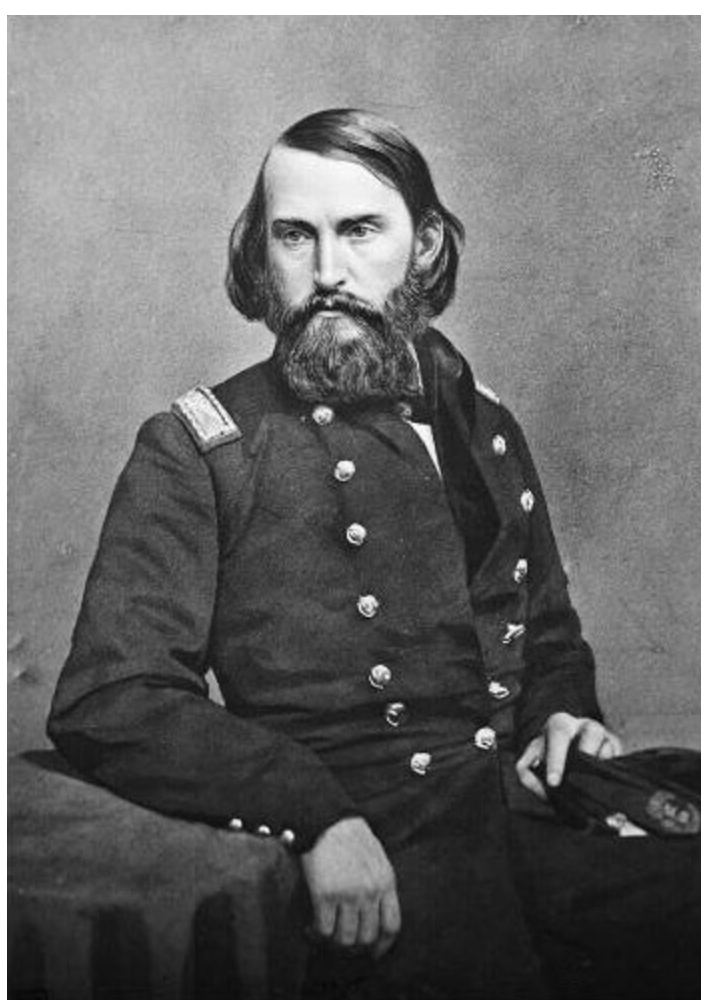




## Croton's Raid

Norman Dasinger, Jr., November 27, 2020

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Gen. John T. Croton | public domain

In March 1865, Gen. John T. Croton was one part of a 13,000-man Union cavalry force raiding through Alabama from Florence south to present-day Birmingham, Selma, Montgomery, and Columbus, Georgia. At the time, it was the largest cavalry force ever assembled in North America and was commanded by 27-year-old Maj. Gen. James H. Wilson.

On March 30, 1865, near present-day Birmingham, Wilson ordered Croton to take his 1,500-man brigade and detach from the main force. Croton was ordered west to Tuscaloosa to burn the university and the military cadet school located there, and then head east across central Alabama, destroying any suitable targets including iron works, railroad stations, factories, post offices, homes, and mills, with the hope of rejoining the main force somewhere near the Georgia–Alabama border.

Croton's men fought several engagements around Tuscaloosa and eventually invaded the city and burned the university. Then, as ordered, they traveled east in search of Wilson's main column, which was in the process of defeating Confederate Gen. Nathan B. Forrest at Selma and later entering Montgomery and then forcibly invading Columbus, Georgia. In the meantime, Croton had a brief skirmish against a small Confederate force at Munford, Alabama, where the last Confederate casualty of the war east of the Mississippi River occurred on the 23rd of April. Then on the morning of the 24th, Croton burned the iron works at Oxford and all the railroad box cars and the station at Blue Mountain near Jacksonville, and then started east toward present-day Heflin in Cleburne County.

This Union force included men from Iowa, Michigan, and Kentucky, and many were armed with repeating rifles. The night of the 24th they camped along the banks of the Tallapoosa River, their last stop before moving into Georgia the next day. They did not know that several days prior General Lee had surrendered to General Grant at Appomattox, Virginia.

On the 25th, Croton arrived at Carrollton, Georgia, and by May 1, his force was in Macon and there rejoined Wilson just in time to help capture Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

During their separation from Wilson's main force, the brigade traveled 653 miles, crossed four rivers, demolished five iron works, three factories, one university, and several mills. They also captured 300 prisoners and four cannon, while losing four officers and 168 men.



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