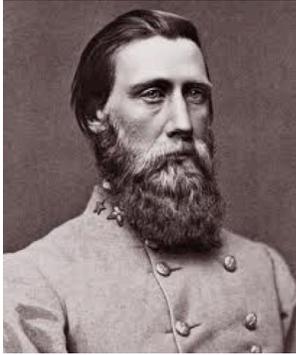


**Case Study: Battle of Atlanta**  
**Major General John Bell Hood, CSA**  
**July 21, 1864**

“Hood is a bold fighter, very industrious on the battlefield, careless off, and I have had no opportunity of judging his action, when the whole responsibility rested upon him. I have a high opinion of his gallantry, earnestness and zeal. General Hardee has more experience in managing an army.”

-- Robert E. Lee



*John Bell Hood was born in Kentucky and graduated from West Point in 1853. Not an exceptionally gifted or disciplined student, Hood graduated 44th in his class of 52 and received 196 demerits during his four years, just four short of the amount that would have mandated expulsion. At the outbreak of the war, Hood took up arms with his “adopted” state of Texas when Kentucky failed to secede. Serving under some of the South’s greatest generals, including Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, James Longstreet and Joseph E. Johnston, Hood soon established himself as one of the bravest fighters in the Confederate Army. An excellent commander at the brigade and division level, Hood and his men distinguished*

*themselves at Gaines Mill, Second Manassas and Antietam. But Hood’s bravery, and bad luck, caught up to him at Gettysburg where he sustained an injury so severe to his left arm that it would be rendered useless for the rest of his life. After recovering, Hood was soon back in the thick of battle, this time with the Army of Tennessee at the Battle of Chickamauga in northwest Georgia in September of 1863. Bad luck struck again, this time in the form of a minie ball, which shattered the young general’s right leg. The injury required amputation of the leg from the hip down. With only one good arm and one leg, Hood returned to the Army of Tennessee by the spring of 1864. More celebrated than ever as the epitome of a Southern Warrior, Hood lived up to his bold reputation by criticizing his commander, Major General Joseph E. Johnston, for his constant withdraws southward to Atlanta during May, June and July. Disregarding the chain of command, Hood wrote directly to Confederate President Jefferson Davis that Johnston had failed to “strike the enemy a decisive blow.” Of course Hood made no mention of his own ineptitude just weeks earlier when, at Johnston’s direction, he had misread the designs of an unsuspecting Union force at Cassville. Hood’s miscue cost the Confederates a rare chance to strike a crippling blow against the Yankee invaders. “I regard it a great misfortune,” Hood had the audacity to write weeks later, “...that we failed to give battle to the enemy many miles north of our present position.” On the night of July 17, Davis removed Johnston and placed the 33-year-old Hood as the Army of Tennessee’s new commander. The vainglorious Hood was now the youngest Confederate general to command an entire army. He was also the Army of Tennessee’s fifth leader in three years and its third within the last eight months.*

Johnston’s removal and Hood’s ascension sent shock waves through the Confederate ranks. Hood had been selected over several more experienced Confederate generals, most notably 50-year old Major General William J. Hardee, perhaps the most competent commander within the army. Many soldiers openly wept at the news believing that “Old Joe” had brought them safely to Atlanta without needlessly sacrificing their lives.

On July 19, just one day after assuming command, Hood received reports that the 19,000-man Union Army of the Cumberland under Major General George H. Thomas, the venerated Rock of Chickamauga, was approaching Atlanta from the north and would soon be crossing the Peach Tree Creek just four miles from the city. A gap of several miles separated Thomas’s army from

the other two armies under the overall command of Union Major General William T. Sherman. Gathering his army's three corps commanders that night, Hood laid out his strategy for striking that "decisive blow" which had eluded the Confederates for three months. Hood's plan called for General Hardee to lead an attack that would commence from the Rebel right and roll en echelon to the left. It would begin at 1 p.m. the next day before the Yankees crossed the creek.

By noon on July 20 the sun was baking the Georgia ground and the Rebel army was floundering. Lacking accurate maps and reliable guides, the Confederates struggled to navigate the heavy woods, streams and rolling hills on the rough outskirts of Atlanta. Finally, at 4 p.m., three hours later than planned, Hardee's attack commenced. The delay had given the Union troops time to cross the creek and coordinate a strong response to Confederate's piecemeal charges. After three hours, the bloodshed was severe: The Rebels lost 2,500 men either killed, wounded or missing. Thomas reported about 1,900 total casualties.

Hood's first sortie was an unequivocal loss and was a bitter pill to swallow. Other than inflicting serious casualties on the Union and proving that he would not give up Atlanta without a fight, Hood could claim no strategic advantage gained by the attack at Peach Tree Creek.

That night as Hood and his senior officers gathered to assess their losses and discuss their next move, another opportunity was revealed. Scouts reported that a second Union army, this one under the command of Hood's former West Point classmate James B. McPherson, was closing in on the city from the east. McPherson's army was strung out over several miles and its left flank was unprotected. If Hood could somehow strike this unprotected flank, or better yet, get behind McPherson's army, it would surely be a rout for the Confederates. Pouring over maps, a sense of urgency filled the room; a decision needed to be made quickly. McPherson would surely be reinforcing his flank soon and consolidating his positions. Recalling the bold and successful maneuvers under his former commanders Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, the young general was determined to strike again.

Hood wanted both surprise and deception. Hood's orders were for the Confederates to abandon their fortified positions on the outskirts of town and withdraw into the city confines on the night of July 21. Then, two corps of 15,000 men under Hardee's command would make a 15-mile night march to gain McPherson's flank. The Confederate cavalry would gallop to McPherson's rear and the railroad town of Decatur to decimate the Union supply wagons stationed there. Finally, at just the precise time of his choosing, Hood would order Major General Frank Cheatham and 15,000 rebels to storm out of the city and strike the Federal's unsuspecting center line. Cheatham's attack would be the crushing blow that would send the blue invaders recoiling. Hood's plan called for Hardee to launch his attack at daybreak.

The risks were high, but so were the rewards. If successful, the elimination of McPherson's 20,000-man army would help level the Confederate's numerical disadvantage. It would also leave the Rebel's in control of the vital east-running Georgia Railroad, a key source of supplies and a potential avenue of escape or troop reinforcement for Hood's army. It would also require Sherman to rethink his strategy for capturing Atlanta; perhaps it would even force him to abandon that goal. Last but not least, it would avenge the loss and stain of Peach Tree Creek.

As a blood-red sun began to slip off in the west on the evening of July 21, Hood had laid out his strategy and was now relying on his subordinates to execute effectively. The battle-weary officers and soldiers trudging out of the city that evening were filled with expectation. Was this the battle that would save Atlanta and turn the tide? Or, was this to be another blood-filled struggle with nothing to show for it?

### Sample Participant Questions

What techniques do you use to build consensus with your team?

How do you assess and account for opinions that are different from yours?

What are the steps you take to evaluate risk vs. reward?

In this particular case, what personnel or management decisions would you make to ensure the plan's success?

What accommodations to your communication style do you make when speed is of the essence?

What communication techniques would use to "sell" this plan to your staff and ensure its success during the operation itself?

### Sources:

War Like the Thunderbolt: The Battle and Burning of Atlanta," Russell S. Bonds

"Atlanta and the War," Webb Garrison

"Decision in the West: The Atlanta Campaign of 1864," Albert E. Castel