

Forward to Richmond

New state website allows people to trace their ancestors' steps in Civil War battles | *Zachary Abate*



THE SUNKEN ROAD, FREDERICKSBURG / U.S. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

If you are one of the millions of Americans who have descended from Civil War soldiers, you may be interested in a new interactive website launched by the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the Civil War Commission.

For the first time ever, people can track the movements of an individual soldier or regiment across Virginia's Civil War battlefields with the [Walk in Their Footsteps program](#).

"So many people have ancestors who served in the Civil War but don't know where or when they may have fought in battles," said Virginia Speaker of the House of Delegates William J. Howell. "Walk in Their Footsteps is a resource that can connect visitors to the legacy of their Civil War ancestors and help them to plan a trip to Virginia to visit the battlefields where they fought."

The website provides a database of military regiments that fought in Virginia during the Civil War and the battles those regiments served in. While the database only shows Virginia battles, it does provide detail of any regiment from any state that fought in Virginia. And since the Commonwealth was home to more than two-thirds of Civil War battles, the database is quite deep.

By inputting the state and regiment of a soldier, a visitor can track the movements of the unit from battlefield to battlefield, read the history of the regiment, and browse pictures from national archives. The Walk in Their Footsteps program provides military records, birth and death records, census information and African-American genealogical records.

The website, launched in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War, invites citizens to visit the battlefields where their ancestors fought. An interactive map allows users to view a battlefield and create a plan to literally walk in the footsteps of their ancestors.

"This is a great initiative by the Commission to find the intersection between the history of the war and the impact it had," said Del. L. Scott Lingamfelter. "You now have the ability to walk where they walked, see what they saw and begin to have a fuller sense of what this war was about-- America's pursuit of freedom."

The Walk in Their Footsteps program was created to encourage people to learn more about the Civil War and promote tourism for Virginia battlefields.

An example search of the 69th Infantry Regiment from New York reveals a summary of the regiment's formation and movements from 1861 to 1865. The website also provides a list of battles, a map with

the regiment's 26 engagements, and photos of the regiment's soldiers and camps.

According to Cheryl Jackson, Executive Director of the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the Civil War Commission, visitor feedback regarding the website has been 100 percent positive.

"We had emails this weekend from people who were looking at it and sent images from their family, additional information that you can't find from primary resources," Jackson said. "People really like being able to connect their family history to these sites."

From Manassas to Fredericksburg, Virginia is home to dozens of Civil War battlefields that draw hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. Most of the battlefields are preserved by the National Park Service and other organizations.

The Virginia Tourism Corporation hopes that the website draws out-of-state tourists. Tourism in Virginia generated \$17.7 billion in 2009.