

Lesson 4 The Course of War

Lesson Summary

The North planned to take control of the Mississippi River and seize Richmond, Virginia, the Confederate capital. The North also set up a naval blockade to prevent the South from selling cotton overseas and from importing war materials.

The South had a simple strategy: defend against attacks and wait until the North gave up.

Both sides used ironclads, warships protected with metal-covered sides. Ironclads enabled the Union to maintain its naval blockade throughout the war.

Northerners expected to end the war quickly with a decisive battle. The First **Battle of Bull Run** was fought outside Washington, D.C., near Manassas, Virginia, on July 21, 1861. The South held firm, and the poorly trained Union troops panicked and retreated.

After its demoralizing defeat at Bull Run, the Union army got a new commander, General George McClellan. McClellan was a very cautious leader. Eventually, he began to move a force toward Richmond. The Confederates stopped McClellan's advance, then forced the Union army to retreat in late June.

Meanwhile, Confederate General Robert E. Lee decided to invade the North. He moved his army into western Maryland, and McClellan abandoned his plan to attack Richmond.

In September 1862, McClellan finally attacked Lee's army at Antietam Creek near Sharpsburg, Maryland. The Confederates retreated. It was the bloodiest day of the Civil War.

After Antietam, President Lincoln appointed a new commander of the Union army, General Ambrose Burnside. In Burnside's first major battle, the **Battle of Fredericksburg**, he sent thousands of men running into Confederate gunfire.

In May 1863 the Union army was also defeated at the **Battle of Chancellorsville** by a Southern force half its size. The South, however, lost one of its best commanders, General Stonewall Jackson, in the battle.

In the West, Union generals were more successful. In February 1862, General Ulysses S. Grant captured Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, and in April he won the **Battle of Shiloh**. By June, the Union controlled almost all of the Mississippi River.