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## Ten Miles from Richmond

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# Ten Miles from Richmond

**Abstract**

At the tiny crossroads town of Cold Harbor, Ulysses S. Grant hoped to crush Robert E. Lee's army and hasten the war's end. What happened instead would become one of his greatest regrets.

**Keywords**

Civil War, Cold Harbor, Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, Richmond, Virginia, Union, Confederacy

**Disciplines**

History | Military History | United States History

**Comments**

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## Ten Miles from Richmond

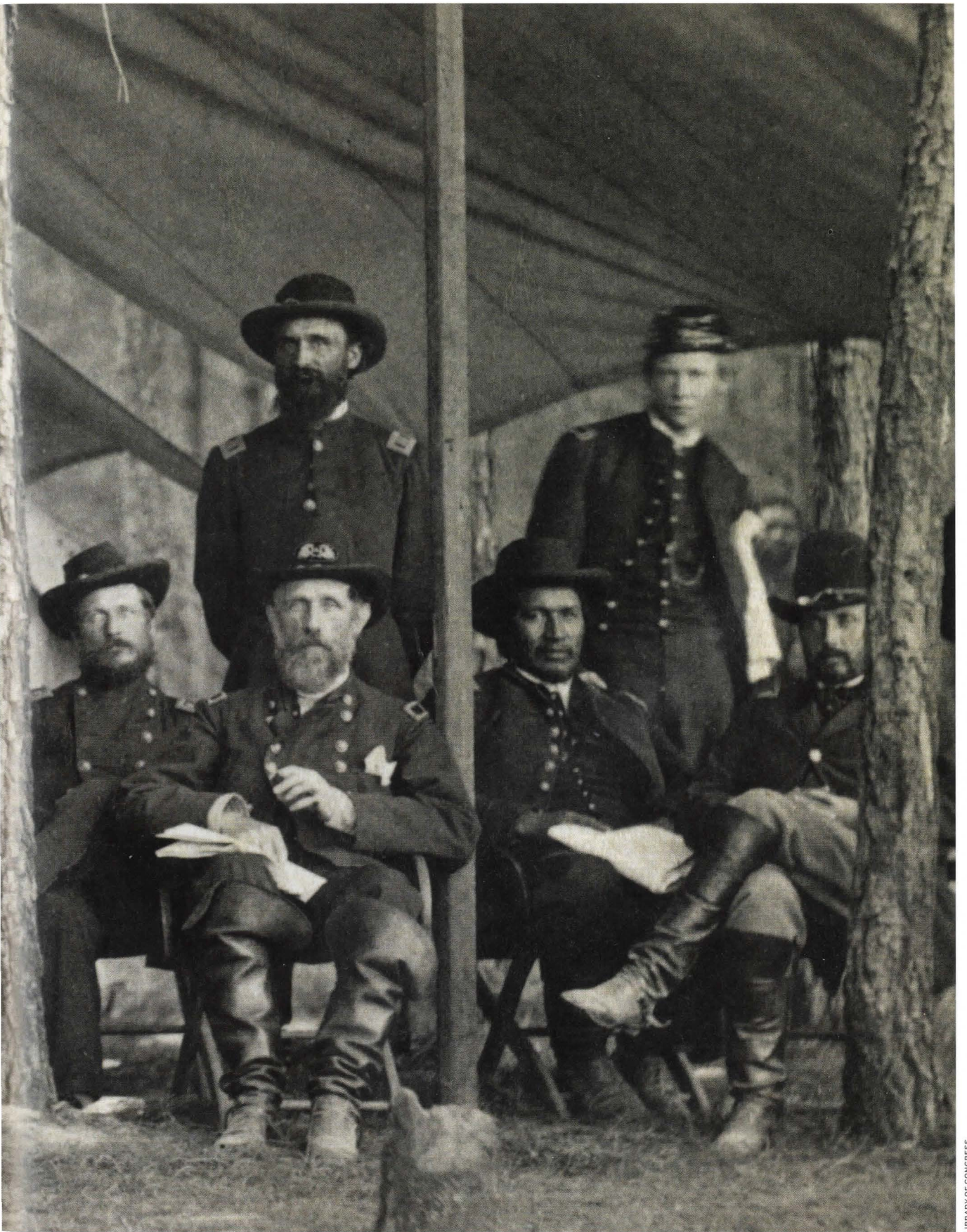
AT THE TINY CROSSROADS TOWN OF COLD HARBOR, ULYSSES S. GRANT HOPED TO CRUSH ROBERT E. LEE'S ARMY AND HASTEN THE WAR'S END. WHAT HAPPENED INSTEAD WOULD BECOME ONE OF HIS GREATEST REGRETS.

By Allen C. Guelzo



Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant (seated fourth from left) and staff pose in front of his headquarters tent at Cold Harbor, Virginia, in June 1864.





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## By late May 1864, the Army of the Potomac resembled a wagon with the wheels coming off.

Since May 4, when the army had crossed the Rapidan River and begun what would become known as the Overland Campaign, it had faced an incessant strain of day-after-day combat—in the Wilderness, at Spotsylvania Court House, at the North Anna River, and in a dozen smaller brushfires in between. The relentless pace had brought the Army of the Potomac to what its commanding general, Major General George Gordon Meade, believed was the end of its tether. “I don’t believe the military history of the world can offer a parallel to the protracted and severe fighting which this army has sustained for the last thirty days,” Meade complained, and he feared that “with all this severe fighting ... the physical powers of the men would be exhausted.” But Meade had little choice but to slog onward. Although he was still, by title, in charge of the army, he was taking direction from Lieutenant General Ulysses Simpson Grant, the overall general of all Union armies, and Grant was determined “to fight it out on this line,” from the Rapidan to the Confederate capital of Richmond, “if it takes all summer.”<sup>1</sup>

So far, it looked like it would take far beyond summer. Over the course of May’s campaigning, the Army of the Potomac had lost a stomach-sinking total of 40,000 men out of action. And it would soon lose more without firing a shot, as 34 of the army’s three-year regiments were due to see their enlistments expire in June. Historian John Codman Ropes estimated that “exclusive of worthless bounty-jumpers and such trash,” Grant had “only about 65,000 veteran infantry in the three corps,” an advantage of less than 10,000 over his Confederate foe Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>2</sup> To make up the shortfall, Grant raided the District of Columbia’s garrison for another 33,000 men—although half of them were in huge heavy-artillery regiments and had never done anything more in the way of war than guard the intricate string of Washington’s fortifications and pose heroically for photographers.

On the other hand, the Army of Northern Virginia had also been severely ground down. James Longstreet, commander of the First Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia and Lee’s “old war-horse,” had been wounded by mistaken Confederate bullets in the Wilderness; Richard Ewell, another corps commander, had suffered a near-complete breakdown at Spotsylvania.<sup>3</sup> Lee found replacements—Richard Heron Anderson for Longstreet and Jubal Early for Ewell—but neither Anderson nor Early would ever shine as great subordinates. And, like Grant, Lee would fill the gaps in the ranks only by stripping elsewhere, including the Richmond defenses of Robert F. Hoke’s division and the Shenandoah Valley of John C. Breckinridge’s division, and recalling the division commanded by the unreliable George Pickett from semi-exile in North Carolina. Above all, Lee could not repair the damage a month’s savage fighting had done to the northern Virginia countryside,





which he would need to feed his army. “There are no crops worth speaking of,” reported one Yankee colonel. “The country is one vast graveyard—graves everywhere, marking the track of the army on the march and in battles.”<sup>4</sup>



**From a strictly military point of view**, Grant’s greatest frustration on this campaign had been geography. The rivers of northern Virginia—the Rapidan, North Anna, and Pamunkey—ran west-east, and Lee attempted to make the most of their obstacles. Bitter fighting had taken place along all these rivers in May, and even if Grant could get across the Pamunkey without another costly fight, he would face Totopotomy Creek and then the Chickahominy River.

But surprisingly, the movements across the Pamunkey and the Totopotomy proved the easiest of the entire campaign. On May 27, the Army of the Potomac crossed the Pamunkey with two divisions of Phil Sheridan’s cavalry and the VI Corps (under Horatio Wright) at Dabney’s Ferry.<sup>5</sup> Winfield Hancock’s II Corps followed the VI, while the army’s remaining two infantry corps, Gouverneur K. Warren’s V Corps and Ambrose Burnside’s IX Corps, crossed farther downstream at Newcastle Ferry. Grant also detached the XVIII Corps under William Farrar “Baldy” Smith from the stalled Union expedition on Bermuda Hundred, and brought them up to the York River, where they could disembark and extend the Union reach still farther, to the Totopotomy.

Lee’s response to this threat was curiously sluggish, and Grant took this as a sign that the long month of campaigning was finally wearing down the Army of Virginia. Despite the horrendous Union casualties, Grant convinced himself that “Lee’s army is really whipped.... I may be mistaken, but I feel that our success over Lee’s army is already assured.”<sup>6</sup> On May 30, Grant extended the first elements of the Army of the Potomac over the Totopotomy, beginning with Warren’s V Corps and a division of Sheridan’s cavalry, pushing all the way down to the crossroads of Old Cold Harbor, only a mile and a half above the Chickahominy and less than 10 miles from Richmond.

THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE odd name Cold Harbor has long been a puzzlement, since the village was neither a harbor nor, in the chalky-dry summer of 1864, anything like cold. But the name’s genealogy stretches back to Roman Britain, where a *col herbergh* was an unfortified guard post along the Roman-built roads. John Stow’s celebrated survey of the cities of London and Westminster names the Lord Mayor’s mansion as “Cold Harbour,” and it was not difficult for Shropshire antiquarian Charles Henry Hartshorne to find over 70 Cold Harbors in northern England alone in 1841.<sup>7</sup>

Whatever the romantic origins of its name, the Cold Harbor in the Army of the Potomac’s path consisted of little more than a tavern, a collection of buildings, and a crossroads. Seizing and holding the area would force Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia into a fast shuffle, giving Grant the opportunity to knock the Confederates apart with an attack. Grant could, in that case, “crush Lee’s army on the north side of the James, with the prospect in case of success of driving him into Richmond, capturing the city perhaps without a siege, and putting the Confederate government to flight.” Politics contributed another behind-the-scenes motive. The Republican National Convention was due to assemble in Baltimore on June 7 to renominate Abraham Lincoln for the presidency. If Grant could deliver a significant victory on the eve of the conven-



Union soldiers forage through a potato field along the banks of the Pamunkey as elements of the VI Corps cross the river on a pontoon bridge during the Army of the Potomac’s southward move in late May 1864.



tion, it would enhance Lincoln's nomination and silence Radical Republican dissidents, who were already assembling their own rival convention in Cleveland to nominate John C. Fremont.<sup>8</sup>

At first, this was exactly how the scene promised to play. Two Union cavalry divisions arrived at the Cold Harbor crossroads on May 31, clearing out a "slight force of [Confederate] cavalry." Alarmed, Lee at once tried to recover the crossroads by dispatching an entire division of Confederate cavalry under Fitzhugh Lee and diverting Robert Hoke's newly arrived infantry division; Richard Heron Anderson's corps would follow as fast as they could march. But neither Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry nor the first infantry brigades to get on the ground—Lawrence Keitt's South Carolina brigade and Thomas Lanier Clingman's North Carolinians—were able to dislodge Federal troopers armed with repeating carbines.<sup>9</sup>

Now began a race to get infantry to Cold Harbor, and Grant looked to be in the lead. Horatio Wright's VI Corps was already in motion after midnight on May 31, and William F. Smith's XVIII Corps had just debarked from its transports and moved down to the Totopotomy, with orders from Grant to push on to Cold Harbor. Sliding down behind them, the II Corps and V Corps would link up with the VI Corps and XVIII Corps and form a protective, west-facing shield a half-mile west of the Cold Harbor crossroads.

Wright and the advance guard of the VI Corps arrived at Cold Harbor on June 1 to the delirious cheers of the Yankee cavalry and a band "out on the skirmish line playing 'Hail Columbia.'" The problem was that this arrival did not occur until 9 a.m. Charles Dana, the assistant secretary of war, was traveling with the army, and coldly noted Wright's lack of energy. "Instead of having his advance there at 9 a. m.," Dana tattled furiously to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, "it was General Grant's and Meade's design that his whole corps should be on the ground at daylight, when a rapid attack in mass would certainly have routed the rebel forces." Worse still, it was not until noon that the bulk of the VI Corps was fully in place, "getting into line of battle and digging rifle pits all along the line" west of Cold Harbor. Baldy Smith and the XVIII Corps had been given wrong directions by a staff officer, and didn't appear until

**Delays in the attack of the Union VI and XVIII Corps on June 1 allowed Confederate troops at Cold Harbor to erect hasty, but effective, breastworks. BELOW: XVIII Corps commander William F. Smith (seated) and his staff in June 1864. ABOVE: Part of the Rebel defenses at Cold Harbor.**



"about 3 p.m., after a march of more than twenty-five miles."<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, Wright and Smith had pre-emptory orders from Meade to move to the attack. "General Wright is ordered to attack as soon as his troops are up," Meade wrote to Smith at noon, "and I desire you should co-operate with him and join in the attack." Just by the numbers, Wright and Smith should have been more than sufficient for the task; together, they could mass six divisions—between 25,000 and 30,000 men—and even though it took another three hours to get "into position a little to the west of the old tavern, at Cold Harbor Cross Roads," by 6 p.m., the two Federal corps "were formed in four lines of battle, by regiments," and ready to advance to the attack.<sup>11</sup>

But the delay gave the Confederates time to entrench, a recurring course of events on the campaign, and one that usually had fatal consequences for Federal attackers. Hoke's division, with its four brigades, had been joined by Breckinridge, and then by Joseph B. Kershaw's division (from Anderson's corps) and Harry Heth's division (from A.P. Hill's corps), and together they had dug themselves into defenses along a string of hills and ridges perpendicular to Cold Harbor Road, just west of the crossroads. The entrenchments were something less than a marvel of engineering. The terrain was cut sharply by ravines, gullies, and streams, and Thomas Clingman (whose North Carolina brigade held the first section of the line stretching northward from Cold Harbor Road) was bothered by a gap "of about seventy-five yards" made by a stream that ran between his left flank and the next Confederate brigade, William T. Wofford's, in Kershaw's division. There was at least enough time to create an abatis of cut pine trees, "interlocking with each other and barring all farther advance." That would have to do.<sup>12</sup>

Sometime before 6 p.m., with "the sun ... less than an hour high," both Wright's and Smith's corps "almost simultaneously" advanced "to the



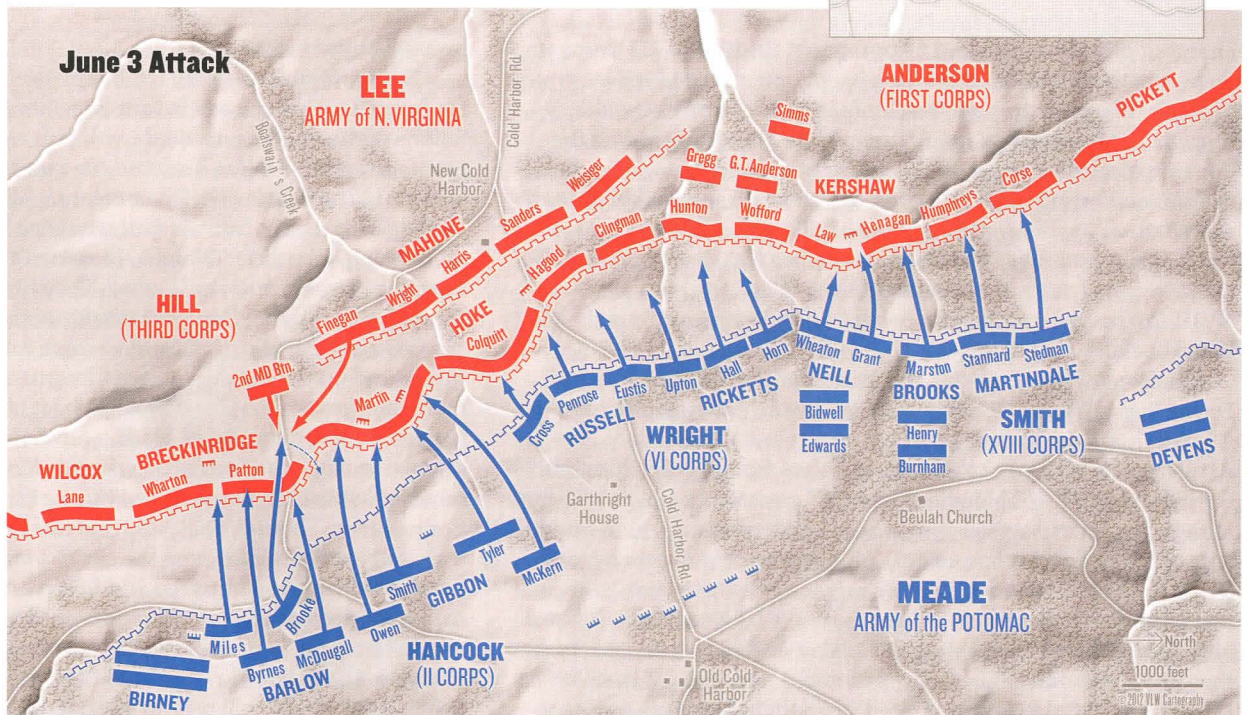
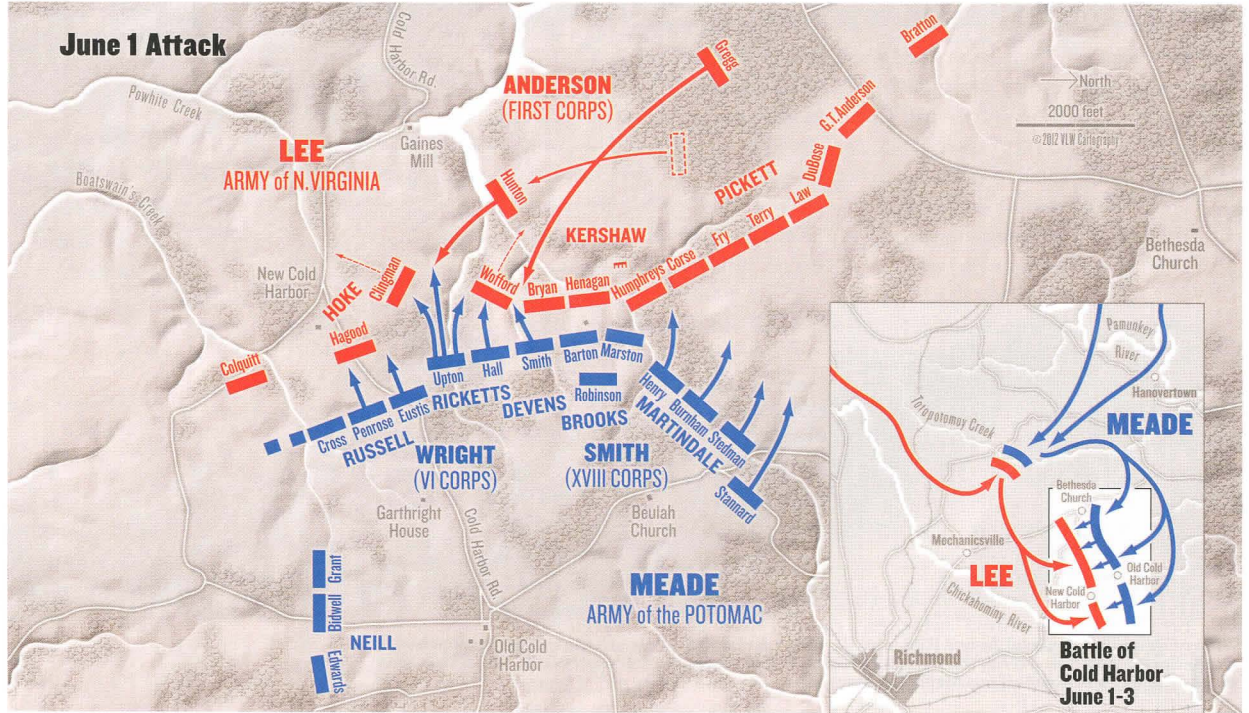
To view this article's reference notes, turn to our Notes section on page 78.



# THE BATTLE OF COLD HARBOR

COLD HARBOR, VIRGINIA | JUNE 1-3, 1864

Determined to defeat Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and take Richmond, Ulysses S. Grant advanced the Army of the Potomac southward in May 1864, looking for a fight. After clashing with Lee in a series of bloody but indecisive battles, including at the Wilderness and Spotsylvania Court House, Grant launched another attack at Cold Harbor, a tiny crossroads town less than 10 miles from the Confederate capital. On June 1, Union forces repeatedly assaulted Lee's outnumbered but well-entrenched Confederates, but to no avail. The same result awaited the Union troops who renewed the attack two days later. By the time Grant finally called a halt to the operations on June 3, over 13,000 of his men were dead, wounded, or missing. Grant would later admit he regretted the assault at Cold Harbor "more than any one I have ever ordered."







Men of Brigadier General James Ricketts' VI Corps division advance to assault an entrenched Confederate position during the fighting of June 1. The attack, which pierced the Rebel line, was one of the day's few successes for Union forces.

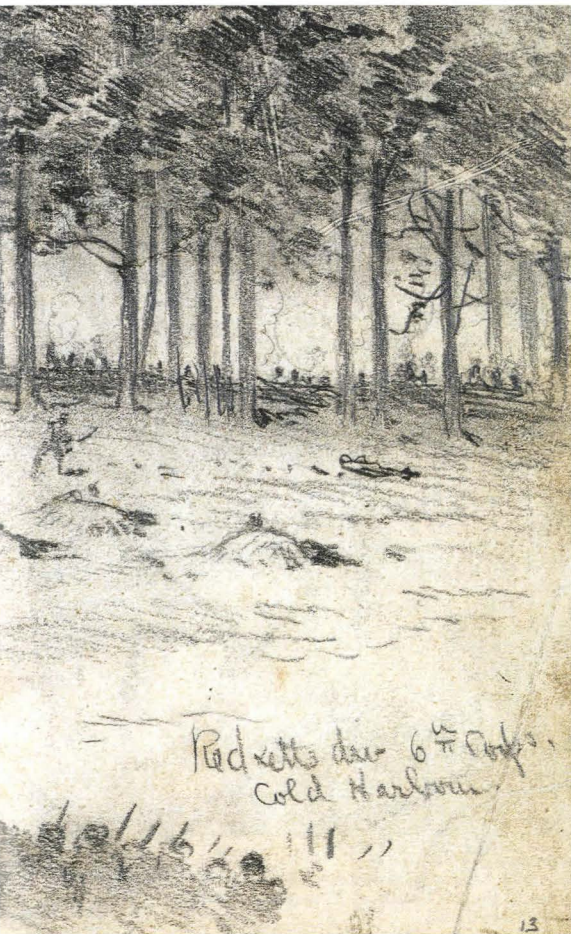
charge, a dash by more than 25,000 men." Smith's XVIII Corps went into the attack "in battalions in column closed in mass," trying to spear their way through the Confederate defenses. A soldier in the 25th Massachusetts Infantry saw that "they had entered the opening of a valley shaped like a horse-shoe, and that the land rose in front and on either flank, covered with wood and brush, so that" even in their hastily contrived "line of rifle-pits and a low breastwork of logs and rails," the Confederate fire was too heavy to stand. Once they had overrun the outer skirmish line, the men of the XVIII Corps "were at the mercy of a concealed enemy," and began to fall back."<sup>13</sup>

In front of the VI Corps, the going was even tougher. One of David Russell's brigades, commanded by the newly promoted Emory Upton, had been reinforced by the 2nd Connecticut Heavy Artillery, one of the units Grant had fished from the Washington fortifications. The unbloodied "heavies" counted an unwieldy 1,800 men in line (heavy artillery regiments had to maintain both an artillery and an infantry component), and they were more than twice as big as the entire rest of Upton's brigade (the 5th Maine, 95th and 96th Pennsylvania, and Upton's own 121st New York). In their unfaded uniforms, brass shoulder scales, and red-piped jackets, they endured endless jibes as "fresh duck" and "pets of the War Department." Cold Harbor offered them their first opportunity to

prove themselves.<sup>14</sup>

Emory Upton was only too happy to oblige. He formed up his brigade in four lines: three battalions of the 2nd Connecticut (with four companies in each battalion line) and the rest of the brigade in the fourth line. Their colonel, Elisha Kellogg, led from in front, wearing a straw hat and aiming directly at Thomas Clingman's North Carolina brigade, 400 yards away. They brushed through the outlying Confederate skirmish line, crossed an open field, then spilled down into a ravine and up the far side, where Clingman's main line was waiting for them. "A sheet of flame, sudden as lightning, red as blood, and so near it seemed to singe the men's faces, burst along the rebel breastworks," wrote the adjutant of the 2nd Connecticut, Thomas Vail. "The air was filled with sulphurous smoke, and the shrieks and howls of almost two hundred and fifty mangled men, rose above the yells of the triumphant rebels." In the rear rank of the Union attack, a soldier in the 121st New York could see the Connecticut "heavies" collapse "in all shapes. Some





Yet the June 1 attack was not entirely unsuccessful. Although Upton's brigade was stalled and pinned down, it did not retreat. And just as Thomas Clingman had feared, when James Ricketts' VI Corps division hit the gap between Clingman's line and Kershaw's division, one of Ricketts' brigades broke through, flinging William Wofford's Georgia brigade backward in panic. The brigade "carried the works in its front and captured several hundred prisoners, who were taken to the rear," then "notwithstanding the difficulties encountered in a dense thicket and swamp," they forced both Hoke's and Kershaw's divisions to abandon their entrenchments and pull back a quarter-mile to a new line.<sup>17</sup>

THE COMING OF DARKNESS gave Lee space to move more of Anderson's and A.P. Hill's brigades down to the hastily redrawn Cold Harbor defenses. He could be grateful that on June 2, the weather, which had been sand-dry through May, suddenly clouded over and brought on a "deluge of rain." Meade and Grant had seen just enough success so far that (as they had done at Spotsylvania) they decided to try another attack, this time adding Warren's V Corps and Hancock's II Corps to make the blow at Cold Harbor an overwhelming one. Grant's intention, Horace Porter recalled, "was to attack early in the morning ... push it vigorously, and if necessary pile in troops at the successful point from wherever they can be taken." But getting Hancock's corps to Cold Harbor proved no easier than getting Wright and the VI Corps there the day before. Hancock denounced it as "the most severe march of the campaign, marching ten and one-half hours until June 2." The head of the old Irish Brigade only "reached Cold Harbor at 6.30 a.m.," and even then was "in such an exhausted condition that a little time was required to allow the men to collect and to cook their rations." Reluctantly, Grant delayed any fresh attack until 4 p.m. Then down came the "tempest of wind and rain." Hancock "was so earnest in opposition to" the idea of an assault "that Meade countermanded the order," and set the attack back to 4:30 a.m. on June 3.<sup>18</sup>

would fall forward as if they had caught their feet and tripped and fell. Others would throw up their arms and fall backward. Others would stagger about a few paces before they dropped."<sup>15</sup>

Kellogg was still on his feet, and close enough that Clingman noticed him and locked eyes for a moment even as he gave the order to fire. Kellogg took off his hat to cheer his men on, but Clingman's fire "knocked down the front ranks of the column, while the oblique fire along the right and left cut down men rapidly all along the column towards the rear." Kellogg was shot in the arm, and struggled to give the order to about-face when he was hit in the head and fell dead "upon the interlocking pine boughs" of the abatis. The slaughter was so unnerving that Emory Upton, whose horse had been shot from under him, actually stopped the second battalion of the "heavies" from going in and ordered them to lie down, then recruited a squad of marksmen to join him in picking off Confederate heads above the breastworks in order to dampen the Rebels' enthusiasm for more firing.<sup>16</sup>

As Hancock and Warren arrived, Grant positioned Hancock's corps on the left of the VI Corps, below Cold Harbor Road; Lee promptly matched that by bringing up the balance of A.P. Hill's corps, along with Breckinridge's division. He lined them up opposite Hancock and set them to digging. All the Rebels needed was time, and Hancock's tardiness and the afternoon downpour granted it. "Both sides anticipated battle on the 3rd," wrote Confederate artilleryman Robert Stiles. But since the Confederates intended to fight this battle on the defensive, they "set to work to rectify the lines about this point." One of Anderson's brigadiers, Evander McIvor Law, actually "laid off the new line with his own hand and superintended the construction of it during the night of the 2d."<sup>19</sup>

The rest of the Army of the Potomac knew how to read these signs. As Horace Porter wandered along the lines, observing the "preparations for the next morning's assault, I noticed that many of the soldiers had taken off their coats and seemed to be engaged in sewing up rents in them." At first, he thought this was a charming but puzzling effort to look one's best in a fight. "But upon closer examination it was found that the men were calmly writing their names and address on slips of paper, and pinning them on the backs of their coats, so that their dead bodies might be recognized upon the field, and their fate made known to their families at home. They were veterans who knew well from terrible experience the danger which awaited them...."<sup>20</sup>





While showing initial promise in places, the attack by the Army of the Potomac's II Corps on June 3 ended in disappointment. **ABOVE:** II Corps commander Winfield Scott Hancock (seated) is shown with his division commanders (from left to right): Francis Barlow, David Birney, and John Gibbon. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Men of the 7th New York Heavy Artillery break through the Confederate lines on June 3 before being pushed back by a counterattack.

**At 4:30 the next morning**, a single signal shot was fired from the 10th Massachusetts battery. The first light was “cloudy and foggy,” and the rain was “still pattering in fitful showers.” In the “blinding mist,” Union officers could barely discern on the south side of the road an “intrenched line of the enemy ... on a low hill that was quite long, ending ... on the Chickahominy swamps, making it quite impossible to turn the position without crossing the river.” Against this ground, Grant proposed to throw all three divisions of Hancock’s II Corps, storming against the Confederate entrenchments south of Cold Harbor Road; north of it, Wright and Baldy Smith would renew the attacks the VI and XVIII Corps had made two days before. “The tactical movement was very simple,” wrote Charles Porter of the 39th Massachusetts. “Each corps commander was to form his corps as he might determine, a grand rush was to be made, and great were the hopes that success would crown our arms.”<sup>21</sup>

Hancock formed his corps with the divisions of Francis Barlow and John Gibbon in front, and David Birney’s division in reserve, ready to exploit any opening. Barlow, in turn, formed his four brigades into two waves, and as the Federal artillery erupted with a barrage “heavy and incessant” enough to awaken Richmonders “from their slumbers,” his two lead brigades sprang forward, headed for the trenches held by John Breckinridge’s small division. Double-quicking, and “without firing a shot,” Barlow’s men overran the Confederate picket line, crossed over a sunken road at the

base of the long hill occupied by the Rebels, “and swept into the enemy’s lines, capturing prisoners and three pieces of artillery.” There were no “artificial obstructions, such as abatis or ‘slashings,’ to detain an assaulting column,” and the 7th New York Heavy Artillery, in John Brooke’s brigade, snatched the regimental flag of Breckinridge’s 26th Virginia Battalion.<sup>22</sup>

But the going was less easy farther northward. In John Gibbon’s division, the 155th New York made a rapid advance to “within 50 yards of the enemy’s works.” But the hill was steeper here, and the “sunken road” in the ravine deeper, and in the face of “the heavy fire from the enemy’s breastworks, it was impossible for the regiment to gain the works.” After 30 minutes of pointless punishment, the New Yorkers began inching backward, until, “at about 150 yards from the enemy’s line the regiment halted and established a new line ... by using fence rails and throwing up earth with bayonets and tin cups.” Soon enough, even Barlow’s headlong attack lost its momentum. The 116th Pennsylvania “succeeded in gaining the main works of the enemy ... but they were soon forced out by the heavily reinforced Con-





federates.” They “fell back ... about seventy-five yards from the enemy’s line and quickly covered themselves with rifle pits or took advantage of such shelter as the broken ground afforded.”<sup>23</sup> Eventually, Barlow’s men, too, began to wilt under Confederate counterattacks, clambering out of “the captured works” and fleeing “wildly for the protection of ... the Union guns.” In all, “twenty minutes had not passed since the infantry had sprung to their feet,” and now the “dazed and utterly discouraged” survivors “drifted off ... and found their regiments, but some of them drifted to the rear and to coffee pots.”<sup>24</sup>

Still, the failure of Hancock’s attack was less dismal than the result that awaited Wright and Smith on the north side of Cold Harbor Road. “About sunrise here they came,” wrote William McClendon of the 15th Alabama, “charging through the pine thicket, huzzaing as they came, expecting to run over and capture all that were in the breast-works.” Smith’s XVIII Corps jumped to their attack in close column, “ten lines deep, with arms at a trail,” and so closely packed that “it was hardly possible for a ball to pass through without hitting some one.... I never in all the bloody conflicts that I have been in saw such destruction of human lives. They literally piled on top of one another, often the dead would hold down the wounded and vice versa.” Griffin Stedman’s brigade was stacked in column of regiments, with the 12th New Hampshire first, then the 11th Connecticut, 8th Maine, and 2nd New Hampshire. The 12th took the brunt of the fire, the men (according to Sergeant John L. Piper) bending over “as they pushed forward, as if trying ... to breast a tempest, and the files of men went down like rows of blocks or bricks pushed over by striking against one another.” Another sergeant, Jacob Tuttle, saw so many of his men drop to the ground at once that he thought he had missed an order to lie down. He was wrong. Most of his company had been killed outright, and he “dropped ... among the dead, and did not discover my mistake until my living comrades had advanced some distance beyond me.”<sup>25</sup>

The Confederates who opposed them could

scarcely believe the easy targets the Yankee attackers offered. “The excitement ran so high ... that the surgeon of the regiment quit his litter corps and was in the line firing before I discovered him,” marveled one Confederate, while “the officers, with hats in hands, went up and down the line, feeling so much elated that they would strike the men over the heads and faces and shout with all the joy ever expressed at a camp-meeting by a new convert.” The Alabama brigadier, McIvor Law, “found the men in fine spirits, laughing and talking as they fired.... I had seen nothing to exceed this. It was not war; it was murder.” Or even worse, massacre. William Oates, commanding the 15th Alabama in Law’s brigade, saw the 25th Massachusetts barreling toward him “in a column by divisions, thus presenting a front of two companies only.” The Alabamians opened up “the most destructive fire I ever saw.... I could see the dust fog out of a man’s clothing in two or three places at once where as many balls would strike him at the same moment. In two minutes not a man of them was standing.”<sup>26</sup>

At some point, the havoc ceased to make sense even to the Confederates who were wreaking it. In front of Law’s Alabama brigade, a Union regiment had been “so roughly handled” that most of its survivors had fallen back without orders—except their color sergeant who, oblivious of his abandonment, “steadily advanced, solitary and alone, proudly bearing his flag.” Not even Law’s hard-nosed veterans could stand shooting the man, and instead began waving their arms and yelling, “Go back! Go back! We’ll kill you!” When his peril finally dawned on him, the Yankee sergeant stopped, lifted his flag from its socket, and looked anxiously and deliberately “first to the right rear, and then his left rear.” Then “with the same moderation gathered in the flag, right-shoulder-shifted his charge, came to and about-faced as deliberately, and walked back amid the cheers of Law’s men.”<sup>27</sup>

The mood was less generous among the battered survivors of the VI and XVIII Corps. Orders “to renew the attack without reference to the troops on the right or left” were issued, conveyed, and passed down “through the wonted channels; but no man stirred, and the immobile lines pronounced a verdict, silent yet emphatic, against further slaughter.” In Stedman’s brigade, one captain “stood up before his superiors in rank” and “declared with an oath that he would not take his regiment into another such charge, if Jesus Christ himself should order it.” Baldy Smith was more succinct: “I received a verbal order from General Meade to make another assault, and that order I refused to obey.”<sup>28</sup>



**The attacks on the morning of** June 3 lasted barely an hour. All operations had practically halted by 11 a.m., and at 12:30 p.m., Grant advised Meade that “The opinion of the corps commanders not being sanguine of success in case an assault is ordered, you may direct a suspension of farther advanced for the present.” There was desultory fighting farther northward at Bethesda Church, and in the evening, A.P. Hill’s Confederates attempted a short-lived counterattack below Cold Harbor Road to clear what small advances the Yankees had made there in the morning. But Federal artillery vengefully “opened with shell, case, and solid shot,” leaving “the rebel line back broken and shattered” and “leaving their dead and part of their wounded on the field.”<sup>29</sup>

This was small consolation to Grant, who had hoped to deliver a fatal military blow to the Army of Northern Vir-

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## DISUNION

CONTINUED FROM P. 23

the very nature of freedom was being questioned and the bonds of restricted servitude were being broken, and when the unfulfilled promise that “all men are created equal” was tentatively held out to an expectant generation of American women who, almost 20 years earlier at Seneca Falls, had

## CASUALTIES OF WAR

CONTINUED FROM P. 27

trophies of a very small victory culled from a much larger, bloodier defeat.<sup>3</sup>

Since the turn of the 20th century, multiple renditions of this story have been circulated, each with a varying explanation as to who exactly killed Skaggs and, perhaps more interestingly, who began the process of mutilation. Regardless of storyteller, though, one element remained constant: The tactics of terror so gleefully employed by Larkin Skaggs were turned on him wholesale. By the afternoon of August 21, 1863, the morning’s most exultant hunter had become the hunted. The town’s own carnival of the grotesque had become a macabre kind of therapy. And therein the cogs of irregular violence turned along the Missouri-Kansas border. Death spawned grief; grief necessitated vengeance; and so, as Larkin Skaggs discovered too late, the cycle of violence kept rolling on. **M**

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inscribed their gender onto Thomas Jefferson’s ringing prose.

It would be many years before their sisters-in-arms would reap the benefit of their fledgling feminist agitation—in a world where the word “feminist” did not even exist. Like many pioneers, they sowed the seeds that they would not live to see burst into flower. **M**

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## BATTLEFIELD ECHOES

CONTINUED FROM P. 29

Creek, and several other battles during the Civil War, proved is that when soldiers are more interested in the spoils of war than the fate of the enemy, good tactical judgment and discipline can easily disappear. **M**

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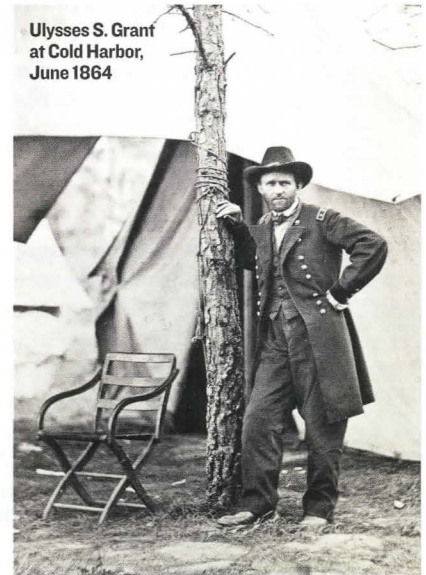
## TEN MILES FROM RICHMOND

CONTINUED FROM P. 53

ginia. With the Republican convention so near at hand, he was unusually terse in the notification he sent to Washington before the end of the day on June 3. “We assaulted at 4.30 a.m. this morning, driving the enemy within his intrenchments at all points.... Our loss was not severe.” Suspiciously, Grant refused to ask for the customary post-battle truce to recover the wounded trapped between the armies. Tradition dictated that the *loser* ask for the truce, but Grant was unwilling to make such an admission until 5:30 p.m. on June 7, by which time the Republican convention was already in full swing.<sup>30</sup>

To his staff, however, Grant freely admitted that he had made a hideous

Ulysses S. Grant  
at Cold Harbor,  
June 1864



mistake. “I regret this assault more than any one I have ever ordered ... as it has proved, no advantages have been gained sufficient to justify the heavy losses suffered.” He would eventually have to report—as an aggregate of all the casualties from the cavalry fight at the crossroads, the infantry attacks on June 1 and 3, and the skirmishing that followed for the next week—a depressing total of 13,153 killed, wounded, or missing from the Army of the Potomac. Only a third of these actually took place on the fatal morning of June 3. But eventually the futile assaults that morning came to stand for the cluster of battles around Cold Harbor, and the staggering total of over 13,000 fixed itself in the public mind for June 3 alone.<sup>31</sup>

Cold Harbor would cling to Grant like mud, sealing his image as an unfeeling butcher whose primary strategic metaphor was a meat grinder. For the Army of the Potomac, Cold Harbor would remain a monument to chances lost instead of seized. “It is very interesting to revisit the battlefields of the war, but I never heard any one who was engaged there express a wish to see Cold Harbor again,” wrote a former VI Corps staffer after the war. “It remains in memory the Golgotha of American history.”<sup>32</sup> **M**

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