

Today in History - April 2

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Today's Stories: [Ulysses S. Grant's Army Attacks Confederate Lines at Petersburg](#)

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Ulysses S. Grant's Army Attacks Confederate Lines at Petersburg

At approximately 7:00 a.m. on Sunday, **April 2**, 1865, Ulysses S. Grant's army attacked Confederate lines at Petersburg, Virginia. By mid-afternoon, Confederate troops had begun to evacuate the town. The Union victory ensured the fall of Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, located just twenty-five miles north of Petersburg.

President Jefferson Davis received word of the events in Petersburg while attending services at [St. Paul's Church](#) in Richmond. He abandoned the capital late that night on a train bound for Danville, Virginia.

I think it is absolutely necessary that we should abandon our position tonight...

Telegram from Robert E. Lee, in Petersburg, to Jefferson Davis, in Richmond, **April 2**, 1865.¹



[Petersburg, Va. General view](#). Timothy H. O'Sullivan, photographer, [1865]. [Civil War Glass Negatives and Related Prints](#). Prints & Photographs Division

Richmond, meanwhile, burned, as fires set by fleeing Confederates and looters raged out of control. Davis was eventually [captured](#) by Union soldiers, but not until May 10, 1865.²



[Richmond, Va. Ruins of Richmond & Danville Railroad Bridge](#). Alexander Gardner, photographer, [1865]. [Civil War Glass Negatives and Related Prints](#). Prints & Photographs Division



[Richmond, Va. Street in the Burned District](#). 1865. [Civil War Glass Negatives and Related Prints](#). Prints & Photographs Division

1. Telegram from Robert E. Lee, in Petersburg, to Jefferson Davis, in Richmond, April 2, 1865, quoted in *The Civil War Day By Day: An Almanac, 1861-1865*, E.B. Long with Barbara Long (1971; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 663. ([Return to text](#))
2. *Ibid.*, 663, 664. ([Return to text](#))

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- [Civil War Glass Negatives and Related Prints](#) includes numerous photographs of the [siege of Petersburg](#) and [Richmond in 1865](#). To narrow the selection, try searching the collection on [Petersburg AND Union](#), [Petersburg AND Confederate](#), or [Richmond AND burned](#).
- By 1861 telegraph lines networked much of the United States and were an important means of wartime communication. Less than twenty years earlier, on May 24, 1844, the [first telegram](#) was sent by inventor Samuel F. B. Morse. See the [Samuel F. B. Morse Papers at the Library of Congress, 1793 to 1919](#) for more information about the [invention of the telegraph](#).
- Long after the fall of Richmond, the Confederate States of America echoed on in Southern culture. Julia A. Wood's 1877 sheet music, [Virginia Cotillions](#) (which pays homage to Confederate heroes Jeff Davis, Robert E. Lee, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, P. G. T. Beauregard, James Longstreet, and "Jeb" Stuart) is found in [Music for the Nation: American Sheet Music, ca. 1870 to 1885](#), consisting of tens of thousands of pieces of sheet music registered for copyright during the post-Civil War era. The cotillion was a popular ballroom dance in both the antebellum and post-Civil War periods.
- Search on [Petersburg](#) and [Richmond](#) to view maps, charts, and atlases depicting battles, troop positions and movements, engagements, and fortifications in [Civil War Maps](#).
- View the online exhibit, [The Civil War in America](#), which presents selected items from the hundreds of thousands of items found in the many collections across the Library of Congress. The exhibit was created to commemorate the sesquicentennial of this nation's greatest military and political upheaval.

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