



Harpers Ferry and the Civil War



Before the Civil War, 3000 people lived and worked in the prosperous industrial town of Harpers Ferry. Benefitting from abundant natural resources and situated at the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers, this area was advertised as “one of the best situations in the United States for. . . factories.” The town’s largest industry, the United States Armory, had over 20 factory buildings and 400 employees. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal also provided a steady flow of people and commerce through the town.

These assets made the town strategically important to both sides during the war. The town changed hands

eight times, but remained under Union control 80% of the war.

Time Line: 1861	Apr. 12	Fort Sumter bombarded at Charleston, SC.
	Apr. 15	President Lincoln calls for 75,000 volunteers to put down the rebellion.
	Apr. 17	Virginia secedes from the Union.
	Apr. 18	Virginia militia march on Harpers Ferry, VA. Federal soldiers torch the U. S. Armory and arsenal, destroying over 15,000 weapons.
	Apr. 28	Col. Thomas J. (later “Stonewall”) Jackson takes his first command of the war at Harpers Ferry, VA. Over the next 7 weeks, all machinery and tools from the Armory are removed and shipped south to Richmond, VA, and Fayetteville, NC, to produce weapons for the Confederacy.
	June 14	The B&O Railroad bridge and the U.S. Armory buildings burned by evacuating Confederates.
	June 28	Confederate raiders burn Hall’s Rifle Works and the Shenandoah Bridge.
	July 4	First civilian death occurs in Harpers Ferry when businessman Frederick Roeder is shot by a Union soldier on Maryland Heights.
	July 21	Union troops occupy Harpers Ferry.
	Aug. 17	Union troops withdraw from the town to the Maryland shore. Harpers Ferry is not occupied by either side until February 1862.
Time Line: 1862	Oct. 16	Battle of Bolivar Heights. 500 Confederates (Col. Turner Ashby) clash with 600 Federals (Col. John Geary.) Ashby fell back towards Charles Town and Union flags were planted on the ridge.
	Feb. 7	Union soldiers burn the commercial area near “The Point” in retaliation for the death of a Federal scout killed by Rebel snipers.
	Feb. 25	Federals occupy the town to maintain communication and supply lines along the B&O and deter invasion of the Shenandoah Valley. 14,000 Union soldiers, the “Railroad Brigade,” are stationed here.
	Mar. 29	Col. Dixon S. Miles is given command of the “Railroad Brigade” at Harpers Ferry.
	Sept. 4	Confederate General Robert E. Lee begins the first invasion of the North.
	Sept. 9	At Frederick, MD, Gen. Lee issues Special Orders 191, boldly dividing his army into four parts, sending three columns to capture or destroy the garrison at Harpers Ferry.

Sept. 13	Under command of “Stonewall” Jackson, Confederates take strategic positions on the hills surrounding Harpers Ferry, boxing in the Union garrison on three sides.
Sept. 14	The Battle of South Mountain delays the advance of 87,000 Federals, while “Stonewall’s” artillery hammers the Harpers Ferry garrison. During the night, Jackson orders Gen. A.P. Hill’s division to the Chambers’ Farm to outflank the Union position on Bolivar Heights.
Sept. 15	12,500 Federal soldiers surrender to “Stonewall” Jackson. It was the largest surrender of Federal troops during the war and remained so until the Fall of Bataan during World War II.
Sept. 17	The Battle of Antietam, the bloodiest single day of the war.
Sept. 18	Confederates evacuate Harpers Ferry.
Sept. 20	Federals occupy Harpers Ferry and begin extensive fortifications on the heights.
Sept. 22	President Lincoln issues the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation.
Oct. 1-2	Lincoln reviews the Union troops on Bolivar Heights and Maryland Heights.

Time Line: 1863	June 16	The South invades the North for the second time.
	June 17	Federals evacuate Harpers Ferry and man fortifications on Maryland Heights.
	June 20	West Virginia is admitted to the Union as the 35th state.
	June 30	Federals abandon Maryland Heights, retreating to Frederick, MD.
	July 1-3	Battle of Gettysburg
	July 14	Harpers Ferry is occupied by Union troops after Southern troops retreat from Gettysburg.

Time Line: 1864	July 4	Third invasion of the North. Confederate Gen. Jubal Early forces Union soldiers to withdraw from Maryland Heights.
	July 7	Federal forces reoccupy Harpers Ferry.
	July 9-12	The Battle of Monocacy delays Early’s advance through Maryland. Early’s army forced back less than five miles from Washington, D.C.
	Aug. 6	Union Gen. Philip Sheridan arrives at Harpers Ferry to mount a major offensive to conquer the Shenandoah Valley. Supply trains leave for the “front” regularly, always under threat of attack from Col. John S. Mosby’s Partisan Rangers or other Confederate guerrillas.
	Sept. 19	Battle of 3rd Winchester
	Sept. 22	Battle of Fisher’s Hill
	Sept. 23	1,500 prisoners from these battles are processed through Harpers Ferry.
	Oct. 19	Battle of Cedar Creek ends major Confederate resistance in the Shenandoah Valley.
	Nov. 8	President Lincoln is reelected.

Time Line: 1865	Apr. 2	Richmond falls.
	Apr. 9	Lee surrenders to Grant at Appomattox.
	Apr. 14	President Lincoln is assassinated

For additional information on Harpers Ferry and the Civil War be sure to see:

The Civil War Museum	1862 Battle of Harpers Ferry Museum	Bolivar Heights Trail
School House Ridge Trails	Maryland Heights Trail	Murphy Farm Trail