

# GEORGIA

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# BATTLEFIELDS

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## Society for Women and the Civil War conference in Atlanta 26-28 July

The [Society for Women and the Civil War](#) will hold its [annual conference](#) in Atlanta in 2024. Kennesaw State University's [Center for the Study of the Civil War Era](#) is a cosponsor partner organization for the conference. Hotel will be the [Courtyard by Marriott Kennesaw](#). Georgia Battlefields Association provided input for the planning of events and tours.

The conference agenda will focus on the lives and roles of women during the Atlanta Campaign and will feature presentations on Friday (26 July) afternoon, a buffet dinner that night, and a key-note presentation after dinner. Saturday (27 July) will include a guided tour of special collections at the [Atlanta History Center](#), a boxed lunch, a tour of Roswell sites associated with the mill workers who were shipped north after U.S. cavalry occupied the town in early July 1864, a visit to the [Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History](#), and a visit to [Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park](#) for a presentation and tour. Saturday's dinner will again be a buffet, followed by a trivia contest. Sunday (28 July) morning will include three presentations, and the conference will close between noon and 1 p.m. Register for the conference [here](#).

## Decisions of the Atlanta Campaign – part 7

GBA member Larry Peterson, author of the 2019 book [Decisions of the Atlanta Campaign](#), continues his series. The most recent installment was in the [December 2023 newsletter](#).

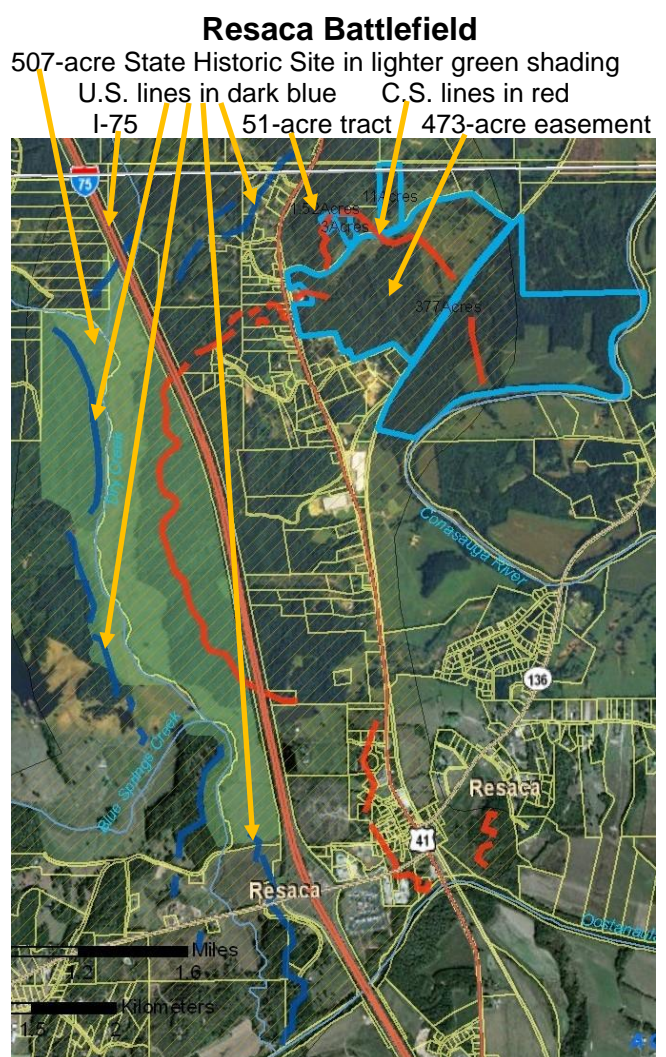
## Sherman Outflanks Johnston at Resaca

### Situation

Sherman joined McPherson at Snake Creek Gap on May 10 and prepared once again to capture Resaca. Confederate cavalry reports of U.S. troops west of Resaca made Johnston realize that he was outflanked and in serious danger of being cut off from his supply base. Consequently, he retreated from Dalton. By May 12, the Confederates had entrenched in a fishhook-like pattern in the area of Resaca, with the bottom of the shank anchored at the Oostanaula River just north of the mouth of Camp Creek. The Rebel line continued north about three and three-quarters of a mile before it bent to the east, anchoring the end of the hook on the Conasauga River, a tributary of the Oostanaula. Sherman marched most of the rest of his forces through Snake Creek Gap and the remainder down the Dalton-Resaca Road, and on the morning of May 13 he directed them into position opposite the now well-established Confederate line.

### Options

As Sherman faced Johnston's Army of Tennessee at Resaca, he had three options: a general assault; attempt to hold the Army of Tennessee in place while determining a plan of action; or try to outflank Johnston.



Resaca battlefield is bisected by I-75, with the State Historic Site to the west. To the east of I-75, GBA contributed \$48,000 towards a conservation easement on 473 acres (outlined in light blue) and \$75,000 towards the purchase of 51 acres.

### **Option 1**

A successful assault on Johnston's army at Resaca could render that army largely ineffective. Although Sherman's troops outnumbered Johnston's, he knew a frontal assault would succeed only at the cost of significant casualties. While Sherman's numerical advantage meant he could sacrifice men in a successful effort to overcome Johnston, he was not usually the type to order a massive frontal assault as a first option. Sherman preferred maneuver instead.

### **Option 2**

Holding Johnston in place would be a short-term solution, but it would not defeat Johnston's army. However, this option would spare a large number of casualties while Sherman devised a new plan of attack.

### **Option 3**

Outflanking Johnston would allow Sherman to continue to advance southward, compelling Johnston to do the same, while reducing the loss of men. This option would also keep U.S. forces on the offense, forcing Johnston to react to Sherman's movements.

### **Decision**

On May 14, Sherman tried to outflank Johnston by ordering Brig. Gen. Thomas Sweeny's division cross the Oostanaula River near Lay's Ferry, a few miles downriver from Resaca. After crossing the river, Sweeny discovered he was being shadowed by Maj. Gen. W. H. T. Walker's Confederate division, which Johnston had posted south of Resaca, near Calhoun. Sweeny subsequently retreated across the river. On May 15, Sherman ordered Sweeny to try again, and this time Sweeny gained a lodgment south of the Oostanaula.

This critical decision is very interesting because Sherman actually used all three of his options! By ordering several assaults, Sherman kept Johnston from retreating from the battlefield until U.S. troops had outflanked the Confederates. This measure was also the equivalent of pinning Johnston in place until Sweeny's division successfully outflanked Johnston via Lay's Ferry. While Sherman's choice to outflank the enemy ultimately succeeded, his brief use of the other two options played a distinct role in the outcome – an interesting management of the possibilities.

### **Results/Impact**

Once Walker informed Johnston that U.S. forces were south of the Oostanaula in strength, Johnston realized that he had to retreat before he was outflanked. When darkness ended the fighting on May 15, Johnston conducted an exceptionally orderly withdrawal. The next morning, U.S. soldiers found the opposing trenches empty: The Confederate army had stolen away.

In fairness to Johnston, his position at Resaca was forced upon him by Sherman's maneuvering. Johnston had to defend the railroad. While Johnston's entrenchments were built quickly and well, the terrain at the southern end of the battlefield, directly west of Resaca, was not as favorable for defense. The terrain grew even more favorable for the U.S. forces when Sherman's men captured Bald Hill, just west of town. Federal artillery was now within range of Johnston's primary escape routes over the bridges south of Resaca. The Confederate failure to retake Bald Hill doomed Johnston's prospects for keeping his army at Resaca for any significant amount of time. Sweeny's successful crossing at Lay's Ferry forced Johnston to retreat.

To see a list of all books in the Command Decisions in America's Civil War series, go to <https://utpress.org/command-decisions/>. Larry's sixth book in the series, Decisions of the Vicksburg Campaign, is scheduled for publication later in June.

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