

## **Tullahoma, Vicksburg, and the Road to Gettysburg**

**<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>**

As Confederate General Robert E Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia marched closer towards its destiny at Gettysburg, Confederate forces in middle Tennessee came under pressure as Union General William Rosecrans moved his army southward and began the Tullahoma Campaign to push Confederate forces under Braxton Bragg out of Tennessee, while in Mississippi Ulysses Grant tightened his noose around Vicksburg.

On June 24, Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland, which had been encamped at Murfreesboro since the battle at that location months before, finally launched an offensive aimed at the Confederate Army of Tennessee at Tullahoma, Tennessee, located about thirty miles to the southeast. His goals were to prevent the rebels from reinforcing Vicksburg, but primarily it served as a first step in the campaign to capture Chattanooga. Rosecrans was a capable commander and the campaign he conducted proved successful. Despite being slowed by heavy rains, his army reached the Confederate position at Tullahoma by July 1. There he found that Bragg, worried about Union cavalry raids against his supply lines and facing disagreements among his subordinate officers, had determined to retreat. Rosecrans paused to regroup after this easy victory, earned at little cost, and he soon began preparations to move against Chattanooga.

As Bragg lost control over much of middle Tennessee, Confederate fortunes also deteriorated along the Mississippi, as the siege of Vicksburg ground towards its conclusion. After a campaign of maneuver, Grant's army had reached the defenses of Vicksburg by mid-May. Following failed assaults on May 19 and 22, he laid siege to the nine mile long Confederate defensive positions. The commander of the southern garrison, General John Pemberton, had been urged to evacuate his troops before the siege began, but he elected to

remain. Supplies soon ran short for both Confederate soldiers and civilians as Grant's army, supported by Union naval forces, strengthened their lines around the city. On June 25, the Federals exploded a mine beneath the Confederate defenses, but they were unable to exploit their brief breakthrough. As the end of June approached however, the prospects of the defenders appeared hopeless.

As the Vicksburg campaign moved towards its inevitable conclusion, the two armies in Pennsylvania also moved closer to a collision. By mid-June, much of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had moved north of the Potomac River, with the remainder to follow shortly. In response, General Joseph Hooker began moving his Army of the Potomac from its camps north of the Rappahannock River, keeping it in a position to defend Washington, D.C. until Lee's intentions could be determined. By the latter part of June, advance elements of Richard Ewell's Corps had moved well into Pennsylvania. Chambersburg and Carlisle were briefly occupied, and the state capital at Harrisburg threatened. Lee's movements were hampered somewhat by the absence of much of his cavalry under Jeb Stuart, and he was unaware of the exact position of Hooker's army.

Hooker, meanwhile, had disagreed with his immediate commander General Henry Halleck over the positioning of his forces, and particularly over the fate of the Union garrison at Harpers Ferry. These disagreements escalated until Hooker requested to be relieved of command. The administration, which had little confidence in Hooker after his poor performance in the Chancellorsville campaign, accepted the general's resignation on June 28. To replace Hooker, President Lincoln selected General George Gordon Meade, commander of the Union Fifth Corps and from a Pennsylvania family, to command the Army of the Potomac. In three days he would lead it in the most famous battle of the war.

