

HARPERS FERRY

Few places played such an important role in the Civil War as Harpers Ferry. This was where some of the first shots of the conflict were fired, when abolitionist John Brown led his "army" of would-be slave liberators there on October 16, 1859. After shedding the first blood and seizing the U.S. Armory, Brown and his followers were overwhelmed two days later, when a detachment of marines stormed the engine house. Col. Robert E. Lee with his aide Lt. J.E.B. Stuart commanded the force. Brown was captured, tried, convicted of treason against Virginia, and hanged at nearby Charles Town on December 2, 1859.

When the war came, both Union and Confederate forces coveted this strategic location at the gateway to the Shenandoah Valley. The Federals used the town and its connection to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad as a supply base, launching repeated incursions from here into the heart of Virginia. The Confederates marched through the area when they invaded the North and occupied Harpers Ferry during the 1862 Maryland (Antietam) Campaign, the 1863 Gettysburg Campaign, and Gen. Jubal A. Early's 1864 raid on Washington. Nearby Shepherdstown and Martinsburg also played key roles in the conflict, as hospital and transportation centers respectively.



Gen. William E. Jones
Courtesy West Virginia State Archives

Gen. John Imboden
Courtesy Library of Congress

JONES-IMBODEN RAID

On April 20, 1863, Confederate Gens. William E. "Grumble" Jones and John D. Imboden began a cavalry raid on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad from Virginia through present-day north-central West Virginia. They planned to disrupt rail transportation, cut telegraph lines, weaken Federal control, and seize provisions and supplies. The generals took separate routes. Imboden led 3,365 men from Staunton through Beverly and Buckhannon. Jones rode with 2,100 men through Petersburg and Moorefield, fought an engagement at Greenland Gap in Hardy County, and was repulsed at the Rowlesburg rail viaduct. He occupied Morgantown and seized Federal supplies and horses on April 28. The next day, Jones fought his largest engagement at Fairmont. Despite the efforts of 500 Union regulars and home guards defending the town, he destroyed a railroad bridge and burned the library of Francis H. Pierpont, governor of the Restored Government of Virginia. Jones reunited temporarily with Imboden at Buckhannon and skirmished to Weston. Jones destroyed the oil wells and equipment at Burning Springs, and both forces maneuvered southeast, returning to Virginia's Shenandoah Valley by May 26. The generals claimed that they marched 1,100 miles, fought numerous engagements, captured 700 Federals, seized about 1,200 horses and 4,000 cattle, and burned 4 turnpike bridges, more than 20 railroad bridges, 2 trains, and 150,000 barrels of oil. Most bridges were soon repaired, but the raid prolonged the struggle in the new state.

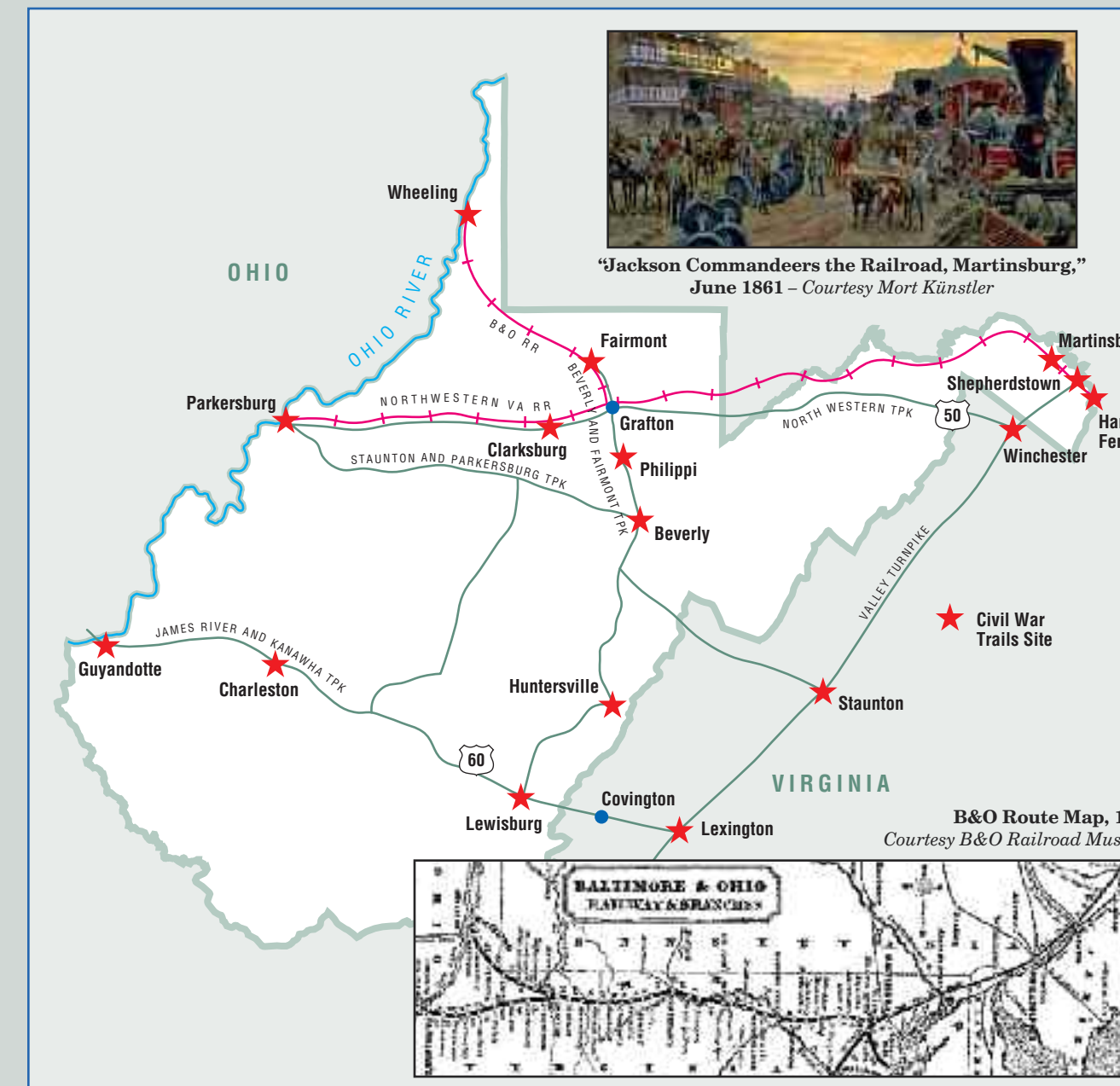


Gen. Albert G. Jenkins
Courtesy Library of Congress

Confederate raiders, *Century Magazine*, ca. 1880.
Courtesy West Virginia State Archives

JENKINS'S RAID

Confederate Gen. Albert G. Jenkins led 550 cavalrymen on a 500-mile raid through central West Virginia between August 22 and September 12, 1862, attacking Federal forces, capturing prisoners, and destroying military stores. From Salt Sulphur Springs in Monroe County, he rode along the Tygart and Buckhannon Rivers, capturing Union scouts in Huttonsville and taking 5,000 weapons in Buckhannon on August 30. As Jenkins and his men rode west on the Staunton and Parkersburg Turnpike, he occupied Weston and destroyed the telegraph line there. He drove off two companies of Federals at Glenville and then captured the Union garrison (5 companies of the 11th West Virginia Infantry) under Col. John C. Rathbone at Spencer on September 2. Next, he took Ripley in Jackson County and seized \$5,550 from the U.S. paymaster. At Ravenswood on September 4, the Federals retreated across the Ohio River. That evening, Jenkins forded the river and raised the Confederate flag in Ohio. He captured Racine, recrossed the river, and passed through Point Pleasant. Jenkins then continued through Barboursville, Logan Court House, Pineville in Wyoming County, and Beckley in Raleigh County. On September 12, Jenkins ended the raid at Red House on the Kanawha River. Jenkins's Raid, like most cavalry expeditions, temporarily disrupted the Union communication and supply system but had no long-term consequences, although planting the Confederate flag in Ohio provided a brief lift to Confederate morale.



B&O Route Map, 1860
Courtesy B&O Railroad Museum

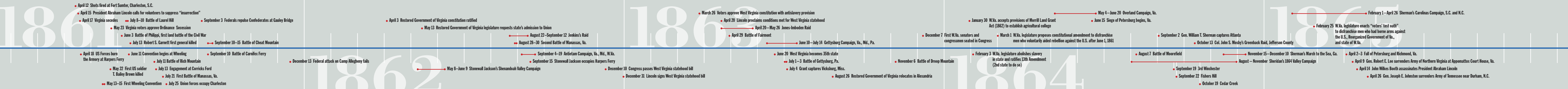


MOUNTAIN MANEUVERING

West Virginia's rugged terrain made campaigning extremely difficult despite numerous gravel turnpikes. Major western turnpikes included the Staunton and Parkersburg, Beverly and Fairmont, James River and Kanawha, Valley, and North Western. In northern West Virginia, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the Northwestern Virginia Railroad linked Wheeling and Parkersburg on the Ohio River with Grafton, Martinsburg, Baltimore, and the Chesapeake Bay. These railroads were the most strategically important lines of communication and transportation in the state.

The turnpikes were serviceable in dry weather, but heavy rain and snow often rendered them impassible. Gen. John D. Imboden reported that two weeks' hard rain had made the roads "horribly bad": to lighten his artillery enough to get it through the mud, he "had to destroy the spare wheels ... and throw away fifty solid shot from each caisson." Road maintenance, infrequent in peacetime, was minimal during the war. Most large-scale military campaigns, therefore, took place farther east in Virginia.

Both sides sought to control or disrupt the railroads. Besides Confederate cavalry raids, there were numerous Federal raids, including the one that Gens. William W. Averell and Alfred N.A. Duffield led in November 1863. Most of the raids succeeded only briefly, as the lines were quickly repaired or rebuilt.

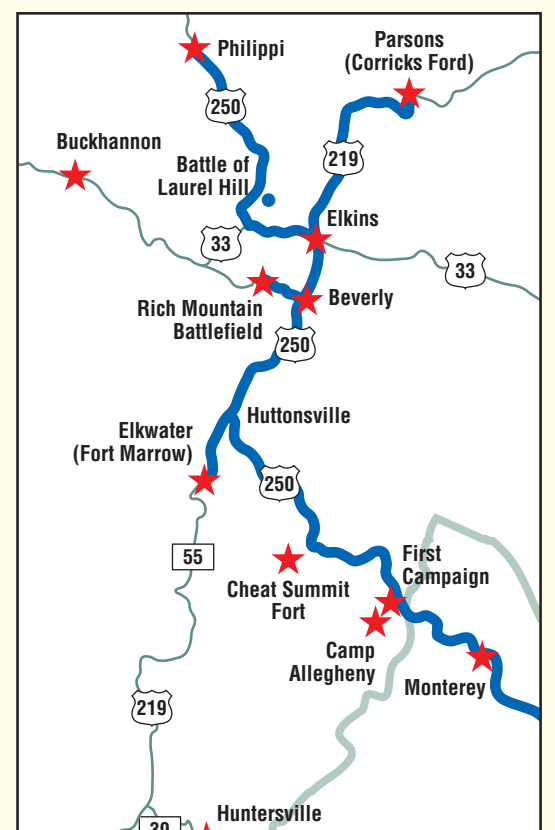


WEST VIRGINIA CIVIL WAR TRAILS



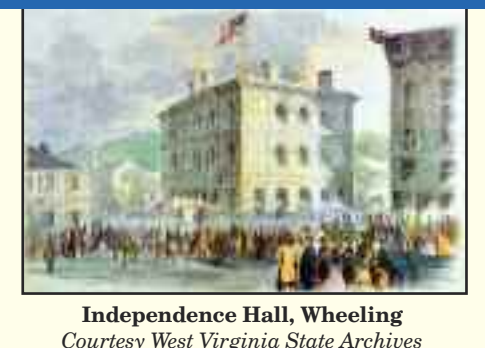
THE FIRST CAMPAIGN

In the spring of 1861, after the secession of Virginia from the Union, Federal forces rushed to secure the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, which passed through northwestern Virginia and linked the Chesapeake Bay with the Ohio River and the West. Gen. George B. McClellan led the Union effort to hold the railroad and to protect the largely Unionist part of Virginia that soon became West Virginia. The first land battle of the Civil War occurred on June 3, 1861, when McClellan's forces brushed aside Confederate resistance at Philippi. The next month, on July 11, Union troops under Gen. William S. Rosecrans overcame Confederate forces at Rich Mountain commanded by Gen. Robert S. Garnett, who was charged with protecting the turnpike crossroads at Beverly. Trying to retreat, Garnett was killed two days later at Corricks Ford. McClellan became a Union hero, and President Abraham Lincoln soon appointed him commander of the Federal army in the eastern theater. In August, Confederate president Jefferson Davis sent his senior military advisor, Gen. Robert E. Lee, to western Virginia to salvage the situation. In contrast with his future adversary McClellan, Lee failed. Many factors conspired against Lee: friction between subordinate Confederate commanders, poor weather, disease among the troops, and rugged terrain. Lee attempted to drive the Federals from their bastion at Cheat Summit Fort on September 11-13, taking personal command in his first battle of the war. Plagued by rain and ineffective underlings, Lee was forced to withdraw, and the Federals retained control of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the Staunton and Parkersburg Turnpike. Davis soon transferred Lee to South Carolina to supervise the construction of fortifications. While in western Virginia, however, Lee acquired a horse that he would treasure the rest of his days. Lee named him Traveller. At about the same time as the Cheat Mountain debacle, Union forces under Rosecrans drove Confederate Gen. John B. Floyd's command from its fortifications at Carnifax Ferry. Eventually, Confederate forces established Camp Allegheny on the present-day Virginia-West Virginia border to guard the Staunton and Parkersburg Turnpike. A Union attack there failed on December 13, 1861. The Confederates evacuated the site early in 1862. After the fighting and maneuvering in 1861, much of the area that would become West Virginia was in Union hands, where it remained for the rest of the war. Confederates mounted periodic raids and isolated actions but never again seriously threatened Federal control there.



ROAD TO STATEHOOD

The long-standing political, social, and economic differences between western and eastern Virginia reached a crisis in April 1861, when Virginia seceded and created a pro-Confederate state government in Richmond. Union supporters generally dominated western Virginia, where there were fewer slaves, especially in the northwestern counties. On June 11, delegates from 26 western counties convened in Wheeling, reorganized, and restored the loyal government of Virginia under Gov. Francis H. Pierpont. A later session authorized a referendum to dismember Virginia and create a new state, Kanawha (later named West Virginia). However, not all of the residents within the new state's boundaries concurred; secessionists dominated the eastern and southern portions. In the months after November 1861, a convention drafted a state constitution. Voters in the western counties ratified it on April 3, 1862. The new legislature, which convened on May 13, requested the state's admission to the Union. The U.S. Congress passed a bill—soon amended to address the slavery issue—that President Abraham Lincoln signed on December 31, 1862, and on March 26, 1863, the voters approved a state constitutional provision to deal with slavery. West Virginia became the 35th state on June 20 under Gov. Arthur I. Boreman. Two 45th U.S. Colored Troops companies were credited to the new state.



Independence Hall, Wheeling
Courtesy West Virginia State Archives

GUERRILLA WARFARE

Northwestern Virginia (including present-day West Virginia) was the first part of the state to experience guerrilla conflict. There, John H. McNeill was the precursor of John S. Mosby in northern Virginia. Guerrillas resisted "invading" forces from the opposite side and carried out often-personal vendettas against civilians who supported the other side. In the spring of 1861, the Unionists, who generally dominated the area, formed guerrilla bands to intimidate their pro-Confederate neighbors, who formed their own bands to retaliate. Such rival groups included the Confederate Moccasin Rangers and the Unionist Snake Hunters. Confederate guerrillas also attacked the occupying regular Union troops who sought to protect Unionist civilians and control the strategically important turnpikes and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. The Federals frequently resorted to extreme measures to subdue the Confederate guerrillas, whom they considered little more than outlaws. Unionist volunteers acting under official orders targeted Confederate guerrillas, capturing or killing them wherever they found them. The Confederate guerrillas, likewise, struck any target of opportunity from Unionist civilians to local government officials. Officially, both the United States and the Confederate States denounced such "irregular" warfare, but each side supported its own guerrillas while condemning those of the other side. The "war within the war" was so vicious and uncontrollable, despite attempts to regulate it with "partisan ranger" legislation, that hatreds and low-level violence continued in some areas for decades after the war ended.

THE CIVIL WAR REVISITED

The following further explore and expand upon the story of the Civil War:

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John Brown's Fort
Courtesy West Virginia Dept. of Commerce



Hampshire County gunsmith Jacob Sheets converted flintlock rifles to percussion for military use during the Civil War.
Courtesy Royce Saville and the Hampshire County Historic Landmarks Commission

Follow this sign to discover more than 1,000 Civil War sites along ten breathtaking trails. Hundreds of sites are accessible to the public for the first time.

www.CivilWarTrails.org

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View of Parkersburg from Fort Boreman
Courtesy Marty Seuffer, Greater Parkersburg CVB



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