

# THOMAS' NIGHT MARCH

## CHICKAMAUGA CAMPAIGN HERITAGE TRAIL

On September 18, 1863, the Confederate forces began a preliminary push against Reed's Bridge and Alexander's Bridge on the extreme left of the Federal position. Colonels Minty



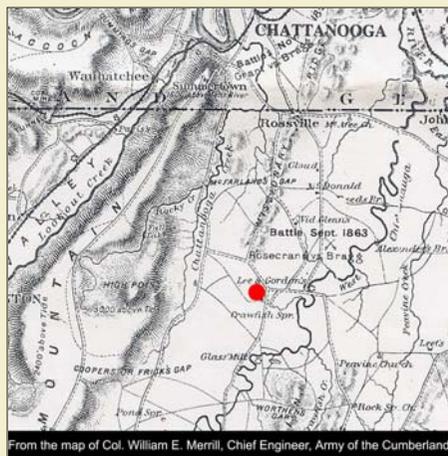
PREPARING TO MARCH

and Wilder, stationed at these bridges, had given General William Rosecrans repeated warnings of a Confederate buildup that threatened these positions. By the end of the day on the 18th General Rosecrans realized that he was in danger of being cut off from Chattanooga. General George Thomas was ordered to move the 14th Army Corps up from McLemore's Cove to cover the Federal left.

"By that night it became perfectly clear to all," Charles Dana wrote, "that Bragg's plan was to push by our left into Chattanooga. This compelled another

rapid movement by the left down the Chickamauga. By a tiresome night march Thomas moved down past Crittenden and below Lee and Gordon's Mills, taking position in the vicinity of a little house, known as the Widow Glenn's, and below, covering the Rossville road, and now forming the left of the Union army... These movements were hurriedly made, and the troops, especially those of Thomas, were very much exhausted by their efforts to get into position."

Thomas encountered considerable difficulty on the



From the map of Col. William E. Merrill, Chief Engineer, Army of the Cumberland

move. The roads were in bad shape and also congested. In some areas, units from other commands refused to move. It was 10:30 p.m. by the time Thomas reached Crawfish Spring. He moved Negley's division off the road at that point and instructed them to camp around the spring. He knew that it would take most of the night to march his men to the right of the army. It was obvious that the men would be in poor shape for combat in the morning after such a march. Nevertheless, he determined to make the best of the situation. He sent advance parties north along the Dry Valley road. They set fire to the rail fences on either side of the road to light and mark the way. Smoke from the fires mixed with the rising dust to sting the eyes and burn the throats of the marching soldiers. The column moved slowly, with frequent stops and starts. Whenever the men to the front would halt, those behind would drop to the dust, or rest in place, asleep on their feet. All night long it went on stopping and starting, stopping and starting all night to cover five miles. Dawn was approaching when they halted in the fields east of the Widow Glenn's farm.



GENERAL THOMAS AND HIS STAFF IN THE FIELD

The head of the column [of the 14th Army Corps] reached Kelly's farm about daylight on the 19th, Baird's division in front," General George H. Thomas later wrote, "and took up a position at the forks of the road, facing toward Reed's and Alexander's Bridges over the Chickamauga... Kelly's house is situated in an opening about three-fourths of a mile wide, on the east side of the State [Lafayette] Road." Both armies were now in place to begin the Battle of Chickamauga.

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