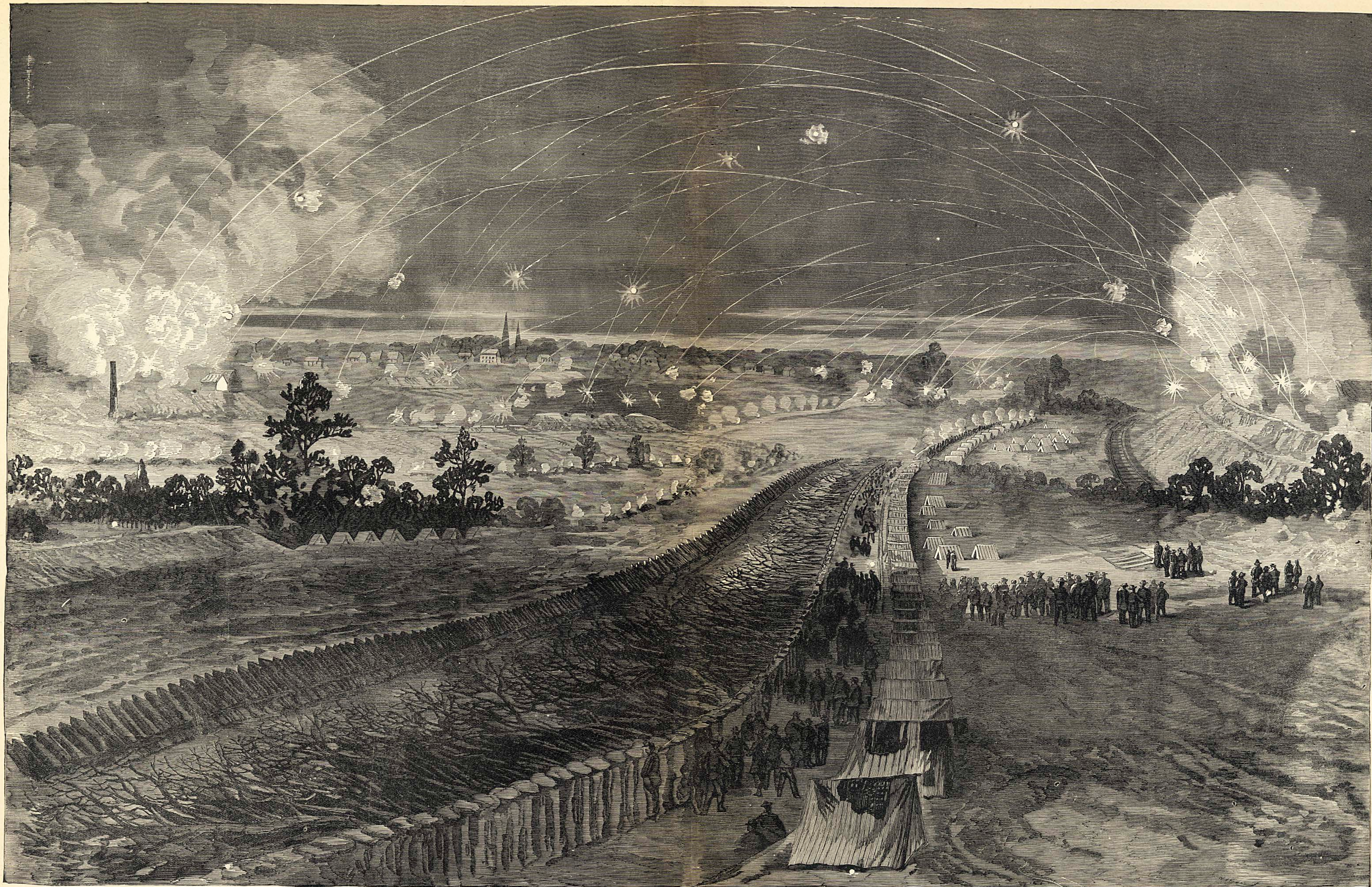




THE LAST NIGHT BOMBARDMENT OF PETERSBURG, VA., APRIL 1, 1865, PREPARATORY TO A GENERAL ASSAULT.

When the news reached Grant's headquarters in front of Petersburg, on the evening of April 1, that Sheridan had carried Five Forks and cut off the retreat of Lee's army southward, he promptly ordered an assault all along the lines against the defences around the doomed city. At 9 p. m. it was determined to delay the attack by storming columns until daylight of the 2d, but all the batteries were opened and kept at work throughout the night. Many of the guns had been trained upon the city for months and the artillerists were in good practice. One battery of seven rifled cannon, in rear of the Ninth Corps, called the "Seven Sisters," threw shells into the heart of the city. It was a thrilling spectacle to watch the mortar shells climbing slowly into the air, distinguishable by the thread of white light trailing behind them, and as answering shots were sent back by the Confederate batteries, two shells would occasionally strike each other midway in the air between the conflicting forces, and, bursting, send down fiery fragments over both lines. The large fort shown in the right-centre ground of the picture is Fort Sedgwick, named after General Sedgwick, the hero of the Sixth Corps, whose troops captured the ground and erected the parapets. It was popularly known as "Fort Hell" in both armies on account of the bitterness of its fire. Directly opposite stands the Confederate Fort Mahone, which, for the same reason, was called by the Union soldiers in front of it "Fort Damnation." The artillerists in these two forts were almost daily engaged in fierce duels, and, during a general bombardment, entered into the work with the zeal of demons, so great was the spirit of antagonism, rivalry and retaliation engendered by the long siege. The effect of the bombardment upon the buildings of the city was not so serious as might have been expected. On entering the city the next day some of the more elevated portions of the streets were found blockaded by drifts of debris torn from the brick walls of the houses, which, of course, showed the gaps where the shells had burst in passing through, and most of the chimneys were down. This proved that the shots had skimmed over the tops of the buildings, and had been aimed at the enemy's works beyond the town rather than at the settled portions of the city itself.