

Official Map and Guide

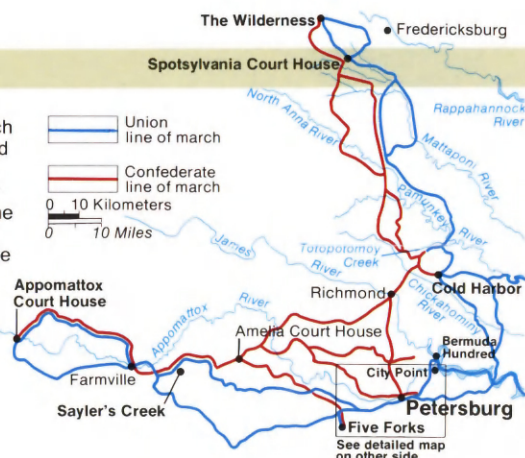


The Battle of Fort Gregg, 1865, from a painting by Sidney King.

The Campaign

The campaign that brought the armies to Petersburg and on to Appomattox Court House (see map at right) began in May 1864 when the 122,000-man Union army under Gen. Ulysses S. Grant crossed the Rapidan River and engaged Gen. Robert E. Lee's Confederate army of 65,000 in a series of hard-fought battles. For a month the two armies

clashed, marched, and clashed again. After each encounter, Grant moved farther southward and closer to Richmond. By the beginning of June the Federals were within 9 miles of the Confederate capital, but Lee still



blocked their path. At Cold Harbor on June 3 Grant tried by frontal attack to crush the Confederate army and enter the city. He failed in a defeat marked by very heavy casualties. After Cold Harbor, Grant abandoned his plan to capture Richmond by direct assault. Instead, he moved his forces to the south side of the James River and on June 15-18

threw them against Petersburg, a key rail center on the Confederate supply line. The city might have fallen then had Federal commanders pressed home their assaults and prevented the few Confederate defenders from holding on until Lee's army arrived from the north. When four days of combat failed to capture the city, Grant began siege operations.

The Commanders

Gen. Robert E. Lee (near right) commanded the Army of Northern Virginia, the main Confederate army in the East. His job was to defend the Richmond-Petersburg front. When Union forces crossed the Rapidan and headed south in May 1864, Lee told one of his officers, "We must destroy 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." Lee's worst fears were realized when the Federals reached the James and beyond and settled down to besiege Petersburg. As the months passed and the Union army's grip on the city tightened, all Lee could do was try to stave off the inevitable as long as possible.

Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant (near left) commanded all Federal forces as of March 1864 and possessed the authority to commit the total war resources of the Union against the Confederacy. His primary objective was to "get possession" of Lee's army. "With the capture of [this] army," he said, "Richmond would necessarily follow." Grant's long campaign of attrition against

Lee from the Wilderness through Spotsylvania and Cold Harbor to Petersburg has been called one of the first examples of modern warfare. Although taking an enormous toll in human lives, for which Grant was sharply criticized, it did help to wear down Confederate resistance and end the Civil War sooner than might have otherwise been possible.

"...a mere question of time"

"The key to taking Richmond is Petersburg." That's what General Grant believed when his forces began arriving at the eastern environs of the city in mid-June 1864. It was the four railroad lines and key roadways that made Petersburg important. If these could be cut, then the city could no longer provide Richmond with much-needed supplies, equipment, and subsistence. Many believed that if Richmond fell, the war would be over. Others, however, like Grant, knew that only when Lee's army was eliminated would the war come to an end.

In a grim 10-month struggle—the longest siege in American warfare—Grant's army gradually but relentlessly encircled Petersburg and cut Lee's supply lines from the south. For the Confederates it was 10 months of desperately hanging on, hoping the people of the North would tire of the



Battery 5, part of the original Confederate line.

war. For soldiers of both armies it was 10 months of rifle bullets, artillery, and mortar shells, relieved only by rear-area tedium: drill and more drill, salt pork and corn meal, burned beans and bad coffee.

Although Grant's first attempts to capture Petersburg from the east on June 15-18 failed miserably

The Battle of the Crater, from a painting by John A. Elder.



The Battle of the Crater: A Good Plan Goes Wrong

Shortly after the siege began, members of the 48th Pennsylvania Infantry, many of whom were coal miners before the war, began digging a tunnel toward a Confederate fort at

Pegram's (sometimes called Elliott's) Salient, southeast of Petersburg. The plan: explode four tons of gunpowder under the salient and send a large body of troops through the gap created

in the enemy's defenses by the explosion. If the plan succeeded, Petersburg might be captured without a long siege and the war could be shortened by many months. The tunnel took a

month to dig and was 511 feet long, with lateral galleries at the end to hold the powder. When the explosion took place on the morning of July 30, it blew up a Confederate art-

illery battery and left a crater about 170 feet long, 60 feet wide, and 30 feet deep. Union troops, instead of going around the crater, plunged directly into it and were unable to go

any farther. Confederate counterattacks retook the position, inflicting more than 4,000 Federal casualties. The siege would continue.



Union mortar "Dictator" outside Petersburg, 1864.

bly and cost him 10,000 men, his soldiers did manage to cut two of the railroads leading into the city and gain control of several roads. In August he struck out to the south and west against the Weldon Railroad. After 3 days of fierce fighting in brutal heat, Union troops were astride the iron rails near Globe Tavern. Several days later, on August 25, Lee's Confederates scored a minor victory at Ream's Station, 5 miles south of Globe Tavern, but failed to break the Federal hold on the railroad.

By October, Grant had moved 3 miles west of the Weldon Railroad and the noose around Petersburg tightened. The approach of winter brought a general halt to activities. Still there was the everyday skirmishing, sniper fire, and mortar shelling. By early February 1865, Lee had only 60,000 cold and hungry soldiers in the trenches to oppose Grant's well-equipped force of 110,000. On February 5-7, Grant extended his lines westward to Hatcher's Run and forced Lee to lengthen his own thinly stretched defenses. Federal supplies rattled continuously over the newly completed U.S. Military Railroad from City Point to the front.

By mid-March it was apparent to Lee that Grant's

superior force would either get around the Confederate right flank or pierce the line somewhere along its 37-mile length. The Southern commander hoped to break the Union stranglehold on Petersburg by attacking Grant at Fort Stedman. Plans were to breach the Union line, hold the gap, and gain access to Grant's military railroad a short distance beyond. If it worked, Grant might have to relinquish positions to the west, and Lee could shorten his own lines. On March 25, Confederates overpowered Fort Stedman only to be crushed by a Union counter-attack.

With victory near, Grant unleashed Gen. Philip H. Sheridan at Five Forks on April 1. His objective: the Southside Railroad. Sheridan smashed the Confederate forces under George Pickett and gained access to the tracks beyond. On



Appomattox Manor, City Point, Va.

April 2, Grant ordered an all-out assault, and Lee's right flank crumbled. A Homeric defense at Confederate Fort Gregg saved Lee from possible street fighting in Petersburg. On the night of April 2, Lee evacuated Petersburg. Appomattox Court House, the site of the final surrender, was but a week away.

Petersburg Tours

City Point Unit

Between June 1864 and April 1865, City Point was transformed from a sleepy village of less than a hundred inhabitants into a bustling supply center for the 100,000 Federal soldiers on the siege lines in front of Petersburg and

Richmond. By the spring of 1865, when the Union army forced Lee to abandon Petersburg, more than 280 new buildings of all descriptions, a half mile of new wharves, and a vastly expanded railroad remained in City

Point to mark its presence. Grant's headquarters on the lawn of Appomattox Manor, where tents or cabins occupied nearly every available square foot of ground, became a nerve center for the

Northern war effort. From here the Union telegraph system provided rapid transfer of information to all field commanders and the national capital, enabling Grant to coordinate operations in all theaters of the war. President Lin-

coln visited the area on two occasions, and was here for two of the last three weeks of his life.

Battlefield Tour

This four-mile driving tour of the park's main unit is designed for use at your own pace. Besides way-side exhibits and audio stations, some of the stops have short, interpretive walking trails. Your visit will be more enjoyable and informative if you take time to explore them.

1 Visitor Center Begin your tour here where a map program explains the complex operations of the 9½-month siege. Exhibits and a walking trail to Battery 5, on the original Confederate defense line (the Dimmock Line), will take you to the site where the "Dictator," a huge Union mortar, was located.

2 Battery 8 This battery was captured by black U.S. troops and renamed Fort Friend for the large Friend House located nearby. The fort was re-facced and served as a

supporting artillery position for the duration of the siege.

3 Battery 9 Black U.S. troops of Hink's Division captured this position during the first day of fighting. It is a 10-minute walk to the site of Meade Station, an important supply and hospital depot on the City Point and Army Line, the military railroad built during the siege. The winter quarters of the Union IX Corps were in the surrounding area.

4 Harrison Creek Driven from their original line in

the opening battle, Confederate forces fell back and dug in along this stream. Here they held for two days, finally withdrawing to a new line closer to Petersburg, which they held until the fall of the city. In March 1865 the main Confederate advance of Lee's last offensive (the Battle of Fort Stedman) was stopped along this stream.

5 Fort Stedman This Union stronghold was the focus of Lee's attack on March 25, 1865, in his attempt to relieve heavy pressure west of the city.

The loop trail leads from Fort Stedman to Colquitt's Salient where the Confederate attack originated. The trail also passes the 1st Maine Monument, commemorating the greatest regimental loss in a single action of the Civil War.

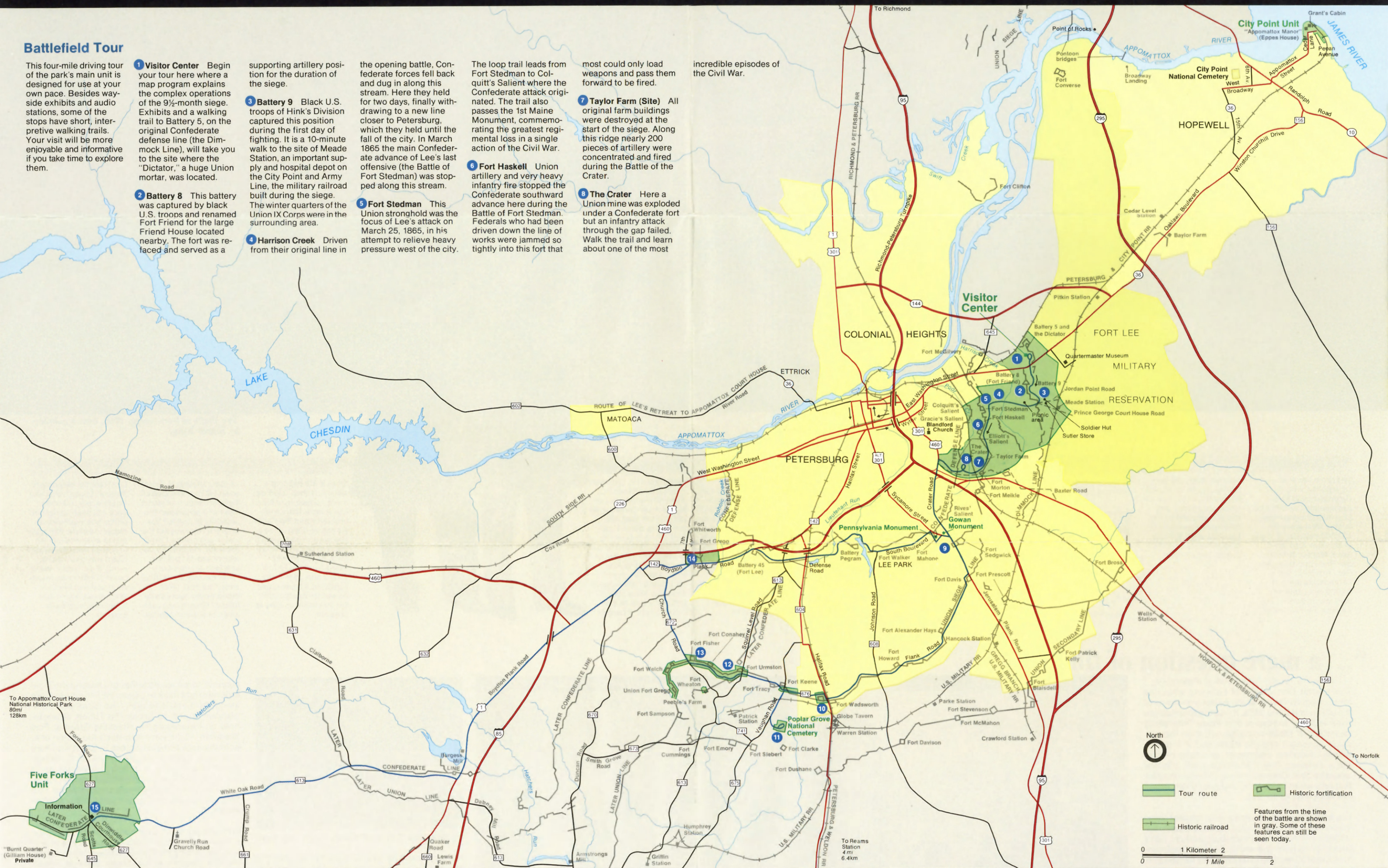
6 Fort Haskell Union artillery and very heavy infantry fire stopped the Confederate southward advance here during the Battle of Fort Stedman. Federals who had been driven down the line of works were jammed so tightly into this fort that

most could only load weapons and pass them forward to be fired.

7 Taylor Farm (Site) All original farm buildings were destroyed at the start of the siege. Along this ridge nearly 200 pieces of artillery were concentrated and fired during the Battle of the Crater.

8 The Crater Here a Union mine was exploded under a Confederate fort but an infantry attack through the gap failed. Walk the trail and learn about one of the most

incredible episodes of the Civil War.



Siege Line Tour

This extended driving tour is 16 miles long and takes you to park areas south and west of town. You begin it when you exit the main unit and turn left onto Crater Road (U.S. 301). This is the original Jerusalem Plank Road of the war period, one of the main roadways leading into the city from the southeast. Although modern development has destroyed most of the trenches, some traces can still be found. In general, Union works were located to the left of the road, Confederate works to the right. Many of the sites are on both public and private property.

Please honor property lines where posted. You will be traveling both State and county roads; be aware of fast-moving traffic.

9 Fort Sedgwick (Site) Union troops built this fort in July-August 1864 to control the Jerusalem Plank Road. Named for Gen. John Sedgwick, killed in the Battle of Spotsylvania, it was the key Federal post along the eastern portion of the siege line. It was nicknamed "Fort Hell" because of heavy Confederate mortar and sniper fire. This was also the site of a major assault by the

Federal IX Corps against Rives' Salient and Fort Mahone on the Confederate line, April 2, 1865. A nearby monument honors Col. George Gowan, 48th Pennsylvania Volunteers, who was killed in this attack. Fort Sedgwick was leveled in the late 1960s. It stood in the southeast corner of Crater Road and Morton Avenue. A nearby marker identifies the site of Rives' Salient, defended on June 9, 1864, by local militia in the first attack on Petersburg.

10 Fort Wadsworth This was a very strategic point on the Petersburg front.

Named for Union Gen. James S. Wadsworth, killed in the Battle of the Wilderness, the fort stands on the site of the Battle of the Weldon Railroad, August 1864, and was built to strengthen the Federal hold on this sector. Interpretive markers within the fort discuss its significance in more detail. The Hagood Monument on the grounds memorializes the South Carolina soldiers who broke through the Union lines in this area on August 21. The present Halifax Road follows the original bed of the Petersburg and Weldon Railroad. The site of Globe

Tavern, Gen. G. K. Warren's headquarters during part of the siege, is ½ mile south on the left side of the road.

11 Poplar Grove Cemetery was established in 1868 for Union soldiers who died during the Petersburg and Appomattox campaigns. Others are buried in the City Point National Cemetery in Hopewell. Of the 6,178 internments, 4,110 are unknown. Most of the Confederate soldiers who died during the siege are buried in Blandford Cemetery in Petersburg.

12 Forts Urmston and

Conahey These forts were built in October 1864 on ground captured by Federal forces during the Battle of Peeble's Farm, September 30-October 2. They, like several other nearby forts, were named for Federal officers killed in the battle. Be sure to read the interpretive marker at Fort Conahey for information about its significance on the siege lines.

13 Fort Fisher This was the largest earthen fortification on the Petersburg front. Union soldiers completed it in March 1865. Because the Confederate works were

more than a mile to the north, there was little shelling along this part of the line and Fort Fisher never saw any fighting. The fort did, however, play a part in the campaign: on April 2, 1865, a day after Union victory at the Battle of Five Forks compelled Lee to abandon Petersburg, elements of the Union VI Corps assaulted the Confederate defenses from between Forts Fisher and Welch. Nearby Fort Wheaton was originally Confederate Fort Archer, a part of the Southern line captured during the Battle of Peeble's Farm. Access to Fort Welch,

which along with Fort Gregg forms a continuation of the Federal trench system across Church Road (Va. 672), is by foot trail only.

14 Fort Gregg This Confederate fort (not to be confused with the nearby Federal fort of the same name) was built as an outpost guarding the western approach to Petersburg. On April 2, 1865, when Grant ordered his final assault on the Confederate lines, the 600 men defending Forts Gregg and Whitworth (to the north) held off the Federal XXIV Corps of 5,000 men for two hours,

enabling Lee's army to safely withdraw from the city that night.

15 Five Forks By the spring of 1865, the last remaining supply line into Petersburg was the South Side Railroad. On March 29, 1865, Grant sent his forces on a westward movement to cut this major artery, knowing that it would cause Lee to abandon Petersburg and Richmond. Countering this move, Lee sent a force of 10,000 infantry and cavalry under Gen. George E. Pickett to an important road junction called Five Forks, which protected the railroad. On April 1,

22,000 Northern cavalry and infantry under Gen. Philip H. Sheridan smashed into Pickett's force at Five Forks and captured almost 2,000 prisoners while suffering a loss of less than 1,000 men. The next day Grant assaulted Petersburg and the city was evacuated that night.

About Your Visit

Petersburg National Battlefield contains 2,460 acres and is made up of six major units. We suggest you start your visit at the visitor center in the main unit, east of the city of Petersburg just off Va. 36. Other units preserve extensive fortifications and battlefields. Poplar Grove National Cemetery contains the graves of more than 6,000 Union and 36 Confederate soldiers.

Please stay on the designated walking trails. Walking on the historic earthworks slowly destroys them. Hunting for artifacts with or without a

metal detector within park boundaries is prohibited by law. If you have a question about the location of the boundaries, check with the park ranger. Copies of park regulations are posted at the visitor center; we urge you to read them. Park roads are often congested, so please drive slowly and safely.

Petersburg National Battlefield is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is P.O. Box 549, Petersburg, VA 23804, is in immediate charge.