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The 1862 Shenandoah Valley Campaign: The History of the Civil War Campaign that Made Stonewall Jackson a Confederate Legend

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures
*Includes accounts of the campaign written by soldiers and generals
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"Jackson and his army, in one month, have routed Milroy—annihilated Banks—discomfited Frémont, and overthrown Shields! Was there ever such a series of victories won by an inferior force by dauntless courage and consummate generalship?" – An anonymous newspaper correspondent for the Richmond Whig, June 6, 1862

Confederate general Thomas Jonathan Jackson had been a virtual unknown upon his arrival at the front line of First Bull Run, but by the spring of 1862, thanks to his actions at that battle, "Stonewall" was already becoming known across the battlefields. Ultimately, it would be the Valley Campaign of 1862 that made him a legend.

In the early months of 1862, Jackson was given command of an army numbering about 17,000 in the Shenandoah Valley. His task was daunting. The loss at Bull Run prompted a changing of the guard, with George B. McClellan, the "Young Napoleon", put in charge of reorganizing and leading the Army of the Potomac. That spring, the Army of the Potomac conducted an ambitious amphibious invasion of Virginia's Peninsula, circumventing the Confederate defenses to the north of Richmond by attacking Richmond from the southeast.

General Johnston's outnumbered army headed toward Richmond to confront McClellan, but the Union still had three armies totaling another 50,000 around the Shenandoah Valley, which represented a threat to Richmond from the north. It was these armies that Jackson would be tasked with stopping.

Jackson would go on to lead his undermanned army through what military strategists and historians consider the most incredible campaign of the Civil War. From late March to early June, Jackson kept all three Union armies bottled up and separated from each other in the Shenandoah Valley by marching up and down the Valley about 650 miles in 50 days, earning his army the nickname "foot cavalry."

After the amazing campaign in the Shenandoah Valley in June of 1862, Lee recalled Stonewall's men to travel by rail to Richmond in an effort to envelop the right flank of the Army of the Potomac. Upon taking command, Lee immediately took the offensive, attacking the Army of the Potomac repeatedly in a flurry of battles known as the Seven Days Battles. Fearing he was heavily outnumbered, McClellan began a strategic retreat, and despite badly defeating the Confederates at the Battle of Malvern Hill, the last battle of the Peninsula Campaign, it was clear that the Army of the Potomac was quitting the campaign. The failure of McClellan's campaign devastated the morale of the North, as McClellan had failed to advance despite originally having almost double the manpower.

McClellan’s Peninsula Campaign has been analyzed meticulously and is considered one of the grandest failures of the Union war effort, with McClellan made the scapegoat. In actuality, there was plenty of blame to go around, including Lincoln and his administration, which was so concerned about Jackson’s army in the Valley that several Union armies were left in the Valley to defend Washington D.C. and even more were held back from McClellan for fear of the capital’s safety. The Administration also micromanaged the deployment of certain divisions, and with Stanton’s decision to shut down recruiting stations in early 1862, combined with the Confederacy concentrating all their troops in the area, the Army of the Potomac was eventually outnumbered in front of Richmond.

The 1862 Shenandoah Valley Campaign: The History of the Civil War Campaign that Made Stonewall Jackson a Confederate Legend analyzes the history of one of the most famous campaigns of the war. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the Valley Campaign like never before.

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