

The Peninsular Campaign, 1862



General McClellan



General Johnston

The **Peninsula Campaign** (also known as the **Peninsular Campaign**) of the American Civil War was a major Union operation launched in southeastern Virginia from March through July 1862, the first large-scale offensive in the Eastern Theater. The operation, commanded by Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, was an amphibious turning movement against the Confederate States Army in Northern Virginia, intended to capture the Confederate capital of Richmond. McClellan was initially successful against the equally cautious General Joseph E. Johnston, but the emergence of the aggressive General Robert E. Lee turned the subsequent Seven Days Battles into a humiliating Union defeat.

McClellan landed his army at Fort Monroe and moved northwest, up the Virginia Peninsula. Confederate Brig. Gen. John B. Magruder's defensive position on the Warwick Line caught McClellan by surprise. His hopes for a quick advance foiled, McClellan ordered his army to prepare for a siege of Yorktown. Just before the siege preparations were completed, the Confederates, now under the direct command of Johnston, began a withdrawal toward Richmond. The first heavy fighting of the campaign occurred in the Battle of Williamsburg, in which the Union troops managed some tactical victories, but the Confederates continued their withdrawal. An amphibious flanking movement to Eltham's Landing was ineffective in cutting off the Confederate retreat. In the Battle of Drewry's Bluff, an attempt by the U.S. Navy to reach Richmond by way of the James River was repulsed.

As McClellan's army reached the outskirts of Richmond, a minor battle occurred at Hanover Court House, but it was followed by a surprise attack by Johnston at the Battle of Seven Pines or Fair Oaks. The battle was inconclusive, with heavy casualties, but it had lasting effects on the campaign. Johnston was wounded and replaced on June 1 by the more aggressive Robert E. Lee, who reorganized his army and prepared for offensive action in the final battles of June 25 to July 1, which are popularly known as the Seven Days Battles.