ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

The Carolinas Campaign

By **Robert M. Dunkerly**

Major General William Tecumseh Sherman's two Union armies, The Army of the Tennessee and the Army of Georgia, left Atlanta on November 15, 1864 to begin their famous March to the Sea. Along the way they targeted industry, railroads, and other infrastructure.

The Union forces, about 60,000 men, converged on Savannah on December 10. Major General William Hardee had about 10,000 defenders at the port city. The Confederates had flooded the area outside the city, leaving only narrow approaches to its defenses.

On December 13, Sherman decided to attack Fort McAllister, a key defensive position. It was overrun in a mere fifteen minutes at a cost of only 134 Union casualties. From there Sherman moved in to lay siege to the city.

General Hardee, however, evacuated on December 20, and the city's mayor surrendered the city, asking that private property be respected. Union troops occupied the city that day. Sherman then famously telegraphed president Lincoln, ""I beg to present you as a Christmas gift the City of Savannah, with one hundred and fifty guns and plenty of ammunition, also about twenty-five thousand bales of cotton." [1]

After resting and resupplying, Sherman's forces began moving into South Carolina on February 1, 1865. Keeping the two wings of his army separated, he could cause more destruction, and keep the Confederates guessing as to his intended target.

Sherman bypassed Charleston, focusing instead on the capital at Columbia. The only major resistance in the Palmetto state occurred at Rivers Bridge on the Salkehatchie River on February 3. A small Confederate force held back a Union division until flanked. The Confederates also evacuated Charleston, as Sherman's forces were now in the state's interior, and the city could not be defended.

[1] Mark A. Smith and Wade Sokolosky, *No Such Army Since the Days of Julius Caesar* (Ft Mitchell, KY: Ironclad Publishing, 2005), 1.

As the Union invaders closed in on Columbia, a chain of events began which stirred controversy up to the present day. Cotton that could not be moved was stacked in the streets, and evacuating Confederates set it on fire. As Union troops entered on February 17, they did little to stop the flames. They also looted freely. Much of the downtown area was destroyed, and debate continues regarding who was to blame and what outrages occurred.[2]

Moving north and east from Columbia, Sherman's forces advanced toward the North Carolina state line in early March. They easily captured and destroyed the arsenal at Fayetteville, an important source of supply for the Confederate war effort. North Carolina's interior had largely been spared the harsh realities of war though its first few years. This allowed the state to become one of the leading sources (through both internal production and overseas importation) of foodstuffs and supplies for the Confederate war effort. That was about to change in the spring of 1865. By February, Union and Confederate armies were concentrating there in a campaign that was crucial to the war's ending.

In the meantime, other Union forces under Major General Alfred Howe Terry had taken Fort Fisher on January 15 and Wilmington on February 2. Another force under Lieutenant General John McAllister Schofield and Major General Jacob Dolson Cox landed at New Bern and moved inland towards Goldsboro on March 22. The junction of all of these forces would provide overwhelming numbers against Confederate forces.

Confederate Lieutenant General Joseph Eggleston Johnston had been re-appointed commander of the Army of Tennessee. Charged with organizing the defense of North Carolina from General Sherman's Union forces, General Johnston had a mix of troops from various Departments, including remnants of the Army of Tennessee, troops transferred from the Army of Northern Virginia, units from the Department of South Carolina and Georgia, Florida, and North Carolina Reserves. Johnston concentrated his army near Smithfield.

Their first battle that spring was the Battle of Averasboro which took place near Fayetteville on March 15-16. Confederate troops under Major General William Joseph Hardee deployed in three lines to block the line of march of the Union Army of Georgia. At dawn on March 16, in a steady rain, Union infantry and cavalry probed forward. Eventually Union troops turned the flank of the Confederates' first line.

The thinly held second line was also forced back. Then Federal troops began to outflank the final, third line. Confederate cavalry under Major General Joseph Wheeler arrived to bolster the line, and fighting died down as evening approached. That night the southerners pulled back. This action delayed, but did not stop, Sherman's progress.

[2] Ibid., 17.

Johnston saw an opportunity to strike at Sherman's forces before they reached Goldsboro. He planned a major effort at the crossroads town of Bentonville, taking advantage of a gap between Sherman's widely separated forces. His hope was to destroy one wing before the other could arrive and support it. Fighting raged at the Battle of Bentonville from March 19-21, and the Confederates came close to success, but Union troops held on with dogged determination.

On March 19, Union troops of the XIV Corps of the Army of Georgia encountered Confederate resistance as they marched towards Goldsboro, their rendezvous point with other forces. Resistance stiffened, and eventually the XX Corps arrived to launch an attack to clear the way. Army commander Major General Henry Warner Slocum had no idea that Johnston's entire Confederate force was in front of him.

That afternoon the Confederate Army of Tennessee launched its last attack of the war, crushing Union resistance and at one point surrounding an entire division. One Confederate noted that the attacking force "looked like a picture and was truly beautiful." Yet he admitted it was "painful to see how close their battle flags were together, regiments being scarcely larger than companies." [3]

The attacked overwhelmed the Union troops of Brigadier General William Passmore Carlin's division, one soldier noting that they "stood as long as man can stand." Nearby, Brigadier General James Dada Morgan's division fought from both sides of their earthworks, as they beat back Confederate assaults from front and rear. By late afternoon the Confederates pushed the surprised Union forces back until a last ditch effort stopped them. [4]

The next day both sides held their ground, as the Army of the Tennessee arrived to bolster Slocum's forces. On March 21 fighting resumed with a limited Union attack on the Confederate right. Briefly overrunning Johnston's headquarters, the attackers ran out of steam and fell back. The Confederates withdrew that night.

A more aggressive Union attack at Bentonville might have proved decisive, as the Confederates had only one line of retreat over Mill Creek. Yet Sherman was more focused on uniting the various Union columns at Goldsboro, and let the Confederates slip away.

Bentonville was the largest battle ever fought in North Carolina, involving over 80,000 troops (60,000 Union and 20,000 Confederate) and producing about 4,000 casualties. Pulling back, both armies rested and prepared for the next step. Near Smithfield, Johnston reorganized the army on April 9, the same day that General Lee met with General Grant in the McLean house at Appomattox Court House. The army had seen other consolidations, but this was more drastic than anything experienced before.

[3] Mark Bradley, *Bentonville* (Campbell, CA: Savas Beatie, 1996), 204.
[4] Ibid., 212.

The army had too many undersized regiments and an overabundance of general officers. Many regiments were combined into new Consolidated Regiments. Johnston ordered that the massive reorganization move "with all possible speed, Sherman will not give us much rest." In another order he wrote that consolidation begin "without delay." [5]

With the army reconstituted, Johnston pulled back towards Raleigh, ahead of Sherman's advance. News of Richmond's fall was a tremendous blow, and put Johnston on the road to link up with Lee somewhere near the state line. However, rumors soon began to filter through to the army about Lee's surrender. Disbelief turned to shock when confirmation arrived.

The Army of Tennessee retreated through Raleigh, abandoning the capital without a fight, and continued marching west through Hillsborough and Chapel Hill towards Greensboro, a major supply and railroad center. Johnston knew that President Jefferson Davis and the Confederate Cabinet were on the way from Danville, and planned to meet with them to decide the future of the struggle.

As the Army of Tennessee arrived in the Greensboro area, it entered a region sharply divided by the war. Guilford, Randolph, and Davidson Counties were home to Quakers and Moravians, and many others who supported a large anti-war movement. The arrival of the massive army also strained resources for civilians.

Yet to his credit, Johnston kept his army out of reach of Sherman, and made good progress in reorganizing his supply and transport systems in his rear. In short, he had options that Lee did not, and at no time was even close to being trapped.

In the meantime, President Jefferson Davis and his Cabinet made their way south from Danville to Greensboro, narrowly escaping Union cavalry. The party split their time between their railroad cars at the yard, and a rented home. Captain Wood who accompanied Davis recorded, "Houses all closed. The people are afraid to take any one in; the Cabinet, General Cooper, and others are sleeping in the cars. The surrender of General Lee and his entire army is confirmed. I can hardly realize this overwhelming disaster, it crushes the hopes of nearly all." [6]

In his railroad car, Davis met with Johnston, General P. G. T. Beauregard, and the cabinet to discuss strategy. Davis was strongly in favor of continuing the war, but the generals insisted that the situation was hopeless. Some of the cabinet members agreed. Finally, a frustrated Davis agreed to allow Johnston to meet with Sherman to discuss a truce.

[5] Ibid., 404; Robert M. Dunkerly, The Confederate Surrender at Greensboro, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013), 20-22.
[6] Ibid.,, 32.

Outside, tensions built on the crowded streets of Greensboro. The town was filled with disorderly troops, escaped slaves, refugees, and deserters. Several warehouses in the city bulged with supplies, tempting both soldiers and civilians alike.

On April 15 a mob of soldiers and civilians looted the warehouses holding food and supplies. The crowd gathered on South Elm Street and ransacked the Confederate Quartermaster Department's warehouse and another that held supplies for the state (near the corner of Market and Elm Streets). The rampaging mob included deserters and stragglers from Johnston's infantry, cavalry who did not feel compelled to continue the retreat, paroled men from Appomattox who had drifted into town, civilians bent on getting their hands on supplies, runaway slaves, and every category of refugee and displaced person that could be imagined. Bacon, sugar, blankets, shoes, cloth, and corn were among the goods stolen.

General Beauregard, Johnston's second in command, ordered a trusted North Carolina unit to deal with the mob, and they fired into it (the last shots fired by these troops were at other Confederate soldiers). The chaos died down and soon troops patrolled the streets of Greensboro, yet violence broke out at warehouses in nearby towns.

In their camps around Guilford, Randolph, and Davidson Counties, the men of the Army of Tennessee could only wait with anxiety as they learned that their commander was going to meet with General Sherman. Many were relieved, hoping to be released to go home, others were bitter at the prospect of surrender, all were apprehensive about the future.

On the pleasant spring morning of April 17, Generals Sherman and Johnston, accompanied by their staffs and escorts of troops, rode out from their respective lines to meet somewhere in the middle. Johnston had started from Lieutenant General Wade Hampton's headquarters at the Dickson Farm just outside of Hillsborough, while Sherman had taken a train from his headquarters in Raleigh to Durham Station, and was met there by his cavalry commander, Major General Hugh Judson Kilpatrick.

Both groups rode along the Hillsborough Road, meeting not far from a farmhouse that Johnston's party had just passed. They decided to return there and asked the use of the home belonging to James and Nancy Bennett for their discussion.

Like many families, the Bennetts had endured the tragedies of war, losing both sons, Lorenzo, who died in the ranks of the 27th North Carolina, and Alphonzo, believed to have died of illness at home. Their son-in-law, Robert Duke, serving with the 46th North Carolina, had also perished. The Bennetts obliged the officers and waited in the kitchen with their daughter Eliza and her first born son while the generals used the home.

Inside, Sherman revealed to Johnston the telegram announcing President Lincoln's assassination. Johnston instantly realized it changed the entire scope of the

negotiations. Both generals wished to quickly restore peace, order, and a sense of normalcy as soon as possible. Johnston suggested that, "instead of a partial suspension of hostilities, we might, as other generals had done, arrange the terms of a permanent peace," in other words, end the war, for good. [7]

Sherman was hesitant (as he believed could not make political decisions), but agreed, thinking that this was in the spirit of Lincoln's hope for a quick and smooth transition to peace. As both officers concurred in their conviction, a friendship began to form. After two hours, near sunset, they agreed to meet at noon the next day after Johnston informed President Davis of their decision.

That night in Hillsborough, Johnston, Major General (and Secretary of War) John Cabell Breckinridge, Postmaster John Henninger Reagan, and North Carolina Governor Zebulon Baird Vance discussed the terms they wished to propose. They produced several key points that would not only end the fighting here but end the war as a whole, restore peace, and keep the current state governments running. Not wishing to merely surrender the army, they prepared terms to restore the South on an equal footing with the North.

The following day Breckinridge accompanied Johnston to the Bennett House, arriving at 2:00 p.m. Sherman objected to the participation of a member of the Confederate government, but Johnston explained his role was not as Secretary of War, but as a Confederate general. As the Confederates presented their plans, Sherman became frustrated with their proposed terms, at one point asking, "See here, gentlemen, just who is doing the surrendering, anyhow?" [8]

The war-hardened Ohio-born general then quickly wrote out terms he felt were appropriate, incorporating the thoughts of Johnston and Breckenridge and the spirit of President Lincoln. The agreement allowed the men of the Army of Tennessee to march home and deposit their arms in state arsenals, provided that the existing state governments would continue to be recognized as such and that federal courts would be re-established, and guaranteed the property and political rights of the citizens. As Johnston commanded the Department of the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida, the terms would affect all troops in that region, a huge swath of Confederate territory.

The terms were wide and sweeping. The agreement was everything the two Confederates hoped for and more; Johnston readily agreed and both commanders signed off on these terms. After departing Sherman sent a copy of his agreement to Washington for review by President Andrew Johnson, while General Johnston did the same, sending his news to President Davis.

According to Sergeant Daniel Dantzler of the 2nd South Carolina Artillery in Greensboro, "Rumor says that Gen. Johnson has surrendered his whole army." He later

[7] Robert M. Dunkerly, *To The Bitter End* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2015), 50.
[8] Mark Bradley, *This Astounding Close* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2006), 171.

wrote, "We hear that negotiations are being made for peace, and that the war is at an end, on the basic of reconstruction under the United States Constitution. Great excitement prevails in the army. Some talking one thing and some another. A great many men are talking of quitting and striking out for home. Some have gone." Others greeted the news with pleasure, glad to be relieved of marching and fighting. Word spread throughout the scattered camps, and the men began preparing to return home. [9]

Unfortunately, Sherman and Johnston had met just two days after Lincoln's assassination, and the mood in the north had changed greatly since the surrender at Appomattox. President Johnson and the US Congress were in no mood to be generous, and the terms from the Bennett farm were rejected on the grounds that Sherman had no authority to negotiate political issues beyond a simple surrender.

General Grant journeyed to Raleigh to consult with Sherman, arriving on April 25. He was given strict orders to offer the same terms Lee had been granted at Appomattox, or the Union Army would mobilize within forty-eight hours to advance on Greensboro. Sherman contacted Johnston requesting another meeting.

Imagine Johnston's frame of mind when he received Davis's approval for the terms, then an hour later got Sherman's message of their rejection by President Johnson.

Desertion, drunkenness, and general disorder were sliding the Army of Tennessee's camps into chaos across the region. South Carolina staff officer Bromfield Ridley wrote, "Around the campfires the surrender was discussed. Confusion and unrest prevailed." [10]

The two commanding generals realized they had to continue negotiating before the situation dissolved into chaos. On April 26, Johnston and Sherman met for a third time in the Bennett's small dining room, finalizing terms that led to the largest troop surrender of the war. Johnston's surrender not only included the Army of Tennessee, but the Department of the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida, with many garrisons, detachments, and scattered commands in those four states. Altogether it included 89,270 Confederate troops.

The final terms allowed the men of the Army of Tennessee to keep their sidearms and to use the army's transportation (wagons and horses) to return home. It stipulated that the Union army would send rations to their camps around Greensboro, and that the navy would assist those needing transportation to the Gulf states. The men were to stack their rifles and park their artillery where they were camped, battle flags were to be turned over as well. Yet there were no Union troops to oversee this process, they were to self-police their own surrender.

[9] Dunkerly, *To The Bitter End,* 52.
[10] Ibid., 56.

As at Appomattox, the men were to be issued paroles. Brigadier General William Hartsuff was sent by Sherman to organize this effort. Arriving in Greensboro by rail, he wrote "it was with a curious, half-uneasy sensation that I thus for the first time found myself on the wrong side of the Confederate outposts without having driven them in by a hostile advance. It was not easy to orient one's self at once with the new condition of things, and it would hardly have been a surprise to find that we had been entrapped by a ruse." [11]

To provide a measure of security, one regiment, the 104th Ohio, was chosen to move into Greensboro. Private Joseph Gaskill wrote of their arrival. In the only instance of a somewhat formal ceremony, they relieved a guard of South Carolinians at the railroad yard in downtown Greensboro:

> A patrol guard of Union soldiers is placed on duty in the village to keep order while other detachments are sent to surrounding fields where rebel guards are relieved from duty over supplies surrendered to our forces… Relieving this guard from duty over their own property is a new experience and some what embarrassing yet the change is made without friction and apparent regret on the part of the rebel guards we are relieving. The "Johnnies" knew what we are there for, so after receiving instructions from the sergeant of this guard we march along the line when the rebel guard takes proper position, instructs the 'yank' who relieves him and drops in rear of the line until all are relieved. They are then formed in line by their sergeant and stack arms on which they hang a varied assortment of equipment, break ranks and their warfare is ended. [12]

Guarding those trains was Private George Bussey of the 7th South Carolina Consolidated Regiment. He provides a perspective of the same event from the other side:

> It fell to my lot to be on post when the enemy came to relive us… In a short time a detail was sent to relieve me. I simply gave the man direction as to what I was there for, and bade him adieu. They didn't take my gun or anything that I had. I walked leisurely alone down the railroad in the direction our regiment had gone, meditating upon what had happened and that the terrible fight was all over with, as it could not be helped and we had done all that a brave people could do, and felt relieved and glad that we were going home. [13]

By May 3 the men of the Army of Tennessee were on the way home, flooding the roads south and west of Greensboro. The army officially paroled about 36,000 men, yet it had started the campaign with close to 60,000 in early April. Included in the ranks

[11] Ibid., 57.
[12] Ibid., 57-58.
[13] Ibid., 58.

were men from every Confederate state and the Border States of Missouri, Maryland, and Kentucky.

Not all terms of the surrender were observed. The 1st Georgia not only kept their flag, but openly flew it as they marched home. Colonel Charles Hart Olmstead of the unit wrote that, "The Regiment marched back to Ga with its colors flying, and disbanded at Augusta. I brought the flags home with me." [14]

With Davis' approval, Generals Wade Hampton and Joseph Wheeler, who were in no mood to surrender, took as many fast-moving cavalry as they could out of the camps around Greensboro and went south. Wheeler raced to catch up with Davis and his escort while Hampton went through the heart of South Carolina to join other forces. While camped near Augusta, Georgia, Wheeler and his men were captured by Union patrols. Hampton reached Yorkville, South Carolina on May 1. Dejected and exhausted, Hampton called it off. The few who had made it that far went to their homes.

General Joseph Wheeler, the other Confederate cavalry commander, wrote, "One by one they had fallen away, some begging off on account of their families, others alleging that their horses could go no farther. Their spirit was gone, they felt that the expedition was without a purpose or hope. Their heart was not in what they were doing, and seeing this realizing that all efforts were in vain, the general let them go." [15]

Union troops moved into western North Carolina in May to occupy key points. In a warehouse in Charlotte they found documents from the Confederate War Department, as well as boxes of captured Union battle flags, which were sent to Washington.

Because the armies were camped in different locations and the negotiations and distribution of paroles also occurred in different areas, accounts from participants mention the surrender taking place at Durham Station, Greensboro, Bennett Place, and elsewhere. The men who participated in the largest troop surrender of the war did not agree on its name.

The closing of the war in North Carolina is not a neat, compact story like that at Appomattox. The armies did not perform a formal surrender ceremony. The commanders were less prominent. The procedures were not even carried out evenly: some units received paroles in the field, others not until they reached home. The armies were not even in contact. Events occurred at various, widespread locations and are not easy to follow. It was extremely chaotic.

The North Carolina surrender is also more complicated than that at Appomattox, in part because events did not happen in one place, as they did in the small Virginia town. Generals William T. Sherman and Joseph E. Johnston negotiated at the Bennett Place

[14] Ibid., 59.
[15] Ibid., 60.

near Durham. The Confederate army's camps were spread over a wide area, with the troops camped at High Point, New Salem, Jamestown, Salisbury, Trinity College, Bush Hill, and Greensboro. Union forces were over sixty miles away in Raleigh. The stacking of arms and issuing of paroles—the only tangible motions of surrender—took place at the various Confederate campsites, for the most part, with no Union troops in sight.

For those who experienced it, the war's end at Greensboro was tedious, fraught with rumors, and agonizingly slow. Speculation abounded—rumors in the Confederate camps ranged from Grant surrendering to Lee, to Lee surrendering to Grant, to Johnston surrendering, to tales of both forces joining in a war with Mexico. The fighting was suspended, then resumed, then called off again; it was simply maddening. The soldiers of Army of Tennessee received four pieces of dreadful news one after another that broke their morale in April, 1865. First was the army's massive reorganization, followed by news of the fall of Richmond, next word of Lee's surrender, followed by news of their own surrender after four exhausting years.

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