May 4, 1864 – The Union Army of the Potomac crossed the Rapidan River west of Fredericksburg setting into motion the climactic and most decisive campaign of the Civil War. Robert E. Lee moved quickly to meet the challenge. The Confederate commander had just 60,000 soldiers with which to stop Grant’s 100,000-man juggernaut. He had faced such odds before, and each time he had turned back the threat. However, this time a Union general-in-chief was traveling with the Federal forces. U.S. Grant would prove to be made of tougher stuff.

The Confederates delivered devastating blows to the Union advance as they moved through the tangled Wilderness south of the Rapidan. May 6, Burnside struck back as others had done, Grant pushed his army south toward Spotsylvania Court House. Lee had been there. Barely a week later, the armies stood and fought—sometimes hand-to-hand—as Lee resisted the advance.

Failing to break through at Spotsylvania, Grant maintained his momentum, shifting south and east around the Confederate army. Lee, realizing the Union movements, built a strong line of northern fortifications protecting a critical railroad junction south of the North Anna River.

The battered Confederate army again turned the Northern back, but Grant moved around the North Anna lines, and to the Pamunkey River. Lee moved to block Grant’s progress. He held another strong position behind the Totopotomoy Creek. After three days of sporadic skirmishing, Grant turned his attention toward the Old Cold Harbor crossings. The Union army now was positioned to threaten the Confederate capital itself.

After nearly a month of continuous fighting, Confederate soldiers found themselves digging defensive lines with Richmond at their backs.

Grant launched a desperate dawn attack against these earthen defenses near Cold Harbor. June 3. He lost nearly 5,500 men in less than an hour. Lee had won his last major victory.

On June 13, Grant again disregaged and moved south. The Union army crossed the James River and marched toward Petersburg and its vital rail connections to the south. Lee once again met to resist the threat, but this time the Confederates were pinned down.

Grant, utilizing his greater numbers, stretched Lee’s army to the breaking point. On April 2, 1865, the Confederate line snapped. The Army of Northern Virginia abandoned Richmond and started west. Appomattox was a week away.

Robert E. Lee
Governor of Virginia

The Civil War Revisited

The following feature explore and expand upon the story of the Civil War:

Adams-Hunt House Visitor Center
16217 US 1
Amesville, OH 45102
513-758-1772
www.amesvilleohio.org

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park
1200 N. 3rd St.
Washington, DC 20001
202-482-1127
www.nps.gov/chco

Goodloe House Museum
1033 16th St. N.
Arlington, VA 22201
703-203-1463
www.arlingtonhistory.org

Brockhampton State Park
5702 Maymont Rd.
Richmond, VA 23227
804-780-7686
www.virginia.org/park

Monumental Church
330 Monumental Church Rd.
Charlottesville, VA 22901
434-970-1727
www.monumentalchurch.org

Richmond National Battlefield
2230 Monument Ave.
Richmond, VA 23220
804-780-2165
www.nps.gov/rich

Richmond Visitor Center
200 E. Broad St.
Richmond, VA 23219
804-777-3456
www.visitrichmondva.com

Black Troops

African Americans made significant contributions to both the Union and Confederate war efforts in Virginia. Free blacks and slaves provided much of the labor for southern fortifications protecting Confederate strongholds at Richmond and Petersburg.

During the 1865 Virginia campaigns, Negro troops took serious action for the Union cause. The United States Colored Troops (USCT) fought bravely at Barry’s Farm, Deep Bottom, New Market Heights and Fort Gilmer.

Voula G. Grant
Virginia Civil War Trails

Supply and Logistics

At the heart of the Overland campaign was the challenge of maintaining supply lines. With the Union Army advancing quickly and stretching deep into enemy territory, the Confederates found it difficult to keep up with the Union demands. The Union Army, on the other hand, had a massive supply depot at City Point on the James River.

One of the Union’s key advantages was its ability to move vast amounts of supplies by water. The Union high command and the ability to function and survive. An interruption—even for a few days—could spell disaster.

In order to maintain contact with his bases, Grant had to keep his army supplied. Consequently, he always moved by the left flank, in the east, when maneuvering around Lee’s army.

From these depots, units of wagon trains and railroads delivered supplies to the front lines. Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia relied on railroads to supply its soldiers as others had done. Grant pushed his army south toward Spotsylvania Court House.

The main part of this map-guide suggests a driving tour from the Rappahannock River crossing at Germanna to the James River crossing at Ashland. Follow these signs to more than 1,000 Civil War sites. The tour that follows the “Blue Line” tour from the Rappahanock River crossing at Germanna south to the gates of Petersburg. Peel back the years while driving along the roads the soldiers used.

How to Use This Map-Guide

This map-guide takes a full two days and covers four national battlefields. But it is designed to be flexible. You can focus on a single battlefield or try to visit them all. The “Blue Line” tour from the Rappahanock River crossing at Germanna south to the gates of Petersburg is the most popular. It visits all the national battlefields.

Virginia Civil War Trails

The Civil War Revisited

Visit Petersburg, Richmond, Hopewell, and Stafford for more information on other Virginia Civil War sites. For additional Civil War Trails information, visit www.civilwartrails.org.

THE 1864 OVERLAND CAMPAIGN

BLACK TROOPS

For information on other Virginia Civil War Trails, call 1-888-CIVIL-WAR.

Virginia Civil War Trails

www.civilwar.org

1-888-CIVIL-WAR

THE CAPITAL OF THE CONFEDERACY

Richmond became the capital of the Confederate States of America in the spring of 1861. The prosperous Upper- South city seemed an improbable choice to many, located only 18 miles south of the Union capital at Washington, D.C. But the Richmond survived as the capital for nearly four years. During the war, the city became a center for wounded soldiers and prisoners of war. Its industrial capacity turned out thousands of weapons used by Confederate troops in the field. Richmond had to President Jefferson Davis and to the Confederate legislature. The city took on symbolic meaning to both sides.

Union forces moved into Richmond’s suburbs twice during the war. Union Gen. George McClellan marched his soldiers within hearing of Richmond’s church bells in 1863, and U.S. Grant approached the city in 1864. Each time, Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia turned back the threat.

Richmond finally fell April 3, 1865, when Lee’s lines at Petersburg collapsed. As Davis and his government prepared to leave the city, fierce street battles by evacuating Confederate troops prevented word of the surrender from flowing into Union hands and began consuming the commercial district of the city.

Lee and Grant

A corridor and line of fire at this site led to the Union lines. On April 3, 1865, the city was partially destroyed by fire which consumed most of the central business district.