



THE CAMPAIGN ON THE JAMES RIVER—GENERAL BUTLER LANDING AT FORT PAWHATAN.

### THE CROSSING OF THE JAMES

On June 4, 1864, the Army of the Potomac sat in the trenches of Cold Harbor, brought to a standstill by Robert E. Lee's soldiers. Since crossing the Rapidan River on March 3rd, the Union Army had lost 55,000 men attacking the Confederate defenses around Richmond. Southern losses were not as heavy, but every foot soldier was irreplaceable, and the Union Army had killed, wounded, or captured 22 of Lee's 58 Generals.

After each battle, Grant's troops had slipped off to the left and swung back towards Richmond, only to find the roads blocked with Southern breastworks. Checked at Cold Harbor with 13,000 casualties, Grant began slipping to the left on the night of June 11th. Lee suspected Grant would cross the James River but the Union Army held Lee's scouts at a distance. Unable to move without leaving Richmond unguarded, Lee waited for the Army of the Potomac to reappear.

Grant had shifted his point of attack from Richmond to Petersburg. Defended by over 60,000 Confederates, Richmond had five supply lines, four of which passed through Petersburg, which was guarded by only about 2,200 men. To reach Petersburg, Grant's 115,000 troops had to cross the James River.

On June 12, 1864, Lt. Peter Michie of the Corps of Engineers, ordered to find the best place below City Point for a pontoon bridge, surveyed the area around Ft. Powhatan. At the point he selected, the river was

1,992 feet wide from Weyanoke to Flowerdew Hundred. The next day, Michie was given 150 axmen to cut logs, and by that night over 3,000 feet of timber was gathered at the mouth of Flowerdew Creek. Within 12 hours the Engineers turned this timber into corduroy roads leading to the bridge anchorage, which required a 150 foot pier on the Weyanoke end. The army was gathering, the roads were ready, but the pontoon boats hadn't arrived from Fort Monroe.

An hour later, at 11:10 A.M. June 14th, Hancock's Corps of about 28,000 men began boarding ferries several miles upriver at Wilcox Wharf. They landed at Windmill Point, the tip of Flowerdew Hundred, near the site of the original English settlement of 1618. While waiting for all of the Corps to cross, Hancock's men swam in the river, harvested "...early vegetables...", and tore down a barn for firewood.

Meanwhile, the pontoons had arrived. These wooden boats, 31 feet long, were lashed together into rafts and swung into place. It took 101 pontoons, set about 20 feet apart, to cross the river. Finished in 9 hours, the bridge was 2000 feet long and carried a plank roadbed 11 feet wide. For strength, the bridge was tied to 6 schooners anchored in the channel. Between these ships was a removable section which could be opened to allow ships to pass. Two warships guarded the bridge, the Mackinaw above and the Atlanta, a captured Confederate ironclad, below, off Flowerdew Creek. Finished about 1:00 A.M. on June 15th, the bridge was in almost constant use for the next 70 hours.

Hancock's Corps had completed ferrying to Windmill Point and began marching to Petersburg about 10:00 A.M. on June 15th. All through the flanking movement, but particularly at this point, every second counted. The day before, the Confederates had discovered Grant's approximate position and realized Petersburg was in danger, but Lee could not leave Richmond until he was certain Grant's entire army was south of the James. At about the time Hancock's troops began to leave Flowerdew, Union cavalry riding point for Smith's Corps approached Petersburg and were driven away. Smith's men, carried by boat from the Pamunky River, had landed at Bermuda Hundred and were immediately ordered to attack Petersburg. As the 15th wore on, the 2,200 Confederate defenders were pushed back by Smith's 15,000 troops, but Smith, expecting reinforcements from Hancock, stopped his assault. Beauregard, the Confederate commander, rushed every available man to Petersburg and begged Lee for troops from Richmond. Hancock, meanwhile, got lost in Prince George County and didn't reach Petersburg until dark. One of his soldiers wrote "All night we heard the whistling of the engines as the cars came from Richmond loaded with troops for Lee....By morning the works...were fully manned and bristling with bayonets...". Grant's brilliant move had failed to crush Lee's supply line, the war would last another nine months and thousands more would die.



GRANT AND HANCOCK AT WILCOX'S WHARF

At Flowerdew Hundred, the crossing by ferries and pontoon bridge continued until the afternoon of the 17th. Over 60,000 men crossed the bridge along with a train of wagons and artillery 50 to 60 miles long. The last to cross the bridge were about 3,000 head of cattle.

After the war, Confederate General E. Porter Alexander described the bridge as "the greatest...the world has seen since the days of Xerxes". Occurring after the battle of Cold Harbor and before the siege of Petersburg, however, the crossing and the bridge were overshadowed and quickly slipped between the cracks of history.

One hundred and twenty-two years later, the bridge was "rediscovered" by Flowerdew Hundred archaeologists. Actually it was never lost; Peter Michie's commanding officer submitted a report with a map showing the location of the bridge anchorage. In the spring of 1986, archaeologist Taft Kiser took a Brady Company photograph to the low, swampy area indicated by General Weitzel. He found a cypress tree quite similar to one dominating the June 1864 photograph. At the same time, in Berkeley California, the Lowie Museum of Anthropology Staff Photographer and Flowerdew Hundred Research Associate, Gene Prince, was developing a technique he called "the Method". Since nicknamed "Prince's Principle" by Ivor Noel Hume, the method consists of putting the slide of an old photograph into a camera viewfinder and using landmarks to line up the old image with the modern landscape. Working together in the summer of 1986, Prince and Kiser united the Method and the tree, and put Grant's almost forgotten pontoon bridge back on it's anchorage.

**FLOWERDEW HUNDRED FOUNDATION**  
**A NON-PROFIT, EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATION**

Flowerdew Hundred is a unique resource for the study and interpretation of the history of the American people. The Museum's goals are to "...study, collect, preserve, and interpret the culture history of the Tidewater region and Flowerdew Hundred specifically to the public...". The Foundation sponsors, hosts, and occasionally supports special educational programs. The Museum's collection consists of the artifacts and records resulting from excavations, as well as the excavated archaeological features and unexcavated sites. In addition to the Museum, the Foundation operates a windmill, an archaeological lab, workshop, offices, research library, and conference area. In time, the Foundation will use structures built in the likeness and location of buildings that once stood at Flowerdew Hundred. These, in addition to the Windmill, will be used for various public interpretative programs. Interpretative tours are the major public service activity of the Museum.

**Flowerdew Hundred is located on the south side of the James River off Route 10, about 5 miles east of the Benjamin Harrison Bridge.**

**Open Daily (except Mondays) April 1 - November 30 (or by appointment)**

**Hours: 10:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.**

**Admission: Adults \$4.00; over 55 \$3.50; Children 6-12 \$2.50; under 6 free.**

**Discounted group rates with confirmed reservation.**

**For more information write or call:**

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