
Fort Stedman

Colquitt's Salient

TRAIL

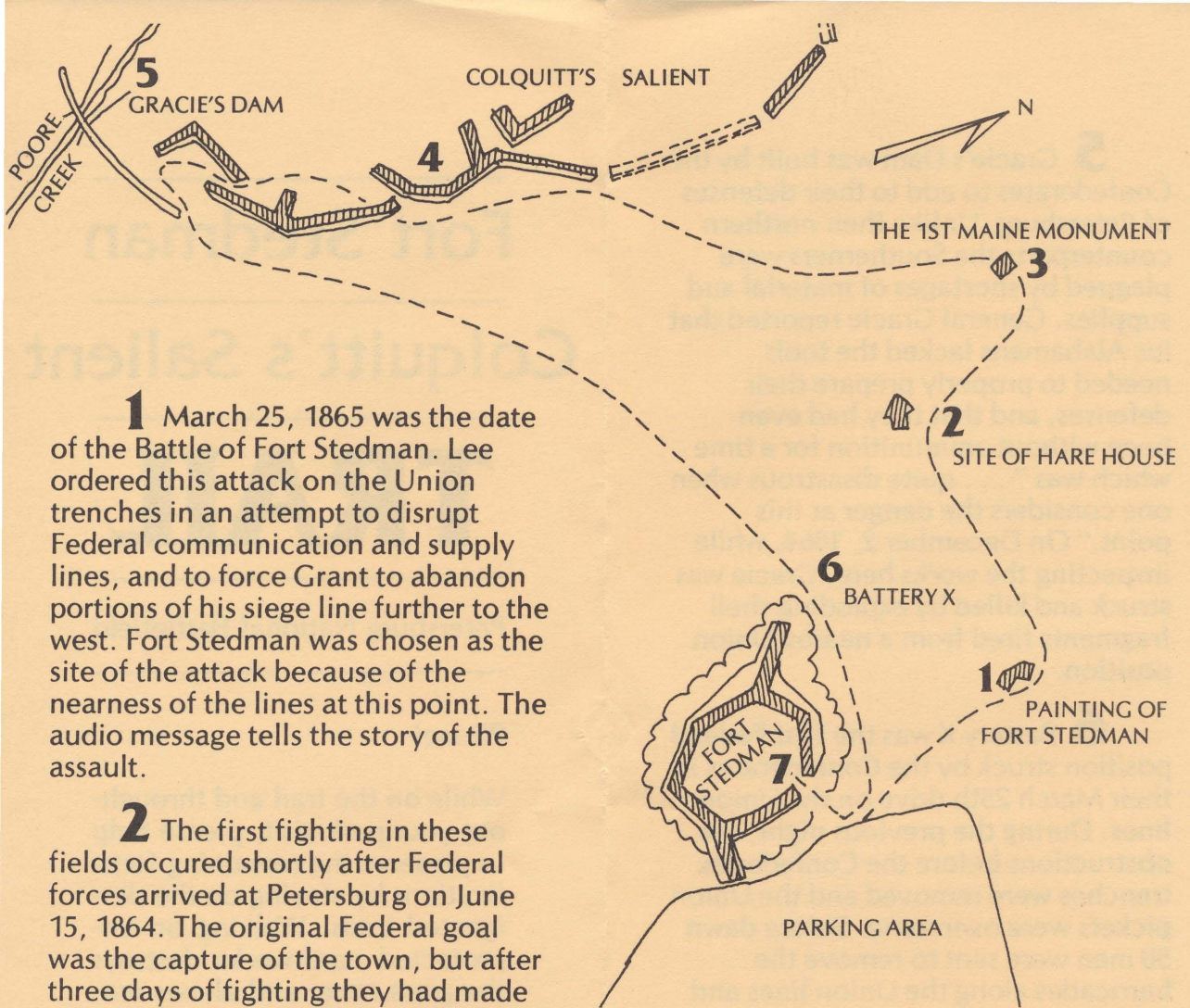
Petersburg National Battlefield

Please!

While on the trail and throughout your park visit, please help us preserve the remaining fortifications by staying on the designated trails. Walking on unprotected earthworks destroys the grass cover and allows erosion to set in. Thank you for helping to preserve these features for future generations.

The Fort Stedman — Colquitt's Salient Trail crosses Hare Hill, one of the bloodiest spots on the Petersburg Siege Line. The strategic importance of the hill was recognized by both sides and during the 10 month siege it was the scene of two major battles and almost daily sniper fire. On June 18, 1864 after three days of fighting, Union forces captured the hill and built Fort Stedman to secure their position. On March 25, 1865, the Confederates launched an assault on the Union lines from Colquitt's Salient, the rebel position about 1/4 mile west of Fort Stedman.

The trail is a one mile loop and can be walked in about 35 minutes.



1 March 25, 1865 was the date of the Battle of Fort Stedman. Lee ordered this attack on the Union trenches in an attempt to disrupt Federal communication and supply lines, and to force Grant to abandon portions of his siege line further to the west. Fort Stedman was chosen as the site of the attack because of the nearness of the lines at this point. The audio message tells the story of the assault.

2 The first fighting in these fields occurred shortly after Federal forces arrived at Petersburg on June 15, 1864. The original Federal goal was the capture of the town, but after three days of fighting they had made only moderate gains. On the 18th, a Union drive finally carried Hare Hill, but the main line of Confederate defenses at Colquitt's Salient held firm. No further Union advances were made and the Petersburg Siege began.

The Hare House was the modest home of a Petersburg family caught in the midst of a siege. Both sides had used the house as shelter during the assaults but a Federal soldier returning here a few weeks after the hill was taken wrote that "the spot was . . . scarcely recognizable . . . and the former landmarks obliterated." Among the sites destroyed was the home of Otway Hare.

3 Although the First Maine Heavy Artillery was only one of many units involved in the attacks on June 18th, their losses were the greatest. Their regimental historian described the scene after the day's fighting as follows: "The firing from the enemy lines . . . was constantly kept up . . .

When night came on a dense mist settled over the field. Some of the wounded, who could, crawled into the lines. Some were rescued by their brave comrades who went to them in the darkness. Every attempt to make a rescue was equal to the hazards of an ordinary hard-fought battle". Listen to the audio message for the story of the Charge of the First Maine.

4 Colquitt's Salient was only 613 yards from the main Federal trenches, much closer than most points along the Petersburg front. Because of its proximity, the shelling and sniper firing continued almost daily throughout the siege. The works the Confederates built to protect themselves were particularly elaborate. One officer described the salient as " . . . a mere labyrinth of trench, with bomb-proof cover in every available spot."

5 Gracie's Dam was built by the Confederates to add to their defenses of Petersburg. Unlike their northern counterparts the Southerners were plagued by shortages of material and supplies. General Gracie reported that his Alabamans lacked the tools needed to properly prepare their defenses, and that they had even been without ammunition for a time which was " . . . quite disastrous when one considers the danger at this point." On December 2, 1864, while inspecting the works here, Gracie was struck and killed by exploding shell fragments fired from a nearby Union position.

6 Battery X was the first Federal position struck by the Confederates in their March 25th drive on the Union lines. During the previous night, the obstructions before the Confederate trenches were removed and the Union pickets were overcome. Before dawn 50 men were sent to remove the barricades along the Union lines and 300 infantrymen followed to spearhead the assault on Fort Stedman and the nearby positions. The plan worked at Battery X. At 4 a.m. the entire garrison, along with the 2 guns and 7 mortars placed here, was surprised and captured.

7 The Confederates had little difficulty in seizing Fort Stedman on March 25th, but stiff resistance and over-whelming numbers prevented them from advancing much further. The men who had taken the fort soon found themselves isolated and forced to choose between surrender and a retreat under fire to their own lines. By 8 a.m. the Rebel drive was broken and the Yankee stranglehold on Petersburg restored. Fort Stedman was the last instance where Lee was able to go on the offensive against the Union Army. Two weeks later on April 9, 1865, he surrendered at Appomattox.

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