

CAMP CASEY

Arlington, VA

RESEARCH AND HISTORIC CONTEXT

May 1, 2019



Prepared for:
Stantec Architecture



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Methodology.....	1
Historical Background	1
U.S. Colored Troop Regiments.....	1
Camp Casey.....	4
Location	6
Conclusion	11
Bibliography	12

Executive Summary

Camp Casey was a Union military camp utilized by United States Colored Troops (USCT) during the Civil War. Active from 1862-1865 in what was then Alexandria County (now Arlington County) Camp Casey was one of many encampments for Union regiments that surrounded Washington, DC.. Unlike the forts and earthworks constructed for the defense of Washington, the locations of the supporting troop encampments established around the National Capitol, including Camp Casey, were not typically documented. Today, the exact location of Camp Casey remains unknown, although information from several primary sources provides some evidence to its approximate location.

Methodology

During the analysis of materials related to Camp Casey, Traceries reviewed existing documentation and previously published information on the camp as background to our research efforts. The scope of the research relied on primary sources such as private correspondence, maps, and images from the Library of Congress and the National Archives. Further research included secondary sources related to Civil War camps in the region around Washington, DC, and of U.S. Colored Troops generally.

Additional repositories, including the Arlington Historical Society and the Black Heritage Museum of Arlington, were contacted but Traceries was told that neither hold records relating to Camp Casey on site. The Black Heritage Museum referred Traceries to an individual who has conducted research on Camp Casey and may know more about the subject. However, several attempts to contact the individual have not succeeded. The Arlington Historical Society referred Traceries to the Arlington Public Library's Center for Local History, but the Center did not have any relevant materials on the subject. Additional research is still being conducted in an attempt to locate any remaining sources or documentation of the Camp.

Historical Background

U.S. Colored Troop Regiments

African-American troops, commanded by white officers and designated U.S. Colored Troops, were quickly raised by the War Department following the formal Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. The proclamation declared all slaves in rebellious states be given their freedom with the exception of those in areas already under Union control, and that freed slaves would officially be allowed into the armed forces of the United States. Initially, USCTs were not typically used in combat roles, often serving in roles of labor or reserve instead. After proving themselves in several major battles, USCTs saw extensive action in over four hundred engagements throughout the war. In addition to infantry, more than 9,000 African-American seamen served in the U.S. Navy, and thousands more served in military support positions aiding the war effort for the Union. By the end of the war, there were more than



Figure 1: Enlisted men and an officer of the 54th U.S. Colored Troops Infantry Regiment posed with a 10-inch Rodman cannon at an earthwork fort. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

38,000 casualties among USCTs caused by combat and disease. For their gallant service, the U.S. awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor to twenty-four African-Americans.¹

African-American troops came from throughout the country to fight for the Union, but the largest number came from Southern territory under Union control. Many of these troops were fugitive slaves deemed “contraband,” a military term for seized enemy property such as cotton, machinery, and other goods. The former slaves sought refuge behind Union lines to gain their freedom and safety, with many of them serving as soldiers, laborers, servants, nurses, and other supportive roles. Many of the first African-American troops were restricted to labor and fatigue duties at the outset of the war due to the belief by commanding officers that USCTs were not fit for combat, but successful skirmishes in 1862 proved their ability in combat situations and led to the increased use of African-American Infantry as shown in **Figures 1 and 2**. The Bureau of Colored Troops was established for the recruitment and training of USCTs and to provide for the selection and training of white officers to command the USCT regiments. Extensive recruitment occurred in the North with the assistance of leaders such as Frederick Douglass, who served as a recruiting agent, and in occupied Confederate territory.²

1 City of Alexandria, “Fighting for Freedom, Black Union Soldiers of the Civil War,” Last updated August 26, 2017.

2 City of Alexandria, “Fighting for Freedom, Black Union Soldiers of the Civil War.”



Figure 2: A picket station of African-American troops near Virginia's Dutch Gap Canal in 1864. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

When African-Americans were admitted to the Union Army, the Confederacy instituted a policy that treated African-American troops not as soldiers, but as slaves in a state of insurrection, meaning they would likely be executed or sold into slavery if captured. Consequently, the soldiers and their commanding officers were trained to expect no quarter if they were wounded or captured. As the war progressed and USCTs came into contact with Confederate forces more frequently, atrocities against African-American troops increased as well. On April 12, 1864, a Union garrison at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, was overrun by Confederate Forces who shot down the African-American troops as they surrendered. Additional atrocities occurred throughout 1864 at the Battle of Poison Springs in Arkansas, and the Battle of the Crater in Petersburg, Virginia. Possibly the most notorious event took place in Saltville, Virginia on October 2, 1864 when Confederate Forces murdered both white and black Union soldiers who were wounded or captured following the Battle of Saltville.³

USCTs also faced mistrust and hostility from white Union troops despite the fact that they were fighting alongside one another.⁴ When the 23rd USCT regiment was sent to join the battle against Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, one of Union General Meade's staff officer wrote a demeaning letter about them: "As I looked at them my soul was troubled, and

3 Chelsea Gilmour, "The Mystery of the Civil War's Camp Casey," *Consortium News*, 26 February 2015.

4 City of Alexandria, "Fighting for Freedom, Black Union Soldiers of the Civil War."

I would gladly have seen them marched back to Washington. We do not dare trust them in battle. Ah, you may make speeches at home, but here, where it is life or death, we dare not trust them.”⁵

African-American soldiers faced additional injustices, including inadequate training and equipment. One of the injustices that drew the ire of USCTs was the fact that they received less pay than white union soldiers. African-American enlisted men and officers received only \$7 per month while white privates earned \$13. Due to the intervention and protests of Frederick Douglass, the Governor of Massachusetts and commanding officers such as Col. Higginson and Col. Robert Gould Shaw, the unequal pay was amended by mid-1864. In spite of the injustices, African-American troops demonstrated their determination and bravery in the final two years of the war.⁶

Camp Casey

Camp Casey was one of many Union encampments in Arlington (**Figures 3 and 4**) for Union regiments defending the national capitol or on their way to the front. Named after Major General Silas Casey who oversaw the training of recruits around the Capitol, Camp Casey was in operation from 1862-1865. The camp served as an important rendezvous point for troops before they were shipped to combat areas. Camp Casey is primarily known as an encampment where USCTs were organized or stationed in Northern Virginia. At least sixteen regiments spent time there between 1864 and 1865, including the 6th, 29th and 31st USCT. It was also the site where the 23rd USCT regiment was organized in late 1863 before being sent south to fight in the Overland Campaign in 1864. Many of the recruits for the 23rd came from Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania, Virginia, and areas between Washington and Richmond. Some of the other USCT regiments known to have spent time at Camp Casey include the 28th and 29th USCTs. The 28th and 29th USCT regiments were raised in Indiana and Illinois before they were sent to Washington and stationed briefly at Camp Casey before being sent to the front in Virginia.⁷

While it was not the largest Union base for training USCTs, Camp Casey was one of the few located within the boundaries of a Confederate State. The camp quickly became an important terminus for African-American regiments in Northern Virginia as they were increasingly sent there. A letter from August 1864 directed Colonel Bowman of the 84th Pennsylvania Volunteers to forward all recruits for USCT regiments in the Army of the Potomac to the recruiting rendezvous at Camp Casey. Although they served in the Defenses of Washington, the USCTs did not generally garrison the fortifications but served in the Provisional Brigade. These troops worked as laborers on the Washington defenses at various times, as did other Union Troops, but they were not provided equal training, equipment or pay that white troops received.⁸

5 Gilmour, “The Mystery of the Civil War’s Camp Casey,” *Consortium News*.

6 City of Alexandria, “Fighting for Freedom, Black Union Soldiers of the Civil War.”

7 Gilmour, “The Mystery of the Civil War’s Camp Casey,” *Consortium News*.

8 Gilmour, “The Mystery of the Civil War’s Camp Casey,” *Consortium News*.

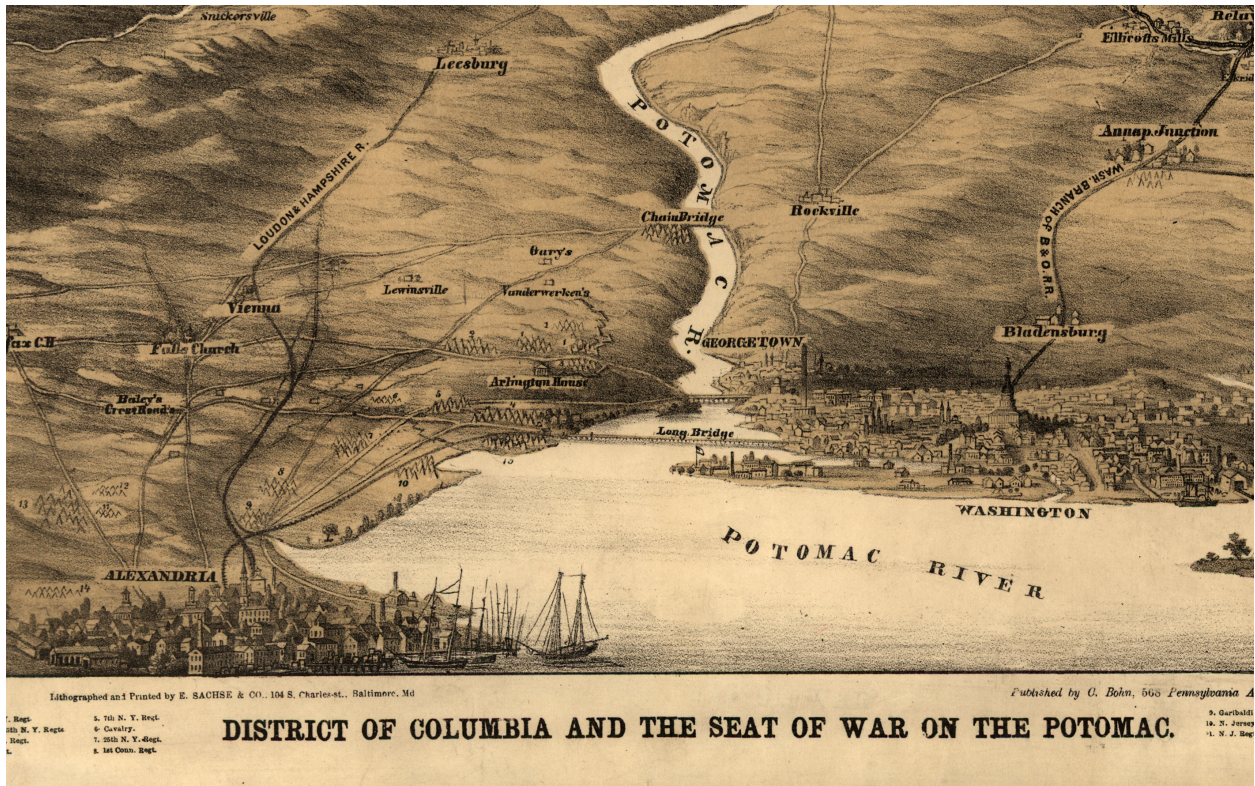


Figure 3: 1860s. Cropped image from the District of Columbia and the Seat of War on the Potomac. Note the tent clusters representing camps. Camp Casey is not named. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

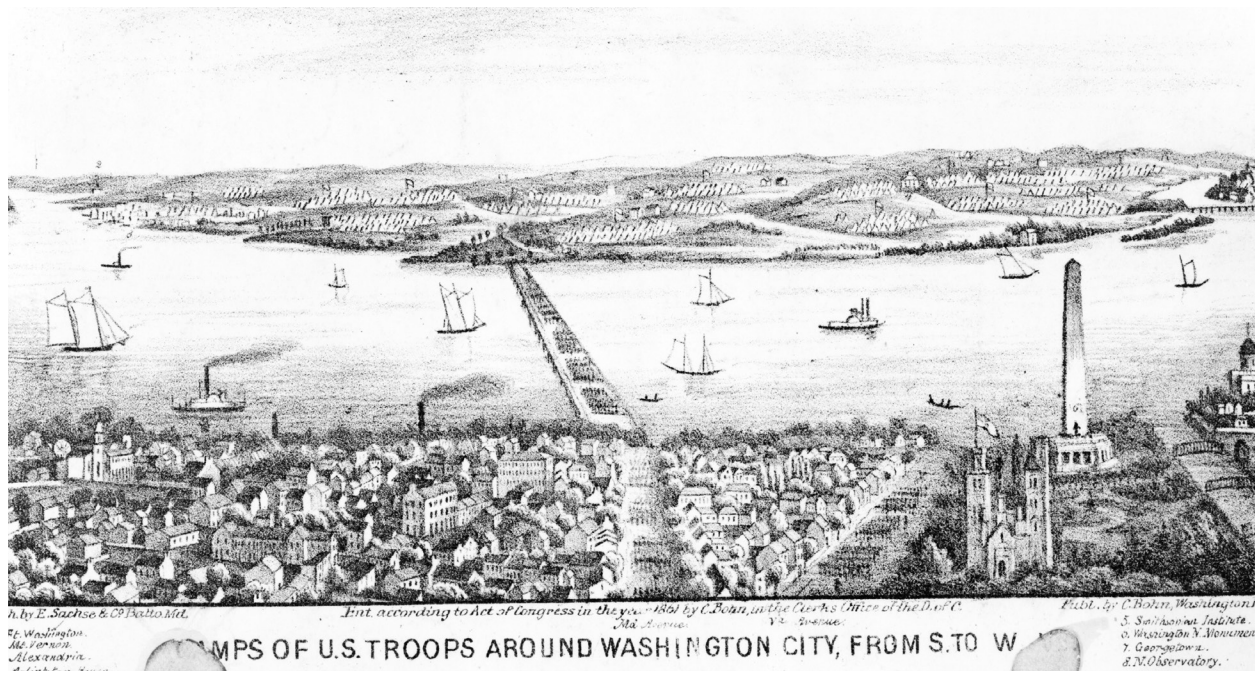


Figure 4: Camps of U.S. Troops Around Washington City, from S. to W. Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

On September 15, 1864, the department commander directed that General Casey furnish fatigue details as asked for by Barton S. Alexander who was Chief Engineer of the defenses of Washington. Alexander, on September 18, 1864, specifically requested a detail of 600 men from General Casey, with all their officers, to report to Engineer Camp Barnard. Superintendent Clark reported that 1700 African-American troops were at Camp Casey, 800 of them unassigned and, therefore, should be able to do fatigue duty. In a June 23, 1863 letter to the chief of staff of the department, in regard to troops that could perform fatigue duty at Fort Thayer, Alexander wrote it “has occurred to me that the regiment of negroes [sic] now encamped in Anastolia Island (now Theodore Roosevelt Island) might with perfect propriety be directed to perform it and the more particularly as they understand it well, many of the men in this regiment having left this very work to enlist in the service.”⁹

General Casey appeared reluctant to furnish troops for fatigue duty on the fortifications at times. On September 14, 1864, the Department of Washington informed Alexander that 800 USCTs could be furnished him if necessary. The next day, then, the Department of Washington issued an order requiring Casey to furnish fatigue details from the USCTs as Alexander might request. Some USCTs, such as the 45th USCT did furnish fatigue details for fortification work at that time. On September 19, 1864, Casey remarked, “the regular garrison of Camp Casey, VA, consists of 343 men and they are constantly required for duty there. The others who may be at the Camp, are recruits in process of preparation for sending to the front. I have not enough officers to distribute the recruits.”¹⁰

Location

Following the outbreak of the Civil War, both Arlington and Alexandria were heavily fortified in the defense of Washington, and camps were established throughout the area. The exact locations of many of these camps, including Camp Casey, are largely unknown since they were not typically documented. Letters written by men stationed at Camp Casey described the camp as located on or near Arlington heights, and in the vicinity of Robert E. Lee’s residence (Arlington House) and Fort Albany.

It is mentioned in multiple letters from the period that Arlington House, shown in **Figure 5**, could be seen from Camp Casey. A soldier in the 1st Battalion, New York Sharpshooters wrote in late 1863 that Camp Casey was in sight of Rebel General Lee’s residence.¹¹ Robert Hamilton, a correspondent for the Weekly Anglo-African, further substantiated this claim when he wrote that Camp Casey was “situated on Arlington Heights not very far from the late residence of the far-famed rebel General Lee.”¹² One of the most detailed descriptions of the location and

9 National Park Service, “A Historic Resource Study: The Civil War Defenses of Washington,” Last updated October 29, 2004.

10 National Park Service, “A Historic Resource Study: The Civil War Defenses of Washington.”

11 NY Sharpshooters - Jimmy Price

12 Robert Hamilton, Weekly Anglo-African.

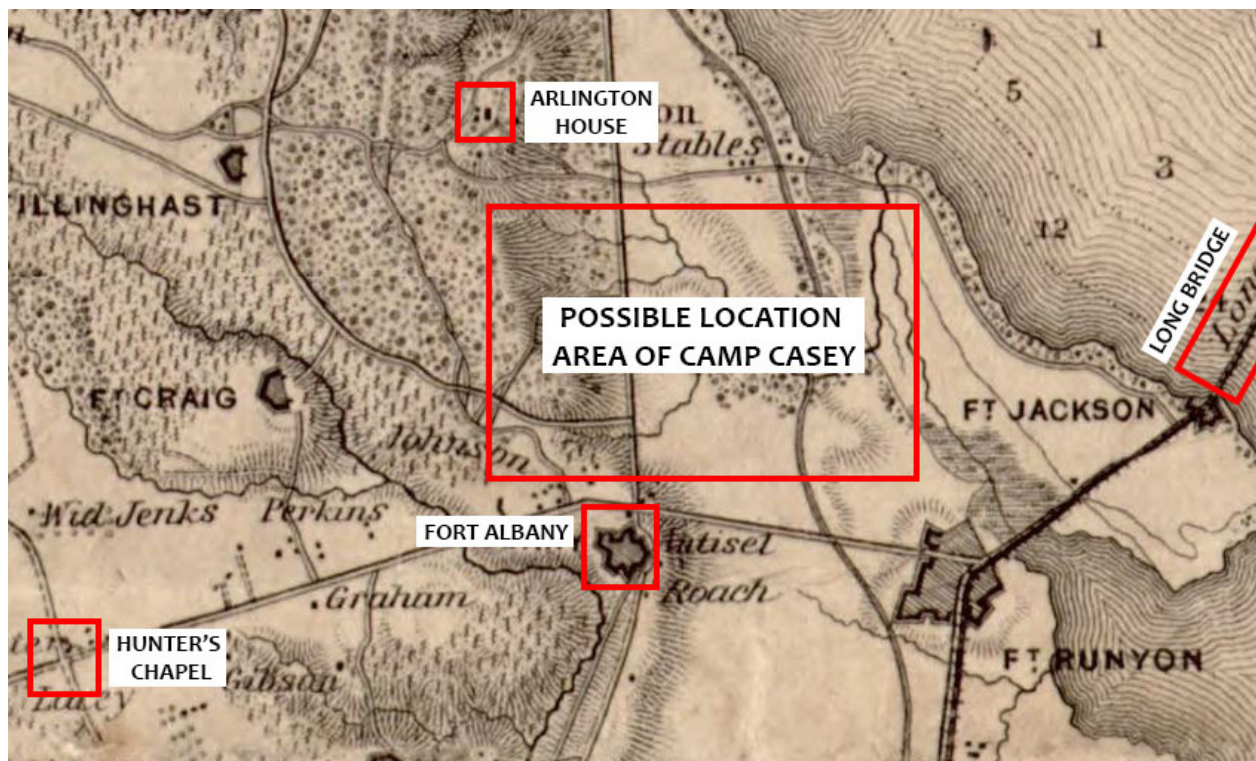


Figure 5: Cropped image from the 1862 Map of North Eastern Virginia and Vicinity of Washington. Fort Albany is at the center of the image along the south side of Columbia Pike. Also note the locations of Arlington House in the upper-center, Long Bridge at the right, and Hunter's Chapel at the lower left. The area labeled as a possible location area for Camp Casey is based on the letters written by soldiers stationed at the camp while it was active. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

surroundings of Camp Casey, however, comes from a letter written by a Union Officer, B. F. Trail, to his brother, David Trail, on May 2, 1864. Writing from Camp Casey, Trail stated in the letter that five roads west of his office was “a chain of breastwork thrown up, a mile long, done by the rebels some time ago and I can see where General Lees Headquarters used to be.”¹³

Throughout the letter, Trail provided additional information about Camp Casey's location, mentioning that from the window in his quarters he could see the entire city of Washington and the Potomac River stretched out between the camp and the city, seeming to imply that the camp was on a hill or bluff overlooking the river, likely near Fort Albany and Long Bridge.¹⁴ A September 5, 1865 advertisement in the *Daily National Republican* supports this assumption, as it announced the sale of government buildings at Camp Casey “about one and

13 William A. Gladstone, Collector, “Letter, 28th United States Colored Troops, enlisted man, B.F. Trail, Camp Casey, Arlington Heights, Va,” *William A. Gladstone Afro-American Military Collection*, Library of Congress, Manuscript/Mixed Material.

14 Gladstone, Collector, “Letter, 28th United States Colored Troops, enlisted man, B.F. Trail, Camp Casey, Arlington Heights, Va,” *William A. Gladstone Afro-American Military Collection*, Library of Congress.

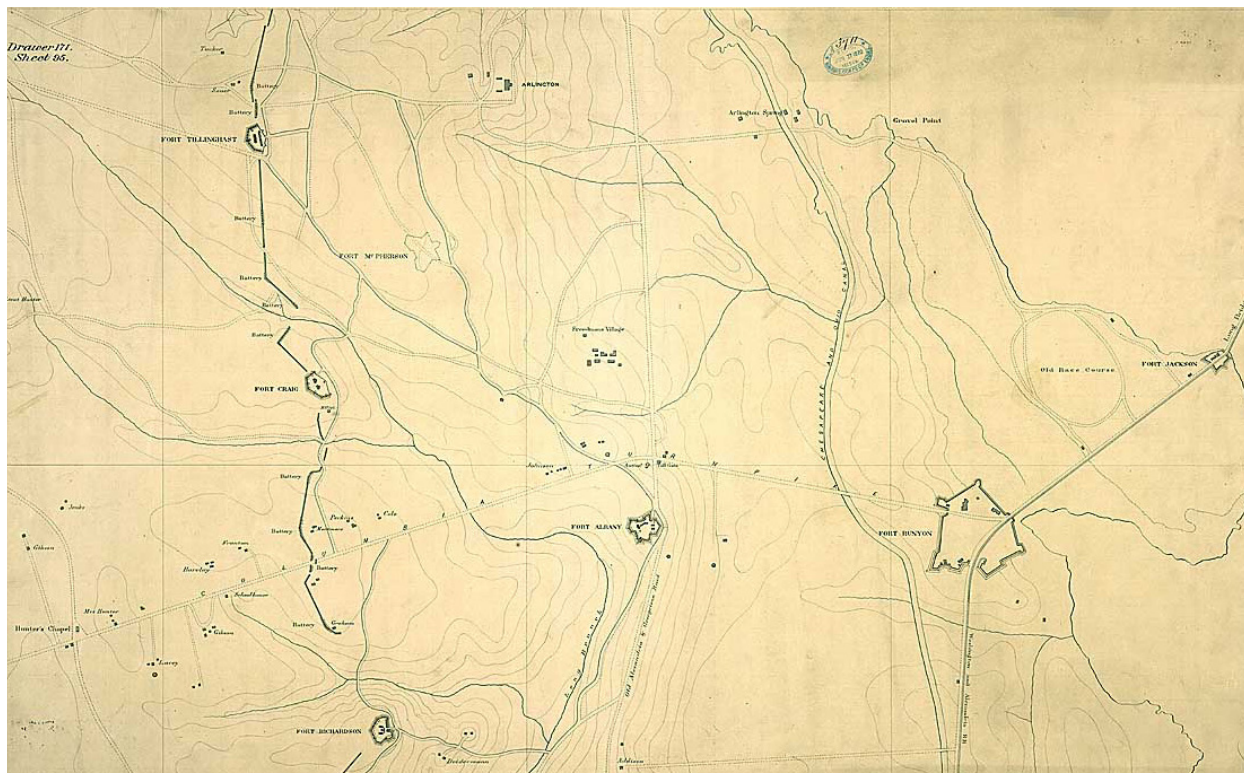


Figure 6: 1865 Map of the Defenses of Washington. Note the location of Fort Albany in the lower center of the map, and the Freedman’s Village and Arlington House to its north. Courtesy of the National Archives.

one-half miles from Long Bridge.”¹⁵ Another source from May 1864 stated that Camp Casey was located “at the Virginia End of Long Bridge.”¹⁶

There are those who believe that Camp Casey was located closer to Hunter’s Chapel which was located near the intersection of Columbia Pike and Glebe Road as shown in **Figure 6**. This conclusion is likely based on a letter written by John B. Stickney, a Union soldier serving with the 35th Massachusetts. In the August 1862 letter, Stickney described Camp Casey as being near Hunter’s Chapel. If this were inferred as being directly adjacent to Hunter’s Chapel, then the Camp would be nearly two miles southwest from the possible site between Fort Albany and Long Bridge. Additionally, there was a Union encampment called Camp Hunter’s Chapel where the 4th NY Cavalry Regiment was stationed. It was allegedly located at the site of Hunter’s Chapel - the intersection of Glebe Road and Columbia Pike - which draws into question whether Camp Casey was located there.

Complicating the search further is that in addition to the Camp Casey in Arlington, there were at least two other encampments named Casey in the area surrounding Washington. One of these camps was located near Bladensburg, Maryland, while the other was located west of

15 “Sale of Government Buildings at Camp Casey, Virginia,” *Daily National Republican*, September 5, 1865, Library of Congress - Chronicling America.

16 Using the Valley Project, “Letter, 21 May 1864, 21st Cavalry, Camp Casey, Va, R. H. W.,” *Franklin Repository*, University of Virginia Library and the Virginia Center for Digital History, 2007.

Alexandria, Virginia, near the Fairfax Seminary (now the Virginia Theological Seminary). This camp is depicted in a lithograph (**Figure 8**) from c. 1862 which shows the camp situated on a bluff, and the top of the Seminary building in the far left of the image.

Some have proposed that the lithograph depicts the Camp Casey at Arlington Heights, using the lithograph to argue that the camp was located at the current intersection of Columbia Pike and Walter Reed Drive. Based on the lithograph, however, this assertion is incorrect. The intersection of Columbia Pike and Walter Reed is located approximately two miles north of the Seminary, and the topography around the intersection is not situated at the top of a bluff as the camp is depicted in the lithograph. Additionally, the regiments listed on the lithograph – the 25th & 27th New Jersey Volunteers, 15th Connecticut Volunteers, 12th Rhode Island Volunteers, and the 13th New Hampshire Volunteers – are not USCT regiments. Sheldon Thorpe, a Sergeant with Company K of the Fifteenth Connecticut Volunteers, described the location of Camp Casey at Fairfax in his history of the regiment, saying, “The layout of “Camp Casey,” at Fairfax, was on high ground about a hundred rods [approx. 1,650 feet] south of the Seminary, and a mile and a half west of Alexandria. A long row of dilapidated buildings served as quarters for the officers.”¹⁷ Based on this description, Camp Casey at Fairfax was located outside of Alexandria, as shown in **Figure 7**, in an area that is today north of Duke Street and south of Janney’s Lane, on a bluff bisected by N Quaker Lane. Unfortunately, the exact location of Camp Casey at Arlington Heights remains unknown.

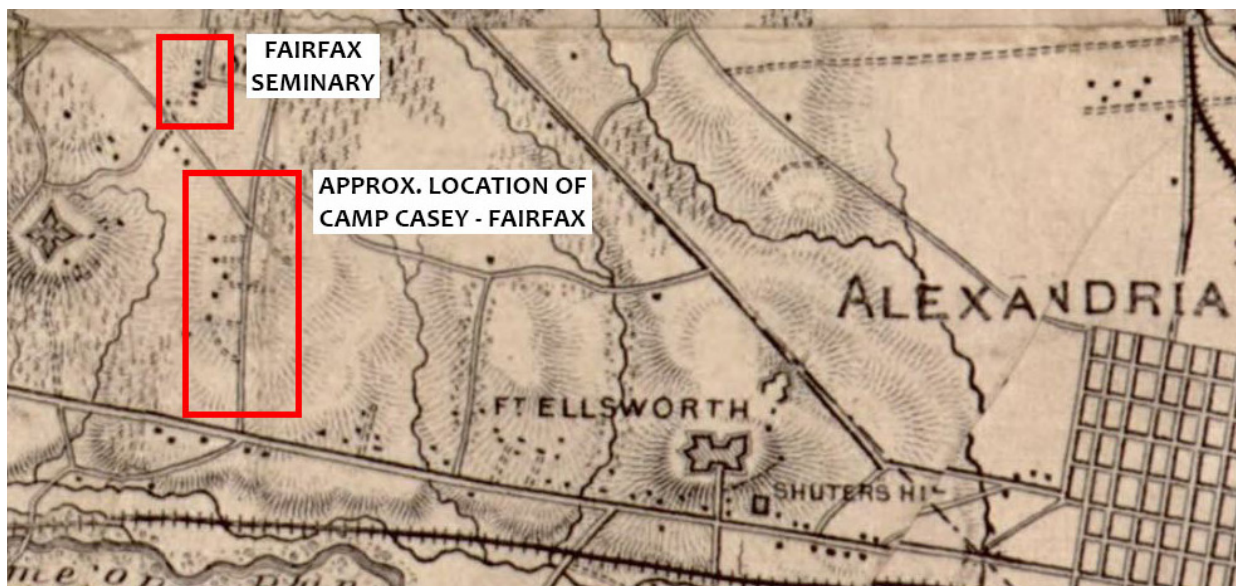


Figure 7: Cropped image from the 1862 Map of North Eastern Virginia and Vicinity of Washington. Shown to the left is the location of the Fairfax Seminary (Virginia Theological Seminary) and the approximate location of the Camp Casey at Fairfax outside of Alexandria. The buildings shown were likely the ones that Sheldon Thorpe describes as being used for officers’ quarters. Camp Casey at Fairfax was one of three known Camp Caseys located around Washington. Note that this is not the location of the Camp Casey in Arlington Heights that this report seeks to identify. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

¹⁷ Sheldon Thorpe, *The History of the Fifteenth Connecticut Volunteers in the War for the Defense of the Union, 1861-1865*, (New Haven: Price, Lee & Adkins Co., 1893), 27.



Figure 8: This lithograph, dated 1862, shows one of several Union encampments named Camp Casey that were part of the defenses of Washington. This Camp Casey was located near the Fairfax Seminary (now the Virginia Theological Seminary) along a bluff. The Seminary building is visible at the far left of the image, and the Potomac River is on the far right. The handwritten text at the bottom of the image says “This picture was given to me by brother Sou- who was in Heintzelman’s Division.” Unfortunately, this is not the Camp Casey that was located in Arlington Heights. The exact location of that camp remains unknown. Image courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society.

Conclusion

Based on the available information, Traceries is unable to determine the exact location of Camp Casey. Although primary sources from the period do agree on several landmarks that were within proximity to the camp, none provide enough detail to pinpoint a definitive location. However, there are several clues about the camp's siting which allow an approximate position to be determined. Letters from the period when the camp was active state that Arlington House could be seen from the camp, and its location was said to be within close proximity to Long Bridge and Fort Albany. It is important to note that there were multiple forts throughout Arlington which are not mentioned in any of the primary sources regarding Camp Casey. This alone makes it increasingly likely that the camp was close to Fort Albany, somewhere around the intersection of Columbia Pike and the Old Alexandria and Georgetown Road (now S. Arlington Ridge Road). Additionally, working from B. F. Trail's description of the location, both the Potomac River and the Capitol could be seen from the camp, increasing the likelihood that it was located in this area. If the camp were located at Hunter's Chapel, it is unlikely that both the Capitol and the Potomac River would be fully visible, if at all, despite the majority of tree cover having been removed to increase the line of sight for the fortifications.

Based on the available information, it can be surmised that Camp Casey may have been located in a field on the north side of Columbia Pike between Long Bridge and Fort Albany. Today, this is the area where Columbia Pike, I-395, and South Washington Boulevard meet near the south parking lot of the Pentagon. Others searching for the site of Camp Casey have come to similar conclusions in the past, but nothing has been definitively proven. Additional research may confirm the location of the camp, but it is possible that there are no sources from the period which document its exact location.

Bibliography

City of Alexandria. "Fighting for Freedom, Black Union Soldiers of the Civil War." Last updated August 26, 2017. <https://www.alexandriava.gov/historic/forward/default.aspx?id=40018>.

"Sale of Government Buildings at Camp Casey, Virginia." *Daily National Republican*, September 5, 1865. Library of Congress - Chronicling America.

Gilmour, Chelsea. "The Mystery of the Civil War's Camp Casey." *Consortium News*, 26 February 2015. Accessed 5 February 2019. <https://consortiumnews.com/2015/02/26/the-mystery-of-the-civil-wars-camp-casey/>.

Gladstone, William A., Collector. "Letter, 2 May 1864, 28th United States Colored Troops, enlisted man, B.F. Trail, Camp Casey, Arlington Heights, Va." *William A. Gladstone Afro-American Military Collection*. Library of Congress, Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss83434284/>.

Hamilton, Robert. *Weekly Anglo-African*. James Price Article.

Thorpe, Sheldon. *The History of the Fifteenth Connecticut Volunteers in the War for the Defense of the Union, 1861-1865*. New Haven: Price, Lee, & Adkins Co., 1893.

Using the Valley Project. "Letter, 21 May 1864, 21st Cavalry, Camp Casey, Va, R. H. W." *Franklin Repository*. University of Virginia Library and the Virginia Center for Digital History, 2007. <http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/news/fr1864/pa.fr.fr.1864.06.01.xml>.

National Park Service. "A Historic Resources Study: The Civil War Defenses of Washington." Last updated October 29, 2004. https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/civilwar/hrs1-4b.htm.

1st Battalion, New York Sharpshooters, 1863. James Price article.

[This page intentionally left blank]

EHT|||TRACERIES
HISTORIC PRESERVATION