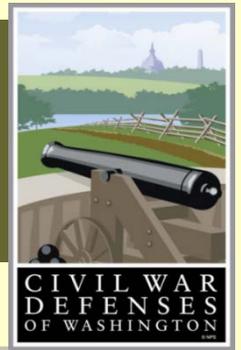




Civil War Defenses of Washington NEWSLETTER

Fort Marcy Fort Reno Fort Slocum Fort Mahan Fort Davis Battery Carroll Battery Kemble Fort DeRussy Fort Chaplin Fort Bunker Hill
Fort Foote Fort Totten Fort Stanton Fort Greble Fort Bayard Fort Stevens Fort Dupont Fort Ricketts Battleground National Cemetery



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

January 2014 Volume 111 Issue 2



Saving the Nation's Capital – And Sharing Its History!

By Susan Claffey, President and Loretta Neumann,
Vice-President of the Alliance to Preserve the Civil
War Defenses of Washington

Nearly 150 years ago, in July 1864, President Abraham Lincoln stood atop the parapets of Fort Stevens in Northwest Washington and a Confederate sharpshooter, in a tree on what is now the old Walter Reed Army Medical Center, took aim and shot. He narrowly missed his mark and the incident remains the only time in our Nation's history that a sitting President has come under direct enemy fire.

Today, few people remember the Battle of Fort Stevens (July 11-12, 1864) or know about the remains of the old fort located between 13th Street and Georgia Avenue NW just a few blocks north of Missouri Avenue. However, the battle and the location are as significant to our shared history as the September 11 terrorist attacks and the World Trade Towers, Pentagon, and the field in Shanksville PA are at the present.

Had Lincoln been killed during the battle or had the Confederates succeeded in their plans to capture the Union capital, U.S. history would have been changed forever. How were President Lincoln and the nation's capital city saved? That credit goes to the city's defenses, erected by the Union Army in 1861, and the troops that manned them.

Washington DC was a strategic target during the Civil War just as it is today. The Washington DC of our time is protected by restricted air space, security cameras, bomb-sniffing dogs, chemical-detection devices and other anti-terrorism measures. During the Civil War, the threat to the nation's capital wasn't so much terrorist attacks as it was the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. That enemy army had managed to come within 30 miles of Washington in 1861, 1862, and again uncomfortably close again in 1863. In response to the threat posed by the Confederate forces on its doorstep, the Union Army constructed what we now call the Civil War Defenses of Washington (CWDW). Those defenses, of which Fort



Located atop the parapet of Fort Stevens is a commemorative granite boulder with a plaque showing President Lincoln during the Battle of Fort Stevens on July 12, 1864. The President had come to give moral support to the troops, he stood atop the fort's parapet, and was fired upon by Confederate sharpshooters. It is the only time in American history in which a sitting president came under direct fire from enemy combatants. The boulder was placed in Fort Stevens on November of 1911. The plaque was added and dedicated on July 12, 1920 by the 6th Army Corp, D.C. Associated Survivors, who dedicated it to Abraham Lincoln.

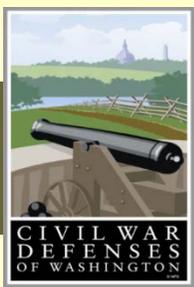


Fort Stevens. Officers and men of Company F, 3rd Massachusetts

Civil War Defenses of Washington

NEWSLETTER

January 2014 Volume 111 Issue 2



Contrabands and Confederates Building Washington's Defenses

by Michael Zwelling, CWDW Volunteer

In July 1864 Confederate Major General Jubal Early arrived on the edges of Washington City and looked upon the Union capital before him. In aided sight was the unfinished dome of the U.S. Capitol. This was not Early's first time in the Capital Region; he served as a Confederate Colonel at the First Battle of Bull Run or First Manassas in 1861.

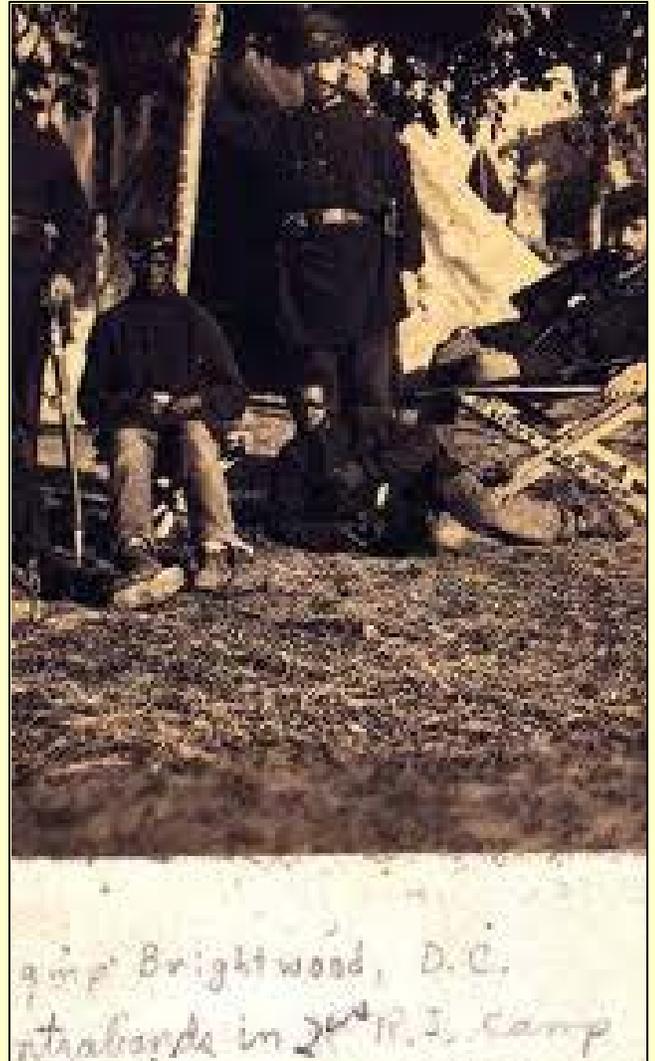
Three years later, the capital city was quite different. Early could see the fortifications and the manpower on the edge of the city. Washington, once a sleepy and unprotected capital, was now one of the most protected cities in the world - rivaling the capitals of Europe. Early's concern was the construction of the city's defenses, what kind of troops manned them and what armaments his troops would have to face to overcome them.

What Early did not know, and most assuredly was of no concern to him in July 1864, was who built the fortifications that encircled the city he hoped to capture. U.S. Army and civilian engineers played a large role in designing and building the fortifications. The largest pool of labor came from soldiers. However, civilian workers, Confederate prisoners and deserters, and contrabands labored alongside those soldiers to complete the monumental effort of constructing what are now called the Civil War Defenses of Washington (CWDW).

In all, there were likely less than a dozen Confederate deserters who voluntarily switched sides before taking up work on the earthen forts. We know of three rebel soldiers that were sent to help construct the defenses after taking the oath of allegiance to the Union and then seeking work on government rolls. They worked on the fortifications in the company of military workers representing the Marines and United States Colored Troops, Union convalescents and conscripts, and other Confederate deserters and prisoners of war.

Contrabands were one of the larger groups to work on the defenses, at the time numbering at least 1,000 strong. The term 'contrabands' was given to escaped slaves by Union leaders. The name is based on the Confederate belief that slaves were property. Union General Benjamin Butler, a lawyer, reasoned that if the South considered slaves as their property then slaves

Contrabands continued on page 3



Saturday, March 22

Tour

**"DEFENSES OF
WASHINGTON/FORT STEVENS
& LINCOLN"**

**With Historian, Author, and Fort Expert
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN COOLING III**

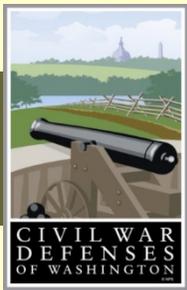
For more information or to register, please contact Ms. Susan Cumbey, Director, Fort Ward Park, Alexandria VA at 703.746.4848 or Susan.Cumbey@alexandriava.gov

Hosted by Friends of Fort Ward.

Civil War Defenses of Washington

NEWSLETTER

January 2014 Volume 11 Issue 3



Contrabands from page 2:

qualified as "contraband of war." International law allowed the confiscation of property, contraband, during times of war. By being declared as contraband, Union forces did not have to return runaway slaves that reached Union controlled territory. Some of the contrabands were brought from the South to Washington DC where they found work as laborers building the capital's defenses.

Some took advantage of using former slaves as laborers because they could be paid less than white workers and placed into some of the most demanding jobs. In August 1862, contraband workers were paid 40 cents per day plus rations. By 1863, engineers in charge of the project upped the recommended amount to \$1 daily plus rations though that amount was rarely seen by the contraband workers. A representative of Union General A.W. Whipple reported that some were still holding fast to the 40 cents per day rate. He also noted that, in many cases, the workers could go weeks or months without being paid, leaving them and their families destitute. Different solutions were sought to solve the problem of proper pay for the contrabands.

Additionally, although the contrabands provided work for the defenses, they were not always welcomed by those in charge. "A portion of the contrabands remaining in my charge" were "entirely unsuitable for the purpose," said Edward Frost, a civilian engineer in an 1862 letter. His opinion would change after the war however, when he pointed out that without the contraband workers the construction of the ring of forts would not have been as timely or successful.

FORT STEVENS 'THEN' and 'NOW'



Spring/Summer 2014:

***The Commemoration
of the 150th
Anniversary of the
Battle of Fort Stevens
will take places on
July 10-13, 2014***

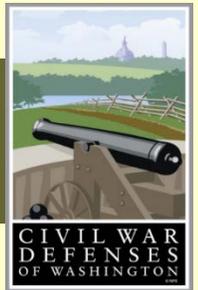
***Interested in
Volunteering?***

*If you are interested in volunteering
for the Civil War Defenses of
Washington D.C. please contact
Ranger Kenya Finley by calling 202-
426-7723 ext: 101 or by email
kenya_finley@nps.gov.*

Civil War Defenses of Washington

NEWSLETTER

January 2014 Volume 111 Issue 2



Alliance from page 1:

Stevens is only one of many, consisted of a ring of earthworks strategically placed in DC, Virginia and Maryland. The defensive circle around the capital included 68 forts supported by 93 detached batteries for field guns, 20 miles of rifle pits, and covered ways, wooden blockhouses at three key points, 32 miles of military roads, several stockaded bridgeheads, and four picket stations. And they served their dual purpose of deterrent and protection well.

The Alliance to Preserve the Civil War Defenses of Washington (Alliance) wants to assure that the story of the CWDW; the memory of the battle of Fort Stevens; the sacrifice of the men who fought, were wounded, and died there; and their significance to the outcome of the Civil War, the abolition of slavery, and the preservation of our Union are not forgotten by the current and future citizens and visitors of the District. We believe that the Defenses are worth preserving, enhancing, and interpreting, and we are dedicated to that mission.

The Alliance is a private, non-profit association of people interested in the Civil War and preservation/interpretation of the CWDW, particularly those sites under Federal ownership and National Park Service (NPS) management. It was incorporated in 2008 as a DC non-profit and received an IRS Sec. 501(c)(3) tax exempt designation in 2009. The board of the Alliance consists of representatives from DC Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, neighborhood groups, Civil War and preservation organizations, citizen activists, and other interested persons. The Alliance also has an Advisory Committee representing Civil War organizations, preservation and environmental groups, and scholars.

Our mission is to create a coalition of individuals and groups to work with the federal and DC governments to preserve, protect, improve, interpret, and connect the CWDW. Our goal is to stabilize, maintain, preserve, and interpret the remainders of the defenses for the benefit of residents and visitors to the region. The Alliance further believes that greater effort is needed to integrate the forts into their surrounding neighborhoods and communities through educational, historical, environmental, and recreational experiences that result in pride and a sense of ownership. We also support efforts to preserve, interpret, and raise the public's awareness of the remaining Civil War Defenses in

Virginia and Maryland. To this end, we seek partnerships with other Civil War preservation groups in the Washington area, such as the Friends of Fort Ward in Alexandria VA, Forts Ethan Allen and C.F. Smith in Arlington VA, Fort Willard in Fairfax County VA, and Battery Bailey in Montgomery County, MD.

Because the CWDW under the care of the NPS are managed under three separate units of the National Capital Region, they lack a unified, mandated focus. This has contributed to continued deterioration of the remaining earthworks and inattention to public needs including safety, maintenance, preservation and interpretation. As no dedicated site exists to inform the public about the CWDW, their history and significance, the Alliance has determined that a visitor contact station at Fort Stevens is an especially critical need. To further the protection of the forts, their maintenance, and appropriate interpretation, we are promoting legislation in the U.S. Congress to establish a separate unit of the NPS as the Civil War Defenses of Washington National Historical Park.

Additionally, the Alliance is working with the NPS to spearhead creation of plans to commemorate the sesquicentennial of the Battle of Fort Stevens and the related Battles of Monocacy, MD (July 9) and Cedar Creek VA (October 19). We have invited national and local organizations and government agencies to join in marking this noteworthy anniversary. We have identified and met with nearly 50 organizations including the National Parks Conservation Association; Civil War Trust; National Trust for Historic Preservation; the Sierra Club; the Committee of 100 on the Federal City; DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities; park and historic preservation organizations in DC, Maryland and Virginia; Advisory Neighborhood Commissions; and more. The Alliance welcomes new organizations and individual volunteers to participate.

For further information, on the Alliance please visit [our website](#) or [our Facebook page](#). To contact us, send a message to info@dccivilwarforts.org. We welcome – and need – YOU!

Editor: Ranger Kenya Finley

*Contributors: Susan Claffey, Loretta Neumann
and Michael Zwelling*



The Civil War Online: Follow the Civil War Reporter on

[twitter](#)

and

[facebook](#)

Stay up to date with the National Park Service Civil War 150 events @

www.nps.gov/civilwar150