

U.S. Civil War Time Line

1861 - 1865

January 1865 -Fort Fisher, North Carolina

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Transportation problems and successful blockades caused severe shortages of food and supplies in the South. Starving soldiers began to desert Lee's forces, and although President Jefferson Davis approved the arming of slaves as a means of augmenting the shrinking army, the measure was never put into effect.

February 1865 -- Sherman Marches through North and South Carolina.

Union General Sherman moved from Georgia through South Carolina, destroying almost everything in his path.

February 1865 -- A Chance for Reconciliation Is Lost.

Confederate President Jefferson Davis agreed to send delegates to a peace conference with President Lincoln and Secretary of State William Seward, but insisted on Lincoln's recognition of the South's independence as a prerequisite. Lincoln refused, and the conference never occurred.

April 1865 -- Fallen Richmond.

On March 25, General Lee attacked General Grant's forces near Petersburg, but was defeated -- attacking and losing again on April 1. On April 2, Lee evacuated Richmond, the Confederate capital, and headed west to join with other forces.

The Defenses of Washington -- 1865

The Lincoln administration was determined to make the capital safe from attack by ringing the city with a chain of forts manned by substantial garrisons of artillerymen and other troops.

April 1865 -- Surrender at Appomattox Courthouse.

General Lee's troops were soon surrounded, and on April 7, Grant called upon Lee to surrender. On April 9, the two commanders met at Appomattox Courthouse, and agreed on the terms of surrender. Lee's men were sent home on parole -- soldiers with their horses, and officers with their side arms. All other equipment was surrendered.

April 1865 -- The Assassination of President Lincoln.

On April 14, as President Lincoln was watching a performance of "Our American Cousin" at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C., he was shot by John Wilkes Booth, an actor from Maryland obsessed with avenging the Confederate defeat. Lincoln died the next morning. Booth escaped to Virginia. Eleven days later, cornered in a burning barn, Booth was fatally shot by a Union soldier. Nine other people were involved in the assassination; four were hanged, four imprisoned, and one acquitted.

April-May 1865 -- Final Surrenders among Remaining Confederate Troops.

Remaining Confederate troops were defeated between the end of April and the end of May. Jefferson Davis was captured in Georgia on May 10.

August - November 1865

The Execution of Captain Henry Wirz -- November 1865

The notorious superintendent of the Confederate prison at Andersonville, Georgia, was tried by a military commission presided over by General Lew Wallace from August 23 to October 24, 1865, and was hanged in the yard of the Old Capitol Prison on November 10.

January 1862 -- Abraham Lincoln Takes Action.

On January 27, President Lincoln issued a war order authorizing the Union to launch a unified aggressive action against the Confederacy. General McClellan ignored the order.

March 1862 -- McClellan Loses Command.

On March 8, President Lincoln -- impatient with General McClellan's inactivity -- issued an order reorganizing the Army of Virginia and relieving McClellan of supreme command. McClellan was given command of the Army of the Potomac, and ordered to attack Richmond. This marked the beginning of the Peninsular Campaign.

Battle of the "Monitor" and the "Merrimac" -- March 1862

In an attempt to reduce the North's great naval advantage, Confederate engineers converted a scuttled Union frigate, the U.S.S. Merrimac, into an iron-sided vessel rechristened the C.S.S. Virginia. On March 9, in the first naval engagement between ironclad ships, the Monitor fought the Virginia to a draw, but not before the Virginia had sunk two wooden Union warships off Norfolk, Virginia.

April 1862 -- The Battle of Shiloh.

On April 6, Confederate forces attacked Union forces under General Ulysses S. Grant at Shiloh, Tennessee. By the end of the day, the federal troops were almost defeated. Yet, during the night, reinforcements arrived, and by the next morning the Union commanded the field. When Confederate forces retreated, the exhausted federal forces did not follow. Casualties were heavy -- 13,000 out of 63,000 Union soldiers died, and 11,000 of 40,000 Confederate troops were killed.

Fort Pulaski, Georgia -- April 1862

General Quincy A. Gillmore battered Fort Pulaski, the imposing masonry structure near the mouth of the Savannah River, into submission in less than two days, (April 10-11, 1862).

April 1862 -- New Orleans.

Flag Officer David Farragut led an assault up the Mississippi River. By April 25, he was in command of New Orleans.

April 1862 -- The Peninsular Campaign.

In April, General McClellan's troops left northern Virginia to begin the Peninsular Campaign. By May 4, they occupied Yorktown, Virginia. At Williamsburg, Confederate forces prevented McClellan from meeting the main part of the Confederate army, and McClellan halted his troops, awaiting reinforcements.

May 1862 -- "Stonewall" Jackson Defeats Union Forces.

Confederate General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, commanding forces in the Shenandoah Valley, attacked Union forces in late March, forcing them to retreat across the Potomac. As a result, Union troops were rushed to protect Washington, D.C.

June 1862 -- The Battle of Seven Pines (Fair Oaks).

On May 31, the Confederate army attacked federal forces at Seven Pines, almost defeating them; last-minute reinforcements saved the Union from a serious defeat. Confederate commander Joseph E. Johnston was severely wounded, and command of the Army of Northern Virginia fell to Robert E. Lee.

July 1862 -- The Seven Days' Battles.

Between June 26 and July 2, Union and Confederate forces fought a series of battles: Mechanicsville (June 26-27), Gaines's Mill (June 27), Savage's Station (June 29), Frayser's Farm (June 30), and Malvern Hill (July 1). On July 2, the Confederates withdrew to Richmond, ending the Peninsular Campaign.

July 1862 -- A New Commander of the Union Army.

On July 11, Major-General Henry Halleck was named general-in-chief of the Union army.

August 1862 -- Pope's Campaign.

Union General John Pope suffered defeat at the Second Battle of Bull Run on August 29-30. General Fitz-John Porter was held responsible for the defeat because he had failed to commit his troops to battle quickly enough; he was forced out of the army by 1863.

September 1862 -- Harper's Ferry.

Union General McClellan defeated Confederate General Lee at South Mountain and Crampton's Gap in September, but did not move quickly enough to save Harper's Ferry, which fell to Confederate General Jackson on September 15, along with a great number of men and a large body of supplies.

September 1862 -- Antietam.

On September 17, Confederate forces under General Lee were caught by General McClellan near Sharpsburg, Maryland. This battle proved to be the bloodiest day of the war; 2,108 Union soldiers were killed and 9,549 wounded -- 2,700 Confederates were killed and 9,029 wounded. The battle had no clear winner, but because General Lee withdrew to Virginia, McClellan was considered the victor. The battle convinced the British and French -- who were contemplating official recognition of the Confederacy -- to reserve action, and gave Lincoln the opportunity to announce his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation (September 22), which would free all slaves in areas rebelling against the United States, effective January 1, 1863.

Antietam -- September-October 1862

The Army of the Potomac remained in possession of the field, and the photographers were able to work over it thoroughly immediately after the battle of September 17. One can witness President Lincoln's visit to McClellan's headquarters, and follow the army across the Potomac at Berlin (present day Brunswick, Maryland) and into re-occupied Harper's Ferry.

December 1862 -- The Battle of Fredericksburg.

General McClellan's slow movements, combined with General Lee's escape, and continued raiding by Confederate cavalry, dismayed many in the North. On November 7, Lincoln replaced McClellan with Major-General Ambrose E. Burnside. Burnside's forces were defeated in a series of attacks against entrenched Confederate forces at Fredericksburg, Virginia, and Burnside was replaced with General Joseph Hooker.

January 1863 -- Emancipation Proclamation.

In an effort to placate the slave-holding border states, Lincoln resisted the demands of radical Republicans for complete abolition. Yet some Union generals, such as General B. F. Butler, declared slaves escaping to their lines "contraband of war," not to be returned to their masters. Other generals decreed that the slaves of men rebelling against the Union were to be considered free. Congress, too, had been moving toward abolition. In 1861, Congress had passed an act stating that all slaves employed against the Union were to be considered free. In 1862, another act stated that all slaves of men who supported the Confederacy were to be considered free. Lincoln, aware of the public's growing support of abolition, issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, declaring that all slaves in areas still in rebellion were, in the eyes of the federal government, free.

March 1863 -- The First Conscription Act.

Because of recruiting difficulties, an act was passed making all men between the ages of 20 and 45 liable to be called for military service. Service could be avoided by paying a fee or finding a substitute. The act was seen as unfair to the poor, and riots in working-class sections of New York City broke out in protest. A similar conscription act in the South provoked a similar reaction.

May 1863 -- The Battle of Chancellorsville.

On April 27, Union General Hooker crossed the Rappahannock River to attack General Lee's forces. Lee split his army, attacking a surprised Union army in three places and almost completely defeating them. Hooker withdrew across the Rappahannock River, giving the South a victory, but it was the Confederates' most costly victory in terms of casualties.

May 1863 -- The Vicksburg Campaign.

Union General Grant won several victories around Vicksburg, Mississippi, the fortified city considered essential to the Union's plans to regain control of the Mississippi River. On May 22, Grant began a siege of the city. After six weeks, Confederate General John Pemberton surrendered, giving up the city and 30,000 men. The capture of Port Hudson, Louisiana, shortly thereafter placed the entire Mississippi River in Union hands. The Confederacy was split in two.

Through the Fall of Vicksburg -- June 1863

Confederate General Lee decided to take the war to the enemy. On June 13, he defeated Union forces at Winchester, Virginia, and continued north to Pennsylvania. General Hooker, who had been planning to attack Richmond, was instead forced to follow Lee. Hooker, never comfortable with his commander, General Halleck, resigned on June 28, and General George Meade replaced him as commander of the Army of the Potomac.

July 1863 -- The Battle of Gettysburg

On July 1, a chance encounter between Union and Confederate forces began the Battle of Gettysburg. In the fighting that followed, Meade had greater numbers and better defensive positions. He won the battle, but failed to follow Lee as he retreated back to Virginia. Militarily, the Battle of Gettysburg was the high-water mark of the Confederacy; it is also significant because it ended Confederate hopes of formal recognition by foreign governments. On November 19, President Lincoln dedicated a portion of the Gettysburg battlefield as a national cemetery, and delivered his memorable "Gettysburg Address."

September 1863 -- The Battle of Chickamauga.

On September 19, Union and Confederate forces met on the Tennessee-Georgia border, near Chickamauga Creek. After the battle, Union forces retreated to Chattanooga, and the Confederacy maintained control of the battlefield.

Meade in Virginia -- August-November 1863

After the Battle of Gettysburg, General Meade engaged in some cautious and inconclusive operations, but the heavy activity of the photographers was confined to the intervals between them -- at Bealeton, southwest of Warrenton, in August, and at Culpeper, before the Mine Run Campaign.

November 1863 -- The Battle of Chattanooga.

On November 23-25, Union forces pushed Confederate troops away from Chattanooga. The victory set the stage for General Sherman's Atlanta Campaign.

Chattanooga -- September-November 1863

After Rosecrans's debacle at Chickamauga, September 19-20, 1863, Confederate General Braxton Bragg's army occupied the mountains that ring the vital railroad center of Chattanooga. Grant, brought in to save the situation, steadily built up offensive strength, and on November 23- 25 burst the blockade in a series of brilliantly executed attacks.

May 1864 -- Grant's Wilderness Campaign.

General Grant, promoted to commander of the Union armies, planned to engage Lee's forces in Virginia until they were destroyed. North and South met and fought in an inconclusive three-day battle in the Wilderness. Lee inflicted more casualties on the Union forces than his own army incurred, but unlike Grant, he had no replacements.

May 1864 -- The Battle of Spotsylvania.

General Grant continued to attack Lee. At Spotsylvania Court House, he fought for five days, vowing to fight all summer if necessary.

June 1864 -- The Battle of Cold Harbor.

Grant again attacked Confederate forces at Cold Harbor, losing over 7,000 men in twenty minutes. Although Lee suffered fewer casualties, his army never recovered from Grant's continual attacks. This was Lee's last clear victory of the war.

The Army of the James, June 1864-April 1865

Grant hoped to take Petersburg, below Richmond, and then approach the Confederate capital from the south. The attempt failed, resulting in a ten month siege and the loss of thousands of lives on both sides.

The Siege of Petersburg -- 1864

The Petersburg Campaign gave the photographers full opportunity to build a superb corpus of documentation, completed when they were able to enter the town and its defenses in the first days of April. Grant won by steadily extending his lines westward³

July 1864 -- Confederate Troops Approach Washington, D.C.

Confederate General Jubal Early led his forces into Maryland to relieve the pressure on Lee's army. Early got within five miles of Washington, D.C., but on July 13, he was driven back to Virginia.

August 1864 -- General William T. Sherman's Atlanta Campaign.

Union General Sherman departed Chattanooga, and was soon met by Confederate General Joseph Johnston. Skillful strategy enabled Johnston to hold off Sherman's force -- almost twice the size of Johnston's. However, Johnston's tactics caused his superiors to replace him with General John Bell Hood, who was soon defeated. Hood surrendered Atlanta, Georgia, on September 1; Sherman occupied the city the next day. The fall of Atlanta greatly boosted Northern morale.

November 1864 -- General William T. Sherman's March to the Sea.

General Sherman continued his march through Georgia to the sea. In the course of the march, he cut himself off from his source of supplies, planning for his troops to live off the land. His men cut a path 300 miles in length and 60 miles wide as they passed through Georgia, destroying factories, bridges, railroads, and public buildings.

Sherman in Atlanta -- September-November, 1864

After three and a half months of incessant maneuvering and much hard fighting, Sherman forced Hood to abandon Atlanta, the munitions center of the Confederacy. Sherman remained there, resting his war-worn men and accumulating supplies, for nearly two-and-a-half months. During the occupation, George N. Barnard, official photographer of the Chief Engineer's Office, made the best documentary record of the war in the West. Much of what he photographed was destroyed in the fire that spread from the military facilities blown up upon Sherman's departure.

November 1864 -- Abraham Lincoln Is Re-Elected.

The Republican party nominated President Abraham Lincoln as its presidential candidate, and Andrew Johnson for vice-president. The Democratic party chose General George B. McClellan for president, and George Pendleton for vice-president. At one point, widespread war-weariness in the North made a victory for Lincoln seem doubtful. In addition, Lincoln's veto of the Wade-Davis Bill -- requiring the majority of the electorate in each Confederate state to swear past and future loyalty to the Union before the state could officially be restored -- lost him the support of Radical Republicans who thought Lincoln too lenient. However, Sherman's victory in Atlanta boosted Lincoln's popularity and helped him win re-election by a wide margin.

Fort Monroe and Hampton, Virginia -- 1864

Its own intrinsic strength and the ease with which it could be supplied and reinforced by sea kept the largest American fort in federal hands throughout the war. Fort Monroe was the starting point for McClellan's Peninsular Campaign in 1862 and for Butler's advance to Petersburg in 1864.

Sherman at the Sea -- December 1864

After marching through Georgia for a month, Sherman stormed Fort McAllister on December 13, 1864, and captured Savannah itself eight days later.

Hood before Nashville -- December 1864

Continuing his policy of taking the offensive at any cost, General John B. Hood brought his reduced army before the defenses of Nashville, where it was repulsed by General George H. Thomas on December 15-16, in the most complete victory of the war.

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