

# Civil War history comes to life at Pamplin Historical Park



A boardwalk leads to the Tobacco Barn, part of Tudor Hall Plantation at Pamplin Historical Park. Photo by Loretta Sherwood.

Did you know that almost a quarter of the Civil War was fought around Petersburg?

We Richmonders have only a 45-minute drive to Pamplin Historical Park, a most innovative Civil War experience. Located just outside of Petersburg, this private park encompasses 422 acres, including the remains of the infamous 1865 “Breakthrough” Battlefield. Now a National Historic Landmark, this dramatic spot is where the Confederates lost the crippling nine-month siege of Petersburg. With all rail and supply lines cut, they were forced to evacuate Richmond and surrender just one week later in Appomattox Court House. The rest, as they say, is history. Pamplin presents this tragic history extremely well, using artifacts and the latest interactive museum technology.

Pamplin’s centerpiece is the National Museum of the Civil War Soldier. This unique museum focuses on neither Grant nor Lee, but on the soldiers themselves, those 3 million common men who fought on both sides of America’s bloodiest conflict. They accounted for almost 10% of the population. Its main exhibit, “Duty Called Me Here,” is incredibly powerful for kids and adults alike. At the outset each visitor selects a “real”

soldier to follow throughout the war. Kids are enthralled with tracking their “comrade.”

As visitors work their way through the exhibit, their soldier’s “voice” narrates his harrowing experiences via a user-friendly digital MP3 player. At the end, his fate is announced. Did he die or live to make it home? Each visitor can customize his player, playing each section as desired.

This excellent audio recording continues to Pamplin’s many outdoor exhibits. In addition to the Breakthrough Battlefield’s landscape and earthworks, there are three additional museums, four antebellum homes and costumed living-history areas focusing on plantation life, slavery, and Confederate military encampments. Easy trails offer a chance to see some of the best-preserved fortifications and earthworks.

The Civil War Store offers a large and outstanding selection of Civil War-related items. There are unique books, maps, musical instruments, art, jewelry, clothing, and videos. The store also stocks replicas of all kinds of relics, even bullets. Kids can try “hard tack,” the soldier’s on-the-go snack that adds a whole new meaning to the concept of staleness. Their popular candy called “musket

powder” is also packaged for sale, tasting like Jello sugar.

Pamplin welcomes many visitors from around the U.S. and across the world. They hosts thousands of students annually with field trips geared specifically to particular age groups, homeschoolers, and Virginia SOLs. They also offer “electronic field trips” through interactive video-conferencing. The Civil War Adventure Camp allows kids to experience life as a private on an original battlefield during the day or overnight.

Just minutes away and definitely a worthy destination in itself, Petersburg National Battlefield Park covers a mammoth 2,659 acres. With 11 major battles fought in the area, its complete driving tour is 33 miles long and includes three visitor centers, 13 separate sites. There are also many well-maintained trails, bike paths, and beautiful spots for a picnic.

If you have limited time, head to the Eastern Front Visitor Center and see the 17-minute movie. Kids can participate in the National Park’s Junior Ranger Program, completing fun and educational activities for rewards. Take the bucolic 10-minute stroll to see the “Dictator,” the Union’s massive cannon. On the four-mile driving tour, make

sure to stop at the eerily gorgeous site of the Battle of the Crater. (It is the last stop.) This is where Union soldiers built an underground mine and then set off an explosion, killing 278 Confederates. In the confusion afterwards, countless Union soldiers entered the massive Crater and were trapped, leading to enormous casualties and an ultimate Confederate victory.

There is also a 16-mile driving tour of the siege line and Western Front, ending at the Five Forks Battlefield where the Union finally managed to cut the last supply line. Another worthwhile stop is at Grant’s Headquarters at City Point to see the Union’s massive supply base and field hospital operation.

The U.S. Quartermaster Museum at nearby Fort Lee in Hopewell is dedicated to the impressive history of Army logistical support. General Grant’s saddle is on display as well as a new exhibit on the Civil War. Also at Fort Lee, the U.S. Army Women’s Museum is the only museum of its kind worldwide. Admission is free.

**RPM**

## WANT TO GO?

### Addresses:

Pamplin Historical Park, 6125 Boydton Plank Road, Petersburg, VA 23803  
Petersburg National Battlefield Park at Eastern Front, 5001 Siege Road, Petersburg, VA 23875

**Websites:** [www.pamplinpark.org](http://www.pamplinpark.org), [www.nps.gov/pete](http://www.nps.gov/pete), [www.qmmuseum.lee.army.mil](http://www.qmmuseum.lee.army.mil)

**iPhone App:** [www.CivilWar.org/battleapps](http://www.CivilWar.org/battleapps)

**Admission:** Pamplin – \$12 for adults, \$6 for kids, free for kids under age 6

PNBP – \$5 per carload/\$3 per person

**Access:** Pamplin is open daily year-round. PNBP closes only on Christmas, New Years and Thanksgiving.

**Directions:** Only 40 miles from Richmond. For Pamplin, take I-95 South onto I-85 to Exit 63A, and continue for one mile. For PNBP, take I-95 to the Wythe Street exit, and follow 2.5 miles.

**Phone:** 1-877-PAMPLIN