

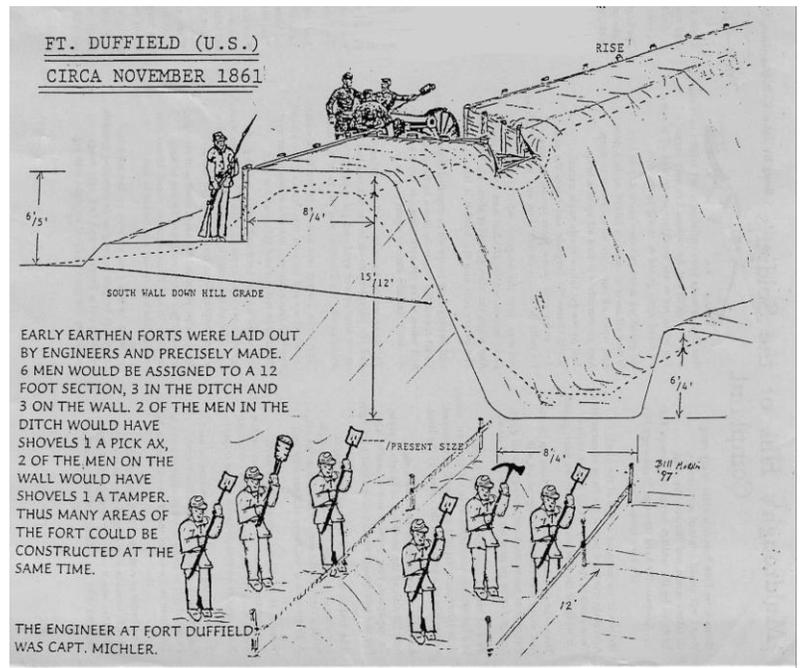
Fort Duffield Construction Notes (1861–62)

Fort Duffield • West Point, Kentucky

Building a Fort on Muldraugh Hill

Fort Duffield was constructed in late 1861 by Union soldiers and civilian laborers working under difficult conditions. The steep slopes of Muldraugh Hill required extensive clearing, grading, and earth-moving before any defensive structures could take shape. The work was urgent: Confederate forces were active in the region, and Louisville's supply corridor needed protection.

![[Timber Clearing](<https://fortduffield.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/cutting-trees-down.webp>)



The first task was clearing the hillside.

Soldiers felled hundreds of trees, cut brush, and removed stumps to create open fields of fire and to provide timber for construction. The cleared wood was used for:

- Support beams and revetments
- Palisades and retaining walls
- Firewood for the encampment

The transformation of the landscape was dramatic. What is now a forested ridge was, in 1861, a bare, exposed slope.

Earthwork Design and Layout

The fort followed a simple but effective earthwork design typical of early-war Union defenses. Engineers shaped the hilltop into a series of angled walls and trenches that maximized defensive coverage while minimizing construction time.

Key features included:

- A long, angled parapet facing the valley
- A ditch and berm system for added protection
- Timber-reinforced walls to prevent erosion
- Interior platforms for artillery and observation

The layout allowed defenders to cover the Salt River, the Turnpike, and the approaches from the south.

Labor, Tools, and Daily Work

Construction relied on hand tools and sheer manpower. Soldiers used:

- Axes and saws for timber
- Shovels and picks for earth-moving
- Sledges and wedges for splitting logs

Workdays were long and physically demanding. Soldiers alternated between construction duty, picket duty, and camp chores. Despite the hardships, the fort was completed in a matter of weeks.

Life in the Construction Camp

The camp around the fort bustled with activity. Tents and makeshift shelters housed the workers, while supply wagons brought tools, rations, and equipment up the steep road from West Point. Evenings were spent around campfires, repairing tools, cooking meals, and writing letters home.

The rapid construction of Fort Duffield reflected the urgency of the moment. Louisville needed protection, and the soldiers on Muldraugh Hill delivered it.

Conclusion

Fort Duffield's construction in 1861 stands as a testament to the determination and labor of Union soldiers. Their work created a strong defensive position that helped secure the Union's supply lines and contributed to the broader success of the Western Theater. The fort's earthworks, though softened by time, still tell the story of the men who built them.