



Civil War Preservation Trust

Saving America's Endangered Civil War Battlefields

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*“There is nothing new in the world except
the history you do not know.”*

HARRY S. TRUMAN

September 10, 2008

Dear Fellow Battlefield Preservationist,

Why in the world am I quoting Harry Truman to you in a letter about Civil War battlefield preservation?

Well, today, I'm writing to you about a new, historic opportunity for a six-fold matching grant – saving all of a battlefield that can still be saved – at a battle that I'm guessing most people “do not know.”

But before I divulge the name of that battle, let me ask you:

Would you be willing to help save 125 acres of threatened hallowed ground that saw nearly 1,000 casualties?

Would you be willing to help save hallowed ground that was so significant that it held the attention of both Robert E. Lee and U.S. Grant in late July 1864?

Would you be willing to help save this hallowed ground that – were we not to move immediately to purchase it – would certainly become a housing development?

And would you be willing to help save this hallowed ground that adds dramatically to the land very near Glendale and Malvern Hill that CWPT has already preserved outside of Richmond, Virginia, especially if I tell you that CWPT will turn every \$1 you give into \$6?

I'll say it again: this is not a battle that most people – even many Civil War buffs – will have on their list of “Top Ten” conflicts they know much about.

But taking Harry Truman's words to heart, this is exactly why it is important for CWPT to save America's endangered Civil War battlefields: so that we can all continue to learn about the history we do not know.

And if you will give me just the next two minutes, I will make you an expert on this “mystery” battle . . .

In most accounts, it is known as First Deep Bottom, and it was fought July 27-29, 1864.

And right now, CWPT has the opportunity to save 125 pristine acres of this important battlefield, known as the Darby Farm, the ONLY land that has ever been saved there, and the LAST land that COULD be saved there, as residential development is quickly encroaching.

Do you know why this land is so important? In a nutshell, in conjunction with the explosion of the mine at what later became known as “The Crater,” Ulysses Grant attempted to get Robert E. Lee to shift troops from the Petersburg lines to the outskirts of Richmond. As Grant wrote in his memoirs:

“The mine was constructed and ready to be exploded, and I wanted to take that occasion to carry Petersburg if I could. It was the object, therefore, to get as many of Lee’s troops away from the south side of the James River as possible. Accordingly, on the 26th, we commenced a movement with Hancock’s corps and Sheridan’s cavalry to the north side by the way of Deep Bottom, where Butler had a pontoon bridge laid. The plan, in the main, was to let the cavalry cut loose and, joining with Kautz’s cavalry of the Army of the James, get by Lee’s lines and destroy as much as they could of the Virginia Central Railroad . . .”

If all the stars had aligned for the Union forces, Grant had hoped possibly to take Petersburg and Richmond at nearly the same time. But as you know, the explosion at the Crater was, in Grant’s own estimation, “a stupendous failure,” and the Confederate counterattack at Deep Bottom was just strong enough to allow Lee to secure his position.

The heaviest of the fighting at Deep Bottom occurred on the property CWPT is saving, including the wartime Enroughty House that Confederate sharpshooters from Gregg’s-McGowan’s Brigade used during the battle. There are extensive Confederate earthworks on the property as well.

In performing our customary due diligence before deciding to buy any hallowed ground, we conduct a market appraisal, as well as consult with historians about the significance of the land.

In our appraisal, these 125 acres were described as “*a natural extension of the [Mansfield Woods] subdivision and provide the flexibility of access from Long Bridge Road, and create a large block of developed land in the heart of the battlefield core area.*” Further, this report concluded that “*it is inevitable the property will be absorbed by growth in the area.*”

One of the historians we consulted was Richard J. Sommers, Ph. D., noted author of Richmond Redeemed: The Siege at Petersburg, and a fixture at CWPT’s annual conferences who is universally recognized for his tremendous breadth of knowledge.

Dr. Sommers was so elated to hear that CWPT had a chance to save this property that he wrote the following statement in support of our efforts. I reproduce his comments here in their entirety:

“The great Virginia campaign of 1864-1865 witnessed Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee locked in mortal combat for eleven months. In the spring, their warfare remained mobile, from the Wilderness in early May to the initial operations against Petersburg in mid-June. By summer, however, it stagnated into siege. The ensuing Siege of Petersburg was not so much a ‘tactical siege’ as a ‘strategic siege,’ waged through a series of field battles on both sides of James River. These two-pronged Federal strikes threatened Richmond or Petersburg or both as well as the supply lines into those cities. Confederates, in turn, strove not merely to block

these blows but to counterattack and hurl them back.

“This approach began in late July, 1864, with Grant’s Third Offensive. Winfield Scott Hancock’s II Corps and three cavalry divisions under Philip H. Sheridan crossed to the north side of James River at the Deep Bottom bridgehead on July 27. The infantry was expected to push the Graycoats westward, thus allowing Sheridan to launch another great raid to sever the railroads linking Lee to Jubal Early’s threatening army in the Shenandoah Valley -- and possibly even to break into Richmond itself. Hancock overran the Confederates’ outer line that day but stalled before their main position, far short of his objective.

“Sheridan started on his raid on July 28 but was almost immediately counterattacked by Richard H. Anderson’s infantry. The Butternuts gained initial advantage, but their attempted pursuit was checked and then driven from the field right here on the Darby farm. Yet again, dismounted Northern troopers, with repeating carbines, demonstrated that they could beat Southern infantry.

“Hancock and Sheridan withdrew nearer to Deep Bottom late on July 28. Overnight July 29/30, they recrossed James River to be ready to help exploit the expected breakthrough at Petersburg when Grant unleashed the second prong of his Third Offensive: the Battle of the Crater.

“Tactically, the fighting here on the Darby farm was a Yankee victory. Grand tactically, First Deep Bottom represents Southern success in thwarting immediate Union objectives on the Peninsula. Strategically, the Federals gained the advantage since they caused Lee to mass five and a half divisions north of James River, thus leaving only four at Petersburg. This shift made Petersburg all the more vulnerable when the Crater was detonated on July 30 -- a great potential advantage which the Bluecoats failed to exploit.

“On all those dimensions -- tactical, grand tactical, strategic -- First Deep Bottom was a historic battle. It is all the more significant because it was the first of a series of battles that characterized the operations of Grant and Lee for the rest of 1864 and in many respects for the rest of the Siege of Petersburg. The most intense fighting of the battle raged on the Darby farm. The Civil War Preservation Trust has rendered great service in saving the most crucial sector of this critical battle.”

Even further, historian Robert E. L. Krick, yet another respected rising star in our business (and a one of the best battlefield guides, too!), adds that, *“Because of extensive recent development in the area, this is the only sizable portion of the July 28 battlefield that can be saved.”*

In short, my friend, this means that if you and I don’t save it now, it will be destroyed . . .

Hopefully, you are now an expert on the First Battle of Deep Bottom (there was a second battle, located less than a mile away, and our friends at the Richmond Battlefield Association are working on saving a crucial part of that land) . . . and you are almost ready to join in the fight to save it.

The last piece of the puzzle that I can fill in for you is how CWPT is going to pay for it.

The purchase price for these 125 acres is \$1,931,700 – about \$15,450 per acre . . . expensive, yes, but not outrageous for that part of the world, and well within the range that a circling developer would be willing to pay for it.

The good news is that we can apply both federal and state matching funds to this transaction, meaning that if we can raise \$321,950 – or just 16.67 percent of the total cost – we can earn matching

grants for the remaining \$1,609,750! That is a \$6-to-\$1 multiplier of your donation dollar!

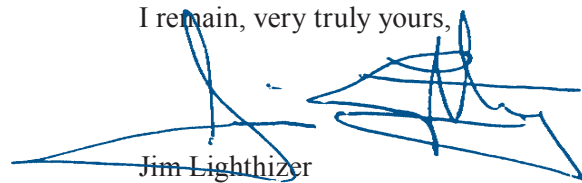
Every \$1 you give turns into \$6, and (I believe this point is extremely essential) we are saving all that we can save of an important Grant vs. Lee battlefield – if successful, we get to take this one out of the “Endangered” column and put it into the “Saved!” column.

While I am busy quoting presidents to you, let me give you one, in closing, from Teddy Roosevelt. TR said this of The Grand Canyon, but I believe it is absolutely appropriate for our cause of saving American heritage battlefield land, as well: *“Leave it as it is. You cannot improve upon it... man can only mar it – keep it for your children, your children’s children, and for all who come after you.”*

Will you please be so kind as to send the most generous contribution you can make at this time to help CWPT raise our portion of the match, \$321,950? I know this is a lot of money, and the economy is still tough on a lot of folks right now, but please remember that every \$1 you give to this effort is multiplied into \$6 – a fantastic return on your charitable “investment.”

Any amount will help, and will be greatly, greatly appreciated. I can never thank you enough for your stalwart support.

I remain, very truly yours,



Jim Lighthizer
President

P.S. A final, wonderful quote: Before his death in 1870, Robert E. Lee penned a letter to Col. Charles Marshall in which he said that we must cast our eyes backward in times of turmoil and change, concluding that *“it is history that teaches us to hope.”* In these difficult days for battlefield preservation, it is with hope in my heart that I send this appeal to you today . . . to help save our history.