

THE CIVIL WAR IN WEST VIRGINIA

1861

The Civil War began when Confederate artillery shelled the Union-held Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina on April 12, 1861. Five days later, leaders of Confederate Virginia decided to capture the United States Armory and Arsenal at Harpers Ferry for the southern cause. As southern militia marched toward Harpers Ferry, Union troops set fire to the armory and arsenal, preventing the weapons from falling into Confederate hands. With a loud explosion on the night of April 18, the Civil War arrived in western Virginia. During the war, Harpers Ferry changed hands numerous times. The intersection of two major railroads, the Baltimore and Ohio and the Winchester and Potomac, and its military importance in the Shenandoah Valley made Harpers Ferry a key strategic stronghold.

During the first weeks of the war, the Confederate government of Virginia recruited troops in western Virginia, assigning Colonel George A. Porterfield to Grafton, which was connected to most of northwest Virginia by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. As Union troops under General George B. McClellan advanced, Porterfield drew his forces back to Philippi. As McClellan neared the region, he sent Colonel Benjamin F. Kelley and the First Virginia Provisional Regiment (later the First West Virginia Infantry) as an advance guard. On the morning of June 3, 1861, Kelley's troops attacked Porterfield's forces at Philippi, resulting in a Confederate retreat. This is considered by many to be the first land battle of the Civil War.

To prevent Union troops from advancing further up the Tygart Valley, reinforcements led by General Robert S. Garnett joined the retreating Confederates and established strongholds at Laurel Hill in Tucker County and Rich Mountain in Randolph County. On July 11, Union General William S. Rosecrans won a decisive battle at Rich Mountain and days later, the Confederates were pushed from Laurel Hill. On July 14, the retreating Confederates were routed at their position at Corrick's Ford and Garnett was killed. This series of engagements resulted in Union control of northwest Virginia for virtually the remainder of the war. Control of the transportation routes made it difficult to supply Confederate units throughout the war. This also ensured the safety of West Virginia statehood leaders meeting in Wheeling.

While the Confederates were easily defeated in the northern part of present-day West Virginia, they mustered a better effort in the Kanawha Valley. Former Virginia governor Henry S. Wise, now a general, had established his forces at the mouth of Scary Creek in Putnam County. On July 16, Wise pushed back an attack by forces under General Jacob D. Cox. After the arrival of reinforcements, Cox's men drove Wise up the valley to Gauley Bridge and eventually into Greenbrier County. The North suffered a setback in August as General Rosecrans' advance forces were defeated at Kessler's Cross Lanes in Nicholas County while marching toward Gauley Bridge. Another former Virginia governor, General John Floyd, established his troops on a bluff at nearby Carnifex Ferry.

Union troops attacked Floyd on September 10. Although the Union casualties totaled 158 compared to 20 Confederate, the larger number of northern forces drove both Floyd and Wise back into Greenbrier County. A significant factor leading to the southern defeat was a long-standing political rivalry between Wise and Floyd. The Battle of Carnifex Ferry placed the important Kanawha Valley in Union hands for the early part of the war. In only a few short months, the North had gained control of northwestern Virginia and the Kanawha Valley.

In August, Robert E. Lee, in his first assignment of the war, set up camp on Valley Mountain in Pocahontas County. He first hoped to put more pressure on northwestern Virginia, but overestimated Union strength at the Cheat Mountain Summit Fort and elected not to attack. Many feel that Lee's 15,000 men in the area could have re-taken all of northwestern Virginia had he pushed forward. In October, Lee again failed to attack Rosecrans' outnumbered force following Carnifex Ferry. These early disappointments landed Lee an administrative post in Richmond until later in the war.

1862

In 1862, the Civil War in Virginia revolved around Clarksburg native General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's brilliant campaign in the Shenandoah Valley. His first step was to obstruct Union access to the valley by cutting off portions of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. In January, Jackson captured the town of Romney, an important link on the B&O. During the war, Romney is said to have been captured by Union and Confederate troops at least 56 times. During the spring of 1862, Jackson moved his men swiftly down the valley, outracing Union troops. At McDowell, Virginia, Jackson's forces crushed Union troops and pursued General John C. Fremont's retreat into Pendleton County. Jackson occupied the county seat of Franklin briefly before continuing his march down the valley. Following his victory at the Battle of Winchester, many suspected Jackson would continue on to the nation's capital. Rather than continue chasing the southern troops, the North decided to cut off Jackson's retreat with a superior force. Confederates advanced as far as Bolivar Heights, west of Harpers Ferry, before retreating. Somehow, Jackson's men managed again to outrace Union forces.

West of the Alleghenies, two future United States presidents were fighting in what is now southern West Virginia. On May 1, as Union troops neared, Confederates set fire to the town of Princeton. Union troops under Colonel Rutherford B. Hayes, including Lieutenant William McKinley, managed to save part of the town. Earlier in the year, Union forces had burned the courthouses of Boone and Logan counties.

Another significant skirmish occurred in southern Virginia in May, as Confederates under General Henry Heth attacked Union troops under Colonel George Crook occupying Lewisburg. After initial success on May 23, the Confederates were driven south into Monroe County. Crook later gained notoriety for capturing the Chiricahua chief Geronimo.

Although Confederates were unable to control significant regions of western Virginia for considerable periods of time during the war, they were successful in conducting destructive raids. In August 1862, Cabell County's Albert Gallatin Jenkins led 550 men from Monroe County on the Staunton and Parkersburg Turnpike to the Ohio River in Jackson County, capturing the towns of Buckhannon, Weston, Glenville, Spencer, and Ripley on the way. Supposedly, Jenkins was the first military leader to carry the Confederate flag into the state of Ohio. Jenkins' raid revealed Union weaknesses in the Kanawha Valley caused by the transfer of 5,000 troops to eastern Virginia prior to the Second Battle of Bull Run.

On September 11, Confederates under General William Loring overran General Joseph A. J. Lightburn at Fayetteville, driving his Union forces back to Charleston. Two days later, Loring defeated Lightburn at Charleston, beginning a brief Confederate occupation. For six weeks, southern forces confiscated salt supplies and destroyed virtually all of the Kanawha Vally salt works.

Meanwhile, in the east, General Robert E. Lee, now in command of the Army of Northern Virginia, planned an invasion of Maryland. Lee divided his forces, sending one of four units to cut off General McClellan's lines of communication. Stonewall Jackson captured the town of Martinsburg and then prepared to move on General Dixon Miles' 12,000-man force at Harpers Ferry. Jackson devised a three-pronged attack, dispatching General John G. Walker to occupy Loudoun Heights and General Lafayette McLaws to capture Maryland Heights, both overlooking Harpers Ferry. On September 15, with the support of McLaws' artillery bombardment, Jackson and General A. P. Hill captured Miles' entire army. Only at Bataan and Corregidor during World War II have larger United States armies been forced to surrender. Two days later the bloodiest one-day battle in the history of the North American continent was fought at Antietam Creek, Maryland. After the Battle of Antietam, numerous small skirmishes occurred in the present-day Eastern Panhandle.

1863

With Union troops in control of western Virginia, Confederate leaders chose to harrass Union troops and confiscate supplies. In the spring, General John D. Imboden designed a raid to destroy portions of the B&O Railroad and break up the Restored Government of Virginia in session in Wheeling. With a force of 3,400 men, Imboden marched out from Staunton, Virginia, on April 20. General William E. Jones led a group of 1,300 from Lacey Springs, Virginia, the following day. Imboden's men marched through Beverly and captured the town of Buckhannon on April 29. Jones joined Imboden at Buckhannon after failing to destroy the B&O line at Rowlesburg in Preston County, capturing Morgantown, and destroying the railroad bridge at Fairmont. On May 6, Jones' troops marched from Weston through West Union and Cairo. Three days later, he destroyed 150,000 barrels of oil and the oil works at Burning Springs in Wirt County. On May 14, Jones joined Imboden at Summersville before retreating into Virginia. Although it

succeeded in destroying property and industry, driving away livestock, and occupying the attention of Union troops which might have been used elsewhere, the Jones-Imboden Raid failed to destroy significant portions of the B&O or break up the Restored Government of Virginia.

On October 13, Confederate troops again tried to gain control of transportation routes by attacking a Union fort at Bulltown in Braxton County. Southern troops under Colonel William L. "Mudwall" Jackson charged the fort under the command of Captain William Mattingly. Outnumbered, Mattingly refused to surrender on the first day of the battle. On the second day, Union reinforcements arrived and the Confederates were forced to retreat.

In November, the North won a decisive victory at Droop Mountain in Pocahontas County. Confederate forces, previously under the command of William Loring and now led by General John Echols, had controlled the Greenbrier Valley for most of the war. Following the northern defeat at the Battle of Chickamauga in Georgia, the North hoped to break up the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad in southeastern Virginia. In the first phase, the Union sent General William Averell from Beverly and General Alfred Duffie from Charleston to remove the Confederates from the Greenbrier Valley. On November 6, both columns converged on Echols on the summit of Droop Mountain. The Confederates retreated, allowing General Averell to conduct a raid on the Virginia and Tennessee depot at Salem, Virginia, in December.

During 1863, the North continued its hold on western Virginia, withstanding several raids. In addition to the Jones-Imboden Raid and the Battle of Droop Mountain, several other skirmishes occurred, including Hurricane Bridge in Putnam County, the first use of indirect artillery fire at Fayetteville, General John Morgan's raid through Jackson and Wood counties, White Sulphur Springs, and a variety of encounters in the Eastern Panhandle following the Battle of Gettysburg. Western Virginia soldiers played significant roles on other fronts as members of the 4th West Virginia Infantry took part in the siege of Vicksburg, Mississippi.

1864-1865

The year 1864 in West Virginia's Civil War history is best remembered by the actions of Mason County's John McCausland. During the summer, General McCausland battled Union leader David Hunter in southern Virginia. Hunter led a raid on the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad. He was stopped at Lynchburg, but not before destroying much of the town of Lexington. In retaliation, McCausland later rode his cavalry into the town of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, and demanded a ransom. When the people refused to pay, McCausland burned the town.

Nationally, 1864 marked the year Confederate cavalry rode to the outskirts of Washington, D.C. After a series of victories in the Shenandoah Valley, Jubal Early's Confederate troops attacked Union positions on Bolivar Heights near Harpers Ferry on July 4. The northern troops were forced to abandon Harpers Ferry for the first

time since September 1862. However, following the surrender of Dixon Miles' army, the Union had improved its fortifications overlooking this strategic area. After three days of fighting, the North was able to re-take and hold Harpers Ferry for the remainder of the war.

Southern forces later won an important battle at Monocacy Creek in Maryland prior to being stopped at Washington. John McCausland was one of the few Confederate military leaders who could brag that he stood within the city limits of the nation's capital during the Civil War.

As northern control of western Virginia strengthened later in the war, southern military support was found more often in the form of irregulars, troops never mustered into the Confederate service. West Virginia's first governor, Arthur Boreman, considered these irregulars the most serious threat to the new state. West Virginia's most famous band of these guerrillas was McNeill's Rangers, organized in Hardy County. During 1863 and 1864, they wreaked havoc on the B&O Railroad in the Eastern Panhandle, seizing numerous Union supplies. However, on February 21, 1865, the rangers executed their most daring raid. A small group of men rode into Cumberland, Maryland, kidnapped generals Crook and Kelley, and delivered them to General Jubal Early. At the end of the war, McNeill's Rangers surrendered to Union troops under General Rutherford B. Hayes on May 8, one month after Appomattox.

Conclusion

The Civil War has often been referred to as a war of brother against brother and father against son. No other state serves as a better example of this than West Virginia, where there was relatively equal support for the northern and southern causes. Often families were split down the middle over their beliefs on the war. There are many instances of divided loyalties and even of individuals fighting for both sides. During the Battle of Scary Creek, a Confederate soldier supposedly saw his brothers fighting on the other battle lines, decided he was in the wrong place, and changed sides on the spot.

While many historians have traditionally placed the number of Union troops enlisted in West Virginia at a much higher figure than Confederates, more recent studies suggest there were almost as many southern troops as northern. Traditional sources have placed Union strength as high as 36,000 compared to only 7,000 to 10,000 Confederates. At least one recent study has raised the southern number to over 20,000 and lowered the Union figure to about the same. Part of the problem with early studies is they ignored numerous southern sympathizers who fought in militias or as irregulars.

The divisions caused by the Civil War lasted long afterward. These were usually fought out in political arenas but occasionally developed into violence. Military service in the Civil War became a badge of honor, as both Union and Confederate veterans attended reunions and participated in parades well into the twentieth century. West Virginia was the only state to send relatively the same number of Union and Confederate veterans to

the Battle of Gettysburg reunion, another symbol of the divided state created by the Civil War.