April 1865 – The Month that Saved America

Part I – Richmond Falls – April 1-7, 1865

It is the last days of the Confederacy as Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia tries desperately to link up with Johnston’s Army. Lee abandons Petersburg and Richmond falls. Grant’s Union forces are in hot pursuit as he tries to cut off the retreat.
These lectures describe the events in the American Civil War.

Some of the material presented may be upsetting and students are cautioned to be aware of this.

Racial descriptions and references to races from letters, field reports and other material from the time period may also be objectionable.

Such material is intended for educational purposes and does in no way reflect the author’s or college’s beliefs and attitudes.

Comments about political parties and figures are intended for educational purposes and are used to contrast the difference between these parties today and their philosophies during and the time of the American Civil War.

The instructor may recommend resources that provide additional content, these recommendations are intended as suggestions and students should use their own discretion in visiting websites, reading blogs, and/or obtaining books or magazines.

The author tries to maintain a balanced perspective relative to Southern and Northern attitudes.

– Allen Mesch
Instructor – Allen Mesch

- Over 40 years in the oil & gas industry
- Adjunct business professor at UTD, TWU & SMU
- Visited over 100 Civil War sites
- Taken over 4,000 pictures
- Created Civil War Journeys web site and blog Salient Points
- Author of Teacher of Civil War Generals: Major General Charles Ferguson Smith, Soldier and West Point Commandant
- Book reviewer for The Civil War Courier
- Married, 2 children & 6 grandkids
- Author of political thriller, The Analyst

Prior SAIL Civil War classes
- The Civil War
- Voices of the Civil War
- Civil War Photography
- From West Point to Fort Sumter
- Civil War Turning Points
- From Springfield to Fort Sumter
- The Armies Clash – First Bull Run and Wilson’s Creek
- Stonewall Jackson’s Valley Campaign
- Union Leadership Crisis in the East
- Gettysburg: Three Days of Glory
- The Teacher – The Life of Major General Charles F. Smith
Its Last Great Stand

- **November 1864** – Lincoln wins reelection
  - “Thank God it is thus for it is the salvation of the Country”
  - “... a people’s government can sustain a national election, in the midst of a great civil war.”
- **November 1864** – Sherman begins “March to the Sea”
  - “I can make the march, and make Georgia howl.”
  - Atlanta is left a smoldering disaster with “blackened ruins and lonesome chimneys”
- **November 1864** – Hood’s Army of Tennessee is destroyed
  - At Franklin – “Five times the rebel columns charged that little army ... five times they went back shattered and broken.”
  - “The death-angel was there to gather its last harvest”
- **December 1864** – Sherman cuts a swath across Georgia
  - “I know what hole he went in at, but I can’t tell what hole he will come out of”
  - “Everything on foot and wing, all the things of the earth and air were contraband.”
Disasters Have Come Thick and Fast

- **December 1864** – Savannah captured, Hood defeated, and Wilmington closed
  - “I beg to present to you, as a Christmas gift, the city of Savannah…”
  - “Hood’s whole army was crushed, “broken and scattered,” and “in full retreat.”
  - “The last breathing-hole of the rebellion” was closed.

- **January 1865** – House passes Thirteenth Amendment ending slavery
  - “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude ... shall exist in the United States…”
  - “this great moral victory” and “a King’s cure for all the evils.”

- **February 1865** – No agreement at Hampton Roads
  - “No hope --- no good. Who dares hope?”
  - “We have been able to submit our opinions and views directly to prominent insurgents, and to hear them in answer in a courteous and not unfriendly manner.”
**With Malice Toward None**

- **February 1865** – Sherman burns Columbia, SC
  - “... solid masses of fire as far as the eye could reach...”
  - “... in position to catch Lee between [their] two thumbs.”
  - Our world “has gone to destruction.”

- **March 1865** – Lincoln presents inaugural address
  - “... I may better finish a difficult work.”
  - “With Malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right... let us strive to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; ... to all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace...”

- **March 1865** – Lincoln visits Grant at City Point
  - “I was afraid ... that I would awake from my sleep to hear that Lee had gone...”
  - “I mean to end this business here.”
“Atlanta had been overwhelmed. Columbia had been surrendered --- and burned. Charleston had been abandoned. The peace conference at Hampton Roads had been fruitless. And the British and French had refused to intervene. The Army of Northern Virginia, after striking its own harsh blows against the Union in the six bloodiest weeks of the war, from the Wilderness to Cold Harbor, had wriggled free of the enemy’s clutches and fallen back, converging in a defensive position around Petersburg and Richmond.” ---Jay Winik April 1865
Dilemma – South Considers Arming Slaves

- “Freedom is not possible without slavery” and “we are either slaves in the Union or freemen out of it.”
- “Free our Negroes and put them in the army.” – M. Chestnut Dec 1861
- “As between the loss of independence and the loss of slavery, we assume that every patriot will freely give up the latter --- give up the Negro slave rather than be a slave himself.” – P. Cleburne
- “If slaves will make good soldiers our whole theory of slavery is wrong.” – H. Cobb
- In spite of petitions, Davis orders the idea scrapped.
- “This measure was not only expedient but necessary.” – R. Lee
- On March 13, the Confederate Congress passed a measure to enlist black soldiers.
Time was Running Short

- Lee approves attack on weak spot in the Union line at Petersburg.
- Gordon leads the attack and Fort Stedman was taken.
- Confederate forces occupied nearly a mile of Yankee trench systems.
- Union counterattack drives Confederates back with a loss of 4,800 men.
- “I fear now it will be impossible to prevent a juncture between Grant and Sherman.” – R. Lee
The Appomattox Campaign

- Union forces under **Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant** had besieged **Lee's** army around the city of Petersburg, Virginia, since June 1864.
- The two armies spent the winter in an elaborate series of trenches, stretching almost 35 miles.
- During the winter **Grant** moved to the west and the Confederates were forced to extend their lines.
- The Confederate lines were stretched too thin and there were only 1,000 men per mile.
- **Lee** knew that his army could not survive a siege indefinitely and looked for ways to escape his predicament as spring arrived.
- The Appomattox Campaign consists of two parts:
  - **The Capture of Petersburg and Evacuation of Richmond (March 31-April 2)** - Lewis's Farm, White Oak Road, Dinwiddie Court House, Five Forks, Petersburg, and Sutherland's Station.
  - **Lee’s Retreat (April 3- April 9)** - Namozine Church, Amelia Springs, Sayler's Creek, Rice's Station, Cumberland Church, High Bridge, Appomattox Station, and Appomattox Court House
Lewis’ Farm & White Oak Road

Lewis’ Farm – March 29
- **Philip Sheridan** led the Union cavalry followed by the V Corps under **G. K. Warren** toward Dinwiddie Court House to try turn the right flank of **Lee’s** Petersburg defenses.
- The Union V Corps crossed Rowanty Creek, moved up the Quaker Road toward the Boydton Plank Road intersection, and forced **Bushrod Johnson’s** Confederate brigades back to their entrenchments on the White Oak Road.

White Oak Road – March 31
- On March 30, **Lee** sent reinforcements to meet the Federal movement to turn his right flank, placing **W. H. Fitzhugh Lee’s** cavalry divisions at Five Forks and transferring **George Pickett’s** division from the Bermuda Hundred front to the right.
- On March 31, **Warren** directed his corps against the Confederate entrenchments along White Oak Road, hoping to cut **Lee’s** communications with **Pickett** at Five Forks.
- A counterattack by **Johnson** stalled the Union advance but **Warren’s** soldiers reached the road.
On March 31, W. H. Fitzhugh Lee’s cavalry and Pickett’s infantry division met the Union vanguard north and northwest of Dinwiddie Court House and drove it back, temporarily stalling Sheridan’s movement.

With Union infantry approaching from the east, Pickett withdrew before daybreak to entrench at the vital road junction at Five Forks.

Lee ordered Pickett to hold this intersection “at all hazards.”
Five Forks - April 1, 1865

- **Lee** ordered Pickett to “Hold Five Forks at all hazards” and “prevent Union forces from striking the Southside Railroad.”

- On April 1, while Sheridan’s cavalry pinned the Confederate force in position, the **G. K. Warren’s** V Corps attacked and overwhelmed the Confederate left flank.

- **Sheridan** personally directed the attack, which stretched **Lee’s** Petersburg lines to the breaking point.

- The loss of Five Forks threatened **Lee’s** last supply line, the Southside Railroad.

- The next morning, **Lee** informed Jefferson Davis that Petersburg and Richmond must be evacuated.
Richmond and Petersburg Abandoned

- After the Confederate defeat at the Battle of Five Forks, Lee informed Jefferson Davis that Richmond and Petersburg could no longer be defended.
- Lee’s plans to move his army west along the Appomattox River, re-supply the troops and move south to unite with Joseph Johnston’s army in North Carolina.
- Grant senses the end is near and plans to pursue Lee’s forces and destroy them before they can join with Johnston.
With Confederate defeat at Five Forks on April 1, Grant and Meade ordered a general assault against the Petersburg lines by II, IX, VI and XXIV Corps on April 2.

A heroic defense of Fort Gregg by a handful of Confederates prevented the Federals from entering the city that night.

Lt. Gen. A. P. Hill was killed trying to reach his troops in the confusion.

After dark, Lee ordered the evacuation of Petersburg and Richmond.
Communion Sunday - April 2, 1865

- “I advise that all preparations be made for leaving Richmond tonight.” – R. Lee
- An official evacuation announcement was finally made around 4 p.m. and at that point “any remaining veneer of calm broke.”
- At 11 p.m. Davis left Richmond for the new Confederate capital at Danville.
- After midnight, the militia starts to destroy weaponry and commodities and get rid of all the liquor.
- Thousands of gallons of whiskey are poured into the gutters and mob rule takes over.
The Devil was Loosed

- The fires spread fueled by the burning whiskey and drunken crowds.
- Munitions at the National Arsenal began to explode bombarding the city with a 100,000 shell attack that lasted four hours.
- Some twenty blocks of Richmond lay in waste, “a smoking, simmering ruin, forever thence to be known as ‘the burnt district.’”
- By the end of April 3, 900 homes and businesses were destroyed and fifty-four city blocks were gone.

“The sun rose, and the city’s vistas were chilling. The fires still burned. Everywhere were broken houses, charred buildings, and dead animals.” – J. Winik – April 1865
Lincoln Visits Richmond

- On April 4, 1865, president Lincoln left Washington on the *River Queen*.
- At about 11:00 am, Mr. Lincoln entered the city of Richmond on foot, accompanied by Admiral David Porter, and a small protective force of about a half dozen soldiers.
- Crowds of freed slaves greeted their Great Emancipator and thanked him.
- One group of newly freed slaves cried out, "Glory Hallelujah!", and fell to their knees before Mr. Lincoln.
- The President paused, and motioned for them to rise. "Don't kneel to me," he told them, "You must kneel only to God, and thank him for your freedom. Liberty is your birthright. God gave it to you as he gave it to others, and it is a sin that you have been deprived of it for so many years."
Confederate Retreat Begins

[5] **Amelia Court House** – April 4-5 – **General Lee** brought all his troops to this village with plans to move south into North Carolina and join forces with **General Joseph E. Johnston’s** army.

[4] **Namozine Church** – April 3 - A rearguard cavalry skirmish took place around the church as **Lee’s** soldiers marched toward Amelia Court House.

[3] **Sutherland Station** – April 2 - The engagement here enabled **Grant’s** forces to sever the South Side Railroad, **Lee’s** last supply line into Petersburg.

[2] **Pamplin Park Civil War Site** – April 2 - Here the Union’s Sixth Army Corps broke through the Confederate lines defending Petersburg, causing a series of actions which led to the evacuation of the city that evening by **Lee’s** army.

[1] **South Side Railroad Station** - April 2 - This railroad was **Lee’s** last supply line coming into Petersburg. When this was cut, **Lee** was forced to withdraw from the Richmond-Petersburg front.
Lee’s Plan to Join Forces

[7] **Amelia Springs** - April 6 - At this point, the Union Army came in contact with Lee’s rear guard as the Confederates completed their night march to avoid Grant’s troops at Jetersville.

[5] **Amelia Court House** - April 4-5 - General Lee brought all his troops to this village with plans to move south into North Carolina and join forces with General Joseph E. Johnston’s army.

[6] **Jetersville** - April 5 - On his advance toward North Carolina, Lee ran into Union forces here, forcing him to change direction and march to Farmville.

“My shoes are gone. My clothes are almost gone. I’m weary, I’m sick, I’m hungry. My family has been killed or scattered, and may be wandering helpless and unprotected. I would die, yes I would die willingly, because I love my country. But if this war is ever over, I’ll be damned if I ever love another country.” --- Confederate veteran.
On April 5, Confederate cavalry under **Fitzhugh Lee** and **Rosser** assaulted Union cavalry under **George Crook** as they returned from burning Confederate wagons at Painesville.

This running fight started north of Amelia Springs and pushed through and beyond Jetersville.
Grant Tightens the Noose

[8] Deatonville - April 6 - Union troops fought a brief action here as they continued pressing the Confederate’s line of march.

[9] Holt’s Corner - April 6 - At this road junction, part of Lee’s army turned north while the main part continued to the crossing of Little Sailor’s Creek.

[10] Hillsman House - April 6 - Union and Confederates fought on the slope across from house. Most of the Confederate troops surrendered. The Hillsman house was used as hospital during the battle.


[12] Lockett House - April 6 - Fighting occurred around the house which was used as hospital.

[13] Double Bridges - April 6 - The Confederate column and wagon train which turned north at Holt’s Corner became bogged down in crossing Sailor’s Creek and were attacked by Union troops.

[14] Rice’s Depot - April 6 - Confederate troops built entrenchments to protect the road from Burkeville Junction.
In three distinct engagements, the Federals overwhelmed the defending Confederates, capturing 7,700 men and depriving Lee of roughly one-fourth of his army.

– First, the Confederate rear guard under John Gordon was forced to make stand against the Union Second Corps under Andrew Humphreys on the James Lockett Farm.

– To the south, the Union Sixth Corps under Horatio Wright, bombarded then assaulted Richard Ewell's two divisions along Little Sailor's Creek near the James Hillsman Farm.

– Lastly, Confederate divisions under Richard Anderson squared off against Wesley Merritt's three divisions of Union cavalry in the vicinity of Marshall's Crossroads.

These three disparate battles occurred almost simultaneously giving the illusion of one large general engagement.
On April 6, cavalry under Phil Sheridan effectively cut off three corps of Lee's army, near Marshall's Crossroads while the Union Second and Sixth Corps approached from the east.

This action was considered the death knell of the Confederate army.

Upon seeing the survivors streaming along the road, Lee exclaimed “My God, has the army dissolved?”

Among the prisoners were six Confederate generals including Ewell, Joseph Kershaw, and Custis Lee.

Lee wrote president Jefferson Davis, “a few more Sailor's Creeks and it will all be over.”

“The battle degenerated into a butchery and a confused melee of personal conflicts. I saw numbers of men kill each other with bayonets and the butts of muskets, and even bite each other’s throats and ears and noses, rolling on the ground like wild beasts.” --- Confederate officer at Sailor’s Creek.
**Hillsman House** - April 6 - Union and Confederates fought on the slope across from house. Most of the Confederate troops surrendered. The Hillsman house was used as hospital during the battle.

**Lockett House** - April 6 - Fighting occurred around the house which was used as hospital.
Confederates Fail at High Bridge

[16] **Farmville** - April 7 - Lee was unsuccessful in his efforts to obtain rations and crossed the Appomattox River.

[17] **Cumberland Church** - April 7 - Union troops which had crossed the Appomattox at High Bridge attacked Lee’s forces.

[18] **High Bridge** - April 7 - Confederate forces fail to destroy the entire bridge which allows Union troops to pursue Lee on the north side of the Appomattox.
On April 6th, the Confederate cavalry fought stubbornly to secure the Appomattox River bridges.

On April 7th, elements of the II Corps came up against Longstreet’s rear guard attempting to fire the High Bridge and wagon bridge.

Union forces were able to save the wagon bridge.

This allowed the II Corps to cross in pursuit of Lee’s army.

Failure to destroy this bridge enabled Union forces to catch up with the Confederates at Farmville.