

# 1ST COMPANY, RICHMOND HOWITZERS

## THE HOWITZERS DURING THE WAR BETWEEN THE STATES

**George Wythe Randolph**, the first captain of the Richmond Howitzers, was born in 1818 at Monticello, the home of his maternal grandfather, Thomas Jefferson. Randolph was appointed a midshipman at the age of thirteen, and served in the navy for six years. Afterwards he studied law at the University of Virginia, and in 1850 moved to Richmond to practice his profession. He conceived the idea of the "Howitzer Battery", which began organization on November 9, 1859, himself as captain and Gaston Otey as First Sergeant.



Major George Wythe Randolph  
1818-1867

The Richmond Howitzers grew into a battalion of three companies by May 1861. The original company, reorganized on May 8 with the election of Captain John C. Shields, was thereafter known as the 1st Company. In November 1861 Captain Shields was promoted to Lt. Colonel and transferred, to be replaced by Lt. Wm. Palmer. In March of 1862 Captain Palmer, who desired to go into army medical service, was replaced by 1st Lt. Edward McCarthy.

An elite unit, the Howitzers served with distinction. The 1st Company Richmond Howitzers, a four-gun battery, participated at First Manassas, the Peninsular Campaign, Seven Pines, the Seven Days' Battles, Sharpsburg, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, Petersburg, and the retreat from Richmond to Appomattox.

At Gettysburg, on July 2, 1863, its two rifled guns expended 200 rounds of ammunition in less than two hours at Devil's Den, and the next day, one piece alone expended 300 rounds in support of Pickett's Charge.

The battery saw its commander, Edward S. McCarthy, killed at Cold Harbor; felled instantly by a sharpshooter's minie ball.



Captain "Ned" McCarthy  
1836-1864

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*"All was ready; guns loaded and pointed, carefully, every man at his post, --feeling right solemn too,—and a dead stillness reigned. The Captain's steady voice rang out! As an echo to it, Dan McCarthy sung out "Fourth Detachment commence firing, fire!" I gave the lanyard a jerk. A lurid spout of flame about ten feet long shot from the mouth of the old "Napoleon", then, in the dead silence, a ringing, crashing roar, that sounded like the heavens were falling, and rolled a wrathful thunder far*



Pvt. Wm.Dame, 1824-1923

*over the fields and echoing woods. Then became distinct, a savage, venomous scream, along the track shell. This grew fainter, —died on our ear! We eagerly watched! Suddenly, right over the heads of the enemy, a flash of fire, a puff of snow-white smoke, which hung like a little cloud! We gave a yell of delight; our shell had gone right into the midst of the Federals, and burst beautifully. The ball was open! "*

*—From Wm. Meade Dame's "From the Rapidan to Richmond"*

# 1ST COMPANY, RICHMOND HOWITZERS: CIVIL WAR RE-ENACTORS

**Our modern-day re-enactment group** was organized in February 2005, with members from Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. The purpose of our group is to offer a faithful portrayal of the soldiers in a Confederate Artillery unit and the non-combatant persons who supported them. Organized to preserve the history and tradition of the American Civil War era, we participate in Living History Displays, Reenactments, and other occasions to educate and entertain the public and our membership. A family-oriented group, you will be able to find the members of the "Howitzers" drilling, marching, and sharing their stories at many events through the season.



Josephine Dame DeButts, granddaughter of Pvt. William Meade Dame of the original 1st Company, Richmond Howitzers, and re-enactor Pvt. Wayne James Rowe, of the 1st Company, Richmond Howitzers re-enacting group.

Membership in the 1st Company Richmond Howitzers is open to anyone, regardless of creed, gender, or race, with a genuine desire to participate in all the activities of the Company. There are many events and social occasions scheduled year-round — anytime is a good time to begin!



From right, Pvt. Wayne Rowe, Sgt. Walter Slachetka, Pvt. Bob St. Jean, and Cpl. Jeremy Mercer as members of 1st Co., Richmond Howitzers, with their reproduction 12-lb Mountain Howitzer.

Our hobby is Living History, portraying a period of time as accurately as we can and with as much integrity as possible. We enjoy educating the public, and consider a factual presentation our responsibility. We do this voluntarily; in fact we pay to do it! We constantly research in order to present to the public the most historically accurate image possible. By 'getting it right' we are best able to teach American History to the public, and honor the ancestors we represent.

The Howitzers have Federal troops in their sights at Groton's 350th Anniversary celebration re-enactment presented at Hillbrook Orchards.





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## RICHMOND, VIRGINIA: CONFEDERATE CAPITAL

On April 17, 1861, Virginia seceded from the United States and joined the Confederate States, and soon thereafter the Confederate government moved its capital to Richmond. The strategic location of the Tredegar Iron Works was one of the primary factors in the decision.

In the first years of the war, Richmond saw its population double, and then double again. People flocked to the capital to work in government departments and factories. Refugees poured in to escape each successive invasion of the surrounding countryside. Private residences became hospitals to receive



Period view of Richmond, Virginia

incoming wounded; incoming prisoners of war were kept in Libby and Belle Isle prisons. All had to be housed and fed.

As most, if not all, able-bodied men had gone to fight for the Confederacy, much of this work was undertaken by women of all ages. In addition to providing crucial support for their soldiers and the war effort, they had to contend with the twin problems of inflation and critical food shortages in the city. The non-combatant residents of Richmond coped with “Pawnee Sunday”, the Bread Riot, influxes of prisoners and wounded from the First Manassas and the Seven Days’ battles, the Brown’s Island Explosion, Dahlgren’s Raid, Libby Prison break, and the ultimate evacuation and burning of Richmond.

The Brown’s Island Explosion was a disaster in which a Richmond munitions plant exploded, killing about 50 people, most of them young girls who were working to produce much of the ammunition that kept the Confederate army fighting. The youngest known victim was Eliza Willis, age 10.

The great number of sick and wounded turned many of Richmond’s private homes into hospitals. The only woman ever granted a commission in the Confederate Army was the director of Robertson Hospital, Captain Sallie Louisa Tompkins. Due to the excellent care she and her staff provided, Robertson had the lowest mortality rate of the Richmond

hospitals. Her commission put her hospital under the auspices of the army, allowing it to receive food and medical supplies; however, she refused to have herself put on the army payroll, to continue work as a volunteer.



Captain Sallie Tompkins  
1833-1916

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*“It was mighty fine to be young in Richmond that week—young and pretty and wellborn, if one was a girl; young, handsome, and gallant in threadbare gray and tarnished gold, if a man. The Howitzers came home—the companies that had passed the winter at Leesburg, that is to say, sporting smart new boots made by the Leesburg bootmaker. Their guns, caked thickly with the mud of Hanover Court House, they parked at Camp Lee, and it was: ‘Capt’n, can I go in to Richmond tonight? I*



“Ride with Anna” by  
John Paul Strain

*want to see them all at home mighty bad.’*

*The girls went horseback riding with them, drove with them, and strolled in the woods that bordered the canal. A big wedding reception in Grace Street was crowded with rusty uniforms. ...*

*... But the bright days were soon over. They ended before April did, with the crushing news of the fall of New Orleans. ...”*

—From Alfred Hoyt Bill’s “The Beleaguered City”

# 1ST COMPANY, RICHMOND HOWITZERS: THE GRACE STREET SOCIETY

**Civilian presentations are an integral** part of the structure of the Richmond Howitzers. Historical records provide more than enough information regarding the participation of civilians in the Civil War and their significant contributions to the armies of the Federal and Confederate forces. Civilian impressions are instrumental in the success of our presentation and their active participation in field and ceremony presentations further improve the versatility of our unit.



Visitors in the Richmond Howitzer's camp during a Living History in Sturbridge, MA. Troops might be stationed less than a day's ride from the city, and women would venture out to the camps, bringing what supplies they could.



"Columbia". 1142 West Grace Street, Richmond, VA built circa 1817. The house later became part of Richmond College, and served as headquarters for the Howitzers for a brief time in 1861.

As many military units were affiliated with "societies" of woman supporters, the Richmond Howitzer's civilian contingent has taken the name, "The Grace Street Society." Grace Street was a fashionable address in Richmond prior to the war. We chose the name to reflect the steadfastness, resiliency, and grace under pressure that the ordinary citizens on the home front exhibited under the extraordinary circumstances of wartime.

Re-enacting truly has something for everyone, a pursuit the entire family may enjoy together. Becoming a re-enactor isn't difficult —bring your interest in the Civil War, or history in general, to us — and we'll help with the rest!



Re-enactor Tonia Bongialotti strikes a patriotic pose. Many women learned to handle firearms in the event they were called to defend the home front.