

**The Search for Redoubt Number 6  
at New Ebenezer**

*LAMAR Institute Publication  
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**The LAMAR Institute, Inc.  
2010**





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By Daniel T. Elliott and Daniel E. Battle

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## Introduction

This report documents an archaeological reconnaissance survey of a portion of Effingham County, Georgia, which was the scene of important events in American history in two wars—The Ebenezer Creek crossing. The study area is located adjacent to Ebenezer Creek, near its confluence with the Savannah River in east central Effingham County, Georgia (Figure 1). The reconnaissance survey was conducted on February 20, 2009 by LAMAR Institute researchers Daniel T. Elliott and Daniel E. Battle. This study represents the first archaeological investigation of this site.



**Figure 1. Project Location.**

## ***Augusta Road and the Ebenezer Creek Crossing***

Construction on the earliest European-styled road in Georgia began in 1733. This road paralleled the Savannah River on its western side and it stretched from Savannah to the fall line at present-day Augusta. The settlement at Augusta was created in 1736, although this area of the fall line already had been an important trading location for several decades. The initial construction of the road was done by Captain John Cuthbert of Josephstown and his troop of Georgia Rangers. The Georgia Rangers performed a variety of tasks, of which road construction was one. This task was grueling and undoubtedly it contributed to the premature death of Captain Cuthbert in 1739 (Elliott 1997:36).

The earliest landowner identified thus far on the land situated on the north side of Ebenezer Creek near its confluence with the Savannah River is Jacob Myers. Jacob Myers petitioned the Governor and Council for 100 acres of land in April 1765, which was granted. His grant was located on the north side of Ebenezer Creek in what was known as the Bethany settlement. The minutes of the Georgia Governor and Council recorded Jacob Myers petition:

The Read a Petition of Jacob Myers setting forth that he had been many Years in the Province had had One hundred and fifty Acres of Land granted him and was desirous to obtain an additional Tract having- a Wife and two and 'Negroes Therefore praying for One hundred Acres at Bethany adjoining Ebenezer Creek by the Bridge—

Resolved That on Condition only that the Petitioner Granted, doth take out a Grant for the said Land within seven Months from this Date and that he doth also register the said Grant in the Register's Office of the said Province within Six Months from the Date thereof that his Majesty may not be defrauded of his Quit Rents the prayer of the said Petition is granted (Candler 1907, [CRG] Volume 9:333).

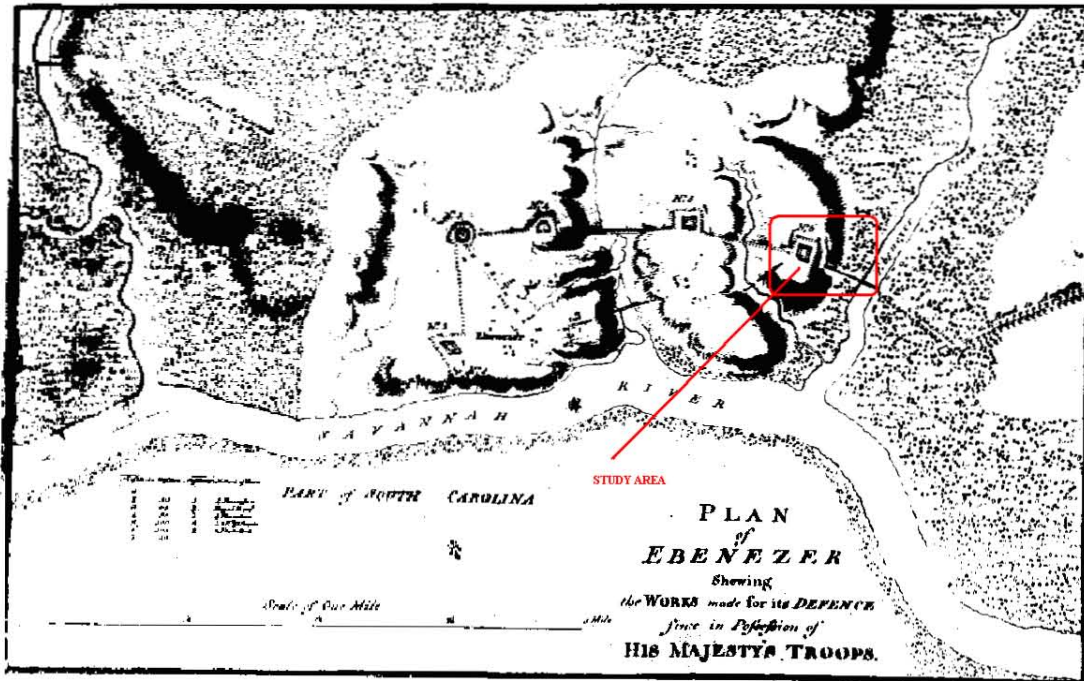
The creation of the Bethany settlement in 1751 led to improvements in the road system in that vicinity. The pious Lutherans who settled at Bethany had continuous contacts with their neighbors at Ebenezer and the need for improvements to the stream crossing was immediately realized. The first construction of a bridge across the creek dates to about 1751. Prior to that, the Ebenezer Creek crossing was by small boats or ferries.

By the time of the American Revolution, the Augusta Road was well traveled and the crossing at Ebenezer Creek was well established. When the British troops arrived in early January, 1779, engineers immediately began implementing a defensive network around the town. Seven redoubts surrounded the town of Ebenezer and the one identified in this study is Redoubt Number 6. The culmination of these improvements is shown on a plan map, which is attributed to Lieutenant John Wilson, who was an engineer with the 71<sup>st</sup> Regiment (Wilson 1779) (Figure 2).

Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Campbell also drafted a plan map of these defenses, which he published in 1780. Campbell's map, which encompasses a large portion of coastal and interior Georgia, depicts three symbols for buildings in the general vicinity of the study area. While these symbols are stylized and do not necessarily represent a true reflection of the number and size of improvements at this location, they do strongly suggest that



buildings were present in the vicinity prior to the arrival of the British troops. The construction of the British defenses around New Ebenezer included modifications to the route of the existing Augusta Road. Redoubts 3 and 6 served as gates to the town during the war.



**Figure 2. Study Area, shown on 1779 British Fortification Plan Map (Wilson 1779).**

The Patriots also occupied Ebenezer several times during the American Revolution. While no specific mention of the redoubt at Ebenezer Creek in any research conducted thus far, it is quite likely that the Americans reoccupied the abandoned Redoubt 6 when they occupied the town. Their rationale would have been the same as that of the British, to control access along the Augusta Road. When Major General Anthony Wayne and his men garrisoned Ebenezer in 1782 they had many fewer troops than the British had posted at Ebenezer in 1779. Consequently, the number of men who manned the various fortifications was fewer.

In the 2002 battlefield survey of Ebenezer, British Redoubt Number 6 was recognized as an important Defining Feature of the Revolutionary War landscape (Elliott 2002). This area was beyond the bounds of that study, however, so it was not examined at that time. The following year, as part of a second, but unsuccessful research grant application, access to the property was obtained. Another six years would pass, however, before a reconnaissance visit to the site was mounted by the LAMAR Institute research team (Figures 3-5).

Another military feature at Ebenezer was the “great swamp hospital”. This was a term used to describe the Patriot’s military hospital at Ebenezer in 1782 (Elliott 2003:113, 202-203). Other variants include swamp hospital, big swamp hospital, and deep swamp

hospital. Although no specific geographic location for it is contained in any of the correspondence, it is reasonable to predict that, for health and sanitary reasons, it was located beyond the immediate town. One possible location for it is on the landform situated between Redoubts 3 and 6. The British also maintained a military hospital at Ebenezer but no primary references to its location have been identified.

Adiel Sherwood (1837:165) wrote, “The Ebenezer Creek, crossed on a toll-bridge, is one mile north [of the town of New Ebenezer]; this is said to be owned by persons in Germany”. Reverend George White made brief mention of the Ebenezer Creek bridge, “The bridge over Ebenezer creek is the property of the Ebenezer church, from which a considerable fund is derived” (White 1849:223).

Reverend Philip A. Strobel, pastor of Jerusalem Lutheran Church at New Ebenezer, provided this information on the Augusta Road crossing at Ebenezer Creek,

Mention has been made of the erection of a bridge over Ebenezer creek, and the making of a causeway through the swamp. The first bridge, however, was a very humble and unpretending structure, and answered only a temporary purpose. Mr. King, who owned most of the land north of Ebenezer creek, applied to the Legislature, in 1791, for a charter for a causeway and toll bridge. The charter covered a period of thirty years. In 1824, (24th of April) the Trustees of the Lutheran church purchased, at public sale, Mr. King's interest, which was for the unexpired term of nine years, for the sum of eighteen hundred dollars. With the bridge the Trustees obtained sixty-five acres of land. A new bridge was erected by Messrs. William and Lewis Bird, in the fall of the same year, at a cost of four hundred and ninety-nine dollars. The Trustees obtained a renewal of the charter in 1824 for thirty years. Mr. C. F. Bergman, in a note in his journal, estimated that the income from the bridge for nine years would amount to about five thousand dollars. ‘Whether or not this expectation was realized, it would be difficult to ascertain; though it is certain, that the Trustees did realize at first a handsome profit upon the investment. Within the last fifteen years, however, the bridge and causeway have been rather a tax upon the church, as the inferior court of Effingham county authorized the opening of a public road from Sister's Ferry, on the Savannah river, by way of Springfield, on to the city of Savannah.’ This measure has cut off nearly all the travel from the old Augusta road, and the toll-gate does not now pay expenses (Strobel 1855:232-233).

Over the course of time the original Augusta-Savannah Road fell into disuse. As the local population shifted westward most traffic was routed via Springfield-the new county seat which sprang up in the 1790s. The bridge over Ebenezer Creek continued to operate as a toll bridge in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the Confederates burned the bridge in 1864 it was never rebuilt. Interstate telegraph line followed the abandoned Augusta Road route. The stumps of the poles that served this system remain visible along portions of the old road.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the land on the south side of Ebenezer Creek near the bridge was farmed by Charles Marvin Exley, Sr. and his family. Mr. Exley farmed a large field of sweet potatoes, which is now in planted pines. Several cabins were built on the property and, by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, these served as an informal Boy Scout camp. By that time the area was mostly wooded (Charles Marvin Exley, Jr. personal communication, November 27, 2009).



**Figure 3. Augusta Road at Ebenezer Creek, Facing South (Courtesy of Daniel Battle).**



**Figure 4. Augusta Road Causeway at Ebenezer Creek, Facing North (Courtesy of Daniel Battle).**



**Figure 5. Remnants of Augusta Road at Ebenezer Creek (Courtesy of Daniel Battle).**

## Events at Ebenezer Creek, Thursday, December 8-9, 1864

Ebenezer Creek was the scene of military action in December 1864, as the U.S. forces under Major General William Tecumseh Sherman approached their destination of Savannah, Georgia. Sherman's army was divided into three prongs. His Left Wing was engaged at Ebenezer Creek. Major General H.W. Slocum commanded the Left Wing of the Army of Georgia. The left wing was comprised of the 14<sup>th</sup> Corps, commanded by Major General Jefferson C. Davis and the 20<sup>th</sup> Corps, commanded by Brigadier General A.S. Williams. On the section of the march from Jacksonborough to Savannah, however, Major General Slocum noted that the 20<sup>th</sup> Corps took, "the road through Springfield", which indicates that this portion of the Left Wing were not following the Augusta Road but were on Middleground Road(OR 1893, Series 1, Vol. 44:158).

The 14<sup>th</sup> Army Corps was the easternmost portion of the Left Wing and its route paralleled the Savannah River on the Georgia side. That route actually followed the first road from Augusta to Savannah, which was built in the 1730s. Ebenezer Creek was one of the main stream crossings on this route and its topographic setting contributes significantly to its historical importance as a place. A partial list of the Union and Confederate units involved in the action at Ebenezer Creek on December 8 is presented in Table 1.

Colonel George P. Buell commanded "about 900 men and 600 mules" of the 58<sup>th</sup> Indiana Volunteer Infantry, who built several miles of corduroy roads and many pontoon trestle bridges for the 14<sup>th</sup> Army Corps on the march from Atlanta to Savannah. They were assisted in the engineering effort by a portion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Engineers, commanded by Major J.B. Yates. Buell reported, "[December] 7<sup>th</sup>, marched twenty-five miles, reaching Ebenezer Creek; commenced building a trestle bridge over Ebenezer Creek, working my men all night. 8<sup>th</sup>, finished the trestle bridge in the morning and also threw a pontoon bridge over Lockner's Creek, four miles in advance. 9<sup>th</sup>, took up both bridges and moved forward during the night towards Savannah" (OR 1893, Series 1, Vol. 44:160-162).

Brigadier General James D. Morgan commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, 14<sup>th</sup> Army Corps, which included: 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade (commanded by Colonel Robert F. Smith), 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade (commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Pearce), 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade (commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Langley), and Battery I, 2<sup>nd</sup> Illinois Artillery. Morgan wrote in his report of December 29:

The bridge at Ebenezer Creek having been destroyed (two miles in our front), Colonel Buell's command went actively to work to construct a new one. December 8, the bridge having been completed, left camp at 10 a.m., crossing Ebenezer Creek, marched to Little Ebenezer Creek, where, after a delay of several hours for completion of pontoon, moved forward to Kegler's [Kogler's] Creek. Just after going into camp received orders from General Davis to return to Little Ebenezer to protect the train of the corps, an attack being apprehended; returned, and the Second and Third Brigades recrossing the creek bivouacked for the night, having marched ten miles. December 9, left camp at 7 a.m., marched eight miles and constructed three bridges (OR 1893, Series 1, Vol. 44:181-182).

The journal entries of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division for December 8 and 9 stated:

Division moved at 10 a.m.; crossed Large Ebenezer and waited till 3 p.m. for Colonel Buell to pontoon Little Ebenezer; then crossed and marched four miles; at dark were ordered back to Little Ebenezer; Second and Third Brigades encamped north and First Brigade and battery south of creek. Colonel Buell was all night and till 10 a.m. making a bridge over Large Ebenezer; marched twelve miles.

December 9. ---Division moved at 7 a.m. from Little Ebenezer; marched eight miles (OR 1893, Series 1, Vol. 44:184).

Colonel Robert F. Smith, 16<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry, who commanded Morgan's 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade wrote on January 3: "on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December struck the Savannah River and crossed Ebenezer Creek. Here a rebel gun-boat threw a few shells at our column, doing no damage. In the afternoon, December 9, it was found that the enemy had erected a battery at the point where the Middle Ground and river roads meet" (OR 1893, Series 1, Vol. 44:185).

Lieutenant Colonel James W. Langley, 125<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry, commanded the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade of Morgan's 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. Langley stated in his report of January 3:

[December 7] reached camp near Ebenezer Creek at 8 p.m. December 8, marched at 7 a.m. Order of march changed. Left all transportation except that belonging to brigade and regimental headquarters. Crossed Ebenezer Creek at 12 m. and awaited the building of a bridge over Little Kegler's [Kogler's] Creek, after which we marched four miles beyond and went into camp at 8 p.m. In half an hour afterward I received orders to return and camp for the night between the two creeks. Got into camp at 11 p.m. December 8, marched at 7 a.m.; moved four miles, and built two bridges over creeks (OR 1893, Series 1, Vol. 44:198).

General Baird's Division was divided into three brigades of infantry, "commanded respectively by Col. George P. Este, Fourteenth Ohio Volunteers, Col. Morton C. Hunter, Eighty-second Indiana Volunteers, and Col. N. Gleason, Eighty-seventh Indiana Volunteers. The Fifth Wisconsin Battery, four guns, Capt. Joseph McKnight, was likewise attached to it. Baird's Division was composed of an effective fighting force of "a little under 5,000" and he noted, "the number of mouths which we had to feed, including teamsters and servants, somewhat over 6,000" (OR 1893, Series 1, Vol. 44:204). Baird wrote in his report: "December 7, late at night, reached Sister's Ferry. December 8, remained in camp during the day and had considerable skirmishing with the advance of the enemy's cavalry. Marched at midnight, and crossed Ebenezer Creek at 3 a.m. December 9" (OR 1893, Series 1, Vol. 44:204).

On December 7, 1864, cavalrymen in the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Michigan Cavalry engaged in battle with Confederate cavalry in a skirmish known as Cypress Swamp in Effingham County, Georgia. Some historical sources equate this engagement with the action at Ebenezer Creek the following day, although it more likely took place a few miles up the Savannah River in the vicinity of Two Sister's Ferry (Turner 2002). This was the first

serious contact between Sherman's cavalry and the Wheeler's Confederate cavalry since the massive cavalry battle at Waynesboro, Georgia. This battle is not discussed any further in this report, since it is a separate engagement and was not located on Ebenezer Creek.

Major General Henry Warner Slocum, who commanded Sherman's Left Wing, wrote from Headquarters of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army Corps in Springfield, Georgia on December 8, 1864, 7 a.m. to General Davis:

General Sherman has information that the line of defense around Savannah is about four miles from the city. He desires to take the road extending from Cherokee Hill, through Silk Hope, to Litchfield, as our first position. Your corps should be at or near Cherokee Hill; the Twentieth will be to the left of Pooler; Seventeenth on right of Twentieth; and Fifteenth near Litchfield. The Twentieth Corps will be at Monteith tonight.

General Jefferson C. Davis, who was subordinate to Major General Slocum wrote from headquarters near Ebenezer Creek, Georgia on December 8 at 8 a.m. to Lieutenant Colonel H.C. Rodgers, Chief of Staff, [Sherman's] Left Wing (Hughes et al. 2006):

I have the honor to report my arrival at this point last night. Ebenezer is a large stream and requires bridging, and considerable to be cut out of the road. Our road was obstructed by timber at many points yesterday; notwithstanding, we made twenty miles. Kilpatrick reports his rear attacked yesterday afternoon; number offeree not reported. We heard some artillery and small-arms yesterday evening in rear of the Twentieth Corps. The bridge in my front will be done by 10 a. m.; I will then commence crossing. It will take all day to get on the other side of Ebenezer. I sent you a messenger yesterday morning, who has not returned.

Davis wrote on the following morning,

Headquarters Fourteenth Army Corps, Two Miles South of Ebenezer Creek, December 9, 1864—9 a. m. Col. H. C. Rodgers,

Chief of Staff, Left Wing:

Colonel : My rear only completed the crossing of the creek at daylight. I am now moving for Saint Augustine Creek, and if the obstructions or opposition is not too great will reach there to-day. One of the enemy's gun-boats made several demonstrations against our bridge yesterday, but a few shells satisfied them they could accomplish nothing, and it gave up the project. My troops skirmished all day. Fewer attacks in rear. I have destroyed the bridge behind me,-and do not think I shall be troubled from the rear to-day. I can hear nothing of the Twentieth Corps. Heavy cannonading is now progressing in the direction of Savannah or Coosawhatchie. I am, very respectfully,

JEF. C. DAVIS, Brevet Major-General, Commanding (OR, Ser. 1, Vol. 44:674).

Assistant Adjutant-General and Chief of Staff A.C. McClurg, 14<sup>th</sup> Army Corps, sent a report from headquarters, Near Ebenezer Creek, Ga., December 8, 1864 to Brigadier General A. Baird. McClurg's dispatch was never received by General Baird, however, as it was captured by General Joseph Wheeler (OR, Series I, Vol 44:663). In the dispatch, McClurg advised General Baird of his situation:

Commanding Third Division, Fourteenth Army Corps: General Carlin has just begun to advance toward the crossing. The general commanding directs you to take charge of the cavalry, dispose it as you may deem best to cover your crossing, and cross your division over the creek to-night. He desires that you give orders to the commanders of the cavalry to hold possession of the causeway on this side of the bridge until to-morrow noon at least. Having crossed his animals, he will thoroughly obstruct the road with fallen-timber and will destroy the bridge as completely as possible (OR, Series I, Vol 44:663).

In December, 1864, the 123<sup>rd</sup> Illinois Infantry was assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, Cavalry Corps. The regimental history of the 123<sup>rd</sup> Regiment records no service in southern Georgia in December, 1864, however, some troops from the regiment apparently were detached and served under General Davis' Corps and were present at Ebenezer Creek on December 8. Major James A. Connolly, Companies F and S, 123<sup>rd</sup> Illinois Infantry, wrote in a letter while "In the field, near Ebenezer Creek, Georgia,"

Division moved forward again at 7 o'clock, everybody tired, sleepy and worn out. I don't think I could stand this kind of soldiering more than a month or two without some rest. After marching about 3 miles, and crossing a small creek, we were compelled to halt, Carlin's and Morgan's Divisions which were in front of us being detained by the destruction of the 'Ebenezer Creek' bridge.

Early in the afternoon the cavalry which was in our rear, was pressed by a superior force of the enemy (as they said). The enemy continued during the day to threaten an attack, and thus kept us on the alert all day, which was very annoying as we were all very sleepy. At 12 ½ midnight we withdrew in the utmost silence, not a bugle being sounded nor a loud command being given, and resumed our march, crossing Ebenezer Creek and encamping just south of it now.

This night's work was harder than that of last night, and I never was so utterly exhausted and worn out as am after crossing Ebenezer Creek. The enemy was just in our rear, undoubtedly listening for every sound that would indicate a movement on our part, and to cross the creek we had to pass through at least a mile of the most gloomy, dismal cypress swamp I ever saw, on a narrow causeway, just wide enough for a wagon to drive along. If the enemy had discovered our movement and had planted a piece of artillery in the road to rake that causeway while we were on it, they could have killed or wounded three-fourths of the men in the division, and we should have been utterly helpless to defend against it. If there were no other road to approach Savannah except by this one over Ebenezer Creek, five thousand rebels could defend the city against the world. I don't believe they thought we would be foolish enough to try to cross here.

When the head of the column reached the 'Ebenezer Causeway' I went ahead with one of Genl. Davis' aids who had come back to point out our ground for camping, and as I reached the bridge, I found there Major Lee, Provost Marshal of the Corps, engaged, by Genl. Davis' order, in turning off the road, into the swamp all the fugitive negroes that came along. When we should cross I knew it was the intention that the bridge should be burned, and I inquired if the negroes were not to be permitted to cross. I was told that Genl. Davis had ordered that they should not. This I knew, and Genl. Davis knew, must result in all these negroes being recaptured or perhaps brutally shot down by the rebel cavalry to-morrow morning. The idea of five or six hundred black women, children and old men being thus returned to slavery by such an internal copperhead as Jeff. C. Davis was entirely too much for my Democracy; I suppose loss of sleep, and fatigue made me somewhat out of humor too, and I told his staff officers what I thought of such an inhuman, barbarous proceeding in language which may possibly result in a reprimand



form his serene Highness, for I know his toadies will repeat it to him, but I don't care a fig; I am determined to expose this act of his publicly, and if he undertakes to vent his spleen on me for it, I have the same rights that he himself exercised in his affair with Nelson. I expect this will cost me my Brevet as Lieut. Colonel, but let it go, I wouldn't barter my convictions of right, nor seal my mouth for any promotion.

U.S. Army historian Frank Moore (1866:28) wrote soon after the war:

December seventh, the column moved in the same order of march. Baird and Kilpatrick, unencumbered by the trains, covered the rear.

Morgan's division and the pontoon train reached Ebenezer Creek late in the evening, and went immediately to work, cutting away the fallen timber which obstructed the road-way through the immense swamp which skirts the creeks on both sides at this point.

The pontooniers, under Colonel Buell, set to work at once-notwithstanding an exceedingly hard day's march—to reconstructing the bridge, and by noon the next day, the column commenced crossing this formidable defile.-

Notwithstanding the immense amount of labor expended upon the road and bridge, to make them passable, much was still required to keep them in condition: and it was not until daylight, the ninth, that the rear of the column had completed the crossing.

During the eighth, the enemy's cavalry made several attempts to drive in our rear pickets, but did not succeed. The loss on our side during these attacks was but slight, although at times the skirmishing was quite animated.

On the morning of the ninth, marched from camp, at Ebenezer Church, to Cuyler's plantation, where General Morgan, who was in the advance, found the enemy occupying a strongly-erected field-work, disposed to dispute his advance.

Moore wrote further about events at Ebenezer Creek:

December seventh, left camp at half-past six a.m., and marching fifteen miles, camped at plantation, twenty-six miles from Savannah. Road badly obstructed by fallen trees, but by heavy details removed them, causing but little delay. The bridge at Ebenezer Creek having been destroyed two miles in our front, Colonel's Buell's command went actively to work to construct a new one.

December eighth, the bridge having been completed, left camp at ten A.m., crossing Ebenezer Creek, marched to Little Ebenezer Creek, where, after a delay of several hours for completion of pontoons, moved forward to Cuyler's Creek; just after going into camps, received orders from General Davis to return to Little Ebenezer to protect the train of the corps, an attack being apprehended; returned, and the Second and Third brigades, re-crossing the creek, bivouacked for the night, having marched (10) ten miles. December ninth, left camp at seven a.m. marching eight miles, (and constructing three bridges) (Moore 1866, Volume 9:44).

When the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army Corps left Atlanta in the Savannah Campaign, their commander General A. Baird noted,

The division entered upon the campaign organized as it had hitherto been, into three brigades of infantry, commanded respectively by Colonel George P. Estes, Fourteenth

Ohio volunteers; Colonel Morton C. Hunter, Eighty-second Indiana volunteers; and Colonel N. Gleason, Eighty-seventh Indiana volunteers.

The Fifth Wisconsin battery, four guns, Captain Joseph McKnight, was likewise attached to it. Our effective force of fighting men during the whole march was, upon an average, a little under five thousand.

The number of mouths which we had to feed, including teamsters and servants, somewhat over six thousand.

General A. Baird's report was written after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was in Savannah. He remarked on the former slaves who flocked to join the U.S. Army on their march towards Savannah:

Negroes to the number of about six hundred and sixty-eight joined or followed our column on the march, and have, since our arrival here [Savannah], either been employed or turned over to the Provost-Marshal. A large number was probably with the column, or near it, at certain times; but as no notice was taken of any of them, and no restraint exercised over those simply passing along the road, many doubtless disappeared without any account being had of them (Moore 1866, Volume 9:46).

Lieutenant Stevens, Battery C, 1<sup>st</sup> Ohio Light Artillery, who was assigned to the Artillery Brigade, 20<sup>th</sup> Army Corps in the Savannah Campaign, briefly summarized Battery C's march to Savannah and their involvement with pontoon construction in the Ebenezer Creek area,

[December] 7th. Marched twenty-five miles, reaching Ebenezer Creek; commenced building a trestle-bridge over Ebenezer Creek, working my men all night. [December] 8th. Finished the trestle-bridge in the morning, and also threw a pontoon-bridge over Lockmer [Lochner] Creek, four miles in advance. [December] 9th. Took up both bridges, and moved forward during the night toward Savannah (Moore 1866, Volume 9:144).

The 85<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry Regiment formed part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, 14<sup>th</sup> Army Corps crossed Ebenezer Creek in the study vicinity. Regimental historian Henry Aten (1901:250-251), who was a former 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant in Company G, 85<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry, wrote,

On the 7th, we marched fifteen miles, passing through two swamps that were badly obstructed by trees felled by the enemy to delay the advance, and camped near Ebenezer Creek. The next day we had to wait until pontoons were brought up and bridges built before we could cross the two streams known as Big and Little 'Ebenezer. This was historic ground, Ebenezer church, standing at the roadside, having been a rallying point for General Marion and his men in the War of the Revolution. It was dark when we camped that evening, the rain was falling steadily, and everything in the shape of fuel was soaked with water. Finally, when with much effort the men had succeeded in starting their fires, and had just put their coffee on to boil, orders were received to fall in and return to Ebenezer creek. Wheeler's cavalry was pressing the rear guard and threatening the pontoon train with capture. The wet, tired, and hungry men, while taking their places in the ranks, made many forcible if not elegant remarks descriptive of their feelings, and expressive of their forlorn condition. But perhaps no one came nearer expressing the sentiment of the entire brigade than did a soldier who was observed to linger to the last, over a coffee can that refused to boil. At the last moment, he kicked his can over and his fire out, and as he slung his musket across his back and started to take his place in his

company, his strong, clear voice rang out in perfect time, as he sang a profane parody of the line in that familiar song, 'O, when this cruel war Is over.'

The return of the Third brigade to Ebenezer creek promptly checked the enemy and we camped about midnight on the north bank of that stream. On the 9th, we marched eight miles, built bridges over two creeks, and ran up against a line of rebel earthworks, with a battery planted at the point where the works crossed the road (Aten 1901:250-251).

William Harvey Ray wrote in his diary about his march with Sherman's Army,

December 7 Wednesday. Rained some last night were to march at 7 a.m. as usual but did until 11 then went 3 miles and rested till 3 p.m. when we lit out 9 miles in a hurry. Marched about 12 miles in all. Two days more to Savannah miles 25 ½.

December 8 Thursday. Orders to march at 7. Marched at 8 crossed Ebenezer Creek and large swamp Stopped till 3 p.m. 12 miles went 4 miles to camp and returned to where we took dinner between E [Ebenezer] and Lockover [Lockner] Creeks. 11 Miles.

December 9 Friday. Marched at 7. 4 miles and stopped. Moved 4 M. further and had a skirmish. Lt. Coe killed with shell. Getting cold within 15 m of Savannah. Day march 8 miles (Ray 1864).

The 88<sup>th</sup> Indiana regiment apparently suffered no casualties on these days. Lieutenant Colonel C.E. Briant, 88<sup>th</sup> Indiana Volunteers, reported:

December 8, more especially at Ebenezer Creek, which the enemy had destroyed, blockading the road across the swamps. While a new bridge was being built the enemy attacked the skirmishers of General Baird's division. My regiment was immediately thrown into position, in the rear line of brigade, and threw up logs, &c. At 11 p.m. my regiment crossed Ebenezer Creek, and halted near the church. December 9, moved from Ebenezer, crossing Ebenezer Creek (OR 1893, Series 1, Vol. 44:173).

Francis Marion McAdams, a former Sergeant in Company E, 113<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry, 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, 14<sup>th</sup> Army Corps, remembered the events at Ebenezer Creek in his book, published in 1884, that provides the enlisted man's perspective:

Our division with a pontoon train in charge of Colonel Buell, reached Ebenezer creek late in the evening and began to prepare to lay a bridge across the stream. The 113th took a position near the creek, and within a supporting distance of Colonel Buell's pontooneers. We have marched fifteen miles, and have passed several dreary swamps on either hand.

The foragers marched again in command of Captain Shepherd. We killed seventeen hogs on the left of the road, and after dressing and cutting up the meat into small pieces (leaving the hair on), we piled it at the road side on some rails, in ten equal quantities, for the ten companies of the regiment. Leaving three men in charge of the meat we moved on. When the 113th came along in the line of march the meat was pointed out to them, and each company, securing the pile to which it was entitled, carried it to the end of the day's march, when the pieces were skinned and prepared for cooking.

Late in the evening we found a large lot of sweet potatoes, and piling them into a cart, we prevailed on a cavalry man of Kilpatrick's command to haul them into camp for us. Harness? Well, the harness, cart and potatoes belonged at the same place.

Our column did not move till late in the forenoon, though Colonel Buell and his force worked all night to complete the bridge. When the bridge was completed the work of crossing Ebenezer began, but progressed slowly. After crossing, our brigade halted for dinner' near the bridge; several shots were fired at our column from a gunboat in the river on our left. We were not harmed, but the first shot made us a little nervous. Captain Jones remarked that in all probability there was flour on board that boat, but we had better delay going for it till after dark. We can hear artillery a distance in our front. We moved ahead six miles and prepared to camp, but an order to counter march was given, and the division returned and camped near where we had taken dinner. Have marched twelve miles.

The foragers under Captain Shepherd moved off to the right, procured sweet potatoes and mutton, and then returning to the main road, had a vexatious time finding the regimental camp. The Ebenezer has two streams here; one is smaller than the other. The smaller one is spanned by a pontoon, Our column moved from Ebenezer, and passing southward through a low, swampy country, reached Cuyler's plantation, where we found the enemy occupying a small fort planted in our pathway (McAdams 1884:122).

The 5<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Cavalry, 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Division, was engaged in military action at Ebenezer Creek in December, 1864. Colonel Thomas T. Heath, who commanded the 5<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Cavalry included in his report this account by Col. W.D. Hamilton of the 9<sup>th</sup> Ohio Cavalry's experience at Ebenezer Creek,

Our next encounter with the enemy was on the seventh December. While the column was crossing through a swamp near Ebenezer Creek, the enemy, who had not made his appearance since the engagement at Waynesboro, came upon our rear, consisting of the Ninth Michigan cavalry. While the rear of the column was waiting for the advance to cross, I, being next in advance of the Ninth Michigan cavalry, took two companies, A and B, of my regiment, and went back to assist Colonel Acker, Ninth Michigan cavalry, taking a position and deploying upon his extreme left, in front of a road running off from the main road in that direction. The ground was covered with thick underbrush, which prevented us from seeing the movements of the enemy. After remaining here a few minutes, we discovered a strong force moving immediately in our front, who, from their uniform, I supposed to be Colonel Acker's men. The enemy, however, evidently aware of the road above mentioned, had made a flank movement, under cover of the thicket, and were approaching, with a risk of cutting off the rear-guard. Discovering their true character, I opened a heavy fire upon them, checking them for an instant; but gathering, they rushed forward, part of their extended line gaining the road in our rear, near a point touched by lie extreme of a swamp ; and would thus have cut us off, had they not been held back by the fire of mother company which I had fortunately left to guard that point, thereby enabling us to get around and form in the open ground between the swamp and the main road upon which our column was moving.

The enemy seeming determined to produce confusion in our column, pressed forward vigorously in heavy force; to check which, I found it necessary to send for company after company, until two battalions were deployed in different lines, holding him back, until Colonel Acker brought up his regiment and passed all but the rear-guard across the swamp. I in the mean time had my Third battalion and part of his command formed on foot in front of the swamp, thus holding back the enemy, until the entire mounted force had effected a crossing. In this affair, our timely assistance and support, I am assured, saved the rear-guard of our column on that occasion.

Our loss was killed, none; wounded, two; missing two, (2.)

Next day, December, my regiment, being rearguard, was attacked by the enemy about noon, but held him in check until our column was massed in rear of the Fourteenth corps, at Ebenezer Bridge, at which point he was held in check by our cavalry and infantry combined, until the road was cleared, and our whole force passed safely over and bridges destroyed. My loss on this day was killed, none; wounded, none; missing, one. Company G, during the march, was on detached service with the Tenth Wisconsin Battery (Moore 1866, Volume 9:167-168).

The 92<sup>nd</sup> Illinois Infantry was a mounted infantry regiment attached to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division Cavalry Corps in 1864. The 92<sup>nd</sup> Illinois was engaged in action at Ebenezer Creek in December, 1864. Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Van Buskirk, 92<sup>nd</sup> Illinois Infantry submitted this report to Captain H. J. Smith, Acting Assistant Adjutant-General, Second Brigade, Third Cavalry Division, Military Department of the Mississippi:

Until the eighth instant [December 8] nothing of moment occurred. On the eighth we had a skirmish with the enemy, without casualty. We remained in line of battle nearly all night. On the morning of the ninth we crossed Ebenezer Creek, leaving one battalion, under command of Captain Becker, at the bridge, to guard the pioneers while they destroyed it, and blockaded the road. While thus employed, they were fired upon by the enemy's sharp-shooters, wounding one (1) man (Moore 1866, Volume 9:172).

The 75<sup>th</sup> Indiana Volunteer Infantry was attached to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, 14<sup>th</sup> Army Corps in December, 1864. Sergeant David Bittle Floyd (1893:356), Company I, provided this brief summary of the 75<sup>th</sup> Indiana Volunteer Infantry's activity at Ebenezer Creek on December 8, 1864:

Our Brigade was in the rear deployed as skirmishers, resisting the enemy's Cavalry. On the 8th, about noon, we had quite a severe scrimmage with this force, in which a member of the Second Minnesota Regiment—George Boyson by name—was mortally wounded. Towards night of the same day, our Division marched over Ebenezer Creek, in Effingham county, on a pontoon bridge, which our pontoniers had thrown across the creek for the purpose, and our Brigade being the rear guard of the Division, was greatly pressed by the Confederates, while the pontoniers were taking up the bridge. During the next day we marched eight miles, hearing occasionally the reverberations of artillery in the direction of Savannah.

The 16<sup>th</sup> Illinois Cavalry participated in the Georgia campaigns in 1864 as part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 23<sup>rd</sup> (and later 6<sup>th</sup>) Division Cavalry Corps, Military Division of Mississippi and although their regimental history does not list any engagements at Ebenezer Creek, it does list their involvement at Waynesboro. Colonel Charles D. Kerr, who commanded the 16<sup>th</sup> Illinois Cavalry, wrote in his diary for December 8, 1864:

Eleven o'clock: road obstructed ahead. Bridge burned over Ebenezer Creek. Ebenezer a dilapidated little town one hundred and thirty-one years old. Antiquated, tumble-down church, same age as town. Laid pontoons. Shelled by rebel gunboat in river quarter of mile distant: no one hurt. Camped at six o'clock S. S. W. seven miles. Eighteen miles from city heard heavy cannonading all day on right and in direction of city: rear of Baird attacked by Wheeler. Marched back six miles, and camped for the night at ten o'clock p.m. Plenty to eat. No provisions destroyed by the rebels yet (Kerr 1887:215).

Colonel Kerr later elaborated on the military situation at Ebenezer Creek in a published address:

Ebenezer Creek, where we crossed next day, was a swollen stream about ten rods wide and eight or ten feet deep. Wheeler's cavalry was closely pressing our rear. On the pretence that there was likely to be fighting in front, the negroes were told not to go upon the pontoon-bridge until all the troops and wagons were over: a guard was detailed to enforce the order; but, patient and docile as the negroes always were, the guard was really unnecessary. My regiment was in the rear of everything in the Fourteenth Corps that day. As soon as we were over the creek, orders were given to the engineers to take up the pontoons, and not let a negro cross. The order was obeyed to the letter. I sat upon my horse then and witnessed a scene the like of which I pray my eyes may never see again.

Already the shots from Wheeler's carbines were beginning to tell upon the dense mass upon the farther shore. Rushing to the water's brink, they raised their hands and implored from the corps commander the protection they had been promised. Sherman was many miles away, the prayer was in vain, and with cries of anguish and despair, men, women, and children rushed by hundreds into the turbid stream, and many were drowned before our eyes. From what we learned afterwards of those who remained upon the land, their fate at the hands of Wheeler's troopers was scarcely to be preferred. I speak of what I saw with my own eyes, not those of another, and no writer who was not upon the ground can gloss the matter over for me. It is claimed that this was done because rations were becoming scarce; in short, that it was a military necessity. There was no necessity about it. Not only the dictates of humanity, but the call of duty as well, demanded that we should afford these helpless creatures the protection within our power. There was not a soldier who would not have gladly come much nearer starvation than was at all likely rather than have sanctioned such a measure. It was unjustifiable and perfidious, and across the stretch of twenty years my soul burns with indignation to-night as I recall it. To set over against this act, I wish to record my testimony here, that in the four years and three months of my service in the army, most of it in the field, I never knew a case, and I never heard of an instance, of a negro slave proving faithless to the Union cause, or false to its defenders (Kerr 1887:215-216).

In two immediate post-war histories, Headley (1865) and Abbott (1866) quoted, "one of the army correspondents" for this version of the events of December 8, 1864 at Ebenezer Creek:

From the time we left Atlanta, with fifty or one hundred contrabands, the colored brigades continued to swell in numbers until we arrived at the Ogeechee River, when fully ten thousand were attached to the various columns. They represented all shades and conditions, from the almost white housemaid servant, worth in the market fifteen thousand dollars in rebel currency, to the tar-black, pock-marked cotton-picker, who never crosses Massa's door-sill. A very large majority of them were women and children, who, mounted on mules, sometimes five on an animal, in ox- v, wagons, buggies, and vehicles of every description, blocked the roads and materially delayed the movement of the column. It was no unusual sight to behold a slave mother carrying two young children and leading a third, who, in a half-nude state, trudged along the thorny path to freedom. Columns could be written descriptive of the harrowing scenes presented by this unfortunate class of fugitives. So much difficulty did General Davis find in moving his column, that at the Ogeechee River, as a military necessity, he placed a guard at the bridge, who halted the caravan of contrabands until the rear of the column had passed, and then removed the pontoon. The negroes, however, not to be frustrated, constructed a footbridge and crossed. Next day the column had its full complement of negroes.

Arriving at Ebenezer Creek, the same method was taken to clear the column, with better success. The creek runs through a half-mile of swamp, which is covered by water, and can only be crossed by a narrow bridge. This bridge was taken up, and the moment our forces disappeared the brutal Wheeler was in our rear. Next day only a few darkies came in. Another day passed, and fully two-thirds were missing. Inquiries elicited the information that Wheeler, on finding the defenceless negroes blocked, drove them pell-mell into the water, where those who escaped say they struggled to reach the opposite bank amidst heart-rending shrieks; but most of the mothers went down in the water, with their children clasped to their bosoms, while Wheeler and his inhuman band looked on with a demoniac laugh. How far true this may be I know not. But all the negroes who escaped, with whom I have talked, seemed to agree in their account of the hellish slaughter (Abbott 1866:476-477).

The 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Michigan Cavalry was assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, Kilpatrick's 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, Cavalry Corps, Military Division of the Mississippi and they were engaged in the action at Ebenezer Creek on December 8, 1864. In his history of Michigan in the Civil War, which was published in 1882, John Robertson, a former Private in the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Michigan Cavalry, quoted a correspondent who wrote:

This road [Old River Road passing between Jacksonboro and Sylvania] we had been informed by the darkies was obstructed by the felling of timber in all the swamps, and the destroying of bridges across the creeks. We found this to be true, but our marches were so regulated that we reached the principal swamps at night, and our pioneer force cut the timber out and constructed bridges during the night, so that the next morning we were ready to move on. The largest of the streams had to be 'pontooned,' but Sherman had his pontoons and pontooners along, as well as all other needful parts of his army, and a few hours sufficed to bridge any stream. At Ebenezer creek the rebels tried to frighten us by shelling us from the river, on which they had some young gunboats, but did not hurt us or hinder our progress at all (Robertson 1882:310-311).

John McAuley Palmer (1899:225), a former 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant in Company H, 32<sup>nd</sup> Illinois Infantry, which was assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> (and later 3<sup>rd</sup>) Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Division, 17<sup>th</sup> Army Corps in Georgia in late 1864, reminisced about the noble actions of Major Connolly at Ebenezer Creek:

When the fourteenth Army Corps was approaching Savannah it was necessary to march over a causeway through the Ebenezer swamps. Major Connolly was with the rear guard of the corps, which was hard pressed by Wheeler's cavalry. Near midnight the Major and his followers arrived at a bridge which spanned the Ebenezer creek, and there found the provost marshal of the Fourteenth Army Corps, which was then commanded by General Jeff. C. Davis, guarding the bridge and preventing negroes, thousands of whom were hid in the swamp, from crossing the bridge and following the troops. Replying to Major Connolly's inquiry, the provost marshal informed him that he was obeying his superior's orders. Major Connolly then told him that as it was then late he and his company could then retire to headquarters, and that he would relieve him. After the provost marshal retired the Major permitted the negroes to flock over the bridge, and thus saved them from capture and severe punishment and perhaps death by Wheeler's cavalry. The action of Major Connolly was commended, and the incident nearly cost General Davis his promotion (Palmer 1899:225).

Major General William T. Sherman wrote in his memoirs concerning the affair at Ebenezer Creek bridge and his discussions with Secretary of War Henry Stanton on the subject:

He [Secretary of War Henry Stanton] talked to me a great deal about the negroes, the former slaves, and I told him of many interesting incidents, illustrating their simple character and faith in our arms and progress. He inquired particularly about General Jeff. O. Davis, who, he said, was a Democrat, and hostile to the negro. I assured him that General Davis was an excellent soldier, and I did not believe he had any hostility to the negro; that in our army we had no negro soldiers, and, as a rule, we preferred white soldiers, but that we employed a large force of them as servants, teamsters, and pioneers, who had rendered admirable service. He then showed me a newspaper account of General Davis taking up his pontoon-bridge across Ebenezer Creek, leaving sleeping negro men, women, and children, on the other side, to be slaughtered by Wheeler's cavalry. I had heard such a rumor, and advised Mr. Stanton, before becoming prejudiced, to allow me to send for General Davis, which he did, and General Davis explained the matter to his entire satisfaction. The truth was, that, as we approached the seaboard, the freedmen in droves, old and young, followed the several columns to reach a place of safety. It so happened that General Davis's route into Savannah followed what was known as the 'River-road,' and he had to make constant use of his pontoon-train—the head of his column reaching some deep, impassable creek before the rear was fairly over another. He had occasionally to use the pontoons both day and night. On the occasion referred to, the bridge was taken up from Ebenezer Creek while some of the camp-followers remained asleep on the farther side, and these were picked up by Wheeler's cavalry. Some of them, in their fright, were drowned in trying to swim over, and others may have been cruelly killed by Wheeler's men, but this was a mere supposition. At all events, the same thing might have resulted to General Howard, or to any other of the many most humane commanders who filled the army. General Jeff. C. Davis was strictly a soldier, and doubtless hated to have his wagons and columns encumbered by these poor negroes, for whom we all felt sympathy, but a sympathy of a different sort from that of Mr. Stanton, which was not of pure humanity, but of politics (Sherman 1904:243-244).

The progress of the quartermaster train of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army Corps from December 6-9, 1864 was summarized by Lieutenant Colonel J.E. Remington, Chief Quartermaster, 14<sup>th</sup> Army Corps, in a report that was filed on July 1, 1865:

December 6.—Started at daylight; road passed through swamp immediately after leaving camp on U. S. river mail road, two miles and a half from Savannah River; distance of day's march, twenty-one miles. Scouting and foraging parties find a good many valuable animals hid in the swamps; natives are astonished at the Yankees finding everything; begin to think it is useless to hide from our foragers; quartermasters of the corps are directed to load their trains as heavily as possible with forage and commissary supplies, and, if possible, to forage liberally for that purpose.

December 7.—Marched at daylight; found roads blockaded at four different places and very swampy; camped twenty-seven miles from Savannah, Ga., near Ebenezer Creek; distance of day's march, twelve miles; rained very hard all forenoon.

December 8.—Started at 1 p. m.; crossed two miles of swamp, then Ebenezer Creek; camped near Ebenezer Church; distance of day's march, three miles; twenty-four miles from Savannah, Ga.; rebel gun-boat trying to shell the train, but does no damage.

December 9.—Started at daylight, through very bad swamp; cross two creeks on pontoons; camped four miles from Charleston and Savannah Railroad bridge across the Savannah; distance of march, nine miles, mostly swampy; distance from Savannah, fifteen miles; weather cloudy (OR, Series III, Volume V:412).



Brevet Captain William W. Glazier and Company E of the New York Volunteer Cavalry, were fleeing the Confederates in the Savannah River swamps in mid-December 1864, when he encountered two freedmen refugees who had accompanied Sherman's Army on the march southward from Burke County and had encamped north of Ebenezer Creek. William W. Glazier is likely the same officer as Willard W. Glazier who served as a Lieutenant in Company E, 2nd New York Cavalry. Glazier recounts their freedmen's story,

Seeing a smoke in the woods, we crept towards it, and found a black man and his wife lying by the fire. After arousing them, we learned their history. They had followed General Sherman's army from Burke County, Ga., and being encamped on an island in Big Ebenezer Creek, with four or five hundred others, were shelled out by the Rebels, and compelled to seek safety by flight into the swamps.

In this way they lost his trail, and reasoning that if the slaves were all emancipated they should be free when the war ended, without any trouble of their own, they were going back to their masters.

We were at this time without food and very hungry, and as our colored friends had nothing but a little shelled corn, we lent Sambo our haversack and sent him to find some negroes, detaining Dinah as a hostage for his safe return. He rather objected to the risk of such an expedition, but as we were very urgent, at last complied, while we sat roasting and eating corn during his absence. He brought back some sweet potatoes, which were in no way objectionable.

Very soon the worthy couple decided, after a little persuasion on our part, that they were not in very safe quarters, and consequently left us in full possession of the fire and potatoes, the latter of which we roasted in the former (Glazier 1869:257).

Captain Glazier wrote later in his diary of Company E's encounter with Confederate pickets near Ebenezer Creek,

In A Swamp Near Big Ebenezer Creek,

Thursday, December 15.

Began about ten o'clock to creep cautiously up to the edge of the swamp. Soon discovered a large fire. This gave us their locality, and in the darkness we began to wade through the mud and water on their left flank. It was a terrible undertaking, but there was no alternative. Sometimes in to our armpits, we continued to push our way through. We were never further from the picket than fifteen rods, and on account of stopping to rest, and the obstacles in the way, were about two hours in going two hundred yards. Several other pickets were passed during the night; in fact, we approached so near as to hear their conversation; but as the ground was firmer, had no difficulty in turning their flank. The last was passed at the edge of the swamp skirting the Big Ebenezer Creek. This swamp was corduroyed, and had been passed through by a portion of General Sherman's army.

On either side of the road the land was entirely submerged, and it was not among things possible to travel through it. Three miles or more brought us to the stream, which was very wide.

The bridge had been burned, and we stood on the charred abutment, surrounded by water, with no visible means of making a crossing. Although inspection did not bring to light

anything satisfactory, daylight was just coming, and through the rising mists so could see the opposite shore. Were there friends there, or foes? We did not know. A sense of desolation came over us. A broad river lay before us and an impenetrable swamp all around\* and we possessing not even a pocket-knife to aid us. We thought of secreting ourselves, and stealing back past the pickets at night, to get boards with which to construct a raft. Just how this was to be done we did not know; but it was a plan, and better than no plan at all.

Accordingly, we began searching for a place of concealment. In walking back along the road toward the picket we saw what had the appearance of being a walk of logs leading out into the swamp. Following along this, and jumping from log to log, we soon came to an island, or elevated bit of ground, in the midst of the swamp. No discussion was needed to determine that this was the place we were looking for. Men had evidently rested there before. There were pieces of garments, and ashes of fires. Weary with our tramp of more than twenty miles, we soon fell asleep. Our nap was short, however. Lemon soon shook me, saying that he had heard a noise like the sound of oars falling into a boat. Most are familiar with this peculiar ringing sound.

Wide awake then, we watched the road, and soon saw two Rebel couriers pass along with papers in their hands. Waiting till they were well past, we crept out, and watched them till they were out of sight, when we went down to the river's edge (Glazier 1869:262-264).

A correspondent for an Albany, New York newspaper filed this report on the events at Ebenezer Creek:

On the 8<sup>th</sup> [December 1864] the [U.S.] troops moved at the usual hour, crossed a long and dangerous swamp, and suddenly found Ebenezer creek in their front, with all the bridges burned. This creek is quite near the Savannah, in the midst of a half mile of swamp, which was overflowed by the back waters of the Savannah. All the pontooneers, under Col. Buell were put to work; but the trains did not get over until about dark. In the meantime the rebel cavalry under Ferguson came upon our rear and flanks, and attacked Atkins' cavalry brigade. General Davis placed Baird and Carlin in line of battle, threw up breastworks and awaited an attack. In the afternoon the rebels charged what they supposed to be cavalry, when Baird gave them a volley that sent them back howling like whipped curs. They were satisfied, and did not renew their efforts to capture our trains. While the troops were in line of battle half a mile from the Savannah, awaiting the crossing of Morgan and the trains over Ebenezer creek, a Rebel gunboat ran down the river and shelled the road upon which our trains were moving, but did no damage, fortunately. Had a section of artillery been planted on the river bank, the gunboat could have been blown to atoms, as the river at this point is only about fifty yards wide.

At twelve o'clock at night the column resumed their march, crossed Ebenezer creek and another smaller river, and at two o'clock A.M., encamped at Fort Greene, ground rendered historical in the annals of the Revolution as the spot where Greene defended the Savannah river against the British. Kilpatrick on the Flanks.

Nearly all the skirmishing, from Atlanta to Macon, was done by General Kilpatrick's division of cavalry, composed of the First brigade, under command of Col. E.H. Murray of the Third Kentucky, and the Second brigade, under Col. Atkins, of the Ninety-Second Illinois mounted infantry (*Albany Evening News* 1864:2).

Captain David P. Conyngham (1865:279), an Army correspondent for the *New York Herald*, accompanied the 14<sup>th</sup> Corps and he described the Ebenezer encampment,

At 12 o'clock at night we crossed Ebenezer Creek, and encamped on Fort Greene.

Fort Greene.

This fort has been named in honor of the distinguished revolutionary general of that name, and is said to be the spot where that hero defended Savannah River against the British. A Lutheran church, erected in 1769, stands near the river. It is an old, red brick structure, surmounted by a modest cupola, which looks as if undecided whether it will stand or fall. The interior of the church is even more unassuming than the outside. The pulpit is a plain, rude affair, and gives one the impression of an old desk. The floor and pews were clean, and the seats painted and moulded.

It is a venerable structure; and though looking as if it had taken a bad cold, or was afflicted with the rheumatism, it is likely to last near another century.

The citizens say it was used by General Greene as a hospital.

Confederate Accounts of the engagement and events at Ebenezer Creek are rare in comparison with the Union accounts. Major General Joseph Wheeler provided this account of the action in the vicinity of Ebenezer Creek in December, 1864:

On the night of December 8 we shelled the camp of the Fourteenth Corps with good effect, throwing the corps into confusion and causing it to leave camp at midnight, abandoning clothing, arms, &c. By breaking up the camp during the extreme darkness a great many negroes were, left in our hands, whom we sent back to their owners. We also captured three wagons and teams, and caused the enemy to burn several more wagons. The whole number of negroes captured from the enemy during the movement was nearly 1,000 (OR, Ser. 1, Vol. 44:410).

In a postwar account, General Wheeler noted:

Skirmishing continued during the day, and toward evening General Wheeler, pushing on with his escort, met the cavalry in force, who charged, driving him back toward our main column. This he had directed to be in readiness and, charging the enemy with his advance brigade, he drove them in. wild disorder for two miles, capturing one hundred prisoners,, and driving the remainder into a swamp, from which many- were unable to extricate their horses, they gladly working out on foot during the night. The enemy fortified their camps at every halt, building lines of earthworks for miles in extent. The obstructions our troops had placed on the road interrupted their march, and on the 8th they met with considerable delay at Ebenezer Creek. Wheeler drove in their pickets and pressed his line so as to engage the enemy in their fortifications.

Fight Near Ebenezer Creek.

At dark Wheeler examined the Federal works, and finding their infantry and cavalry huddled together, he brought up a battery of twelve-pound guns, and began a terrific shelling of their position. The affrighted Federals so suddenly- awaked from their slumbers, and not knowing the force which assailed them, hurried to the overcrowded crossing, leaving arms, horses, knapsacks and over two thousand negroes, who, though desiring to cross, the enemy, in their panic, refused to delay the destruction of the bridge. These negroes Wheeler sent back to their owners, from whom they had been, stolen (Dodson 1899:301).

## ***Battle Casualties***

Casualties for the military action at Ebenezer Creek can only be estimated since most official reports and private diaries or memorials do not provide complete information. The list of killed, wounded, and captured would include Confederate and Union army troops, civilian freedmen, and possibly others.

Bowman (1865:286), one of General Sherman's biographers, described: "The loss in the corps during these attacks was but slight, although at times the skirmishing was quite animated".

Among those killed in the engagement at Ebenezer Creek in December, 1864 was Private Enoch Mustard, Company B, 85<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry Regiment. Private Mustard had enlisted in the company at the age of 21 years and "served with his company until he died on the march to the sea, near Ebenezer creek, Georgia, December 8, 1864" (Aten 1901:371). Also killed in the battle was George Boyson, 2<sup>nd</sup> Minnesota Infantry (Floyd 1893:356). The 2<sup>nd</sup> Minnesota Infantry was assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, 14<sup>th</sup> Army Corps in December, 1864 and that regiment was engaged in the action at Ebenezer Creek.

Among those wounded in the skirmish at Ebenezer Creek was Private Abner Curry, Company I, 92<sup>nd</sup> Illinois Volunteer Mounted Infantry. Private Curry was the one man in Captain Becker's Battalion who was severely wounded by a Confederate Sharpshooter's bullet while protecting the pioneers who were disassembling the pontoon bridge at Ebenezer Creek on December 8 (Moore 1866:172).

Confederate artillery fired a barrage of shells into the U.S. Army and freedmen positions at Ebenezer Creek. It is doubtful that the gunners on the Confederate vessel, which was most likely the C.S.S. *Macon*, had a clear line of sight to their targets. The naval guns were trained on the Augusta-Savannah Road and the extensive Union wagon train that was moving along it. It is difficult to gauge the effectiveness of their artillery fire, or to assess its results in terms of battle casualties. Union reports suggested that the effect of the naval bombardment was minimal (Dotson 899:301; Robertson 1882:310-311; Albany Evening News 1864:2).

The C.S.S. *Macon* was steaming on the interior Savannah River channel in early December when the 14<sup>th</sup> Army Corps approached the river. Correspondence between the *Macon* and other Confederate vessels plying the Savannah River with Confederate General Hardee in early December reveal that the C.S.S. *Macon* was the only vessel in the vicinity of Ebenezer Creek on December 8-9, 1864 (United States. Navy Department 1903). The *Macon* had a crew of about 105 Confederate Navy men, Confederate Marines, and support staff (Foenander 2003).

The C.S.S. *Macon*, formerly known as the Ogeechee was built at the H. F. Willink shipyard in Savannah. The vessel was a J. L. Porter design and the wooden vessel was fitted with the engines from the steamer *Empire* in early 1864. It was a side-wheel,

Morgan-class steam vessel, 196 feet [or possibly 150 feet] in length, 25 feet breadth, 10 ft displacement, and 8 ft draught. The steamer was armed with six or eight guns. The *Macon*, then commanded by Lieutenant W.V. Comstock (replacing Lieutenant J.S. Kenard), became trapped once Savannah was captured by the Union and it steamed to Augusta, Georgia where its damages were repaired. This seems unlikely, however, given the complete Union control of Savannah harbor after December 20, 1864. The vessel was in a rotted condition at Augusta, where it was berthed in early 1865 and Confederate and Union naval records indicate that the *Macon's* crew surrendered at Augusta that year. Other U.S. Navy records note that the C.S.S. *Macon* apparently burned when Elizabeth City, North Carolina was evacuated, but this is incorrect (Mooney 1959-1981). Gaines (2008:49) provided this summary of the C.S.S. *Ogeechee* (C.S.S. *Macon*):

Confederate. Screw ram. Length 130 or 150 feet, beam 30 or 25 feet, draft 7 feet 3 inches or 8 feet, depth 10 feet, speed 12 knots. Complement of 120, with four 32-pounder smoothbores, one rifled 32-pounder, and one 9-inch smoothbore. Built in 1863 at Savannah. Surrendered to Union forces in May 1865. Was sunk in the Savannah River across from the City Exchange (Chief of Engineers Report 1888, 1017; CWC, 6-265; WCWN, 218).

Major General Joseph Wheeler noted in his memoirs that his cavalymen captured formerly enslaved people at Ebenezer Creek and that they were returned to their owners. Wheeler's version of their treatment differs from other accounts, which suggest a major slaughter of unarmed civilians. A recently dedicated historical marker memorialized the plight of the freedmen at Ebenezer Creek, which read:

March to the Sea: Ebenezer Creek

One mile north, on December 9, 1864, during the American Civil War, U.S. Gen. Jeff. C. Davis crossed Ebenezer Creek with his 14th Army Corps as it advanced toward Savannah during Gen. William T. Sherman's March to the Sea. Davis hastily removed the pontoon bridges over the creek, and hundreds of freed slaves following his army drowned trying to swim the swollen waters to escape the pursuing Confederates. Following a public outcry, Sec. of War Edwin Stanton met with Sherman and local black leaders in Savannah on January 12, 1865. Four days later, President Lincoln approved Sherman's Special Field Orders No. 15, confiscating over 400,000 acres of coastal property and redistributing it to former slaves in 40-acre tracts (Georgia Historical Society and Georgia Department of Economic Development 2010).

The United States Congress quickly took note of the events at Ebenezer Creek, which was perceived as a public disgrace. The United States Senate passed a resolution on January 27, 1865, which stated:

Resolved, That the Committee on the Conduct of the War be instructed to inquire into, and report upon, the action of Brevet Major General Jeff. C. Davis, in preventing a number of negroes, who had joined the army on the march through Georgia, from crossing a creek known as Ebenezer creek, near Savannah, by burning the bridge after the troops had crossed, on the night of the 8th of December last, many of these negroes having been killed by the rebel cavalry, or drowned in attempting to cross the creek on rafts (U.S. Senate 1865:105).

Major General Sherman recalled in his memoirs, “On the occasion referred to, the bridge was taken up from Ebenezer Creek while Some of the camp-followers remained asleep on the farther side, and these were picked up by Wheeler's cavalry. Some of them, in their fright, were drowned in trying to swim over, and others may have been cruelly killed by "Wheeler's men, but this was a mere supposition” (Sherman 1875, Vol. 2:244).

Headley (1865) and Abbott (1866), two of Sherman’s biographers, repeated the words of an unidentified wartime correspondent in their post-war history:

Arriving at Ebenezer Creek, the same method was taken to clear the column, with better success. The creek runs through a half-mile of swamp, which is covered by water, and can only be crossed by a narrow bridge. This bridge was taken up, and the moment our forces disappeared the brutal Wheeler was in our rear. Next day only a few darkies came in. Another day passed, and fully two-thirds were missing. Inquiries elicited the information that Wheeler, on finding the defenceless negroes blocked, drove them pell-mell into the water, where those who escaped say they struggled to reach the opposite bank amidst heart-rending shrieks; but most of the mothers went down in the water, with their children clasped to their bosoms, while Wheeler and his inhuman band looked on with a demoniac laugh. How far true this may be I know not. But all the negroes who escaped, with whom I have talked, seemed to agree in their account of the hellish slaughter (Abbott 1866, Vol. 2:477).

An even stronger description of the calamity at Ebenezer Creek was penned by Deacon John Smith Dye. Dye was not a first-hand observer of the events at Ebenezer Creek and his estimates of “Thousands of these poor creatures perished” is likely an exaggeration. He wrote,

Over ten thousand contrabands were now following the Union army, and its own safety and convenience required that the great exodus should be checked. At Ogeechee River for this purpose a guard was placed at the pontoon bridge which kept the blacks from passing until the troops got over, when the bridge was removed and the caravan left on the other side. The negroes would not be checked, but built a foot bridge next day when they all passed over and followed the army. At Ebenezer Creek the same means were resorted to, to prevent the blacks encumbering the army, which did not know what moment it might be attacked. Wheeler came up in the rear with his rebel cavalry, and finding this great army of contrabands trying to cross the stream, charged on the defenceless beings, drove them into the stream amidst shrieks of despair. Mothers clasped their infants and sank down in their watery grave. Thousands of these poor creatures perished in the stream into which they had been driven by the hellish monster, while he and his cut-throat cavalry companions sat on their horses on the river bank, shouting and laughing at the painful sight (Dye 1866:225).

As demonstrated by the wide range of freedmen deaths at Ebenezer Creek, the truthful casualty figures remain elusive. Responsible officers, including Generals Jefferson Davis, William T. Sherman, and Joseph Wheeler, sought to downplay the number of deaths that occurred to only a few, whereas abolitionists and others inflated the numbers into the thousands. In reality, the truth lies somewhere in between and, since no accurate body count was taken, history is left with only these estimates.

## **Results of Archaeological Reconnaissance**

The archaeological reconnaissance of the study area was limited in scope and relatively simple in design. Archaeologists consulted historical maps and approximated the location of the British Redoubt Number 6. The location was superimposed on a modern topographic map and aerial photographs to narrow the search location. An estimated UTM location was generated from the cartographic research. Armed with this estimated location the archaeologists walked to the site (approaching from the swamp side) and immediately observed clear evidence of the redoubt's earthworks. The area was traversed on foot and waypoints were recorded at locations where the fortifications were evident. Waypoints also were recorded for the road traces. A metal detector was then used to spot check a few metal signals. The locations of these finds were recorded as waypoints and the discovered objects were replaced in the ground. The archaeologists returned to the lab, downloaded their GPS data and created maps showing the location of the fortification, the Augusta Road, and other potentially important cultural features. An archaeological site form was submitted for the location, which was not previously documented in the Georgia Archaeological Site File. The site was recorded as 9Ef290.

The cultural features identified in the reconnaissance include visible evidence of ditches and parapets that are likely part of British Redoubt Number 6 (Figure 6); outer ditch work that also may be associated with the American Revolution; traces of the Augusta Road consisting of deeply incised road bed, an elevated artificial causeway across the Ebenezer Creek floodplain, and log pilings in Ebenezer Creek.

A metal detector was employed by Daniel Battle in order to confirm the military character of the site and to establish it as a potentially important archaeological site. Fewer than six metal soundings were investigated by exhumation. Metal detector finds included a small buckle (Figure 7), a small lead cube, and iron objects. These objects were located, identified and returned to the ground. No artifacts were collected by the survey.



**Figure 6. South View of Redoubt 6, 9Ef290.**



**Figure 7. Brass Buckle, Redoubt 6, Ebenezer, Located by Metal Detector.**



## Summary

The Savannah-Augusta Road crossing of Ebenezer Creek, which is located near its confluence with the Savannah River, has a rich and underappreciated history. Its military history in the American Revolution and American Civil War is significant. Historical context for this location in the American Revolution is briefly summarized in this report and may be read in greater detail in Elliott (2002). A context for the Civil War history of this location is presented in this report. The common thread in the stories from both wars is the Ebenezer Creek crossing and its military defense.

The archaeological remains identified by this reconnaissance effort display great promise for future research. The most obvious cultural resources at this location are the ditch work relating to British Redoubt Number 6, constructed in early 1779, and the trace of the Augusta-Savannah Road. cursory examination of the locale using a metal detector confirmed the military nature of the ditch work and attests to the archaeological potential beneath the ground surface. This location was recorded as archaeological site 9Ef290 and a general historical context for the site was established in the present document. Even though the present study did not fully delineate the resources associated with this spot, it appears to be potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The full extent of the resources will require additional archaeological and historical study.

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