

Richmond

NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD PARK • VIRGINIA

The struggle for Richmond preoccupied Northerner and Southerner alike for 4 years. Situated at the head of navigation on the James River and only 110 miles from the Federal capital of Washington, Richmond was a symbol and a prime psychological objective. If the South lost its capital, Southerners might lose their will to fight—so reasoned leaders on both sides in the early years of the war. But there were more compelling reasons, for besides being the political center of the Confederacy, it was a medical and manufacturing center, and the primary supply depot for troops operating on the Confederacy's northeastern frontier.

Of the seven major drives launched against Richmond, two brought Union forces almost within sight of the city—McClellan's Peninsular Campaign of 1862, culminating in the Seven Days' Battles, and Grant's crushing campaign of 1864.



George B. McClellan

By early 1862 Gen. George B. McClellan had forged around the "cowering regiments" that survived the first Battle of Manassas a ponderous but disciplined 100,000-man fighting machine. With it he moved by water to invest east-central Virginia and capture Richmond. The operation was to have been assisted by an overland assault by troops under Gen. Irvin McDowell, but by May 24, when McClellan was deployed within 6 miles of the prize, President Lincoln had become alarmed for Washington's safety and suspended McDowell's movement. While McClellan fretted, Confederate Gen. Joseph Johnston struck an inept blow at the Union forces near Fair Oaks on May 31. Johnston was seriously wounded in the battle and Gen. Robert E. Lee succeeded to command—one of the most significant events of the war.

McClellan, who had maintained his dangerous position astride the Chickahominy expecting McDowell's corps to join him, hesitated too long. On June 26 the reinforced Confederates attacked and rolled up the Union right wing at Mechanicsville, then suffered heavy losses in futile attacks against the strong Union position on Beaver Dam Creek. Thus began the Seven Days' Battles, a series of side-stepping withdrawals and bitter holding actions that climaxed the Peninsular Campaign and enabled the Union Army to avoid disaster by circling east of Richmond to the security of Federal gunboats on the James River.



Robert E. Lee

For 2 years, while the armies fought indecisively in northern Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, Richmond entrenched and applauded Lee's unbroken successes in keeping northern armies impotent. In March 1864 Gen. Ulysses S. Grant assumed command of all Union armies in the field. Attaching himself to the Army of the Potomac, Grant embarked on an unyielding campaign against Richmond and the Army of Northern Virginia. Said Lee: "We must stop this army of Grant's before he gets to the James River. If he gets there it will become a siege, and then it will be a mere question of time."

In a series of flanking movements designed to cut Lee off from the Confederate capital, the Union Army slipped past the Southerners at the Wilderness and Spotsylvania Court House, although it suffered heavy casualties. At Cold Harbor, Grant's massive frontal assaults against the strongly entrenched Confederate line failed dismally with appalling losses. For 10 days the badly bruised Federals and starving Confederates broiled in the trenches; then Grant withdrew, crossed the James, and drove toward the important rail center of Petersburg.

Ulysses S. Grant





Evacuation of Richmond. From a contemporary engraving

Richmond withstood all attacks until Grant's successful siege of Petersburg forced Lee to retreat westward from that city on April 2, 1865. Richmond was abandoned the following day. Flushed from the cover of his fortifications, Lee fell prey to superior Union forces. His surrender at Appomattox Court House and the collapse of the Confederacy followed swiftly.

Richmond National Battlefield Park commemorates the Seven Days' Battles, Cold Harbor, and five lesser operations.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

We suggest you stop first at the headquarters visitor center at 3215 East Broad St., where exhibits and an audiovisual program introduce you to the history of the 1861-65 defense of Richmond. Here you may also buy an interpretive folder and an illustrated historical handbook giving fuller accounts of the fighting. Uniformed Park Service interpreters will answer your questions and provide you with historical information, as well as the latest traffic and road conditions. There are other visitor centers at Cold Harbor and Fort Harrison.

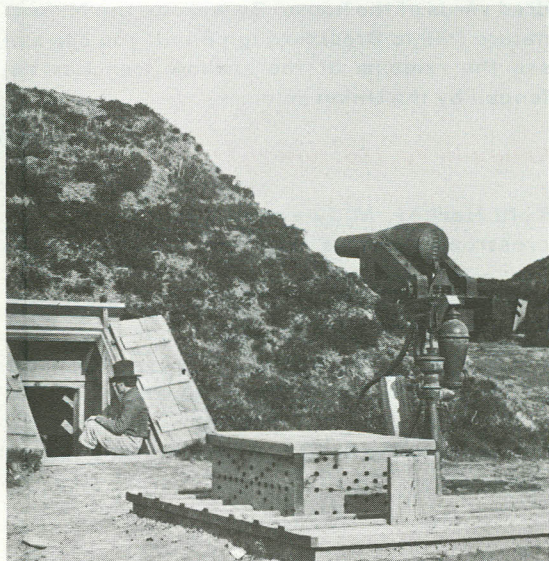
Each area of the park is identified by the distinctive blue and gray signs with the bright-red cannon, and each is interpreted by Park Service historical markers. Some areas (Chickahominy Bluff, Malvern Hill, and Fort Harrison) also have an oil painting and/or an audio station. Whenever possible, spend some time walking in each area; it is the only way to gain a real understanding of its significance.

Plant and animal life, ground cover, earthworks, buildings, and historical artifacts above and below ground are protected by Federal law and

must be left undisturbed. Climbing on earthworks and fortifications is not allowed.

Special hiking trails have been constructed at the Watt House, Fort Harrison, Fort Brady, and Drewry's Bluff. A picnic area is provided only at Fort Harrison.

All park areas are for daytime use only, except for moving traffic or by written permission. State traffic regulations apply unless otherwise posted. Please conduct yourself in a manner that does not interfere with the right of others to enjoy the park. When in doubt, ask a ranger.



Interior of Fort Darling

ADMINISTRATION

Richmond National Battlefield Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is 3215 East Broad St., Richmond, Va. 23223, is in immediate charge.

A TOUR OF THE RICHMOND BATTLEFIELDS

A complete tour of the battlefields, which includes those of 1862 and 1864, requires a 78-mile drive as outlined on the map. For convenience, follow the route as laid out.

From the headquarters visitor center drive 5 miles north on U.S. 360 to

Chickahominy Bluff. A part of the outer Confederate line defending Richmond, this bluff offers a fine view of the Mechanicsville and Chickahominy area. Within sight of the earthworks here, Gen. Robert E. Lee watched the beginning of the Seven Days' Battles.

Continue north 2.5 miles on U.S. 360 to Mechanicsville; turn right on Va. 156, "The Battlefield Route." From Mechanicsville drive 0.8 mile to

Beaver Dam Creek. Part of the 3-mile Union front which the Confederates unsuccessfully attacked on June 26, 1862, lies in the valley of Beaver Dam Creek. Few Confederates crossed the stream as massed Union artillery and infantry fire stopped Lee's attack all along the line. The earthwork beyond the creek was a millrace which, said one Confederate officer, was "waist deep in water."

Proceed 4.8 miles along Va. 156, where you will find a sign directing you to the Watt House, 0.7 mile off the highway.

Gaines' Mill. Most of the fighting during the battle of Gaines' Mill on June 27, 1862, took place about 1 mile from the mill. Near the Watt House, a restored landmark of the battle, Gen. Fitz John Porter established his headquarters during a crucial point in the fighting. Texas and Georgia troops broke the line within a few hundred yards of the house. By walking the history-nature trail to Breakthrough Point, you can still see the remains of the shallow trenches defended by the Union soldiers.

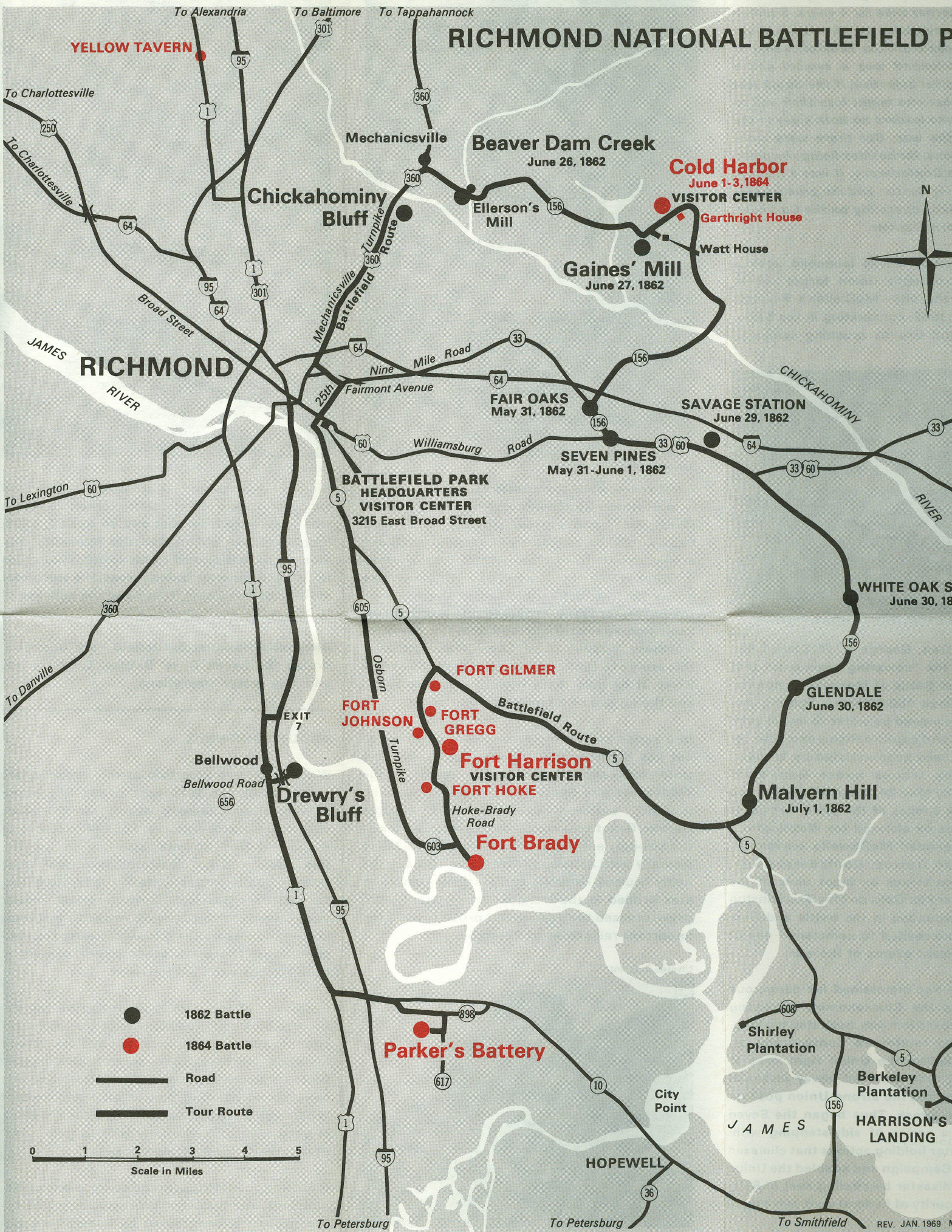
Return to Va. 156, turn right, drive 0.3 mile to

Cold Harbor. Midway between two shabby crossroads taverns—Old and New Cold Harbors—the Confederates dug in on June 1-2, 1864, to await Grant's attack. It came on June 3, a frontal assault on a narrow section of the line, and it cost the Federals 7,000 casualties in 30 minutes. The well-preserved trenches are fine examples of Civil War field fortifications. (The Garthright House is 0.2 mile from the Cold Harbor exit along Va. 156.)

From Cold Harbor, continue 20.6 miles on Va. 156 to Malvern Hill. Along the way you will pass several battlefields of the 1862 Peninsular Campaign that are not part of Richmond National Battlefield Park—Fair Oaks, Seven Pines, Savage Station, White Oak Swamp, and Glendale. State historical markers tell of the fighting.

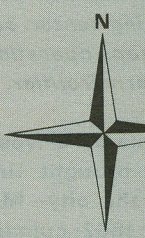
Malvern Hill. This was the last of the Seven Days' Battles of 1862, after which McClellan

RICHMOND NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD

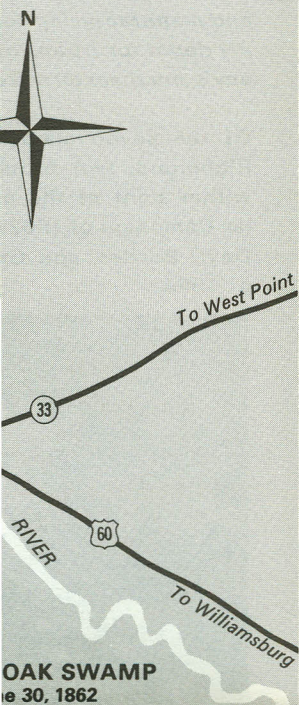


- 1862 Battle
- 1864 Battle
- Road
- Tour Route

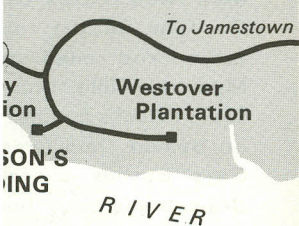
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withdrew to his base at Harrison's Landing. The Federals, on the defensive, dug no trenches. Instead, they stood at bay in parade-ground, line-of-battle formation across the gently sloping field, and their massed artillery and infantry fire shattered the ranks of the attacking Confederates. The steep slopes of Malvern Hill on the Union left and the swampy stream bottoms on the right forced the Confederates to advance across open ground.

From Malvern Hill, follow Va. 156 for 1.3 miles and turn right on Va. 5. Stay on Va. 5 for 7.1 miles, where a sign directs you to the left along a park road to

Fort Harrison. After Cold Harbor, Grant crossed the James and directed his main effort against Petersburg. In a surprise attack, designed to prevent Lee from shifting troops to another theater of operations, Union soldiers captured the fort on September 29, 1864. The fort was occupied and enlarged by the Federals, thus forcing a realignment of Richmond's southern defenses.

From Fort Harrison follow the park road south 4.1 miles to

Fort Brady. This was one of the few river forts not designed to stop enemy ships. A Federal stronghold on the James River, it was intended to neutralize Fort Darling across the river on Drewry's Bluff and to anchor the Union line from Fort Harrison. Later, more guns were added to fire on Confederate gunboats.

From Fort Brady, return to Kingsland Road (Va. 603), turn left, and follow the "Battlefield Tour Route" back to Richmond. From Richmond, drive 7.4 miles south on Int. 95 (toll) to Exit 7. Turn left on U.S. 1 and drive 2.4 miles to Va. 656 (just beyond the railroad overpass), turn left, and follow the signs to the parking lot at

Drewry's Bluff (Fort Darling). The Federals called this Confederate stronghold Fort Darling; Southerners called it Drewry's Bluff. On May 15, 1862, four Federal gunboats, including the famous ironclad *Monitor*, and one revenue steamer attacked the fort but were driven off. Exhibits and markers provide details of the successful Confederate defense.

Return to U.S. 1, turn left, and drive 4 miles to Va. 10. Turn left and proceed 0.7 mile to Va. 898, turn right, and drive 0.4 mile to the intersection of Va. 617. Parker's Battery lies on your immediate right, just beyond the intersection. Follow signs 0.2 mile to the parking lot.

Parker's Battery. This battery held a small section of the Howlett Line. It was a quiet post, but one that helped immobilize Gen. Benjamin F. Butler's Army of the James in May 1864.

This concludes the battlefield tour. You may retrace the route to Va. 10, then return to Richmond via int. 95.

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