

## **The Battle of Alleghany Mountain** **<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>**

One of the most important transportation routes in western Virginia was the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike. This road traversed some of the most rugged and remote areas in the eastern United States. Surveyed by Claudius Crozet in 1823, the road was completed in 1847 after 16 years of construction. Completion of the turnpike provided access from Richmond all the way to the Ohio River.

From the earliest days of the Civil War, Confederate and Union troops had struggled to gain control of the road. Beginning in July, Confederate troops had occupied Alleghany Mountain along the turnpike. At the base of the mountain, most of the Confederates occupied Camp Bartow while others were at the peak of the mountain in Camp Baldwin. Camp Baldwin, also known as Camp Alleghany, was at 4,400 feet the highest elevation camp for either side during the war. In the distance, roughly 10 miles away, they could see the smoke from the fires of the Union troops who were entrenched along the turnpike at the top of Cheat Mountain.

In September, troops under the direction of Robert E. Lee had tried unsuccessfully to dislodge Union troops at Cheat Mountain. Lee was subsequently recalled to Richmond and Colonel Edward Johnson took over the Confederate command. On October 3, Union forces attacked Camp Bartow and were themselves repulsed. Casualties were fairly light on each side.

On November 22, 1861, with the weather worsening, Johnson pulled all his troops up to Camp Baldwin for the winter. His report to Richmond a week later read:

"Day before yesterday our forces at Camp Bartow withdrew eastward, part stopping here on top of the Alleghany mountains, and the rest taking up quarters in Crab Bottom and Monterey. It is snowing; the wind is blowing a hurricane; it is as cold as the North Pole; and of all the dreary and desolate places on earth, this is entitled to be the palm. Yet, the boys are in spirits, their loud halloo, jocund laughter, and occasionally the enlivening sound of the fiddle bravely throwing off Dixie to the echo of these hills, break on my ears above the flapping of tents and the whistling of the tempest."

In early December, Brigadier General Robert Milroy, in Union command at Cheat Mountain, resolved to take the Confederate position. Success would mean control of the turnpike and unfettered access to the Shenandoah Valley for the northern forces. The advance began on December 12 under the direct command of Brigadier General Joseph Reynolds. At the base of Alleghany Mountain, Reynolds split his forces, with about 1,000 men continuing up the turnpike while about the same number worked their way up the mountain on a side road.

Shortly after 4 am, Confederate pickets detected the Union forces coming up the turnpike and their shots warned the rest of the Southerners who quickly got into defensive position. At daylight, firing became widespread. The Union troops coming up the side road also failed to surprise the Confederates and were beaten back. By early afternoon, the firing had stopped and the Union troops sullenly made their way back to Cheat Mountain. Federal losses totaled 137, with 20 dead, 107 wounded and 10 missing. On the Confederate side, losses were similar, with 20 killed, 98 wounded and 28 missing for a total of 146.

Neither the Union camp on Cheat Mountain or the Confederate on Alleghany Mountain would ever be taken by the enemy. In April of 1862, both camps would be abandoned as fighting shifted eastward to the Shenandoah Valley.

