The image shows a close-up of a flag with a blue field, a white star, and a red field. The word "RICHMOND" is written vertically in large, bold, black letters across the center of the flag. The flag has a white border and a white star on the blue field. The red field is visible in the upper right and lower left corners.

RICHMOND

Malvern Hill · Cold Harbor
Fort Harrison · Gaines' Mill
Drewry's Bluff · Beaver Dam

RICHMOND

capital of the Confederacy. The very name evoked emotion. In the North people cried, "On to Richmond," demanding capture of the city, as though in some mystical way its fall would end the war. But only a few understood the reason for the cry. The city's true value lay in its factories, mills, and warehouses that provided food, clothing, and weapons for the largest Confederate army in the field.

We can better understand those who were so long preoccupied with seizing and defending Richmond by looking at the war through their eyes. They were not historians, but many faithfully recorded what they saw and believed.

Consider the war situation in mid-1861. A few weeks after the Union disaster at Manassas, George B. McClellan took command of the Federal Army of the Potomac. He thoroughly organized and trained his men, but his hesitancy in using them brought rebuke from President Abraham Lincoln: "And once more let me tell you it is indispensable that you strike a blow."

Extracts from McClellan's own accounts—prose almost as ponderous as his movements—tell of his army's approach to Richmond in the spring of 1862:

"The council organized by the President of the United States adopted Fort Monroe as the base of operations for the movement of the Army of the Potomac upon Richmond. On the 17th of March the leading division embarked at Alexandria. On the 1st of April, I embarked on the steamer *Commodore*, and reached Fort Monroe on the 2nd.

"Then on the 5th of April, I found myself [before Yorktown] with 53,000 men in hand. In our front was an intrenched line, apparently too strong for assault. We were thus obliged to resort to siege operations. All the batteries would have been ready to open fire on, at latest, the morning of the 6th of May, but during the night of the 3rd and 4th of May the enemy evacuated his position, regarding them as untenable.

"The moment the evacuation of Yorktown was known, the order was given for the advance. The enemy's rear-guard held the Williamsburg lines against our advance until the night of the 5th, when they retired. On the 20th of May our light troops reached the Chickahominy. By the 24th, Mechanicsville was carried, so that the enemy was now all together on the [Richmond] side of the river."

While McClellan was moving on Richmond, the Union Navy tried its hand at taking the prized city. On May 15, a flotilla of five vessels, including the *Monitor* and one revenue cutter, attacked the fort on Drewry's Bluff, a few miles below Richmond.

Charles H. Hasker, a boatswain of the Confederate Navy, remembered the arrival of the flagship, U.S.S. *Galena*:

"She steamed up to within seven or eight hundred yards of the bluff, let go her starboard anchor, ran out the chains, put her head inshore, backed astern, let go her steam-anchor from the starboard quarter, hove ahead, and made ready for action before firing a gun—one of the most masterly pieces of seamanship of the whole war."

Years later, Cpl. Samuel A. Mann, who commanded the fort's No. 2 gun, recalled the fight:

"I ran to my post on the gun, served the vent—the detachment continuing to load as coolly as if on parade. We ran the gun 'in battery' and I pointed it. Then Lieutenant Wilson gave the order to 'fire' in his most stentorian tones. When the shot struck pretty much where it had been aimed, and glanced off.

"As soon as we opened fire every gunboat simultaneously commenced pouring their huge shells into us. And I have thought that when the first broadside from the *Galena* passed just over our parapets, together with the sounds of the shells from the others, mingled with the roar of our guns, was the most startling, terrifying and diabolical sound I had ever heard.

"With blanched but earnest faces we continued to pelt the *Galena*, trying to penetrate her armor, which we finally did at the water-line. When Captain Drewry commanded, in a very confident tone of voice: 'Fire on those wooden boats and make them leave there,' both of our guns resumed fire, and put some shot through them broadside.

"Then I saw a peculiar flag (to me) slowly creeping up the mast of the *Galena*. When at once, (about 11:05 o'clock) after the fire had been going on for fully four long hours, the three wooden gunboats began to steam rapidly down the river, followed more slowly by the *Monitor* and the *Galena*.

"Then we tossed our caps into the air and shouted our cry of victory."

Six weeks later, McClellan beat back a Confederate attack at Seven Pines. In the 2-day battle, within

hearing distance of Richmond, the Confederate Commander, Joseph E. Johnston, was severely wounded, and Robert E. Lee took over leadership of the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee planned to strike McClellan's forces unit by unit, as one would eat a bunch of grapes. Calling "Stonewall" Jackson's force from the Shenandoah Valley to help, Lee struck northward across the Chickahominy, where Fitz John Porter's troops and McClellan's supply base lay isolated from the main Union army. So began the Seven Days' Battles.

The first major collision came at the village of Mechanicsville on June 26. Federal soldiers pulled back about a mile, drawing the Southerners after them, and took position behind Beaver Dam Creek, in fortifications already built for just such a purpose. Porter later recorded the action there:

"The forces which were directed against Seymour at Ellerson's Mill made little progress. Semour's direct and Reynolds' flank fire soon arrested them and drove them to shelter. Late in the afternoon, greatly strengthened, they renewed the attack with spirit and energy, some reaching the borders of the stream, but only to be repulsed with terrible slaughter. Little depressions in the ground sheltered many from our fire, until, when night came on, they all fell back. Night put an end to the contest.

"The Confederates suffered severely. All night the moans of the dying and the shrieks of the wounded reached our ears. Our loss was only about 250 of the 5,000 engaged."

That night, as Jackson's tardy troops arrived from the valley, Porter's men fell back beyond Gaines' Mill on Powhite Creek to the plateau between Boatswain's Creek and the Chickahominy. The next day they withstood hours of attack until, almost at dusk, Southern soldiers broke the Northern line within sight of the Watt House. Confederate Col. Evander McIvor Law remembered the charge this way:

"Passing over the scattering line of Confederates on the ridge in front, the whole division 'broke into a trot' down the slope toward the Federal works. Men fell like leaves in an autumn wind; not a gun was fired in reply; not a step faltered as the two gray lines swept silently and swiftly on; the pace became more rapid every moment; and when the men were within thirty yards of the ravine a wild yell answered

the roar of Federal musketry; and they rushed the works. The Confederates were within ten paces of them when the Federals in the front line broke cover, and swarmed up the hill in their rear, carrying away their second line with them. Then we had our 'innings.' As the blue mass surged up the hill in our front, the Confederate fire was poured into it. The target was a large one, the range short, and scarcely a shot fired into it could fail. The debt of blood contracted but a few moments before was paid, and with interest."

But Porter, by making the defense, bought the time needed to move much of the Union supplies south of the Chickahominy. At Savage Station 2 days later the Union rear guard beat off stiff Confederate attacks. Next, Lee tried a pincers movement—simultaneous attacks at White Oak Swamp and Glendale. The Federals held, and their supply wagons continued to roll south to the James.

At Malvern Hill on July 1, the Union army turned to face the Confederates. In parade-ground order Federal soldiers stood in line of battle, and their massed infantry and artillery fire shattered the attacking Confederates. The result was chaos. Capt. Frank A. Bond, 1st Maryland Confederate Cavalry, could later tell his children:

"We were certain from the numbers of stragglers coming back that things were going badly with us at the front. Col. Johnston and I decided we would ride forward and take a look. We, of course, felt confident we would find our line of battle between us and the enemy.

"One look was sufficient and we turned and fled. We had no line of battle. There was nothing in front of the enemy but a mass of broken and demoralized stragglers. Truly, a very bad showing."

A few days after the battle, Confederate Pvt. Randolph Fairfax of the Rockbridge Artillery realized that he and his comrades were more fortunate than most. The gentle-born college student, too young to be an officer, wrote his sister:

"Our battery was held in reserve until the last battle, when we were brought up and for nearly an hour exposed to the most terrific artillery fire I ever witnessed. God again in his mercy preserved me, and none of my friends was severely hurt; for which together with other mercies I owe Him a life of gratitude and pray for grace to lead it."

The Confederates knew they had taken a beating at Malvern Hill, so Lee pulled back to allow his army to lick its wounds. McClellan established his army at Harrison's Landing, safe under the guns of the Federal navy. As so often happens in war, neither side succeeded fully. McClellan failed to capture Richmond; Lee failed to destroy McClellan's army. In August 1862 the Federal navy convoyed McClellan's army back to the vicinity of Washington. Lee moved northward, and there followed a series of battles that will be remembered as long as men chronicle valor—Second Manassas, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg. Lee proved himself to be an instinctive warrior, and Lincoln sought a general who could cope with him.

In March 1864 Lincoln appointed Ulysses S. Grant to the command of all the Union armies. Grant made his headquarters with McClellan's old force, the Army of the Potomac. In nearly 3 years of fighting that army probably took more punishment than any American army before or since. Grant's arrival gave it a leader who refused to be beaten. Hammering southward, Grant clashed with Lee in the Wilderness and at Spotsylvania. Another commander might have drawn back, but Grant side-stepped to the left after both battles. As May ended, Grant's men were approaching the dusty little crossroads of Cold Harbor. There at the gates of Richmond, Union soldiers died by the thousands in gallant assaults on the Confederate trenches. Again Evander McIvor Law, now a Confederate brigadier general, recalled the carnage of battle:

"On reaching the trenches, I found the men in fine spirits, laughing and talking as they fired. There, too, I could see more plainly the havoc made in the ranks of the assaulting column. I had seen the dreadful carnage in front of Marye's Hill at Fredericksburg, and on the 'old railroad cut' which Jackson's men held at Second Manassas; but I had seen nothing to exceed this. It was not war; it was murder."

Murder or not, Grant's army was still intact and still determined. But for Lee's army, the end was inexorably approaching. Among the thousands who had fallen was young Randolph Fairfax. His even younger brother, Ethelbert, took his place. From Cold Harbor, Ethelbert Fairfax wrote home:

"Last night was the third time that the Division has passed a night out of line of battle for a whole



month & one of those was spent on the march. Grant seems never to tire of this horrible slaughter, but is determined to wary us down with his repeated attacks."

Grant then moved his army south of the James to get at Richmond's soft "underbelly," Petersburg. For 10 months he laid siege to that city, while keeping up the pressure on the Howlett line between the two cities and the defenses around Richmond. Then in late September Grant struck Fort Harrison. Maj. James B. Moore, 17th Georgia Infantry, described the onslaught:

"The enemy came with a rush for our works. Owing to our being short of ammunition we were unable to do much execution with our rifles. It took but a few moments for them to clear the intervening space and reach the ditch, some five feet deep, in front of our works, into which they piled pellmell. They immediately began to scale the embankment and pour over the works into the fort. Seeing the hopelessness of further efforts to save the fort, I gave orders to get out in the best manner possible and to re-form on the next line of works. On my leaving I saw that the 32-pounder had been dismounted by the recoil and was standing up nearly perpendicular, firmly imbedded in the hard clay. Private (afterward Captain) A. P. McCord was on top of the traverse embankment firing right down into the midst of the enemy not more than fifteen feet distant. He even remained in this perilous position until the bluecoats became as thick within the fort as blackbirds upon a millet stack.

"In my hasty retreat from these uncomfortably warm quarters, I dropped a very fine sword, which I left to the enemy's care."

The pressure continued. Grant kept the Confederates on edge—probing here, slashing there, and hammering elsewhere. Finally, the thin, exhausted line, stretching 30 miles from Richmond to beyond Petersburg, collapsed.

Pvt. Royal W. Figg, Parker's Battery, Army of Northern Virginia, remembered the last of the thrusts on the Howlett line and the subsequent evacuation:

"Day was just reddening the east when the crash of musketry from the pickets again called us to our feet. Scarcely had we time to man our pieces when the enemy carried the picket line and were rushing on us. Bang! bang! bang! went the cannon in rapid succession with a roar of small arms on either flank. The advance of the Federals was scarcely more, after all, than a heavy demonstration.

"About dusk that evening, amidst profound quiet, we proceeded to withdraw our pieces and move cautiously to the rear.

"No one seems to know where we are going. Some say Petersburg to reinforce the troops there, but it is soon evident that Petersburg is not our objective."

It wasn't. It turned out to be Appomattox Court House. As Private Figg started his last retreat toward the west, a Union major general waited east of Richmond. Thirty years old, the son of German immigrants, and second in his class at West Point, Godfrey Weitzel served steadily and competently through the war. In a few hours he would stir the Nation with a telegram: "We entered Richmond at eight o'clock this morning." But now, at midnight, he went to bed.

While Weitzel slept, a remarkable young gentlewoman walked the city's streets in anguish. A long-remembered belle of Richmond, Constance Cary was a volunteer nurse, a published author at 21, and a frequent guest in the home of Jefferson Davis. Now her world was falling apart. Close relatives lay dead or wounded; her childhood home stood in ruins; her fiance had disappeared into the ruck of retreat.

The last Sunday night before the city fell on Monday, she said goodby to her brother Clarence, a midshipman. Before he had ridden out of Richmond on guard duty with the Confederacy's gold stock, he had sent back to his sister one last priceless gift, a ham.

In church that Sunday morning she was watching as a messenger approached the Confederate President.

"I happened to sit in the rear of the President's pew, so near that I plainly saw the gray pallor that came upon his face as he read a scrap of paper thrust into his hand by a messenger hurrying up the middle aisle. With stern, set face and his usual quick military tread, he left the church, a number of other people rising in their seats and hastening after him, those who were left swept by a universal tremor of alarm. The rector, accustomed as he was to these frequent scenes in church, came down to the altar rail and tenderly begged his people remain and finish the service."

Godfrey Weitzel also knew the end of the war was near. But even at his age he was too experienced a soldier to become excited. He knew it would be better to wait and watch. Later he remembered that he slept only a couple of hours that night.

"A little before two o'clock I was awakened by General Shepley and informed that bright fires were seen in the direction of Richmond. Shortly after, while we were looking at these fires, we heard explosions. I directed all of my troops to be awakened and furnished with breakfast, and to be held in readiness to move as soon as it was light enough to pass through the lines of rebel torpedoes [mines] without injury."

At daybreak he put his troops—seasoned veterans serving under a professional soldier—on the road to Richmond.

"When we entered Richmond we found ourselves in a perfect pandemonium. Fires and explosions in all directions; whites and blacks, either drunk or in the highest state of excitement, running to and fro on the streets, apparently engaged in pillage or in saving some of their scanty effects from the fire; it was a yelling, howling mob.

"All the liquor in the city had been ordered destroyed, but it seems that many of the poor wretches had scooped it up from the gutters and drank it. To add to the horror of the scene, the convicts broke out of the penitentiary and began an indiscriminate pillage.

"A sad sight met us on reaching Capitol square. It was covered with women and children who had fled here to escape the fire. Some had saved a few articles of furniture, but most had only a few articles of bedding, such as a quilt, blanket, or pillow, and were lying upon them. Their poor faces were perfect pictures of utter despair. It was a sight that would have melted a heart of stone."

Constance Cary's world had indeed fallen apart. Though she was living with her uncle, the father of her beloved cousins, Randolph and Ethelbert Fairfax, her mother was in North Carolina, nursing the badly wounded Ethelbert. Miss Cary watched events without hope, yet sustained by a fierce pride. The day after Weitzel's men marched into Richmond, she wrote:

"My Precious Mother and Brother: I write you this jointly, because I have no idea where Clarence is. Can't you imagine with what a heavy heart I begin it—? The last two days have added long years to my life. I have cried until no more tears will come. When I bade you goodby, dear, and walked home, I could not trust myself to give another look after you. All that evening the air was full of farewells, as if to the dead. Hardly anybody went to bed. We walked through the streets like lost spirits till nearly daybreak. My dearest mother, it is a special Providence that has spared you this!

"With the din of the enemy's wagon trains, bands, trampling horses, fifes, hurrahs and cannon ever in my ears, I can hardly write coherently.

"Hardly had I dropped upon my bed that dreadful morning when I was wakened suddenly by four terrific explosions. It was the blowing up of our gunboats on the James, the signal for an all-day carnival of thundering noise and flames. Soon the fire spread, shells in the burning arsenals began to explode, and a smoke arose that shrouded the whole town. Flakes of fire fell around us, glass was shattered, and chimneys fell.

"By the middle of the day poor Aunt M's condition became so much worse the doctor said she positively could not stand any further sudden alarm. It was suggested that some of us should go to headquarters and ask for a guard for the house where an invalid lay so critically ill. Edith and I set out for Capitol Square, taking our courage in both hands. Looking down from the upper end of the square, we saw a huge wall of fire blocking out the horizon. In a few hours no trace was left of Main, Cary, and Canal Streets, from 8th to 18th Streets, except tottering walls and smouldering ruins. The War Department was sending up jets of flame.

"We went on to the head-quarters of the Yankee General in charge of Richmond, and I must say were treated with perfect courtesy and consideration. We heard stately Mrs. _____ and the _____'s were there to ask for food, as their families were starving. Thank God, we have not fallen to that!" Years later Constance Cary published the letter in her memoirs. To spare embarrassment to the families, she left out the two names. Their identities are unimportant. It is enough to know that the Federal army had indeed come on to Richmond.

—William Kennon Kay

Quotations have occasionally been simplified for readability.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

A complete tour of the battlefields requires a 57-mile drive, outlined on the map. We suggest that you begin at the main visitor center in Chimborazo Park, 3215 East Broad Street. Markers and other devices explain the military operations.

ADMINISTRATION

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

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

A superintendent, whose address is 3215 East Broad Street, Richmond, Va. 23223, is in immediate charge of the park.

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR — the Nation's principal natural resource agency—has a special obligation to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that our renewable resources are managed to produce optimum benefits, and that all resources contribute to the progress and prosperity of the United States, now and in the future.

U. S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service



Revised 1967

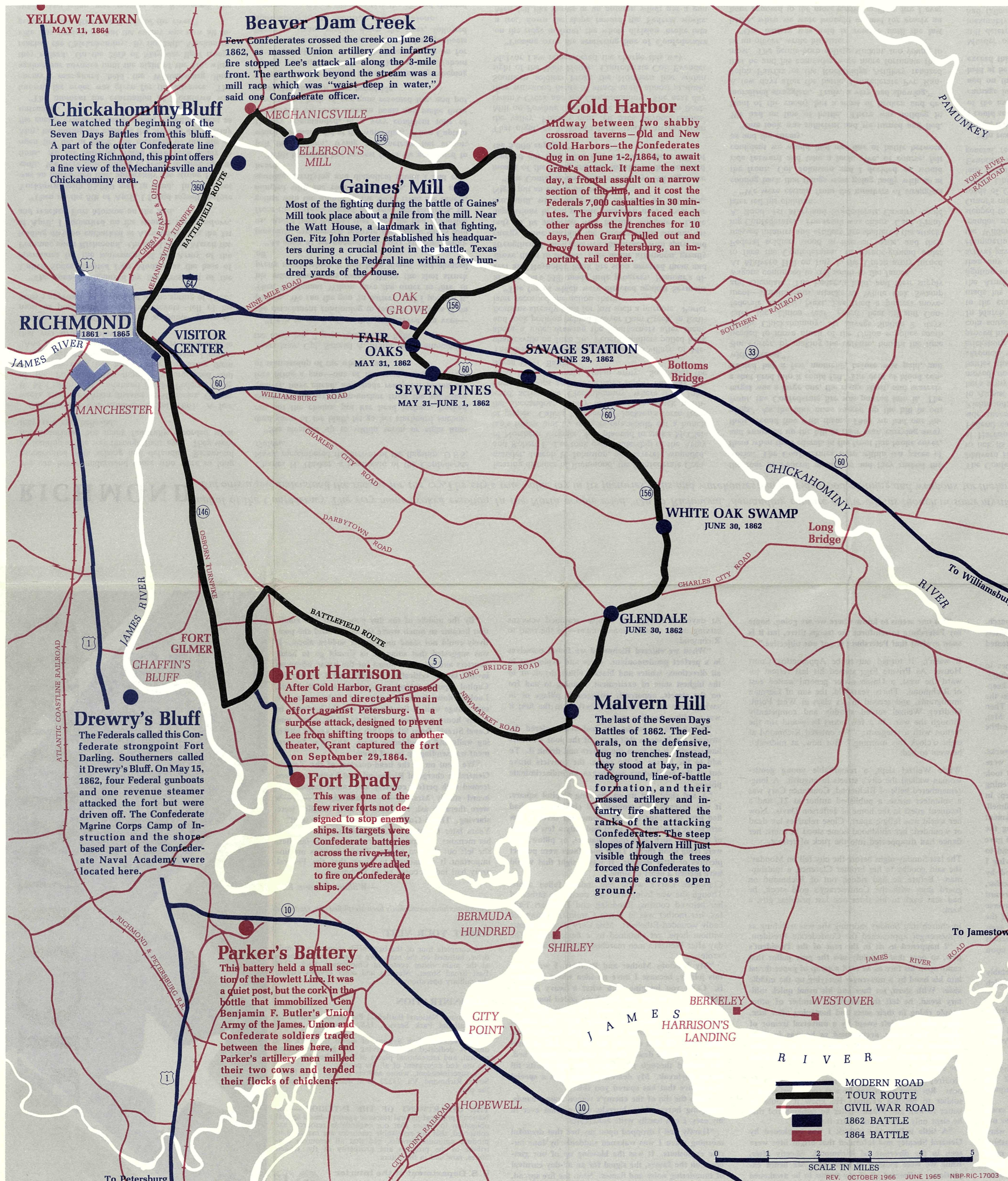
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IN DEFENSE OF RICHMOND



THE PATRICIAN CITY Richmond was not perhaps the wisest choice for the Confederate capital. The 100 miles separating that city from Washington provided scant room for the Union and Confederate armies to maneuver with ease. But Richmond possessed mills, factories, arsenals, and railroads that would be vital to any large army operating on the Confederacy's northern frontier. Then, too, the State would imbue the war with its immense prestige. By choosing Richmond as the capital, the Confederacy assured Virginians that the Old Dominion would not be abandoned. It also meant that Virginia would become the major battleground of the war.

Richmond is not an old city. Laid out in 1737, it is far younger than New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and even Norfolk. Yet even by 1779, when it became the capital of Virginia, the city reflected the State's ancient glory and the complicated, stratified, highly conservative society which had grown up in the century and a half since Jamestown. An aristocracy ordered Virginia's affairs. Most were related by blood or marriage, and their deep pride sprang from a sense of continuity with the generations before who had transplanted a civilization to a wilderness.

By 1861 Virginians had come to look upon non-Virginians with a certain gentle skepticism. Always willing to help those less fortunate than themselves, they called for a peace conference 6 weeks after South Carolina seceded, but the effort failed. When President Abraham Lincoln requested volunteers from all the States to put down rebellion in the South, Virginia promptly seceded. Though the State felt a strong proprietary interest in the Union, her ties were with the South. The South's rights were threatened, and the State, in a new War for Independence, would walk again in the footsteps of George Washington.

This was the state of mind in Virginia and Richmond at the outbreak of the war. The city had a population of 40,000, excellent inns and taverns, good shops, theaters that attracted internationally known actors, and a rising medical school. Its industry was growing, and its residential sections displayed an air of quiet good taste. Like the State the city had a reputation for enjoying the good life. In the Virginia manner its citizens tended to consider agriculture superior to industry, rural life better than city. And culturally and emotionally Richmond faced toward London rather than toward any American city.

Richmond went to war enthusiastically. Militia companies mobilized and were mustered into the Confederate service. Volunteers formed new units. Women's sewing circles began turning out clothing for the troops. Industry stepped up production.

As volunteers from other Southern States poured into the city, they received a heartfelt welcome. Camps sprang up on the city's outskirts, and soldiers speaking every variety of Southern accent strolled the streets. With their unconscious air of self-assurance, Virginians mildly irritated some from other sections. One Louisiana Creole officer, who saw years of hard service with Lee's army, later told his grandson: "I had the impression the Virginians wanted me to thank them for the privilege of fighting in Virginia."

But war brought worse problems than this. The population grew to 125,000. Thousands were refugees, industrial workers—now much in demand—and

civil and military officials. Others were simply the riffraff that collect in any wartime capital. Life, formerly quiet and leisurely, now became a nightmare. The streets were unsafe at night. Prices soared. By the end of the war, food had become so scarce that the sight of a pigeon on the wing was a rarity, and clothing and shelter could only be had at great price.

The war was less than a year old when Federal Armies pressed toward the city. In 1862 the Army of the Potomac advanced up the peninsula to within 5 miles of Richmond. Hard fighting stopped the Union drive, but the thousands of casualties turned Richmond into an enormous hospital. Cavalry raids and threats kept the citizenry on edge continually, and as the lists of dead from hundreds of skirmishes and battles were published, more and more of the townspeople went into mourning.

In 1864 Grant hammered his way southward from the Wilderness and Spotsylvania Court House, past the North and South Anna Rivers, the Pamunkey, and Totopotomoy Creek to Cold Harbor, only a few miles north of Richmond. Held here momentarily, Grant then sidestepped his way around to Petersburg, 20 miles south, where he began systematically to sever the railroad connections into Richmond. Only the most essential goods could now enter the city. The people tightened their belts and somehow hung on. Prices rose still higher, and many had to sell prized heirlooms just to stay alive.

On Passion Sunday 1865 Confederate troops evacuated Richmond, setting fire to supplies they could not transport. Soon much of the town was ablaze, and as the Federal soldiers marched in they were greeted by a sight which their commanding general said "would have melted a heart of stone." When the fire was over, more than 900 buildings lay in ruins, and the population was dazed, ragged, and starving.

Little was left but pride and a fierce determination to rebuild. And the people set about the task, even if it meant that Robert E. Lee's own sons would hitch their cavalry horses to plows.

As the passions of war gradually subsided, a new generation tried to write a sequel of concord to what was once a tale of bitterness. In 1898, during the Spanish-American War, the 71st New York Volunteer Infantry boarded a train in New York for Tampa, Fla., where it would join the Cuban Expedition. Three-and-a-half decades earlier the 71st had stormed the very gates of Richmond. Now a new generation had filled its ranks and was headed south again.

Their route lay through Richmond. The news spread through the city, and on the appointed day brass bands, Confederate veterans, militiamen, and the plain people who always gather for such occasions turned out in throngs to greet the troops. They decked the station with flags and piled tables high with chicken, turkey, and fine Virginia ham. There were gallons of lemonade and perhaps a few stronger concoctions.

Then some officious zealot, obviously not a Virginian, rerouted the train around the city. Someone feared that the citizens would be outraged by a Yankee regiment traveling through Richmond. At a distance of 70 years it is difficult to tell who was the more disappointed, the gentlemen and ladies of Richmond or the men of the 71st New York Volunteers.