

This week's article is written by author Robert D. Jenkins, Sr. who has recently completed a book about the Battle of Peach Tree Creek.

Please join us Friday, July 17th at 6:30 pm at the Bobby Jones Golf Club to celebrate the 145th Anniversary of the Battle of Peach Tree Creek. Have a cocktail overlooking the battlefield, and listen while Mr. Jenkins discusses his recent findings about troop movements during the battle.

To register please visit our website, www.BuckheadHeritage.com/events. Registration fee for Members is \$5, for Non-members \$10.

The Battle of Peach Tree Creek

The First Nail in the Coffin of Atlanta

by Robert D. Jenkins, Sr. ©

The morning of Wednesday, July 20th, 1864, broke warm, promising another sultry summer day. It would spawn the first offensive action for the new Southern Commander, John Bell Hood and his gray forces as he took over the defense of Atlanta for the Confederate States of America in the fourth summer of the war. What began as a golden opportunity to repel Northern General William Tecumseh Sherman and his blue legions from the gates of the Gate City, as Atlanta has been called, became a day of missed chances, broken dreams, and for a number of the Rebel leaders' soldiers, a grave.

The Battle of Peach Tree Creek marked the beginning of the end for the Confederacy, for it turned the page from the patient defense displayed by General Joseph E. Johnston to the bold offense called upon by his replacement, General John Bell Hood. Until this point in The Georgia Campaign, the Southern Army had fought primarily in the defensive, from behind earthworks, forcing Sherman to either assault fortified lines, or go around them in flanking moves. At Peach Tree Creek, the roles would be reversed for the first time, as Confederates charged Union lines.

Peach Tree Creek is important because it is the last planned battle for Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston who was so popular among his men, but who was held in such contempt by his President in Richmond. Peach Tree Creek is important because it is the first of the new Southern Commander John Bell Hood's many offensive exploits as he attempted both to impose his bold will on the rebel army and to repel Sherman's legions from Georgia through aggressive and hard offensive tactics. Peach Tree Creek offers a clue to what was in store for these Confederates under Hood's leadership. It was the first of many bloody contests that so decimated the Southern Confederacy that she would, by the following Spring, be brought to her knees. From the wooded ridges and ravines along Peach Tree Creek's southern shores lie the untold stories of a desperate struggle which littered the countryside with the dead and dying. Today's landmarks like Collier Mill, Tanyard Creek Park, Bobby Jones Golf Club, and Cardiac Hill which dot the upscale neighborhoods of Atlanta's Buckhead Community, once were the sites of some of the Civil War's bloodiest fighting.

The Battle of Peach Tree Creek is important because it was the beginning of the end for the Deep South and the Confederacy. Peach Tree Creek would be the first in a series of defeats and set-backs from which the South would not recover. Before Peach Tree Creek, there remained some semblance of hope for victory and Southern Independence. After Peach Tree



Creek and the defeats at Decatur and Ezra Church which quickly followed, there could be no more hope of a military win by the Confederacy. After Peach Tree Creek, and its companion battles for Atlanta, the clear hearing Southerner could hear the death throes of the Confederacy.

Peach Tree Creek was the first of three battles in eight days where Hood led the Confederates to desperate, but unsuccessful attempts to repel the Union Armies encircling Atlanta. Hood's aggressive plan to sweep a portion of the Northern invaders into the creek and Chattahoochee River beyond and force the Yankees to retreat, would demonstrate good skill in its planning, but, it would display a failure to grasp the logistical requirements needed to make it a success, an inability to account for and adjust to changes in circumstances during the attack, a break-down in the chain of command, and a piecemeal and mixed effort in its execution, all common threads in each of Hood's future battles. Peach Tree Creek started the South on its downward spiral from which it would never recover. It was the first nail in the coffin of Atlanta and the Confederacy.

This photo shows some of the graves from the Battle of Peach Tree Creek, taken along Collier Road facing north from near the bridge crossing over the railroad. Collier Mill is hidden among the trees in the distant left part of the picture. This photo depicts the scene of the Confederate breakthrough where a Brigade of Mississippians led by General W. S. Featherston with some 1,230 men fought desperately and, at times, hand-to-hand with some 5,000 Yankees of Ward's Division before the devastated Mississippians were finally compelled to withdraw. Over 200 Mississippians and 100 Northern troops were killed while another 500 from each side were wounded in the space of only a few hundred yards during three hours of some of the most intense fighting that the North American Continent has ever witnessed. Featherston lost 679 men, including one regiment, the 31st Mississippi, which saw only 34 out of 215 men come out of the bloody contest unscathed, while Ward's casualties reached 557. The fight began a little after 4 p.m. and lasted until sundown, and the carnage which resulted reminded many veterans of the scene at Gettysburg after three days of fighting.