



Civil War Battles 2

Chancellorsville

The new Union commander, “Fighting Joe” Hooker, was popular with his troops and eager to meet the Confederates in battle. In May 1863, he attacked the 60,000-man Confederate army at Chancellorsville, Virginia, with his 130,000 troops. Hooker was repeatedly outmaneuvered by Generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, who positioned their men so that they always had equal or superior numbers at the point of attack. After three days of fighting, Hooker’s troops were beaten, and he was forced to retreat. Despite his brilliant military maneuvers, Lee lost 13,000 men and his best commander. Jackson was wounded in battle and died a week later.

Vicksburg

Vicksburg was the last Southern stronghold on the Mississippi River. General Ulysses S. Grant was determined to take the city and cut the Confederacy in half. Despite the destruction of much of his supply line by Confederate forces, Grant marched his men over 180 miles in 17 days, fought five major battles, and surrounded the city. His artillery pounded the city until July 4, 1863, when Vicksburg finally surrendered. By this time, its weary citizens and defending army were both starving. Control of this city gave the Union forces control of the Mississippi River.

Gettysburg

Hoping to bring the war to an end, General Lee decided to invade the North again and take advantage of the war weariness of Union citizens. Confederate and Union forces clashed by accident at Gettysburg, a small town in Pennsylvania.



During three days of brutal warfare, Lee tried to destroy the Union armies and convince the North to accept the division of the country. Fighting with fewer men, less supplies, and unable to secure a military advantage on the ground, Lee’s army was halted and defeated by Union forces.

The final effort—an attack by Confederate General George Pickett’s troops—failed. Lee was forced to retreat back to Virginia, having suffered over 28,000 casualties. Union dead and wounded numbered over 23,000.

After the bloody repulse at Fredericksburg, Union General Ambrose Burnside was relieved of his command. Lincoln replaced him with a more aggressive military leader, General Joseph "Fighting Joe" Hooker, who was eager to take charge. Hooker had a reputation for being concerned about his troops, so he began at once to improve morale. A soldier confided, "I have never known men to change from a condition of the lowest depression to that of a healthy fighting state in so short a time." But Hooker was also an astute politician and engineered his rise through the Union ranks by cultivating power.

Once spring arrived and the roads were less muddy, Hooker declared that he would pin Lee down at Chancellorsville and then send troops in from behind to finish him off. He believed his plan was foolproof, but Lincoln warned, "The hen is the wisest of all the animal creation because she never cackles until after the egg is laid."

With Hooker nearby, Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson decided to attempt the same daring military maneuver that the Union general had boasted he would accomplish—an ambush from the rear. Hooker's men were dug into the dense forested region known as "the Wilderness" to fight off Lee's advance. At this time, Jackson marched the bulk of the Confederate forces around to attack Hooker's troops from behind. This maneuver caught the Union completely by surprise and scattered the troops into the brambles. A Union witness recalled, "It was a whirlwind of men. The enemy seemed to come from every direction." As a result, the soldiers in blue were trapped and entangled and confused. Fires raged and men were caught in the dense burning woods.

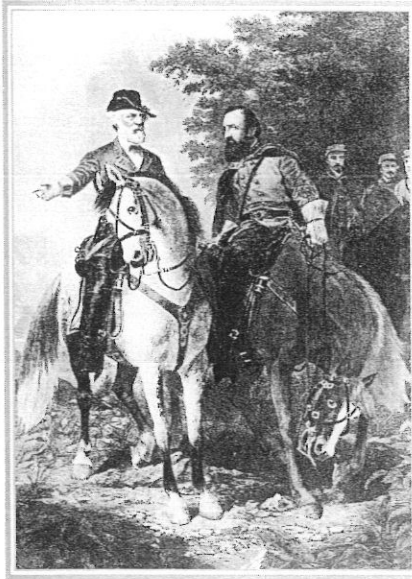
EYEWITNESS

"I saw the body of a man killed the previous day this morning and a horrible sight it was. Such sights do not affect me as they once did. I can not describe the change nor do I know when it took effect, yet I know that there is a change for I look on the carcass of a man with pretty much such feeling as I would do were it a horse or hog."

Young HENRY GRAVES,
expressing his feelings
about battle in a letter home.

An officer inspects Union artillery before the battle at Chancellorsville.





Near the end of the battle, Lee forced Hooker's troops into retreat despite being outnumbered two to one. This defeat, a stunning blow to the Union army, paved the way for Hooker to be relieved of his command the last week of June, after less than six months in charge. He was replaced by General George Meade.

The triumph of the Confederacy at Chancellorsville was bittersweet, however. A tragic accident occurred when General Jackson was accidentally wounded by his own men during the battle. General J.E.B. Stuart replaced this key commander when the fallen Jackson was carried off. A few days later, Lee and the Confederate nation mourned Jackson's death.

DEATH OF STONEWALL JACKSON

Beloved, eccentric General Thomas J. Jackson was at the peak of his military powers when he joined Lee near Chancellorsville. The two generals had spent the recent Christmas together, and Lee had attended the christening of Jackson's daughter weeks before. The two comrades met shortly before midnight on May 1 to plan strategy for the next day of battle. Lee believed that Jackson could pull off a miraculous maneuver and surprise the Union men from behind. Indeed, Jackson's men performed beautifully the next day.

But in the darkness and confusion of returning to camp, Jackson was hit by a bullet from one of his own men. As they carried him to safety, his officers had to make a human shield to protect his body from the gunfire. The doctor was forced to amputate Jackson's left arm. Hearing the news, Lee said: "He has lost his left arm, but I have lost my right."

At first Stonewall Jackson seemed on the road to recovery. But by the time his wife, Mary Anna, arrived, pneumonia had set in and he was fading. On the morning of Sunday, May 10, Jackson's doctor warned that he might die. Anna broke the news to her husband, a deeply religious man. Jackson replied, "I have always desired to die on Sunday." He became delirious, shouting orders as if he were still in the thick of battle. Finally he closed his eyes and spoke his dying words: "Let us cross over the river and rest under the shade of the trees."

When Jefferson Davis declared a day of national mourning, the Confederacy bowed its head. Stonewall Jackson was buried in Lexington, not far from the grounds of the Virginia Military Institute, a shattering loss to his family and his comrades.

BATTLE AT-A-GLANCE

BATTLE OF CHANCELLORSVILLE
Chancellorsville, Virginia, May 1-5

Union troops: 115,000

Confederate troops: 60,000

Union casualties: 17,300

Confederate casualties: 12,000

CONFEDERATE VICTORY

One of the most enduring Confederate images of the war, the *Last Meeting of Lee and Jackson*, (shown at left) was painted in 1869. Reproductions hung in many Southern homes as a tribute to these two great military leaders.



Female mourners gathered at Jackson's grave near the Virginia Military Institute, where he once taught.