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The Affair at Indian Creek Ford: The Archaeology of a Small Civil War Battle

By Ben Hoksbergen and Brian Hogan

...Learned this morning that there had been quite a fight near Ellick Jones' and that the enemy had brought in 49 prisoners and several wounded men of Col. Wynn's [sic] regiment with the exception of Capt. Jordan and two of his men...The wounded men were badly cut up with saber cuts, as it was a hand-to-hand fight, and the enemy says the young rebels fought bravely...

-Diary of Mary Jane Chadick December 23, 1864

Background

It was the winter of 1864. Huntsville was being reoccupied by Union forces for the fourth time. They had left town in a panic a month earlier, fleeing northeastward up the Memphis & Charleston Railroad to avoid being outflanked by the advancing forces of Confederate General John Bell Hood¹. In mid-November, Hood had crossed the Tennessee River at Florence on his way to Nashville to lure Sherman away from his Atlanta Campaign, but now Hood was defeated, and the Union forces were sweeping back down the railroad to cut off his retreat.

Confederate cavalry units under Brigadier General Philip D. Roddey² had been covering and supplying Hood, but now were dispersed across northern Alabama engaging the advancing

¹ John W. Andes and William A. McTeer, "McTeer", *Loyal Mountain Troopers: The Second and Third Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry in the Civil War, Reminiscences of Lieutenant John W. Andes and Major Will A. McTeer* (Maryville, Tennessee: Blount County Genealogical and Historical Society, 1992), 183; James Bennington Irvine, *The Civil War Diary of James Bennington Irvine (1829-1881)*, (Peter bennington Irvine, 1987) 42.

² The following units were commanded by Brig. Gen. Roddey: 4th Alabama Cavalry (Roddey's 4th) under Lt.Col. F.M.Windes, the 5th Alabama Cavalry (Patterson's) under Lt.Col. James M.Warren, the 10th Alabama Cavalry under Col. Richard O.Pickett, Burtwell's Alabama Cavalry under Col. John R.B.Burtwell, Stuart's Battalion under Maj. James H.Stuart, and Ferrell's Georgia Battery under Capt. Coleman B.Ferrell.

Union forces and delaying their advance³. Roddey ordered part of a cavalry regiment under Colonel John R. B. Burtwell to advance from their camp in Mooresville toward Huntsville where they were to occupy and hold the town and await reinforcements from Colonel Josiah Patterson's Brigade⁴. Burtwell and his Inspector General, James B. Irvine, rode to Huntsville on the evening of December 20 to assess the situation. As they rode into town from the west, they were met by two companies of Roddey's men who had been on picket at Paint Rock Bridge, but had been routed by advancing Union cavalry who chased them westward toward Huntsville. One of Burtwell's companies that had been on provost duty in Huntsville had retreated toward Athens. Burtwell ordered the retreating men to join his unit at Mooresville and fell back with them to regroup.

The Union force that arrived in Huntsville consisted of detachments of the 10th, 12th, and 13th Indiana Cavalry and the 2nd Tennessee Union Cavalry under Lieutenant-Colonel William F. Prosser. They pushed into Huntsville from the east on December 21, and set about resupplying and ransacking stores and houses⁵. Soon after, Union infantry under Major General James B. Steedman began arriving from Nashville to reinforce them. Upon recapturing Huntsville, the Union troops settled down for an occupation that would last through the end of the war.

On the morning of the 22nd, Col. Burtwell advanced with at least two companies of cavalry⁶ from Lieutenant Colonel F.

³There were two units known as 4th Alabama Cavalry that were involved in the delaying tactics. The 4th Alabama Cavalry in this case was under Brig. Gen. Philip D. Roddey's command. Roddey commanded the District of North Alabama, in the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana, and cooperated with General Hood but was not commanded by him. The 4th Alabama Regiment, on the other hand, reported directly to General John Bell Hood's Army of Tennessee and was commanded by Colonel Alfred A. Russell (4th Alabama Cavalry, Russell's).

⁴ Irvine, *Diary*, 42.

⁵ Chadick, *Diary*,

⁶ Irvine (p. 44) states that there were about 150 men in the Confederate camp at Indian Creek; Andes (p. 180) estimated the Confederate force to be about 390 strong, while McTeer (p. 192) claimed that there were 800 rebels. If there

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M. Windes 4th Alabama Regiment and detachments of the 10th Alabama Cavalry and Moreland's Cavalry Battalion to a position on Indian Creek, six miles west of Huntsville about three-quarters of a mile upstream from the Memphis & Charleston Railroad Bridge⁷. Burtwell and his officers set up camp in a house⁸ in the bluffs west of Indian Creek, while the enlisted men camped about 200 yards away on the floodplain. Leery of the substantial Union force in Huntsville, the Confederate troops hunkered down to await reinforcements from Patterson's Brigade. In the meantime, Burtwell gave the order to pile fence rails on the railroad bridges between Huntsville and Decatur in case the Union forces attempted to advance further westward by rail⁹.

Meanwhile, Union gun-boats advanced down the Tennessee River toward Decatur, bombarding any possible Confederate positions there¹⁰. The heavy cannonading to their rear and the large Union force to their front unnerved the Confederate soldiers at Indian Creek who were already receiving rumors of Hood's defeat. There was no word from Patterson's brigade, and the scouts and couriers they sent out never returned. On the afternoon of the 23rd, Burtwell ordered the railroad bridges burned, and the men settled in for an uneasy night leaving their clothes on and their horses saddled. Burtwell sent out extra pickets and ordered a scouting party to head toward Huntsville to warn of any Union movement¹¹. They held their position and waited in vain for reinforcements.

were two companies of cavalry present, there were probably between 150 and 200 men in Burtwell's camp.

⁷ Irvine (p. 46.) says the distance was a quarter mile from the bridge, but the archaeological survey indicated the distance was more like three-quarters of a mile.

⁸ Probably the double log cabin mentioned by McTeer (p. 193) where they came upon a mortally wounded Confederate soldier after the battle.

⁹ Irvine, *Diary*, 44.

¹⁰ James B. Steedman, "Report of Maj. Gen. James B. Steedman, U.S. Army, Commanding Provisional Detachment (District of Etowah), The Battle of Nashville", January 27, 1865; Irvine, *Diary*, 44.

¹¹ Irvine, *Diary*, 44-45.

The Battle

During the night of December 23rd, a slave belonging to the residents of the house occupied by Burtwell and his officers, reacted to the harsh treatment he had received from the Confederate troops and escaped to Huntsville where he warned the Union garrison of the Rebel force at Indian Creek. Irvine, Burtwell's Inspector General, noticed the slave's absence soon after nightfall and reported it to his command¹², but by then it was too late. Col. Prosser had already received word of the Confederate position and was ordering around 200 of his men¹³ to advance on Indian Creek. The Union force made up of parts of the 10th Indiana and 2nd Tennessee left Huntsville at 3:00 a.m., setting off down the Decatur Road¹⁴.

The night was cold, and the ground frozen, but the Union cavalry rode hard and arrived at Indian Creek at dawn, driving the Confederate pickets and scouts ahead of them. Col. Prosser and Captain George R. Mitchell led the charge with the 10th Indiana while the 2nd Tennessee held up the rear¹⁵. Col. Burtwell and his staff had arisen just before dawn and rode to the railroad bridge across Indian Creek to make sure it was destroyed, but no sooner had they returned to camp when gunfire was heard toward Huntsville. Burtwell set up a line of defense at the narrow ford across Indian Creek with Sloss Company (4th Alabama, Co F) commanded by Lieutenant Thomas J. Williams in front, "25 to 30 steps¹⁶" from the bank of the creek. The other company, Company I¹⁷, began forming a line on the bluff overlooking the floodplain¹⁸. The formation was done leisurely since they thought that the scouts and pickets would delay the Union

¹² Irvine, *Diary*, 44-45.

¹³ Andes (p. 180) and McTeer (p. 192) both state that the Union force was 200 strong; *Official Records* concur.

¹⁴ Andes and McTeer, *Reminiscences*, 191. See discussion below.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Irvine, *Diary*, 47.

¹⁷ Company I was organized in Huntsville as Jordan's Life Guards by Captain Thomas B. Jordan. Many of these men were newly-mustered after the Union forces fled Huntsville to avoid being flanked by Hood's army.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

charge, but no sooner had the company on the bluff began to dismount to advance into position with Sloss Company when they spotted a Union saber charge driving down the tight road-cut east of the creek. The Union advance began to cross the narrow ford with Prosser and Mitchell leading the charge and the 2nd Tennessee driving hard to join the fight. The Confederate company on the bluff wavered and turned, fleeing westward down the road toward Madison and Mooresville beyond. Sloss Company was only able to fire off one volley of shots from horseback before the Union charge crashed into their line, forcing them to join their fleeing comrades¹⁹. The 2nd Tennessee cavalrymen used their sabers with devastating effect while the 10th Indiana clubbed at the retreating Rebels with their carbines²⁰. Burtwell and his officers tried in vain to turn the retreating column. The Confederate troops were pursued along the road all the way to Mooresville²¹, many being cut down and captured along the way.

The small battle was little more than a rout of the Confederate force. It was primarily a saber charge, and one Union eyewitness stated "There was not exceeding one hundred shots fired on our side"²². Confederate casualties included 50 to 60 captured and several wounded and killed²³. A review of the Confederate rolls identified 51 Confederate cavalrymen captured near Madison Station on the day of the battle (see list at end of article). The account of John W. Andes of the 2nd Tennessee mentions the citizens of Mooresville reporting that about 100 wounded Confederate soldiers had passed that way. In her diary, Huntsville resident Mary Jane Chadick reported hearing that the Union occupiers brought in 49 prisoners and several wounded men from the fight²⁴. The wounded were "badly cut up with

¹⁹ Ibid. 48.

²⁰ Andes and McTeer, *Reminiscences*, 192.

²¹ Andes and McTeer, *Reminiscences*, 180.

²² Ibid., 192.

²³ Andes estimated 15 Confederates killed and 15 mortally wounded.

²⁴ McTeer (p.193) reported 54 prisoners, Andes reported 50 prisoners.

Various accounts from the *Official Records* include 25 (I,vXLV/1, 570) and 60 (I,vXLV/2, 342).

saber cuts, as it was a hand-to-hand fight"²⁵. Union casualties are listed in the Official Records as one killed, three wounded²⁶, but first-hand accounts list one killed²⁷ and only one wounded²⁸.

The prisoners were taken back to Huntsville where they were marched to the public square and placed under guard. Some of the captured Confederate troops were released through the intercessions of their loved ones, but the remainder was divided up and sent by rail to Union prisons. The officers were sent to Fort Delaware on the Delaware River, while the enlisted men were sent to Camp Chase in Ohio²⁹. Captain Mitchell was later commended for leading the Union charge³⁰.

Locating the Battleground

The initial battlefield survey was conducted as part of an archaeological and historical survey of around 7,635 acres of western Huntsville and eastern Madison conducted by the Redstone Arsenal Environmental Management Division to assess impacts to historic properties from the Redstone Gateway development on the north end of Redstone Arsenal³¹. It was known at that time that the battle had occurred somewhere in the survey area, but its exact location was up for debate. Available historic maps were digitally scanned and uploaded using the ArcGIS program to electronically georectify them so that they could be overlaid on modern aerial imagery to help narrow down the location of the battle.

²⁵ Chadick

²⁶ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. XLV, Part 2, 342.

²⁷ Andes and McTeer, *Reminiscences*, 193.

²⁸ Andes and McTeer, *Reminiscences*, 180, 193; The wounded man was a Lieutenant named A. S. Prosser who was shot in the foot while attacking an unmounted rebel with his saber.

²⁹ Irvine, *Diary*, 50.

³⁰ *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XLV, Part 1, 570.

³¹ Ben Hoksbergen and Katie Stamps, *A Section 106 Assessment of Impacts to historic Properties Resulting from the Redstone Gateway EUL Development at Redstone Arsenal, Madison County, Alabama* (Redstone Arsenal, 2011).



Original pier of the Memphis & Charleston Railroad Bridge across Indian Creek; a pier still stands on either side of the creek, even though neither is used for support anymore.

Based on a detailed account in James Bennington Irvine's wartime diary, the battle took place around a quarter of a mile away from the Memphis & Charleston Railroad Bridge across "six mile branch"³² six miles west of Huntsville. All Union accounts list the creek as "Indian Creek". The drainage now known as Indian Creek is located about six miles west of downtown Huntsville, although the creek went by many other names in the past. It is labeled Hurricane Fork on an 1837 map³³ and Price's Fork on the 1875 Madison County map which reserves the name Indian Creek for that portion of the drainage below its confluence with Huntsville Spring Branch. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that this was the creek where the battle took place.

The Memphis & Charleston Railroad followed the same route as what is now the Norfolk Southern line through Huntsville and Madison. The modern Norfolk Southern bridge crosses at the same place the Memphis & Charleston line crossed during the Civil War. All that is left of the Memphis &

³² Irvine, *Diary*, 43.

³³ John LaTourrette, "An Accurate Map of the State of Alabama and West Florida (New York: Colton & Co., 1837).

Charleston railroad bridge over Indian Creek are the two end pilings which are left intact but no longer support the bridge deck. Rock from the remaining original pilings is spread out as rip-rap along the north side of the bridge abutments. It is likely, but uncertain that these stone pilings are the remains of the original bridge that was present during the skirmish on December 24, 1964.

Another contemporary account by Major William A. McTeer of the Union 3rd Tennessee Cavalry states that the Union force set off down "Decatur Road" from Huntsville to attack the Confederate position. The 1861 Huntsville city map³⁴ shows the main westward thoroughfare out of Huntsville as "Pulaski Road". This is where Holmes Avenue runs now. The 1875 Madison County map³⁵ shows the same road as "Athens Pike" which follows the current route of Holmes Avenue westward to what is now Sparkman Drive where it comes to a fork. The southward branch of the fork is called the "Huntsville to Madison" road on the 1875 map. It followed what is now Sparkman Drive southward until it got to where I-565 is now and then turned westward toward Madison. The road angled across Indian Creek about 165m upstream from where Old Madison Pike currently crosses it. The crossing is indicated by a deep roadcut on the east side of the creek, and there is still a narrow natural ford across the creek at that location. The 1875 road then passed southwest across the Indian Creek floodplain and up into the bluffs where it turned westward again, following the current route of Old Madison Pike until it branched again a mile west of what is now Wall-Triana Road. The south branch of this fork is labeled "To Decatur" on the 1875 map suggesting that this was the route that was considered the "Decatur Road" during the Civil War.

These locations were compared to the first-hand descriptions of the battle allowing the battleground to be laid out on modern aerial imagery. This was viewed in ArcGIS using a

³⁴ "City of Huntsville, Madison County, Alabama" (Louisville: Hartley and Drayton, 1861).

³⁵ James H. Mayhew, "Map of Madison County, Alabama" (Cincinnati: Strobridge and Co., 1875).

shaded model produced using high-resolution digital elevation data generated through a Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) scan of the landscape. This imagery was used to locate areas with minimal ground disturbance for a metal detector survey to determine if any material residue of the skirmish remained.

The metal detector survey was conducted using a White MXT Tracker E-series metal detector with an Eclipse 950 coil. The initial survey was conducted by sweeping all undisturbed ground along transects laid out every five meters. Wherever Civil War era artifacts were found, the surrounding area was swept at closer intervals in an increasing radius around each find to delineate any concentrations. Each metal detector hit was excavated. All 19th century artifacts were collected, and their find locations were electronically marked using a Trimble GeoXH hand-held Global Positioning System (GPS) unit with sub-meter accuracy. This data was then uploaded as an ArcGIS shapefile so that it could be overlaid on maps and analyzed for any spatial patterning.



Probable route followed by Union cavalry from Huntsville to Indian Creek.

Survey Results

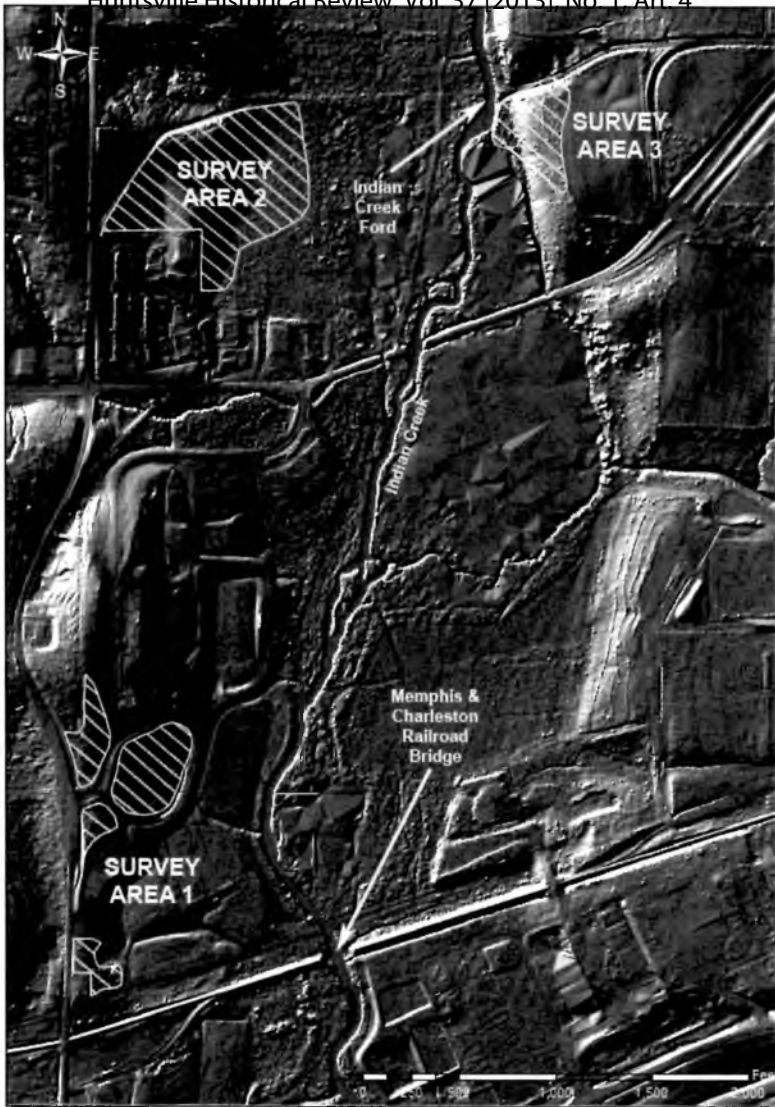
The metal detector survey focused on three areas (hatched areas on map below). The first area investigated was

designated Survey Area 1. The survey of this area was based on Irvine's account which put the Confederate soldiers' camp on the west side of Indian Creek, "about 1/4 mile" from the railroad bridge. All undisturbed ground within this radius was surveyed. About six hours were spent on the actual survey. The vast majority of this area had been disturbed by modern construction. Four parcels (circled by a yellow line in the figure) were determined to be intact enough to be selected for the metal detector survey. All four of these parcels were on the low ridge above the Indian Creek floodplain. Each of these parcels was surveyed with the metal detector in transects spaced a maximum of 10m apart. While lots of 20th century debris (aluminum cans, oil filters, shotgun shells, modern bullets, etc.) was recovered, only two artifacts possibly dating to the Civil War period were collected. One half of a mule shoe was recovered north of a modern electric substation, and a horseshoe was collected in the center of a turnaround in the Madison Academy driveway. Both of these artifacts could have been associated with 19th or early 20th century agriculture, but the 1937 aerial photographs indicate that both find locations were not in cultivation at that time. Nonetheless, there was no evidence that there were any Civil War camps or skirmishes at that location.

The next area surveyed was the vicinity of the ford across Indian Creek which was identified through the analysis of historic maps. The west side of the creek was a parcel of mature hardwoods that was designated Survey Area 2. It was surveyed in transects spaced at 5m intervals. A total of about 30 hours were spent metal detecting this area once all the 19th century finds were delineated. The north boundary of the survey area was a deep historic road cut which shows up as a secondary road on the 1936 quad map and may mark the original location of the historic Huntsville to Madison Road. The survey area was bound to the south by The Vintage Apartment Complex and to the east by a dense stand of Chinese privet on the Indian Creek floodplain which inhibited metal detecting. Several Civil War and possibly related 19th century artifacts were recovered in this survey area including a fired Henry repeating rifle casing, a dropped Burnside .54 caliber bullet, two dropped .54 caliber Merrill carbine bullets, a melted Minié ball, a dropped .44 Colt pistol

Union issue knapsack hook, a Union uniform button, a civilian spur, two concentrations of cut nails, a trace chain, and several horse and mule shoes. All 19th century artifacts were plotted using the GPS, and all GPS points were uploaded into ArcGIS for distributional analysis.

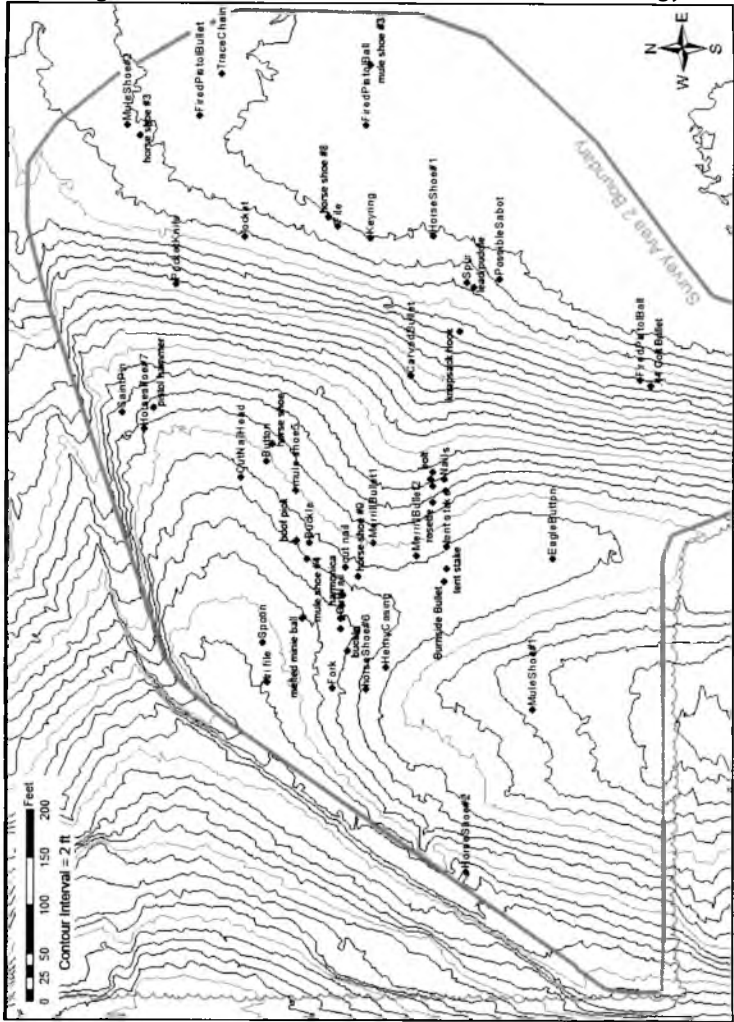
Survey Area 3 was the east side of Indian Creek where the historic Huntsville to Madison Road cuts through the Indian Creek bluffs and leads to the natural ford across the creek. Only about three hours were spent at this location. The north side of the road was heavily disturbed by earth borrowing around a modern house, so the metal detector survey focused on the south side of the historic road trace. Transects were spaced 5m apart. Only three Civil War era artifacts were recovered there including a carved .44 caliber Sage bullet, a cut nail, and half of a horseshoe.



Survey areas on LIDAR hillshade imagery

Artifacts Recovered

Many of the artifacts recovered from Survey Areas 2 and 3 on either side of the Indian Creek Ford are without a doubt associated with the Civil War. These artifacts include both camp items and items associated with the actual fighting. Many other artifacts have more



ambiguous association, and while they might date to the middle 19th century, are not absolutely associated with Civil War activity.

All artifacts were cleaned and analyzed. Significant iron artifacts were stabilized through electrolysis and coated with micro-crystalline wax to prevent further oxidation. All collected artifacts will be curated with the rest of the Redstone Arsenal collection at the Erskine Ramsay Archaeological Repository in Moundville, Alabama.

Eleven bullets and bullet casings associated with small arms used during the Civil War were recovered from the survey areas around Indian Creek Ford. They represented rifle, carbine, and pistol ammunition.

.577 or .58 Caliber Minié Ball.

One melted Minié ball (l. in figure below) was recovered from the bluff top among a concentration of camp items. These bullets were cast in .58 caliber for the Springfield rifle musket or slightly narrower for the Enfield rifle musket, the two most common infantry weapons of the war³⁶. Minié balls had a conical cavity in the base that allowed the bullet to expand upon firing to grip rifling with grooves around the exterior of the bullet. This specimen is half melted and probably represents recycling of a found bullet by melting it in order to pour the lead into a mold for another type of ammunition. The remaining bullet weighs 19.7g or 304.0 grains. Since most .577 or .58 caliber Miniés weighed around 500 grains, around 200 grains of lead has been melted off. This bullet could be associated with either Union or Confederate activity, but its association with camp debris at the crest of the bluff suggests that it was left there by Burtwell's troops camping there just prior to the battle.

.44 Henry Repeating Rifle Casing.

One .44 caliber copper casing from a Henry Repeating Rifle (a. in figure below) was recovered from the bluff top in Survey Area 2. This fired casing bears the distinctive double firing pin marks diagnostic of the Henry rifle³⁷. The Henry was a breech-loading lever-action rimfire rifle first patented in 1860 and used throughout the Civil War and into the last half of the 19th century. Some Henry rifles were introduced to the war theater early in the war by soldiers who brought their personal weapons into battle with them, although the first Henrys did not hit the market until the summer of 1862³⁸. The U.S. Ordnance Department did not purchase any Henrys until the summer of 1863

³⁶ Earl J. Coates and Dean S. Thomas, *An Introduction to Civil War Small Arms* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 1990), 16-19.

³⁷ Dean S. Thomas, *Round Ball to Rimfire: A History of Civil War Small Arms Ammunition, Part II: Federal Breechloading Carbines and Rifles* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 2002), 289.

³⁸ Joseph G. Bilby, *Civil War Firearms: Their Historical Background, Tactical Use and Modern Collecting and Shooting*, (Conshohocken, Pennsylvania: Combined Books, 1996), 192.

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when 240 Henry rifles were ordered to arm the recently-mastered 1st D.C. Cavalry³⁹. Even by the end of the war, however, the vast majority of Henry rifles used in combat were privately purchased⁴⁰. Several Union regiments with known Henry rifles among their ranks⁴¹ passed through the area or occupied Huntsville around the time of the Affair at Indian Creek Ford:

-The 16th Illinois Infantry passed down through the area in August of 1863 on their way to Stevenson⁴².

-The 51st Illinois Infantry passed through Huntsville and Athens on their way to engage Hood at Spring Hill⁴³. They arrived back in Huntsville with Steedman following the Battle of Nashville, arriving just before the Affair at Indian Creek Ford, and it's conceivable that some of the infantrymen from that regiment joined in the battle.

- The 73rd, 80th, and 96th Illinois Infantry regiments joined in the occupation of Huntsville from early January to mid-March of 1865⁴⁴.

Union soldiers used Henry rifles far more than Confederate soldiers since they had better access to the ammunition, but with as many as 10,000 Henrys in use during the war⁴⁵, undoubtedly many were captured and used by Confederate troops. Many Union infantry regiments armed with Henrys participated in the Atlanta campaign with Sherman, and some of the weapons may have been captured there and made their way into Roddey's Division in north Alabama. The position of the Henry casing on the battlefield makes it inconclusive whether it represents a Union or Confederate shot, but what is known

³⁹ Thomas *Round Ball to Rimfire*, 291.

⁴⁰ Andrew L. Bresnon, "The Henry Repeating Rifle", accessed January 9, 2011, http://www.rarewinchesters.com/articles/art_hen_02.shtml

⁴¹ Bilby, *Civil War Firearms*, 193-195; Coates and Thomas, *Civil War Small Arms*, 92.

⁴² "16th Illinois Infantry Regiment History: Adjutant General's Report", accessed January 9, 2011, <http://civilwar.ilgenweb.net/history/016.html>

⁴³ "51st Illinois Infantry Regiment History: Adjutant General's Report", accessed January 9, 2011, <http://civilwar.ilgenweb.net/history/051.html>

⁴⁴ "73rd Illinois Infantry Regiment History: Adjutant General's Report", accessed January 9, 2011, <http://civilwar.ilgenweb.net/history/073.html>; "96th Illinois Infantry Regiment History: Adjutant General's Report", accessed January 9, 2011, <http://civilwar.ilgenweb.net/history/096.html>; "80th Illinois Infantry Regiment History: Adjutant General's Report", accessed January 10, 2011, <http://civilwar.ilgenweb.net/history/080.html>

⁴⁵ Bresnon, "The Henry Repeating Rifle"

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is that Union troops armed with Henrys were in the area at the time of the battle.

While some Henry cartridges had an "H" headstamp, the casing recovered at Indian Creek Ford has none. It measures 0.865 inches long with a rim diameter of 0.511 inches and a rim thickness of 0.068.

.54 Burnside Carbine Bullet

A single badly-corroded .54 caliber Burnside Carbine bullet (b. and c. in the figure below) was found on the crest of the bluffs. A portion of the brass casing was still clinging to the lead bullet, so the cartridge was presumably dropped without being fired. The bullet weighed 391.98 grains (25.4g) without the casing.

Burnside Carbines were patented by (future Brigadier General) Ambrose E. Burnside in 1856. The Burnside was one of the first successful breech-loading carbines with metal cartridge casings. The distinctive tapered casing with a projecting bead for holding lubricant around the distal end is unique to Burnside cartridges, and is very diagnostic. The U.S. Ordnance Department purchased over 50,000 Burnside Carbines throughout the war making the Burnside the third most widely used carbine in the Union Cavalry⁴⁶. Captured Burnsidees were also widely used by Confederate Cavalry⁴⁷.

.54 Merrill Carbine Bullets

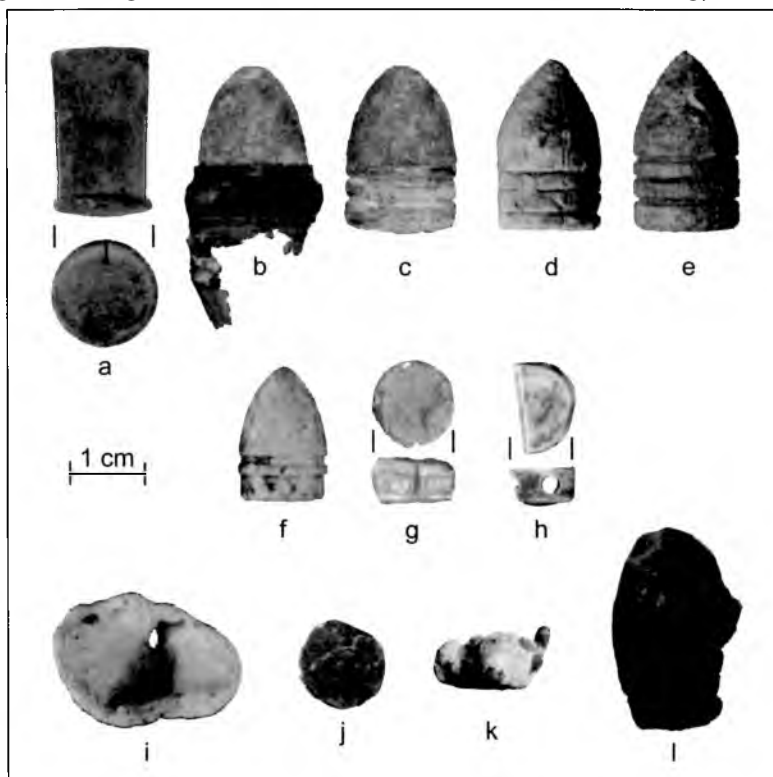
Two dropped .54 caliber Merrill Carbine bullets (d. and e. in the figure below) were found on the top of the bluff in the vicinity of the Burnside bullet. Both of the bullets appear to be unfired, although one of them has some damage that probably resulted from trampling. The trampled specimen weighs 379.64 grains (24.6g) while the other weighs 407.41 grains (26.4g).

Over 15,000 Merrill Carbines were issued to Union Cavalry beginning in 1861. It was never a very popular weapon, and by 1863, most of the Merrills still in use were concentrated in the western theater. Many Merrill Carbines were captured by the Confederate Cavalry early in the war, and they were in common use among Confederate horsemen⁴⁸. Merrill bullets had paper cartridges which would have decayed on dropped specimens.

⁴⁶ Coates and Thomas, *Civil War Small Arms*, 38.

⁴⁷ Ibid..

⁴⁸ Coates and Thomas, *Civil War Small Arms*, 44.



Small arms ammunition recovered during the metal detector survey.

.44 Colt Pistol Bullet

One dropped .44 caliber bullet (f. in figure above) for a Colt revolver was found at the base of the bluff in Survey Area 2. The bullet would have had a paper cartridge which has since rotted away, but the bullet is undamaged indicating that it was dropped and not fired. The Model 1860 Colt Army Revolver was the most widely-used handgun of the Civil War, and many soldiers on both sides brought their personal guns with them when they enlisted⁴⁹. The recovered bullet weighs 211.42 grains (13.7g).

Carved .44 Sage Pistol Bullet

A single carved .44 Sage pistol bullet (g. in figure above) was recovered from the top of the bluff in Survey Area 3. Only the

⁴⁹ Coates and Thomas, *Civil War Small Arms*, 54.

proximal end of the bullet was recovered, the distal end having been cut off with a knife. Obvious cut marks are visible on the truncated cross-section of the bullet, and the band around the base of the bullet is truncated by a knife cut. The .44 Sage cartridge was used in both the Colt and Remington revolvers, the two most common revolvers of the Civil War⁵⁰. The U.S. Ordnance Department purchased over 3 million Sage cartridges between the summer of 1863 and the autumn of 1864.

Whittling of bullets and other lead was evidently a common pastime among soldiers of both sides during the Civil War based on the vast array of carved bullets that have been recovered from period military camps⁵¹. The presence of a carved bullet near the top of the bluff along the historic road cut on the east side of Indian Creek suggests that a picket was posted there.

Carved .44 Caliber Bullet

Another carved bullet (h. in above figure) was recovered from Survey Area 2 on the west side of Indian Creek midway up the bluff in a low draw that may have been the route of the mid-19th century Decatur Road. The measurable diameter of the bullet averages 0.486 inches, so the original bullet may have been .50 caliber, the diameter has probably been modified. The bullet was cut latitudinally, two 0.08 inch diameter holes were drilled through the base, and then the base of the bullet was cut along one of the holes resulting in a D-shaped piece. The cutting was well-executed, and the cuts appear to have been sanded or otherwise smoothed. A 0.237 inch diameter raised area is evident on the base of the bullet, although it's difficult to tell whether this was sprue from a bullet mold or whether the raised area is the remains of the pin from a lead plunger from a cleaner bullet. The latter is likely since the raised area is very close to the same diameter as the plunger pin on Type III Williams cleaner bullets. Williams cleaner bullets came in .58 caliber and had zinc washers attached by a cast lead plunger to the base which were intended to grip the rifling of the gun barrel upon firing⁵². The carved bullet was found in the vicinity of other camp debris and is likely associated with the Confederate Cavalry camp.

⁵⁰ Coates and Thomas, *Civil War Small Arms*, 54 and 61.

⁵¹ W. Reid McKee and M. E. Mason, Jr., *Civil War Projectiles II: Small Arms & Field Artillery* (Orange, Virginia: Publisher's press, Inc., 1980), 69-72.

⁵² James E. Thomas and Dean S. Thomas, *A Handbook of Civil War Bullets & Cartridges* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 2007), 55.

Fired Pistol Bullet

This fired bullet (i. in figure above) was found embedded in the soil at the base of the bluff in Survey Area 2. It was badly deformed upon impact, but weighs 12.2g or 188.27 grains, similar to the weight of a .44 caliber pistol bullet.

Fired Pocket Pistol Balls

Two fired pocket pistol balls were recovered from Survey Area 2. One (j. in figure above) was recovered from near the dropped .44 Colt bullet at the base of the bluff. It was crushed upon impact, but appears to have been a round ball. It weighed 50.93 grains (3.3g), indicating that it was probably from a small caliber pistol in the .28 to .36 caliber range. A sprue eye mark and seam from a two-piece mold can be distinguished on the bullet. The other (k. in the figure above) was recovered from the floodplain of Indian Creek about 30m from the base of the bluff. It too was badly deformed and weighed 44.75 grains.

Clothing and Accoutrements

Several items were recovered from Survey Area 2 that are definitely associated with the Civil War including government-issued accoutrements and parts of uniforms. Others have a more ambiguous association but are still likely related to Civil War activity based on their spatial association with other artifacts.

Union Uniform Eagle Button

A gilded eagle general service button (a. in figure below) for a Union great coat was recovered from the top of the bluff in Survey Area 2. The button has a legible stamped maker's mark on the back for "Steele & Johnson-Waterbury". The Steele & Johnson Button Company operated in Waterbury, Connecticut from 1858 to 1875⁵³.

They produced many uniform buttons for Federal troops during the Civil War.

Union Knapsack Hook

One copper hook from a Union issue M1855/1864 knapsack (b. in figure below) was recovered from a sunken draw in the bluff west of Indian Creek which may have been the mid-19th century route of the Decatur Road. The clasp of the hook is sharply bent as if the

⁵³ Warren K. Tice, *Uniform Buttons of the United States, 1776-1865* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 1997), 41.

strap of the knapsack had been violently pulled forcing the hook to give way.

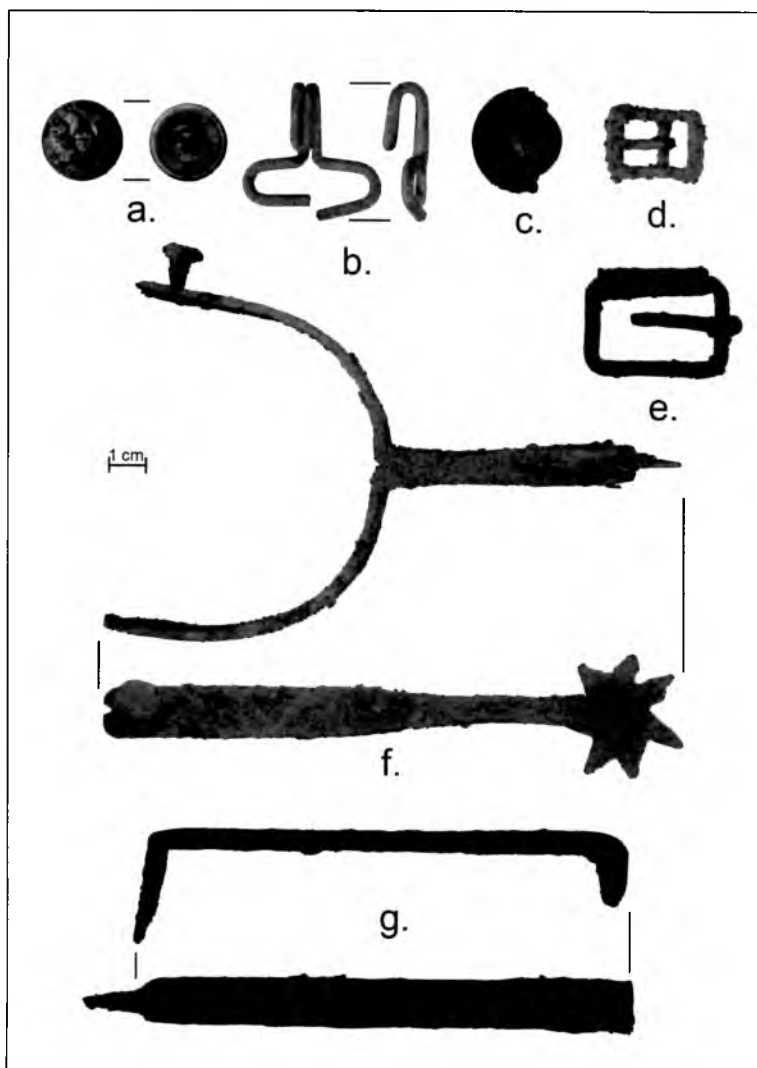
Possible Blanket Roll Buckle

A small iron buckle (d. in figure below) similar to those used to secure the blanket roll to the Federal issue M1855/1864 knapsack, was recovered from the top of the bluff in Survey Area 2. The buckle was found along with a light concentration of camp items.

Iron Roller Buckle

A 1.5" by 1.0" iron roller buckle (e. in figure below) was recovered from the bluff top in Survey Area 2. The buckle is similar in shape and size to those used on Enfield pattern leather cartridge boxes⁵⁴.

⁵⁴ H. R. Crouch, *Civil War Artifacts: A Guide for the Historian* (Fairfax, Virginia: SCS Publications, 1995), 14.



Uniform button and accoutrements recovered during the metal detector survey.

Civilian Rowelled Spur

A nearly-complete non-issue spur (f. in figure above) was recovered from the base of the bluff in Survey Area 2. The spur was found in a small concentration of camp items and may be related to the Confederate camp. It is a hand-made rowelled spur with riveted pegs for attachment to the spur strap.

One of the pegs is missing – probably resulting in the spur being lost or discarded. The yoke and shank are forge-welded from two pieces of

bar stock, and the 7-pointed rowel is hand cut from a piece of sheet metal. Since the spur is not military issue, it cannot be said for certain that it is associated with Civil War activity, but its spatial association with Civil War camp items suggests that it is related.

Rosette

A stamped sheet brass rosette (c. in the figure above) was recovered from the side of the bluff along the shallow draw that may have been the early route of Decatur Road. It measures 1.13 cm in diameter and appears to have once had some sort of gem stone mounted in the center. It may have once adorned a bridle or saddle. It is not military issue, so it is not definitely associated with the Civil War, although it was found in the vicinity of other 19th century artifacts that appear to be Civil War camp debris.

Horseshoes

A total of ten horseshoes were recovered during the metal detector survey. Horseshoes were produced both by machine and hand forging throughout the nineteenth century. Most horseshoes purchased by the U.S. Army during the Civil War were machine-made by a machine invented by Henry Burden in Troy, New York in 1835⁵⁵. Machine-made horseshoes were often modified by farriers to adapt them to specific terrain or to fit individual horses, so it is often difficult to tell how recovered specimens were made. The shape of a horseshoe can indicate which foot it was made for. Front horseshoes are more circular toward the toe and wider at the heel, while rear shoes are more pointed at the toe with a greater constriction at the heel and the widest point at the back quarter. For rear shoes, the outside web or branch is always longer than the inside one, indicating whether the shoe is for the right or the left foot⁵⁶.

Survey Area 1 yielded one horseshoe, a heavily worn and bent shoe with forged heel calks. Survey Area 2 yielded eight horseshoes and horseshoe fragments, only two of which were whole horseshoes. Survey Area 3 yielded a half of a hand-forged horseshoe. The characteristics of the horseshoes recovered are shown in the following table.

⁵⁵ Nathaniel Bartlett Sylvester, "Henry Burden" in *History of Rensselaer Co., New York* (Philadelphia, Everts & Peck, 1880), 218.

⁵⁶ Dale L. Berge, *Simpson Springs Station: Historical Archaeology in Western Utah*, (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Museum of Peoples and Cultures, 1980), 237-239.

| FS # | Horse shoe# | Survey Area | Position | Manufac ture | Calk s | Ful ler | Nail Holes | Wear/ Damag e |
|------|-------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|---------|------------|---------------------------------|
| 14 | | 1 | left rear | hand-forged | forged heel | yes | 6? | heavy toe wear, bent |
| 32 | 1 | 2 | left rear | Burden machine? | forged heel | yes | 8 | moderate toe wear |
| 44 | 2 | 2 | right rear | Burden machine? | none | yes | 8 | moderate toe wear |
| 33 | 3 | 2 | front | unknown | forged heel | no | 6 | halfed, heavy toe wear |
| 47 | 4 | 3 | unknown | hand-forged | none | yes | 6? | halfed, heavy toe wear |
| 64 | 5 | 2 | front | unknown | forged heel | yes | 8? | halfed, heavy toe and heel wear |
| 65 | 6 | 2 | front | hand-forged | forged heel | yes | 6? | halfed, heavy toe wear |
| | 7 | 2 | front | unknown | forged heel | yes | 8? | halfed, heavy toe wear |
| 19 | 8 | 2 | front | hand-forged | forged heel | no | 6 | halfed, heavy toe wear |
| | 9 | 2 | rear | Burden machine? | none | yes | 8? | halfed, heavy toe wear |

It is difficult to determine whether any of the horseshoes are definitely associated with the Civil War engagement. Certainly, the possible Burden machine-made shoes are likely candidates for having fallen off Union horses during the charge, although Burden shoes were also saw plenty of civilian use throughout the mid to late nineteenth century. Under normal circumstances, U.S. cavalry units would routinely re-shoe their horses once a month⁵⁷, so it is unlikely that any of the shoes thrown by Union horses would have extremely heavy wear. Also, since the Union cavalry engaged at Indian Creek had been on the move since the evacuation of Huntsville on November 27, it is likely that they re-shod their stock immediately after re-occupying Huntsville. If this was the case, they could have used locally-produced horseshoes commandeered in Huntsville, and very few shoes would have been lost since the horses were freshly-shod. As for the Confederate cavalry camped at Indian Creek, their horses could have been shod with either locally-forged shoes or captured machine-made shoes.

It is clear that there was much equestrian traffic in the area that was not directly related to the battle. In addition to the horseshoes, no less than six mule shoes were also recovered – a half from Survey Area 1 and five whole shoes from Survey Area 2. Since neither side involved in the battle would have been mounted on mules, these shoes must have been lost during regular traffic along the Decatur road. The 1936 quad map and the 1937 aerial photographs show all three survey areas heavily forested, so it is unlikely that the shoes were lost during agricultural activities.

Possible Hoof Pick

A common tool carried by horsemen on both sides was a hoof pick for removing pebbles, impacted dirt, or other material from the "frog" or the soft recessed sole of a horse's foot. There were several different types of hoof picks including double-headed muller picks which had both a pointed tip for prying out stones and a flat tip for scraping away mud or dirt. This type was in common use among Confederate cavalymen⁵⁸. Another common type consisted of a

⁵⁷ Douglas D. Scott, Richard A. Fox, Jr., Melissa A. Connor, and Dick Harmon, *Archaeological Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 208-209.

⁵⁸ Ken R. Knopp, *Confederate Saddles & Horse Equipment*, (Shepherdsville, Kentucky: Publisher's Press Inc., 2002)154.

Hoksbergen and Hogan: The Affair at Indian Creek Ford: The Archaeology of a Small Civil pointed hook on a simple handle with a loop on the proximal end for suspending from a lanyard.

One possible hoof pick (g. in figure above) was recovered from Survey Area 2 on the bluff top among a concentration of camp items. This pick seems to be a variation of a muller pick. It is hand-forged from half-inch flat stock. Both ends are bent 90 degrees to the handle. One end is hammered to a point, while the other end is hammered or filed to a flat edge for scraping.

Camp Items

Several artifacts are typical of material found in Civil War camps. These include lead for making bullets, lost or broken personal items, and lost or discarded utensils and tools. Most of these items are not military issue but rather represent personal property carried along with the soldiers into theater. Since they are not military issue, it cannot be said with certainty that they are related to the battle, but their age and spatial associations suggest that they are Civil War related.

Camp Lead

Three items recovered from Survey Area 2 represent "camp lead" or lead scrap for recycling into usable items or for melting into bullet molds. The first example is the .58 or .577 caliber Minié ball discussed above. Another example appears to be a fragmented piece of lead sabot from an exploded artillery shell (a. in figure below). This fragment weighs 6.1 oz. (173g) and has a maximum width of 1.7" with a thickness of 0.2". It has jagged edges and is heavily deformed by apparent impacts with rock and soil. Many different artillery shells used by both Union and Confederate forces had lead sabots to seal against the cannon barrels and grip the rifling. Since artillery was not used in the Affair at Indian Creek Ford, and there is no record of artillery use in the immediate area, this piece of artillery shrapnel was probably picked up elsewhere and brought to the site as a source of lead for molding bullets. Only 28 ft. away from the sabot, a 0.77 oz. (21.7g) puddle of lead was recovered further suggesting that scrap lead was being melted and molded into bullets at this location.

Improvised Tent Stakes

Various iron spike-shaped items were frequently foraged by troops on both sides for use as tent stakes. A wide variety of these

items have been recovered at Civil War camps for both sides⁵⁹. Three such items were found in a concentration near the top of the bluff in Survey Area 2. One is a hand-made carriage bolt (d. in figure below). It measures 4.12" long and is made from a hand-headed piece of ½" bar stock with die-cut threads up the lower 1" of the shank. Another is a headless shank of ½" bar stock which has been hammer-tapered to a point (e. in figure below). The third is the proximal end of a bent and broken hand-made stake forged from ½" bar stock with a hand-hammered 1.3" diameter head (f. in figure below).

Harmonica Reed Plate

An iron harmonica reed plate (c. In figure below) was found on the bluff top in the center of a concentration of camp items. It had ten reeds, remnants of seven of which were still affixed to one face of the plate. This is one of two reed plates which would have been part of a typical Richter-tuned diatonic harmonica, colloquially known as a "blues harp". These harmonicas were introduced to the North America in the 1850's. Since they were easy to play and very portable, they became immensely popular among troops on both sides of the Civil War. Broken and discarded harmonicas are frequently recovered from Civil War camp sites⁶⁰.

Files

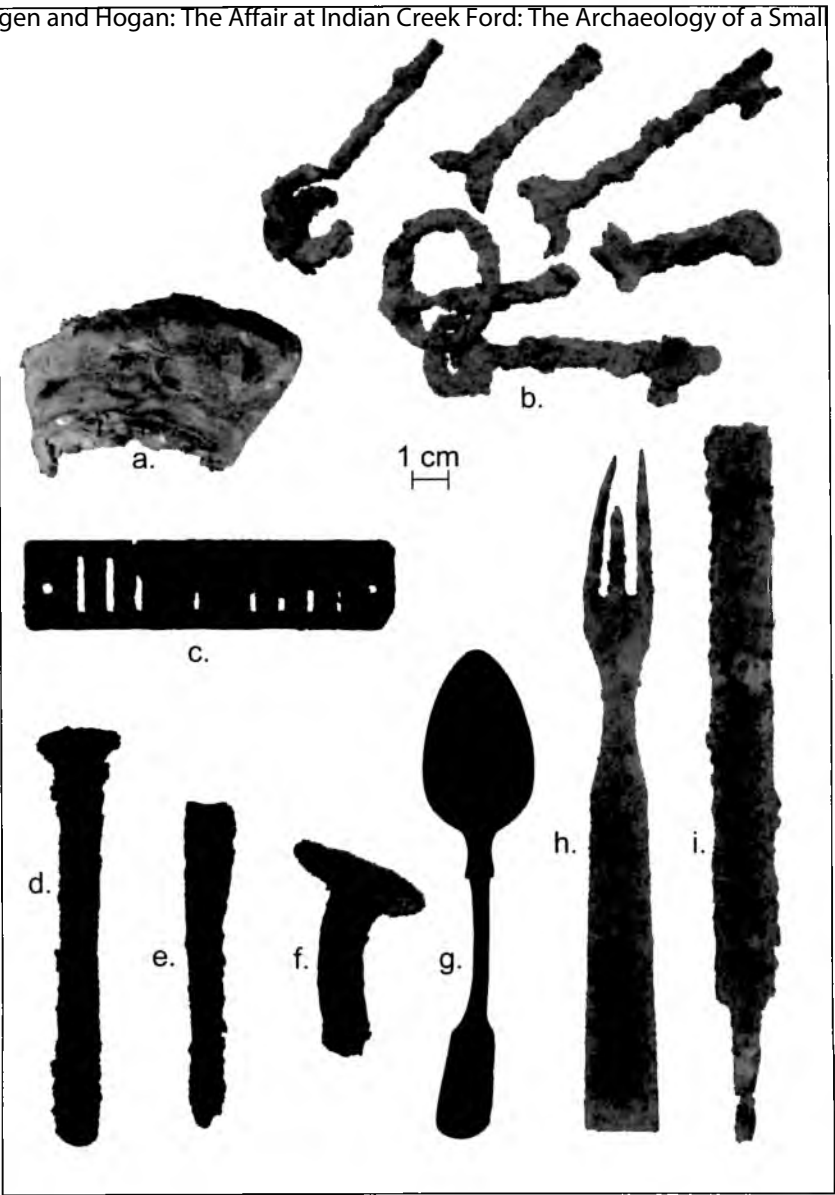
Portions of two rat-tail files were recovered from Survey Area 2. One was a whole mill file (i. in figure above) found in the vicinity of the lead sabot, lead puddle, and other camp items at the base of the bluff. The other was the proximal end of a tri-file found among a concentration of camp items on the bluff top.

Cut Nails

Ten cut nails and cut nail shanks were recovered during the metal detector survey. One was found on the slope of the bluff in Survey Area 3, but the majority was found in two concentrations in Survey Area 2. One of the concentrations was located in a 5m diameter scatter along the shallow draw in the side of the bluff near the

⁵⁹ James M. Moore, "Artifact Descriptions" in Lawrence S. Alexander and Elsa Heckman, *Archaeological and Historical Survey and Preparation of a Battlefield Protection Plan for the Western Perimeter of the Lookout Mountain Battlefield, Hamilton County, Tennessee* (Wildwood, Georgia: Alexander Archaeological Consultants, 2006), 152.

⁶⁰ Moore, "Artifact Descriptions", 155.



Civil War camp items recovered during the metal detector survey.

improvised tent stakes. The nails in this concentration were all small, around an inch-and-a-half long and are typical of those used as fasteners in wooden ammunition boxes. Four whole nails and one shank were recovered from this concentration. The other concentration

was among a scatter of several other camp items on the bluff top. Nails in this concentration included one proximal end, two shanks, and one whole nail. The whole nail measured 2.5 inches long, and the three partial nails all appeared to have been the same size. In addition to being pried from ammunition or food boxes, cut nails might have arrived at camp in boards salvaged for firewood, although none of the nails exhibit any signs of having been burned.

Fork and Spoon

A brass spoon and a three-tined fork (g. and h. in the figure above) were found 26m apart in one of the concentrations of camp items on the bluff top in Survey Area 2. The fork is iron with a flat handle with rivets for affixing a two-piece wooden or bone handle. The spoon was stamped out of sheet brass. Neither utensil bears a maker's mark, but both are typical of the Civil War era.

Ring of Skeleton Keys

An iron ring with at least six keys including three iron skeleton keys (c. in figure above) was found at the base of the bluff in Survey Area 2. The iron was heavily-corroded, and three of the objects hanging on the ring couldn't be identified, but they probably represent additional keys of one type or another.

Non-Civil War Artifacts

Several items were collected from Survey Area 2 that are probably not related to the Civil War engagement, but are either contemporary or are unique and worthy of mention. They shed light on the non-military use of the area during and after the Civil War.

Trace Chain

A portion of a harness trace chain was found on the floodplain below Survey Area 2. The chain is heavily corroded, but it appears to include at least nine links and one of the toggles. Trace chains were used to attach a breastcollar or harness to the wagon, caisson, or other load. This specimen probably dates to the 19th century, but since the accounts don't mention any draft vehicles pulled during the affair at Indian Creek ford, it is probably not related to the battle.

Pocket Knives

Two pocket knives were found during the metal detector survey. Both are straight-handled stockman style knives. One (FS#39) is two-bladed. The handle has brass bolsters with a glittered celluloid

Hoksbergen and Hogan: The Affair at Indian Creek Ford: The Archaeology of a Small Civil
inlay on one side. The inlay on the other side apparently fell off during
the use-life of the knife and was replaced with a strip of leather. The
other knife (FS#70) is a three-bladed stockman with brass handle
bolsters and dark brown or black jigged delrin inlays. One side of the
handle has an inlaid crest shield. Both of these knives probably date to
the early to mid-twentieth century.

Locket Cover

A gilded brass locket cover with a scrolled heart motif was
found at the base of the bluff away from any of the camp item
concentrations. It cannot be easily dated.

Coins

Two coins were recovered during the metal detector survey.
They were in close proximity to one another on the north end of the
survey area on the bluff top. One was a 1916 penny, while the other
was a heavily-worn 1907 Liberty-head quarter.

Saint Christopher Pin

A Roman Catholic Saint Christopher pin was found near the
edge of the early twentieth century road cut near the rim of the bluffs
in Survey Area 2. The pin appears to be made from stamped nickel
alloy, possibly with silver plating. It has a pin soldered to the back and
bears the inscription "SAINT CHRISTOPHER BE MY GUIDE"
surrounding a bas-relief of St. Christopher carrying the Christ child. It
is interesting that the pin was found near the road bed since St.
Christopher is typically evoked for protection of travelers.

Civilian Buttons

Four civilian buttons were recovered. One (FS#40) is a unique
brass button with a Sanders-type shank with the front inlaid with a
white and copper spattered glass cabochon. The cabochon is fixed in
an oval setting giving the button the appearance of an eye. It probably
dates to the mid-nineteenth century. It was found on the bluff top near
the concentration of box nails and tent stakes and could possibly be
associated. A brass O'Bryan Bros. coverall button (FS#27) was also
found on the bluff top. It bears the Duck Head logo of O'Bryan
Brothers indicating that it dates post-1892. Another button is a
Sanders shank button with an iron back and a brass front embossed
with "LPE 1904" and "SWEET ORR & CO OVERALLS". Sweet, Orr

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& Co. was founded in 1871 in Wappingers Falls, New York⁶¹. This button was found on the bluff top among one of the concentrations of camp items, but obviously post-dates the Civil War. The iron back of a similar button (FS#71) was found 160 ft. to the northeast along the rim of the bluff. It too probably dates to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

Pistol Hammer

An iron pistol hammer was found adjacent to the St. Christopher pin. The hammer appears to be from a late-nineteenth or early twentieth-century derringer revolver or similar small handgun.

Post-Civil War Ammunition

A total of 185 pieces of post-Civil War small arms ammunition were found in Survey Area 2 during the metal detector survey. By far the most common artifacts found in Survey Area 2 were early- to mid-twentieth century shotgun shells (n=158). All but 13 of these were the brass bases for paper shells with headstamps dating from the 1870's to the 1930's. The 13 plastic shells indicate recreational firearm use in the area into the last half of the twentieth century. The majority of the shotgun shells were for small game loads suggesting that the area was a popular spot for squirrel and rabbit hunting. The parcel was probably also used for target practice judging by the sheer number of bullets and shells, and was used by the whole community based on the variety of guns represented. At least ten guns are represented including four sizes of shotguns, as well as .30 and .22 caliber rifles, and .45, .36, and .32 caliber pistols. The area is currently a forest of mature hardwoods and red cedars. The 1937 aerial photographs show it then already as mature forest stretching from what is now Slaughter Road eastward to the top of the bluff on the east side of Indian Creek. This would have been an excellent hunting area throughout most of the twentieth century.

Early 20th Century Condom Tin

The cover of an aluminum condom tin embossed with "3 MERRY WIDOWS", "Price \$100", "SELECTED-TESTED" was found on top of the bluff near the south end of the survey area. The lower part of an aluminum condom tin was found about 125 yards (115m) away on the slope of the bluff toward the north end of the

⁶¹ John J. Nutt, *Newburgh: Her Institutions, Industries and Leading Citizens* (Newburgh, New York: Ritchie & Hull, 1891), 270.

Hoksbergen and Hogan: The Affair at Indian Creek, Ford: The Archaeology of a Small Civil survey area. The two halves are from the same brand of condom tin and are probably a match. The 3 Merry Widows brand condoms were popular during the early twentieth century⁶². Apparently, hunting, target practice, and warfare weren't the only human activities conducted at this location.

Conclusions

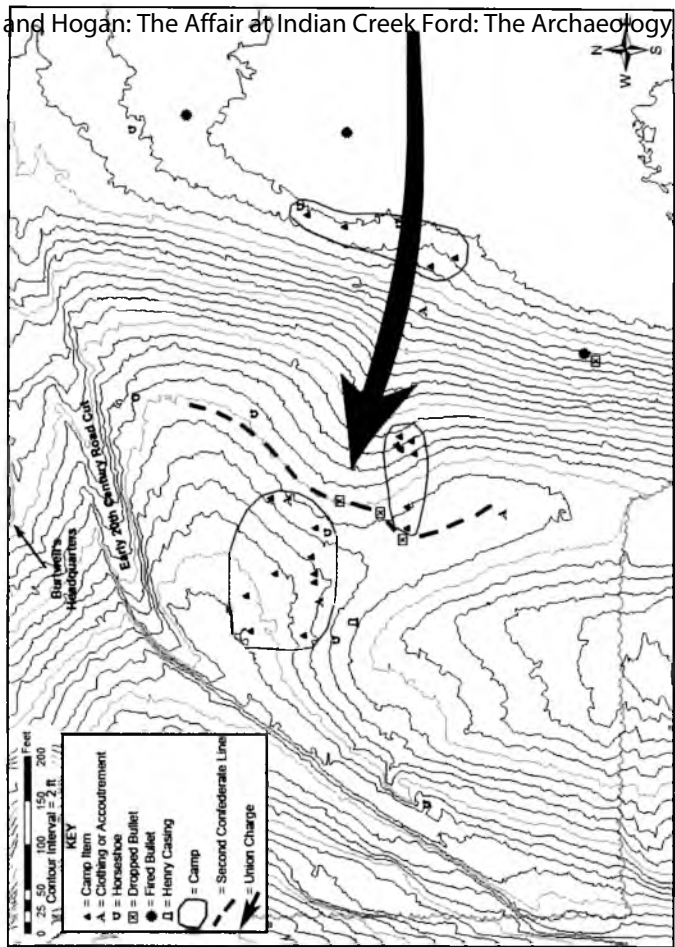
The presence of Civil War artifacts in Survey Areas 2 and 3 seems to confirm that location as the battleground for the Affair at Indian Creek Ford despite Irvine's misestimating of its distance from the railroad bridge. Based on the artifact scatter, certain conclusions can be drawn about the battle.

Few of the 19th century artifacts were found in the immediate vicinity of either the deep historic road cut in the bluffs west of Indian Creek or the location of the road shown on the 1875 map. Rather, most were concentrated along an east-west oriented saddle in the bluff between the two. The saddle shows up well in the hillshade imagery and also appears to have some artificial modification on the west end where it converges with the deep road cut. It can be surmised that this saddle was the route of the mid-19th century Decatur Road and that the deep road cut was a later right-of-way. The route is probably slightly misplotted on the 1875 map. The saddle in the bluff also marks the mid-point in the distribution of equestrian-related artifacts such as the horseshoes, mule shoes, and the trace chain. This supports the theory that the saddle was the route of the Decatur Road up the bluffs west of Indian Creek when the battle took place.

There are three concentrations of camp-related items in Survey Area 2 (see map above). One is located along the base of the bluff roughly centered on the saddle. The artillery sabot fragment was found in this concentration indicating a Civil War association. Another concentration included the box cut nails and improvised tent stakes and was situated near the top of the bluff along the south side of the saddle. The third concentration was located on the broad level blufftop north of the saddle. This concentration included the melted Minié ball, confirming a Civil War association. These three camps could represent undocumented picket outposts not associated with the battle, but based on the diversity of the artifacts and the still usable items that were

⁶² G. K. Elliott, George Goehring, and Dennis O'Brien, *Remember Your Rubbers!: Collectible Condom Containers* (Atglen, Pennsylvania: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1998).

recovered from the camps, they more likely represent portions of Burtwell's Confederate soldier's camp. The camp items indicate that the soldiers were involved with various activities while they awaited orders to advance toward Huntsville or withdraw. Scavenged lead was being melted down to mold fresh bullets. Knives or sabers were being sharpened as indicated by the files. At least one tent was being occupied. Overall, the artifacts in the camps suggest that the occupants were surprised and fled dropping their tools on the spot and leaving meals uneaten. Undoubtedly, much of the usable items were looted by the Union victors, but dropped tools such as the hoof pick, the file, the fork and the spoon suggest a hasty departure.



The house on the bluffs that the Confederate officers commandeered for their headquarters was probably located north of the soldiers' camp. McTeer's Union accounts mention a "double log cabin" on the left of the Confederate line. A soldier with the 10th Indiana Cavalry brought McTeer and Colonel Prosser to this cabin where he had found a mortally-wounded Confederate soldier hiding after the battle⁶³. This double cabin is likely the same house that the Confederate officers spent the night before the battle in. Two houses are shown in the vicinity on the 1937 aerial photographs of the area. Neither house is still standing. One was located about 130 yards (119m) west of the bluffline, around 115 yards (105m) north of the deep road cut. That location has been covered by modern fill. The other house was located at the bluffline about 120 yards (110m) north

⁶³ Andes and McTeer, *Reminiscences*, 193.

of the deep road cut. Yucca plants and a hewn limestone chimney base still marked the location of this house. A single shovel test was placed on the downhill side of the chimney base resulting in the recovery of a cut nail along with a slate fragment, a wire fragment, and two shards of glass. Cut nails were mostly replaced by wire nails by 1880, so the presence of a cut nail suggests that the house dates to the 19th century. It very well could have been there when the battle took place.

Three dropped bullets along the edge of the bluffline probably mark the Confederate line that began forming in rear of Sloss Company, but wavered and retreated, leaving Sloss Company to fire one volley before they joined the retreat. The three bullets, two for Merrill rifles and one for a Burnside carbine were probably dropped in the panic. If this is the case, it indicates that at least some in Burtwell's unit were armed with Merrill carbines and at least one Burnside carbine, probably captured at some point from Union troops. The Henry casing might also be associated with this line indicating at least one shot fired from the second Confederate line. The Henry may have been previously captured from Union forces, possibly during Hood's Nashville campaign.

At least two types of fired pistol bullets were found embedded near the base of the bluff. These were probably fired by the Union Cavalry as they charged across Indian Creek. If this is the case, the Union force was firing their .44 Colts and small-caliber pocket pistols as they charged toward the Confederate line. The Union accounts mention several incidents in which pistols were used in the battle.

The bent knapsack hook and lost Union button hint at the grappling and hand-to-hand combat that occurred as the Union cavalymen overtook the fleeing Rebel force.

The preservation of this battlefield appears to have been a happy accident. The marshy floodplain of Indian Creek was not suitable for building or agriculture at this location, and somehow, the bluff in Survey Area 2 has escaped development. While the data recovered from the battlefield did not dramatically alter our understanding of the Affair at Indian Creek Ford, it did clarify the events and made them tangible. Countless similar small engagements occurred during the four years of our Civil War. Some have been forgotten. Some are mentioned in diaries or are given passing mention in the official records. Some were more important than others in terms of the broad strategic campaigns of the war. If nothing else, this study has demonstrated that even these small relatively insignificant battlegrounds can yield valuable archaeological data that can be used to help flesh out history. Undoubtedly, additional archaeological work

at this battleground could yield more important information, and every piece in the puzzle increases our understanding of the event. Sites such as this are becoming more and more rare as they succumb to suburban sprawl or are stripped of data by uncontrolled collecting. During this sesquicentennial anniversary of the war, it is more important than ever to identify even these small plots of hallowed ground, and recognize them as repositories of our shared national heritage.

Collected Artifacts

| Site | FS number | Provenience | Specimen | Notes |
|---------------|-----------|-----------------------|---|--|
| Survey Area 1 | 14 | metal detector survey | 1 mule shoe half 1 bent horse shoe with heel calks | |
| Survey Area 2 | 15 | metal detector survey | 1 .54 cal. Burnside carbine bullet | Bullet #1; dropped, possibly misfired; only distal part of cartridge; bullet 25.4g |
| Survey Area 2 | 16 | metal detector survey | 1 M1855/1864 knapsack "J" hook | bent strap loop like it was violently pulled off |
| Survey Area 2 | 17 | metal detector survey | 1 small iron buckle | possible from a M1855/1864 knapsack blanket roll strap |
| Survey Area 2 | 18 | metal detector survey | 1 mule shoe with heel calks | Mule Shoe #4; probably not related to battle |
| Survey Area 2 | 19 | metal detector survey | 1 half of a colt or donkey shoe with heel caulk | Horse Shoe #8 |
| Survey Area 2 | 20 | metal detector survey | 1 mill file | possibly camp associated |
| Survey Area 2 | 21 | metal detector survey | 1 cut nail 1 cut nail shank | small, possibly box nails |
| Survey Area 2 | 22 | metal detector survey | 1 iron "Mexican style" spur | hand-made, non-issue; missing button |
| Survey Area 2 | 23 | metal detector survey | 1 iron ring with 5(?) iron skeleton keys | badly rusted; possibly camp associated |
| Survey Area 2 | 24 | metal detector survey | 1 hand-made carriage bolt | probably not related to battle |
| Survey Area 2 | 25 | metal detector survey | 1 possible lead artillery shell sabot | not-heavily patinated; may be camp associated as a curated source of bullet lead |
| Survey Area 2 | 26 | metal detector survey | 1 carved lead fragment | appears to be a cut bullet with two laterally-drilled holes; 2.9g |
| Survey Area 2 | 27 | metal detector survey | 1 brass coverall button with lead shank | "O'BRYAN BROS." Duck Head (post-1892); not related to battle |
| Survey Area 2 | 28 | metal detector survey | melted lead "puddle" | not heavily patinated; may be |

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| | | | | |
|---------------|----|-----------------------|---|--|
| | | | | recent, but found near FS# 22 and 25 |
| Survey Area 2 | 29 | metal detector survey | 1 mule show with heel caulks | Mule Shoe #1; probably not related to battle |
| Survey Area 2 | 30 | metal detector survey | 1 half of mule show with heel caulk | Mule Shoe #2; probably not related to battle |
| Survey Area 2 | 31 | metal detector survey | 1 mule show with heel caulks | Mule Shoe #3; probably not related to battle |
| Survey Area 2 | 32 | metal detector survey | 1 horse shoe with heel caulks | Horse Shoe #1 |
| Survey Area 2 | 33 | metal detector survey | 1 half horse shoe with heel caulk | Horse Shoe #3; large nail holes, probably post-dates battle |
| Survey Area 2 | 34 | metal detector survey | 1 harness trace chain | end tie and ~10 links; contemporary with but probably not related to battle |
| Survey Area 2 | 35 | metal detector survey | 1 fired pistol bullet | Fired Bullet #1; 12.2g |
| Survey Area 2 | 36 | metal detector survey | 1 .44 rimfire casing | .44 Henry; double firing pin |
| Survey Area 2 | 37 | metal detector survey | 1 .44 Colt pistol bullet | Bullet #2; dropped; 13.7g |
| Survey Area 2 | 38 | metal detector survey | 1 fired pistol ball | Fired Bullet #2; 3.3g |
| Survey Area 2 | 39 | metal detector survey | 1 pocket knife | plastic over glitter on one side, replaced with leather on other; probably post-dates battle |
| Survey Area 2 | 40 | metal detector survey | 1 brass shank button with white and copper glitter glass cabochon | probably not related to battle |
| Survey Area 2 | 41 | metal detector survey | 1 iron 3-tined fork with flared handle | missing handle attachments |
| Survey Area 2 | 42 | metal detector survey | 1 1907 quarter | obviously post-dates battle |
| Survey Area 2 | 43 | metal detector survey | 1 1916 penny | obviously post-dates battle |
| Survey Area 2 | 44 | metal detector survey | 1 horseshoe without heel caulks | Horse Shoe #2 |
| Survey Area 3 | 45 | metal detector survey | 1 cut .44 Sage pistol bullet | cut with knife just above ring; 4.9g |
| Survey Area 3 | 46 | metal detector survey | 1 cut nail | |
| Survey Area 3 | 47 | metal detector survey | 1 half horseshoe without heel caulks | Horse Shoe #4 |
| Survey Area 2 | 48 | metal detector survey | 1 aluminum condom tin | "3 MERRY WIDOWS Price |

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|------------------|----|--------------------------|---|---|
| | | | | \$1.00 SELECTED- TESTED"; ca. 1915-1935 |
| Survey Area 2 | 49 | metal detector survey | 1 stamped brass rosette | central setting for gemstone |
| Survey Area 2 | 50 | metal detector survey | 4 cut nails | small, possibly box nails; same location as FS 21 |
| Survey Area 2 | 51 | metal detector survey | 1 .54 cal. Merrill carbine bullet | Bullet #4; possibly fired into soft ground; 24.6g |
| Survey Area 2 | 52 | metal detector survey | 1 .54 cal. Merrill carbine bullet | Bullet #5; dropped; 26.5g |
| Survey Area 2 | 53 | metal detector survey | 1 fired bullet | Fired Bullet #3; 2.9g |
| Survey Area 2 | 54 | metal detector survey | 1 gilded brass locket cover | heart design |
| Survey Area 2 | 55 | metal detector survey | 1 hand-made spike shank | tent stake? |
| Survey Area 2 | 56 | metal detector survey | 1 hand-made spike head | tent stake? |
| Survey Area 2 | 57 | metal detector survey | 1 mule shoe with heel caulks | Mule Shoe #5; probably not related to battle |
| Survey Area 2 | 58 | metal detector survey | 1 cut nail shank | |
| Survey Area 2 | 59 | metal detector survey | 1 brass coverall button | Sweet-Orr & Co. "LPE 1904"; not related to battle |
| Survey Area 2 | 60 | metal detector survey | 1 .58 minie ball | melted; 19.7g |
| Survey Area 2 | 61 | metal detector survey | 1 iron buckle | "Buckle #2" |
| Survey Area 2 | 62 | metal detector survey | 1 brass spoon | |
| Survey Area 2 | 63 | metal detector survey | 1 triangular file proximal fragment | |
| Survey Area 2 | 64 | metal detector survey | 1 half of horse shoe without heel caulk | Horse Shoe #5 |
| Survey Area 2 | 65 | metal detector survey | 1 half of horse shoe with heel caulk | Horse Shoe #6 |
| Survey Area 2 | 66 | metal detector survey | 1 half of horse shoe with heel caulk | Horse Shoe #7 |
| Survey Area 2 | 67 | metal detector survey | 1 half of horseshoe without caulk | Horse Shoe #9 |
| Survey Area 2 | 68 | metal detector survey | 1 cut nail 1 cut nail shank 1 cut nail head | |
| Survey Area 2 | 69 | metal detector survey | 1 Saint Christopher pin | |
| Survey Area 2 | 70 | metal detector survey | 1 pocket knife | |
| Survey Area 2 | 71 | metal detector survey | 1 iron button | |
| Survey Area 2 | 72 | metal detector survey | 1 pistol hammer | |

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|------------------|----|----------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Survey Area 2 | 73 | metal detector survey | 1 hand-forged hoof pick | |
| Survey Area 2 | 74 | metal detector survey | 1 harmonica reed plate | |
| Survey Area 2 | 75 | metal detector survey | 1 Union general service eagle button | "Steele & Johnson . Waterbury" |
| Survey Area 2 | 76 | shovel test N1000 E1000 | 1 slate fragment 1 cut nail head 1 wire fragment 1 light aqua flat glass 1 colorless container glass body shard | on east side of house ruin |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Confederate Casualties

The confederate rolls for units that were known to be operating in this area during the Affair at Indian Creek Ford were examined to identify those captured or wounded on December 23, 1864.

4th Alabama Cavalry (Roddey's)

Armistead, George W., Pvt., Co F - Residence in Lauderdale Co., took Oath of Allegiance June 13, 1865.

Carroll, John E., Pvt., Co. F - Wounded, gunshot wound left shoulder, surrendered, took Oath of Allegiance December 25, admitted to post hospital (Thomas Barracks) December 26, released January 24, 1865.

Flint, Samuel, Pvt., Co F - Residence in Lauderdale Co., age 19

Hendrick, Alonzo D., Pvt., Co F - Residence in Lauderdale Co., age 18, took Oath of Allegiance June 13, 1865.

Ingram, Benjamin, Pvt., Co F. - Died of pneumonia March 14, 1865 in Camp Chase, buried in Grave # 1650.

Irvine, James B., Inspector General and Adjutant to Colonel Burtwell, - Residence, Florence, Lauderdale County, Captured at Madison Station, December 23, sent to Fort Delaware POW Camp via Nashville and Louisville. Took Oath of Allegiance, released June 13, 1865.

Irvine, Seymour, Pvt., Co F - Residence, Florence, Lauderdale Co., Sent to Camp Chase POW Camp. Took Oath of Allegiance June 13, 1865. James B. Irvine's brother. Actually captured a few days prior to the battle – may have been serving as a vidette or scout.

Kirkman, J.J., Sgt., Co F - Residence in Lauderdale Co.

Oliver, Albert W., Pvt., Co F - Residence in Lauderdale Co.

Reeder, Reuben A., Pvt., Co F - Residence in Lauderdale Co. Actually captured a few days prior to the battle – may have been serving as a vidette or scout.

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Stewart, Edward M., Pvt., Co F - Residence in Lauderdale Co., age 18, took Oath of Allegiance June 12, 1865.

Weems, James M., 2nd Lieut., Co F - Residence in Lauderdale Co.

Young, Samuel C., Pvt., Co F - Residence in Lauderdale Co., age 23, took Oath of Allegiance June 13, 1865.

Jordan, Thomas B., Captain, Co I - Captured at Madison Station, December 23, sent to Point Lookout (MD) POW Camp via Nashville and Louisville. Transferred to Aiken's Landing (VA) for exchange on March 17, 1865. Other information indicates that he had been arrested April 16, 1864 by Major General Logan and held by order of Major General Sherman. Released from confinement August 2, 1864 by bail-bond of \$10,000. Charged with violating parole, awaiting trial. Recruited and commanded a company during the rebel army advance on Nashville.

Leedy, W.B., Sgt, Co I - Appears on muster roll, dated March 20, 1865, of a detachment of paroled and exchanged prisoners at Camp Lee, near Richmond. He was shown as enlisting in Huntsville December 1, 1864, by Captain Jordan. Leedy had been sent to Point Lookout POW Camp from Nashville for special exchange. Exchanged March 17, 1865. He had been charged with being an employee of the QM Department, US Army, and deserted to the enemy. Tried February 14, 1865 at Nashville, but was released on special exchange near City Point, VA.

Moore, Alfred, Pvt., Co I - Residence in Madison Co., age 17, took Oath of Allegiance June 13, 1865.

4th Alabama Cavalry (Russell's)

Hancock, Henry E., Pvt., Co K - Captured at Ft. Donelson Feb. 3, 1863, paroled and delivered to City Point, VA Feb 11, 1863, in General Hospital, Branch A, Petersburg, VA Feb 20, returned to duty Feb 27, 1863, then captured near Huntsville Dec 23, 1864, sent to Camp Chase via Nashville and Louisville, Oath of Allegiance June 13, 1865. Enlisted at New Market, AL, age 30

Note: Do not know if he was captured at Indian Creek. May have been captured near his home. Russell's 4th not known to have been at Indian

Creek but perhaps he got separated from his command and joined up with Roddey's 4th.

10th Alabama Cavalry

Littleburgh, H.Binford, Surgeon - Sent to Ft. Delaware POW Camp via Nashville and Louisville, transferred to Fort Monroe (VA) for exchange. Exchanged January 22, 1865.

Castleberry, William, Sgt., Co. B - Residence in Tishomingo Co., MS, age 35, took Oath of Allegiance June 13, 1865.

Ganong, Cornelius, Pvt., Co B - Residence in Tishomingo Co., MS, age 20.

Nunley, William, Pvt., Co B - Residence in ?, age 31, took Oath of Allegiance June 12, 1865.

Smith, Thomas R., Pvt., Co B - Residence in Tishomingo Co, MS, age 31, took Oath of Allegiance June 13, 1865.

Landers, Josiah B., Pvt., Co E - Took Oath of Allegiance June 13, 1865, admitted to Branch A, Post Hospital, Louisville, KY June 21, 1865, scurvy, discharged June 25, 1865.

Covington, Thomas, Pvt., Co G - Residence in Lauderdale Co., age 17.

Wilson, William, Pvt., Co G - Residence in Lauderdale Co, age 20, took Oath of Allegiance June 13, 1865.

Branson, David, Pvt., Co. I - Residence in Tishomingo Co., MS, age 32.

Nance, Washington P., Pvt., Co I - Died March 9, 1865 in Camp Chase, pneumonia, buried in Grave # 1699, 1/3 mile south of Camp C.

Martin, William R., Pvt., Co K - Admitted to USA General Hospital # 2 at Vicksburg, MS, May 27, 1865 from Marine Barracks, acute dysentery, returned to duty June 3, 1865.

Hamilton, George W., Pvt., Co. L - Residence in Limestone Co., age 19, took Oath of Allegiance June 13, 1865.

Nelms, James L., Pvt., Co L - Residence in Lawrence Co., age 38, took Oath of Allegiance June 12, 1865.

Sholar, William A., Pvt., Co. L - Died February 28, 1865 in Camp Chase, buried in Grave # 1477 , 1/3 mile south of Camp C.

May, Samuel W., Pvt., Co. ? - Residence in Franklin Co., deserted December 23, took Oath of Allegiance March 13, 1865.

Owens, Marquis L., Pvt., Co.? - Residence in Giles Co., TN, deserted December 23, took Oath of Allegiance March 9, 1865, was a conscript.

Note: Civil War Soldiers and Sailors (CWSS) lists Branson, Castleberry, Covington, Ganong, Landers, Martin, Nance, Nelms, Nunley, Smith, and Wilson as being in the 11th Alabama Cavalry. The 11th was organized by the consolidation of Warren's and William's battalions on 14 Jan, 1865.

Moreland's Alabama Cavalry

Pierce, Thomas W., Asst. Surgeon - Sent to Ft. Delaware , then Ft. Monroe for exchange on February 22, 1865.

Clark, Julius F., Pvt., Co A - Died January 28, 1865 in Camp Chase, pneumonia, buried in Grave # 9340, 1/3 mile south of Camp C.

Gains, H.M., Pvt., Co A - Residence in Franklin Co., Oath of Allegiance June 13, 1865.

Sartin, Langford, Sgt., Co A - Paroled at Camp Chase and transferred to City Point, VA February 25, 1865, for exchange. (alternate name: Sartain).

Cathey, Andrew D.A., Pvt., Co C - Residence in Tishomingo Co, MS, age 15.

Kay, John, Pvt., Co C - Died June 5 1865 in Camp Chase, pneumonia, buried in Grave # 2017, 1/3 mile south of Camp C. Enlisted at Dickson, AL.

Davis, James H., 2 Lt., Co D - Residence in Tishomingo Co, MS, sent to Ft. Delaware, Exchanged and released Jan.17,1865.

Holder, Benjamin A., Pvt., Co D - Paroled at Camp Chase and transferred to City Point, VA February 25, 1865, for exchange, in Jackson Hospital, Richmond, VA March 10, 1865. Enlisted at Warren Mills, MS.

Looney, Lowry B., Pvt., Co D - Residence in Tishomingo Co., MS.

McCoy, William F., Pvt., Co D - Died March 2, 1865 in Camp Chase, buried in Grave # 1530, 1/3 mile south of Camp C.

Moore, John, Sgt., Co D - Paroled at Camp Chase and transferred to City Pont, VA February 25, 1865, for exchange, in General Hospital, Camp Winder, March 10,1865.

Spencer, William A., Pvt., Co D - Died February 20, 1865 in Camp Chase, buried in Grave # 1394, 1/3 mile south of Camp C.

Tackett, Enoch B., Pvt., Co D - Paroled at Camp Chase and transferred to City Point, VA February 25, 1865, for exchange Roddey's Escort Company.

Gurley, John S., Pvt., Co G - Residence in Tishomingo Co, MS.

Burgess, Richard F., Pvt., Co H - Gunshot wound, right side, admitted to Granger General Hospital, December 24, then sent to prison, where he died on February 20, 1865. Buried in grave # 1353, 1/3 mile south of Camp C.

Crowell, George W., Pvt., Co H - Residence in Franklin Co., age 24.

Leadbetter, Henry, Pvt., Co H - Paroled at Camp Chase and transferred to City Point,VA for exchange, in Jackson Hospital, Richmond, VA March 8,1865. furloughed March 9.

Norris, William W., Pvt., Co H - Paroled at Camp Chase and transferred to City Point, VA February 25, 1865 for exchange.

Patterson A.W., Capt., Co H - Sent to Ft. Delaware January 9, 1865. Oath of Allegiance June 10, 1865.

Rogers, John H., Pvt., Co H - Paroled at Camp Chase and transferred to City Point, VA February 25, 1865 for exchange, in Jackson Hospital, Richmond, VA March 8, debilitas, Forloughed March 10. (alternate name: Rodgers).

Gable, James H., Cpl., Co I - Died May 16, 1865 in Camp Chase, buried in Grave # 1972, 1/3 mile south of Camp C.

All the following were captured near Huntsville but were not involved in the battle at Indian Creek. They would have been sent as prisoners to Huntsville, then transferred to Camp Chase, via Nashville and Louisville.

Chittwood, Richard O., Pvt. - Captured December 20, 1864, Died February 20, 1865 and buried in Grave # [illegible].

Coons, Everitt, Pvt. - Captured December 20, 1864, at Maysville. Residence in Franklin Co, Oath of Allegiance June 13, 1865.

Dodson Willis, Pvt. - Captured December 27, 1864, at Madison Station. Residence in Lawrence Co. (Note: one card says captured January 15, 1865.).

Doss, James M., Pvt. - Captured December 27, 1864 in Madison Co, sent to Camp Chase, then Vicksburg MS for exchange. Admitted to General Hospital # 2 from Marine Barracks May 21, 1865, remittent fever, returned to duty May 22.

Heflin, Alexander, Pvt. - Captured December 27, 1864 in Madison Co. Residence in Lauderdale Co, age 18, (Note: one card says captured December 25.).

Roberts, Henry C., Pvt. - Captured December 20, 1864 at Brownsboro, died in Camp Chase, buried in Grave # 1748, 1/3 mile south of Camp C.

Yerby, Tolbert, Pvt. - Captured December 20, 1864. Residence in Fayette Co, age 18.

Stuart's Battalion

5th Alabama Cavalry

None found. Assumed not engaged at Indian Creek. Believed to have been in Decatur. (Note: Only Roll # 19 (A-L) was reviewed on the basis that if there were no captures on or about December 23 of the men on this roll that it would be unlikely to find any on Roll # 20 (M-Y). There were a number of captures December 29, 1864 at Pond Springs (Courtland), which supports the preceding statement.