



The CCC at Work in Richmond National Battlefield Park

HOW THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN CAMP 1375 SHAPED THE PARK

Many of us are well aware of how much the Richmond National Battlefield Park has grown in recent years, largely thanks to the RBA's efforts and those of the Civil War Trust. It is easy to take for granted the basic park that has existed for decades: units that each feature parking lots, roads, walking trails, and historic homes.

Much of the park's infrastructure, and its earliest preservation work, was done in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The institution itself also

molded the young men who labored here, giving them unique opportunities they otherwise might not have had.

In the 1920s none of the Richmond-area battle

sites were preserved, or even well-known. The Richmond Rotary Club, led by author and historian Douglas S. Freeman, made excursions to find the battle sites, often taking veterans from the Confederate Soldiers Home. The Club was inspired to put up markers, and eventually formed the Battlefield Parks Corporation to purchase key lands.

Their holdings became the basis for the Richmond Battlefield Park, becoming Virginia's first state park in 1932. Quickly efforts were underway to transfer the park to the National Park Service.

In the meantime the Great Depression had set in, and the CCC was one of the relief projects that performed work in parks nationwide. In July, 1933, Camp 1375 opened at the battlefield park. Run by army officers,

this camp, like all at the time, was segregated. Camp 1375 was an African-American camp, with men ages 18-28 from Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. Its enrollment was about 200.

Initially the men lived in tents, but barracks with wood stoves were completed by November. The camp stood just east of Fort Harrison, and the barracks were in a U-shape around a central courtyard with flag pole.

The men had a very structured schedule. The day began with reveille at 6:00 am, followed by breakfast at 6:30, sick call at 7:00, and at 7:15 the workday began. Lunch was a thirty minute break in the field. The day

ended at 4:00 and at 5:00 they held a flag lowering ceremony. Lights-out was at 10:00 p.m.

The enrollees had weekends off and were free to leave the camp. Sunday

services were offered. An account noted that, "Every Sunday morning a colored minister from Richmond attends the camp and conducts religious services. The chaplain visits the camp two times a month. There is a large attendance at the Sunday services."

The men were to bathe at least weekly, brush teeth daily, and keep hair and nails short. They also had to make their beds each day. The pay was \$30 a month, of which \$25 was automatically sent to their families.

The menu for February 5, 1938 was as follows: Breakfast: apricots, corn flakes, fried herring, fried potatoes, coffee, milk, cornbread, and butter. Lunch: Tomato, macaroni and cheese, sweet potatoes, corn, apple salad, devils cake, tea, bread and butter. Dinner: cold cuts, sardines, potato salad, beets, tomatoes,



Members of the 1375th Company C.C.C. Camp in 1935 (RNBP archives)



C.C.C. Camp Barracks, 1930s (RNBP archives)

lettuce, Jell-O, tea, bread and butter.

Besides the work on the park, they had the chance to take night courses. Topics included auto mechanics, carpentry, literacy, arithmetic, reading, spelling, writing, grammar, US History, algebra, electrical wiring, cooking, shorthand, table-waiting, typing, photography, drawing, leather and metal work, piano, first aid, safety, health, teacher training, and job applying. No doubt these skills served the men well beyond their days in the CCC.

Visiting speakers gave lectures on topics like local history and character-building, and there were field trips as well. Each week the men in the best-kept barracks won a pack of cigarettes. The men also received education about venereal diseases.

There were other activities too, like a choral club. The camp also had its own baseball team, and travelled to play nearby CCC camps. One year they went 9-0. These were educational and recreational opportunities which the men likely might not have had in their hometowns.

The men did a tremendous amount of work getting the park ready for visitation after the close of World War II, when it was ready for the public. The work included stabilizing earthworks to halt erosion, planting trees, clearing brush, fighting forest fires, and routine mowing. They also built what is now Battlefield Park road—linking several of the forts in that area, established trails at Cold Harbor and Gaines' Mill, built a contact station at Cold Harbor, did restoration work on the Garthright House at Cold Harbor, and created the picnic area near Fort Harrison. They even assisted with the 1936 flood in Shockoe Bottom in downtown Richmond.

While the work was impressive and well-intentioned, they did some things that the Park Service would not attempt today. For example, they largely reconstructed Fort Hoke without adequate



Checking erosion on earthworks, 1936 (RNBP archives)

documentation. Rebuilding the walls and creating a 'typical' Civil War fort, they did not rebuilt what had actually been there. Much of their work on earthworks was not well documented, today park planners would use a more cautious approach with managing earthworks and better document any work being done. For example, no field notes were taken during their archaeological investigations. Yet their work was revolutionary for the time.

To quote from a park report, "Fort Hoke as it is seen today is not an authentic reproduction of the original fort, however, the details of construction are authentic and conform to the specifications set forth in the field manuals in use during the war."

During these years in the mid-1930s, two 'education guides' were in place to greet visitors and explain the battlefields—the very first attempt at visitor services in the park. Unfortunately, little is known about them or their programs, or how the largely white audience received black guides.



Restoration work at Ft. Hoke, 1930s (RNBP archives)

Camp 1375 closed in 1938, having transformed the fledgling park into a facility now ready to receive visitors and interpret its resources. They had placed 125 signs and markers, planted 7,831 trees, built 11 miles of fire breaks, constructed 4 miles of trails, and built 4 miles of roads.

In 1930, National Park Director Horace Albright visited and toured the battlefields. He said to his host, J. Ambler Johnston of the Richmond Battlefield Parks Corporation, "I shall never forget the ride around the Richmond's battlefields with you... It won't be many years before it will be one of the best known parks in the country."

One final word on the CCC comes from a park report: "As one drives along the road, leading to the main fort, and sees long lines of breastworks, trenches, and moat, completely cleared of shrubs, weeds and the accumulated trash of seventy years, the magnitude of the job done by the CCC simply amazes". ❖

This article was researched and written by Robert (Bert) M. Dunkerly, Park Ranger, historian, preservationist, and award-winning author (*To the Bitter End: Appomattox, Bennett Place, and the Surrenders of the Confederacy*).

Masthead photo on page 1:
C.C.C. Camp 1375 collage



ANNUAL MEETING RECAP - GAINES' MILL TOUR

Last October, the Richmond National Battlefield Park hosted RBA's annual meeting & tour on the Gaines' Mill Battlefield. After accepting the transfer of 3 acres of battlefield land saved by RBA, Superintendent Dave Ruth outlined preliminary plans for this new addition to the park, including a foot bridge across Boatswain's Creek to connect this site to the existing Gaines' Mill Unit (*see article below*). Our resident historian Mike Andrus led a walking tour of this site made famous by Hood's Texas Brigade on June 27, 1862. The future of battlefield preservation efforts at Gaines' Mill looks promising.

What matters now is that this land is protected by the National Park Service. It is in the best hands possible, those of the Richmond National Battlefield Park. This is a banner day for the Richmond Battlefields Association! — Bernie Fisher, RBA president

PRESERVATION NEWS! The Richmond Battlefields Association was one of two recipients of the *2017 Edwin C. Bearss Preservation Award*. The award was presented by the Civil War Round Table of Chicago, the oldest such organization in the country. RBA appreciates the recognition from such a fine group, and is grateful for their generous donation to support our battlefield preservation efforts. ❖

EAGLE SCOUT PROJECT — 100' BRIDGE CONNECTS UNION & CONFEDERATE POSITIONS AT GAINES' MILL

Wyatt Schneck, a Life Scout with Boy Scout Troop 534, put his love of history into action recently. The young man spearheaded an Eagle Scout Leadership Service Project aimed at building a bridge across Boatswain's Creek on the Gaines' Mill Battlefield. In June 1862, this creek separated two opposing armies along its steep banks.

Land saved by the Richmond Battlefields Association was recently acquired by the Richmond National Battlefield Park. However, access to the Confederate (west) side of the creek was unavailable from the existing NPS Gaines' Mill Unit on the Union (east) side of the creek.

Acting as project manager,

Schneck gained approval for the bridge project and developed a plan to raise funds and secure building materials. The Richmond National Battlefield Park teamed up by providing some funding and materials.

Volunteers, including a substantial group of military personnel from Fort Lee, improved a walking trail built by RBA, manually transported the heavy building materials creek side, and aided in construction of the bridge.

Today, an impressive one-hundred foot wooden span connects the positions of the Union and Confederate forces. This new bridge will allow park visitors to explore the historic Gaines' Mill battlefield from both sides of Boatswain's Creek.

We owe Wyatt Schneck and all of the volunteers a debt of gratitude for their hard work. ❖

Published for the RBA membership

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RICHMOND DISPATCHES

AN OFFICIAL DISPATCH. —

The following dispatch was received by President Davis at a late hour on Friday night. It relates to the operations of Friday.

Headquarters, June 27, 1862
His Excellency, President Davis:

Mr. President

--Profoundly grateful to Almighty God for the signal victory granted to us, it is my pleasing task to announce to you the success achieved by this army to-day.

The enemy was this morning driven from strong position behind Beaver Dam Creek, and pursued to that behind Powhite Creek, and finally after a severe contest of five hours entirely repulsed from the field.

Night put an end to the contest. I grieve to stand that our loss in officers and men is great.

We sleep on the field, and shall renew the contest in the morning.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully,
(signed) R. E. Lee, General

- *The Richmond Dispatch*: Jun 30, 1862

There was much confusion regarding the small streams coursing through eastern Hanover County. At Gaines' Mill, Federal troops were positioned along Boatswain's Creek, not Powhite Creek. One can hardly fault Gen. Lee, however, even today Google Maps incorrectly identifies Powhite Creek as Boatswain Creek!

Yes!

I WANT TO HELP PRESERVE OUR NATION'S HERITAGE, PLEASE SIGN ME UP.

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