

## Civil War 150 years ago, December 1864

Sherman continued with his desired plan - an advance on Savannah. He reached the city before Christmas and offered the city to Lincoln as a Christmas gift. Sherman planned to use the rest of December to allow his troops to rest before marching north to link up with Grant in preparation for an all-out attack on Richmond.

December 1 The Union army commanded by Schofield, entrenched itself in Nashville and dominated the Cumberland River.

December 2 Sherman was halfway to Savannah. His subordinates in Nashville were ordered by Washington to confront and defeat Hood's Army of the Tennessee. However, very poor weather hindered both armies.

December 8 General Grant made it clear that he supported the President's wish that Hood should be attacked immediately by Schofield's men. Either that or he wanted Schofield replaced. The Union commander in Nashville was General Thomas, a subordinate of Schofield. He telegraphed Grant that his cavalry had no horses and that any attack not supported by the cavalry was doomed to failure.

December 9 Appalling weather in Nashville made all forms of fighting near impossible. Roads had been reduced to quagmires.

December 10 Sherman's army arrived in Savannah.

December 12 Thomas telegraphed Grant with the information that he would attack Hood as soon as the weather improved.

December 13 In a further blow to the defenders of Savannah, Sherman's men established a route to the sea that would allow the Union Navy to supply his army. Grant appointed Major-General John Logan to replace General Thomas in Nashville.

December 15 Once the weather had cleared Thomas ordered an attack on Hood's army at Nashville. The only thing that saved Hood was the shortened day. Other than failing to finish off Hood's army, the attack was an overwhelming success with 1,000 men taken prisoner.

December 16 Thomas conveys the news to Grant. He followed up the attack with a further massive attack using all the men at his command - 50,000. Hood could only muster 30,000 men. The Army of the Tennessee put up a good defense but defeat was almost inevitable. 4,500 Confederate troops surrendered, 1,500 men were either killed or wounded. 59 out of 156 artillery guns were captured. Hood could only order a retreat for those who survived - a retreat that had to be executed in the dead of winter with minimal supplies.

December 22 Sherman telegraphed Lincoln the following: "I beg to present you, as a Christmas gift, the city of Savannah."

December 24 Union forces started an attack on Fort Fisher in North Carolina. This fort defended the only remaining port open to the Confederacy - Wilmington. The largest Union naval force of 60 warships

gathered before the fort to blast it into submission. However, their task was not easy. The design of the fort and the inaccuracy of those bombarding the fort meant that many Union shells fired from the ships simply flew over the fort and into Cape Fear River.

December 25 6,000 Union troops landed to take Fort Fisher but the fort's guns were still intact and kept them pinned down. A rumor that Confederate reinforcements were on their way, convinced the commanders on the ground that they should withdraw.

December 26 The Union troops at Fort Fisher were evacuated. Lincoln ordered an investigation as to what went wrong and why what should have been a relatively easy victory turned into a full-scale withdrawal.

December 30 Lincoln proposed to remove General Ben Butler from the command of the Army of the James. It was Butler who commanded the abortive landing at Fort Fisher. Grant also had a very low opinion of Butler's ability.

December 31 Sherman's army rested in Savannah in preparation for its advance north to support Grant.