

# Petersburg National Battlefield VirtualCache Program

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## Site 17: Mahone Monument

N 37° 13'7.051"  
W 77° 22'4.405"



Mahone Monument was named after William Mahone,(1826-95), a Confederate army officer, born in Monroe, Virginia.

As the political differences between Northern and Southern factions escalated in the second half of the 19th century, Mahone was in favor of secession of the southern states. During the American Civil War, he was active in the actual conflict even before he became an officer in the Confederate Army. Early in the War, in 1861, his Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad was especially valuable to the Confederacy and transported ordnance to the Norfolk area where it was used during the Confederate occupation. By the end of the war, most of what was left of the railroad was in Federal hands.

After Virginia seceded from the Union in April 1861, Mahone was still a civilian, and not yet in the Confederate Army, but working in coordination with Walter Gwynn, he orchestrated the ruse and capture of the Gosport Shipyard. He bluffed the Federal troops into abandoning the shipyard in Portsmouth by running a single passenger train into Norfolk with great noise and whistle-blowing, then much more quietly, sending it back west, and then returning the same train again, creating the illusion of large numbers of arriving troops to the Federals listening in Portsmouth across the Elizabeth River (and just barely out of sight). The ruse worked, and not a single Confederate soldier was lost as the Union authorities abandoned the area, and retreated to Fort Monroe across Hampton Roads. After this, Mahone accepted a commission as Lieutenant Colonel and later Colonel of the 6th Virginia Infantry Regiment in the Confederate Army. He commanded the Confederate's Norfolk district until its evacuation. He was promoted to brigadier general in November 1861.

In May 1862, after the evacuation of Norfolk by Southern forces during the Peninsula Campaign, he aided in the construction of the defenses of Richmond on the James River around Drewry's Bluff. A short time later, he led his brigade at the Battle of Seven Pines and the Battle of

Malvern Hill. He also fought at Second Bull Run, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, the Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House.

Small of stature, 5 foot 5 or 6 inches, and weighing only 100 lb (45 kg), he was nicknamed "Little Billy". As one of his soldiers put it, "He was every inch a soldier, though there were not many inches of him." Otelia Mahone was working in Richmond as a nurse, when Virginia Governor John Letcher sent word that Mahone had been injured at Second Bull Run, but had only received a "flesh wound." She is said to have replied "Now I know it is serious for William has no flesh whatsoever."

Although his wound at Manassas had not been serious, Mahone did suffer from acute dyspepsia all of his life. During the War, a cow and chickens accompanied him in order to provide dairy products. Otelia and their children moved to Petersburg to be near him during the final campaign of the War in 1864-65 as Grant moved against Petersburg, seeking to sever the rail lines supplying the Confederate capital of Richmond.

It was during that final campaign that William Mahone became widely regarded as the hero of the Battle of the Crater on July 30, 1864. During the Siege of Petersburg of 1864-65, former Pennsylvania coal miners in the Union army tunneled under the Confederate line and blew it up in a massive explosion, killing and wounding many Confederates and breaching a key point in the defense line around Petersburg. However, they lost their initial advantage and Mahone rallied the remaining Confederate forces nearby, repelling the attack. After beginning as an innovative initiative, the Crater scheme turned into a terrible loss for the Union leaders. The quick and effective action led by Mahone was a rare cause for celebration by the occupants of Petersburg, embattled citizens and weary troops alike. "Little Billy" Mahone was promoted to a major general as a result.

However, Grant's strategy at Petersburg eventually succeeded as the last rail line from the south to supply the Cockade City (and hence Richmond) was severed in early April 1865. Mahone was with General Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia for the surrender at Appomattox Court House about a week later. Dr. Douglas Southall Freeman, noted biographer of Robert E. Lee, wrote that, after the surrender, Lee instructed his lieutenants: "Go home and start rebuilding."

William Mahone was interred in the family mausoleum in Blandford Cemetery in Petersburg, Virginia. His widow, Otelia, lived until 1911, and was interred alongside him. The mausoleum is identified by the General's well known monogram, the initial "M" centered on a star inside a shield.

Otelia and William Mahone's first home in Petersburg, originally occupied by John Dodson, Petersburg's mayor in 1851-2, was on South Sycamore St. That structure now serves as part of the Petersburg Public Library. In 1874, they acquired and greatly enlarged a home on South Market St. and it was their primary residence thereafter. Virginia State University, which he

helped found as a normal school, is a major community presence nearby.

A large portion of U.S. Highway 460 in eastern Virginia (between Petersburg and Suffolk) parallels the 52-mile tangent railroad tracks that Mahone had engineered, passing through some of the towns he and Otelia are believed to have named. Several sections of the road are labeled "General Mahone Boulevard" and "General Mahone Highway" in his honor. A monument to Mahone's Brigade is located on the Gettysburg Battlefield.

The site of the Battle of the Crater is a major feature of the National Park Service's Petersburg National Battlefield Park. In 1927, the United Daughters of the Confederacy erected an imposing monument to his memory. It stands on the preserved Crater Battlefield, a short distance from the Crater itself.

**Visit Instructions:**

The monument has a tribute to William Mahone copy down this tribute and provide it to the ranger at the Eastern Front Visitors Center.