

# Allatoona Pass Battlefield

Atlanta had fallen. The Confederacy was desperate to stop Sherman and lure Union forces away from Atlanta. CSA General John B. Hood drove north attacking the railroad, Sherman's line of supplies and communication. The first stage of Hood's plan was an attack on one of the most strategic locations along the Western & Atlantic Railroad. This location was a man-made cut through the Allatoona Mountain Range known as the Allatoona Pass. The Pass was approximately 360 feet long and 175 feet deep. Built in the 1840's, it was the deepest rail cut along the W & A between Atlanta and Chattanooga.

Union General William T. Sherman greatly admired the strategic value of the Pass, which had been fortified with a system of earthen forts and trenches that would take full advantage of Allatoona's natural strength. The fortifications would protect not only the railroad, but also the Union's main supply depot south of Chattanooga, which had been established at Allatoona.



The Confederate assault on the forts at Allatoona would be the first major battle in what proved to be Hood's disastrous Nashville Campaign.



The Battle of Allatoona Pass, fought on October 5, 1864, is rich both in myth and legend and is one of the most dramatic and tragic episodes of the Civil War. It was the inspiration for the familiar hymn by Evangelist Peter Bliss, "Hold the Fort," and is remembered for the summons to surrender message by Confederate General Samuel G. French, "in order to avoid a needless effusion of blood."

Brigadier General John Corse was instructed to move his division from Rome to back up the garrison of 976 men under the command of Lt. Colonel John E. Tourtellotte at Allatoona. Corse and his troops reached Allatoona Pass at 1:00a.m. on October 5<sup>th</sup>. He assumed command of better than 2,000 men but expected more. Twice the previous day, Tourtellotte had received telegraph messages from Sherman at Kennesaw to "...Hold out," and "...We are coming."

At 3:00 in the morning, October 5<sup>th</sup>, CSA General Samuel French arrived at Allatoona with his division of 3,276 men. His orders were to take the fort and fill the pass with debris, burn the Etowah River bridge five miles away, and then rejoin Hood the next day at New Hope Church.

Within a few hours, the "needless effusion of blood" began. The Confederate offensive came from the north and west, forcing a main contingent of Union troops inside the Star Fort, but at a terrible price. French's forces made four assaults on the western fort, coming within 100 yards of taking it each time.

French received a message around noon leading him to believe Sherman was sending reinforcements to Allatoona. With no hope of reinforcements for his own weary troops, French gave his orders to withdraw.

The Battle of Allatoona Pass was one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. Of the 5,301 men engaged in the battle (2,025 Union & 3,276 Confederates), 1,603 were reported killed, wounded or missing. This 30% casualty rate was one of the highest in the war for the time engaged. Today, a memorial site on the battlefield is dedicated to the Union and Confederate forces that fought at Allatoona Pass.

A large portion of the battlefield remains in a condition little changed since the time of the battle. Within easy walking distances are found a spectacular railroad cut through solid rock, two well-preserved earth forts with extensive undisturbed trenches and outworks, a classic antebellum plantation house and the grave of the unknown hero of the battle.