

The Battle of Cold Harbor brought an end to a month of bloody fighting in Virginia. Since the spring 1864 campaign opened, Gen. Ulysses S. Grant had lost upwards of 50,000 men, yet critics pointed out that he was no closer to Richmond than George B. McClellan had been in 1862. Stymied in his efforts to capture Richmond directly, Grant set his sights on Petersburg instead. Another Union army, under Gen. David Hunter, had reached Lexington and would soon be crossing the Blue Ridge Mountains toward Charlottesville. If Grant could capture Petersburg and its railroads and if Hunter could destroy the Virginia Central Railroad and the James River Canal, Richmond would be untenable.

In order to capture Petersburg, Grant had to transfer his army to the south side of the James River in the face of Gen. Robert E. Lee's Confederate army—a perilous undertaking. To draw off Lee's cavalry and thus blind the Confederate commander as to his intentions, Grant sent Gen. Philip Sheridan and two divisions of cavalry on a diversionary raid toward Charlottesville. Sheridan had orders to tear up as much of the Virginia Central Railroad as came within his grasp, then push on to Charlottesville and unite with Hunter. Together, the two men would advance on Richmond from the west, while Grant enveloped the city from the south.

Sheridan left the Army of the Potomac on June 7th and headed west up the North Anna River toward Trevilian Station, a stop on the Virginia Central Railroad. (Since the war, the village's name has changed to "Trevilians" or "Trevillians.") He took with him the mounted divisions of Generals Alfred Torbert and David M. Gregg, totaling 9,300 men, 24 guns, and 125 wagons.

Lee sent the cavalry divisions of Generals Wade Hampton's and Fitzhugh Lee in pursuit of Sheridan on June 9th. Hampton had overall command of the 6,400-man force which included 15 guns. Traveling by a shorter route than that used by Sheridan, Hampton reached the Trevilian area on June 10, one day ahead of the Union column. Fitz Lee bivouacked at Louisa Court House, a few miles east of Trevilian. Rather than stand on the defensive, Hampton planned to attack the Federals at their camp, located at Clayton's Store. Two roads ran from Clayton's Store to the railroad: one struck the railroad at Trevilian Station, the other at Louisa Court House. Thick woods lay between them. Hampton took the first road and Lee the second.

Early on June 11th, Hampton engaged portions of Torbert's division and in stubborn, dismounted fighting pushed him back up the Trevilian Station Road toward Clayton's Store. At the same time, Fitz Lee had encountered Gen. George A. Custer's brigade on the Louisa Court House road, a few miles to the east. Lee fell back after establishing contact with Custer, creating a dangerous gap between himself and Hampton. Custer exploited this gap and captured Hampton's wagon train, 800 horses, and three caissons parked behind the lines.

When Hampton learned that Custer had gained his rear, he acted decisively, ordering Gen. Thomas Rosser's brigade to attack Custer. Rosser's swift and powerful charge sent the Union horsemen reeling. Other Confederate brigades joined the attack, compelling Custer to relinquish his spoils and take up a defensive position east of Trevilian Station. To the young general, it seemed as though the forces of Hampton and Lee had converged and surrounded him, which indeed they had. He later wrote that "From the nature of the ground and the character of the attacks that were made upon me our lines very nearly resembled a circle." To relieve Custer's hard-pressed brigade, Sheridan attacked Hampton, compelling the Confederate general to retreat to a point several miles west of Trevilian Station. Fitz Lee meanwhile fell back to the east, toward Louisa Court House.

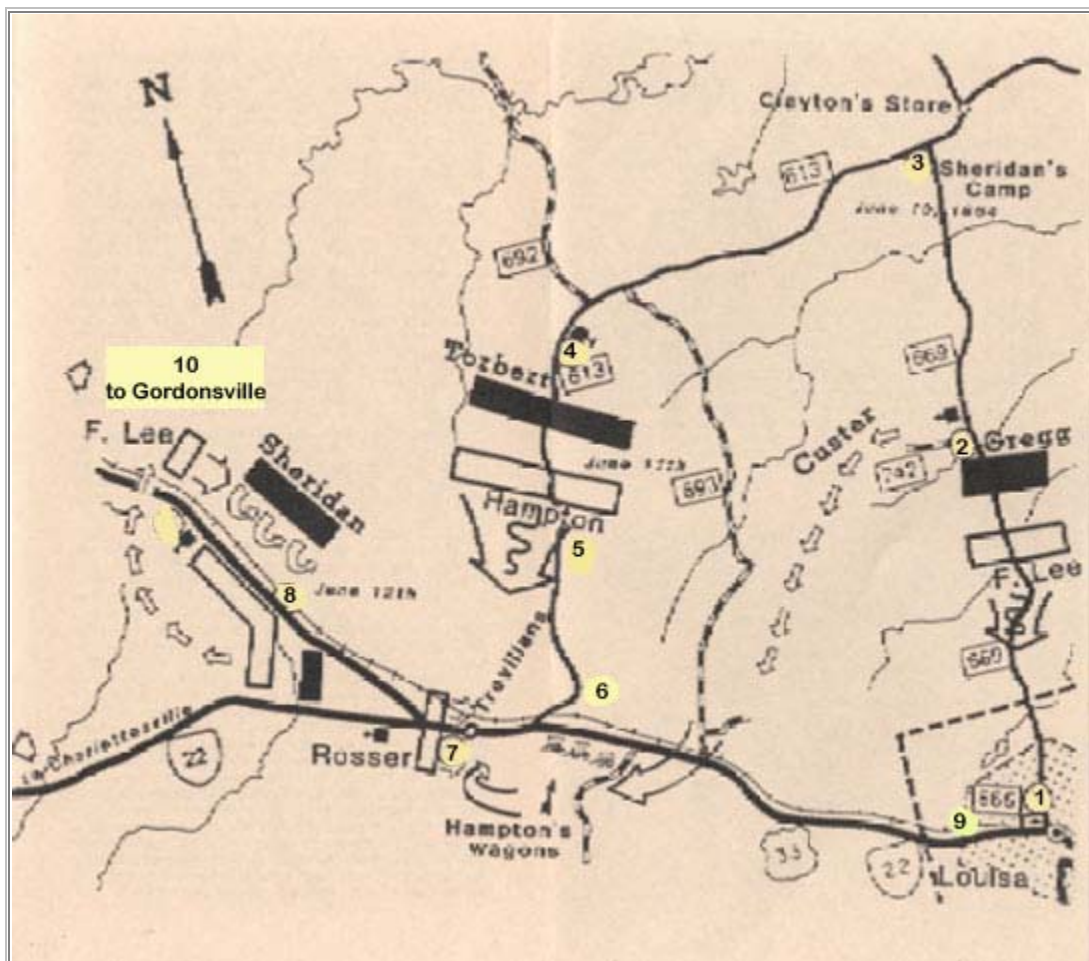
The first day of battle belonged to the Union, but not the second. During the night of the 11th, Hampton posted his division in an angled line covering the railroad west of Trevilian. The railroad embankment covered his left flank, while open ground in front of his position offered

an excellent field of fire. Fitz Lee joined Hampton by noon the next day, reinforcing his right flank. Sheridan spent the morning of June 12th destroying some five miles of the railroad track. Only then did he move out to attack Hampton's strong position west of the station. Time and again the dismounted Federals charged the Confederate line only to be repulsed. Federal soldiers took to calling Hampton's position their own "Bloody Angle," in reference to the recent battle at Spotsylvania Court House. However, Hampton's situation was becoming critical. His ammunition was nearly exhausted, Union artillery raked portions of his line, and Union sharpshooters picked off officers and enlisted men from the vantage point of a barn situated near the front. However, the Confederates persevered. By late afternoon additional ammunition reached the front. At the same time, Confederate artillery silenced the offending Federal battery and set fire to the barn that housed the annoying sharpshooters. An attack by Fitzhugh Lee against Sheridan's right flank late in the day brought the battle to a close.

At 10 p.m. Sheridan broke off the fight and returned to the Army of the Potomac, having failed to unite with Hunter or to inflict any permanent damage to the railroad. Sheridan lost 735 men in the two-day battle; Confederate losses, though not precisely known, probably numbered near 1,000.

Directions to the Battlefield

Begin your auto tour in front of the Ogg Building which is the building next to and just west of the Louisa Court House. There is a Virginia Civil War Trails marker there.



Stop 1: Louisa Courthouse

You are standing in the historic town of Louisa Court House (now Louisa). During the Civil War, the Virginia Central Railroad passed through this county seat. The main street became the Gordonsville Road (Rte. 22/33) at the west end of town. The Marquis Road (Rte. 669), named for the Marquis de Lafayette, crossed the railroad several blocks northwest of here.

On June 7, 1864, Union Gen. Philip H. Sheridan headed west from Cold Harbor with two of the Army of the Potomac's cavalry divisions. His mission was to destroy the Virginia Central Railroad junctions at Gordonsville, Cobham Station, and Charlottesville, unite with Gen. David Hunter's army, and return to the Army of the Potomac by way of the James River. During Sheridan's absence, the Army of the Potomac slipped across the river to invest the critical crossroads town of Petersburg.

Two days after Sheridan departed, Gen. Robert E. Lee sent two divisions of cavalry under Gen. Wade Hampton, of South Carolina, to intercept the raiders and protect Confederate supply lines. About 6,400 troopers with 15 pieces of horse artillery pursued Sheridan's 9,300-man force across Virginia. Both sides suffered from central Virginia's drought and heat wave. By taking a shorter route, Hampton reached Louisa Court House ahead of Sheridan on June 10, 1864, and Gen. Fitzhugh Lee's division camped around the county seat. One of Hampton's brigades bivouacked west of Trevilian Station, the other two at the depot.

From the Courthouse proceed West/North on Rt. 33/22 and, just past the gas station on the right, cross the railroad tracks and head north on Rt. 669/Ellisville Drive for approximately 8/10 (.8) miles. There is a VCWT marker on the left at the entrance to a garage.

Stop 2: First Contact

Having reached Louisa Court House on June 10, 1864, Gen. Wade Hampton's cavalry divisions bivouacked around the Virginia Central Railroad and across Union Gen. Philip H. Sheridan's route to Gordonsville. About 3 A.M. on June 11, Gen. Williams C. Wickham's Virginia cavalry brigade left camp and rode up the Marquis Road (Rte. 669). The troopers captured a scouting party of the 7th Michigan Cavalry about a mile north of town and then continued north toward Clayton's Store. At daybreak, they encountered the 7th Michigan's pickets arrayed on the opposite bank of Nunn's Creek.

The Virginians attacked, firing the first shots of the Battle of Trevilian Station, and skirmished for about 45 minutes in what a member of the 4th Virginia Cavalry later described as "a considerable fight." Gen. George A. Custer, camped a short distance to the north, heard the engagement and ordered the 1st Michigan to reinforce the 7th, causing the Virginians to break off the engagement and withdraw to Louisa Court House. By 8:45 A.M., Custer's entire Michigan Brigade and Pennington's Battery of horse artillery were in motion, headed down Nunn's Creek Road to its junction with the Gordonsville Road west of Louisa Court House.

Continue north on Rt. 669/Ellisville Drive for approximately three and one half (3.5) miles to the intersection of 669 and 613. Park in the paved area of the driveway of the garage on the right. There is a VCWT marker there.

Stop 3: Sheridan's Camp at Clayton's Store

After riding across Virginia for three days on a raid to destroy parts of the Virginia Central Railroad, Gen. Philip H. Sheridan's 9,300 cavalymen and horse artillerists crossed the North Anna River at Carpenter's Ford about two miles north, and camped here the night of June 10, 1864. The house at the intersection just north marks the approximate location of Clayton's Store, Sheridan's headquarters. Although Sheridan knew Confederate forces were in the area, he had no idea that two divisions of Southern cavalry, commanded by Gen. Wade Hampton, had camped nearby.

Gen. Wesley Merritt's brigade bivouacked south along the Marquis Road (Rte. 669), with Merritt's headquarters at the Buck Chiles farm. Gen. George A. Custer's camps were farther south, toward Louisa Court House, while Col. Thomas C. Devin encamped his brigade on the Woolfolk Farm just north of here on the Fredericksburg Stage Road (Rte. 613).

Sheridan planned to continue to Gordonsville and Cobham Station on the Virginia Central Railroad the next day. Merritt's and Devin's brigades, along with Sheridan's wagon train, followed by Gen. David M. Gregg's division, would move down the Fredericksburg Stage Road toward Trevilian Station. Custer's brigade would take the Nunn's Creek Road to the Gordonsville Road, turn west onto the Gordonsville Road, and rejoin the rest of Sheridan's force at Trevilian Station. Sheridan's plan put his force on a collision course with Hampton's divisions.

Carefully leave the parking lot and turn left heading southwest on Rt. 613/Oakland Rd. for approximately two and one half (2.5) miles. You will see a small store on the right and just past that is Ebenezer United Methodist Church. Pull into the church parking lot.

Stop 4: First Shots Fired at Bibbi's Crossroads

A 9,300-man Union cavalry force under Gen. Philip H. Sheridan, on a raid to destroy parts of the Virginia Central Railroad, camped a few miles east on June 10, 1864. The next morning, Gen. Wesley Merritt's brigade, followed by Col. Thomas C. Devin's brigade, moved out of their camps near the Buck Chiles and Woolfolk farms about 5 a.m. With Gen. Alfred T.A. Torbert in personal command, the troopers marched southwest along the Fredericksburg Stage Road toward Trevilian Station

Pickets of the 4th South Carolina Cavalry of Confederate Gen. Matthew C. Butler's brigade at Bibb's Crossroads surprised Merritt's troopers and fired the first shots of the main battle. Merritt and Devin immediately deployed their men into line of battle, and Col. J. Irvin Gregg's brigade with three batteries of horse artillery came up in support. Butler deployed his own troopers as well as the Georgians of Col. Gilbert J. Wright's brigade, and a heavy dismounted engagement developed along the Fredericksburg Stage Road.

Continue south on Rt. 613/Oakland Road toward Trevilian Station. Approximately two miles from Bibb's Crossroads (Oakland) and just beyond Wayland Church, there is an abandoned house on the left. Carefully turn in the driveway and park at the crest of the hill. There is not much of a turnaround spot. This property is owned by Trevilian Station Battlefield Foundation, Inc. and is a future marker site. This is the approximate spot of Hampton's Charge and Hart's Battery. Facing the direction from which you just arrived, the Poindexter House is several hundred yards across the road and in the woods to your left.

Stop 5: Poindexter House / Hart's Battery / Hampton's Charge

After the Battle of Trevilian Station began nearby on June 11, 1864, the fighting along the Fredericksburg Stage Road grew serious and bloody. Constrained by heavy woods, the fighting resembled an infantry battle more than a cavalry engagement, as the troopers fought dismounted. Confederate Gen. Wade Hampton heard a commotion in his rear as Union Gen. George A. Custer's fought to capture Hampton's wagons near Trevilian Station, and ordered Gen. Matthew C. Butler and Col. Gilbert J. Wright to withdraw their brigades to a defensive position near Netherland Tavern.

Col. William Sackett led his 9th New York Cavalry in a dismounted attack near here to drive Butler and Wright south toward Trevilian Station. The popular Sackett received a mortal wound, died on June 14, and was buried in the Poindexter farmyard. His regiment sustained heavy losses but succeeded in its mission.

The Union assaults exposed Hampton's horse artillery to capture. In response, Hampton personally led the 6th South Carolina Cavalry's Cadet Company from the Citadel, the state military academy, in a charge astride his great war-horse Butler. The Confederate commander and a Union officer emptied their pistols at each other, without effect, in the close combat for Capt. James Hart's battery, but Hampton killed two other Union cavalymen and saved the guns. Soon after, a hush fell over the battlefield while both sides regrouped and prepared for the next phase of the fight.

Continue South on Rt. 613/Oakland Road for less than one mile. On the left you will see the reconstructed Netherland Tavern. Carefully turn left into the drive and park at the VCWT marker there.

Stop 6: Netherland Tavern

This is the site of the reconstructed Netherland Tavern, the original having been demolished in the 1950's. The original tavern dated from the 1790's, and served travelers along the Fredericksburg Stage Road, which fronts the current tavern, and the Gordonsville Road.

Maj. Gen. Wade Hampton of South Carolina, commander of the Southern forces, made the Netherland Tavern his headquarters on the night of June 10, 1864, and spent the night sleeping on a carpenter's bench in the tavern's front yard. At dawn on June 11th, his subordinates, Brig. Gen. Matthew C. Butler and Thomas L. Rosser awakened Hampton, and the three officers made their preparations for the day's action. When Rosser asked Hampton what his plans for the day were, Hampton replied, "I propose to fight."

Two of Hampton's three brigades, Butler's South Carolina Brigade and Colonel Gilbert J. Wright's Georgia Brigade, were to advance up the Fredericksburg Stage Road toward Clayton's Store, where they would meet General Fitzhugh Lee's Division, which would advance up the Marquis Road from Louisa Court House. The united force would attack Sheridan at Clayton's Store. Hampton intended to drive the Union horsemen back to the banks of the North Anna River, where he would destroy them. Rosser's Laurel Brigade covered Hampton's west flank on the Gordonsville Road.

Continue south on Rt. 613/Oakland Road across the railroad tracks to the stop sign. Turn right on Rt. 22/33. Go about 4/10 (.4) mile and then turn right into the parking lot of K&B Market and park in front of the two VCWT markers.

Stop 7: Hampton's Wagon's Captured / Rosser's Charge / Custer's First Last Stand

Nearby stood Trevilian Station, south of which Confederate Gen. Wade Hampton had parked his wagon train on the evening of June 10, 1864. At daylight the next day, Gen. Matthew C. Butler and Col. Gilbert J. Wright advanced north on the Fredericksburg Stage Road to probe for Federals.

About 8 A.M., Union Gen. George A. Custer's Michigan Brigade turned west onto the Gordonsville Road from the Nunn's Creek Road at Mildred Crossing, with Col. Russell A. Alger's 5th Michigan Cavalry leading the way. Alger, seeing Hampton's parked wagons and horses, charged and captured most of them. His charge, however, carried him beyond the wagon park and into Gen. Thomas L. Rosser's Laurel Brigade, which was galloping south to counterattack. Rosser drove Custer's troopers and the captured wagons east into Gen. Fitzhugh Lee's division, which was approaching from Louisa Court House. Butler and Wright turned back to join the fighting and help surround Custer's command, which spent four hours alone in a "living triangle" and suffered heavy losses.

During the fighting, Custer's guidon bearer was mortally wounded and handed the brigade's flag to Custer, who ripped it from its staff and stuffed it into his shirt. Custer later carried a badly wounded trooper of the 5th Michigan Cavalry to safety and personally led a dismounted charge that retook one of his artillery pieces. Lee's men recovered Hampton's wagon train and horses and captured Custer's wagon train, including the headquarters wagon and all of Custer's personal effects.

Custer Rescued

By mid-morning on June 11, 1864, Gen. George A. Custer's attack on Confederate Gen. Wade Hampton's wagon train here had gone from success to near disaster, as Southern cavalry surrounded Custer's force. A staff officer of Gen. Alfred T. A. Torbert, Gen. Philip H. Sheridan's 1st Cavalry Division commander, finally discovered Custer's predicament and reported it to Torbert. About 2 P.M., Torbert launched an all-out assault along the railroad with three brigades that broke through to Custer's Michigan men and rescued them. The 10th New York Cavalry of Col. J. Irvin Gregg's brigade also captured Trevilian Station, and Sgt. Herbert Farnsworth and Lt. Noble D. Preston each later received the Medal of Honor for their valor. The Federals now controlled this portion of the Virginia Central Railroad, including the depot and Netherland Tavern.

Two hours later, Confederate Generals Matthew C. Butler and Thomas L. Rosser counterattacked along the Union west front, but Rosser received a serious leg wound and the attack faltered. The first day's fighting sputtered out as Hampton's division withdrew toward Gordonsville and Gen. Fitzhugh Lee's division retired east, leaving Sheridan's weary but victorious troopers in control of the battlefield. Hampton's men were still full of fight, however, and still sat astride Sheridan's route to Gordonsville.

Go right out of the K&B parking lot and go about 2/10 (.2) mile turning right on Rt. 33W/South Spotswood Trail going west towards Gordonsville. Go approximately one mile and you will see a white farmhouse on the left. On the right will be a pull off spot. This site is undeveloped so be careful and watch traffic. This is a future marker site.

Stop 8: Ogg Farm / Bloody Angle

After breaking off the fighting of June 11, 1864, Confederate Gen. Wade Hampton's cavalry division withdrew to a position near here. Gen. Matthew C. Butler's South Carolinians spent the next morning preparing a stout defensive position along the bed of the Virginia Central Railroad. You are standing near the point of the L-shaped line Butler established to block Union Gen. Philip H. Sheridan's route to Gordonsville. A few yards from here, the apex of that line became known as the Bloody Angle during the heavy fighting later that day. Col. Richard H. Dulany's and Col. Gilbert J. Wright's brigades supported the South Carolinians and extended the line past the Ogg House and along the Charlottesville Road. The Danne Store and Gentry Farm occupied the narrow ridge to your front. Behind this narrow ridge was the staging area for numerous Union assaults on the Confederate line.

After spending the morning of June 12 destroying more than three miles of the Virginia Central Railroad and burning Trevilian Station, Gen. Alfred T. A. Torbert's Union cavalry division moved out toward Gordonsville about 2 P.M. The horse soldiers soon encountered Butler's strong defensive works, and Gen. George A. Custer's Wolverines deployed to attack them. The 1st Michigan, supported by the 7th Michigan, assaulted along the railroad tracks and was repulsed with heavy losses. They withdrew and were no factor in the rest of the day's fighting.

During the afternoon of June 12, 1864, Gen. Matthew C. Butler's fatigued South Carolinians repulsed seven separate attacks on the Bloody Angle by Gen. Wesley Merritt's and Col. Thomas C. Devin's dismounted troopers of Gen. Alfred T. A. Torbert's division. By the seventh attack, the main lines of battle lay only a few yards apart. Union artillerist Lt. Edward B. Williston's guns blasted away at the South Carolinians at pointblank range, a feat for which Williston later received the Medal of Honor.

Almost out of ammunition, Butler's men grimly hung on. In mid-afternoon, Gen. Fitzhugh Lee's division arrived in support after a lengthy flank march from Louisa Court House. Gen. Williams C. Wickham's brigade joined Butler while Gen. Lunsford L. Lomax's brigade went around the Union right flank about half a mile up the Gordonsville Road. As Merritt made the seventh Union attack, Lomax had his cavalymen and a battery of artillery in position to strike the unsuspecting Torbert's flank.

Lomax launched his attack, supported by the rest of the Confederate force, shattering Torbert's lines and sending the Federals retreating toward the ruins of Trevilian Station. Left with no alternative and low on ammunition, Gen. Philip H. Sheridan broke off the battle and withdrew across the North Anna River that night, leaving Gen. Wade Hampton in possession of

the battlefield. By defeating Sheridan, Hampton thwarted his plan to join Gen. David Hunter's army and protected the Virginia Central Railroad, the link to the Shenandoah Valley, the "Breadbasket of the Confederacy."

You may proceed west on Rt. 33 about 3/10 (.3) mile until you reach Trevilians Elementary School. This was the location of the Confederate flanking movement.** Carefully turn into the school, turn around, and head back to Louisa on Rt. 33 and then Rt. 33/22. Four miles from Trevilians as you approach the town, turn left onto West Street, Rt. 666. Be careful at the railroad crossing. Continue to the cemetery which is just past Purcell Lumber Company.

** See optional stop 10 which due to your proximity to Gordonsville may be your choice at this time.

Stop 9: Oakland Cemetery

Here in Oakland Cemetery, beneath small, rectangular stone markers, rest as many as 60 Confederate dead from the Battle of Trevilian Station. Most of them were never identified.

Immediately inside the gate are the graves of the three Towles brothers, all of whom served in Company A, 4th Virginia Cavalry, and died of battle wounds. Sgt. Robert C. Towles was mortally wounded on the morning of June 11, 1864, the first day of the battle of Trevilian Station, and died in Louisa Court House five days later. The Rev. John Towles had the remains of his other two sons, J. Vivian and James H. Towles, disinterred from other battlefields and buried here.

Also here is the grave of Lt. Col. Joseph L. McAllister, commander of the 7th Georgia Cavalry, who was killed in action while defending Trevilian Station on the afternoon of June 11, 1864. He had refused to surrender and was cut down in a hail of Union bullets. Trevilian Station was the first battle for the 7th Georgia Cavalry, which suffered 38% casualties on the first day, including nearly all of the regiment's officers. Capt. John P. Hines, commander of Company H, rests next to his commander.

Decisive Confederate Victory

Confederate Gen. Wade Hampton's victory over Gen. Philip H. Sheridan at Trevilian Station on June 11-12, 1864, prevented Sheridan from joining Gen. David Hunter and destroying the Virginia Central Railroad at Charlottesville. Gen. Jubal A. Early's Second Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia then used the railroad to reach Lynchburg in time to repulse Hunter on July 17-18. Trevilian Station was the largest all-cavalry battle of the Civil War. "The Battle of Trevilians," wrote Hampton's chief of artillery, was important "because, if lost, General [Robert E.] Lee and his whole army would have been without supplies. Trevilians was so important to General Lee that he was enabled thereby to stay in Petersburg for nearly a year longer." A month after the battle, Lee requested that Hampton be promoted to permanent command of the cavalry corps because of his victory here.

Both sides suffered heavy losses. Of Sheridan's force of 9,300 cavalymen and 300 horse artillerists, 95 were killed, 445 wounded, and 410 missing, for a total of 955, or more than 10% of his total force. Hampton and Fitzhugh Lee lost 813 men out of 6,000 cavalymen and 400 horse artillerists engaged for a casualty rate of more than 12%. Sheridan withdrew eastward and rejoined the Army of the Potomac on June 18, 1864. Hampton and his command followed, slowed by the exhaustion of his men and horses and the lack of supplies.

This concludes your auto tour.

Optional Stop 10: Exchange Hotel, Gordonsville Confederate Receiving Hospital

Many of the wounded were treated locally but, also, many were taken to the Exchange Hotel, which had been converted into a Confederate Receiving Hospital. TSBF encourages you to go on to Gordonsville and visit this remarkable structure and museum. It is well worth the time. We feel you will be quite impressed with the contents of the museum and the 1860 structure as well. The location is 400 South Main Street, which is on the right and across the railroad tracks shortly after entering Gordonsville. Over 600 soldiers are also buried at Maplewood Cemetery, Rt. 33 West of the town of Gordonsville. Please call to verify the Museum is open. 540 832-2944