

Fortifications of Nashville

8 February 2023



October 1864- Things get real

When Zebulon Tower takes over the Defenses of Nashville in fall 1864, only Ft. Negley and "Fort Andy Johnson" (State Capital) are complete, the other fortifications were still under construction

- U.S. Forces have spent another \$10,000 maintaining Fort Negley
- As the use of Nashville has increased, the store-houses and hospitals (some as big as 3000 patients) extend beyond the ability of the defensive range of the Capital so the stockade portion is removed
- While approximately 50,000 troops are assigned to the Thomas' they were spread across Tennessee and Kentucky to guard supply lines and occupy the area - constantly harassed by Forrest

"For so important a place, held so long by our troops, the Nashville defenses certainly were not pushed forward as much as they should have been."

Then the Army of Tennessee invades...



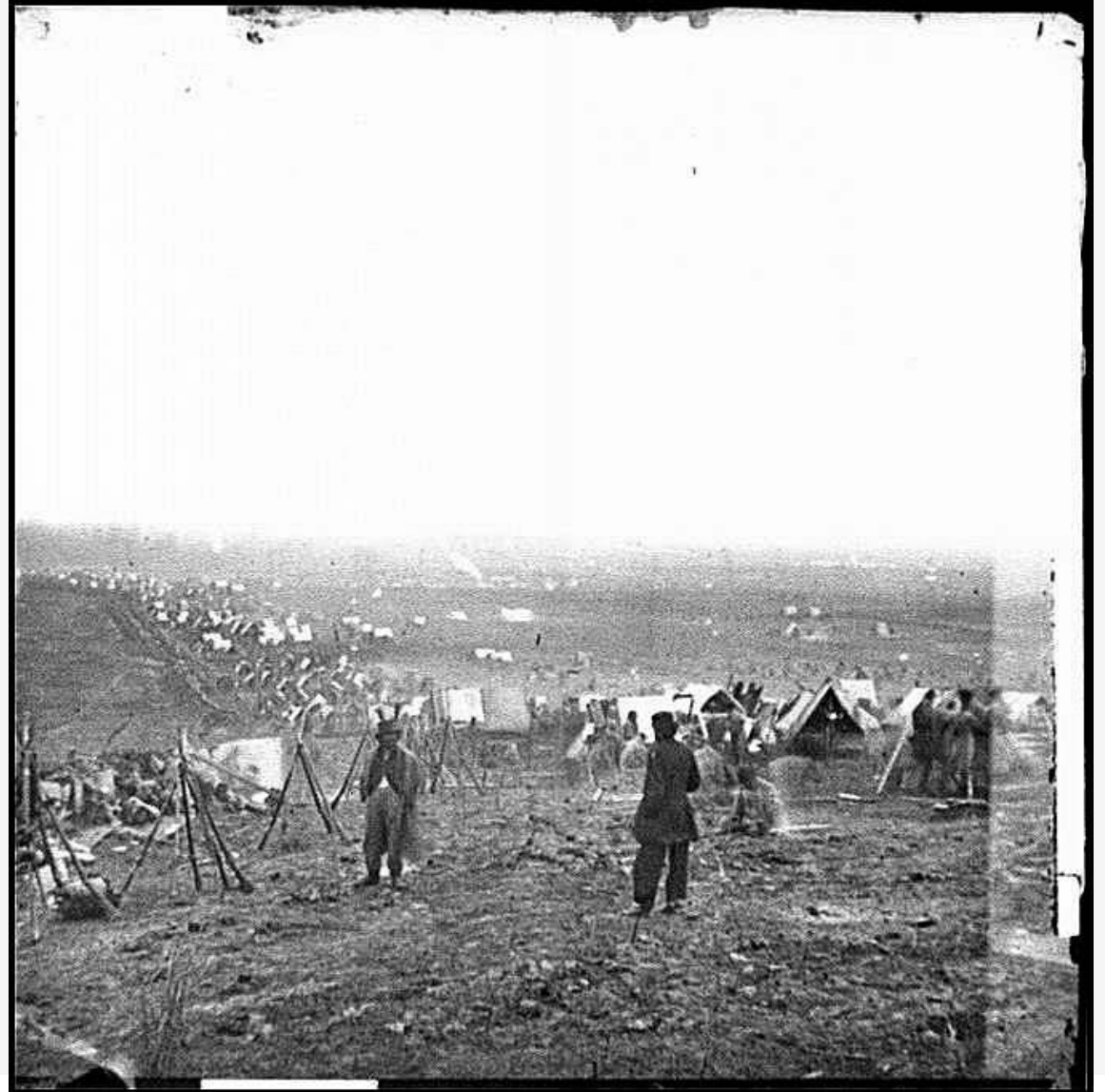
A new urgency

Tower seeks to complete, and indeed enhance the line originally envisioned by Morton with forts on the hilltops encircling the city now connected by entrenchments

Labor and lack of urgency have been limiting factors, but "On The 30th of November, by my request, the commanding general directed large forces of the quartermaster and railroad departments to report to me for constructing an infantry line around the city."

Work begins on a line of entrenchments to surround the city- 7 miles in total

It commenced at the reservoir and passed over Cemetery hill to the railroad track, and was continued thence by General Schofield to Casino Hill.



The line continues

BG Tower indicated that the line continued from Fort Morton it passed around the Taylor Barn and then north in the rear of the Ellison house to Hill 210

Most of the line from hill 210 to the Cumberland River, touching at Gillem, Donaldson, and Hyde Ferry :Forts, was a rifle-pit.

This line was supported by twenty batteries, constructed with embrasures



Defense in Depth

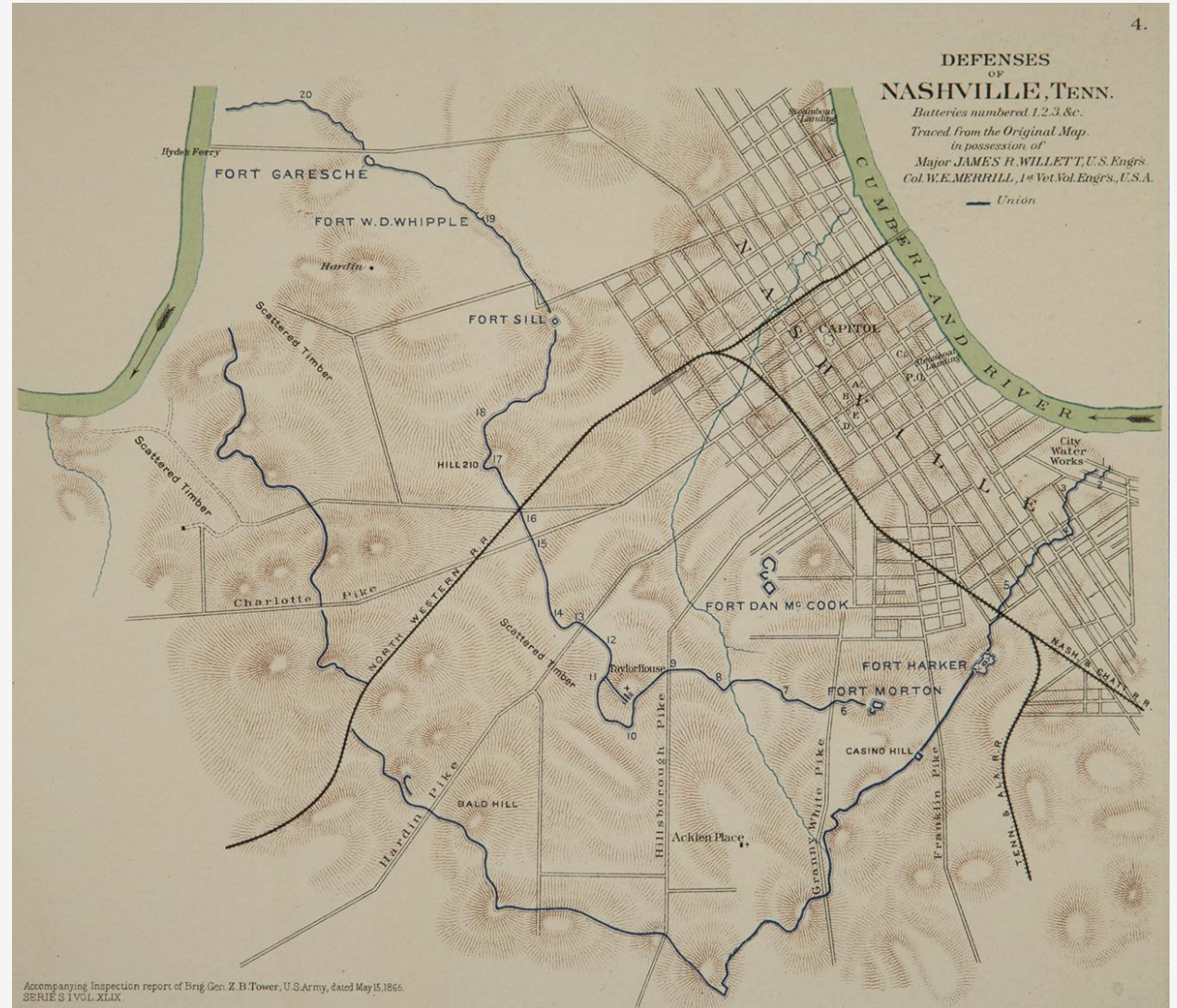
The Exterior line was built by the main Army was about one and a half miles from the Interior line generally following the hills

The Interior line was built by the quartermaster employees and other laborers and extended to the river touching four forts and adding twenty artillery positions protected by embrasures

Thus tower was able to "Tie in his flanks" with the river and provide robust, interlocking fields of fire around the entirety of the city

Further, BG Tower directed the Thirteenth U.S. Infantry, under CPT La Motte to build on the north side of Nashville, "An octagonal redoubt about three-quarters of a mile from the railroad bridge, at bend of track, where there is usually a large collection of cars." in order to cover approaches to the fortified bridge.

By the time of the Battle, The ditch was excavated, parapet raised and revetted with openings left for embrasures, but the overall work was not completed



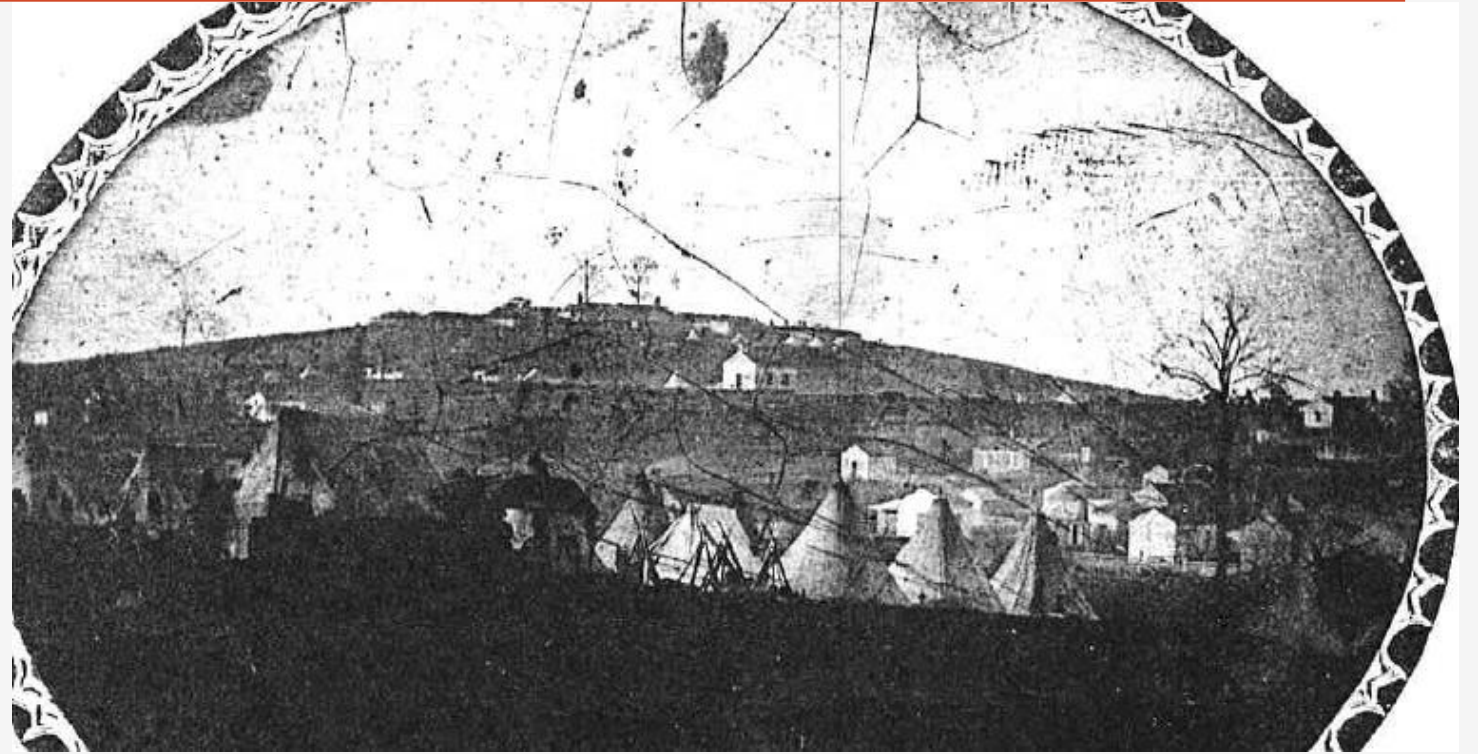
Insights into the Defense

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/ca870d6d4c324f5d8320cd9cde0cd>

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Answering questions about the Battlefield

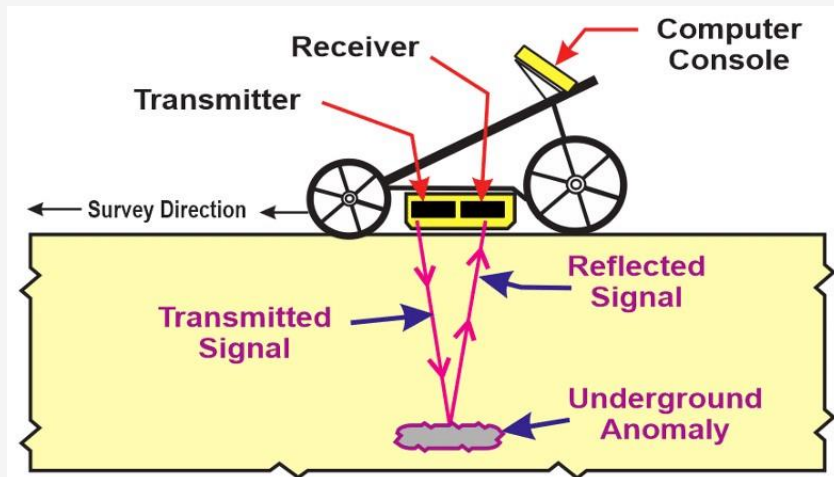
- Why did GEN Hood make his line where he did?
- Was the perimeter of Nashville impregnable?
- Could it have been successfully attacked?



New Tools

Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR)

GPR sends radar waves into the ground which bounce off objects in the ground allowing us to "See" below the surface without disturbing it

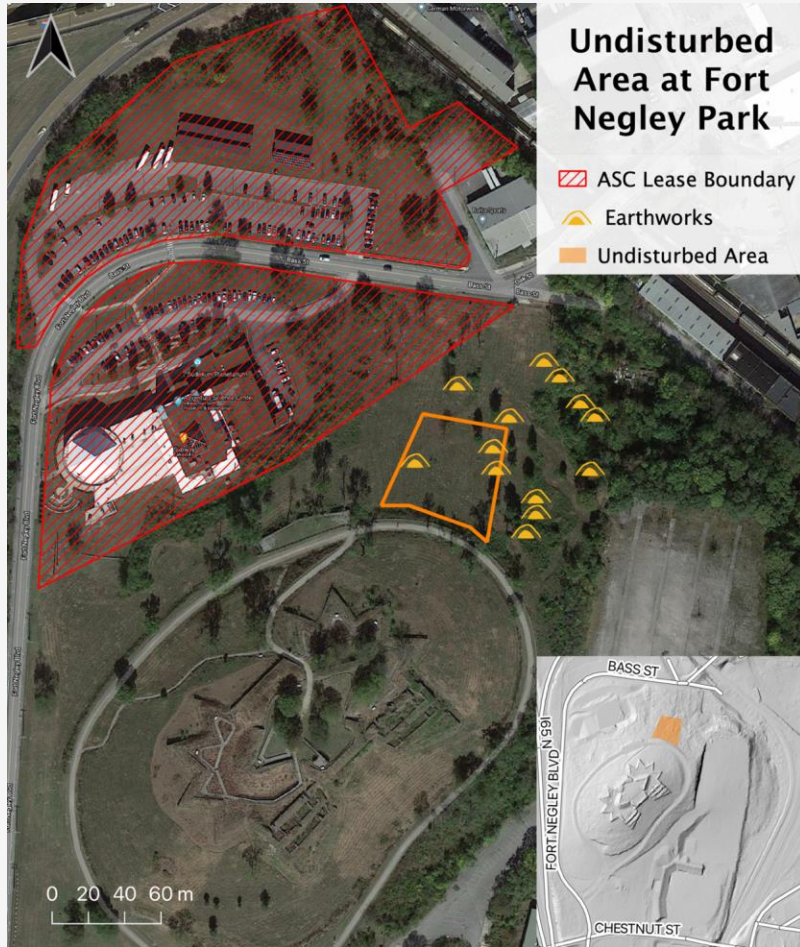


Magnetometer/Gradiometer

Allows us to detect iron-based objects and anomalies below the surface without disturbing it



Fort Negley



GPR Study

- Divide the area we wanted to study into grids
- Maneuver the GPR equipment over the grid in parallel lines to ensure coverage of the entire grid
- Analyze the data with high-speed computers at Vanderbilt's Spatial Analysis Research Lab



Findings

- Several features noted 30-60 cm (approx. 12-24 in) below surface
- Depth is consistent with civil war finds in the area

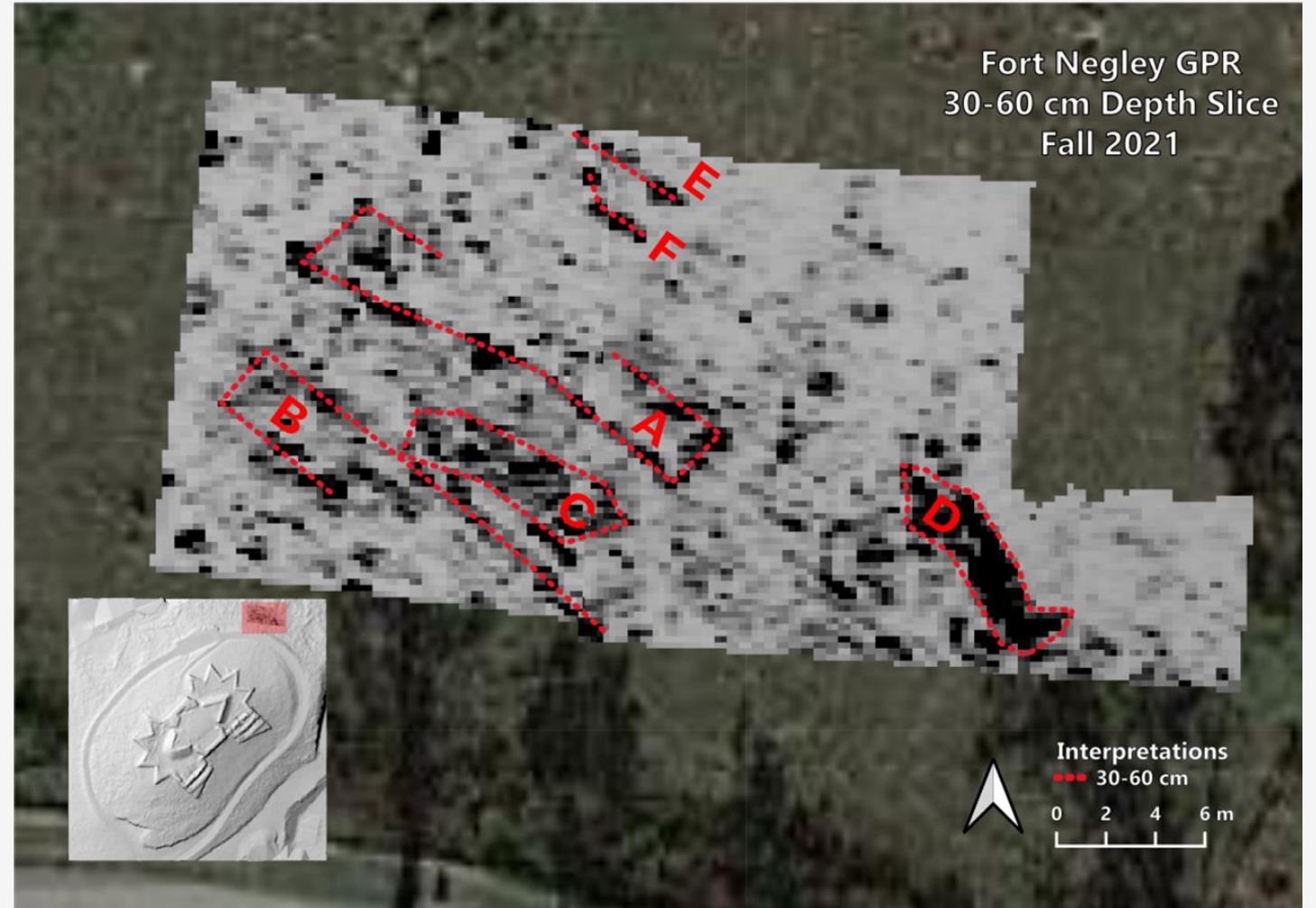
A & B: Rectangular Features approximately 55 ft x 10 ft
-Consistent in size with late CW entrenchment



C: Smaller Rectangular feature
Possible bomb-proof?

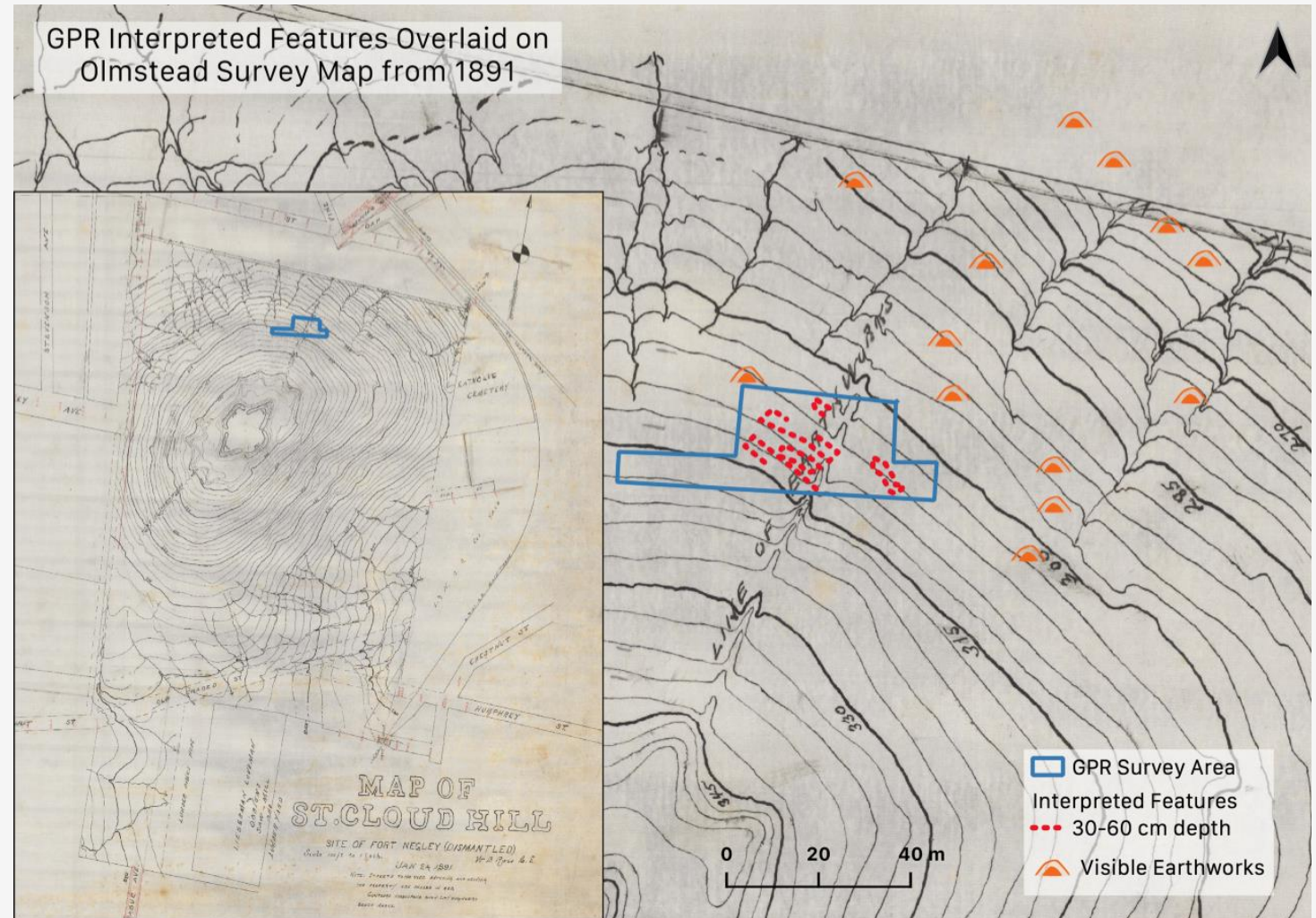
D: Geologic formation

E & F: Incompletely characterized anomaly
Pickets or a larger feature?

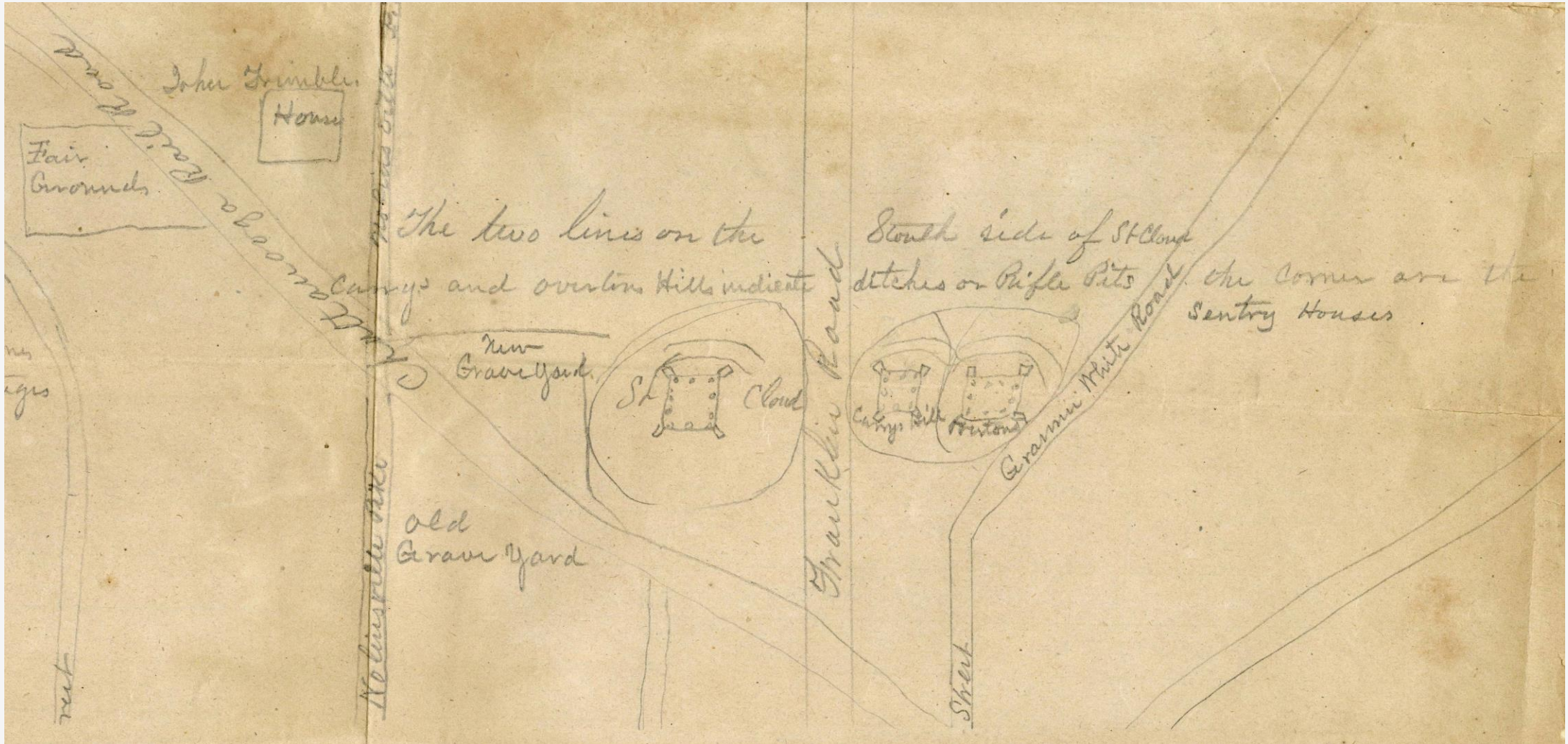


Overlay with Historic Map

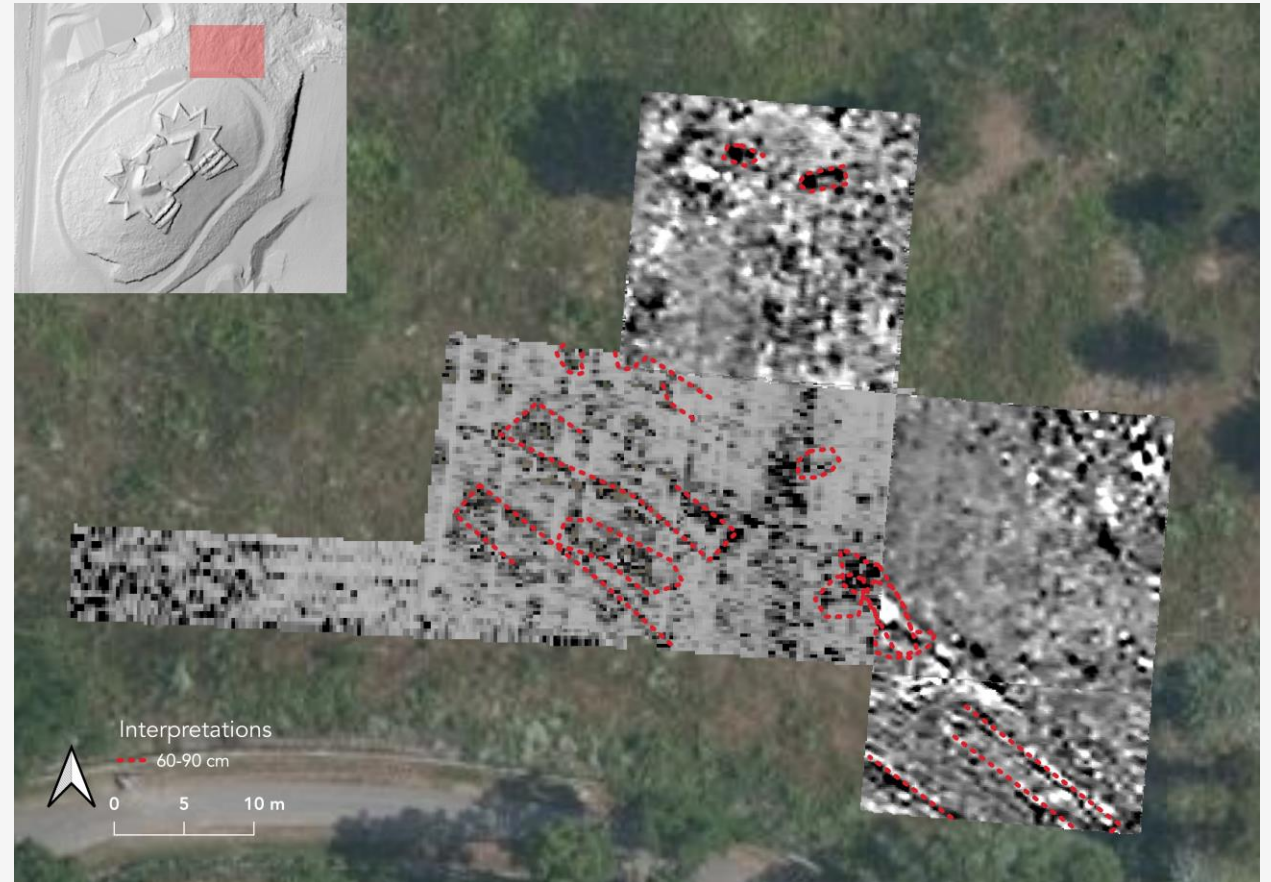
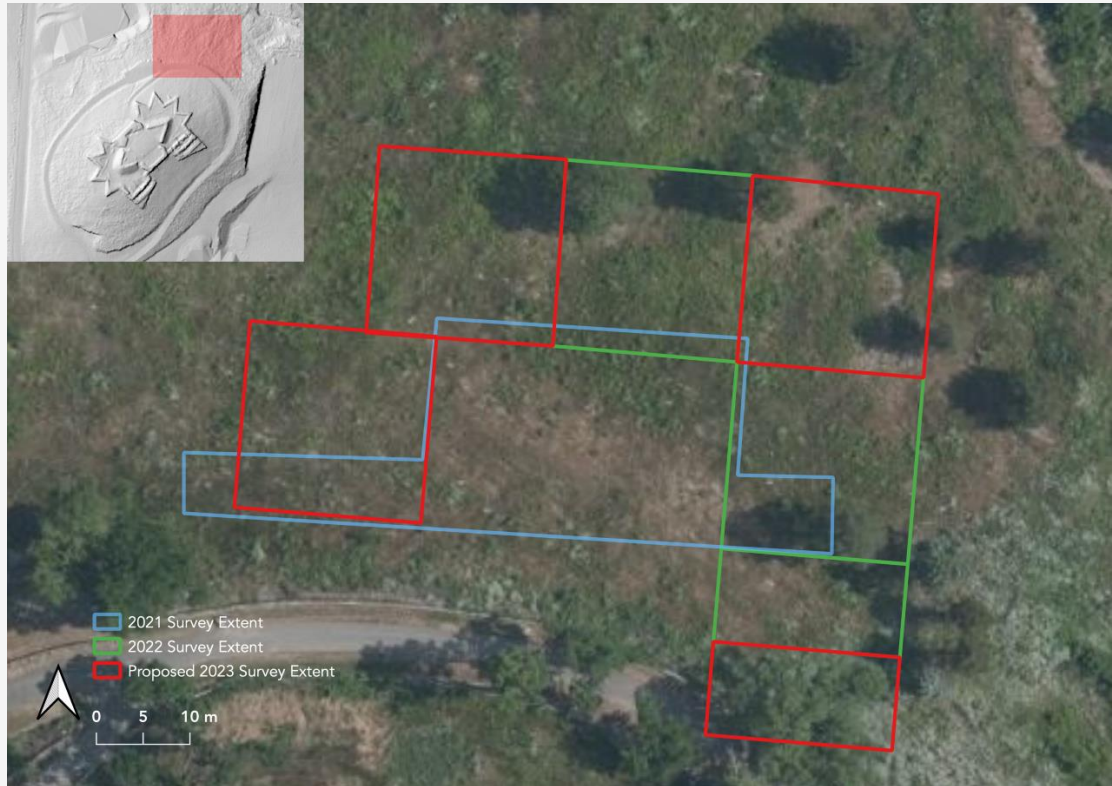
- Edward Law Olmstead was retained to plan to develop the site for residential use in the early 1890s
- He created a detailed survey of the site in 1891 which reflects the remnants of the line of earthworks that once surrounded the city and passed directly through the Ft. Negley site
- We overlaid our GPR survey area and findings on this map, and the anomalies noted align very well with the earthworks Olmstead noted in 1891



Back to the library!

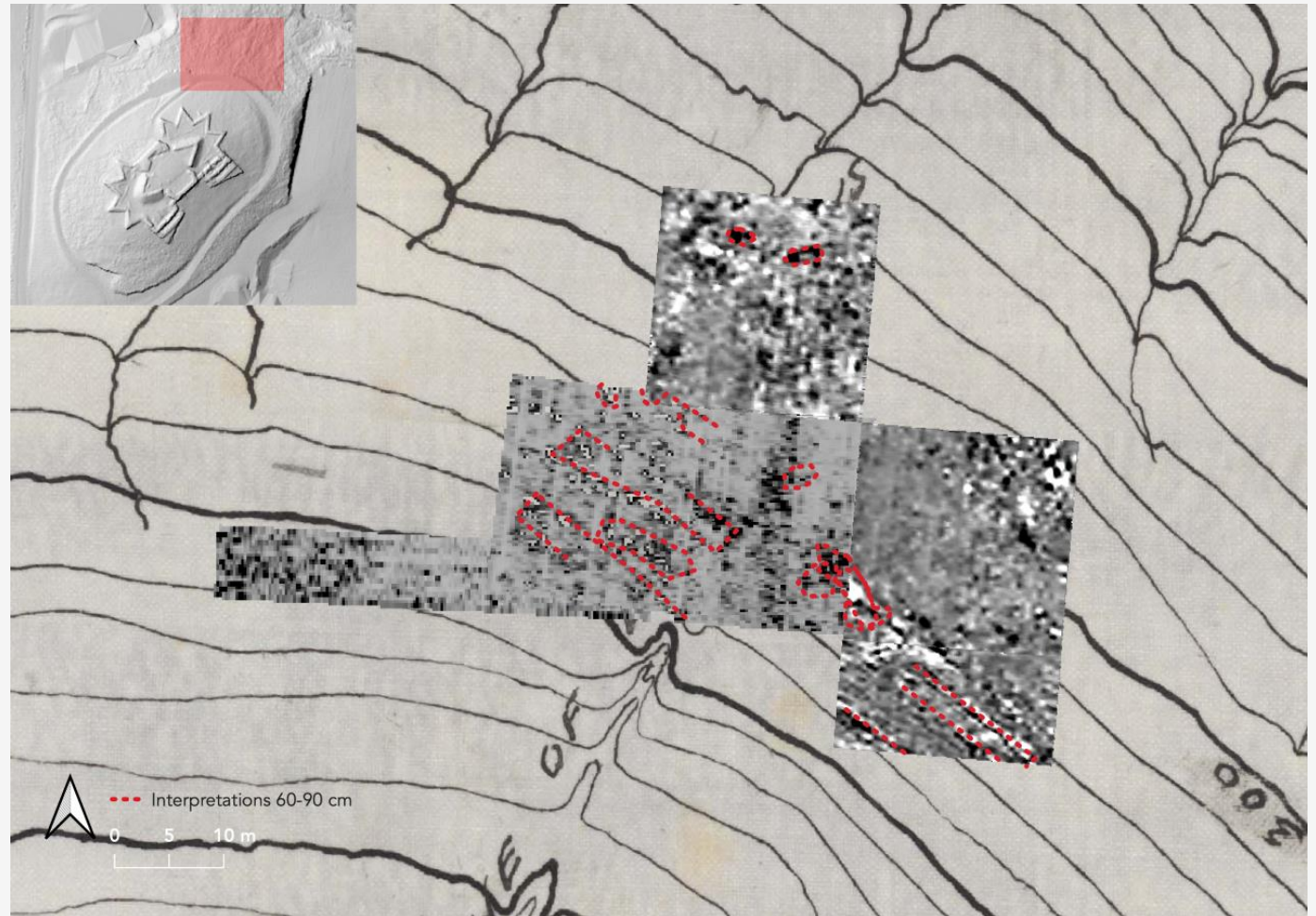


At Fort Negley



Putting it all together

- When you overlay the 2021 data and the 2022 data on the Olmstead map you can see how they all line up
- Note that some of the entrenchments line up with the contour lines



Questions?

