

THE CHARGER

March 2014

504th Meeting

Vol. 35, #7

Tonight's Program:

The Battle of Kennesaw Mountain

The Battle of Kennesaw Mountain was a short but sanguinary struggle in Georgia in late June of 1864. On June 27, 1864, the Confederate Army of Tennessee stopped repeated assaults by Union soldiers commanded by William Tecumseh Sherman. The battle was a Confederate victory in 1864, temporarily slowing down Sherman's advance toward Atlanta. The brutal heat and fighting at Kennesaw Mountain were representative of the struggles which both commanders and common soldiers endured during 1864 as Federal forces placed a strangle hold on the Confederacy. Historian Dan Vermilya will discuss this battle as well as its meanings for generals and the enlisted men involved, placing the struggle for Kennesaw Mountain in the broader context of the American Civil War.



Tonight's Speaker:

Dan Vermilya



Dan Vermilya currently works for the National Park Service as a park ranger at Gettysburg National Military Park and Antietam National Battlefield. He is a graduate of Hillsdale College, where he studied history, and received his master's degree at John Carroll University, where he studied the American Civil War and the American Revolution. He was awarded the first annual Joseph L. Harsh Memorial Scholar Award by the Save Historic Antietam Foundation in 2012. He is currently writing a book on the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain for the History Press. It will be published in early 2014.

Date: **Wednesday, March 12, 2014**

Place: **Judson Manor
1890 E. 107th Street
Cleveland, Ohio**

Time: **Drinks 6 pm
Dinner 6:45 pm**

Reservations: **Please send an email to ccwrt1956@yahoo.com with your reservation, or call Dan Zeiser at (440) 449-9311 by 9 pm the Sunday before the meeting.**

Meal: **Entree, vegetable, salad, and dessert.**

**CLEVELAND
CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE
FOUNDED 1957**

President: **Jim Heflich** (216) 381-8833
Vice President: **Patrick Bray** (216) 407-7878
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1962 **Edward Downer**
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1960 **Howard Preston**
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1958 **George Farr Jr.**
1957 **Kenneth Grant**

President's Message

Vice President Patrick Bray is planning a very exciting September 2014 Field Trip to Middle Tennessee - where we will visit some combination of such famous battle sites as Stones River National Battlefield, Franklin, Spring Hill, and Nashville. These places will all be new to me - I cannot wait.

In the past five years I have gone on four of the Roundtable's Field Trips - only missing Richmond due to a work conflict. They have all been incredible experiences - Harpers Ferry, Winchester and the Shenandoah Valley, Petersburg to Appomattox, Forts Henry & Donelson, and this past fall, South Mountain and Antietam. Standing at the southern tip of Fort Defiance State Park below Cairo, IL, at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, was a transcendent experience never to be forgotten.

There is no substitute to walking the actual battlefields to make what you have read about come alive - and to enliven your subsequent readings. So I urge any Roundtable member who has not been on one of our Field Trips to come along to Tennessee this September. And it is a great way to really get to know your fellow Roundtable members - on the car-pooling drive, walking the battlefields, and over a beer at dinner.

Every guide we have hired has been stellar, the accommodations excellent, and the dining superb. And on this year's trip to Tennessee, Patrick is taking us back home to Franklin where he grew up - I expect exceptional meals at little-know Southern restaurants only he knows. Do not miss out on a grand experience.

Respectfully,
Jim Heflich
laureldoc@gmail.com

CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

2013-2014 SCHEDULE

September 11, 2013



*A Species of Legal Fiction:
The Wheeling
Conventions and the
Creation of West Virginia*

**Dr. David T.
Javersak**

October 9, 2013

*Slaves to Contradictions:
Patrick Cleburne's
Emancipation
Proposal*

Wilson R. Huhn



November 13, 2013

*Zouaves:
America's Forgotten
Soldiers*
Patrick Schroeder



December 11, 2013



*"It was a terribly grand
scene..."
The Slaughter Pen and
Prospect Hill
at Fredericksburg*

Kristopher White

January 8, 2014

*The Dick Crews Annual Debate
What Was the Most Important Battle
of the Civil War?*

Moderator: William F. B. Vodrey

February 12, 2014

*The U.S. Navy
and the
Naval Battles of
Charleston 1863*

Syd Overall



March 12, 2014

*The Battle of
Kennesaw
Mountain*

Dan Vermilya



April 9, 2014

*Materials and
Processes in the
Manufacture of Civil
War Small Arms*

John Harkness



May 14, 2014

*Soldiers and the Homefront:
A Northern Community
Confronts the Civil War*

Nicole Etcheson



The Battle of Kennesaw Mountain - A Synopsis

Fearing envelopment, Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston withdrew his army to a new defensive position astride Kennesaw Mountain, to the north and west of Marietta, Georgia. Johnston selected this position in order to protect his supply link to Atlanta, the Western & Atlantic Railroad. Prior to taking up this new line on June 19, Johnston had pioneers working through the night digging trenches and erecting fortifications, turning Kennesaw into a formidable earthen fortress. Having defeated Gen. John B. Hood troops at Kolb's Farm on the 22nd, Union commander William T. Sherman was convinced that Johnston had stretched his line too thin and, therefore, decided on a frontal attack on the Confederate bastion. After an intense artillery bombardment, Sherman sent his troops forward at 9AM on June 27. Determined Yankee assault troops came to within yards of the Confederate trenches, but were unable to break the Southern line and by 11:30 the attack had failed. Sherman, who later dubbed the battle as "the hardest fight of the campaign up to that date," lost roughly 3,000 men in the contest, including generals Charles Harker and Daniel McCook.

A Perfect Pandemonium The Battle of Kennesaw Mountain by John Fowler

Although twenty years had passed, Sam Watkins, a Confederate veteran, still vividly recalled the savage struggle for Cheatham's Hill, the climax of the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain and one of the bloodiest days of the Atlanta Campaign:

A solid line of blazing fire right from the muzzles of the Yankee guns . . . poured right into our very faces, singeing our hair and clothes, the hot blood of our dead and wounded spurting on us, the blinding smoke and stifling atmosphere filling our eyes and mouths, and the awful concussion [from the firing of nearby Rebel batteries] causing the blood to gush out of our noses and ears, and above all, the roar of battle, made it a perfect pandemonium. . . . When the Yankees fell back, and the firing ceased, I never saw so many broken down and exhausted men in my life. I was sick as a horse, and as wet with blood and sweat as I could be, and many of our men were vomiting with excessive fatigue, over-exhaustion, and sun stroke; our tongues were parched and cracked for water, and our faces blackened with powder and smoke, and our dead and wounded were piled indiscriminately in the trenches. There was not a single man in the company who was not wounded, or had holes shot through his hat and clothing.

Yet Watkins was just one actor in a drama that involved millions, and Kennesaw Mountain was but one battle in an epic struggle to decide the fate of two nations in the summer of 1864. That March, General Ulysses S. Grant assumed supreme command of Union armies and designed a strategy to overwhelm the weakened Confederacy with a series of simultaneous offensives. Grant's plan involved two bold thrusts. In the Eastern Theater, Grant and the Army of the Potomac (technically still commanded by Major General George Meade) would destroy Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and capture the Confederate capital at Richmond.

Meanwhile, in the Western Theater, Major General William Tecumseh Sherman's army group – consisting of the Army of the Cumberland under Major General George Thomas, the Army of the Tennessee under Major General James McPherson, and the Army of the Ohio under Major

General John Schofield – would crush General Joseph E. Johnston’s Army of the Tennessee and inflict as much damage as possible on the Confederacy’s resources. The upcoming 1864 presidential election added significance to the coming campaigns. If Lincoln lost – and there was a good chance he might – Peace Democrats proposed an armistice with the Confederacy. Although the armistice was no guarantee of Southern independence, it would stop the Federal advances and buy the beleaguered Republic time. Thus, the South’s last real hope of independence depended on stymieing the Union offensives of 1864.

The Atlanta Campaign opened in May when Sherman put his 100,000-man force in motion toward Dalton. Johnston would have only about 60,000 with whom to face the invaders during the course of the campaign. With such a disparity, he resorted to a Fabian strategy, always entrenching his army across Sherman’s path and forcing the Federals into either a frontal assault against well prepared field works or a flanking maneuver. Johnston was ever alert for an opportunity to strike at isolated units of the Federal army but was primarily concerned with keeping his army together as a cohesive fighting force and blocking Sherman’s thrust toward Atlanta.

Starting at Dalton, the pattern of the Federals flanking entrenched Confederates continued throughout May and into June in what one historian has described as a Red Clay Minuet. As the armies maneuvered across the dense piney woods and narrow country roads of north Georgia, they clashed in a series of inconclusive battles at places such as [Resaca](#), [New Hope Church](#), Pickett’s Mill, and Dallas.

By late May, unrelenting rain slowed the pace of the campaign as both forces slogged along muddy rut-ridden roads. Johnston continued to invite a frontal assault; Sherman, however, refused to take the bait, and the war of maneuver continued. By the night of June 18, the Yankees had driven the Confederates back to Kennesaw Mountain, the last significant high ground before the Chattahoochee River and Atlanta. Although only 700 feet at its highest point and just over two miles long, the twin peaks of Big Kennesaw and Little Kennesaw were steep, rugged, and perfectly suited for defense. From the mountain, Confederate entrenchments extended to the right and left in a six-mile arc to the northeast and south, protecting Johnston’s lifeline – the Western and Atlantic Railroad.

At first, Sherman intended to avoid a fight at Kennesaw and sent Schofield’s Army of the Ohio to find a route around the Confederate left flank. On the 21st, Schofield crossed Noyes Creek south of the Confederate lines. Johnston quickly shifted General John Bell Hood’s corps to meet the threat. Hood, however, on his own initiative, launched an attack on the 22nd against Schofield and Joseph Hooker’s Twentieth Corps from Thomas’s Army of the Cumberland near the farm of Peter Kolb. Hood was apparently trying to pinpoint the edge of the Union line and roll up the Union flank. Alerted to the possibility of attack from recently captured Rebels, Schofield and Hooker entrenched and waited. Rebel yells announced the advance of two Rebel divisions; however, intense artillery fire and marshy terrain frustrated the Confederates, ending the Battle of Kolb’s Farm.

After Hood’s attack, almost everyone expected Sherman to continue working around the Rebel left. Sherman, however, believed Johnston had spread his forces too thin to protect his left flank, thereby weakening his center along Kennesaw Mountain. Sherman planned to exploit Johnston’s

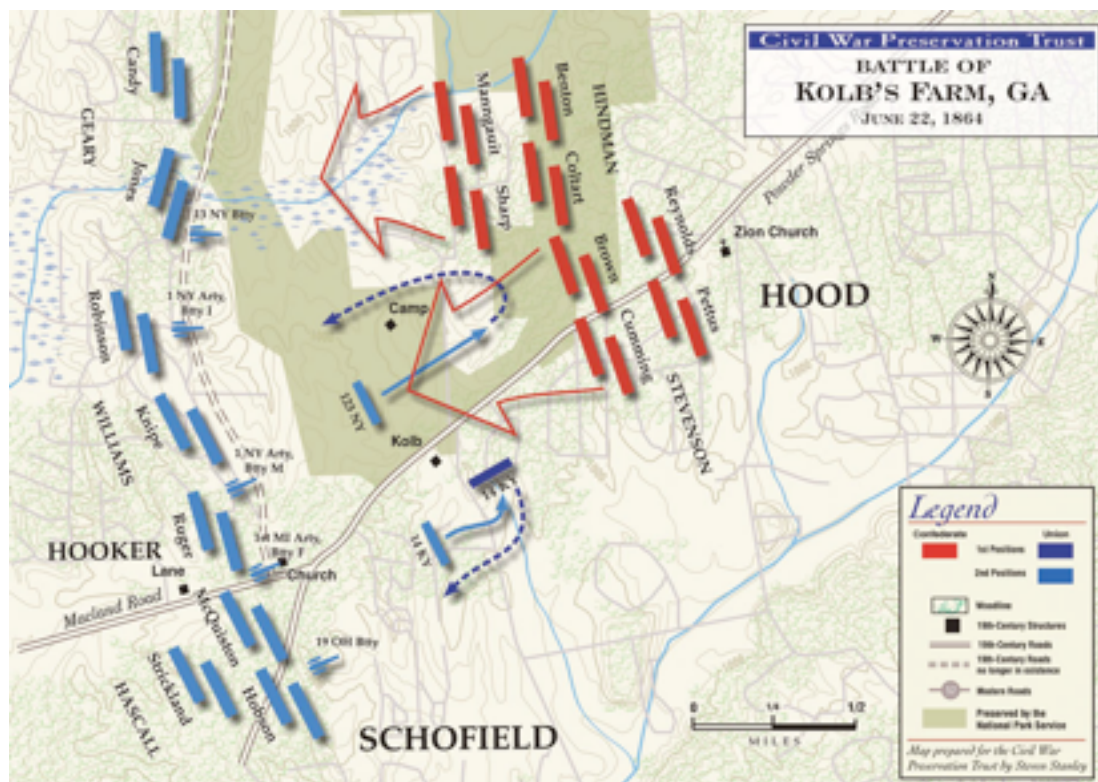
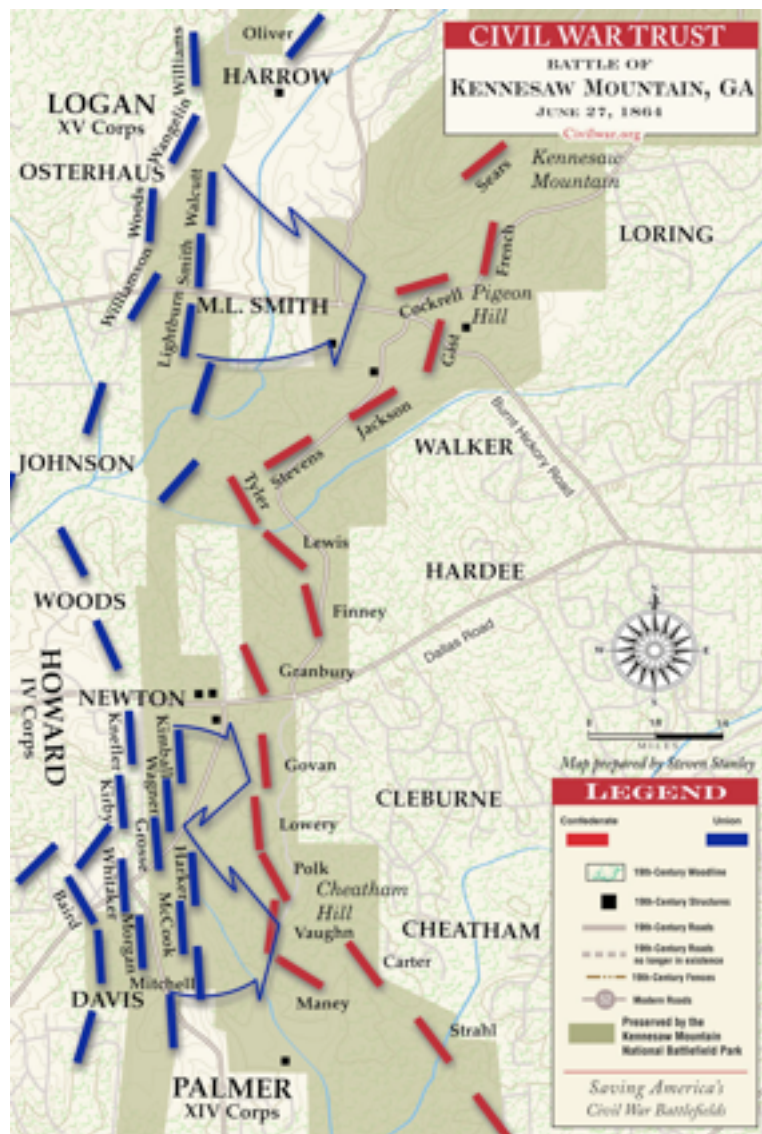
mistake with a frontal assault aimed at the Confederate center. While feints against both flanks would pin the Rebels and prevent them from reinforcing the center, General Thomas's Army of the Cumberland would attack the Rebel line just south of Kennesaw Mountain, piercing the center and shattering the Confederate army. A secondary attack by McPherson's Army of the Tennessee would support Thomas's effort and divert Confederate attention.

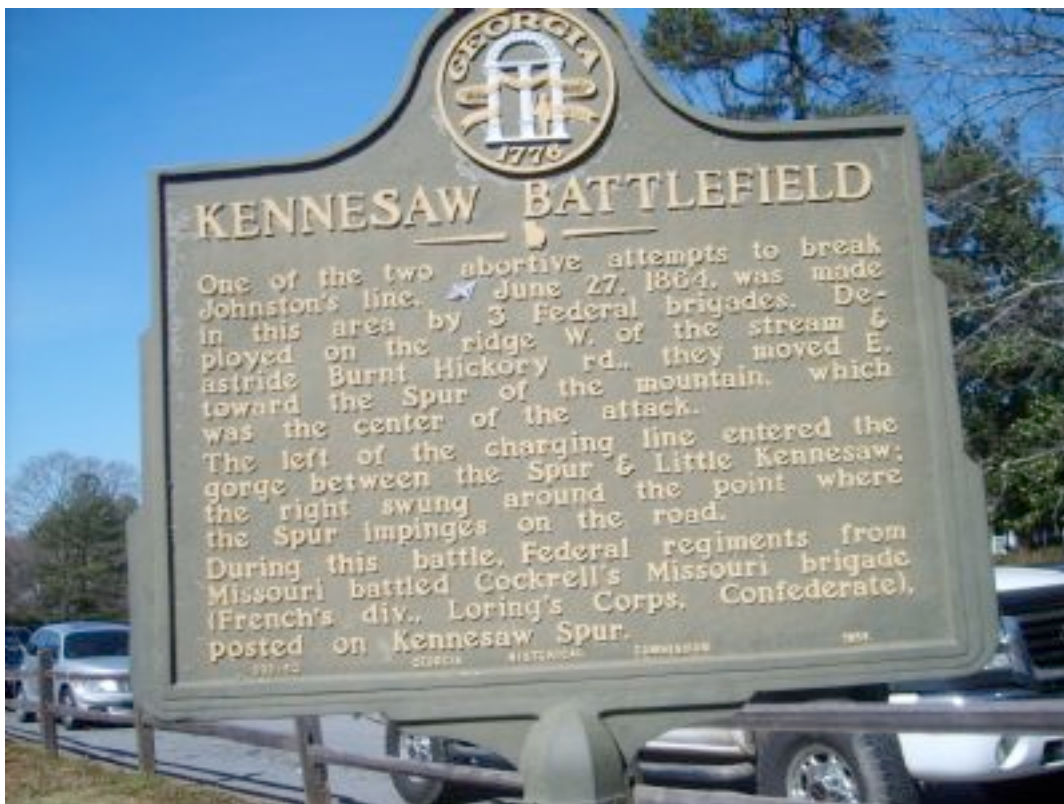
At 8 a.m. on the morning of July 27, a heavy Union cannonade heralded the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain. On the Union left, General McPherson launched a feint attack at Big Kennesaw, hoping to catch the Confederates by surprise. Instead, the rocky slope and heavy fire brushed aside the assault. At the same time, farther south along the spur of Little Kennesaw (today known as Pigeon Hill), rugged terrain, coupled with Confederate fire, stalled and then repulsed the secondary Federal assault led by Brigadier General Morgan L. Smith.

Meanwhile, south of Smith's position, the Federals launched their main assault. General Thomas had planned for two divisions to shatter the Confederate line near a salient on what is today known as Cheatham's Hill (named in honor of the Tennessee general whose men held the line). Brigadier General Jefferson C. Davis's division would strike the salient head on while Brigadier General John Newton's Division provided support to the left. Although the Union generals had planned to overwhelm the Confederate works quickly by forming dense regimental columns, such was not to be the case. As elsewhere on the battlefield, terrain, undergrowth, and Confederate fire caused command and control to collapse. Musketry decimated the compacted Yankee formation as it approached the Confederate entrenchments, and concentrated fire from previously concealed Rebel batteries sent torrents of canister ripping through their ranks. Despite this maelstrom, Union troops reached the Confederate trenches along Cheatham's Hill at a spot that will forever be known as the "Dead Angle" and engaged the defenders in savage hand-to-hand fighting. As senior officers were killed and casualties mounted, the exhausted Federals retreated to the edge of the hill, taking shelter in a defilade, digging in, and exchanging fire with the Rebels until nightfall. In less than half an hour, the Union attackers had lost nearly 1,800 men. Although Sherman wanted to press the attack, General Thomas's blunt assessment that "one or two more such assaults would use up this army" convinced him that further attempts to storm the Rebel works were doomed. The Battle of Kennesaw Mountain was over. It had cost Sherman about 3,000 casualties and the Confederates nearly 700.

For almost a week, both sides skirmished and waited while Union forces looked for a route around the Confederate lines. Sherman's men slipped away to surprise Johnston on July 1, only to find the Rebels blocking their path at Smyrna. Although a tactical defeat for the Union, the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain did not seriously disrupt the relentless Federal advance. While Sherman had thus far failed to destroy Johnston's army, strategically he still had the initiative, and, more importantly, he had the men, the materiel, and the will to continue pressing the Confederates. Only a miracle could save Atlanta and the Confederacy.

John D. Fowler is an Associate Professor of History at Kennesaw State University in Georgia, where he teaches courses in the Civil War, Old South, the Confederacy, and U.S. Military History. He is also the Director of the Center for the Study of the Civil War Era. His recent works include Mountaineers in Gray: The Story of the Nineteenth Tennessee Volunteer Infantry Regiment, C.S.A., published by the University of Tennessee Press in 2004, and The Confederate Experience: Essential Documents and Essays.





The Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, A Synopsis,
A Perfect Pandemonium, battle maps, and historical
marker photo taken from
www.civilwar.org/battlefields/kennesaw-mountain.html.



NEXT MONTH

Materials and Processes in the Manufacture of Civil War Small Arms

John Harkness