

# United States Army Heritage and Education Center

## Discussions on Military History Roundtable

A quarterly forum on military history

### Richmond Redeemed: Opportunities Won and Lost in the Siege of Petersburg

**Dr. Richard Sommers**

Distinguished Fellow, U.S. Army War College

As the brutal summer of 1864 closed, the Federal Army under General Ulysses S. Grant pinned the hard-fought troops of General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia down in the town of Petersburg, Virginia. This roundtable presentation analyzes the generalship, strategy, operations, and tactics of the Federal Fifth Offensive in the Siege of Petersburg in the early autumn of 1864. This onslaught overran the outer defenses of Richmond and gave the Northerners the greatest opportunity they ever had to capture the Confederate capital with a field army capable of holding the city. So dire was the danger, that the Graycoats were prepared to abandon their main rail center, Petersburg, if required, to rescue Richmond. How the Unionists came so close to taking one or both cities -- and yet fell short -- and how the Confederates fought back, not just defensively but offensively, and succeeded in prolonging the war for another half year forms the focus of our roundtable presentation.

These operations pitted Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee directly against each other. Their generalship is assessed, as is that of their senior subordinates, Benjamin F. Butler and George G. Meade for the North and Richard S. Ewell and A.P. Hill for the South. In this offensive, Pennsylvania was well represented, with such generals as Meade, Winfield Scott Hancock, John G. Parke, David B. Birney, Andrew A. Humphreys, and David M. Gregg. Some 83 Keystone State regiments, battalions, batteries, and detachments participated in these operations including six regiments of U.S. Colored Troops credited to Pennsylvania. Indeed, the first of these fights, Chaffin's Bluff, marked the biggest, bloodiest battle for black troops in the entire Civil War. Fourteen black soldiers and one of their white officers earned the Medal of Honor for their service in these battles. Twenty-nine soldiers and officers of white units were comparably recognized.

This presentation will feature Dr. Richard Sommers and is based on his new book, the expanded 150th anniversary edition of *Richmond Redeemed: The Siege at Petersburg*, published by Savas-Beatie in September of 2014. Dr. Richard J. Sommers served for over 43 years at the U.S. Army Military History Institute of the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, until nominally "retiring" as the Senior Historian in January of 2014. He continues teaching at the U.S. Army War College, writing about the Civil War, and speaking to Civil War groups across the nation, and he has published over 100 books, articles, chapters, entries, and reviews on the Civil War. Two expert panelists will join him to discuss the battle, its results, and its long term effects on the outcome of the Civil war.

**DATE: Saturday, March 19, 2016, 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM**

**Place: USAHEC, Visitor and Education Center, Multi-Purpose Room**

**For updates and any last-minute changes meeting times and places, please check the USAHEC homepage: [www.USAHEC.org](http://www.USAHEC.org) or call the Information Desk: (717) 245-3972.**