

# 1861 Garrett County *In the Civil War*

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Garrett County's role in the Civil War was closely associated with transportation corridors that wound through the mountainous terrain. Protection of transportation routes was a priority to Federal authorities who recognized that nearby Confederate forces were capable of disrupting supply lines and damaging military installations in Union territory. As a way to protect property and project a military presence in Garrett County, two military facilities were constructed, one for the purpose of protecting a railroad trestle and the other for monitoring a bridge and pike heading toward Oakland, Maryland.

In 1861, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad quickly became involved in the Civil War because its routes passed through Confederate controlled Virginia and what was later to become West Virginia. The Federal government moved to secure the railroad's operations in Maryland and began by stationing troops in contested areas and at high value targets such as bridges and rail yards. Since railroad operations would be of importance throughout the conflict, small fortifications, often called blockhouses or garrisons, were constructed near the rail lines. Federal authorities subsequently ordered that fortifications be built along the B&O Railroad, including one at a wooden trestle that crossed the Youghiogheny River about a quarter mile west of Oakland, Maryland.

The site chosen for the blockhouse was in the northeast angle between the Youghiogheny River and railroad line, a short distance from the wooden trestle. Railroad workers supplied the initial manual labor required to construct a 15 foot mound of dirt on which the blockhouse was to be built. The top of the mound was leveled to provide the foundation for a log, stone, and earth structure designed to protect the 19 troops assigned to the post. Although no photograph or drawing of the structure is known to exist, it could be assumed that it looked similar to other railroad blockhouses that utilized heavy log walls that were interspersed with small openings for observation and weapons uses. The Union infantrymen could have effectively fired their weapons from that position against

small groups of Confederates approaching either end of the trestle.

Ramparts made of earth and wood surrounded the garrison. An examination of the site today suggests the rifle pits faced the trestle and would have been sufficient for use in defending against limited incursions coming from the direction of the railroad. The location also reveals obvious weaknesses because Confederates could have easily occupied a higher adjacent hill, thereby providing a direct downhill line-of-sight into the trenches and garrison. The Federal troops were also vulnerable to attacks from both sides.

The trestle was originally referred to as "The 88 Bridge" by the B&O Railroad, so designated because it was the 88th railroad bridge from Baltimore. In subsequent years the site has been called "Fort 88" and "Fort Alice," although no definitive source for when the military term began is available. It could be speculated the name Fort Alice was applied to the blockhouse because of the Middle English origins of the word meaning a "small fort." Therefore, the "fortalice" (pronounced for-te-lis) became Fort Alice. While the blockhouse was eventually built, its completion date came too late for Federal forces that were dug in along trenches above the railroad. Fort Alice would not factor in Oakland's only military engagement of the Civil War, the Jones-Imboden Raid of April 26, 1863.

As Federal preparations at the Youghiogheny site lagged, Confederate forces moved into the area in what was to become known as the Jones-Imboden Raid conducted under the direction of Confederate Generals John Imboden and William "Grumble" Jones. The raids were intended to disrupt rail traffic and forestall the growing statehood movement in the western part of Virginia.

Unlike most engagements during the war, this one occurred without bloodshed because the defenders decided to lay down arms to the numerically superior force. Unknown to the few men at the trestle, the town of Oakland had been surprised earlier by a force of 800 Confederate troopers led by Colonel Asher W. Harman.

Colonel Harman was part of a larger Confederate force of 4,500 men that made incursions into Maryland and West Virginia under “Grumble” Jones.

The raid on Oakland was remarkably absent of violence with only one or two shots being fired by a Union picket. The Confederates were on their best behavior and reportedly waited patiently until church services ended before taking prisoners. The company of 57 men and two commissioned officers were immediately paroled without incident. And unlike other raids in nearby towns that involved widespread looting of stores, Oakland escaped without major damage.

The B&O Railroad trestle was not so lucky. While the Union troops at the site were also paroled after surrendering, the trestle they were guarding was promptly burned and heavily damaged. The Confederates successfully accomplished several of their objectives during the raid but the effects were not long lasting, and the B&O quickly resumed operations at Oakland.

Garrett County’s second Civil War fortification was located near Confederate territory along the North Branch of the Potomac River at the present day villages of Gorman and Gorman. A wooden covered bridge resting on stone pillars allowed traffic to pass over the river and to a road identified on time period maps as the “Parkersburg and Cumberland Pike” or “Northwestern Turnpike.” United States Route 50 identifies the contemporary road.

Unlike Fort Alice where Federal troops built and occupied a blockhouse, it was Confederate forces who quickly occupied the high ground overlooking the bridge, post office, and stagecoach facilities along the river and pike. A log fort was begun on the hilltop and near the home of Philip Pendleton, thereby giving the military location a name.

Strategic events overtook the tiny Confederate garrison, and a decision was made to fall back toward friendlier southern territory. Union troops quickly occupied the hilltop in July 1861 where they continued the work begun by their opponents. General Williams Rosecrans subsequently ordered troops from the 17th Indiana, 4th, 6th, and 8th Ohio Regiments of Volunteers and Howes Battery of Regulars and other troops to fortify the hilltop.

Fort Pendleton was significantly larger than the blockhouse near Oakland. A contemporary drawing by Harland

C. Bittinger appearing in the *Glades Star* revealed an extensive series of winding trenches on the hilltop. A second drawing from official government records notes the fort was constructed by Captain E.B. Olmsted by order of General McClelland, per Colonel L. Andrews, August 8 to October 13, 1861. The drawing also clearly identifies key features of the fortification.

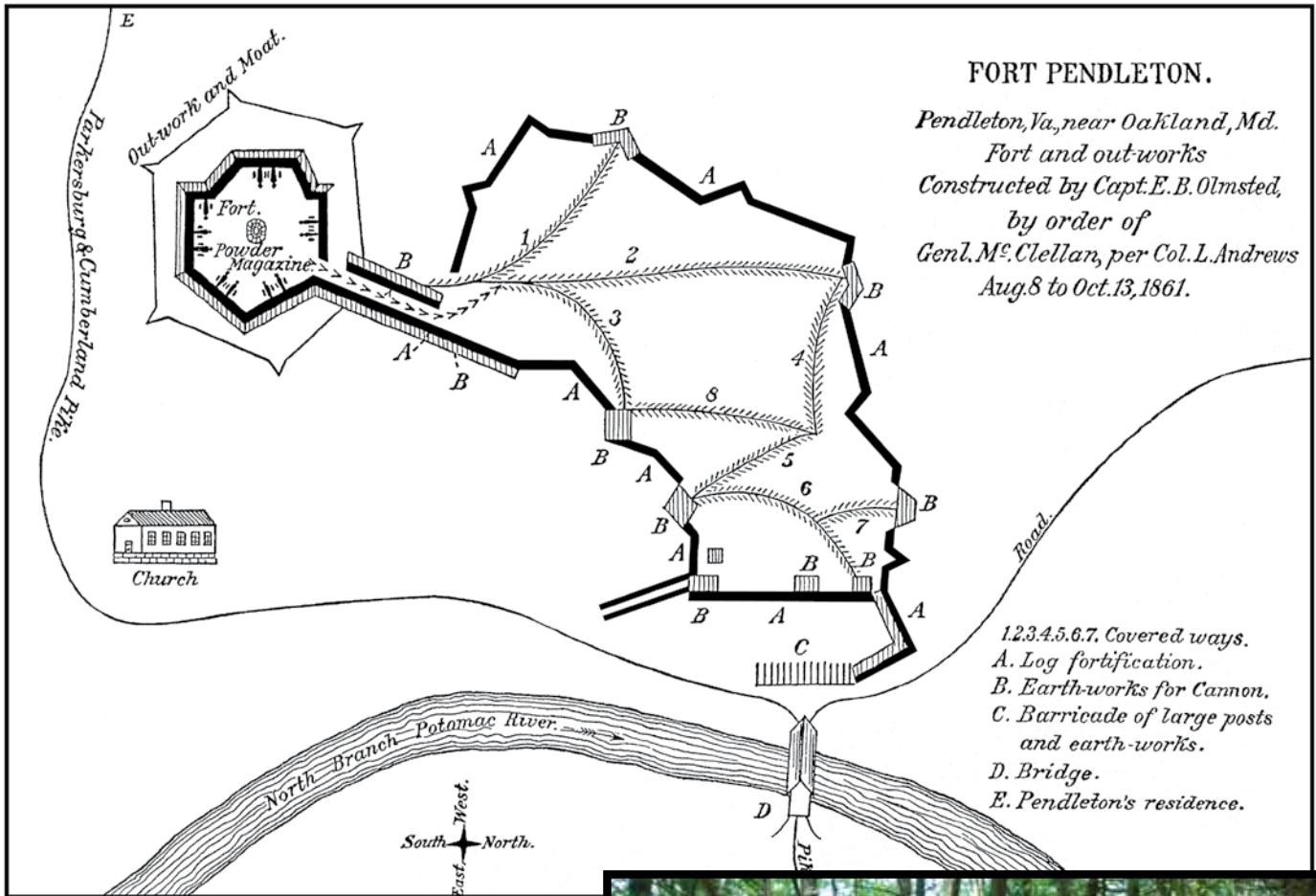
Additional information concerning the fort appeared after the war when Philip Pendleton made a claim against the United States government for the possession of his land during the conflict. Pendleton’s claim provided details concerning what activities occurred on the site that negatively affected the value of his property. Specifically, Pendleton charged that Federal troops dismantled houses and structures for the purpose of building soldiers’ quarters.



Federal troops vacated Fort Pendleton in January 1862 and then briefly reoccupied it in April 1863 following the Confederate raid on Oakland. As events transpired, Fort Pendleton did not play a role in military engagements and was quickly forgotten in the post war period. Today the site is privately owned.

Garrett County will commemorate local Civil War history with a series of events during April 2013. One highlight of the commemoration will be activities planned around Fort Alice, a location previously not easily accessible to visitors. According to Garrett County resident and real estate appraiser Jerry Thayer, “The Fort Alice property was sold in 2005 for development of Liberty Mews, an affordable and market rate housing complex. The purchase involved 50 acres. When the landowner learned of events surrounding Fort Alice while planning for future housing developments, he worked out a deal to preserve the site. The developers transferred the 12 acre site of Fort Alice to the Town of Oakland in 2008 so as to preclude it from future development and preserve it as part of Oakland’s Civil War heritage. Many residents aren’t aware of the site, and it is hoped that events in April 2013 will highlight Garrett County’s role in the Civil War.”

Access to the Fort Alice site has been enhanced through cooperative efforts of the Town of Oakland and Boy Scout Troop 22 under the direction of Dan Clark. Troop 22 has cleared trails to the site, so it will be suitable for walking tours during the April commemoration.



Former Oakland Mayor Asa McCain, who played an important role in preserving local railroad history, was instrumental in highlighting Fort Alice as a potential visitors' site.

The town of Oakland will commemorate its role in the Jones-Imboden Raid with a series of events on April 26, 27, 28, 2013.

Tentative plans include Civil War music, a Union encampment at the B&O Train Station, a Confederate cavalry reenactment of the raid, shuttle buses and carriage rides to the Fort Alice site, skits and stories of the raid, John Wilson impersonating B&O President John Garrett, Roger Ware impersonating John McNeill, and Matthew Dodd, story teller. There will be a kick off dinner on Friday night featuring historian Steven French and music by Hammer and Strings. A Saturday evening dinner at the Elks Club will feature Dan Toomey, historian for the B&O Railroad Museum, and the Shenandoah Valley Minstrels.

For additional information see or call The Garrett County Historical Society at 301-334-3226 or John Rathgeb at 301-334-8332.



**Top:** Site plan of Fort Pendleton provided by Dr. Lawrence Sherwood.

**Above:** Photo of the mound area today, believed to be the site of Fort Alice.

*The author acknowledges Judge Ralph Burnett, "The Jones Raid Into Garrett County," W.W. Price, "Fort Pendleton" (appearing in the Glades Star), Dennis Rasche, "Fort Alice 88," (appearing in the Glades Star), Jerry Thayer, Dr. John Rathgeb, Bob Boal, and Dr. Lawrence Sherwood for assistance in writing the article.*