

Engagement at Waynesborough and Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address

<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>

This Civil War Podcast was written by Ms. Hope Cashion, Senior History Major at Longwood University.

The week of March 1, 1865, started with an engagement in Waynesborough, Virginia, between Jubal Early's Confederate army and George Armstrong Custer's division of Phillip Sheridan's army. It was the beginning of the end for the Confederate army. The goal was for Sheridan's cavalry division to rout the remnant that was left of Early's army. Custer's cavalry was to go into the Shenandoah Valley to seek out the remnant of Early's army. They would encounter each on the cold and rainy day of March 2, 1865. Traveling on muddy roads and through harsh weather, Custer encountered Jubal Early's Confederate army in Waynesborough. Early's army quickly dispersed when they were confronted by Armstrong's division.

Jubal Early was unable to keep his soldiers from fleeing at the sight of Custer's division of 5,000 men. With a strong position located along the South River, Early's men had a good defensive position. The Confederate army would not stand up long to Custer's attack as the Confederate's left side was exposed. Custer would take advantage of the exposed left flank of the Confederate army. The Federal army would quickly defeat a force of Confederates that numbered about 2,000 men. Early just narrowly escaped while the Federal army would go on to capture Confederate supplies and over 1,000 of Early's men.

The fighting at Waynesborough was quick and the casualties were smaller than most other battles during the war. It would negatively impact the morale of the Confederates. Jubal Early spoke of "the mortification of seeing the greater part of my

command being carried off as prisoners.” The downfall of the Confederacy was within sight of most Confederate troops, while the Federal army’s morale was gaining. Phillip Sheridan would continue to move and cross the Blue Ridge Mountains. His next order of business would be in Charlottesville, Virginia, where he would carry out raiding expeditions.

The week of March 1, 1865, was filled not only with battles and skirmishes, but also included important political events. On its last day, March 3, 1865, the U.S. Thirty-eighth Congress would approve the Freedmen’s Bureau. This was a victory for President Abraham Lincoln as he was the one to establish such a policy. The Freedmen’s Bureau was made up of agents that would help newly freed slaves become acclimated to their new lives. It did so by providing land and temporary subsistence for the newly freed slaves.

The next day, March 4, 1865, would be Abraham Lincoln’s 2nd Inauguration. Lincoln’s inauguration speech would become one of the most well remembered speeches that the United States of America would ever know. In just over 700 words and a time of six minutes, Lincoln spoke about the United States and the Civil War. Throughout the speech Lincoln avoided talking about Union triumphs and victories, but instead focused on the causes of the Civil War. Referring to slavery as one of the root causes of the war, Lincoln professed in his speech that the institution needed to be ended in both the North and the South before America could move on.

To end the speech, Lincoln concluded “With malice toward none; with clarity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him shall have borne in battle,

and for his widow, and his orphan-to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.” Lincoln wanted the United States together again, and he wanted to see the Civil War end soon in order for the country to begin the healing process. As the week drew to a close, Lincoln’s speech for hopes of the war ending soon would become closer to reality with General Sherman being victorious in several skirmishes in South Carolina.