

**JOHNSONVILLE:
THE EVOLUTION, DEFENSE, AND DEMISE OF THE UNION'S
TENNESSEE RIVER SUPPLY DEPOT, 1790-1890**

by

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ABSTRACT

Johnsonville was a Union army supply depot on the Tennessee River during the American Civil War from 1863 to 1865. This dissertation reveals what happened at Johnsonville, why the activities that occurred there are significant, and offers an assessment of the contributions of supply depots to the eventual Union victory. I first review the Trace Creek region and Johnsonville's pre-Civil War history. Next, I address how Union strategy and policy led to the creation of Johnsonville and what this isolated river and railroad post contributed to Union forces in the Western Theater. Third, I address the role of African-Americans and Johnsonville's garrison forces, which included a combination of both white and African-American troops living and working together. Fourth, I explore the inner workings of the Johnsonville supply depot then revisit the activity by Union forces in the fall of 1864 including an overview of the Battle of Johnsonville and what happened to the supply depot. Finally, I conclude with the post-war memory and public history practice at Johnsonville State Historical Park and how scholarship has shaped its development in the twenty-first century.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAG – Assistant Adjutant-General

AAIG – Acting Assistant Inspector-General

AAQM – Acting Assistant Quartermaster

AIG – Assistant Inspector-General

AQM – Assistant Quartermaster

ARA – Acting Rear-Admiral

AVL – Acting Volunteer Lieutenant (Navy)

BG – Brigadier General

CAPT - Captain

COL – Colonel (Army)

COM – Commander (Navy)

CPL – Corporal

L&N – Louisville and Nashville Railroad

LT – Lieutenant

LTC – Lieutenant Colonel (Army)

LTCMDR - Lieutenant Commander (Navy)

LTG – Lieutenant General (Army)

MG – Major General

N&C – Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad

NC&STL – Nashville, Chattanooga, and St. Louis Railroad

NNWRR – Nashville and Northwestern Railroad

OR – Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies

ORN – Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies

PDR – Pounder (such as 20-PDR Parrott Guns)

PVT – Private

ROHC – Registrar’s Office of Humphreys County

SGT – Sergeant

SHA – State Historic Area

SHP – State Historic Park

TSLA – Tennessee State Library and Archives

USCT – United States Colored Troops

USS – United States Ship

INTRODUCTION

America's Civil War was in its third year when, in 1863, impressed African-American civilian laborers and a variety of African-American and white soldiers and engineers succeeded in building a military railroad through Cheatham, Dickson, and Humphreys counties in Middle Tennessee. The purpose of the railroad was to provide an overland connection between Nashville, the central base for Union operations and an ascent river port, and a depot for receiving and shipping military supplies, which had been built on the eastern edge of the Tennessee River in Humphreys County. The place was called Johnsonville, named for Tennessee's Military Governor at the time, Andrew Johnson. In the spring of 1864, as the war progressed into the Deep South, the Union's military strategy in the western theater shifted to one based on attrition – the south would be bled and starved to death. To achieve this, Federal officials directed an enormous flow of supplies to front-line troops in Tennessee and Georgia. Johnsonville became central to the federal train of logistical support directed at Major General William T. Sherman for his army in Georgia and to Major General George H. Thomas in Nashville in the fall of 1864.

The contributions of the Johnsonville supply depot to Union operations in the western theater have never been fully assessed. This Tennessee River supply depot included almost every subject associated with Civil War military operations: black and white infantry soldiers, sailors and naval vessels, cavalry troopers, engineers, field and naval artillery, quartermaster personnel, officers, civilian laborers, administrators, and citizens (men, women and children), politicians, horses and mules, trains, towns, forts, food, and burials.

The task of illustrating Johnsonville's significance during the Civil War, or just being able to comprehend its many facets, is challenging. Johnsonville evolved from a convoluted mix of ideas and themes that included elements of geography, agriculture, engineering, emancipation, supply, and combat. More than a year and a half after the Union's occupation of Nashville in February 1862, its army still lacked any sort of defined plan for defeating the Confederacy. Even by the summer of 1863, the Union army, which was operating all over Middle and West Tennessee and Northern Alabama, still had no solid plan for how to supply its forces operating in the field. Since the war had moved so rapidly into the Deep South, the lack of railroads posed the biggest challenge to the Union army in having the ability to rapidly supply troops in the field. This transportation challenge is why Johnsonville was built as a quick fix for a critical need.

Past scholarship on Johnsonville has consistently addressed the same three themes: the Confederate's two-week long Fort Heiman-Johnsonville Tennessee River campaign from mid-October 1864 to early November 1864; the Confederate victory at the Battle of Johnsonville on November 4-5, 1864; and the role of Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest and his Confederate troops in one of the last Confederate tactical victories in the Western Theater. Unfortunately, this singular focus on the battle, Forrest's role, and its designation of the last "great" Confederate victory in the western theater, is reflected, and reinforced, in the Lost Cause historiography of the Civil War. Aside from the largely Confederate combat stories about the Battle of Johnsonville, what else happened at Johnsonville has been ignored.

In 1971, the State of Tennessee established Johnsonville State Historic Area at the original location of the Civil War-era depot site in Humphreys County, Tennessee. The park has two existing original Civil War redoubts (forts) and a mile-long line of original rifle pits constructed by United States Colored Troops and various white regiments in 1863-64. In 1977, a museum opened to the public near the Lower Redoubt, the small fort that guarded the supply depot at Johnsonville and where Union gunners returned cannon fire during the Battle of Johnsonville on November 4-5, 1864. However, early interpretive exhibits and signage offered a limited and inaccurate visitor experience because the interpretation was presented from a victorious Confederate perspective and excluded details about the Union supply depot, the role of United States Colored Troops, and its contributions in helping the Union win the war. In this initial installation, park officials displayed some Civil War artifacts, but most of the exhibits centered on Confederate history.

The Union story about the building of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad, the construction of the supply depot and earthen fortifications, the defenders of Johnsonville which included both black and white infantry and artillery regiments, the Union gunners' tough resistance (as attested to by Forrest himself) during the Battle of Johnsonville, and the fact that the sole reason the town of Johnsonville was built, and still exists today as New Johnsonville, is due to the efforts of the Union army, nowhere to be seen or heard. The park from 1971 to 2011 was largely a recreational experience.

In addition to Johnsonville's Civil War story, the park includes building foundations from the town of Johnsonville that existed at the site from the 1863 to 1944. These cultural elements, including the Civil War earthworks, are the reason that

Johnsonville was initially designated as a state historic area in 1969. Cultural resources provide a variety of public history themes about the citizens of Johnsonville such as the existing African-American cemetery, the Civil War depot and battle, and the post-Civil War town site that the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) flooded with the creation of Kentucky Lake in 1944. In 2012, a new visitor center opened with updated exhibits about the Civil War depot and the town of Johnsonville. As a topic in Civil War scholarship and cultural resources management, this dissertation provides a rationale for public history's contemporary relevance at Johnsonville that are similar to comparable Civil War fortifications as Clarksville's Fort Defiance and Fort Donelson National Battlefield in Dover.

The primary question answered in this study is how did the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad, the Union supply depot, and troops located at Johnsonville ultimately contribute to the Union's overall victory in 1865? The conclusion provides an assessment of Johnsonville's post-war memory and the cultural resources that still remain from the Civil War. Additionally, the historical information presented in this dissertation should be used to assist park interpreters in conducting tours and for conducting living history programs, and to address future interpretive ideas that park staff and public historians may consider.

CHAPTER ONE

BEFORE THE SOLDIERS CAME: SETTLEMENT IN THE TRACE CREEK REGION

This place known as Johnsonville has a deep history, rooted to the role of the Tennessee River in the settlement and development of the state. The geographical area where Johnsonville was established in 1864 is known as the Trace Creek region; named for a tributary that flows year-round through a scenic valley of open meadows and forests. The Trace Creek region nearest the Tennessee River is considered to be one of Humphreys County's oldest habitable areas, both by Native Americans and white settlements. This geographical region was in Middle Tennessee's northwestern angle of the Highland Rim. The Highland Rim, which extends west to the Tennessee River valley, encircles the Cumberland Basin (also called the Nashville Basin), a geological anomaly that resembles an oval fish bowl with an elevation of just 600-feet above sea level.¹ Trace Creek begins at the western edge of Dickson County. The scenic tributary is twenty miles long and it winds west through the present-day town of Waverly, Tennessee. The creek empties into the Tennessee River five hundred yards north of the area that would become Johnsonville in 1864.²

Where Trace Creek derived its name is somewhat of a mystery. It is known that prior to 1800 Trace Creek was called Brevard's Creek, named for Alexander Brevard, the first Revolutionary War land grant recipient in the Trace Creek region.³ However, by the

¹ John Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 3.

² Jill Knight Garrett, *The History of Humphreys County, Tennessee* (Columbia, Tennessee (Self-published), 1963, 11.

³ Ibid.

time settlers entered the Trace Creek region between 1800 and 1802, the name “Brevard’s Creek” had passed from usage and *Trace* Creek had become its adopted namesake from that point forward.⁴

It is possible that the name *Trace* Creek was derived from the Lower Harpeth and West Tennessee Trail or its more popular name from the period, the Chickasaw Trace. This *trace* was an ancient buffalo trail that had been heavily used by the Chickasaw Indians as an east-west thoroughfare across Middle Tennessee.⁵ In *Indian Trails of the Southeast*, William Myer illustrates how the Lower Harpeth and West Tennessee Trail “continued down Trace Creek until within two miles of the Tennessee River, where it turned north to the crossing of the Tennessee. Trace Creek is so called because this old Indian trace ran near it.”⁶ Settlers called it Glover’s Trace, named for William Glover, a Chickasaw tribal leader. It is likely that the earliest white settlers who emigrated from the eastern United States and settled in the Tennessee River Valley, especially in Humphreys County, used the Glover’s Trace to get there.⁷

In the years following the initial Humphreys County settlements around 1800, it would have been natural for someone to refer to the trail, or *trace*, that followed alongside Brevard’s Creek, simply as *trace* creek, especially at that time when settlers were familiar with the more popular Natchez Trace. Since the Trace Creek region was mainly unsettled before whites arrived, the name Brevard or Brevard’s Creek (likely

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ William E. Myer, “Indian Trails of the Southeast,” *Forty-Second Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, To the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1924-1925* (Washington: The United States Government Printing Office, 1928), 852-853; Wayne Moore, “Farm Communities and Economic Growth in the Lower Tennessee Valley: Humphreys County, Tennessee, 1785-1980,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Rochester, 1990, 76-78.

⁶ Myer, “Indian Trails of the Southeast,” 852-853.

⁷ Jonathan K. T. Smith., *An Historical Survey of the Road System of Benton County, Tennessee* (Memphis, TN: Published by Author, 1976), 12-13.

called that by Brevard himself or others he employed), was probably dropped simply because the name Brevard was unknown, misinterpreted, or just not remembered in letters written to and from families in the east. Instead, the word *trace* was easy to remember. Therefore, it is likely that the naming of Trace Creek happened simply by default.

Like many Tennessee counties, Humphreys County has prominent rivers and waterways like the Duck River, Hurricane Creek, Little Dry Creek, Big Richland Creek, White Oak Creek and Trace Creek. As Trace Creek winds its way through Humphreys County, it continues west through the hills of Trace Creek valley, then gradually widens before terminating at the Tennessee River near Johnsonville.⁸

Reconstructing exactly when whites first stepped into the Trace Creek region is difficult to determine. Archaeological evidence points to the possibility of Spanish expeditions that advanced north up the Tennessee River during the late 1530's and 1540's.⁹ Scholars of this period suggest that the Spanish explorer, Hernando De Soto, explored the region where the Tennessee River (the Spanish called it the "River of Espiritu Santo") flows into to the Ohio River, and constructed a fortification there in present-day southern Illinois. The location of this Spanish fortification is identified on "The Desoto Map," a modern, reconstructed map originally produced in 1544 and is the earliest known map that describes the interior of North America. This map shows a

⁸ Garrett, 3-6.

⁹ Lawrence A. Clayton, Vernon James Knight, Jr., and Edward C. Moore, eds., *The DeSoto Chronicles: The Expeditions of Hernando De Soto to North America in 1539-1543*, Vol. II (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 520. See also the configuration of the Tennessee River on "The Desoto Map" in John R. Swanton, *Final Report* (Washington, DC, 1928), 343.

fortification below the mouth of the Tennessee River on the north side of the Ohio River. Today, this is the current site of Fort Massac in southern Illinois.¹⁰

Archeological examples and other material culture of Spanish explorations in America are important because they provide evidence that white Europeans entered the Tennessee River valley by watercraft and apparently explored the Tennessee River and possibly as far south as the Trace Creek region. During Desoto's expeditions, it is likely that his parties hunted for game and collected food such as mussels, persimmons, walnuts, and sassafras leaves in the upper and middle Tennessee River valley. This area included the Trace Creek region.¹¹

A century and a half later, the French and British arrived. Local historians from Cheatham, Davidson, Dickson, Hickman, Humphreys, Montgomery and Stewart counties concur that French and British traders, in addition to soldiers from these countries, moved into the Tennessee River valley from west Tennessee (through the Chickasaw nation) in the early 1700's.¹² In Middle Tennessee, the French appear to have explored the Tennessee River Valley and even established permanent living in the Cumberland Basin, known also as the Nashville Basin. Frenchmen such as Martin Chartier, a trader who arrived in 1690, and Jean de Charleville, who also appeared in 1710, operated trading posts near French Lick, the future site of Nashville. Existing French maps of this era illustrate the Cumberland River as "Riviere des Chaouanons," or, the Shawnee River. Since the 1670's, fragmented bands of Shawnee Indians had lived and hunted the area

¹⁰ Charles Hudson, *Knights of Spain, Warriors of the Sun: Hernando de Soto and the South's Ancient Chiefdoms* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 453-54.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 464-65.

¹² Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers*, 25-30.

together with a mix of proto-Creek Indians and a few bands of eastern Cherokees.¹³ To the west of French Lick, the Chickasaw Indians occupied practically all of the area that encompasses today's Cheatham, Dickson, Hickman, Houston, Humphreys, Perry, and Stewart counties.¹⁴

Local historians have also suggested that during the French and Indian War (1754-1766), French and British soldiers were active in the Tennessee River Valley. No primary source, however, supports this claim. It is unlikely that French and British soldiers entered the valley in the 1750's and 1760's considering that there were no military targets in the frontier of the western Tennessee River Valley, and specifically in the Trace Creek region, that warranted the infiltration of military troops.¹⁵ The Lyman Draper manuscripts at the Wisconsin Historical Society, which include collections of writings and correspondence from a variety of early American settlers, offer no evidence that situates European soldiers in the Tennessee River Valley either before or after the 1760's.¹⁶

Throughout the 1770's, hunters came to the Tennessee River valley. When they arrived, these men used canoes and flatboats to ply the rivers, creeks, and small tributaries and to hunt big game. At times, such expeditions could involve up to sixty persons. Hunters traveled by land following buffalo traces (paths) and deer trails on

¹³ Ibid, 27.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Fred Anderson, *The Crucible of War: The Seven Years War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 453-458; Finger, 25-29.

¹⁶ Anderson, *The Crucible of War*, 457-458; Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers*, 38-40; Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in Frederick J. Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt Publishers, 1920), 1-38.

horseback, pack mules, and oxen.¹⁷ The sponsors of these expeditions were normally uninterested in land purchase. Instead, they wanted big game pelts only in order to accommodate the demands of a continent-wide fur trade.¹⁸

In *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition*, historian John Finger illustrates how early visitors to Middle Tennessee during the 1770's and 1780's discovered herds of buffalo "bellowing... from the hills and forests."¹⁹ In *The Long Hunt: Death of the Buffalo East of the Mississippi*, historian Ted Belue supplies widespread evidence of buffalo in Middle Tennessee. In southwestern Middle Tennessee, Belue describes the widespread "slaughter and despoliation" that accompanied the great mammal.²⁰ Big game expeditions offered men the freedom they so regularly sought from wilderness adventures outside of city or village life. For example, on June 24, 1784, a journal entry by early Tennessee traveler, John Lipscomb, described how "his merry gang...did little else than ride through the countryside blasting away at wildlife, getting drunk, and frolicking with tavern girls."²¹

Another Tennessee hunter was Lewis Brantz, who in the winter of 1793-94, wrote that "herds of buffalo" had been "considerably hunted by the woodsmen" and were now "diminished in number."²² Brantz's account is important as it reveals evidence of white hunters in the Tennessee River valley west of the French Lick (Nashville). Considering that Brantz wrote extensively about witnessing buffalo in the 1790's near Nashville, other

¹⁷ Ted Franklin Belue, *The Long Hunt: Death of the Buffalo East of the Mississippi* (Mechanicsburg: PA, Stackpole Books, 1996), 16-17.

¹⁸ Moore, "Farm Communities," 46; Belue, *The Long Hunt*, 51-53.

¹⁹ Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers*, 75.

²⁰ Belue, 159.

²¹ Samuel Cole Williams, *Early Travels in the Tennessee Country 1540-1800* (Johnson City, TN: Watuga Press, 1928), 276.

²² Belue, 159-161.

early hunters such as Joseph Bishop, John Montgomery, and the famous French botanist, Francois Andre Michaux, also witnessed buffalo in Montgomery, Stewart, and Robertson counties between 1793 and 1795.²³

As more white hunters heard stories about the abundance of “game, springs, streams, timber and natural grasslands” in the Cumberland Basin and Tennessee River valley, they too came to hunt big game and harvest their furs.²⁴ Historians attest that buffalo and most of the other big game, such as deer, elk, and bear, were virtually hunted out by the 1820’s.²⁵ However, despite the reduction of buffalo and other quadrupeds, smaller game like turkey, squirrels, beaver, and fox, including hordes of waterfowl, were still plentiful enough to help sustain the survival of most settlers in Middle Tennessee.²⁶

In 1777, the state of North Carolina first created political boundaries in present-day Tennessee by establishing Washington County and its seat of Jonesboro.²⁷ Two years after the Revolutionary War ended, the state of North Carolina passed the Act of 1783, which allowed for the establishment of a military district in the Cumberland Valley. This act provided opportunities for soldiers who had served in the Continental Line to purchase one hundred acres inside the military district at a price of ten pounds.²⁸

During the first three years after the Revolutionary War, 1782-1785, land surveyors from the east, especially North Carolina, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, arrived in

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Finger, 3.

²⁵ Belue, 162-164.

²⁶ Ibid, 2-3, 14, 156-60; Thomas B. Abernathy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee: A Study in Frontier Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932), 65-66; Williams, *Early Travels in the Tennessee Country 1540-1800*, 75-76.

²⁷ John Haywood, *The Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee: From Its earliest Settlement Up to the Year 1796 including the Boundaries of the State*, 2nd ed. (Knoxville: Tenase Company, 1969), 69-72.

²⁸ Ibid.

Middle Tennessee and began laying out tracts for settlement.²⁹ For the Trace Creek region, probably the most influential Revolutionary War land grant recipient (land grant No. 260), was Captain Alexander Brevard of Lincoln County, North Carolina.³⁰ From 1786 through the 1820's, Brevard was arguably the most important figure to enter the Trace Creek region. His ingenuity brought business to the area which ultimately increased the region's population. In 1785, Brevard paid surveyors Martin Armstrong and Henry Rutherford a large sum to survey land just north of Trace Creek.³¹ Two chain carriers, James Tate and James Robertson, accompanied Armstrong and Rutherford. Robertson later was the man who would become the "Father of Middle Tennessee."³²

Together, Armstrong and Rutherford surveyed a total of 3,840 acres for Brevard. The surveyed tracts included all the land located north of Little Dry Creek and south of Trace Creek, each bordered by the Tennessee River. The surveyed tracts were completed on May 11, 1785, and Brevard was officially granted this land by the State of North Carolina on March 14, 1786.³³ Twenty-eight years later, in 1814, Brevard would pay another surveyor, Benjamin Hudson, to re-survey his land. Hudson would discover that Brevard's land actually consisted instead of 4,009 acres.³⁴

²⁹ Walter T. Durham, *Daniel Smith: Frontier Statesman* (Gallatin, TN: Sumner County Library Board, 1976), 85.

³⁰ Registrar's Office of Humphreys County (hereafter ROHC), *Deed Book A: 1810-1816*, 74, 111-112; Humphreys County Land Grant Book, A-1 (Revolutionary), Grant #260, warrant #761, microfilm, TSLA, Nashville, TN, 131.

³¹ Lyman Draper to Henry Rutherford, 1844, Lyman Copeland Draper Manuscript Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society (Madison), 29 s, microfilm, 55-66. (Hereafter cited as Draper Manuscripts).

³² Ibid; P.T. Glass, "Sketch of Henry Rutherford," *American Historical Magazine*, V, No. 3 (July, 1900): 225-29.

³³ ROHC, *Deed Book A*, 74, 111-12; Humphreys County Land Grant Book, A-1 (Revolutionary), Grant #260, warrant #761, microfilm, TSLA, Nashville, TN, 131.

³⁴ Jonathan K.T. Smith, *The Wylly Saga* (Memphis: Padmoor Press, 1981), 19; ROHC, *Deed Book A*, 111-12.

Armstrong and Rutherford also surveyed most of the Humphreys County lands granted to brothers William and John Gray Blount, the richest of all land holders in Tennessee.³⁵ William Blount's desire for land purchase was insatiable. He owned 1,280 acres at the mouth of Dry Creek in addition to thousands of other acres in Humphreys County and in areas that would spawn the town of Clarksville in Montgomery County in 1786.

Another North Carolina surveyor, Isaac Roberts, also entered the region in 1785 and conducted surveys of 5,000-acre tracts for Memucan Hunt Howard and at points opposite the junctions of the Duck and Tennessee Rivers near Trace Creek.³⁶ Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Baptista Ashe, another Revolutionary War land grant recipient, owned lands in the Trace Creek region as well. Ashe owned 4,457 acres just south of Brevard's tract where the mouth of Trace Creek flowed into the Tennessee River. Almost eighty years later, in 1864, Ashe's tracts would be the land on which Johnsonville was established.³⁷

Just up river from Trace Creek was an enormous alluvial bottom area, some 18,000 acres, along the Duck and Tennessee rivers. Surveyors, like Rutherford, and other white settlers began referring to this bottom land as the "Big Bottom."³⁸ Big Bottom was located just a half mile from the confluence of the Duck and Tennessee Rivers. Big Bottom had been a prehistoric hunting ground for aboriginal people thousands of years earlier and where Mississippian Indians hunted deer and other game. These natives were

³⁵ROHC, *Deed Book A*, 122-125, 171-172.

³⁶Smith, *An Historical Survey of the Road System of Benton County, Tennessee*, 4.

³⁷ROHC, *Deed Book E*, 111.

³⁸Moore, "Farm Communities," 46.

also attracted to the abundance of river mussels along this corridor of the Tennessee River.³⁹

In his dissertation “Farm Communities and Economic Growth in the Lower Tennessee Valley: Humphreys County, Tennessee, 1785-1980,” historian Wayne Moore reveals that “like the white settlers who would follow them centuries later, these aboriginal tillers prospered on the bottom land while inhabiting the higher alluvial terraces.”⁴⁰ Big Bottom was part of the lower geological surface in the Western Country of North Carolina (today’s western middle and west Tennessee region). Much of the land located west of the Cumberland Mountains, which runs northeast and southwest, contains an enormous base of limestone rock. The lower bottom land in the Tennessee River Valley, which included the Trace Creek region, offered rich, black soil, much different from the red and darker brown soils throughout most of Tennessee.⁴¹ Years later, at the outset of the Civil War in 1861, Big Bottom was revered as the finest and most fertile farm land in the State of Tennessee.⁴²

Even though Armstrong, Rutherford, and other surveying parties established camps in the rough wilderness near the Trace Creek Valley during the 1780’s, Rutherford’s correspondence indicates that he never had intentions of establishing a permanent homestead in this “uncharted wilderness of hostile Indians.”⁴³ Records show that the earliest white settlers to establish a permanent settlement in Humphreys County

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Haywood, *The Civil and Political History of Tennessee*, 2-4.

⁴² Westin Goodspeed, et. al., *History of Tennessee: From Earliest Time to the Present: Together with an Historical and Biographical Sketch of Montgomery, Robertson, Humphreys, Stewart, Dickson, Cheatham, and Houston Counties* (Nashville, TN: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1886), 874.

⁴³ Lyman Draper to Henry Rutherford, 1844, Draper Manuscripts, 55-66.

were William and Cynthia Rogers of North Carolina. In 1790, the Rogers family settled on 200 acres in the eastern portion of Humphreys County.⁴⁴ Even though some of the earliest land grants issued in 1784 and 1785 included the western portion of the county, Humphreys County land grant records reveal no permanent white settlements in the Trace Creek region until the year 1800.⁴⁵

Local Humphreys County records suggest that the first settler to establish a permanent homestead in the Trace Creek region was Moses Box and his wife Nancy, both born in 1776. Land deeds indicate that Box and his wife settled in the Trace Creek region in March 1800, having arrived from the Laurens District of South Carolina. Following on the heels of Moses and Nancy Box was John McAdoo. McAdoo, born in 1783, first settled in Dickson County, Tennessee, with his wife Hannah Cecilia, both from Gilford County, North Carolina. In 1802, John and Hannah McAdoo, both just nineteen years of age, settled in the Trace Creek region.⁴⁶ Together, Box and McAdoo established temporary camps, then built permanent log houses somewhere along Trace Creek.⁴⁷

It is unclear if the Box and McAdoo settlements were located near the present-day site of Waverly or ten miles west along Trace Creek near the future site of Johnsonville.⁴⁸ For example, Goodspeed's *History of Humphreys County, Tennessee*, states that Moses

⁴⁴ Will T. Hale and Dixon L. Merritt, *A History of Tennessee and Tennesseans: The Leaders and Representative Men in Commerce, Industry, and Modern Activities* (Chicago and New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1913), 1097; Garrett, 11.

⁴⁵ Garrett, 11; Moore, 48-55; Goodspeed, 869-871.

⁴⁶ Worth S. Ray, *Tennessee Cousins: A History of Tennessee People* (Austin, TX: Published by the Author, 1950), 370.

⁴⁷ Moore, 78; Garrett, 11.

⁴⁸ Garrett, 11; Goodspeed, 869; ROHC, *Deed Book A*, 7-12.

Box first settled on Trace Creek “near the present site of Waverly.”⁴⁹ Goodspeed offers no other geographical descriptions of what “near the present site of Waverly” meant. Local historians, Jill Knight Garrett and Jonathan K.T. Smith, contend that Box (not McAdoo) settled “on the banks” of Trace Creek and “to the river.”⁵⁰

Land deed records and the transfer of land accounts that occurred around Trace Creek from 1810 to 1830 tell a similar story. These records show that for approximately twenty years, the multiple land transactions that Box participated in only occurred in the Duck River area and along the borders of “Trace Creek of Tennessee River.”⁵¹

Considering that the geographical area where the land transactions occurred, which from land deeds proves was west of Waverly “on the [Tennessee] river,” it is reasonable to conclude that the Box and McAdoo settlements were located, instead, at the Tennessee River and not along Trace Creek at the present-day site of Waverly.⁵² Box and McAdoo set the foundations for later widespread settlement in the Trace Creek region, an area that over the next thirty years would quickly grow to become the largest populated region of Humphreys County.⁵³

From 1800 to 1810, during the first decade of white settlement in the Trace Creek region, there were still several large Indian villages and encampments along the Tennessee River.⁵⁴ Like most whites who had explored the region before Box and McAdoo, ongoing raids with Indians and other hardships awaited them. These local

⁴⁹ Goodspeed, 869.

⁵⁰ Garrett, 11; Goodspeed, 869-70; ROHC, *Deed Book A*, 74; Humphreys County Land Grant Book, A-D, 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Goodspeed, 869-70.

⁵³ Garrett, 12, 16-19.

⁵⁴ Moore, 46-47.

natives, mainly Chickasaws, considered the white settlers to be trespassers. The Chickasaws captured livestock, burned tents and temporary houses, and sometimes fought and killed whites in periodic raids.⁵⁵

More settlers began arriving in the Trace Creek region between 1804 and 1810. Some of these settlers were from Georgia, such as Samuel Parker, John and Jesse Holland, but others were mainly from North Carolina such as Jesse Rodgers, John Thompson, Kemps Crawley, Louis Barfield, and two men by the names Cass and Madlock. Joining the Box and McAdoo settlements, these emigrants established permanent homesteads in the Trace Creek region.⁵⁶

One entrepreneur who arrived in Humphreys County and established commerce around Trace Creek was a former Revolutionary War general, Robert Jarmon, also from North Carolina. Jarmon had first settled in Davidson County in 1801 and operated cotton gins for James Robertson, the founder of Nashville. Moving from Dickson County in 1810, Jarmon purchased a sizable portion of land near the mouth of Hurricane Creek and eventually became one of the largest land owners in Humphreys County.⁵⁷ Like Jarmon, more settlers such as surveyor Isaac Lucas and Christopher Waggoner, made their way to Humphreys County from the Nashville area and settled near Trace Creek.⁵⁸

In 1808 Trace Creek settlers faced a lawsuit over whether the original 1784 military district boundary lines were correct.⁵⁹ When Tennessee Superior Court Judge Parry W. Humphreys ruled that “the line run in February 1784 is the true Continental

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Goodspeed, 874.

⁵⁷ “Jarmon,” vertical file, TSLA; *Biographical Directory, Tennessee General Assembly, 1796-1969* (Preliminary No. 35), Houston, Humphreys, and Stewart Counties, TSLA, 1973, 17-18.

⁵⁸ Moore, 74-75.

⁵⁹ Durham, *Daniel Smith: Frontier Statesman*, 88-89.

Line and no person can be permitted to dispute it,” the settlers could be secure about their land.⁶⁰ In 1809, as an offer of thanks to Judge Humphreys, settlers in the Trace Creek region asked the Tennessee General Assembly to establish a new county, named Humphreys, in honor of the judge.⁶¹ The General Assembly obliged the request of the Trace Creek citizens and on October 9, 1809, established Humphreys County.⁶² The act that created Humphreys County provided for the holding of the first court at the home of Samuel Parker, Jr., seven miles east of the Tennessee River along Trace Creek.⁶³

Trace Creek remained an important area for settlement in the new county. Upon arriving to the region, a majority of settlers lived in temporary encampments at the confluence of Trace Creek and the Tennessee River. This was for the purpose of establishing a point of commerce at this highly visible junction.⁶⁴ There is some evidence which reveals that Trace Creek settlers established a small landing at the confluence of Trace Creek and the Tennessee River before 1810.⁶⁵ Local records indicate that this landing was called Knott’s Landing, the first riverboat landing established in Humphreys County, and what appears to have preceded all other Tennessee River landings in Humphreys County.⁶⁶ Land deeds show that there was a

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Iris Hopkins McClain, *A History of Stewart County, Tennessee* (Self-Published, 1965), 2; Smith, *The Wily Saga*, 20.

⁶² Garrett, 11-12; McLain, 2; Jerome D. Spence and David L. Spence, *A History of Hickman County, Tennessee* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Publishing Company, 1900), 22-25; *ACTS OF TENNESSEE*, 1809 (Knoxville, Printed by George Wilson, 1809), 82-84.

⁶³ Ray, *Tennessee Cousins*, 703; *ACTS OF TENNESSEE*, 1809, 82-84.

⁶⁴ Garrett, 11-13; Goodspeed, 869-873.

⁶⁵ Garrett, 11.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

landing, which served as a shipping point for Big Bottom and the Trace Creek region beginning around 1800.⁶⁷

It is uncertain how Knott's Landing received its name or if members of the Knott family, a prestigious English family, were even in the Trace Creek region. What is known, however, is that the earliest Knott ancestor was James Knott, an early American emigrant who arrived in Virginia from England in 1620.⁶⁸ Sometime in the 1770's, James Knott's ancestors immigrated to Tennessee (which at the time was the State of Franklin) from Granville County, North Carolina.⁶⁹ However, it is unknown if Knott ancestors entered the Trace Creek region.

The majority of the Tennessee faction of Knott emigrants settled heavily in the area that would become Bedford County, Tennessee. The Knott genealogical record shows no evidence of business activity in Humphreys County in the 1790's or early 1800's. However, the Knott's business interests included timber "found only along water courses" and near river communities. The fact that the Knott's harvested timber along "water courses," is important in understanding why John Knott and his cousin, James Knott, the decedents of James Knott from 1600's Virginia, sought permits from the Bedford County court in 1822 to "build a dam across Duck River."⁷⁰ The Knott's construction of the Duck River dam provides a significant clue as to why Knott's Landing near Trace Creek may have existed. Since John Knott's timber interests exceeded the boundaries of Bedford County in search for the "fertile soil upon river

⁶⁷ Garrett, 32; *ROHC, Deed Book A*, 1810-16, 18.

⁶⁸ Willie Mae Caldwell, *The Genealogy of the Knott Family 1617-1989* (Published by the Author for Knott's Berry Farm, 1989), 75-77.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 75-77.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*.

banks and rich hill sides,” likely because fertile soils around the Duck River produced an abundance of hickories, sycamore, and ash trees, it is easy to assume why the Knott’s may have established a steamboat landing, for no other reason, than to capitalize on the commerce activities of a thriving inland river timber trade.⁷¹

No records identify what year the first Trace Creek landing or Knott’s Landing ceased to exist. However, later in 1847, when Thomas Wyly bought the Trace Creek landing property from Alexander Brevard’s son John Brevard, the Knott’s Landing most likely adopted Wyly’s name, then became Lucas Landing shortly before the Civil War.⁷² By 1810, families had constructed a blockhouse, a type of protective wooden fort that could be secured from the inside and provide a safe environment from Indian attacks, two miles north of Trace Creek at the Tennessee River.⁷³ The knob where this primitive blockhouse was located would soon be transformed into one of Tennessee’s first western frontier towns called, Reynoldsburg.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Smith, *The Wyly Saga*, 21; ROHC, *Deed Book E*, 324.

⁷³ Jonathan K. T. Smith, “Old Reynoldsburgh,” (Unpublished essay, no date), 3; Garrett, 11-12.

CHAPTER TWO

REYNOLDSBURG AND LUCAS LANDING: CROSSROADS OF COMMERCE ON THE TENNESSEE RIVER

Two years after Humphreys County was created in 1809, the Tennessee General Assembly made provisions to establish a permanent seat for Humphreys County. On October 25, 1811, the General Assembly appointed a county commission. These men were charged with the task of selecting a tract of land for the purpose of locating a county seat. The commissioners agreed that the western region of the county, with its dense population along Trace Creek and the Tennessee River, had been well-established now for over a decade and was an obvious choice for its seat of government. The county commissioners favored this location because of its proximity to an existing stage road and other densely populated settlements within two to five miles, north and south, along the Tennessee River.¹ Eventually, the commissioners selected a 50-acre tract, still mainly a forest, located one mile above Trace Creek and just below the mouth of Little Dry Creek.²

The county commissioners selected a site that was located on a high knob, twelve miles above where the Duck River flows into the Tennessee, and fifteen feet above the Tennessee River's high water mark. Captain Alexander Brevard had owned the selected tract for twenty-seven years, since 1785.³ The new town site was situated across from Cypress Creek on the opposite side of the Tennessee River. This geographical position

¹ Garrett, 16-17.

² Goodspeed, 871-72; Smith, "Old Reynoldsburgh," 3.

³ Moore, *Farm Communities*, 91; Smith, *An Historical Survey of the Road System of Benton County, Tennessee*, 3-4; Jonathan K.T. Smith, *Historic Benton: A People's History of Benton County, Tennessee* (Memphis: Richard H. Harris, Printer, 1975), 10-11; Garrett, 16.

offered many advantages for development, especially for a ferry operation because of a shoal in the middle of the river formed by years of sediment that had washed out of the creeks. The shoal had narrowed the Tennessee River at this point creating large shallows that could easily be forded.⁴

Even before the commissioners chose the location of their new county seat, they had already agreed to name the new town, Reynoldsburg, in honor of James B. Reynolds, a genial Irishman and member of the United States Congress from Tennessee. “Count” Reynolds, as his Congressional colleagues called him, ironically did not live in Humphreys County. Instead, Reynolds resided at “Grattan’s Grove,” his home in Clarksville, Tennessee.⁵

In June, 1812, the same month that the United States declared war on Great Britain for a second time, Alexander Brevard’s son, John F. Brevard, acting on behalf of his father, travelled to Humphreys County from North Carolina and officially deeded 52 ½ acres to Humphreys County. He told his father that “there is a suitable site for a town, and that several citizens were desirous that a town be laid off and erected on the same.”⁶ Shortly afterwards, the commission hired surveyors who then platted a community with “five streets, 100-feet in width.”⁷ In the center of town, Brevard had reserved a large strip of land for himself between the acreage set aside for the construction of a court house and the Tennessee River. As an act of generosity, Brevard granted free access across his land to townspeople who needed access to the river.⁸ Along the river’s edge,

⁴ Moore, 91; Smith, *Historic Benton*, 10-11.

⁵ Jerome and David Spence, *A History of Hickman County, Tennessee*, 91.

⁶ ROHC, *Deed Book A*, 200-203; Smith, *A People’s History of Benton County, Tennessee*, 10.

⁷ Garrett, 17.

⁸ *Ibid*, 16-17.

Brevard employed his attorney, Samuel Polk, with the duty of also establishing a “publick ferry.”⁹

As more emigrants arrived in late 1812 and early 1813, Reynoldsburg’s population steadily expanded. Lots were sold at \$6 each along five primary streets. Residents constructed several wood-framed houses along two of the town’s main corridors, Main Street and Murray Street.¹⁰ Some of Reynoldsburg’s first citizens included Jobe Hicks, Isaac Pavatt, John and Robert Thompson, Lewis Barker, Isaac S. Crow, Felty Farmer, Royal and Benjamin Hudson, William Sooter, Henry Pugh, Peter and Thomas Black, George Turner, and Henry Daimwood.¹¹ Reynoldsburg’s most important citizen, however, was Thomas K. Wyly, likely the first businessman in Humphreys County.¹²

As the centerpiece of the town, a fine, two-story brick court house, 30-feet square, was constructed in 1813.¹³ The courthouse was Reynoldsburg’s main public building.¹⁴ It had a total of five rooms, three upstairs and two downstairs, and consisted of two large fireplaces in the lower rooms.¹⁵ The courthouse was constructed in the Federal style using solid bricks made on-site which were fired in a brick kiln that “stood just a little

⁹ ROHC, *Deed Book A*, pp. 122-126; Moore, 93; Smith, *The Wyly Saga*, 20.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Smith, “Old Reynoldsburgh,” 3.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Goodspeed, 875; Smith, *The Wyly Saga*, 20; Scrap Book of John F. Shannon, clipping about Old Reynoldsburg by J. Ben Fuqua in Jill Knight Garrett Collection, manuscripts, TSLA. (Hereafter cited as Fuqua).

north” of the courthouse building.¹⁶ One hundred yards from the courthouse was a small spring that provided the town with a fresh, year-round water source.¹⁷

By 1815, Tennesseans, like most Americans, had developed a strong sense of national identity. This was an “era of good feeling.”¹⁸ The strong sense of Tennessean nationalism was due mainly to America’s victory over the British when General Andrew Jackson and General John Coffee’s Tennessee militia helped defeat the British at the Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815.¹⁹ Most of Tennessee’s militia troops, who had fought valiantly at the Battle of New Orleans, returned north from New Orleans by following the Natchez Trace where they then “turned off at or near the Chickasaw Old Towns and crossed the Tennessee River near Reynoldsburg.”²⁰ President James Madison, now into in his second term, would continue promoting the nation’s “era of good feeling” following the Battle of New Orleans and for much of 1815. The town of Reynoldsburg was on the rise.²¹

In August 1815, the Tennessee General Assembly appointed Reynoldsburg’s first town commissioners: “Francis Murray, Michael Dickson, James Gordon, Joshua Williams, and Burwell Lasly.”²² By the winter of 1816, the officials finally plotted Reynoldsburg, but the town incorporation came five years later.²³ Why the delay? Officials may have been waiting on Federal actions. For instance, on December 24, 1816,

¹⁶ Garrett, 17; Fuqua (no page number provided)

¹⁷ Jonathan K.T. Smith, “Old Reynoldsburgh,” 3.

¹⁸ Daniel J. Howe, *What Hath God Wrought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 93, 124.

¹⁹ Robert V. Remini, *The Battle of New Orleans: Andrew Jackson and America’s First Military Victory* (New York: The Penguin Group Publishers, 1999), 20.

²⁰ U.S. Department of the Interior, *Natchez Trace Parkway Survey* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941), 86.

²¹ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 93, 124.

²² *ACTS OF TENNESSEE*, 1815 (Nashville: T.G. Bradford, Printer to the State, 1815), 208.

²³ Smith, *The Wyly Saga*, 20; *ACTS OF TENNESSEE* (Knoxville: Heiskell & Brown, 1821), 107.

the *Daily National Intelligencer* reported that the U.S. House of Representatives spent some time that day discussing a bill about the opening of a federal road through Reynoldsburg. After a considerable debate on the floor of Congress, representatives tabled the bill until after Christmas Day whereas “Mr. [Daniel] Webster, Mr. [John] Calhoun, and others advocated the motion to lay the bill on the table, on the ground that it would be improper to act, specially [*sic*] on any particular road.”²⁴

After much debate focused largely on the costs associated with building a national road, Congress finally determined that a road would be opened from states in the north “to Reynoldsburg and from there to points south.”²⁵ This federal road led 50 miles south from the town of Cumberland, which overlooked Clarksville above the confluence of the Red and Cumberland rivers (today known as New Providence) to Reynoldsburg. The *Intelligencer* reported that from Reynoldsburg, the road would continue “thence to the Chickasaw Old Towns, a fine road opened by the United States, *intersecting* the road leading from Nashville to Natchez.”²⁶

Reynoldsburg was centrally located to other river towns too such as Clarksville, Port Royal, and Palmyra. This location made it a popular destination point along the “great highway from the states of Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky, to the state of Mississippi, the Alabama Territory and New Orleans,” which had become popular after the signing of the Treaty of Fort Jackson in 1814.²⁷ The treaty, more popularly known at the time as “The Treaty with the Creeks, 1814,” forced the Creek Indians to cede 23

²⁴ *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington), Wednesday, December 25, 1816.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid*; Ursula Smith Beach, *Along the Warioto or A History of Montgomery County, Tennessee* (Nashville: McQuiddy Press, 1964), 76-77.

²⁷ “The Town of Cumberland,” in the *Nashville Whig and Tennessee Advertiser*, March 20, 1819.

million acres in the Mississippi Territory to the United States. The land transfer “opened up a vast fertile territory to white settlement.”²⁸

Reynoldsburg was also a postal stop along the national road. In the *Daily National Intelligencer* of August 26, 1820, it was reported that mail carriers would “leave Reynoldsburg every other Thursday at 6 am and arrive at Lower Chickasaw Bluff on Sunday by 7 pm. Leave Lower Chickasaw Bluff every other Monday at 6 am, and arrive at Reynoldsburg on Thursday at 6 pm.”²⁹ Additional post roads left Reynoldsburg “by Paris, Weakly Court House, to Obion Court House and to Dover.”³⁰

Post riders, who were usually young men, rode a single horse, laden with saddle bags full of mail and would ride long distances between towns. The designated towns along the national post road were responsible for providing food, drink, and shelter for the post road riders. At various liverys along the route, the rider acquired water, fodder, and shelter for his horse. Stone markers known as milestones helped mark distances between major towns. Through much of Reynoldsburg’s existence, the town served as one of Tennessee’s primary mail receiving points along the national post road.³¹

The ferry crossing at Reynoldsburg received heavy foot, horse, and stage traffic from the new northern stage road as well as travelers from the east headed toward the Chickasaw Nation and West Tennessee. West of Nashville, Reynoldsburg was the most popular crossing point on the Tennessee River. Stage travelers were responsible from

²⁸ Christopher Maloney, “Treaty of Fort Jackson,” in *The Encyclopedia of Alabama* (Auburn University Online source, 2011), 1.

²⁹ *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington), Saturday, August 26, 1820.

³⁰ *Daily National Journal* (Washington, District Of Columbia), Monday, March 14, 1825.

³¹ Howe, 225-230.

changing Reynoldsburg from a frontier town to a thriving center of commerce.³² After Memphis was established in 1819, Reynoldsburg was the step-off point to the most heavily traveled western stage line in Tennessee.³³

After stages crossed the Tennessee River, the road continued, rounded the foot of Pilot Knob (in today's Benton County), and veered northwest into the Western District. The Western District was all of the land that lay between the Tennessee and Mississippi Rivers, some 10,700 square miles of Chickasaw tribal territory. In 1820, the Western District, including the western portion of Kentucky, one tenth of the state, was officially ceded to the United States.³⁴ The *Nashville Gazette* on November 18, 1820 reported that "persons wishing to explore the Western District, have three ways of getting to Memphis," all of which left Nashville, by way of Reynoldsburg, 77 miles away, and where a ferry took them across to take the "Congress Trace to Natchez," a secondary stage road, with the word "Congress" referring to the continuation of the national post road.³⁵

After the establishment of the Western District in 1820, Reynoldsburg also became a rallying point for many land speculators. Two major Middle Tennessee speculators, John Overton and former General James Winchester, for example, met there in 1820.³⁶ Overton and his party, including Marcus Winchester, the general's son, arrived in Reynoldsburg in late November 1820. They used the town as a jumping off point in route for the newly created town of Memphis. Overton had purchased lots for

³² "The Town of Cumberland," March 20, 1819; Moore, "Farm Communities," 97-99.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 248.

³⁵ *Gazette* (Nashville, Tennessee), November 18, 1820.

³⁶ John Overton to James Winchester, October 18, 1820, John Overton Papers, microfilm, TSLA, Nashville, TN.

development in Memphis the year previous, when he, Winchester, and Andrew Jackson, established the town in 1819.³⁷ What is revealing in many of Overton's letters and his reference to Reynoldsburg is his recurring use of the word "bluffs," such as "to meet at Reynoldsburg on the Bluffs."³⁸ His descriptions of the "bluffs" at Reynoldsburg, identifies the type of terrain located along this portion of the Tennessee River. The "bluffs" consisted of an uneven geological surface of sandy soil, mainly of "chert and limestone rock."³⁹

I had written to Mr. ^uStence
one of Mr. Lemon's ^{arrange} locators
that I would meet him
at Reynoldsburg, when
he came up there on
the 20th. He as well
as others will go from
thence with us + take an
assistance. Besides I
have 5 or 6 thousand
Acres of Land ^{to locate}
and have engaged
Mr. Lemon's Co. to locate
for me, and wish to
be there so as to distrib-
ute my ^{land} according
to this ^{arrangement} ~~arrangement~~
+ according to the information

Figure 1: John Overton's letter, written October 18, 1820, suggesting to James Winchester to meet at Reynoldsburg. Courtesy of TSLA.

³⁷ Durham, *General James Winchester*, 107.

³⁸ Overton to Winchester, October 21, 1820.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Reynoldsburg reached its zenith in the 1820's. Beginning in January, 1822, and every first Saturday in the month of January thereafter, the sheriff of Humphreys County held an election at the courthouse for the purpose of "electing seven intendant and council for the town of Reynoldsburg."⁴⁰ Travelers from everywhere anxious to move and settle in the newly opened Western District all converged on Reynoldsburg. Brevard's ferry profited heavily from eager travelers seeking to cross the Tennessee River.

Reynoldsburg was a popular location for entrepreneurs as well such as Simon Bateman of Williamson County. In February 1822, the Franklin *Independent Gazette* identified Bateman's business interest in Reynoldsburg. "I have rented for five years the ferry at Reynoldsburgh. There is now a road opened around what is called the 3 mile slew only a small distance farther than the public way so that high water will never be any obstruction to passengers."⁴¹ Bateman's attempt at managing the Reynoldsburg ferry, however, did not last. Ten years later in 1832, Bateman's wife, Penelope, petitioned the Maury County equity causes court for a divorce from her husband on grounds of desertion. Penelope asserted that she and Simon had "lived together until 1826 when he deserted her and does not know where he is...he has left the state, possibly the United States."⁴²

As one would expect, business in Reynoldsburg prospered due to the commercial boost generated from the town's ferry, two taverns, and variety of merchants. One

⁴⁰ *ACTS OF TENNESSEE*, 1821, 107.

⁴¹ *Independent Gazette*, Saturday, February 2, 1822.

⁴² "Maury County Equity Causes Tried, October 1833," in *The River Counties Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1972): 53.

merchant, likely Thomas Wyly, kept a detailed ledger of purchases made at a store in Reynoldsburg in 1823. As evidenced in the ledger's pages, some of the more popular purchases included pints and half pints of whiskey and brandy, decks of playing cards, shale buttons, needles, printed cloth (calico was most popular), knives, and hand tools of all varieties.⁴³

The popular stage road that crossed the Tennessee River west from Reynoldsburg was now called the Paris-Reynoldsburg Road and by 1824, it was familiar to all travelers entering the Western District. If a passenger decided to take a stage from Reynoldsburg to Memphis, a three or four-day trip (depending on the weather), a \$17.00 fare was required.⁴⁴ At times, the Paris-Reynoldsburg road became so muddy during the winter and early spring months that sometimes only two-wheeled carts could be used to haul mail and carry passengers.⁴⁵

In 1827, Juliana Conner of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, got married and started west with her new husband Henry to begin their life together. As the Conner's entered Tennessee, Juliana began keeping a diary where she wrote about the bad food, the crude taverns, and especially, the difficulties of travel along nearly impassable roads. The Conner's eventually made their way to West Tennessee and upon their return east to Nashville, they reached the western bank of the Tennessee River across from Reynoldsburg on Wednesday, September 19th. After waiting for the ferry to cross the river in the dark of the night, Juliana wrote:

⁴³ Mercantile Ledger Book from Reynoldsburg, Tennessee, 1823, manuscripts, TSLA, 13-15.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 14.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

Entered the town of Reynoldsburgh 28 m. On driving up to the Tavern received the pleasing intelligence that it was court time, full house and could not possibly take us in – very grateful news to tired worn out travelers but there was no alternative. The man directed us to the Squire’s where he said they might take us in. The Squire was absent but his wife was quite a genteel woman- had supper prepared and treated us very politely- that we regretted not our previous disappointment.⁴⁶

The state recognized Reynoldsburg’s central location when it used the town for sessions of the western branch of Tennessee’s Supreme Court from 1827 to 1833. When the Supreme Court was in session, politicians, attorneys, and judges stayed at the homes of the town’s citizens or at a “two-story log hotel built of poplar logs which stood right across from the courthouse.”⁴⁷ Additionally, adjacent to the courthouse was a log jail.⁴⁸ In December 1835, the State General Assembly decided that the Middle Division of the Supreme Court, which included Humphreys County, would be moved from Reynoldsburg, first to Centerville, then to Murfreesboro, and eventually, Nashville.⁴⁹

By 1832, Reynoldsburg was a well-established town with a population of 500 citizens and over 40 buildings that included a “courthouse, jail, 28 dwelling houses, two taverns, three stores, one blacksmith, one saddler, one cabinet maker, one shoe maker, and one tanner.”⁵⁰ The previous year, Alexander Brevard had died, but his will stipulated

⁴⁶ “Excerpts from the Diary of Juliana Conner in 1827,” in Emma Williams, *Historic Madison: The Story of Jackson and Madison County, Tennessee* (Jackson, TN: Madison County Historical Society, 1946), 468-69.

⁴⁷ Smith, *The Wyly Saga*, 20.

⁴⁸ Garrett, 18; *Nashville Banner*, March 17, 1958; Goodspeed, 875.

⁴⁹ *ACTS OF TENNESSEE*, 1836, Chapters III-VII (Nashville: Nye and Company, Printers, 1836), 26-50.

⁵⁰ Garrett, 17.

that all of his properties in Reynoldsburg, including the ferry, as well as his other Tennessee properties, were to be sold.⁵¹

The buyer of Brevard's properties at Reynoldsburg was Thomas K. Wyly, the shrewd businessman who had moved to Reynoldsburg in 1820 and gained prosperity by owning and operating a successful packet boat operation. Amidst his growing financial success, Wyly purchased one of Reynoldsburg's most successful mercantile businesses from Bill McClure and William Mallory. Together with his two brothers, Thomas Wyly grew the mercantile business as the largest general store in the region.⁵² In 1832, Wyly acquired the earlier Brevard property for \$6,000 and four years later, he purchased the acreage on the western shore of the Tennessee River for \$1,500, some 1040 acres which he needed to expand his business interests with the ferry.⁵³ Wyly's Reynoldsburg ferry was still the most popular among travelers.⁵⁴ Historian Wayne Moore concluded "for most of the 1830's and 40's, Wyly possessed the only real fortune in the county, and the lion's share of it derived from the ferry."⁵⁵ By the end of the decade, Wyly owned 4,509 acres on both sides of the river including the town site of Reynoldsburg.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Ibid, 20-21.

⁵² The purchases accounted for in the ledger described in the preceding paragraph were likely entered by McClure and Mallory prior to Wyly's ownership.

⁵³ *Nashville Republican*; Moore, 100-101.

⁵⁴ Smith, *Historic Benton: A People's History of Benton County, Tennessee*, 32.

⁵⁵ Moore, 101.

⁵⁶ Smith, *The Wyly Saga*, 21.



Figure 2: Map showing Humphreys County and Reynoldsburg prior to the creation of Benton County in 1836. Map circa 1830. Courtesy of TSLA.

Despite the early promise, Reynoldsburg was in sharp decline by 1840. Four major events led to Reynoldsburg's demise. First, was the constant and unpredictable flooding along the Tennessee River each winter and early spring, especially in the lower areas of Reynoldsburg. The annual flooding simply became too much to weather for Reynoldsburg's citizens since the ferry operation stayed flooded for weeks each year. Second, Reynoldsburg significantly began losing its political importance when Humphreys County was split in half and the Tennessee General Assembly created Benton County, named for Samuel Benton, an early settler who established a homestead on the

western bank of the Tennessee River.⁵⁷ The river served as the counties' boundaries.⁵⁸ Third, in 1836, a group of citizens in Waverly petitioned many of the county's citizens and the Tennessee General Assembly to designate their town as the county seat.⁵⁹ A vote was eventually cast and was successful. In December 1836, the county seat at Reynoldsburg was moved, under state law, to the newly established town of Waverly, just nine miles east.⁶⁰

Finally, the most unfortunate event that fueled Reynoldsburg's rapid decline, even after losing the county seat, was the Panic of 1837, a major national economic crisis. The Panic caused wide-spread distress throughout the United States brought on by excessive speculation and inflated currency.⁶¹ As historian Daniel Howe explains in *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, the Panic of 1837 "reflected the chronic shortage of capital in the United States and the country's dependence on inflows of foreign money."⁶² Reynoldsburg, which depended heavily on river commerce, could not rebound from the weak economy. Thomas Wyly, however, managed to successfully weather the economic depression and expand his business in the 1840's. Despite its decline, Reynoldsburg still received thousands of single-horse riders and stagecoach and steamboat passengers who passed through daily making purchases at stores, taverns, and lodging at one of the town's three hotels.⁶³

⁵⁷ Smith, *Historic Benton*, 32.

⁵⁸ Henry D. Whitney, *The Land Laws of Tennessee* (Chattanooga: J.M. Deardorff & Sons, Printers and Binders, 1891), 757; Smith, *Historic Benton*, 32.

⁵⁹ *The River Counties Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (July 1975): 191.

⁶⁰ Garrett, 22-25.

⁶¹ Smith, *The Wyly Saga*, 22.

⁶² Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 502.

⁶³ *Ibid*; Smith, *The Wyly Saga*, 20.

Reynoldsburg in the 1850's was still a river crossroads, but it never became a major town. But in the decade to come, its fortunes changed dramatically as the machine of war came to this spot above the Tennessee River. A census snapshot of Humphreys County in 1850 documents a very rural place, of small towns and farms. The exception was Thomas Wyly, the primary landowner around Reynoldsburg and who owned much of the rich bottom land in the area called Big Bottom. In 1859, it was reported that just a portion of Big Bottom's 18,000 acres was known to yield "75 bushels of corn per acre."⁶⁴

During the 1830's, Thomas Wyly began to amass the wealth of a planter. He purchased plantation properties in Louisiana and had prospered heavily in the cotton market of the southern United States. This success allowed Wyly the capital needed to buy hundreds of slaves to help cultivate and grow the cotton. In the 1840's, Wyly purchased even more land in Humphreys County and on the opposite side of the Tennessee River across from Trace Creek in Benton County.⁶⁵ For example, in January 1847, Wyly purchased 1,466 acres just south of Reynoldsburg. This acreage included many of the original Revolutionary War veteran land grant tracts that were located along Trace Creek near the Tennessee River.⁶⁶ Additionally, Wyly had purchased a small number of steamboats and employed riverboat captains and deck hands to traverse the Tennessee and Mississippi Rivers from Reynoldsburg to the Gulf of Mexico. By 1850, Wyly's steamboat operation was receiving and delivering merchandise to towns all over the southern United States.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Goodspeed, 874.

⁶⁵ Smith, *The Wyly Saga*, 25.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 21.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*.

In 1851, Wyly's eldest son, James J. Wyly, purchased the important Nashville and Memphis stage line. By owning this important route, James was awarded a contract by the United States government which allowed various stages to carry mail by use of his stage line. James Wyly's stage line was profitable. His father continued operating his ferry business at the old Reynoldsburg site until just weeks before his death in 1857. Upon Thomas Wyly's death, it was reported that his net worth was around \$200,000 which he had earned mainly from his prosperous Reynoldsburg ferry operation.⁶⁸ During Thomas Wyly's 40-year tenure in Humphreys County, he and his brothers had accumulated over 30,000 acres, 5,200 acres of which was in Humphreys County alone.⁶⁹

James Wyly served as the administrator of his father's massive estate, dividing the Humphreys County land holdings with his sister Blake "Babe" Wyly Lucas.⁷⁰ James Wyly also awarded Babe's husband, John Griff Lucas, 1,077 prime acres along the waterfront of the Tennessee River at the juncture of Trace Creek.⁷¹ Additionally, Thomas Wyly's widow, Hester, agreed to a condition of sale to be conducted by her children, James J. Wyly and "Babe" Lucas, for the very riverfront property that would be transformed into Johnsonville in 1864.⁷²

When John Lucas retained ownership of Wyly's Landing, Lucas Landing became the disembarkation point for trade goods, people, food, and livestock in the region. Lucas

⁶⁸ Moore, 103-05.

⁶⁹ Ibid; Smith, *The Wyly Saga*, 20, 22, 25-26.

⁷⁰ ROHC, *Deed Book O*, 173; Smith, 26.

⁷¹ In 1840, John G. Lucas had married into the Wyly family taking Thomas Wyly's beloved daughter, Babe, as his wife. John Lucas was also the younger brother of Hugh Ross Lucas, a member of the Tennessee General Assembly during the 1850's, and who would later serve in the Civil War as a Confederate captain in the 11th Tennessee Infantry along with other members from this Humphreys County regiment.

⁷² Ibid.

Landing was typical of other steamboat landings along the Tennessee River which had gained similar notoriety in the region such as Paris Landing (1830) in Henry County and Pickwick Landing (1839) in Hardin County. In Humphreys County, Cuba Landing (1830), Fowler's Landing (1860), Sycamore Landing (1868), and later, Shipp's and Trotter's Landings, would all prosper from servicing a bustling steam boat industry.⁷³

Although no descriptions of Lucas Landing appear to exist in any local records, it is known that John G. Lucas constructed a substantial residence located near the waterfront, probably along the water's edge sometime between his initial ownership of the land between 1858 and 1860.⁷⁴ The strategic positioning of Lucas's residence was likely so that during boat arrivals, John Lucas and others who worked for him could easily be on-site to assist the needs of customers at all hours. From the accounts of military surveyors and engineers just prior to the construction of Johnsonville in 1863-64, it is known that Lucas Landing also had a substantial wharf where river vessels could be moored and cargo unloaded onto wagons for shipment to local merchants.⁷⁵

By 1860, the year before the outbreak of the Civil War, John Lucas was a merchant and farmer, continuing to successfully operate his lucrative river landing and reap the profits from the rich farmland along the Tennessee River bank worked by his slaves.⁷⁶

⁷³ Goodspeed, 890.

⁷⁴ Smith, *The Wyly Saga*, 26.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Byron and Barbara Sistler, eds., *1860 Census-Tennessee*, Vol. 3 (Nashville: Byron Sistler & Associates, 1982), 335.

CHAPTER THREE

OPPORTUNITIES LOST AND FOUND: THE BEGINNING OF THE CIVIL WAR AND THE UNION'S ENTRY INTO TENNESSEE

Casting the Die

As the United States expanded in the four decades before the Civil War, the admission of new states into the Union as either slave or free remained the dominating political topic in the United States. Around the globe, slavery had already been under assault since the early 1800's. Countries in South America, such as Bolivia and Chile, and in Europe, such as Great Britain and France, these countries had already taken actions to abolish slavery. Great Britain, however, according to historian Sven Beckert, actually helped sustain the South's cotton industry in the 1850's. In fact, British factories were processing approximately 800 million pounds of cotton each year which had been cultivated by slave labor in the American South. So despite Britain's political efforts in contributing to the dismantling of European slavery, its agricultural economy during the 1850's, which had been sacked hard by endless drought, effectively still supported the South's system of chattel slavery.¹ By 1860, however, the South's importation of cotton at Britain's docks slowed considerably due to overstock and overproduction. As historian David Surdam reveals, by the end of 1861, only "311,000 American bales reached Liverpool's dock and nearly every mill in England, Scotland, and Ireland stopped for actual want of the raw material."² The negative impact that American slavery had upon

¹ Sven Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire: reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War," *American Historical Review* 109 (2004):1408.

² David G. Surdam, "King Cotton: Monarch or Pretender? The State of the Market for Raw Cotton on the Eve of the American Civil War," *Economic History Review* 51 (1998): 120.

Britain was considerable, especially the extent of antislavery sentiment among British workers, as Chancellor William Gladstone experienced when factory hands proved willing to endure “considerable privation if the sacrifice meant the liberation of 4 million black Americans.”³

The legacy of the 1848 European revolutions, as well as the American and French revolutions of the late eighteenth centuries, served as models for northerners and southerners who this time, had taken up arms over issues linked to slavery. Northerners and southerners alike believed they were living in an “age of revolution,” or rather, the belief that their Civil War was a struggle to resolve the great “nation question,” the same kind of fight that European countries had brought to issue during the 1848 revolutions.⁴ Each side believed they were in the midst of what historian Andre Fleche determined was “an emerging international system of nation states,” or in other words, that the North and South had gone to war to address the relationship between race and nation, and to resolve, by war, the ideologies over “the place of slavery, servitude, class distinction, and the legitimacy of the right of self-determination.”⁵ After many bloody revolts and protests, by 1860, countries around the world had achieved success in bolstering slavery’s abolition.⁶

³ Duncan Andrew Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War* (London: Royal Historical Society, 2003), 212-19 in Douglas R. Egerton, “Rethinking Atlantic Historiography in a Postcolonial Era: The Civil War in a Global Perspective,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, No.1 (March 2011): 82.

⁴ Andre Fleche, *The Revolution of 1861: The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 2; James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 264; Belle B. Sideman and Lillian Friedman, eds., *Europe Looks at the Civil War* (New York: Orion Publishers, 1960), 117-18.

⁵ Fleche, *The Revolution of 1861*, 4-6.

⁶ *Ibid.*

In the first half of the nineteenth century, chattel slavery in the United States had expanded and become even more important in the Deep South and Chesapeake region of Virginia. Congress banned the importation of slaves in 1808; in its place developed a flourishing inland slave trade. Historian Ira Berlin coined this development as America's "Second Middle Passage," which was America's internal slave trade based on the economic needs of the South.⁷

As war clouds gathered over the nation in early 1861, supporters of the newly established Confederate States of America argued that slavery would bring their "nationalist revolution" total victory because their government could control the class conflict which had doomed previous European efforts.⁸ On April 12, 1861, Confederate troops under the command of Brigadier General P.G.T. Beauregard, fired on Union Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, marking the official beginning of the Civil War. At the start of hostilities, Tennessee remained heavily divided between either staying in the Union or joining the Confederacy as a slave state. On June 8, 1861, despite East Tennessee's wide-spread support of the Union and West Tennessee's overwhelming support for the Confederacy, Middle Tennessee, which was equally divided, finally affirmed that Tennessee would enter the new Confederate States of America, as a slave state.⁹

⁷ Berlin, Ira, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 44; James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Slavery and the Making of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹ Larry H. Whitaker, "Civil War," in Carroll Van West, ed., *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1998), 168.

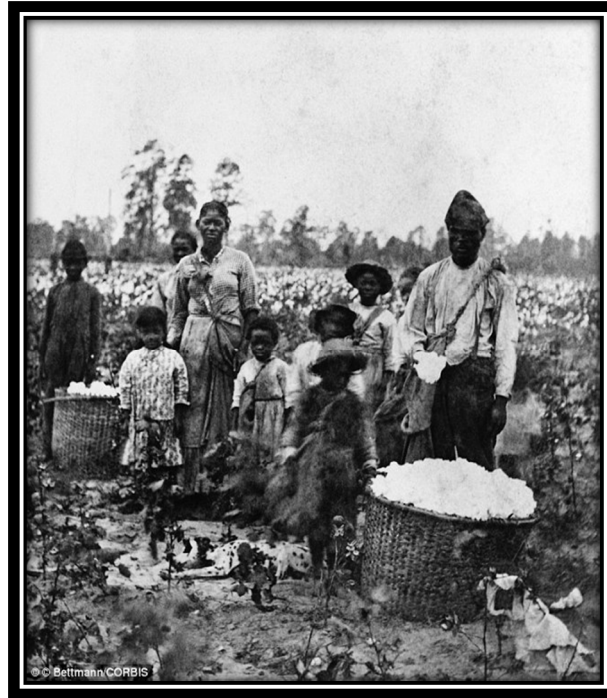


Figure 3: Southern slaves working cotton, circa 1862. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Following the attack on Fort Sumter and the first battles in the summer of 1861, most Americans thought that the rebellion would cease by autumn. The majority of Union supporters believed that the Confederates would run away at the first sight of blood-letting since most thought that the Confederate army was nothing more than “an armed mob led by lawyers.”¹⁰ In short, the Confederates fought for the right to secede and create a new nation which, if victorious, would allow slavery to exist. The Union forces fought to prevent the South from winning such a victory. As the fighting began,

¹⁰ Winston Groom, “War’s Bitter End,” *America’s Civil War* (May 2015): 36-37.

neither citizens or military leaders, North and South, really understood the military capacity of the other.¹¹

In early February 1862, the war had raged for only ten months when the Union won its first major victory in Tennessee with the capture of two Confederate forts, Fort Henry on the Tennessee River, and Fort Donelson, located 12 miles to the east on the Cumberland River. The Battle of Fort Henry occurred February 6, 1862, when land forces under the command of Union Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant and a naval flotilla under Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote, out-gunned Confederate Brigadier General Lloyd Tilghman's forces. Tilghman's Confederates fought hard, but superior firepower from the Union gunboats and high water, which had entered the fort prior to the battle, forced Tilghman to surrender.¹²

Grant's forces next marched overland from Fort Henry on the Tennessee River and laid siege to Fort Donelson just outside the town of Dover. After two days of skirmishing on February 12-13, Foote's Union flotilla and the Confederate gunners inside Fort Donelson's upper and lower river batteries, exchanged intense fire on February 14. The Confederates won the day turning back Foote's gunboats. Late that evening, the Confederate commanders, concerned that their situation would become hopeless if surrounded by Grant's land forces, agreed to escape from Fort Donelson.

¹¹ Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 201; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 360-361.

¹² *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Vol. 7 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1892), 136-144, 148-152. (Hereafter cited as *OR*).



Figure 4: U.S. Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant, 1862. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Early the next morning, the Confederates, in a furious fight against Union forces, attempted to move out of the fort, but failed. That evening, and early into the morning of February 16, the Confederate commanders agreed to surrender Fort Donelson and its defenders to Grant's forces. The fort's two leading commanders, Brigadier Generals John B. Floyd and Gideon J. Pillow, abandoned their positions and fled with small contingents of soldiers during the early morning hours. Floyd passed his lead command to Pillow, who then, fearing the worse if captured by the Union, turned over the Confederate overall command to Brigadier General Simon B. Buckner, a former West Point classmate of General Grant.¹³

¹³ Kendall D. Gott, *Where the South Lost the War: An Analysis of the Fort Henry-Donelson Campaign, February 1862* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003), 263; *OR*, Series I, vol. 7, 159-61, 170-182.

On Sunday, February 16, Buckner surrendered his army of 13,000.¹⁴ Of the 21,000 Confederate troops who defended Fort Donelson, 300 of them would be killed, 1,200 wounded, and 13,000 would become battlefield prisoners. Grant reported to Major General Henry Halleck, that his victory came at little cost to his army. He had “forty-six infantry regiments, three cavalry regiments, and eight independent companies, and ten batteries of light artillery. The average available strength of regiments fit for the field is about 500 men.”¹⁵ Historian Kendall Gott in *Where the South Lost the War: An Analysis of the Fort Henry-Donelson Campaign, February 1862*, contends that the “southern disasters at Fort Henry and Fort Donelson signaled the beginning of the dismemberment and ultimate defeat of the Confederate States of America.”¹⁶

A “Great Panic”

News of the Confederate disaster at Fort Donelson flooded pages of northern newspapers. After months of early Union defeats and the uncertainty of a quick victory for the north, news of Grant’s victory and the surrender of 13,000 Confederates spread to every large city, small town, and rural farm in the North. Public celebrations took place everywhere. In the South, however, a cloud of defeat and the uncertainty about a new southern nation became apparent for the first time in the war.¹⁷

In Nashville, Tennessee, the morning of February 16th found many of its citizens sitting in church when the startling news of Fort Donelson’s surrender reached the city.

¹⁴ Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 1 (New York: The Century Co., 1887), 425-428; Benjamin F. Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson: Keys to the Confederate Heartland* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987), xi-xiv; Gott, *Where the South Lost the War*, 263.

¹⁵ *OR*, Series I, vol. 10, 5.

¹⁶ Gott, xv.

¹⁷ Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson*, xi-xiv.

Almost immediately, a “Great Panic” ensued. As one Nashville citizen remembered, “thousands hurriedly gathered as many of their belongings as they could carry off including their slaves and fled southward to Confederate held territory.”¹⁸ John McKee, the editor of *The Union and American*, wrote that “men and women were to be seen running to and fro in every portion of the city, and large numbers were hastening with their valuables to the several railroad depots, or escaping in private conveyance to some place of fancied security in the country.”¹⁹ Newspaper editors across America detailed reports of Nashville’s “Great Panic.” The Washington *Daily National Intelligencer* reported that:

A perfect panic reigned throughout the whole city. The streets were thronged with people wild with excitement. Leading rebels were making speeches from store goods boxes and from the street corners, to the excited populace, stating that the Federals were upon them, the city was defenseless, and appealing to every man who had a species of firearms to rally to the defense of the place.²⁰

Nashville at that time contained roughly 37,000 citizens, including 24,000 whites, 1,000 free blacks, and 5,000 slaves.²¹ The city was a major shipping point for riverboat traffic and an important rail hub to both northern and southern states including the Louisville and Nashville Railroad and the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad.

¹⁸ Paul H. Bergeron, Stephen V. Ash and Jeanette Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 151.

¹⁹ John M. McKee, *The Great Panic: Being Incidents Connected with Two Weeks of the War in Tennessee* (Nashville: Johnson and Whiting, Publishers, 1862), 8-9.

²⁰ *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, District Of Columbia), February 27, 1862.

²¹ Walter Durham, *Nashville: The Occupied City, 1862-1863* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985, 2008), 3; *Nashville City and Business Directory for 1860-61* (Nashville: L.P. Williams Publishers, 1860), 25.

Following the surrender of Fort Donelson, a small contingent of Confederate soldiers remained in the city. They were primarily rear guard troops from General Albert Sidney Johnston's Confederate forces, many of whom were still in position to the north at Bowling Green, Kentucky. Remnants of various regiments from "Virginia, Texas, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Tennessee," who had escaped along with Floyd and Pillow from Fort Donelson, were also present in the city.²²

Nashville's Mayor Richard B. Cheatham, along with the city's police force, made several desperate and unsuccessful attempts to control its panicked citizens and the necessary evacuation of military stores located in buildings throughout the city. Soon, rioting and looting became apparent and crowds took over the quartermaster's depot and commissary stores. Rioters burned several of Nashville's buildings days before Union forces arrived.²³

With his defense line in tatters, Johnston moved his army from Bowling Green through Nashville and made Murfreesboro, 30 miles south of Nashville, as a temporary base. Johnston placed Brigadier General John B. Floyd in charge at Nashville. Floyd's orders were to immediately stop the local rioting and looting of public stores.²⁴ Floyd managed to contain the unwarranted removal of quartermaster and commissary stores which consisted mainly of clothing, shoes, harnesses, and a considerable amount of unmanufactured materials such as leather hides and bolts of cotton and wool.

²² *OR*, Series I, vol. 7, 428.

²³ McKee, *The Great Panic*, 11-12; Durham, *Nashville: The Occupied City*, 31-33.

²⁴ Gott, 266.



Figure 5: Nashville Mayor Richard B. Cheatham, 1861. Courtesy of the Tennessee Historical Commission.

Floyd ordered Confederate Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest, who had escaped from Fort Donelson with about 700 soldiers, to take action against the rioters.²⁵ Immediately upon orders, Forrest subdued the unruliness and looting and ordered his mounted troops to charge into the crowd of “straggling soldiers and citizens of all grades.”²⁶ After the threat had been put down, Forrest reported that he “dispersed it so that wagons could be placed for loading and resuming shipments south to the army.”²⁷

An Indianapolis newspaper, *The Daily Journal*, reported about Nashville’s “panic” that:

²⁵ *OR*, Series I, vol. 7, 429-31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

no preparations have been made for encamping, and very few of the regiments retained their camp equipage on their retreat. The army's demoralized companies make their appearance without officers, and officers without companies, and whole regiments without arms.²⁸

From February 19 to 23, Forrest's troopers continued to save what supplies they could and ship them south. Forrest and his 2,100 soldiers labored day and night.²⁹ He reported that his men loaded "nearly one thousand wagonloads of ammunition, clothing, bales of osnaburgs, artillery and food stores."³⁰ Forrest complained that "if the quartermaster and commissary had remained at their post and worked diligently with the means at their command, the government stores might have all been saved between the time of the fall of Fort Donelson and the arrival of the enemy at Nashville."³¹ One Unionist estimated that five million dollars-worth of stores and food stuffs were lost to the Confederacy with the fall of Nashville.³²

Return to Order

After the Confederate surrender of Fort Donelson, Grant's forces remained in Dover. In the two days that followed, the victorious Union troops were put to work immediately at consolidating the immense amount of captured Confederate munitions, weapons, and food in and around Fort Donelson. Battered Union regiments were reorganized and resupplied and almost all of the 13,000 Confederate prisoners were organized and loaded onto steamboats destined for northern military prisons. On the

²⁸ *Indianapolis Daily Journal*, May 7, 1862.

²⁹ Durham, *Nashville: The Occupied City*, 31-33.

³⁰ Eddy W. Davison and Daniel Foxx, *Nathan Bedford Forrest: In Search of the Enigma* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2007), 60-61.

³¹ *OR*, Series I, vol. 7, 428-432.

³² Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson*, 237.

morning of February 19, Grant's bluecoats crossed the Cumberland River just south of Dover and marched to Clarksville, Tennessee, where they arrived on February 20 in conjunction with Flag Officer Foote's naval flotilla which anchored at the base of the town.³³

Foote had coordinated his advance up the Cumberland River from Dover with the army's overland movements. Grant's overland movement was fairly rapid considering what many believed would be slowed by Confederate partisans and infantry, and especially, by cavalry troops. However, aside just a few brief skirmishes and run-ins with Confederate partisans, Grant's forces encountered little resistance. While Grant himself stayed put in Clarksville, he entrusted his officers to advance the troops swiftly toward Nashville.³⁴

Major General Don Carlos Buell and his Army of the Ohio also moved overland toward Nashville from Kentucky. As historian Robert Hunt reveals in *The Good Men Who Won the War: Army of the Cumberland Veterans and Emancipation Memory*, Buell, a West Pointer and not an abolitionist, was "soft" on war and believed that it was actually acceptable, (to him at least) that if the federals allowed the southerners to retain their property, that this strategy might actually "persuade the majority to return to the Union."³⁵ However, as Buell soon discovered after capturing Nashville, southern sympathies toward bluecoats "did not suggest Southern hearts and minds eager to be won

³³ Stephen D. Engle, *Struggle for the Heartland: The Campaigns from Fort Henry to Corinth* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 90-91; *OR*, Series I, vol. 7, 644-45.

³⁴ Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson*, 227-28.

³⁵ Robert Hunt, *The Good Men Who Won the War: Army of the Cumberland Veterans and Emancipation Memory* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 11-12.

back to the old loyalties.”³⁶ Buell’s men had been encamped at Camp Nevin, nine miles south of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, and adjacent to both the Louisville and Nashville turnpike and railroad.³⁷ On Saturday, February 22, Buell telegraphed Foote in Clarksville that “I am marching on Nashville. Your gunboats should move forward instantly. I believe they will meet no serious opposition.”³⁸

Mrs. Louisa Brown Pearl, a Nashville citizen whose husband was serving in the Confederate Army, described the scene in Nashville prior to the Union army’s arrival:

The rain poured in torrents all night & till since dinner-I have not felt work anytime than today-Gov. Harris, Gen. Johnston & others are in town & we fear a return of the army-Harris has issued a proclamation calling out 30,000 of the militia & everybody says he will need an armed force to get them, for nobody will go at his call-the contemptible man- He has lost the few friends that he had, by his cowardly behaviour [*sic*] and flight...The lower part of the town is overflown & many people must leave their houses-Poor Nashville seems doomed.³⁹

On Monday, February 24, advanced elements of Buell’s 3rd Division, under the command of General Ormsby Mitchel, arrived at the city of Edgefield just across from Nashville on the east side of the Cumberland River. The day before the first appearance of federal soldiers, Nashville’s Mayor Cheatham had officially surrendered the city to a cavalry captain (the only officer to be found) in Mitchel’s Third Division.⁴⁰ Two days earlier, Mitchel had occupied Bowling Green, Kentucky, which Johnston’s 22,000

³⁶ Ibid, 12.

³⁷ Dan Lee, *The L&N Railroad in the Civil War: A Vital North-South Link and the Struggle to Control It* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company Publishers, 2011), 34.

³⁸ *OR*, Series I, vol. 7, 653.

³⁹ Diary of Mrs. Louisa Brown Pearl, February 22, 1862, microfilm, TSLA, Nashville, TN.

⁴⁰ Lee, *The L&N Railroad in the Civil War*, 34-36.

Confederates had abandoned just hours before. In advance of the arrival of Mitchel's 3rd Division was Brigadier General William "Bull" Nelson with his 4th Division of the Army of the Ohio. Nelson had arrived by river transport just hours ahead of Mitchel and "stole" the honor of raising "Old Glory" once again over the state capitol building.⁴¹

The next day, Tuesday, February 25, Buell led the first elements of Mitchel's 3rd Division, across the Cumberland River from Edgefield on one "abandoned transport boat and a gunboat named *Diana*."⁴² Led by the 6th Ohio Volunteer's regimental band, Buell's men landed at river's edge, disembarked from the transports, and marched by columns, straight up Broadway Street to Church Street, and halted at Nashville's courthouse square.⁴³ A witness of the grand scene was Louisa Pearl. Her diary entry for February 25 vividly illustrated Buell's arrival:

Evening-At last we have seen the bluecoats-Indeed we can see nothing else-About ten thousand landed this morning from eleven gunboats-The public square is filled with them-A large body of them marched up Church St. this morning with a fine band of music playing Dixie-they present a striking contrast to our troops as regards dress & arms-I am told they are all mostly Irish & Dutch & seem well disciplined.⁴⁴

In just three weeks, from mid-February to early March 1862, the Union army took control of Middle Tennessee. President Abraham Lincoln understood that to maintain and execute authority over Nashville, the first captured Confederate capitol, he must act quickly to forestall any congressional interference. On March 3, 1862, he appointed the

⁴¹ Durham, *Nashville: The Occupied City*, 31-35.

⁴² Bobby L. Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 49.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Diary of Mrs. Louisa Brown Pearl, February 25, 1862.

staunch Unionist and Tennessee Congressman, Andrew Johnson, into a new position: *Military Governor* of the State of Tennessee. Johnson was the only senator from a seceded state that had remained loyal to the Union. Even though Lincoln had first experimented with a civilian military governor in North Carolina, the state was turned back over to the military. Johnson, however, remained as Military Governor in Tennessee.⁴⁵ The same day of Lincoln's announcement, Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, informed Johnson of his new appointment as Military Governor, which also carried with it the rank of brigadier general.⁴⁶

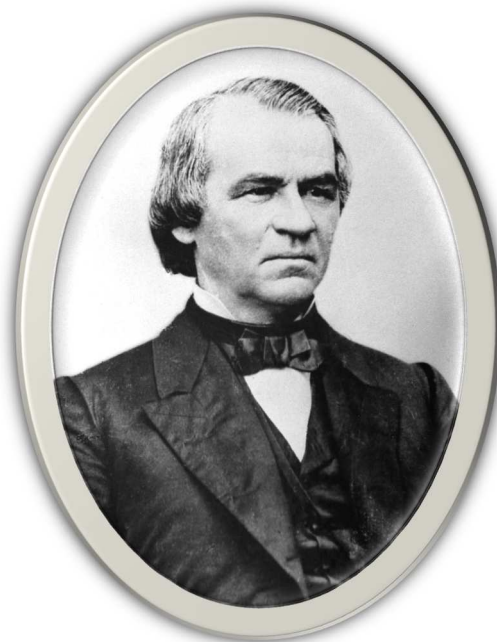


Figure 6: Tennessee Military Governor, Andrew Johnson, 1864. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

⁴⁵ Paul H. Bergeron, "Andrew Johnson," in *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1998), 482; Paul H. Bergeron, Stephen V. Ash and Jeanette Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 151-54; Gregory P. Downs, *After Appomattox: Military Occupation and the Ends of War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 65.

⁴⁶ Earl J. Hess, *The Civil War in the West: Victory and Defeat from the Appalachians to the Mississippi*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 22; Bergeron, Ash and Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History*, 147-149; Leroy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. 5 (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1979), xl- xliii.

As Lincoln anticipated, there was immediate opposition. The most damning came from the “fighting” generals, especially from Lincoln’s own commanding general, George B. McClellan. Just two months earlier, McClellan had written to General Buell on January 6, “Bowling Green and Nashville are of secondary importance. Interesting as Nashville may be to the Louisville interests, it strikes me that its possession is of very secondary importance to East Tennessee, West North Carolina, South Carolina, North Georgia, and Alabama.”⁴⁷ Now, with Nashville firmly in Union hands, McClellan thought the city was of such importance that the army, not a political appointee of Lincoln, should manage its military occupation.⁴⁸ Tennessee’s old-line Whig party, who despised Johnson, also opposed his appointment. The state’s Democrats, naturally, hated Johnson for his firm stand against secession. For instance, in the 1860 election, supporters of Southern Democratic presidential candidate John C. Breckenridge burned Johnson in effigy in the streets of Nashville for his stand against secession.⁴⁹

Lincoln ignored them all. The President favored Andrew Johnson because he felt the Tennessean shared his vision of restoring the South and that he “represented the kind of Southern loyalty that Northerners hoped would undermine the Confederate war effort.”⁵⁰ Lincoln could also depend on Johnson to help restore Nashville as it was before the war and transform Tennessee back into the Union. What angered most pro-Confederate Nashvillians was that Johnson had been given presidential authority to take whatever steps were necessary to put down the southern rebellion in Tennessee. Johnson

⁴⁷ *OR*, Series I, vol. 7, 531.

⁴⁸ David H. Donald, *Lincoln* (London: Jonathan Cape Publishers, 1995), 334-35.

⁴⁹ Bergeron, Ash and Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History*, 147-149.

⁵⁰ Hess, *The Civil War in the West*, 42.

believed that the white citizenry of Middle Tennessee had been tricked into secession by a number of ill-informed and villainous secessionists. His action would constitute “one of the critical tests of his governorship.”⁵¹ One of Johnson’s major challenges was to foster loyalism among Middle Tennesseans, especially in Nashville. Therefore, Johnson’s policy was to restore the civil government in Middle Tennessee as soon as possible “after purging the body politic of the truly disloyal and disenthraling the rest of the populace.”⁵²

Johnson looked to Nashville’s Unionists for support. These men, and women, were staunch supporters of Lincoln and of the federal government and many praised Johnson for his stand against secession.⁵³ One staunch Nashville Unionist was Maggie Lindsley. Upon hearing about the surrender of Fort Donelson, Lindsley wrote:

I ran screaming over the house, knocking down chairs and tables, clapping my hands, and shouting for the “Union” until the children were terrified...I rushed to the parlor and thundered “Yankee Doodle” on the piano in such a manner that I had never done before...the Governor and Legislature left the very day Donelson surrendered. May they never return!⁵⁴

⁵¹ Graf and Haskins, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. 5, xlii.

⁵² Stephen V. Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed 1860-1870* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 97; Ormsby M. Mitchel to Andrew Johnson, March 30, 1862, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. 5, eds. Graf and Haskins, 257.

⁵³ Peter Maslowski, *Treason Must Be Made Odious: Military Occupation and Wartime Reconstruction in Nashville, Tennessee, 1862-65* (New York: KTO Press, 1978), 6-7, 19-20; Durham, *Nashville: The Occupied City*, 57-59; Correspondence from Secretary of War Edwin Stanton to Andrew Johnson, March 3, 1862, in *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. 5, eds. Graf and Haskins, 177.

⁵⁴ “MAGGIE!” *Maggie Lindsley’s Journal* in *Tennessee in the Civil War: Selected Contemporary Accounts of Military and Other Events, Month by Month*, ed. James B. Jones, Jr., 6-7 (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc. Publishers, 2011), 67.

By early summer 1862, Federal officers, in order to keep Confederate sympathizers at bay, ordered the jailing of Nashville citizens who refused to comply with Johnson's orders of conciliation. As this resistance continued, Johnson, who earlier had restricted Union soldiers from harming or looting Nashville's civilians, lifted those same restrictions on private property and told troops to seize "whatever supplies they needed."⁵⁵ At various times throughout the war, whenever Confederate guerillas attacked Nashville, Johnson ordered all Union troops to "retaliate by looting or burning nearby homes or by holding local residents hostage until the guerillas desisted."⁵⁶ While Johnson continued his strict military rule over the citizens of Nashville and throughout Middle Tennessee, the war carried on. From March 1862 through January 1863, casualties from the battlefields at Shiloh and Stones River inundated Nashville. The day-to-day presence of sick soldiers, amputations, and death, ceased much of Nashville's civilian unruliness. Such scenes of horror brought the reality of war straight into their homes.⁵⁷

Supply Troubles

President Lincoln had informed his military leaders that as long as the rebellion continued, troops of the United States government would be well-supplied. Lincoln made it his personal responsibility to ensure that the army always had the best and most up-to-date equipment. Shortly after the Union's occupation of Nashville, procedures of supplying the army in Tennessee were enacted. Like Lincoln, Governor Johnson understood that to win the war, an army must be maintained with a consistent supply

⁵⁵ Bergeron, Ash, and Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History*, 150-151.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 152-53.

⁵⁷ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death in the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), xii-xviii.

chain of food, clothing, and ammunition. With the help of Buell's troops and impressed black laborers, Johnson ordered the construction of warehouses and loading platforms for shipping and receiving military supplies. Nashville was now an important terminus for shipping military supplies to southern destinations.⁵⁸

In late March 1862, the army constructed an enormous railroad yard just below the state capitol building in Nashville. Located on McLemore Street (between today's Church and Cedar Streets), a supply depot and rail yard was completed mainly by impressed black laborers, many of whom had previously been slaves. As the war rapidly progressed, railroad cars, supply boats, and barges, loaded with military supplies, hauled critical supplies from Nashville to Union forces operating in military campaigns all over the South.⁵⁹

As General Buell's forces in Nashville planned to pursue Johnston's Confederates south in March 1862, loads of military supplies poured into Nashville by way of railroads and from supply boats which steamed to Nashville along the Cumberland River. By the summer of 1862, however, a serious logistical problem surfaced regarding Union supply efforts on the Cumberland River. Ever since Union forces had occupied Nashville in February 1862, the Cumberland River had been used extensively for the delivery of military supplies. Riverine pilots who navigated the rivers steered packet boats laden with

⁵⁸ Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee*, 49.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

military supplies from shipping destinations such as Cincinnati, Ohio; Louisville, Kentucky; and St. Louis, Missouri.⁶⁰

By late July 1862, pilots of supply vessels discovered that the Cumberland River was too shallow to navigate due to a severe draught. Since many of the boats were deep draft vessels, it was too dangerous for them to dock at Nashville's steep wharf. This meant that only when the river level reached 22 feet could river commerce and transportation resume. By August 1862, the water level of the Cumberland River was so low that river traffic stopped permanently for two weeks. The river levels at Nashville became such a concern to Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs that Governor Johnson and Union commanders worried whether Nashville could actually be maintained as a base of operations.⁶¹

If the military had to abandon Nashville as a shipping and receiving point for supplies due to the Cumberland River's unpredictable water levels, where could it establish a more reliable river base of supply? Moreover, if Nashville was not a supply base, how would the railroads, which entered the city from three directions, be kept from Confederate hands? Finally, if the army did have to abandon using the Cumberland River at Nashville as a supply artery, what existing railroad would be used to connect Nashville with the deeper channeled Tennessee River and who would build it since all able-bodied soldiers were needed for combat on the front? These critical logistical decisions lay in the hands of Andrew Johnson.

⁶⁰ Durham, *Reluctant Partners: Nashville and the Union, July 1, 1863 to June 30, 1865* (Nashville: The Tennessee Historical Society, 1987), 15-18.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

By June 1863, the Union high command in Nashville redirected much of its military resources and supplies to Murfreesboro to assist Major General William H. Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland in its advance toward Chattanooga. As historian Robert Hunt points out in *The Good Men Who Won the War: Army of the Cumberland Veterans and Emancipation Memory*, Rosecrans' army, which had been spread out between Nashville and Murfreesboro for six months since the Battle of Stones River, "lay at the end of a long and tenuous supply line."⁶² From June 24 to July 3, 1863, during what was called the Tullahoma Campaign, Rosecrans, who had no intention of advancing on General Braxton Bragg's confederates who were now well-entrenched at Shelbyville and Tullahoma, Tennessee, carefully planned and finely executed a "turning movement" that involved gaining control of a series of gaps and hills just south of Murfreesboro. After ten days of hotly contested frontal and flanking maneuvers, Rosecrans succeeded in pushing Bragg's forces out of Middle Tennessee, without a major battle.⁶³

While Rosecrans assisted in pushing Bragg's confederates out of Middle Tennessee, Johnson and Union officers in Nashville agreed that constructing a railroad that would connect Nashville with a base of supplies somewhere west at a location along the deeper channeled Tennessee River, some 78 miles, made the most sense. In August 1863, Johnson assigned military engineers with the task of designing plans for a railroad that would extend west to the Tennessee River. Johnson expected the railroad to be fully operational by the following spring. Given the short time frame, military engineers, who were in high demand, would be needed on site each day to help oversee construction of

⁶² Hunt, *The Good Men Who Won the War*, 14.

⁶³ *Ibid*, xiii.

the railroad. The military engineers estimated that to complete the railroad with crews working around the clock, it would take one year.⁶⁴

Finally, and most importantly, was the question of where the labor would come from to build the railroad? At the suggestion of General Rosecrans, the “First and Second Regiments Colored Troops” and “other black units” were proposed as a labor source for the new railroad. Even before Johnson was appointed overseer of the project, the *Nashville Dispatch*, in August 1863, had reported that “five thousand Negroes would be impressed” to work on the railroad.⁶⁵ This use of African-American labor to build the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad to link Nashville with the Tennessee River in Humphreys County would have more impact on Johnsonville’s existence than any other single thing during the war.

⁶⁴ *OR*, Series I, vol. 30, pt. 3, 67.

⁶⁵ *Nashville Dispatch*, August 23, 1863.

CHAPTER FOUR
AFFECTING EMANCIPATION:
AFRICAN-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS IN TENNESSEE

Laws for Freedom

African-Americans made significant contributions in the building of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad and at Johnsonville. These contributions occurred because the Civil War offered opportunities for free blacks and enslaved African-Americans to fight for freedom and for their own sense of American nationalism. After the Civil War began in April 1861, abolitionists continued their arguments that slaves came under the protection of international “laws of war,” which included the proclamation by the U.S. government of an Atlantic blockade and the treatment and imprisonment of Confederate captives as prisoners of war. Therefore, federal officials could emancipate slaves by “the confiscation of enemy property,” an action that “was a belligerent right recognized by international law.”¹

Just days after the Union’s disastrous defeat at Manassas, Virginia, on July 21, 1861, Lincoln addressed the Congress on July 25 about a number of war concerns and national issues. One issue in particular included Lincoln’s “mentioning” of a nationally supported emancipation bill, which at the urging of abolitionist Frederick Douglass, had slowly gained momentum in the northern states. In fact, in the weeks following his address to the Congress, the President continued to push his ideas about emancipation on a reluctant Congress.

¹ James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 267.

During the summer of 1862, with the support of Frederick Douglass and Senator Charles Sumner, Congress approved two laws that helped pave the path toward putting an end to slavery and enlisting African-Americans into military services. First was the Second Confiscation Act, which addressed freed slaves of people who were loyal to the Confederacy and property confiscation. Secondly, there was the Militia Act, which approved the recruitment “of persons of African descent” in “any military or naval service for which they may be found competent.”²

The Second Confiscation Act came about as a result of the Congress’s discussion about confiscation of enemy property. In December 1861, Senator Lyman Draper introduced a bill to “Confiscate the Property of the Rebels and Free Their Slaves.”³ Draper’s bill eventually became what was called the First Confiscation Act. Congress’s second proposal, developed from Draper’s 1861 legislation which “deprived any masters of any slaves used in the rebellion,” became the Second Confiscation Act.⁴ The difference between the two was that in the First Confiscation Act, Congress declared the forfeiture of slaves used in the rebellion, “but it ceded to the President...the power to emancipate forfeited slaves.”⁵ The Second Confiscation Act gave Congress the direct power, without the president, to “emancipate rebel owned slaves within Union lines in the seceded states.”⁶

² Gary Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 90.

³ James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 224-225; Hess, *The Civil War in the West*, 65-66.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, 226-227; Silvana R. Siddali, *From Property to Person: Slavery and the Confiscation Acts, 1861-1862* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 32-42, 182-189.

The First and Second Confiscation Acts were important because each created legislation that set into motion the destruction of slavery in all the seceded states. The Second Confiscation Act, however, proved to have more significance because it brought the issue of emancipation in Congress to the forefront and eventually separated the issues of confiscation and emancipation into two separate pieces of legislation. In other words, rather than confiscate slaves, the Act emancipated them, “not as a military necessity but as punishment for the crime of rebellion,” and was a legislative action that offered emancipation of slaves instead of one that required emancipation by force of military.⁷

In addition to the provisions outlined in the Second Confiscation Act that addressed the forfeiture of slaves as property, the Act also addressed the military’s ability to seize actual property from persons who supported the rebellion. However, as historian Earl Hess argues, Union soldiers, who were in a position to seize “property of anyone who supported the rebellion,” were denied such authority by the President. Lincoln instead put the responsibility of the Act’s seizure of property enforcement into the hands of Attorney General, Edward Bates, who (only at the beginning of the war) denied officers the ability to exercise orders to seize property from civilians. However, the seizure of property by Union soldiers such as houses for use as headquarters, food and livestock, and fuel sources, happened regardless because anywhere that the army ended up they “believed that seizure of property hurt Rebel sympathizers.”⁸

Lincoln, however, was not in favor of the provisions outlined in the Second Confiscation Act. He thought the act violated a constitutional ban on attainder, or rather,

⁷ Oakes, *Freedom National*, 226-232; *Congressional Globe*, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, 1862, 2233.

⁸ *Ibid*, 66; Hess, 65-66.

the confiscation of real estate beyond the life of a convicted traitor, which in this case were persons who had pledged to support the Confederate States of America. Eventually, the differences between Congress and the President were settled and on July 17, 1862, Lincoln signed into law the Second Confiscation Act. Overall, the Second Confiscation Act freed slaves from disloyal masters meaning slave owners in rebellion against the United States. The Second Confiscation Act was the first major step toward a broad and overarching proclamation of emancipation in the United States.⁹

A second piece of significant legislation involved the enlistment of African-Americans into military services known as the Militia Act of July 17, 1862, an updated version of the Militia Act of 1792, which restricted military service only to “every free able-bodied white male citizen.”¹⁰ Military demands on Union manpower had increased so much that the available surplus of white men needed to fill military ranks was quickly being depleted from sickness, death, and severe wounds. All branches of the Union’s military forces needed more men to fill the void. The army had excluded African-Americans from the rank and file of the regular United States Army since the War of 1812 and this was continued by the Union army at the beginning of the Civil War. The total number of free African-American men in the northern states, of all ages, equaled about 200,000. In the southern states, there were a tiny number of free blacks but almost four million black slaves.¹¹

⁹ Ibid, 236-238; *U.S. Statutes at Large*, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, 1862, 589-592.

¹⁰ Oakes, 360-61; Elizabeth D. Leonard, *Men of Color to Arms! Black Soldiers, Indian Wars, and the Quest for Equality* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010), 7-8.

¹¹ Ibid.

Lincoln's own military leaders did not want African-American combat soldiers but they did want more military labor battalions to free white soldiers needed for combat. The Militia Act allowed for the recruitment of men of "African-descent," but instead, these men were assigned to garrison "forts, positions, stations, and other places."¹² While the question of black enlistment was being dealt with in Washington, there had already been a substantial effort made in Louisiana to recruit blacks into military service. Eight months earlier on May 1, 1862, after Union forces under Major General Benjamin F. Butler seized the city of New Orleans, Brigadier General John W. Phelps, an ardent abolitionist and a principal subordinate to Butler, wanted to organize black soldiers and had already taken steps to do so. Butler, who upon hearing about the enlistment of blacks, told Phelps that only "the president could authorize the arming of blacks."¹³

To enforce the Militia Act, Lincoln urged Stanton to issue stringent orders to military leaders, which included Military Governor Johnson in Tennessee, to suppress criticism of the Militia Act. Johnson acknowledged Stanton's order but went even further by allowing occupying forces in Tennessee to commit hundreds of civil liberty violations against "civilians who were subjected to arbitrary, and often quite unreasonable, arrests."¹⁴

Meanwhile, Butler had begun conscripting African-Americans at New Orleans. Butler had actually considered the idea of black enlistment a year earlier in the summer

¹² James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 564.

¹³ Howard C. Westwood, "Lincoln's Position on Black Enlistments," in *Black Troops, White Commanders, and Freedmen During the Civil War*, ed. Howard C. Westwood (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 6-7; Leonard, 6-7.

¹⁴ Donald, *Lincoln*, 380.

of 1861 while stationed at Fortress Monroe, Virginia. Butler's idea was to use *contraband*, a legal term that reinterpreted African-Americans as enemy property, for military benefit.¹⁵ As a result, Butler created the First, Second, and Third Regiments of the Louisiana Native Guards, all which were African-Americans who eagerly joined the Union cause.¹⁶ During this period, the African-American "Native Guards" of New Orleans, refused to leave the city with the escaping Confederate Army. When Butler spoke with leaders of New Orleans' black community about why they had accepted service under the Confederate government they answered "they had not dared to refuse; that they had hoped by serving the Confederates, to advance a little nearer to equality with whites."¹⁷

On July 22, 1862, shortly after the Militia Act went into effect, Lincoln informed his cabinet that he intended to issue an emancipation proclamation. Lincoln understood, however, that only through a decisive military victory could he publically announce a proclamation that ended slavery in the United States. Lincoln also understood that the longer the war continued the chances were greater that slavery would not survive. Even though Lincoln's emancipation proclamation did not require legislative passage by Congress, still after much debate, Democrats begrudgingly agreed to its terms, but only after one condition: that West Virginia be granted statehood and emancipation offered only to persons born after July 4, 1863.¹⁸ Democrats rumored that the emancipation proclamation was a Republican ploy and that Lincoln would withdraw the bill, but they

¹⁵ Leonard, 7.

¹⁶ Ibid; Westwood, 7.

¹⁷ James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted During the War for the Union* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), 24; James Parton, *General Butler in New Orleans* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1864), 517.

¹⁸ McPherson, *Ordeal By Fire*, 297.

were mistaken. On December 1, 1862, Lincoln told the Congress that “in giving Freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to be free. We must disenthral ourselves, and then we shall save our country.”¹⁹

As 1862 drew to a close, the House of Representatives voted (by a straight line Republican Party vote), to adopt a resolution endorsing the proclamation. During the Civil War, most Northern Democrats endorsed socially conservative positions on race and slavery but they often were opposed to black equality in the North. For example, Lincoln’s defeated presidential opponent, democrat Stephen Douglas, declared “We do not believe in the equality of the Negro socially or politically. Our people are white people; our state is a white state, and we mean to preserve the race pure without any mixture with the Negro.”²⁰ One Northern Democrat newspaper, the *Burlington Weekly Sentinel*, even declared that it had “no love for the negro-slave system as such” and would not “for a moment stand in the way of its abolition.”²¹ But then the newspaper announced that “abolition, and not Slavery is the cause of all our present national troubles.”²² This exchange reveals notions that even though slavery was not good, Northern democrats believed abolition would be worse because by ending slavery neither blacks or whites, North or South, would benefit.

At last, Lincoln announced a new war aim for the Union when he officially signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, proclaiming freedom to all slaves

¹⁹ Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 Volumes, vol. 5 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 537.

²⁰ Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 185.

²¹ *Burlington Weekly Sentinel*, Jan 10, 1862, in Michael D. Pierson, “The Meaning of a Union Soldier’s Racial Joke,” *Civil War History* 61, no. 1(2015): 17.

²² *Ibid.*

located in the Confederate states not yet occupied by the Union army. However, the proclamation said nothing about free blacks, North or South. Lincoln had shown very little concern about the idea of enlisting blacks into military service until after he signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Regardless, just days after the signing of the proclamation, the President, acting upon his own initiative, ordered Colonel Daniel Ullman, to go to Louisiana and “organize a brigade of blacks whether found within or beyond the New Orleans area.”²³ After Ullman arrived, he started a successful system of black recruitment. From then on, black recruiting was authorized “quite beyond the emancipated slaves, and in the course of the spring the war department itself embarked on a nationwide black recruiting program conducted in the Mississippi Valley by the adjutant general and elsewhere by a new bureau, the Bureau of Colored Troops.”²⁴

Immediately, the Confederate government in Richmond, Virginia, condemned the proclamation claiming that emancipating the slaves was a “Yankee trick.”²⁵ As historian James M. McPherson emphasizes, Lincoln had shrewdly crafted the document to be used as a war measure “directed against enemy resources.”²⁶ McPherson reveals that even though the President of the United States and the army had the right to seize enemy resources, such as slaves, the Constitution did not protect slaves that were not owned by the enemy. But it did not matter. In southern states, already 100,000 blacks within Union liberated areas, including Tennessee, were now free from the “realities of war.”²⁷ As the war continued, the actions of slaves had a profound effect upon white soldiers and

²³Dudley T. Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1956), 100-101; Westwood, 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 298.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

citizens. As historian Barbara Fields contends, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation not only contributed to the Union's war aims by shifting the emphasis of the war against slavery, but in areas controlled by the United States military forces, it "fundamentally transformed the character of the war. The war for the Union became a war against slavery."²⁸

Unquestionably, Lincoln put great value in the service of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) in helping to win the war as historian John David Smith argues in *Lincoln and the U.S. Colored Troops*. Smith argues that "while Lincoln's final Emancipation Proclamation liberated and armed the slaves on paper it was the men of the USCT who welcomed them to their camps and liberated (sometimes by force) slaves on farms and plantations as they enveloped the Confederacy."²⁹ Harold Holzer's recent study on the Emancipation Proclamation, *Emancipating Lincoln: The Proclamation in Text, Context, and Memory*, suggests that it was the USCT, not Lincoln, who "fought directly for the freedom that Lincoln had promised."³⁰ Additionally, in *The Good Men Who Won the War*, historian Robert Hunt assesses the high performance level of the USCT as remembered by white soldiers in the Army of the Cumberland operating in Tennessee in 1862-63. Hunt contends that "those who saw blacks in action were obviously struck by the soldiers' performance and were willing to credit their action in the collective memory."³¹

²⁸ Gallagher, *The Union War*, 80.

²⁹ John David Smith, *Lincoln and the U.S. Colored Troops* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 108.

³⁰ Harold Holzer, *Emancipating Lincoln: The Proclamation in Text, Context, and Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 152-153, 161.

³¹ Hunt, 96.

The “Contrabands of War”

All over the south, thousands of slaves left their farms and plantations and went wherever the Union forces were camped. During the four years of the Civil War, more than 500,000 of the 3,500,000 slaves in the Confederacy, entered Union lines and gained their freedom.³² As Union troops filtered into Tennessee communities, thousands of former slaves flocked to Union camps. The problem of runaway slaves became so acute that General Grant actually created a policy to deal with the thousands of freed blacks who sought aid and protection from the army. Although Grant felt compassion for the enslaved blacks, he still examined the issue of how to deal with the former slaves as a process of military occupation. Essentially, wherever the Union army ended up in Tennessee, as well as in other southern states, slavery disintegrated.³³

To deal with the issue of runaway slaves in Tennessee, in November 1862, General Grant appointed John Eaton Jr., a chaplain in the 27th Ohio Infantry, to take charge of the thousands of contraband. As part of his appointment, Eaton was provided a new title, General Superintendent of Freedmen, in the Department of the Tennessee, an area that included west Tennessee, eastern Arkansas, northwestern Mississippi, and northern Louisiana.³⁴

³² “No More Auction Block for Me,” in James M. McPherson *Marching Toward Freedom: The Negro in the Civil War, 1861-1865* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 33. Marse Bob is a nickname for “Master Bob.” The term “Master” is a reference to slave master, or rather, the owner of the slave(s).

³³ Hess, *The Civil War in the West*, 73.

³⁴ McPherson, *The Negro’s Civil War*, 122; Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1953), 97.



Figure 7: John Eaton, Jr., General Superintendent of Freedmen, Department of Tennessee, 1863. Courtesy of TSLA.

Eaton wasted little time and established a contraband camp at Grand Junction, the first of its kind in Tennessee.³⁵ Inside the contraband camps, Eaton introduced sanitation policies, fed and clothed thousands of displaced men and women, provided food and medical care for black men, women, and children, and helped place able-bodied freedmen to work on government projects.³⁶ Even Grant wrote to his sister about the frustrations of how to deal with the former slaves. “I don’t know what is to become of these poor people in the end, but its weakening the enemy to take them from them.”³⁷

³⁵ Cheri LaFlamme Szcodronski, “From Contraband to Freedmen: General Grant, Chaplain Eaton, and Grand Junction, Tennessee,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 106-27.

³⁶ McPherson, *The Negro’s Civil War*, 122-124.

³⁷ Grant to Sister, August 19, 1862, in *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, 28 Volumes*, vol. 5, ed. John Y. Simon (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), 311.

Two years later, in June 1864, to assist Eaton in his efforts, Colonel Robert W. Barnard of the 101st USCT regiment in Tennessee, “took control of the contraband camp at Fort Donelson, Tennessee, and a new one at Hendersonville, Tennessee.”³⁸ Barnard, who was committed to seeing emancipation in Tennessee, provided himself with the title, Superintendent of Freedmen for the Department of the Cumberland. Contraband camps during the Civil War only evolved in Middle and West Tennessee. There is evidence of contraband camps that existed in Knoxville and Chattanooga late in the war, however, East Tennessee had a much smaller slave population than Middle and West Tennessee.³⁹

Eaton and Barnard strived to make their contraband camps as self-sufficient as possible. For example, Eaton secured equipment such as spinning wheels and looms where women could spin and weave their own clothing. One contraband camp located in Clarksville, Tennessee, even produced shoes.⁴⁰ However, as Robert Hunt argues, some Union officers were actually opposed to a contraband labor force such as Major General Lovell Rousseau, commander at Nashville in January 1864. Rousseau wrote that “Negroes leave their homes to work for themselves boarding and lodging with their masters, defiantly asserting their right to do it.”⁴¹

During the winter of 1862-63, Eaton put to work thousands of recently liberated Tennessee blacks on projects that were necessary for military activities.⁴² As the Union moved south, the army established more contraband camps. Eaton’s efforts in

³⁸ Cimprich, *Slavery’s End in Tennessee*, 51-52.

³⁹ Ibid; Bobby L. Lovett, “Contraband Camps (1864-1866),” in *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1998), 203-04.

⁴⁰ Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War*, 46; *Cincinnati Gazette*, March 24, 1862.

⁴¹ Hunt, 17.

⁴² Quarles, 97.

establishing contraband camps led to the organization of work parties that supported the army. For example, contraband were normally assigned to work parties and assigned tasks such as picking cotton on abandoned plantations, or, as the War Department suggested to General Grant, put to work in the Quartermaster's Department as teamsters, cooks, laborers for field fortifications, roads, and railroads.⁴³

In Nashville from 1862 to 1864, the number of fugitive slaves seeking military protection became so great it annoyed military officers, including Governor Johnson. Most of the problems stemmed from fugitive slaves consuming rations for the soldiers, occupying living spaces that were needed for military storage and encampment areas, and most of all, the time spent dealing with fugitive slaves that took officers and soldiers away from their daily military duties such as building defensive works, training and drilling, and guarding the city.⁴⁴

During the first three months of Nashville's occupation in 1862, so many fugitive slaves escaped to seek refuge with the army that General Buell issued orders not to allow any "contraband" inside the army's defensive lines.⁴⁵ Larger towns, which had been occupied by the Federal army, such as Nashville and later Memphis, offered contrabands their greatest chance of safety and for obtaining an occupation. Refugee camps arose around towns wherever the army made their camps. Contraband families usually moved into abandoned homes and outbuildings and whenever they could afford it, rented rooms which were rarely available to them. Shelters inside the refugee camps were typically

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Maslowski, *Treason Must Be Made Odious*, 99; Bobby L. Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 49.

⁴⁵ *Nashville Dispatch*, June 14, 1862.

built from wooden boards that had been stripped from the many wood-framed buildings. Most were windowless shacks with sod roofs and a tarp or blanket used for door or window coverings as an attempt to keep out inclement weather. In Memphis, Major General Stephen Hurlbut reported that over 2,000 contraband who were “not supported by the government, were crowded into all vacant sheds and houses, living by begging or vice. I see nothing before them but disease and death.”⁴⁶

A majority of Union officers did not agree with Governor Johnson’s war aim of following President Lincoln’s desire for abolition in Tennessee. At times, even Johnson did not agree with Lincoln’s policy of emancipation. For instance, in the summer of 1862, the federal government issued orders prohibiting the return of runaway slaves to masters which was a common problem in Nashville. Lincoln’s preliminary emancipation proclamation threatened “all seceded areas with immediate and uncompensated emancipation.”⁴⁷ Once again, Rousseau, an opponent of Lincoln’s emancipation policies, was just one of Lincoln’s general officers who detested how the effects of emancipation impacted the activities of the army. For example, as Robert Hunt reveals, Rousseau reported “negroes leave their homes and stroll over the country uncontrolled. Hundreds of them are now supported by the government who neither work or are able to work.”⁴⁸

Lincoln’s idea of emancipation in Tennessee frustrated Johnson who, at first, was not supportive of black freedom. Actually, after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, Johnson “lobbied to make sure Tennessee would not be covered by

⁴⁶ *OR*, Series I, vol. 24, pt. 3, 149.

⁴⁷ John Cimprich, “Military Governor Johnson and Tennessee Blacks, 1862-65.” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 39 (1980): 460-462.

⁴⁸ Hunt, 17.

the final version's provisions, but gave it strong support as a war measure everywhere else."⁴⁹ Even after Stanton's War Department sanctioned the enlistment of African-Americans, there were still many "Union-occupied regions in the South that lagged behind" as historian Anne Bailey reveals. In fact, many Union officers shared the same opinion as the brother of General William T. Sherman, Senator John Sherman, that black enlistees should be used only as "laborers and railroad guards."⁵⁰

African-American Soldiers and Impressed Laborers

Black men in every northern state had been offering their services as soldiers in the Union army since the first day of the war. Any such attempt, however, was immediately denied. This was, in part, because northern whites feared that by putting guns in the hands of blacks, they would organize into mobs and attack and kill whites in mass such as the actions led by Nat Turner in 1831. This was in addition to concerns about "black men's incapacity for disciplined military service."⁵¹ Still, however, thousands of free blacks who wished to enlist followed the same complex and practical motives as white soldiers. But regardless of their beliefs and motives, most blacks wanted to be inspired by the call to arms from black army recruiters and by orators such as Frederick Douglass. In *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee*, historian David Blight reveals that "the task was not only to convince the black soldier to come

⁴⁹ Mark W. Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion: A New History of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 22.

⁵⁰ Anne Bailey, "The USCT in the Confederate Heartland, 1864," in *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era*, ed. John David Smith (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 227.

⁵¹ Leonard, 5.

forth; it was also to persuade white northerners to fight a war against slavery with the aid of their black brothers.”⁵²

When Lincoln first became President, he told Congress on July 4, 1861, that he had “no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with slavery in the States where it exists.”⁵³ Initially, Lincoln viewed that the North was fighting the war for the restoration of a slaveholding Union, or as historian Gary Gallagher contends “the maintenance of the Union,” a war aim that the majority of northerners ranked atop the abolition of slavery.⁵⁴ President Lincoln’s methods, early in the war, to “restore the Union quickly and with minimal disruption to its racial traditions and institutions,” or in other words, to fight a “soft war,” presented many obstacles for African-American soldiers.⁵⁵ The Emancipation Proclamation, however, signaled Lincoln’s abandonment of his original “soft war” approach to handling the Confederacy. After January 1, 1863, the recruitment of blacks into the military increased twofold.⁵⁶ Lincoln wrote to Governor Johnson on March 26, 1863, to convince him that:

the colored population is the great available, and yet unavailable of, force for restoring the Union. The bare sight of fifty thousand armed, and drilled black soldiers on the banks of the Mississippi, would end the rebellion at once. And who doubts that we can present that sight, if we but take hold in earnest? If you have been thinking of it, please do not dismiss the thought.⁵⁷

⁵² David Blight, *Frederick Douglass’ Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 155.

⁵³ *Saturday Review*, September 14, 1861, in Ephraim D. Adams, *Great Britain and the American Civil War*, 2 vols., I (New York: Green and Company, 1925), 181; Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 263.

⁵⁴ Gallagher, *The Union War*, 34.

⁵⁵ Leonard, 5-6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁷ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 565; Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 94-95; *OR*, Series III, vol. 3, 103.

Revealing as the statement is, there is no evidence in Johnson's correspondence that he ever replied to the President's letter. Regardless of Johnson's inaction, the letter provides a look into what Lincoln was thinking in regards to the enlistment of black troops after his signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Historian Dudley Cornish revealed that Lincoln's letter to Johnson "stands as clear evidence that the movement which had painfully struggled for its existence in 1862 had finally won a permanent place in the war policies of the administration and of the president."⁵⁸

On September 19, 1863, Major George L. Stearns, who in June 1863 Secretary Stanton had designated as Tennessee's Commissioner for the Organization of U.S. Colored Troops, wrote Secretary Stanton about his concerns regarding pay for the colored troops. In his letter, Stearns expressed that "the colored men are anxious to enter the Army as soon as they can be treated fairly and paid promptly, but many have been employed for months without pay, some few I am told for twelve months and they distrust the officers who have thus neglected their duties."⁵⁹ This distrust infuriated Johnson who, in an earlier letter to Secretary Stanton, had already confirmed his dissatisfaction with Major Stearns' organization of Nashville's African-American workers:

Maj Stearns proposes to organize and place them in Camp where they in fact remain idle this will to a very great extent impede the progress of the works & diminish the number of hands employed. I must be frank in stating my

⁵⁸ Cornish, 94-95.

⁵⁹ Major George L. Stearns to Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, 19 September, 1863, in Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867, Selected from the Holdings of the National Archives of the United States, Series II, The Black Military Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 173-74.

opinion that Maj Stearns mission with his notions will give us no aid in organization Negro Reg'ts in Tennessee.⁶⁰

During Stearns' tenure as Tennessee's recruiting commissioner for colored troops, his efforts advocating the fair treatment and earned military pay were largely overlooked. In Graf and Haskins' *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, the authors note that Stearns' arrival in Tennessee "precipitated a conflict between those who favored the traditional use of blacks as unenlisted military laborers and those who saw them as a source of fighting power as enlisted and drilled soldiers."⁶¹

Despite the conflict between using blacks as either impressed laborers or fighting soldiers, Stearns ultimately recruited six regiments of USCT in Tennessee. But Stearns' attempt at providing bounties for black recruits strained his relationship with Stanton and "his objections to impressment and large-scale use of Negro soldiers for fatigue duty" made him unpopular with fellow field officers.⁶² Stearns resigned from the army on March 30, 1864. A year later, the Boston, Massachusetts, native returned to his home town and established a radical Republican newspaper called the *Right Way*.⁶³

African-American soldiers were rarely popular with the rank and file. One Indiana private remarked in 1863: "If emancipation is to be the policy of this war...I do not care how quick the country goes to pot."⁶⁴ Historian Anne Baily concluded "the majority of Northern citizens felt uncomfortable with what an armed black man would mean to

⁶⁰ Ibid, 172.

⁶¹ Graf and Haskins, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. 6, 354.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 120.

society at large.”⁶⁵ In a letter written by an Illinois officer serving in Tennessee in 1863, his opinion about African-American soldiers is a common reflection among whites’ disapproval of U.S. colored troops:

I don’t care a damn for the darkies, but I couldn’t help but send a runaway nigger back. I’m blamed if I could. I honestly believe that this army [in Tennessee] has taken 500 niggers away with them. I have 11 negroes in my company now. They do every particle of the dirty work. Two women among them doing the washing for the company.⁶⁶

Harsh, but authentic, this example provides a raw and realistic view of the grim future of black soldiers. James McPherson argues that the majority of white soldiers preferred African-American soldiers in support roles such as laborers on railroads and serving in rear support areas like Johnsonville. McPherson concluded that the majority of white soldiers and officers viewed the enlistment of USCT pragmatically, or rather, by understanding that with African-Americans entering the ranks, this weakened the Confederacy’s war effort.⁶⁷

On March, 25, 1863, Stanton ordered Adjutant-General of the United States, Lorenzo Thomas, to go west to the Mississippi Valley and conduct the organization of African-American troops in the war’s western theater. Thomas, a West Point graduate, had served 40 years in the army. Stanton chose Thomas because of his impeccable record at implementing policies.⁶⁸ Stanton’s orders confirmed to Thomas that “the President desires you to confirm freely with Major General Grant and explain the importance

⁶⁵ Bailey, “The USCT in the Confederate Heartland, 1864,” 227.

⁶⁶Ibid, 119.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 112-113.

attached by the Government to the use of the colored population emancipated by the President's proclamation, and particularly for the organization of their labor and military strength."⁶⁹

Three weeks later, Stanton wrote a similar communication to Governor Johnson directing him to "take in charge all abandoned slaves or colored persons who have been held in bondage, and provide for their useful employment and subsistence in such a manner as may be best adapted to their necessities and the circumstances."⁷⁰ Johnson, acting upon Stanton's own words, had already taken steps to impress free blacks in Nashville. In the first 18 months of Union occupation in Nashville, blacks were significantly mistreated and impressed into labor details for military purposes by orders of Governor Johnson. As an impressed laborer, one benefit, if any, was that the army would provide clothing, food, and housing as a condition for service to the government.⁷¹

The impressment of Tennessee's African-Americans into the Union war effort had three significant periods. The first was in August 1862, when General Buell requested one thousand slaves "for hands to work" on a variety of military buildings and at the wharf in Nashville.⁷² A second period of impressment occurred in the fall of 1862 when Union commanders in Nashville ordered the impressment of local blacks to work on fortifications around the city, a need that required enormous amounts of labor. The Union Army "took in or impressed many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of black laborers

⁶⁹ *OR*, Series 3, vol. 3, 100.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 123.

⁷¹ John Cimprich, *Slavery's End in Tennessee, 1861-1865* (The University of Alabama Press, 1985), 46-47.

⁷² Maslowski, 100.

throughout the heartland...and a number of those [former] slaves did not return home.”⁷³

A third period of impressment, and probably the most important as it relates to Johnsonville, was in August and September 1863, when Union authorities impressed 2,500 black laborers to help build the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad.⁷⁴

African-Americans impressed into working on federal war projects like the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad, were rarely paid. In historian Bobby Lovett’s dissertation “The Negro in Tennessee, 1861-1866: A Socio-Military History of the Civil War Era,” Lovett asserts that because a majority of the laborers were not paid, they therefore complained to white officers about it, and when they did, were heavily beaten, abused, and withheld food. Because of this treatment, Lovett argues, “many blacks deserted the labor camps,” especially those along the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad. Lovett accounts that from August 1863 to September 1864, “no less than 7,242 blacks worked on the Northwestern project.”⁷⁵

In August 1863, the *Nashville Daily Press* advertised for loyal slave owners to “join the labor force” suggesting that the longer they held out, the less likely they would get paid.⁷⁶ African-American railroad workers were to be paid ten dollars a month.⁷⁷ The following month, Governor Johnson advertised for “one thousand men, white or black,

⁷³ Stephen V. Ash, “Civil War, Black Freedom, and Social Change in the Upper South: Middle Tennessee, 1860-1870,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Tennessee at Knoxville, 1983, 335.

⁷⁴ Maslowski, 100.

⁷⁵ Bobby Lovett, “The Negro in Tennessee, 1861-1866: A Socio-Military History of the Civil War Era,” Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Arkansas, 1978, 33-34; Correspondence of General Alvan Gillem, Adjutant General, Department of the Cumberland, *Telegraph Book*, 1863, vol. 40 and *Letter Book*, vol. 41, RG 21, microfilm, TSLA.

⁷⁶ *Nashville Daily Press*, August 25, 1863.

⁷⁷ Maslowski, 100.

assuring loyal slave owners that they would be paid three hundred dollars for each of their slaves who was committed to the project [of building the N&NW railroad].”⁷⁸

United State Colored Troops and impressed black civilians were used significantly in the construction of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad. In addition to the impressed African-American laborers, the primary task of constructing and guarding the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad from Kingston Springs to the Tennessee River, went to the 12th, 13th, 40th, 100th, and some men of the 101st USCT regiments. Working around the clock in all weather conditions, these African-American civilians and soldiers labored heavily from September 1, 1863 to September 1, 1864, a total of twelve months.⁷⁹ African-Americans worked under the supervision of the First Michigan Engineers, a regiment of armed combat engineers and craftsmen experienced in a variety of construction and mechanical trades. In Mark Hoffman’s book “*My Brave Mechanics*” *The First Michigan Engineers and Their Civil War*, the author describes how members of the 12th and 13th USCT regiments “graded and filled the route” at section 38 of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad.⁸⁰

African-American laborers performed back-breaking work along the Nashville and Northwestern line, sometimes sixteen to eighteen hours a day. They used pick-axes, shovels, buckets, sleds, and wheel-barrows to move dirt and ballast to raise the height of the railroad bed. At the railroad’s terminus located at the Tennessee River (Lucas Landing), the 12th and 13th USCT had the additional task of working with

⁷⁸ Durham, *Reluctant Partners*, 26.

⁷⁹ *OR*, Series III, vol. 5, 947-48.

⁸⁰ Mark Hoffman, “*My Brave Mechanics*” *The First Michigan Engineers and Their Civil War* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 189.

Quartermaster's Department employees in constructing the buildings, corrals, and loading platforms at the supply depot.⁸¹

For abolitionists, Johnson's endorsement of using African-Americans to build the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad caused immediate controversy. Johnson's plan demonstrated to abolitionists that under his military governorship, which had been created by President Lincoln, the army endorsed the use of free African-Americans just for labor purposes. Abolitionists viewed Johnson's motive as an act by the U.S. government that imposed slave labor upon free civilians.⁸²

Eventually, the impressment of all able-bodied African-American adult men into separate, 98-man labor details, increased dramatically, and even included the use of women and teen-age children who were "independent of those regularly organized and employed as teamsters, cooks, pioneers, & c."⁸³ In March 1863, Major General Stephen A. Hurlbut, commander of the Sixteenth Army Corps in Memphis, wrote President Lincoln about the use of contraband including women and children. "There are about 5000 negroes, male and female, of all ages, supported by the Government. Most of these, say, two-thirds to three-fourths, are women and children, incapable of army labor-a weight and incumbrance [*sic*]."⁸⁴

Many times, Union officers ordered infantry and cavalry detachments to regularly visit African-American communities, and impress free blacks by force against their will. For example, in 1863, former slaves in Ashland City, Tennessee, were forcibly gathered

⁸¹ Lovett, "The Negro in Tennessee, 1861-1866," 288-291.

⁸² *Ibid*; *OR*, Series III, vol. 5, 944-49.

⁸³ *OR*, Series I, vol. 24, Pt.3, 149.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*.

by Union cavalry and made “to walk all the way to Nashville to be organized into labor battalions.”⁸⁵ James E. Yeatman, a representative of the Western Sanitary Commission, visited Eaton’s Department of Tennessee in 1864 and recalled similar acts while in Memphis. Yeatman wrote:

I saw a number of colored men pressed into service (not military), to labor at a rate of \$10 a month. Besides the fact that men are thus pressed into service, thousands have been employed for weeks and months who have never received anything but promises to pay, thus he was promised freedom, but how is it with him? He is seized in the street and ordered to go and help unload a steamboat, for which he will be paid, or sent to work in the trenches, or to labor for some Quartermaster, or to chop wood for the Government. He labors for months, and at last is only paid with promises. Under such treatment he feels that he has exchanged one master for many masters.⁸⁶

A roster of impressed laborers used to build the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad indicates that the majority of African-American males who were impressed in October 1863, were between the ages of 12 and 66, and almost all of them from surrounding areas such as Montgomery, Maury, Sumner, and Giles counties in Tennessee, and Todd and Logan counties along the southern Kentucky border.⁸⁷ Some African-American men were impressed strictly for their skills such as Nathan Anderson, Jr., a blacksmith from Centerville, Tennessee. Other impressed laborers, such as Benjamin Pitts, eventually found their way into the military ranks of the United States

⁸⁵ *Telegraph book*, Adjutant General Alvan Gillem to Captain M.S. Moore, September 28, 1863, Nashville, Tennessee, in the correspondence of Alvan Gillem, RG 21, TSLA, Nashville, TN.

⁸⁶ James E. Yeatman, “A Report on the Condition of the Freedmen of the Mississippi (St. Louis, 1864),” in *The Negro’s Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted During the War for the Union*, ed. James M. McPherson (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), 123-25.

⁸⁷ Roster of Negroes impressed for work on the Northwestern Railroad, 1863, microfilm, RG 4, TSLA, Nashville, TN.

Colored Troops (USCT). Pitts was mustered into the 40th USCT regiment, one of the USCT regiments who helped guard and labor on the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad. Although in many ways African-American men were better off being in a uniform, they were still expected to relieve white soldiers from menial and laborious duties. Prior to becoming soldiers, the men who later enlisted in the 12th USCT had been “impressed as contrabands” and put to work on Fort Negley and other Nashville fortifications in August and September 1862. The men who later joined the 12th USCT regiment remained in government service as impressed laborers until August 12, 1863, at which time they enlisted as volunteers in the United States Army at Nashville.⁸⁸

After recruitment, African-Americans from the 12th, 13th, 40th, 100th, and 101st USCT regiments were used regularly as military labor details, and in some instances, were ordered to work side-by-side with impressed laborers along the Nashville and Northwestern line.⁸⁹ In just twelve months, from September 1863 to September 1864, impressed African-American laborers, various USCT regiments, and a scattering of companies from various white regiments and engineer battalions, completed the remaining 50 miles of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad from Kingston Springs to the Tennessee River.

While skilled carpenters built trestles over watery terrain, impressed laborers raised the railroad bed, set railroad ties, and pounded rail spikes into position. This practically unknown and forgotten accomplishment, in which the railroad bed is still used today, is truly one of the greatest engineering marvels of the Civil War considering that laborers and engineers built 50- miles of railroad across almost impassable terrain in just

⁸⁸ *OR*, Supplement, Records of Events, vol. 77, U.S. Colored Troops (Union) Infantry, 482.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 482-83.

one year. Altogether, the contributions of African-Americans had an enormous impact on the history of Johnsonville and the construction of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad.

CHAPTER FIVE

JOHNSONVILLE'S LIFELINE: THE NASHVILLE AND NORTHWESTERN RAILROAD

Tense Beginnings

On January 22, 1852, the Tennessee General Assembly chartered the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad Company for the “purpose of establishing communication by railroad between Nashville and the Mississippi River, beginning at Nashville and terminating on the Mississippi River in Obion County.”¹ Prior to this, however, citizens of Weakley County in Martin, Tennessee, had already seen the advantage of an east-west railroad. These citizens had raised funds to connect Martin with the Hickman and Obion Railroad, which consisted of only fourteen miles of finished track between Union City, Tennessee, and Hickman, Kentucky.²

The following month, February 1852, the Tennessee General Assembly enacted that the railroad companies of the Tennessee Central, Memphis and Nashville, and the “North-western,” were required to “construct their tracks respectively with the same gauge as the Nashville and Chattanooga railroad.”³ The state granted these three railroad companies the right to “pass their locomotives and train of cars to the depot of the Central Trunk Railroad (at Nashville).”⁴ The Tennessee General Assembly authorized the Central Trunk Railroad Company to select “the most eligible route, to cross the Tennessee river at some point between the mouth of Duck river and the foot of White

¹ *ACTS OF TENNESSEE*, 1853-1854, 82; E.H. Marshall, *History of Obion County* (Union City, TN: H.A. Lanzer Co., 1970), 159.

² Westin Goodspeed, et, al., *History of Tennessee: With Sketches of Gibson, Obion, Weakley, Dyer, and Lake Counties* (Nashville: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1887), 834-835.

³ *ACTS OF TENNESSEE*, 1851-52, 531.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Oak island in Humphreys county, and to reach the highland on the west side of the Tennessee river.”⁵

To ensure that a Tennessee River bridge would be completed, the Tennessee General Assembly appointed a board of commissioners from those counties by which the Nashville and Northwestern would traverse. For the commissioner’s service, each received “subscriptions of stock,” at a cost of \$100 a share, in the Central Trunk Railroad Company, and were not required to pay more than one percent back to the Company of their subscription’s worth.⁶ In other words, this meant that once 10,000 shares of stock were subscribed and the capital stock was fixed at 30,000 shares, the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad Company increased its capital stock shares “to a sum sufficient to complete the road and equip it.”⁷ Under Tennessee’s General Improvement Laws of 1851-52, the state retained a lien as a security measure for the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad Company.⁸ These state bonds, funded by taxpayers, amounted to \$4,590,859.50 and were used to pay for the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad.⁹

One taxpayer was Nashville businessman, Jacob French. In December 1861, French made a payment of taxes to help fund the construction of the railroad.¹⁰ Years later in 1870, the State of Tennessee would eventually file a bill in the Chancery Court in Nashville seeking to enforce the lien against the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad

⁵ Ibid, 528.

⁶ Ibid, 532.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Edward W. Hines, *Corporate History of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad Company and Roads In Its System* (Louisville: John P. Morton & Company, 1905), 321.

⁹ *Legislative History of the Louisville & Nashville R.R. Co. and Roads in its System* (No publisher provided, 1898), 19.

¹⁰ Tax receipt for Mr. Jacob French.

Company for default in the payment of interest on the bonds issued for the benefit of its construction.¹¹ State records show that by 1853, railroad construction in Tennessee took priority over practically all business conducted by the Tennessee General Assembly. For instance, on December 20, 1853, the General Assembly declared that the stock of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad Company shall be “forever exempt from taxation” for a period of twenty years from its completion. This benefit allowed not only the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad to be completed within its construction schedule as outlined by its chief engineer, but also provided other railroad companies with the financial leverage to begin or complete new and previously laid track.¹²

By December 1854, the city of Nashville had raised \$270,000 to help kick-off the construction of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad.¹³ Around the same time, the Tennessee General Assembly also authorized the Hickman and Obion Railroad Company to extend its rail lines to the town of Dresden, in Weakley County, and to connect to the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad “at such point as may be convenient” elsewhere in either Weakley or Obion county.¹⁴ A year later, the Hickman and Obion Railroad connected to the Nashville and Northwestern at Dresden, Tennessee, for the purpose of intersecting with the Mobile and Ohio Railroad.¹⁵ However, during the winter of 1855-56, it was so “intensely cold” that construction operations on the Nashville and

¹¹ *ACTS OF TENNESSEE, 1870-71*, 25.

¹² *Ibid*, 1853-54, 690-691.

¹³ John Wooldridge, Ed., *History of Nashville, Tenn* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1890), 330.

¹⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁵ *ACTS OF TENNESSEE, 1853-54*, 702-703; *Report of the Committee of the City Council of Nashville, Upon the Affairs of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad Company*, (Publisher Unknown, 1859), 11.

Northwestern line would not commence again until mid-March, 1856.¹⁶ That same month, the Kentucky General Assembly adopted the charter for the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad Company for its connection from Nashville to Hickman, Kentucky.¹⁷ For the remainder of the year, the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad Company continued their existing tracks from Union City to Martin, then eventually to Dresden, Tennessee. By 1857, the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad joined the critical junction of the Memphis and Ohio Railroad at McKenzie, Tennessee.¹⁸

From the center of Nashville, beginning near the original depot site of the Central Trunk Railroad, the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad Company was successful in completing 25 miles of finished rail to the town of Kingston Springs, Tennessee.¹⁹ Beginning at the Tennessee River heading east, an additional six miles of track had been laid just south of Reynoldsburg. The Nashville and Northwestern Railroad Company, since its beginnings in 1852, had continued to follow its plans of constructing a “draw bridge” across the Tennessee River so as not to obstruct “the free navigation of said river.”²⁰

¹⁶ *The Annual Report of the President and Directors of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company: Commencing on the First Monday in October 1856, and Ending October 1857* (Louisville: C. Settle, Third Street, Over Madden’s Bookstore, 1857), 8-9.

¹⁷ *ACTS OF KENTUCKY*, 1855-56, 80.

¹⁸ Addie Lou Brooks, “The Building of the Trunk Line Railroads in West Tennessee, 1852-1861,” *Tennessee Old and New, 1796-1946*, II (Memphis: The West Tennessee Historical Society, 1942), 208-209.

¹⁹ *The Annual Report of the President and Directors of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company: Commencing on the First Monday in October 1856, and Ending October 1857* (Louisville: C. Settle, Third Street, Over Madden’s Bookstore, 1857), 8-9.

²⁰ *ACTS OF TENNESSEE*, 1853-1854, CCCXII, 703.

In September 1857, Colonel Vernon K. Stevenson, President of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad Company, submitted a report to Mr. Robert G. Payne, the State Railroad Commissioner of Tennessee, about the conditions of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad.²¹ Stevenson reported to the Nashville City Council that the total funds needed to build all 170 miles of track was \$2,933,200.00. This figure included all grading, cross-ties, iron of the “U pattern (rails),” spikes, gravel, depots, locomotives, passenger and railcars, box and freight cars, repair cars, switches, eight miles of side track, labor, engineering, and contingencies.²²

Five months later members of the Tennessee House of Representatives used the expiration of the railroad’s original charter on January 1, 1858, as a wedge to force concessions from the railroad and send its route through the center of Carroll County, especially the county seat of Huntingdon. The Tennessee General Assembly extended the charter but kept the original route to Hickman, Kentucky. Problems in funding the line, however, remained and as 1860 arrived, little of the actual route had been finished.²³

²¹ Stevenson made the report to the State Railroad Commissioner because at that time there was “no Superintendent or Chief Engineer on this road.” As mentioned in the: *Report of the Committee of the City Council of Nashville, Upon the Affairs of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad Company*, 1859; R.G. Payne, *Report to the General Assembly on the Condition of the Railroads in Tennessee* (Nashville: G.C. Torbett & Co., Printers, 1857), 15-19.

²² *Report of the Committee of the City Council of Nashville, Upon the Affairs of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad Company*, 10; Payne, *Report to the General Assembly on the Condition of the Railroads in Tennessee*, 23-26; *Nashville Union and American*, February 16, 1858.

²³ *Ibid.*

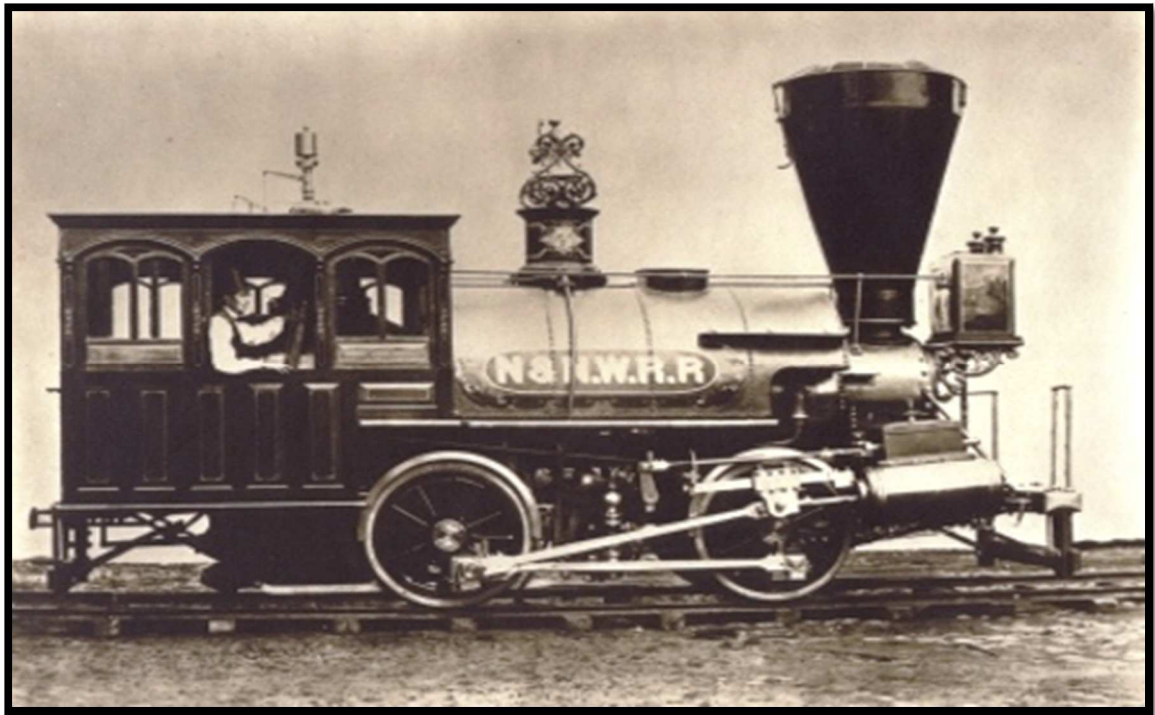


Figure 8: A Nashville and Northwestern Railroad Engine, circa 1859. Courtesy of TSLA.

A “Military Railroad”

By April 1861, the first month of the Civil War, a total of 51 miles of track of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad—less than a third of the route—had been completed between McKenzie, Tennessee, and Hickman, Kentucky.²⁴ In June, Tennessee voted to leave the Union and join the Confederate States of America. Tennessee’s railroad network became a major factor in the Western Theater of the war. Because of the railroads’ generally good condition and ability to deliver troops and supplies in all directions, these transportation systems were not just an advantage to the Confederacy

²⁴ Brooks, “The Building of the Trunk Line Railroads in West Tennessee, 1852-1861,” 204-211.

but proved also to be advantageous for Union forces as their plans for an invasion of the South developed.²⁵

In 1861, five of six of the primary Tennessee Railroads were (north to south): the Mobile and Ohio Railroad in West Tennessee, the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad and Louisville and Nashville Railroad in Middle Tennessee, and the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad and East Tennessee and Georgia Railroad in East Tennessee. The one east to west railroad of significance was the Memphis and Charleston Railroad. The Nashville and Northwestern Railroad was not near completion, and war planners on both sides gave it little consideration.²⁶

In June 1862, leading West Tennessee unionist, Emerson Etheridge, wrote Governor Johnson imploring him to comply with the wishes of Lawrence Trimble, the president of the New Orleans and Ohio Railroad, who wanted to “take charge of the Nashville and North Western Rail road from Hickman KY. to McKenzie junction on the Memphis and Ohio Road and to put it in running order immediately.”²⁷ Johnson ignored the request, but a year later, federal officials were ready to finish the Nashville and Northwestern route and to provide an east-west outlet for transportation to Nashville and to supplement the north-south links provided by the Louisville and Nashville and the Nashville and Chattanooga. Once Major General William T. Sherman invaded the Deep

²⁵ Hess, *The Civil War in the West*, 208-212.

²⁶ Edward A. Johnson, “Railroads,” in *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West 769-72; Bonnie Gamble, “Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad,” in *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West, 767-68; Russell Wigginton, “Louisville and Nashville Railroad,” in *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West, 765-66.

²⁷ Emerson Etheridge to Governor Andrew Johnson, June 11, 1862, in Graf and Haskins, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. 5, 464.

South in 1864, the Nashville-centered transportation network proved crucial.²⁸ Sherman admitted in his memoirs that the logistical and military importance of the Louisville and Nashville and Nashville and Chattanooga railroads was crucial to the Union's victory. "That single stem of railroad supplied an army of 100,000 men and 35,000 horses for a period of 196 days: from May 1 to November 12, 1864. To have delivered that amount of forage and food by ordinary wagons, would have required 36,800 wagons of six mules each, allowing each wagon to have hauled two tons twenty miles a day, a simple impossibility in such roads as existed in that region."²⁹

The construction of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad was critical to Nashville's importance as a major federal base of operations. Railroad historian Jessie Burt called the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad "the key to the main Federal logistical problem in the West: how to eliminate constant risk and uncertainty of supply at Nashville, and thus avoid the most disastrous of all emergencies known to an army, failure of supply."³⁰

Building a railroad in the middle of a war also created opportunities for African-Americans in the Union army. On August 18, 1863, Governor Johnson wrote General Rosecrans, who was now located with his Army of the Cumberland at the Nashville and Chattanooga railroad junction at Stevenson, Alabama, suggesting that "this is a favorable time to commence work on the Northwestern Railroad. The force necessary is a guard. Its construction need not be large. The labor and money necessary can be readily

²⁸ Durham, 23.

²⁹ William T. Sherman, *Memories of General W.T. Sherman, Vols. I & II Together* (New York: Charles L. Webster and Co., 1891), 399.

³⁰ Jesse C. Burt, "Sherman's Logistics and Andrew Johnson," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 15 (1956): 198.

obtained.”³¹ Johnson received a telegraph instructing that the “general commanding [Rosecrans] authorizes and directs the construction of the Northwestern Railroad as soon as possible. Major-General Granger has had orders to clear that country and furnish guards as soon as possible.”³² The next day, Major Frank Bond, Rosecrans’ aide-de-camp, told Tennessee Adjutant-General, Alvan C. Gillem, that Rosecrans intended for him to “get all the negroes you can and notify him, and he will have them organized and mustered into service and put to work on the Northwestern road.”³³

On August 27, 1863, Rosecrans gave Johnson the task of the “building of the North Western Railroad. Colonel Innes Military Supt. of Rail-roads, will detail the requisite number of engineers, and furnish rolling stock to carry on the work.”³⁴ Upon receiving Rosecrans’ orders, Johnson promptly responded: “Your orders in regard to the construction of the Northwestern Railroad I have taken steps to execute, and will proceed to have it finished without delay.”³⁵ Military construction on the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad began in early September 1863, although a later 1866 report, prepared by Assistant-Adjutant General, Thomas M. Vincent, inexplicably assigned a project beginning date of October 22, 1863.³⁶ Secretary Stanton empowered Johnson to “employ a competent engineer, and other officers, agents, and workmen necessary to complete said line of railroad without delay.”³⁷

³¹ *OR*, Series I, vol. 30, Pt. 3, 67.

³² *Ibid*, 74.

³³ *Ibid*, 80.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 184-185; Graf and Haskins, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. 6, 343.

³⁵ *OR*, Series I, vol. 30, Pt. 3, 297.

³⁶ *Ibid*.

³⁷ *OR*, Series III, vol. 5, 943.

Working under Johnson's oversight, Colonel William P. Innes, commander of the U.S. Military Railroad Department in Tennessee, already had "a considerable force of soldiers and civilian laborers employed on the road."³⁸ Work commenced aggressively, however, as the war pushed south following the Confederate victory at the Battle of Chickamauga on September 19-20, progress began to wane. By February 1864, it was apparent that the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad had not progressed under Innes' management "to the satisfaction of the commanding general (U.S. Grant)." Instead, Grant assigned Brigadier General Daniel C. McCallum the sole responsibility of completing the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad to the Tennessee River.³⁹

Thousands of impressed civilian African-American laborers, seven-hundred men from the 12th and 13th USCT, various white regiments, and the First Michigan Engineers, joined the efforts already in progress by the First Missouri Engineers on the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad. All of these men provided the initial labor for building the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad.⁴⁰ However, it was the First Missouri Engineers, who had temporarily been ordered by Military Governor Johnson to commence work as early as February 24, 1863, and who had remained on duty along the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad longer than anyone else until August 1, 1864. Regardless of the work conducted by this combined force, still more laborers were needed. Rosecrans told Governor Johnson to "Ask President Lincoln if he cannot send you more colored or

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid, 933-34, 943-44.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 948.

engineer troops from General Grant's department for the same purpose, the whole to be under your command."⁴¹

More African-American laborers from surrounding communities in Montgomery, Maury, and Giles counties in Tennessee, and from Todd and Logan counties in southern Kentucky, were pressed into service and paid ten dollars a week.⁴² These men were rounded-up by federal troops and either transported or required to report to Nashville where they were organized into railroad labor detachments.⁴³ Additionally, federal officers in charge of military troops operating in the area were required to contribute men to the railroad construction project. One officer was Colonel Henry R. Mizner of the 14th Michigan Infantry. Writing from Columbia, Tennessee, on September 3, 1863, Mizner told Governor Johnson that:

Col Cypert (U.S. 2nd Tennessee Mounted Infantry) left this morning with nearly two hundred men. I sent advanceguard to protect him to Franklin. I shall earnestly cooperate in furnishing Negroes for North western Road unless directed by Genl Comdg to do otherwise. I have suggested to officers here recruiting for Negro Regiments that they Return to Nashville & Report to Maj. Stearns.⁴⁴

In the *Nashville Daily Union* on September 27, 1863, an advertisement requested "one thousand men, white or black, assuring loyal slave owners that they would be paid three hundred dollars for each of their slaves who was committed to the project [of

⁴¹ *OR*, Series I, vol. 30, Pt. 3, 185.

⁴² Roster of Negroes impressed for work on the Northwestern Railroad, 1863, microfilm, RG 4, TSLA, Nashville, TN; Maslowski, 100.

⁴³ Maslowski, 100.

⁴⁴ Henry R. Mizner to Andrew Johnson, September 3, 1863, in Graf and Haskins, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. 6, 353. George L. Stearns was designated recruiting commissioner of colored troops by Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton in June 1863.

building the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad].”⁴⁵ To ensure a successful project, federal officials first had to find enough troops to guard against any attacking Confederate parties that might hamper the railroad’s completion. This task went to Major General Gordon Granger who assigned guard details at various points along the railroad. Secondly, rations for the railroad’s workers were supplied by “the chief commissary” in Nashville while Colonel Innes continued to supply “a requisite number of engineers, and furnish the rolling stock necessary to carry on the work.”⁴⁶

Finally, there was the constant search for materials needed to build the railroad. Captain Simon Perkins, Jr., an assistant quartermaster who served at the Nashville depot from 1863 to 1864, was responsible for administering hundreds of requisitions for construction materials needed to build the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad. Many of Perkins’ orders were for timber needed to make railroad ties. One such requisition was a payment to Mr. William B. Ewing, a private timber contractor. Ewing had entered into competition with a Mr. G.M. Anderson, another timber supplier competing for a contract for the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad. As illustrated in an August 1863 memorandum, Anderson agreed:

not to cut such timber as will be needed for Rail Timber, but such as will be selected from places designated by said Ewing paying for the same at One Dollar per board, payable when Five Hundred Cords shall be cut. Timber to be measured in Gov’t Wood Yard. Mr. Anderson agrees his Hands shall commit no depredations on said place.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Nashville Daily Union*, September 27, 1863.

⁴⁶ Durham, 26.

⁴⁷ Memorandum from the Assistant Quartermasters Office, August 26, 1863, in the *Papers of Simon Perkins, Jr., Assistant Quartermaster, Nashville Depot*, microfilm Accession # 1527, Box 2, Folder 1, TSLA, Nashville, TN.

This example demonstrates not only that competition for military contracts by civilian suppliers was tight, but also proves that acquisition of construction materials for the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad had commenced prior to the official start date of October 22, 1863, and that the U.S. Quartermaster's Department in Nashville was intensely involved with locating private contractors to supply the massive amount of wood needed to complete the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad.

Another revealing example which proves that construction of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad was already underway in early September 1863 was included in correspondence dated September 9, 1863, from Assistant Adjutant-General Goddard to Colonel Innes in Nashville instructing him to "send the four companies to Northwestern road if it could be done without interfering with work on this line."⁴⁸

On October 24, 1863, Assistant Quartermaster Perkins issued a "Wood Contract" for the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad to a Mr. W.G. Harding (not the William Giles Harding of Belle Meade). The wood contract was an agreement to allow "Harding Four (4) dollars per Cord for (1000) One thousand cords of wood to be cut and delivered where corded near the North Western Rail Road by the first day of January 1864 for supply of United States Troops Stationed at this Depot. Wood to be delivered within Seven & half miles of this city."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *OR*, Series I, vol. 30, Pt. 3, 480.

⁴⁹ Wood Contract by A.Q.M. Simon Perkins for W.G. Harding, October 24, 1863, Papers of Simon Perkins, Jr., Assistant Quartermaster, Nashville Depot, Microfilm Accession # 1527, Box 2, Folder 11, TSLA, Nashville, TN.

Military lumber contracts became competitive among local civilians, and at times, even deadly. For example, on August 30, 1864, the *Louisville Daily Journal* stated that “a most atrocious murder was committed on the Northwestern railroad, 45 miles from that city [Nashville].”⁵⁰ The story recalled how an “old gentleman...about 60 years of age, a former resident of Nashville, an owner of blooded horses, and a man of considerable wealth, and his wife [were] found in their own house bearing the marks of bloody crime.”⁵¹ The grisly details describe how the:

old gentleman was found lying upon his face, a large stab in the back, and, a large number of stabs visible upon his chest, and his throat was gashed in three places. The body of the woman-apparently a woman of 30 years of age-was found lying across the bed, her throat cut from ear to ear, and two large gashes upon her forehead. A large butcher knife, covered with blood, was found lying near her head.⁵²

As the railroad progressed toward the Tennessee River from Cheatham County, Tennessee, it is clear that the enlistment of African-American soldiers had a significant impact on the completion of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad and its protective fortifications including various redoubts and blockhouses along the route. The task of guarding the road from guerrilla attacks fell to the responsibility of the 12th, 13th, 40th, and 100th USCT regiments and troopers of the 8th Iowa Cavalry. As the railroad work progressed, the 12th and 13th USCT regiments encamped at Waverly, Tennessee, and

⁵⁰ *Louisville Daily Journal*, August 30, 1864.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

were assigned as permanent guards at various sections of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad between Kingston Springs and the Tennessee River.⁵³

The 12th and 13th USCT guarded a variety of railroad sections such as “C-3, 26 ½, 38 and 53,” from November 1863 to June 1864.⁵⁴ At each section, the USCT were used to fulfill two primary goals: to provide a military labor force and to guard the railroad against Confederate or partisan attacks.⁵⁵ Together with the 40th and 100th USCT regiments, the 12th and 13th USCT worked alongside impressed African-American laborers to set railroad ties, move steel rails into place, and hammer rail spikes along the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad. As work on the railroad commenced, these same regiments showed up at the Tennessee River at various times and assisted with the construction of the supply depot.⁵⁶

On November 3, 1863, a telegraph from the adjutant of Major General George H. Thomas was sent to Brigadier General Alvan C. Gillem who was in Chattanooga with the First Regiment of USCT, about the need for guards along the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad:

The First Regt. Colored Troops, from Elk River, will be ordered to report to you for duty on the Northwestern Railroad. A regiment of cavalry 1,100 strong, now marching from Louisville, will also be sent to you for guard duty. The general commanding wishes you to assist the colonel of this regiment [Eighth Iowa Cavalry] in disciplining his regiment and perfecting it in drill. All the troops on the Northwestern Railroad are under your

⁵³ *OR*, Supplement, Records of Events, U.S. Colored Troops (Union), vol. 77, 469-70.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 471.

⁵⁵ *OR*, Series III, vol. 5, 947-48; *OR*, Supplement, Records of Events, U.S. Colored Troops (Union), vol. 77, 471-72.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

command while engaged on that work, and the general expects you to control them and enforce discipline.⁵⁷

Some of the USCT proved to be unruly at times. On October 16, 1863, Dr. William Carter, who resided on the Harpeth River around “Dog Creek,” about fifteen miles southwest of Nashville, complained to Governor Johnson about the “conduct of some of the Colored troops under the command of [name not legible]. I hope you will give him a hearing in the premises.”⁵⁸ The “Colored troops” that Carter identified were likely the 12th USCT under the command of Colonel Charles R. Thompson. Stearns told Johnson that he had been apprised of the situation and that “five men were promptly punished for the offence.”⁵⁹

On August 9, 1864, the U.S. Army officially took over operation of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad, and the line became strictly a military railroad.⁶⁰ The amount of grading of the line was considerable and by the time the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad was fully completed, 7,300 impressed African-American laborers and 4,000 USCT and various white soldiers had labored to complete 50 miles of finished railroad to the Tennessee River. Even though the depot officially opened on May 19, 1864, and was accessed by the railroad on that date, there were still sections not yet completed and much

⁵⁷ OR, Series I, vol. 31, Pt. 3, 28. It should be noted that the “First Regt. Colored Troops” that Gillem referred to was actually men in the 12th, 40th, 100 and 101st USCT infantry regiments, not to be confused with the 1st and 2nd regiments of the U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery regiments who were mustered in and operated around Memphis, TN.

⁵⁸ Andrew Johnson to George Stearns, October 16, 1863, in Graf and Haskins, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. 6, 421; W.W. Clayton, *History of Davidson County, Tennessee, With Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis and Company, 1880), 432.

⁵⁹ Ibid, Graf and Haskins, 421.

⁶⁰ Dain L. Schult, *Nashville, Chattanooga, and St. Louis: A History of “The Dixie Line”* (Lynchburg, VA: TLC Publishing Inc., 2001), 30.

labor was required of these men to “dress up the embankments and clean out the cuts.”⁶¹

After one full year of constant labor, guerilla attacks upon railroad work details, and great expense, the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad was officially completed on September 1, 1864.⁶²

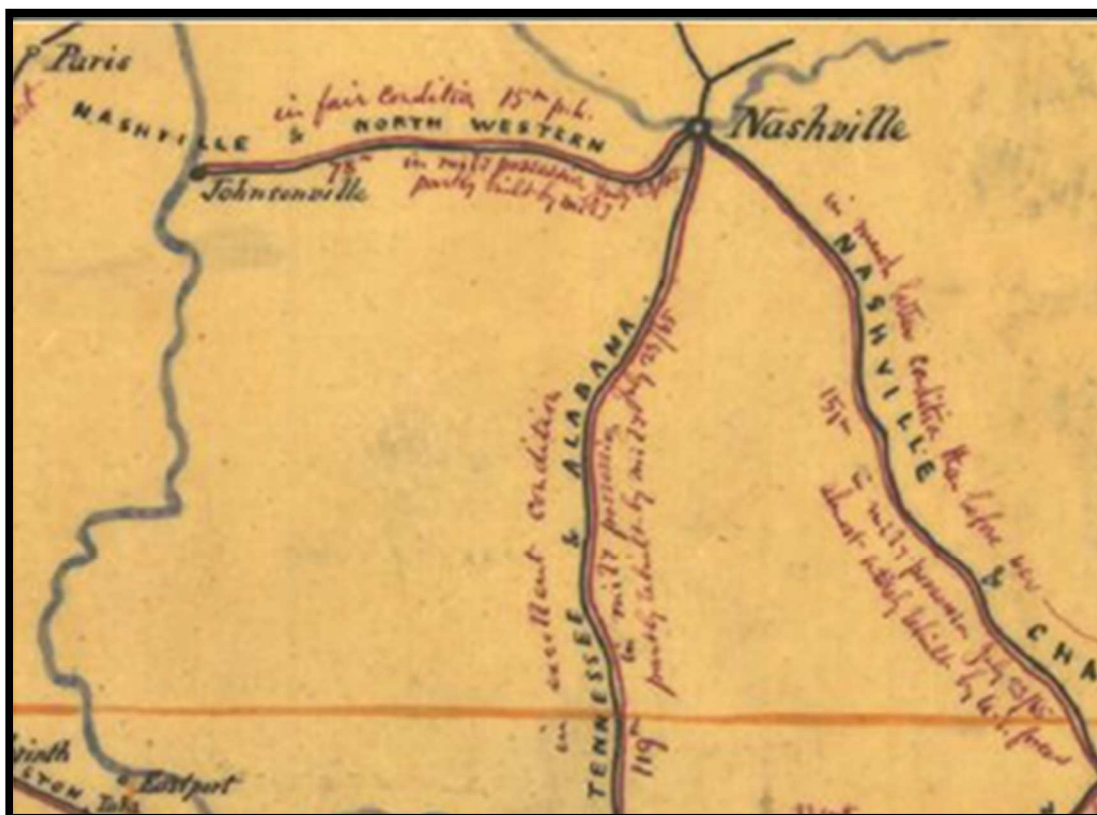


Figure 9: U.S. Officer's map of NNWRR, N&CRR and TN&AL RR, 1865. Courtesy of TSLA.

⁶¹ OR, Series III, vol. 5, 945.

⁶² Ibid, 948-49.

CHAPTER SIX
LIVING AND WORKING AT JOHNSONVILLE



Figure 10: The 2nd U.S. Colored Light Artillery at Johnsonville, Tennessee, Nov. 1864. Photograph by Jacob F. Coonley taken November 23, 1864. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Photographic evidence of supply depots and logistical operations outside of larger Union occupied cities such as Nashville and Atlanta, are practically non-existent in the western theater. Johnsonville, however, is the rare exception. In late 1864, photographer Jacob F. Coonley, together with mentor and fellow photographer, George N. Barnard, produced most of the images of Nashville and surrounding areas in Tennessee during the

Civil War. Prior to the Civil War, Coonley had been a landscape painter, but due to the economic crash of the Panic of 1857, Coonley was unable to survive selling portraits and instead turned to a more lucrative art-form of the period, photography. Coonley trained and learned his photography skills from George Barnard and eventually operated his own photography studio in Syracuse, New York. When the war began in 1861, Coonley left New York and became an employee at the gallery of famed photographer, Matthew Brady, in Washington. Together, with Barnard, Coonley traveled around the South to shoot “field and camp portraits” of the Union army.¹

In 1907, Coonley wrote about his war-time experiences. In his memoirs Coonley recalled that in 1864:

I was informed that a contract had been awarded me by the Quarter-master-General [Montgomery Meigs] for photographic work along the lines of the railroads in possession of and used by the War Department, extending from Nashville to Chattanooga, Knoxville, Johnsonville, Tenn.; Atlanta, Ga., and Decatur and Huntsville, Ala. On arriving at Nashville the military authorities had a box-car equipped for my work, and this, with an engine, was placed at my disposal with authority to go over the territory. The work had many interruptions, owing to the destruction of bridges or being chased by cavalry or similar charges.²

It is unknown on what date Coonley arrived at Johnsonville, however, one clue is “Nov. 23,” visible on one of the original negatives of Johnsonville.³ Considering that the negatives would have been produced on-site, it is almost certain that this was the date

¹ Bob Zeller, *The Blue and Gray in Black and White: A History of Civil War Photography* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2005), 159-60.

² *Ibid.*, 160.

³ Image of 2nd U.S. Colored Light Artillery at Johnsonville, Tennessee. On the original negative of this image at the Library of Congress is inscribed, “Nov. 23, 64.”

Coonley made the Johnsonville images. It is uncertain, however, how many photographs Coonley made of Johnsonville, but only five images are known to exist and are included in the Civil War photograph collection at the Library of Congress.⁴ Coonley's Johnsonville photographs identify the town and a majority of the depot's buildings. These five photographs provide much of the intricate detail about Johnsonville and are included throughout this dissertation.

Constructing the Supply Depot

Military Governor Andrew Johnson had the overall responsibility of overseeing the completion of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad and the Tennessee River supply depot. The construction of the supply depot was managed by the Quartermaster's Department in Nashville. The Chief Quartermaster of the Nashville depot was Colonel James L. Donaldson. Donaldson was ordered by the U.S. Army's Chief Quartermaster, Major General Montgomery C. Meigs, to oversee construction of the depot at the Tennessee River and to get operations there moving quickly. Donaldson assigned a chief quartermaster and a variety of assistant quartermasters to run operations at Johnsonville.⁵ At first, Captain Charles A. Reynolds was assigned as Chief Quartermaster. Serving under him were Assistant Quartermasters Captain Henry Howland, Captain Joseph D. Stubbs, and Captain James E. Montandon. Eventually, Reynolds was reassigned to a different post and Captain Henry Howland replaced him as Chief Quartermaster at Johnsonville.⁶

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *OR*, Series III, vol. 5, 948.

⁶ *OR*, Series I, vol. 30, pt. 3, 310-11.

On September 1, 1863, civilian laborers from Nashville and from local communities in the Trace Creek region arrived at the depot site. The civilian laborers were supervised by the U.S. Quartermaster's Department. Soldiers toiled alongside the civilians constructing buildings, loading platforms, corrals and every other structure necessary for operating the supply depot. Since most of the civilian workers were from the local area, except for the impressed African-American laborers, many were actually Confederate sympathizers and had relatives serving in the Confederate Army.⁷ As more workers and soldiers arrived at the Tennessee River, they were put to work by Quartermaster's Department officers using felling axes and cross-cut saws to open a 100-acre patch of forest in a circular pattern around Lucas Landing.⁸ After trees were felled and de-limbed, buck sawyers then cut the felled trees into logs.⁹ Soldiers used the logs to build shelters and camps in the bottomland south of Trace Creek about three-quarters of a mile from the Tennessee River.

The terrain that surrounded the area where the military depot was built was hilly and thickly forested. In May 1864, a newspaper reporter described the supply depot area. "On the opposite side is a dense forest, extending as far as the eye can reach; the water is smooth as glass, and all nature is hushed. At this point, the river is 903 feet wide at low-water mark, and there is at least four feet water at all seasons of the year."¹⁰

⁷ Garrett, 49-60.

⁸ Letters of Corporal Lorenzo Atwood, 43rd Wisconsin Infantry Regiment, October 19, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee. With permission from Warren and Robin Atwood.

⁹ *Ibid*; Buck sawyers were loggers responsible for selecting and cutting the felled trees into logs. During the Civil War, these men would have had experience prior to the war as sawyers. They were used extensively as pioneers for the army.

¹⁰ *Nashville Dispatch*, May 21, 1864.

In October 1864, Corporal Lorenzo Atwood of the 43rd Wisconsin Infantry, described the area inside and around the supply depot in a letter to his wife Cordelia:

This whole country is far as the eye can reach from the eminence on which we are stationed is an unbroken forest with the exception of some 100 acres around Johnsonville which is partially cleared through, the most of it is just as it was slashed, the timber is very thick and heavy. Many trees being from 4 to 6 feet through, this timber has been fallen every which way to form a barrier against the Rebel Cavalry [*sic*].¹¹

Lieutenant Colonel William Sinclair, the Assistant Inspector General for the U.S. Army, inspected the federal base at Johnsonville in January 1865. Sinclair also gave a detailed description of Johnsonville's terrain:

Johnsonville is located on the right bank of the Tennessee River. There is a range of hills coming down to within 100 yards of the river bank, the railroad running some distance along the base of these hills before reaching the river. The country north of the railroad, in the direction of Reynoldsburg, is flat, the timber has been cut off hills and flats for more than a mile out from the depot on the river bank. The river at this point is about 400 yards wide, and the course straight. The ground on the left bank of the river is flat and heavily wooded, no timber having been cut down on that bank.¹²

Confederate John W. Morton, Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest's Chief of Artillery, gave another perspective of Johnsonville. Morton's account, however, gave a panoramic description as seen from across the river as he remembered it during the Battle of Johnsonville on November 4, 1864. Morton wrote:

¹¹ Lorenzo Atwood to Cordelia Atwood, October 19, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee.

¹² *OR*, Series I, vol. 39, Pt. 1, 861.

Trace Creek empties into the Tennessee a half mile below where the railroad now crosses. A number of barges clustered around; negroes were loading them, officers and men were coming and going, and passengers could be seen strolling down to the wharf. The river banks from some distance back were lined with quantities of stores, and two freight trains were being made up. It was an animated scene, and one which wore an air of complete security.¹³

These personal descriptions provide a rare look into the interior of Johnsonville and the terrain challenges that Union forces either wrestled with or used to their advantage. The most troublesome of terrain issues at Johnsonville was that the supply depot's buildings had to be constructed at river level in order to allow trains to enter and load at normal elevation. Since the depot was built at river level, often after heavy rains and the unpredictable flooding of the Tennessee River, water would sit inside much of the depot's interior for weeks and sometimes even months spawning "hordes of mosquitoes."¹⁴

When the army arrived and began removing trees, this created an advanced erosion problem inside the 100-acre depot area. As photographic evidence shows in Coonley's photograph on page 109, you can see standing water just below the south railroad spur. On the opposite side of the center railroad embankment, even more standing water is visible. Like most army camps during the Civil War, watery, muddy terrain, created problems for the mobility of wagons, cannons and limbers, horses and mules, and especially personnel.

¹³ John Watson Morton, *The Artillery of Nathan Bedford Forrest's Cavalry* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church South, 1909), 252-53.

¹⁴ Walter Howland to mother, September 1864.



Figure 11: Standing water, mud, stumps, and fallen trees at Johnsonville, Tennessee, Nov. 1864. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

At Johnsonville, mud was a constant problem. With two major corrals, muddy roads, piles of horse dung mixed with flies, swarms of mosquitoes, and smoke from cook fires and steam engines, the atmosphere at Johnsonville was a most odorous and unpleasant place.

Saw Mill No. 1

There is no known evidence that describes which buildings were first constructed at Johnsonville. However, what is known is that a large saw mill, located south of the central rail line and was located about 100 yards southeast of the river, was likely the first structure built considering the depot's immediate need for board lumber. This operation was called Saw Mill No. 1. The Quartermaster's Department in Nashville was

responsible for the construction and operation of all saw mill's located along the Nashville and Northwestern line.¹⁵

Saw Mill No. 1 was a board-roofed, open-air shed, with seven enclosed frame offices and support buildings. Saw Mill No. 1 was approximately 150 feet in length, 40 feet wide, and its machinery faced southwest. The positioning of the saw mill provided sawyers with the most abundant daylight needed to conduct the saw mill's machinery. In the photograph on the next page, Saw Mill No. 1 is pictured in the middle of the depot and shows, what appears to be offices or support buildings on its eastern end.¹⁶ The machinery located inside Saw Mill No. 1 was steam powered and belt driven. With the photograph enhanced, a worker appears to be standing underneath the roof of Saw Mill No. 1 and, what appears to be, posed as if receiving a recently-sawn board coming through the saw blade. Fuel for firing the steam boilers used to turn the saw's belt was from an abundance of scrap lumber, shavings, bark wood, and sawdust; a ready and recyclable on-site fuel source.

Saw Mill No.1 was instrumental to Johnsonville's quick success. Between January 1864 and November 1864, Saw Mill No. 1 produced 488,000 feet of board length lumber.¹⁷

¹⁵ *OR*, Series III, vol. 5, 948-49.

¹⁶ Description of Johnsonville's saw mill described visually by the author from an original photograph taken by Jacob Coonley on November 23, 1864; *OR*, Series III, vol. 5, 948.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 947-48.



Figure 12: Saw Mill No.1, Johnsonville, Tennessee, 1864. Photograph taken by photographer Jacob F. Coonley, November 23, 1864. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Laborers used all of the largest trees located in the immediate area inside the 100-acre depot site to produce lumber. When the supply depot and railroad were finally completed in the fall of 1864, Johnsonville consisted of approximately 180 buildings.¹⁸ Saw Mill No. 1 produced all of the lumber used for constructing soldiers barracks and huts, houses and out-buildings for civilian workers and officers, administrative buildings, sheds, warehouses, corrals, blockhouses, cannon and train platforms, loading ramps, and most of all, the one hundred and seven thousand cross-ties used in laying track for the Northwestern railroad.¹⁹

In addition to Saw Mill No. 1, other mills were established at strategic points along the 78 mile length of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad and were numbered in sequence beginning at Johnsonville with Saw Mill No. 1, and ending in Nashville. There was also a Saw Mill No. 2 located somewhere near the Johnsonville supply depot.

¹⁸ *Nashville Daily Union*, May 18, 1865; *OR*, Series III, vol. 5, 947-48.

¹⁹ *OR*, Series III, vol. 5, 946.

The only known description of Saw Mill No. 2 was made by a former Quartermaster's Department clerk at Johnsonville named Eleazer A. Greenleaf. In a letter to Vice-President Andrew Johnson in 1865, Greenleaf recalled "I was a clerk in the Q.M. Dept and stationed at Saw Mill No. 2 about a mile below the Village on the River bank."²⁰ The *Official Records* also mention a "saw mill and a house for carpenters" as being destroyed and rebuilt, but thereafter offers no other mention of either Saw Mill No.1 or Saw Mill No. 2.²¹

Saw mill No. 1 and its machinery remained at Johnsonville after the war. In 1866, Junius M. Palmer, Jr., a former Union captain from Ohio who came to Tennessee with General Buell's Army of the Ohio in 1862, served as a local judge in Humphreys County.²² The same year, Palmer purchased Saw Mill No. 1 and many of the abandoned military buildings at the depot and started the Palmer Lumber Company. In 1867, Palmer's lumber business eventually earned a contract from the United States government to "furnish plank for 8 U.S. National Cemeteries."²³ Palmer's government contract was short-lived however. In February 1867, Confederate sympathizers, who still resided in the Trace Creek region in large numbers, and who found Palmer's business with the Federal Government "exceedingly offensive," burned Saw Mill No.1 and destroyed all of its machinery.²⁴

²⁰ Eleazer A. Greenleaf to Andrew Johnson, January 13, 1865, in Graf and Haskins, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. 7, 400.

²¹ *OR*, Series III, Vol. 5, 947.

²² *Nashville Daily Press and Times*, February 21, 1867, 2.

²³ *Ibid*, 4.

²⁴ *Ibid*.

The Freight Transfer Warehouses

As trains arrived at Johnsonville pulling empty box cars ready to be filled with military supplies, “the approach to the river was an embankment seventeen feet high above the surface of the ground on the river bank.”²⁵ In order to accommodate the supply trains, “it became necessary to construct ample and convenient arrangements for the transfer of freight from steam-boats to cars.”²⁶ Of the 200 buildings constructed at Johnsonville, the “crown jewels” of the depot were two, enormous “transfer freight houses,” each anchored along the river bank on both sides of the center rail line “starting at the bluff and curving right and left until parallel with the buildings and river bank.”²⁷

From Coonley’s photographic documentation of Johnsonville, it appears that the south freight transfer house was located within 100 to 200 yards of Saw Mill No. 1. One possible theory for the positioning of Saw Mill No. 1 was so that it was in close proximity of where both freight transfer warehouses would be constructed considering the enormous amounts of board lumber needed to construct both warehouses. The freight transfer warehouses were the largest structures ever built at Johnsonville and were used to store practically all of the freight received at the depot.²⁸

The north freight house, which was also referred to as the “lower warehouse” or “warehouse No. 1,” was “600 feet long by 30 feet wide” and was “hastily knocked up so as to bring it into immediate use, and the levee in front graded off to the water’s edge

²⁵ *OR*, Series III, vol. 5, 947.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 944.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

²⁸ *OR*, Series III, vol. 5, 944.

with a slope of 9 degrees or about 16 feet rise in 100 feet horizontal.”²⁹ The south freight house, also called the “upper warehouse” or “warehouse No. 2,” was “600 feet long and 90 feet wide [and] was a much more complete building. The floor was two feet and a half above high water mark and the levee in front graded to a slope of 14 degrees, on which it was designed to lay railroad tracks from low-water mark to floor of freight-house.”³⁰

The grading of Johnsonville’s levee where the warehouses were located “involved considerable work; about 30,000 cubic feet of earth had to be removed.”³¹ Actually, only a portion of the wharf was paved “in a covering of broken stone” since this work had only been “partially carried out” prior to the November 4 engagement.³² Both freight houses were designed so when steamboats arrived at Johnsonville’s wharf, freight could be unloaded from the boats, stock-piled at the base of the wharf, and then transferred:

onto small cars, which were hauled up the levee to the level of the freight-house floor by a wire rope passing round a pulley or spool. The freight was then dropped into or lifted out of gear with the main shaft by a lever. The main shaft was 500 feet long and passed through the center of the building immediately below the floor or platform and was operated by an engine located in the middle of the building. The freight was then passed through the building and loaded into cars on the opposite side.³³

In a letter to his wife, Corporal Lorenzo Atwood described the two warehouses and the activities around them in extraordinary detail:

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, 945.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

There was 12 steam boats and 3 gunboats at the wharf when I was there besides some 15 flatboats, the store house is 40 rods* long and 100 feet wide with a double roof on one side of the centre track of the Rail road and on the other side 40 rods long by 50 feet wide; these buildings are full of army supplies and the ground between the wharf and store house is piled six feet deep with sacks of oats and bails of hay. There is five heavy loaded trains run from here to Nashville daily and yet there is a number of boats waiting to unload. A little to the right of the store house is a parell [corral] in which there is some 1000 horses and mules. One of the boats at the wharf was loaded with horses.³⁴

The warehouses were short-lived however. When Confederates attacked Johnsonville on November 4, 1864, Warehouse No. 1 was burned completely. Warehouse No. 2, the double-roofed warehouse, “with the engine and machinery for hoisting freight” was spared from the fires and the army reused it beginning in March 1865. Sometime around 1870, the building was disassembled and its materials used to reconstruct non-military buildings in the expanding civilian town of Johnsonville.³⁵

³⁴ Lorenzo Atwood to Cordelia Atwood, October 27, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee. *A rod is a measurement of 5.5 yards or 16.5 feet. The 40 rods that Atwood described equals 220 yards. In other words, the upper freight transfer warehouse at Johnsonville was longer than two football fields.

³⁵ *OR*, Series III, vol. 5, 945-47.

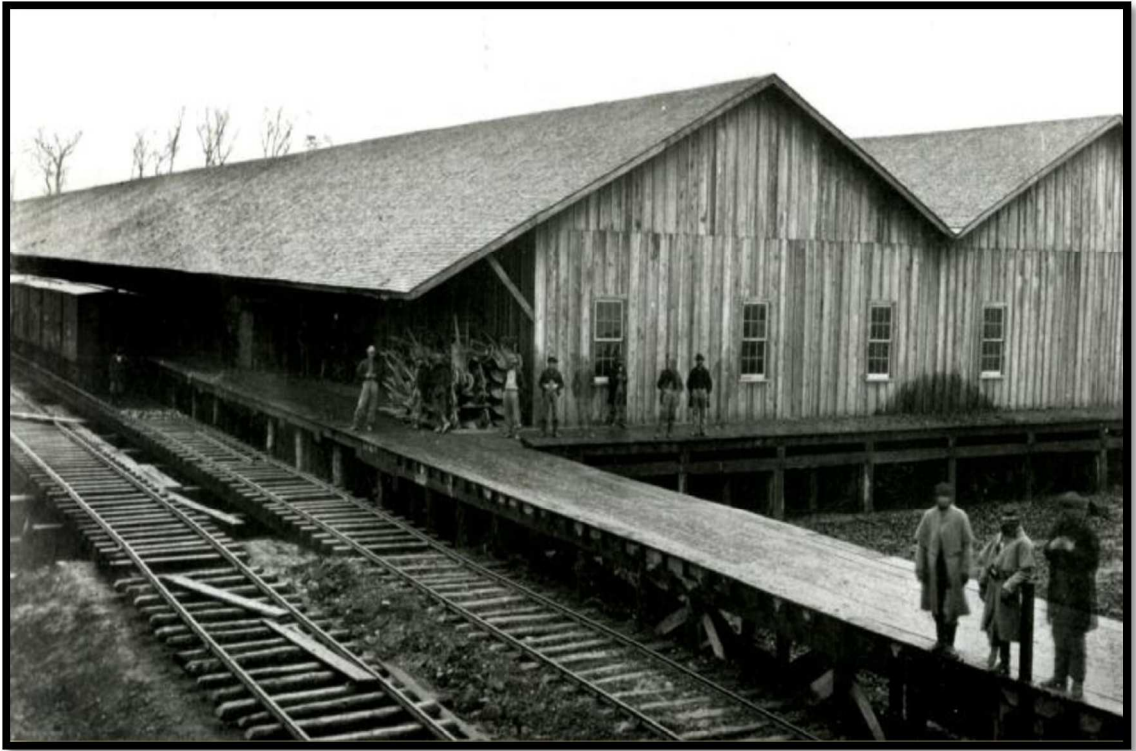


Figure 13: Upper Freight Transfer Warehouse (No.2), Johnsonville, Tennessee, November 1864. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The Turntable

After trains passed Johnsonville's block-house, they continued about a half-mile toward the Tennessee River on a single-section of rail until they were 500 yards from the depot's warehouses. At this point, the train was stopped, and the cars detached from the engine. The train's engine was then advanced from the main track, onto a rotating, single-section of rail called a turntable. The engines were then (manually) turned in the opposite direction of the Tennessee River (in the direction of Nashville). While this process took place, the empty cars were pulled by a second engine (which remained at the depot), along one of two spur tracks, either a north or a south spur, and past the warehouses until the last car exited the spur. Then, a switchman, who operated the tracks from inside a

switch house located near a junction, switched the track from the spur section allowing the cars to be aligned onto a straight section of track that paralleled the warehouses.³⁶

The empty cars were then backed into position in front of the warehouses and loaded with military supplies. Additionally, in front of the warehouses, was a secondary line of track. This track was close to the warehouse (only twenty feet away) and provided a location where extra boxcars could wait, loaded or unloaded, until the secondary engine was again available to attach and deliver the loaded cars to another main engine. When the cars were loaded, the secondary engine pulled them forward along the parallel track (parallel to the warehouses) until again, the last car cleared the intersection of the spur track.³⁷

Once again, the switchman then performed the same routine as before and switched the loaded cars, now being moved in reverse by the secondary engine, onto the spur track. Once the switch was made, the secondary engine, in reverse, pushed the cars back up the track to the vicinity of the turntable, where, by this time, the primary engine had been serviced and turned around on the single floating turntable track, and was now facing east, toward Nashville.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

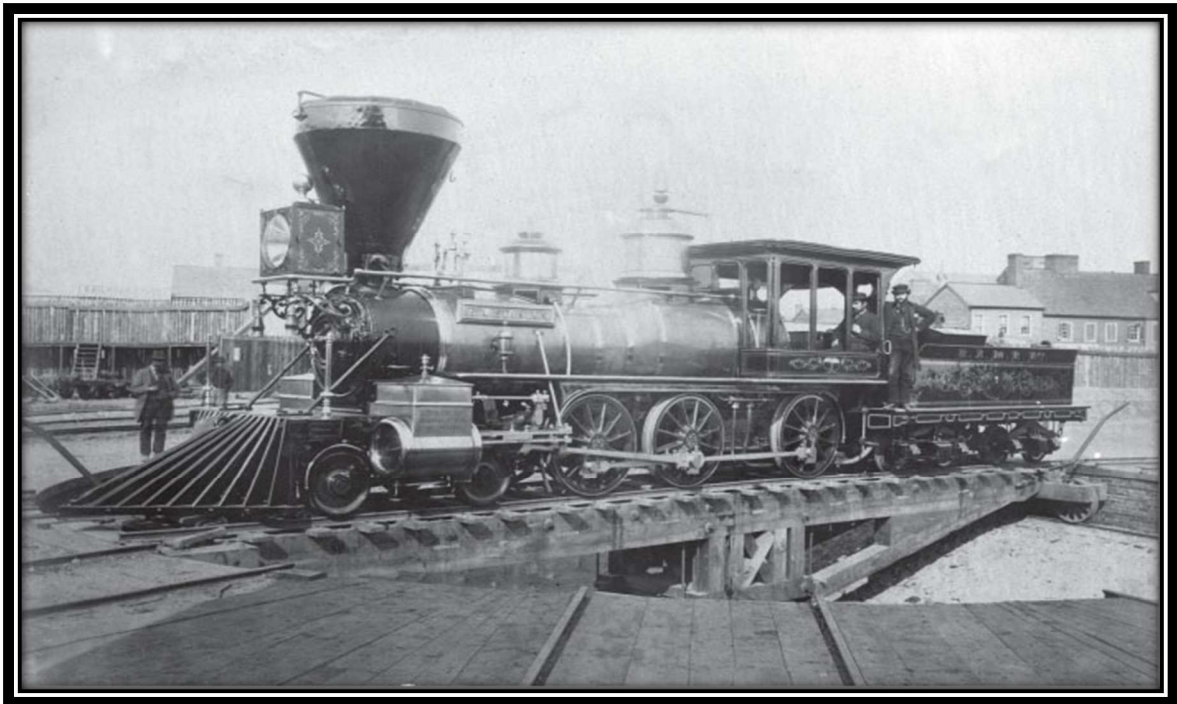


Figure 14: An example of a Civil War-era turntable, City Point, Virginia, 1865. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The front car was then attached to the main engine, with the others attached in line, and the secondary engine then detached from its rear position. Once the head switchman cleared the loaded trains for departure, trains exited the depot and steamed toward Nashville with supplies. The entire process, from arrival to departure, usually took about eight hours.³⁸

The sequence of loading and unloading supplies continued sporadically and usually without a schedule to ward-off potential attacks on the trains. A variety of military supplies, everything from army hardtack (a hardened biscuit) to blankets and

³⁸ Ibid.

uniforms, to mules and horses, ammunition, whiskey, lumber, food, and medical supplies, all passed through the supply depot.³⁹

Johnsonville: Complete

On May 21, 1864, the *Nashville Dispatch* reported that a “large number of influential gentlemen assembled at the depot of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad [in Nashville] at 6 o’clock on Thursday morning [May 19th] for the purpose of celebrating the opening of that important route...to the Tennessee River, a distance of seventy-eight miles.”⁴⁰ The “influential gentlemen” on board a special excursion train (which had been arranged by Johnson), included a host of dignitaries that included Governor Johnson, the State of Tennessee’s comptroller Joseph S. Fowler, Nashville’s Mayor John Smith, Judge M.M Brien, State of Tennessee Attorney General Stubblefield, Major General R.S. Granger and his adjutant, and a “Capt. Nevin, Col. Scully, 10th Tennessee infantry, Cols. Thompson, John Clark, and Fladd, Capt. Maurice P. Clarke, W.S. Cheatham, Esq., E.B. Garrett. and many others.”⁴¹

The reporter who accompanied the party to the depot described the newly completed Nashville and Northwestern Railroad and scenery along the route to the Tennessee River:

The road is an excellent one, and is well laid, the wheels gliding smoothly over it. There are numerous bridges of various dimensions, the trestle work of some being from fifty to eighty feet high; the Harpeth River is crossed five times...some of the bridges being very long, and all of them well guarded by troops, some white others black,

³⁹ Hess, 202-04, 217-20.

⁴⁰ *Nashville Dispatch*, May 21, 1864.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

infantry, cavalry, and artillery, and strong stockades and fortifications...the strongest, neatest, and best, we have ever seen.⁴²

Military Governor Johnson and the other federal officials certainly hoped that the new line would improve communication and transportation. The Nashville and Northwestern Railroad was not only important for military purposes, but important as a means of trans-state commerce for Tennessee's citizens who had originally lobbied for the road in 1852.⁴³ "It does great credit to the builders," stated a reporter from the *Nashville Daily Times and True Union*, that "there is not a better made road in the county" due to its "remarkable smoothness and evenness [*sic*] of the new-laid portion of the track."⁴⁴

As the train steamed through the town of Waverly, the seat of Humphreys County, the town was reported to be "cleaned out and Court House, Church, and nearly all the dwelling houses appropriated by Uncle Sam."⁴⁵ Finally, after passing cannon salutes by the First Kansas Battery just outside of Waverly, the ceremonial train entered the newly finished supply depot at the Tennessee River at 12 noon. As the ceremonial train pulled into the supply depot, it stopped near the "end of the track at the Tennessee River," and the party disembarked and strolled along the river bank. After many comments shared among the group, at 1 p.m., the party was called to "an excellent cold collation spread in the spacious depot, sandwiches, cobbles, lemonades, cigars, ice-water

⁴² Ibid, 1.

⁴³ Ibid; Goodspeed, *History of Tennessee: With Sketches of Gibson, Obion, Weakley, Dyer, and Lake Counties*, 834-35.

⁴⁴ *Nashville Daily Times and True Union*, May 21, 1864.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

and other patriotic refreshments, lavishly distributed through the cars by the managers of the excursion.”⁴⁶

At 3:00 p.m. “dinner was announced” and after “full justice having been done to the edibles, wine flowed like water, and inspired all with good natured sentiments which they seemed anxious to proclaim to the assembled guests. The first toast proposed was by Mayor Smith who called upon all to fill up and drink a bumper ⁴⁷to “Andrew Johnson, who, amid storm and tempest, secession and disunion, has always been firm and consistent. After loud, applause, the toast was drank, and the Governor called upon for a speech.”⁴⁸

Johnson delivered a speech to about 100 onlookers which included a combination of citizens from the small town just outside the military depot, soldiers assigned to the post, and workers at the depot. Part of Johnson’s speech shared his ideas about loyalty to the Union and the effects of emancipation:

We have had slaves and bondmen among us, to-day the great idea of freedom is abroad, and this struggle which agitates the land is a contest of merit, of human right, and freedom. Let the people see facts as they are and no longer delude themselves with old prejudices. Let the blacks understand that they must assume responsibilities, and take that position which their merits or demerits may assign them. In the words of Mr. Lincoln: Let all have a fair start and an equal share in the race of life. As soon as you can, acknowledge the legality of emancipation. Unless you people show a desire to put down these guerrillas and

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ *A bumper is when a group of people hold their drinking glasses above their heads (usually filled with an alcoholic beverage), and after a toast is presented, the group, together at the same time, “bump” the glasses together for the purpose of creating a high-pitch, clanging noise. After the bumper, the drinks are then consumed.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

restore the law no General can save you from ruin. Do your part and the soldiers will protect and sustain you.⁴⁹

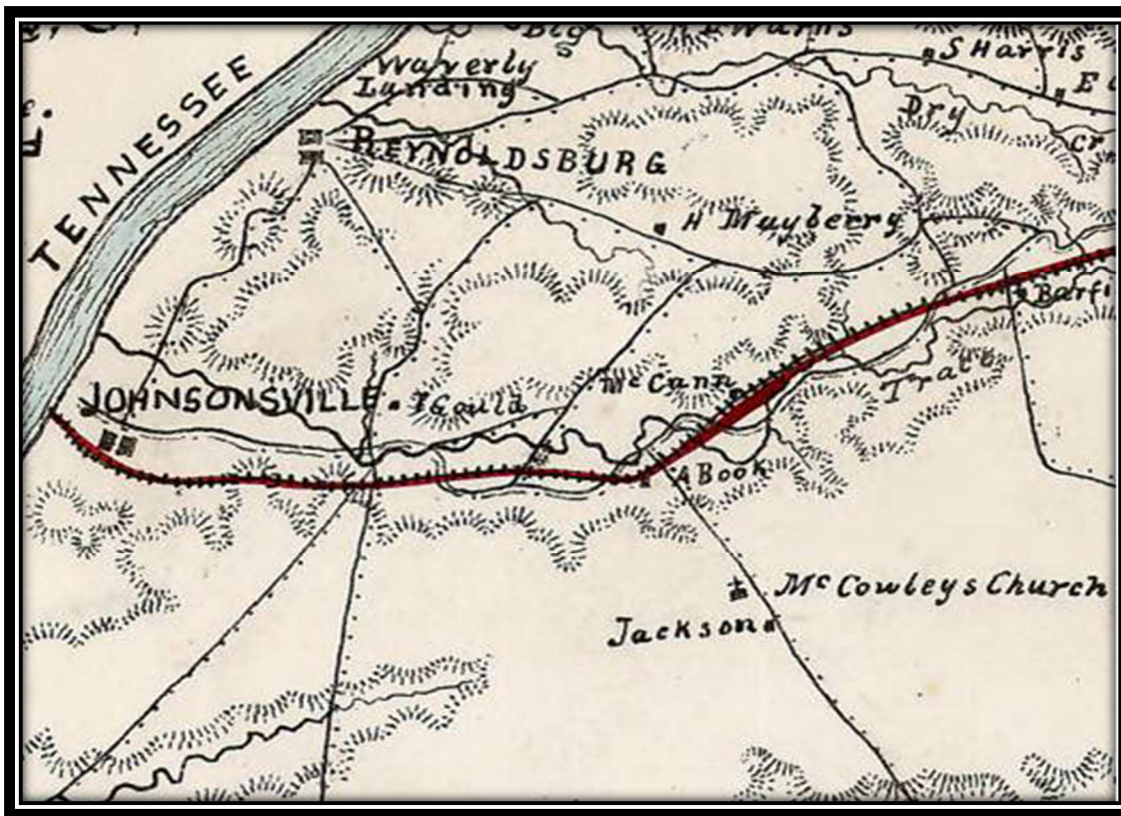


Figure 15: Map of Nashville and Northwestern Railroad terminus at Johnsonville, TN, 1864. Courtesy of TSLA.

Johnson probably gave the speech standing on the rear balcony of a caboose or on top of a flatbed railcar. This is very likely considering that accounts suggest Johnson was aboard the train where “refreshments were lavishly distributed through the cars by the managers of the excursion,” and the fact that Mayor Clark suggested the toast to Johnson “at the table,” which, if “the table” was indeed inside a railcar, then the party probably ate inside. Then, after dinner, the top dignitaries, which included Governor Johnson, stepped

⁴⁹ Ibid.

out onto the caboose balcony, and addressed an assembled crowd standing around the excursion train.⁵⁰

It is unknown when the name Johnsonville was first used or if the new name was pronounced the day the excursion train arrived at the river on May 19, 1864. The name Johnsonville spread quickly and was already being printed in newspapers and titled on military correspondence. For example, on July 20, 1864, Assistant Quartermaster William A. Wainwright, assigned to the Nashville Depot, was signing equipment vouchers that stated “purchased for immediate use at the Port of Johnsonville, Tenn. for J.D. Stubbs, Capt. and AQM.”⁵¹

In a letter to Stanton in August 1864, Governor Johnson informed the Secretary of War that:

on the 9th of May this Road [Nashville and Northwestern Railroad] was turned over to the Military for all Military and Governmental purposes. A population has accumulated of over six thousand at Johnsonville since the connection was made with the Tennessee River. The importance of the North Western Rail Road is now being seen and felt and our army could not be sustained without it.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Capt. William A. Wainwright to J.W. Wilson and Co., July 23, 1864, Nashville, Tennessee, National Archives, Washington, DC.

⁵² Graf and Haskins, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. 7, 104-05. Graf and Haskins points out that this figure “appears to be an exaggeration.” In Goodspeed’s *History of Tennessee*, Humphreys County, it was mentioned that at the time of Johnsonville’s completion of the supply depot and the terminus for the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad in May 1864, the town “had upward of 1,000 population, not including the soldiers.”

Johnson was obviously very proud of his accomplishment that the supply depot at Lucas Landing was now serving the Union cause as he had anticipated a year and half earlier.

He continued proudly in telling the Secretary that:

We are loading seven or eight boats and as many Barges for your place. Six hundred tons of R Road iron leave here tonight. From two to five Boats arrive daily now with large quantities of Commissary stores, Five thousand and twenty one packages this A.M. in from steamers. This is a mere beginning of what the construction of this road will open up to the Gov't and the Country, demonstrating the wisdom and propriety of improvement at this time.⁵³

Building the railroad and depot were not enough to guarantee smooth transportation. On August 16, the Nashville depot's chief quartermaster, Colonel James Donaldson, wrote Major General Lovell H. Rousseau, commander of the District of Tennessee, that:

we have a large number of horses and cattle now at Johnsonville, and it is exceedingly important that they should be brought here [Nashville]. Unless the Northwestern railroad is properly guarded we shall have terrible disaster and stoppage of supplies. A regiment of troops must at once be placed at important points on the road, and men sent to Johnsonville to drive cattle here."⁵⁴

Union officers turned to the 12th and 13th and detachments of the 40th and 100th U.S. Colored Troops to protect the line.⁵⁵ Donaldson's plea for help eventually managed to get an additional full regiment of infantry, the 43rd Wisconsin, assigned to Johnsonville to serve as garrison troops. Upon their arrival at Johnsonville in mid-October 1864, Corporal Atwood wrote:

⁵³ Johnson to Stanton, August 19, 1864, in Graf and Haskins, vol. 7, 104-05.

⁵⁴ *OR*, Series I, vol. 39, Pt. 1, 464-65.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 465.

arrived here at 10 in the evening were marched into a large building built for a machine shop [the upper freight transfer warehouse] on the banks of the Tenn. river, we moved out early in the morning to where we are now, we have got our tents up and our dinners eaten, some of the men are out on picket duty on the rail road some are cleaning up the camp ground some are digging [sic] a trench for a privy. I have just been out with a squad of men after water about 1 ½ miles into the woods along the banks of the Tenn.⁵⁶

From September 1 to November 25, 1864, Johnsonville had more defense troops to defend the place than at any other time during the war.



Figure 16: The town of Johnsonville located just outside of the military supply depot. November, 1864. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

⁵⁶ Lorenzo Atwood to Cordelia Atwood, October 16, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee.

Johnsonville: An “Embryo City”

While the Union supply depot was in operation, some of the civilians who lived in the town of Johnsonville included Elijah G. Hurst, William W. Swain, Thomas H. Mabry, John T. Street, W.H. Blankenship, and H.H. Garner. In the summer of 1864, these citizens petitioned Governor Johnson to ask for the state’s help in getting their small lots of cotton (which were grown in the fertile bottom near where Trace Creek intersected with the Tennessee River) sold to northern markets. On September 23, Elijah Hurst accompanied the petition to Governor Johnson in Nashville with a formal letter:

The People of these Sections cannot dispose of their little crops of cotton, as a very large Majority of them raise a less amt. than will Justify them in taking the rounds required to get their Small lots to Market. That there are many loyal Citizens and Union Soldiers families in these Sections nearly entirely destitute of Supplies and whose Sole dependence is the proceeds of their little crops of cotton. The Premises Considered we Respectfully ask that you give your influence to the proper authorities for a Supply Post at Johnsonville Tenn. For the benefit of the Loyal People of those counties in that Portion of the State, as also for the benefit of Government in obtaining the cotton raised in this section. And your Petitioners as in duty bound will ever Pray & c.⁵⁷

One description of the town of Johnsonville dates to May 1865. The author, identified only as “A Looker On,” obviously did not intend to reveal his official identity. From this account, “A Looker On,” reported:

I came to this embryo city in company with several gentlemen to attend the sale of lots. We found the ravages of war had made sad havoc in the sole row of houses. All

⁵⁷ Petition from Elijah C. Hurst and Others, Johnsonville, TN, Sept. 23, 1864, in Graf and Haskins, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. 7, 185.

the buildings of the town were burned except one, numbering more than one hundred.⁵⁸

As the only account known to provide an actual number of buildings in the town of Johnsonville, this helps establish a more realistic idea of how many buildings were constructed at Johnsonville, including those at the military depot. Additionally, Corporal Lorenzo Atwood remembered Johnsonville as:

a little one horse town in the woods about 6, months old and consequently with 7000 soldiers here we have to put up with what we can get, from Uncl Sam there is no use in fretting or complaining, but will trust God for the final result.⁵⁹

Knowing this kind of information helps historians determine the size of Johnsonville during the Civil War and compare it with other similar depots, such as the one at Decatur, Alabama, and to offer a more realistic interpretation of the depot and the civilian town that supported it.

“Bucked and Gagged”

The civilian workers hired by the U.S. Army to build the Nashville and the U.S. Quartermaster’s Department in Nashville paid Northwestern Railroad and the supply depot. After the depot was completed in May 1864, employees at Johnsonville received their pay directly from the Nashville Depot.⁶⁰ Due to the intensity of supply operations

⁵⁸ *Nashville Daily Union*, May 18, 1865.

⁵⁹ Lorenzo Atwood to Cordelia Atwood, November 17, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee. Atwood’s description of 7,000 troops was including the arrival of a brigade of Maj. General John Schofield’s Division which was dispatched to Johnsonville by Maj. Gen. George Thomas on November 5, 1864, following the Battle of Johnsonville. Before Schofield’s arrival on November 7, there was just short of 4,000 troops that could have defended the place in the event of another Confederate attack from the land-side, east of the wharf.

⁶⁰ Walter Howland letter to mother, September 23, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee. It is unknown was capacity Walter Howland served while stationed at Johnsonville in the fall of 1864. Walter Howland was the brother of Johnsonville’s lead quartermaster, Henry Howland. It is possible that he served, in some sort

created by General Sherman's campaigns in Georgia, great demands were put upon quartermaster employees. For workers assigned to outlying supply posts such as Johnsonville, the daily demand of administering the shipment of supplies to Sherman's army created weeks of backlogged requisitions, unwarranted delays from tired and over-worked assistant quartermasters, and administrative disorganization, especially with payroll. Civilian workers were paid separately from the soldiers with funds from the Quartermaster's Department in Nashville, as recalled by Walter Howland. "I have been at Nashville two days of the past week, leaving on Thursday, and returning Saturday, or yesterday morning, bringing out with me some over twenty thousand dollars for the payment of employees here."⁶¹

During the Civil War, soldiers in the field were supposed to be paid every two months but "were fortunate if they got their pay at four-month intervals."⁶² There were some instances where soldiers even went "six and eight months without pay."⁶³ At Johnsonville, soldiers like Corporal Atwood wrote about the delay of military payroll. "We muster for pay to day, shall get two months pay within a few weeks, to fuster for pay is to sign the pay roll. as soon as we get it 24, dollars will be sent from Maddision [*sic*] to you."⁶⁴ When Johnsonville's soldiers finally did receive their military pay, many of them had to settle debts as Atwood recalled:

of capacity, as the depot's paymaster considering that he wrote his mother about "bringing out with me [from Nashville] some over twenty thousand dollars for the payment of employees here."

⁶¹ Walter Howland to mother, September 23, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee.

⁶² Fred Albert Shannon, *The Organization and Administration of the Union Army 1861-1865*, 2 vols. (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1928), 21-33, 55-61.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Lorenzo Atwood to Cordilia Atwood, October 31, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee.

Some of the boys in our company have spent all of their Town bounty that they received in advance (60) dollars and their 33 1/3 Government bounty and are living on borrowed money and as a natural consequence some of them are in the Hospital and the rest are puney and sickly. I started from Camp Washburn with 6.25 and have 4.75 now. I have paid for mending my boot and washing cloths 40cts out of that.⁶⁵

Pay for employees of the Quartermaster's Department was not much different from the soldiers. Pay was usually delayed sometimes for months. During the summer of 1864, Sherman's army demanded much from every Quartermaster's Department employee in Nashville, Chattanooga, and other surrounding depots like Johnsonville. Such inconveniences were especially true for African-American troops. As required by the U.S. Congress, the paymaster of the United States required that African-American troops or support employees in the service of the United States government were to be paid "\$10 per month from which \$3 was automatically deducted for clothing, resulting in a net pay of \$7."⁶⁶ In contrast, "white soldiers received \$13 per month from which no clothing allowance was drawn. In June 1864, Congress granted equal pay to the U.S. Colored Troops and made the action retroactive. Black soldiers received the same rations and supplies. In addition, they received comparable medical care."⁶⁷

Despite Congress granting equal pay for African-Americans serving in the United States Army, racism still existed heavily and blacks were almost always paid last. The withholding of wages was not just directed at blacks, but also at the Irish. In July 1864, an incident occurred at Johnsonville that involved the withholding of wages from an

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Elsie Freeman, Wynell Burroughs Schamel, and Jean West "The Fight for Equal Rights: A Recruiting Poster for Black Soldiers in the Civil War." *Social Education* 56, 2 (February 1992): 118-120.

⁶⁷ Mark M. Boatner III, *The Civil War Dictionary* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1959), 624-25.

Irishman named John O' Flanagan, a civilian worker who came to Tennessee to work at the depot. Earlier that summer, O' Flanagan had inquired about an advertisement that the Quartermaster's Department in Nashville had inserted in newspapers in New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin. The advertisements stated that "civilian employees were wanted for the department principally at Nashville, Chattanooga, and Johnsonville," and would be supplied transportation to their destinations, provided free rations, and would be paid good wages for work as wheel wrights, carpenters, teamsters, and laborers.⁶⁸

O' Flanagan had become so enraged that he and other Irishmen had come to Tennessee, and had not yet received any wages for work performed while employed at Johnsonville, that he wrote a letter to the editor of the *Nashville Daily Press* addressing the issue and a number of other mistreatments by Quartermaster's Department officers at Johnsonville. In his letter, O' Flanagan complained that:

Quartermaster Stubbs sent for me and a man named McCormick, when he in the most czar-like manner told us - that after coming a thousand miles to work here, and after having worked nearly two months - that we 'must leave here' without time or voucher, for our work, or a cent in our pockets through a hostile country. We have "left" Johnsonville, and after now having been in Nashville and, under no inconsiderable expense, we have no better prospects of being paid than at the date of the czar-like order to 'leave,' with the prospect of being forced, as those now with us, and others, have been forced to pay from 10 to 20 per cent of our wages *into the hands of speculators* to cash our vouchers. I can never believe that our Government intends such a wholesale raid as this upon our labors for the benefit of capitalists. To use a common and course

⁶⁸ *Nashville Dispatch*, January 31, August 23, 1864, 2; Durham, *Reluctant Partners*, 143-44.

expression ‘there is a screw loose somewhere,’ and a heavy one.⁶⁹

It is possible that O’ Flanagan and the other men were victims of labor reductions. Previously, Colonel James Donaldson had instructed his officers to instead retain contrabands, soldiers, and refugees, in preference to Northern laborers as they were “the most costly of all, and at the same time in the general reductions could better take care of itself.”⁷⁰ O’ Flanagan’s letter created a stir of response in the headlines of the *Nashville Daily Press* and for two weeks in August 1864, became what was titled “The Johnsonville Controversy.”⁷¹

The focus of “The Johnsonville Controversy” involved more than just pay for O’ Flanagan and the Irish employees at the supply depot. Instead, “The Johnsonville Controversy” became a heated issue over race and the violation of “white” civil rights. In O’ Flanagan’s letter dated August 1, the issue of “white” civil rights was apparent when he attested to an incident that occurred during his employment regarding the “arbitrary and barbarous treatment of some of us, in Johnsonville –white, loyal employees, from the North, “bucked and gagged” *by negroes, for absolutely nothing.*”⁷²

The “bucked and gagged” incident spawned such an outcry from Johnsonville’s assistant quartermasters that Governor Johnson requested Donaldson to conduct an investigation. Eventually, Captain Joseph D. Stubbs, Johnsonville’s Acting Assistant Quartermaster and the officer accused by O’ Flanagan, submitted his official response to

⁶⁹ *Nashville Daily Press*, August 3, 1864, 1.

⁷⁰ *OR*, Series I, vol. 52, Pt. 1, 684.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

the “bucked and gagged” accusation. Stubbs, by order of Donaldson, submitted his response to his superior, Captain Charles A. Reynolds, Chief Quartermaster at Johnsonville. Stubbs stated that “Since I have been here at this depot, there has been no employee bucked or gagged. The Provost Marshall at this place says that no employee has been bucked or gagged.”⁷³

Despite Stubbs’ statement of defense against O’ Flanagan’s accusation, Donaldson was not convinced. He believed there was a discrepancy between Assistant Quartermaster Stubbs’ official report and the sworn testimony of many “Northern employees.”⁷⁴ Donaldson’s unsureness of Captain Stubbs’ statement, which affirmed that no employees had been “bucked and gagged,” likely developed from the testimonies which had been taken from various quartermaster employees at Johnsonville. One such employee was James Ford, who had sworn under oath that:

On Sunday, July 24th, 1864, I was ordered to report on the levee to work at laboring work; before reporting, *the negro guards*, 13th U.S.C.I. put us in line, *in our own camp*, preparatory to working, when I asked ‘how is it about green backs to-day,’ as I had not had any money from the time I commenced the first day of May previous, when I was immediately ordered by an officer of said 13th U.S.C. I. to be ‘*bucked and gagged for five hours.*’ I was immediately ‘bucked and gagged’ by the said negroes, and so held until released by the Brigade Wagon Master. All the above in Johnsonville, Tenn., whilst in government employ, as a teamster, under Captain J.D. Stubbs.⁷⁵

⁷³ *Nashville Daily Press*, August 10, 1864, 1.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Another testimony was given by George Sherwood, a seventeen year-old Pennsylvanian and an employee at Johnsonville. Sherwood remembered an “employee named King “bucked and gagged” by the negro guards. He was lying in the road in front of the guard house ‘bucked and gagged’ and crying.”⁷⁶

Again, on September 16, 1864, O’Flanagan submitted another letter to the *Nashville Daily Press* regarding “The Johnsonville Controversy.” O’ Flanagan recalled incidents where:

Negro soldiers humiliated and abused both white soldiers and civilians” and that “before the law creating Negro regiments could be passed, it was found necessary to plainly and explicitly provide that no negro could ever assume Command over white men, yet at Johnsonville, by placing Negroes in command of the guardhouse, a black sergeant daily commands “alike all the white citizens and white soldiers temporarily immured for that most microscopic of peccadilloes, ‘a military offence.’⁷⁷

In the end, O’ Flanagan’s persistence about “The Johnsonville Controversy” ultimately made an impression on Governor Johnson. Johnson declared that regardless of the accusations by O’ Flanagan and the revealing testimony of the other laborers at Johnsonville, he still supported the Quartermaster’s Department officers at Johnsonville, but noted that the “Controversy” had stained the reputation of the Quartermaster’s Department including Donaldson’s reputation and his leadership abilities. Eventually, after weeks of military inquiries into the “bucking and gagging” of white workers, a military tribunal court-martialed Captain Stubbs due to the revealing testimonies

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Graf and Haskins, vol. 7, 169-70.

delivered against him in the “bucking and gagging” incidents.⁷⁸ Finally, O’ Flanagan responded once and for all: “I wish to know what earthly harm it can do the Government agents if they are only the victims of erroneous ideas, and if their intentions are right, to let their acts see the light so we can canvas them amongst us?”⁷⁹

Until now, “The Johnsonville Controversy” has not resurfaced since the Civil War. The incident was buried deep in newspapers from 150 years ago. “The Johnsonville Controversy” is relevant to this study for two reasons. First, because it addresses racism at a U.S. military base which are issues still prevalent at U.S. military facilities today. It can be argued that incidents like “The Johnsonville Controversy” certainly helped fuel America’s segregation of armed forces until after World War II. Secondly, “The Johnsonville Controversy” demonstrated how a minority citizen was brazen enough to deliver to the media an incident of racial discrimination during the height of racism in the nineteenth century. The “Controversy” was important because it popularized the incident through newspapers and because its appeal reached a wide audience, this influenced the decision that brought justice to O’ Flanagan’s discriminatory issues.

⁷⁸ William Given, Argument made by Col. William Given, 102nd O.V. in the Case of Capt. J.D. Stubbs, A.Q.M. before Court Martial in Nashville, Tennessee. William Given Press Book and Job Office. Nashville, TN, 1864.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 2.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PROTECTING JOHNSONVILLE: THE DEFENSE OF THE SUPPLY DEPOT

During the height of Johnsonville's operation as a supply depot from May to November 30, 1864, a military garrison combined from a variety of both white and colored troops, was assigned to protect the depot from a Confederate attack. Johnsonville's garrison troops consisted of artillerists, infantrymen (both foot and mounted), cavalrymen, and, in an unusual arrangement, armed civilian laborers from the U.S. Quartermaster's Department in Nashville.¹ Johnsonville never had a permanent garrison assigned strictly for its defense. Instead, a variety of troops were assigned to the post at different intervals during its existence as a military supply depot.

In addition to the land forces, Johnsonville had a thriving river front and served as a docking point for U.S. Navy gunboats and privately owned transports that were leased to the navy.² The U.S. Quartermaster's Department operated the wharf at Johnsonville. The wharf was defended by the U.S. Navy, the army's garrison troops, and by October 1864, armed Quartermaster's Department employees.³ Aboard the naval vessels were armed sailors, many of whom were trained in operating seacoast and riverine artillery.

¹ *OR*, Supplement, Records of Events, vol. 77 (U.S. Colored Troops), 473, 477; *OR*, Series I, vol. 52, pt. 1, 655-59.

² Affidavits from representatives of the states of Ohio, Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, and Iowa regarding the destruction of privately owned transports destroyed at Johnsonville, Tennessee, on November 4, 1864. Affidavits sworn and subscribed from January to February, 1865, at Nashville, Tennessee, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³ *OR*, Series I, vol. 52, Pt.1, 659.

The gunboats assigned to Johnsonville patrolled the Tennessee River “up to the Muscle Shoals perfectly” and to Paducah, Kentucky, a distance of 230 miles.⁴

Corporal Atwood wrote that Johnsonville’s garrison force was “nearly 4,000 men.”⁵ However, the total number of effective defense forces prior to the arrival of reinforcements at Johnsonville was actually much less with only about 2,500 total defenders. Immediately following the Battle of Johnsonville, the garrison was temporarily “reinforced with some 7000 men, and 3, batterys.”⁶ These reinforcements were from one brigade from Major General John M. Schofield’s Division, Twenty-Third Corps. From Pulaski, Tennessee, Schofield’s single brigade arrived by train at Johnsonville on Monday, November 7, 1864. Schofield’s infantrymen reinforced Johnsonville’s garrison and its defensive works in anticipation of a rumored land attack by the Confederates.⁷ Nowhere else in Tennessee was there such a convoluted array of army and navy forces assisted by armed employees of the U.S. Quartermaster’s Department and all mixed-together within a 100-acre perimeter assigned with the same responsibility: to protect a military supply operation and a railroad.⁸

⁴ Charles Dana Gibson and E. Kay Gibson, *The Army’s Navy Series, Volume II, Assault and Logistics: Union Army Coastal and River Operations 1861-1866* (Camden: Maine, Ensign Press, 1995), 385; *ORN*, I, 26, 589; Roscoe C. Martin, “The Tennessee Valley Authority: A Study of Federal Control,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 22 (Summer 1957): 351-377.

⁵ Lorenzo Atwood to Cordelia Atwood, November 8, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Jacob D. Cox, *The Battle of Franklin, Tennessee, November 30, 1864: A Monograph* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1897), 9-10.

⁸ David W. Higgs, *Nathan Bedford Forrest and the Battle of Johnsonville* (Nashville: The Tennessee Historical Commission, 1976), 59-62.

Johnsonville's Commanders

There were two commanding officers at Johnsonville, although it is unclear in the *Official Records* why there were two men in command. One theory, as reported in the *Official Records* of both the army and navy, is that apparently an army colonel was in command of the land forces, and the other officer, an Acting Volunteer Navy Lieutenant, commanded all the naval vessels docked at Johnsonville's wharf.⁹ Lieutenant Colonel William Sinclair, the Assistant Inspector General for the U.S. Army, who came to investigate Johnsonville in January, 1865, reported: "Col. C.R. Thompson, of the Twelfth U.S. Colored Infantry, was in command of the troops, and Lieutenant-Commander King of the gun-boats."¹⁰ Based on Sinclair's report, we can assume that the officer in command of Johnsonville's land forces was army Colonel Charles R. Thompson. Born in Bath, Maine, in 1840, Thompson became a resident of St. Louis, Missouri, in 1859, and while there, he engaged in the mercantile trade. When the war broke out in 1861, Thompson enlisted as a private "in the Engineer Regiment of the West, Missouri Volunteers," where he served under Brigadier General John C. Fremont. Thompson was soon appointed First Lieutenant and in March 1862, participated in the Battle of New Madrid, Missouri, and at the siege of Island No. 10, where he assisted in building "the famous canal which led to the capture of the entire rebel force."¹¹

⁹ *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 Volumes, Series I, vol. 26, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1894-1927), 615. (Hereafter cited as ORN).

¹⁰ *OR*, Series I, vol. 39, pt. 1, 861.

¹¹ John Fitch, *Annals of the Army of the Cumberland: Comprising Biographies, Descriptions of Departments, Accounts of Expeditions, Skirmishes, and Battles* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1864), 53.



Figure 17: Colonel Charles R. Thompson, Johnsonville's Commander, 1862. Image courtesy of a private collection.

In June 1862, Thompson was appointed as “post quartermaster at Hamburg, Tennessee” and eventually as “ordnance officer of the Army of the Mississippi,” under the command of Major General William S. Rosecrans. His fellow officers in the Department of the Cumberland held Thompson in high esteem.¹² At the Battle of Corinth, Mississippi, in October 1862, Thompson served as aide-de-camp to Rosecrans. Rosecrans so revered Thompson in this position, that the general awarded him with the “red ribbon of the Roll of Honor” for his organization “of the first regiment of colored troops organized in this department” and for his “meritorious services and gallantry as aide-de-camp to the general commanding at the battles of Corinth and Stone’s River.”¹³ Rosecrans additionally expressed “his admiration for the qualities which have raised

¹² Ibid, 54.

¹³ OR, Series I, vol. 30, Pt. 3, 298.

Colonel Thompson from the position of private, in which he entered the service at the commencement of the rebellion, to his present rank, which has been attained solely by his own merit and attention to duty.”¹⁴

Thompson was promoted to Colonel in August 1863, and given command of the 12th Regiment of United States Colored Troops. Thompson and his regiment were stationed at various locations in Tennessee such as Elk River and at practically every section of the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad from Kingston Springs to eventually, Johnsonville. Although Thompson’s command was strictly assigned to guard duty, the 12th USCT, along with the 13th and 100th USCT regiments, had seen their share of engagements with bands of marauding Confederates and guerillas.¹⁵

When Thompson arrived at Johnsonville in October 1864, the depot was well-established with buildings and other structures such as loading platforms, corrals, and barracks. However, even though he had arrived at Johnsonville and assumed command of the post, there is some discrepancy about whether Thompson was officially Johnsonville’s commander. For example, in an interview with Thompson shortly after the Battle of Johnsonville on November 4, 1864, he stated that:

I was in command of all troops on line of the N. and N. W. Rail Road and went to Johnsonville when the place was threatened by Forrest early in October with about 600 Col’d Troops from the 12th, 13th and 100th U.S.C. and 43rd Wis. I was not ordered there but took my Head Quarters and all the men that could be spared from the defence [*sic*] of the Rail Road. My Quarters were about four hundred

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ OR, Supplement, Records of Events, U.S. Colored Troops (Union) Infantry, vol. 77, 470-77.

yards from the Levee in the beginning of the fight, when I moved on the hill [Fort Johnson].¹⁶

Thompson's statement is revealing because it proves that he was apparently, not assigned to Johnsonville as its overall commander. As Thompson tells it, he never actually received orders from the commander of the Department of the Cumberland, Major General George H. Thomas, Governor Johnson, or any other superior officer, assigning him officially as Johnsonville's commanding officer. Instead, from Thompson's testimony, it appears that he, as the colonel of the 12th USCT, somehow, either ended up at Johnsonville by his own decision and as the highest ranking officer there at the time, he simply developed his headquarters there while awaiting a new assignment. In other words, by Thompson's own account, it appears that he became the overall commander at Johnsonville for no other reason than by his own actions or simply by default.¹⁷

Acting Volunteer Lieutenant, Edward M. King, who apparently shared some kind of command responsibility with Thompson, was at "the town of Johnsonville, Tennessee, and the senior naval officer present" in charge of gunboat No. 32, the U.S.S. *Key West*.¹⁸ During the Battle of Johnsonville, King commanded the "U.S.S. *Key West* in company

¹⁶ Avadavat, account provided by Colonel Charles R. Thompson regarding the actions of the U.S. forces at Johnsonville, Tennessee, that resulted in the destruction of government property on November 4, 1864, for the Board of Survey at Nashville, Tennessee, in the Court Martial case of Acting Volunteer Lt. Commander, Edward M. King, December 29, 1864, U.S. Navy Records 1864-65, Courts Martial, RG 11-86, U.S. Navy Department Records, National Archives, Washington, D.C..

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Jack B. Irion and David V. Beard, *Underwater Archaeological Assessment of Civil War Shipwrecks in Kentucky Lake, Benton and Humphries Counties, Tennessee*. Study for Tennessee Dept. of Archaeology, Department of Environment and Conservation (Nashville: TDEC, 1993), 35, 39.

with the U.S.S. *Tawah*, gunboat No. 29, and the U.S.S. *Elfin*, gunboat No. 52, all part of the U.S. Navy's Mississippi Squadron.”¹⁹



Figure 18: Acting Volunteer Lieutenant, Edward M. King, 1864. Commander of the U.S.S. Key West. Courtesy of a private collection.

On November 2, 1864, the U.S.S. *Key West*, under King's command, helped recapture the Confederate occupied U.S.S. *Undine* and the transport *Venus*. King's leadership ability as Acting Volunteer Lieutenant during the fight with Confederate batteries on November 3 and the morning of November 4, 1864, just prior to the Battle of Johnsonville, "was handled in magnificent style."²⁰ However, his leadership actions during the Confederate attack on Johnsonville was controversial and his career tarnished considerably after he ordered the burning of Union vessels docked at Johnsonville's wharf in order to keep them out of the hands of the enemy. King was eventually held accountable for the destruction of the stores and naval vessels at Johnsonville and in 1865, charged with the "abandonment and destruction" of the burned vessels and sat before a court martial hearing, but was exonerated. Regardless, King believed he did his

¹⁹ *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 607; Irion and Beard, 35.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 614.

duty at Johnsonville and “all that men could have done to defeat the plans of the enemy, and to uphold the honor of the flag.”²¹

Johnsonville’s Land Defenses

As trains arrived at Johnsonville, railroad engineers, military personnel, and visitors were stopped and inspected by guards from Johnsonville’s garrison. These guards were from the 12th and 13th USCT regiments and soldiers from the 43rd Wisconsin Infantry such as Corporal Lorenzo Atwood. During Atwood’s tenure at Johnsonville, he wrote that at various times he, together with his fellow soldiers, served as “Corparel of the guard” and helped “keep out a picket guard in the edge of the woods.”²² Immediately to the left of the railroad was a 16 foot-wide road that led directly into the central area of the depot. This road regularly accommodated supply wagons, cavalry and infantry troops, and every visitor, civilian resident, and military individual who entered the supply depot. Although no records or correspondence indicate that an entry gate existed at Johnsonville’s main entrance, the place almost certainly had one based on other similar posts such as Fort Donelson in Dover, Tennessee, and Fort Rosecrans in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.²³

²¹ Ibid, 615.

²² Lorenzo Atwood to Cordelia Atwood, Johnsonville, Tennessee, October 19, 1864.

²³ Samuel D. Smith, Benjamin C. Nance, and Fred M. Prouty, *A Survey of Civil War Era Military Sites in Tennessee* (Nashville: Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Division of Archeology, Research Series No. 14, 2003), 133.

Considering that an entry gate is visible in Jacob F. Coonley's image of Johnsonville's lower redoubt on the following page,²⁴ one can assume that Johnsonville's commander, Colonel Charles R. Thompson, would have very likely ordered the construction of an identical gate located at the depot's main entrance, especially, if for no other reason, because of "reports constantly of guerrillas abroad."²⁵ For soldiers stationed at Johnsonville, such as Lieutenant Walter Howland, who acknowledged that it "was not quite safe to venture out," an entry gate into the compound would have been military protocol as a means of deterrence from enemy attacks.²⁶



Figure 19: Sentry standing on what appears to be the north wall of Fort Johnson's lower redoubt. Note the stockade-style entry gate into the fortification behind the soldier, 1864. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

²⁴ Detail from Jacob Coonley's photographic image of Johnsonville's supply depot and Fort Johnson taken November 23, 1864, at Johnsonville, Tennessee. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress.

²⁵ Walter Howland to mother, September 23, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee, Walter M. Howland Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC, 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Upon entering Johnsonville's 100-acre compound, trains passed a small blockhouse positioned to the left of the rail line and between the access road atop a steep knob.²⁷ Richard Wagner, the Acting 1st Assistant Engineer aboard the gunboat U.S.S. *Key West* docked at Johnsonville's wharf remembered "a small blockhouse, unfinished and unmanned."²⁸ By 1864, "blockhouses had replaced the more commonly known spiked-topped stockades, which were "30 feet square" and designed to hold "about 30 men... a sufficient guard for the less important [railroad] bridges."²⁹

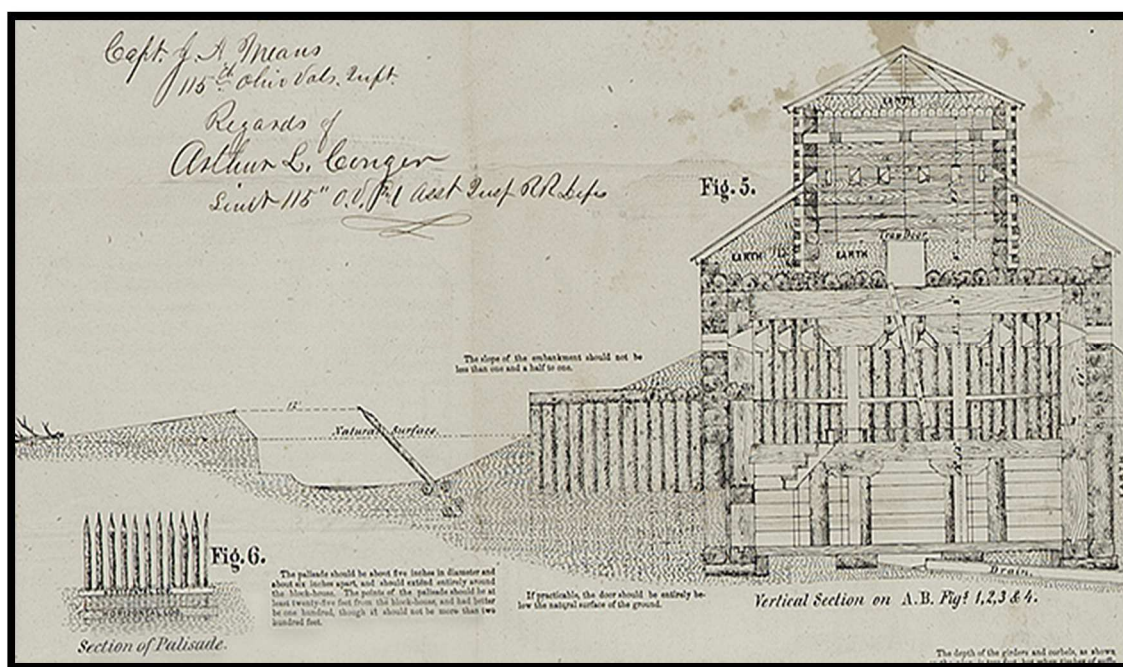


Figure 20: Department of the Cumberland, Chief Engineer William E. Merrill's blockhouse design, 1864. Courtesy of TSLA.

²⁷ *The Official Atlas of the Civil War*, Plate XIV.

²⁸ Testimony of Acting 1st Assistant Engineer for the U.S.S. *Key West*, Peter Wagner, regarding the destruction of government property at Johnsonville, Tennessee on November 4, 1864, for the Court of Inquiry at Mound City, Illinois, for the Court Martial case of Acting Volunteer Lt. Commander Edward M. King, May 15, 1865, U.S. Navy Records 1864-65, Courts Martial, RG 11-86, U.S. Navy Department, 75.

²⁹ *OR*, Series I, vol. 16, pt. 2, 178; Smith, Nance, and Prouty, *A Survey of Civil War Era Military Sites in Tennessee*, 144-48.

In 1864, Colonel William E. Merrill, Chief Engineer for the Army of the Cumberland, designed enhanced concepts of blockhouses based on Mahan's guide to field fortifications for the army (pictured above).³⁰ Although no details describe what Johnsonville's blockhouse looked like, it was probably a small, square, stronghold made of logs with shuttered windows and loop holes for protection. Loop holes were small holes in the side walls of the blockhouse that allowed soldiers on the inside to fire their muskets at enemy attackers by sticking only the barrel of their rifles through a hole and offering protection from incoming fire.³¹ The blockhouse roof was made with a "layer of logs laid side by side and covered with earth. On top of all was a roof of shingles or of boards and battens – it being very important to keep the block house dry, so that the garrison might live in it. Additionally, blockhouses were supplied with ventilators, cellars, water-tanks, and bunks."³²

Blockhouse guards had a clear view of incoming trains for one mile as they approached Johnsonville, including road travelers as well. In a report by Captain Henry Howland, Johnsonville's Chief Quartermaster who shared quarters with his brother Walter, Howland wrote "we had nothing worthy the name of fortifications, only one small block-house and a little earthwork thrown up on two hills (the lower redoubt)

³⁰ D.H. Mahan, *A Complete Treatise on Field Fortification, with the General Outlines of the Principles Regulating to the Arrangement, the Attack, and the Defence [sic] of Permanent Works* (New York: Wiley and Long, 1836), 96-98, 102.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Block-Houses, Etc., "The Engineer Service in the Army of the Cumberland" in *History of the Army of the Cumberland, Its Organization, Campaigns, and Battles*, vol. 2, ed. Thomas B. Van Horne (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1988), 439-458. A slightly different version also appears as: "Block-Houses for Railroad Defense in the Department of the Cumberland," in Robert Hunter, ed., *Sketches of War History 1861-1865*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1888), 444.

overlooking the town and river, where were mounted the six 10-pounder Parrotts of the First Kansas Battery, the only guns then here.”³³



Figure 21: Captain Henry Howland, Johnsonville’s chief Quartermaster, 1864. Courtesy of Mudpuppy and Waterdog Inc.

On the following page, figure 22 shows a section of an 1865 map of Johnsonville. On the map, just below the railroad track to the left of the word “NASHVILLE,” is a small black dot. This dot is positioned in the area where Johnsonville’s blockhouse was located and likely represents it.³⁴

³³ *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 621.

³⁴ Although no records provide detail of Johnsonville’s blockhouse, a Civil War era engineer’s map vaguely identifies the position of the depot’s blockhouse.



Figure 22: Detail from an 1865 engineer's map of Johnsonville. Note the two freight transfer buildings on each side of the center track and the lower redoubt, the wedge object on the lower left side. Map taken from the Official Atlas of the Civil War.

It is important to note that Howland's description of Johnsonville's fortifications to his superior officer, Chief Quartermaster Colonel James L. Donaldson, regarding "only one small block-house" and "little earthwork," is, although in many ways revealing, quite confusing based on other known descriptions of Johnsonville's defenses. For example, Howland made no mention of any other defensive fortifications in his report such as the extensive line of rifle pits that protected Johnsonville's outer areas described by Corporal Atwood as "the circumference of the line being 5 miles in extent."³⁵

³⁵ Lorenzo Atwood to Cordelia Atwood, October 19, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee.

Additionally, Captain Samuel J. McConnell, 71st Ohio Volunteer Infantry and Acting Assistant-Inspector General for the District of Tennessee, discussed the Quartermaster's Department employees and his orders to "put them in the intrenchments [sic]."³⁶ The "intrenchments" that McConnell recalled were even in view of Howland's own quarters in which he and his brother Walter were "quite comfortably settled" and where he had built "a very comfortable little house" near the depot's wharf.³⁷ Colonel John C. Peterson, the commander of the Second regiment of Quartermaster's Department employees, also reported that "I commenced to improve the works we occupied. The works erected were of sufficient strength to resist field artillery, and they were well protected from a flank fire by heavy traverses every fifteen feet."³⁸

Based on these descriptions, which detail extensively the earthen defensive works located around and inside Johnsonville's perimeter, it is difficult to understand why Howland, who was "in charge of this quartermaster's depot,"³⁹ was either ignorant of the post's defensive fortifications or purposely downplayed Johnsonville's defenses in order to make his report have more appeal to his superiors about the hapless destruction of Johnsonville's wharf which, supposedly, occurred under his orders.

Fort Johnson

Johnsonville's major land defenses included two earthen redoubts. Although both redoubts were 700 yards apart, combined they were called Fort Johnson, named after

³⁶ *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 626.

³⁷ Walter Howland to mother, September 23, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee; Henry Howland to mother, October 23, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee; *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 626.

³⁸ *OR*, Series I, vol. 52, pt. 1, 656.

³⁹ Henry Howland to mother, October 23, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee.

Military Governor Andrew Johnson. A redoubt is a military term for a square, polygonal, or circular enclosed fortification. In Tennessee, redoubts were usually small and almost always built on top of a hill or rising ground. Redoubts were usually positioned at a higher point to help strengthen long lines of defensive earthworks. At Johnsonville, earthen rifle trenches were constructed between both redoubts and encircled the depot site in a continuous arc that resembled a horse shoe “5 miles long.”⁴⁰

Johnsonville’s redoubts sat atop two separate hills that overlooked the supply depot, each with commanding views about two miles up and down the Tennessee River and of the Trace Creek bottoms. Except for only a few descriptions in the *Official Records*, it is unclear whether the men stationed at Johnsonville and the officers in Nashville referred to the fortifications as simply redoubts, forts, or as Fort Johnson. Colonel J.C. Peterson, commander of the Second Infantry Regiment, Quartermaster’s Department, wrote that “my command was posted in Fort Johnson and remained under arms during the night. We remained in the fort until Monday evening (November 7).”⁴¹ Other officers, like Assistant Quartermaster Howland, who had been stationed at Johnsonville since the spring of 1864, referred to one of the fortifications simply as “a little earthwork.”⁴²

Major General George H. Thomas, commander of the Department of the Cumberland, provided evidence that two forts at Johnsonville engaged the Confederates

⁴⁰ Lorenzo Atwood to Cordelia Atwood, October 19, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee.

⁴¹ *OR*, Series I, vol. 52, pt. 1, 656.

⁴² *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 621.

on November 4: “I do not see how the enemy can cross the river to attack the forts.”⁴³ Assistant Adjutant General, Lieutenant Colonel William Sinclair, offered another revealing description, but of just one fortification. “On the hill, near the river, there was an earth-work, the artillery being posted in and about this work. Part of the infantry was posted in this work, and part in rifle-pits that had been thrown up on the flat north of the railroad.”⁴⁴ Sinclair’s report dates no earlier than January 1865, however, his exclusion of a second fort (upper redoubt) may have been an oversight or was excluded from his report simply due to it not being mentioned in previous reports from officers present during the battle such as Howland.

Fort Johnson’s lower redoubt or, redoubt No. 1, sat atop a lower hill that was closest to the center of the supply depot. Therefore, it was called the “lower” redoubt. Fort Johnson’s lower redoubt was built of earth and was 210 feet long by 100 feet wide.⁴⁵ The fort was designed with six embrasures. Embrasures were openings in the parapet wall where an artillery piece could be rolled forward and fired.

Fort Johnson’s upper redoubt, or redoubt No. 2, was 700 yards behind the lower redoubt (to the southwest), and positioned on an even higher hill with a commanding view of the Tennessee River. The upper redoubt was more circular in shape and was approximately 255 feet by 120 feet and its walls approximately 15 feet high.⁴⁶

⁴³ *OR*, Series I, vol. 39, 859.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 861.

⁴⁵ Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer “National Register Nomination, Johnsonville Historic District,” Humphries County, Tennessee, Section 7, 1990, 1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 3.



Figure 23: Fort Johnson, Lower Redoubt, Johnsonville, Tennessee, 1864. Note cannons on the far right of the photograph located outside of the fort on a flat, open plane. A lone sentry stands post atop the fort wall wearing a poncho. To the left of the sentry, is Fort Johnson's stockade-style, spiked-top entrance gate. Photograph by Jacob F. Coonley, November 23, 1864. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

During the early occupation of Johnsonville by the First Kansas Battery in the summer of 1864, the battery was staged and encamped at several locations inside the defensive perimeter at Johnsonville. The “six 10 pd’r parrots of the 1st Kansas battery,” as Henry Howland reported “were stationed in the small fort” and participated heavily in the fight at Johnsonville on November 4, 1864.⁴⁷ Theodore Gardner, a sergeant in the First Kansas Battery, remembered two different locations where they were positioned. His accounts are important because he describes both Fort Johnson’s lower and upper redoubts. In his description of the lower redoubt, Gardner recalled that:

at the southern edge of the village in a round knob some seventy-five feet above the river and a few hundred feet east of it... was constructed an earthwork with embrasures in which were installed the six guns of the

⁴⁷ AQM Henry Howland to Brigadier General James S. Donaldson, November 16, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee.

First Kansas battery, giving them a commanding position, covering the village and the great warehouses on the levee, which were filled with supplies for the Army of the Cumberland. Just south of this redoubt was our camp, a few yards away.⁴⁸

Gardner also provided perhaps the most revealing account of Fort Johnson's upper redoubt. Even if Fort Johnson's upper redoubt was not yet fully completed before November 4, 1864, there was at least some kind of defensive position located on a hill behind the lower redoubt as Gardner recalled in his memoirs. "At the back of this knob [lower redoubt] about a thousand feet was a second ridge, perhaps a hundred feet higher. This second ridge was dubbed by the battery boys "Mt. Pisgah."⁴⁹ In an after-action report made after the November 4 battle, Captain Charles H. Lovelace, one of the assistant quartermasters at Johnsonville, provided an account of possibly even a third defensive position "on the range of Hills between the fortifications before mentioned. Here the 1st Kansas Battery of Six Guns was stationed."⁵⁰ What is interesting about Lovelace's account, as compared to Gardner and Howland, is that he remembered the guns of the First Kansas Battery not being positioned at either the lower or upper redoubts, but instead at another location, "between the fortifications."⁵¹

From the various accounts made by Gardner, Lovelace, and Howland, it appears they all agreed that the First Kansas Battery was on-site and engaged the enemy on November 4-5, 1864. Exactly where the First Kansas Battery was located, however, is

⁴⁸ Ibid, 276.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Avadavat, account provided by Captain Charles H. Lovelace regarding the destruction of government property at Johnsonville, Tennessee on November 4, 1864, for the Board of Survey at Nashville, Tennessee, in the Court Martial case of Acting Volunteer Lt. Commander, Edward M. King, December 29, 1864, U.S. Navy Records 1864-65, Courts Martial, RG 11-86, U.S. Navy Department, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁵¹ Ibid.

unclear. From at least two accounts (Gardner and Lovelace) it is very likely that the First Kansas Battery relocated from the upper redoubt (“Mt. Pisgah”) to a more strategic position somewhere to the left and outside of Fort Johnson’s lower redoubt. The First Kansas Battery most likely occupied this position instead of inside the lower redoubt because from all accounts, the Second U.S. Colored Light Artillery occupied the fort on November 4. Lovelace also corroborated the location of the Second U.S. Colored Light Artillery by stating “we had a fortification on the hill, I think four Brass 12 pdr’s manned by a Colored Battery, [and] the two 20 pd’r Parrotts taken from the steamer “Venus.”⁵² However, Gardner’s recollection was different. He remembered that the First Kansas Battery was indeed inside the lower redoubt at first, but after the battle, relocated to the upper redoubt. Gardner wrote:

the small earthwork in which our battery was located, being within easy range of the enemy’s guns, caused us, on the night of the 3rd to move them back to the higher ground of Mt. Pisgah, where we were out of their range and yet within effective range of our own. The morning of the 5th was damp and a dense fog hung upon the river. We were up bright and early having bivouacked on the high ground beside our guns.⁵³

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Theodore Gardner, “The First Kansas Battery: An Historical Sketch, With Personal Reminiscences of Army Life, 1861-65,” in *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society 1915-1918: Together with Addresses at Annual Meetings, Memorials and Miscellaneous Papers, Vol. XIV*, ed. William E. Connelley (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1918), 277. It should be noted that probably Gardner mistakenly said the “night of the 3rd” but actually meant to write “on the night of the 4th” considering that he completely skipped the main day of the battle, November 4th and then picks back up the next sentence with “The morning of the 5th was damp and dense.”

Stationed inside each redoubt were various artillery and infantry soldiers. Artillerists helped man the cannons at each embrasure and also outside of the fort's walls. For the majority of the time, artillery members of the First Kansas Battery and the Second U.S. Colored Light Artillery, occupied the lower redoubt, including men from the 12th and 13th USCT, the 43rd Wisconsin Infantry, and the 11th Tennessee Infantry (mounted). As Colonel Charles Thompson recalled, civilian employees of the Quartermaster's Department were stationed inside of Fort Johnson, probably as guards. One possible theory about the civilians' role inside the fort was remembered by Theodore Gardner and that "the battery recruited a number of civilian men from the quartermaster's department" suggesting that the civilians were to be used in some capacity to help the First Kansas Battery.⁵⁴ At some point, Gardner was then ordered to go to Nashville, retrieve the civilian Quartermaster's Department employees that had been assigned to assist the battery, and return with the men to Johnsonville. However, the civilians never made it as Gardner recalled. Instead, "the train ran out fifty miles [from Nashville], when it was ditched by guerrillas and burned, the passengers being murdered in cold blood."⁵⁵

Connecting the two redoubts was a continuous line of earthen rifle pits. Every five to six hours, garrison troops took routine shifts guarding Johnsonville's perimeter in the outer lines of rifle pits, that distance recorded by Corporal Atwood as "the circumference of the line being 5 miles in extent."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ibid, 275.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Lorenzo Atwood to Cordelia Atwood, Johnsonville, Tennessee, October 19, 1864.

Johnsonville's Defense Forces

The land forces present at Johnsonville included: 700 men of the 43rd Wisconsin Infantry Regiment; 500 men comprised of various companies of the 12th, 13th, 40th and 100th regiments of United States Colored Infantry; 1000 armed Quartermaster's Department employees (this number includes 500 civilian employees who were already working at Johnsonville and 500 employees who arrived on November 3 from the Nashville depot); 20 men of the 11th Tennessee (mounted) Infantry Regiment; 100 men of the 2nd Tennessee Mounted Infantry, (operating somewhere in the vicinity of Johnsonville, but the *Official Records* do not place them present at the post on November 4); six-10-pound Parrott cannons of the First Kansas Battery with about 80 men; two-12-pound Napoleon cannons of Battery A, 2nd U.S. Colored Light Artillery, with about 40 men; two-12-pound Napoleon cannons which belonged to a battery operated by the Quartermaster's Department from Nashville with about 30 men; and finally, two-20-pound Parrott cannons captured from the Confederates aboard the transport U.S.S. *Venus* and "mounted on a hill north of the battery of 10 Pdrs," and manned by 30 artillerists (likely Quartermaster's Department employees).⁵⁷ Altogether, a force of around 2,500 was on-site and ready to defend Johnsonville.

Additionally, the U.S. Navy had approximately 400 sailors and officers aboard four gunboats stationed at Johnsonville: the U.S.S. *Tawah* (No. 29), U.S.S. *Key West* (No.

⁵⁷ U.S. Navy Department, testimony of Acting 1st Assistant Engineer for the U.S.S. *Key West*, Peter Wagner, regarding the destruction of government property at Johnsonville, Tennessee on November 4, 1864, for the Court of Inquiry at Mound City, Illinois, for the Court Martial case of Acting Volunteer Lt. Commander Edward M. King, May 15, 1865, U.S. Navy Records 1864-65, Courts Martial, RG 11-86, 75.

32), U.S.S. *Elfin* (No. 52), and U.S.S. *Undine* (No.55).⁵⁸ The gunboats, called Tinclads, were civilian packet boats converted to military use by adding a few guns and light armor to the front and sides. The gunboats at Johnsonville were stern-wheel powered except for the side-wheeler U.S.S. *Tawah*.⁵⁹ The armor “was intended to deflect light arms fire and not much more; hence the name “tinclad” versus the more heavily clad “ironclads.”⁶⁰



Figure 24: U.S.S Key West (Left) and possibly the gunboat U.S.S. Carondelet (Center), an ironclad. Courtesy of TSLA.

Drill and Quarters

Officers drilled the men in military tactics in the open areas of Trace Creek and on the clear-cut bank just north of the depot’s central area along the Tennessee River.

Walter Howland, the brother of Johnsonville’s Assistant Quartermaster, Henry Howland, shared quarters at Johnsonville with his brother. On September 23, 1864, Walter wrote

⁵⁸ *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 605-18.

⁵⁹ W. Craig Gaines, *Encyclopedia of Civil War Shipwrecks* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 160-63.

⁶⁰ Stephen R. James, Jr., “Additional Archaeological Investigations of Two Battle of Johnsonville Troop Transports Site 40HS338, Tennessee River, Humphries County, Tennessee,” Pan-American Consultants, Inc., Memphis, Tennessee (February 2011): 11.

his mother about the intense Confederate partisan activity in the Johnsonville vicinity and of their preparations to defend the post. “I went with two others some eight miles into the country to attend [a] meeting. It was a little exciting too as a guerrilla band stopped there the night before and interrupted a meeting which was then going on. We are hearing reports constantly of guerrillas abroad and I suppose it is not quite safe to venture out. Rumors are again afloat of an anticipated attack from Forrest and the men are today out drilling.”⁶¹ Captain Samuel J. McConnell, Seventy-First Ohio Infantry, and Acting Assistant Inspector-General for the District of Tennessee, made a revealing report about the efforts, or rather, lack of effort, of the infantry forces at Johnsonville. He wrote that “none of the troops, except the men of the First Kansas Battery, had ever been under fire; the 400 colored troops were the only ones that were drilled.”⁶²

As reported in the *Official Records*, the infantry forces were “posted in rifle pits that had been dug on the flat just north of the railroad [and] the remainder of the troops were stationed in and around the fortifications.”⁶³ When not serving on picket duty, the men were usually resting. At Johnsonville, soldiers were housed in a variety of shelters such as clapboard-sided barracks that were 30 x 60 feet in diameter with bunks along the walls and with a stove on each end. Additionally, men such as those in the 43rd Wisconsin Infantry built small wooden huts with chimneys in anticipation of a long winter. At Johnsonville, soldiers enjoyed the lax life of being a garrison soldier. This meant they went to sleep each night in roofed quarters and usually prepared or were served hot

⁶¹ Walter Howland to mother, September 23, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee.

⁶² *OR*, Series 1, vol. 39, pt. 1, 865.

⁶³ *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 641.

meals. Corporal Atwood even wrote his wife about his friend Jairus, who he thought was “a good bunk mate.”⁶⁴

In one of Atwood’s letters to his wife Cordelia, he made an interesting sketch showing the perimeter of Johnsonville and included many interior details of the place. To illustrate to his wife Cordelia how he lived at Johnsonville, he sketched the barracks as they were arranged like row houses, and even identified them by their company letter. What is interesting however, is that the sequence of company letters are not aligned in order. Additionally, Atwood identified other areas around the depot such as “No. 1 is a battery of 6, guns,” and “No 2. Reg. of Cavelry [*sic*].”⁶⁵ Another interesting detail includes a semi-circular sketch identifying a “picket line five miles long.”⁶⁶

Atwood’s drawing is extremely important to Johnsonville’s Civil War history because it identifies many elements that were previously unknown such as the existence of eleven soldier barracks buildings, the location of a second corral at the position of (“No.2 Reg. of Cavelry), and possibly the position of the upper redoubt as described in the sketch as “No. 3, Company Batt’y of our Reg. on a high hill 100 rods.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Lorenzo Atwood to Corlelia Atwood, October 31, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

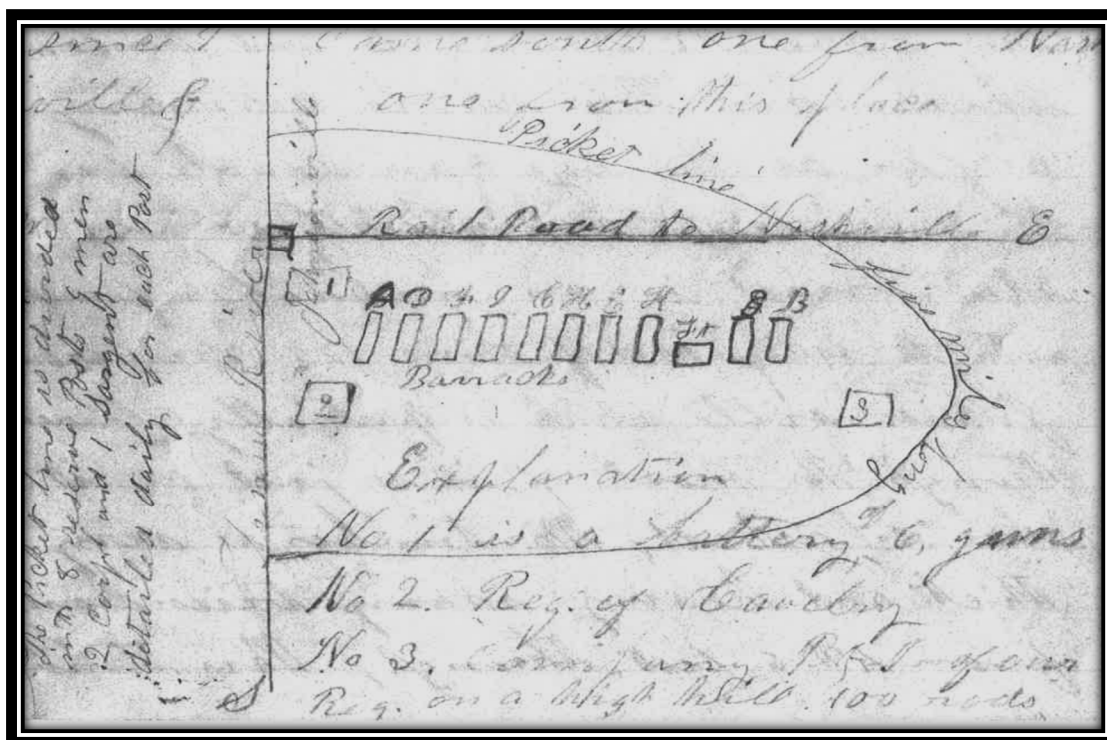


Figure 25: Detail of letter written on October 31, 1864, by Corporal Lorenzo Atwood to wife Cordelia. Courtesy of Warren and Robin Atwood.

The defense force at Johnsonville was relatively small for the size of the depot considering that its perimeter included a “picket line five miles long” as Atwood indicated.⁶⁸ The defenses were well-positioned on high terrain but not adequately manned. In more than one report, Colonel Thompson and Acting Volunteer Lieutenant King appealed to their superiors for more men, but the force was never increased. Had Johnsonville come under attack from its land side (rear), it is quite possible that the supply depot would have been captured. This is because the troops assigned to guard the place had never been under fire (except for the 1st Kansas Battery and a few USCT troops) and could not hold a five-mile long perimeter around the depot in an organized effort. This is especially true since the Union defenders at Johnsonville were about to

⁶⁸ Ibid.

come up against one of the Confederacy's master field tacticians, Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest, who had much experience with laying siege to similar outposts and forcing surrender as he did at Fort Pillow, Union City, Murfreesboro, and Athens, Alabama.

If Johnsonville's Union defenders had any advantage at all over the Confederates, it was having the experienced USCT, First Kansas Battery, and the mounted infantry of the 11th and 2nd Tennessee on-site to protect Johnsonville's rear areas and the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad from guerilla attacks.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE WAR COMES TO JOHNSONVILLE OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1864

Target Johnsonville

By placing so many untested units at Johnsonville, federal commanders obviously thought that Confederate forces would never mount a major attack there. After the fall of Atlanta in September 1864 and General John B. Hood's decision to abandon Georgia to Major General William T. Sherman and move his Army of Tennessee to the Tennessee Valley, Union commanders saw posts like Johnsonville to be on the periphery of the war. Confederate officers saw it differently. Federal bases still had supplies, and wrecking federal logistics was always worthwhile. That fall, Lieutenant General Richard Taylor, sent his trusted cavalry commander, Confederate Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest, on a West Tennessee raid that targeted Johnsonville.

The Johnsonville campaign officially began on October 12, 1864, when Forrest wrote Taylor proposing a threefold plan that would either result in the destruction or the capture of the Union supply depot at Johnsonville. Forrest told Taylor that he intended to first, deprive the Federals of their "supplies from the Northwestern railroad, which are shipped up the Tennessee River and thence to Johnsonville and Nashville."¹ Secondly, that he would connect up with Brigadier General James R. Chalmers' force at Jackson, Tennessee, who was already operating just outside Memphis harassing Federals there as a diversionary tactic. Even though Forrest informed Taylor that Chalmers' "500 men will

¹ *OR*, Series I, vol. 39, Pt.3, 815.

probably swell my command to 3,400 troops,” in reality, Chalmers had “one small brigade of a thousand cavalry, one section of artillery, and three hundred militia,” altogether equaling about 1,400 men.²

Once Forrest rallied with Chalmers’ force at Jackson, he would then move northeast and occupy Fort Heiman, a deserted Confederate fort located three miles across the Tennessee state line in Kentucky on a high bluff overlooking the Tennessee River, and while there, disrupt river transportation with Johnsonville.³ “It is my present design,” he told Taylor, “to take possession of Fort Heiman, on the west bank of the Tennessee River below Johnsonville and thus prevent all communication with Johnsonville by transports.”⁴ Thirdly, Forrest would gather up as much food, horses, and supplies as he could. Taylor obliged his plan and offered any logistical support that Forrest desired. The same day, October 12, Forrest dispatched Chalmers at Memphis requesting that he “report to me at Jackson, Tenn., with all the available men you have... fetching the two batteries with you. I will supply you at Jackson. Fetch your wagons with you.”⁵

On October 17, 1864, the first of Forrest’s troops, a brigade led by Brigadier General Tyree Bell, left Corinth, Mississippi, and headed north as planned. Two days later Brigadier General Abraham Buford, a career military officer and a graduate of West Point, also departed Corinth with about 750 men of the Kentucky Brigade, mostly who were mounted infantry. Accompanying Buford was Forrest’s 24-year-old Chief of

² Captain James Dinkins, “Destroying Military Stores and Gunboats,” *Confederate Veteran* 34, no. 5 (May 1926): 176.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid; Jordan and Pryor, 588.

Artillery, Captain John W. Morton. Morton's artillery force included his own battery and another commanded by Lieutenant E.S. Walton of Hudson's Mississippi Battery.⁶



Figure 26: Confederate Partisan Alexander Duval McNairy, 1861. Courtesy of a private collection.

Meanwhile, along the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad, Union supply shipments to Johnsonville continued on their regular schedule. While Forrest moved back into West Tennessee, guerrilla actions along the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad remained intense. On October 17, the same day that Forrest's command started toward Jackson, Confederate partisans under the command of Alexander Duval McNairy in Humphreys County, attacked a group of "track repairers" at section 36 on the Northwestern railroad and commenced in sabotaging the rails. The first train escaped derailment, even though the rail spikes had been pulled out by McNairy's gang. The next day, three supply trains on the same route, were again "heavily fired into by McNairy's gang."⁷ The Confederate's managed to fire "a shower of bullets" into the train wounding

⁶ Jordon and Pryor, 690.

⁷ *OR*, Series 1, vol. 39, pt. 1, 877-78. The *Official Records*' reference for "McNary" was actually the Confederate partisan, Alexander Duval McNairy. McNairy originally served as 3rd Lt., Company B in 20th Tennessee Infantry Regiment. "He commanded a company of independent scouts known as the "Swanee Rifles" and fought at Fishing Creek and Shiloh; they later organized a battalion of partisan cavalry, which operated behind Union lines in Tennessee. They operated between the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers in Tennessee during 1862 and 1865. McNairy was considered the terror of the Federal Army. His gang

three and killed “a boy, who was a cook and brakeman, dead on the bunk, where he happened to be lying.”⁸

These sort of raids continued almost daily along the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad and usually resulted in the destruction of tracks, burning of trestles, cars, support buildings, and very often, the deaths of railroad guards, especially among the 12th and 13th USCT regiments who supplied the guard force for railroad sections 49 through 78 which started near Camp Mussey (today’s Tennessee City in Dickson County) and ended at Johnsonville. On August 30, 1864, company G of the 13th USCT, was “attacked by a company of guerillas under the command of the notorious guerilla chief “Petty John” in which during the attack the company lost one man killed and one sergeant wounded severely.”⁹

Additionally, on September 1, 1864, while stationed at Waverly, Tennessee, an officer in company H of the 13th USCT, reported that “while out, had a skirmish with guerillas and lost two men killed and one wounded. Lieutenant Ekstrand was wounded while riding along the road by guerillas.”¹⁰ As historian Robert Hunt points out “guerillas combined terrorism with sabotage and became worse as guerillas degenerated into little more than bandit gangs.” By late 1864 “anarchy ruled outside the garrison towns,” like Johnsonville.¹¹

specialized in the harassment of railroad workers. On 18 Oct 1864 the track workers were captured by McNairy and his men between Smeedville (now Dickson but originally named for railroad surveyor E. C. Smeed) and White Bluff. Three days later the bushwhackers burned all the dwellings and worker's huts on the railroad."

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *OR*, Supplement, Records of Events, vol. 77, U.S. Colored Troops (Union), 470-71, 477, 482, 495.

¹⁰ Ibid, 496.

¹¹ Hunt, *The Good Men Who Won the War*, 15.

Forrest's Confederates remained focused on disrupting Federal shipping on the Tennessee River. On October 19, Buford's troops arrived at Jack's Creek, Tennessee, together with Morton's Artillery.¹² Forrest and his escort joined Buford's men two days later at Jackson. Having rallied as planned, Forrest's 2,000-man force, together with Chalmers' 1,400 men, now brought his effective strength to about 3,400 soldiers.¹³ By October 24, the first phase of Forrest's threefold plan was now complete.

On October 28, Buford's Division, which included Tyree Bell's brigade, reached the mouth of the Big Sandy River at the point where it flows into the Tennessee River just south of Paris Landing.¹⁴ Forrest, who was still in route with his escort, had previously ordered Buford to establish batteries there and then move north and occupy Fort Heiman.¹⁵ That afternoon, "after a careful reconnaissance," Buford and Morton selected artillery positions at Paris Landing.¹⁶ Buford ordered Brigadier General Tyree Bell to remain at Paris Landing with his brigade of about 450 Tennesseans, and a section of "about four or five pieces" of three-inch ordnance rifles of Morton's battery.¹⁷

Buford's Division continued north toward Fort Heiman with Morton and an infantry brigade commanded by Brigadier General Hylan B. Lyon. Upon arriving at Fort Heiman that afternoon, Morton oversaw the positioning of two 20-pounder Parrott rifles that had been brought-up from Mobile, Alabama.¹⁸ Inside of the old Confederate

¹² Jordan and Pryor, 589.

¹³ Ibid, 589.

¹⁴ Ibid, 591; Dinkins, "Destroying Military Stores and Gunboats," 177.

¹⁵ Ibid, 591; Lonnie E. Maness, *An Untutored Genius: The Military Career of General Nathan Bedford Forrest* (Oxford, Mississippi: The Guild Bindery Press, 1990), 309; John Watson Morton, *The Artillery of Nathan Bedford Forrest's Cavalry* (Marietta, Georgia: R. Beamis Publishing, Ltd., 1995), 245.

¹⁶ Jordon and Pryor, 591-92; Morton, 245.

¹⁷ *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 601; Jordon and Pryor, 591-92; Dinkins, 177.

¹⁸ Jordon and Pryor, 591; Dinkins, 177.

earthworks at Fort Heiman, Morton left Lieutenant William Hunter in charge of the two 20-pounder Parrott guns.¹⁹ About four hundred yards south of Fort Heiman, another section of Morton's battery was concealed at river level and placed under the command of Lieutenant J.W. Brown.²⁰ As Morton later recalled "each of these sections was masked and each commanded the river about a mile from either direction."²¹

Following Forrest's orders to "prevent all communication with Johnsonville by transports" on the Tennessee River, Buford ensured that the batteries he positioned the day before were well camouflaged. General Chalmers arrived that evening with his 1,400-man division at the town of Paris, eighteen miles west of Buford's artillery positions and a safe supporting distance from both Paris Landing and Fort Heiman.²²

The next morning, October 29, Forrest, with his escort and staff, joined Buford at Fort Heiman. With troops now in position at Paris Landing and Fort Heiman, the second phase of Forrest's plan produced results, and quickly. At 9 a.m., the Union transport U.S.S. *Mazeppa*, heavily laden with military supplies, appeared in front of Fort Heiman towing two barges. Morton's artillerymen fired multiple rounds into the *Mazeppa* and with "her machinery being speedily disabled," forced her to the other side of the bank where the crew quickly dispersed into the woods.²³

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, 592.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Captain James Dinkins, "Destroying Military Stores and Gunboats," *Confederate Veteran* 34, no. 5 (May 1926): 176.

²³ Jordon and Pryor, 592; Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest*, 225.

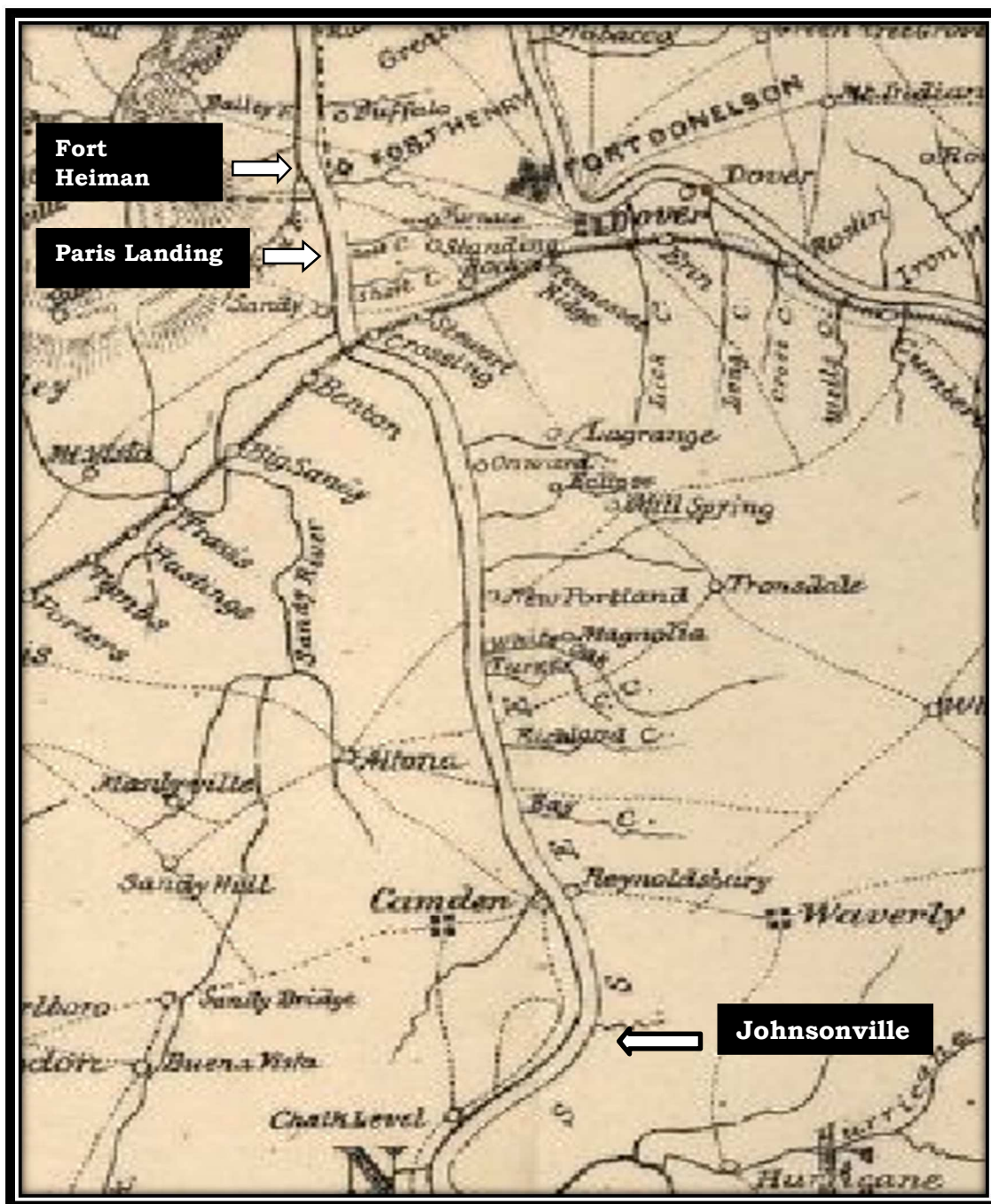


Figure 27: 1865 map of the Tennessee River between Johnsonville, Tennessee, and Fort Heiman, Kentucky. Author identification of Johnsonville, Fort Heiman, and Paris Landing. Map courtesy of TSLA.

A Confederate swimmer was sent across the river to the abandoned *Mazeppa*. Commandeering a yawl (rowboat), the swimmer returned to the western shore, along with the *Mazeppa*'s captain, hauling a rope back with him. The *Mazeppa* was then "warped by a hawser across to the west bank of the river."²⁴ By 5 p.m., most of the captured supplies aboard the *Mazeppa*, which included shoes, hard tack, blankets, clothing, and hundreds of pounds of military stores, had been off-loaded onto the western

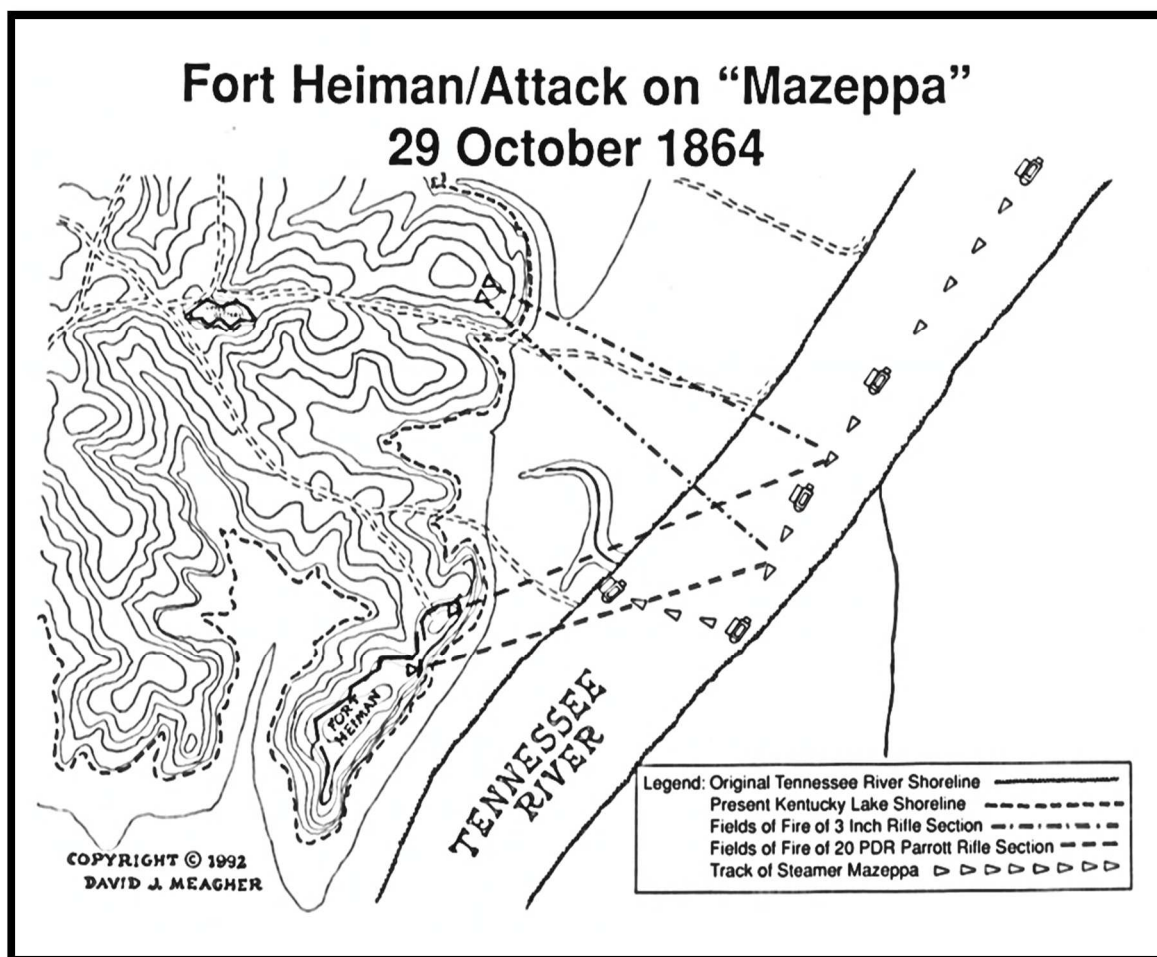


Figure 28: Drawing of Fort Heiman and the Attack on the U.S.S. Mazeppa, October 29, 1864. Drawing courtesy of David J. Meagher.

²⁴ T.E. Crutcher, "Witness to the Capture of the *Mazeppa*," *Confederate Veteran* 37, no. 11 (November 1929): 71; Jordon and Pryor, 593.

river bank.²⁵ To prevent her capture, the Confederates burned the *Mazeppa* on the river bank then “worked all that night, and during the 30th, in hauling the captured supplies to a place of security, with wagons and teams mainly impressed for the service from the neighborhood.”²⁶

Forrest’s troops continued to strike Union transports and gunboats for the next two days. On October 30th, General Chalmers’ division, with Colonel Rucker’s brigade as an escort, arrived at Paris Landing around 11:00 a.m. Chalmers reported that shortly before his arrival, Colonel Bell informed him that “a gunboat and two transports had passed his position going down the river.”²⁷ The gunboat was the U.S.S. *Undine* (No. 55), one of four gunboats stationed at Johnsonville along with the U.S.S. *Elfin* (No. 52), U.S.S. *Key West* (No. 32), and U.S.S. *Tawah* (No. 29).²⁸

Just months prior to this current affair, Frank Drake, a crew member aboard the *Undine*, wrote a series of letters to friends and family describing the *Undine* and some of its mechanical advantages. Drake wrote to his sister Clemma that:

the boat I am on now carries 2, 24 pound Dahlgren boat howitzers, brass bow chasers. They are the most exquisite pieces of workmanship. This is a “tin” clad...covered with iron of sufficient thickness to resist rifle balls and perhaps grape and canister though old “salts” say that the gun deck when greased will glance a 32 pound shot.²⁹

Six weeks later, Frank again described the *Undine* while at Johnsonville:

This is a stern wheel “Tin Clad” and the fastest one in the squadron. We made 25 miles per hour the other day coming down the river. We started up from Paducah July 1st – 8 am

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Morton, 247; Jordon and Pryor, 593.

²⁷ *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 682.

²⁸ Irion and Beard, 32.

²⁹ Frank Drake to Clemma Drake Smith, May 16, 1864, Cario, Illinois.

with 3 convoys. I don't think we will come up here many more times as the river is so low that we can hardly move.³⁰

The two Federal transports that Colonel Tyree Bell told Chalmers about were the *Anna* and *Venus*. The *Anna* was towing a barge "under convoy of the gunboat *Undine*."³¹ In addition to the *Venus*, the *Anna* was leading a second transport, the *J.W. Cheeseman*, also towing a barge coming from Johnsonville. As the *Anna* passed the Confederate batteries at both Paris Landing and Fort Heiman, she was fired upon and badly damaged by heavy cannonading, but still managed to escape and return to Paducah to warn officials there of Forrest's trap.³² The *Venus*, *Cheeseman*, and *Undine*, all three which were boats assigned to the naval flotilla at Johnsonville, were not so lucky. After six-hours of heavy engagement with the Paris Landing batteries, the boats were so badly damaged that they were forced to land against the eastern shore. The crews abandoned ship, leaving their dead and wounded aboard, and escaped to Pine Bluff, a Federal outpost located 13 miles west of Fort Donelson.³³

After the Federal vessels were beached just north of Paris Landing, Forrest ordered Chalmers to "burn nothing unless you are compelled to do so; save all the blankets and shoes as we will need them for McCulloch's brigade and Mabry's brigade."³⁴ But Chalmers had already ordered two companies to swim or use makeshift rafts to cross the Tennessee River and commandeer the abandoned vessels. The men off-loaded supplies from the *J.W. Cheeseman* and the two barges, then scuttled and burned

³⁰Ibid, July 2, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee.

³¹ *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 682; Hurst, 225.

³² Maness, 310; Irion and Beard, 32; *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 601-03.

³³ *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 624.

³⁴ *OR*, Series I, vol. 39, pt.2, 868.

her at the shoreline.³⁵ The *Undine* and *Venus*, which were only slightly damaged, were quickly repaired and placed into Forrest's new Confederate navy.

One of Chalmers' men, T.E. Crutcher, was present during the supposed destruction of the *Cheeseman*. In 1911, Crutcher recalled that the *Cheeseman* was not burned at all despite what the *Official Records* claimed. Crutcher remembered that:

We did not capture the *Cheeseman*, a Federal transport, coming down from Johnsonville the day after the capture of the *Mazeppa*. When the *Cheeseman* arrived opposite Fort Heiman, she was summoned to surrender by a shot across her bow from Capt. Gracey's Battery. She responded instantly by slowing her engines and running in under the bank. When she went ahead at full speed, the guns of the battery could not be depressed sufficiently to bear on her. So she escaped amid the jeers of her crew; but she alone of all the gunboats, and barges above Fort Heiman, escaped."³⁶

In contrast to Crutcher's recollection, *Way's Packet Directory* lists the *J.W. Cheeseman* as being captured at "White Oak Island, Tenn., Nov. 3, 1864, when a shot from shore severed the steam line and the boat was captured. The crew was taken prisoner and didn't get back to Cincinnati until Mar. 3, 1865. The rebels burned the boat."³⁷ Today, the mystery surrounding the *J.W. Cheeseman* still begs the question: was it burned and sunk by Confederates in the Tennessee River or as Crutcher recalled, did the boat actually make it past the Confederate batteries at Fort Heiman and survive the war?

³⁵Ibid; Maness; 310; J.P. Young, *The Seventh Tennessee Cavalry-Confederate* (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Bookshop Press, 1976), 113-14.

³⁶ Crutcher, "Witness to the Capture of the *Mazeppa*," 71.

³⁷ Frederick Way, Jr., *Way's Packet Directory, 1848-1994* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1994), 237.

Forrest, now with the captured *Undine* and *Venus* in his possession, devised a new plan of attack against Johnsonville. Always in favor of experimenting with his artillery, Forrest asked John Morton “how would you like to transfer your guns to these boats and command a gunboat fleet?”³⁸ Morton declined the offer but agreed to accompany the boats by land. The captured vessels would steam toward Johnsonville in a concerted motion with Chalmers’ Infantry Division in front. Morton’s artillery would parallel the boats from the western shore of the Tennessee River and act as a screen for any potential Union gunboats encountered. Buford’s Division brought up the rear “to cover them from any gunboats which might come from the direction of Paducah.”³⁹

Forrest, together with his “horse marines,” made trial runs inside the five-mile distance on the afternoon of October 31st between the batteries at Paris Landing and Fort Heiman.⁴⁰ Piloting the *Undine* was Captain Frank M. Gracey, a former steamboat captain from Clarksville, Tennessee, and an officer in the Third Kentucky Infantry who now served as an artillery officer in Morton’s battery. Lieutenant Colonel William A. Dawson piloted the *Venus*.⁴¹

On Tuesday, November 1, Forrest’s entire command left Fort Heiman, and was soon in route toward Johnsonville. At Paris Landing, a local man named Jack Hinson, a local marauder from Stewart County, Tennessee, who lived in the land between the two rivers, the Tennessee and Cumberland, offered to “show Forrest the road the guns should take through the Cypress Creek Swamp to get to good positions for the bombardment of

³⁸ Morton, 248.

³⁹ Jordon and Pryor, 596-97; *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 683.

⁴⁰ Morton, 249.

⁴¹ Maness, 311; Jordon and Pryor, 597.

Johnsonville.”⁴² That morning, a hard rain began to fall and lasted well into the late evening, making the roads and riverbanks literally impassable for Morton’s broken and exhausted artillery horses.⁴³ The infantry on shore struggled intensely to keep up with the gunboats. After almost two days of intense marching to cover the 40 miles needed to reach Johnsonville, both vessels had excelled ahead of the land troops by almost two miles. As the Confederate “navy” rounded the bend at Davidson’s Ferry on the afternoon of Wednesday, November 2, the *Undine* and *Venus* came face to face with two Union gunboats, the U.S.S. *Tawah* (No. 29) and the U.S.S. *Key West* (No. 32), both which had steamed down river from Johnsonville about five miles.⁴⁴

As the *Tawah* and *Key West* entered into range, Acting Volunteer Lieutenant King, commander of the *Key West*, immediately engaged the *Undine*, which was well in advance of the *Venus*. After “a sharp engagement for some twenty minutes,” the tiller-ropes on the *Venus*, which controlled the vessel’s steering capacity, was somehow severed.⁴⁵ The *Undine* moved in and tried unsuccessfully to rescue the troops aboard the *Venus*. Seeing that containing control of the boat was now hopeless, Colonel Dawson ran the *Venus* ashore and abandoned her “under a hot fire” along with the two 20-pound

⁴² Jill Knight Garrett, “Guerillas and Bushwhackers in Middle Tennessee during the Civil War,” in Jill Knight Garrett collection, Box 11, F1, manuscript s, TSLA, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁴³ Ibid; Capt. James Dinkins, “Destroying Military Stores and Gunboats,” *Confederate Veteran* 34, no. 5 (May 1926):178.

⁴⁴ *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 621.

⁴⁵ Jordon and Pryor, 598. According to the authors, Jordon suggests that since the Confederates retained some of the crew of the *Venus*, such as the boat’s “old engineer,” that during the fight with the Johnsonville gunboats, the *Venus* was likely sabotaged by having her tiller-rope slashed by the engineer, considering that the bow of the *Venus* faced the Union gunboats. During the Civil War, “Steering was still accomplished by a wheel and transmitted via tiller ropes and tackles to the rudder, as it had been for centuries. The protection of these tiller ropes (also called wheel-ropes and steering chains) was a matter of importance in warship design, as damage to them would quickly put the ship out of action. The *Louisville* had her tiller ropes shot away at Fort Donelson and drifted away down the river, out of control. The *Tennessee’s* steering chains were for some indecipherable reason left exposed in grooves on the afterdeck, covered only by a thin sheet of boiler iron, and they were soon shot away by the *Chickasaw*, leaving her unmanageable.”(Mark F. Jenkins, *Naval Gazette* 2, no. 6, and vol. 3, no. 1 (1998): 1-3.

Parrott guns and much of the captured cargo from the *Mazeppa* and *Cheeseman*.⁴⁶ The Confederates aboard fled into the woods without even time to burn the vessel or retain any supplies on board which included “200 rounds of ammunition (a great loss to General Forrest), 100 boxes of shoes, two bales of blankets, and 576 boxes of hard bread.”⁴⁷

Eventually the *Venus*'s crew rallied with Chalmers' land forces at Davidson's Ferry.⁴⁸ The Union gunboats under King's command, for reasons no other than “weather so misty and dark,” failed to pursue the *Undine* and make any attempt to sink her. However, King managed to maneuver the *Tawah* and *Key West* into position, recapture the *Venus*, and tow her back to the wharf at Johnsonville.⁴⁹

While the *Venus* and *Undine* were engaged with King's gunboats, Forrest had previously ordered Buford to send Colonel Hinchie P. Mabry's Brigade, with the 4th, 6th and 38th Mississippi regiments, along with Captain J.C. Thrall's Battery, and Lieutenant Colonel Taylor's Seventh Tennessee Cavalry, to go up river (south) and “establish his command nearly opposite to Johnsonville.”⁵⁰ All of these actions provoked King to message Lt. Commander LeRoy Fitch at Paducah, to send his fleet of six gunboats: *Paw-Paw*, *Moose*, *Fairy*, *Victory*, *Curlew*, and *Brilliant* immediately toward Johnsonville.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Jordon and Pryor, 598-99; Morton, 251.

⁴⁷ Wyeth, 462; It should be noted that Wyeth, in his reference of the November 2 engagement on page 462, mistakenly confused the *Venus* with the *Undine*.

⁴⁸ Maness, 312-13.

⁴⁹ Irion and Beard, 35.

⁵⁰ Jordon and Pryor, 598-99.

⁵¹ Irion and Beard, 35.

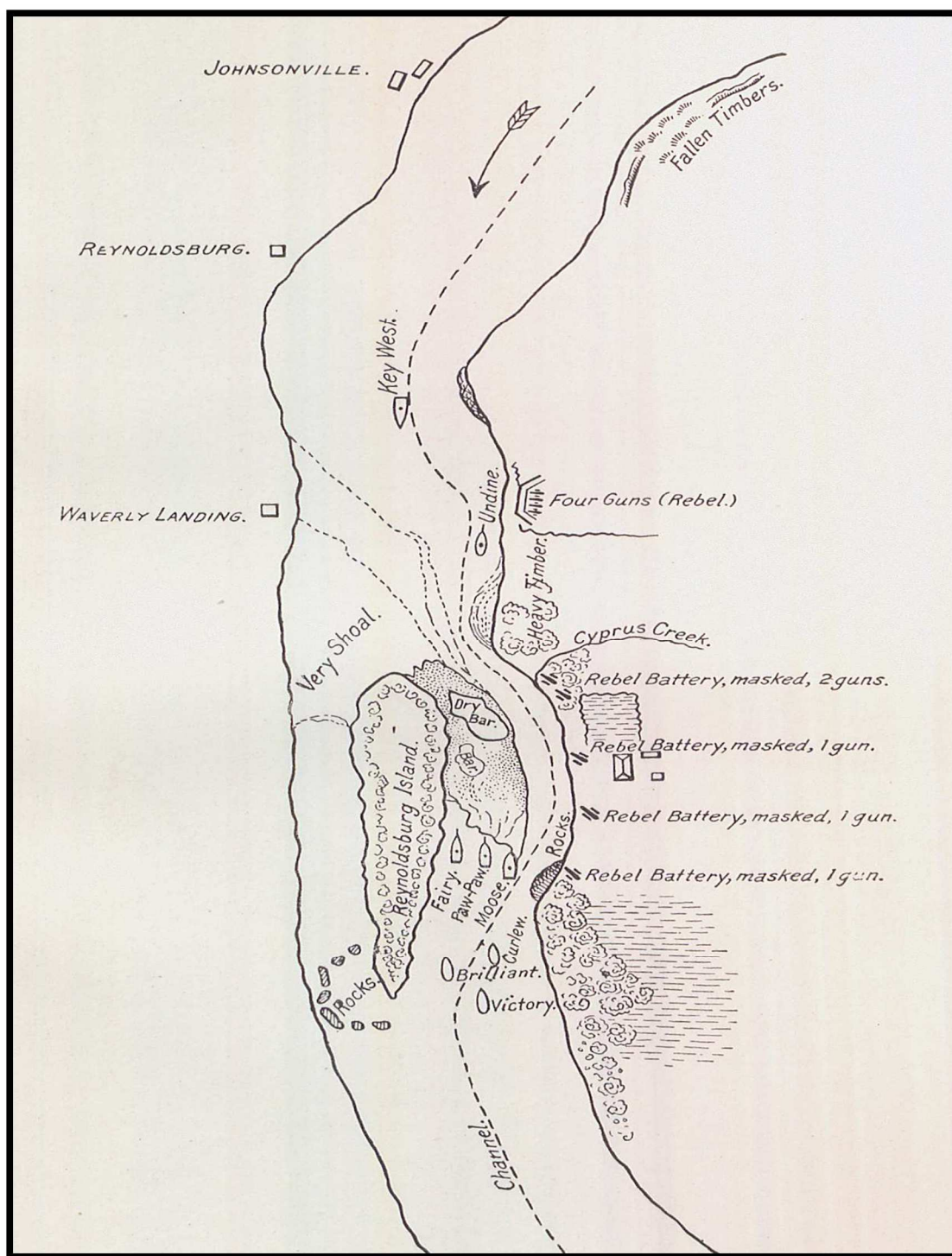


Figure 29: Original sketch by Lt. Commander Le Roy Fitch, Commander of the Tenth District Mississippi Squadron. Sketch details actions at Reynoldsburg Island, November 3-4, 1864, during the Johnsonville Campaign. Map in the Official Records of the Union and Confederate navies in the War of the Rebellion, Series, I, vol. 26, 630.

The next morning, November 3, while the rest of the Confederate land forces under Buford and Chalmers Divisions moved into their instructed positions, Forrest's artillery planted four batteries on the western shore above and below Reynoldsburg Island, a large treed shoal in the middle of the Tennessee River, closer to the eastern shore. The day before, Chalmers' men had concealed batteries on the western shore across from Reynoldsburg Island at a narrow curve of the river full of bars and shoals. Boat pilots knew this 500-yard stretch of river as "the chute."⁵² With Captain Gracey at the wheel, the Confederate "horse marines" returned on the *Undine* and anchored just offshore on the western river bank beside a battery of 10-pounders below Reynoldsburg Island and about a mile and a half north of Johnsonville.⁵³

The Confederates used the *Undine* as a decoy to draw the gunboats in closer to the land batteries. Lt. Commander King, with gunboats *Key West* and *Tawah*, steamed down river from Johnsonville returning to the same location as the previous day to engage the *Undine*. At noon on November 3, Confederate troops fired on both vessels. King returned to Johnsonville and waited for Lt. Commander Fitch's gunboats to arrive from Paducah.⁵⁴ That evening, no further actions threatened Johnsonville and the union defenders made arrangements throughout the night preparing for the battle that was sure to come.

⁵² *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 630: Irion and Beard, 35.

⁵³ *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 621-23.

⁵⁴ Irion and Beard, 35.

CHAPTER NINE

“RECKLESS AND WHOLESAL DESTRUCTION”: THE BATTLE OF JOHNSONVILLE

Black Friday - November 4th

When soldiers found time to write, usually at night, rarely did they discuss the horrors associated with the war. Instead, they wrote about family and home, living conditions, the food, and of course, more than anything else, the weather. On the morning of November 4, 1864, the weather at Johnsonville was cloudy and still misty from rain showers which had been “falling incessantly” for three days.¹ Lieutenant Walter Howland wrote his mother that:

I would have clung to my native hills with a devotion which several men I have just met wish they had experienced before they left their Mass. Homes for the mud of Tenn. Yesterday about seventy arrived here from Boston to stay some six months to work as carpenters and laborers for the Gov't. They looked rather blue for quarters are scarce and accommodations poor. I know I tramped around in the mud & rain to get them comfortably treated and exerted myself more than I would for any, save Mass. Men. They have reason to appreciate it.²

Corporal Atwood described the weather conditions at Johnsonville. “It has rained nearly all of the time night and day for the last 3, days, mud from ankle to boot leg deep. A good

¹ Jordon and Pryor, 599.

² Walter Howland to mother, November 20, 1864, Johnsonville, TN, Walter M. Howland Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 3. The “carpenters and laborers” that Walter Howland described were some of the civilian workers who came to Johnsonville for employment after advertisements were distributed to northern newspapers requesting workers for the Quartermaster’s Department at the depots in Nashville, Chattanooga, and Johnsonville.

deal of thunder with the rain. We have had but one frost yet. It is as warm this morning as Aug. in Wis. (Wisconsin).”³

The Confederates had it even worse than the federals considering that during the two-week long Johnsonville campaign, they were constantly operating in the field in some of the most intense rainfall that year in Tennessee. Confederate Captain James Dinkins of Brigadier General Chalmers’ staff chided that “it had been raining continuously and was very cold, but General Forrest never postponed anything.”⁴ After two intense days of river actions with Forrest’s Confederates, the garrison at Johnsonville had increased security at the post.

On November 1, Acting Assistant Quartermaster, Captain James E. Montandon, had been told to expect an attack on November 5. Montandon reported this intelligence to Acting Volunteer Lieutenant Edward M. King, the naval commander at Johnsonville, who asked about the value of Johnsonville’s stores. Montandon replied:

About three million dollars (\$3,000,000). He desired to know my idea of the probabilities of saving the property in case of an attack, with the defence on hand. I said, that if we were attacked by a large force we could save nothing.⁵

³ Lorenzo Atwood to Cordelia Atwood, November 8, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee.

⁴ Dinkins, 178-79.

⁵ Avadavat, account provided by Captain James E. Montandon regarding the actions of the U.S. forces at Johnsonville, Tennessee, that resulted in the destruction of government property on November 4, 1864, for the Board of Survey at Nashville, Tennessee, in the Court Martial case of Acting Volunteer Lieutenant Edward M. King, December 29, 1864, U.S. Navy Records 1864-65, Courts Martial, RG 11-86, U.S. Navy Department, National Archives, Washington, D.C.



Figure 30: Johnsonville, Tennessee, 1864. Detail of water and mud from heavy rains. Note the tarps covering piles of lumber and barrels. The white misty open space to the left behind the bare trees is the Tennessee River. In front of the dark tree line to the rear and far right is Trace Creek as it empties into the Tennessee River. Photograph taken by Jacob F. Coonley, November 23, 1864. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Regardless of the impending threats and hostilities, supply shipments to Nashville from Johnsonville continued. The Confederate artillery commander, John W. Morton, reported the scene at the depot on the morning of November 4:

A number of barges clustered around; negroes were loading them, officers and men were coming and going, and passengers could be seen strolling down to the wharf. The river banks for some distance back were lined with quantities of stores, and two freight trains were being made up. It was an animated scene, and one which wore an air of complete security. The federals evidently thought General Forrest had accepted his loss of the day before and retired.⁶

⁶ Morton, 253.

That morning, the U.S.S. *Key West*, *Tawah*, and *Elfin*, were the only gunboats present at Johnsonville's levee since the *Undine* had been captured and commandeered by Forrest's Confederates on October 30. There was also a variety of "steamers and barges lying at our levee," remembered Acting Assistant Quartermaster, Lieutenant Samuel W. Treat. These eight vessels, as Treat wrote, were the "*Mountaineer*, *Doane* #2, *Duke*, *Arcola*, *Aurora*, *Goody Friends*, *Venus*, and *J.B. Ford*."⁷ Additionally, there were eleven barges "clustered around" at the foot of the wharf.⁸ The barges were the "*Whale* #8, *U.S. 44*, *T.H. U.S. 57*, *Guthrie* #36, *Chickamauga*, *Kentucky*, *J.H. Doan*, *Eagle Coal Co. No. 20*, *U.S. 11*, *Josephine*, and *Celeste*."⁹

Prior to the actions around Reynoldsburg Island on November 3, Acting Volunteer Lieutenant King, along with Peter Wagner, Acting 1st Assistant Engineer for the U.S.S. *Key West*, and the commander of Johnsonville's land forces, Colonel Charles E. Thompson, met "aboard the *Key West*" at Johnsonville's levee on November 1, to discuss "the course to be pursued in case of an attack."¹⁰ As Wagner later recalled, they agreed during the meeting that "in the event the gunboats were destroyed it would probably be necessary to destroy the transports to prevent their falling into the enemy's

⁷ AAQM Samuel W. Treat to Colonel L.B. Parsons, Chief Quartermaster of West River "transp," November 24, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee, (National Archives), 1; *Vessels Bought, Sold, and Chartered by the United States, 1861-1868: Report by the Quartermaster General Relative to Vessels Bought, Sold, and Chartered Since April 1861*. 40th Congress, 2nd Session, House Executive Document No. 337, 114-17, 124-25, 160-61, 164-65, 172-75, 182-83, 194-95, 200-01, 220-21.

⁸ Morton, 253.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Testimony of Acting 1st Assistant Engineer for the U.S.S. *Key West*, Peter Wagner, regarding the destruction of government property at Johnsonville, Tennessee on November 4, 1864, for the Court of Inquiry at Mound City, Illinois, for the Court Martial case of Acting Volunteer Lt. Commander Edward M. King, May 15, 1865, U.S. Navy Records 1864-65, Courts Martial, RG 11-86, National Archives, Washington, D.C., 75.

hands.”¹¹ The decision reached at this meeting would ultimately seal the fate of Johnsonville on November 4. The officers decided that the property the U.S. Army and Navy entrusted them to protect would be destroyed rather than take the chance of Confederate capture.

On November 3, Acting Volunteer Lieutenant King suggested to Captain Howland that “in the event of the gunboats being attacked to night [sic] & disabled, I think it will be well for now to make preparations for destroying by fire all the transports now here so that they may not fall into the enemy’s hands.”¹² However, King’s suggestion seemed to fall upon deaf ears. Howland, as with many other similar actions, seemed to act independently of any orders or recommendations from either King or Thompson. For example, on the same day Howland received King’s recommendation to fire the transports in the event the supply depot was captured, he then immediately told his Acting Assistant Quartermaster, Second Lieutenant Samuel W. Treat, not to “fire any transports until it is certain that they will fall into the hands of the enemy.”¹³ Howland, for some unknown reason, even acted as a naval officer where he, for instance, informed the pilots of all the boats at the levee to keep “steam-up” overnight in anticipation of an attack.¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Acting Volunteer Lt. Edward M. King to AQM Henry Howland, November 3, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹³ AQM Henry Howland to AAQM Samuel W. Treat, November 3, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Excerpt from proceedings of the Board of Survey, in Nashville, Tennessee, for the investigation into the destruction of government property at Johnsonville, Tennessee, on November 4, 1864. Testimony provided by Johnsonville AAQM Lieutenant Samuel W. Treat, January 4, 1865, National Archives, RG not provided, pgs. 12-18.

¹⁴ Ibid; *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 621-23.

The threat was certainly real. At 9:00 a.m. on November 4, the *Undine*, with its Confederate hosts, made another appearance about one-half mile below Johnsonville.¹⁵ As the *Undine* approached Johnsonville, she turned broadside in the middle of the river, then fired “many rounds” to alert the Union defenders at the depot that the Confederates had not retreated. The gunboats U.S.S. *Tawah*, *Key West*, and *Elfin* moved toward the *Undine* and prepared to engage her. Captain Gracey slowly guided the *Undine* down river towards Reynoldsburg Island and returned to the protection of the batteries near the “chute.”¹⁶

While King’s gunboats advanced down river from Johnsonville to give battle to the *Undine*, Commander Le Roy Fitch’s flotilla of six more gunboats arrived at the north end of Reynoldsburg Island. However, Fitch’s gunboats hesitated to move into the chute and engage the Confederate batteries. Instead, Fitch began a long-range bombardment into areas of where the Confederate batteries, they thought, were located.¹⁷ But the batteries had been removed and re-positioned, in secrecy, in front of Johnsonville along the western shore of the river.

The *Undine*, now caught between gunboats approaching from both directions, fired a few quick salvos against King’s three gunboats who had already struck her three times. To evade capture, Captain Gracey beached the *Undine* into a sandbar on the

¹⁵ Avadavat, account provided by Colonel Charles R. Thompson regarding the actions of the U.S. forces at Johnsonville, Tennessee, that resulted in the destruction of government property on November 4, 1864, for the Board of Survey at Nashville, Tennessee, in the Court Martial case of Acting Volunteer Lt. Commander, Edward M. King, December 29, 1864, U.S. Navy Records 1864-65, Courts Martial, RG 11-86, U.S. Navy Department, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁶ Irion and Beard, 35.

¹⁷ Maness, 313; *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 610, 630.

western bank below Pilot Knob.¹⁸ “Turning the bow of the vessel hurriedly into the bank,” the *Undine*’s rebels quickly disembarked, then “set her on fire, and made off for their horses as fast as they could scamper.”¹⁹ In 1882, Captain Gracey recalled the *Undine*’s final moments:

I ordered a number of mattresses used by the mariners, and made of shavings, to be cut open and thrown in the magazine. On this was poured a barrel of oil. A man stood by with a burning lamp to touch it off when I gave the word, and not before. She struck a sandbar in three feet of water, and about seventy-five yards from shore. The torch was applied, and almost before you could jump into the water, the flames burst through the hurricane roof. The boat, in five minutes of being fired by the torch, was in total ruins, and Forrest’s fleet was dissolved forever more.²⁰

Prior to King’s departure at 8:00 a.m., he invited Captain Montandon “to go down the river on the *Key West*.”²¹ Montandon recalled that the vessel took fire and was damaged heavily.²² Actually, all of the Johnsonville gunboats, *Key West*, *Tawah*, and *Elfin* were damaged, but they continued “firing heavy until 11:00 a.m.”²³

“The Firing Was Terrific”²⁴

Colonel Charles Thompson was worried, and rightfully so. The previous evening of November 3, he received a dispatch from King that the Confederates had withdrawn from the Reynoldsburg Island vicinity and “that a large portion of Forrest’s command

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Jordon and Pryor, 599.

²⁰ Frank P. Gracey, “Captain Gracey’s Paper,” in John W. Morton, Battle of Johnsonville. *Southern Historical Society Papers*, vol. 10 (1882): 478-79.

²¹ *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 626.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid, 622.

²⁴ *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 683.

had crossed the east side of the river and that an attack would be made on Johnsonville the next morning.”²⁵ With the recent actions that morning, Thompson considered that King might be correct and that the *Undine* fight was simply a diversionary tactic to get the gunboats away from Johnsonville and force the removal of 25 artillery pieces down river that he needed to defend the depot. Thompson also considered that the diversion of the *Undine* would allow time for Forrest’s troops to cross the river, surround Johnsonville from the land side, and force a surrender.

All the time, Confederate officers were positioning troops and guns across from Johnsonville to prepare for a mid-day attack on November 4. General Lyon, who had been an artillery officer before the war, accompanied Captain J.C. Thrall’s battery of “four 12-pound Howitzers” and positioned them, by hand, so that horse noises would not alert the Union defenders on the opposite bank. Thrall’s battery was located about 100 yards south of warehouse No.2.²⁶

Colonel Rucker positioned a section of Morton’s Battery “just opposite of Johnsonville” under the command of Lieutenant J. West Brown.²⁷ The Confederates had three more artillery positions located north of these locations: one section of Morton’s battery positioned four hundred yards north of Brown just opposite the mouth of Trace Creek; another section of Rice’s battery under Lt. H.H. Briggs was about 100 yards north of Brown; and a final section under Lt. Hudson, about a mile and a half down river

²⁵ Avadavat, account provided by Colonel Charles R. Thompson regarding the actions of the U.S. forces at Johnsonville, Tennessee, that resulted in the destruction of government property on November 4, 1864, for the Board of Survey at Nashville, Tennessee, in the Court Martial case of Acting Volunteer Lt. Commander, Edward M. King, December 29, 1864, U.S. Navy Records 1864-65, Courts Martial, RG 11-86, U.S. Navy Department, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²⁶ Jordon and Pryor, 599.

²⁷ Ibid; Dinkins, 178.

(north) between “Reynoldsburg and Johnsonville” to protect “a crossing of a shallow bar.”²⁸

Confederate troops labored the entire night of November 3 until sunrise on November 4 hauling guns by hand into position, digging chambers (big dugouts) for the cannons to allow for more elevation, carving embrasures into the natural levee, and cutting enough underbrush to camouflage the gun positions. Morton recalled the difficulty of positioning the guns in such a short period of time. “It took two hours of infinitely toilsome work to get the guns in position. Every step of the road had to be made, and in many places the guns had to be carried over fallen timber by hand. The underbrush was dense and the mud sticky.”²⁹

The previous evening, Forrest had ordered Chalmers and Buford to move their infantry into positions early on the morning of November 4 and carefully conceal themselves in the underbrush and behind logs between each of the five artillery positions. By 8:00 a.m. on November 4 “all the guns were sunk” and the batteries were “completely shielded from the gunboats.”³⁰ At 12 noon, the Confederates were in position and ready

²⁸ Ibid; Morton, 254; *OR*, Series I, vol. 39, pt. 2, 883-84.

²⁹ Ibid; In many ways, the Union forces at Johnsonville had a much greater tactical advantage over their Confederate rivals considering that their artillery and much of their infantry were positioned on high hills that over-looked the western river bank. But there were disadvantages. Being a busy supply depot with saw mills constantly running and especially, noisy train engines and steamboats coming and going, both which consistently maintained high-pitched, hissing sounds from pressure valves on steam boilers, these devices would have easily muffled any accidental noises made by horses, rattling chains, or the squeaking sounds of wheels and rusted axel joints from water-logged artillery carriages and limbers after three days of rain. Since the Confederate gunners had not concluded positioning themselves and were only 300 yards across, moving under cover of the high natural levee as late at 1:00 p.m. in broad day light, from today’s standpoint, it is difficult to believe that not a single individual on the Union side of the river witnessed or heard anyone out of approximately 1,800 Confederates on the opposite side of the river.

³⁰ Ibid, 601; Morton, 254; Dinkins, “Destroying Military Stores and Gunboats,” 178.

to attack.³¹ Sometime between then and 1:30 p.m., Forrest rallied with his officers at a rear position behind the lower batteries, and together, synchronized their watches with the understanding that the bombardment would commence all at once, led by an opening shot conducted by Lieutenant Brown's section of Morton's battery "precisely at two p.m."³²

There is some discrepancy about when the cannonade began. Most of the Union accounts from November 4 describe that the shelling started around 2:00 p.m. Some accounts, however, recall that the battle opened at 3:00 p.m.³³ In any case, the bombardment commenced, and the other batteries joined promptly. "The enemy returned the fire from 28 guns on their gunboats and 14 guns on the hill," as Forrest recalled. "About 50 guns were thus engaged at the same time, the firing was terrific."³⁴

³¹ Morton, 254; *OR*, Series I, vol. 39, Pt.2, 882-83; Jordon and Pryor, 601; Maness, 314.

³² Jordon and Pryor, 602.

³³ *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 683.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

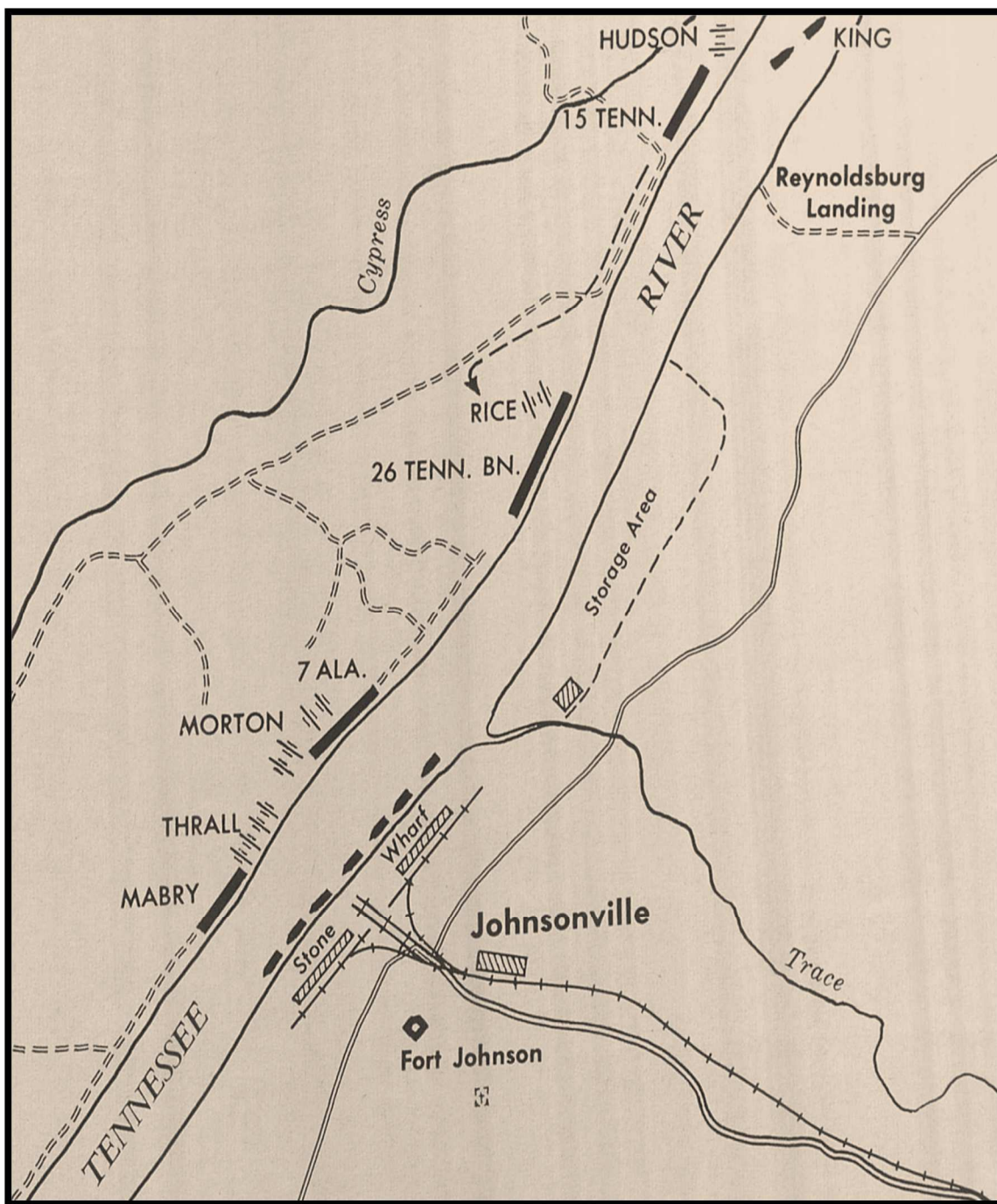


Figure 31: Confederate positions at 2:00 p.m. on November 4, 1864, at Johnsonville, Tn. Map taken from Civil War Times Illustrated Issue 4, No. 3, (1965) in "Forrest's Johnsonville Raid" by Col. Campbell Brown.

At the supply depot, Assistant Quartermaster Henry Howland remembered, “at about 2 o’clock p.m. the enemy were discovered planting batteries directly opposite, also above and below our warehouses and levee. The gunboats opened fire upon them, as did also our batteries upon the hill.” Like Forrest, Howland also remembered that “the cannonading was the most terrific I have ever witnessed.”³⁵

A State of Confusion

As with most any battles, confusion reigns. As the Confederates opened their barrage from four batteries, Morton recalled the scene:

as if a magician’s wand had been suddenly waved over it, Spurts of steam broke from the boats, the crews dropping their washing, hauling and packing, and jumping into the water like rats deserting a sinking ship; the passengers who had been sauntering around in the neighborhood of the wharf rushed wildly up the hillside, and everybody made for shelter.³⁶

At the same time, Confederate Thomas Jordan remembered seeing “ladies just approaching the transports rushed wildly up the hillside toward the fort (lower redoubt).”³⁷

³⁵ AQM Henry Howland to Brigadier General Jacob Donaldson, November 16, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³⁶ Morton, 255.

³⁷ Jordan and Pryor, 602.

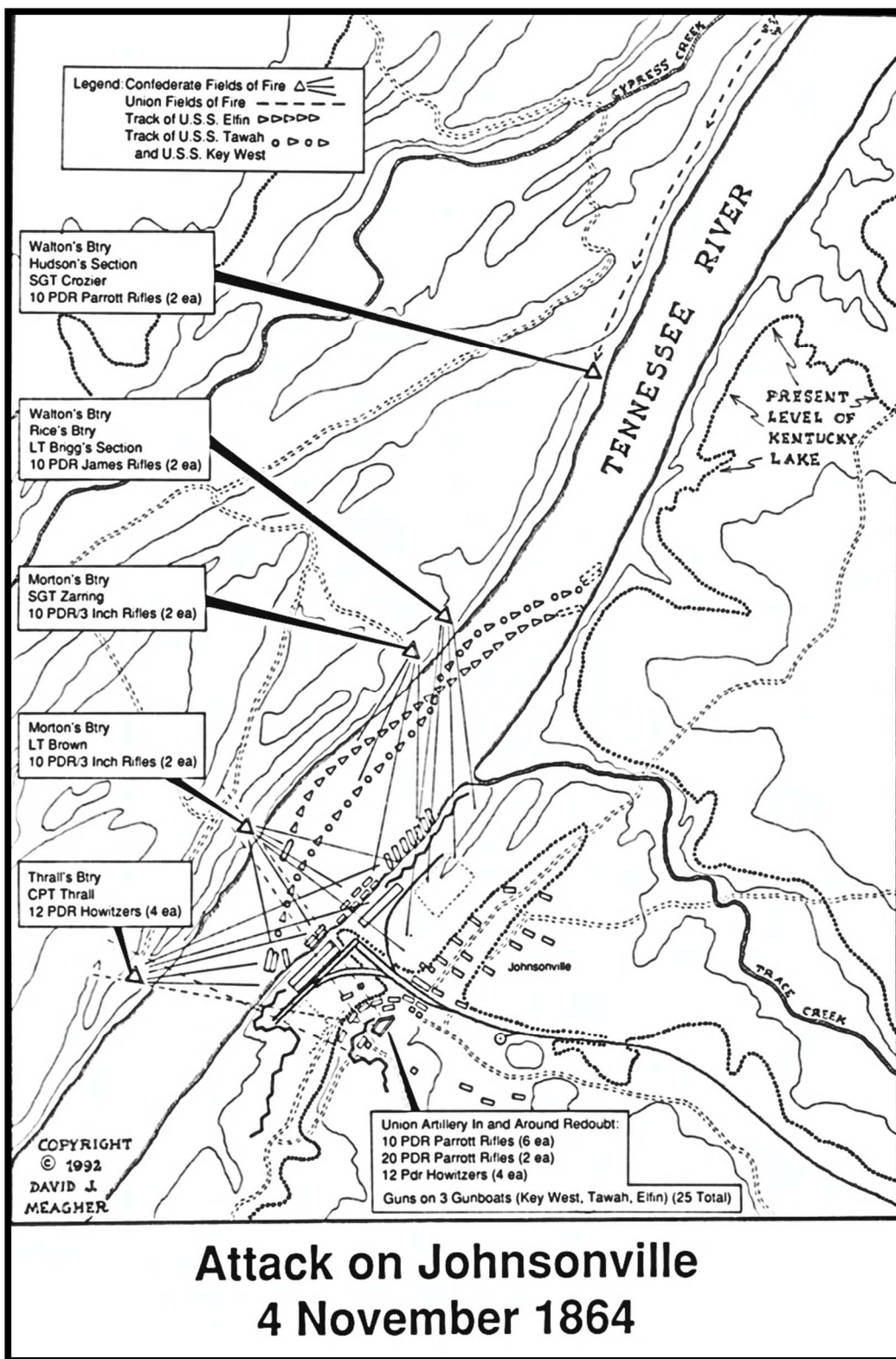


Figure 32: Map of the attack on Johnsonville at 2:00 p.m. on November 4, 1864. Courtesy of David A. Meagher.

Just after the Confederates commenced firing, the three gunboats, *Key West*, *Elfin*, and *Tawah*, with “steam up,” entered the channel and engaged the batteries.³⁸ The first gunboat targeted was the *Key West*. As she tried to slip her anchor and move out of range from the rebel guns, her anchor buoy caught in the stern paddle wheel and she became disabled. Under fire, the *Tawah* came to her rescue and towed her back to the levee out of danger. However, the *Tawah* was now badly taking on water following the morning’s engagement with the Confederate batteries at Reynoldsburg Island. It was later discovered that due to defective ammunition, one of her bow guns malfunctioned after a powerful concussion dismounted a gun from its carriage and caused major damage to the stern.³⁹ *Tawah* was actually tied to the *Key West* and a barge when the Confederate barrage began.⁴⁰

About twenty minutes into the cannonade, the captain of the *Tawah* ordered his crew to abandon ship. Henry Howland recalled the scene: “The gunboats fought magnificently, and continued firing for more than twenty minutes after they were all disabled.”⁴¹ Each boat was badly damaged from artillery fire. The *Tawah* was hit 40 times and the *Key West* 19 times with cannon shot. Shortly afterwards, King ordered the crews of the *Key West* and of the *Elfin* to set fire to the boats to keep them from falling into the hands of the Confederates. The Confederates were astonished to see the crew setting fire to such magnificent vessels and even shouted from across the river not to burn

³⁸ Howland to Donaldson, November 16, 1864.

³⁹ Irion and beard, 42-43; U.S. Navy Department records, 1865, 150-58, 169-171.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ AQM Henry Howland to Brigadier General Jacob Donaldson, November 16, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

the vessels.⁴² Commander Fitch reported that “the *Key West*, *Tawah*, and *Elfin*, fought desperately and were handled in magnificent style.”⁴³ Fearing that the Confederates were in a stronger position somewhere within the 500 yard stretch of the “chute,” Fitch was unable to help protect Johnsonville and was also concerned that “Johnsonville was in all probability surrounded by the enemy” and therefore “moved down to Paris Landing and anchored for the night as I did not see that I could do any good from above.”⁴⁴

With the gunboats neutralized, Forrest ordered his batteries (all except for Hudson) to concentrate their fire on the warehouses, transports, and the stores of supplies spread out along the wharf. At about 2:30 p.m., Colonel Thompson received reports that Forrest had 13,000 men and that Buford’s Division had crossed the Tennessee River and was intending on attacking Johnsonville from the rear.⁴⁵ Thompson, seeing King’s three gunboats burned and no longer as a source of protection, and concluding that “the rebels would endeavor to cross sufficient force under the cover of their guns to obtain possession of our transports,” he directed Howland “to destroy by fire all the transports.”⁴⁶ Howland proceeded to direct officers, enlisted soldiers and sailors, and civilians, to burn the boats.⁴⁷

⁴² *ORN*, Series I, vol. 26, 683.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 614.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*; Howland to Donaldson, November 16, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*. As Charles Dana Gibson describes in *The Army’s Navy Series*, Vol. II, it is important to note (as stated previously), Howland acted upon his own accord in the firing of the transports. Gibson contends that “There is no evidence that suggests Howland (other than in his own report to Brig. General J.L. Donaldson) ever consulted with Thompson. Lt. King appears to have ignored Thompson as well.”

The Confederates' artillery and small arms fire continued at the wharf and inside the interior of the supply depot for a "little over an hour," creating panic and chaos.

Assistant Quartermaster, Captain James Montandon reported:

I arrived here at about 2 p.m. and was immediately put in command of about 550 Government employees, and directed to put them in the intrenchments [sic]. Our battery was firing over the left of the line, where my employees were stationed, one of the 20-pounder guns going off and killing twenty mules in the corral near where the employees were stationed, completely demoralizing them and causing them to stampede immediately. About this time the gunboats were set on fire, and Captain Howland told me that he had ordered the transports to be burned.⁴⁸

As the transports were being fired, the Confederates turned their guns upon the large stockpiles of quartermaster stores that had recently been unloaded.⁴⁹ They hit some barrels of whiskey causing them:

to burst with loud explosion and the burning liquor ran in torrents of livid flame down the hillside; spreading a flame in its course toward the river and filling the air with the blended yet distinct fumes of burning spirits, sugar, coffee, and meat.⁵⁰

Howland agreed about the level of destruction: "The flames spread rapidly and soon communicated to the small transfer building (No.1) which with its contents was speedily consumed" and which contained "six hundred and fifty tons of provisions."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ibid, 626.

⁴⁹ *OR*, Series I, vol. 39, pt.1, 862.

⁵⁰ Jordon and Pryor, 604; Hurst, 227, *OR*, Series I, vol. 39, pt. 1, 871.

⁵¹ Howland to Donaldson, November 16, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Louisville Democrat, November 8, 1864.

Even though Howland “gave orders to have the flames extinguished, very little was done toward complying with the order” due to the intensity of the fires.⁵² The “men were detailed to subdue the raging fire, but they would no sooner make their appearance than the rebel batteries and sharpshooters would fire upon them.”⁵³

As the fires raged around them, Johnsonville’s garrison troops, Quartermaster’s Department employees, and other reinforcements, did their duty and fought back.

Corporal Atwood later wrote:

As soon as we got the range of their guns we sent some 20 lb. pound shells howling down to them. One company stood a little to the left of the battery watching the effect of our shells not thinking that the rebs, would turn their fire from the gunboats, but to our surprise they paid us a compliment in the shape of a 20 lb. shell which burst just in front of our company, one piece that we picked up some 2 inches square passed between Capt. Stockwells legs and mine and we stood within 2 feet of each other, one piece brushed the shoulder of one man, no one was hurt.⁵⁴

The massive inferno spread across the upper end of the wharf fully consuming the smaller warehouse (No. 1) with all of its machinery and military supplies. The Confederates attempted in setting on fire the larger freight transfer house (No. 2), but failed to ignite it. Warehouse No. 2 escaped the flames and was not burned. At this point, two of the burning gunboats, “drifted against some loaded barges, these were quickly in flames.”⁵⁵ Lt. Colonel William Sinclair later reported that after the fires had burned down considerably, sailors who had been released unarmed from the burning boats, and many

⁵² *OR*, Series I, vol. 39, pt.1, 862.

⁵³ *Louisville Democrat*, November 8, 1864.

⁵⁴ Corporal Lorenzo Atwood to Cordelia Atwood, November 8, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

civilian employees at the wharf “inaugurated a general system of theft,” looting the stores and boats. Additionally, “the sailors and quartermaster’s employe’s [sic] came in for their share of the plunder.”⁵⁶ Johnsonville’s railroad agent, C.H. Nabb, headed to Waverly “with a train of cars loaded with clothing and some 400 men from the gun-boats. The boxes on this train were broken open and a considerable amount of clothing stolen.”⁵⁷

At around 10:00 p.m., King, without Colonel Thompson’s knowledge, telegraphed Major General George Thomas in Nashville with a panicky, indecisive, and desperate message: “My officers and crew I have ordered to the fort. Johnsonville can only be saved by a large force and iron-clads. Seven transports and our prize *Venus* are set on fire. We have done what we could.”⁵⁸ Just minutes later, at 10:30 p.m., Thomas received another telegraph from Colonel Thompson who displayed more control as military protocol of the day would have dictated. It read “three gun-boats were disabled at Johnsonville to-day and abandoned, and destroyed by fire by rebel batteries on the western bank of the Tennessee River...the gun-boats and transports captured by enemy a few days since were all destroyed.”⁵⁹ Neither report admitted how devastating the destruction had been. Whether King or Thompson were at Johnsonville when they sent the messages is unknown.

Eleazer A. Greenleaf, a civilian employee who worked at the depot and who was at Johnsonville the evening of November 4, said that “not one person in charge” could be

⁵⁶ *OR*, Series I, vol. 39, pt. 1, 862.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 866-67.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 859.

found. Greenleaf recalled the incident in a letter to Andrew Johnson just two months after the battle:

Where were the authorities? They were neither fighting the enemy nor protecting the Government property. After considerable search, I found they had fled for safety out by some Negro shanties behind a hill near the R. Road, perhaps half a mile from the River – Here I found Quarter Masters Henry Howland, & T.E. Montandon with several other gentlemen whom I took to be officers of the burning boats...whoever counselled or ordered the destruction did not know what he was about...Never did I witness so sad a sight as the burning of our stores that night – our successes in Tennessee appeared to me utterly hopeless and our own authorities as our worst enemies.⁶⁰

Forrest reported that “by night the wharf for nearly one mile up and down the river presented one solid sheet of flame. The enemy continued a furious cannonading on my batteries.”⁶¹ Late that evening, the Confederates, having inflicted as much damage on the depot as possible, withdrew, except for Brigg’s section and Rucker’s Brigade, and moved south “six miles during the night by the light of the enemy’s burning property” on nearly “impassable roads” in the direction of Perryville, Tennessee.⁶² Forrest stayed at Johnsonville with the remainder of his men that evening and at about 7:00 a.m. on the morning of November 5, the Confederates “again opened on Johnsonville and kept up a brisk cannonading” for an hour, perhaps two, as primary sources differ on the length of the assault. A newspaper reporter who was at Johnsonville during the two-day battle wrote:

⁶⁰ Eleazer A. Greenleaf to Governor Andrew Johnson, January 13, 1865, in Graf and Haskins, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, vol. 7, 401-02.

⁶¹ *OR*, Series I, vol. 39, pt.1, 871.

⁶² *Ibid.*

The citizens and non-combatants commenced to leave the town in the morning, and as they went out on the road they were shelled by the rebel batteries and a number of them were killed. At about 10 o'clock, the cannonading was again commenced, and lasted some thirty minutes. All remained quiet for the next eight and a half hours until seven o'clock in the evening...when the cannonading resumed.⁶³

Forrest, with Rucker's Brigade and Brigg's artillery, following the same route as the rest of his command, finally joined the rest of the Confederates thirty miles above Johnsonville at Perryville, Tennessee.⁶⁴

Abandoned

As the *Official Records* reveal, military operations resumed immediately the next day. Even though the estimated value of the destroyed Government supplies and ships reached \$2,200,000, the destruction did not stop the operations of this vital federal depot. A few days later, Corporal Atwood wrote Cordelia about his usual duties as corporal of the guard, discussing his food, bedding, and the weather, as if there are was no destruction at all.⁶⁵

Hampered by more rain and mud, rising rivers, and worn-out horses, two more weeks would pass before Forrest's Confederates finally rallied with General John Bell Hood's Army of Tennessee in northern Alabama.⁶⁶ On Monday, November 7, the Second Brigade of Major General John Schofield's Second Division, Twenty-Third

⁶³ Louisville Democrat, November 8, 1864.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 606.

⁶⁵ Lorenzo Atwood to Cordelia Atwood, November 8, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee.

⁶⁶ Hurst, 228.

Army Corps, reinforced Johnsonville. On November 20, 1864, Walter Howland discussed the arrival of Schofield's Division in a letter to his mother:

Notwithstanding the many reports in the papers the place [Johnsonville] stands and is likely to. There is a large force here now part of the 23rd Corps-but it is rumored part will be withdrawn. What time remains for the fall campaign will, it appears, be all employed and the issue must be doubtful.⁶⁷

Regardless of Walter Howland's prediction that Johnsonville would likely "stand," preparations were already in motion to abandon the depot. Just days after Howland wrote his mother, Assistant Quartermaster of the Nashville Depot, Captain James Rusling, informed Walter's brother Henry to make preparations for abandoning Johnsonville and remove all public property, supplies, and its garrison by November 30.⁶⁸ Writing on November 26, 1864, from Nashville, Walter described the current situation again to his mother:

Wednesday Henry received a telegram to forward all gov't stores [from Johnsonville] to this place as rapidly as possible. I presume for the present- as I learn that Johnsonville will probably be evacuated tomorrow. It seems rather rough to be turned out of home just as we had got pleasantly located for the winter.⁶⁹

Two days later, Walter wrote his mother again, only this time from Johnsonville, and obviously caught up in the hurried evacuation activities between there and Nashville:

⁶⁷ Walter Howland to mother, November 20, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁸ Captain James Rusling to Henry Howland, November 23, 1864, Nashville, Tennessee, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁹ Walter Howland to mother, November 26, 1864, Nashville, Tennessee, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

I received a telegram from Henry to return and although rumors were plenty that – Johnsonville was evacuated, I arrived here last night & found everything as quiet as ever. It may be given up for a time although it does not look much like it to day [sic].⁷⁰

On November 30, the same day that Hood's war-weary Confederates attacked Major General Schofield's troops at Franklin, Tennessee, (the same men who just three weeks earlier had reinforced Johnsonville), the supply depot was ordered abandoned by Major General Thomas with all of its personnel, stores, animals, and machinery, and to be loaded onto trains and sent to Nashville.⁷¹ Again, Walter Howland described the event: "Nashville, Dec. 2, 1864, Johnsonville is evacuated. We left on Tuesday and Wednesday. Military matters are quite stirring. Thomas entire army is in & near the city."⁷²

After Hood's defeat at the Battle of Nashville on December 16 and the pursuit actions that occurred for fourteen days after, Thomas ordered the 13th USCT regiment to establish guard posts along the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad and to be stationed at Waverly.⁷³ In January 1865, Company E, 13th USCT, returned to Johnsonville under the direction of Chief Quartermaster Donaldson. By April 1865, a new labor force comprised of civilians from the Trace Creek area and employees of the Quartermaster's

⁷⁰ Walter Howland to mother, November 28, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁷¹ *OR*, Series I, vol. 45, pt.1, 1020-21, 1049-50, 1072, 1085, 1100.

⁷² Walter Howland to mother, Dec 2, 1864, Nashville, Tennessee (National Archives).

⁷³ *OR*, Supplement, Records of Events, U.S. Colored Troops (Union), vol. 77, 486-97.

Department re-opened the operations of Saw Mill No. 1 and warehouse No. 2 at Johnsonville.⁷⁴

In the aftermath of the Battle of Johnsonville, the destruction of both private and government property, including the transports and barges at the wharf, was deemed unwarranted and the self-destruction of government property was unparalleled to any other event like it during the Civil War. As it turned out, the actions of a variety of officers that took place at the wharf and at the depot on November 4, 1864, was questioned and investigated. In January 1865, an army investigation team ultimately determined that the burning of the transports had been ordered by Acting Volunteer Lieutenant King, not Colonel Thompson, and that he would be charged and ordered to appear in a military court-martial trial. The three charges brought against Lt. King by a U.S. Navy court of inquiry included “misconduct in action with the enemy; unnecessary destruction of government property; and neglect of duty.”⁷⁵

The proceedings started in January 1865 and concluded on May 8. After months of sworn testimonies from sailors, Quartermaster’s Department personnel, civilian workers, and officers in charge on November 4, including Colonel Thompson and AQM Henry Howland, King was eventually found not guilty and acquitted of all charges. Strangely, the court brought no charges against Colonel Thompson and Captain Howland who had ordered the burning of the vessels. Instead, Thompson would be promoted to

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Case No. 4, *Acting Volunteer Lieutenant E.M. King, lately of the U.S.S. “Key West,” May 8, 1865. The Abandonment and Destruction of the U.S.S. Key West, Tawah, and Elfin*, RG 11-86, Roll 159, U.S. Naval Records, Court Martial, National Archives, Washington, D.C., 4-7.

Brevet Brigadier General in April 1865, and Captain Howland assigned to a higher position of responsibility at the Nashville depot until the end of the war.⁷⁶

For the remainder of the war, even though military operations in the Western Theater had practically ceased, operations at Johnsonville resumed in conjunction with the Nashville Depot and the distribution of military supplies until June 1865 when the Union finally declared total victory over the Confederacy after four long and costly years of war. That same month, salvage activities to retrieve the sunken equipment and armament aboard the destroyed gunboats and transports commenced at Johnsonville's wharf. The salvage vessel was the U.S.S. *Kate* and for the next eleven months, until March 1866, the U.S. Navy maintained a heavy presence at Johnsonville as they conducted salvage activities along the wharf where most the vessels had been burned and sunk.⁷⁷

The supply depot at Johnsonville was the second largest supply operation in Tennessee during the Civil War. Only the massive Nashville depot was larger. Johnsonville was significant as a supply operation for three reasons. First, it provided Tennessee's Union forces with a better location for receiving supplies shipped from northern supply points. Second, with the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad fully operational by September 1864, this allowed a steady flow of supplies to connect to the important Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, General Sherman's main line of supply. Without Johnsonville, Sherman's army could not receive the adequate amount of

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ U.S. Navy Deck Log, U.S.S. *Kate* (Salvage Ship), April 2, 1865-March 25, 1866 by Master Mates: J.H. Bentley, Sprague, and Cullbertson, RG 24, Specialist 44, Department of the Navy Deck Logs, National Archives, Washington, D.C., 56-58

ammunition, food, clothing, munitions and other ordnance needed to conduct operations in Georgia. Third, like Nashville along the Cumberland River, Johnsonville established a permanent docking point for Union naval operations on the Tennessee River. With its central location, gunboats and transports had a geographical advantage of conducting river operations either north or south of Johnsonville. It is uncertain how Johnsonville compares to other Union supply operations during the Civil War. However, Union supply depots such as City Point, Virginia, and Washington D.C., which were similar to Johnsonville by having both water and rail transportation for receiving and distributing supplies, also had the advantage of more personnel, permanent defenses, and support buildings, and were also nearer to bigger populations with connections to northern cities. By comparison, Johnsonville was more rural, was threatened more of being captured because of its geographical position in a pro-Confederate and partisan area, and supplies had to be shipped there from longer distances which meant more time on the rails and on water therefore increasing risk of capture. In many ways, Johnsonville was in the best and worst of places.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Hess, 12-16, 43-47, 119-228.

CONCLUSION

JOHNSONVILLE'S LEGACY: POST-WAR MEMORY AND THE REWARDS OF PUBLIC HISTORY

Post-War Improvements

Union operations ceased at Johnsonville in June 1865.¹ The civilian employees at the depot were released and returned home. For the next six months, the Union army practically abandoned the supply depot's facilities but some were dismantled and the lumber re-used to construct houses in the town. The largest freight transfer building, warehouse No. 2, remained intact with its machinery until the 1870's, but was eventually dismantled and sold. A few manufacturing buildings were established along Johnsonville's wharf, but there are no records that indicate just how many new structures were built at Johnsonville.²

In the first five years after the war, Johnsonville experienced three significant changes. The first change, and probably the most important, was what propelled Johnsonville out of economic ruin: rail passenger service and the bridging of the Tennessee River. What this meant for Johnsonville was economic stability. Rail passengers could now travel from Nashville to Memphis and stay at Johnsonville's hotels and boarding houses and spend money at restaurants and mercantile stores. The Tennessee River bridge completely rejuvenated Johnsonville as the *Nashville Republican Banner* described in 1867:

¹ *OR*, Supplement, Records of Events, U.S. Colored Troops (Union) Infantry, vol. 77, 486-97.

² Moore, "Farm Communities," 156, 162-163, 218-219.

The new bridge over the Tennessee River is a splendid piece of workmanship. It is 1,900 feet long, resting upon seven stone pillars, neatness and durability, leaves nothing to be desired. From pillar to pillar leads a heavy wooden frame, joined by iron bolts, hanging on heavy blocks, and between the fourth and sixth pillar is the draw, which affords ample room for the passage of the largest steamers. The timber and ironwork of this bridge, the building of which took just ten months, was done at Chicago and brought by water to this place. It will enable us to reach Memphis to Nashville in nine hours.³

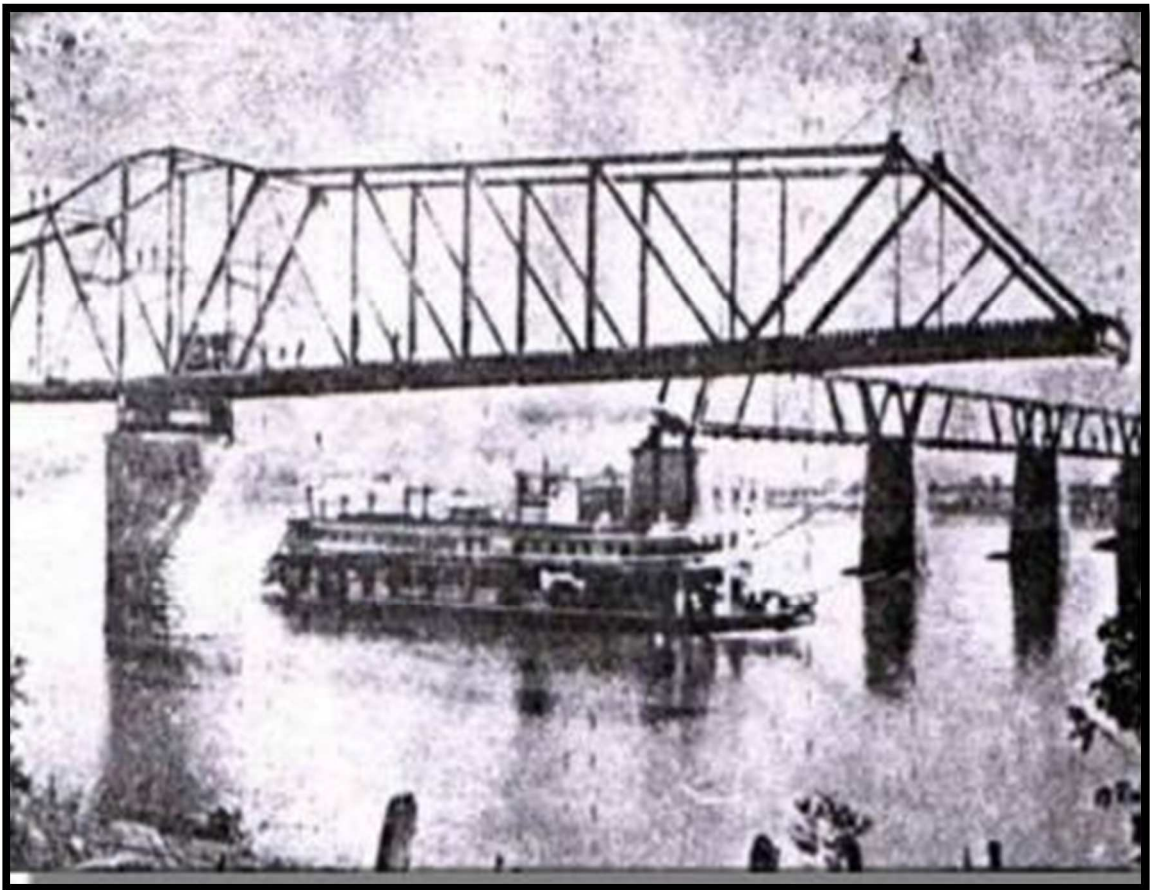


Figure 33: Nashville, Chattanooga, and St. Louis R.R. Bridge at Johnsonville, TN, 1902. Courtesy of Bridge. Hunter.com images.

³ *Nashville Republican Banner*, September 22, 1867, 4.

The second major change was Johnsonville's population. From March to November, 1864, Johnsonville's population reached its height at 2,500 people. After the supply depot closed in June 1865, the population was reduced almost by half and the majority of its employees returned home. In 1868, Johnsonville still had a sizable population of about 1900 people, both whites and African-Americans.⁴ This is important because it helped Johnsonville remain relevant as the third most populated area in Humphreys County behind Waverly and McEwen.⁵

The third change was Johnsonville's identity. From the beginning, Johnsonville was popularized as a boat landing and military support operation. But this had changed by 1867. Johnsonville's identity as a sanctuary for Unionism faded as terrorist activities committed upon African-Americans became routine activity. As passenger trains passed through Johnsonville, stories of murder abounded and this greatly affected the town's economy by keeping travelers from staying and eating at Johnsonville's hotels, boarding houses, and restaurants. Johnsonville's identity was also threatened when heavy flooding submerged "the town completely under water" and its citizens worried about the "danger of the bridge being swept away."⁶ After the flooding subsided, the citizens of Johnsonville, who only recently had begun to recover from the war, were emotionally devastated. Flooding damages at Johnsonville were regular headlines. One correspondent, who was present at Johnsonville reporting on the Nashville and Northwestern railroad in 1867, witnessed the degradation recalling that the town had:

⁴ Byron and Barbara Sistler, eds., *1870 Census-Tennessee* (Nashville: Byron Sistler & Associates, 1985), 19, 31, 36-39, 55-65, 107-09.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Nashville Daily Times and Press*, March 20-21, 1867.

the most doleful appearance. The farm houses erected in great haste, are forsaken and forgotten; the stores once filled with goods of all kinds, are closed. Here and there you may still see, wandering among this desolation, a few of the former inhabitants, as if unwilling to forsake the pace which offered them once so good an opportunity to make money fast. There they sit and bewail the evil days which have come upon them.⁷

African-American Struggles

Approximately thirty African-American veterans settled at Johnsonville after the war. The majority of these veterans were men who had served in the 13th, 40th, 41st, and 110th USCT regiments. Sixteen of these veterans had actually been stationed at Johnsonville during the war such as Private Dempsey Green, Company A, 13th USCT; Private Jacob Anderson, Company E, 13th USCT; Private Henry Young (company unknown), 13th USCT; Private George Overall, Company C, 13th USCT; and a man listed only as “George (Sutler Madison’s),” Company D, 13th USCT. There were also two disabled USCT veterans living at Johnsonville; Sergeant Henry McWilliams, U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery Sergeant (company unknown), listed as having Rheumatism, and Corporal Washington Carmack, Company H, 13th USCT, who had been shot in the hand during the Battle of Nashville.⁸

⁷ *Nashville Republican Banner*, September 22, 1867.

⁸ Moore, “Farm Communities,” 156, 162-163, 218-219; Byron and Barbara Sistler, eds., *1890 Civil War Veterans Census-Tennessee* (Evanston, Illinois: Byron Sistler & Associates, 1978), 4, 6, 89, 119, 122, 197, 215, 239, 306, 312, 335. These pages list many of the black Union veterans from the 12th and 13th USCT as living in Johnsonville in 1890 and was derived from the 1890 Special Census Schedules, Civil War Union Veterans & Their Widows: West Tennessee, MF 98, “Benton Co. through Weakley Co.,” TSLA, Nashville, Tennessee. USCT veterans Green, Anderson, Young, Overall, “George,” McWilliams, and Carmack were confirmed by examining muster rolls of the 12th and 13th USCT by permission of Dr. Wayne Moore, Assistant Archivist, TSLA.

There were limited employment opportunities at Johnsonville after the war. Some whites found employment farming and at various businesses in town such as Palmer's saw mill and at the landing. For African-Americans, however, there were no opportunities because whites refused to hire them. The small contingent of African-Americans who lived in Johnsonville were also constantly "chased and harassed by local desperadoes" and visited regularly by a secret, anti-black society called the "Red Jackets," which had formed in Johnsonville in 1868 and were similar to the Ku Klux Klan.⁹ The harassment of Johnsonville's African-American citizens became so bad that a correspondent recorded "Johnsonville is bad news, its people, almost without exception are void of all moral and religious sentiments."¹⁰

The eradication of African-Americans' from the historiography of the Civil War and their contributions at Johnsonville was deliberate and accomplished through racist motives as literature from the Lost Cause decades reveal. However, modern readers of history must connect with southern racism of the 1860's by understanding the political atmosphere in the South after the Civil War. Historian Gregory Downs does a good job addressing race and politics in the South immediately following the war in *After Appomattox: Military Occupation and the Ends of War*. Downs documents in his book a pervasive pattern of discriminatory actions that affected African-Americans in towns all over the South. Johnsonville mirrors that regional trend as early as 1865. For example, Downs addresses how the Black Codes, which were laws designed by southerners (many who were former Confederates) to restrict freedmen's activities and ensure their availability as a labor force now that slavery was abolished, impacted the advancement of

⁹ *Nashville Daily Press and Times*, February 4, 1868, 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, February 4, 25, 1868 and October 29, 1868.

African-Americans in the South, especially at converted areas such as Johnsonville where African-Americans, who had fought for the Union, had chosen to congregate and live.¹¹

African-Americans did not receive recognition for their contributions to the Union victory, but were often quickly blamed for being the cause of the war.¹² When you place Johnsonville into the framework of Downs' argument that racism fueled how blacks were equally mistreated through actions such as unfair employment practices and segregated housing, then it is easier to understand why African-Americans became marginalized.

Eventually, conditions for African-Americans at Johnsonville improved drastically with the arrival of a branch of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, known as the Freedmen's Bureau.¹³ The Bureau had an enormous impact on the lives of African-Americans and even some poor whites at Johnsonville by 1866. It was only after freedmen began receiving the much needed assistance from the Bureau in forms of food, clothing, and employment, that the town rebounded and its African-American community expanded. The Bureau also helped African-Americans become self-sufficient by assisting in negotiating labor contracts between landowners and freedmen.¹⁴ In Tennessee alone from July 1865 to October 1866, the Freedmen's Bureau issued over 150,000 rations to both freedmen and white refugees. Additionally, several charitable organizations in Nashville and other towns near Johnsonville contributed significant amounts of corn, clothing, and fuel to aid the destitute.¹⁵

¹¹ Downs, *After Appomattox*, 84.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Annual Reports of the Assistant Commissioner, Freedmen's Bureau of Tennessee, September 30, 1867 [pp. 5–6] and October 10, 1868 [p. 4], *Records of the Commissioner, Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands*, RG 105, National Archives, Washington, DC.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Weymouth T. Jordan, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Tennessee," *The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 11 (1939): 54–55.

In August 1867, the Freedmen's Bureau opened a school at Johnsonville and operated it until April 1869. The first Freedmen's Bureau agent assigned to Johnsonville was John Enoch. Enoch stayed only a few months and helped open the school, but it was his replacement, John Wilson, who arrived in November 1867, who was responsible for initiating much of the Freedmen's Bureau activities in Johnsonville. Wilson supervised the school and ensured that African-American children were provided a fair opportunity at education. The Bureau also legalized marriages for freedmen entered into during slavery and arranged transportation for African-Americans who attempted to reunite with their families and relocate. Wilson also helped former African-American soldiers receive back pay and pensions that were owed to them by the military.¹⁶

In the late 1860's, the segregated African-American community at Johnsonville expanded and in addition to the school, which had been constructed by funds from the Freedmen's Bureau, the small congregation began the Johnsonville African Methodist Episcopal Church which would remain until 1944.¹⁷

Johnsonville's Decline

From 1870 to 1890, Johnsonville's population peaked with around 2,900 citizens and boasted a number of businesses that catered to the railroad passengers.¹⁸ In the immediate years after the war, new manufacturing establishments were built that included a coffin factory, a lumber yard, and a peanut re-cleaning mill operated by the Barnhart

¹⁶ Letters of Johnsonville agents John Enoch and John L. Wilson to Assistant Commissioners Fisk, Lewis, Carlin, and Thompson of the Tennessee Freedmen's Bureau received from 1866-1869, *Records of the Tennessee field offices of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872*, MF1911, RG 105, Reel 21, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Garrett, 49-61.

Mercantile Company of St. Louis. This peanut operation employed hundreds of Humphreys County citizens and especially, large numbers of women.¹⁹

After a series of major floods and recessions which had started in 1867 and continued regularly until the 1940's, Johnsonville's economy suffered tremendously and its population decreased. In 1913, George Eric Moore and his family had moved away from Johnsonville because of the recurring flooding, but returned in 1918. Years later Moore remembered that:

we moved into a house ½ mile east of town. My dad had gotten the night job at the elevator, watching, checking freight and pumping water for the trains. There was a coal chute across the track from the water tank where trains took the coal. In the early twenties a blight killed all the chestnut timbers. About 1926, they were cutting it for dye wood. I hauled dye wood off of Fort Hill [lower redoubt] and loaded it into box cars to ship.²⁰

In the 1930's, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) sought to bring hydro-electric power to the suffering citizens of the flood-ravaged Tennessee River valley. To do this, they constricted the free-flowing Tennessee River by constructing a system of locks and dams. By 1941, at the end of the Great Depression and America's entry into World War II, only about 300 citizens remained in Johnsonville. Finally, in 1944, TVA completed the last dam project and hired many of laborers, including citizens from Johnsonville, to clear away all the timber in preparation of the flooding. In *The Johnsonville Times*, author Robert Wyatt reported that "much good timber, fine oak, poplar, ash, walnut, gum, and other trees was raked up into huge piles by machinery and

¹⁹ Robert G. Wyatt, "The Johnsonville Times: TVA Dam Brings Death of Old Town, Birth of New Johnsonville," in *The Nashville Banner* 5 (March 1958): 1.

²⁰ George Eric Moore, "Memories and Experiences of George Eric Moore," self-published memoirs, 1977, 2-3.

then the Tennessee Valley Authority gave men contracts at pleasing pay to burn them.”²¹ The new dam, located just below Paducah, Kentucky, at Gilbertsville, Kentucky, opened and backed-up the Tennessee River thus flooding all of the river towns that lay below flood stage, which included Johnsonville. Like so many early river towns, Johnsonville was buried beneath the waters of TVA’s new Kentucky Reservoir, today’s Kentucky Lake.²²



Figure 34: E.E. Martin’s General Store, Johnsonville, TN circa 1910. Courtesy of JSHP.

²¹ Wyatt, “The Johnsonville Times,” Part 5, 1.

²² Ibid.

Memory Forgotten: Ruination and the Lost Cause

While conducting research for this dissertation, it became apparent that Johnsonville's contribution to the Union victory had been practically erased from the collective memory of the Civil War. After an extensive search of post-war newspaper articles from 1867 to 1910, and seeking anything about Johnsonville's Civil War memory, I was surprised to find that the only information available was about the re-use of a few military buildings, an article here-and-there about a business in town, and very little about railroad activities. These omissions were strange considering that the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad, which terminated at Johnsonville, was a project that completely altered the landscape of four Middle Tennessee counties and was the only commercial mechanism still in place that helped rejuvenate the devastated economies of those counties following the war.

Purposely forgetting the war was normal, especially for citizens of Humphreys County where 99% of its white population had supported secession in 1861.²³ Johnsonville's exclusion from the collective memory of the war, more than anything else, was due to its geography. This was because the Union army took advantage of its military occupation of Tennessee and built Johnsonville in the very heart of an area that had completely pledged loyalty to the Confederacy.

In 1865, while the North celebrated victory with parades, dedicated some of the first victory monuments, displayed flags, and held musical and stage performances, southern citizens living at or near former military posts like Johnsonville, had no choice

²³ Garrett, 53-55.

but to live among the ruins of the war: a constant reminder of loss. At Johnsonville, such ruination included burned out warehouses, visible hulls of the sunken transports and gunboats, abandoned sheds and mills, piles of scrap wood and stumps, and a landscape that had been so mauled-up by horse hoofs and wagon-wheels, that it was almost impossible to cultivate. Ruination is the process of change, as historian Meagan Kate Nelson argues in her book *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War*. Nelson explains how rural towns, like Johnsonville, with “fields of stumps,” were “grubbed up to make way for agricultural fields,” and that many times “war ruins were absorbed into different forms.”²⁴ One example of such ruination at Johnsonville was a barracks used by enlisted men that was later converted into the popular, Waggoner Hotel, named after Johnsonville resident, Randolph Waggoner.²⁵



Figure 35: Waggoner Hotel. Johnsonville, Tennessee, 1937. Courtesy of Humphreys County Library U.S.

²⁴ Megan Kate Nelson, *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2012), 232.

²⁵ Garrett, 54.

Buildings such as Johnsonville's Waggoner Hotel, as Nelson contends, were *converted ruins*. In other words, they were tangible elements left over from the war, or basically, war relics: what northerners and southerners alike used to create a new national narrative between 1865 and 1890, and as a way to "contemplate the savage behavior of humans and the invasions of domestic privacy during wartime."²⁶

When the historic town, depot sites, and the location of the Battle of Johnsonville became part of the Tennessee State Parks system in 1971, the primary interpretive theme was based almost completely on the Confederate actions and the story of the Union defenders was practically excluded. Johnsonville is a classic example of what is called an ethnographic landscape: cultural landscapes that "mirror the systems of meanings, ideologies, beliefs, values, and world-views shared by a group of people."²⁷

Johnsonville, however, had another stigma prior to its inclusion as an ethnographical landscape and one that since the Battle of Johnsonville influenced the geographical area: The Lost Cause. Until now, Johnsonville's collective memory of the Civil War was cloaked in Lost Cause rhetoric, and really, with no reason to change. The Lost Cause was the re-writing of the Confederate history of the Civil War by southern whites for the purpose of demonstrating the South's "noble struggle against Northern aggression rather than as a losing effort to preserve the institution of slavery."²⁸

²⁶ Nelson, 3.

²⁷ Donald Hardesty, "Ethnographic Landscapes: Transforming Nature into Culture," in *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America*, eds. Arnold R. Alanen and Robert Z. Melnick (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 172-80.

²⁸ Jonathan Leib, "The Witting Autobiography of Richmond, Virginia: Arthur Ashe, the Civil War, and Monument Avenue's Racialized Landscape," in Richard H. Schein, ed., *Landscape and Race in the United States* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 190.

The historiography of the Lost Cause is apparent in many books and periodicals about Johnsonville. There are numerous articles in the *Confederate Veteran* magazine and the *Southern Historical Society Papers* that highlight only the Confederate actions at the Battle of Johnsonville, and in books too, like John A. Wyeth's *That Devil Forrest* and John W. Morton's *The Artillery of Nathan Bedford Forrest's Cavalry*, each written during the height of the "first" Lost Cause era from the late 1870's to the early 1920's.²⁹ A more aggressive, second generation of Lost Cause history resumed around 1940 with books such as *Call of Duty: The Sterling Nobility of Robert E. Lee* (Wilkins, 1941) and continued through the 1990's with books like *The South was Right* (Kennedy, 1991).³⁰

The influence of the Lost Cause in books and articles was primarily shaped by former Confederates and "journalists and fiction writers."³¹ The recurring theme always associated with Johnsonville was Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest and the Confederate victory there in November 1864. Any other actions by the Union forces during the Battle of Johnsonville other than the purported "mass destruction and panic" and especially, the contributions from the United States Colored Troops, was purposely omitted for 150 years from the historiography of Johnsonville.³²

One consistent story associated with the Lost Cause interpretation of the Battle of Johnsonville, for example, is that prior to the Confederate attack on November 4, the Union defenders were unaware of the Confederates' movements and were completely

²⁹ Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4-5, 55-57.

³⁰ Paul A. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2003), 26-29.

³¹ Shackel, *Memory in Black and White*, 27.

³² *Ibid*; David Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 228-29.

overtaken by a surprise attack and which ultimately caused massive destruction of the depot and defeat of the Union forces. My research reveals that this was far from the truth. What I discovered by examining extensively the *Official Records* was that the Confederates actually inflicted very little damage on November 4, and that the majority of the large scale destruction at the wharf was caused by its own defenders (Chapter 9). Apparently, the stories of the supposed surprise attack and massive destruction was first written by Lost Cause authors, again mostly former Confederate soldiers.³³

Overall, the Lost Cause interpretation of Johnsonville was nothing more than a revamping of the larger-than-life exploits of Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest. In other words, the collective memory of the Battle of Johnsonville, prior to 1920, was symbolized not by parks or monuments as it later was at Nathan Bedford Forrest State Park and Johnsonville State Historic Park, but by its southern participants who helped “win” the battle for the Confederacy. As historian Timothy Smith points out in *This Great Battlefield of Shiloh*, it was simply a common activity by southern participants in the war to blame the North “for trying to run its affairs and retreated to the Lost Cause mentality (martyrdom, honor, courage, constitutional correctness, defiance, and defeat only because of massive Union numbers) to defend its section.”³⁴

Lost Cause historians who wrote about Confederate events at Johnsonville, such as John Wyeth, John W. Morton, General Thomas Jordon, and Captain Frank Gracey, who excluded any of the Union’s accomplishments in their books and articles, were

³³ Henry Howland to Brigadier General Jacob Donaldson, November 16, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³⁴ Timothy B. Smith, *This Great Battlefield of Shiloh: History, Memory, and the Establishment of a Civil War National Military Park* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 89.

implying that the Confederacy was far from defeat, even as late as November 1864 when the Battle of Johnsonville occurred. Their basis was that superior generalship and southern wit out-smarted the federals at every move during the Johnsonville campaign.³⁵ In fact, by studying the writings of Lost Cause authors on the Battle of Johnsonville, it is clear that their message was to prove the genius of Forrest, the Confederate victory, and nothing more. For example, Wyeth wrote “His (Forrest) movements had been so carefully made that the enemy were loath to believe that he could be on the opposite side of the river.”³⁶

As my research evolved and sources surfaced about the Union’s perspective of the battle and of the operations at the supply depot, I discovered from reading the correspondence of multiple Union accounts, specifically of three Union officers and an enlisted man that the Union defenders were very much aware that the Confederates were on the river bank opposite Johnsonville. Obviously, these persons did not know to what extent the Confederate’s plans were nor that a cannonade was about to occur, but, by November 4, they were at such a level of alert, that actions had previously been taken to prevent the Confederates from occupying the western bank. For example, Chief Quartermaster Henry Howland wrote:

At about 2 o’clock p.m. the enemy were discovered planting batteries directly opposite also above and below our Warehouses and levee. The gunboats opened fire upon them, as did also our batteries upon the hill. After some

³⁵ Jordan and Pryor, 599-605, Morton, 254-58, Wyeth, 462-63, Gracey, “Capture of the Mazeppa,” 566-70.

³⁶ Wyeth, 463.

twenty minutes firing, a reply was received from all the rebel batteries.³⁷

Additionally, Colonel Thompson recalled in an after-action report that “the gunboat fight lasted about twenty minutes. The batteries then opened from three points. There were in my opinion about twelve guns.”³⁸

Regardless of Lost Cause theories, in truth, the results of the Battle of Johnsonville changed nothing strategically for the Confederacy. By November 1864, the Confederacy was losing the war, and they were losing badly. What Johnsonville did change, however, was not steeped in Lost Cause rhetoric at all. Instead, the story of Johnsonville proved how effective military planning, engineering, and logistical operations that combine networks of rivers and railroads can win wars.

As the Lost Cause became even more popular into the twentieth century, “the memory of African-American participation in the war became rather limited in American literature.”³⁹ The Lost Cause did not only influence Johnsonville, but at other southern towns in middle and west Tennessee.⁴⁰ However, at Johnsonville, the contributions of African-Americans during the Civil War vanished almost completely. This idea is explored in historian Paul Shackel’s book, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape*. Shackel argues that “whoever controls

³⁷ Captain Henry Howland to Brigadier General Jacob Donaldson, November 16, 1864, Johnsonville, Tennessee, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³⁸ Avadavat, account provided by Colonel Charles R. Thompson regarding the actions of the U.S. forces at Johnsonville, Tennessee, that resulted in the destruction of government property on November 4, 1864, for the Board of Survey at Nashville, Tennessee, in the Court Martial case of Acting Volunteer Lt. Commander, Edward M. King, December 29, 1864, U.S. Navy Records 1864-65, Courts Martial, RG 11-86, U.S. Navy Department. , National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³⁹ Shackel, *Memory in Black and White*, 176.

⁴⁰ Bobby L. Lovett, “Nashville’s Fort Negley: A Symbol of Black’s Involvement with the Union Army,” in *Tennessee in the Civil War*, ed. Carroll Van West (Nashville: The Tennessee Historical Society, 2011), 131-33.

the public memory of the events of the Civil War controls the historical consciousness that interprets those events.”⁴¹

Another reason that the public memory of African-Americans and the Union’s contributions at Johnsonville vanished was because, as historian Gaines Foster explained in *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913*, “they brooded over defeat, rallied against the North, and offered the image of the Confederacy as an antidote to post-war change.”⁴² By applying this theory to better understand what happened to African-American memory at Johnsonville, then naturally, southerners who lived in this region or who had family members that fought for the Confederacy, would almost certainly uphold “the image of the Confederacy as an antidote for post-war change,” if for no other reason, than as a way to ease the pain of the North’s harsh reconstruction policies toward land owners and former Confederate officers, like Forrest, whom President Andrew Johnson strove to ensure they knew that “treason is a crime and must be made infamous, and traitors must be impoverished.”⁴³

The reconstruction policies handed down by the Republican Congress so soon after the war, quickly backfired, even before the end of 1865, and southern leaders continued once again to display their irascible independence. For example, some state legislatures ratified the Thirteenth Amendment; some did not. Many began to argue about war debts; while some declared secession null and void, others merely “repealed” their

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 4-5.

⁴³ Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Leuchtenburg, *A Concise History of the American Republic*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 333.

articles of secession.⁴⁴ And if this were not enough to alarm Radical Republicans, old Confederate leaders were elected to the state constitutional conventions and states even sent ex-Confederate generals and congressmen to Washington, among these, even the Vice President of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens.⁴⁵

Confederate symbols such as the Confederate battle flag and stone monuments dedicated to either famous Confederate leaders or the common Confederate soldiers were raised and erected in towns all over the south beginning in the late 1870's. Southerners used the flag as a decoration of Confederate soldiers' graves as well. Gaines Foster argued that organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of Confederate Veterans sought "to look at the war years as a glorious and heroic era" and "sought a way out of defeat."⁴⁶ The Confederate flag was also used to revive the memory of the Battle of Johnsonville and Nathan Bedford Forrest around the Tennessee River region at places such as Eva, Tennessee, where the symbol helped strengthen the Lost Cause and promoted the Civil War by favoring the "ideals of the Old South."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ The American Black Codes, 1865-1866. The George Washington University, September 26, 2012, <http://home.gwu.edu/~jjhawkin/BlackCodes/BlackCodes.htm>.

⁴⁵ Ibid; McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 500-03.

⁴⁶ Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 57.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 22.

Traces of Johnsonville

As park manager of Johnsonville State Historic Park, I investigated the park for traces of events that helped supply its story.⁴⁸ As I systematically “probed” Johnsonville for “traces,” or rather, clues that were left by people or events from the Civil War, I discovered a variety of “material traces” that still bore the marks of its past like the railroad turntable, the two earthen fortifications, and lines of rifle pits. I discovered “written traces” too, such as maps, photographs, and even inscriptions on grave markers.⁴⁹ Even though many of these material traces were listed in the park’s National Register of Historic Places nomination in 2000, there were still some elements left out. One such trace, for example, was Johnsonville’s blockhouse location which I located using a Civil War-era map, or rather, a “written trace” from the Civil War.⁵⁰

Additionally, when writing about the park’s two fortifications, the lower and upper redoubts, I took regular walks to these locations to get a real sense of the terrain. I even stood in front of each fort’s embrasures where the guns of the 1st Kansas Battery and 2nd U.S. Colored Light Artillery were positioned and did battle with Forrest’s confederates on November 4-5, 1864. This experience afforded me an appreciation of the actual size and elevation of the two forts which assisted me greatly when writing about how difficult it must have been to traverse the steep terrain around Johnsonville and the

⁴⁸ David E. Kyvig and Myron A. Marty, *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2000), 42-43.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 46.

⁵⁰ Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, “National Register Nomination, Johnsonville Historic District,” Humphreys County, Tennessee, Section 7, 1990, 1-25.

challenges for men on such terrain to move a 20-pound Parrott gun into position that weighed almost 3,000 pounds.

I was able to locate, for example, broken chimney bricks, foundation stones, glassware, and even a cistern associated with Civil War-era buildings that were located next to the forts and are even visible in two of the Jacob Coonley photographs of Johnsonville in 1864. Another exciting experience was that this project coincided exactly with the sesquicentennial of the Civil War (2011-2015) which afforded many opportunities to present public programs about Johnsonville during the Civil War and compare those experiences with knowledge that we have gained over the last 150 years about the war and how we can express that information through the public history process of things such as living history interpretation, exhibits, and multi-media programs. All of this activity is the real work of public historians.

There are many material traces from the Civil War that are still visible today at Johnsonville State Historic Park. They are, in a modern definition, *visual aids* that correspond with the information distributed in this dissertation. In other words, the research presented in these pages will become a tool for future public historians as a way to connect Johnsonville's visual history to the public. Therefore, this dissertation is a working document: an interpretive tool for future park staff and students of the Civil War and the history of Johnsonville.⁵¹

⁵¹ Ibid.

The Rewards of Public History

Johnsonville was more than just a logistical tool used to defeat the fledgling Confederacy in the waning days of the war. Instead, Johnsonville's legacy is still apparent today, not only as a State Park, but through the impact it had upon issues of race and emancipation and military logistics during the Civil War. Aside being a working document as an interpretive tool, this dissertation is also an analysis of how the Union won the Civil War at small and obscure places like Johnsonville. As a public history site, Johnsonville State Historic Park is overwhelmed with interpretive potential. For instance, Johnsonville includes an array of themes such as supply and logistics, emancipation and African-American troops, military railroads, naval actions, Quartermaster's Department activities, infantry and cavalry troops, artillery, battles, animals, civilians, and death: a smorgasbord of themes that an historical interpreter can use to develop a park interpretive program, walking tour, or an interpretive brochure.

Therefore, the chapters and narratives that I have described reassert Johnsonville's place in the literature of the Civil War. By paying particular attention to how the story of Johnsonville during the Civil War was represented by the railroad, the Quartermaster's Department, civilians, the army and navy, and African-Americans, the public is awarded with a more complete examination of the Union's position late in the war in Middle Tennessee. By demonstrating that Johnsonville's diversity was underpinned by three distinct perspectives; northern, southern, and African American, and that in the years from 1865 to 1900 the absence of African-Americans' contributions were replaced by white interpretations, this affords an opportunity for today's public

historians to engage audiences, both in academic and fruitful dialogue, about the causes of the war, its consequences, and why maintaining a diverse understanding of America's Civil War is important when compared to modern-day civil conflicts around the world.⁵²

The rewards of public history at Johnsonville State Historic Park are apparent today through public exhibits such as wayside interpretive panels and permanent museum exhibits, reconstructed soldier huts, interpretive hiking trails, reproduction cannons, and informative literature about Johnsonville during the Civil War and its post-war history. These interpretive elements are effective visual aids, not just for remembering the tragedy of America's great Civil War and the people who lived it, but for educating all citizens.

Finally, there are two underlying themes in this dissertation that should benefit public historians the most. First, is how the Civil War affected massive regional change, and secondly, how race and southern culture, where blacks and whites have long memories, some good, but mostly bad, continue to challenge public historians in having to negotiate between the "stakeholder, persons with some claim to the story being told, and the historic record."⁵³

Going forward, future public historians and staff members at Johnsonville State Historic Park must recognize that racial healing requires time. For most park visitors, the story of Johnsonville will always remain be a symbol of Confederate victory, but for others, it is a reminder of America's racial struggle. By accepting and understanding the perspectives of black and white, historical interpreters should develop a higher comfort

⁵² James Broomall, "The Interpretation Is A-Changin: Memory, Museums, and Public History in Central Virginia," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, vol. 3 (March 2013): 114-122.

⁵³ James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, eds., *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 166.

level when interpreting race and the Civil War. In using the story of Johnsonville as a lesson for public historians, Marie Tyler-McGraw sums it up best in that “faith in scholarship’s ability to persuade communities that their interests lie in acknowledging complexity and diversity is the motivator for most of the research done by academic and public historians.”⁵⁴ Finally, as revealed in this dissertation, because of the Union’s legacy and the ingenuity and bravery exhibited by soldiers and sailors, the events that occurred at Johnsonville from 1863-1865, will continue to add to the expanding efforts of public historians and to the diverse scholarship of America’s Civil War.



Figure 36: Union soldier interpretive program at Johnsonville State Historic Park, 2014. Photograph by author.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 167.



Figure 37: Site of Union supply depot, Johnsonville SHP, 2014. Photograph by Author.



Figure 38: Reconstructed soldier huts, Johnsonville SHP, 2015. Photograph by Author.



Figure 39: Upper Redoubt at Johnsonville SHP, 2015. Photograph by author.



Figure 40: A 10 pound-Parrott cannon at Johnsonville SHP, 2015. Photograph by author.

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