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An historical archaeological examination of a battlefield landscape: An Example from the American Civil War Battle of Wilson's Wharf, Charles City County, Virginia

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AN HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION

OF A BATTLEFIELD LANDSCAPE:

An Example From The American Civil War

Battle Of Wilson’s Wharf,

Charles City County, Virginia

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Anthropology

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

Jameson Michael Harwood

2003
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Jameson Michael Harwood

Approved, May 2003

Norman Barka

Dennis Blanton

Marley Brown, III
DEDICATION

To the soldiers who fought and died
on the Wilson’s Wharf battlefield landscape
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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a case study for the historical archaeological examination of a battlefield. It presents an American Civil War battlefield, known as the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf, not so much as an archaeological site but rather as a cultural landscape of conflict. An examination of the artifactual residue of the battle patterned within the cultural landscape combined with an analysis of the historical documentation on the May 24, 1864, engagement, reveals a much broader insight into the nature of battlefields than can be reached through either history or archaeology alone. The thesis also makes recommendations for additional fieldwork on the battlefield.
AN HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION

OF A BATTLEFIELD LANDSCAPE:

An Example from the American Civil War

Battle of Wilson’s Wharf,

Charles City County, Virginia
INTRODUCTION

May 24th, 1864. Charles City County, Virginia. After an all night ride the 2,500 Confederate cavalrymen under the command of Major General Fitzhugh Lee finally reached their destination. As the military activity near Richmond developed into a virtual stalemate, the Confederate government decided it was time to deal with a small situation transpiring downriver. On May 5th, Federal troops assigned to protect the communication and supply line of the Army of the James had landed at Wilson’s Wharf and established a base of operations. All throughout the month reports had come in stating the Union garrison was continuing to fortify their position. However, it was not the strategic location of the fortification that worried the Southern military as the Union navy controlled the James River. Rather it was the nature of the Federal infantry stationed at Wilson’s Wharf that caused Confederate officials such discomfort. For the Union soldiers consisted of two regiments of United States Colored Troops (U.S.C.T.) under the command of the contentious Brigadier General Edward Wild.

As in North Carolina, Wild continued to take the war to the local populace by raiding the surrounding countryside from his base at Wilson’s Wharf. Accounts of Wild’s activities, ranging from the factual to the fantastical, led outraged Southern citizens to demand action. By May 23, the Confederate army could no longer tolerate the idea of black soldiers operating freely in the heart of Virginia and General
Braxton Bragg sent the cavalry force to “break up the nest and stop their uncivilized proceedings in the neighborhood” (Fitzhugh Lee’s Postwar Report 1866).

This thesis is based on an investigation of the May 24, 1864, Battle of Wilson’s Wharf conducted by the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research in the fall of 2000 (Harwood 2001) (Figure 1 and 2). The project was funded by a grant from the National Park Service American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP). The project sought to demonstrate the value of a systematic metal detector survey combined with in-depth historical research as a means of delineating troop positions within a battlefield site. The artifact distributions not only demonstrated a positive correlation with aspects of the historical record, but also provided valuable insights into areas where the written accounts were incomplete or silent.

By drawing on the data collected during the 2000 survey this thesis presents a case for the historical archaeological examination of a battlefield. It presents the Wilson’s Wharf battlefield not so much as an archaeological site but rather as a cultural landscape of conflict. An examination of the artifactual residue of the battle patterned within the cultural landscape, combined with an analysis of the historical documentation on the May 24, 1864, engagement, reveals a much broader insight into the nature of battlefields than can be reached through either history or archaeology alone. The thesis also makes recommendations for additional fieldwork on the battlefield.
The following chapters provide an historical archaeological examination of the Wilson’s Wharf battlefield landscape. Chapter One examines issues related to the study of battlefield archaeology. Chapter Two presents the battlefield as a cultural landscape and examines the study of landscapes in historical archaeology. Chapter Three discusses the study of battlefield archaeology from its beginnings up to the present day. Chapter Four presents the history of the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf. Chapter Five provides a description of the cultural landscape encompassed by the battle and presents the data recovered from the 2000 fieldwork. Chapter Six provides an historical archaeological examination of the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf through a comparison of the historical record and the behavioral patterning of artifacts within the cultural landscape of the battlefield.
Figure 1. Study Area location and environs (U.S. Geological Survey [USGS] 1980, 1987).
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CHAPTER I.
ISSUES IN BATTLEFIELD ARCHAEOLOGY

In the mid-1960s, a growing number of American archaeologists began to specialize and focus on the study of the historic period. The establishment of the Society for Historical Archaeology in 1967 provided a professional forum for the presentation and exchange of ideas related to the study of historic sites. For nearly forty years, historical archaeology has attempted to strengthen its place within the field of anthropology through contributions to the understanding of the recent past (Shackel and Little 1994).

However, since its beginnings the field of historical archaeology appears to be continuously in a crisis of reinvention (see Harrington 1955; Binford and Binford 1968; South 1977a; Ferguson 1977a; Schuyler 1978a; Deetz 1983; Leone and Potter 1988; Little and Shackel 1989; Beaudry 1996). Much of the crisis has centered on questions of the definition of historical archaeology and its methods of contribution to the scholarly enterprise. DeCunzo (1996: 3) states that the debate has essentially turned on a few key issues: historical archaeology’s rightful place in history and the humanities or in anthropology and the sciences, our sources of evidence and approaches to analyzing and interpreting them, and the theoretical paradigms driving our investigations with their associated conceptions of culture and its relationship to material culture.
The continual redefinition of the place of historical archaeology and its analytical contributions has led to the evolution of the field into an interdisciplinary endeavor that brings innovative approaches and perspectives to the study of the emergence of the modern world. Schuyler (1978b: 27) provides a concise characterization of historical archaeology as “the study of the material remains from any historic period.” South (1977a: xxix) adds that material remains of culture are examined in order to understand “past lifeways, culture history, and culture process.” Beaudry (1996: 476) notes that the historical archaeological process involves the combination of “sophisticated ethnographic analysis of documentary and oral historical data with... anthropologically sensitive excavation and material culture research to produce highly contextualized and nuanced studies of historical sites, neighborhoods, and communities.” Thus the unique approaches of historical archaeology appear to place the discipline “directly over the fault on the academic landscape that separates the social sciences from the humanities” in order to attend to both “the humanist’s concern for meaning, intention, and being, and to the scientist’s concern for form, behavior, and conditions.” (Glassie 1977: 24).

The debate surrounding the definition of the field not only forced historical archaeologists to position themselves within both the sciences and humanities but to also address the problems and questions that drive the efforts of its practitioners (Mrozowski 1988). Historical archaeologists have realized that their unique position within the “academic landscape” affords them the opportunity to be omnivorous in their attempts to study the past. Through the use of a multievidential approach, researchers have integrated a wide range of documentary, ethnographic, scientific,
and material culture evidence to forge a more productive understanding of the behavioral and cultural processes that shaped the modern world (Deegan 1988).

The expansion of the field of inquiry in historical archaeology has led to the examination of new bodies of evidence. One of the arenas that has benefited from the contribution of historical archaeology has been the study of battlefields. Battlefield archaeology is sometimes viewed as synonymous with military sites archaeology, a sub-discipline devoted to the study of features associated with military activities. Military sites archaeologists are concerned with the social and behavioral dynamics associated with the occupation and use of military features such as fortifications, earthworks, trenches, prisons, field hospitals, and camps. In a similar manner, battlefield archaeologists also investigate military facilities but rather with the view that the features are part of a larger cultural and natural landscape associated with a specific battle event.

As battle events occur within the cultural landscape over a relatively short time span compared to other occupational sites, the archaeological study of battlefields was initially ignored due to the misconception that no relevant information could be recovered from the residue of war. In recent decades, researchers have recognized the issues involved in the study of the battlefields and have begun to adapt traditional field methods and analytical techniques in order to accommodate the unique nature of the historical and archaeological record of battlefields.

For most of the twentieth century the excavation of battlefields was relegated to the domain of the relic hunter as historical archaeologists dismissed battlefields as
containing no meaningful stratigraphy and therefore no meaningful time dimension (Noel Hume 1969). Battlefield archaeology was viewed in much the same light as underwater archaeology, essentially a salvage rather than scientific project "requiring none of the archaeologist's techniques of revealing, studying, and recording the relationships between objects and their stratigraphy" (Noel Hume 1969: 190).

It was reasoned that as archaeologists extract information from the relationship between objects and stratigraphy, the apparent lack of meaningful stratigraphy on a battlefield meant that no relevant information could be recovered from battle-related objects. Thus the perceived absence of vertical sequencing on battlefield sites relegated any battle-related objects to a mere scatter of "relics." Noel Hume failed to account for the information available from gross and dynamic pattern analysis when he noted, "there is little to be gained from the painstaking plotting of the position of each item" (1969: 190). It was not until the Little Bighorn study in the 1980s that historical archaeologists developed the potential of horizontal sequencing analysis within battlefields (Scott and Fox 1987).

The failure to develop analytical techniques for the analysis and documentation of battlefields was due in part to the bias of researchers. Given the robustness of the written record many asked: What can we learn from battlefield archaeology that we do not already know? Historical archaeologists were in a sense asking what battlefield archaeology could contribute to the discipline rather than what the discipline could contribute to the study of battlefields. In failing to address the issues involved in the analysis and documentation of artifactual residues of war,
historical archaeologists were overlooking major resources for understanding the physical manifestation of conflict.

One of the most challenging issues for battlefield archaeologists is the balance between the nature of the documentary and material culture evidence of an engagement. Smith (1994: 9) states that before archaeologists can offer germane contributions to the study of battlefields, they have a responsibility to assimilate the vast amount of documentary research. Battlefield archaeologists must become familiar with what is available in the primary source archives and the methods for using and interpreting documents (Schuyler 1988: 42). The task should not be viewed as a detriment or a limitation but rather as a means to enhance the relevance of archaeological work. Such historical context not only aids in the development of a context for the archaeological research, but also stimulates the discipline toward asking relevant questions. Smith (1994: 9) calls for battlefield archaeologists to be researchers who use and integrate the information provided by both documents and archaeology, rather than simply archaeologists excavating battlefields of the historic period.

Not only must battlefield archaeologists be experts in the traditional sources of documentary evidence, they must also be well versed in nontraditional literature. Espenshade et al. (2002: 43) notes that many archaeologists loathe the idea of purchasing relic-collector literature. While many “collector” books provide maps and descriptions of battlefields simply to aid in the looting of artifacts (LeGaye 1989) other sources provide educational overviews of specific arms, ammunition, and accoutrements (see Coates and Thomas 1990, Lords 1995, McAulay 1991, McAulay
1987, Melton and Pawl 1996, Tice 1997, Thomas 1997, Thomas and Thomas 1996). These sources represent years of research and can provide the battlefield archaeologist with the means to educate themselves in the technology and artifact types manufactured in the era of the engagement. Such nontraditional information can aid in the identification and interpretation of the material culture residue of a battle.

While it is important to investigate nontraditional sources of information, it must also be realized that sometimes the source of the information must also be considered. Many archaeologists have championed the use of relic hunters as archaeological informants (Espenshade et al. 2002: 42-43). They view communication with relic hunters as a potentially productive source of archival and field evidence and as a chance to transform looters into amateur archaeologists. While some relic hunters can be made to see the error of their ways, a significant proportion will never understand the goals of archaeological research. Even if nine out of ten relic hunters repent their looting sins, it must be remembered that it only takes the one looter to rape a site of its integrity. Unfortunately, relic hunters, even reformed ones, tend to have friends who still enjoy “pot-hunting” and simple word of mouth, however innocent, can lead to the downfall of a battlefield site. Many archaeologists have returned to the site only to discover the artifacts and features they flagged had been looted over the weekend (Beis 2003). Just because archaeologists are supposed to operate under a system of ethics does not mean that a relic hunter will be bound by the same professional code.
The abundance of the documentary record challenges historical archaeologists to develop and adapt traditional methods of archaeological inquiry to the unique nature of battlefields. Espenshade et al. (2002) provides a succinct overview of the challenges facing the study of battlefields. Battlefields have a low level of deposition scattered across the cultural landscape in comparison to domestic sites, which tend to have denser, more intensive concentrations of artifacts. Thus, at the survey level, many of the archaeological residues of battle events appear invisible when traditional methods, in the form of probabilistic sampling, are employed. The placement of shovel tests at regular intervals relies on a site containing a scatter of sufficient artifact density to allow detection. Even military facilities that underwent prolonged occupations in comparison to battle events, such as camps, have been missed entirely or misrepresented in their scope and value (Legg and Smith 1989: 132-33). At Folly Island, South Carolina, two different survey teams using the traditional survey methods of systematic shovel testing, failed to recognize the extensive nature of the Union campground (Smith 1994: 12). At Bray’s Island, South Carolina, another campground was missed altogether by shovel testing only to be discovered later by resurvey using a metal detector (Smith 1994: 12).

While many archaeologists have labeled the technology as merely a means of salvaging artifacts (Noel Hume: 188), researchers have proven the worth of the metal detector as an efficient and effective method for examining a battlefield (Scott and Fox 1987, Roach 2001). As most military artifacts that survive in the archaeological record are made of metals such as iron, copper, and lead, battlefield archaeologists quickly learned what had been known to relic hunters for decades - that the best way
to detect metal is with a metal detector. For the investigation of the 760 acres of the Little Bighorn project area, Scott et al (1989) determined that a systematic metal detector survey in conjunction with visual inspection and small block excavation would provide the most successful method for examining the battlefield area. Scott and other researchers (see Chapter 3) have shown how the combination of traditional and nontraditional archaeological methods is a requirement for the successful interpretation of the archaeological residue of war.

The challenges of developing an historical archaeology of battlefields may appear daunting, however through the mastery of the documentary data and the expansion of the traditional methods of investigation, researchers can contribute meaningfully to both the professional and public world of contemporary society (Smith 1994: 15). One of the necessary means to achieving a more widespread relevance is to advance the discussion of battlefields and military sites beyond the “grey literature” of compliance archaeology (Espenshade et al. 2002: 40). While the work of cultural resource management firms and non-profit agencies has contributed significantly to the study of battlefields, much of the resulting reports languish in a state of obscurity and are difficult to access. Historical archaeologists, regardless of affiliation, have begun to merge the requirements of report writing with an interpretive prose that makes the study of battlefields not only technically sound but also readable (see Fox 1993; Geier and Potter 2000; Geier and Winter 1994; Scott et al. 1989; Smith 1993).

Beyond adding to a public and professional understanding of battle events, archaeologists can make significant contributions to the study of cultural processes.
Archaeologists must begin by examining battlefields in order to establish basic, but very necessary, archaeological facts (Courbin 1988: 110-149). Smith (1994: 16) describes the method and importance of establishing archaeological facts.

Archaeological facts are established first through careful excavation and recording of the site being excavated. Archaeological facts seem mundane but actually are critical discoveries, such as where an artifact is found or the identity of a feature and its relationship to another (Courbin 1988: 112-113). Archaeological facts are those solid statements that are added to others to interpret a single site. The interpretations of that site then are tested against interpretations of other sites, and new archaeological facts are established.

It is through the comparison of facts that true patterns are seen, measured, and tested and from these patterns valid statements can be made concerning behavioral processes.

Smith (1994) determines that the establishment of archaeological facts achieves two critical steps: it provides historians and other disciplines with new information that can be absorbed into the general body of knowledge about warfare and it provides a scientific foundation upon which to build an archaeology of battlefields. Smith is quick to point out that the simple establishment of facts is an aim that will be viewed as restrictive or particularistic, and thus fail to satisfy the larger theoretical concerns of the field. Yet it must be understood that a degree of particularism is central to all archaeological research given the unique events and individuals that shape the material record. To understand the relevance of battlefield archaeology, it is essential to have a historical and particular appreciation for the context of the battle (Potter 1994: 27).

The study of the context of the battle event is an important aspect of transitioning from the archaeological facts to the larger behavioral processes visible within the battlefield. The context of space is one of the most important, yet difficult
aspects of a battlefield to interpret archaeologically due to the large scale of most
battle events. An investigation of a battle event requires the battlefield to be
examined within the context of the natural and cultural environment in which it was
fought. The following chapter will present the battlefield as a cultural landscape and
examine the study of landscapes in historical archaeology.
CHAPTER II.

BATTLEFIELD AS CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

In recent years the idea of landscape has become increasingly important in archaeology, not just from an academic point of view but also in relation to the protection and management of cultural resources (Ashmore and Knapp 1999; Brown and Samford 1994; Kelso 1996; Kelso and Most 1990; King 1994; Kryder-Reid 1994; Mayne and Murray 2001; Rossignol and Wandsnider 1992; Ucko and Layton 1999; Yamin and Metheny 1996; Young 2000; Zierden 1996). The idea of the “cultural landscape” is widely used and yet at the same time often poorly defined. As so often happens, an intractable term that defies close definition and lacks consensual understanding is among the most widely used. The following chapter will present a discussion of the definition of cultural landscape, current research in the historical archaeological study of landscape, and finally how the battlefield must be viewed as a cultural landscape.

Of the three dimensions of archaeology (form, time, and space), James Deetz (1990: 1-2) notes that the spatial dimension seems to have been approached somewhat discontinuously. While households and communities have received widespread attention, the space between has attracted far less consideration. This space contains the gardens, fields, rivers, roads, mountains, and other features that provide the “connective tissue” and give the households and communities their proper
context (Deetz 1990: 1). The total context of all the natural and man-made features that exist both inside and outside human settlement is referred to as the cultural landscape (Orser 1996). The landscape is cultural in that it physically embodies the history, structure, and contexts of human behavior in such a way that they are not readily separable from each other (Hood 1996: 121).

The cultural landscape represents a generic term for the expression of particular ways of seeing the world, specialized in time and place. Traditionally, archaeologists have viewed the landscape as a physical phenomenon that is essentially of human construction. The landscape becomes an object to be measured or quantified or a subject to be reconstructed as it appeared at some defined stage in its past. Treating landscapes as objects for measurement or subjects for reconstruction aids in the development of archaeological approaches but fails to fully perceive the landscape as a socially constituted, spatially-referenced, and time dependent perspective of the world.

Landscapes are essentially social, not physical, constructions that are modified, categorized, defined, and negotiated according to a set of cultural plans (Deetz 1990: 2). Daniels and Cosgrove highlight the social construct of landscapes when they state, “a landscape is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring, or symbolizing surroundings” (1988: 1). The creation of the cultural landscape involves the application of value systems to the categorization and understanding of the spaces encountered by people as individuals, groups or whole communities. Cultural landscapes exist in a continuum of human perception and usage, and they can only be individually understood in the context of one another.
In identifying the cultural landscape it would seem necessary to define the opposite or “natural landscape” representing land that has not been intentionally modified. However, the very concept of what is “natural” is in itself a subjective social construct and thus the natural environment (rivers, mountains, ravines, etc) becomes part of the cultural landscape. Hood (1996: 122) notes that natural landscapes are often perceived and categorized into culturally relevant entities such as “the wilderness”, “the edge of the Earth”, “the unknown”, “virgin land.” As soon as something is categorized as a natural landscape, it ceases to be so because it has now been brought into the realm of the social.

Landscape studies have become an increasingly important focus of attention in historical archaeology. Since the early 1980s archaeologists have realized that the cultural landscape is analogous to a document - a cultural autobiography empowered with the social context of human perception (Lewis 1993). The cultural landscape served as more than ornaments attached to the great houses of the past; it also expressed the ideals of those who affected and were affected by the environment. Studies of cultural landscapes in American historical archaeology have included analysis of region (Kealhofer 1999), urban towns and cities (Brown and Samford 1994; Leone et al. 1989; Mayne and Murray 2001; Miller 1994, 1988; Shackel 1994; Wall 1994; Young 2000; Zierden 1996; Zierden and Herman 1996), houselots (Beaudry 1984; Harrington 1989, Rotman and Nassaney 1997), factories and boardinghouses (Beaudry 1989; Mrozowski and Beaudry 1990), gardens (Brown and Samford 1990; Kryder-Reid 1994; Leone 1984; Leone and Shackel 1990), ethnicity (Upton 1985), farmsteads (Adams 1990; Garrison 1996; King 1994), and
environment (Kelso 1996; Miller et al. 1990; Rovner 1990; Schoenwetter 1990). The following discussion will present an overview of three studies that incorporate a landscape approach in the examination of a recreated urban landscape, a symbolic garden landscape, and an urban farmstead.

Marley Brown and Patricia Samford (1994) examine the landscape of Williamsburg, Virginia, to challenge assumptions about eighteenth century urban life. Their research focuses on the aim of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation to recreate the cultural landscape of the colonial past. The early efforts of the foundation in the 1930s focused on unearthing and reconstructing eighteenth century buildings and gardens. As a result the picture of the past was a landscape skewed in favor of upper-middle-class and gentry homes, quaint shops, boxwood gardens, and grazing livestock (1994: 233).

Brown and Sanford identify the social connection between the restored landscape of the twentieth century and the reality of the eighteenth in that both are planned entities reflecting the cultural views of their creators (1994: 233). The early twentieth century vision of eighteenth century Williamsburg served to ease the minds of its Depression-era creators, but was in reality a sterile, inaccurate image of the past. Researchers have reexamined the eighteenth century landscape in light of new historical archaeological evidence.

Studies have shown that the prevalence for formal colonial gardens in the 1930s was a greatly exaggerated view of the eighteenth century landscape. While formal ornamental gardens did exist, kitchen or utilitarian gardens were much more the norm. For example, Brown and Samford note that the excavations at the Shield’s
Tavern site revealed planting beds, walkways, and fencelines that were indicative of a large kitchen garden that would have provided food for the tavern’s kitchen (1994: 234). Brown and Samford conclude that historical and archaeological research have played a prominent role in defining the scope, character, and level of landscape alteration within the town of Williamsburg from its beginnings to the present day.

In recent years historical archaeologists have been concerned with the role of gardens as social statements of status and power and to what extent the ornamental features enhanced or masked the solidarity among the various social sectors of the community (Yamin and Metheny 1996). Some of the most clear cut evidence that ordinary people understood the symbolism of ornamental landscapes comes from the seventeenth century South African estate of Vergelegen (Markell 1995).

Markell recounts the protest of Dutch settlers against the governor and how they sought his removal. As their resistance came to a successful end, the settlers exhibited their new power in a particularly forceful way. They trampled and destroyed both the mansion and its ornate garden as a means of removing the symbols of power from the landscape. The removal of the governor reveals that the rebels recognized the garden as a symbolic representation of power and status. Markell determines that the cultural landscape is a symbolically charged entity capable of yielding multiple and changing meanings.

Rotman and Nassaney (1997) build on the idea that members of society use space to reinforce and resist relations of power, authority, and inequality by organizing the cultural landscape to facilitate the activities and movements by some individuals, while constraining others. Through a political-economic approach,
Rotman and Nassaney determine that, although the village of Plainwell, Michigan witnessed political, economic, and social changes at the local, regional, and national level, the nineteenth and twentieth century occupants of the Woodhams homelot experienced considerable continuity in class and gender relations.

During the course of the investigation, Rotman and Nassaney were forced to confront the meaning of rural and urban places as the case study shared characteristics of both but did not fit neatly into either category. Rural is typically characterized as agricultural, sparsely populated, and egalitarian while urban represents the opposite—industrial, densely populated, and stratified (Rotman and Nassaney 1997: 43). As the nineteenth century properties of the region embodied aspects of both categories, a simple dichotomy was lacking. Rotman and Nassaney developed the model of the “urban farmstead” to indicate that rural and urban are not mutually exclusive but rather constitute poles of a continuum.

The developments in landscape archaeology have called into question the traditional methods of spatial analysis used in historical archaeology. The definition of landscape in the field of historical archaeology has typically involved the identification of the total terrestrial context in which archaeological study is pursued (Deetz 1990: 2). Albert Spaulding quipped that the definition of a site is “a place where an archaeologist digs” (In Deetz 1990: 1). However, to limit our view of the cultural landscape to only those gardens, houselots, and other features that can be perceived within the arbitrarily defined “site” is to lose sight of the all-pervasive quality of the cultural landscape. This sort of “tunnel vision” inhibits the perception
needed to examine the archaeological record in the context of the larger cultural landscape.

Much of the same tunnel vision limited the traditional study of military landscapes. Military facilities, such as forts and camps, were treated singularly without any reference to the larger context of the cultural landscape. The focus on the history of an engagement or on the recovered material, while important in the creation of archaeological facts, accounted for only the time and form dimension of archaeology. The spatial dimension of the military landscape was overlooked as most military features were examined only within the arbitrary context of the “site”. While the site provides the archaeologist with a manageable study unit, many military archaeologists failed to look beyond the boundaries of the site to the larger context of the cultural landscape. Thus the extent of what was discussed on a military site tended to be only those artifacts and features that appeared within excavation areas.

Much of the early failure to account for the spatial dimensions of battlefields was due to the perception that a battlefield could be examined as a site. A battlefield is not a spatially discrete entity that can be precisely defined and measured. Most battlefields encompass large areas and typically lack the specific locational focus of the usual archaeological features (Deetz 1990: 2). Battle events ebb and flow over the cultural landscape as combatants interact with the natural and cultural features. Soldiers march to battle along roads, storm beaches, fight in towns, fields, jungles, and are often buried where they fall. To confine a battlefield within the boundaries of an archaeological site is to fail to account for the full spatial context of battle.
Battlefields must be viewed as cultural landscapes as they physically embody the history and social structure of human behavior before, during, and after a battle event. Battlefields consist of military facilities and natural features that provide the "connective tissue" and give military actions a proper context. The battlefield becomes a unique snapshot of the cultural landscape during a moment of human conflict. By examining the battlefield as a cultural landscape, historical archaeologists can bring to light the "cultural plans" and human processes involved in negotiation and manipulation of the environment during battle.

The combatants interact with the cultural landscape through socially defined rules and regulations known as strategy and tactics. Strategy is the "aspect of military science that deals with the planning and directing of projects and campaigns and involves the mass handling and movement of troops, artillery, and equipage for waging war within the theater of operations" (Haecker and Mauck 1997: 97). Tactics, "the armored fist of strategy," represent the means by which the field commander achieves the goals of the strategy planners (Haecker and Mauck 1997: 97). Attack and defense, deployment of soldiers in advance or withdrawal, patrols and skirmishes, commitment of additional troops are all elements of tactics.

Military tactics function as a set of culturally defined plans that direct soldiers within the landscape and therefore any understanding of battlefield archaeology must recognize the relationship between tactics and the battlefield landscape. War tactics represent prescribed patterned behavior governing the movement, deployment, and establishment of troops (Fox and Scott 1991). Thus as war tactics are patterned, so too will the residues of tactics in warfare – artifacts, features, and their contextual
relationship - also be patterned. An examination of battle remains in the context of the battlefield landscape can reveal patterning indicative of the cultural plans that guided and directed the conflict.

A general overview of battlefield research traces the transition of the field from the singular focus on the historical or material culture remains of a battle to the development of a multidisciplinary approach that meshes history, ethnographic, archaeology, and geography to examine battle events within the proper context of the battlefield landscape.
CHAPTER III.
RESEARCH IN BATTLEFIELD ARCHAEOLOGY

“Little can be usefully said about battlefield sites...and the salvage of relics becomes the be all and end all” (Noel Hume 1968:188). Every researcher specializing in the study of battlefields is familiar with the disparaging remarks presented by Noel Hume in his antiquated guide to historical archaeology. Such pessimism may have been warranted throughout much of the twentieth-century as traditional battlefield interpretations often focused more on a history of the engagement. If an archaeological investigation was conducted it focused on a description of recovered artifacts or excavated features rather than the placement of the soldiers within the military or battlefield landscape (see Calver and Bolton 1950; Harrington 1978; James and Stotz 1958; Manucy 1962; Maxwell and Binford 1959; Peterson 1964).

Early archaeologists tended to overlook battlefields as battle events occur within a short span of time relative to most occupational sites. While a domestic occupation may span hundreds of years, a battle event may only occur over a few hours. A battlefield was thought to have no meaningful stratigraphy and consequently no meaningful time dimension. Traditional interpretations have therefore provided a perception of battlefields as a largely static and random configuration of artifacts and features situated within the cultural landscape.

By the end of the twentieth century archaeologists began to view battlefields in a new light. Ferguson (1975, 1977b), South (1977a) and Gould (1983) were
among the first in historical archaeology to define behavioral patterns of warfare in cultural terms. Ferguson’s spatial study of the lead ball types recovered from Fort Watson demonstrated how historical documents, the archaeological record, and the behavioral principles that create the archaeological record can be used to interpret battle events. South expanded on the Fort Watson data and suggested that the recognition of patterning within a battlefield can lead to a greater understanding of the cultural processes of conflict. Gould extended the archaeological study of war and the search for behavioral patterning into the realm of underwater archaeology.

Ferguson was one of the first researchers to conduct an historical archaeological examination of a military site with the purpose of reconstructing battle events through a spatial analysis of battle-related artifacts. During the summers of 1972 and 1973, Ferguson conducted excavations at Fort Watson, a Revolutionary War fortification in South Carolina occupied by the British for four months from 1780-1781. American forces attacked and captured Fort Watson by firing from a high tower overlooking the fort. A comparison of the spatial distribution of various types of fired and unfired lead balls allowed Ferguson to determine the direction of the American assault on the fort.

South (1977) discusses the patterning of battle-related artifacts recovered by Leland Ferguson at Fort Watson. While the Fort Watson data did not fall within the Carolina or Frontier Pattern, South did attempt to identify artifact patterning that would be indicative of the battle. South determined that a battle event could be recognized through “a classification of musket balls, rifle balls, and shot on the basis of whether or not they have been distorted through having been fired” (South
Military sites that were the scene of a battle should display a higher ratio of distorted to nondistorted ammunition. While South did not develop his idea for a Revolutionary War Military Outpost Pattern/Battle Pattern, he helped lay the groundwork for future research on the study of battle-related artifacts.

Gould built on the work of South and searched for behavioral patterning within the underwater archaeology of war. Gould examined two case studies in the history of war, the Spanish Armada of 1588 and the Battle of Britain of 1940, to draw attention to general relationships that may exist between particular kinds of combatant behavior and the archaeological residues that the behavior can be expected to produce. Gould makes the analogy that archaeological signatures can identify particular kinds of behavior in much the same way that sonar signatures can identify a particular submarine.

Gould (1983:134) states that the value of the study of war in the archaeological context is its capability to “identify specific relationships between certain kinds of behavior under the stress of war and the characteristic material by-product of the behavior of their final (archaeological) context of discard.” While Gould acknowledges that law-like relational statements can be perceived as aspatial and atemporal, he determines the goal is not the law itself but the acquisition of new knowledge as one is directed by the questions raised through such law-like formulations (Gould 1983).

Following the work of Ferguson at Fort Watson, few studies attempted to identify the relationship between behavioral patterns and the movement of troops on the battlefield landscape. Rather, most investigations focused on the documentation

The study of battlefields was revolutionized in the 1980's with the groundbreaking investigation of the June 25-27, 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn presented by Douglas Scott and Richard Fox (Scott and Fox 1987; Scott et al. 1989; Fox 1993). As most artifacts of war are metal or associated with metal, a controlled metal detector survey was used to investigate the large battlefield area. While the Little Bighorn study may not have been the first investigation to employ a metal detector on an archaeological site (see Gregory and Rogerson 1984), the study was pioneering in the scientific and systematic application of the technology to a battlefield landscape. Fox and Scott employed the comparative methods of artifact analysis developed by Ferguson in his investigation of Fort Watson. The mapping of battle-related artifacts within a grid system set over the site revealed both Native American and United States cavalry positions based on artifact type, class, and density variation.

Through a comparison of historical documentation and archaeological data, Fox and Scott (1991) developed a framework within which battlefield behavioral dynamics could be examined. The Battlefield Pattern analysis provided the key by
which behavioral events at the Little Bighorn battlefield represented in space could be ordered in time as well.

**The Battlefield Pattern**

The Battlefield Pattern developed by Fox and Scott is an attempt to inquire about battle events not only in space but in time as well. An examination of behavioral interactions within the battlefield landscape, on the individual and unit level, allows Fox and Scott to go beyond the traditional archaeological interpretation of a battle as a static event. The Battlefield Pattern incorporates history and archaeology whereby historical research affixes identity to the actors and events while the archaeological record sets the actors and events in motion. The key to the resolution of the Battlefield Pattern is the examination of behavioral patterns at two inclusive analytical levels: gross pattern and dynamic pattern analysis.

Fox and Scott determined the analytical foundation for the Battlefield Pattern is laid by recognizing individual behavioral patterns. Behavioral patterns are expressed through individual behaviors directed and constrained by the norms, values, sanctions, and statuses governing the group within which the individual operates (Fox and Scott 1991). The military represents one of the most rigidly defined and hierarchically ordered groups and thus, in warfare, tactical operations are designed to precipitate individual behaviors carried out within and on behalf of the military unit. As war tactics represent prescribed patterned behavior governing the movement, deployment, and establishment of troops, so too will the residues of warfare – the artifacts, features, and their contextual relationships – also be patterned and reflect details of battlefield behavior (Fox and Scott 1991).
Fox and Scott (1991) note that the recognition of individual behavioral patterns is dependent upon the identification of individual positions and movements on the battlefield. As individual behavior is the product of unit operations, individual patterns, though themselves discrete, should generally reflect unit behavioral patterns in time and space. By integrating individual patterns of the soldier, unit patterns of the squad, platoon, company, battalion, etc., emerge. It is the composite of unit patterns representing opposing forces that define the Battlefield Pattern that accounts for the events and progress of a battle (Fox and Scott 1991).

The Battlefield Pattern characterized by Scott and Fox (1991) requires an investigation of the archaeological data at two inclusive analytical levels: gross pattern and dynamic pattern analysis. Fox and Scott define gross patterning as “a synchronic approach that represents a composite of battle events exclusive of, or poorly understood in time.” (1991: 93). Battle events are perceived statically at fixed locations on the battlefield landscape using archaeological density information, such as artifact clustering, clinal distributions, or presence/absence criteria. Behavioral patterning is then interpreted from frequencies, variations, and proportions within and between artifact classes.

Fox and Scott identify the danger of relying solely on the archaeological record to assign meaningful identities to the gross patterns observed on the battlefield.

Historical sources provide the means by which gross patterning can be differentiated. Certain combatant positions may be ascribed to one combatant group; others, to the opposing force by using historical accounts. Accounts such as eyewitness testimonies, maps, and official reports may also allow identification of archaeological data as residues of known units, such as regiments or companies, comprising an army. A detailed knowledge of organizational, tactical, ordnance, and equipage variation is necessary, particularly where opposing forces differ only subtly.

Fox and Scott 1991: 94
Gross pattern development is dependent upon the fit between history and archaeology or the resolution of discrepancies between the two. However, even with the aid of the historical record, it is usually difficult to distinguish individual positions in unit patterns without the aid of dynamic pattern analysis (Fox and Scott 1991). Dynamic pattern analyses help resolve the fit and, by adding the temporal element to gross patterns, provide a mechanism for testing historical theories regarding the progress of the battle.

Fox and Scott determine the key to translating gross patterns into dynamic patterns is based on modern firearm identification analysis of ammunition components.

Firearm identification analysis allows resolution of individual positions and movements, or trajectories, across a battlefield. Individual patterns are integrated to form unit patterns; together these patterns develop the flow or progress of a battle, allowing hypothesis testing and formulation of alternative explanations.

Fox and Scott 1991: 94

The procedures undertaken for the Little Bighorn study followed ballistics analysis methods typically used in police laboratories. When a firearm is discharged and reloaded, distinguishing attributes are imparted to the ammunition components. A comparative analysis of the firing pin, extractor, and land-and-groove marks or "signatures" on the cartridge case and its projectile, the bullet, can provide information that is vital to the resolution of dynamic patterning. Fox and Scott (1991: 95) note that the comparative analysis of signature variations allows sorting of ammunition components representative of individual weapons. When all unique signatures are compared and sorted, the number of individual weapons within each type can be determined.
Precise artifact locational data (gross patterning) coupled with individual firearm signature comparisons (dynamic patterning) can be used to trace the positions and movements of combatants across a battlefield. A cluster of casings or bullets can indicate a single firing position. Ammunition components with identical signatures from several discrete locations indicate that the weapon moved about the battlefield. The identification of a spatially discrete set of identical signatures dissimilar in composition to other sets elsewhere in space reflects a group of individuals who composed a discrete military unit. The spatial and temporal patterning of units provides insight into the horizontal sequencing of battle events that occurred across the battlefield landscape. The archaeological sequencing of a battle can then be compared with the documentary record to give historical context to those who fought and died.

Scott and Fox applied the Battlefield Pattern analysis to the investigation of the Little Bighorn battlefield (Scott and Fox 1987; Scott et al. 1989; Scott 1991; Fox 1993). The Custer Battlefield Pattern illustrated the transformation of gross patterning into time and space dynamics. Gross archaeological patterning identified the positions of U.S. troopers and Native American warriors within the battlefield landscape. Firearm type analysis provided a spatial-temporal relationship between combatant units that allowed Fox and Scott to develop a historical-archaeological examination of the behavioral patterns that contributed to the demise of Custer and his men.

Beginning in the 1990s a growing number of archaeologists began to employ the battlefield pattern developed by Fox and Scott on a wide variety of American
battlefields such as those associated with the Mexican-American War (Haecker and Mauck 1997), Civil War (Cornelison 2000; Lees 1994; Potter et al. 2000; Scott and Hunt 1998; Sterling and Slaughter 2000; Whitehorne and Geier 2000), and Indian Wars (Adams et al. 2000a, 2000b; Ludwig and Stute 1993; Pratt 1995). The key to the success of these studies is the search for behavioral patterning within the context of the battlefield landscape. The following will present a discussion of three battlefield studies that employed a systematic metal detector survey and the contribution each has made to the archaeology of battlefield landscapes.

Haecker and Mauck (1997) present an analysis of the 1846 battle of Palo Alto, Texas, the first major engagement of the War with Mexico and one of only a handful to be fought in what is now the United States. In the late 1990s, the Palo Alto battlefield became the Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site, a unit of the National Park Service (NPS). As part of the NPS planning efforts, limited archaeological investigations were undertaken at the site in an effort to delineate the Mexican and American battlelines, as well as other features and archaeological sites. Haecker, an NPS archaeologist, headed the archaeological investigations of Palo Alto and produced a fine technical report (Haecker 1994).

The battle was essentially an artillery duel, pitting new and well-developed United States cannon and mobile artillery tactics against antiquated Mexican artillery. The guns of the American army pounded the Mexican line for nearly eight hours while the Mexican artillery proved ineffective. The Mexican army stood fast, absorbed the shelling, and even attempted flanking and frontal assaults on the
American lines. However the Mexicans were repulsed with heavy losses and retired from the field late in the day.

Haecker and Mauck provide a masterful story of the Palo Alto battle using both the historical and archaeological context. The historic context of the battle is developed through an examination of the comparative strengths, tactics, recruitment policies, arms, and equipment of the two armies. Building on the historical analysis, Haecker and Mauck develop a detailed analysis of the battle through the use of landscape studies, which they term topographic analysis. The landscape study is then compared with contemporary battle reports and maps of troop deployment to correlate Napoleonic-era weaponry and tactics with topographic features of the battlefield.

One outcome of the Palo Alto battle study was the identification of a pattern of use of smoothbore weaponry in the pre-Civil War era. Haecker and Mauck were able to correlate the linear-and-column tactics typical of this type of warfare with linear depositions of artifacts on the battlefield landscape. They were also able to demonstrate that the Mexican army was armed with a variety of out-dated, poorly maintained, Napoleonic War-era surplus British firearms.

Haecker and Mauck also identified some of the difficulties inherent in battlefield landscape studies. They realized that while linear depositions were apparent on the Palo Alto battlefield, the same distributions might not always appear on Euro-American battlefields dating to the same time period. Haecker and Mauck state, “Each battle has its own unique set of parameters...Terrain, vegetative cover or lack thereof, weather, chosen tactics, competency of the commanders, morale of the
soldiers, the degree of relic hunting – these and many other factors ultimately decide what type(s) of artifact patterning one will find” (1997: 183). Thus the particular nature of each battlefield must be considered when attempting to develop broad patterns of warfare.

One of the unique elements of the Palo Alto study was uncovered during the examination of the armament system employed during the time of the battle. While cartridge signature analysis is an appropriate and highly productive avenue of research when investigating battles of the Civil War era and later, those who fought at Palo Alto possessed a fundamentally different armament system. Both American and Mexican armies were supplied primarily with smoothbore weaponry with rifles playing a relatively minor role during the battle. Firearm ammunition came in the form of round lead balls and black powder usually wrapped together into a cartridge made of paper. Metal cartridges did not make their debut on battlefields until the 1860s. The absence of cartridge signatures required Haecker and Mauck to examine the battle residue in light of the particular nature of the technology and tactics available to the Mexican and American armies.

Through a comparison and assessment of the arms, equipage, and logistics of the two armies it was possible to translate the artifact patterning within the Palo Alto landscape into behavioral dynamics of the smoothbore period. The strength of the Palo Alto study is that Haecker and Mauck employ an interdisciplinary approach to the study of battlefield landscapes and transform a “grey literature” report into a well-developed and highly readable scholarly endeavor.
Lees (1994) discusses the investigation of the Civil War battle of Mine Creek, Kansas. Research focused on a program of discovering and recording battle-related or potentially battle-related artifacts in order to examine the national, regional, local, individual, and personal contexts of the historic event. For poorly documented battlefields such as Mine Creek, historical archaeology offers the potential to anchor details of the historical events to a modern landscape.

On October 25, 1864, the provisional Army of the Border attacked and routed the Confederates at Trading Post, Kansas. Seven miles down the road and several hours later, Federal cavalry forces engaged the rear guard of Confederate cavalry at Mine Creek. A short but sharp clash resulted in a decisive Federal victory known as the Battle of Mine Creek. The battle engaged roughly seven to eight thousand Confederate cavalry and two to three thousand Union cavalry. Although the Confederates had an impressive numerical superiority, they suffered substantial casualties and quickly gave way to the better-armed Federal cavalry. The fight lasted less than half an hour but resulted in the death of a least three hundred and capture of five hundred Confederate troopers.

In the historical context, the battle of Mine Creek was something of an anticlimax to the real civil war that Kansas had known in the 1850s and that still found expression during the early 1860s. In a different sense, the battle interrupted the political and economic construction of a new state, as many Kansans remained more concerned with the hostilities of the Plains Indians than with the Confederacy.

An archaeological examination of the recovered ammunition identified positions associated with the Confederate and Federal cavalry. Lees determined that
Confederate cavalry was armed with the more outdated muzzleloading carbines while the Federal cavalry were armed with the more advanced breechloading carbines. As bullets for breechloaders were the most common type identified on the battlefield, it followed that the outnumbered Federals were still able to fire more rounds per capita than their Confederate counterparts armed with muzzleloaders.

From the historical and archaeological evidence, Lees examined the battlefield landscape of Mine Creek. A feature of the battlefield that emerged very clearly from the study was the location of the route of Confederate withdrawal south of Mine Creek. The route followed an abandoned road that appeared as a shallow swale leading from a rock-bottom ford. Another ford had been historically interpreted as the main ford used during the battle, however Lees was able to identify the correct route of retreat.

Lees acknowledges that his conclusions may seem particularistic and not applicable to the broader contexts of the battle. However, it is at the humanistic level that archaeology comments on the importance of the Mine Creek battle and the Civil War. While the positions of combatants were identified through artifactual evidence, Lees reminds the reader that the dropped bullet is a stark reminder that a soldier stood nearby. In a different way, the recovery of fired bullets testify to the very individual level of conflict as the projectiles were intended to take an individual’s life. Lee sums up his humanistic view of the battlefield landscape:

For the individuals involved in this battle, the universe shrunk, for a moment, to the fields on either side of Mine Creek. The social and political dynamics that form a context for the battle were no longer a part of the context for the participants. The context became the landscape, the thousands of other individuals who shared the field, and the act of survival. The artifacts and the patterns of battle comment on this.

Lees 1994: 58
Adams et al. (2000a) presents a study of the Last Chance Canyon Apache/Cavalry battlefield. Beginning in the summer of 1997, the Lincoln National Forest Heritage Program began an intensive Apache Indian War Period Research Project in the Guadalupe Mountains of southeastern New Mexico. With limited historical information, archaeologists set out to locate and identify the November 18, 1869 battle between the Apaches and members of the Third United States Cavalry. The battle is important as it represents one of the first documented Cavalry incursions into the Guadalupe Mountains.

A landscape approach was used during the project to compare and contrast the archaeological and historical record. Historical accounts provided descriptions and measurable distances on the landscape in order to identify the location of the Apache rancheria and the skirmish lines. Cavalry participants recounted the battle with reference to physical features such as the “canyon”, “stream”, and “small steep hill with a commanding view.” Adams et al. corroborated the historical descriptions with the cultural landscape to locate the battle area.

From the battle residue, Adams et al. determined that the Apaches were caught off guard, something that was usually not accomplished by the Cavalry. The strategy employed by the Cavalry was successful as it sought to attack the Apache in their stronghold during the winter months, a tactic that was not expected. The study showed that the Apache warriors responded with the implementation of a strategy of delay while the women and children escaped.

One aspect of the project was to define and document the existence of the Apache rancheria described in the documentary record. The first two summers failed
to locate the Apache camp due to misconceptions regarding the cultural landscape of the Apache. The early surveys examined only the flat open areas on the edge of drainages. In the summer of 1999, a reevaluation of strategy led to the investigation of less obvious areas near the base of slopes, recessed benches, hillsides, hilltops, and in areas of thick vegetation. The rancheria was discernable by the intentionally constructed rock rings situated on recessed benches at the base of the canyon. To the Apaches, the immediate proximity of water was not important, though it was available within a short distance. The most important aspect in the Apache landscape was the placement of the rancheria site near multiple avenues of escape up side drainages and over hills. By abandoning their own preconceived notions of the Apache cultural landscape, Adams et al. were able to identify and document the battle event and develop a better understanding of Apache culture.

The following chapters present a case study for the historical archaeological examination of a battlefield. The American Civil War battlefield, known as the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf, is presented not so much as an archaeological site but rather as a cultural landscape of conflict. An historical examination of the May 24, 1864 engagement, combined with an analysis of the artifactual residue of the battle patterned within the cultural landscape, reveals a much broader insight into the nature of battlefields than can be reached through either history or archaeology alone.
CHAPTER IV.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE BATTLE OF WILSON’S WHARF

The pre-Civil War historical information was summarized from a more intensive study conducted by Charles M. Downing (1996). The Civil War historical information was drawn from official war records and correspondence, newspaper accounts, historic maps, and secondary sources relating to the 1864 campaign of the Army of James, the May 24 Battle of Wilson’s Wharf, and the subsequent occupation of Fort Pocahontas.

1635-1861

The property encompassing the battle of Wilson’s Warf was first purchased in July 1635 by David Jones and was described as a 300 acre tract “a little below the point, butting South Southwest upon the maine river, being bounded between 2 Creeks, the second & third Creeks below Matticoe Creek” (Nugent 1992:1: 25). The property became known as Kennon’s Landing when Richard and Ann Hunt Kennon purchased the tract in the late 1730s. In 1738, at the age of 26, Richard Kennon was elected to the House of Burgesses, where he served for seventeen years. In 1742, the Virginia Assembly chose Kennon’s Landing as the site of one of two tobacco inspection warehouses in Charles City County (Hening 1969:V: 144).

In early January 1781, British troops commanded by Benedict Arnold began moving up the James River. The British colonel John Simcoe led about 100 of the
Queen’s Rangers in an assault on the American stronghold of Fort Powhatan at Point Hood. Simcoe’s men met no resistance as the Americans had withdrawn at their approach. Arnold and about 1000 troops then ascended to Kennon’s Landing and disembarked at Westover Plantation. Troops under his command pillaged and vandalized the properties at Westover and Berkeley Plantation.

The wharf and warehouse at Kennon’s survived the war as indicated when the Assembly again designated the property as the site of a tobacco inspection warehouse (Hening 1969:XI: 210). The property later changed hands several times until it was sold to Josiah C. Wilson in November 1835. Kennon’s Landing, or Wilson’s Wharf as it would become known, appeared to be the only officially designated stop on the steamboat line in the immediate area. Edmund Ruffin mentioned the wharf in his 1857 description of a visit to the home of former president John Tyler. Ruffin traveled to “Kennon’s Wharf” (as he called it) and walked “three and a half miles to Sherwood Forest,” carrying his “very light carpet bag” (William and Mary Quarterly Historical Magazine 1906:194; Nasca et al, 1998:12).

The Civil War – 1862

The Union Peninsula campaign of 1862 was the largest single campaign of the Civil War. Nearly a quarter of a million men were assembled on the Virginia Peninsula as the principle army of the Federal government fought the principle army of the Confederacy for control of Richmond (Spears 1992). From late March to late June 1862 McClellan’s operations at Yorktown and Seven Pines pushed the Confederates west toward the Southern capital. With the wounding of General Joseph Johnson at Seven Pines, Robert E. Lee was given command of the Army of
Northern Virginia. Lee quickly took to the offensive and in the Seven Days’ Battle drove the Federal army back down the Peninsula. When the campaign was finally over, one of every four men engaged was dead, wounded or missing.

From the abundance of the late 1862 inventory, it appears the Wilson property was left relatively unscathed after McClellan’s 1862 Peninsula Campaign (Charles City County Will Book 6:161). Other plantations in the area were not so lucky as Union troops destroyed property and killed livestock. For the Wilson family, the year 1864 would bring the worst of the war directly to their doorstep.

**The Civil War – 1864-5**

By its third autumn the Union war effort was facing a major reorientation. Fresh from a series of victories in the Western Theater, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant succeeded Major General Henry W. Halleck as general-in-chief of the armies of the United States. Grant became responsible for coordinating the Federal activities in all theaters in order to bring the war to a successful conclusion for the Union. To accomplish victory, Grant was now required to formulate a plan of attack for the Federal forces in the Eastern Theater, as well as for his more familiar armies in the West. Grant initially rejected the customary overland advance toward Richmond in favor of an entirely different course of action (Robertson 1987). He proposed a thrust from Suffolk, in southeastern Virginia, to Raleigh, North Carolina, by a force of approximately sixty thousand men. Throughout the advance, the invading army would destroy important railroad facilities along the way, and coupled with the threat posed by the arrival of the army at Raleigh, would force the Confederates to evacuate Richmond and most of Virginia.
However, after conferring with Lincoln, Grant set aside his North Carolina plan in favor of a more conventional line of advance. In the spring campaign of 1864 there would be two major Federal offensives (Robertson 1987). The first would consist of a drive by Major General William T. Sherman’s armies from Chattanooga, Tennessee, toward Atlanta, Georgia. The second advance would consist of an overland push by Major General George Meade’s Army of the Potomac toward the Confederate capital of Richmond.

Supplementing the two primary offensives were to be three smaller operations: an advance by an army under Major General Nathaniel Banks from New Orleans to Mobile, Alabama, an advance by Major General Franz Sigel into the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, and an advance by Major General Benjamin Butler’s Department of Virginia and North Carolina (later referred to as the Army of the James) from Hampton Roads up the south side of the James River toward Richmond. Grant considered the James River column a high priority as Butler’s army was to serve as the left wing of the grand Federal offensive in which the Army of the Potomac represented the center and Sherman’s forces the right wing (Robertson 1987).

Benjamin Butler and the Army of the James

In October 1863, after a long deliberation President Lincoln took a chance and renamed Benjamin Butler as commander of the organization know as the Department of Virginia and North Carolina (Figure 3). A prominent criminal lawyer and Democratic politician in Massachusetts before the war, Butler initially commanded the Department at Fort Monroe in August 1861 but was installed as the commander of
the subject of rumors and illicit affairs, Butler was finally relived of his post in the Department of the Gulf after an altercation with the City’s foreign consuls. Butler remained without a command until his return to the Hampton Roads area in 1863.

Figure 3. Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler (Library of Congress)

Benjamin Butler was not the logical choice for most military men who considered it folly to entrust a citizen-soldier with field command. However, Lincoln may have reasoned that Butler’s new appointment was not significant enough to ensure the General a triumph of epic proportions, nor would his army campaign in the mainstream of the Virginia theater. Meade’s army would continue to be the focus of Northern attention by virtue of its size, its long term opposition to Lee, and its role as defender of Washington D.C. (Longacre 1997).

Undaunted, Butler realized the important role his army would play in the spring campaign of 1864 given his department’s position astride the southern approach to Richmond (Figure 4). The quick minded general had been studying the
advantages offered by an advance up the James River basin since his installation as commander. Butler recognized that the Richmond defensive fortifications were less formidable to the south and that the surrounding high ground would be suitable for maneuvering. In addition, the Bermuda Hundred peninsula would serve as an excellent base for operations. Located approximately 15 miles south of Richmond at the confluence of the Appomattox and James Rivers, the Bermuda Hundred peninsula was characterized by deep ravines at its foot and a readily defensible narrow neck.

To facilitate Butler’s advance on Richmond, two defensive positions on the lower James would have to be secured to protect the army’s lines of communications. The first was Wilson’s Wharf, a bluff on the south bank of the James that commanded the channel for some distance above and below. The second position was Fort Powhatan, the site of an unoccupied Confederate fortification on a bluff a few miles upriver from Wilson’s Wharf.

Assigned to carry out Butler’s plan of attack was Major General Quincy A. Gillmore’s X Army Corps and Major General William F. Smith’s XVIII Army Corps. Most of April 1864 was spent assembling various regiments scattered throughout all parts of Butler’s domain. The infantry and artillery components of the Army of the James numbered approximately 36,000 officers and enlisted men. Completing the army were approximately 3000 cavalrmen massed at Portsmouth under Brigadier General August V. Kautz, and 1800 black cavalrmen who would parallel the invasion fleet (Robertson 1987). When and if the cavalry detachments joined the main body, Butler would command a field army of some 40,800 men.
Figure 4. Eastern Virginia – Spring 1864 (reprinted from Robertson 1987: 15, copyright by University of Delaware Press).
While the Army of the James gathered near Yorktown, Butler was making preparations with Acting Rear Admiral Samuel Philips Lee of the United States Navy. Elements of S.P. Lee’s North Atlantic Blockading Squadron would occupy portions of the James River so as to protect the army’s debarkation from Confederate fleet action. Also, naval gunfire would support the troop landings until the army was established ashore and safely entrenched.

The Federal Departure – May 1864

Despite the enormous complexities of such a joint army/navy operation, at 4:00 A.M. on May 5, 1864, the fleet transporting and guarding Butler’s Army of the James cast off for its destination upriver. A half dozen of Admiral Lee’s vessels fronted the operation consisting of his flagship, Malvern, followed by the gunboats Dawn, Osceola, Commodore James, Commodore Morris and Shawseen. Next to follow were the numerous transports carrying, in order, Brigadier General Edward W. Hinck’s Third Division consisting of two brigades of United States Colored Troops (U.S.C.T.), the 15,000 white soldiers of the XVIII Corps, and the portions of the X Corps that had arrived in time for departure. Attending the troop ships were barges of siege equipment, followed by dozens of cargo and hospital ships. Admiral Lee’s ironclads – The Roanoke, Onondaga, Tecumseh, Canonicus, Sagus and Atlanta (a recently captured ship of the Virginia class) – defended the rear accompanied by a score of double ender gunboats and armed tugs (Longacre 1997).

Early on the afternoon of May 5, Butler’s riverborne soldiers at last arrived at Wilson’s Wharf and Fort Powhatan, the first destinations of the campaign. The initial landing party consisted of the First Brigade of Hinck’s division under the command
of Brigadier General Edward Wild. The 1st and 22nd regiments U.S.C.T. captured Wilson’s Wharf without opposition and set to work felling trees and constructing a large earthen fortification. Meanwhile, the 10th and 37th regiments U.S.C.T. landed at Fort Powhatan, also without resistance. Butler realized retaining possession of Wilson’s Wharf and Fort Powhatan was key to maintaining an open supply route to City Point. Butler therefore entrusted the defense of these strategic garrisons to the U.S.C.T. as he believed they would fight more desperately than any white troops in order to prevent capture. He reasoned that as captured black soldiers would be returned into slavery (under Confederate President Jefferson Davis’ proclamation) and the white officers possibly murdered, there would be no danger of surrender (Butler 1892).

By 4:00 P.M. Hinck’s Second Brigade, under the command of Colonel Samuel Duncan, reached City Point, a once active river port located a mile and a half down river from Bermuda Hundred. Duncan’s 4th, 5th, and 6th regiments of U.S.C.T. disembarked and quickly dispatched the handful of Confederate signalmen and guards stationed at the old wharf. While Hinck’s men were occupying City Point, the rest of the fleet continued to Bermuda Hundred. Except for a lone steamer and a few horsemen in the distance, the Confederates had not put up any resistance to the initial Union advance. However, Butler’s Army of the James would see action soon enough.

Edward Wild and the United States Colored Troops

At the beginning of the Civil War few Union policy makers foresaw a military role for African-American men, free or slave. Northern abolitionists may have
identified slavery as the cornerstone of the Confederacy, but Northern politicians minimized the connection between secession and chattel bondage. In the eyes of Northern leaders, and most Northern whites for that matter, the conflict would be a war to preserve the Union, not to free the slaves.

However, as the Union army confronted its enemy in the field, the importance of slavery to the Southern war effort soon became evident. The Confederate armies depended heavily on the labor of slaves not only to construct fortifications, transport supplies, and perform camp services, but also raise and manufacture the goods needed to feed and fund the army. Slave labor helped maintain the Confederate war machine by performing services that freed Southern white men for battlefield service.

General Butler was one of the first to make the conclusion that winning the war required an assault upon the system of slavery in the South. In May 1861, three slaves commandeered a canoe and paddled to the safety of Union occupied Fort Monroe, Virginia. When a Confederate officer sought a return of the men based on the U.S. Fugitive Slave Law, Butler pointed out that since the state of Virginia had seceded from the Union, its citizens could no longer benefit from federal laws. Furthermore, Butler argued that as the Confederates had employed the slaves on a military project, and since slaves were considered “property,” the bondsmen were subject to confiscation as contraband of war according to international law. Butler not only refused to surrender the “property,” but also offered to pay the three men to build a bakery for the Union troops. In one bold action, Butler had not only established a policy for freeing runaway slaves, but also set a precedent for incorporating African-Americans into the Union war effort.
Butler’s policy became law through the passage of the First Confiscation Act that authorized Federal officials to seize Confederate property, including slaves, that was being used in the war effort (Glatthaar 1990). By July 1862, Congress went a step further and passed the Second Confiscation Act that bestowed freedom to all slaves upon crossing Federal lines. Of special note within the legislation was Section II which

Authorized the President to receive into service of the United States, for the purpose of constructing entrenchments or performing camp duty, or other labor, or any military or naval service for which they were found to be competent, persons of African descent, and provided that such persons should be enrolled and organized, under such regulations not inconsistent with the Constitutions and laws as the President might prescribe (Gladstone 1993)

Even with congressional approval, President Lincoln was still not ready to enroll blacks as soldiers in the Union Army throughout the remainder of 1862.

By 1863, as Union armies penetrated deeper into the South, the demands of large-scale war were pushing the Lincoln administration steadily towards authorizing black military service. Precedent supported the admission of African-Americans into the armed forces as black soldiers had fought valiantly in the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Finally, on January 2, 1863, Lincoln issued his Proclamation of Emancipation. The seventh paragraph of General of General Order No. 1 authorized that “such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States, to garrison Forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service” (Gladstone 1993).

Once authorized, the recruitment of African-Americans into the military service proceeded at an almost breathless pace. By mid-1863, the administrative load forced the War Department to create a single entity called the Bureau of Colored
Troops. The bureau was to systematize the process of raising black units and securing officers. Black commands changed from state designations to the United States Colored Troops (U.S.C.T.) and the various units became United States Colored Infantry, Artillery, or Cavalry. Of all the black regiments, only the 54th and 55th Massachusetts Infantry, 5th Massachusetts Cavalry, and the 29th Connecticut Infantry retained their original state designations (Glatthaar 1990).

Due to the controversial nature of the African-American military service, the Lincoln administration determined that whites should officer the new black regiments. By offering commissions to whites the War Department hoped to appease objections in and out of the army. Racial stereotypes played an important role in the decision to bar blacks from becoming officers. Since most white Northerners believed that black men lacked the innate ability to fight well given their supposed inferior character, the Federal government decided these new U.S.C.T. regiments would require committed and talented white officers to train and lead them.

Certainly one of the most committed and most talented white officers to lead the U.S.C.T. was the contentious Brigadier General Edward A. Wild (Figure 5). Initially chosen because of his uncompromising belief in the value of black soldiers, Wild was a Harvard-educated physician whose distrust of his superiors was only surpassed by his hatred of the Confederacy. Wild had already paid a high price for his patriotism. While serving as captain in the 1st Massachusetts he fought in the Battle of Seven Pines where his right hand was permanently damaged by a Confederate bullet. After recovering, Wild became colonel of the 35th Massachusetts only to severely injure his left arm up to the shoulder (Trudeau 1998).
By October 1863, Wild’s recruiting efforts had mustered into U.S. service the 2nd Regiment of North Carolina Volunteers. Also under his command were the 1st U.S.C.T. from the District of Columbia, and the 5th U.S.C.T. from Delaware, Ohio. Wild and his troops spent the remaining days of 1863 raiding and generally terrorizing guerrillas and citizens in North Carolina.

By May 1864, Wild became part of General Benjamin Butler’s invasion force that sailed upriver bound for Bermuda Hundred. The assignment to protect the supply line of the Army of the James went to Brigadier General Edward Hincks’ black division. This was a two-brigade division, with the First under the command of
Wild and the Second under Colonel Samuel Duncan. Wild’s Brigade consisted of the 1st (District of Columbia), 10th (Virginia), 22nd (Camp William Penn), and 37th U.S.C.T. (from North Carolina) while Duncan’s comprised the 4th, 5th, and 6th U.S.C.T. (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Officers and men of the 1st Regiment United States Colored Troops at an unidentified location (Library of Congress).

**Action at Wilson’s Wharf**

Throughout May 1864, Butler and his army made demonstrations toward Petersburg, engaging General P.G.T. Beauregard’s Confederates at major battles such as Port Walthall Junction, Chester Station, and Drewry’s Bluff. However, for the U.S.C.T. stationed at Wilson’s Wharf and Fort Powhatan the majority of the month was spent fortifying, guarding, and patrolling. As in North Carolina, Wild continued to take the war to the local populace by raiding the surrounding countryside from his base at Wilson’s Wharf. Throughout the occupation of the fort the so-called “foraging parties” pillaged local plantations causing many landholders to flee the area (Arter 1864). Wild’s reign of terror reached a head when a foraging party captured a
local planter named William Clopton, who had earlier severely beaten several female slaves. In a May 10th letter to the Christian Recorder, Sergeant George Hatton (1864) described how the Union troops enacted revenge on the notorious slave owner:

On the arrival of Mr.C. in camp, the commanding officer determined to let the women have their revenge, and ordered Mr.C. to be tied to a tree in front of head-quarters, and William Harris, a soldier in our regiment (1st U.S.C.T) and a member of Co. E, who was acquainted with the gentlemen, and who used to belong to him, was called upon to undress him and introduce him to the ladies that I mentioned before. Mr. Harris played his part conspicuously, bringing the blood from his loins at every stroke, and not forgetting to remind the gentleman of the days gone by. After giving him some fifteen or twenty well-directed strokes, the ladies, one after another, came up and gave him a like number, to remind him that they were no longer his, but safely housed in Abraham’s bosom, and under the protection of the Star Spangled Banner, and guarded by their own patriotic, though once down-trodden race. Oh, that I had the tongue to express my feeling while standing upon the banks of the James River, on the soil of Virginia, the mother state of slavery, as a witness of such a sudden reverse!

(Hatton in Redkey 1992:93-94)

The real and imagined fears brought about by the thought of black Union soldiers operating freely in the heart of Virginia caused a general outrage amongst Virginians. Letters to the Richmond Examiner accused Wild’s soldiers not only of robbing, burning, and plundering, but also of bayoneting and nailing no less than three white citizens to trees and making some ladies “victims of their hellish appetites…” (May 1864). By May 23, the Confederate army could no longer tolerate the presence of the black soldiers at Wilson’s Wharf and General Braxton Bragg sent a force commanded by Major General Fitzhugh Lee to “break up the nest and stop their uncivilized proceedings in the neighborhood” (Fitzhugh Lee’s Postwar Report (FLPR) 1866).
Fitzhugh Lee, the nephew of famed Confederate General Robert E. Lee, was a West Point graduate who served with the 2nd United States Cavalry in Texas (Figure 7). In 1859, while fighting Comanches, Lee was severely injured when an arrow passed under his arm and through both lungs (Nichols 1989). After a long leave in the summer of 1860, Lee was ordered to West Point to serve as instructor of cavalry tactics (Nichols 1989). After the secession of Virginia from the Union on April 17, 1861, Lee left West Point and tendered his resignation. In late July 1861, Lee was commissioned a Lieutenant Colonel in the Virginia Volunteers and assigned to the First Virginia Cavalry. By 1864, Lee had quickly advanced to the rank of Major General.

At the time of the attack on Wilson’s Wharf, Fitzhugh Lee’s Confederate force comprised 800 men from Brigadier General William Wickham’s Brigade (1st,
2nd, 3rd, 4th, Virginia Cavalry Regiments); 750 men from Brigadier General Lunsford Lomax’s Brigade (5th, 6th, 15th Virginia Cavalry Regiments); 420 men from Brigadier General James Gordon’s Brigade (1st, 2nd, 5th North Carolina Cavalry Regiments); and approximately 500 men from Colonel John Dunovant’s 5th South Carolina Cavalry Regiment. One artillery gun accompanied the expedition under the command of Lt. Marcellus Moorman (Rhea 2000, Besch n.d.) (Table 1).

Lee’s force of approximately 2500 men left Atlee’s Station (northeast of Richmond) and after an all night ride arrived at Wilson’s Wharf around 11 a.m. on May 24. At the time of Lee’s arrival, Wild had 900 infantry in ten companies of the 1st regiment U.S.C.T. and four companies of the 10th regiment U.S.C.T. The 10th regiment U.S.C.T. had recently replaced the 22nd regiment U.S.C.T. that transferred to Fort Powhatan during the middle of May. Wild was supported by two 10-pounder rifled Parrott guns from Battery M, 3rd New York Light Artillery (which replaced the 6-pounder howitzers from Battery B, 2nd U.S.C. Light Artillery), 2nd Lieutenant Julius M. Swain’s signal detachment, and the gunboat U.S.S. Dawn commanded by Navy Acting Lieutenant J.W. Simmons.
### Table 1

**Confederate and Union participants at the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confederate participants (approx. 2,500)</th>
<th>Union participants (approx. 1,000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Army of Northern Virginia</td>
<td>Army of the James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzhugh Lee’s Division, Cavalry Corps</td>
<td>Edward Hincks’ Third Division,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>XVI Corps,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wickham’s Brigade (800 men)</td>
<td>Wild’s Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st Regiment USCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10th Regiment USCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Virginia Cavalry Regiment</td>
<td>3rd New York Light Artillery,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Virginia Cavalry Regiment</td>
<td>Battery M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Virginia Cavalry Regiment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Virginia Cavalry Regiment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunovant’s Brigade (1,250 men)(^1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Virginia Cavalry Regiment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Virginia Cavalry Regiment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15th Virginia Cavalry Regiment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th South Carolina Cavalry Regiment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordon’s Brigade (420 men)(^2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st North Carolina Cavalry Regiment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd North Carolina Cavalry Regiment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th North Carolina Cavalry Regiment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Lomax did not accompany the expedition, and his brigade was commanded by Dunovant.

\(^2\) Gordon died on May 18 and was succeeded by Col. Clinton M. Andrews.
The action began around noon with a mounted Confederate cavalry charge on Union pickets posted some distance in front of the fort (Figure 8). Companies C and F of the 1st Regiment U.S.C.T. checked the Confederates, but some of the Union soldiers were cut off and captured (Nasca et al 1998). Following the attack on the Union pickets Lee had his cavalrymen dismount and a line of skirmishers advance on the Federal works. Although the earthworks were only partially finished, Lee found the fortifications strongly manned. Lieutenant Edward Simonton, Company I, 1st Regiment, U.S.C.T. described the earthworks at the time of the engagement:

Along one-third of the line ran a ditch 8 feet wide and 5-6 feet deep...along the remaining part was no ditch at all; abatis constructed simply of felled trees and trimmed branches and limbs placed outside the ditch. Our intrenchments were only about one-third completed when General Lee’s force came upon us suddenly. Along the unfinished portion of our line, the enemy could easily and successfully have charged upon the works, but our men were ready for them.

(Besch n.d.)

Henry Turner, African-American Chaplain of the 1st U.S.C.T., described his tense excitement in witnessing the repulse of the initial Confederate advance:

Things moved quietly until the 24th...when my attention was called to the front of the works by a mighty rushing to arms, and shouts that the rebels were coming. I immediately joined the proclaiming host and bellowed out (I reckon in fearful tones) “The rebels! The Rebels! The Rebels are coming!” At this period the long roll began tell that doleful tale that she never tells unless the enemy is about to invade our quarters. Then commenced another rush to arms, fearful in its aspect. Notwithstanding many were at dinner, down fell the plates, knives, forks and cups, and a few moments only were required to find every man, sick or well, drawn into the line of battle to dispute the advance of twice, if not thrice, their number of rebels. Captains Borden and Rich of the 1st U.S. Col’d Troops, with their gallant companies, were at some distance in front, skirmishing with the advance guard of the rebels. And here permit me to say, that this skirmish was the grandest sight I ever beheld.

(Turner in Redkey 1992:96-9)
Chaplain Turner then notes that by the time the pickets were driven into the fort, a flag of truce could be seen waving in the distance. Lee had dispatched Major R.J. Mason and John Gill with a message stating “he had force enough to take the
place, demand its surrender and in that case the garrison should be turned over to the authorities at Richmond as prisoners of war, but if this proposition was rejected he would not be answerable for consequences when he took the place” (Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies {ORUCA} 1891). General Wild declined the offer by simply replying, “We will try it,” a phrase he used before attempting a difficult problem (ORUCA 1891).

As Gill returned Wild’s response, news of the battle was attracting the attention of naval ships stationed nearby. The transport Thomas Powell landed some 150 unarmed soldiers at the garrison, including six men from the 1st Connecticut Heavy Artillery. The gunners replaced several of the New York artillerymen who had dropped with heat exhaustion and Private John Taylor who had been wounded in the face (ORUCA 1891, Besch n.d.). Another transport, the Young America, was stationed between Wilson’s Wharf and Fort Powhatan and subsequently ordered into action when the attack commenced. However, the transport was disabled at the time of the attack due to boiler problems and had to be towed to the engagement by the army tug Johnson (Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies {ORUCN} 1900: 88).

Back on land, Wild’s decline to surrender caused Lee to deploy his troops for battle. Wickham and Gordon’s Brigade were to assault Wild’s strongest position while Dunovant’s 5th South Carolina Cavalry with Lomax’s Brigade were to create a diversion against the weakest portion and fire on vessels on the James River (FLPR 1866) (Figure 9). Wild reported how the Confederates “massed troops on our extreme right, concealed by wooded ravines, and made a determined charge, at the
same time keeping up a steady attack all along our front and left flank” (ORUCA 1891: 270). The Confederate soldiers located on Wild’s extreme right (east side of the fort) consisted of Gordon’s Brigade, with the 5th North Carolina Cavalry closest to the James River, and Wickham’s Brigade of Virginia Cavalry. Colonel Dunovant commanded his own regiment and Lomax’s Brigade against Wild’s left wing (FLPR 1866). Lee directed Dunovant to “make a demonstration upon the upper and opposite side, with a view to drawing the garrison in his front whilst Wickham got in” (FLPR 1866). Therefore, while Dunovant attracted the attention of the defenders from the west and north side of the fortification, Wickham would move his dismounted troops along a circuitous route through the wooded ravines of Kennons Creek.

Dunovant’s men raised havoc on the Union signal station and passing transports when a Confederate detachment succeeded in gaining possession of a small piece of woods to the west of the fortification. Signal Officer, 2nd Lieutenant Julius Swain, reported how the sharpshooters, numbering approximately 100, gained possession of the heavy-timbered point on the river not more than 70 yards from the signal station. Swain recalled how the enemy “opened fire upon us so fiercely that we were forced to abandon our post and seek protection behind the earthworks” (ORUCA 1891: 272). After a half hour delay, Swain opened a signal station on board a transport near the wharf and directed the fire of the gunboat against Wickham’s charge of the Union right.
Figure 9. Battle of Wilson’s Wharf, second phase (USGS aerial photo).
One transport in particular, the *Mayflower*, also absorbed the brunt of Dunovant’s attack. The scene of the heroic actions of Acting Ensign William Chase, who took charge of the vessel when the captain and pilot were severely wounded, were described by Lieutenant Simmons of the U.S.S. *Dawn*;

> On the *Mayflower* passing the woods above me, where the enemy’s sharpshooters had got possession, they poured a murderous volley of musketry on the *Mayflower*, badly wounding the captain and pilot of the boat, leaving her completely at their mercy. Mr. Chase at once jumped to the wheel and brought the boat safely through the terrific fire poured at him.

(ORUCN 1900:91)

Chase then proceeded to land the vessel at the wharf, at which point General Wild commandeered it for the use of transporting the wounded.

After the attack on the *Mayflower*, the gunboat U.S.S. *Dawn* opened fire on Dunovant’s sharpshooters and succeeded in driving the soldiers out of their wooded position (ORUCN 1900:90). As the firing ceased on the Union left, the *Dawn* moved down the river in time to encounter the Confederate charge on the Union right. The gunboat fired on the Confederates without mercy expending a total of 118 rounds of ammunition consisting of:

- 100-pounder rifle: 46 rounds percussion shell
- 20-pounder rifle: 34 rounds percussion shell, 1 round 10-second shell
- Rifled 12-pounder howitzer: 11 rounds percussion shell, 21-rounds 5-second shell, 3 rounds canister, 2 rounds grape

(ORUCN 1900:91)

Even with the destructive amount of ordinance expended at the battle, two Union officers lamented their deficiency of artillery. The commander of the *Dawn*, Lieutenant Simmons, reported that if he “had two 32-pounders in addition to my present battery, I could do much more service, having now no smoothbore guns to throw grape and canister” (ORUCN 1891:271).
Confederates described the terrifying sight of the 100-pounder ordinance fired from the *Dawn*. The shells looked like “turkey gobblers flying over” recollected a man in the 2nd Virginia Cavalry (Gill 1905). Private Paul Means of the 5th North Carolina Cavalry remembered the ordinance as “great black masses, as big as nail kegs, hurtling in the air and making the earth tremble under us and the atmosphere jar and quake around us when they burst” (Means 1901). Means also noted the devastating effect of one of the large shells on a comrade: “it passed at least ten feet from him and paralyzed his right arm by concussion of air. There was no visible injury, but it fell useless and quickly turned black, he never recovered its use” (Means 1901).

Private Henry St. George Tucker Brooke, Co. B, 2nd Virginia Cavalry participated in Wickham’s charge and described the action just prior to the assault:

(We) marched through the woods to the river (Kennons Creek) below the fort. The undergrowth was thick and the land swampy. We drew up in line of battle. (We) charged across a field and suddenly came to a deep ravine 50 yards across. The enemy had poured a destructive fire into the column as it charged across the field. The trees on each side had been cut...and formed an impenetrable thicket on each side. When the charging column reached the ravine it came to an abrupt halt.  

(Brooke in Besch n.d.)

After the halt in the ravine, a signal gun fired and Wickham’s men charged into the cleared ground around the fort. As the Confederates rushed forward, Private Means reported, “The Negroes, with uncovered heads, rose above the entrenchments and leveled their guns upon us. Then came a cloud of smoke...bullets whizzed through our ranks, and the men in our lines tumbled over each other, some forward, some backward” (Means 1901). Wickham’s men made a determined charge and approached a parapet, however, they were driven back under severe crossfire
(ORUCA 1891:270). Means recollected the failed attempt; "we were within 30 feet of the fort when we saw the utter hopelessness of the attack. The line halted a moment; the order to retreat was given, and we retired under fire from the most useless and unwise attack and the most signal failure we were ever engaged in" (Means 1901) (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Battle of Wilson’s Wharf, final phase (USGS aerial photo).
Despite the initial optimism of the Confederate charge, the Union fortifications, reinforced during the day by the remaining four companies of the 10th U.S.C.T., proved too strong for Lee’s forces. Lee withdrew shortly after dusk and his defeated troops retired to Charles City Court House. Wild initially reported his losses at 2 killed, 19 wounded, and 1 missing. However, the June 11, 1864 Harper’s Ferry reported 7 Union dead and 40 wounded. Confederate losses were higher, ranging from 175 to 200, with a reasonable estimate of 180 total Confederate casualties during the action at Wilson’s Wharf (Besch n.d.).

Chaplain Henry Turner bragged regarding the African-American soldiers role in the engagement:

The 1st Regiment of the United States Colored Troops, with a very small exception, did all the fighting…The coolness and cheerfulness of the men, the precision with which they shot, and the vast number of rebels they unmercifully slaughtered, won for them the highest regard of both the General and his staff, and every white soldier that was on the field.

(Turner in Redkey 1992:97-98)

Turner then continued by dismissing the Confederate effort:

Allow me to say that the rebels were handsomely whipped. They fled before our men, carrying a large number of their dead, and leaving a great many on the field for us to bury. They declared our regiment were sharpshooters.

(Turner in Redkey 1992:98)

North Carolina Private Means appeared to agree with Turner’s evaluation of the expedition when he called it “the most useless sacrifice of time and men and horses made during the war” (Means 1901).
Occupation of Fort Pocahontas

After the action on May 24, the fortifications at Wilson’s Wharf were completed and renamed Fort Pocahontas. By mid-June, Ohio National Guard troops of the 143rd and 163rd Regiments replaced the U.S.C.T. who were eventually assigned to the operations at Petersburg and City Point. The guardsmen remained until the end of August when their 100 days of service ended. On June 23, Captain A. R. Arter of the 143rd U.S. Regiment wrote a letter describing the conditions at the fort. Arter characterized the “breastworks” at Wilson’s Wharf as “the best arranged...I have ever seen” (Arter 1864). A few weeks earlier, Union engineers had prepared a plan of the works that indicated the location of the headquarters of General Wild within the fortification (Weitzel 1864) (Figure 11).

Figure 11. “Sketch of Works at Wilson’s Wharf or Landing” (Weitzel 1864; Library of Virginia).
Captain Arter stated that there were about 1000 soldiers armed with Sharp’s repeating rifles in addition to “one full artillery company composed of some 12 or 15 heavy cannon” (Arter 1864). It appears Arter was referring to the arms and artillery added after the battle to strengthen the fort’s defensive as the Union infantry (1st and 10th U.S.C.T.) and Union artillery (Battery M, 3rd New York Light artillery) who participated in the battle were outfitted with .58 caliber Springfields or Enfields and two 10-pounder rifled Parrott guns, respectively.

In September 1864, the 89th New York and two regiments of U.S.C.T. who had replaced the Ohio troops were reassigned and replaced with companies of soldiers from New York and New Jersey (ORUCA 1891:88). These soldiers, primarily members of the 38th New Jersey and 16th New York Heavy Artillery Companies E and H, comprised the core of the forces stationed at Fort Pocahontas from October 1864 through the end of the war.
CHAPTER V.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE BATTLE OF WILSON’S WHARF

Between October 23–November 4, 2000 the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research (WMCAR) conducted an archaeological investigation at the site of Fort Pocahontas in Charles City County, Virginia. The investigation was funded through a grant from the National Park Service American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP). The project objective was to identify and document the American Civil War battle known as Wilson’s Wharf in order to evaluate and preserve archaeological evidence of the May 24, 1864 conflict. The project also sought to demonstrate the value of a systematic metal detector survey combined with in-depth historical research as a means of delineating troop positions within a battlefield site. At the Wilson’s Wharf site the positions represented the attacking Confederate cavalry under the command of Major General Fitzhugh Lee, and the defending Union infantry under Brigadier General Edward Wild.

In previous archaeological reports the site area has been referred to as Fort Pocahontas from the name of the Union fortification located on the property. However, as the fortification was not finished and named until after the conflict, the site area will herein be referred to as Wilson’s Wharf in accordance with the Union title for the engagement. The designation is appropriate given the objective of the survey to identify the archaeological remains associated with the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf. The Confederate army also referred to the action as the Battle of Kennon’s or
Kennons Landing, however this was not a commonly used name and therefore will not be employed in the report.

**Description of the Study Area**

Wilson’s Wharf/Fort Pocahontas is situated approximately 1.5 miles south of Route 5 in Charles City County, Virginia, on the north shore of the James River. Kennon’s Creek and its associated drainage ravines encompass the northeastern and eastern face of the earthworks (see Figure 1 and 2). The fortification is located less than 5 miles east of Sherwood Forest, the plantation home of the late President of the United States, John Tyler. The study area is currently owned by Mr. Harrison Tyler, grandson of the late President, and is defined by the natural boundaries of the James River to the south and Kennon Creek to the east. The northern boundary of the study area is defined by the limit of the property owned by Mr. Tyler. A dirt road leading south from County Road 614 to the James River bisects the fortification into eastern and western halves.

Prior to European contact, this region of Virginia supported a varied biotic community. Oak/hickory hardwood forests, whose ground cover and seasonal mast production supported many species, dominated the elevated river terraces while pines and mixed pine hardwoods dominated the interior uplands (Hodges 1996).

The arrival of European settlers impacted the study area in a variety of ways. Forests were cleared for settlement, timber, and later for planting crops. Most of the study area was plowed during the historic occupation of the site, excluding the ravines and low-lying areas. Impacts on the project area within the past 100 years
have included episodes of gravel mining, cultivation and the clear-cut timbering of the regenerated pine forest.

The shift from farming to timbering by site landowners during the twentieth century allowed the cultivated land within the study area to be returned to forest. Logging of the area surrounding the fortification provides the greatest threat to the site with the most recent episode occurring within the past decade. Future logging will occur as the plantings mature. The removal of trees, the destruction caused by heavy machinery, and the replanting and growth of new trees will each cause a major disturbance to the landscape, and, thereby, lead to the loss of archaeological resources within the site boundaries.

Another potential threat is vandalism caused by relic seekers who destroy the integrity of a site solely for the perceived material and monetary value of the artifacts of war. In the past, local "hunt clubs" were allowed access to the fort environs so they might loot battle remains from the site. Fortunately, relic hunters are no longer welcome on the property.

**Definition of Study Areas**

As the purpose of the present study was to identify and document the Civil War engagement referred to as the action at Wilson's Wharf, it was the first necessary to analyze historical accounts of the battle in order to place troop movements within the landscape. Documentation indicated the Confederate attack encompassed the Union left (west), center (north), and right (east), with the main thrust occurring on the east of the fortification. Reconnaissance of the site environs identified thirteen areas totaling 1,360,000 sq. ft. to be investigated as containing possible battle related
The areas were chosen based on their accessibility and probable location within the historically documented line of the Confederate attack (Table 2).

Figure 12. Wilson’s Wharf Battlefield survey examination areas (USGS aerial photo).
Table 2

Summary of sampling coverage by area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDY AREA</th>
<th>PROPOSED COVERAGE (SQ. FT.)</th>
<th>ACHIEVED COVERAGE (SQ. FT.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area 1</td>
<td>260,000</td>
<td>93,000 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 2</td>
<td>170,000</td>
<td>28,000 (16.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 3</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>200,000 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 4</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>90,000 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 5</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>7,500 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 6</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>50,000 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 7</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>5,000 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 8</td>
<td>12,500</td>
<td>2,500 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 9</td>
<td>62,500</td>
<td>62,500 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 10</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>30,000 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 12</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>50,000 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 13</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>30,000 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,360,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>658,500 (48%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area 1

Area one represents a 260,000 sq. ft. (800 ft. north-south by 325 ft. east-west) tract located to the west of the main access road approximately 100 ft. north of the west bastion of the fortification. The area was chosen to determine if evidence of the frontal Confederate attack could be identified. Direct access to the ground surface was hindered in Area 1 as the section contained new growth pine and dense undergrowth. At the request of the landowner, the pine trees were cleared for the survey only within sample transects (Figure 13). The pine and underbrush were removed within a total of seven transects representing a 35% sample of Area 1. Transects 1-5 were each 20 ft. in width and extended the length (800 ft.) of the survey area on a north-south orientation. Transects A and B were placed at the northern end of Area 1 and were 20 ft. in width, extending the width of the survey area (325 ft.) on an east-west orientation.

Figure 13. Photograph of Area 1, Transect 1
Area 2

Area 2 represents a 170,000 sq. ft. (200 ft. north-south by 850 ft. east-west) area located approximately 100 ft. to the north of Lee’s Ravine within a large bend in the secondary east-west access road. The area was chosen to determine if any evidence of the initial Confederate attack on the Union pickets could be identified. As within Area 1, the ground surface in Area 2 was inaccessible as the section was overgrown with small pine trees and thorny underbrush. The vegetation was removed within seven transects representing a 16.5% sample of area 2. Each transect was 20 ft. in width and extended the length (200 ft.) of the survey on a north-south orientation.

Area 3 (Lee’s Ravine)

Area 3 is the natural topographic feature referred to as Lee’s Ravine and is part of the drainage system of nearby Kennon’s Creek (Figure 14). Area 3 represents an approximately 200,000 sq. ft. portion of the natural feature located to the north of the fortification. The boundaries of Area 3 are formed by the natural edges of the ravine to the north, west, and south. The eastern boundary of Area 3 is marked by a swamp that continues through Lee’s Ravine along the eastern side of the fortification eventually draining into Kennon’s Creek. The ravine

Figure 14. Photograph of Area 3
was investigated to determine if the feature was the “circuitous and wooded route”
employed by the Confederates to conceal the movements for Wickham’s main attack on
the eastern or strongest portion of the garrison. The vegetation of the ravine consists of large, widely dispersed trees interspersed with a thin grass cover. The grass cover was easily mowed throughout Area 3 thereby allowing for nearly 100% coverage of the ground surface.

*Area 4 (Powerline Cut)*

Area 4 represents a powerline cut cleared by Dominion Virginia Power shortly before the start of the project. The cut was added to the scope of the project as the removal of vegetation within this area afforded the opportunity to examine the western extent of the property. The powerline cut is 1800 sq. ft. in length east-west and 50 ft. in width north-south (90,000 sq. ft.). Area 4 was investigated for evidence of Dunovant’s feint attack on the Union left.

*Area 5 (Large Circular Rise)*

Area 5 is a large circular rise located approximately 125 ft. to the north of the east bastion. The rise is located below the southern edge of Lee’s Ravine (Area 3) where the natural feature turns from an east-west to a southern course. Area 5 is approximately 200,000 sq. ft., however, due to the extremely overgrown nature of the rise sample transects could not be placed within the area in time for the survey. Only a small 150 ft. by 50 ft. (7500 sq. ft.) portion of area 5 was cleared representing a 4% sample. The sample is situated above a cut leading down into Lee’s ravine and was investigated as one possible route for the main charge of Wickham’s Brigade from
out of the ravine. The sample area, while small, displayed evidence of heavy fighting near the cut in the ravine.

**Area 6 (Ravine Finger 1)**

Area 6 is a ravine cut which is part of the drainage features for Lee’s Ravine. The cut is bounded to the west by the east wall of the fortification, to the east by Lee’s Ravine, to the south by Area 7 (Narrow Promontory), and to the north by Area 5 (Large Circular Rise). The cut leads into the swamp within Lee’s Ravine. Area 6 is approximately 50,000 sq. ft. (250 ft. east-west by 200 ft. north-south) and contained a dense cover of thorny underbrush that was removed. The removal of the vegetation allowed for a 100% coverage of the area during the survey. Area 6 was investigated to determine if it contained evidence of Wickham’s main charge as the cut leads directly to the eastern face of the fortification and could have been employed as a path of attack from Lee’s Ravine.

**Area 7 (Narrow Promontory)**

Area 7 is a narrow promontory located between two ravine cuts (Area 6 and Area 8). Area 7 is approximately 5000 sq. ft. (200 ft. east-west by 20 ft. north-south) and contained a dense cover thorny underbrush that was removed. The removal of the vegetation allowed for 100% coverage of the area during the survey. Area 7 was examined for evidence of Wickham’s charge against the eastern side of the fortification.

**Area 8 (Ravine Finger 2)**

Area 8 is a second ravine cut located to the east of the fortification. The cut is bounded by Area 7 (Narrow Promontory) to the north, Lee’s Ravine to east, the
fortification to the west and Area 9 (Cemetery Knoll) to the south. Area 8 is approximately 12,500 sq. ft. (250 ft. east-west by 50 ft. north-south) and contained a dense thorny underbrush that was removed. The removal of the vegetation allowed for 100% coverage of Area 8 during the survey. As with Area 6, Area 8 was examined to determine if Wickham’s Confederates employed the ravine finger as a path of attack against the eastern face of the fortification.

*Area 9 (Cemetery Knoll)*

Area 9 is the Cemetery Knoll first identified during the 1997 field season. The knoll is bounded by the fortification to the west, the swamp within Lee’s Ravine to the east, Area 8 to the north, and the James River to the south. The knoll is approximately 62,500 sq. ft. (250 ft. by 250 ft.) and contains a grass cover that facilitated the 100% coverage of Area 9 during the survey. Area 9 was examined to determine the southern most extent of the Confederate attack against the garrison.

*Area 10 (Eastern Cleared Area)*

Area 10, also known as the Eastern Cleared Area, is an approximately 185,000 sq. ft. section located directly north of the fortification and east of the main access road. The WMCAR conducted a metal detector survey within the majority (approximately 155,000 sq. ft.) of the Eastern Cleared Area during the 1997 field season. However, a portion of Area 10 (approximately 30,000 sq. ft.) was not accessible at the time of the original investigation. As the additional portion of Area 10 was cleared by the time of the 2000 ABPP battlefield survey, it was determined the small area be added to the scope of the project. The area is located directly north
of the east bastion and was examined for evidence of Wickham’s main Confederate charge on the fortification.

**Area 11 (Western Cleared Area)**

Area 11, also referred to as the Western Cleared Area, is an approximately 45,000 sq. ft. section located directly north of the fortification and west of the main access road. As the Western Cleared Area was previously investigated during the 1997 WMCAR metal detector survey, Area 11 was not reexamined during the 2000 ABPP survey.

**Area 12**

Area 12, defined as Area A in Nasca 1998, is an approximately 50,000 sq. ft. parking lot area designated for visitors to the site. A portion of the parking lot consists of a gravel fill while the remainder of Area 12 is covered with short grass. Only the portion of Area 12 with a grass cover was surveyed to determine if the parking lot contained evidence of the Confederate frontal assault on the fortification.

**Area 13**

Area 13, also referred to as the Western Shoreline, is a 30,000 sq. ft. (100 ft. north-south by 300 ft. east-west) area located approximately 2000 ft. from the western side of the fortification on a bluff overlooking the James River. The area appears to have been used as a camping location in recent years and was therefore relatively free of underbrush allowing for easy access to the ground surface. The lack of vegetation permitted the archaeologist to survey Area 13 in its entirety. Area 13 was examined to determine if the bluff was the “small piece of woods to the west of the
fortification” taken by Dunovant’s men from which the Confederates raised havoc on passing transports and the Union signal station.

**Field Methods**

The field investigations at Wilson’s Wharf followed the techniques developed in 1984 by Dr. Douglas Scott at the Little Bighorn Battlefield Site (Scott and Fox 1987). The fieldwork consisted of three sequential operations: survey, recovery and recording. The survey phase was designed to locate subsurface metallic items associated with the battle through the use of electronic metal detectors. Standard archaeological survey methods involving visual surface collection and subsurface shovel tests were determined to be inadequate for the present study given the large size and overgrown nature of the Wilson’s Wharf battlefield environs. Another limiting factor was the short amount of time available to conduct the investigation. All fieldwork was to take place within a one-week span and therefore an efficient and effective means of examining the site was necessary. As the vast majority of surviving battlefield artifacts are composed of iron, lead and copper alloy, a systematic metal detector survey was chosen as it would allow a relatively small crew to employ the most productive method of recovering the physical remains of the engagement. While the use of metal detectors in the field of archaeology has slowly become more accepted in recent years, the application of the technology has been mostly embraced by military and battlefield-site researchers (Adams 2000, 2000; Gregory and Rogerson 1984; Haecker 1997, 1998; Ludwig and Stute 1993; Nasca 1998; Pratt 1995; Scott 1987, 1989, 1998).
As the main goal of the project was the identification and documentation of the battle remains of the action at Wilson’s Wharf, it was determined that a transect technique would be the most appropriate method for revealing the spatial and temporal aspects of the engagement. A transect is a long, narrow sample unit as opposed to the quadrant, a square unit whose location within the sample universe is determined arbitrarily or at random. While both sampling methods are equally accurate in estimating artifact frequency and numeric abundance, transects are considered more accurate in the estimation of distribution (Mueller 1975, Hacker 1998).

The size and placement of transects within the site areas were influenced not only by the historical record, but also by the density and type of vegetation. In areas 3-13, all underbrush within the area was mowed to facilitate the metal detectors’ direct access to the ground. Within these cleared areas the survey transects were tightly spaced allowing for almost 100% coverage. However, Areas 1 and 2 contained new growth pine and were not completely cleared at the request of the landowner. As a result, the small trees and undergrowth were only cleared within seven 6-foot transects running the length of the two areas. The transects within Areas 1 and 2 followed a northwest-southeast orientation.

Each site area was systematically surveyed by a total of five metal detector technicians (Figure 15). The operators were spaced approximately two meters apart
in order to prohibit the machines from electronically interfering with one another.

While maintaining the two-meter interval, each technician slowly proceeded to sweep the detector at arms length while transecting the site area. Once a transect was completed, each operator shifted over to examine the two meters previously left as a buffer zone. This process continued until each site was investigated, ensuring complete ground coverage. Only in Areas 1 and 2 did the process vary whereby only the cleared sample rows were fully investigated.

As artifact locations were detected, each operator immediately excavated their own targets (Figure 16). Each artifact location was given a separate pin flag with one color representing all Civil War related artifacts and a second indicating all non-Civil War related artifacts. The pin flags allowed the technicians to visually determine the location of artifacts within the site areas for mapping purposes (Figure 17). All non-Civil War related artifacts were left in situ. All possible Civil War related artifacts were given a unique specimen number, individually bagged,
and collected by the project archaeologist. The specimen number was recorded in a notebook and labeled on the associated pin flag. The number was then stamped on a small metal tag that was placed in the excavation location. The tag served as a secondary locator in case of the disturbance of the pin flag prior to mapping. The depth of each artifact was noted in order to maintain not only the horizontal but also the vertical location of the specimen.

Figure 17. Artifact locations marked by pin flags

After all the site areas were thoroughly examined, each possible Civil War artifact was mapped with reference to an existing grid using a Nikon DTM-300 Electronic Distance Measurer (EDM) (Figure 18). The information gathered by the EDM was downloaded and then transferred into an Excel file that allowed the data to be manipulated by the mapping program, Autocad. The map, coupled with an analysis of the recovered artifacts, served as the main tools used in the examination of the Wilson’s Wharf site. The
map showed all recovered artifact types, distributions and densities reflecting troop movements and utilization of the natural landscape.

_Laboratory Methods_

All recovered artifacts were returned to the WMCAR laboratory for washing, identification, numbering and cataloging. The inventory was assembled using a standard descriptive typology for historic artifacts (see Harwood 2001). All artifacts were prepared for curation according to the standards set by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR).

All Civil War-related artifacts were identified by the author using identification guides such as Coates and Thomas 1990, Lords 1995, McAulay 1991, McAulay 1987, Melton and Pawl 1996, Tice 1997, Thomas 1997, Thomas and Thomas 1996.

_Artifact Analysis_

A total of 265 metal artifacts were collected during the metal detector survey, of which 205 could be identified as relating to the Civil War battle and occupation of the fortification (Table 3).
### Table 3

**Battle-related artifact types and percentages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fired</th>
<th>Dropped</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bullets</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Union</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minié</td>
<td>44 (21.5%)</td>
<td>34 (16.5%)</td>
<td>78 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams cleaner</td>
<td>8 (4%)</td>
<td>7 (3%)</td>
<td>15 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>93 (45%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confederate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardner</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharps</td>
<td>10 (5%)</td>
<td>5 (2%)</td>
<td>15 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starr</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
<td>4 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enfield</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
<td>1 (.5%)</td>
<td>3 (1.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colt revolving rifle</td>
<td>1 (.5%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unident. carbine</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>27 (13%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Misc. Ammo</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musket ball</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pistol</td>
<td>12 (6%)</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
<td>14 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shot</td>
<td></td>
<td>30 (15%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentifiable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>63 (31%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Bullets</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>183 (89%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                |             |             | |
| **Misc. Artifacts** |         |             | |
| **Weaponry**      |             |             | |
| Sword tip fragment |             |             | 1 (.5%)     |
| Uniform Insignia  |             |             |             |
| Possible “X”      |             |             | 1 (.5%)     |
| **Buttons**       |             |             | 11 (5.5%)   |
| **Hardware**      |             |             |             |
| Finial           |             |             | 3 (1.5%)    |
| Grommet          |             |             | 2 (1%)      |
| **Artillery**    |             |             |             |
| Projectile fragments |         |             | 4 (2%)      |
| **Total Misc. Artifacts** |       |             | **22 (11%)**|

**Total Battle-Related Artifacts** 205
Figure 19. **Representative bullets and firearm artifacts** (a - .69 caliber roundball [MD32]; b - .69 caliber roundball [MD220]; c - .577 caliber Enfield with plug [MD77]; d - .58 caliber Minie [MD60]; e - .56 caliber Gardner [MD178]; f - .58 caliber Williams Cleaner Type II [MD227]; g - .58 caliber Williams cleaner Type III [MD86]; h - .56 caliber Starr [MD46]; i - .56 caliber Colt revolving rifle [MD78]; j - .56 caliber Sharps ringtail pattern [MD223]; k - .52 caliber Sharps [MD26]; l - .45 caliber pistol [Watervliet Arsenal] [MD122]; m - .44 caliber Colt [MD181]; n - .45 caliber roundball [MD121]; o - .31 caliber shot [MD96]; p - modified bullet, whittled [MD52]; q – modified bullet, ring [MD219].
**Ammunition**

*69 caliber roundball (n=2)*

The .69 caliber roundball was the most fundamental projectile employed by the Union and Confederate armies during the Civil War (Figure 19a-b). The ball was used in the older smoothbore weapons, such as the Model 1842 Musket, the Remington conversion of the Model 1816 Musket, and some foreign models. The .69 caliber roundball saw much action during the first two years of the war, as many soldiers could not be issued a rifled weapon due to government inventory shortage. As the war progressed, the production of the rifled musket improved and the less accurate smoothbore muskets slowly became obsolete, causing the .69 caliber roundball to fall into disuse.

Three .31 caliber buckshot were added to the .69 caliber roundball to form a buck and ball cartridge. The purpose of the buckshot was to increase the chances of hitting a target when fired from the highly inaccurate smoothbore musket. The American military use of buck and ball round dates to the Revolutionary War, with the buck and ball becoming the standard musket cartridge during the War of 1812. The buck and ball was utilized during the Civil War but gradually fell into disuse with the replacement of smoothbores by rifled muskets.

The .69 caliber roundball was also employed as shot within an artillery projectile. The internal cavity of the shell was filled with the lead balls in a sulphur or pitch matrix. A small bursting charge of black powder was designed to disperse the balls in a cone-shaped pattern (Melton and Prawl 1996).
The multiple uses for the .69 caliber roundball creates a difficulty in determining how the ball was employed during the action at Wilson’s Wharf. Even though most smoothbores would have been phased out by the May 24, 1864 engagement, many Confederate soldiers were issued outdated firearms. Although the smoothbore musket was an awkward firearm for use on horseback, the dismounted Confederate attack at the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf may have required the use of longarm weapons that allowed the troopers to fire on the fort from a greater distance. Another possible explanation is that the .69 caliber roundballs were part of the matrix of an artillery projectile. The balls may be associated with a Union artillery shell fired at the advancing Confederates given the recovery of the two balls well away from the fortification.

*577 caliber Enfield (n = 3, 2 fired, 1 dropped)*

Ammunition of this type was intended for the British pattern 1853 Enfield rifle musket (Figure 19c). The pattern ’53 was the standard firearm of the British Army from 1853 to 1867 (Coates and Thomas 1990). Originally produced for British service at the Royal Small Arms Factory at Enfield, England, the rifle was imported in large quantities by both the North and South. The recovered Enfield pattern bullets are associated with the Confederates since the Northern army did not use ammunition of this type (Thomas and Thomas 1996). The Federals issued standard .58 caliber rounds while the Confederacy purchased the British-made ammunition or cast them in imported molds.

One of the recovered Enfield bullets (MD 77) still contains the clay expansion plug within the basal cavity. Upon firing the bullet, the force of the explosion would
drive the plug up into a hollow in the base causing the bullet to expand into the rifling. The British-made Enfield employed a clay or wooden plug as opposed to the iron cup found in certain Minie balls due to the tendency of the iron cup to drive through the bullet (Coggins 1962).

.58 caliber Minie (n = 78, 44 fired, 34 dropped)

The .58 caliber Minie represented the greatest number of Civil War artifacts recovered during the investigation (Figure 19d). The basic infantry weapon of the Civil War was the .58 caliber rifled musket. The Minie was cylindrical-sided bullet with a conical nose. In early designs, a hollow in the base of the ball was fitted with a small iron cup. The force of the explosion was supposed to drive the cup up into the hollow, forcing the bullet tight into the rifling. However, a serious drawback developed as the cup tended to drive through the bullet. The British solved this problem by substituting a clay or wooden plug in the Enfield bullet, while the American version of the Minie did away with both the cup and plug and relied on a hollow base bullet for expansion (Coggins 1962).

The two types of firearms issued to the U.S.C.T. troops at Wilson’s Wharf were the regulation U.S. M1855/61 Springfield, caliber .58, and commercial copies of the British M1853 Enfield, caliber .577. The standard U.S. bullet was a refinement of the French “Minie” ball that was used by the Union army in both the Federal-issued Springfield and Enfield. Therefore the recovered Minie balls are attributed to the Union garrison, as the ammunition was the standard issue for the rifled musket of the infantry. It is possible that some of the Minie balls represent captured Federal
supplies employed by the Confederates as at least one regiment (2nd North Carolina Cavalry) was issued .577 caliber Enfields.

.58 caliber Gardner (n = 2 fired)

Frederick Gardner received Confederate patent #12 dated August 17, 1861 for his bullet and cartridge-making machine (Thomas and Thomas 1996). The Gardner was unique because of how the paper cartridge was attached to the bullet (Figure 19e). Normally the paper was either wrapped or tied around the body but in the Gardner the paper was inserted into a groove in the base of the bullet. The majority of Gardner bullets were manufactured at the Richmond Laboratory. As the two recovered bullets were produced in the South, they were associated with the Confederate participants at the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf.

.58 caliber Williams Cleaner (n = 15, 8 fired, 7 dropped)

The Williams Cleaner bullet was intended for use in various .58 caliber firearms (Figure 19f). The recovered Williams bullets are associated with the Union-issued Springfield or Enfield rifled muskets, as this type of ammunition was included within every bundle of ten .58 caliber cartridges. By April 1863, three out of every ten cartridges were Williams Cleaners, which was standard until August 1864 when the number was increased to six out of ten (Thomas 1997). The Williams cleaner was manufactured by Elijah D. Williams whose 1862 patent called for the used of zinc washers and a pin of plunder as a means for the bullet to take the rifling of the musket (Thomas and Thomas 1996). In operation, the powder gases directly or indirectly flattened the washers causing them to expand into the rifling. The flattened washers also scraped away the fouling bore as the bullet excited from the gun (Thomas and
Thomas 1996). The recovered Williams cleaners included both the Type II and Type III bullet. The type II cleaner is distinguished by having three rings while the Type III displays two rings. The Type II was patented in late 1862, and the Type III in early 1863 (Thomas 1997).

.54 caliber Starr (n=4, 2 fired, 2 dropped)

During the Civil War over 20,000 Starr carbines were purchased by the Union army, however, the firearm was not well-liked given its light and overly complicated mechanism (Coates and Thomas 1990) (Figure 19h). Carbines were well suited to cavalry operations as they were shorter and less awkward than rifles. The breech-loading mechanism of the Starr allowed for a higher rate and more convenient method of fire for the mounted soldier. Given the intended use of the carbine as a cavalry firearm, coupled with the fact that no Starrs were issued to the Union infantry, indicates the weapon was associated with a Confederate soldier. It is likely the Starr was a captured carbine put to use during the attack on Wilson’s Wharf.

.56 caliber Colt Revolving Rifle (n=1 dropped)

One possible bullet for a Colt Revolving Rifle was recovered during the investigation (Figure 19i). The rifle was first produced in 1855 and was submitted to the U.S. Army for field tests in 1857 (Coates and Thomas 1990). The weapon was designed and produced by Colt Firearms Manufacturing Company as an enlarged version of the famous Colt revolver. Despite the purchase of 4600 Colt rifles by the Federal government, the firearm was considered too complex for military use (Coates and Thomas 1990).
As no Colt Revolving Rifles were issued to the Union troops stationed at Wilson's Wharf, the bullet may indicate that a Confederate soldier employed a captured weapon of this type.

.52 caliber Sharps (n=15, 10 fired, 5 dropped)

This type of ammunition could be used in either the Sharps rifle or carbine (Figure 19j-k). Both firearms were breech-loading, allowing the soldier to fire with much greater ease than the standard muzzle-loading rifle. The Sharps carbine and the Sharps rifle were mechanically identical and each used a paper or linen cartridge (Coates and Thomas 1990). The Federal government purchased over 80,000 Sharps carbines and approximately 10,000 Sharps rifles during the Civil War. Both Union and Confederate cavalrymen tended to favor the Sharps carbine over other more advanced firearms given the simplicity and reliability of the weapon. The Sharps ammunition recovered from the battle site is associated with the Confederate force as no Sharps firearms were issued to the U.S.C.T. stationed at Wilson’s Wharf. The bullets indicate the presence of captured Federal carbines, or Southern produced copies, in the battle. The latter is most likely the case as the South issued Confederate Sharps carbines to three regiments who participated in the May 24, 1864 engagement. These were the 2nd North Carolina and 1st and 6th Virginia (Coates and Thomas 1990). The simple mechanism of the Sharps carbine allowed the weapon to be copied and manufactured first by S.C. Robinson Co. of Richmond, Virginia, and later by the Confederate government. The South produced some 5000 Confederate Sharps carbines that, while nearly identical in appearance to their Northern counterparts,
were prone to malfunctions due to the poor quality of manufacture (Coates and Thomas 1990).

*.44 caliber (n=14, 12 fired 2 dropped)*

This type of ammunition was intended for the Colt “Army” revolvers. The first type of recovered .44 caliber pistol bullet represents ammunition produced by the Watervliet, New York Arsenal (Figure 19l). The second and third type represents a .44 caliber Colt pistol bullet (Figure 19m) and a .44 caliber roundball (Figure 19n) of unknown manufacture. Colt revolvers were the most famous and widely used handguns in the Civil War. All Colt pistols were six-shot, single action, percussion revolvers (Coates and Thomas 1990). The prominence of the Colt revolver in the pre-war meant many soldiers went to war with the popular firearm. Most of the Federal purchases of Colt revolvers went to arm Union cavalrymen (Coates and Thomas 1990).

Confederate imitations of the Colt revolver totaled less than 7000 arms with most of the copies representing the .44 caliber Colt “Dragoon” first produced in the 1850s (Coats and Thomas 1990). The .44 caliber bullets may represent the handguns of the attacking Confederate cavalry as the 1st and 15th Virginia regiments were issued both Colt Army and Navy revolvers (Coats and Thomas 1990). However, as many Union officers carried the popular handgun, it is possible the ammunition may be associated with the personal side arms discharged during the engagement by the Union pickets patrolling the site perimeter.

*.31 caliber (n=30)*
This type of ball was typically associated with buckshot (Figure 19o). Buckshot rounds consisted of multiple small caliber balls encased in a single cartridge for use in a shotgun. Three .31 caliber balls were also combined with a .69 caliber ball to create the "buck and ball" round. The purpose of the buck and ball was to increase the chance of hitting a target when fired from the highly inaccurate smoothbore musket (Thomas and Thomas 1996).

The fact that Union soldiers at Wilson's Wharf were not armed with smoothbores indicates that the .31 caliber shot is associated with Confederate weaponry. Although smoothbore muskets were outdated by 1864, it is possible that some poorly armed Confederate troopers used the longarm with buck and ball rounds during their dismounted attack on the fort.

Another probable explanation for the .31 caliber shot is that the ammunition is associated with the shotgun. The shotgun had limited value as an infantry weapon due to its short effective range. It was in the close, sometimes hand to hand fighting common to mounted troops that the shotgun found its greatest use. As the double-barreled weapon existed in abundance in the ante-bellum South, the shotgun was quickly incorporated into the ranks of the Confederate cavalry. With its barrels shortened for ease in carrying on horseback, the resulting spray of buckshot made the shotgun a formidable weapon in close combat. The recovered .31 caliber bullets may be associated with the shotguns employed by the Confederate cavalry during the initial mounted attack on Union pickets.

*Modified Bullets (n=6)*
Several modified bullets were recovered during the investigation. Each represents the post-battle activities of the Union soldiers stationed at Wilson’s Wharf, by that time known at Fort Pocahontas. Much of garrison life was monotonous and soldiers often whittled the soft lead bullets during idle time (Figure 19p). One recovered bullet was carved into a flat ring while two others were simply the tips of the bullets that had been removed (Figure 19q).

**Unidentified bullets (n=11)**

Eleven fired bullets were recovered which were disfigured to the point that they could not be positively identified or associated with either Union or Confederate troops.

**Artillery**

*Shrapnel (n=4)*

Four shrapnel fragments were recovered during the project. Three of the fragments were too small to be associated with a specific projectile type. The fourth fragment (MD 27) is from the nose end of a Federal Read-Parrott projectile intended for a 10-pounder Parrott rifle of 2.9-inch caliber (Melton and Pawl 1996) (Figure 20). The fragment contains a section of the fuse hole where the percussion fuse was screwed into place by the use of a spanner wrench. The screw threat grooves for the percussion fuse are still visible on the artifact. The projectile fragment is associated with the Union garrison and Wild’s Battery M, 3rd New York
Light Artillery manned two 10-rifled Parrott guns which were employed against the
Confederate force at the battle of Wilson’s Wharf.

Weaponry

Sword Fragment (n=1)

The specimen (MD 13) represents the tip end of straight backsword (Figure 21). The saber has a straight, rather than curved bladed and is single rather than double-edged. The artifact measures 7 and 5/16” in length, 1 and 7/16” in width, and 5/16” in thickness.

Figure 21. Straight backsword fragment (MD13)

In the Civil War, the sword served both as weapon and symbol of rank. Before the war, many mounted soldiers considered the saber their principal weapon. As cavalry charges were seldom practical in the overgrown terrain of the eastern United States, Civil War cavalrymen cam to rely on pistols and carbines. Artillerymen and infantry officers were issued swords but they also preferred the
revolver for close combat fighting. Staff officers and generals carried swords mainly as a badge of office.

Among the enlisted men in the Union Army, only cavalrymen, sergeants, some artillerymen, and musicians were issued swords. Nearly all Federal regulation swords were patterned after weapons of the French Army. Most Confederate sabers were variations on U.S. Army models and were manufactured in the South. The recovered sword fragment is attributed to a Confederate cavalry participant in the Battle of Wilson's Wharf as mounted soldiers carried most straight backswords. The specimen is not associated with the Union infantry as most foot officers were typically issued straight, double-edged swords.

Buttons

*Unidentified Buttons (n=4)*

Four buttons were recovered during the survey too corroded for identification. The first specimen (MD 210) is a ferrous fastener 11/16” in diameter (Figure 22a). The second artifact (MD 87) is the face fragment of a copper-alloy button 13/16” in diameter (Figure 22b). The third specimen (MD 222) is a face and back fragment of a copper-alloy fastener 11/16” in diameter (Figure 22d). The fourth artifact (MD 123) is the face and back fragments of a copper-alloy button ¾” in diameter (Figure 22e).
Figure 22. Buttons (a - unidentified button [MD210]; b – unidentified button [MD87]; c – Union “Waterbury” button [MD85]; d – unidentified button [MD222]; e – unidentified button [MD123]; f – Confederate artillery button [MD76]; g – Navy button [upside-down] [MD173]; h – civilian button [MD62]; i – civilian button [MD216]).
"Waterbury" Button (n=1)

The specimen (MD 85) represents the back of a copper-alloy button ¼" in diameter with the Waterbury Button Company backmark (Figure 22c). In 1849, the Benedict and Burnham Manufacturing Company of Waterbury, Connecticut spun off the button department to form the "Waterbury Button Company" (Tice 1997). The company manufactured vegetable ivory, composition, cloth-covered, and brass buttons. During the Civil War, the firm became one of the foremost button suppliers to Federal forces. Of all the nineteenth-century companies making military buttons, the Waterbury Button Company is the only one surviving to modern times (Tice 1997).

The "Waterbury" button may be associated with the Union occupants of the garrison as the company was a Northern firm. However, a Confederate soldier may have lost the button as Southern forces supplied much of their troops with captured Federal equipment (Coggins 1962:25).

Confederate "A" Artillery Button (n=1)

The specimen is a gilded, convex, copper-alloy button 7/8" in diameter as shown in Tice (1997:221) (Figure 22f). The button was one of eight Confederate dress regulation patterns with the large raised letter "A" denoting a member of the artillery. The size of the button (7/8") indicates the fastener was intended for the blouse or overcoat of a Confederate officer of the artillery (Tice 1997:197). The button may be attributed to a Confederate gunner present at the engagement under the command of Lieutenant Marcellus Moorman. The artifact may also represent
evidence of reuse by the mounted Southern soldiers as uniforms and supplies were in ever increasingly short supply by the end of the war.

Lacking the industrial infrastructure of the North, Confederates depended upon small, poorly tooled shops and even home industries to supply military goods. The South imported much of their war materiel from Europe, however the effort was frustrated by an effective Federal naval blockade. As the war progressed and the southern economy became more and more exhausted, undecorated buttons of wood, cloth-covered wood, and bone were all the Confederates could produce for enlisted men. Officer’s buttons, such as the recovered artifact, continued to follow the prescribed regulation design and were produced throughout the war. A Confederate cavalryman may have previously salvaged the single button or an entire article of clothing only to lose the fastener during the engagement.

*Navy Button* (*n* = 1)

One small Navy cuff button was recovered during the survey (Figure 22g). The copper-alloy fastener is \(\frac{1}{2}\)” in diameter and displays an upright anchor design on the front. The fastener contains no backmark. Although the precise design could not be identified at present, a similar upright anchor design was located in Tice (1997:160). However, the device contains a rope intertwined around the anchor whereas the recovered button lacks this feature. Tice notes the upright anchor device was used on the earliest United States Navy buttons for junior officers. Chief Petty Officers began using similar buttons around 1840. During the early 1850’s, the Navy issued a design with an eagle standing on the shank of a horizontal rather than an upright anchor. In 1852, the Navy decreed that the horizontal anchor buttons were to
be worn by all personnel. The recovered button was most likely manufactured sometime after 1840.

As the origin of the design could not be identified, the button could not be directly attributed to either the Union or Confederate participants. As it is unique for a naval button to be recovered from the site of an engagement between infantry and cavalry forces, it is possible a Confederate soldier reused the fastener.

Civilian Buttons ($n=2$)

Two flat, one-piece buttons were recovered that are associated with pre-Civil War occupation of the site. The first specimen (MD 62) is a copper alloy fastener 1” in diameter (Figure 22h). The second specimen (MD 216) is a copper alloy fastener 13/16” in diameter (Figure 22i).

Miscellaneous Artifacts

“X” Emblem ($n=1$)

This artifact is a copper alloy “X” measuring 11/16” x 11/16” (Figure 23a). While the precise function of the artifact is as yet undetermined, it appears similar to the “X” emblem of Major General Horatio Wrights VI Corps of the Union Army of the Potomac. Brigadier General Joseph Hooker prescribed corps and division insignia in 1863 to boost his army’s flagging spirits and provide a means by which commanders could identify their units in the field. The first corps badges were distinctive shapes cut from colored cloth. In time, more elaborate badges appeared from materials ranging from bone to solid gold. If the copper alloy “X” is a corps emblem, it remains a mystery as to how the artifact found its way to the site since Wright’s VI Corps was stationed outside of Richmond near Cold Harbor around the
time of the action at Wilson’s Wharf. The troops involved in the engagement, the 1st and 10th U.S.C.T, were attached to Major General William Smith’s XVIII Corps of the Army of the James. The emblem may have been associated with a VI Corps soldier who passed through Fort Pocahontas as the garrison served as a communications and supply outpost for the campaign against Petersburg and Richmond.

Figure 23. Miscellaneous artifacts (a – “X” [MD19]; b – finial [MD31]; c – rivet [MD97]; d – grommet [MD23]; e – thimble [MD90]; f-h – buckles [MD93, 41, 43]; i – copper-alloy sleeve [MD39]; j – modern percussion cap [MD110]; k – modern “I” uniform emblem [MD239]).
**Finial (n=3)**

The recovered finials appear to belong to cartridge boxes issued to soldiers during the Civil War (Figure 23b). The finials have not been associated with either the Union or Confederate participants at the action of Wilson’s Wharf.

**Rivet (n=5)**

The rivets appear to be similar to the harness rivet/burrs recovered at the Camp Lewis Civil War site in New Mexico (Haecker 1998:33c) (Figure 23c). Haecker states that the large size of the rivets, relative to what was found on military accouterments, suggest the artifacts were used on horse tack, such as traces. Given the possibly that the rivets were associated with the civilian residents of the site area and not the Civil War military occupants, the specimens were not included with the Civil War artifacts recovered from the battlefield survey.

**Grommet (n=2)**

The grommets are a half-inch in diameter and are the same as those found at the Civil War sites of Folly Island, South Carolina and Camp Lewis, New Mexico (Legg and Smith 1989, Haecker 1998) (Figure 23d). The grommets are associated with a Civil War-era rubber poncho employed by Union soldiers stationed at Wilson’s Wharf/Fort Pocahontas.

**Thimble (n=1)**

One small copper alloy thimble was recovered during the survey (Figure 23e). The thimble may have been part of a sewing kit carried by a Union Soldier stationed at the fort.

**Buckles (n=3)**
The three small buckles appear to be associated with horse-related equipment. Buckle 1 (MD93) is a ferrous buckle 2 ¼ in. in diameter with a tongue (Figure 23f). Buckle 2 (MD41) is a small rectangular ferrous buckle 15/16 in. by 7/8 in. with a tongue (Figure 23h). None of the buckles could be specifically associated with the military occupation of the site and were not included in the Civil War artifact totals.

_Copper Alloy Sleeve/Hardware (n=1)_

The small copper alloy sleeve-like cylinder measures 15/16 in. in height and 1 ¼ in. in diameter (Figure 23i). The function of the artifact could not be determined and therefore the cylinder was not included in the Civil War artifact totals.

_Modern Percussion Cap (n=27)_

A total of 27 modern percussion caps were recovered from the western most finger of Lee’s Ravine (Area 3) (Figure 23j). As modern percussion caps are essentially the same as those used during the Civil War, the age of the artifacts is based on their lack of corrosion. Most still contain a shiny brass finish and had not developed a green corrosion layer on their surface. The percussion caps were associated with the activities of Civil War re-enactors who have recreated the battle of Wilson’s Wharf in recent years. The re-enactors appear to have been discharging their weapons within a certain portion of the ravine. The modern percussion caps were not included in the Civil War artifact totals.

_Modern Pistol Percussion Cap (n=1)_

One modern pistol percussion cap (MD177) was also recovered within Lee’s Ravine. As with the other recovered percussion caps, the artifact appears to be
associated with the activities of Civil War re-enactors due to their lack of surface corrosion. The modern percussion cap was not included in the artifact totals.

Modern “I” Company Uniform Emblem (n=1)

One modern “I” Company uniform emblem was recovered within Lee’s Ravine (Figure 23k). The emblem was determined to be modern based on its method of construction. It is associated with the activities of Civil War re-enactors. The modern emblem was not included in the Civil War artifact total.

Distribution of Civil War Artifacts Within Study Areas

The investigation of the Wilson’s Wharf battlefield necessitated the division of the site into discrete elements, as a 100% survey of the property was not feasible. Each study area was chosen arbitrarily by the project archaeologist and served as a method of control during the survey. The study areas, while artificial, facilitated the sampling of the archaeological evidence of the battle within definable sections. The distribution of individual artifacts within each study area was then analyzed in order to identify specific battle positions. The identification of discrete positions then contributed to an overall interpretation of battle-related events. The following section provides a description of the distribution of Civil War artifacts recovered within each study area. Only Study Areas 1 – 6, 9, 10, 12, and 13 produced evidence relating to the May 24, 1864 engagement or Union occupation of the fortification. No artifacts were recovered within Study Areas 7 and 8. Study Area 11 was not investigated during the 2000 ABPP survey as it was previously examined by the WMCAR in 1997. All recovered artifacts are listed in the inventory appendix according to their respective specimen number and study area location.
Figure 24. Equipment and Hardware Distribution Within Site Examination Areas
Figure 25. Ammunition Distribution Within Site Examination Areas
Area 1 \((n = 52)\)

Area 1 was investigated for evidence of the frontal diversionary attack on the garrison employed by the Confederates. Out of the total of fifty-two recovered artifacts, forty-seven were attributed to the battle. The remaining five artifacts were of unknown function or did not relate to the engagement.

A total of thirty-eight bullets were identified, representing a variety of ammunition types. The largest number of specimens consisted of fourteen dropped and two fired .58 caliber Minie balls. The majority of the Minie balls were recovered within a 250 ft. length of Transect 1. The second greatest number of recovered specimens consisted of .31 caliber shot possibly associated with the shotguns of the Confederate cavalry. A total of four .52 caliber Sharps and four unidentifiable bullets were collected. One Williams Cleaner (Type III) and one Enfield bullet was found within Area 1.

A variety of other Civil War-era artifacts were recovered within Area 1 including: the possible “X” insignia, the Confederate cavalry backsword tip, a fragment of a 10-pounder Parrott shell, a .69 caliber roundball (possibly shot for an artillery projectile), a copper-alloy button, two poncho grommets, and two finials.

Area 2 \((n = 10)\)

Area 2 was investigated for evidence of the diversionary frontal assault carried out by the dismounted Confederate soldiers. Out of the ten recovered artifacts, nine were attributed to the engagement while the last specimen was a .22 caliber bullet not associated with the battle.
A total of six bullets were recovered within Area 2 consisting of: two fired Minie balls, one Enfield bullet with its clay plug, one .56 caliber bullet for a Colt Revolving Rifle, one Williams Cleaner, and one .31 shot. Also identified were two small shrapnel fragments from an artillery shell and a Confederate “A” artillery button.

**Area 3 – Lee’s Ravine (n = 129)**

Area 3 was investigated to determine if the ravine was the “circuitous and wooded” route employed by the Confederates in staging their main attack on the fort. Area 3 produced the greatest number of artifacts and appeared to have been the location of heavy fighting during the engagement. Out of the one hundred twenty-six recovered artifacts, ninety-six were attributed to the engagement while thirty-three specimens proved to be modern or unidentifiable. The non-Civil War artifacts consisted of 27 modern percussion caps and an “I” Company insignia associated with re-enactors and five miscellaneous artifacts.

A total of ninety bullets were recovered within Lee’s Ravine with the majority represented by Minie balls (34 fired, 4 dropped). The remainder of the recovered bullets are as follows: seventeen specimens of .31 caliber shot, eleven .44 caliber pistol bullets, nine Williams Cleaners (6 fired, 3 dropped), six unidentifiable bullets, four .52 caliber Sharps, two .54 caliber Starr, two .58 caliber Gardner, and one Enfield.

Also recovered were two buttons including a small Navy button with an upright anchor, three rivets, and a buckle.

**Area 4 – Powerline Cut (n = 16)**
Area 4 was examined to determine the western extent of the battle-related evidence. Only eight of the sixteen artifacts collected in Area 4 were attributed to the engagement. A total of five bullets were recovered consisting of three Minie balls (2 fired, 1 dropped) and two dropped .54 caliber Starr. Also two miscellaneous buckles and a small fragment of shrapnel were identified.

**Area 5 – Large Circular Rise (n = 24)**

All artifacts recovered from Area 5 represent a sample from a small section of the study area that was investigated. The sample section is situated above a cut leading down into Lee’s Ravine (Area 3) and was examined as one possible route for the main charge of Wickham’s Confederates. A total of twenty-two of the twenty-four recovered artifacts were attributed to the engagement. The specimens consist of: ten dropped Minie balls, four dropped .56 caliber Sharps, three Williams Cleaners, two unidentifiable bullets, one dropped and one fired .44 caliber pistol bullet, and one copper-alloy rivet.

**Area 6 – Ravine Finger 1 (n = 10)**

Area 6 is a drainage cut for Lee’s Ravine located on the eastern side of the fortification. The ravine finger was investigated for evidence of Wickham’s main charge on the Union garrison. A total of eight of the ten artifacts recovered in Area 6 were attributed to the engagement. The two non-Civil War specimens represent late nineteenth century coins. The Civil War artifacts are two dropped and two fired Minie balls, two .52 caliber Sharps, one dropped .44 caliber pistol ball, and one ferrous button.

**Area 9 – Cemetery Knoll (n = 4)**
The survey of the Cemetery Knoll was hindered due to the recent use of the locale to dump and burn trash. The abundance of metal artifacts, such as wire and nails, forced the archaeologists to discriminate out all ferrous materials during the investigation of the knoll. A total of three of the four artifacts recovered in Area 9 were attributed to the Civil War occupation of the site. One dropped Minie ball, one unidentifiable bullet, and a lead bullet carved into a ring were associated with the Union garrison. A civilian button dating to the colonial or antebellum occupation of the site was also collected as the knoll contains eighteenth century archaeological features.

Area 10 – Eastern Cleared Area (n = 4)

A Union encampment area was located in Area 10 during the 1997 field season. The 2000 survey investigated the eastern one-third of Area 10 that was not investigated in 1997 due to heavy vegetation. All four artifacts collected in the Eastern Cleared Area were attributed to the engagement. The specimens represent one dropped Minie ball, one .69 caliber roundball, one unidentifiable bullet, and one copper-alloy button.

Area 12 - Parking Lot (n = 6)

The investigation of the grassy portion of the parking lot revealed six artifacts associated with the Civil War occupation of the site. Two Minie balls (1 fired, 1 dropped) and a Williams Cleaner represent the bullets recovered in Area 12. Also recovered were two copper-alloy buttons and a small thimble.

Area 13 - Western Shoreline (n = 9)
Area 13 was investigated to determine if the bluff represented "the small piece of woods to the west of the fortification" used by Dunovant's Confederates to raise havoc on passing transports and the Union signal station. Only two of the nine artifacts collected from Area 13 were attributed to the Civil War occupation of the site representing a fired Minie and a whittled bullet.
CHAPTER VI.

AN HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON
THE BATTLE OF WILSON’S WHARF

Interpreting the Evidence

This chapter combines historical evidence with the archaeological data recovered from the 2000 ABPP survey to formulate an interpretation of the events of the May 24, 1864 Battle of Wilson’s Wharf. Scott (1998) describes the interpretation of battlefield archaeology as analogous to reading a crime scene. The historical documentation becomes the eyewitness testimony and the archaeological data represents the physical remains of the event. The researcher then integrates the two types of evidence in order to solve the mystery of how the actions of the engagement unfolded. Yet, it must be recognized that any interpretation of a battle is subject to various biases. The Battle of Wilson’s Wharf is only moderately well documented in the Civil War records and remembrances of the Civil War participants are limited due to the small scale of the action. Most official reports and recollections generally agree on the sequence of events during the engagement, however most accounts fail to detail the specific location of the soldiers on the landscape. The archaeological evidence fills in the gaps in the story left blank by the historical record.

Just as the historical evidence contains biases, it must be noted that the archaeological record also displays shortcomings. Uncontrolled relic hunting by local “hunt clubs” over the years may have reduced the total artifact quantity and has undoubtedly disrupted the artifact distribution patterns. Another bias taken into
consideration is that the battle was not the only cultural event at the fortification. The site was occupied beginning in the seventeenth century and continues to be in use. The May 24, 1864 engagement was not the only Civil War activity on the site as Union troops began building the earthworks in early May 1864 and garrisoned Fort Pocahontas until the end of the war. The area contains a rich archaeological record of which the battle remains are only a small part, but the pre- and post-battle activities were generally easily recognizable by datable artifact types. Recovered artifacts not associated with the occupation of the fort or battle were left in situ.

The interpretations offered here are based on the analysis of the patterning of the archaeological evidence within the battlefield landscape combined with the available historical documentation of the engagement. The artifacts are the material culture remains of past activities. Information about the nature of those activities is available not only through individual artifacts but also in the spatial relationships between artifacts (Scott 1998). An examination of the artifactual relationships within the context of the cultural landscape allows behavioral patterns to be defined and measured. It is from the analysis of behavioral patterning within the battlefield landscape that statements can be made concerning the behavioral processes that shaped a battle event. The documentary record provides the historic context into which the behavioral processes of the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf can be placed, thereby providing a more complete picture of the actions of May 24, 1864.

The following discussion will present a synthesis of the behavioral processes that shaped the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf. An examination of the spatial distribution of recovered clothing, equipment, and firearm related artifacts within the context of
the May 24, 1864 battlefield landscape allows for the identification of behavioral patterning that can be attributed to either the Union and Confederate participants. In the case of firearm related evidence, the patterning of bullets and projectile fragments can indicate combat activity on the individual or unit level. The firearm evidence can be compared with official records listing weapon types issued to various groups in order to attribute identity to the individual or unit patterns defined within the battlefield landscape.

**Evidence of Clothing and Equipment**

The number of artifacts representing clothing and equipment used by the combatants is relatively few. This is not unexpected given the small scale of the engagement. Also, the survey sampled the total area of the battlefield and therefore the number of recovered clothing and equipment artifacts represents only a sample of what may be present in the archaeological record.

**Clothing**

By the last years of the Civil War clothing was in short supply for the Confederate army while the Union troops were relatively well clothed and accoutered. Much of what the Confederates wore and carried was captured from the Federal army (Coggins 1962:25). Archaeological evidence for clothing consists of seven buttons.

An “A” button was originally associated with a Confederate artillery officer’s blouse or overcoat. The fastener may indicate the presence of an officer attached to Lt. Moorman’s gun as this design was produced throughout the war. Another plausible explanation may be that a Confederate cavalry soldier salvaged the button,
or even an entire blouse or overcoat, as clothing, especially overcoats, was in short supply in the South by the time of the battle.

A “Waterbury” button and the unidentifiable buttons may be associated with the Union occupants of the garrison. The Waterbury Button Company was a Northern-manufacturing firm that became one of the foremost suppliers of fasteners to the Federal army during the Civil War. However, as the Confederate cavalry was infamous for their ability to raid Union supplies, the buttons may be associated with use by Confederate soldiers.

The Navy cuff button presented a mystery. How did the artifact find its way to Lee’s Ravine (Area 3)? As the precise design could not be identified, the button could not be associated with either army. The fastener may indicate further use of Federal supplies by Confederate soldiers as no Union infantry soldier would have been issued this type of button.

Overall the archaeological clothing specimens provided little insight into the details of the battle. The Confederate “A” button confirmed the presence of the Confederate troops at the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf and possibly placed the Confederate artillery gun to the north of Lee’s Ravine within Area 2. However, further investigation is necessary to confirm this hypothesis. More research is required to identify the design of the Navy button. The remaining buttons were scattered throughout the survey area and were too corroded to be identified.

**Military Equipment**

The archaeological evidence for equipment is limited in number. The average Civil War soldier was issued a variety of equipment. Beside his weapon, the soldier
would have carried a belt with a buckle, a cartridge pouch, and a cap pouch. Other equipment may have included a canteen, mess gear, and a haversack. While the Federal soldier may have been so well equipped, the supply shortages in the South often forced the Confederate trooper to rely on salvaged accouterments (Coggins 1962:25).

One of the most unique equipment specimens is the backsword fragment. The sword was associated with a Confederate participant in the battle as cavalry soldiers were issued the weapon as part of their equipage. The recovery of the sword tip indicates heavy action occurred within Area 1 as a forceful impact would have been required to fragment the weapon. The area received Union artillery fire as indicated by the recovery of a shell fragment from a 10-pounder Parrott gun, the same type employed by Wild’s Battery M, 3rd New York Light Artillery.

Other recovered equipment includes two cartridge box finials, five harness rivets, two poncho grommets, a thimble, and three miscellaneous buckles. The finials, rivets, and buckles could not be attributed to either the Union or Confederate participants. The poncho grommets and thimble are attributed to the Union soldiers who garrisoned the fort after the battle.

_Firearms at the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf_

Bullets and shell fragments are the most numerous artifacts recovered during the survey and are most indicative of battle events. The combination of historical documentation and archaeological evidence allows for the determination of the firearm and artillery types employed at the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf. An examination of documents relating to weapon types issued to the Union and
Confederate participants provides indirect evidence of possible firearms used at the battle. Recovered bullets and shrapnel provide direct evidence of the firearms types present at the engagement. The recovered firearm evidence can be compared with official records listing weapon types issued to various groups in order to attribute identity to the individual or unit patterns. The analysis of Union and Confederate unit patterns within the context of the battlefield landscape is the key in determining how the actions and movements of the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf unfolded.

Historical Evidence

Although historical documentation is not extensive on the firearm types present at the battle, official records note the weapons originally issued to certain Union and Confederate participants. All documentation is taken from Record Groups 94, 109, and 156, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C., as listed in Coates and Thomas (1990).

Firearm and artillery types are known for the Union participants at the battle. In 1863, the 1st U.S.C.T. was originally issued .69 caliber 1842 Smoothbore muskets, but were upgraded to .58 caliber Springfield rifled muskets for the 1864 campaign against Richmond. The 10th U.S.C.T was issued .577 caliber Enfield rifled muskets that could fire the same .58 caliber ammunition as the Springfield. Battery M of the 3rd New York Light Artillery manned two 10-pounder Parrott guns, while the Union gunboat Dawn was armed with a 100-pounder rifle, 20-pounder rifle, and a rifled 12-pounder Howitzer.

Firearm types are known for several Confederate regiments present at the engagement. Documentation identifies some of the arms issued to the 1st, 6th, and
15th Virginia Cavalry and the 2nd North Carolina Cavalry. The 1st Virginia Cavalry was issued Hall carbines, Merrill carbines, and Colt Army and Navy revolvers. The 6th Virginia Cavalry was issued Burnside carbines and Hall carbines. The 15th Virginia Cavalry was issued Colt Army revolvers. The most detailed records for issued firearms are known for the 2nd North Carolina Cavalry. The Tarheel regiment was issued the following arms: M1842 .69 caliber rifled musket, .577 Enfield rifled musket, .577 Enfield rifled musket w/ saber bayonet, .54 caliber Austrian rifle muskets, Spencer rifles, Burnside carbines, Sharps carbines, and Smith carbines.

Archaeological Evidence

The archaeological record not only confirms the documentary evidence but also provides new insight regarding the firearm types present at the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf. The survey identified at least eight different small arms and one artillery gun type which are as follows: Springfield rifled musket, Enfield rifled musket, shotgun (.31 caliber), Colt Army revolver, Sharps carbine, Starr carbine, Colt revolving rifle, .69 caliber musket, and a 10-pounder Parrott rifled-gun. In several cases, only one or two specimen types were recovered.

The most common bullet type recovered was the .58 caliber bullet represented by the Minie ball (n=77), Williams Cleaner (n=15), Enfield-type (n=3), and Gardner (n=2). All ammunition of this type could be fired from both the Springfield Rifled Musket and Enfield Rifled Musket. The North issued the .58 caliber Minie ball to be used in either firearm. Since the 1st U.S.C.T was armed with Springfields and the 10th U.S.C.T. with Enfields it is probable that the recovered Minie balls and Williams Cleaners were associated with the Federal troops. However, the historical record
indicates the 2nd North Carolina Cavalry was issued Enfields at some point during the
war. It is possible that some of the Minie balls or Williams Cleaners represent
Confederate positions, given the propensity of the South to supply their troops with
captured Federal goods. The recovery of three British Enfield bullets and two
Southern-made Gardner bullets further corroborates the use of .58 caliber rifled
muskets by the Confederates as only the South issued these ammunition types.

The distribution pattern of the .31 caliber lead shot (n=30) suggests a battle
association. The shot may be associated with weapons of the Confederate cavalry as
the ammunition type was clustered amid battle-related artifacts. The majority of the
shot was recovered within Lee's Ravine (Area 3), an area the survey identified as the
scene of intense combat action.

The .44 caliber pistol bullets (n=14) may represent the use of the Colt Army
revolver by the Confederate cavalrmen. The documentary record indicates both the
1st and the 15th Virginia Cavalry were issued this type of firearm. The revolver
ammunition was recovered only within Lee's Ravine (Area 3) and may indicate the
presence of the 1st and/or 15th Regiment within this section of the battlefield. The 1st
Virginia Cavalry was part of Wickham's Brigade that participated in the main attack
on the eastern side of the garrison. The 15th Virginia cavalry was attached to
Lomax's Brigade under the command of Colonel Dunovant and participated in the
demonstration on the north and west side of the fortification. The recovery of the .44
caliber bullets within Area 3 confirms Wild's report of the use of the wooded ravine
by the Confederates to conceal their movements during the engagement (ORUCA
1891: 270).
The recovery of Sharps ammunition (n=15) confirms the use of the firearm by the Confederates. The sparse historical record identifies that Sharps carbines were issued to the 2nd North Carolina Cavalry. The 2nd participated in Wickham’s main charge on the Union right. As Sharps bullets were distributed throughout the battlefield site and not just to the east of the fortification, it appears that troopers other than the 2nd were armed with Sharps. It is possible other Confederate troopers were issued Sharps carbines given the popularity of the firearm.

Two weapon types not listed in the documentary evidence were identified in the archaeological record. The retrieval of Starr carbine (n=4) and Colt revolving rifle (n=1) ammunition confirms Confederate use of captured Federal supplies since no Southern troops present at the battle were issued either firearm. The recovery of Starr bullets to the north and to the west of the fortification may represent the movement of one trooper during Dunovant’s feint on the Union front and left. The second possibility is that more than one Confederate participant was armed with a Starr carbine during the engagement. The Colt revolving rifle bullet, while represented by a single dropped specimen, was recovered in proximity to other Confederate bullets and provided confirmation of a Confederate position to the north of Lee’s Ravine (Area 2).

The .69 caliber roundballs (n=2) may indicate the use of smoothbore muskets by the Confederates. While no Confederate participants were officially issued smoothbore muskets due to the unfeasibility of the longarm for mounted use, Confederate troopers may have used the smoothbores during the dismounted attack on the fort. The roundballs may have also been deposited by Union artillery fire.
This idea is further corroborated as one roundball (MD 32) was recovered near the Parrott shell fragment within Area 1.

The recovery of a nose-end fragment of a 10-pounder Parrott shell confirms the presence of the two 10-pounder Parrott rifles manned by Battery M of the 3rd New York Light Artillery. The Union artillerymen appear to have fired upon a Confederate position located within Area 1. Small, unidentified shrapnel fragments (n=3) are associated with either the Union guns of the 3rd New York or the Dawn, given their location around the perimeter of the fortification.

**Movements and Actions at the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf**

The following synthesis combines the archaeological evidence with the historical documentation to form an interpretation of the actions at the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf. To interpret the movements, it was necessary to separate the battle into a series of discrete events. These divisions are identified for discussion purposes only, as actions on the battlefield were continuous and evolving. Only in hindsight does the conflict have definable elements.

**Initial Confederate Attack**

Confederate Major General Fitzhugh Lee arrived at Wilson’s Wharf around noon on May 24, 1864 and promptly ordered a mounted cavalry charge on the Union pickets posted some distance from the garrison. Companies C and F of the 1st U.S.C.T. initially checked the troopers, however, some of the Union pickets were cut off and captured. Lee then ordered his cavalrymen to dismount and attack the fortification on foot. Lee’s men formed a line of battle and marched through the field located to the north of Area 2. Private Henry St. George Tucker Brooke, Co. B, 2nd
Virginia Cavalry described the initial attack on the fort. Brooke notes the Confederates began at “the river” and charged across a field where they came to a deep ravine 50 yards in width. Brooke’s description of “the field” corresponds with the area between the swampy arm of Kennons Creek to the north and Lee’s Ravine to the south.

Area 2 is situated within the southern end of “the field” and contains a concentration of fired Union bullets and dropped Confederate bullets. The evidence may represent the “destructive fire” encountered by the cavalrmen as they reached the ravine. However the pattern may also be attributed to the retreating Federal pickets firing at the Confederate skirmishers. The concentration confirms the southward movement of the Confederate troops across the field and toward Lee’s Ravine.

The large quantity and intermixing of Confederate and Union bullets within Lee’s Ravine confirms the movement of both armies through the drainage feature. The Confederates drove the Union pickets through the ravine and into the fortification. A group of Federal troops appear to have utilized a drainage cut to exit the ravine. A heavy concentration of dropped Union bullets was recovered at the top of the cut indicating the pickets regrouped to make a stand against the advancing Confederates. A matching concentration of fired Union bullets at the bottom of the drainage cut identifies the position of pursuing Confederates.

_Dunovant’s Attack on the Union Left_

After the Confederates halted at “the deep ravine” (Lee’s Ravine), Lee directed Dunovant to make a demonstration against the upper (north) and opposite
(west) side of the fortification. The purpose was to draw the Union attention away from Wickham’s main attack on the Union right. For the feint on the Union left, Dunovant appears to have followed a small rise to the river in order to raise havoc on passing transports and the Union signal station. Union Lt. Simonton noted the unfinished condition of the line on the Union left and commented how “the enemy could easily and successfully have charged upon the works.” A small ravine to the west of the fort may have prevented the Confederates from easily overrunning the Union garrison.

A small concentration of ammunition was recovered at the top of the rise within Area 4. The dropped Confederate bullets and the fired Union bullets confirm the presence of the Confederate position to the west of the fortification.

Dunovant’s Attack on the Union Center

While a section of Dunovant’s troops moved against the Union left, the remainder of his command assaulted the Union center. The feint against the north side of the garrison appears to have followed along the west side of the old access road for the wharf. The road, which appears on an 1863 Confederate map (Gilmer 1863), divides the fortification in half and is still in use today.

A mixed concentration of dropped and fired bullets associated with both participants appears to indicate a running fight occurred as the Confederates drove the Union pickets into the fort. A line of ten dropped Union bullets hints that a Federal soldier lost an entire bundle of cartridges in his haste for the safety of the earthworks. The recovery a 10-pounder Parrott shell fragment and a .69 caliber roundball suggests
Battery M of the 3rd New York Light Artillery may have halted the Confederate advance with well-placed artillery fire.

_Wickham’s Main Charge on the Union Right_

While Dunovant conducted his operations against the Union left and center, Lee ordered Wickham to attack the Union right. The east side of the fortification was the most complete, and therefore the strongest, at the time of the engagement. Wickham had the cavalrmen move through Lee’s Ravine in order to conceal their movements against the garrison. The troopers followed the feature until they encountered the swamp located at the southern turn of the ravine. As the marshy ground hindered the movement of the soldiers, the Confederate attack could not encompass the entire east side of the garrison. The main Confederate charge moved up and out of Lee’s Ravine and then across Area 5 (Large Circular Rise) against the east bastion of the fortification.

The low number of recovered artifacts suggests the Confederates did not focus the main attack against the eastern side of the garrison. Rather, it appears Wickham’s charge may have been concentrated against the east bastion, located in the northeast corner of the fortification.

**Conclusion**

The 2000 Wilson’s Wharf ABPP Survey resulted in identification and documentation of the May 24, 1864 engagement. A systematic metal detector survey, in conjunction with in-depth historical research, provided an efficient and effective means of evaluating the battle site. Metal detectors, if operated in a controlled manner by experienced professional archaeologists, can be a cost-effective approach.
The technology allows the researcher to examine the large areas encompassed by most battlefields without expending the countless hours testing and excavating. The survey was able to sample approximately 658,500 sq. ft. of the battlefield area over a four-day period.

The investigation recovered 205 artifacts relating to the Battle of Wilson’s Wharf. An analysis of the distribution of the artifacts throughout the battlefield landscape provided new insight into the order of the engagement. The archaeological evidence not only demonstrated a positive correlation with the historical record, but also provided new information regarding areas in which the written accounts were incomplete or silent. The strength of this type of investigation lies in its ability to draw together the documentary and archaeological record to form a richer account of the past.

The archaeological evidence supported the notion that the battle encompassed the north, east, and west sides of the fortification. The investigation identified Lee’s Ravine (Area 3) as an area of intense fighting, given the relatively large quantity of recovered artifacts. The ravine proved to be the circuitous and wooded route used by the Confederates to conceal their movements. Other Confederate positions were located throughout the study areas.

Perhaps the most significant departure between the historical and archaeological records was the location of Wickham’s main attack on the fortification. Historic accounts placed the charge on the Union right, however few battle-remains were recovered to the east of the fortification. The archaeological evidence suggests the Confederates moved eastward through Lee’s Ravine but were
forced to stop when they reached the swamp located in the southern end of the ravine. Wickham’s troopers may have charged only the east bastion rather than the entire eastern side of the fortification.

This thesis presents the Wilson’s Wharf battlefield as a cultural landscape of conflict in order to examine the full context of the May 24, 1864 battle event. The examination of the artifactual residue of the battle patterned within the cultural landscape, combined with an analysis of the historical documentation, reveals a multifaceted view of the behavioral processes that guided the actions of those men who fought and died at Wilson’s Wharf. The historical archaeological examination of any battlefield landscape must apply both the humanistic concern for meaning and intention with the scientific concern for form, behavior, and conditions. The Wilson’s Wharf study relied on a multievidential approach that maintained a balance between the historical and archaeological record in order to determine how the context of the battlefield landscape was negotiated and modified during the engagement.

The concern with the context of a specific battle can be viewed as particularistic however each engagement is unique with its own set of parameters. Whereas a domestic site may be occupied for decades, the average engagement lasts only a few hours to a few days and thus a battle event is hypersensitive to particular variables such as terrain, weather, tactics, armament, and individuals involved. These variables make up the historical and archaeological “facts” of a battle event and form the foundation of any battlefield interpretation.
However, for battlefield studies to be relevant to the field of historical archaeology, researchers must go beyond the traditional concern with historical and archaeological facts in order to establish behavioral patterns that speak to the larger behavioral processes at work during combat. Through a comparison of the spatial and contextual relationships between battle-related artifacts, the Wilson’s Wharf study examines the patterns visible within the cultural landscape in order to interpret the battle events of May 24, 1864.

The Wilson’s Wharf battlefield landscape is viewed not as a physical but as a social construct that is modified and negotiated according to a set of cultural plans. When the Union army arrived at Wilson’s Wharf they set about manipulating the cultural landscape in order to create a defensible position for the garrison. The Federal soldiers set about clearing trees, digging ditches, building earthworks, and constructing shelters according to a prescribed set of military plans. When the Confederate cavalry attacked the Union garrison, the troopers also followed prescribed tactics by dismounting to assault the fortified position. The dismounted cavalrymen were forced to not only negotiate the man-made defense works of the Federal army but also the fields, swamps, ravines, woods, and waterways that make up the cultural landscape of Wilson’s Wharf. For example, Confederate troopers were unable to encompass the Federal right flank due to the presence of a large swamp. Also, the Federal control of the James River allowed the Union gunboat Dawn to provide a timely barrage that helped drive off the main Confederate attack. Ultimately the successful manipulation of the cultural landscape aided in the Union victory.
This study of the Wilson's Wharf battlefield landscape is meant not as an all-encompassing interpretation of the battle but rather as a foundation for future research. While the project only sampled the battlefield area, it provides an initial step in the examination of the behavioral processes that shaped the Battle of Wilson's Wharf. Future research is recommended within areas not examined during the present study in order to develop a more detailed view of the spatial and contextual patterning of battle-related artifacts.
APPENDIX

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

Recommendations for additional archaeological study of the battlefield are presented below in current order of priority. The order is based on judgments of research potential for specific areas, gauged by degree of archaeological preservation, quality of archaeological evidence, and completeness of current knowledge; in short, those areas that offer the greatest potential to contribute relevant information about the least known aspects of the May 24, 1864 engagement.

Perimeter Areas

The boundaries of the battlefield should be identified in order to develop a preservation plan for the site. The ultimate goal of site improvements at Fort Pocahontas is to prepare for public interpretation during regular, guided tours and special events such as re-enactments. Much of the impact to the site comes from the development of roads and other facilities to accommodate visitors to the fort. Until the size of the engagement area is delineated, the archaeological remains of the battle will remain at risk. Once the limits of the site are known, a plan can be implemented to protect the archaeological record from modern disturbances.

The examination of the perimeter areas can also provide much needed insight into the areal extent and opening and closing actions of the battle. More information is needed regarding the location of the initial skirmish between Lee's mounted troopers and Companies C and F of the 1st U.S.C.T and the final path of Lee's retreat.

Area 1
Further archaeological testing should expand Area 1 to the north and west in order to provide a fuller account of the battle within the vicinity. Expansion of the area would answer questions regarding the Confederate attack on the north side of the fortification.

**Area 2 - “The Field”**

The large tract of land located between Area 2 and the arm of Kennons Creek to the north warrants further investigation to determine if it contains the initial Confederate line of battle. Private Henry St. George Tucker Brooke, Co. B., 2nd Virginia Cavalry portrayed a similar area in his account of the battle. He noted that the regiment marched to Kennons Creek and drew into a line of battle. The Confederates then charged across a field where they suddenly came to a deep ravine 50 yards across. Brooke’s regiment may have formed into a battle line and marched across the field situated to the north of Area 2 only to be forced to halt when they reached Lee’s Ravine (Area 3). An expanded survey of the area would recover evidence of “the destructive fire” poured into the Confederates as they charged across. The destructive fire noted by Brooke may refer to the 100-pounder ordinance projected by the Union gunboat *Dawn* as another member of the 2nd Virginia Cavalry recalled the terrifying sight of the shells flying over.

**Area 4 – Powerline Cut**

Area 4 should be expanded near the small Civil War artifact concentration in order to recover more evidence of Dunovant’s attack on the Union left. Further investigation can determine the extent of the Confederate presence in this area and the location from which the 5th South Carolina Cavalry “sharpshooters” raised havoc on
passing transports. Archaeological testing may reveal evidence of the Union signal station situated to the west of the fort.

**Area 5 – Large Circular Rise**

The Large Circular Rise should be examined for evidence of Wickham's charge out of the ravine. The small sample area investigated in 2000 displayed evidence of heavy fighting. Further testing may confirm the rise was the scene of the repulse of the main Confederate attack against the fortification. The distribution of ammunition types within the area would answer a major question regarding the battle: was the artillery fire from the Union gunboat *Dawn* responsible for the turning back Wickham's charge as indicated in the historic record? If this is the case then Area 5 should be littered with projectile fragments like those fired from the gunboat.
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