

In Virginia, One Campaign Begins and Another Ends

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During the last days of July and the first days of August, 1862, a major new military campaign commenced in northern Virginia, while another wound down on the Virginia Peninsula. Near Washington the newly-organized Army of Virginia, commanded by Major General John Pope commenced moving southward, while George McClellan began sending troops northward towards the capital in the aftermath of his failed Peninsula Campaign.

Pope, a Kentuckian and West Point graduate who had connections with the family of President Lincoln's wife, had won several promotions for service in the Mexican War, and at the beginning of the Civil War had served competently in Missouri. He won fame earlier in 1862 while commanding the Army of the Mississippi for his seizure of New Madrid, Missouri and Island Number 10. The latter victory resulted in the capture of nearly 5,000 prisoners and gained the Union control of the Mississippi River north of Memphis. Pope was then ordered east and in June he took command of the remaining Union forces in the Shenandoah Valley, which were renamed the Army of Virginia. The new commander did little to earn the support of his fellow officers and his troops, as he made a number of derogatory comments concerning the fighting abilities of Union soldiers in the east as compared with those he had previously commanded in the war's western theater. Pope famously stated that his headquarters would be "in the saddle," which led to many jokes at his expense, and he also warned civilians that those harboring Confederate guerrillas or even living near where guerrilla attacks had taken place, would be responsible for damages. General Robert E. Lee believed this to be in violation of the rules of war, and labeled Pope a "miscreant," while Confederate President Jefferson Davis informed Lee that any officers captured from Pope's army should not be treated as prisoners of war, but as

“robbers and murderers.” Union General John Sturgis would later simply state of his new commander: “I don’t care for John Pope one pinch of owl dung.”

President Lincoln had originally planned for Pope’s army to move southward towards Richmond, hopefully forcing the Confederates to split their forces to defend against both Pope and McClellan’s army on the Peninsula. McClellan’s withdrawal from the gates of Richmond following the Seven Days’ Battles ended that plan, until troops could be shifted from the Peninsula to Pope’s command, which would then make the next major thrust southward. Pope left Washington on Tuesday, July 29, to take command of his forces in the field, and within several days elements of the Army of Virginia approached Orange Court House. In response to this threat, Lee would order Thomas Jackson’s command northward towards Pope. What would eventually become known as the Second Manassas Campaign had begun.

By the end of July, Lincoln had lost all patience with General McClellan and was convinced that the general would make no further advances against Richmond. Consequently, he directed Henry Halleck, the newly-appointed general-in-chief of all Union armies, to order McClellan to begin preparations for withdrawal from the Peninsula. On the thirty-first Halleck ordered McClellan to begin evacuating the sick and wounded from his encampment at Harrison’s Landing, followed three days later by another directive for McClellan to start transporting the remainder of his army by water to the vicinity of Washington. These troops would then support the operations of Pope’s Army of Virginia, with McClellan being effectively stripped of his command. The Young Napoleon criticized the orders and tried to convince Lincoln that the Army of the Potomac should remain on the Peninsula as a threat to Richmond, but the president was undeterred. Over the next several weeks McClellan’s army slowly made its way northward,

with some elements joining forces with Pope in time for the fighting at Second Manassas at the end of August.