

White House Landing Sustaining the Army of the Potomac during the Peninsula Campaign

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Establishment of the Supply Base and Line of Communication

White House on the Pamunkey River

White House Plantation rested on a bluff along the scenic outside bend of the Pamunkey River. White House had been the home of Martha Custis where George Washington courted her in 1758. The property then passed through Martha's son to her grandson, George Washington Parke Custis, the father of Mary Anna Custis, who married Robert E. Lee. They moved to Arlington and Parke Custis passed the farm to Mary Lee's son, W. H. F. "Runney" Lee. When the war broke out Mary Lee had left Arlington and was living at White House when the Army of the Potomac advanced up the Virginia Peninsula. She was packing to move to the home of Edmund Ruffin in Marlboro, Hanover County, when the Union Army arrived. The original manor house where George courted Martha had burned and a second house was built on the original foundation. This was the house that stood on the grounds when the Union arrived in May 1862 and would become the major supply base for the Union thrust toward Richmond.¹

The spring rains of April and May inundated the Virginia Peninsula turning the unimproved roads into morasses of mud that impeded wagon transportation. Even with half loads, wagons became mired in the mud and the speed of supply reduced from the normal two to three miles an hour to a snail's pace overland on rainy days. Consequently, McClellan leapfrogged his supply bases up the York and Pamunkey Rivers, with what is now called logistics over the shore (LOTS) terminal operations starting with a supply base at mouth of Cheeseman Creek and Poquosin River eight miles east of Yorktown, his second at Yorktown, then West Point, and fourth at Cumberland Landing on the Pamunkey River. The success of his campaign plan rested on establishing his main supply base at White House Landing and making use of the York-Richmond Railroad in his advance to the outskirts of the Confederate capitol itself, Richmond.

When War Correspondent Joel Cook sailed up the Pamunkey River in May 1862 to join up with the Army of the Potomac, he wrote of what he saw:

¹ Jim Harris provided the information about how White House descended to W. H. F. Lee and why Mary Lee was there when the Union Army arrived.

The Pamunkey² between Cumberland and White House is a crooked stream, bending about in all sorts of ways. This section, however, is the most pleasant portion of the river. A ride between its green banks, rolling and rich, skirted with beautiful hills and dotted all over with patches of dark woods, was most enchanting; and every bend enhanced its beauty. A few miles above Cumberland, bordering the northeast bank, were a series of islands, upon one of which were a few log huts, inhabited by half-breeds. This place was called Indian Town, and its inhabitants were said to be the last remnants of Powhatan's tribe. Near the huts there had been a ship-yard, and the half-burned ruins of a gunboat lay upon the river-bank and lined the shore below. Just above, at a point where its guns could sweep for miles both up and down the stream, was a Rebel earth-work, partly hidden by the trees, and with one end adjoining a house which claimed protection under of the omnipresent white flags. Several traps for fish-catching were paced in eligible spots on either bank.³

The approach to White House was one worthy the pencil. A beautiful curve of a mile in length, the outer side of which was a low bluff surmounted by trees, changed the course of the river. In the centre of this curve was the White House and its grounds, and above it were the wharves and landings. Land and water blended to produce the scene; and the life given it by the moving craft on the river and the toiling negroes on the shore rendered the whole most picturesque.⁴

William H. Osborne, 29th Massachusetts Volunteers, likewise described his journey up the River:

The sail up the York and its larger branch, the Pamunkey, occupied the remainder of the day. The country was in its finest dress; broad green meadows skirted the stream as far as the vision could extend; the meadows landward were bounded by high banks, covered with flowering trees and climbing vines comfortable, peaceful-looking farm-houses, about which clustered groups of colored people, who waved their hands as the large white steamer glided by.⁵

White House Plantation already had a wharf for importing supplies and shipping crops to market. Less than half a mile upriver, the York-Richmond Railroad crossed the Pamunkey on its way to West Point. This single lane track made this place on the map operationally significant for McClellan's invasion of Richmond. He needed the railroad not only to rapidly push supplies to his troops on the very outskirts of Richmond, but to also move his heavy siege artillery up, which was how he planned to pound the Confederacy into submission. From May 10 until it was burned on June 25, White House Landing served as the Army of the Potomac's major supply base for the drive toward Richmond.

Contraband of War – Local Labor

² During the Civil War, the river was spelled both "Pamunkey" and "Pamuncky."

³ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*

⁴ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*

⁵ William H. Osborne, *The History of the Twenty-Ninth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry in the Late War of the Rebellion*, Boston, Albert J. Wright, Printer, 1877.

During the 19th century, the actual manual labor of logistics, such as teamsters and stevedores, was performed by civilians hired by the Quartermaster. The increasing size of the Army for the war created an increasing need for civilian labor to support it, especially when it invaded the Virginia Peninsula; but to encourage Southern states to rejoin the Union and prevent Border States from seceding to the rebel cause, President Lincoln's official policy toward slavery was to protect the rights of states to own slaves, thus enforcing the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and confirming the slaves' status as legal property. By a twist of fate, the commanding general of Fortress Monroe was a former New York lawyer and it was this definition of slaves being property that allowed Major General Benjamin Butler to find a legal loophole to offer freedom to escaped slaves. This was the same shrewd general who shot his wife's lover in broad daylight in Washington and was acquitted by being the first to plea temporary insanity. A master of interpretation, if slaves were property; then by law any property employed by the enemy could be commandeered for military service. Consequently, when the Army of the Potomac arrived at Fortress Monroe in April 1862, the Quartermaster had a ready pool of local labor from which to hire. James Parton described General Butler's decision process in his 1864 publication:

On the evening of the second day after his arrival at the post, the event occurred which will for ever connect the name General Butler with the history of the abolition of slavery in America. Colonel Phelps's visit to Hampton had thrown the white inhabitants into such an alarm that most of them prepared for flight, and many left their homes that night, never to see them again. In the confusion three negroes escaped, and, making their way across the bridges, gave themselves up to a Union picket, saying that their master, Colonel Mallory, was about to remove them to North Carolina to work upon Rebel fortifications there, far away from their wives and children, who were to be left in Hampton. They were brought to the fortress, and the circumstance was reported to the general in the morning. He questioned each of them separately, and the truth of their story became manifest. He needed laborers. He was aware that the rebel batteries that were rising around him was the work chiefly of slaves, without whose assistance they could not have been erected in time to give him trouble. He wished to keep these men. The garrison wished to keep them. The country would have deplored or resented the sending of them away. If they had been Colonel Mallory's horses, or Colonel Mallory's spades, or Colonel Mallory's percussion caps, he would have seized them and used them, without hesitation. Why not property more valuable for the purposes of the rebellion than any other?⁶

[On May 24, 1861] He pronounced the electric words, "These men are CONTRABAND OF WAR, set them at work."

"An epigram," as Winthrop remarks, "abolished slavery in the United States." The word took: for it gave the country an excuse for doing what it was longing to do. Every one remembers how relieved the "conservative" portion of the people felt, when they found that the slaves could be used on the side of the Union, without giving Kentucky a new argument against it, Kentucky, at that moment, controlling the policy of the administration. "The South," said Wendell Phillips in a recent speech, "fought to sustain

⁶ James Parton, *General James Butler in New Orleans; History of the Administration of the Department of the Gulf in the Year 1862*, New York: Mason Brothers, 1864.

slavery, and the North fought not to have it hurt.” But Butler pronounced that magic word, ‘contraband,’ and summoned the negro into the arena. It was a poor word. I do not know that it is sound law; but Lord Chatham said, ‘*nullus liber homo*’⁷ is course Latin, but it is worth all the classics. Contraband is a bad word, and may be bad law, but it is worth all the Constitution; for in a moment of critical emergency it summoned the saving elements into the national arena, and it showed the government how far the sound fiber of the nation extended.”

By the time the three negroes were comfortably at work upon the new bake-house, General Butler received the following brief epistle, signed, “J. B. Carey, major-acting, Virginia volunteers:”

“Be pleased to designate some time and place when it will be agreeable to accord me a personal interview.”

The general complied with the request. In the afternoon two groups of horsemen might have been seen approaching one another on the Hampton road, a mile from the Fort. One of these consisted of General Butler and two of his staff, Major Fay and Captain Haggerty; the other, of Major Carey and two or three friends. Major Carey and General Butler were old political allies having acted in concert both at Charleston and at Baltimore - hard-shell democrats both. After an exchange of courteous salutations, and introductions of companions, the conference began. The conversation was, as nearly as can be recalled, in these words:

Major Carey: “I have sought this interview, sir, for the purpose of ascertaining upon what principles you intend to conduct the war in this neighborhood.”

The general bowed his willingness to give the information desired.

Major Carey: “I ask, first, whether a passage will be allowed through the blockading fleet to the families of the citizens of Virginia, who may desire to go north or south to a place of safety.”

General Butler: “The presence of the families of the belligerents is always the best hostage for their good behavior. One of the objectives of the blockade is to prevent the admission of supplies of provisions into Virginia, while she continues in an attitude hostile to the government. Reducing the number of consumers would necessarily tend to the postponement of the objective in view. Besides, the passage of vessels through the blockade would involve an amount of labor, in the way of surveillance, to prevent abuse, which it would be impossible to perform. I am under the necessity, therefore, of refusing the privilege.”

⁷ *Nullus liber homo* (no free man) referred to page 3 of the Magna Carta, “No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any other way, nor will we proceed with force against him, or send others to do so, except by the lawful judgment of his equals or by the law of the land.”

Major Carey: "Will the passage of families desiring to go north be permitted?"

General Butler: "With the exception of an interruption at Baltimore, which has now been disposed of, the travel of peaceable citizens through the North has not been hindered; and as to the internal line through Virginia, your friends have, for the present, entire control of it. The authorities at Washington can judge better than I upon this point, and travelers can well go that way in reaching the North."

Major Carey: "I am informed that three negroes, belonging to Colonel Mallory, have escaped within your lines. I am Colonel Mallory's agent, and have charge of his property. What do you intend to do with regard to those negroes?"

General Butler: "I intend to retain them."

Major Carey: "Do you mean, then, to set aside your constitutional obligations?"

General Butler: "I mean to abide by the decision of Virginia, as expressed in her ordinance of secession, passed the day before yesterday. I am under no constitutional obligations to a foreign country, which Virginia now claims to be."

Major Carey: "But you say, we *can't* secede, and so you can not consistently detain the negroes."

General Butler: "But you say, you *have* seceded, and so you can not consistently claim them. I shall detain the negroes as contraband of war. You are using them upon your batteries. It is merely a question whether they shall be used for or against the government. Nevertheless, though I greatly need the labor which has providently fallen into my hands, if Colonel Mallory will come into the fort and take the oath of allegiance to the United States, he shall have his negroes, and I will endeavor to hire them from him."

Major Carey: "Colonel Malory is absent."

This interview here terminated, and each party, with polite farewell, went its way.

This was on Friday, May 24. On Sunday morning eight more negroes came in, and were received. On Monday morning, forty-seven more, of all ages, men, women, and children, several whole families among them. In the afternoon, twelve men, good field hands, arrived. And they continued to come in daily, in tens, twenties, thirties, till the number of contrabands in various camps numbered more than nine hundred. A commissioner of negro affairs was appointed, who taught, fed, and governed them; who reported after several weeks' experience, that they worked well and cheerfully, required no urging, and perfectly comprehended him when he told them that they were as much entitled to freedom as himself. They were gentile, docile, careful and efficient laborers; their demeanor dignified, their conversation always decent.

General Butler's correspondence with the government on this matter is not forgotten; but it is proper that it is repeated here. He merely related his interview with Major Carey in his first letter to General Scott, and asked for instructions. In his second dispatch, dated May 27th, he referred to the subject again.

"Since I wrote my last," he observed, "the question in regard to slave property is becoming one of serious magnitude. The inhabitants of Virginia are using their negroes in the batteries, and are preparing to send their women and children south. The escapes from them are very numerous, and a squad has come in this morning, and my pickets are bringing their women and children. Of course these can not be dealt with upon the theory on which I designed to treat the services of able-bodied men and women who might come within my lines, of which I gave you detailed account in my last dispatch.

"I am in the utmost doubt what to do with this species of property. Up to this time I have had come within my lines men and women, with their children, entire families, each family belonging to the same owner. I have, therefore, determined to employ, as I can do very profitably, the able-bodied persons in the party, issuing proper food for the support of all, and charging against their services the expense of care and sustenance of the non-laborers, keeping a strict and accurate account as well of the services as of the expenditures, having the worth of the services, and the cost of the expenditure determined by a board of survey hereafter to be detailed. I know of no other manner in which to dispose of this subject, and the questions connected therewith. As a matter of property, to the insurgents it will be of very great moment, the number that I now have amounting, as I am informed, to what in good times would be of the value of \$60,000.

Twelve of these negroes, I am informed, have escaped from the erection of the batteries on Sewall's Point, which fired on my expedition as it passed by out of range. As a means of offense, therefore, in the enemy's hands, these negroes, when able-bodied, are of great importance. Without them the batteries could not have been erected, at least for many weeks. As a military question, it would seem to be a measure of necessity, and deprives their masters of their services.

"How can this be done? As a political question, and a question of humanity, can I receive the services of a father and a mother, and not take the children? Of the humanitarian aspect I have no doubt; of the political one I have no right to judge. I therefore submit all this to your better judgment; and these questions have a political aspect, I have ventured, and trust I am not wrong in so doing, to duplicate the parts of my dispatch relating to this subject, and forward them to the secretary of war."

The secretary replied, May 30th: "Your action in respect to the negroes who came within your lines, from the service of the rebels, is approved. The department is sensible of the embarrassments, which must surround officers conducting military operations in a state, by which the laws of slavery is sanctioned. The government can not recognize the rejection by any state of its federal obligation; resting upon itself, among these federal obligations, however, no one can be more important than suppressing and dispersing any combination of the former for the purpose of over throwing its whole constitutional

authority. While, therefore, you will permit no interference, by persons under your command, with the relations of persons held to service under the laws of any state, you will on the other hand, so long as an state within which your military operations are conducted, remain under the control of such armed combinations, refrain from surrendering to alleged masters any persons who come within your lines. You will employ such persons in the services to which they will be best adapted, keeping an account of the labor by them performed, of the value of it, and the expense of their maintenance. The question of their final disposition will be reserved for future determination.”⁸

With the Secretary of War’s reply, Contraband of War trumped the Fugitive Slave Act and provided the Union Army a legitimate reason to harbor and employ escaped slaves from the Virginia Peninsula. Any slave could find freedom and a job inside the boundaries of Union occupation of Virginia.

Importance of the Quartermaster

I [William G. Le Duc] consulted with a friend [Napoleon J. T. Dana], a [1838] graduate of West Point who had seen honorable service in the war with Mexico, and asked him how best I could serve the country in the impending struggle. He agreed with me in believing war between the North and the South inevitable, and said: “War is business, and the best business capacity, backed by the longest purse, is sure to win. The South will be conquered, her slaves freed, her people impoverished. You say you know nothing of military matters, but desire to take up that part of the business you can most readily acquire, and where your services will be most effective. I think you are best fitted by natural and acquired qualifications for service in the quartermaster’s department. This is a very important department of the army service. An inefficient quartermaster department will render useless the best military organization, commanded by the best officers. It is through this bureau that all army supplies of whatever kind are obtained, transported, issued to troops, accounted for, and returns made to the Treasury Department of the general government. The difficult and intricate duties of the department require men of wide range of knowledge and experience; of willing hearts, and untiring zeal. No army can be efficient without the prompt exercise of their duties. At the same time there is more work than in any other branch of service, and less chance for advancement in rank and pay. The officers who direct or lead troops in battle, are – if they come out alive – those whom the people delight to honor. But the man whose business skill, energy and fertility of resources makes possible the marching and fighting of an army, rarely gains fame beyond the commander, or troops with whom he serves. I, having been educated at West Point, will, of course, tender my services, and, from my experience, will expect to command a brigade. And if you should apply for and obtain an appointment as captain and assistant quartermaster, I wish you would ask to be assigned to my command.”⁹

⁸ James Parton, *General James Butler in New Orleans; History of the Administration of the Department of the Gulf in the Year 1862*, New York: Mason Brothers, 1864.

⁹ W.G. LeDuc, *Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster*, p. 65-66.

William G. Le Duc received his commission as a captain in the Quartermaster Department as requested and was assigned to Brigadier General Dana's Brigade, Sedgewick's Division, Sumner's II Corps of the Army of the Potomac in time to participate in the Peninsula Campaign after it had reached White House Landing.

During the Civil War, the Quartermaster Department had responsibility for the issuance and accountability of all supplies, and transportation. The Quartermaster branch did not appear until 1910 and so the Quartermasters were officers of the line appointed to the position. The Commissary Department likewise had responsibility for provisions. Ordnance had responsibility for the issuance of ammunition as well as the repair of weapons and carriages. A regiment had a lieutenant as the Quartermaster, who was assisted by a Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant. A brigade's staff had Quartermaster, Ordnance and Commissary officers who held the rank of captain. The division staff comprised field grade officers and Brigadier General Stewart Van Vliet was the Chief Quartermaster of the Army of the Potomac.

Securing White House Landing

Because of the reliance on boats and the river system for resupply, this required the Army of the Potomac and US Navy to combine in the conduct of joint operations. The Navy first sent four gun boats up the Pamunkey to secure the waterway, while Brigadier General Stoneman's Cavalry Division raced to White House up the River Road that paralleled the Pamunkey River.

The four US Navy gunboats that operated on the Pamunkey River:

USS Chocura was screw gunboat launched October 5, 1861 by Curtis and Tilden, Boston, Massachusetts, and commissioned February 15, 1862, Commander T. H. Patterson in command.

USS Maratanza, a 786-ton double-ender, wooden steamer, was built at Boston Navy Yard in 1861, then launched 26 November and commissioned on April 12, 1862.

USS Marblehead was an Unadilla-class gunboat launched by G. W. Jackman, Newburyport, Massachusetts on October 16, 1861.

USS Sebago, a 832 long tons (845-ton) double-ended, sidewheel steamer, was built by the Portsmouth Navy Yard, Kittery, Maine, launched on November 30, 1861; and commissioned on March 26, 1862, with Lieutenant Edmund W. Henry in command.

At 10:15 a.m. on May 8, the *USS Maratanza* weighed anchor and sailed up the Pamunkey River on a reconnaissance, in company with the gunboat *Chocura*. Having proceeded up the river about six miles the gunboats discovered a company of rebel cavalry and the gunboat *Chocura* opened fire upon them. *USS Maratanza* also fired one 24-pounder howitzer shell at the rebels.¹⁰

At 4 p.m. on May 10, a pilot for the Pamunkey River came on board the *Chocura* and it steamed up the river in the company of the *Sebago*, *Marblehead*, and tugboat *Boardman*, astern. The next day, from noon to 4 p.m., the gunboats spotted the approach of Union cavalry on the left bank of

¹⁰ *Official Records Of The Union And Confederate Navies, Vol VII* (on CD-ROM)
Abstract log of the *USS Maratanza*.

the river. The gunboats dropped anchor a little below White House, fired their pivot and rifle gun in the direction of a camp of rebels, and continued firing till 4, at intervals of fifteen minutes.¹¹

Robert Hunt Rhodes, D Company, 2nd Rhode Island Volunteers, Devens' Brigade, Couch's Division, Keyes' IV Corps wrote in his journal:

Camp near Pamunkey River, Va., May 11/62 – Friday our Cavalry came up with the Rebels and charged through the lines, and falling into an ambush, turned and came back. The Cavalry lost three killed and several wounded but brought back a number of prisoners. The Rebels opened with skill and we were ordered to move up. Our Artillery replied and the Rebel rear guard moved on. We followed to this place and are now waiting orders. Food is scarce, and all that we have to eat is the cattle killed by the way. No bread or salt in the Regiment and I am most starved. But it is all for the Union and we do not complain.¹²

May 12th 1862 – Left camp in the evening and marched to White House Landing on the Pamunkey River. Here we found three gun boats [*Chocura, Sebage, and Marblehead*], and we feel more comfortable. In the evening we attended an outdoor jubilee meeting held by the Negroes. One of them preached a sermon. He tried to prove from the Bible that truth that every man must seek his own salvation. He said: “Brethren, the Scripture says, ‘Every man for himself. Every tub on its own bottom.’ Not exactly Scripture but it came near the truth. Our chaplain addressed the slaves, and the scene was a wild one.”¹³

White House Landing, Va., May 13/62 – This is historic ground for in yonder house George Washington was married. From this house Colonel Wheaton has procured a fine black saddle mule. We are now within twenty-four miles of Richmond.¹⁴

On May 12, 1862, Lieutenant Stevens, commanding *USS Maratanza* and senior Navy officer on the Pamunkey River, wrote to Captain William Smith, “senior officer present,”

Sir: I have to report that since my last communication, at the request of General Stoneman, I proceeded the same day as the date of my letter up the Pamunkey River ... as far as the White House, for the purpose of exploring the river and supporting his advance. We met with no obstacles of any kind, and found water enough for vessels drawing 16 feet. Saw at the White House quite a force of mounted rebels, which we [shelled and put] to flight.

The information derived from our reconnaissance will be of value to the general commanding, as it will enable him to make the White House, distance only 22 miles from

¹¹ *Official Records Of The Union And Confederate Navies, Vol VII* (on CD-ROM)

Abstract log of the *USS Chocura*

¹² Robert Hunt Rhodes (editor), *All For the Union; The Civil War Diary and Letters of Elisha Hunt Rhodes*, New York: Orion Books, 1985.

¹³ Rhodes, *All For the Union*.

¹⁴ Rhodes, *All For the Union*.

Richmond, with a good road leading to the city, the base of his operations, or Cumberland, as he may elect.

The railroad bridge crossing the Pamunkey at the White House has been destroyed by the rebels, and also several gunboats at different points on the river.

On my return I left the *Chocura* at time White House, the *Marblehead* at Cumberland, and directed the commanding officer of the *Sebago* to return and report to you. The *Maratanza*, at the request of General Franklin, occupies a point midway between Eltham and Cumberland, where the railroad from West Point to Richmond approaches quite near the river, for the purpose of cutting off the use of the road by the rebels. I hope the disposition of the force will meet your approval.¹⁵

Joel Cook summarized:

White House was peaceably evacuated by the enemy on the evening of May 10, and was immediately taken possession of by General Stoneman. Previously to their evacuation the Rebels burned the Richmond & York River Railroad bridge a rude structure built upon piles and crossing the Pamunkey, making a break in it just large enough to allow the Federal gunboat to pass through and ascend the river above. This destruction was thus a positive benefit to the Union cause, and at any rate could not have inflicted any injury, as the intention of the supply department was to use the railroad from White House to the Chickahominy, abandoning the section leading to West Point. The orders given to General Stonemen, when he occupied White House, were to hold it until the enemy appeared with stronger force, in which case he was to retreat. A transport, with supplies, sent up from Cumberland on Sunday, May 11, landed them, with every thing arranged for a hasty departure if danger appeared. The enemy did not come, however, and on May 12 several thousand infantry marched to the place, and formed an adequate garrison.¹⁶

At Cumberland the march upon Richmond was really commenced. The *corps d'armee* were arranged into wings and centre, and General Stoneman, Philip St. George Cooke, and Emory, with their cavalry forces, were the advanced guard. General Keyes, with his corps, was on the extreme left, then general Heintzelman. General Sumner was in the centre, with General Fitz-John Porter adjoining, and General Franklin on the extreme right. The enemy were in force upon the Richmond side of the Chickahominy river, and had strong bodies advancing across it, but they made no demonstrations against the Federal army. General McClellan proceeded slowly and cautiously, abstaining from all offensive movements until the supply post at White House was established and the whole army free to act in concert.¹⁷

General Robert E. Lee's wife, Mary, was at White House, the home of her son, Colonel Fitzhugh Lee, when the Federals arrived. General McClellan made arrangements for Mrs. Lee's safe

¹⁵ *Official Records Of The Union And Confederate Navies, Vol VII* (on CD-ROM)
Abstract log of the *USS Maratanza* (p. 353)

¹⁶ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*

¹⁷ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*

passage through the Union lines to Richmond. She left a note on the door requesting that the Union troops honor the memory of the Custis and Washington historical significance of the house and not molest it. McClellan ordered guard placed on the house with instructions that the house would be protected.

Trooper Francis Adams, of the 1st New York Cavalry, arrived at White House about 6:00 in the morning on May 15 while it was raining and described what he saw:

Slocum and other general officers came up, dripping wet, and having given directions to the troops where to camp, were glad to accept shelter in the dingy cabin of an old negro, the few smouldering [sic] embers in the great fireplace affording us a little warmth.¹⁸

The [White House] plantation here was an extensive level plain of rich and productive soil, easy of cultivation, and evidently under good care. It extended about five miles along the bank of the river, and nearly three inland. There were fields of clover a foot deep, and rye, and wheat, and corn, looking so bright and healthy, extending as far as the eye could reach. Clumps of the old shade trees broke the monotony here and there, while broad avenues ran in various directions, fringed with willows and cedars. The plantation had belonged to the Custis estate, and, like the rest of that property, had descended to the Lee family.¹⁹

The scenery, as we advanced up the Pamunkey, became more and more beautiful, the plantations more extensive and under a higher state of cultivation, and the people more wealthy and intelligent. In short, it seemed as if our march was through a succession of beautiful gardens, on which the eye dwelt with admiration. The people, however, were considerably alarmed at first, and approached us with an air of timidity.²⁰

Now there was a sort of feudal air about these estates which reminded me of many parts of the West of England. A high ridge extended along the bank of the river, which was obscured here and there by tall trees and clustering vines, affording delightful shade in the summer. The Lee house, a small, neat cottage of modern style, with gothic windows, pointed gables, and little balustrades, stood at the upper end of the ridge, overlooking the river, and was surrounded by a green lawn in which there were a few shade trees. A graveled walk led to the front entrance. The grounds were small, but laid out with considerable taste. Indeed, everything about the cottage was neat and plain. There were also flower and vegetable gardens near by, both under good condition; and it was here that we had the first strawberries and green peas of the season. Then there were extensive fodder yards, barns, and cribs, filled to their utmost capacity with wheat, corn, and other cereals. Below these there was quite a village of negro cabins, stretching along the ridge and divided up into classes, with streets running between. The many-colored occupants of these cabins seemed well provided for and contented. According to the Custis will, they would all be free on the 4th of July. I conversed with a number of them, found them much

¹⁸ Francis Colburn Adams, *The Story of a Trooper; With Much of Interest Concerning the Campaign on the Peninsula, Not Before Written*, New York: Dick Fitzgerald, 1865, reprinted, General Books, 2009.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

attached to the place, and quite indifferent about changing their condition to long as they could be made safe against being sold off the plantation.²¹

On the inside of this ridge there was a deep ravine, filled tangle-wood and vines, a number of bubbling springs, giving out a plentiful supply of pure cold water. Mrs. Lee and her sister, and a few old servants, yet remained in the house, and solicited protection from us. We at once placed guards over the house and gardens, and the Quartermaster placed a guard over the grain and forage. These were necessary as a means of preserving the property from useless destruction. We wanted the forage and grain for our own use. And we asserted that our army came into the South to protect the people and their property, not to burn down their houses and make war on defenceless [sic] women and children, placing guards over this little house and garden seemed to me perfectly proper.²²

The young gentlemen of the Sanitary Commission coveted the house, and complaints were made because they could not get it for a hospital. The good intentions of these gentlemen were not always advanced with good judgment; for although this house might have afforded very pleasant and comfortable accommodations for a number of themselves, it would have made a very poor hospital, not being capable of accommodating more than could be provided for in two hospitals.²³

It ceased raining about two o'clock, and at four General McClellan came up and pitched his headquarters tents on the lawn in front of the house. We all had a short supper that night, and slept in our blankets on the wet ground.²⁴

A number of pigs ran loose on the plantation, and soon became an object of envy to our soldiers, several of whom laid violent hands on them, thereby endangering that exact discipline which ruled in the army under McClellan, and discovering also an unpardonable want of respect for the orders of General Andrew Porter, our Provost Marshal General.²⁵

I have spoken in the early part of this history of the melancholy man in black, who figured in the organization of the 1st New York Lincoln Cavalry. He was now a Captain of the regiment, and being exceedingly hungry, and not having the fear of certain orders before his eyes, paid an old negro two dollars, good and lawful currency, for the privilege of shooting a pig. For this grievous military offense the melancholy man was placed under arrest, and confined to his tent, with a guard over him, for the space of ten days. It was reported that the General who ordered this severe punishment of an officer had the pig for supper. The melancholy man, I ought to mention, employed his time in giving license to his poetical inspirations. Indeed he wrote a number of poems, and painted several amusing figures, all illustrating the great military offense of killing a pig in an

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

enemy's country. And when he had sufficiently repented of his crime, he wrote a letter to the Commanding General, setting forth the great reform that had taken place in his morals, and promising that if he were restored his liberty, never to shoot another pig without a special order from the Provost-Marshal General.²⁶

On the 16th our fleet of transports came up, and with it a swarm of inquisitive Jews and speculating "Yankees," who commenced trade on the river, and were soon carrying on a brisk business with the soldiers. The White House plantation soon changed its color and character. Mrs. Lee, not fancying the demonstrative character of her new visitors, nor the freedom they made with her fields, applied to be sent through the lines to her husband. Her application was granted a few days after, and, with a flag of truce and an escort of cavalry, she was delivered outside of our lines, with an amount of ceremony beyond even what gallantry demanded.²⁷

On May 16, the Union vanguard advanced further north vacating White House Plantation to the remainder of the Army. Robert Hunt Rhodes recorded his arrival at Dr. Macon's plantation, near Tunstall's Station:

Macon's Plantation, Va., May 16/62 – Wednesday we left the White House and came to this place, a distance of three miles, and on the Richmond and West Pont Railroad. Last night one of the Rebel General Stewart's orderlies came into our Cavalry lines by mistake and was captured. Two of our companies had a brush with the Rebels yesterday. We are on a high hill and our Batteries command the country round about. This farm is owned by a Dr. Macon. One of our gun boats fired an eleven inch shell that landed in his yard. Property is respected as much as it was in Washington. Even the generals sleep out of doors, and the rights of the people are respected. The men living here are surprised at this, as they were told the Yankees would destroy everything. The female portion of the population are very bitter and insult every soldier they meet, or rather think that they do. One of them said as the U.S. flag was borne by her house: I never expected to live to see this day." If the Rebels were not in our front we could ride to Richmond by rail in a short time as the distance is only about twenty miles. General McClellan visited out camp.²⁸

Trooper Adams rode up to the Macon estate on May 17 and said Dr. Macon was very friendly. He admitted that other inhabitants of the region were very friendly and regretted the war.

Joel Cook described the subsequent advance of the remainder of the Army of the Potomac from Cumberland Landing to White House:

On the morning of Friday, May 16, the camp at Cumberland was broken up, and the army left for White House, five miles northwestward. Troops were constantly leaving Cumberland until Saturday, and Sunday morning saw the last teams of the United States army being dragged from the once so thickly-peopled plain. A rain, which began on Thursday and continued all night, converted the roads into deep mud, and the marching

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Rhodes, *All For the Union*.

troops and artillery cut them up terribly. This movement was most sadly delayed. Many of the teams had to be assisted along the whole distance by details of men, and it took nearly all of them thirty-six hours to pass between the two places. Virginia roads, after a rain-storm, are execrable.²⁹

The troops of General Franklin, Porter, and Sumner, upon their arrival at White House, encamped upon a piece of level ground extending along the Pamunky, and which had been planted with corn and clover. General Keyes and Heintzelman were to the south of them [advancing along the Richmond-Williamsburg Road now Highway 60]. Until his baggage-train arrived, General McClellan made the White House his headquarters. Troops and teams were arriving from Friday until Sunday, and it was not until the afternoon of that day that everything became settled and quiet. Monday morning, early, saw the vast army move again. The supply post had been established and had commenced operations, and the army was free to begin the earnest work before it. General Heintzelman and Keyes marched toward Bottom's Bridge, a crossing-place of the Chickahominy ten miles east-southeast of Richmond and thirteen west of White House. These general commanded a force of forty thousand men of all arms of service, and were well supplied with artillery. The main body left by roads crossing the Peninsula north of the railroad, though near it and by noon on Monday, May 19, the entire army of the Potomac was on the direct road toward Richmond.³⁰

War Correspondent George Alfred Townsend arrived at White House shortly before the Army of the Potomac vacated it.

It was growing dark as we rounded to at "White House;" the camp fires of the grand army lit up the sky, and edged the tree-boughs of the margin with ribands of silver. Some drums beat in the distance; sentries paced the strand; the hum of men, and the lowing of commissary cattle, were borne towards us confusedly; soldiers were bathing in the river; team-horses were drinking at the brink; a throng of motley people were crowding about the landing to receive the papers and mails. I had at last arrived at the seat of war, and my ambition to chronicle battles and bloodshed was about to be gratified.³¹

Rains had turned the road into morasses which severely impeded traffic. Wagons could only haul half their normal weight and still become mired in the mud. Lieutenant Josiah Marshall Favill, Adjutant of the 57th New York Infantry, French's Brigade, Richardson's Division, Sumner's II Corps, wrote in his diary on May 15:

If there were any kind of roads in this country, it would not matter so much, but they are all clay, and the center of the road is universally the lowest part of it, in consequence, an

²⁹ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*

³⁰ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*

³¹ Geo. Alfred Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-Combatant, and his Romaunt Abroad During the War*, New York: Blelock & Company, 1866.

hour's rain makes them impassable for artillery or wagons, and laborious and difficult for infantry.³²

Likewise animals sunk up to their bellies and were unable to extract themselves. On May 16, Keyes Corps had just left Cumberland Landing and Charles H. Brewster of the 10th Massachusetts Infantry, Couch's Division of Keyes' IV Corps wrote about what he observed on their way to Bottom's Bridge:

We passed any quantity of Wagons that they left in the road, many of them stuck in the mud clear up to the bottoms of them and of the dead mules and horses there is not end, and the stench is horrible.³³

The rains would continue to plague transportation throughout the rest of the campaign.

On May 16, McClellan established his headquarters at White House Landing on the Pamunkey with Porter's V Corps, Franklin's VI Corps, Sykes Regular Division, and Smith's Division. Casey and Couch's Divisions of Keyes' IV Corps were at New Kent Court House, Hooker and Kearney's Divisions of Heintzelman's III Corps were near Roper's Church, and Richardson and Sedgewick's Divisions of Sumner's II Corps were still near Eltham Landing on the York River.³⁴

On May 18, two days after the port operations began, Charles B. Hayden of the 2nd Michigan Infantry, Kearny's Division of Heintzelman's III Corps wrote of arriving at White House:

We have plenty of provisions & can buy anything we wish [from the Sutlers] at the landing. The Pamunkey is not more than 20 to 25 rods [330 to 412.5 feet] wide but is so deep that large vessels run up close to the shore & unload without the aid of lighters or a wharf. We are supplied here with as little trouble as if we were at Ft. Monroe.³⁵

When the first vessels arrived at White House Landings, as seen from later Matthew Brady photos, they anchored perpendicular to the shore line with their bows facing the river bank. Since the river bank was the same height as the decks of the vessels, the stevedores most likely ran planks from the deck to the bank to offload cargo by hand.

On 19 May, McClellan relocated his headquarters along with Porter's V Corps and Franklin's VI Corps to Tunstall's Station, five miles from White House Landing.³⁶ A railroad station was where the road intersected with the railroad and a rail spur paralleled the main track where cars

³² Josiah Marshall Favill, *The Diary of a Young Officer; Serving with the Armies of the United States During the War of the Rebellion*, Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 1909.

³³ David W. Blight, edit, *When This Cruel War Is Over; The Civil War Letters of Charles Harvey Brewster*, Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.

³⁴ MG George B. McClellan, *Letter of the Secretary of War, Transmitting Report n the Organization of the Army of the Potomac, and of Its Campaigns in Virginia and Maryland*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864, p.93.

³⁵ Stephen W. Sears, *For God and Country; The Civil War Journal of Charles B. Hayden*, New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1993.

³⁶ McClellan, *Report on the Army of the Potomac*, p. 93.

could unload without interfering with passing traffic. The main line and spur cut through a small rise in elevation just west of where the road intersected the railroad.

After McClellan removed his headquarters from White House, Reverend James Junius Marks, Chaplain of the 63rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry under Kearney's Division, Heintzelman's III Corps arrived at White House. He described what he saw:

I landed at White House, and found more than a hundred vessels, transports, and steamers lying in the river at this place. No one who is not familiar with a great army can have any conception of the vastness of the expedition of labor essential to feed it.³⁷

After operating at Bottom's Bridge from May 20-23 (Companies "A," "F," "H" and "K"), Companies "B," "C," "D," "E," "G" and "I" of the 93rd New York Volunteer Infantry of Casey's Division was assigned duty back at White House Landing on May 19 to secure it until it was burned on June 25. The 93rd New York then fought in the Seven Days Battles.

The Union Supply Base – White House

McClellan appointed his aide-de-camp and former I Corps Chief Quartermaster, Lieutenant-colonel Rufus Ingalls, USMA 1843, in charge of the supply base at White House. An extremely efficient officer, he would later replace BG Stewart Van Vliet as the Chief Quartermaster of the Army of the Potomac on July 10, 1862 and hold that position throughout the remainder of the war. BG Van Vliet described the challenge of logistics operation at White House and the problems caused by the constant rain:

Extensive wharves were at once constructed by throwing our barges and canal-boats ashore at high tide and bridging them over. The railroad bridge across the Pamunkey had been burned by the enemy, and the rolling stock of the road removed. From a reconnaissance in front the railroad was found to be uninjured, with the exception of two or three small bridges, which had been burned. In anticipation of moving along this road toward Richmond, rolling stock for the road had been purchased, and a competent force employed to work on it. Working parties were immediately put on the road and the engines and cars landed and in a few days the road was again in running order, and cars loaded with supplies were constantly running to the front. The real troubles in supplying the army commenced at this point, owing to the condition of the roads, rendered almost impassable by frequent and long-continued storms... At this point our large depots remained until the battle of Gaines' Mill, the 27th of June. During this time the army was in front of Richmond, from 15 to 20 miles in advance, all of its immense supplies were thrown forward by the railroad and the large supply trains of the army. The frequent and heavy rains, by injuring the railroad and impairing the wagon roads, rendered it a matter of great difficulty at times to transport the large amount of material and supplies, but in not instance, I believe, did our department fail in discharging the duty devolving upon it. Of forage and subsistence alone over 500 tons were daily required by the army. Adding to this the other necessary supplies swelled this amount to over 600 tons, which rain or

³⁷ James Julius Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1864, p. 72.

shine, had to be handled at the depots each day and forwarded to our lines. The difficulties in supplying an army of 100,000 men are not generally comprehended. Each man consumes 3 pounds of provisions per day, and every horse 26 pounds of forage. One hundred thousand men would therefore be readily seen that an army of this size could leave its depots but a short distance in the rear in marching through a country destitute of supplies and depending on carrying everything with it.³⁸

Joel Cook described the logistical base at White House:

Before leaving White House, the commissary post and its operation, together with the condition and usefulness of the contrabands employed there, ought to be fully described. At the time the army left, the post was not in full operation; but the following week saw a port on a tortuous, scarcely-known river of Virginia, which was a fair rival of New York, Philadelphia, or Boston in all extent of its coastwise commerce. Steam and sail vessels continually arriving and departing, extensive wharves, with cargoes constantly unloading, crowds of negroes, carrying boxes, rolling barrels, dancing, singing, and joking, officers, armed with a little brief authority, giving orders with stentorian voices, and all the hubbub and confusion of a large port, were found at White House. It was a busy town, without a single warehouse in which to store its goods. Lines of railroad ran to the river-side, and beside them the commissary stores were piled, and, as they were needed by the army before Richmond, were loaded upon the cars and sent forward. All was under the superintendence of two most excellent officers. The quartermaster's department was presided over by Lieutenant-Colonel R. Ingalls, and the subsistence department by Captain G. Bell. Both were honest, hard-working men, and they conducted the business of the post admirably.³⁹

Fleet:

John Tucker, the Assistant Secretary of War, chartered 128 steamers, 187 schooners, and 90 barges.⁴⁰ There was a harbor-master at White House and another stationed at Fort Monroe who sent ships forward to White House landing as needed.⁴¹

An unending stream of vessels passed both up and down the river. A fleet at Fortress Monroe fed the upward current, and another of anchored transports at White House received it. As the supplies were needed, the vessels containing them were brought to the wharves and unloaded by negroes; and as soon as the cargo was discharged the vessel was sent off to a Northern port for another. All kinds of craft were employed by the government, - brigs, schooners, sloops, canal-boats, steam-boats, and propellers, - every thing which could float, and whose owner could get the Government to employ it.⁴²

³⁸ Report of BG Stewart Van Vliet, US Army, Chief Quartermaster, August 2, 1862, OR, Series I, Volume II, Part I, p. 159.

³⁹ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*

⁴⁰ Bruce P. Schoch, "Union Logistics in the Peninsula Campaign," *Army Logistician*, March-April 1996.

⁴¹ Upon arrival of his brigade of II Corps on April 4, BG O. O. Howard detailed CPT Sherlock as the harbor-master to supervise the unloading of transports at Ships Point, Ft Monroe. There is no other reference as to whether he remained in that duty for the duration of the campaign. OR, Series I, Volume II, Part I, p. 284-5.

⁴² Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*

Joel Cook described the condition of the fleet:

Some of the vessels chartered by the Government were the greatest oddities. The North seemed to have been ransacked to find all the queer, old, worn-out steamboats and broken-down barges and canal-boats. Steamboats which had, from age or debility, been discarded from Northern pleasure-lines, and which during 1861 suddenly disappeared from Northern bays and rives, were found plying up and down the York and Pamunky Rivers. Old tow-boats, familiar servants to the ship-owners of large cities, long, lank propellers, which neither nature nor art ever intended to be models either of speed or beauty, sprightly tugs, once frisking about in Northern harbors, all had been transferred to the Pamunky, where they puffed and labored and made the hills echo their shrill whistles.⁴³

Some vessels in Government employ were new and in excellent repair. By far the greatest portion, however, were in bad condition, and were held at exorbitant prices, - prices promptly paid, and in many cases without adequate services rendered. Some were completely broken down, - leaky hulls and leaky boilers, - and other managed to get rid of doing any work. One owner is said to have gone up to White House to look after his vessel, when he was told by some one in the quartermaster's department, -⁴⁴

“The Government is going to discharge the boat.”

“Why so?”

“Because the captain keeps dodging about hiding among the big boats, and don't carry one cargo in six months.”

Boats out of repair were condemned, and sent home to be fixed up, the payment of charter-money being stopped in the mean while. Unless damage was caused by Government officials, the authorities never paid for its repair. The boats on the Pamunky were condemned by scores.⁴⁵

Sail-vessels were generally chartered at prices very near the ruling ones in the freight-markets. They were employed to carry cargoes from Northern ports to White House, were paid fair freights, and the usual allowances for delays in unloading.⁴⁶

Warren Lee Goss, 7th Massachusetts, Devens' Brigade, Couch's Division, Keyes' IV Corps, described,

The Pamunky is navigable to this point [White House], having sufficient depth, but is very narrow, in fact, so narrow that some of the larger steamers could not turn, for their stem and stern would reach either bank, except at selected places.⁴⁷

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Warren Lee Goss, “Recollections of a Private,” *Century Magazine*, Vol. XXIX, March., 1885.

Bruce P. Schoch summed up the volume of traffic passing through White House:

Over a 3-week period, the transports moved 3,600 wagons, 700 ambulances, 300 tubes of artillery, 2,500 head of cattle, and 25,000 horses and mules. Four hundred five vessels totaling 86,278 tons-including 71 side-wheel steamers; 57 propeller-driven steamers; 187 schooners, brigs, and barks; and 90 barges-hauled an enormous tonnage of cargo for the Peninsula campaign to Fortress Monroe in the spring of 1862. The daily supply requirements were prodigious: 3 pounds of subsistence per man and 26 pounds of fodder per horse or mule; over 500 tons of rations and fodder and over 100 tons of all other classes of supply for the entire army.⁴⁸

On May 19, Lieutenant Josiah Favill, Adjutant of the 57th New York Infantry, French's Brigade, Richardson's Division, Sumner's II Corps recorded in his diary riding back to White House to bring up the regimental wagons:

After a comfortable chat we parted company, and I rode along, meeting no one, until close to White House, where I passed an immense drove of cattle, and apparently an endless string of wagons; by good luck, I ran across Quartermaster Demarest, of the sixty-sixth [New York], in charge of the [French's] brigade train, and asked him to send our wagons up to the regiment, which he promised to do.⁴⁹

Wharves:

Joel Cook described the construction of the wharves:

When its cargo was discharged, the vessel usually sailed back to the North free of Government control. Still, in some instances the courses taken with steam-vessels was followed in the case of the others, and as exorbitant prices paid to charter indifferent hulks as were ever paid the owners of dilapidated steamboats. Coal-boats were generally bought, being made into wharves when their cargoes were all out. All the landing-places at White House were old barges and canal-boats securely lashed together and laid side by side until they extended to deep water. Lumber was sent up from Fortress Monroe to cover them, and to make floors upon which the stores might be piled on shore.⁵⁰

A study of the Matthew Brady photos show the initial wharves built around White House and expanded from there. The photos also reveal up to five locations from White House to the railroad bridge where boats berthed perpendicular to the shore line, probably because there were no empty barges available to build wharves. The Engineers busied themselves with the reconstruction of the railroad bridge over the Pamunkey River. There seemed to be no material handling equipment like cranes and all cargo was offloaded by hand.

In his February 17, 1863 report to MG McClellan Rufus Ingalls mentioned:

⁴⁸ Bruce P. Schoch, "Union Logistics in the Peninsula Campaign," *Army Logistician*, March-April 1996.

⁴⁹ Josiah Marshall Favill, *The Diary of a Young Officer; Serving with the Armies of the United States During the War of the Rebellion*, Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 1909.

⁵⁰ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*

The depot at White House was made very perfect and efficient. Ten or twelve barge wharves were constructed for use of the various staff departments. The railroad was put in thorough repair, and the army on the Chickahominy was kept well supplied.⁵¹

Classes of Supply:

Class I Subsistence and forage

Lines of railroad ran to the river-side, and beside them the commissary stores were piled, and, as they were needed by the army before Richmond, were loaded upon the cars and sent forward.⁵²

Cattle on the hoof were grazed in pasture a couple miles from White House.

Lieutenant Favill, Sumner's II Corps, wrote in his diary on June 9 and 10:

Food is scant, and limited as to variety; the mess has little besides salt pork, hard tack, and a few cans of preserved peaches; breakfast, dinner, and tea are all alike. Luckily, the *eau de vie*, the commissary in the vernacular, and the coffee, comes down to us in endless streams, so we shall not utterly collapse.⁵³

And then again on June 16th:

Food is still poor for officers on account of the non-appearance of the sutlers. The men get fresh beef twice a week; bean soup, salt pork, desiccated vegetables, and occasionally canned peaches.⁵⁴

He later recorded that a sutler finally arrived at the camp of French's Brigade on June 19.

Some forage was offloaded at Garlick's Landing on the Pamunkey River above the railroad bridge.

Class II clothing and equipment

Replacement or initial issue of tentage and replacement clothing was issued at White House Landing to units passing through as well as forward at the advanced depots once they were established.

Class III Fuel

Coal was always furnished steam-vessels by Government. Hundreds of barges from the Lehigh and Schuylkill regions of Pennsylvania came to White House loaded with fuel, and, when the stock on any boat was low, the captain procured an order to fill his bunkers, and, hauling alongside the nearest barge, took what was requisite. Contrabands were always furnished for coal-heavers, and the order having the number of tones taken

⁵¹ Report of BG Rufus Ingalls, US Army, Chief Quartermaster, February 17, 1863, OR, Series I, Volume II, Part I, p. 165.

⁵² *ibid*

⁵³ Favill, *The Diary of a Young Officer*.

⁵⁴ Favill, *The Diary of a Young Officer*.

marked upon it was a sufficient voucher for the captain of the coal-barge. This coal was bought by the Government, under some of the numerous contracts which were so famous during the summer of 1861. It was of all qualities, - a great deal of good, but still a great deal of bad.⁵⁵

Class IV Construction materials

Lumber was sent up from Fortress Monroe to cover them [barges], and to make floors upon which the stores might be piled on shore.⁵⁶

Captain Le Duc wrote about returning to White House for lumber and carpenters on June 3.⁵⁷

Lumber for construction of the corduroy roads and bridges was also acquired from local saw mills.

Class V Ammunition

Some of the transports – especially those containing ordnance stores - remained for months at anchor without being once disturbed.⁵⁸

Class VI Sundry Items were purchased from Sutlers, civilian merchants who accompanied the Army to the field and sold provisions to soldiers either from the back of their wagons or tents. The Sutlers set up operations at White House and some did accompany the Corps forward. Sutlers were the predecessor of AAFES trailer.

After the Army of the Potomac vacated White House Landing and J.E.B. Stuart's Cavalry arrived on 29 June, they found large quantities of provisions attesting to the abundance and diversity of food supplied to Union troops:

Their sutler's shops were on the most elaborate scale – quantities of barrels of sugar, lemons by the millions, cases of wine, beer and other liquors of every description, confectionary, canned meats, and fruits and vegetables, and great quantities of ice, all still in excellent condition. The eggs were packed in barrels of salt.⁵⁹

When Francis Adams of the New York Cavalry returned two weeks after the port operations began at White House, he described the city of merchants and businessmen that had sprung up:

This White House plantation has since been a prominent feature in the war. I visited it about two weeks after the time we first occupied it, and found it transformed into a city of tents, inhabited by Jews, sutlers, and speculators. Streets were laid out and named, and long lines of tent-shanties, in which a brisk trade was carried on, gave a gay and picturesque appearance to the place. Here a persuasive Jew made his bow, and invited

⁵⁵ Report of BG Rufus Ingalls, US Army, Chief Quartermaster, February 17, 1863, OR, Series I, Volume II, Part I, p. 165.

⁵⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁷ Le Duc, William G., *Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster; The Autobiography of William G. Le Duc*, St. Paul, Minnesota: The North Central Publishing Company, 1963, p. 75.

⁵⁸ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*

⁵⁹ W.W. Blackford, *War Years with Jeb Stuart*, p. 75

you in to buy his cheap clothing and his flimsy haberdashery; there, an enterprising gentleman from Boston had opened a showy establishment, and had everything the soldier wanted, from a bunch of matches to a leathery cheese. Then a respectable looking gentleman from New York invited you in to see the extensive stock he was just opening, and intended to sell at cost and expenses. He didn't want to make a dollar out of the soldier, he was sure he didn't; and as for the like of a bottle of good whiskey, why he always threw that in as a matter of friendship. The "Broadway Saloon" rivaled with the "Philadelphia House" in the quantity and quality of the dinner given you for a dollar. Both had their female contraband waiters, draped in the gayest attire; both swarmed with flies, and steamed with the heat of a furnace. Steamboats in the pay of the Government were turned into lodging-houses by their enterprising captains, who would oblige the traveler with a mattress and a blanket for a dollar a night. The good young men of the Sanitary Commission had a part of the city set off to themselves, and went about in search of the sick and hungry, whom they invited to come in and be healed. These gentlemen, I found, were the object of dislike to the Jews, who complained that trade was seriously damaged by the Sanitary men giving away what they had to sell. There, too, was the sleek, insinuating gentleman, with his dyed beard and moustache, and his hair so exactly oiled and parted, moving about and making the acquaintance of officers, to whom he would suggest in a quiet way that there was a "little game" going on just beyond the Oaks. The great feature of this city of camps, however, was the vast number of contrabands that had congregated in it, of every hue, and the gay colors they were draped in. The energetic Col. Ingalls, whose highest ambition was to see the soldiers well provided for, was the great presiding genius of this queer city, and managed its affairs in a manner that seemed to give satisfaction to all. I noticed that he was a great favorite with the contrabands, for whom he found employment.⁶⁰

Contraband labor:

While the Army had Quartermaster and Ordnance Sergeants in the companies and regiments, there were no logistics units and all labor above the regimental level was performed by civilian hire or contract labor. Major General Butler's decision to consider escaped slaves "contraband of war," provided the Army of the Potomac a ready manpower pool to hire as civilian labor. The name "contraband" stuck and they were hired to drive wagons; and when the Army arrived at White House Landing, they were hired as stevedores.

Approx. 300-400 "contraband" laborers were camped about 1/8 mile from White House (or hospital at White House)⁶¹

Joel Cook gave a detailed account of the contraband labor force at White House Landing:

All the labor of unloading stores or transferring them from one boat to another was performed by gangs of negroes. Twenty or thirty were placed under the charge of a sharp negro overseer, whose pay was generally regulated by the amount of work his gang performed. These negroes would commence at daylight and work until dark, every one

⁶⁰ Adams, *The Story of a Trooper*.

⁶¹ Richard Wheeler, *Sword Over Richmond: An Eyewitness History Of McClellan's Peninsula Campaign*, p. 191-193.

arguing, ordering, singing, or shouting. A boat-load of negroes with no officer by was unbearable, and the overseer, whose supreme authority was most prominent in all his acts, generally led the rest in their noise by all sorts of unintelligible orders. Let an officer step on board, though, and all would be quiet, each man rolling his barrel or carrying his box, but keeping most careful watch over his tongue.⁶²

These negroes were paid good wages by the Government, and were fed with soldier's rations. Each gang slept on a barge, and one of the number, exempted from other labor, did the cooking. The negro quarters were always a popular place of resort after nightfall for all who wished to be amused. Songs, dances, stump-speeches, and arguments, in which "words of learned length and thundering sound" were used without reference to grammar or dictionary, would be heard for hour after hour. A negro is an exhaustless wit; and these original Virginians, brim-full of every kind of fun, talked politics, discussed the war, gave characters to their former masters, and settled the fate of Richmond, nightly. But even humor often became listless; and theirs, as midnight approached, usually waned. Each weary fellow crept off to what he called his bed, the last one kicking over the candle. And until dawn Africa was quiet.⁶³

The usual statement of the officers of the subsistence department, as to their work-abilities, was that if free negroes from the Slave States could be exclusively employed they would wish no better help. Slaves who were runaways, or who had been emancipated by the advance of the Union troops, were very poor workmen. A Virginia negro never performs a quarter of a day's work on his master's plantation. If he is a house-servant, he is usually a favorite, and, of course, knows nothing of the really hard labor required on the transports. Field-hands plough, plant, and hoe corn, reap the crops, and husk the ears; but the greater part of the them work when they please, and even then have no employment for large part of the year. Even when wages are offered, the stimulus is not sufficient to overcome ancient habits of laziness. The department was always anxious to rid itself of these lazy runaways.⁶⁴

Parties of fugitives from all parts of Eastern Virginia came daily into the lines of the army. The majority flocked to White House to seek employment. Of course, they were taken if there was the slightest possible chance of giving them work, either there or at the issuing-depots on the railroad. These negroes had strange ideas of what they expected to find in the North. One of these numerous parties was asked, -
"Well, what made you leave your master? Wasn't he kind to you?"
Oh, yes, massa, berry kind, berry kind."
"Well, didn't he give you enough to eat?"
"Oh, yes, I plenty of dat; nuff to eat."
"Well, what made you leave him?"
"Why, de trufe am dat he made us work."⁶⁵

⁶² Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Another squad were questioned, -

“Well, what made you leave your homes?”

“Why, we’d heerd ‘bout de Norf bein’ such a nice place, so we tort dat we would go to um.”

“Nice place! Why, how do you mean?”

“Well, we were told dat nobody did no work up dar.”

The usual ideal with all the runaway slaves was, that once out of the Confederacy and they would be free of work. Many a one who has had a day-dreams, and night-dreams too, of living without work, has been terribly disappointed when he stepped upon the White House wharves. A free negro never has such ideas. He had to work too hard to support himself and family before he thought of leaving his home, ever to believe such rumors. No negro artificers or mechanics ever came into the Federal lines. They were always pressed into the Rebel service, where their skill in their various callings was employed to the utmost extent, and they were watched too closely to allow of desertion. The habits of the White House contrabands were a fruitful source of study, and gave amusement to everyone there.⁶⁶

Medical:

Each regiment was authorized a surgeon and assistant surgeon, and each division was assigned a hospital. As the right wing of the Army of the Potomac had advanced along the Pamunkey River from Cumberland Landing, they dropped off their sick at Baltimore Crossroads, eight miles from Cumberland and five miles short of White House.⁶⁷

Army chaplains busied themselves with the wounded and consequently provided good insight to the hospitals. Chaplain Joseph Hopkins Twichell of the New York Excelsior Brigade, BG Joseph Hooker’s Division of Samuel Heintzelman’s III Corps, wrote to his father on May 26:

As we approach Richmond the houses all the houses, especially those of the better class, are deserted and the sight of a white native is rare. Our hospitals are established in these empty abodes, thus made in an essential point to contribute to our comfort. I think the medical department of the Army is far behind all others in energy and capacity. There has been much unnecessary suffering among the sick...⁶⁸

The army hospital was established at White House where soldiers could be evacuated by boats. Frederick Law Olmsted, Executive Secretary of US Sanitary Commission, headed the medical effort for the sick and wounded at White House Landing until McClellan abandoned it. As the Corps advanced to their positions on the outskirts of Richmond, their surgeons established their field hospitals usually at or near one of the railroad stations.

Surgeon and Medical Director of the Army of the Potomac, Charles S. Tripler, reported to MG McClellan on May 27:

⁶⁶ Ibid..

⁶⁷ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 175, 179.

⁶⁸ Peter Messent and Steve Courtney (edit), *The Civil War Letters of Joseph Hopkins Twichell, A Chaplain’s Story*, Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2006.

At White House, Va. This hospital consists of 105 hospital tents at present – all I have been able to command. It will probably be extended when more are received. One-half of these tents have been furnished with plank banquettes. The remainder will be similarly furnished when the lumber can be procured. Brigade Surg. J. H. Baxter, Volunteer service, is at present in charge. He is to be relieved by Brigade Surg. A. T. Watson in a few days. Drs. Alexander Bicker, of New York; A. E. Stocker, Asa Millett, Joseph Underwood, Francis C. Grecue, and F. LeB. Monroe are the surgeons in attendance. When this hospital was organized, the medical service was performed gratuitously by Drs. Cogswell, Swinburne, Lansing, Willard, and Kneeland, of New York, and Drs. Page and Hall, of Massachusetts. They were relieved on the 26th by the contract physicians above mentioned.⁶⁹

War Correspondent George Alfred Townsend recorded that Surgeon General Watson was the Hospital Commandant at White House.

Reverend Marks described the hospital at White House when he saw it after the Battle of Fair Oaks:

In the course of two days we had them all removed to the White House. At this place, in one of the great fields, was pitched a city of hospital tents. The location of these was most ill-advised; for the ground was swampy, the water lying much of the time upon the surface. Many of the tents were without floors, and the men suffered from much dampness... There was an excellent position for the tents around the White House: here the grounds were high, well drained, and covered with grass, and the whole surface protected by shade-trees. No more genial and delightful spot could be selected near the Pamunky than the grounds around General Lee's house. But for some unexplained reason a boggy field was chosen for the hospital tents, and guards were stationed at every gate of the White House, allowing no one to enter the premises.⁷⁰

Captain Le Duc likewise mentioned a criticism he heard:

'I fear McClellan will be censured,' one of them said, 'for putting a guard over the house, and for not putting the hospital in the yard of the place, - although it is better where it is.' And McClellan probably knew nothing of the guard, or of the location of the hospital, which is the Surgeon's business.⁷¹

US Military Railroad (USMRR)

After Secretary of War Edwin Stanton appointed COL D. C. McCallum as the General Manager of the newly created US Military Railroad on 11 February 1862; and in 1866, McCallum reported,

⁶⁹ Report of Charles S. Tripler, Surgeon and Medical Director, Army of the Potomac, May 17, 1862, OR, Series I, Volume II, Part I, p. 205.

⁷⁰ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 184-185.

⁷¹ Le Duc, *Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster*, p. 80.

March 14, 1862, General McClellan instructed me to have five locomotives and eighty cars loaded upon vessels in the harbor of Baltimore, and held subject to his orders with a view to using them in his contemplated peninsular campaign.

They were purchased from northern railroad companies, loaded as directed and remained on the vessels until early May, when they were sent to White House, Virginia and placed upon the Richmond and York River railroad.

Another engine was added in June to the number, and all employed in transporting supplies between White House and the front, which toward the close of June, was twenty miles from White House and four miles from Richmond. Upon the withdrawal of the army of the Potomac to Harrison's Landing, June 28, all rolling stock was destroyed or damaged, as far as practicable, to prevent it from falling into the hands of the enemy.⁷²

McCallum purchased 40 cars from the Boston and Worcester Railroad and 50 from the Providence and Worcester Railroad at \$500 for flat cars and \$600 for covered cars.⁷³

A Civil War locomotive could pull up to 20 cars.

Transportation:

6 locomotives:⁷⁴

Ontario, No. 1, built by Hinkley & Drury in 1848, and sold by Fintchburg Railroad; captured by the Confederates and sold in 1865

Wyandank, (was *Thornton*) No. 8, built by Baldwin in 1853, and sold by Long Island Railroad; captured by the Confederates and sold in 1865

Exeter, No. 27, built by Hinkley & Drury in 1856, and sold by Boston & Maine Railroad; captured by the Confederates and sold in 1865

Speedwell, No. 18, built by Lawrence Machine Shop in 1859, and sold by Old Colony & Fall River Railroad; captured by the Confederates, renamed *Chickahominy*, and sold to O. H. Donovan in 1865 for \$5,000

Spark, No. 33, built by Norris & Son in 1862, captured by the Confederates and sold in 1865

Lincoln, no record exists for this locomotive

80 rail cars

3,600 Wagons⁷⁵

700 ambulances⁷⁶

71 side-wheel steamers⁷⁷

⁷² "Report of Col. D. C. McCallum, General Manager of the U.S. Military Railroads, 1866," Edwin P. Alexander, *Civil War Railroads & Models*, New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc/Publishers, 1977.

⁷³ Thomas Weber, *The Northern Railroads in the Civil War, 1861-1865*, Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1952.

⁷⁴ Names of locomotives were provided by George B. Abdill, *Civil War Railroads*, Burbank, CA: Superior Publishing Company, 1961; and information on the locomotives was provided by Alexander, *Civil War Railroads & Models*.

⁷⁵ Report of BG Stewart Van Vliet, US Army, Chief Quartermaster, August 2, 1862, OR, Series I, Volume II, Part I, p. 159.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

57 propeller driven boats
187 schooners, brigs and barks⁷⁸
90 barges⁷⁹

Each regiment had an average of six wagons. One of the wagons hauled the surgeon's medical stores. Another carried three wall tents and the baggage of the field and staff officers. The third wagon carried the baggage of the line officers. The fourth wagon hauled the pans and kettles of the line companies. The fifth and sixth wagons carried rations.⁸⁰

Transportation was organic to the Corps so they employed the pull system of supply. The Corps sent their wagons back to either the advance supply depots on the railroad or supply base at White House for supplies. Trooper Francis Adams of the 1st New York Cavalry described one other problem with wagon transportation:

The army had become much encumbered with baggage, in consequence of a large number of officers traveling with their families and furniture, as if they had joined the army for the purpose of opening a boarding-house as soon as they entered Richmond. General Franklin's attention had been called to his subject; and that a stop might be put to this improper use of army wagons, he ordered an inspection of baggage to be made. An order was sent to the several regiments of the division to be got ready for marching. Captains Arnold, McMahan, and myself proceeded first to examine officers' baggage in the First New York Cavalry, when considerable amusement was caused by Major Von Flopp, who had appropriated a whole army wagon to himself, and had it filled with the most promiscuous assortment of furniture ever soldier went to the wars with. Here was the venerable rocking chair, bolsters, pillows, mattresses, bed-quilts, a lounge, a bath tub, and a number of bootjacks; crockery enough for a large family, and a stock of preserved fruits and vegetables that showed the Major had no idea of living on the country. Now, Arnold was an officer of the old army, and a true soldier, who was content with his blanket and the ground for a bed, and traveled with a dozen shirt-collars, a towel, pocket-comb, and toothbrush for baggage. His remarks as he directed the orderlies to unload Major's furniture were extremely amusing. Nor was it decreased by the air of surprise with which the doughty Major witnessed the recklessness of the mischievous orderlies as they tossed his venerable incumberances [sic] to the ground.⁸¹

"Provided for a large family, eh?" said Arnold. "rocking-chair, eh? Feather-beds'll come next. Intend to open a boarding-house when you get to Richmond, that's clear."⁸²

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Dodge, N. S. (1863). *Hints on Army Transportation*. Albany NY: Charles Van Benthuysen, Printer, page 6. The six regimental wagons were just the tip of the iceberg. Brigades, divisions and army corps were apportioned wagons to carry baggage, rations, forage, hospital supplies, ammunition, entrenching tools and quartermaster supplies. The mobility of the army depended on the carrying capacity of its wagons. Towards the end of the war, the Army of the Potomac carried ten days' rations and ordnance stores for a campaign.

⁸¹ Adams, *The Story of a Trooper*.

⁸² *Ibid.*

“If a field officer can’t carry his traveling comforts, why, he’d better not go to the war. When a gentleman’s going into a country he don’t know, it’s wisdom on his part to go well provided,” replied the Major, with a polite bow.⁸³

“A man who can’t go to war as a soldier is an incumbrance [sic] to the army, and had better say at home,” returned Arnold, dryly, as he ordered the men to turn the traps over to the provost marshal.⁸⁴

“But, sir,” rejoined the Major, rubbing his head, “I can’t prove to you that I am a soldier and a gentleman. And I will get you the proof in writing; yes, sire, in writing. And as there is no knowing when this war will end, or when we leave Richmond when we get into it, I take it that he is a wise soldier who travels with his furniture.” We left the Major declaring that he would go see General McClellan, who was a friend of his, and get an order to restore his property.⁸⁵

It is due to Von Flopp to say here that he was not the only officer who incumbered [sic] the army with baggage enough to furnish a house. We found one Lieutenant Colonel traveling with his wife and three children, and to carry his furniture he had a government wagon and four horses, and a private wagon and two. Thus incumbered [sic], the Army of the Potomac marched, and the men were deprived of their proper allotment of transportation.⁸⁶

War Correspondent George Alfred Townsend was just as critical of the encumbrance of some at White House:

So far as I could observe and learn, the authorities at White House carried high heads, and covetous hands. In brief, they lived like princes, and behaved like knaves. There was one – whose conduct has never been investigated – who furnished one of the deserted mansions near by, and brought a lady from the North to keep it in order. He drove a span that rivaled anything in Broadway, and his wines were luscious. His establishment reminded me of that of Napoleon III. In the late Italian war, and yet, this man was receiving merely a Colonel’s pay. My impression is that everybody at White House robbed the Government, and in the end, to cover their delinquencies, those scoundrels set fire to an immense quantity of stores, and squared their accounts thus: “Burned on the Pamunkey, June 28, commissary, quartermaster’s, and hospital stores, one million dollars.”⁸⁷

Further Improvements

Security for the supply base at White House during the advance to Richmond was initially provided by units as they marched through. Warren Lee Goss, 7th Massachusetts Volunteers, Devens’ Brigade, Couch’s Division, Keyes’ IV Corps described his arrival:

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-Combatant*

Our corps [Keyes IV Corps] arrived at White House Landing, May 22, 1862, and here we found a large portion of our army, which was encamped on the wide, level plain between the wood-skirted road and the Pamunkey River, occupying tents of all descriptions. Another camp was located at Cumberland Landing, a few miles below White House. The first night of our arrival was a stormy and tempestuous one, and it was evident that an attack from the enemy was expected, as we received orders to lay upon our arms. The Pamunkey is navigable to this point, having sufficient depth, but is very narrow, in fact, so narrow that some of the larger steamers could not turn, for their stem and stern would reach either bank, except at selected places. The broad plain was crowded with tents, baggage-wagons, pontoon trains, and artillery, -- all the accompaniments of a vast army. Here some of the regiments who came out from home in a Zouave uniform changed their bright clothes for the regular army blue, and, as marching orders came with the sunrise, moved off the field, leaving windrows of old clothes on the plain.⁸⁸

BG Stewart Van Vliet, Quartermaster General, reported to MG McClellan on May 23 1862:

General: Since my last communication I have established our final depot at White House, the point where the West Point Railroad crosses the Pamunkey River, 23 miles from Richmond. The army now occupies the line of the Chickahominy from 16 to 18 miles in advance. Supplies are now hauled by land from the depot, and owing to the nature of the roads it is about the utmost limit at which an army of this size can be supplied by wagon transportation. I trust, however, that in two days I shall have the railroad in running order, when all anxiety with regard to supplies may be dismissed. I have had all the rolling stock of the railroad ordered to White House instead of West Point. About twenty-five cars are now landed, and builders and carpenters only reached the White House last evening. They are now building the two small bridges between White House and Chickahominy which were burned by the rebels. These will be finished by to-morrow evening, when supplies can be brought on the road to which 7 miles of our extreme right wing. Our left will have to haul only about 2 miles. Only one span of the Chickahominy Bridge has been burned. The bridge across the Pamunkey and one short bridge near West Point will be rebuilt as soon as the road in front is put in running order. When that is done West Point can be made a depot also. It possesses many advantages. There is a good wharf, and 20 feet of water can be carried there, up one of the finest rivers I have ever seen. Two or three days would have been gained in putting the road in order had the proper vessels been forwarded from Baltimore. By some mistake the vessels which should have sailed first sailed last.⁸⁹

Because the railroad bridge had been rebuilt, the US Navy could send gunboats and ships upriver. The Army of the Potomac established a wharf at Garlick's Landing for the offloading of forage upriver from the railroad bridge.

⁸⁸ Warren Lee Goss, "Recollections of a Private," *Century Magazine*, Vol. XXIX, March., 1885

⁸⁹ Report of BG Stewart Van Vliet, US Army, Chief Quartermaster, May 23, 1862, OR, Series I, Volume II, Part I, p. 162-3.

Request from McClellan to Cdr A. Murray [OIC, Pamunkey Flotilla] to confiscate private boats on the Pamunkey to stop smuggling across the river, 23 May 62

Take measures to have the small boats on the Pamunkey above the White House, and as much higher as you may deem prudent, collected at the White House and retained there until such time as the owners may be willing to take the oath of allegiance and the detention of the boats no longer necessary. The general understands that these boats are used to a considerable extent to convey across improper persons and articles.

This request was converted to orders for the *USS Currituck*, Acting Master Shankland commanding, on 24 May 62 with caveats:

Tell citizens how/when they can get their boats back

Don't go upriver more than 10 miles⁹⁰

Surgeon Thomas T. Ellis arrived at White House on the night of June 1 and described the supply base.

The river at this point is quite a large stream, very deep and muddy. The opposite bank is but little above the level of the stream, which now bore on its winding waters a numerous fleet of steamboats, barges, schooners, and every imaginable kind of vessel used in transporting troops; and the horses, mules, guns, gun-carriages, locomotives, railroad cars, and the immense amount of hay, grain, and commissary stores necessary for the army. Over one thousand vessels, of all sizes, were afloat on the river, - some freighted with ordnance stores, and many others pack with live cattle and mules, which from their unceasing uneasiness seemed to suffer from the heat and confined quarters. The landing of the cattle was an occasion of much sport among the hundreds of idlers on the bank; and as each one, tied by its horns, would be hoisted over the vessel's side into the river, a shout of merriment would rend the air.⁹¹

With the exception of the dwelling and the out-houses described, and from which the place derives its name, there is not a dwelling for a mile round. And the shanties, erected by sutlers and refreshment dealers, were the only shelters from the burning sun, if I except the pine-trees along the river's bank, beneath which, and extending to the railroad, the quarter-master, his assistants, post-office, telegraph, and a host of other officials, had erected large and comfortable tents, in which the business of their departments was carried on.⁹²

The cattle were actually herded to a grazing pasture a couple miles away.

Main Supply Route

The York-Richmond Railroad obviously served as the main means of transportation to the Union Army's advance supply depot at Savage Station.

⁹⁰ *Official Records Of The Union And Confederate Navies, Vol. VII, p.35*

⁹¹ Thomas T. Ellis, *Leaves from the Diary of an Army Surgeon, Or, Incidents of Field, Camp, and Hospital Life*, New York: Rennie, Shea, and Lindsay, 1863, republished Bedford, Mass: Applewood Books

⁹² *Ibid.*

The Union Army also used wagons to augment the railroad. The main supply route followed the River Road from White House Landing to where the York-Richmond Railroad turned away from the path of the Pamunky River and crossed the road. There the wagons and soldiers followed the railroad to where it again turned west toward Richmond. The road picked up from there and intersected with the Williamsburg Road that crossed the Chickahominy River at Bottom's Bridge. The Confederates in their retreat had burned all the bridges; and since the flood plain of the Chickahominy was a quarter to three quarters of a mile wide swamp, the Union Engineers had to construct corduroy bridges across it.

Captain William G. Le Duc landed at Fort Monroe at 10 a. m. on the morning of May 19 and found "a boat ready to leave for the front, took passage thereupon, and arrived at White House Landing, Pamunky River, at five o'clock p.m. with assignment as the Assistant Quartermaster for Dana's Brigade, Sedgewick's Division of Sumner's II Corps. He described his arrival and the duties of running supply trains back to White House,

Steamers and sailing vessels of all sorts filled the stream, and crowded the landing. A large force of men were engaged in unloading stores, guns, ammunition, and every conceivable munition of war. We stepped from the deck of the steamer to the deck of Quartermaster Wagner's wharf and storage barge; from the steady going ways of civil life into the very vortex of the cyclone of army life; and for three and a half years I was one of the atoms "in God's great storm that roared through the angry skies."⁹³

An officer seated at a table with a pencil and memorandum book... and several clerks near at hand, all busy, looked up as we entered his office, with a tired, appealing look, which I soon interpreted to mean 'Please don't take any more time to state your business than is necessary.' He said: 'I am CPT Wagner, in charge here. Can I do anything for you?'"⁹⁴

"I don't know, sir. I am Captain Le Duc, Assistant Quartermaster, recently appointed, and assigned to Dana's Brigade, Sedgewick's Division, Sumner's Corps."⁹⁵

"I am glad to see you and make your acquaintance," he answered, "and wish you had been assigned here, where we need more help. Your corps is advancing today, and a part of Dana's Brigade is guarding the stores and landing. General Dana will be along tomorrow, and you will easily find your command – it is too late today. Take a bunk (two pairs of army blankets on some board slats) "on this barge for tonight, and start fair in the morning. Meanwhile you will want horses, and an outfit of desks and stationary, which you can select, and receipt for."⁹⁶

In the morning I found that Dana's Brigade had gone forward to Cumberland, to which I rode and reported to General Dana for assignment to duty, the 20th of May, 1862. On the 21st I was announced in orders as he Quartermaster of the Brigade, and, taking command

⁹³ W.G. LeDuc, *Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster*, p. 68-70.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

of the transportation and ammunition trains, I moved them eight and a half miles to a camp near the Richmond and West Point railroad. The officer whom I relieved was a lieutenant of the line, detailed for this duty for as short time, who knew little and cared less for the business connected with it. The regimental quartermasters were intelligent and willing, and, by their assistance, my clerk and I soon became familiar with the various forms of account, and methods of making requisitions and obtaining supplies, and we thus commenced the endless duties of this department serving with troops in the field in active warfare.⁹⁷

On the 22nd of May, late in the afternoon, I started, with all available teams, to bring supplies from the White House depot. The night was dark, the road unknown to me, and so muddy that, on level ground, the horses were splashing through a bed of thin mortar, and the wagons would sometimes drop to the axle in mud holes. Lieutenant Garland, a Regimental Quartermaster, whom I had taken with me, had rode ahead of the train to guide and direct. Knowing that we should turn to the left, and go eastward where we came to the Bottom Bridge Road, we were alert and anxious, lest, in the darkness, we should pass the junction, and run into the lines of the enemy. This anxiety became intense as we entered a wood, heard the tramp of marching men, and felt their presence, for we could not see them. We halted, and at the same time were challenged with: “Who goes there?”⁹⁸

Garland answered, “Friends – Brigade Train – Sumner’s Corps – going to White House for supplies. Who are you?”⁹⁹

“Kearney’s Division, marching to the front by way of Bottom’s Bridge. All right. Turn sharp to the left here, if you go to White House.”¹⁰⁰

“All right,” and we turned to the left, and soon met Kearney’s trains, floundering through the mud, making such progress as was possible in the dense darkness. Several of the wagons were hopelessly fast, the teams taken off, and tethered in the woods. I remember one team stuck in mud and water halfway to the horses’ bellies, and the driver asleep. We had to build a fire by the road side to enable us to see how to get by, and shortly after getting to dry ground we camped by a large spring and waited for daylight. In the morning I proceeded to the depot to draw supplies, instructed by Garland in the use of that all powerful paper, a requisition, properly signed and verified – the requisition of the commanding officer, backed by the receipt of the quartermaster, being a sufficient settlement of account with the depot officer. The officer receiving the property, or money, then becomes responsible, and either turns it over to other officers, on like vouchers, or it ammunition, or forage, expends it as such; if food, clothing, or garrison equipment, issues it to the troops, or wears it out in the service. This simple but thorough

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

system of accountability suffices to transfer, expend, and accurately account for millions of dollars worth of property or money, without loss to the government.¹⁰¹

On the 23rd I returned to the Brigade, and found it had moved forward to savage's farm, and it was with difficulty that supplies could be brought to the troops in wagons, as they would frequently drop through the surface soil and rest on the axles....¹⁰²

On May 22, McClellan moved his headquarters to Cold Harbor north of the Chickahominy River.

Chickahominy River

About eight miles from White House the Chickahominy River intersected the Williamsburg Road at Bottom's Bridge. Prince Philippe d'Orleans, Count of Paris, served with the Army of the Potomac during the Peninsula Campaign and described this major water obstacle:

The ground on which he [McClellan] was about to operate may be described in few words. It presents but a single obstacle, the Chickahominy – a serious one, it is true. This river, after passing within seven or eight kilometres of Richmond, turns off, continuing to flow in a south-easterly direction, so that Bottom's Bridge lies about eighteen or twenty kilometres from that city. Taking its rise to the north-east of the capital of Virginia, it winds through a valley regularly enclosed on both sides averaging eight or nine hundred meters in breadth. Following its downward course, we find Meadow Bridge first, over which passes a wagon-road and the Gordonsville railway; lower down, the bridge of Mechanicsville, commanded on the left bank by the hamlet of that name, is situated at the point where this river runs nearest to Richmond. Here the surrounding hills on each side are destitute of trees, and presently, on the road between Richmond and Cold Harbor, we come to New Bridge, which connects the hamlet of Old Tavern with the Gaines' Mill heights. One kilometer below this bridge the forest again enfolds the banks of the Chickahominy, and of the West Point railway, which is situated one kilometre above Bottom's Bridge. The only tributaries of the Chickahominy are, on the left bank, a small stream called Beaver-dam Creek, between Mechanicsville and Gaines' Mill, and on the right bank a vast wooded swamp, known as White Oak Swamp, the waters of which empty into the river a few kilometers below Bottom's Bridge. This swamp, which has its origin in the immediate vicinity of Richmond, is absolutely impassable, except at two or three points, where it becomes narrow, affording passage to a few cross-roads.¹⁰³

Le Duc described the Chickahominy River, which was unlike most other rivers crossing the path of advance. While an insignificantly narrow and shallow river between Bottom's Bridge and Meadow Bridge, it was flanked on both sides by wide swampland impenetrable to wagon transportation except across corduroy roads and bridges. In this respect the river was a significant obstacle to transportation.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ The Comte de Paris, translated by Louis F. Tasistro, edited by Henry Coppee, LL.D., *History of the Civil War in America*, Vol. II., Philadelphia: Jos. H. Coates & Co., 1876.

On the 24th we marched westward four or five miles, and camped on Tyler's farm, with the Chickahominy swampy bottomlands in our front, General Sumner's Headquarters being in the Tyler house yard. There we remained undisturbed, and on the 26th were building the grapevine bridge. The Chickahominy Creek, at this place, is an insignificant stream, with only two to four feet of water and mud, twenty to thirty feet wide when all together, but divided into several channels, and running through a heavily wooded swamp, four or five hundred yards wide. When the stream rises a few feet above the ordinary summer level, this swamp is inundated, and the bottom lands, which intervene between the swamp and the higher lands, are little elevated at their margins from the swamp, and so a rise of a few feet of river covers large areas. The rich and cultivated bottom lands are very soft, without corduroy or stone made roads, and are impracticable for artillery, or wagon transportation of the army.¹⁰⁴

Only four bridges crossed the Chickahominy in McClellan's area of operations starting with Bottoms in the south, then Grapevine Bridge, New Bridge and Meadow Bridge near Mechanicsville with about four to five miles distance between them. McClellan described the dilemma the Chickahominy posed by bisecting his lines of communication diagonally:

In view of the particular character of the Chickahominy, and the liability of its bottom land to sudden inundation, it became necessary to construct between Bottom's bridge and Mechanicsville eleven (11) new bridges, all long and difficult, with extensive log-way approaches.¹⁰⁵

The entire army could probably have been thrown across the Chickahominy immediately after our arrival, but this would have left no force on the left bank to guard our communication or to protect our right and rear. If the communication with our supply depot had been cut by the enemy, with our army concentrated upon the right bank of the Chickahominy, and the stage of water as it was for many days after our arrival, the bridges carried away, and our means of transportation not furnishing a single day's supplies in advance, the troops must have gone without rations, and the animals without forage, and the army would have been paralyzed.¹⁰⁶

It is true I might have abandoned my communications and pushed forward towards Richmond, trusting to the speedy defeat of the enemy and the consequent fall of the city for a renewal of supplies; but the approaches were fortified, and the town itself was surrounded with a strong line of intrenchments [sic], requiring a greater length of time to reduce than our troops could have dispensed with rations.¹⁰⁷

Under the circumstances, I decided to retain a portion of the army on the left bank of the river until our bridges were completed.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Le Duc, *Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster*, p. 70.

¹⁰⁵ McClellan, *Report on the Army of the Potomac*, p. 100.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

On May 25, McClellan sent a telegram to President Lincoln from his headquarters at Cold Harbor north of the Chickahominy:

I have two corps [Keyes and Hentzelman's] across the Chickahominy, within six miles of Richmond; the others on this side at other crossings within same distance, and ready to cross when bridges are completed.¹⁰⁹

The Chickahominy was an obstacle to traffic except over the bridges and their log-roads stretching across the vast swamp that flanked the river. Consequently, the river denied McClellan the advantage of having interior lines where he could rapidly shift forces from defending the right flank and line of communication to a concentrated attack on Richmond, or the reverse. The construction of these eleven bridges and McClellan's constant want for McDowell's I Corps was what delayed his attack on Richmond.

Advance Depots

The railroad stations that dotted the York-Richmond Railroad served as advance supply depots where the Corps could pick up supplies.

George Alfred Townsend, War Correspondent of William F. "Baldy" Smith's Division of Keyes' IV Corps, described the first advanced supply depot at Dispatch Station while his corps was still on the north side of the Chickahominy:

By the 19th of May the skirts of the grand army had been gathered up, and on the 20th the march to Richmond was resumed. The troops moved along two main roads, of which the right led to New Mechanicsville and Meadow Bridges, and the left to the railroad centre, and although the Chickahominy fords were but eighteen miles distant, we [Smith's Division] did not reach them for three days. On the first night we encamped at Tunstall's, a railroad-station on Black Creek; on the second at New Cold Harbor, a little country tavern, kept by a cripple; and on the night of the third day at Hogan's farm, on the north hills of the Chickahominy. The railroad was opened to Dispatch Station at the same time, but the right and centre were still compelled to "team" their supplies from White House. In the new position, the army extended ten miles along the Chickahominy hills; and while the engineers were driving pile, tressel [sic], pontoon, and corduroy bridges, the cavalry was scouring the country, on both flanks, far and wide.

After Heintzelman's III Corps and Keyes' IV Corps advanced across the Chickahominy, they could draw their supplies from Savage, Orchard, and Meadow Stations on the York-Richmond Railroad, while Sumner's II Corps drew from Dispatch Station east of the Chickahominy. Porter's V Corps and Franklin's VI Corps advanced further up the north side of the Chickahominy all the way to Meadows Bridge, just outside Mechanicsville, far from support of the railroad.

Medical Issues

¹⁰⁹ McClellan, *Report on the Army of the Potomac*, p. 101.

The swampland flanking the Chickahominy provided another detriment to the Army of the Potomac – sickness. Unsanitary water and mosquito-born illnesses plagued the Army as it camped around the swampland. The field hospitals would swell with the sick.

On May 25, Reverend Marks returned to the Baltimore Crossroads to check on the condition of the sick left there by Kearney's Division, Heintzelman's III Corps.

After passing through these heavy forests, I emerged into the green fields at Baltimore Cross-roads. At all the houses for miles around, and in the barns and stables, had been left our sick men. As yet there was no provision made for sending the sick of the army to the White House. I rode to the place where I saw tents in the field, and learned that the sick were to be gathered from all these places and sent to a particular house. On repairing to this house I found a young surgeon, having under his care some three or four hundred patients. The men were extremely despondent, the place was lonely and out of the way, the army having gone, and they felt like those abandoned on a desert island. The hospital was in one of the large country houses, surrounded by a great number of outhouses, built without any definite plan. In these houses, and in tents and barns, were lying the sick, in all stages of disease. During the day all those who had been scattered over miles were gathered in. I returned the same day a part of the way, taking the long bridge road, which carried me almost to the pickets of the enemy, but I escaped the dangers of the army road.¹¹⁰

Reverend Marks then reported his observations to General Kearney, who on May 27 sent an order to Marks “regularly detailing me to take charge of such sick in the hospitals as had to be removed to the White House, and to take measures to obtain for them in all the hospitals such sanitary stores as could be reached.”¹¹¹ Reverend Marks would provide a glimpse of medical operations along the line of communication reaching back to the hospital at White House.

War Correspondent George Alfred Townsend observed:

A subtle enemy had of late joined the Confederate cause against the invaders. He was known as the Pestilence, and his footsteps were so soft that neither scout nor picket could bar his entrance. His paths were subterranean, - through the tepid swamp water, the shallow graves of the dead; and aerial, - through the stench of rotting animals, the nightly miasms of the bog and fen. His victims were not pierced, or crushed, or mangled, but their deaths were not less terrible, because more lingering. They seemed to wither and shrivel away; their eyes became at first very bright, and afterward lusterless; their skins grew hard and sallow; their lips faded to a dry whiteness; all the fluids of the body were consumed; and they crumbled to corruption before life had fairly gone from them.

This visitation has been, by common consent, dubbed “the Chickahominy fever,” and some have called it the typhus fever. The troops called it the “camp fever,” and it was frequently aggravated by affections of the bowels and throat. The number of person that

¹¹⁰ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 179-181.

¹¹¹ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 183.

died with it was fabulous. Some have gone so far as to say that the army could have better afforded the slaughter of twenty thousand men, than the delay on the Chickahominy. The embalmers were now enjoying their millennium, and a steam coffin manufactory was erected at White House, where twenty men worked day and night, turning out hundreds of pine boxes. I had, occasion, in one of my visits to the depot, to repair to the tent of one of the embalmers. He was a sedate, grave person, and when I saw him, standing over the nude, hard corpses, he reminded me of the implacable vulture, looking into the eyes of Prometheus. His battery and tube were pulsing, like one's heart and lungs, and the subject was being drained at the neck. I compared the discolored body with the figure of *Ianthe*, as revealed in Queen Mab, but failed to see the beautifulness of death.¹¹²

Townsend observed that the contraband did not suffer the fever.

For his next supply run, Captain Le Duc used the rail line from Dispatch Station east of the Chickahominy River. This was the advance supply depot for Sumner's II Corps.

On the 27th I took the cars at Dispatch Station, to go to White House to obtain and forward supplies over the railroad, which had been furnished with engine and cars from Washington. In passing at a short distance from the Chickahominy, I noticed a little saw mill, and, on a siding, two cars loaded with lumber, ready for shipping, which subsequently served a very important purpose. The depot quartermaster had compelled order out of the chaos existing previously, and my requisitions were promptly filled, and I returned by rail on the 28th, and found the troops had been ordered out, with three days rations, to hasten the completion of the bridge, and cut a road through the bottoms to and from the grapevine bridge. May 30th I issued clothing and camp supplies to the troops, and sent teams to Dispatch Station four miles distant for supplies. They were the entire day in going and returning, nearly all the time being expended in returning, loaded. The ground was so soft that loaded wagons would cut through the top soil, and have to be unloaded and dug or pried out.¹¹³

Being short of forage, I seized nearly all that a farmer (Charles Baker) had, which was of little value, as it was corn blades, the only kind of coarse fodder the Virginia farmers save for their stock.¹¹⁴

In preparation for the upcoming battle, Reverend Marks of Kearney's Division, Heintzelman's III Corps wrote how the sick were evacuated from the front to White House:

The expectation began to be universal, that at the very first hour possible an advance would be ordered, and therefore preparations were made to send away all the sick in the hospitals on the field; and on the Monday [May 26] previous to the battle of Fair Oaks

¹¹² Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*.

¹¹³ Le Duc, *Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster*, p. 71.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

the order came down from head-quarters to move all the sick of the camp-hospitals to the White House.¹¹⁵

The arrangement was made to send the sick of Kearney's and Hooker's divisions to Meadow Station, about one mile east of Savage Station.¹¹⁶ The surgeons were generally satisfied with seeing the sick placed in the ambulances, and sent with them no nurses and often no food. They were brought to the station, and placed upon the porticoes and under cover of the building; a great number arrived and soon under every green tree were lying sick men. Many were constantly crying for water, many begging for medicines, and others beseeching me to write to their friends. To all these it was necessary, in various ways, to give attention. The porticoes around the station were from four to six feet above the ground; and there had to be a constant care lest the trembling, staggering men, or those tossing with fever, should fall and be seriously injured. We had expected to be taken from this place in two or three hours, but the cars on this road were in such demand to transport troops, ammunition, and forage, that the conductors refused to halt long enough to place the sick men on board. Hence we remained two days at this station. The suffering of the men the first few hours after their removal were very great; the fatigue, the jolting on the rough roads, the anxiety, all increased their miseries, and caused many to pray for death.¹¹⁷

In the course of two days we had them all removed to the White House. At this place, in one of the great fields, was pitched a city of hospital tents. The location of these was most ill-advised; for the ground was swampy, the water lying much of the time upon the surface. Many of the tents were without floors, and the men suffered from much dampness... There was an excellent position for the tents around the White House: here the grounds were high, well drained, and covered with grass, and the whole surface protected by shade-trees. No more genial and delightful spot could be selected near the Pamunky than the grounds around General Lee's house. But for some unexplained reason a boggy field was chosen for the hospital tents, and guards were stationed at every gate of the White House, allowing no one to enter the premises.¹¹⁸

This was the state of sustainment from White House prior to the first major combat. The supply base was established complete with a field hospital. The rail line was operational with cars moving back and forth to advance supply points at railroad stations along the line. Wagon transportation supplemented the rail, but was slowed due to frequent and heavy rains that turned the unimproved roads into a soup. However, the Army of the Potomac was short of nothing it needed to fight. The Chickahominy had been bridged and two corps were across along the Williamsburg Road.

¹¹⁵ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 183.

¹¹⁶ According to Reverend Marks, this was Captain Carter's house, one mile northeast of Savage Station and a half a mile from the railroad. Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 216.

¹¹⁷ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 184-185.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

Battle of Fair Oaks and Stuart's Raid¹¹⁹

Battle of Fair Oaks, May 31 and June 1 Medical Treatment and Evacuation

When the war broke out, each regiment had a hospital with one Surgeon and one Assistant Surgeon. With the new brigade, division and corps structures, the regimental hospitals were consolidated into an independent hospital eventually run by a Surgeon in charge, with an Assistant Surgeon as executive officer and a second Assistant Surgeon as recorder, an operating staff of three Surgeons, three Assistant Surgeons and a number of male nurses and attendants. During this part of the Peninsula Campaign, this organization seems more ad hoc. Division hospitals were located out of the range of artillery and sometimes three or more were consolidated under the Corps Medical Director, who was assisted by the Medical Inspector, Quartermaster, Commissary, and chief ambulance officer. When the medical officers were not employed at the division hospital, they accompanied their regiments and established temporary depots as near as practicable to the line of battle. Each regiment, squadron, or battery had one to three ambulances; each brigade had one medicine wagon; and an additional two or more supply wagons formed the division ambulance train. Each regiment detailed three enlisted men for each ambulance and one for each wagon under the charge of a sergeant. The division ambulance train was commanded by a first lieutenant of the line assisted by a second lieutenant, and the hospital and ambulance train was under the responsibility of the Surgeon-in-Chief of the Division.¹²⁰

On May 23, the main body of Keyes' IV Corps crossed the Chickahominy and was followed by Heintzelman's III Corps a few days later. Heintzelman's III Corps consolidated its division hospitals near Savage Station along the York-Richmond Railroad. The other three corps remained on the north side of the river. After Sumner's II Corps crossed the Chickahominy during the battle, Adjutant Josiah Favill recorded on June 5 seeing Richardson's Division Hospital was established "in and about a large house on the hill, in the rear."¹²¹

Porter's V Corps had established his division hospitals at his camps at the Hogan, Curtis and Dr. Gaines' homes by the Battle of Hanover Court House on May 27.

I rode across the fields to the Hogan, Curtis, and Gaines mansions; for some of the wounded had meantime been deposited in each of them. All the cow-houses, wagon-sheds, hay-barracks, hen-coops, negro cabins, and barns were turned into hospitals. The floors were littered with "corn-shucks" and fodder; and the maimed, gashed, and dying lay confusedly together. A few, slightly wounded, stood at windows, relating incidents of the battle; but at the doors sentries stood with crossed muskets, to keep out idlers and gossips. The mention of my vocation was an "open sesame," and I went unrestrained,

¹¹⁹ Civil War battles often have two names given by each side. The Union referred to this as the Battle of Fair Oaks, named after the location where the Union Army halted and drove back the Confederate attack. The Confederates named the battle after Seven Pines where they drove Keyes' Corps back.

¹²⁰ *Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion (1861-1865)*; Prepared in accordance with Acts of Congress under Direction of Surgeon General Barnes, US Army, Washington: 1875-1888, Vol. II, pt. 3.

¹²¹ Favill, *The Diary of a Young Officer*.

into all the largest hospitals. In the first of these an amputation was being performed, and at the door lay a little heap of human fingers, feet, legs, and arms. I shall not soon forget the bare-armed surgeons, with bloody instruments, that leaned over the rigid and insensible figures, while the comrades of the subject looked horrifiedly at the scene. The grating of the murderous saw drove me into the open air, but in the second hospital which I visited, a wounded man had just expired, and I encountered his body at the threshold. Within, the sickening smell of mortality was almost insupportable, but by degrees I became accustomed to it. The lanterns hanging around the room steamed fitfully upon the red eyes, and half-naked figures. All were looking up, and saying, in pleading monotone: "Is that you, doctor?" Men with their arms in slings went restlessly up and down, smarting with fever. Those who were wounded in the lower extremities, body, or head, lay upon their backs, tossing even in their sleep. They listened peevishly to the wind whistling through the chinks of the barn. They followed one with their rolling eyes. They turned away from the lantern, for it seemed to sear them. Soldiers sat by the severely wounded, laving their sores with water. In many wounds the balls still remained, and the discolored flesh was swollen unnaturally. There were some who had been shot in the bowels, and now and then they were frightfully convulsed, breaking into shrieks and shouts. Some of them iterated a single word, as, "doctor," or "help," or "God," or "oh!" commencing with a sound spasmodic cry, and continuing the same word till it died away in cadence. The act of calling seemed to lull the pain. Many were unconscious and lethargic, moving their fingers and lips mechanically, but never more to open their eyes upon the light; they were already going through the valley and the shadow. I think, still, with a shudder, of the faces of those who were told mercifully that they could not live. The unutterable agony; the plea for somebody on whom to call; the longing eyes that poured out prayers; the fearful looking to the immortal as if it were so far off, so implacable, that the dying appeal would be in vain; the open lips, through which one could almost look at the quaking heart below; the ghastliness of brow and tangled hair; the closing pangs; the awful *quietus*.¹²²

Townsend described the evacuation of the wounded:

The wounded were to be consigned to hospital boats, and forwarded to hospitals in northern cities, and the prisoners were to be placed in a transport, under guard, and conveyed to Fort Delaware, near Philadelphia.¹²³

When the Confederates attacked on Saturday, May 31, the Army of the Potomac had two bridges nearly completed, but the rising waters flooded the log-way approaches and made them impassable.¹²⁴

On May 31, Captain Le Duc ascended a hill to hear the distant gunfire of Keyes and Heintzelman's Corps at Seven Pines. He rode back to camp to find his II Corps moving across the Grapevine Bridge to hasten to the fight. General Dana then ordered Le Duc back to camp, "take charge of it, and await further orders." At 11:00 he received orders from General Sumner

¹²² Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*

¹²³ Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*

¹²⁴ McClellan, *Report on the Army of the Potomac*, p. 112.

“directing the quartermaster of the corps to turn out with every available man in camp, camp guard and officers, servants – and all of the sick able to do anything – to help the artillery through the mud and across the Chickahominy.” The Corps Quartermaster was either sick or drunk and did not show, so Captain Bachelder and Le Duc took charge of the work on opposite sides of the River and got the last battery across by daylight. On June 1st, Le Duc was next detailed by General McClellan to plank the railroad bridge so wagons could cross it. This kept him from his quartermaster duties of going back for supplies for a week.¹²⁵

Reverend Marks of Kearney’s Division, Heintzelman’s III Corps described the field hospital near Savage Station during the first night after the battle. Casey and Couch’s Divisions of Keyes’ Corps had borne the brunt of the fighting that first day:

During the entire night the wounded were brought in, until they covered the grounds around the house of Mr. Savage, and filled all the outhouses, barns, and sheds. Lying alongside of our wounded were many Confederate soldiers and officers; and to the honor of our men be it said, I heard no words of anger or reproach, but the rebels were uniformly treated as kindly as the Union soldiers.¹²⁶

All night the surgeons were occupied in amputations; and, in the circumstances, they found it impossible to look after those whose condition demanded immediately, to revive them, food and stimulants. Wounded men suffer greatly from cold, and shiver as in winter, or with an ague. It was there-fore essential to lift them from the damp ground, and cover them as far as possible.¹²⁷

In the course of the evening twenty or thirty soldiers from different regiments, who had borne in upon their shoulders their wounded comrades, permitted me to organize them into a corps of nurses. Colonel McKelvy, than whom no man was more active for the relief of our men, furnished twenty bales of hay, a thousand blankets, and permitted me to draw on the Commissary Department for coffee, sugar, and crackers to an indefinite amount. The nurse-soldiers soon spread down this hay, and many of a shivering, wounded man, when lifted from the damp earth, and placed upon the soft grass bed, with a blanket spread over him, poured out his gratitude in a thousand blessings. When this was done we followed with hot coffee, and found our way to every suffering man. Everywhere we were compelled to place our feet in streams of blood: one spectacle of anguish and agony only succeeded another. The mind was overwhelmed and benumbed by such scenes of accumulated misery. Where there was so much to be done, and where we could do so little, the temptation was to hurry away from such painful spectacles, and remember them only as the visions of a frightful dream. Great must be the cause which demands such a sacrifice. Here and there over the grounds were seen through that night a circle of lanterns waving around the tables of amputators. Every few moments there was shriek of some poor fellow under the knife. And one after another the sufferers were brought forward and laid down before the surgeons on stretchers, each waiting his turn. And then again one with face as white as marble, and every line telling that he had passed

¹²⁵ Le Duc, *Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster*, p. 72-73.

¹²⁶ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 189-191.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

through a suffering, the utmost which human nature could endure, was borne away and laid down for some kind-hearted man to pour into his lips a few drops of brandy, to lift up his head, and give him the assurance of life and sympathy. There a brother knelt and wept over a dying brother, and his voice, broken with sobs, begged me to come and pray that his brother might be able to see Jesus and depart in peace...¹²⁸

The next morning, June 1, Reverend Marks of Kearney's Division, Heintzelman's III Corps wrote of the new hospital at Savage Station:

It was understood that the battle would be renewed this morning; and with the first dawn of the day I saw Generals Keyes and Heintzelman leave the head-quarters of the latter at Savage Station. They rode, surrounded by their aids, across the field leading to the Williamsburg road. I had heard, during the night, that an hospital had been created about a mile from the Station towards the battle-field. I started to find it, and in a short time reached the house, in and around which were lying a multitude of our dying and wounded. Several surgeons were there, amongst others Dr. Rogers, to whom all accorded the praise of being one of the most successful and humane of operators, and Dr. Heighhold, one of the most active and humane surgeons in the army. Ambulances were here and removing the disabled to Savage Station. Mingled with the great number of wounded were many dead, who having been brought in, did not survive the night.¹²⁹

War Correspondent George Alfred Townsend described the evacuation of the wounded of the camp of the Irish Brigade, Richardson's Division, Sumner's II Corps:

There were about thirty [wounded] at this spot, and I was told that they were being taken to Meadow Station on hand cars. As soon as the locomotive could pass the Chickahominy, they would be removed to White House, and comfortably quartered in the Sanitary and hospital boats.¹³⁰

Lieutenant Favill, Adjutant of the 57th New York Infantry, Richardson's Division, Sumner's II Corps recorded in his diary on June 5:

I heard at division headquarters that the wounded have not yet been all collected; several were brought in to-day, who have been lying three days and nights on the drenched battlefield, in the woods; some of them were burnt, as well as wounded.¹³¹

Marks estimated the Army of the Potomac lost 7,000 killed and wounded. More correctly over the two days fighting, the Union lost approximately 790 killed and 3,594 wounded and the Confederates lost 980 killed and 4,749 wounded.

In the course of a week all the wounded whose removal was possible were taken in the cars to the White House, and thence transferred by boat to Fortress Monroe and Northern

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

¹²⁹ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 193-194.

¹³⁰ Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*

¹³¹ Favill, *Diary of a Young Officer*.

cities. The most of them never returned, -- one-fourth were maimed for life, one-fifth, after lingering for days and weeks on couches of pain and suffering, passed from earth forever, leaving desolate a thousand homes; and by many a stream the broken harp of hope was hung on the willows, and the song began in gladness ended in the sobbings of despair.¹³²

Surgeon Thomas T. Ellis described the arrival of the wounded at White House from the first day's battle.

About a mile beyond the White House there was erected a large number of hospital tents, in which were treated the sick sent down from the advance. The wretched water and miasmatic condition of the Chickahominy kept these tents well filled. The rebels having destroyed the railroad bridge across the river, the cars were run down to the river-side, filled with wounded, after the battle of Fair Oaks. It was here, lying around on the track, as they had been taken out of the freight cars in which they were transported from Savage's station, I found over 300, many of them in a dying condition; and all of them more or less mutilated, and still enveloped in their filthy and blood-stained clothing, as they were found on the battlefield. Some of these had been attended to by the surgeons, but by far the greatest number were sent down to the station before receiving any surgical care. On learning that there was not any medical officer detailed for this duty, I consulted with colonel Ingalls, the chief quarter-master, and Dr. Alexander, the medical purveyor, and with their advice proceeded to have them taken care of, first telegraphing to the surgeon-general and Dr. Cayler, the medical director at Fortress Monroe, the exact state of affairs. I found that there was lying in the river a large number of steamboats, chartered for the purpose of transporting them, but having no orders remained totally inactive. Colonel Ingalls at once placed the harbor-master under my orders; and by his aid I got the steamers *State of Maine*, *Elm City*, and *Whildin* alongside of the railroad wharf. On board of these boats I had the wounded men carried on litters by all the civilians I could press into the service, and a detail of the 93rd New York Volunteers, promptly given me by Lieut.-colonel Butler of that regiment, which was stationed as guard over the stores accumulated here.¹³³

The agents of the Sanitary Commission, on board of their boat, the *Wilson Small*, were also in the river, under the guidance of Frederick Law Olmstead, Esq., the efficient secretary of the commission. He responded to my call in the most prompt and efficient manner, and labored with me night and day, to relieve the sufferings of the unfortunate. The general agent of the society, Mr. Knapp, Mr. Mitchell, and Dr. Ware, were also untiring in their exertions. Nor can I ever forget the devoted and self-sacrificing services of the ladies of the Commission, Mrs. Griffin, Mrs. Howland, and Miss Wollsey, and the invaluable aid they rendered in making nutritious beverages and cooling drinks for the parched lips of the fainting and exhausted wounded for forty-eight hours, without intermission or rest. They quickly and cheerfully responded to my innumerable calls on them for clothing, bandages, lint, &c, and their intelligent and fatiguing self-imposed duties were discharged with a courtesy and endeavor I have never seen equaled. By their

¹³² Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 209.

¹³³ Ellis, *Leaves from a Diary*.

aid I was enabled to have the men well provided with clean under-clothing, and freely supplied, on arrival in the cars, with tea, coffee, lemonade, &c. Many a poor fellow's life was saved, and the hundreds of blessings asked for these ladies, by the parched lips of the exhausted but patients heroes, will doubtless be granted. Without food or rest, at all hours, and often under the most trying and disagreeable circumstances, they labored cheerfully, carrying hope and comfort to the wounded and weary. Before three o'clock, Monday morning, June 2d, I had loaded and dispatched the *Whildin*, under Dr. Smith of Pennsylvania, the *Elm City*, under the care of several physicians and surgeons of the Sanitary Commission, and the steamer *State of Maine*, under the care of Dr. McDonald. These vessels carried away about twelve hundred, but they continued to arrive from the field by the hundreds. I felt terribly the want of assistants, and called on the surgeons of the gunboats *Sebago*, *Marblehead*, and *Currituuck*, anchored in the river, who quickly lent their aid. I am under obligations, of no ordinary kind, to Dr. Quin, of the *Sebago*, for able and unremitting assistance, He worked with me steadily and with great skill, for three days and nights and not until exhausted nature compelled him, did he relinquish his humane efforts; and again, as soon as he had snatched a few hours of rest, he returned to his post. In this manner, for the seven successive days and nights, did I work, not stopping a moment to eat or sleep, performing the necessary amputations, providing steamers, after inspecting them, procuring surgeons, stewards, and nurses for each vessel, and supplying it with commissary and medical stores, and the equally important articles bountifully contributed by the Sanitary Commission. This engagement was the first that really tried the resources and efficiency of this truly good and useful association, and nobly did it respond, through its officers and supplies. The amount of ice, luxuries, and necessaries, freely given and judiciously selected for the wounded, was immense, and I joyfully bear my unqualified testimony to its usefulness.¹³⁴

After describing the battle, Ellis continued:

On the adjoining bed there lay a young, delicate-looking fellow, a corporal in the 3rd Georgia Volunteers, who had lost an arm on the battle-field, in Saturday's fight, and whose father, also wounded, was at the time on board of the *Daniel Webster*, the steamer I selected for use as a receiving ship, as it afforded facilities not possessed by any of the other steamers; and having dispatched all the steamers there were in the river adapted for floating hospitals, I was obliged to have receiving ship for those that would arrive. Even this was insufficient. So that I was obliged to make requisition on the quarter-master's department for forty Sibley tents, which I had erected along the railroad track, to protect the wounded from the sun and rain, and have their wounds dressed and their clothing changed without delay. Some of these men had been lying on the battle-field uncared for for two or three days; nor could this be avoided, as the ground was alternately in the possession of the Union and rebel troops; and their condition, on arrival at White House, was filthy in the extreme, and stiff with congealed blood and dried mud.¹³⁵

The arrival of sick and wounded continuing unabated, I determined to send away none but the wounded. To put in the hospital the sick, for whom room had been made by my

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

repeated drafts on it for convalescent soldiers to act as nurses. I also obtained from Assistant Quarter-master Broadwood fifty contrabands, to aid in carrying the wounded, and distributing the lemonade, as the men detailed from the 96th [93rd] New York Volunteers were entirely worn out with the fatigues of the last three days and nights but I found the colored men poor substitutes for the willing boys of the ninety-sixth [93rd], who, under the order of their efficient officers, rendered most valuable aid. A number of acting assistant-surgeons arrived this day [June 5] in response to my repeated telegraphic requests for them, but I found, on an interview, that a very large majority were young and inexperienced, and totally incompetent to take charge of a steamer. I consequently recommended them to proceed to the advance, where the demand for dressers was very great, and requested Captain Sawtelle, assistant quarter-master, having charge of the transportation, to inform me of the arrival of any surgeons, and thus give a respite to those gentlemen who had worked so long and faithfully with me. The news of the great battle, spread over the nation through the newspapers, brought hundreds to White House, each one fearing his or her relative or friend had fallen a victim; the repeated inquiries by these persons, to many of whom I could offer no consolation, nor impart any intelligence, seriously hindered me, while it was of but little use to them. I adopted a plan: by having my clerk learn from any officer that came down in charge of the wounded, or of prisoners, the names of the regiments engaged, and by taking a list of those that had arrived, I was frequently enabled to give the desired information. Judging from the number of dispatches I hourly received from Dr. Cuyler, [medical director] at the fort [Monroe], he must have been similarly importuned. As far as I could I used the cooking apparatus for the receiving steamer, the *Daniel Webster*, to cook food for the nurses, where the beef tea and other necessaries for the wounded were prepared; and as there was not any hotel or place to procure a meal at the White House, it soon became known that if any thing could be had to eat it was on board the hospital boats. This brought many field and line officers, who for days had not tasted cooked food, and from then I learned the latest news, and probable number of wounded I would be obliged to make provision for.¹³⁶

The Congressional committee on the conduct of the war had paid a visit to the White House, accompanied by Hon. John C. Tucker, assistant secretary of war, and other gentlemen. Two members of it, the Hon. Moses F. Odell, M. C. of Brooklyn, and Hon. John Patten, M. C. of Pennsylvania, worked unceasingly to aid in getting order. In this they were ably seconded by Col. Wm. Borden, of New York, agent of the Fall River line of steamers, two of which, the *Canonicus* and *State of Maine*, were being used as hospital boats, and both of them were models of cleanliness and order, and well worthy the imitation of others.¹³⁷

The number of wounded was so great that I was obliged to have mattresses spread on the saloon floors of the steamers, on each of which a patient was laid. And finding it much cooler and easier, I selected the worst cases for these beds...¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

On Thursday night [June 6], at 11 P.M., I received a dispatch from the advance that a cargo of 250 wounded had left for the White House at 6 P.M., and asking if they had arrived, as the officer in charge had failed to telegraph his arrival, as ordered. I proceeded, with about fifty nurses carrying lanterns, along the road for a mile, the rain pouring in torrents, not meeting the train. Several of them sat down, myself among the number, and soon fell asleep, the first I had since the Saturday night previous. I had lain on the wet ground for about an hour, when I was awakened by the shrill whistle of the locomotive, making up in speed for the loss of time it had sustained by running off the track near Dispatch station. When these had been received and cared for, I determined to return with the train to the advance, to learn, by personal observation, the number of wounded still remaining. We started at three in the morning, and after a tedious ride of three hours reached Fair Oaks station. I then procured a horse and orderly to visit the hospitals and learn the number each contained. To do this it was necessary to pass near the battle-field, the odor from which was insufferable. For over a mile, the ground was thickly strewn with unburied men, mules and horses, whose decomposing bodies infected the atmosphere for miles. Having collected all the wounded together fit to be removed, I proceeded with two hundred of them to the White House, the rest to follow the return of the train. I had them conveyed on board of the Louisiana, one of the largest and best boats chartered by the government, and determined on the arrival of the others from the advance, to proceed in person with them to a Northern hospital. My reasons for doing so were, that I had received all the wounded who for some time would be fit for removal, and as among those last sent down, were very many of the most dangerous cases, - many of them having lain on the battle-field uncared for for several days, - and as all the surgeons in whom I could place confidence had been dispatched with the other steamers that took away over four thousand of the wounded; I decide don going with these myself, taking Dr. Bates, surgeon of the 15th Massachusetts, and Doctors Case and Robinson, of Buffalo, as assistants.¹³⁹

Lieutenant Favill, of Sumner's II Corps, recorded visiting Richardson's Division hospital on June 7:

Our division hospital is in and about a large house on the hill, in rear. The doctors have had more than they could do, and are pretty well used up. I went over there to-day to see McKim, and found him up to his ears in work. Below the house, just outside the door, I saw a heap of arms, feet, legs, hands, etc.; the pile was beastly odoriferous, and most suggestive. The doctor said they had been unable, so far, to get anybody to bury it.¹⁴⁰

2LT Francis Adams Donaldson, Co. M, 71st Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, Burns' Brigade, Sedgewick's Division, Sumner's II Corps was wounded in the left upper arm shortly after his brigade arrived at the Battle of Fair Oaks, on the afternoon of 31 May 1862. The following medical evacuation of 2LT Donaldson accurately describes the process of wounded soldier evacuated from the Battle of Fair Oaks to the White House Landing and onto a hospital in Philadelphia.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Favill, *Diary of a Young Officer*.

After proceeding a short distance I came to a pile of cordwood behind which a young surgeon was busy in spreading out a case of instruments, who, upon my approach, ordered me to lie down while he examined my hurt. This brave fellow had certainly selected an exposed position for his hospital, as the bullets were striking the wood and sending the bark and splinters in all directions. Whether it was the danger he was in, or whether he nervousness, it certainly happened that the doctor ripped up the sleeve of my right arm in his haste to get at my wound. His hasty manner and nervous actions caused me to laugh and I said, "Confound it man, it is the other arm that is hurt," where upon he cut up the other sleeve and made an examination, when finding the bone completely broken, he said, "You will have to go to the house in the distance where they will amputate the arm." This was the first intimation I had I was to lose my arm and I may add it depressed me a good deal. During all this time I had kept my overcoat with me, and at the time I was shot, it was rolled and thrown over my shoulder. The surgeon now undid it and throwing it over my shoulders buttoned it around my neck.¹⁴¹

I now noticed for the first time several of Baxter's men lying behind the wood pile, and asked the doctor whether these men were dead. He said no!, there was nothing the matter with them, they were merely seeking shelter. As I soon after observed a good many of this same regiment tearing across the country to the rear, it struck me that all the good places for shelter had already been occupied by others of the same command to have caused these fellows to go so far to seek cover.¹⁴²

I now started for the house indicated by the surgeon as the field hospital and had proceeded but a short distance when I saw Major Robb Parrish of our regiment coming up at a brisk trot, leading his pack horse. He halted at meeting me, dismounted and taking his holster pistols, turned his horses over to a shelter seeking Zouave and ordered him to lead them out of danger. From the prompt manner with which the man obeyed, I could not but admire the thorough discipline of Col. Baxter's men. The Major now asked about my hurt and examined my arm, which I was holding across my body with my right hand. He expressed much sympathy and trusted I would not lose my arm. He said he had been denying the privilege of fighting with his own command, being under arrest, and was about to join the brave fellows who were hotly engaged at the fence. Bidding me goodbye, I saw him walk boldly forward, with pistols in both hands, until lost to view in the smoke from the cannon.¹⁴³

At this moment, I saw four men coming from the front bearing a stretcher upon which lay Capt. Markoe, wounded in two places, the most serious which was an ugly hurt in the groin. Brave fellow, he had been standing at the right of his division, and by his conspicuous bravery giving confidence and steadiness to his men....¹⁴⁴

Again moving off toward the hospital, I noticed at but a short distance a mounted officer attempting to stop a group of stragglers. After a free display of his pistol he succeeded in turning

¹⁴¹ J. Gregory Acken (edit), *Inside the Army of the Potomac; The Civil War Experience of Captain Francis Adams Donaldson*, Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1998.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

them men back towards the battle. He now rode up to me, and with a volley of blasphemy wanted to know what I, an officer, meant by going to the rear. Greatly surprised at his profanity and manner of authority, I stood still for a moment and tried to reconcile his words to his rank, believing it impossible that a staff officer, and a captain at that, could assume so much, as this blackguard did. I replied, and I fear I was led into language somewhat stronger than was my want, for intense indignation bristled all over me, "Damn you, you cowardly skulker, had you been where your brave general now is, you would not have dared to offer so gross and uncalled for insult to one so utterly unable to resent it as I am." With that I threw back my overcoat and displayed my bloody arm. The fellow had some sense of decency left, for he said quickly upon perceiving that I was wounded, "Oh!, excuse me," and before I had time to ask his name, put spurs to his horse and made off, but not towards the front, however. This officer I think was on Genl. Sumner's staff, and no doubt was incensed at the vast number of unhurt armed men running to the rear. I can make allowance now for his vehemence, but at that time I was very much angered at his ungentlemanly language....¹⁴⁵

It was a sickening scene that presented itself upon arriving at the little two story and attic frame house now being used for the surgical operations on the desperately wounded that needed immediate attention. The ground around was strewn with mangled fellows while away off, towards the front, streams more were either walking or else being carried to this spot. The house had one story extension back, used as a kitchen, a window on either side, and a door in the rear with steps leading down to the yard. The principal operations were being carried on in this small room, as I could judge from the pile of arms and legs that, on the ground outside the window, reached nearly up to it as they had been thrown out after amputation. As I came towards the front of the house I noticed we were till within reach of artillery, as a round shot came howling along and struck a gray horse standing tied to a tree near the front door, completely carrying away his muzzle. The poor creature presented a most horrible appearance as he stood trembling blood streamed from his torn and bleeding head.¹⁴⁶

Seeing that I was an officer, and attendant took me inside, and as the lower rooms were loaded with wounded, I went back to the rear and found four tables being used as operating tables, each of which was occupied, while the surgeons with sleeves rolled up were literally working up to their elbows in blood, so busy were they with knife and saw. One of the subjects then undergoing amputation seemed to be put partially under the influence of chloroform, he struggle so. One of the surgeons, upon examining my arm, said it would have to come off. I had made up my mind to the fact, but could not get over the horrible thought of it being taken off at the socket, there not being room to cut it below. I was wondering what the sensation would be, as waiting my turn I stood in the doorway watching the busy doctors, when Doctor [Martin] Rizer of the 72nd P.V. came into the house, and recognizing me, made an examination of my hurt. He said that if I could get home, I would have a chance for my arm, as I was in a state of such perfect health. He took me to the attic and put me on a blanket that lay on the floor, then, bringing a feather pillow from the room below, he put it under my arm and detailed a man to pour cool water on it, while he went after splints. Returning soon after with a few pieces of shingle he had found, he bound up my arm as well as he could, then administered a pill opoi and ordered the man to keep my arm wet. He said that I must try to get some sleep, while he hunted up Mr. Clem. Barclay, a

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Philadelphia Philanthropist who was then with the army and who would at once return home with as many wounded Philadelphians as he could take care of. I had known Mr. Barclay personally before enlisting, and I felt assured if he but knew of my mishap he would surely take me with him. With the happy thought of soon again being at home, and with a sense of great relief at the bare chance of saving my arm, I thanked the good doctor for his kindness and soon fell asleep. I awakened but once during the night and found another soldier by my side pouring water on my arm, which now pained me a good deal. I went to sleep again, however, and did not awaken till the booming of the cannon announced daylight and the renewal of the battle. I laid in this house all day Sunday, June 1st.¹⁴⁷

Mr. Clement Barclay left early in the morning taking Capt. Markoe with him. He failed to learn of my being in the building. I was a good deal depressed when I heard of his departure, although Dr. Reizer did all he could to cheer me and said he would personally see that I should be sent to the transports that were taking on board the wounded for removal North. During the night several wounded men had been brought into the room where I was. They were very chatty fellows, and tried hard to get me into conversation, but I never replied to any of their numerous questions, but lay quite enveloped in my own gloomy thoughts.¹⁴⁸

During the morning the sounds of battle were very distinct, and some fool of an ambulance attendant started the report that our army was being cut to pieces, that the enemy were taking no prisoners, but wee bayonetting all, including the wounded, that they would soon be at this house when all our throats would be cut. He urged all that could possibly do so to leave. As we were all too badly hurt to avail ourselves of this timely information, a general howl and cry of despair ensued. Men in the shattered, wounded, nervous condition these poor fellows were in are quite ready to believe anything told them. I will confess that I, too, felt a little anxious, but after reflecting a while, soon realized how utterly ridiculous was such a report. Beside, if my ears did not deceive me, the battle was receding, clearly proving that our army was anything but cut to pieces, but was at this very time driving the enemy. Addressing my bewailing comrades, I made known to them my deductions, and was gratified shortly after to hear one of them laugh. The sounds of battle ceased altogether during the afternoon, and nothing was heard excepting the continuous rattle of ambulances past house. The soldier who first did duty with me was again in attendance and was very assiduous in gratifying as well as he could my wants. He kept my arm wet and cool and fanned and bathed my face continually. I am very grateful to him and regret that I do not know his name or regiment.¹⁴⁹

Nothing of note during the night and I awakened June 2nd to find the sun shining brightly and a warm though refreshing breeze blowing on me through the window. This morning I had a good breakfast of fresh beef, coffee, and bread, furnished by the U.S. Christian Commission who were busily engaged in establishing field depots for the relief of the wounded. About 9 A.M. Dr. Reizer came in, examined my pulse, looked at my arm and then helped me to my feet, saying, "I have an ambulance at the door to take you away." When I reached the door, I saw the grounds surrounding the house were literally one vast hospital. The ambulances, as fast as they could, were removing the wounded, while details were taking away for burial those who had died

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

through the night. The ambulance to which I was taken was a “double decker,” two beds below and two above. The two lower and one upper were occupied, and the remaining bed was pulled out, upon which I was put, when it was again slid into place. As my wounded arm was next [to] the side of the wagon, I was tied to the wagon bows to keep me from jolting. Next [to] me was an agreeable gentleman who, after witnessing in silence the operation of tying, said, “Now then youngster, as long as you are so secure just be kind enough to help keep me steady with your free arm.” I learned his name to be [Edward E.] Cross, Colonel, 5th New Hampshire, and that he was wounded in the thigh, a very painful hurt. The subsequent jolting of the ambulance caused him to use strong adjectives by the way of easing his pain, as he put it.¹⁵⁰

It was a rough road over which we went, corduroy nearly the whole way to savage Station on the Richmond and York River R. R., and I had to abandon the poor Colonel and look for myself. I could do very little however, with only one arm towards keeping myself steady. At intervals of a quarter of a mile along the road were a tents with barrels of lemonade, claret punch, and liquors, together with oranges, lemons, and other refreshments. This was the work of the Christian Commission. At each of the tents the ambulance would halt and refreshments administered. I was invariably given claret punch, while Col. Cross was given lemonade, much to his disgust. He always asked for a stimulant but was always refused, as his appearance and indeed his pulse indicated a high state of fever. As for me, I needed stimulating, being quite reduced from the loss of blood.¹⁵¹

On reaching the station, we were put aboard a train of box cars, which after being filled to their utmost, without further delay were taken to White House, where we found quite a number of transports loading the wounded. The boat to which I was directed looked like one of our Delaware River pleasure steamers, with its great paddle boxes and long sharp bow built for speed on smooth water. It was a shocking sight to see the mass of wounded and mangled soldiers congregated at the landing. Those able to walk were slowly moving along in line aboard the boat, while those who had to be carried were patiently waiting their turn. Many were sitting around on stumps and boxes, and all were a look of dejection sad to behold. There was one man in particular who had been shot full in the face, the ball going through the bridge of his nose and lodging in the back of his head. Since then the wound had blackened while the rest of the face was chalky white. He presented the most repulsive, hideous countenance I ever beheld, anything but human. I saw hundreds with arms and legs off, many with loss of eye, and one man whose lower jaw had been shot away, a horrifying object to look at. There were some, too, slightly wounded, too slight to be sent away. One in particular, a captain, [was] wounded in the thumb of [his] left hand. His hurt was not serious, and had he been of true grit he would have stayed with his command.¹⁵²

When I got aboard the sight that met me was most sickening. The deck was filled to its utmost capacity with the desperately wounded, and for the first time, I heard the groans of men hurt in battle. I that often read about the groaning wounded on the battlefield, and although I had been on several, had never yet heard any myself. But here, on this hospital ship, I did hear the agonizing cry of anguish. Poor fellows, no wonder. Such a multitude of them, and so many who

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

had not yet received attention. I noticed one man, a huge fellow with leg amputated above the knee, sitting up screaming for help, saying the maggots were eating him alive, and it was so. I saw them creeping in and out of the bandages covering his bloody stump. Sick and weak I was lead to a state-room on the port side and was helped into a lower berth, where for a long time I lay, overcome by fatigue and the horrifying sights surrounding me.¹⁵³

There were two state rooms on either side [of] the boat, and the one I occupied had two comfortable berths, the upper one was not occupied while I remained aboard. I was fatigued that I fell asleep directly. I don't know exactly how long I slept, but I was finally awakened by severe pains in my arm, which upon investigation I found had fallen out and was hanging over the side of the berth. The temporary dressing made by Dr. Reizer being unable to withstand an accident of this kind, the broken portion of the bone were, therefore, forced through the wound, occasioning the pain that awakened me. Upon trying to arise, the pain was so severely increased that I was glad to recline again. I now resorted to all manner of expedients to get my arm up again. The last and most feasible one was to pass a string I had in my pocket through the slat of the bed above me, then, letting the noose end down, try to swing my hand so as to catch it. Whether it was that I had lost feeling or that the pain was so great, I could not tell when I touched the string. Anyway, this bright expedient failed also, I now became very much alarmed, and as the sun had gone down and darkness would soon be upon us, I cried lustily for help! help! I kept this up without cessation for a long time, when finally the door opened, and a young doctor, putting his head in, asked what was the matter. Not waiting a reply, he sprang to my side and lifted my arm into the berth. Noticing the contrivance I had arranged to do a like service for myself, he laughed a good deal and said he would put a permanent dressing on my arm that would prevent all accidents in the future. A little while after he returned with a soldier bearing a basin of water and proceeded to take off the old bandages & splints. He made an examination of my hurt, inserting his finger into the wound, and after a thorough sponging and cleaning with soap and water, proceeded to mould my arm into proper shape and then to put on patent Kid lined splints, which he cut into suitable lengths, and then made openings for the wounds to slough. After all was done he bandaged my arm and fastened it to my side. In fact I was in skillful hands, and when he left me, I felt so comfortable and easy that I again fell asleep. And here, at this time, I lost the reckoning by days.¹⁵⁴

From one ship to another I went and knew nothing positively certain until informed by an attendant that we were off Norfolk, Va., our place of destination, but that the hospital at Portsmouth being too full to receive us, it was uncertain where we would be ordered.¹⁵⁵

After about two hours delay our boat steamed over to the R. S. Spaulding, a large ocean steamer belonging to the Christian Commission. This vessel was fitted up in the most complete manner as a floating Hospital. Every available space was occupied by comfortable berths, with every appliance for the comfort of the wounded. A large corps of lady nurses were also in attendance, together with skillful doctors and helpers in sufficient number so that all the 1,500 patients this splendid ship was said to accommodate could receive constant and unremitting attention.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

I was much amused at the business like way with which the crew of the “Spaulding” handled the living freights taken aboard. As the patient, after hoisting from our boat, would swing over the rail of the “Spaulding,” the man at the hatch would call out “Right Stump” or “Left stump,” or “Right Fracture” or “Left fracture” as the case might be. Then the attendants, or more properly the starboard or port gang, would be on hand to take the man to the proper side of the boat. As they brought me over the side, the man called out “Left fracture,” and I landed ‘tween decks, I was at once taken to the port, or left side of the vessel, and put into an upper berth with my left arm out. All around me were rows of berths either filled or being filled by the wounded, while the helpers lost no time in attending to the needs of the poor fellows as fast as they were received aboard.¹⁵⁷

Shortly after I was placed in my bunk, a middle aged lady came along with sleeves rolled up and commenced to “clean me up” as she said. Without ceremony or asking whether I liked it or not, she deliberately took a pair of scissors and, commencing at my neck, cut my clothes, both outer and under, completely off me. She then, with assistance of an able bodied Christian Commission nurse, washed me from head to foot. I was then put into clean new clothes. The shirts were a marvel of ingenuity and were made to give the sufferer as little trouble and pain as possible. They were in halves. First the back of the flannel undershirt was put under me, then the other half over my breast and arms, after which, by tapestrings, they were tied together. So also with the outer shirt. I shall never forget this dear lady’s kindness. She seemed to feel so much interest in me, and as she toiled and labored over me, I could hear her say repeatedly, “How could his mother let him go in the army?,” “What a pity, What a shame.” I did not tell her that I went against my mother’s wishes. After I was washed and dressed the surgeon came along and examined me. He said I had received skillful treatment and needed nothing except a little wine, which was given me. I then fell asleep.¹⁵⁸

When I awakened, by the rolling of the vessel, I knew we were at sea. I had no idea of our destination, and the nurses, if they knew, did not tell it. Immediately across the aisle from me was a wounded man, who, by the constant attention of the doctors and several nurses, I knew to be in desperate condition. I became much interested in witnessing the care given him by all. From a lady nurse, I learned this man was so desperately hurt that death was momentarily expected. Yet strange to say, he had rallied so often and had remained so intently conscious that the doctors were using every effort to prolong his life. He was a thoroughly religious man and spoke so beautifully to those around him that every one was moved to tears. Upon inquiring his name I learned that it was Cpt. [William] Gleeny, Company E, 64th N. Y., of Elmira, N.Y., wounded on the morning of June 1st. I will add that he recovered sufficiently before I left the ship to make my acquaintance, and for hours we would talk together. He was a cultured gentleman, and I shall ever look back with thankfulness to the hours and days spent in listening to his agreeable and instructive conversation, which made me forget my pain and which went so far to give me hope and encouragement....¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

After tossing about for some days, a report reached me that we had passed the Delaware breakwater. I then learned our destination had been New York, but owing to the storm blowing us out to sea our coal was well nigh exhausted. It had then been determined to proceed to Philadelphia for order. This news nearly overcame me. I could scarcely credit it. I waylaid everyone for information and finally was compelled to believe it true. Oh! how glad I was, and, I will add parenthetically, I shed a few tears, joyful ones though, tears of emotion.¹⁶⁰

Sunday morning, June 8th. We arrived at Race St. wharf. News of our coming had been telegraphed, and the wharves, buildings and shipping were crowded with people eager to catch a glimpse of men wounded in battle.... Dr. Jno. Neil, Surgeon U.S.A. was sent for and I was placed under his care. He had charge of the Cherry Street Hospital and I was entered on the books there. My recovery was slow but sure. Dr. Neil pronounced the dressing of the arm at White House to be most excellent and never changed it.¹⁶¹

Burial of the Dead

Many of the dead were hastily buried on the battlefield, but the smell was overwhelming. Chaplain Joseph Twichell of the New York Excelsior Brigade, Kearney's Division, Heintzelman's III Corps wrote home to his father on June 4, three days after the battle:

One hardship which our Brigade has encountered is almost too horrible to mention – viz. the stench arising over the dead bodies of both horses and men, lying on the field unburied. The enemy sent no flag of truce to ask permission to assist in this duty, and after our own were covered it seemed hard to ask the overworked men to complete the task. The field and roads for a mile were strewn thick. I counted in one space of not more than a square rod, thirteen of the enemy under the broiling sun, these corrupted so fast, that yesterday we were forced to cover them with earth, for they could not be moved. The air was so heavy with the smell that it was in some places hard to breathe at all. It turned the stomach of even the surgeons. The horses were most of them burned by making bonfires about them...¹⁶²

On June 7, Twichell wrote again to his father,

Yet we are troubled considerably by the stench of the field on which both the battles Saturday and Sunday were fought. We are encamped in the midst of it, for the position must be occupied. As our pickets advance they find unburied dead still scattered through the woods. The loss of the rebels must have been tremendous. A flag of truce that came over yesterday expressed surprise that we had any of their dead to bury, to speak of, as they supposed they had done most of it, or rather, as they carried off large numbers Saturday night while they held the field.¹⁶³

Lieutenant Favill, of Sumner's II Corps, recorded in his diary on June 5:

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Messent, *The Civil War Letters*.

¹⁶³ Messent, *The Civil War Letters*.

Early this morning the colonel [Samuel Zook] sent me to General Richardson's headquarters to report the wretched position the [57th New York Infantry] regiment was in and get permission, if possible, to move it. I rode over the battlefield of the thirty-first and first on my way, and I found it in many places knee deep in water; the dead had been buried by digging little ditches around them, and throwing the earth over the bodies; when it rained, it washed the earth away, particularly at each end of the mound, leaving the feet or head exposed in the most horrible manner. I saw scores of such cases, most of whom were rebels, but that did not make the picture any the less horrible. The general gave permission to change the regiment's position... Detailed Company B to complete the burial of the rebel dead about our front; in the course of two hours they picked up ninety-one men, and buried them in one long ditch.¹⁶⁴

Favill recorded on June 7:

To-day the last of the dead were buried, and the general appearance of things much improved.¹⁶⁵

Meanwhile the rains continued to hamper the transportation of supplies forward. On June 5, 1862, BG Van Vliet reported to MG McClellan on the condition of transportation:

General: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your communication of the 21st ultimo in regard to taking horses from the teams for artillery purposes. This is impracticable at the present time, as our transportation is insufficient, owing to the very bad conditions of the roads. I have never seen worse roads in any part of the country. Teams cannot haul over half a load, and often empty wagons are stalled. Our loss of animals is very great. The railroad is of great assistance, but it does not allow us to dispense with our wagons, as with the exception of very few troops are not on it. The heavy rains of yesterday have injured the railroad very materially, having washed it away in several places. Heavy working parties are on it, and I hope to have it in running order again to-day. The difficulties under which our department has to labor, owing to the frequent and heavy rains and the nature of the country in which we are operating, are very great.¹⁶⁶

On June 6, Le Duc wrote in his diary:

Friday, June 6th. The transportation of the corps being ordered to the front, several wagons were lost in crossing the swamp [Chickahominy], but none of mine. The roads are execrable, and even on the high ground and knolls, the wheels cut through frequently to the axles. Bad, almost impassable as the traveled tracks is, it is better than the apparently firm looking ground outside. Our march seven miles occupied all day, and into the night. – leaving some wagons fast in the mud within half a mile of camp. The

¹⁶⁴ Favill, *Diary of a Young Officer*.

¹⁶⁵ Favill, *Diary of a Young Officer*.

¹⁶⁶ Report of BG Stewart Van Vliet, US Army, Chief Quartermaster, June 5, 1862, OR, Series I, Volume II, Part I, p. 163.

newspaper generals in the great cities, with their granite pavements, are shouting themselves hoarse with the cry: "On to Richmond!"¹⁶⁷

Battle of Fair Oaks took place on 31 May and 1 June with the Confederate withdrawing back to their original lines and the Union moving up to the edge of the battlefield. The main difference was Sumner's II Corps had reinforced Heintzelman's III Corps and Keyes' IV Corps south of the Chickahominy River. McClellan also transferred Franklin's VI Corps south of the River. The four Corps worked from June 1 to 21 constructing entrenchments in front of their positions between the Chickahominy River and White Oak Swamp to the south.

Advanced Supply Depots

After the Battle of Fair Oaks, the Quartermaster in the attempt to simplify logistics operations assigned two Corps to a rail station where they would pick up their supplies; however, the four Corps south of the Chickahominy River chose to take the easiest route and pick up their supplies from the nearest rail stations. This would require the Quartermasters to separate the supplies at each station for their customers. Heintzelman and Keyes' Corps were south of the railroad and Franklin and Sumner's Corps north. Joel Cook described the forward supply depots:

The besieging army had two posts at which to get supplies. General Keyes and General Heintzelman sent to Savage Station. This, in addition to being an issuing-station, was also an immense hospital, some thirty tents and huts and houses being required to accommodate the sick and wounded. There will be occasion to speak of it again, in describing the march to the James River. Generals Sumner and Franklin drew their stores from Orchard Station, on the railroad at the seven-mile post. This was the nearest one to Richmond, and was within three hundred yards of the line of intrenchments [sic]. In a direct line it was scarcely five miles from the capital, and the enemy shells, on many occasions, fell quite near it. Marks of the Fair Oak fight were seen on all sides, and graves reared their humble head-boards from the midst of piles of provisions. This issuing-depot, though at first but a small one, finally eclipsed all the others. General s Keyes and Heintzelman left Savage Station and drew from Orchard, and for the last two weeks of the siege it fed three-fourths of the army. A small hospital was located there, and at it the first processes of embalming were gone through with, the bodies being sent to White House for the work to be completed. An immense commissary business was daily transacted at Orchard station. Captain Henry N. Swift, of Dutchess county, New York, was chief officer of the post, and performed his duties with greatest urbanity.¹⁶⁸

The minor skirmishes between small elements of the Army of the Potomac resulted in a trickle of casualties for the medical professionals. However, the Union Army had 790 killed, 3,594 wounded, and 647 captured or missing, while the Confederates lost 980 killed, 4,749 wounded and 405 captured or missing.¹⁶⁹ Since the Union Army recovered the ground they had lost the day before, they also policed up most of the Confederate wounded. So the Union hospitals had around 8,333 wounded to treat and approximately 1,770 dead to either bury or embalm and ship

¹⁶⁷ Le Duc, *Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster*, p. 76.

¹⁶⁸ Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*, p. 232

¹⁶⁹ "Battle of Seven Pines, Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Seven_Pines.

home. The wounded were initially treated at the field hospitals and others sent back to the hospital at White House Landing at the availability of rail transportation.

McClellan wrote to the Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton on June 4 that if he had five new regiments for Fort Monroe, he could draw upon three old ones from there and assign four of the green regiments to his line of communication. Stanton replied that day, he would send four new regiments to Fort Monroe. The 29th Massachusetts Infantry was one of the veteran regiments McClellan pulled up from Suffolk.¹⁷⁰ William H. Osborne, 29th Massachusetts Infantry described his arrival:

On the morning of the 7th [of June], the regiment embarked on the steamer "Catskill," for White House Landing, at the head of navigation on the Pamunkey River. The pleasure of this trip, which occupied the entire day, was in striking contrast with the numerous discomforts and hardships which the soldiers had experience during the four weeks preceding, and which they were destined to encounter in the eventful campaign upon which they were about to enter. The day was exceedingly fine, and the course of the steamer lay along the banks of the Elizabeth River, Craney Island, Hampton Roads, and the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, - some of the finest water and land scenery to be found in the Old Dominion. The mouth of York River was reached about noon. There were few, if any, on board the "Catskill" who were ignorant of the historic associations that clustered about the two points of high land that form the mouth of the York. All eyes were busy obtaining a view of these places, - Yorktown on the left and Gloucester on the right. Here was encamped but recently the army of General Magruder; here on the 19th of October, 1781, Lord Cornwallis surrendered to General Washington his sword, an event that practically terminated the war of Revolution. Still standing in Yorktown was the house of General Thomas Nelson, who commanded the Virginia militia at the capture of Cornwallis.¹⁷¹

The sail up the York and its larger branch, the Pamunkey, occupied the remainder of the day. The country was in its finest dress; broad green meadows skirted the stream as far as the vision could extend; the meadows landward were bounded by high banks, covered with flowering trees and climbing vines comfortable, peaceful-looking farm-houses, about which clustered groups of colored people, who waved their hands as the large white steamer glided by.¹⁷²

White House Landing was reached just as the sun was going down. The river here was filled with transports, gun boats, and vessels of all sizes and descriptions. White House was a busy place in those days. There were to be seen large stacks of bread-boxes. Immense numbers of barrels of beef and pork, army wagons, and ordnance supplies; and droves of horses and mules and large herd of fat cattle were grazing among the green fields of General [then colonel] Fitzhugh Lee, who owned the place. Here, also, were arriving and departing long trains of wagons, engaged in transporting these supplies to

¹⁷⁰ McClellan, *Report on the Army of the Potomac*, p. 114.

¹⁷¹ William H. Osborne, *The History of the Twenty-Ninth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry in the Late War of the Rebellion*, Boston, Albert J. Wright, Printer, 1877.

¹⁷² Osborne, *The History of the Twenty-Ninth Regiment of Massachusetts*, p. 138-140.

the front, some ten or fifteen miles away, and close at hand was a locomotive attached to an extensive train of cars, the engine bearing the familiar name of “Mayflower.”¹⁷³

Upon leaving the steamer, the regiment marched the distance of a mile from the wharf, into a fine grass-field near the wagon-road. By this time it was quite dark; the night was warm, and the men made a few complaints at being compelled to sleep without tents/ Just as they were going off into a sound sleep, some wag, whose love of fun was still active, cried out to the guard, “Put up the bars there, by the road; if you don’t, we shall all catch our death-colds before morning!” This was the signal for a hearty laugh, the merriment of the occasion being heightened by the actual putting up of the bars.¹⁷⁴

On the morning of the 8th of June, the regiment was for the first time supplied with shelter-tents. These consisted of two pieces of cloth, each about six feet long and three and one-half feet wide, so made as to button together, the two parts overlapping and thus shedding water. One tent was issued to every two men, each man carrying his half in his knapsack. There were no ends to this slight covering, and hence the name shelter-tent. At about four o’clock in the afternoon of this day, the regiment started for the front, marching a distance of some seven miles on the Richmond and York River Railroad, halting at night, and going into camp on a slight elevation of ground near the track. After breakfast on the following morning, the march towards the front was resumed. The destination of the regiment was Fair Oaks, about seven miles from Richmond. Fair Oaks was the centre of the Union line, and was held by the corps of General Sumner. The march was performed on the railroad, a distance of about thirteen miles, and was accomplished by two o’clock in the afternoon. Upon reaching the lines, the regiment was halted in a piece of plowed ground, some thirty yards or more in front of the grove of graceful oaks that gave the place its name, and just on the edge of the forest in which were stationed our pickets.¹⁷⁵

At Fair Oaks, the 29th Massachusetts was assigned to Colonel Thomas Meagher’s Irish Brigade of Sumner’s II Corps. They saw many of the dead from the Battle of Fair Oaks were still unburied.¹⁷⁶

Abstract Log of the *USS Sebago*

May 29.—Off White House, Va. At 3:30 p. m. Captain Murray came on board, bringing with him Major Samuel D.J Lowe, of the Confederate Army, as prisoner.

June 11.—At 8 p.m. delivered the four prisoners before mentioned to Lieutenant Randall, of the tugboat *Stevens*.

June 13.—At midnight a tug came alongside and left on board four political prisoners [names unintelligible]¹⁷⁷

On June 9, 1862, BG Van Vliet reported to MG McClellan:

¹⁷³ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Osborne, *The History of the Twenty-Ninth Regiment of Massachusetts*, p. 141-142.

¹⁷⁷ *Official Records Of The Union And Confederate Navies, Vol. VII, p.730*

General: In view of the re-inforcements ordered to this army (twenty-five regiments), seven of which have already arrived, I have the honor to state that I this day telegraphed you for one hundred and fifty wagons and teams complete. This should be in addition to the transportation with McCall's division, which it is supposed he will bring with him. It now requires every means of transportation we possess, both rail and wagon, to keep the army supplied with forage and subsistence. Had we had such weather as we had reason to expect at this season of the year we could have had no difficulty whatever in supplying every want, but we have had one continued series of storms every want, but we have had one continued series of storms ever since we landed on the Peninsula. Notwithstanding this drawback, however, I believe I can assert that no army of this size, under similar circumstances, or any other, has been better or more regularly supplied. The railroad is in good working order from the depot on the Pamunkey to our front, through the recent heavy rains damaged it to a considerable extent. This road of course assists us vastly, though a small portion of our force only is immediately on it. Most of our supplies are obliged to be transported by wagons.

Our transportation as a general thing is still in fair condition, but if the rains continue we will be injured very materially. It is often the case that empty wagons stall, and no teams can ever haul more than 1,000 pounds. Casey's division lost a few wagons in the recent battle, but nothing to embarrass us. It lost, however, all of its shelter-tents, knapsacks, canteens, & etc. These articles are being replaced from the White House depot. The railroad bridge across the Pamunkey is being rebuilt, and could be finished in a few days, but I am delaying it, as we want for the present the river above the bridge, and we have a forage station at Garlick's Landing for the right wing of the army. The moment the army crossed the Chickahominy the road can be put in running order to west Point, if we desire to use it. At present the depot at White House answers our wants. When we get possession of Richmond our supplies, a portion at least, can come by Fredericksburg and the James River, though the latter river will be rather unsafe unless we clear the southern bank of guerrilla, which can be easily done.¹⁷⁸

Charles Brewster, of the 10th Massachusetts Infantry, Couch's Division of Keyes' IV Corps wrote his mother on June 5,

We are a pitiable a plight as you can imagine, with no blankets or shelter, except a few blankets we picked up on the battlefield, which the Rebels did not carry off, and we are lying in the mud and it rains incessantly and not such rains as you have in the north, but torrents, such as you never saw. The Chickahominy has risen and overflowed its banks so that teams cannot cross at all and the Rail Road is washed away, though it was expected to be repaired yesterday...Requisition was made for Blankets, Knapsacks +c [etc] but it will be at least two weeks before we can get them.¹⁷⁹

On June 15, Brewster wrote to his mother,

¹⁷⁸ Report of BG Stewart Van Vliet, US Army, Chief Quartermaster, June 9, 1862, OR, Series I, Volume II, Part I, p. 163-4.

¹⁷⁹ Blight, *When This Cruel War is Over*.

We have received D'aubry tents, woolen Blankets +c [etc] and are once again more as comfortable as could be expected under eth circumstances.¹⁸⁰

Brewster later wrote again on June 21,

The officers have got Wall tents once more and it really seems a little like having again though we have got noting t put in them in the way of furniture, but then we can get head and feet both in when it rains which is something you cannot do with eh little shelters.¹⁸¹

J.E.B. Stuart's Raid, 12-15 June

On June 12, McClellan moved his headquarters to Dr. Trent's House near Alexander Bridge, a mile upriver from Grapevine Bridge. That day General Lee ordered J. E. B. Stuart to begin his famous ride around the right flank and rear of the Federal position. Stuart returned three days later.

War Correspondent George Alfred Townsend described the line of communication and establishment of a second depot at Garlick's Landing prior to Stuart's raid:

We were, meantime, drawing our supplies from White House, twenty miles in the rear; there were no railroad guards along the entire line, and about five companies protected the grand depot. Two gun boats lay in the river, however, and as the teams still went to and fro, a second depot was established at a place called Putney's or "Garlic," [Garlick] five miles above White House.¹⁸²

At the time of Stuart's raid LTC Rufus Ingalls in command at White House had roughly 600 men for security and roughly 250 sick, guards, and civilian labor.

93rd New York Volunteers (6 companies)
Battery F, 1st New York Light Artillery (3-inch guns)
11th Pennsylvania Cavalry (5 companies)
3rd US Infantry (2 companies)

Lieutenant Alexander Murray's five-gunboat flotilla was at White House at the time also joined the defense, sighting on the plain. Signal Officer for Lieutenant-colonel Ingalls, Lieutenant F.W. Owen, was sent to the top of a chimney on the White House to help Navy boats adjust their fire. The five gunboats were:

USS Sebago
USS Marblehead
USS Corwin
USS Chocura
USS Currituck

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*.

Stuart's cavalry raided Garlick's Landing on the Pamunkey River above the railroad bridge and captured 14 wagons and some sutler's stores, and burnt two schooners laden with forage and then headed toward Tunstall's Station.¹⁸³

War Correspondent George Alfred Townsend was heading back to White House at the time of Stuart's raid and described what he saw at Garlick's Landing and White House when he arrived:

I remained a full hour under cover; but as no fresh approaches added to my mystery and fear, I sallied forth, and kept the route to Putney's, with ears erect and expectant pulses. I had gone but a quarter of a mile, when I discerned, through the gathering gloom, a black, misshapen object, standing in the middle of the road. As it seemed motionless, I ventured closer, when the thing resolved to a sutler's wagon, charred and broken, and still smoking from the incendiaries' torch. Further on, more or these burned wagons littered the way, and in one place two slain horses marked the roadside. When I emerged upon the Hanover road, sounds of shrieks and shot issued from the landing a "Garlic," and, in a moment, flames rose from the woody shores and reddened the evening. I knew by the gliding blaze that vessels had been fired and set adrift, and from my place could see the devouring element climbing rope and shroud. In a twinkling, a second light appeared behind the woods to my right, and the intelligence dawned upon me that the cars and houses at Tunstall's Station had been burned. By the fitful illumination, I rode tremulously to the old head-quarters at Black Creek, and as I conjectured, the depot and train were luridly consuming. The vicinity was marked by wrecked sutler's stores, the embers of wagons, and toppled steeds. Below Black Creek the ruin did not extend: but when I came to White House the greatest confusion existed. Sutlers were taking down their booths, transports were slipping their cables, steamers moving down the stream. Stuart had made the circuit of the Grand Army to show Lee where the infantry could follow.¹⁸⁴

Joel Cook described what he heard about the attack on the train passing through Tunstall's Station and the reaction at White House Landing:

There were numerous passengers on the cars, mostly laborers, civilians, and sick and wounded soldiers, and a general effort was made to jump off, and, if possible, elude the enemy's fire. Several succeeded, and hid themselves in the wood; but the quickly increasing speed of the train prevented the majority from following their example. The cars, however, were soon out of reach of the Rebels, and the engineer, fearful of pursuit or of meeting more enemies, increased the pressure of steam so that the train almost flew over the distance between Tunstall's Station and White House.¹⁸⁵

There the news of what had occurred spread like lightning, and there was the utmost consternation among the sutlers, civilians, clerks, laborers, and negroes who inhabited the canvas town which had sprung up on the Pamunkey. Lieutenant-colonel Ingalls, of the quartermaster's department, was the officer in command, and, under fear of impending

¹⁸³ McClellan, *Report on the Army of the Potomac*, p. 117.

¹⁸⁴ Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*.

¹⁸⁵ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*

danger, he mustered the few soldiers who were at the place, and armed the civilians and laborers. He also placed all the money, records, mails, and other valuable property of the United States upon a steamboat in the river. The panic among the sutlers was beyond all description: each one expected utter ruin, and awaited, with an anxious heart, the approach of the enemy. They did not come, however, and White House, though it was so soon to be destroyed, had a short respite.¹⁸⁶

Surgeon Ellis recorded one train that was captured,

Wednesday night [June 12] the train from Fair Oaks station, with over two hundred wounded, was delayed nearly three hours by the following causes. It appears that a rebel cavalry company of Stuart's brigade conceived the idea of cutting off the communication between White House and head-quarters, and made a sudden dash at the train, which, in consequence of the track having been washed away with the late heavy rain, was proceeding at a very slow pace. A shot from one of their carbines disabling the engineer, the fireman stopped the locomotive, and the rebels proceeded to rifle the cars. Ascertaining that it contained wounded, they were not very close in their scrutiny, and failed to discover a paymaster's safe, containing thirty thousand dollars of government funds, which Paymaster Taylor was returning to the White House with, having been obliged, by the confusion consequent on the battle, to suspend paying the men of the brigade to which he was attached. The attack on the train was so sudden and unexpected, and the means of resistance at hand so feeble, that the paymaster, leaving the safe with the money behind him in the car, sought refuge in an adjoining wood. The train, after some delay, was allowed to proceed to its destination, and the valuable, but much-coveted prize, was found in one of the freight cars, and handed over to Captain Sawtelle, of the quarter-master's department. The frightened paymaster made his appearance at the White House in a state of great trepidation for the supposed loss of the money; but, after some bantering and ridicule for his cowardly desertion of the treasure, was informed of its safety, to his great and unconcealed joy.¹⁸⁷

Reverend Marks of Kearney's Division, Heintzelman's III Corps happen to return to White House on one of his routine visits just as Stuart's cavalry raid reached Tunstall's Station:

On the evening of the 13th of June I went to the White House on one of my semi-weekly excursions, for the purpose of seeing after the condition of the men in the hospitals, reporting the same to General Kearney, and obtaining supplies of medicines and sanitary stores. The day had been oppressively warm. I was invited on board the steamer Commodore by the surgeon in charge; and during the evening we were alarmed by the firing of cannon and musketry, and the intelligence that the enemy had taken possession of Tunstall's Station on the railroad, and had attacked our troops on other parts of the line. Instantly the signal was given for the various vessels at anchor at White House to fall down stream. The whole night was one of greatest commotion and alarm. This was

¹⁸⁶ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*

¹⁸⁷ Ellis, *Leaves from the Diary*.

the celebrated raid of General Stuart, in which he, with 1800 [1,200] cavalry, swept round our entire rear.¹⁸⁸

On the following day I saw several of our wounded men, and learned from them they had been on duty at Tunstall's station; and that the enemy had attacked and overpowered them with vastly superior numbers.¹⁸⁹

When the wounded and dead were brought in on these cars, and the many officers and soldiers sprang out to tell the story, the scene of excitement beggars description. Hundreds of negroes, running back to their miserable shanties, gathered up their little effects; sutlers packed their goods, and hastened them to vessels that were about slipping their cables; numbers of officers ran to and fro to gather men to repel an attack; others were busy securing the papers and goods of their departments, and issuing orders which no one obeyed. And any observer could see how easy it is for a few men, acting in concert, to scatter ten thousand acting without a plan or head.¹⁹⁰

Colonel Ingalls, at the head of the commissary department, acted with the greatest coolness; and in case the enemy had made an attack, would have saved to the country three-fourths of the supplies and public property accumulated there, which was estimated, including the military and commissary stores, and shipping, at \$5,000,000.¹⁹¹

On June 12 and 13, McCall's Division arrived at White House adding 15,000 fresh troops to McClellan's force. Reverend Marks of Kearney's Division, Heintzelman's III Corps watched them march to the railroad with considerable satisfaction.¹⁹²

Lieutenant-colonel Rufus Ingalls' report to Brigadier General Stewart Van Vliet about the security at White House Landing on June 13:

18 June, McClellan ordered shiploads of supplies moved from White House Landing to the James River.

WHITE HOUSE, VA., June 19, 1862.

GENERAL: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your telegram of the 17th instant, requesting me to furnish you with a detailed account of my arrangements for the protection of this depot on the 13th instant and the loss sustained in men and public property by the depredations of the rebels on that day within the limits of my command. I had already forwarded to General Williams the report of the services of the five companies of the Eleventh Pennsylvania Cavalry, under the command of Colonel Harlan, with my indorsements [sic] thereon. I now submit a copy herewith.

¹⁸⁸ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 213-214.

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*

¹⁹² Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 216; and McClellan, *Report on the Army of the Potomac*, p. 117.

As a protective measure simply, without having supposed the enemy would make a movement so unaccountable, one company of Harlan's regiment was sent to Garlick's Landing on the evening of the 12th where it remained until daylight of the 13th when it scouted up the right bank of the Pamunkey as high as Hanover Ferry, where Captain Royall, of the Fifth Cavalry, was met, who reported all quiet in front. This company returned by the road to near Garlick's, and it was there, while waiting the return of a guard sent to arrest the rebel miller, that it was overtaken by a sergeant and 4 men of the Fifth Cavalry, who had escaped during the attack on Royall, and who reported a rebel force rushing down in that direction. This company shortly afterward was overtaken by a superior force and compelled to give way slowly before it and to finally fall back to this point, exhibiting all the time as far as I can learn courage and good judgment. It reached here before sunset; so did the fugitives from the Fifth Cavalry, and all concurred in representing a large rebel force in pursuit and already very near the depot. The danger at that moment of an attack on our shipping, railroad, &c., seemed imminent. I had received a telegram from General Marcy informing me of the attack on Royall. I learned the fact at the same time from my own scouts. Before I could make proper reply to General Marcy the rebels had cut the connection of the wires at Tunstall's. The force here was very small, not exceeding 600 men of all arms. I could only act on the defensive. I assumed, however, that the commanding general would send back an overpowering force from Dispatch Station, which was promptly done. With your timely advice and assistance, rendered in person, I immediately ordered out all of Harlan's cavalry, except the company just returned, with orders to occupy and reconnoiter the rail and wagon roads toward Tunstall's and to give notice of the approach of the enemy, which service Colonel Harlan directed in person in a prompt and vigorous manner. Wilson's battery, First New York Artillery, of 3-inch guns, was posted on the plain, so as to command the roads by which the enemy would make his appearance. Colonel Butler, with a portion of his regiment, the Ninety-third New York, and Captain Hildt, with two companies of the Third Regular Infantry, were posted in rear to protect the battery or skirmish forward in pursuit.

The hospital convalescents, some 250, and some returning guards, employees, and citizens cheerfully and readily volunteered their services, and were armed and kept posted near the hospital and shipping to defend the depot from violence. All the officers and persons present behaved with great merit, and I doubt not would have gallantly defended the place in case of an attack.

In addition to those arrangements I called upon the gunboats under command of Captain Murray, who responded promptly, placing the boats in position off the depot to sweep the plain of any hostile force. To aid in this a signal officer was posted on the top of the White House, to give timely and proper signals to direct the fire of the boats. These dispositions being made, there remained nothing further during the darkness of the night but to wait. You have since learned the route pursued by the enemy; that he burned two Government schooners and some wagons at Garlick's Landing, killing 2 or 3 men, making some prisoners, and dispersing the balance; that he fired on a down-train at Tunstall's, killing 2 men, wounding 8, and making some more prisoners, but doing little or no damage to railroad or telegraph; that Generals Reynolds and Emory soon came up

with a large force, gave pursuit, and followed the enemy to the Chickahominy, where farther pursuit was abandoned.

So far as this depot was directly concerned it lost the two schooners and some forage—amount unknown—and in all not to exceed 75 wagons. There were more trains lost, probably, but they were in possession of brigade quartermaster's, serving with the army in front.

We are daily recovering wagons and animals which the rebels were unable to carry away. One man of the Eleventh Pennsylvania Cavalry was taken prisoner when he was sent in to Garlick's to assist in the arrest of the miller. There were no other casualties of which I am informed.

With a depot stretching from Cumberland to this point, with three hundred ships crowded into so small a river, containing all our supplies, a much larger force would seem necessary to its protection. I have not been pressing for troops, because I hoped we could defend the depot with the force provided, and because I know the general commanding wishes every good soldier with him in front of Richmond.

I am, respectfully, your most obedient servant,

LTC Rufus Ingalls, Aide-de-Camp, Commanding White House.

Le Duc described his third trip back to White House Landing for supplies:

June 14th. I went to Whitehouse for supplies. The officer in charge was excited over the raid of Fitz Hugh Lee yesterday. He fired on a railroad train at Tunstall's station, killed some people, and wounded others on the train.¹⁹³

June 19, McCall's Division was attached to Porter's V Corps at Mechanicsville. McClellan moved Franklin's VI Corps south across the Chickahominy. Heintzelman's III Corps held the left flank anchored on White Oak Swamp, Sumner's II Corps was in the center and Franklin's V Corps was to Sumner's right anchored on the Chickahominy. Keyes' IV Corps was in reserve behind them. Porter's V Corps remained the open right flank of the Army of the Potomac north of the Chickahominy in order to establish communication with McDowell's I Corps if it every arrived. Casey's Division guarded the supply depot at White House Landing.

During this time the sick and wounded continued to increase. Reverend Marks of Kearney's Division, Heintzelman's III Corps recorded,¹⁹⁴

The suffering amongst the sick were of the most acute and painful character. They were tortured with constant thirst, generally with intense pain in the head, and frequently with delirium. The camp diseases, such as dysentery, diarrhea, and miasmatic fevers, are very painful and exhausting. The hospitals had to be created on the field in the immediate

¹⁹³ Le Duc, *Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster*, p. 80.

¹⁹⁴ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 211.

neighborhood of our camps: often these were rude cabins, without floors and without beds, and generally speaking destitute of any of those comforts that go to alleviate sickness at home. No wonder that many soldiers gave themselves up with stoic indifference to die.¹⁹⁵

My employment at this time was, as before, the superintendent of the removal of the sickest men of the [Kearney's] division from the field-hospital to those that had been created by the orders of General Kearney in various farm-houses.¹⁹⁶

On June 15, Charles Brewster of the 10th Massachusetts Couch's Division of Keyes' IV Corps wrote his mother on the condition of the soldiers,

We have a great sick at this time and no wonder for it a man was exposed one day at home to what our boys have to endure continually, it would be considered almost a miracle if he was not sick. I often smile as I think of how careful we always were at home to change our clothes if we happened to get wet, and our stockings even if we got our feet wet and here we get soaked through + through and lie down and sleep in them, and are obliged to, and yet we live through it all.¹⁹⁷

Chaplain Twichell of the New York Excelsior Brigade of Hooker's Division, Heintzelman's III Corps wrote his father on June 15,

Our sick are everywhere. Some are in hospitals at the North, others at Yorktown and others are still at White House. A few we have lost track of entirely having been left on the march to the care of strangers. Even here they are much scattered both through bad management and hard necessity. The army has been so depleted by sickness that all who have the prospect of soon being able to return to duty are not now permitted to go far to the rear. All those whose ailments are slight are kept in camp and compelled to take their place in the ranks when an attack is apprehended, although excused in other respects. At such a time you would be tempted to laugh at the sight of the maimed and halt, rheumatics and diarrhea cases hobbling to their posts with rueful visages, yet sharing the excitement of the moment and as able to load and fire as anybody...Of course in our circumstances the main effort of all chief officers, besides the medical, is addressed to the work of keeping the *fighting* men in condition....The Sanitary Commission has done a great deal to mitigate the evil where they could get at it, yet there can hardly be said to be any cooperation in the matter, for the feeling displayed by Army Medical officers toward this institution is anything but cordial. I think, indeed, that the Commission has been somewhat deflected from its original design and does not have an eye single to humane considerations....¹⁹⁸

Meanwhile, Le Duc made a fourth trip back to White House on June 21:

¹⁹⁵ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 211-212.

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Blight, *When This Cruel War is Over*.

¹⁹⁸ Messent, *The Civil War Letters*.

June 21st. I took a detachment to the White House for stores, especially Johnson and Dow's patent cartridges. The Seventh Michigan used them in the Battle of Fair Oaks, and the rebels thought they had repeating rifles.¹⁹⁹

That was Le Duc's last trip back to White House for supplies because the Seven Days Battles began on June 25 and shortly thereafter he was ordered to take his Brigade's supply train to the James River. During his month at the front, he was only able to return to White House for supplies four times. The Battle of Fair Oaks and the swollen river had tied him down for a week planking bridges.

On June 21, the 9th Pennsylvania Reserve Infantry, arrived aboard the Schooner *Georgia*, and bob Taggart described what he saw.

On Tuesday the 17th we resigned the indolence of camp life near Fredericksburg, and marched to a point on the River Rappahannock 7 miles below the city, expecting to there [illeg.] [illeg.] and proceed to join the "Army before Richmond." It was Friday however before we shipped and [illeg.] on Saturday at 3 P.M. disembarked at Whitehouse landing on the [unclear: Parum] bay. I enjoyed the trip down the Rappahannock down the bay, and up the York, very much, the scenery along the banks of those waters is beautiful, but on entering the [illeg.] everything seemed to suddenly change. The shore land, so low that it could be [illeg.] distinguished, covered with swamp weeds. Vegetation looks sickly. Swamps abound, and no signs of improvement or civilization are visible as far as the eye could reach. Treked out Charter's creek being a crooked stream, [illeg.] [illeg.] as we were steaming up the Rappahannock over appeared at anchor right before us I thought about 300 yards. Imagine my surprise when after more than two hours sailing at the rate of ten miles an hour we found [illeg.] schooner at anchor, and on looking back, could see other schooners which we had passed early in the morning, apparently right behind us. I must have been twenty-five miles around this peninsula -- so I understand from hands on the boat -- and only a few hundred yards across. Our regiment occupied the steamer "Georgia," having in time two schooners [illeg.] baggage & train.

Whitehouse station is a miserable looking place. The only thing to be seen are "Government Hospitals" "Undertaker's" shops, Embalmers of the dead, Suiters, & niggers. I felt no reluctance on Sunday morning -- the day after our arrival -- as we packed up and started out the Richmond & West Point R.R. Just as we were about leaving I met Dr. Gilmore who looked well and reported the healthy condition of Woodville and vicinity. On Sunday evening we bivouaced at [unclear: Huntlett's] Station, getting our shelter up, just in time to protect us from a heavy rain. On Monday, we marched to "Dispatch" Station 13 miles from Richmond. Remained there until Wednesday morning and started out again after marching above 9 miles [illeg.] right in front of Gen. Porter's division a little less than a mile from Col. Black's Regiment.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Le Duc, *Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster*, p. 80.

²⁰⁰ Bob Taggart to Sam Taggart, June 24, 1862, in Ayers, Thomas, Rubin and Target , *Valley of the Shadow: Two Communications in American Civil War*, <http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/papers/F0048>.

McClellan wrote, "On the 25th, our bridges and intrenchments [sic] being at last completed, an advance of our picket line of the left was ordered, preparatory to a general forward movement."²⁰¹

Medical Director Charles Tripler, from Fort Monroe, reported on the condition of the field hospital and looked at the potential of White House as a hospital on June 22.²⁰²

General: I have the honor to report that in obedience to your instructions I proceeded to White House on Friday afternoon (20th), and returned yesterday. I called upon Colonel Ingalls, and in his company with him examined the house known as the White House, as well as the outbuildings, grounds, and spring. The house is two stories in height, with two small rooms on each floor, a cellar under the main building, and with no attic. The four rooms in the main building can each accommodate 5 patients. One of the wings can accommodate 3 or perhaps 4 patients, the other is a sort of pantry, and has on one side the opening for the stairway to descend into the cellar. This room is unfit for any other purpose than a dispensary or kitchen. The cellar is dark, damp, and foul, and, in my opinion, should of itself forbid the occupation of the house as a hospital. The greatest number of sick the house can accommodate is, then, 24, leaving no room for the nurses. The outbuildings are entirely unfit for hospital purpose.

The grounds consist of a lawn, shaded by locust trees, and a kitchen garden. The lawn affords room for about 25 hospital tents. The kitchen garden is of loose soil, parts of it rather low, and in wet weather would be muddy and uncomfortable. By ditching it might be drained. The spring is at the foot of the bank, near the dairy-house. The water is good, similar to that of the other springs that have been prepared for the use of the men. The supply of water in the spring within the grounds is very scanty. The hospital steward told me he had abandoned it, because he found it required two hours and a half to fill a barrel of water. The spring is inaccessible to wagons. It has always been at the service of the hospital. I inclose [sic] the order of Colonel Ingalls to this effect. If this house were used for hospital purposes it could only be made available for the quarters of the surgeons attached and for a dispensary. The sick would require hospital tents upon the lawn. If the grounds were occupied in this way, as they are altogether insufficient for the whole establishment, it would necessitate the organization of a separate administration – surgeons, cooks, stewards, &c. – an expenditure of *personnel* that we cannot very well afford. We have now 170 hospital tents pitched on the plantation, well arranged and well policed; the camp well drained; the administration tents, the cooking apparatus, and the subsistence tents centrally located and convenient for all parties. Thirty-five more tents are on the ground, and are being pitched as the force at our disposal will allow.

Sixty-five of these tents have plank floors. The remaining 35 of the first 100 would have been floored if the lumber had been on hand. The delay in receiving this, however, has developed an interesting and important fact: The mortality in the floored tents has been

²⁰¹ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 216; and McClellan, *Report on the Army of the Potomac*, p. 117.

²⁰² OR, Charles S. Tripler, Surgeon and Medical Director, report, June 22, 1862, Series I, Volume II, Part I, page 205-6

very sensibly greater than in those without floors. I have directed the surgeon in charge to prepare tables showing the comparative rates of deaths in the two classes of tents for my information. If lumber is received, I will suspend the flooring of the remaining tents until these tables can be examined and the question set at rest. I must remark that although the whole of the tents occupied were in good police, and an air of comfort pervading them, still those without floors were decidedly superior in these respects to the others.

In relation to the relative advantages of hospital tents and buildings for hospital purposes, I think that among those at all familiar with the subject there is but one opinion – that the tents are decidedly the best.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

Chs. S. Tripler
Surgeon and Medical Director Army of the Potomac.

Surgeon Ellis was still away when Tripler inspected White House. When Ellis returned, the camp was preparing to abandon that supply base for another on the James River.

Good water seemed to be a major health concern with the Army of the Potomac camped around the flooded swampland of the Chickahominy River. Lieutenant Charles B. Haydon, of the 2nd Rhode Island Volunteers, Devens' Brigade, Couch's Division, of Heintzelman's IV Corps, recorded in his journal on June 18,

Our camp is a very pleasant one, beautifully shaded. The only drawback is the want of water. There is little to be had that is drinkable & it is becoming every day more scarce.

And then on June 24, he wrote,

We now have three good wells which supply an abundance of excellent water adding greatly to our health & comfort. I have now good quarters at the Adjutant's office. We have plenty to eat & I am in the best of health. I keep a paper of quinine in my pocket & every m'g [morning] take a little on the point of my knife. It keeps off fevers.²⁰³

²⁰³ Stephen W. Sears, *For Country, Cause & Leader, The Civil War Journal of Charles B. Haydon*, New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1993.

Abandonment of the Supply Base at White House Landing

Casualty Evacuation and Treatment after the Battle of Oak Grove, June 25

On June 25, McClellan ordered the corps south of the Chickahominy to advance a short distance closer toward Richmond along the Williamsburg Road. The lead elements of Heintzelman's III Corps and Keyes' IV Corps advanced across the same battle ground they had fought over a month before. Lieutenant Brewster of Devens' Brigade, Couch's Division, Keyes' IV Corps wrote home,

We sat there and listened to a terribly heavy firing of musketry and looked at the dead and wounded being brought back, and the dead being buried. But a few hours ago they went out full of life, and now we can see them brought back on the shoulders of 4 or 5 men carrying the pick and shovel. They deposit thier [sic] burdens on the ground, and dig a grave or rather a hole, put the body into it cover it up, and the soldier rests among the thousands of his friends + foes who fell in the 1st battle of Seven Pines or Fairoaks and whose graves are almost as thick over this plain and in woods and swamps, as they are in the burying ground at Northhampton. In addition to this we were right in front of a house which was used as a Hospital, and to quiet our nerves I suppose they would occasionally send out an arm, or a leg from the windows.²⁰⁴

After taking ground and giving it back up that night, Brewster wrote about the next day,

To add to our comforts, there were lots of dead Rebels scattered round in the woods yet unburied and the stench was intolerable as we marched by an open space to day I took the idea into my head to count the graves. It was just back of Casey's old camp, the space is no bigger than our garden + [&] yard and I counted 51 graves, many of them I presume contained from 6 to 10 Rebels. The graves were not generally dug more than a foot or two deep and then the earth piled over them. Sometimes no hole at all was dug but the earth just thrown over them, and anybody can get thier [sic] full of horrors by going over that battlefield.²⁰⁵

Chaplain Twichell of the New York Excelsior Brigade, BG Joseph Hooker's Division of Heintzelman's III Corps described the wounded coming in after the battle,

Soon the wounded began to come in. Each regiment furnished its quota and it was not long before ambulances were in great demand. The first dressings were performed under the trees and in two houses just back of the intrenchments [sic], then the patients were removed about half a mile to a hospital established near the rail road. As before, the wounds of every description were to be found, from those that were mortal in an hour to those that were a slim apology for leaving the ranks.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Blight, *When This Cruel War*.

²⁰⁵ Blight, *When This Cruel War*.

²⁰⁶ Messent, *The Civil War Letters*.

Reverend Marks of Kearney's Division, Heintzelman's III Corps described the casualties that came in to Savage Station from the second Battle of Fair Oaks:

During this day 600 or 700 wounded men were brought in from the battle-field to Savage Station. For some unknown reason the wounds were not so severe as in the previous engagements. Many were struck in the feet and arms, the flesh wounds were more numerous than at the battle of Fair Oaks. But again were renewed the painful, excruciating scenes of suffering that paralyzed and benumbed the faculties of the most benevolent. It now began to be apparent to us that a retreat from our present position was inevitable, and that we must fall back was the course that the enemy expected us to take: the retreat upon James River, however, was chosen by General McClellan. The right wing of the army passed the Chickahominy in safety during Friday night, bringing with it nearly all our guns.²⁰⁷

The survivors set about to bury their dead as soon as the battle was over and many of the dead were buried within short proximity of their camp.

General Lee concentrated his attack on McClellan's exposed weak right flank at Beaver Dam Creek and Gaines Mill, and began the Seven Day's Battles. McClellan would have to conduct the most challenging military maneuver, abandon his supply base at White House Landing on the Pamunkey River, withdraw to Harrison's Landing and establish a new supply base on the James River while under continuous attack from the enemy.

On June 26, Lee struck McClellan's right at the Battle of Mechanicsville with the intent to cut the Union Army off from its supply base at White House and subsequently drive it back down the Peninsula the way it had come. Anticipating this threat to his exposed line of communication and realizing that Washington was not going to send him McDowell's I Corps, McClellan determined to abandon his line of communication to White House and shift his supply base from the York-Pamunkey Rivers in the north to the James River in the south, an extremely difficult maneuver especially when pressed by the enemy and with no knowledge of the local roads. He did not reveal his plan to his Corps commanders until after the Battle of Gaines Mill on the night of June 27. The only hint of his intentions to his corps commanders was to order Porter's V Corps to fall back south of the Chickahominy, but his logisticians had to start their preparations sooner.

Preparations

War Correspondent Joel Cook wrote that McClellan explored the option of shifting his supply base to the James River as early as June 24 when he sent Captain Keenan with two companies of cavalry to reconnoiter a route to the James.²⁰⁸ He evidently had his Quartermaster direct the officer in charge of White House Landing to begin preparations for abandoning the supply base.

Major General McClellan wrote in his report to the Secretary of War:

²⁰⁷ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 226.

²⁰⁸ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*

On the same day [June 26] General Van Vliet, chief quartermaster of the army of the Potomac, by my orders, telegraphed to Colonel Ingalls, quartermaster at the White House, as follows: "Run the cars to the last moment, and load them with provisions and ammunition. Load every wagon you have with subsistence, and send them to Savage's station, by way of Bottoms bridge. If you are obliged to abandon White House burn everything you cannot get off. You must throw all our supplies up the James river as soon as possible, and accompany them yourself with all our force. It will be of vast importance to establish our depots on James river without delay, if we abandon White House. I will keep you advised of every movement so long as the wires work; after that you must exercise your own judgment."²⁰⁹

Brigadier General Van Vliet telegraphed Lieutenant-colonel Ingalls on June 26:

You will have your whole command in readiness to start at any moment. Please consult with LT Nicholson of the Navy to have his vessels placed in such a position that he can protect our depot. ... Don't fail to send down into [the York River] all the vessels in the Pamunkey that are not required soon. Three or four days' forage and provisions are all that should be retained afloat at White House. This is a precautionary measure entirely, but must be attended to at once.²¹⁰

That same day, McClellan also directed his corps commanders with troops north of the Chickahominy "to be prepared to send as many troops as they could spare on the following day to the left bank [south side] of the river...."²¹¹

The evening of June 26, Chaplain Twichell of the New York Excelsior Brigade, Hooker's Division, Heintzelman's III Corps decided to accompany a train back to White House,

Thursday [June 26] afternoon the artillery on the right betrayed the fact that an engagement was opening in that quarter [Battle of Mechanicsville]. This same night I went down in the cars to White House to take some articles to our wounded boys who were carried down the evening before. I found all along the road indications of some unusual movement or event close at hand. Stores were being packed on cars, others piled together in shape to be burnt if necessary, while rumors of the enemy were rife among the employees and soldiers we met. At White House the excitement was intense. It was said that guerrillas had been seen near etc. etc. To all this I paid little attention, the experience of a camp near the advance before Richmond having cured me of that excessive timidity which sutlers and civilians are subject to the slightest provocation. I only concluded that something was to develop shortly; what I knew not. To my great disappointment I found the boat on board which my boys were bestowed gone. Hurrying up some business I had at the express office, I lay down on the floor of a barge till morning and started back by the first train in the grey dawn. Arriving at Savages Station, I heard artillery on the right as on the previous evening, and was told that a battle [of Gaines Mill] successful on our

²⁰⁹ COL C. H. Lanza, *Source Book of the Peninsula Campaign*, p. 178; and McClellan, *Report of General George B. McClellan*, p. 124.

²¹⁰ Gibson, *Assault and Logistics* (cover: "The Army's Navy Series II"), p. 211

²¹¹ McClellan, *Report of General George B. McClellan*, p. 124.

part so far, was again opening. As our part of the lines was quiet I bestowed a little thought on the subject, but mounted my horse which was in waiting and rode over to the Division Hospital, which for several days I had been unable to visit.²¹²

Twichell had witnessed the early stages of the abandonment of the supply base at White House Landing, which had started the day prior.

Abandoning White House Supply Base

After the Battle of Gaines Mill on June 27, General J. E. B. Stuart's Cavalry was racing toward White House with its owner, Colonel Fitzhugh Lee, in the lead. Meanwhile, Lieutenant-colonel Ingalls had to upload all the supplies he could onto ships to transfer to the new base on the James River, then load the rest on available wagons bound for Fort Monroe and burn what he could not transport. "As of June 25, McClellan had moved from the White House none of the forty-eight pieces of seacoast artillery, which presumably remained on the ships."²¹³ The Union Army had a "great town of canvas and board houses" at White House.²¹⁴ Approximately 300-400 "contraband" laborers camped about one-eighth of a mile from White House.²¹⁵

War Correspondent Joel Cook recorded what he observed:

General McClellan, so soon as he had matured his plan, sent orders for the evacuation of the post [White House]. Upon June 25, the day after the order was received, matters progressed there as usual, with the exception that the landing of stores from the transport had ceased, whilst those already on the shore were rapidly loaded upon wagons and sent across Bottom's Bridge to the Federal left wing. Several steamers, with vessels in tow, laden with forage and subsistence, had also sailed down the river, with orders to proceed to City Point on the James River.²¹⁶

This change in the course of transportation caused considerable commotion and speculation. Some supposed the stores sent down the Pamunky to be intended for the supply of General Burnside's army, which, rumor said, had reached the James River and was co-operating with General McClellan. An order was also received from headquarters upon Wednesday, the 25th, to prohibit any one from coming forward to the lines on any consideration whatever, unless he belonged to the army. This order was so peremptory that even those connected with the press, some of whom had come to White House to forward their letters by mail-boats, were prevented from returning, and others who had smuggled themselves through were promptly sent back.²¹⁷

On the same day General Casey came from the army in front of Richmond and took command of the small land-force, not exceeding six hundred men, and in the evening was

²¹² Messent, *The Civil War Letters*.

²¹³ Dowdey, *The Seven Days*, p. 165.

²¹⁴ Blackford, W.W., *War Years with Jeb Stuart*, p. 75

²¹⁵ Wheeler, *Sword Over Richmond*

²¹⁶ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

notified to prepare at any moment for the entire evacuation of the post, and the preservation, as far as practicable, of the public property. Similar orders were also given to Lieutenant-colonel Ingalls. Communication was at once had with the fleet of gun-boats in the Pamunky near White House, and a division of men, armed with axes, proceeded during the night to cut down the trees surrounding the White House, and afterward all along the shore above and below the railroad-bridge, so as to give free play to the guns.²¹⁸

For defense of White House Landing, Brigadier General Silas Casey had under his command:

93rd New York Volunteers (6 companies)
Battery F, 1st New York Light Artillery
11th Pennsylvania Cavalry (5 companies)
6th Pennsylvania Reserves
4th Pennsylvania Cavalry (2 companies)²¹⁹

Joel Cook described the activity at White House and what it revealed:

On that evening there was a report that a body of Rebels were approaching the Pamunky. The trains on the railroad were kept running as swiftly as possible, carrying forward nothing but ammunition and munitions of war, with siege and rocket trains and field-pieces.²²⁰

On Thursday [June 26] morning it was found that the gun-boats had all taken position in front of the landing, with their ports open and their guns run out. This, and the equally astounding discovery that the trees had been cut down, gave great activity to all the camp-followers congregated at White House. The quartermaster's office was thronged by those anxious to procure transportation to Fortress Monroe, and the population was rapidly depleted. The morning train from the front reported all quiet, with the exception of certain mysterious movements not comprehensible to civilians. The immense stock of stores and forage at Dispatch Station, eleven miles from the Pamunky, were being hastily carried away, and subsequently it was learned that an immense train of wagons had been running from that place all day. In the evening it was announced that not a box, bale, or barrel remained.²²¹

Throughout the day the greatest vigilance was observed in and around the head-quarters of General Casey, who had pitched his tents on the lawn in front of the White House, the building itself being occupied by the Sisters of Charity. The stocks of good piled on the landings were rapidly diminishing, as the wagons carried them off. The railroad-trains moved steadily forward with ammunition. Cavalry scouts were sent out to different points, and preparations made for obstructing the roads. And at dusk a panic was occasioned by the discovery that bales of hay had been piled over and around the stores

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*.

²²⁰ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*.

²²¹ Ibid.

still remaining at the wharves – indicating the probability that during the night it might become necessary to apply the torch.²²²

Whilst all this was doing on shore, the numerous steamers and tugs in the river, some fifty in number, had been busy towing to West Point long lines of laden transports. The vessels still scattered about the harbor were also collected and prepared for towing. Some seven hundred craft were at White House two days before. On Friday morning, the tow-boats were still moving down the river with their convoys, and vessels at the landings were being loaded with stores from the shore and moved out into the stream.²²³

There was also great commotion among the crowds of contrabands employed as laborers. They soon understood that danger was apprehended, but, being assured by Lieutenant-colonel Ingalls that they would not be left behind to meet the vengeance of their masters, they worked with renewed energy. Stores and munitions everywhere disappeared from the landings, and were being packed on the wharf-boats and the vessels contiguous. The wives and children of the contrabands also made their appearance, and, being sent on the canal-boats, were floated out into the stream.²²⁴

The mail-steamer, which should have left early in the morning, was detained, and at eleven o'clock a dispatch announced that General Porter had driven the enemy before him, repulsing them three times with terrific slaughter, and was then ordered by General McClellan to fall back. This dispatch was the signal for renewed energy in the work of evacuation, and all the quarter-masters' papers and valuables, and the chests of the paymasters, were taken on board the mail-boat. The household furniture and servants of some officials following, it increased the excitement among the sutlers and camp-followers. Some of the former because so panic-stricken as to sell out their stocks at half-price, and hastened on board the boat. Others, however, determined to keep their goods and to take the chances. That there was an intention on the part of General McClellan to evacuate White House as soon as his movement in front should be perfected, there was no doubt, but for what cause, no one there knew.²²⁵

At three o'clock in the afternoon, the following dispatch was received from headquarters: -

“We have been driving the enemy before us on the left wing for the past half-hour. Cheers are heard all along the lines.”²²⁶

This increased the panic, and was the signal for a change in the programme [sic]. The valuable property was taken off the mail-boat and placed upon another steamer, and the former, taking vessels in tow, was at once sent down the river.²²⁷

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

On Saturday [June 28] morning [when the Corps Commanders were finally informed of the retrograde], the work at White House was nearly completed, and, though numerous vessels still remained in the harbor, there were plenty of tow-boats to take them quickly out of danger. At nine o'clock a train of cars was sent toward the Chickahominy, but before an hour had elapsed it returned, reporting the enemy to be approaching Despatch Station, and at once the tugs and vessels sailed down the river, and every thing on shore was destroyed. At seven o'clock in the evening, the rebels appeared upon the river-bank, and were greeted with a tremendous bombardment from the gun-boats. Very little of value was left there, and, as at all other places vacated by the Federal troops during the retreat, nothing fell into the hands of the enemy but the camp-grounds and rubbish, which the Union officers did not think it worth while even to burn.²²⁸

Anything that could not be taken was destroyed. Buildings were surrounded by whiskey-soaked hay bales and burned. Colonel Thomas Morris, 93rd New York, supervised the burning of supplies, which included; Tents, beds, liquor, medicines, utensils, oranges, lemons, baggage, food, clothes, the locomotives and over one hundred railroad cars.²²⁹

Against McClellan's orders, an unknown soldier would set fire to White House as the Army was abandoning it. M.D. Ellis commented:

Many mourned its destruction, which, I learn, was contrary to the orders of General Casey, but the torch was set to it by someone of the many who for a long time complained of its being so jealously guarded by Union sentries, and it the property of a rebel leader.²³⁰

Colonel Lansing, 17th New York, believed a disgruntled private from the 93rd New York set fire to the White House.²³¹

All the forces at White House Landing swiftly boarded the boats after Confederate cavalry advance was checked, so they could cast off that evening. Brigadier General Casey and his staff boarded the *Knickerbocker*, while Lieutenant-colonel Ingalls and his staff boarded the *Circassian* and departed White House for Harrison's Landing on the James River. Waters Braman, 93rd New York, was the last man to board and set fire to the wharf. The gunboats remained as the rearguard.²³²

Abstract Log of the *USS Sebago*

June 28.—At 1:30 p. m. military authorities on shore commenced firing stores, storehouses, tents, etc., and continued firing said stores at intervals of every fifteen minutes during the watch.²³³

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ B.K., Burton, *Extraordinary Circumstances*.

²³⁰ Wheeler, *Sword Over Richmond*.

²³¹ Burton, *Extraordinary Circumstances*.

²³² Burton, *Extraordinary Circumstances*.

²³³ *Official Records Of The Union And Confederate Navies, Vol VII* (on CD-ROM), p. 730.

Abstract log of the *USS Marblehead*

June 28.—Meridian to 4 p.m.: Transports all passing up and down river. At 1:30 p.m. *Chocura* made signal No. 5, "Prepare for action." All hands at quarters. At 1:55 fired rifled gun into west bank of river. At 3:45 received on board, by order of Captain Patterson, three companies of Seventeenth New York Volunteers, 150 men. At 4:15 all the commissary stores on shore were set on fire, with the adjoining buildings. Several explosions occurred at different times. At 4:30 White House, with its adjoining buildings, was fired.²³⁴

Joel Cook described the departure the next day, Sunday morning:

At ten o'clock on Sunday morning, the 29th, Lieutenant-Colonel Ingalls and Captain Sawtelle were before Yorktown with an immense fleet, on their way to the new base of operations upon the James River. Since a very early hour of the previous day, General McClellan had been deprived of his telegraphic communication with Washington. He abandoned its use several hours before the wires were cut, doubtless being fearful that the enemy might, by some means, become acquainted with the tenor of his despatches [sic].²³⁵

Such was the end of the far-famed supply-post at White House.²³⁶

Abstract log of the *USS Marblehead*

June 29.—At 8:10 a. m. fired 1[one] 5-second shell from 12-inch gun at a body of rebel cavalry seen on shore about 1,000 yards. At 10:15 the first cutter returned and brought one rebel prisoner found in a tent. At 10:25 discovered a body of rebel cavalry and infantry forming; fired one shot from pivot gun. At 10:35 rebels forming in large numbers. We opened fire with 5 Hotchkiss percussion and 1 Parrott from ride gun, and from 9-inch pivot 3 shrapnel, 2 [two] 10-second Birney fuze, 1 [one] 20-second and 2 Birney shell, and from howitzer 3 shell. During the time the rebel sharpshooters got within range behind some huts, their shots striking us in a number of places and wounding Garrett G. Majorey, a soldier (flesh wound, hip). Sent two boats ashore with soldiers, who were deployed as skirmishers. At 11:30 boats with soldiers returned on board. At 11:43 got underway and steamed down the river, the rebel artillery firing at us after we were underway, their shot going over us and some falling short, in hauling the boats alongside the second cutter capsized, losing all the oars, cushions, etc.²³⁷

Colonel Fitzhugh Lee arrived with his column of cavalry on the morning of June 29 to find his home a smoldering ruins. The Confederate cavalry dismounted and engaged Union troops from the last gunboat, *USS Marblehead*. Federals were driven off when the Rebels brought up a light artillery piece.

²³⁴ *Official Records Of The Union And Confederate Navies, Vol VII* (on CD-ROM), p. 720.

²³⁵ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*.

²³⁶ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*.

²³⁷ *Official Records Of The Union And Confederate Navies, Vol VII* (on CD-ROM), p. 720.

When Stuart arrived he saw two square miles of smoldering heaps of supplies, skeletons of burnt wagons, endless lines of blistered railroad cars, and five locomotives, and burning barges. His troops found plenty of “provisions and delicacies of every description” the Army had failed to destroy or take with them, such as lobster, champagne, cigars, desiccated vegetables, and cans of fish.²³⁸

Vast quantities of things remained... Their sutler’s shops were on the most elaborate scale – quantities of barrels of sugar, lemons by the millions, cases of wine, beer and other liquors of every description, confectionary, canned meats, and fruits and vegetables, and great quantities of ice, all still in excellent condition... The eggs were packed in barrels of salt... There was a place where embalming was done and several bodies were under treatment... These were no doubt officers killed in recent engagements, but there was no record of who they were... A lunch out upon the grass under the trees near the river... Great buckets of lemonade... Pickled oysters, eggs roasted in blocks of salt, canned beef and ham, French rolls, cakes and confectionary... Havana cigars, and coffee... No one but a soldier can appreciate the pleasures of such a repast.” “We captured at the White House a pontoon train... and numbers of new cars and locomotives that had been brought from the North... At my suggestion he [Stuart] gave me orders to damage them [the engines] to such an extent as to make it necessary to send them to a shop, and... not to injure the costly parts... I concluded the best thing to so would be to put a cannon ball through their boilers... though rendering the machine absolutely useless for a time, the cost of repair would be moderate. A rifled gun... at a distance of fifty yards... of each locomotive...²³⁹

Stuart left a cavalry squadron of Cobb’s Legion at White House when he left on the morning of June 30. White House Landing was back in the owner’s hands.

The Army’s Retreat to the James River

While Ingalls and Casey made preparations to abandon White House, Reverend Marks of Kearney’s Division, Heintzelman’s III Corps visited the field hospital near Meadows Station before June 27 and described the increasing number of sick and wounded:

To this house of Captain Carter was sent about 150 of the sick of General Kearney’s division. I was sent by Colonel Hayes to take charge of them. A physician of the 105th Pennsylvania, Doctor Smith, visited us once or twice a day. His hospital was about one half mile from us on the railroad. Here likewise were 180 men.²⁴⁰

There had been brought to Meadow Station on Friday evening, the 27th of [June], about 100 men, mostly of Hooker’s division, to be sent to the White House on the cars.²⁴¹

²³⁸ Dowdey, *The Seven Days*, p. 250-251.

²³⁹ Blackford, W.W., *War Years with Jeb Stuart*, p. 75

²⁴⁰ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 217-218.

²⁴¹ *ibid.*

But before this was possible the enemy were in our rear, and those poor suffering men, without physicians and only three nurses, were left without food, and they knew not where to turn or to whom to appeal. Their surgeons were more than occupied with the demands made upon them in the field; and there was no one to look after these men.²⁴²

Casualty Evacuation after the Battle of Gaines Mill, June 27

War Correspondent George Alfred Townsend left the Michie House to cross the Grapevine or the Military Bridge to witness the Battle of Gaines Mill about the time units were falling back and Rush's 6th Pennsylvania Lancers had arrived at the base of the hill, which was probably around 1800 hours.

It was with difficulty that I could make my way along the narrow corduroy, for hundreds of wounded were limping from the field to the safe side, and ammunition wagons were passing the other way, driven by reckless drivers who should have been blown up momentarily. Before I had reached the north side of the creek, an immense throng of panic-stricken people came surging down the slippery bridge.²⁴³

Townsend witnessed panic in the eyes of the returning wounded and skulkers. One retreating soldier grabbed the reins of his horse with intent to take it away from him.

I spurred my pony vigorously with the left foot, and with the right struck the man at the bridle under the chin. The thick column of parted left and right, and though a howl of hate pursued me, I kept straight to the bank, cleared the swamp, and took the military route parallel with the creek, toward the nearest eminence. At every step of the way I met wounded persons.²⁴⁴

Porter's Corps had established a field hospital on Turkey Hill to the rear of the battlefield.

A mile or more from Grapevine Bridge, on a hill-top [Turkey Hill] lay a frame farmhouse, with cherry trees encircling it, and along the declivity of the hill were some cabins, corn-sheds, and corn-bins. The house was now a Surgeon's headquarters, and the wounded lay in the yard and lane, under the shade, waiting their turns to be hacked and maimed. I caught glimpse through the door, of the butchers and their victims; some curious people were peeping through the windows at the operation. As the processions of freshly wounded went by, the poor fellows, lying on their backs, looked mutely at me, and their great eyes smote my heart.²⁴⁵

Townsend observed that ammunition wagons and ambulances had pushed up to as far as the base of Turkey Hill.

²⁴² *ibid.*

²⁴³ Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*.

²⁴⁴ Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*.

²⁴⁵ Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*.

At the foot of the hill to which I have referred the ammunition wagons lay in long lines, with the horses' heads turned from the fight. A little beyond the ambulances; and between both sets of vehicles, fatigue-parties were going and returning to and from the field.²⁴⁶

Porter's front lines broke before any ammunition could be pushed forward. At the signs of defeat, Townsend tried to cross Grapevine Bridge with the rest of the V Corps but the Provost Officer permitted only the wounded to cross. When he arrived at McClellan's headquarters at Trent's House, preparations seemed to be underway for the retreat to the James River.

I followed the winding of the woods to Woodbury's Bridge, - the next above Grapevine Bridge. The approaches were clogged with wagons and field-pieces, and I understood that some panic-stricken people had pulled up some of the timbers to prevent a fancied pursuit. Along the sides of the bridge many of the wounded were washing their wounds in the water, and the cries of the teamsters echoed weirdly through the trees that grew in the river. At nine o'clock, we got underway, - horsemen, batteries, ambulances, ammunition teams, infantry, and finally some great siege 32s, that had been hauled from Gain's House. One of these pieces broke down the timbers again, and my impression is that it was cast into the current. When we emerged from the swamp timber, the hills before us were found brilliantly illuminated with burning camps. I made toward headquarters, in one of Trent's fields; but all the tents save one had been taken down, and lines of white-covered wagons stretched southward until they were lost in the shadows. The tent of General McClellan alone remained, and beneath an arbor of pine boughs, close at hand, he sat, with his Corps Commanders and Aides, holding a council of war.²⁴⁷

On the night of June 27, McClellan held a war council with his Corps Commanders and announced his intentions to shift his base of supply from the York to the James River. The Quartermasters would have to load up everything they could on all available transportation and burn what they could not. The objective of the corps was to protect the retreat of the supply trains and artillery.

Reverend Marks described the reaction that night to the prospect of being cut off from the supply base at White House Landing:

On the evening of Friday, the 27th, General McClellan changed his head-quarters from near the Chickahominy to Savage Station; and the wounded men brought in from the field, and couriers arriving at head-quarters, made us aware of the fact that our right was now in full retreat across the Chickahominy; and now, if not before, the peril of the army stared us in the face. We knew that Jackson was in our rear, sweeping down the Pamunkey, and would, in a few hours at most, cut off our communications with White House. Broken squadrons of troops, and dusty and wounded officers, were arriving during the entire night, increasing our consternation. Groups of men were seen collected together discussing, with anxious faces, our probably destiny and fate. In spite of all that could be done to avoid inquiry, and to throw us on a false scent, our real condition began

²⁴⁶ Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*.

²⁴⁷ Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*.

to make itself sensible to every mind and to blanch a thousand cheeks. Every way we looked there was destruction and death. Cut off from the base of our supplies, in a country surrounded by our foes, embarrassed by thousands of wounded and sick men, with all the avenues of escape closed up, the prospect before us was most gloomy and appalling.²⁴⁸

Joel Cook mentioned sending the wounded back to White House on the trains:

At five o'clock on Friday [June 27] afternoon, a train of cars destined for White House left Savage station. They were nine or ten in number, and filled with wounded soldiers. Though much apprehension was felt, the train passed safely over the road. It returned during the night, bringing the mails and Philadelphia and New York papers of June 26. These were the last received from White House. The last train left Savage Station on Saturday morning [June 28] about eight o'clock, with some four hundred wounded, and got safely through; the telegraph worked till about eleven o'clock A.M., the last message being sent to Philadelphia by Captain Arthur McClellan to the general's family. Another train then at Savage station was withheld. The railroad-bridge – a point of the utmost consequence, being directly in our rear and the key to our position – was held coolly and gallantly, to the last moment of usefulness, by General Naglee, and then effectually destroyed.²⁴⁹

War Correspondent Townsend who was at the Michie House (not Savage Station) heard that one train loaded with wounded safely made it out on the morning of 28 June, but the second did not.

A train had departed for White House at dawn, and had delivered its cargo of mortality safely; but a second train, attempting the passage, at seven o'clock had been fired into, and compelled to return. A tremendous explosion, and shaft of white smoke that flashed to the zenith, informed us, soon afterward, that the railroad bridge had been blown up.²⁵⁰

Reverend Marks described retreat and attempt to evacuate the wounded to White House:

During Saturday [June 28] our immense baggage train, between 5000 and 6000 wagons was dispatched along the Williamsburg road, followed by the ambulance train; and during the day Generals Porter, Sykes, and McCall, with their divisions, passed over the railroad, taking the direction towards Williamsburg. Our communications with the White House were not cut off until ten o'clock on Saturday morning; for we had already sent down a train of cars filled with wounded men [at eight o'clock that morning], and another train was laying at Savage Station with 500 wounded men, waiting the signal to start, when the telegraphic wires suddenly ceased working. I was in the telegraphic office when this was announced by the operator. Our worst fears were now realized. It was certain the enemy was in our rear. The train moved down the road three or four miles, to learn, if possible, the condition of things at the White House; but failing to hear anything satisfactory, it returned to the station; and for several hours the poor, broken, maimed

²⁴⁸ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 226-227.

²⁴⁹ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*

²⁵⁰ Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*.

men waited and hoped, and rejected the offer of friendly hands that proposed to remove them from the cars, and place them on beds upon the ground.²⁵¹

War Correspondent George Alfred Townsend described from the Michie House the beginning of the retreat:

The retreat had been in progress all night [27 June], as I had heard the wagons through my open windows. By daylight the whole army was acquainted with the facts, that we were to resign our depot at White House, relinquish the North bank of the river, and retire precipitately to the shores of the James. A rumor – indignantly denied, but as often repeated – prevailed among the teamsters, surgeons, and drivers, that the wounded were to be left in the enemy's hands. It shortly transpired that we were already cut off from the Pamunkey.²⁵²

By Saturday, June 28, the line of communication with White House Landing had been severed by Stuart's Cavalry. In his July 5 letter to his father, Chaplain Twichell, of the New York Excelsior Brigade, Hooker's Division, Heintzelman's III Corps described leaving the Division Hospital near Savage Station with Dr. McAllister and heading back to the front after stopping at Bottom's Bridge on June 28 to confirm the rumors of having enemy in their rear.

Rumors that we had heard within a few hours led us to shape our course to Bottom's Bridge, where we found a sight that confirmed all previous whisperings. The bridge was destroyed, an earthwork was thrown up – artillery was in position with a force of infantry, and the cavalry pickets of the enemy were in sight. Then we realized that the right wing of our line had been turned and that strange times were at hand. Delaying but a few minutes we pushed on for the lines. Arrived in sight of Savage station, the plain was full of moving trains of wagons, and dark columns of troops appeared coming over the hill from the right. At a glance we read the story and our hearts sank down – down – down, until the very horses seemed to feel it. Further on we saw that all the reserve force of our left had been removed, leaving the second line of ranks empty both of men and guns. This change had been sedulously hidden from our boys in the front who still, poor fellows, stood on picket or lay in the outworks, gazing hopefully and bravely toward Richmond. We went among them. They were laughing over the absurd rumors of defeat on the right and consequent evacuation of our hard-earned position, which they had heard, and we prudently forbore to undeceive them. Gen. Syckles stood under a tree looking calm but anxious. Col. Hall was near and, riding up, Dr. McAllister told him in undertone what we had seen at Bottom's Bridge, and he in turn told it to the General, who seemed much incensed thereat, for he instantly, and not very mildly, ordered Dr. McAllister to return to the hospital. He is so universally courteous that I attributed his manner at the time to his very great apprehension lest he men should find out what was going on and lose spirit. The fate of the Doctor warned me and I was very cautious what I afterward said. I staid with our regiment till it was relieved at 5 o'clock and went into camp with it....After the regiment had reached camp and the men, now always tired from overwork, had began to get quietly and unsuspectingly to their hard beds, I rode over to

²⁵¹ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 228-231.

²⁵² Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*.

Division Headquarters to learn what was to be done with the sick. Dr. Sim showed me an order just received, to the effect that no transportation could be afforded to the thousands who were disabled – that all who could possibly work their way along with gun and ammunition were to start at once – the rest were to be left with surgeons, medicine and stores to become prisoners of war. The Dr. desired me to proceed at once to the hospital, announce the order and assist both in making ready, and subsequently in the march itself. Dr. Powell and McAllister were ordered to remain behind I returned once more to camp, put my baggage on the horse and told Joe to get himself all ready, and go with the regiment. After informing the Colonel of my assignment, I turned and rode away out of the bloody field, past the graves of the dead, heroic multitude, over the ground drenched and drenched again in true blood, where we hoped and feared and suffered for weary weeks, where valor had met valor and brave souls escaped through gaping wounds – I passed the point where my own lads first shook hands so gallantly with a soldier's perils - a little further on and Fair Oaks was left behind, maybe forever, to become the abode of death and stillness. I could not help a feeling of rebellion against the fate that forced the abandonment of ground that cost so much and was made so sacred, yet with a deep sigh and a fervent prayer for the boys who lay sleeping, thus far, in peace, I rode briskly away.²⁵³

Reverend Marks described the scene at Savage Station the day after McClellan directed the shifting of base of supply to the James River:

Saturday [June 28] was ushered in with a quiet unusual and almost unnatural in the Peninsula – not a gun was fired. This was owing to the fact of the enemy looking for us on the banks of the Chickahominy, and not anticipating our retreat on James River.²⁵⁴

Captain Le Duc found himself promoted from Brigade Quartermaster to the arduous duty of supervising the retreat of II Corps' supply trains:

I was sent to come to General Sumner's headquarters, to assume the duties of the chief quartermaster, in place of Captain Putnam. When I reported to the General, he said: Captain, we are getting ready to retreat, or to seek a new base, on the James River, and I want you to take charge of my transportation, and of the heavy artillery, and push them out of the way; it may be very important for me not to be delayed by the transportation."²⁵⁵

"Certainly, General Sumner, I'll do the best I can, but I don't know as much about the business as Captain Bachelder, who has been here a long time. Would he not do the work better?"²⁵⁶

The old gray haired General, with austere dignity, replied: "When I find it necessary to consult my inferior officers as to appointments, I will call on you, sir!"²⁵⁷

²⁵³ Messent, *The Civil War Letters*.

²⁵⁴ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 227.

²⁵⁵ Le Duc, *Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster*, p. 81-82.

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*

I felt that somehow I had blundered, but did not then realize the honor done me in being selected for such important duty. I said, “Well, General, I am only a green volunteer, but please tell me where I am to take the transportation, and when I am to start.”²⁵⁸

“You will ride to General McClellan’s headquarters, and ask these questions, and report to me as soon as possible.”²⁵⁹

To army headquarters I went, and saw Adjutant General Seth Williams. “I am sent by General Sumner,” I told him, “to ask where I may take the transportation of the second corps, and when I may start.”²⁶⁰

“Our destination is the James River – by what roads I know not,” he answered. “Better you see the chief quartermaster, General Van Vliet.”²⁶¹

To him I went, and he knew nothing of the roads, and directed me to see the chief engineer, and he told me he had no map of the country, and knew nothing of the roads.²⁶²

I reported to General Sumner, and said: “I will have to find a road, or make a road. The transportation is all ready. Shall I start them?”²⁶³

“Not by my order. Get that from the Adjutant General, Seth Williams.”²⁶⁴

To him again I went, and by this time the engineer had heard of a narrow road through the woods leading south across White Oak Swamp, and advised that I take that road, on which teams were already moving. This road led by Savage Station, where immense piles of army supplies were stacked up to be fired, to prevent their falling into the hands of the enemy. I ordered my men to take on all they could carry of boxes of hard bread, and other supplies, and, finding the road leading south, pushed everything forward, and, before sundown, was well into this thicket of woods and brush.²⁶⁵

The Confederate threat to the line of communication now dictated the conduct of McClellan’s campaign and *Harper’s Weekly* had a good overview of McClellan’s retreat and Lee’s analysis and reaction:

McClellan’s retreat was in the following order: At noon on the 28th [June], Keyes, who lay nearest, crossed White Oak Creek and took position on its opposite bank, to cover the passage of the other troops and trains. These, which would have stretched for a distance

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *ibid.*

²⁶¹ *ibid.*

²⁶² *ibid.*

²⁶³ *ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *ibid.*

of forty miles if drawn up in single line – accompanied by a herd of 2500 cattle - were got safely over, and proceeded on their way, Keyes's corps guarding the advance. They reached the James River without molestation on the morning of the 30th, Franklin and Porter followed from the rear by the same route, and were over on the morning of the 29th. At daybreak of this day Heintzelman and Sumner evacuated their works in front, falling back toward Savage's Station, which they were to hold until night, and then to cross were to keep a line of battle fronting toward the creek to check pursuit from the rear, while others were to take position across the three roads, and so fronting toward Richmond, in order to protect the trains passing behind them from assault in flank. McClellan, having given general directions for the movements and positions of the troops, rode to the James to select the best position on that river, and to consult with the naval commanders there.²⁶⁶

On the morning of the 28th Lee was wholly at a loss what next to do. There was no force in front on his side of the Chickahominy; but still McClellan might propose to cross the river lower down, and give battle, in order to preserve his communications with the York River. The cavalry, with Ewell's division of Jackson's command, were sent down to the railroad to observe the state of things there. As they approached, the few troops guarding the railroad passed the river, burning the bridge behind them. Ewell remained until evening, and then rejoined his command. Stuart, with his cavalry, dashed down the railroad toward the White House, which they reached next morning [29 June]. With him was the proprietor of that estate, Fitz-Hugh Lee, son of the Confederate commander. The house was in flames; nearly all the immense quantity of stores accumulated here had been removed, and were on their way to the James. The abandonment of the railroad and the destruction of the bridge showed that no attempt would be made to hold that line; but still it might be McClellan's purpose either to move upon Richmond or to reach the lower bridges on the Chickahominy, cross the stream, and retreat down the Peninsula. Lee was therefore forced to wait until the intent of his opponent was developed. During the night it was evident that the Union army was in motion, and the Confederate pickets failing to detect any approach to the lower bridges, it became evident that the retreat was toward the James River. So, early on the morning of the 29th, Longstreet and A. P. Hill were ordered to cross the Chickahominy by the New Bridge, which had been rebuilt by Magruder during the night of the 27th, and, crossing in front of Richmond, to move by the Charles City Road, thus taking the Federal army on the flank; while Jackson at a later hour was to cross by the Grapevine Bridge, and move down near the right bank of the river, thus threatening the rear.²⁶⁷

At dawn Magruder discovered that the Federal works at Fair Oaks were abandoned, and Sumner and Heintzelman were slowly falling back toward Savage's Station. The works on the extreme right were held a little longer. Magruder, in the mean time, followed cautiously down the railroad, opening a distant fire at intervals – Sumner's retiring troops turning occasionally, and then keeping on the retreat. Late in the afternoon they had fallen back nearly to Savage's Station from the front and the right. Sumner and Heintzelman had been ordered to hold this point until nightfall, the positions of each

²⁶⁶ Alfred H. Guernsey and Henry M. Alden, *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War*, 1866.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

being assigned to them by McClellan. But Heintzelman abandoned his position before the time, and crossed the swamp by the upper road, giving orders for the destruction of the ammunition and stores remaining at Savage's Station which could not be carried off by the trains. The ammunition with shells were heaped upon a train, which, with steam up, was sent down the railroad to the Chickahominy. Fire was set to the train, and before it reached the site of the bridge it was ablaze, and the shells began to explode. So great was the momentum, that the engine and first car leaped clear across the chasm and landed on the opposite side. At the same instant the whole mass of powder exploded, and the remaining cars plunged, shattered into the mud of the river.²⁶⁸

War Correspondent Joel Cook described what he learned about the beginning of the retreat:

Upon Saturday afternoon [June 28], the retreat to the James River began. All the teams and cattle were sent in a southerly direction across the White Oak Swamp. At the same time General Morell's division left Woodbury Bridge, where they had been since the end of the previous day's battle, and marching past Savage Station, across the railroad and the Williamsburg road, they entered the swamp and crossed it, halting near Charles City, where they were the next day joined by other portions of the army.²⁶⁹

During the night, orders were given Generals Franklin, Sumner, Heintzelman, and Keyes, whose troops still held their old positions before the Rebel capital, to destroy every article of commissary stores, ammunition, and hospital supplies for which transportation could not be furnished, and abandoning their camps, to gradually withdraw their troops toward Savage Station. Orders were also sent the surgeons at the hospital there to instruct all the wounded who could walk to the start immediately, and move toward Harrison's Point, on the James River. All the ambulances which could be found were loaded with the wounded who were in condition to be moved; but many hundreds whose lives would have been destroyed by an attempt to remove them were left under the charge of the surgeons detailed for the purpose, and turned over to the enemy, as had been done by them at Williamsburg. Two days before, four car-loads of ammunition had been sent up from White House for the use of a siege-train, and unloaded. It was replaced on the cars, and, a full head of steam being raised in the locomotive, they were started off down the railroad toward the burned bridge across the Chickahominy. Every moment the speed increased, and whilst at the highest, the train reached the river, tumbling in with a terrible crash.²⁷⁰

Destruction of tents and stores

Previously on June 27, the 29th Massachusetts had drawn three days rations right before it was ordered to reinforce Porter's V Corps during the Battle of Gaines Mill. Upon its return, it was also instructed to abandon its tents and Osborne described the scene as the Irish Brigade moved to defend Savage Station on Saturday, June 28:

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

The [Irish] Brigade remained at this point for a short time, and was then ordered to the railroad bridge, a distance of about two miles from Savage's Station. This bridge (spanning the Chickahominy at that point) had been burned the day before [June 28] to prevent the enemy from crossing. They [Jackson] had, however, already effected this purpose higher up the stream [at Grapevine Bridge], and their cavalry, with a few field-pieces, were now seen moving cautiously down the road, a mile away.²⁷¹

Near this place, as also at Fair Oaks Station, a mile farther towards Richmond, were vast quantities of army supplies, which could not be moved. The work of destroying these stores began about noon [on June 29]. Enormous fires were kindled, into them were thrown boxes of hard bread, bales of clothing, cases of stores, blankets, fragments of cars, tents, hospital stores, barrels of whiskey, and turpentine. The whole combined made a fire covering an area of nearly two acres. When the flames, mounting above the tops of the trees, were roaring and crackling with intense fury, the workmen, blackened with smoke and wild with the excitement which a vast conflagration always creates, began to pitch into the burning mass kegs of powder and boxes of ammunition. The latter proved a dangerous experiment, and was not repeated. "This destruction of stores," says the Count of Paris, "was a sort of holocaust offered to the god of war." While this was taking place, the troops were hurrying to and fro, taking up the various positions assigned them on the hill and the long plain at its foot, preparing to meet the enemy, who was momentarily expected.²⁷²

Lieutenant Favill in French's Brigade, II Corps, next to the Irish Brigade described the same scene:

When everything was prepared to resist the advance of the enemy, heavy details were made to destroy the immense accumulation of stores the wagons were unable to carry away. There were thousands of boxes of bread, hundreds of barrels of whiskey, pork, beef, vinegar, molasses, etc., thousands of bags of coffee, piles of every kind of equipment, clothing, and a famous rocket battery, that had excited great hopes. All these things were quickly piled together, the whiskey barrels stove in, and then set on fire. The flames leaped from box to barrel, from base to summit, like a lightning flash, while black woolly looking clouds of dense smoke curled and rolled and spread over the surrounding country, advising the enemy beyond doubt of our intentions. In a few seconds, the fire became a seething furnace of white heat, from which all were obliged to run for their lives. As the fire reached the whiskey barrels, great explosions followed, filling the air with burning debris. It was a magnificent fire, and fully accomplished its end, but a sad sight to see so much valuable property destroyed, in order to keep it out of the hands of the enemy.²⁷³

Captain James F. Rusling, of the 5th New Jersey and Acting 3rd Brigade Quartermaster, Hooker's Division, III Corps, remembered receiving this message just after dark on June 28:

²⁷¹ Osborne, *The History of the Twenty-Ninth Regiment of Massachusetts*, p. 155.

²⁷² Osborne, *The History of the Twenty-Ninth Regiment of Massachusetts*, p. 156-158.

²⁷³ Favill, *Diary of a Young Officer*.

The general commanding directs that the trains be loaded with ammunition and sustenance, and dispatched as promptly as possible by Savage Station, across White Oak Swamp, in the direction of the James River. All trunks and private baggage, and all camp equipage, will be abandoned and destroyed, but not burned. The general commanding will trust his brave men will bear these privations with their wonted fortitude, as it will be but for a few days.²⁷⁴

Rusling added how they carried out the order:

I had been up all the night before, and in the saddle for two days mostly, and had just “turned in” for a night’s rest; but I dressed quickly, and again soon was on horseback. I was then Brigade Quartermaster (Third Brigade, Hooker’s Division, Third Corps). We proceeded to carry out this order, and the other two brigades of our division did the same. We cut and slashed our tents with knives, and ripped them to pieces - many of them new Sibley and hospital tents. We chopped and broke the tent-poles. We knocked out trunks and valises to pieces with axes and spades. Our surplus clothing was cut and torn to rags. Our headquarter officers doffed their old uniforms, in which they had been campaigning so far, and donned their best ones – resolved that, if they had to abandon any, they would leave the old ones - and I did the same. But nothing was set on fire that night, lest the Johnnies should learn of our movement prematurely. Then we loaded our wagons with ammunition and rations, as ordered, and started for the James River, and in due time withdrew from our lines and followed after them. The next morning the rear guard set fire to our abandoned stores and property, and there was a general conflagration at Fair Oaks, etc.²⁷⁵

Alfred Bellard, 5th New Jersey Volunteers, Francis E. Patterson’s Brigade, Hooker’s Division, Heintzelman’s III Corps, likewise, received similar instructions about abandoning tents and anything else it could not carry and watched the destruction of supplies, then fell into line south of Sumner’s II Corps:

On the 28th [of June] while on picket we had our first intimation of a retreat. During the day a large siege gun was brought from the right and placed in position in our fort with ammunition placed in readiness, but towards night the gunners received orders to move and they struck for the rear. In a short time orders were given us to return to camp and pack our tents and blankets. Everything that could not be carried off was to be burnt or destroyed. Knapsacks and tents were slashed and cut to pieces with swords and bayonettes [sic], crackers and provisions of all kinds were thrown down all the wells we could find, filling them up to the brim, making a general destruction of everything. The last to disappear was the brigade sutler’s tent. As he did not have wagons enough to carry off his produce, he had to stand by and see the boys help themselves to cans of butter, milk, cheese and in fact everything he had on hand, after which the tent was ribboned [sic]. On the completion of our job we returned to the front with our haversacks well filled with grub and awaited our turn to take the back track.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ James F. Rusling, *Men and Things I Saw in Civil War Days*, New York: Eaton & Mains, 1899, p. 29.

²⁷⁵ Rusling, *Men and Things I Saw*, p. 29.

²⁷⁶ Donald, *Gone For a Soldier*, p. 97-98.

The morning of the 29th we fell back slowly to our second line of rifle pits at Savage's station, and taking our position we were in readiness for the rebs but with the exception of a few straglers [sic], none came in our front, although the right of our line on the rail road was engaged.²⁷⁷

Charles Haydon of the 2nd Rhode Island, Devens' Brigade, Couch's Division, Keyes' III Corps had drawn 150 rounds on June 28 and by the next day had destroyed everything they could not carry and also retreated back to the second rifle pits by 3:00 in the afternoon of June 29.²⁷⁸

Reverend Marks similarly described the destruction of the supplies:

I was again urged by officers and men to go up to Savage Station, and ascertain the state of things now, for possibly there might be some change. I could find at least what would be the best road for them to take in retreat. I went gain to the Station, and learned from my friend, Colonel S. McKelvy, that the order had already been issued for the destruction of all remaining ammunition and commissary stores. He then informed me that the long train of cars, forty or fifty in number, was being loaded with shells, kegs of powder, and cartridges, and that in a few minutes the work of destruction would begin. I could see, mounting above the trees, the flames from the vast commissary stores at Fair Oaks Station.²⁷⁹

I entreated Colonel McKelvy to permit me to place in the cars a barrel of coffee, twenty boxes of crackers, a bag of rice, three or four barrels of dried apples. This he had done himself, and ordered the engineer to run down the road as far as Meadow Station and the Railroad house, and throw off for us these articles, and such other things as we were likely to demand.²⁸⁰

I returned to Savage Station, taking nurses with me for the purpose of securing such articles as would be needed at the hospital, and would otherwise be destroyed.²⁸¹

About noon the work of destruction commenced, and no language can paint the spectacle. Hundreds of barrels of flour and rice, sugar and molasses, salt, and coffee, were consigned to the flames; and great heaps of these precious articles in a few moments lay scorching and smouldering [sic]. A long line of boxes of crackers, fifteen feet high, were likewise thrown into the mass; and the workmen seemed to have a savage and fiendish joy in consigning to the flames what a few days afterwards they would have given a thousand dollars to obtain. The scene was altogether unearthly and demoniac. The men, blackened by smoke and cinders, were hurling into the fires boxes of good, tents, fragments of broken cars, and barrels of whisky and turpentine; and then would be hurled into the burning mass boxes of ammunition, and explosion followed explosion, throwing

²⁷⁷ Donald, *Gone For a Soldier*, p. 100.

²⁷⁸ Sears, *For Country*.

²⁷⁹ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 242-243.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 244-245.

up fragments of shells into the heavens, and the flames mounted above the tops of the loftiest trees. The ammunition was not so easily disposed of, and shells, kegs of powder, etc., were placed in the cars.²⁸²

Osborne, 29th Massachusetts, saw the one remaining railroad train set on fire and sent toward the Chickahominy:

Another, and if possible, a stranger and more unusual scene, was to be witnessed before the serious work of fighting was to begin. On the track near Fair Oaks Station stood a train of nearly fifty baggage-cars, with a powerful locomotive attached to it. Into the cars were put hundreds of kegs of powder, shells, cartridges, and other materials of a highly combustible character. By two o'clock the cars were well loaded with their dangerous freight, and when this was done, each car was set on fire, and the engine, with full head of steam, set in motion. In full view of the waiting army, the burning train swept past Savage's Station with the speed of lightening. The grade from this point to the Chickahominy was descending, greatly increasing the volume of fire, so that now the form of the cars was scarcely visible. The Rev. Dr. James J. Marks, Chaplain of the Sixty-third Pennsylvania Regiment, who witnessed this event from Savage's house, where he was piously engaged in caring for our sick, thus describes it:²⁸³

Reverend Marks had a vantage point to describe the destruction of the train:

The engine attached to this train was ready at any moment to spring on the track; each of the cars was set on fire, and when the flames began to wind around the wooden structures the train was put in motion. Being a descending grade it was soon rushing with the wildest fury, and every revolution of the wheels added to the volume of the flames, until the eye ceased to see the structures of the cars, and only beheld a terrific monster, which like some huge serpent of fire, had come forth to add new feature of horror to the scene. On and on it rushed, with a tread which caused the hills to tremble. I could not think of anything as a suitable representation of a spectacle so grand, but that of a thousand thunderbolts chained together, and wreathed with lightening, rushing with scathing fury and the roar of the tornado over the trembling earth. In a few seconds the engine, cars, and wheels were nothing but one long chain of fire, a frightful meteor flashing past us.²⁸⁴

The distance from Savage Station to the Chickahominy is about two and a half miles. I had placed myself on one of the eminences near our hospital, from which I could command a fine view of the railroad and the coming train. I knew that the long bridge over the river was burned. It plunged past me like some vast monster from a sea of fire. On it thundered until there was a stupendous crash, and far up in the heavens were thrown burning fragments of the cars. This was instantly succeeded by the explosion of innumerable great bombs and kegs of powder. Now a great shell dashed into the air with a wild and angry shriek – this burst and left behind a flash of flame; and again another darted forth and tore with fury through the branches of forest trees; and bomb after bomb

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Osborne, *The History of the Twenty-Ninth Regiment of Massachusetts*, p. 156-158.

²⁸⁴ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 245-247.

sprang from the fiery mass, hissing and screaming like fiends in agony, and coursing in every direction through the forests and the clear heavens. Crash came after crash for many minutes; and again some great shell exploded under the waters, and threw far up a jet of the stream, to which, as it fell in drops and spray, the light of the evening sun gave more than the splendor of ten thousand diamonds.²⁸⁵

Rarely, I believe, has there been a spectacle of greater wonder and grandeur. Such was the momentum of this train, that when it reached the chasm it sprang out fully forty feet, and the engine and first car leaped over the first pier in the stream, and there hangs suspended one of the most impressive monuments of the Peninsular disasters.²⁸⁶

Alfred Bellard, 5th New Jersey Volunteers, described the same scene as Heintzelman's III Corps left the field:

When the right of our army had fallen back, we commenced our retrograde movement bringing up the rear with our Corps. A short distance to the rear we passed a large pile of shot, shell and powder that was to be fired as soon as we were out of danger. In a few moments a terrific roar was heard caused by the explosion, and shell could be heard some time after exploding in different [sic] directions where they had been thrown. A train was also loaded with ammunition and after setting fire to the cars started down the track under a full head of steam. At the commissary depot on the railroad all the crackers and junk that could not be carried away was burnt to the ground, and I do not think that in the history of the rebellion there can be found any place where so much government property was destroyed, or so many sick and wounded left to the care of the enemy.²⁸⁷

Fair Oaks and Savage Station

War Correspondent George Alfred Townsend described what he saw at Savage Station when he arrived there on Saturday June 28.

When I returned to Savage's, where McClellan's head-quarters had temporarily been pitched, I found the last of the wagons creaking across the track, and filing slowly southward. The wounded lay in the out-houses, in the trains of cars, beside the hedge, and in shade of the trees about the dwelling. A little back, beside the wood, lay [Dr. Thaddeus] Lowe's balloon traps, and the infantry "guard," and cavalry "escort" of the commander-in-chief were encamped close to the new provost quarters, in a field beyond the orchard. An ambulance passed me, as I rode into the lane; it was filled with sufferers, and two men with bloody feet, crouched in the trail. From the roof of Savage's house floated the red hospital flag. Savage himself was a quiet Virginia farmer, and a magistrate. His name is now coupled with a grand battle.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Donald, *Gone For a Soldier*, p. 100.

²⁸⁸ Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*.

Reverend Marks and soldiers of Sumner and Heintzelman's III Corps were key eye witnesses to the abandonment of the supply base at Savage Station and Fair Oaks as well as the retreat. Marks was with the sick and wounded at the field hospital at Savage Station and described not only what he saw but also the reaction to being abandoned by the Army of the Potomac:

We waited in a state of the most gloomy expectation for tidings from the White House, still hoping and praying that our fears might be unreal. In the meantime everything wore an aspect the most somber.²⁸⁹

The wounded had increased to the number of 2000; the sick lying in the various hospitals in the camps and country-houses were brought in and lifted out of the ambulances, and placed on the ground; the drivers departed, and without nurses, physicians, or comrades, they were left in that scene of misery. Hundreds of these, as I passed along, beckoned to me, or uttered a low, beseeching cry, "Doctor, we are not to be left here, are we?" "Is there no water, doctor?" "Our wounds have not been dressed for three days." "We have had no medicines." "I have no blanket, doctor, and suffer greatly with the cold."²⁹⁰

The number of surgeons who had been detailed for service here was much smaller than was absolutely necessary for so many patients demanding care the most constant and watchful. For such is the great draft upon the nervous system, that a surgeon perform but few capital operations in a day without complete prostration and danger to his life. And I soon discovered that a surgeon cannot breathe the atmosphere poisoned with the exhalations of disorganized flesh and blood, without very soon suffering from an exhaustion which appears to paralyze every vital power. And after being for weeks with the more merciful in my judgment on physicians in hospitals; for I have been often compelled to turn away from many who came to my tent door, and begged, with tears, that I would wash and bandage their wounds, and destroy, with chloroform and spirits of turpentine, the maggots that tormented them. But sick and fainting from breathing an air so offensive, from sights so ghastly, from groans and shrieks of pain which the most gentle hand must wring from the suffering in dressing his wounds, I have fled from what I could no longer endure. I now began to comprehend the cause of the intense craving for stimulants, especially for brandy and whiskey, on the part of surgeons: the exhaustion was thus repaired, and they were able to endure what would have been otherwise impossible.²⁹¹

We now had at Savage Station about 2500 wounded men. There were lying in various houses before mentioned. Mr. Savage appeared to have built a house for every birthday and for every child that came to him, and now a man of grey hairs, he was surrounded by a village. Into all these houses the wounded were borne, and besides these places of shelter there were pitched fully 300 tents; for every tent were fifteen or twenty men. To three tents there was assigned a nurse; and, again, a surgeon to every four or five tents. These hospital tents being arranged in streets, every surgeon had his own ward, which

²⁸⁹ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 228-231.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

might include 100 or 150 patients. There were six or eight surgeons, mostly brigade surgeons, to whom was assigned the task of amputations.²⁹²

During the entire day of Saturday the various regiments and columns of the right wing marched by Savage Station, taking the Williamsburg road for the James River. The advance was slow, for beyond our own line we knew nothing of the enemy, and therefore were frequent halts of our army for throwing out skirmishers and scouts.²⁹³

Joel Cook described the retreat to Savage Station Saturday night:

On Saturday [June 28] evening at ten o'clock, the last of the Federal army had left Woodbury Bridge and were in full retreat toward Savage Station. The night was dark and cloudy, threatening rain. Numbers of straggling soldiers were mixed up with the wagons as they proceeded. Midnight brought them to the station; and there was the first horror of the journey. The sheds and tents of the hospital were filled to overflowing with sick and wounded, whom exposure and battle had rendered helpless. That railroad-station will always be a sad spot in the recollections of all who saw it.²⁹⁴

Chaplain Twichell of Heintzelman's III Corps arrived at the Division Hospital on the night of June 28 and described the events of June 29 in his July 5 letter to his father,

At the Hospital I found that the news had preceded me, and that every preparation was being made for a start at dawn. About 150 were to be left and the two good Doctors uttered no whisper of recoil from the duty laid upon them of encountering... imprisonment. We slept from 12 till 3 [June 29], when the marshalling of the sick battalion was commenced. According to instructions they were divided into squads and placed in command of officers who had been inmates of the Hospital. Our Major Toler was in command, with one thigh well nigh immovable through rheumatism. Such a crowd you never saw – the halt – the maimed – the disabled in every way. All had chosen to march and, under the impulse of fear, some were setting out who had before supposed themselves unable to save their lives by walking two rods. The sight was both sad and ludicrous. At length they were in motion slowly and painfully. The destination was James River, but what point of it was not known. The fervent hopes of every one made the distance short. Permitting the feeble cavalcade to proceed, I ran through the hospital to say good-bye and a cheering word to those I knew, and to add a last consolation to those I never expected to behold again in the flesh. I hated to leave those poor dying fellows, and offered my services to Dr. Sim to remain with them, in case he could send one of the Doctors on with the regiment; but he counseled otherwise. I gave the little hero Johnny whose leg came off the morning before, a kiss of true love, administered a hug to Dr. McAllister, waved a farewell to the assembled assistants and nurses who were retained, and proceeded to overtake the Major and his command. It was not without fears that I contemplated the fate of those left behind. There were possibilities which I did not like to contemplate. If a formal surrender to the proper officer could be effected, all would be

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*.

well. Both the Surgeons and the sick would be well treated and soon released, but a straggling squad might be their first entertainers, and something evil might happen. God be with them. To His mercy and protection let them be committed.²⁹⁵

War Correspondent George Alfred Townsend described leaving Savage Station on Sunday morning, June 29,

With a last look at Savage's white house, the abandoned wretches in the lawn, the blood-red hospital flag, the torn track and smouldering cars, I turned my face southward, crossed some bare plains, that had once been fields, and at eight o'clock [morning Sunday, 29 June] passed down the Williamsburg road, toward Bottom's Bridge. The original roadway was now a bottomless stretch of sand, full of stranded wheels, dead horses, shreds of blankets, discarded haversacks, and mounds of spilled crackers. Other routes for wagons had been opened across fields, over bluffs, around pits and bogs, and through thickets and woods. The whole country was crossed with deeply-rutted roads, as if some immense city had been lifted away, and only its interminably sinuous streets remained. Near Burnt Chimneys, a creek crossing the road made a ravine, and here I overtook the hindmost of the wagons. They had been stalled in the gorge, and a provost guard was hurrying the laggard teamsters. The creek was muddy beyond comparison, and at the next hill-top I passed "Burnt Chimneys," a few dumb witnesses that pointed to heaven. A mile or two further, I came to some of the retreating regiments, and also to five of the siege thirty-twos with which Richmond was to have been bombarded. The main army still lay back at their entrenchments to cover the retreat, and at ten o'clock I heard the roar of field guns; the pursuit had commenced, and the Confederates were pouring over the ramparts at Fair Oaks.²⁹⁶

While administering to the needs of the patients the morning of Sunday, June 29, Reverend Marks saw troops lined up and sent out two nurses to report on the appearance of friends or foes. They returned to report several regiments of Sumner's II Corps lining up for battle to defend the retreat of the vast supply trains until nightfall. Heintzelman's III Corps was in line south of Sumner.

I went out into the fields, and saw the long, dark lines of Meagher's Irish Brigade drawn up on the bluffs overlooking the river. I saw most distinctly the tents of the enemy in the open fields on the opposite heights, and heard the sound of axes and hammers at work cutting a road and construction a bridge.²⁹⁷

In a few moments Colonel Burke, of the 63rd New York, rode up to the gate of the hospital, called for me, and strongly urged the removal of all the inmates, as the probability was now almost certainty, that in a few moments the enemy would rush up and plant their batteries in the field about us, and the house and barns would be seized by

²⁹⁵ Messent, *The Civil War Letters*.

²⁹⁶ Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*.

²⁹⁷ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 237-242.

one party and the other alternately as the places of rallying and defence [sic]. He said he had been instructed by General Meagher to warn us, and urge our removal.²⁹⁸

I answered the colonel that we were without ambulances; that every one had been ordered away; that we had not one wagon, and were without horses. Except my saddle horse and baggage pony; that we had not more than six men well enough to help the others away; and for these to remove one hundred and fifty sick men, some of them in a dying condition, was simply impossible. We would have to remain and trust to God, as we had done before.²⁹⁹

The kind-hearted colonel was unwilling to leave us in a condition which he deemed so desperate, and he lingered several minutes, trying to counsel and devise some way for our escape. He said he would send men, if possible, from his regiment; but every man was needed at his post, and if he did, he could not take the responsibility, for the place to which he bore our men might be the spot of the severest carnage. But he urged me to ride up to head-quarters, to state our condition and the prospect for a battle around us, and urge, with all the eloquence possible, our instant removal. I thought it due to him and the men of whom I had charge, to follow his advice. I rode with all haste to Savage Station. As I approached it, I beheld the long lines of army wagons and ambulances stretching for miles, slowly retiring in the direction of James River. When I reached General Heintzelman's tent, I found every-thing foreshadowed an immediate removal; generals were there for council and commands – orderlies hurrying backwards and forwards in the wildest haste – surgeons, commissaries, colonels, crowding for directions and help. Now comes in a captain, with clothes torn and sword bent, with the tidings that the wagon train was hopelessly locked, and the troops were unable to proceed; then comes another, reporting that the enemy was crossing the Chickahominy at the Grapevine Bridge, and might be soon upon us. Another, that Jackson and his troops had taken White House, and destroyed stores and transports. Another announced that the woods were full of scouts and spies of the enemy, who were stealing across in small squads, and even now capturing sick officers and small parties who had strayed into the by-roads. All these announcements created a fresh commotion, and orderlies were dispatched with messages, and officers with commands.³⁰⁰

The general issued the orders with all the calmness of one familiar with the greatest dangers. He listened most kindly to my statement, and told me that nothing could be done to help me; that all the wounded at Savage Station would have to be left behind, and that General McClellan had ordered all the ambulances to depart unencumbered; that four or five thousand wounded and sick men would so embarrass the army that escape might be impossible; and that much as it was to be regretted, it was a matter of stern necessity to leave our wounded in the hands of the enemy.³⁰¹

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

Realizing his worst fears, Marks decided to remain with the sick and wounded at the hospital and await capture. He rode back and assembled the officers and men, anyone who could walk, under a mulberry tree to break the bad news.

I read to them a short portion of the New Testament, and then explained to them the actual position of things; that our army was retreating towards James River, and that our division had already started; and I advise such of them as felt they could walk a few miles to fall into the retiring columns; that some kind-hearted driver might permit them to ride, or that with the troops, if they should faint, some way would be provided to carry them on; that even if they should have to stop every few rods, it would be better than to fall into the hands of the enemy. I entreated the stronger to help the weaker; that God would send his angels to strengthen and defend them, if they, like the good Samaritan, lifted up and aided those who were ready to perish by the way; that the stores should be opened, and every man provided with all he needed.³⁰²

I likewise told them that I had now no apprehension that the enemy would cross the river below us, for they were crossing one mile higher up; to take their time, and pack up what they thought they could carry; if they could bear their guns, to take them; they might be better to-morrow, and able to strike another blow; and that I hoped they would remember their safety was not in any human arm of defence [sic], but in the watchful care of that God in whose hand was their breath and all their ways; if they fell exhausted, to pray to Him; if they could not rise again, and were left alone, to lift their eyes to Him to whom the dying thief looked and hoped, and died in peace. If they fell into the hands of the enemy, to trust God, and even their enemies should be made at peace with them: and if taken captives, not to be ashamed of their cause, but to defend it boldly. “Do not let the enemy think that our soldiers are without consciences of principles. They are rebels and traitors, but you are the soldiers of law, and the representatives of the principles for which our fathers fought; and do not forget that a prisoner does not part with all his rights, and though deprived of his gun, he is still at liberty to defend his government and her constitution.”³⁰³

Reverend Marks described the tragic experience of being left behind:

About three o'clock in the afternoon [June 29] General Heintzelman, surrounded by the officers of his staff, mounted his horse. The officers and soldiers who still lingered with their companions, now prepared to leave. And many a manly cheek was wet with tears as they bade farewell to those whom they never expected to meet again. Fathers had to drag themselves away from the couches of their sons; and after they had gone a few steps, would return to look once more, and to renew the oft-repeated instructions to nurse and surgeon. There were many sad partings. Up to this time the disabled had not known that they were to be left behind; and when it became manifest that such was to be their fate, the scene could not be pictured by human language. Some wounded men, who were left in their tents, struggled through the grounds, exclaiming they “would rather die than fall into the hands of the Rebels.” I heard one man crying out, “O my God! Is this the reward

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

I deserve for all the sacrifices I have endured from my wounds.” Some of the younger soldiers wept like children; others turned pale, and some fainted. Poor fellows! They thought this was the last drop of the cup of bitterness, but there were yet many to be added.³⁰⁴

About four o’clock we saw moving over the plain opposite to us the last of the ambulances and wagons, retiring in the distance, and the light of the evening sun was reflected in dazzling brilliance from the guns of the departing regiments [of Heintzelman’s III Corps]. Here and there was a horseman galloping through the dust; but the great throng of dashing officers, of plumed cavalry, of regiments with waving banners and music, passed away like the dream of a brilliant tournament. We were not, however, yet quite abandoned. Opposite to Savage Station, looking north, is a large dark pine forest. The field gradually ascends from the station to the road. On this field were standing in line of battle 20,000 men under General Sumner, the rear-guard of the army, left to hold in check the enemy until our troops were safe beyond White Oak Swamp.³⁰⁵

Joel Cook set the stage for the Battle of Savage Station:

General McClellan, upon the 28th, had made his head-quarters near Savage Station, and at one o’clock on the morning of the 29th he ordered his tents to be struck, and, with his staff and escort, proceeded toward White Oak Swamp. General Smith had charge of the rear, and was ordered to hold his position near the Chickahominy until the wagons were at a safe distance, and then slowly to follow them. At about daylight he began to retire over the road the baggage-trains had taken, and, shortly after, Generals Sumner, Heintzelman, and Keyes gradually changed their front so as to make it face the north, thus protecting the retreat from all attacks either of forces sent from the direction of Richmond or from the Chickahominy. The enemy, having discovered the movement, began to press after, but made no attacks until late in the day. By noon on Sunday, all the artillery, except that required to protect the rear of the retiring column, and also all the wagons, were well on their way to Charles City. General McCall followed immediately after them. Then came Generals Porter, Franklin, and Keyes, with their corps, General Heintzelman protecting the rear. Several attempts were made to flank him, but they were all unsuccessful, and the retreat was conducted in perfect order.³⁰⁶

Lieutenant Favill, French’s Brigade, Richardson’s Division, Sumner’s II Corps, described arriving at the line of battle in his diary:

Soon after taking position, we examined the ground in rear, and found in an immense field near to the swamp, a great park of wagons, ambulances and artillery, and several thousand men, in close column, awaiting their turn to move along. We saw at once that it would be necessary for us to hold the ground till long after dark, to enable them to get

³⁰⁴ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 247-248.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*.

away, and so we returned to the front, and busied ourselves with strengthening the lines.³⁰⁷

Starting at five o'clock on June 29, Sumner's II Corps with part of Franklin's VI Corps fought the Battle of Savage Station holding their ground until nine o'clock then regrettably joined the retreat. A couple thousand more wounded joined those already at Savage's farm and Reverent Marks with the sick and wounded remaining at Savage's farm began prisoners of war. The vast wagon and ambulance train, combined with the artillery, had but one narrow dirt road with which to reach White Oak Swamp with General Huger racing to cut them off from the James.³⁰⁸

The evening of the Battle of Savage Station, the main body of the Army of the Potomac camped near Charles City, six miles from the James River; and the column on the other road slept 15 miles from the James.³⁰⁹

Lieutenant Favill described the scene after the Battle of Savage Station:

After dark the situation with dead and wounded men and the cries of the latter in the still night air were most distressing. Stern necessity compelled us to leave most of them where they fell, to bleed to death, and to suffer unspeakable anguish in the dark somber woods, or star lit fields. A great many, near the station, were brought in by parties from the hospitals, but as the hospitals were full, they could only place them on the grounds surrounding the large tents. Still, this was better than lying alone in the distant fields, and all were anxious for event this relief. The numerous parties, searching the fields and woods, with lanterns, gave a weird and melancholy appearance to the surroundings. There must have been several thousand rebel dead and wounded scattered about the fields, most of whom, being furthest away, were entirely neglected. About nine o'clock, the colonel [Zook] and I rode to the rear, to see how the retreat was progressing, and were glad to find all the wagons, ambulances, and artillery all gone; their small deserted camp fires alone indicated the position they had occupied. A column of infantry, moving at a rapid pace down the hill into the black swamp, showed the column was well under way, so we returned to our command, to await orders. On our way back, we rode past the great hospitals, and were astonished to see such a multitude of wounded men. Hundreds of those brought in from Peach Orchard and the evening's battle field, lay on the ground about the tents, and hard-working surgeons, lanterns in hand, were going amongst them here and there, saving a gallant life by timely aid. It began to rain as we rode past, which added to the distress of this great multitude of wounded and dying men.³¹⁰

The Monday, June 30, after the Battle of Savage Station, the Confederates surveyed the damage of the railroad bridge and found it not as bad as the Union claimed. Reverend Marks probably could not have seen the Chickahominy from Savage Station.

³⁰⁷ Favill, *Diary of a Young Officer*.

³⁰⁸ Marks, *The Peninsular Campaign in Virginia*, p. 248-255.

³⁰⁹ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*.

³¹⁰ Favill, *Diary of a Young Officer*.

On Monday last, at the arrival of the train from Richmond at a point on the [Richmond &] York River Railroad about nine miles from town, where the retreating enemy had set fire to and completely burned up a train of cars, Alexander Dudley, Esq., President of the road, accompanied by the Superintendent, Mr. John McFarland, and Captain P. G. Colligan, of the Va. Ordnance, took a hand car and started in the direction of the White House. On arriving within a quarter of a mile of the trestle bridge which spans the Chickahominy, they observed a locomotive on the track at the far end of the bridge. The engine was enveloped in smoke, and it being impossible to determine what was the cause, the parties on the car being armed entered the woods and came up close to the engine. To their amazement they found that the bridge was on fire, and also that two platform cars attached to the engine were in full blaze. Getting upon the bridge they found that there was imminent danger of the locomotive falling through and the whole bridge being destroyed. Fortunately they found in the swamp some Yankee camp kettles, and attaching one of these to a long pole they succeeded in lifting water from the swamp, and after three hours incessant labor they completely extinguished the fire. They then examined the extent of the damage to the bridge, and found that on the White House side 80 feet span of the trestle work and four or five cars loaded with ammunition had been blown to pieces.³¹¹

The locomotive was headed towards Richmond in front of it were two flats, the throttle was open, and it was plain that the train was started for the bridge with a slow match attached, so as to explode on the bridge, and thus destroy bridge and all; fortunately, however, the tender got partially dislodged, and thus checked the engine until the steam gave out. The scene in the swamps beneath baffles all description; the wheels and axles and heavy timbers of the cars were blown far on either side of the bridge. Cannon shot, shell, cartridges, and commissariat stores were strewn about in every direction, and the stores of various kinds, where they had fallen in heaps, were rapidly burning.³¹²

Mr. Dudley returned to Richmond for aid to extricate the engine, and the other two gentlemen, having crossed the swamp, reached Duval's, a Yankee camp, near Mr. Duval's residence. Here we found a large number of tents standing, and piled around were boxes of axes, shovels, spades, and scythe blades, together with anvils, vices, and all sorts of implements for a smithy, as well as carpenter's tools. Smiths forges had been set up and ovens constructed, and all the arrangements indicated great industry and energy on the part of the occupants.³¹³

The Yankees evidently retreated in hot haste along the railroad. The woods and road all the way are almost literally covered with arms, accoutrements, clothing, and commissariat stores, flung about in the greatest confusion.³¹⁴

The engine saved by the above mentioned gentlemen is worth from \$10,000 to \$15,000, and is of Yankee make. The importance of the preservation of the bridge cannot be over

³¹¹ "The Chickahominy Bridge," *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, July 2, 1862.

³¹² *ibid*

³¹³ *ibid*

³¹⁴ *ibid*

estimated. One hour later and the engine would have gone through; and had not the parties arrived on the ground the whole structure would have been almost entirely destroyed during the night.³¹⁵

The bridge will soon be repaired, and Mr. Dudley and Mr. McFalland have already cleared the track of obstruction, so that the ambulance train can now go out to the bridge.³¹⁶

It is a singular fact, that Mr. Dudley, many months ago, predicted that the York River railroad would be a temptation to the Yankees to come to Richmond by way of York river, and that the swamp would be to many of them their grave.³¹⁷

On to White Oak Swamp

Joel Cook described the journey to White Oak Swamp:

From Savage Station, all the way to the James River, the retreat had to be conducted by two roads, one of which crossed the stream bordering White Oak Swamp by a rude log bridge, so imbedded in mud that every wagon had to be assisted at the crossing. Over these roads a vast army, with all its baggage, passed. About two thousand wagons and twenty-five hundred head of cattle were part of the baggage of the Federal troops. The White Oak Swamp bridge was some six miles from the station, and, from one end of the road between them to the other, wagons, horses, soldiers, cannon, pontoon-boats, caissons, ambulances, and every thing conceivable which can be used by an army, were at times brought to a halt. At almost every step, an officer urged them on. Twenty rows of wagons stood side by side, teamsters swearing, horses baling, and officers shouting. Babel was a second time seen on earth. And over all could be heard General Fitz-John Porter, as he urged his horse up a hill, shouting to a wagoner not to block up the entire road. Many soldiers, straggling through the blockade, passed the swamp, and when they reached the beautiful country beyond, completely tired out, lay down on the ground and slept during the heat of the day. Thousands lay there, belonging to every regiment in the army. Thus passed Sunday morning; and toward night all aroused to continue their weary journey.³¹⁸

During the day the Eighth Illinois Cavalry, commanded by Colonel Farnsworth, had been sent over the longest road, to ascertain if it was clear of the enemy. It ran through dense woods in a circuitous manner. The reconnaissance returned, reporting favorably, and at dusk a long train of wagons, preceded by the cavalry-regiment, commenced moving from Charles City toward the James River. General Keyes's corps was assigned to the rear of this column. At an early hour the next morning, the head of the column, without accident,

³¹⁵ *ibid*

³¹⁶ *ibid*

³¹⁷ *ibid*

³¹⁸ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*.

and without meeting any resistance, reached the [James] river at a point two miles west of Harrison's Landing.³¹⁹

The short road, which was nearer Richmond, was not so free from Rebels. On Sunday morning [June 29], a squadron of cavalry which had been sent out to reconnoiter returned with the information that the enemy were about a mile distant from the camp. Their strength was not known, but was supposed to be small. At seven o'clock in the morning, the pickets reported that some Rebel cavalry were marching along this road toward Charles City. Dispositions were at once made to receive them, and two pieces of artillery were planted in a concealed position, having the range of the road along which the enemy were approaching. A volley poured into them caused a most precipitate retreat, and General Martindale's brigade of General Porter's corps at once occupied the ground upon which the cavalry had appeared. In the afternoon, Generals Morell and McCall, with their divisions, and a large amount of artillery, were sent forward to open the way to the James River. They moved cautiously, and after a few slight skirmishes, reached Turkey Bend. Late in the night a train of wagons, followed by infantry, began moving along the road, and upon Monday morning, the 30th, General McClellan broke up his camp and encamped that evening on the river-bank at Turkey Bend.³²⁰

Meanwhile, Chaplain Twichell and his column of invalids from Heintzelman's Corps having started their march before dawn reached White Oak Swamp early on June 29,

The pursuit of the Hospital column was not a long one. Slowly the convalescents crept along, with great pluck, it is true, but with small speed. Frequent halts were needful and the way wore wearily. Passing White Oak Swamp bridge, just where we were camped before our boys marched that Saturday night [June 28] over to Fair Oaks, we dragged on till the sun began to relax the thin strained muscles, when we halted in a grove for the rest of the day, having accomplished six good miles. White Oak Swamp bridge is a point of interest now, for it was there that a fierce battle lasting a whole day was fought when our rear had crossed. When we passed it, wagons were crossing at the rate of 100 to 120 an hour and so they continued for 36 hours. Nothing was allowed to stop the procession. The engineers were busy as bees and did their work nobly. The approaching battle was foreshadowed by the placing of batteries all over the adjoining eminences. The heat of the sun was not our only reason for so long a halt. Scouts sent ahead reported the enemy's pickets of cavalry on every road. Dr. Brown of our 1st Regt. Who was along with us, and myself, rode ahead for information and ran right into a fight between some of the [Gen. Erasmus D.] Keyes artillery and a band of rebels. It was a very bloody affair resulting in the death [of] 9 of the enemy, and a number of wounded and prisoners. The poor fellows fell into a complete trap and our cannon, in two discharges, did all the mischief for them, but great service for us, and it made the enemy very cautious about approaching any portion of our advance.³²¹

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Messent, *The Civil War Letters*.

War Correspondent George Alfred Townsend arrived at the bridge at 11:00 in the morning of Sunday, 29 June.

At eleven o'clock our little party [of correspondents] crossed White Oak Creek. There was a corduroy bridge upon which the teams travelled, and a log bridge of perilous unsteadiness for foot passengers. But the soldiers were fording the stream in great numbers, and I plunged my horse into the current so that he splattered a group of fellows, and one of them lunged at me with a bayonet. Beyond the creek and swamp, on the hillsides, baggage wagons and batteries were parked in immense numbers. The troops were taking positions along the edge of the bottom, to oppose incursions of the enemy, when they attempted pursuit, and I was told that the line extended several miles westward, to New Market Cross roads, where, it was thought, the Confederates would march out from Richmond to offer battle. The roadway, beyond the swamp, was densely massed with horse, foot, cannon, and teams. The latter still kept toward the James, but the nags suffered greatly from lack of corn. Only indispensable materiel had been hauled from the Chickahominy, and the soldiers who fought the ensuing protracted battles were exhausted from hunger. Everything had an uncomfortable, transient, expectant appearance, and the feeble people that limped toward the *ultima thule* looked fagged and wretched.³²²

Captain Le Duc was responsible for that train of wagons, ambulances and artillery, which followed the road nearest Richmond; and he described the challenge of getting across White Oak Swamp on the night of June 29:

The transportation of some of the troops [Porter's V Corps] that had been fighting on the north side of the Chickahominy was ahead of me, and made the delay that gave the opportunity to load some of my teams with supplies that were not receipted. The halting of a single wagon for any purpose checked the entire movement. There was no such thing as passing unless a new road was cut around the obstruction. The weather was damp. Soon a drizzle commenced which emphasized the darkness. After a halt longer than usual, I became impatient, and pushed my horse through the brush. Reaching the head of the train, I found a team halted, and the driver on the wagon asleep. I had to shake him violently to wake him, and he said he had run into something, and having been up and without sleep for two nights, he could not keep awake to find out what was the trouble.³²³

I shaved some light bark from a tree, and, with some other light stuff made a fire on the ground, near the wagon that was fast....³²⁴

The light of my fire disclosed the difficulty and enabled the driver of the artillery wagon to back off, and resume the road. The trains being again in motion. I went forward until the swamp was reached just at break of day. I saw an artillery caisson to which four horses were attached, and the driver could get the discouraged team to move only a few yards at a time through mud which was up to the axle. I saw it would be impossible to get

³²² Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*.

³²³ Le Duc, *Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster*, p. 82-84.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

my train through that swamp, and ordered the wagon masters to park their wagons in an open field, which inclined toward the swamp, as fast as they came up, and to feed the animals. Then I rode back to a camp of engineers we had passed, and had the sentry wake the officer in command, and of him I asked questions about the swamp.³²⁵

He had been sent, he told me, to build a bridge over the stream, so that the artillery could cross safely. His wagon of tools was down by the stream, and in it were axes to the use of which I could help myself. He said his men had been up so much of nights, and so pushed, that he must let them have some sleep and breakfast; after which he would bring them down to work; that a general in command of troops was camped on the other side of the creek, and that a good stone road was covered by trees that had been felled to obstruct it.³²⁶

I rode back, struggled through the swamp, crossed the stream, and found the camp of the general (General Morrell, I think), who was wakened with difficulty to listen to my request for a detail of five hundred men, and my explanation of the necessity for the detail. He ordered it, and it was made immediately. We made short work of that quarter of a mile of big timber, and I soon had the transportation moving at as fast a gait as possible. The sticky places were the bridge, and the *debouche* on the south side, where the holes cut in the soft ground soon caused a stoppage. But I would not allow any halt to the movement across the bridge, and found it necessary sometimes to break the trains, greatly to the discontent of the officer in charge. A finely equipped train passing over was stopped by a leading team sticking in a mud hole. I ordered the teamster to pull to one side, and clear the bridge. A lieutenant on the other side hallooted to the driver to keep his place, not to break the train. I pricked up the mules with my sword, and compelled obedience to my order. When the lieutenant got across he was noisy with anger, and said: "This is General McClellan's headquarters train, and I am a provost marshall, and I arrest you."³²⁷

I said: "I care nothing for a headquarters train, or any other train. I know nothing of your power to arrest, but I know that this bridge has to be kept clear to save the lives of soldiers of the second corps, who are bringing up the rear. If you have any right to arrest me, you can't do it, but I will promise to report in arrest to the Commander-in-chief within twenty-four hours, and I promise further to give you a good, old fashioned, country licking the first time I meet you after I get clear of this more important duty. Now you get out of the way, and get out quick!"³²⁸ And he went.

I heard vociferous laughter, and looking round saw, seated on the grass a little way off, my engineer friend, (Alexander, I think his name was,) who had ridden with me after sweet potatoes, sitting near his grazing horse, laughing immoderately. I rode up to him, and said: "Something seems to have touched your funny bone – what is it?"³²⁹

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

“Why,” he replied, “I was sent here to keep this bridge clear, and to see you doing my duty so well tickles me.”³³⁰

“Well, you are here now,” I said, “and you want to keep that bridge clear until the artillery is all over, and some of it in position on that rise just back of you, to protect this crossing. I’ll leave you to enjoy your “tickle,” while I go and find my own train that passed over some time back, and get something to eat and drink, as I have had nothing since yesterday morning.”³³¹

Chaplain Twichell, accompanying the wounded of Hooker’s Division Hospital, found the road to the James River open the night of June 29 and they decided to march that night.

At about night [June 29] we learned that the City Point road was open and that a long baggage train with a strong guard was to start upon it, and travel through the night. We resolved to avail ourselves of this protection, as, according to orders, we were most anxious to get the sick safely to the river as soon as possible. It was hard work for the weak legs to dodge among the wagons but we made about six miles more, and halted at 8 ½ o’clock in a piece of woods, where the exhausted men lay down on the ground and slept till 12 when the last of the train passed and we were compelled to rouse them up and push ahead, not knowing what might befall us if we tarried. As we proceeded we halted oftener and longed for the end. Thus far excitement kept our staggering line in motion, but this could not last much longer. Another hour’s sleep between 3 ½ and 4 ½ o’clock by the roadside, another start, another weary pull of flagging miles and James River came in sight at 8 ½ o’clock a. m. We had been told that the hospital boats would be in waiting, with comfort, rest, care and refreshment, and this goal we kept constantly in sight. Down to the river we crawled. A cavalry guard stopped us at the gate. The boats were not there. Too tired to indulge in emotion of any kind, half-dead with fatigue, the men crept down into a cool, grassy ravine by the river side, spread their blankets and sank into a stupor of sleep and exhaustion, having accomplished full 20 miles in 28 hours – a feat seldom equaled, I think, in the annals of war. Let us leave them here for a while to rally their powers and travel back on the road, to look for the stragglers, who threw themselves down in despair, and see how the tide of battle goes. I felt great anxiety for the regiment. Ever since early morning [June 30] the thunder of our protecting canon had been sounding upon the air, and the frequency of the report showed that no boys’ play was transacting. A careful count reported about 70 discharges to the minute and it was not far off. I started to see and learn the fate of my flock. After several hours of effort, I abandoned the design. The road was absolutely impossible. There was little real confusion, although to the uninitiated it might seem otherwise. Amid noise indescribable the army, with its stores contained in thousands of wagons, and all munitions of war, was working rapidly and successfully toward its determined position on the river, but it was not in the power of man under ordinary inducements to stem the tide and make headway. I was quite near the gun boats when they opened their magnificent fire, and defeated a well-directed effort to pierce the centre of our vast column, by a movement down from

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

Richmond and paralleled to the river, at a distance of 1 ½ miles. Had this attempt not been timely frustrated, the Army of the Potomac were now only a historical fact. At dark I returned to some of our stragglers working their way along bravely and some that had secured a hard seat in the baggage wagons. As soon as I reached the river retreat I spoke of, one of our colored men came to me and said, "Please Sir! Johnny wants to see you." "Johnny!!" said I, "What do you mean?" "He came in an ambulance, Sir, and is close by here on the hill." Under the darkey's guidance I went and there was the noble little fellow placed on the ground on an ambulance bed, also a number of other severely wounded men from our Division Hospital. I was both amazed and delighted. It appeared that a few ambulances had been sent to the hospital after we left and filled with those best fitted for the journey in the Doctor's opinion. Johnny was in excellent spirits although tired, and his pale face lighted up with a smile of real pleasure when he saw me coming. I assisted a Surgeon in dressing his leg, and found it doing very well so far, although I have grave doubts as to the result. It was a strange sight, this dressing horrid wounds, out of doors, by the light of a candle, and the deep still river flowing by. Well! War has strange sights.

As it turned out, the wounded had arrived at the wrong location on the James River.

War Correspondent George Alfred Townsend record,

During the rest of the night [June 29] the weary fugitives were crossing White Oak Creek and Swamp. Toward daybreak, the last battery had accomplished the passage; the bridge was destroyed; and preparations were made to dispute the pursuit in the morning.³³²

McClellan recorded that by midnight all the troops were on the road to White Oaks Swamp with French's Brigade in the rear. All crossed the bridge by five o'clock in the morning of June 30 and the bridge was destroyed. On the night before, McClellan had instructed Porter and Heintzelman to push to the James River and the other corps to defend the approaches from Richmond with Franklin's Corps guarding the passage of White Oak Swamp. The next morning he "found, notwithstanding the all the efforts of my personal staff and other officers, the roads were blocked by wagons, and there was great difficulty in keeping the trains in motion."³³³

Osborne, 29th Massachusetts, Irish Brigade of Richardson's Division, Sumner's II Corps, described their arrival at White Oak Swamp:

The storm spoken of in the last chapter continued all night. The roads were in a very bad condition; the entire army and trains had passed over them, and this, together with the rain, had served to render them almost impassable. The effects of the retreat were apparent all along the route; lying beside the road were broken wagons and hundreds of sleeping men. These men had straggled from their commands and lain down to spend the night; but as the rear guard passed along, they were aroused and forced to move toward White Oak Swamp. Through this swamp runs a sluggish stream called White Oak Swamp Creek, bounded on both sides by an extensive morass, which, in its natural conditions, was impassable for an army and its heavy trains. While the preparations for the retreat

³³² Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*.

³³³ McClellan, *Report*, p. 134-135.

were being made, General Barnard and his engineers performed the remarkable feat of construction a raised corduroy road over the whole space of this swamp and morass, about two hundred yards, throwing across the creek a number of bridges, and arranging for each bridge an independent wagon-road through the forest. When the [Irish] Brigade reached here, on the Monday morning, the 30th of June, a large number of wagons were found waiting for their turn to cross over the stream, and the greatest confusion prevailed. By daylight, however, the trains had all crossed over the creek, and, shortly after, followed the troops. General Richardson's division was the last to cross, and when over, formed in line of battle, the Irish Brigade and Twenty-ninth Regiment being nearest the creek, and thereby constituting the rear of the entire army.³³⁴

The men were so weary from the great fatigues they had endured, that many fell asleep as they stood leaning on their guns. Soon after sunrise, the cavalry crossed, driving before them a horde of stragglers; the bridges were blown up, and the necessary disposition made of the troops to repel an attack from the stream, and took up a position in a little valley, a short distance from a larger farm-house (Nelson's). Here the entire forenoon was passed in quiet; the men made a little coffee, the last of three days' rations, [they had drawn on June 26] and received a small supply of raw salt pork and hard-tack.³³⁵

About one o'clock in the afternoon [June 30], while our men were asleep upon the ground, the enemy [Jackson] suddenly, without any warning, opened with all their guns a furious fire. There had been gathered here a large number of our wagons and several pontoon trains. Just as the fire opened, these trains were preparing to move on, and the mules, several hundred in number, had been detached from the wagons and driven to the creek for water. The result was a stampeded of all these animals; and the men, suddenly aroused from sleep by the firing, found themselves in the midst of a herd of crazed mules, braying and running in all directions. The shot and shell from the enemy's batteries were falling like hail about the troops, and at one time a movement to the rear commended. This was quickly checked, however, and the Irish Brigade was ordered forward to support our batteries, which were now being placed in position on the crest of a little hill at the left of Nelson's house, to reply to the fire of the enemy... The situation was serious; it was necessary to get the trains away; and to do this, the enemy must be prevented from crossing the creek.³³⁶

Lieutenant Favill, French's Brigade of Richardson's Division, Sumner's II Corps, occupied the high ground overlooking the crossing of White Oak Swamp as rear guard of the retreat and described the scene below:

To the left and rear was parked a splendid pontoon train, apparently deserted, and in the rear, and on the right, covered with wagons, their teams unhitched, going to and from the river, where they were taken to water by the teamsters, preparatory to an early start. All the troops were lying down, almost every one fast asleep, and with the exception of the braying of the mules, and the chopping of the pioneers corps [destroying the bridge], all

³³⁴ Osborne, *The History of the Twenty-Ninth Regiment of Massachusetts*, p. 161-162.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

was quiet, and peaceful. As I had to await the complete destruction of the bridge, I dismounted; passed the bridle over an arm and lay down, and in a moment was fast asleep. Suddenly I jumped to my feet, awakened by what seemed to be a most terrific earthquake shock. Looking about me, I saw across the river a little to the left twenty-four guns within easy range furiously shelling our position. The hill which their guns were placed, the other side of the stream, was ablaze with fire, and the air over my head filled with shot and shell, howling, screeching, and exploding amongst the guns and men on the ground above. At the very opening, the mules took fright and galloped wildly about the field. Many of the teamsters, panic-stricken, leaped upon their backs, and galloped to the rear at full spread, overthrowing everybody and everything in their way. At the train, the stampede was complete; everybody, and every team galloped away as fast as possible, abandoning the wagons to find safety for themselves. The scene was so ridiculous, that for a moment the men forgot the enemy's fire, to laugh at the misfortunes of the quartermaster's department. It was not long however, before the officers in charge stopped the skeddaddle, brought their men and teams back again, and marched off their trains in good order.³³⁷

War Correspondent George Alfred Townsend likewise described being awoken by Jackson's artillery,

A crash and a stunning shock, as of a falling sphere, aroused me at nine o'clock. A shell had burst in front of our [Colonel Murphy's] tent, and the enemy's artillery was thundering from Casey's old hill, beyond the swamp. As I hastily drew on my boots, - for I had not otherwise undressed, - I had opportunity to remark one of those unaccountable panics which develop among civilian soldiers. The camps were plunged into disorder. As the shells dropped here and there, among the tents and teams, the wildest and most fearful deeds were enacted. Here a caisson blew up, tearing the horses to pieces, and whirling a canoneer among the clouds. There an ammunition wagon exploded, and the air seemed to be filled with fragments of wood, iron, and flesh. A boy stood at one of the fires, combing out his matted hair; suddenly his head flew off, spattering the brains, and the shell - which we could not see - exploded in a piece of woods, mutilating the trees. The effect upon the people around me was instantaneous and appalling. Some, that were partially dressed, took to their heels, hugging a medley of clothing. The teamsters climbed into the saddles, and shouted to their nags, whipping them the while. If the heavy wheels hesitated to revolve, they left horses and vehicles to their fate, taking themselves to the woods; or, as in some cases, cut traces and harness, and galloped away like madmen. In a twinkling our camps were almost deserted, and the fields, woods, and roads were alive with fugitives, rushing, swearing, falling, and trampling, while the fierce bolts fell momentarily among them, making havoc at every rod.³³⁸

Alfred Bellard, 5th New Jersey, of Heintzelman's III Corps, described the action at White Oak Swamp:

³³⁷ Favill, *Diary of a Young Officer*.

³³⁸ Townsend, *Campaigns of a Non-combatant*.

About 10 o'clock the rebels commenced shelling our wagon train, and our brigade was ordered out to drive them back. By flank movement we succeeded and the train was safe. The teamsters had already commenced to cut the traces of their horses, ready, to save themselves on horseback at the expense of the ammunition. Our Col. was equal to the emergency however, for seeing their intentions he threatened to put an end to their lives if they did not keep with their wagons.³³⁹

Meanwhile McClellan had no word on the route to the James River:

The engineer officers whom I had sent forward on the 28th to reconnoitre [sic] the roads had neither returned nor sent me any reports or guides. Generals Keyes and Porter had been delayed – one by losing the road, and the other by repairing an old road - and had not been able to send any information. We then knew of but one road for the movement of the troops and our immense trains.³⁴⁰

While Jackson attacked the Union rear guard at White Oak Swamp on June 30, Captain Le Duc was searching for a route south to the James River:

After leaving the engineer I remember nothing until, before daybreak the following morning, I was awakened by Bachelder, who proposed we should ride out and explore a road. We soon mounted, and rode rapidly to the southwest. Seeing a farm house a little distant from the road, with two or three men on a porch, we rode up and made inquiry about roads, but meeting with unfriendly replies we turned and pursued our way to the forks of the road, where we met a Negro who gave us information readily. The Turkey Bend road directly south was the short way to the James River at Haxall's Landing; the road east was the Williamsburg Road; and that to the southeast the Charles City road. We cantered a short distance down the Turkey Bend road, and rode back toward our camp.³⁴¹

Passing some tents we saw General Marcy, chief of staff, whom I knew. Saluting, we asked for orders – where to take our transportation. General Marcy said: "We are going to the James River, but have no maps, no knowledge of the country or it's [sic] roads."³⁴²

I dismounted and traced the roads we had seen in the dirt. While I was doing this General McClellan came and looked over the dirt map, and asked questions. Finally he said to march: "Pleasanton's cavalry must have gone down the road where they saw the dead cavalry men. I think it will be safe to let the trains go down the Turkey Bend road."³⁴³

Then I said: "May we move at once?" We are hitched up, ready"³⁴⁴

³³⁹ Donald, *Gone For a Soldier*, p. 102.

³⁴⁰ McClellan, *Report*, p. 135.

³⁴¹ Le Duc, *Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster*, p. 84-86.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

“I would like to have you ride with me, Captain,” he said, “and show me where the roads meet.”³⁴⁵

“Very well, sir,” I answered, “Captain Bachelder can start the trains – but I have had no breakfast.”³⁴⁶

“There is opportunity here for breakfast,” he said. “I have just left the table, and some of my staff are yet there. Take your breakfast while my horse is saddled.” This being done we mounted and cantered off, accompanied by his orderly, who was a long way in the rear when we arrived at the cross roads. Here I pointed out the different roads, as explained by the negro, and he directed the movement of the transportation to be made down the road to Haxall’s Landing. I remembered my controversy with the lieutenant in charge of his headquarters train, and my promise to report under arrest, and told the General I knew nothing about provost marshalls, or their authority, but did know that the bridge must be kept in use, or the Second Corps would suffer, and I did keep it clear, in spite of the complaints of officers in charge of trains.³⁴⁷

“You were right, Captain,” he said, “you are discharged from arrest, and I thank you for the valuable service you have rendered the army by clearing a passage across White Oak Swamp, and getting the transportation over.”³⁴⁸

“I did not stay to get it all over,” I told him. “There was an engineer officer who came to my relief, and had charge when I left, but I would like to know the name of that lieutenant, for I promised him a good country thrashing, and I like to keep my promises.”³⁴⁹

“Let it pass, Captain, let it pass,” he said. “Things are altogether too serious now to indulge in personal animosities.”³⁵⁰

I was looking at General McClellan as he spoke, and saw that he was much worried, and that this movement was a retreat to the James River, and not a flank movement to take Richmond, as I and others hoped and expected. Bachelder had started the trains, and brought them to the Turkey Bend Road down which we were moving, when I discovered men in line of battle, parallel with the road, and learned that they were awaiting an attack from the enemy who were advancing, and that the trains were between the two lines of battle [of Glendale]. The soldiers commenced calling and jeering “Get out of here – *git* – double quick!”³⁵¹

As the road was on a dry ridge, and was down hill, the drivers put whip to their teams, and raced down to the broad clover field on Malvern Hill, escaping with the loss of but

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Le Duc, *Recollections of a Civil War Quartermaster*, p. 87-88.

one wagon of ammunition, hit by a shell. The hungry mules had only time for a few bites of clover when down came battery after battery of artillery, on the gallop, shouting: “Get out of here – we go into battery action here – get out – quick!”³⁵²

They took the place, cutting me off from the road that led down and around the hill. To regain the Haxall road was the problem. It ran around the hill, and was plainly seen at the bottom of a very steep slope of a hundred and fifty or two hundred feet. There seemed to be no other way out of the difficulty and I dropped the entire train down the steep slope by locking both hind-wheels, and attaching a long picket rope to the axles of foremost wagons, snubbed them down until a deep rut had been cut in the soft soil, then the rope was dispensed with. Some young trees on the brow of the hill afforded good snubbing posts, and the entire train went safely down with the upsetting of only two wagons. The drivers escaped serious injury. We made Haxall’s Farm having been fought, and the enemy repulsed [at Glendale].³⁵³

Joel Cook described a different version but without the Battles of Glendale or White Oak Swamp:

When an aid from Generals Morell and McCall rode back to report to General McClellan that the road was open to the James River, a thrill of relief ran through the entire army; and, when the troops reached the stream, the sight of the green fields skirting its banks invigorated all. It was upon the top of Malvern Hill that the view first broke upon the weary soldiers’ gaze, and it was there that the commander-in-chief, expressing the belief that, with a short time to prepare, the position could be held against any force the enemy were able to bring against it, disposed his forces to resist their anticipated attacks. This hill but three miles from Turkey Bend.³⁵⁴

Charles Haydon of the 2nd Rhode Island, Devens’ Brigade, Couch’s Division, Keyes’ III Corps described the final retreat to Malvern Hill,

July 1, 1862 Gen. Richardson by hard fighting opened the road on which we are to retreat. While we held the enemy in front the army nearly all retreated. Our dead & all the wounded who could not walk had to be left. It was sad indeed the way the poor fellows begged to be taken along. It could not be done. The most of them will die. The Rebs cannot even take care of their own wounded. Our Regt. was separated by some runaway teams & troops coming in on another road got between the parts.³⁵⁵

Alfred Bellard, 5th New Jersey, of Heintzelman’s III Corps, described his arrival at Malvern Hill:

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Joel Cook, *The Siege of Richmond*. Joel Cook’s description of the events is sketchy in regards to details when compared to his description of events at White House indicating he was probably among the journalist trapped there and what he described about the retreat to the James he must have learned later. He mentions nothing of the Battle of Glendale.

³⁵⁵ Sears, *For Country*.

At daylight July 1st we were off again on the way for Malvern Hill, our destination, passing on the road several lines of battle that were drawn up to cover our retreat, with artillery [sic] planted in their front and cavalry and infantry as skirmishers in front of the artillery [sic]. On reaching one of the hills we halted to rest and the sight that met our eyes was magnificent. From our position we had a good view of the grand Army of the Potomac or at least what was left of it. Waggons [sic] and artillery [sic] were parked. The cavalry were encamped, while the infantry were drawn up in long lines of battle, one behind the other, waiting for the enemy. The sun flashing on the bayonettes [sic] and brass guns presented a beautiful sight but was soon destined to pass in oblivion.³⁵⁶

The Army of the Potomac had successively protected the retreat of the trains, which safely arrived at Haxall's Landing on the James River. Lee brought up his Rebel Army to challenge McClellan for control of Malvern Hill on July 1.

Chaplain Twichel with the wounded from Hooker's Division Hospital further up river from Harrison's Landing described in his letter to his father on July 5, how he joined up with the rest of the Army of Potomac on July 1.

Next morning [July 1], after endeavouring [sic] to secure something to eat to the men, who spite of all their hardship were more refreshed and in better spirits than you could expect, I again started back for the purpose of finding the regiment, and moreover of seeing and consulting with Dr. Sim, concerning the subsistence and disposal of the sick. This time I succeeded. I found the regiment in line of battle on a huge plateau called Malvern hill, which hill was covered with artillery and troops. All the morning fight had raged and the enemy were still held back.

The Battle of Malvern Hill lasted all day and as it wined down, Chaplain Twichell assisted with the wounded, and then returned to the invalid of Hooker's Division Hospital,

In a few minutes the wounded began to be brought off from the field, when I repaired to the Hospital in the rear, lent a hand till dark at the work of dismemberment and nursing. Dr. Sim was there. He told me that to keep the sick well in the rear (or rather, advance) was all that could be done just then, but gave me some cans of soup to take to them. After dark, finding that there was abundance of help at the hospital, I returned to my previous charge and found them pretty much as before. A boat had come and removed the wounded. I never expect to see Johnny again. In the morning [July 2] we were awaked by the pouring rain, ... [A] cavalry officer came riding around in hot haste. "Turn out! Turn out! Every one who does not wish to be taken prisoner must leave without a minute's delay! The army has gone on and the enemy are upon us!" for a moment I thought I would counsel all to remain and be taken. It seemed as though the men *could not* go. But they did not await my advice or any one else's. Hastily gathering up their guns and blankets, preternaturally strong through fear, they started. I never knew it rain so. The three hours already past of it had converted the soft rich soil into yielding mud from which it was not easy for a strong man to pluck his feet. But off they went, filing in long, forlorn procession across the fields, under the guidance of a dragoon, and paralleled to

³⁵⁶ Donald, *Gone For a Soldier*, p. 103.

the road which was full of troops and artillery...The rear guard had evacuated the position held the day before, after holding it, like heroes that they were, against tremendous odds until the rest were safe. It seems that we had been forgotten and here we were, compelled to hasten or be left behind...Through thick woods, over ditches, and roads swimming in mud, thrust aside by the strong, cursed by the heartless, the heavy-hearted, helpless men struggled through six of seven miles to their final destination on the river. One large house and several barns were appropriated to the wounded, the sick were laid in the mud without a cover, and there lay for two whole days, until the wounded [were] placed on board the boats of the [Sanitary] Commission. Hard bread was given them and occasionally soup and coffee, but their condition was almost irredeemably wretched.³⁵⁷

Twichell mentioned that Hooker's Division preceded the invalid that morning and only his regiment of the New York Excelsior Brigade fought in the Battle of Malvern Hill.

Harrison's Landing

Harrison's Landing, Va³⁵⁸
July 18, 1862
General M. C. Meigs,

General: I was much gratified to receive your letter of the 13th, and trust you will always give me the benefit of what suggestions you may think fit to offer.

I had already stopped all the transportation (horses, mules, and wagons) afloat at the fortress, where it now remains subject to my orders. Many of the horse teams were broken up to fill up the batteries; meantime some good artillery horses were sent from Philadelphia. So far as I can learn the batteries have received horses, as many as were required, on demand. I still have for issue some 200 fit for artillery and cavalry service. We have too much cavalry for any real advantage to us.

Many were of opinion that we had too much land transportation, but it was generally supposed we had a far greater number of wagons than an actual inspection shows we have. We have here now about 2,000 wagons for service with troops, engineer and supply trains; each regiment is allowed six. There are some 106,000 men in this army present, and Burnside is expected to re-enforce it with thirty regiments. The operations may require the use of considerable land carriage. I do not think we have too much. As the matter stands now, the amount can easily and quickly be augmented or reduced, as circumstances may render necessary. There will be no trouble if they are kept in the proper condition and place in encampments and on marches. They gave infinite cause for anxiety and embarrassment in the last week of June. It is a miracle so few were lost. The spectacle at times of entangled wagons with batteries and troops was frightful, though we reached here in good order and spirits.

³⁵⁷ Messent, *The Civil War Letters*.

³⁵⁸ OR, Series I, Volume II, Part III, p. 326-7.

The army is a magnificent one to-day. All we require now is more men and generals full of health and desire to go into Richmond. We must and soon can go forward. This army must not go back one foot. The commanding general is in excellent health and full of confidence, and is the "pride and boast" of his men.

The Peninsula is sickly here, as it was at White House. White laborers cannot stand the climate; we have but few; we depend on contrabands chiefly. I have invariably made use of all fair means to increase the number. I brought away every man, woman, and child from the Pamunkey; that is, they took passage on our boats. I am sending along this river to Norfolk, even to North Carolina, for colored laborers. Where the army actually is he negroes come in to a man almost. I hope next week to have the numbers much increased.

I am, very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

Rufus Ingalls
Lieutenant-Colonel, Aide-de-Camp, Chief Quartermaster.

In Rufus Ingalls report to MG McClellan on February 17, 1863, he claimed:

It appears from my records that on the 20th following [July] there were present with the army about 3,000 wagons for baggage and supplies, 350 ambulances, 7,000 cavalry, 5,000 artillery, and 5,000 team horses and 8,000 mules.³⁵⁹

As the adjutant of the 57th New York Volunteer Infantry, Favill described the administrative activity that followed at Harrison Landing.

The Army now settled down for a comfortable rest, and the administrative bureaus began their activity, the executive officers working from morning till night. After the tremendous campaign just closed, there is an immense amount of work to do. Every man must be satisfactorily accounted for, as well as every article of public property. Our losses cannot have been less than six or eight thousand men, and a fabulous lot of stores, of the reason given for its abandonment, or destruction. All this must be accounted for, and the reason given for its abandonment, or destruction. The muster rolls require the greatest care, to avoid doing injustice, for every man reported absent without leave, must be restored to his place by court martial, which is slow and uncertain. In the meantime the man, if again with his regiment, is debarred from drawing pay, or doing duty, and is a source of weakness, rather than strength to his regiment. Consequently, adjutants are busy people in camp, as well as regimental quartermasters, who have to re-equip the whole command wherever necessary. I have only one clerk, and write every morning till noon.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁹ Report of BG Rufus Ingalls, US Army, Chief Quartermaster, February 17, 1863, OR, Series I, Volume II, Part I, p. 165.

³⁶⁰ Favill, *Diary of a Young Officer*.

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