

Virginia's Role in the War

1. On the morning of April 12, 1861, Confederate cannons fired on the flag of the United States as it flew above Fort Sumter in the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. The bloodiest and most tragic war ever fought by American soldiers had begun.
2. During these four bloody years, Virginia became a major battleground between Union and Confederate troops. Most white Virginians supported the Confederacy. The Confederacy relied on enslaved African Americans to raise crops and provide slave labor for the army. Many enslaved African Americans fled to the Union army as it approached and found work. Some free African Americans joined the Union Army and Union Navy. Many American Indians did not remain neutral during the Civil War.
3. The first Battle of Bull Run (or Manassas) took place in July of 1861. It was the first major clash of the Civil War. Confederate General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson played a major role in this battle. During the battle he earned his nickname when he was shot in the hand but continued to shout orders as the shells flew around him. Another Confederate general who was retreating with his men under the heavy Union fire called out, "Look yonder! There's Jackson standing like a stone wall!"
4. Important battles also occurred at sea. President Lincoln used the Union navy to blockade southern ports. A major sea battle between the Monitor (Union) and the Merrimack (Confederate) took place in Virginia waters near the present-day cities of Norfolk and Hampton. This battle between two ironclad ships was fought to a draw in March of 1862.
5. Like Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, Robert E. Lee was a general in the Confederate army. Lee took command of the Army of Northern Virginia and defeated Union troops at Fredericksburg, Virginia in December of 1862.
6. The Union had its share of war heroes. One such hero was Ulysses S. Grant. President Lincoln gave Grant command of all Union troops. Near the end of the war, the Confederates evacuated Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy after burning it to keep supplies out of the hands of the approaching Union army. Grant led the Union army into the burning city in April of 1865.
7. The Civil War ended at Appomattox Court House, Virginia in April of 1865. Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered his beloved Army of Northern Virginia to Union General Ulysses S. Grant. To spare Lee any further embarrassment, Grant did not make Lee hand over his dress sword. Also, as he left the courthouse, Grant refused to let his men fire cannon to celebrate their victory. Grant said, "No men, no cannonade. The Rebels are our countrymen again."