

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

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NATIONAL REGISTER, HISTORY  
& EDUCATION  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

323

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Roper's Knob Fortifications  
other names/site number 40WM101

2. Location

street & number off Liberty Pike not for publication N/A  
city or town Franklin vicinity N/A  
state Tennessee code TN county Williamson code 0187 zip code 37064

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets    does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant    nationally    statewide X locally. (    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Herbert L. Hays Date 2/16/00  
Signature of certifying official

DSHPO Tennessee Historical Commission  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property    meets    does not meet the National Register criteria. (    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:  
 entered in the National Register     
   See continuation sheet.  
 determined eligible for the     
National Register  
   See continuation sheet.  
 determined not eligible for the     
National Register  
 removed from the National Register   

Edson H. Beall 4/6/00

other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

   Signature of Keeper Date of Action

Roper's Knob Fortifications  
Name of Property

Williamson County, Tennessee  
County and State

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## 5. Classification

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Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)    Category of Property (Check only one box)

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private      | <input type="checkbox"/> building(s)     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-local            | <input type="checkbox"/> district        |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-State | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal          | <input type="checkbox"/> structure       |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> object          |

### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count).

| Contributing | Noncontributing |            |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| <u>0</u>     | <u>0</u>        | buildings  |
| <u>1</u>     | <u>0</u>        | sites      |
| <u>0</u>     | <u>0</u>        | structures |
| <u>0</u>     | <u>0</u>        | objects    |
| <u>1</u>     | <u>0</u>        | Total      |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Historic and Historic Archaeological Resources of the American Civil War in Tennessee

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## 6. Function or Use

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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

|                  |                      |
|------------------|----------------------|
| <u>DEFENSE</u>   | <u>Fortification</u> |
| <u>LANDSCAPE</u> | <u>Forest</u>        |
| _____            | _____                |
| _____            | _____                |
| _____            | _____                |

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

|                  |               |
|------------------|---------------|
| <u>LANDSCAPE</u> | <u>Forest</u> |
| _____            | _____         |
| _____            | _____         |
| _____            | _____         |
| _____            | _____         |

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## 7. Description

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Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A  
roof N/A  
walls N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
other N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Roper's Knob Fortifications  
Name of Property

Williamson County, Tennessee  
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions).

MILITARY
[Blank lines for other categories]

Period of Significance

1863-1865
[Blank lines for other periods]

Significant Dates

1863
[Blank lines for other dates]

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A
[Blank lines for other affiliations]

Architect/Builder

N/A
[Blank lines for other architects/builders]

Criteria Considerations N/A

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or a grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

- Previous documentation on file (NPS) N/A
preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data

- X State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository: Tennessee Historical Commission

Roper's Knob Fortifications  
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## 10. Geographical Data

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Acreeage of Property 58.44 acres Franklin 63 NE

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing    Zone Easting Northing

1 16 514830 3978000    3 16 513800 3976590  
2 16 514200 3976400    4 16 513860 3978000

     See continuation sheet.

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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## 11. Form Prepared By

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name/title Philip Thomason

organization Thomason and Associates date November 11, 1999

street & number P.O. Box 121225 telephone (615) 385-4960

city or town Nashville state TN zip code 37212

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## Additional Documentation

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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## Property Owner

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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name The Heritage Foundation of Franklin and Williamson County (c/o Mary Pearce) and State of Tennessee (Real Property Management), c/o Larry Kirk

street & number P. O. Box 723 and 312 8th Ave. N telephone 615/591-8500

city or town Franklin and Nashville state TN zip code 37064 and 37243

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Roper's Knob Fortifications   
name of property  
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DESCRIPTION

Roper's Knob is a conical hilltop located approximately 2,000 feet northwest of the intersection of Liberty Pike and Mack Hatcher Parkway in Franklin, Williamson County, Tennessee. Franklin is situated approximately fifteen miles south of Nashville and was a strategic garrison held by the Union Army from 1863 to 1865 during the Civil War. Union forces used Roper's Knob, which at that time lay outside the Franklin town limits, as a signal station. The site consists of a central redoubt surrounded by an outer entrenchment, both of which are clearly discernible and retain a high degree of integrity.

A winding footpath on the south side of the hill leads to the top of Roper's Knob and the Civil War earthworks. The hill has a steep slope and is covered by brush and hardwood timber. No buildings or structures are present on the property. The earthworks are well preserved and definable and have deteriorated only slightly due to natural erosion. At the foot of the hill to the south is a ca. 1970 subdivision and Liberty Pike. To the east and north is the Mack Hatcher Parkway.

The earthworks are situated at the summit of Roper's Knob and command an impressive view of the Harpeth River Valley. The redoubt is circular in design, approximately 108 feet in diameter, with a ten to fifteen foot opening in the south wall. The walls of the redoubt are well defined and measure four to five feet in height. On the north side of the redoubt's interior are two, three to four foot deep pits approximately twelve to fifteen feet in diameter. These pits either served to hold ammunition or were the location of two cisterns, which are mentioned in Civil War descriptions of Ropers Knob.

Surrounding the redoubt is an outer elliptical entrenchment approximately 519 feet long east to west, and 200 feet north to south. The walls of this outer entrenchment are also well defined and measure two to three feet in height. An opening in this outer entrenchment lines up with the opening of the redoubt. The footpath leading to the top of the hill ends at this opening. A possible encampment site lies on a level area along the outer western edge of the entrenchments. In this encampment area is a discernible brick pile, which is possibly the remains of a chimney fall.

These fortifications have not been significantly disturbed and they retain a high degree of integrity. The earthworks have experienced some degree of natural erosion, but the walls of the redoubt and outer entrenchment are clearly defined and readily visible. The Roper's Knob fortifications meet the requirements for earthworks set forth in the multiple property nomination "Historic and Historic Archaeological Resources of the American Civil War in Tennessee, 1861-1865," which was documented in May of 1997. Highly defined and undisturbed, the Roper's Knob earthworks maintain integrity of design, material, and workmanship. Its immediate setting has remained relatively unchanged since its use in the Civil War, although there are continual encroachments from modern residential and commercial building. The site conveys a strong sense of the era's time and place.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SUMMARY STATEMENT

Roper's Knob is significant under National Register Criterion A from 1863-1865 for its role in the military history of the Civil War. The site is representative of fortifications constructed by the Union army as a signal station during the war. The fortifications were constructed in 1863 and served as an important communication post with visibility of six miles in all directions in the Harpeth River Valley. Franklin occupied a strategic location in middle Tennessee during the Civil War. The Tennessee and Alabama Railroad (also known as the Nashville and Decatur Railroad) crossed the Harpeth River at Franklin. This vital rail crossing near Nashville made it an important point in the Union defenses of the region. Completed in 1863, the Roper's Knob fortifications retain much of their historic character and design.

Roper's Knob meets the registration requirements for earthworks set forth in the multiple property documentation form, the "Historic and Historic Archaeological Resources of the American Civil War in Tennessee, 1861-1865." Under these requirements, eligible earthworks are those that possess sufficient character and integrity to retain their sense of time and place from their period of significance. Earthworks possess integrity if their historic landscape features and surroundings are intact and if there are no associated significant intrusions. A site must retain integrity of setting, location, feeling, and association of its physical remains and surrounding historic landscape features. The earthworks must possess sufficient integrity of these qualities to provide a sense of time and place from the Civil War era. To be eligible under criterion A, earthworks must have a strong association with the strategic planning or specific campaigns of the Civil War, or illustrate offensive or defensive planning and tactics which are representative of the evolvement and course of the Civil War.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In February of 1863, the town of Franklin, Tennessee became a Federal post commanded by Colonel C.C. Gilbert. Located just fifteen miles south of Nashville, Franklin held a strategic position in the Union's line of communications and supplies as well as defense. To secure the Union garrison at Franklin, the army constructed fortifications on surrounding hilltops throughout the area. A signal station was established on Roper's Knob, which was visible from hilltops surrounding the large valley in which Franklin was situated.

The fortifications at Franklin were constructed between April 19 and May 29, 1863. Approximately 5,000 men accomplished the operation. Each day two reliefs of 600 men worked eight-hour shifts until the work was complete.<sup>1</sup> Captain William E. Merrill, U.S. Topographical Engineer, supervised the construction of the Franklin defenses. In his final report, Merrill describes Roper's Knob as having a "remarkable cross section," shown in the accompanying sketch, with:

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<sup>1</sup>Captain William E. Merrill, Engineer Report, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, May 29th, 1863. From Record of the Office of the Chief Engineer - Letters Received M4321 (1863), National Archives, Record Group 77. Photocopy on file at the Tennessee Historical Commission.

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a rifle pit just above the terrace which surrounds it - a redoubt for four heavy guns - and a blockhouse for sixty men inside the redoubt. On the crest of the terrace surrounding the crown of the hill is a strong line of abatis. It has likewise two cisterns capable of holding 4500 gallons of water, and a good size magazine. Fifty men could hold it against 5000. It is the signal station, being visible in all directions from the range of hills surrounding the large valley in which Franklin lies. It sees all the country within a radius of six miles. It is about 250 feet above the level of the plain, with steep sides and with no hill higher than thirty feet above the plain, in its vicinity - excepting the one next, which is in easy musketry range and is lower and in-accessible to artillery.<sup>2</sup>

Well fortified, the signal station at Roper's Knob relayed important communications to fortifications in Triune to the east and La Vergne to the northeast, and then to Nashville. Records do not reveal the precise number of men stationed at Roper's Knob throughout the conflict. However, in June of 1863, First Lieutenant H.C. Wharton, U.S. Army, chief engineer, was ordered to reorganize the garrison at Franklin and station 150 men from the Seventy-Eighth Illinois Volunteer Infantry on Roper's Knob.<sup>3</sup> Post Commander Colonel John P. Baird responded negatively to this course of action, stating "The Seventy-eighth in on Roper's Knob, and the balance in the fort. This order changes my whole disposition of the forces, and I don't feel satisfied at all . . . . My brigade consists of the uncaptured force of the Eighty-fifth and Thirty-third Indiana, Nineteenth Michigan, and Twenty-second Wisconsin, amounting to about 400 . . . . The Seventy-eighth Illinois numbers about 400, and only 332 for duty."<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of the number of men assigned to them, the signal stations were important to the Union military effort as they transmitted information regarding the movement of Confederate troops to Union officers. Communications proved especially important during the 1864 campaign of Confederate General John Bell Hood through Middle Tennessee. Commander of the Army of Tennessee, Hood began a series of maneuvers in late September against the Union line of supply and communications running through northwest Georgia, north Alabama, and Middle Tennessee. It is unclear whether artillery was arranged at Roper's Knob in defense against the Confederate mission, but records indicate that this is certainly a possibility. In response to a raid by Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest on the important Union controlled Tennessee and Alabama Railroad in late September to early October, 1864, Union Major and Assistant Adjutant-General B.H. Polk relayed the following communication dated October 1, 1864, to Major General Rousseau:

The following dispatch just received from Franklin:

'As sure as you live Forrest at Spring Hill at 3 this p.m.; Gen. Lyon is with him; this you can rely on. I have good information Roddey was at Huntsville this a.m.; said to have 15,000 men and twenty-three pieces of artillery. I cannot get a piece

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 volumes (Washington, DC: 1890-1901), series II, Vol. 23, p. 388-389. Hereinafter cited as *OR*. All references to series I unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

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of artillery on Roper's Knob without machinery. Shall I do it? . . . .

J.B. Park, Lieut.-Col., Cmdg.'

I send down to Franklin this evening two 3-inch Parrots and 400 rounds of ammunition.

Shall any guns go upon Roper's Knob, or shall all go in the large fort?<sup>5</sup>

By late November, Hood's troops had reached the outskirts of Franklin, and prepared to launch a general assault on the well-entrenched Union forces. The Confederate advance began at approximately 4:00 p.m. on the afternoon of November 30, 1864. Although the Confederates were initially able to drive back two Federal brigades, the Union soldiers held their main line. After a long night of continued fighting, Union troops withdrew across the Harpeth River and headed north to Nashville. Along with the other Franklin fortifications, Roper's Knob was abandoned by the retreating Federal army. Following the Union victory at the Battle of Nashville in mid-December, Roper's Knob was again reoccupied by Federal forces until the end of the war.

Shortly after the Battle of Nashville, Major General George H. Thomas wrote to Captain P. Babcock, Jr., Acting Chief Signal Officer, Army of the Cumberland, to inform him of the useful service that the signal stations provided. Thomas argued that "a signal corps was one of the essential organizations of a well-appointed army."<sup>6</sup> He notes that communication between the posts at Franklin, Triune, La Vergne, Readyville, and Murfreesboro were frequent and signals were often the only means of transferring information. Thomas testified that "messages could be transmitted from one station to the other with the greatest celerity," and pointed to specific examples to support his claim:

When Van Dorn attacked Franklin re-enforcements were directed how to move to give the greatest assistance to the garrison by message sent from Murfreesborough to Triune by signal. . . . Since our arrival here the value of the system has time and again been most clearly demonstrated by the great amount of information of the movements of the enemy, obtained and transmitted to headquarters by its aid, which could not have possibly been obtained by any other means in time to have been of use. During the recent battle here the officers of the corps rendered most valuable service by observing and signaling information of every movement of the enemy within the range of their telescopes.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>OR, 39, III, p. 21. The "large fort" refers to Fort Granger.

<sup>6</sup>OR, 31, III, p. 377-378.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.



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Thomas's testimony reveals the important role Roper's Knob and other signal stations played in the Union military defense effort. The Roper's Knob Fortifications have not been significantly disturbed since their use by the Union Army over 135 years ago. The outer entrenchment and redoubt are clearly discernible and well defined, and have only experienced natural erosion. The high peak with its commanding view of the surrounding valley combined with the high integrity of the earthworks conveys a strong sense of its historical period. Given its historical involvement in the Civil War and its high degree of integrity, Roper's Knob meets the registration requirements established for earthworks in the multiple property nomination "Historic and Historic Archaeological Resources of the American Civil War in Tennessee." Roper's Knob was recently acquired by the State of Tennessee and The Heritage Foundation of Franklin and Williamson County. The Heritage Foundation is planning to preserve and interpret the fortification as part of the city's Civil War heritage.

The archaeological significance of Roper's Knob is not known. In March 1988, the Tennessee Division of Archaeology conducted a survey of the site and noted its potential as an important archaeological resource.<sup>8</sup> The division is planning to implement a more thorough survey soon. If the new information presents evidence of the sites significance under criterion D, the nomination will be amended.

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<sup>8</sup>Tennessee Division of Archaeology, Site Survey Form No. 40WM101, "Roper's Knob." March 28, 1988.

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- Davis, Major George B., Leslie J. Perry, and Joseph W. Kirkley, compiled by Captain Calvin D. Howles. *The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1891-1895; reprint edition, New York: Gramercy Books, 1983.
- Dilliplane, Ty L. "Fort Granger (Franklin, TN): A Study of Its Past and Proposal for Its Future." Printed for limited distribution by the Franklin Jaycees, 1974.
- Merrill, W. E., Capt. (US). Report to the Office of Topographical Engineers, Army of the Cumberland, Murfreesboro, Tennessee. 1863. Photocopy on file at the Tennessee Historical Commission.
- Tennessee Division of Archaeology, Site Survey Form No. 40WM101, "Roper's Knob." March 28, 1988.
- U.S. War Department. *The War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. Washington, DC: 1890-1901).

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**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The boundary for Roper's Knob includes parcels number 1.04, 1.03 and 1.02 on Williamson County tax map 62. This parcel encompasses all of the property containing the fortifications and includes approximately 58.44 acres. The boundary is defined by property lines on all sides.

**VERBAL BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The boundary for Roper's Knob includes contiguous property which is historically known to be associated with Roper's Knob Fortifications. The 58.44 acre parcel includes the top of Roper's Knob as well as the slopes on all four sides. The nominated property has no intrusions on it, but it is surrounded by non-historic development.

The map scale for this nomination is 1" = 800.' It is the only scale map available for this part of Williamson County.

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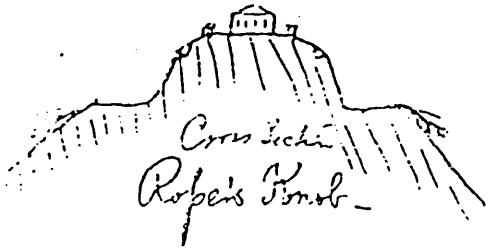
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PHOTOGRAPHS

Roper's Knob  
Liberty Pike, Franklin, Williamson County Tennessee  
Date of Photographs; February, 1999  
Photos by: Thomason and Associates  
Location of Negatives: Tennessee Historical Commission

- Photo No. 1: View of Roper's Knob from Liberty Pike. View towards the north.
- Photo No. 2: View of the south wall of the outer entrenchment line and redoubt. View towards the north.
- Photo No. 3: View of the outer entrenchment line on the north side of the earthworks. View towards the northwest.
- Photo No. 4: View of the height of the inner wall of the redoubt. View towards the east.
- Photo No. 5: View of the possible encampment area, looking north towards the redoubt.

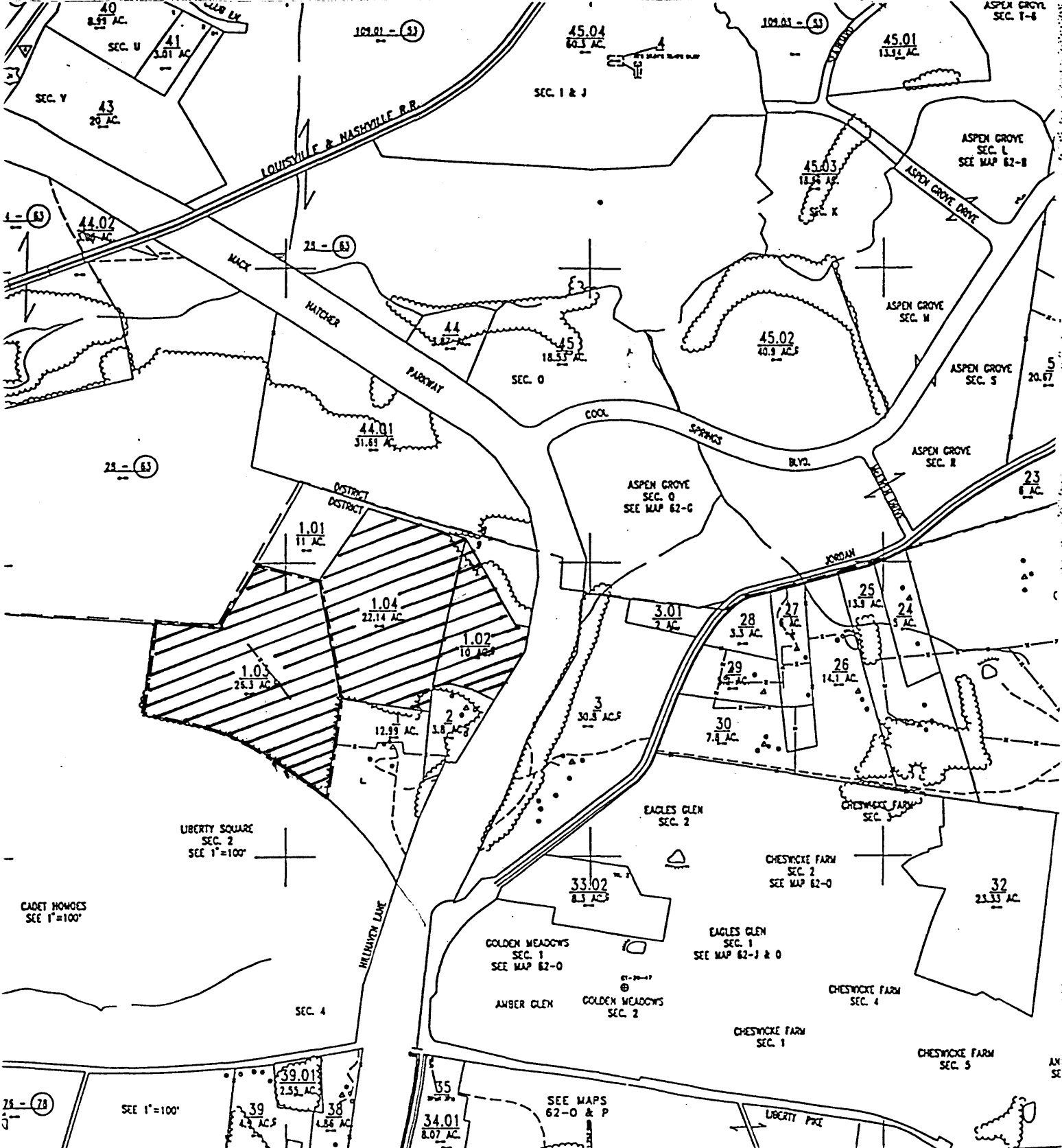
by carefully constructed abattis.



Roper's Knob, which has the same section shown in the sketch, has just above the terrace which is a redoubt for 4 heavy guns - and for 50 men inside the redoubt. On the crest

This sketch of the Roper's Knob Fortifications was completed in 1863 by Captain William E. Merrill.

ROPER'S KNOB FORTIFICATIONS  
WILLIAMSON COUNTY TN









Roper's Knob  
 Liberty Pike Vicinity  
 Franklin  
 Williamson County, TN  
 Tax Map 62, Parcel 1.03  
 Scale 1" : 800±  
 ^N

/// Nominated property

# Ropers Knob; Franklin, Tennessee

## GPS Survey of Civil War Works

### Legend

-  Roads
-  Property Boundary
-  Old Road
-  Redoubt
-  Outer entrenchments
-  Ramp
-  Probable encampment site

