

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

FOR INTERPRETING TENNESSEE'S CIVIL WAR ERA MILITARY SITES

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Abatis

Rows of trees felled in the direction of the enemy with the smaller branches removed, the remainder sharpened to a point to create a defensive obstacle against advancing troops.

Advanced Works

Fortifications located beyond the glacis, but still within musket or rifle range of the main works.

Accouterments

Refers to the basic equipment of the infantry soldier; such as the cartridge box, belts, bayonet scabbard, haversack, knapsack, canteen, etc. When a soldier is under arms, he is said to be armed and accoutered.

Anchoring Gad

A device consisting of a three to four foot long “rope,” made from twig fibers, and attached to a gad and an anchoring picket. This was used to secure the fascine to the parapet wall.

Anchoring Picket

A stake driven into the parapet as it was built to tightly hold the ropes or anchoring gads, which held fascines, gabions, and hurdles in place as revetments.

Approaches

The lines of entrenchments or ditches by which besiegers approach a fortified position. The principal trenches are called the first, second, and third parallels.

Armory

A storehouse where arms were stored and repaired. The individual who made repairs to the weapons was called an armorer.

Army

The body of troops of various corps (infantry, cavalry, artillery, and engineers) organized and commanded by a general.

Arsenal

A facility where arms were made, repaired, and stored, along with other types of military equipage.

Artillery

This term includes all kinds of military cannon, mortars, howitzers, etc., and all munitions and implements required for their operation.

Attack

Any type of movement upon the enemy. In siege warfare the term attack implies the works constructed by the besiegers. When an assault was partially made, with the intent of deceiving the enemy and diverting attention, it was called a false attack or a feint.

Banquette

The inside step at the base of a parapet wall that allowed a soldier to stand, load and fire over the crest of the parapet while being sheltered.

Banquette Slope

An access ramp to the banquette.

Barbette Battery

Cannons (referred to as guns) were said to be in barbette when they were mounted so as to be able to fire over the crest of the parapet, providing a wide range of fire. In this position the firing angle of the guns was not limited, as in firing through embrasures. The disadvantage of firing in barbette was the increased exposure of the artillery crew to direct enemy fire.

Barricade

To obstruct the avenues of access, as roads, streets, etc. This was accomplished by overturning wagons, placement of large stones, *abatis*; and ditches.

Bastion

A projection from a main work (or field fortification) containing two faces and

two flanks that provide flanking fire to the front of the main work.

Bastion Fort

A polygon work with bastions at the corners. These eliminate dead spaces and angles in the main work.

Bastioned Front

An area of the work between the capitals of two adjacent bastions.

Battalion

Battalions consisted of approximately 500 men or one half the strength of a 1000 man infantry regiment. The term battalion was used loosely during the Civil War. Occasionally two companies (200 men) were referred to as a battalion, while the whole regiment was often mistakenly called a battalion. It was commonly accepted, however, that a regiment was composed of two battalions.

Battle

A contest between two large bodies of hostile troops. The term battle usually applies to a larger and more significant contest than a skirmish or an affair or engagement.

Battlefield

The area over which two large bodies of hostile troops engaged in combat. During the Civil War military site surveys conducted in Tennessee, battlefields were divided into two categories, small or large engagements. *Small engagements* involved a relatively small number of troops, while *large engagements* were fought by units the size of a division or greater, approximately 12,000 troops or more.

Battle Order

In the use of tactics, the order of battle referred to the arrangement or formations of troops drawn up in a line of battle, ready to meet the enemy. The theory of military formations was defined in all the U.S. and Confederate drill manuals of the day and was derived almost exclusively from translations of French manuals dating back to the Napoleonic era. Scott's *Infantry Tactics* of 1835 was updated by Hardee's *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics* in 1855, and in 1862 both of the above were combined in Silas Casey's, *Evolution of a Brigade and Corps D'Armee*. Casey's manual soon became the most popular on the subject. The usual order of battle began with a skirmish line, generally two companies, deployed 400 to 500 yards in front of the main line of battle. These were positioned at wide intervals and were used to locate the enemy or protect the main line from surprise. As the war progressed, frequently half of the regiment would form as skirmishers. The main line of troops (usually composed of six companies) was next in line and was drawn-up in two lines or ranks, for both attack and defense. The double line formation allowed

the maximum number of muskets to fire and made it possible for officers to better control their men in the confusion of battle. A brigade might occupy less than 500 yards of front. To the rear of the main battle line (300 yards) two companies were placed in reserve.

Berm

A narrow shelf between the parapet and the ditch (or exterior slope and the scarp), which prevented the parapet from collapsing into the ditch.

Bivouac

A temporary encampment for one night or longer with troops using tents or other types of hastily constructed shelters or lean-tos of wood branches or other types of available natural cover.

Blockhouse

In Tennessee, blockhouses were wooden defensive structures that served primarily to guard railroad trestles. They were constructed of heavy vertical timbers and incorporated flat overhead ceilings of heavy timber, usually covered with a thick layer of dirt and capped with sloping board and batten roofs to shed water. The exterior walls contained loopholes for the firing of weapons, and these were located just above an embankment made from dirt removed from a surrounding ditch. As the war progressed, horizontal timbers were added to double the thickness of the walls to enable them to withstand artillery fire. Most of the blockhouses constructed in Tennessee were square, rectangular or cross-shaped.

Bombproof

A structure built of wood and earth that could withstand artillery fire.

Boyau

In siege work fortifications a *boyau* trench was constructed to allow troops to move from one parallel trench to another. They were usually made in zigzag form to provide protection from enemy fire.

Breach

An opening in an enemy wall or position usually made by artillery fire, for the purpose of allowing entry by attacking troops. During the Battle of Franklin, Tennessee in 1864, Confederate infantry, without the aid of supporting artillery, breached the federal entrenchments.

Break Joints

In sod revetments, each layer of sod overlapped the joints of the prior layer, adding strength to the sod wall.

Breastwork

A hastily constructed parapet that was breast high and usually did not include a banquette or step at the base of the parapet.

Bridge Head

A work composed of one or more redans or bastions that protected a bridge from enemy fire. It was also known by its French name, the *tete-du-pont*.

Brigade

A military unit, ideally consisting of four regiments, or approximately 4,000 soldiers, though during the Civil War actual numbers varied. Brigades were commanded by brigadier generals.

Camp

A temporary place for the repose of troops, whether for one night or a long period of time.

Cantonment

Refers to the quartering of troops in temporary structures, sometimes distributed among towns or villages, or when placed in huts at the end of a campaign.

Capital

An imaginary line that bisects the salient angle, dividing a work into two symmetrical parts.

Caponnier

A work projecting perpendicularly from the main work to provide flanking fire in the ditch and along the front. The work could also be bomb proofed and contain loopholes and serve as a line of communication or a passage to another work.

Casemate

A bombproof structure made of timber and earth and constructed of post and beam form, used to house artillery. In permanent fortifications it could also be used as quarters for the garrison, a powder magazine, a hospital, or as a last place of refuge within a fortification if overrun by the enemy.

Cavalier

An elevated artillery position within a fort, commanding its interior and the surrounding countryside. This was sometimes constructed on the terreplein of a bastion or curtain.

Cheek

This refers to the sides of an embrasure and was often revetted with fascine, gabions, or sand bags.

Chevaux-de-frise

An obstacle made of a wooden shaft or body from which wood projections or spears radiated in four directions. They were used to obstruct passages, protect a breach in the line, or form an impediment to cavalry.

Citadel

A small and strongly enclosed work, located in the interior of a fort, used as a final place of defense. Sometimes referred to as the keep.

City-class Ironclad

The United States Navy created these vessels as their first operational ironclads. They were designed with a single paddle wheel located mid-ship and enclosed within the protection of the ship's armament. There were a total of seven ironclads built by the U.S. during the war and all of them were named after cities. They were also known as "Pook's Turtles" (after the designer) or sometimes as "Eads Ironclads" (after their builder).

Company

The smallest tactical unit of soldiers, usually containing 50 to 100 men, commanded by a captain.

Commanding Position

A position that overlooked another position or surrounding country and enabled an army to give a plunging fire.

Corps

A military unit of two to four divisions, commanded by a major general in the Union armies or by a lieutenant general in the Confederate armies.

Cottonclad

Many Union and Confederate vessels were given extra protection by stacking cotton bales on their decks as barricades against small arms and light artillery fire. Larger vessels were known to have carried over 900 bales. Some Confederate "cottonclads" used compressed layers of cotton between the heavy walls of their gun-decks. Most of the Confederate cottonclads were reinforced on the bow and also carried an iron prow for ramming.

Counterscarp

A wall located on the far side of the parapet ditch, opposite the exterior slope and scarp wall of the parapet. If the entrenchment is constructed with a glacis, the

counterscarp wall will also include a banquette, interior slope, covered way and glacis slope. Most of the entrenchments constructed in Tennessee were built without the use of a glacis.

Covered Way

In permanent fortifications, a narrow walkway between the counterscarp and the glacis that covered troop movements and provided an outer line of defense for infantry. Very few of these entrenchments were constructed during the war. Union Fort Negley in Nashville was the largest inland masonry fortification built during the war, and it contained covered ways.

Cremaillere or Indented Line

A zigzag line of field fortifications. This type of earthwork was placed between two advanced works that were too far apart to protect each other as well as the space between them.

Cross Fire

Rifle or cannon fire delivered from two or more directions against the same target or point of ground in front of a work.

Crow's Foot

A star-shaped obstacle (also called Caltrop) made of iron prongs that radiate in all directions. When placed on the ground, at least one point will always point upward, forming an obstacle for troops and especially cavalry. They appeared in warfare as early as the Bronze Age and are still in use.

Cunette

A small ditch within the main ditch that acted as a drain or run-off for water.

Curtain

A section of the rampart that existed between two bastions and connected the flanks of the bastions.

Dead Angle or Space

Any angle or ground in front of a fortification that could not be covered by musket or artillery fire.

Defilading

The process of constructing the profile of a parapet to protect its interior from enfilading and plunging fire. Defiladement of fortifications consisted of either raising the parapet, constructing traverses, or excavating the terreplein below the line of sight of the enemy, located on a commanding height. A work constructed in this manner was said to be defiladed.

Defile

A narrow passage or road.

Demilune

A French engineers term meaning half moon. Such works were often constructed in early Renaissance defenses. The demilune was a crescent-shaped outer work created to protect a bastion or a fort's curtain wall. In later fortifications, demilune became synonymous with ravelin, a v-shaped outer work.

Detached Works

Fortifications constructed beyond musketry or rifle range of the main work but serving as part of the overall defenses of the main work.

Direct Fire

To fire perpendicular to the curtain wall or line of works; to fire into the front of an enemy.

Ditch

An excavation made in front or behind an earthwork providing the earth for that work. When the ditch is located in the front it serves as an obstacle to an attacker and when dug in the back, it affords the defender a secure position.

Division

A military unit consisting of approximately three brigades or 12,000 men. As with other units, actual numbers varied during the course of the Civil War.

Earthworks

A generic term applied to fortifications that were built for temporary use, especially those constructed of earth.

Embrasure

An opening in a parapet wall through which an artillery piece or other weapon could be fired.

Embrasure Battery

A battery that fired through embrasures in the parapet wall and provided more protection to the guns and crews than barbette style batteries. The drawback was a severely reduced field of fire for the guns.

En Barbette

The arrangement of cannon to fire over the parapet wall and not through embrasures. This provided a wide field of fire but afforded little protection for the gun

crew (see Barbette Battery).

Encampment

A place where troops temporarily camped. Civil War troop movements resulted in numerous short-term encampments of over night or several days duration. Long-term encampments are considered to be camps with durations of weeks, months, or even years.

Enfilade Fire

A sweeping rifle or artillery fire delivered along the length of the parapet from a direction that was parallel to the front of the target so that it crossed the target from one flank to the other.

Engineers

In 1861 the engineers of the Union army were organized in two small but highly professional bodies – the Corps of Engineers and the Corps of Topographical Engineers. In 1863 these were merged and became known collectively as the Corps of Engineers.

Entanglement

An obstruction, usually *abatis*. Occasionally telegraph wire “entanglements” were strung close to the ground to trip attackers. Wire entanglements were created by union troops to help deter Confederate attacks on Fort Sanders in Knoxville in 1863.

Entrenchment

A temporary fortification or fieldwork composed of a ditch and parapet.

Epaulement

An earthen wall constructed on the open ends or flanks of a battery fortification to protect the flanks from enemy fire. Some sources use the term to denote both the front and flanks of the parapet of a battery.

Exterior Ditch

The ditch on the outer side of the parapet, between the parapet and the enemy.

Exterior Slope

The outer side of the parapet that faced the enemy. The exterior slope extended from the superior slope to the berm.

Face

The two sides of a work that converge to form a salient angle. The faces of field

works were the stretches of parapet extending from one angle in the work to the next and were designed to provide a direct fire on an attacking body of troops as they advanced up the glacis.

Fascine

A long cylindrical bundle of closely-bound thin saplings. The saplings were usually referred to as green brushwood and were approximately one to two inches in diameter. Fascine was used as revetment for sustaining the slopes of a battery or parapet wall or to cover excessively wet ground. The most common type of fascine (one of three types below) was called battery or long fascine (also called *saucissons*) and was made in bundles 18 feet long by ten inches in diameter, weighing about 140 pounds. Trench fascine was made four to six feet long and was used for crowning a line of gabions in a sap or trench. These were made by sawing the long fascine into three parts. Water fascine, used as cover for marshy ground, was 18 inches in diameter and six to nine feet in length. Fascine could also be used as fill for crossing an enemy ditch during an attack. Five men could construct long fascine in one hour, including the cutting of wood.

Fascine Choker

A device composed of two five-foot-long wooden poles with one end of each connected to a chain and used to tighten the fascine into bundles by looping the chain around the saplings and tightening with leverage from the poles. The fascine were then tied with tough withes or gads, prepared by twisting small sapling so as to render them flexible or easily bent into knots.

Fascine Horse

A “machine” used to hold saplings in a bundle to form fascines. Driving stakes into the ground, obliquely, in pairs so that each pair crossed at the same height made the horse. They were then firmly lashed together to form an X-shaped support and repeated every eighteen inches until the desired length of the horse had been attained.

Field Engineering

The practice of making temporary military fortifications and military roads, the planning and construction of military bridges, and the attack and defeat of military works. This included all the various duties of engineer troops, either in the operation of a campaign, or in the dispositions on the battlefield.

Field Fortification

Field fortification was the art of engineering and strengthening a position for temporary use with available materials. Military engineers developed field works along the same principals as permanent fortifications, but were given greater latitude in their application in the field.

Field Works

Most field works were commonly called entrenchments during the Civil War. These were temporary fortifications constructed of available materials and used to defend important positions, or bodies of troops, against a sudden assault from superior forces. Field works were usually confined to a single campaign and used to strengthen positions that were to be occupied for short periods of time. Most field works could be constructed by troops in a single day. Field works can be divided into two major categories: *Major field works* were constructed to serve as both protection and as an obstacle, while *minor field works* were intended only for protective cover. The primary distinguishing feature was the placement of the ditch. Major field works contained a ditch around the exterior of the parapet, whereas minor works usually had no exterior ditch or a ditch on the interior of the parapet. As per the regulations of the day major works included redans, lunettes and redoubts, while minor works usually referred to rifle pits, blockhouses, and stockades.

Flank

The right or left side of a position or body of troops. Flanks are also the re-entering sides of a lunette or bastion.

Flying Bridge

A floating vessel (usually some type of wooden raft) that was propelled from one bank to the other by the current of the stream. The usual procedure to create a “ferry” of this kind was to attach the head of the boat, by means of a cable and anchor, to some point near the middle of the stream. By steering obliquely to the current, the boat could cross from shore to shore along the same arc.

Flying Sap

Refers to the rapid construction of the type of siege trenches referred to as saps.

Fort

An enclosed work of higher class than a field work, consisting of either a detached work or a work constructed within the framework of a large fortified area. During the Civil War the term was often used to mean any important position, no matter what type of military engineering was used in its construction.

Fortification

The military art of strengthening a position to resist an attack from a superior force. If the fortification was to be placed in a position of great importance and the materials were of durable quality, it is called a permanent fortification; if not it is called a field or temporary fortification. A position can be strengthened by the use of natural resources such as rivers, forests and hills or by artificial means using earth, timber, and stone for temporary or permanent works.

Fougass

Fougass was a small mine placed in a pit or shaft dug in the ground. It could be hidden in the ditch of a work with a thin covering of dirt or debris. It could also be placed and detonated anywhere advancing troops were forced to cross. An obstacle was often placed over it, such as *chevaux de frize* or *abatis*, in order that the attackers were occupied long enough for the charge to be detonated by means of a long fuse. Sometimes a fougass was made by using several loaded artillery shells placed in a watertight box with a charge of powder under them. Another type of mine used during the war was the contact mine. It consisted of a small powder charge with a mercury fulminate detonator arranged to explode under the pressure of a man's foot. The term "torpedo," as it was used in the 1860s, referred to another type of explosive mine fired by use of mechanical or electrical detonators. Both sides denounced mines as illegal and immoral at different times but continued to use them, though few were ever manufactured.

Fortress

A fortified town or city, or any large fortification so strongly fortified as to be capable of resisting a large and sustained attack. Fortress Rosecrans in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, was one of the largest earthen fortifications in the state and contained over 200 acres within its walls.

Fraise

A fraise is an obstacle formed by means of constructing a palisade, placed horizontally or slightly inclined at the edge of the berm of a ditch, so as to be concealed by the counter scarp crest.

Gabion

Stout, rough, cylindrical baskets, open at top and bottom used torevet the interior slopes of batteries or the cheeks of embrasures, to form the parapet of trenches, and to form free-standing defensive works. Gabions were made of various dimensions and heights according to their use. The open-end basket was woven from twigs and small branches and was filled with dirt.

Gabionnade

A fieldwork constructed of gabions.

Gads

These were also called withes and were used to tie fascine bundles. They were made of tough twigs or sapling rods and were to be "no smaller than your little finger and no larger than your thumb." They were prepared by twisting by hand, in order to make them supple, then "tying" them around the fascine bundles.

Gallery

A covered passage way usually in the counterscarp and used as a ditch defense. The gallery was about six feet high and four feet wide.

Glacis

A mound of earth placed in front of the ditch. The function of raising the ground in front of the rampart was to eliminate any dead space and to allow a sweeping fire from the parapet. The Glacis also caused shots from enemy cannons to ricochet over the main works. It was seldom used in field works due to the time and energy needed for construction.

Gorge

The open-ended side of the rear of a lunette or redan or the opening in an enclosed work. If the work was detached or isolated, the gorge may have been fortified with a stockade wall.

Gunboat

The term gunboat was used broadly during the Civil War to describe any armed vessel that was not a ship of the line, a frigate, or a sloop. The term included all ocean-going ships and steamers that could operate for long periods of time at sea. It also included Union and Confederate ironclads and monitor class vessels with V-shaped hulls of the ocean going type. These ships were handicapped by not being able to sail far from the protection of a friendly harbor. The term gunboat also includes all of the flat-bottomed armored ships that navigated the inland waterways and were predominately propelled by either side wheels or stern paddle wheels.

Head Log

Logs placed horizontally on top of an earthwork and raised three to four inches above the work allowing a soldier to fire a rifle through the opening without exposing his head to enemy fire. Log supporting struts were often placed beneath the head log and back across the top of the trench to keep the head logs from rolling into the trench if hit by enemy artillery fire. This type of defensive work was used with deadly effect by entrenched federal troops at the Battle of Franklin, Tennessee.

Headquarters

Refers to buildings or field sites occupied by commanding officers and their staff for one night or up to several months.

Hurdle Revetment

A wicker or woven sapling wall, 3 to 4 feet high and 6 to 9 feet long, constructed between upright poles. Hurdles were used as revetments in temporary works, and were placed on the steep interior slope or used on the walls of traverses. Hurdles were also used to form a dry footing in trenches during wet weather.

Indented or Cremaillere Line

A continuous line of alternating (zigzag) long and short faces constructed perpendicular to each other. The reenterings were arranged so as to provide for cross-fire in front of them.

Inundations

Water inundations were created by damming streams that passed in front of a field fortification. This type of obstacle was rarely used during the Civil War, but at Knoxville, Tennessee, sections of the Federal defenses were partially protected by damming several creeks.

Interior Slope

The angle of the parapet wall extending between the superior slope and the banquette.

Ironclad

A ship or boat that was sheathed in thick iron plate. Ironclad ships were in use in Europe before 1861, but not until the American Civil War did any ironclad vessels fight one another.

Keep

The final stronghold in the interior of a complex fortification. Often referred to as the citadel.

Loopholes

Small openings in a wall through which a weapon could be fired. Most frequently seen in blockhouse and stockade construction.

Lunette

An earthen fortification similar to a redan in construction and function, with the addition of two flanking walls on either side of the open gorge.

Magazine

A bombproof compartment designed to safely store and contain gunpowder and fixed ammunition.

Merlon

A portion of the parapet wall between two embrasures.

Military Crest

The military crest of a ridge is a position that allows troops to see all the ground in front of them. The topographical crest of a ridge is the highest point on the ridge.

and allows for a favorable position for distant observation but would not allow troops to see the foreground and fire upon an enemy. Therefore, on a convex slope, the military crest is below the topographical crest.

Military Foundry

Foundries were used for the manufacture of cast iron or bronze cannons or other metal military products, such as munitions, small arms, swords, and belt buckles. In Tennessee several civilian foundries were converted into military use by the Confederacy, the T. M. Brennan Foundry in Nashville being one of them.

Military Hospital

During the surveys of Civil War military sites in Tennessee, military hospitals were categorized as *short term* and *long term*. The first refers to buildings that were used as temporary hospitals following a battle, as well as tent hospitals, known as “brigade depots” or “forward dressing stations.” The latter were located as close as possible to battle fronts, and the wounded from the field were brought there by stretcher-bearers. Soldiers treated in these front line hospitals were often placed in ambulance wagons or train cars and transported to larger field or divisional hospitals further in the rear. Wounded soldiers from brigade depots or divisional hospitals were often transported to “general” or “base” hospitals, which were usually permanent buildings located in larger cities.

Military Railroad Depot

Military depots usually consisted of collections of warehouses built for the storage of large quantities of military goods. Supplies were shipped by river, train, or wagon to these depots, usually located in larger cities and guarded by extensive fortifications. During the Civil War, Nashville, Johnsonville, and Murfreesboro, Tennessee, became major Federal storage facilities.

Military Saltpeter Mine

A military controlled mining operation for extracting saltpeter from the floors of caves. This material was refined and became a major component in the manufacturing of gunpowder.

Military Shipyard

Civil War era military shipyards were designed for the construction and maintenance of vessels such as gunboats, transports, and barges. Most were located in large cities on major waterways. In Tennessee, important military shipyards were located at Nashville, Johnsonville, Chattanooga, and Memphis.

Mitre

Another name for a priest cap or swallow tail earthwork.

Mouth

The narrow opening of an embrasure at the interior slope of a parapet.

Oblique Embrasure

An embrasure that intersects a parapet at an acute angle.

Obstacle

A device or material, such as *abatis* or *chevaux-de-frise*, placed in front of a fortification or a passage to hinder attackers by breaking up the orderliness and momentum of an attack. It delayed enemy troops at a point in the field where defenders could most effectively sweep the enemy with gunfire.

Palisade

Pointed stakes placed in the ground at an angle facing the enemy. The stakes were 6 to 8 inches in diameter and 6 to 10 feet long. A small ditch, about 2 feet 6 inches in depth and width, was dug for the palisade line. A large lintel or beam, called a riband, was nailed to the bottom of the palisade stakes, sunk into the ditch, filled with earth, and packed. When finished, at least 7 feet of palisade was angled above ground. Another riband was sometimes attached to the upper portion of the palisade stakes, about 18 inches from the pointed ends, to provide additional strength. The palisade was usually placed in front of a ditch or the base of a slope, as an obstacle. Today the terms stockade and palisade are sometimes used interchangeably, but during the Civil War, palisade referred to the above described angled defensive configuration, while stockade referred to vertical post defenses.

Pan coupe

A pan coupe was constructed by modifying a lunette or redan fortification by the addition of a small face (or flattened point) constructed across the salient angle, allowing a wider range of fire.

Parallels

Trenches constructed parallel to enemy works to contain reserve troops and artillery during a siege. Successive parallels were dug, each being nearer to the work and connected by saps.

Parapet

The wall of the rampart that troops stood behind to defend the fortified position. In field works, the height of the parapet was recommended at about 7 feet, the thickness of the parapet varied according to the kind of fire it was intended to resist. If the parapet was out of the range of enemy artillery (about 800 yards), then it was constructed to resist only musketry or rifle fire, a thickness of 2½ feet. To withstand artillery fire the thickness of the wall was 6 to 10 feet.

Permanent Fortifications

Fortifications designed for long-term occupation and constructed of durable materials. Fort Negley in Nashville and Fortress Rosecrans in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, are two examples.

Picket Stake

A stake driven through fascine or other forms of revetment in order to secure them to the interior slope of the parapet wall.

Pioneers

Soldiers equipped with axes, saws, spades, mattocks, pickaxes, billhooks and other tools for clearing the way before an advancing army or to entrench. Pioneers were sometimes detailed from different companies of a regiment and formed under a non-commissioned officer.

Pisa

A form of sun-dried brick revetment made of ordinary earth mixed with clay and sometimes with chopped straw. The mixture was kneaded with water and laid wet, 12 inches thick by 2 feet broad and well packed. To protect the face from weathering, grass seeds or oats were sown, but were not to be cut when the stalks matured.

Plane of Sight

An imaginary line sighted by an engineer that represented the converging enemy's fire into the interior of a work.

Platform

A foundation, usually built of timber, which supported an artillery piece and kept it from miring into the dirt surface of the terreplein.

Plongee

The downward slope of the superior slope of the parapet; also the downward slope of the sole or floor of an embrasure.

Plunging Fire

An annihilating fire from a high or commanding position. River batteries were often positioned on high ground to obtain a plunging fire that would strike the vulnerable and unarmed decks of gunboats and other river transportation.

Pontoniering

The construction of temporary military bridges or ferries by engineers, aided by a detachment of sappers. The bridges were made using wooded pontoon skiffs

(called *bateau* by French engineers), which were transported on carriages, or by using wooden raft frames covered with a vulcanized India rubber canvas. During the Civil War these devices were generally called pontoons, but the engineer corps continued to refer to them by the older spelling “pontons.”

Postern

A covered passage beneath the rampart that provided communication from the interior into the ditch. The passage from the covered way into the surrounding countryside, usually in front of the works, was called the sally port.

Priest Cap

An earthwork resembling the capital letter “M,” having an indented salient that forms two small redans. It was seldom used as a detached work, but was often constructed at the end of a main line of defenses. One example of this type fortification is recorded in Tennessee.

Profile

A wooden outline, or frame of poles and laths nailed together, usually constructed on the ground and raised to a vertical position to simulate the dimensions of the desired earthen fortification to be built. Dirt would then be excavated from the ditch and thrown back into the profiled framework and compacted until it filled the dimensions of the profile. The parapet was then ready to be finished with a suitable revetment.

Railroad Guard Post

This refers to posts that protected vulnerable points along the rail system such as bridges, trestles, or depots. These were often defended using stockades, blockhouses, or earthworks such as redoubts and entrenchments.

Ram

A ship or boat equipped with an armored prow for ramming another ship was called a “ram.”

Ramp

An inclining passage from the interior of a work to the terreplein, allowing troops and artillery access to the parapet wall.

Rampart

A broad wall or embankment forming the main body of a fortification and consisting of a terreplein and a parapet.

Rampart Plane

That part of the rampart that is visually in line or in the same plane as a point in

the rear of the work and the commanding heights in the front of the work. The plane represents the converging fire along the length of the rampart.

Rampart Slope

The side of the rampart between either the banquette or the terreplein and the rear of the work, constructed with a slope of forty-five degrees.

Ravelin

A large V-shaped outwork composed of two faces forming a salient angle, constructed outside the ditch. It was used to cover the curtain wall, the gate, or the flank of a bastion. It was sometimes referred to as a *demi lune*. Two ravelins were used in the construction of Fort Negley at Nashville.

Redoubt:

An earthwork that is enclosed on all sides. The overall configuration may be square, polygonal, or circular. Redoubts on level ground were generally square or pentagonal. On a hill or rising ground their outlines often followed the contour of the summit of the hill. Tennessee redoubts were often relatively small detached works used to fortify hilltops or to strengthen main lines of defense.

Redan

A V-shaped earthwork, open at the rear, the opening being referred to as a gorge. In Tennessee examples occur both as detached works and as portions of defensive lines.

Re-entering

An angle or line that points inward or toward the interior of the work. Almost all flanks joined faces of field works at re-entering angles.

Regiment

A military unit composed of ten or more companies, usually about 1,000 men at the start of the Civil War. Regiments were commonly thought to consist of two battalions. As the war progressed regiment size was often under strength, with considerably less than 1,000 men, in some reported instances as low as 375.

Relief

The height of the work. High or bold relief refers to a tall or commanding work; low relief refers to a work that is low in height.

Retrenchment

A retrenchment was a parapet or trench constructed in the rear of the forward parapet of a field work that defending troops could fall back to when driven from the outer works. It was a second line of defense that could be used to prevent enemy

forces from entering the interior of a field fortification or penetrating through a line of works. Retrenchments were used in the works at the Battles of Franklin and Nashville and at other Civil War sites across Tennessee.

Reverse Fire

A fire that strikes the rear of a work or a fire that hits the interior slope of a parapet at an angle greater than thirty degrees.

Revetment

Material used to sustain an embankment when the slope is steeper than the natural slope. Revetments were constructed with materials such as wood, stone, sandbags, sod, gabions, or fascines, held in place with wooden picket stakes.

Riband

A thick plank or log nailed horizontally to the base of a row of palisades and placed in the ground to strengthen the palisades. Another riband was sometimes placed about 18 inches from the pointed ends or tops of the palisades to also provide more stability.

Ricochet Fire

Ricochet artillery fire was delivered at a low elevation toward a parapet so that shot would pass over the parapet wall and bound along the interior of the work.

Rifle Pit

Rifle pits were relatively simple to construct, requiring no engineering expertise. They could be thrown up quickly almost anywhere and provided fairly efficient protection against small arms and some light artillery fire. Some of the entrenchments had an interior or exterior ditch, but it was not intended as an obstacle for the enemy. Rifle pits can be subdivided into two distinct types of works defined by their lateral extent (rather than their profiles) and function. *Skirmish pits* were small, detached works providing cover for one or two or small groups of troops. They were placed on the flanks of a fortified or unfortified position to provide cover for skirmishers or pickets. *Rifle trenches* were extended lines of rifle pits that were used to connect major field works and cover the front of infantry troops deployed in a position. The term rifle pit was a “catch-all” phrase used during the war, and its true definition was commonly misinterpreted when describing types of infantry field works. Both subdivisions were used in many locations throughout Tennessee. Fort Donelson National Battlefield in Dover, Tennessee, contains excellent examples of both types of rifle pits as described above (see also “Entrenchment”).

Salient

Part of a work that projects outward from the main work.

Salient Angle

A projection of a work that forms an angle.

Sally Port

An opening in a work that allowed access into the work and was used by troops to make a sally or sortie out of the work.

Sandbag

A canvas bag (sometimes tarred) measuring roughly 14 inches by 30 inches and filled three-fourths full with earth to form a quick defensive structure or a revetment.

Sap

Armies advanced on enemy works by the construction of approach trenches, referred to as saps, the work being carried out by sappers (the term sap derives from the French word *sappe*, meaning spade or shovel). A large sap roller was placed at the head of the sap (or trench) and advanced foot by foot as gabions were placed on the side towards the besieged work and filled with dirt. These protected the workmen from enemy fire. When enemy fire was slack many gabions could be placed and filled at the same time, this procedure being known as a flying sap. If two gabion parapets were placed one on each side of the trench, this was called a double sap.

Sappers

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a system of siegecraft was developed by French Field Marshal Vauban that provided a systematic approach for attackers and their artillery to enemy fortifications by means of entrenchments. Under the cover of artillery fire, the attacking troops dug “saps,” or approach trenches, toward the enemy (thus the origins of the word “sapper” for certain kinds of engineers). During the American Civil War, detachments of sappers, miners, and pontoniers were used in advance of the infantry to open and repair roads, establish pontoon bridges, and occasionally to lay siege to fortified positions.

Sapping

This is a general term applied to the operation of forming trenches, along which troops may approach an enemy work without being exposed to enemy fire. Construction of the trench could be carried out night and day without cessation.

Sap-Roller

A device that was placed at the head of the trench being dug by a squad of sappers and pushed ahead of them (using specialized tools) to provide cover from enemy fire. It consisted of two large concentric gabions, 6 feet in length, the outer one having a diameter of 4 feet, the inner one a diameter of 2 feet 8 inches. It was made

shot proof by filling the space between the gabions with small pieces of hardwood, cotton, straw, or some similar type material.

Saucisson

The largest type of fascine measuring 10 inches in diameter and 18 feet long, used in constructing batteries and magazines.

Scantling

A small-sized timber for construction, similar to a stud or rafter.

Scarp

The inner slope of the ditch under the berm.

Side Wheeler

A vessel propelled by steam-powered paddle wheels on either side of the hull.

Signal Station

Usually located on prominent hilltops, signal stations were set up to form an interlocking grid throughout the theater of war. Their primary function was to pass messages by semaphore (or “wig wag”), but their localities also offered ideal views of enemy movements. Most of the signal stations had signal towers of wood or used large trees to support observation platforms. In a few cases strategically located buildings, such as the Tennessee State Capital building in Nashville, were occupied as signal stations.

Simple sap

A trench constructed on ordinary soil beyond the range of the enemy’s artillery grape shot was called a simple sap or ordinary trench. The earth was thrown up on the side towards the enemy, so as to form a kind of parapet to cover the men in the trench. The work was done by working parties detached from various military units, supervised by engineer troops.

Skirmisher

Skirmishers were used in advance of the main body of advancing troops. They fought on open ground, taking advantage of the terrain. When formed into line of battle, a regiment might fight with all its companies abreast, forming one long double line of men, or one or more companies might be held back as reserves. One or more companies were usually sent forward as a skirmish line. In a divisional attack, whole regiments might be assigned as skirmishers. As the war progressed skirmish lines grew heavier, in some cases consisting of half the regimental strength, the remainder being held in line of battle as reserves. Skirmish lines might be 400 to 500 yards in advance of the main formation.

Small Pickets

An obstacle made of pickets or sharpened branches two and a half feet long and driven into the ground one foot apart in quincunx order.

Sod revetment

Sod or turfs used for the formation of the interior slopes of parapets and the cheeks of embrasures. The sod was to be cut from good grass, with thickly matted roots, and was to be mowed and watered before it was cut. Sod was cut in two sizes with the typical pattern consisting of headers that were 12 inches square by 4½ inches thick and stretchers that were 18 inches long by 12 inches broad and 4½ inches thick. For the first layer the sod was laid horizontal, grass side down, with two stretchers and one header alternating and packed firmly with a mallet. When this was completed a second layer with the grass side up was laid on the first, positioned so as to cover the joints. In hot weather the revetment was to be watered frequently.

Sole

The bottom or floor of an embrasure.

Splay

The widening effect of an embrasure.

Sortie

A secret movement of troops made by a strong detachment of troops in a besieged position, to destroy or retard the enemy's approaches.

Star Fort

An enclosed work composed of salients and re-entering angles. It was an ineffective design for defenses as the flanks did not receive sufficient flank protection.

Strategy

The art of creating a plan of campaign, combining a system of military operations to attain certain goals, such as the character of the enemy, the nature and resources of the country, and the means of attack and defense.

Stern-Wheeler

A flat-bottomed steamer propelled by a single paddle wheel located in the stern of the vessel.

Stockade

Stockade, or picket, was an early frontier term that described a relatively simple enclosure designed in a German cross or square shape, often with bastioned corners. Vertical log walls usually contained loopholes for firing. Troops often dug outer

ditches and heaped the earth against the exterior walls to add strength to the stockade. Before blockhouses became common in Tennessee in 1864, Federal troops relied primarily on stockades to protect railroad trestles.

Superior Slope

The top of the parapet extending from the interior slope to the exterior slope.

Swallow Tail

A priest-cap or mitre type of earthwork.

Tactics

As opposed to strategy, tactics is the art of handling the movement of armies upon the battlefield within sight of the enemy.

Tambour

A loop-holed stockade with two faces forming a salient angle, constructed to defend the gorge of a small field work or to guard the doorways of a fortification or fortified building.

Temporary Fortifications

Fortifications built for a battle or a campaign and constructed of available materials; usually constructed in a single day.

Terreplein

The name given to the floor or level ground surface inside a fortification, located between the banquette slope and the interior slope of a rampart.

Tete du pont

A detached fortification designed primarily to cover a bridge, usually constructed as a redan.

Tinclad

A river gunboat that was minimally armored with thin sheets of iron plating no more than 5/8 inch thick. Some tinclads were reinforced by two layers of plating but were still only protected from small arms fire and were susceptible to artillery shells that sometimes penetrated entirely through the vessel. Most tinclads were stern-wheelers and the exposed wheel could be disabled if hit by enemy fire. This flaw soon led to a new class of vessel, the "city-class ironclad."

Traverse

An earthen wall or embankment, perpendicular to the main rampart wall, that provides protection from enfilading fire. In the construction of artillery batteries,

splinter-proof traverses were placed alternately between the cannons to limit the destructive effect of a shell exploding within the battery. These rectangular earthen traverses were usually reveted with fascine, gabion or sand bags.

Tread

The top platform of the banquette.

Trench

A common name for a parapet and ditch; also the parallels or zigzags constructed by besiegers in an attempt to capture enemy works.

Trestle bridge (for infantry)

A bridge principally used for crossing a small stream not more than eight feet in depth. In shallow water, they also served to connect floating bridges with the shore.

Trestle bridge (railroad)

Military Bridges of the American Civil War were usually constructed with unskilled laborers, supervised by officers trained in such construction, using materials obtained on or near the site. The illustration depicts a military railroad bridge in Virginia that was 80 feet high and 400 feet long. A Civil War era guide to building military railroad bridges (*Military Bridges: Designs for Trestle and Truss Bridges*, 1864) was published by Colonel Herman Haupt, Chief of U.S. Military Railways.

Trous de loup

An obstacle consisting of a sharpened stake placed in an inverted pyramid or cone-shaped pit, some six feet in diameter and about the same number of feet in depth. They are usually placed in “checkerboard” rows a few yards in front of the ditch and concealed by some type of slight covering. An identical type of defensive tool, substantiated by recent archaeological findings, was used by Roman legions in 52 BC at the siege of Alesia in Britain. *Trous de loup* derives from the French, meaning wolf holes.

Vertical Fire

Artillery mortars generally used vertical fire to reach their targets. Fire was said to be vertical when it was delivered at a high angle.

Withes

Wooden twigs twisted together to form a rope for tying a fascine, also known as gads (see Gad).

Works

The term works was commonly used by Civil War era military personal in ref-

erence to any type of earthen field works or field fortifications.

Zigzag

A line of defiladed approach trenches, built by besiegers in an attempt to move toward enemy works while under the protection of a parapet. The zigzag trenches could eventually lead to the capture of the besieged position.