

Episode 159: Changes in Command and Supply

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The Bristoe and Manassas campaign, fought from the 19th to the 21st of October, 1863, caused 1381 Confederate casualties. The Union casualties totaled 2292. Very little territory changed hands during this episode, and little tactical advantage was achieved by either side.

General Grant, on the 21st of October, after discussion with Stanton, traveled to Chattanooga, TN to assume command of those troops. Grant traveled along a road, used also to supply Rosecrans' command, both rain drenched and littered with the remains of rotting mules and horses. Due to his fall from his horse in New Orleans, earlier Grant was handicapped by crutches. By the 23rd of October, General Grant arrived in Chattanooga. After arriving, General "Baldy Smith's report of the supply lines caused Grant to reevaluate his logistical organization. He made a personal inspection, riding in considerable pain, and devised a new supply line, which came to be called "the cracker route." It began at Brown's Ferry on the Tennessee River and linked bases in Alabama to Chattanooga by a water route in place of the long, rugged mountain trail then in use.

On the 23rd, as a result of not following direct orders, President Jefferson Davis relieved General Leonidas Polk of duty. General Polk was a well-liked General, and a clergy man. Even so, while he was liked by his men, he had frequent conflicts with other generals due to a lack of respect for authority. On more than one occasion Polk had a detrimental effect on military functions because he blatantly disregarded direct orders. On the Union command front Major-General William T. Sherman was placed in command of the Army of the Tennessee, replacing Grant.

The Battle of Pine Bluff was lost by the Confederates. The court square in that town, protected by about 300 African American soldiers, did not fall to the Rebel forces. Following the failure to take the square by force, the Confederates attempted to burn the soldiers out. Eventually the Confederate forces retired leaving Pine Bluff to the triumphant black troops.

In Washington, President Lincoln instructed General Halleck that “with all possible expedition ready the Army of the Potomac to attack Lee.” Meade replied that he would “make every preparation with the utmost expedition to advance.”