

*A Grand Opening  
Squandered*

**THE BATTLE FOR PETERSBURG,  
JUNE 15-18, 1864**

by Sean Michael Chick

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JUNE 15-18, 1864**

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Savas Beatie  
California

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First edition, first printing

ISBN-13: 978-161121-721-6 (paperback)

ISBN-13: 978-161121-722-3 (ebook)

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Chick, Sean Michael, 1982- author.

Title: A Grand Opening Squandered : The Battle for Petersburg, June 15-18, 1864 / by Sean Michael Chick.

Other titles: Battle for Petersburg, June 6-18, 1864

Description: El Dorado Hills, CA : Savas Beatie, [2025] | Series: Emerging Civil War series | Includes bibliographical references. | Summary: "This provides fresh and renewed attention to one of the most important, fascinating, and yet oddly forgotten battles of the Civil War. Inside are original maps, new research, and dozens of images--many published here for the first time. The first in a series on the Petersburg Campaign, which will provide readers with a strong introduction to the war's longest campaign"-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024026461 | ISBN 9781611217216 (paperback) | ISBN 9781611217223 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Petersburg (Va.)--History--Siege, 1864-1865.

Classification: LCC E476.93 .C54 2024 | DDC 973.7/37--dc23/eng/20240614

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2024026461>



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All Savas Beatie titles are available for bulk purchase discounts. Contact us for details.

Proudly published, printed, and warehoused in the United States of America.

*To Bryce Suderow*  
*A peerless researcher committed to the truth*

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PHOTO CREDITS: American Civil War Museum (acwm); Karen Ferency Baker (kfb); Sarah Kay Bierle (skb); Bowdoin College Library (bcl); John Buckbee (jb); Mike Cavanaugh (mc); Sean Michael Chick (smc); City of Petersburg Museum Collection (cpmc); Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives (cushor); Confederate Memorial Hall Museum (cmhm); Confederate Museum, Charleston, SC (cmcsc); Cowan's Auction House (cah); Lance Dyckman (ld); The First Maine Heavy Artillery (fmha); *The Illustrated London News* (iln); *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (flin); *Harper's Weekly* (hw); Harvard University (hu); *History of the Eighteenth Regiment Conn. Volunteers* (herc); *History of the North Carolina Regiments in the War of the Rebellion* (hncrwr); *History of the United States from the Earliest Discovery of America to the Present Day* (husedap); Library of Congress (loc); Chris Mackowski (cm); Maine State Archives (msa); Massachusetts Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (mollus); Michigan State Senate (mss); Ashleigh Moody (am); National Archives (na); Gerald Netherland (gn); *New Orleans Times-Democrat* (notd); Petersburg National Battlefield (pnb); *Photographic History of the Civil War* (phcw); Brian F. Swartz (bfs); Andrew Simoneaux (as); *Southern History of the War* (shw); *Story of American Heroism* (sah); Terry Rensel (tr); Thomasville History Center (thc); *The Truth About Titanic* (tat); Virginia Military Institute Archives (vmia); *War Diary and Letters of Stephen Minot Weld* (wldsmw); West Point Museum Collection (wpmc); Scott Williams (sw); University of South Carolina (usc); US Army War College History Center (usawhc)

## For the Emerging Civil War Series

Theodore P. Savas, *publisher*  
Sarah Keeney, *editorial consultant*  
Veronica Kane, *production supervisor*  
Melissa Wells, *copyeditor*  
Patrick McCormick, *proofreader*

Chris Mackowski, *series editor and co-founder*  
Cecily Nelson Zander, *chief historian*  
Kristopher D. White, *emeritus editor*

Layout by Jess Maxfield  
Maps by Hal Jespersen and Edward Alexander



# Acknowledgments

I came upon the battle of Petersburg in 2006 as I was writing my thesis on Maj. Gen. Gouverneur Kemble Warren. I took special note of Warren's spectacular failure at Petersburg on June 17, 1864. I knew of the battle, but discovered it was important yet only sparsely covered. As such, I wrote my thesis on Petersburg at Southeastern Louisiana University. That thesis became *The Battle of Petersburg, June 15–18, 1864*.

After joining the Emerging Civil War, I looked into writing about Petersburg again. I hoped to correct a few errors in the original book and update the maps. Chris Mackowski decided to not just have me do the June 15–18 battle, but the entire campaign and siege. This will be the first book in a multi-volume set that will culminate with Five Forks. I would like to thank Chris and publisher Ted Savas for the opportunity.

I crafted the original book in difficult times after leaving the University of Kentucky, and my finances were a shambles, which limited my research. Still, I am proud of my first book and was humbled at how much aid I received. At Southeastern Louisiana



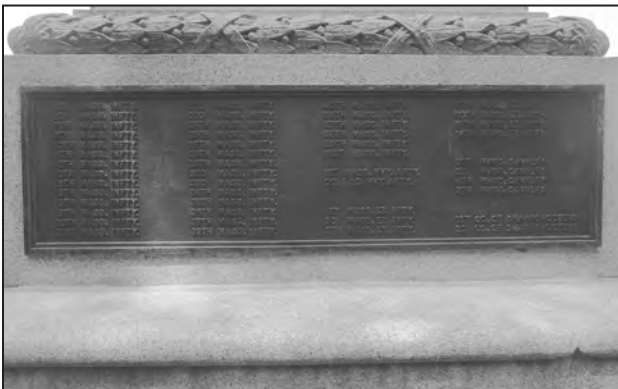
University, Harry Laver helped me strengthen my ideas, Barbara Forrest tightened my prose, and both Samuel Hyde and William Robison provided good advice. Brett Schulte's Petersburg website, *Beyond the Crater*, was of immense importance, and Brett was helpful. Bryce Suderow has taken an interest in me and my work, aiding with research and connecting me with other authors.

Sarah Kay Bierle kindly wrote a piece on Piedmont. Events in the Shenandoah Valley were important to Petersburg, and vice versa. Every volume will cover events in the valley in miniature. Brian F. Swartz wrote a piece on Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, which was vital to the book. Petersburg was as important to Chamberlain's career as Gettysburg. If the latter gave him fame, the former earned him promotion but at the cost of a wound that plagued him until his death.

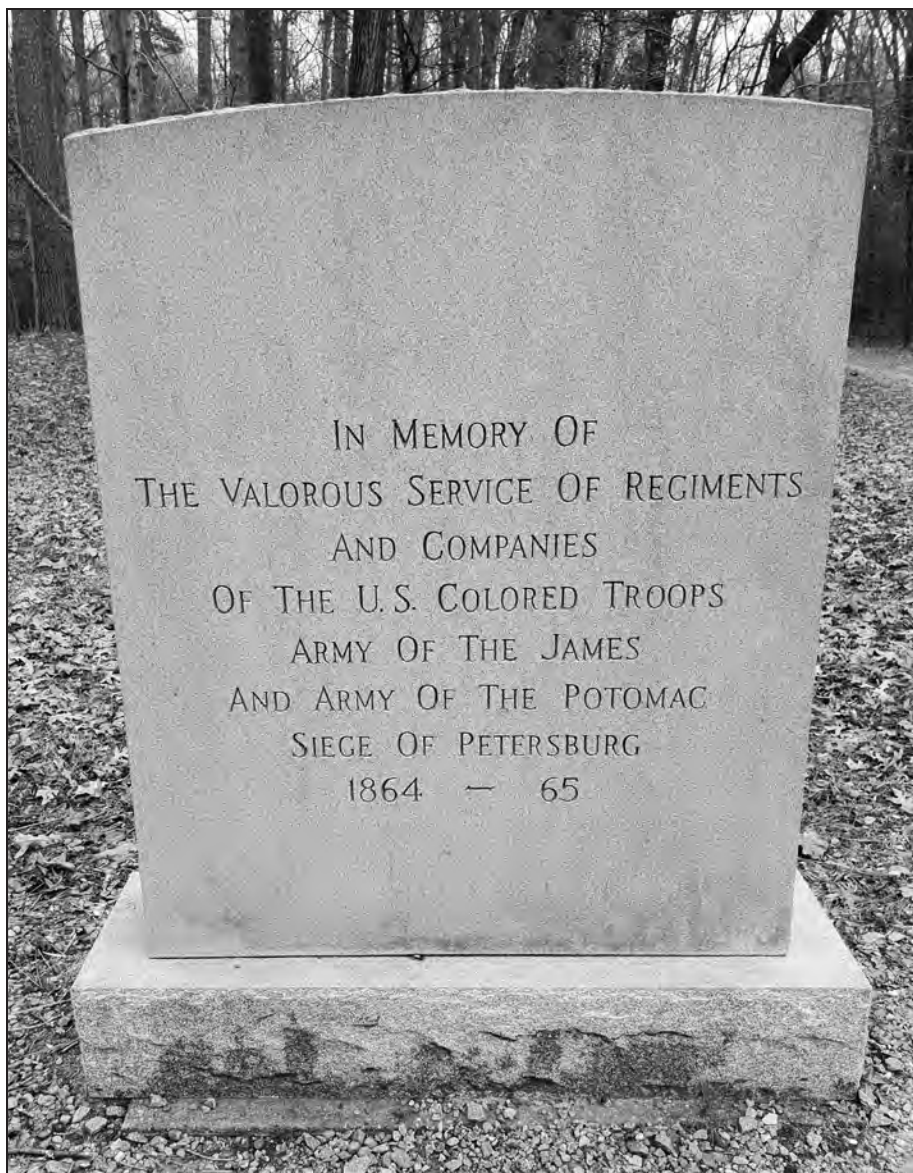
Gerald Netherland and Gordon Rhea read over the completed book, and Gordon was kind enough to write a foreword. Frederick M. Schreiner, Mark Jacobson, Scott Williams, and Netherland helped with the driving tour and the maps. Hal Jespersen was eager to update the maps, and he remains the best in the business. I will always be indebted to Thomas J. Howe and *The Petersburg Campaign: Wasted Valor, June 15–18, 1864* (1988), which was the only monograph on the battle until mine came out in



**The highest-ranking Confederate to die at the battle of Petersburg was Powhatan R. Page. His funeral took place in Petersburg in the midst of the battle.** (smc)



**The Petersburg Massachusetts Monument features all of the Bay State units that saw action in the Petersburg campaign. Most of them were engaged at Petersburg from June 15–18, 1864.** (smc)



**The USCT played a critical role in Federal successes on June 15, capturing a mile and a half of Confederate works. A monument to their effort, dedicated in 1992, marks the area near Battery 9. (tr)**

2015. Howe assisted with his research on the actions at Bermuda Hundred, June 16–17, 1864.


Derek Green scanned numerous images from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, which Allyson O'Keefe cleaned up and readied for publication. In Virginia, I was able to get photographs with help of Daniel Chick, who drove me around, and Andrew Simoneaux, who loaned his camera. Other images were provided by Ann M. Blumenschine, Emmanuel

Dabney, John Buckbee, Mike Cavanaugh, Lance Dyckman, Karen Ferency Baker, Ashleigh Moody, Terry Rensel, Mackowski, Swartz, Bierle, Simoneaux, Netherland, and Williams.

Lastly, I will thank those who were pivotal in crafting the first book. Holly Bissonnette Braud, Daniel Chick, Terri Blom Crocker, Andrea Daniel, Sarah Harrell, Michael Kraemer, David Marsich, Rebecca Murry Rushing, Mechelle Rouchon Neuerburg, Evelyn Ashley Sorrell, and Tara Subaiya read over the text. James Blankenship of the Petersburg National Battlefield read the book and corrected some minor errors. Robert E. L. Krick of the Richmond National Battlefield also assisted in this regard. James Bartek, Derek Green, Jordan Grove, and Bryce Suderow assisted me in a similar fashion. Bridget Barry of Potomac Books was quick to reply and read over my work. Lastly, to pay for that book's maps, images, and index, at a time when my finances were not in the best shape, I launched a Kickstarter campaign. That I was able to raise the needed money was a humbling experience. Below are the contributors, printed here for a second round of gratitude:

Ken Agress, James Bartek, Chris Baudot, Andy Beaton, Antonio Benitez-Donoso, Stephen Benson, Jesse Blazek, Brad Boudreaux, Tam Cao, Daniel Chick, William J. Chick, Christopher Cook, Thomas Cmajdalka, Madelaene Coy, Terri Crocker, Andrea Daniel, Chris Davis, Zach Dewoody, Andy Donovan, Ashley Dunham, Brian Eiermann, Alex Grant, Derek Green, Billy Grove, Jordan Grove, Brett Guidry (15 dollars... 15 American dollars!), Louis Guidry, Adam Hackley, Christina Cavicchia Hargis, Bethany Heist, Ken Hemphill, Scott Henshaw, Michael Kramer, Annie Labruzzo, Harry Laver, Quentin Mason, Michael McCalpin, Brian McClure, Lanise McKenzie, Ashley McKnight, Stephen McLeod, Veronica Miles, Sean Neuerburg, Allyson O'Keefe, Joe Parrino, Zasu Pitts, Ryan Powers, Peter Putnam, Devin Savoie, Nina Schwanse, Nichole Simmons, Andrew Simoneaux, Jill Soileau, Cora Grace Smith, Eric Stubbs, Markus Stumptner, Michael Sünder, Tony Taplin, Bruce Verdin, Jayne Verdin, Melanie Verdin, Melissa Verdin, Lance Wattigney, Alexis Williams, and Reid Willis.



A black and white photograph of a stone marker in a field. The marker is a rectangular stone with text carved into it. The background shows a line of tall pine trees under a cloudy sky. The field is filled with tall grass and weeds.

GOLOQUITT'S SALIENT  
ON JUNE 18 1864 THE  
CONFEDERATES ON THIS  
HILL REPULSED THE  
CHARGE OF THE FIRST  
MAINE REGIMENT  
ON MARCH 25 1865 FROM  
THIS SALIENT GENERAL  
JOHN B. GORDON LED A  
BODY OF PICKED MEN  
TO SURPRISE AND  
CAPTURE FORT STEADMAN

# Foreword

BY GORDON C. RHEA

On May 3, 1864, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant launched a multi-faceted campaign to bring Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia to its knees. One Union army advanced south through the Shenandoah Valley, threatening Lee's western flank, while another moved north up the James River toward Richmond, aiming to capture the Confederacy's capital and sever Lee's supply lines. Grant's hammer was the Army of the Potomac, commanded by Maj. Gen. George Gordon Meade. Twice the size of Lee's army, the Potomac Army confronted Lee across Central Virginia's Rapidan River and stood poised to assail Lee head-on.

The ensuing series of battles, popularly known as the Overland Campaign, opened as Meade's army, accompanied by Grant, marched from its camps near Culpeper Courthouse and crossed to Lee's side of the Rapidan. For the next forty days, the armies fought and maneuvered non-stop in a ferocious campaign that left some 90,000 soldiers dead, wounded, or imprisoned. Combat flared on May 5 as the armies grappled below the Rapidan in a thickly-forested region aptly named

**The Confederate position—  
which the 1st Maine Heavy  
Artillery charged on June 18,  
1864—is marked just in front  
of the lines the Confederates  
held.** (smc)

The Wilderness. Stymied, the Potomac Army slid south to Spotsylvania Court House, aiming to interpose between Lee and Richmond and compel the Confederates to fight on ground favorable to the Federals. Lee, however, won the race to the courthouse town, and his troops erected imposing earthworks that again stalled the Union advance. Over the next two weeks, a welter of Union offenses failed to overwhelm Lee's defenses. More maneuvering brought the armies south to the North Anna River, where Lee responded by deploying the Army of Northern Virginia into a wedge-shaped formation, its apex resting on the river's southern bank and each leg fortified along high ground. The clever arrangement invited the Federals into an ambush; when they advanced, the Confederate wedge split Meade's army in half, enabling Lee to attack either half of the divided Union force. Lee, however, had become too ill to execute the maneuver, and the Federals soon discovered the trap and entrenched. Stalemated again, the Potomac Army disengaged and ventured downriver some thirty miles to crossings near Hanover town. Lee responded by forming a strong line at Totopotomoy Creek, interposing between the Federals and Richmond. Attempting to slip around Lee's lower flank, the Potomac army, reinforced by William F. "Baldy" Smith's 18th Corps, focused on an intersection known as Old Cold Harbor. Fighting raged in that sector on June 1 and June 3, but the Federals were unable to make any significant headway against the Confederate defenses.

Undaunted, Grant shifted his focus to cutting Lee's supply lines, calculating that the strategy would compel Lee to abandon his Cold Harbor fortifications. He dispatched Union cavalry to sever the Virginia Central Railway, aiming to shut off Lee's supplies from the Shenandoah Valley, and explored ways to attack Petersburg and sever Lee's supply lines from the south. Confederate cavalry thwarted the move against the railway by scoring a victory at Trevilian Station on June 11–12, but Grant, undaunted, withdrew the Army of the Potomac from Cold Harbor during the night of June 12 and headed south toward the James River and Petersburg.

Grant's ensuing attempt to capture Petersburg is the focus of this book. As a climax to his Overland Campaign, Grant on June 15–18 launched a series of attacks to take the Cockade City. While Baldy Smith,



who led the initial assault, broke through the Confederate fortifications protecting Petersburg, his failure to promptly exploit his victory enabled Confederate Gen. Pierre G. T. Beauregard to bring in reinforcements and construct a new defensive line. Over the next three days, the Potomac Army arrived piecemeal and launched a series of disjointed and largely unsuccessful attacks. Frustrated, Grant finally halted the offensives and set about preparing for an extended campaign. The first four days of combat at Petersburg ended with the Confederates still holding the city and Grant stymied once again.

Sean Chick ranks among the most knowledgeable historians of Grant's attempt to take Petersburg at the culmination of the Overland Campaign. His *The Battle of Petersburg: June 15–18, 1864* (University of Nebraska Press, 2015), explores those events in detail. This current book presents a shorter but equally engaging recounting and serves as an excellent guide to touring the Petersburg battlefield. It is a fine addition to the outstanding campaign studies sponsored by Emerging Civil War.

**A lone cannon sits in Battery 5 near the Petersburg Battlefield Visitor Center. (cm)**

**GORDON C. RHEA is the author of numerous Civil War books, mostly about the 1864 Overland Campaign, including *On to Petersburg: Grant and Lee, June 4–15, 1864*.**





**“You cannot strike a full blow  
with a wounded hand.”**

*—Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Lyman III,  
aide-de-camp to Maj. Gen. George Meade*







VAIVE  
FIRST HEAVY ARTILLERY  
A MEMBER OF  
504 BRAVE MEMBERS WHO FELL  
DURING HERE  
AUG 8, 1864

VAIVE  
PEACE  
VAIVE



# Prologue

Between the lines, the horrors of the June 18 battle of Petersburg were omnipresent. The 1st Maine Heavy Artillery had charged that day with some 900 men—charged bravely but in vain. Not a man reached the Rebel lines. Colonel Robert McAllister, a nearby brigade commander, was in shock. “[T]he ground was strewn with wounded, dead and dying,” he recorded. “The cry of the wounded is ‘Water! water! water!’ but no relief can be sent them. Hundreds of our wounded thus died in sight. It was perfectly heartrending to hear their cries and yet be unable to give them that relief which we would so gladly have furnished.”

Colonel Daniel Chaplin, commander of the 1st Maine Heavies, cried that night. Over the following months, many thought a desire for death overcame him: he recklessly exposed himself to enemy fire whenever he could.

McAllister and Chaplin were not alone in their gloom. Brigadier General Regis De Trobriand wrote, many years after the war, that having seen his

**A monument to the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery stands vigil over the field where so many members of its regiment fell.**  
(cm)



**In 1885, the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery held a reunion at the home of their comrade Horace T. Shaw. Shaw wrote a history of the unit.** (fmha)

brigade “sacrificed under his eyes . . . a melancholy discouragement took hold” and he “was surrounded by phantoms.” On June 19, Sgt. H. P. Smith called roll in the 1st Maine Heavies and considered it the most difficult task of his life.

The dead could not be recovered. When the Federals advanced a skirmish line, they were ambushed by the 7th South Carolina Battalion. Recovery would come only late at night. A reporter for the *New York Daily News* noted that “all night by the light of a full moon the living were burying the dead. It is horrible work, but the end is not yet.” Sergeant Thomas R. Petrie of the 152nd New York rode about on horseback and commanded his stretcher bearers as they brought the men to the rear. Even by June 20, some forty dead and wounded still lay where the 1st Maine Heavies had charged. In the end, some 200 men from the regiment died.

On the same day Smith called his difficult roll, Union Maj. Gen. George Meade asked Confederate Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard if he could collect his wounded. Beauregard replied, “Since assuming our present lines, no serious engagement has taken place which would justify an approval of your proposition, which appears unusual under existing circumstances.” He added “All the dead and wounded in reach of my lines have been removed. After a general battle I will cheerfully accede to a flag of truce for the purposes indicated.” Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Lyman, serving in Meade’s staff, considered it evidence of Beauregard’s “mean creole blood.”





The left (top) and right (bottom) plates of the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery monument chronicle those mortally wounded or killed, respectively, on June 18, 1864. (am)



**The 1st Maine monument as it appeared in 1934. At that time, there were fewer trees and no residential homes bordering the park. (cpmc)**

It was inhumane, but likely Beauregard did not want the Federals getting a closer look at his still incomplete works. In addition, the fighting in the earlier Bermuda Hundred campaign had seen many occasions where the Rebels did not bury Federal dead, no doubt in part because the loathed Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler was their opponent.

The Union hospital corps was—surprisingly—not adequately prepared. The surgeons of the XVIII Corps had been ordered elsewhere to establish field hospitals and, thus, were not on hand to help in the aftermath, forcing VI Corps to send its medical personnel. The band of the 152nd New York was also pressed into service in the hospitals. Wounded men from previous days were crammed on boats but delayed in their evacuation by the army's crossing of the James River. Others suffered in springless wagons. Many men died of wounds each day, and many hospital assistants were untrained and did as much harm as good. Amputated limbs piled up and blood pooled in low places.

Still, hospitals saved lives. James Donley of the 18th Pennsylvania Cavalry underwent two amputations, but survived to live a long life. His comrade Sgt. Thomas Fitzpatrick was maimed when a bullet hit his carbine and wood splinters mangled



his hand. He survived and was later the head of several national cemeteries.

The pain did not end there. Major George Sabine returned to Maine, but died of his wounds nearly a year later. S. B. Dearborn of the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery encountered one of the 1st Maine's wounded after the war. Dearborn described the man as having "had seven bullet holes in him, one of which was through the throat so that he was unable to speak, but he . . . was peddling confectionery on the muster field at Concord, MA, minus an arm, breathing through a tube."



**Members of the 1st Maine wore special badges at their 1885 reunion. (cah)**



# The Aftermath of Cold Harbor

## CHAPTER ONE

*JUNE 3–7, 1864*

Less than ten miles from Richmond, Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia faced off against Maj. Gen. George Gordon Meade's Army of the Potomac. For weeks, the two armies had fought a bitter series of engagements: Wilderness, Spotsylvania, and North Anna. Wilderness and Spotsylvania were among the ten bloodiest battles of the war. Losses soared, but the Federals got the worst of it—and were further weakened as soldiers' enlistments ran out.

Both armies suffered terrible officer casualties. Federal officers directing brigades, regiments, and companies fell by the bushel, and some brigades went through numerous command changes. Lee suffered worse at the top. Lieutenant General James Longstreet, commander of Lee's First Corps and his second in command, suffered a horrible wound at the Wilderness, and Maj. Gen. James Ewell Brown "Jeb" Stuart, commander of the cavalry corps, was dead following a battle at Yellow Tavern. Lieutenant Generals Richard Ewell and Ambrose Powell Hill, commanding the Second and Third Corps, both

**Some of the trenches dug by the VI Corps at Cold Harbor are visible at Richmond National Battlefield Park.** (SMC)

**Ulysses Grant (left) was shy, but his ironclad loyalty won him hard and fast friends who aided his rise to command of all the Union armies. (loc)**

**Before 1864, George Meade (right) could claim three battlefield victories against Lee's army at Gettysburg, Bristoe Station, and Rappahanock Station. (loc)**



underperformed, with Hill often out due to illness and Ewell reassigned to the Richmond defenses.

On June 1, the armies clashed again at Cold Harbor, the same area where they had fought in 1862. Grant ordered an attack for June 3. Meade, out of practice and in a foul mood, did not scout the ground or develop a good plan of attack. Federals did not detect Lee's exposed right flank. Even worse, the one-day delay allowed the Confederates to entrench. Their lines were thin but held by determined veterans in strong fortifications. Reserves were well-placed, and Lee's commanders cooperated effectively. The Union's II, VI, and XVIII Corps made a full attack, while the IX Corps probed, and the V Corps did not make a full strike. In the day's ensuing carnage, some 7,000 men were lost.

After the war, Charles S. Venable, a lieutenant colonel on Lee's staff, concluded that the June 3 victory was "perhaps the easiest ever granted to Confederate arms by the folly of the Federal commanders."

In disgust, Col. Emory Upton, one of the Army of the Potomac's finest combat commanders, bemoaned that "the courage of the poor men is expected to obviate all difficulties" and that some of the generals "are not fit to be corporals." Men in the ranks increasingly detested Grant, one cry being that his initials U. S. no longer stood for "Unconditional Surrender" or "Uncle Sam" but rather "Unfortunate Strategist."

Cold Harbor saw Meade's army shredded. Grant and Meade were ignorant for a time that they had suffered such a stinging defeat, although Meade's corps commanders advised Grant not to try again. For

now, the two armies were locked in a death grip at the gates of Richmond.

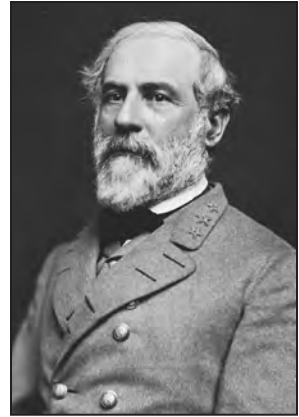
In between the lines, it was a horror show. Hundreds of wounded Northern soldiers—as many as 1,100 by some estimates—laid under a merciless June sun. Rebel sharpshooters picked off any who dared to come out to help them. Artillery shells kept up a constant barrage, shells sometimes falling among those wounded between the lines.

Some men killed themselves, one reportedly slitting his throat to end the pain. Others lived off dew from plants or drank from canteens thrown over the lines. John G. Perry, attached to the Federal II Corps, said the Confederate lines were “so near that a biscuit could easily be tossed into them.” Close as they were, it was nigh impossible to retrieve men in daylight, and even night forays were dangerous.

The dead turned black and bloated; the stench became unbearable to the living. “[M]en lay in places like hogs in a pen—some side by side, across each other, some two deep, while others with their legs lying across the head and body of their dead comrades,” wrote Augustus Dickert of the 3rd South Carolina. “Calls all night long could be heard coming from the wounded and dying, and one could not sleep for the sickening sound ‘W-a-t-e-r’ ever sounding and echoing in his ears.”

Men on both sides wondered when someone would call a ceasefire, but none came on June 3 or on June 4. By some accounts, Grant was reluctant to ask for a truce, which could have been seen as an admittance of defeat, although Grant himself never stated this. Nevertheless, after a failed assault at Vicksburg, he went for days without asking for a ceasefire. During that time, according to William Lovelace Foster of the 35th Mississippi, the bodies had become “very offensive” because, “The weather being hot, decomposition was rapid.” The Confederate commander, Lt. Gen. John Pemberton, finally called for a ceasefire to deal with the problem, to which Grant acquiesced.

Perhaps it was a delay in word getting back to the commanders about the horror between the lines, but nothing was done until Grant finally blinked on June 7. By then, the field was a realm of stinking flesh, and precious few men remained alive to be



**Although Robert E. Lee had checked Grant in every battle, his failure to stop him from reaching Richmond depressed him, knowing Grant's victory would then be a question of time unless the Confederates were successful in Georgia.**

(loc)





**The dead of Cold Harbor—and the nearby battles of Mechanicsville, Gaines Mill, and Savage Station—were interred in a national cemetery shortly after the war. (smc)**

rescued. For Grant, Meade, and Lee, it was not their finest hour. It was a reminder of the war's brutality and the pettiness and callousness that even these high commanders could exhibit.

At this point, the campaign had been a costly success for Lee. He prevented the destruction of his army and still held Richmond; his men were exhausted but in high spirits. But Maj. Gen. Charles W. Field, one of Lee's division commanders, caught the army's predicament. They had foiled Grant in every battle and, backed up against Richmond, were actually eating better than ever. Nonetheless, "there was a sombre tinge to the soldier within our thinned ranks which expressed itself in the homely phrase, 'What is the use of killing these Yankees? it is like killing mosquitoes—two come for every one you kill.'" The fighting had been so constant, Pvt. Frank M. Mixson of the 1st South Carolina noted, that he and his comrades could recall little that had happened in the previous weeks. Lee's army was intact, but hardly capable of an offensive. Fortunately, Grant and Meade could clearly not again attack and force their way into Richmond.

In the Federal camp, the officers bickered in an army already notorious for its back-biting. At one point Meade, Maj. Gen. William F. Smith, and Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside were in a meeting. Meade detested Burnside and Burnside detested Smith who, in turn, openly detested Burnside and, unknown to Meade,



blamed him for Cold Harbor. The whole meeting was described by one observer as a “Military icicle.”

Meade, for his part, privately blamed Grant, but he never made this known. Instead, Meade took his frustrations out on Edward Crapsey, a reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Crapsey reported that Meade wanted to retreat after the Wilderness, so Meade ran him out of camp on an angry mule while a band played “The Rogue’s March.”

Grant blamed his subordinates in general, but he did not remove anyone or openly blame them. They were loyal to Grant, a trait he valued above all others. Brigadier General James Wilson, who commanded a cavalry division, was friends with Grant but blamed both Grant and his subordinates for the poor results.

Regardless, as the armies faced each other, Grant turned his determined eyes elsewhere. He would not let Cold Harbor be the last word on his Virginia campaign. Many noted that in the coming days, Grant’s usually flat expression showed one burdened by heavy thinking.

And as Grant thought, his eyes turned south to Petersburg.

**The Garthright House served as a field hospital during Cold Harbor. Some ninety-seven men died in the home. (smc)**



PA 159

GLENDALE (FRAYSEK'S FARM)

In the night, the Union Army of the Potomac made a stand on 30 June 1862, during its retreat from the Chickahominy River toward the James River. Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan posted several Union divisions facing east and north to guard the intersection, known locally as Suddell's Loop, in the ensuing battle. Confederate divisions commanded by Major General James Longstreet and A. P. Hill attacked the Union divisions of Brig. Gen. George A. McCall and Maj. Gen. Philip Kearney. The action became hand-to-hand, the two sides fighting with bayonets while they attempted possession of the loop at their mutual nearby. In addition, McClellan ordered Maj. Gen. John C. Hunter to lead the 47th Virginia Infantry. The Union line held, enabling McClellan to continue his retreat.

YARD SALE



*From the Chickahominy  
to the James*

**CHAPTER TWO**  
*JUNE 6-14, 1864*

In the aftermath of Cold Harbor, the armies led by Robert E. Lee and George Meade had settled into a strategic stalemate. They were less than ten miles from the brass ring of Richmond, which, if taken, would decide the war. Meade was close, but the Confederates held the advantage. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia was well entrenched and in comparatively better shape. Despite some heavy officer losses, Lee's men had high morale and, with some exceptions, his brigades were battered but still cohesive.

The Army of the Potomac, while not destroyed, was in poor condition. Their morale had plummeted, and many blamed Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, commander of the entire Union Army and who, in particular, oversaw operations in Virginia. As such, any failure in Virginia was attributed to him. Grant fought costly battles with Lee, suffering huge losses in manpower. Grant ignored those losses, which had some strategic benefits, but that approach did nothing to improve morale in the army or throughout the North.

**The site of Riddell's Shop is marked, although the plate discusses it in context of the 1862 battle of Glendale instead of the 1864 skirmish. (smc)**

Not since the aftermath of Shiloh was Grant so unpopular with the rank and file. John West Haley of the 17th Maine wrote, “We were tired of charging earthworks. Many soldiers expressed freely their scorn of Grant’s alleged general ship, which consists of launching men against breastworks. It is well known that one man behind works is as good as three outside the works.”

“If losing sixty thousand men is a slight loss, I never want to see a heavy one,” wrote Surgeon Daniel M. Holt of the 121st New York. “We, as a regiment, have almost ceased to exist, and if the next six months prove as disastrous to us as the last six weeks have, not a soul will be left to recite the wholesale slaughter which has taken place on the sacred soil of Virginia.”

Captain Abner R. Small of the 16th Maine wrote, “We couldn’t help thinking how McClellan had got the army almost to Richmond with hardly the loss of a man, while Grant had lost already thousands more than we cared to guess.”

Colonel Charles S. Wainwright, chief of artillery for the Federal V Corps, sharply criticized the frontal attacks as “a mere shoving forward of a brigade or two now here now there, like a chess-player shoving out his pieces and then drawing them right back.” Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, who was a little less critical, thought Grant “was like Thor, the hammer, striking blow after blow, intent on his purpose to beat his way through, somewhat reckless of the cost.”

The army’s poor condition was in no small part due to the command situation. The Army of the Potomac had originally been crafted by Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan. In order to preserve the Union—with slavery intact and the Constitution

unchanged—he favored conservative Democrats intent on a quick, relatively bloodless victory. The Radical Republicans opposed these aims and were scared that McClellan might ride his victories into a presidential term, as military heroes George Washington, Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison, and Zachary Taylor had done before him. As such, they undermined



**George McClellan was popular in 1864 with Democrats who believed he had been undermined by Lincoln and Stanton. This sheet music written in his honor was called “McClellan is the Man.”** (loc)

McClellan, and the army divided into pro- and anti-McClellan factions that still posed an issue long after “Little Mac” left the field.

Just as bad, the Army of the Potomac’s proximity to Washington made it susceptible to political meddling—subject to intervention and even micro-management by President Abraham Lincoln, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck, and many others in both parties.

In contrast, out West, generals such as Grant and Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans had more flexibility. Lincoln never told his Western generals that the Army of Tennessee had to be destroyed in battle as he expected with Lee’s army in Virginia. To be sure, there was a fair share of bickering and back-biting within the Western armies, but overall, they had freer hands and, tellingly, much more success.

In this atmosphere, the Army of the Potomac was a snake-pit, hobbled by bickering, lethargy, and interference. Command of the army was, to quote Meade in a letter to his wife, “more likely to destroy one’s reputation than to add to it.” Meade might have added subordinates to that list. Both Brig. Gen. Charles F. Stone and Maj. Gen. Fitz John Porter had earlier been stripped of commands chiefly for the sin of being McClellan loyalists and Democrats.

In large part, Meade owed his command to his ability to rise above such squabbles for, although a conservative, he avoided politics. He had also proven to be a brave and capable warrior, and he had performed well at Second Bull Run and Fredericksburg. However, Meade was not an inspiring man. When a medical officer complained to him that his men called him “Old Pills,” Meade snapped back, “Well, what of that? How can I prevent it? Why, I hear that, when I rode out the other day, some of the men called me ‘a damned old goggle-eyed snapping turtle.’”

Lincoln promoted Meade to army command in the summer of 1863, and just days later, Meade won the battle of Gettysburg. Considering the magnitude of the fighting, the victory added to Meade’s standing in the army but not much outside of it. Critics blamed him for failing to pursue Lee in the aftermath of the fight. The accusation was hollow because rain, a lack of cavalry trained for pursuit, inadequate supplies,

and strong Confederate defenses at Falling Waters made Meade's task nearly impossible. Lincoln did not see it that way, though, declaring, "We had them in our grasp. We had only to stretch forth our hands and they were ours." In a more charitable, if still bitter, moment, Lincoln said, "I am profoundly grateful down to the bottom of my boots for what he did at Gettysburg, but I think if I were General Meade I would have fought another battle."

Meade came under criticism and eventually investigation. At the same time, he bickered with Halleck and disagreed with Lincoln, who wanted Lee's army destroyed. Meade wryly observed that if Lee did not want a battle, he could avoid it. In that fall of 1863, Meade wanted to flank Lee, either by marching on Fredericksburg or trying another march up the James Peninsula. Lincoln—who wanted Lee destroyed before he could withdraw to Richmond and its entrenchments—rejected both plans.

In this, Lincoln was playing into Lee's hands. Lee feared a slow, grinding campaign at Richmond. Lee knew he could not win such a campaign in the long run, and he preferred to fight in northern Virginia, away from Richmond.

After the Mine Run campaign ended with only minor Federal victories and territorial gains, Lincoln wanted a new commander. Although Meade was under investigation, he dodged the fate of Porter, in no small part because he was popular with most of the army's best commanders, in particular Brig. Gen. John Gibbon and Maj. Gens. Winfield Scott Hancock, John Sedgwick, and Gouverneur Kemble Warren. Except for Gibbon, any of these men might have replaced Meade, but none of them were willing to actively intrigue against him.

Lincoln instead turned to Grant, promoting him from the Western armies to come east and take command of all Federal forces. With Grant coming, Meade expected to be removed. While Lincoln only hinted that he preferred Meade gone, Stanton bluntly told Grant, "You will find a very weak irresolute man there and my advice to you is to make a change at once."

When Meade met Grant, he offered his resignation and stated his willingness to serve wherever he was placed. Grant recalled, "This incident gave me even



a more favorable opinion of Meade than did his great victory at Gettysburg.”

Meade, whether he knew it or not, had just shown the attitude Grant most looked for in his subordinates: subservience. Grant was perpetually stoic and calm, but his outward modesty and reticence hid an unquenchable ambition, and he did not brook ambitious or willful subordinates, no matter their abilities. Major Generals Gordon Granger, William S. Rosecrans, John McClelland, George Thomas, and Benjamin Prentiss had all suffered Grant’s quiet wrath, even though each had performed well in battle.

Meade, by his show of duty, saved his position, but Grant was not willing to trust Meade to lead the army on his own. For one, he knew Meade disapproved of Lincoln’s strategy; for another, Meade was unpopular with the press and the politicians. If he suffered a defeat, there would be hell to pay. Furthermore, Grant could not pass up the possibility of taking on the South’s most celebrated soldier.

Grant’s presence had a mixed effect on the army. Grant was tenacious and had an aptitude for combined operations, logistics, strategy, and operational maneuver. However, he was not an inspiring man; Grant had no dash, and he was never a darling of the soldiers.

Furthermore, by hovering near Meade, Grant created command confusion. When Meade bickered with Maj. Gen. Phillip Sheridan, the cavalry corps commander, rather than back Meade, Grant chose Sheridan. Meade and Maj. Gen. William F. Smith, commander of XVIII Corps, were on foul terms, as well. Sheridan and Smith were both Grant favorites, and Grant had a proclivity to defend his friends no matter the situation.

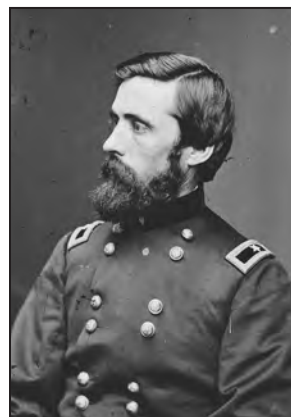
Another of Grant’s weaknesses was that he was not a particularly good tactician. He ordered many fruitless assaults at the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, and Cold Harbor. James Wilson, one of the army’s cavalry commanders, and Brig. Gen. John Rawlins, Grant’s chief of staff, blamed the poor tactics on Lt. Col. Cyrus Comstock, who encouraged Grant to make frontal assaults.

By the time Federal forces assaulted at Cold Harbor, they had been fighting and marching for four straight weeks. They had sustained tens of thousands



**William F. Smith favored the peninsula approaches to Richmond, which is one reason he was sacked in early 1863. In 1864, he advised Grant to take this approach.**  
(loc)

**John Rawlins kept Grant sober and proved to be a first-rate administrator with a solid grasp of tactics and strategy. He favored concentrating 180,000 men under Meade and Butler rather than Grant’s two-pronged attack.** (loc)





**Although he was among the first Union generals, Benjamin Butler did not command troops in a battle until 1864, when he lost to Beauregard at Drewry's Bluff. (loc)**

of casualties, high losses in the officer corps, and thousands of departures from expired enlistments. The Army of the Potomac seemed a spent force.

\* \* \*

If the Federal army was in rotten condition, it nonetheless sat in its best strategic position since June 1862. Much of this had to do with Grant, who was a good strategist. Grant's previous battles showed his understanding of strategic points and armies as the twin objectives. For instance, Fort Donelson in 1862 and Vicksburg in 1863 were both strategic points that also offered prime opportunities to attack substantial enemy forces—forces that were subsequently captured because they were defending those very geographic points.

When Grant first came east, he sought to use more indirect approaches, and he considered the Virginia peninsula, North Carolina coast, and Shenandoah Valley as areas of major operations. Lincoln and Halleck would have none of it, and Grant did not press the issue. Indeed, one of Grant's other talents was his skill at army politics and, unlike McClellan and Meade, he bent to Lincoln's wishes. It was not the first time Grant had acquiesced to Lincoln's questionable decisions. After Vicksburg fell, Grant opposed Lincoln's plan to send troops to Texas, instead preferring to take Mobile. When Lincoln reacted negatively to Grant's opposition, Grant quickly changed his tune.

Grant did, however, get Lincoln to approve a move on Richmond with Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler's Army of the James. This was not a feint but a major operation that Grant hoped would "break the military power of the rebellion."

Grant's flexible approach, to simultaneously crush Lee in battle (as Lincoln wanted), destroy his supply centers in the Valley, and capture Richmond, should have worked. However, Lee foiled Grant in each of their battles; the attacks into the Shenandoah Valley failed; and Butler was ultimately beaten.

Despite tactical defeats in battle, Grant had steadily moved closer to Richmond after each conflict, maneuvering around Lee's dug-in army. Cold Harbor proved the latest check, just eight miles outside the



Confederate capital. Now with the James River to the immediate south, Grant faced a diminished ability to continue maneuvering around Lee. The Federal commander began to cast about for options.

On May 3, he had pointed to a line from Richmond to Petersburg and declared, "When my troops are there, Richmond is mine." That line, the railroad, provided all the supplies for Lee's army.

Comstock wanted to swing out and around Lee again, this time with the objective of destroying the railroad. Meade wanted to pin Lee at Cold Harbor while Sheridan raided the rear. Halleck, meanwhile, advocated a plan of siege, with Grant north of Richmond, where he could more easily defend Washington if need be while he slowly enveloped the Confederate capital.

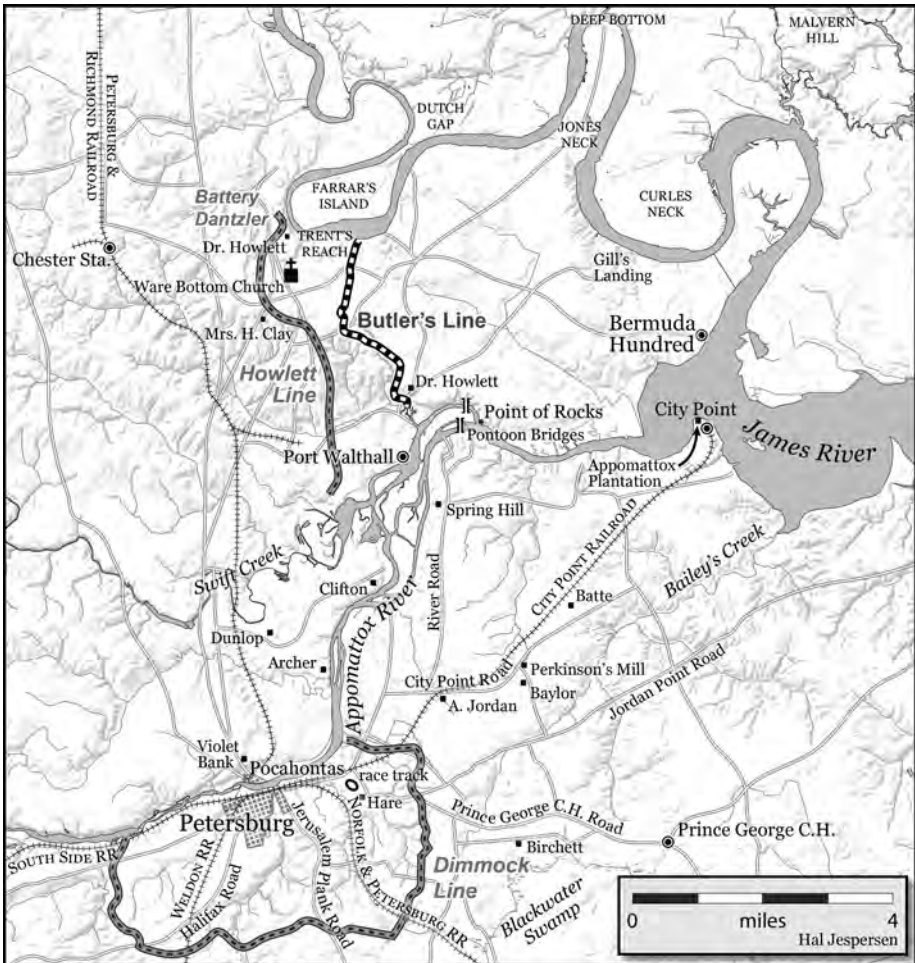
Grant admitted to Halleck that, while he had hoped to destroy Lee, he always saw himself ultimately going south of the James to either besiege or chase Lee. As such, Meade would swing south, cross the James, and take Petersburg. Once Petersburg fell, Richmond could only be supplied by one exposed rail line.

It was a bold and complicated plan that required quick action. However, Grant could not wholly decide if he expected to take Petersburg by surprise or by siege. In one letter, he confessed, "This is likely to prove a very tedious job I have on hand but I feel very confident of ultimate success." It was not a good sign for an operation predicated on fast maneuvers.

The supply line between Petersburg and Richmond was so vital that the fall of Petersburg would mean the fall of Richmond. That, in turn, would mean the reelection of President Lincoln—and Lincoln needed the help. He was, by the late spring of 1864, in the toughest political position of his presidency.

Democrats blocked the Thirteenth Amendment. Radicals, mad at him for opposing their Reconstruction plan, nominated John C. Fremont for president on May 31 to try and force Lincoln's hand. Butler, himself looking to replace Lincoln on the ticket, declared, "This country has more vitality than any other on earth if it can stand this sort of administration for another four years."

The long casualty lists, all to end up where McClellan was in June 1862, encouraged no one. The Western theater, normally a source of good



**BERMUDA HUNDRED AND PETERSBURG**—The fighting in June 1864 mostly took place in an area where Butler and Beauregard had fought weeks before. Strong Confederate defenses kept Butler from attacking and pushing toward the Petersburg & Richmond Railroad, but Petersburg to the south was vulnerable, leading to the skirmish of June 9 and the battle of June 15–18, 1864.

news, had seen some minor Confederate victories at New Hope Church, Pickett's Mill, and Brice's Crossroads. A minor but much-publicized Federal victory at Dallas was not enough.

Meanwhile, good news arrived from the Valley. On June 5, Maj. Gen. David Hunter smashed a Confederate force at Piedmont. Confident his lines could hold, Lee sent Maj. Gen. Jubal Early with 10,000 men to defeat Hunter and, if possible, threaten Washington, D.C. Such a threat might force Grant to send men north, a gambit that had worked in 1862. Grant, meanwhile, sent Sheridan on a massive raid

meant to aid Hunter. Sheridan ended up fighting at Trevilian Station on June 11. The battle was fierce but ultimately a Rebel victory. Sheridan could not come to Hunter's aid, and Early's move to the Valley went off without a hitch. More importantly, Trevilian Station deprived Lee and Grant of most of their cavalry. This would have major repercussions for both commanders.

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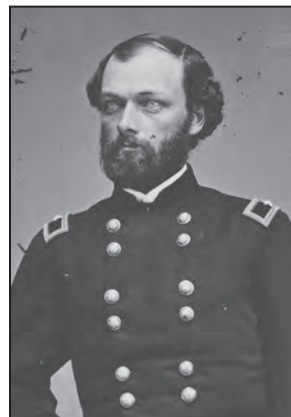
On June 7, Grant sent Comstock and Lt. Col. Horace Porter to choose a site for crossing the James River. They were also to meet with Butler, still "bottled up" south of the James in an area known as Bermuda Hundred. The three men discussed Grant's river crossing, but Comstock and Porter did not reveal Grant's exact plans. Butler easily discerned that Petersburg was the goal, though. A canny Massachusetts politician, Butler had converted from being a Democrat, skeptical of abolitionism, to the Radical Republican camp. He decided to try a preemptive strike of his own.

Butler's intelligence indicated that Petersburg was lightly held. There were only 1,500 men there, mostly cavalry and militia led by Meade's brother-in-law, Brig. Gen. Henry A. Wise. Butler wanted to raid the city, and in particular destroy the vital railroad bridge over the Appomattox River. For the mission, Butler amassed 4,600 men under Brig. Gen. Edward Hinks. However, Maj. Gen. Quincy Gillmore, commander of X Corps, politely insisted that he should lead the men due to his rank. Butler later mused, "I was fool enough to yield to him."

On June 9, two columns made for Petersburg. Brigadier General August Valentine Kautz with 1,300 cavalrymen came up the Jerusalem Plank Road. Gillmore, with the infantry, pressed upon Petersburg along City Point Railroad. If Gillmore and Kautz pressed ahead, they could accomplish their mission.

The Rebels had plenty of warning, though, and the local militia turned out to bolster the Confederate forces. Wise positioned what few veterans he had. Dubbed the "Life Insurance Brigade," they had only recently fought at the small battle of Ware Bottom Church. Before that, their last big fight was

**Quincy Gillmore, after victories at Fort Pulaski and Somerset, failed to take Charleston in 1863 and failed as commander of X Corps in the Bermuda Hundred campaign. (loc)**





**A small monument to the Petersburg militia commemorates the June 9 skirmish at Petersburg. (smc)**

at Malvern Hill in July 1862. They were experienced but hardly the hardened legions of Lee's army.

Wise left to get more men, and Brig. Gen. Raleigh E. Colston took command. Colston had an uneven record, but on June 9, he proved in top form, inspiring the defenders and shifting around his forces. Gillmore, meanwhile, performed at his worst. He was so inactive, the Rebels and the newspapers did not even report the presence of infantry in the fight. Butler, ever one for a good quip, told an officer, "I hope the next town we attack we shall get near enough for the enemy to know we are there."

Kautz came up the road at noon, confronting only the 160-man 3rd Virginia Reserves led by Maj. Fletcher Archer, a Petersburg lawyer with combat experience. They were well drilled but inadequately armed, yet they still managed to drive off the first Federal attack, a poorly made charge led by Col. Samuel Spear. Kautz admonished Spear and decided



to work around Archer's flanks, inflicting around eighty casualties in two hours. It worked, but it took time enough that Brig. Gen. James Dearing arrived with the 4th North Carolina Cavalry and Capt. Edward Graham's Petersburg Artillery. They raced through the streets, Graham yelling, "Damn the women! Run them over if they don't get out of the way!"

Kautz had pushed up to the city limits when he saw these fresh Confederate forces and wisely decided to retire. By then, Gillmore was falling back, removing Kautz's infantry support.

Butler was enraged. He already had a poor relationship with Gillmore, and now Butler rashly had his subordinate arrested. (Grant later transferred Gillmore to duties more fitting for a man of his engineering talents.) Butler was doubly embarrassed that his men were defeated by "old men and boys, the grave and the cradle being robbed." The June 9 engagement was one of the few great moments that a local militia force enjoyed in the Civil War. It was also—along with Staunton River Bridge and Honey Hill, fought almost six months later—the last hurrah for the militia system that had served America since Jamestown was founded in 1607.

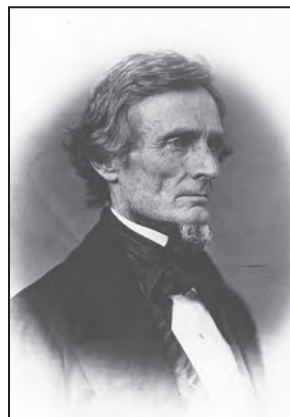
Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard commanded at Bermuda Hundred and Petersburg, and he determined that the June 9 attack was a prelude to something greater. Beauregard thought Grant would likely strike at Petersburg and Bermuda Hundred, although Chaffin's Bluff on the north side of the James was a possible target. He informed Lee, but Lee thought Grant would swing to the north bank of the James and hug it as he moved on Richmond, with gunboats supporting him. President Jefferson Davis and Gen. Braxton Bragg, Davis's chief military advisor, agreed with Lee. It was not surprising. Davis trusted Lee like no other, while he hated Beauregard more than any other commander of his rank. For Lee's part, he was confident that if Meade did move on Petersburg, Beauregard would detect it in time. Of all the high-ranking officers, only Maj. Gen. Daniel Harvey Hill, serving on Beauregard's staff, correctly guessed Grant's plans at this point.

Regardless, on June 11, Beauregard wisely sent the rest of Wise's brigade to Petersburg. At the same



**Kautz fought with the 6th U.S. Cavalry in the Peninsula campaign before going west to lead the 2nd Ohio Cavalry.** (loc)

**Jefferson Davis agreed with Lee that the best route to victory was breaking the North's will, but Davis was generally more defensive minded.** (loc)



time, Archibald Gracie III's brigade, temporarily assigned to the Department of Richmond, returned to Beauregard's command.

The two men tasked with defending Richmond and Petersburg were a study in contrasts. Beauregard was an indifferent Catholic who was dramatic, arrogant, and flashy. He had a poisoned relationship with Davis and was a difficult subordinate. Lee, in contrast, was

reserved, unflamboyant, and serious about his Episcopal faith. He was a good subordinate and possessed a great relationship with Davis.

However, there were telling similarities between Lee and Beauregard. They had both gained fame in Mexico as engineers and often worked together in that conflict. Both were handsome, impeccably dressed, and popular with their troops and subordinates. By the summer of 1864, they had proven to be the only two consistently successful independent commanders of their rank.

Yet, Beauregard always felt he was in Lee's shadow. Lee received more praise in Mexico, and Lee had replaced Beauregard as the South's military hero in the summer of 1862. While each thought the other

among the South's best, Beauregard was jealous of Lee and could be quite critical of his strategic decisions. Lee, for his part, never seemed to have wholly trusted Beauregard.

The Confederate command's strengths and weaknesses were a mirror image of their Federal counterparts. Grant held a unified command, but his proximity to Meade hampered that high-strung officer. The army was wracked by back-biting. While Lincoln, Halleck, and Stanton gave Grant more probity and support than they ever did McClellan, Meade, or any other commander in Virginia, they had still turned down his initial plan to move against Lee indirectly. Meanwhile, outside of the Davis-Beauregard feud, the Confederates had less bickering within the army.



**A large oil painting of Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard was painted by P. P. Carter in 1894. This painting hung in city hall until it was put on "special loan" in January 2007 to the Confederate Museum in Charleston. (cmssc)**

However, the Rebels lacked a unified command. Beauregard did not fall into Lee's jurisdiction, so requests for troop transfers and strategic proposals had to go through Richmond. Lee, who respected Beauregard, wanted him as his second in command, but Beauregard refused. It was a bad arrangement that created confusion in terms of communication and planning.

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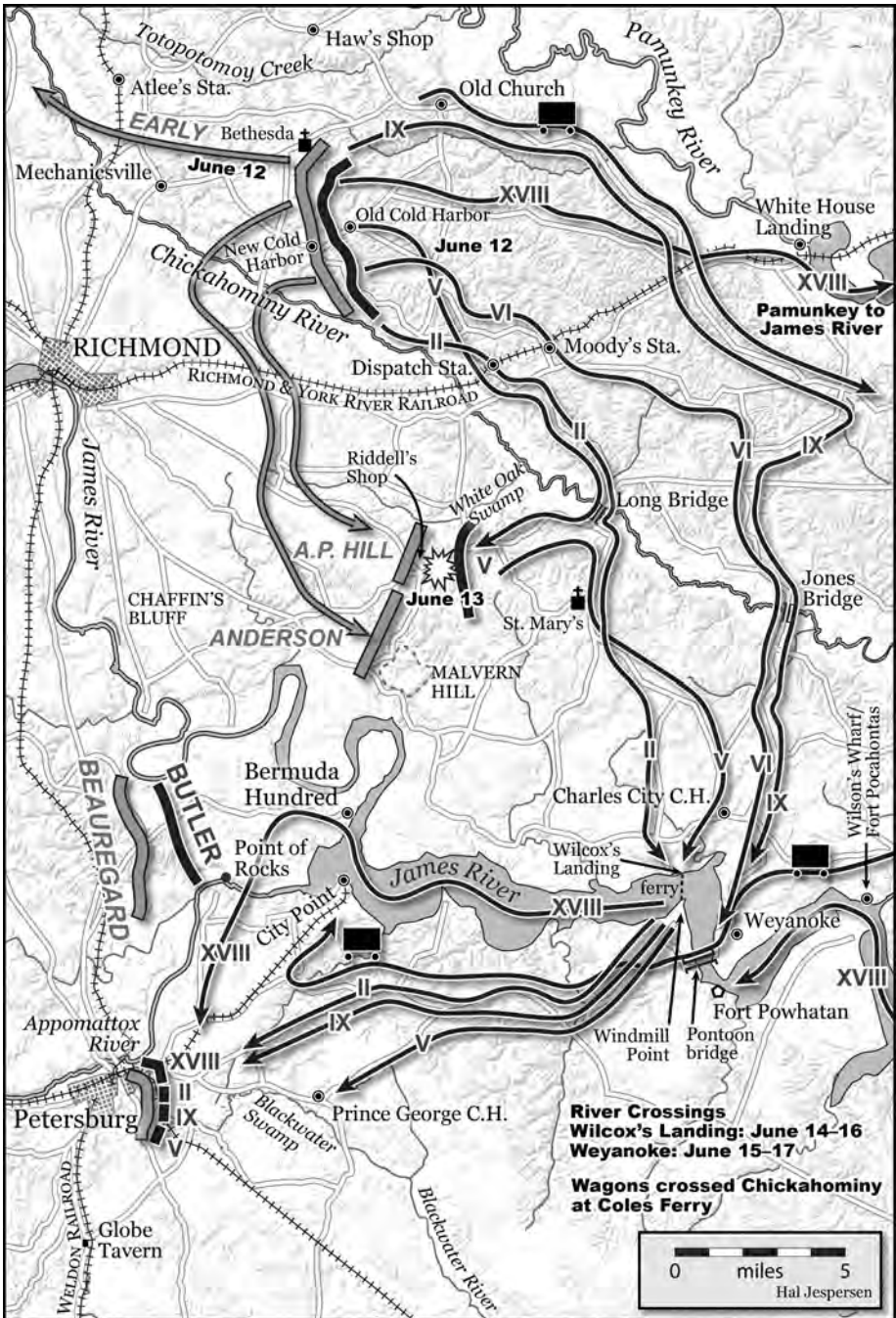
On June 11, Grant informed Meade and Butler of his plans to cross the James River, telling each to be ready on June 12. It was short notice for Meade, but he and his staff acted quickly and made the needed arrangements on time. Brigadier General Andrew Humphreys, Meade's highly competent chief of staff, aided in the effort. Whatever Meade's failures in 1864, he continued to ably carry out nearly every operational maneuver Grant asked him.

The plan was for V Corps and Brig. Gen. James Wilson's cavalry to make for Riddell's Shop, a crossroads less than fifteen miles from Richmond near Malvern Hill and Glendale, scenes of terrible fighting in 1862. They were to engage the Confederates, both screening the army's movements and decoying Lee into thinking that Grant was hitting Richmond from the south.

Meanwhile, II and VI Corps would make for the James to be ferried across. The IX Corps and the wagon train would cross a massive pontoon bridge, with the wagons guarded by a division of United States Colored Troops (USCT). The XVIII Corps would return to Bermuda Hundred by boat. From

**During the movement to the James River, Meade and his staff took time for a photograph on June 12. (loc)**





**CROSSING THE JAMES**—On June 12–13, Meade’s Army of the Potomac slipped away south while the XVIII Corps took boats to Bermuda Hundred. This phase of the operation was masterfully executed. By June 14, Federal forces had reached the James River with few delays. The V Corps and Wilson’s cavalry kept Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia at bay, and Lee was unable to discover what Grant and Meade intended.





there, if Butler deemed it possible, they would move on Petersburg, hopefully taking the city before Meade even arrived.

On June 12, final arrangements snapped into place. Porter noted that Grant seemed “wrought up to an intensity of thought and action that he seldom displayed.” That night, XVIII Corps moved to White House to board steamers for Bermuda Hundred. On June 12–13, the Army of the Potomac moved across the Chickahominy River. They withdrew without drawing Confederate attention.

The only considerable delay was at the Long Bridge, which V Corps had to cross. Confederate cavalry had destroyed the bridge and contested the crossing. The delay tested the patience of Warren, the prickly commander of V Corps. “Tell general Wilson if he can’t lay that bridge to get out of the way with his damned cavalry and I’ll lay it!” Warren snapped. Wilson took the slight hard. He later refused to shake Warren’s hand and told Grant to “send for Parker the Indian chief, and after giving him a tomahawk, a scalping knife and the worst whiskey the Commissary

**The Long Bridge as it appeared in August 2021.** (smc)





**William Waud sketched the crossing at Wilcox's Landing for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.** (flin)

Department can supply, send him out with orders to bring the scalps of major generals." Wilson had Warren on his mind.

Despite the delay, the V Corps successfully crossed the Chickahominy River, and on June 13, both Wilson and Warren made for Riddell's Shop. That same morning, the Rebels discovered Meade was gone, and Lee shifted his 40,000 men south of the Chickahominy River. Lee had considered that Grant might move below the James, but only with part of his force.

The day was hot, and both Union and Confederate forces suffered in the dirt and dust as they trudged south.

At Riddell's Shop, a nasty skirmish erupted. Federals gradually forced Rebel cavalry back, but then Confederate Maj. Gen. Cadmus Wilcox's Third Corps division arrived, forcing Wilson's horsemen back in turn. However, even when Maj. Gen. Henry Heth's Confederate division came up, the Rebels could not take Long Bridge. Confederates contented themselves with entrenching from Malvern Hill to White Oak Swamp, covering every major road into Richmond. The V Corps, having ably achieved their goal, gradually trudged behind the II Corps.

On June 14, the XVIII Corps reached Fort Monroe. The men were cramped, and many were weak from drinking bad water at Cold Harbor. Not least among the ill was Smith. The corps then haphazardly disembarked at Bermuda Hundred. Once landed, though, Smith's command was enlarged. He would keep the two X Corps brigades he had brought to Cold Harbor, plus have use of Kautz's cavalry and the USCT then stationed at City Point. While Butler discussed his plan of attack with

Kautz on June 13, Smith only discovered he was to attack Petersburg that night.

Meanwhile, the vanguard of II Corps reached the James River at Weyanoke Neck, although no transports waited to move them across. The II Corps would not cross until 5:00 p.m., a tedious process lasting until the morning of June 15. Downriver, nearly 500 engineers under Maj. James Duane, with assistance from Brig. Gen. Godfrey Weitzel of Butler's staff, worked on Grant's bridge. Construction did not begin until noon June 14 because Butler had sent his bridging material away. Once started though, the Federals worked fast. Duane had written the *Manual of Engineer Troops* in 1862 and pontoon bridges were his specialty. The completed bridge was nearly 2,100 feet long and consisted of 101 pontoon boats.

While II Corps crossed, Grant met with Butler. The general in chief wanted his subordinate to strike at Petersburg, with the II Corps to support as reinforcements. The II Corps needed rations—or so Grant had been incorrectly informed—and he wanted Butler to provide them. Meanwhile, II Corps Commander Winfield Scott Hancock told Meade, his direct superior, that II Corps had enough food. Meade might then have told Hancock to press on to Petersburg, but it seems Grant had not yet told Meade that the “Cockade City” was the goal (and wouldn't tell him so until that night).

**The crossing at Wilcox Landing was featured in *Harper's Weekly*. (hw)**



The other corps had no problems, and many marched through lands relatively unaffected by the war outside of occasional raids. The men looted homes freely and occasionally burned them. The VI Corps, in particular, committed many acts of vandalism and freely slaughtered livestock. There were reports of rape, as well, and after the coming battle, some men were executed for their crimes.

Confederates reacted in muddled fashion to Grant's maneuvering. Lee lacked enough cavalry to penetrate Wilson's screen. Without proper intelligence—but knowing he must defend Richmond—Lee assumed that Grant was moving on Chaffin's Bluff. While transports were seen going to Bermuda Hundred, scouts soon discovered the boats carried men of the Federal XVIII Corps. Lee assumed Grant was merely returning them to Butler for a strike at Bermuda Hundred.

Although Lee did not ascertain Grant's intention, Beauregard did. In reaction to Grant's moves, and after loaning Maj. Gen. Robert Hoke's division to Lee on the eve of Cold Harbor, Beauregard ordered Hoke back to Petersburg. He did not send his orders until the night of June 14. Hoke, still under Lee's command and responding to his order rather than Beauregard's, did not move out until the morning of June 15.

Although Beauregard could be condescending and overly dramatic in his communications, a discerning reader would have seen the logic in Beauregard's moves. The Federals had tried for

**The James River pontoon bridge when it was completed.**  
(loc)





Petersburg already. There was no reason to suppose they would not try again, particularly given the geography. If Meade could not bludgeon his way through Cold Harbor, he had less of a chance at Malvern Hill. Besides, Petersburg was too tempting a target.

Unfortunately, Lee had too readily dismissed Beauregard. The Army of Northern Virginia commander remained fixed on Richmond—understandable, considering the city’s importance and a lack of any hard intelligence. However, Lee might also have been wary of accepting the inevitable. According to Maj. Gen. Jubal Early, Lee had declared that if Grant “gets to James River . . . it will become a siege, and then it will be a mere question of time.”

That fear was being realized.

**Wilcox Landing today is a boat ramp with a pier. (smc)**





IN MEMORY OF  
THE VALOROUS SERVICE OF REGIMENTS  
AND COMPANIES  
OF THE U.S. COLORED TROOPS  
ARMY OF THE JAMES  
AND ARMY OF THE POTOMAC  
SIEGE OF PETERSBURG  
1864 — 65