

The Battle of Chickamauga

By Darrell Osburn, Copyright 1996

[Graphic: scroll]

Ft. Sumter
First Bull Run
Wilson's Creek
Seven Days Battles
Jackson's Valley Campaign
Second Bull Run
Fredericksburg
Chancellorsville

[CS marchby]

By June of 1863, the Confederates had won most of the major battles of the Civil War.

[Graphic: Gettysburg and Vicksburg]

But in early July, the Union army had won two very important victories, one at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and the other at Vicksburg, Mississippi.

Southerners needed another major win somewhere to keep their hopes alive, if they were to realize their dream of an independent Southern nation.

[Tending to wounded]

The main Union and Confederate armies in the east were not actively campaigning, and were still licking their wounds after the battle of Gettysburg.

[Pic of Gen. Braxton Bragg]

Gen. Braxton Bragg commanded the main Confederate army in the western theater of the war.

[CS march-by]

Gen. Bragg was not well-liked by his men. He was tough, inflexible and had a ferocious temper.

[Pic of Gen. William S. Rosecrans]

Bragg's opponent was Union General William S. Rosecrans.

[US march-by]

On the other hand, Gen. Rosecrans was popular with his men. They nicknamed him "Old Rosy."

Rosecrans outmaneuvered Bragg's army, forcing the Confederates to retreat south, from Tennessee and into northern Georgia. Rosecrans accomplished this without having to fight a major battle. Because Rosecrans believed that he had the Confederate army on the run, his 58,000-man army was scattered out to chase them.

Rosecrans' army was divided into 3 corps, and he was attempting to encircle Bragg's 60,000-man army.

[Bragg issues orders to his officers]

[CS march-by]

Bragg sent out orders for his army to concentrate at Lafayette, Georgia, in an attempt to destroy Rosecrans' forces one corps at a time, while they were still scattered.

[CS officers receive orders, shake their heads]

Bragg's subordinates did not have much confidence in Bragg's ability to lead, and when Gen. Bragg issued orders to attack, his officers created excuses as to why they could not follow his orders.

[Rosecrans and his US officers receive reports]

Meanwhile, Rosecrans was getting reports that large numbers of Confederate troops were concentrating at Lafayette, Georgia, and Rosecrans woke up to the fact that Gen. Bragg was no longer retreating.

[Rosecrans writes and sends dispatches]

Rosecrans issued orders for his army to re-unite in the vicinity of Chickamauga Creek, a few miles southeast of Chattanooga, Tennessee.

[Pan of US and CS troops in battle formation]

At dawn, September 19th, 1863, both armies were solidly facing each other along a line stretching 6 miles.

[Pan thick woods, troops]

The woods were so thick that neither commander could be sure where the enemy units were, or even where their own units were.

The battle began by accident.

[Pic of US Gen. George Thomas]

One of the Union corps commanders, Gen. George Thomas,

[US scouts move forward]

sent out some scouts to investigate the thick woods.

[US scouts and CS cavalymen get into a firefight, US scouts push the CS cavalry back to a heavy line of CS infantry]

The Yankee scouts discovered some rebel cavalymen and drove them back to their own infantry lines.

[A large CS infantry force pushes back the US scouts, back to the US infantry line]

Then the Confederate infantry advanced, pushing back the Union scouts.

[Heavy firing, volleys, cannons]

Heavy firing broke out on both sides, with neither side gaining any advantage.

[Big CS attacks]

All day long Bragg attacked the Union left flank, hoping to push the Yankees into a dead-end valley.

[US reinforcements double-quick toward their left flank]

Rosecrans responded by sending reinforcements to his left flank. Rosecrans was fortunate that his left was commanded by one of the toughest generals in the Union army,

[Pic of Thomas]

Gen. George Thomas.

[Telegraph?]

Thomas had a direct telegraph wire to Rosecrans. Telegraph was considered to be ultra-modern technology in 1863, and Chickamauga was one of the few Civil War battles when this high-tech device was used to good effect.

[US forces on a hill, behind fortifications, drive back heavy CS attacks]

Thomas held off the brunt of the Confederate attacks throughout the day.

[CS double-quick march-by]

Early in the morning of September 20th, Bragg got reinforcements.

[Pic of Jefferson Davis, then pic of CS Gen. James Longstreet]

Confederate president Jefferson Davis ordered Gen. James Longstreet, along with 12,000 tough veterans from Robert E. Lee's army, to board trains, to join Bragg at Chickamauga.

[Railroads]

Because Union forces held the railroads at Knoxville, Tennessee, Longstreet's corps was forced to take the long way around. The long detour took Longstreet's force through both Carolinas and Georgia, which meant that only 6,000 of Longstreet's 12,000-man corps arrived in time for the battle.

[CS double-quick march-by]

With Longstreet's arrival, Bragg would now have 66,000 men with which to oppose Rosecrans' 58,000.

[Pic of CS Gen. Leonidas Polk]

Bragg gave command of his right flank to Gen. Leonidas Polk.

[Bragg issues orders, pan CS troops in line of battle, waiting]

Bragg issued orders for Polk to begin the attack, which was to be followed up with an attack by Longstreet on the Confederate left.

[Bragg impatiently looking at his watch]

Bragg waited several hours, listening for the sound of Polk's attack.

[Bragg sends an officer to find out why there was no attack]

[CS officer finds Polk sitting on a porch, reading a newspaper, Bragg's officer salutes, hands Polk a dispatch, inquiring about what was happening]

Bragg's officer found Gen. Polk sitting on a porch, waiting for his breakfast, reading a newspaper.

[Polk reads dispatch and says with southern accent]

Do tell Gen. Bragg that my heart is overflowin' with anxiety for this attack, such, overflowin' with anxiety!

[Cut to Bragg's HQ, Bragg reads Polk's reply and has a fit]

When this response was reported to Gen. Bragg, it was said that he swore in such a manner that would have powerfully assisted a mule team up a mountain.

[Bragg sends his officer back to Polk]

Bragg ordered Polk to attack immediately.

[CS army attacks, then retreats]

Polk's attack made no headway,

[Bragg orders Longstreet to attack]

So Bragg told Longstreet to go ahead with everything he had.

[CS army advances in battle line]

Longstreet then had a great piece of luck.

[US officer, with binoculars, pans the US lines and a patch of thick woods]

Over on the Union side, an officer had failed to see a blue division that was hidden in the woods.

[US officer reports to Rosecrans]

This officer reported to Rosecrans that there was a dangerous quarter-mile gap in the Union battle line.

[Rosecrans issues orders, US troops left-face and march]

Upon hearing this, Rosecrans ordered another division to move over to close this supposed gap. The result was, while trying to close a gap that did not exist, Rosecrans created a real one.

[CS army charges in, rebel yell, etc., see below]

Into this gap charged Longstreet's veterans, shooting, hollering, and taking prisoners. The rebels drove back all the Yankees in the area.

About 1/3 of the Union army, including Rosecrans himself, and 2 corps commanders, were sent scurrying back to Chattanooga.

[Longstreet, with binoculars, watches his army tear up the Union line, sends a dispatch to Bragg]

Longstreet could not believe his luck! He sent messages to Bragg asking for reinforcements to follow up where the Confederate army was breaking through.

[Bragg reads dispatches, tells dispatch officer] "No."

But Bragg responded that he could not spare any troops from his exhausted right, and that Longstreet would have to make do with what he had.

[US army fortifying a hilltop, some waiting in battle line, some with axes chopping trees, etc.]

Unfortunately for Gen. Bragg, most of the Union army did not run away. Those that remained rallied around Gen. Thomas in a defensive, semi-circle, hilltop position.

[Repeated CS attacks are repulsed]

From here, Thomas held off repeated attacks by Bragg's entire army.

This last-ditch stand made Thomas famous. He was nicknamed "The Rock of Chickamauga."

[Pan US army waiting in battle line]

Rosecrans had placed a division in reserve, under Gen. Gordon Granger. Granger's men had been ordered to guard the road to Chattanooga.

[Granger is anxious as the sound of far-off battle is heard]

Granger, hearing the sound of a large-scale, far-off battle, went against his orders and said, "I'm going to Thomas."

[US army double-quick march]

[Cut to the hilltop fort, CS attacks, some US soldiers throw rocks]

By 4 o'clock, Thomas was still holding firmly, even though his men were nearly out of ammunition. Some even began throwing rocks.

[US troops look behind them, see an army coming, but cannot tell which side it is]

Looking behind them, the Union soldiers could see a large force coming toward them and moving fast. If these turned out to be rebels, the whole Union army would be wiped out, and everybody knew it.

[US troops reach the fort, giving out ammunition to the cheering defenders]

When Granger's men arrived, bringing extra ammunition, Thomas was overjoyed.

[A stronger US line repels CS attacks]

Granger's division arrived in time to repel several heavy attacks by Longstreet.

[Night approaches, US troops pull back from their fort]

Finally, at sunset, Thomas ordered his exhausted troops to retreat to Chattanooga.

[Bragg's generals beg him to let them advance]

The next morning, Bragg's generals urged him to pursue the Yankees before they could reorganize behind defensive positions in Chattanooga.

[Bragg, seemingly dazed, refuses to advance]

But Bragg did not realize he had won the battle. He was shocked about the overwhelming number of casualties in his own army.

[CS dead scene]

True, his men had captured 51 cannons, 31,000 muskets, thousands of prisoners and tons of supplies, but they also had lost 18,000 men, killed, captured, wounded and missing, including 10 generals.

[US dead]

Rosecrans had lost about 16,000 men.

Chickamauga was an old Indian word meaning "River of Death." It appeared that the river already had the right name.

[CS generals angrily protesting Bragg's decision]

[Pic of General Nathan Bedford Forrest]

When Bragg waited a day to begin his pursuit, his generals were furious. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest called him a coward and a scoundrel and demanded a transfer.

[US troops build a new fort, different location]

The one-day delay gave the Yankees time to prepare for the expected rebel assault.

[CS moves to surround the US army, but does not attack]

Bragg then ordered his army to surround the Union army, which was reorganizing in Chattanooga. He was determined to starve them into surrendering.

[US army in a miserable condition, starving, wounded, behind fortifications]

The blue-coats, those who had run and those who stood, were reunited in defense of a besieged city. For months, these soldiers were trapped, without any way to get out, and without any way to get supplies in.

[Big battle scenes-outtakes]

The battle of Chickamauga was the biggest battle in the Western theater of the Civil war. The great victory gave new hope to the southern people that they might yet win their war for Southern independence.

SPEAKING PARTS

Rosecrans
Thomas
Granger
Longstreet
Bragg
Polk
Forrest
US officer
CS officer

SPECIAL PROPS

Log fortifications
Binoculars
Telegraph
Dispatches
Entrenching tools
Pocket watch for Bragg
HQ tent
Fake rocks