

Listed On:  
 VLR 06/18/1985  
 NRHP 08-01-1985

046-0095

**United States Department of the Interior  
 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
 Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
 Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic FORT BOYKIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE (44IW20) (DHL File #46-95)

and/or common N/A

**2. Location**

street & number N/A  not for publication

city, town Smithfield  vicinity of XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

state Virginia code 51 county Isle of Wight code 093

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>N/A</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Commonwealth of Virginia, Division of Parks and Recreation  
Contact: Ronald D. Sutton, Commissioner

street & number 1201 Washington Building

city, town Richmond N/A vicinity of state VA zip code 23219

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Isle of Wight County Courthouse

street & number N/A

city, town Smithfield state Virginia

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Division of Historic Landmarks  
Survey (Site #44IW20) has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1983  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Division of Historic Landmarks' Research Center for  
Archaeology -- P. O. Box 368

city, town Yorktown state Virginia zip code 23690

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date <u>      N/A      </u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

### DESCRIPTION

The Fort Boykin Archaeological Site (44IW20) is located in Isle of Wight County,

An earthen fortification, Fort Boykin was strategically sited on the James River by the Confederate forces to defend Richmond from incursion by Union gunboats. Now, the fort's steep ramparts, deep encircling ditch, and lofty view of the James River provide an impressive setting. Not only do the aboveground remains of Fort Boykin manifest an excellent example of a Civil War period fort, but test excavations have revealed intact subsurface cultural features which are precisely datable to the one year of the fort's occupation between June 1861 and May 1862.

### BACKGROUND

Fort Boykin was named after Francis Marshall Boykin who was a Virginia state senator, a general in the state militia, and owner of the property on which the fort was constructed. The 14.43-acre tract encompassing the Fort Boykin Archaeological Site (44IW20) remained in private hands until August 1974 when it was bequeathed as a park to the Commonwealth of Virginia (Photo 1). The Virginia Department of Conservation and Economic Development, Division of Parks, subsequently negotiated a fifty-five-year lease of the property with the Isle of Wight Public Recreational Facilities Authority. In April 1981, Isle of Wight County opened Fort Boykin Historic Park to the public with an eleven-station self-guided walking tour (Photo 2).

The topography of the Fort Boykin Archaeological Site provided the best possible location for a fort designed to monitor river traffic to Richmond. Laid out by Colonel Andrew Talcott of the Confederate Engineers, Fort Boykin fronts the James River on the highest promontory in the area. In addition, shoals in the James River cause the channel to sweep in close to the shoreline at Fort Boykin, which would have brought all vessels traveling the river within firing range. Although built as a river defense, Fort Boykin was also designed to withstand assault from land. The ground on the back and sides of the fort slopes naturally away, a condition which afforded the Confederates a commanding view in all directions.

Today, the fort site is heavily covered with hardwood forestation which obscures the original view but which protects the ramparts from erosion (Photo 3). Historically subject to the erosive forces of storm waves, the area of shoreline including Fort Boykin has retreated about 260 feet since 1873. Some erosion has occurred to portions of Fort Boykin's front parapet, but stabilization efforts by Isle of Wight County through backfilling and seeding, and the anchorage of the James River Reserve Fleet in Burwell Bay, appear to have arrested this process. There has been no appreciable erosion to the site in the last five years. Also on the site are a house with landscaped garden and associated farm buildings constructed within the walls of the fort by Herbert T. Greer who owned the property between 1908 and 1931 (Photo 4).

Local tradition holds that the site of the fort's well was discovered through information given Greer by a soldier who had served at Fort Boykin during the Civil War. The location of the well was verified through archaeological investigations from July 1968 through September 1969 by volunteers working under the direction of E. King Reid,

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1861-1862 **Builder/Architect** Colonel Andrew Talcott

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Fort Boykin, a Civil War military fortification in Isle of Wight County, Virginia, was built by the Confederate Army between June 1861 and May 1862. Situated on top of a bluff overlooking the James River, Fort Boykin was part of the Confederate defensive system built to control Union access to Richmond via the James River. As Fort Boykin was captured by Federal troops shortly after its completion and has remained essentially intact, it constitutes a well preserved example of the military architecture of its era. In addition, archaeological testing has revealed intact subsurface features from this tightly datable context of one year in the 19th century. Used in conjunction with an extant detailed description of Fort Boykin made in 1862, the archaeological data could help define activity areas within the fort. It could also lead to important information about camp life and the differences or similarities in diet, living conditions, and material culture for the stratified society of laborers, enlisted men, and officers who were stationed there.

BACKGROUND

Fort Boykin was one in a series of Civil War earthworks designed to prevent inland invasion by the Union Navy, whose buildup at the mouth of the James River posed a severe threat to the Confederate capital at Richmond. Upon the orders of General Robert E. Lee, Colonel Andrew Talcott of the Confederate Engineers laid out Fort Boykin, which was constructed under the supervision of Lt. C.A.R. Jones of the Virginia Navy.

While Fort Boykin was under construction, the Third Regiment of the Virginia Volunteers and part of the Ninth Virginia Regiment moved into the area, encamping at a site to the rear of the earthworks.

In an account of March 12, 1862 on Richmond's defenses, Captain A.L. River of the Confederate Army reported that ten guns were mounted at Fort Boykin, including 32 pounders and 42 pounders. Similar defensive works were then in place at Fort Huger, and near Richmond, at Drewry's Bluff. At Burwell Bay, naval vessels cruising up the James were obliged to pass beneath the guns of Forts Boykin and Huger, where shoals and barriers constricted the river channel and diverted traffic into the mouth of Burwell Bay (Figure 1).

The Confederate military strategy, though well planned, failed to take into account the potential damage that could be inflicted upon these forts by Union ironclad vessels. On May 8, 1862 at 10:00 A.M., three Union gunboats, one of which was the ironclad U.S.S. GALENA, moved within firing range of Fort Boykin. The two smaller, wooden gunboats withdrew from Confederate fire, while the GALENA's battery, which had a much longer range than the guns of Fort Boykin, within an hour overwhelmed the Confederates, who abandoned their fort. Meanwhile, the two wooden gunboats slipped by. The GALENA then moved up to

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References (See Continuation Sheet #5)

Anonymous. The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies with the War of the Revellion (Series 1). Washington: USGPO, 1898.

Anonymous. War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies: Operations in North Carolina, Virginia, W. Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania. Washington: USGPO, 1922.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property 14.43 acres

Quadrangle name Mulberry Island, Virginia

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A				B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code
state	N/A	code	county	N/A	code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Division of Historic Landmarks Staff

organization Division of Historic Landmarks date 1985

street & number 221 Governor Street telephone (804) 786-3144

city or town Richmond state Virginia zip code 23219

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

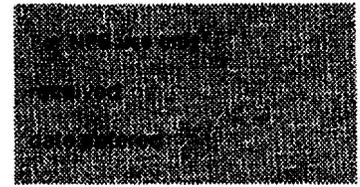
H. Bryan Mitchell, Director  
title Division of Historic Landmarks

date June 18, 1985

For HCRS use only
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register
date
Keeper of the National Register
Attest:
date
Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



FORT BOYKIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE (44IW20), ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY, VA

Continuation sheet #1

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**7. DESCRIPTION -- Background**

professor of anthropology at Old Dominion University, and Floyd Painter of the Chesopiean Archeological Association. The 51'6" brick-lined well was completely excavated resulting in the recovery of a wide variety of well preserved wooden and iron artifacts relating to the Confederate occupation of the fort.

Archaeological investigations at that time also included limited testing within the earthworks which identified two powder magazines, a shot furnace, a flagpole mound, and a brick chimney base. These archaeological tests documenting the presence of well preserved subsurface features, together with observation of aboveground features have resulted in a plan of Fort Boykin which conforms with an 1862 description of the fort (see Section 8). The contemporary account by a Union Navy officer mentions three powder magazines, one of which was blown up by the Confederate troops as they retreated and the other two destroyed by the Union landing party. Although only two of the magazines have been located thus far, the bunkers, parade ground, and barracks area listed in the contemporary account have all been identified at the site. In addition, the present five-sided configuration of the fort, with bastions at the angles and surrounding deep ditches, matches the 19th-century description, as does the dimension of the fort's 800-foot frontage along the James River.

BS

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FORT BOYKIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE (44IW20), ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY, VA

Continuation sheet #2

Item number 8

Page 1

8. SIGNIFICANCE -- Background

Fort Huger and again engaged and defeated the Confederates. The commanders of two Confederate vessels which lay upstream, witnessed the fight but did not enter the engagement, for their vessels were relatively useless against the GALENA. The Union Navy having thus penetrated the Confederate defenses, the Confederates elected to blockade the river by means of obstructing the channel further upstream.

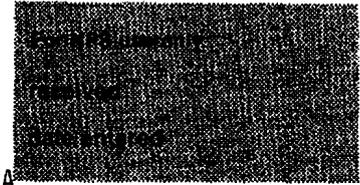
On May 17, 1862 the Union Navy dispatched a landing party to inspect the two forts. As a result of this examination, Lt. John Watters was able to prepare a detailed report on Fort Boykin. He described the fort as a very strong defensive work, which had been built on the farm of General Francis M. Boykin. According to Watters' account,

Fort Boykin, which is built [redacted] overlooking the river, being the highest point in the vicinity, [redacted]...has a fine command in all directions, the ground sloping away to the rear and on all sides except the front which is a steep bank [redacted]. The fort is an earthworks of very elaborate plan and great extent, displaying a prodigious amount of labor and good engineering skill in its projection. Its form or outline is a polygon of five unequal sides, with bastions at the angles. The front is the longest side, being on the river, and presents the indented or cremaillere line. Two of the other sides are advanced in the center of the curtain, presenting a small redan to flank the faces of the bastions. The length of the front of this work is about 800 feet, and it is about the same in depth from the front to the salient of one of the rear angles. It is surrounded with a deep ditch, which on the right and part of the rear, owing to the inequalities of the ground, gives a command of about 20 feet, and the thickness of the parapet measured on the superior slope twice that, or 40 feet. Part of this ditch has on the scarp a revetment of timber picketed on the inside. The interior of the work is traversed in all directions with bombproof traverses on the flanks of the curtains, and the bombproof shelters, and the magazines, all of which are strongly built and are works of great magnitude and carefully finished with sods; the interior slope of parapets also faced with revetment of sods. It contains three magazines, one of which had been blown up when the work was evacuated; two bombproof shelters for troops, which would shield 500 men, a parade ground, and space for quarters, not many of which had been built, as the troops were supplied from an extensive enclosed camp about a mile in the rear, in which I was informed a regiment had been quartered for the purpose of building this fort, and had worked on it daily from the middle of June 1861, to the beginning of the present month. The work fully justifies the statement. The bombproofs are built of massive framework of pitch pine, 11 by 9 inches, and covered to considerable depth with earth, presenting cover to fire from the river side (Watters, ORUCN:390-391).

(See Continuation Sheet #3)

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FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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FORT BOYKIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE (44IW20), ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY, VA

8. Continuation sheet #3-

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A wharf near Fort Boykin projected into the James River and served for the landing of military supplies and material. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED], one twenty five foot long, [REDACTED] lunette, armed with a seven-inch army columbiad, which protected the wharf and the road. [REDACTED]

A subsequent military report, which tabulated the armament at Fort Boykin when it was taken, listed eight 32 pounders, three 42 pounders, and two VIII-inch shell guns. A detailed rendering of Fort Boykin's layout and its environs ca. 1871-1873 appears on J.W. Donn's map entitled "James River: Pagan Creek to Point of Shoals" (Figure 2).

Lt. John Watters' account states that:

...in evacuating this strong work [Fort Boykin], after the fight with our gunboats, the rebels burned the gun carriages and spiked the guns, having evidently made the attempt to remove them, but being in too great haste. They blew up one of the magazines, destroyed the shot furnaces, and burned their camp in the rear, which was well provided with log houses and stockaded. We finished the work of destruction inside the fort by blowing up the other two magazines and burning some houses, and also the bombproofs. In one of the magazines I found about 120 pounds of powder, which together with 600 pounds provided from the U.S.S. SUSQUEHANNA, was used in blowing up the magazines, the explosion of which left only a pile of rubbish, which would be no easy task to reconstruct. This fort, although covering a great extent of ground, and having been built with great care, mounted but a comparatively small number of guns, thirteen being all that remained. Some had been removed; they were found some distance back on the road to Smithfield, but I do not think there ever had been more than twenty guns, as there were no evidences of beds having been laid out on some parts of the banquette. The guns had all been mounted in barbette, and except one, which was mounted in the rear, had all been placed on the river front. Six were heavy 8-inch army columbiads, mounted on circle traversing carriage pivoted on the center of the carriage; weight of guns, 3,645 pounds. Six others, double fortified navy 32s of the year 1827 and varying in weight from 51 to 56 cwt. One navy 42 pounder carronade, mounted in bastion to the rear, overlooking the camp. [Total] 13 guns. The guns had all been spiked and the carriages set on fire and it appeared from the positions of the guns on the ground that they had, when heated, discharged themselves and pitched off the carriages, as most of them were lying in such a manner, that I could not see the marks on the reenforce (Watters, p. 390).

Watters also reported that the army columbiad which had been mounted on the lunette overlooking the wharf had been spiked and removed and its carriage burned. In the rear of

(See Continuation Sheet # 4)

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FORT BOYKIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE (44IW20), ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY

FORT BOYKIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE (44IW20), ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY, VA

Continuation sheet #4

Item number 8

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8. SIGNIFICANCE -- Background

the battery a furnace for heating hot shot had been dismantled and its ironwork prepared for removal. Thus, by mid-May 1862, Fort Boykin was out of service.

Nearly two years later, on March 29, 1864, the Union Navy again engaged Confederate troops at Day's Point, when the U.S.S. SHOKOKON opened fire upon an estimated one hundred infantrymen who had taken shelter in the woods there. On April 14, 1864, Union troops were landed at Burwell Bay at 4:00 A.M. under the cover of navy gunboats. They were under orders to march to Smithfield. Encountering resistance at Wrenn's Mill and other locations in the area, and having no means to transport the wounded, Union troops withdrew to Fort Boykin. There, they took possession of a Confederate signal station, a piece of artillery, and a quantity of ammunition believed to have been taken from the Union gunboat BARNEY SMITH. They then reembarked upon naval transports. It was the last documented military encounter to occur at Fort Boykin.

During the first quarter of the 17th century a settlement known as Bennets Welcome was located in the vicinity of the acreage nominated and in 1623 a fort was built which was generally known as The Castle. Later, the area formed part of a plantation known as The Rocks, and is said to have been fortified during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. While no archaeological features predating the construction of Fort Boykin have yet been identified in the nominated area, past archaeological research has been too limited to rule out their possible existence.

As noted in his detailed description of Fort Boykin, Union naval officer John Watters was clearly impressed by what he saw of the "elaborate plan" and "good engineering skill" associated with this example of military architecture which even today remains essentially intact. It is not yet known what principles Colonel Andrew Talcott, the engineer responsible for the design of Fort Boykin, followed in laying out the fort. Guides to the construction of fortifications, such as that written by John Mueller in 1794, "A Treatise Containing the Practical Part of Fortification," were well known in the early 19th century, and recent archaeological research sponsored by the National Park Service has revealed that Mueller's precepts were followed in planning defensive structures in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. during the War of 1812. It is not known how long Mueller's theories were followed, but archaeological examination of Fort Boykin's architectural features could reveal if they were incorporated by Talcott into his design, or if they were discarded in favor of more modern principles of military science propagated at West Point in the antebellum period. Unlike many other Civil War earthworks, Fort Boykin was occupied for only one year and endured no alterations or reconstructions from years of use subsequent to its capture.

Only one cultural feature, a well, was completely excavated at the site during archaeological investigations in 1968 and 1969. Lined with dry-laid bricks, the 51'6" well yielded many military artifacts deposited in the last hours of Fort Boykin's life as a Confederate fortification. As indicated by the well excavation and more limited tests elsewhere, sufficient data are preserved at the site from tightly datable contexts so that the study of the nature and distribution of material culture within the fort and its various architectural features should provide new information about camp life and

(See Continuation Sheet #5)

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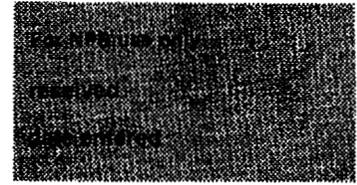
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FORT BOYKIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE (44IW20), ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY

Continuation sheet #5

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8. SIGNIFICANCE -- Background

associated social conditions. For example, there were apparently provisions for quarters at the fort although not many had been completed at the time of Fort Boykin's demise. Archaeological investigations of the barracks area could help determine whether the inhabitants were officers, common soldiers, or the slave laborers who were brought in to build the fort. Related, the distribution and nature of material culture recovered through archaeological excavations could not only help define activity areas within the fort but could also provide information on living conditions of the men garrisoned there. Questions here range from sanitary conditions faced by soldiers and types of medical supplies available for use to the extent of dependency on local resources for provisions as opposed to being supplied regularly from military stores. Such questions are not readily approached by traditional documentary research methods. If addressed by archaeology, however, they could yield a more complete understanding of local military life during the Civil War.

MM/BS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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