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CAMP CARONDELET

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Chris Moorhead—staff photographer

Tom Yanoti stands next to a depression that he said was once a fireplace of a cabin in Camp Carondelet Tuesday.

Civil War-era camp at risk

New developments surround M. Park's Camp Carondelet

By DAVID ANDREWS
Staff Writer

MANASSAS PARK — Tom Yanoti stands on a trail between the past and future of what is now Manassas Park.

To his left lies a series of depressions, covered by leaves, that mark the former sites of cabins that were once part of the Civil War camp called Camp Carondelet.

To his right, beyond a few more yards of woods and depressions, sits a row of brand-new houses, part of the Blooms Crossing neighborhood that will soon surround the camp.

The once-obscure site where dozens of log cabins once housed the Confederacy's "Louisiana Tigers" in the winter of 1861-62 is finally coming into public view as developers build around it.

Before Blooms Crossing sprang up, the camp was relatively unknown and unguarded.

"This place was lined with garbage," said Yanoti, an Army veteran whose great-grandfather fought in the First Battle of Manassas. A few years ago, he said, discarded televisions lined the site that once was home to the Confederate Army's Grand Military Ball.

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Civil War-era camp is at risk

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The few who knew the significance of the woods came hunting for the valuables that were left behind. Armed with metal detectors, robbers took whatever they could find from the nine-acre camp and sold them to antique stores or collectors.

Some people went to the adjoining cemetery, where the 21st Georgia infantry was buried, and stole buttons from the coats of the dead.

But to most, the area was forgotten.

Today, the camp and the adjoining cemetery are faced with new problems and possibilities.

The camp will no longer be in the middle of nowhere. In a few years, it will be surrounded by rows of houses on two sides and an elementary school on another.

The camp will not be disturbed, Manassas Park officials assure historians — at least not intentionally.

But a miscalculation of the camp's borders have already caused the destruction of one

well-preserved cabin site, Yanoti said.

When a house was being built on the outskirts of the camp, he said, remains of a cabin chimney were destroyed by a bulldozer.

"We think about the living, and the dead we plow under," Yanoti said.

Though red stone is liberally scattered in different areas of the camp, Yanoti said, none was as well-preserved as the one destroyed by development.

City council member William Wren said the area has been marked off as a historic site, and signs will hopefully be placed that describe the site.

Concrete fences have been placed on two sides, and Wren said he hopes replicas of the cabins will be built.

Wren said Manassas Park cannot afford to revamp the site alone, having to first deal with new housing development and school construction.

Meanwhile, volunteer efforts are being made to keep what remains in order, Wren said. Neighborhood children have been at work at the cemetery on weekends, raking the leaves away from the graves.

Yanoti said he hopes to use radar equipment to track just how many people are buried in

the cemetery. While earlier estimates set the number at about 25, Yanoti said the dead may have been stacked close together, placing the possible total at 75.

One group that may benefit from the camp's presence is students at Manassas Park's new elementary school, which is set to begin construction next to the camp in July 1999.

Schools Superintendent Tom DeBolt said he would like students to be able to walk through the camp to learn some local history.

Soldiers from the 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th Louisiana infantry lived at the site, having fought in the First Battle of Manassas in 1861. They remained until March 1862, when they burned the camp down and retreated south, according to research by former county archaeologist Jan Townsend.

During the winter, troops played cards and chess, read books, and participated in drills. The site was also home to the Grand Military Ball in late February 1862.

Yanoti said he once found a plate with the words "New Orleans" inscribed, but said he left it where it was.

"You should leave the history here," he said.