Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

The Cincinnati Defense Perimeter of the Civil War

By

Clifford H. Specht, Sr.

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THE CINCINNATI DEFENSE PERIMETER OF THE CIVIL WAR

Introduction

The Northern Kentucky Historical Society

Before starting my story tonight, I must, in all modesty, correct several impressions that may have been given through the generous flattery in our official bulletin this month. Therein, the writer was referred to as a "Historian of Note" and a Military Tactician of some capacity.

The only experience the writer has had with military tactics must have been acquired as an enlisted man, doing kitchen police or other unimpressive duties in World War I. His record as a tactician is even less impressive from the fact that such duties were performed with a Field Hospital Company of the Medical Corps where any complicated field strategy was left to the commissioned officers, the loyal town and country doctors from Crossroads, Indiana and Oshkosh, Wisconsin. From this association, the writer learned to work with them and respect them, but NEVER did they teach him any military tactics.

The fact is, that regardless of his limitations as a student of history, his interest in this subject has existed since childhood when the kids from our end of town, unencumbered by the social gifts of the present day--canteens, swimming pools, gymnasiums, playgrounds, etc., were compelled to use their own initiative in providing recreation. They found their own wading pools in Sherman's Creek above the cattle crossings where now stands the Shopping Center, exploring in the soft clay around the old Jones Mansion where now is St. Martin's and the Newport Catholic High School (we called it Lumea Bank). Fishing on the shady shores of Berry's Lake not far from the "Old Fort", swimming on the bar at Bellevue above the cinder deposits of the old Newport Foundries where more than one keel boat had put aground and survivors of thes Rogers Massacre had passed, skating on the old Ice Pond in the Mill Bottoms and up and down its creeks and fills and hiking and exploring the South Hills--the old Civil War trenches and parapets on Grandview Avenue, Clifton, in Fieldman's pasture and along Moock Road and Licking Pike.

Most of us knew that these breastworks were built during the Civil War. We were, at that time taught both elementary American History and Kentucky History in the grade schools. We are among those who are appalled by the attitude of some of our present day educators in respect to the gradual elimination of these subjects from our school systems. But we knew nothing of the cause for the existence of these breastworks, how used and the extent of territory covered. In my case, whatever I have learned has come from the curiosity implanted by our history teacher in the Newport Public Schools and those early, happy explorations.

Many people have written about this subject through the years--from many points of view. My own attitude in approach may reflect emphasis on that part of the perimeter contained in Campbell County. Because it was chiefly the hills of our homeland, South of Newport and East of Licking, where our interest has been concentrated. These are OUR hills--to see every day and to speculate and wonder and appreciate their past and to marvel that, through them Providence has given
us food, water, timber for shelter, and cover from the violence of storms. And, in time of military threat, they provided the locations and elevations demanded for installation of sufficient defensive barriers. How much thought has been given to the hills back of Newport - their natural beauty - their history - their possibilities?
In 1861, there were few houses on the roads and hills south of Newport and Covington. Orchards and vineyards dotted the slopes, a few farms and large areas of native timber - hickory, walnut, oak, poplar, chestnut, some beechnut and white pine and locust spotted with paw-paws and the gums. Much of this timber was cut down during the early years of the war and stripped and pointed at the ends and tied together to make the abatis approaches to front the trenches and batteries. The roads entering the Ohio Valley from the south became the key points of interest with the approach of the drums of war. For it was over these roads that the threat to the industrial center of the Ohio Valley would come. And these hills must be scarred with gun emplacements and trenches along their slopes to repulse an enemy, who, if successful, could cause a great set-back to the war production of the Union and wedge farther to the complete bisection of the northern states.

On the west side of Licking, the main roads leading to Covington were:

Robinson Road down river and through Ludlow and Bromley.
Lexington Turnpike through Ft. Mitchell.
Independence Pike
Banklick Pike south along Licking.
Ky. Central R. R. terminating around 7th Street.

There were numerous cross roads, one of which ran from Bromley along Pleasant Creek and finally intersected the Lexington Turnpike south of Covington.

In Campbell County there were:

Licking Pike south along the river.
Alexandria Pike.
River Road running east along the Ohio.

These were the chief avenues of vulnerability. The story of the approach from the river, which was protected by Union gun boats, must be told elsewhere. On the Cincinnati side, several of the hills (Mt. Adams included) were used for the installation of gun emplacements.

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When Braxton Bragg replaced Beauregard as Commander of the Army of Tennessee in June 1862, and led in the abortive invasions of Kentucky, August to October 1862, much of the Northern Kentucky perimeter (see notes) had been constructed through the efforts of the Cincinnati Lawyer-Teacher O. M. Mitchell. Most of the construction had been supervised and planned by Col. Chas. Whittlesey, Maj. J. H. Simpson, Capt. W. E. Merrell and Lt. Tardy all of the Department of Ohio which was then commanded by Gen. H. G. Wright. Some of the installations were accordingly named after these engineers. We feel that, at this point, some mention should be made of Col. Whittlesey. The installation at what is now Ft. Thomas, was named after him. He was born in Connecticut in 1808; graduated from West Point in 1831; served at Mackinac and during the Black Hawk War; located in Cuyahoga County as lawyer and newspaperman; was state geologist; made many archaeological and
agricultural surveys and was a man of great versatility and talents. In 1861 he became G. W. General and Ohio Military Engineer and re-entered the service as Colonel of the 20th Ohio Volunteers. He was cited for meritorious service at Shiloh in the Lew Wallace Division. After the war, he organized the Western Reserve Historical Society and published over 190 books on research in science and history. Technically, any favorable appraisal of the Northern Kentucky Perimeter should reflect largely to the credit of Col. Chas. Whittlesey.

The perimeter consisted of two forts and twenty three batteries connected by military roads and old roads and fronted by the forerunner of barbed wire - felled trees with pointed ends referred to as abatis. ( A ba tis ). A pontoon bridge connected the Kenton and Campbell ends of the perimeter at a point near to what is now the Wilders Distillery. The two forts - Mitchell and Whittlesey - consisted of stockades with parapets, ditches, emplacement for heavy guns, powder magazines, etc., and were more substantial installations than the batteries which were usually gun emplacements on high, leveled spots and fronted by trenches and abatis which strung along the hillsides to the next installation. Some of these diggings remain today.

The perimeter stretched from Bromley ( on the west ) south and east to Licking at Sunnyside. This was approximately at the fork where Madison Avenue turns from the approach to Latonia and the Independence Pike started. There is a traffic light at or near this point today. A road ran from Sunnyside to the Licking River pontoon bridge. Thus quick movement could be made from the battieries in Kenton to those in Campbell County or the reverse according to where the speedy concentration of men and guns was indicated.

On the Campbell County side of Licking, the perimeter extended from Wilders along Mock Road ( North Branch Road ) east to the Alexandria Pike and south on the Alexandria Pike to Grandview Avenue, up Grandview Avenue to the intersection of what is now Ft. Thomas Avenue, and River Road where a toll gate once stood.

The installations were, from the west -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Battery</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COOMBS BATTERY</td>
<td>approximately one-half mile south of Bromley.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BATES BATTERY</td>
<td>about half way between Bromley and Ft. Mitchell.</td>
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These batteries commanded the territory and roads to the west and southwest and north of the Lexington Turnpike.

FT, MITCHELL A key point commanding the approach from the Lexington Turnpike, the cross-roads from the Independence Pike and Latonia Springs.
From Ft. Mitchell, the perimeter wandered around the hillsides southeast toward Sunnyside (Latomia) connected by military roads.

KYLE BATTERY were on the hills above Wolf Road and facing south to the territory between the Independence Pike and Lexington Turnpike.
McRAE BATTERY commanded approach of Ky. Central R. R.
HOOPER BATTERY
BURR ONE BATTERY on short road between Madison intersection and Pontoon Bridge.
BURBANK BATTERY
LARZ ANDERSON
BATTERY

On the Kenton side, at the time the military map was drawn in 1862, Ft. Wright had not been completed. It was completed August 11, 1863.

BUFORD BATTERY, under construction, commanded a visible distance of 3-1/2 miles past Sandfordtown to the Flower Farm. The visibility, at this point, reached 4 miles past DeCourcy, and joined the area from Battery Wiggins on the Campbell side at John's Hill.

There were numerous outposts, a few of which were:

5 MILE POST within range of Buford.
6 MILE POST Independence Pike at Hold's Branch.
8 MILE POST At Stearns Mill between Tupman Blacksmith Shop and Powder Creek.
10 MILE POST At Sandfordtown.

This constituted the arc of defense from Bromley to Sunnyside and Licking Gardens.

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The PONTOON BRIDGE connected by a camouflaged military road from Sunnyside, crossed Licking somewhere near the present Distillery Road at Wilders and trenches were strung out across the bottoms and across Licking Pike and up the East Hill above the present Feldman Farm house to the promontory above where the main installations of

BATTERY HOLT were placed. This is the south end of the ridge that overlooks the Licking Valley and the steel mill and runs northwardly intersecting the terminal of the old County Road (Walnut Street, Southgate) and becomes the present Grandview Avenue, past the intersection of Lindsay Road and on to the Grandview School and 13th Street. A road followed this ridge from Newport to Battery Holt. An established road came from Newport as far as the County Road Intersection (Battery McLean) and from there to Battery Holt. At the south promontory of the ridge, a military road had been constructed. Thus the entire ridge became available for defense through a number of channels – Licking Pike, the Ridge Road, Military Road from the Alexandria Pike by way of the ravine north of the cemetery, and North Branch or Mooch Road.

Campbell County installations therefore began with Battery Holt.
JOHN'S HILL BATTERY was on a high, volcanic shaped promontory rising from the south shore at the mouth of Three Mile Creek.

Still higher and southeast, about 3/4 mile on a promontory above the intersection of John's Hill Road and Licking Pike and probably in the neighborhood of the home of the late Dr. Anderson, was another battery. The map does not name it but it must have been referred to as the

WIGGINS BATTERY

John's Hill Battery and the Wiggins Battery were primary defenses with long visibility, primary trenches and covered the Licking Valley south and the Licking Pike southern approach.

As we leave the Wilders area and proceed eastwardly along North Branch (Moock) Road, we find batteries on the hills north of the road before we reach the Alexandria Pike.

HARRISON BATTERY was on the crest of the first hill past Holt and just west of Shaler Battery.

SHALER BATTERY in Evergreen Cemetery with which most of us are familiar because the breastworks still exist and surround the memorial circle. This battery was important because of visibility of the Licking Pike, Alexandria Pike, North Branch Road and the hills to the south. There were 32 pounders and Parrott Guns at Shaler, a powder magazine. Where once grew N. B. Shaler's vineyards were trenches and gun emplacements which extended around the ridge to the Alexandria Pike. You will find signs of emplacements at the Shaler monument and still farther around the south ridge to the Taylor Lot. These overlooked the intersection of North Branch and the Alexandria Pike. There are signs of bastions and redouts (re dout). Roads ran from these installations past the Old Shaler House and to the North Ravine where a military road starting at the present Highland Avenue, and Alexandria Pike, ran west down the ravine, past Belle Acres (Berry's Lake) and to the Licking Pike.

It appears, from the biography of Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, that he returned home from Harvard long enough to take command of a battery stationed in the cemetery near the family monument (his grandfather's). Forty years after the war he called attention to a deep, moss grown scar made by heavy wheels upon the monument. That these batteries drilled frequently is evidenced by the following from war verses by Shaler:

"But first of all to me to go upon the run upon this crest
And place my pieces by this monument sweeping the highway in the vale.
Then, in a moment, forth the battery swept down the slope before it,
Broke right through the wall and fences;
Then into that gulch in seeming ruin, yet with gear unharmed
And horses stout enough to pull it out
With spur and lash to speed them up the slope,"
McLEAN BATTERY. If you go out Walnut Street, Southgate, and past Belle Acres Lake on the old County Road to Grandview, you will find signs of the breastworks of McLean Battery covered with brush and timber on the northeast corner of the intersection. This, of course, was north of the Holt Battery on the ridge and the nearest to the city. The parts that were south of the intersection were plowed off. This was the "Old Fort" of our childhood.

There still are signs of entrenchments on the south slopes of the Alexandria Pike west of the Beverly Hills Club. There were also heavy entrenchments on the east hill at Mooock intersection which has been recently cut away for business development. At Blossom Lane, the Highland Club and on to Metcalf's Hill where now stands a gas station.

PHIL KEARNEY BATTERY extended on ridges at south ends of what is now Tower Place and Military Park. The visibility covered the fork at Grandview and the Alexandria Pike north and south.

The ridges overlooking River Road from both sides, were lined with trenches as you proceeded down hill toward Brent.

The military map shows one house, probably the old Locke home, on the west side of Ft. Thomas Avenue, between Grandview Avenue and the pike. This area is spotted with orchards and the ridge east of Marguerite Lane where lives our esteemed secretary, was topped with a string of entrenchments. There were trenches and site of a proposed field battery back along what became Officers Row and overlooking the river. A peach orchard occupied much of the ground where now are the Veteran's Bureau buildings. Even then troops from the Newport Barracks of the regular army probably stood duty on the site which later became an important Army Post.

The third key location in the perimeter, probably intended as secondary defense, being constructed and approached with difficulty through the maze of hill trenches, was

FORT WHITTLESEY. On the south side of Jamestown Road (Ft. Thomas Avenue) across from the peach orchard and probably opposite the site of the present water tower. It is difficult to gauge visibility without a map showing elevations, but Ft. Whittlesey, no doubt, commanded the Alexandria Pike for several miles south as well as any possible approach from the river side. Parapets fronted the stockade and abatis were placed in the approaches.

This completes the perimeter of approximately 25 installations with miles of side trenches, military roads, abatis and other defensive media. A perimeter approximately 12 miles long. It is hard to visualize the amount of time, manpower, equipment and planning that went into its construction, the magnitude of which, even with modern means of construction, would challenge the best. The construction alone, should be worthy of an important place in the history of the Ohio Valley.

Most of this was completed when the major threat to the Valley approached.
Bragg relieved Beauregard as Commander of the Army of Tennessee in June, 1862. Both armies were attempting to bisect their enemies through the west. Bragg dispatched Morgan into Kentucky and Forrest into Tennessee to break up the supply lines of Gen. Buell. Kirby Smith marched from Knoxville, across the Cumberland and isolated Union General George Morgan at the Gap. Bragg crossed the Tennessee River intending recovery of Kentucky and with his eyes on Cincinnati and Louisville. Smith won a decisive battle at Richmond and later took possession of Lexington, Frankfort and Maysville. Henry Heth commanded one of the two columns under Smith at Lexington. Smith's column completed the successful march on Frankfort and Heth's column advanced toward Cincinnati. Heth was an intimate of Gen. Lee. Later, in the eastern theatre, he touched off the battle of Gettysburg where he was wounded. He was a conspicuously brave officer.

Thus the threat to the Ohio Valley expanded.

That these three Confederate officers did not succeed was greatly due to the efforts of GEN. Lew WALLACE.

A great deal of confusion existed among the home guard and citizenry when Wallace entered the scene. Wallace, after a controversial misplay at Shiloh, had been relieved of his command by Secretary Stanton. He was back home, fishing on the Kankakee River when summoned by Gov. Morton of Indiana. Morton informed him that Bragg had broken loose from Chattanooga and that there was "nobody between Bragg and Louisville." According to the Wallace biography, Morton suggested that "it was better that Kentucky suffer than Indiana. She helped precipitate the misery." He asked Wallace to take one of five new Indiana regiments to Kentucky. Wallace found the command at Louisville unprepared and proceeded to Lexington with the 66th Indiana Volunteers. Wallace felt that the capture of Lexington was the equivalent to the surrender of Cincinnati. He had set his plans when he was again "kicked downstairs" on orders of Don Carlos Buell and relieved by General Nelson whom he outranked. (Nelson was defeated by the Smith forces at Richmond and later killed at Louisville in a personal duel with Gen. Davis of Indiana.)

Wallace went to Cincinnati in disgust and was there when the battle of Richmond took place. Next he received a telegram from Gen. Wright, Dept. Commander, and started for Lexington. But at Paris the order was countermanded and he was sent back to take command at Cincinnati.

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When Wallace came to Cincinnati the 3rd of September, 1862, much remained to be made ready with the defense. Secondary defenses, rifle trenches, gun movements and of course the movement of men and supplies to the perimeter. There is evidence that a few cannon had been placed in the most strategic areas - Ft. Mitchell, Ft. Whittlesey, Buford and other points. The subject of artillery must be left to others. But some idea can be obtained from ordnance and government pamphlets.
Guns. For instance, at Battery Kearney and Battery Shaler and probably at other points, there were 32 pounders. These were big guns and had range of little more than 1000 yards. There is also mention of 20 pounders ( Parrott ) and 12 pounders. Some are said to have had a range of over 4500 yards.

But on September 2nd, Gov. Todd of Ohio and Gen. Wright started the flow of ammunition and guns from Columbus and elsewhere. Gov. Todd also ordered all loyal men from counties to arm themselves, form companies and proceed to Cincinnati by railroad. This element became a part of the famous "squirrel hunters". Wallace found about 400 regular army men at the Newport Barracks. Many of them were used to drill the untrained citizens.

There was much assistance from local industries that made Cincinnati such an important defensive area. At the East End Shipyards scores of old boats were refitted — many river gunboats turned out. The packing houses had a record of over 600,000 hogs in one year. Hollenshade many army wagons and pontoon bridges — one contract called for 80 boats and 160 wagons in 20 days. Miles Greenwood's Eagle Iron Works rifled 60,000 muskets ( $80 per day ) and turned out 200 cannon, scores of gun carriages, caissons and even one sea-going monitor.

Within 24 hours of his arrival, Wallace had declared martial law. Newport and Covington were included. This suspended all business, stopped ferry boats and summoned ALL citizens to enroll for defense. A meeting with the captains of a number of steamboats produced the pontoon bridge which was constructed within 48 hours.

On September 5th, the units began pouring over this bridge into Northern Kentucky and steamboats hauled guns, supplies and straw to the Kentucky shore. The Buck-town Colored Brigade was assigned to the trenches back of Newport. The Squirrel Hunters found a place in the trenches fronting Ft. Mitchell. Regulars and artillery units took over the hill top batteries and a constant flow, from morning to night, crossed from the foot of Vine Street.

In Cincinnati, prior to this threat, there existed a number of trained military companies — The Colonel Rynas, Rover Guards, LaFayette Guards, Guthrie Grays, Zouaves and Turners. Most had been called to service. But many remained who had received some military training. The Silver Grays were among them.

Thus the modest estimate of N. S. Shaler numbered the strength of the perimeter at 25,000 men. There were probably far more than that.

This is what Gen. Heth found when he approached from the south on the Lexington Turnpike with an estimated 12,000 men. General Heth stopped — looked — and left.

By Saturday, September 13th, 1862, the crisis had passed and the thousands of volunteers were streaming back to their homes and their occupations.

Once more, in 1863, the trenches were occupied briefly because of a passing scare from John Morgan.
But from that date to this, these sites have gradually been erased by the farmer and the builder until there are but few remains to remind us that here once stood an army.
CONCLUSION

I quote from a recent newspaper article that in 1885, N. S. Shaler wrote in his "Kentucky, A Pioneer Commonwealth" that

"Until the morning of September 8th, General Kirby Smith could have broken this line from Bromley to Ft. Thomas with the loss of a few score of his men. Once, within the defenses, the very number of the mob engaged in the defense (estimated at 25,000 to 70,000) would have made his victory more certain."

Gen. Wm. T. Sherman once charged (Home Letters of Sherman) that Cincinnati "had furnished more contraband goods to the Confederacy than had Charleston and had done more to prolong the war than the State of Carolina."

Prof. Shaler failed to say why General Heth and Gen. Smith, a former West Pointer and West Point teacher, an old campaigner of Mexican and Indian wars considered one of the best leaders of the Confederacy, had not taken advantage of this "weak defensive line from Bromley to Ft. Thomas", the capture of which might have turned the tide for the South.

Perhaps Shaler, one of the greatest geologists, scientist and story teller of his time, should have known. He returned home from Harvard to take command of a home-guard battery which was a part of the perimeter stationed on land owned by his father. According to his biography, he later left the military and returned to Cambridge and geology.

As I stated in my opening paragraph, I have had no schooling in military tactics. But Henry Heth, after he saw what confronted him at Ft. Mitchell, DID turn in another direction.

So, from our kitchen police bench, we feel at liberty to observe that, historically, the Cincinnati Defense Perimeter may have been of more importance than some people have thought.  

5/26/62

Cliff Specht

Credits:

Memoirs of General Grant
Autobiography of Lew Wallace
Autobiography of N. S. Shaler
U. S. Military Maps 1862
T. Buchanan Read
Historical Collections of Ohio (Howe)
Cincinnati Guide (Ohio Rivers Project)
Generals in Gray
Notes on Guns of the Civil War (Lewis)
Pharmacist, fire chief dies at 81

Clifford H. Specht Sr., former fire chief, pharmacist and history buff, died at 12:23 a.m. Wednesday at Cincinnati Veterans Administration Hospital, at age 81.

His involvement in organizations had somehow touched the lives of most Southgate citizens.

Specht was born on Feb. 24, 1895, in Newport. His father was a pharmacist, and Clifford worked for him as a boy. He was graduated from pharmacy school when he was 19 and went into business at Specht's Pharmacy, Southgate.

In 1919 he married Anna Brinkman.

Specht was past president of the Northern Kentucky Firefighters Assn., and Southgate Fire Chief from 1928 to 1939. He also was Southgate city clerk.

Specht was past vice president of Northern Kentucky Historical Assn. As president of the Evergreen Cemetery Board, he was able to do much historical research on the cemetery, said his daughter, Mrs. Wilma Herklotz.

"He instigated the complete restoration of the cemetery chapel," she said. "He also was instrumental in getting historical markers in the area."

Specht was a member of John R. Little VFW Post, past commander of Robert D. Johnson American Legion Post, and a member of Southgate Junior Order, Southgate Masonic Club, Syrian Temple, Newport Commandery Knights Templar, Newport Masonic Lodge and Olive Branch Chapter R.A.M.

"When he was in his 60's, he started oil painting," his daughter said. "He was very versatile and talented."

He liked hunting and fishing, was a prolific reader and an expert on the Civil War.

Specht has had been ill for the past year, his daughter said.

He leaves his widow, Anna, at home, 112 Electric Ave., Southgate; daughter Mrs. Herklotz, Bellevue; sons Clifford Jr., Fr. Thomas, Fred, Southgate; 14 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Services 10 a.m. Saturday, Evergreen Chapel, Southgate. Visitation 4 to 9 p.m. Friday, Muehlenkamp-Erschell, Newport. Masonic services 7:30 p.m. Friday. Burial Evergreen Cemetery. Memorials to Shrine Burns Institute, Cincinnati.