



The First Battle for Petersburg: The Attack and Defense of the Cockade City, June 9, 1864

William Glenn Robertson

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The nearly ten-month struggle for Petersburg, Virginia, is well known to students of the Civil War. Surprisingly few readers, however, are aware that Petersburg's citizens felt war's hard hand nearly a week before the armies of Grant and Lee arrived on their doorstep in the middle of June 1864. Distinguished historian William Glenn Robertson rectifies this oversight with the publication of *The First Battle for Petersburg* in a special revised Sesquicentennial edition.

During his ill-fated Bermuda Hundred Campaign, Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler in late May took note of the "Cockade City's" position astride Richmond's railroad lifeline and its minuscule garrison. When two attempts to seize the city and destroy the bridges over the Appomattox River failed, Butler mounted an expedition to Petersburg on June 9. Led by Maj. Gen. Quincy Gillmore and Brig. Gen. August Kautz, the Federal force of 3,300 infantry and 1,300 cavalry appeared large enough to overwhelm Brig. Gen. Henry Wise's paltry 1,200 Confederate defenders, one-quarter of which were reserves that included several companies of elderly men and teenagers. The attack on the critical logistical center, and how the Confederates managed to hold the city, is the subject of Robertson's groundbreaking study. Ironically, Butler's effort resulted in Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard's decision to slightly enlarge Petersburg's garrison—troops that may have provided the razor-thin margin of difference when the head of the Army of the Potomac appeared in strength six days later.

The First Battle for Petersburg describes the strategy, tactics, and generalship of the Battle of June 9 in full detail, as well as the impact on the city's citizens, both in and out of the ranks. Robertson's study is grounded in extensive primary sources supported by original maps and photos and illustrations. It remains the most comprehensive analysis of the June 9 engagement of Petersburg's "old men and young boys."

Petersburg itself has never forgotten the sacrifices of its citizens on that summer day 150 years ago, and continues to honor their service with an annual commemoration. Once you read Dr. Robertson's *The First Battle for Petersburg: The Attack and Defense of the Cockade City, June 9, 1864*, you will understand why.

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