

Stonewall Jackson

1824–1863



WHY HE MADE HISTORY The military skill and heroism of Stonewall Jackson made him a serious opponent to Union forces and an asset to Confederate commander Robert E. Lee.



As you read the biography below, look for examples of Jackson's military skill. What role did he play in the outcome of the war?



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At a time when the South was feeling the weight of northern military force, Thomas Jonathan “Stonewall” Jackson emerged as a hero for the southern people. Under the command of Gen. Robert E. Lee, Jackson made a name for himself on the battlefield. Even when his troops were badly outnumbered by the enemy, he was able to maintain command and hold a position. It was nearly impossible for northern forces to get past him.

Orphaned at an early age, Jackson was raised by relatives. He showed little evidence of future greatness. Although his educational and social skills were poor, he gained admission to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He studied with determination to improve his class rank and graduated with a respectable record.

After graduation, Jackson fought in the Mexican American War, where his bravery and resourcefulness in battle earned him promotions. A few years later he resigned his post with the army and went on to teach for 10 years at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI). He was not highly regarded by students there and was often the subject of their pranks.

When the Civil War broke out, Jackson volunteered for the Confederate Army and led a group of VMI cadets to Richmond where they drilled new recruits. A few months later Jackson was promoted to brigadier general.

During the First Battle of Manassas, another general, trying to rally his troops, pointed to Jackson standing atop a hill. The general said, “Look, men! There stands Jackson like a stone wall! Rally behind the Virginians!” The Confederates won the battle and Jackson earned the nickname “Stonewall.”

Jackson emerged as a military genius known for staging surprise attacks. He would ride on his favorite horse, Little Sorrell, at the head of his troops. He guided his troops around enemy lines, identified the weakest spot, and attacked quickly and unexpectedly.

The Civil War

Biography

Jackson was the most able of Robert E. Lee's generals and was credited with many victories in the early years of the war. These victories kept Confederate hopes and spirits alive.

Stonewall Jackson's glory was short-lived. He died after a successful attack against Union forces at Chancellorsville. His own men failed to recognize him and shot him as he rode into camp. Jackson was taken to a field hospital, and his left arm was amputated. He seemed to be recovering when he came down with pneumonia. Without the benefit of modern-day penicillin or antibiotics, Jackson died of the disease.

At his request, Jackson was buried at VMI. The cemetery there was renamed the Stonewall Jackson Cemetery. Because Jackson was said to love lemons, visitors often leave baskets of lemons at his grave. Little Sorrell, his horse, lived until 1886 at VMI, grazing on the school's parade grounds under the care of VMI cadets.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. **Recall** Why was Stonewall Jackson considered the most able of Lee's generals?

2. **Make Judgments** Select two words that you feel describe Stonewall Jackson. Explain your choices.

ACTIVITY

With a small group of classmates, read more about the military strategies of Stonewall Jackson. Work together to create a map of one of Jackson's military campaigns. Include a description of the battle with your map, and present your map to the class.