

**The Legacy of Stones River:
Occupation and the Home Front in Tennessee**

**A Symposium in Murfreesboro, TN
October 22, 2005**

Summaries of Speakers' Presentations

Jim Lewis, Stones River National Battlefield

“Showing Their Ill Nature: The Military Occupation of Murfreesboro, 1863-1865”

Mr. Lewis focused on the changing nature of the Union's occupation of Murfreesboro during the Civil War, contrasting the lenient occupation of the spring and summer of 1862 with the much harsher occupation that followed the Battle of Stones River (Dec. 31-Jan. 2, 1862). Using plentiful quotes from soldiers and civilians, Mr. Lewis illustrated the tense cohabitation of occupiers and local residents, the devastation of the countryside by the troops' enormous appetite for provisions, and the slow but steady demise of slavery.

During the first two years of the war, Murfreesboro was occupied at various times by both Confederate and Union troops. As Lewis made clear, the majority of local white residents favored the Confederacy. The Union occupation from March to August of 1862 was relatively benign; the occupying soldiers had little combat experience and were largely conciliatory. The Confederate occupation in late 1862 began to put a strain on local resources.

Lewis emphasized that the scale and destructiveness of the bloody Battle of Stones River shocked most of Murfreesboro's civilians. The Union occupation that followed the battle was decidedly harsher than the previous stay by the Yankees. Lewis quoted local businessman and Confederate supporter John Spence: “It did appear that the federal army had come with redoubled determination to destroy everything before them. They showed more ill nature in every thing they did than the year before.” The Union's determination to prosecute the war vigorously in and around Murfreesboro was evident in the construction of Fortress Rosecrans as a massive Union supply depot, the imposition of full martial law, the greatly increased use of former slaves as laborers (and as soldiers as well), the commandeering of homes, and intensive foraging in the countryside.

With Fortress Rosecrans basically completed by July 1863, the Union occupation force in and around Murfreesboro was drastically reduced in size. Less experienced soldiers, most of whom were convalescents, made up the occupation force and focused mainly on guarding the railroad from Confederate cavalry and guerilla raids. Lewis pointed out that the scale of destruction decreased, but so much damage had been done, basically stripping the countryside bare, that privations continued. Many locals actually relied on the Union army for food. There were still some arrests and executions of Confederate partisans. Commerce revived somewhat, with the Union army firmly in control of it. At

the same time, areas beyond the garrison's control sunk into anarchy, held hostage by guerilla violence.

Lewis concluded his presentation by using Fortress Rosecrans as a symbol of the cycle of occupation. When it was abandoned by the U.S. Army in 1866, it had already begun to crumble, resembling the devastated landscape around it. Local residents raided the fortress to get supplies to rebuild their homes and businesses, thus beginning the reconstruction of Murfreesboro.

Kevin Smith, Middle Tennessee State University

“The Hospital in which we are is an old Presbyterian Church’: Archaeology of the Union Occupation of Murfreesboro”

Dr. Smith illustrated his remarks with images of some of the Civil War sites and related artifacts that he has surveyed over the years. His talk clearly illustrated his contention that, in essence, all archaeological sites in Tennessee are Civil War sites as there are so many artifacts from the war remaining under the ground. While he never intended to be a Civil War archaeologist, he often finds himself dealing with the war and its effects on the landscape.

Dr. Smith's dig during the summer of 2003 at the site of the former First Presbyterian Church (1820-1863) in Murfreesboro unearthed some materials related to the building's use as a church and as an early Tennessee state capitol, but the majority of the artifacts were related to the Civil War. During the war, first the Confederate army and then the Union army used the church as a field hospital. Numerous Union soldiers wounded at the Battle of Stones River were cared for at the church. The Union army later used the church as a supply warehouse.

Dr. Smith has plotted the distribution of Civil War artifacts found at the church site. He has determined that the church probably also served as a stable during the war--such stories associated with Civil War-era churches often turn out to be myths, but evidence suggests that First Presbyterian did house horses at one point. Dr. Smith also found some evidence of desecration of the church cemetery during the war. In addition, he discovered that there were possibly some residential buildings on the site that housed African Americans during the war. The church building was destroyed sometime between the fall of 1863 and the spring of 1864; possibly the church was dismantled by Union soldiers and former slaves in need of bricks that could be used to build shelters during the harsh winter of '63-'64.

Dr. Smith concluded his discussion of the church property by describing how the church persistently petitioned the federal government for recompense for the destruction of the church building and its contents during the war. Thirty years after the conflict, Congress awarded the church \$4,000 in damages.

Carol Crowe-Carraco, Western Kentucky University
“Women on the Home Front: ‘Oh, lawdy what are we goin’ do’”

Dr. Crowe-Carraco discussed black and white women’s experiences during the Civil War in Tennessee and Kentucky. While some women served as spies and soldiers, most women lived through the war as homebound non-combatants. They experienced a high level of anxiety, with mounting concerns about their relatives on the battle lines and their families at home. In essence, women faced the everyday problems of family life along with war-related difficulties that grew in number and magnitude as the war proceeded.

The rigors of war came to most areas of Tennessee and Kentucky. Dr. Crowe-Carraco used numerous anecdotes to illustrate the challenges that women experienced, especially as scarcity and hunger increased. The lack of food only made worse the everyday mid-nineteenth-century problems of contagious childhood diseases, high child mortality, childbirth dangers, and insufficient medical care.

Dr. Crowe-Carraco pointed out that yeomen women and their families in particular suffered as food grew scarce. Although many slave women also experienced a scarcity of provisions, they at the same time helped bring about the steady demise of slavery that was a cause for celebration and renewed hope. Early in the war, many planter women struggled with the new responsibility of being in charge of agricultural production and the management of field slaves; by the war’s later years, they had to adjust to the departure of much of their labor force.

Women in many areas of Tennessee and Kentucky had to contend with the incursions and threats of both armies at various times during the war. Women who lived near the battlefield, such as residents of Perryville, Kentucky, and Murfreesboro, Tennessee, witnessed bloodshed and suffering that shocked them terribly. Mortality was high among both Tennessee and Kentucky soldiers during the war, leaving many women widowed.

Dr. Crowe-Carraco concluded her talk by entreating members of the audience to save their journals, letters, and e-mails so that future historians will be able to write the histories of women in the 21st century.

Stephen V. Ash, University of Tennessee
“When the Yankees Came to Tennessee”

Dr. Ash began by emphasizing the significance of Tennessee’s central location within the Confederacy. If the Union was going to prevail, it had to control Tennessee. The North succeeded in this aim, so that Tennessee was the only Confederate state totally under Union control before the war ended. As Dr. Ash made clear, most Tennesseans spent most of the war under Union occupation, which made the wartime experience of the state’s residents unique among their fellow members of the Confederacy.

Dr. Ash next stressed the importance of Tennessee's internal geography that had resulted in distinctive agricultural economies in the state's three grand divisions. The slave population was concentrated in Middle and West Tennessee, and most of the white residents of those areas supported the Confederacy. East Tennesseans, on the other hand, tended to support the Union.

The political reconstruction of Tennessee began following the fall of Nashville early in 1862. Dr. Ash described the working relationship between President Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson, whom Lincoln appointed as military governor of Tennessee. Dr. Ash made the point that Lincoln and Johnson approached Tennessee's political reconstruction with the assumption that they could focus on stifling the leaders of the state's Confederates because the people at large weren't really secessionists at heart. This assumption turned out to be erroneous, and the Union's conservative, conciliatory approach had to give way to a heavier hand, as Dr. Ash would describe in detail.

Dr. Ash reviewed the social and economic characteristics of occupation in Tennessee. Although there was panic among many Confederate supporters when the Yankees arrived, the army early on took a lenient stance. There was little harassment of Confederates or confiscation of property. Resistance among Confederate supporters, who hoped that Tennessee might be redeemed from Union rule, took the form of spying, smuggling, and guerilla warfare. This resistance was threatening enough that the Union occupiers of Tennessee had to revise their approach.

The Union army responded with a harsher policy that included arrests, house burnings, and the seizure of provisions. These reprisals sometimes worked, but other times they just led to increasing violence from Confederates. As Dr. Ash made clear, rural areas in particular descended into violence and social chaos in the latter years of the war. There was a complete breakdown of community relations in many of these locales. Agriculture was at a standstill, and starvation was real for many residents.

Dr. Ash concluded his talk by analyzing the demise of slavery in Tennessee. He emphasized that slaves took the first steps to end slavery; they were active, not passive, participants in their own emancipation. Although at first they were not welcome in Union army camps, eventually their persistence paid off. By mid-1863, any slaves who remained with their owners in Middle and West Tennessee were doing so voluntarily. By the end of the war, slavery in Tennessee was no more—the only state in the Confederacy that had seen slavery completely dismantled by war's end. Dr. Ash made the point that this self-emancipation was almost entirely peaceful.

Question-and-Answer Session

Participants engaged in a lively discussion of the following issues: the wartime contraband camp experiences of slaves who had escaped to Union lines; the population of Murfreesboro during the war; Confederate military strategy after the fall of Middle and West Tennessee; the role of students in Dr. Smith's archaeological dig; the status of

schools in the state during the war; and the needs of elementary and secondary school teachers who teach the Civil War today.