

# This Day in History... September 20, 1863

## Battle of Chickamauga

On September 20, 1863, the first major battle fought in Georgia, the bloody Battle of Chickamauga, came to a close.

Union General William S. Rosecrans had previously had great success in his Tullahoma Campaign and hoped to push Confederate General Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee, out of Chattanooga. Rosecrans consolidated his forces and forced Bragg to flee Chattanooga. Bragg then assembled his troops in Lafayette, Georgia, and prepared to retake Chattanooga.

Bragg followed the Union Army and engaged them in a small fight at Davis' Cross Roads. He then received reinforcements from John Bell Hood's Virginia division and Bushrod Johnson's Mississippi Division. Early in the morning of September 18, Bragg marched his troops to the Chickamauga Creek, aiming to separate the Union troops from Chattanooga. Bragg's men then crossed the river, though his arrival wasn't a surprise – Rosecrans had seen them marching toward his position and called in reinforcements.

Though there was some small skirmishing on the 18th, the battle began in full force after dawn on September 19th. All day, Bragg's men launched vicious attacks but could not break through the Union line. Then, at 11:00 that night, General James Longstreet arrived with a massive force that gave the Confederates the upper hand.

The battle began again at 9:30 the next morning, September 20, with a large Confederate attack on the Union left flank. As the battle continued, Rosecrans believed a gap had formed in his line and ordered Thomas Wood's division to fill it. However, the gap didn't exist and when they left their positions to obey his orders, they actually created a large gap. The Confederates used this mistake to their advantage and flooded the line, rushing the Union troops from the field.

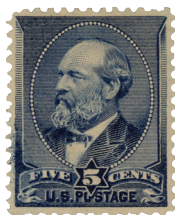
Union General George H. Thomas then worked to consolidate the fleeing Union troops and establish a defensive position. Though the Confederates brought the battle to them, the Union troops held their position. Thomas was then known as "The Rock of Chickamauga" for his leadership. Rosecrans was later relieved of his command and Thomas took control of the Army of the Cumberland.

Though Bragg had succeeded in the driving the Union troops from the field, Rosecrans and the Union Army still held Chattanooga. The Confederates would then occupy the heights surrounding the city, blocking their supply lines. The Union Army responded by launching the two-month-long Chattanooga Campaign, which finally pushed the Confederate forces out of Tennessee.

Chickamauga was one of the bloodiest battles of the war, with the highest number of casualties in the Western theater. In fact, it had the second-highest number of casualties after Gettysburg, with about 16,000 Union and 18,000 Confederate soldiers killed, wounded, missing, or captured.



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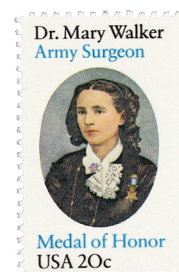
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