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Virginia Court of Appeals Deals Blow to Data Center Complex Threatening Manassas Battlefield

Three-judge panel agrees Prince William County acted unlawfully in fast-tracked vote approving the world’s largest data center complex

Jared Herr, ABT, March 31, 2026

(Arlington, Va.) — The Virginia Court of Appeals has rejected the rezonings approving the world’s largest data center complex alongside Manassas National Battlefield Park, upholding a lower court ruling that found Prince William County had improperly fast-tracked the votes without properly advertising the proposal or making its text available to the public.

with the American Battlefield Trust, the Oak Valley Homeowners Association, and local landowners who challenged the rezonings. Finding numerous violations of Virginia Code and Prince William County Ordinances, the Court stated that “we affirm the trial court’s judgment declaring the [Prince William Digital Gateway] rezonings void *ab initio*.”

American Battlefield Trust President David Duncan praised the ruling: “The Court of Appeals agreed with the position we have taken for years: the County did not properly advertise this nightmarish proposal or make its text available to the public, despite the extraordinary public impact that the project would have. Instead, the County rushed to judgment, because they knew support on the Board for this mega-project was eroding.”

“This is a great victory for every citizen in Prince William County who can now trust the county must strictly adhere to legal processes put in place,” said Mac Haddow, president of the Oak Valley Homeowners Association, which led one of the two lawsuits against the Prince William Digital Gateway rezoning. “It is also a signal of what will happen to these predatory data center developers who abuse power to get their way.”



Trust attorney Chap Petersen addresses reporters outside the Virginia Court of Appeals. Jared Herr

In a major victory for county residents and the region’s irreplaceable historic landscapes, a unanimous three-judge panel of the Virginia Court of Appeals sided



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A rendering of what would be the largest data center campus proposal in the world – including its relationship to Trust-protected land!

Today’s ruling is a long-sought victory in the 26-month legal challenge against the Prince William Digital Gateway. However, deep-pocketed data center companies are expected to appeal to the Virginia Supreme Court. Prince William County has gone along with these appeals to date, racking up more than \$1.6 million in legal fees to support a project its citizens fiercely opposed and do not want.

“While heartened by the Court of Appeals’ ruling, we know we must stay in the fight and pursue every angle to ensure this project does not come to fruition and desecrate the hallowed ground of the Manassas Battlefield,” added Duncan.

The Virginia Court of Appeals decision addresses two parallel suits challenging the December 2023 rezoning vote. Those rezonings were hastily pushed through by a lame-duck Board of Supervisors as the terms of two pro-data center members were about to expire. The rezonings were approved with a 4-3 vote, and one abstention, amid overwhelming public opposition and against recommendations from county planning staff.

In one suit, a Prince William Circuit Court Judge agreed with the Oak Valley Homeowners Association that the rezonings were void because of improper public advertisement, prompting appeal by the County and developers. Meanwhile, in the separate Trust-led case, a different judge ruled that the project could advance, without hearing the evidence, a decision that the Trust and its allies appealed.

Because of similarities in the cases, notably the issue of improper public notice of the vote — primarily that newspaper advertisements of the rezonings published on December 2, 5 and 9 did not adhere to Virginia or Prince William law, requiring them to appear six days apart for two consecutive weeks — the Virginia Court of Appeals chose to combine oral arguments into a unified hearing on February 24. Today, it made a unanimous decision to set aside the rezonings.



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Manassas National Battlefield Park, Va. Buddy Secor

The Prince William Digital Gateway — with 37 proposed data center buildings, roughly the equivalent of 144 Walmart Supercenters — would require 14 on-site electrical substations for operation. These data centers are expected to consume up to 9 gigawatts of electricity, enough to power over 2 million homes, and to stretch miles of high voltage transmission lines over the hallowed grounds and private homes of Prince William County.

Six leading national and regional conservation organizations with more than 1 million combined members and supporters filed *amicus curiae* briefs in support of the American Battlefield Trust and Oak Valley Homeowners Association lawsuits. Those briefs voiced their organization's and allies' concerns that the project "would inevitably lead to the irreversible and irreparable desecration of hallowed ground and the despoiling of the natural and cultural resources" in historic Prince William County.

Manassas National Battlefield Park commemorates two critical battles of the

American Civil War, the Battles of First and Second Manassas (a referred to as First and Second Bull Run). Together, the two battles resulted in nearly 27,000 casualties. While the presence of a national park demonstrates the significance of these battles, important historical events occurred beyond its modern boundaries, some of which are slated to be the site of the Prince William Digital Gateway. Additionally, the proposed complex threatens the remains of those who fell and were laid to rest in unknown, unmarked graves.

The American Battlefield Trust is dedicated to preserving America's hallowed battlegrounds and educating the public about what happened there and why it matters today. The nonprofit, nonpartisan organization has protected more than 60,000 acres associated with the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War across 160 sites in 25 states, including 387 acres at Manassas. Learn more at www.battlefields.org.

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In Memoriam: Chris Calkins

April 2, 2026

Christopher M. Calkins

Civil War historian Christopher M. "Chris" Calkins, a battlefield preservation leader in Virginia stretching back to the earliest days of the movement, died on April 1, following a years-long battle with Parkinson's disease. His passing comes on the eve of the release of his latest book, *Final Bloodshed: Hospitals and Caring for the Wounded in the Appomattox Campaign*, co-authored with Patrick A. Schroeder and published by the



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Appomattox-Petersburg Preservation Society.

Calkins had a 34-year career with the National Park Service, working at Appomattox Court House National Historical Park and Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park, before concluding his NPS career as historian and Chief of Interpretation at Petersburg National Battlefield. In 2008 he accepted the position of first full-time Park Manager at the newly established Sailor's Creek Battlefield Historical State Park – a park he “developed from scratch,” as he liked to put it.

But some of his greatest contributions came from his behind-the-scenes work on behalf of Civil War battlefield preservation and interpretation. The Trust recognized Calkins's extraordinary contributions in 2021 by awarding him the Edwin C. Bearss Lifetime Achievement Award.

“Whenever we needed confirmation of the historical integrity of any tract of battlefield land associated with either the Petersburg or Appomattox campaigns, Chris was always the first person we would call,” said Trust President David Duncan. “I’ll never forget touring battlefields such as Reams Station, White Oak Road, Saylor’s Creek or Hatcher’s Run with Chris. He made those places come alive as few people ever could, and he was always extraordinarily dedicated to seeing that these places he loved were preserved. He was personally generous with his time, his deep knowledge, and his treasure, donating significant amounts to our

mission over the years. We will miss him desperately.”

For eight years, Calkins served on the board of directors of the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites, Inc., which was founded in 1987 and has since evolved into the modern the American Battlefield Trust. In 1989, Calkins engineered the purchase of three small parcels totaling 8.4 acres at the site of a Confederate battery on the White Oak Road battlefield, among the first acquisitions of the fledgling organization.

Calkins helped broker preservation deals at seven battlefield sites around Petersburg and Appomattox, including Five Forks, White Oak Road, Hatcher’s Run and Reams Station. But perhaps his most notable accomplishment was starting the effort that led to the initial preservation in 1991 of the Petersburg Breakthrough battlefield by Dr. Robert B. Pamplin, Jr., and the creation of Pamplin Historical Park. That project came full circle just last month, with the Trust completing its purchase of the 417-acre Pamplin Campus, uniting ownership of the battlefield and establishing the Breakthrough Battlefield Foundation to continue operation of the park and museum.

“The Pamplin property was brought to us through another wonderful, fine, outstanding historian, a great friend, Chris Calkins, who, of course, is Mr. Petersburg, Mr. Appomattox, and everything in between Petersburg and Appomattox,” former APCWS President Dennis Frye recalled in a 2012 oral history interview with the Trust.



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“Chris identified the Pamplin family, and identified the property there and brought that to the board. And so, it just kind of dropped in our laps. But it didn't, really, because Chris researched it, figured it out and helped make it happen.”

In 1994, Chris was among a small group of historians who created what became Civil War Trails. It started as Lee's Retreat, a modest history trail that followed the route of Lee's retreat to Appomattox from Richmond and Petersburg to Appomattox Court House. The original 12 locations grew to 26 sites that included wayside exhibits with maps and solar-powered AM radio transmissions of historical information. Today, Civil War Trails and its distinctive “red bugle” signs are part of more than 1,500 sites across six states.

Calkins authored twelve publications, numerous articles, and spoken nationally to many Civil War and preservation groups. He was interviewed on the History Channel, A & E, Discovery Channel, HGTV and ITV in the UK.

A native of Detroit, Michigan, he became hooked on the Civil War as a boy. “In May of 1963 my parents took us to Washington, D.C., and on our way back we saw a sign for Gettysburg. So, we ended up at Gettysburg. . . I bought my first bullet there and I still have it on my desk,” Calkins said in a 2012 oral history interview with the Trust.

After graduating from high school in 1969, Calkins and some friends went on a

“Cannonball Circuit,” visiting East Coast Civil War battlefields. That led to a part-time job as a living history participant at Appomattox Court House and then a full-time job in 1971.

“And the day after Christmas in 1971 I packed up my Beetle – I had a VW Beetle then – and everything I owned, and came down to Virginia and haven't left since,” he said in 2012. He subsequently earned a degree from Longwood College (now University) in Farmville and published his first book, *Thirty Six Hours Before Appomattox*, in 1980.

Calkins said in 2012 that many of his preservation accomplishments were due in no small measure to his wife, Sarah, who passed away in 2016, after a 40-year marriage.

In developing personal relationships with landowners – a crucial element in battlefield preservation – “it doesn't hurt to be married to the local gal from Appomattox that everybody knows,” he said. “We met at the Dairy Queen in Appomattox. I was 20. And she is Miss Personality. But she grew up in a totally different environment – a 200-acre hog and tobacco farm. And, of course, I came out of Detroit and the city. But she's my secret weapon.”

And Calkins, in turn, was an ace up the sleeve of the preservation movement.

“I can safely say that without Chris's excellent relationships with local landowners, coupled with his thorough, dedicated research, that many important



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sites, like Appomattox Station, would not be preserved today,” noted Tom Gilmore, chief land preservation officer at the Trust.

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Call for Volunteers: Nationwide Clean-Up Day at Historic Sites

The 30th annual Park Day encourages volunteers nationwide to join in revitalizing historic sites in their regions and communities

Jared Herr, ABT, April 2, 2026

(Washington, D.C.) —This April, thousands of volunteers will descend upon historic sites across the country as part of the American Battlefield Trust’s annual Park Day event. Now in its 30th year, the spring clean-up effort has provided an avenue to refresh battlefields, museums and other historic sites in time for tourist season, and this year, America’s Semi quincennial anniversary.

Park Day is scheduled for Saturday, April 25, 2026, in alignment with Earth Week, National Volunteer Week and the America Gives initiative, amplifying the impact of volunteer efforts from coast to coast. Volunteers will be joined by participants at more than 110 sites across 27 states and the District of Columbia, banding together to give back to their communities.

For a complete list of participating Park Day sites and more information, visit www.battlefields.org/parkday. Volunteers can share their Park Day participation online using #ParkDay2026.

“Volunteers serve a crucial role in preserving the landmarks that showcase our rich American heritage,” said Trust President David Duncan. “Park Day provides a powerful opportunity to play a part in saving our great nation’s stories, especially ahead of its 250th birthday,”

For three decades, Park Day has boasted a remarkable legacy of volunteerism, with more than 475,000 hours dedicated to the safeguarding of treasured community staples. All told, some 115,000 participants, from dedicated scout troops to esteemed veterans organizations and ordinary citizens from all walks of life, have rallied to ensure these sites remain pristine and accessible for all.

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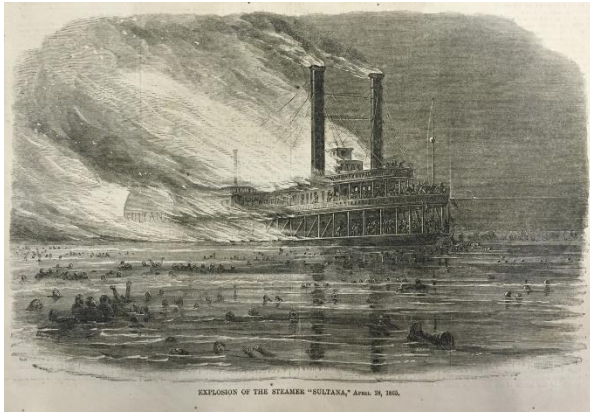
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The Titanic of the Mississippi

Clay Hoffman, blueandgrayeducation.org
March 30, 2026



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Sultana on fire, illustrated in Harper's Bazaar | public domain

On April 27, 1865, the side-wheel steamboat *Sultana* exploded and sank into the Mississippi River, claiming the lives of 1,164 souls, the majority being Union Army soldiers. The tragedy was overshadowed in the press by the events surrounding the end of the Civil War, including the killing of President Abraham Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth, the previous day.

Under the command of Captain James Cass Mason, *Sultana* left St. Louis on April 13, 1865. When the vessel reached Vicksburg, Mississippi, Mason learned that thousands of newly freed Union soldiers—former prisoners of war from Confederate prisons at Cahaba, Alabama, and Andersonville, Georgia—were being held at a nearby parole camp, awaiting release to the northern states. At the time, the U.S. government paid \$2.75 per enlisted man and \$8 per officer to carry these soldiers home. Needing money, Captain Mason agreed to take aboard an excessive number of prisoners, primarily from the states of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, and West Virginia. The ship also carried approximately 70

cabin and deck passengers, a small amount of livestock, and a crew of 85.

When *Sultana* pulled away from Vicksburg on the night of April 24, she was dangerously overcrowded. On board were 1,950 paroled prisoners, 22 guards from the 58th Ohio Volunteer Infantry, plus fare-paying passengers and crew members—for a total of 2,127 people. Many of the paroled prisoners had been weakened by their incarceration and associated illnesses. They were packed into every available space, and the overload was so severe that decks began to creak and had to be reinforced with heavy wooden beams.

Sultana spent two days traveling upriver, in the midst of one of the worst spring floods in the Mississippi's history. On April 26, she stopped at Helena, Arkansas, and later that evening arrived at Memphis, Tennessee, when the crew began unloading 20 tons of sugar from the hold. Near midnight, *Sultana* left Memphis, leaving behind about 200 men. She then went a short distance upriver to take on a new load of coal before continuing north.

At about 2 a.m. on April 27, *Sultana* was seven miles north of Memphis when her boilers exploded violently. The hot steam tore through the crowded decks above and destroyed the pilothouse. Without a pilot to steer the vessel, *Sultana* had become a drifting, burning hulk, her two smokestacks gone. The upper deck had collapsed onto the middle deck, killing and trapping hundreds. Those who survived the initial explosion were forced to risk their lives in the icy



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spring runoff of the Mississippi or remain on the burning Sultana. Many died of drowning or hypothermia, while some survivors were plucked from the tops of semi-submerged trees along the Arkansas shore. Bodies of victims continued to be found downriver for months, and many others were never found. Most of Sultana's officers, including Captain Mason, were killed in the disaster.

Many of the dead soldiers were initially buried at Fort Pickering Cemetery near Memphis. A year later, when the U.S. government established Memphis National Cemetery, the bodies were moved there. Today, the Sultana Disaster Museum, located in Marion, Arkansas, commemorates what was the worst maritime disaster in U.S. history.



Captain James Cass Mason perished in the Sultana disaster | public domain

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Gettysburg and the 14th Indiana Infantry

Donald Jones – The Uniformed Historian;
March 23, 2026, blueandgrayeducation.org



The author at the 14th Indiana marker at Gettysburg National Cemetery. Dedicated in 1885, the monument proudly sits on the ground where the regiment fought, looking toward Culp's Hill. | photo courtesy of the author

The “Gallant 14th” Indiana Infantry was organized in Terre Haute, Indiana, in May 1861. The men originally enlisted for a single year of service to the Union, but in June the regiment was reorganized for three years. The 14th Indiana was sent to the mountains and backwoods of what would become my beloved State of West Virginia for its first assignment, arriving in Clarksburg on July 5, 1861. The regiment was held in reserve at the Battle of Cheat Mountain and saw its first action along the Greenbrier River. It went on to great glory at places such as Kernstown, Fredericksburg, Antietam, and Chancellorsville before



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arriving at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in July 1863.

On July 2, 1863, the 14th Indiana Infantry, 236 men strong, took part in the struggle on Cemetery Hill. As part of Carroll's Brigade, these brave Hoosiers repulsed an onslaught by Confederate forces under Brigadier Generals Robert F. Hoke and Isaac E. Hays, who had overwhelmed a Union artillery position. The 14th Indiana helped retake the Union guns in fierce hand-to-hand combat, driving the Confederates from their portion of the field. Captain David Enoch Beem, a prewar lawyer, wrote of the affair:

“Again they swept forwards to where our infantry advanced upon the open plain to meet them, and then commenced the last and bloodiest conflict. It was soon decided. Our men swept the field like a tornado, left it strewn with the dead and dying, captured several thousands and were victors on the bloody field. All our banners floated, and from one end of our line to the other tens of thousands sent up their cheers.”

During the fighting, the 14th Indiana lost its color-bearer, Isaac Morris, along with five others killed and 25 more wounded. Colonel John Coons, who led the regiment at Gettysburg, was killed at Spotsylvania Court House, Virginia, on May 12, 1864.

The “Gallant 14th” Indiana saw its last action at Cold Harbor, Virginia, on June 6, 1864. The men mustered out at Indianapolis shortly thereafter, and those who reenlisted were transferred to the 20th Indiana Infantry.

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John Pelham: The Confederate Boy Artillerist Who Stunned the Army of the Potomac

Norman Dasinger, Jr., March 16, 2026
blueandgrayeducation.org



*Major John Pelham | public domain
Born on September 7, 1838,*

John Pelham was the third of seven children born to Dr. Atkinson and Martha McGehee Pelham in Alexandria Valley, near present-day Anniston, Alabama.

Pelham grew up enjoying life as the son of a hardworking but fairly prosperous country doctor. In 1856, he secured an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point. At that time, cadets completed a



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five-year term and, as Pelham's graduation approached in the spring of 1861, so too did the rising hostilities between the United States and the Confederate States.

Pelham resigned from West Point before graduation, returned to Calhoun County, and soon offered his services to the newly formed Confederacy. Appointed an artillery officer, he was sent to Virginia.

Following the First Battle of Manassas, famed Confederate cavalry commander J. E. B. Stuart selected Pelham to command his newly organized horse artillery. Pelham quickly distinguished himself, participating in more than 60 engagements, including the battles of Antietam (Sharpsburg), Maryland, and Fredericksburg, Virginia.

Pelham was mortally wounded at the Battle of Kelly's Ford, Virginia, on March 17, 1863, when a piece of shrapnel struck the back of his skull. Carried more than 6 miles to Culpeper, he died later that night. He held the rank of major at the time of his death, but his promotion to lieutenant colonel had already been initiated.

Stuart ordered that Pelham's body be returned to his family in Alabama. Placed in an iron coffin with a viewing window, he was transported by train from Richmond to Blue Mountain, the nearest depot to Alexandria.

Dr. Pelham wanted the funeral to be held at the Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville, but because of construction, the service was



moved to the Baptist Church. Thousands attended either the funeral service or the burial at the (Old) Jacksonville City Cemetery on March 31, 1863.



An illustration of Pelham's death | public domain

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The American Civil War in the Italian press, 1861–1865

Alessandro Bonvini. University of Salerno, Italy

ABSTRACT

The American Civil War garnered significant interest in the Italian press. Despite the challenges faced by the nascent Kingdom of Italy and the rise of brigandage in the Mezzogiorno, newspapers across the political spectrum closely followed the conflict between Unionists and Confederates. In addition to documenting the military events, observers and commentators extensively covered the main issues related to the American Civil War, including the merits and drawbacks of the republican-federal system, the abolition of slavery, and the Second French intervention in Mexico. During years of fierce civil violence, the



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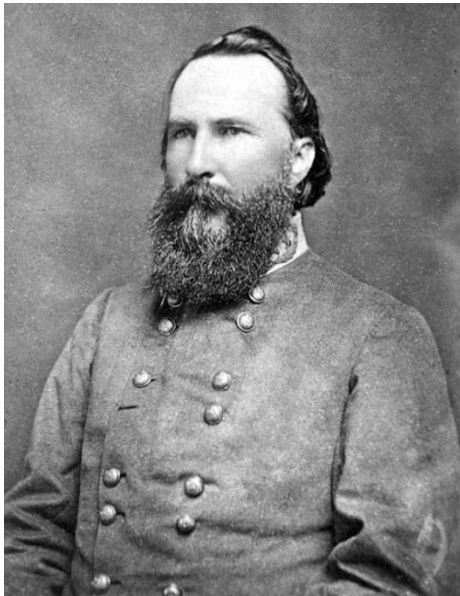


conflict served as a lens to explore issues that transcended the United States and pertained to the institutional, political and social challenges undertaken by nation states undergoing unification or reorganization. Through contrasting ideological perspectives, Italian newspapers reframed the American Civil War in the context of Italy's contemporary reality, thereby challenging the traditional view of the United States as an 'exception' in the nineteenth-century Western world. What emerged was a new, and in many ways less idealized, archetype of the United States, distinct from both the 'land of freedom' vision and the 'land of opportunity' image that had become prevalent during the Risorgimento.

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Longstreet's Foraging Campaign in Virginia

Brian S. Wills, March 13, 2026,
blueandgrayeducation.org



*Confederate general James Longstreet |
Wikipedia*

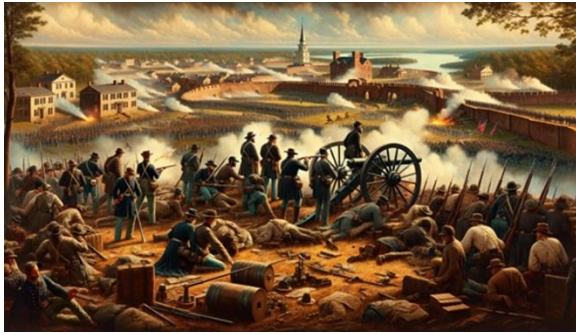
Food and fighting—terms that might bring to mind cafeteria misbehavior—are nevertheless tethered in wartime imperatives. Just ask Napoleon, who maintained that an army marches on its stomach. Or ask Omar Bradley, who was supposed to have said that amateurs talk strategy while professionals talk logistics. He recognized that limited resources hindered his options and risked hamstringing operations.

“Dammit, Brad,” Bradley recorded Patton as declaring, “just give me 400,000 gallons of gasoline and I’ll put you in Germany in two days.” Exaggeration aside, General Bradley knew there was little in the way of German forces. “But 400,000 gallons of gasoline? George might as well have asked for the moon.”

Robert E. Lee did not require “gasoline,” but he did have to keep his horses and mules sufficiently fed to haul artillery, wagons, and ambulances. By spring 1863, the winter months and previous military operations had so depleted food and forage in the region that the Army of Northern Virginia had entered a critical period. Lee required a restocking of such supplies to allow the army to undertake even defensive—much less offensive—operations. A potential source that would benefit the Confederacy, while drawing food and fodder from Union-occupied areas, centered on Suffolk, Virginia.



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Siege of Suffolk | public domain

Evacuated by the Confederates for approximately a year following the loss of Norfolk, the town featured a substantial array of fortifications and a capable commander, Union Major General John J. Peck.

In March, General Lee detached the divisions of George E. Pickett and John Bell Hood—soon followed by James Longstreet himself—to capture the Union garrison at Suffolk, if practicable, and, most imperatively, to obtain supplies from the Suffolk area and the northern counties of North Carolina. On April 11, Longstreet “invested” the town from three sides and probed for weaknesses.

The placement of Confederate field artillery along the Nansemond River, particularly at Fort Huger, or Hill’s Point, threatened Peck and the Union’s lightly protected gunboats. But an audacious Federal assault by infantry under Brigadier General George Washington Getty, ably supported by the navy, resulted in the capture of Longstreet's position and a battery of artillery. The result of these actions was the awarding of multiple Medals of Honor.

While the subsequent fighting devolved into sharpshooting, cannonading, and skirmishing, Longstreet sent his wagons out to gather food and fodder of all types for transshipment to General Lee and Richmond. By the beginning of May, Longstreet moved back to rejoin Lee, although too late for the engagement at Chancellorsville. His commissary chief, Raphael Moses, declared the operation successful to the extent that it allowed the Army of Northern Virginia to wage war through 1863.

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