

Movements in Georgia, Promotions North and South, and a New Prison Opens

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In the aftermath of its defeat at Chattanooga in November 1863, the Confederate Army of Tennessee, now under the command of General Joseph Johnston, maintained defensive positions in the vicinity of Dalton, Georgia, awaiting a Union advance against Atlanta that would surely come the following spring. In February 1864, General William T. Sherman led an operation against Meridian, Mississippi, which led to reinforcements being sent from Johnston's army to contest Sherman's advance. As a result, Union troops under General George Thomas were ordered to test the Confederate defenses in north Georgia, resulting in what is known as the first battle of Dalton.

By late in the month, Thomas had advanced towards Johnston's line, which was situated in strong defensive positions along Rocky Face Ridge. Maneuvering through gaps in the mountains, Thomas' men had some initial limited success before being stopped by a Confederate counterattack. With southern troops returning from Mississippi, and with the rebel positions too strong to directly assault, the Federals began withdrawing on the twenty-seventh, after some inconclusive skirmishing. The operation did, however, convince Sherman, when he opened the main campaign in north Georgia the next May, to concentrate on threatening Johnston's line via Snake Creek Gap rather than risking a direct attack on Rocky Face Ridge.

In other news of the week, Confederate General Braxton Bragg, humiliated at Chattanooga the previous November, yet retaining the trust of President Jefferson Davis, was appointed to the position of Davis' main military advisor. Essentially serving as Chief of Staff, Bragg was tasked with improving "the conduct of military operations in the Armies of the

Confederacy.” Despite Bragg’s new position, the Confederacy would remain without a General-in-Chief until the appointment of Robert E. Lee to that role in early 1865.

Steps were also being taken during the last week of February in preparation for the appointment of a new General-in-Chief of all Union armies. With the known intention of President Lincoln to appoint General Ulysses S. Grant, victor of Fort Donelson, Vicksburg, and Chattanooga, to this position, the U.S. Congress passed a measure to revive the permanent rank of lieutenant general. This rank had previously been held only by George Washington, though General Winfield Scott had received an honorary, or brevet promotion to that rank. Lincoln signed the bill on February 29, and nominated Grant for the rank the following day.

Finally, the first prisoners arrived at a camp that would typify the horrors of all such prisoner of war facilities during the Civil War—Andersonville. The prisoner exchange program that had operated fairly efficiently since near the beginning of the conflict, was breaking down in early 1864. Part of the reason was the Confederate refusal to treat captured black Union soldiers as prisoners of war; while Union officials such as soon-to-be-promoted Ulysses Grant also recognized that the exchange program was of more benefit to the manpower-starved south.

With an increase in prisoners likely as a result of the upcoming spring campaigns, and with Richmond prisons vulnerable to a Union attack, a decision was made to establish a new facility deep behind Confederate lines. The location chosen was Andersonville in south Georgia. Known officially as Camp Sumter, the prison camp was near rail lines for transport yet remote enough to prevent a Union rescue attempt. Initial plans to build wooden barracks for the prisoners were dropped due to the cost, so the Confederates simply built a log stockade enclosing a sixteen acre compound in which the prisoners would be exposed to the elements. The only water supply came from a sluggish stream running through the enclosure. The first prisoners

arrived on February 25. The most deadly Civil War prison, over the next fifteen months more than 45,000 unfortunates were incarcerated there, with almost 13,000 dying.