

# Seeking to Recover Forgotten Soldiers

## Volunteers Hunt for Long-Lost Graves

By LINDA WHEELER  
Washington Post Staff Writer

The tired land, where generations struggled to grow wheat and corn on the packed clay of the Dodd Farm, holds its secrets well. The farmers are long gone, having left behind hundreds of rough acres where black snakes slither through tall stands of goldenrod and Queen Anne's lace.

Twenty men and women gathered at the farm in Bristow yesterday to harvest those secrets, trudging through thick weeds and scouting under the tall oaks. They were hunting for the lost graves of forgotten Confederate soldiers who died there in the Civil War.

Until the 1980s, there was little need to worry about the battlefields, campgrounds and field cemeteries scattered throughout rural Virginia because many were as they had been left when the war ended in 1865, undisturbed except for farming.

That has changed as farmland has been snatched up by developers eager to meet the demand for new housing in Northern Virginia.

Residential development is what brought Robert "Red" Barbour, a longtime member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans of Roanoke and chairman of the graves project, and others to the old farm on Route 28, just south

of Manassas.

For Barbour, the need to see the graves protected was powerful.

"These are soldiers who served their country," he said. "Their country was their state, and for many of them, they were up here in Virginia to keep the war away from their families in Texas and Alabama. We can't let their graves be bulldozed."

In this case, developer Centrax Homes doesn't want graves disturbed either. Rather than fight the preservationists for years, Centrax took the virtually unprecedented step of selling the 127 acres of land historians say contains many of the graves to the Civil War Preservation Trust.

In addition, Barbour was given 120 days—until Nov. 11—to search the land that will be developed for any additional graves. Yesterday was the first of those searches. Although Barbour raised \$7,000 to pay for thermal imaging and ground radar to aid the search, archaeologist Patrick O'Neill is the one who will determine where the graves are, using a four-foot probe.

O'Neill paused yesterday morning at a leaf-filled depression between two tall maples, checked to see that it was on an east-west axis—because graves usually face the rising sun—and shoved his metal probe into the ground.

"Hard there, must be a root," he

## Search for Civil War Graves

*The search for Civil War dead at Dodd Farm in Bristow began yesterday and will continue until Nov. 11, when the land will be turned over to developers.*

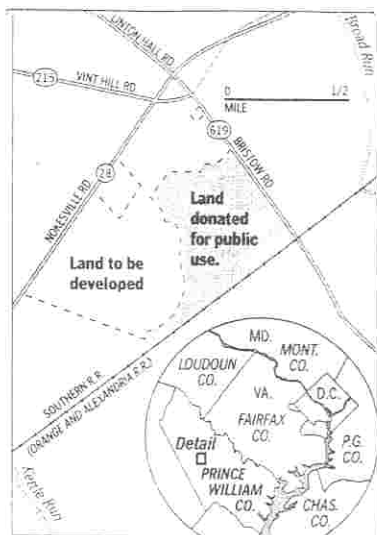
**Civil War battles, skirmishes and other events took place on this ground. Among them:**

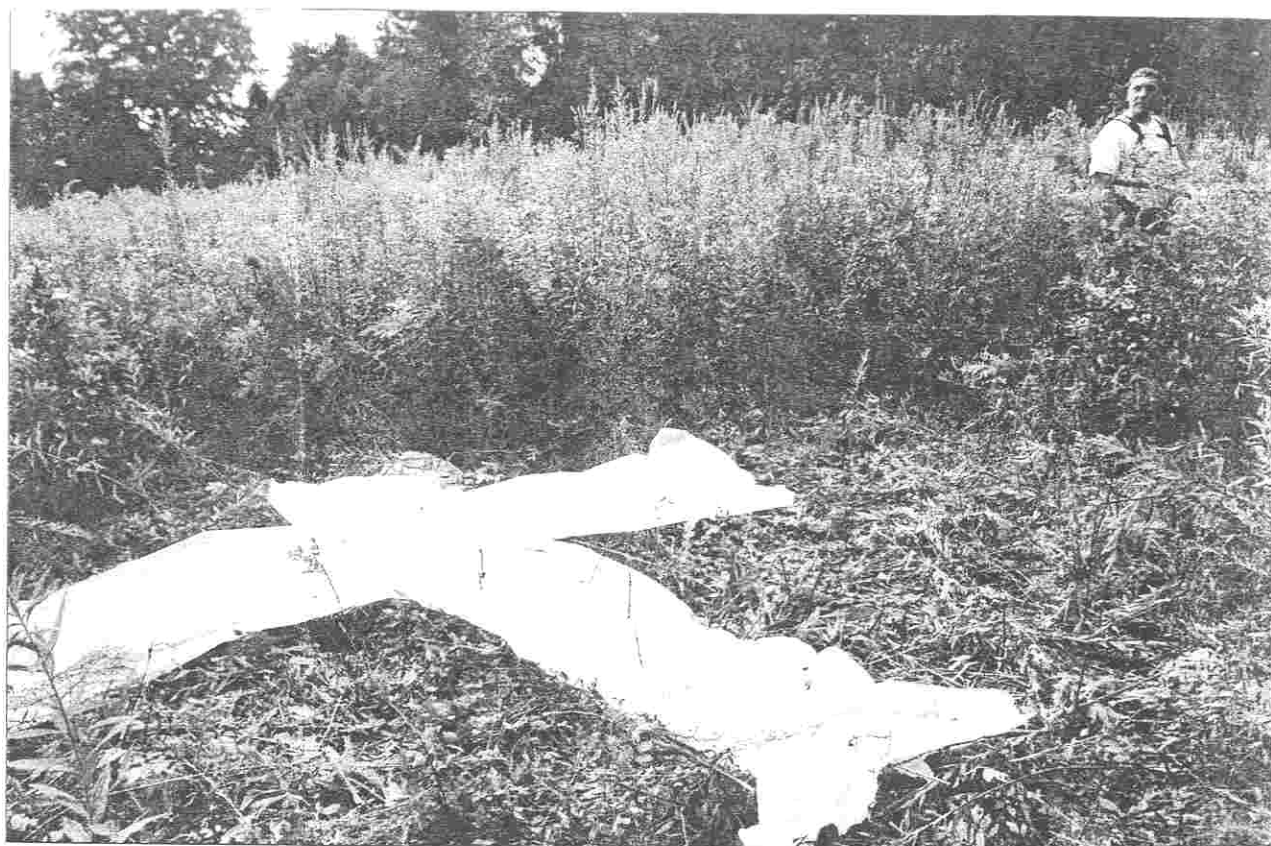
**August-September, 1861:**  
Camp Jones was a confederate hospital set up at this location following the battle of First Manassas; many died of disease as well as wounds and are assumed to be buried here.

**Spring 1862:**  
Union troops camped here, and the graves from Camp Jones were noted in letters home.

**Aug. 27, 1862:**  
Battle of Kettle Run  
Approximately 600 casualties

**Oct. 14, 1863:**  
Battle of Bristoe Station  
Approximately 2,000 casualties





PHOTOS BY LARRY KOBELKA FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Volunteer Mark Knowles looks at a site believed to be a mass grave, marked so it can be spotted from a helicopter using thermal imaging to locate graves.

said. "Hard here too. May be a rock."

Then the probe slid three feet into earth before hitting a hard surface.

"We may have something here," he said.

There may be as many as 500 graves on the land that was used during the war for campgrounds and as a travel route for troops on both sides along a single-lane dirt road that ran through the farm and two battles. All the graves that are found will be marked, and a monument to the soldiers will be built.

Some of the North Carolina and Alabama troops who fought in the First Battle of Manassas got typhoid fever from tainted water at the battlefield and moved their camp to the Dodd Farm. They called the place Camp Jones, but it was later referred to as the "Portals of Hell" because of the muddy conditions and inadequate medical care the soldiers received. In a letter home, one soldier told his wife, "the sick were allowed to wallow in mud and shift for themselves."

The next year, a Union brigade camped there and noted, "two small enclosures were counted and 128 graves, and all who had died within a few days of each other, the majority from the 25th to the 28th of August."

The two sides met again at the farm on Aug. 21, 1862, in what became known as the Battle of Kettle Creek for a stream that runs



Robert "Red" Barbour, a member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans of Roanoke, is in charge of the graves project.

along one side of the farm. Thirty southerners died at that engagement and are presumed buried on the farm.

The biggest battle on the site was the Battle of Bristoe Station on Oct. 14, 1863, when two brigades of Confederates got caught in a crossfire at the railroad station and were mauled. Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee was so angry at the incompetence of Lt. Gen. A.P. Hill that when Hill tried to explain his blunder, Lee told him to bury his dead and say no more.

The casualties were listed at about 2,000, and the Confederate dead were left on the field, along with their baggage, according to a

Union report. Barbour said he believes Union soldiers buried those dead in a mass grave on the farm.

Barbour and the other volunteers are searching for unmarked graves, but at one time, the graves of the Alabama soldiers who died at Camp Jones had markers—first cedar stakes and later engraved stones. In a letter to Confederate Veteran magazine in 1909, James Coleman of Riverside, Ala., said he returned to Bristoe Station to pay his respects to comrades who were buried there.

"The land where our dead were buried is owned by the daughter of a federal soldier," he wrote. "I pleaded with her to sell me the

small space, but she refused to do so, assuring me, however, that the soil over which our loved ones lie shall never be tilled as long as she is spared upon the earth."

He made an appeal for stones to replace the wooden stakes, and apparently he succeeded because for many years the graves were marked properly.

When Barbour first visited the farm in 1998, he was told the stones had been removed to keep relic hunters away from the cemetery.

"I saw one leaning up against the fence," he said. "Now that one is gone as are all the others. Just plain gone."

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