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July 2022

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## *License Plate to the Battle of Missionary Ridge or Tunnel Hill*



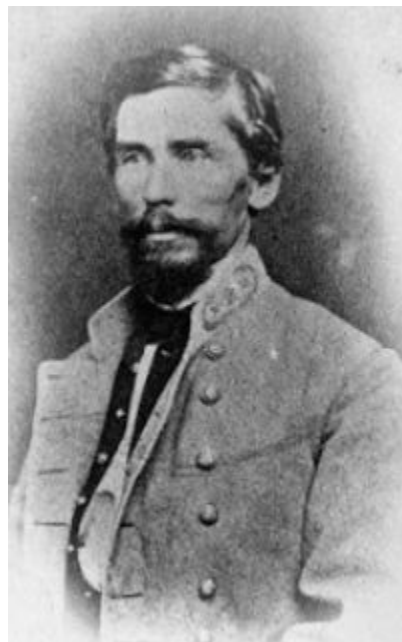
*This battlefield supporter views the entrance to the Sherman Reservation on the northern end of Missionary Ridge. This unit is one of six sites preserved atop Missionary Ridge as part of Chickamauga-Chattanooga National Military Park. The Sherman Reservation is the largest and best preserved of the NPS holdings scattered amongst the modern residential development on the Ridge.*



*The northern end of Missionary Ridge is often referred to in period accounts as "Tunnel Hill" due to the East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad tunnel, built in the late 1850s, that passes through Missionary Ridge just below where our battlefield preservationist is parked. This picture, taken roughly 1890 as a stereographic view, shows the ET&G tunnel entrance on its western or Chattanooga side. Bypassed in the mid-twentieth century due to its small size for modern rail traffic, the tunnel remains in active use by the Tennessee Valley RR Museum and visitors can ride a steam locomotive through the historic tunnel. Missionary Ridge's Tunnel Hill should NOT be confused with the nearby north Georgia town of the same name, which is located on the Western & Atlantic RR and is also the site of a historic tunnel. Both "Tunnel Hills" appear frequently in period accounts, which leads to confusion.*

After defeat in the Battle of Chickamauga in September 1863, the Union Army of the Cumberland found itself trapped in Chattanooga. Due to Confederate occupation of the heights around the city, the Army of the Cumberland was cut off from the short route to its supplies at Stevenson, Alabama. U. S. Grant, who replaced Rosecrans in late October, opened and secured the short supply route to Stevenson in the battles of Browns Ferry and Wauhatchie as October came to a close.

With the opening of the "cracker line" both supplies and reinforcements flowed into Chattanooga. General Joseph Hooker would arrive with elements of two corps from the Army of the Potomac. Additionally, General William T. Sherman whose Army of the Tennessee had recently participated in the fall of Vicksburg, would also reinforce the Cumberlanders in Chattanooga. By late November, Grant had developed a plan that gave primary tactical responsibility to his friend Sherman who would attack the northern end of Missionary Ridge (aka Tunnel Hill). After securing the Tunnel Hill section, Sherman would sweep south down Missionary Ridge, driving the remaining Confederate defenders from the crest. The Army of the Cumberland, somewhat in disfavor and distrust due to its defeat at Chickamauga, would be relegated to a secondary role, demonstrating against the center of the Ridge to draw pressure from Sherman's main effort.



Leading the Confederate defense of Tunnel Hill was an Irish immigrant turned Arkansas Confederate general, Patrick R. Cleburne, the finest division commander in Bragg's army. Cleburne's division had so distinguished itself in previous campaigns that it was allowed to carry its own distinctive battle flag, often described as a white moon on a blue field.



Hardee or Cleburne pattern flags- note "Tunnel Hill, Tenn." battle honor on the 17<sup>th</sup>- 18<sup>th</sup> Texas flag.

Sherman's main attack against the Tunnel Hill section of Missionary Ridge would occur on November 25 after having mistakenly attacked a detached spur of the Ridge on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Despite repeated attacks, Sherman's men could not carry Cleburne's position. One Confederate defender of Tunnel Hill stated, "We feel we can kill all they send after us." At one point, Sherman's men gained a lodgment on the side of the Ridge as Cleburne's men ran out of ammunition. Cleburne ordered a desperate bayonet counterattack with empty rifles which cleared his front of the Union attackers. At least one Union officer left an account that claimed some of the Confederates involved in this bayonet attack had entered the East Tennessee RR tunnel from the opposite or eastern side and charged through the tunnel to come up in the rear of Sherman's men who had gone to ground on the Ridge's western sides.

Seeing Sherman's attack floundering, Grant at this Orchard Knob headquarters, ordered George Thomas and the Chickamauga defeated Army of the Cumberland to make a "demonstration" against Confederate rifle pits at the base of the Ridge's center. Still carrying the stigma of Chickamauga, the Cumberlanders, seeking redemption, continued their attack beyond the rifle pits to the top of the Ridge, routing the Confederate defenders, and stealing the "glory" from Sherman's men. Still feeling confident, despite the disintegration around him of the bulk of the Confederate army, Patrick Cleburne and his Tunnel Hill defenders would form the rearguard of the Confederate defeat, stopping cold the Union pursuit at Ringgold Gap, Georgia, closing the 1863 Chattanooga campaign.

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