

# The Complete History of the Fortifications at Centreville, Va.

John C. Carter

The Past is Never Dead,  
It's not even Past

William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*

# My original purpose expanded with the discovery several things

- #1 The nature and purpose of temporary fortifications. The sum of the parts of the fortifications at Centreville never seemed to add up.
- #2 Brady's photographers had deliberately created iconic images which depicted both the fortifications and the town of Centreville as being inconsequential.
- #3 William Harrison Lamb's statement that a **complete** history of the fortifications had never been written. A complete history would require knowing what led the war to Centreville and what happened afterwards. The history of the fortifications and the village are intertwined and must be studied together.
- #4 William Harrison Lamb's 20th century plan for "returning Centreville to its former level of prosperity." When was Centreville prosperous before the war?
- #5 The diversity of Centreville since colonial times - including immigrants and marginalized people- indentured servants, enslaved persons, and free Blacks.
- #6 The importance of community and its soul which holds it together, which helped to save Centreville after the war.

# #1 - Re-discovering the Fortifications

- The works were not designed to defend a position, neither Centreville nor Manassas Junction, but to slow up an attacking army and allow defenders time to fall back or to be reenforced.
- The army had to remain in Northern Virginia as the best defense of Richmond. Centreville became the army's cantonment.
- General Joseph E. Johnston did not want to be in Centreville. Johnston wanted to either attack Washington, D.C., or set up a defensive line behind the Rappahannock River.
- Johnston's plan was to man the works at Centreville with 2-3,000 soldiers, leaving the rest of the army free to maneuver.
- The fortifications were developed from July 1861- Jan. 1862.

# Temporary Fortification





# #2 The Iconic Images of Centreville

- Matthew Brady's photographers intentionally created an iconic image of Centreville- an icon is a sign or graphical symbol whose form suggests its meaning. Image becomes identity. There are four iconic images of the fortifications at Centreville
- The photographers were strong Union men who thought the Confederates' just dessert was death. Union soldiers were posed on the fortifications to show how easily they were taken; the fake "Quaker Guns" were a shot at General McClellan hesitancy to attack them.
- The empty, deteriorating camp amid the fortifications showed how insignificant the works were, and that Centreville was a ghost-town.
- Washington Star photographer, J. (John) Harry Shannon, "The Rambler," perpetuated the 20th-century ghost-town image.



**Iconic Image #1**  
The Stone Church at Centreville





# Iconic Image #2

The Quaker Guns



# Iconic Image #3

The Centreville Encampment



# Iconic Image #4

Fort Johnston Redoubt



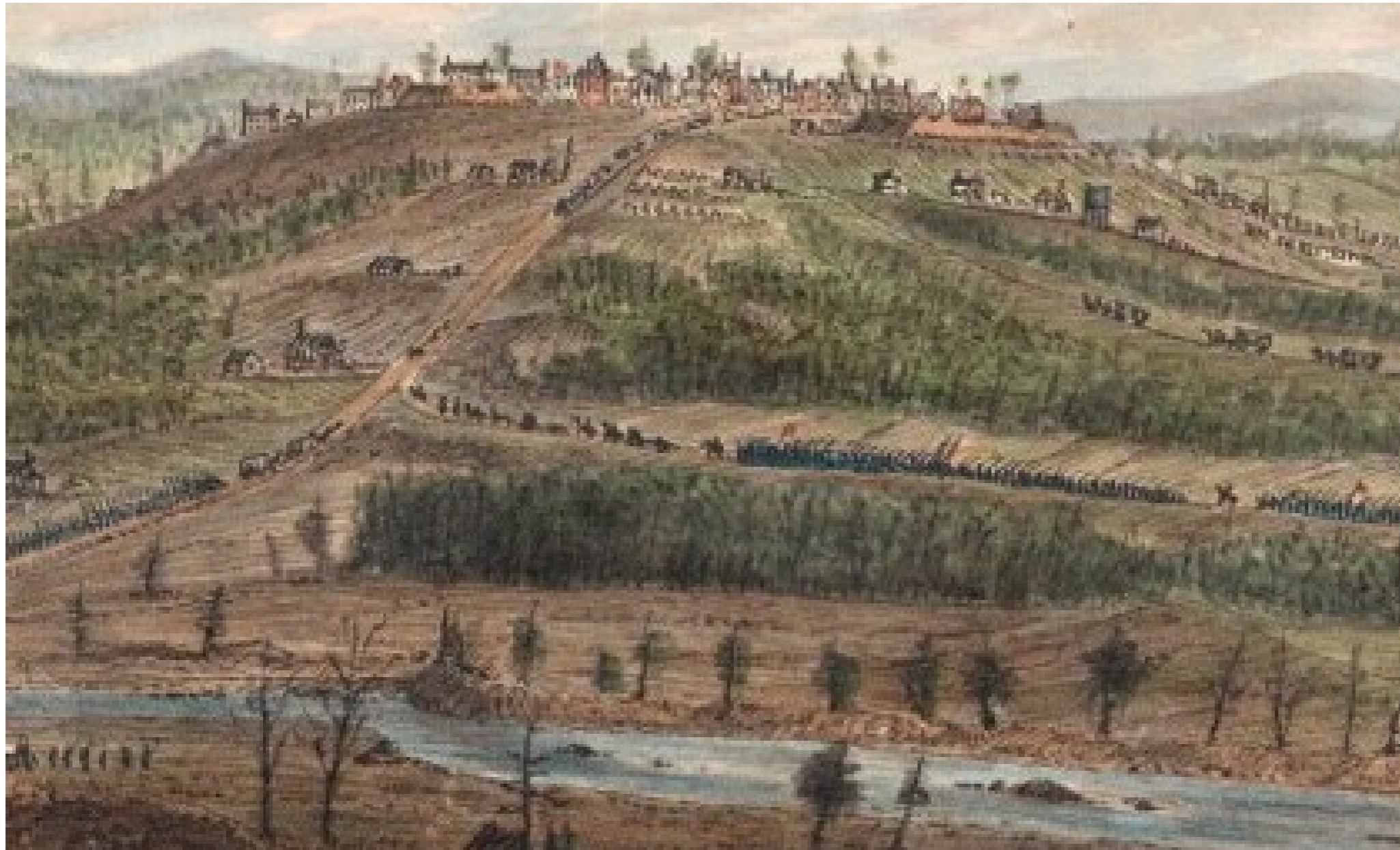
Early 20th-Century Centreville  
J. Harry Shannon, “The Rambler”

“In all the literature of Virginia history there exists no consecutive account of the forts of Centreville. No one seems to have made a consecutive record of the full service performed by the forts of Centerville in that stirring drama.”

-William Harrison Lamb

# Centreville's Geographical Connections

- Centreville was a product of its geographical environment. It is encircled by the Potomac River and its tributaries including the Occoquan. The fords were crossing sites for Bull Run, Cub Run, Big and Little Rocky Run.
- Mountains and their mountain gaps determined the location of the roads around Centreville and allowed passage through the Bull Run Mountains and the Blue Ridge Mountains to the Shenandoah Valley.
- Connecting roadways at Centreville brought in people, commerce, and later armies on the Warrenton Pike, Braddock Road, and the Centreville Road. They were passageways between Alexandria and the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Shenandoah Valley.
- The factors which led to its commercial success made it a strategic point during the Civil War.



The lay of the land determined the site  
of the fortifications and of the town  
“The Heights of Centreville”



# Centreville skyline

Left- Grigsby House; right St. John's & Royal Oaks



# The Civil War Comes to Centreville

- The Civil War didn't just arrive one day at Centreville. A long chain of events over more than a century led to its involvement.
- The village was connected to the Blackburn's Ford area. The coming of the railroad created Manassas Junction and changed the relationship, making Centreville a strategic point. The direct path to it went through Centreville.
- The decisions of both Confederate and Union leaders directly impacted Centreville. The first decision was to set up a defensive line along Bull Run, and not at Centreville.
- Centreville was twice occupied during the war by each army.
- Both armies greatly impacted the village. "Anywhere the Army of Northern Virginia bivouacked became instantaneously a community larger than any pre-war Virginia city" – Historian, Robert K. Krick

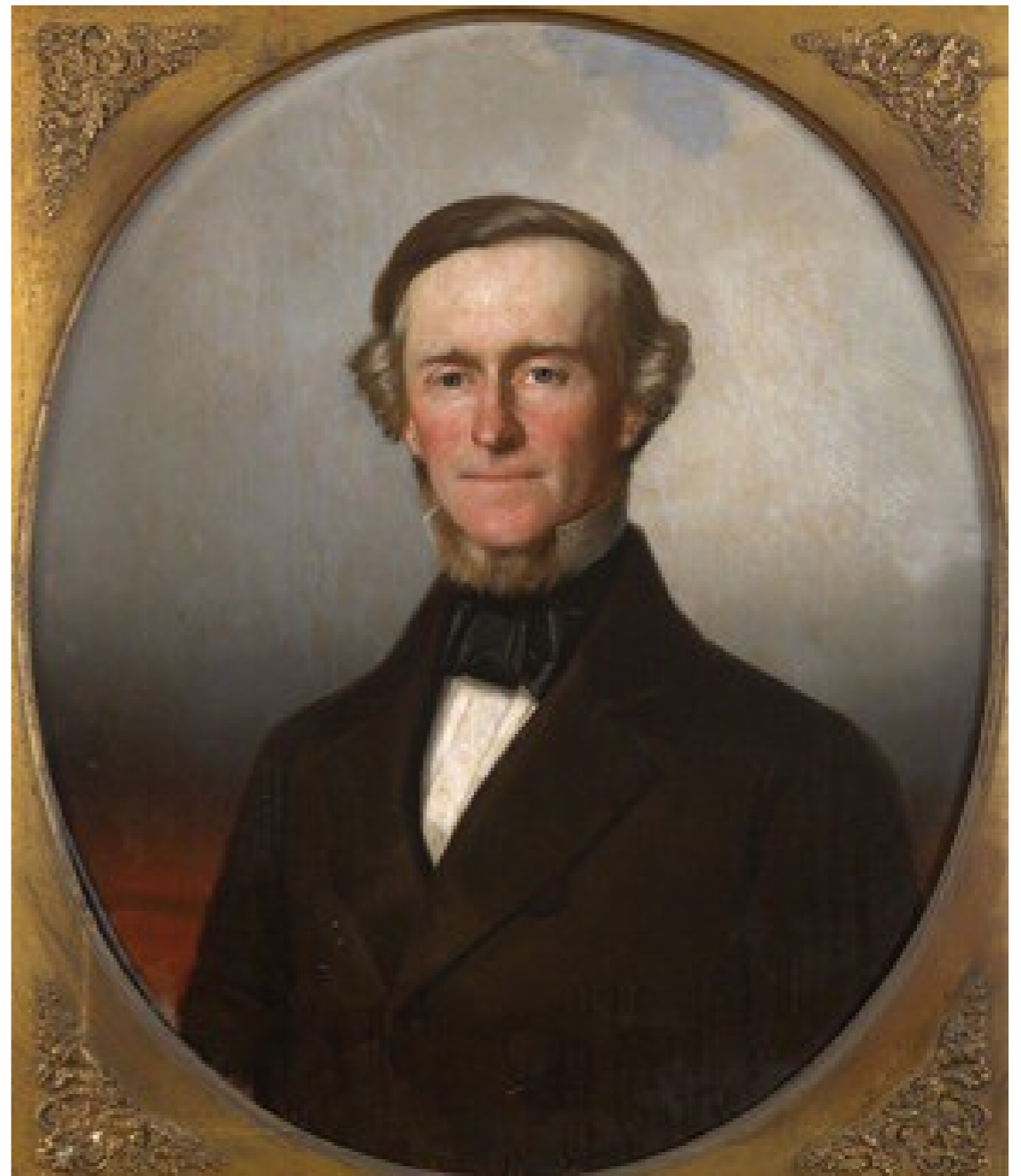
# First Confederate occupation June 1861

- April 1861: first Confederate defense- Alexandria Line- Br. Gen. Phillip St. George Cocke.
- May 1861: Gen. Beauregard takes command at Manassas. Cavalry scouts Centreville.
- Early July 1861: Beauregard sends Cocke & Capt. David Bullock Harris to Centreville.
- July 1861: First fortification built- probably Artillery Hill.



# Brig. Gen. Phillip St. George Cocke

- 1832 West Point graduate. Raised his own companies.
- First commander of the Alexandria line (Manassas).
- Owned Belmead Plantation in Powhatan County.
- Presented the idea to use trains to move troops between Manassas & the Shen. Valley.
- Committed suicide the day after Christmas, 1861.



# Capt. David Bullock Harris

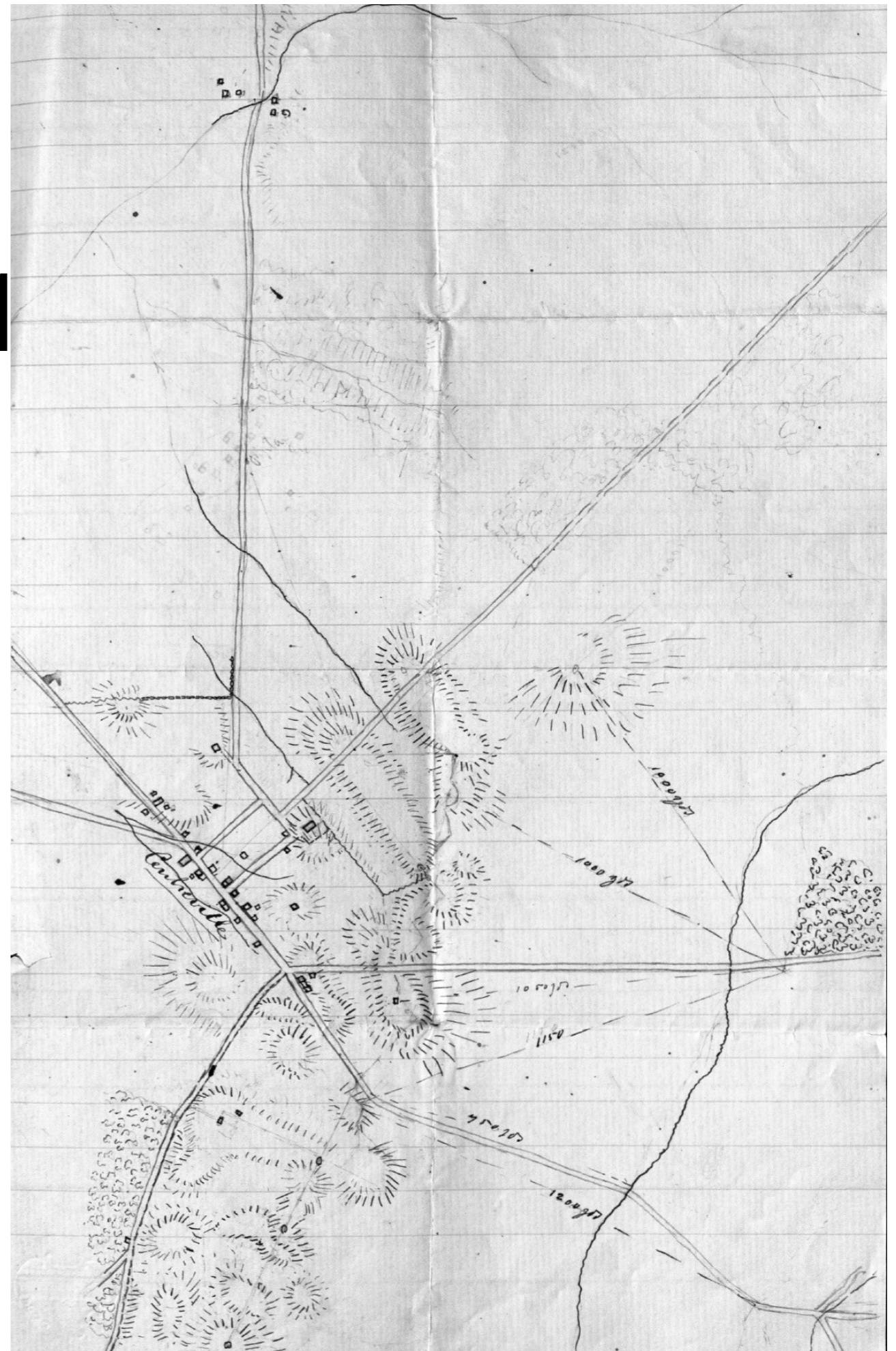
- David Bullock Harris, Confederate engineer of the fortifications.
- West Point graduate General Beauregard's top engineer. He was 14 years old when he went to West Point
- Beauregard once wrote: "He was the only officer in his command who never made a mistake...he always exceeded his most sanguine expectations...his rank never equalled his true position."
- Fortifications built according to Mahan's West Point standards, but modified to fit the terrain.

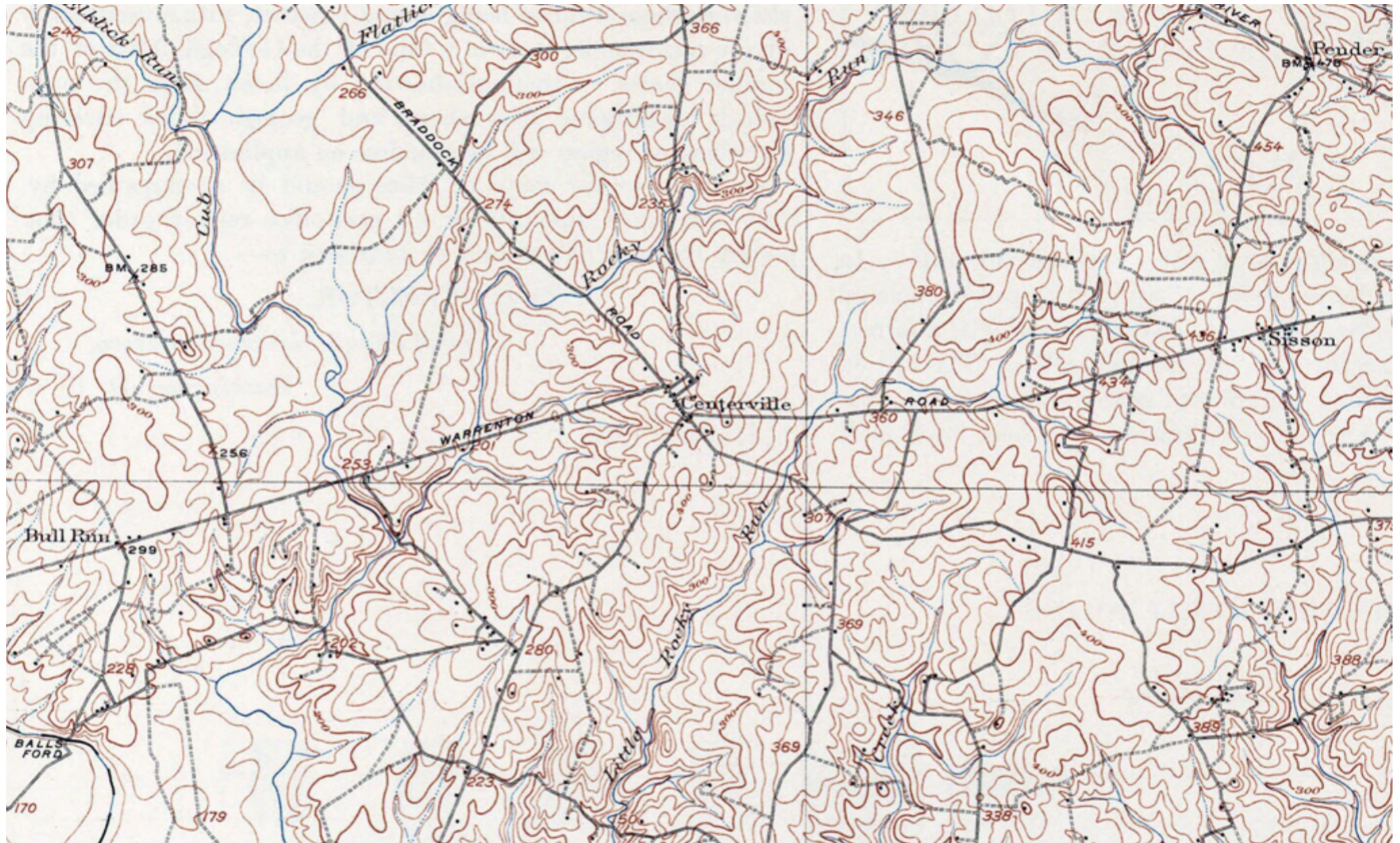


June-July 1861

# Map of Centreville

Capt. David Bullock  
Harris



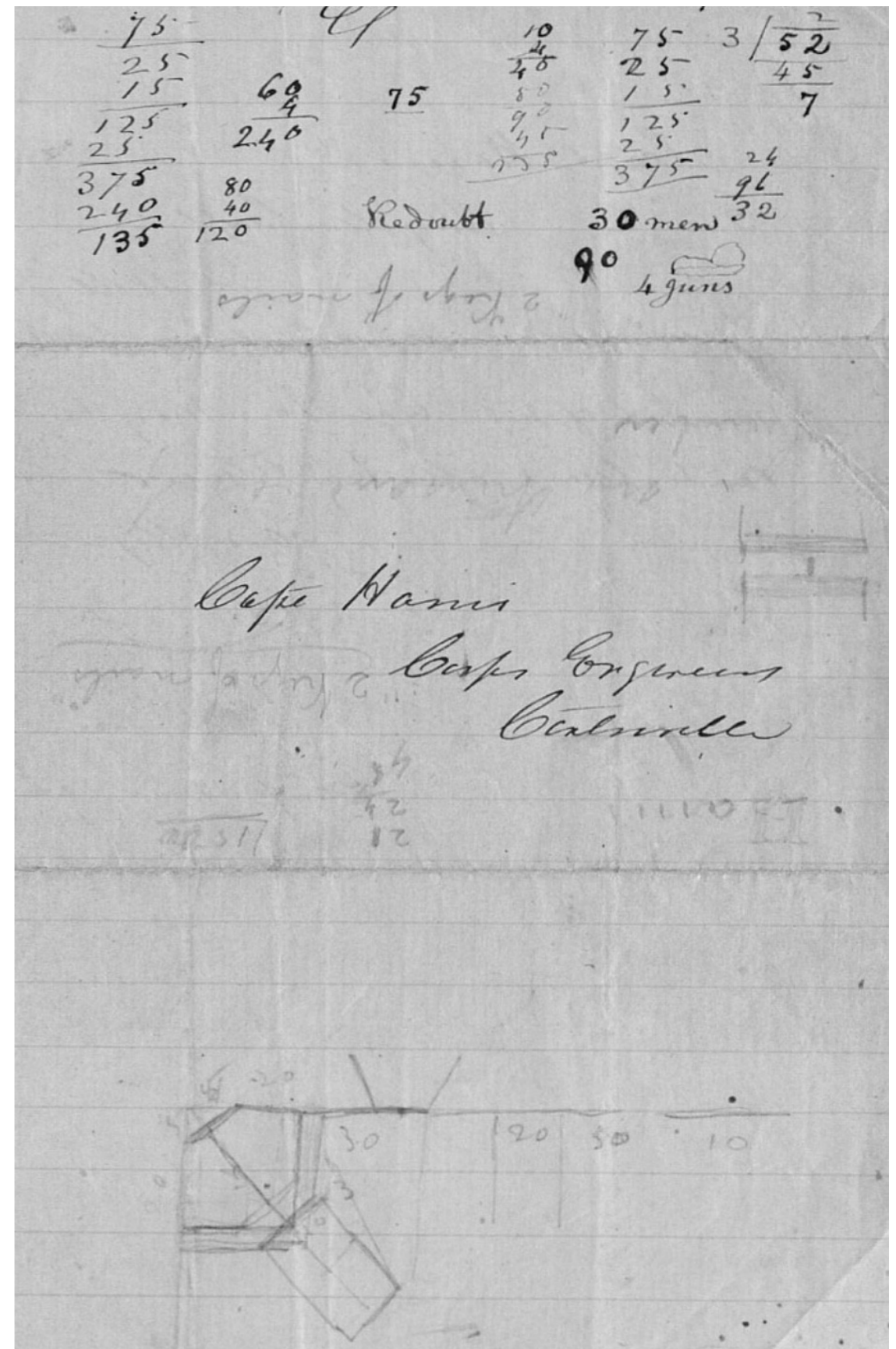


# 1912 U.S. Geological Survey Map

Fairfax Quadrangle- Centreville area

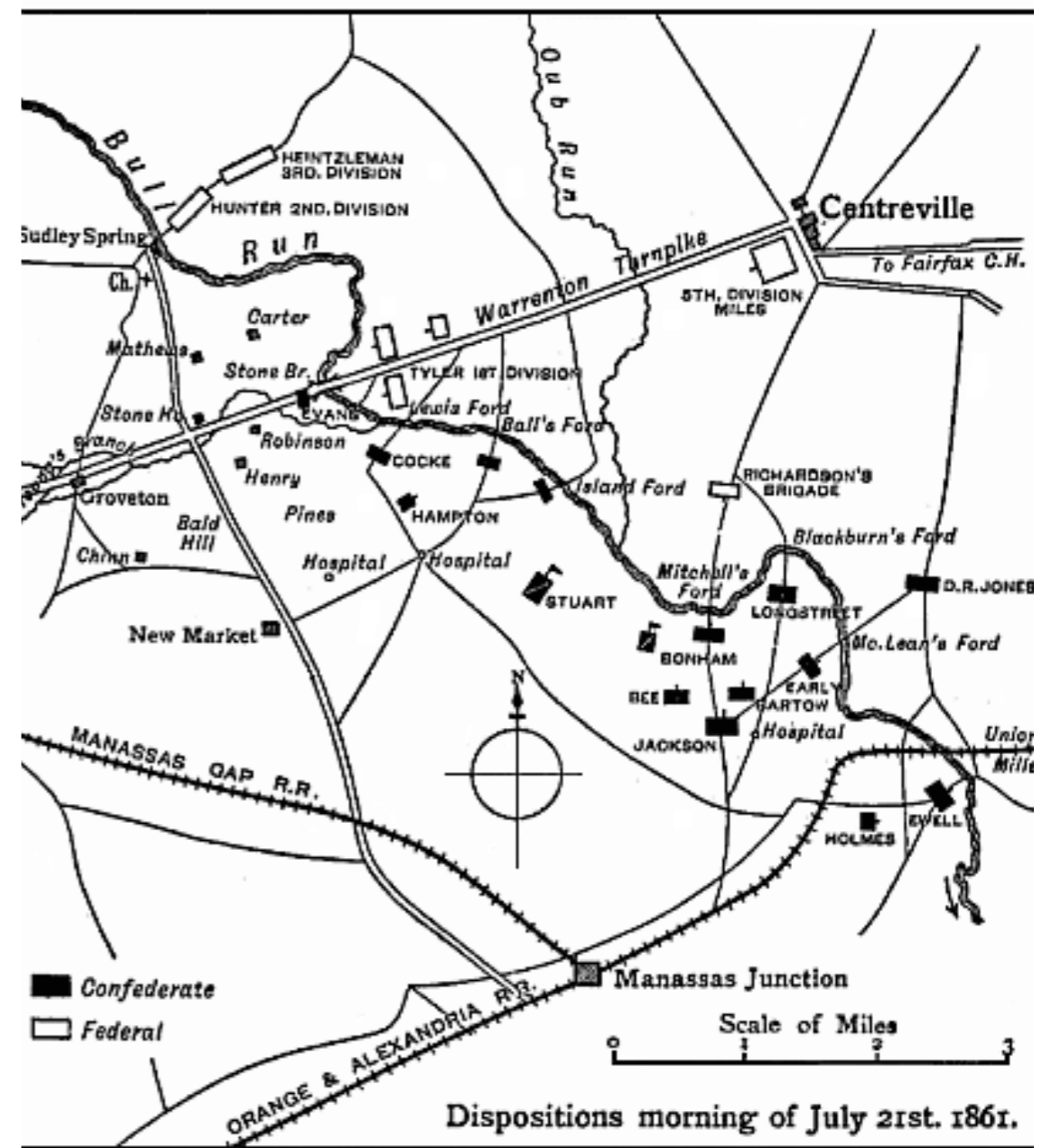
# Capt. David Bullock Harris sketch

Notes and redoubt  
sketch in Centreville



# First Union Occupation July 1861

- Confederates abandoned Centreville just before First Manassas- McDowell occupies Centreville and builds defensive redoubts.
- Blenkers Brigade defends the ridge at Centreville- Confederates will only advance as far as Cub Run.
- Union forces immediately abandon Centreville after the battle.
- Johnston, Beauregard and Davis were criticized for not attacking Washington.
- No one had considered the possibility of a victorious Confederate army not being able to go on the offensive.





# Second Confederate Occupation

## 6 Months- September 1861- March 1862

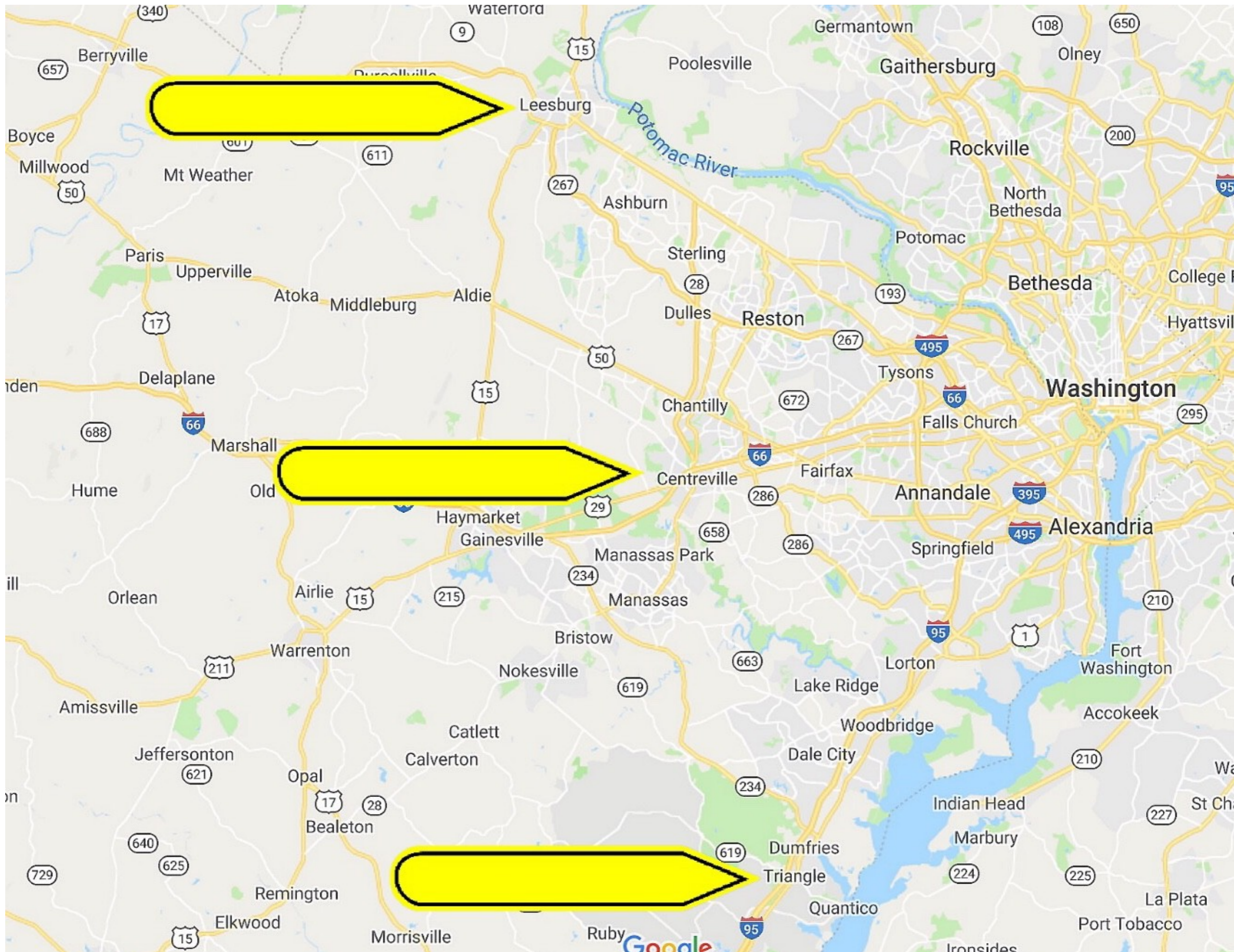
- Death from disease forces the army out of Manassas and to Bristow.
- Aug. 8-9- Johnston & Beauregard move their HQs to Fairfax C. H.
- September 22- October 1861- army moves to Centreville.
- Capt. David Bullock Harris ordered to build the fortifications.
- Work continues to mid-Jan. 1862.
- Sgt. James Daniel map of 12/18/61.

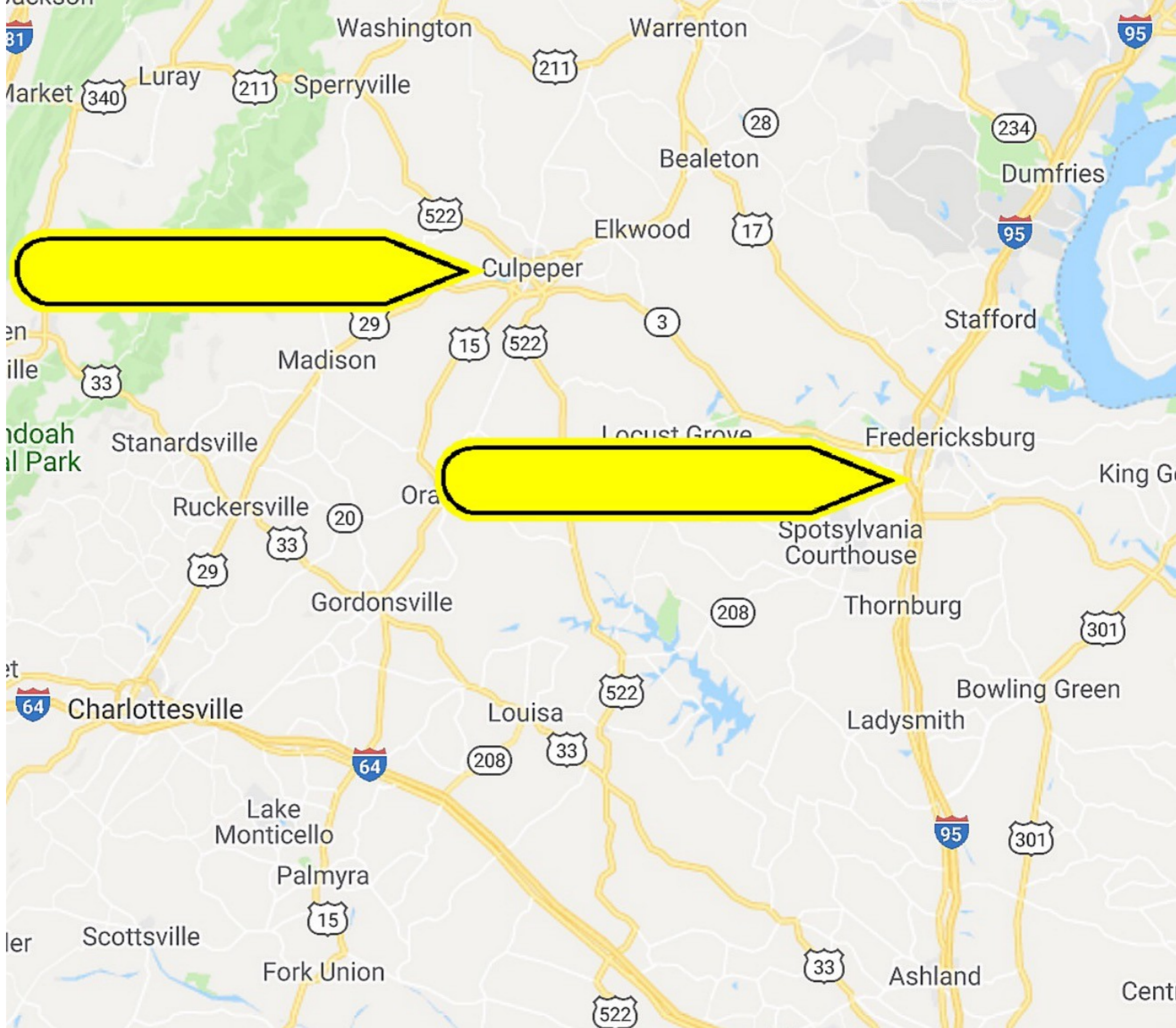


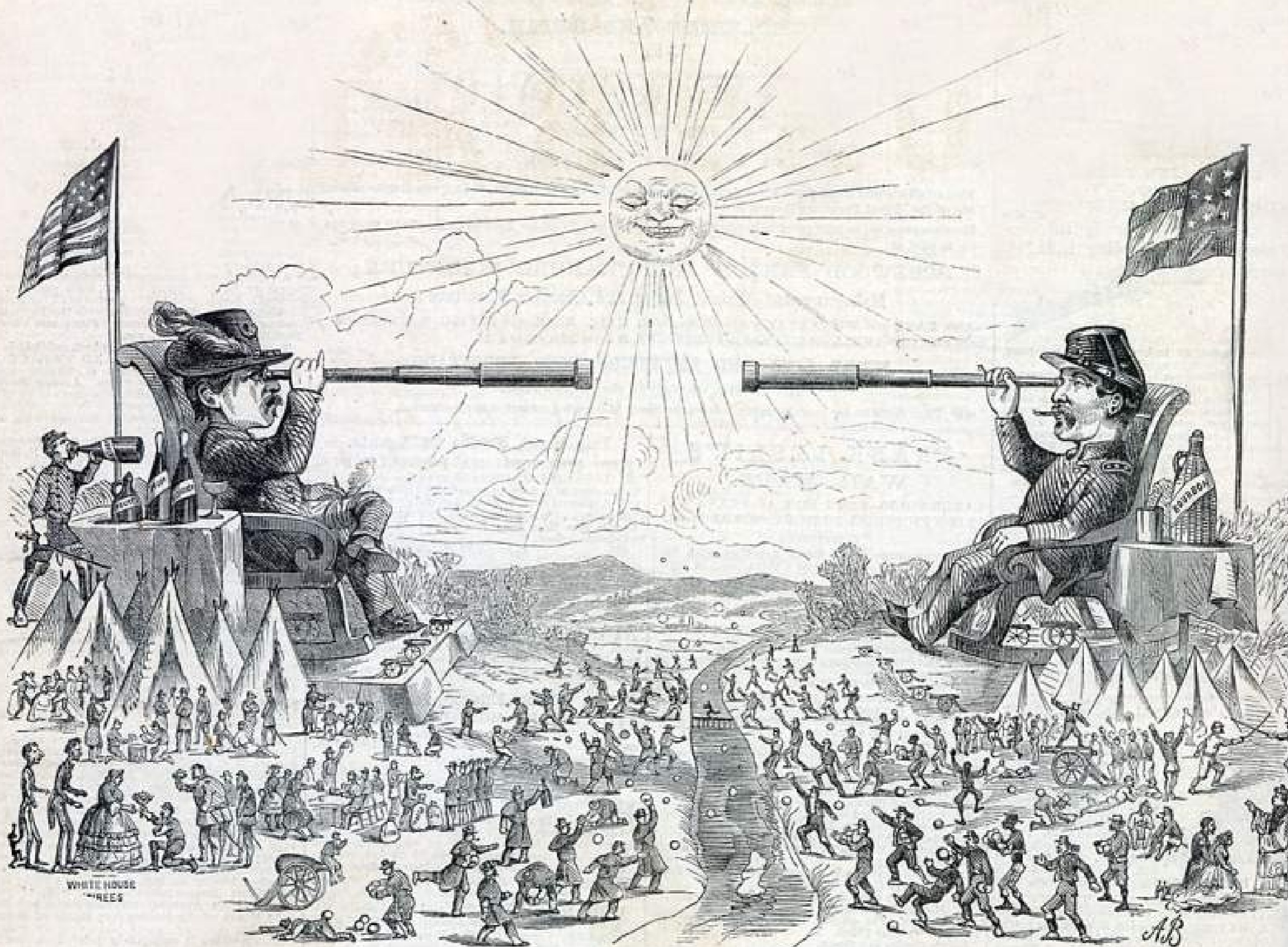


# STRATEGY

The Union cavalry hesitated to charge- there had to be more Confederates close by







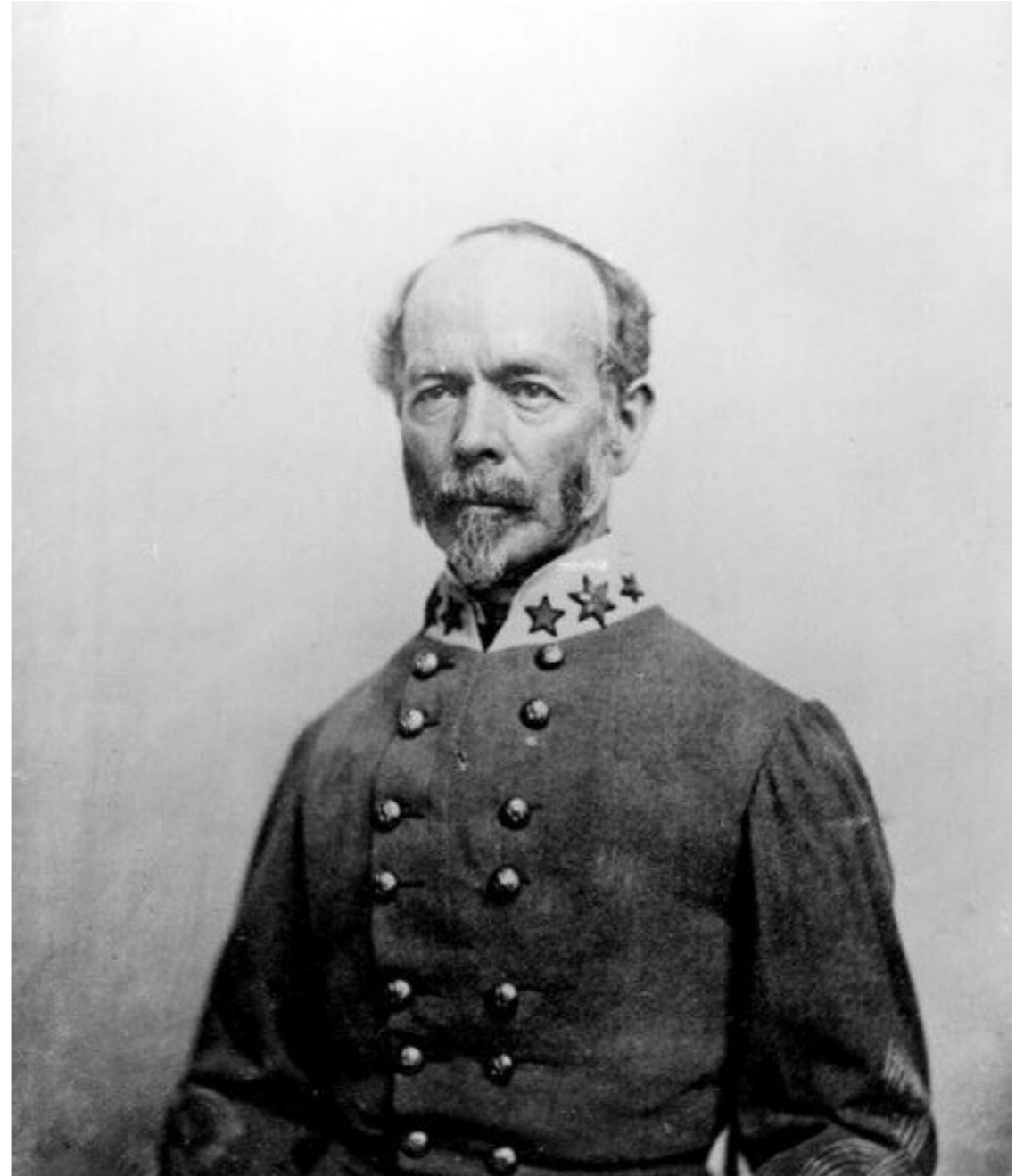
WHITE HOUSE  
"REES"

AB

"MASTERLY INACTIVITY," OR SIX MONTHS ON THE POTOMAC.

# Gen. Joseph E. Johnston

- Commander, Army of the Shenandoah prior to First Manassas; Commander, Army of the Potomac afterwards.
- Wanted to attack Washington or to defend behind the Rappahannock River- He did not want to be in Centreville.
- His decisions affected all operations at Centreville- for better or for worse.





# Joseph Johnston's Headquarters

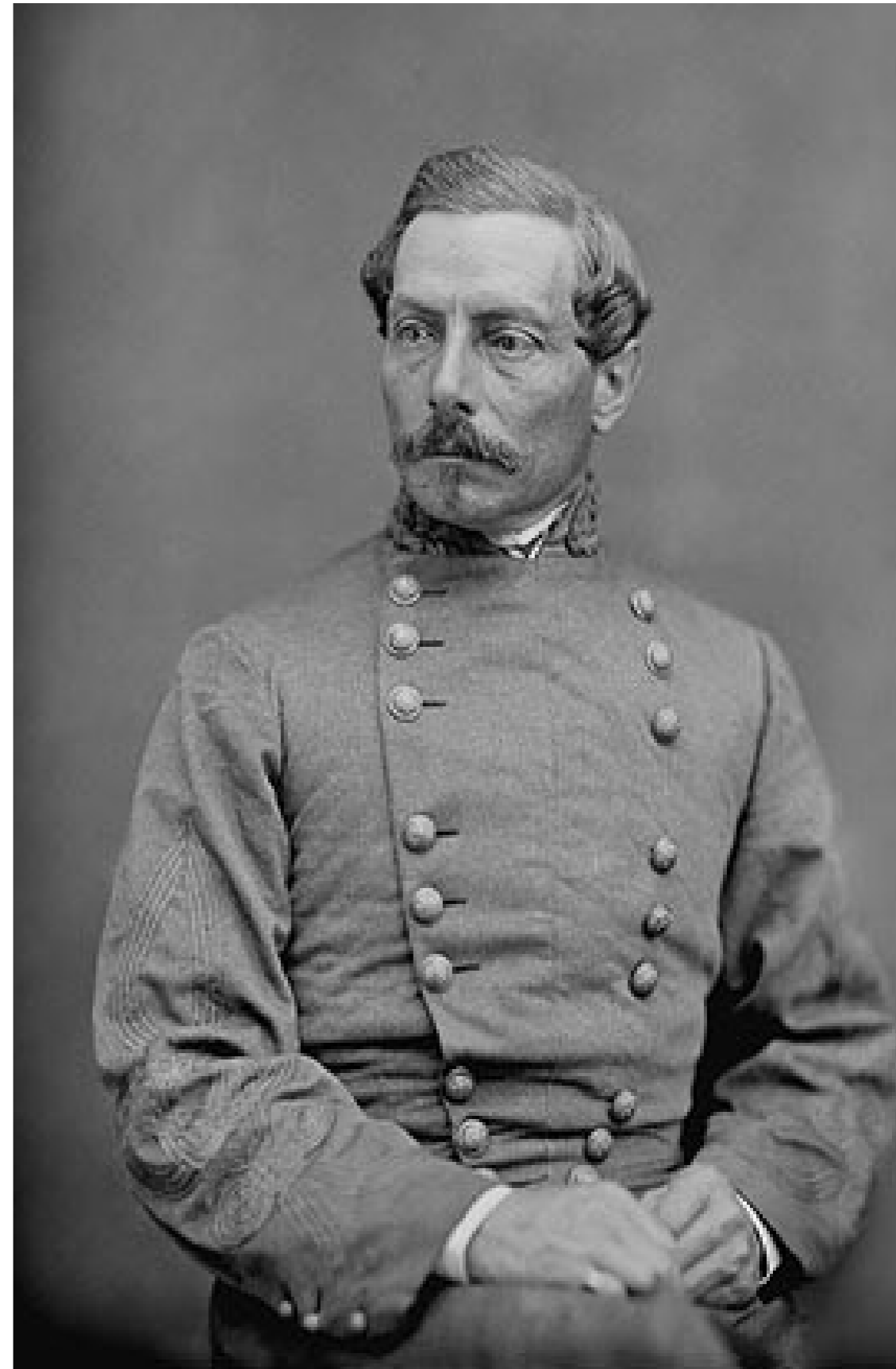
The Grigsby House



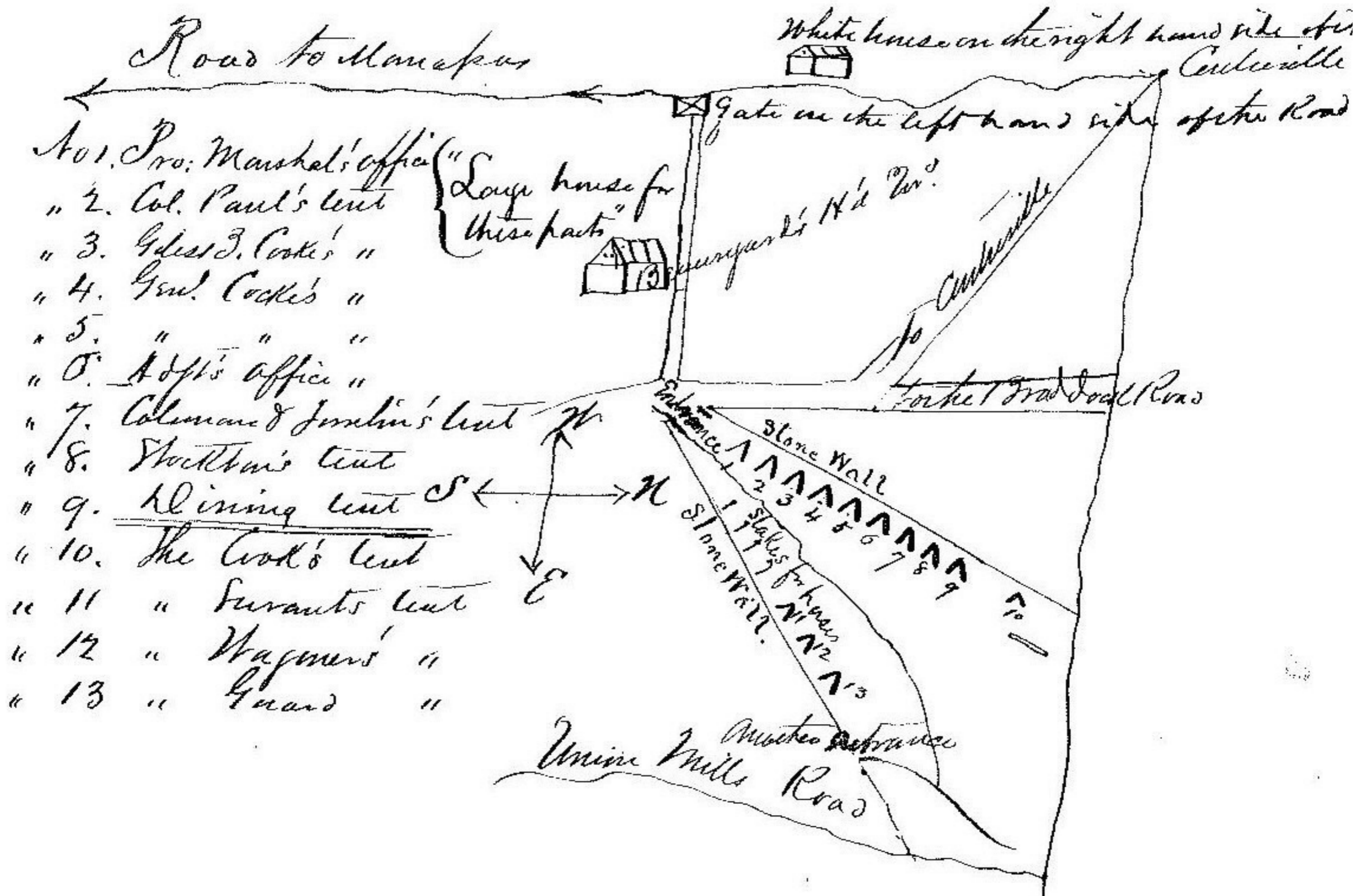


# General G. T. Beauregard

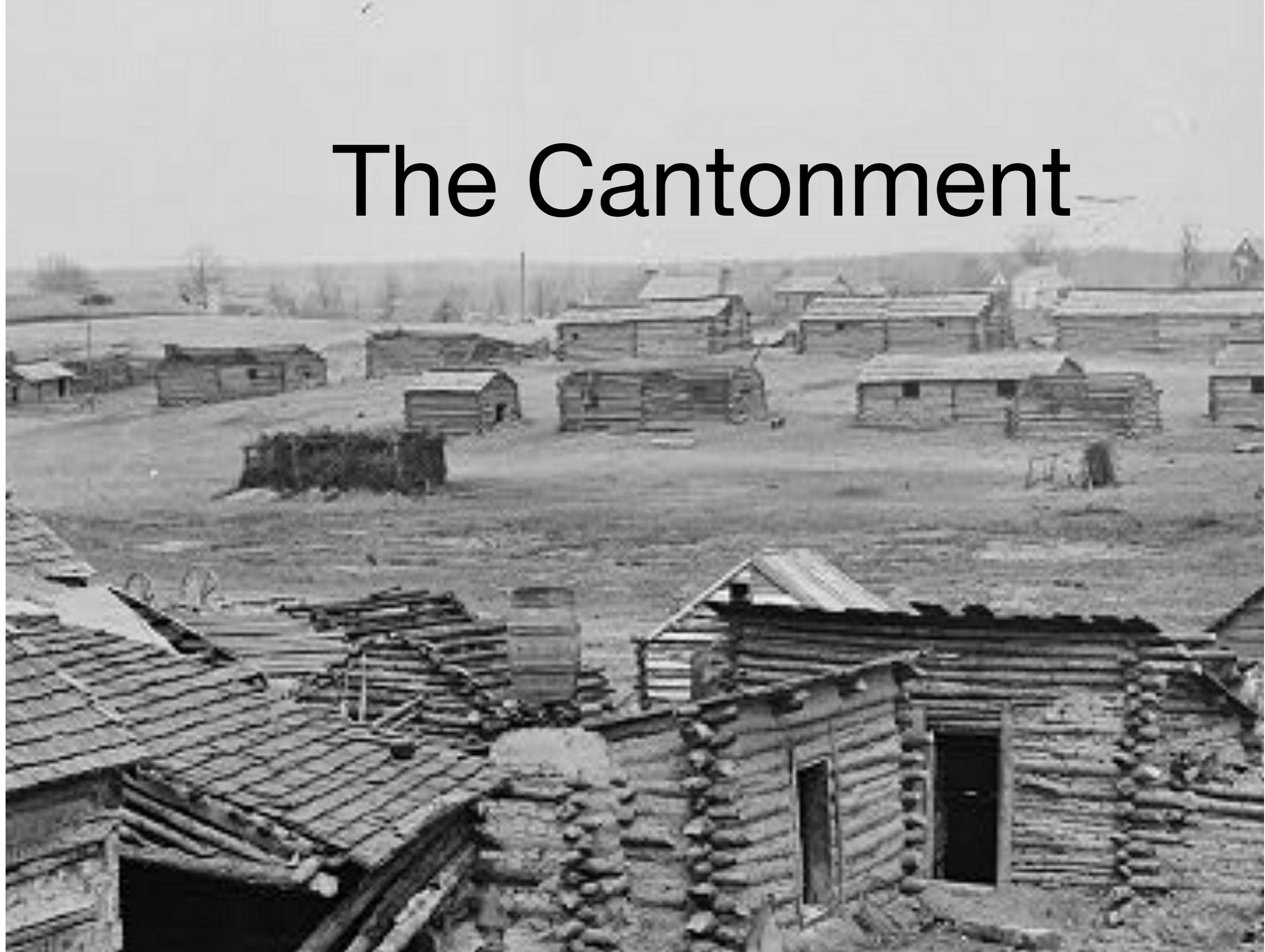
Commander at  
Manassas Junction,  
2nd in command at  
Centreville,  
Headquarters at the  
Stewart House  
residence at Level Green



# Beauregard's Headquarters



# The Cantonment



# Where the Soldiers Lived

- During most of their time in Centreville soldiers lived in tents and modified tents in the cantonment.
- Housing evolved from 2-man tents- each man providing half of the canvas- to tents with foundations and fly covers for roofs- then to seven-man cabins.
- Troops who lived together formed a mess of 6-7 men and those men later shared a cabin.
- Johnston mis-managed the construction of the cabins.





# Winter Cabins

One of two sections of winter cabins built in Centreville, not moved into until Christmas

# The Other Winter Encampments

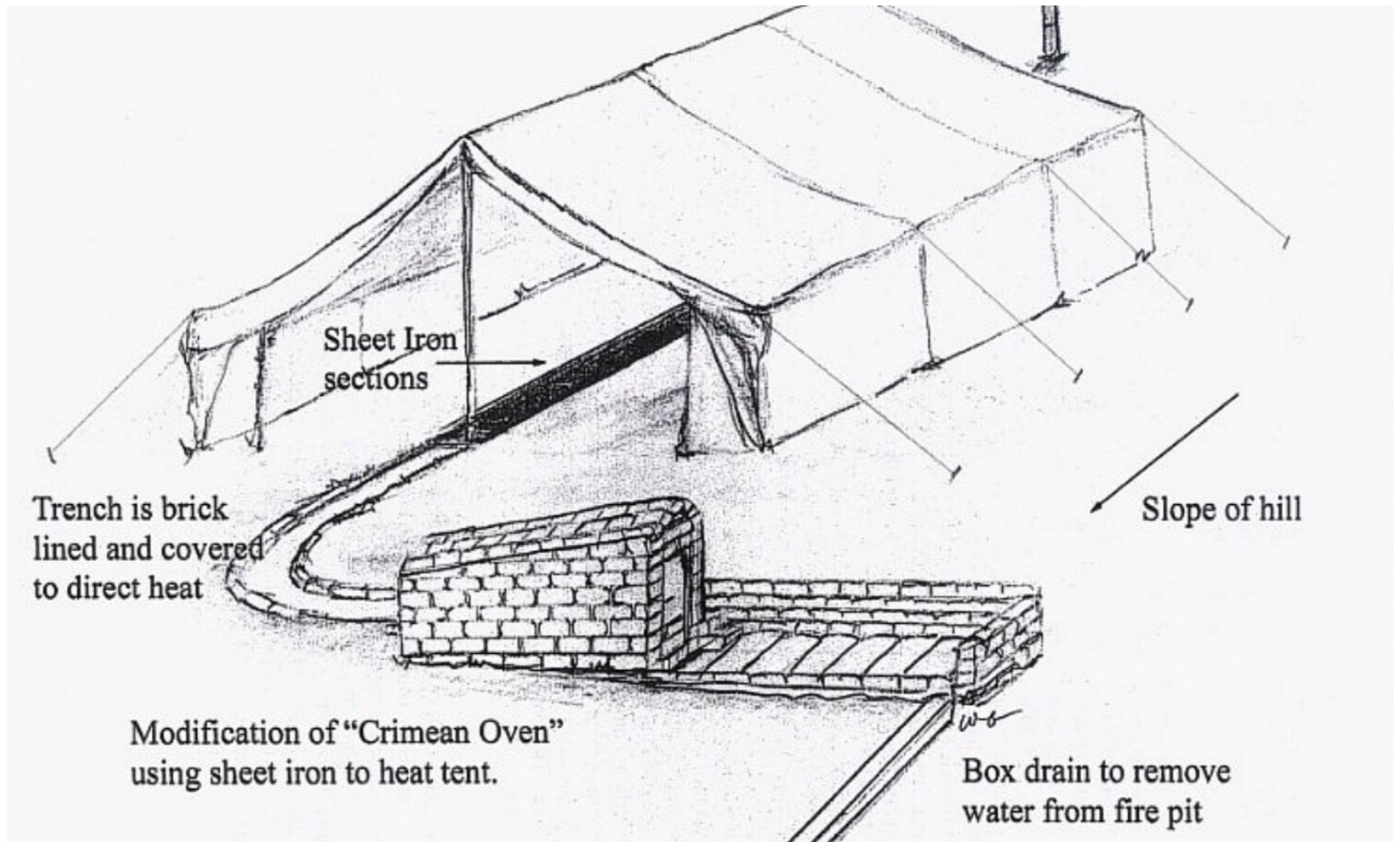
- There were 2 sections of winter cabins in Centreville. But not enough space for all of the winter cabins.
- The brigaded artillery were kept with their brigades, but in late November they had been moved to Culpeper.
- The Reserve artillery was left behind to be placed in the embrasures.
- The Cavalry encamped outside of Centreville- Fairfax, Wolf Run, Walney.
- By Christmas 1861 1/3 of the army had left for winter camps at Portici on the Warrenton Pike & Blackburn's Ford



# Availability & Use of Wood

- What happened to all the trees? According to a southern reporter, the 40,000 man Army of the Potomac (CSA) consumed EACH DAY, in cold weather, the amount of wood found on 6-7 acres of land.
- Wood was used for cooking, heating, planking roads, building the fortifications & winter cabins. Trees were also cut down for lines of fire for the artillery.
- As the winter went on, the regiments had to go further out from the town to cut and haul wood- Level Green & Sarah Summers.
- Sources of wood also included: fences, outbuildings, abandoned homes, hitching posts.





# California Oven

Crimean Oven Heating system

# Availability of water

Springs in Centreville at St. John's Church fed Dowling's Branch and the Thames River which flowed through camp.

Circling Centreville: Big Rocky Run and Little Rocky Run.

Nearby: Willow Spring- 2 miles east; Russia Branch 3 miles south near Blackburn's Ford; Johnny Moore Creek- 2 miles southeast; Cub Run- 2 miles west.

The 15-20,000 Horses had to be watered daily.

There were wells in town and more wells were dug in camps.

# Supplying the Cantonment

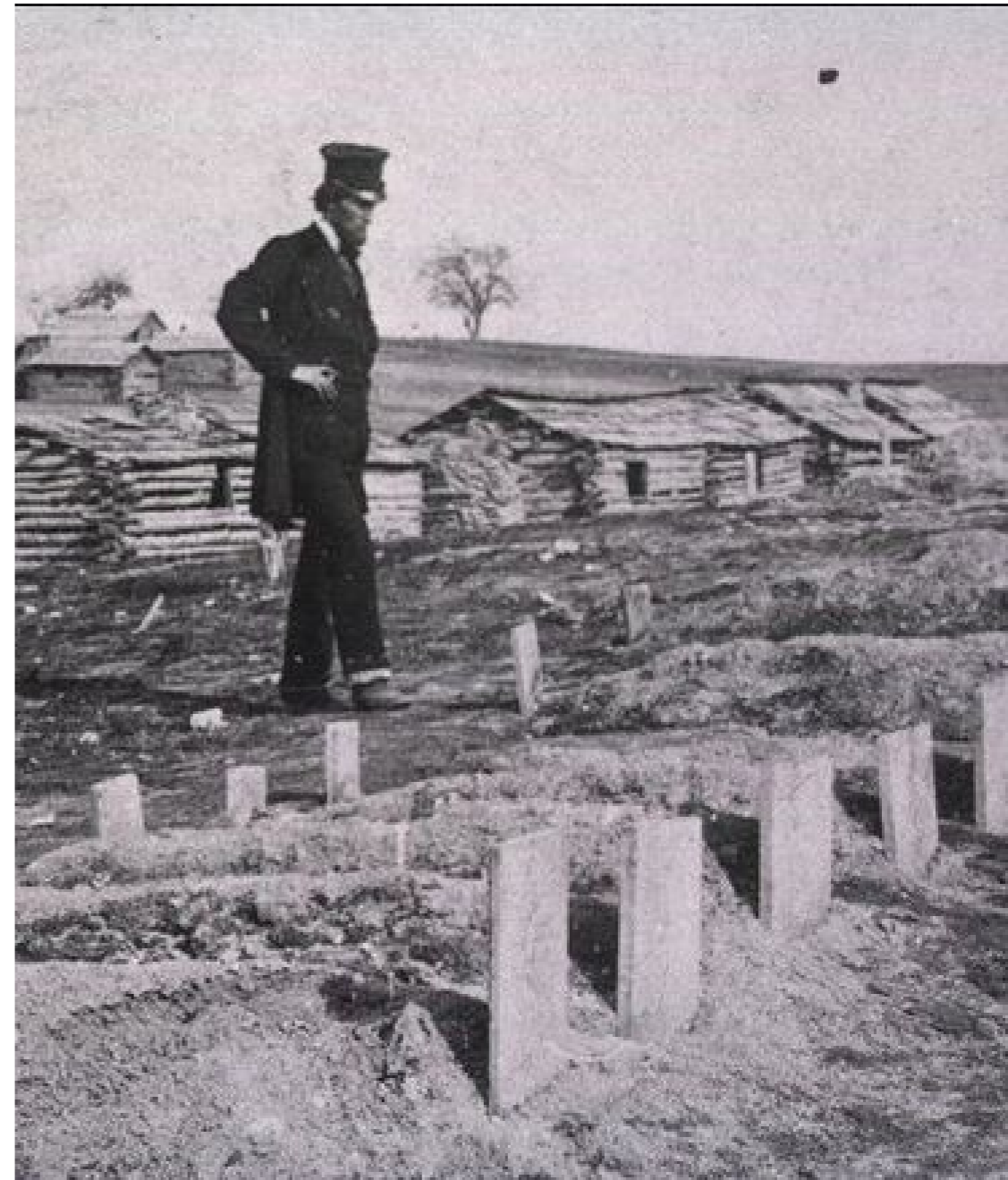
- Most supplies & rations came by train from Richmond to Manassas Junction; soldiers also bought food locally from sutlers and citizens, from citizens with whom they also dined.
- The Confederate army was at war with its own commissary system; Richmond's control versus local control. Beauregard and Johnston worked against each other in supplying their own troops at Centreville.
- Southern railroads were of poor quality and could not efficiently transport needed supplies. Different gauge tracks. Rail line not completed between Winchester and Strasburg.
- A new and developing government along with states' rights got in the way of organizing an effective railroad and supply system.

# Horses in Centreville

- 15-20,000 horses and mules, 3,000 head of cattle were in Centreville. There were over 4,000 wagons.
- Each horse required about 20 pounds of feed or forage per day.
- A brigadier general reported that 800,000 pounds of forage and grain was needed each day to feed the horses- about 400 wagon loads.
- March, 1862 the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported the presence of horse graves; dead horses lined the pike to Manassas during the withdrawal.
- There was little shelter for the horses. Most horses at Centreville were unstabled and many died from exposure. Horses were buried just to the west of Centreville.
- The life expectancy for an artillery or supply horse was 7.5 months.

# Death and Burial at Centreville

- No hospitals at Centreville. The more seriously sick or injured were sent to Culpeper.
- Soldiers were buried at St. John's Church- cemetery was extended across Wharton Road.
- Additional burials at the parade grounds near the railroad (the Massachusetts soldiers).
- Soldiers who died in hospitals were buried in Culpeper.



# Centreville Military Railroad

- The railroad was only the last resort to move supplies in the winter mud between Manassas and Centreville.
- 1st- they planked Centreville Road- the mules and horses kept slipping; 2nd- they brought in oxen- too expensive to use.
- The railroad became operational on February 15, 1862.
- The 7-mile long railroad's main purpose was to evacuate the army in the Spring of 1862.





The object on  
the right- What  
is it?

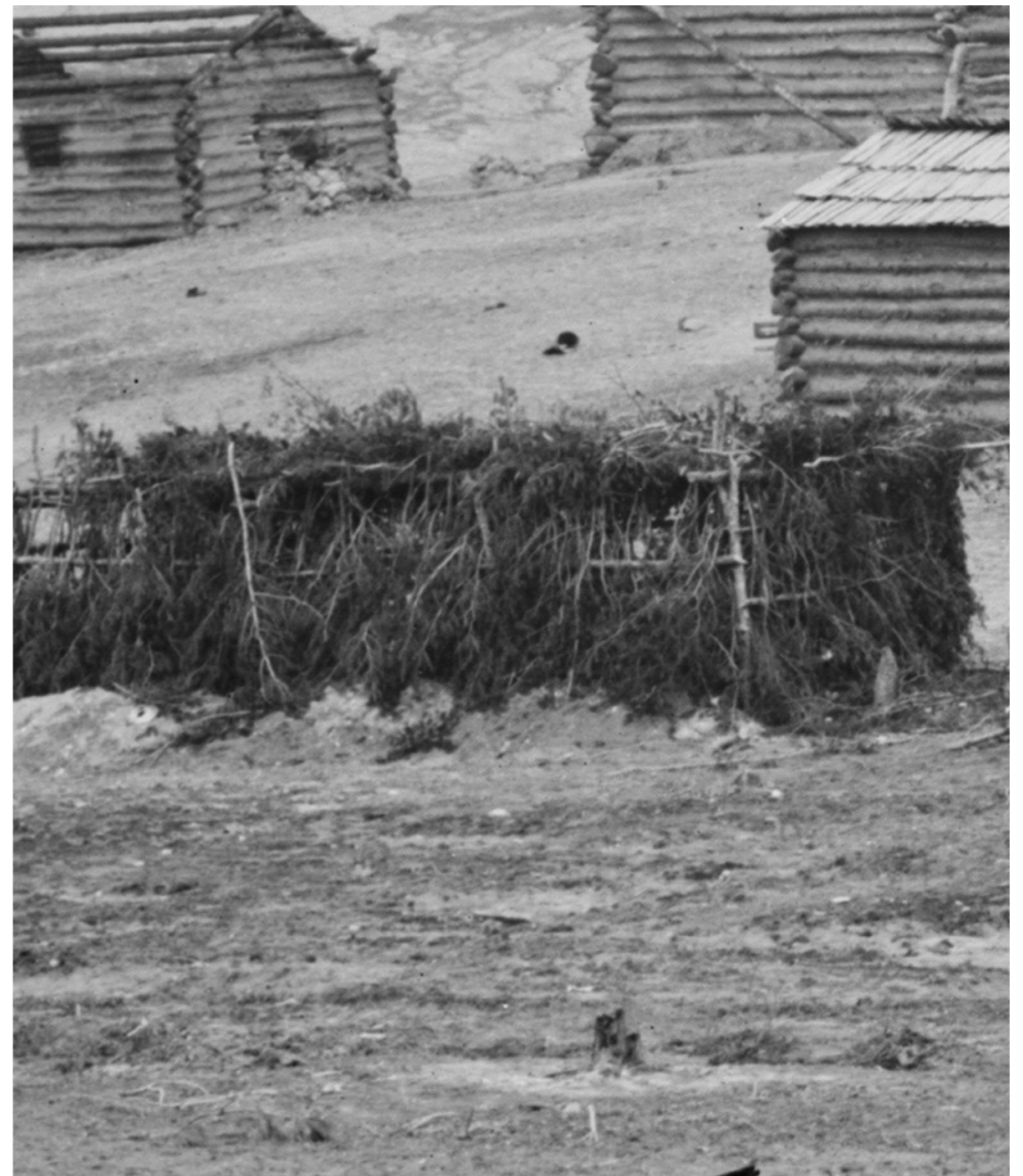
- A. Latrine
- B. Storage Facility
- C. Magazine
- D. Well





# The Object on the Left-What is it?

- A. Latrine
- B. Well
- C. Magazine
- D. Gen. Joseph Johnston's Residence
- None of the above



They were tree limbs used in the embrasures to camouflage the Quaker Guns



The interior of the Principal Fort Redoubt showing the wooden pole canopies and the limbs

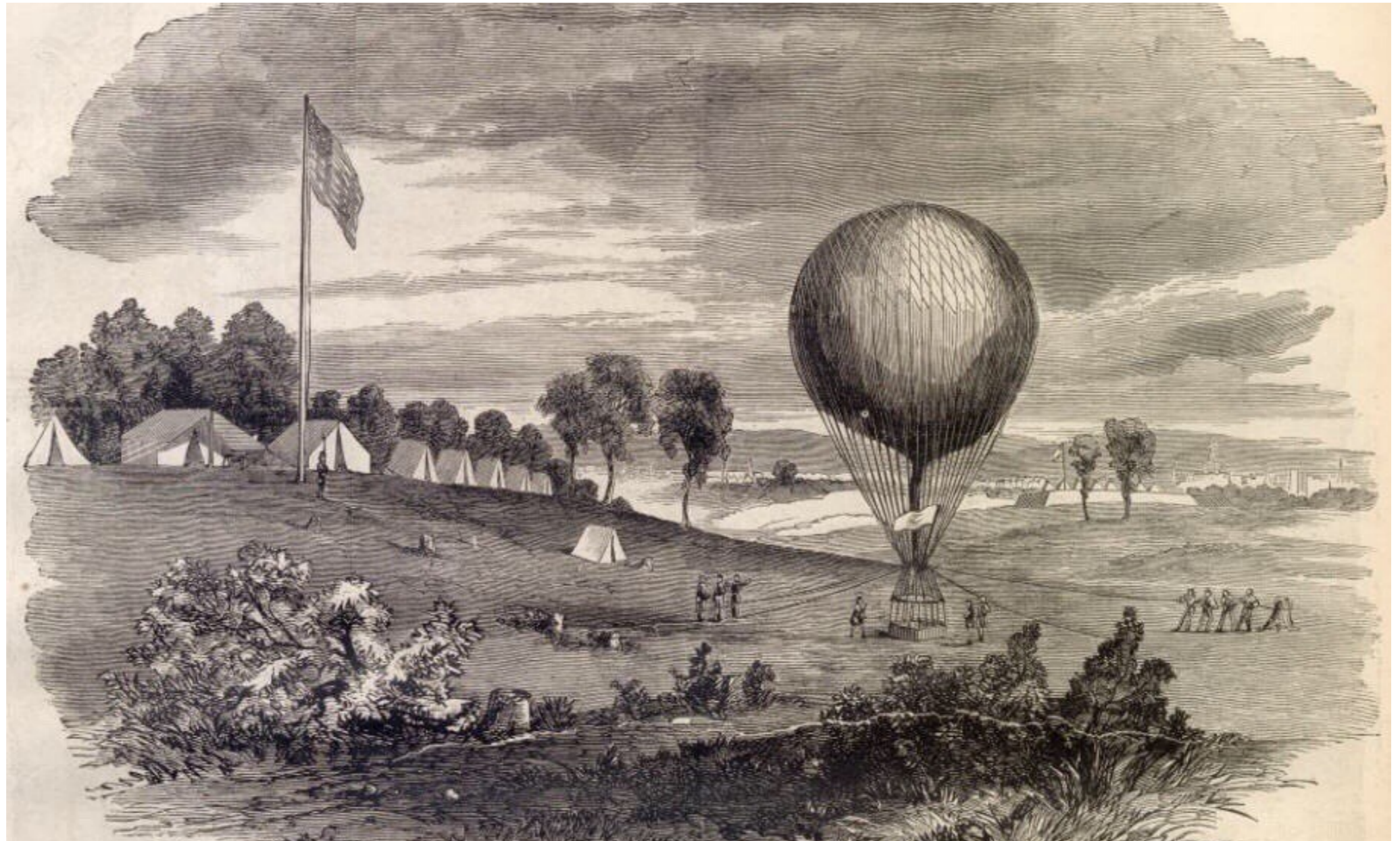


# The Quaker Guns

Joseph Johnston: “As we had not artillery enough for their works and for the army fighting elsewhere, rough imitations of guns were made, and kept near the embrasures, in readiness for exhibition in them...To conceal the absence of carriages, the embrasures were covered with sheds made of bushes.”

Beauregard to Joseph Johnston in a December 9, 1861 memo: “To prevent spies and others from communicating to ‘George’ [McClellan] our arrangements, I think it would be advisable to keep in reserve at some place, our ‘wooden guns,’ to be put in place **only when required.**”

The fortifications were designed to allow artillery pieces to quickly be rolled into place in the embrasures through the gorge or sally ports in the rear of the positions.



# Why Conceal the Quaker Guns?

Professor Thaddeus Lowe's Balloon and binoculars



# Artillery at Centreville

40 guns remained with the brigades  
48 in Pendleton's Reserve to man the embrasures  
The final total of artillery pieces in Centreville was 120

# The Fortifications

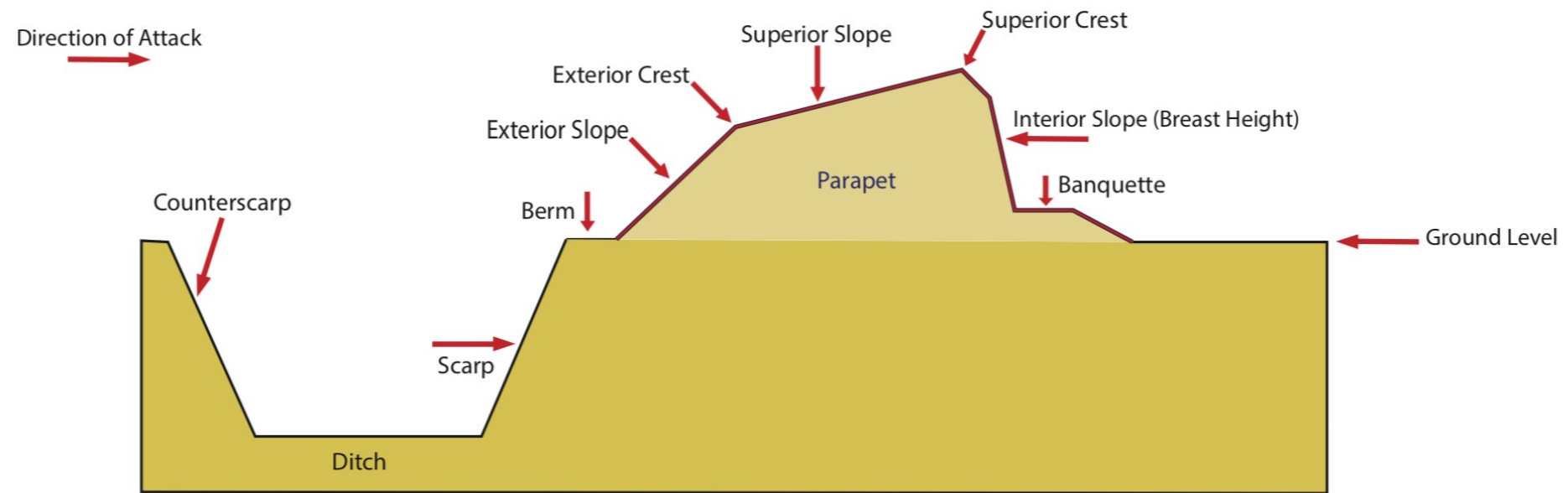


# The Fortifications

- Temporary fortifications made mostly from wood and dirt, and except for the principal fort, all redoubts used hurdle revetment.
- Built section-by-section and not as a fort; sections not named.
- Largest structures: Artillery Hill, Fort Johnston, Middle Fort, Principal Fort- these artillery positions are “redoubts” and not forts
- The Chantilly Redoubt on Wharton Lane was a UNION fortification.
- The redoubt on Stone Road was a UNION redoubt built during either 1st or 2nd Manassas.



# Componets of a Civil War Infantry Parapet



# Infantry Parapet

Lines ran in front of and between redoubts



# Artillery Hill Redoubt

Hexagonal 10-gun redoubt





# Fort Johnston Redoubt

From Middle Fort Redoubt

# Close-up of Fort Johnston Redoubt





## Infantry Trench from the Middle Redoubt to Fort Johnston Redoubt

Fort Johnston Redoubt in Distance- to the left of the  
photo is Little Rocky Run



**Fort Johnston Redoubt**



8/189





# Middle Fort Redoubt

Looking toward Fort Johnston Redoubt



# Middle Fort Redoubt

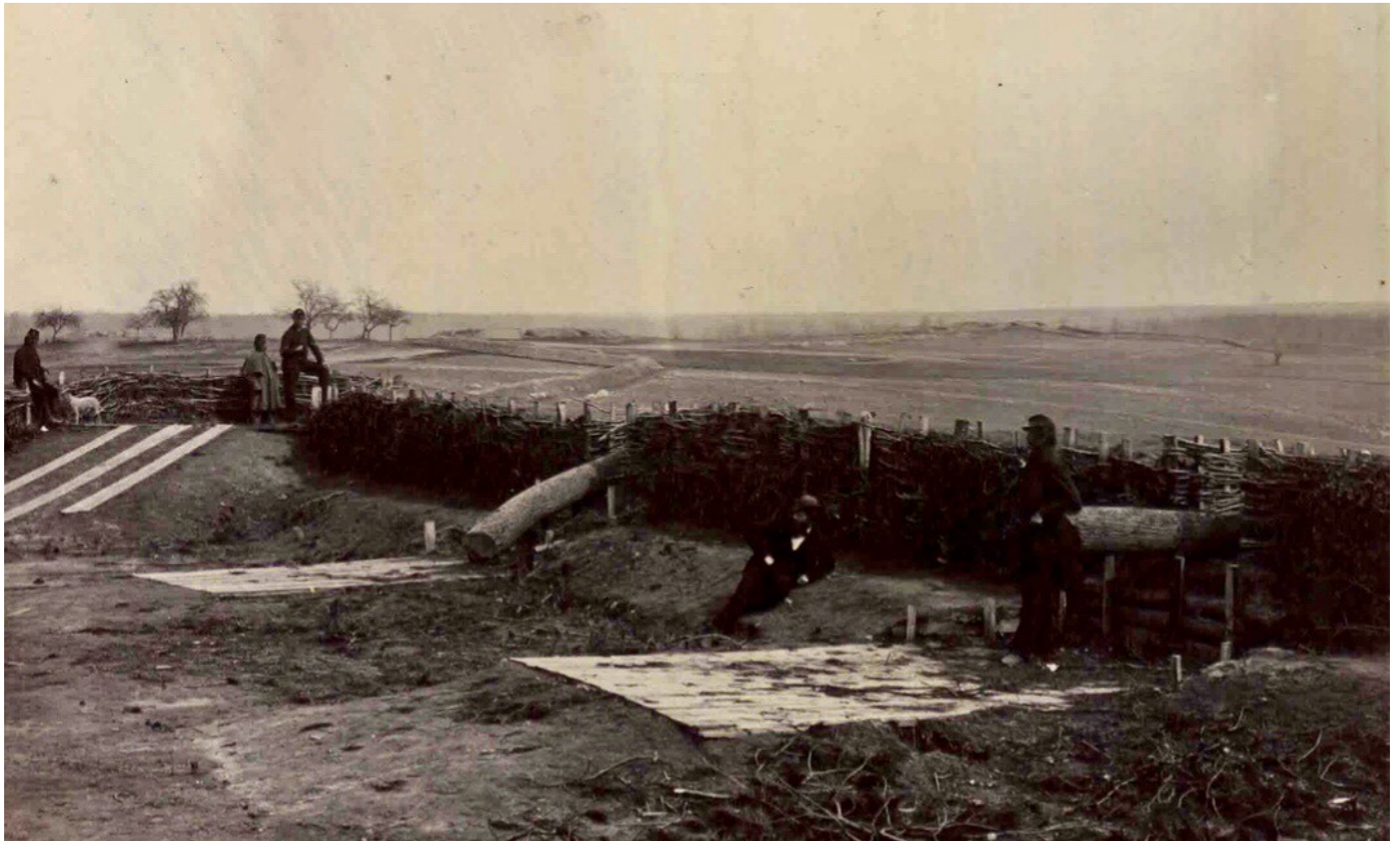
As seen from Fort Johnson w/zig-zag Infantry line





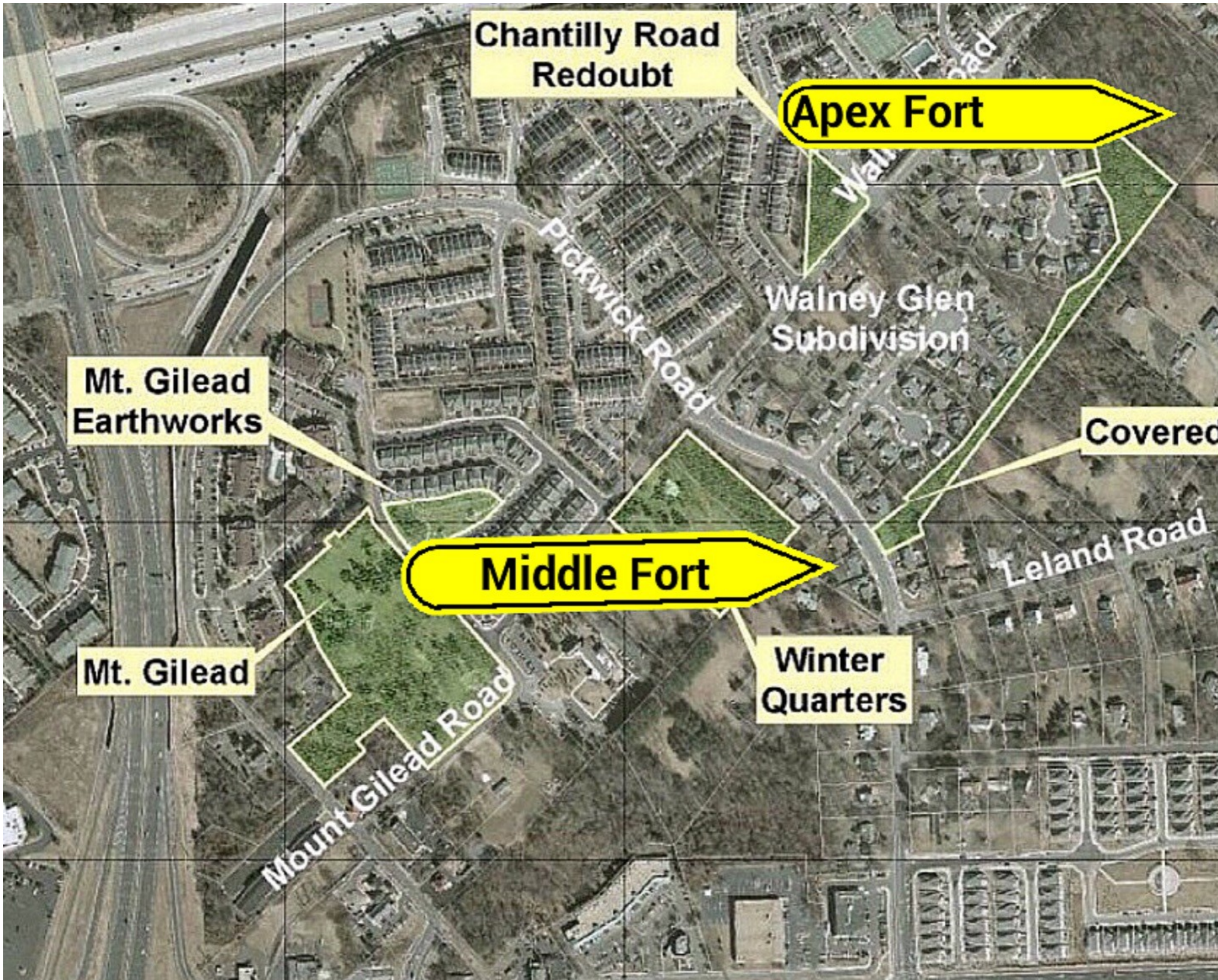
# Covered Way

Linked Apex Fort Redoubt with Middle Fort Redoubt



# Apex Fort Redoubt

Upper right hand corner past Middle Fort Redoubt



**Chantilly Road Redoubt**

**Apex Fort**

Walney Glen Subdivision

**Mt. Gilead Earthworks**

**Covered**

**Middle Fort**

**Winter Quarters**

**Mt. Gilead**

Mount Gilead Road

Pickwick Road

Leland Road



# Chantilly Redoubt

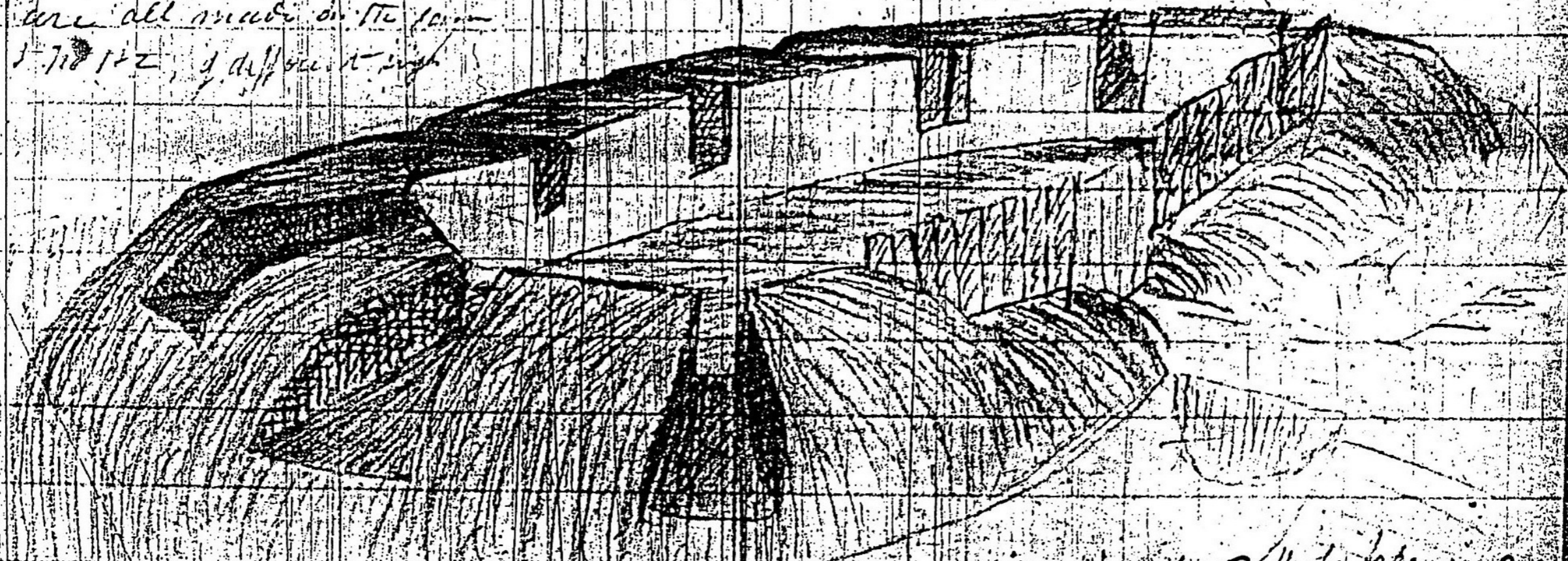


# Principal Fort Redoubt

Note the log revetment & left side hinged Sally Port



The plan is composed of many parts...  
 that will be placed together...  
 the entrance...  
 No. 1 & 2 are composed...  
 built...  
 are all...  
 No. 3 is...  
 as the...  
 can...  
 for they will not...  
 are all made...  
 as this...



These works are all...  
 better they could not be used...  
 No. 1 & 2 have the same...

# Withdrawal from Centreville

## March 8, 1862

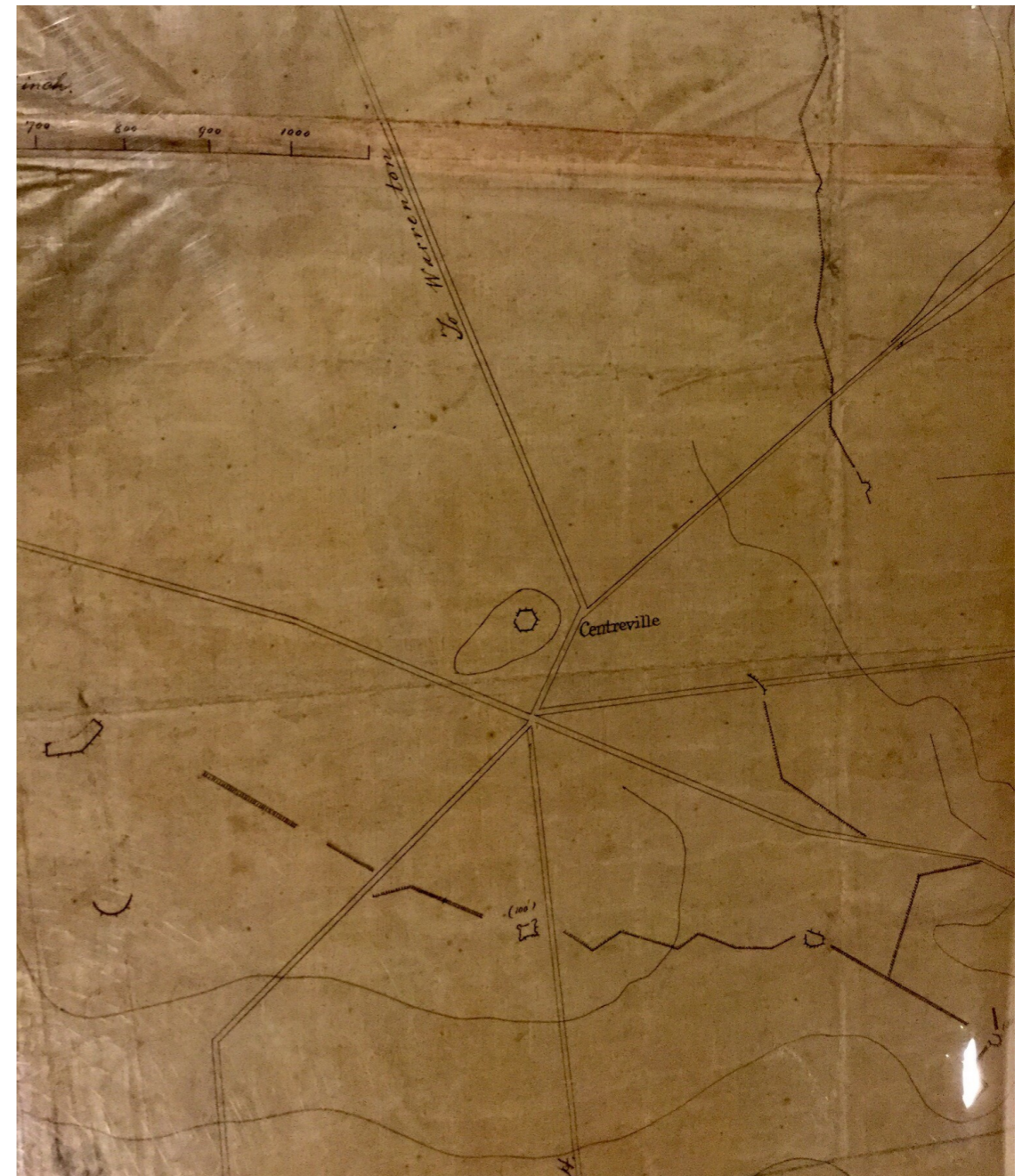
- Confederates evacuate Centreville, Manassas Junction & the Blockade on the Potomac River March 8, 1862
- Withdrawal kept secret from Richmond. Johnston gave the date to one general & said: TELL NO ONE ABOUT IT. President Davis did not know about it until March 13, 1862. Johnston had been concerned about security breaches in Centreville Richmond .
- Averill's PA Cavalry entered Centreville first, then Kearney's Brigade on March 9, 1862. Brady's photographers followed.
- Confederates abandoned most stored provisions and heavy artillery on the blockade of the Potomac

# Photographs

- George P. Barnard, and James F. Gibson, Brady's photographers, did not photograph the Apex Fort, the Middle Fort, the outside of the Principal Fort, or the inside of Artillery Hill. Portions of the Middle Fort are visible in some photos. Alexander Gardiner also photographed Bull Run.
- While soldiers were posed on the fortifications as conquerors, some posing was done just for fun.
- What was cropped out of the photographs? What photographs were thrown out? How many versions were made?
- What were the photographers' vantage points for their photographs? Mostly from the tops of the winter cabins and revetments.
- There are no known Confederate photos of the works.

# Lt. Miles Daniel McAlester Map of the Confederate Fortifications

- March 1862 map drawn by Union engineer, Lt. Miles Daniel.
- Most accurate map created of the Confederate fortifications.
- I discovered it at the National Archives in Greenbelt MD
- It was the base map used by Hanson and Lamb to create their 20th century maps.



# McAlester's Report of March 14, 1862

According to McAlester: The **eastern** line consisted of seven works, and ran south for 1 1/4 miles from the Apex Redoubt to Little Rocky Run. It consisted of 7 positions.

The **northern** line ran from the Apex Redoubt for 2 miles to Big Rocky Run, then 3/4 of a mile farther to Cub Run. It consisted of six lunettes and batteries.

“At the town of Centreville, on a high hill commanding the rear of all the works within range, was a large hexagonal redoubt with ten embrasures” (Artillery Hill).



# McAlester Map

Original

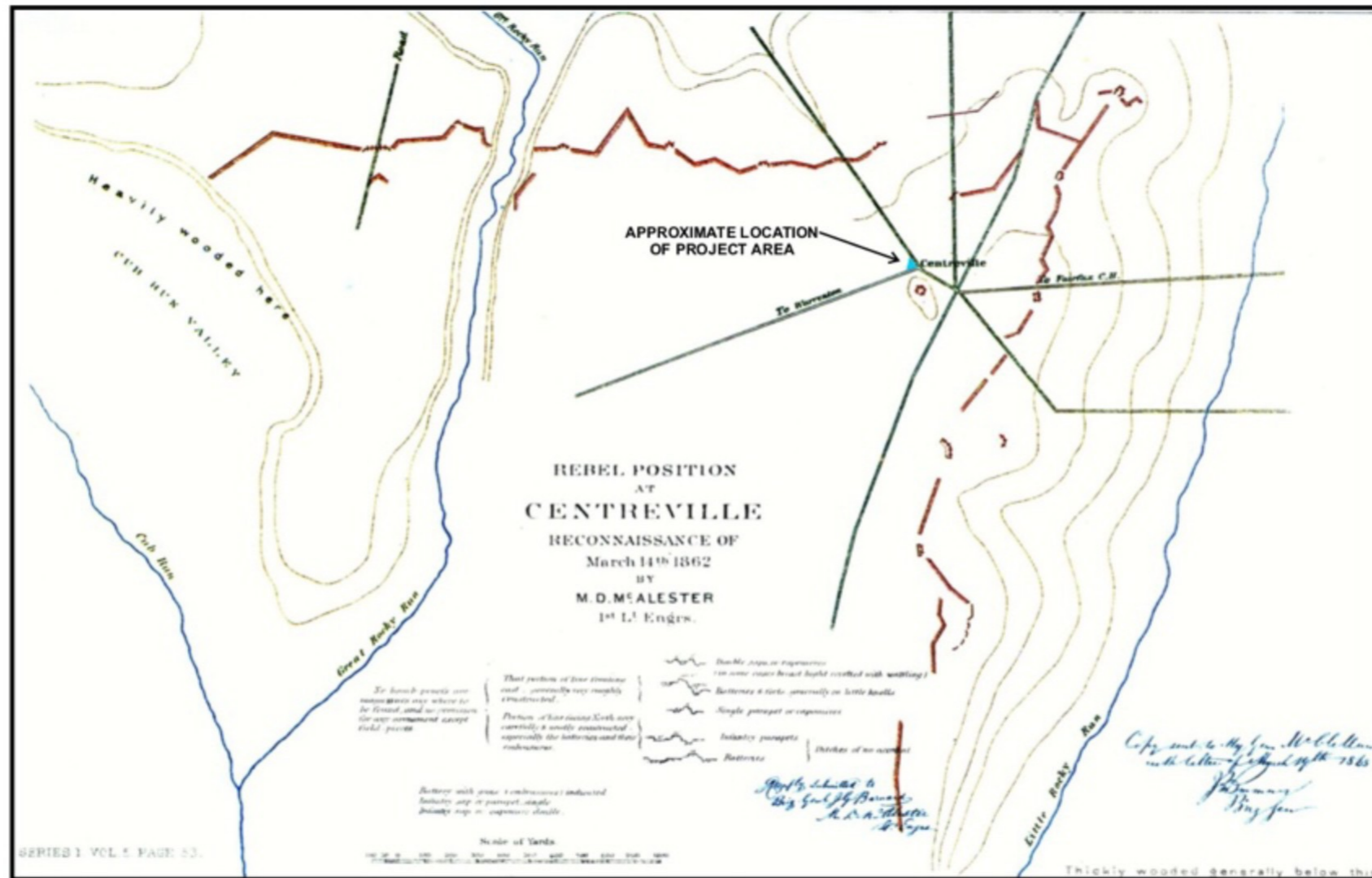
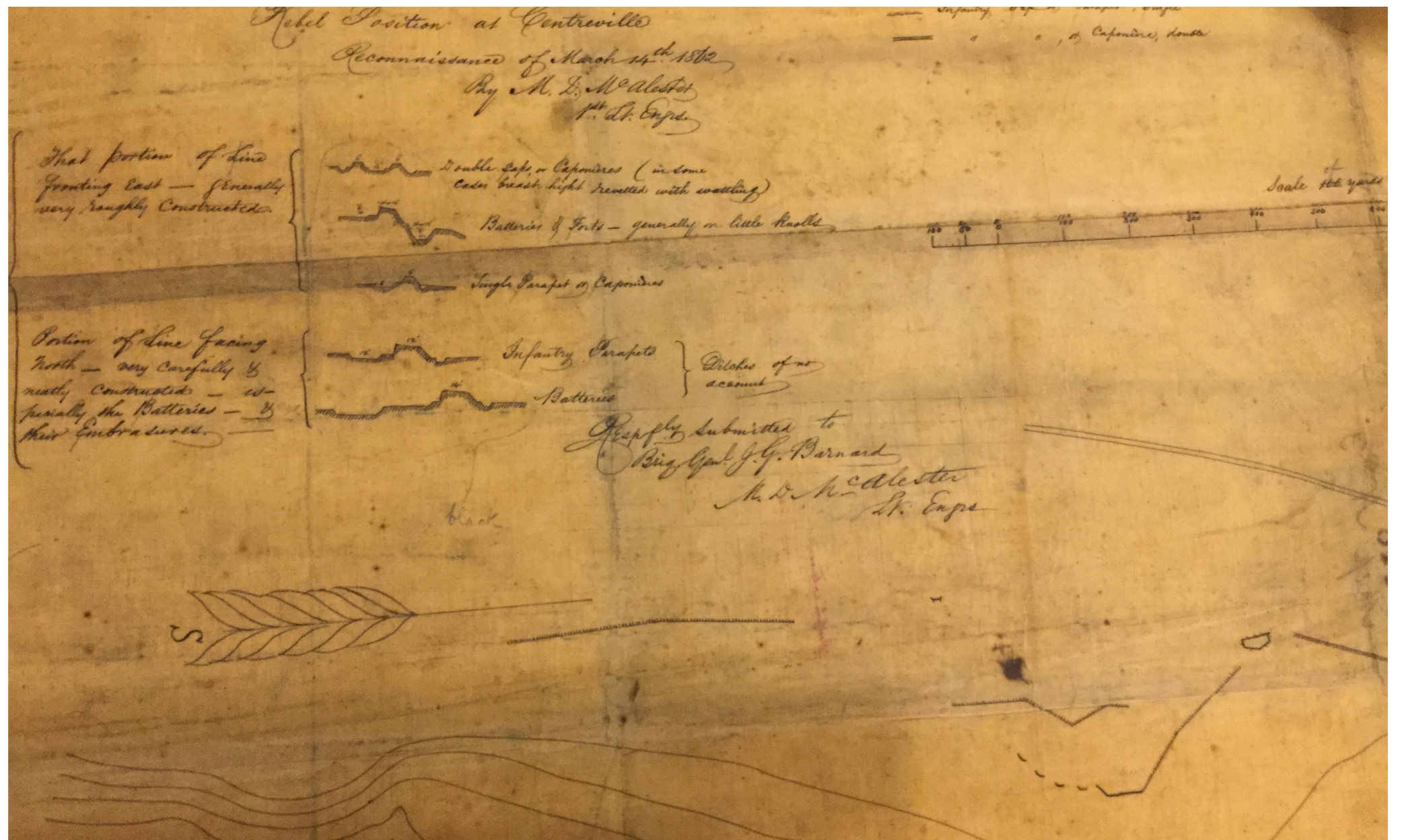


Figure 5. "Rebel position at Centreville...March 11, 1862" (Davis et al. 1983:Plate X:7).

# McAlester Map

Small sized version seen in the *Civil War Atlas*



# McAlester Map

Detail of infantry lines and parapets



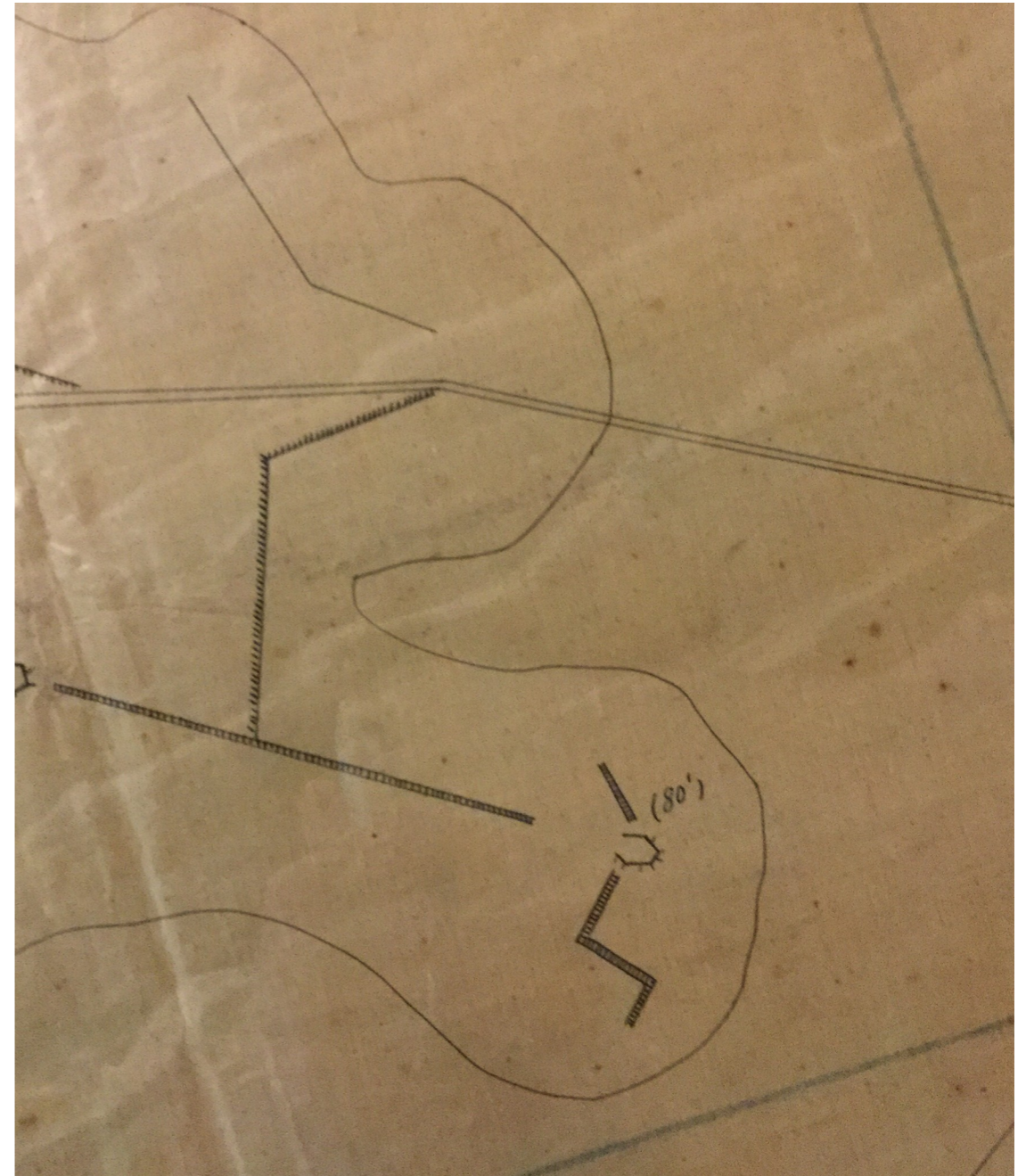


# McAlester Map

Northern line- Braddock Road to Cub Run

# The Chantilly Redoubt Absence

- Redoubt not shown on the McAlester Map.
- Only appears on and after Sneden's maps.
- What is shown in the lower right is the Apex Redoubt.
- Redoubt on Stone Road also a Union redoubt.



# *Union* map of the Fortifications

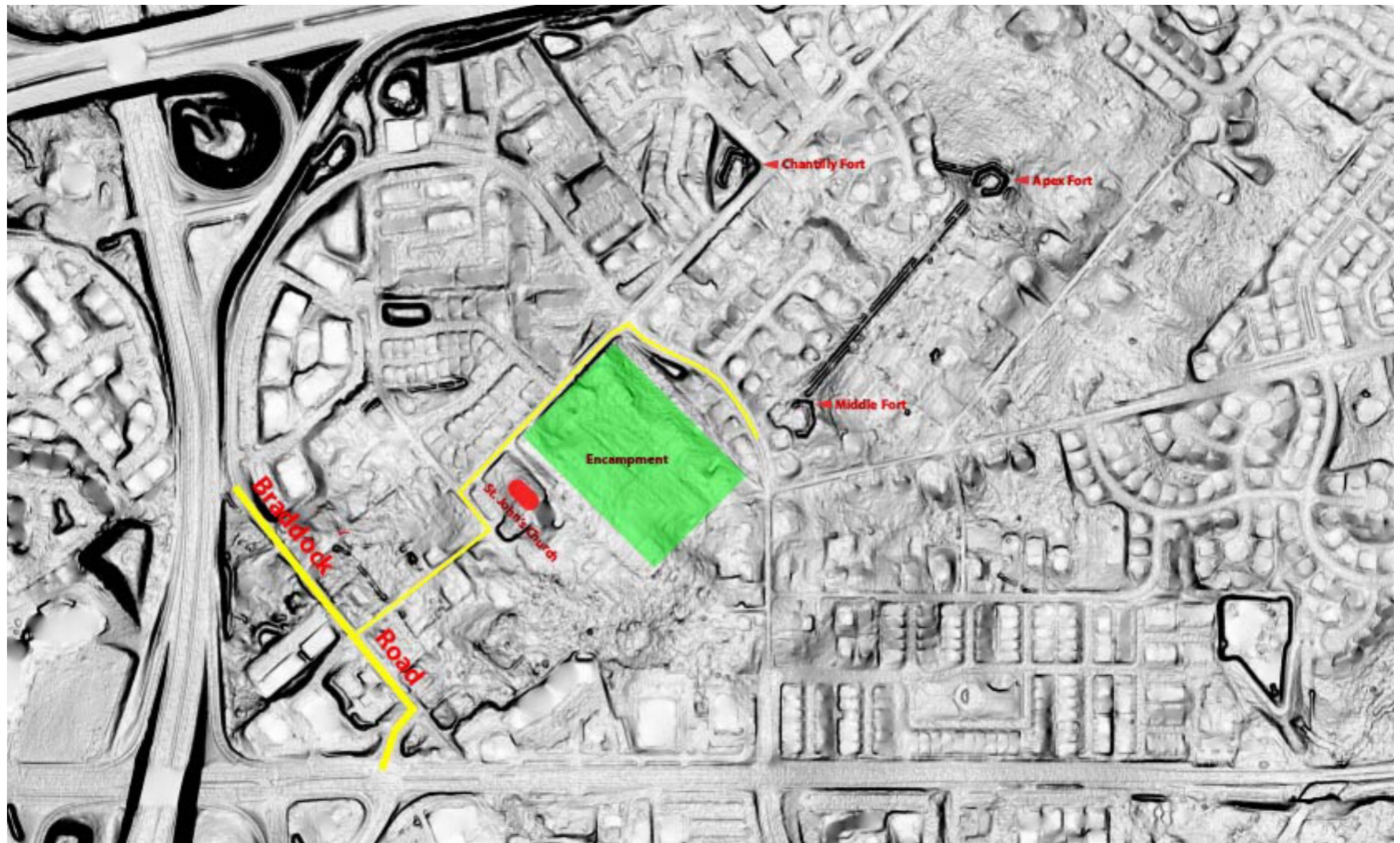
- Drawn by Robert Knox Sneden after March 1862.
- Map published in *Eye of the Storm- Private Robert Sneden*.
- Sneden was a mapmaker for Maj. General Samuel Peter Heintzleman.
- Sneden was an architect, but not a trained engineer
- His drawings were more accurate than his maps



# Sneden's Second *Union* Map

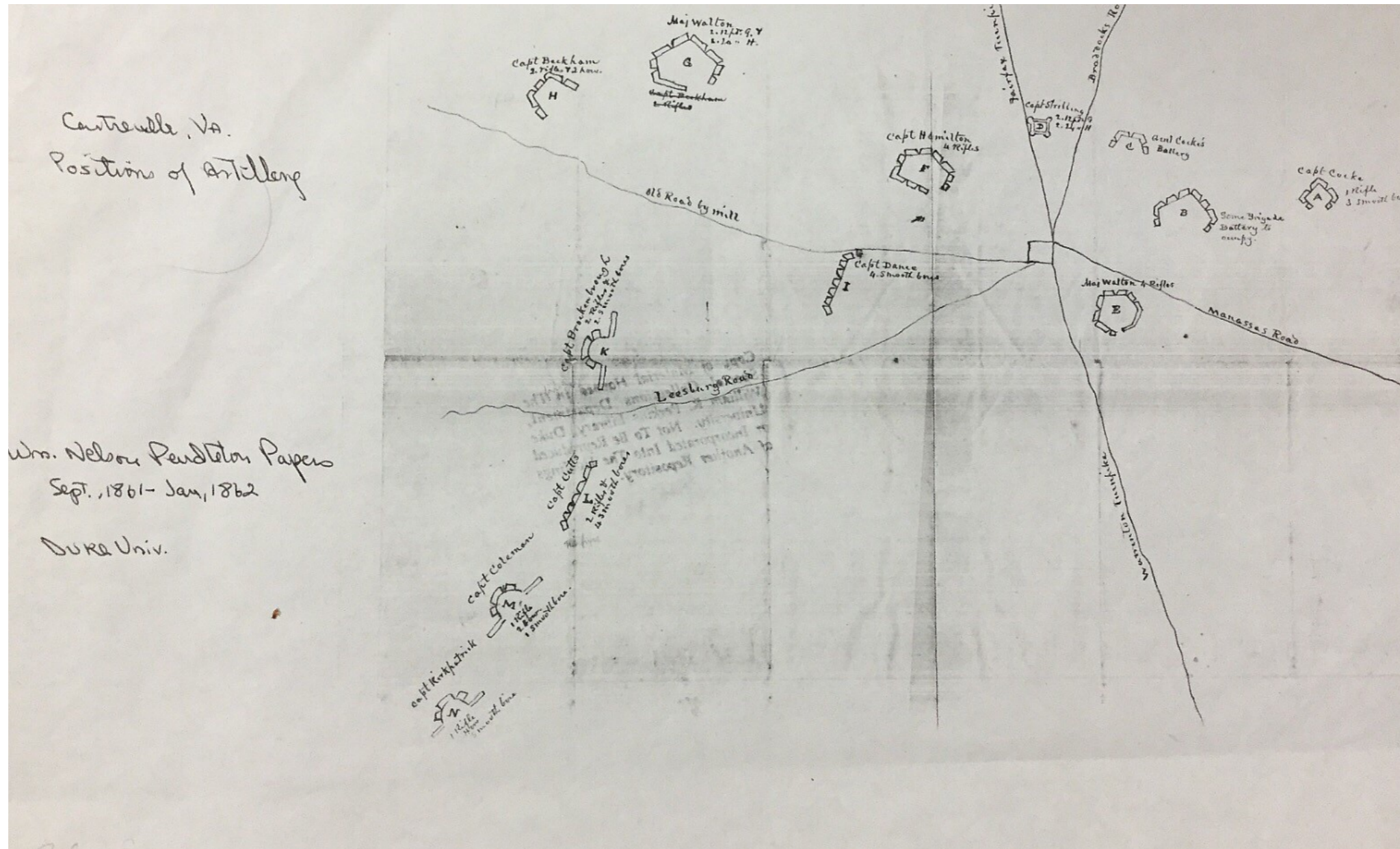
- Portions over-written by a pen of a different color.
- Shows the engineering, artillery, and infantry units.
- Map also published in *Eye of the Storm- Private Robert Sneden*.
- Compare his “maps” with Harris and McAlester.





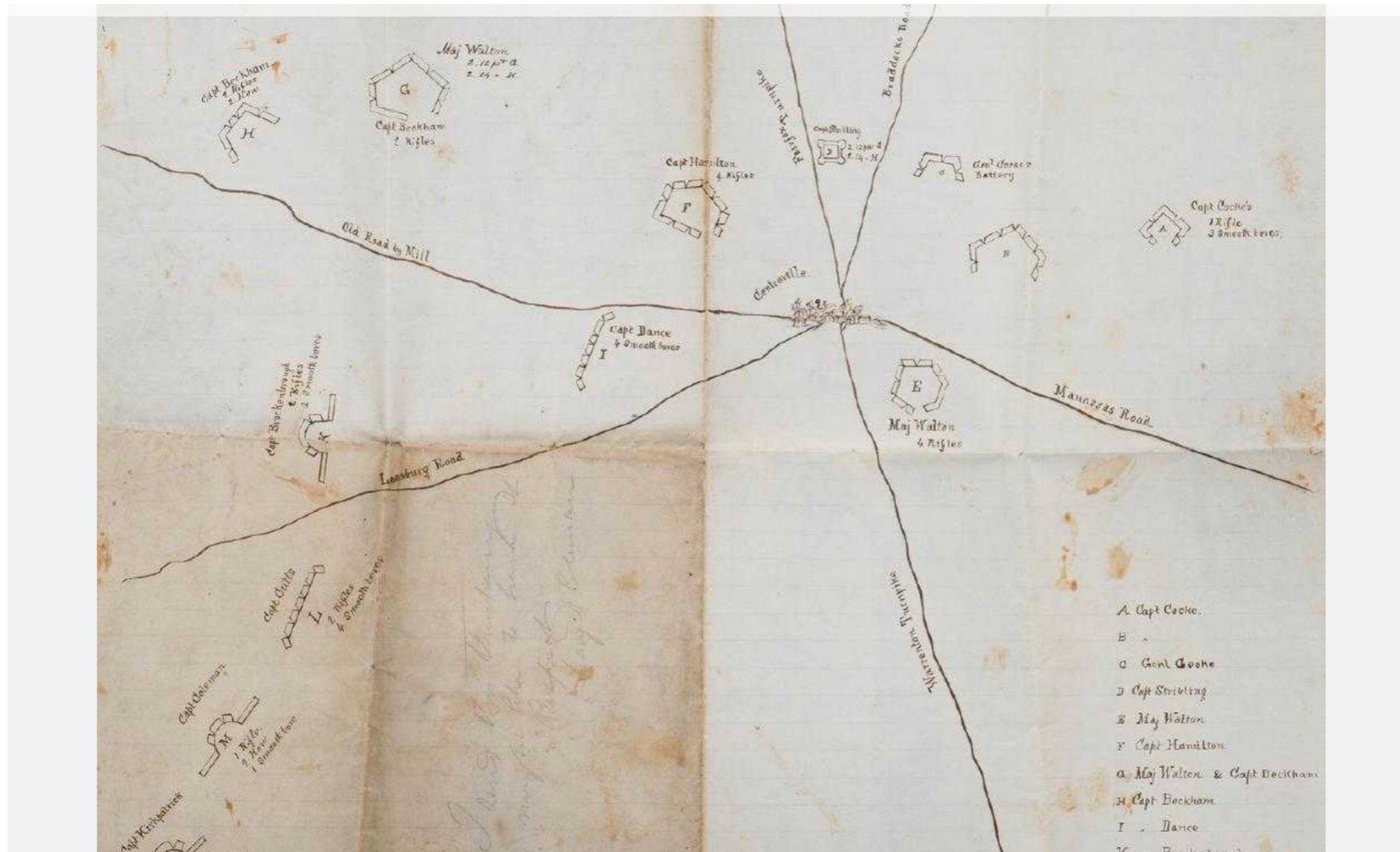
# LIDAR Imaging of Fortifications

Apex Redoubt-Middle Fort- Covered Way



# Centreville Artillery Map

William Nelson Pendleton



# Centreville Artillery Map

Col. Lewis M. Coleman map

Maj Walton  
2.12.9. Y  
2.10" H.  
G  
Beckham  
rifles

Capt Hamilton  
4 Rifles  
F

Capt Strickland  
2.12.9. Y  
2.14" H  
D

Capt Cook's  
Battery  
C

Capt Cook  
A

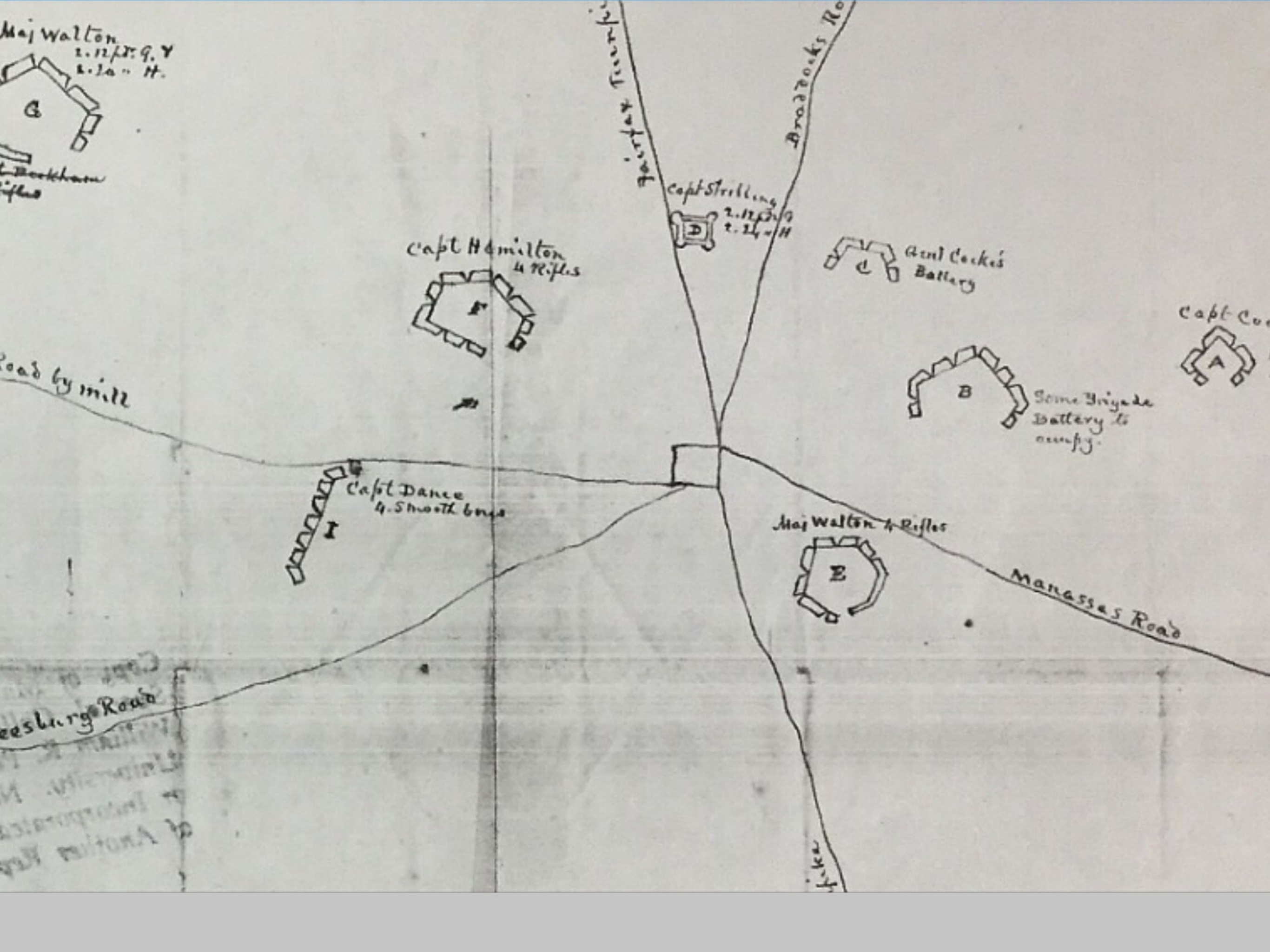
Some Brigade  
Battery to  
camp  
B

Capt Dance  
4 Smooth bore  
H

Maj Walton & Rifles  
E

Manassas Road

eesburg Road  
of Another Reg





# Second Union Occupation

## March 1862-1865

- Remained in Union hands to the end of the war- mostly by engineering forces.
- A complete history includes the Union use of the fortifications 1862-1865.
- Served as an outer picket line for combating partisan rangers including Mosby.
- Cavalry headquarters for Col. Charles Russell Lowell, Jr.
- Gen. Pope used Centreville as a defensive position after 2nd. Meade occupied Centreville after Gettysburg to prevent Lee from occupying it.



# Into the 20th-Century



# 20th Century Restoration Efforts

- Joseph Mills Hanson
- William Harrison Lamb
- Bull Run Civil War Roundtable members
- Fairfax County Park Authority; historical societies in Centreville
- *Battling for Manassas- the Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park- Joan M. Zenzen*



# Early 20th-century Centreville

The “Rambler” photograph



# Grigsby House

1902 Rambler photograph

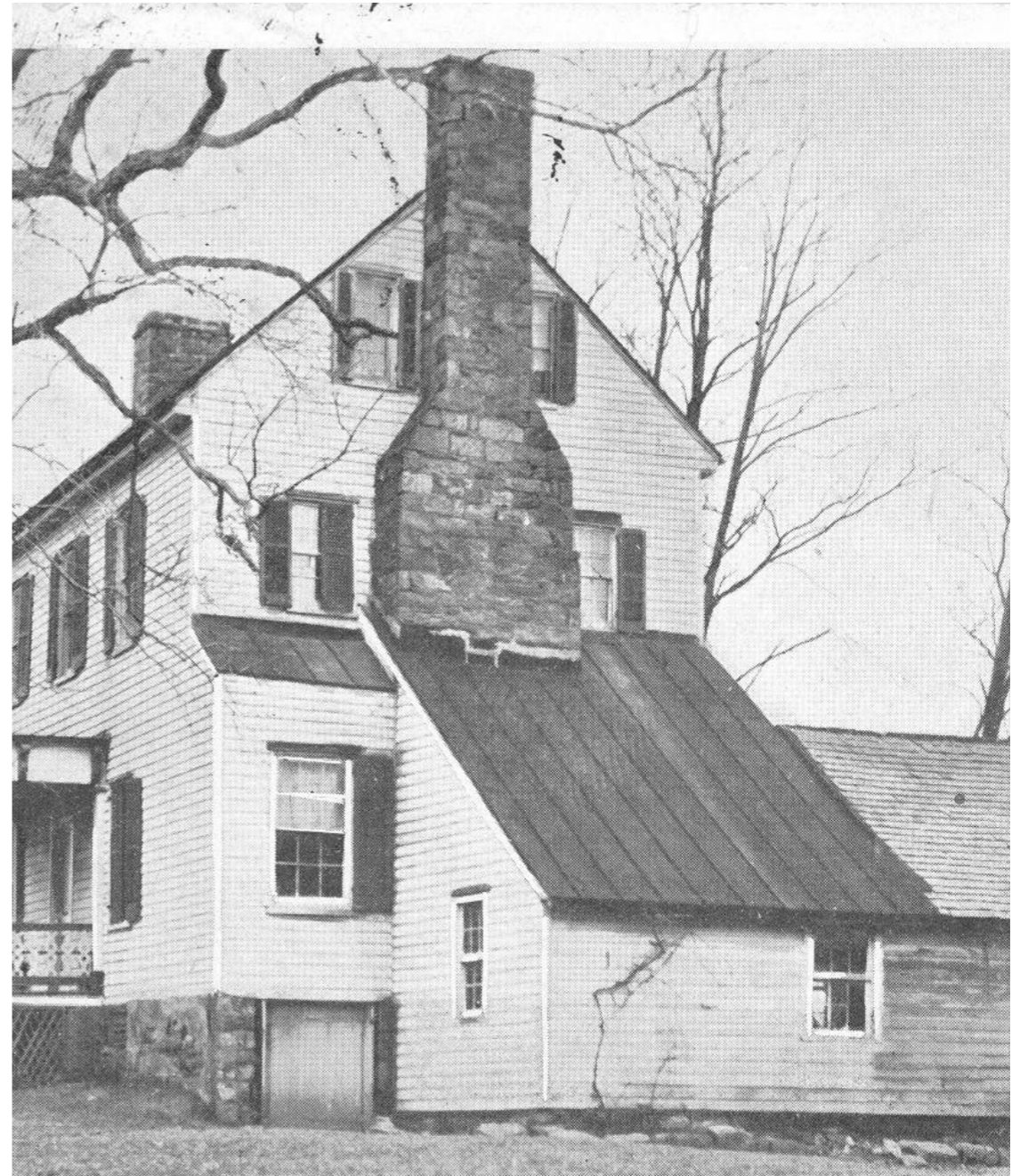
# Returning Centreville to its level of prosperity

- Centreville was already slowly declining before the Civil War. The war appeared to have killed it.
- Efforts 1920-30 by William Harrison Lamb to return it to prosperity.
- Attempt to breathe life back into the town by negating the iconic images of Centreville past.
- Connect Centreville to The Battlefield at Manassas as part of a National Park and improve the roadways to it.
- Saving the soul of a community- the little things people see.

- **1803 traveler, John Davis:** “I prosecuted my walk to Newgate, where on the piazza of Mr. Thornton’s tavern, I found a party of gentlemen from the neighboring plantations carousing over a bowl of toddy and smoking cigars. No people could exceed these men in politeness. On my ascending the steps to the piazza every countenance seemed to say, ‘This man has a double claim to our attention, for he is a stranger in the place.’ In a moment, a place was made for one to sit down, a new bowl was called for, and every one who addressed me did it with a smile of conciliation. But no man had asked me where I had come from or whither I was going... if good breeding consists in sentiment, it was found in that circle I had gotten into.”
- **Photographer, Alexander Gardner after the war:** “Perched upon the gentle slope of the ridge that bears its name and looking across the fertile fields to the mountains that rise up gradually, hiding the west, Centreville had smiled on many generations and had grown feeble with all its pleasant things about it. The houses were leaning structures with huge stone chimneys, doors that creaked in their old age and fences that struggled every way, but there was always an odor of wild roses and honeysuckle about it and a genial hospitality to welcome the stranger.”

# William Harrison Lamb

- Lamb lived at Royal Oaks with his wife, Georgia from 1922-1959, after Georgia's death her will entrusted the property to the Church of the Good Shepherd in Burke.
- Lamb's projects included preserving the earthworks and returning the town to its former level of prosperity.
- Lamb was the owner & operator of the Manassas Journal, with E. D. Wharton (Wharton Road named after him); Publisher of the Alexandria Herald 1928-1929.







# Map of Centreville

William Harrison Lamb- "The Centreville Forts," Northern Virginia Industrial Edition of the Alexandria Journal, January 1, 1929



# Lamb's Concession

Lee Highway cut through Artillery Hill

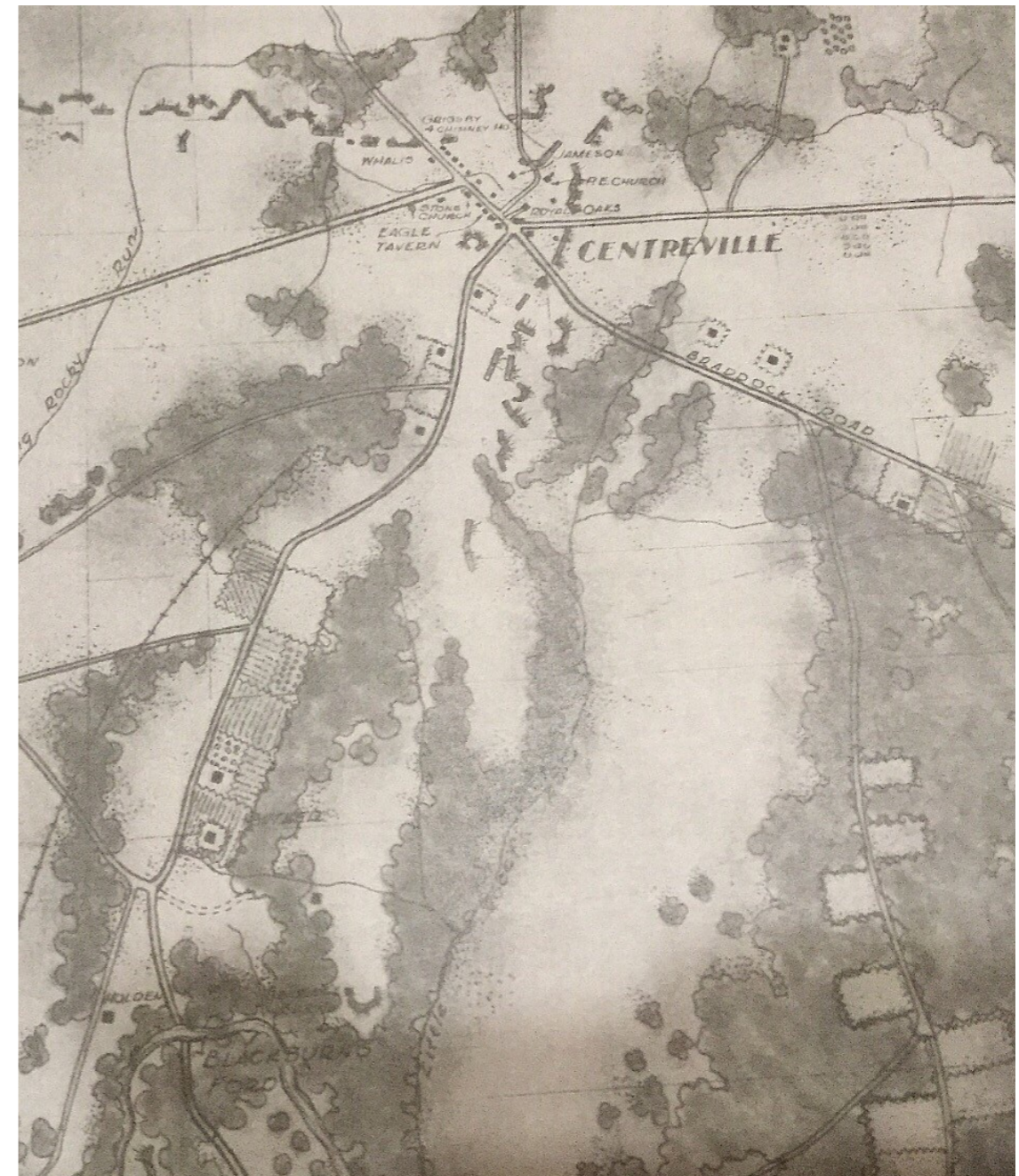


**Lose the past to create a future**

The old and new Warrenton Turnpike

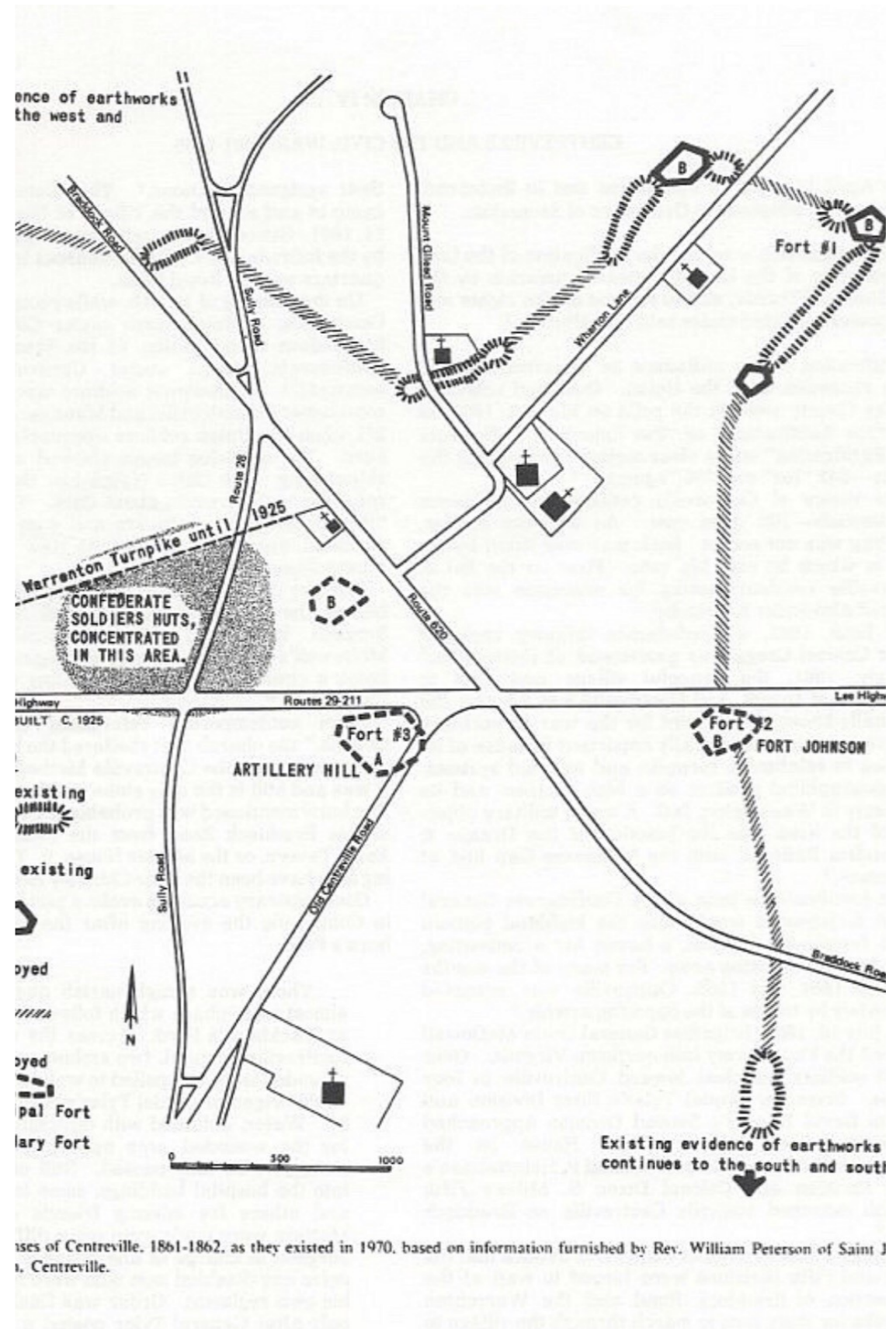
# Joseph Mills Hanson

- *Bull Run Remembers*, by Joseph Mills Hanson 1951, 1991.
- His 1935 map is in the office at the Bull Run Battlefield. Copy used by the Bull Run Civil War Roundtable.
- The plan was to make small national park “outposts” of areas like Centreville and Signal Hill.
- Park struggling to hold on to what it had. Lack of funds, WW II, & refusal of Congress to expand the park, ended efforts to include Centreville.



# Eugenia Smith Map of Centreville Fortifications

1970

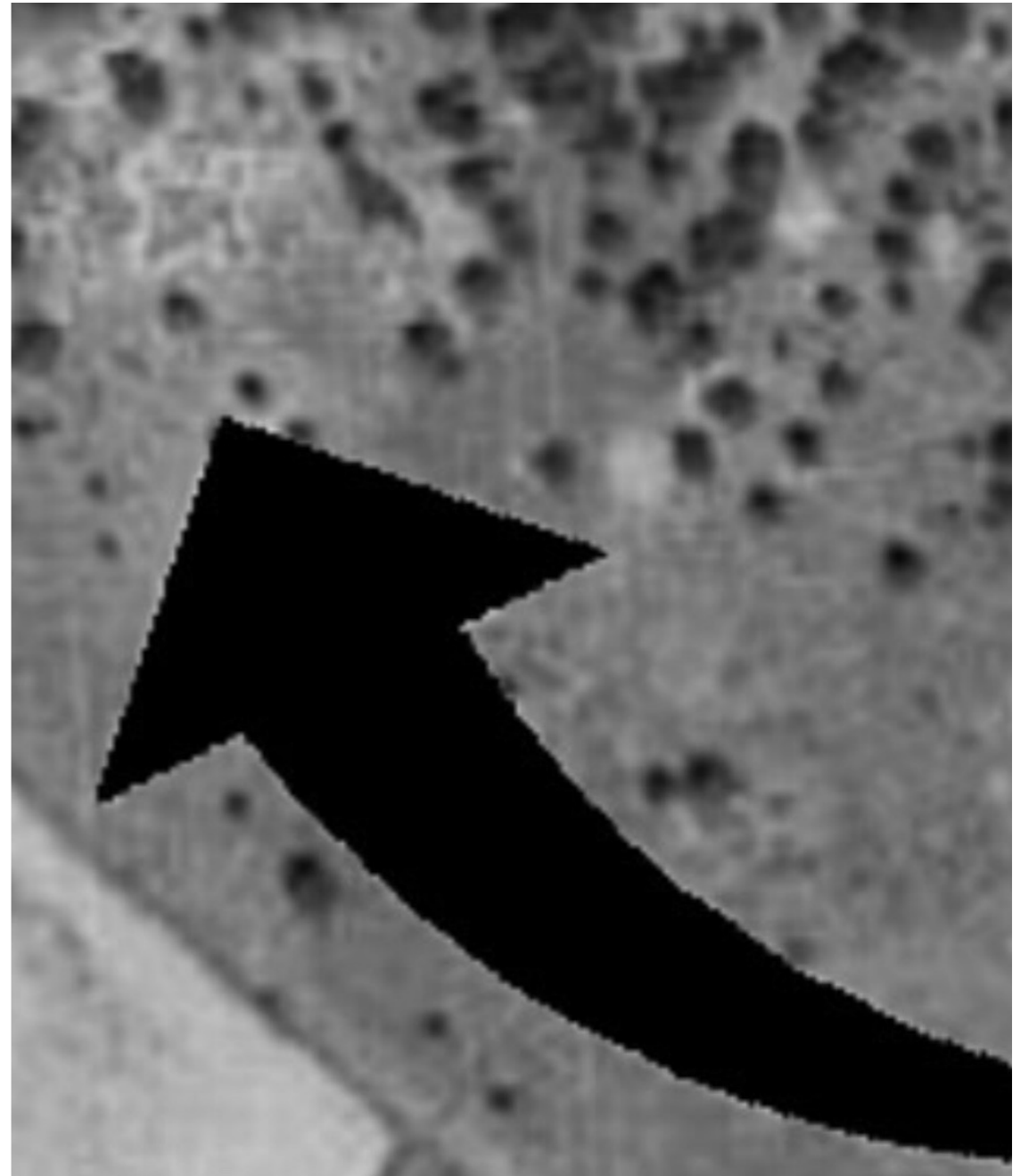


# The “Star-Fort”

Aerial photograph taken  
in 1937

There was a star, but no  
fort

It was gone by 1953  
Wharton Road &  
Pickwick Road



# What the Confederates accomplished in Centreville

- Established a defensive perimeter at Centreville running over 70 miles between Leesburg and Dumfries.
- Maintained an army in Northern Virginia & threatened Washington, D.C.- the best way to defend Richmond.
- Joseph Johnston's plan: "By holding Centreville...the strongest point with two or three thousand men, the army itself might be free to maneuver."
- Trained & developed what would become Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.

# Where are we now?

- Was William Harrison Lamb correct when he proclaimed that Centreville had been returned to its former level of prosperity?
- What level of prosperity has Centreville attained today?
- What sacrifices have been made to attain it?
- Is this still MY Centreville?
- The soul of the community and the Civil War enabled Centreville to survive.
- The village and the fortifications were a products of their environment.
- Despite not having a battle in Centreville, it is still hallowed ground.