

## **Episode 194: The Battle of Kennesaw Mountain**

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When Ulysses Grant was named general in chief of the Union army in March 1864, he devised a strategy built around making multiple offensive threats against the Confederacy. Attacking in different areas would prevent the Confederates from reinforcing each other and Grant hoped that this combined with his superior numbers would eventually force the grey army to crack.

While Grant and George Meade fought it out with Robert E. Lee in the Overland Campaign to Richmond and Petersburg, Union forces under Franz Sigel would attack in the Shenandoah Valley and Nathaniel Banks would lead troops against Mobile, Alabama. The major complement to Grant and Meade, however, would be the movement of Union troops under William T. Sherman from Chattanooga, Tennessee to Atlanta, Georgia.

While Sherman's main goal was the destruction of the Confederate army opposing him, commanded by Joseph E. Johnston, capturing Atlanta would also serve the Union cause. The city had become a center for manufacturing and destroying these production capabilities would cripple the Confederate military. In addition, once past Atlanta the rest of the Deep South would be open to Sherman.

Starting in early May, Sherman's 100,000 men steadily pushed Johnston's forces back toward Atlanta. After each engagement, Johnston would pull back and refortify in the difficult mountainous terrain. By mid-June, Johnston had retreated 100 miles and had retrenched in the area around Kennesaw Mountain, about 25 miles northwest of Atlanta. The Confederates now had a nearly impassable barrier in Sherman's path, as the steep mountains prevented Sherman

from getting on the Confederate flank. The only choice for the Union commander was to make a frontal assault.

The attack began at 8:00 am on June 27, 1864 with 200 Union guns opening up to try and soften the Confederate position. A half hour later, Union soldiers moved against the entrenched Confederates. Predictably, the bloody fighting did not result in success for Sherman. By late morning, he called off the fight, having suffered 3,000 casualties to only 1,000 on the Southern side. The Confederates could claim a rare victory over Sherman and it would be the Union commander's last attempt at a frontal assault during the war.

However, there was some light in the outcome for the Union. Toward the end of the fighting, some Union units under the command of Major General John Schofield found a clear path around the left flank of the Confederates. Five days after the battle, Sherman would send cavalry troops and part of his army around Johnston's left flank, forcing him to give up his fortress-like position at Kennesaw Mountain.

Six days later, on July 8, Sherman outflanked Johnston again near Smyrna, Georgia forcing the Confederates to retreat ever closer to Atlanta. This was enough for President Jefferson Davis. On July 17, he replaced Johnston with John Bell Hood. Hood was already a Confederate hero, having served admirably under Robert E. Lee in Virginia, losing the use of an arm at Gettysburg and then having a leg amputated after Chickamauga. As the summer continued to heat up, Atlanta would soon be under siege.