

# TAC NEWS

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## Opening the Cracker Line The Battle of Wauhatchie Junction October 29, 1863



The fall of 1863 was a rough one for both the Federal Army of the Cumberland and their Confederate foes of the Army of Tennessee.

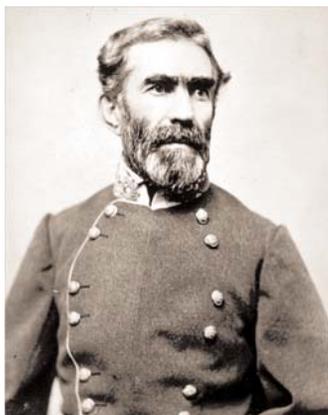
Following the near disaster at the Battle of Chickamauga, the Army of the Cumberland had fallen back to their supply depot at Chattanooga, Tennessee. In its own way, Chattanooga resembled the western theatre's Harpers Ferry: a vital transportation hub which was very difficult to defend. It sat at the floor of the valley on the banks of the Tennessee River, and was surrounded on all sides by huge bluffs and mountains. Enemy forces, particularly artillery, on the heights could turn the town into a deathtrap. If those hills were occupied, the

warehouses would rapidly empty of food and fodder with very little hope of replenishing them.

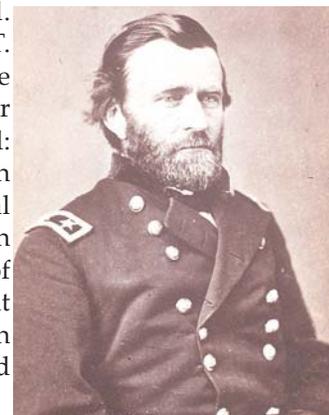
Lieutenant General Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee did just that: they followed the Federal retreat as quickly as the shattered forces, which had lost 18,454 casualties at Chickamauga, could. The majority of the forces occupied Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge. From these

dominating overlooks, any supply operations endeavored by the Federal forces in the valley below were clearly visible. Confederate cavalry raids, mostly commanded by Major General Joseph Wheeler, closed the ring. By mid-October the Federal Army was on two-thirds rations. Soon after that was reduced to half rations. Not surprisingly, horses suffered more acutely than the men.

The Lincoln administration had lost confidence in the commander of the Army of the Cumberland, Major General Thomas Rosecrans. They gave Ulysses S. Grant command of all forces west of the Appalachian Mountains, and he traveled to Chattanooga as quickly as possible. George Thomas was promoted to replace "Rosey" at the Army of the Cumberland. Grant ordered William T. Sherman's Army of the Tennessee to join him. Other reinforcements were at hand: The Eleventh and Twelfth Corps, under Major General Joseph Hooker, had been shifted west from the Army of the Potomac and were at that time marching across northern Alabama toward the besieged town.



Braxton Bragg



U.S. Grant

Despite their apparently superior position, Bragg's command was about as hungry as their opponents. Worse was the enmity felt by almost all of his generals toward the commander: 12 had signed a petition to CS President Jefferson Davis demanding Bragg's replacement! Bragg was retained, and he went on the offensive against the ringleaders, particularly Daniel H. Hill, James Longstreet and Simon B. Buckner. Hill and Buckner were sent packing. Longstreet's lack of respect for Bragg bordered on insubordination. The men knew about all this in-fighting.. And the inability to deliver food in a timely fashion made the circumstances for the Army of Tennessee about as miserable as for the besieged. Men deserted to the Federal lines every night.

## "The Cracker Line"

The plan for opening the Federal supply line was developed by Grant's chief Engineer, Brigadier General William "Baldy" Smith. The Tennessee River was un-navigable down river of Chattanooga, but supplies could reach Bridgeport, Alabama. As Hooker's command repaired the Bridgeport bridge, a daring operation was launched to throw a pontoon bridge across the Tennessee at Brown's Ferry. In the dead of night on Monday, 26



Joseph Hooker

October 1863, assault troops of Hazen's Brigade floated around the big bend around Moccasin Point and landed at Brown's Ferry. Simultaneously, the "Mad Russian" John Turchin led his brigade across the point. As soon as Hazen's men were ashore, the boats crossed the river, picked up Turchin's command, and by the time the dazed Confederates knew what had happened, the better part of a division of Union troops were entrenched around Brown's Ferry.

To complete the line of supply, Hooker moved out from Bridgeport, following the tracks of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad northwest toward Brown's Ferry. In a commendably rapid march, his 15,000 men opened the line and closed in on Chattanooga. Late in the day on October 28, 1863, most bivouacked, extending the lines around the Brown's Ferry bridge. One small 1,500 man division, commanded by Brigadier General John Geary, was left about 3 miles behind at Wauhatchie, a sleepy railroad junction. Camp was established 300 yards north of



John Geary

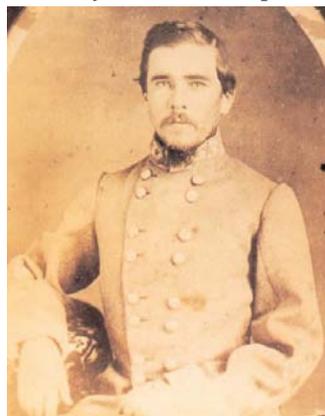
where the Trenton Railroad met the N&C. Tension was in the air: One of Geary's brigade commanders, Major General George Greene, order the men to sleep on their arms and remain in their boots!

Geary's exposed position did not go unnoticed by the Confederates atop Lookout Mountain, 1400 feet above the valley floor. In fact, Bragg and Longstreet were holding a conference when Hooker's command came marching north through Lookout Valley. Bragg immediately ordered Longstreet, who commanded that sector of the line, to assail and drive the Federals back. Indeed, he had been ordering him to attack ever since Brown's Ferry had been occupied by the blue coats. He ordered it again that brisk October day.

Seemingly, Longstreet ignored the order, again. After the war there was a lot of finger pointing, but clearly "Old Pete" was not at his best during this campaign. He did not concentrate his troops for the operation: 2 of his 3 divisions were on the east side of Lookout Mountain and were never ordered to move to the threatened west side. Indeed, no orders were issued to Colonel Evander McIvor Law's Alabama brigade to prepare for a night assault - even though Law's command was the only one in close proximity to Hooker's "Yankees."



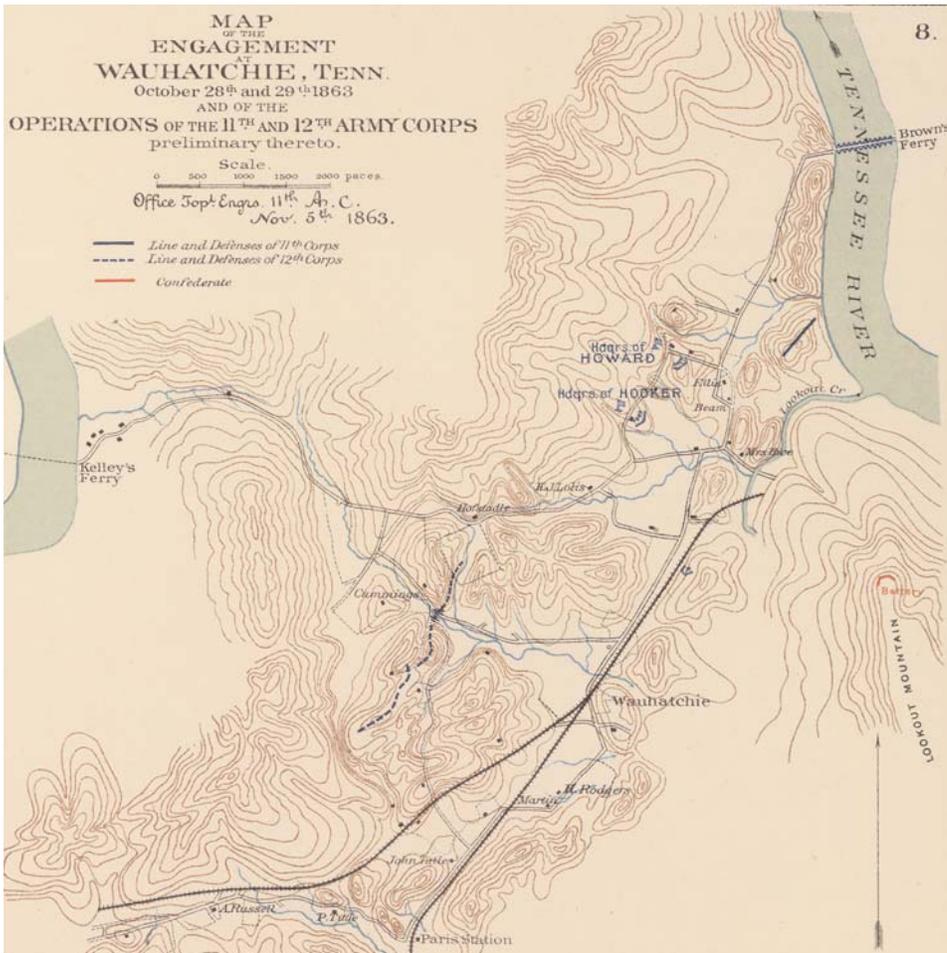
Evander McIvor Law



Micah Jenkins

As the sun was setting over Raccoon Mountain, Longstreet developed a new plan. When a wagon train arrived at Geary's exposed position at Wauhatchie, he devised to attack it with one brigade. He summoned the young commander of his left most division, Brigadier General Micah Jenkins. Jenkins was to move his remaining 3 brigades over Lookout and be in position to block any Yankee reinforcements from moving south and providing succor to the dangling rearguard. Jenkins' own brigade, then commanded by Col. John Bratton, would envelope and crush Geary. This was to be done quickly: Longstreet wrote Bragg that the attack would go in between 9:00 and 10:00 that evening.

Bragg was furious. He wanted Longstreet's Corps to assault the main Federal position at Brown's Ferry. Clearly, communications within the command of the Army of



8. But orders were orders, and the troops were to be set in motion immediately.

By 10:00 PM, Law had his brigade atop a steep hill which ran north-to south on the floor of Lookout Valley between the Brown's Ferry Road and Lookout Mountain. As was standard practice, the Alabamians fortified their position. Robertson's Texas brigade was placed in the valley behind the hill, both as a reserve for Law and to cover his right rear. Bratton's Brigade was just then crossing the creek and would move south toward Geary's forces, while Benning's Georgians were right behind to act as a reserve. The stage was set for one of the few night engagements of the American Civil War.

Around 10:30, a patrol sent south from Hooker's command stumbled upon Law's skirmish line. Chaotic shots rang out in the dark. This brief encounter amounted to very little on its own, but the sounds of musket fire reverberated throughout Lookout Valley. Bugles rang out and drums pounded around Wauhatchie. Within minutes Geary's men were in formation

Tennessee were breaking down. This was true at many levels: Evander Law had been the senior brigadier in Hood's Division, and had commanded it following that general's wounding at both Gettysburg and Chickamauga. But Micah Jenkins' brigade had been attached and his seniority gave Jenkins command. The two loathed one another, and Law seethed at Longstreet's complacency in this regard. So the major players at every level of Southern command were barely speaking to one another on the verge of a night assault across terrain with which most were unfamiliar.

Brigadier General Law was so dissatisfied with the plan that he told Jenkins:

"...as matters now stood, the Brown's Ferry force and that of Hooker having united, their numbers amounted to at least three times our own, which rendered the success of the attack more than doubtful. And even if he gained a temporary success during the night, the light of the next morning would reveal his weakness, with a force of the enemy on both sides of him, each of which would be superior in numbers to his whole force. The chance of success may be calculated by anyone at all conversant with military affairs - and he would be quite safe in estimating them at zero."

and staring into the moonlit distance. They stood in line for an hour before being allowed to lie down and sleep if they could.

An hour later, a little after midnight Bratton's skirmishers stumbled into Federal pickets from the 29th Pennsylvania along the Brown's Ferry road. The Yankees were driven in, and some captured. Despite confusion in being awakened a second time, Union forces quickly formed up. The 111th PVI advanced in line up the Brown's Ferry road, and struck Bratton's South Carolinians. The Confederates deployed across the valley and enveloped the Federal line which bend back into a "V." The four Parrott rifles of Knap's Pennsylvania Battery lit the night, providing the best view of the enemy whenever a gun fired.

For nearly three hours heavy musketry split the night. Exposed on a knoll in the center of the Union position, Battery E suffered terribly, while unleashing 224 rounds at the Confederates. 22 of 48 artilleryists were hit, not to mention 2 mules and 35 horses killed. Men fired until their ammunition ran low and had to be collected from the casualties on both sides. Just as Bratton planned to settle the fight with the bayonet, he received orders from General Jenkins to retire: a strong force of Hooker's command was ascending the valley and at that moment was closing on his rear.

Law's words had been prophetic: there was zero chance of success in this utterly unnecessary battle. 216 Federal and 356 Confederate graves were required: total casualties neared 1700 men. The Cracker Line was open for good!

**CSA Forces**

**Jenkins' Brigade: Col. John Bratton's**

- 1st South Carolina
- 2nd South Carolina Rifles
- 5th South Carolina
- Palmetto Sharpshooters

Detached and arrived later in the battle:

- Hampton's Legion
- 6th South Carolina

**US Forces**

**2nd Division,  
Twelfth Army Corps: Major Gen. John Geary**

**Second Brigade: Col. George Cobham Jr.**

- 29th Pennsylvania
- 109th Pennsylvania
- 111th Pennsylvania

**Third Brigade: Major Gen. George Greene**

- 60th New York
- 78th New York
- 102nd New York
- 137th New York
- 149th New York

**Artillery: Major John Reynolds**

- Knap's Battery E, Pennsylvania Light
- 4 x 10 pound Parrott Rifles

**A MicroForce 10mm Scenario for the Battle of Wauhatchie Station will be found at the GHQ website.**

*In Memorium*

**John Fernandes, Jr.**

1948 - 2009

It is with the greatest sadness that we announce the sudden death of a great friend of GHQ's, John Fernandes. John was someone who put family, friends, and his country ahead of everything else, including himself. He will be missed by the many people who he touched around the world. You could always count on him being upbeat and optimistic, no matter what the circumstances. Everyone who knew him will never forget him, and we are all better off because of people like him.

John was the author of *Micro Armour®: The Game*, both World War II and Modern. Every dime John received in payment was donated to help Vietnam veterans. John wrote countless *Tacnews* articles, and all of the Modern Country Studies found at the GHQ website. To get an idea of what John contributed to our hobby, read some of those - his depth of knowledge was unfathomable.

John joined the USMC - twice! He served in Vietnam, including the Battle for Hue City during the Tet Offensive. He then studied psychology at NYU, concurrently working at SPI as a game designer and playtester. Following graduation, he re-entered the Marine Corps and became a Chinese linguist and interrogator. His service included Beirut in 1983 (where he was in the barracks when terrorists blew the front half off the building!); in Afghanistan later in the 1980s (coordinating the transfer of Stinger missiles to fight the Soviet Invasion) and was in Tiananmen Square during the student protests in 1989. After retirement from the Marines, John established numerous gaming groups, always working on a set of playable *Micro Armour®* rules: GHQ liked them as fun, realistic and a true set of combined arms rules!

John had several ongoing GHQ projects when he passed away on April 25, 2009. His colleagues want to see them to completion. These will include a set of 1:1 rules, and a series of booklets on the North Africa campaign in WWII. Watch for those to appear at GHQ's website.

He's survived by his lovely wife, Beverly.  
John Fernandes - *Semper Fidelis!*

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