

2012



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GUIDE TO VIRGINIA'S CIVIL WAR

BATTLEFIELDS & SITES

1862 IN VIRGINIA

By the end of March 1862 Confederate fortunes in Virginia looked pretty grim.

Federal troops occupied the northern tier of the state and were inching toward Fredericksburg, just 50 miles north of Richmond.

The Southern navy's technological wonder, the ironclad CSS *Virginia* (*Merrimack*) was neutralized after a fight with the USS *Monitor* in Hampton Roads.

And most worrisome for Confederate authorities, a powerful Union army was gathering under Gen. George McClellan at Fort Monroe in Hampton, preparing to slug its way 80 miles west to the Confederate capital.

Many on both sides believed the spring of 1862 would bring with it the end of the war.

In April, the huge Union Army of the Potomac finally unwound from Fort Monroe and began a slow march west toward Richmond on Virginia's "peninsula," the strip of land between the James and York rivers.

By the end of May, after fighting along the Warwick River and in Williamsburg, this



Cannon on the Malvern Hill battlefield near Richmond

ponderous but potent federal juggernaut was parked in the outskirts of Richmond.

But just as the end seemed inevitable, the Union offensive in Virginia began to unravel.

It started in the Shenandoah Valley where Gen. Stonewall Jackson took advantage of geography and surprise, routing Federal forces at Front Royal and Winchester, May 23-25. He followed up with twin victories at Cross Keys and Port Republic June 8-9.

Jackson's shenanigans threw a scare into Washington and held Union soldiers in the Valley, preventing them from joining McClellan, who was pleading for more troops for a last push against Richmond.

Another incident that late spring should have worked to the Union's advantage but turned out to be key to the Confederate turn-around. The Southern commander in Richmond, Gen. Joseph Johnston, was severely wounded May

31 during the Battle of Seven Pines/Fair Oaks, fought in a Richmond suburb.

The man who took his place, Robert E. Lee, didn't intend to wait for the Union army's final assault, and he didn't waste time. Just 26 days after assuming command, Lee staged a daring assault on an exposed Union corps near Mechanicsville, beginning a series of battles known as the Seven Days. Lee's

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Map of Virginia, pages 24-25

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relentless attacks left McClellan's army bloody and beaten on the banks of the James River, more than 25 miles from Richmond and effectively out of the game.

But another Union army was forming near Washington, this time under Gen. John Pope, a hero from the West. Lee didn't wait around for this new army to mount a campaign against his capital either.

He sent Jackson north where he defeated the lead elements of Pope's army near Culpeper, then continued to the railroad junction at Manassas. On Aug. 28-30, Lee caught up with Jackson and smashed Pope at the Battle of Second Manassas, fought on the old Bull Run battlefield.

In a couple of months, Lee's army had rescued Richmond, regained a hold on Northern Virginia, defeated two Union armies and was poised to cross the Potomac River into Maryland.

Lee did cross the river and after fighting to a bloody draw at the Battle of Antietam near Sharpsburg, Md., Sept. 17, he brought his wounded army back to central Virginia. The Union army, equally torn up, was slow to pursue.

Exasperated by the delay, President Abraham Lincoln named yet another new commander. Gen. Ambrose Burnside led the Union army south again, this time on a course through Fredericksburg. By the time Burnside arrived and was ready to occupy the city, the

Confederates held strong positions on high ground. On Dec. 13, Burnside decided to attack and he shouldn't have. Lee won one of the most lopsided battles of the war, leaving the slopes above Fredericksburg carpeted with Union dead and wounded.

That ended the fighting in Virginia in 1862. No rational person now believed the war could be won quickly or negotiated away. Bumbling Union commanders and Robert E. Lee had seen to that.

While battles dominated the headlines in 1862 and will get the largest share of attention in 2012, Civil War military action is not the only thing Virginia communities will recognize this year. Civilians across Virginia were affected by the war. Folks lost their land or were displaced; crops and possessions destroyed; loved ones died or were wounded or captured.

And the spring advance of the Union armies carried with it another non-military consequence. Abraham Lincoln didn't announce his Emancipation Proclamation until September, but it hadn't taken presidential action for thousands of Virginia slaves to see their chance. They saw freedom in the blue tide and took advantage of it, flocking to Federal lines.

All these stories, too, will be told in Virginia Civil War commemorations this year. ♦



A cemetery on the Cross Keys battlefield in the Shenandoah Valley.

150th Anniversary Events 2012

Here's an overview of the major 150th anniversary events planned throughout Virginia. More specific information on these and other anniversary events is listed on pages 22-23. Keep up with any changes on CivilWarTraveler.com.

■ The Peninsula Campaign and the Battle of the Ironclads

The Mariners' Museum in Newport News hosts a conference and living history weekend March 9-11 commemorating the Battle of the Ironclads in Hampton Roads. Endview Plantation stages reenactments of Peninsula Campaign battles April 21-22 and the national park at Yorktown opens a new Civil War exhibit and hosts living history weekends April 14-15 and May 26-28.



The USS Monitor after the battle

■ The Valley Campaign

Plans call for special tours on the anniversary dates at Kernstown (March 23), McDowell (May 8), Front Royal (May 23), Winchester (May 25), Cross Keys (June 8) and Port Republic (June 9). Many more related events are scheduled.

■ The Seven Days

Special anniversary ranger tours at Beaver Dam Creek (June 26), Gaines' Mill (June 27), Glendale (June 30) and Malvern Hill (July 1) highlight a schedule that also includes living history and other programs.

■ The Northern Virginia Campaign and Second Manassas

Commemorations of the battles of Cedar Mountain, Kettle Run, Thoroughfare Gap and Second Manassas (Bull Run) are planned on or near the anniversary dates. The Manassas National Battlefield Park plans special ranger tours Aug. 28-30. The park and Old Town Manassas host living history programs Aug. 24-26. A special program on the Chantilly battlefield (Sept. 1) also is scheduled.

■ The Battle of Fredericksburg

Special ranger-led tours on the anniversary dates, Dec. 11-13, follow the course of the battle. A living history weekend with programs throughout the area is planned Dec. 7-9. ♦

GUIDE TO VIRGINIA'S CIVIL WAR

BATTLEFIELDS & SITES

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PAGE ONE HISTORY PUBLICATIONS

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