The Atlanta Campaign

VOLUME 1:

Dalton to Cassville, May 1–19, 1864

David A. Powell

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To my wife, Anne for her constant presence and support.

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Dramatis Personae

The Federals

The Men at the Top

Ulysses S. Grant has risen from colonel to lieutenant general, from command of the 21st Illinois Infantry to command the entire Federal war effort. His dramatic rise has not been without hindrance; for some time after the battle of Shiloh, his fortunes seemed on the wane. Subsequent triumphs at Vicksburg and Chattanooga secured his fortunes, and now he must formulate a war-winning strategy to satisfy President Lincoln.

Grant's status as a determined, even obstinate, fighter, was amply demonstrated by his unwillingness to retreat after the disaster of the first day at Shiloh, and by his persistent efforts to reduce Vicksburg. He is not afraid of battle—something he will amply illustrate in the coming months. He decides he is needed in Virginia to face the great Confederate commander Robert E. Lee, though that is not his first plan. He prefers to stand on the defense in front of Washington, D.C. while operating against the Confederacy's strategic flanks in the Carolinas, in Georgia, and against Mobile. President Lincoln has pledged to let Grant run the war, but overrides this plan; it is not politically viable to ignore Lee or Virginia.

Thus Grant will come east to face Lee, though his good friend William T. Sherman urges him not to. That does not mean he will pass through these pages unnoted. Though he directs affairs in North Georgia from afar, appearing seldom in this chronicle, his influence is always present.

Henry W. Halleck is the second part of a military triumvirate (the others being Grant and Sherman) who often passes unremarked in the literature of the war. This is at least partially understandable because after ascending to overall Federal command in 1862 and found wanting, Halleck has been supplanted

by Grant. Further, Halleck eschews field command and confines himself to the Federal capital. But he should not be overlooked.

Despite a sometimes-frosty prewar relationship in California, Halleck and William T. Sherman become good friends during the course of the conflict. Sherman regards Halleck as the man who saved his career after Sherman was relieved from the Department of the Ohio in 1861. Virtually all of Sherman's correspondence with his higher-ups will be sent to Halleck during the campaign to come, and Halleck is Sherman's principal respondent.

William T. Sherman completes this trio. He is in many ways Grant's opposite. The wiry, irascible, restless, and opinionated red-haired Ohioan very nearly found himself sidelined early in the war, overwhelmed by what might be called a case of nerves. His steadiness under fire at Shiloh, coupled with his staunch defense of Grant's role in the battle, builds a strong sense of trust and solid friendship between the two men. When Grant goes East, he endorses Sherman as the man to replace him as head of the Military Division of the Mississippi, with sway over the entire Western Theater between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River.

Unlike Grant, Sherman does not favor battle. He is not a slugger. Some might say he lacks the killer instinct of a Great Captain. When Grant departs for Washington his faith in Sherman is unwavering, and he wholeheartedly endorses his friend for the post he leaves behind.

Army Commanders

George H. Thomas is next in authority. Thomas leads the Army of the Cumberland, the most important of the trio of departments (each with its own army) that make up Sherman's new command. Thomas is a Virginian who did not forsake the flag for the nascent Confederacy. Some Northerners initially questioned Thomas's loyalty, but Sherman, his prewar friend and comrade in arms, did not. That trust has been borne out. Thomas proved his steadfastness through many battles. He is now called "the Rock of Chickamauga" by his soldiers because of his magnificent defensive stand on that field. Thomas reluctantly inherited command of the army after its previous commander, William S. Rosecrans, was relieved; when Thomas offered to resign in protest, Rosecrans insisted the army needed him to remain.

Grant, by contrast, does not like him. There is a rivalry between the Army of the Cumberland and Grant's former command, the Army of the Tennessee, as well as personal animosity between Grant and Rosecrans, which carries over to Thomas. But Sherman relies on him and the army he now leads. Thomas brings

65,000 men to the campaign—two-thirds of Sherman's entire field force, including nearly all the cavalry and an immense logistical apparatus without which Sherman cannot operate. In many ways Thomas is Sherman's opposite. He is slow of speech, deliberate, careful, and cautious, whereas Sherman is often frenetic, speaks without sufficient forethought, and is willing to take greater risks. How well these two men will function together once battle is joined remains to be seen.

James B. McPherson is a rising star with Halleck, Grant, and Sherman his patrons. Early in the war he served on Halleck's and Grant's staffs before moving to a line command in the fall of 1862. He is bright, articulate, and well-liked. But he is young and his rise so meteoric that even McPherson is surprised at his elevation. Other corps commanders in the Army of the Tennessee have better combat records and are more seasoned, but McPherson is a graduate of West Point, which counts for much among his fellow West Pointers.

Sherman intends for McPherson to open the campaign with the most audacious element of it: the move to Resaca against Johnston's supply line. This mission requires nerve and daring. Speed is vital, and Sherman counts on McPherson to deliver this master stroke. But McPherson's command, reduced by detachments, can field only 25,000 men in two corps. The rest of the army—and all of his cavalry—remain in Mississippi and in other garrisons. Will it be enough?

John M. Schofield is a man hungry for rank and recognition. A peer of McPherson and John Bell Hood, he also began the war as a staff officer. Though Halleck and Grant favor him, promotion has not come easily. His first appointment to a major generalship fell through due to politics, and his assignments have mostly been to backwater sectors, including Missouri. His opportunity arrives when Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside takes the Union IX Corps back to Virginia, leaving command of the Department of the Ohio vacant. Schofield is tapped for the job.

However, East Tennessee is stripped of troops, and Schofield's "army" consists of one small infantry corps and a cavalry division. He will field only 15,000 men. Though ranked as an army commander, he worries that his lack of numbers will not grant him the respect he feels he is due.

Corps Commanders

Joseph Hooker, who now commands the XX Corps under Thomas, is seeking redemption. A year earlier, in the tangled snake pit that was army politics in the Army of the Potomac, Hooker rose to command the army before being laid low at Chancellorsville. He retained command after that defeat, but President Lincoln's

confidence in him ebbed. In June 1863, in a ploy to gain a freer hand on the eve of an even more momentous engagement, Hooker threatened to resign. He miscalculated his importance. To his dismay Lincoln accepted, and three days later a new man, George Gordon Meade, won the battle of Gettysburg. Hooker remains a favorite of the Radicals in Congress, who despise the careful cautious nature of most West Point-trained officers, which is one reason that door to redemption opens in the fall of 1863 as he leads two corps west to reinforce Thomas' Army of the Cumberland.

Now he finds himself commanded by Sherman, who does not like him. In prewar California, Hooker defaulted on a loan owed to Sherman's bank, which contributed in part to Sherman going bust as a banker. Despite his stumble at Chancellorsville, Hooker is still one of the better combat soldiers and fighting corps commanders in the entire Federal army, as he proved in the Eastern Theater and again during the November fighting for Chattanooga.

Oliver O. Howard is the man Joe Hooker most blames for the defeat at Chancellorsville, for it was his XI Corps, posted on the army's right flank, that was surprised and overrun by Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's famous attack. Howard's corps was overwhelmed by those same Rebels at Gettysburg on July 1. Despite fighting quite valiantly, the rest of the army blamed the XI Corps, which contained a high proportion of recent German immigrants, for failing to stand its ground. When the time comes to dispatch forces to the Western Theater the XI Corps is quickly chosen to be part of that movement.

While personally brave, his tactical skills are modest. He is famously pious—a teetotaler in an army and an era of hard drinkers. Now he commands the Federal IV Corps under Thomas, of equal rank and status with Hooker, which grates on the other man. Howard is not a man to make waves or seek attention. He dutifully soldiers on, a quality that Sherman will come to value.

John M. Palmer commands the XIV Corps, George Thomas's old command. Though he is not a military academy graduate or a professional soldier, Thomas trusts and respects him. He is a capable leader and an effective soldier, but a reluctant warrior. He dislikes the professional West Point bias toward their own, and believed they are too cautious. Like many Republicans, he sometimes wonders if they really want to win the war.

In earlier days Palmer was an Illinois congressman—political influence that translated into a field command. He proved himself on several battlefields. He tried to resign to go home and care for his family in the fall of 1863, but Thomas

valued him too highly to let him go. Now he commands the largest corps in the Army of the Cumberland and some of Thomas's best troops.

John A. Logan, another Illinoisian and a lawyer, politician, and Mexican War veteran, commands the XV Corps in the Army of Tennessee under James McPherson. As a congressman and Democrat he supported Stephen A. Douglas for president, but he is also a fervent Union man. He personally shouldered a weapon as a civilian volunteer at Blackburn's Ford on July 18, 1861 during the First Bull Run Campaign. Soon thereafter he resigned his seat in Congress to go home and raise the 31st Illinois Infantry from southern Illinois, where war fever could be described as lukewarm.

Logan proved himself in combat as a regimental, brigade, division, and corps commander. Like Palmer, Logan is an outstanding leader and an aggressive combat soldier. After Vicksburg General Grant opined that Logan is fully capable of commanding an army, but when McPherson rises to lead the Army of the Tennessee Logan is not embittered, for he admires and respects the other man. Logan is popular with his troops, who nicknamed him "Black Jack" for his dark hair and moustache, as well as his swarthy complexion.

Grenville M. Dodge heads the XVI Corps. Born in Massachusetts, he graduated from Norwich University in 1851 and headed west to put his civil engineering degree to work surveying and building railroads in Illinois and Iowa. In 1861 he raised the 4th Iowa Infantry, became its first colonel, and led a brigade at the battle of Pea Ridge. Soon thereafter he was promoted to divisional command and stationed at Corinth, Mississippi.

Dodge does not play a frontline role in the Vicksburg Campaign but was nevertheless vital to Grant's eventual success. At Corinth, Dodge reveals a devious streak and a hidden talent: spymaster. Using in part funds garnered from smuggled cotton, Dodge organized an intelligence-gathering operation of more than 100 agents, their names and identities closely guarded secrets. Even Grant does not know the details. No need, for Dodge's accurate and timely details are, says Grant, worth a division of troops.

By 1864 Dodge in in charge of the XVI Corps and tasked with a mission for which he is equally well suited: rebuilding and defending railroads in Tennessee and Alabama. By the time Sherman is ready to march, Dodge's reconstructed lines are essential to the Federal logistical network.

The Confederates

A Triumvirate of Distrust

President Jefferson Davis is imperious and aloof, not normally the characteristics of a great politician. Yet, he rose to the Confederate presidency almost by acclaim and now wages the war with relentless determination. A West Point graduate, a Mexican War hero, and a former secretary of war, Davis believes he is the martial equal of any of his generals. He favors aggressive war and wishes to carry the conflict into the North to reclaim lost Rebel territory.

It is with great reluctance that he appoints Joseph E. Johnston to command the Army of Tennessee, for Johnston is Davis's opposite in things strategic: cautious rather than bold, defensive-minded, painfully aware of the Federal advantage in numbers, and petty to a fault. As a result, a strategic gulf, never closed, separates the two men. Davis wants Johnston to strike into Tennessee, while Johnston believes he has no choice but to await Sherman's attack in Georgia before undertaking an offensive. He also argues for reinforcements. Davis counters that the Army of Tennessee can only be reinforced if Johnston first commits to an early offensive.

Davis has never fully grasped the logistical constraints facing Confederate armies in the Western Theater, which by 1864 have only grown worse. What Davis is asking is impractical, if not impossible. His expectations do not diminish as the campaign unfolds.

Joseph E. Johnston is a graduate of West Point, class of 1829, and a classmate of fellow Virginian Robert E. Lee. Johnston is reserved, close-mouthed, sensitive to snubs actual or perceived, and touchy about rank. A rift between himself and Davis opens in 1861 when Johnston feels slighted by his ranking—fourth out of five—among the full generals in the Confederate Army. Their relationship does not improve when Johnston retreats from northern Virginia to the gates of Richmond in 1862, and then fails to rescue Vicksburg from Federal besiegers in 1863. By that fall, Johnston is convinced that Davis will never again give him an important command. Public and private pressures, however, elevate him to lead

the Army of Tennessee after Braxton Bragg resigns. Old Joe assumes command around Christmastime.

The next few months are marked by argument between himself in Georgia and Davis and Bragg in Richmond. Johnston finds much at fault with his army, which lacks transportation, horses, and even sufficient artillery. Other, more optimistic, officers feed Davis positive views, which only exacerbates dissatisfaction. Johnston communicates as little information as possible to Richmond, leaving Davis in the dark about his plans for the coming spring campaign. Even Johnston's corps commanders know little or nothing about what he intends to do when the roads dry.

Braxton Bragg is a disgruntled man in the spring of 1864. After a disastrous turn of affairs at Chattanooga, where Bragg's demoralized army is driven off what most believe is an impregnable position on Missionary Ridge, Bragg offers to resign. The gesture was intended as a means of ferreting out disloyalty in his own ranks, where command issues have festered since the Kentucky Campaign of 1862. Instead, Davis accepts, and Bragg packs his bags.

Curiously, Davis makes Bragg his military advisor. It is from Richmond that Bragg will still play a role in the relationship between Davis and Johnston. Bragg shares Davis's desire for offensive action and is dismayed by Johnston's ongoing pessimism, even though his own tenure as commander of that army made him aware of the problems Johnston now faces. Instead, bitter at his removal, Bragg helps to further undermine Johnston's already difficult relationship with the president.

Corps Commanders

William J. Hardee is called "Old Reliable" by the solders. Another West Pointer, Hardee's name is widely recognized North and South as the author of a prewar drill manual that came to be widely used by volunteers learning soldiering on both sides. He has been a corps commander in the Army of Tennessee since the battle of Shiloh, and a veteran of several campaigns. Hardee's long service under Bragg, however, was marked by dissension.

As the senior corps commander, he takes command of the army after Bragg's resignation. Hardee makes it clear that he does not want that command permanently, and gladly bows out in favor of Joe Johnston. After decades of bachelorhood, Hardee is now engaged to be married, and he frets that the responsibility of army command will interfere with his wedding.

John Bell Hood is the new man on the scene. Badly wounded at Gettysburg and again at Chickamauga nearly three months later, Hood is widely hailed as a military hero. Recuperating in Richmond, Hood spends much time with President Davis, who discovers that Hood is exactly the kind of aggressive-minded senior commander he wants in the field. Hood is promoted to corps command—endorsed by both Bragg and Johnston—and arrives in Georgia that spring.

Much to Hardee's growing irritation, Hood soon becomes the favored subordinate, with Johnston relying on him for his opinions on army matters of all kinds. But Hood is also sending periodic letters to Richmond, undermining Johnston's expressed doubts about the army's readiness. Though Hood is far from alone in this practice, his letters bear extra weight. As the campaign opens, Johnston repeatedly turns to Hood with expectations of battlefield excellence.

Leonidas Polk, though formerly a corps commander under Bragg, is now an army commander in his own right in charge of the Army of Mississippi—understrength as it is. He is a graduate of West Point, a close friend of Davis, and the Episcopal Bishop of the Southwest. Despite his West Point training, Polk never actively commanded troops or served in the U. S. Army until the outbreak of the rebellion. Moreover, his long and contentious history as Bragg's senior subordinate—with whom he often quarreled and repeatedly undermined—has left a permanent sense of malaise within the Army of Tennessee. There is little in his record to suggest that his performance will be any better under Johnston.

When Sherman advances, however, Polk drops everything and rushes virtually his entire army to Johnston's aid over Davis's and Bragg's objections. Even though those troops should have been sent sooner, by the end of May Johnston will command an army of some 70,000 men. The decision to move quickly early in the campaign is perhaps the best of Polk's career.

Joseph Wheeler is Johnston's cavalry commander. He is young, a West Pointer (class of 1859), and eager for action. He has a close relationship with Bragg, and is another officer who maintains a confidential correspondence with Richmond. Despite his rapid rise to corps command, Wheeler has sometimes proven to be an indifferent cavalryman, neglecting the mundane duties of scouting and screening. He wishes instead to conduct deep headline-grabbing raids against Union rear areas such as those executed by Nathan Bedford Forrest or John H. Morgan. Johnston keeps Wheeler on a tight rein, for he will need Wheeler's troopers to balance out Sherman's sizeable Union cavalry force. The restrictions chafe the young would-be cavalier.

Chapter 1

February 1864

According to *The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* the campaign for Atlanta formally commenced on May 1, 1864. It's opening however, was heavily foreshadowed (and in some ways shaped) nearly three months earlier, in February.

At that time Ulysses S. Grant, still headquartered at Nashville, ordered Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas, at Chattanooga, to move against the Confederate Army of Tennessee, which then was wintering in Dalton Georgia. Though unsuccessful, the Federals learned many important lessons about how best to assail the Rebels in Dalton, which would become the basis for William T. Sherman's strategy that Spring. This, it can be argued that the long drive to Atlanta really began on February 22nd, 1864.

> Nashville, February 12, 1864.
>
> Major General Thomas:
>
> Should you not be required to go into East Tennessee, could you not make a formidable reconnaissance toward Dalton, and, if successful in driving the enemy out, occupy that place and complete the railroad up to it this winter?
>
> GRANT,
>
> Major-General[1]

Major General Ulysses S. Grant was a man of action. He hated to see troops sitting idle, even in winter, his recent victory at Chattanooga the previous November

1 U.S. War Department. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington D.C.: 1880-1901), Series I, Volume 32, pt. 2, 373. Hereafter cited as *OR*.

notwithstanding. Grant's elevation to command of the recently created Military Division of the Mississippi gave him purview over a vast swath of territory, from the mountains of East Tennessee to the bayous of Louisiana. In Mississippi, troops were already moving: 20,000 men under Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman from Vicksburg, and 7,000 more under Brig. Gen. William Sooy Smith from Memphis, all converging on Meridian.

Grant also desired action in East Tennessee, where Lt. Gen. James Longstreet's 20,000 Confederates still nominally threatened Knoxville. Grant wanted Longstreet driven entirely from the region, securing Knoxville once and for all. This objective proved too ambitious; correspondence with Maj. Gens. John G. Foster and John M. Schofield convinced Grant that the difficult terrain and poor weather limited any chance of success against Longstreet.

Thwarted, Grant turned his attention to the railroad town of Dalton in northern Georgia, 33 miles south of Chattanooga along the Western & Atlantic Railroad leading to Atlanta. Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston's 47,000 troops of the Army of Tennessee occupied Dalton, recovering from Grant's drubbing of them back in November. Opposing Johnston, Federal Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas's Army of the Cumberland occupied Chattanooga and environs. Though there were 80,000 troops in Thomas's department, only about 40,000 were available for a move against Dalton. The remainder guarded his supply line stretching back to Nashville. Nevertheless, when queried, Thomas's answer was hopeful: "I think an advance on Dalton would be successful," he wired, assuming he could be reinforced by a division from John A. Logan's XV Corps currently occupying northern Alabama.[2]

Dalton would be no easy nut to crack. Several steep mountain ridges separated the two armies, the most rugged being Rocky Face Ridge, which began three miles north of Dalton, rose to 1,500 feet, and extended 15 miles south. The Federal Road (the old treaty route through Cherokee territory) from Chattanooga ran east from Ringgold to skirt Rocky Face's northern end to Spring Place, east of Dalton; while a second road pierced Rocky Face at Mill Creek Gap (Buzzard's Roost Gap). Farther south Snake Creek Gap divided Rocky Face from John's Mountain, providing another water-level passage to the town of Resaca. Two lesser passages, Boyd's Gap (also sometimes called Mill Gap, not to be confused with Mill Creek Gap) and Dug Gap, pierced Rocky Face south of Mill Creek, but each of these

2 Ibid., 282-283, 373, 586, 776, 820. Thomas's force contained an aggregate of 91,253, of which 77,718 were listed as "present for duty." Logan's men in northern Alabama belonged to Sherman's Army of the Tennessee. Confederate returns for February show an army strength of 42,000, present for duty, but exclude Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Cheatham's entire division of about 4,500, which had been temporarily transferred to Alabama.

offered limited access only through the sheer palisade at the mountain's crest. They required steep ascents and descents. Indeed, while Dug Gap was accessible to wagons, Boyd's Gap was little more than a footpath. Dalton was bounded on the east by ranges of lesser but still tactically formidable hills, and then the Conasauga River. Federal troops could approach Dalton from the north, via Crow Valley, thus bypassing Rocky Face, but would also run the risk of being isolated from the rest of the army.

Ever willing to gamble, Grant proposed a different strategy. On February 13 he suggested: "I would feel no hesitation in marching past all the force they have at Tunnel Hill and Dalton and come in on the railroad to their rear with a force from sixteen to twenty thousand effective fighting men."[3]

This very strategy would become the main Union plan of operations in May: a rapid move south from Ringgold to fall upon the Western & Atlantic near Resaca on the Oostanaula River. However, the risks of such a movement were high. At Dalton, Johnston's Confederates could use interior lines and (presumably) newly arriving reinforcements to fall on any expedition before it could be reinforced. But the rewards were equally high: If successful, the Rebel Army of Tennessee could be forced into a precipitate retreat across difficult country, or even trapped and destroyed outright.

Thomas considered Grant's proposal and demurred. "I have thought of the route you suggest," he wrote back on the 15th, "but find upon inquiry that the roads across the mountains are so difficult that they can hardly be considered practicable at this season of the year." Instead, Thomas planned to send a reinforced division from Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger's IV Corps through Crow Valley to threaten Dalton from the north, while Maj. Gen. John Palmer's XIV Corps advanced from Ringgold. Not all the forces for this movement were in place. Only half of Logan's men (seven regiments) had reached Chattanooga by the 15th, while Granger's IV Corps remained at Cleveland, Tennessee, ready to reinforce Knoxville if needed. Still, Thomas was equally impatient to set out. "Should the weather clear up, however, I will not wait."[4]

As it turned out, James Longstreet had a say in the matter. On February 10, Longstreet ordered Brig. Gen. Micah Jenkins, commanding John B. Hood's former division, to bridge the Holston River 20 miles northeast of Knoxville. General Schofield asked Thomas for reinforcements, a request that reached Chattanooga

3 John Y. Simon and John F. Marszalek, eds. *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, 32 vols. to date (Carbondale, IL: 1967-present.), 10:119, hereafter cited as Simon, *PUSG*, followed by volume and page number.

4 *OR* 32, pt. 2, 395.

on the 16th—the day after Thomas informed Grant that he was nearly ready to move. Thomas immediately informed Grant that if he reinforced Schofield "it will also become necessary to give up any demonstration against Dalton."[5]

Longstreet's plans fizzled due to a lack of support. Confederate General Robert E. Lee proved reluctant to send Longstreet any more troops from his Army of Northern Virginia, while Johnston was dealing with a different crisis. On February 11 and again on the 16th, President Jefferson Davis in Richmond urged Johnston to hurry reinforcements to Lt. Gen. Leonidas Polk in Mississippi, who was facing an advancing Sherman. Johnston protested that he would have to send 24,000 men to accomplish anything in Mississippi, while "the small force left here could little impede the enemy's advance on Atlanta." Far from sending any reinforcements, Johnston's recall of Longstreet's cavalry force further derailed that general's plans.[6]

Dismissing Longstreet's activities as a feint, Grant's thoughts were also on Mississippi. He instructed Thomas to stick to the original plan and move directly against Dalton. As Thomas already indicated, however, February was not an ideal time to undertake active campaigning in the mountains of Georgia. A "heavy rain" on February 14 rendered Chickamauga Creek unfordable for most of the ensuing week, postponing the start date. Then Thomas fell ill: "I regret . . . that I do not think I shall be able to take the field, the cold and damp weather having brought on an attack of neuralgia, from which I suffer intensely." Instead, "I am getting troops prepared as rapidly as possible, and will send them out under General [John M.] Palmer if you think it best." Grant did think it best. "By all means send the expedition," he urged. "I think it should move as soon as possible, for the effect it will have in favor of Sherman and also . . . East Tennessee."[7]

Finally, on Monday the 22nd, Brig. Gen. Charles Cruft's two-brigade division of Palmer's IV Corps, reinforced by a brigade from Logan's XV Corps, departed Cleveland for Red Clay, the old Cherokee parley ground on the Georgia-Tennessee border. Cruft's 5,500 infantry were supported by a battalion drawn from the 4th Michigan and 4th Ohio cavalries—155 riders, which was everyone with a serviceable horse. Simultaneously, Palmer led the XIV Corps out of the Chattanooga at "early dawn." Brig. Gen. Richard W. Johnson's First Division led the corps, spearheaded by the 39th Indiana Mounted Infantry. Palmer reached Ringgold that afternoon, finding only "a small picket of the enemy, which fled."

5 James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America* (Philadelphia: 1896), 538; *OR* 32, pt. 2, 408.

6 *OR* 32, pt. 2, 752, 760-61.

7 Ibid., 414, 421.

Palmer halted there, forced to spend much of the day rebuilding a wagon bridge over the still-high East Chickamauga Creek.[8]

Cruft pushed one brigade forward to Varnell Station on the East Tennessee Railroad, three miles south of Red Clay, where it encountered another Rebel picket at the Wade house, who immediately retreated. Colonel William Grose, commanding the reconnaissance, ordered the accompanying cavalry to give chase, but no serious encounter resulted. One of Grose's regiments, the 84th Illinois, sported their new "very costly and beautiful flag—a present from the citizens of McDonough County" back home in Illinois. The 84th, recorded one Illini soldier, had just received this "splendid flag, bearing in gilt letters the names of our hard fought battles," the day before, borne by an officer returning from furlough.[9]

Guarding Cruft's left were 600 Union cavalrymen under Col. Eli Long moving down the Cleveland and Spring Place Road toward the Conasauga River. Long's force was also an amalgam of several commands: "350 men of the 98th Illinois Mounted Infantry and 250 cavalry [from] the 2nd Kentucky, 1st Ohio, 3rd Ohio, and 4th Ohio." Furloughs and broken-down horses left all those commands depleted. After an easy march the troopers camped at Waterhouse's Mill, southeast of Varnell's. Here, reported Long, "[We] have met or heard of nothing [of the enemy] as yet."[10]

The Federal activity caught Johnston in mid-move. Tired of cajoling, on February 17 President Davis simply ordered Johnston to send Lt. Gen. William J. Hardee and two of his three infantry divisions to reinforce Polk. Although this movement was not as large as the force Johnston thought would be required, it deprived Dalton of 15,000 men and reduced Johnston's available force to 27,000 of all arms. By February 20, Hardee and his headquarters staff were in the Alabama state capital of Montgomery. Two days later Benjamin F. Cheatham's Division began arriving in Selma (50 miles farther west). That same day, Maj. Gen. Patrick Cleburne's Division boarded the cars at the Dalton depot and reached West Point, Georgia, the next morning.[11]

This was not the first time Davis embarked on such a course, having drained the Army of Tennessee of sizeable forces at least twice, both at the expense of Gen.

8 Ibid., pt. 1, 423, 451-452.

9 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 432; L. A. Simmons, *The History of the 84th Reg't Ill. Vols.* (Macomb, IL: 1866), 136.

10 Nancy Pape-Findley, *The Invincibles: The Story of the Fourth Ohio Veteran Volunteer Cavalry, 1861-1865* (Tecumseh, MI: 2002), 193; *OR* 32, pt. 1, 469.

11 *OR* 52, pt. 2, 621; M. Todd Cathey, *Captain A. T. Fielder's Civil War Diary, Company B 12th Tennessee Infantry C.S.A. July 1861-June 1865* (Knoxville, TN: 2012), 310; Irving A. Buck, *Cleburne and his Command* (New York: 1908), 225.

Braxton Bragg. In December 1862, he ordered Bragg to send 10,000 men to bolster the Vicksburg garrison on the eve of the Battle of Stones River at precisely the time they were needed in Middle Tennessee. The next June, he ordered Bragg to send an infantry and a cavalry division west in an unsuccessful effort to relieve Vicksburg. Each time Johnston had vehemently objected, knowing that the lack of direct rail lines and the increasingly decrepit condition of the existing track made such transfers arduous affairs. In each case the move deprived one command of needed strength at a crucial moment while failing to make a difference at the destination.[12]

When Confederate cavalry commander Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler reported this new Federal movement, Johnston reacted. After seeing his wife off to Atlanta on the morning of February 23, Johnston ordered Wheeler that, if driven back by the enemy, he was to "destroy all bridges and make the road as impracticable as possible. Offer him every obstruction and difficulty in your power." That same morning Johnston informed Davis: "I have therefore suspended the movement [to Mississippi.] . . . Was I right?"[13]

Davis's frustration was evident in his reply. "The re-enforcement you were called on to send General Polk was for immediate service. Promptitude, I have to repeat, is essential," he scolded. "To hesitate is to fail. . . . To destroy Sherman will be the most immediate and important method of relieving you and best secures the future supply of your army. Speedy success in Mississippi restores the forces you detached, and adds others to enable you to follow up the advantage." That telegraphic tantrum, however, was soon followed by a more realistic acknowledgement of Johnston's situation, which led to Davis reversing course. "Information just received from General Polk indicates that the re-enforcements . . . are too late. Recall those troops which have not passed Montgomery."[14]

Though Davis's acquiescence probably further infused Joseph Johnston with a sense of vindication, it was at best cold comfort because a Federal army was still advancing on Dalton. "About 10:00 the night of the 22nd," penned Lt. L. C. Apperson of the 22nd Alabama, "we received orders to hold ourselves in readiness

12 Even when Johnston was on the receiving end of those reinforcements, as he had been for the two major transfers in 1863, he viewed Davis's policy as folly. In September 1863, Johnston was called upon to return those troops sent from Tennessee because Chattanooga was being threatened by Union Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans. Fearing that he could not hold what was left of Mississippi if Grant's army attacked him, he objected anew. Fortunately for Johnston, in this case, Rosecrans was defeated at Chickamauga, and the Federal Government responded by detaching 20,000 men from Grant to reinforce Chattanooga. This fundamental rift in Confederate strategy would never be resolved.

13 "My Darling," W. W. Mackall to wife, February 24, 1864, Joseph E. Johnston Papers, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA; *OR* 32, pt. 2, 798.

14 Ibid., 52, pt. 2, 627. Davis consistently failed to grasp that such transfers could not be made as quickly as he supposed.

for immediate action. Three days rations were very hurriedly cooked, every feller was doing something [and] many were the conjectures of what was going to take place. Some thought a skedaddle was on hand, but . . . the more thoughtful saw something different from a run . . . it was 'be ready for action,' which meant prepare yourselves for a fight." As if to confirm the idea of retreat, "early on the morning of the 23rd," Apperson continued, "the Quartermaster (you never see a Quartermaster when there is danger) and the trains of wagons began to move to the rear, they were well after noon passing." Believing that "Johnston, as a prudent man, prepared for any emergency," Apperson still thought there might be a fight.[15]

Captain C. Irvine Walker of the 10th South Carolina wrote that as he "was quietly sitting down waging a war of 'Chess,' I was considerably astonished by an order coming down from Div. Hd. Qrs. to hold ourselves in readiness for action. Chess was at once abandoned for real war, and in a few minutes the hitherto quiet camp was one scene of indescribable bustle. . . . [A] great many of the men had their wives in camp, and all such were in a most piteous condition." As brigade adjutant, Walker was privy to more of the army's details, noting that "all our wagons were sent to the rear across the Oostanaula River. . . . Dalton was being rapidly cleared of all government stores. . . . [E]verybody expected to retreat . . . that night." As Walker noted, Johnston's wagons headed south toward Resaca and the Oostanaula, triggering a panic as civilians also flooded the trains headed south on Tuesday.[16]

That same morning, reinforced by Col. W. A. Dickerman's brigade from the XV Corps, Cruft continued to press south. At 2:00 p.m. Palmer ordered Cruft to shift west and join the XIV Corps near Ringgold. Departing within the hour, his column moved southwestward from Red Clay, reaching the Stone Church (very near Catoosa Platform, roughly two miles east of Ringgold) by 10:00 p.m. after a 12-mile march. Dickerman's troops, having come from Cleveland, had the hardest day's tramp with 25 miles.[17]

Colonel Long was not idle during this time. The cavalry officer pushed his troopers south along the Conasauga River toward Dalton and, at 11:30 a.m. six miles southeast of Varnell's, reported attacking a Confederate infantry regiment in "winter quarters (log huts). . . . They were completely surprised." The surprise

15 "Dear Grandpa," *The Troy Messenger*, March 18, 1864.

16 William Lee White and Charles Denny Runion, eds., *Great Things Are Expected of Us, the Letters of Colonel C. Irvine Walker, 10th South Carolina Infantry, C.S.A.* (Knoxville: 2009), 100-101.

17 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 423; Orendorff, H. H., et. al. *Reminiscences of the Civil War from Diaries from Members of the 103rd Illinois Volunteer Infantry 1904* (Chicago: 1904), 40. Catoosa platform was a temporary station on the Western & Atlantic, built by the Confederates the previous fall to unload supplies and troops when the destruction of several small bridges over East Chickamauga Creek rendered Ringgold depot unusable.

raid captured 12 Mississippians, but when the Confederates recovered from their discomfiture and formed for battle, Long prudently retired to Russell's Mill. Catching Confederate infantry in camp, within "3 ½ miles" of Dalton demonstrated that Rebel cavalry pickets were thin on the ground.[18]

Wheeler's headquarters were at Tunnel Hill. The cavalry corps was worn down by active service in East Tennessee and suffered from a severe shortage of forage for their animals. Wheeler reported only 4,600 officers and men present for duty. Worse, though they had just been recalled to Georgia, Brig. Gen. William T. Martin and four brigades were still in East Tennessee some 25 miles northeast of Knoxville, and would be some time arriving. Other regiments were as far away as Alabama and at Rome, Georgia.[19]

While Cruft joined Palmer and Long in the thrust toward Dalton, Richard Johnson's division, again led by the 39th Indiana, set out for Tunnel Hill. Brig. Gen. William P. Carlin's brigade followed Col. Thomas Harrison's Hoosiers. "About 2 miles beyond Catoosa Station I met Colonel Harrison falling back before superior numbers of rebel cavalry, under General Wheeler. Finding himself supported, Harrison immediately resumed his former line, where he had been skirmishing for some time." Deploying four infantry regiments, and with the 39th Indiana's mounted skirmishers in the van, Carlin "drove the enemy steadily for about 2 miles [to a] barricade of rails . . . from which a heavy volley was opened on my line." Shunning a frontal assault, Carlin dispatched the 88th Indiana to "seize a hill to the right and rear of the enemy," which forced Wheeler back to Tunnel Hill.[20]

A correspondent for the *Huntsville Daily Confederate* detailed the day's fight. "Our cavalry met and fought him at Stone Church, and kept him in check during the day," began the paper. "Early on [Tuesday] morning the enemy again began their advance and charged our cavalry, but it was handsomely repulsed, and such was the effect . . . that before attempting to advance further he deployed long infantry lines. We fought him successfully . . . frequently ambuscading him, but late in the evening permitting him to march into Tunnel Hill, we forming our cavalry lines on the ridge next to Dalton." Carlin described the capture of Tunnel Hill considerably differently: "Within 500 yards of the town, Colonel Harrison, with only 25 men, charged on the enemy and put him to a most disgraceful

18 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 470-472.

19 Ibid., pt. 2, 776.

20 Ibid., pt. 1, 453-454.

flight. . . . This was the most gallant and handsome exploit of cavalry I ever witnessed."[21]

Whether it was a disgraceful flight or planned withdrawal, Wheeler did not flee far. The Rebels soon rallied and engaged their pursuers with artillery. In addition to his own 39th Indiana, Colonel Harrison also commanded Col. William P. Boone's 28th Kentucky Mounted Infantry and elements of the 2nd Kentucky Cavalry. The Rebels "directed their fire principally at Colonel Boone's Kentuckians, who "advanced on Col. Harrison's right." Carlin's infantry did not escape unscathed. Sergeant James Jackson of the 19th Illinois was killed and three more—two from the 88th Indiana and one from the 10th Wisconsin—fell wounded. The strength of the Confederate fortifications, Wheeler's stiffening resistance, the Federal lack of artillery, and the distance from the main Union force were factored into Johnson's decision to fall back to Catoosa Platform.[22]

The Federals began a more serious advance on Wednesday, February 24. At 10:00 a.m., General Palmer ordered General Cruft to move three-and-a-half miles east to Doctor Lee's house, which sat near the intersection of the Tunnel Hill-Cleveland and the Ringgold-Varnell roads. This put Cruft at the north end of Chetoogeta Mountain (through which ran the railroad tunnel at Tunnel Hill) and Rocky Face Ridge, both of which begin rising sharply just south of that point. Cruft left Dickerman's borrowed brigade at Dr. Lee's while Col. Thomas Champion's brigade moved south along the west side of Rocky Face to connect with the XIV Corps. Colonel Grose's brigade marched southeast of the ridge into Crow Valley with orders "to feel the enemy sturdily."[23]

Meanwhile, all of the XIV Corps returned to Tunnel Hill. Johnson's men again led the movement, followed by Brig. Gen. Jefferson C. Davis's two-brigade division, then Brig. Gen. Absalom Baird three-brigade force. At Palmer's direction, Davis left his Second Brigade, currently under Lt. Col. Carter Van Vleck of the 78th Illinois, to hold Ringgold Gap in the corps' absence. This suited Van Vleck, who informed his wife that they caught up to the division "last night at midnight & were left here on account of our fatigue to garrison the town. [The rest of the corps] captured Tunnel Hill today and are pushing forward for Dalton. I think

21 W. C. Dodson, *Campaigns of Wheeler and His Cavalry 1862-1864 from Material Furnished by Gen. Joseph Wheeler, to which is added his Concise and Graphic Account of the Santiago Campaign of 1898* (Atlanta: 1899), 166; *OR* 32, pt. 1, 454.

22 "Important advance into Georgia," *Belmont Chronicle*, St. Clairsville, Ohio, March 3, 1864.

23 Ibid., 424.

there will be some hard fighting tomorrow, but the probabilities are that my Brigade will not participate."[24]

Richard Johnson made contact about 11:30 a.m., when Confederate artillery opened on the front of his command. "A number of shells were thrown with great accuracy into our ranks," wrote the *Cincinnati Gazette's* correspondent, and "several were killed or wounded." Thomas's chief of staff, Brig. Gen. William D. Whipple, observing the action in his commander's absence and "narrowly escaped death" from one of the bursts. Unlike yesterday's probe, the Federals now pressed the issue. Johnson deployed all three of his brigades in line opposite Wheeler's troopers, with Col. Henry Hambright's brigade on the right, and Carlin's and Brig. Gen. John H. King's commands filling in successively to the left. Davis's division deployed next, the available brigades deploying on King's left and connecting with Colonel Champion's men (Cruft's command) filing down from the north. The 2nd Minnesota and 19th Indiana batteries (each reduced to one section of two guns due to a lack of available horseflesh) returned the enemy gunfire. Despite a plague of faulty rounds, the Yankee gunners found the range and drove off Wheeler's horse artillery, whose retreat triggered a general Union advance. Facing six brigades of Federal infantry and overlapped on both flanks, Wheeler wisely ordered a retreat.[25]

To assist Wheeler, on the morning of the 23rd Joe Johnston ordered Maj. Gen. Thomas C. Hindman's corps to establish a line in Mill Creek Gap. Hindman sent two divisions. As he explained to Maj. Gen. Alexander P. Stewart, "it is expected that yours and [Maj. Gen. John C.] Breckinridge's shall hold the gap. Williams' battalion of artillery will be ordered to your support." Stewart formed three of his brigades in line north of the road and railroad, while Brig. Gen. Joseph H. Lewis, the temporary head of Breckinridge's division, deployed on Stewart's left. They spent a quiet night and morning improving their positions until, as Stewart reported, "the enemy appeared in our front."[26]

In his diary, the observant Pvt. John Jackman of Company B, the Confederate 9th Kentucky, observed how "at daylight [on February 23rd] all our baggage

24 Ibid., 455; Teresa K. Lehr and Philip L. Gerber, eds., *Emerging Leader, The Letters of Carter Van Vleck to his Wife, Patty, 1862-1864* (Bloomington, IN: 2012), 204.

25 "Important advance into Georgia," *Belmont Chronicle*, March 3, 1864. William Denison Whipple, West Point Class of 1847, arrived in December to assume the duties of the Army of the Cumberland's Chief of Staff, replacing James A. Garfield, who left in October to assume his seat in Congress. Thomas and Whipple's relationship must have been solid, for Whipple would continue to be associated with Thomas until the latter officer's death in 1870.

26 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 477-78. As senior major general and division commander, Hindman commanded a corps over the winter after returning from his Chickamauga wound. When John Bell Hood replaced him at the end of February 1864, Hindman reverted to division command. Breckinridge was assigned a new command in Virginia, and no new commander for the division had been appointed.

was loaded and the trains started for the rear." To Jackman "everything has the appearance of a retreat." He was dissuaded of that notion when "our brigade moved up to Mill Spring or Creek Gap . . . and formed lines on a ridge. . . . Seeing the troops clambering up the steep hills on either side of the Gap reminded me of pictures seen of Hannibal crossing the Alps. We are held in reserve. The day has been beautiful—springlike."

"This morning [February 24] is one of sunshine," continued Jackman in his diary. "We are quietly resting on arms—not having heard a hostile gun yet. The news from the front is, the enemy is advancing in strong force, slowly. . . . Things don't look so much like a retreat now—more like 'fight.'" At 4:00 p.m., "the skirmishers in front commenced a lively popping, our cavalry coming back to the rear, and one of our batteries opened on the gap." Sometime during this action, Jackman's brigade—the famed "Orphan Brigade" of Rebel Kentuckians—shifted to support "Steward [Stewart] who was having quite a lively skirmish."[27]

After outflanking Wheeler, Jefferson Davis's Federals gained the advance, and it fell to Brig. Gen. James D. Morgan's small brigade to lead the pursuit. Morgan had only the 10th Michigan and 60th Illinois with him. Both regiments had recently reenlisted as veteran volunteers, and the men were expecting to be sent home on furlough instead of leading a foray against the Rebel army. Near dusk, reported Morgan, "the enemy were found strongly posted, and opened a brisk fire of musketry and artillery."[28]

With almost no daylight left to launch an attack, and lacking a clear picture of the Confederate defenses, Davis halted. "I ordered the brigade commanders to put out strong pickets and to place the troops in bivouac for the night," explained the general. One of those pickets was Capt. Noah Hart of the 10th Michigan, who recorded "sharp skirmishing until sundown. [We were] shelled by the enemy in a manner not at all agreeable. After dark, went on picket. Posted sentinels within sixty rods of enemy pickets."[29]

In addition to the masses of Federals swarming his front, General Stewart had an additional worry: Yankees were moving down Crow Valley behind his right flank. These 2,400 Federals were Col. William Grose's brigade of six infantry regiments, Battery H, 4th U.S. Artillery, and Col. Long's 600 horsemen. With Long in the lead and skirmishers deployed, Grose "pressed the enemy to within

27 William C. Davis, ed., *Diary of a Confederate Soldier: John S. Jackman of the Orphan Brigade* (Columbia, SC: 1996), 107.

28 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 459-60.

29 Ibid., 456; Noah H. Hart Diary, entry for February 24, Dominican University online collections, https://tinyurl.com/52jfun3n, accessed 7/27/2019.

300 yards of the railroad . . . driving rebel infantry out of their camp." The "camp" was a large cluster of huts serving as winter quarters for Brig. Gen. Henry D. Clayton's Alabama brigade. A. P. Stewart dispatched Clayton and three of his four regiments to deal with the threat.[30]

"About 4 o'clock . . . a force of cavalry and mounted infantry came down Crowe's Valley on our right flank, and drove in our advance to 1,000 yards of the position of our army. . . . It was a bold, very bold dash of theirs, and was well executed," wrote one of Clayton's Alabamans. The brigade "fought in its own quarters. Just as we arrived, one or two companies of Yankees who advanced, deployed as skirmishers, had reached within fifty yards of our cabins. A lively skirmish followed in which," he admitted, "the Yankees got the advantage, though we outnumbered them by ten to one. They had splendid rifles, and we had poor muskets. They retired in good order and with leisure and dignity. After a little hesitation, Clayton's brigade advanced about 1,000 yards, driving back the Yankee advance upon their reserves." The "splendid rifles" were Spencer seven-shot repeaters carried by the 98th Illinois Mounted Infantry, formerly members of Col. John T. Wilder's famous Lightning Brigade. Their firepower was overpowering, as the Alabamans could attest.[31]

Colonel Grose described a similar action, reporting that "lines of the enemy's infantry commenced an advance . . . [until] a few well directed rounds from the . . . artillery with the aid of a heavy skirmish line, brought them to a halt and put them under cover." The Federals left two dead within Clayton's lines, plus at least three wounded and captured; the Rebels admitted to about 30 casualties. Grose placed his skirmish line and established his headquarters at the Widow Burke's farm two miles north of the railroad. "I don't believe there is much force of the enemy in our front," he reported, "but too much for our small force."[32]

Meanwhile, west of Rocky Face, Davis and Palmer conferred. Given Grose's success in Crow Valley, Palmer opted for a flanking move rather than try and force Mill Creek Gap by assault, hoping to repeat Grose's accomplishment in greater measure. Accordingly, Davis reported, "I received orders to hold my position, supported by Johnson's division, while Baird's and Cruft's, under the immediate command of the general commanding, prosecuted the reconnaissance on the east

30 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 433.

31 "The Late Fight near Dalton," *Mobile Advertiser and Register*, March 3, 1864.

32 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 432-33.

side of Rocky Face Ridge on the following morning. It was thought this movement would turn the enemy's position at Buzzard Roost."[33]

When reports filtered in suggesting George Thomas was moving on Dalton with up to three corps of Federal infantry, Joseph E. Johnston feared he was about to be overwhelmed. Even though those numbers were exaggerated (Joe Hooker's Union XX Corps was not involved in this effort) Johnston had reason to be concerned. Two of his four available divisions—Stewart's and Breckinridge's—defended Mill Creek Gap. At least two brigades of Maj. Gen. Thomas C. Hindman's division (those of Brig. Gens. Arthur Manigault and William F. Tucker) were deployed along the Cleveland Road toward Varnell's Station, just east of where Clayton's brigade encountered Grose. This left Maj. Gen. Carter Stevenson's three brigades as Johnston's only reserves, which the army commander put to work erecting a second line of defenses. According to Lieutenant Apperson of the 22nd Alabama, Stevenson's Division "formed line of battle about a mile north of Dalton, and constructed temporary breastworks of rails. By the way," he added, "it is a very easy matter to get men to work on breastworks when a fight is pending, every fellow works as if his life depended on this notion. This is not the case when a fight appears a long way off."[34]

Dalton was not Johnston's only concern. If the move on his front was a feint, his southern flank (especially the towns of Resaca 15 miles to the south and Rome 45 miles southwest) were both vulnerable. Initially, Johnston worried the Yankees were moving out from northern Alabama on Rome, which was an important logistical and manufacturing center and a pathway into Johnston's rear. Rome was only protected by Brig. Gen. Philip D. Roddey's brigade of Alabama cavalry, so in early February Johnston had dispatched Brig. Gen. John C. Brown's Tennessee infantry brigade (Stevenson's Division) to help defend the city. Maj. Flavel C. Barber of the 3rd Tennessee was delighted with the change. Ordered with the rest of Brown's brigade to board the cars for Rome just after midnight on February 7, Barber's regiment arrived in Rome at 3:00 p.m. that same afternoon and took up residence in some warehouses. "We enjoyed our fine quarters hugely," recalled Barber, "as we expected to have lain on the cold, wet ground." Even better, "provisions are cheaper and much more abundant."[35]

33 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 456. The Federals usually referred to the Gap as Buzzard's Roost rather than Mill Creek.

34 "Dear Grandpa," *The Troy Messenger*, March 18, 1864.

35 Flavel C. Barber, with Robert H. Ferrell, ed. *Holding the Line: The Third Tennessee Infantry, 1861-1864* (Kent, OH: 1994), 160.

Closer to home, Johnston feared that Thomas might do just what Grant had proposed on February 13: slip southwest of Rocky Face while the Rebels were focused on Dalton. Chief of Staff William Mackall confessed in a letter to his wife, penned that evening, that "we are busy, the enemy are making movements not yet understood . . . [but] we are ready for whatever they may try." To ensure that readiness, on the 24th Johnston ordered General Brown to "send two regiments [from Rome] to Calhoun to guard the depot there," and instructed Mackall to wire General Roddey, whose Alabama troopers were currently at Rome, to "move your command to Resaca instantly."[36]

Nominally part of the Army of Tennessee, Roddey's men usually covered northern Alabama. Recruited locally, their primary mission was to prevent Federal incursions south of the Tennessee River. Roddey organized the 4th Alabama Cavalry in 1862, later joined by the 5th Alabama, the 53rd Alabama Partisan Rangers, and the three-company 24th Alabama Cavalry Battalion. The newest formation was the 10th Alabama Cavalry, which finalized its organization only that spring. Sending Roddey to Rome proved controversial, leaving citizens to loudly protest that northern Alabama had been "virtually evacuated."[37]

Early on February 25, George Thomas' Federals began stirring outside Dalton. According to Charles Cruft, his division "started from [Dr.] Lee's house at 3 a.m., and made a rapid march to Burke's farm, say 5 miles, the head arriving before dawn of day. . . . The morning was cloudy and raw, the atmosphere heavy and full of fog and mist. It was impossible to see the lay of the country or to discern objects at any considerable distance." At Burke's, Cruft joined with Grose's brigade and waited for further orders, which arrived shortly after daylight instructing Cruft to "push the column toward Dalton and attack any force that might be met." After conferring with Grose and Eli Long, Cruft moved "up to Neal's farm . . . where the road turned left to Dalton direct." While deploying into line of battle, "the enemy commenced a sharp attack upon [our] pickets, who reported the advance of a heavy column of [Rebel] infantry."[38]

Corps commander Palmer arrived about 8:00 a.m. The two generals conferred, with Cruft forming "a temporary line of battle" in case the Confederates attacked. When no such blow materialized, Palmer ordered Cruft to finish deploying. Col.

36 "My Darling," Mackall to Wife, February 24, 1864, Johnston Papers; *OR* 32, pt. 2, 799. Calhoun was six miles south of Resaca just across the Oostanaula River.

37 *OR* 32, pt. 3, 7. For regimental organization, see the files for the 4th Alabama Cavalry, 5th Alabama Cavalry, 10th Alabama Cavalry, and 24th Alabama Cavalry Battalion, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery AL. Hereafter ADAH.

38 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 425.

Thomas Champion's brigade of six regiments swung out to the left, Grose's six regiments on the right, and Col. Dickerman's borrowed XV Corps brigade in support, "all in double lines."[39]

Palmer placed Baird's division on Cruft's right in the same formation. Baird's line faced south into Crow Valley, with Rocky Face Ridge rising on the right, while Cruft's men faced the narrower chute of Cox Valley with Hamilton Mountain on their left. Crow and Cox valleys were separated by an irregular hill mass, often steep, that provided ample positions for good defense. Poplar Springs Baptist Church sat at the northern end of this high ground. "At 11:20," wrote Cruft, "Major General Palmer gave orders to advance."[40]

That morning Baird had with him only two of this three brigades, those of Brig. Gen. John B. Turchin and Col. Ferdinand Van Derveer. In total, these two commands counted about 2,700 men with no artillery, his battery having been detached to operate with General Johnson. Turchin formed on the right and Van Derveer on the left. Once ready, the line "advanced down the narrow valley as rapidly as the nature of the ground would permit. Rebel skirmishers . . . fell back before us . . . and it was not until my left had come up and opened communication with General Cruft's right that we came under a fire of any note."[41]

Sergeant Major Charles Partridge of the 96th Illinois in Champion's brigade remembered that "the advance was very rapid for a mile or more, the ground passed over being a series of low hills, most of them heavily timbered. The Rebels were soon encountered, but [our] skirmishers pushed them back in an admirable manner, keeping up a rapid fire." Even though in the second line, the 96th suffered at least three wounded. When "it became apparent that the Rebel main line had been reached . . . [we] halted at the crest of a wooded ridge." The Confederates

39 Ibid. "Double lines," regularly used by the Army of the Cumberland, denoted that half the regiments in each brigade deployed in the first line and half roughly 150 yards behind. Dickerman's brigade, also of six regiments, formed two lines behind Champion and Grose, centered on the interval between those two commands. Thus, Cruft's division of 18 regiments had a frontage of six regiments, supported by a second line of six regiments and then two more lines of three regiments each behind them. This formation was adopted after the publication of Maj. Gen. Silas Casey's new drill manual for the U.S. Army appeared in January 1862, and ordered into effect by Maj. Gen. Don Carlos Buell that April. Buell's insistence on using Casey's manual remained largely unique to the Army of the Cumberland; the Army of the Potomac and the Army of the Tennessee tended to use an older version where all the regiments in a brigade formed on a single line.

40 Ibid. Cox Valley is a local name unmarked on modern maps, though Federal reports referred to it by that name. Baird mistakenly referred to Cox's Valley when referencing Crow Valley. Interview with historian Robert D. Jenkins, Dalton, GA, Sept. 11, 2019.

41 Janet B. Hewett, Noah Andre Trudeau, Bryce A. Suderow, eds. *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Wilmington, N.C.: 1994-2004), Series I, Vol. 6, 226. Hereafter *SOR*.

were on a similar rise across a shallow valley. Rather than press home an assault, Cruft deployed his artillery (the 5th Indiana Light Artillery and Battery H of the 4th U.S. Regulars). When the guns opened, a member of the 99th Ohio called the exchange "one of the hardest artillery duels . . . I ever witnessed."[42]

The Confederate artillery position on the hill separating the valleys laid enfilading fire across the flatter ground of Crow Valley to their left, which, combined with similar angles of fire from additional guns on the eastern slopes of Rocky Face, made the open terrain between the two lines a death trap. Baird quickly checked his advance. "My right [Turchin] . . . reached an open space when it was opened upon by an artillery fire which, for precision and accuracy, I have not seen equaled." That fire was clearly effective. The Confederate "second shot . . . [took] off the arm of a man in Company K" of the 11th Ohio. The 11th sought "temporary shelter" in a belt of timber, made necessary, complained the regimental historian, since "our Regiment was entirely unsupported and the fire from the rebel ranks heavy and increasing." Baird reported that "our extreme left now became hotly engaged and as the center [Van Derveer] could not yet be advanced without exposing it to a heavy crossfire of artillery . . . I directed my attention to the right."[43]

From the valley, Baird noticed "a cabin on an elevated projection" of Rocky Face Ridge "whose position seemed to flank the lesser ridges in front of our center. . . . I directed General Turchin . . . to move by our extreme right and take possession of this cabin, reaching well up . . . the side of the mountain." As Turchin complied, Col. Van Derveer fed regiments from his second line into the center, freeing more of Turchin's command to ascend the ridge.[44]

"After I explained to General Palmer the nature of the movements," wrote Baird, "[I] then joined General Turchin." However, "on reaching the log cabin I discovered that the position was different from what it had appeared" from the valley. The Rebel line also extended up the side of Rocky Face, meaning Turchin's advance would be enfiladed from their right; further, the Federals could now see that the Confederates had "a largely superior force close in our front, with strong reserves not far in rear." The enemy amounted to two brigades: Clayton's

42 Charles A. Partridge, *History of the Ninety-Sixth Regiment Illinois Volunteer Infantry* (Chicago: 1887), 290; "Communication," *Sidney Weekly Journal*, Mar. 18, 1864, as cited in Kevin B. McCray, *A Shouting of Orders, A History of the 99th Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment* (Xlibris: 2003), 339.

43 *SOR* 6, 226; Joshua H. Horton and Solomon Teverbaugh, *A History of the Eleventh Regiment (Ohio Volunteer Infantry) Containing the Military Record, So Far as is Possible to Obtain it, of Each Officer and Enlisted Man of the Command—A List of Deaths—An Account of the Veterans—Incidents of the Field and Camp - Names of the "Three Months" Volunteers, Etc., Etc.* (Dayton, OH: 1866), 111.

44 *SOR* 6, 226.

Alabamans from last night, now supported by Brig. Gen. Alexander W. Reynolds's mixed Virginia and North Carolina brigade of Stevenson's Division. With only 1,100 men, Turchin was considerably outnumbered.[45]

As the senior officer, General Reynolds had command of both his own and Clayton's brigades. Writing home on the 29th, he boasted that "the Battle of 'Stone Side' was my own fight. . . . I selected the field and my troops alone gained the victory. My command consisted of my Brigade and 3 regts of Clayton's . . . in all about 2,500 men." His opposition, he revealed, was "Granger's Army Corps, Yanks, about 7,000 men."[46]

According to Alfred Hunter, the adjutant and regimental historian of the 82nd Indiana, the Hooisers moved to the right up the ridge to connect with the 89th Ohio. Turchin sent word for Lt. Col. Paul E. Slocum of the 82nd "to take command of the two regiments and at a signal . . . charge down the hill and drive the enemy from the ravine and take the hill in our front." Curiously, this order was delivered not by one of Turchin's staff but by "a soldier carrying a gun for Colonel Slocum." Apparently doubting its authenticity, Slocum "failed to obey." Any doubt should have vanished when "one of Gen'l Turchin's orderlies came up and gave the same order, but still Slocum failed to act. It took yet a third repetition, delivered this time by one of Turchin's staff officers, to get the line moving." The assault only made it half way up the opposite ridge because as the line advanced, it "became extended to the left and exposed [our] right flank in such a manner as to endanger the whole line." Capt. William Stinebeck, who drafted the 82nd Indiana's post-battle report, explained that "General Turchin, upon being informed of this, sent orders to us to remain in our present position until reinforcements were brought up to us."[47]

Meanwhile, Thomas' chief of staff, William D Whipple, joined Turchin and Baird at the cabin to convey his own and Palmer's "impatience . . . at our delay." As Turchin later recalled, "General Whipple . . . urged me to charge [a] grove . . . supposing it was the key of the position, and that if taken it would open the gap beyond Buzzard Roost where General Davis' column was stopped by the enemy." Turchin was less sanguine about success than his superiors and settled for sending the 11th Ohio forward "to provoke the enemy and oblige him to show his

45 Ibid.

46 Jeffrey C. Weaver, *54th Virginia Infantry* (Lynchburg, VA: 1993), 102.

47 Alfred G. Hunter, *History of the Eighty-Second Indiana Volunteer Infantry. Its Organization, Campaigns and Battles* (Indianapolis: 1893), 110-111; *OR* 32, pt. 1, 466.

force," with the 92nd Ohio in support. Both regiments moved up on the right of the 89th Ohio.[48]

Once in position, Col. Ogden Street led his 11th Ohio down into the same ravine and prepared to move up the opposite slope toward the Rebel position. There, Street encountered yet more Federal resistance. As he moved through their line, Street ordered the brigade's skirmishers to join his advance, "but as they did not belong to our regiment they refused to go." Undeterred, Street advanced up the hill only to meet "two solid lines of rebels who opened a terrible fire. . . . Receiving no support the 11th was compelled to fall back, many of the men falling into a ditch at the foot of the hill." A dismayed Turchin reported that "the enemy in front and on the flank opened such a murderous fire that the regiment was broken in the twinkling of an eye."[49]

It was Clayton's Confederates who exploited Turchin's right flank vulnerability. Capt. Benjamin L. Posey was on the Rebel left with Company K of the 38th Alabama, placed there to cover a slight gap in the palisade of Rocky Face. The company was woefully understrength with only twelve men present, but when "at 3 o'clock the Yankees sent a regiment [the 11th Ohio] up on the mountain," Posey sensed an opportunity. He sent word to the brigadier "that if he could get fifty men he would attack them." One of Clayton's staff officers detailed 26 men from the 38th and another 30 from the 42nd Georgia (also picketing Rocky Face) and sent them to Posey. With these reinforcements, along with half of his own company, Posey "flanked the Yankees, startling them by an unexpected fire upon their flank. He then ordered a charge, and a terrible fight ensued at 75 yards distance. The Yankees were driven 250 yards upon their main force, leaving two men dead and an orderly sergeant dying on the field. They shot the orderly three times before he would surrender. Capt. Posey shot one Yankee through the heart with his Sharpe's rifle. Capt. Posey had two men slightly wounded, and was himself shot through the pants and drawers with a rifle ball, grazing his skin."[50]

Officially, General Reynolds noted only that "the fight was entirely successful, driving the enemy back twice." Privately, he provided a much more florid description:

> The enemy advanced in three lines of battle in great confidence expect[ing] to overwhelm me. [A]t 10 o.c. the battle raged furiously all along my line. The thunder of cannon and the clatter of musketry was absolutely deafening, yet

48 *SOR* 6, 226; *OR* 32, pt. 1, 463.

49 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 463.

50 "The Late Fight near Dalton," *Mobile Advertiser & Register*, March 3, 1864.

> our boys stood fast and pounded in their volleys with terrible effect. The enemy [faltered] and I ordered an advance. Shouts went up which rent the air and the Yankees broke. They soon reformed and again came to the charge. We met them again and drove them, being reinforced they made their third and heaviest attack. . . . I rode forward and ordered a charge and this line entirely routed them. I never felt so glorious in my life.

The actual losses belie this description, because all four of Reynolds's regiments suffered only 53 casualties: seven killed or mortally wounded, and 46 wounded—almost all of which were inflicted by Federal artillery.[51]

Whatever the degree of Reynolds's participation, Posey's assault exceeded expectations by routing not only the 11th but part of the 92nd Ohio. The Alabamans were only checked when, as Turchin reported, "Captain Edward Grosvenor, of the Ninety-second Ohio . . . with 28 men of his own and 20 men of other companies . . . charged on the enemy scattering in pursuit of our men, drove them back, and retained his position in the front during the whole afternoon."[52]

Adjutant Hunter of the 82nd Indiana watched Grosvenor's counterattack and recalled how it "relieved our flank and we carried the ridge. The men were so elated there was no holding them; they followed the enemy down into the ravine and up another hill. When we raised the top of the hill the enemy was laying four lines deep and poured a galling fire into our ranks, making it so hot that we were compelled to fall back to the first hill." There, the winded Hoosiers halted and threw up a hasty defensive work "of logs, rocks, rails or anything that would turn bullets."[53]

This engagement demonstrated unequivocally that the Confederates held Crow Valley in force and were too strong to be moved. Turchin admitted "we paid unfortunately for our success in discovering 'the bear in his den' by a loss of 9 killed and 78 wounded," including Colonel Slocum, who was mortally wounded during the final assault. Turchin vented his frustration by complaining that "the small size of the regiments and brigades . . . mix up our ideas about their capacities. Forgetting to ascertain the number of men, a brigade is assigned sometimes to a duty requiring a division." J. Dexter Colton, the 92nd's regimental surgeon, had a similar complaint. Our brigade, he wrote on March 2, "was the only one that was ordered to charge. . . . It is said a whole division could not take the place. . . .

51 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 483; Weaver, *54th Virginia*, 102-103.

52 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 464.

53 Hunter, *Eighty-Second Indiana*, 111-112.

Turchin himself did not like to make the charge but was ordered to, and of course obeyed orders."[54]

Once Turchin's probe determined to everyone's satisfaction that the Rebels were present in large numbers, Baird and Palmer agreed to hold fast. Shortly thereafter General Whipple sent forward the three regiments of Col. William H. Hays' Third Brigade, which for some reason had not accompanied the rest of Baird's command east of Rocky Face. Baird "post[ed] them so as to support General Turchin," and personally "remained, with this, the critical portion of our line until dark."[55]

Meanwhile, all was not quiet west of Rocky Face. Though the morning of February 25 saw only minor skirmishing, when "the sound of Baird's and Cruft's cannon announced their arrival on the opposite side of the ridge," Union Brig. Gen. Jefferson C. Davis decided to lend whatever support he could. "About 3 p.m. the increase of firing seemed to indicate what might be a general engagement," Davis decided to prevent the Rebels from massing even more men against Cruft or Baird by throwing forward strong lines of skirmishers and feeling the enemy position. Orders issued and artillery emplaced, Davis took up a post of observation "which enabled me to see the general movements of the troops."[56]

His line faced Mill Creek Gap. James Morgan's brigade still held the left, while Col. Daniel McCook's brigade had moved on Morgan's right. Davis selected Morgan's men for the job. "[I] was directed to make a strong demonstration, and, if possible, make the enemy develop his line and strength," reported the brigadier. Morgan ordered six companies of the 60th Illinois, "four deployed as skirmishers and two in reserve . . . [to] push forward to a point in front" of the gap. "No sooner had this force entered the valley than a terrible fire of infantry and artillery was opened upon them from right, left, and front." That was enough to satisfy Morgan that the enemy's line had been fully developed and he recalled the 60th Illinois. Morgan ordered Lt. Col. Christopher Dickerson of the 10th Michigan to "move . . . his command briskly to the right to cover the [60th's] retreat."[57]

Within a few minutes Capt. Robert B. Stinson, Morgan's provost-marshal, returned with alarming news. "To my astonishment," wrote Morgan, "I was informed that the Tenth Michigan had pushed forward with the Sixtieth." Somehow, Lieutenant Colonel Dickerson interpreted the 60th's movement as the

54 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 464; Richard A. Baumgartner, ed. *Fractured Paths of Duty. The Civil War Letters of Surgeon J. Dexter Colton & Adjutant George B. Turner, 92nd Ohio Volunteer Infantry* (Huntington, WV: 2013), 365.

55 *SOR* 6, 228.

56 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 456.

57 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 459. Davis' third brigade under Van Vleck was in Ringgold.

signal for a general advance. In his diary, Captain Hart of the 10th noted that the Wolverines were "ordered to a ridge to support [a] line of skirmishers. Then and there took place one of the most daring, hazardous, cool and determined charges of the war. We drove the enemy from ridge to ridge until we found ourselves in the midst of one of the most terrific and destructive fires imaginable."[58]

Morgan's Michigan men ran up against Stovall's Georgia brigade, whose front was covered by skirmishers from Companies G and H of the 42nd Georgia under Capt. Joshua M. Mitchell. The Georgians settled atop a low foothill in front of the main line. The 40th Georgia held the brigade left, with its left resting near the Western & Atlantic tracks. Next came the 41st Georgia, the bulk of the 42nd Georgia (less two companies, C and I, held in reserve), and the remainder of the brigade extending north along the spine of Rocky Face Ridge. Col. Robert J. Henderson, commanding the 42nd, placed Lt. John S. Stubbs of Company I in charge of both reserve companies, with orders to reinforce Mitchell's skirmishers if they were attacked. "Whatever you do," cautioned Henderson, "do not let Mitchell be driven in."[59]

When Morgan's Wolverines advanced, Stubbs led his two companies forward only to find Mitchell out of action, "his arm bleeding profusely." Stubbs assumed command and led the skirmisher in a counterattack. The 40th and 41st, watching the drama from back up the main slope, erupted in excitement. "How we did wave our hats and cheer the 42nd as they made the charge down the mountain, in splendid order, in full view of the rest of us!" recalled Pvt. Joseph Bogle of the 40th. William E. Curtiss, in command of the 41st Georgia, was so energized by the fighting that he jumped onto the Confederate breastworks to wave his hat and was shot dead.[60]

Assailed by fire and facing a determined countercharge, the 10th Michigan and 60th Illinois beat a hasty retreat. The 60th lost one killed, 34 wounded, and nine missing or captured. The 10th Michigan paid a heavier price because Colonel Dickerson believed this was a full-fledged attack instead of a probe, losing 13 killed, 35 wounded, and 17 captured. Captain Hart described a hot place indeed, with "three batteries playing on us in front, and sharpshooters on the left. For

58 Hart Diary.

59 Joseph Bogle, *Some Recollections in the Civil War, by a Private in the 40th Ga. Regiment, C.S.A.* (Dalton, GA; 1902), 10; W. L. Calhoun, "History 42nd. Georgia Volunteers (Infantry) Confederate States Army," 42nd Georgia File, Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park, Kennesaw GA. Hereafter KMNBP.

60 Calhoun, "History 42nd. Georgia Volunteers"; Bogle, *Some Recollections*, 10. Curtiss was reported as "severely wounded," by his brigade commander, Marcellus Stovall, but Curtiss's service record has his death on February 25.

thirty or forty minutes our little band of veterans breasted the storm of shell, grape, and canister, and minnies, when it became obvious to all that to remain was certain death. . . . [H]aving already lost every third man, a retreat was ordered. My company lost three killed." Dickerson, badly wounded in the leg by a shell fragment, fell into enemy hands.[61]

His health improved, George Thomas departed Chattanooga that same morning. "I shall go to the front . . . to see how matters are progressing," Thomas informed Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker, who was responsible for Chattanooga's security in his absence. "[M]ay be gone for three or four days." Thomas arrived that evening to find Palmer's advance completely stymied at Mill Creek Gap and in Crow Valley. Thomas ordered a retreat to Ringgold; Palmer instructed General Baird that his own and Cruft's forces should withdraw "to Catoosa Platform during the night." In Crow Valley, where the Federals were most exposed, Baird reported that "after an interview with General Cruft it was arranged that we should withdraw simultaneously at 11 o'clock p.m."[62]

To safeguard that movement, Davis's and Johnson's men held their ground lest the Rebels find a way to sally forth and intercept the withdrawal and isolate the troops east of Rocky Face Ridge. According to Baird, his men disengaged "without a mishap" and reached Catoosa at daylight. Eli Long's cavalry accompanied them.[63]

The night did not pass quietly. One Federal correspondent wrote that "the rebels, at about 2 o'clock A. M. . . . advanced their lines . . . [to] within twelve feet of our pickets. . . . As soon as our lines were discovered, the enemy opened a volley of musketry, which was returned in gallant style." This engagement involved Col. Henry Hambright's and Brig. Gen. John King's brigades (Johnson's division), supported again by Morgan's brigade (Davis' division). Its dimensions were surely exaggerated: none of the extant Confederate reports even mentioned the encounter. Still, it did produce at least one casualty. According to Capt. Henry Haymond of the 18th U.S. Regulars, in command of a battalion of his regiment in King's brigade, Col. Geza Mihalotzy's 24th Illinois relieved his force on the picket line about dusk. "It was said at the time that in giving an order in rather loud tones he was heard . . . by the enemy, who fired a shot . . . which . . . proved fatal." The round badly wounded Mihalotzy, who died on March 11. Per his request, he was buried in the new National Cemetery in Chattanooga, interred among the men of

61 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 458; Hart Diary; "Mich. 10th at Tunnel Hill," *The Standard*, March 15, 1864.

62 *OR*, 32, pt. 2, 466; *SOR* 6, 228.

63 *SOR* 6, 228.

his regiment who had fallen at Chickamauga. His wife, summoned from Chicago via telegram, failed to arrive before he died.[64]

The remaining two Union divisions held their ground west of Rocky Face through Friday, February 26, but Thomas had no intention of staying there any longer than he must. That morning he drafted an explanatory dispatch to Grant in Nashville:

> Davis and Johnson occupy the pass at Buzzard's Roost. They have a force equal to theirs in their front, who outnumber them in artillery. It is not possible to carry the place by assault. Palmer made the attempt to turn it yesterday with Baird's and Cruft's divisions, but was met by an equal force, exclusive of their cavalry, and in an equally strong position as at Buzzard's Roost. . . . Our transportation is poor and limited. We are not able to carry more than 60 rounds per man. Artillery horses so poor that Palmer could bring but sixteen pieces. The country is stripped entirely of subsistence and forage. The enemy's cavalry is much superior to ours. Prisoners taken yesterday report that a portion of Cleburne's division has returned. I will await the developments of this day, and advise you further.[65]

Thomas offered little optimism, but he did convey an important piece of news: at least some of the Confederate reinforcements sent to Mississippi had reversed course and were now back at Dalton. This could only help Sherman's expedition, which remained uppermost in Grant's thoughts.

Joe Johnston was satisfied with the results, but he certainly did not view the fight as being over. On that day he issued urgent orders to Col. Hypolite Oladowski (the army's Polish-born ordnance chief) to send "without delay, post haste, 20 rounds of [small arms] ammunition for the whole army," and further, "2,000 rounds of Napoleon ammunition, assorted; also some Parrot and 3-inch rifle [shells] and fuses."[66] As if to underscore the threat, that same day Johnston had a personal brush with danger. In a letter home, Sgt. Washington Ives of the 4th Florida wrote that "Gen. Joe E. Johnston had his horse shot under him by a Yankee

64 "The very latest from Dalton," *Nashville Daily Union*, Feb. 28, 1864. Henry Haymond, "Reminiscences by Col. Haymond," *National Tribune*, Nov. 28, 1907; *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 29, 1864. Mihalotzy was a Hungarian exile who fled to America after actively participating in the failed revolution of 1848-49. He joined the mostly German 24th Illinois "First Hecker" regiment and commanded it after Freidrich Hecker resigned to form a new command.

65 *OR* 32, pt. 2, 480.

66 Ibid., 804.

sharpshooter [at] over 100 yards." The skirmishing around Mill Creek Gap, he noted, "was very heavy" on the 26th.[67]

While the Federals were departing Crow Valley, Johnston "received a report that an enemy U. S. brigade was occupying Dug Gap, from which it had driven our troops." Dug Gap, five miles south of Buzzard's Roost, gave the Yankees direct access to Dalton, if they could hold it. Accordingly, "Granbury's Texas brigade, returning from Mississippi, . . . was ordered to march to the foot of the mountain immediately and to retake the gap at sunrise." They did so handily, driving off some Federal cavalry. Jim Turner of the 6th Texas recalled that "we arrived at Dalton . . . and while getting off the cars orders came . . . to go at once and retake Dug Gap. . . . Away we went as fast as we could. We drove the enemy away and took possession of the place, where we remained until the next day."[68]

Farther south, Johnston's focus shifted from Rome to Resaca. On the 25th, Mackall fired off a testy dispatch to General Roddey at Rome ordering him to "proceed at once to Dalton. In the opinion of General Johnston the delay in your movement is inexcusable." Brig. Gen. John C. Brown's Tennessee brigade was also en route. Mackall hurriedly instructed Brown to "stop the train [at Resaca] with your troops that have not yet passed Resaca, until further orders," but he was to hold the trains in place and be "prepared to come on at a moment's warning." Brown should also "expect the enemy from the direction of Villanow." This last sentence was especially significant, for if Federals moved on Resaca from Villanow, they could only do so via Snake Creek Gap—a geographic feature of singular import.[69]

Johnston had little to fear. Thomas was done. On February 26, he shifted Baird's and Cruft's men to covering positions east of Dr. Lee's house to guard Palmer's flank at Buzzard's Roost. Union cavalry were dispatched to scout toward Crow Valley and toward Nickajack Gap in Taylor's Ridge, where Cleburne's Rebels were reported. Aside from minor skirmishing, the 26th passed quietly. "At dark," noted Union General Jefferson C. Davis, "in compliance with orders from General Palmer, I withdrew my entire command and marched to Ringgold." Richard

67 Jim R. Cabaniss, ed. *The Civil War Journal and Letters of Washington Ives, 4th FLA. C.S.A.* (Tallahassee, FL: 1987), 61.

68 *OR* 32, pt. 1, 477; Deane Labenski, "Jim Turner, Co. G, 6th Texas Infantry C.S.A. From 1861 to 1865," Texana, vol. XII, no. 2 (Spring, 1974), 167-68. The Union horsemen were from either the 39th Indiana, the 2nd Kentucky Cavalry, or the 28th Kentucky Mounted Infantry, all of whom were present in the area.

69 *OR* 32, pt. 2, 804-5. This was not the first such order calling Roddy to Dalton.

Johnson's men followed suit. By daylight on the 27th all the Federals had returned to their jumping-off points.[70]

* * *

Grant was deeply disappointed. At 11:30 a.m. on the 27th, even before he learned of this latest retreat, he wired that "it is of the utmost importance that the enemy should be held in full belief that an advance into the heart of the South is intended until the fate of General Sherman is fully known." Hoping to forestall Thomas' objections, Grant offered up a series of makeshift suggestions ranging from running the trains beyond Ringgold (impossible until bridges had been repaired and track relayed) to stripping Hooker's and Howard's forces of their draft animals in order to maintain the effort against Dalton. More troops might be had from Howard or from Schofield if James Longstreet, wintering in East Tennessee, remained quiet. These recommendations were all easy to make while poring over maps in a Nashville hotel room, but not so simple to implement in the wintry mountainous terrain of northern Georgia.[71]

Sherman was no longer in any danger. On February 20, he left a smoldering Meridian, Mississippi, and headed back to Vicksburg. The junction with Sooy Smith was thwarted by Confederate cavalry under Brig. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest. With Smith out of the picture, Sherman elected not to press on. Grant had no way of knowing any of this, since both Sherman and Smith were well beyond the reach of Union telegraphy, but he still hastened to reassure Halleck that "with a man like Sherman to command he is in no great danger. He will find an outlet."[72]

On February 27, Private Jackman of the Orphan Brigade admitted that "I have been fooled twice in this movement. First I thought we were going to retreat back toward Atlanta—then I later thought we were going to have a big battle. We neither retreated, nor had to fight much." Another Rebel took the outcome as a welcome sign of divine favor, long withheld from Southern arms. On the 28th, a Georgia private named William Chunn wrote that "the Yankees have retreated back to their old camps. I think it likely however that they will renew the contest as soon as they get reinforcements. Yet we will be able to meet them, conquer & destroy them. I do not think there will be any more reverses to our cause. I feel more sensibly than ever that God is on our side."[73]

70 Ibid., pt. 1, 457.

71 Ibid., pt. 2, 480.

72 Ibid., pt. 2, 481.

73 Davis, *Diary of a Confederate Soldier*, 109; "My Darling," William A. Chunn to Wife, February 28, 1864, Emory University, Atlanta GA.

Some Federal observers viewed the operation as folly, but George Thomas was not among them. One of Grant's intended purposes—preventing detachments to operate against Sherman in Mississippi—had been achieved. The bulk of Wiliam Hardee's Confederate troops, who had been dispatched to join Leonidas Polk, had been recalled. The Federals were aware of this reversal as early as the evening of February 27, when Grant telegraphed Halleck that Thomas's movement "has had the effect to bring back one division which had already started south."[74]

Nor was that all. Despite the short campaign's difficulties and limitations, all outlined in a dispatch from Thomas to Grant on the night of the 27th, Thomas now knew how to proceed the next time. On the next day, Thomas struck a very different tone: "I believe, if I can commence the campaign with the Fourteenth and Fourth Corps in front, with Howard's corps in reserve, that I can move along the line of the railroad and overcome all opposition as far, at least, as Atlanta." This was a remarkable statement. Just the day before Thomas confessed that "Johnston has no idea of leaving Dalton until compelled, and having a force greater than what I now have . . . I cannot drive him from that place."[75]

So, what had changed? In 1866, before the Joint Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War, Thomas provided an intriguing answer: "It was my intention (having acquired by the reconnaissance of February 23d, 24th, and 25th, a thorough knowledge of the approaches direct upon Dalton) to . . . [throw] the main body of my infantry and cavalry through Snake Creek Gap . . . which I had ascertained from scouts [Johnston] had, up to that time, neglected to observe or guard."[76]

74 *OR* 32, pt. 2, 481. Reflecting her husband's opinion of the matter, the ever-acerbic Nadine Turchin thought the expedition was foolhardy, saved only by General Turchin's perspicacity: "A stupid order given to our detail—'decorated' with the name 'forced reconnaissance'—resulted in a contact with enemy forces. . . . [F]acing a gorge occupied by the enemy, our great generals decided to take the gorge by force. The honor was accorded to my husband's brigade. . . . [A]fter having protested uselessly against this maneuver . . . he accepted the task but . . . sen[t] in a regiment in order to detect the enemy. . . . The enemy was detected so effectively that in ten minutes we lost one hundred men. . . . [A]ll the calm and obstinate courage of the General was needed . . . to stop our men from retreating. . . Thus executed, the maneuver saved the division." Then, she sneered, "the danger of being crushed fortunately avoided, our native warriors regained their composure and naturally started once again to boast of their bravery. . . . Experts will laugh at this thoughtless expedition, and for well-founded strategic reasons." Mary Ellen Mcelligott, "A Monotony Full of Sadness: The Diary of Nadine Turchin, May 1863–April, 1864," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (February, 1977), vol. 70, no. 1, 85.

75 Ibid., 489.

76 *OR* 32, pt. 2, 482; George H. Thomas, "Report of Major General George H. Thomas to the Hon. Committee on the Conduct of the War," *Supplemental Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War*, Volume I (Washington D.C.: 1866), 198.