

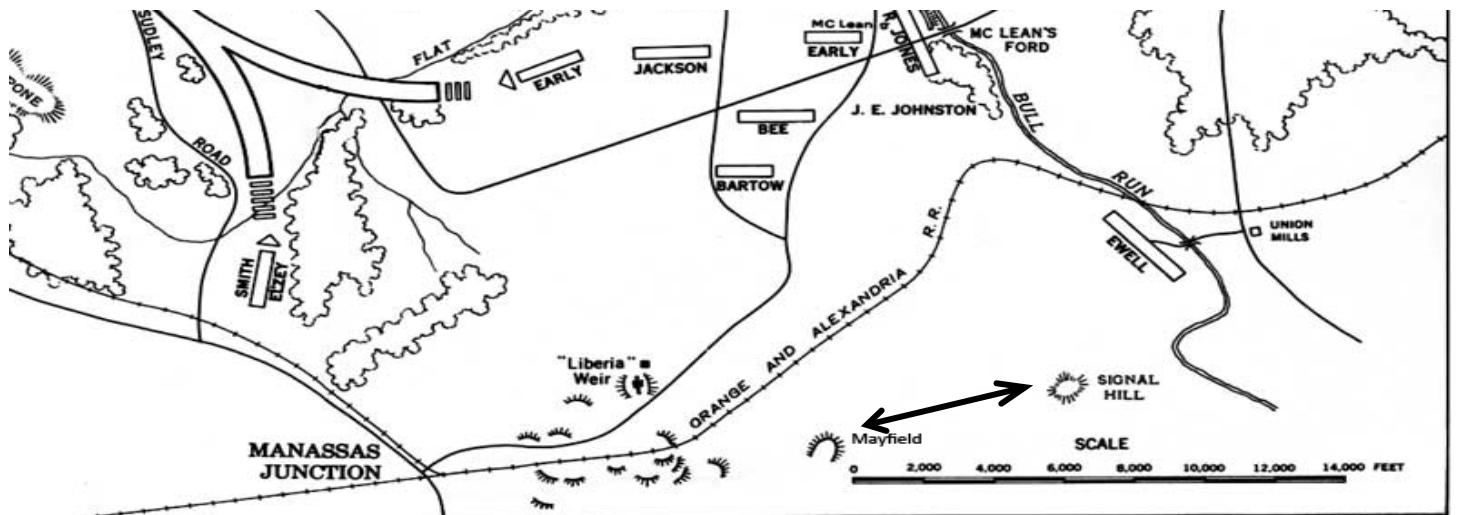
Mayfield Earthwork Fort History

Situated between the Buckhall and Russia Branch tributaries of the Occoquan River and overlooking the Orange & Alexandria Railroad and Manassas Junction, Mayfield's strategic high ground and water made it an ideal location for a fort.

During May and June 1861, General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, CSA constructed a ring of earthwork forts to defend the junction of the Orange & Alexandria and the Manassas Gap railroads at Manassas. Mayfield was one of four Confederate signal stations established by Captain Edward Porter Alexander, Beauregard's signal officer. Constructed of earth reinforced with log revetments, the forts were armed with naval guns captured from the Norfolk Navy Yard. Mayfield may have also contained some "Quaker Guns," logs colored black to deceive the enemy as to the true firepower of the fort. Confederate soldiers and slaves furnished by local planters built the fort.

The mostly treeless site had large open expanses of grass. Soldier huts or tents were located in or nearby the six-sided fort. The fort had parapet walls, 16 flared gun openings, a southern entrance, and three interior structures.

In 1861 or 1862 Mayfield owners John and Virginia Hooe and children left Mayfield, leaving their 18 x 50 foot red stone house and 615-acre estate. They returned at war's end.



 = earthwork fort

Historical Context

July 21, 1861

Adapted from *The Signal Corps of the U.S.A. in the War of the Rebellion* by J. Willard Brown

The Confederate Signal Corps consisted of officers and men detailed from the line. The soldiers were newly trained in code and signals, and as couriers and telegraph operators. The officers were "intelligent men of good education, possessing good eyesight, and persons in whom the regimental commanders have especial confidence, the privates to be selected on account of their intelligence, and to be able to read and write."

The men practiced at 5 hours a day, memorizing the signal code, practicing with wands (pine sticks), reading signals and increasing their speed in all areas. As the men learned their signals, the distance between signalers and signal readers was increased. Lookouts watched day and night for incoming signals and movements of the enemy. When weather, landscape, or distance prevented sending signals by flag or torch, couriers carried messages to commanding officers or other signal stations. Officers made reports every thirty minutes, whether there was anything of interest to report or not.

Signal camps like Mayfield were usually small camps on high places, much preferable to the crowded, muddy, and unhealthy conditions of other camps. Because the camps tended to be isolated (with the exception of those around Washington), officers stayed with their men in the evenings, building camaraderie and cohesion.

On July 2, 1861, Captain Edward Porter Alexander reported to Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard in Manassas to establish a signal corps. He selected "a set of clever young men, drilled them and put them into operation" at four stations: Signal Hill, Centerville, Stone Bridge, and Mayfield.

On the morning of July 21, 1861, Alexander was at his main station on Signal Hill scanning the horizon. While peering through a glass at the area near Sudley Ford at about 8:45 a. m. he saw a glitter which turned out to be the morning sun on a brass field piece. Then he saw the glinting bayonets and musket barrels of a large Union column marching toward Sudley Springs to turn the Confederate left flank. Quickly he signaled Col. Nathaniel G. Evans at the Stone Bridge, "***Look out for your left; you are turned.***"

This message played an important part in the tactical development of the battle, and represents the first use under combat conditions of the "wig-wag" system of signaling. The famous flag signal sent from Signal Hill in July 21, 1861 was probably seen by the men at the fort at Mayfield.

Then Alexander sent a note to Beauregard by courier that read

I see a body of troops crossing Bull Run about two miles above the Stone Bridge. The head of the column is on the woods on this side. The rear of the column is on the wood on the other side. About a half a mile of its length is visible in the open ground between. I can see both infantry and artillery.*

The Union rout at Bull Run created special interest in the rapid field communication a signal corps could provide. The North moved quickly to establish a Signal Department.

**Signal Corps USA 1902 Reunion Booklet*