

## 150 Years Ago during the Civil War May 1864

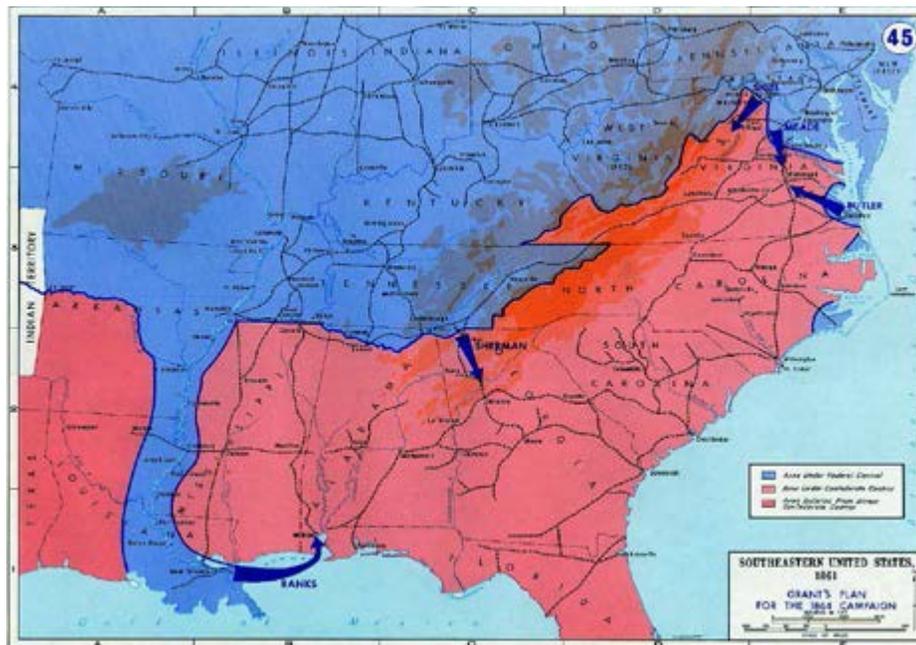
**Unity of Command:** From Manassas to Chattanooga, the Federals had fought without a grand strategy or a supreme field commander. Lincoln's appointment of Grant as General in Chief brought a strategic focus to the Union War effort.

### Grant's plan for 1864 was as follows:

- Simultaneously advance on all fronts to prevent the Confederates from shifting forces
- Focus on enemy forces rather than "strategic points"
- Maximize forces by eliminating passive occupation duties and reallocating forces in dispersed locations like Florida and Arkansas
- Combine destruction of Southern armies with destruction of Southern war resources

### Based on these objectives, Grant's Grand Strategy was to:

- Maneuver Lee away from the Rapidan River and defeat him in open terrain by decisive battle (Meade) Army of the Potomac.
- Cut the James-Appomattox River line to sever Lee's rail and road links to other parts of the Confederacy (Butler) Army of the James.
- Execute a wide wheeling movement through the South to complete the envelopment of the Confederacy east of the Mississippi (Sherman)
- Attack through Mobile to close that port (Banks)



**May 2** President Davis told the Confederate government that there was no hope of any form of recognition of the Confederacy by foreign governments.

**May 4** The final Spring Campaign of the Civil War began as the Army of the Potomac crossed the Rapidan River in Virginia and three smaller armies (Ohio, Tennessee and Cumberland) pushed into Georgia.

The Wade–Davis Bill of 1864 was a bill proposed for the Reconstruction of the South written by two Radical Republicans, Senator Benjamin Wade of Ohio and Representative Henry Winter Davis of Maryland. In contrast to President Abraham Lincoln's more lenient Ten Percent Plan, the bill made re-admittance to the Union for former Confederate states contingent on a majority in each Southern state to take the Ironclad oath to the effect they had never in the past supported the Confederacy. The bill passed both houses of Congress on July 2, 1864, but was pocket vetoed by Lincoln and never took effect. The Radical Republicans were outraged that Lincoln did not sign the bill. Lincoln wanted to mend the Union by carrying out the Ten percent plan. He believed it would be too difficult to repair all of the ties within the Union if the Wade–Davis bill passed.

**May 5-7** Battle of the Wilderness. Grant is badly beaten on the field by Lee but rather than retreat, Grant advances to Spotsylvania Court House. Union losses 17,666. Confederate losses 7,750.

**May 5** Army of the James under General Benjamin Butler lands at Bermuda Hundred and City Point, east of Petersburg. The Army is comprised of two corps totaling nearly 40,000 men.

**May 6** A half-hearted attack by Butler on the Southside Railroad is repulsed by George Pickett.

In the first engagement of the Atlanta Campaign, a division from the Army of the Cumberland strikes a Confederate regiment at Tunnel Hill and easily overpowers the outnumbered Rebels.

**May 7** Butler briefly seizes the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad before retiring.

**May 9** Coming out of Snake Creek Gap, General James McPherson runs into a Rebel force at Resaca that was stronger than expected. He returns to the gap rather than attack. Atlanta campaign.

**May 11** Battle of Rocky Face Ridge (Dalton) Sherman begin his pattern of using one Army to hold the Confederates in position while he maneuvers, thus forcing Johnston to fall back.

Battle of Yellow Tavern. J. E. B. Stuart CSA is mortally wounded in losing a cavalry battle to Phillip Sheridan.

**May 13** First soldier interred at Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia on the grounds of the Lee estate.

Sherman encountered determined opposition at Resaca. Here the South had built extensive entrenchments and they proved a major obstacle for Sherman and his army.

**May 14** Heavy rain meant that all forms of movement were curtailed around Spotsylvania.

**May 15** A Union force commanded by General Sigel was defeated at New Market. Sigel had been sent to defeat Confederate forces in the Shenandoah Valley. In this he failed. On the side of the successful Confederates was Colonel George Patton, grandfather of the officer with the same name who found fame in World War Two. Sigel was relieved of his command on May 19th. Sherman was unable to make a breakthrough at Resaca.

**May 16** The Union suffered a major defeat at Drewry's Bluff and lost 25% of their manpower during the battle – 4,160 men killed and wounded out of 18,000. The blame was later directed at the lack luster leadership of General Butler.

**May 18** When the rain stopped Grant launched another unsuccessful frontal assault on Lee's positions. With increasing casualties, Grant called off the attack. He had clearly underestimated just how well the Confederates' entrenchments had been made.

**May 19** Buoyed by his successes, Lee turned to the Confederate II Corps and ordered an attack on Union lines. This led to heavy fighting between both armies but neither one gained an advantage. By the end of the day the fighting around Spotsylvania had come to an end. The Army of the Potomac had lost 17,500 men. Combined with the loss of men at the Battle of the Wilderness, Grant had lost 33,000 men out of 122,000 in just one month – 27% of the Army of the Potomac's total. However, Grant still had an army nearly 90,000 strong. There are no accurate figures for Lee's losses for the same period but they were undoubtedly high. While the Union could sustain their losses, however unpalatable the figure, the South could not.

**May 20** Sherman continued his advance on Atlanta.

**May 23** Grant continued in his policy of shadowing Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. He had a 2 to 1 advantage in terms of troop strength. The cause of the South was not helped when Lee was taken with a fever and had to retire to bed.

**May 24** One of the consequences of Sherman's advance was that he had extended supply lines. On this day a raid by Confederate cavalry on his lines led to the destruction of large quantities of supplies. There was not a great deal Sherman could do about this, as he wanted to continue with his advance to Atlanta and the Confederates were skilled at quick cavalry attacks.

**May 28** The Army of Northern Virginia moved towards Cold Harbor. By doing this Lee had placed his army between Grant and Richmond.

**May 29** Lee entrenched his positions around Cold Harbor.

**May 31** Sherman's advance on Atlanta was stalled by Confederate troops commanded by J E Johnston. Their tactics, while never going to defeat Sherman, were sufficient to slow down his army to, on average, just one mile a day.

**May 31** A small convention in Cleveland of Republican abolitionists unhappy with Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and other things, nominates John C. Fremont for president.

**Sources:** History Learning Site, University of Mississippi lecture Grant's Grand Strategy 1864, Wikipedia