

Professionally converted for accurate flowing-text e-book format reproduction, this report by the U.S. Army examines the Petersburg and Appomattox campaigns of 1864 and 1865 in the American Civil War. By mid-June 1864, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, commander of all United States armies fighting to defeat the Confederate rebellion, faced a strategic dilemma at his headquarters near Cold Harbor, Virginia. Under his close control, the Union Army of the Potomac led by Maj. Gen. George G. Meade had just battled 66,000 rebels of General Robert E. Lees formidable Army of Northern Virginia in a bloody, month-long campaign. Beginning on 4 May, when Meades 100,000 troops had marched south across the Rapidan River west of Fredericksburg, the opposing armies had been in almost constant contact. Grant had sought to bring Lees army to battle and to destroy it with the Federals superior numbers, but Lee had deftly thwarted Grants flanking maneuvers in the battles of the Wilderness (5-6 May), Spotsylvania Court House (8-21 May), and the North Anna River (23-26 May). After each battle, Grant had attempted to outflank Lees entrenched position by moving to the Union left to prevent the rebels from falling back to strong defenses and to force them to fight in the open. The Confederate commander had successfully parried each of Grants thrusts and positioned his force between the Union army and Richmond, the Confederate capital. But Grant was not easily discouraged. Born in Ohio, he had graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1843, and had served in the Mexican War. After that, his Army career took a downward turn, and he resigned his commission in 1854 amid accusations of chronic drunkenness. Later, several business ventures and attempts at farming ended in failure, and by 1860, he was working at his fathers tannery in Galena, Illinois. The outbreak of the Civil War saw Grant back in uniform, first organizing new state units, then as a regimental commander, and he was soon promoted to brigadier general. Grants fortunes rose rapidly, as he earned a second star and won impressive victories at Fort Donelson and Shiloh in Tennessee, at Vicksburg, Mississippi, and at Chattanooga, Tennessee. President Abraham Lincoln was impressed by Grants successes and secured his promotion to lieutenant general in March 1864. Now in command of all Federal armies, Grant chose to make his headquarters in the field with Meades army, which had won few victories against the rebels in the wars Eastern Theater. Grants presence with the Army of the Potomac was awkward and tended to undermine Meades authority, but the latter kept his command until the wars end.

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