

THE SKIRMISHER

CIVIL WAR TRUST

1863: THE CENTER OF THE STORM

VOLUME 7

A SAVAGE SIX MONTHS

Bells rang and spirits rose in the North at the beginning of 1863. Millions of slaves were at least in concept now free due to the Emancipation Proclamation. Their freedom depended on Union military success, however, and men in blue attempted in 1863 to penetrate and subjugate the South on several fronts.

The Union Army under Maj. Gen William Starke Rosecrans repulsed the final Confederate assaults under Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg at Stones River, Jan. 2, 1863. Rosecrans was poised with his Army of the Cumberland to threaten Georgia and the Southern heartland. Only Bragg's Army of Tennessee stood in his way.

In the Army of the Potomac, after its disastrous defeat at Fredericksburg, Virginia, and a subsequent campaign so fruitless it derided as the Mud March, a new commander, Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker made changes that improved morale and reinvigorated the army. Confederate General and hero Robert E. Lee faced Hooker across the Rappahannock River.

Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant continued his quest for complete control of the Mississippi River. By land, river and canal, Grant aimed to capture the final Confederate stronghold at Vicksburg, Mississippi. Northern-born Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton held Vicksburg with an army named for the town.

In May, Grant's forces moved to capture Vicksburg by land while Hooker marched around Lee's flank near Chancellorsville, Virginia. Grant's stunning campaign resulted in victories on Mississippi soil at Port Gibson, Jackson, Raymond, and Champion Hill before Pemberton stopped Grant cold at Vicksburg. Grant laid siege to the city which fell on July 4. The Confederates had lost an entire army and, when the last Confederate bastion on the Mississippi River fell soon after, control of its most important waterway. The Confederacy was split in two.



The Emancipation Proclamation (Library of Congress)



The Battle of Gettysburg (Library of Congress)

A BLOODY SUMMER

In the east, Joseph Hooker was not at all successful. Although he faced an army half the size of his own and despite his all-but masterful flanking maneuver, the daring General Lee not only averted disaster but drove the Union army from the field at Chancellorsville, May 1-5. Seizing the initiative, Lee embarked on his second invasion of the North. He barely averted disaster at the war's largest cavalry engagement, Brandy Station, in June, before marching into south-central Pennsylvania. As Lee's army concentrated near the cross

roads town of Gettysburg he was met by the newest and last commander of the Army of the Potomac, Maj. Gen. George G. Meade. In the war's bloodiest battle, July 1-3, 1863, Lee was turned back and the eastern armies returned to Virginia.



The 54 Mass. Infantry Memorial(Library of Congress)

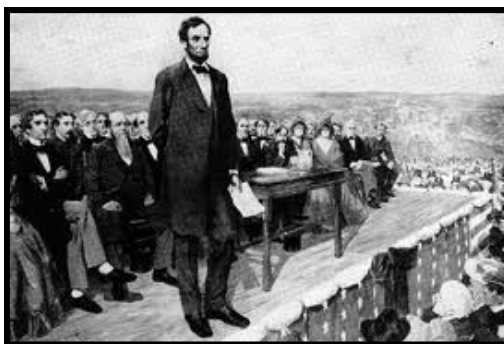
On July 18, the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry went into combat storming Fort Wagner in South Carolina. This assault, even though it was repulsed, demonstrated that African American soldiers were brave and willing to fight for the Union as well as freedom for those of the same ethnic heritage.

July also saw the convulsive New York City Draft Riots, which to this day remains the worst race riot in American history. Men conscripted to serve in the Union Army, many Irish immigrants believed that the draft was unfair and unwarranted to them because they could not afford to pay for a substitute. Other were unwilling to fight in a war for enslaved African Americans liberation.

Throughout June and July Rosecrans's army maneuvered its way through Tennessee and forced Bragg to abandon Chattanooga. Soon after, Rosecrans advanced into Georgia to pin Bragg down but with Confederate reinforcements on hand, Bragg turned the tables and defeated Rosecrans in the second bloodiest engagement of the war—the Battle of Chickamauga, September 18-20. The Union army limped back to Chattanooga where Bragg besieged the town and threatened to force the surrender of the Army of the Cumberland.

In October, however, Grant arrived on the scene and things turned around for the Union. As Bragg's army shrunk and weather turned colder, Grant's forces swelled. One week after President Lincoln stressed the need to continue the struggle in his Gettysburg Address, Grant's forces captured Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge at Chattanooga, November 24-25.

The tide had shifted and at year's end Union armies faced a determined but gravely weakened foe.

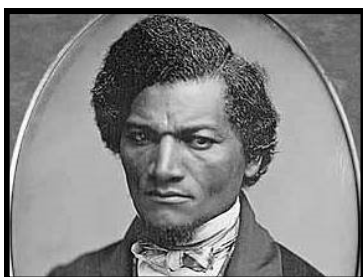


Lincoln at Gettysburg(Library of Congress)

VOICES FROM THE STORM

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

Speaking in Philadelphia in July, 1863, escaped slave and prolific author Frederick Douglass delivered this impassioned argument:



Douglass c. 1850. (Library of Congress)

"Once Let the Black man get brass buttons on his breast, bullets in his pocket and a rifle on his shoulder and there is no power on earth that can deny him the right to citizenship"

What do you think Douglass meant?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

- 1) Ask students to read the Gettysburg Address.
- 2) Break into mixed ability groups of 4-5 students and give each group a sheet of newsprint and markers.
- 3) On the newsprint have students list five main points of the address
- 4) Have students explain how the ideas that they noted still resonate in the United States today



This is the only known photograph of Lincoln delivering the Address. (Library of Congress)