The Road Past Kennesaw: The 1864 Atlanta Campaign

When Union Gen. Joseph E. Johnston moved his army north of Atlanta on May 7, two days later he approached Gen. John Bell Hood’s position on a river ridge called Rocky Face. Sherman sent a column to attack Johnston’s position on a steep ridge, ever alert to Union movements, side-swinging back east, following a bend in the Kennesaw Mountains, outside the town of Kennesaw. Johnston moved his entrenchments and retreated to Adairsville, Georgia, before recapturing Kennesaw Mountain. A Confederate earthwork was a formidable line of defense. Astride Burnt Hickory Road three miles to the south of Atlanta, Johnston held out three weeks, until Johnston fell back by June 19. By June 15, Johnston had pulled back to a position by Confederate forces in a mountain spur today named Pigeon Hill—sheets of paper torn into strips and tied to liquid-gasoline-soaked cotton were shot down. Some advanced to close-range rifle fire. From Little Kennesaw and Pigeon Hill the Union troops fell back. The Union line held out, but Union troops did not advance on Johnston’s position. Johnston’s forces retreated to Atlanta this situation was repeated as Johnston moved his army north of Atlanta on May 7, two days later he approached Gen. John Bell Hood’s position on a river ridge called Rocky Face. Sherman sent a column to attack Johnston’s position on a steep ridge, ever alert to Union movements, side-swinging back east, following a bend in the Kennesaw Mountains, outside the town of Kennesaw. Johnston moved his entrenchments and retreated to Adairsville, Georgia, before recapturing Kennesaw Mountain. A Confederate earthwork was a formidable line of defense. Astride Burnt Hickory Road three miles to the south of Atlanta, Johnston held out three weeks, until Johnston fell back by June 19. By June 15, Johnston had pulled back to a position by Confederate forces in a mountain spur today named Pigeon Hill—sheets of paper torn into strips and tied to liquid-gasoline-soaked cotton were shot down. Some advanced to close-range rifle fire. From Little Kennesaw and Pigeon Hill the Union troops fell back. The Union line held out, but Union troops did not advance on Johnston’s position. Johnston’s forces retreated to Atlanta. The Atlanta Campaign

Kennesaw Mountain

The Campaign Begins

Sherman had set his sights on Atlanta on May 7. Two days later he approached Gen. John Bell Hood’s position on a river ridge called Rocky Face. Sherman sent a column to attack Johnston’s position on a steep ridge, ever alert to Union movements, side-swinging back east, following a bend in the Kennesaw Mountains, outside the town of Kennesaw. Johnston moved his entrenchments and retreated to Adairsville, Georgia, before recapturing Kennesaw Mountain. A Confederate earthwork was a formidable line of defense. Astride Burnt Hickory Road three miles to the south of Atlanta, Johnston held out three weeks, until Johnston fell back by June 15. By June 15, Johnston had pulled back to a position by Confederate forces in a mountain spur today named Pigeon Hill—sheets of paper torn into strips and tied to liquid-gasoline-soaked cotton were shot down. Some advanced to close-range rifle fire. From Little Kennesaw and Pigeon Hill the Union troops fell back. The Union line held out, but Union troops did not advance on Johnston’s position. Johnston’s forces retreated to Atlanta. The Atlanta Campaign

The Atlanta Campaign

The war-making capacity of the Confederate 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. 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, Georgia, to Selma, Alabama.

Even more importantly, Atlanta was a vital Confederate rail junction. Four railroads met there, linking the southern Atlantic coast with the western Confederacy. The Western & Atlantic, upon which both sides depended for supplies, ran north 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 Charlotte, 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 week 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 rolling countryside around the Kennesaw Mountain battlefield was settled by whites in the 1830s on land taken from the Cherokee by the U.S. government. The battle of Kennesaw Mountain took place on June 27, 1864, at the epicenter of Atlanta’s defense against Sherman’s armies. The battlefield is now a National Park, and the park has been restored to its historic appearance.

**Your Visit to the Battlefield**

Begin your visit at the visitor center. Here you will find information, a short orientation film, exhibits, and park staff on duty to answer questions and help you plan your visit. The visitor center is open daily, except Thanksgiving and Christmas Day, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. To contact the visitor center, call 770-427-4686 ext. 0 before your visit.

**Ilinois Monument**

The Illinois Monument is the largest monument on the battlefield. Dedicated in 1914, it honors the Illinois soldiers who fought during the battle. The monument is the centerpiece of a larger site called the Confederate cemetery, which includes the graves of over 1,400 soldiers. The Illinois Monument is located on an elevated hill, with a museum tour for the visually impaired. There is limited water availability at the visitor center parking lot.

**Georgia Monument**

The Georgia Monument honors the Georgia soldiers who fought at Kennesaw Mountain. It is located on an elevated hill, with a museum tour for the visually impaired. There is limited water availability at the visitor center parking lot.

**Your Trail**

Begin your hike at the visitor center. Here you will find information, a short orientation film, exhibits, and park staff on duty to answer questions and help you plan your visit. The visitor center is open daily, except Thanksgiving and Christmas Day, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. To contact the visitor center, call 770-427-4686 ext. 0 before your visit.

**Illinois Monument**

The Illinois Monument is the largest monument on the battlefield. Dedicated in 1914, it honors the Illinois soldiers who fought during the battle. The monument is the centerpiece of a larger site called the Confederate cemetery, which includes the graves of over 1,400 soldiers. The Illinois Monument is located on an elevated hill, with a museum tour for the visually impaired. There is limited water availability at the visitor center parking lot.

**Georgia Monument**

The Georgia Monument honors the Georgia soldiers who fought at Kennesaw Mountain. It is located on an elevated hill, with a museum tour for the visually impaired. There is limited water availability at the visitor center parking lot.