

The new year opened with Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation taking effect. For the moment it was largely a useless document as far as the institution of slavery was concerned, but it was packed with political clout on the international front. It caused some upheaval in the armies of the North as soldiers re-evaluated their reasons for fighting - preserving the Union was one thing, an abolitionist crusade was another; there were some desertions among the rank and file. As the document read, slaves in territories still at war with the United States were now called Free, but the Proclamation did not disturb slavery in areas behind Union lines. Still, the moral and psychological impact of the Emancipation Proclamation was hailed internationally as a bold and brilliant stroke for Lincoln, equal to several battlefield victories.

Union generals and their armies, not politicians, would be the great emancipators, conquering territory and thus freeing the slaves therein as the armies marched through. This created huge caravans of blacks trailing behind the Western armies, sometimes slowing the column and always a drain on supplies. Lincoln's proclamation also allowed former slaves to be admitted to the armed forces. Eventually an estimated 200,000 blacks entered Federal service, and Lincoln later claimed their participation contributed significantly to preserving the Union.

Some commanders, such as General William T. Sherman, refused to accept black units, except as garrison troops in rear areas, and he criticized government officials who attempted to recruit black regiments in his department. Late in the war, Sherman even burned a bridge behind him to prevent freed slaves from following his army. Black soldiers were never really accepted as equals by most of their white comrades in arms; their units were officered by whites, and until 1865 they were paid less than whites. Risks were greater in black units, too. The Confederate government decreed that white officers commanding black units were guilty of inciting slave uprisings and thus subject to execution if captured. Black soldiers took great risks too, for they rarely ended up on prisoner lists.

Meanwhile, at Fredericksburg General Burnside was still bringing shame to his Army of the Potomac with a miserable campaign that literally bogged down in the muck and mire of a Virginia winter, entering the history books as Burnside's Mud March. The general had overstayed his welcome and on January 25 was replaced by General Joseph Hooker, a boastful sort, prime critic of Burnside, and a man who once said the government needed a dictator. To be a dictator, wrote Lincoln to his newest army commander, one needs great victories on the battlefield. Get him those victories and Lincoln would risk the dictatorship.

With the coming of spring Hooker gave all the indications of doing just that by deftly stealing a march on Lee and getting behind him. Then, however, Hooker lost his nerve and allowed the Lee-Jackson team to out-march, out-maneuver and out-general him at the Battle of Chancellorsville, May 1-4, sending the Potomac boys heading for safety behind the Rappahannock River. It was yet another disaster for Union forces in the East. Lee boldly split his army three separate times in the face of a superior foe, and in the end a flanking force under Stonewall Jackson provided the decisive blow. Chancellorsville has been called Lee's greatest victory, though a very costly one. Mighty Stonewall was accidentally wounded by his own men and died of complications on May 10.

Lee reorganized his army from two corps to three, dividing Jackson's old corps between Generals Richard S. Ewell (Second Corps) and A.P. Hill (Third), while James Longstreet retained command of the First Corps. In command of Lee's cavalry was the flamboyant General James Ewell Brown Jeb Stuart, whose ride completely around McClellan's army on the Peninsula in '62 had only served to make him more of a risk-taker. Indeed, his horsemen held the upper hand over their Eastern counterparts in blue so far in this war, but times were changing, and consequences were more dire now. Lee endured Stuart's antics and flashy dress, knowing how valuable the young cavalryman was in reconnaissance and screening the army. Right now, Stuart was to screen the Army of Northern Virginia as it embarked on its most daring invasion of the North - one that would take them to the lush, unspoiled farmlands of Pennsylvania.

The beginning of the northward thrust was delayed and nearly exposed at its outset when Stuart was caught napping at Brandy Station, Virginia. In his full contempt for the enemy cavalry, Stuart had been lax with the dispositions of his units and in vigilance, allowing General Alfred Pleasanton's Union horsemen to catch him fully unawares on the morning of June 9, the day the northward march was to commence. Only after hard fighting and superb leadership under extreme pressure did Stuart manage a tactical victory in what was the largest cavalry fight on the North American continent. Stuart's men grudgingly accorded a new respect for Yankee cavalry after Brandy Station.

There were several reasons for Lee's invasion of the North. First and foremost, Virginia was trampled and desolate after

two years of war. The Old Dominion needed a rest. By moving into Pennsylvania, Lee would relieve pressure on Richmond - where a bread riot had occurred in April - and his army could live off the enemy's land for a change. Furthermore, a victory on Yankee soil might garner more support for Northern Peace Democrats, known as Copperheads. Most of these individuals sought a politically negotiated end to the war through certain concessions to the South, while at the extreme was the notion to allow the South to go its own way. That same victory might entice European recognition and support.

The Army of Northern Virginia swept northward after Brandy Station with considerable elan, as if possessed by the spirit of the lamented Jackson. On June 14-15, his old command whipped a Federal force under General Robert Milroy at Winchester in the Shenandoah, the Valley veterans old stomping grounds. By the 24th, Confederates were across the Potomac and on Pennsylvania soil.

There was one problem. The army was spread far and wide for strategic as well as foraging purposes, and Stuart, the eyes of Lee's army, was off on another of his daring rides - perhaps trying to erase some of the embarrassment of Brandy Station - leaving Lee's infantry blind in enemy territory. Meanwhile, Hooker had been relieved of command of the Army of the Potomac and replaced by General George G. Meade on June 28. Meade did not possess the overbearing and boastful qualities of past commanders. He was a solid and steady leader. When Lee heard of the change in command, he predicted that Meade would not make the careless mistakes other Yankee commanders had made. The Army of the Potomac gave pursuit and Lee's invasion culminated in a chance meeting at the crossroads town of Gettysburg in south-central Pennsylvania.

In three days of desperate fighting, July 1-3, 1863, Meade's army turned back the best the South had to offer in the greatest battle of the war. Over 50,000 casualties resulted, and a turning point in the war was at hand: in addition to the Army of the Potomac's success at Gettysburg, another great Union victory was achieved in the West.

While Lee began his retreat from Gettysburg on July 4, Independence Day, 1863, General U. S. Grant accepted the surrender of Vicksburg, Mississippi, after a lengthy siege. Since early May, Grant had Vicksburg in his sights, with fighting at Port Gibson (May 1), Raymond (May 12), Jackson, the capital of Mississippi (May 14), Champion's Hill (May 16), and at the Big Black River (May 17). These engagements merely got Grant into position before Vicksburg, and the siege began on May 18. Grisly tales came out of Vicksburg after its surrender - families living in caves, the stench of decay (human and animal), people feeding on rats, and the sheer hell of being under bombardment for days. Siege operations were also underway at Port Hudson, Louisiana, lower down on the Mississippi, where the last Rebel garrison on the river held out until July 8. The Union now held the great river from its headwaters in Minnesota to its mouth at the Gulf of Mexico, and thousands of prisoners.

Elsewhere in the South, Union attacks on Fort Wagner near Charleston, South Carolina brought into battle one of the first black units raised in the North, the 54th Massachusetts under Colonel Robert G. Shaw, son of a wealthy Boston abolitionist. The July 18th assault was very costly to the regiment and resulted in the death of Shaw but failed to take the fort. A month later, on August 17, in a reversal of roles from the opening guns of the war, Union batteries erupted on Confederate-occupied Fort Sumter and fired over 900 shots on Sumter, Fort Wagner and Battery Gregg. The bombardment continued in earnest through the 23rd. After 5,000 rounds, which reduced Fort Sumter's brick walls to rubble and dust, the Confederates miraculously still held out. Sporadic fire continued until the 27th, with still no white flag at Fort Sumter; however, the Confederates evacuated Fort Wagner on Morris Island on September 6.

Two days later, a heroic stand was made by a handful of determined Texans under Lieutenant Dick Dowling, manning a mud fort. They turned back an amphibious invasion force at Sabine Pass, a narrow water-way separating Texas and Louisiana that dumps into the Gulf of Mexico. (The scrappy Texans, mostly Irish, were considerably aided by a sandbar that the Union boats could not negotiate.)

In the North, draft riots in New York City claimed lives and property. The summer of 1863 also saw a new star added to the flag of the United States as delegates in western Virginia elected to sever ties with the Old Dominion and to form their own state, West Virginia, loyal to the Union - though loyalties in this new border state remained divided and bushwhacking in the mountains reached a new high. Confederate General John Hunt Morgan raided through Ohio in July with his free-wheeling horsemen and did more damage than good for the Southern cause. Most of his command was

eventually captured, including Morgan himself, and his raid through Copperhead country created such a scare that many Peace Democrats converted to staunch avengers. Three months later they helped elect a strong war governor in Ohio.

In Kansas, Confederate guerrilla William C. Quantrill, a Northerner by birth (Ohio), exercised no manly restraint in an August raid on the anti-slavery town of Lawrence, which resulted in a four-hour orgy of blood and flames that left 150 dead and the town in smoldering ruins. Quantrill's force was more of a gang than an organized military unit - an embarrassment to the Confederacy - and represented an element of lawlessness and vendetta rampant in Kansas and Missouri that did not stop with the end of the war. Veterans of this border violence would write a new chapter in American history - with names like Jesse and Frank James, the Younger brothers, and other outlaws of the Wild West who once rode with Quantrill and his more evil protege Bloody Bill Anderson.

Things remained surprisingly quiet in Tennessee after the Battle of Stones River (or Murfreesboro), which had concluded January 2, and left the Union in possession of the battlefield. As Grant plotted the fall of Vicksburg and the Army of the Potomac fought one major battle and was on the verge of another in the East, General Rosecrans sat with his army at Murfreesboro, stockpiling, fortifying, and raising fears in Washington that Lincoln might have another McClellan on his hands. Bragg's Army of Tennessee was concentrated in and around Tullahoma, Tennessee, less than 40 miles away, and it was feared in Washington that Bragg might send reinforcements to Vicksburg unless he were otherwise occupied. After no small amount of prodding, Rosecrans prepared to move against Bragg.

The Tullahoma Campaign of June 23-July 3 was extremely well executed by the Union commander, incurring few casualties as he outmaneuvered Bragg at every step, forcing the Confederates over the Tennessee River into Chattanooga, near the Georgia border. Rosecrans stopped pursuit and waited a month and a half before attempting to wrestle Bragg out of his new position.

Again after some prodding by Washington, Rosecrans planned a new offensive that would take his army across the Tennessee River south and west of Chattanooga and trap Bragg between his army and a force under General Burnside moving south from Kentucky into East Tennessee. Bragg evacuated Chattanooga on September 6, and on that day Burnside occupied Knoxville. Maneuvering and blundering over the days to come culminated in the Battle of Chickamauga, September 19-20, fought along Chickamauga Creek in North Georgia. Reinforced by most of James Longstreet's corps of Lee's army, Bragg drove the Union army from the field in a tremendous tactical victory just when Southern spirits needed a lift. Rosecrans limped into Chattanooga, in the looming shadow of Lookout Mountain. The town proved to be a strong defensive position for Rosecrans, but he was now trapped there by the mountains, the Tennessee River, and Bragg's army.

The Confederates occupied Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge and appeared immovable. Bragg laid siege and Rosecrans was stymied. A change in command was necessary.

General Grant arrived on October 23, as the new department commander, and General George H. Thomas - who'd given a good account himself in the late battle, earning the nickname Rock of Chickamauga - succeeded Rosecrans's as army commander. By the end of the month a cracker line was open, bringing ample supplies into the city. Reinforced with troops from other theaters which were now relatively quiet as winter approached, Grant soon launched a series of attacks to break out of Chattanooga.

On November 24, troops under General Joe Hooker - who like Burnside had stayed on in a subordinate role after failing as the Potomac army's commander - scaled Lookout Mountain and fought what has been called the Battle Above the Clouds, because of the dense fog clinging to the mountainsides. Next morning the Stars and Stripes fluttered conspicuously from high atop Lookout Mountain, providing inspiration to all the Yankees below. Later that day Union forces struck the Confederates on Missionary Ridge. Momentum on the Federal side, not orders, and apprehension among the Confederates turned the attack into a foot race as charging Yankees swept startled Rebels completely from the ridge. Bragg's retreat did not stop until Dalton, Georgia, and all of Chattanooga and its mountains and ridges belonged to Grant. It would serve as a base for further operations into Georgia and the all-important Confederate supply center at Atlanta.