

GEORGIA

BATTLEFIELDS

Published by Georgia Battlefields Association, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to preservation of Georgia's Civil War history and sites. Contact newsletter editor by e-mail: info@georgiabattlefields.org

GBA tour still set for 31 March to 3 April in Macon

Hotel: Springhill Suites at 4630 Sheraton Drive. The hotel is at I-75 exit 171 and is visible from the interstate. Phone the hotel at 478 803 9100. **Note:** Do NOT press 1 for reservations. Wait for one of the hotel staff to pick up and ask for the Georgia Battlefields Association rate of \$99 per night, which with the unavoidable taxes is about \$119.

Cost & Registration: \$430. Register online at www.georgiabattlefields.org/tours.aspx, or mail check payable to Georgia Battlefields Association to PO Box 669953, Marietta GA 30066.

Schedule: We'll begin as usual with a Thursday evening reception at the hotel. We'll set up around 5 p.m., hand out maps near 6 p.m., and conclude by 7 p.m. so you can head for dinner on your own. A selection of restaurants is available at I-75 exit 169, two miles south of the hotel. Friday: Route of the Left Wing during the early days of the March to the Sea: Eatonton, Cobb's Plantation, and Milledgeville, followed by a stop at Ocmulgee National Historical Park (NHP) to cover cavalry actions of July and November 1864. Dinner at Michael's on Mulberry in Macon. Saturday: Route of the Right Wing, including Old Clinton, town of Griswoldville, Griswoldville battlefield, Gordon, and Ball's Ferry. Dinner at Cannonball House in Macon. Sunday: Rose Hill Cemetery and downtown Macon sites relating to the town's significance as a manufacturing and supply center and Jefferson Davis' capture. A map of the tour appears in the [December 2021 newsletter](#).

How much walking?

We've had inquiries about the amount of walking involved. Friday will involve a walking tour of Milledgeville in the middle of the day. At Ocmulgee NHP in the afternoon, we'll walk from the parking lot to the location of Civil War earthworks and hope to have time for participants—if they wish—to explore at least some of the Native American mounds. Saturday will include a walking tour of Old Clinton early in the day, followed by some walking of the Griswoldville battlefield in the early afternoon. Sunday morning will include walking to cover part of Rose Hill Cemetery and a few blocks of walking in downtown Macon.

We're glad to report that Chickamauga & Chattanooga National Military Park historian Jim Ogden plans to join us for the tour. For several years, GBA has coordinated with Jim to succeed Ed Bearss as principal guide for our annual tours. We changed our annual tour dates to late March or early April because Jim usually has a very full schedule in March.

We're eager to resume our tours, but public health officials predict another spike in virus cases this winter. Since health and safety of tour participants is first priority, we'll watch the situation and let you know of any change as soon as we decide. In addition to the newsletter and web site reflecting any changes, those registered for the tour will receive individual notifications. If you register for the tour and are subsequently dissuaded by virus concerns, you'll have the option of a full refund. **Note:** The bus company may change its policy by the time of the tour, but for now, assume that masks will be required while you're on the bus. If not vaccinated, do not expect to participate in tour events on an equal basis with those who are vaccinated.

The Atlanta Campaign seen through critical decisions

In early 2018, the University of Tennessee Press began publishing the *Command Decisions in America's Civil War Series*. The series now includes twelve books, all published in paperback, and they can also be purchased in Portable Document Format that a buyer can print. More about the series and available titles is at www.utpress.org/command-decisions.

Co-editors of the series are Matt Spruill and Larry Peterson. Matt has also authored or co-authored four books in the series, and Larry has authored three, with his fourth scheduled for publication in March 2022. Matt is a retired U.S. Army colonel who has written several battlefield guides. Larry served in the Air Force and the National Park Service before a long career as a commercial pilot, and he wrote a 2013 biography of Brigadier General Alfred Vaughan, one of his ancestors. Many of you will also recognize Larry as a long time GBA member and frequent participant on our tours. Larry has agreed to write newsletter articles that summarize his 2019 book on Decisions of the Atlanta Campaign.

Decisions of the Atlanta Campaign - What Exactly IS a Critical Decision?

Article by Larry Peterson

The series *Command Decisions in America's Civil War*, co-edited by Matt Spruill and myself, attempts to explain how Civil War battles and campaigns unfolded. Rather than looking at what happened, we explain why these battles and campaigns turned out the way they did. We do this by examining the few critical decisions that formed them. Originally, we thought that a summary narrative of events should come first but then decided that examining the critical decisions as they occurred is a better way to understand the battles and campaigns.

During each campaign and battle, thousands of decisions are made daily. Some are more important than others, and some are very important. However, only a very few are critical. We define a critical decision as one that not only affects the events immediately following but also all the events from that point on.

So, is it no big deal to find the critical decisions? We use the following question to prove that these decisions are not as easy to discover as you might think. On July 3, 1863, at the Battle of Gettysburg, Gen. Robert E. Lee made a critical decision: What was it? Most likely you will answer that he ordered Pickett's Charge. You would be incorrect. Actually, that day he had four choices, two of which were realistic. He could attack, defend, retreat or surrender. Ignoring the last two, he chose to attack. The result of that critical decision were the assaults on Culp's Hill and the famous Pickett-Pettigrew-Trimble Charge.

Critical decisions fall into one of six classifications: strategic, tactical, organizational, operational, personnel, and logistical. They are typically made by the very senior officers and/or commanders, but occasionally can be made by commanders a lower levels.

We present each critical decision in the same format: situation facing the decision-maker, his options, decision (option selected), results/impact, and sometimes an alternate scenario (what might have happened if he had chosen another option). Because the GBA's members usually have extensive knowledge of the Atlanta Campaign, I will focus less on the situation and more on the results/impact.

The first four critical decisions of the Atlanta Campaign concerned personnel ones, ultimately determining the opposing campaign commanders. These decisions were: Davis appoints Johnston to command the Army of Tennessee; Lincoln selects Grant as general-in-chief of all U.S. armies; Grant decides to go east and attach himself to the Army of the Potomac; Grant appoints Sherman to succeed him in command of the Military Division of the Mississippi. Thus Sherman opposes Johnston. Their methodology and style of command will be revealed in the upcoming critical decisions, so we will address them in detail in future installments.

I hope that you all will enjoy this different way to evaluate the Atlanta Campaign!

Larry

Our thanks to Larry for providing us his take on Critical Decisions of the Atlanta Campaign.

**Georgia Battlefields Association
PO Box 669953
Marietta GA 30066**

www.georgiabattlefields.org

January 2022