

**CLASH**  
*at*  
**KENNESAW**



# CLASH *at* KENNESAW

*June & July 1864*

RUSSELL W. BLOUNT, JR.



PELICAN PUBLISHING COMPANY

Gretna 2012

Copyright © 2012  
By Russell W. Blount, Jr.  
All rights reserved

---

*The word “Pelican” and the depiction of a pelican are trademarks of Pelican Publishing Company, Inc., and are registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.*

---

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Blount, Russell W.

Clash at Kennesaw : June and July 1864 / by Russell W. Blount, Jr.  
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4556-1664-0 (hardcover : alk. paper)—

ISBN 978-1-4556-1665-7 (e-book) 1. Kennesaw Mountain, Battle of, Ga., 1864. I. Title.

E476.7.B56 2012

973.7'36—dc23

2012008800



Printed in the United States of America

Published by Pelican Publishing Company, Inc.

1000 Burmaster Street, Gretna, Louisiana 70053

For Lisa and Maria Grace

Now be witness again, paint the mightiest armies of earth,  
Of those armies so rapid so wondrous what saw you to tell  
us?

What stays with you latest and deepest? of curious panics,  
Of hard-fought engagements or sieges tremendous what  
deepest remains?

—Walt Whitman  
*The Wound-Dresser*

# Table of Contents

Preface.....	9
Chapter One: The Darkest Night.....	17
Chapter Two: A Bit of Stern Open Air.....	29
Chapter Three: A Daring Old Man .....	39
Chapter Four: Gilgal Church.....	47
Chapter Five: One Vast Fort.....	59
Chapter Six: Kolb's Farm.....	69
Chapter Seven: Too Red-Haired to be Patient.....	81
Chapter Eight: A Death Sentence to Every Man .....	89
Chapter Nine: So Many Gallant Men.....	99
Chapter Ten: Boys, This Is Butchery .....	105
Chapter Eleven: The Dead Angle .....	115
Chapter Twelve: A Morning Dash.....	123
Epilogue: A Question of Muscle and Nerve .....	131
Notes.....	139
Bibliography .....	153
Index .....	157





# Preface

In November of 1866 a boy was born in Millville, Ohio, the sixth of seven children sired by Dr. Abraham Landis, who had served as a surgeon in the Thirty-Fifth Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment during the American Civil War. The boy's birth was notable for a number of reasons, not the least of which being the name his father chose for him over the objections of the family: Kenesaw Mountain Landis. Although the doctor misspelled "Kennesaw" it was, nevertheless, a name fresh on his mind—the name of a mountain that he felt, in some way, should be memorialized. It was there during one of the most vicious battles of the Atlanta Campaign that the doctor was wounded in the leg by a Rebel cannonball. The wound left him with a limp for the rest of his days and the indelible memory of the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain.

The boy, incidentally, grew up to become a famous federal judge, and later the first commissioner of Major League Baseball, banishing eight players from the game in the aftermath of the notorious Black Sox Scandal. Like the mountain, the judge will always be remembered as the hard, craggy-faced jurist, immovable and never compromising his position. That, however, is another story. Somehow though, when I hear his peculiar name, it reminds me of a terrible battle fought long ago, which of course is the subject of this book.

I've selected this particular moment in history not because I have some special affinity for dreadful subjects, or even mountains, but because of my nagging thoughts of how something like this could have actually taken place in a war between Americans. A few years ago while visiting the Atlanta area, those thoughts first began to bother me and, in a sense, inspired the writing of this book. Driving north on Cobb Parkway, between Marietta

and Kennesaw, a Civil War battle should have been the last thing on my mind or, for that matter, anyone's mind. Shopping centers, malls, offices, restaurants, signs, and a plethora of other commerce were all competing for my attention. So I never saw it. Then, stopping at a light, I lifted my eyes to the left and there, towering majestically above all the urban sprawl, was Kennesaw Mountain. I couldn't help thinking about it.

In the summer of 1864, from early June to Independence Day, Kennesaw Mountain loomed as the focal point around which two huge armies fought and suffered. From the Georgia rail towns of Acworth to Big Shanty (now Kennesaw) and Marietta, nearly 200,000 men, blue and gray, struggled over a forbidding landscape dominated by several mountains rising out of the heavily wooded hills and hollows north of Atlanta. Across this ground, the armies moved in crab-like motions, changing positions in a series of sudden attacks, skirmishes, and full-blown battles. With each move, they left behind miles of squalid trenches, giving the land a face of death and destruction. Perhaps there was never a time when geography and weather came together to create such a menacing enemy for Americans at war, as they endured days of misery, beginning with the endless downpours of unseasonably cold rain followed by a sea of mud, swarms of insects, and finally ending in unbearable heat and the smell of rotting bodies that surrounded the climactic battle.

Ironically, that battle, which occurred on June 27, 1864 and which is known in Civil War lore as the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, was not actually fought on the mountain, but on the low hills and ridges spilling off to the south of the mountain. Although this book includes what I believe to be an adequate account of that dramatic engagement, it's not just about the battle, but also the events leading up to it and the people who experienced it. Along the way, I have included a number of different perspectives from the primary accounts of civilians, together with accounts from the common privates through the commanding generals.

For the reader to appreciate the month-long ordeal and the fury of the horrible assault that ensued requires at least some insight into the character of the commanders William Tecumseh Sherman and Joseph Eggleston Johnston. Both men have long

been subjected to the scrutiny of historians and biographers whose findings include not only analyses of their strengths and qualities but of a variety of character flaws and even mental disorders. It was not my purpose to add to or detract from these assessments, but only to give the best account I could of their unique personalities and allow the reader to draw his own conclusions.

In Sherman's case, his presence is ubiquitous throughout the book. I never intended as much, but everywhere my research took me there he was: sometimes depressed, sometimes elated, but always exploding with nervous energy, anxiety, and impatience. Such were the emotional demons that drove him to order the vicious attack on June 27, immortalized now as the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain. Looking back, historians today agree it was Sherman's greatest blunder of the Atlanta Campaign, and even though he never acknowledged it, neither did he ever repeat it.

Johnston, on the other hand, rarely made such costly mistakes, because he rarely took the risk of ordering an attack. As a soldier, he was a master of defense and retreat. As a man, he was touchy, temperamental, and insensitive to political consequences that might result from his military behavior. Oddly enough these questionable traits, especially his preference for caution over boldness, ensured him the victory at the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain. At the same time, they cost him his job soon after his brilliant retreat from the mountain. The battle, ultimately, would be Johnston's last stand of the Atlanta Campaign.

In addition to these commanders, I have introduced a number of other soldiers from the rosters of both armies. Some of them, though lesser-known, played key roles in the grinding, month-long struggle for Kennesaw. Bringing to life men such as Dan McCook, Sam Watkins, Charles Harker, Frank Cheatham, and "Fighting Joe" Hooker gives us what I believe to be a fascinating, close-up look at what might otherwise be just an objective history that recounts factual details. In other words, when we get a glimpse at the raw feelings and emotions of ordinary people caught up in the ferocity of war, it brings us closer to the actual experience, and helps to satisfy our curiosity of the past. Courage, fear, incompetence, and genius are all present in these pages, as I have tried to draw the reader closer to the characters, and thus

provide a more colorful version of what happened in the hills of North Georgia in the early summer of 1864. That, of course, was my intent. Whether or not I am judged to have succeeded in the endeavor, I trust the reader will at least credit me with the effort.

Any further credit that may come my way must be shared with many others who have contributed to this narrative. Expressing my thanks to them is one of the best parts of writing a book. First, I owe a debt of gratitude to the many eminent historians who have already studied and written about the Atlanta Campaign. Earlier works by Albert Castel, Richard M. McMurry, Thomas L. Connelly, David Evans, and Russell S. Bonds, to name just a few, now serve as excellent models for future studies.

Anyone attempting to write on any phase of the Civil War must inevitably begin with that imposing work published by the U.S. government between 1880 and 1901; *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. For allowing me access to this huge record, as well as other historical papers, I am grateful to the knowledgeable staff at the Local History and Genealogy Library in Mobile, Alabama. For generous help in gathering copies of letters, diaries, and other primary sources, I sincerely thank Retha W. Stephens, curator at Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park. Also from Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park, a special thanks to ranger and historian, Willie R. Johnson, who guided me over hill and dale of the battlefield and answered so many of my questions about the landscape and the positions of the armies.

To Mark Lemon of Acworth, Georgia, for his kindness in providing excerpts from the Lemon Family Papers, I owe a debt of gratitude. That correspondence, which deals with Eliza Lemon's unpleasant encounter with Sherman and his troops when they occupied the Lemon home in June of 1864, provides an interesting anecdote from the civilian perspective.

And of course I am beyond fortunate that Milburn Calhoun and the good folks at Pelican Publishing agreed to publish this book. The talented staff there was cheerful, enthusiastic, and scrupulous in their efforts to produce a first-rate work. Specifically, credit should be given to Katy Doll, the editor who oversaw the project, and to Stacy Schlumbrecht and Ashley Grubbs for their tireless efforts in promoting the book.

As always, my greatest thanks are reserved for family and friends, not only for lending support and encouragement while enduring my complaints, but also for helping in the development of the book. My son, Russell W. Blount III, and his colleague, Keith Hadden, prepared the maps that help make some sense of the position of the troops and the ground they fought over. Thanks guys. And finally to my wonderful wife, Elaine Hartley Blount, who was with me throughout the entire process: it could have never been done without her. Not only did she lend a sharp eye reading and re-reading drafts, but she took on the technical, tiresome, and essential task of putting the book in computer form acceptable for publishing.

Thanks again to everyone, whether mentioned or not, who did all they could to make this a better book. If it is not, the fault is certainly mine.

Russell W. Blount, Jr.  
Mobile, Alabama



**CLASH**  
*at*  
**KENNESAW**