

On Richmond's FRONT LINE

Volume 6, Number 1

Summer 2007

Vital Railroad Village North of Richmond

The tiny town of Hanover Junction, twenty miles north of Richmond, could have seen more Civil War action than it did. Two crucial Confederate railroads converged there: the Virginia Central and the Richmond, Fredericksburg, & Potomac. The former connected Richmond with the Piedmont region and ultimately the Shenandoah Valley. The latter bisected the key ground between northern Virginia and the capital city. Each line had origins in the second half of the 1830's. Each carried hundreds of thousands of soldiers and probably millions of tons of materiel during the war.

It is surprising that Federal planners never placed much emphasis on Hanover Junction. Troops in blue stopped there briefly in May 1862, and threatened the junction on other occasions, but Hanover Junction never felt more than slight discomfort from enemy operations until the war's final month.

Railroads suffered from substantial imperfections in that era, many of which were produced by the difficulties of communication and coordination. The wartime Richmond newspapers abound with references to collisions, derailments, and accidents, both

major and minor. Perhaps the earliest wartime incident at Hanover Junction occurred on July 9, 1861, when trains of the two lines "came into collision" from unknown causes. One month later a larger event illuminated the hazards of rail travel. Rain washed out a portion of the Virginia Central track near the junction. A train carrying Kentucky troops northward

On May 27, 1862, the day of the Battle of Slash Church (or Hanover Court House), a small Union force reached the vicinity of the junction and shot up a train full of surprised North Carolinians, who "leaped from the cars and took to the woods." The raiding party did little if any damage to Hanover Junction itself.

It probably is true that every

railroad town in Virginia hosted Confederate hospitals during the war. The facility at Hanover Junction could accommodate as many as 200 soldiers, but most patients stayed only a day or two, briefly detained from their destinations by sickness. The midwar smallpox scare in Virginia prompted

the government to assign an assistant surgeon to the junction. He inspected passing soldiers and operated a special smallpox wing of the Hanover Junction hospital. Two full surgeons (just one rank higher than assistant surgeons) oversaw the primary hospital. Surgeon/Inspector T. H. Wingfield inspected the entire operation in February 1863 and commended it to his superiors as being "in good condition," and "very necessary in



This wartime Confederate map predates the May 1864 battle, which covered the landscape with entrenchments.

"plunged into the chasm, dragging after it the cars, which piled one upon another in a confused mass. A scene of indescribable terror ensued, which the darkness made still more appalling." In fact only one soldier died outright, but several dozen sustained major injuries, including a private named Donaldson who had "head, left arm, and left leg broken." The following year a soldier in the 49th Virginia fell from a train at the junction, was run over, lost both legs, and died the next day.

Continued on page 3

Voices From the Field

This number of the newsletter inaugurates a new feature that will appear intermittently in subsequent issues. Dennis Buttacavoli is an enthusiastic collector of Civil War documents, and in particular those that pertain to the Peninsula Campaign and the Seven Days battles. He also is a steady friend of preservation. He has agreed to provide typescripts of original documents from his collection for publication in "On Richmond's Front Line." The letter below, written by Willie S. Campbell of the 5th Alabama Infantry, offers the early war perspective of a Deep South boy in one of Richmond's hospitals, during the period when the Confederate army was evacuating Northern Virginia. Campbell's regiment served with distinction throughout the war in the Rodes-Gordon-Battle brigade of the Confederate Second Corps.

*First Ala Hosptl Richmond
March 18 1862*

Dear Cousin

As yet I have heard nothing from the regiment but am expecting a letter daily and expect to join it as soon as I can learn where it is camped. From some who came here after they had been marching three or four days I learn that

owing to the bad conditions of the roads bad weather and scarcity of tents the troops suffered greatly. Ere this time I hope that they have arrived at the new line and are now resting from their fatigues. There are almost numberless rumors and speculations in regard both to our movements and those of the enemy. Some say that the enemy are advancing with a very heavy force and others say that after occupying Leesburg and Winchester the enemy evacuated them and re-crossed the Potomac into Maryland. Such rumors I think are altogether the workings of some hopefuls imagination set afloat. The news from N.C. and Fla are bad and it is also reported that the enemy are advancing on Knoxville. If such is the case I see no prospect of our returning in May for if they take it communication will be almost cut off. I received a letter from Cousin Jane about two weeks since. She says that her health is now much better then when at Pickensville. I sincerely hope that she has improved both in health and social disposition. I took dinner today with Mr Davis the gentleman with whom I staid while here in September and October. He is as clever and kind now as then and invited me to go round

again but as I am very comfortably located in the hospital and expect to remain here but a few days I shall not go. This Hospital and also the Second Alabama are under the charge of Mrs Hopkins of Mobile. They are kept clean and nice the fare though plain is never the less good and such as the sick ought to have. The physicians in charge Dr Morgan and Stinson are very attentive. In short a sick man fares finely here in comparison to other hospitals. Last night I attended what is called the Varieties (a kind of theater in the city) and saw Macbeth acted on the stage. The actors and actresses were good (at least I thought so) consequently was not very well pleased. Some parts of the performance was a little amusing especially that of the witches in their strange actions to make the form appear from the ground as it were, but the other was very tedious and irksome.

I will try to have my ambrotype taken tomorrow and will send it by the first opportunity when that will be I don't know but hope that it will not be long first. My health is greatly improved and I feel much better than I when I first came. Write often. I do not think that I have received a letter from home in

Preservation Ramblings

Regular readers will remember occasional references to the Richmond Battlefield Parks Corporation. That group banded together in the 1920's for the purpose of marking and then preserving Civil War battlefields in the Richmond area. Without their foresight there would be no connected system of protected battlefields outside the Confederate capital. Thinking that it is fruitful and perhaps inspiring to remember our successful predecessors, here are some excerpts from a promotional broadside issued by the RBPC in about 1930.

"Richmond Battlefield Parks Acquired for the Public by Richmond Battlefield Parks Corporation, A Non-Stock Corporation of Richmond People-T. M. Carrington, President."

After preserving land at Fort Harrison and Cold Harbor in the late 1920's, the group's founders began to worry about speculators: *"By this time the rumor had begun to spread that Richmond people were buying up the battlefields....Realizing that this would cause prices to rise unreasonably and perhaps prohibitively, the original group of citizens was enlarged,*

the Richmond Battlefield Parks Corporation was chartered, and a 'sites committee' was named to investigate quietly the condition of all the battlefields around Richmond and, if possible, to acquire the scenes of important actions by private purchase....To facilitate these purchases without giving the enterprise the publicity that would come from a solicitation of funds, the directors jointly signed a note for \$20,000, using their individual and joint credit in the belief that when Richmond peo-

Continued on page 4

Hanover Junction....

Continued From page 1

order to forward the patients [elsewhere] with dispatch." The Hanover Junction Hospital's precise dates of opening and closing are not known, although the arrival of the Maryland Line (see below) probably triggered its closure later in 1863.

In November 1863 a large group of Marylanders established a camp somewhere near the junction. They called the place "Camp St. Mary's," and it included a chapel, a hospital, extensive barracks, and many other comforts. Colonel Bradley T. Johnson supervised the group, which consisted of infantry, cavalry, and artillery. He organized those formations into the late-war version of the "Maryland Line," numbering about 700 soldiers. His jovial Marylanders enjoyed themselves ("plenty to eat + plenty of girls") all through the winter, visiting the locals, scouting in the surrounding counties, and preparing for the spring campaign. When he broke camp the last week of April 1864, Johnson wrote of his regret: "I dislike very much giving up Camp St. Mary's for the six months here have been most happy

ly spent...."

One month later the families living around Hanover Junction witnessed the Battle of the North Anna River. The contending armies gathered around the river and the



Bradley Johnson commanded the Maryland contingent at Hanover

junction, with the Confederate line actually running just north of the railroad intersection and wrapping around it to the east. R. E. Lee had his headquarters tent in one of the angles at the junction. There he suffered through a debilitating bout of dysentery during the critical May 23-26 operations.

Union cavalry raiders finally reached the junction in force in

March 1865. They burned the depot and crippled one of the last remaining rail links between Richmond and the rest of Virginia. The following year the railroad authorities constructed a "new and commodious" depot and water station at Hanover Junction. Passenger trains still whistle through the junction today, although the name of the surrounding village has been changed to Doswell, in honor of Thomas W. Doswell and his family. Best known as a local racehorse breeder, Doswell also served as sheriff of Hanover County, and performed brief duty on the staff of General William E. Starke at Sharpsburg in 1862.

Annual Meeting

The RBA's annual meeting occurred in June at Drewry's Bluff. Blistering heat kept the attendance low, though the walking tour of the site proceeded more smoothly because of the manageable size of the group. Members later had a chance to mingle with the RBA's

leaders. They heard about the group's finances, asked questions, consumed refreshments, and learned about ongoing work aimed at developing battlefield preservation projects.



RBA members on the viewing platform atop Drewry's Bluff, June 9.

On *Richmond's*
FRONT LINE

is published for the RBA membership at P.O. Box 13945, Richmond, VA 23225. The web address is: www.saverichmond-battlefields.org. The RBA is chartered as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All contributions are tax deductible. A financial statement is available, upon request, from the Virginia Office of Consumer Affairs.

The Richmond Battlefields Association Board of Directors

Julie A. Krick
President
Derek E. Leake
Vice President
David M. West
Treasurer
Patricia Walenista
Secretary
Ben Brockenbrough
Sam Craghead
Bernard Fisher
Claude Foster
Robert K. Krick
Shep Parsons
Marc Ramsey

more on early preservation....

ple knew what had been done to preserve these historic places, they would be glad to share the expense....

The plan of the association is to ask the co-operation of the counties and of the State Highway Commission in linking up the existing roads and in filling a few gaps. When this is done, it will be possible for a traveler to start at Mechanicsville, to go on to Gaines Mill and Cold Harbor, and thence to Seven Pines, Savage Station, White Oak Swamp, Frazier's Farm, Malvern Hill and Fort Harrison and to emerge at Chaffin's Bluff where, the associa-

tion is sure, the traffic will soon justify the construction of a ferry to Drewry's Bluff.... Thus will be created the most extensive battlefield park in the United States.... In time, it is believed that as many motorists will come to the Richmond battlefields park as now go annually to Gettysburg. The cost of the undertaking will be approximately \$100,000, including the smaller roads, the relief maps, the models and the marking. The corporation respectfully solicits subscriptions to make possible the completion of an enterprise in which every Virginian is a trustee for posterity."

What began as a local matter, initiated by Richmonders as a matter of pride and civic responsibility, eventually evolved into an issue for "every Virginian." Now it is a subject of national interest, as the RBA's geographically scattered membership attests. There is no ferry connecting Chaffin's Bluff with Drewry's Bluff, and the RBPC utterly failed to protect anything at Seven Pines, Frayser's Farm/Glendale, and most of the 1864 battlefields north of the James River. Despite the rosy prediction, today far fewer tourists visit the Richmond battlefields than Gettysburg (more than a million fewer, annually). But the

Yes! I WANT TO HELP PRESERVE OUR NATION'S HERITAGE, PLEASE SIGN ME UP.

(Please print)

Name		
Address		
City	State	Zip
Daytime Phone	E-mail Address	
Type of Membership:		
<input type="checkbox"/> \$1000 Benefactor	<input type="checkbox"/> \$500 Patron	<input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Sustaining Member
<input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Active Member	<input type="checkbox"/> \$35 Annual Member	
<input type="checkbox"/> Additional Contribution: \$ _____		

Please return completed membership form with a check payable to: **Richmond Battlefields Association**
Mail completed form to: **Richmond Battlefields Association P.O. Box 13945 Richmond, Virginia 23225**
Contributions may be deductible as provided in 26 USC Sec. 170.

Richmond
Battlefields
ASSOCIATION

Richmond Battlefields Association
P.O. Box 13945
Richmond, VA 23225

Place
Stamp
Here