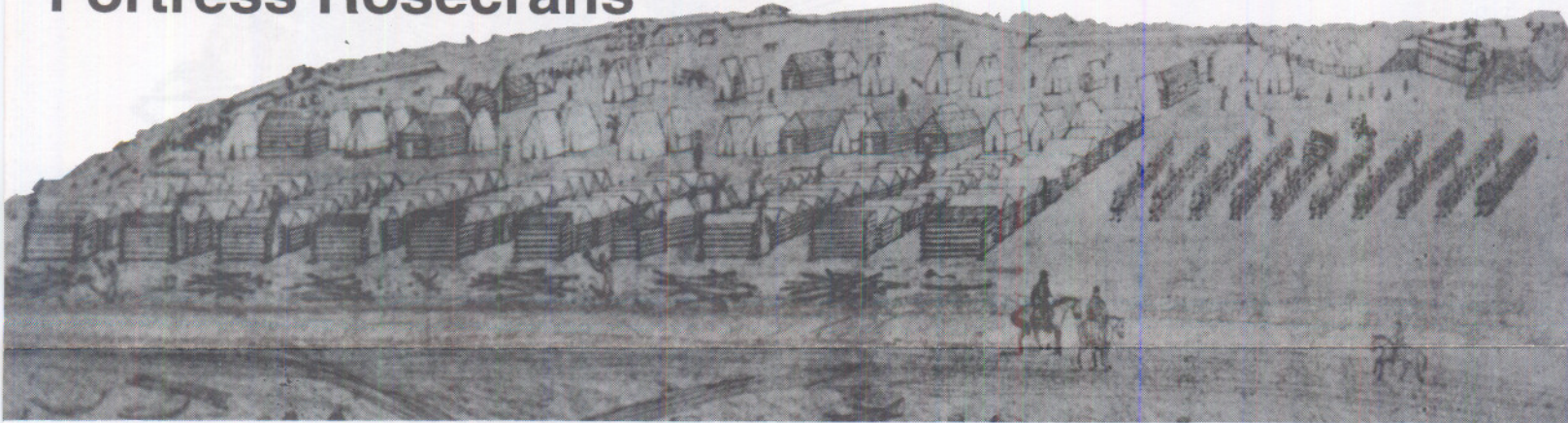




Fortress Rosecrans



Camp of the 115th Ohio, fortress walls in background courtesy Timothy R. Brookes

Rosecrans Leads the Union Army South

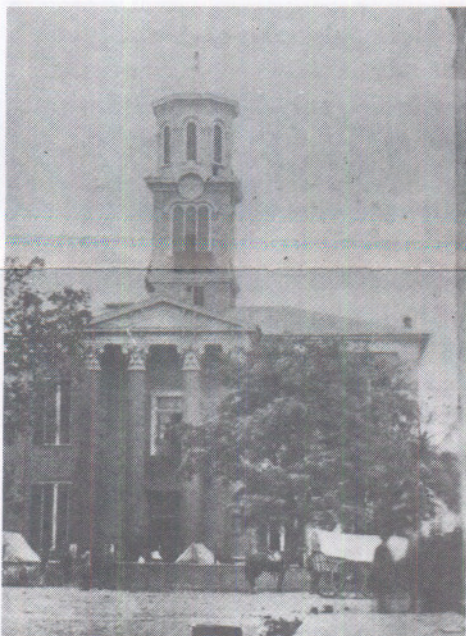


General William S. Rosecrans

The citizens of Murfreesboro never dreamt “they would ever hear the roar of cannon, the rattle of musketry, the groans of the dying.” So wrote John Spence, founder of the Red Cedar Bucket Factory in Murfreesboro, Tennessee and an opponent of secession. The bloody Union victory at Stones River in 1863 brought destruction and death to Murfreesboro. But the North gained a much-needed boost to morale. General William Rosecrans planned to press the Confederates south to Chattanooga, gain control of the vital rail link, and drive a Union wedge through Tennessee.

The Union army was far from its supply base at Louisville. General Rosecrans' troops constructed a depot, along with a fort to defend it, at Murfreesboro to distribute arms, food, and equipment. From January to June, 1863, the soldiers labored to complete the 200-acre earthen fort. It was named Fortress Rosecrans.

Occupation of Murfreesboro



*Rutherford County Courthouse
Library of Congress*

Military occupation drastically altered life in Murfreesboro. Houses were torn down and the lumber hauled off to construct buildings for the army. John Spence wrote that “the streets were crowded [sic] at all times with wagons and soldiers, giving the place much the appearance of a wagon yard. Soldiers camping thick in and round town.” The officers particularly loved milk, “making use of citizens cows.”

When the Federals set off on the Tullahoma campaign, Spence noted that Rosecrans was “scarcely leaving forces sufficient to man the forts.” The new recruits and convalescents who stayed behind reportedly had orders to shell the town and burn it in the event of a Confederate raid.

One gun at the fort was trained on the courthouse. This elegant landmark was constructed shortly before the Civil War. During the war it served as barracks and a prison. By the end of the war, half the roof was blown off by the wind, windows and doors were broken, and plaster crumbled from the ceiling. The courthouse, now restored, still stands at the center of the downtown square.

