

# The Richmond Howitzers

The Richmond Howitzers is a military unit formed in Richmond not long after [John Brown](#)'s raid on [Harpers Ferry](#) late in 1859. During the American Civil War (1861–1865), three companies organized as the Richmond Howitzer Battalion and served in most of the campaigns of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. The Howitzers reorganized in 1871 and saw active duty during both World War I (1914–1918) and World War II (1939–1945). It is now a unit in the Virginia National Guard.

## Civil War

The Richmond Howitzer Company of the 1st Regiment of Volunteers was founded on November 9, 1859, by George Wythe Randolph, a grandson of Thomas Jefferson, a U.S. Navy veteran, and a Richmond lawyer. After electing Randolph its first captain, the company, which was recruited from elite Richmond circles, marched to Charles Town, Virginia (now [West Virginia](#)), to help provide security during Brown's trial and subsequent execution. Curious out-of-towners had flooded into Jefferson County, taxing the authorities' ability to keep order. In addition, a series of damaging fires had swept through the area, and the locals pointed their fingers at allies of the accused. Virginia governor [Henry A. Wise](#) called for militia support, including the Howitzers, the cadets from the Virginia Military Institute in [Lexington](#) (commanded by Thomas J. Jackson and including the sixty-six-year-old "cadet" Edmund Ruffin), and the Richmond Grays, in whose ranks was the nonmember John Wilkes Booth.

In 1860, the unit became Company H of the 1st Regiment of Volunteers and established an armory on the north side of Cary Street between Eleventh and Twelfth streets in [Richmond](#). On April 21, 1861, four days after [Virginia seceded](#), Colonel John B. Baldwin of [Staunton](#), the state's inspector general of volunteers, mustered the unit into state service. As enlistments increased, the company was separated from the 1st Regiment to join an artillery battalion commanded by Randolph, who on May 3 was promoted to major. The original Company H became 1st Company, Richmond Howitzer Battalion, commanded by Captain John C. Shields. On May 9, the 2nd Company was organized, with John Thompson Brown as captain. The following day, the 3rd Company was organized under the command of Captain Robert C. Stanard. Attempts to organize a fourth company during June 1861 failed.

The 1st Company left Richmond on May 24 to join the Confederate army near Manassas Junction and would never again serve with the other two companies. The men were present but not engaged at a skirmish at Blackburn's Ford on July 17 and the First Battle of Manassas on July 21. Meanwhile, late in May and early in June 1861, the 2nd and 3rd companies moved to the vicinity of Yorktown and joined John B. Magruder's Army of the Peninsula. The companies fought at Big Bethel on June 10, the first full-scale battle of the war in Virginia, suffering three men wounded. This was the only time that the Richmond Howitzers Battalion would fight as a unit during the war.

On September 13, 1861, the 2nd and 3rd companies joined the 2nd Virginia Artillery Regiment, later designated the 1st Virginia Artillery Regiment. (As a tactical organization, the Richmond

Howitzers Battalion now ceased to exist.) The three companies had all moved to the Peninsula by the spring of 1862. The 1st Company fought in the Battle of Williamsburg on May 5. Both the 1st and 2nd companies participated in the Battle of Seven Pines, May 31–June 1. And the 1st and 3rd Companies were engaged several times during the Seven Days' Battles, June 25–July 1.

All three companies continued to participate in the various campaigns of the Army of Northern Virginia. They fought at Second Manassas, Antietam, and [Fredericksburg](#) in 1862; [Chancellorsville](#), [Gettysburg](#), and Mine Run in 1863; and the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, Cold Harbor, and [Petersburg](#) in 1864. On June 1, near Cold Harbor, the three companies met for the only time during the war but quickly went their separate ways. The 2nd Company served in the Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1864 and lost all of its cannons at the Battle of Cedar Creek on October 19. When they returned to the entrenchments near Richmond, the men of the company received small arms for a brief period but primarily manned heavy artillery pieces at Fort Clifton, which was situated at the junction of the Appomattox River and Swift Creek.

The Army of Northern Virginia, including the Howitzers, evacuated its lines in front of Richmond and Petersburg on the night of April 2, 1865, and marched westward. The men of the 2nd Company resumed their duties as infantrymen and fought the enemy in several skirmishes. The 3rd Company saw only minor skirmishing near Deatonville on April 6 during the [Appomattox Campaign](#). After participating in an engagement near Appomattox Court House on April 8, the men of the 1st Company separated from the army to march toward [Lynchburg](#). They disbanded the following day near Red Oak Church and buried their cannons in a nearby ravine. The 2nd and 3rd companies, meanwhile, surrendered with Lee's army at Appomattox on April 9, 1865.

## Post–Civil War

On April 10, 1871, the Richmond Howitzers was reorganized as a single company. Then, on November 8, 1877, the Virginia state artillery was reorganized as the 1st Battalion Volunteer Artillery, and the Howitzers became Battery A of the new battalion. When the United States entered World War I in 1917, the Howitzers returned to federal service as part of the 1st Field Artillery Regiment of the Virginia National Guard. The regiment was designated as the 111th Field Artillery Regiment, and the Howitzers served as Company A. The unit left for France on June 29, 1918. Before the men could reach the frontlines, however, the Armistice had been signed, and the regiment returned to home in May 1919. The 111th Field Artillery was formally mustered out of service at [Camp Lee](#), Virginia.

On February 3, 1941, the 111th Field Artillery again entered active federal service as a part of the 29th Infantry Division. When the division reorganized in March 1942, the 1st Battalion, 111th Field Artillery, became the 111th Field Artillery Battalion. The 29th Division traveled from the United States to England in September and October 1942. The 111th Battalion participated in the Normandy invasion, fought around St. Lô in northwestern France, and captured the fortress at Brest in France. It then served in Holland and participated in the crossing of the Roer River in December. Early in April 1945, the division crossed the Rhine River and fought in Germany until the German surrender in May. The Howitzers and the rest of the battalion were deactivated on January 16, 1946.

In the years following World War II, the Richmond Howitzers were separated from the 29th Division and served under several different configurations. The unit again became Battery A, 111th Field Artillery Regiment, in 1972 and currently retains that designation in the Virginia National Guard.

# Time Line

- **November 9, 1859** - The Richmond Howitzers organize as a light artillery company in the Virginia State militia.
- **1860** - The Richmond Howitzers become Company H, 1st Virginia Volunteer Regiment.
- **May 3–9, 1861** - Three companies organize as the Richmond Howitzer Battalion and are mustered into Confederate service.
- **September 13, 1861** - The 2nd and 3rd companies, Richmond Howitzers, become a part of the 1st Virginia Artillery Regiment.
- **April 9, 1865** - The 1st Company, Richmond Howitzers, disbands near Red Oak Church, Virginia, and the 2nd and 3rd companies surrender with the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Court House.
- **April 10, 1871** - The Richmond Howitzers reorganize as a light artillery company of the Virginia militia.
- **1917–1918** - The Richmond Howitzers serve as Company A, 111th Field Artillery Regiment, during World War I.
- **February 3, 1941** - The Richmond Howitzers enter federal service as a part of the 111th Field Artillery Regiment in the 29th Infantry Division.
- **1942–1945** - The Richmond Howitzers serve as Battery A, 111th Field Artillery Regiment, during World War II.
- **1972** - The Richmond Howitzers become Battery A, 111th Field Artillery Regiment, in the Virginia National Guard.

## Further Reading

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Wallace, Lee A., Jr. *The Richmond Howitzers*. Lynchburg, Va.: H. E. Howard, 1993.

Contributed by Arthur W. Bergeron Jr., a reference historian with the U.S. Army Military History Institute. He is a past president of the Louisiana Historical Association and of the Richmond and Baton Rouge Civil War round tables. His publications include *A Thrilling Narrative: The Memoir of a Southern Unionist* (2006), *The Civil War in Louisiana, Part B: The Home Front* (2004), and *The Civil War in Louisiana, Part A: Military Activity* (2002).