

HISTORIC RAIL FENCE RECONSTRUCTED ON RAYMOND BATTLEFIELD

Friends of Raymond, with the help of the Civil War Trust, purchased 67 acres of core battlefield property at Raymond in June 2009. Then, after the land had been cleared of superficial growth in the spring months of 2011, an amateur FOR archaeology team, led by retired Brigadier General Parker Hills, jumped at the opportunity to study the ground. Hills, a resident of Clinton, MS, and president of FOR when the land purchase was made, made plans to slog into the muddy fields in the December holiday season. With Hills were two trusted friends and experienced relic hunters, Jason Polk, D.D.S. of Richland, and his brother, Alan, a Raymond lawyer, who brought their metal detectors while Hills lugged his GPS, wire marking flags, storage bags, and notebook. On occasion a Jackson newspaperman, Tom Hughes, brought his detecting machine and assisted in the work. The work began in the winter of 2011 and ended in the early months of 2015. After five years of traipsing in the muddy fields, the findings were well worth the effort. One of those findings resulted in the construction of a period rail fence.

Several soldier diary accounts tell of a split rail fence behind which the Union line sought shelter, and that fence was depicted in two drawings by on-the-scene newspaper artist Theodore Davis. However, the fence was torn down during the battle, and its location was lost to history and virtually forgotten by historians. But the team located the elusive fence line by following the clues in the diary of a sergeant from the 20th Illinois. Almost immediately after following the soldier's detailed description (in paces and rods) of the fence's distance from the creek, the team began to find a line of unfired bullets—bullets dropped by soldiers in the heat of battle.

Metal detectors and GPS device were laid down for a few moments as the team paused to envision the blue line pouring out of the woods along the southern bank of the creek, surprised by the sudden and savage attack of the 7th Texas. It was one of those "Eureka moments," because the muddy researchers could almost see and hear the desperate soldiers in blue clambering their way to the meager shelter of the fence rails, harassed by buckshot as ferocious as a swarm of outraged bees. The astonished team could almost hear the reverberating sounds of .69 caliber balls and buckshot splattering against the rails, throwing splinters in all directions and causing many a Federal soldier to drop his .58 caliber Minié ball while attempting to load his rife-musket. The line of

dropped and smashed balls told quite a story, especially the story of where the fence was located on that fateful day.

Hills went on the speaking circuit to raise funds to build the fence, and in February 2016, the San Joaquin Valley Civil War Roundtable donated the necessary funds. In December 2016, using archaeological evidence, the fence line was staked off using the GPS coordinates of the discovered relics, the battlefield artist's sketches, and the eyewitness descriptions. In May 2017 the fence was constructed, and just over a month later in July, an interpretive marker and cannon were moved to the fence battle line.

Piece by piece, the puzzle of the Raymond battlefield is being assembled, and the actions are being accurately interpreted. Now, the lost history of this battlefield is being rediscovered and retold, one piece at a time.