

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

Part Six – Union Troops Constructed Camp Davies South of Corinth

It's time for a stroll off the beaten path. The first five places I sent you to were so easy to find you didn't even need to turn on the GPS. This one will take you to a part of Corinth you've probably never seen. And if you think it's hard to find now, imagine finding it in 1862. Okay, it's not that difficult to find as the folks in the Sand Hill Community will tell you.

A month after the October, 1862, Battle of Corinth, the Union troops in the area were still on the lookout for any Confederates lurking in the neighborhood. There was no longer any danger of another major battle but there were still enough guerillas and raiders in the area to keep the local commanders on their toes. Camps were set up in strategic locations for two reasons. First, to keep an eye on enemy activity, and, second, to move the soldiers out of town and closer to a reliable supply of fresh water.

The summer of 1862 had been a season of drought and wells and creeks had gone dry. Soldiers from both sides drank from polluted creeks and inevitably came down with dysentery, a great number dying of the malady. Corinth was not a healthy place to be stationed. (For any out-of-towners reading this, our water is much better today!) As a consequence many of the camps were moved to the east and south of town and Clear Creek proved a favorite.

In November, 1862, the 14th Missouri Infantry, also known as Birge's Western Sharpshooters, made their camp along the lower reaches of Clear Creek, not far from its junction with the Tuscumbia River. The men were all crack shots and wore squirrel tails on their hats to boast of their marksmanship. Located six miles south of Corinth, the camp was eventually enclosed by a wooden stockade and in due course had forty buildings within the walls. The men called it Camp Davies in honor of Brigadier General Thomas A. Davies, the commander of their old division.

By all accounts, Camp Davies was a pretty cushy place to be posted. There were wooden barracks, a hospital, commissary and even a Masonic Hall. Fifteen-foot pine trees were transplanted to create shady avenues. There was a spacious parade ground on the inside of the stockade and a target range on the outside. There were catfish and bass in the Tuscumbia and blackberries on the vines. Life was good.

Another unit that enjoyed a stay at Camp Davies was the 1st Alabama Cavalry (U.S.), a regiment of horsemen recruited from northwest Alabama and northern Mississippi. The counties of this region were predominantly pro-Union prior to the war and a number of men refused to enlist in the Confederate army. Referred to as Tories or even traitors by their neighbors, they remained loyal to the United States when their states seceded. Many of the men were drafted into Confederate service and then deserted at the first opportunity, hiding out in the woods and caves of the country. From their ranks came the troopers of the 1st Alabama Cavalry.

But it was not all fun and games on the banks of Clear Creek. Confederate scouts and guerrillas were always skulking on the fringes of the camp, ready to grab any unwary soldier who wandered too far from the compound. Regular forays were sent out from the camp to chase away the enemy, often returning with prisoners of their own.

The end of Camp Davies came on January 24, 1864. Corinth was no longer the strategic rail center it had been early in the war and the Union chose to abandon the town and transfer men and equipment to Memphis. This movement included the men at Camp Davies. Rather than leave the camp for any use by the enemy, the troopers of the 1st Alabama Cavalry set fire to the buildings and stockade. Within a matter of hours the comfortable camp was reduced to ashes.

To learn more about Camp Davies come out to the Corinth Civil War Interpretive Center. The rangers can provide detailed directions out to the Camp Davies site and show you where to find more research material about this unique Corinth location. 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.