

General Joseph Wheeler: The Loyal Rebel

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A Thesis

Submitted to

The Graduate Faculty of

Salisbury University

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Degree of

Master of Arts

Salisbury, Maryland

May, 2009

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This project for the M.A. degree in
History has been approved for the
History Department by

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05/19/2009

Introduction

General Joseph Wheeler was born into a time of great change for the world and America. In his lifetime horses were replaced by trains, sails by steam engines, and paintings by photographs. As a young man Wheeler watched and participated as his nation sought to tear itself in two. During his midlife, as an elected representative, he took part in attempts to heal the wounds of a bloody war that had kept the nation as one but left it divided in the minds of its people. In his later years, Wheeler once again became a soldier and showed the world that the South was ready to be more than an occupied territory. As a young man the love of his home had led him to defiance and in later years that same love called him to serve once more.

Through a study of Joseph Wheeler's life it is possible to follow the transitions that America went through during these times of change. Wheeler graduated from West Point, and led men the likes of Nathan Bedford Forrest with great zeal during the war. He practiced law after the war, defending the South from his seat in congress during the dark days of reconstruction. When war returned to America he volunteered to serve his country against Spain. Wheeler would don the uniform of his former enemies and show the nation once and for all that the South had healed much since the war and was ready to be a loyal part of the Union. Following the Spanish-American War, America stood as a united world power. No longer were the primary concerns of the nation internal; instead they focused on the place of America in the world. These times of change thrust men like Theodore Roosevelt, who served under Wheeler in Cuba, on to the world stage.

This paper will explain the life of General "Fightin Joe" Wheeler. His actions on the battlefield, in Congress, and in Cuba, helped America get through the growing pains on its way to becoming a world power.

Joseph Wheeler's parents were both descended from English settlers who came to America before the American Revolution.¹ His mother, Julia Knox Hull, was the daughter of General Hull, who became famous during the Revolutionary and Boarder Wars under General George Washington.² His father, who he was named after, had lived in Connecticut and been a merchant. Following the War of 1812 and the collapse of New England's economy, Joseph Wheeler Sr. left the North and headed south to Georgia to try his hand at farming. During his time in Georgia Wheeler Senior bought and traded real estate, helped organize the Augusta Savings Bank and the Merchants and Planters Bank of Augusta. Eventually he bought a farm, a few slaves and proceeded to raise cotton.³ Joseph Wheeler Jr. was born in Augusta, Georgia on September 10, 1836. When only five his mother, Julia Knox Wheeler, died.⁴ Along with this hardship the family suffered economic troubles due to a poor crop and failing investments. With the family emotionally and financially drained Joseph Wheeler Sr. moved the remainder of his family "way Down East"⁵ back to his home state in an attempt to start over.

In Cheshire Connecticut, Wheeler Jr. attended school and was later described by classmates as "a fighter and usually licked boys much larger than himself."⁶ After finishing his schooling he left his home to move to New York where he lived with his older sister and her husband. His sister's husband was a lawyer and could have easily gotten the young Wheeler a job at his firm but the future general had already made up his

¹ *The Confederate Veteran Magazine*; Volume VI. Broadfoot's Bookmark. Wendell. 1989. Page 361.

² DeLeon, T.C. *Joseph Wheeler, The Man, The Statesman, The Soldier; Seen in Semi-Biographical Sketches*. Continental Book Company. Kennesaw. 1899. Page 51/2.

³ Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Page 8/9.

⁴ DeLeon, T.C. *Joseph Wheeler, The Man, The Statesman, The Soldier; Seen in Semi-Biographical Sketches*. Continental Book Company. Kennesaw. 1899. Page 53.

⁵ *Ibid.* Page 53.

mind to join the army. At the age of fourteen he went to work to help his struggling family. Although it is unclear what kind of job he had. Through this work he met a Congressman from New York who also bore the name of Wheeler although the Congressman was not related to young Joseph.⁷

It was through this Congressman that Joseph obtained his nomination to West Point. Robert E. Lee, recently promoted captain of engineers, was the superintendent at the time. Wheeler arrived at West Point as the curriculum changed from a four course program to five courses, a fact which would later place him above his fellow Confederate officers as the Civil War began. Despite poor grades Wheeler quickly rose to the class-company lieutenancy. While his grades might have suffered, Wheeler “early and late imbibed thirstily all the military side of the instruction, and was an omnivorous student, not only for practical military science, but also of every book on war that he could lay his hands upon.”⁸ The young student rarely received demerits but was not seen as deserving praise by his teachers and instructors. While a student he received the nick name of “Point Wheeler,” in reference to his size; as one of his classmates described him “so little that he had neither length, breadth, nor thickness.”⁹ Just before the start of the Civil War Wheeler would be described as; “five feet, two inches in his jackboots. His narrow-waisted tunic suggested that he weighed no more than one hundred and twenty pounds soaking wet.”¹⁰ When he graduated in 1859, he stood nineteenth out of a class of twenty

⁶ Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Page 11.

⁷ DeLeon, T.C. *Joseph Wheeler, The Man, The Statesman, The Soldier; Seen in Semi-Biographical Sketches*. Continental Book Company. Kennesaw. 1899. Page 54.

⁸ Ibid. Page 21.

⁹ Ibid. Page 22.

¹⁰ Longacre, Edward G. *A Soldier to the Last; Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler in Blue and Grey*. Potomac Books, Inc. Washington. 2007. Page 2.

two, his worst grades came from classes relating to cavalry.¹¹

Following his formal education in the military, Wheeler was sent to an army base in Pennsylvania to receive further instruction in cavalry tactics. From Pennsylvania he was attached to the First Dragoons as a brevet second lieutenant. Rather than stay in this relatively safe position, he wanted to serve in a place where he might see battle and have a better chance at promotion; he chose the Mounted Rifles. Despite his repeated attempts at transfer, he was told by his commanding officer that a transfer would not be possible. As his frustration reached its peak the angered officer marched into the offices of the Adjutant General and “bluntly stated his case to Colonel Sam Cooper; and came back, just as quietly as he went, with the transfer order in his pocket.”¹² His new position sent him to New Mexico, largely to protect wagon trains for the army and civilians. On only one occasion did he ever have the opportunity to use his weapons and training in battle. While escorting a wagon train of army supplies the train came under attack by Indians. Young lieutenant described the instance to friends; “That was my chance, I charged the crowd knocking down a horse with a shot from my musket. Then I threw away my gun and went at them with my Colt pistol.”¹³ From this skirmish the young man gained the nickname “Fightin Joe Wheeler” which replaced his former name as “Point Wheeler.”¹⁴ This instance could no doubt be attributed to the heady notions of battle and valor that are instilled in almost any young untested soldier; but Wheeler’s flare for leading at the front would continue on even into his days of battle outside Santiago, Cuba. On the first of

¹¹ Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of “Fightin’ Joe” Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Page, 13.

¹² DeLeon, T.C. *Joseph Wheeler, The Man, The Statesman, The Soldier; Seen in Semi-Biographical Sketches*. Continental Book Company. Kennesaw. 1899. Page 26.

¹³ Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of “Fightin’ Joe” Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Page 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Page 15.

September, 1860 he was promoted to second lieutenant. On April 22, 1861 he resigned his commission to serve his state in the coming war.

While there are numerous memoirs and books written on the topic of how difficult it was for most Confederate officers to decide between a Union or Confederate life, the young officer did not suffer from indecision. A few weeks before it became clear that the South would leave the Union, Wheeler wrote to his brother “Much as I love the Union, and much as I am attached to my profession all will be given up when my state by its action, shows that such a course is necessary and proper.”¹⁵ When he was certain that there would be separation and war, he abandoned the army he had worked so hard to join and went home. The decision to join the South led to his receiving a promotion and he was appointed to the 7th Alabama, an artillery unit. Here he showed such leadership that he was reassigned by the commander of Alabama’s armed forces, General Walker, to lead the 19th Alabama, an infantry unit, and given a promotion to colonel.¹⁶ Wheeler must have looked out of place when he met with General Walker. His fellow officers at the meeting, all political appointees, wore fine tailored uniforms while Wheeler himself wore an artillery officer’s gray wool uniform designed for a first lieutenant. Within three short years the young man had gone from brevet second lieutenant to colonel as well as serving in all three branches of the army; cavalry, artillery, and infantry. Wheeler’s quick rise and wide range of positions can be attributed to his education. Due to his “omnivores” appetite as a student at West Point, Colonel Wheeler had studied all three branches of the army, even though he did not excel in any one of them at school, his knowledge of all

¹⁵ Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of “Fightin’ Joe” Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Page 17.

¹⁶ Longacre, Edward G. *A Soldier to the Last; Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler in Blue and Grey*. Potomac Books, Inc. Washington. 2007. Page 2.

three gave him a wider range of opportunity than most officers. He was also one of the few officers in the Confederate Army who had been educated under the new five course curriculum, meaning he had an education that was more modern than most of his fellow officers, many of whom were politically appointed and had little if any military training. Shortly after his promotion, his commanding general, Braxton Bragg, wrote to the acting Secretary of War, J. P. Benjamin, informing the latter that “The Department, just before your entrance on its duties, came into their midst, and selected one of the very youngest of their number for the grade of colonel. Lieutenant (Colonel) Wheeler is a very excellent officer, and none envy him his good fortune, but they cannot see the justice of the apparent reflection on themselves.”¹⁷ Bragg and many others were not angry with Wheeler but rather with the people who had promoted him. In a return letter J.P. Benjamin replied to Bragg stating that those who received promotion received them because of their education and status as a professional soldier. In the same letter, Benjamin reminded Bragg that most of those overlooked for promotions were political appointees who had no formal military education.

Wheeler’s early life was harder than most. The loss of his mother, his family’s economic collapse, and the move to Connecticut undoubtedly made life hard for the young Wheeler. But from this hard fought youth Joseph Wheeler found determination. With this determination Wheeler achieved his goal of joining the army. It was this same drive that led him to leave the army and join the South in the coming war. Despite the fact that he was primarily raised and educated in the North, Wheeler identified himself with the South. With only one fight under his belt and a promotion that placed him in

¹⁷ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies.* Government Printing Office. Washington. 1895. Series I. Volume 6. Part I. Page 744. (From here on referred to as WOR. Section I. Volume #. Part #. Page #.)

charge of more men than he had ever commanded, Colonel Wheeler, at the age of twenty five, followed the Confederate States of America into an uncertain future and an uncertain war.

Once promoted, Wheeler set out to train his fresh troops. Moving into Camp Jones, he and his men were greeted with a picturesque view, which also happened to be located in a marshy area and caused much disease among Wheeler's men. Despite the lack of previous training in his men and their steadily declining health Wheeler did not lose hope and chose to move his troops to Blue Spring; creating a new camp called Bradford.¹⁸ Wheeler faced more problems than just training his troops to be soldiers; he lacked uniforms, guns, and other basic necessities for soldiers. To counter these problems he pressed the state of Alabama constantly for supplies. Working with what he had the young colonel made his men drill with sticks and boards until they were provided with true weapons.

By the time he was done training his men the war was several months old and the 19th Alabama was ordered to the west to help protect and attempt to retake the state of Tennessee; recently lost by General Albert Sidney Johnston.¹⁹ Under the command of General Braxton Bragg and the ultimate command of General Johnston Wheeler along with the rest of the Army of Mississippi moved north. Their goal was to try and push the Union forces under General Grant back and gain a decisive victory in the west. On April 2, Johnston gave the marching orders for the army to move on to Pittsburgh Landing Tennessee. Along with his orders Johnston issued a statement to his troops; "with resolution and discipline and the valor becoming men fighting for all worth living or

¹⁸ Longacre, Edward G. *A Soldier to the Last; Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler in Blue and Grey*. Potomac Books, Inc. Washington. 2007. Page 4.

dying for, you cannot but march to a decisive victory over the agrarian mercenaries sent to subjugate you and despoil you of your liberties, your property and your honor.”²⁰

With this stirring command and new marching orders Wheeler and his men moved north to help stop the invasion of their new nation. Johnston’s plan, for what would be called the battle of Shiloh, called for the 19th to move on the Confederate right in an attempt to turn the Union left. The untested 19th fought bravely, but by mid-day on April 6, 1861 had done little to help turn the Union left. Wheeler, seeing little else that could be done to change the tide of the battle, personally led several charges against the Union lines and eventually forced them back as Johnston had ordered. Through out the day the Confederate lines surrounding the colonel became more and more disorganized. Wheeler’s troops maintained their formations and acted as an anchor for the surrounding units, a testament to the training the young officer had given his men at Camp Bradford.²¹ As the day ended news came that General Johnston had been shot in the leg while personally leading a charge to rally his men, Johnston later died due to complications from the wound. Command of the Army of Mississippi passed on to General Beauregard, who was less certain of pressing battle on the following day. Throughout the night the Union forces received reinforcements and supplies, at the same time the Confederate forces received next to nothing. The following day the South tried to exploit its victories but was unable to muster the forces needed to defeat the newly invigorated Northern troops. By the close of the seventh the Confederate army was preparing to retreat, due to

¹⁹ Ibid. Page 22.

²⁰ WOR. Series I. Volume 10. Part II. Page 389.

²¹ Longacre, Edward G. *A Soldier to the Last; Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler in Blue and Grey*. Potomac Books, Inc. Washington. 2007. Page 26.

Union advances which had taken back nearly all the ground gained on the sixth.²²

With the retreat beginning Colonel Wheeler was ordered to stay back and help General Breckinridge with rear guard actions. At this point Wheeler yet again saw a chance, as he had in his younger days in the west. Breckinridge pointed out in the post script of a letter to Colonel Jordan, of the Adjutant-General on April 9, 1863; "Colonel Wheeler, of the 19th Alabama Regiment, is with me with the remnant of his command, and suggest that while he thinks his regiment (now numbering about 100 men for duty) had better go on, he is quite well enough to take charge of any troops sent on. I regret to be obliged to say that I am very unwell and nearly unfit for duty."²³ The reply came later that day from general command, Wheeler was to be placed in charge of rear guard actions and take command of any reinforcements sent there since Breckinridge was too sick to command.²⁴ As rear guard action began, the infantry officer turned cavalry commander and his men were charged with defending the rear of the army, such as baggage trains, and reporting where the enemy likely was. Most of the colonel's reports confirmed the Union advance and helped to protect the retreating army. During this time Wheeler and his new command successfully fended off multiple attacks. Sherman and his men made one last attempt to overtake the Confederate retreat, Wheeler wrote of the instance; "I have the honor to state that our pickets were pressed this morning by a force of about 200 enemy's cavalry. I ordered all the available mounted men to the front, and the enemy retired after some circuitous movements. (letter to Adjutant-General April 12, 1862)"²⁵

The limping Army of Mississippi was free from the potential destruction that had loomed

²² Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Pages 30-32.

²³ WOR. Series I. Volume 10. Part II. Page 403.

²⁴ WOR. Series I. Volume 10. Part II. Page 404.

over it following the battle of Shiloh.

Following the defeat and subsequent retreat from Shiloh, the Confederate government lost faith in General Beauregard. As Beauregard went on sick leave President Jefferson Davis ordered him relieved of command. He was replaced by General Braxton Bragg who was seen as more assertive, the hope being that he would press the enemy more than Beauregard had seemed willing to do. Given some time to think out his future campaign, Bragg decided that he would initiate an offensive designed at recapturing the occupied regions of East Tennessee. If successful the plan would allow Bragg to attack the Union army under General Buell.²⁶

During the planning period for what would later be known as the Perryville Campaign, Wheeler was reaping the benefit of his actions during the Shiloh retreat. He had been given the temporary title of general and command of the remnants of the cavalry arm of the Army of Mississippi including parts of “Jackson’s, Wake’s, Pinson’s and Slemons’ regiments,” in all about 1,000 men.²⁷ The early days as a general were spent trying to locate the remaining troops who had been scattered during the rear guard actions. Starting out in late July, Wheeler’s duty during the Perryville Campaign was to keep the Union forces confused and distracted while General Bragg made his advance. The first act of deception undertaken was to make it appear that the main force of the army was moving towards West Tennessee. Throughout this advance the general used a small force of infantry to help compliment his cavalry and give the impression of an army in advance. Once convinced the enemy saw him as a much larger force Fightin Joe was

²⁵ WOR. Series I. Volume 10. Part II. Page 414.

²⁶ Longacre, Edward G. *A Soldier to the Last; Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler in Blue and Grey*. Potomac Books, Inc. Washington. 2007. Page 40.

²⁷ WOR. Series I. Volume 17. Part I. Page 23.

obliged to send back his force of infantry, leaving him with around 500 men. The cavalry continued to keep on the move and having fooled the Union forces so completely that “we so thoroughly shut them in (at Bolivar) as to enable us to send out a large number of squads of men to burn cotton which had been seized or purchased by the enemy . . . burning in all about 3,000 bales . . . So great was their alarm that they allowed us to burn cotton undisturbed almost within sight of their entrenched positions.”²⁸ So effective was Wheeler’s campaign of confusion that the Union forces held up at Bolivar called for reinforcements, and received around 3,000 men all of whom were kept under constant alert in case the of attack.

While convincing the Union troops that he was in fact the main force of the army Wheeler undertook to destroy Union capabilities in the region. He destroyed sections of railroad, he burned as much cotton as he could find, he captured and destroyed wagon trains, and he sought to destroy all lines of communication including telegraph lines. He reported his success to Bragg finally summing up his accomplishments for the campaign. He stated that with only 500 cavalry his forces had penetrated some seventy miles behind the enemy’s main lines. At the same time they destroyed the railroad bridges they crossed over. They force fought in eight separate engagements, all of which except for one the cavalry was victorious.²⁹ From this point on the cavalry general’s role shifted from that of raiding to that of protection for the real army as it marched through Tennessee towards Kentucky.

Wheeler was tasked with moving in front of the army, protecting it from ambush and defending its flanks. This was achieved, again through deception. Making frequent

²⁸ WOR. Series I. Volume 17. Part I. Page 24.

²⁹ WOR. Series I. Volume 17. Part I. Page 25.

raids and reaping havoc among the enemy's supply lines to keep them occupied while the army moved. Early on in the campaign, while guarding General Hardee's column, Wheeler made a raid upon part of Buell's forces latter reported by Buell himself as "General Hardee attempted to cross the mountain with his corps, but by his (Buell writing in the third person) placing a large force at Altamont had compelled General Hardee to fall back into the valley."³⁰ Arriving in Carthage on September 7, Wheeler and his men were ordered out towards Nashville to harass the Union troop movements. To do this Wheeler made surprise raids on their flanks along with raiding of communication and supply lines. Wheeler would continue his advance actions throughout the coming days. His reports show there was seldom a time where he was not either on the move to a new location or in a confrontation with the enemy. In most cases the Union army felt that the cavalry was the main force of the army and refused battle believing themselves outnumbered. In one case the opponent realized the deception³¹ of the cavalry and offered battle. Wheeler was compelled to engage, but being out numbered soon fell to retreat. As Bragg positioned his army for what would latter be called the Battle of Perryville, Wheeler's role was to slow the Union advance so the Confederate Army would be ready. Boasting in his reports the general commented; "By keeping our lines continuously skirmishing until night we prevented the enemy from making any demonstration that day upon our infantry."³²

The following day, all of Bragg's forces were in place and Wheeler was ordered to guard the Confederate left. He was left to his own discretion, being told that the

³⁰ WOR. Series I. Volume 16. Part II. Page 893.

³¹ WOR. Series I. Volume 16. Part II. Page 896.

³² WOR. Series I. Volume 16. Part II. Page 897.

commanding general trusted him “to do what is best for the service.”³³ It did not take long for the cavalry to find battle, quickly receiving orders from General Polk to clear the road leading from Lebanon to Perryville. With his usual style, Wheeler led a charge which drove the enemy back forcing them to retreat over two miles. In their retreat the enemy left behind supplies and an artillery battery. Despite the effort of the Confederate forces, at the end of the day the Union army was not defeated. The following day, as with Shiloh, the Confederate army was forced to withdraw before the newly reinforced Union army. Wheeler was ordered to guard the army’s front as it made its retreat; he was also ordered to make reports every two hours. Wheeler and the cavalry were later commended by General Brent; “No cavalry force was ever more handsomely handled and no army better covered.”³⁴ After being ordered to guard the army’s front the young general was ordered to also guard the left and rear of General Hardee. Wheeler was making a name for himself, in a position that no commander ever wishes to be known for. On the thirteenth of October he was ordered to take command of all cavalry and given permission to act in the name of the commanding general.³⁵ Along with these commands, his orders expanded to guarding the rear of the whole army as it retreated. As the Confederate forces slipped away from the enemy, Wheeler was praised by his commanding officers. Bragg sent reports of his outstanding rear guard actions to the War Department in Richmond. At the close of the campaign the cavalry commander summarized the actions of his men with a closing speech. The autumn campaign was over. He commended his men for their gallantry in action as well as their “cheerful endurance of suffering for hunger, fatigue, and exposure.” He told them to be proud of their actions over the previous months were

³³ WOR. Series I. Volume 16. Part II. Page 891.

³⁴ WOR. Series I. Volume 16. Part II. Page 932.

they were almost always in contact with the enemy engaging in over one hundred skirmishes. He ended by explaining that the constant action had taught them all to live under the enemy's guns without fear, "to fight him wherever found, and to quietly make your bivouac by the light of his campfires."³⁶

Wheeler's tactics for guarding the rear were not totally original, although he perfected the art. As the army continued on, the cavalry stayed behind engaging the enemy's forward movements until they were so outnumbered that they had to retreat. In this manner the cavalry prevented the Union forces from catching up to the army, it also prevented them from truly knowing which direction Bragg and his army were headed.

As October ended the cavalry received some rest from their continual fighting and were allowed a chance to recuperate through the end of autumn. Throughout this time they only engaged in small conflicts. One engagement, on November twenty-seventh, earned Wheeler a rebuke "you expose yourself too recklessly in affairs."³⁷ While his style of command, fighting from the front, won him praise and admiration from his men it clearly upset his commanding generals that he placed himself in such danger. This trend of fighting from the front would continue throughout the war. Even when he was advanced in years and ill Wheeler would still lead his men from the front during the Spanish-American War.

Throughout November and December, Wheeler was again given a great deal of command, many new units arriving were placed under his control. Along with these duties, the general now acting as administrator was expected to handle the promotion of officers, the enforcement of Order Number 186 (which banned the production of whiskey

³⁵ WOR. Series I. Volume 16. Part II. Page 940.

³⁶ WOR. Series I. Volume 16. Part II. Page 976/977.

in the armies immediate vicinity), and he was tasked with drilling and instructing the units under his command so they would be better prepared when hostilities resumed.³⁸ Around this time, news of Lee's success against the Army of the Potomac reached the west. Reports began to come in of massive desertion by Union soldiers who were "sick of the war, and only desirous of returning home."³⁹ With the news from the east and the inability to crush the Confederate army hurting morale the Union forces sought to engage the Confederates in a final battle. The hope being it would not only remove the enemy threat, but also boost morale for the entire Union. On Christmas day 1862, the Union army of the Cumberland under its new commander General Rosecrans attacked Bragg's forces camped near Nashville. Bragg chose not to offer battle but instead retreated back towards Murfreesboro. While the main force retreated Wheeler was again left with the duty of defending the army's rear; engaging and falling back as he had done following Shiloh and Perryville. Once again he succeeded in sufficiently slowing the Union forces to a crawl, allowing Bragg and his army time to retreat. As the Union army finally reached the Confederate forces around Murfreesboro, Wheeler took up a position on the far right of the Confederate lines and proceeded to head back to general command to receive his next orders from General Bragg.⁴⁰

Wheeler's orders suited his style and temperament perfectly. Rather than stay and fight with the main force of the army, he was ordered to cross over behind Union lines and disrupt supplies and communications between the army of the Cumberland and Nashville. The ultimate purpose of this action was to distract Rosecrans as much as

³⁷ WOR. Series I. Volume 20. Part I. Page 19.

³⁸ Longacre, Edward G. *A Soldier to the Last; Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler in Blue and Grey*. Potomac Books, Inc. Washington. 2007. Page 70.

³⁹ WOR. Series I. Volume 20. Part II. Page 428.

possible so that he might weaken his lines to guard his rear and allow for Bragg to attack the Union right. The cavalry moved out as ordered and proceeded to cause massive confusion. Returning from his small raid Wheeler found Bragg's army in a vicious battle. Wheeler and his menthe cavalry commander and his men threw themselves into battle and at the end of the day the Confederate forces held a slight victory, succeeding in halting and pushing back the Union advance.⁴¹ The following day, New Years 1863, Bragg expected Rosecrans to have retreated from his precarious position, instead he found the Union army holding its ground. Rather than press another attack Bragg ordered the army to camp. Wheeler was asked again to return to the enemy's rear. Within the first day a large wagon train was attacked, a large number of wagons and stores were destroyed and a piece of artillery was captured.⁴² The following day another wagon train was attacked, only this time the train was well guarded and all that could be done was to prevent it from reaching the main force of the army. Returning from raiding duties the army was found again in conflict. Wheeler participated little in the battle, instead making his way back to General Bragg to issue a report on Union movements. Perhaps exaggerating or honestly confused by his intelligence reports he informed Bragg that a large number of reinforcements were headed to help Rosecrans; when in fact the large number was a small number of infantry. With this information, Bragg decided to abandon the field and the town of Murfreesboro.⁴³ Again Wheeler moved to defend the rear of the army, although there was little action as Rosecrans let the army slip away feeling he could safely take and defend Murfreesboro.

⁴⁰ WOR. Series I. Volume 20. Part I. Page 956.

⁴¹ WOR. Series I. Volume 20. Part I. Page 960.

⁴² WOR. Series I. Volume 20. Part I. Page 959.

⁴³ WOR. Series I. Volume 20. Part I. Page 960.

While Wheeler's part in Murfreesboro had not shifted the tide of battle or lead to a Confederate victory it had forced Rosecrans to change his strategy. Rather than moving his full force against Bragg, Rosecrans, had been forced to move troops away from the battle to help defend wagon trains. This action, which Wheeler reported when he referred to not being able to take an artillery train during his second day of raids, had forced Rosecrans to prolong the battle. On such a small scale, two days, raiding had forced the Union to change its tactics. With this in mind it became obvious to Wheeler and his commanders that the greater part of success came when he was not directly attached to the army but rather when he was free to move about such as in raids and defensive movements. With these successful raids in mind a new strategy was created. Instead of staying with the army and working in close proximity to it, he would be sent far into enemy lines to cause as much damage as he possibly could. The ultimate hope of this tactic was that Rosecrans would be forced to spend time, supplies, and troops stopping raiding parties. This would allow the Confederate army some breathing room, which would give it the chance to prepare for battle on its own terms or move about as it pleased. This tactic would also allow Wheeler and his men to forage for supplies, both for themselves and the army in general, meaning that the cavalry would hopefully be self sufficient and free up more supplies for the main army.

On January 8, 1863 Wheeler, with his cavalry, crossed the Cumberland burning the railroad bridge they had used once they were across.⁴⁴ The next several days in his reports and the reports of Union troops are empty as the raiders moved on towards Nashville to begin their raiding mission. The first Union reports of Wheeler's movements came on the tenth, when it was reported that "there is good reason to believe that General

Wheeler, with about 1,000 cavalry, has left Shelbyville for the purpose of coming in and cutting the railroad.”⁴⁵ On the evening of January 12, Wheeler and his men attacked the steamer *Charter* on the Cumberland and burned it with what supplies they could not take with them.⁴⁶ On the evening of the thirteenth a Union officer reported to his local general that “the rebels are burning everything on the river. There are at least four more freight boats destroyed, and the *Slidell* taken and burned.”⁴⁷ These actions so disturbed the Union officials that General Rosecrans sent back a letter to his commander stating that the Confederate cavalry outnumbered his four to one and was causing great mischief. He argued that they were in such force that they could not be challenged. He sited that the day before he attacked some ships south of Nashville and captured and burned three of them. He stated that “the government pays the expense and we lose the provisions.” To conclude his letter Rosecrans asked that armored steam ships be sent. He also stated that he did not have the proper force to handle Wheeler and his raiders; he then asked for horses and saddles to mount infantry, asking for enough to mount 5,000 extra troops.⁴⁸ For these raiding actions General Bragg informed the Confederate Congress that Wheeler deserved a promotion for an instance where he “was hotly pursued by a gunboat, which he attacked and captured.”⁴⁹ This action was described by the general in his reports by one single paragraph, odd considering that for most of his reports he took several pages. Despite how he saw the raid in his own reports it is obvious from Union reports and actions that the raid frightened Rosecrans and others. At first the Union officers reported Wheeler’s crossing almost casually, later they spoke of it in panicked tones as if it

⁴⁴ WOR. Series I. Volume 20. Part I. Page 961.

⁴⁵ WOR. Series I. Volume 20. Part II. Page 313.

⁴⁶ WOR. Series I. Volume 20. Part I. Page 982.

⁴⁷ WOR. Series I. Volume 20. Part I. Page 983.

threatened the whole of the army of Cumberland. Even Rosecrans in his letter shows clear discomfort with the presence of raiders, as is shown by the need to ask for more horses to mount. Later, the Confederate Congress would approve Wheeler for promotion to major general, along with the thanks of the Confederate Congress; “the thanks of Congress are due, and are hereby, tendered to Brigadier General Wheeler and the officers and men of his command, for his daring and successful attacks upon the enemy’s gunboats and transports in the Cumberland River. Approved May 1, 1863.”⁵⁰ Even though he was being hailed as a hero for his actions, Wheeler could not sit back and bask in the light of glory. The new brigadier-general had to keep moving, he could not stay in one place for too long for fear of the idle cavalry causing “serious depredation on the friendly countryside.”⁵¹ Depredation meaning stripping the land of food and supplies.

The next move for Wheeler and his cavalry would be with General Forrest, who Wheeler had respect for although they did not appear to get along well with each other. Wheeler being a by the books soldier while Forrest was more of an independent free thinker. Although they had differences the two came up with a plan to retake Fort Donelson. Both hoped that by taking the fort they would so threaten Rosecrans’ river transportation that he would be forced to spend men and resources to retake the fort, or better yet be forced to retreat to a place where he would have unthreatened supply lines. On February third, Wheeler and his forces assembled outside of Fort Donelson and sent a message to the Colonel holding the fort; “Having invested Fort Donelson with a force sufficient to take it, and desiring to prevent the effusion of blood, we have the honor to

⁴⁸ WOR. Series I. Volume 20. Part II. Page 328.

⁴⁹ WOR. Series I. Volume 20. Part I. Page 983.

⁵⁰ WOR. Series I. Volume 20. Part II. Page 504.

demand an immediate and unconditional surrender of the fort.”⁵² The colonel refused this offer and the raiders prepared to attack. Despite being ordered to remain on foot General Forrest made an attack with his mounted forces and placed himself under heavy fire from some of the buildings in the town surrounding Donelson. After dismounting his men again he took several of the buildings which he had been repulsed from. In some confusion Forrest mistook the retreating of some Union troops to be headed towards the horses Wheeler’s men had left behind. Forrest left his position and moved back to guard the horses of his and other units. Wheeler admitted in his reports that this was an honest mistake although he also places the blame for the failure to take the fort on this mistake; “But for this accident the garrison would have surrendered in a very few minutes.”⁵³

Other problems confounded the Confederate attack, throughout the day there were reports from all over that men were running low on ammunition. The general did not blame his subordinates for the lack of ammunition instead he blamed the speed at which his forces necessarily had to move. By the end of the day it was obvious that the fort was going to receive reinforcements from the river and the raiders decided to withdraw from the attack. In the aftermath of the battle Wheeler wrote his reports and took full responsibility for the failure. Forrest, far less the strict military man than his new commander was, vowed that he would never again serve under Wheeler due to the high loss of men he had suffered. Wheeler accepted Forrest’s attack and again accepted blame and notified General Bragg of Forrest’s wishes.⁵⁴

From February till April very little happened that involved the young general or

⁵¹ Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of “Fightin’ Joe” Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Page 74.

⁵² WOR. Series I. Volume 23. Part II. Page 39.

⁵³ WOR. Series I. Volume 23. Part I. Page 40.

his cavalry. Most of his time was consumed in minor raids. For many of these Wheeler called for more cavalry being convinced that with enough force he could make Rosecrans abandon Nashville. For the army as a whole Bragg was planning his summer campaign which would push back at Rosecrans. Bragg hoped to exploit the weaknesses that Wheeler and his cavalry had shown throughout the winter.

Among Wheeler's reports is contained March 7, he pointed out to Bragg that "the enemy at Carthage came out to Rome yesterday."⁵⁵ The report explains little other than mentioning that Rosecrans was clearly not ready for an advance. Given the nature of his education in historical battles and tactics the young general no doubt enjoyed the reference to Carthage attacking Rome that the town names offered.

In April Wheeler again took his role as a scout for the main army, and began sending reports of the enemies movements back to Bragg's headquarters. Among reports came numerous instances of attacks on railroad trains. On April 11, he reported back to Bragg that he and his men had, under the cover of darkness, placed themselves and some artillery within range of railroad tracks. Early in the morning a train passed by and the artillery opened fire destroying the engine of the train with the first three volleys. Following this, Wheeler's dismounted cavalry pushed back the train guards, only having one man wounded. With the train subdued, the raiders gathered what supplies they could carry and then; "brought our guns to bear upon the locomotive, and shot through it several times. We also shot the horses in the cars and retired."⁵⁶ During another raid the Confederate cavalry managed to capture \$30,000 in greenbacks destined to be pay for the

⁵⁴ Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Page 77.

⁵⁵ WOR. Series I. Volume 23. Part II. Page 668.

⁵⁶ WOR. Series I. Volume 23. Part I. Page 219.

soldiers under Rosecrans. With his actions, Wheeler was hurting Rosecrans and his army with very little in the way of personnel.

Beginning in April, Rosecrans was left with little option. Having nearly been forced to abandon Nashville by Wheeler's raids and his army in poor morale Rosecrans had no choice. He decided to push the Confederates before they would be able to exploit the weaknesses they had found in his position. Beginning July first, Wheeler's reports to Bragg showed that Rosecrans was pushing hard on the cavalry force that had troubled him so much through the harder months of winter. After initial engagements with the advance force of Rosecrans; Wheeler was forced to abandon his positions in enemy held territory.

Wheeler ordered his infantry to obstruct the roads as had been done in all previous retreats. However, Rosecrans was prepared for this action and by the afternoon of April second Wheeler reported; "the work of obstructing the road has ceased, the enemy having appeared in such large force that the men were not able to continue work."⁵⁷ Rosecrans was desperate; his supplies were few, his men were in poor morale, Wheeler's cavalry might strike at him any time, and the army that Bragg commanded might attack in full force. Because of the position Wheeler and his force had placed Rosecrans in, the only sure way of preventing the Confederates from succeeding was to strike first. By late June Rosecrans had massed his forces and was prepared to attack the Confederate army, as it searched for a better position to defend from.

While Wheeler retreated back through the land that he had virtually dominated during the winter Bragg was retreating to a more favorable spot to offer battle. The cavalry was charged with preventing the army's supply wagons from being overtaken by

the massive force that followed. The only place that the wagons were able to cross the Duck River was at the town of Shelbyville. Wheeler, in no way had a force capable of holding back the Union army but decided to make a stand at Shelbyville to prevent the loss of the wagon train. Throughout the day of June 24, Wheeler and his men made numerous charges and prevented the enemy forces from approaching the bridge. The general had called upon Forrest to return to his command so that the bridge might be protected. By midday it became apparent to Wheeler that Forrest would make good on his promise never again to serve under the general. Later in the afternoon it was reported that Forrest was in fact returning; as Wheeler waited at the bridge, with the last of the wagons crossing, it was reported that Forrest had found a ford further down river and crossed there rather than at the bridge which would have brought him in direct contact with the general he did not trust. While Forrest had avoided going back on his promise, he had placed himself in a dangerous position, he was unable to return the way he had come left with only one exit from battle; over the bridge Wheeler and his men had protected for the wagon train. The order was passed on to burn the bridge, when news was received of Forrest's position. Rather than burn the bridge Wheeler and a small group of volunteers again crossed over to help Forrest and his men escape.⁵⁸

Again charging into battle, Wheeler and his men made numerous attacks on the Union line while Forrest and his men made their escape. During the battle Wheeler and the small rescuing force were cut off from their retreat over the river, as the Union forces overwhelmed and rode through his line Wheeler had few options. Cut off from the river, heavily outnumbered, and totally surrounded the Union army felt sure that they had

⁵⁷ WOR. Series I. Volume 23. Part I. Page 615.

finally captured the man who had orchestrated so many of their winter troubles. With no option besides death or surrender the order was given that the men were to escape in any way possible.⁵⁹ With a small group of his men, Wheeler rode towards the Duck River, charging through enemy lines. As he approached the bank of the river with his saber drawn Wheeler his men leaped into the water from the high river banks, followed by some of his men. "The Union troopers rushed to the water's edge and fired at the men and animals struggling in the river, killing, or wounding and drowning a number. Holding to his horse's mane, General Wheeler took the precaution to shield himself as much as possible behind the body of the animal, and although fired at repeatedly, he escaped and safely reached the opposite shore."⁶⁰ Safely making their way across, despite heavy enemy fire, Wheeler and his men lived to fight another day. The total casualties of the saving action were around forty or fifty men out of the five hundred volunteers.⁶¹ Even though he had been known by many for his previous actions Wheeler's leap into Duck River made him into an instant celebrity throughout the South, the events also added even more to the mystique which surrounded him for the Union forces that had felt so sure of his capture.

On July third Wheeler received orders to halt his retreat and hold the town of Cowan. While Bragg would bring his main force up to halt and hopefully turn Rosecrans advance. The normally obedient cavalry commander expressed disbelief in his ability to hold the town and urged Bragg to bring his forces up as quickly as possible.⁶² On July

⁵⁸ DeLeon, T.C. *Joseph Wheeler, The Man, The Statesman, The Soldier; Seen in Semi-Biographical Sketches*. Continental Book Company. Kennesaw. 1899. Page 100.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Page 101.

⁶⁰ Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Page 85.

⁶¹ Ibid. Page 85.

⁶² WOR. Series I. Volume 23. Part I. Page 616.

fourth Wheeler's pickets informed him that Rosecrans' troops were camped out on the other side of the mountains leading to Cowan and that they had heard large amounts of cannon fire. Wheeler reported that he was not able to tell whether it was "intended for shelling the woods or Fourth of July guns."⁶³ During midday of the fourth, Forrest and his cavalry officially left the main cavalry force and proceeded to head back to the main force of Bragg's army. With Forrest gone and the enemy resting, Wheeler ordered his men in the mountains to proceed with blocking the roads by cutting down trees.

Rosecrans, still unsure of his enemies size, was proceeding with caution and was waiting for reinforcements before he pressed his attack.⁶⁴ Wheeler reported later that his delaying action had worked, in a few light skirmishes the Union forces were driven back and in one instance the enemy was thrown back with heavy loses. In both of these instances the general reported that the Union forces were unwilling to push for more than light fighting and that he personally felt they were waiting for reinforcements. While the defending cavalry force observed, Rosecrans prepared to strike at his opponents; he would wait till August to make his next major push to try and destroy the western army of the Confederate States. Even though the Confederate forces under General Wheeler had put up a greater fight than they could have been asked to, it had taken Rosecrans only ten days to push them from a position of tormenter to tormented.

Bragg's army had managed to escape the onslaught of Rosecrans' initial strike. His supplies and men had managed to outrun the Union army and had taken up what Bragg felt was a more suitable place to defend; Chattanooga Tennessee. General Wheeler had put up a great resistance against the Union thrust and managed to hold up the enemy

⁶³ WOR. Series I. Volume 23. Part I. Page 616.

⁶⁴ WOR. Series I. Volume 23. Part I. Page 617.

while the Confederate army escaped, but he and the Confederate army had not managed to defeat the Union forces. In the east, General Lee was having relatively good success, but by the time Wheeler was making his leap General Lee was preparing for the last great strike of the Confederate forces at Gettysburg. In the west, General Bragg was preparing for the first time, to start defending within Confederate territory. Where before he had made most of his actions in territories forcefully held by the Union. With General Bragg on the retreat and General Lee forced to withdraw from Union territory, the Confederate States of America were on shaky ground. Despite the downward spiral, no one was willing to see defeat in the future and all were willing to keep up the fight for states rights.

As Bragg prepared to defend true Confederate territory, he began to enjoy what he had previously been denied; internal lines of communication and supply. With this advantage the Army of the West would also come under a new threat; the possibility of Union raids. Bragg turned to the man he felt was best suited for preparing these lines for defense. Wheeler, with his massive experience in raids, set to work figuring out how to prevent the Union raids from being successful. No doubt the “omnivorous student of war” had taken mental note during his raids as to what the Union could have done to prevent his raids. On July 19, Wheeler wrote to General W.W. Mackall telling him that to keep lines open by railroad in Georgia and protect the public works of Rome and Atlanta it would be necessary to stockade bridges. He argued that the moral effect of the stockades and artillery would help deter raids. He felt that with an extra division of cavalry along with these defenses he would be able to follow up and prevent future Union

raids.⁶⁵ He knew that a raiding force would go after the easiest targets; any form of resistance would likely dissuade Union forces from attacking. Slightly fortified lines of communication at their weakest point would likely prevent the Union raiders from going after the more important lines of communication and supply. Along with these, General Wheeler had learned from his raids that an army had to have the ability to react quickly to raids. Unlike Rosecrans, the general did not plan to leave the Confederate rear unguarded. While Rosecrans begged for horses and supplies to defend his lines in the winter of 1863, Wheeler planned to act swiftly and be able to engage the enemy at any point where they might strike.

While Wheeler was preparing the defenses of his nation's western half, he was also able to see that things might be taking a turn for the worst. On July 24, he asked for the authority to recruit slave owners and overseers into his cavalry force.⁶⁶ The general no doubt saw that his plans for defense would require a good deal of personnel, something that Bragg's army would not be able to supply without consequences. On the twenty-ninth he was refused the authority to recruit from slave owners. Cracks in the Confederacy were beginning to show to Wheeler, even if others saw no need to fear. He felt that in a time of need the nation needed to call on all its resources, in this instance slave owners, but his commanders did not see things the same way. So General Wheeler was forced to work with what he had even if it would stretch him and the army thin. By the end of August not only was Wheeler being forced to supply troops for communications he was being asked to protect commercial trade, to help protect the

⁶⁵ WOR. Series I. Volume 23. Part II. Page 916.

⁶⁶ WOR. Series I. Volume 23. Part II. Page 936.

cattle being sent to the army from private sellers.⁶⁷ Already stretched thin Wheeler was forced to guard a much larger area which would require trained cavalry, where his fortifications of bridges could be supplied with auxiliary troops.

Bragg's army was preparing to challenge Rosecrans. To prevent further friction he split up Wheeler and Forrest. The former would guard the southern approach across the Tennessee River while the later would guard the northern approach across Walden's Ridge.⁶⁸ By August twenty-ninth, Rosecrans was moving his army across the Tennessee River and pushing into Wheeler's forces towards Chickamauga Creek. On September fifth, Wheeler was ordered to find out what kind of forces were headed towards the Confederate lines, "even at the sacrifice of troops."⁶⁹ For the first time in the war he disobeyed a direct order and instead of sending a full force of cavalry into what might have very well been their destruction he sent observers to the mountain tops and informed Bragg of Union strength in this manner. Wheeler later justified his defiance in a letter to Bragg stating that he felt what he was ordered to find out could be learned better by other means. He also added that these means were less risky than his orders since the main gap had been blockaded and supplied with troops. He finished by telling Bragg that had he done as ordered he would have lost most of his forces, and if they did return they would have only brought back small parts of the information they brought back from the tops of the mountains.⁷⁰ The scouts informed Bragg where the enemy was and were instructed to continue watching them. The cavalry did not have the easy time of reconnaissance it had once enjoyed. Surrounded by mountains the horses had a difficult time of quickly moving

⁶⁷ WOR. Series I. Volume 30. Part IV. Page 557.

⁶⁸ Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Page 88.

⁶⁹ WOR. Series I. Volume 30. Part IV. Page 602.

and at the same time Rosecrans had learned to keep large forces of cavalry present around his army to prevent raids.⁷¹ On the eighth, General Forrest informed Wheeler that he was moving south and making constant advances towards the enemy to find out his true strength. Despite their differences the two would work together again against their common foe. In one regard the two generals completely agreed, stated by Forrest; "If the enemy does not advance we must move on them."⁷² Both were ready to push at the enemy, their primary role in the army to be constantly moving, but General Bragg had other plans and held his generals back as much as he could, a safe guard that helped lessen the threat that the mountains offered the cavalry.

By this time, Bragg was able to stop retreating and prepared to attack his foe, who was again sitting back and waiting for his army to regroup after its difficult crossing of the Tennessee river. On the eighteenth, Wheeler was ordered to slow the enemy down, this time not to aid in the retreat of his commander but to give the army time to prepare for attack. Bragg's army was preparing to go on the offensive for the first time in about a year, an act that would take the Union army by surprise, as they had grown use to the constant retreat of Confederate forces, and had only prepared themselves for the constant raids of Wheeler and Forrest.

While Rosecrans was still trying to collect his scattered army, Bragg moved to attack the divided forces one by one. Despite the high advantage Bragg enjoyed, he was unable to fully exploit the situation. In the time it took Bragg's forces to gather for an attack Rosecrans' men were able to form together, leaving Bragg's offensive forces with

⁷⁰ WOR. Series I. Volume 30. Part IV. Page 614.

⁷¹ Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Page 91.

⁷² WOR. Series I. Volume 30, Part IV. Page 628.

only empty space.⁷³ While the attempted destruction of the Union army failed it did provide Bragg with the definitive answer that Rosecrans had regrouped his army and was much more of a threat than he had been during the previous weeks.

Following the failed attempts to destroy Rosecrans, Bragg called his forces back and prepared for a true battle placing, Wheeler on his left and Forrest on his right. On the nineteenth, Bragg ordered his right wing to advance, they met with heavy resistance and by the end of the day little had been decided by the battle. During the night, in a reversal of previous trends in the west, it was Bragg's army which received reinforcements; General Longstreet newly sent from the east.⁷⁴ The next day Bragg again ordered his right to push forward, Rosecrans having misread reports, moved the center of his army to stop the rebel advance leaving a hole; which Longstreet moved his forces into. The Union army, under constant pressure and with a broken back was forced into a rout. The rout was not covered as well as it should have been and most of the Union forces were able to retreat back towards Chattanooga which was already being prepared for a siege. Wheeler was ordered to follow the enemy and prevent it from performing the operations of rear guard that he had so mastered. However, Bragg was unwilling to hotly pursue his enemy and prevented Forrest or Wheeler from attacking the enemy's main force. In spite of the victory, Bragg allowed his opponent to flee from destruction and live to fight another day.

Bragg instead chose to let the enemy retreat to Chattanooga and prepared his army to lay siege to the city. At the same time he prepared to send Wheeler out to disrupt Union communications and supplies. this action was probably looking back at Wheeler's

⁷³ Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Page 93.

winter raids which had nearly forced the Union troops to abandon Nashville; hoping that with the combined pressure of raids and siege the army would be able to force Rosecrans into surrender rather than sacrifice troops in an all out attack. The decision most likely upset the troops and commanders grown accustomed to retreat for so long they most likely wanted to exploit their first major victory rather than sit back and wait. Into this disappointment Bragg confounded things even more by attempting to place Forrest and his men under General Wheeler again. Forrest hotly protested the new assignment and when ordered to follow it or be arrested Forrest rode to Bragg and stated; “you have threatened to arrest me or not obeying your orders promptly, I dare you to do it, and I say to you that if you ever again try to interfere with me or cross my path, it will be at the peril of your life.”⁷⁵ Despite this blatant threat Forrest went unpunished and was later assigned to his own independent command freeing him from Bragg and the possibility of being placed again under Wheeler’s direction.

To aid in the siege, Wheeler was sent out again on raids designed to starve the enemy. In early October he and his men rode into the union rear and captured several large stores of supplies. Most of the supplies were ordered burned; although the Union forces under attack reported that the raiders went looting and stole not only from store houses but from POWs and civilians. Longacre in his book *A Soldier to the Last* writes that while Wheeler, who was personally apposed to looting, and tried to discipline his men on such things, was unable to control them, most likely due to his small size and incredibly young age as a general.⁷⁶ During these raids, Wheeler also managed to capture

⁷⁴ Ibid. Page 94.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Page 98.

⁷⁶ Longacre, Edward G. *A Soldier to the Last; Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler in Blue and Grey*. Potomac Books, Inc. Washington. 2007. Page 123.

the town of McMinnville; no shots were fired and the Union forces agreed to march out of the town and be paroled so long as their personal belongings were not taken.⁷⁷

While the Confederate forces were working out how to secure another victory they raced against the clock. Following the battle of Chickamauga, the Union leaders immediately sent reinforcements to help save Rosecrans' army. Among them were two divisions from the army of the Potomac and General Grant, who brought with him General Sherman.⁷⁸ General Bragg's failure to pursue the defeated foe and instead lay siege would prove to be one of his greatest mistakes. By the twenty-eight of October, Wheeler was receiving reports that the enemy was taking up strong positions around Brown's Ferry on the Tennessee river.⁷⁹ These new positions were being taken by General Grant, and were the beginning of a well defended supply line, one that Wheeler would be unable to break with raids as he had done in the past. Because of Bragg's delay the Union army in Tennessee escaped destruction and instead found itself once again in a position to pursue their Confederate opponent.

Despite his failure to help break Rosecrans and the clearly declining state of affairs for the Confederate forces Wheeler did manage to find one life long benefit in his unsuccessful raids around Chattanooga. While camping his forces at the plantation of Colonel Richard Jones, young Joseph met young Miss Daniella Jones. She had become interested in him by the reports she read of him in newspapers and wished to meet the young general. Although they spent little time together the two instantly fell in love. Shortly after the end of the war the two were married, and spent the rest of their natural

⁷⁷ WOR, Section 30. Part II Page 710.

⁷⁸ Longacre, Edward G. *A Soldier to the Last; Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler in Blue and Grey*. Potomac Books, Inc. Washington. 2007. Page 125.

⁷⁹ WOR. Series I. Volume 31. Part III. Page 600.

lives together. While Wheeler focused on his love of Miss Jones, he would also receive the benefit of the 1,800 acres of land she had recently inherited from her deceased husband.⁸⁰

In late October, Wheeler and his command were ordered to assist General Longstreet in an attack on Grants forces located around Knoxville, under the command of General Burnside. The fear being among Confederate leaders, including Jefferson Davis, that this force would help break through the siege of Chattanooga and reunite the Union forces. By mid November, the force was on the move. Wheeler was ordered to move on a near by town with a small garrison as a distraction while Longstreet moved the whole of his force against Knoxville.⁸¹ Wheeler's operation went well early on, having completed his distractions he returned to Longstreet's command at Knoxville where things were proceeding much slower. Longstreet ordered Wheeler to leave some of his force at Knoxville and proceed further down the road towards Kingston, where he had heard there might be forces ready to resupply Burnside.⁸² What Wheeler found was not the light forces he had been told of, instead a rather large force of Union infantry and artillery. Ignoring the training he had received at West Point, Wheeler marched his smaller force forward and dismounted, and headed towards the enemy which held a ridge outside of the town. In his reports on the matter he explains the dangerous move as a hope to break the middle of the Union lines, although he admitted that the danger was greater than he expected.⁸³ At the request of two of his generals he ordered the withdraw of his forces from the battle before things turned worse. Ordered to return to General Bragg, Wheeler

⁸⁰ DeLeon, T.C. *Joseph Wheeler, The Man, The Statesman, The Soldier; Seen in Semi-Biographical Sketches*. Continental Book Company. Kennesaw. 1899. Page 57.

⁸¹ WOR. Series I. Volume 31. Part I. Page 540.

⁸² WOR. Series I. Volume 31. Part I, Page 543.

left his forces to contain Kingston while he made his reports. Back at Knoxville, the delay of Longstreet to attack prevented him from taking the town. The enemy had been given far too much time to prepare for the assault. General Sherman was on his way with reinforcements; Longstreet abandoned the attack and returned to Bragg's main force.⁸⁴ While Wheeler was on the move General Bragg was replaced by General Hardee, who was replaced by General Joseph E. Johnston by the middle of December.⁸⁵

The months following the November attempt at Knoxville held no major actions for the Army of Tennessee. December and January were filled with the retraining and resupply of the Army of Tennessee. Wheeler and the other cavalry troops committed themselves to drills and training. By mid February 1864, Wheeler's cavalry and indeed the whole army had gone from a ragged, largely shoeless, force to once again being a true army complete with discipline and order. In late February, forces under the command of General Forrest engaged Grants attempts to move on Atlanta Georgia. For Wheeler there was little action, he performed some light raids, the best being on the twenty-seventh where he captured "camps, wagons, stores, &c., with a number of prisoners."⁸⁶ Along with his raids Wheeler was ordered to burn all bridges in his rear as he moved against the enemy, clearly stating that the army would not be marching out come spring but instead would be preparing to defend.⁸⁷ The Cavalry would not again see major action until early May.

Beginning in May, the Union began what would be the final chapter of the Civil

⁸³ WOR. Series I. Volume 31. Part I. Page 544.

⁸⁴ Longacre, Edward G. *A Soldier to the Last; Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler in Blue and Grey*. Potomac Books, Inc. Washington. 2007. Page 132.

⁸⁵ Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Page 117.

⁸⁶ WOR. Series I. Volume 32. Part I. Page 484.

⁸⁷ WOR. Series I. Volume 32. Part II. Page 798.

War. The whole of Union forces were under the command of General Grant, who ordered an offensive against Lee in the east and Johnston in the west. To strike at Johnston, Grant sent General Sherman whose goal was to capture the city of Atlanta thus reducing the ability of the heart of the Confederacy to produce supplies. Sherman began his march towards Atlanta on May second. The first forces that he came in contact with were those of Wheeler and his cavalry who constantly skirmished and attempted raids on the advancing army. Sherman's advance was not like other advances, on May seventh he moved on Tunnel Hill, the closest Confederate encampment, in a line of battle that was "not less than one mile in length, with a heavy skirmish line in front."⁸⁸ Sherman took the town but was driven back again by Wheeler. He was later forced to abandon the position and retreat closer to his own lines.⁸⁹ Even in the face of heavy losses the Union forces continued a steady advance. The general and his cavalry were able to slow the advance, despite being outnumbered in cavalry 5,000 to 900, but slowing was all they were capable of doing.⁹⁰ Sherman continued on by May 15, 1864 Wheeler and his men had been driven back to the town of Resaca, which they were ordered to hold to help guard the rear of the main army.⁹¹ Here the former raiders took a stand against the forces of Sherman. Although he was constantly forced to abandon positions and ultimately to react to Sherman's advance Wheeler managed to hold his ground for several days. On the twenty-fourth despite being under heavy pressure a division was sent to attack a union supply depot, they succeeded in scaring off the guards and managed to capture about

⁸⁸ WOR. Series I. Volume 38. Part III. Page 944.

⁸⁹ *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Part I. Volume 7, Serial No. 7. Broadfoot Publishing Company. Wilmington. 1994. Page 115.

⁹⁰ WOR. Series I. Volume 38. Part III. Page 944.

⁹¹ *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Part I. Volume 7, Serial No. 7. Broadfoot Publishing Company. Wilmington. 1994. Page 111.

eighty wagons.⁹² Even though he had managed to hold up a much larger force Wheeler would not be able to defeat Sherman's force, he was obliged to retire and gave up his position to move closer to Atlanta.

The South was forced into a reactionary status. With such great forces pushing from two fronts there could be no major advances, only reactions to what the Union was doing. During his delaying action, in most cases, Wheeler was only able to hold the enemy until the main army sent out infantry to replace him.⁹³ By the end of May the cavalry was forced to return to the main army although he had hurt the enemy and caused a much slower advance than they had hoped. The odds the Confederate Army in the west faced were becoming worse.

Throughout the end of May Wheeler and his men acted as infantry with the main force of the Confederate army about twenty-six miles outside of Atlanta. They dug trenches and breast works and held the enemy to a standstill. For several weeks both Sherman and Johnston were unwilling to make bold moves against the other; Sherman afraid to attack the growing defenses, Johnston afraid of being forced to retreat. In early June, Johnston made an advance on the Union forces hoping to catch them off guard.⁹⁴ The offensive managed to drive back the Union forces slightly, although Johnston was unwilling to remain on ground he did not feel he could defend, so the army after its advance, fell back towards better defended land. Throughout this offensive, Wheeler was charged with guarding the Confederate Right, positioned a few miles ahead of the main army. The cavalry saw mild fighting throughout the advance but was not truly tested until

⁹² WOR. Series I. Volume 38. Part III. Page 947.

⁹³ WOR. Series I. Volume 38. Part III. Page 948.

⁹⁴ Longacre, Edward G. *A Soldier to the Last; Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler in Blue and Grey*. Potomac Books, Inc. Washington. 2007. Page 157.

the twentieth of June when Sherman made his counter attack. On that day Wheeler's primary task was to prevent the Union left from advancing. In a total of three heroic charges, Wheeler and his men held the Union left at bay taking their highest number of single day casualties up to that point. At nightfall they withdrew their forces to the main army having done their duty and unable to hold their ground on the coming day.⁹⁵

On June 27, Wheeler and his men were again dismounted; this time to help defended the right and center of the Confederate forces focused around Kennesaw Mountain. The Confederate forces held a ridge which Johnston had hoped Sherman would attack due to its steep slopes, causing high Union losses. Early in the morning Sherman granted his opponents wish and sent the main force of his army headlong into crippling Confederate fire. Sherman suffered heavy losses but at the same time moved a portion of his army to flank Johnston. Johnston, fearing his army would be outflanked ordered a retreat. With the army in retreat there was no plan. His army had lost some of its confidence in him and it was questionable as to whether he would be able to defend Atlanta when the time came. Because of his lack of results in the early spring leading to summer Johnston was removed from command of the defense of Georgia replaced by General Hood.⁹⁶

As the army retreated towards Atlanta, in late July, Sherman became bolder and began launching raids against the Confederate supply lines, specifically at Augusta. Wheeler wanted to ride out to meet the enemy and prevent his actions from harming the lines, but he was ordered to hold his ground while the army tried to capture Decatur.⁹⁷ For

⁹⁵ Ibid. Page 158.

⁹⁶ Ibid. Page 159.

⁹⁷ Lawson, Lewis A. *Wheeler's Last Raid*. The Penkevill Publishing Company. Greenwood, Fl. 1986. Page 8.

the advance on Decatur, Wheeler was given the job of attacking the railroad. Starting at 3 am. The cavalry drove back the defenses and captured 200 prisoners along with 4 pieces of artillery.⁹⁸ Even though he had helped with the capture of Decatur there was little that could be done to help hold it. After five days the force was ordered to retreat back towards Atlanta, which was being shelled by advance forces of Sherman, to take up positions in the trenches ringing the city. Un-contented to sit in trenches, Wheeler proposed that he and his men could instead cause more damage in the enemy's rear, attacking their supply line to Nashville. On the morning of August 10, a force of around 4,500 set out from Atlanta to start raiding the Union lines once again.

It was not until the fourteenth that Wheeler and his party made any kind of contact with the Union Forces outside of brief firefights with small groups.⁹⁹ As they again approached Dalton, Wheeler urged the Union colonel in charge that; "to prevent the unnecessary effusion of blood, I have the honor to demand the immediate and unconditional surrender of the forces under your command."¹⁰⁰ The Union forces refused to surrender and Wheeler pressed on with his attack. The Union colonel reported later that he and his men were forced back to earthworks they had prepared earlier and were only saved defeat by the advance of re-enforcements.¹⁰¹ Driven back from Dalton, Wheeler did not dwell on his defeat and instead moved on. Moving on the raiders began tearing up railroad tracks where ever they were to be found. By the seventeenth, Wheeler had reached the outskirts of Cleveland Tennessee. As he had done three days before he asked the town to surrender; "I desire to know if you intend compelling me to shell the

⁹⁸ *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Part I. Volume 7, Serial No. 7. Broadfoot Publishing Company. Wilmington. 1994. Page 80.

⁹⁹ Lawson, Lewis A. *Wheeler's Last Raid*. The Penkevill Publishing Company. Greenwood, Fl. 1986. Page 124.

town?” to which the Union captain replied; “I have to say that I have no objections to your shelling the town.”¹⁰² The Union captain had no objections because he pulled his forces back into a fort located near the edge of town; Wheeler had no hope of defeating the garrisoned force and instead settled for “tearing up the tracks at either end of town and move on.”¹⁰³ He was not on his raid to try and capture towns, although he made several attempts, his main objective was to push into Tennessee and cause havoc where Union forces were likely too weak to prevent his actions.

Wheeler and his men crossed back into Tennessee on the eighteenth of August and again began to destroy the Union lines of communication and supply. On the thirtieth Wheeler called for support and resistance from the local population, announcing that Confederate troops again marched on the soil of Tennessee. He offered them the opportunity to serve their nation and aid the men that were fighting for their sake. He told them of the state of things in Georgia; how the state was giving everything it had to fight the Union. He reminded them that many of their own boys were fighting in front of Atlanta. He finally asked them to supply all available fighting men to help the cause of defending Atlanta; promising that the Confederacy would return to Tennessee and set it free once the city was safe.¹⁰⁴ His request for aid from the local population would go unanswered, while the people of Tennessee were helpful when asked they did not supply enough aid to greatly help Wheeler and his men. While Wheeler was raiding and sending out messages to the people of Tennessee calling for aid for the “chivalrous sons before

¹⁰⁰ WOR. Series I. Volume 38. Part I. Page 324.

¹⁰¹ WOR. Series I. Volume 38. Part I. Page 324.

¹⁰² WOR. Series I. Volume 38. Part II. Page 744.

¹⁰³ Lawson, Lewis A. *Wheeler's Last Raid*. The Penkevill Publishing Company. Greenwood, Fl. 1986. Page 140.

¹⁰⁴ WOR. Series I. Volume 38. Part V. Page 1004.

Atlanta,” Hood was surrendering the city following a loss against Sherman.¹⁰⁵ By mid September the raiders were running into difficulties of their own. Their raids were harming the Union but all the tracks they tore up were replaced relatively quickly. Towns which Wheeler had felt would be lightly guarded were instead equipped with full garrison capable of repelling his attacks. While the South had just as much, if not more, heart than their Northern foes they did not have the supplies or man power that the North was throwing full force into the war. Outside of Nashville Wheeler along with General Kelly, one of his most famous generals, assaulted Franklin, the forces left the battle bloodied and in retreat. General Kelly had died “while trying to obey Wheeler’s order to capture a hill crowned by Yankee sharpshooters.”¹⁰⁶ Wheeler and his men had faced hard times before, but most of their retreats and engagements had been on their terms. Now for the first time the general and his men were being forced to leave at the peril of their own lives. The raiding party had little choice but to leave Tennessee and instead retreated towards Alabama where they could rest, resupply, and find a path for the future.

By the fourteenth of November, Wheeler received news of the fall of Atlanta. Along with this he was informed that Sherman’s troops were destroying railroad from Atlanta to Altoona.¹⁰⁷ Wheeler was again on the move to rejoin his army, he was supplied with more cavalry units, ordered to stay out of towns and cities so that he would not be caught up in an sieges. He was given the main objective of “harassing the enemy, destroying his trains, and cutting off his foraging parties.”¹⁰⁸

By late December, Wheeler was again answering to General Bragg. In his reports

¹⁰⁵ Longacre, Edward G. *A Soldier to the Last; Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler in Blue and Grey*. Potomac Books, Inc. Washington. 2007. Page 175.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* Page 174.

¹⁰⁷ WOR. Series I. Volume 45. Part I. Page 1206.

on December 28, he lamented the loss of Savannah stating that he knew the city would be lost when he heard that it could not be re-enforced. Along with this he repudiated claims that his men were stealing horses from the local population, stating that the horses had been stolen by the Union and liberated by himself and were begin returned. In another attempt to harm the enemy Wheeler also reported that he was forcing civilians to remove their horses from the path of Sherman so that he would not be able to steal them for his own use.¹⁰⁹ Closing his letter to Bragg he offered the first example that the war was going poorly stating; “The world is getting worse and worse every day.”¹¹⁰ Wheeler and his men had done their best to slow Sherman but were unable, along with the rest of the army, to prevent the fall of Savannah. Wheeler and his men spent the remainder of 1864 and the first month of 1865 re-supplying and awaiting General Sherman’s next move.

By late January Sherman and his men were on the march headed north.¹¹¹ As always there to try and prevent the advance of Union forces. At the war department the winds were shifting against Wheeler, constant reports of his troop’s misbehavior was hurting his reputation. Even though all these reports were proven false by Wheeler and those in a position to know, the War Department still sought to remove Wheeler from the public view.¹¹² By the twenty-eighth, the cavalry had been pushed back to Charleston; there General Wheeler was placed under the command of General Wade Hampton, recently promoted so that he would outrank Wheeler. Even though his new commander could be seen, then and today, as an insult to Wheeler, he never once questioned the

¹⁰⁸ WOR. Series I. Volume 44. Pages 864 - 868.

¹⁰⁹ WOR. Series I. Volume 44. Page 998.

¹¹⁰ WOR. Series I. Volume 44. Page 999.

¹¹¹ *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Part I. Volume 7, Serial No. 7. Broadfoot Publishing Company. Wilmington. 1994. Page 862.

¹¹² Longacre, Edward G. *A Soldier to the Last; Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler in Blue and Grey*. Potomac Books, Inc. Washington. 2007. Page 191.

orders and never once issued a complaint over the situation, believing obedience to his country to be more important than his own pride.¹¹³ Together Wheeler and Hampton were charged with preventing Sherman's troops from entering into South Carolina. In their typical fashion the cavalry, under General Hampton, slowed the Union advance but were constantly pushed back; being outnumbered and under supplied. Once again Wheeler and his men delayed enemy forces by blocking their path; "We are falling back and obstructing the roads thoroughly . . . We are burning the railroad ties, and are giving every assistance to party taking up the track."¹¹⁴ By the beginning of February the Confederate cavalry facing Sherman had been pushed back and Sherman entered into South Carolina.

Wheeler still believed that there could be civility in war, he continued to prosecute men who stole from civilians even though more and more of his men turned to the act each day. On February 7, the general attempted to ease the pressure Union troops put on the locals by writing to General Howard stating that if Union troops stopped burning houses he would stop burning cotton, along with the letter he left behind 300 bales of cotton as a show of good faith. His attempts at fighting a civilized war were crushed when the following day he received a letter from Sherman stating; "I hope you will burn all cotton and save us the trouble. We don't want it, and it has proven a curse to our country. All you don't want I will burn."¹¹⁵ Sherman was out to destroy the Confederacy, any hopes that Wheeler had of fighting a fair war were surely blown away; "The world is getting worse and worse every day."

By mid February Wheeler and Hampton were in an almost total rout. On

¹¹³ Longacre, Edward G. *A Soldier to the Last; Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler in Blue and Grey*. Potomac Books, Inc. Washington. 2007. Page 192.

¹¹⁴ WOR. Series I. Volume 47. Part I. Page 1116.

¹¹⁵ WOR. Series I. Volume 47. Part II. Pages 330 & 342.

February 17, one of Sherman's cavalry reported that they were chasing Wheeler's men in full retreat and that they had captured several wagons and prisoners.¹¹⁶ The story for the retreating cavalry stayed the same from February into march. The force would march parallel to Hampton, disrupting the enemy's movements, engaging in light skirmishes, and above all else preventing the army from collapsing in the face of what was blatantly soon to be a Confederate surrender.¹¹⁷

Leading into April, news came of Lee's surrender but for Wheeler and Hampton the war continued. On the eleventh, Wheeler sent numerous reports of the enemy ceasing their movement, possibly having just received word themselves of Lee's surrender and awaiting their opponents reaction.¹¹⁸ The two generals continued to act as they had in the past, blocking roads and trying their best to stay in front of the enemy's movements. On the twenty-sixth Wade Hampton received a letter from Jefferson Davis to select a group of men to protect the fleeing Confederate President, he also ordered that Wheeler be left in charge of all remaining Confederate cavalry. The same day Wheeler wrote to Hampton, following news that Johnston had surrendered his army, that Hampton should send all rifles and ammunition to him so that his men could stay supplied.¹¹⁹ Even though most of the Confederate forces had surrendered Wheeler had a clear plan to continue fighting. By Late April Wheeler met up with President Jefferson Davis, with him and other Generals started southward intending to try and escape to the west.¹²⁰

Wheeler and his men intended to continue fighting for the cause they had spent so

¹¹⁶ *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Part I. Volume 7, Serial No. 7. Broadfoot Publishing Company. Wilmington. 1994. Page 864.

¹¹⁷ WOR. Series I. Volume 47. Part II. Pages 1432 - 1433.

¹¹⁸ WOR. Series I. Volume 47. Part III. Page 790.

¹¹⁹ WOR. Series I. Volume 47. Part III. Page 841.

¹²⁰ *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Part I. Volume 7, Serial No. 7. Broadfoot Publishing Company. Wilmington. 1994. Page 972.

much for. Even though they were willing to fight they were unable to. On April 29 Wheeler bid farewell to his men saying to his men that they had fought a gallant fight over the course of four years. They had struggled for liberty in more than two hundred battles, and more than a thousand smaller conflicts. He called them heroes, veterans, and patriots. He marked their battles across; Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. He gave them thanks for their gallantry in battle and their fortitude under suffering. He also expressed gratitude for the feelings they extended towards him and asked “the blessing of our heavenly Father, before he bid farewell.”¹²¹ His duties as a general were over. Although he was no longer in command of men he was still with the body guard of Jefferson Davis. However Davis was unwilling to continue on in what he felt was a lost cause. Instead of continuing on the outlaw president left and went to family in the nearby territory. On May 9, 1865 General Wheeler, General Bragg, and the remainder of Jefferson Davis’ body guard were captured by Union forces. General Bragg was released on parole, but General Wheeler was detained in Savannah being seen as too great a threat to remain at large.¹²²

For Wheeler and Confederacy the war was over. He was held until the end of hostilities and with no major reason to keep him the Union Soldiers in Savannah let him go. The ex-general returned to Alabama to marry Miss Daniella Jones.¹²³ With no profession but soldiering in his life, Wheeler was no doubt confused about his future, his families future, and his defeated nations future. Throughout his career with the Confederacy he had fought numerous large battles and countless skirmishes. He had

¹²¹ *The Confederate Veteran Magazine*; Volume VI. Broadfoot’s Bookmark. Wendell. 1989. February 1893. Page 62.

¹²² *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Part I. Volume 7, Serial No. 7. Broadfoot Publishing Company. Wilmington. 1994. Pages 969 - 970.

seventeen horses shot out from under him throughout his brilliant career. He seldom broke from military protocol, and was seldom soundly defeated always managing to ride away just in time to steal a victory away from his Union foes. With his career over and his future uncertain Wheeler set out for civilian life with the same ferocity that he had shown throughout the war. Unlike many of his comrades of the rank of general, he was only twenty-nine at the end of the war and had still a long life ahead of him.

Reconstruction took a heavy toll on the South. For Wheeler, the change was just as hard as for the rest of the region. Left with no army to fight under and an uncertain future Wheeler, like many, had no where to turn to. In the wake of the war many from the North started buying up businesses throughout the South. One of the business ventures was the purchase of a hardware store in New Orleans by Sterling Smith, Joseph Wheeler's brother-in-law. With his new bride and a chance at a future the civilian Wheeler rode south for New Orleans to try and start a strange and new life. Within a few years, through the investment of his wife, he with a partner managed to buy out controlling interest in the store and it was again owned by southerners.¹²⁴

By 1870 Wheeler lost interest in the merchant business and sold his portion of the store back to his brother-in-law and his partner. From New Orleans he and his wife moved back to Alabama to begin farming on the land owned by his father-in-law. Wheeler's laborers came from the former slaves that had worked the land; "finding their new freedom did not carry a living with it."¹²⁵ During his time as a farmer he took up the common practice for financially successful farmers and became a lawyer. Together with

¹²³ DeLeon, T.C. *Joseph Wheeler, The Man, The Statesman, The Soldier; Seen in Semi-Biographical Sketches*. Continental Book Company. Kennesaw. 1899. Page 56.

¹²⁴ Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Page 192.

his wife's brother he set up a local law firm and had mild success as a lawyer. Very little is known about the law carrier of the civilian Wheeler; however it was this career that first led him to politics.¹²⁶ Like most Southern lawyers his profession made him more acceptable to the people as a political leader. Wheeler spoke out against the ideas that separated people. He argued that the South should forget the war, in terms of dwelling on their loss. Rather than constantly feeling they had been cheated, Wheeler thought that the people of the South should have worked to overcome their loss and focus instead on a future where the South would again be stable and eventually reunited with the Union as a whole.¹²⁷

Wheeler managed to touch a cord with some of those who listened to him. They were able to faintly see the world he talked of and they were ready for anything that was better than the political corruption and economic depression that Reconstruction had brought to the South. By 1880, he was nominated by the Democratic party to run for congress; his opponent was to be William M. Lowe the leader of a fractured alliance of independents with multiple special interest. Lowe's group posed little problem for Wheeler and the democrats until it was announced that he would be supported by the Republican party, which made Lowe a force to be reckoned with.¹²⁸ The race was close, both sides spent more time attacking the other than they did talking about their own political goals and achievements. When the votes finally came in Wheeler beat out Lowe by forty-three votes. However Lowe argued that democrat had won because other

¹²⁵ Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Page 194.

¹²⁶ DeLeon, T.C. *Joseph Wheeler, The Man, The Statesman, The Soldier; Seen in Semi-Biographical Sketches*. Continental Book Company. Kennesaw. 1899. Page 94.

¹²⁷ Ibid. Page 95.

¹²⁸ Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Page 201.

democrats had controlled the election boxes and had thrown out a section of independents as being unqualified for voting. Over the next year Lowe and his independents waged a court battle to decide who had actually won the vote, during this time Wheeler acted as congressmen. Eventually it was decided, by federal courts, that Lowe's votes had been unfairly disqualified and the seat was turned over to Lowe. Although there were rampant claims of democratic foul play none of these were ever aimed at Wheeler. Even Lowe himself commented that Wheeler probably had no idea it was happening and certainly had not requested it in any way.¹²⁹

Even though he was defeated and forced to leave Congress Wheeler was not long before he returned. For the next several months most of his time was spent working on a campaign to prove his innocence in the matter of who had orchestrated the election fraud. His efforts at vindication proved to be unnecessary; four months after his taking office Lowe died of tuberculosis.¹³⁰ Lowe had been the force holding together the independent party in northern Alabama, with him gone there was no one to replace his charisma and most of the party deserted to the democrats. In the election that followed to fill Lowe's seat Wheeler won, this time by such a majority that the possibility of fraud was not even considered. Once in office his record would prove so solid that he faced little competition throughout the rest of his carrier and won multiple terms to the office of Congressmen, until his voluntary stepping down to once again become a soldier.

As a Congressman, Wheeler would once again prove his devotion to his homeland. In almost every speech he presented before bills he defended the South. Along with this, he tirelessly argued for actions that would help the South regain some of her

¹²⁹ Dyer, John P. *From Shiloh to San Juan; The Life of "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, La. 1941. Page 208.

past economic stability and help secure her a place in the ever changing future. One of Wheeler's first acts was to introduce a bill that would require and guarantee the pensions of veterans from the Mexican War.¹³¹ This bill was hotly contested by Northern republicans who argued that many of the soldiers who fought in the war were from the South. They argued that the proposed bill would in effect grant pensions to many of the ageing Confederate officers. Wheeler presented his case arguing that the Mexican War had been conducted by a unified nation, and that since the nation was unified again there was no need to deprive these men who had been, largely, officially forgiven for their past transgressions. The nation was whole again and its heroes needed to be taken care of. With Wheeler's constant pressure on the issue the bill was eventually accepted and both ex-Confederate and ex-Federals received pensions for their aid in the war with Mexico.¹³²

One of the congressman's first acts while in congress would help to prove his loyalty to the country he had spent so much time fighting against. Wheeler championed the passing of a bill that undid the charges leveled against General Fitz John Porter, who had been court-martialed for his actions at the Second Battle of Manassas. Although Wheeler had fought against Porter during several battles later in the war he now came to his defense. With maps, charts, and testimonials he argued that the general had done nothing wrong during the Second Battle of Manassas but had in fact behaved exactly as he should have. It was explained to the congress that in battles where he had faced Porter, the general had preformed in a manner befitting a leader and had done nothing to disgrace his country.

¹³⁰ Ibid. Page 211.

¹³¹ DeLeon, T.C. *Joseph Wheeler, The Man, The Statesman, The Soldier; Seen in Semi-Biographical Sketches*. Continental Book Company. Kennesaw. 1899. Page 109.

¹³² Ibid. Page 109.

Wheeler's motion passed, "In the exact language in which he introduced it,"¹³³ General Fitz John Porter was exonerated. Wheeler had proven that he was not simply a man devoted to only the Southern cause. If there had been any doubt that he was not for the nation as a whole, his arguments for Porter proved that he had reconciled the war within himself and was ready for a new era; where the Union would stand proudly and both parts would move towards prosperity.

Congressmen Wheeler also knew that he had to take care of his home state. One of his constant battles throughout his career in congress was trying to build a dam on the Tennessee river; not far from Decatur where he had fought the Federal troops so fiercely. He knew that making the Tennessee river more navigable would help the surrounding territory economically.¹³⁴ The dam was not built in his time but the plans he left behind were used by the Tennessee Valley Administration, altered to include a hydro electric facility, in the 1930's to build what still stands as Wheeler Dam.

Perhaps his greatest virtue as a Congressman was that he was never short on facts. Nearly every speech that he gave was backed up with historical or scientific facts.¹³⁵ One such example comes from 1893 during a discussion on a bill relating to election laws. Wheeler argued that the nation was returning to states rights with the current bill. A Northern representative, Mr. Gillett of Massachusetts, had argued that the federal government held more sway than state governments. The representative had come prepared, as always, and replied that in the past when President Washington had visited Massachusetts its governor had refused to call on the president feeling that his position

¹³³ Ibid. Page 112.

¹³⁴ Ibid. Page 111.

¹³⁵ Kinney, Anders M. *Joseph Wheeler: Uniting the Blue and Gray*. Writers Club Press. New York. 2002. Page 32.

was higher than that of president. Then, to the laughter of the congress, Wheeler produced a copy of Bancroft's *Life of Washington*, quoted pages and read the relating instance.¹³⁶ Following this book he produced five more relating the formation of the nation, all of which regarded federal interference in state elections. Wheeler argued that it was never the intention of the founding forces of the nation that the federal government be allowed to dictate what states were allowed to do. Where he had failed on the battlefield to guarantee them he was trying to secure them in the halls of power which dictated national law. Along with the historical evidence in regards to the laws in question Wheeler produced evidence from his own district that proved the laws were biased and stripped away the rights of the individual states; "Mr. Speaker I come from a section of the country that is probably more interested in the repeal of this election law than any other part of the United States. For twenty years the Southern people have suffered tyranny from the exercise of the powers given to the Federal judges by this law"¹³⁷ Wheeler argued that these judges used their power to prevent the election and appointment of democratic candidates despite that they were in the majority of the political parties, to which he provided exact ballot numbers. The representative from Alabama was distinct in his use of constant facts and empirical evidence, many of his colleges preferred speeches filled with flowery language. He earned the respect, even of his political opponents, as being able to provide hard evidence to ever point he made.¹³⁸

Wheeler's main contribution as a congressman was to argue Southern causes. In the midst of these argument he showed the other representatives that the South was more

¹³⁶ *Selections From Speeches of Hon. Joseph Wheeler of Alabama; Fifty-Third Congress. 1893-1895.* Washington. 1895. Page 89.

¹³⁷ *Selections From Speeches of Hon. Joseph Wheeler of Alabama; Fifty-Third Congress. 1893-1895.* Washington. 1895. Page 92.

than just a defeated territory, he showed them that the South was and always had been a major contributor to the greater causes of the nation. During one debate a Northern representative charged that the South had done little militarily for the nation as a whole. he instantly produced records proving that during the Civil War more Southern men had served in the Federal army than had served for the Confederacy itself.¹³⁹ Wheeler was a constant advocate for the South while a congressman which brought him into direct confrontation with the proposed Tariff of 1894.

The tariff argued Wheeler would do nothing but harm his home territory, as tariffs in the past had done. He argued that the bill “advocated the interest of New England” and that it also was “directed against the interest of the South.”¹⁴⁰ Wheeler explained to the whole of congress that the bill would do nothing but create profit for New England and a burden for the South. Wheeler then proceeded to explain the benefits of the tariff for New England; he argued that the tax was raised or remained the same on almost all articles the bought by people in the south. He used this to argue that the north gained from the tariff, while the south paid the price. At the same time the tariff removed any taxes on things produced in the south, removing any chance of raising funds for the South and causing a second burden. He argued that “the bill is a free-trade bill for Alabama, and a protection bill for Massachusetts.” Further more the congressman argued that of all the money raised by the tariff five dollars went to the North East while only one dollar went south, and that went to Maryland, while none of it ever went to Alabama.¹⁴¹ He went on to explain exactly where the money taxed would come from. He argued that a tariff was not

¹³⁸ Kinney, Anders M. *Joseph Wheeler: Uniting the Blue and Gray*. Writers Club Press. New York. 2002. Page 34.

¹³⁹ Ibid. Page 33.

a bad thing, only that things such as forty percent tax on products only produced in the South was unjust and harmed his home state as well as the rest of the South. Into these arguments, as always, were thrown charts and tables demonstrating the bias of the tariff against the South and for the Northeast. Eventually a new tariff was adopted, lowering the taxes on raw materials which largely came from the South. Wheeler and his supporters had succeeded in changing the tariff enough that it would not keep the South under the economic drain it had suffered for many years.

Perhaps Wheeler's most famous defense of the South involved a speech on slavery and states right, from July of 1894. The South was challenged by a Northern Republican who blamed it for the causes of the Civil War. The representative had to know this would provoke a response by Wheeler who in all previous instances had come to the defense of the South when he felt it was slandered for past activities. Wheeler began his speech with a brief talk on how slavery was not the cause of the war that it was states rights. Even though he felt the argument was states rights he agreed to comply with his opponents charge; "I will comply with my friends' request, and, from a southern standpoint, give some reasons which come to my mind."¹⁴² Wheeler began by pointing out the simple fact that it was New England businessmen who had first brought slaves to the colonies. Following this he moved on to the time of the Revolution and the subsequent framing of the constitution, in which he pointed out the South had argued the transportation of slaves should be ended. Wheeler then explained why the North turned against slavery, as he put it they found their climate was not suitable for slavery: "about

¹⁴⁰ *Selections From Speeches of Hon. Joseph Wheeler of Alabama; Fifty-Third Congress.* 1893-1895. Washington. 1895. Page 148.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* Page 149.

¹⁴² <http://www.civilwarhome.com/wheelercauses.htm>

this time there commenced what history will record as a war upon the institution of slavery.”¹⁴³ Wheeler argued that it was not the South that had greedily sought to bring slavery to America but instead the North, releasing the South of the view that slavery was the key cause and reason for the war.

From this point the little congressman moved on to explain other reasons for Southern secession. He started with the works of Daniel Webster. Mr. Webster, he argued, stated in several cases that the North had broken the constitution with the passage of its fugitive slave laws, rather than attempting to amend them. Under this pretence Webster argued that the South was no longer constitutionally obligated to remain in the union. Wheeler used Webster to explain how the North was moving towards a state where it would no longer value the South and seek only to oppress it.

Wheeler also faced charges that the South had no respect for the Union, and that this was the reason for disunion. To this Wheeler answered that the people of the South loved the Union. He argued that this was true because the country was largely their creation. “The South gave to the sacred cause the voice and eloquence of Patrick Henry, to arouse the people to actions: the pen of Jefferson, to write the Declaration that we were a free and independent people: the sword of Washington, to win the battles which made us one of the nations of the earth.”¹⁴⁴ He continued on with the South’s history of support; pointing out that most of the soldiers and generals of the Revolution had been southern. Finally pointing out that the only time southern men had gone against the Union had been the Civil War arguing that “since 1865 they have been as devoted to the flag and the

¹⁴³ Ibid

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

Union as the people of any part of our land.”¹⁴⁵

The congressman then turned his attention to the North and her contributions to secession. He began by explaining that it was Massachusetts which had so often claimed the right of secession and showed the South “that when the people of a State found that it was not to their advantage to remain in the Union it was not only their privilege but their duty to peacefully withdraw from it.”¹⁴⁶ Furthermore he produced numerous Northern papers praising the South for its leaving the Union (before the war), explaining in most cases that they felt it the right of any part of the Union to leave.

Wheeler ended his speech by explaining the cost of the Civil War in men, and how both sides had paid a heavy price. His closing statements showed no malice towards those who had challenged him and his region. Instead he praised the efforts of both sides during the war: “Forty-six generals of the United States army and seventy-six generals of the Confederate army were killed at the head of their command in battle.”¹⁴⁷ Even though he had fought against the North, Wheeler expressed his own view, and he believed the view of the South, that “since the close of that war has been as devoted to the Union of the States and the prosperity, welfare, and glory of our country as the most distinguished soldier who fought in the Federal army.”¹⁴⁸

Wheeler’s continual reelection showed that he was widely supported by the people of his state for his actions. He argued at every chance for things which would help Alabama, and ultimately the South. He was not arguing for the same South he had served during the war. Instead he was arguing for a new South, one that was in his mind an equal

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

¹⁴⁸ Ibid

part of the Union. This belief lead him into conflict with those who still resented the South for the war, but he never backed down from the challenge of proving the South's loyalty and worth to the nation as a whole. It would have been easy for Wheeler to fall into the trap that so many in the South had fallen victim; to resent the loss of the war and the subsequent mistreatment of reconstruction. Instead Wheeler used his seat in congress to try and heal some of the wounds of the war and reconstruction. He promoted good will between the North and South; he argued for prosperity for all the Union and not just the Northeast. Despite his effort Wheeler was not able to completely heal the wounds of the past, many still resented their geographical opposites, and ultimately words were not going to change the outlook of how each half of the nation saw the other.

Where Wheeler's words would fail to show the nation the true motivations of the South his actions and the actions of his home would prove them. Beginning in 1895 the congressman had started making speeches on the conditions in Cuba. He also at this time began informing, not publicly, the War Department and the Office of the President that if war should come he would gladly serve again.¹⁴⁹ By the time the *Maine* was sunk the entire nation was prepared for war. Years of newspaper articles crying the harms of Spanish rule on the citizens of Cuba and the Spanish mistreatment of American citizens had provoked them into a state where very little would have them call for war with Spain.

On the night of April 26, two days after war was declared, Wheeler received a letter from President McKinley asking him to report the next day to his office. The next day McKinley asked Wheeler, now sixty-one years old, if he would be willing and able to go to Cuba to once again command men. He replied that he "felt as strong and capable as

¹⁴⁹ Kinney, Anders M. *Joseph Wheeler: Uniting the Blue and Gray*. Writers Club Press. New York. 2002. Page 37.

when I was forty, or even younger, and that I desired very much to have another opportunity to serve my country."¹⁵⁰ By May 9, Wheeler had been appointed and approved by the Senate for the rank of major-general. His orders were to head south to Florida to take command of the cavalry that would be shipping out for Cuba soon.¹⁵¹ Wheeler was perhaps best prepared of all the generals to lead the "cavalry" in the armies advance. The force had only horses for the officers, the rest of the troops fought dismounted in the style that he had grown use to during the Civil War.

Joseph Wheeler was not the only Wheeler to go to war. His two sons went to war; one as a naval officer fought in the Philippines, the other an army officer, from West Point, served as General Wheeler's aid. His daughter served in the Red Cross in Cuba and became known as the "Army Angle."¹⁵²

One northern soldier coming south commented on the feeling of the nation prior to Wheeler's appointment. His train was delayed outside of Richmond for fear that the city's people would fire upon the train carrying "boys in blue." They waited several days for word from Washington; where people were afraid that they might upset the South if they moved the train around Richmond. Finally a compromise was made, "General Joseph Wheeler, a private citizen and pure Southern, was made a major general of United States Volunteers, and our troop train was directed to pass through Virginia but not Richmond."¹⁵³ While there is no record of Wheeler being appointed as part of a bargain like Private Post states in his book, Wheeler's appointment did show the doubtful nation

¹⁵⁰ Wheeler, Joseph. *The Santiago Campaign; 1898*. Lamson, Wolffe, and Company. Boston. 1898. Page 4.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. Page 5.

¹⁵² DeLeon, T.C. *Joseph Wheeler, The Man, The Statesman, The Soldier; Seen in Semi-Biographical Sketches*. Continental Book Company. Kennesaw. 1899. Page 65.

¹⁵³ Post, Charles J. *The Little War of Private Post; The Spanish American War Seen Up Close*. University of Nebraska Press. Lincoln. 1960. Page 37.

that the South was again willing to serve its part in the unified nation.

While northern citizens showed relief for the reunion of South and North the South was excited at the chance to prove how loyal it would be. The Confederate Veteran, a Southern monthly paper dedicated to the Confederate side of the Civil War, explained that while everyone was sad that the “peace of nations” was broken they also explained that; “it was gratified to see that General Wheeler was of the first volunteers to buckle on armor again for his country.”¹⁵⁴ Wheeler was forced to resign his seat in congress as a result of his becoming a military leader again. When confronted by the coming war the members of congress, many who had long been Wheeler’s opponents, all felt the same, summed up by a speech made by Mr. Settle of Kentucky. He argued that the Congressman had fostered the growth of healing between the two sections of the nation. Even following the war when neither side loved the other. Because of his actions the nation was closer and able to stand united against the enemy. Mr. Settle went on to explain that the nation had never been so united as it was in the freeing of the Cuban people, and that in freeing the Cuban people America was in fact freeing itself from sectional hate.¹⁵⁵ The onset of war had done more for national unity than all the years following reconstruction or the years leading up to the war. Wheeler along with the rest of the nation prepared for war; the nation was confident that it could defeat the Spanish. At the same time Spain was still a force to be reckoned with and the outcome of the war was not a certain one.

By the fourteenth of June Wheeler was ready to leave Florida with the whole of

¹⁵⁴ *The Confederate Veteran Magazine*; Volume VI. Broadfoot’s Bookmark. Wendell. 1989. May 1898. Page 200.

¹⁵⁵ <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9F06E3DC1139E433A25751C0A9609C94699ED7CF>

his command; on June 22 Wheeler and his men were the first to land on Cuban soil.¹⁵⁶ By afternoon of the twenty-second Wheeler and his men received orders to set up pickets and defend the road leading from the landing sight to Santiago.¹⁵⁷ Teddy Roosevelt remarked in his book *The Rough Riders*, that “Wheeler was a regular game-cock, and he was bend upon putting the cavalry division to the front as quickly as possible.”¹⁵⁸ While setting up pickets it became obvious to Wheeler that there was an enemy army camped on the road to Santiago, and set out to discover their full strength.¹⁵⁹ Wheeler’s observation consisted of him climbing a tree to get a better view of the enemy.¹⁶⁰ He decided to find the enemies true strength by testing them a little. Wheeler ordered his new Hotchkiss guns to fire to which “the enemy replied, and the firing immediately became general.”¹⁶¹ Wheeler now found himself in a fight, the first of the war outside of navel engagements. The first notification that Shafter and his generals had that there was even a fight taking place was when they heard guns open fire. After about two hours of heavy fighting the Spanish began a general retreat. As Wheeler noticed the flight of the Spanish he was reported to have shouted; “We’ve got the damn Yankees on the run!”¹⁶² There is no evidence for this shout from the old general, and no names can be given as to who heard him make the statement. Either way the newspapers in America ran the quote in all their headlines and the American people enjoyed the remark, another sign that the whole nation had accepted Wheeler, and in a way the South, despite their past rebellion.

¹⁵⁶ DeLeon, T.C. *Joseph Wheeler, The Man, The Statesman, The Soldier; Seen in Semi-Biographical Sketches*. Continental Book Company. Kennesaw. 1899. Page 123/125.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* Page 126.

¹⁵⁸ Roosevelt, Theodore. *The Rough Riders*. Barnes & Noble. New York. 2004. Page 45.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* Page 45.

¹⁶⁰ *The Confederate Veteran Magazine*; Volume VI. Broadfoot’s Bookmark. Wendell. 1989. August 1898. Page 361.

¹⁶¹ Wheeler, Joseph. *The Santiago Campaign; 1898*. Lamson, Wolffe, and Company. Boston. 1898. Pages 18/19.

The battle became known as the Battle of Guasimas. The only report made by Shafter was that Wheeler had engaged the enemy and “now occupies their ground.”¹⁶³ Shafter had planned on moving the whole army at once and felt that the ex-Confederate had moved ahead simply to receive the prestige of being in the first battle of the war. Others took up this same notion and there was talk of bringing Wheeler up on charges for disobeying orders that did not include engaging in battle.¹⁶⁴ However many came forward defending him saying he had done the right thing. Roosevelt later wrote on the subject stating that; “General Wheeler was in command ashore; he was told to get in touch with the enemy, and, being a man with the ‘fighting edge,’ this meant that he was certain to fight.”¹⁶⁵ There were never any charges brought against Wheeler, partially because the public was so excited about his first battle that it would have caused an uproar had he been charged with anything. It would not be the last time that Shafter and Wheeler clashed in the short war.

By the third of July Wheeler and the rest of the army were coming to the realization that the fighting in Cuba was less dangerous than the atmosphere itself. Most of the army was becoming ill with fevers, Wheeler included. Shafter, who was overweight and ill himself, reported to the War Department that his subordinate was ill, creating problems in the chain of command.¹⁶⁶ In his book on the war Wheeler remarked that he was upset that the papers, and Shafter, had said that he was sick. He stated that he

¹⁶² Trask, David F. *The War With Spain in 1898*. University of Nebraska Press. Lincoln. 1996. Page 221.

¹⁶³ *Correspondence Relating to the War With Spain; Including the Insurrection in the Philippine Islands and the China Relief Expedition; April 15, 1898, to July 30, 1902*. Volume I. Center of Military History United States Army. Washington. 1993. Page 54.

¹⁶⁴ Trask, David F. *The War With Spain in 1898*. University of Nebraska Press. Lincoln. 1996. Page 222.

¹⁶⁵ Roosevelt, Theodore. *The Rough Riders*. Barnes & Noble. New York. 2004. Page 213.

¹⁶⁶ *Correspondence Relating to the War With Spain; Including the Insurrection in the Philippine Islands and the China Relief Expedition; April 15, 1898, to July 30, 1902*. Volume I. Center of Military History United States Army. Washington. 1993. Pages 74/82.

was slightly feverish like the rest of his army but that he maintained his command.¹⁶⁷ A few days later Shafter referred to Wheeler as “feeble but maintains command.”¹⁶⁸ While Shafter was telling the War Department how poorly his subordinate was doing, his own men, at the front made other observations; “General Wheeler was sick, but with his usual indomitable pluck and entire indifference to his own personal comfort, he kept to the front.”¹⁶⁹ Shafter seems to have chosen Wheeler to single out for being sick, possibly due to what Shafter felt was disobedience at the battle of Guasimas. What ever his reasons where Shafter felt that he was not fit, physically, to command and chose not to inform the general of the coming battle for San Juan Hill.

The first notification that Wheeler had that the army was on the move was the sound of soldiers marching past his tent towards the front. Even though he was still slightly sick he ordered his men to bring him an ambulance and move out towards the coming battle. Once at the front he had himself propped up on his horse as his friend DeLeon remarked, “the fever of war was too much for the fever of climate.”¹⁷⁰ Wheeler led his men from horse back even though he was too sick to stand on his own. By the end of the battle Teddy Roosevelt had made his famous charge up San Juan Hill and the American forces had secured the major hills ringing the port of Santiago where the main army of the Spanish was located. That Night Wheeler, feeling much better than earlier in the day, was asked by his men if it was safe to retire for the evening even though there was still some gun fire going on. Wheeler told his men it was safe to go to sleep stating

¹⁶⁷ Wheeler, Joseph. *The Santiago Campaign; 1898*. Lamson, Wolfe, and Company. Boston. 1898. Pages 117/118.

¹⁶⁸ *Correspondence Relating to the War With Spain; Including the Insurrection in the Philippine Islands and the China Relief Expedition; April 15, 1898, to July 30, 1902*. Volume I. Center of Military History United States Army. Washington. 1993. Page 100.

¹⁶⁹ Roosevelt, Theodore. *The Rough Riders*. Barnes & Noble. New York. 2004. Page 68.

that “he had been through too much heavy firing in the Civil War to regard the present fight as very serious.”¹⁷¹ Once again Wheeler and his straight forward style of fighting had helped to win the day.

Shafter, still severally sick himself, felt that the positions on the hills were too dangerous, and began a discussion with his generals about retreating from their newly held ground. While most of the generals agreed with Shafter, Wheeler loudly protested the idea. He stated that giving up any ground would make “every backward step meant redoubled loss and effort to regain later.”¹⁷² Shafter refused to listen, and made plans to withdraw troops from the hills. Wheeler, usually very strict at following orders sent word to the War Department that Shafter was making a mistake and explained the situation. The War Department agreed and gave Shafter orders not to withdraw his troops. Fortunately for the two generals the war was not to last much longer, surely they would have clashed on every issue had the war continued on longer.

Santiago lay under siege, the navy it had harbored had been destroyed, and its army was held within the city with no chance of escape. Wheeler and the rest of the generals agreed that a massive assault would serve no greater advantage than waiting for the enemy to surrender so the U.S. forces sat quietly and fired artillery at the town every once and a while to remind the Spanish they were still there. Finally, after several days the Spanish forces asked for terms, Wheeler and two other representatives were sent to

¹⁷⁰ DeLeon, T.C. *Joseph Wheeler, The Man, The Statesman, The Soldier; Seen in Semi-Biographical Sketches*. Continental Book Company. Kennesaw. 1899. Page 128.

¹⁷¹ Roosevelt, Theodore. *The Rough Riders*. Barnes & Noble. New York. 2004. Page 88.

¹⁷² DeLeon, T.C. *Joseph Wheeler, The Man, The Statesman, The Soldier; Seen in Semi-Biographical Sketches*. Continental Book Company. Kennesaw. 1899. Page 129.

discuss the surrender of Cuba.¹⁷³ The terms of capitulation were not long in being drawn up. In his writings Wheeler explains that the term capitulation was used rather than surrender because the Spanish commander seemed more concerned with “maintaining his honor and prestige as a soldier.”¹⁷⁴ With the wording finally correct the Spanish forces surrendered and the war was over, only a few months after it had been declared.

Wheeler and his men were sent home as quickly as possible, while Shafter remained to continue occupation. On the ride home Wheeler would spend time talking to his soldiers about the Civil War.¹⁷⁵ By August 15, 1898 Wheeler and his men came home to a hero’s welcome.¹⁷⁶ The Confederate Veteran again wrote of Wheeler and the new unity that the country enjoyed; “Foreigners not familiar with the character of our free-born American citizens must stand amazed at the spectacle of Wheeler leading the advance of our army against Santiago when they recall the fact that he once led the advance and covered the retreat of an army opposing the flag he is now so bravely defending.”¹⁷⁷ The country had enjoyed nothing but victory, the only large losses of the war coming from sickness in the tropic heat. America now effectively ruled the Western Hemisphere and the region of the Philippines. No longer was the America a slight power. It had flexed its muscles and shown the world that it was capable of doing more than just defending its own territory, it was able to go on the offensive in the defense of other

¹⁷³ *Correspondence Relating to the War With Spain; Including the Insurrection in the Philippine Islands and the China Relief Expedition; April 15, 1898, to July 30, 1902.* Volume I. Center of Military History United States Army. Washington. 1993. Page 146.

¹⁷⁴ Wheeler, Joseph. *The Santiago Campaign; 1898.* Lamson, Wolfe, and Company. Boston. 1898. Page 128.

¹⁷⁵ Roosevelt, Theodore. *The Rough Riders.* Barnes & Noble. New York. 2004. Page 128.

¹⁷⁶ *Correspondence Relating to the War With Spain; Including the Insurrection in the Philippine Islands and the China Relief Expedition; April 15, 1898, to July 30, 1902.* Volume I. Center of Military History United States Army. Washington. 1993. Page 228.

¹⁷⁷ *The Confederate Veteran Magazine; Volume VI.* Broadfoot’s Bookmark. Wendell. 1989. July 1898. Page 325.

nations and for its own national good.

Returning home Wheeler found little peace. He was placed in charge of the convalescent camp at Montauk. Shortly after returning home Wheeler's son, Lieutenant Joseph Wheeler, Jr., drowned off the shores of Montauk.¹⁷⁸ Wheeler was devastated and shortly after the event requested to be sent to the Philippines to help aide in the fighting that was still going on there.¹⁷⁹ This was probably his way of dealing with his sons death, to keep busy fighting so that he would not have to deal with the pain of his lose. Following his time in the Philippines, which consisted of a few fights and mostly down time. Wheeler returned home and returned to his seat in Congress. In his later years Wheeler enjoyed the success of his life. He continued fighting in the Congress to defend the South, although with much less need to, and make the nation a better place. He wrote roughly fourteen books on various subjects including the Civil War, the War with Spain, and several books relating to Science. There were even hints that he was too be placed as the Vice Presidential candidate for McKinley's next run at president, although nothing ever came of this.¹⁸⁰ Instead Theodore Roosevelt ran as McKinley's Vice President. Had Wheeler taken the position, when McKinley died Wheeler would have become the first and only ex-Confederate president of the United States. In 1906 following a long period of sickness Wheeler died at the age of seventy. And was buried in Arlington National Cemetery, one of the few ex-Confederates to ever receive the honor.

At his memorial General Clement A. Evans, one of the few remaining Union

¹⁷⁸ DeLeon, T.C. *Joseph Wheeler, The Man, The Statesman, The Soldier; Seen in Semi-Biographical Sketches*. Continental Book Company. Kennesaw. 1899. Page 130.

¹⁷⁹ *Correspondence Relating to the War With Spain; Including the Insurrection in the Philippine Islands and the China Relief Expedition; April 15, 1898, to July 30, 1902*. Volume II. Center of Military History United States Army. Washington. 1993. Page 1034.

¹⁸⁰ DeLeon, T.C. *Joseph Wheeler, The Man, The Statesman, The Soldier; Seen in Semi-Biographical Sketches*. Continental Book Company. Kennesaw. 1899. Page 135.

officers who had fought against him, gave a speech on Wheeler's life:

“There are yet more lustrous occasions when warriors and people of the same lineage and land forget the hostile steps already trod on bloody ground and, having learned the law of brotherly fellowship press forward together to make their resorted Union a Commonwealth indeed and their country's grandeur in peace and example for true national greatness for al the world to follow. . . He made unvarying affirmation of his fidelity to the main principle for which he had fought. Without a moment of anarchy he resumed the duties of citizenship, and was thoroughly allegiant to the reunited country. He deprecated agitations that fed animosity, and advocated all measures that would promote a sincerely welded Union. With the had that had sheathed his bright sword and with a great heart whose throbs expelled the mere passions of war, he grasped the memories and the principle of his cause deliving that they could not fail, and turned his energies into the ways of peaceful endeavor to restore his Southern Land.

In the course of time a foreign monarchy adventured war with the United Sates to hold fair Cuba in the thrall of longer oppression . . . There fame again soon found her favorite son on the firing line and heard him give the word to charge, and next she saw him flushed with victory that set Cuba free and made his country great and then again, as of yore, she knighted him hero of the day and called upon his willing nation to give her honors to this Confederate Soldier.”¹⁸¹

Wheeler had led a long and full life. He fought in the Civil war quickly gaining the rank of general and national fame before he was even thirty. He had served his reunited nation as a congressman, always fighting to heal the wounds of the past war and prevent his home from being abused by others. Finally he had served his nation once again and helped to prove to the world that she was in fact a great power worthy of being on the world stage.

Wheeler's example provides an understanding of the changes America was going

through in his life. As the still young nation struggled with the idea of secession he removed himself and took up the flag of a new nation. He fought as much as any other soldier during the war, sharing their hardships and troubles as the nation struggled to remain whole, and struggled to be divided. In the aftermath he fought hard along with the rest of the South to rebuild from the consequences of the war, trying to find a life that would work in a world that had changed so much over six years. Like the South he moved towards an understanding that things would never be the same and that the South would have to work hard to be viewed as equal again. He served his home state as a congressman and always fought to maintain a level of dignity that would prove not only his worthiness but his land's to be considered equal and loyal. Finally he served his reunited nation one last time and proved once and for all that the South could be counted on to come to the aid of the nation despite its past history. Over Wheeler's life American went through more changes than could ever have been predicted, it reemerged stronger than ever and showed the world what that it was capable of surviving even the hardest of times.

¹⁸¹ *The Confederate Veteran Magazine*; Volume XIV. Broadfoot's Bookmark. Wendell. 1989. June 1906. Pages 248/249.

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