

CIVIL WAR at 150

In the summer of 1864 the Civil War came to Montgomery County again. This time the Confederates were led by Gen. Jubal Early, a cantankerous old man, on orders from General Robert E. Lee, to threaten Washington DC. If the bold plan worked, Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant would have to send some of the soldiers now surrounding Petersburg-Richmond back to defend the Union's capital.

Follow the day-by-day account leading up to the Battle of Ft. Stevens barely two miles from the yet-to-be Takoma Park, on July 11-12, 1864. This account is not intended to be comprehensive, but to give a flavor of the military activities of each day.

June 13, 1864 – Confederate Lt. Gen. Jubal Early and his troops slip away from Richmond unnoticed, under orders to reach Lynchburg before Union Maj. Gen. David Hunter could capture its rail lines. Early's men cheer when they turn west into the Shenandoah Valley.

June 14, 1864 – In addition to Early's main force, additional Confederate units of infantry, artillery and cavalry are hurrying toward Lynchburg's defense.

June 15, 1864 – Meanwhile, Union troops under Hunter take time out to burn local farms instead of pushing to Lynchburg, unaware that Rebels are on the move. This “scorched earth” policy will have ramifications in coming weeks.

June 16, 1864 – Rebel troops reach Charlottesville. Early arranges for trains to ferry his exhausted troops to Lynchburg. Delays getting the cars, and only enough for half his forces. They finally board at 2 am on the 17th. The other half continue marching or wait for the second round of transport. Meanwhile, Union troops are within 20 miles of Lynchburg.

June 17, 1864 – Lynchburg residents greet the first of Early's corps with cheers and cool water. Union and rebel forces converge the town of 8,000. Early confers with second-in-command Maj. Gen. John Breckinridge, who arrived just ahead of him. Late in the afternoon, Rebels confront Yankees four miles outside town and push them back.

June 18, 1864 – Day spent in small skirmishes as both sides try to gauge who has greater numbers. Early and Hunter each delay attack orders as they await the arrival of additional troops. By evening, with all his troops gathered, Early determines to attack at first light, only to discover that Hunter is withdrawing under cover of darkness.

June 19, 1864 – By 9:30 am, Early mobilizes pursuit of Hunter along roads deep in dust on a day that proves to be intensely hot. At sundown, Rebel cavalry catch sight of Hunter's rear guard at sundown 25 miles north of Lynchburg, but fail to engage, much to Early's frustration.

June 20, 1864 – Union troops moving in pre-dawn darkness continue to retreat into the high ground of the Blue Ridge mountains.

June 21, 1864 – After a third full day of pursuit, Early determines “nothing useful could be gotten, so I did not deem it proper to continue,” and breaks off the march.

June 22, 1864 – Early orders a day of rest near Roanoke for his weary men who have marched 60 miles in three days with little food for the last two.

June 23 – Early informs Lee he has a clear path into Maryland and will proceed with the second objective - to cross the Potomac, invade Maryland and threaten Washington DC. Hunter, meanwhile safe in West Virginia, neglects to inform Grant of his encounter with the Confederates, and Grant assures Washington that Early remains outside Richmond.

June 24 – Facing little opposition, Confederates begin long trek north.

June 25 – As the long column pass Lexington, those troops from Stonewall Jackson's old division take time to pay their respects at Stonewall's grave. Back in Richmond, Lee sends word to Pres. Jefferson Davis about Early's plans, including the first mention of some troops going on to rescue Rebel prisoners held at Pt. Lookout.

June 26 – Early arrives in Staunton ahead of his troops and reorganizes his army for the march north. The Army of Northern Virginia becomes the Army of the Valley District, with two corps (second under Breckinridge's command), plus cavalry and artillery. The critical lack of supplies convinces Early to reject an invasion route via Loudoun, opting instead for a route through Maryland where they “could take provisions from the enemy.”

June 28, 1864 - At 3 am, the new Army of the Valley District heads north. As one soldier put it: “We feel perfectly at home since nearly all of the Valley from Staunton to the Potomac River was familiar to us and many of its inhabitants are old acquaintances.” Half the men are without shoes, but there is no time to wait for the requested shipment from Richmond.

Meanwhile, Union Gen. Hunter wires Washington that his campaign in Virginia has been “extremely successful, inflicting great injury to the enemy (perhaps he meant the houses burned rather than Rebels attacked), giving no clue that Early is headed their way.

June 29, 1864 – At 1 a.m. the War Department receives a telegram from John Garrett, president of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. He cites rumors of rebel forces, as reported by refugees fleeing to his train stations, insisting this is “a situation that demands the greatest vigilance and attention.” The message is passed to Grant that afternoon.

June 30, 1864 – Another long day of marching for Confederates.

July 1, 1864 – Word of rebels on the move reaches Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel in Martinsburg. His request for 150 cars to transport troops to Harper's Ferry comes to Garrett's attention.

July 2, 1864 – Early halts his troops at Winchester to replenish provisions and give the cavalry time to destroy the B&O rail lines and C&O canal as far as possible. Grant reports to Washington that Early has returned to Richmond.

July 3, 1864 – Garrett travels to Baltimore to personally urge Maj Gen. Lew Wallace (in charge at Baltimore) to take action to protect the railroad, especially at Monocacy. That afternoon, Garrett begins arranging transport for Union troops.

July 4, 1864 – Early reaches Harper's Ferry and marks the holiday by pushing Union defenders from town across the Potomac. It is almost exactly one year since the evacuation of Harper's Ferry in the aftermath of Gettysburg. As Federal troops retreat, they destroy the bridges and take a commanding position on the Maryland Heights opposite the town. From there they will bombard the Rebels for the next three days.

July 5, 1864 – Unable to cross into Maryland, Early sends half the troops eight miles north to Shepherdstown. It takes 40 hours to move all the men across the Potomac. When Rebels cut communication lines in Harper's Ferry, Grant finally learns that, contrary to reports, Early is in fact in Maryland. This raises considerable alarm in Washington: "We have almost nothing in Baltimore and DC except militia." Meanwhile, Union forces on the Maryland Heights welcome reinforcements from Frederick.

July 6, 1864 – All Confederate probes of Union defenses fail to find a way past. Meanwhile, miles north in Hagerstown, advance cavalry under Confederate Gen. John McCauseland rides into the town of 6,500 and demands \$20,000 in ransom and 1500 sets of clothes. Three local banks agree to front the money.

July 7, 1864 – Confederates get within 600 yards of the Union line, but are foiled by the shelling from Maryland Heights.

July 8, 1864 – After four frustrating days, Early finally detours around Harper's Ferry, crossing into Maryland. Heading east toward Frederick, Rebels stop overnight at Middletown.

Next.....Confederates march through Maryland.