

PETERSBURG

National Military Park • Virginia



Federal troops regain Fort Stedman, thus foiling "Lee's Last Grand Offensive."
From the painting by Sidney King.

ualties; the Confederacy suffered losses of 28,000. Appomattox—and final surrender—was now only a week away.

Poplar Grove National Cemetery

The graves of about 6,000 Union soldiers and 13 known Confederates are in this cemetery, which is 3 miles south of Petersburg on State Route 675.

The Park

Petersburg National Military Park was established on July 3, 1926, by act of Congress. It covers nearly 2½ square miles and preserves remains of both Union and Confederate fortifications. At the visitor center are exhibits describing many aspects of the siege.

About Your Visit

The park is east and south of the city of Petersburg and has many entrances. We suggest that you stop first at the visitor center at the Crater. This is southeast of Petersburg on U. S. 460-301; it can be reached from the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike by a nearby exit ramp.

Markers along the tour route (see map on next page) identify important sites. Self-

guided tours at Battery 5, the Crater, and Fort Stedman help you to re-create actions at these points.

Visitors in groups may receive special service by making advance arrangements with the superintendent.

More detailed treatment of military operations at Petersburg is contained in the 25-cent, 56-page booklet, *Petersburg Battlefields*. You can buy it at the visitor center or from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington 25, D. C.

Mission 66

Mission 66 is a program designed to be completed by 1966 which will assure the maximum protection of the scenic, scientific, wilderness, and historic resources of the National Park System in such ways and by such means as will make them available for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Administration

Petersburg National Military Park is administered by the National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Petersburg, Va., is in immediate charge.

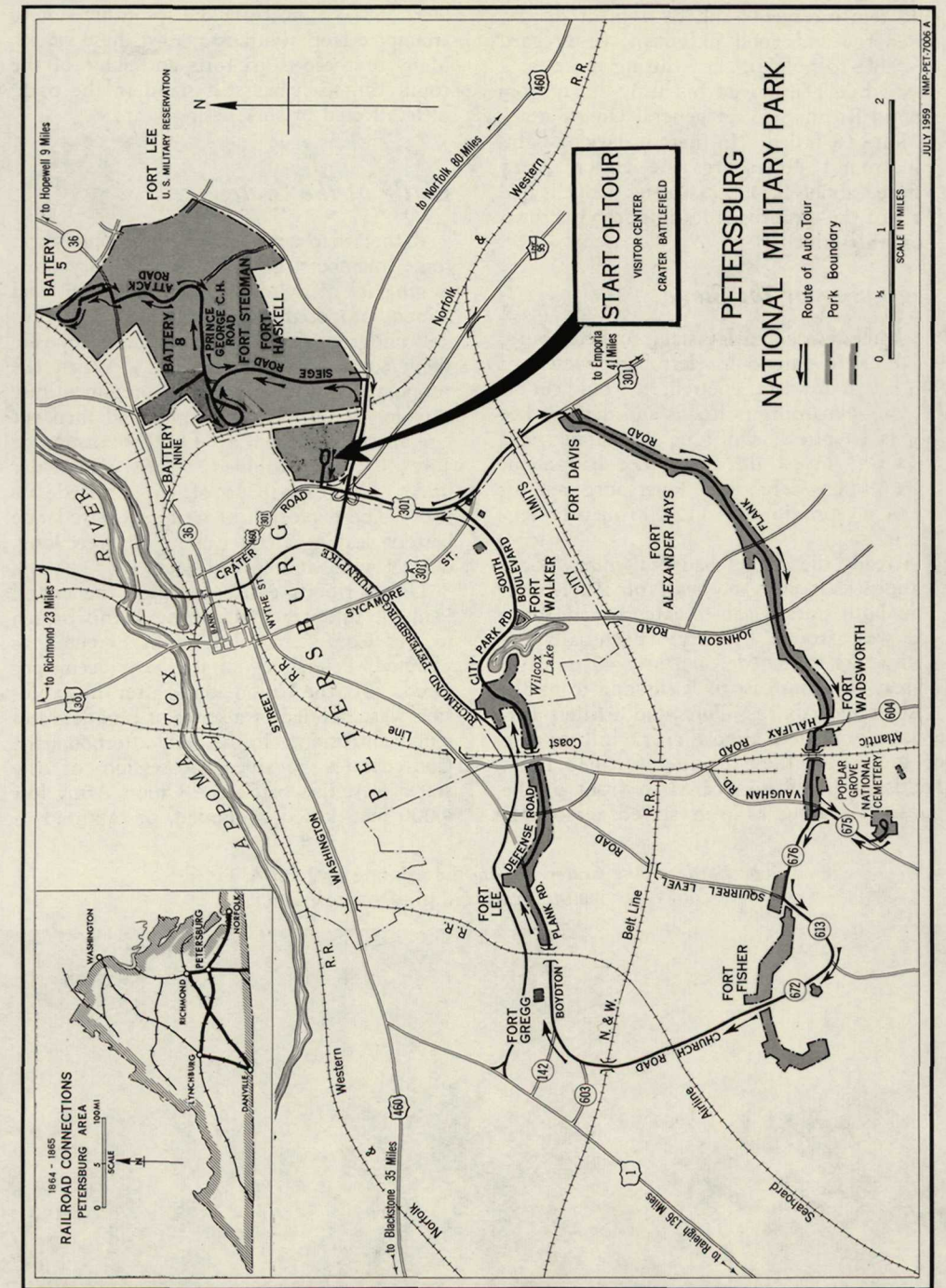


UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fred A. Seaton, Secretary

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Conrad L. Wirth, Director



COVER: The "Dictator"—a 13-inch, 17,000-pound mortar used by the Union Army to shell Petersburg. Courtesy, National Archives.

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PETERSBURG

NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

Scene of Union military operations that cut lines of communication to the Confederate Capital at Richmond and led to its capture.

For 10 months from the summer of 1864 to the spring of 1865, Generals Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant engaged in a military struggle which took place in a semicircle around Petersburg and covered approximately 170 square miles, the largest single battlefield in the United States.

This decisive contest between the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia and the Union Army of the Potomac was for control of lines of communication. Unless food, ammunition, and other kinds of supplies could reach Richmond, Lee's army must starve or withdraw and the Confederate Capital of necessity must fall. Excepting the one from Danville, all the rail lines supporting Richmond passed through Petersburg. Petersburg was the supply funnel to Richmond, the Confederate Government, and Lee's army.

Events Leading to Petersburg

Grant's campaign against Lee's army and Richmond began with the battles of the Wilderness, May 5-7, 1864, west of Fredericksburg. Thereafter, during the summer, the Union Army under the immediate command of Gen. George G. Meade (but in reality commanded by General Grant) engaged Lee's Confederate Army in a series of hard fought battles. After each battle, Grant moved farther southward and closer to Richmond. Finally, on June 3, at Cold Harbor,

8 miles east of Richmond, Grant tried by frontal attack to crush the Confederate Army and enter the city. He failed in a defeat marked by very heavy casualties.

Believing now that he could not capture the Confederate Capital by frontal attack, Grant decided to maneuver around Lee's right flank, cross the Chickahominy, James, and Appomattox Rivers, and swing in behind Petersburg south of Richmond. Grant began his withdrawal from in front of Lee at Cold Harbor the night of June 12. Two nights later, Union engineer troops completed a pontoon bridge more than 2,000 feet long over the James River. The army started that night, and completed its crossing 2 days later on June 16.

Lee discovered the Union movement in front of him the morning of June 13, but he believed Grant was swinging around his flank to move on Richmond north of the James River, and disposed his troops accordingly. Grant's maneuver deceived Lee completely. At the time the vanguard of Grant's forces crossed the Appomattox River east of Petersburg, there were only 3,500 Confederates in and about the town, under the command of Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard.

Petersburg and its vital rail communications should have fallen to the Union forces on June 15. But because of a series of Union blunders by subordinate commanders, Beauregard was able to hold a defense line at the edge of the town. By bringing in all avail-

able reinforcements and by a great display of energy and good judgment, Beauregard was able to hold the city during the next 2 days while Lee moved his army down from around Richmond. A general Union attack on June 18 failed. In these 4 days of fighting around Petersburg, the Union Army suffered about 10,000 casualties. But it had cut 2 of the 4 railroads leading into the town from the south.

Beginning of the Siege

Grant decided to lay siege to Petersburg. If he could extend his left flank westward around the town far enough, he would cut off the two remaining railroads and deprive Lee of his supplies. On June 21, Grant gave orders to invest the city. Lee had about 50,000 men defending Petersburg against Grant's approximately 112,000 men besieging it.

Already the armies had built many fortifications east and southeast of Petersburg. Now both sides began to extend them south and west around the city. Eventually the earthworks stretched for nearly 40 miles in a great arc from east of Richmond to southwest of Petersburg. Forts and artillery batteries dominated almost every hill or rise of ground of these parallel fortified lines. Fields of fire were cleared in front of the guns. As long as men stayed reasonably

alert, it was almost suicidal for either side to attempt a frontal attack against these works. Many of these earth forts and some of the connecting trenches still stand in the park, little affected by the passing years.

Battle of the Crater

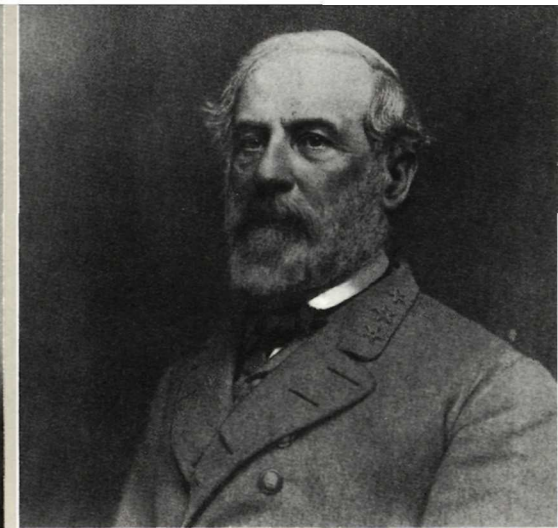
Rather than settle down to a long siege, some members of the 48th Pennsylvania Regiment, many of whom had been coal miners, proposed that they drive a mine tunnel under a Confederate battery opposite them southeast of Petersburg. When the proposal received approval, the regiment dug a main tunnel 511 feet long, and then cut lateral galleries from it. On the morning of July 30, they exploded 4 tons of powder under Elliott's salient of the Confederate line. The explosion blew up a Confederate battery, leaving a crater about 170 feet long, 60 feet wide, and 30 feet deep.

Union troops easily occupied the crater. Had the infantry attack through this breach in the Confederate line been executed as planned, Petersburg might have been captured. But the Union attack after the explosion was attended by a series of blunders and much confusion. In the early afternoon, the Confederates regained possession of the crater. At this battle the Union Army lost 4,000 men killed, wounded, or captured.

The Battle of the Crater. From the painting by John A. Elder.
COURTESY VIRGINIA STATE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.



Gen. Ulysses S. Grant.
COURTESY SIGNAL CORPS, U. S. ARMY.



Gen. Robert E. Lee.
COURTESY COOK STUDIO.

The Siege Works Extend Westward

Grant then began a series of maneuvers and battles for possession of the two remaining railroads running into Petersburg from the south and west. On August 18, the Weldon Railroad (now the Atlantic Coast Line) was seized by Union troops at a point near the Globe Tavern. Because of this, the Confederates had to haul supplies around the Union left flank into Petersburg from their railhead 20 miles south of the city. Soon Union forces had destroyed so much of the Weldon Railroad that the Confederates abandoned it completely.

By October 2, Union forces had won the ground where they subsequently built Fort Fisher—one of the largest earth forts ever built in North America. There the Union Army stood only 3 miles short of the all-important Southside Railroad (today the Norfolk and Western) which ran along the south bank of the Appomattox River.

By March 1865, Grant's tactics and superior manpower had forced the Confederates to extend their defensive lines for a total length of 37 miles around Petersburg. It was clear that soon Grant's forces would either get around the Confederate right flank or pierce the line at some point. Either would doom Petersburg. Grant's great worry in March was that Lee's army would escape from Petersburg before he could deliver the final blow.

In a major diversionary effort to give him-

self time to withdraw from Richmond and Petersburg, Lee ordered a final attack on the Union lines at Fort Stedman. This attack on March 25 failed.

The end of the long struggle around Petersburg came suddenly in the first days of April. On April 1, Sheridan's cavalry and some infantry gained a crushing victory at Five Forks, 17 miles southwest of Petersburg. The city was now almost surrounded. Many miles to the east Grant received the news. He walked over to the signal tent, and when he came back, said, "I have ordered an immediate assault all along the lines."

The next morning, Sunday, April 2, Grant's army struck from Fort Fisher in a great attack. By noon they had captured the Southside Railroad and the Confederate outer line west of Petersburg all the way to the Appomattox River, except for Forts Gregg and Baldwin. These forts fell in the afternoon after desperate close combat. That morning at 10 o'clock Lee had sent word to President Jefferson Davis that Richmond and Petersburg would have to be evacuated.

In the evening, the Confederates began crossing to the north side of the Appomattox River at Petersburg, the only way still open for retreat. By dawn the next morning, when the Union soldiers resumed the attack, Lee's army was out of Petersburg and marching west north of the river, headed for the Richmond and Danville Railroad. Petersburg had fallen, but at a heavy price. The 10-month campaign cost the Union 42,000 cas-

The National Park System, of which this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and inspiration of its people