

Civil War February 1864

Eastern armies remained in winter quarters while operations continued in Mississippi and Florida.

Feb 1 President Lincoln ordered another 500,000 men to be drafted to serve for three years or for the duration of the war.

Feb 3 Jefferson Davis suspended habeas corpus for those accused of spying, desertion or association with the enemy. This move increased Davis' unpopularity.

Sherman started his march to destroy the Mobile/Ohio railway. His army consisted of 20,000 men. Sherman had by now decided to destroy as much Southern property as he could. When the war started any deliberate attack on civilians was all but unheard of. Now it was to form a specific part of Sherman's tactics in the South. Confronting Sherman's army was a Confederate force that also numbered 20,000. But they were demoralized, poorly equipped and poorly fed.

Feb 5 Sherman's army reached Jackson, Mississippi. His next target was Meridian.

Feb 6 The South banned the import of all luxury goods.

Feb 9 109 Union officers escaped from Libby Jail in Richmond. It was the largest escape of its kind during the war. 59 made it back to Union lines, 48 were recaptured and 2 men drowned.

Feb 14 Sherman's army entered Meridian and started to systematically destroy it. Hotels, hospitals and storehouses (once what was in them was removed) were set alight.

Feb 16 The Confederates under General Polk made a half-hearted attempt to confront Sherman. However, Sherman was so confident of success that he left half his men – 10,000 – in Meridian to complete their destructive work.

Feb 17 Conscription in the South was extended to all white 17 to 50 year olds. Opposition to this was widespread and included the Confederacy's Vice-President!

Feb 20 A Union force of 5,500 men confronted a similar number of Southern troops at Olustee, Florida. The Confederates were successful as the Union troops (many of whom were 'substitutes') turned and fled. Many of the Union troops were armed with the new Spencer rifle and nearly 1,600 of these were left behind.

Feb 24 Congress agreed to reinstate the rank of lieutenant general. Grant is given this rank and became the supreme military commander of the army, answering to the commander-in-chief – Lincoln. The president also agreed to a plan to compensate farmers \$300 for every slave they allowed to go free and who enlisted in the Union Army.

Jefferson Davis appointed his friend, General Bragg, to have full control of all the South's military operations. Many senior Confederate officers expressed their opposition to this appointment.

Feb 27 Union prisoners started to arrive at the stockade at Andersonville, Georgia. Conditions and treatment there meant that by the end of the war, this prison was to have a notorious reputation.

Feb 28 The North launched a cavalry attack against Richmond. The idea was to free Union prisoners held at Belle Isle and race back to Union lines. Lincoln considered that such a raid would have enormous propaganda value if it succeeded. It was to go wrong from the start.