



Confederates invade Montgomery County

To most people, saying “Civil War” brings horrific images of Antietam and Gettysburg to mind. Few imagine 20,000 Confederate soldiers trudging through the rural farmland north of Washington, DC, land that soon after became Takoma Park and Silver Spring. But that’s exactly what happened in July of 1864.

One year after the devastation at Gettysburg, the Confederates were still refusing to surrender. President Abraham Lincoln was worried about how the unending war might hurt his chances for re-election in the fall. General U.S. Grant was with his troops in Petersburg laying siege to Richmond hoping to force surrender. His conviction that the Northern capital was safe from attack turned out to be wrong.

Pinned down in Richmond, the ever wily General Robert E. Lee opted for a bold strike. He ordered Lt. General Jubal Anderson Early to march into Maryland via the Shenandoah Valley. The idea was to commandeer badly-needed supplies along the way, then put enough pressure on the Washington to force Grant to send some of the troops strangling Richmond back north to defend DC.

Although very little remembered or celebrated today, General Early’s campaign came close to altering the outcome of the war. His 20,000 troops swarmed through the Maryland countryside and by July 10 were at the walls of Fort Stevens. They very nearly succeeded in overwhelming the

sparsely-defended fortifications and pushing into the city itself. More alarmingly, a Southern sharpshooter nearly killed President Lincoln as he stood on the battlements. Two days of skirmishing outside the fort walls had both sides braving cannon fire and sharpshooters. In the end, Early decided he didn’t have enough troop strength for a direct assault and opted to withdraw.

The tale of why he didn’t succeed tells much about the chaos, and luck, of war. Like all the Civil War debates, there are plenty of “what-ifs” on both sides.

Southern Delays

General Early started out well. He left Richmond on June 13, with 9,000 infantry plus cavalry support. He encountered little resistance after scaring the Union forces at Lynchburg into a full-scale retreat. But he had trouble keeping his soldiers marching in the 95-degree summer heat and trouble reining in the independent-minded cavalry.

Reaching Harpers Ferry on July 4, his troops took time to celebrate in grand fashion. Meanwhile, Union troops rallied to protect Harpers Ferry, forcing the Confederates to ford the Potomac at Shepherdstown. In Maryland, they crossed the old battlefield at Sharpsburg (or Antietam). But the scorching weather and the 200 wagons of commandeered goods made for slow progress.



PHOTOS COURTESY SILVER SPRING HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mural depicting the “crossroads of Sligo, MD” (present-day intersection of Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road) in July, 1864

Northern Confusion

The delays worked in the North’s favor because it took weeks for the Federal Government to realize the danger. Ironically, the most accurate warnings came from John Garrett, president of the B&O Railroad. His employees kept him informed of Early’s threat to his railroad lines, but he couldn’t convince Federal officials. General Grant, from 100 miles away in Richmond, kept insisting by telegraph that Early was still in Petersburg.

It took until July 10 before Grant was finally persuaded to send reinforcements, requiring several days travel by boat. These men were crucial because few veteran soldiers remained in DC, every able-bodied man having been dispatched to replace lost troops elsewhere. More than \$1 million had been spent to build an elaborate 37-mile fortification system of 60 forts and 93 interconnecting batteries. However, it took 45,000 men to staff the battlements, and the only soldiers available were untested militia, convalescents, and civil servants.

Stand at Monocacy

The B&O’s Garrett did find one army man willing to listen – General Lew Wallace, in command of the Baltimore garrison. Realizing the urgency, Wallace took it upon himself to move troops from Baltimore to Frederick, although he knew he was overstepping his authority. Thus he was able to slow down the invaders as they marched through Frederick. More importantly, he placed his troops at the junction south of town where both the railroad and the Washington turnpike crossed the Monocacy River.

Unaware of an alternative way across the Monocacy, Early’s Confederates pushed against the Union lines for the entire day of July 9. Wallace’s men held out until late in the afternoon. The Union reinforcements that could have brought victory remained sidelined in railroad cars east of Frederick, because their commander refused to order them into battle. In any case, the Union guns took a withering toll on the Confederate troops, especially cavalry officers. And Wallace could report that 20,000 Southern troops

were indeed headed to Washington.

While Wallace was making a stand at Monocacy, the Blair clan was taking leave of their estates north of Washington for their annual summer retreat to Pennsylvania and points east. Although Francis Preston Blair had retired from DC politics, his 1000-acre “Silver Spring” estate remained a key political center. The adjoining estate of Falklands belonged to his son Montgomery Blair, a member of Lincoln’s cabinet. The empty houses awaited the Confederate arrival.

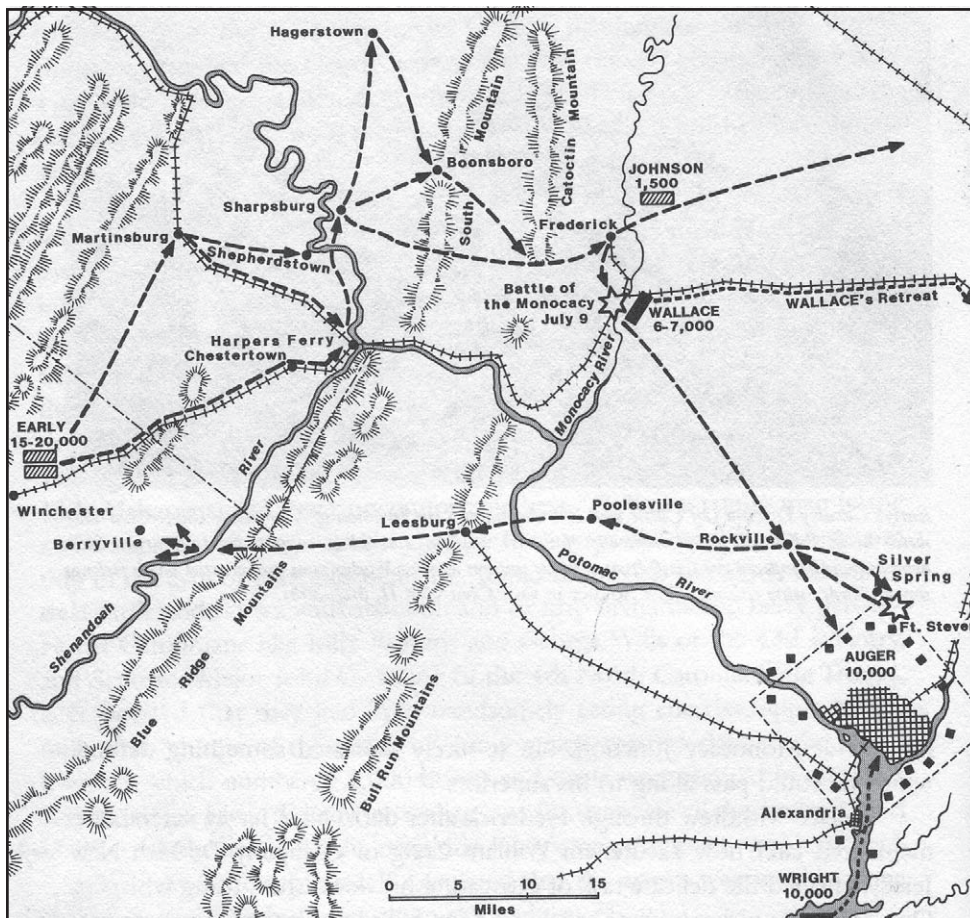
On July 10, the Confederates were on the move again, but strung out from Gaithersburg to Rockville as the long, hot days of marching took their toll. Turning onto the old Seventh Street Turnpike at Leesborough (later renamed to honor Union Gen. Frank Wheaton), it became clear they were headed for Fort Stevens.

By evening, the first troops wearily passed through the toll gate at tiny Sligo Post Office (where the Pike crossed the Brookeville Road, now Georgia at Colesville), and staked out campsites on the Blair grounds. General Early himself commandeered Blair’s Silver Spring chateau as headquarters. The Blair wine cellars contributed to the evening’s entertainment as the Southern command discussed their options.

Assault on DC

Meanwhile, the North was scrambling to move defenders into the forts, focusing on Fort Stevens, which guarded the Seventh Street Turnpike entrance into the city. The troops who built the fort in 1862 named it Fort Massachusetts in honor of their home state, but recently it had been expanded and renamed in honor of General Issac Stevens, who died at Chantilly. Reinforcements from Richmond began arriving that night, but were held back as a precaution should the Confederates breach the walls.

Early hesitated until noon to send the first assault, unaware that only 300 soldiers held the fort. Skirmishes developed in front of the walls. Sharpshooters picked off defenders while cannon fire from inside the fort reached as far as Blair’s Silver Spring (3700 yards away). Day One ended in a stalemate.



MAP TAKEN FROM JUBAL EARLY'S RAID ON WASHINGTON: 1864

Early was planning an all-out assault for the next morning until he received word confirming that veteran reinforcements were arriving from Petersburg. He resolved to withdraw but after a day of skirmishing.

Skirmishing on Day Two sometimes extending a mile in front of the fort. That afternoon, President Lincoln's arrival to support the troops provided the biggest "what-if" of all. Concern for President Lincoln's safety had forced him back to the White House (from his summer retreat just north of Fort Stevens), but he insisted on

visiting the fort, perhaps more than once. In any case, on this day, he climbed the ramparts only to be shocked when the surgeon next to him was hit by a sharpshooter from 1000 yards away -- the only President to face enemy fire. (Local lore cites a particular tree on what is now the grounds of Walter Reed Medical Center as the perch for said sharpshooter.)

Several people took credit for telling the President to take cover, including future Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes and Aunt Betty, the freed black slave whose house was demolished to make way for Fort Stevens. He did so but stayed to watch as the Union reinforcements finally ordered over the walls to chase the enemy north.

Threat Over

Early's decision to retreat was already made, and the Union attack only hurried matters.

Two events from this retreat have entered local lore: 17 Confederates who died along the way were buried at Grace Episcopal Church in northern Silver Spring (also the Blair family church). And sometime in the night, Montgomery Blair's Falklands caught fire and burned to the ground. Silver Spring escaped damage, possibly because the Confederate General Breckinridge shared Kentucky relatives

General Early wrote in a report of the 1864 campaign:

"Some of the Northern papers stated that, between Saturday and Monday, I could have entered the city; but on Saturday I was fighting at Monocacy, thirty-five miles from Washington, a force which I could not leave in my rear; and after disposing of that force and moving as rapidly as it was possible for me to move, I did not arrive in front of the fortifications until after noon on Monday, and then my troops were exhausted..."

with the Blair family.

With the threat to the Capital over, the countryside gradually recovered from the invasion. Not until March 1965 did Gen. Phil Sheridan finally defeat the remnants of Early's forces, and lead to Appomattox. Gen. Lew Wallace would later write the classic, "Ben Hur."

Barely 20 years passed before the suburbs began to reach out to the fields that had seen Confederate campfires. The green oasis that is Fort Stevens (13th and Piney Branch) bears silent witness to those days in July 1864 when the Confederacy almost captured the capital.



Ruins of the Falkland Mansion

Learn More:

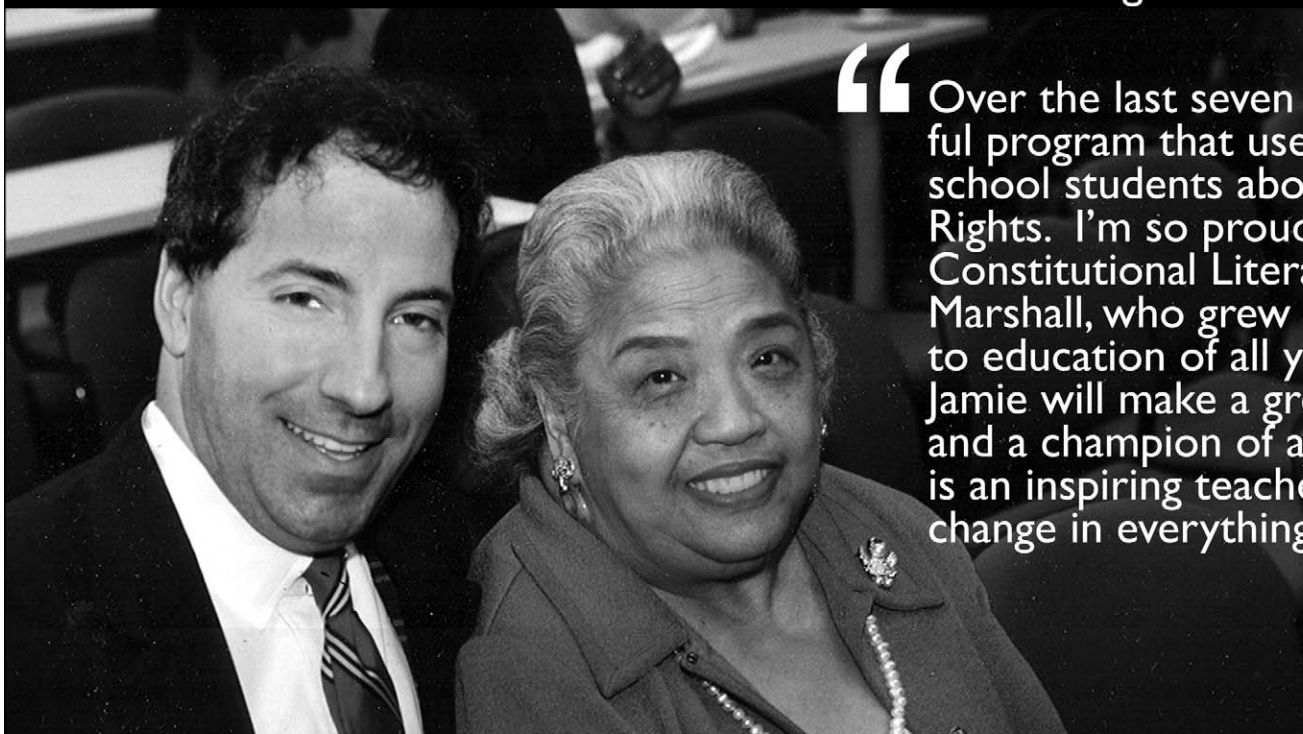
Local military historian B.F. Cooling has written the definitive account of the assault, "Jubal Early's Raid on Washington, 1864." He is also spearheading a campaign to increase awareness of the Ft. Stevens story by creating a Visitors Center at the fort similar to that recently opened at Monocacy. In that vein, the National Park Service will hold a **Fort Stevens Day commemoration on Saturday, July 8** at the fort (13th and Piney Branch). Dr. Cooling will describe the July events at 11 AM and 1:15 PM, along with other presenters, including President Lincoln. Additional activities include a Civil War encampment, military bands, and children's crafts, from 10 AM-4 PM.

The July 1998 Takoma Archives story on the battle contains a **guided tour of local landmarks**. It can be accessed online at www.takoma.com, selecting "Features," and then "Takoma Archives."

“A champion of public schools and a passionate leader for change”

- Mrs. Thurgood Marshall on Jamie Raskin

“Over the last seven years, Jamie has built a wonderful program that uses law students to teach high school students about our Constitution and Bill of Rights. I'm so proud of the Marshall-Brennan Constitutional Literacy Project and I know Justice Marshall, who grew up in Maryland and was devoted to education of all young people, would love it too. Jamie will make a great State Senator in Maryland and a champion of all our public schools because he is an inspiring teacher and a passionate leader for change in everything he does.”



Vote Democratic Primary - Tue. Sep 12! www.raskin06.com

By authority: Friends of Jamin Raskin. Chair: Marlana Valdez. Treasurer: Sam Agger

DEMOCRAT **JAMIE RASKIN**
STATE SENATE
SILVER SPRING | TAKOMA PARK | www.raskin06.com