

APPENDIX D: SIGNIFICANCE OF JOHNSTON'S RIVER LINE*

*An assessment of significance and condition from the Georgia Battlefield Association's website - www.georgiabattlefields.org/endangered



Johnston's Line, Chattahoochee River, c1865

Significance of the Johnston's River Line

On 18 June 1864, the Confederate Army of Tennessee was about to withdraw from the Mud Creek-Brushy Mountain Line to the Kennesaw Mountain Line. On that date, the chief of artillery, Brigadier General Francis Shoup, approached the Army commander, General Joseph E. Johnston, about building a defense line on the north bank of the Chattahoochee River to which the Army might withdraw if the pattern of Federal flanking maneuvers continued. Shoup envisioned a line so strong that it would deter any assault and so efficient that it might be held by part of the Army while a substantial force struck any Federal bridgehead attempted above or below that section of the river. Johnston approved the proposal, and Shoup and the staff engineers conscripted slaves from the Atlanta-area plantations to construct a unique set of fortifications over the next two weeks.

From above, Shoup's design appeared as a saw blade: At the point of each tooth was an infantry fort intended to hold 80 men. The arrowhead shape of the fort would allow its defenders to shoot to the left, right, or front. Each fort would have log walls inside and out and a fill of dirt in between. The outer wall would rise above the inner to form a firing platform for the riflemen. Depending on topography, the forts would be 14 to 20 feet high.

Connecting the forts would be an infantry trench, but rather than running directly between the forts, the trench would recede from each fort to form an angle, where an artillery redan would hold a two-gun section. Any attacking force would be channeled by fire from the forts towards the recessed angle, where artillery fire would sweep the ground.

After the 27 June 1864 Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, Federal forces threatened to outflank the Confederate left, leading Johnston to withdraw early on 3 July to a temporary line near Smyrna and late on 4 July to the unique fortifications designed by Shoup and subsequently called Johnston's River Line. As they occupied the strange structures, many Confederates were skeptical of the design and even began modifying the line into something more conventional; but highly regarded division commander Maj Gen Patrick Cleburne judged the works to be excellent. Major General G.W. Smith remarked that the design would make Shoup famous and dubbed the forts "Shoupades."

On the morning of 5 July 1864, Federal Major General William T. Sherman observed Johnston's River Line and later wrote: "It was one of the strongest pieces of field fortifications I ever saw." Sherman declined to attack the works and determined to cross the Chattahoochee River to the northeast, but he had two of his armies pin the Confederates inside the fortifications. Federal troops constructed trenches and battery positions opposing the Confederate works. The opponents engaged in daily artillery duels, with some points of the Confederate Line receiving hundreds of rounds from the Federal guns. The Federals established bridgeheads upriver on 8 and 9 July, and Johnston pulled his troops across the Chattahoochee River on the night of 9-10 July. Johnston's withdrawal from a line he himself had claimed could be held for a month led to his dismissal from command.

Current status of the site

As late as the 1950s, a person could walk the length of the Confederate and Federal lines. Now, housing and commercial development has destroyed most of both. The earthen remains of only 9 of the original 36 Shoupades are identifiable: most are damaged, and many are threatened.

For the Confederate Line, Cobb County owns a 100 acre parcel (the largest relating to the site) containing dozens of yards of infantry trench, one Shoupade, and a 7-gun fort that anchored the left (southwestern) end of the line. The other 8 Shoupades are on privately owned parcels of 1 to 3 acres and sometimes sit in the yards of houses.

The Fort Drive area is a special section of the Confederate Line. Fort Drive got its name from its proximity to five Shoupades along its half mile length. One Shoupade was destroyed in the 1950s to improve the front yard of a house, and the associated artillery redan was flattened for a pasture. Another property owner bulldozed a Shoupade in the early 1990s because he feared its historic value would restrict his ability to use the land as he wished. Three Shoupades (one third of the total still existing) and the only surviving artillery redan remain along Fort Drive, with one Shoupade being against the fence for I-285.

The Federal line exists in at least 7 parcels: Three contain trench line and range from 3 to 20 acres. Four contain remnants of battery sites and are on parcels of 1 to 20 acres.

Rifle pits in front of both lines are numerous (at least in the dozens), and some are probably yet to be identified on the tangled and sometimes steep terrain.

In 2000, two Shoupades were intentionally bulldozed by an owner who didn't want any impediment to development of his property.

In October 2003, a Federal artillery battery site was bulldozed for a shopping center parking lot.

Early in 2004, a section of Federal trench was filled in for a new housing development.

In January 2004, the Smyrna City Council approved rezoning for a housing development after the developer agreed to fence off and preserve a Shoupade. While the Shoupade was saved, the view will now be houses rather than woods and fields.

Also in January 2004, a developer incorporated preservation of Confederate rifle pits into a plan for new housing, though other rifle pits and trenches will be destroyed.

In June 2004, Cobb County used its remaining Greenspace Program funds to save a section of Federal trench near a creek and pipeline.

In July 2005, an area along Fort Drive containing two Shoupades and the last artillery redan was rezoned for a development. The development contains over 100 detached houses and townhouses. While the Shoupades were saved by the developer, the view has been severely altered.