



The Road Past Kennesaw: The 1864 Atlanta Campaign

The Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, by Thure de Thulstrup, depicts Sherman's feat against Confederates on Big Kennesaw on the morning of June 27, 1864. The original painting is on display in the Kennesaw Mountain visitor center.

When Ulysses S. Grant assumed command of all Federal armies in March 1864, he ordered a coordinated offensive to destroy Confederate resistance and end the war. The major efforts focused on eastern Virginia and northwest Georgia. Grant accompanied Maj. Gen. George G. Meade's Army of the Potomac in Virginia and aimed to finally defeat Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman, in charge of the Georgia offensive, commanded 100,000 soldiers, divided among three armies concentrated near Chattanooga, TN. Opposing them was the 53,000-man Army of Tennessee under Gen. Joseph E. Johnston entrenched at Dalton, GA, along Rocky Face Ridge. Grant ordered Sherman to "move against Johnston's army, to break it up, and to get into the interior of the enemy's country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their war resources."

The war-making capacity of the Confederacy remained formidable after three years of fighting. By spring 1864 the Federals controlled the Mississippi River and the Confederates had been expelled from most of Tennessee and much of Mississippi. Still, the heartland of the Confederacy, stretching from Alabama through Georgia to the Carolinas, was virtually untouched by the war. Atlanta, 125 miles southeast of Chattanooga, was a significant manufacturing city, the center of a belt of manufacturing communities extending from Augusta, GA, to Selma, AL.

Even more importantly, Atlanta was a vital Confederate rail junction. Four railroads met here, linking the southern Atlantic seaboard states with the western Confederacy. The Western & Atlantic, upon which both sides depended for supplies, ran

You cannot qualify war in harsher terms than I will. War is cruelty and you cannot refine it . . .

—William T. Sherman, General, US Army

northwest to Chattanooga and was the axis along which the Atlanta Campaign was fought. The Georgia Railroad ran east to Augusta, where it connected with lines to Charleston, Raleigh, and Richmond, the Confederate capital. The Macon & Western ran southeast, with connections to Savannah. Just south of Atlanta, at East Point, the Atlanta & West Point extended west into Alabama.

From May to September 1864, Federal and Confederate forces fought across north Georgia from Dalton to Atlanta, with almost daily skirmishing and frequent maneuvering for position punctuated by fierce battles. During the final siege of Atlanta Sherman's troops cut the city's rail links. Confederate troops evacuated the city on September 1; Sherman entered the following day. Atlanta had fallen.

The Civil War in the Western Theater, 1861–1864

Southern states secede; Fort Sumter bombarded; war begins. Dec. 1860–April 1861	Kentucky ends neutrality, comes under Union control. September 1861	Union takes Forts Henry & Donelson, gains control of Tennessee R. February 1862	Union takes Island No. 10, then Memphis on Mississippi R. February, June 1862	Union victory at Battle of Pea Ridge establishes control of Missouri. March 1862	Union victory at Shiloh opens way into northern Mississippi. April 1862	Union navy takes New Orleans; gains access to Mississippi R. April 1862	Battle of Stones River secures middle Tennessee for Union. January 1863	Grant takes Vicksburg, opening Mississippi R. & splitting Confederacy. January–July 1863	At Chickamauga, South gains greatest victory in western theater. September 1863	Union victory in Chattanooga Campaign opens way to lower South. November 1863	Atlanta Campaign; Sherman takes Atlanta, begins March to the Sea. May–November 1864
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The Campaign Begins

Sherman began his march on Atlanta on May 7. Two days later he approached General Johnston's position on a steep ridge called Rocky Face. Sherman sent a column through Snake Creek Gap to threaten the Western & Atlantic Railroad, Johnston's supply connection with Atlanta. After an engagement at Rocky Face, Johnston moved south and dug in at Resaca, where on May 13–15 he repulsed Sherman's attacks.

When a Union column swung west to cross the Oostanaula River and again threaten the railroad, Johnston retreated to Adairsville, where the two forces skirmished on the 17th. They halted only with the approach of darkness, when Johnston fell back.

Time and again during Sherman's advance to Atlanta this situation was repeated as the generals engaged in a tactical chess match. When Sherman found the Confederates entrenched, he tried to hold them with part of his force while sending another column around their flank—always trying to cut the Western & Atlantic. Johnston repeatedly withdrew to intercept the threats.

By late May he had pulled back to a position in the Allatoona Mountains. Sherman swung wide to the southwest, but Johnston, ever alert to Union movements, side-stepped to slow him with stubborn fighting May 25–28 at New Hope Church, Pickett's Mill, and Dallas. When Sherman resumed his advance on June 10, he was forced to swing back east, following a bend in the railroad so he would not stray too far from his own supply line.

Battle for Kennesaw

By June 19, although hampered by weeks of continual rain, Sherman's troops forced Johnston to withdraw again, this time to a prepared defensive position anchored by Kennesaw Mountain, a lofty humped ridge with rocky slopes rising above the surrounding plain. Confederate engineers using slave labor had laid out a formidable line of entrenchments covering every approaching ravine or hollow with cannon and rifle fire.

Again Sherman extended his lines to the south to get around the Confederate flank. Again Johnston countered, shifting 11,000 men under Gen. John Bell Hood to meet the threat. At Kolb's Farm on June 22 Hood struck savagely but unsuccessfully, his attack failing to repel the Northerners.

Stalemated and immobilized by muddy roads, Sherman suspected that Johnston's defenses, though strong, might be thinly manned and that one sharp thrust might break through. His plan called for diversionary moves against Kennesaw and the Confederate left while a two-pronged assault hit Johnston's center.

The attacking brigades moved into position before dawn on June 27. At 8 am, after an artillery bombardment, they surged forward. Both attacks were brief, bloody failures. Astride Burnt Hickory Road three Union brigades totaling 5,500 men crossed swampy, heavily wooded terrain. Before they could reach their objective—a mountain spur today named Pigeon Hill—sheets

The Atlanta Campaign



of fire drove them under cover. From Little Kennesaw and Pigeon Hill Confederates rolled rocks down on them. As soon as it was obvious the attack could not succeed, Sherman recalled it.

Meanwhile, south of Dallas Road (now Dallas Highway), 8,000 Union infantrymen attacked two divisions of Johnston's army. Many of those in the assaulting waves were shot down. Some advanced to close quarters, and for a few minutes there was brutal hand-to-hand fighting on top of the defenders' earthworks. Both sides grimly nicknamed this place the "Dead Angle."

Sherman resumed his flanking strategy, forcing Johnston to abandon his Kennesaw lines during the night of July 2. The Confederates had lost 800 men, the Northerners 1,800, but the Union diversionary movement on the Confederate left had an unforeseen benefit, placing Sherman closer to Chattahoochee River crossings. He surprised Johnston by sending a small force across the river upstream from where Confederates guarded the railroad bridge. Outflanked again, Johnston had to retreat across the Chattahoochee.

The Fall of Atlanta

The rest of Sherman's army crossed the Chattahoochee on July 9 and Johnston withdrew to the fortifications of Atlanta. For Confederate President Jefferson Davis, already exasperated by Johnston's fallbacks and lack of aggressiveness, this was the last straw. He relieved Johnston of command

and replaced him with General Hood. Meanwhile, Sherman was closing on Atlanta from the north and east. Hood tried unsuccessfully to destroy the army of Gen. George H. Thomas as it crossed Peachtree Creek on July 20.

Two days later at the Battle of Atlanta Hood struck at Gen. James B. McPherson's army and was repulsed with heavy losses. When Sherman tried to outflank Atlanta's outnumbered defenders by maneuvering west of the city, Hood lashed out with another attack at Ezra Church on July 28. Again Hood was defeated.

In August Sherman placed Atlanta under siege, continually shifting troops to cut the railroads that linked Atlanta with the rest of the South. On August 31 he seized the last one, the Macon & Western. Hood, after losing a two-day battle near Jonesboro, ordered all public property destroyed and the city evacuated. Sherman entered on September 2 and triumphantly telegraphed the news to Washington: "Atlanta is ours, and fairly won."

The fall of Atlanta was a crippling blow to the Confederacy's capacity and will to make war. Coupled with Union victories elsewhere, the war's end was now in sight. In the North there was rejoicing, and on November 8 voters reelected President Abraham Lincoln, endorsing a fight to the finish. A week later Sherman left Atlanta in ruins and began his soon-to-be-famous "March to the Sea."



Left: View from behind Confederate earthworks on Pigeon Hill. This was part of the formidable line of entrenchments erected by Confederate engineers to defend against Union attacks.

Bottom right: In this picture of Little Kennesaw, Pigeon Hill is the knob rising to the right in the middle distance. Big Kennesaw is barely visible at the left, beyond Little Kennesaw.

Union and Confederate Leadership

Gen. William T. Sherman's repeated attempts to maneuver around Gen. Joseph E. Johnston's army were frustrated by Johnston's skillful retreat toward Atlanta. Johnston's failure to stop the Federals, however, caused Jefferson Davis to replace him with Gen. John Bell Hood. Hood fought hard to save Atlanta, but supply and morale problems forced him to abandon the city.



William T. Sherman
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Joseph E. Johnston
NATIONAL ARCHIVES



John Bell Hood
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



The Western & Atlantic Railroad depot (above) was the terminus for a supply line crucial to both sides during the campaign. Upon leaving Atlanta,



Sherman ordered the destruction of all military and government buildings. The depot was among the casualties (above).



Right, clockwise: Confederate officer's shell jacket; Confederate field cap; tin drinking cup and plate.



Left, clockwise: Federal officer's frock coat; Confederate officer's leather trunk; Confederate officer's saber; Federal officer's telescope.

Life in Cobb County and on the Battlefield



Left: Henry G. Cole was a secret Union supporter and son-in-law of the owners of the Fletcher House Hotel in Marietta. Sherman's army spared the building in part because of Cole's clandestine activities.

Below: Tools of the trade for soldiers at Kennesaw Mountain included a surveyor's compass used by army engineers, surgeon's kit, and (right) Confederate army Maj. Gen. Joe Wheeler's map, drawn on cotton for durability.

Right: Confederate regimental flags.

Below right: Park volunteers demonstrate how a gun crew sponged, loaded, sighted, and fired its weapon.

ALL IMAGES NPS

Harper's Weekly artist Theodore R. Davis made this sketch of Kennesaw (then called Big Shanty) in June 1864. Right: Citizens of Cobb County used Georgia banknotes and Western & Atlantic Railroad "fare notes," recognized by the State of Georgia as currency for certain uses.



The rolling countryside around the Kennesaw Mountain battlefield was settled by whites in the 1830s on land taken from the Cherokee after the 1830 Indian Removal Act. By the time of the Civil War, Cobb County had become one of the most populous and wealthy counties in northwestern Georgia—at the time still called "Cherokee Georgia." Much of the county's prosperity derived from the Western & Atlantic Railroad, completed by 1850. This vital rail line provided easier access to distant markets and attracted new settlers from Georgia and other parts of the nation. The town of Kennesaw, then called Big Shanty, began as a construction camp for workers laying rails for the Western & Atlantic.

The Kennesaw Mountain region was the home of large and small planters and yeoman farmers. Most of the rural population lived in log cabins, or later in small frame homes as sawmills began providing lumber for building. Of the county's 14,242 people, 3,819 were enslaved workers. Few local farmers owned large numbers of slaves; most owned fewer than 10. While slaves on the larger plantations typically worked in gangs supervised by an overseer, those on smaller farms most likely worked in the field alongside their white owners.

By 1860 cotton was the dominant cash crop of the area, but most acreage was devoted to food production and free range pasturage for livestock, particularly hogs. Although

some farmers owned horses or mules, the most common draft animals were oxen. The largest industrial enterprise, the Roswell Mills complex, produced textiles, including "Roswell Grey" for Confederate uniforms. There were also grist mills, tanneries, and sawmills.

Marietta, the thriving county seat, was described in an 1864 article in the *New York Tribune*: "The town is a perfect grotto of shade. . . . There were during good times, sixteen stores, two druggists, eight groceries, three hotels, four churches . . . Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian and Episcopal, three female and one male school besides small schools for young children, all well patronized . . ." Marietta was

home to 2,680 residents, 1,175 of them slaves. Only 13 free African Americans are registered in the 1860 county census, all of them living in Marietta. They were free but not equal, their daily lives subject to numerous restrictions imposed by state laws and local codes.

By the beginning of the war a number of fine residences had been constructed in Marietta, often by families from coastal Georgia and South Carolina seeking the healthier climate of Piedmont Georgia during the summer malaria season. One Union soldier declared that Marietta was "The prettiest town in Northern Georgia."

Touring Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park

This self-guiding auto tour (see map at right) takes you to the major points of interest. Each tour stop has parking and wayside exhibits. Short interpretive trails are located on the mountaintop, at Pigeon Hill, and at Cheatham Hill.

- 1 Kennesaw Mountain** An overlook near the summit offers a panoramic view of Atlanta and the northern Georgia terrain where Sherman's and Johnston's armies struggled in the late spring and summer of 1864. A short, moderately steep trail leads to the summit. Along the way are exhibits and gun emplacements dug by Confederates to control the Western & Atlantic (now CSX) Railroad.
- 2 24-Gun Battery** Located on a small, wooded rise facing Little Kennesaw and Pigeon Hill, this Federal gun emplacement accommodated four batteries, each containing six artillery pieces. These guns bombarded Confederate forces on Kennesaw Mountain off and on for 10 days.
- 3 Wallis House** Built by Josiah Wallis about 1853 and abandoned upon the approach of Sherman's armies, this house was Union Gen. Oliver O. Howard's headquarters during the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain. It was earlier used as a Confederate hospital. General Sherman was at the Wallis House during the battle at Kolb's Farm.
- 4 Pigeon Hill** A foot trail leads to Confederate entrenchments on this mountain spur, where one of Sherman's two major attacks was repulsed.
- 5 Cheatham Hill** To protect this hill now named for Confederate Gen. Benjamin F. Cheatham, the Southerners created a salient (a protruding angle) in their lines. The fiercest fighting of the battle raged here at what came to be called the "Dead Angle." Along a trail to the imposing Illinois Monument are Confederate earthworks and markers where Union soldiers fell.
- 6 Sherman/Thomas Headquarters** The two Union generals met here to discuss, and ultimately order, an ill-fated frontal assault against Confederate Gen. William Hardee's troops entrenched atop Cheatham Hill.
- 7 Kolb's Farm** On the afternoon of June 22, 1864, Union soldiers repulsed Confederate General Hood's ill-fated attack just north of Powder Springs Road. Union Gen. Joseph Hooker used the Kolb House for his headquarters after the fight. The Kolb family cemetery is adjacent to the house.

Your Visit to the Battlefield

Begin your visit at the visitor center. Here you will find information, a short orientation film, exhibits, and a bookstore. Park staff can answer questions and help you plan your visit. The visitor center is open daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Hours vary seasonally. Call 770-427-4686 or visit www.nps.gov/kemo for specific times.

This is a day-use-only park. All gated lots have posted hours. Please refer to them before parking. Any vehicles left at the park after the posted closing time are subject to being ticketed and towed at the owner's expense.

Pets All pets must be on a leash no longer than 6 feet and under physical control at all times. Please note: pets are NOT allowed in the visitor center, restrooms, or shuttle bus.

Getting Here From I-75, take exit 269 and drive 2.1 miles west on Barrett Parkway. Turn left onto Old US 41 and proceed 1.2 miles to Stilesboro Road at the first traffic light after entering the park. Turn right onto Stilesboro Road, then left through the park gate into the visitor center parking lot.

More Information
Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park
905 Kennesaw Mountain Drive
Kennesaw, GA 30152-4855
770-427-4686 / www.nps.gov/kemo

Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

Kolb's Farm



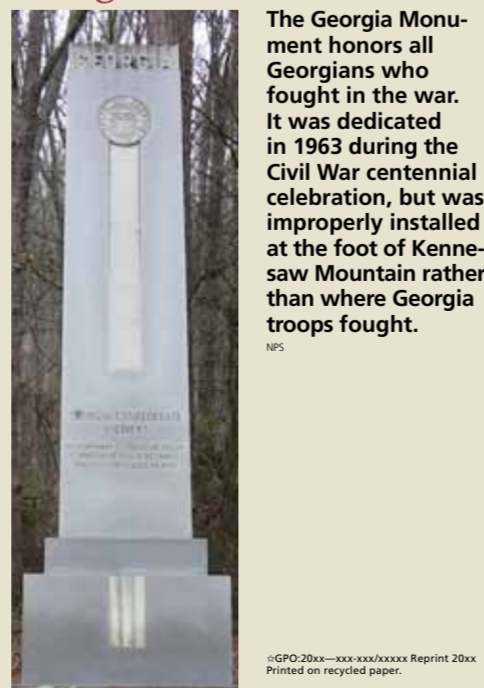
Peter Valentine Kolb II was one of the earliest settlers of Cobb County. He built this house in the 1830s and operated a self-sufficient farm with 10 enslaved workers and about 600 acres of land. When the Federal troops approached the farm along Powder Springs Road in 1864, the Kolb family fled and did not return until the 1880s. The battle here on June 22, 1864 damaged the house and destroyed several outbuildings. The house has been restored to its historic appearance.

Illinois Monument



The Illinois Monument on Cheatham Hill is the largest monument on the battlefield. Dedicated in 1914, it honors the Illinois soldiers who served during the battle. Near the base of the monument is the entrance to a tunnel begun by Union soldiers intending to blow up the Confederate position with a mine.

Georgia Monument



The Georgia Monument honors all Georgians who fought in the war. It was dedicated in 1963 during the Civil War centennial celebration, but was improperly installed at the foot of Kennesaw Mountain rather than where Georgia troops fought.

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