

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

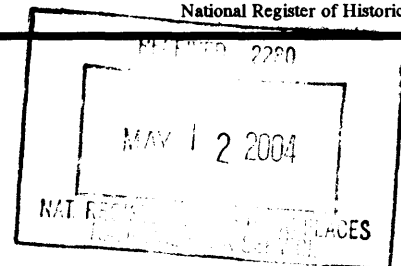
OMB No. 1024-0018

BURR'S FERRY EARTHWORKS, VERNON PARISH, LA

Page 1

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Burr's Ferry Earthworks

Other Name/Site Number: 16VN2799

2. LOCATION

Street & Number LA HWY 8, approximately 2,000 feet east of the Sabine River Not for publication: NA

City/Town Leesville Vicinity: X

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: Vernon Code: 115 Zip Code: 71496

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
Nationally: ___ Statewide: X Locally: ___

Jonathan Fricker
Signature of Certifying Official/Title Jonathan Fricker
Deputy SHPO, Dept of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

May 11, 2004
Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official/Title

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

BURR'S FERRY EARTHWORKS, VERNON PARISH, LA

Page 2

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
Determined eligible for the National Register
Determined not eligible for the National Register
Removed from the National Register

Other (explain):
Edson H. Beall
6/22/04
Signature of Keeper
Date of Action

5. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property
Private: X
Public-Local:
Public-State:
Public-Federal:

Category of Property
Building(s):
District:
Site:
Structure: X
Object:

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing
1
1

Non contributing
buildings
sites
structures
1 objects
1 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: NA

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USD/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

BURR'S FERRY EARTHWORKS, VERNON PARISH, LA

Page 3

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Defense

Sub: Fortification

Current: Recreation and Culture

Sub: outdoor recreation/park & picnic area

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: NA

Materials:

Foundation:

Walls: earth

Roof:

Other:

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Confederate earthworks at Burr's Ferry in west central Vernon Parish are relatively small fortifications associated with the Civil War's Red River Campaign. The site is located on the north side of Louisiana Highway 8, approximately 2,000 feet east of the current course of the Sabine River. (The Sabine forms the border between Louisiana and Texas.) Its name comes from the fact that a ferry operated there until some time in the early twentieth century. The earthworks were surveyed and constructed during the fall and winter of 1863-1864 by Confederate soldiers and enslaved African-Americans under the command of Lieutenant Colonel C.G. Forshey, chief consulting engineer of the District of Texas. Portions of the fortifications have been destroyed by home construction (to the north and west) and farming activities. The remaining earthworks have experienced natural deterioration and adaptation for use as a park. Nevertheless, enough of the Burr's Ferry fortification remains to convey its intended use as a defense against an invading Union force.

The fort's exact original size cannot be ascertained, although it is clear from the construction orders (see below) that it was much larger than what remains today. Burr's Ferry never saw action, and documents from the Trans-Mississippi Department of the Confederacy are rare. Civil War historian and cartographer Gary Joiner (a co-author of this nomination) searched all known possibilities and could find no period map depicting Burr's Ferry. Fortunately, there are two evidentiary letters in the *War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* dealing specifically with Burr's Ferry. These consist of the original and follow-up orders (dated July 2, 1863, and signed by Major General John Bankhead Magruder, and September 27, 1863, signed by Major and Assistant Inspector-General William Kearny) for the construction of the earthworks. The second letter calls for fortifications at Burr's Ferry large enough to accommodate 2,500 men.

Nineteenth century American forts were constructed in different shapes according to their location and purpose. Common shapes used in Louisiana during the Civil War included circles, squares, triangles, and continuous lines with projecting angles and indentations. The latter were called indented, or *cremaillere*, forts; their angles allowed marksmen to fire in different directions at advancing enemy troops attempting to climb the earthworks wall. Approximately 450 feet long and from about three to about six feet high, the remaining Burr's

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

BURR'S FERRY EARTHWORKS, VERNON PARISH, LA

Page 4

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Ferry earthworks (see attached sketch map) are a fairly typical example of the *cremaillere* type of fortifications.

Although the overall shapes of earthwork fortifications were different, a typical pattern of construction was used to build each fort's walls. Each wall consisted of two contiguous lines. The first was in the form of a deep ditch (also known as a dry moat). The second line consisted of a mound which was formed by dirt excavated from the ditch. Known as a parapet, the mound protected the area behind it from artillery fire and elevated troops to a higher and better position from which to defend the fort. No matter what its overall shape, the fort always had at least one, and perhaps several, large acute or projecting 60 degree angles, each of which was called a redan. The redan was the spot meant for the placement of a cannon. The *cremaillere* at Burr's Ferry has mounds, ditches and a redan.

In addition to this configuration, the Burr's Ferry earthworks exhibit a feature designed for locations defending roads leading to river crossings, as was the case at this site. Known as a *têtes de pont*, or head of bridge, this element was an opening in the defensive line where it crossed the road. Well fortified on each side of the gap, the opening allowed the civilian population to pass freely when the site was not imminently threatened by enemy troops. One student of the Civil War in Louisiana has described a *têtes de pont* as a "bunker with a guardhouse, but made of earth." The center of the emplacement, with an original road remnant, still exists at Burr's Ferry.

The passage of 140 years has had a definite impact on the earthworks. They have been plowed away on both extremities. However, this destruction has not affected the most important part of the fortifications, the central section guarding the old road to the Sabine River crossing and Texas. It remains intact and easily identifiable. The parapet and ditches (dry moats) have suffered very little erosion, exhibiting chiseled corners and flat tops, with uniformity in the forward (east facing) slopes. Most of the earthworks' walls are taller than a person and still illustrate their role as a protective device. Parts of the ditches have some infill (mostly in the form of debris), but most are clearly visible. Thus, any veteran of the army which built the fortifications at Burr's Ferry would recognize the earthworks if he were to return to the site today. As a rare example of a resource associated with the Red River Campaign, and as a rare example of a *têtes de pont* within Louisiana, the Burr's Ferry earthworks is a viable candidate for National Register listing.

Non-Contributing Element

The land holding the remaining earthworks has been purchased by the local Sons of Confederate Veterans Camp for use as a park, and the group has placed a plaque on the site. Mounted on a concrete pad, it stands on (but at the edge of) one of the earthworks' mounds. The group has also placed a small frame pavilion near the earthworks, but it is located outside the boundaries chosen for this nomination.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

BURR'S FERRY EARTHWORKS, VERNON PARISH, LA

Page 5

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable National Register Criteria: A X B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): NA A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance: Military

Period(s) of Significance: September 1863

Significant Dates: NA

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: Builder: Confederate troops of General William R. Scurry and enslaved African-Americans

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

BURR'S FERRY EARTHWORKS, VERNON PARISH, LA

Page 6

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The Civil War fortifications at Burr's Ferry in Vernon Parish are significant in the area of military history at the state level as a rare surviving earthworks representing the Red River Campaign. It is also a rare example of a particular kind of earthworks, a *têtes de pont*, designed specifically to defend roads leading to river crossings. The significant date for the nomination is September 1863, the time construction began.

The Red River Campaign was the Union Army's final attempt to invade Texas. The reasons for this invasion included the possibility of securing a large and reliable cotton crop for northeastern mills and the need to prevent the possible intervention of France in the Civil War on the side of the Confederacy. This threat seemed very real after French troops occupied Mexico and made it a puppet state under France's hand-picked ally, Archduke Maximilian, formerly of Austria, in 1863. Statesmen apparently believed that a Texas held in Union hands would prevent cooperation among the governments of Mexico, France and the Confederacy.

Federal forces tried three times to invade Texas in 1863. The first attempt was a failed attack on the mouth of the Sabine River. The second was an overland expedition across southern Louisiana, which ended in St. Landry Parish when the forces retired to New Orleans due to lack of clear orders. The third attempt succeeded in securing some of the barrier islands along the Gulf Coast, but had no affect on the mainland. Thus, then General-in-Chief Henry W. Halleck ordered his subordinates to stage a fourth Texas invasion. That invasion is known as the Red River Campaign.

A route approximating the path of the Red River (which runs roughly from northwest to southeast) was chosen because the Federal invasion had a secondary aim -- to capture the northwest Louisiana town of Shreveport. This community was a target because at that time it was serving as the state capital of Louisiana as well as the headquarters of the Confederate army west of the Mississippi River. In addition, the city contained several small manufacturing establishments which were contributing to the Confederate war effort. These included factories producing small arms, ammunition, and artillery projectiles, as well as a small naval yard where the Confederate ironclad CSS Missouri had been built. Once successful in capturing Shreveport and neutralizing these factories, Union officers planned to leave a garrison in the Louisiana town and move the rest of the troops forward into East Texas toward the towns of Marshall and Tyler. The campaign's opening was delayed until March 1864 while Union generals planned and negotiated among themselves to get more troops for the initiative.

The invasion plans of the Union army (including the proposed route up the Red River) could not be kept secret, and the Union delay gave Confederate forces time to take measures designed to defend central and northwest Louisiana. These measures included the probing of the state for additional troops, the transfer of troops from Texas to Alexandria (on the Red River in central Louisiana), an order that civilians remove property which might be useful to Union troops, and the construction of a series of earthen forts along the Red River. These included Forts No. 1 and No. 2 at Yellow Bayou, three positions along the river in Caddo Parish, and a series of eight forts and sixteen redans encircling Shreveport and Bossier City. Fort DeRussy (a pre-existing fort located north of Marksville in Avoyelles Parish) and pre-existing fortifications at Grand Ecore (northwest of Natchitoches) also figured in Confederate defense plans.

Although Confederate planners considered the Red River the most likely invasion route, they also feared that Union forces might bypass Shreveport by leaving the river to head west via land. If this happened, they would try to enter Texas by crossing the Sabine River at Niblett's Bluff (located near the town of Vinton in

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

BURR'S FERRY EARTHWORKS, VERNON PARISH, LA

Page 7

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Calcasieu Parish), Burr's Ferry (in west central Vernon Parish), or Logansport (in DeSoto Parish). These were the only three locations along the Sabine which could be crossed by ferries or fords. (Indeed, once the campaign started Confederate cavalry units from Texas flooded into Louisiana via the Burr's Ferry and Logansport crossings.)

Thus, Major General John Bankhead Magruder (the Texas District Commander) issued orders that east-facing fortifications, designed to keep invading troops from crossing the stream, be built at those locations. (The orders for Burr's Ferry were dated July 2, 1863, with follow-up orders issued on September 27.) Of these sites, Magruder considered the works at Burr's Ferry to be the most important. He ordered them to be constructed first and, as previously mentioned, instructed (through a subordinate) that they be large enough to hold 2,500 men.

The Red River Campaign finally opened on March 10, 1864, when Union troops stationed at Vicksburg moved via transports down the Mississippi River to Simmesport, in Avoyelles Parish. Simmesport was chosen as the starting point because the Mississippi, Atchafalaya, and Red rivers converge nearby. The troops, under the command of Brigadier General Andrew J. Smith, were accompanied from Vicksburg by a large Union fleet under the command of Admiral David D. Porter. Smith's men began disembarking for a march toward Marksville (in Avoyelles Parish) on the 12th, and soon thereafter the Union fleet began to steam up the Red River.

After partially destroying Fort No. 1, at Yellow Bayou, Union forces took Fort DeRussy near Marksville on March 14. Then Smith's troops and Porter's gunboats proceeded to Alexandria, where they met Major General Nathaniel P. Banks' army marching from south Louisiana. The troops arrived at Grand Ecore near Natchitoches on April 3. At this point, General Banks, under pressure to take Shreveport by April 15, 1864, or lose the additional troops loaned to him for the campaign, decided to abandon the river route in favor of a shorter land route through Mansfield. However in a stunning victory, Confederate forces stopped the advancing troops at Mansfield and pursued them all the way back to Avoyelles Parish near Simmesport, where a final battle was fought at Yellow Bayou. Because the Union army and fleet escaped from the Confederates, this last battle is deemed a Federal victory. However, the outcome of the broader Red River Campaign was a defeat for Union forces.

Because the Union invading force adhered to its original plan to ascend the Red River until the army and navy were well northeast of Burr's Ferry, that emplacement never saw action. However, its rarity as a Red River Campaign fortification, as well as its rarity as a Louisiana example of a *têtes de pont*, make it eligible for National Register listing. By their very nature, earthworks are subject to deterioration caused by the ravages of time and inclement weather. In addition, most of those located in rural areas have been plowed under by farmers wishing to use every inch of their land to grow crops. Finally, most of those once located in or near cities were long ago the victims of destruction by construction projects.

According to Gary Joiner, who has examined the landscape for remnants of the Red River Campaign, only one of the ring of forts once surrounding Shreveport and Bossier City survives intact. Known as Battery Walker, it is buried under the Red River flood plain and is only recognizable on aerial photographs. The others have been lost or survive only in bits and pieces which are difficult to identify on the landscape. All of the sixteen redans protecting Shreveport are gone. Of the three Caddo Parish fortifications on the river below Shreveport, only one (located on the grounds of the Port of Caddo-Bossier) remains, and it is threatened by development. Further down river in central Louisiana, Forts DeRussy and Fort No. 2 at Yellow Bayou survive. The fortification at Grand Ecore also survives but, according to Dr. Art Bergeron (another expert on the war in Louisiana), it was altered so many times during the war that it can no longer be attributed to the Red River

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

BURR'S FERRY EARTHWORKS, VERNON PARISH, LA

Page 8

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Campaign. Of the three Sabine River earthworks, those at Niblett's Bluff and Burr's Ferry survive, but whether the *têtes de pont* at Niblett's Bluff remains is unclear. Thus, of the thirty-four fortifications associated with the Red River Campaign, only six (or eighteen percent) survive in relatively good condition. The Burr's Ferry earthworks are one of these survivors and also have the only *têtes de pont* known to survive in Louisiana. Therefore, the Burr's Ferry fortifications are a legitimate candidate for National Register listing.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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- Brooksher, William Riley. *War Along the Bayous: The 1864 Red River Campaign in Louisiana*. Washington: Brassey's, 1998.
- Casdorph, Paul D. *Prince John Magruder: His Life and Campaigns*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1996.
- Johnson, Ludwell H. *Red River Campaign: Politics and Cotton in the Civil War*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1993.
- Joiner, Gary D. "I Will Fight Banks If He Has a Million Men." *The DeSoto Plume* (journal), Vol. XXXVII, no. 3 (Spring 2002), pp. 2-10.
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- Sayers, Brian. *On Valor's Side: Tom Green and the Battles for Early Texas*. Hemphill, Texas: Dogwood Press, 1999.
- Taylor, Richard. *Destruction and Reconstruction: Personal Experiences in the Civil War*. New York: Da Capo, 1995.
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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USD/I/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

BURR'S FERRY EARTHWORKS, VERNON PARISH, LA

Page 9

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register. (partially)
- 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:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 1.72 acres

UTM References: **Zone Easting Northing**
 15 451140 3436800

Verbal Boundary Description:

See enclosed sketch map.

Boundary Justification:

Boundaries were chosen to discretely encompass the extent of the fort.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

BURR'S FERRY EARTHWORKS, VERNON PARISH, LA

Page 10

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: Gary D. Joiner, Director, Red River Regional Study Center,
Louisiana State University at Shreveport

Address: One University Place, Shreveport, Louisiana 71115

Telephone: (318) 222-6112

Name/Title: National Register staff

Address: Division of Historic Preservation, P. O. Box 44247, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804

Telephone: (225) 342-8160

Date: Spring 2004

PROPERTY OWNERS

Sons of Confederate Veterans Louisiana Division
c/o Roy S. Lilley
P. O. Box 9065
Mandeville, Louisiana 70470-9065

Burr's Ferry Earthworks

Leesville Vicinity, Vernon Parish, LA

