

druggist of Petersburg,” and John Crowder, “a noble youth,” were among the nine killed and 21 wounded.

The Confederate reinforcements that eventually arrived consisted of the Petersburg Artillery, also known as Graham’s Battery, commanded by Captain Edward Graham, and elements of the cavalry brigade commanded by Brigadier General James Dearing, which consisted of the 8th Georgia, 4th North Carolina (59th Regiment NC Troops), and 12th and 16th North Carolina battalions. The account by a member of the local militia continued, “They were almost in Petersburg – could see its spires and steeples and many of the houses on our suburban limits – but ... the city was saved from the tread of the ruthless invader. Just at this opportune moment Graham’s battery reached the Reservoir Hill, unlimbered in an instant [and] threw into the ranks of the enemy a shower of shell. The missiles of death coming so unexpectedly to the foe, he at first seemed overwhelmed with surprise, and halted, neither advancing nor retreating. But a minute or two later another branch of our service made its appearance, which quickly determined the enemy as to the best course for him to pursue. Dearing’s cavalry brigade quickly dismounted, and descending the hill with a yell, charged upon the enemy in beautiful style. This was more than they expected, (since they had encountered but a few militia in the breastworks, and had advanced nearly a mile without seeing any regulars) and they instantly wheeled their horses and started back up the hill in great confusion. Graham’s battery continued to play upon them, and Dearing’s men crossed the ravine and ascended the opposite hill, in gallant style, their carbines keeping up a regular and most musical fusillade.”

As they fell back, the Union cavalrymen brought off 42 prisoners and a 12-pounder gun captured by the 1st DC Cavalry. Due to the poor performance and lack of determination of General Gillmore, a valuable opportunity to capture Petersburg had been lost. On his return to camp, Butler demanded a full report explaining why the opportunity to break through the thinly manned Confederate defenses had been squandered. With the feud between Butler and Gillmore rumbling on, Grant transferred Gillmore to Washington, DC, where he successfully organized new recruits and invalids into a 20,000-man force to help protect the city from a threat by 10,000 Confederates under Jubal A. Early, who had reached the outer defenses of the Union capital on July 11–12, 1864. Wounded while pursuing Early’s retreat, he recovered to command the Department of the South and the X Corps again until June 28, 1865.

## CROSSING THE JAMES RIVER, JUNE 9–15, 1864

Despite Butler’s abortive sortie toward Petersburg on June 9, 1864, Lee remained convinced that Grant’s main army would operate north of the James River. As a result, he retained the bulk of his forces around Richmond. Meanwhile, two days after the disastrous assault at Cold Harbor Grant made the decision to cross the James River to cut the critical rail and road junctions south of Petersburg. To accomplish this he quietly withdrew 100,000 soldiers from a 10-mile front line, negotiated 50 miles of swampy ground and crossed a half-mile-wide tidal river. The 15th New York Engineers, under General Henry W. Benham, constructed the necessary pontoon sections behind the main Union lines at Cold Harbor on June 11. The same day, Grant ordered Major General George Gordon Meade to prepare the Army of the Potomac

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for movement on June 12. Major General Gouverneur K. Warren's V Corps were the first to pull out of the trenches near Richmond at 6 p.m. that day. The first obstacle en route to Petersburg was the Chickahominy River running in a southeasterly direction below the Union position at Cold Harbor. Arriving at Long Bridge before midnight, Warren's troops encountered Confederate pickets, which were driven back with a well-placed volley of musketry fire. The engineers immediately went to work clearing away the demolished bridge span and deployed their pontoon sections across the river. By midnight the cavalry was crossing the bridge, followed closely by the infantry. Once over the river, Warren's corps was assigned the task of feinting toward Richmond and covering the right flank of Grant's main movement.

At sunset on June 12, activity began along the entire length of the Union line at Cold Harbor. Major General William Farrar Smith's XVIII Corps departed due east for White House on the Pamunkey River, where they boarded river transports to join the Army of the James operating on the Bermuda Hundred peninsula near City Point, Virginia. Major General Winfield S. Hancock's II Corps and Major General H.G. Wright's VI Corps withdrew to the secondary line of trenches erected days earlier by the engineers. At 11 p.m. Hancock's corps departed to follow Warren's men across the Chickahominy at Long Bridge. They were followed by the VI Corps which struck out toward Jones Bridge about three miles downstream. Major General Ambrose Burnside's IX Corps departed from the right flank of the line and followed Wright's corps to Jones Bridge. Bringing up the rear of the Union withdrawal were cavalry troopers and a scattering of pickets left on the lines until almost daybreak on June 13. Soldiers' accounts of the march recall a bright moonlit night obscured by the choking dust of thousands of shuffling feet. According to J.T. Connolly, "This was a terrible forced march, lasting all one night, and next day, and half of the ensuing night, before we halted to eat or sleep."

South of the Chickahominy, Union engineers began the construction of 12 miles of defenses to protect the crossing point on the James River. By late afternoon, Hancock's men had arrived from the Long Bridge and occupied these positions. That evening Grant's headquarters removed to Wilcox's Landing on the James River. Meanwhile, engineers assisted by II Corps soldiers felled hundreds of trees to clear the path for the sections of pontoon bridge being brought up to lay across the James. This operation included the building of a 150-foot pier across a swamp on the north side. During the morning of June 14, the pontoons at Jones Bridge were removed as the last of the infantry crossed over the Chickahominy River. At Wilcox's Landing, the II Corps left their defensive positions and began crossing the James River by boat.

In the meantime, Grant's supply train bypassed the Chickahominy crossings at Long and Jones bridges and continued eastward to Cole's Landing. The pontoon bridge constructed there was the longest of the Chickahominy crossings, measuring 1,200 feet. The swampy terrain required extensive use of corduroy approaches to this bridge. The 1,200-foot span was completed after dark on June 14, and the supply train began moving across the bridge during the night. The longer route to the Cole's Landing crossing prevented the supply train from encumbering the movement of the main army, which was a constant concern for Grant and his quartermasters.

On the afternoon of June 14, 450 engineers began construction of the pontoon bridge across the James River. Work began simultaneously from Weyanoke Point on the north bank and near Windmill Point on the south.



The James River Pontoon Bridge was completed in only eight hours on June 8–9, 1864, by 450 engineers under Captain G.H. Mendell, who were initially directed by Major J.C. Duane and then by General Henry W. Benham. Working from both sides, 101 pontoons and three schooners were used to span the 2,100-foot width of the James River to enable the Army of the Potomac to cross the river in order to commence the assault on Petersburg. (Library of Congress LC-B8171-7484)

#### **OPPOSITE PAGE**

On June 12, 1864, the Army of the Potomac realized the worst fears of Robert E. Lee by crossing the James River. Within three days, Grant had moved five divisions within striking distance of Petersburg, with the main objective of cutting the supply routes converging on that city en route for Richmond, Virginia.

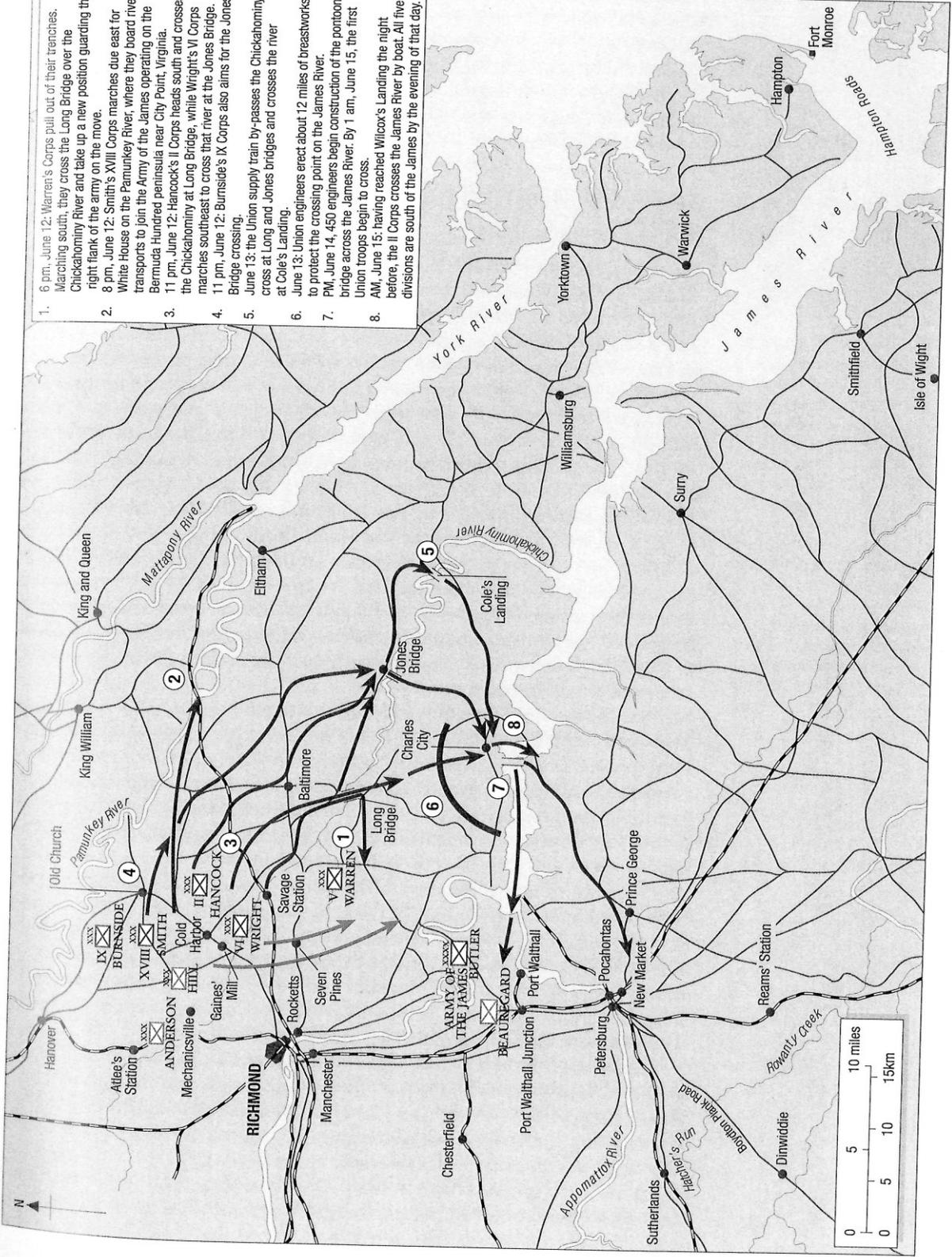
Constructed with 101 wooden pontoons, the bridge carried a roadbed 11 feet wide, and was lashed to six schooners anchored upstream to hold the bridge against the current. Three of these schooners held in place a 100-foot removable section that allowed gunboats and other vessels to pass through the bridge. Farther upstream, Butler had five stone-laden ships sunk in the channel to prevent Confederate gunboats from coming downstream to disrupt the operation. Taking nine hours to complete, the bridge was ready to receive traffic at 1 a.m. on June 15. When finished, the bridge was 2,100 feet in length, making it the longest floating bridge in military history.

Soon after its completion, troops and trains began crossing the bridge. The infantry of the IX Corps, a division of the VI Corps, and Wilson's Cavalry Division went via this route. However, most bridge traffic consisted of the large supply train arriving from Cole's Landing, plus cannon, limbers and caissons of the artillery, ambulances, baggage wagons and about 3,500 beef cattle. Among the personnel crossing the bridge on the first day were General Grant and his headquarters staff. Three hours after Union troops began crossing the James River pontoon bridge Hancock's II Corps completed its crossing of the James by boat. Delayed by difficulties in communications, this force arrived too late to assist the XVIII Corps in the initial assault on Petersburg on the evening of June 15.

After crossing the James River, the supply train was parked in and around the small hamlet of City Point and the City Point Railroad. A supply base had been established at this location during the weeks prior to the James River crossing by elements of Butler's Army of the James. An ideal location because of its position at the confluence of the James and Appomattox rivers, City Point allowed large seagoing vessels to dock at its waterfront. Separate

## Crossing the James River, June 12–15, 1864

1. 6 pm, June 12: Warren's Corps pull out of their trenches. Marching south, they cross the Long Bridge over the Chickahominy River and take up a new position guarding the right flank of the army on the move.
2. 8 pm, June 12: Smith's XVIII Corps marches due east for White House on the Pamunkey River, where they board river transports to join the Army of the James operating on the Bermuda Hundred peninsula near City Point, Virginia.
3. 11 pm, June 12: Hancock's II Corps heads south and crosses the Chickahominy at Long Bridge, while Wright's VI Corps marches southeast to cross that river at the Jones Bridge.
4. 11 pm, June 12: Burnside's IX Corps also aims for the Jones Bridge crossing.
5. June 13: the Union supply train by-passes the Chickahominy cross at Long and Jones bridges and crosses the river at Cole's Landing.
6. June 13: Union engineers erect about 12 miles of breastworks to protect the crossing point on the James River.
7. PM, June 14, 450 engineers begin construction of the pontoon bridge across the James River. By 1 am, June 15, the first Union troops begin to cross.
8. AM, June 15: having reached Wilcox's Landing the night before, the II Corps crosses the James River by boat. All five divisions are south of the James by the evening of that day.



facilities were constructed to store commodities such as ammunition, clothing, subsistence, forage, medical supplies and camp equipment. On a daily basis, approximately 40 steamboats, 75 sailing ships and 100 barges operated from its wharves. By the fall of 1864, 20 miles of railroad constructed by the Railroad Construction Corps stretched from City Point to the rear of the Union siege lines, and about 18 trains daily made the trip to the front delivering supplies and evacuating casualties to the hospital complex at City Point.

### **BREAKTHROUGH ON THE DIMMOCK LINE, JUNE 15-18, 1864**

Lee was completely fooled by Grant's move across the James River. For several days, the Confederate commander held the bulk of his army in their lines in front of Richmond. He did not move south across the James until June 18, and even then was not entirely convinced that Grant's entire army was across the river. Thus, when the Union XVIII Corps, under General W.F. "Baldy" Smith, arrived at the eastern approaches to Petersburg on June 15, Beauregard had only half of Dearing's cavalry brigade and a single infantry brigade under the former Virginia governor (now Brigadier General) Henry A. Wise. Confederate reinforcements from the Bermuda Hundred lines had been ordered to march rapidly for Petersburg, but could not reach the city before late evening. Until then, the 2,200 men under Wise, plus Dearing's cavalry, were all that Beauregard had at his disposal.

After being delayed by a skirmish at Baylor's Farm, Smith's Corps marched in sight of the Dimmock Line at approximately 11 a.m. on June 15. Remembering the debacle at Cold Harbor, the veteran Union general performed exhaustive reconnaissance. Determining that the eastern expanse of Confederate defenses was manned primarily by artillery, he finally ordered an attack which began about 6 p.m.

Because the Confederate works were actually held only by elements of Ferree's dismounted 4th North Carolina Cavalry, supported by Graham's Battery, the Union troops advanced entirely as a skirmish line with intervals of two paces between each man. Entering a ravine between what the Confederates had designated Batteries 7 and 8 on the Dimmock Line, which was a weak point in the otherwise formidable Rebel breastworks, Smith's men were able to capture from the rear Battery 5, one of the strongest of the Confederate positions, which was a V-shaped salient containing 16 guns. Commanding the 13th New Hampshire, Colonel Aaron F. Stevens reported, "Advanced our line at about 6.15 p.m., when my skirmish line, consisting of about 400, the center being held by my regiment, assaulted the enemy's advance rifle pits ... Being the first to break the line of enemy's works around Petersburg, [we] captured four 12-pounder Howitzer iron guns, a large quantity of ammunition and about 150 prisoners. Lost about forty men and officers."

Meanwhile, the rest of that sector of the Confederate line, manned by the 26th and 46th Virginia Infantry, of Wise's brigade, was rapidly disintegrating. Men from the 1st, 4th, 6th and 22nd US Colored Troops (USCT) moved south along the enemy works. Among the other positions captured was Battery 9, which contained a three-gun section of Sturdivant's artillery, on a slight hill at the junction of the Jordan's Point and George Court House roads, two important routes into Petersburg. Two companies of the 1st USCT cleared obstacles around this work, and turned the captured guns on the