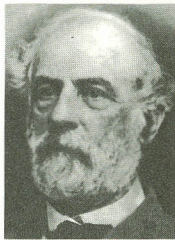


Petersburg

NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD, Virginia



In a grim 10-month struggle, Ulysses S. Grant's Union army gradually but relentlessly encircled Petersburg and cut Robert E. Lee's railroad supply lines from the south. For the Confederates it was 10 months of desperately hanging on, hoping the people of the North would tire of the war. For soldiers of both armies it was 10 months of rifle bullets, artillery, and mortar shells, relieved only by rear-area tedium: drill and more drill, salt pork and corn meal, burned beans and bad coffee.

To the individual soldier it added up to sloshing in mire and steaming trenches in summer; shivering in ice, snow, and mud in winter. Somehow most survived the coldest wartime winter they could remember.

The 10 months went like this:

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JUNE 1864

Grant's troops suffered frightful losses attacking Lee's entrenched Confederates at Cold Harbor, 16 miles northeast of Richmond. Moving south across the James River, Grant threw his forces against Petersburg on June 15. Except for a series of Union fumbles, the city might well have fallen in that attack. Federal commanders, perhaps shaken by the Cold Harbor disaster, failed to press home their assaults, allowing the few Confederate defenders to hold on until Lee transferred his army south from Richmond. Grant now settled down for a siege.

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JULY

Hardly had the siege begun when coal miners of the 48th Pennsylvania Infantry began digging a tunnel under Elliott's Salient. The plan: blast a mighty gap in the Confederate line by exploding 4 tons of gunpowder in the tunnel and rush in before the Confederates could recover from the shock. The explosion blew up a battery, but the Confederates quickly rallied. Southern artillery swept the attacking Federals. Then Confederate infantry waded in, and in an orgy of shooting, clubbing, and bayoneting, the Southerners virtually annihilated one Northern division.

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AUGUST

The Battle of the Crater proved there could be no shortcut to taking Petersburg. Grant's next target was the Weldon Railroad, running due south from Petersburg. After 3 days of heavy fighting in brutal heat, the Federals remained astride the steel rails, permanently cutting another of Lee's major supply lines. By now little food or fodder remained in Petersburg or Richmond. All that Lee had left was one rickety railroad and his worn-out horses and wagons.

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SEPTEMBER

Confederate cavalry commander Wade Hampton led 4,000 horsemen around the Union rear to rustle Northern cattle for Petersburg's hungry defenders. The "Beefsteak Raid" netted 300 prisoners and, more important, 2,400 beeves.

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OCTOBER

Grant's men, moving 3 miles west of the Weldon Railroad, dug in and drove off two Confederate counterattacks. Again the Union forces tightened the noose about Petersburg.

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NOVEMBER

Approaching cold weather ended large-scale efforts by both sides, but rifle, artillery, and mortar fire continued.

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DECEMBER

Cold and miserable soldiers of both sides worked with pick and shovel to strengthen their lines and build rude shelters. There were signs of scurvy among the Southerners. Union and Confederate soldiers remembered merrier Christmases.

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JANUARY 1865

More weeks of frozen mud, whining bullets, and exploding shells. By now Lee's army had lost its fighting edge. Casualties and desertion left only 50,000 cold and hungry Confederate soldiers in the trenches. Grant's force increased to 110,000 well-equipped, well-fed—but nonetheless homesick and weary—troops. Still, they knew they were winning and that now it was only a matter of time.

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FEBRUARY

Grant probed but did not break the Hatcher's Run line southwest of the city. He forced large numbers of the dwindling Confederate command to remain in line of battle for 3 days and nights, with little food of any kind. Grant was wearing down Lee's men, and at the same time Federal supplies rattled continuously over the newly completed U.S. military railroad from City Point (now Hopewell) to the front.

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MARCH

Lee desperately attacked the Union siege line. He wasn't quite sure what he might achieve, but he quickly captured Fort Stedman. If he now could break Grant's line, he might lift the siege. But Grant counterattacked and in 4 hours crushed Lee's "Last Grand Offensive."

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APRIL

There now remained only one railroad to the south, the Southside. Once that was cut, Petersburg was gone and Richmond with it. Grant unleashed Sheridan, who at Five Forks sent the weary Confederates reeling back in defeat. Lee pulled his men together, and led them off down the road and eventually to Appomattox. The Confederacy's long dying was nearly over. Within weeks the last Confederate soldier laid down arms.

A TOUR OF THE BATTLEFIELD

This battlefield tour is designed for use at your own pace. After leaving the visitor center, walk to Battery 5, the first stop. For the other points of interest, follow the auto tour. Leave your car at each stop and walk around the grounds; you will better understand the fighting here.

1. Battery 5. This was the strongest fortification in the original Confederate line. Because few soldiers were available for duty here, the battery fell on the first day of the opening battle. Continue along the trail to a Dictator-class mortar. From this position, the original "Dictator," a 17,000-pound Union mortar, lobbed 200-pound explosive shells into Petersburg, 2½ miles away.

2. Battery 8. Upon its capture by Union forces, this Confederate battery was renamed Fort Friend after the Friend House located nearby. The house, which is no longer standing, endured the siege and became the scene of many courts-martial.

3. Battery 9. The Federals captured this Confederate position on the first day of the opening battle. It is a 10-minute stroll to the site of Meade Station, an important supply and hospital depot on Grant's military railroad. President Lincoln was here on the day Lee attacked Fort Stedman.

4. Harrison Creek. After failing to hold their original line in the opening battle, Confederate forces fell back to hastily prepared positions along this small stream. Here they remained for 2 days before withdrawing to a new line closer to Petersburg, which they held until the retreat to Appomattox.

In March 1865, the main advance of Lee's last offensive was stopped along this stream by a heavy concentration of Union artillery fire.

5. Fort Stedman. This Union stronghold was the central objective of Lee's final effort to relieve Petersburg in March 1865. The trail leads to Fort Stedman and to Colquitt's Salient from where the Confederates attacked. Along the way you will pass the Maine Monument, commemorating the greatest regimental loss of the war.

6. Battery XI. The Confederates captured this battery and Battery XII during the Battle of Fort Stedman.

7. Fort Haskell. At Fort Haskell you can see one of the best preserved fortifications on the battlefield. Northern artillery and infantry stopped the Confederate advance southward during the Battle of Fort Stedman. Notice the direction the guns are pointing. Thousands of Confederate soldiers surrendered rather than face the deadly fire from this fort.

8. Battery XIII. These three guns mark the location of Battery XIII. Union forces used Roman numerals to identify their battery positions. A Union battery normally consisted of 6 guns, each gun manned by 16 men. By 1864, Confederates sometimes had only four guns to a battery.

9. Spring Garden. Before you are the remains of the Taylor house, destroyed at the beginning of the siege. Thereafter it served as a convenient reference point for both armies. Along this ridge a concentration of more than 200 pieces of artillery fired during the Battle of the Crater.

10. The Crater. Park your car and follow the path to the reconstructed entrance of the Union tunnel, and then to the crater itself. Exhibits and audio stations explain one of the most incredible episodes of the Civil War.

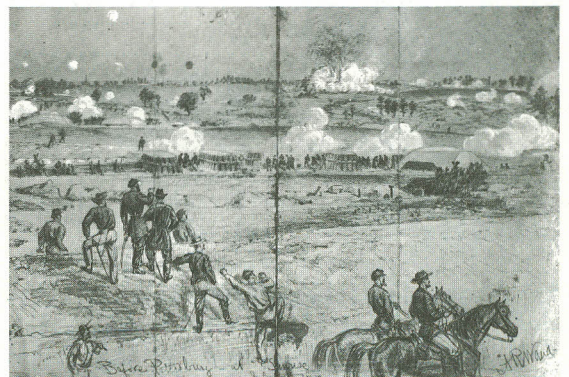
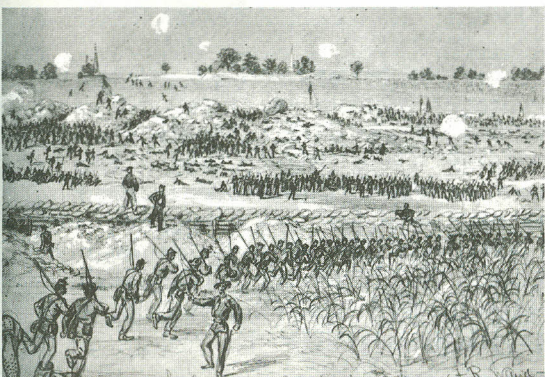
This ends the battlefield tour. If you wish to follow the entire siege line to Poplar Grove Cemetery and return by way of the Confederate defense line, turn left at the stop sign and follow the battlefield tour markers.

ADMINISTRATION

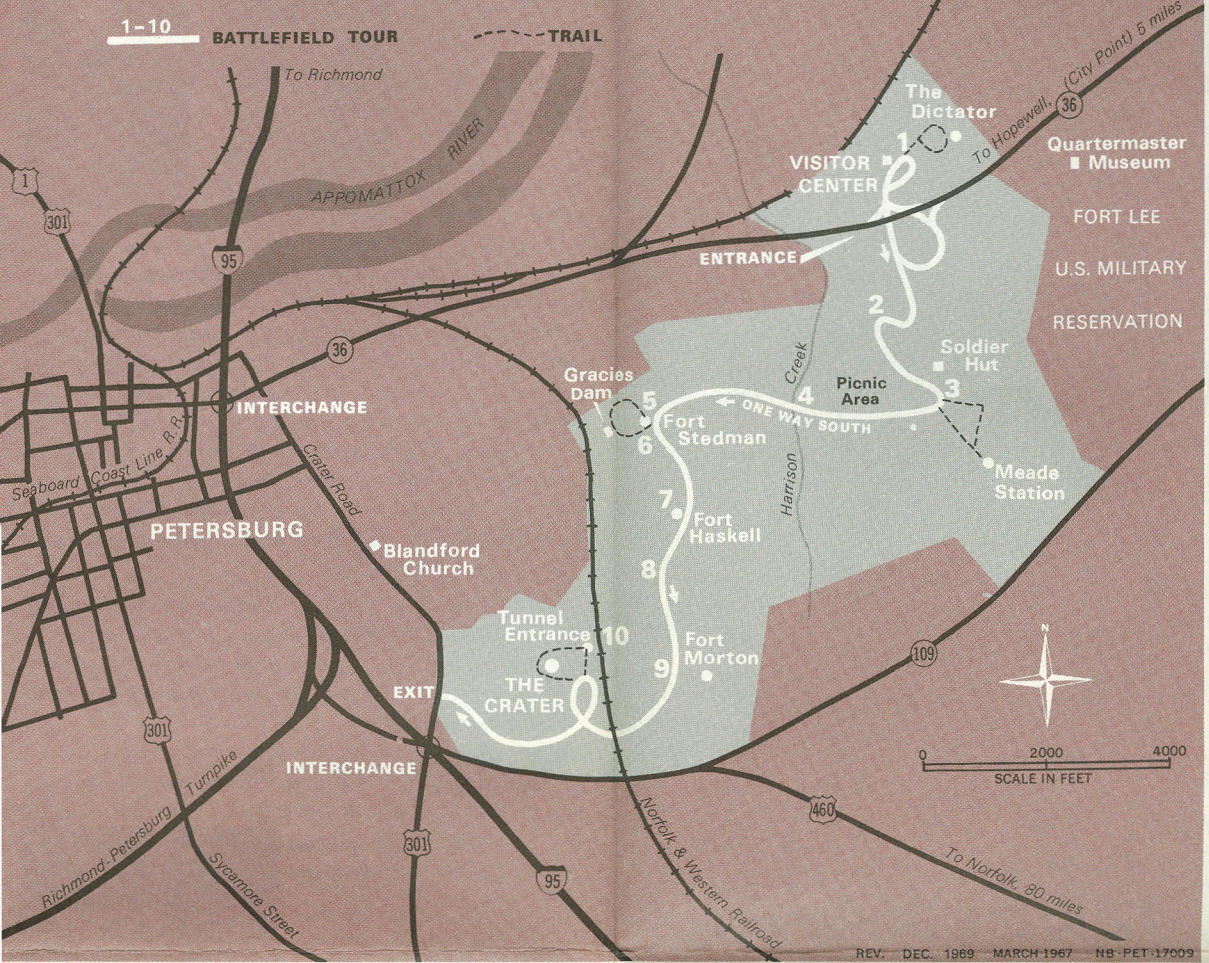
Petersburg National Battlefield is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

The National Park System, of which this battlefield is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the great historical, natural, and recreational places of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.

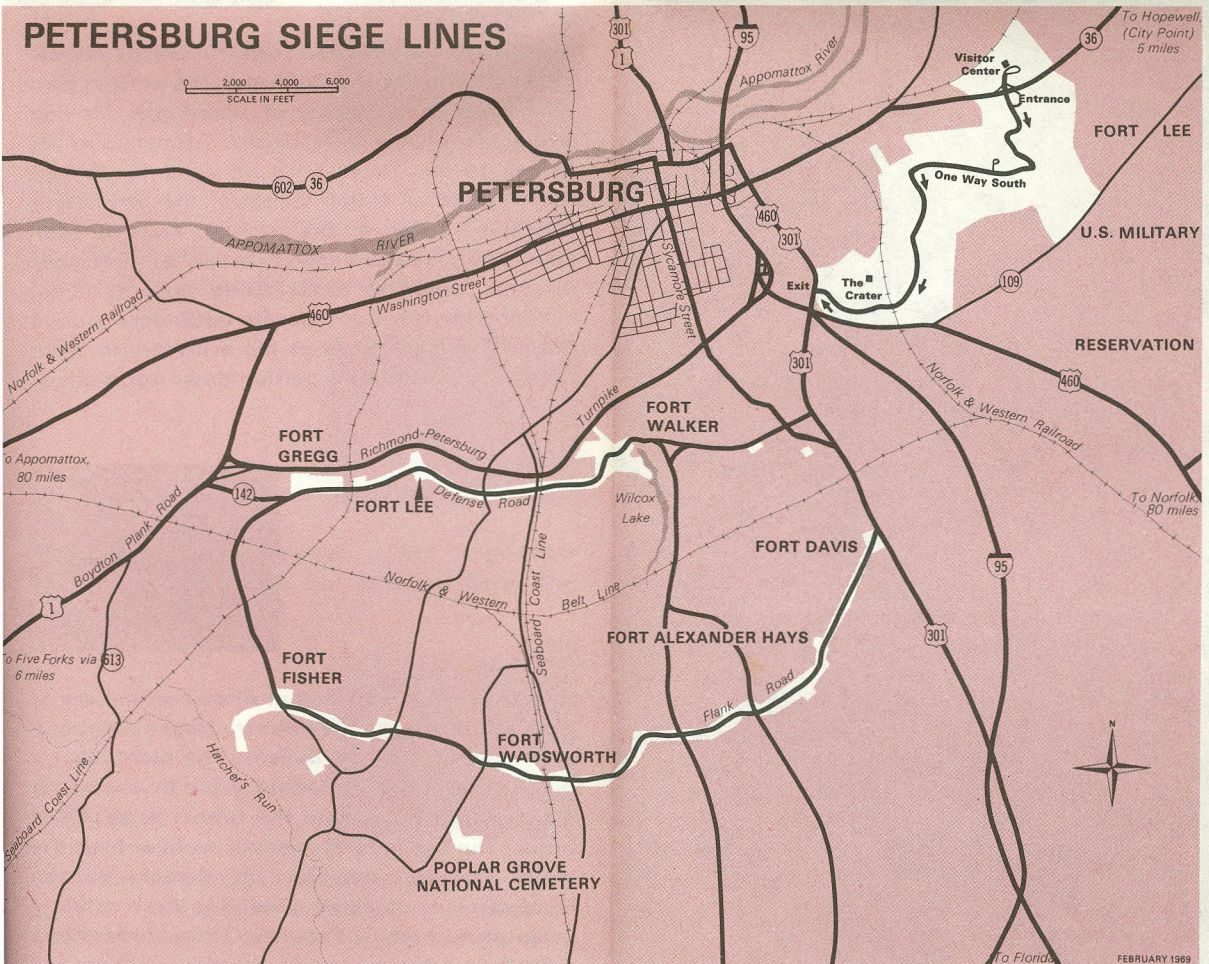
A superintendent, whose address is Box 549, Petersburg, VA 23803, is in immediate charge of the park.



PETERSBURG NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD



PETERSBURG SIEGE LINES



REPRINT 1970

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

U. S. Department of the Interior

National Park Service