

150 Years Ago in the Civil War, April 1863

April 7 Naval attack on Charleston, South Carolina. The striking force was a fleet of nine ironclad warships of the Union Navy, including seven monitors that were improved versions of the original USS Monitor. A Union Army contingent associated with the attack took no active part in the battle. The ships, under command of Rear Admiral Samuel Francis Du Pont, attacked the Confederate defenses near the entrance to Charleston Harbor. Navy Department officials in Washington hoped for a stunning success that would validate a new form of warfare, with armored warships mounting heavy guns reducing traditional forts.

Du Pont had been given seven of the Passaic class monitors, the powerful New Ironsides, and the experimental ironclad Keokuk. Other naval operations were sidetracked as their resources were diverted to the attack on Charleston. After a long period of preparation, conditions of tide and visibility allowed the attack to proceed. The slow monitors got into position rather late in the afternoon, and when the tide turned, Du Pont had to suspend the operation. Firing had occupied less than two hours, and the ships had been unable to penetrate even the first line of harbor defense. The fleet retired with one in a sinking condition and most of the others damaged. One sailor in the fleet was killed and twenty-one were wounded, while five Confederate soldiers were killed and eight wounded. After consulting with his captains, Du Pont concluded that his fleet had little chance to succeed. He therefore declined to renew the battle the next morning.

April 11 Siege of Suffolk, Virginia by Confederates led by Gen Longstreet begins.

April 17 Union Colonel Grierson's Raid from La Grange, Tennessee to Baton Rouge, LA begins. Grierson and his 1,700 horse troopers rode over six hundred miles through hostile territory (from southern Tennessee, through the state of Mississippi and to Union-held Baton Rouge, Louisiana), over routes no Union soldier had traveled before. They tore up railroads and burned crossties, freed slaves, burned Confederate storehouses, destroyed locomotives and commissary stores, ripped up bridges and trestles, burned buildings, and inflicted ten times the casualties they received, all while detachments of his troops made feints confusing the Confederates as to his actual whereabouts and direction.

Confederate Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton, commander of the Vicksburg garrison, was short on cavalry and could do nothing to Grierson. An entire division of Pemberton's soldiers was tied up defending the Vicksburg-Jackson railroad from the evasive Grierson, and consequently did nothing to stop Grant's landing on the east bank of the Mississippi below the city.

April 21 Generals Jones and Imboden begin Confederate raid on the B&O Railroad, VA (now WV) The raid was aimed at disrupting traffic on the vital Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and reasserting Confederate authority in trans-mountain Virginia in an effort to derail the growing statehood movement in the region. The raid was successful from a military vantage as severe damage was inflicted upon the railroad and other critical Union resources and valuable supplies and recruits were obtained. From a political standpoint, however, the raid was a failure, having little effect on the sentiment for the formation of a new state.

April 24 Confederate government passes a tax in-kind on one-tenth of all produce to raise funds for the war effort.