



# **The Overland Campaign: The Battles of the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, North Anna, and Cold Harbor**

*Charles River Editors*

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\*Includes pictures of the battles' important generals.

\*Includes several maps of the battles.

\*Includes accounts of the fighting written by generals and soldiers.

\*Includes a Bibliography of each battle for further reading.

“Grant and Lee were about as evenly matched in military talent as any two opposing generals have ever been. Grant's strength was unwavering adherence to his strategic objective. He made mistakes, but the overall pattern of his campaign reveals an innovative general employing thoughtful combinations of maneuver and force to bring a difficult adversary to bay on his home turf. Lee's strength was resilience and the fierce devotion that he inspired in his troops. He, too, made mistakes and often placed his smaller army in peril. But each time—Spotsylvania Court House and the North Anna River come to mind—he improvised solutions that turned bad situations his way.” - Gordon C. Rhea

The Overland Campaign that pitted Robert E. Lee against Ulysses S. Grant is one of the most famous campaigns of the Civil War, and perhaps its greatest chess match. While Grant sought to destroy Lee's Army of Northern Virginia along the way to Richmond, Lee aimed to defend his capital while staying alert for a golden opportunity to strike a decisive blow against Grant's Army of the Potomac. The result was an incredibly costly campaign that saw 4 major battles and near continuous fighting in May and June 1864. At the Battle of the Wilderness (May 5-7, 1864), Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee had fought to a standstill in their first encounter, failing to dislodge each other despite incurring nearly 30,000 casualties between the Union Army of the Potomac and the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. Despite the fierce fighting, Grant continued to push his battered but resilient army south, hoping to beat Lee's army to the crossroads at Spotsylvania Court House, but Lee's army beat Grant's to Spotsylvania and began digging in, setting the scene for on and off fighting from May 8-21 that ultimately inflicted more casualties than the Battle of the Wilderness. In fact, with over 32,000 casualties among the two sides, it was the deadliest battle of the Overland Campaign.

After Spotsylvania, Grant and Lee both raced to the next natural defensive line, the North Anna River, where Lee sprang a trap for Grant by establishing an inverted V as a defensive line, with the salient touching the North Anna River, which would allow the Army of Northern Virginia to use interior lines to fall upon the separate wings of the Union army if it tried to cross the river. As fate would have it, Grant would fall into Lee's trap, only for Lee to be debilitated by illness at the crucial moments, allowing Grant to realize the potential mistake and avoid a major pitched battle.

By the time the two armies reached Cold Harbor near the end of May 1864, Grant incorrectly thought that Lee's army was on the verge of collapse. On June 3, 1864, sensing he could break Lee's army, Grant ordered a full out assault at dawn in the hopes of catching the rebels before they could fully entrench. Although the story of Union soldiers pinning their names on the back of their uniforms in anticipation of death at Cold Harbor is apocryphal, the frontal assault on June 3 inflicted thousands of Union casualties in about half an hour. In just minutes, 7,000 Union soldiers were killed or wounded as 30,000 Confederate soldiers successfully held the line against 50,000 Union troops, losing just 1,500 men in the process.

The Overland Campaign stunned Americans in 1864, but Cold Harbor would be the last major battle of the Overland Campaign because Grant would reach his objective by stealing a march on Lee to cross the James River, beginning the actions that would lead to the siege of Petersburg. This book chronicles the campaign

with analysis of the generalship, accounts by generals and soldiers, pictures, and more.

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