

The battles for Buckhead: From Nancy Creek to Peach Tree Creek in the Battle for Atlanta

Posted By [admin](#) On May 6, 2010 @ 8:29 pm In [Brookhaven Community](#), [Buckhead Community](#), [Sandy Springs Commentary](#) | [No Comments](#)

By Robert D. Jenkins, Sr.



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The color painting above is of the Battle of Nancy Creek and is part of the collection of the Atlanta History Center.

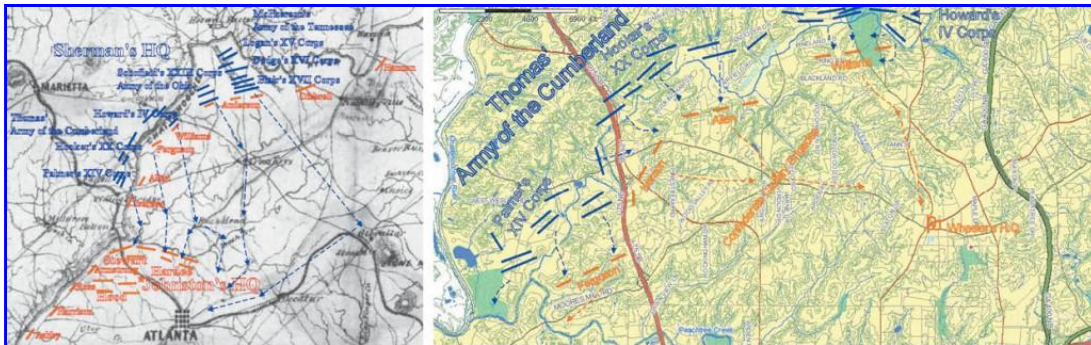
After four years of bloody struggle, the American Civil War was reaching critical mass. As the two sides carried on their fight, they put to the test the South's limited resources versus the North's will to continue to wage war into the crucible. For both sides, time was running out. The battles of the long summer of 1864 would decide the outcome of the war.

Many believe the Civil War was decided during the third week of July 1864.

Confederate President Jefferson Davis replaced Gen. Joseph E. Johnston with the young and brash Gen. John Bell Hood. As Hood learned of his promotion on the evening of Sunday, July 17, northern Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman prepared for his advance on Atlanta. With some 100,000 troops at his disposal, the federal commander began an encirclement of the Gate City, as Atlanta was known, from the north and east.

One girl who witnessed the scene at the Dexter Niles House, where Hood took over for the popular Johnston, would later write: "The clear-hearing statesmen of the Southland heard the doom bells ringing the death knell of the Southern Confederacy."

Part of Sherman's force, the Army of the Cumberland commanded by Gen. George Thomas, was tasked with advancing on Atlanta from the north while the other two federal armies approached the city from the east and northeast. With Howard's IV Corps at Powers' Ferry, Hooker's XX Corps at Paces' Ferry, and Palmer's XIV Corps below it at Vinings, Thomas' Army of the Cumberland of nearly 60,000 men, or about 20,000 in each corps, was posted along a six-mile front.



[2]

The map at left depicts Gen William Sherman's troop advance on Atlanta, which took place July 17-20, 1864. The blue represents Union troops and the red Confederate troops. The map at right shows the advance over Nancy Creek on July 18, 1864, by the Union Army of the Cumberland under the command of Gen. George Thomas. Both maps were created by Robert D. Jenkins, Sr., Civil War historian and the author of this article for Reporter Newspapers, as well as two books on Civil War battles in the Buckhead area of Atlanta.

The terrain north and west of Buckhead was a series of wooded ridges and deep ravines riddled with significant creeks and tangled vines. This part of the Georgia wilderness had been sparsely settled prior to the war.

Confederate Cavalry Commander Gen. Joseph Wheeler, with just four brigades at his disposal, or roughly 1,000 to 2,000 men per federal column, was charged with defending the area.

Ferguson's Brigade had the task of checking the advance of Palmer's XIV Corps which headed toward Moore's Mill and the mouth of Nancy Creek. Williams' Kentucky Brigade covered the Power's Ferry Road and Howard's IV Corps advance on Buckhead from the north. Iverson's Georgians were assigned the role of covering the crossings of Nancy Creek by Hooker's XX Corps from the west along Paces Ferry Road, while Allen's Alabama Brigade covered the space between Iverson and Williams.

The XIV Corps forced a crossing over Nancy Creek at Kyle's Bridge along what today is West Paces Ferry Road just north of Westminster High School. There, the federals tangled with Iverson's Georgians and Ferguson's Mississippi horsemen and they

also tangled with the rough Georgia terrain and with each other. Caught in a bend in the creek during July 18th, the Yankees struggled for most of the day before realizing that they were fighting each other. According to John Ferguson of the 10th Illinois, "the creek forked without being noticed by either of the two companies and after advancing some distance, Company D was fired into from the left," by another company from the Illinois Regiment.

Leaving the Yankees to fight themselves, Ferguson's Mississippi troopers were sent north to help Allen's Alabama and Mississippi horse soldiers repel Hooker's XX Corps which had effected a crossing over Nancy Creek north of Kyle's Bridge and near today's Governor's Mansion. While Howard's IV Corps advanced on Buckhead and Palmer's XIV Corps continued to move down the eastern side of the Chattahoochee River, Hooker's XX Corps got the task of advancing through the jungle-like country in between these two points.

When Howard's IV Corps reached Nancy Creek they found the bridge partially burned and Williams' Kentucky cavalrymen waiting for them. Forcing a crossing at today's Chastain Park, "at 8:30 the rebels opened on us with one piece of artillery, and our battery then went to the front, began work, and the rebel piece ceased firing," remembered veteran W. H. Newlin of the 73rd Illinois' Regiment.

First Lieutenant Ralsa C. Rice of the 125th Ohio recalled that "It was obvious that a determined resistance would be made, the place chosen being one of great natural strength. The road, after crossing the creek, climbed a hill, on the crest of which they had placed a battery of two guns in a substantial earthwork."

With heavy timber flanking both sides and Nancy Creek in its front, the Confederate position was most formidable. According to Gen. Howard, "On this account they were able to hold us in check some little time." After placing a couple of batteries in position to respond, the rebels gave way.

"We extinguished the fire, saved a portion of the bridge, and reconstructed it," recorded Howard. Captain Charles T. Clark of the 125th Ohio described the action as a "running fight for six miles to Buck Head." "During the rest of the march [to Buckhead] ... the rebel cavalry made quite stubborn resistance," added Howard.

At Sardis Methodist Church, the oldest church in the region, the Rebels made another effort to repel the Yankee advance. The church was located at the intersection of Powers Ferry Road and Roswell Road, where it remains today. At this intersection, the Federals made a right turn onto Roswell Road and proceeded south to Buckhead.

"At Buck Head they rallied in and tried to hold their works," remembered Captain Clark, "but were expelled before they had time to fairly form, and our own line advanced half a mile further and halted near Wheeler's late headquarters."

One Federal soldier explained, "Skirmishing at the front continued. We pressed on, and at two PM reached a place designated 'Buckhead,' a cross-roads, 6 ½ miles from Atlanta. One store-house and probably 2 or 3 other buildings, including dwelling houses, were all the town contained," remembered the veteran. "We met only slight resistance to our advance during the afternoon, the enemy yielding and falling back to within 6 miles of Atlanta."

Palmer's advance toward Moore's Mill, a span of less than 3 miles would take three days to complete, while Howard and Hooker would likewise require three days to advance just 6 miles each in the Georgia wilderness before they secured a foothold on the south bank of Peach Tree Creek, the last natural barrier between them and Atlanta.

This delay would afford Hood time to make the transition into command of the Rebel Army, and give him time to launch his first attack on the Yankee Army, which would come the next day, July 20, at the Battle of Peach Tree Creek. That contest at several points very nearly succeeded in throwing the federal forces north of Peach Tree Creek and proved to Sherman and his legions that the Confederacy was not going to give up Atlanta without a fight.

Robert D. Jenkins Sr. has written two books on the Civil War, "The Battles for Buckhead" and "The Battle of Moore's Mill," and lectures on the topic. Jenkins is an attorney in Dalton.

Civil War lecture

Robert D. Jenkins, Sr. is lecturing on "The Battle of Moore's Mill" on May 14th at Bobby Jones Golf Club. Cocktails and appetizers at 6:15 p.m. followed by the lecture at 7 p.m. The cost is \$5 for members of the Buckhead Heritage and \$10 for non members. Sign up at www.buckheadheritage.com.

Jenkins also will be putting on a "living history" demonstration at Tanyard Creek Park on Saturday at 10 a.m. It is open to the general public without admission charge.

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