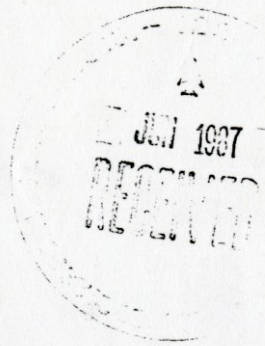


Martin Digg

VIRGINIA RESEARCH CENTER
FOR ARCHAEOLOGY



AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY
OF
CRICKET HILL
MATHEWS COUNTY, VIRGINIA
01-MT

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James River Institute for Archaeology, Inc.
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Jamestown Island, Virginia
May 1987

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ABSTRACT

A Phase I archaeological investigation was conducted at Fort Cricket Hill, a National Historic Landmark, located in Mathews County, Virginia. The investigations occurred from early February to mid-March 1987. Part of the landmark has been proposed for development related to the construction of the Gwynn's Island Boat-Tel by Mr. Robert Payne of Cobbs Creek, Virginia. The construction would alter a portion of the surviving earthwork associated with the July 1776 engagement between the forces of General Andrew Lewis and those of Lord Dunmore. Test holes were excavated across the 8.57 acre parcel at 30' intervals to determine the nature and extent of any areas of cultural activity associated with the military occupation. In addition, three test trenches were mechanically excavated through the part of the earthworks to be disturbed to reveal any construction data.

INTRODUCTION

Cricket Hill, an American Revolutionary War fort located in Mathews County on Milford Haven across from Gwynn's Island, is one of the few surviving remains of the War for Independence in Virginia outside of Yorktown. The hastily erected fort consisted of a long breastwork along the south shore of Milford Haven (Figure 1). The earthwork also contained several embrasures for artillery, which was directed at the forces of Lord John Murray, the Earl of Dunmore and last Royal Governor of Virginia, who had taken refuge and fortified Gwynn's Island. The battle, which was essentially an American artillery bombardment, was well-documented in contemporary newspaper articles and memoirs. Indeed, a sketch of the engagement is included in the Jefferson Papers (Figure 2), though it is not an eyewitness report, but apparently a map based on reports of the battle after the fact.¹

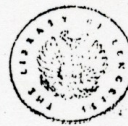
An aerial photograph of the area in 1964 prior to the construction of the United States Coast Guard Station shows a low earthwork extending from the Gwynn's Island Bridge east into the woods of what is now the property of Robert Payne (Figure 3). Much of this earthwork evidently was destroyed by the construction of the Coast Guard Station. The earthwork along the Payne property has a maximum height of 5'-6' and width averaging 22'. It is pierced by several openings, some obviously gun emplacements (Figure 4) and others of questionable origin.

The James River Institute for Archaeology, Inc., was contracted to conduct a field study on property referred to as the Gwynn's Island Boat-Tel. The project was solicited by Mr. Robert Payne after discussions with officials of the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission and the Mathews Historical Society in Mathews, Virginia. The project is located .1 mile northwest of Route 699 and



Figure 1. View of Cricket Hill breastwork on Payne property with archaeologists standing in gun emplacements. Facing east.

1776 JUNE-July



Rappahannock
river

Chesapeake Bay

Middlesex court

Suyones's plantation.

Guyon's island. abt 2000. acres.

W. Garyn's.

Milford haven.

Creek.

Creek.
Deep water.

3 — Breast work

These two breastworks of ours
about 500 yds from the enemy's works.

gulls may pass into Milford Haven quite up to the Enemy's breastworks like Kingston parish.
from the line of the ships, the point of land being pretty high & no large vessel can come into the mouth of
the harbour so as to look down Milford Haven.

[illegible]



Figure 3. 1964 aerial photograph of Cricket Hill vicinity, note low ridge (breastwork) extending east from bridge approach. Facing north.



Figure 4. Detail of cut through breastwork for gun embrasure. Facing north.

.2 mile east of the intersection of Route 699 and Route 223 in Cricket Hill, adjacent to the Milford Haven United States Coast Guard Station (Figure 5). Previous archaeological work at the site consisted of a survey in 1968 by E. F. Heite of the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission² and test excavations by Franklin H. Farmer in 1986, who located a concentration of late eighteenth-century artifacts on the eastern edge of the property (Figure 5).³

The site is located on a 5' contour and frequently water stands in the landward ditch behind the earthwork. Trees of pine, hickory, gum, and cedar cover the lot as does a thick undergrowth. Test units excavated during the 1987 survey recovered cultural material of the late eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries. No indication of structures, other than the earthwork relating to the 1776 engagement, were identified.

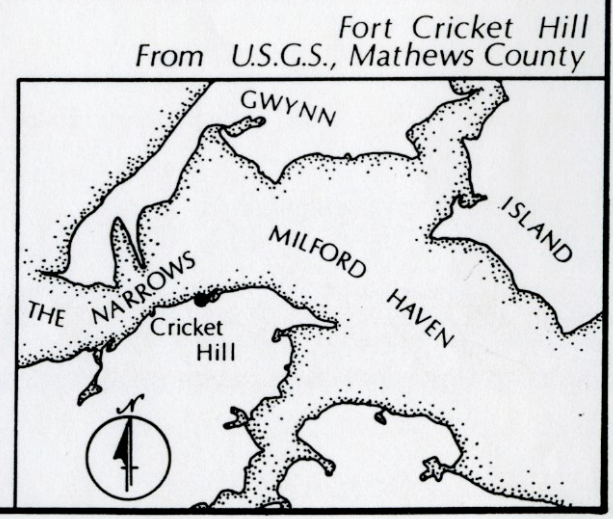
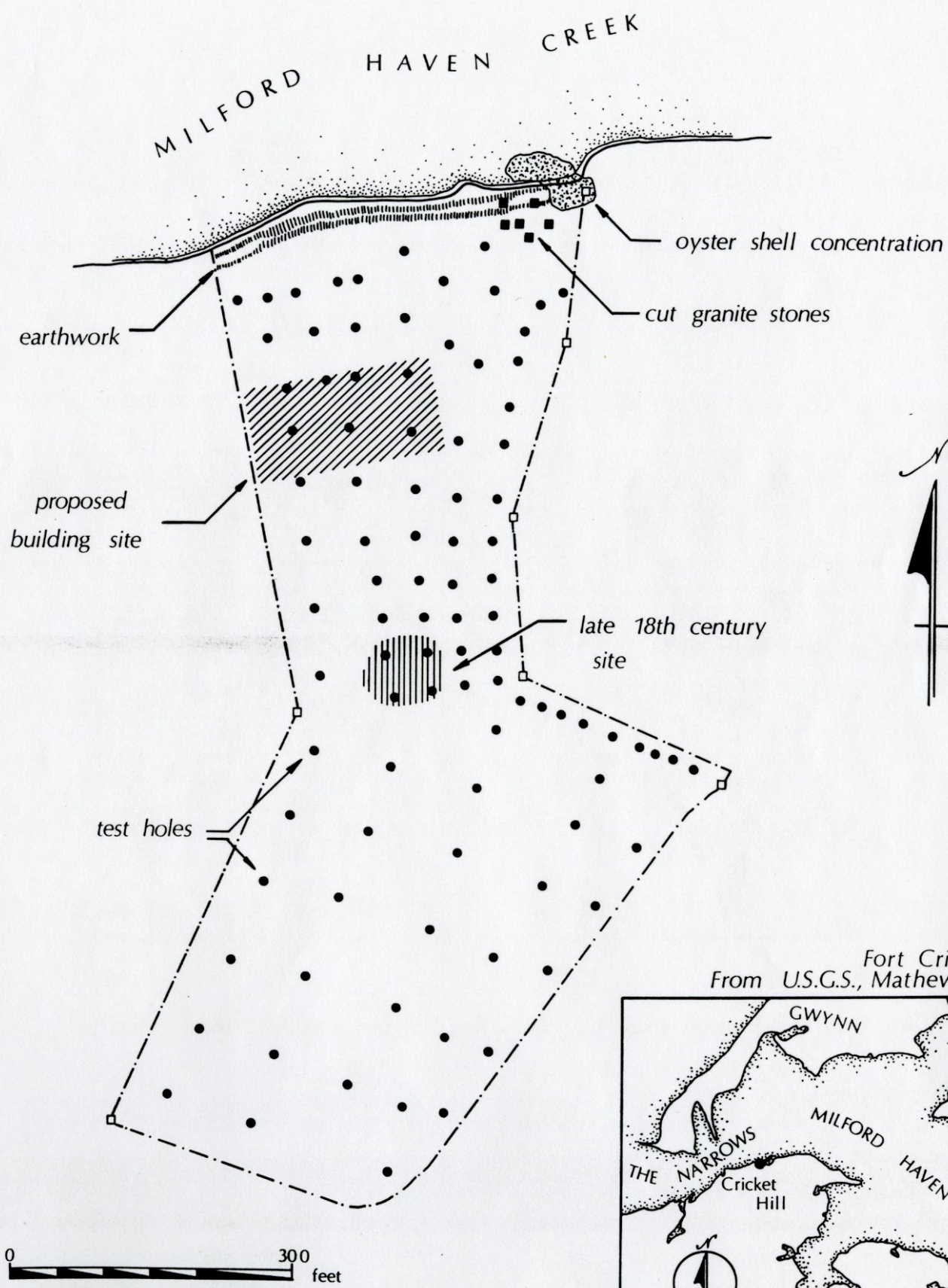


Figure 5. Location map and plan of excavated test holes in survey area.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On the 26th of May, 1776, several months after the burning of Norfolk, John Murray, fourth Earl of Dunmore and the last Colonial Governor of Virginia (1771-1775), sailed with his fleet which consisted of "one hundred and odd sail of large vessels" down the Elizabeth River.⁴ Among the vessels in the fleet were the frigates Liverpool, Fowey, Roebuck; two sloops of war, the Lady Charlotte and the Otter; and the flagship Dunmore.⁵ After maneuvering for a while in Hampton Roads, the fleet arrived off Gwynn's Island on the afternoon of the 27th. Captain Andrew Saape Hammond, commanding the Roebuck reported:

"The next morning, at daybreak we landed and took possession of the island, with our whole force, which with the Marines of the Squadron, did not amount to more than 200 effective men, so great had been the mortality among the negroes while at Tuckers Mills; However, we met with no opposition, and after marching quite thro' the island, returned to the point nearest the main land, (where it is not above 200 yards across) encamped the troops, and began to erect a fort against the enemy, who had began to gather from all quarters: and fired with musquetry upon the people at work but without doing us the least mischief: Being covered by the Fowey's guns on one side, and by two small Tenders (which I had sent into the Haven) on the other. The Otter and her tender immediately returned to cruize off the Capes, to prevent any of the Rebels vessels from getting in or out, and to give notice to vessels coming to us of our removal from Norfolk."⁶

Gwynn's Island did not prove to be the safe haven Dunmore had hoped for. His force, comprising about 500 men including negroes whom he had induced by false promises to leave their masters, was having severe difficulties. Edmund Pendleton, the Chairman of the Virginia Committee of Safety, wrote on the 1st of June to Thomas Jefferson; "Dunmore with 400 half starved motley soldiers on Gwynn's Island, and 2000 of our men on the main are looking at each other."⁷ On the 8th of June, Dixon and Hunter's Virginia Gazette reported;

"It is an undoubted fact that all the Tories who were in Lord Dunmore's service have left him, there not being half the fleet now at Gwynn's Island; where they are gone to is uncertain. This,

it is imagined, was occasioned by a fever which has raged with great fury amongst them for some time past, and from the funeral processions that have been seen there, very probably has proved fatal to some persons of distinction."⁸

On the days following the 27th of May, Lord Dunmore's forces cast up a battery of four embrasures, and a breastwork of "considerable extent," on the finger of land closest to the mainland. In addition, two batteries and a stockade fort were constructed higher up the haven, with the evident intention of making this his place of rendezvous while plundering the neighboring plantations.⁹ Dunmore's army was decimated by smallpox and typhoid fever and became a serious concern of the defenders of the island. On the 10th of June, Captain Hammond sent a communication to Commodore Sir Peter Parker with a request to rectify the problem:

"The island is certainly much too large for us to defend in our present weak situation, if the enemy should make any serious attack upon us, but if we had a body of 200 troops more, I do not think it would be in the power of the Rebels to dispossess us, and I confess now that we are here, I am very desirous of keeping it; as I don't know a better place in Virginia for the headquarters of a fleet and an army... If you can send us any small guns, cohorns or howitzers, they will be of the utmost use to us."¹⁰

Aid to the beleaguered 2200 acre island was apparently precluded when the Americans captured two British ships. One of the English ships siezed by Captain James Barron was the Oxford which carried 220 Highlanders on their way to reinforce Dunmore.¹¹

The HMS Fowey, which earlier facilitated the escape of Lord Dunmore from Williamsburg, was sent to Annapolis for Maryland's Governor Eden, who was at "full liberty to depart peaceably with his effects."¹² When the Fowey returned to Gwynn's Island on June 29, Lord Dunmore's pitiful stronghold had the honor of supporting two Royal Governors and their "Retinues."

Deaths on the island increased daily and soon Lord Dunmore was forced to confess to the War Department in London that he had been unable to set the state

aflame with slave uprisings and assassinations due to the "horrid disorder" which continued to cripple his force.¹³ Even less to his satisfaction was the swarming of the "crickets," Dunmore's derisive term for the rebels, across the dangerously short expanse of water separating him from the mainland.

On the mainland a different scenario was taking shape. When George Washington was appointed Commander-In-Chief of the Continental Army, he recommended Andrew Lewis as one of the major generals. Lewis was overlooked and accepted a lesser rank, that of a brigadier general commanding a detachment of the Continental Army stationed near Williamsburg. Captain O'Hickey d'Arundel, who arrived earlier in April, was given command of the Williamsburg Artillery Company. Together, they were sent by the Virginia Committee of Safety to dislodge Dunmore.¹⁴

On Monday the 8th of July, under cover of darkness, General Lewis, commanding a brigade of Virginia troops with Colonel Adam Stephen, reached the camp near Gwynn's Island and erected two batteries. The western battery, closest the enemy ships, bore two eighteen-pounders while the eastern battery contained two nine-pounders and three six-pounders. The nine-pounders were trained on the enemy breastworks and shipping; the six-pounders on the stockade fort and two batteries.¹⁵ The British forces were reported to include:

"...three British tenders; One a sloop, (The Lady Charlotte), mounting six carriage-guns; a schooner of two carriages, six swivels and cohorn; and a pilot-boat, badly armed, who had orders from Captain Hammond of the Roebuck to prevent our boats passing over to the island, and to annoy the Rebels by every means in their power."¹⁶

At eight o'clock in the morning of July 9, General Lewis ignited the bombardment by applying a match to the first cannon, an eighteen-pounder, himself. "The Dunmore being the nearest to us, at a distance of about 500 yards," received the first salvo of the eighteen-pounders. So true was the aim that the ball "passed through her hull, and did considerable damage." The eighteen-pounders roared again, and a second shot "cut her boatswain in twain;" a third, a nine-

pounder from the eastern battery, "shivered one of her timbers," a splinter from which imbedded itself in Lord Dunmore's leg, rendering him wounded and smashing his valuable china (one of the few possessions removed from the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg during his escape).¹⁷

At this point, both Rebel batteries opened a "furious attack upon the enemies shipping, camp, and fortifications." The batteries raked the Dunmore fore and aft which suffered three dead and many wounded. After a total of ten shot was fired into her, the Dunmore's crew cut her cables and hauled off with the aid of two smaller vessels.¹⁸

The deadly onslaught of shot was now directed on the Otter, anchored next to the Dunmore. She was

"expected would have taken her birth, but the first shot we gave her, took place supposed between wind and water, and she immediately slipped her cable likewise, and hauled out on a careen, without firing a gun."

Subsequently, almost every ship slipped it's moorings and endeavored to escape.¹⁹

Meanwhile, the Continental forces experienced their first loss. Captain Arundel, inventor of a wooden mortar, determined to test his invention against the objections of General Lewis and Colonel Stephen, became the first and only American casualty when it exploded. Lieutenant Denny replaced Captain Arundel and directed the fire of the lower battery while acting Captain Charles Harrison commanded the battery of two eighteen-pounders. The eighteen-pounders fired with great effect, raking the whole fleet. Acting Commander Denny's battery soon "silenced the enemy at the point, knocking down several tents" and opening "terrible breaches" in the stockade fort.²⁰ At half past nine, the Rebel guns fell silent, anticipating Lord Dunmore's surrender. At midday, with no signal of surrender being given, Lewis opened up both batteries with "double vigor" and "nothing prevented our pushing to the island, during the cannonade, but the want of a vessel."²¹

General Lewis, determined to take possession of the island, was forced to wait until morning, while his men collected as many small vessels as possible from the neighboring creeks. That evening Lewis gave orders to Captain Harrison to take command of two brass field-pieces and set up a battery on what was then called Wind Mill Point, "to attack the tender that lay there" and draw cover for the morning crossing.²²

On the morning of July 10, Captain Harrison's field-pieces began firing on the tenders "which he galled so much," that The Lady Charlotte escaped up a small creek on the island, where her crew abandoned the vessel.²³ The sloop in the haven, however, ran aground "in reach of our cannon;" General Lewis's orders to Captain Smith of the 7th regiment were to take possession of the vessels "which was done with alacrity." The pilot-boat, which was poorly armed, made no resistance and was quickly boarded.²⁴

General Lewis then ordered Colonel M'Clanahan to land on the island and take possession with a force of 200 men, which was accomplished as "expeditiously as our small vessels would admit."²⁵ The force wading ashore gazed upon a scene of sickening horror that only the eyewitness accounts may fully interpret. From the Virginia Gazette of the 29th of July, 1776:

"On our arrival, we found the enemy had evacuated the place with the greatest precipitation, and were struck with horror at the number of dead bodies, in a state of putrefaction, strewed all the way from their battery to Cherry Point, about two miles in length, with a shovel full of earth upon them; others gasping for life; and some had crawled to the water edge, who could only make known their distress by beckoning to us. By the small-pox, and other malignant disorders which have raged on board the fleet for many months past it is clear they have lost, since their arrival at Gwyn's Island, near five hundred souls. I myself counted one hundred and thirty graves, or rather holes loosely covered over with earth, close together, many of them large enough to hold a corporal's guard. One in the middle was neatly done up with turf, and is supposed to contain the remains of the late Lord Gosport. Many were burnt alive in brush huts, which in their confusion, had got on fire. In short, such a scene of misery, distress, and cruelty, my eyes never beheld; for which

the authors, one may reasonably conclude, never can make atonement in this world. The enemy left behind them, in their battery, a double fortified nine-pounder, a great part of their luggage, with several tents and marquees, beside the three tenders, with their cannon, small arms, &c. Also the anchors and cables of the Dunmore, Otter, and many others, to the amount, it is supposed of twelve hundred pounds. On their leaving the island, they burnt some valuable vessels which had got aground. Mr. John Grymes' effects on the island have fallen into our hands, consisting in thirty-five negroes, horses, cattle, and furniture.

Major Byrd, on the approach of our canoes to the island, was huddled into a cart in a very sick and low condition, it is said, and carried down to Cherry Point, where he embarked... We had our information from one of his (Dunmore's) people that came ashore after the engagement, and taken by our scouts. He likewise said, that many were killed in the fleet, which had sustained some thousand pounds worth of damage. The Fowey and Roebuck were the lowermost ships, besides which there were one hundred and odd sail of large vessels, which took their departure on Thursday afternoon, and are supposed to have gone into Potomac."²⁶

Upon Lord Dunmore's departure from Gwynn's Island, Purdie's Virginia Gazette in August reported;

"By advices from Hampton we learn that last Wednesday morning (7 August 1776) the Right Hon. the Earl of Dunmore, Viscount Fincastle, and Baron Murray of Blair, Mouilli, and Tilliment, after dividing his fleet, and burning ten or a dozen vessels, took leave of the Capes of Virginia, where he has, for more than a twelvemonth past, perpetuated crimes that would even have disgraced the noted pirate BLACK BEARD."²⁷

And thus, the departure of Lord Dunmore the last Royal Governor of Virginia was made permanent, as John Murray never set foot on Virginia soil for the remainder of his life.

METHODOLOGY

The western property line served as a reference for the Phase 1 survey during which 97 test holes were excavated at approximately 30' intervals across the Payne lot (Figure 5). Each shovel-dug test hole measured approximately 2.5' x 2.5' and was excavated to subsoil. Soil from the test holes was carefully trowel-sorted rather than screened which would have been a tedious operation due to the extremely wet conditions at Cricket Hill. Test units were numbered sequentially beginning with 44MT7/2/1. The number following the first slash was used to designate the Phase 1 testing while the subsequent number after the second slash refers to individual test units (44MT7/2/2, 44MT7/2/3, etc.).

The portion of the breastwork threatened by the impending project was photographed and mapped by a certified land surveyor (Figure 6). It was further examined by cutting three trenches through it using a backhoe. The cuts would reveal stratigraphic and construction information in addition to investigating certain features of the breastwork which were of questionable origin. One trench was placed through an intact section of the breastwork to get a typical profile, while the other two trenches cut enigmatic mounds. The machine cuts were recorded, drawn, and photographed.

The waterfront of the property was periodically inspected at low tide to check for eroding features or artifact concentrations.

RESULTS

Test Holes

A densely knitted forest humus with root fiber and black to brown friable loam was encountered 0.3 to 0.7 feet below the surface horizon in each of the test units excavated during the Phase 1 investigations. Below the forest humus was a white to light grey horizon of sand ranging 0.7 to 1.2 feet in thickness which was likely an alluvial deposit. This sand layer effectively sealed a sterile subsoil which appeared as a orange to brown sandy-silty clay grading to an orange clay at approximately 1.7 foot below modern grade. Both clay layers seemingly are subsoil.

Although most of the test holes were devoid of artifacts, one hole yielded a small amount of cultural material. Ceramic sherds representing late eighteenth and nineteenth-century occupation were found in a layer of dark grey sand underlying the forest humus about 20' to the landward side of the western half of the breastwork. The artifact-bearing unit contained charcoal flecks, brick flecks and fragments, and oyster shell and may be a feature, however, this area will not be impacted. The survey was unable to corroborate the findings of Dr. Farmer's 1986 testing, which discovered cultural material along the center western edge of the property. Artifacts reported from this area include: lead-glazed earthenware, redware, Buckley ware, white saltglazed stoneware, creamware, pearlware, pipe stem and pipe bowl fragments, nails, a lead ball, "rough" gun flints and flakes, and wine bottle glass. All this material was found in an area approximately 40' in diameter.

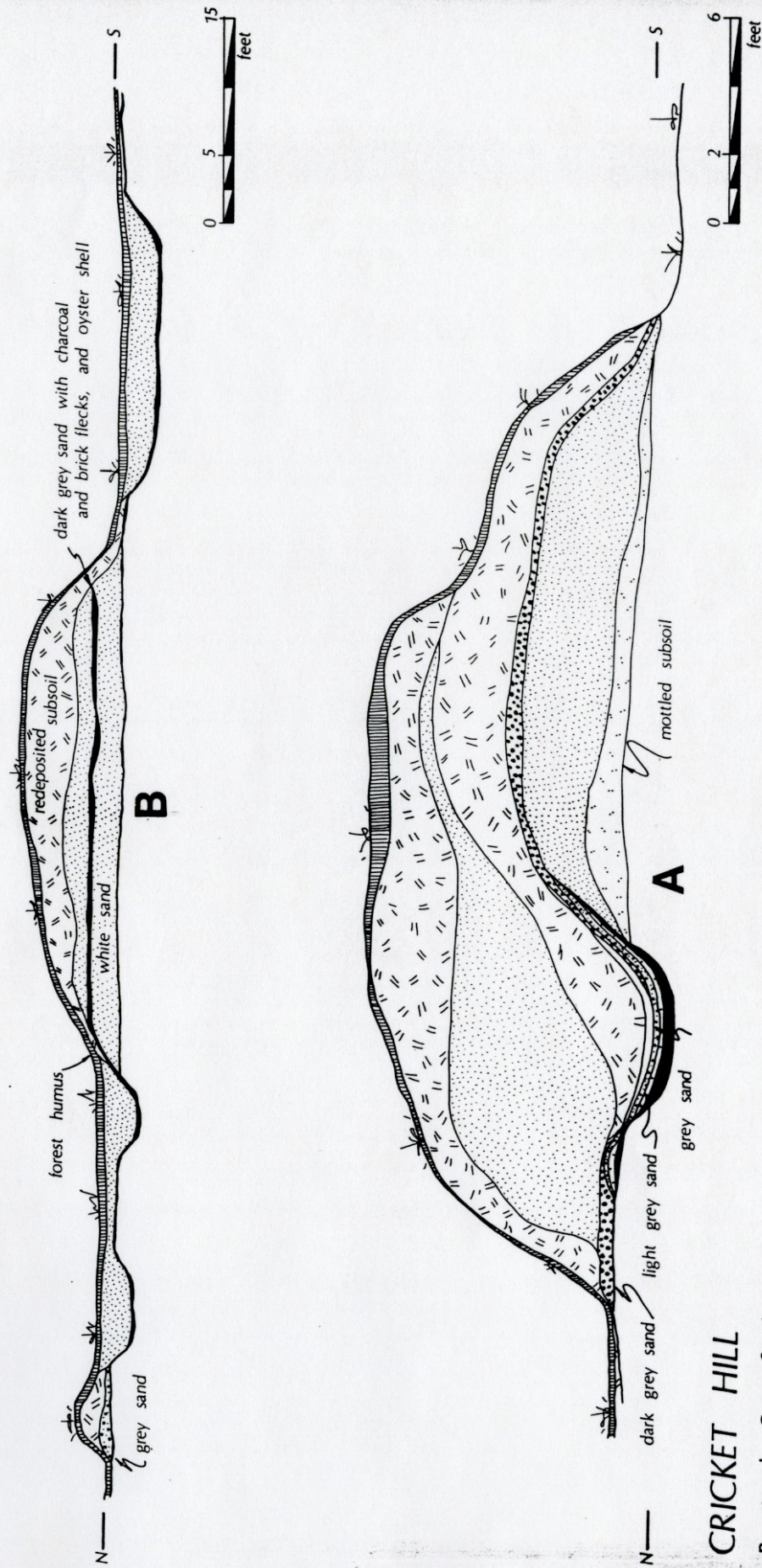
Machine-cut Trenches

Trench A

Trench A was cut through an original part of the breastwork that is scheduled for future removal. It was located approximately 15' west of the westernmost gun emplacement, which will be preserved. The trench extended beyond the front and rear of the breastwork so as to reveal any related ditches.

The profile of trench A (Figure 7) revealed not surprisingly that the breastwork was composed principally of thick layers of white sand and orange clay, both naturally occurring soil types in the vicinity. There also appears to be a shallow ditch on the landward side of the breastwork. About 1' deep, the ditch is of uncertain purpose and may not be man-made but the result of water running off the breastwork and eroding the base of the fortification.

The profile also shows an apparent ditch some 2' wide and 1' deep on the north side of the breastwork, covered by thick layers of white sand and clay. One explanation of this configuration of fill is that a smaller earthen wall was thrown up to protect musket-firing soldiers and later enlarged to protect artillery. A second possibility is that the stratigraphy simply represents two different episodes of construction that were separated by time, but not necessarily related to different military activities. Few artifacts were observed in any of the layers comprising the breastwork, however, the dark grey sand layer did contain a small amount of brick fragments and flecks, oyster shell bits, a hand-wrought nail, and a pipe bowl fragment; perhaps suggesting a time lapse between periods of construction. Further, the heavier fill on the north side may merely be reinforcing material, as the north face of the breastwork faced the enemy and would incur the brunt of cannon fire.



CRICKET HILL

Breastwork Cross Section
Test Trenches A and B

Trench B

Trench B was located across a jog that deviated from the apparent linear configuration of the breastwork near the western boundary of the Payne property. The trench was excavated to subsoil in an effort to determine whether this feature was original or a product of modern landscaping which is evident along the Coast Guard-Payne property line.

No artifacts were recovered to indicate the age of this feature nor was the stratigraphy "jumbled" as in trench C that inferred a recent vintage. The stratigraphy was very similar to that exposed in trench A, including a thin mid-stratum of dark grey sand with a modicum of cultural material as well as ditches on both sides of the mound (Figure 7).

The difficulty in associating this embrasure-like feature to the fortifications is that it has an open, and thus exposed, side to the north or facing Gwynn's Island. This opening, however, may be a recent phenomenon.

Trench C

This trench was cut through another mysterious mound to determine its origin. The presence of decaying organic material and an oil filter indicate it is modern.

CONCLUSIONS

The site of Cricket Hill has the distinction of being the last vestige of colonial rule in Virginia, the first engagement of Virginia continental artillery, and a significant propaganda victory for the American forces. It is likely that the breastworks represent the remains of the lower battery commanded by Lt. Denny following the death of Captain D'Arundel and contained the two nine-pound cannon and the three six-pound cannon. If this is that battery, then it was from here that the nine pound shell was fired which wounded Lord Dunmore and "smashed his valuable china about his ears."

The remains of ten to a dozen ships which got aground and were burned by Dunmore's men are yet to be located. In addition, the battery located at what was then called lower Windmill Point has not been documented.

The physical remains of Cricket Hill have been severely compromised by a number of forces. Catastrophic remodeling of the general topography has taken place, partly due to tidal erosion, but more probably related to the intermittent dredging of Milford Haven and the nautical traffic associated with the Coast Guard Station. Certainly the construction of the bridge in 1936 and the Coast Guard Station in 1967 along with development on both the mainland and the island have contributed greatly to the destruction of archaeological remains of the Battle of Cricket Hill. If any areas of integrity exist to shed more information on the fortifications of the continental military forces, it lies in that portion of the Denny battery identified as not in danger of destruction.

It is strongly recommended that the remaining portion of the earthwork be preserved. It is the last above ground remnant of the battle and should not be altered in any fashion. The breastwork appears originally to have followed the waterfront across the Payne lot and extending into the Coast Guard Station property.

This is suggested by the sketch map of the battle and the pre-Coast Guard Station aerial photograph. Much of the breastwork was leveled with the construction of the Coast Guard Station, though a trace may still be seen at the junction of the Payne and Coast Guard Station lots. This leveling may also have opened up the embrasure-like feature examined by trench B. If this is correct, and the stratigraphy suggests that it is original construction, then it is very likely this was an artillery battery.

The status of the late eighteenth-century site is problematical. It was not found during the initial survey. After consultation with Dr. Farmer regarding the precise location of the site, a second field check could still not locate the site. Dr. Farmer may have encountered shallow discrete deposits or a plowzone concentration. Clearly, this elusive site is not substantial, as both his survey and the current work revealed that most of the property was devoid of cultural material. Further, the apparent location of the site is not within the area to be impacted.

NOTES

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Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks

File 47-15. Department of Conservation and Historic Resources,
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APPENDIX A

ARTIFACT INVENTORY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SPECIMEN CATALOG

Site No. MT7 -Name of Site: Cricket HillCounty: Mathews

Collector/Donor: _____

Date: April 1987

Cataloger: _____

Date: _____

Unit Number	Comments	Description
1/1	surface finds, waterfront oyster shell deposit C18	Coarseware, Buckley: pan base Coarseware, Staffordshire: pan base
	c.1780-1850	American blue and gray stoneware: jar rim, base & body fragments, 7 Brown stoneware, American, 19th century: bottle or jar fragments, 2 (1); base fragment Unidentified iron strap

— ARCHAEOLOGICAL SPECIMEN CATALOG - CONT. SHEET

Site No. MT7 -Site Name: Cricket Hill

Unit Number	Comments	Description
1/2	surface, east of west gun emplace- ment	
	C18 (pre 1780)	Rhenish stoneware: tankard rim

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SPECIMEN CATALOG - CONT. SHEET

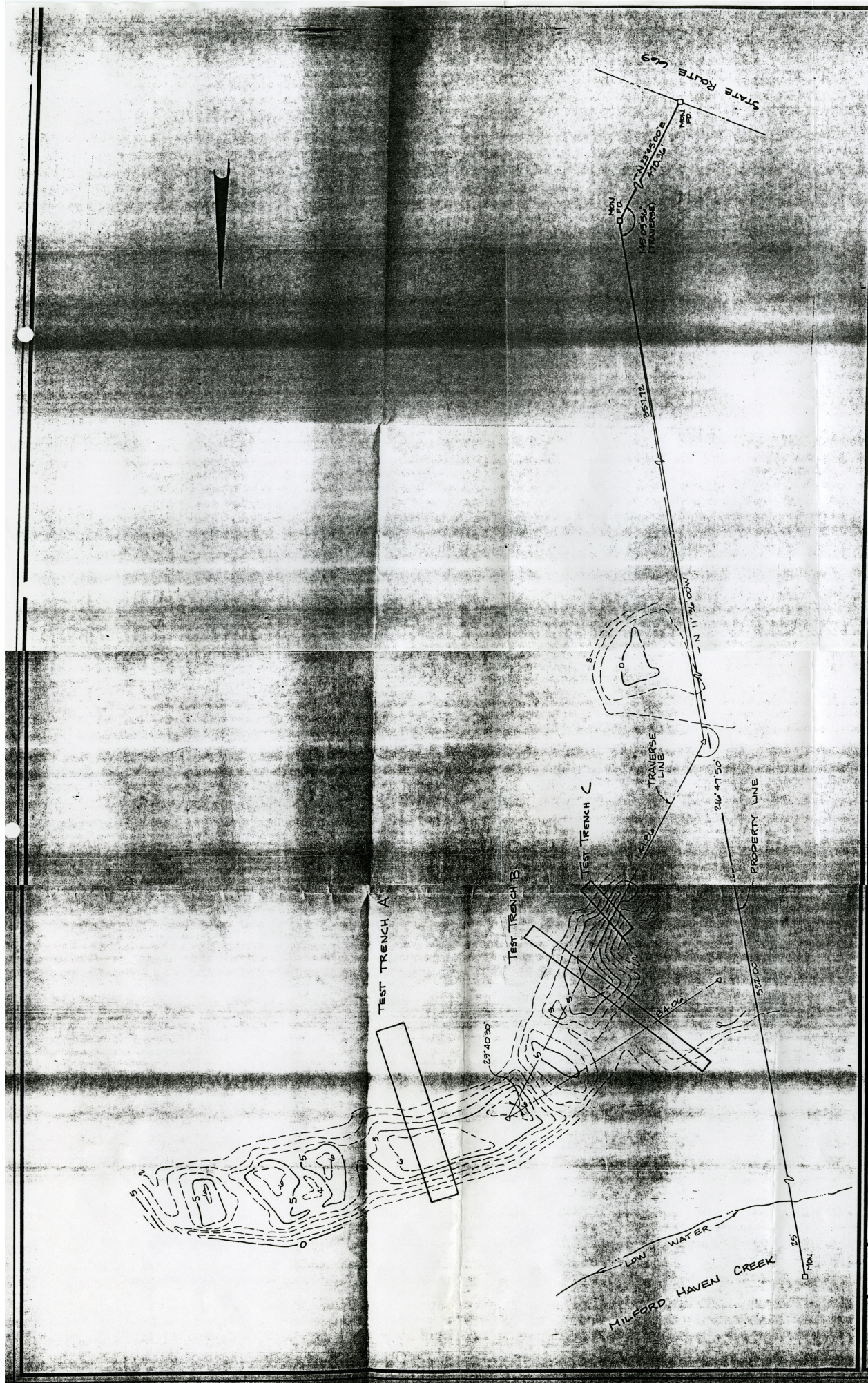
Site No. MT7Site Name: Cricket Hill

Unit Number	Comments	Description
2/61A	test hole on east edge of property p. 1780	Pearlware: plate fragments, 3 Slipware, Pennsylvania: dish fragment Whiteware, hand-painted: plate fragment Brick fragments Iron fragments Oyster shell

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SPECIMEN CATALOG - CONT. SHEET

Site No. MT7 -Site Name: Cricket Hill

UNIT Number	Comments	Description
2/61B	test hole on east edge of property	Coarseware, Pennsylvania: pan rim Slipware, Pennsylvania: jar rim Brick fragment



THE DEYOUNG-JOHNSON GROUP, INC.
ENGINEERS ARCHITECTS SURVEYORS
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Figure 6