

**Climax in the Shenandoah:
The Battles of Cross Keys and Port Republic
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Military operations continued at a rapid pace in early June 1862. On the Mississippi River, a northern flotilla threatened the strategic city of Memphis, Tennessee. The Union occupation of Corinth, Mississippi and the subsequent breaking of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad, had left the former city vulnerable. In early June, the Confederates evacuated Fort Pillow, a defensive work located north of Memphis. Union forces occupied the position, and then continued their southward thrust. On June 6, Commodore Charles Davis' fleet routed an inferior southern force, sinking three vessels and capturing all but one of the remainder. The subsequent capture of Memphis was a major blow to the south's control of the Mississippi, which was now effectively limited to the area between Vicksburg, Mississippi to the north and Port Hudson, Louisiana to the south. Over the next year these two positions would both come under Union attack.

Near Richmond, Virginia meanwhile, the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia and the Union Army of the Potomac faced each other in the aftermath of the recent battle of Seven Pines. The new Confederate commander, General Robert E. Lee, began making plans to drive George McClellan's northern force away from the gates of the Confederate capital. The major events of the week, however, occurred in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, where Confederate General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's campaign rushed to a spectacular conclusion.

Jackson's small army had already fought a number of battles against several Union commands sent to regain control of the valley. In early June two Union forces under Generals John C. Fremont and James Shields advanced from separate directions towards the town of Port Republic, hoping to trap Jackson. On June 6 the Confederates lost their colorful cavalry leader,

Turner Ashby, who fell dead in a rearguard action near Harrisonburg. Fremont's force caught up with the rebels on June 8 at Cross Keys, located northwest of Port Republic. Richard Ewell's command bore the brunt of the fighting for the Confederates, stopping the Yankee attack and forcing part of Fremont's troops to withdraw. After the fighting ended, Jackson left a single brigade to keep watch on Fremont, while the rest of Ewell's force marched to Port Republic, where Jackson was consolidating his command in anticipation of an attack by Shields.

On June 8, the day of the Cross Keys fight, Jackson had skirmished with part of Shields' force, despite the fact that it was a Sunday and, as the devoutly religious Jackson had told an aide: "You know I always try to keep the Sabbath if the enemy will let me." The main fighting at Port Republic took place the following day, when at 7:00 a.m. the Stonewall Brigade led an attack against Shields' line. Jackson hurried his assault in an effort to defeat Shields before Fremont could arrive from Cross Keys with Union reinforcements. The need to cross a makeshift bridge over the south fork of the Shenandoah River slowed the southern advance, and the Stonewall Brigade eventually began to break in the face of heavy Union fire. Ewell's command arrived on the field at a critical moment, relieving the pressure against the Confederates and eventually driving the Federals back. The arrival of Fremont's command, however, prevented a Union rout and a full-scale Confederate pursuit.

In the aftermath of the Union defeats at Cross Keys and Port Republic, President Lincoln ordered Shields and Fremont from the valley. With the Shenandoah secure, Jackson was free to move southward to the Virginia Peninsula to assist the Army of Northern Virginia in the Seven Days Battles. Historian E.B. Long has written that the Valley Campaign made "Jackson's name a symbolic byword, caused frustration and trepidation in the North, and led the South out of the doldrums of almost continuous defeat."