

# **ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM**

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## **Captain Augustus Drewry and the Battle of Drewry's Bluff, May 15, 1862**

By **Dan Welch, Park Ranger**, Gettysburg National Military Park

### **Resources**

**If you can read only one book**

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Newton, Steven H.	<i>Joseph E. Johnston and the Defense of Richmond</i> Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998.

### **Books and Articles**

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.   "Title," in <i>Journal</i> ##, no. # (Date): #.
Bearss, Edwin C.	<i>River of Lost Opportunities: The Civil War on the James River, 1861-1862</i> . Lynchburg, VA: H. E. Howard, 1995.
Beyer, W.F. & O.F. Keydel, eds.	<i>Deeds of Valor: From Records in the Archives of the United States Government</i> , 2 vols. Detroit MI: The Perrien-Keydel Company, 1903, 2: 25-30.
Browning Jr., Robert M.	<i>From Cape Charles to Cape Fear: The North Atlantic Blockading Squadron during the Civil War</i> . Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1993.
Burton, Brian K.	<i>The Peninsula &amp; Seven Days: A Battlefield Guide</i> . Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2007.
Coski, John M.	<i>Capital Navy: the Men, Ships, and Operations of the James River Squadron</i> . Campbell, CA: Savas Woodbury Publishers, 1996.

Donnelly, Ralph W.	<i>The Confederate States Marine Corps: The Rebel Leathernecks</i> . Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company, 1989.
Sears, Stephen W.	<i>To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign</i> . New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1992.
Sullivan, David M.	<i>The United States Marine Corps in the Civil War—The Second Year</i> . Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company, Inc., 1997.
Symonds, Craig	<i>Union Combined Operations in the Civil War</i> . New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.
United States War Department	United States Navy Department, <i>Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion</i> , 30 vols. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894-1922), Series I, volume 7.
	<i>Southern Historical Society Papers</i> , 34, (January-December 1906): 82-98.
	<i>Southern Historical Society Papers</i> , 29 (January-December 1901): 284-5.

## Organizations

Organization Name	Description, Contact information including address, email
Richmond National Battlefield Park	The Richmond National Battlefield Park preserves, protects, interprets, and commemorates Richmond Civil War battlefield landscapes, struggles for the capital of the Confederacy associated with the 1862 Seven Days' Battles, the 1864 Overland Campaign, and the 1864–65 Richmond and Petersburg Campaigns, including the American military, social, and political history as exemplified by the New Market Heights Battlefield. Their mailing address is 3215 East Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia 23223, 804 226 1981. Their website is: <a href="https://www.nps.gov/rich/index.htm">https://www.nps.gov/rich/index.htm</a>
Richmond Battlefields Association	The Richmond Battlefields Association (RBA), established in 2001, is a nonprofit

	<p>501(c)3 organization dedicated to the preservation of historic Civil War sites surrounding Richmond, Virginia. Their mailing address is: Richmond Battlefields Association PO Box 13945 Richmond VA 23225, 804 496 1862. Their website is: <a href="http://www.saverichmondbattlefields.org/">http://www.saverichmondbattlefields.org/</a></p>
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## Web Resources

URL	Name and description
<a href="https://www.nps.gov/rich/learn/historyculture/drewrys-bluff.htm">https://www.nps.gov/rich/learn/historyculture/drewrys-bluff.htm</a>	<p>Overview of Drewry's Bluff from 1862-1864 written by the National Park Service.</p>
<a href="https://www.nps.gov/places/drewry-s-bluff.htm">https://www.nps.gov/places/drewry-s-bluff.htm</a>	<p>Overview of the May 15, 1862 battle at Drewry's Bluff written by the National Park Service.</p>
<a href="https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/civil-war/cw-operations-and-engagements/1862-civil-war/drewry-s-bluff.html">https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/civil-war/cw-operations-and-engagements/1862-civil-war/drewry-s-bluff.html</a>	<p>A detailed article of the events before the battle, the battle itself, and its aftermath.</p>
<a href="https://www.usni.org/magazines/naval-history-magazine/2009/june/marines-fighting-marines-battle-drewrys-bluff">https://www.usni.org/magazines/naval-history-magazine/2009/june/marines-fighting-marines-battle-drewrys-bluff</a>	<p>An article by Gerald S. Henig published by the U.S. Naval Institute of the role of the Marines, both US and CS, at the battle.</p>

## Other Sources

## Scholars

Name	Email
Dan Welch	<a href="mailto:dwelch1863@gmail.com">dwelch1863@gmail.com</a>

## Topic Précis

McClellan's slowness in launching the Peninsula Campaign, which began with the departure of the Federal fleet on March 17, 1862, allowed Confederate forces around Richmond valuable time to construct defenses on land and on water. As McClellan's army prepared to board their boats in Alexandria, Major Augustus Harrison Drewry, Company C, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment Virginia Artillery, sought permission to build a fort on his personal property in which his unit could deploy and in effect add yet another layer to Richmond's defense in depth. Augustus inherited the tract of land just eight miles south of Richmond by river from his second wife Mary A. Harrison. The tract included a high bluff, over 100 feet high above the water, that was adjacent to the James River. Additionally, although the approach to the fort from the southeast and Hampton Roads consisted of a mile of straight waterway, at the bluff, there was a bend in the James River that provided any cannon on the bluff plunging fire on ships coming from that direction. A complement of guns placed here, however, could command that mile-long, straight section of the river below the bend. Furthermore, impediments and obstructions could be dropped into the river's channel, further narrowing the physical area that Federal gunboats could utilize due to their drafts. Eventually, these obstacles would include sunken cribs filled with stones, pilings, and even the hulks of several sunken river-faring vessels. These efforts would slow the rate of speed at which Federal ships could safely move, thus allowing more time for the Confederate artillery to fire upon them. Drewry took his company to the site on the bluff where Fort Darling would be built on March 17. They began working on fortifications and emplacing guns. Initially there was little enthusiasm or support from the government and military authorities in Richmond. But by mid-April work on the fortifications accelerated, blocking the river and training the soldiers to serve the guns also advanced. With the threat of McClellan advancing up the James River both Robert E. Lee and Naval Secretary Stephen Mallory turned their full attention to strengthening Fort Darling including sending Confederate marines to defend against an attack by landed infantry and placing guns on Chaffin's Bluff about a mile downriver from Drewry's Bluff. Work continued right up to the moment on May 15 that the Federal flotilla of two ironclads and 3 wooden gunships engaged the Confederates at Drewry's Bluff at 7:45 a.m. The two ironclads USS *Galena* and USS *Monitor* took up positions near the bluff and the three wooden gunboats, USS *Aroostook*, *Port Royal*, and *Naugatuck* anchored at a further distance and opened fire which was returned by the Confederate batteries. As the battle wore on casualties on both sides mounted. The battle lasted nearly four hours. At 11:05 a.m. the badly damaged wooden gunboats turned and started to steam away from Fort Darling. Both the *Galena* and *Monitor* were damaged and suffered casualties, the former more than the latter. Both ironclads followed the wooden gunboats in retreat. Following the battle, three Medals of Honor were awarded to federal sailors. The last-minute push to complete the works at Drewry's Bluff and rush reinforcements of men and guns to the position no doubt greatly contributed to the Confederate victory on May 15, 1862. In all twelve Confederate guns were emplaced and were engaged at Drewry's Bluff 1,800 soldiers and marines were stationed at Chaffin's Bluff and Drewry's Bluff and 4,000 Confederate reinforcements were marching towards the Fort when the battle started. In William I. Clopton, "New Light on the Great Drewry's Bluff Fight," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, ~~vol.~~ 34, (January-

December 1906) the author stated, “A glorious victory over the hitherto invincible navy of the United States was achieved and the fall of Richmond was prevented, for if the Federal gunboats had succeeded in passing Drewry’s Bluff on that day the capital of the Confederacy would have at once been at their mercy, and the Confederate troops would have been compelled to retreat from Richmond, and probably from Virginia.” A post war poem by Sergeant Samuel Mann who fought with the Confederates at Fort Darling summed up the victory best:

The Monitor was astonished,  
And the Galena was admonished,  
And their efforts to ascend the stream  
Were mocked at.

“While the dreadful Naugatuck,  
With the hardest kind of luck,  
Was nearly knocked  
Into a cocked-hat.

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