

The Family Heritage Series

A weekly discussion of Americanist truths and traditions for those "heirs of all the ages" who will have to preserve that most important inheritance of all — freedom. Produced by the Movement To Restore Decency.



Volume II

Lesson Sixty-Six

The War Between The States

LESSON IDEA

To describe the more important battles of the War Between the States.

PREPARATION

Obtain a pictorial history of the war from your local library and follow the battles with the aid of maps and photographs.

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ABRAMHAM LINCOLN once remarked that if our nation were ever to fall, it would be destroyed not by an external enemy, but by ourselves. The War Between the States almost proved him right.

The first shot of the war was fired from a hidden gun emplacement on the shore of Charleston Harbor, to prevent a supply ship from reaching the Union troops stationed at Fort Sumter, a small fortress located on a man-made island in the harbor.

Major Anderson was the Union officer in command of the fortress and his adversary was Brigadier General G.T. Beauregard of the Confederate States of America. Ironically, the two men were long-time friends, having attended West Point together. There was no personal hostility between them; each man was simply doing his duty as he saw it.

Before the opening shot was fired on Fort Sumter, Anderson received a note from General Beauregard's headquarters, asking for his surrender. It read: "By authority of Brigadier General Beauregard, Commanding the Provisional Forces of the Confederate States, we have the honor to notify

you that he will open fire of his batteries on Fort Sumter in one hour from this time. We have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servants." It was signed by his aides-de-camp.

Anderson refused to surrender, but after a barrage of cannon fire from the shore, he changed his mind and ran up a white flag. He and his men were allowed to sail to New York City.

With the surrender of Fort Sumter, the War Between the States was a reality, but no one imagined it would last as long as it did. Certainly not President Abraham Lincoln, who called for 75,000 recruits to serve three months — in the mistaken belief that the secession would be quickly settled. In fact, when the Confederate forces marched toward Washington, D.C., in July of 1861 to challenge the Northern Army, many residents of Washington packed picnic baskets and followed the Union soldiers to the battle site. No one took the war seriously then; it was going to be fun sitting under a shady tree, eating sandwiches, watching the Union troops send the Southern "Rebels" fleeing in fear.

At the stream known as Bull Run the untrained recruits of both the North and the South got their first taste of battle; and men on both sides recoiled in horror. The Union troops were finally routed and hurried frantically toward Washington, along with the tearful spectators and their picnic baskets. War was not the "fun" they had imagined it would be. Many Confederate troops also fled the battlefield in fright; and in a desperate last-minute attempt to rally them, an officer pointed to Thomas J. Jackson's well-trained brigade, and

shouted: "Look, there is Jackson standing like a stone wall!" The nickname "Stonewall" stuck to Jackson, who was soon to become one of General Robert E. Lee's most valuable officers.

Both armies spent the rest of the year training their troops and devising battle plans. The plans of both sides were very simple, but difficult to carry out. The Union planned to blockade the Southern ports, gain control of the Mississippi River, and then capture Richmond, the new capital of the Confederate States of America. The Confederate plan was even more simple: Repel the invading armies and keep the ports open so the South could continue to receive war materials from abroad.

AFTER SIZING up the strength of the forces defending Richmond in the early stages of the war, the Union military strategists decided to send General Ulysses S. Grant's Army of the West down the Tennessee River in gunboats to capture Fort Donelson and Fort Henry. In this way, the Union hoped to destroy the Confederate states one at a time, instead of launching a massive assault against Richmond.

After the relatively easy capture of Fort Donelson and Fort Henry, General Grant marched his men through mud, sleet, and snow to Shiloh Church at Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee, where they were surprised by 40,000 Confederates. The Union troops retreated in confusion. The Confederates, however, not realizing the extent of their victory, called a cease-fire and waited. By the following morning Grant had reorganized his men, and the Union soldiers turned the brief Confederate victory into a defeat – although it was a costly one. Of 63,000 men under Grant's command, 13,000 were killed, wounded, or missing. The Confederates lost 10,000.

For the remainder of the year the Confederate and Union troops pushed each other all over Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, and West Virginia in hundreds of indecisive skirmishes. In December of 1862 they met at Fredericksburg, Virginia.

Union General Ambrose Burnside sent his troops against the impregnable position held by General Lee on the heights above the town. The Confederates repulsed the Union troops six times before the

defeated Union Army withdrew across the river.

Of course, the war wasn't all fighting, as any soldier knows. More of it was boredom – sitting for weeks at a time, knee-deep in mud, waiting for the generals to decide what they were going to do. And for the troops of both sides, even eating was no pleasure once the supplies started getting scarce. The Union troops were daily treated to "hardtack" – small biscuits made from flour and water, three inches square and half an inch thick. Often these biscuits were inhabited by boll weevils. The ingenious soldiers soon found a way of getting rid of the unwanted guests. They'd dunk the hardtack in boiling hot coffee and watch the bugs dog-paddle to the surface. Then with a finger, they'd skim the floundering weevils off the top, continue drinking coffee and devouring the soggy hardtack. Many of the soldiers were so disgusted by the bugs, they preferred to eat in the dark. A lot of jokes about hardtack were passed around the camps. One told of a sergeant sitting on a stump near a campfire, who said, "Boys, I was eating a piece of hardtack this morning, and I bit on something soft; what do you think it was?" A private asked, "A worm?" "No," said the sergeant. "It was a tenpenny nail."

During lulls in the fighting, the pickets on duty on both sides would sit together out along the lines playing poker and swapping food and tobacco. Then when the order came to prepare for battle, each man would gather up his booty and scurry back to his own side. The men who were so happily playing poker and joking with one another at one moment, might be killing each other the next. That the men who were fighting were not really enemies was one of the most tragic aspects of the War Between the States.

THE BATTLE of Chancellorsville in the spring of 1863 would have been General Lee's Waterloo had not the Union commander, General Joseph Hooker, been incompetent. Hooker had

FOR SERIOUS STUDENTS

Read a biography of one or more of the following officers who fought in the war: G.T. Beauregard, Ulysses S. Grant, William T. Sherman, George Meade, Robert E. Lee, Thomas J. Jackson, John B. Hood, Joseph Hooker, or David Farragut.

