

What Happened after the “Yankees” Left Town?

Want to know about the Battle of Corinth? Piece of cake, there are plenty of books and other sources to tap; likewise the May of '62 “Siege” of Corinth. Though it certainly has not been given the attention as such places as Gettysburg or even Shiloh, the history of Corinth during the war years has been pretty well documented. The early Confederate organization of troops, the siege and battle, and the lengthy occupation by the Federals has all been painstakingly researched and written down; up to a point that is. Though little is written about it, military activity did not end when the Union left Corinth on January 24th, 1864; it just took a short pause.

Six days after the Federals pulled out, the Confederates returned to Corinth, ending a twenty month absence. Battery Williams (site of the modern Long Distribution warehouse) was reoccupied and six cannon were sent from Mobile to guard the tracks of the Memphis & Charleston railroad. A small garrison of about a thousand men made the city their temporary home. Citizens who had left Corinth during the Federal occupation began to return to their homes as well. What they found was a far cry from the beautiful town they had left two years before.

The city was a veritable cemetery with thousands of soldiers, Union and Confederate, buried across the landscape. Most of the Union graves had been marked by their comrades and individual wooden markers identified the resting places. Not so for the Confederates. Many of the Southern graves were men who had died of disease and wounds in the days after Shiloh. Other graves on the west side of town held the dead from the battle of Corinth. In May of 1864 two Confederate officers, Col. H. E. Burnet and Major E. H. Cummins, were sent from Mobile to “identify and protect the resting places” of the Southerners laid to rest in Corinth. Military activity to the south prevented them from accomplishing their mission and the grave sites have been lost to history.

The truth was Corinth was no longer the vital railroad hub which had attracted armies and led to battles. The tracks leading into the city were torn up in all four directions. Bridges and culverts were destroyed. Many of the public buildings were in ashes and the stately Corona Female College lay in charred ruins. Had it not been for the railroads the town would have probably been allowed to fade away and die in peace. But railroads could be repaired and with

limited resources the South slowly put the tracks in operation from Mobile to Corinth. Though the armies had moved on, transportation was vital to move grain and other food supplies out from the Black Prairie Region of Eastern Mississippi.

By April of 1864 the tracks were repaired though a lack of steam engines and boxcars limited the use of the tracks in the Corinth area to flat cars pulled by mules. In June locomotives briefly returned to Corinth. An entire division of Alabama cavalry under General Phillip Roddey came to town late in the month in response to a Federal raid moving out from Memphis. On the 28th of June Major General Nathan B. Forrest set out from Tupelo and rode the train north to Corinth where he inspected the cavalry and sent them south in preparation for the coming battle.

Two Union raids were sent into Northeast Mississippi to divert General Forrest from striking out against Sherman's supply lines in Tennessee. The raids culminated in two battles; Brice's Crossroads and Tupelo (also known as the Battle of Harrisburg). The first was a stunning Confederate victory, the other an equally stunning defeat. One of the results of the fight at Tupelo was the destruction of yet another stretch of the tracks leading up to Corinth and it was months before they were again in operation.

In the fall of '64 a flurry of activity on the tracks once again opened the line as far south as Mobile and eastward to Cherokee, Alabama. This was in response to the Confederate offensive under General John Bell Hood and the need to supply his Army of Tennessee. The campaign resulted in the disastrous defeats at Franklin and Nashville. The bloodied army retreated to Florence, Al., across to Corinth and then south to Tupelo. For a brief period Hood used the Verandah House as his headquarters. Supplies were stockpiled in Corinth, much of it in the Tishomingo Hotel. When the Confederates pulled out of town on January 19th 1865, they burned the iconic hotel lest the supplies fall into enemy hands. The "old" hotel was a mere six years old. The war would drag on for another four months, but for the town of Corinth, once known as "The Crossroads of the Confederacy" the war was over.

For more information come out to the Corinth Civil War Interpretive Center. The park rangers can provide information about "Cross City" during the war and can help with questions or research about the Civil War in Northeast Mississippi. The Center is located at 501 West Linden Street and is open 8:00 to 5:00 daily. Park staff can be reached at 662-287-9273.