



1863: The Tide Turns

10th Annual Civil War Symposium
Saturday, March 25, 2023

Symposium Description

1863 has been called the “turning point” of the American Civil War, for several reasons. As early as January 1, 1863, with the signing of Lincoln's final Emancipation Proclamation, the entire nature of the Union's war strategy changed from one of “preserving the Union as it was,” (with slavery intact), to establishing a new social order, based on the notion that slavery was abolished, and that Black men could serve as soldiers in the armed services of the United States. In retaliation, the Confederacy decided on a daring plan, orchestrated by General Robert E. Lee, to invade the North for a second time, bringing the horrors of war directly on the doorstep of its enemy, and desperately hoping to win the favor of foreign diplomatic recognition by either Great Britain or France. In the Western Theater of the War, Union General U.S. Grant finally succeeded in capturing the fortress city of Vicksburg, Mississippi, by laying siege to it, and starving the city into submission. The dual Union victories of Gettysburg, in the east, on July 3, and the fall of Vicksburg, in the west, on July 4, 1863, represented the military “turning point of the war.” While the Confederacy showed great valor and willingness to sacrifice on behalf of its cause for independence, as demonstrated by the 26th North Carolina Regiment, or the citizens of Vicksburg, who took refuge in caves dug into the high bluffs along the Mississippi River, and were forced to live on rats, raw peanuts, and anything else they could swallow; it simply was not enough. 1863 represented the “high tide of the Confederacy;” never again was the South on the offensive. The final end came in April 1865, with the surrender of General Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Court House.

President Lincoln was aware of the year's lasting significance. He made reference to the victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in his October 1863 Thanksgiving Proclamation, setting aside the “last Thursday of November,” to give thanks for this turn of events in favor of the Union cause. A month later he journeyed to Gettysburg, site of the largest battle ever fought in North America to remind Americans, and the world, why the sacrifice of 50,000 brave men was necessary.

It is the sincere intention of all the presenters at this year's Friends of the Boy in Blue Civil War Symposium that the world *will note* and *long remember* what they [the men who wore the blue and the gray] did here.