

[Print this Page](#)

HISTORIC SITE FILE: *Bristoe Station Battlefield*
 PRINCE WILLIAM PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM
 RELIC/Bull Run Reg Lib Manassas, VA

[Return to story](#)

Trust, developer strike deal to preserve battlefield's core

March 22, 2002 5:02 am

By ELIZABETH PEZZULLO
 The Free Lance-Star

Never are both developers and preservationists happy when historic land is rezoned for houses and businesses.

But there's a first time for everything.

The Prince William County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously this week to rezone a 341-acre tract south of Manassas near the intersection of State Route 28 and Bristow Road.

The land had been zoned agricultural. Much of it will soon be a mix of commercial and residential development.

The catch, however, is that the developer, Dallas-based Centex Homes, has agreed to give 127 acres of the tract to the Civil War Preservation Trust for a battlefield park.

"In most cases, we're actually fighting developers," said Jim Campi, a spokesman for the trust, a Washington-based group with more than 32,000 members in the U.S. and abroad. "But most are not as sensitive to the needs of his-toric preservation."

Centex sought out a number of preservation groups when it started its development plans in the region.

"We approach each project recognizing an area's unique characteristics," said Stephen Fritz, vice president of marketing and land for Centex's division office in Chantilly.

Fritz said Centex has a long standing relationship with The Nature Conservancy. In fact, Centex Homes donates \$35 to the nonprofit conservation group for every new house bought from the company.

Campi said a park will be designed on the acreage where the most intense fighting occurred during the 1863 Battle of Bristoe Station.

Today, the site is a mix of woods and open farm land dotted with some houses. Other than the small village where Bristow Road crosses the railroad tracks, there's little for visitors to see.

About a mile from the core of the battlefield--along State Route 28--are two historical markers noting the fighting at Bristoe Station in 1862 and 1863.



The Bristoe Station Battlefield Park will consist of interpretive trails with wayside signs.

"People can really come out and understand what happened there," Campi said.

The park will also include a cemetery containing remains of Confederate soldiers who died in battle and from diseases that swept through Civil War camps. Anywhere from 200 to 500 remains are believed to be buried around Bristoe Station.

An archaeological survey will be done to find all of the remains on land that will be developed.

"It's our intention through an exhaustive pre-development search to make sure the bulldozers don't find anything," Fritz said.

The trust hasn't set a date yet when the park will be open to the public.

Bristoe Station has been on preservationists' radar for years because it's unprotected by the state government or the National Park Service. It's been on the trust's annual list of the 25 most endangered battlefields in the country for the last few years.

"But we thought it would be difficult if not impossible to save due to the high land values," Campi said.

That changed when the group began working with Centex.

The arrangement is one that could be mimicked at other sites where history runs headlong into population growth.

"Development doesn't always have to come at the price of preservation and vice versa," said John Hennessy, chief historian of Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, which oversees four Civil War battlefields.

"This is the type of creative approach necessary if land outside the park [service's] boundary is to be preserved in any meaningful way."

Though overshadowed by the first and second battles of Manassas, Civil War activities at Bristoe Station were significant.

In the winter of 1861, Confederate camps were clustered around Bristoe Station, which was a stop on the Orange & Alexandria Railroad.

Diseases such as typhoid and meningitis were rampant in the camps.

"Quite a few men succumbed to them," said Jim Burgess, vice chairman of the Prince William County Historical Commission. "The 6th North Carolina lost over 20 men in a two-month period from disease."

Crude wooden headboards were often used to mark the ground where the dead were buried. In war diaries and regimental histories, soldiers who later passed the battlefield wrote about the vast burial grounds.

"One account cites a Mississippi cemetery containing 128 graves," Burgess said.

In the summer of 1862, the Confederates caused mayhem at Bristoe, which by then was under Union control.

Confederate Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson managed to tear up the railroad tracks, causing supply and troop trains to derail and plunge off an embankment.

But luck and skill didn't hold out for the Confederate Army in October 1863.

In an effort to strike Union Gen. George Meade's retreating army, Confederate Gen. A.P. Hill's corps reached Bristoe Station around 10 a.m. Hill acted too hastily, however, when he commanded his soldiers to charge at what he thought was just the Union's 3rd Corps. In doing so, he missed the federals' 2nd Corps behind the railroad embankment.

"There were two brigades that were really cut to pieces," Burgess said of Confederate losses. Total casualties: 1,900.

Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee ordered Hill: "Bury your dead and say no more about it."

Copyright 2001 The Free Lance-Star Publishing Company.