

NR listed 8/18/92

OMB No. 1024-0018

NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 8-86)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

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1. Name of Property

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historic name: Battery A Site, Battle of Helena

other name/site number: N/A

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2. Location

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street & number:
NW of intersection of Adams St. & Columbia St.

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Helena

vicinity: N/A

state: AR county: Phillips code: AR 107 zip code: 72342

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3. Classification

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Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Site

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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4. State/Federal Agency Certification
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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. _____ See continuation sheet.

Cathryn H. Byrd _____ 6-29-92
Signature of certifying official Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. _____ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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5. National Park Service Certification
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I, hereby certify that this property is:

- _____ entered in the National Register _____
_____ See continuation sheet.
- _____ determined eligible for the _____
National Register _____
- _____ See continuation sheet.
- _____ determined not eligible for the _____
National Register _____
- _____ removed from the National Register _____
- _____ other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper Date
of Action

=====
6. Function or Use
=====

Historic: Defense Sub: Fortification, Battle Site

Current : Vacant/Not in Use Sub: _____

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7. Description
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Architectural Classification:

N/A

Other Description: N/A_____

Materials: foundation N/A_____ roof N/A_____
walls N/A_____ other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

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8. Statement of Significance
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Statewide_____.

Applicable National Register Criteria: A_____

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A_____

Areas of Significance: Military_____

Period(s) of Significance: 1863_____

Significant Dates: N/A_____

Significant Person(s): N/A_____

Cultural Affiliation: N/A_____

Architect/Builder: N/A_____

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.
X See continuation sheet.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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X See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: Approximately four

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A	<u>15</u>	<u>720940</u>	<u>3824210</u>	B	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____

____ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: ____ See continuation sheet.

Beginning at a point approximately 400 feet northwest of the intersection of Adams Street and Columbia Street and approximately 100 feet west of the western curbline of Columbia Street (a point that is approximately 25 feet northwest of the nearest house), proceed 400 feet west. Then proceed 400 feet north. Then proceed 400 feet east. Then proceed south to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification: ____ See continuation sheet.

This boundary includes all of the property historically associated with this resource that retains its integrity.

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11. Form Prepared By

=====

Name/Title: Don Baker, Plans Officer / Patrick Zollner, National Register
Historian

Organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program Date: 06/26/92

Street & Number: 225 E. Markham, Suite 300 Telephone: (501) 324-9346

City or Town: Little Rock State: AR ZIP: 72201

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Description

Battery A and Battery B both consisted of earthen fortifications on Crowley's Ridge hilltops overlooking roads leading into Helena from the north and west. Rifle entrenchments were constructed along the western slopes of each hillside, with a timber abatis below the rifle pits. Battery A, atop Rightor Hill, overlooked the Old St. Francis Road (also known as the Wire Road) and the Sterling Road, while Battery B, on Carvill Hill, overlooked the Upper St. Francis Road. The military purpose of both batteries is easily apparent through their physical relationships to existing roads, their elevations, and the visibility of other battery sites from their crests.

Battery B has been substantially altered over the years through residential development and excavation; though only a small portion of Carvill Hill remains, the actual crest of the hill remains intact as an important reminder of its significance in military history. Battery A is more intact; while residential development has approached Rightor Hill, the actual hill remains substantially unaffected and pristine. Evidence of rifle entrenchments and earthen fortifications still remain at the crest of the hill, substantially protected by the difficult terrain and substantial undergrowth. Historic markers commemorate both sites on nearby roads, with concise yet descriptive statements of the individual batteries' roles in the Battle of Helena.

[†]Indeed, the entire Battle of Helena is well interpreted through historic commemorative markers all over the city and its outskirts.

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Summary

Batteries A and B are eligible under Criterion A with local significance due to their direct associations with the attempts of the Union forces holding Helena to defend it against the Confederate assault that occurred on July 4th, 1863.

Elaboration

Helena and the Trans-Mississippi West

The Battle of Helena took place on one of the darkest days the Confederacy would know; on July 4, 1863, General Robert E. Lee began his retreat from Gettysburg, and the strategic Mississippi River town of Vicksburg fell to Major General Ulysses S. Grant. Overshadowed by these major Confederate setbacks, the unsuccessful rebel assault on the well-fortified Union garrison at Helena was significant in that it reaffirmed Union control over eastern and northeastern Arkansas, and made possible the Union capture of Little Rock later that year. Lieutenant General Edmund Kirby-Smith, commander of the Confederacy's Trans-Mississippi Department in Shreveport, Louisiana, recognized Helena's significance to the South's war effort:

"Helena is the point to be looked to; it is the strategic point in that section, and, if a favorable opportunity offers for securing its possession it should be improved."

Helena was an important strategic point on the Mississippi River during the Civil War. Located at the southern tip of Crowley's Ridge where it meets the Mississippi, Helena was situated on the only high ground on the western bank of the river south of St. Louis. Union troops occupied the city in July, 1862, and established a major supply depot for General Grant's siege of Vicksburg further downriver. Union forces in Helena, under the command of General Benjamin Prentiss, had developed a ring of defenses around the city to the west; four batteries on a series of hills and elevations guarding the northern, western, and southern approaches to the city. Battery A, the northernmost outpost, sat atop Rightor Hill overlooking the Sterling Road and the Old St. Francis Road. A few hundred yards to the southwest was Battery B on Carvill Hill overlooking the Upper St. Francis Road. Battery C, on what was then known as Graveyard Hill and later known as Reservoir Hill, guarded another approach to the city, and the southernmost outpost, Battery D atop Hindman Hill, overlooked the Upper Little

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From each of the four batteries, defensive Union forces had a clear view of Fort Curtis, the Union fort and depot west of the actual city.^{**} The Union garrison had also constructed a series of rifle pits lying in front of the four batteries, as well as a series of abatis, a timber obstruction designed to impede the advance of infantry. At the time of the Battle of Helena, Fort Curtis was home to 4,129 troops; a total of eight field artillery pieces (two on each of the four batteries); three 2-pounder guns carried by the 1st Indiana Cavalry; and ten other guns, six belonging to the 3rd Battery of the Iowa Light Artillery and four to Battery K of the 1st Missouri Light Artillery. The Mississippi River, by this time under fairly solid Union control, protected the city to the east, and the Union gunboat Tyler added further defensive firepower. The Tyler's port and starboard naval guns each threw eight-inch time-fused shells, and the ship also sported a 30-pounder Parrott rifle mounted on the Tyler's stern. It is estimated that at least 600 Confederates were killed or wounded during the Battle of Helena by the Tyler's shells alone

The Confederate Movement on Helena

In May, 1863, Lieutenant General Theophilus H. Holmes, commander of the District of Arkansas in Little Rock, began to develop plans to attack and recapture Helena from its Union occupiers and to cut the supply lines for Grant's Vicksburg campaign. On June 17, Holmes met with Major General Sterling Price and General John S. Marmaduke in Jacksonport to plan the assault on Helena, and five days later most of Price's division and Marmaduke's cavalry left Jacksonport with orders to rendezvous in Cotton Plant, fifty miles northwest of Helena. Brigadier General James Fagan's brigade left Little Rock by rail and steamboat for DeVall's Bluff, where they would march to Helena via Clarendon. Meanwhile, Brigadier General L. Marsh Walker's cavalry closely patrolled the approaches to Helena so as to keep any news of the Confederate movements from reaching Prentiss.

Poor weather, impassable roads, and a shortage of forage hindered the Confederate advance. On the 29th of June, Price's infantry camped at Oakland, while Marmaduke's cavalry pushed ahead to the town of Moro, 30 miles northwest of Helena. General Holmes, traveling with Fagan's brigade, meanwhile, remained on schedule, and by the 29th were encamped at Trenton in western Phillips

[†]Batteries C and D are already listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

^{**}Fort Curtis was located where the First Baptist Church now stands at Perry and Franklin.

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County, just 17 miles west of Helena.

On July 2, Price's weary troops rendezvoused with Fagan's forces at Lick Creek, west of Helena, and the next morning Holmes, Price, Walker, Fagan, and Marmaduke met in the Allen Polk farmhouse five miles west of Helena to discuss plans for the attack the following day. Holmes issued his general orders outlining the plan of attack on the Union garrison. Price's troops, with his brigades commanded by Brigadier Generals Dandridge McRae and Mosby M. Parsons were to advance by way of the Little Rock Road and attack Battery C atop Graveyard Hill, while Fagan's brigade was to attack Battery D atop Hindman Hill. North of Helena, Marmaduke's cavalry was to dismount and capture Battery A atop Rightor Hill, with the support of Walker's cavalry on Sterling Road. Once Battery A was captured, Walker's cavalry was to occupy the city.

The success of Holmes' plan hinged on the three attacks being launched simultaneously at daybreak on the morning of July 4. With 7,646 troops at his command, almost twice the number of the Union defenders, Holmes had every reason to expect to take Helena. Unfortunately for the Confederates, Major General Price misunderstood this portion of the plan and would not begin his attack for more than an hour after the commanders, well past daybreak. By midnight on the morning of July 4, the Confederate troops were headed toward their respective staging areas from which they would begin their attacks on the Union garrison.

Major General Benjamin Prentiss, a veteran of the Battle of Shiloh and commander of the Union garrison at Helena, had received intelligence reports of a possible attack on Helena as early as June 24, but at first he placed little credence in the rumors. By late June, however, Prentiss' scouts began to report the increased surveillance by Marsh Walker's cavalry, prompting the Union commander to change his mind about the potential for a Confederate attack. Prentiss ordered the construction of the four batteries, the series of rifle pits, breastworks near the city and within the batteries' perimeter, the construction of the abatis in a perimeter outside the batteries and rifle pits, and the felling of many trees to obstruct the principal roads into the city. In addition, the commander put the garrison under a state of alert and ordered that all troops be placed under arms until further notice. Soldiers from the 33rd Missouri were posted at each of the four batteries, ready to man the cannons in case of a Rebel attack.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Commander S. Ledyard Phelps, the Union naval officer in charge of the Mississippi River between New Madrid, Missouri, and Helena, dispatched three vessels to help protect Fort Curtis; the timber-clad Tyler, commanded by Lieutenant Commander James M. Pritchett, the ram General Bragg, and the tin-clad Hastings. However, by July 3, only the Tyler had made it to Helena.

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The advancing Confederate forces had not anticipated the felled trees blocking the roads into Helena, and their movements were delayed for a time in the early morning hours. General Fagan's cavalry had neglected to even bring any axes to remove the obstructions, and Fagan was forced to abandon his artillery, his ammunition train, or even his company's horses along the upper Little Rock Road. The entire brigade, officers included, was forced to dismount and make their way toward Battery D on foot; they reached the Union fortifications by 4:05 a.m. Price's column left camp at midnight and followed a trail that local guides told them would lead to Graveyard Hill, the site of Battery C. The troops groped their way through a maze of steep hills and treacherous ravines in the pre-dawn darkness; like Fagan, they were forced to abandon their artillery due to the difficult terrain.

North of town, Marmaduke's cavalry left camp at about 10:30 on the night of July 3, and approached the city down the old St. Francis road until they were approximately two miles from town. Marmaduke ordered his troops to dismount, and detailed one-fourth of his men to hold the horses while the rest advanced. Further down the road, however, Marmaduke's advance was blocked by the felled troops left by the Union defenders. Local guides then proceeded to get Marmaduke's troops lost, and they were forced to halt until daybreak. Meanwhile, Marsh Walker's brigade, advancing down the Sterling Road, was similarly halted at daybreak by felled trees on the Sterling Road.

The Battle of Helena

The Union troops at Fort Curtis, still on alert, began to hear occasional musket shots from sentries around 3:30 a.m., and soon thereafter Prentiss received word that Battery D was under attack. Fagan's men had attacked at the first sign of daybreak and succeeded in driving the Union defenders from their first line of rifle pits, then halted their advance up the steep ascent to rest and regroup. At Fort Curtis, Prentiss ordered his troops to assume their battle stations. Because Price had misinterpreted his order to attack Graveyard Hill at daybreak, the Union defenders were able to train the guns of Battery C as well as those of Battery D on Fagan's column. Fagan's troops continued their slow advance up the steep slope of Hindman Hill toward Battery D, and by 7 a.m. had captured three more rows of rifle pits, in part because Price had finally attacked Graveyard Hill and Fagan no longer had to worry about the guns of Battery C.

Further north, Marmaduke's dismounted troops were halted in their advance about 200 yards from the crest of Rightor Hill by the guns of Battery A, manned by elements of the 33rd Missouri. Marmaduke attempted to maintain his position, clashing with troops of the 29th Iowa, while he waited for his artillery to be brought up through the fallen trees blocking the Old St. Francis Road. While the Confederates awaited the arrival of their artillery, Marmaduke deployed his

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cavalrymen on the ridges flanking both sides of the Old St. Francis Road, where they took shelter behind trees and stumps and exchanged fire with the Union soldiers atop Rightor Hill. Meanwhile Battery B, manned by elements of the 33rd Missouri, defended the Old St. Francis Road and fired on McRae's soldiers advancing on Battery C. Marsh Walker's cavalry, meanwhile, maintained its position north of the Sterling Road, prepared to storm the city should Battery A fall.

General Prentiss placed Colonel Samuel A. Rice in charge of the Union troops holding the right flank of the Helena perimeter. The 29th and 36th Iowa were sent to reinforce the 33rd Missouri manning the guns of Battery A. Marmaduke's soldiers had pushed through the Union outposts north of Battery A, and were beginning to dig in on the ridges north of Battery A; Rice was fearful of the prospects of holding Rightor Hill should the Confederates bring up their artillery. Rice sent the 29th Iowa on the offensive against Marmaduke, while holding the 36th Iowa in the rifle pits atop Rightor Hill, then sent the 28th Wisconsin to support Battery B.

Confusion in Major General Price's ranks crippled the Confederate attack. Price did not order his troops to resume their march until at least an hour after both Fagan and Marmaduke had begun their attacks. His two brigade commanders, Parsons and McRae, failed to maintain communications with one another and failed to attack, each expecting the order to come from the other. When Price's forces finally regrouped and began their attack, they stormed Graveyard Hill under fire from Batteries B, C, and D.^{***} Against Parsons' and McRae's assault, the 33rd Missouri infantry defending Battery C were ordered to spike their guns and retreat, and Graveyard Hill fell to the Confederate advance. The retreating Union forces, under Prentiss' second in command, Brigadier General Frederick Salomon, formed a new defensive line 250 yards east of the crest of Graveyard Hill.

Before General Price could have his own artillery moved up from his rear to defend Battery C and fire on Fort Curtis, Prentiss ordered the guns of Batteries A, B, and D, as well as the Tyler's artillery turned on the Confederate enclave. In the confusion, General Holmes disregarded the standard chain of command and ordered one of Parson's regimental commanders to attack Fort Curtis. The other commanders misunderstood and, thinking a general attack order had been issued, joined in the advance down Graveyard Hill, into the murderous crossfire of the Union batteries, the Tyler's artillery, and the reformed Union line. The Confederate assault broke and began to retreat in disorder.

^{***}Fagan's exhausted troops had not resumed their assault on Battery D at this point.

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Dandridge McRae, meanwhile, gathered what men he could of his regiment and led them down the ravine separating Graveyard Hill and Hindman Hill to assist General Fagan's assault on Battery D. The Union defenders opened fire as McRae's troops started to climb Hindman Hill, and the attack collapsed before it had begun. The diversion did enable Fagan to make a charge and take the last line of rifle pits protecting Battery D, but they were unable to take the battery itself.

At 10:30 a.m., General Holmes assessed his situation atop the captured Battery C. The futile attempt by McRae to assist Fagan, the disjointed and disastrous charge on Fort Curtis, and the withering crossfire from the unscathed Battery B and the gunboat Tyler convinced Holmes that the Battle of Helena had been a failure. Holmes ordered his forces to withdraw. Union troops composed of units of the 33rd Iowa, the 33rd and 35th Missouri, and the 1st Indiana Cavalry led by Lieutenant Colonel T. N. Pace quickly re-took Battery C, taking more than 100 prisoners. Fagan received word of the Confederate withdrawal at about 11 a.m.; however, 250 of his forces trapped in a ravine did not get word of the retreat and were forced to surrender to Lieutenant Colonel Cyrus Mackey of the 33rd Iowa. Prentiss did not pursue the retreating Confederates however.

Further north, General Marmaduke was disgusted that his drive on Battery A had been halted by the 29th Iowa since early morning. Marmaduke sent word to Walker, stationed on the Sterling Road, to assist him in a final assault on Battery A, and had his artillery moved forward to provide fire support for a frontal assault on Rightor Hill. Once the Confederate artillery was in place and firing, Marmaduke's soldiers began to advance on the Union emplacements, but the Iowans defending Battery A repulsed them easily. Rice then ordered a counterattack, and the Iowans seized an important ridge north of Battery A, forcing the Confederate artillery to withdraw. An impasse was at hand, and again Marmaduke sent an aide to Walker requesting assistance. Walker failed to respond to Marmaduke's entreaties, and when news of Holmes order to withdraw came at about 11 a.m., Marmaduke was furious with Walker's lack of cooperation. Marmaduke withdrew his forces from the assault on Battery A without relaying his intentions to Walker.***

Following the battle, most of the Confederate forces returned to Cotton Plant, while Marmaduke's men returned to Jacksonport. Marsh Walker's cavalry

***Three months after the Battle of Helena, on September 6, 1863, Marmaduke shot and mortally wounded Walker in a duel near Little Rock, in part due to the anger and resentment between the two over the outcome of the battle; this is said to have been the last duel fought in Little Rock. Walker died of his wound thirteen days later.

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remained in the Helena area to harass any pursuing Union forces. Of the 7,646 troops Holmes had led into the Battle of Helena, 1,636 were lost, about 21 percent of his total force. A total of 169 soldiers were killed, 659 were wounded, and 786 were reported missing and presumed captured. More than 1,500 of the Confederate casualties were suffered by the three infantry brigades; it is estimated that the Tyler's guns alone, firing 413 rounds of eight-inch shells, were responsible for the deaths of about 600 Confederates. Of the 4,129 Union troops defending Fort Curtis, General Prentiss reported only 239 casualties; 57 killed, 146 wounded, and 36 missing.

The Battle of Helena was a futile and ultimately pointless undertaking on the part of General Theophilus Holmes and the Confederate command in Arkansas. Not only did the attack fail to achieve its goal, the capture of Helena, it failed to realize its secondary objective, that of relieving Union pressure on the besieged port of Vicksburg. It is one of the unfortunate ironies of history, that unbeknownst to Holmes and his generals, Vicksburg surrendered to General Grant on the same day that the Confederates launched their ill-fated attack on Helena. The Confederacy soon lost control of the Mississippi River, and the fledgling nation was split in two. It is unlikely that a Confederate victory at Helena would have affected the eventual outcome of the Civil War, but the Battle of Helena remains a significant and important element of the history of the Civil War in Arkansas.

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Bibliography

Bearrs, Edwin C. "The Battle of Helena, July 4, 1863." Arkansas Historical Quarterly, Vol. XX, No. 3 (Autumn 1961): 256-297.

Crisler, E. T. "The Battle of Helena." Historic Helena-West Helena, Arkansas. Helena, Arkansas: Phillips County Chamber of Commerce, 1973: 17-29.

The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. Washington, DC: 1880-1901, Series I, Vol. XXII, 383-442.



BATTERY A

Union forces entered on this hill held off repeated assaults by Confederate troops and CSA General Narayana on the morning of July 1863. In their attack on Battery A, CSA General March Walker's 7th Virginia Cavalry Regiment, consisting of the 5th Arkansas Cavalry Regiment under Col. A. S. Dobbins, failed to join the attack on Battery A from Sterling Road. March and Walker withdrew their command early in the day.



Berry A. Hej Battle of Helena
Phillips Co., Arkansas

Photographed by Mark Christ

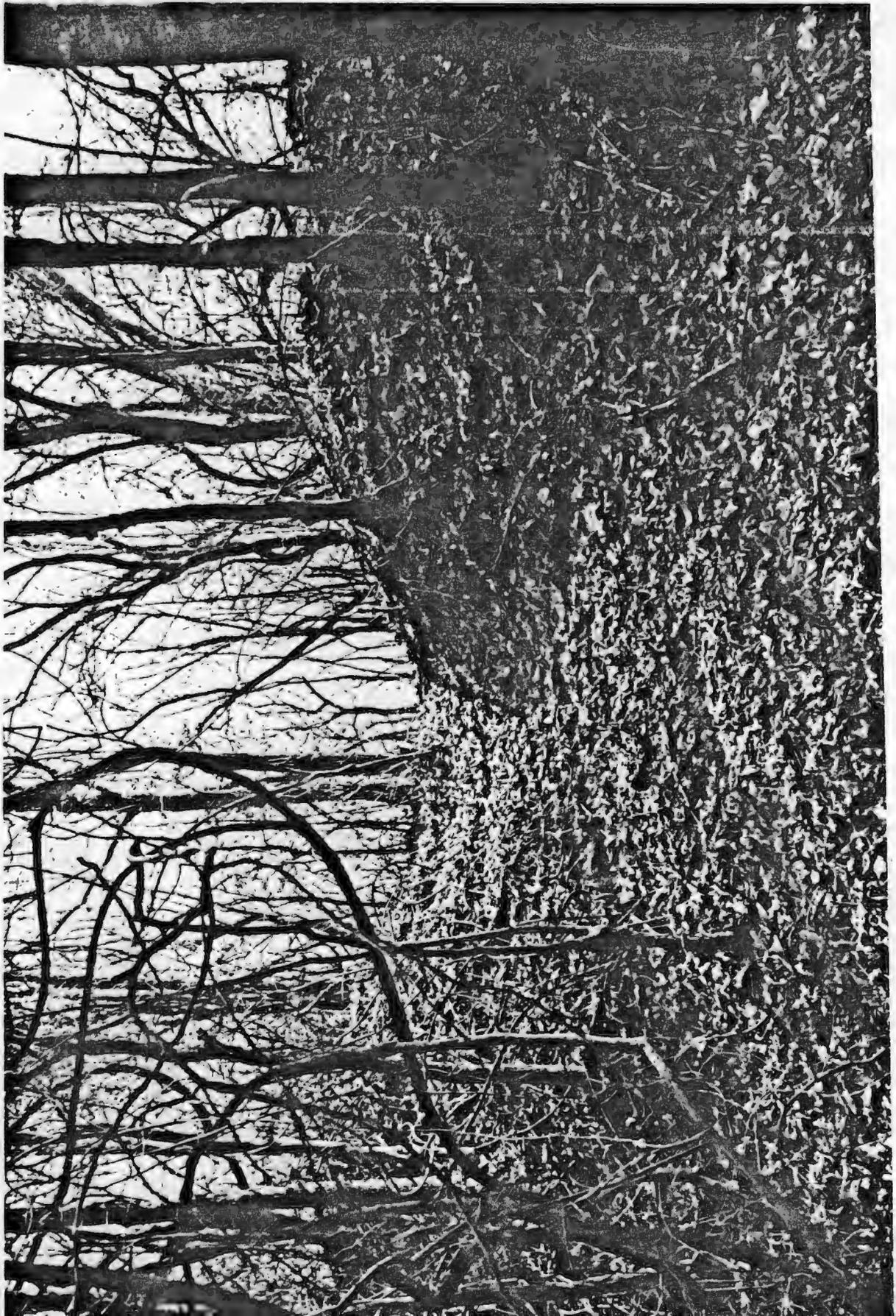
January 1992

Negative on file at AHPP

View at marker from the south



By A site, Battle of Helena
Phillips Co., Arkansas
Photographed by Mark Christ
January 1992
Negative on file at AHPD
View from the southeast



By A site, Battle of Helena
Phillips Co., Arkansas
Photographed by Mark Christ
January 1992
Negative on file at AHDP
Views of earthworks from the north



Henry A site, Battle of Helena
Phillips Co., Arkansas
Photographed by Mar E Christ
January 1992
Negative on file at AHP
View from the west



Berry A site, Battle of Helen
Phillips Co., Arkansas
Photographed by Mark Christ
January 1992
Negative on file at AHPP
View from the southwest

