

A Double-Edged Sword at Shiloh

BY KIM A. O'CONNELL

Of all the Civil War battlefields, the late historian Shelby Foote once said, Shiloh National Military Park has changed the least since the 1860s. "Except for macadamizing all the roads and putting up monuments, it's very much the way it was at the time the battle was fought," Foote mused.

Located in southwestern Tennessee, Shiloh preserves the bucolic green hills and fields where about 110,000 Union and Confederate troops clashed in April 1862 (story, P. 30), resulting in nearly 24,000 casualties. First established in 1894, the park now includes more than 4,000 acres of the core battlefield, as well as the Shiloh National Cemetery, a new 20-acre park unit and interpretive center at Corinth, and well-preserved prehistoric Indian mounds.

Because of its relatively remote location, Shiloh does not yet suffer from issues that plague battlefields in more populous areas. "We are 60 miles from the nearest interstate," says park Superintendent Woody

Harrell. "The 2000 census was the first time that the population of Hardin County exceeded the number of killed, wounded and missing at Shiloh."

But the park is not without its challenges. "To say that we are very rural and isolated is a doubled-edged sword," states Harrell. "It means that we haven't had to deal with the pressures of Manassas or

Fredericksburg, but it also means that there are fewer people in the vicinity who champion the battlefield, or resources we can draw upon for preservation."

The battlefield abuts the flood plain of the Tennessee River, a natural buffer zone. But key areas of the historic Shiloh and Corinth battlefields remain unprotected. In recent years, the National Park Service has worked with the state of Tennessee, the Civil War Preservation Trust (CWPT) and the Tennessee Civil War Preservation Association (TCWPA) to acquire battlefield lands from willing sellers for permanent protection, either as part of the park or through private conservation measures. The CWPT recently helped to acquire nearly 200 acres of land related to the battle of Davis Bridge, Tenn., part of the 1862 Corinth campaign.

"There are 200 or 250 acres that are outside the current boundary and above the flood plain," Harrell says. "If they could be protected, it would enhance the ambience of what the battlefield looked like in the 1860s. But land acquisition money is much tighter now. And if our current neighbors decide to sell, people could do major developments on our edges that would change that historic appearance."

On the upside, the park benefits from its inclusion in the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area, a federal, state and local partnership to preserve and interpret the state's many battlefields. "There are as many as 1,500 battle sites in the state," says Mary Ann Peckham, executive director of the TCWPA. "We focus as much as we can on those battlefields, like Davis Bridge, that may or may not be the best known in the country." The association is now compiling a condition assessment of all the Tennessee battlefields.

Interpretation is also a major focus at the park. The 13,000-square-foot interpretive center at Corinth, which opened in 2004, includes an unusual water feature that traces 100 years of American history.

Last summer, park staff unveiled the new Tennessee state monument, the largest such structure to be placed on the Shiloh battlefield in 88 years. Constructed of black granite, the monument depicts three soldiers in the process of saving the Confederate standard. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/shil. □



Shiloh National Military Park is free from despoiling intrusions and congestion at its core and on its fringes. One can tour the park at an unhurried pace—unlike at many Eastern theater battlefields.

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