

Chronology of the Siege of Richmond and Petersburg, 1864-65

by

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June 15 Maj. Gen. W.F. "Baldy" Smith, with about 10,000 men of XVIII Corps, arrives in front of the Petersburg fortifications, held by only about 2,200 men under Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard. After about seven hours of delays caused by scouting the Confederate positions and sending the artillery horses to be watered, Smith assaults at about 7 p.m., and carries nearly a mile of trenches, and nine redoubts, but fails to exploit this initial advantage. During the night Beauregard is reinforced by about 12,000 troops under Hoke and Bushrod Johnson, and Maj. Gen. W.S. Hancock arrives with II Corps to reinforce Smith. Beauregard pulls back to a new line during the night.

June 16 Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside arrives in front of Petersburg with IX Corps, but Federal efforts to develop and attack Beauregard's new line are hesitant and not pressed with vigor.

June 17 At 3 a.m., 2/IX makes a brilliant dash on an exposed salient in the Rebel line, capturing 600 prisoners and nearly another full mile of entrenched line; but this success is not supported and is poorly exploited and the thin Rebel line continues to hold. Maj. Gen. Gouverneur K. Warren arrives with V Corps to extend the Federal line to the left.

June 18 Beauregard again pulls back to a new line. The initial Federal attacks therefore strike empty trenches, and valuable time is lost locating and developing the new Rebel positions. At 7:30 a.m., the first troops (Kershaw's Division) from Lee's Army of Northern Virginia arrive in Petersburg. Federal attacks continue during the day but are uncoordinated and meet with little success.

June 22 Federal II Corps and VI Corps attempt to cut the Weldon Railroad but are stymied by difficult terrain, poor roads, and vigorous Rebel resistance. Mahone strikes a staggering blow to II Corps, taking about 1,700 men prisoner in an attack on an exposed flank. Leading two divisions of Federal cavalry (his own, and that of Brig. Gen. August Kautz), Brig. Gen. James H. Wilson begins a cavalry raid against the railroads to the south and west of Petersburg. Some damage is done to the Weldon Railroad near Ream's Station, and to the Southside Railroad near Ford's Station. Pursuit from W.H.F. Lee's division of Rebel cavalry begins to develop.

June 23 VI Corps attempts to continue the advance of the previous day but is unable to make headway without exposing its flanks. Wilson orders Kautz to take his division to Burkeville on the Danville Railroad to destroy facilities there, while Wilson holds off Lee.

June 24 Meade calls off the attempt to reach the Weldon Railroad. Lee launches an attack on the Federal right but the affair is mis-managed and serves only to get a South Carolina brigade mangled.

Wilson and Kautz re-unite southwest of Burkeville, along the Richmond and Danville Railroad.

June 25 After destroying track along the Danville Railroad as far south as the Staunton River, Wilson and Kautz are stymied in their attempts to force a crossing and destroy the railroad bridge, and the decision is made to return to the Federal lines.

Men from the 48th Pennsylvania (1/2/IX) begin digging a mine under the Confederate works opposite their position.

June 28 Elements of Wilson's expedition arrive at Stony Creek Station on the Weldon Railroad, about 20 miles south of Petersburg. Instead of finding Union troops, they find more Rebel cavalry and three infantry

brigades. Forced to abandon their wagons and artillery, the Federal troopers flee north and east to friendly lines, where they arrive, badly worn and straggling, over the next three days.

July 6 Ricketts's division (3/VI) and some dismounted cavalry are dispatched to Washington to deal with Early's advance.

July 9 The remaining two divisions of VI Corps are ordered to Washington.

July 19 Grant relieves Smith from command of XVIII Corps, and replaces him with Maj. Gen. E.O.C. Ord.

July 23 Burnside's mine is completed.

July 26 Meade asks for Burnside's views on exploiting the mine.

Hancock leads II Corps across the James at Deep Bottom. His objectives are to provide an opening for a cavalry raid against the Virginia Central Railroad, and to possibly break through the Rebel lines into Richmond if he finds the lines are thinly held.

July 27 Hancock carries an advanced Confederate position north of the James but finds the main line, behind Bailey's Creek, to be strongly held.

July 28 Hancock endeavors to turn the Confederate left flank in order to free up Sheridan's cavalry, but instead is forced to defend against an attack by Kershaw's division, which is handsomely repulsed, but Hancock is forced to take up a defensive posture to avoid being cut off from the Deep Bottom bridgehead.

July 29 At nightfall, Hancock is ordered to return to the Petersburg lines to support the mine assault.

July 30 At 4:45 a.m., Burnside's mine is exploded. The blast tears a hole nearly 500 yards wide in the Confederate lines, but the resulting attack bogs down in an unprecedented series of command miscues and malfeasance. Two division commanders (Ledlie and Ferrero) stay in the trenches getting drunk instead of going forward with their men, and there is a notable lack of command presence at the point of attack. By 9:45 Grant and Meade have ordered the troops recalled, but Burnside refuses to transmit this order to his men until 12:30 p.m. By 2:00 p.m. the Rebels have forced all Yankees within their lines to surrender, and the opportunity provided by the mine has been wasted.

Aug. 7 Sheridan appointed to the command of the Middle Military Division (the Shenandoah Valley command).

Aug. 9 Confederate saboteurs plant and explode a bomb on a Federal ammunition barge at City Point. The blast destroys two million dollars worth of material, including 700 boxes of artillery ammunition and 2,000 boxes of small-arms ammunition. At least 43 men are killed and 126 wounded. An unknown number of dock and wharf workers, mostly blacks, simply ceased to exist.

Aug. 13 With Hancock in command, three divisions of II Corps are loaded on transports and sailed down James River.

Aug. 14 The transports reverse course and ascend the James to Deep Bottom, where the troops disembark. X Corps, plus a division of cavalry, joins Hancock from the Bermuda Hundred lines. Initial attempts to probe the Confederate outer line along Bailey's Creek are stymied.

Aug. 15 Hancock redeploys X Corps from the left of II Corps to the right, and thereby loses a full day.

Aug. 16 At Fussell's Mill, at the right of the Federal line, Hancock achieves a breakthrough when two Rebel brigades are routed, but the breach is sealed and the Rebel lines hold.

Aug. 18 Lee attempts to mount an attack on Hancock's position along Deep Bottom but the effort is poorly organized and fails.

Warren, with V Corps, sets out for Globe Tavern on the Weldon Railroad, which he reaches at mid-morning. One division works at destroying the track while two divisions tentatively advance north toward Petersburg. At about 3 p.m., Heth attacks the Federal advance and drives it back somewhat before being stopped himself.

Aug. 19 Late in the afternoon, A.P. Hill attacks Warren again. A gap in the Federal lines is found and exploited, with the result that one division is routed and driven back with heavy loss in prisoners. V Corps re-forms near Globe Tavern and maintains its hold on the railroad.

Aug. 20 Hancock withdraws back to the Petersburg lines from Deep Bottom. The Federal lines at Globe Tavern are re-arranged, and connected to the main Federal works east of Petersburg.

Aug. 21 Hill attacks Warren yet again, but makes no headway at all, and suffers heavy losses.

Aug. 23 Meade orders Hancock to proceed to the Weldon Railroad to continue the task of destroying track and facilities.

Aug. 24 Hancock, accompanied by Gregg's Cavalry Division, reaches Ream's Station, having destroyed about eight miles of track during the day.

Aug. 25 After a day of skirmishing, Hancock is attacked by three divisions under A.P. Hill and Wade Hampton, and is badly defeated. The Federals are forced back to their lines, having suffered about 2,400 casualties against 700 for the Rebels.

Sept. 14 Hampton captures a herd of about 3,000 beef cattle behind Federal lines and brings it safely within Confederate lines.

Sept. 28 During the night, 18,000 troops from XVIII and X Corps, accompanied by Kautz's cavalry division, begin crossing the James River at Deep Bottom to attack the Confederate lines at New Market Heights and Fort Harrison.

Sept. 29 Maj. Gen. E.O.C. Ord's column of XVIII Corps assaults and carries Fort Harrison on the Rebel main line defending Richmond, while Maj. Gen. David B. Birney's X Corps column carries New Market Heights on the outer line. Attempts to enlarge the Federal gains are repulsed with some loss, with Ord being wounded.

Kautz's Federal cavalry division ranges northwards east of Richmond, cautiously searching, without success, for an opening.

Sept. 30 Lee organizes an effort to dislodge the Federals from Fort Harrison but the attack fails with some loss.

On the Southside, four divisions from V Corps and IX Corps set out westward from Globe Tavern to strike the Confederate lines covering the Boydton Plank Road. At about 1:00 p.m., Griffin's division (I/V) carries the Rebel outer line at Poplar Spring Church, but this success is not followed up until 3:30 or so, when Maj. Gen. John G. Parke leads the two IX Corps divisions forward. Parke is attacked at 4:30 by Harry Heth and driven back with great loss.

Oct. 1 Heth tries another attack to dislodge the new Federal lines on the Southside but is repulsed.

Oct. 2 A further Federal effort to reach the Boydton Plank Road, spearheaded by Maj. Gen. Gershom Mott's division of II Corps, is unsuccessful.

Oct. 7 Lee mounts one more effort north of the James, trying to eliminate the Federal lodgment at Fort

Harrison, but the attack is repulsed. Among the fatalities is Brig. Gen. John Gregg, commander of the Texas Brigade.

Oct. 13 Lt. Gen. James Longstreet returns to duty with the First Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Oct. 27 Hancock leads II Corps, supported by elements of IX Corps and V Corps -- nearly 43,000 of the 57,000 Federal troops in the Petersburg lines -- in an attempt to break the Confederate right flank along Hatcher's Run. The effort fails, and the troops return to their lines after suffering about 1,800 casualties.

North of the James, Godfrey Weitzel leads elements of the Army of the James in an effort to against the Confederate lines along the Williamsburg Road, but is repulsed easily after dawdling for two hours in front of the Rebel positions.

Nov. 26 Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock relinquishes command of II Corps to Maj. Gen. A.A. Humphreys, who had been serving as Meade's chief of staff, and goes on an extended leave of absence.

Dec. 6 VI Corps returns to the Petersburg lines from the Shenandoah Valley.

Dec. 7 Warren, leading elements of V Corps, begins a raid south along the Weldon Railroad.

Dec. 8 Warren reaches Jarrett's Station and begins the task of breaking up the railroad and supporting facilities there.

Dec. 9 Warren reaches the Meherrin River, finds his way blocked by Wade Hampton's cavalry, and decides to retire back to Petersburg.

Dec. 12 Warren reaches the safety of the Federal lines at Petersburg.

Jan. 4 Grant relieves Butler from command of the Army of the James, and replaces him with Ord.

Feb. 3 Hampton Roads Peace Conference between Lincoln and Seward, and C.S. Vice President Alexander Stephens, Sen. R.M.T. Hunter, and Assistant Secretary of War J.A. Campbell.

Feb. 5 Gregg's cavalry division raids the lower reaches of the Boydton Plank Road, destroying about 25 wagons and capturing a handful of prisoners. In support of this operation, II Corps and V Corps take up positions along Hatcher's Run and Gravelly Run. A spirited late afternoon Confederate attack on II Corps is beaten off.

Feb. 6 Federal probes make contact with Confederate forces along Hatcher's Run and near Dabney's Mill. The initial skirmish fight becomes a serious see-saw battle, which finally ends with the Federals slightly driven back but holding their lines. Confederate General John Pegram, recently married, is among the killed.

Feb. 7 The Federal expedition returns to their main lines.

March 24 Abraham Lincoln arrives at City Point for an extended visit with General Grant.

March 25 Lee sends Maj. Gen. John Brown Gordon, with almost half the available Confederate troops, to attack Grant's Petersburg lines at Fort Stedman. Although initially successful, the attack stalls in the face of Federal resistance and by late morning Gordon has been defeated, with a loss of about 4,000 men. In response to this attack, Grant orders his troops to probe for weak spots, as a result of which VI Corps is able to seize and hold the advance Confederate picket line in front of the Boydton Plank Road. Phil Sheridan and two cavalry divisions return to the Petersburg front from the Shenandoah Valley.

March 29 The final Federal offensive begins. Sheridan's Cavalry, supported by Warren's V Corps and Humphreys's II Corps, swings wide to the left to turn the entire Confederate position at Petersburg. In response to the Federal move, Lee sends Pickett's Division and Fitz Lee with three cavalry divisions, to protect his right flank.

Battle of Lewis Farm. Warren's V Corps, driving north along the Quaker Road to take up a position between II Corps and Sheridan's cavalry, is attacked by elements of Anderson's command, but is able to drive forward and take up a position threatening Lee's line along White Oak Road.

March 30 Heavy rains halt the Federal advance.

March 31 Battle of White Oak Road. Warren, in the process of advancing towards Lee's lines covering this vital east-west artery, is attacked in flank and driven back in some confusion. However, a counterattack by Griffin's division (1/V), led by Chamberlain's brigade, and supported on the right by elements of II Corps under Miles, recovers the lost ground and turns the right of the White Oak Road line, cutting Lee off from his forces under Pickett and Fitz Lee.

Battle of Dinwiddie Court House. Pickett and Fitz Lee attack Sheridan's scattered cavalry force and drive it back to Dinwiddie Court House, where the Federals hold at the end of the day.

April 1 Battle of Five Forks. After withdrawing from Sheridan's front during the night, and establishing a defensive position along the White Oak Road covering Five Forks, Pickett's force is attacked by V Corps and Sheridan's cavalry and completely routed. Sheridan relieves Warren of his command of V Corps for allegedly being dilatory in his efforts during the day.

April 2 At about 4:30 a.m., IX Corps, under Parke, assaults the Confederate lines near Fort Mahone. After a six hour see-saw fight, the Federals have established a lodgment, but are unable to enlarge it. At 4:40 a.m., VI Corps, under Wright, attacks the Confederate main line covering the Boydton Plank Road, and quickly achieves a major breakthrough. A.P. Hill is killed, and the entire Rebel line southwest of Petersburg is rendered untenable.

At 9 a.m., II Corps, under Humphreys, successfully advances against the Confederate line along Hatcher's Run. One division (under Miles) is detailed to pursue the remnants of the Confederate defenders (under Heth), while the rest of the troops close in on Petersburg from the west.

At about 4:00 p.m., Miles defeats Heth's remnants (under John R. Cooke) at Sutherland Station on the Southside Railroad, driving the Confederates westward, away from Lee's main body.

Starting at about 1 p.m., elements of Harris's Mississippi brigade desperately defend Forts Gregg and Whitworth, two detached batteries covering the western approaches to Petersburg. This valiant effort gains enough time for Lee to form a line and stave off total disaster.

At nightfall Lee issues orders for the evacuation of Petersburg and Richmond. The siege is over; the pursuit has begun.