

U.S. Fort Duffield

West Point, Hardin County, Kentucky

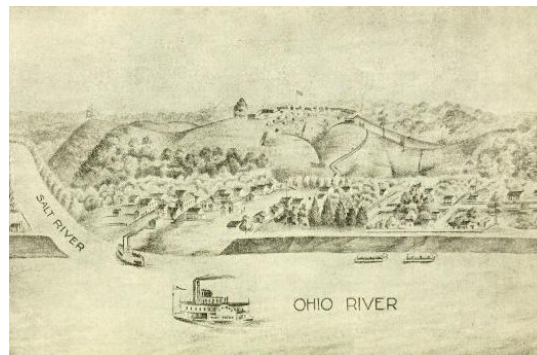
At 4:30 a.m., on April 12, 1861, the guns of the Confederate forces under Pierre G. T. Beauregard opened fire on Fort Sumter in the middle of Charleston Harbor. Native Kentuckian and Union Major Robert Anderson occupied the fort. After surviving the bombardment, Anderson surrendered with no casualties. Robert Anderson was then sent home, promoted to Brigadier-General, and 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 Assembly had argued for months whether to hold a convention of session or stay with the Union. Finding no clear majority for either cause, 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 soldiers under the command of General Leonidas Polk occupied Columbus, Kentucky to harass Union river traffic on the Mississippi River. Soldiers under U. S. Grant countered the Confederate occupation, two days later, by occupying Paducah. By October, the Confederate army had established a defensive perimeter anchored at Columbus in the west, stretching across the state to Bowling Green (which became the Confederate Capitol of Kentucky, in mid November) 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, Kentucky. 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.

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 soldiers 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



Fort Duffield as it appeared in an 1861 sketch

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 soldiers would have a defensible position to fall back upon in case of a military set back.

By November 1861, the fortification of Pearman Hill had begun. Engineers and 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 soldiers stationed at Fort Duffield. The supply line was secure. By mid December, 1862, the fort would be abandoned, as the soldiers were needed elsewhere. The war moved south, as the Federal forces took the offensive against the Confederate perimeter.



Replica log structures constructed at Fort Duffield

Earthworks at Fort Duffield



This fort is an earthwork structure that traverses the top of the heights overlooking the rivers. The earthworks run 1,000 feet along Pearman Hill and according to a letter by 9th Michigan Captain Charles V. DeLand, the distance from the top of the wall to the bottom of the ditch, in 1861, was 17 feet and the top of the wall was 9 feet 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, Reverend 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, Fort Duffield is more of a wall and is not enclosed. Fort Duffield is one of many fortifications in Kentucky that were constructed to defend cities, railroads, rivers and other key points in the Bluegrass state.

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

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Sources:

<http://fortduffield.com/history-khc.htm>
Fort Duffield Heritage Committee



Monument erected at Fort Duffield in 1993