

# City Point Unit

## Petersburg National Battlefield

Hopewell, Virginia



*Grant and Staff*

When Ulysses S. Grant became General in Chief of the United States Armies in March of 1864, three years of bitter warfare had passed. The Civil War appeared no nearer a conclusion than it had in 1861. After leading the Army of the Potomac through battles at the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, and Cold Harbor, Grant transferred the army to the south side of the James River in an effort to seize Petersburg. When four days of bloody frontal assaults failed to capture the city, however, he ordered the army to open siege operations against it.

For the next nine and one-half months General Grant would have his headquarters at City Point, Virginia, eight miles behind Union lines. A small port town at the confluence of the James and Appomattox Rivers, City Point had been connected to Petersburg by railroad prior to the war. Its strategic position next to the railroad bed and the rivers offered Grant easy access to points along the front, as well as good transportation and communications with Fort Monroe, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., in the rear. When he arrived at City Point on June 15, 1864, Grant established his headquarters in a tent on the east lawn of Dr. Richard Eppes' home, Appomattox Manor.

## The Eppes Family

Appomattox Manor was a century old by the time Union forces occupied the site in 1864. It had been built on a large tract of land acquired by Captain Francis Eppes in 1635, and by the time of the Civil War it was the center of a plantation covering more than 2300 acres.

In 1861 Appomattox Manor was owned by Dr. Richard Eppes. Though he owned a plantation and nearly 130 slaves, Dr. Eppes was not a strong secessionist, yet when Virginia cast her lot with the South he took up arms and rallied to her defense. He served as a private in the Thirteenth Virginia Cavalry, but after a year he left the army to become a contract surgeon at a Confederate hospital in Petersburg. His wife, Elizabeth, and their children remained at Appomattox Manor until 1862 when the arrival of Union gunboats in the James River forced them to flee their home for the safety of Petersburg. When the war came to Petersburg two years later, Mrs. Eppes and the children fled again, this time to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

During the Civil War Appomattox Manor was repeatedly shelled and vandalized, and when Dr. Eppes returned to his home he found crumbling plaster, scarred floors, and broken furniture. Windowpanes had

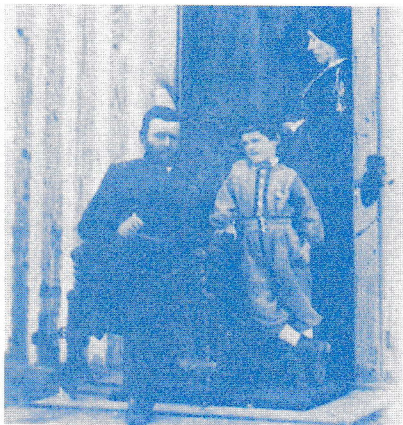


been smashed, mantelpieces torn from the walls, and graffiti was scrawled in the rooms. Throughout the rest of the plantation the situation was equally grim. "It was Desolation personified," he moaned, "a perfect waste, not a house, fence . . . or scarcely tree of any kind standing, everything destroyed." Using borrowed money from Northern relatives he began making repairs. Part of the money was used to purchase the cabins, wharves, and stables the army had erected on his property. Not until he had paid the U. S. Government \$641.50 could he remove the structures. The last Union regiment left City Point in February, 1866. One month later, Elizabeth Eppes and the children returned home.



*Appomattox Manor*

## Headquarters of the Union Armies



*Grant and Family*

In an effort to unify Northern military strategy under a single head, the U. S. Congress on March 9, 1864, appointed Ulysses S. Grant General-in-Chief of the Union Armies, a combined force numbering more than a half million men. Up to that time outnumbered Confederate armies had been able to withstand Union assaults by using their shorter interior lines to quickly shift troops from one threatened point to another. Grant proposed to negate this advantage by exerting simultaneous pressure over a wide front. Rather than remain in Washington, he decided to make his headquarters with the Army of the Potomac, which faced General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.

When the Union army crossed the James River and engaged Confederate forces at Petersburg, Grant established his headquarters at City Point. From his tent overlooking the river Grant issued orders to Union armies throughout the nation, coordinating their movements in such a way as to ultimately defeat the South. While General Philip Sheridan battled Confederate forces in the Shenandoah Valley and William Tecumseh Sherman marched through Georgia toward the sea, Grant relentlessly tightened his grip on Petersburg. He continued to hammer at Lee's position throughout the summer and fall of 1864, gradually extending his line farther and farther to the left in an effort to sever the Confederate army's lines of supply and thereby drive it from the city. He had hoped to capture Petersburg by the end of the year, but as months passed it became apparent that more time was necessary. In November, 1864, General Grant and his staff moved into log cabins constructed for them outside the Eppes House and prepared to endure the long, cold winter. Final victory would have to wait until spring.

## Visitors to City Point

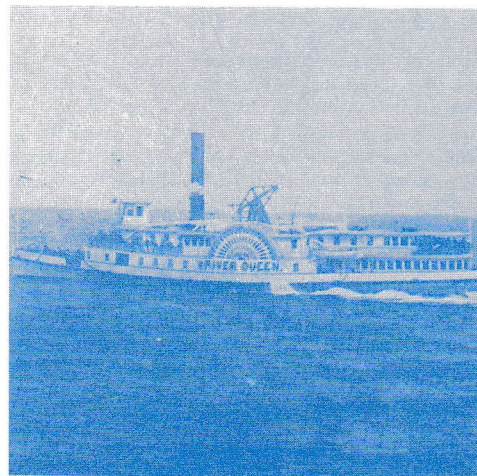
Grant and his staff received many notable visitors at headquarters during their ten months stay, including high-ranking political and military figures from both the North and South. For Grant the most pleasurable visits were those of his wife and children. Julia Grant liked to spend the winter months with her husband, and about Christmas she arrived at City Point with her youngest son, six-year-old Jesse. Mother and son spent the remaining months of the campaign at headquarters, sharing the back room of the General's cabin.

Among the most unique and distinguished visitors to City Point were the members of the Confederate Peace Commission. In January, 1865, Vice-President Alexander Stephens, Assistant Secretary of War John Campbell, and Senator Robert Hunter of the Confederate Government came to City Point in an effort to negotiate a peaceful end to the war. Grant hosted the Southern emissaries at his headquarters, then sent them through the lines to meet with President Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of State William Seward at Hampton Roads, Virginia. Negotiations ground to a halt when the Confederate delegation insisted on Southern independence as an indispensable provision for peace. On their way back to Richmond, the Confederate commissioners again passed through City Point.

President Abraham Lincoln visited City Point twice. During his first visit, on June 21, 1864, he rode with General Grant to the Petersburg front. There he was greeted enthusiastically by the troops, including the black soldiers of General William F. Smith's Eighteenth Corps, who had captured a portion of the original Confederate defense lines on June 15th.

Lincoln's second visit began on March 24, 1865, and lasted two weeks. During that time Lincoln met with Grant, General William T. Sherman, and Admiral David D. Porter aboard the President's ship, the *River Queen* to discuss the military situation. The meeting established the basis for the magnanimous surrender terms by Grant and Sherman to the defeated Confederate armies.

One day after this meeting Grant moved his headquarters closer to the front to begin the final spring offensive. Five days later both Richmond and Petersburg fell. Lincoln visited both cities before returning to Washington, D.C., on April 8th. The days the President spent at City Point were among his last. On April 15th, just six days after returning to Washington, he died at the hands of an assassin.



*River Queen*

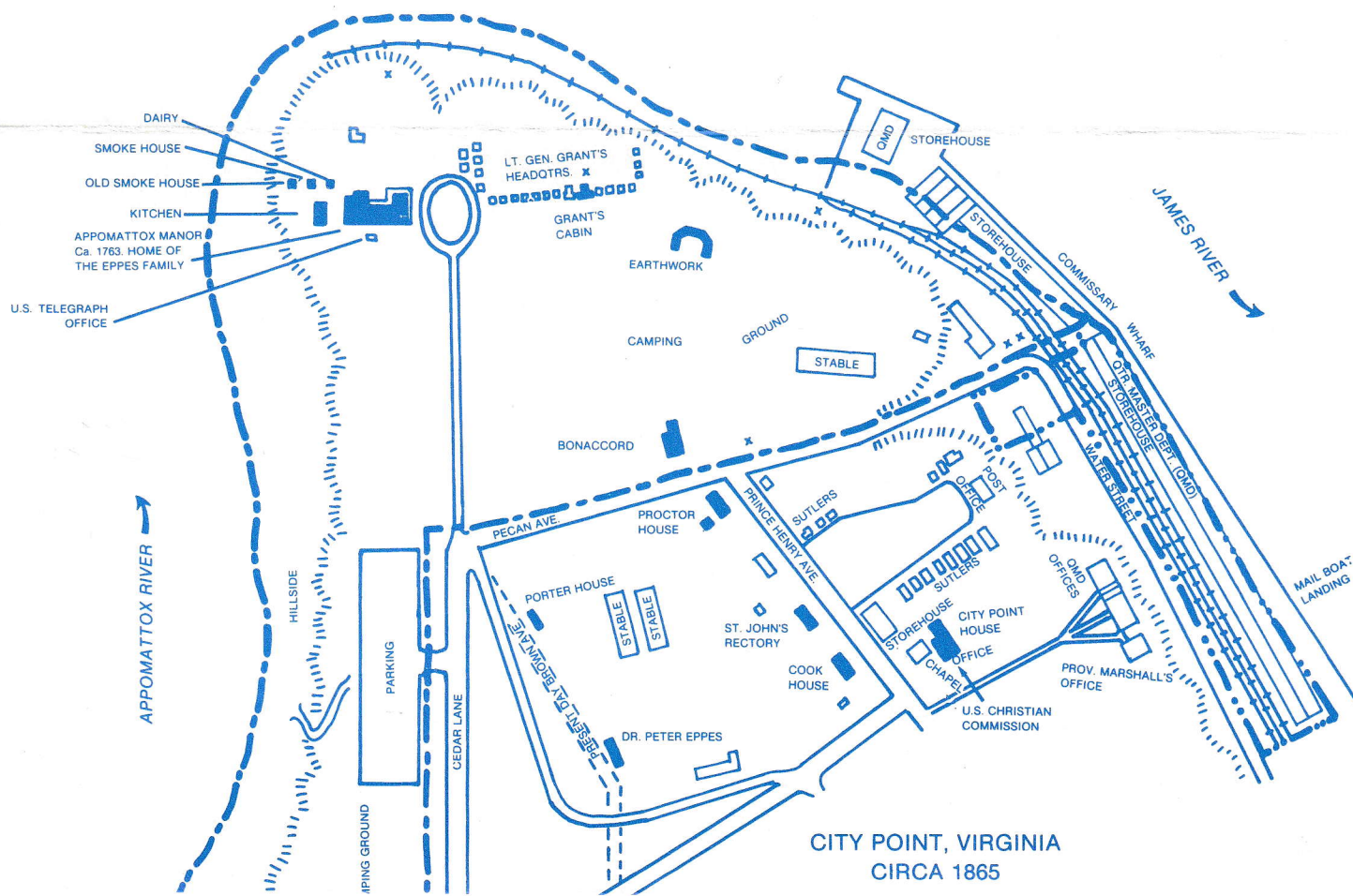
# Supplying the Army

Besides being headquarters for the United States Armies, City Point was the supply base for Union forces fighting at Petersburg. Overnight the tiny village became one of the busiest ports in the world as hundreds of ships arrived off its shores bringing food, clothing, ammunition, and other supplies for the Union army. The goods were unloaded at a half-mile long wharf constructed by U. S. Military Railroad Construction Corps along the base of the bluff. Warehouses built along the waterfront allowed quartermasters to stockpile vast amounts of supplies. On an average day during the siege the Union army had thirty days of food and twenty days of forage stored in and around City Point, or to put it in other terms, 9,000,000 meals of food and 12,000 tons of hay and oats. The only food not imported from the North was bread, which the army produced on site. In a bakery built just outside the inner defense line, commissary personnel produced 100,000 rations of bread a day for the hungry soldiers fighting in the trenches.

Bread and other supplies were sent to the front by train. Using the grading of the old City Point Railroad, members of the U. S. Military Railroad Construction Corps rebuilt the line west to Petersburg, then extended it southwest behind Union lines. Twenty-five locomotives and 275 railroad cars were then brought to City Point by barge from Washington, D.C., to provide rolling stock for the line. In just twenty-two days the army had completed the first stage of the railroad and had the trains operating on a full schedule. At Petersburg, victory rode the rails.

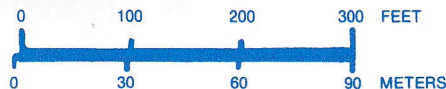


*Railroads*





MAPLEWOOD AVE.



--- NATIONAL PARK SERVICE BOUNDARY LINE

--- PROPERTY TO BE ACQUIRED BY N.P.S.

■ BUILDINGS STILL STANDING

□ BUILDINGS NOT STANDING

X WAYSIDE EXHIBITS

## Prisoners

In the winter months a court martial board of ten officers convened daily to try criminal cases ranging from theft to desertion. Men accused of crimes were held in confinement at the Bull Ring, an enclosure surrounded by high wooden fences and patrolled by sentries. Sanitary facilities at the compound were primitive, and shelter, when it existed at all, was inadequate. One witness to the suffering remembered: "... In rain and snow and frost I have seen hundreds, perhaps thousands, of men huddled together without a particle of shelter or protection from the elements... its horror and its odor sicken me to think of, even a quarter of a century later. ..." Another wrote, "It was a pen of filth and vermin... and I could readily believe the officer, who had



Richard S. Ewell



Joseph B. Kershaw



G. W. Custis Lee

been a prisoner at Richmond, when he said that he would rather be confined in the Libby Prison for six months than in the Bull-Ring for one." The

court martial board tried, on the average, four cases a day. Sentencing followed conviction. In a single day one man saw five men sent off to execution.

Not all those confined at City Point were criminals, however. Confederate soldiers captured in battle were held until special transports arrived to carry them to prison camps in the North. In the two weeks prior to the surrender at Appomattox Court House, some 14,000 Confederates passed through City Point en route to northern prisons, including Generals Richard S. Ewell, Joseph B. Kershaw, and G. W. Custis Lee. Among the last soldiers to be imprisoned during the war, many of these men remained confined for several months before finally gaining their freedom.

## The Depot Field Hospital

Seven hospitals operated at City Point during the siege, the largest being the Depot Field Hospital, which covered an area of two hundred acres and at times held as many as 10,000 patients. Twelve hundred tents, supplemented in winter by ninety log barracks, comprised the compound, which included laundries, dispensaries, regular and special diet kitchens, dining halls, offices, and other structures. Army surgeons administered the hospital aided by civilian agencies such as the U. S. Sanitary and Christian Commissions. Male nurses drawn from the army's ranks kept the hospital clean and comfortable. Each patient had his own bed and washbasin, and regularly received fresh pillows and linens. Covered walkways between the tents shaded patients from the summer sun, while water pumped up from the Appomattox River was used for cleaning, bathing, and spraying down the dry, dusty streets. The excellence of the facilities and the efficiency and dedication of the staff made the Depot Field Hospital not only the largest facility of its kind in America, but also the finest.



Hospital

## Administration

The City Point Unit is a part of Petersburg National Battlefield, and is administered by the National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is P. O. Box 549, Petersburg, Virginia 23804, is in immediate charge of the battlefield. Comments or inquiries may be sent to him at that address.

## Handicapped Access

Ramps into the restrooms assure complete access to those facilities. Please ask a Park Service employee for handicapped access to the display area. A park wheelchair is available on request.

## Safety

We ask that you refrain from picking plants and climbing on the earthworks or other structures. The bluff and river can be dangerous, so please exercise caution as you move about the area.