

150 years ago--Civil War December 1863

The armies on both sides of the American Civil War were effectively driven to a halt by the weather. The impact on the soldiers in the field was huge with scurvy and dysentery affecting many.

December 1st: Meade decided to withdraw the Army of the Potomac away from Richmond. In the previous few days, his army had suffered badly from the very poor weather.

Bragg offered his resignation to Jefferson Davis after the defeat at Chattanooga. Even now, in the aftermath of a significant defeat, Bragg chose to blame others in his army, namely Major-General John Breckenridge, who he described as a drunk, and Cheatham who Bragg claimed was unfit for duty.

December 2nd: Lieutenant-General W H Hardee was appointed on a temporary basis to succeed Bragg as commander of the Army of the Tennessee.

December 3rd: General Longstreet concluded that he did not have sufficient resources to take Knoxville, so he ordered his army to withdraw to its winter quarters at Greeneville.

December 4th: Persistent heavy rain made Longstreet's withdrawal very difficult for his troops who had to endure very harsh conditions.

December 7th: The fourth session of the Confederate Congress met in Richmond. Despite brave words from Jefferson Davis, all present knew that it had been a bad year for the Confederacy.

December 8th: President Lincoln announced the Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction to Congress. He offered a full amnesty to those who fought for the Confederacy except to former Federal army officers who had resigned their commission to fight for the South. Anyone who was found guilty of mistreating Union prisoners was also exempt from any Presidential pardon as were senior government officials. Lincoln also promised that all property in the South (except former slaves) would be restored to their legal owners. He also guaranteed that any Southern state would be allowed back into the Union if just 10% of those in a state swore allegiance to the Union. Each of these states would also have to abandon slavery.

December 10th: The Army of the Potomac went into its winter quarters as no more maneuvers were expected in view of the weather and the great difficulty this placed on movement.

December 15th: The lack of money available to the Confederacy was all too clear to Brigadier-General E P Alexander, part of Longstreet's command, when he noticed men marching in their bare feet. Longstreet ordered his men to exchange their footwear with the boots worn by captured Union soldiers.

December 16th: General J E Johnston was appointed commander of the Army of Tennessee. General Bragg went to Richmond and became the military adviser to President Jefferson Davis.

December 18th: Union troops were suffering the same hardships as those in the South. Union troops at Knoxville had no winter clothing and they slept under their ponchos as no tents had been sent there. Both North and South had more casualties as a result of ill-health and disease as opposed to actual combat. Despite their hardships, General Grant applauded the work done by the men at Knoxville and praised Burnside's leadership.

December 21st: By this day most military operations had ceased because of the weather.

December 26th: The paper strength of the Confederate Army was 465,000 men but only 278,000 were actually present for duty. The discrepancy was accounted for by those men off through illness and the many thousands who had deserted. The North was not in a particularly good position either as it was having major problems enforcing conscription.

December 29th: The first signs of scurvy were reported in both camps along with frequent outbreaks of dysentery.