



# Bullet'n Backstory

Joint Munitions Command

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## Protecting the Past, Surviving the Future: A History of Black Hills Ordnance Depot

The Black Hills Ordnance Depot was a 21,000-acre munitions storage and maintenance facility, located in Fall River County, in southwestern South Dakota, eight miles south of Edgemont. The depot was established in 1942 to help meet the Army's increased ordnance handling needs following the United States' entrance into World War II. Operated by the U.S. Army Ordnance Corps, the depot was renamed Black Hills Army Depot in 1962, remaining in operation until 1967. By August 1942, 6,000 workers were on site constructing the base. This was twice the population of the nearest town. The first load of munitions arrived before the end of the year. Over the years, the Black Hills site was used for storage and testing of chemical weapons, and during World War II, also held Italian prisoners of war, who exchanged work for a minimal amount of personal freedom.

The level of employment at Black Hills was highest during the war years and then varied over time, falling to between 650 and 750 workers during the 1950s. Due to the remote location of the facility, most workers and their families had to make their homes on site. At first, workers lived in tarpaper shacks and tents, but the army soon established a large area of federally-owned housing at the installation. The worker community that developed was called Igloo, named for the base's 802 igloo-shaped concrete munitions storage bunkers. By the summer of 1945, the population of Igloo numbered around 4,200. The Igloo community offered many amenities the population might find in larger established communities. They had a public school, hospital, post office, church, swimming pool, bowling alley, roller rink, dance hall, and recreation center. Some facilities were built from scratch. Others, like the town's theater and grocery store, were moved to the community from towns in Wyoming and Nebraska. For anything not found in Igloo, the army provided regular bus service to Edgemont.

The establishment of the Black Hills Depot and Igloo community was a boon to the region, which had been devastated by the Depression. Still, the installation initially struggled to draw a sufficient workforce from the rural area. This led the army to appeal directly to the nearby Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations for workers as well as to the women of the region. As a result, 160 Native Americans were working for the Black Hills depot by 1945, while women comprised nearly 50% of the workforce. Poor families moving to Igloo found a relative paradise, in some cases going from a two-room home with an outhouse to a two-bedroom home with running water. Many later looked back fondly on life in Igloo, including the town's most famous former resident, news anchor Tom Brokaw, who lived in the community for a few years (1943-1944) as a child. In the 1950s, the workforce dropped to 700 and the population of Igloo consequently fell to 1800. The Depot closed in June 1967, and the Igloo community was abandoned. Most of the residential housing units were then moved to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

In 2016, The Vivos Group purchased most of the former base, including 575 ordnance igloos, each approximately 2,200 square feet. The development is now known as Vivos xPoint, and claims to be the largest survival community in the world, thanks to the conversion of igloos into privately-owned survival bunkers. When completed, the company expects the community to accommodate a population of more than 5,000 people, with an average of 10 people occupying each converted bunker.



Survival Complex Showroom

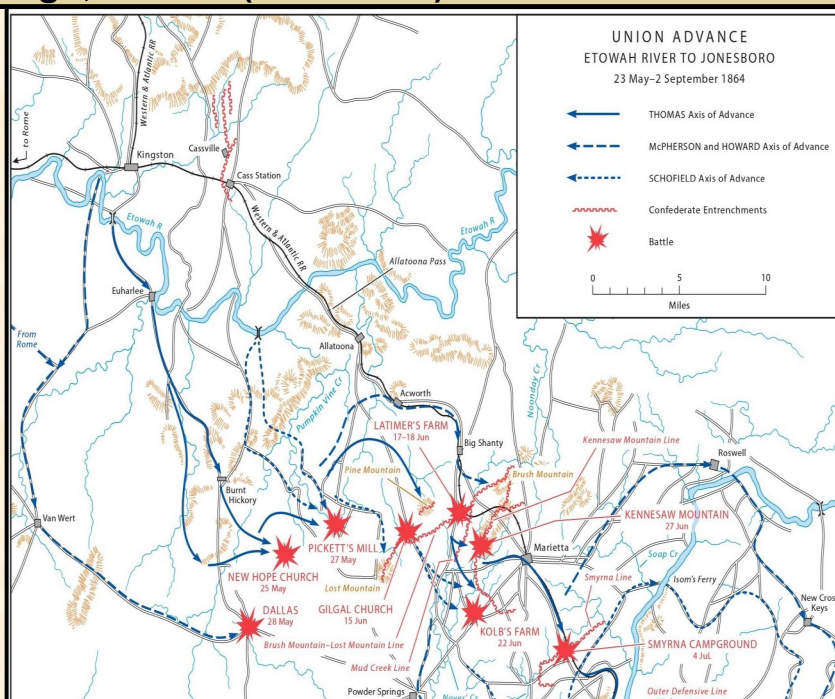


## The Atlanta Campaign, Part 5: (June 1864)

By early June, the Union Army under Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman had covered most of the distance between Chattanooga and Atlanta, and hoped to envelop Confederate entrenchments along the Kennesaw Mountain Line west of Marietta, Georgia. In a letter to his wife on June 8, Maj. Caleb B. Cox, of the 84th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment, gave his impression of the campaign thus far. "Our army has driven the rebels from every stronghold where we have attacked him and if we can ever get him on a fair field, we can beat him easily."

Sherman's effort to flank the Confederate position stalled, as Gen. Joseph E. Johnston maneuvered to shore up his flanks and protect his access to the railroad. Judging a direct assault upon Kennesaw Mountain to be unwise, Sherman sent Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas south with the Army of the Cumberland to threaten the Confederate left flank. Anticipating this move, Johnston countered by sending Lt. Gen. John Bell Hood's corps south to meet them. The 14,000 Confederates met 15,000 Union soldiers at Kolb's Farm on June 22. Thinking his advance line had only met skirmishers, Hood ordered a full advance against the Union troops, which - due to receiving advanced warning of the attack - had already entrenched. The Confederate advance slowed in the face of return fire that was greater than expected, and was ultimately forced to retreat from - and through - heavy artillery and enfilading fire. Confederate losses numbered 1,500, compared to just 350 on the Union side.

Though victorious at Kolb's Farm, Sherman did not have enough forces to complete his planned flanking maneuver. In frustration, Sherman reported, "The whole country is one vast fort, and Johnston must have at least 50 miles (80 km) of connected trenches with abates and finished batteries. We gain ground daily, fighting all the time... Our lines are now in close contact and the fighting incessant, with a good deal of artillery. As fast as we gain one position the enemy has another all ready... Kennesaw... is the key to the whole country." Upon reaching this conclusion, Sherman attempted something he had always avoided: a direct frontal assault. His target was Kennesaw Mountain, the site he had refused to attack a few days earlier. Sherman's change of heart was based on the assumption that Johnston had thinned out his line too much in order to counter Union flanking maneuvers. To increase this likelihood, Sherman sent Maj. Gen. James McPherson's Army of the Tennessee to feint against Johnston's north flank, while Thomas' Army of the Cumberland launched the main attack against the Confederate center. And Maj. Gen. John Schofield's Army of the Ohio continued to push along the south end of the line. The north and center advances stalled under heavy fire, with Union soldiers forced to take cover in ravines and behind trees, with heavy losses. Only Schofield's advance was successful, advancing on the Confederate position largely without opposition, forcing Johnston to withdraw. Kennesaw Mountain was a tactical loss for the Union, which saw 3,000 casualties, compared to 1,000 on the Confederate side. Yet, Johnston's inability to halt the Union advance would soon lead to the end of his command, while setting the stage for the final Union advance on Atlanta. (To be continued.) P.T.F.



### This Month in Military History

January 4, 1780: A major snowstorm hits Gen. George Washington's army at its Winter Quarters in Morristown, New Jersey. This event was just one of many in what became one of the coldest winters on record, bringing even more hardship than the army had suffered at Valley Forge.

January 11, 1879: British troops invade the Zululand area of South Africa, beginning the Anglo-Zulu War. The ensuing five-month conflict resulted in the end of Zulu dominance in the region.

January 18, 532: In the wake of riots, Byzantine Emperor Justinian plans to flee Constantinople, but is stopped by his wife, Theodora, who announces, "Never will I see a day when I am not saluted as Empress." The emperor calls out the troops, who massacre 30,000 rebels, ending the unrest.

January 25, 1971: To avoid being arrested, Field Marshal Idi Amin launches a military coup and declares himself President of Uganda. His nine-year military dictatorship leads to the execution of perhaps as many as 500,000 people.

### JMC Historical Document Collection

The JMC Public and Congressional Affairs Office (PCA) maintains the JMC Archives, which collects and maintains historically significant records, including: emails, manuscripts, letters, reports, studies, images, videos, films, photographs, oral history interviews, briefings, SOPs, policies, decision papers, memoranda, statistics, newspapers, newsletters, brochures, maps, blue prints, drawings, artifacts, and more. Such records are pertinent to the Army's institutional knowledge of active and predecessor installations, the ammunition industrial base, and JMC missions. JMC regularly uses these materials to research command history, and to answer research queries. When JMC workers leave positions or make physical moves, it is vital that their records be assessed before disposal. If employees are uncertain about the historical value of materials, the best policy is to make the items available to Command Historian Keri Pleasant (keri.j.pleasant.civ@mail.mil) or Archivist Paul Ferguson (paul.t.ferguson14.civ@mail.mil) in Room 661.