

## FORT DONELSON MONUMENT COMMITTEE 2024 REPORT

This will be the Fort Donelson Monument Committee 2024 Report, the third annual report of The First Regiment Nebraska Volunteer Infantry at Fort Donelson Committee (the Committee), as required by NEB. REV. STAT. § 82-803(7). In April of 2024, the Committee received a formal response (dated April 15, 2024) from the National Park Service (NPS) asking for more information about the Monument Proposal (copy attached). The Committee submitted Supplemental Information to the NPS on May 7, 2024, providing the information requested (copy attached).

Committee Vice-Chairperson Steve Guenzel spoke with Fort Donelson National Battlefield Superintendent Brian K. McCutchen on November 20, 2024, and again on December 17, 2024. Superintendent McCutchen reported that additional archeological work was been done this year, which provided further information as to where the battle line occupied by the First Nebraska may have been located. The suggested battle line is further east than had previously been thought by historians. While this new location is located on ground owned by the NPS, this area has not yet been developed and interpreted and some residential development is located nearby. For these reasons, it may be that the most appropriate place for a monument to the First Nebraska would be in or near the area originally proposed, with interpretive explanation that the First Nebraska had hurried through the area of the Monument on its way to a battle line to the east. The Committee is waiting for further input from the NPS regarding the Monument.

Superintendent McCutchen commented on the status of Nebraska's Proposal. The Supplemental Information submitted by the Committee in May has been provided to the Interdisciplinary Team of Reviewers for use by the Team in providing input regarding Nebraska's Monument Proposal to the Regional Director. Superintendent McCutchen is hopeful that progress can be made on consideration of the Proposal soon after the upcoming holidays.



IN REPLY REFER TO:  
I.A.2. (FODO-H3415)

# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Fort Donelson National Battlefield  
PO Box 434

174 National Cemetery Drive  
Dover, TN 37058

April 15, 2024



Steven E. Guenzel, Vice Chairperson  
First Nebraska Fort Donelson Committee  
1227 Lincoln Mall  
Lincoln, NE 68508

Dear Mr. Guenzel:

I am writing in response to the proposal by the State of Nebraska, through the First Nebraska Fort Donelson Committee (the Committee), to place a monument on the Fort Donelson National Battlefield, in recognition of the First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry. The proposed monument consists of multiple elements, including: the monument itself, interpretive wayside exhibits, parking area, and a paved walkway.

I commend you, the Committee, and the State of Nebraska, for your interest and enthusiasm to interpret and commemorate the brave and determined “cornhuskers” in what was an immediate and intense introduction to combat on February 15, 1862. Such interest more than 160 years after the event has been noted by National Park Service (NPS) reviewers of the initial submission, creating an enthusiastic interest in what future updates will provide.

A team of historians and regional NPS subject matter experts (SME) was established for review of the current proposal and to be part of subsequent updates and conversation during the evaluation process. Most recent and continued consultation has included battle historians, including Dr. Timothy Smith, James Vaughan, and Jim Jobe, as well as NPS archeologists, and resource management staff.

The SME team has identified the need for further information from the Committee for assessment. Specifics of information needed are found below. This additional information and detail will assist the team in assessment of the proposed design, interpretation, maintenance concerns, impacts, etc.

## **Role of the First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry at Fort Donelson**

The First Nebraska participated with recognition at Fort Donelson, most notably on the afternoon of April 15, 1862, against the Confederate “breakout” attempt, when it and its adjoining units helped halt the Confederate advance in that sector. After the Confederate line began to retreat and the units to the right of the First were ordered to counterattack, Nebraska remained in position as reserve until the end, joining the remainder of Brigadier General Lew Wallace’s organization prior to the Confederate surrender the next morning.

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### **Location of the Battleline Associated with the Proposed Monument**

While the precise location of the battleline is unknown, recent archeological and geophysical survey suggest its location may be as far as 700 feet forward, to the east/northeast of the previous area of focus. This emerging information may impact the suggested location, should it no longer be believed to be the actual vicinity to the battle activities that the proposed monument is to interpret and commemorate.

As previously discussed, Fort Donelson, established in 1928 during the second phase of battlefield preservation, is a landscape where many positions of the five-day engagement are regarded as “in this area;” the determination awaiting new scholarship and or archeological survey and analysis.

To better address the monument proposal and seek evidence of location of the Union line of defense – most specifically that of the First Nebraska—the NPS Southeast Archeological Center (SEAC) conducted extensive archeological geophysical survey of the area in 2023, starting at the proposed monument location and extending southward (Figure 1). In this sector, nothing of historical association was found, although SME determination that a linear depression that parallels the modern Nelson Circle, long theorized by the park to be a historic road trace, is likely the 1862 period road for this vicinity identified on period maps.

At my request, the SEAC team moved forward, surveying eastward and down the slope, approximately 240 yards, before finding dropped bullets in a somewhat linear line. Initial hypothesis by the archeologists is that this may be an indication of the sought-after defensive line of February 15, and, with proximity to the Wynn’s Ferry Road that the First abutted, the actual position of the unit. Further on-site archeological and geophysical analysis is planned for this year.

### **Considerations for Determining a Location for the Proposed Monument**

The current proposal shows a parking area on what is Stewart County fee-property associated with Nelson Circle. We do not anticipate any issues but will consult with the county upon receipt of updated drawings.

As per above, analysis of data obtained by archeologists suggests that the location associated with the First Nebraska may be 240 yards to the east/northeast, placing it in closer proximity to the eastern terminus of the Nelson Circle loop, and relatively close to a private residence, located at the southwest corner of the Wynn’s Ferry and Nelson Circle intersection (Figure 2). Pending a more confident determination, should the NPS and/or Committee propose an alternative location, the same consideration should be given to the above-mentioned resources, as well as topography, vehicular access, accessibility, and potential visitor impacts upon neighbors.

### **Potential Effect upon Resources**

To assess for potential effect, the NPS is required to undertake historic and environmental compliance concerning the monument and its associated elements. The additional information requested will prove of great benefit for providing a full assessment.

### **Proposed Interpretation**

Two interpretive panels are proposed for placement upon approach to the monument, with a third to be affixed to the monument. Specifications of size, material, design, and mounting method, etc. are needed, as well as whether they conform to the format of the current NPS waysides that provide for visitor understanding.

### **Panel 1**

If an interpretive panel is included, significant editing in collaboration with the NPS would be necessary to ensure accuracy, consistency in language and reference to troops, officers, and terminology used.

An alternative to a Nebraska provided interpretive panel would be for the NPS to install a wayside panel, part of the park's updated Wayside Exhibit design plan, telling of the same period of battle and intended for the same location (Figure 3).

### **Panel 2**

A wayside exhibit to accompany a monument is unusual, with none of the reviewers having seen a panel intended to provide a complete history of a specific military unit, from its inception until after the war. Instead, it is anticipated that interpretation of the First Nebraska be brief and speak to the activities of the unit specific to their location and role in the battle, the text mounted or inscribed onto the monument, itself.

### **Panel 3**

Intended for placement on the monument, please include further details as to plaque or inscription size, material, and anticipated maintenance needs, on the updated drawings and specifications.

### **Note as to Emphasis of the First Nebraska**

Per the interpretation provided, historians cited question taking the quote by Brigadier General Lew Wallace, "was terrible .... They alone repelled the charge," literally.

Referring to the same line of defense, Wallace would also state that, "Colonel Thayer and his regiments behaved with great gallantry, and the contest was over." With that more inclusive assessment and in reference to after action reports and accounts, SME historians made note that the vital Union defensive action was a multi-infantry unit effort for success, adding of the benefit of the six guns of the Chicago Light Artillery, positioned to the left of the Nebraskans. Such does not negate the action and bravery of the members of the First Nebraska, but also acknowledges the associated and shared support of those adjacent.

## **Monument Specifications and Symbolism**

### **Monument Specifications**

Additional information needed:

- Intended measurements of features, including height, width, and depth of statuary, base, tablets, etc., to surmise scale when placed on the landscape, to which scale can be placed to assess impacts of the surrounding landscape. The requested information will also allow for planning and cost-estimating by our maintenance and resource staff.
  - Bronze type – Color, patina, and texture of intended bronze, and information of the cyclic care mentioned.
  - Tablet – Material and dimensions of the indicated panel, types of cyclic treatment.
  - Stone – Intended stone type to be utilized, texture/finish, and other treatments. Similarly, the form of joint material / mortar, to allow for cost estimation for NPS cyclic treatment.

- Anticipated weight of monument and specifications of the intended foundation for the monument to rest upon.

### **Monument Symbolism**

Please provide reference to material that provides detail of the design submitted. During your recent visit, you indicated that three designs were submitted by Mr. Hoppe, the one submitted to having been the one preferred by the Committee.

- Understanding that there is great interest on the part of the Committee for a monument to be different and unique, while also expressing a desire for historical accuracy, what references may be found to support the suggested activity displayed?
- Please provide the other two illustrations referenced on your visit for the team to have a comparison against which to assess the version preferred by the Committee.

### **Parking and Walkways**

While the provided schematic is preliminary, dimensions of parking, intended width and length of walkways for necessary accessibility, and whether one or both provided parking spaces are intended for handicap designated parking are needed.

As current archeological work suggests that the actual line may have been more than two hundred yards to the front, assessment on the part of the Committee and/or NPS for an alternative location may be warranted. The park can provide images or reference material for other locations, upon request.

Of note, the document indicates intent to place pavers like those utilized in other areas of Fort Donelson. It is requested that concrete walkways be considered. The park is currently in the planning stage for removal of the difficult to maintain pavers and their replacement with paved, handicap accessible walkways.

Mr. Guenzel, thank you for the proposal submitted, as well as the many conversations and time in the field that you and I have shared both pre- and post- submittal of the proposal. As shared, the dedication and passion demonstrated by you, the Committee, and the State of Nebraska, to commemorate and honor of the First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry at Fort Donelson is wonderful.

The design is impressive, albeit both larger and more imposing than the stone-type marker that you and I had previously discussed as possibilities. The SME review team is committed to ensuring whatever additional material the Committee provides will receive careful review and consideration for placement on the battlefield of Fort Donelson.

Immediately upon receipt of the requested information, the package will be shared with the SME team for review and discussion, with review timelines set for progress. Following will be opportunity for NPS and your Committee to discuss the proposal, request any needed clarification, and to mutually provide input or ideas for consideration.

Pending compilation of a completed package, and with guidance from the NPS compliance program, the park will initiate consultation with applicable entities, ensure placement of the proposed monument project for public comment, and any other requirements before review by the regional directorate. With compliance complete and regional directorate approval, the package will be forwarded to the Director of the NPS for final approval.

Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have questions regarding our request for additional information. We look forward to collaborating with you in gathering this information essential to fully understanding the scope of the project, getting all associated cultural and environmental compliance work underway and, once completed, forwarding a completed proposal packet to the Director of the NPS for his review.

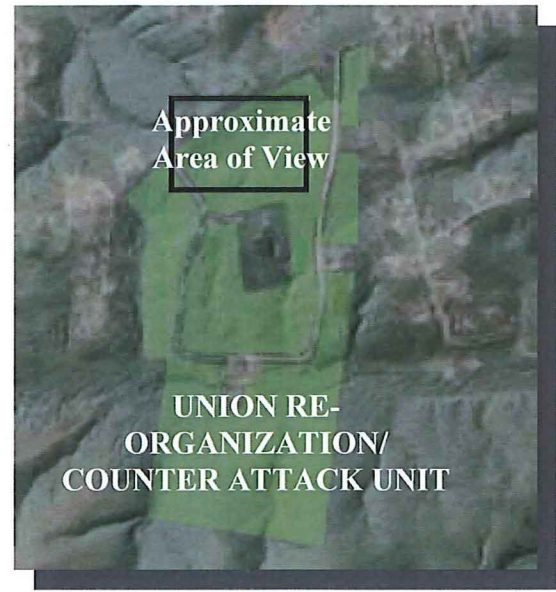
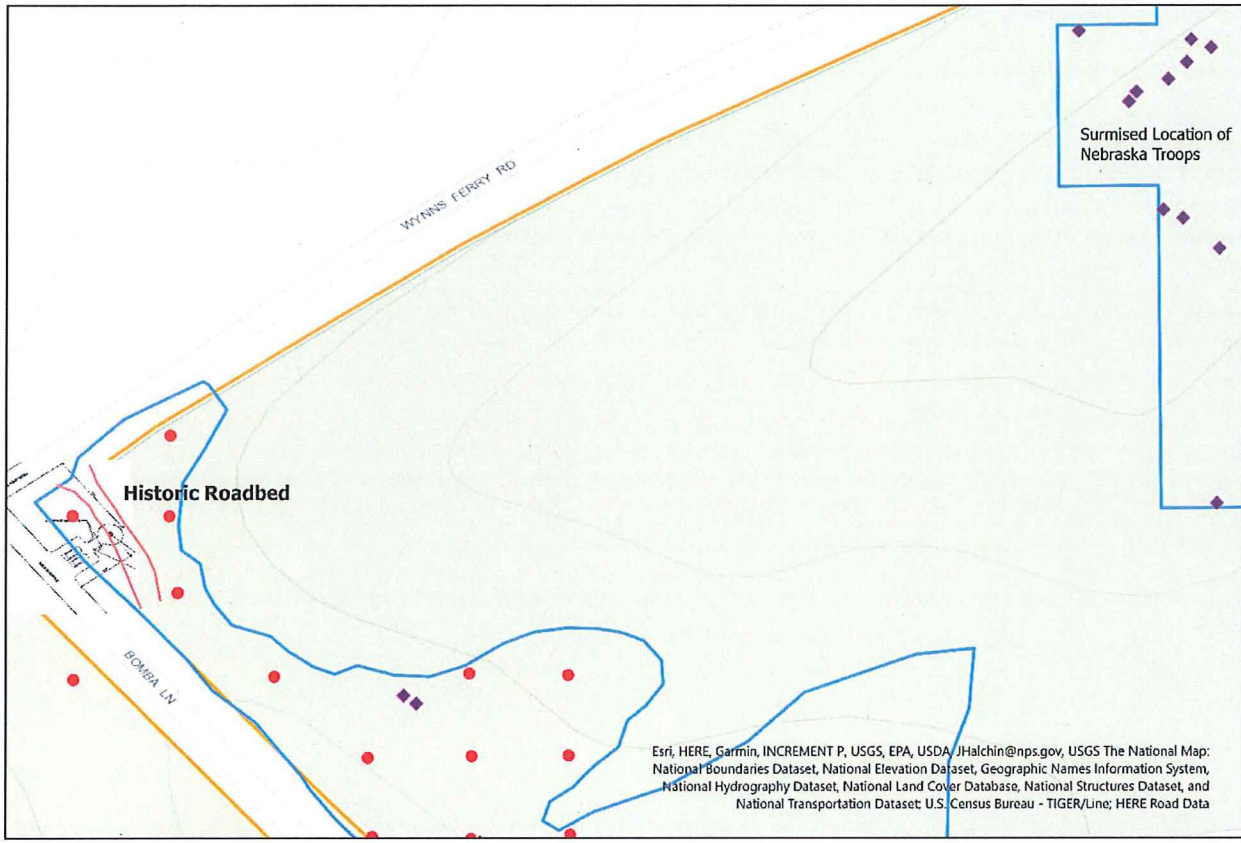
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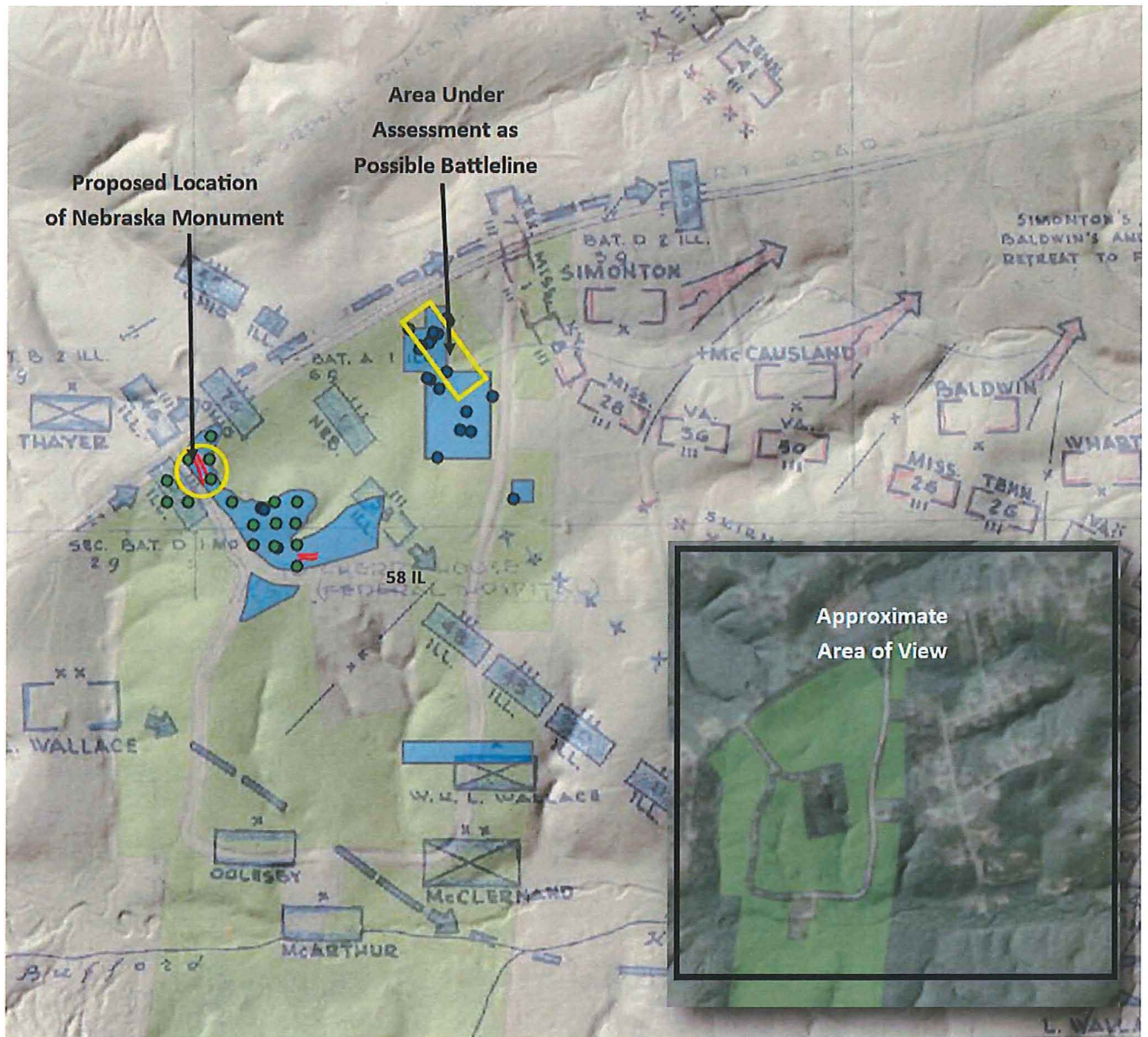
Brian K. McCutchen, Superintendent

Encl: Figures 1 – 3 (Examples referenced in correspondence)





**Figure 1**  
 Map by the Southeast Archeological Center showing scaled overlay of proposed monument and associated infrastructure and location of new area under consideration for possible line of First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry. (Southeast Archeological Center)



**Figure 2**  
 Bears battle unit map for February 15, 1862, overlaid with proposed monument location, documented historic road, areas of survey, and vicinity under assessment as possible battleline location. (Fort Donelson NB Map)



Figure 3  
Fort Donelson NB exhibit panel intended for the location of the proposed First Nebraska monument.

# Opportunities Lost and Gained

## General Pillow *"We had accomplished our objective"*

Here, after accomplishing its objective, the Confederate attack lost momentum and General Pillow let everything he had gained slip away. Believing the Federals beaten and disorganized, and without consulting Floyd or Buckner, he ordered his men back to their original lines.

Buckner protested vehemently, but Pillow argued that his men were exhausted and nearly out of ammunition, and needed to regroup and resupply before evacuating the fort. Floyd, after a heated discussion with Pillow, let the order stand, and sent Buckner back to his original position on the

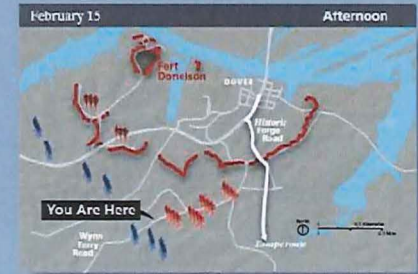
now-vulnerable Confederate right flank. The decision to halt the attack has been called "a move of sublime stupidity that probably could have been achieved only through the combined efforts of a Floyd and a Pillow." And Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant wasted no time profiting from that decision.

## General Grant *"The position must be retaken"*

From here on, the afternoon of February 15, 1862, Grant launched the counterattack that led to the surrender of Fort Donelson. When the Confederate breakout attempt began, Grant was with Flag Officer Foote on his flagship. After returning to the field he determined that "the

position on the right must be retaken" and ordered a counterattack. To divert Confederate attention he had Foote's gunboats demonstrate against the water batteries. He then ordered Smith's division to attack the Confederate right flank and "take Fort Donelson." On the Union

right, Wallace formed an attacking column with three brigades and, with only two hours of daylight left, sent them forward. By nightfall they had driven the Confederates back to their original positions and had retaken most of the lost ground. The next day Fort Donelson was surrendered.



BATTLEFIELD TIMELINE | February 1862

12th Union captures all Fort Donelson

13th Union attacks Murrey's Battery

14th Union gunboats attack Fort Donelson

15th Confederates break out right

16th Confederates surrender

YOU ARE HERE

**SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION FOR THE  
STATE OF NEBRASKA’S PROPOSAL  
TO PLACE A MONUMENT AT THE  
FORT DONELSON NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD  
TO HONOR THE ROLE THE FIRST NEBRASKA VOLUNTEER INFANTRY  
PLAYED IN THIS VERY SIGNIFICANT BATTLE**

**Location**

The Committee greatly appreciates the efforts of Superintendent McCutcheon and the NPS Southeast Archeological Center to identify, as closely as possible without the benefit of any eyewitnesses, the location of the Thayer Brigade battle line. The location identified in Nebraska’s original Proposal was based on what the Committee believed to be the best historical information available at the time. There is better information available now. Nebraska is open to the modification of its Proposal to locate the monument in a location that is most relevant to the most current historical and archeological information. We propose at this time to agree to work with the NPS to come up with the most appropriate location for Nebraska’s proposed monument, with off-road parking and walkways to be adjusted accordingly.

**Proposed Interpretation**

Upon consideration of your response, the Committee feels its proposal should be altered regarding interpretation. The language for the interpretive panel originally proposed by the Committee was actually composed when the thought was that there would *only* be the interpretive panel, and no monument – the Battlefield Superintendent prior to Superintendent McCutcheon had suggested that an interpretive panel would be more favorably considered than a monument. However, the State of Nebraska, through its Legislature and Governor, proposed the erection of a monument. The Committee thought both the panel and a monument might be appropriate. The Committee is happy to scale its proposal back and delete the proposed interpretive panel in favor of the proposed wayside panel set forth as Figure 3 in the NPS’s response. Instead, the committee now proposes that bronze plaques be attached to the sides of the concrete base for the statue. The plaque on the front of the base, most likely the side under the face of the depicted soldier, would be approximately two feet long and ten inches high, and would simply say “Nebraska,” much like the 2015 Mississippi monument at Shiloh. The Committee proposes a second plaque, on the side below the soldier’s back, approximately two feet square, that will

contain the following language, subject to editing and collaboration with NPS subject matter experts:

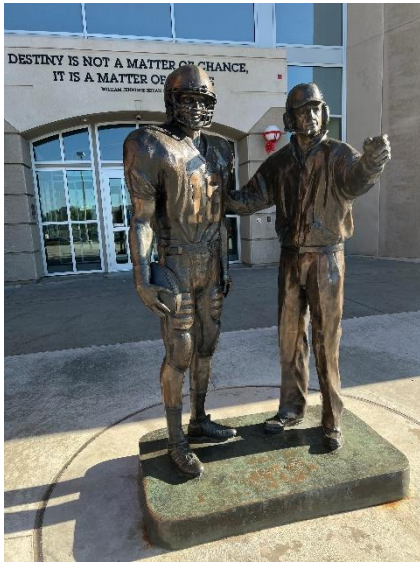
The First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry, along with the rest of Colonel Thayer's Third Brigade of General Lew Wallace's Third Division (the 58<sup>th</sup>, 68<sup>th</sup>, and 76<sup>th</sup> Ohio), and Company A of the Chicago Light Artillery, hurried through this area late in the morning of February 15, 1862, taking a position astride the Wynn Ferry Road just in time to block the Confederate breakout attempt, which had previously overpowered the stubborn resistance of McClelland's greatly outnumbered First Division on the Union right. Wallace singled out the First Nebraska and the Chicago Light Artillery for praise, and concluded "Colonel Thayer and his regiments behaved with great gallantry, and the contest was over."

A third plaque is proposed for one of the other sides of the base that would be a foot and a half wide and ten inches high, and would simply say: "Dedicated February 15, 2025, by the State of Nebraska" (assuming that timing works out), and then in smaller letters below: "Fred Hoppe, Sculptor."

### **Monument Specifications**

Mr. Hoppe has provided the following information as to the specifications for the monument. The recommended measurements of the base have a footprint of 3 feet by three feet (nine square feet) with a height of four feet above the ground. The depth of the footings for frost would be based on recommendations of the area of installation.

The base should be poured out of concrete. The bronze type proposed for the statue is Everdure 87300 (Silicone bronze). The sculpture would be treated and sealed with Nikolas Lacquer. This treatment and sealing should be repeated every two or three decades at a minimal cost. The Husker Legacy monument and the Tom Osborne/Brook Berringer sculpture outside of Memorial Stadium in Lincoln, Nebraska, were both treated with Nikolas Lacquer and have not oxidized or tarnished over the last 27 and 18 years respectively:



(Close up of the back of the Osborn statue's left shoulder showing no oxidation)

The plaques will be cast out of the same bronze type and will have raised letters. They are also treated with Nikolas Lacquer to prevent oxidation.

The sculpture dimensions are approximately six feet tall (life-size) and 48 inches wide at the widest point. With a four foot tall base, any weapons would be approximately seven to eight feet above the ground.

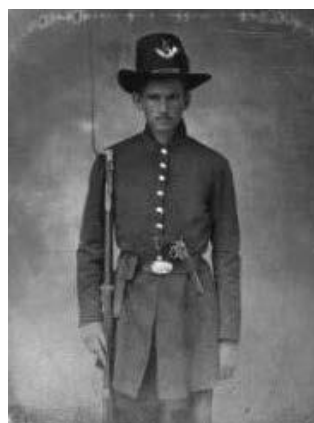
The estimated weight of the sculpture only would be approximately 300 pounds. The base would weigh approximately 5,400 pounds, for a total weight of 5,700 pounds.

### **Monument Symbolism**

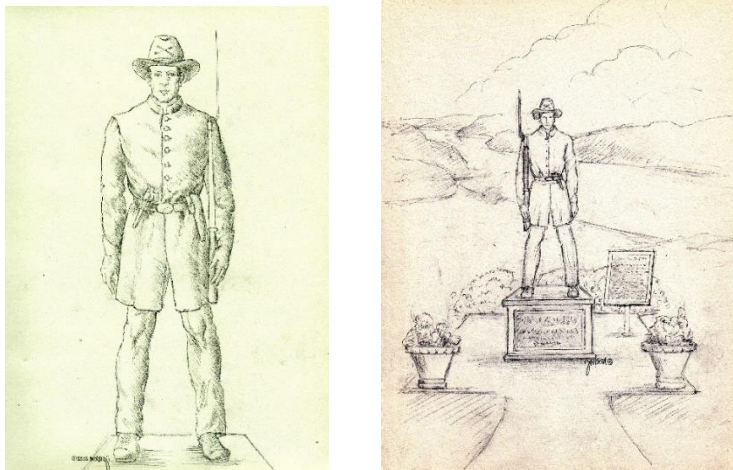
There apparently was a miscommunication regarding the “three proposals.” Mr. Hoppe only made two proposals – the one submitted and this second one:



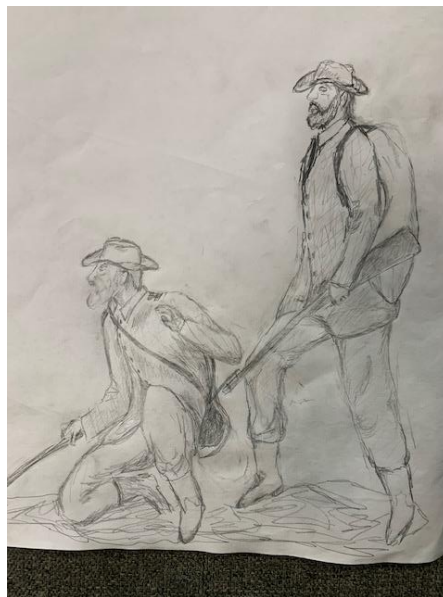
The Committee solicited a total of four sculptors, three Nebraskans (Mr. Hoppe and two others), and a fourth, from Colorado, with significant ties to Nebraska. The Committee received proposals from the three Nebraskans. The Request For Proposal that went to the sculptors included the following photo of a First Nebraska soldier to provide information as to appropriate attire to be depicted:



One of the other Nebraska submissions was a close copy of the soldier in that photo:



The second proposal that was received depicted two soldiers:



The Committee concluded that Mr. Hoppe's first proposal was the most interesting of the four proposals and was more likely to meet the Committee's objective that the monument would spark the interest of visitors to the Battlefield to delve further into the history of the Battle.

In addition to sparking the interest of visitors, the Committee also felt that Mr. Hoppe's first proposal was historically accurate to the actual role of the First Nebraska on February 15, 1862, at Fort Donelson. According to the 1959 Troop Movement Maps drawn by Edwin C. Bearss, the First Nebraska spent the night of February 14 at a location generally west of Indian Creek, and south of the Battlefield's Visitor Center. The next

morning, General Lew Wallace ordered Thayer's Third Brigade to move east to take up a position astride the Wynn Ferry Road to block the Confederate breakout attempt, which had met with some success through the morning hours of February 15. Reviewing the 1959 Troop Movement Maps, a rough estimate can be made that Thayer's Brigade moved approximately 9,000 feet, or nearly one and two-thirds miles. General Lew Wallace described this move:

Colonel Wallace, whose coolness under the circumstances was astonishing, informed me that the enemy were following and would shortly attack. The crisis was come. There was no time to await orders. My Third Brigade had to be thrust between our retiring forces and the advancing foe. Accordingly, I conducted Colonel Thayer's command up the road to where the ridge dips towards the rebel works, and directed the colonel to form a new line of battle at a right angle with the old one; sent for Company A, Chicago Light Artillery, and dispatched a messenger to inform General Smith of the state of affairs and ask him for assistance. The head of Colonel Thayer's column filed right *double-quick*.

(*OR*, 1, 7:238, emphasis supplied.) "Double quick" is "the quickest step next to the run, consisting of 165 steps to the minute, each 33 inches long." (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition.) Historian Timothy B. Smith twice used the word "quickly": to describe the movement of Wallace's blocking force: "Fortunately, Confederate pursuit had slowed, but everyone realized a new line had to be formed quickly." (Smith, Timothy B., *Grant Invades Tennessee THE 1862 BATTLES FOR FORTS HENRY AND DONELSON*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2016, 309.) And "Fortunately, Thayer quickly deployed, . . ." (*Ibid.*, 310.)

While not a direct reference to the speed of Thayer's Brigade's movement, a description of Wood's Chicago Light Artillery's movement to a location next to the First Nebraska illustrates the alarm of the Union units and the speed with which they moved into their blocking position:

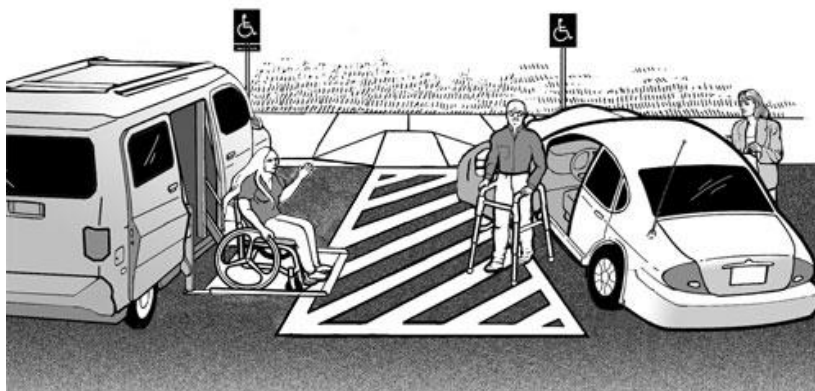
Wallace was amazed how quickly the artillery moved: "it drove forward full speed, the horses running low, the riders standing in their stirrups plying their whips, guns and caissons bouncing over root and rut like playthings, the men clinging to their seats like monkeys."

(*Ibid.*, 311.)

The Committee respectfully suggests that the Hoppe proposed statue, which depicts a soldier moving "quickly," is much more interesting than a standing or kneeling soldier, or even one aiming his rifle. Hoppe's First Nebraskan will attract attention and hopefully spark the interest of visitors, inciting them to investigate why he is in a hurry.

## Parking and Walkways

Nebraska proposes a parking area for two, handicapped access, parking places. The United States Department of Justice recommends specifications for such a parking area. There would be two spots for vehicles, each eight feet wide and twenty feet long, with a common access area in between the stalls that is five feet wide. Thus the entire parking area would be twenty-one feet wide and twenty feet long. Paint on the stalls and signage would be as required. Here is a drawing from the ADA.gov website:



The surface would be concrete, and there would be a handicapped accessible concrete walkway to the monument.

The Committee is completely amenable to adjustments to its proposal in all respects so the final product can meet all NPS objectives.