

Fort Duffield

West Point, KY

At 4:30 a.m. on April 12, 1861, the guns of the Confederate forces under Pierre G.T. Beauregard opened fire on Fort Sumter in the middle of Charleston Harbor. Native Kentuckian and Union General Robert Anderson occupied the fort. After surviving the bombardment, Anderson surrendered with no casualties. Robert Anderson was then sent home appointed as the first Commander of the District of Kentucky in hopes of bolstering Union sentiments in the Commonwealth and keeping her in the Union.

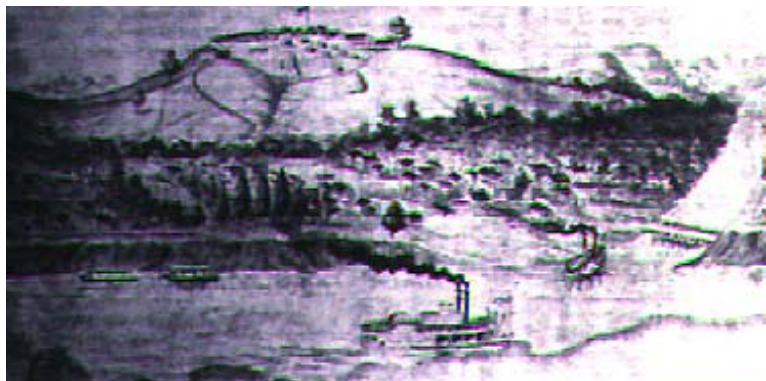
By September, the Kentucky General Assemble had argued for months whether to hold a convention of session or stay with the Union. Finding no clear majority for either course, they instead had chosen a third option of Neutrality in an effort to keep the armies of the now split nation from making the Commonwealth their battleground.

Kentucky's neutrality came to an end on September 4, 1861 when Confederate troops under the command of General Leonidas Polk occupied Columbus, Kentucky to harass Union river traffic on the Mississippi River. Troops under U.S. Grant countered the confederate occupation two days later by taking Paducah. By October the Confederate army had established a defensive perimeter anchored at Columbus in the west, stretching across the state to the Confederate Capitol at Bowling Green occupied by overall Confederate commander Albert Sidney Johnston and on to the Cumberland Gap in the east. President Abraham Lincoln was determined to move them out. Kentucky was pivotal in his strategy to defeat the confederacy and restore the Union. About this time, General Anderson had taken ill after the defeat at Fort Sumter and could no longer serve his appointment in Kentucky. William Tecumseh Sherman was selected as his replacement.

While in command, Anderson had been searching for a strong defensive position to protect Louisville and mobilize an army to move on the Confederates in southern Kentucky. He found what he was looking for at the confluence of the Ohio and Salt Rivers at West Point, KY. Once in command General Sherman acted quickly to complete the plans of his predecessor to fortify West Point by ordering the 37th Indiana and the 9th Michigan regiments there. Sherman planned to use West Point as a supply base for those Union troops stationed at Elizabethtown, Kentucky.

Fort Duffield as it appeared in an 1861 sketch

The Union garrison at Elizabethtown was astride the L&N railroad, the main north south rail link for



both the Union army at Louisville and Albert Sidney Johnston's Confederates at Bowling Green. The troops at this Hardin County post were assigned to protect this vital rail link and be prepared to move south to meet any Confederate threat. In order to insure the success of his overall plan Sherman needed a reliable supply line. West Point's location made it the ideal choice. In order to protect the supply depot Sherman ordered that a fortification be constructed on Pearman Hill. This position commands West Point and the rivers. The fortification of this area would help secure the Federal supply line and Union troops would have defensible position to fall back upon in case of a military set back.

By November 1861 the fortification of Pearman Hill had begun. Engineers of the 9th Michigan Infantry initiated construction of the earthworks that would be named Fort Duffield on Sunday November 3, 1861. Ten pieces of artillery were eventually placed within the fort. By December, in addition to the fort, soldiers were constructing log structures for their quarters just outside of the earthworks. By January 1, 1862 the cabins and the fort were finished. The Federal army had some 950 troops stationed at Ft. Duffield. The supply line was secure. By the end of January 1862 the fort would be abandoned, as the troops were needed elsewhere. The war moved south, as the Federal forces took the offensive against the Confederate perimeter. The formidable fortress would not see duty again, except for the Confederate invasion of 1862.



Replica log structures constructed at Ft. Duffield.

Earthworks at Fort Duffield



This fort is an earthwork structure that traverses the top of the heights overlooking the rivers. The earthworks run some 640 feet along Pearman Hill and according to a letter by 9th Michigan Capt. Charles V. DeLand, the distance from the top of the wall to the bottom of the ditch in 1861 was 17 ft and the top of the wall was 9 ft. wide. Time and the elements have eroded the walls to today's present height and thickness. The original design of the fort is a serpentine wall, open on the Ohio River or

north side that was intended to protect against an invasion from the South. The fort was first named in honor of the commander of the 9th Michigan Infantry Colonel William W. Duffield's father, Rev. George Duffield, a Michigan clergyman. It is generally believed

that Fort Duffield is the oldest Union Civil War fortification in Kentucky. It is certainly the most unique. As a rule the other forts in the state tend to be "star or home plate shaped" enclosures, Ft. Duffield is more of a wall and is not enclosed. Ft. Duffield is one of many fortifications in Kentucky that were constructed to defend cities, railroads, rivers and other key points in the Bluegrass state.

Monument erected at Fort Duffield in 1993

The fort is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Activities include a self-guided walking tour of the fort and annual Labor Day and Memorial Day Weekend programs.

For more information please contact:

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Source:

1. <http://www.state.ky.us/agencies/khc/ftduff.htm>
2. Fort Duffield Heritage Committee

