

# The Bandy Heritage Center for Northwest Georgia

## Atlanta Campaign Driving Tour

### Kennesaw Mountain

## Tour Stops Section #11

### Battle of Kennesaw Mountain

Heavy rain plagued both armies as they withdrew from their Dallas-New Hope-Pickett's Mill lines during the first weeks of June 1864. Forced to return to the Western and Atlantic Railroad to supply his men, Sherman concentrated his forces in the Acworth-Big Shanty region. The lack of roads and the impassable conditions of the ones that existed prevented Sherman from continuing his strategy of moving around Johnston's flanks in order to pry him from his strong defensive positions. A more direct approach to Atlanta would be needed.

Johnston, having no choice but to shadow Sherman's movements, established a new line south of Acworth. Taking advantage of several prominent heights in the area, Johnston's line ran north from Lost Mountain to Gilgal Church, turned east at Pine Mountain, and extended past Brush Mountain to the Western and Atlantic Railroad. This line enabled Johnston to protect both his communications and supply lines as well as the approaches to Marietta. Taking advantage of the wild and broken terrain occupied by his army, Johnston turned the ridges and hills into an extended fortress of earthworks, rifle pits, and artillery firing positions that dominated all avenues of approach across his front.

Reinforced by the arrival of Major General Francis Blair's XVII Corps of McPherson's Army of the Tennessee, Sherman began his advance to Marietta on June 10, 1864. McPherson, on the left, moved along the railroad toward Marietta. Thomas, with the Army of the Cumberland, occupied the center of Sherman's advance and was directed south from Acworth toward Pine Mountain then to Kennesaw Mountain and Marietta. Schofield's XXIII Corps on the right had the Pine Mountain-Gilgal Church area as its target. Thomas's and Schofield's advances, hampered by the rain-swollen creeks and mud-packed roads, encountered unexpected resistance from the defensive lines Johnston had created on the Lost Mountain-Brush Mountain line. The advance slowed to a crawl, and from June 10 through June 18 Thomas and Johnston were locked in a stalemate characterized by vicious small-scale assaults and probes that slowly forced Johnston to pull back closer to the heights of Kennesaw Mountain.

The most notable occurrence during this phase of the campaign came on June 14 on the Pine Mountain sector of the front. Sherman, viewing the situation in front of Pine Mountain with Generals Thomas and Howard, observed a group of Confederates atop Pine Mountain and ordered Howard to scatter them. This group consisted of Johnston accompanied by Generals Polk and Hardee. Disregarding the pleas of their staffs to remove themselves from this exposed position, the three came under artillery fire from Captain Peter Simonson's 5th Indiana Battery. A shot from Simonson's guns struck General Polk in the chest, killing him instantly. That night Johnston ordered the abandonment of the Pine Mountain position and appointed Major General William Loring to take command of Polk's Corps.

By the morning of June 19, Johnston had established a new line, dominated by the imposing 700-foot height of Kennesaw Mountain, which gradually sloped to the southwest to Little Kennesaw and Pigeon Hill. Hood, on the right of the line, protected the Western and Atlantic Railroad and the extreme northern end of Kennesaw. Loring's position occupied the center of the line, stretching from Kennesaw to Little Kennesaw to Pigeon Hill. Hardee, on the left, extended Johnston's line south from Pigeon Hill through a range of low hills ending in a height soon to be known as Cheatham Hill.

Advancing to match Johnston's retreat, Sherman deployed his force in an arc covering both ends of Johnston's lines. McPherson's command on the left covered the area from the Western and Atlantic Railroad south to Burnt Hickory Road, opposite Loring's positions on Kennesaw, Little Kennesaw, and Pigeon Hill. Thomas formed the right, extending south from the Burnt Hickory Road to Powder Springs Road and covering Hardee's positions south of the Kennesaw-Pigeon Hill line. Sherman deployed Schofield's XXIII Corps as a flanking force to probe Johnston's defenses south of the Kennesaw position with the intent of exploiting any opportunity to turn Johnston's line.

Johnston realized that both Thomas's extension beyond his left and Schofield's probes threatened to turn him once more from a strong position. Choosing not to extend Hardee further south and thus weaken his position, Johnston ordered Hood to move on the evening of June 21 from the extreme right of the line to the extreme left and thus check any threats that developed in that area. On June 22, Schofield, accompanied by Hooker's XX Corps, encountered Hood's pickets and outposts along the Powder Springs Road. Knowing Hood's reputation as an aggressive commander, Hooker and Schofield decided to entrench on ridges north and south of the Powder Springs Road and await Hood's anticipated assault. Without informing Johnston of his intent, Hood ordered the divisions of Major Generals Carter Stevenson and Thomas Hindman to attack Schofield's and Hooker's strong earthworks centered on the Kolb Farm. In the face of concentrated infantry and artillery fire, Hood's assault failed, with devastating results. The failure of Hood's unauthorized attack only served to further damage the already tenuous relationship between Hood and Johnston.

After the action at Kolb's Farm, Sherman reassessed his options. Attempts to continue to move around Johnston's flanks would only serve to weaken his position before Kennesaw. Settling down for an extended siege would undermine the gains his army had made since Dalton and allow Johnston to strengthen his positions and the resolve of his army and buoy the hopes of the Confederate government. Seeing neither of these choices as viable, Sherman decided on a third option: to punch through the center of Johnston's line and move directly to Marietta. To implement this strategy, Sherman decided on two points of contact. Logan's XV Corps of the Army of the Tennessee would assault the Confederate line at the juncture of Little Kennesaw Mountain and Pigeon Hill, while a combined force consisting of units from Palmer's XIV Corps and Howard's IV Corps of the Army of the Cumberland would assault Hardee's position south of the main Confederate defenses. Sherman designated June 27 as the date for the attack.

With the main effort to come on Thomas's front, Blair's XVII Corps of the Army of the Tennessee made diversionary attacks on the right flank of the Confederate position under the towering heights of Kennesaw. These assaults kept the Confederate forces of Major General Edward C. Walthall's Division in place, preventing them from being released to reinforce the area of the main attack. Further south, at Pigeon Hill and Little Kennesaw, Major General John Logan aligned his forces with the Burnt Hickory Road as their axis of advance. Logan deployed his Second and Fourth Divisions, commanded respectively by Brigadier Generals Morgan Smith and William Harrow, north of the Burnt Hickory Road and Brigadier General Peter J. Osterhaus's First Division south of the road. After a fifteen-minute artillery barrage, Logan's attack began at 8:15 am. Rough rocky terrain, aided by rain-swollen creeks, quickly degenerated the cohesion of Logan's attack. The natural and man-made obstacles on the steep slopes of Little Kennesaw and Pigeon Hill, skillfully defended by the veteran brigades of Major General Samuel G. French's Division, combined to create a killing field on the slopes of the two hills. Logan called off the assaults after two hours of bitter struggle with nothing to show for his soldiers' sacrifice.

While Logan attacked the center of the Confederate line, Brigadier General Jefferson C. Davis's Second Division of Palmer's XIV Corps and Brigadier General John Newton's Second Division of Howard's IV Corps made the main assault on the Confederate line south of Kennesaw. Facing them in strong, interlocking trenches were the divisions of Major General Benjamin F. Cheatham and Major General Patrick R. Cleburne. The Federal ranks attacked in piecemeal waves against the Confederate breastworks. In the center of the Confederate line, Brigadier General Alfred Vaughn's Tennessee Brigade defended a salient protruding forward from the main defense line. From this position, Vaughn's men delivered deadly fire into the flanks of the oncoming Federal regiments. This "dead angle" quickly became the focus of repeated Union attacks on what became known as "Cheatham's Hill." Small numbers of Federal soldiers reached the parapets, where they were either captured or forced to scratch out shallow defenses on the slopes of the hill. During these assaults, Davis's Third Brigade, commanded by Colonel Daniel McCook, lost 35 percent of its men, including Colonel McCook. The fighting finally subsided on the evening of June 27, and for two days the Federal and Confederate soldiers faced each other in close contact with the area between their lines strewn with the dead and wounded. On June 29, a truce was agreed on, allowing the dead and wounded to be recovered.

While these actions were raging on the Kennesaw front, Schofield's XXIII Corps continued their probing actions south of Johnston's line, searching for an opportunity to turn Johnston from his defenses. After Schofield successfully bridged Olley's Creek and established a strong position overlooking Nickajack Creek beyond Johnston's southern flank, Sherman realized that Johnston's entire position could now be turned, and he began movements to do so. Leaving Thomas in position, Sherman directed McPherson to move from the far northern and central part of the line, passing behind Thomas's position and linking up with Schofield and move eastward to the Chattahoochee. Responding to the threat, Johnston abandoned his Kennesaw position and fell back to prepared positions that awaited him before Atlanta.

## Tour Stops Section #11 Continued

### Directions:

*From Pickett's Mill Battlefield Park, proceed northwest on Acworth-Dallas Hwy (GA Hwy 92) into Cobb County. Two miles after entering Cobb County, turn right on North Cobb Parkway (US Hwy 41). Travel three miles and turn right on Acworth Due West Road. Go south on Acworth Due West Road and turn left on to Old Stilesboro Road and then turn left on Stilesboro Road. In approximately three miles you will gain an excellent first view of the heights of Kennesaw Mountain. Upon entering the Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park, proceed to the Visitor Center. From the grounds surrounding the Visitor Center you can view the steep heights of the mountain and the location of McPherson's diversionary attack of June 27. Take the paved road to the top of Kennesaw Mountain. From the observation area at the top of the mountain, you can observe the commanding view of Sherman's position that this height afforded the Confederate defenders as well as the positions of artillery batteries dragged to the top of the mountain. From the road leading to the top of Kennesaw, you will gain excellent views of Little Kennesaw Mountain. Return to the Visitor Center and exit left onto Stilesboro Road. After 0.5 miles, turn left on Old Mountain Road and travel south to the intersection with Burnt Hickory Road. On your left is Pigeon Hill, site of Logan's XV Corps attack. A short, steep trail takes you to the top of Pigeon Hill, where Confederate trenches attest to the difficult assignment drawn by Logan's men. From the intersection of Burnt Hickory Road and Old Mountain Road, turn right on Burnt Hickory Road and proceed west 1.5 miles to Mount Cavalry Road. Turn left on Mount Cavalry Road and go south to the intersection with Dallas Hwy (GA Hwy 120). Turn left on Dallas Hwy and proceed 0.5 miles to the entrance on your right to the Cheatham Hill section of Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park. A short drive leads to a parking area and trail to the Illinois Monument. During the walk to the monument, you will pass the Confederate infantry trenches and artillery emplacements composing the "dead angle." The open field before you that is visible from the Illinois Monument marks the location of McCook's failed assault against the "dead angle." You will also see the remains of the hastily dug trenches Federal troops used to shelter themselves from the overwhelming Confederate fire.*

*Return to Dallas Hwy (GA Hwy 120) and turn left. Turn left on John Ward Road. From John Ward Road, turn left onto Cheatham Hill Road. After a short distance, turn into the Activity Area on your right. The field across the road from the Activity Area marks the staging area for Davis's and Newton's Divisions in preparation for their assault on Cheatham's Hill. Exit the Activity Area, turning right onto Cheatham Hill Road. Proceed south on Cheatham Hill Road 2 miles to the intersection of Powder Springs Road. Cross Powder Springs Road and park in the area adjacent to the Kolb House. Facing west from this position you will see the route of Hood's attack on Hooker and Schofield's position on June 22, 1864.*



Kennesaw Mountain from Stilesboro Road



Illinois Monument at Cheatham's Hill