



Civil War Battles 1 *(cont.)*

The Second Battle of Bull Run (Manassas)

After months of sparring between Union forces led by General George McClellan and the Army of Northern Virginia led by General Robert E. Lee, the Union Army had been outmaneuvered, defeated, and pushed back out of much of Virginia. Lincoln tried a new commander, General John Pope. Pope was tricked into an attack on Stonewall Jackson's troops on August 29, 1862. Jackson's troops appeared to be beaten, but Lee sent reinforcements to attack the Union's left flank. Union troops broke rank and ran until a determined defense was organized just 20 miles from Washington. It was another bitter defeat for the Union.

Antietam (Sharpsburg)

In September 1862, Lee marched his troops into Maryland hoping to achieve a Confederate victory and gain British recognition of the Confederate States as a nation. On September 17, 1862, Lee's 18,000 troops, backed up against Antietam Creek near the town of Sharpsburg, were attacked by some of McClellan's 95,000 Union troops. The attack was poorly designed and disorganized, but the fighting was bloody. Union forces were unable to defeat or destroy the Army of Northern Virginia, but they did halt its advance into the North. This was the single bloodiest day of the war with over 23,000 casualties.

Fredericksburg

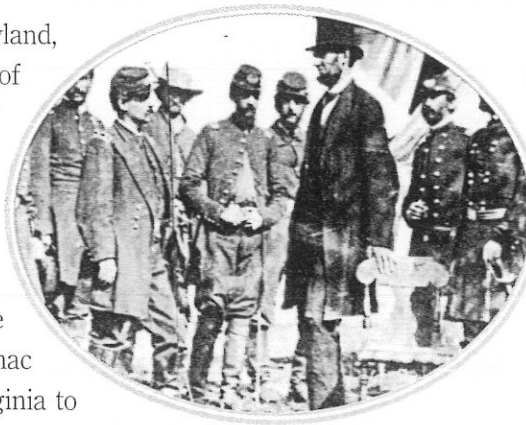
The new commander of the Union forces, General Ambrose Burnside, hoped to capture Richmond and end the war. Delayed for a week until pontoon bridges arrived, Burnside ordered his men to attack Lee's forces which were dug in on the high ground overlooking Fredericksburg, Virginia. The attack on the well-defended Confederates resulted in almost 13,000 Union casualties. The entrenched rebels had about 5,300 casualties. Burnside was forced to order his men to retreat, and the Northern forces suffered another defeat.

ANTIETAM, SHARPSBURG, MARYLAND

In the autumn of 1862, in the cornfields of Maryland, more Americans lost their lives on a single day of battle than ever before or since. The number of Americans who died near Antietam Creek was more than twice the number of dead in the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Spanish-American War combined.

A daring Robert E. Lee wanted to invade Maryland, carrying the war north of the Potomac River to obtain supplies and to buy time for Virginia to recover from the ravages of war. Perhaps a victory on Northern soil would bring France or England in on the side of the Confederacy. Lee counted on the typical caution of Union General George McClellan, but McClellan moved more quickly than Lee had hoped. When Lee arrived near Antietam Creek on September 15, the Confederate commander decided to fight at Antietam.

September 17 dawned gray and foggy, as Union artillery erupted. All day long, fighting continued in the cornfields and woods and along a sunken road that would soon earn the nickname "Bloody Lane." Union General Ambrose Burnside took most of the day to capture a bridge over the creek and by the time it was taken from the five hundred Georgia rifleman defending it, Confederate reinforcements arrived, saving Lee from disaster.



Lincoln visited General McClellan to urge him to pursue Lee's army across the Potomac River.

BATTLE AT-A-GLANCE

ANTIETAM
Sharpsburg, Maryland,
September 17

Union troops: 75,000
Confederate troops: 40,000

Union casualties: 12,400
Confederate casualties: 10,300
DRAW



The dead at Dunker Church, near Antietam.

Lincoln Spares a Soldier's Life

Early on the morning of August 31, 1861, while on guard duty, a young man who had recently enlisted with the Vermont Volunteers fell sound asleep. For sleeping on the job, Private William Scott was arrested, tried, and ordered to be hanged on September 9.

The men of Scott's regiment submitted a petition to Lincoln, begging that the young boy be pardoned. The president, known to have a soft heart, responded, "I do not think an honest, brave soldier, conscious of no crime but sleeping when he was weary, ought to be shot or hung. The country has better uses for him." Lincoln granted clemency, a legal pardon that forgave Scott and allowed him to return to duty.

Young Scott died seven months later in combat, and newspapers described his noble death. A poem about him, "The Sleeping Sentinel," was read before the U.S. Senate in January 1863.

McClellan forced Lee to abandon his invasion, but he could not claim a complete victory. Southern troops managed to slip back across the Potomac River to Virginia, and Lincoln relieved McClellan for his failure to pursue Lee.

Because he was looking for the right time to "strike at the heart of the rebellion," Lincoln decided to emphasize Lee's retreat and claim Antietam as a Union victory. The president believed that emancipating runaway slaves would strip Southern plantations of valuable labor and provide an important resource for the Union army. He would free only those slaves belonging to Rebel masters and not interfere with Union slave owners.

On September 22 Lincoln announced his plan for emancipating all the slaves in Rebel states. By declaring that all Southern slaves would be freed January 1, he signaled that the Union was moving closer to total war, threatening to crush the rebellion by any means necessary.

GRANT APPROACHES VICKSBURG

Vicksburg was a marvel. Perched high atop a bluff over the Mississippi River, virtually unapproachable from three sides and heavily fortified, the town was called the "Gibraltar of the West." This Confederate outpost commanded a view of the river for miles in both directions, so approaching ships and soldiers could be easily picked off.

In December Union General William T. Sherman slogged through a swampy bayou as he headed toward Vicksburg, but Confederates held him off. Although the Union also launched a vigorous naval assault, General Ulysses S. Grant knew that skill, cunning, and patience would be needed to defeat the Confederates, who looked down from their high perch at Vicksburg and jeered at Union failures. Another six months of starvation and deprivation, of attacks on land and sea, would pass before the town of Vicksburg would finally be forced to surrender.

Conscientious Objectors

In all wars, some people are morally opposed to killing, even to defend their country. During the Civil War, many religious groups opposed to war faced a moral dilemma. For example, although the Society of Friends, Quakers, were pacifists who spoke out against war, they were also opposed to slavery. The Quakers had founded the first antislavery societies in the American colonies. They were extremely active in the Underground Railroad and they wanted to help freed slaves with food, clothing, and education. Most Quakers supported the Union cause.

When they were drafted, people whose beliefs would not permit them to fight were allowed to serve in other than combat roles and were given the legal status of "conscientious objectors."

Forced to enlist against his will, Cyrus Pringle, a Quaker from Burlington, Vermont, described his experience: "They are utterly unable to comprehend the pure Christianity and spirituality of our principles. They have long stiffened their necks in their own strength. They have stopped their ears to the voice of the Spirit, and hardened their hearts to his influences. They see no duty higher than to country. What shall we receive at their hands?" Held in a guardhouse, Pringle appealed directly to President Lincoln, who responded that he could do nothing but give him hospital duty. Such work was the "alternate service" offered to most conscientious objectors.