

The Battle of Corinth, Mississippi

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In the first days of October 1862, a bloody engagement would take place in northeast Mississippi that helped keep that region in Union hands. Corinth, a town and important rail junction in the northeast part of the state, was the scene of much military activity during the Civil War, including a siege in the spring of 1862 following the Battle of Shiloh. In the fall of that year Corinth again became the target of military operations, as the Confederacy would launch a strike into northeast Mississippi, as part of a larger offensive that also included Robert E. Lee's invasion of Maryland, and Braxton Bragg's and Edmund Kirby Smith's movement into Kentucky. In Mississippi, small southern armies under Sterling Price and Earl Van Dorn focused first on Iuka and ultimately Corinth. On September 19, a spirited engagement between William Rosecrans and Sterling Price took place near Iuka, after which the latter withdrew from the town.

In the aftermath of that battle, Price met with Earl Van Dorn, commander of a separate small Confederate force operating in northern Mississippi, and determined to launch a joint attack upon Corinth with their combined 22,000 man force. Rosecrans, meanwhile, strengthened his defensive works, including an outer line about two and one-half miles north of the town, artillery positions erected one mile closer to Corinth, and a final line of artillery batteries and supporting earthworks closest to the town. On the morning of October 3 Van Dorn's forces launched their initial assault against the town's outer defenses.

One of Van Dorn's divisions, took its position on the Confederate right, while Price's forces manned the left. During the first day's fighting the Federals conducted a withdrawal towards Corinth and the protection of their final line. By late-afternoon the southern forces

threatened the last Union line, but heavy casualties, as well as rough terrain, heat, and lack of water, exhausted the attackers and convinced Van Dorn and Price to delay a final assault until the following morning.

The next day the Confederates captured a key Union position, driving the exhausted defenders back into the streets of Corinth, with heavy fighting taking place near the railroad junction and a hotel. Union infantry and artillery fire stopped the initial attack, but another Confederate force soon threatened Battery Robinett, one of the key positions of the final Union line. Despite heavy musket and artillery fire, elements of John Moore's Confederate Brigade managed to reach the battery and briefly occupy part of it, until a counterattack killed or captured most of those Confederates who had advanced that far. Colonel William P. Rogers of the Second Texas fell dead while leading a small group of his men in the vanguard of the attack. The failure to take Robinett ended major fighting, and Van Dorn quickly determined to withdraw. Southern casualties in the two-day battle numbered nearly 5,000, including 500 killed; while the Federals lost 2,500 men.

In the battle's aftermath, area commander Ulysses Grant moved to consolidate various forces in an effort to pursue Van Dorn's defeated army. Troops under Edward Ord skirmished sharply with the retreating Confederates on October 5, but the southern troops successfully crossed the Hatchie River and eluded their pursuers. In the campaign's aftermath Van Dorn was relieved of his command, being replaced by John C. Pemberton. Criticism of his leadership led Van Dorn to ask for a court of inquiry, which eventually found him innocent of all charges. Meanwhile, over the next several months Union forces in Mississippi shifted their attention to Confederate-held Vicksburg. Corinth remained in Union hands for the rest of the war, though the region was the scene of a number of skirmishes and other military activity.