

YORKTOWN BATTLEFIELD

(Jamestown Island-Hog Island-Captain John Smith Chesapeake
National Historic Trail District)

(James River District)

Colonial National Historical Park

1000 Colonial Parkway

Yorktown

York County

Virginia

HALS VA-77

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

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HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
YORKTOWN BATTLEFIELD
(Jamestown Island-Hog Island-Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail
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HALS NO. VA-77

Location: 1000 Colonial Parkway, Colonial National Historical Park, Yorktown, York, County, Virginia

The Battle of Yorktown encompasses Gloucester Point in Gloucester County, a small area of James City County near Skiffes Creek, the eastern end of York County, the western portion of the City of Newport News, and crosses the James River into Isle of Wight County, all within southeastern Virginia. The Battle of Yorktown includes the Yorktown Battlefield unit of Colonial National Historical Park, the eastern end of the Colonial Parkway, Newport News Park, and all of Fort Eustis.

37.180200, -76.519774 (Approximate Center of the Battle of Yorktown within the Newport News Golf Club at Deer Run, Google Earth, WGS84)

Significance: The Battle of Yorktown is significant for its role during the Civil War. This landscape also encompasses the smaller Revolutionary War Yorktown Battlefield, which is significant as the decisive battle for American freedom. The Battle of Yorktown has significance as being part of the 1862 Peninsula Campaign. The events surrounding the 1862 Battle of Yorktown occurred within a broad area, spanning the James River, and including a number of significant fortifications which often incorporated the remains of earlier earthworks left standing following the Revolutionary War. The eventual fall of Yorktown in May of 1862 was followed in short order by the fall of Williamsburg. These events left no one to defend Jamestown Island and Union gunboats were able to sail freely up the James River.

Description: According to the American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP), the Battle of Yorktown is located on approximately 64,000 acres, of which approximately 17,000 acres are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The Revolutionary War Yorktown Battlefield, which is included within the Colonial National Historical Park, is contained within the bounds of the larger Civil War Battle of Yorktown. Major fortifications and/or fortification sites in the area include Fort Boykin, Fort Crafford, Gloucester Point Fort, and Fort Magruder. Some of the nearby Civil War fortifications, such as those at Fort Boykin, include the remains of earlier Revolutionary War earthworks. Aside from Revolutionary and Civil War era earthworks, additional resources within the battlefield include cannon emplacements, communication trenches, and rifle pits (VDHR Site Files; National Park Service [NPS] 2009:21).

Today, the Battle of Yorktown landscape is made up of various land uses including conservation, military installation, and residential, commercial, and industrial development. The landscape also includes portions of the York and James Rivers. Large areas of the landscape have been preserved through the establishment of the Yorktown unit of Colonial National Historical Park, Newport News Park, and natural areas on Mulberry Island as part of Fort Eustis. While large portions of the Yorktown unit of Colonial National Historical Park are maintained as fields and meadows, the majority of the conserved area is forest, comprised of pine and mixed hardwoods. The plantations of Lee Hall and Endview are also within the boundary of the Battle of Yorktown. Currently the NPS owns approximately 4,780 acres of the Civil War landscape of Yorktown (NPS 2009:27).

Development is present throughout the area, with commercial development concentrated around the major thoroughfares, which include George Washington Memorial Highway (U.S. 17), Warwick Boulevard (U.S. 60), and Jefferson Avenue (VA 143). Interstate 64, which is generally paralleled by the CSX railroad, bisects the area. Residential development is accessed from collector roads off the major arterials and includes Gloucester Point, Yorktown, Seaford, Grafton, and the west end of Newport News. The George Coleman Memorial Bridge is a drawbridge that connects Gloucester Point to York County via U.S. 17. Major institutional uses in the landscape include U.S. Army infrastructure at Fort Eustis, the U.S. Coast Guard Training Center at Yorktown, the Virginia Marine Institute of Science, and the Museum of the American Revolution (formerly the Yorktown Victory Center). The Newport News-Williamsburg International Airport extends into the Battle of Yorktown at the southeastern boundary. Typical municipal support services also occur throughout the landscape, including schools, recreational parks, hospitals, and emergency services. Industrial development is present with the Yorktown Power Station and Yorktown Refinery.

History: In 1691, Virginia's colonial government established Yorktown. The port town was intended to help regulate trade and collect taxes on products both imported from and exported to Great Britain. By the early eighteenth century, Yorktown had become a major colonial port (NPS n.d.). In the late eighteenth century, amidst a colony-wide decline in tobacco prices, the port at Yorktown turned from the export of tobacco as its primary activity to a "...steady, less spectacular but more solid, flow of normal trade" (Hatch 1971:54).

In the early days of the American Revolution, fortifications were erected on Jamestown Island and Mulberry Island, located on the north side of the James River. On Mulberry Island, located in what is today the City of Newport News, fortifications were built to stave off the transport of British reinforcements to Yorktown (Hatch 1971; Virginia Department of Historic Resources [VDHR] 1999:338). The defining event during the period, the Battle of Yorktown, would

ultimately be the decisive battle for American freedom.

In July of 1781, British Commanding General Sir Henry Clinton sent orders from New York to General Charles Cornwallis, stressing the necessity for establishing a position on the peninsula between the York and James Rivers. Yorktown was thought to be the best location for a naval station to protect the British fleets. By August 2, the landings had been made and Cornwallis and his men began constructing a complex series of fortifications consisting of batteries toward the river, and redoubts toward the land (Hatch 1971:7).

As news of the British digging in at Yorktown spread, French Commander Lafayette took a position about 30 miles to the northwest at West Point, Virginia, to await further orders. American forces under General George Washington, engaged in New York along the Hudson River, received news that French Admiral de Grassi would be heading in from the Indies towards the Chesapeake Bay with a large fleet and 3,200 troops to support their effort. Washington saw the opportunity for a combined land and naval operation at Yorktown, and immediately began to set things in order (Hatch 1971:9 and 11).

By September, de Grassi had arrived in the Chesapeake Bay. De Grassi's fleet successfully defeated the British in the naval Battle of the Virginia Capes, allowing the French to gain control of the sea and effectively cut off supplies to Cornwallis and the occupying British forces (Hatch 1971:11). By mid-September, Washington had arrived at Williamsburg to take command of the growing American and French forces. On September 28, they began to move toward Yorktown (Hatch 1971:18). The following day Cornwallis abandoned the outer works, retreating to the inner defenses to await reinforcements that would not, in the end, arrive in time (Hatch 1971:20). Yorktown was under siege by the joint American/French forces and Cornwallis was forced to evacuate across the river to Gloucester Point (Hatch 1971:21-7). Lack of boats and a heavy storm impeded the evacuation, and on the morning of October 17 Cornwallis surrendered.

In the second year of the Civil War, the Union planned to attack the Confederate capital of Richmond with an overland campaign, rather than via the James or York Rivers (Kennedy 1998:88 and 90). In March and April of that year, Union General George B. McClellan had moved the Army of the Potomac (146,000 men) to the peninsula to try to attack Richmond from the southeast. Confederate forces had established a line of defenses in the area, including works stretching from Yorktown on the York River to Mulberry Point on the James River. These works were, at the time, being defended by General John B. Magruder and his men. The York and James River works incorporated earlier earthworks left standing from the Revolutionary War (Kennedy 1998:88 and 90). One such defensive structure was Fort Boykin. Originally constructed in the seventeenth century to protect the Jamestown colonists from both Native Americans and the

Spanish, Fort Boykin was redesigned by Colonel Andrew Talcott and rebuilt by order of Robert E. Lee (Isle of Wight County Museum n.d.). McClellan ordered heavy artillery to Yorktown, while planning a siege of the Confederate defenses there. Meanwhile Magruder was reinforced by Joseph E. Johnston, bringing up Confederate troop levels to near 35,000 men (Hatch 1971).

On April 16, McClellan ordered an attack at Dam No.1, an area of defense along the Warwick River located about 3 miles southwest of Yorktown, near present day Newport News Reservoir. The attack failed, and over the next two weeks he prepared for the siege of defenses at Yorktown planned for May 6. However, the Confederate forces abandoned their defenses on the night of May 3-4, slipping away ahead of the Union forces to fall back towards Richmond and prepare new defenses (Kennedy 1989:88 and 90). Many earthworks still standing today represent those built up during this occasion, and not the considerably smaller structures created during the Revolutionary War which lie beneath (Hatch 1971)

In May of 1862, several Federal gunboats traveled up the James and fired on Fort Boykin on Burwell's Bay, several miles west of Smithfield. Overwhelmed by the longer range of the Union guns, the Confederate defenders of Fort Boykin abandoned the defenses, destroying their guns and the fort's buildings in the process. After this engagement, Huger withdrew his forces from the Southside forts, and it is likely that the battery near Ragged Island was abandoned by late May 1862 (Isle of Wight County Museum n.d.). That same month, the Confederate soldiers at Jamestown Island burned the magazines and gun carriages at Fort Pocahontas and abandoned the island. A day later, Yorktown fell (Maynard 2013).

On May 4, 1862 McClellan sent Brigadier General George Stoneman in pursuit of Johnston's rear guard, followed by several infantry divisions and about half of his army (Salmon 2001). Muddy roads and rain slowed the progress of Johnston's army and the Union advance; however, Johnston detached a part of his army to make a stand at Magruder's third line of defense east of Williamsburg (Heidler and Heidler 2001; Salmon 2001). Attacks on May 4 were primarily cavalry clashes on the roads leading to Williamsburg (Heidler and Heidler 2001). On the morning of May 5, Union General Joseph Hooker attacked Fort Magruder and suffered heavy casualties. Commanding Confederate General James Longstreet ordered a counterattack on Hooker's retreating forces, until General Phillip Kearny's division arrived to reinforce and stabilize the Union line. During the night of May 5, Longstreet withdrew the rear guard and joined Johnston's retreat up the Peninsula (Heidler and Heidler 2001; Salmon 2001). After the fall of Yorktown, Williamsburg also fell. With no one remaining to defend Jamestown Island, Union gunboats sailed freely up the James River (Maynard 2013). Yorktown would remain under Union occupation until 1864, when, at the start of the siege of Petersburg, Major General Ulysses S. Grant

ordered the federal abandonment of Yorktown (NPS n.d.b).

During World War I, Yorktown served as an operating base for the Atlantic Fleet. During this period, celebrations were held at Yorktown in October of each year, primarily to commemorate the area's Revolutionary history (NPS 1933). In 1930, Jamestown, along with Yorktown and a portion of Williamsburg, was established as part of Colonial National Historical Monument, later to be re-designated Colonial National Historical Park in 1936 (NPS and the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities [APVA] 2003:3-23–3-28; NPS 1933). In 1966, the Colonial National Historical Park was listed to the NRHP.

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Historian: Sandra DeChard
Stantec Consulting Services, Inc.
1049 Technology park Drive
Glen Allen, Virginia 23059

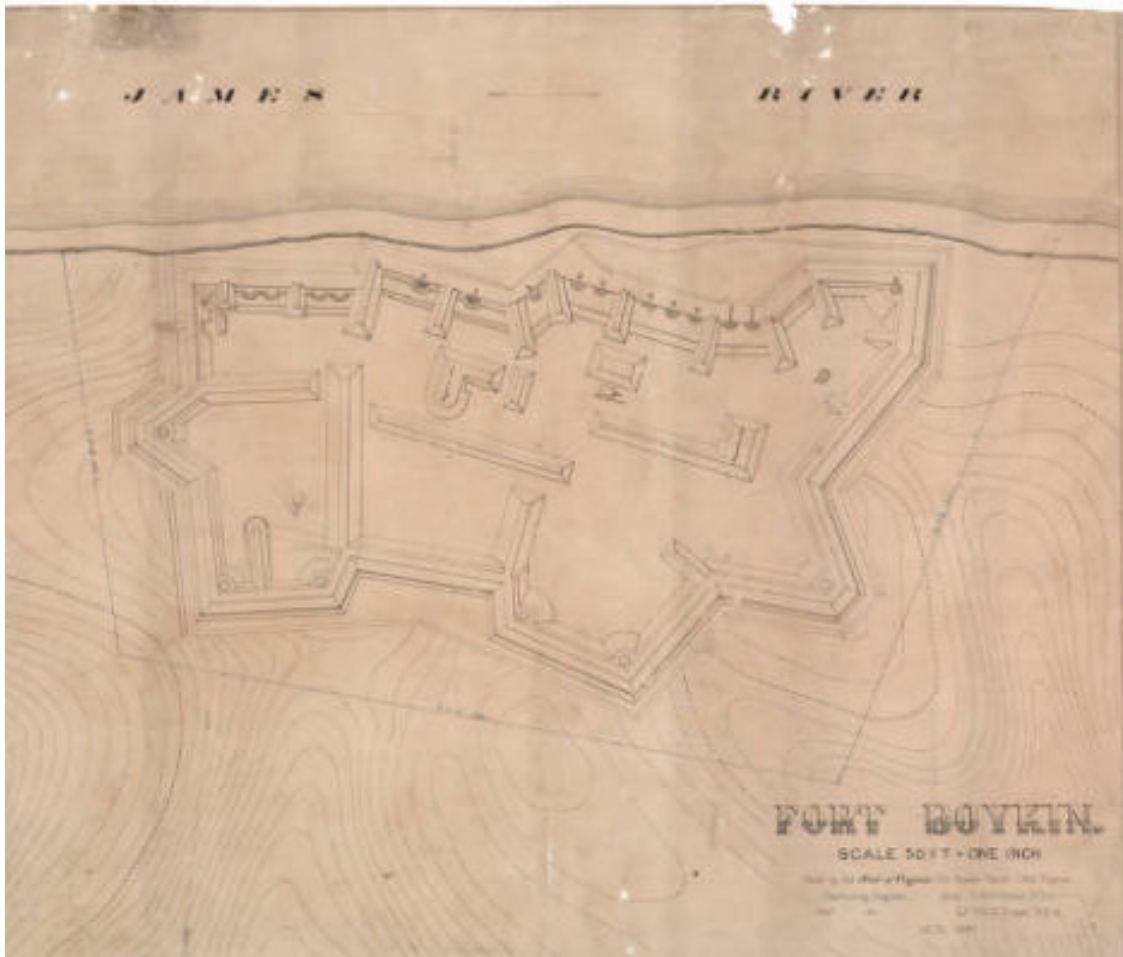
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View of Earthworks within Fort Boykin (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



Detail of 1943 *Yorktown, VA* 15 Minute USGS Topographic Map Depicting the Location of Fort Boykin (Source: <http://historicalmaps.arcgis.com/usgs/>)



Detail of *Fort Boykin* (Drawn by Jeremy Francis Gilmer (Source: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Southern Historical Collection
<http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/gilmer/id/118>))



View from Fort Boykin towards James River (Wes Stewart, 4/19/2017)



View from End of Colonial Parkway at Yorktown Looking towards Felgates Creek (Wes Stewart, 4/20/2017)



View from Welsh Fusiliers Redoubt towards Coleman Bridge (Wes Stewart, 4/20/2017)



View of Surrender Field (Wes Stewart, 4/20/2017)



View of Confederate Earthworks within Newport News Park (Wes Stewart, 4/20/2017)



View of Confederate Earthworks within Newport News Park (Wes Stewart, 4/20/2017)



Fort Crafford (Emily Curme, 10/6/2014)



View of Lee Lake (Wes Stewart, 4/20/2017)