

Seeking to Recover Forgotten Soldiers

Volunteers Hunt for Long-Lost Graves

By LINDA WHEELER
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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 Bristow Station
Approximately 2,000 casualties



