

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

Pickett's Mill relic now on prominent display

Phil Gast's Civil War Picket Blogspot recounts the identification of a relic at Pickett's Mill Battlefield. The relic is a finial, the adornment at the top of a flagstaff. During the Civil War, U.S. Army flags were often topped with finials representing an eagle and were usually made of bronze. In 1963, 30 years before the battlefield became a state historic site, relic hunters, both descendants of the Pickett family and with permission of the land owner, went over the site with a mine detector and found a damaged bronze eagle finial. The heirs of one of the relic hunters donated part of his collection, including the finial, to the Pickett's Mill State Historic Site about 25 years ago. Uncertain of its provenance, the staff put it on a shelf with other relics.

In 2022, a finial expert was informed of the finial's existence and, upon examination, believed it to be genuine. The other original relic hunter, nine years old at the time of the finial's discovery, also believes it is the one his cousin retained for several years. Research showed that two U.S. regiments lost flags at the site during the 27 May 1864 battle. The collective evidence indicates the finial is genuine and is the one found in 1963 on the battlefield. Thus, the Site staff conducted a ceremony on 27 May 2023, the anniversary of the battle, to unveil a new display featuring the finial. Read the whole story at <http://civil-war-picket.blogspot.com/>



Damaged finial at right compared to an undamaged one. Jeff Wright photo.

History scores continue decline

The National Assessment of Educational Progress released the results of its 2022 tests of eighth graders. U.S. History scores continue to decline, with only 13% of students being proficient in the subject. <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/ushistory/2022/>

Separate reporting indicates a host of problems in schools: Many K-12 teachers are not qualified to teach the subjects that they have been assigned to teach, 31% of current Georgia teachers reported they would be unlikely to remain in education for another five years, two-thirds of teachers report that schools are not meeting the needs of their students, only 14% of teachers would recommend the profession to others, only 18% of U.S. households would encourage their children or other children to become teachers, nine out of ten teachers reported they are assigned too many non-teaching duties, 75% of teachers who graduated in 2005 or later have student loan debt, and 41% of them owe more than \$40,000. This is a long but not comprehensive list of issues. Based on the demographics of the three million K-12 teachers, about one million of them could retire in the next four years, and this situation is exacerbated by the high number of newer teachers who don't plan to stay in the profession.

While hard to quantify, new laws in several states have made many teachers afraid that they could be fired or arrested for discussing certain subjects in the classroom. Their concerns might be summarized by one teacher's statement that teaching history is difficult if "You can't talk about our nation's successes without also addressing its failures."

Another issue is disruptive student behavior, both verbal and physical. Teachers have been attacked with weapons. Further, teachers have been fired and suspended for trying to intercede when one child is attacking another.

Georgia Battlefields Association representatives have contacted school administrators and the Georgia Department of Education to see if we might help with history education, either with classroom presentations or field trips. In essence, we were told our help was not wanted.

GBA may not be qualified to help, but it's apparent that whatever has been tried so far is not helping K-12 students learn history. Not only is battlefield preservation more difficult when people don't know history, the nation is in danger of not learning from the past.

Decisions of the Atlanta Campaign – part 4

GBA member Larry Peterson, author of the 2019 book Decisions of the Atlanta Campaign, continues his series. See previous articles in January, August, and October 2022 newsletters.

Sherman decides to sever the railroad at Resaca

Article by Larry Peterson

Situation

In previous campaigns, Sherman had demonstrated that he would try to accomplish his objectives through maneuver rather than direct assault. Consequently, he did not expect a decisive result from his probes of Rocky Face Ridge west of Dalton. Both the difficult terrain and Johnston's strongly reinforced position along the ridge reduced the likelihood of success.

Options

In planning how to open his campaign, Sherman had four options: First, he could attack the Crow Valley entrenchments of the Confederates while providing diversionary assaults against Rocky Face Ridge. Another choice was to cut Gen. Joseph E. Johnston's supply line (the Western & Atlantic Railroad) at or near Resaca via Snake Creek Gap. Alternatively, Sherman could cut the railroad supplying Johnston at some point farther south of Resaca, or he could direct his armies to outflank Johnston altogether and move toward Rome or another location.

Decision

Sherman opted to conduct a turning movement through Snake Creek Gap, originally proposed by Major General George Thomas, to capture Resaca and sever Johnston's supply line. Sherman realized that if he could cut Johnston's supply line, he had a good chance to cripple the Army of Tennessee as an effective force. It would take Sherman's detached Army of the Tennessee only a couple of days to gain the position at Resaca, possibly before Johnston became aware of the danger.

Sherman ordered Major General McPherson and his Army of the Tennessee (Sherman's former command, which many soldiers and officers thought Sherman favored over other commands) to march through Snake Creek Gap, head east, capture Resaca, and disable the railroad there. This would avoid a large-scale frontal assault on Johnston's army. Most of Sherman's men would be spared from costly assaults, and Johnston would be forced to attack McPherson/Sherman to regain his supply line. If successful, the virtual elimination of the Army of Tennessee as a fighting force would help achieve U.S. objectives sooner.

Results/Impact

This well-conceived plan was not carried to fruition. Discussion of the next two critical decisions will address this turn of events. As a result, the campaign would continue for several more months, causing thousands of additional casualties on both sides. It might also reduce Lincoln's reelection prospects if the campaign continued until November.

Alternate Scenario

If McPherson had been able to cut Johnston's supply line at a point farther south, he would have placed Johnston in an unenviable and potentially unrecoverable situation. To reestablish his line of supply, the Confederate general would have had to either attack a prepared and entrenched U.S. force on the railroad or lead his army eastward, away from Sherman and away from Johnston's only substantial supply line. This latter option choice would have exposed Johnston to new danger of attack and left him with a lack of necessary supplies and ammunition. These alternatives will be discussed in the next two critical decisions.

Georgia Battlefields Association
PO Box 669953
Marietta GA 30066

www.georgiabattlefields.org

July 2023