

*A series of frequently overlooked sites in and around Corinth, Mississippi.*

*Part Seven – Confederate lines were seven miles long*

Have you ever dug a hole to plant a tree or maybe spent a few Saturdays digging up bulbs in the garden? It doesn't take too long before the shovel starts getting heavier and the ground gets harder. Better yet, when you were a kid did you ever go out in the field with your buddies and dig a fort? Now there was a great idea that never got finished. It was always too much like work. Now imagine if you will, digging a trench eight feet deep, ten feet wide and seven miles long. Start your trench in the Lowes parking lot and head north on South Parkway. After a few miles hang a left and finish your digging on Wenasoga Road just shy of the railroad crossing. And no backhoes or bulldozers allowed, just picks and shovels.

Before the Battle of Shiloh, and especially after it, Confederate officers saw the need for a line of defensive works to protect the city. Corinth was an important place. The two longest railroads in the Confederacy crossed here and since each of the opposing sides needed either a river or a railroad for supplies, it was obviously a place to defend if you held the keys to the city. And defending the city would not be an easy task. After the battle the Union assembled three armies in Tennessee and intended to take Corinth away from the Southerners. Outmanned and out gunned, General Beauregard had to decide whether to retreat or dig in. He chose to dig.

Most of the senior officers in the Confederate army were West Point graduates. Part of the curriculum at the academy in those days was engineering, and engineers designed

forts and earthworks. Captain Samuel Lockett, General Braxton Bragg's chief engineer, was given the job of laying out a defensive position to protect the city from an enemy coming from the northeast. The earthworks Lockett designed were a series of strong positions connected by trenches and rifle pits. As much as possible he took advantage of the rolling topography and the swampy creek bottoms, placing artillery bastions on key ridges and hills.

Most of the labor to create the fortifications came from slaves "impressed" or borrowed from local farms and plantations. As the enemy slowly moved closer to Corinth, soldiers were included in the backbreaking work and the fortifications grew taller. As new sections of the line were completed they were manned by Confederate soldiers from across the south. Every Southern state was present with the exception of Virginia and North Carolina. When it was finished the impressive project was dubbed "The Beauregard Line," a title it is still known by today.

Despite months of preparation the grand attack against the earthworks never came. Beauregard faced overwhelming numbers and nearly a third of his own men were sick. He knew he could not survive a siege or win a battle, so at the end of May he and his army slipped out of town and headed south to Tupelo. In order to fool the Union soldiers poised on the outskirts of town the Confederates installed "Quaker guns," along the earthworks to give the impression they were still fully manned. What are Quaker guns? The name comes from the Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, well known for their pacifist ways. The guns were merely harmless logs painted black to give the impression of being the real thing.

The earthworks, however, did not go unused. During the Battle of Corinth on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, Union soldiers manned the works north of town to defend against the Confederate attack. Heavy fighting took place on the western end of the line as the Southerners charged the very earthworks they themselves had constructed six months earlier. Unfortunately for the Federals there was a gap in their lines and an 800 yard long section of the works was undefended. Confederates in the brigade of Gen. John C. Moore discovered the gap and the works were overrun in the assault.

One of the most interesting segments of the old “Beauregard Line” was a grouping of three artillery positions known as the “salient”, a bulge in the line protecting the north end of town. Though much of the line has disappeared over the years, the “salient” is still there and is in remarkably good condition. New boardwalks and exhibit panels along the walls and trenches explain how the earthworks were built and used. In addition, the Corinth Civil War Interpretive Center has a great indoor/outdoor exhibit of how earthworks looked while under construction as well as when they were completed. To learn more about earthworks, come by the Center and pick up a map of the Civil War sites around Corinth. Located at 501 West Linden Street, the visitor center is open daily from 8:00 to 5:00, and can be reached at 662-287-9273.