

Station Six — The Overlook

Fort Duffield • West Point, Kentucky Winter 1861–62

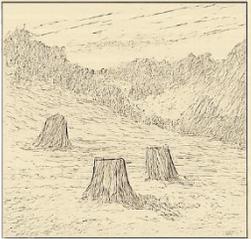
Introduction

From this high ridge on Muldraugh Hill, Union soldiers of the 9th Michigan Infantry watched over the Salt River valley, the Ohio River corridor, and the Louisville & Nashville Turnpike. In 1861, this overlook was not wooded as it is today. The slopes were cleared for nearly a mile in every direction, creating an unobstructed panorama that allowed soldiers to detect movement long before it reached West Point.



This packet reconstructs what those soldiers saw — and why this ridge became one of the most important early-war observation points in Kentucky.

The Terrain in 1861



The ridge on which Fort Duffield sits is part of the steep escarpment known as Muldraugh Hill. In 1861:

- The slopes were stripped of trees for lumber and firewood.
 - Brush was removed to create clear lines of sight.
 - The hillside dropped sharply toward the Salt River and the Turnpike.
- The ridge crest provided a natural platform for observation posts.

Soldiers described the climb as “steep and exhausting,” but the view from the top as “commanding for miles.”

Sightlines and Observation Arcs

From this overlook, soldiers could monitor:

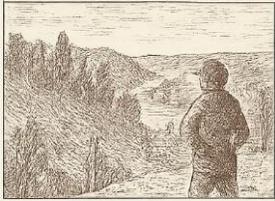
- The mouth of the Salt River
- The Ohio River traffic approaching West Point
- The Louisville & Nashville Turnpike
- The West Point landing and supply depot
- Approaches from Muldraugh Hill to the south



These sightlines were essential for detecting Confederate cavalry, river movement, or threats to the Union supply chain.

Why Sherman Chose This Ridge

General William Tecumseh Sherman ordered the construction of Fort Duffield in late 1861. His reasoning was simple:



- Whoever held this ridge controlled the river junction.
- The fort protected the supply line feeding his army to the south.
- The overlook provided early warning for any approach toward Louisville.

Sherman later wrote that losing Kentucky would have been “a fatal blow” to the Union. This ridge helped prevent that.

Daily Life on Watch Duty

Soldiers assigned to observation posts described:

- Bitter cold winds sweeping across the ridge
- Long hours scanning the valleys below
- Nights broken by alarms, false sightings, and distant noises
- A sense of isolation despite being close to town
- Relief when steamboats arrived with supplies from Louisville

Though Fort Duffield never saw a direct attack, the work done here protected the Union’s most important supply artery in the Western Theater.

Modern vs. 1861 Landscape

Today, the ridge is heavily forested. In 1861:

- The slopes were bare
- The ridge crest was open
- The view extended for miles
- The Salt River and Ohio River junction was clearly visible

Standing here now, it takes imagination — and the sketches in this packet — to see the landscape as the soldiers saw it.

Conclusion

The overlook at Station Six was not simply a scenic viewpoint. It was a strategic asset that helped secure Kentucky for the Union, protected Sherman’s supply lines, and provided early warning during a critical phase of the war. The soldiers who stood watch here shaped the course of the Western Theater through vigilance rather than battle.