



About the author: Barry Gander is a top economic and politics writer on Medium: <https://medium.com/@barry-gander>

THE ROAD TO APPOMATTOX JUNE 15 1864 – APRIL 9, 1865



General Robert E. Lee
Army of Northern Virginia



Lieutenant General U.S. Grant
Armies of the United States

Confederate Army
Strength: 52,000
Casualties: 32,000

Union Army
Strength: 67,000 – 125,000
Casualties: 53,000

Lt. Gen. Grant's plan for the final defeat of the Confederacy was to send **Maj. Gen. Sherman** through the center while Grant attacked **Lee** in the north.

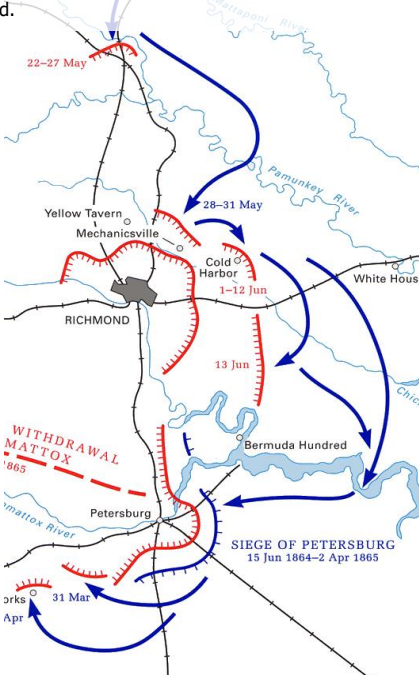
For six weeks, the 110,000 men of the Army of the Potomac tried to slip around Lee's 60,000 men, destroy his army and take Richmond, capital of the Confederacy.

Lee's plan was to hold on until Northern unrest drove Lincoln from office.

The running battles were so bloody that in the first month alone, Grant lost more men than had fallen in the previous three years.

Grant reached the fortifications around Richmond near Cold Harbour, where Lee fought him to a stalemate.

Grant decided that the key was Petersburg, the junction of five railways and a supply centre for Richmond just to north. If it fell, Gen. Lee would have to abandon Richmond.

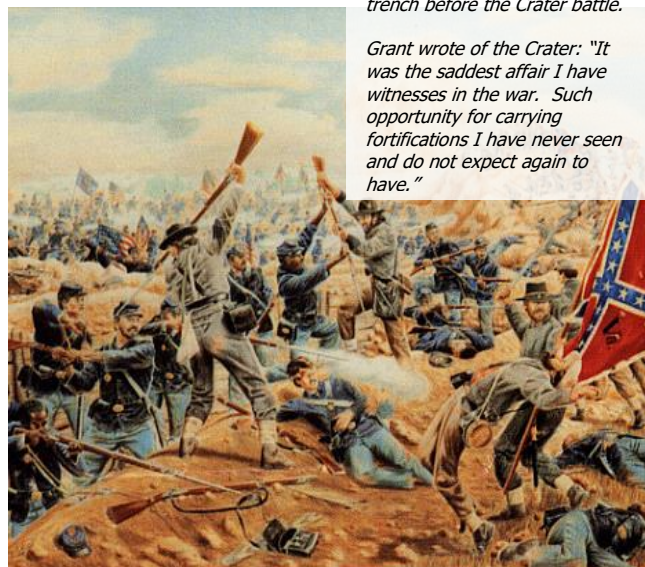


Trenches and the Crater

- In darkness on June 15, Grant's men rapidly built one of the longest pontoon bridges ever constructed, and slipped across the James River. He had outfoxed the "silver fox".
- Grant's massive army took four days to cross the river, but his lead columns under Gen. "Baldy" Smith got to Petersburg ahead of the main Confederate army. He waited too long to attack.
- Lee rushed to Petersburg and entrenched. Grant now had Lee pinned to fight in trenches.
- Trench warfare would continue for nine months, with the misery of daily bombardments by mortars and heavy siege guns.
- A chance to break the impasse came when Pennsylvania coal miners serving under Grant dug a tunnel under Confederate lines. They exploded a mine, which tore open a crater more than 170 feet long in the Confederate trenches. Bungling by Union commanders lost the opportunity, and 4,000 Union casualties.



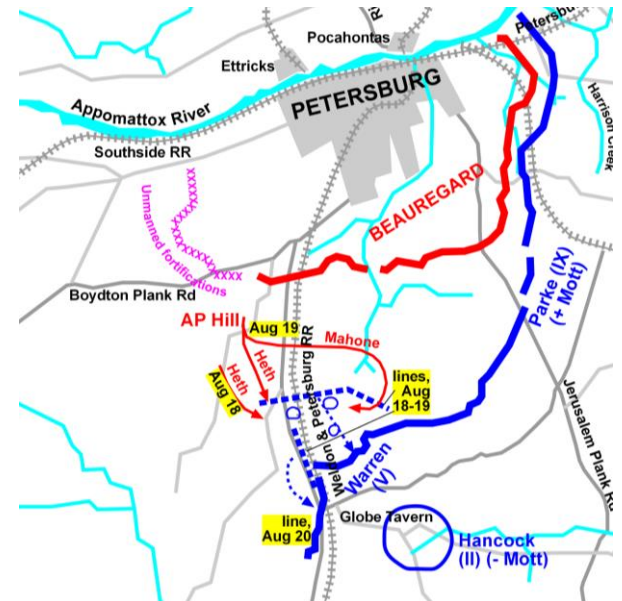
(above) Union soldiers in a trench before the Crater battle.



Grant wrote of the Crater: "It was the saddest affair I have witnesses in the war. Such opportunity for carrying fortifications I have never seen and do not expect again to have."

Relentless Drive West

- The Federals continually extended their lines towards the south and west, to cut the rail lines and outflank the Confederates.
- In mid-August Grant pulled a division out of the Petersburg line and threw it into an attack that cut Petersburg's rail connection directly south. Now Lee's supplies had to come from the west.
- A month later Union Gen. Butler attacked Richmond itself, and Lee had to spread his line thinner to cover the north defences.
- By February 1865, the Federals had extended their lines more the 30 miles, with trenches that included 36 forts and 50 batteries of cannon.



Grant moves to cut Lee's rail supply lines to the south.

Attacking Confederate entrenchments



The Line Snaps

- Lee's men were now stretched so thin in the trenches that each man was 20 feet apart from his neighbour.
- Adding to Lee's pressure, Union Gen. Sherman was coming up from the south.
- Knowing he had to break out of Petersburg, Lee gathered half of his army for a sudden attack on Fort Stedman.
- After initial success, a Union counterattack recaptured the fort and inflicted 5,000 casualties.
- Grant ordered Gen. Sheridan to flank Lee south of Petersburg. In the battle of Five Forks Sheridan's men captured half of Gen. Pickett's Confederate defenders, while Pickett himself was away at a shad bake in the rear.
- On April 2nd Grant followed up with an assault all along the lines. The assault succeeded, and the Confederates pulled out of Petersburg and Richmond.



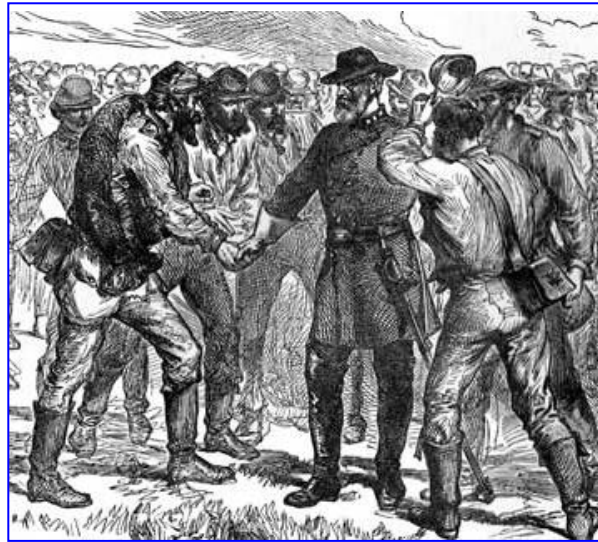
Sheridan's attack at Five Forks threatened Lee's last supply line.

The fall of Richmond



Retreat to Appomattox

- Lee's plan was to break away from Grant, head south to join up with Gen. Johnson, beat Johnson's opponent Sherman with the combined armies, and then strike back at Grant.
- At Saylor's Creek, one-quarter of Lee's army was cut off and surrendered to Sheridan.
- Fighting a series of rear-guard actions, Lee was finally blocked by Federal cavalry under George Armstrong Custer. Lee tried to push through the cavalry by ran up against the full Union V Corps. Lee asked for terms. The place was Appomattox Court House; the date April 8th. Grant's terms provided that the Confederates would not be prosecuted by the Union.
- On April 12th, the 27,805 men left in General Lee's army formally laid down their weapons, and went home.



With tears in his eyes, Lee said good-bye: "I bid you all an affectionate farewell."

Consequences

- By June 23rd, all of the remaining Confederate armies had capitulated.
- At the end, the South had only 160,000 soldiers under arms, compared to one million in the North.
- Lee never forgot Grant's chivalry at the end, and would not hear people speak ill of the Union commander.
- The war caused 625,000 military casualties and an unknown number of civilian lives.
- The war resulted in the freeing of the slaves, the restoration of the Union, and an increase in the power of the Federal government.



As the Confederates filed by to lay down their weapons, the Union soldiers saluted; they felt "an awed stillness...and breath-holding, as if it were the passing of the dead!"

