

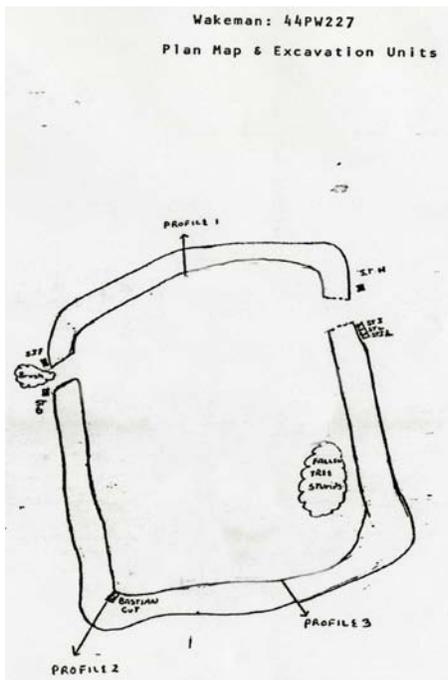
Cannon Branch Earthwork History

According to the contract specifications written up by the Railroad's Chief Engineer Thomas C. Atkinson in 1850 "The bridges from Alexandria, as far as, and inclusive of that at Bull Run, shall be built of the best description of uncoursed masonry, the stones to be not less than ten inches thick to have horizontal beds and vertical joints on the face..." The stone was acquired from the Little Falls area on the Potomac.

After 1862, Union forces controlled the Manassas area for the remainder of the war. Defensive earthworks along the Orange & Alexandria Railroad (O & A) were probably constructed after April 1863, when Major General Joseph Hooker shifted the focus of Union operations to the Prince William County area. Throughout 1863 and 1864, Confederate forces under the command of John Singleton Mosby conducted a series of raids on Union supply lines along the O & A.

Cannon Branch fortification (a National Register of Historic Sites property) is associated with the Union occupation forces from 1862 through the end of the war in 1865. The fort does not appear to have been attacked or seen any action during the course of the Civil War.

After the war, the area around Cannon Branch Fort was used for agricultural purposes during the nineteenth century. B.O. Wakeman, who died in 1984, farmed the tract, known by the family name of Wakeman, as a dairy operation from the 1940s.



Cannon Branch Fort comprises a rectangular earthwork, approximately 105 by 145 feet in area. The earthwork is seated about 80 feet from the right-of-way of the former Orange & Alexandria Railroad

Historical Context

Fall 1862 after the Battle of Second Manassas (Bull Run)

With the defeat of Pope's army at the Battle of Second Manassas, Prince William County was only briefly behind Confederate lines. For the remainder of 1862 the county was again under the watchful eye of Union troops. To secure the area, in the fall of 1862, Union Gen. George G. Meade ordered construction of a series of small earthworks along the O & A to guard against guerilla raids.

The location of Cannon Branch fort indicates that it was one of the earthworks built under Meade's orders. It is positioned at the point where the O & A crossed a stream known as Cannon Branch. The fort would have held a company of federal troops and perhaps several cannon. Cannon Branch earthwork was built to protect a vital supply line from attacks by small, irregular units. At the time of its use during the Civil War, the area surrounding the fort was most likely cleared of all vegetation in order to provide a clear field of vision for observation and defensive fire.

April 1863

The situation changed as General Joseph Hooker, now in command of the Army of the Potomac, sent a force of cavalry to occupy Warrenton in Fauquier County. Once Warrenton was in Union hands, Hooker began to use the O & A to supply his army. Gen. Stuart ordered Mosby to interrupt the Union supply line on April 26, just as Hooker was preparing for the Battle of Chancellorsville.

Attacking the railroad was especially dangerous as Union cavalry camps had been established about every two miles in the area due to previous raids. The Union railroad guards learned to fortify the vulnerable points along the line and to position their cavalry units effectively so that they could respond at a moment's notice to a Confederate attack. In addition, an infantry guard was placed on each train.

October 14, 1863, Battle of Bristoe Station

From their position at Cannon Branch the Union soldiers guarding the O & A could hear the firing and shouting of the battle. After the battle, the Pennsylvania Reserves was the main body that encamped there from November 1863 through April 1864. Pennsylvania Reserves (Third Corps) and other Pennsylvania and New York troops were placed to guard the O & A from Manassas to Warrenton.

The People of Cannon Branch 1862-1863



Major General George Gordon Meade (1815-1872)

Graduating in the West Point Class of 1835, Meade was a surveyor and engineer in the Mexican War. He served as a Union general, rising from command of a brigade to the Army of the Potomac.

Meade was known for his strategic entrenchments such as the system of forts along the O & A Railroad. He is best known for defeating Confederate General Robert E. Lee at the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863.



General Joseph Hooker (1814-1879)

A 1837 graduate of West Point, Hooker served in the Mexican War like many of his colleagues from the academy. When the Civil War broke out, he was made brigadier general of volunteers, served at First Manassas and put in command of the defenses of Washington. He fought at Second Manassas and Antietam. In early 1863, Hooker replaced General Burnside, assuming command of the Army of the Potomac. By the spring of 1863, with 135,000 men, Hooker modestly claimed to have created "the finest Army on the Planet." His defeat at Chancellorsville in May of 1863 proved too much and Hooker resigned to be replaced by Meade.



Col. John Singleton Mosby (1833-1916)

Nicknamed the "**Gray Ghost**," Mosby was a Confederate cavalry battalion commander in the Civil War. His command, the 43rd Battalion, 1st Virginia Cavalry, known as *Mosby's Rangers*, was a partisan ranger unit noted for its lightning quick raids and its ability to elude Union Army pursuers.

By January 1863, Mosby commanded a regimental-sized unit of partisan rangers operating in Northern Virginia, right in the midst of Meade's army. He successfully disrupted the O & A and Manassas Gap railroad operations, burned bridges and captured supplies and money, and attrition of Union couriers caused