

INVESTIGATION OF MILITARY ACTIVITY ON PAGELAND FARM, 1861-1865

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Pageland Farm was untouched by the First Battle of Manassas, July 21, 1861, but "the booming of the cannon and the horrible clatter, of small arms" as a neighbor, Reverend Alexander H. Compton, wrote ¹ must have felt uncomfortably close. From the ridge on which the W.P. Snyder house now stands as well as from neighboring hills such as Douglas Heights (the Brawner farm) and Monroe's Hill (known as Stuart's Hill today) the rising smoke from the battle would have been plainly visible off to the east.

The war had a much greater impact on Pageland in the months that followed First Manassas. In August and September of 1861, troops belonging to the 15th Alabama, 16th Mississippi, 21st Georgia and 21st North Carolina camped in the vicinity of Pageland. It was here these regiments were formed into a brigade under the command of Brigadier General George B. Crittenden of Kentucky.

There was opportunity for many of the troops encamped at Pageland to visit the nearby battlefield and do some sightseeing. Private Madison F. Amos of Company H, 21st Georgia wrote down his observations for his wife in a letter written from Pageland on September 4th: "Our men have rails over their graves, with their name on the head posts. The "Yankees" were permitted to bury their dead but did it very badly for the rains have washed the dirt off of a great many of the bodies and a great many bodies were not buried at all. Even yet the stench from the dead horses & Yankees is intolerable." ²

William C. Oates of the 15th Alabama recorded a similar scene in his war reminiscences: "A battle-field was a new thing then and it elicited the minutest attention from every visitor, and I am quite certain that every officer and man in the regiment availed himself of the opportunity of inspecting this first battlefield of the war. Some of the mounds where the slain were buried were washed down by the rains until here and there could be discovered a putrefying human hand or foot protruding. Such places when approached were offensive." ³

Most of the surviving accounts from these units also make note of the sickness, particularly the measles, which invaded the camps at Pageland. As the chronicler of the Quitman Guards, Company E of the 16th Mississippi Regiment, noted, "the mortality was very great indeed. ⁴ This same account states that the sick of the Mississippi and, perhaps, the other regiments of the brigade were sent to hospitals in Warrenton. This was probably done when the brigade relocated to camps closer to Fairfax Court House later in September. William Oates relates that a policy to keep the sick in camp was adopted and this contributed to the mortality rate. ⁵ All agree that the 21st Georgia suffered the worst. At one time nearly the whole regiment was on the sick list and the officers could hardly get enough men to stand guard.⁶

The prevalence of disease and death in the camps at Pageland makes the area a likely site for burials as well. Documentation for this, this however, remains elusive. It is unlikely a mass grave exists from this period as there would not have been a large number of dead to bury all at one time. Confederate forces had ample time and opportunity to mark the graves of comrades who fell in the First Battle or suffered death from disease in camp but in many cases the grave markers were wood and not long lasting. With the Confederate evacuation of the Manassas area in March of 1862, and

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subsequent occupation by Union forces, many Confederate graves outside established cemeteries became neglected. Unmaintained markers soon weathered away and disappeared. Gravesites for many "unknowns" were eventually lost. Such might be the case at Pageland.

Dr. Cyrus C. Marsteller and his wife Eliza owned Pageland farm at the time of the war but actually resided at "Melbourne" near Gainesville. ⁷ During the winter months of 1862, while the Confederate Army under General Joseph E. Johnston inhabited winter quarters in and around Centreville and Manassas, a number of officers' wives stayed close by at Melbourne. Among those who boarded with the Marsteller's were Monimia Field, wife of Colonel (later Brigadier General) Charles William Field, and Bettie Alexander, wife of Major (later Brigadier General) Edward Porter Alexander. Signal Officer on General Beauregard's staff at the time of First Manassas and later the Army of Northern Virginia's Chief of Ordnance, E.P. Alexander was a frequent visitor at the Marsteller home. In his personal recollections he describes escorting his wife and infant daughter from the Gainesville station to Dr. Marsteller's early in January 1862. Until the army withdrew toward Richmond in March, Alexander rode the Warrenton Turnpike from Centreville every weekend to be with his wife and daughter. ⁸

E.P. Alexander's personal recollections, also document the Marsteller house being used as a Confederate field hospital during the Second Battle of Manassas. As a general rule, field hospitals were only temporary, makeshift facilities where the needs of the wounded were treated until evacuation to a general hospital became possible. The Confederate wounded from Second Manassas were collected at numerous locations some as far away as Haymarket. The Marsteller place was one of the closest to the battlefield on the Confederate side.

Brigadier General Charles Field was among the southern casualties carried to the Marsteller House during the Second Battle of Manassas. On August 29th, while leading his infantry brigade, part of A.P. Hill's "Light Division" on Jackson's left flank near Sudley, Field was seriously wounded in the hip. Since wounds to the body often proved fatal, the surgeons initially had little hope he would survive. Mrs. Field, then at Farmville, learned of the general's condition, rushed to join her husband and found him in the same room she had occupied the previous winter. ⁹ Probably in no small part due to the care provided by his wife, General Field eventually recovered and returned to duty.

Others were not as fortunate as General Field. Many died at the field hospitals before, during and after surgery. Under the circumstances at that time the armies had little choice except to bury the dead on the field where they fell or, if taken to a field hospital, at those locations. It may have been expedient to dig mass graves where large numbers of dead were collected. Lieutenant R.W. Tyler, 1st Independent Company, Veteran Reserve Corps, surveyed the battlefield and reported on the condition of northern graves in 1866. The map accompanying his report indicates the location of Union burial sites only and none are shown in the vicinity of Pageland. ¹⁰ Again, documentary evidence of soldiers' graves at Pageland may be elusive but it is certainly within the realm of possibility if not probability.

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Pageland farm remained behind Confederate lines throughout the Second Battle of Manassas. The fighting came much closer than it had been in the first battle. There was considerable military activity at Pageland. Until the arrival of James Longstreet's "Right Wing" of the Army of Northern Virginia late on the morning of August 29, Jubal Early's and Henry Forno's (Hays') brigades of Lawton's (Ewell's) Division held down Jackson's extreme right flank at Pageland.

General Jackson personally designated Early's position on the morning of August 29th. Early's report describes the position as being on a ridge west of the turnpike and the railroad track [unfinished railroad grade]I formed my own and Hays' brigade in line on the ridge indicated, placing them under cover in the woods, and advanced skirmishers to the railroad track and posted a detachment on my right flank, so as to prevent any surprise from that direction." ¹¹

In his memoirs, written before his death in 1894, Early is generally consistent with his report but recalls it being "a ridge north of the Warrenton Pike and behind the railroad....Hays' brigade and my own were formed in line on the ridge indicated, in the edge of a piece of woods, and skirmishers were advanced to the line of the railroad...." ¹²

Early was somewhat more specific In his testimony before the Board of Officers rehearing the case of Fitz John Porter in 1878: "General Jackson showed me a position on the southwest of Page Land road-- I didn't know it by that name at the time; It was on a ridge about a mile from the Warrenton pike; it was a commanding ridge and commanded a view of all the open country in front of the Warrenton pike and all of the fields to my right and General Jackson's right." ¹³

One might question General Early's sense of direction after comparing these three descriptions but there should be no mistake he was on Pageland farm. Although citing these same sources in his documentation, John Hennessy's troop movement maps for the Second Battle of Manassas (1985) erroneously show Early's and Forno's brigades south and in front of the unfinished railroad. ¹⁴

Upon being relieved by Longstreet's troops, Early shifted his and Forno's regiments to the center of Jackson's line behind the unfinished railroad. The 13th and 31st Virginia Regiments of Early's command, previously detached and deployed south of the Warrenton Turnpike, were recalled. These troops likely used Pageland Lane to rejoin the brigade.

While the brigades of Early and Forno remained In line at Pageland covering Jackson's right flank, Captain John R. Johnson's Virginia battery (Bedford Artillery) of four guns (two 3-inch rifles, one 12-pounder field howitzer, one 6-pounder gun) was "placed in position to command my [Early's] front." ¹⁵ The position of this battery cannot be clearly defined by this ambiguous description. John Hennessy places Johnson's battery along Pageland Lane south of the unfinished railroad on his troop movement maps. This may also be in error. It has been established that Early threw out his skirmishers only as far as the unfinished railroad (with the exception of the 13th and 31st Virginia regiments). It is unlikely he would have placed a battery forward of his skirmish line. It is more likely

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Johnson's battery was situated somewhere along the skirmish line and this seems to be supported by General Lee's Aide-de-Camp Charles S. Venable.

Venable's personal reminiscences reveal the following information relative to Lee's arrival on the morning of August 29th: "Genl Lee rode at the front with his staff. On reaching the field of Jackson's fight of the 28th, on the right, he ordered his staff to remain at the edge of the wood out of sight of the enemy while he went forward on foot to Jackson's skirmish line to - one of our batteries - and made his own observation of the condition of things on Jackson's right. On his return to the edge of the copse, he quietly remarked - "A sharpshooter came near killing me just now." We saw how near it was as his cheek had been grazed by the bullet of the sharpshooter." ¹⁶

No other source has been found to corroborate this particular incident or specifically identify the battery in question. However, if accurate, it is reasonable to assume Lee was dodging bullets at J.R. Johnson's battery, and that battery had to have been situated near Early's skirmish line along the unfinished railroad somewhere in the immediate vicinity of Pageland.

Other evidence of military activity on Pageland Farm was uncovered by Park Historian/Interpreter David Ruth in the early 1980's. Exploring the southeast portion of the meadow adjacent to Pageland Lane with a metal detector, he recovered the nose fragments of an exploded Union 3-inch Schenkle artillery shell to include its fuse. This may have resulted from counter-battery fire going over J.R. Johnson's guns on the morning of August 29th. For a short time that day the farm was within range of Union artillery. (A possible source for this projectile may have been the 10-pounder Parrott rifles of Captain James Cooper's Battery B, 1st Pennsylvania Light Artillery in position for a short time on the Brawner Farm.) A number of musket balls and bullets, all dropped and none fired, were also recovered from the same general area attesting to the presence of Confederate infantry at Pageland. ¹⁷

Little is known of events at Pageland following the Second Battle of Manassas. Having escaped destruction in the battles, Pageland evidently became a refuge for at least two local families whose homes had been lost. According to Elenea H. Henry, widow of Arthur L. Henry, the Carter and Henry families went to live at Pageland after "Pittsylvania" (the Carter home to which the related Henrys had relocated after First Manassas) was burned by General Sigel's retreating Union troops on the night of August 30, 1862. ¹⁸

Except for the escapades of John Singleton Mosby and his band of Partisan Rangers (43d Battalion, Virginia Cavalry), the country around Manassas was dominated largely by Federal forces for the remainder of the war. Large bodies of Union troops frequently passed through the area. The Warrenton Turnpike remained a major thoroughfare and many families residing along this route suffered damages from foraging "Yankees". Southerners were given the opportunity to file claims against the Federal government under an Act of Congress of March 3, 1871. The southern claims provide additional documentation of the war's impact on families living in the area.

Pageland neighbor Lucinda M. Dogan filed a claim in 1878 requesting compensation for

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fence rails and crops taken or destroyed in September 1862 and October 1863. The claim was ultimately rejected on grounds that Mrs. Dogan could not prove how much was actually taken by Federal troops. John C. Brawner's claim, filed in 1871, was for property damages resulting from the fighting on August 28, 1862. His claim was also denied by reason that he could not demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Commission his loyalty to the Union during the war. At least one local man, James Robinson, won his case after submitting a claim in 1871, receiving \$2608.00 from the government for supplies taken by General Pope's army during the second battle.

Dr. Marsteller did not file any claim with the Southern Claims Commission. More research is needed. If no other documentation surfaces, the full extent to which the Civil War visited Pageland Farm may never be known.

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NOTES

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- 1 Alexander H. Compton, "Letter to Mrs. Doris" (Gainesville, July 30, 1861) p. 1.
 - 2 Madison F. Amos, "Letter to Wife" (Pageland, Sept. 4, 1861), pp. 2-3.
 - 3 William C. Oates, The War between the Union and the Confederacy (Dayton, 1985) ' p. 76.
 - 4 A Historical Sketch of the Quitman Guards, Company E, Sixteenth Mississippi Regiment, Harris Brigade. (New Orleans, 1866) , P.11
 - 5 Oates, p.77
 - 6 A Historical Sketch of the Quitman Guards.... p. 11
 - 7 Mary Ellen Bushey, Phase II Architectural and Historical Evaluation of selected Properties Associated with the Proposed Improvements to Route 234 the Manassas Bypass. in Manassas and Prince William County, Virginia. (Richmond, 1993), P. 46
 - 8 Edward Porter Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy, ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill, 1989) , P. 65
 - 9 Ibid. , p. 135
 - 10 R.W. Tyler, "Report & Map to Col. M.J-, Ludington" (Washington, March 28, 1866), Manassas NBP Library Files.
 - 11 Jubal A. Early, "Report", War of the Rebellion; A Compilation of the official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1885), Series 1, Vol. 123, Part 2, p. 711.
 - 12 Jubal A. Early, Lieutenant General Jubal Anderson Early C.S.A (Philadelphia, 1912) , pp. 122-123.
 - 13 Jubal A. Early, "Testimony", Senator Executive Document 37; Proceedings and Report of the Board of Army Officers.. in the Case of Fitz John Porter (Washington, 1879) , Part 2 pp. 809-810
 - 14 John Hennessey, Historical Report on the Troop Movement for the Second Battle of Manassas August 28 through August 30, 1862 (1985), p. 93, Map 3.
 - 15 Early, Lieutenant General, p. 123.
 - 16 Charles S. Veneble, Personal Reminiscences of the Confederate War (University of Virginia Library) , pp. 55-56
 - 17 David Ruth, Richmond NBP, Telephone Conversation, May 26, June 3. 1992. (Mr. Ruth drew a map denoting the locations of artifacts recovered from the W.P Snyder property. He claims to still have it but it is presently packed away due to multiple career moves and is unavailable. When found a copy will be forwarded to Manassas NBP.)
 - 18 Elenea H. Henry, Some Events Connected with the Life of Judith Carter Henry and the Circumstances Surrounding her Death in the First Battle of Bull Run July 21, 1861 (Manassas, n.d.-c,1940), Manassas NBP Library Files, p. 5, (Note: It is uncertain General Sigel's troops actually burned Pittsylvania as they were not the last to occupy that ground -See Hennessey, Troop Movements. Also, evidence suggests Confederate forces captured Union prisoners in and around Pittsylvania immediately after the Union retreat -See Report of Lt. C.B. Brockway, Battery F, 1st Pa Lt. Artillery, Park files.)