A Sesquicentennial Moment

May 25 – 31, 1862

Confederate Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson brought the Civil War to the Shenandoah Valley during the last week in May 1862. As part of his Valley Campaign, Jackson and his men wreaked havoc throughout the valley, advancing as far as Harpers Ferry.

In response to Jackson's successes, President Abraham Lincoln diverted Union troops into the valley. The ensuing battles were intense.

Union Brig. Gen. R. Saxton said in a dispatch to U.S. Secretary of War E.M. Stanton that 7,000 Union soldiers battled as many as 25,000 Confederate soldiers near Harpers Ferry and surrounding areas for five days and nights. Regarding one of those nights Saxton had this to say: "The night was intensely dark; the hills around were alive with the signal lights of the enemy; the rain descended in torrents; vivid flashes of lightning illumined at intervals the green but magnificent scenery, while the crash of thunder echoing among the mountains, drowned in comparative insignificant the road of our artillery."

This sesquicentennial moment is brought to you by the West Virginia Sesquicentennial Commission and the West Virginia Division of Culture and History, Archives and History Section.

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