

Lee Besieged  
GRANT'S SECOND  
PETERSBURG OFFENSIVE,  
JUNE 18–JULY 1, 1864

JOHN HORN

  
Savas Beatie  
California

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In memory of my parents, John and Ann Horn

“A general who fears failure should never take the field,  
for fear in itself is the foundation of failure.”

J. F. C. Fuller, *The Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations	x
Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	xiii
Chapter One: “We Will Try to Gain Advantages Without Assaulting Fortifications”	I
Chapter Two: “Extend to the Left . . . by Rapid Movement, and with as Heavy Force as Possible”	43
Chapter Three: “It Is an Easy Matter for a Mouse to Reach the Cheese in a Trap”	87
Chapter Four: “Each Corps Must Look Out for Itself”	147
Chapter Five: “Run Like the Devil”	175
Chapter Six: “There Is No Confirmation of the Report of the Recapture of Our Guns”	205
Chapter Seven: “Don’t Let ‘Em Dance ‘Round You, Pitch into Them!”	233
Chapter Eight: “Cavalry Must Fight or Run Away”	275
Chapter Nine: “I Shall Try to Give the Army a Few Days’ Rest”	335
Appendix One: Strength, Casualties, Effectiveness	364
Appendix Two: Orders of Battle	369
Bibliography	391
Index	417
About the Author	434

## LIST OF MAPS

1. Overland Campaign May 4–June 11, 1864 3
2. Crossing the James June 12–18, 1864 5
3. Virginia Theater June 18–20, 1864 11
4. Petersburg Bridges 1864 19
5. Deep Bottom Bridgehead June 20–21, 1864 25
6. Firing on Howlett's Farm June 19, 1864 29
7. Action with Battery Dantzler June 21, 1864 31
8. Second Offensive Grant's Plan 49
9. Corps Movements June 20, 1864 51
10. Birney's Advance June 21, 1864 66
11. Barringer's Ambush Mid-afternoon, June 21, 1864 68
12. Jerusalem Plank Road Late, June 21, 1864 79
13. Southside Federal Lines Night, June 21, 1864 83
14. Wilson-Kautz Raid June 22, 1864 89
15. Wilson-Kautz Raid June 23, 1864 99
16. The Grove June 23, 1864 105
17. Wilson-Kautz Raid June 24, 1864 110
18. Wilson-Kautz Raid June 25, 1864 119
19. Staunton River Bridge June 25, 1864 131
20. Wilson-Kautz Raid June 26–28, 1864 134

## LIST OF MAPS (continued)

21. Sappony Church Dark, June 28, 1864 146
22. Gibbon Advances 3 a.m., June 22, 1864 148
23. Mott Advances 4:50 a.m., June 22, 1864 151
24. Jerusalem Plank Road Early Afternoon, June 22, 1864 169
25. Jerusalem Plank Road Mahone Attacks, 3 p.m., June 22, 1864 173
26. Jerusalem Plank Road Barlow Skedaddles 3:15 p.m., June 22, 1864 176
27. Jerusalem Plank Road Rolling Up Mott, 3:25 p.m., June 22, 1864 187
28. Jerusalem Plank Road Rolling Up Gibbon, 3:35 p.m., June 22, 1864 202
29. Jerusalem Plank Road 5 p.m., June 22, 1864 213
30. Jerusalem Plank Road 7 p.m., June 22, 1864 221
31. Jerusalem Plank Road Mahone Approaches, Afternoon, June 23, 1864 239
32. Jerusalem Plank Road Mahone Envelops, Evening, June 23, 1864 253
33. Hare House June 24, 1864 265
34. Wilson-Kautz Raid Night, June 28, 1864 276
35. Sappony Church Early Morning, June 29, 1864 286
36. Wilson-Kautz Raid Early Morning, June 29, 1864 291
37. Reams Station Morning, June 29, 1864 295
38. Reams Station Afternoon, June 29, 1864 315
39. Wilson-Kautz Raid Evening, June 29, 1864 323
40. Virginia Theater June 30–July 1, 1864 362

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Theodore Lyman III 17
2. Francis Channing Barlow 61
3. Rufus Clay Barringer 71
4. Prisoners from the Front 72
5. Andrew Atkinson Humphreys 85
6. James H. Wilson 93
7. William Henry Fitzhugh "Rooney" Lee 103
8. Benjamin Lyons Farinholt 124
9. August V. Kautz 143
10. George Gordon Meade 156
11. Ambrose Powell "Little Powell" Hill 158
12. David Bell Birney 164
13. William Mahone 166
14. Ambrose Ransom "Rans" Wright 171
15. Gershom Mott 185
16. John Gibbon 198
17. "Head quarters near Jerusalem 'pike', A. of P." 203
18. Byron Root Pierce 208
19. Charles Griffin 212
20. Alfred North Scales 216



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS (continued)

21. James Eldred Phillips 225
22. Cadmus Marcellus Wilcox 230
23. Lewis Grant 244
24. John E. Laughton Jr. 248
25. Horatio Gouverneur Wright 257
26. G. T. Beaugard 259
27. Robert Hoke 261
28. Johnson Hagood 263
29. Edward Washburn Whitaker 297
30. Wade Hampton 310
31. Fitzhugh Lee 318
32. Kautz's Cavalry coming back to camp 327
33. Philip H. Sheridan 333
34. Chaplain Louis Napoleon Boudrye 334
35. City Point, Virginia 337
36. Trestle Work (no. 2) 339
37. Pontoon bridge at Deep Bottom 340
38. Bollingbrook St. View of Dunlop House 341
39. Ulysses S. Grant 348
40. Robert E. Lee 350

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADAH	Alabama Department of Archives and History
ACWM	American Civil War Museum
AHEC	United States Army Heritage and Education Center
<i>B&amp;L</i>	<i>Battles and Leaders of the Civil War</i>
CSR	Compiled Service Record
<i>CV</i>	<i>Confederate Veteran</i>
FNBP	Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Battlefield Park
GDAH	Georgia Department of Archives and History
GNBP	Gettysburg National Battlefield Park
LOC	Library of Congress
LV	Library of Virginia
<i>MHSM</i>	<i>Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts</i>
NA	National Archives
RG	Record Group
SHC	Southern Historical Collection
<i>SHSP</i>	<i>Southern Historical Society Papers</i>
VHS	Vermont Historical Society
VMHC	Virginia Museum of History and Culture

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## Introduction

WHEN LT. GEN. Ulysses S. Grant's first offensive against Petersburg ended in failure to take the city, he did not fear to fail again but launched a series of initiatives that within 48 hours began his second offensive against Petersburg. Capturing the city would practically force his opponent, Gen. Robert E. Lee, to abandon Richmond, the Confederate capital, and might well end the Civil War before the critical November presidential election.

Grant ordered a cavalry raid against the railroads supplying Petersburg and Richmond. He summoned his heavy artillery to interdict Petersburg's bridges. He directed the establishment of a bridgehead on the north bank of James River that would allow him to shift from threatening Petersburg to menacing Richmond. He attempted to invest Petersburg from the Appomattox River below the city to the Appomattox above. His soldiers took the initiative themselves as a regiment of miners determined to tunnel under an enemy salient facing them and blow it up.

Grant's foes launched their own initiatives. They tried to drive the United States Navy from Trent's Reach in James River. They repeatedly counterattacked Grant's advancing infantry and attempted to recapture the ground lost to him during his first offensive. They laid a trap for his cavalry raiders, trying to capture them. The Secessionists strained to repair as quickly as possible the damage the raiders caused to the railroads supplying Petersburg and Richmond.

This book describes the progress of Grant's initiatives during his second offensive, the response of the Southerners to those initiatives, and the progress of the Rebels' own initiatives. Some initiatives set the parameters for the siege of Petersburg—one of the longest and bloodiest in the history of the western

hemisphere. Others ended in disaster. Which initiatives of either side most influenced the siege will spring some surprises.

This book provides the most detailed account yet of the campaign of 1864 in southeastern Virginia from the end of Grant's first offensive against Petersburg on June 18 until July 1, the termination of his second—the farthest flung and one of the longest and most dramatic of his nine offensives against the city between June 15, 1864, and April 2, 1865. The text draws on eyewitness accounts of participants on both sides, statistically analyzes the offensive's results, assesses the significance of the battles, and measures the effectiveness of the officers and men of both sides. The battle of Jerusalem Plank Road, the Wilson-Kautz Raid, and the relationship between the two form the book's heart. Each side had some of its best laid plans go awry.

## Chapter One

### “We Will Try to Gain Advantages Without Assaulting Fortifications”

EVEN BEFORE Grant's first offensive against Petersburg ended, he began planning another and launched it while the wounded from the first were still suffering and dying on the battlefield. Having failed to storm Petersburg, he would now lay siege to the city.

\* \* \*

By the spring of 1864, the American Civil War was entering its fourth year. The combatants knew that the 1864 campaign would decide the fate of the United States of America. Either the Federals would make enough progress to persuade Northern voters to re-elect President Abraham Lincoln, a Republican who would continue to pursue victory, or those voters would probably elect a Democrat running on a peace platform that would doom the Union.<sup>1</sup>

Lincoln summoned from the west his best general, then Major General Grant, captor of Fort Donelson, victor of Shiloh, captor of Vicksburg, and savior of Chattanooga. The president promoted Grant to lieutenant general so that he would outrank all other active Northern generals, and put him in charge of the armies of the United States in the hope that he would produce a victory on the national scale as he had in the war's western theater.

Grant took command fresh from his experience as commander in the west, where in November 1863 he had led Federal forces to the relief of Chattanooga.

1 Abraham Lincoln, "Blind Memorandum," Aug. 23, 1864, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Manuscript Division, LOC, Washington, D.C.

He had seen how, after the Federal Army of the Cumberland captured Chattanooga from the Confederate Army of Tennessee, the Secessionists employed their interior lines to reinforce their Army of Tennessee from their Army of Northern Virginia because the latter army was under insufficient pressure from its foe, the Union's Army of the Potomac. The reinforced Army of Tennessee had then defeated the Army of the Cumberland at Chickamauga and besieged it in Chattanooga until Grant's forces came to its rescue.

The general-in-chief determined that a disaster such as Chickamauga must not reoccur. He decided that the armies of the United States would no longer act "separately and independently of each other, giving the enemy opportunities of depleting one command, not pressed, to reinforce another more actively engaged." He planned "to concentrate all the force possible against the Confederate armies in the field" and accordingly "arranged for a simultaneous movement all along the line."<sup>2</sup>

His troops would prevent incursions into the northern states as effectively by advancing as by remaining still and, Grant wrote, "would compel the enemy to keep detachments to hold them back, or else lay his own territory open to invasion."

This feature appealed to Lincoln.

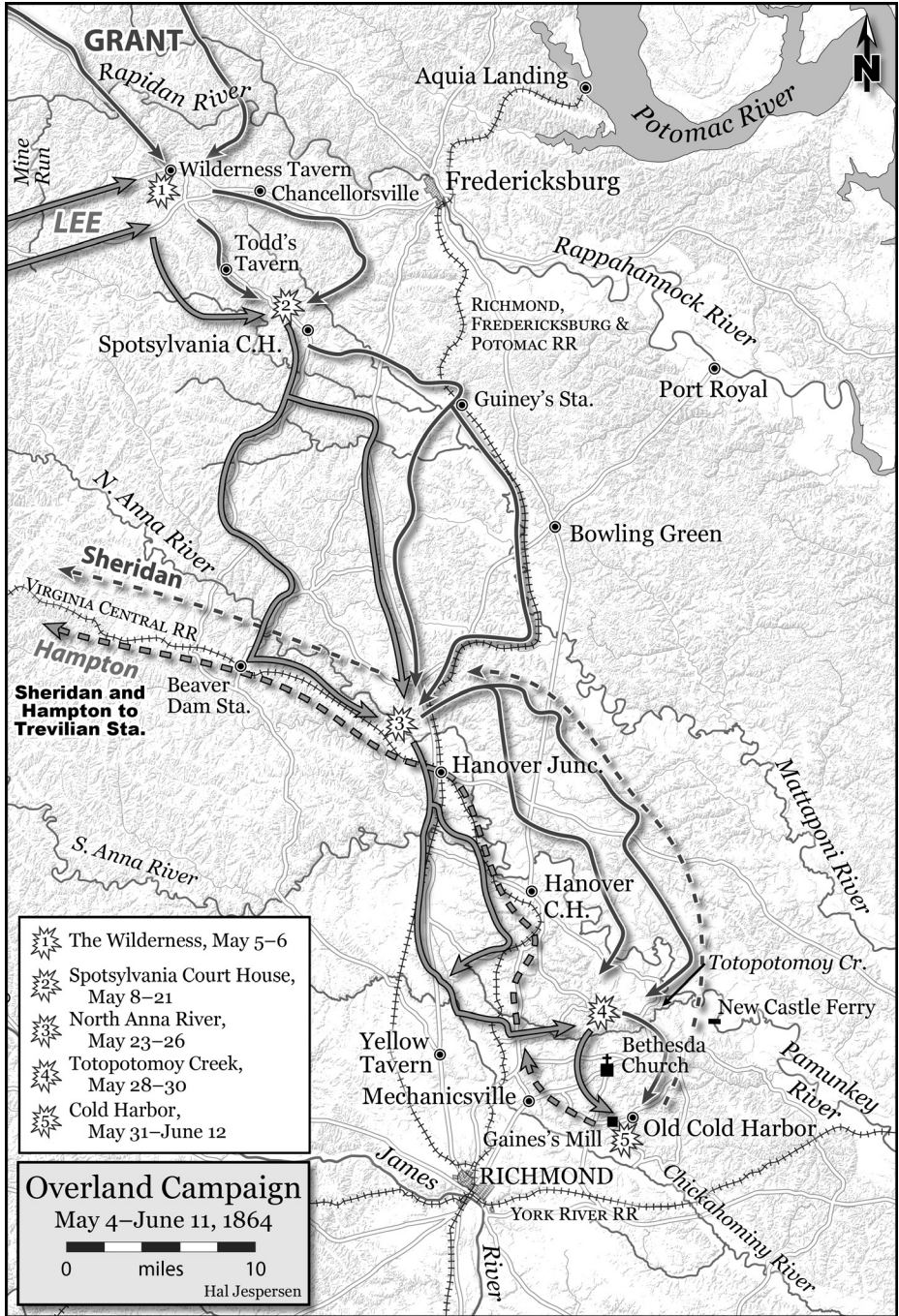
"Oh, yes! I see that," the president declared. "As we say out West, if a man can't skin he must hold a leg while someone else skins."<sup>3</sup>

Grant directed the Army of the James under Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler to land on the south side of James River and operate against Richmond. The general-in-chief would remain with the Army of the Potomac to move across the Rapidan River against the Army of Northern Virginia. He intended for an army group under Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman to advance toward Atlanta and break up the Army of Tennessee. A pair of smaller columns would also attack. One, under Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel, would march up the Shenandoah Valley and cut the Virginia Central Railroad. The other, led by Brig. Gen. George Crook, would strike from West Virginia and sever the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad. Sigel's and Crook's columns would then unite and attack the vital Southern supply center of Lynchburg, Virginia. Grant hoped that Maj. Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks would complete as soon as possible his expedition already in progress against Shreveport, Louisiana, return to Sherman men borrowed from that general, leave small forces to hold the Mississippi and Rio Grande Rivers, and advance against the Confederate port of Mobile, Alabama.

2 Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, 2 vols. (New York, 1886), 2:129–130.

3 *Ibid.*, 143.



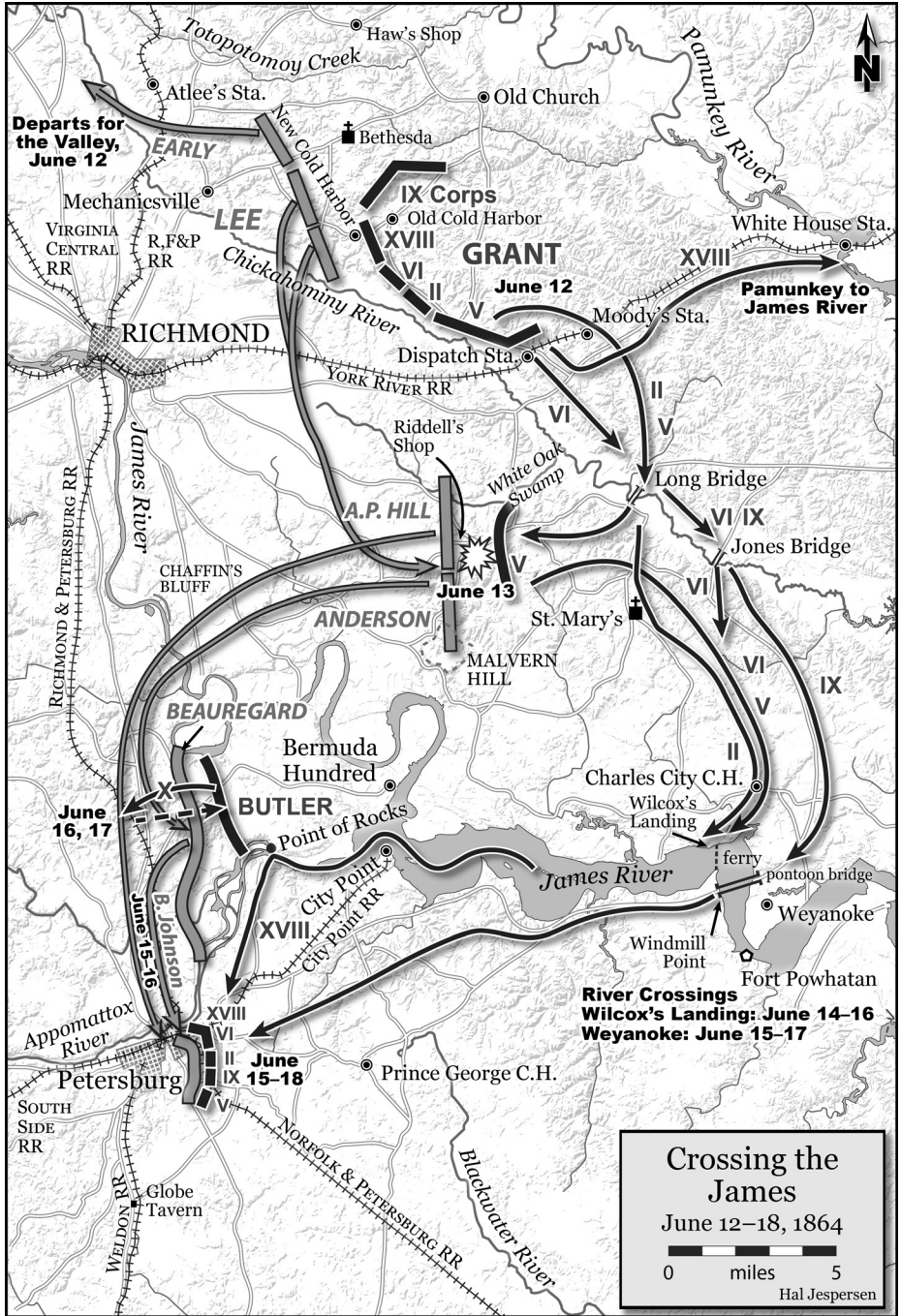


The campaign commenced in early May. It did not go according to plan. The Secessionists nearly captured Banks's army and a supporting fleet. Crook's column from West Virginia cut the Virginia & Tennessee but by May 11 began withdrawing on exaggerated reports of gathering opposition. Sigel's force, advancing by way of the Shenandoah Valley, met with defeat at New Market on May 15. Butler failed to take Richmond and by May 20 found himself largely confined to City Point and Bermuda Hundred on the James. Grant and Sherman made substantial progress but did not destroy their respective opposing enemy armies. The general-in-chief reached Cold Harbor, 15 miles from Richmond, about June 1 after fighting bloody battles in the Wilderness and at Spotsylvania Court House but failed to drive the Army of Northern Virginia into the Richmond defenses. Sherman captured Allatoona, more than halfway to Atlanta from his starting point, around June 4.

By that time, some of the other Northern columns were getting a second wind. Sigel's force, now under the command of Maj. Gen. David "Black Dave" Hunter, won a battle at Piedmont on June 5, and severed the Virginia Central at Staunton. Reinforced by Crook and almost 10,000 more men from West Virginia, Hunter headed for Lynchburg by way of Lexington. Butler found a way out of Bermuda Hundred by crossing the Appomattox River on June 9, but his attempt to seize a lightly defended Petersburg failed. Grant decided to cross James River and capture Petersburg, cutting Richmond's connections with the Deep South. To distract Lee, the general-in-chief sent two cavalry divisions under Maj. Gen. Philip Sheridan on June 7 to rip up the Virginia Central northwest of Richmond and possibly link up with Hunter at Lynchburg. Hunter's advance toward Lynchburg pressured Lee on June 12 into ordering Early's Corps to the Shenandoah Valley to destroy Black Dave, then march down the Valley and threaten Washington and Baltimore. Lee hoped such a move would compel Grant "either to weaken himself so much for their protection as to afford us an opportunity to attack him, or that he might be induced to attack us."<sup>4</sup> On the same day, Grant began heading for the James.

Grant's crossing of the James began on June 14 and at first proceeded flawlessly, but the drive on Petersburg broke down. Two army corps arrived at the city's eastern edge on June 15, but only one of them attacked the small Southern garrison, and not until evening. The attackers did not capture the city but only some of its eastern fortifications. Petersburg's fortifications, constructed from 1862 until early 1864 and called the Dimmock Line after Capt. Charles H. Dimmock,

4 United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (OR)* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880–1901), 128 vols., Series I (all will be from Series I unless otherwise specified), vol. 37, pt. 1, p. 346 (OR 37, 1:346).



the engineer who had overseen the line's construction, ringed Petersburg for about 10 miles from the Appomattox below the city to the Appomattox above.

Southern reinforcements began arriving at Petersburg that night. To defend the city better, the Confederates pulled out of the Howlett Line holding Butler's troops in Bermuda Hundred, and Butler advanced on June 16 to seize the Richmond & Petersburg Railroad. Assaults that day captured more of Petersburg's eastern fortifications, but not enough to break into the city. Meanwhile the Secessionists from the Howlett Line reinforced the city's defenders. Yet another assault on the morning of June 17 pierced the next Confederate line east of Petersburg. By this time the Army of Northern Virginia was marching toward Petersburg and drove Butler's troops off the Richmond & Petersburg, back into Bermuda Hundred. The Southerners at Petersburg largely plugged the hole in their line by day's end.

The Federals began shelling Petersburg on the night of June 17–18, terrorizing many of the city's inhabitants. "It was a lovely moonlight night, and I had just gone to bed after listening to a band belonging to some brigade encamped across the river, when I heard the sound of heavy firing, and by and by a shell flew with a whiz over the house and exploded near by," remembered Mrs. Charles E. Waddell, who lived on Bollingbrook Street in the heart of the city. "My heart sank within me!" Praying for the shells to spare her, Mrs. Waddell lay listening to the gunfire and shell bursts until nearly 1:00 a.m. on June 18, when a shell exploded so near that its flash lit her face and a fragment struck her back porch. This terrified her sister, who insisted on going to a neighbor's basement for safety. "Oh, what sad weary hours were those as we lay listening to the fearful sounds that seemed to threaten us every moment with destruction," Mrs. Waddell recalled.<sup>5</sup>

An exodus of Petersburgers began. Mrs. Waddell packed her mother and sister off to Raleigh, North Carolina, in the morning. She felt compelled to remain in Petersburg until she could learn the fate of her husband, Capt. Charles E. Waddell, who served with Lee's army in the Petersburg City Guard, Company A of the 12th Virginia Infantry, called "the Petersburg Regiment" because six of its ten companies hailed from the city.<sup>6</sup> The exodus included people from all walks of life.

5 David Macrae, *The Americans at Home: Pen-and-Ink Sketches of American Men, Manners and Institutions*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1870), 1:170. Macrae identified the author of the diary quoted as "the wife of a captain in Lee's army." *Ibid.*, 167. Macrae also calls her "Mrs. W----." *Ibid.*, 174. The diary quoted is essentially the same as the Mrs. Charles E. Waddell Diary, June 17–19, Papers of Miss Georgia Hicks, Collection of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, North Carolina Division, North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, NC.

6 John Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment in the Civil War: A History of the 12th Virginia Infantry from John Brown's Hanging to Appomattox, 1859–1865* (El Dorado Hills, CA, 2019), 16.

“We left Petersburg when de shellin’ commenced an’ went to Pamplin in box cars, getting out of de way,” remembered Fannie Berry, a slave in 1864.<sup>7</sup>

The Army of Northern Virginia began arriving at Petersburg on the morning of June 18 and was reinforcing the troops in the city’s defenses as Grant’s forces launched a series of increasingly disjointed and unsuccessful frontal attacks. That afternoon, during the Union assaults, the usually audacious Lee declined to strike the vulnerable Federal left despite the urging of Gen. G. T. “Gus” Beauregard, whom Lee succeeded as the principal defender of Petersburg. Lee explained that his men would need rest after their long march from north of the James, and that the best policy lay in remaining on the defensive.<sup>8</sup>

While Grant prepared to authorize an end to four days of bloody assaults on Petersburg, he was already thinking of other ways to capture the city. “If this assault does not carry, we will try to gain advantages without assaulting fortifications,” he wrote to Maj. Gen. George Gordon Meade, the West Pointer in command of the Army of the Potomac.<sup>9</sup>

Shortly afterward, the general-in-chief spoke to Col. Horace Porter, a governor’s son who served as one of Grant’s aides. “Lee’s whole army has now arrived, and the topography of the country about Petersburg has been well taken advantage of by the enemy in the location of strong works,” the general-in-chief told Porter. “I will make no more assaults on that portion of the line, but will give the men a rest, and then look to extensions to our left, with a view to destroying Lee’s communications on the south and confining him to a close siege.”<sup>10</sup>

At 10:00 p.m., as Grant sat in his tent at City Point near the confluence of the James and the Appomattox, he accepted that his first offensive against Petersburg

7 “Interview of Mrs. Fannie Berry, Ex-slave 861 E. Bank Street—Petersburg, Virginia, Feb. 26, 1937,” 6, in *Slave Narratives, A Folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews with Former Slaves: Typewritten Records Prepared by the Federal Writers Project 1936–1938, Assembled by the Library of Congress Project, Works Projects Administration for the District of Columbia Sponsored by the Library of Congress* (Washington, D.C., 1941). Pamplin City straddles the border between Appomattox and Prince Edward counties. [appomattoxcountyva.gov](http://appomattoxcountyva.gov). Retrieved Jan. 30, 2024.

8 G. T. Beauregard, “Four Days of Battle at Petersburg,” in Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War (B&L)*, 4 vols. (New York, 1884, 1888), 4:544; G. T. Beauregard, “The Battle of Petersburg, Part II,” in *North American Review* 145, no. 372 (Nov. 1887), 514–515. Colonel Alfred Roman, aide-de-camp and inspector general to Beauregard, gives a different account involving a more favorable initial reception of Beauregard’s idea followed by a rejection because of the obstacles posed by Second Swamp, about six miles south of Petersburg, and the cuts of the Norfolk & Petersburg Railroad. Alfred Roman, *The Military Operations of General Beauregard in the War Between the States 1861 to 1865 with a Brief Personal Sketch and a Narrative of His Services in the War with Mexico 1846–1848*, 2 vols. (New York, 1884), 2:254.

9 *OR* 40, 2:156.

10 Horace Porter, *Campaigning with Grant* (New York, 1906), 210.

had failed. The Cockade City—known as such because of cockades in the hats of a company of soldiers from Petersburg defending Ohio's Fort Meigs during the War of 1812—had withstood the Federal onslaught.

The general-in-chief reacted characteristically. He neither sought scapegoats nor made excuses. He brushed aside his own blunders and those of his subordinates and made his current position the jumping off point for his next effort.

"I am perfectly satisfied that all has been done that could be done, and that the assaults to-day were called for by all the appearances and information that could be obtained," Grant wrote to Meade. "Now we will rest the men and use the spade for their protection until a new vein can be struck." The general-in-chief had more than one new vein in mind. In his next sentence, he revealed one of them, writing, "As soon as Wilson's cavalry is rested we must try and cut the enemy's line of communication."<sup>11</sup>

Grant was referring to Brig. Gen. James H. Wilson's cavalry division of the Army of the Potomac, the only one of that army's three cavalry divisions present outside Petersburg. A West Pointer hailing from Illinois, Wilson had served with distinction on Grant's staff during the Vicksburg campaign. Wilson's cavalry division was pitching camp near Mount Sinai Church on the Blackwater River, southeast of Prince George Court House. The division's horsemen had worn themselves out screening the Army of the Potomac during its crossing of James River.

By partially investing Petersburg for about three miles from the Appomattox on the north to the vicinity of Jerusalem Plank Road on the southwest, Grant was already laying siege to the city. At the same time as he decided to launch Wilson's cavalry division against the enemy's lines of communication, the general-in-chief began laying the foundation to extend his infantry's left westward to sever the roads and railroads running southward and westward from Petersburg, further confining Lee.<sup>12</sup>

Grant directed the taking of defensive measures in case the United States Navy failed to contain the Confederate warships on James River despite the recent sinking of obstacles in Trent's Reach. "In view of a temporary blockade of the river being possible, I think it advisable that supplies in depot should be kept up to full twenty days', besides ten days in wagons and haversacks," he informed Meade.<sup>13</sup> A siege could not succeed without adequate supplies.

11 *OR* 40, 2:157. Grant showed remarkable charity toward the commander of the Army of the Potomac, given that Beauregard thought Meade by extending his left to Jerusalem Plank Road could easily have flanked the Confederates out of Petersburg. Letter, G. T. Beauregard to C. M. Wilcox, June 9, 1874, *MHSM* 5:117–123.

12 Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 210.

13 *OR* 40, 2:157.

The depot at City Point—where the Appomattox River flowed into the James—was already growing by leaps and bounds. That day personnel of the United States Military Railroad Construction Corps were rebuilding the City Point Railroad, which ran from City Point to Petersburg, as well as constructing wharves and buildings for the use of Grant’s army group in unloading and storing supplies.

The general-in-chief’s headquarters at City Point consisted of a few tents for his entourage and himself. Those with Grant at the time included Sylvanus Cadwallader, a Wisconsin reporter who had belonged to the general-in-chief’s retinue since late 1862. “My own tent was under the umbrageous branches of a large mulberry tree which afforded protection from the blistering sunshine, until it had to be removed to conform to the general camp arrangement,” the scribe recalled.<sup>14</sup> Headquarters took the form of a parallelogram, with the two ends and the north side packed with tents and the south side open. The west end stretched to a bluff overlooking the confluence of the Appomattox and the James. The cavalry escort camp lay behind Grant’s headquarters and reached nearly to the bank of the James. Infantry on fatigue duty camped east of headquarters.

Tents, shanties, mess halls, and sutlers soon covered the plateau east of the infantry camp. “The place was beautiful for situation, easily policed and drained,” remembered Cadwallader. “The landing on the James below the mouth of the Appomattox . . . presented a scene of indescribable bustle and activity.”<sup>15</sup> Vessels and transports which had followed the army with supplies had covered the James since June 17. As the ships unloaded horses, mules, wagons, caissons, limber chests, cannons, railroad trains, rations, clothing, shoes, rifles, ammunition, and every other form of ordnance, warehouses rose and parks expanded to contain their cargoes. City Point would soon grow into one of the largest ports on the continent. Like Sherman, Grant had served as a supply officer earlier in his career.

With the transports came crowds of curious civilians. “They swarmed around the wharves, filled up the narrow avenues at the landing between the six-mule teams which stood there by the acre, plunged frantically across the road in front of your horse wherever you rode, plied everybody with ridiculous questions about ‘the military situation,’ invaded the privacy of every tent, stood around every mess-table till invited to eat unless driven away, and wandered around at nearly all hours,” recalled the newspaperman. They stood in rows just outside the guard-line of headquarters, gawking at Grant and his staff and importuning anyone who

14 Benjamin P. Thomas, ed., *Three Years with Grant as Recalled by War Correspondent Sylvanus Cadwallader* (New York, 1961), 230.

15 *Ibid.*, 230–231.

ventured out of headquarters with questions about the celebrities. "For several days headquarters resembled a menagerie," Cadwallader remembered.<sup>16</sup>

An immense general hospital, amounting to a city in itself, grew near City Point. Hundreds of clean, white hospital tents, with their flaps turned up on account of the warm weather, covered many acres and could hold thousands of patients. The tents stood in regular blocks with broad, clean streets. Fragrant green pine boughs ornamented some of the tents to keep off the hot sun, others with their ends laid all one way carpeted the floors and streets. "After coming from the front one wished he might have a 'flesher,' if for nothing more than to get a change of diet from hard-tack, pork and fresh meat to nice food furnished by the medical department and the goodies from the sanitary commission," recalled Pvt. James Madison Aubery, regimental clerk of the 36th Wisconsin.<sup>17</sup>

In the same missive to Meade of 10:00 p.m. on June 18 in which Grant called for a cavalry raid and directed the taking of defensive supply measures, the general-in-chief alluded to his determination to seize a bridgehead on the north bank of James River. The bridgehead he sought would extend Grant's right across the James and would allow him to communicate rapidly with all parts of his command as he distracted the Confederates by threatening their left. "If nothing occurs to prevent I shall be absent to-morrow from 10 a.m. to about 3 p.m. up the river near the naval fleet," he wrote.<sup>18</sup>

Meade, the commander of the Army of the Potomac and a former civil engineer, anticipated a siege of Petersburg. At 10:00 p.m. on June 18 he informed the general-in-chief that the Army of the Potomac's siege train remained at Washington. It consisted of 40 rifled siege guns, either 4.5-inch siege rifles or 30-pounder Parrott rifles, 10 10-inch mortars, 28 8-inch mortars, 20 Coehorn mortars, six 100-pounder Parrott rifles and the necessary mortar wagons, battery wagons, forges, carriages, platforms, ammunition and miscellaneous articles loaded aboard about a dozen schooners each of around 200 tons' burden. "I think it proper to advise you of this fact, as in case you contemplated using them it would take some time to procure them," Meade wrote to Grant.<sup>19</sup>

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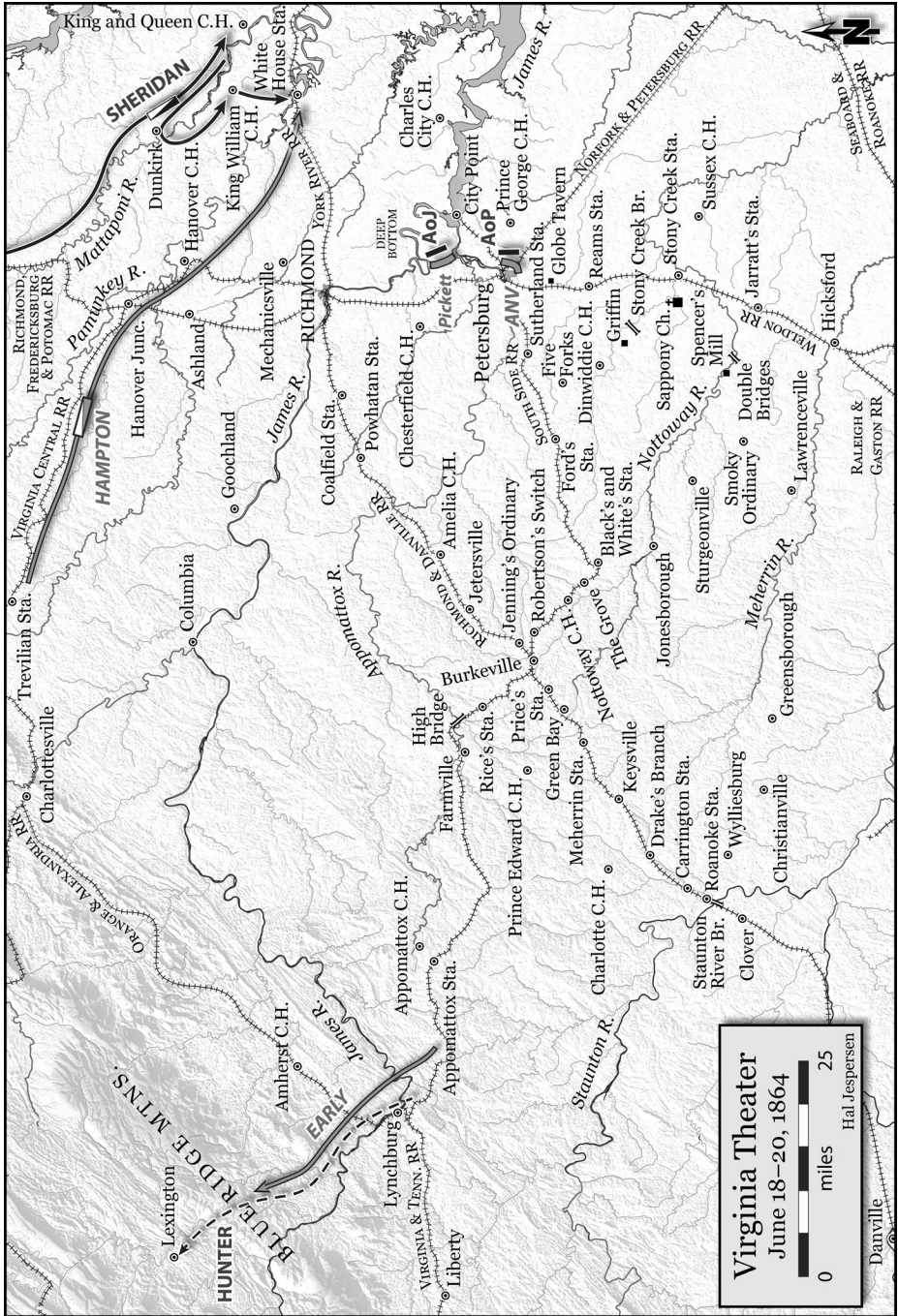
16 Ibid., 231.

17 James M. Aubery, *The Thirty-Sixth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, 1st Brigade, 2d Division, 2d Army Corps: An Authentic Record of the Regiment from Its Organization to Its Muster Out* (Milwaukee, 1900), 93.

18 *OR* 40, 2:157.

19 Ibid., 158.





Sheridan's raid succeeded in diverting Lee's attention from the James crossing and drew off most of the Virginian's cavalry, but accomplished little else. Defeated by Maj. Gen. Wade Hampton at Trevilian Station on June 11 and 12 in Louisa County, Sheridan's horse soldiers were limping back toward White House Landing near the mouth of Pamunkey River encumbered by wounded, prisoners, dismounted men, a long wagon train and contrabands who had joined the column. Hampton's cavalymen hung about the flanks of Little Phil's column, capturing stragglers and killing those who were plundering civilians.

With the way to Lynchburg kept clear by Hampton's Trevilian Station victory, Early's Corps began arriving at Lynchburg on June 17. On June 18 Hunter, short on supplies and thinking his forces outnumbered, retreated westward pursued by the Confederate Army of the Valley—Early's Corps joined by local troops.

\* \* \*

Lee, now pitching his tent at the Violet Bank estate on Dunn's Hill in present day Colonial Heights north of the Appomattox, fully grasped that Grant had targeted Richmond's communications with the Deep South. On June 19 the Southern chieftain gloomily assessed his chances of maintaining his lines of communication with the rest of the Confederacy. In a letter to President Jefferson Davis, the Virginian despaired of defending the Petersburg and Weldon Railroad, which ran from Petersburg to near Weldon, North Carolina, where it connected with the port of Wilmington, North Carolina and points south. "The enemy's left now rests on the Jerusalem [plank] road, and I fear it would be impossible to arrest a sudden attack aimed at a distant point," he wrote. "In addition, the enemy's cavalry, in spite of all our efforts, can burn the bridges over the Nottoway and its branches, [and] the Meherrin." Lee considered the South Side Rail Road, running from the Cockade City to Lynchburg, where it connected with the Virginia & Tennessee, "very much exposed" as well.

In Lee's eyes, the Confederates could depend only on the Richmond & Danville Railroad, which ran southwestwardly from Richmond through Danville, Virginia and connected with the Deep South. "Every effort should be made to secure that road sufficient rolling stock by transferring that of other roads, and to accumulate supplies of all kinds in Richmond in anticipation of temporary interruptions," he declared. He urged Davis to give "every aid" to the railroads to enable them to restore traffic as soon as possible after the Unionists broke them. "Duplicate timbers for all the bridges should be prepared in safe places to be used

in an emergency, and every other arrangement made to keep the roads in running order,” wrote the Southern army group commander.<sup>20</sup>

James A. Seddon, Davis’s secretary of war, would soon respond to Lee. Seddon appreciated Lee’s concern for the Danville railway but doubted its ability to supply the Richmond-Petersburg area alone. The secretary of war thought Lee must defend all the area’s rail communications for several weeks longer until the local wheat crop, which would sustain the Richmond-Petersburg area for several months, ripened.

The Confederates would need to take precautions to protect their railroads soon. Grant had the Weldon, the South Side, and the Danville railroads in his mind’s gunsights.

\* \* \*

At 10:00 a.m. on June 19, while most of the Federal forces outside Petersburg rested, Grant ordered forward his siege train. He then proceeded by steamer to choose the site for a bridgehead on the north bank of the James. “Went with General [Grant] & [General] Butler & one or two others up James river to see site for crossing & bridgehead on [the] other side,” recorded Lt. Col. Cyrus B. Comstock, one of Grant’s aides. “Deep Bottom selected, not as being easily defended but as covering the other side of the river as well.”<sup>21</sup> At Deep Bottom, after running northwardly along the west side of a pencil-like peninsula called Jones Neck that stuck out from the south bank, the James made a 180-degree turn at the foot of a bluff on the north bank and ran southwardly along Jones Neck’s east side. The approximately 80-foot depth of the river at the foot of the bluff gave the place its name.

After selecting the spot for the bridgehead, the party proceeded to USS *Malvern*, a big, fast steamer and the flagship of Acting Rear Adm. Samuel P. Lee, commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron. Grant and Butler consulted with Admiral Lee about dealing with Confederate threats to the Federal forces’ principal line of communication—the James.

The admiral, a Virginian and third cousin of the Confederate general, had served in the Navy since 1825. Known as a troublesome officer, Admiral Lee had

20 Douglas Southall Freeman, ed., *Lee’s Dispatches: Unpublished Letters of General Robert E. Lee, C.S.A., to Jefferson Davis and the War Department of the Confederate States of America 1862–65* (Baton Rouge, 1994), 252–253. The Petersburg and Weldon Railroad was officially known as the Petersburg Railroad. A. Wilson Greene, *A Campaign of Giants: The Battle for Petersburg*, 3 vols. projected (Chapel Hill, NC, 2018), 1:7. It was sometimes called “the Petersburg and Weldon Railroad” but usually just “the Weldon railroad.” *OR* 40, 2:274–275, 678, 689.

21 Merlin E. Sumner, comp., *The Diary of Cyrus B. Comstock* (Dayton, OH, 1987), 274–275.

engaged in several duels, and even killed a man on a Mississippi steamboat. Before taking charge of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, he had seen action in the Mexican War, at Charleston, at New Orleans, and at Vicksburg. When asked why he remained loyal to the Union, the admiral said, "When I find the word Virginia in my commission I will join the Confederacy."<sup>22</sup> His hold on his position was growing shaky because Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles was losing confidence in him. Admiral Lee frequently sought instructions from Welles, who preferred subordinates who exercised their own discretion.

Grant and his companions next went aboard and inspected USS *Onondaga*, the biggest of the monitors that protected the James from incursions by the Confederate ironclads upriver. The Union fleet on the James included four monitors. Three—USS *Canonicus*, USS *Saugus* and USS *Tecumseh*—had single turrets armed with two fifteen-inch Dahlgren guns. These Dahlgrens could fire a 350-pound shell up to 2,100 yards at an elevation of seven degrees. The fourth monitor, *Onondaga*, had two turrets, each of them armed with a 15-inch smoothbore Dahlgren gun and a 150-pounder (eight-inch) Parrott rifle. The Parrott could fire its shell 8,000 yards when elevated 35 degrees.

"Then to horse & rode along Butler's line to Appomattox [river] where we took a steamer back," remembered Comstock.<sup>23</sup> Grant still had to inspect Butler's lines. The general-in-chief and his entourage began their ride at the northern end of Butler's line near Trent's Reach, a stretch of the James that ran along the southeastern side of Farrar's Island, a miscategorized peninsula formed by a big loop of the river. The ride of Grant's party took it along the line of fortifications across the mouth of Bermuda Hundred to Point of Rocks at the southern terminus of the works.

The journey brought the group past the headquarters of the Army of Potomac's VI Corps, two divisions of which Grant had loaned to Butler, who had scarcely employed them during the assaults on Petersburg. "They halted, and Grant took special delight in exhibiting a fine looking horse he had recently procured," recalled Pvt. George Prowell of the 87th Pennsylvania. "He dismounted and his noble looking animal was admired by a number of officers."<sup>24</sup>

22 Adolph A. Hoehling, *Thunder at Hampton Roads: The U.S.S. Monitor—Its Battle with the Merrimack and Its Recent Discovery* (Boston, 1993), 6.

23 Sumner, *Diary of Cyrus B. Comstock*, 275.

24 George R. Prowell, *History of the Eighty-Seventh Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers, Prepared from Official Records, Diaries, and Other Authentic Sources of Information* (York, PA, 1903), 164.

Butler did not make as favorable an impression. “It was my first sight of Butler,” remembered 1st Lt. Lemuel Abijah Abbott of the 10th Vermont. “His beauty won’t kill him.”<sup>25</sup>

The ride also took the cavalcade past the 142nd Ohio, a regiment of 100-days men. Private Charles O. Poland of the 142nd’s Company B thought that Grant “looks exactly like his photograph.”<sup>26</sup>

By the time the general-in-chief and his staffers boarded the steamer back, Grant had communicated to Butler the decision to throw a brigade across the James the following night “from Jones Point to Deep Bottom, to fortify and hold that point, connecting the two shores by a pontoon bridge.”<sup>27</sup> Butler decided to put in charge of the operation Brig. Gen. Godfrey Weitzel, an engineer and Butler’s acting chief of staff.

During the ride, Grant inquired of Butler where Mrs. Grant and Grant’s two sons might lodge at Fort Monroe. The politically savvy Butler invited Grant’s family to stay at the fort with Mrs. Butler in Butler’s permanent quarters. Butler informed his wife, “if you do all that your knowledge of the world, tact, and genius will enable you to do, then you will do a thousand times more in captivating the woman than I could possibly do with the husband.”<sup>28</sup>

The commander of the Army of the James had good reason to draw upon his wife’s tact. “Navy hate Butler cordially—& no wonder,” Comstock recalled.<sup>29</sup> In the absence of a unified command, the divergent interests of the army and navy increased the friction between them. Oblivious to the difficulty of navigating—under enemy fire—the shallow, narrow, meandering, obstructed, and torpedo-strewn channels of the James, ignorant of the disadvantage at which ships engaged land batteries, the cockeyed general had made himself obnoxious to the tars by pushing Admiral Lee to use his gunboats to cover the flanks of the Army of the James. Admiral Lee wanted Butler to clear the riverbanks of enemy artillery so that the navy could sweep for torpedoes. Butler urged Lee to protect himself from a sortie by the Confederate ironclads by sinking obstructions in the James.

Lee feared that if he did so, others would assume that he lacked the nerve to fight the Secessionist fleet. He and his sailors did not think Butler and the army

25 Lemuel Abijah Abbott, *Personal Recollections and Civil War Diary* (Burlington, 1908), 85.

26 Charles O. Poland Diary, June 19, 1864, Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA.

27 *OR* 40, 2:209.

28 Jessie Ames Marshall, *Private and Official Correspondence of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler during the Period of the Civil War*, 5 vols. (Norwood, MA, 1917), 4:417.

29 Sumner, ed., *Diary of Cyrus B. Comstock*, 275.

were doing their fair share. The Confederate navy had to be kept in check lest it sortie and cut Grant's supply line, which ran up James River to City Point. The Federals dreaded this to the point that on June 15 they had, according to the *New York Herald*, "performed an act that . . . has called an honorable blush to the cheek of every officer in [the] fleet."<sup>30</sup> Under Grant's orders, they had sunk five ships in Trent's Reach, barring themselves from a foray up the James to Richmond as effectively as a sortie of the Secessionist ships against City Point. The Lincoln administration considered the chance of capturing Richmond by a thrust up the tortuous, treacherous James under the guns of bastions such as Fort Drewry remote enough that giving it up to secure City Point seemed a good bargain.

\* \* \*

That morning an obscene charade began over a truce to bury the dead and retrieve the wounded. Meade proposed an armistice, which would not amount to an admission of defeat by Grant. That the commander of the Army of the Potomac proposed it indicates that he considered the general-in-chief, who had remained back at City Point throughout the assaults on Petersburg, absent. Otherwise, Meade knew very well that any communication by flag of truce would have to come from Grant—the Confederates did not consider the victor of Gettysburg in command in the general-in-chief's presence.

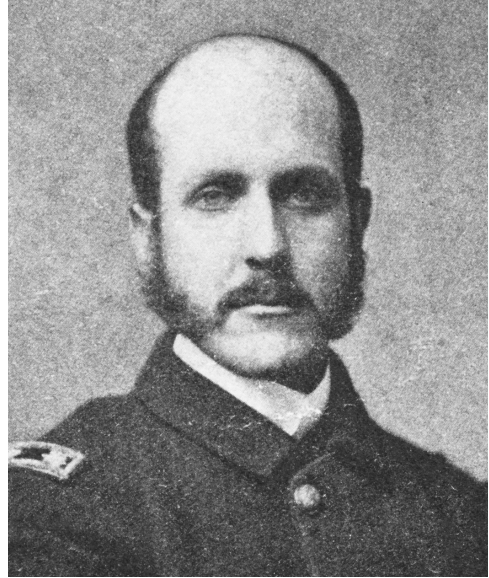
The assignment to carry the armistice proposal to Beauregard fell to Lt. Col. Theodore Lyman III, an 1855 graduate of Harvard who had become the archivist on Meade's staff, "as the man having good clothes," Lyman recalled. Accompanied by a bugler "with a German-silver key-bugle" and "a tall sergeant, in Sunday best, with Gen. Seth Williams's new damask tablecloth, on an appropriate staff," Lyman proceeded on his mission "furnished with a large letter."<sup>31</sup> At 7:00 p.m., Lyman received a rejection from Beauregard, who implicitly considered Grant present and insisted that he admit defeat as a prerequisite to a truce because practically all the dead and wounded between the lines were Northerners. Besides, the prevailing west wind carried the stench from the decomposing dead away from Petersburg and toward the Unionists.

30 Craig L. Symonds, *Lincoln and His Admirals* (Oxford, UK, 2008), 320; *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (ORN), 30 vols., Series I (All references will be to Series I unless otherwise noted), 10:149. For a discussion of the risk to reward ratio of leaving the James unobstructed, see David D. Porter, *The Naval History of the Civil War* (New York, 1886), 475–477.

31 George R. Agassiz, ed., *Meade's Headquarters, 1863–1865: Letters of Colonel Theodore Lyman from the Wilderness to Appomattox* (Boston, 1922), 171. Williams was serving as Grant's inspector general. Ezra J. Warner, *General in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge, 1988), 562–563.

Theodore Lyman III  
*Digital Commonwealth,  
Massachusetts Collection Online*

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The commander of the Army of the Potomac did not renew his request for a truce, telling the general-in-chief, “I have reason to believe there are but few wounded not brought off,” which was only true because so many of those wounded on June 18 had already died.<sup>32</sup> The political repercussions of an admission of defeat by Grant outweighed soldiers’ lives.

Lyman returned with Beauregard’s negative response sometime after 7:00 p.m. The Harvard-educated naturalist failed to understand the significance of the exchange. Attributing Beauregard’s refusal to “his mean Creole blood,” Lyman wrote in his journal that, “Lee does not do such things.”<sup>33</sup> In fact, Lee had done the same thing in the protracted negotiations that failed to produce a truce at Cold Harbor until most of the Northern wounded between the lines there had expired—he had insisted that Grant admit defeat prior to the Republican National Convention in Baltimore, where Lincoln would be nominated for reelection. The difference between the negotiations at Cold Harbor and at Petersburg lay in that at the Cockade City, the Federals gave up negotiating rather than admit defeat.

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While Grant and his party selected a spot for a bridgehead on the north bank of the James, the army group’s staff at City Point scurried about to comply with his order to meet the possibility of a temporary blockade of the river. “Everything progressing finely here; wharves are being built for the accommodation of all the departments; issues of all necessary stores have been made,” wrote Brig. Gen. Rufus Ingalls, Chief Quartermaster of the Army of the Potomac and the general-in-chief’s classmate at West Point. “Since yesterday morning over 800 wagons were

<sup>32</sup> OR 40, 2:210–211.

<sup>33</sup> Agassiz, ed., *Meade’s Headquarters*, 173.