

Episode 161: The Struggle for Tactical Advantage

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Between November 3rd and November 9th, 1863, there was great concern in the Confederate Army at both Chattanooga and Charleston. It was especially important for the Confederates to regain their communication with Virginia which was beginning to be largely controlled by Federal forces. Also this week included the bombardment of Fort Sumter and the advance of the Confederates, led by General James Longstreet into Eastern Tennessee. There was a significant battle at Droop Mountain in West Virginia and the engagement of Federal troops on the Rappahannock River in Virginia where they would meet Lee and his Confederate troops.

Fort Sumter, where the American Civil War began, was still under attack two and half years after the first shots were fired. The fort at Charleston was important because it was located in South Carolina on a fine natural harbor, essential for the continuance of trade with other countries. Fort Sumter was controlled by the Confederate Army, but Charleston was under a Union siege, and neither side was yielding. On November 3rd, over 660 rounds of Federal artillery were fired upon the already weakened fort. This proved to be devastating.

In Chattanooga, Tennessee, General Braxton Bragg was caught at a crossroads. General Bragg had to decide whether to keep his forces in Chattanooga strong enough to hold off Grant or to separate troops from Chattanooga, by sending them to Knoxville, Tennessee, to regain communication with Virginia. Bragg chose to send General James Longstreet to eastern Tennessee to fight against the Union's General Ambrose Burnside on November 4th. This struck fear in Grant, which caused him to wait for General William Sherman to arrive to Chattanooga

before making moves on Bragg and his troops. Grant could only hope that Sherman arrived to him before Longstreet could arrive to Burnside.

In West Virginia Federal troops engaged in a brief but important battle with Confederate troops at Droop Mountain. The Confederates, under the control of General John Echols, were attacked by General William Averell and his corps on the 6th of November. Knowing that his troops outnumbered those of the Confederates, Averell split his troops into two and attacked. This resulted in the Confederates scattering for safety, giving way for the Federals to move in to strategically important Lewisburg, West Virginia.

Finally, the fighting along the Rappahannock River between General Meade of the Federals and General Robert E. Lee of the Confederates took place on the 7th and 8th of November. Two key areas engaged by Meade and his troops were Rappahannock Station and Kelly's Ford. Lee, knowing that his corps of soldiers was greatly outnumbered, decided to retreat towards the Rapidan River. Meade's initiative to engage Lee's troops on the Rappahannock put fear in the hearts of the Confederates. Both commanders were wary about their decision to attack one another, both waiting for the right chance to inflict enough damage without resulting in a greater loss of their own forces. Neither was satisfied with the result.