Ambrose Burnside at Fredericksburg

Class Three

The Confederacy is formed and the war begins at Fort Sumter. Union forces are defeated at Bull Run, Big Bethel and Wilson’s Creek. Lincoln appoints George McClellan to lead Union forces.
Outline

- Class One – John Pope at Second Bull Run
- Class Two – George McClellan at Antietam
- Class Three – Ambrose Burnside at Fredericksburg

Ambrose Burnside
Events of 1862 [3]

- **October 3-4** - Confederate forces are defeated by Union forces entrenched at **Corinth, MS** ending the threat to Middle Tennessee.
- **October 8** - The Union victory at **Perryville, KY** ends the Confederacy's invasion of Kentucky.
- **November 7** - **Ambrose Burnside** assumes command of the Army of the Potomac
- **December 13** - Union forces under **Burnside** are defeated at **Fredericksburg, VA** by **Lee's** Confederate troops. **Lee's** forces inflict 10,000 casualties from defensive positions on Marye's Heights but lose 5,000 men.
Ambrose Burnside (5/23/24 – 9/13/81)
- Soldier
- Railroad executive
- Inventor – breech loading rifle
- Industrialist
- politician from Rhode Island who served as governor and a US Senator.

He graduated from West Point in 1847.

As a Union Army general, he conducted successful campaigns in North Carolina and East Tennessee but was defeated in the disastrous Battle of Fredericksburg and Battle of the Crater, earning his reputation as one of the most incompetent generals of the war.
Ambrose Burnside [2]

- **Burnside** conducted a successful amphibious campaign that closed over 80% of the North Carolina sea coast to Confederate shipping.
- For his successes at the battles of Roanoke Island and New Bern he was promoted to major general of volunteers on March 18.
- Following McClellan's failure in the Peninsula Campaign, Burnside was offered command of the Army of the Potomac.
- He refused this position because of his loyalty to McClellan and because he understood his own lack of military experience.
- **Burnside** again refused command after Pope's defeat at Second Bull Run.
Burnside at Antietam

- **Burnside** did not perform adequate reconnaissance of the area, and instead of taking advantage of several easy fording sites out of range of the enemy, his troops were forced into repeated assaults across the narrow bridge which was dominated by Confederate sharpshooters.

- By noon, **McClellan** was losing patience and he sent a succession of couriers to motivate **Burnside** to move forward.

- He ordered one aide, "Tell him if it costs 10,000 men he must go now."

- He increased the pressure by sending his inspector general to confront **Burnside**

- The delay allowed Maj. Gen. **A.P. Hill's** Confederate division to come up from Harpers Ferry and repulse the Union breakthrough.

- **McClellan** refused **Burnside's** requests for reinforcements, and the battle ended in a tactical stalemate.
Burnside Takes Command

- **McClellan** was removed after failing to pursue **Lee's** retreat from Antietam, and **Burnside** was assigned to command the Army of the Potomac on November 7, 1862.
- Lincoln pressured **Burnside** to take aggressive action and on November 14 approved his plan to capture Richmond.
- This plan led to a humiliating and costly Union defeat at the **Battle of Fredericksburg** on December 13.
The Battle of Fredericksburg

- The Battle of Fredericksburg - History Animated
- The Battle of Fredericksburg – Gods and Generals - DVD
- Fredericksburg, VA I - Civil War Journeys
See next two slides
For details of battle on Maryre’s Heights
Sumner's assault, 1:00 p.m., December 13, 1862. The sequence of Union division attacks was French (II Corps), Hancock (II), Howard (II), and Sturgis (IX).

Hooker's assault, 3:30 p.m., December 13, 1862. The sequence of Union division attacks was Griffin (V Corps), Humphreys (V), and Getty (IX).
Burnside accepted blame, but his offer to retire was refused.

In January 1863, he launched a second offensive (the Mud March) against Lee, but it bogged down in winter rains and never accomplished anything.

He asked that several insubordinate officers be relieved of duty and court-martialed, and he also offered to resign.


Lincoln assigned Burnside to command the Department of the Ohio.

In Ohio, Burnside issued his controversial General Order Number 38, making it a crime to express any kind of opposition to the war.
General Order Number 38

- General Order Number 38 was issued on April 13, 1863 while Burnside commanded the Department of the Ohio.
- Among other issues, the order attempted to make it illegal to criticize the war within that Department:
  - *That hereafter all persons found within our lines who commit acts for the benefit of the enemies of our country, will be tried as spies or traitors, and, if convicted, will suffer death. This order includes the following classes of persons: ... The habit of declaring sympathies for the enemy will no longer be tolerated in the department. Persons committing such offences will be at once arrested, with a view to being tried as above stated, or sent beyond our lines into the lines of their friends.*
- Any kind of opposition to the war - such as that expressed by the Copperheads peace movement - was considered sympathy to the enemy, and the order was immediately used as justification to arrest Ohio congressman Clement Vallandigham, a prominent leader in the movement who was arrested for criticizing the order itself, and to try him in a military court.
Burnside at The Crater

- In July 1864 the armies were locked in trench warfare at Petersburg, VA.
- **Burnside** agreed to a plan suggested by a regiment of Pennsylvania coal miners to dig a mine under a fort in the Confederate entrenchments and ignite explosives there to achieve a surprise breakthrough.
- The fort was destroyed on July 30 in the [Battle of the Crater](#).
- Because of interference from Meade, **Burnside** was ordered, only hours before the infantry attack, not to use his division of black troops, which had been specially trained for this mission.
- He was forced to use untrained white troops and had his division commanders draw lots to select the replacement division.
- The division commander, by Brig. Gen. **J. H. Ledlie**, failed to brief the men on what was expected of them and was drunk behind the lines during the battle.
- **Ledlie's** men entered the huge crater instead of going around it, becoming trapped, and were subjected to murderous fire from Confederates around the rim, resulting in high casualties.
After the War

- **Burnside** was relieved of command on August 14, sent on leave by **Grant**, and never recalled him to duty by **Meade**.
- He finally resigned his commission on April 15, 1865.
- After his resignation, **Burnside** was employed in numerous railroad and industrial directorships, including the presidencies of the Cincinnati and Martinsville Railroad, the Indianapolis and Vincennes Railroad, the Cairo and Vincennes Railroad, and the Rhode Island Locomotive Works.
- He was elected to three one-year terms as Governor of Rhode Island (May 1866 to May 1869).
- He was commander-in-chief of the **Grand Army of the Republic** veterans' association from 1871 to 1872.
- He served as the first president of the National Rifle Association in 1871.
- In 1870, **Burnside** attempted to mediate between the French and the Germans in the Franco-Prussian War.
- In 1874 he was elected as a Republican U.S. Senator from Rhode Island, was re-elected in 1880, and served until his death in 1881.
What Makes a Good General?

- Based on the unsuccessful Union generals (Pope, McClellan, Burnside) and the triumphant Confederate commanders (Lee, Jackson, Longstreet) ...
  - What are those traits that make a “good general?”
  - What makes a “bad general?”

- “Best” Generals of the Civil War
  - Georgia’s Blue Gray Trail
  - Salient Points
  - The American Civil War
  - Civil War Journeys
  - The CWI Discussion Board