

1650

1700

1750

1800

1850

1900

Reading
Passages

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.

BATTLE OF FREDERICKSBURG FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA

Union General Ambrose Burnside, who had replaced George McClellan as head of the Army of the Potomac, knew he had to strike at the Confederate capital, Richmond, or he, too, would be fired. Burnside had a daring plan—to march his force of more than a hundred thousand across the Rappahannock River on bridges of floating structures called pontoons. He launched his operation near the small town of Fredericksburg, halfway between the two capitals, Richmond and Washington. Unfortunately, Lee had anticipated the Union attack and fortified his positions near the riverfront.

Confederate sharpshooters picked off many of the soldiers in blue as they crossed on pontoons. When they tried to storm up a steep hill called Marye's Heights, Burnside's men were mowed down. The slaughter was intense and awful, as charge after charge of Yankees was turned back. One Confederate commander described the bravery of the Union men, who "melt[ed] like snow coming down on warm ground." Indeed, snowflakes covered the ground where bodies didn't on the raw December day in Fredericksburg, where thousands of Union soldiers lay dead.

BATTLE OF STONES RIVER MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

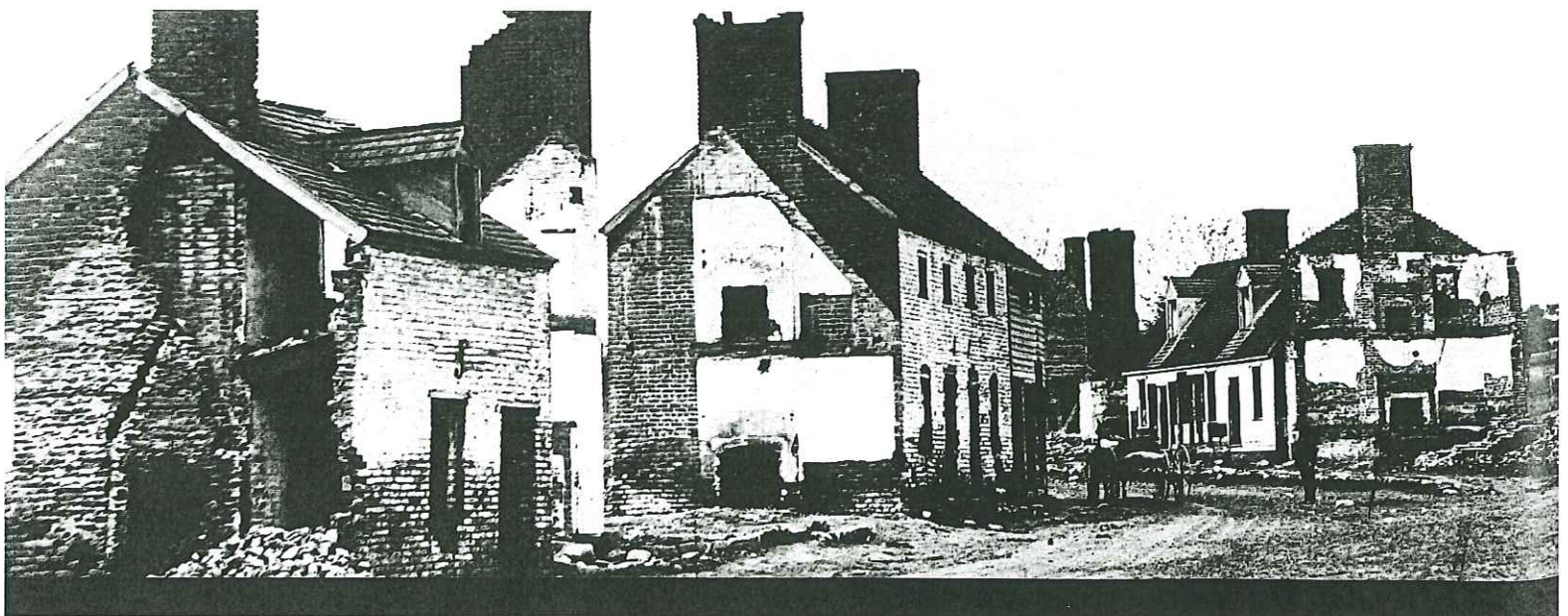
On the frozen western front, in the dead of winter, while most commanders on both sides had suspended fighting until spring, the overconfident Confederate General Braxton Bragg launched an attack on Union forces near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, where Union General William S. "Rosey" Rosecrans had set up winter quarters. All day long on December 31, fighting was bitter. Bragg, anticipating victory, telegraphed Richmond, "God has granted us a happy New Year." But when New Year's Day finally dawned, Rosecrans had held his position and fought off the Rebels. Bragg ordered another assault on January 2, but his officers insisted on retreating instead. Heavy casualties and his men's lack of support forced Bragg's withdrawal, making the Battle of Stones River a terrible loss of face for the Confederates.

EYEWITNESS

"Hard fighting does not begin to express the work that was done. I never want to see another engagement. 'To what did it amount?' . . . We can never whip the Rebels. I believe. Let those who talk of the valor of our troops—which is all true—come and see the Rebels fight. Why not settle the difficulty at once without further expense and loss of life? . . . Why not confess we are worsted, and come to some agreement? . . . Why murder your sons and brothers for no commensurate result?"

SAMUEL EDMUND NICHOLS,
a Union soldier writing in despair
to his cousin Phoebe, after the
Battle of Fredericksburg

Fredericksburg after the battle.



NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

When 1862 drew to a close, both North and South had suffered enormous loss of life and morale. Lincoln was reeling over the drastic losses at Fredericksburg. He was worried that the mounting death lists posted at general stores and at railway depots throughout the North would turn the country against the war, as well as against him as the president responsible for it.

Similarly, President Jefferson Davis had to deal with strong-willed generals like Braxton Bragg and other independent Confederate officers, who boasted that they would “whip the Yankees,” but who sometimes ended up defeated.

Despite military setbacks, the Confederates had managed to hold on to the upper Mississippi River, which kept supplies flowing between the upper South and the Delta region. Jackson and Lee claimed important victories in Virginia, which lifted sagging Southern spirits. But during the autumn of 1862, Lincoln attempted to pull the rug out from under Rebel triumphs by promising to free the slaves. He knew his preliminary outline of plans for the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863 would undermine Confederate campaigns to gain diplomatic recognition or further economic support abroad. In addition, his offer of freedom and refuge to millions of slaves trapped within Rebel borders would signal an important shift. Confederate leaders realized that Lincoln's new moral agenda, as well as the infusion of black soldiers into the Union army, might alter the course of the war and redefine the terms of peace.

BATTLES AT-A-GLANCE

BATTLE OF FREDERICKSBURG Fredericksburg, Virginia, December 13

Union troops: 120,000
Confederate troops: 75,000

Union casualties: 12,500
Confederate casualties: 5,300
CONFEDERATE VICTORY

BATTLE OF STONES RIVER Murfreesboro, Tennessee December 31–January 2

Union troops: 45,000
Confederate troops: 12,400

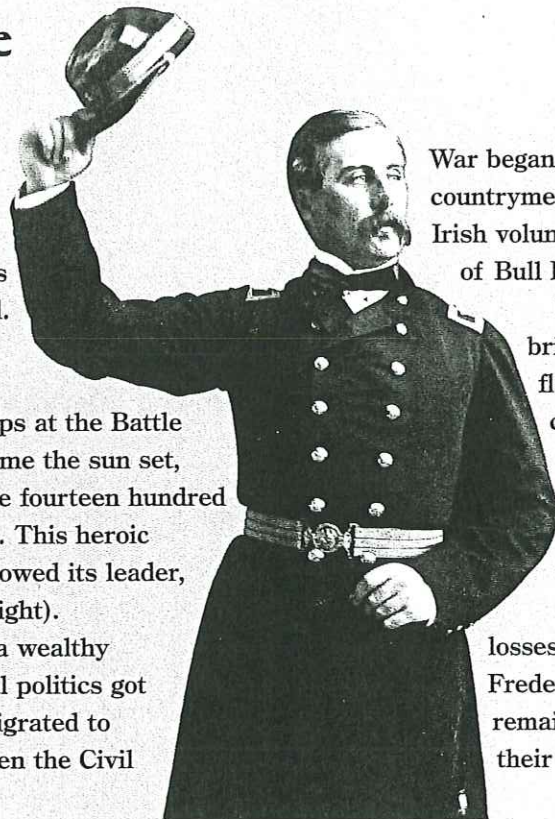
Union casualties: 38,000
Confederate casualties: 12,000
UNION VICTORY

Irish Brigade

IMMIGRANTS AND THE UNION ARMY

When the Civil War erupted, huge numbers of Irish immigrants in the United States enlisted. The fighting Irish marched into battle with sprigs of evergreen tucked in their caps at the Battle of Fredericksburg. By the time the sun set, only two hundred fifty of the fourteen hundred men in the brigade survived. This heroic immigrant company had followed its leader, Thomas Francis Meagher (right).

Meagher was born into a wealthy family in Ireland. His radical politics got him into trouble, and he emigrated to New York City in 1852. When the Civil



War began, Meagher urged his fellow countrymen to join the Union army. His Irish volunteers fought in the First Battle of Bull Run.

Meagher then filled an entire brigade with Irish soldiers. The flamboyant recruiter wore a colorful uniform and was an eloquent speaker. He drew Irish volunteers from all over, but mostly from eastern cities crowded with immigrants.

Despite the Irish Brigade's losses at Antietam and Fredericksburg, the brave men remained fighting together under their regimental green silk flags.