**First Battle of Bull Run**

On July 21, 1861, Union and Confederate armies clashed near Manassas Junction, Virginia, in the first major land battle of the American Civil War. Known as the First Battle of Bull Run (or Manassas), the engagement began when about 35,000 Union troops marched from the federal capital in Washington, D.C. to strike a Confederate force of 20,000 along a small river known as Bull Run. After fighting on the defensive for most of the day, the rebels rallied and were able to break the Union right flank, sending the Federals into a chaotic retreat towards Washington. The Confederate victory gave the South a surge of confidence and shocked many in the North, who realized the war would not be won as easily as they had hoped.

**Prelude to the First Battle of Bull Run (Manassas)**

By July 1861, two months after Confederate troops opened fire on [Fort Sumter](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/fort-sumter) to begin the Civil War, the northern press and public were eager for the Union Army to make an advance on Richmond ahead of the planned meeting of the Confederate Congress there on July 20. Encouraged by early victories by Union troops in western [Virginia](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/virginia), and by the war fever spreading through the North, President [Abraham Lincoln](http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/abraham-lincoln) ordered Brigadier General Irvin McDowell to mount an offensive that would hit quickly and decisively at the enemy and open the way to Richmond, thus bringing the war to a mercifully quick end. The offensive would begin with an attack on more than 20,000 Confederate troops under the command of General [P.G.T. Beauregard](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/pgt-beauregard) camped near Manassas Junction, Virginia (25 miles from [Washington](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/washington), D.C.) along a little river known as Bull Run.

**Did You Know?**

After First Manassas, Stonewall Jackson further distinguished himself in the Shenandoah Valley, Second Manassas and Fredericksburg. The man Lee called his "right arm" was accidentally shot by his own men at Chancellorsville and died of complications relating to the injury.

The cautious McDowell, then in command of the 35,000 Union volunteer troops gathered in the Federal capital, knew that his men were ill prepared and pushed for a postponement of the advance to give him time for additional training. But Lincoln ordered him to begin the offensive nonetheless, reasoning (correctly) that the rebel army was made up of similarly amateur soldiers. McDowell’s army began moving out of Washington on July 16; its slow movement allowed Beauregard (who also received advance notice of his enemy’s movements through a Confederate espionage network in Washington) to call on his fellow Confederate General [Joseph E. Johnston](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/joseph-e-johnston) for reinforcements. Johnston, in command of some 11,000 rebels in the Shenandoah Valley, was able to outmaneuver a Union force in the region and march his men towards Manassas.

**Battle Begins at Bull Run**

McDowell’s Union force struck on July 21, shelling the enemy across Bull Run while more troops crossed the river at Sudley Ford in an attempt to hit the Confederate left flank. Over two hours, 10,000 Federals gradually pushed back 4,500 rebels across the Warrington turnpike and up Henry House Hill. Reporters, congressmen and other onlookers who had traveled from Washington and were watching the battle from the nearby countryside prematurely celebrated a Union victory, but reinforcements from both Johnston and Beauregard’s armies soon arrived on the battlefield to rally the Confederate troops. In the afternoon, both sides traded attacks and counterattacks near Henry House Hill. On Johnston and Beauregard’s orders, more and more Confederate reinforcements arrived, even as the Federals struggled with coordinating assaults made by different regiments.

**The “Rebel Yell” at Bull Run (Manassas)**

By four o’clock in the afternoon, both sides had an equal number of men on the field of battle (about 18,000 on each side were engaged at Bull Run), and Beauregard ordered a counterattack along the entire line. Screaming as they advanced (the “rebel yell” that would become infamous among Union troops) the Confederates managed to break the Union line. As McDowell’s Federals retreated chaotically across Bull Run, they ran headlong into hundreds of Washington civilians who had been watching the battle while picnicking on the fields east of the river, now making their own hasty retreat.

Among the future leaders on both sides who fought at First Manassas were Ambrose E. Burnside and William T. Sherman (for the Union) along with Confederates like Stuart, [Wade Hampton](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/wade-hampton), and most famously, Thomas J. Jackson, who earned his enduring nickname, “Stonewall,” in the battle. Jackson, a former professor at the Virginia Military Institute, led a Virginia brigade from the Shenandoah Valley into the battle at a key moment, helping the Confederates hold an important high-ground position at Henry House Hill. General Barnard Bee (who was later killed in the battle) told his men to take heart, and to look at Jackson standing there “like a stone wall.”

**Impact of Bull Run (Manassas)**

Despite their victory, Confederate troops were far too disorganized to press their advantage and pursue the retreating Yankees, who reached Washington by July 22. The First Battle of Bull Run (called First Manassas in the South) cost some 3,000 Union casualties, compared with 1,750 for the Confederates. Its outcome sent northerners who had expected a quick, decisive victory reeling, and gave rejoicing southerners a false hope that they themselves could pull off a swift victory. In fact, both sides would soon have to face the reality of a long, grueling conflict that would take an unimaginable toll on the country and its people.

On the Confederate side, accusations flew between Johnston, Beauregard and President [Jefferson Davis](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/jefferson-davis) over who was to blame for the failure to pursue and crush the enemy after the battle. For the Union, Lincoln removed McDowell from command and replaced him with George B. McClellan, who would retrain and reorganize Union troops defending Washington into a disciplined fighting force, thereafter known as the Army of the Potomac.

**Battle of Hampton Roads**

The March 9, 1862, battle between the Monitor and the Merrimack (CSS Virginia) during the American Civil War (1861-65) was history’s first duel between ironclad warships. The engagement, known as the Battle of Hampton Roads, was part of a Confederate effort to break the Union blockade of Southern ports, including Norfolk and Richmond, Virginia, that had been imposed at the start of the war. Though the battle itself was inconclusive, it began a new era in naval warfare.

**USS Merrimack Rechristened the CSS Virginia**

The CSS [Virginia](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/virginia) was originally the USS Merrimack, a 40-gun frigate launched in 1855. The Merrimack served in the Caribbean and was the flagship of the Pacific fleet in the late 1850s. In early 1860, the ship was decommissioned for extensive repairs at the Gosport Navy Yard in Norfolk, Virginia. The vessel was still there when the Civil War began in April 1861, and Union sailors sank the ship as the yard was evacuated. Six weeks later, a salvage company raised the ship and the Confederates began rebuilding it.

**Did You Know?**

The design of the USS Monitor was so innovative, that when it was launched the ship featured more than 40 different newly patented inventions.

The Confederates covered the ship in heavy armor plating above the waterline and outfitted it with powerful guns. Rechristened the Virginia, it was a formidable vessel when launched in February 1862. On March 8, the Virginia sunk two Union ships and ran one aground off Hampton Roads in southeastern Virginia.

**Battle of Hampton Roads: March 9, 1862**

The next day, the USS Monitor steamed into the Chesapeake Bay. Designed by Swedish engineer John Ericsson, the vessel had an unusually low profile, rising from the water only 18 inches. The flat iron deck had a 20-foot cylindrical turret rising from the middle of the ship; the turret housed two 11-inch Dahlgren guns. TheMonitor had a draft of less than 11 feet so it could operate in the shallow harbors and rivers of the South. It was commissioned on February 25, 1862, and arrived at Chesapeake Bay just in time to engage the Virginia.

The battle between the Virginia and the Monitor began on the morning of March 9 and continued for four hours. The ships circled one another, jockeying for position as they fired their guns. However, the cannon balls simply deflected off the iron ships. In the early afternoon, the Virginia pulled back to Norfolk. Neither ship was seriously damaged, but the Monitor effectively ended the short reign of terror that the Confederate ironclad had brought to the Union navy.

**The Monitor and the Merrimack: Final Days**

Both ships met ignominious ends. When the Yankees invaded the James Peninsula two months after the Battle of Hampton Roads, the retreating Confederates scuttled the Virginia. The Monitor went down in bad weather off Cape Hatteras, [North Carolina](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/north-carolina), at the end of the year. In 1973, the wreck of the Monitor was discovered at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. Many artifacts from the vessel have since been recovered and are on display at the Mariners’ Museum in Newport News, Virginia.

Though they had short lives, the two ironclads ushered in a new era in naval warfare.

**Battle of Shiloh**

Also known as the Battle of Pittsburg Landing, the Battle of Shiloh took place from April 6 to April 7, 1862, and was one of the major early engagements of the American Civil War (1861-65). The battle began when the Confederates launched a surprise attack on Union forces under General Ulysses S. Grant (1822-85) in southwestern Tennessee. After initial successes, the Confederates wereunable to hold their positions and were forced back,resulting in a Union victory. Both sides suffered heavy losses, with more than 23,000 total casualties, and the level of violence shocked North and South alike.

**Yankees Score Key Victories Before Battle of Shiloh**

In the six months prior to the Battle of Shiloh, Yankee troops had been working their way up the [Tennessee](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/tennessee) and Cumberland rivers. [Kentucky](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/kentucky) was firmly in Union hands, and the U.S. Army controlled much of Tennessee, including the capital at Nashville. General [Ulysses S. Grant](http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/ulysses-s-grant) scored major victories at forts Henry and Donelson in February, forcing Confederate General [Albert Sidney Johnston](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/albert-sidney-johnston) (1803-62) to gather the scattered Rebel forces at Corinth in northern [Mississippi](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/mississippi). Grant brought his army, 42,000 strong, to rendezvous with General [Don Carlos Buell](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/don-carlos-buell) (1818-98) and his 20,000 troops. Grant’s objective was Corinth, a vital rail center that if captured would give the Union total control of the region. Twenty miles away, Johnston lurked at Corinth with 45,000 soldiers.

**Did You Know?**

Union General Lew Wallace (1827-1905), who played a controversial role in the Battle of Shiloh, later went on to write the popular 1880 novel “Ben Hur.”

Johnston did not wait for Grant and Buell to combine their forces. He advanced on April 3, delayed by rains and muddy roads that also slowed Buell.

**Battle of Shiloh Begins: April 6-7, 1862**

In the early dawn of April 6, a Yankee patrol found the Confederates poised for battle just a mile from the main Union army. Johnston attacked, driving the surprised bluecoats back near Shiloh Church. Throughout the day, the Confederates battered the Union army, driving it back towards Pittsburgh Landing and threatening to trap it against the Tennessee River. Many troops on both sides had no experience in battle. The chances for a complete Confederate victory diminished as troops from Buell’s army began arriving, and Grant’s command on the battlefield shored up the sagging Union line. In the middle of the afternoon, Johnston rode forward to direct the Confederate attack and was struck in the leg by a bullet, severing an artery and causing him to quickly bleed to death. He became the highest ranking general on either side killed during the war. General Pierre G. T. Beauregard (1818-93) assumed control, and he halted the advance at nightfall. The Union army was driven back two miles, but it did not break.

**Battle of Shiloh: Grant Counterattacks**

Now, Grant was joined by the vanguard of the Buell’s army. With an advantage in terms of troop numbers, Grant counterattacked on April 7. The tired Confederates slowly retreated, but they inflicted heavy casualties on the Yankees. By nightfall, the Union had driven the Confederates back to Shiloh Church, recapturing grisly reminders of the previous day’s battle such as the Hornet’s Nest, the Peach Orchard and Bloody Pond. The Confederates finally limped back to Corinth, thus giving a major victory to Grant.

**Battle of Shiloh: Casualties**

The cost of the victory was high. More than 13,000 of Grant’s and Buell’s approximately 62,000 troops were killed, wounded, captured or missing. Of 45,000 Confederates engaged, there were more than 10,000 casualties. The more than 23,000 combined casualties were far greater than the casualty figures for the war’s other key battles ([First Battle of Bull Run](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/first-battle-of-bull-run), Wilson’s Creek, Fort Donelson and Pea Ridge) up to that date. It was a sobering reminder to all in the Union and the Confederacy that the war would be long and costly.

**Battle of Antietam**

On September 17, 1862, Generals Robert E. Lee and George McClellan faced off near Antietam creek in Sharpsburg, Maryland, in the the first battle of the American Civil War to be fought on northern soil.Though McClellan failed toutlilize his numerical superiority to crush Lee’sarmy, he was able to check the Confederate advance intothe north. Aftera string ofUnion defeats, this tacticalvictory provided Abraham Lincoln the political cover he needed to issue his Emancipation Proclamation. Though the result of the battle was inconclusive, itremains the bloodiest single day in American history, withmore than 22,000 casualties.

Fought along Antietam Creek, at Sharpsburg, [Maryland](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/maryland), this battle brought about America’s bloodiest day, the product of Confederate audacity and Union command failure.

**Did You Know?**

The 1st Texas Infantry lost 82 percent of its menduring the Battle of Antietam, the highest casualty rate for any Confederate regiment in one battle of the Civil War.

Following Second Manassas, General [Robert E. Lee](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/robert-e-lee) advanced into Maryland, believing that the potential strategic and political gains justified his defiance of the avowed Confederate defensive policy. Lee’s complex operational plan divided his outnumbered force; disaster loomed when a lost copy of that plan came to the Union commander, Major General George B. McClellan. Slow, cautious, and defensive-minded, however, McClellan wasted all the advantages of his lucky discovery and his two-to-one numerical superiority.

The battleground Lee selected was well suited for defense but dangerous as well, having the Potomac River behind him. McClellan planned to overwhelm Lee’s left flank but failed to exercise command control, so the combat diffused south along the battle line.

The first four hours of fighting, much of it across farmer David Miller’s thirty-acre cornfield, were indecisive. Next came a series of bloody head-on attacks against Lee’s center that finally overran the area afterward called Bloody Lane. The last action of the day was against Lee’s right, where Union troops pierced the line (weakened to reinforce other sections) but were stopped by late-arriving Confederate reinforcements.

Lee withdrew across the river on September 18, suffering 10,318 casualties (of 38,000 engaged) to McClellan’s 12,401 (of 75,000). The draw that the Union claimed as a victory provided the Lincoln administration enough justification to issue the preliminary [Emancipation Proclamation](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/emancipation-proclamation). A series of graphic battlefield photographs of the dead, taken by Alexander Gardner, brought to the home front “the terrible earnestness of war.”

**Battle of Gettysburg**

The Battle of Gettysburg, fought from July 1 to July 3, 1863, is considered the most important engagement of the American Civil War. After a great victory over Union forces at Chancellorsville, General Robert E. Lee marched his Army of Northern Virginia into Pennsylvania in late June 1863. On July 1, the advancing Confederates clashed with the Union’s Army of the Potomac, commanded by General George G. Meade, at the crossroads town of Gettysburg. The next day saw even heavier fighting, as the Confederates attacked the Federals on both left and right. On July 3, Lee ordered an attack by fewer than 15,000 troops on the enemy’s center at Cemetery Ridge. The assault, known as “Pickett’s Charge,” managed to pierce the Union lines but eventually failed, at the cost of thousands of rebel casualties, and Lee was forced to withdraw his battered army toward Virginia on July 4.

**Battle of Gettysburg: Lee’s Invasion of the North**

In May 1863, Robert E. Lee’s Confederate Army of Northern [Virginia](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/virginia) had scored a smashing victory over the Army of the Potomac at Chancellorsville. Brimming with confidence, Lee decided to go on the offensive and invade the North for a second time (the first invasion had ended at Antietam the previous fall). In addition to bringing the conflict out of Virginia and diverting northern troops from Vicksburg, where the Confederates were under siege, Lee hoped to gain recognition of the Confederacy by Britain and France and strengthen the cause of northern “Copperheads” who favored peace.

**Did You Know?**

In November 1863, President Abraham Lincoln delivered his most famous speech at the dedication of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg, eloquently transforming the Union cause into a struggle for liberty and equality--in only 272 words.

On the Union side, President [Abraham Lincoln](http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/abraham-lincoln) had lost confidence in the Army of the Potomac’s commander, [Joseph Hooker](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/joseph-hooker), who seemed reluctant to confront Lee’s army after the defeat at Chancellorsville. On June 28, Lincoln named Major General George Gordon Meade to succeed Hooker. Meade immediately ordered the pursuit of Lee’s army of 75,000, which by then had crossed the Potomac River into [Maryland](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/maryland) and marched on into southern [Pennsylvania](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/pennsylvania).

**Battle of Gettysburg Begins: July 1**

Upon learning that the Army of the Potomac was on its way, Lee planned to assemble his army in the prosperous crossroads town of Gettysburg, 35 miles southwest of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. One of the Confederate divisions in A.P. Hill’s command approached the town in search of supplies early on July 1, only to find that two Union cavalry brigades had arrived the previous day. As the bulk of both armies headed toward Gettysburg, Confederate forces (led by Hill and [Richard Ewell](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/richard-ewell)) were able to drive the outnumbered Federal defenders back through town to Cemetery Hill, located a half mile to the south.

Seeking to press his advantage before more Union troops could arrive, Lee gave discretionary orders to attack Cemetery Hill to Ewell, who had taken command of the Army of Northern Virginia’s Second Corps after Lee’s most trusted general, Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson, was mortally wounded at Chancellorsville. Ewell declined to order the attack, considering the Federal position too strong; his reticence would earn him many unfavorable comparisons to the great Stonewall. By dusk, a Union corps under [Winfield Scott](http://www.history.com/topics/winfield-scott) Hancock had arrived and extended the defensive line along Cemetery Ridge to the hill known as Little Round Top; three more Union corps arrived overnight to strengthen its defenses.

**Battle of Gettysburg, Day 2: July 2**

As the next day dawned, the Union Army had established strong positions from Culp’s Hill to Cemetery Ridge. Lee assessed his enemy’s positions and determined–against the advice of his defensively minded second-in-command, James Longstreet–to attack the Federals where they stood. He ordered Longstreet to lead an attack on the Union left, while Ewell’s corps would strike the right, near Culp’s Hill. Though his orders were to attack as early in the day as possible, Longstreet didn’t get his men into position until 4 pm, when they opened fire on the Union corps commanded by [Daniel Sickles](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/daniel-sickles).

Over the next several hours, bloody fighting raged along Sickles’ line, which stretched from the nest of boulders known as Devil’s Den into a peach orchard, as well as in a nearby wheat field and on the slopes of Little Round Top. Thanks to fierce fighting by one [Minnesota](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/minnesota) regiment, the Federals were able to hold Little Round Top, but lost the orchard, field and Devil’s Den; Sickles himself was seriously wounded. Ewell’s men had advanced on the Union forces at Culp’s Hill and East Cemetery Hill in coordination with Longstreet’s 4 pm attack, but Union forces had stalled their attack by dusk. Both armies suffered extremely heavy losses on July 2, with 9,000 or more casualties on each side. The combined casualty total from two days of fighting came to nearly 35,000, the largest two-day toll of the war.

**Battle of Gettysburg, Day 3: July 3**

Early on the morning of July 3, Union forces of the Twelfth Army Corps pushed back a Confederate threat against Culp’s Hill after a seven-hour firefight and regained their strong position. Believing his men had been on the brink of victory the day before, Lee decided to send three divisions (preceded by an artillery barrage) against the Union center on Cemetery Ridge. Fewer than 15,000 troops, led by a division under [George Pickett](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/george-edward-pickett), would be tasked with marching some three-quarters of a mile across open fields to attack dug-in Union infantry positions.

Despite Longstreet’s protests, Lee was determined, and the attack–later known as “Pickett’s Charge”–went forward around 3 pm, after an artillery bombardment by some 150 Confederate guns. Union infantry opened fire on the advancing rebels from behind stone walls, while regiments from [Vermont](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/vermont), [New York](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/new-york) and [Ohio](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/ohio) hit both of the enemy’s flanks. Caught from all sides, barely half of the Confederates survived, and Pickett’s division lost two-thirds of its men. As the survivors stumbled back to their opening position, Lee and Longstreet scrambled to shore up their defensive line after the failed assault.

**Battle of Gettysburg: Aftermath and Impact**

His hopes of a victorious invasion of the North dashed, Lee waited for a Union counterattack on July 4, but it never came. That night, in heavy rain, the Confederate general withdrew his decimated army toward Virginia. Though the cautious Meade would be criticized for not pursuing the enemy after Gettysburg, the battle was a crushing defeat for the Confederacy. Union casualties in the battle numbered 23,000, while the Confederates had lost some 28,000 men–more than a third of Lee’s army. The North rejoiced while the South mourned, its hopes for foreign recognition of the Confederacy erased.

Demoralized by the defeat at Gettysburg, Lee offered his resignation to President [Jefferson Davis](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/jefferson-davis), but was refused. Though the great Confederate general would go on to win other victories, the Battle of Gettysburg (combined with Ulysses S. Grant’s victory at Vicksburg, also on July 4) irrevocably turned the tide of the Civil War in the Union’s favor.

**Battle of Fredericksburg**

The Battle of Fredericksburg on December 13, 1862, involved nearly 200,000 combatants, the largest concentration of troops in any Civil War battle. Ambrose Burnside, the newly appointed commander of the Army of the Potomac, had ordered his more than 120,000 troops to cross the Rappahannock River, where they made a two-pronged attack on the right and left flanks of Robert E. Lee’s 80,000-strong Army of Northern Virginia at Fredericksburg. On both ends, Lee’s rebel defenders turned back the Union assault with heavy casualties (nearly 13,000), particularly from their high position atop Marye’s Heights. The results of the battle sent Union morale plummeting and lent much-needed new energy to the Confederate cause after the failure of Lee’s first invasion of the North at Antietam the previous fall.

**Battle of Fredericksburg: A New Union Commander**

Before the fall of 1862, President [Abraham Lincoln](http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/abraham-lincoln) had twice offered [Ambrose Burnside](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/ambrose-everett-burnside) overall command of the Union’s Army of the Potomac due to frustration with its present commander, George B. McClellan. Burnside turned it down both times–once after the failed [Peninsula Campaign](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/peninsula-campaign) and again after the Confederate victory in the [Second Battle of Bull Run](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/second-battle-of-bull-run) (Manassas)–insisting that McClellan was the man for the job. In September 1862, Burnside led the left wing of the Army of the Potomac at the [Battle of Antietam](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/battle-of-antietam), during which his forces struggled to capture what became known as “Burnside’s Bridge.” When McClellan declined to press his advantage and pursue Robert E. Lee’s defeated Army of Northern [Virginia](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/virginia) after Antietam, Lincoln reached the limits of his patience. On November 7 he removed McClellan from command and appointed the reluctant Burnside to his post.

**Did You Know?**

General Ambrose Burnside's distinctive side-whiskers, which he wore for most of his life, spawned a new fashion that would become known as "burnsides," later changed to "sideburns."

Burnside may have doubted his own qualifications to command the Army of the Potomac, but he nonetheless acted quickly to move the large force into Virginia in an advance toward the Confederate capital of Richmond. By mid-November, he had moved two advance corps to Falmouth, located on the north bank of the Rappahannock River across from Fredericksburg. In response, Lee rushed his troops to dig in positions in the hills south of the Rappahannock before the bulk of Burnside’s army could arrive.

**Battle of Fredericksburg: An Ill-Fated Advance**

Unfortunately for Burnside, the section of the Rappahannock near Falmouth was too deep to ford, so he was forced to wait for pontoon bridges to arrive in order to cross the river. Due to a miscommunication between Burnside and Henry Halleck, general in chief of all Union armies, the pontoons were delayed in arriving, and James Longstreet’s Confederate corps had ample time to occupy a strong position on Marye’s Heights in Fredericksburg. On December 11, as Burnside crossed the Rappahannock with more than 120,000 Union troops, Lee offered only a token resistance in order to give Stonewall Jackson’s corps time to connect with Longstreet’s, stretching out the Confederate line by some three miles.

On December 13, Burnside ordered his left wing (led by General William B. Franklin) in an attack on Lee’s right, commanded by Jackson, while the rest of his army attempted to assault Longstreet’s First Corps at Marye’s Heights. Though a division led by General George Meade managed to temporarily break Jackson’s line, Franklin failed to send 50,000 more troops forward when given the opportunity, and Jackson was able to launch a successful counterattack. Meanwhile, Longstreet’s artillery mowed down ranks of attacking Union soldiers from their strong position on high ground. By the time darkness fell, there had been no change in position. The Union had suffered nearly 13,000 casualties, most of them in front of Marye’s Heights, while the Confederates counted fewer than 5,000.

**Impact of the Battle of Fredericksburg**

The Battle of Fredericksburg was a crushing defeat for the Union, whose soldiers fought courageously and well but fell victim to mismanagement by their generals, including confused orders from Burnside to Franklin. Burnside accepted responsibility for the defeat, though many blamed Lincoln for pressuring him to go ahead with an impossible offensive. In the rush of political recriminations that followed, a majority of Republican senators voted to remove Secretary of State [William Seward](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/william-seward), who had become the primary target for their frustrations over the administration’s conduct of the war. Led by Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Chase, the senators pressed Lincoln to reorganize his cabinet, and when he refused, Chase offered his resignation. Seward had also offered to resign, but Lincoln refused in both cases, smoothing over the cabinet crisis and deftly limiting the political repercussions of the defeat at Fredericksburg. In January 1863, the president named [Joseph Hooker](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/joseph-hooker) to replace Burnside as commander of the Army of the Potomac.

On the Confederate side, the victory at Fredericksburg restored Confederate morale after Lee’s unsuccessful campaign into [Maryland](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/maryland) in the fall. At the head of a rejuvenated Army of Northern Virginia, Lee would follow up with an even more smashing success over a numerically superior Union force at Chancellorsville in May 1863 before launching a second invasion of the North through [Pennsylvania](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/pennsylvania). In July, Lee’s army would again meet the Army of the Potomac–by that time under the command of George Meade, who replaced Hooker after Chancellorsville–in the decisive [Battle of Gettysburg](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/battle-of-gettysburg).

**Peninsula Campaign**

The Peninsula (or Peninsular) Campaign was a major Union offensive against the Confederate capital of Richmond led by Major General George B. McClellan in the spring and summer of 1862, during the American Civil War. After moving his Army of the Potomac by boat to Fort Monroe on the Atlantic coast in late April, McClellan planned an advance toward Richmond via the peninsula formed by the York and James Rivers. Due to a habit of consistently overestimating his enemy’s numbers, the Union general refused to act until late May. The first stage of the Peninsula Campaign ended in the inconclusive Battle of Seven Pines, during which Confederate General Joseph Johnston was injured and command passed to Robert E. Lee. Beginning on June 25, Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia held off the Army of the Potomac in a series of engagements known as the Seven Days’ Battles, effectively ending McClellan’s campaign toward Richmond.

**Peninsula Campaign: General vs. President**

In November 1861, President [Abraham Lincoln](http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/abraham-lincoln) named George B. McClellan to replace the aging [Winfield Scott](http://www.history.com/topics/winfield-scott) as general in chief of all Union armies. A rising star in the U.S. Army before the war, the West-Point educated McClellan had been summoned to [Washington](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/washington) after the Union’s devastating defeat at Bull Run (Manassas) the previous July and had since managed to shape the mass of inexperienced volunteer troops into a disciplined fighting force, known as the Army of the Potomac. Though much loved by his men, McClellan was deliberate and cautious in the extreme, and from early in the conflict he consistently overestimated the strength of Confederate troops facing him. Lincoln soon grew frustrated with McClellan’s reluctance to take the initiative, and in late January 1862 he issued General War Order No. 1, calling for all armies to move forward.

**Did You Know?**

A year after the failure of the Peninsula Campaign, George McClellan led the Union to the brink of victory at Antietam, but his failure to pursue Robert E. Lee's defeated army there led Lincoln to relieve him of command. In 1864, antiwar Democrats backed McClellan in a failed run for president.

Issuing a long list of objections to the president’s plan, McClellan persuaded the skeptical Lincoln to further postpone the offensive against Joseph E. Johnston’s Confederate army, then stationed at Manassas in northern [Virginia](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/virginia) (scene of July’s defeat). Instead of an overland offensive, McClellan wanted to move his army by boat down the Chesapeake Bay to the mouth of the Rappahannock River and get in between Johnston’s army and the Confederate capital of Richmond. In early March, Lincoln approved this plan (provided enough troops were left behind to safeguard Washington) but removed McClellan as the Union general in chief, leaving him in command only of the Army of the Potomac.

**Peninsula Campaign: Preparing to Advance**

Even as McClellan won approval for his planned offensive, Johnston withdrew his army from Manassas to a more easily defensible position at Culpeper, some 40 miles south and on the other side of the Rappahannock. The Union Army’s inspection of the abandoned Confederate works revealed that the enemy’s defenses had been far weaker than McClellan had claimed. In particular, a number of the Confederate cannons were found to be only logs painted black, known as “Quaker guns.” From then on, McClellan’s continued demands for more troops to face a superior enemy force would fall on deaf ears in Washington.Foiled by Johnston’s move, McClellan now sought to move his Army of the Potomac by boat to Fort Monroe, located at the tip of the peninsula formed by the York and James Rivers in Virginia. From there, the army would move up the peninsula towards Richmond, forcing Johnston to move quickly south to defend the Confederate capital. Lincoln and Secretary of War [Edwin M. Stanton](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/edwin-m-stanton) agreed reluctantly. After finding that McClellan had not complied with the president’s order to leave enough troops to defend Washington, they ordered an entire large corps held back from the advance, and a furious McClellan traveled to Fort Monroe with some 100,000 troops instead of the 150,000 he had wanted.

**Peninsula Campaign: From Yorktown to Seven Pines**

By early April, 60,000 of McClellan’s soldiers were facing Confederate lines near Yorktown, Virginia, defended by some 13,000 rebels. Though the bulk of Johnston’s army was some 80 miles away, McClellan continued to wait, defying Lincoln’s repeated orders to attack. On May 4, Johnston decided to pull his troops from Yorktown and withdraw them toward Richmond, and McClellan finally ordered his army to move up the peninsula. By the third week of that month, the Army of the Potomac was approaching the Confederate capital. Though he was leading more than 100,000 Federals against 60,000 rebel defenders, McClellan continued to call for reinforcements.

On May 31, Johnston led Confederates in an attack against two Federal corps south of the Chickahominy River, six miles east of Richmond. In the two-day Battle of Seven Pines and Fair Oaks, the rebels were able to drive back one Union corps and inflict heavy casualties before the Federals (with the help of reinforcements) stabilized their line. General Johnston was seriously injured in the battle, and President [Jefferson Davis](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/jefferson-davis) replaced him with [Robert E. Lee](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/robert-e-lee), a move that would have profound consequences for the rest of the conflict.

**Peninsula Campaign: Seven Days’ Battles**

Through most of June, as Lee prepared a counteroffensive, McClellan complained to Washington of his need for more supplies and reinforcements. He claimed to be facing some 200,000 enemy troops; in reality, the maximum strength of Lee’s forces was around 92,000. Leaving some divisions to defend Richmond, Lee attacked McClellan’s right flank north of the Chickahominy (around 30,000 Federals) with an army of some 85,000 on July 26. During the seven days that followed, the Confederate general ordered repeated attacks: at Mechanicsville, Gaines’ Mill, Savage’s Station, Frayser’s Farm, Malvern Hill and many smaller skirmishes.

**Second Battle of Bull Run**

The Second Battle of Bull Run (Manassas) proved to be the deciding battle in the Civil War campaign waged between Union and Confederate armies in northern Virginia in 1862. As a large Union force commanded by John Pope waited for George McClellan’s Army of the Potomac in anticipation of a combined offensive, Confederate General Robert E. Lee decided to strike first. Lee sent half of his Army of Northern Virginia to hit the Federal supply base at Manassas. Led by Stonewall Jackson, hero of the First Battle of Bull Run (Manassas) 13 months earlier, the rebels seized supplies and burned the depot, then established hidden positions in the woods. On August 29, Pope’s Federals clashed with Jackson’s men, who held their ground with heavy losses on both sides. The following day, after the rest of Lee’s army arrived, 28,000 rebels led by James Longstreet launched a counterattack, forcing Pope to withdraw his battered army toward Washington that night.

**Prelude to Second Bull Run (Manassas)**

In July 1862, President [Abraham Lincoln](http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/abraham-lincoln) appointed Henry Halleck as the new commander in chief of Union armies during the Civil War, having relieved George B. McClellan of that command the previous March. To Lincoln’s frustration, McClellan was demanding more troops in order to renew his offensive against the Confederate capital of Richmond during the [Peninsula Campaign](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/peninsula-campaign). Lincoln and Halleck decided to recall the Army of the Potomac to [Washington](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/washington) and unite it with the newly formed Army of [Virginia](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/virginia), then under the command of John Pope, in order to make a combined offensive toward Richmond. Pope, who had previously made his reputation in the war’s western theater, was known for his tendency to boast, and was widely disliked among his fellow Union generals, including McClellan.

**Did You Know?**

Union Major General John Pope lost about 15,000 men in the Second Battle of Bull Run (Manassas), along with his reputation. Relieved of command, he was sent to the Army's Department of the Northwest for the remainder of the Civil War.

Knowing McClellan’s army was on its way to join Pope, which would mean an overwhelming numerical advantage for the Federals, the Confederate General [Robert E. Lee](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/robert-e-lee) resolved to strike Pope’s army before that happened. In late August, he divided his Army of Northern Virginia, sending half under Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson to the northwest to march around Pope’s right flank while the rest, under [James Longstreet](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/james-longstreet), watched Pope’s army across the Rappahannock River. Though Union scouts detected Jackson’s movement, Pope thought he was heading for the Shenandoah Valley. Within two days, Jackson’s army of some 24,000 covered more than 50 miles, striking the Federal supply base at Manassas Junction, some 25 miles to Pope’s rear.

**Union Attacks at Second Bull Run (Manassas)**

Though Pope then turned his army to confront Jackson’s assault, they could not locate the rebels, who had left Manassas Junction and taken up positions in the woods and hills a couple of miles from the site of the war’s first major engagement, the [First Battle of Bull Run](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/first-battle-of-bull-run) (Manassas) in July 1861. McClellan continued to resist sending troops forward to Pope’s aid, arguing that they were necessary to defend Washington.

Meanwhile, Lee remained in contact with Jackson via cavalry troops led by Jeb Stuart. After a firefight between Jackson’s men and one of Pope’s divisions at dusk on August 28, Pope prepared his army overnight to mount an attack against the Confederates. Believing that Jackson was preparing to retreat in order to join the rest of the rebel army (and not realizing that in fact Longstreet was advancing to join Jackson), Pope did not wait to assemble a large force, but sent divisions in smaller assaults on the Confederate positions on the morning of August 29. Jackson’s men managed to hold their ground, turning back the Federal assault with heavy casualties on both sides.

**Hesitant Leadership and Rebel Counterattack at Bull Run (Manassas)**

On the Union left, Fitz John Porter defied Pope’s orders to lead his men forward against the Confederates on August 29, believing himself to be facing Longstreet’s entire corps. In fact, Longstreet’s men did arrive by noon, and took position on Jackson’s flank. (Porter was later court-martialed and convicted for his failure to act, though the verdict was finally reversed in 1886 after captured Confederate documents proved that Porter had indeed been facing Longstreet’s corps.) For his part, Longstreet was intimidated by the unknown size of the Union force facing him (commanded by Porter and Irvin McDowell). When Lee suggested that he advance on August 29 to relieve pressure on Jackson, Longstreet resisted, insisting it would be better to fight on the defensive.

When several Confederate brigades adjusted their positions that night, Pope mistakenly took the movement for the beginning of a retreat. After sending word to Washington of an imminent victory and his army’s planned pursuit of the retreating enemy, he renewed the Union attacks on August 30. After Confederate artillery turned back a Union attack on Jackson’s positions, Longstreet ordered his corps forward in an aggressive counterattack on the Union left, which had been weakened after Pope shifted his troops right to hit Jackson. Faced with Lee’s entire army, the Federals were forced back to Henry House Hill, scene of the hardest fighting in the earlier Bull Run battle. That night, a crushed Pope ordered his army to fall back across Bull Run toward Washington.

**Impact of Second Bull Run (Manassas)**

A wave of despair rolled over the North with news of the battle’s outcome, and morale in the army sank to new depths. Accusations flew among Pope, McClellan, McDowell and Porter about who was to blame for the defeat. His cabinet (notably Stanton) pushed for McClellan’s dismissal, and Lincoln himself had harsh views of the general’s conduct. But as McClellan had the unwavering support of the soldiers, and Lincoln needed a speedy reorganization of Union forces, he left McClellan in command.

Despite heavy Confederate casualties (9,000), the Battle of Second Bull Run (known as Second Manassas in the South) was a decisive victory for the rebels, as Lee had managed a strategic offensive against an enemy force (Pope and McClellan’s) twice the size of his own. Pressing his advantage after the northern Virginia campaign, Lee launched an invasion of the North, crossing the Potomac into western [Maryland](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/maryland) on September 5. McClellan united his army with the Army of Virginia and marched northwest to block Lee’s invasion. On September 17, the two generals would clash in the [Battle of Antietam](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/battle-of-antietam), the costliest single day of fighting in American history.