



Yorktown - A Civil War Auto Tour Companion

As you take the self-guided auto tour through Yorktown's Revolutionary War battlefield, you are also traveling through many areas connected to the Civil War. During the Peninsula Campaign of 1862 Major General George B. McClellan's Army of the Potomac conducted siege operations against the Confederacy's Army of the Peninsula, commanded by Major General John Bankhead Magruder and later the Army of Northern Virginia, commanded by General Joseph E. Johnston. Yorktown's 1862 siege lasted from April 5 until the Confederate withdrawal on the night of May 3-4. Following is a description of some of Yorktown's Civil War sites that can be found along the self-guided Battlefield Auto Tour for the 1781 siege; as well as a map of the 1862 siege lines.

STOP A (British Inner Defense Line)

The earthworks on your left as you drive from the parking lot were originally built by British forces in 1781, though by the start of the Civil War, they had greatly diminished in size. In 1861, Confederate forces began reinforcing the remains of the British works. By April 1862, Yorktown was again surrounded by a formidable wall of earthworks.



1862 View of Confederate Earthworks

STOP B (Grand French Battery)

This area was an open "no man's land" in 1862. American and French earthworks were leveled for the Allied forces after the 1781 siege, though some Union soldiers wrote of seeing traces of these Revolutionary War earthworks. Several hundred yards to the west, the Confederates constructed another line of earthworks that ran from Yorktown southward for almost 12 miles to the James River. In the woods to the east and south, the Union army constructed heavy siege batteries, placing at Yorktown the largest grouping of siege guns that had ever occurred in the world until that time.

STOP C (Second Siege Line)

In 1862, the Union army began burying their dead on this site; by war's end over 600 soldiers were interred here. In 1866, this "Union Cemetery," site was selected to be the "Yorktown National Cemetery," as it was in the general vicinity of various engagements related particularly to the Peninsula Campaign of 1862. Besides interments of Union soldiers who had died in the Yorktown area, bodies were removed from 27 different places in the surrounding area, within a distance of 50 miles. There are 1,596 marked graves in the cemetery and a total of 2,204 burials, with only approximately one-third identified. While most of the burials are Union soldiers, 10 Confederate soldiers are also buried here. Several hundred yards east of the National Cemetery is a Confederate burying ground, marked by a small granite stone.

STOP D (Redoubts 9 and 10)

Scattered Union rifle pits occupied this advanced "no man's land" position of the Army of the Potomac. To the east was a strong, double line of earthworks which contained three batteries of siege guns. Continuing on the auto tour, you will travel down a ravine and along an arm of Wormley Pond. In 1781, General George Washington used the cover of the pond's ravines to safely move his troops and supplies from their encampment areas to the siege lines. In 1862, these ravines again provided cover for Union troops who built four large siege batteries at the heads of some of the ravines. The Union army also constructed a network of roads and bridges around the pond to bring in their siege guns and ammunition.

STOP E (Moore House)

In 1862, the Moore House was between the double line of Union earthworks and batteries mentioned at Stop D, and Union Battery number 4, which today is located on the Coast Guard Base. The Moore House served as a Union signal station. Some troops recognized the importance of the house to the surrender negotiations of the 1781 siege. One Union soldier wrote home of using wood stripped from the house to build his cook fire with. A Matthew Brady photograph taken of the house after the 1862 siege shows the structure extensively damaged, including a hole in the chimney caused by Confederate cannon fire. (Visit the Moore House to discover more about the house and its history.)

STOP F (Surrender Field)

As you walk from the Surrender Field parking lot to the pavilion overlooking the field, the earthworks on your right are Union Battery number 6, a field battery built for several mortars. To your left is the covering work that provided protection for soldiers moving into the battery. Standing in the pavilion, look across the field and just inside the edge of woods is a line of Union earthworks that include a large redoubt designated as Redoubt B. By 1862, what was an open field in 1781 was now woods.

