

X Marks the Spot: Miscalculations in Civil War Cartography

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The Civil War affected every aspect of American life. Across the nation, north and south, homes and families were destroyed. In the south, the once fertile landscape was laid to waste, and an entire region was stripped of its ability to foster any type of economy. As war broke out in 1861, there was a serious lack of reliable maps. General George McClellan poignantly tells of maps, “correct local maps were not to be found, and the country, though known in its general features, we found to be inaccurately described in essential particulars, in the only maps and geographical memoirs or papers to which access could be had; erroneous courses to streams and roads were frequently given, and no dependence could be placed on the information thus derived.”¹ In short, maps and mapmakers came into great demand, and focus shifted towards advancing the field of cartography.

Today, historians are fortunate enough to have extensive records providing an incredibly detailed story of the war. Maps provide historians with a relatively accurate depiction of the landscape a particular general was looking for, as well as any special landmarks that might have deserved special reference on the map, thus implying an importance to the army itself. The mapmakers of the Civil War possessed many tools and methods that are used today. Appraisals of these Civil War maps are varied among those who analyze them, generally depending on the specialty of the critic. David Bosse writes on the varied opinions: “To further complicate matters, the informational requirements of

¹ Richard Stephenson, *Mapping the Civil War* (Library of Congress: Starwood Publishing, 1992), 9.

the local historian, the military historian, and the historical geographer vary, and so will their opinion of any given map's utility.”²

Like all maps, Civil War maps are entirely relative to one man: the cartographer himself. It is true that the technology used to produce these maps was quite advanced, yet it all had to be processed by the one man heading the mapmaking team, and the man putting pen to paper. This produces many problems that are often overlooked by modern historians. These maps are incomplete, estimated, and relative reproductions of a man or team of men partial to the desires of an army, and a limited amount of time. Thus, things on the maps carry a twisted sense of importance. For instance, someone who is merely an overseer of fifty acres may find his name referenced on a map, while his employer, a man owning one thousand acres, is omitted. Why the inconsistency? If a mapmaker is searching for the important residents of an area, why would an insignificant farmer be marked while his powerful employer is not even mentioned? What were the priorities of the passing cartographers? Postwar accounts detail a decimated landscape marred with a lack of resources, indicating that the moving armies lived extensively off of the land. If the maps were meant to show resources, why was the listing of the resource controllers so sporadic? Without answers, what degree of credibility can be given to these maps?

The *Map of the Country North of Grand Junction, Tennessee*, referred to here as the “Ames Map” (and attached at the end of this paper), provides an example of the complicated nature of Civil War maps. It is an archive that allows for modern comparison because of the area on which it focuses. The area featured in the map almost exactly overlays the land boundaries of the modern day Ames Plantation, an 18,600 acre land base in Fayette and Hardeman counties of western Tennessee. The plantation, currently

² David Bosse, *Civil War Newspaper Map* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 45.

under control of the Hobart Ames Trust, is a center for agricultural and historical research, much of which is done by the University of Tennessee. The plantation maintains a detailed historical resource program, allowing for Civil War era landmarks, many of which are featured on the Ames Map to be geo-referenced and compared to its modern day landscape. This comparison will allow for the map to be critiqued from historical and topographic approaches.

The Ames Map has significant discrepancies in what is featured and what is not. If someone considers the map from either a historical or archaeological perspective these discrepancies must be taken into account. The discrepancies between the map and the actual landscape are significant enough to prevent it from being entirely reliable as a historical document. The team that created the map was essentially walking the roads in the area, causing major players in the economic landscape to be left off. In a study of the cultural geography of the area, these omissions make the map less than a reliable source in the archaeological or historical record. Instead, it becomes merely a rough representation of the spatial relationships of the area, and little more.

In order to understand the map, its context of the creation must be understood. The Civil War in the West was unique, particularly regarding the trouble with guerilla warfare. A broad understanding of the Civil War at the outset of this paper will allow for specific conclusions to be made later. Understanding the life of Lt. Colonel James H. Wilson, who appears on the map as chief engineer, will allow an understanding of the actions of Civil War cartographers. An overview of Civil War maps and mapmakers gives some idea as to what C.I. Spangenberg, the cartographer of the Ames map, was looking for and how he determined what was represented on the map.

The answers to these questions can be traced back to the original issue: perspective. In order to determine just how accurate a depiction of life during the Civil War these maps provide, they must be examined from the perspective of the cartographer.

The War in the West

In order to establish the background of the Ames Map, a brief overview of the events that led up to the map's production will be provided. As the Civil War commanded focus in the eastern half of the United States, the two sides began clashing for control of the numerous waterways of the west. The rivers were vital to the southern economy, as their comparatively underdeveloped railroad system left much of the Confederate war machine relying on shipping via rivers. Likewise, the underdeveloped infrastructure meant that in order for an effective invasion of the Southern states, the Union needed to control those same waterways. The sheer size of the south, coupled with the thinly spread population, meant the Union had to wage a different type of warfare than in the more urban east. This mindset would eventually lead to "total war," the involving of an entire population in the military strategy, making everything capable of supporting the southern war effort a target. Some of the war's most famous names emerged from the war in the west: Ulysses S. Grant, William Tecumseh Sherman, and Nathan Bedford Forrest. These three would clash on numerous occasions throughout the war, and would leave a legacy of both honor and destruction throughout the Confederacy.

Official western conflicts began in Missouri where, on August 10, 1861 a Union force under Nathaniel Lyon attacked a band of Confederate sympathizers near Wilson's

Creek in southern Missouri.³ Lyon and the Union soldiers were defeated, marking the beginning of Missouri as a constant battleground between the two sides. Quite early in the conflict, both the Union and the Confederacy recognized the importance of the Mississippi River for control of the Confederacy.

The first conflicts over the waterway began in Cairo, Illinois, and Columbus, Kentucky. Both cities were Union territory, and asked for help from the federal government. In Columbus, Confederate troops occupied the city after moving up from northern Tennessee. The Kentucky state legislature asked the federal government for help, and Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant soon arrived and occupied Paducah, Kentucky with a force of about 4000 men.⁴ He would later move towards Belmont, Missouri just across the Mississippi River from Columbus. A battle occurred in the middle of the two cities. It was Grant's first battle of the war. From Belmont, Grant's army began moving along southern Kentucky and into northern Tennessee.

At first, the western theater was made up of minor skirmishes. Grant's bulky army was hampered down by his superior, Henry Halleck, who continued to withhold permission for an all-out invasion of Tennessee.⁵ Once the word came in January of 1862, Grant moved against his targets, first at Forts Henry and Donelson in northern Tennessee.⁶ Fort Henry was captured quickly, and Donelson was eventually captured after an intense four day stand by Confederate troops.⁷ From Fort Donelson, Grant had

³ Col. R. Ernest Dupuy and Col. Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Compact History of the Civil War* (New York: Warner, 1960), 49-50.

⁴ "American Civil War," Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2007
<http://encarta.msn.com> © 1997-2007 Microsoft Corporation. All Rights Reserved.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Col. R. Ernest Dupuy and Col. Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Compact History of the Civil War* (New York: Warner, 1960), 57-58.

⁷ Ibid., 58-59.

intended to move quickly towards Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston, who was encamped in Corinth, Mississippi. But Grant was ordered to wait for General Don Carlos Buell to arrive and provide reinforcements.

Instead of Grant's plan of an aggressive pursuit, he became the victim of a surprise attack.⁸ Johnston, who had received word of Grant's pending advance, moved with speed and stealth to Grant's position. He arrived undetected and attacked Grant's army where it was encamped at Pittsburgh Landing, Tennessee, on April 6, 1862. Johnston's 40,000 troops attacked Grant's 45,000, and the fighting proved to be the fiercest of the war to that point.

Union attacks were consistently repelled until General Buell, rushing to aid Grant, arrived on April 7th and forced the Confederate troops to withdraw. General Johnston was killed in the fighting, and Grant was labeled in the Union as careless for his allowance of such a surprise attack to occur.⁹ At the end of the fighting over 20,000 men were dead, and while the Confederates were forced to withdraw, no side gained ground or a decisive victory.¹⁰ The battle of Shiloh provides a perfect example of the slaughter that occurred during the war for small pieces of land.

From Shiloh, Grant began his movements through Tennessee towards the Mississippi River with his eventual goal at the Confederate stronghold of Vicksburg, MS. Vicksburg, like the recently captured Confederate city of Memphis, Tennessee, was a key city along the Mississippi River because of its strategic bluffs.

On November 4, 1862, Grant captured the Confederate cities of LaGrange and Grand Junction, Tennessee. Grand Junction was an important capture for Grant because

⁸ Ibid., 74.

⁹ Ibid., 82.

¹⁰ Stanley F. Horn, *Tennessee's War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1965), 80.

of its location at the crossroads of the Memphis and Charleston railroads. The major east-west and north-south railroad crossing in Tennessee had fallen into Union hands. Grand Junction and LaGrange are also important to the present study because they are the two cities closest to the modern day Ames area.

James Wilson, who was mentioned on the Union Army's map of this area, was transferred to the company of Major-General John A. McClernand, who participated in the capture of Grand Junction and LaGrange.¹¹ Reconnaissance of the area surrounding the cities would have most likely occurred shortly after their capture; with Wilson present and intelligence needed, it is likely that the Ames Map was produced sometime shortly after the capture of Grand Junction and LaGrange in late 1862.

The Union army, now controlled by General W.H. Halleck who superseded Grant after Shiloh, moved south towards the Confederate stronghold at Corinth, Mississippi. Like Grand Junction, Corinth was of great importance to both armies because of its strategic railroad junction. Halleck said of Corinth: "Richmond and Corinth are now the great strategic points of war, and our success at these points should be insured at all hazards."¹² The plan was for Grant to march south from Memphis and rendezvous with General William Tecumseh Sherman who was proceeding by water to the Chickasaw Bluffs, just north of Vicksburg.¹³ Grant hoped that the two armies combined would be able to overwhelm the heavily fortified city.

¹¹ John A. McClernand to E.M. Stanton from Washington, City, October 15, 1862: "Please assign Liet. James H. Wilson, Engineers, U.S. Army, who is now here, for duty as a member of my staff." Taken from *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (The National Historical Society: Broadfoot Publishing, 1971), 277-278.

¹² Rogers, Margaret Green. 2002. *Corinth 1861-1865*. Corinth, MS: Corinth Tourism Council. On-Line. Available from Internet, http://www.corinth.net/NEW%20SITE/History/1861_1865.htm, accessed July 18th, 2007.

¹³ "American Civil War," Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2007 <http://encarta.msn.com> © 1997-2007 Microsoft Corporation. All Rights Reserved.

Before he left for Vicksburg, Grant dispatched General Benjamin H. Grierson's cavalry division from La Grange on a diversion raid throughout the south, hoping to divert Confederate attention from Vicksburg.¹⁴ Grierson made an enormously successful ride through the south to Baton Rouge, Louisiana.¹⁵ Grant's plan for a diversion did not work, as both Generals were met with heavy resistance and the plan to take Vicksburg failed. Grant's supply base of Holly Springs, Mississippi was destroyed when Confederate General Earl Von Dorn moved in on his rear. Calls arose again in the north that Grant was reckless and an irresponsible defender of his advances. Sherman was eventually repulsed at the Battle of Chickasaw Bluffs, sending back the poignant report of, "I reached Vicksburg at the time appointed, landed, assaulted, and failed."¹⁶

Grant formulated a new plan to force the Confederates inside of Vicksburg and lay a classic siege. He would march on the western side of the Mississippi River and cross it south of Vicksburg. After crossing the river, he marched to Jackson, the capitol of Mississippi, which held the only Confederate force that could prevent a challenge of Vicksburg. He captured Jackson on May 12, 1863. After the Jackson triumph, Grant was relatively free of Confederate opposition to his rear, Grant turned west towards Vicksburg. At Champions Hill, a point halfway between Jackson and Vicksburg, two of Grant's commanders were attacked by Confederate General John C. Pemberton.¹⁷ The Union generals forced Pemberton to retreat, and after a secondary battle at Big Black River, Pemberton held stubbornly to Jefferson Davis's orders to hold Vicksburg at any

¹⁴ Col. R. Ernest Dupuy and Col. Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Compact History of the Civil War* (New York: Warner, 1960), 256.

¹⁵ Ibid.

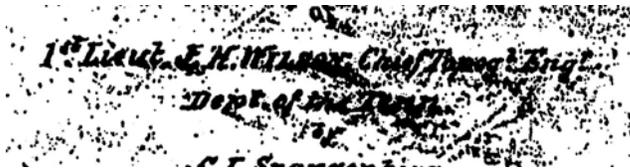
¹⁶ "American Civil War," Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2007
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¹⁷ Col. R. Ernest Dupuy and Col. Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Compact History of the Civil War* (New York: Warner, 1960), 257.

cost and barricaded himself and his army inside the city.¹⁸ Grant initially tried a frontal assault of the city, but was repulsed decisively. He then reverted to his plan of a classic siege. For six weeks, a river and land blockade of the city starved the army and people of Vicksburg until July 4, 1863 when General Pemberton surrendered.

Vicksburg was the turning point for the war in the west,¹⁹ as the Union gained complete control of the Mississippi River. The Confederacy was also split into two theaters with Grant's army corralling Confederate troops to the areas of northern Mississippi and Alabama. After Vicksburg, it became a desperate struggle for Confederate troops with the Union armies at the south, controlling the Mississippi River to the west, and advancing from the north.

1st Lieutenant James Harrison Wilson



The story of James Wilson is one that explains the dramatic effect that the American Civil War had on

all of those who participated in it. Wilson was able to rise from a simple topographical engineer to a revolutionary cavalry commander. He is mentioned and examined because his name is on the map of the area surrounding Grand Junction, Tennessee that is the focus of this project. But it is important to understand Wilson's time in the Army as a means of understanding Civil War maps and those who produced them.

¹⁸ Ibid., 259.

¹⁹ Ibid., 263.

Wilson was born in 1837 in Shawneetown, Illinois. In 1860, he graduated from The United States Military Academy at West Point, and entered the Army as a topographical engineer.²⁰ His first assignment was at Fort Vancouver, Oregon, as Assistant Topographical Engineer.²¹ In April of 1862 he was promoted to Major and transferred to the Regular Army, specifically the Army of the Potomac. It was there he became a reliable aide to General George McClellan.²² Wilson frequently saw combat with the Potomac troops, showing the duality of a cartographers place in the army. They were expected to create and understand complicated maps, while at the same time giving direction to the generals who oversaw the military operation. As Wilson and others held the key knowledge of the landscape, they were expected to be near to the center of control and also the center of action.

Wilson was transferred to Ulysses S. Grant's Army of the Tennessee, still as an engineer.²³ It is likely that the map of Grand Junction was created while Wilson was with Grant after the Battle of Shiloh as he moved southwest towards the Mississippi river and eventually Vicksburg. Wilson participated extensively in the Vicksburg campaign as an engineer, and produced what is perhaps his most widely recognized map, a map of the Vicksburg area.²⁴



1 James H. Wilson, ca. 1864

²⁰ Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 566.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 567.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Earl B. McElfresh, *Maps and Mapmakers of the Civil War* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 123.

Wilson's success during the Vicksburg Campaign and his entire stay with Grant was marked by his numerous promotions during the time. During the Vicksburg Campaign, he was appointed to the position of General Inspector of Grant's Army. On October 30, 1863, he was promoted to Brigadier General of Volunteers,²⁵ and was the only officer in Grant's regular staff to be promoted to troop command.²⁶ Wilson remained in command still doubling as an engineer, through the Battle of Chattanooga, and collaborated with General William T. Sherman in his capture and defense of Knoxville.

In 1864, Wilson changed his duties from engineering to the cavalry. General Grant had Wilson appointed Brigadier General of Volunteers and placed him with a cavalry command under General Sherman.²⁷ On November 30, 1864 Wilson was instrumental in saving the Union army during the Battle of Franklin. The Battle of Franklin was marked by repetitive Confederate frontal assaults at the Union lines. General Nathan Bedford Forrest attempted to flank the Union forces on their left, but Wilson repelled the attack.²⁸

On March 22, 1865 Wilson embarked on Wilson's Raid, an incredibly successful cavalry march through northern Alabama. Wilson led 13,500 men primarily against General Forrest. Wilson defeated Forrest near Montavello, and marched uncontested to Montgomery, which he occupied on April 12th.²⁹ He then pursued Forrest to his

²⁵ John H. Eicher and David J. Eicher, *Civil War High Commands* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 574.

²⁶ Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 567.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ David J. Eicher, *The Longest Night: A Military History of the Civil War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 772.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 837.

stronghold and center of commerce at Selma, Alabama. Ezra Warner says of Wilson's maneuvering after capturing Selma: "he [Wilson] turned east sweeping through the remnant of the Confederacy and whirling away its defenders in the greatest independent cavalry movement of the Civil War."³⁰ The end of Wilson's raid came with the capture of Macon, Georgia and the defeat of General Forrest. The end of the raid became one of the last battles of the Civil War, occurring only six days prior to the official surrender of all Confederate troops.

It is not certain that Wilson had a hand in creating the Ames Map, and it is a possibility that he is merely credited because of his position as Grant's chief topographical engineer. By early 1863 he had become heavily involved in the Yazoo Pass expedition as well as playing a leading roll in the siege of Vicksburg. It is possible that Wilson merely commissioned the map, and Charles Spangenberg did most of the cartographic work. Spangenberg is mentioned beneath Wilson on the map; however, Wilson's name does appear as chief of the expedition, and his summoned presence shortly before the conquering of the two cities in closest proximity to the Ames Map area points to a higher level of interest from Wilson. If Wilson did participate in the field mapping, the map must have been made shortly after the cities fell, because Wilson is confirmed moving further west to Oxford, Mississippi by early December of 1862.³¹

Regardless of his level of involvement, Wilson's credit on the map connects the Ames Map to a large Civil War personality. Wilson's life shows the versatility Civil War

³⁰ Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 567.

³¹ Ulysses S. Grant, Oxford Miss. to Col. T. Lyle Dickey, Springfield, Miss., December 11, 1862: "Lieutenant Wilson has gone to the front." taken from *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. (The National Historical Society: Broadfoot Publishing, 1971), 399.

cartographers were expected to have. A man who could be one of the most effective mapmakers and cavalry generals of the American Civil War shows how skilled the profession was. His quick promotions also allude to how important skilled mapmakers were. As an engineer, Wilson was quickly promoted up through the ranks of the Union Army. Grant must have recognized his capabilities and valued him as a mapmaker.

Civil War Maps

The American Civil War provides historians with one of the most well documented conflicts in American history. Advances in technology became applied to the field of record keeping and journalism, thus an emphasis was placed on the conservation of all information detailing the course of the war. As a result, a comprehensive account of the war is available, featuring order records, photographs, diary entries, and maps. Each of these archives are looked upon by historians to learn just what life was like during the war. At first, many of those pieces of information were taken by historians as the truth. Few questions were asked about photos from Matthew Brady; rather his photographs were considered to be the accurate depiction of the battlefield. As time went on, historians have come to find many faults in the literal interpretations of these Civil War documents. For instance, many of Brady's photographs were staged, bodies were put together to create a more gruesome scene or actors were used to give Brady complete control of the shot. In truth, some of Brady's photos did not depict reality at all, and consequently historians learned to read Brady's photos with the consideration of perspective in mind.

Maps are reliable in telling the story of a battle or the goals of a general moving towards a particular area. These are all on a large scale. On the small scale though, the difficulties of technology and the use of guesswork become more apparent. For the purposes of an advancing army, a set of slave cabins being off by a hundred yards would not usually slow them down much. For modern-day archaeologists treating a Civil War map as their main source on an area, a hundred yards could set them back months.

This consideration must be applied to all Civil War documents. As is the case with primary documents, they were created by an author not intending to keep a historical record, but one with an agenda. Letters home to families were coming from people, on whom the war has had a profound effect, thus creating a tone with which the letters were written. This tone must be taken into consideration.

The same is true for maps. Maps are rarely looked at critically, and when they are used as primary sources, are usually taken at face value. The Ames Map can be considered evidence of what was believed to be an accurate depiction of the life and landscape of the Civil War on the Ames Plantation. Often times, many assumptions are made about the maps practical applications, whether it is a search for resources or a means of organizing and directing travel. David Bosse writes on the complicated nature of Civil War maps: “Because the various representations on a map (of roads, vegetation, terrain, etc.) coincide to greater or lesser extents with reality, different levels of accuracy exist within a single map.”³²

Archaeologists may look at a map and assume that a site is present in the vicinity with which it is portrayed on the map, or there are no sites in the map’s empty spaces.

³² David Bosse, *Civil War Newspaper Maps* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 45.

The truth is, not enough is known about these maps to make an offhand assumption about their purpose.

Each map is unique; it is one man's, or team's interpretation of a scene, and that scene in has had a cartographer's and commander's agenda forced onto it. While technology was quite advanced at the time of the Civil War, it was not necessarily used all of the time to create the most accurate maps possible, thus making the map a product of a cartographer's style and interpretation. Bosse believes that a certain bias or misrepresentation might exist in maps based on the sides from which they originate. "[Confederate] Maps occasionally misrepresented armies by employing a large number of symbols or symbols of exaggerated size." ³³

A new understanding of these maps is needed. One must look at the methods these maps were created, the men who created them, and the circumstances with which they were commissioned and used.

The Cartographers



¹⁵
2 Detail of Yorktown, Va., vicinity. Topographical engineers, Camp Winfield Scott
Taken from: <http://memory.loc.gov/service/pnp/cwpb/00100/00124v.jpg>

The men who created these maps did so under unique circumstances with unique challenges. Some maintained regular relations with their respective armies; others were employees of the governments. A few engineers, such as Jed Hotchkiss of the Confederate army, and D.H. Strother of the Federal army, maintained their positions throughout the war.³⁴ For others such as James H. Wilson or George Custer, engineering was either a hobby or a stop on the way to regular commands. Regardless of their eventual destiny with the army, topographical engineers were highly valued by both sides.³⁵

Mapping Technology

The industrial revolution that had reached the United States by the mid 19th century had been applied to cartography. Compared to wars past, the technology on hand for cartographers had made one of the greatest advances in history. Railroads allowed for maps to be shipped across the country in a matter of days, while the telegraph allowed for intelligence and orders to be wired from Washington to the front in minutes. The revolving cylinder press allowed for mass production and distribution of maps.³⁶ As for field tools, the transit had caught on in popularity in the mid-19th century, making distance surveying easier. The production of these technologies was something that required industry, a key advantage held by the Union army.

³⁴ Earl B. McElfresh, *Maps and Mapmakers of the Civil War* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 23.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 23-25.

³⁶ David Bosse, *Civil War Newspaper Maps* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 21.

Federal Advantages

After the secession of the southern states, the Federal Army maintained an enormous advantage with its organization. With a few exceptions, their entire Corps of Topographical Engineers remained intact, along with the United States Coast Survey, Smithsonian Institution, Naval Hydrographic Office, and the Pacific Wagon Road Office.³⁷ The federal engineers, (or *Topogs* as they were called by the soldiers³⁸) also had at their disposal the resources of the federal government. Mapmaking supplies were expensive, particularly in the blockaded Confederacy. Confederate engineer Jed Hotchkiss writes in his diary that pencils cost \$1 in Richmond. The cost of hiring an engineer for one day was about \$3, so supplies were at a premium.³⁹ These resources went towards things like the reproduction of maps. Maps were difficult things to make accurate copies of, and the industrialized Union held a significant advantage over the Confederacy in their ability to mass produce maps. In short, as with the Federal armory the Federal topographers were vastly more prepared materially than their Confederate counterparts.

Confederate Advantages

In the typical discussion of Civil War advantages, the one Confederate advantage that invariably comes up is that “the Confederates knew the lay of the land.” Nowhere is this more apparent than in the field of Topography. Federal topographers were faced with

³⁷Earl B. McElfresh, *Maps and Mapmakers of the Civil War* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 29.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

an enormous disadvantage when they marched into unfamiliar territory amongst a host of suspicious residents put on the other hand, the Confederates were amongst their neighbors and friends. As stated earlier, many of these topographers did not maintain regular relations with the army.⁴⁰ The sudden appearance of a civilian in unfamiliar territory making maps undoubtedly would have raised suspicions of spying. Many cartographers were arrested, even if they were working at the rear of an army passing through. On these suspicions, Earl B. McElfresh conveys a story from D.H. Strother's diary:

A Union soldier approached him (Strother) in a barroom and demanded to know his name, business, destination, and why he was traveling with a map of Washington County in his haversack. Strother then turned on the soldier: "I asked him sharply who he was, what he was doing here, and upon what authority he undertook to question travelers. He answered, that he was a soldier of the Potomac Home Brigade, and he considered it his duty to find out whether a man had a right to travel about with a map of Maryland in his Pocket. In return, I informed him that I was in the United States service, and attached to the Topographical Corps of Patterson's army. 'To-py—top-py—to-pee—to hell!' he exclaimed, staggering with the effort to accomplish the knotty polysyllable. 'I believe you're a dam'd rebel spy.'" ⁴¹

The fact that the Confederacy was in familiar territory was one advantage the Union was never able to fully overcome. The Federal army, in order to achieve victory, had to invade the Confederacy; while the Confederacy merely had to repulse that invasion. The Federals tried to compensate by pouring resources into the Corps of Topographical engineers.

⁴⁰ Earl B. McElfresh, *Maps and Mapmakers of the Civil War* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 23-25.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

Union topographers were in unfamiliar territory, meaning their maps must be looked at with an even more critical eye. McElfresh writes that the topographers would know the exact size of familiar objects to provide reference points from distances, for example “he would know what a church steeple looked like from ten miles away, what a house looked like from five miles away.”⁴² The territorial disadvantage comes into play again because of the differences in the atmospheric conditions in the north versus the south. “It was noted that in the extremely dry atmospheric conditions prevailing in the West, Easterners would misjudge badly, thinking objects ten miles away to be only two or three miles away.”⁴³

While the Confederacy did hold an advantage because they were in familiar territory, that advantage was entirely relative. While a Virginian was a southerner, his territorial advantage was completely gone once he left Virginia. Confederate General Richard Taylor notes that his cartographers “knew no more about the topography of the country than they did about Central Africa.”⁴⁴ It took time to train and equip these cartographers, and their skill level should be considered while analyzing their maps.

Why They Mapped

In order to understand the maps of the Civil War, one must understand why the maps were commissioned, the specific details of the orders, and how the maps were used by the armies. An understanding of a map’s purpose can allow for a reevaluation of the maps status as a primary source. By looking at the map itself and pairing it with the

⁴² Ibid., 33.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Richard Stephenson, *Mapping the Civil War* (Library of Congress: Starwood Publishing, 1992), 9.

desires of the commanders who commissioned their creation, we can begin to place the maps' within a context with the rest of the relevant Civil War primary sources.

Maps were used in battle as a means of designing and executing attacks. The most famous Civil War maps are almost always of famous battlefields, depicting troop positions or movements. These were used by Generals to create battle plans. As this was the case, the cartographers who created these maps included only what would prove necessary for a battle map. The maps then represent the landscape accurately, but accurately only in relation to what is useful in a battle. Things such as elevated areas, waterways, forests, roads and fields become the important items represented on the map. Specifics about those areas suffer.

Pillaging

One reason the Ames Map was produced was possibly due to the need of the Union Army to procure food and shelter after their successful campaign at Grand Junction. The war brought devastation to the area. Pillaging was a major problem, and the official record reflects that the army took conflicting steps to deal with it. One order written November 23rd, 1862 from J.H. Hammond, Assistant Adjunct General reads: "Pillage or robbery by the soldiers or subordinate officers must be promptly checked and punished."⁴⁵ While another, given one month earlier by Hammond, reads: "Subordinates and privates must not pillage, but commanders may do anything necessary to impress upon the people the guerillas must be driven from their midst, else they must necessarily

⁴⁵ Hammond, J.H. *General Order No. 94*. taken from *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. (The National Historical Society: Broadfoot Publishing, 1971), 359.

share the consequences.”⁴⁶ First hand reports of the landscape are clearer. One story is of a man who joined the Confederate army, only to return to where he thought his home was. He searched, only to find his once wealthy family living in a shanty, walking miles merely for firewood. The *Cincinnati Commercial* wrote on October 25, 1862 of the desolation in the area:

“For miles around Grand Junction, Bolivar, and LaGrange, the country speaks of a progressing revolution. Fields are laid bare; fences used up for fuel; corn crops long since appropriated; cotton fields half picked; houses standing here and there surrounded by desolation with not a board, picket, or scarcely a post left to mark where a garden had been. No horses, no mules, no cows, no hogs, no cabbage, potatoes, or apples, no chickens, no nothing that is edible or that can be useful. Our trains went thirteen miles today for forage.”⁴⁷

Some maps could have been used as a means of finding resources to be used as supplies for the passing army. It seems reasonable to assume that if the Ames map were one of these maps, those resources would have appeared on the map. If that was one of the purposes of the Ames map, it appears that food and supplies were to be found by the passing soldiers, as only guesswork is left on the map.

⁴⁶ Hammond, J.H. *Special Order No. 285*. taken from *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. (The National Historical Society: Broadfoot Publishing, 1971), 289-90.

⁴⁷ Allen, Dan Sumner IV and Glyn D. Duvall, *A Phase I Historical Archaeological Survey and Limited Testing of Ames Plantation, Fayette and Hardeman Counties, Tennessee* (Frankling: Duvall & Associates. 1995), 16.

The previous map, a map detailing the battle of Shiloh, is an accurate depiction of the battlefield from a tactical perspective. Instead of a search for resources or civilian settlements, the map shows only roads, fields, swamps, and the locations of the troops themselves. It shows elevations and places where engagements could take place, proving its worth as a military asset. What it does not show are places of value to an army not in battle. Unlike the map of the Ames area, the map of Shiloh does not show areas where food may be found or where residents might be encountered.



The Ames Map

The map of the modern day Ames Plantation, or as it was known at its creation in 1862, *The Map of the Country North of Grand Junction, Tennessee*, provides a perfect example of the subjectivity of Civil War maps. The map carries the same boundaries as the modern day Ames area, allowing the past and present to be easily compared. Furthermore, the Ames area retained its historical resources, giving the modern day historian several landmarks that show up on the Ames map and remaining today. It is because of Ames's rich historical and archaeological record that the validity of the Ames map can be questioned from our perspective. There are sites on the map whose existence

has been confirmed. More importantly though, there are sites whose existence have been confirmed by the archaeological and historical records, yet they do not show up on the map, as well as sites that are represented on the map that have been searched for in the archaeological and historical record and cannot be confirmed.

Names of the residents that find their way onto the map are significant in that they carry a great deal of inconsistency with regard to their importance. Poor farmers with no record of major crop production are found on the map, while a family like the McNeills, who controlled large amounts of land and held great sway in the area's economy, were omitted. The parts of the map that are accurate further point to the maps use. The roads are accurate in their depiction and can be located today. Railroads can be easily located, as well as forested areas and areas where crop production would occur. In short, the areas useful to an advancing army are clearly marked and easily located on the ground. These discrepancies show just how Civil War maps provided an estimate, not an exact survey of the land that lay ahead of an advancing army.

The Making of the Map

There is no clear way of knowing exactly when the map was made, or under whose orders. First, let us start with what is known:

The map was used by the Union army. The Union army was seeking to, or already had occupied Grand Junction. As stated earlier, General Grant moved through the area to LaGrange and Grand Junction on November 4, 1862 as a means of controlling the railroads passing through the area. The Ames Map could have been created either in late

1862 or early 1863.⁴⁸ The Union army advanced south towards Grand Junction from Bolivar, Tennessee. Bolivar sits northeast of the area featured on the Ames map. It is unlikely that the army would have passed through the Ames area on their journey to Grand Junction and LaGrange because the Ames area lies out of the way of their destination.⁴⁹ However, once situated in LaGrange reconnaissance was sent out that would have passed through the area. Colonel Mortimer D. Leggett of the Seventy-eighth Ohio Infantry sent out reconnaissance teams towards Somerville⁵⁰ where rebels had been reported to be hiding.⁵¹

If scouts were being sent into the area the day after the occupation of Grand Junction,⁵² it seems likely a formal mapping of the area would have been ordered shortly thereafter.

Since Wilson's level of participation is in question, as the only man who can be confirmed to have participated in the creation of the Ames Map, C.I. Spangenberg is the man who should be kept in mind in relation to the Ames cartography. His name appears as the artist of the map, meaning his interpretations and leadership determined the outcome of the Ames Map.

⁴⁸ The Union army occupied the area in November of 1862. Reconnaissance was sent out into the Ames area, making the creation of a map like the Ames Map a reasonable assumption.

⁴⁹ The Union army was heading south towards Corinth, Mississippi. Somerville and the Ames area are north of the army's route to Corinth and Vicksburg.

⁵⁰ "Sir: In obedience to the verbal orders of General Logan I started at 8 o'clock this morning, in command of the Thirtieth Illinois Artillery, four companies Second and three companies Seventh Illinois Cavalry, to reconnoiter in the direction of Somerville."- Leggett, M.D. *Report of Reconnaissance from LaGrange toward Somerville, Tenn., November 5.* taken from *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (The National Historical Society: Broadfoot Publishing, 1971), 485-6

⁵¹ "Bands of guerillas still infest the neighborhood under Street, Richardson, and others, carrying away citizens, stealing horses, and subsisting by plunder. At present they harbor in the bends of the river, a few miles above here, in the neighborhood of Somerville." Brayman, M. *Mississippi Central Railroad, November 5.* taken from *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (The National Historical Society: Broadfoot Publishing, 1971), 485.

⁵² November 4th 1862.

What Spangenberg Sought

The mapping crew needed an understanding of the area to move troops through. Several thousand troops would be moving through the area and would undoubtedly come into contact with the residents. The soldiers needed an understanding of the road system, as well as contact with the residents of the area. Intelligence reported that the Confederate soldiers had sought refuge with the residents of the area, meaning the soldiers would have sought contact with as many residents as they could. While the cartographers probably sought to contact as many residents as possible, it is also probable that they were under serious time constraints, as the order to pursue “rebels” in Somerville was one that assumed great haste would be made to prevent their escape. Thus the mapping crew stuck mainly to the roads, and left the more serious interrogations of residents to those in Somerville, some miles further north and west. The expedition to Somerville was a success, as Lieutenant Colonel Edward Prince reported on the November 26th skirmish with the Somerville rebels:

“The only fault to be found with the command was too great eagerness to get at the enemy. The officers and men betrayed no symptoms of fear nor sought any protection from trees. The firing of the rebels was very spirited, but wild... We captured two very handsome colors, one of them the colors of the rebel battalion engaged.”⁵³

⁵³ Edward Prince. *Report of Lieut. Col. Edward Prince, Seventh Illinois Cavalry*. taken from *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (The National Historical Society: Broadfoot Publishing, 1971), 527.

Where the Map Succeeds

The map could not be, and is not, total guesswork. The roads had to be easy to follow with a few defining landmarks. The Ames Map does provide that. After a survey including GPS plotting, several roads and their intersections were easily located and followed even this summer. The road surveyed this summer during the Rhodes College archaeology field school at the Ames Plantation showed a bearing almost exactly what the road would have carried in 1863, and the road was easily located through the overgrowth for over two miles. An advancing army would have found the area easily navigable, as the overgrowth that marks the landscape today would have been absent. The roads provide the one common theme with the houses plotted on the map. Without exception, every landmark or house on the map lies along the road. Spangenberg goes into great detail, marking cotton gins, churches and slave quarters.⁵⁴

Where the Map Fails

Because of the accuracy of the maps depiction of the roads and rail of the area, it may seem an accurate depiction of life at the Ames area. There are a number of houses plotted along the road, and all evidence points to the fact that there were residents at those locations. Since some of the houses are shown at their correct locations, a careless historian or archaeologist may be led to believe that the map is accurate. An explanation of who made the map and who did not is in order.

⁵⁴ *Map of the Country North of Grand Junction, Tennessee* (Surveyed under the direction of 1st Lieut. J.H. Wilson, Chief Topographical Engineer.) circa 1862-3

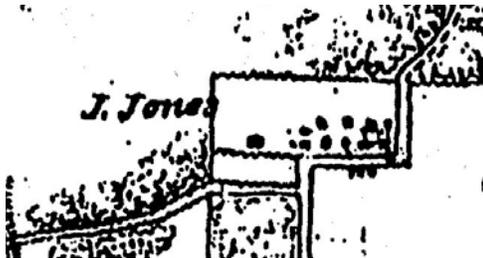
It is significant that the Wolf River crossing is missing. The north fork of the Wolf River was the strategically important waterway in the area, yet it receives minimal detail on the map. It is strange that a river which was fought over on several occasions is not plotted.⁵⁵

Stranger still is the bridge that would have appeared in the area is not plotted. Bridges were of the utmost importance to the advancing Union army, and should have been noted extensively.



4 The Wolf River. The horizontal line represents a road, while the two wavy lines are the river. It is peculiar that the crossing is not mapped.

John Jones



The Jones plantation lies at the center of the map, and for good reason. John Jones was the area's most important planter, with a plantation controlling over 3500 acres of land in 1860.⁵⁶ The Jones plantation house has now become the center of the modern Ames plantation after its purchase by Hobart Ames in 1901. The Cedar Grove Manor house was built by John W. Jones in 1847, and would have been an easily recognizable landmark for a passing army.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Sherman, W.T. *Skirmish Near Wolf River, Tenn.* taken from *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (The National Historical Society: Broadfoot Publishing, 1971), 23.

⁵⁶ 1860 Fayette County Agricultural Census.

⁵⁷ Hobart Ames Foundation, *Welcome to Ames Plantation* (<http://www.amesplantation.com>), July 22, 2007.

Jones was the major planter in the area. In nearly every agricultural category of value, he controlled twice as much as his nearest competitor. In 1860, he owned 184 slaves, sold 320,000 pounds of ginned cotton, and 12,000 bushels of corn.⁵⁸ If Wilson and Spangenberg (the man in Wilson's company who put pen to paper) were looking for the major residents of the area with whom a passing army would have to deal, Jones seems an obvious choice for labeling on the map. Jones's Cedar Grove manor house is also located at a strategically important crossroads in the area. The major east-west road meets the major north-south road that runs to LaGrange about a mile west of Jones's house.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Jones's house and slave quarters are located within eyeshot of the old east-west road.

Where is Alexander McNeill?

The first impulse would be to say that Spangenberg marked Jones on the map mainly because he was so important to the area. It is true that Jones was vital to the economy of the area, and if a map were being made he would be the first to be marked. However, the impulse to say that Spangenberg and his team of cartographers marked Jones for his importance to the area must be fought. While Jones may be the most important planter in the area, he is not the only important planter.

It seems that Spangenberg was a practical cartographer. His map need not show the importance of a planter, it only needed to show who any troops would come into contact with. So he plotted everyone, rich or poor, that lived along the road. If

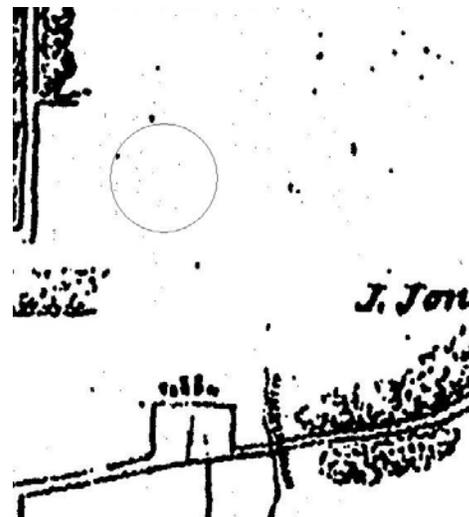
⁵⁸ 1860 Fayette County Agricultural Census.

⁵⁹ *Map of the Country North of Grand Junction, Tennessee* (Surveyed under the direction of 1st Lieut. J.H. Wilson, Chief Topographical Engineer.) circa 1862-3.

Spangenberg was looking for the important planters in the area, where was Alexander McNeill? McNeill was the second wealthiest planter in the area, with over 2200 acres surely to be touched by the Union army.⁶⁰ Simply put, the reason he was left off is that his plantation house was farther from the road than the other labeled farmers.

Woodstock and Slave Cabins

Less than a mile from the Jones plantation five buildings appear unlabeled. The buildings lie along the main east-west road of the area just across the stream running north-south. These are believed to be slave cabins originally belonging to the Holcombe family. The Holcombe family house, known as Woodstock, was located approximately five hundred yards north from the slave cabins. The Holcombe family is one of historical significance to the plantation. They



5 The arrangement of buildings at the top of the image represents the Holcombe slave cabins. The circle represents the area of the Holcombe plantation house site, which runs along a creek to the cabins. It is farther from the road than the slave cabins, making it harder to spot and thus mark.

were one of the first families to settle in the Ames area, and probably lived in a modest cabin. John Jones bought the Holcombe plantation after the Holcombes left the area, and it is likely that an overseer of Jones's lived at the Holcombe house, and that the slave cabins continued to be used by Jones to house slaves.

⁶⁰ 1860 Fayette County Agricultural Census

Modern Explorations at Ames

The Woodstock site has been studied in depth by Rhodes College undergraduates. The findings of an excavation during the summer of 2007 resulted in artifacts from as early as the 1830's to the late 20th century, meaning the house was definitely present at the time Spangenberg passed through the area. A discrepancy arises with Woodstock's absence from the map, while the slave cabins that may have originally have belonged to the Holcombe family are featured. The area where the cabins should be located according to the map has been scanned with ground penetrating radar (GPR). GPR sends a radar wave through the ground and back to a computer allowing the user to see depressions or artifacts which lie beneath the surface. A GPR scan by Dr. Robert Freeland, Jamie Evans, Dr. Milton Moreland, Elizabeth Welch and Ethan McClelland turned up next to nothing at the map's indicated location of the slave quarters,⁶¹ while the Woodstock site resulted in a great deal of artifacts.

The lack of results from the slave cabins scan further proves that Spangenberg was merely walking the roads, the one area that troops were sure to pass, and noting anyone or any building he came in contact with. The slave cabins were easily located on the map, yet were difficult to locate on the ground. The roads, on the other hand, were easy to locate on the ground. A simple foot survey during the Rhodes field school found the major east-west road on the map and plotted GPS points along it. The ease with which the road was found compared to the difficulty in finding the slave cabins gives a brief modern glimpse of Spangenberg's intentions. He sought to make the roads clearly

⁶¹ The site did test positive for artifacts with a metal detector.

marked because of their importance to an advancing army. The rest of the buildings could be mapped with more estimation.

A GPS survey by Jamie Evans, Dr. Andrew Mickelson of the University of Memphis, and Ethan McClelland produced quantifiable evidence of the discrepancies in the map versus the terrain. Using landmarks in existence today and known to be in existence at the time of the Ames Map's creation (the Jones manor house and various road intersections), the team was able to geo-reference the Civil War map with points on the satellite-marked landscape. The rectified map showed varying miscalculations in the Ames Map. Some points on the Ames Map were off by twenty feet, others by sixty, others none at all. This all shows that the Ames Map is an estimation, not an exact picture. The varying miscalculations combined with unknown changes in the landscape show just how many questions the Ames Map leaves. Archaeologists must be careful not to take a labeling of a building on a map like the Ames Map as an assurance that a site is present. As was the case with Woodstock and the slave cabins, the opposite might also be true.

Conclusions

The Ames Map is a useful historical resource. It marks, with relative accuracy, a number of historical sites in the modern day Ames Plantation. It gives an understanding of how road systems were designed in antebellum western Tennessee, as well as hinting at the needs of troops moving through the area. To its credit, it is a most egalitarian map in what is featured. This is a double-edged sword. The freeness with which Spangenberg mapped can be misleading, as his map shows only part of the picture of the area. Houses,

even those of important landowners not living within clear eyesight of his party, are overlooked while the slave quarters of those landowners were shown.

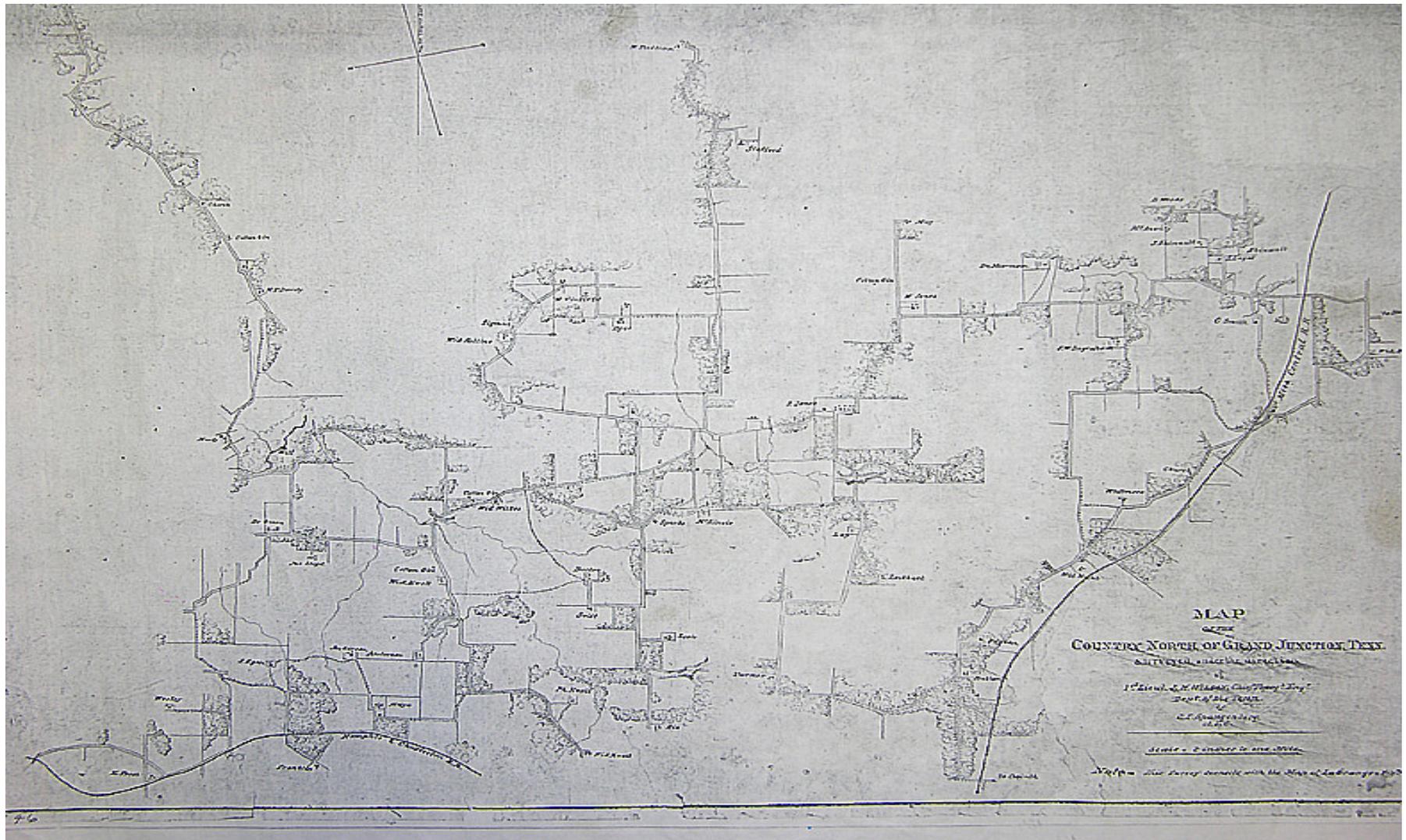
Spangenberg's line of sight is a variable which cannot be predicted. If a blank space appears on the map, the possibility exists of an archaeological site being present, only out of sight to the map crew. It could also mean that nothing was there. An archaeologist should not assume the map is entirely correct, and the traditional methods of site location upheld foremost. These Civil War maps, though accurate in some respects, are not complete representations of the historical landscape.

The best way to determine a map's accuracy is to first analyze the perspective in which it was created. As in the case of the Ames Map, the orders most likely called for a rudimentary understanding of the infrastructure of the area, as well as some basic intelligence of the citizens capable of supporting Confederate troops. This is represented in the map's accurate depiction of the road system, but varying accuracy in its depiction of the residents.

The excavation of the Holcombe site proves the need for care when analyzing the map. Had the Ames Map been the primary source of site location, it is likely that the Holcombe site would not have been discovered. Since the map was used amongst other sources, like primary accounts of the area, and clues from the geography of the area, the site was easily located, and a disparity in the map revealed. The unsuccessful location of the slave cabins provides a perfect example of what happens when these maps are used as the primary archaeological source. Using Civil War maps for exact location of sites is reliance on guesswork and luck. These maps should be used combined with other evidence of a site, not used as the primary source.

The Ames Map is merely an outline, a rough estimate created by a scout party moving with haste along a limited area with a limited objective and point of view. Everyone who lived in the Ames area is not featured on Spangenberg's map, and any archaeological question should be approached with that in mind. A mere glance at the map without any knowledge of the economic system or the historical record could allow for John Jones, the most important farmer in the area, to be categorized with an overseer of his slaves, or for Alexander McNeill to be completely ignored simply because of their proximity to Spangenberg's limited point of view.

The evidence presented should serve as a guide to archaeologists and historians hoping to tap the great resource that is historical mapping. Without a doubt, the Ames Map provides insight to the working relationships of the citizens of the country north of Grand Junction, Tennessee. Other Civil War maps provide insight into what generals were looking for as they advanced through an area. But as archaeological evidence, these maps should be looked at with an informed and careful eye. Without study and understanding of all available resources on an area, a map can lead one on an endless search for a site that may be located in an entirely different place, or divert one from locating an important site which was overlooked because of an unpredictable perspective.



6 Wilson, James H. and C.I. Spangenberg. *Map of the Country North of Grand Junction, Tennessee* (Surveyed under the direction of 1st Lieut. J.H. Wilson, Chief Topographical Engineer.) circa 1862-3.

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1860 Fayette County Agricultural Census

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