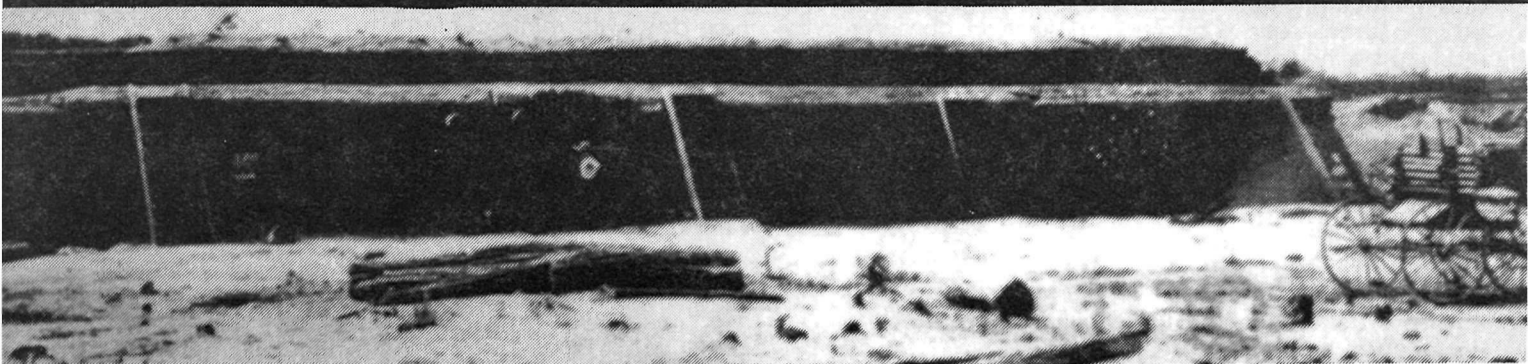


# Fort Harrison

Richmond National Battlefield Park



## Touring The Fort

### STOP 1

You are facing the side gate of Union Fort Burnham. The short traverse to your left and the portion of the earthworks on your right were added by the Federal troops after the capture of Fort Harrison. These two features protected Federal troops from deadly artillery fire from Fort Gilmer due north, directly behind you and toward Richmond—the Capital of the Confederacy.

### STOP 6

The opening beside the great traverse is an original roadway constructed after the capture of Fort Harrison to provide full access to the fortification.

### STOP 2

Enter the fort and stay on the path to the left. These earthworks make up the primary wall of Confederate Fort Harrison and are an extension of the outer defense line of Richmond. This wall's total height from the bottom of its moat to its top was 18-27 feet high, 12-15 feet wide and at least 2/3 larger than you now see.

### STOP 7

At this point, Confederate Fort Harrison comes to an abrupt end and Federal Fort Burnham begins. You will notice a contrast in the size of the walls. The Confederate walls took two years to build and are considerably larger than the Federal walls.

FORT HARRISON  
(Confederate)

FORT BURNHAM  
(Federal)

### STOP 3

The structure you are passing is a traverse built by the Federals as an inner wall of Federal Fort Burnham affording greater protection from artillery fire from nearby Confederate Ft. Johnson.

START  
TOUR HERE

### STOP 8

The guard rail encloses the remainder of the fresh water well, dug by the Confederates when they occupied the fort. The federal troops continued to use it after their occupation.

In anticipating the fact that the Confederates knew the location of the well, the Federals built a small traverse around it to protect them from enemy gun fire.

### STOP 4

The rectangular space now in front of you, enclosed on three sides and open in the rear formed one of three similar sections of the Confederate fort. The other sections of Fort Harrison are not clearly visible because of changes made after federal occupation of the fort. According to the official reports, the wall on your left is where Federal troops first entered the Confederate fort. This section was weakened considerably when 2 large seacoast artillery pieces commanding this area were rendered inoperable.

The solid mass of earth to your right was built by the Confederates to protect against heavy naval shells fired on the fort from Federal gunboats on the James River.

### STOP 9

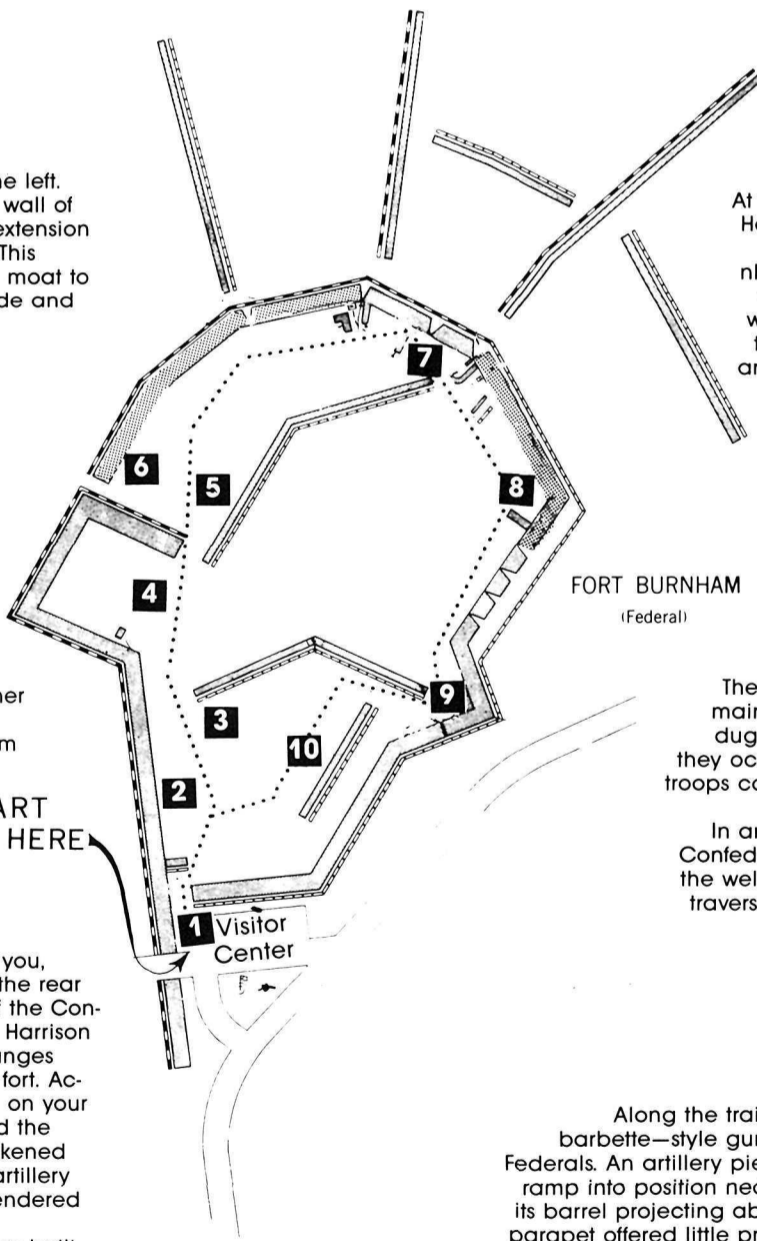
Along the trail to your left, you will see a barbette—style gun emplacement built by the Federals. An artillery piece would be rolled up the ramp into position near the angle in the fort with its barrel projecting above the parapet. While the parapet offered little protection for men operating the piece, the position gave freedom of sweep to the artillery piece horizontally.

### STOP 5

This large traverse was built as protection from artillery fire.

### STOP 10

Along this wall are the caved in remains of Federal bombproofs used to protect the troops garrisoning the fort.

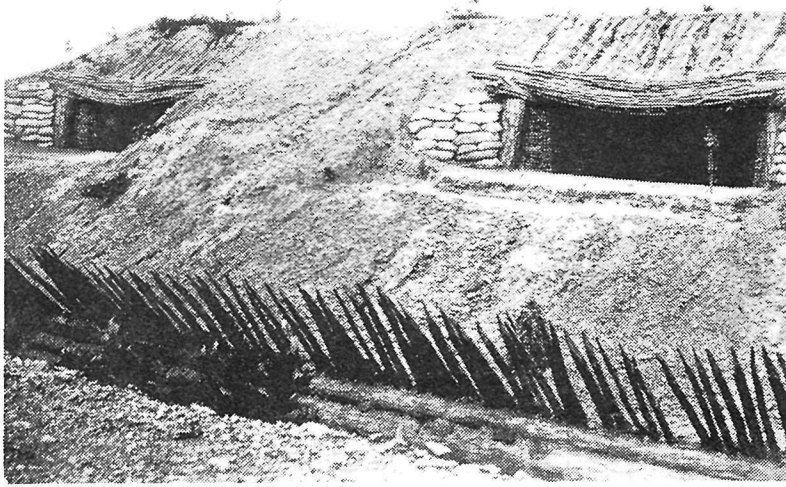


## The Battle

After Cold Harbor, General Ulysses S. Grant crossed the James River and directed his main effort against Petersburg, VA. There the conflict continued for nearly 10 months in what became known as the siege of Petersburg. During this siege, Confederate troops under General Jubal Early threatened Washington, DC, the Federal capital. Faced with this threat and the multiplying problems of a long siege, Grant decided on a surprise attack against Fort Harrison, considered by many to be the key to the Richmond defenses. Grant's plan involved three objectives; (1) prevent Lee from reinforcing Early in the Shenandoah Valley reducing the Confederate threat against Washington, DC, (2) force Lee to weaken his lines at Petersburg leaving it vulnerable to attack, and (3) capture Richmond.

During the night of September 28, 1864 and in the pre-dawn darkness of September 29, approximately 15000 Federal troops were transferred to the north side of the James River at Varina Road and Deep Bottom in a surprise move against the outer defenses of Richmond.

The plan of attack was carefully drawn in utmost secrecy and executed with unusual success. Union Gen. Ord's XVIII Corps successfully stormed heavily armed but badly undermanned Fort Harrison on the Varina Road. The Confederate troops north of the



James had no knowledge of the approaching attack until it was well under way. Fort Harrison was captured by the Federals with very little difficulty before 8 a.m. on September 29. General Birney's X Corps was repulsed a mile and a half north of Fort Harrison in a simultaneous attack on New Market Road at Fort Gilmer. General Lee regarded the loss of Fort Harrison as serious enough to demand his personal attention. The next day, with reinforcements rushed from Petersburg, he directed several vigorous assaults against the fort. However, the Union forces had closed in the rear and strengthened it, and, armed with new repeating rifles, successfully beat back the attacks and inflicted heavy losses on the Confederates.

Fort Harrison was later renamed Fort Burnham in honor of Union General Hiram Burnham who was killed in the initial assault on the fort. The fort was greatly strengthened and remained in Federal hands until the end of the war.

After the capture of Fort Harrison, the Confederacy would see their capital hold on for six more months. Lee would have to pull Gen. Early out of the valley away from Washington, DC, and Grant would crack the Confederate line at Petersburg in April of 1865.

The war for the Army of Northern Virginia would end on April 9, 1865 at Appomattox Court House, VA.

## The People

The people who were involved in the fighting and the support of the fighting around the Fort Harrison area did not just consist of soldiers wearing the traditional blue and grey.

They involved women and military men in special branches of the service including United States Colored Troops and the United States Corps of Engineers.

Blacks in the United States Army served in both Eastern and Western theaters of the Federal army including half a dozen regiments of cavalry and numerous batteries of both light and heavy artillery and the U.S.



Navy. There were 14 Congressional Medals of Honor awarded to black troops during the battle of Chafin's Farm (Ft. Harrison). About 100 blacks were commissioned officers.

Engineers played an important role on both sides in the fighting of the defenses around Richmond. They built bridges, strung telegraph wire, opened roads, laid out fortifications, kept railroads in repair, and were in charge of building the numerous pontoon bridges which allowed troops to move freely across the James River.



Women also made an important con-

tribution to the war effort. They were involved in ministering to the sick and wounded as army nurses, private citizens and as members of aid societies and sanitary commissions. Women were also active behind the lines as spies, vivandiers and laundresses. On rare occasions, some women dressed as men and fought as soldiers. Women were also busy on the homefront working in arsenals, factories, government jobs, and running farms and households. They received the bulk of hardships created by blockades, sieges and occupied cities during the war.



## About Your Visit

Fort Harrison Battlefield is a unit of Richmond National Battlefield Park and is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Headquarters for the park is located at Chimborazo Visitor Center, 3215 East Broad Street, Richmond, VA. The Visitor Center is open daily except Christmas and New Year's Day and contains a museum, slide program, maps and other literature. Park Service Rangers are on duty to answer your questions and to help you in planning a visit to the battlefields. For further information on this and other units of the park, write:

### Superintendent

Richmond National Battlefield Park  
3215 East Broad Street  
Richmond, VA 23223  
804-226-1981

### PICNICKING

Picnicking is allowed only in designated picnic areas. The possession or consumption of alcoholic

beverages in the park is prohibited. Kite flying, ball games and other recreational activities are restricted to the picnic area. If in doubt, ask a ranger or call 226-1981.

### FOR YOUR SAFETY

While every effort is made for your safety, you must remain alert and cautious. Drive carefully—park roads are narrow, winding and intended for leisurely enjoyment. Observe all speed limits and warning signs on park roads. Park only in designated parking areas. Be alert for poisonous snakes, ticks, and poison ivy.

### REMEMBER

Historic artifacts including earthworks within National Park areas are protected under federal law. The possession or use of metal detectors is a serious offense, punishable by fine and/or imprisonment. Your cooperation is essential in protecting and preserving the park for your continuing enjoyment and the enjoyment of future generations.