general and was one of two Army lieutenant generals KIA during WWII. His son, in turn, would also graduate from West Point and serve as an armor officer from 1948 through 1953. He passed in Kansas City in 2013.*] General Smith reported that his forces literally dissolved and returned home with few organized units capable of mustering to conduct a proper surrender. They were not the last Confederates to surrender however.

The last Confederate military forces to surrender did so in Liverpool, England on 6 November 1865 when the crew of the commerce raider Shenandoah lowered their battle ensign.

Within weeks of the end of the war in Virginia, Union forces began a rapid demobilization. Hundreds of thousands of men were given their papers and entire units went home to begin their new lives. On the Confederate side, many POWs were kept for several more months while those in the field were issued paroles and told to make their ways home the best they could. No transportation was provided and many set-out on foot to walk the entire distance back to their abodes depending upon the charity of those whose dwellings they passed enroute to feed and shelter them.

The Regular U.S. Army units were immediately directed to the West to resume frontier duty while the hundreds of state volunteer units were hastily sent home and disbanded. The Regular Army of 1860 was just over 16,000 men. In four years of war it went to a peak strength of 1,000,692 in January 1865. Due to post-war downsizing, the U.S. Army was slated to go through a series of downsizing reorganizations so that ten years after the war, the end strength was only 25,513. This would occur with no changes to the antebellum missions of frontier duties.

In addition, post war police duties in the South during "Reconstruction" absorbed many of the troops that should have been on frontier duty. The five military districts of the South required garrisoning and patrolling, best done by cavalry due to their inherent mobility and speed covering large areas.

Reconstruction duties were unpopular and tedious, but only the Army could perform the policing that the policies required.

Reconstruction would last for over ten years and is a topic of its own to be covered later.

