

Kennesaw Mountain

Kennesaw Mountain
National Battlefield Park
Georgia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior





The Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, by Thure de Thulstrup.

Atlanta was too important a place in the hands of the enemy to be left undisturbed, with its magazines, stores, arsenals, workshops, foundries, and more especially its railroads, which converged there from the four great cardinal points.

William T. Sherman

Campaign for Atlanta By the spring of 1864 the Confederacy was weakening and the mighty war power of the Union was at last being employed. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, recently promoted to military commander-in-chief, ordered a concerted offensive by all Union armies. His orders to Gen. William T. Sherman at Chattanooga, Tenn., were to attack the Confederate army in Georgia, "break it up, and go into the interior of the enemy's country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can upon their war resources."

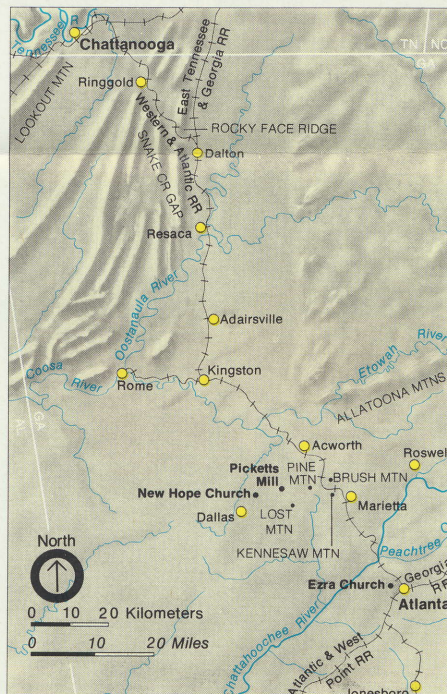
Sherman's 100,000 men and 254 pieces of artillery departed their encampments south and east of Chattanooga during the first week in May. Confronting them along Rocky Face Ridge, near Dalton in the mountains of northwest Georgia, were Gen. Joseph E. Johnston's 65,000 Confederates with 187 cannon. Although Confederate authorities wanted Johnston to march north into Tennessee, the campaign quickly devolved into a contest for Atlanta, railroad hub and war manufacturing and storage center for the Confederacy.

Sherman approached Rocky Face with two-thirds of his men on May 9, while the rest

marched 15 miles southward through Snake Creek Gap, threatening the Western & Atlantic Railroad, Johnston's vital supply connection with Atlanta. Johnston hastily retreated and dug in at Resaca, where, on May 13-15, the Confederates repulsed Sherman's attacks. Johnston, however, fell back after a Union column crossed the Oostanaula River and again threatened the railroad.

Time and again the same strategic situation was repeated. Whenever Sherman found the Confederates entrenched in strong positions, he would attempt to hold them in place with part of his force while dispatching another portion behind their flank, attempting to cut the Western & Atlantic. Johnston retired backwards to intercept the threats. By late May he had pulled back to an impregnable position in the Allatoona Mountains. Sherman swung wide to the southwest, but Johnston, alert to Union movements, side-stepped to meet him with stubborn fighting at New Hope Church on May 25, Pickett's Mill on May 27, and at Dallas on the 28th. Sherman then returned to the railroad at Acworth, while Johnston took position across Lost, Pine, and Brushy Mountains.

The Atlanta Campaign



Battle at Kennesaw

Sherman resumed his advance on June 10. A southwestward twist of the railroad forced him to operate south and west of Marietta so as not to endanger his own supply line. By June 19, although hampered by weeks of continual rain, Sherman's troops had 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 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. Johnston countered by 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 failed to drive the Northerners away, but it did temporarily check their southward extension.

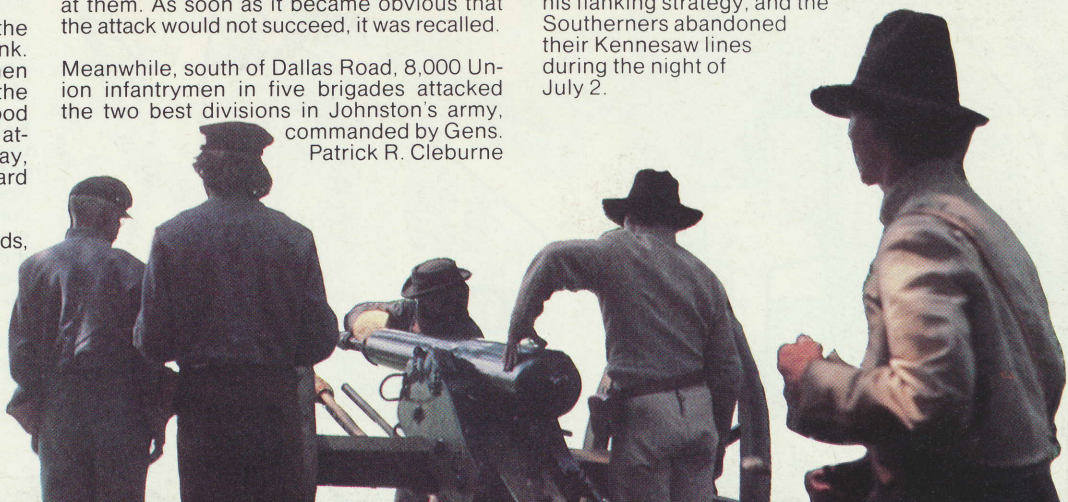
Stalemated and immobilized by muddy roads, Sherman suspected that the Confederate lines, although very strong, might be thinly held and that one sharp thrust might break through and destroy the entire Southern army.

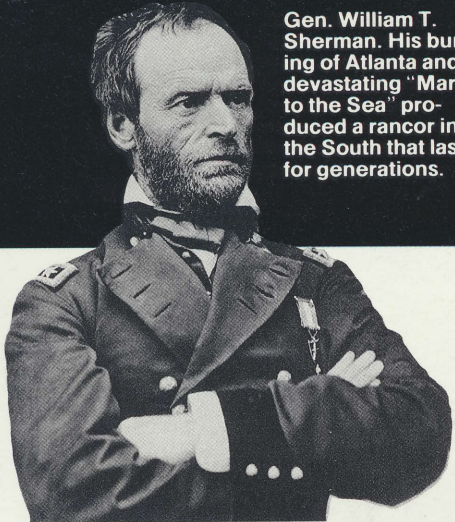
His plan called for diversionary moves against Kennesaw and the Confederate left, while the real blow, a two-pronged assault, hit Johnston's center. The attack brigades moved into position before dawn on June 27. At 8 a.m., after an artillery bombardment, they surged forward. Both attacks were brief, bloody failures. Astride Burnt Hickory Road three Union brigades totaling 5,500 men crossed swampy, heavily wooded terrain. Sheets of fire drove them under cover before reaching their objective, a mountain spur today named Pigeon Hill. Confederates on Little Kennesaw rolled huge rocks downhill at them. As soon as it became obvious that the attack would not succeed, it was recalled.

Meanwhile, south of Dallas Road, 8,000 Union infantrymen in five brigades attacked the two best divisions in Johnston's army, commanded by Gens. Patrick R. Cleburne

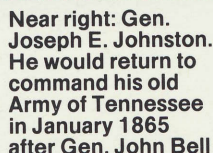
and Benjamin Franklin Cheatham. Most of those in the assault waves were shot down. Some got to close quarters and for a few minutes there was brutal hand-to-hand fighting on top of the defenders' earthworks. Both sides grimly nicknamed this place the "Dead Angle."

The Northerners lost 3,000 men, the Confederates 500. Ironically the diversionary movement on the Confederate left seized an important road intersection that placed Sherman closer to the Chattahoochee River crossings than Johnston. Sherman resumed his flanking strategy, and the Southerners abandoned their Kennesaw lines during the night of July 2.

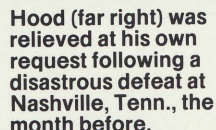




Gen. William T. Sherman. His burning of Atlanta and devastating "March to the Sea" produced a rancor in the South that lasted for generations.



Near right: Gen. Joseph E. Johnston. He would return to command his old Army of Tennessee in January 1865 after Gen. John Bell



Hood (far right) was relieved at his own request following a disastrous defeat at Nashville, Tenn., the month before.

The Fall of Atlanta Sherman crossed the Chattahoochee near Roswell on July 9 and Johnston withdrew to the fortifications of Atlanta. Exasperated by Johnston's retreats and his lack of aggressiveness, President Jefferson Davis on July 17 relieved him of command and replaced him with General Hood.

Meanwhile, Sherman was closing in on Atlanta from the north and east. Hood tried unsuccessfully to destroy Gen. George H. Thomas' army as it crossed Peachtree Creek on July 20. Two days later, at the Battle of Atlanta, he struck out at Gen. James B. McPherson's

army and was again 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. Once more he was defeated.

During the month of August Sherman placed Atlanta under siege. Both sides attempted cavalry raids to break the other's grip, but to no avail. Always Sherman shifted troops to cut the railroads linking Atlanta with the rest of the South. Finally 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 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 Abraham Lincoln was re-elected President, endorsing a fight to the finish. A week later Sherman left Atlanta in ruins to begin his devastating March to the Sea.

Touring the Battlefield

Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park was established to commemorate the 1864 Atlanta Campaign. The visitor center and park headquarters provide introductory information about the park and the battle. Living history programs are presented during the summer months.

The park is located 3 miles north of Marietta, Ga., and easily accessible from U.S. 41 and I-75. No camping is allowed, but picnicking is permitted in designated areas. Pets must be leashed at all times. Park trails may be used for short walks or long hikes. Starting at the visitor center, the round-trip distances

are 2 miles, 5 miles, 10 miles, and 16 miles. All trails require some moderately steep climbing. Be prepared: There is no water, shelter, or food concessions along the way.

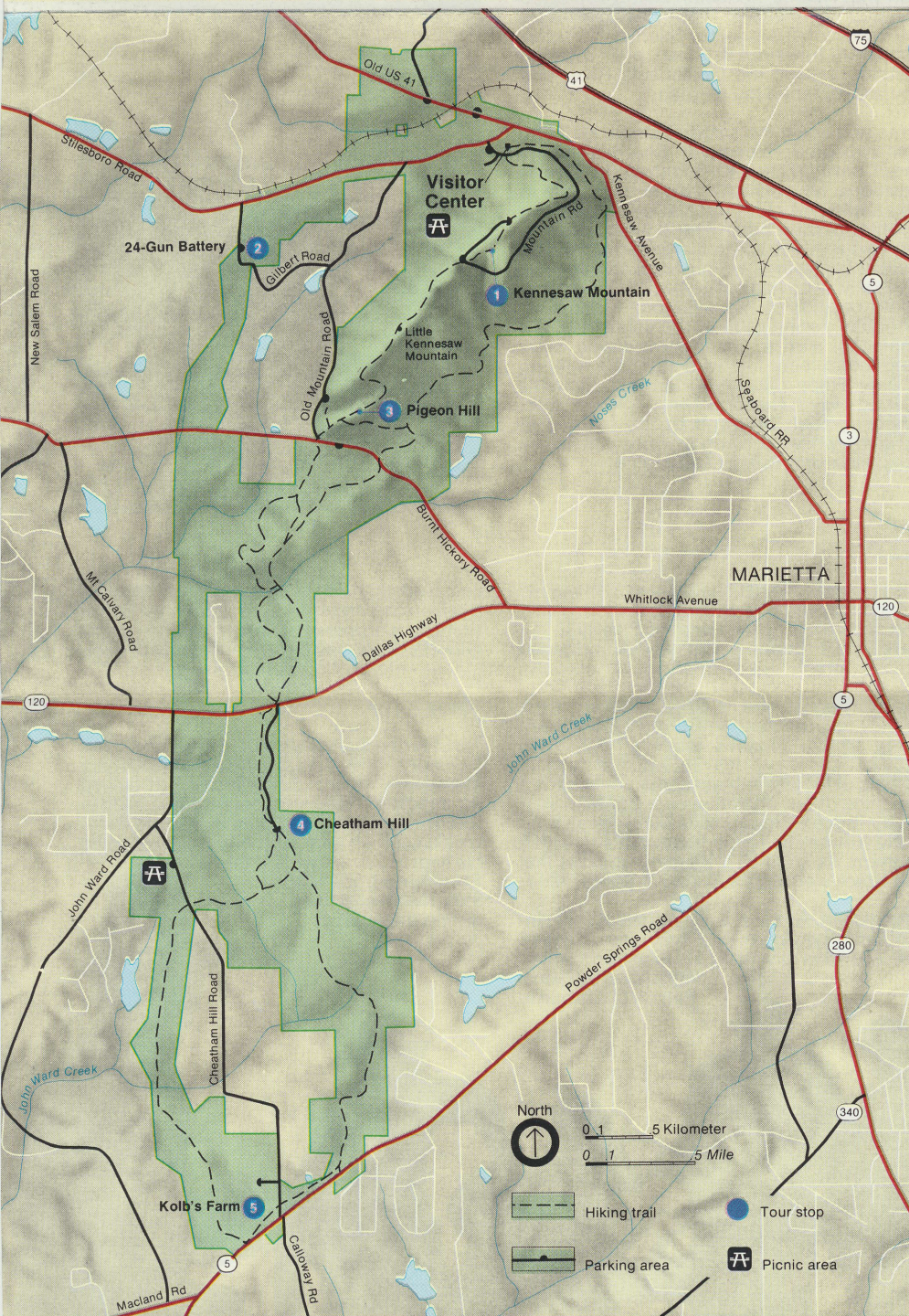
Buildings, historic objects, geologic specimens, and the plant and animal life within the park are protected by Federal law and must be left undisturbed. Stay on the roadways and trails and do not take shortcuts. The earthworks and mountain ecology are fragile, and disturbing them causes irreparable damage.

Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park

is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is P.O. Box 1167, Marietta, GA 30061, is in charge.

For Safety's Sake Motorists should exercise caution while driving the mountain road and tour route. Hikers should be aware that they are entering a natural environment where conditions can be hazardous. Stay on trails, wear shoes, and be aware of poisonous plants, insects, and snakes. Do not climb on cannons, monuments, or earthworks.

Self-guiding Auto Tour



The following self-guiding auto tour (keyed to the map at left) will take you to the major points of interest. Each tour stop contains a parking area and wayside exhibits. Short interpretive trails are located on the mountain top and at Cheatham Hill.

Kennesaw Mountain An observation overlook near the summit offers a sweeping panoramic view of the northern Georgia terrain where Sherman's and Johnston's armies struggled in the late spring and summer of 1864. Modern Atlanta dominates the southern skyline. A short, moderately steep trail leads to the mountain top. Along the way are exhibits and gun emplacements dug by Confederate cannoneers to command the Western & Atlantic (now Seaboard) Railroad.

24-Gun Battery From this entrenched position, 24 Union cannons bombarded Confederate defenses on Little Kennesaw for nearly a week. One Southerner afterwards remarked that the mountain should have been renamed "Bald Mountain." *Under development; not yet open to visitors.*

Pigeon Hill A foot trail leads to Confederate entrenchments on this mountain spur, where one of Sherman's two major attacks was repulsed.

Cheatham Hill To protect the hill now named for Confederate Gen. Benjamin F. Cheatham, the Southerners created a salient in their lines. The fiercest fighting of the battle raged here. Along a short trail to the imposing Illinois Monument are Confederate earthworks and markers where prominent Union soldiers fell. 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. Also nearby are Union entrenchments dug under fire and held for six days.

Kolb's Farm Damaged by gunfire, Peter Valentine Kolb's 1836 log house has been restored to its historic appearance. It is not open to the public. On the afternoon of June 22, 1864, General Hood's Confederates were repulsed in an ill-fated attack just to the north of Powder Springs Road. Union Gen. Joseph Hooker used the Kolb house for his headquarters after the fight.

Note: Possession or use of metal detectors within the park is unlawful.