

= Battle of Atlanta =

The Battle of Atlanta was a battle of the Atlanta Campaign fought during the American Civil War on July 22 , 1864 , just southeast of Atlanta , Georgia . Continuing their summer campaign to seize the important rail and supply center of Atlanta , Union forces commanded by William T. Sherman overwhelmed and defeated Confederate forces defending the city under John B. Hood . Union Maj. Gen. James B. McPherson was killed during the battle . Despite the implication of finality in its name , the battle occurred midway through the campaign , and the city did not fall until September 2 , 1864 , after a Union siege and various attempts to seize railroads and supply lines leading to Atlanta . After taking the city , Sherman 's troops headed south @-@ southeastward toward Milledgeville , the state capital , and on to Savannah with the March to the Sea .

The fall of Atlanta was especially noteworthy for its political ramifications . In the 1864 election , former Union general George B. McClellan , a Democrat , ran against President Lincoln , on a peace platform calling for a truce with the Confederacy . The capture of Atlanta and Hood 's burning of military facilities as he evacuated were extensively covered by Northern newspapers , significantly boosting Northern morale , and Lincoln was reelected by a large margin .

= = Background = =

In the Atlanta Campaign , Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman commanded the Union forces of the Western Theater . The main Union force in this battle was the Army of the Tennessee , under Maj. Gen. James B. McPherson . He was one of Sherman 's and Grant 's favorite commanders , as he was very quick and aggressive . Within Sherman 's army , the XV Corps was commanded by Maj. Gen. John A. Logan , the XVI Corps was commanded by Maj. Gen. Grenville M. Dodge , and Maj. Gen. Frank P. Blair Jr. commanded the XVII Corps .

During the months leading up to the battle , Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston had repeatedly retreated from Sherman 's superior force . All along the railroad line , from Chattanooga , Tennessee , to Marietta , Georgia , a pattern was played and replayed : Johnston took up a defensive position , Sherman marched to outflank the Confederate defenses , and Johnston retreated again . After Johnston 's withdrawal following the Battle of Resaca , the two armies clashed again at the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain , but the Confederate senior leadership in Richmond was unhappy with Johnston 's perceived reluctance to fight the Union army , even though he had little chance of winning . Thus , on July 17 , 1864 , as he was preparing for the Battle of Peachtree Creek , Johnston was relieved of his command and replaced by Lt. Gen. John Bell Hood . The dismissal and replacement of Johnston was one of the most controversial decisions of the civil war . Hood , who was fond of taking risks , lashed out at Sherman 's army at Peachtree Creek , but the attack failed with more than two thousand five hundred Confederate casualties .

Hood needed to defend the city of Atlanta , which was an important rail hub and industrial center for the Confederacy , but his army was small in comparison to the armies that Sherman commanded . He decided to withdraw , enticing the Union troops to come forward . McPherson 's army closed in from Decatur , Georgia , to the east side of Atlanta .

= = Opposing forces = =

= = = Union forces = = =

= = = Confederate = = =

= = Battle = =

Meanwhile , Hood ordered Lt. Gen. William J. Hardee 's corps on a march around the Union left flank , had Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler 's cavalry march near Sherman 's supply line , and had Maj. Gen. Benjamin Cheatham 's corps attack the Union front . However , it took longer than expected for Hardee to get his men into position , and , during that time , McPherson had correctly deduced a possible threat to his left flank , and sent XVI Corps , his reserve , to help strengthen it . Hardee 's men met this other force , and the battle began . Although the initial Confederate attack was repulsed , the Union left flank began to retreat . About this time , McPherson , who had ridden to the front to observe the battle , was shot and killed by Confederate infantry .

Near Decatur , Brig. Gen. John W. Sprague , in command of the 2nd Brigade , 4th Division of the XVI Corps , was attacked by Wheeler 's cavalry . Wheeler had taken the Fayetteville Road , while Hardee 's column took the Flat Shoals Road toward McPherson 's position . The Federals fled the town in a stampede , but managed to save the ordnance and supply trains of the XV , XVI , XVII , and XX corps . With the failure of Hardee 's assault , Wheeler was in no position to hold Decatur , and fell back to Atlanta that night . Sprague was later awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions .

The main lines of battle now formed an " L " shape , with Hardee 's attack forming the lower part of the " L , " and Cheatham 's attack on the Union front as the vertical member of the " L " . Hood intended to attack the Union troops from both east and west . The fighting centered on a hill east of the city known as Bald Hill . The Federals had arrived two days earlier , and began to shell the city proper , killing several civilians . A savage struggle , sometimes hand @-@ to @-@ hand , developed around the hill , lasting until just after dark . The Federals held the hill while the Confederates retired to a point just south of there . Meanwhile , two miles to the north , Cheatham 's troops had broken through the Union lines at the Georgia railroad . In response , twenty artillery pieces were positioned near Sherman 's headquarters at Copen Hill , and shelled the Confederates , while Logan 's XV Corps regrouped and repulsed the Southern troops .

The Union had suffered 3 @,@ 641 casualties , including Maj. Gen. McPherson , to the Confederate 's 5 @,@ 500 . This was a devastating loss for the already reduced Confederate army , but they still held the city .

= = Siege and closure = =

Sherman settled into a siege of Atlanta , shelling the city and sending raids west and south of the city to cut off the supply lines from Macon , Georgia . Both of Sherman 's cavalry raids were defeated by superior southern horsemen . Following the failure to break the Confederates ' hold on the city , Sherman began to employ a new strategy . He swung his entire army in a broad flanking maneuver to the west . Finally , on August 31 , at Jonesborough , Georgia , Sherman 's army captured the railroad track from Macon , pushing the Confederates to Lovejoy 's Station . With his supply lines fully severed , Hood pulled his troops out of Atlanta the next day , September 1 , destroying supply depots as he left to prevent them from falling into Union hands . He also set fire to eighty @-@ one loaded ammunition cars , which led to a conflagration watched by hundreds .

On September 2 , Mayor James Calhoun , along with a committee of Union @-@ leaning citizens including William Markham , Jonathan Norcross , and Edward Rawson , met a captain on the staff of Maj. Gen. Henry W. Slocum , and surrendered the city , asking for " protection to non @-@ combatants and private property " . Sherman , who was in Jonesborough at the time of surrender , sent a telegram to Washington on September 3 , reading , " Atlanta is ours , and fairly won " . He then established his headquarters there on September 7 , where he stayed for over two months . On November 15 , the army departed east toward Savannah , on what became known as " Sherman 's March to the Sea " .

= = Aftermath = =

The fall of Atlanta and the success of the overall Atlanta Campaign were extensively covered by Northern newspapers , and were a boon to Northern morale and to President Lincoln 's political standing . The 1864 election was between former Union general George B. McClellan , a Democrat ,

and Abraham Lincoln . McClellan ran a conflicted campaign - McClellan was a Unionist who advocated continuing the war until the defeat of the Confederacy , but the Democratic platform included calls for negotiations with the Confederacy on the subject of a potential truce . The capture of Atlanta and Hood 's burning of military facilities as he evacuated showed that a successful conclusion of the war was in sight , weakening support for a truce . Lincoln was reelected by a comfortable margin , with 212 out of 233 electoral votes .

Maj. Gen. James B. McPherson , who was one of the highest @-@ ranking Union officers killed in action during the Civil War , was mourned and honored by Sherman , who declared in his official report :

His public enemies , even the men who directed the fatal shot , ne 'er spoke or wrote of him without expressions of marked respect ; those whom he commanded loved him even to idolatry ; and I , his associate and commander , fail in words adequate to express my opinion of his great worth . I feel assured that every patriot in America , on hearing this sad news , will feel a sense of personal loss , and the country generally will realize that we have lost , not only an able military leader , but a man who , had he survived , was qualified to heal the national strife which has been raised by designing and ambitious men .

Despite the damage caused by the war , Atlanta recovered from its downfall relatively quickly ; as one observer noted as early as November 1865 , " A new city is springing up with marvelous rapidity " .

= = Legacy = =

In 1880 , Atlanta ranked among the fifty largest cities in the United States . The battlefield is now urban , residential , and commercial land , with many markers memorializing notable events of the battle , including McPherson 's place of death . The marker was erected in 1956 by the Georgia Historical Commission . To commemorate the 140th anniversary of the battle , in 2004 , two new markers were erected in the Inman Park neighborhood . The Atlanta Cyclorama building , built in 1921 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places , is a museum located in Grant Park containing a panoramic painting of the battle .

One notable establishment destroyed by Union soldiers was the Potter ( or Ponder ) House , built in 1857 , and owned by Ephraim G. Ponder , a holder of 65 slaves before the war . In the battle , it was used by Confederate sharpshooters until Union artillery inflicted heavy damage . It was never rebuilt . One of Ponder 's slaves , Festus Flipper , was the father of Henry Ossian Flipper , who later became the first African American cadet to graduate from the United States Military Academy at West Point .

In 1962 , two years short of the centennial of the battle , the country music singer / songwriter Claude King of Shreveport , Louisiana , released the hit song , " The Burning of Atlanta " .

= = = Memoirs and primary sources = = =

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U.S. War Department , *The War of the Rebellion : a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* . Washington , DC : U.S. Government Printing Office , 1880 ? 1901 .