

Timeline of the Civil War, August 1864–May 1865

Adapted from Time Line of the Civil War, 1861 (see <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cwphtml/tl1861.html>), compiled by Joanne Freeman for the Library of Congress.

1864

AUGUST 1864

General William T. Sherman's Atlanta Campaign

Union General Sherman departed Chattanooga, and was soon met by Confederate General Joseph Johnston. Skillful strategy enabled Johnston to hold off Sherman's force — almost twice the size of Johnston's. However, Johnston's tactics caused his superiors to replace him with General John Bell Hood, who was soon defeated. Hood surrendered Atlanta, Georgia, on September 1; Sherman occupied the city the next day. The fall of Atlanta greatly boosted Northern morale.

NOVEMBER 1864

General William T. Sherman's March to the Sea

General Sherman continued his march through Georgia to the sea. In the course of the march, he cut himself off from his source of supplies, planning for his troops to live off the land. His men cut a path 300 miles in length and 60 miles wide as they passed through Georgia, destroying factories, bridges, railroads, and public buildings.

Sherman in Atlanta

After three and a half months of incessant maneuvering and much hard fighting, Sherman forced Hood to abandon Atlanta, the munitions center of the Confederacy. Sherman remained there, resting his war-worn men and accumulating supplies, for nearly two-and-a-half months.

Abraham Lincoln Is Re-Elected

The Republican party nominated President Abraham Lincoln as its presidential candidate, and Andrew Johnson for vice-president. The Democratic party chose General George B. McClellan for president, and George Pendleton for vice-president. At one point, widespread war-weariness in the North made a victory for Lincoln seem doubtful. In addition, Lincoln's veto of the Wade-Davis Bill — requiring the majority of the electorate in each Confederate state to swear past and future loyalty to the Union before the state could officially be restored — lost him the support of Radical Republicans who thought Lincoln too lenient. However, Sherman's victory in Atlanta boosted Lincoln's popularity and helped him win re-election by a wide margin.

1865

JANUARY 1865

Fort Fisher, North Carolina

After Admiral David D. Porter's squadron of warships had subjected Fort Fisher to a terrific bombardment, General Alfred H. Terry's troops took it by storm on January 15, and Wilmington, North Carolina, the last resort of the blockade-runners, was sealed off.

The Fall of the Confederacy

Transportation problems and successful blockades caused severe shortages of food and supplies in the South. Starving soldiers began to desert Lee's forces, and although President Jefferson Davis approved the arming of slaves as a means of augmenting the shrinking army, the measure was never put into effect.

FEBRUARY 1865

Sherman Marches through North and South Carolina

Union General Sherman moved from Georgia through South Carolina, destroying almost everything in his path.

A Chance for Reconciliation Is Lost

Confederate President Jefferson Davis agreed to send delegates to a peace conference with President Lincoln and Secretary of State William Seward, but insisted on Lincoln's recognition of the South's independence as a prerequisite. Lincoln refused, and the conference never occurred.

APRIL 1865

Fallen Richmond

On March 25, General Lee attacked General Grant's forces near Petersburg, but was defeated — attacking and losing again on April 1. On April 2, Lee evacuated Richmond, the Confederate capital, and headed west to join with other forces.

Surrender at Appomattox Courthouse

General Lee's troops were soon surrounded, and on April 7, Grant called upon Lee to surrender. On April 9, the two commanders met at Appomattox Courthouse, and agreed on the terms of surrender. Lee's men were sent home on parole — soldiers with their horses, and officers with their side arms. All other equipment was surrendered.

The Assassination of President Lincoln

On April 14, as President Lincoln was watching a performance of "Our American Cousin" at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C., he was shot by John Wilkes Booth, an actor from Maryland obsessed with avenging the Confederate defeat. Lincoln died the next morning. Booth escaped to Virginia. Eleven days later, cornered in a burning barn, Booth was fatally shot by a Union soldier. Nine other people were involved in the assassination; four were hanged, four imprisoned, and one acquitted.

MAY 1865

Final Surrenders among Remaining Confederate Troops

Remaining Confederate troops were defeated between the end of April and the end of May. Jefferson Davis was captured in Georgia on May 10.

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