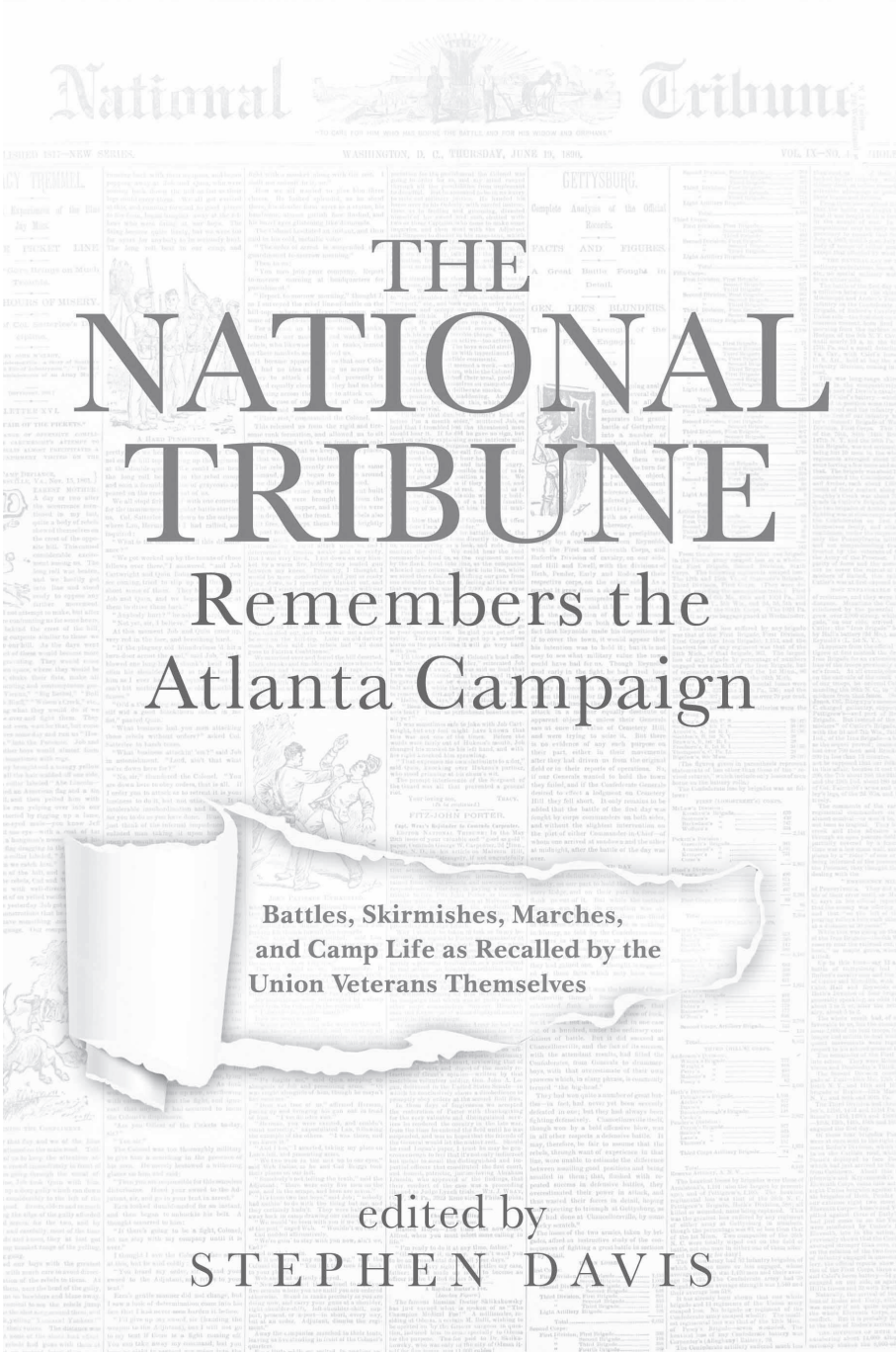

THE NATIONAL TRIBUNE

Remembers the Atlanta Campaign

Battles, Skirmishes, Marches, and Camp Life as Recalled by the Union Veterans Themselves

edited by

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Unedited Excerpt

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Dedicated to my sweet loving wife Billie

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Introduction

> Still, everyone who writes truthfully of what fell under his immediate observation at least adds something to history, and is therefore to be given due credit for what he contributes, so there is something to be gained even in thrashing over the straw.

So wrote First Lieutenant A. J. Gleason in an article published in the *National Tribune* of February 11, 1897. Writing about a couple of Northern comrades' recollections of the battle of Pickett's Mill, Georgia, fought on May 27, 1864, Gleason mildly chided two authors for getting the names of the battle wrong (both called it New Hope Church, which was fought two days earlier). But his point was a good one: "everyone who writes truthfully of what fell under his immediate observation at least adds something to history."[1] Lieutenant Gleason could not have better described the contents of the *National Tribune* or hinted at the importance of its articles to today's students and scholars of the Civil War.

Modern historian Richard A. Sauers proclaimed the *National Tribune* as "the premier newspaper published for Union veterans of the Civil War and their families." George E. Lemon, editor and proprietor, who was himself a veteran of the 125th New York Infantry, founded the newspaper in October 1877 in Washington, D.C., as a monthly, eight-page paper.[2] A year's subscription was modestly priced at $1 with Lemon urging readers to hand each copy around to other veterans whom he sought to build his subscriber base.[3]

1 A. J. Gleason, "Confusion as to Names: New Hope Church, Pickett's Mill, Dallas" (February 11, 1897), 3.

2 Richard A. Sauers, "Introduction" in Sauers, ed., *The National Tribune Civil War Index: A Guide to the Weekly Newspaper Dedicated to Civil War Veterans, 1877-1943*, 3 vols. (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2018), 1:vii.

3 "History of the Bounty Bill," "Twain's Tales," "Introductory," and "Terms to Subscribers" (October 1877), vol. 1, no. 1; James Marten, *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union & Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 147.

Its first issue demonstrated the purposes of Lemon's newspaper. The first page declared it to be "a monthly journal devoted to the interests of the soldiers and sailors of the late war, and all pensioners of the United States." Accordingly, volume 1, no. 1 carried long articles about Union soldiers' pensions. A Washington attorney, Lemon specialized in helping Union veterans secure their rightful compensation. Since *National Tribune* intended to educate as well as entertain, page two reprinted a story by Mark Twain that had appeared in the *Atlantic* that month.

"Is the Country Too Poor to Pay Its Soldiers?" headlined the paper's second issue in November 1877, reemphasizing Lemon's primary purpose with the *National Tribune*. The paper also offered such diversions as a poem entitled "An April Fool," an article on Abraham Lincoln as a duelist, and a subscription appeal to members of the Grand Army of the Republic, the principal postwar organization of Union veterans. As a further inducement, the editor announced in February 1878 that he was reducing his subscription rate from a dollar to fifty cents. "Soldiers stand by the *National Tribune*," he implored, "give us a circulation of 250,000, and we will put through the Pension and Bounty Bills, and will effect the needed reforms in the Pension Office. Do not delay. Decide fairly, frankly, and at once."[4]

Lemon was not above stoking wartime animus. The front page of his issue for February 1878 spotlighted the horrors of Andersonville, the notorious Confederate prison camp in southwest Georgia, complete with graphic woodcuts of emaciated inmates. One was of Private John Breinig, showing his frightened countenance, his unkempt beard and hair, and his skin-and-bones body lying helplessly in bed. Its caption read, "admitted April 18, 1864. Improved a little for two weeks, then gradually failed and died on the 12th instant." An accompanying article explained how the pictures had been obtained from the U.S. Committee on the Conduct of the War. In it was printed a letter, sent on behalf of the committee chairman, Ohio senator Benjamin F. Wade, harrowingly describing the condition of Breinig and other Andersonville prisoners. "No one, from these pictures, can form a true estimate of their condition then," it asserted; "not one in ten was able to stand alone; some of them so covered and eaten by vermin that they nearly resembled cases of small-pox and so emaciated that they were *really* living skeletons."[5]

As Lemon suggested in February 1879, the paper began catching on with the public. "Friends," the editor explained, "we are sorry to inform you we cannot

4 "Is the Country Too Poor to Pay Its Soldiers?", "An April Fool," "President Lincoln as a Duelist," "Grand Army of the Republic" (November 1877), vol. 1, no. 2; "Reduction of Subscription" and "Soldiers Stand by the *National Tribune*" (February 1878).

5 "Andersonville" and "Photographs of Prisoners of War, Showing Their Condition When They Reached the Union Lines" (February 1878), vol. 1, no. 5.

supply back numbers. We have had such a rush and demand for them, that we exhausted a large extra edition. You can have the January number, 1879, for free."[6]

The breakthrough came when the *National Tribune* began printing articles on war history. In January 1878, Lemon reprinted from the *Rochester* (NY) *Democrat and Chronicle* a veteran's article, "Reminiscences of Gettysburg." A few months later, it reprinted an additional piece from the *Harrisburg Telegraph* about Northern enlistments of 1861. A year later, in March 1879, the paper excerpted a letter received from G. N. Bachelor of Fitchburg, Michigan. It contained several anecdotes that he remembered from the war, including his service under Brigadier General Lovell Rousseau at Perryville. Then followed in April a piece entitled "An Iowa Mother Who Had Eleven Sons in the U.S. Army—Their Record" (three had died in the war). Two months later, the June issue featured "A Memory of the War: The Amputation of Gen. Rice's Limb" at Kennesaw Mountain.[7]

This is where we begin—the first article pertaining to the Atlanta Campaign, one of a hundred or so articles reprinted in this collection. We are not placing them in the order in which they appeared in the *National Tribune*; instead, we have arranged the articles in a chronological order of the campaign, adding editorial background or commentary.

Some three and a half years after its founding, the *National Tribune* was doing so well that on August 20, 1881, George Lemon turned his paper from a monthly into a weekly. Then, a few years later in 1884, Lemon hired John McElroy, another Union veteran, as managing editor. McElroy formerly edited the *Toledo Blade* and had written a sensational memoir of his wartime imprisonment, *Andersonville* (1879), which was said several decades later to have sold 600,000 copies. After Lemon's death in December 1896, McElroy bought the paper, serving as owner and editor until his death in October 1929. W. L. Mattocks then became editor.[8]

6 "Back Numbers" (February 1879), vol. 2, no. 2.

7 "Reminiscences of Gettysburg" (January 1878), vol. 1, no. 4; "The Truth of History" (April 1878), vol. 1, No. 7; "Soldier's Anecdotes" (March 1879), vol. 2, no. 3: "An Iowa Mother Who Had Eleven Sons in the U.S. Army—Their Records" (April 1879), vol. 2, no. 4; "A Memory of the War: The Amputation of Gen. Rice's Limb" (June 1879), vol. 2, no. 6.

8 Sauers, "Introduction," vii-viii, xi; John McElroy, *Andersonville: A Story of Rebel Military Prisons, Fifteen Months a Guest of the So-Called Southern Confederacy* (Toledo: D. R. Locke, 1879); "For Commander-in-Chief" (December 23, 1909), from McElroy's 600,000 copies. McElroy's prison expose was reprinted by the *National Tribune*'s Washington publishing company in 1899 (William Marvel, *Andersonville: The Last Depot* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994], 319). More recent editions are Roy Meredith, ed., *This Was Andersonville* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1957) and Philip Van Doren Stern, ed., *Andersonville: A Story of Rebel Military Prisons* (Greenwich CT: Fawcett Publications, 1962).

Students of the *National Tribune* have generally not commented on McElroy's prodigious volume of writing for the newspaper, which contributed respectable scholarship on a wide range of topics from campaign histories to generals' biographies. Of his more than two dozen series in the *National Tribune*, those devoted to the last year of the war (118 articles), to General Grant (101), and to "leading Civil War battles" (98) were the longest.

Moreover, McElroy was remarkably consistent in his production of copy for the newspaper. In two years, spring 1897-spring 1899, only two issues appeared without an article bearing his name. Then he took a few years off, for there was no McElroy piece in the *National Tribune* from April 20, 1899 to November 17, 1904. Another huge spurt of work came from November 24, 1904 to July 18, 1912; only one week's issue appeared without a McElroy contribution. (For more than half of the year 1909, McElroy had *two* articles in each weekly issue.) Sometimes a few months would pass between the conclusion of one series and the start of another. Half of the paper's issues in 1921 carried no piece by the editor; another 33-week dearth occurred from November 6, 1924 to June 18, 1925.

When tallied, more than 1,000 articles appeared with McElroy's name in the *National Tribune* from March 11, 1897 to October 24, 1929. During this time, the paper put out 1,291 weekly issues, 87 percent of which during that 32 1/2 years span included an article by McElroy. Just as remarkably, he kept writing to the very end. At the time of his death on October 12, 1929, at the age of 83, he had just started yet another series of articles, "Most Critical Period of Civil War Days"; the first installment appeared on October 17 and the second a week later.

Over the decades, the *Tribune* published long series of articles by such famous Union officers as Maj. Gen. Oliver O. Howard. Just as notable, the paper published, in two dozen installments, excerpts from Confederate Gen. John Bell Hood's memoir *Advance and Retreat* (1880), Feb.-Aug. 1906. The *Tribune*'s printing company published books as well: not only McElroy's *The Struggle for Missouri* (1913) but works by other writers. For example, after the paper presented J. P. Cannon's "Inside Rebeldom: Life of a Private in the Confederate Army" in forty articles (Oct. 1897-Apr. 1898, it published Cannon's memoir of service in the 27th Alabama.[9]

The *National Tribune*'s last issue appeared on December 30, 1943. Sadly, in its last years the paper published more veterans' obituaries than it did expository

9 Allan Nevins, James I. Robertson, Jr., and Bell I., eds., *Civil War Books: A Critical Bibliography*, 2 vols. (Baton Rouge: 1967, 1969), 1:67. The paper announced it would publish excerpts of Confederates memoirs, including Hood's : "A good deal of attention will be paid to the stories of the other side. . . . [[It is] very entertaining, often, to hear the story of the fellow who was shooting at you" (October 26, 1905) 8.

articles on war history. Between its first article relating to the Atlanta Campaign, on the amputation of General Rice's leg (June 1879) to June 25, 1942 (a Northern shell exploding in Atlanta), the newspaper ran at least a thousand articles or letters on the contest between Sherman, Johnston and Hood. For reasons we explain in our commentary, we have selected 118 of them. Broadly speaking, they are almost entirely written by veterans, mostly Federals but occasionally by Confederates. As expository pieces on events that the writers witnessed or participated in, some of the best were printed in a regular section under the title, "Fighting Them Over. What Our Veterans Have to Say About Their Old Campaigns," which began in March 1883. Many articles are also conversational exchanges among ex-soldiers recalling the same incident; some allowed good-natured point-counterpoint as veterans read each other's recollections, remembered something different, and wrote the newspaper to "correct the record."

The *National Tribune* obviously fed on readers' written contributions. A lively weekly section entitled "Picket Shots" offered summaries of the many letters received from veterans, usually commenting on something they had read in the newspaper. In 1905, the newspaper began running a weekly series, "Recitals and Reminiscences. Stories Eminently Worth Telling of Experiences and Adventures in the Great National Struggle." It featured rather long articles (two to three long columns on page three) submitted by veterans with a good tale to tell.

Given the enormous number of articles about the Atlanta Campaign that appeared in the *National Tribune*, we have limited our selections to the period from 1877 to 1911. It was in the latter year (April 27) that the newspaper ceased to print Civil War-related articles on its front page. About that time, editor McElroy informed readers that he was changing the look of the paper to keep pace with the times. New sections such as "Woman and the Home" and "Farm and Garden" appeared. As a final demonstration of the aging of the *National Tribune*, its third and last editor, W. L. Mattocks, was not even a veteran of the Civil War but of the Spanish-American War.[10]

In our annotated commentary of our contributors' writings, we have not been uniform. For some tactical, more technical narratives, we have interspersed bracketed, italicized insertions. For others, we have posted italicized commentary either at the beginning or end of the *National Tribune* articles. (It is sort of how John McElroy edited his pieces.) As a final note, we do not correct archaic spellings or misspellings, especially of Georgia place-names (e.g., Chattahoochie).

With this we express hope that present and future scholars will more readily turn to the pages of this underappreciated historical resource.

10 Sauers, "Introduction," xi.

1

Sherman Establishes His Supply System

John McElroy, "The Atlanta Campaign: Mighty Preparations" (January 28, 1909, p. 2)

Most of the 27 articles written by John McElroy appeared weekly from January 21 to July 29, 1909. This second chapter is subtitled, "Sherman Strips His Army for Swift, Hard Work—Johnston Gathers His Army Behind the Granite Walls of Rocky Face Ridge." Here we have excerpted its first part regarding how Sherman assembled a logistical system to feed and supply his army's men and animals once the campaign began in north Georgia.

The Question of Supplies

Gen. Sherman's first and most intense thought was given to the all-important question of supplies. An active army of 100,000 men meant, with its necessary attendants and adjuncts, at least 125,000 men, besides a myriad of animals, all ravenous devourers of rations and forage. Chattanooga had to become an immense maw into which must flow constantly and without interruption a great Mississippi River of bread, meat, oats, corn and hay. All this had to be brought from Louisville, nearly 400 miles away. Between Nashville, 151 miles away, and Chattanooga ran a single-track railroad, never of the best and which had suffered immeasurably from destruction by the contending armies and the guerrillas. It ran a large portion of the way thru a very hilly country, with deep cuts, large fills and long, high bridges, all of which invited trouble to the working of the line and offered tempting opportunities to enemies. The first work was to put a great force of men at work under the able superintendence of Col. [*William W.*] Wright to put the roadbed between Nashville and Chattanooga in as good condition as possible to facilitate the rapid and uninterrupted movement of trains. This was followed by the erection of block houses at every bridge, culvert and tunnel. This protected them from dashes of the guerrillas. These block houses were something unique in the history of war, and were evolved, like many other valuable features of the science of warfare which were developed by the keenly active American soldiers, from the very necessity of the situation. The Army of the Cumberland was the only army in history that

operated continuously along a line of railroad, and had to depend wholly upon the road for its supplies. The construction of these protections for the bridges had been commenced by Gen. [sic*: Col. George P.*] Buell's Engineers, who had constructed stockades in the shape of a Greek Cross, with each bastion the size of a Sibley tent. Each bastion was therefore made a home for a squad, with the Sibley tent for the roof. These did very well to resist infantry attacks, but a single piece of artillery would convert them into a slaughter pen by dropping in a shell. Col. W. [*William*] E. Merrill, Chief Engineer of the Army of the Cumberland, improved upon these by designing a rectangular block house strong enough to resist light artillery, and the [*1st*] Michigan Engineers, under Col. [*William P.*] Innes, did excellent work in erecting them. They were built up with heavy logs from below the surface of the ground, and roofed with a layer of logs laid side by side and covered with earth. On top of this was a roof of shingles or boards when they could be procured. Above this roof rose the tower, which afforded an excellent lookout, but was not strong enough to resist artillery, and was vacated if the attacking force had guns. Inside of the block house were the bunks and living rooms of the garrisons, with water tanks and cellars for supplies. These fortifications did magnificent service, and repeatedly beat off determined attacks of heavy forces. They were, in fact, the anchors of the army's safety, since they secured the maintenance of its cracker line. Many brilliant defenses by these little garrisons are on record, and one particularly, by 30 men of the 115th Ohio, commanded by Lieut. H. [*Henry*] H. Glosser, held for three weeks the block house protecting Overall's Creek, five miles north of Murfreesboro. It was repeatedly attacked by Bate's Division of infantry, with some cavalry and three 12-pound guns. These latter fired 72 shots at it, but the garrison maintained itself for the two critical weeks during Hood's siege of Nashville, and saved not only their block house, but the railroad bridge. Gen. Hood ruefully admits the strength of these defenses in his "Memoirs." After he had captured Dalton, in the Fall of 1864, he attempted to march thru Mill Creek Gap, but was stopped by the men in one of these block houses placed there to defend the bridge over Mill Creek. Hood's artillery cannonaded it savagely, but the plucky garrison held out, one of Hood's staff officers was severely wounded while trying to demonstrate how it could be taken, and Hood at last had to march 20 miles to get around it.

The railroad from Louisville to Nashville was helped out in transporting supplies by steamboats coming up the Cumberland River. They also came up the Tennessee River as far as Johnsonville, 30 miles from Nashville, from which their supplies were sent forward by rail to Nashville. From Nashville to Chattanooga, however, all the supplies had to come over the single track railroad referred to.

Other Demands Upon the Road

Not only had the 125,000 men and 35,000 animals gathered at Chattanooga to be supplied, but a large portion of the Armies of the Tennessee, Cumberland and Ohio operating near the railroad and the citizens of the country. The base of the Army of the Ohio was at Cincinnati, and a railroad ran from that city to Nicholasville, 18 miles beyond Lexington. From there to Knoxville, Tenn., is 250 miles over great mountain ranges and country of extreme ruggedness, with great mountain torrents, all unbridged, and the worst possible roads. Therefore, a great deal of the supplies needed by that portion of the Army of the Ohio in East Tennessee had to be sent up the river from Chattanooga to Knoxville and distributed there. Not only had the daily wants of this great host of men and animals to be provided for, but a stock sufficient for 30 days had to be accumulated in order to provide against any of the very likely interruptions of the railroad by the attacks of the enemy or, what was even more dreaded, the destruction of bridges and culverts by the severe storms of Winter.

General Sherman's able staff speedily worked out a system by which 135 carloads a day, each of 10 tons, should be delivered in Chattanooga. For this service 100 locomotives were secured and 1,000 cars, and every locomotive and car kept running night and day. The people of the country were denied the use of the road, the troops were required to march instead of riding on the cars, and immense herds of beef cattle were driven over the mountains. Sherman records with grim humor that in order to supply himself with engines and cars his men laid hands on everything that came within reach, and he made his reach very long. Establishing a car ferry at Louisville, he was enabled to catch trains from the Northern roads, and it was very amusing to see afterwards away down in Georgia cars and locomotives labeled Pittsburg & Fort Wayne, Delaware & Lackawanna, Baltimore & Ohio, and so on. He expressed some curiosity as to how the Northern railroads got their property back and accounted to the other railroads for its use.

McElroy pays appropriate attention to Sherman's masterful effort to keep his army supplied—the practice of logistics. A telling instance is the general's calculation that to build his supply base at Chattanooga he needed 130 train cars, each carrying ten tons, unloaded daily (Marlin G. Kime, "Sherman's Gordian Knot: Logistical Problems in the Atlanta Campaign," Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 1 [Spring 1986], 105). One further example is Sherman's attention to blockhouses as protection for railroad bridges against Rebel cavalry raids. Before his campaign began, 50 of these little forts were built on the Nashville & Chattanooga Railroad. Each was to be garrisoned by 20 to 25 men, supplied with food, water, and fuel to hold out until help arrived. As*

*mentioned by McElroy, Union Lieutenant H. H. Glosser wrote on December 18, 1864, that he had been "hemmed in for thirteen days" by Confederates who had repeatedly called upon him to surrender but who finally gave up and rode off (*The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), Series I, vol. 45, part 1, page 633, hereafter cited as* OR. *All references are to Series 1 unless otherwise noted.).*

Colonel Merrill describes his system of block houses in "Block-houses for Railroad Defense in the Department of the Cumberland" (Robert Hunter, ed., Sketches of War History 1861-1865: Papers Prepared for the Ohio Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States 1880-1890, *6 vols. [Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1890], 3:389-421*).

*Hood in his memoirs acknowledges that Major Kinloch Falconer of his staff was severely wounded in the fight at the Mill Creek Gap blockhouse in mid-October 1864 (*Advance and Retreat, *262), but McElroy is incorrect stating that the blockhouse held out; it surrendered to Confederates in Hood's march into north Georgia, October 13 (Richard McMurry,* John Bell Hood and the War for Southern Independence *[Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982], 161).*

Finally, in his Memoirs*, Sherman admits during his Atlanta campaign that he "was amused to see, away down in Georgia, cars marked 'Pittsburg & Fort Wayne,' 'Delaware & Lackawanna,' 'Baltimore & Ohio,' and indeed with the names of almost every railroad north of the Ohio River" (*Memoirs of General William T. Sherman. Written by Himself. Planning the Great Campaigns of 1864 *(February 11, 1897), 2:12).*

*General Sherman commends Colonel Wright in his campaign report: "Col. W. W. Wright, who has charge of the construction and repairs, is not only a most skillful, but a wonderfully ingenious, industrious, and zealous officer, and I can hardly do him justice" (*OR *38, pt. 1, 83).*

2

Thomas Discovers Snake Creek Gap

F. Phillips, "Snake Creek Gap: Gen. Thomas's Proposition to Take the Army of the Cumberland and Attack Johnston's"

(June 30, 1904, p. 3)

During the winter of 1863-64, Johnston strengthened his army's position around Dalton. To the west of town ran a tall north-south ridge called Rocky Face; along it, and running east into Crow Valley north of town, Confederate infantry was deployed for the attack that Johnston desired. All were well supported by artillery, with cavalry pickets out front and on the flanks. The main cut through Rocky Face was Mill Creek Gap, also called Buzzard Roost. Through it ran the Western & Atlantic Railroad and the main road to Chattanooga. About three and a half miles south of Mill Creek was Dug Gap; in several days of skirmishing there in late February, the Federals nearly broke through the Confederate lines before the Southerners frantically called for reinforcements.

From this encounter, Union Maj. Gen. George Thomas deduced that there were likely other gaps. He was right; the Northerners soon learned of Snake Creek Gap, five miles south of Dug Gap, affording a passageway through the steep ridge well south of the Rebel line.

Thomas then proposed to Sherman that while McPherson and Schofield held Johnston's attention with demonstrations against his Rocky Face line, Thomas would march his large army through the undefended gap. Once through, he could get into the rear of Johnston's army, and either engage it in battle, or cow it into a hasty retreat before he cut the Rebels' supply line, the Western & Atlantic Railroad to Atlanta. Sherman said no, preferring to send Maj. Gen. James B. McPherson's Army of the Tennessee. "Cump" Sherman genuinely liked McPherson, and had a higher regard for his army (which he had previously commanded) than Thomas's, which he generally thought moved too slowly.

Here a veteran learns of the story from Donn Piatt's General George H. Thomas *(1893)—an illustration of how readers of the* National Tribune *were keeping up with the developing literature.*

EDITOR NATIONAL TRIBUNE. In reading Donn Piatt's Life of Gen. George H. Thomas, I came across the statement that Gen. Thomas offered to take

his army (the army of the Cumberland), numbering 60,000 effectives, and march through Snake Creek Gap, while the balance of the army, under Gen. Sherman, continued to make demonstrations in front of Rocky Face Ridge; Thomas by marching through the Gap would cut off Gen. Johnston's connection with his depots at Resaca and force him to give battle, or else to retreat toward the rear through a broken and barren country, where it would be very difficult to march or to maintain an army.

Col. Piatt states that when this plan was submitted to Sherman by Thomas he declined to let Thomas take the Army of the Cumberland, but, instead, after two or three days' delay, sent Gen. McPherson with 20,000 men through the Gap (Snake Creek), and that as he was not strong enough to fight Gen. Johnston's army he only hastened the falling back of the Confederate army from Rocky Face Ridge, when Johnston found that the Union army was getting too near his line of retreat.

Do any of the men who were there know whether such an offer was made by Thomas and declined by Sherman?

Again, is it certain that if the Army of the Cumberland had been sent on any such errand, they would have been able to defeat the rebel army themselves?

There must be many men still living who can give a good account of this proposed move.

Col. Piatt says that if the offer of Thomas had been accepted, in all probability there would have been no Atlanta Campaign, for the Confederate Army would have been beaten right there at Dalton by Thomas as it was afterward at Nashville.

I have not read Piatt's book before and he makes some rather strong statements as to the conduct of officers in the West in '63 and '64.

We have learned through the National Tribune what regiment it was that raised the first flag on Lookout Mountain at the time of the battle, and what part of the army captured those four guns at Resaca; also what battery it was that killed Polk. Now let us find out, if we can, why Gen. Sherman would not let Gen. Thomas make the move he wanted to at Rocky Face Ridge in May, 1864.—F. PHILLIPS, No. 770 Holton Street, Milwaukee, Wis.

3

Sherman, McPherson, and Snake Creek Gap, May 8-10

"Memoirs of General William T. Sherman. Written by Himself. Planning the Great Campaigns of 1864"

(February 11, 1897, pp. 1-2)

When the campaign opened in early May, Sherman stuck with his plan: Thomas and Schofield launching demonstrations against the Rebel line, May 8-9, while McPherson's Army of the Tennessee stealthily marched through Snake Creek Gap, heading east for the Western & Atlantic in Johnston's rear. If he could interpose his infantry on the railroad, Johnston's supply line would be blocked, and the Confederates would either have to retreat or attack McPherson. Sherman's plan worked well—at first. Johnston had left the gap virtually unguarded; on May 9, McPherson's troops marched through it and toward the railroad. But then, fearing a Confederate counterstrike, he halted his column and ordered it back into the gap (Stephen Davis, Texas Brigadier to the Fall of Atlanta: John Bell Hood *[Macon: Mercer University Press, 2019], 123).*

Sherman was disappointed, to say the least, as he expressed in his Memoirs*, which were published in 1875, a year after Johnston's* Narrative of Military Operations*, and five years before the posthumous publication in 1880 of John Bell Hood's* Advance and Retreat. *The* National Tribune *printed excerpts of Hood's memoir in its pages from February 22 to August 9, 1906. Editor McElroy apparently chose not to reprint portions of Johnston's' book in his newspaper.*

The National Tribune *published a long section of Sherman's* Memoirs *in 98 parts, April 12, 1896 to February 24, 1898. The portion pertaining to the Atlanta Campaign consisted of parts 44 to 51, from the advance on Dalton to the Federal occupation of Atlanta (February 11-April 1, 1897).*

Here, from the February 11, 1897, issue we read of Sherman's chagrin over McPherson at Snake Creek Gap.

. . . on the 9th McPherson's head of column entered and passed through Snake Creek, perfectly undefended, and accomplished a complete surprise to the enemy. At its farther *debouche* he met a cavalry brigade, easily driven, which retreated hastily north toward Dalton, artillery was to his rear and within a few miles of his

railroad. I got a short note from McPherson that day (written at 2 p.m., when he was within a mile and a half of the railroad, above and near Resaca), and we all felt jubilant. I renewed orders to Thomas and Schofield to be ready for the instant pursuit of what I expected to be a broken and disordered army, forced to retreat by roads to the east of Resaca, which were known to be very rough and impracticable.

That night I received further notice from McPherson that he had found Resaca too strong for a surprise; that in consequence he had fallen back three miles to the mouth of Snake Creek Gap, and was there fortified. I wrote to him the next day the following letter, copies of which are in my letter book; but his to me were mere notes in pencil, not retained:

> GENERAL: I received by courier (in the night) yours of 5 and 6:30 p.m. of yesterday.
>
> You now have your 23,000 men, and Gen. Hooker is in close support, so that you can hold all of Jos. Johnston's army in check should he abandon Dalton. He cannot afford to abandon Dalton, for he has fixed it up on purpose to receive us, and he observes that we are close at hand, waiting for him to quit. He cannot afford a detachment strong enough to fight you, as his army will not admit of it.
>
> Strengthen your position; fight anything that comes, and threaten the safety of the railroad all the time. But to tell the truth, I would rather the enemy would stay in Dalton two more days, when he may find in his rear a larger party than he expects in an open field. At all events, we can then choose our own ground, and he will be forced to move out of his works. I do not intend to put a column into Buzzard Roost Gap at present.
>
> See that you are in heavy communication with me, and with all Headquarters. After to-day the supplies will be at Ringgold.

M'PHERSON HAD STARTLED JOHNSTON

in his fancied security, but had not done the full measure of his work. He had in hand 23,000 of the best men of the army, and would have walked into Resaca, then held only by a small brigade, or he could have placed his whole force astride the railroad above Resaca, and there have easily withstood the attack of all of Johnston's army, with the knowledge that Thomas and Schofield were on his heels. Had he done so, I am certain that Johnston would not have ventured to attack him in position, but would have retreated eastward by Spring Place, and we should have captured half his army and all his artillery and wagons at the beginning of the campaign.

Such an opportunity does not occur twice in a single life; but at the critical moment McPherson seems to have been a little cautious. Still, he was perfectly

justified by his orders, and fell back and assumed an unassailable defensive position in Sugar Valley, on the Resaca side of Snake Creek Gap. As soon as informed of this I determined to pass the whole army through Snake Creek Gap, and to move on Resaca with the main army . . . on the 11th, perceiving signs of evacuation of Dalton, I gave all orders for the general movement . . . through Snake Creek Gap [and] during the 12th and 13th the bulk of Thomas's and Schofield's armies were got through, and deployed against Resaca, McPherson on the right, Thomas in the center and Schofield on the left. Johnston, as I anticipated, had abandoned all his well-prepared defenses at Dalton, and was found inside of Resaca with the bulk of his army, holding his divisions well in hand, acting purely on the defensive. . . .

Sherman understated his dismay in terming McPherson "a little cautious." In McPherson's defense, after getting through Snake Creek Gap, he was advancing east, pushing back a Confederate mounted brigade, but without cavalry of his own to warn of a Rebel counterattack as he approached the Western & Atlantic. Besides, as historian John R. Scales has charitably observed, this was McPherson's first test as commander of the Army of the Tennessee; he had been promoted from XV Corps command just a month and a half before.

John R. Scales, Sherman Invades Georgia: Planning the North Georgia Campaign Using a Modern Perspective *(Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2006), 163.*

End of Unedited Excerpt