
AUTO TOUR

of Union and Confederate Lines around

PETERSBURG

BEFORE YOU BEGIN. This self-guided tour follows most of the Union and Confederate lines built around Petersburg during the 1864-1865 siege. Directions for the tour are given in the folder and by markers along the route. Important sites are identified in the text and are noted in the map.

The tour begins at the exit of Petersburg National Battlefield on Crater Road, Route 301. It runs for 16 miles, returning to Crater Road about one mile south of the park exit.

Before you begin your tour, note the mileage reading on your car at the exit from the Battlefield. This point is mile 0.0. All future mile posts are given from this point. Enjoy your tour.

CAUTION: The sites identified along the tour are on both public and private lands. Please honor property lines where posted.

Most of the forts and trenches you will see are overgrown. Poison ivy, chiggers, ticks, or snakes may be present. Please be advised!

THE UNION SIEGE LINE

TURN LEFT as you exit from the Park. This is Mile 0.0, and you are on Crater Road, Route 301, heading South.

The Petersburg Siege lasted from June of 1864 until April 2, 1865. During that time General Ulysses S. Grant's Army of the Potomac built miles of earthen trenches around the city in an attempt to isolate Petersburg, and Lee's Army, from supply lines to the south. In the days immediately after the Army's arrival on June 15, 1864 the fighting was centered to the east of the city, in the area now preserved as part of Petersburg National Battlefield. Over the next nine and a half months the action moved west as Federal earthworks were extended to cut the roads and rail lines to Petersburg. In 1864 this road was called Jerusalem Plank Road and was one of the principle highways leading into Petersburg from the south.

Modern development has destroyed most evidence of the trenches, but for the most part Union lines were to the left of the road, and Confederate earthworks to the right. After following this direction for about a mile the Union trench line crossed the road to the west. At that point the Federal soldiers built Fort Sedgwick to secure their hold on the highway.

At Mile 1.3 on the left is the site of Fort Sedgwick. A gas station and department store now stand there.

1 Fort Sedgwick was the key Union post along the eastern portion of the Petersburg Siege Line. It was only a few hundred yards from the Rebel lines, and the continual mortar and sniper fire gave the fort its nickname "Fort Hell." The fort was preserved in private hands until the 1960's when it was leveled.

CONTINUE on Crater Road to Flank Road, Mile 1.9. **TURN RIGHT** and drive about 300 yards to the pull-off on the left.

2 On the left you can see Fort Davis, the next fort on the Union lines. From here Grant launched the first Union drive west around Petersburg attacking the Weldon Railroad on June 21, about 3 miles to the west. It was not taken but Federal trenches were stretched across the Jerusalem Plank Road.

CONTINUE on Flank Road following the Union trenches on the right to Mile 2.9. **PULL-OFF** for Fort Hayes on the right.

3 Fort Hayes was built in August of 1864. Brigadier-General Alexander Hayes had been killed at the Battle of the Wilderness earlier that year in May. As a rule the Union forts were named for men killed in the war. Usually the Confederate name fortifications for living military leaders, often those stationed there. Today only a single interior wall of the fort remains.

CONTINUE on Flank Road.

Flank Road was built in the 1940's as a tour road to follow the Federal Siege Line. The trenches are visible first to the right of the road and later on to the left. Union Batteries 24 and 25 are located at mile-posts 3.2 and 3.7, with a pull-off opposite Battery 25. The Union forces constructed a total of 42 such batteries along their lines at strategic points between the forts.

CONTINUE on Flank Road to Route 604, Halifax Road, mile 5.3. **Directly in front of you is Fort Wadsworth, MAKE A RIGHT TURN** and then pull into the parking area to the left.



Union Fort Sedgwick

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You are now at a very strategic point on the Petersburg front. Halifax Road follows the original route of the Weldon Railroad, the most important rail line between Petersburg and the rest of the South. The Weldon connected the city with Wilmington, North Carolina, which by 1864 was the only Atlantic seaport still open to Confederate shipping. On August 18, 1864, the Union V Corps, under Major-General G. K. Warren, drove west and reached the Weldon near here. Warren established his headquarters about one-half mile to the south at Globe Tavern and Union troops began destroying the railroad. On August 25th, Rebel forces under Lt. Gen. A.P. Hill counterattacked and defeated the Union II Corps 3 miles to the south at Reams Station, but were not able to dislodge the Yankees from the railroad. After the fighting the Union siege line was extended across the Railroad. Fort Wadsworth was built to help defend the position.

LEFT onto Flank Road. The tour continues by following more trenches visible on the left. At Vaughan Road, Mile 6.0, TURN LEFT. Continue to Poplar Grove National Cemetery, the entrance to the cemetery is to the left at mile 6.4.

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Poplar Grove National Cemetery was established in 1868 for Union soldiers who died during the Petersburg Campaign. The Cemetery contains over 6000 graves, nearly 2/3 unidentified. Interpretive markers at the cemetery tell the story of Poplar Grove.

RETURN to Vaughan Road, Mile 7.1, and TURN RIGHT. CONTINUE to Route 676, at mile 7.5, and TURN LEFT. CONTINUE until Union trenches are again visible to your right.

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Fort Conahey, as viewed from the Union Signal Tower

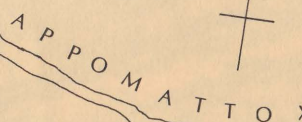
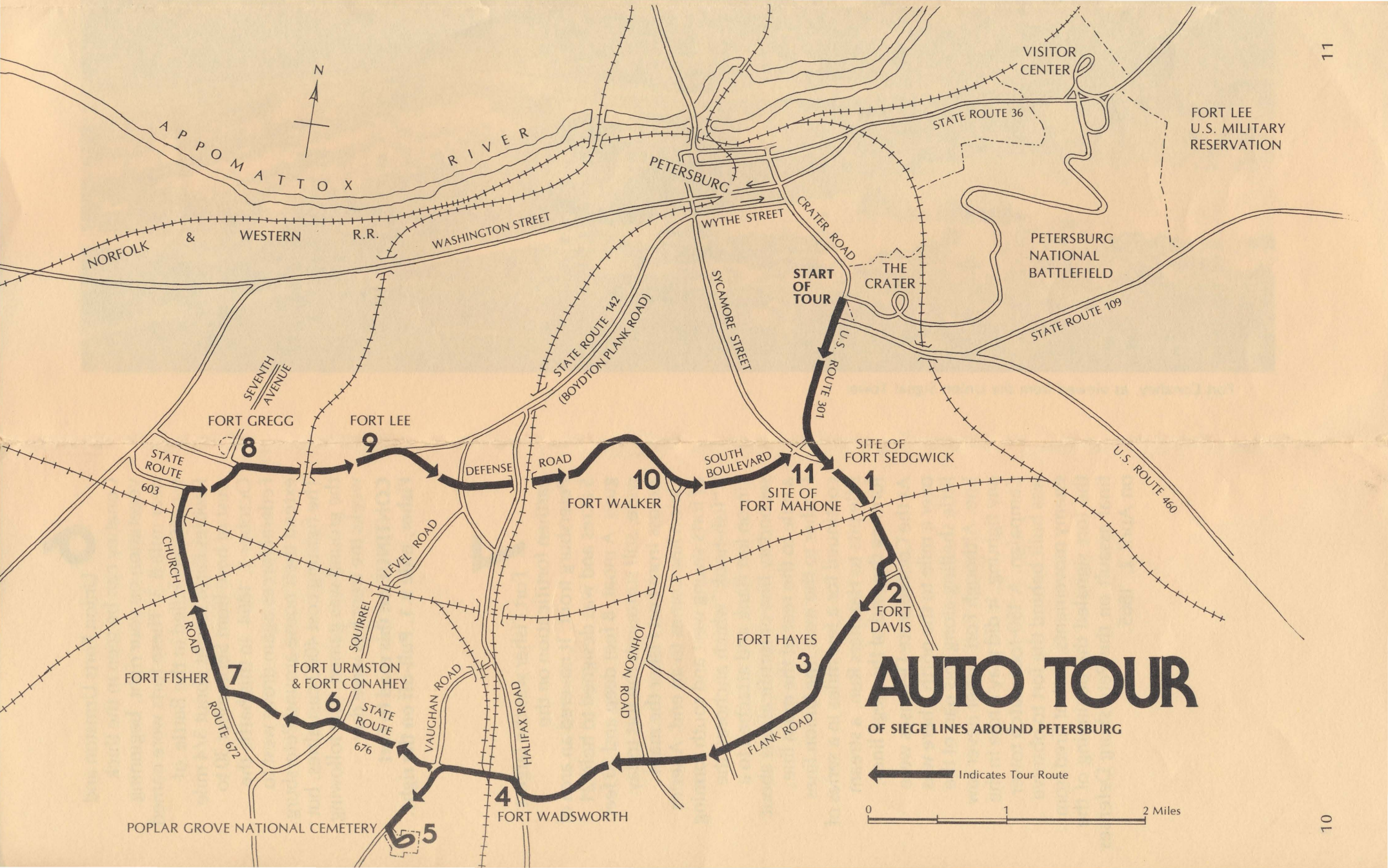
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Union Forts Urmston and Conahey can be seen in the thick vegetation on your right, beginning near mile 8.3. These forts were named for officers killed in the Battle of Peebles Farm fought about 3/4 mile west of here from September 30 to October 1, 1864. In this battle the Federal forces again drove west to extend their noose around Petersburg. The fighting cost 4000 casualties, but the ground was gained. The following weeks the trenches were dug.

CONTINUE on this road to Fort Fisher, mile 9.1. Pull-off on the right.

7

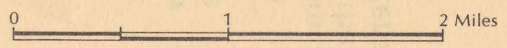
Fort Fisher was the largest earthen fortification on the Petersburg front. It covered an area of 5 acres and was designed to hold 21 guns. A moat, 8 feet deep and 20 feet wide, still surrounds the fort today. Across from Fort Fisher the main Union line comes to an end. A series of forts swung west and south forming a "fish-hook" which anchored the Union left flank and attached to a secondary line of fortifications about a mile to the rear of the main line. Further to the west, the Union lines continued for a few miles in a series of rifle pits to Hatchers Run, a stream forming the end of the siege lines. As the Confederate Defenses were over a mile to the north, there was little shelling along this part of the line. Although Fort Fisher never saw any fighting, it did play a role in the Campaign. A 150-foot watch tower was built behind the fort to observe enemy movements. A shot fired from the fort signaled the beginning of the final assault on the Petersburg Defenses on April 2, 1865.



AUTO TOUR

OF SIEGE LINES AROUND PETERSBURG

← Indicates Tour Route



THE CONFEDERATE DEFENSE LINE

After leaving Fort Fisher CONTINUE on the road about 20 yards and TURN RIGHT.

You are now heading north toward Petersburg between the Union and Confederate lines. Even though there was no fighting here once the siege lines were established, pickets from both sides would pass through this area on scouting missions.

CONTINUE to Route 672, mile 10.6, and TURN RIGHT. At mile 11.1 TURN RIGHT onto Boydton Plank Road. To the left is Confederate Fort Gregg.

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Fort Gregg is in the field to the north of the Boydton Plank Road. This fortification, built just outside the main Rebel line, acted as an outpost guarding the approach to Petersburg from the west. Here one of the most gallant incidents of the Petersburg Campaign occurred. On April 1, 1865 the Union victory at the Battle of Five Forks, about 5 miles to the west, cut the last supply line into the city forcing General Lee's withdrawal from Petersburg. The next day Grant ordered his final assault on the city. Five thousand men from the Union XXIV Corps struck Fort Gregg and nearby Fort Whitworth.

Defending these two positions were less than 600 men left behind as a rear guard. For two hours these determined Rebels prevented the Yankee breakthrough. When Fort Gregg finally fell, the Confederate hold on Petersburg ended, but the delay gave Lee enough time to escape with his army. Had the defense of Fort Gregg been less successful the Civil War might have ended with fighting in the streets of Petersburg.

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Confederate Fort Mahone

CONTINUE on Boydton Plank Road toward the main Confederate Defense line.

The original defenses for Petersburg were designed by Col. Charles Dimmock and constructed by black slave labor in 1862. The earthworks ran in a semi-circle around the city on the south side of the Appomattox River. The "Dimmock Line" extended for 10 miles and consisted of 55 batteries, numbered consecutively from east to west. The eastern part of this line fell in the first few days of the fighting in June of 1864, but most of the trenches held throughout the nine and a half month struggle.

At mile 12.2 Boydton Plank Road passes through a five-way intersection. BEAR TO THE RIGHT onto Defense Road. Fort Lee is located to the left.

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Fort Lee, originally called Battery 45, was renamed in honor of the Commander-in-Chief. At different times during the siege men from Wilcox's, Mahone's and Heth's Divisions were stationed here. Throughout the Petersburg operations the men on both sides were continually moved about to confuse the enemy and to keep the soldiers active. Fort Lee was evacuated when the Confederates withdrew from Petersburg on April 2, 1865.

CONTINUE on Defense Road following the Confederate trenches. At mile 14.4 TURN RIGHT into the parking lot for Lee Park, a city recreation area. To the right of the parking lot is Fort Walker.

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Fort Walker, originally Battery 35, was named for Brigadier-General R. Lindsay Walker, the chief of artillery for the Confederate III Corps. He was in command of all artillery along the Petersburg Defenses.

EXIT from the parking area and TURN RIGHT. CONTINUE through the traffic light onto South Boulevard. At mile 15.5 TURN RIGHT onto South Sycamore Street and note the Pennsylvania Monument directly in front of you.

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Today there are no indications of Confederate trenches in this area, but the site of Confederate Fort Mahone was near the Pennsylvania Monument. Fort Mahone, or Fort Damnation, was the Rebel position opposite Union Fort Hell, only 200 yards away.

CONTINUE past the Monument and TURN LEFT at the end of the street. CONTINUE on this road to Crater Road, Route 301. At Crater Road TURN LEFT to return to Petersburg and Petersburg National Battlefield. TURN RIGHT to head south.

Petersburg National Battlefield
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior