



Bullet'n Backstory

Joint Munitions Command

Volume 10, Issue 2

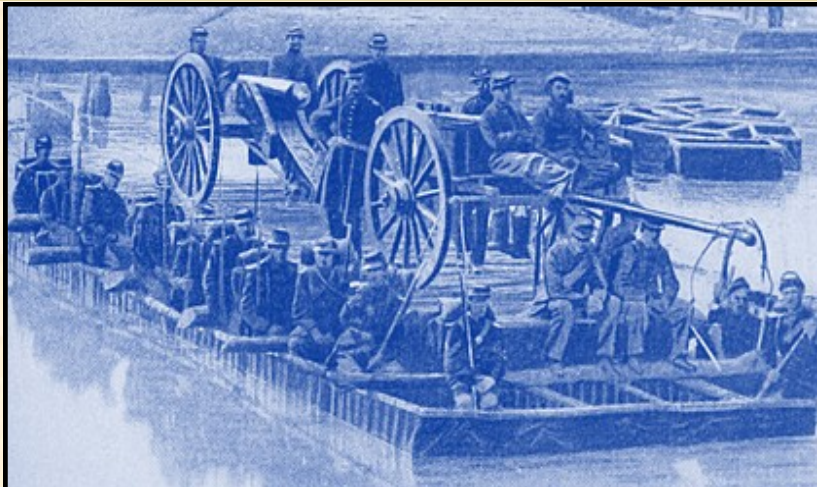
February 2022

History of the 84th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment: The Atlanta Campaign, Part 6

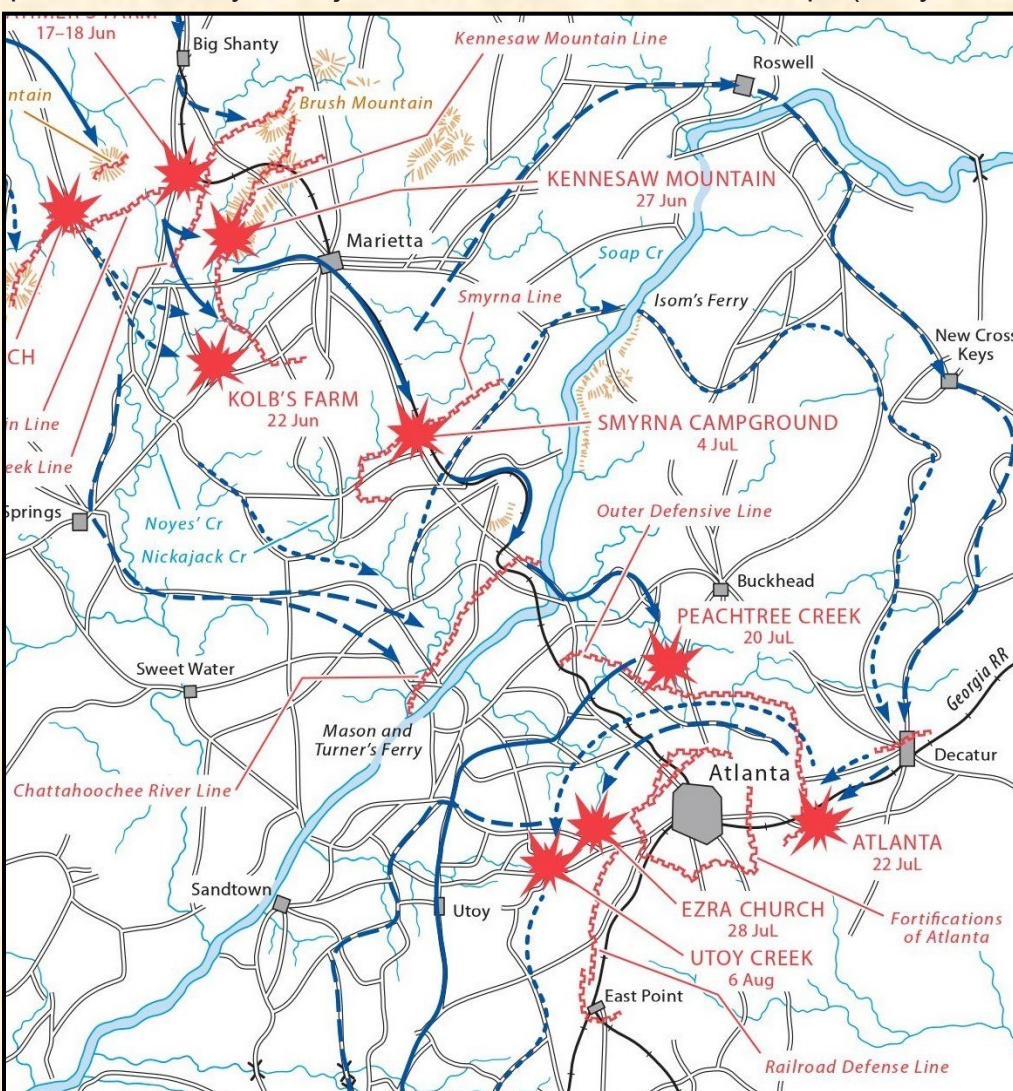
The Battle of Kennesaw Mountain (June 27, 1864), despite being a tactical loss for the Union, led Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston to withdraw his forces further. In a letter to his wife, Maj. Caleb Cox of the 84th Illinois wrote, "On the night of the 2d... the army evacuated their strong position... and early on the 3d we pushed after them, our division in the advance, and our brigade in advance of the division... About noon on the 4th our brigade... had to advance over an open field and the enemy poured shot and shell into us, but our skirmish line charged with a yell, captured the rifle pits and many prisoners. Our brigade lost about one hundred men in the attack." Despite these losses, Louis A. Simmons, also of the 84th Illinois, reported, "Though our Regiment, on this occasion, charged at least half a mile across an open field, part of the time in plain view of the enemy, strange to say not a single man was severely or seriously wounded." Cox also noted the strange success of the charge, both for the regiment and himself, writing, "A bullet struck me halfway between the knee and ankle, passed through my boot leg, pants, drawers, and glanced off my shin with no other injury than a slight bruise. I consider it a fortunate shot under the circumstances, for it seems almost a miracle that it did not break my leg." Simmons offered the simple explanation that Maj. Cox's boot, "being very hard and dry, broke the force of the ball," though he also acknowledged that this incident "was [Cox's] second narrow escape on the campaign."

Falling back from the Union advance, Confederate defenders moved east to a new line of defensive works along the west bank of the Chattahoochee River. This line of thirty-six earth-and-log forts connected by trenches, had been constructed during the previous two weeks by a combined force of convalescing soldiers and impressed slaves. This defensive line on the Chattahoochee River - the last remaining natural barrier between Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman's Union forces and Atlanta - became known as Johnston's River Line. Johnston believed he could defend this line for at least one month, if necessary. Upon observing the new Confederate position on July 5, Sherman agreed, declaring it, "the best line of field entrenchments I have ever seen." Wary of a direct assault on Johnston's position, Sherman ordered the bulk of his forces to entrench opposite the defenders, then immediately returned to his preferred tactic: attempting to outflank Johnston.

The first Union success along Johnston's River Line came while Confederate forces were still moving into position. On July 5, Maj. Gen. Oliver O. Howard's IV Corps (Army of the Cumberland), darted around the

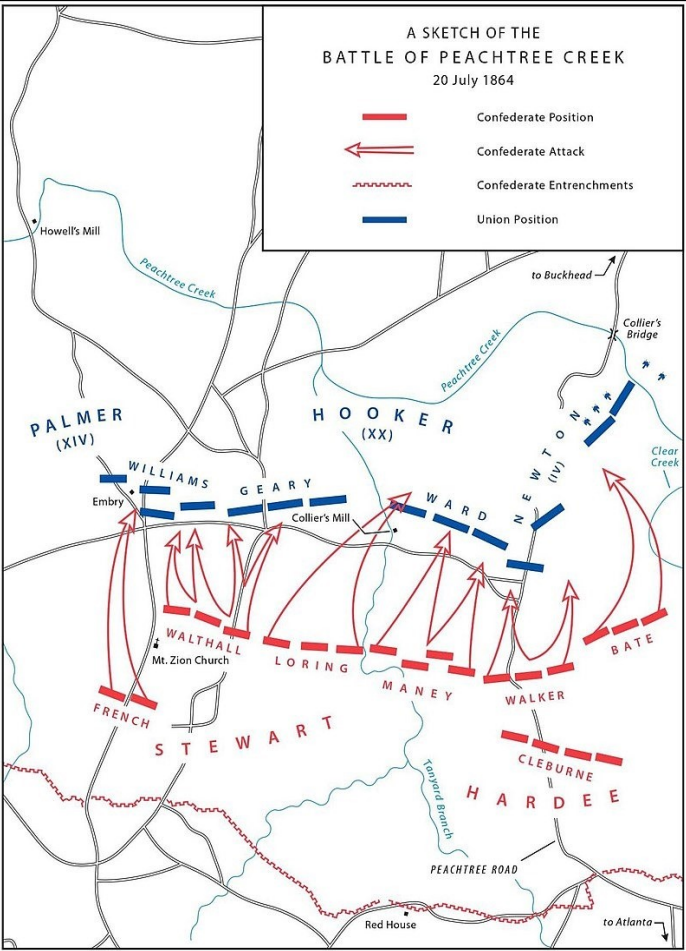


Union forces crossing the Chattahoochee River.



north end of the line to reach the river across from the mouth of Peachtree Creek. At this crossing, Brig. Gen. Thomas J. Wood's 3rd Division encountered a brigade of dismounted Confederate cavalry. Quickly overpowering the defenders, Wood seized the damaged pontoon bridge called Pace's Ferry, which allowed Union soldiers to establish positions on both sides of the river. According to Cox, "We are now [July 6] encamped on the North bank of the Chattahoochee river, and the Rebs on the South bank. From a ridge we can see the city of Atlanta very plain." Union successes along the river continued on July 8, when Brig. Gen. Kenner Garrard's 2nd Cavalry Division (Army of the Cumberland) and Maj. Gen. John M. Schofield's Army of the Ohio secured additional crossings near Soap (Sope) Creek and the town of Roswell. With the Union firmly established on the east side of the Chattahoochee River at three separate crossings, Johnston ordered his army on July 9 to abandon their position and establish a new line south of Peachtree Creek, just three miles north of Atlanta.

The Atlanta Campaign, Part 6, continued:

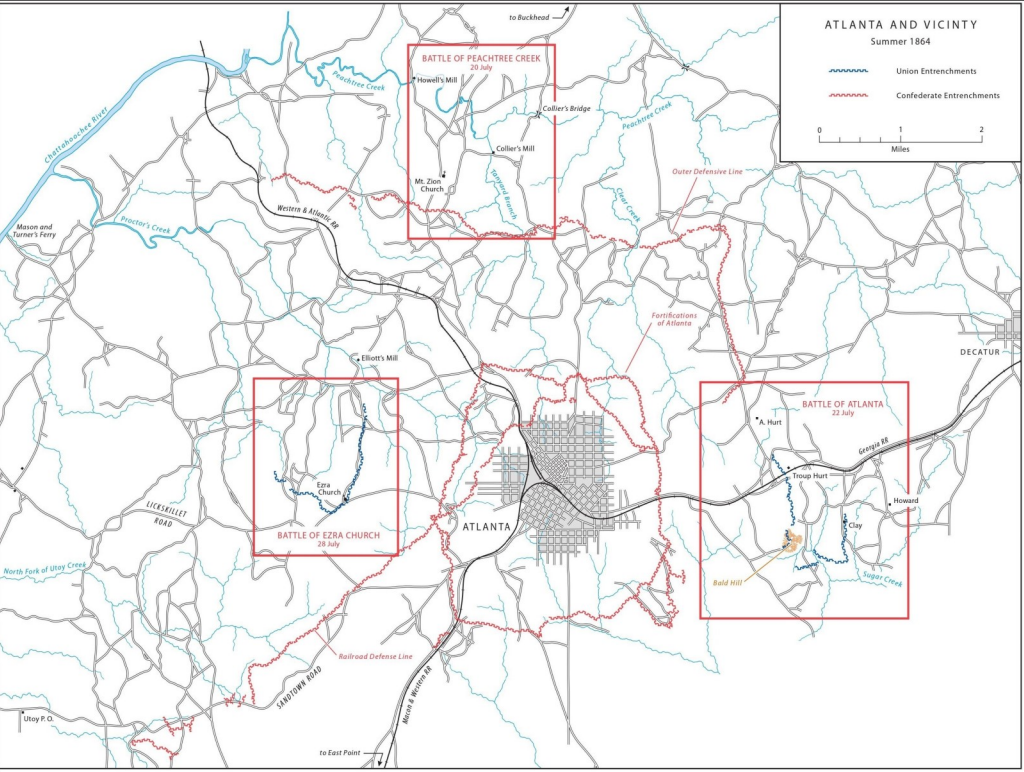


Frustrated by Johnston's conservative response to the Union advance, Confederate President Jefferson Davis sent Gen. Braxton Bragg to assess the situation. Bragg met with officials in Atlanta and Johnston's subordinates, then recommended that Davis replace the general. On July 17, Johnston was relieved of duty. The next day, Gen. John Bell Hood took command and planned an aggressive counter-attack upon learning that Sherman had split his forces, with Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas's Army of the Cumberland pushing south toward Atlanta, while Maj. Gen. John M. Schofield's Army of the Ohio and Maj. Gen. James B. McPherson's Army of the Tennessee moved on Decatur to threaten Atlanta from the northeast.

Hood hoped to counter Thomas on July 20, before he could cross Peachtree Creek. To that end, he sent the corps of Lt. Gen. William J. Hardee and Lt. Gen. Alexander P. Stewart north, with Hardee reserving Maj. Gen. Patrick R. Cleburne's Division to protect the east side of Atlanta. Thomas's forces prepared to defend the line at Peachtree Creek, with Maj. Gen. John M. Palmer's XIV Corps on the Union right, Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker's XX Corps in the center, and one division of IV Corps under Maj. Gen. John Newton on the left. Hood ordered a 1 p.m. attack, but miscommunication delayed the advance until nearly 4 p.m., when fighting erupted along the entire line. The Confederate right collapsed, and the left, though

initially successful, fell to a Union counterattack. Casualties numbered 1,750 for the Union, including McPherson, and 2,500 for the Confederacy. Hood had little choice but to withdraw to Atlanta and prepare for a final defense of The Gate City.

(To be continued.) P.T.F.



JMC Historical Document Collection

The JMC Public and Congressional Affairs Office (PCA) maintains the JMC Archives, which collects and maintains historically significant records, including: emails, manuscripts, letters, reports, studies, images, videos, films, photographs, oral history interviews, briefings, SOPs, policies, decision papers, memoranda, statistics, newspapers, newsletters, brochures, maps, blue prints, drawings, artifacts, and more. Such records are pertinent to the Army's institutional knowledge of active and predecessor installations, the ammunition industrial base, and JMC missions. JMC regularly uses these materials to research command history, and to answer research queries. When JMC workers leave positions or make physical moves, it is vital that their records be assessed before disposal. If employees are uncertain about the historical value of materials, the best policy is to make the items available to Command Historian Keri Pleasant (keri.j.pleasant.civ@mail.mil) or Archivist Paul Ferguson (paul.t.ferguson14.civ@mail.mil) in Room 661.

This Month in Military History

February 5, 1864: The Prusso-Danish War (Second Schleswig War) ends when the Danish army is forced to withdraw from the Danevirke, a series of 1,200-year-old fortifications, thus paving the way for annexation by Prussia. Denmark would never again control the Danevirke.

February 12, 1429: As part of the Hundred Years War, a combined force of French and Scottish soldiers attempt to capture a supply train on its way to aid the English siege of Orléans. The English convoy decisively defeats the attackers, thanks to the leadership of Sir John Fastolf, whom Shakespeare would later immortalize as the character Falstaff.

February 19, 1797: In the Peace of Tolentino, Pope Pius VI cedes the Papal territories of Avignon, Venaissin, Ferrara, Bologna, and the Romagna to France.

February 26, 1915: At Malancourt, France, German soldiers unveil the first use of the flamethrower, the expanded use of which greatly contributed to the frightful carnage of World War I.