

Malvern Hill Ends the Seven Days Battles

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On the first day of July in 1862, the bloody fighting on the Virginia Peninsula came to a conclusion with the battle of Malvern Hill. Starting on June 25, Robert E. Lee had launched his Army of Northern Virginia in a series of vicious, yet often poorly coordinated attacks on George McClellan's Army of the Potomac. The Confederates succeeded in driving the Yankee force away from the gates of Richmond and towards the James River, yet they had failed to destroy McClellan's command. On June 30 at the battle of Glendale, Lee had hoped to cut off the retreating Federals and capture their supply train, but an overly-complicated plan of attack and a subpar performance by Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson allowed the Union forces to escape.

The following day the frustrated Lee, still hoping to prevent all of the enemy forces from escaping to the protection of their new supply base at Harrison's Landing, determined to attack a strong position at Malvern Hill held by a portion of McClellan's Army under General Fitz John Porter. The Federals had strengthened an already naturally-strong position by positioning nearly 100 cannon along the hill's crest, with many more nearby in reserve. Porter's infantry divisions protected the artillery, and extensive reinforcements waited nearby. On the early afternoon of July 1, despite the doubts of some of his subordinates such as General Daniel Harvey Hill, Lee would order an attack against the position at Malvern Hill. The Confederate plan to drive off the Union artillery with counter-battery fire failed, leaving the rebel infantry alone to make a series of piecemeal charges in the face of intense artillery and musket fire. The attacks, primarily by the divisions of Hill and John Magruder, failed to penetrate the Federal line and suffered more than 5,600 casualties. Hill would later famously state of the battle: "It was not war—it was murder."

Despite the Union victory at Malvern Hill, McClellan continued his withdrawal to Harrison's Landing, where his army could be easily supplied and protected by Union gunboats. Thus, despite the repulse at Malvern Hill and the failure to destroy McClellan, Lee had ended the immediate threat to his capital. Though he remained with his army at Harrison's Landing for about a month, McClellan would make no serious attempt to resume the offensive. President Lincoln paid a visit to McClellan and his troops at Harrison's Landing in early July, wanting to see for himself the condition of the Union troops. While the visit was civil, the president soon would replace McClellan as general-in-chief of the U.S. armies with General Henry Halleck, and order the return of the Army of the Potomac to Washington, D.C. as Lee's army moved northward in what would become known as the Second Manassas Campaign.

During the week, as the conflict raged to the south, the northern congress adopted several important pieces of legislation that expanded the Federal government's power. President Lincoln signed the Revenue Act of 1862, which established a graduated tax on income ranging from 3% to 5%. This Act was adopted as a temporary measure to expire in 1866. Other significant pieces of legislation that were adopted included an act to authorize construction of the Union Pacific-Central Pacific Railroads in the west, and the Educational Land Grant Act, also known as the Morrill Act, which allowed states to receive 30,000 acres of land from the Federal government for each member of congress from their state, with the sale of the land to fund the establishment of land grant colleges for agriculture and mechanics. Thus the impact of the Civil War would resonate throughout the country for generations to come.