

Newsletter

March/April 2015

The Yankees Came: Wilson’s Raid Across Alabama and Georgia, March and April 1865

Have you heard stories about cannon balls found in backyards? Or the hardships women at the home front endured with all the men away? Perhaps you’ve heard stories about burying the family possessions. Or how the Yankees could fire all week without reloading. Or of relatives who provided those Yankees food and forage. Have you heard that General Wilson spared today’s Arlington Antebellum Home as it served as headquarters to organize his raid?

In this newsletter based upon official records and diaries, as well as archeological and other studies of area ironworks, Birmingham Historical Society tells the real story of the advancement of the area’s iron and foundry industries during the Civil War (“hidden away in the Alabama back woods”), their destruction during Wilson’s Raid of 1865, and what Wilson’s Raid was really about.

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“... the cavalry movement under General Wilson was not a cavalry *raid*. It was not a dash upon exposed points, conducted with a view to avoid battle and withdraw after accomplishing its immediate object. It was, on the contrary, a legitimate military campaign, planned and executed with rare ability, directed against fortified points, defended with all the resources of military art, and, in the aggregate, by vastly superior numbers. The results, as affecting the life of the Confederate government, can scarcely be overestimated. This campaign, in little more than one short month, literally destroyed the vitals of the Confederacy ...”

—Capt. Lewis M. Hosea, 16th U.S. Infantry, 1883

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According to historian Jim Bennett, the Yankees in fact had little trouble finding, burning, and wreaking havoc on the machinery at area ironworks and mines near the future city of Birmingham. The use of charcoal for fuel had necessitated the timbering of vast acres to provide fuel for the furnaces, making them highly visible targets.

As industrial archeologist Dr. Jack Bergstresser has pointed out, Union troopers destroyed the area’s ironworks, mines, railroads, and arsenals but not the labor force, who received substantial on-the-job training thanks to Confederate government financial support—and undoubtedly later found employment in the Birmingham District mines and mills.

Birmingham-area furnaces rebuilt after the war include Brierfield, McElwain, and Oxmoor. The industrial plant at Oxmoor continued through World War I. A Tannehill furnace was refired during America’s Bicentennial in 1976. The red ore mines at Eureka (now on the grounds of Birmingham’s Red Mountain Park) and Helen Bess were also reopened. The McElwain furnace ruins are preserved in a City of Mountain Brook park.

Judge William S. Mudd’s residence at Elyton, later the home of prominent Birmingham industrialist Eugene Munger, was sold to the City of Birmingham in 1952 to become a house museum. It is maintained and open to the public today as the Arlington Antebellum Home and Gardens by the City and the Arlington Historical Association.

The three Roupes Valley Furnaces at Tannehill and the Brierfield furnace ruins



James Harrison Wilson, officer of the Federal Army. Photograph, May 6, 1865, Brady National Photographic Art Gallery (Washington, D.C.).

have been preserved in two State of Alabama Historical Parks. Historians and archeologists have detailed how the ironworks at Tannehill operated and provided documentation for rebuilding the wooden and mechanical structures. Both sites are open to the public daily.

Birmingham Historical Society prepared this publication in observance of the 150th anniversary of the close of the American Civil War. In Alabama, the Sesquicentennial is sponsored by the Alabama Department of Archives and History in cooperation with the Department of Tourism and Travel.

See page 12 for a special event at Arlington.

Wilson's Raid

by Jim Bennett

As the Civil War tore America apart, Alabama's iron and weapon making capability increased significantly, inviting invasion.

Early in 1865, federal war planners reasoned that if they could destroy the South's military production sites, they would hasten the conflict's end. The Union Army's mission of that year into Alabama and Georgia became the largest cavalry raid and last major engagement of the war. Kept from the headlines by Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox on April 9, President Abraham Lincoln's assassination on April 15, and Gen. Joseph E. Johnston's surrender on April 26, the story of "Wilson's Raid" received little

mention in the press of 1865. Today, certain historians suggest that the 28-day, 525-mile campaign eliminated the possibility of the Confederacy regrouping in the West.

Munitions for the Confederacy

In the last two years of the war, Alabama's iron furnaces produced 70 percent of the iron supply for the Confederate war effort. Output increased due to Confederate government subsidies and manufactories lost in Tennessee and Virginia. Foundries and rolling mills turned Alabama iron into everything from weapons to warships.

The Selma Ordnance and Naval Foundry was the second largest supplier of war materials in the South, led only by the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia. The foundries at Selma and

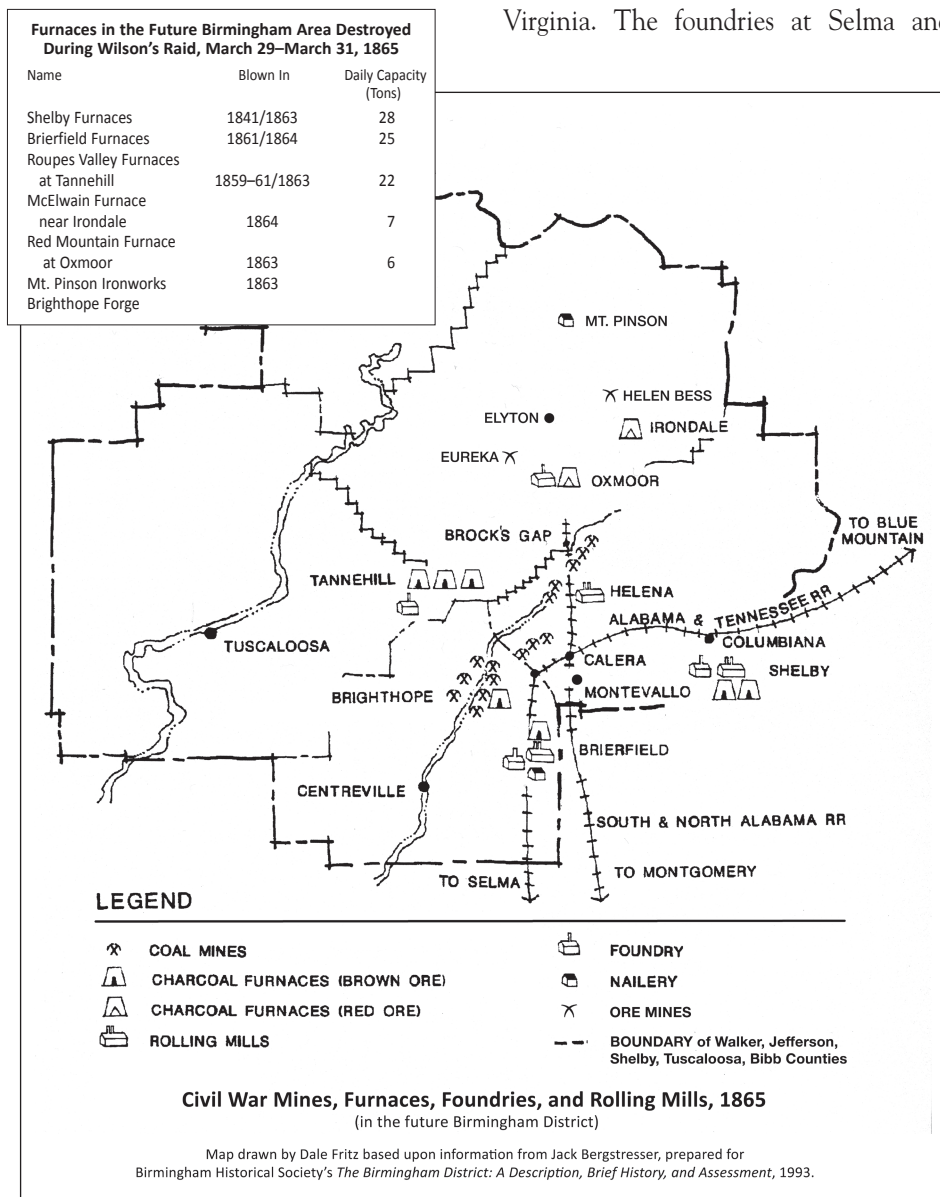
Richmond were the sole manufacturing facilities in the Southern states capable of turning out the Brooke naval gun, the Confederacy's answer to the Union's mainstay, the Parrott. One half of the cannon and two thirds of the fixed ammunition used by the South during the last two years of the war were made at Selma. At times, the Selma facilities employed up to 10,000 persons.

Alabama iron, produced in great volume (for this era) at places like Brierfield, Irondale, Oxmoor, Shelby, and Tannehill, went into all the munitions of war—shot and shell, cannon, naval plate, and gun boats. Among the larger blast furnaces, those at Brierfield, Shelby, and Tannehill had a combined daily capacity of 75 tons. Iron from the Shelby Furnace was used for plating the CSS *Tennessee*, CSS *Huntsville*, and CSS *Tuscaloosa* warships. Iron from the Bibb Naval Furnace at Brierfield went into the Brooke, a triple-banded version of which, when test fired, pierced 8 inches of iron and 18 inches of wood from a distance of 260 yards.

Many of Alabama's ironworks were expanded or built from the ground up during the war thanks to Confederate government financing. In return, the iron produced was to be sold to the government. In 1863, pig iron from the Roupes Valley Furnaces near Tannehill sold for \$50 to \$75 a ton. Inflation pushed the prices to more than \$150 a ton before the war's end.

The labor force at these war-time plants consisted mainly of slaves trained in one part of the iron-making process. It also included white mechanics and army conscripts who were deemed more valuable at the furnaces than at the front. Brierfield employed 200 whites and 600 blacks, most of the latter slaves.

In addition to Alabama's blast furnaces, smaller bloomeries, or Catalan forges—17 by 1856—also turned out iron and iron products. New forges were added throughout the war years, including the Mt. Pinson Ironworks in Jefferson County and the Brighthope Forge in Bibb County.



Timeline of the War in the East, 1864–1865

1864

- May 7–Sept. 2 Gen. William T. Sherman's Atlanta Campaign
- Nov. 15–Dec. 21 Sherman's March to the Sea (Savannah Campaign)
- Dec. 21 Sherman in Savannah

1865

- Feb. 18 Sherman takes Charleston
- Feb. Peace talks fail
- March 25 Final Union siege of Petersburg, Virginia and its subsequent abandonment
- April 2 Gen. Robert E. Lee orders the abandonment and burning of Richmond
- April 9 Lee surrenders the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox
- April 15 President Abraham Lincoln assassinated
- April 26 Gen. Joseph E. Johnston surrenders the Army of Tennessee and all remaining Confederate forces in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, the largest surrender of the war

Wilson's Raid

Plans for a Union raid into Alabama and Georgia were made at the highest levels of federal command, proceeding from orders of Gen. Ulysses S. Grant himself. The official orders, amended and then formally transmitted on February 27, 1865, by Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas—the “Rock of Chickamauga”—gave the raid’s commanding officer discretion as an independent commander in the final movement of his forces. Selma and Tuscaloosa were the campaign’s targets, as well as Montgomery, Columbus (Georgia), or Mobile.

The Union was occupied on other fronts as plans for Wilson’s Raid proceeded. In Alabama, Maj. Gen. Edward Canby was advancing toward Mobile. General Grant had begun his campaign to drive the Confederates out of Petersburg, Virginia. Gen. William T. Sherman was moving northward through North Carolina to the Confederate capitol at Richmond. Almost all Confederate forces in the West had been ordered to North Carolina, leaving only the cavalry under the command of Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, the home guard, and a few trained units in Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi.

Twenty-seven-year-old James H. Wilson, commander of the U.S. Army Cavalry Corps of the Military Division of the Mississippi, would equip, train, and lead approximately 14,000 federal troopers into Alabama and Georgia. An Illinois native, Wilson graduated in 1860 from the United States Military Academy and joined the service as a topographic engineer. He served as an aide to Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan during the Maryland Campaign before joining Grant’s Army of the West. Nicknamed “Dandy” by his foes for his regal comportment, Wilson transferred from engineering to the Cavalry Bureau in 1864, displaying notable leadership in many engagements of the Overland Campaign and in reorganizing the cavalry itself.

During the early months of 1865, Wilson camped, armed, and trained his corps at sites in northwest Alabama, just north of the Tennessee River near Gravelly Springs. The invading force, consisting of 12,500 cavalry and 1,500 dismounted men, included 36 batteries of 12-pounder cannon, 58 pontoons, and 60 supply wagons. Brig. Gens. Eli Long, Edward M. McCook, and Emory Upton commanded the corps’ three divisions that would enter Alabama.

Some 12,000 of Wilson’s troops were armed with seven-shot Spencer repeating carbines and 120 rounds of ammunition. Writing in 1976, James Pickett Jones, historian of the raid, noted the three divisions “could fire over 80,000 balls in one minute.” One of Wilson’s cavalymen noted in his diary that the troops were fully cognizant of their superior firepower.

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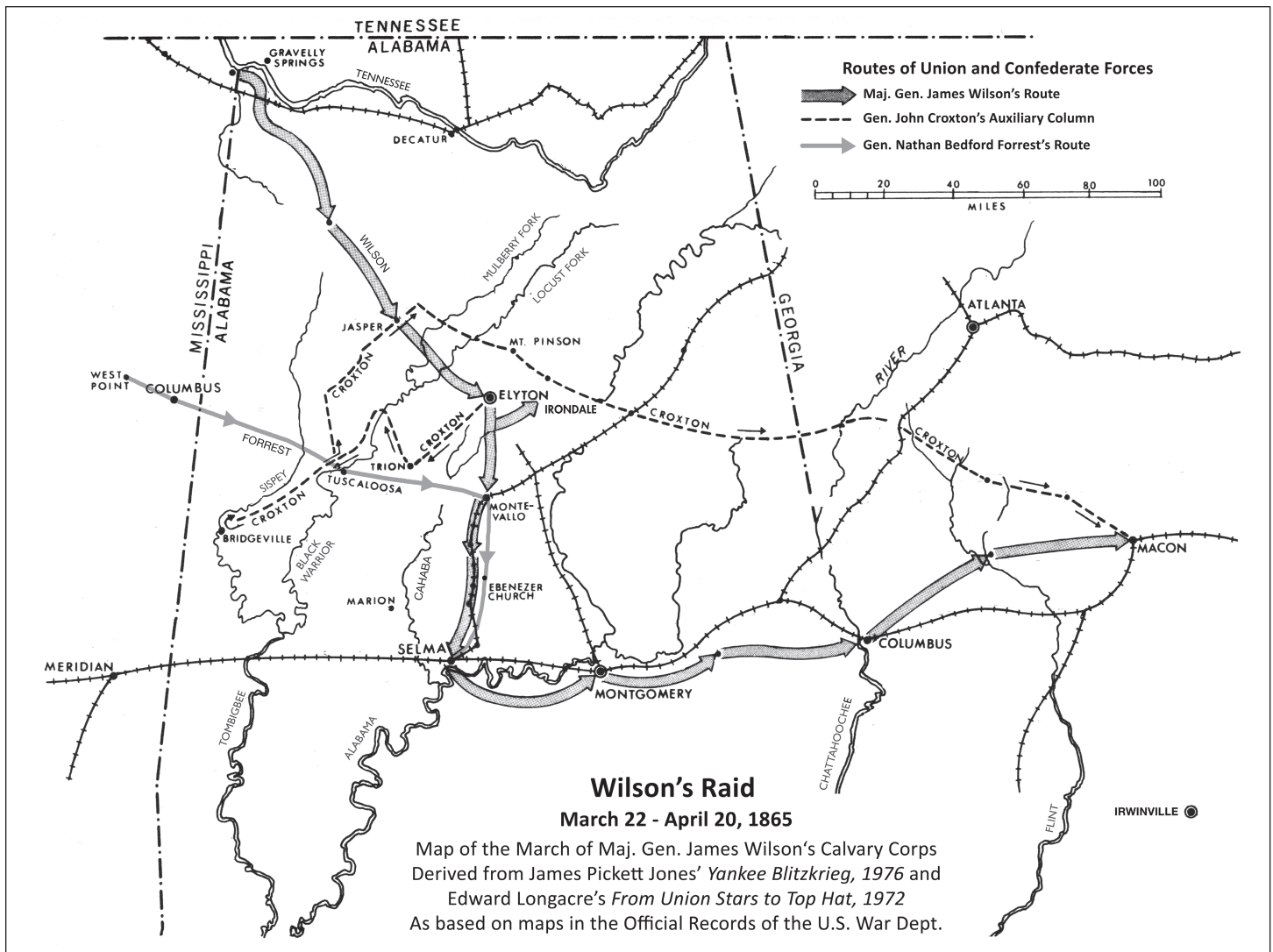
“My command is certainly in a magnificent condition, well armed, splendidly mounted, perfectly clad and equipped, and will turn out a heavier fighting force than ever before started on a similar expedition in this country. I am personally in the best of spirits and health.”

— Maj. Gen. James H. Wilson, Letter to Adam Badeau, March 20, 1865

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Timeline of Wilson's Raid Across Alabama and Georgia, 1865

- March 20–22 Depart Gravelly Springs, Alabama
- March 25 Skirmish at Houston, Winston County
- March 26 Skirmish at the Black Warrior River
- March 27 Jasper, Walker County
- March 28–29 Elyton, Jefferson County
- March 28 Skirmish near today's Avondale Park, Jefferson County
- March 28 Destruction of the ironworks at Oxmoor and Irondale, Jefferson County
- March 31 Destruction of the Shelby Ironworks, Shelby County
- March 31 Destruction of the Roupes Valley Ironworks at Tannehill, Tuscaloosa County
- March 31 Destruction of the Brierfield Furnace and Rolling Mill, Bibb County
- March 31 Destruction of the C. B. Churchill & Co. foundry, Columbiana, Shelby County
- April 1 Battle of Ebenezer Church, Stanton, just north of Selma
- April 2 Battle and burning of Selma
- April 3–9 Destruction of munitions-making facilities at Selma
- April 4 Burning of the Alabama Military College (The University of Alabama), Tuscaloosa
- April 12 Occupation of Montgomery
- April 16 Battle of West Point, Georgia
- April 16 Battle of Columbus, Georgia
- April 19 Destruction of the Mt. Pinson Ironworks, Jefferson County
- April 20 Occupation of Macon, Georgia
- End of the Raid
- May 10 Capture of Confederate President Jefferson Davis near Irwinville, Georgia



Heavy rains delayed Wilson's troops from crossing the rain-swollen Tennessee River. The raid finally got under way on March 22, 1865. The mission had an air of secrecy; many officers didn't know exactly what lay ahead. To mask intentions and confuse the enemy, Wilson sent his three divisions into northwest Alabama in three separate columns.

The leader of the opposing Confederate forces, Lt. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, commander of the Cavalry Corps of the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana, had been resting and reorganizing his troops in Mississippi following decisive losses against Wilson's cavalry in Confederate defeats at the Battles of Franklin and Nashville. The 6'2" experienced cavalry leader was one of the most feared Confederate commanders, well known for personally leading his men in battle and defeating superior numbers of Union forces. Forrest's forces consisted of two small divisions led by Brig. Gens. James R. Chalmers and William (Red) Jackson, two partial brigades under Brig. Gen. Philip D. Roddey and Col. Edward Crossland, and a few local militia. Forrest was reported to say he would fight to the end, although many of his men were discouraged.

Forrest did not figure out Wilson's route until late in the game. Minor skirmishes between opposing troops took place at Houston in Winston County (March 25) and the Black Warrior River (March 26). On March 27, Wilson's columns rejoined at Jasper, where they burned the county courthouse and raided neighboring farms for supplies.

Wilson's Troops at Elyton

On March 28, near Elyton, then the seat of Jefferson County and today a neighborhood of Birmingham, another skirmish occurred at the springs at today's Avondale Park, where the larger federal force quickly overwhelmed the Confederate defenders. Wilson stopped briefly on March 29 at "The Grove," the residence of Judge William S. Mudd (today's Arlington Antebellum Home and Gardens), while his staff commandeered other prominent sites nearby. General McCook camped at the Williamson Hawkins plantation, later the site of Republic Steel's Thomas Works and today's Wade Sand and Gravel Quarry. Brig. Gen. Edward F. Winslow's brigade of Upton's division also camped here before moving on to Montevallo. By this point, Forrest was well aware of the federal advance.



“Mr. Budd’s” campground for the 7th Iowa Cavalry, March 28, 1865. Today’s Arlington Antebellum Home and Gardens, the residence of Judge William Mudd and his family in 1865, has served as

a museum of the City of Birmingham since 1952. Photograph by Jet Lowe, 1993, for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) AL No. 424. HABS also documented the site in 1937.

Troops continued to arrive during the night of March 28, including the 4th Iowa Cavalry, which set up camp at 9 p.m. in an “orchard of the very nicest peach trees,” as Jacob Gantz recorded. First Lt. Charles D. Mitchell, acting adjutant of the 7th Ohio Cavalry, camped at “Mr. Budd’s” (likely Judge Mudd’s), arriving in the advance after a hard day’s march over 20 miles, delayed by slow-moving artillery and bad roads.

Due to the large numbers in the command, federal troops were bivouacked all around Elyton. Some were recorded on a “freshly planted crop of wheat and corn” on the farms of Nathaniel Hawkins and Robert H. Greene.

Judge Mudd reportedly spoke with Wilson about Confederate positions. Having been at Tuscaloosa on March 28, Mudd said that there were no Confederate forces between Elyton and Tuscaloosa and that Tuscaloosa itself was defended by only cadets and militia. Armed with this information, Wilson on March 30 dispatched 1,500 troops under Brig. Gen. John T. Croxton to march on Tuscaloosa and destroy the factories and mills along the way.

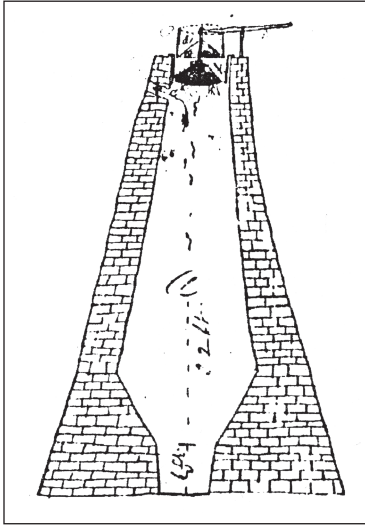
Not all local residents were as forthcoming as Judge Mudd. While at the Williamson Hawkins plantation, General

McCook’s troopers took over a grist mill to grind corn and wheat for his men. In a note to Maj. E. B. Beaumont, the general reported an “abundance of forage and meat, good water, and camping ground.” The federal troops were surprised to find the 75-year-old Hawkins and his wife, Elizabeth, along with over 100 slaves carrying on life as usual on his plantation, which included 1,000 acres under cultivation. In his war diary, Maj. S. V. Shipman of the 1st Wisconsin Regiment described the Hawkins plantation as “a very extensive and prosperous one,” the first of its kind they had come across since leaving the plantations along the Tennessee River. On the place, Shipman said had they found 10,000 bushels of corn, a “good supply” of wheat fodder, bacon, and pork, which they had appropriated. Hawkins was none too happy. “The proprietor is very cranky and insolent which will avail him little at present,” Major Shipman wrote.

In addition to helping themselves to provisions, Upton’s men discovered in Hawkins’ wine cellar a keg of fruited brandy, which E. N. Gilpin of the 3rd Iowa Cavalry reported in his journal “was confiscated without delay, lest it might give aid and comfort to the enemy.”

Furnaces and Factories Destroyed

On March 29, Upton's forces, in advance of other forces moving toward Selma, came across the Red Mountain ironworks at Oxmoor in Shades Valley and set wooden structures ablaze. They also set torches to the McElwain Furnace near Irondale in today's Mountain Brook (4th Iowa Veteran Volunteers), briefly occupy-



Alabama's Confederate ironworks featured the latest technological innovations. This drawing shows the first bell and hopper, a device to regulate the flow of raw materials into a furnace that was installed at the Shelby Furnace in 1863. In this year, the ironmaster at the McElwain Furnace first experimented with a coke (not charcoal) fired blast. Most furnaces used steam engines to blast hot air into the fiery furnace chambers, replacing a cold blast produced by water wheels.

Red Mountain red ore was tested and used instead of the traditional brown ore. Industrial archaeologist Dr. Jack Bergstresser notes that other technological upgrades to facilities were made to increase production and quality of the iron produced for military use during the war. Illustration from *Alabama Blast Furnaces* by Joseph H. Woodward II (University of Alabama Press, 2006).

ing the site's commissary (today's 4180 Glenbrook Road) while the furnace burned. The tramway to its Helen Bess ore mines on Red Mountain was also destroyed.

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 "The iron and coal region of Alabama was entered. Here the enemy had thrown up extended lines of fortification, to protect their iron-making establishments; but they were all deserted upon the approach of the Yankees. This day [March 29] the Third and Fourth Iowa reached and destroyed, by fire and explosion, the first of the iron-making plants, the McElwain [McElwain Furnace near Irondale] and Red-Mountain [Red Mountain Furnace at Oxmoor]."

—Adj. William F. Scott, 4th Iowa Veteran Volunteers

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 "At last I mustered courage to venture on and found myself standing by blackened ruins, against the wall of the furnace tower [at Oxmoor]. As I contemplated the silent houses up the hill, the deserted road, the awful truth flashed upon me in despair. In alarm for my personal safety, blinded with tears, I knelt and prayed."

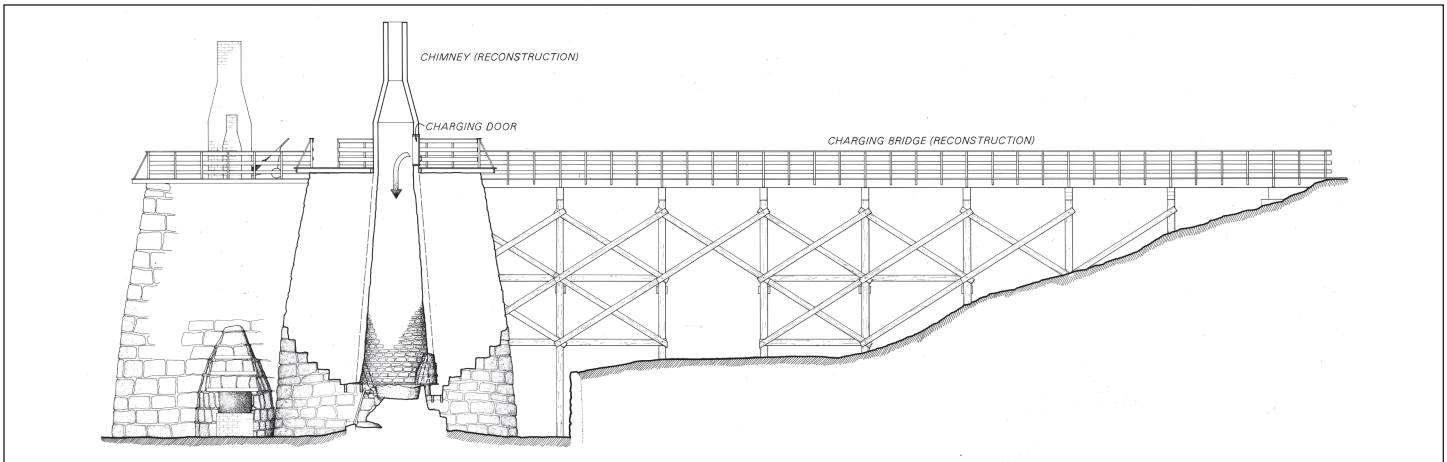
—Mary Gordon Duffee, Alabama historian

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 On March 31, Upton's men wrecked the Bibb Naval Furnaces at Brierfield (10th Missouri Cavalry) and the Shelby Furnaces in Shelby County. The large rolling mills at Shelby and Brierfield were also destroyed, as was the Helena Rolling Mill on Bucks Creek and the C. B. Churchill and Company foundry in Columbiana.



Today, the three Civil War-era stone furnaces at Tannehill Ironworks Historical State Park serve as the centerpiece of a 2,060-acre park. Charging bridges, cast sheds, and other documented pieces of the furnaces have been rebuilt to assist understanding of how the furnaces operated to produce iron for Confederate munitions. Tannehill's sister

park, Brierfield Ironworks Historical State Park, preserves the ruins of the Brierfield ironworks. Photograph by Jet Lowe, 1993, for the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) recording project at the site, HAER AL No. 276.



Section Through No. 2 Blast Furnace, Tannehill. Drawing by Adam Campagna and Erik Heintz, 1993, for the Historic American Engineering Record. HAER AL No. 126. Sheet 2.

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 "At sunrise the 10th Missouri was in the saddle and by itself underway on a mission of destruction. We marched out through the town of Monte Valley [Montevallo], a small affair though wisely [sic] situated in a beautiful valley. . . .We reached the extensive ironworks [Brierfield], sawmills and rolling mills about five miles from town and applied the torch."

—Capt. Charles F. Hinrichs, 10th Missouri Cavalry

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 "... about 2 p.m. [on March 30 we] came to a miserable little town called Elyton.... We passed by the smouldering ruins of ... the Red Mountain Iron Works.... The sky was red for miles around [the next evening], caused by fires burning cotton-gins, mills, factories, &c., by our scouts and the 4th division."

—Sgt. Benjamin F. McGee, 72nd Indiana Volunteer Infantry

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 On March 31, General Croxton, en route to Tuscaloosa, sent a detachment to burn the stores in old Jonesboro and dispatched Capt. William A. Sutherland (8th Iowa Cavalry) to destroy the Roupes Valley ironworks at Tannehill near the Tuscaloosa County line. Before the day was done, Sutherland's men damaged the three furnaces at the site, wrecked the steam blast engine, set fire to the overhead charging bridges, tore up the tramway to the ore mines, and torched the foundry and cast houses. The raiders also burned a raw materials warehouse containing heaps of iron ore, limestone, and charcoal that fueled the furnaces, as well as two covered bridges, the old blower house, and the grist mill.

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 "During the day Company I and Company D were ordered off to the left of the line to burn a large iron works and smelter [Tannehill]. I was on the advance of this party and as we rode up to the works there was a large collection of colored ladies in front of a building and one of them addressed me saying, 'What are you all guine to do?' I told her we were going to burn the iron works. She replied I am powerful glad of that for it uses up any amount [of my people] every year."

—Sgt. George Monlux, 8th Iowa Cavalry

At daylight the next day, April 1, Croxton's brigade encountered the Confederate forces of Brig. Gens. Chalmers and Jackson at Trion (near today's Vance) in Tuscaloosa County. Here, on John White's farm, some 30 Union combatants were killed or wounded and another 30 captured. Confederate losses were moderate. The Confederates forced Croxton away from his original line of march, but his brigade made it to Tuscaloosa and on April 2 accomplished its task of destroying factories, warehouses, and the military school (The University of Alabama).

### Engaging with Forrest at Montevallo

While the military school and the ironworks along the way were important war targets, Wilson's chief objective was the capture and destruction of the military facilities and supplies at Selma. Moving south from Elyton, Wilson's cavalry encountered Confederate troops under the command of General Forrest at Montevallo, site of the Alabama and Tennessee River Railroad Depot, which the federal cavalry burned. The station had been a shipping point for pig iron coming from ironworks in Jefferson and Shelby counties. Here, wagon loads of iron were loaded onto train cars headed to Selma's wartime foundries. Decidedly outnumbered, Forrest's forces retreated.

### Onward to Selma

Before heading to Selma, Forrest decided to be "the first," as his battle strategy often was, to reach Stanton, 24 miles north of Wilson's target site, to stage an effort to halt the invasion. The Battle of Ebenezer Church would be the last battle on ground of Forrest's own choosing. It ended in a Union victory.

As Wilson gathered intelligence on Selma's elaborate defenses—forts and earthworks with palisades, built in 1863 to ring the city—Forrest rushed into the city to support the many untrained defenders. Chalmers' division rejoined Forrest and the home guard. They probably numbered 2,000 souls.

The Battle of Selma took place on April 2 as Long and Upton's divisions began the assault. Dismounted federal troops broke through by late afternoon, and after a period of hand-to-

hand combat, the local militiamen withdrew. Accompanied by the U.S. 4th Cavalry, Wilson personally led one mounted charge. Confederate sharpshooters shot his horse out from under him. In the fierce fighting, General Long was severely wounded. Forrest, too, was wounded and retreated with his force to Marion. That night, Selma burned—the same day as did the Confederate capital at Richmond.

Federal troops spent a week in Selma destroying the Confederate foundries and military facilities. Reflecting in his memoir on the destruction of the huge Confederate installation, Wilson concluded that the Confederacy's loss at Selma was "not only great, but irreparable."

Forrest, the loser, agreed about the impact of the loss of Selma to the Confederate cause. In a meeting with Wilson several days after the Battle of Selma to discuss a prisoner exchange, Forrest told the Union general (who recorded the statement in his diary): "If I had captured your entire force twice over it would not compensate us for the blow you've inflicted upon us." General Winslow, in his report of June 29, 1865 (see page 11), described the facilities Wilson's Raiders destroyed at Selma.

The Battle of Selma, along with the Battle of Mobile Bay in August 1864, were the most significant battles during the war in Alabama.

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"Sunday, April 2, 1865, was the greatest day in the history of the Cavalry Corps ... for on that day it had not only captured the most complete set of fortifications in the South, covering the most important Confederate depots of manufacture and supply, but it had by the same act planted itself firmly across the central line of railway connecting Richmond with the southwestern states."

—Maj. Gen. James H. Wilson, U.S. Army Cavalry Corps,
Military Division of the Mississippi

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**Montgomery Captured**

From Selma, Wilson's corps moved toward Montgomery, where he occupied the Alabama capital city on April 12. Hours before the federal force arrived, the City Council, with concurrence of retreating Confederates, burned 100,000 bales of cotton stored in local warehouses so they would not fall into enemy hands. According to contemporary accounts, the smoke obliterated the rising sun. The mayor met Wilson on the edge of town and surrendered the city.

In response to the destruction of the cotton, Union troops burned five steamboats, local arms factories, and a number of railroad cars. But the city of Montgomery, the first capital of the Confederacy, escaped the heavy destruction focused on Selma. The capitol building was spared.

**Onward to Georgia**

Wilson next directed his troops toward Georgia, capturing West Point, Georgia, on Easter Sunday, April 16, and moving quickly on to Columbus. There, on the same day, Upton's

division clashed with Confederate forces under Gen. Howell Cobb, who guarded a large naval works. Federal troops scuttled and burned the unfinished ironclad, the CSS *Jackson*, and destroyed the arsenal, several foundries, a small-arms factory, mills, railway facilities, and large stores of cotton.

Columbus was the largest surviving supply city in the South. Cobb had decided to defend the city on the Alabama side of the Chattahoochee River in the town of Girard (today's Phenix City). There, the Confederates used trenches and breastworks to defend the river crossing point. Too few Confederates, however, remained to oppose the federal onslaught. Wilson learned of Lee's surrender after the battle of Columbus.

The engagement at Columbus is largely regarded as the "last battle of the Civil War." Wilson agreed. In a letter to Col. Charles Swift, he wrote:

There seems to be no grounds left for doubting that "Columbus was the last battle of the war." It, added to Selma, was doubtless the sufficient cause and justification of the advice that [Confederate Gen. Joseph] Johnston gave Jefferson Davis, and which culminated in Johnston's surrender to Sherman a few days later, on substantially the same terms that Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox.

On April 20, Wilson's men captured Macon, Georgia, without resistance. This city was the site of several important Confederate installations: an armory and arsenal, ironworks, rail yards, and the Confederate States Laboratory, where ordnance was both made and tested. Wilson's Raid was over.

Six days later, Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston surrendered the remaining forces (89,270 men) of the Carolina Campaign to Gen. William T. Sherman at Bennett Place near Durham Station, North Carolina. This was the largest surrender of the war.

Wilson's incursion into Alabama and Georgia to destroy the Confederate military resources was hailed a major success. As Wilson reported to his command (see page 10), in 28 days his cavalry corps captured five fortified cities, 288 cannon, and 6,820 prisoners at a cost of 725 Union casualties. The Confederates lost many more men from a much smaller force of defenders. Every Alabama iron-producing furnace but one (which was off the line of Wilson's march) had been rendered useless: their wooden structures burned and mechanical equipment and rail lines dismantled. The great manufacturing complex and the city of Selma; the classically styled buildings at the military school in Tuscaloosa; forges, foundries, factories, warehouses, mills, mines, railroad tracks, and depots were all in ruins. The capture of Confederate President Jefferson Davis and his family by Wilson's troops from the 4th Michigan Regiment on May 10 near Irwinville, Georgia, closed the curtain on the rebellion that dismantled Alabama's growing iron and foundry industry and nearly split the nation apart.

Jim Bennett is a journalist, historian, and politician with a specialty in the history of the Tannehill Furnaces.

## The Spencer

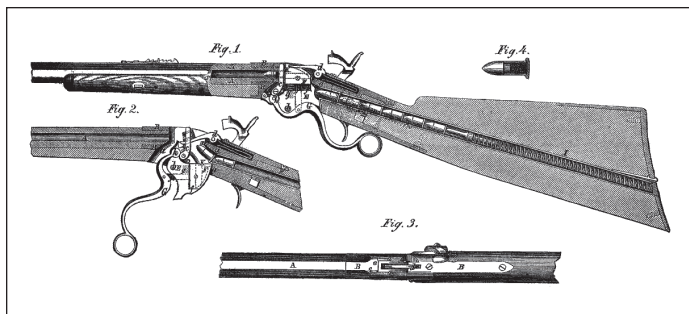
by Carol L. Slaughter

From around the year 1300, when mankind first put gunpowder into a metal tube for the purpose of hurling a projectile at someone or something, the push was on for accuracy, range of fire, ease of loading, reliable ignition, sturdy ammunition, rapid firing, ease in maintenance and operation, and safety. For a military operation, additional concerns were the cost, the ability to produce guns in quantity, the ease with which troops could be trained to use them, and the ability to supply enough ammunition. Improvements came in fits and starts and leaps and bounds, encouraged or hampered by need, funding, bureaucracy, current manufacturing abilities, and personal preferences.

Although more-sophisticated systems existed at the start of the Civil War, the single-shot rifle musket was the most widely used shoulder arm, both North and South. Before a soldier could aim and fire this weapon, he had to swing it from his shoulder until the butt rested on the ground, reach into his cartridge box for a single paper cartridge, tear the paper with his teeth, pour the powder into the muzzle, squeeze out the projectile into the muzzle, draw the rammer from alongside the barrel, insert it into the barrel, ram down the projectile, return the rammer to its storage position, bring the weapon to his side above the hip, halfcock the hammer, reach into his cap box for a primer, put the primer on the nipple, and fullcock the hammer. In battle, he was expected to fire at least two times a minute. To do this while riding a horse was, to say the least, difficult, even with a shorter version, the carbine.

By the start of the war, metal cartridges were available for certain arms. The Sharps single-shot breech-loader carbine had become very popular since its creation in the late 1840s, but muzzle-loading carbines predominated in the Confederate Calvary. Better guns found on the battlefield were useless without the appropriate ammunition.

In March 1860, Christopher M. Spencer of Manchester, Connecticut, patented a lever-action breech-loading rifle that pushed rim-fire cartridges into the chamber and then ejected them after firing. The rifle had to be cocked after each shot, but it held seven rounds and was sturdy and relatively cheap. A trained person under good conditions could fire 14 rounds a



The breech-loading Spencer seven-shot repeating carbine gave Wilson's cavalry troopers a powerful edge over their Confederate foes. Drawing from "Improvement in Breech-Loading Rifles." *Scientific American*, vol. 6, no. 4 (January 25, 1862).

minute. Spencer offered the weapon to the United States. At the beginning of the war, the U.S. Navy placed an order, but Army Ordnance was reluctant. President Abraham Lincoln himself test-fired the gun in 1863 and pushed its purchase.

Production problems delayed delivery, but the Spencer began to reach Union troops by 1863. The first Spencer carbines were delivered in October 1863. The carbine, at .52 caliber with a 22-inch barrel, weighed a little over eight pounds and cost \$35. As chief of the U.S. Cavalry Bureau, James H. Wilson was hot to get the Spencer for the troops. Whether Wilson's superior forces or his superior weapons were the reason, he suffered 725 casualties during Wilson's Raid while his Confederate opponents suffered over 8,000.

Carol L. Slaughter is a former National Park Service ranger who has fired the rifle musket in training exercises.

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"Calmly Wilson told [Brig. Gen. Eli] Long to dismount one of his most experienced regiments, the Seventy-second Indiana Mounted Infantry of the old 'Lightning Brigade' (a sobriquet derived from the blazing power of its Spencer repeaters). With inexorable power the regiment drove in the enemy's skirmishers."

—Edward G. Longacre in *From Union Stars to Top Hat* describing the start of the Battle of Ebenezer Church
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SOURCES: Atkins, Leah Rawls. *The Valley and the Hills: An Illustrated History of Birmingham and Jefferson County*. Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor Publications, 1981; Bennett, James R. *Historic Birmingham and Jefferson County*. San Antonio: Historical Publishing Network, 2008; Bennett, James R. *Tannehill and the Growth of the Alabama Iron Industry*. Birmingham: Alabama Historic Ironworks Commission, 1999; Bennett, James R. and Karen Utz. *Iron and Steel: A Guide to Birmingham Area Industrial Heritage Sites*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010; Davis, Kathleen, ed. *Such Are the Trials: The Civil War Diaries of Jacob Gantz*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1991; Duffee, Mary Gordon. *Sketches of Alabama*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1970; Fleming, Walter L. *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1905; Gilpin, E. N. "The Last Campaign: A Cavalryman's Journal." *Journal of the U.S. Cavalry Association*, vol. 18, no. 68 (April 1908); Hosea, Lewis M. "The Campaign of Selma." Paper Read Before the Ohio Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States. Cincinnati: Peter G. Thomson, 1883; Hunnicutt, John L. *Reconstruction in West Alabama: The Memoirs of John L. Hunnicutt*. Tuscaloosa: Confederate Publishing Co., 1959; James H. Wilson Diary, 1865. Delaware State Historical Society, Wilmington, DE; James H. Wilson Manuscripts, Library of Congress; Jones, James Pickett. *Yankee Blitzkrieg: Wilson's Raid Through Alabama and Georgia*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1976; Lewis, Berkeley R. *Notes on Ammunition of the American Civil War, 1861–1865*. Washington, D.C.: American Ordnance Association, 1959; Lewis, Berkeley R. *Small Arms and Ammunition in the United States Service*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1956; Longacre, Edward G. *From Union Stars to Top Hat: A Biography of the Extraordinary General James Harrison Wilson*. Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1972; McGee, B. F. *History of the 72d Indiana Volunteer Infantry of the Mounted Lightning Brigade*. LaFayette, IN: S. Vater & Co., 1882; Mitchell, Charles D. "Field Notes of the Selma Campaign." *Sketches of War History, 1861–1865*. Papers Read Before the Ohio Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, vol. 6. Cincinnati: Monfort & Co., 1908; Monlux, George. *To My Comrades of Company I*. Private Papers, Iowa State Historical Department, Des Moines, IA, February 13, 1933; Peterson, Harold L. *The Fuller Collection of American Firearms*. Philadelphia: Eastern National Park & Monument Association, 1967; Peterson, Harold L. *The Treasury of the Gun*. New York: Golden Press, 1962; Ripley, Warren. *Artillery and Ammunition of the Civil War*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1970; Scott, William Forse. *The Story of a Cavalry Regiment: The Career of the Fourth Iowa Veteran Volunteers from Kansas to Georgia, 1861–1865*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1893; Shipman, Stephen V. *Maj. S. V. Shipman Diary*, March 29, 1865. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society; Swift, Charles Jewett. "The Last Battle of the Civil War at Columbus, Georgia." *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States* 56 (1915); United States War Department. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, ser. 1, vol. 49, pts. 1 and 2. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1897; Wilson, James H., *Under the Old Flag*, vol. 2. New York: Appleton & Co., 1912; "Wilson's Raid," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilson's\\_Raid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilson's_Raid) (accessed January 30, 2015); "Wilson's Raid Through Alabama and Georgia, 1865." <http://www.exploresouthernhistory.com/wilsonraid.html> (accessed January 30, 2015). EDITORS: Julius Linn, Carol Slaughter, Katie Tipton, Marjorie White.

**Maj. Gen. James F. Wilson's Summary Report  
on Wilson's Raid**

Hdqrs. Cavalry Corps, Mil. Div. of the Mississippi,

*Macon, Ga., June 29, 1865*

By reference to the reports herewith it will be seen that since leaving the Tennessee River the troops under my command have marched an average of 525 miles in twenty-eight days, captured 5 fortified cities, 23 stand of colors, 288 pieces of artillery, and 6,820 prisoners, including 5 generals; have captured and destroyed 2 gun-boats, 99,000 stand of small-arms, 7 iron-works, 7 foundries, 7 machine-shops, 2 rolling-mills, 5 collieries, 13 factories, 4 niter works, 1 military university, 3 C. S. arsenals and contents, 1 navy-yard and contents, 1 powder magazine and contents, 1 naval armory and contents, 5 steam boats, 35 locomotives, 565 cars, 3 railroad bridges, and immense quantities of quartermaster's and commissary and ordnance stores, of which no account could be taken, and have paroled 59,878 prisoners, including 6,134 commissioned officers. Our total loss was 13 officers and 86 men killed, 39 officers and 559 men wounded, and 7 officers and 21 men missing. I cannot close this report without calling attention to the remarkable discipline, endurance, and enthusiasm displayed throughout the campaign. Men, officers, regiments, brigades, and divisions seemed to vie with each other in the promptitude and cheerfulness with which they obeyed every order. The march from Montgomery to this place, a distance of 215 miles, was made between the 14th and 20th of April, and, involving the passage of the Chattahoochee River at two important points, both strongly fortified and well defended, is especially worthy of notice. The destruction of iron-works, foundries, arsenals, supplies, ammunition, and provisions in Alabama and Georgia, as well as the means of transporting the same to both the armies under Taylor and Johnston, was an irreparable blow to the rebel cause. The railways converging at Atlanta, and particularly those by which the immense supplies of grain and meat were drawn from Southwestern Georgia and Central Alabama, were firmly under our control. The final collapse of the entire Southern Confederacy east of the Mississippi became simply a question of time. Fully appreciating the damage already done, I had determined to make a thorough destruction, not only of them but of everything else beneficial to the rebels which might be encountered on the march to North Carolina and Virginia. It will be remembered that my corps began the march from the Tennessee River with something more than 12,000 mounted men and 1,500 dismounted men. When it arrived here every man was well mounted and the command supplied with all the surplus animals that could be desired. I have already called attention in a previous communication to the good merits of Brevet Major-General Upton and Brigadier-General Long, commanding divisions, and Brigadier-General Croxton, Brevet Brigadier-Generals Winslow and Alexander, and Colonels Minty, Miller, and La Grange, commanding brigades. I have seen these officers tested in every conceivable way, and regard them worthy of the highest honor their country can bestow. For many interesting details and special mention of subordinate officers, I respectfully refer to the reports herewith submitted. The accompanying maps and plans were prepared under the direction of Lieutenant Heywood, of my staff, and will materially assist in understanding the foregoing narrative of the campaign.

I am, general, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. H. WILSON,  
*Brevet Major-General.*

**Brig. Gen. Edward F. Winslow's Report  
on the Destruction of Military Facilities at Selma**

*Selma, Alabama, April 9, 1865.*

I have the honor to submit the following statement concerning the destruction of public property captured and found at this place:

In obedience to orders from the Brevet Major-General commanding corps, I assumed the command of the city on Monday the third instant, and commenced destroying everything which could be of benefit to the enemy.

The following is a partial list, which was not made complete, as in many cases the whole property could not be destroyed in the limited time allowed:

1. Selma Arsenal—Consisting of 24 buildings, containing an immense amount of war material and machinery for manufacturing the same. Very little of the machinery had been removed, although much of it was packed and ready for shipment to Macon and Columbus, Georgia. Among other articles here destroyed were 15 siege guns and 10 heavy carriages, 10 field pieces, with 60 field carriages, 10 caissons, 60,000 rounds artillery ammunition, 1 million rounds of small arms ammunition, 3 million feet of lumber, 10,000 bushels coal, 300 barrels resin, and 3 large engines and boilers.

2. Government Naval Foundry—Consisting of 5 large buildings, containing 3 fine engines, 13 boilers, 29 siege guns, unfinished, and all the machinery necessary to manufacture on a large scale naval and siege guns.

3. Selma Iron Works—Consisting of 5 buildings, with 5 large engines and furnaces, and complete machinery.

4. Pierces Foundry, Nos. 1 and 2—Each of these contained an engine, extensive machinery, and a large lot of tools.

5. Nitre Works—These works consist of 18 buildings, 5 furnaces, 16 leaches, and 90 banks.

6. Powder Mills and Magazine—Consisting of 7 buildings, 6,000 rounds of artillery ammunition, and 70,000 rounds small arms ammunition, together with 14,000 pounds powder.

7. Washington Works—Small iron works, with 1 engine.

8. Tennessee Iron Works—Containing 2 engines.

9. Phelan and McBride's Machine Shop, with 2 engines.

10. Horse Shoe Manufactory—Containing 1 engine; about 8,000 pounds of horse shoes from this establishment were used by our army.

11. Selma Shovel Factory—This factory contained 1 steam engine, 8 forges, and complete machinery for manufacturing shovels, railroad spikes, and iron axle-trees for army wagons.

12. On the Alabama and Mississippi Railroad—1 roundhouse, 1 stationary engine, and much standing machinery, together with 20 box and 2 passenger cars.

13. On the Tennessee Railroad—1 roundhouse, with machinery, 5 locomotives, 1 machine, 19 box and 50 platform cars.

14. In the Fortifications—One 30-pound Parrott gun, four 10-pound guns, 11 field pieces, 10 caissons, 2 forges, and 500 rounds of fixed ammunition.

A portion of the guns destroyed in the arsenal were those captured on the fortifications at the time of the assault. The machinery, engines, and the trunnions of the guns were broken before being burned.

The arsenal buildings were of wood, with but few exceptions, the foundry buildings were of brick. Together with all other buildings enumerated these were completely destroyed, without firing other than public buildings. Several buildings were fired on the evening of the second instant, and quite a number of private dwellings were thereby consumed. This burning being done without authority, destroyed supplies which would have been useful to the army, and did no particular damage to the enemy.

I cannot estimate, in dollars, the value of the public property here destroyed; but all can readily see that the value in a mechanical, social, and war point of view is almost inestimable.

Respectfully submitted,

E. F. WINSLOW  
*Brevet Brigadier-General Commanding Post*

To commemorate the close of the American Civil War

Arlington Historical Association  
Cordially invites Birmingham Historical Society members to

A Talk, Luncheon, and Home Tour at  
Arlington Antebellum Home and Gardens, 331 Cotton Avenue SW  
Tuesday, April 14, 2015

Talk at 11 a.m. “Wilson’s Raiders”  
Jerry Desmond, Director, Birmingham History Center

Lunch at Noon • Following lunch, the opportunity to tour Arlington

Reservations must be made by calling 780-5656 by Tuesday, April 7. No exceptions!  
Bring \$15 as a check or cash to the meeting.

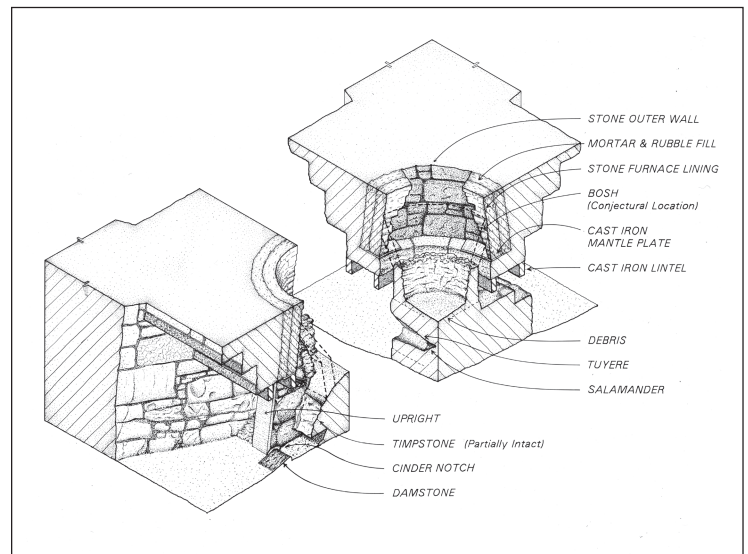


No. 1 Furnace Hearth (operated 1859–1865, 1976), Tannehill Furnaces. Photograph by Jet Lowe, 1993. HAER AL No. 126.



Tannehill Furnaces Nos. 1 and 2. Photograph by Jet Lowe, 1993. HAER AL No. 126.

From this hearth at Tannehill, molten iron poured forth to make kettles and agricultural implements, shot and shell, and souvenir ingots. On the final federal raid through Alabama, Major General J. H. Wilson’s troops devastated the state’s armament industries and this furnace. Three companies of the 8th Iowa Cavalry under Capt. William A. Sutherland put it out of business on March 31, 1865. For the next 100 years, Tannehill remained isolated and abandoned until concerned local citizens began its transformation as a state historical park. Furnace No. 1 was refired during America’s Bicentennial celebration in 1976. The last charge of 1865 iron still remains in the No. 2 Furnace hearth as recorded in the HAER drawing (below).



Isometric Detail, No. 2 Furnace Hearth at Tannehill. Drawing by Adam Campagna and Erik Heintz, 1993. HAER AL No. 126. Sheet 2.