

Jackson's Romney Campaign **<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>**

Upon the conclusion of the *Trent* Affair in early January 1862, attention turned once again to military affairs. While the major armies in Virginia remained idle in winter quarters, during the first week of the year, Major General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson began his Romney Campaign in the lower Shenandoah Valley. The Shenandoah had been strategically important from the onset of the war for both sides. For the south in particular, in addition to its significance as the "Breadbasket of the Confederacy," the valley approached close to the west of Washington D.C., and provided a quick invasion path towards the Union capital.

Various Union forces were spread out throughout the region, including General Nathaniel Banks' V Corps along the Potomac River in Virginia and Maryland, and William Rosecrans' forces farther to the west. They were poorly positioned considering the amount of territory they defended, and the primitive communication technology of the time. A key position was small town of Romney, Virginia (now West Virginia), which guarded the lines of communication between Banks and Rosecrans.

General Jackson, meanwhile, commanded the Valley District of the Department of Northern Virginia, with his headquarters at Winchester. In late November, he proposed an expedition to capture Romney, in hopes of disrupting a Federal movement against Winchester and threatening parts of the scattered Union forces. He received permission to do so, and on January 1, 1862, left Winchester, moving northward with a force of 9,000 Confederate soldiers

against Federal positions in Berkeley Springs, Virginia and Hancock, Maryland. He advanced on these positions first in order to isolate the garrison at Romney and prevent its reinforcement.

The march north began well enough with good weather that was unusual for the season. As the march continued, the temperature plummeted and the movement became delayed by snow and sleet. A Confederate soldier wrote that the roads became “almost an uninterrupted sheet of ice, rendering it almost impossible for man or beast to travel.” It was not until January 4 that Jackson and his men made it to Bath, Virginia where there were small skirmishes between Federal and Confederate forces. The following day Jackson reached Berkeley Springs, which had been abandoned with the Federals fleeing to Hancock. There Federal forces under General Frederick Lander skirmished with the Confederates and kept them from crossing the Potomac. Jackson’s men bombarded the town and destroyed part of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad before moving on to Romney. Yet again, on the march, Jackson and his troops met with a series of delays from the poor weather and road conditions. When they arrived on January 14, they found that Brigadier General Benjamin Kelley had withdrawn from the town. Jackson had originally planned to continue his advance into Maryland, but the wretched weather conditions convinced him to cancel further operations. While not a complete success, the expedition had stopped a planned Union advance against Winchester and driven Union troops from the immediate vicinity.

Following the campaign, Jackson returned to Winchester, leaving General William Loring in command at Romney. Feeling that his position was too dangerous and isolated, however, towards the end of January, Loring contacted the Confederate War Department directly and received permission to withdraw. Jackson was furious with Loring’s abandonment of the normal chain of command. He filed court-martial charges against his subordinate and wrote

letters of protest to both the War Department and Virginia Governor John Letcher, offering to resign his commission. Ultimately the matter was smoothed over, with Jackson remaining in command and Loring being transferred. Within several months Jackson would win far greater fame for his spectacular Shenandoah Valley campaign.