

An Engagement of Some Severity

The Battle of Dam Number 1, Newport News, VA

“Intelligence reached this city at an early hour yesterday morning that an engagement of some severity had taken place on the peninsula, on Wednesday afternoon, in which 10,000 men were engaged, 5000 on each side.”¹ So began a contemporary newspaper account of the first major engagement of the Peninsula Campaign near Lee’s Mill, VA, on April 16, 1862. Compared to the later battles of the war, it was small in scope. However, it was the only major battle that took place during the Siege of Yorktown, from April 5 to May 4, 1862, and it proved to be an important indicator of things to come for the Union forces under Major General George B. McClellan.

McClellan’s plan for the Peninsula Campaign called for the Army of the Potomac to deploy to Fortress Monroe in Hampton, VA, and then move up the Virginia Peninsula to Richmond. On April 3, 1862 McClellan ordered two divisions of the III Corps to move up the eastern side of the peninsula on the Yorktown Road and two divisions of the IV Corps to move up the west side of the peninsula on the Newport News Road.² McClellan’s plan was sound. The vast majority of the Confederate forces in Virginia were deployed in the northern part of the state and the Shenandoah Valley, leaving only a small force on peninsula. The commander of those forces, Major General John Bankhead Magruder stated in his report on the campaign he had only 11,000 troops when McClellan’s forces advanced from Fortress Monroe. Of these, 6000 were reserved to garrison forts at Gloucester Point and Yorktown on the York River, and on Mulberry Island, north of Newport News, on the James River. The Confederates needed these forts to block the Union Navy from moving up the rivers to Richmond, but garrisoning them left Magruder with only 5000 men to cover a 13-mile front. To make the most of his limited force, Magruder had partially constructed three lines of defense across the peninsula. The northern line centered on Williamsburg; the center line ran from Yorktown to Mulberry Island, paralleling the Warwick River for most of its length; the southern line ran from a large fort at Ship Point, a few miles south of Yorktown, to Harwood’s Mill, Young’s Mill and Mulberry Island. Magruder stated in his report that his southern line would be impregnable if it could be manned by 20,000-25,000 troops. However, he added, “Finding my forces too weak to attempt the defense of this line, I was compelled to prepare to receive the enemy on a second line, on Warwick River.”³

As McClellan’s forces advanced on April 3 and 4, Magruder’s forward detachments offered little resistance to the Federal juggernaut. However, the Federals suffered a setback when they reached the Warwick Line on the afternoon of April 5. At Lee’s Mill

¹ Unattributed. “The Late Battle Before Yorktown. Rebel Account of the Engagement at Lee’s Mills.” *The New York Times*, April 23, 1862, page unknown. The *Times* credited this article as a reprint from the *Petersburg (VA) Express* on April 18, 1862. Article available on line at: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9404E4D91E3FEE34BC4B51DFB2668389679FDE>

² *Official Records of the Rebellion*: (hereafter abbreviated “OR”) Volume Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 1., “Report of Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, U. S. Army, commanding Army of the Potomac,” p.8

³ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 58, “Report of Maj. Gen. John B. Magruder, C. S. Army, commanding at Yorktown, &c,” p. 405.

on the west side of the peninsula, the Second Division of the IV Corps under Brigadier General William Farrar Smith (popularly known as “Baldy Smith”) came under severe artillery fire where the road from Newport News crossed the Warwick River. Smith’s men also found the river flooded. At the same time, Brigadier General Fitz John Porter’s Division of the III Corps was also stopped on the east side of the peninsula by severe artillery fire and impressive earthworks at Yorktown. (Many of these works were relics of the Revolutionary War.) The Federals replied with artillery and deployed skirmishers to probe Magruder’s line for the remainder of the day. On April 6, reconnaissance operations continued, prisoners were questioned and the intelligence gathered by these operations dampened McClellan’s enthusiasm. On April 7 he sent a telegram to President Abraham Lincoln, stating, “The whole line of the Warwick, which really heads within a mile of Yorktown, is strongly defended by detached redoubts and other fortifications, armed with heavy and light guns. The approaches, except at Yorktown, are covered by the Warwick, over which there is but one, or, at most, two passages, both of which are covered by strong batteries. It will be necessary to resort to the use of heavy guns and some siege operations before we assault.”⁴

Some of McClellan’s officers did not believe a siege was necessary because they had found several weak points in the Yorktown-Warwick Line. The weakest point was located about two-thirds of a mile northeast of the April 5 skirmish at Lee’s Mill. On April 6, Baldy Smith ordered Brigadier General Winfield Scott Hancock to reconnoiter the Lee’s Mill area with two regiments of his brigade. During this mission, the 6th Maine Infantry Regiment, under Colonel Hiram Burnham, discovered one of the few places on the Warwick Line where the ground was slightly higher on the south shore than on Magruder’s side. This point was on cleared farmland adjacent to a dam the Confederates had built to flood the Warwick River, and Burnham got a good look at Magruder’s defenses. Burnham noted that the Confederates had only a one-gun battery adjacent to the dam and two more gun positions in the main line of fortifications further behind. Additionally, he reported the stream was about 80-100 feet wide below the dam. Hancock pointedly mentioned this place in his report to Smith, noting it could have been easily taken, but would have been difficult to hold with only Burnham’s regiment, no artillery, and no entrenching equipment on hand. Smith passed this information to McClellan, and the area became a point of interest to the Federals.⁵

The site the 6th Maine found was the Garrow Farm. The farm was bounded by the Warwick River to the north and the Yorktown Road to the south, and was surrounded by woods on all sides except at the river. A low ridge ran through the middle of the farm, parallel to the river, sloping down to the river on one side and sloping more gradually toward the road on the other. The Garrow House had stood near the center of the farm, but when Magruder decided to fight along the Warwick Line his men burned it, leaving three burnt chimneys amidst well-maintained fields. The Federals often referenced these chimneys in their reports, but the Confederates called the area “Dam Number 1.”⁶

⁴ OR, Vol. 11, Ch. 23, Part 1: No. 1. “Report of Gen. McClellan,” pp. 8-11.

⁵ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 18, “Report of Brigadier General Winfield S. Hancock, U. S. Army, of reconnaissance toward Yorktown, April 6” pp. 308-310.

⁶ Benedict, George Grenville. *Vermont in the Civil War*. Burlington VT: Free Press association, 1888, pp. 249-250.

April 16, 1862 – 6 A.M. to 10 A.M.

McClellan was so focused on the siege at Yorktown that it took him ten days to move against Dam Number 1. In his after-action report, he wrote “It was determined to push a strong reconnaissance on this point, to silence the enemy’s fire, and ascertain the actual strength of the position. Being prepared to sustain the reconnoitering party by a real attack, if found expedient, General W. F. Smith was directed to undertake the operation on the 16th of April.”⁷ Baldy Smith chose the Vermont Brigade, under Brigadier General William T. H. Brooks, for the mission on April 16. At 6 A.M., the 4th Vermont Infantry Regiment, under Colonel Edwin H. Stoughton, proceeded to the Garrow Farm. At 6:30 A.M., they were followed by the 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th Vermont Infantry Regiments. Brooks sent the 4th Vermont to the right, in the woods east of the farm, and the 3rd Vermont to the left, in the woods west of the farm. Both regiments then deployed skirmishers near the edge of the river. The 5th Vermont was placed in support behind the 3rd Vermont while the remaining regiments were placed in a field southeast of the chimneys.⁸ The 3rd New York Independent Battery under Captain Thaddeus P. Mott also left camp at 6:30 A.M. and proceeded to the farm. One section of the battery (two guns) took up a position behind the chimneys, about 1100 yards from Magruder’s works, while the remaining four guns awaited further orders.⁹

Across the river from the Garrow Farm, the Warwick Line was held by the brigade of Brigadier General Howell Cobb, which was subordinate to the division of Brigadier General Lafayette McLaws. The 2nd Louisiana Infantry Regiment held the line at Dam Number 1, and the 15th North Carolina Infantry Regiment occupied the position to their right. The remainder of Cobb’s brigade was camped nearby. Cobb placed Colonel William P. Levy of the 2nd Louisiana in tactical command of the forces at the dam.¹⁰ That morning the 15th North Carolina was on fatigue duty and Company D of the 16th Georgia Infantry Regiment was sent to their rifle pits to protect a work detail of Carolinians.¹¹ Magruder’s men had cleared the dense woods in this area in front of their works to give their infantry and artillery clear fields of fire. However, artillery support for the troops here was very limited. As Hancock’s men had observed on April 6, the Confederates had only placed three artillery pieces in this area because of the low ground, and even these pieces were of dubious value. The forward position, adjacent to

⁷ *OR*, Vol. 11, Ch. 23, Part 1: No. 1. “Report of Gen. McClellan,” p 18.

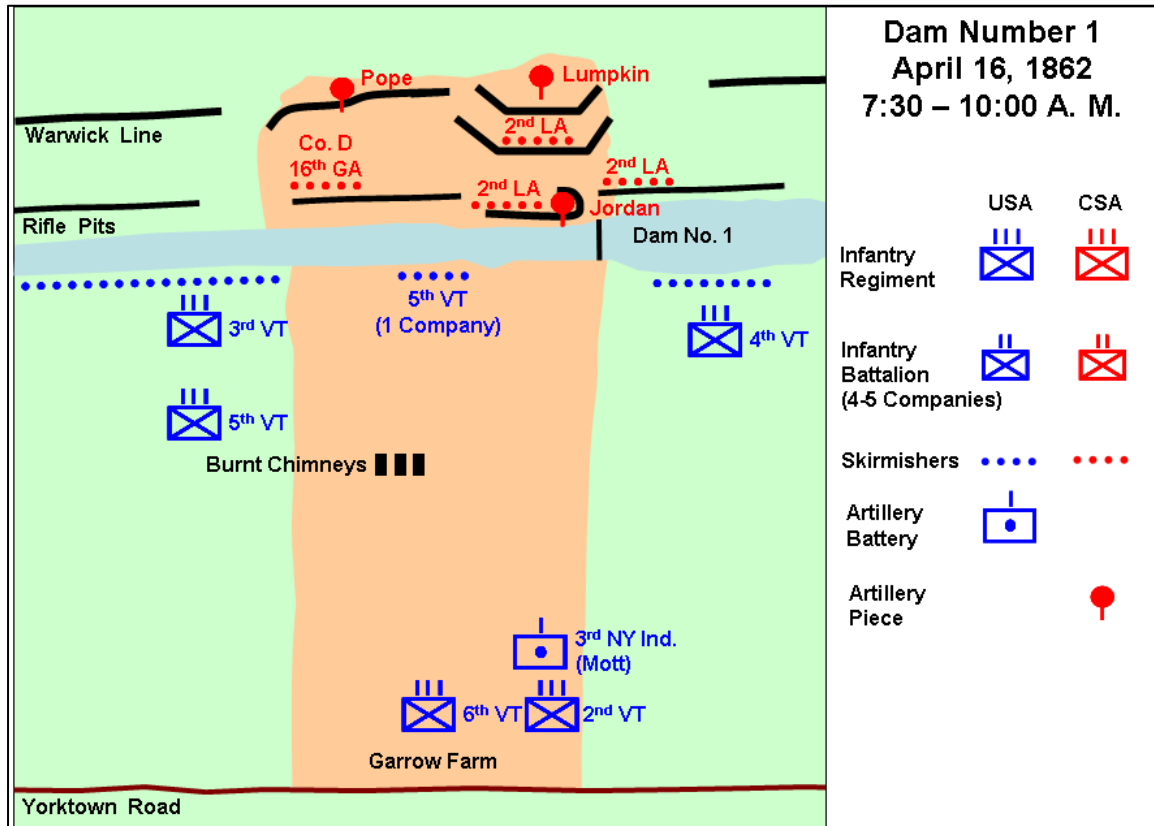
⁸ *OR*: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 34, “Reports of Brig. Gen. William T. H. Brooks, U. S. Army, commanding Second Brigade, Smith’s division, of engagement at Lee’s Mill or Burnt Chimneys,” p. 372.

⁹ *OR*: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 32, “Report of Capt. Thaddeus P. Mott, Third New York Battery, of engagement at Lee’s Mill, or Burnt Chimneys,” p. 369.

¹⁰ *OR*: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 61, “Report of Brigadier General Howell Cobb, commanding Second Brigade, Second Division, of engagement at Dam No. 1 (Lee’s Mill),” pp. 416-417.

¹¹ *OR*: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 63, “Report of Colonel Goode Bryan, 16th Georgia Infantry, of engagement at Dam No. 1 (Lee’s Mill),” p. 419.

the dam, was manned by a 24-pound howitzer commanded by Captain Jordan. Both positions in the main line were filled by guns from Captain M. Stanley's Troup Artillery Battery from Cobb's Georgia Legion. In the left position was a 12-pound howitzer under Lieutenant Lumpkin and in the right position was a 6-pound bronze field piece under Lieutenant Pope.¹²



The engagement began around 7:30 A.M. when Colonel Stoughton's skirmishers from the 4th Vermont opened fire on the enemy works and the Confederates answered with artillery fire.¹³ These opening shots quickly widened into a general engagement. The deployed section of Mott's battery responded to the Confederate artillery and Baldy Smith ordered Mott's other guns into action. On the left, the skirmishers of the 3rd Vermont also opened fire. Additionally, Brooks ordered the commander of the 5th Vermont, Colonel Henry A. Smalley, to organize a company of the best marksmen in his regiment and deploy them as skirmishers between the other regiments on the north edge of the Garrow Farm. Smalley complied and sent the men forward across the farm fields under Confederate artillery fire. After a harrowing march, the marksmen reached the river bank and plugged the gap between the 3rd and 4th Vermont skirmish lines. By

¹² OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 62, "Report of Capt. M. Stanley, commanding Troup Artillery, Cobb's (Georgia) Legion, of engagement at Dam No. 1 (Lee's Mill)," p. 418.

¹³ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 37, "Report of Colonel Edwin H. Stoughton, Fourth Vermont Infantry, of engagement at Lee's Mill or Burnt Chimneys," p. 377.

8 A.M., Baldy Smith had a line of skirmishers over a mile long and six artillery pieces pouring a steady fire into Cobb's line.¹⁴

On the Confederate side, only one of the three artillery pieces was having any success in dueling with the Federals. Captain Jordan's gunners at the dam quickly realized they were too low and too close to Garrow Ridge to effectively range any targets except for those near the dam. They fired several rounds without success before Jordan ordered them to cease fire and take shelter. The situation was even worse for the crew of Lieutenant Lumpkin's 12-pound howitzer. Their position in the Warwick Line was only a few feet higher than the works in front of it, where skirmishers from the 2nd Louisiana were deployed. If Lumpkin's men fired, they would be shooting directly over the heads of their own infantry at point-blank range. Given the well-known reliability problems with Civil War artillery ammunition (especially Confederate products), there was an enormous risk that duds from Lumpkin's gun could hit the skirmishers or defective fuses would detonate shells and case shots over their heads. Lumpkin decided that it was better to hold his fire, and his commanding officer, Captain Stanley, concurred. However, Stanley's other gun, the 6-pound piece under Lieutenant Pope, was able to fire from the right embrasure without significant risk to the infantrymen near the river. So, together with the skirmishers in the rifle pits, Pope's crew did their best to trade fire with the Federals.¹⁵

The engagement continued for several hours before trailing off into a mutual cease fire. The only officer on either side who noted the length of the engagement was Captain Mott, who stated that his battery was engaged from 7:45 to 10:00 A.M. Mott's notes on ammunition also offer insight into the intensity of the engagement. His right section (the first to deploy) fired 58 rounds, the center section fired 64 rounds, and the left section fired 45 rounds. The combined total for the battery was 167 rounds. This number of rounds over more than two hours suggests their rate of fire was steady, but not intense.¹⁶ Baldy Smith noted in his report that Mott's battery lost three men killed and several more wounded when one of Lieutenant Pope's shells hit the wheel of a Federal gun. Aside from this lucky shot, there was little of significance to report on either side.¹⁷

Confederate reports on the morning operations emphasized the Federal advantage in numbers and high terrain. This was correct, but it was only half of the story. The Federals were firing at a smaller number of targets that were dispersed across a wide front and shielded by good earthworks. Additionally, as it became obvious the Federals were not preparing to assault the Warwick Line, Confederate commanders had the option to withdraw their forces behind the works until Mott's bombardment ended. In the end, the small size of this engagement, the lack of a Federal assault, and the asymmetric advantages enjoyed by each side kept the morning's casualties to a minimum.

¹⁴ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 34, "Reports of Gen. Brooks, p. 372.

¹⁵ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 62, Report of Capt. Stanley, pp. 418-419.

¹⁶ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 32, "Report of Capt. Mott, p. 369.

¹⁷ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 29, Reports of Brigadier General William F. Smith, U.S. Army, commanding Second Division, Fourth Corps, of engagement at Lee's Mill, or Burnt Chimneys," p. 365.

April 16, 1862 – 10 A.M. to 3 P.M.

After the firing died down, Smith reconnoitered the Warwick Line and observed almost no movement in the works. He also noted that Lumpkin's howitzer had been replaced with a wooden decoy. These developments convinced him that his operations had driven the Confederates out of the area.¹⁸ His opinion was then reinforced by a scouting mission undertaken by a Lieutenant in the Vermont Brigade. At 10:30 A.M., First Lieutenant Edwin M. Noyes, an aide-de-camp to General Brooks from the 3rd Vermont, crossed the river, climbed the opposite bank and approached the rifle pits of the 15th North Carolina. Finding them empty, he advanced another 150 yards until he was within 50 yards of the main works. Noyes then paused to observe the situation before he retraced his steps and reported his findings to Brooks. During his mission, Noyes had not been approached, verbally challenged, or fired upon by any Confederates. During this time the Federals also saw wagons in the rear of the works that appeared to be removing stores. These facts reinforced Smith's belief that the Confederates were abandoning the area.¹⁹

At noon, General McClellan arrived at the Garrow Farm and spoke to General Smith and General Brooks about the morning operations. Lieutenant Noyes also recounted his reconnaissance to the general commanding. McClellan directed Smith to move his division to the Garrow Farm and hold it for siege operations. Smith then requested permission to initiate a larger bombardment and send a small force of skirmishers across the river to determine if the enemy works could be seized. McClellan agreed, but added a caveat: Smith was to avoid a general engagement by withdrawing his forces if they met serious resistance.²⁰ After the meeting, Smith directed his chief of artillery, Captain Romeyn B. Ayres, to assemble as many guns on Garrow Ridge as he could fit and to push them as far forward as possible. Around 2 P.M., Mott's battery moved to a new position near the chimneys, and other batteries deployed beside them. In less than an hour, Ayres had 20 of Smith's 22 guns deployed within 500 yards of the Confederate works.²¹ For the infantry assault, Smith chose the 3rd Vermont and ordered the commander, Colonel Breed N. Hyde, to send two companies across the river, followed by two more in support. Hyde chose Companies D and F to lead the attack, followed by Companies E and K in support, and placed Captain Fernando C. Harrington of Company D in command of the mission.²² Additionally, Brooks moved the 2nd and 6th Vermont forward, while the 5th Wisconsin and the 6th Maine from Hancock's Brigade moved into

¹⁸ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 29, Reports of Gen. Smith, p. 365.

¹⁹ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 34, "Reports of Brig. Gen. Brooks," p. 372.

²⁰ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 29, Reports of Gen. Smith, pp. 365-366.

²¹ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 30, Report of Captain Romeyn B. Ayres, Fifth U.S. Artillery, Chief of Artillery Smith's division, of engagement at Lee's Mill or Burnt Chimneys, p. 368. Ayres estimated the range to the enemy line as 900 yards, but this is about twice the actual distance.

²² OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 35, "Report of Colonel Breed N. Hyde, Third Vermont Infantry, of engagement at Lee's Mill or Burnt Chimneys," p. 375.

reserve behind the artillery.²³ By 3 P.M., Smith was in firm possession of the Garrow Farm and everything was ready for the next engagement at Dam Number 1.

April 16, 1862 – 3 P.M. to 6 P.M.

At 3 P.M., Captain Ayres' artillery began a massive barrage on the enemy works. Not only had the number of guns tripled since morning, but so did the rate of fire. Captain Mott recorded the ammunition expenditure for his three sections again as he had earlier, and his numbers tell the story. During the morning, Mott's entire battery had fired 167 rounds. During the afternoon, Mott's right section fired 211 rounds, his center section fired 122 rounds, and the left section fired 247 rounds, for a total of 580 rounds for the battery.²⁴ Many of the officers who reported on the battle were awed by the Federal artillery that afternoon. General Magruder wrote, "...by 3 p.m. nearly three batteries were directing a perfect storm of shot and shell on our exposed position."²⁵ Captain Stanley also noted, "...the fire of their artillery upon our works was terrific. The whole atmosphere was filled with the exploding shell and shrapnel." In spite of this barrage, Stanley sent Lieutenant Pope's gunners back to work, fighting another up-hill battle (literally and figuratively) against the 20 guns on Garrow Ridge. This time they also got some help from Captain Jordan's gunners at the dam. By moving closer to the front of the ridge, the Federal batteries had improved Jordan's ability to acquire them from his low position.²⁶ Jordan's help was short-lived, however, because his gun was soon disabled by the Federal artillery. General McLaws called for replacements, but no guns were placed until the battle was over.²⁷

As the barrage intensified, Companies D and F of the 3rd Vermont crossed the river, followed by Companies E and K. However, they found the crossing to be more difficult than Lieutenant Noyes had. When the Confederates built the Warwick Line and the military dams, they also snarled the bottom of the river with timber and undergrowth.²⁸

²³ *OR*: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 33, "Report of Brigadier General Winfield S. Hancock, U. S. Army, of engagement at Lee's Mill or Burnt Chimneys," p. 371.

²⁴ *OR*: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 32, Report of Capt. Mott, p. 369.

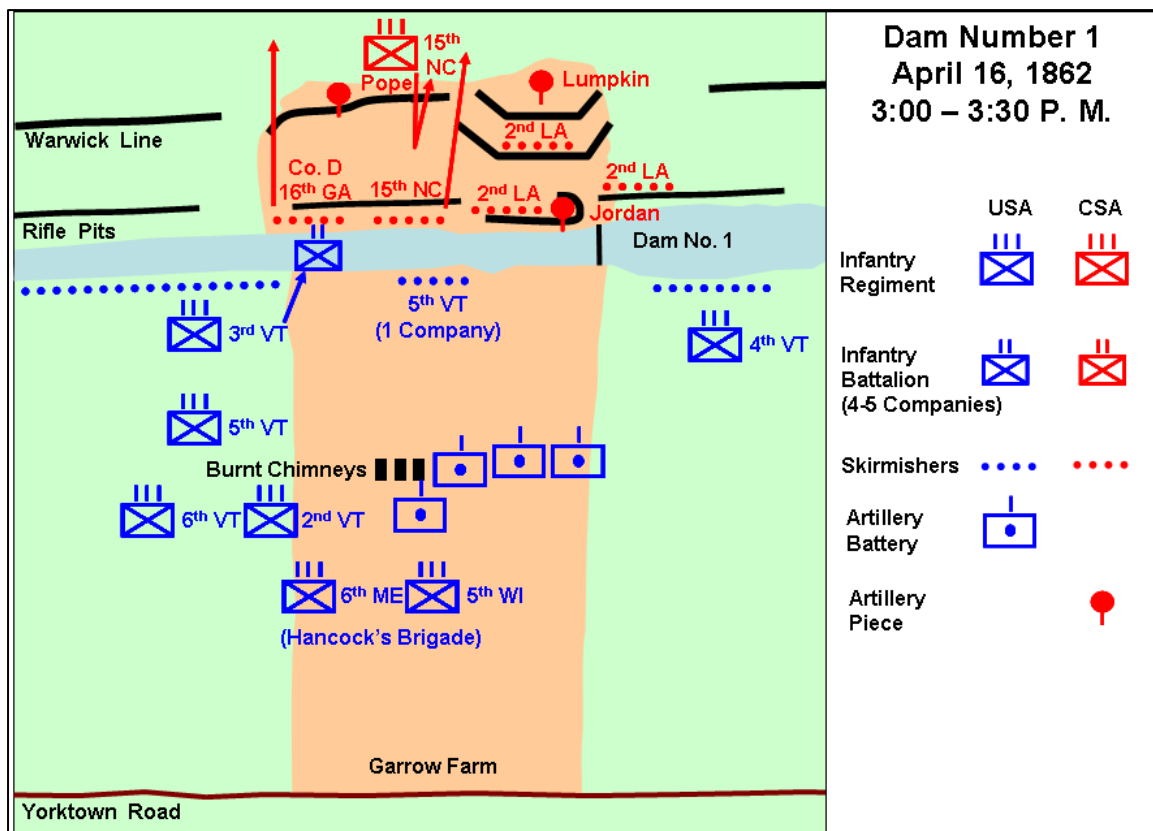
²⁵ *OR*: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 58, Report of Gen. Magruder, pp. 406-407.

²⁶ *OR*: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 62, Report of Capt. Stanley, p. 419.

²⁷ *OR*: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 60, Report of Brigadier General Lafayette McLaws, C.S. Army, commanding Second Division, of engagement at Dam Number 1 (Lee's Mill), p. 416. Also, *OR*: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 59, Report of Colonel H. C. Cabell, First Virginia Artillery, Chief of Artillery, pp. 413-414. McLaws called for guns from the batteries of Captain Palmer and Captain Thomas Jefferson Page, but he made no mention about sending any to the dam. Magruder's chief of artillery, Colonel H. C. Cabell, confirmed that the gun was replaced after the battle.

²⁸ *OR*: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 65, Report of Lieutenant Colonel Ross R. Ihrie, Fifteenth North Carolina Infantry, of engagement at Dam Number 1 (Lee's Mill), p. 422. In his report, Ihrie mentioned the obstacles on the bottom and estimated the depth of the water in front of the 15th North Carolina's position at around 4 feet.

These obstacles caused some of the charging infantrymen to stumble, and they arrived on the other shore with wet ammunition. The Vermonters also came under fire from pickets of the 15th North Carolina and Company D of the 16th Georgia, who killed and wounded a number of them. In spite of their difficulties, the Vermonters reached the opposite shore, deployed in line of battle and opened fire on the pickets. After their volley, they charged the pickets and drove them out of the rifle pits. The Vermonters then took cover behind the front wall of the rifle pits and waited to see how the Confederates would react to their presence.²⁹ They would not have to wait long to find out. Captain Montgomery, who commanded the pickets of the 16th Georgia, had gone to the rear with several of his men during the assault to advise Colonel Robert M. McKinney, the commander of the 15th North Carolina, of the threat to his sector.³⁰



Montgomery found McKinney and the Carolinians at their camp site, where they had been working on new fortifications since 10:30 A.M. McKinney called the regiment to arms and marched them to the works.³¹ At the same time, General Cobb rode to Dam Number 1 and ordered the rest of his brigade into the main line. From left to right, this included the 2nd Louisiana Infantry, the 15th North Carolina Infantry, the 16th Georgia Infantry, the 11th Georgia Infantry, and Cobb's Legion (under the command of his brother, Colonel Thomas Cobb). Cobb also requested support from the brigade of

²⁹ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 35, Report of Colonel Hyde, p. 375.

³⁰ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 63, Report of Colonel Bryan, pp. 419-420.

³¹ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 65, Report of Lt. Col. Ihrie, p. 422.

Colonel G. T. Anderson, and Anderson sent the 7th Georgia Infantry and 8th Georgia Infantry. With these additions, Cobb had seven regiments (about 4000 men) converging on fewer than 200 Vermonters.³²

The 15th North Carolina was the first regiment to reach the main works and they saw the Vermonters in their rifle pits. Colonel McKinney deployed the regiment in line of battle and ordered them forward at the double quick with a Rebel Yell. However, as soon as the Carolinians entered the open ground in front of the works, the Vermonters hit them with a well aimed volley that killed a number of men, including Colonel McKinney.³³ McKinney's death threw the Carolinians into confusion, and an unauthorized order caused them to retreat to the main works. Once inside the works, their panic spread through the 16th Georgia, 11th Georgia, and Cobb's Legion, throwing most of Cobb's Brigade into chaos for about 5 minutes. During this time, the officers rallied their men and moved them back to the works.³⁴

The engagement had reached its turning point, but Smith could not decide what to do next. McClellan had directed him to withdraw in the face of serious resistance, but the plucky Vermonters had repulsed a larger enemy force and thrown Cobb's Brigade into disorder. This raised doubts about the "seriousness" of their resistance. At the same time, the enemy response to the operation showed that they were not abandoning this sector, and this new intelligence contradicted the original premise for assaulting the rifle pits. Confounded by McClellan's nebulous instructions, Smith was not sure whether to send reinforcements or withdraw the four companies, so he chose a third option. He did nothing and waited to see what would happen.

The Confederates rallied around 3:30 P.M., and from then on, Cobb imposed a greater degree of cohesion on their operations. Instead of charges, the Vermonters were subjected to intense fire from the main works and a gradual envelopment from the front and both flanks. On the Confederate left, the 2nd Louisiana turned the Federal right flank. When the Vermonters attacked, Companies I and K of the 2nd Louisiana were deployed as skirmishers at the battery near the dam. While the other Confederate pickets abandoned the rifle pits, the Louisiana men stayed by the dam and turned so that both companies were able to fire at the Vermonters. They were then joined by Companies B and D, who climbed out of the main works, wheeled right and aligned with them. Together, these four companies began firing into the Federals' unprotected flank at a right angle. The remaining companies of the 2nd Louisiana fired down on the Vermonters from the main works.³⁵ In the center, the 15th North Carolina moved forward again more carefully, with a battalion from the 16th Georgia on their right and the 7th and 8th Georgia of Anderson's Brigade moving up behind them in support. The

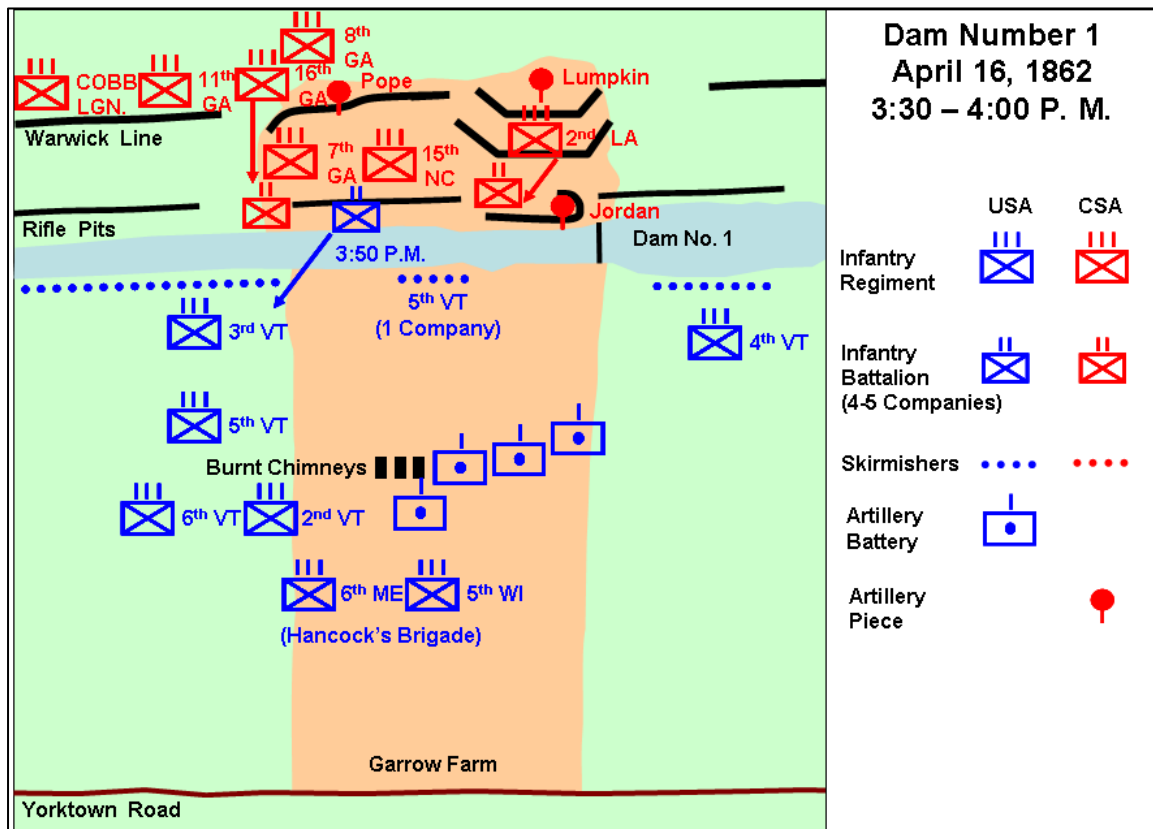
³² OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 61, Report of General Cobb, pp. 416-417.

³³ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 65, Report of Lt. Col. Ihrie, p. 422.

³⁴ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 61, Report of General Cobb, p. 417.

³⁵ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 64, Report of Colonel William M. Levy, Second Louisiana Infantry, of engagement at Dam Number 1 (Lee's Mill), p. 421.

remainder of the Cobb's regiments occupied the main line and added their fire to the counterattack.³⁶



As the Confederates closed in on the rifle pits, the Vermonters' situation grew desperate. The last of their dry ammunition was running out, nearly half of their men were dead or wounded, no reinforcements were coming, and a superior enemy force was pouring fire into their position. General Smith's artillery chief, Captain Ayres, tried to help by concentrating his batteries on the advancing Confederates. He noted, "At one time we fired upon a regiment marching by flank, carrying away their colors and scattering them quickly."³⁷ Ayres' support probably saved the lives of a number of Vermonters by delaying the envelopment of the rifle pits, but he couldn't prevent the inevitable. From the Federal lines, Colonel Hyde watched the situation deteriorate and tried to send a full report to General Brooks. When his courier could not find the general, Hyde signaled to the four companies to retreat at 3:45 P.M.³⁸ Captain Harrington passed the order, but some of his men initially didn't comply. Harrington passed the order a second time and around 3:50 P.M. all four companies ran for the river.³⁹

³⁶ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 63 (Bryan), p. 419; p. 417; No. 64 (Levy), p. 421; and No. 65 (Ihrie), p. 422. These reports each provide different information on the counterattack and the roles of the units involved.

³⁷ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 30, Report of Captain Ayres, p. 368.

³⁸ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 35, Report of Colonel Hyde, p. 375.

³⁹ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 36, "Report of Captain Harrington," p. 376.

Having held the enemy rifle pits for 40 minutes in the face of overwhelming opposition, the Vermonters showed equal defiance in their retreat. Ignoring the severe enemy fire, they evacuated every wounded man whom they believed had a chance of survival and carried them across the river. Even for those who were not carrying a wounded man the crossing was perilous. After the battle, an unidentified 16 year-old soldier from Lamoille County, VT, told a newspaper reporter, "Why, Sir, it was just like sap-boiling in that stream—the bullets fell so thick."⁴⁰ At 4 P.M. the last of the Vermonters crossed their regimental skirmish line with the wounded and entered the safety of the woods. Captain Harrington reported the number of killed, wounded and missing among the four companies at 82 out of the 192 men who began the attack, for a 43% casualty rate.⁴¹

The area around Dam Number 1 grew quiet for about an hour, and soldiers on both sides of the river probably thought that the fighting was over. However, during this time, Smith decided to make another attack on the rifle pits. A section of Ayres' artillery was pushed forward on the right to enfilade the rifle pits of the 15th North Carolina. Then, under an artillery barrage, a battalion of the 4th Vermont, on the Federal right, would move along the abatis by the river to the end of the dam and would cross the dam, if possible. At the same time, the 6th Vermont would send a battalion across the stream on the left, where the 3rd Vermont had crossed.⁴² The 4th Vermont was already in place above the dam and Colonel Stoughton selected four companies for the mission.⁴³ Below the dam, the 6th Vermont relieved the 3rd Vermont from their position by the river and the commander, Colonel Nathan Lord, Jr., chose five companies for the assault.⁴⁴

At 5 P.M., Captain Ayres' artillery opened fire on the Confederate works again. As the bombardment began, Colonel Stoughton led his battalion out of the woods and down to the river. At the same time, Colonel Lord also led his battalion down to the shore on the left. Both battalions, however, quickly found the situation had changed since 3 P.M. Cobb's regiments were waiting in their works to repel the attack, and Stoughton's advance was quickly checked at the end of the dam by heavy fire. The men of the 4th Vermont sought cover behind the abatis and any natural obstacles they could find as Baldy Smith looked on from the ridge. Fortunately, Smith quickly realized the hopelessness of the situation and sent a courier to Stoughton with an order to abort the mission. Upon receipt of the order, Stoughton ordered his men to carry off their wounded

⁴⁰ Unattributed. *Harper's Weekly*, "Our Army Before Yorktown," May 3, 1862, p. 283. (*Harper's* credits the story as a reprint from the *New York Tribune*.) According to the book, *The Civil War: A Book of Quotations*, by Robert Blaisdell (2004, Courier Dover Publications), the soldier who compared the river to sap boiling was Private Julian A. Scott. In 1865, Scott was awarded the Medal of Honor for crossing the Warwick River several times to carry off wounded men during the Battle of Dam Number 1.

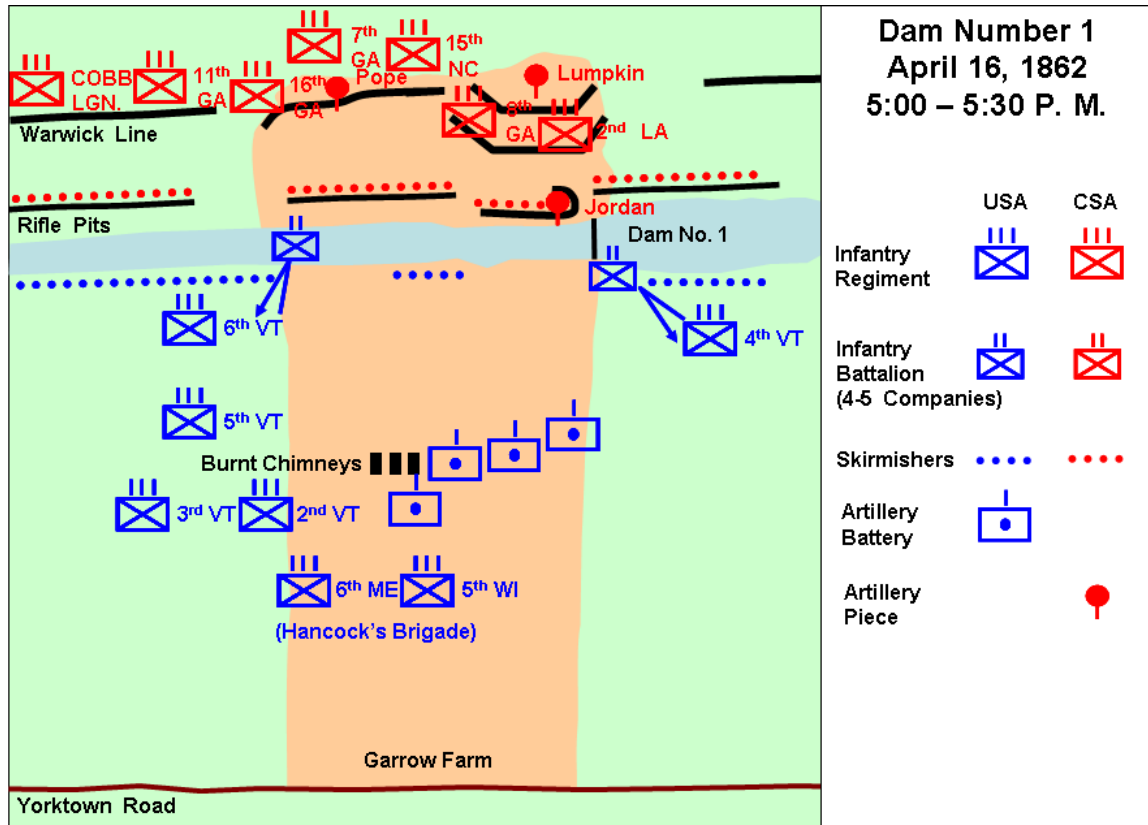
⁴¹ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 36, "Report of Captain Harrington," p. 376.

⁴² OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 34, "Reports of Brig. Gen. Brooks," pp. 372-373.

⁴³ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 37, "Report of Colonel Edwin H. Stoughton, Fourth Vermont Infantry, of engagement at Lee's Mill or Burnt Chimneys," p. 377.

⁴⁴ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: Peninsular Campaign: Reports, No. 39, "Report of Colonel Nathan Lord, Jr., Sixth Vermont Infantry, of engagement at Lee's Mill or Burnt Chimneys," pp. 378-379.

and return to the woods. The role of the 4th Vermont in Smith's second assault probably lasted no more than ten minutes.⁴⁵



On the left, Lord's companies made more progress. Companies A and F entered the river and proceeded across, followed by Companies D, H and I. A number of men were hit during the crossing, but the forward companies pressed on until they were within 30 yards of the rifle pits. At this point they were hit by a massive crossfire from the enemy works that halted their advance. Colonel Lord was surprised by the intensity of the fire, and, aware that Stoughton's advance had been checked, he realized that his battalion had no chance of taking the rifle pits under such fire. He immediately ordered a withdrawal and his men returned to their lines with their wounded. Lord's decision undoubtedly saved many lives, but a number of additional men fell during the retreat, including the regimental color sergeant. First Sergeant Edward A. Holton of Company I rescued the flag from the river, earning an official commendation in Colonel Lord's report. Lord also noted that the flag had 11 bullet holes after the mission.⁴⁶

Federal casualties for the second mission were lighter than those from the first. Colonel Stoughton reported that the 4th Vermont had lost two killed and ten wounded, including the commander of Company C, Captain Atherton. Colonel Lord's casualty reports for the 6th Vermont were unrealistically low and are contradicted by the number of men of the 6th Vermont who are buried at nearby Yorktown National Cemetery (see p. 18). A

⁴⁵ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 34, "Reports of Brig. Gen. Brooks," p. 373.

⁴⁶ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 39, "Report of Colonel Lord," pp. 378-379.

post-war book, *Vermont in the Civil War*, by George Grenville Benedict, estimated the casualties of the 6th Vermont at 13 killed and 67 wounded.⁴⁷

As Lord's men returned to the shelter of the woods, the mid-April sun was setting. Colonel Levy of the 2nd Louisiana noted with satisfaction, "After this second decisive repulse, the enemy retired their infantry from the field, and, night coming on, the combat ceased, leaving us in full possession of our position, from which we had not moved, except to drive back and pursue the enemy..."⁴⁸

Aftermath

In his book, Benedict reported the total casualties in the Vermont Brigade on April 16, 1862 at 44 dead and 148 wounded, for a total of 192.⁴⁹ Baldy Smith reported the casualties for Captain Ayres' artillerymen as 3 dead and 7 wounded in Mott's Battery and 1 wounded in Ayres' 5th U.S. Battery.⁵⁰ All together, the Federal casualties were 47 dead and 156 wounded, for a total of 203.

General Magruder mentioned Confederate losses in his report, saying, "Our own loss was comparatively trivial, owing to the earthworks, which covered our men, and did not exceed 75 killed and wounded." Aside from Magruder, only Lieutenant Colonel Ross Ihrie of the 15th North Carolina reported any Confederate casualty figures. Ihrie said his regiment lost 12 killed and 31 wounded, for a total of 43. This total constitutes 9% of the regiment and 57% of the Confederate losses.⁵¹

The Battle of Dam Number 1 was small, but it was significant because it was the only major combat operation during McClellan's siege of the Yorktown-Warwick Line. McClellan made no more attempts to test the Confederate weak points outside Yorktown, and the Confederates abandoned the Yorktown-Warwick Line on the night before McClellan's 100 siege guns were ready to open on Yorktown. Magruder had stalled McClellan's drive to Richmond for a month at little cost and bought time for the Confederate government to move the Army of Northern Virginia to the peninsula. Magruder's command became a part of this army, and together they fell back to Magruder's northern line at Williamsburg, where the next battle of the Peninsula Campaign took place on May 4-5, 1862.

Dam Number 1 is also noteworthy because it gave a clear warning of the sufferings that Federal soldiers would endure under General McClellan. McClellan had done a magnificent job of organizing, training, and equipping the Army of the Potomac. He excelled in these areas because he was logical, methodical and careful. He also cared deeply about his men and was reluctant to see them sacrificed in anything short of a perfect situation. Perfect situations are rare on the battlefield, however, where chaos

⁴⁷ Benedict, p. 264.

⁴⁸ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 64 Report of Colonel Levy, p. 421

⁴⁹ Benedict, p. 264.

⁵⁰ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 29, "Report of General Smith," pp. 367.

⁵¹ OR: Vol. Eleven, Chapter 23, Part 1: No. 58, (Magruder), p. 408; and No. 65 (Ihrie), p. 422.

reigns and outcomes cannot be predicted with certainty. This was why McClellan preferred his methodical, but plodding siege operations in Yorktown and refused to exploit Confederate weak points outside Yorktown. It was also why McClellan gave Smith highly restrictive guidance when he finally authorized an assault on the Confederate works at Dam Number 1.

Ironically, the excess caution of McClellan and Smith on April 16 actually *caused* the majority of the Federal casualties. McClellan viewed the use of battalions against regiments as economy of force, since fewer men were put in harm's way. In fact, the battalions from the 3rd and 6th Vermont suffered extraordinary losses in their lop-sided engagements, and it is far from certain that the Federals would have lost significantly more men if they had attempted to break the Warwick Line with a brigade-sized assault. Unfortunately, McClellan never learned from this experience and remained highly cautious throughout the Peninsula Campaign and the Battle of Antietam. This finally led to his dismissal by President Lincoln in the fall of 1862.



The last meeting. President Lincoln visited McClellan's headquarters on the Antietam Battlefield on October 3, 1862. McClellan would later describe the meeting as "cordial," but Lincoln seethed when McClellan refused to swiftly pursue the beaten Confederates into Virginia. For Lincoln, McClellan's inaction culminated a pattern of overly cautious behavior that began at Dam Number 1. A few weeks after the meeting, Lincoln removed McClellan from command of the Army of the Potomac.

Touring the Battlefield and the Yorktown-Warwick Line

Today, Magruder's Yorktown-Warwick Line is remarkably well preserved. The fort at Mulberry Island still exists inside Fort Eustis, but the U.S. Army does not permit access to the site. However, all of the other sites are accessible and a list of the accessible sites follows.

1. Lee's Mill

Start your tour from Interstate 64 (I-64). Take exit 250A to Fort Eustis Boulevard West (VA Route 105). Follow this road for .9 mile and take the ramp onto Warwick Boulevard (VA Route 60.) East. Follow Warwick Boulevard for .6 mile and turn right on to Lee's Mill Drive. After .1 mile, turn left on to Rivers Ridge Circle. Follow Rivers Ridge Circle for .2 miles, and Lee's Mill Park is on the left. There is a parking area in front of the park.

Lee's Mill has become a residential area, but the city of Newport News has preserved part of Magruder's works at the site where Baldy Smith's Division first made contact with the Warwick Line on April 5, 1862. The site is a city park with well-developed trails and several interpretive markers.

2. Dam Number 1 and the Warwick Line

From Lee's Mill, retrace the drive from Rivers Ridge Circle to Lee's Mill Drive and Warwick Boulevard. Turn left (west) onto Warwick Boulevard and go .2 mile to the ramp to Yorktown/I64. Take the ramp and follow Fort Eustis Boulevard East .8 mile *past* I-64 to Jefferson Avenue (VA Route 143). Turn left onto Jefferson Avenue and travel .3 to the entrance to Newport News Park. Turn right into the park and follow Constitution Way for .9 mile to the park's Discovery Center on your right. Inside the Discovery Center, you can see displays on the Battle of Dam Number 1 and talk to park rangers about the battlefield.

Much of the Warwick Line is preserved inside the grounds of Newport News Park, as is the entire Dam Number 1 battlefield. Begin your walking tour at the park's Discovery Center. Behind the center there is a trail that passes the site of the Garrow House. The chimneys are no longer standing, but an archaeological project has unearthed many of their bricks. The house site is adjacent to the left flank of Federal artillery embrasures that were built after the battle. These works mark the final position of Captain Ayres' guns during the battle, and they noticeably slant forward from left to right, reflecting Ayres' attempt to enfilade the rifle pits. Behind the embrasures there is a golf course that extends to Fort Eustis Boulevard. The golf course is built over the Garrow Farm and Fort Eustis Boulevard follows the same course as the road that bounded the farm.

Return to the Discovery Center and find the battlefield trail on the east side of the parking lot. There are four interpretive markers on the south (Federal) side of the water. After seeing these sites, proceed to the large pedestrian bridge across the river. At the river, visitors will discover the only major change in the battlefield today. The city of Newport News has dammed this portion of the Warwick River to create Lee Hall Reservoir. The high waters of the reservoir cover Dam Number 1, but the ends of the dam are visible from the bridge. Cross the bridge and turn left to follow the Twin Forts Loop Trail around the Confederate rifle pits and main works. There are six interpretive markers on the Confederate side of the river.

3. Yorktown National Cemetery

From the Discovery Center, turn left (west) on Constitution Way and return to the entrance of the park. Turn left onto Jefferson Avenue and travel .3 to the intersection with Fort Eustis Boulevard. Turn left on to Fort Eustis Boulevard and continue for 3.6 miles. Turn left at George Washington Memorial Highway/U.S. Route 17 North and continue for .6 mile. The road then forks; take the right fork, Cook Rd. (VA Route 704), and continue for 2.1 miles. Yorktown National Cemetery is located at the intersection of Cook Rd. and Union Rd., and there is a parking lot on the right side of Cook Rd.

Following the battle, the Federals buried their dead in neat, well-marked graves on the Garrow Farm. After the war, these men were reinterred at Yorktown National Cemetery. Among Yorktown's known burials, there are 37 men of the Vermont Brigade and three artillerymen from Captain Mott's 3rd New York Independent Battery who were killed or died of wounds received on April 16, 1862. There is also one man from the 2nd Michigan Infantry Regiment. His regiment was with General Hamilton's Division on the right flank of Smith's Division, and he was killed by artillery fire on April 16. (See roster below.) Evidence suggests there are some additional casualties from Dam Number 1 among Yorktown's 800 unknown graves as well.

One of the Vermonters buried at Yorktown is Private William Scott of Company K, 3rd Vermont, who some called the most famous private of the war. In September 1861, Scott had the dubious distinction of being the first Union soldier to be condemned to death by a court martial. He was found sleeping on guard duty in the early morning hours of August 31, but there were extenuating circumstances because Scott had pulled guard duty on two consecutive nights to help out a sick friend. The court martial board was not impressed by this, but President Abraham Lincoln was impressed and Scott became the first of many Union soldiers that Lincoln saved from the ultimate penalty with a presidential pardon. At the time, Lincoln's decision was widely reported in northern newspapers and was sharply criticized by those who believed that a slacker had escaped justice. Public opinion changed, however, when the same newspapers later reported that Private Scott died on April 17, 1862 from six bullet wounds he received in the rifle pits at Dam Number 1. Scott's comrades also reported that his last words were a prayer of blessing for the President who had allowed him to die with honor. Lincoln's standing increased in the eyes of many people, and William Scott became a legendary figure who is still well known and honored in his native Vermont. Private Scott, the Sleeping Sentinel, is buried in grave number 351 at Yorktown.

3RD INDEPENDENT BATTERY, NY LIGHT ARTILLERY – CAPTAIN MOTT						
Name	Rank	Battery	Age	Notes	Date of Death	Grave #
Lambert, Emile	Corporal	3 Indpt Btry, NY Light Arty	30	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	462
Morehouse, Charles P.	Private	3 Indpt Btry, NY Light Arty	Unknown	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	456
Parville, Anton	Private	3 Indpt Btry, NY Light Arty	Unknown	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	448

3RD VERMONT INFANTRY REGIMENT – VERMONT BRIGADE						
Name	Rank	Regiment / Company	Age	Notes	Date of Death	Grave #
Bailey, Andrew A.	Private	3 VT Infantry Company A	28	Mortally wounded	April 17, 1862	1266
Batten, Albert J.	Private	3 VT Infantry Company K	19	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	322
Boynton, Austin L.	Private	3 VT Infantry Company F	23	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	606
Campbell, Jr., David	Private	3 VT Infantry Company D	22	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	592
Genneville, Felix	Private	3 VT Infantry Company K	24	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	784
Cookman, James	Private	3 VT Infantry Company D	26	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	596
Danforth, Sewell	Private	3 VT Infantry Company D	24	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	588
Downer, William H.	Private	3 VT Infantry Company F	21	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	353
George, M.	Private	3 VT Infantry	Unknown	Unknown.	Unknown	602
Hill, Henry C.	Private	3 VT Infantry Company D	18	Mortally wounded	April 18, 1862	573
Hutchinson, Alonzo	Corporal	3 VT Infantry Company D	26	Mortally wounded	April 18, 1862	574
Morrill, Frank	Private	3 VT Infantry Company F	22	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	357
Perry, Jacob F.	Sergeant	3 VT Infantry Company F	22	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	355
Scott, M.	Private	3 VT Infantry	Unknown	Unknown.	April 16, 1862	251
Scott, William	Private	3 VT Infantry Company K	22	Mortally wounded	April 17, 1862	351
Thomas, Frank J.	Private	3 VT Infantry Company E	18	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	598
Thompson, Samuel	Private	3 VT Infantry Company E	22	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	590
Vance, Walter P.	Private	3 VT Infantry Company E	42	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	604
Waterman, Ezekiel D.	Private	3 VT Infantry Company K	42	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	326
Wells, Charles W.	Private	3 VT Infantry Company E	18	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	603
Wilson, Don C.	Corporal	3 VT Infantry Company F	22	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	594
Wilson, Richard	Private	3 VT Infantry Company F	21	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	586

4TH VERMONT INFANTRY REGIMENT – VERMONT BRIGADE						
Name	Rank	Regiment / Company	Age	Notes	Date of Death	Grave #
Dibble, David J.	Private	4 VT Infantry Company I	18	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	346
Niles, Stephen B.	Private	4 VT Infantry Company I	26	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	334

6TH VERMONT INFANTRY REGIMENT – VERMONT BRIGADE						
Name	Rank	Regiment / Company	Age	Notes	Date of Death	Grave #
Axtell, Channing	Private	6 VT Infantry Company F	18	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	778
Barney, Mason	Private	6 VT Infantry Company E	18	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	441
Basconer, Mitchell	Private	6 VT Infantry Company H	27	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	794
Blakely, Roger T.	Private	6 VT Infantry Company F	20	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	450
Colburn, Chandler E.	Private	6 VT Infantry Company D	19	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	782
Connell, Philip	Private	6 VT Infantry Company F	39	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	776
Daniels, Thomas	Private	6 VT Infantry Company H	27	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	255
Dodge, Edwin R.	Corporal	6 VT Infantry Company H	27	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	786
Godfrey, William W.	Private	6 VT Infantry Company F	26	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	774
Oakes, Joseph	Private	6 VT Infantry Company F	28	Mortally wounded	April 25, 1862	1465
Talbot, Lewis	Private	6 VT Infantry Company D	45	Mortally wounded	April 17, 1862	444
Wales, Lucius W.	Sergeant	6 VT Infantry Company H	18	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	780

2ND VERMONT INFANTRY REGIMENT – VERMONT BRIGADE						
Name	Rank	Regiment / Company	Age	Notes	Date of Death	Grave #
Savory, John H.	Private	2 VT Infantry Company B	24	Mortally wounded	April 18, 1862	788

2ND MICHIGAN INFANTRY REGIMENT – HAMILTON'S DIVISION						
Name	Rank	Regiment / Company	Age	Notes	Date of Death	Grave #
Bishop, William L.	Sergeant	2 MI Infantry Company F	31	Killed in action	April 16, 1862	222

4. Yorktown National Battlefield

The Visitor Center for Yorktown National Battlefield is near the cemetery. From the cemetery parking lot, turn right and head north on Cook Rd. for .2 mile. Turn left at Ballard Street and continue for .1 mile. Turn right at Colonial National Historical Parkway and continue for .3 mile. The Visitor Center is on your right and the parking lot is on your left.

Yorktown National Battlefield is part of Colonial National Historical Park and the focus of the park is on Revolutionary War history. However, the staff has information on the Civil War siege and can direct visitors to the sites in the park related to the Civil War.