

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

The Battle of Port Republic, June 9, 1862

By Phillip S. Greenwalt, Emerging Civil War

Perched at the confluence of the South and North Rivers in Rockingham County, Virginia where navigation of the South Fork of the larger Shenandoah River starts lies the town of Port Republic. Native Americans, including the Shawnee, used the area before the first Europeans appeared in the early 1700s. By 1745 a flour mill, the first European industry in Port Republic was built, and shortly thereafter three impressive mansions were constructed. One of those would factor prominently in the 1862 engagement, Madison Hall. Chartered in 1802 by an Act of the General Assembly, the town grew slowly but due to the proximity of the rivers travel, transportation, and various mills sprouted up and goods were shipped down the Shenandoah Valley to Harpers Ferry. Eight roads entered Port Republic and that is what drew the Confederates in the late spring of 1862 for what the Confederate commander thought would be time to relax, plan, and then drive away the two Federal forces pursuing Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley.

The town of Port Republic was situated on the east side of the South Fork of the Shenandoah River. A covered bridge spanned the North River to the west of town but the South River, on the east side of the town, had no bridge. Two fords over this waterway provide access to and from Port Republic. Due to the seasonal rains that can blanket the area during spring, the two fords ran high in June 1862.¹

Leading one of the pursuing Federal forces, Brigadier General James Shields had detached a portion of his command to range ahead of his main column. Their initial aim was to destroy a bridge at Conrad's Store to deny its use by Jackson and his men in case the latter was preparing to leave the Shenandoah Valley via either Brown's Gap or Swift Run Gap to join Confederate forces around Richmond.

"We have footed and counter-footed distance of over four hundred and fifty miles" one soldier of the 7th Indiana grumbled into his diary. "Roaming through the valleys and clambering over the mountains...", but now on the night of June 7, 1862, the Federal soldiers were within six miles of Port Republic after finding the bridge at Conrad's Store already torched. The objective had now changed, unbeknownst to the grumbling private in the 7th Indiana. His commander and the overall commander of the flying column, Colonel Sameul Sprigg Carroll, a West Point

¹ Robert L. Durham, "Rebel Fury at Port Republic," in *Military Heritage*, 25, no.1 (Spring 2023), See <https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/article/rebel-fury-at-port-republic/>, accessed September 11, 2025.

graduate of the Class of 1852, had decided to burn the North River bridge. To do so, he had in his command the 7th Indiana, the 1st Virginia (Union), and the 84th and 110th Pennsylvania. The infantry was augmented by approximately 150 men belonging to the 1st Virginia (Union) Cavalry and Battery L, 1st Ohio Light Artillery commanded by Captain Lucius N. Robinson. Interestingly, Carroll's command, the 8th Ohio, was not included in the column rushing south to confront Jackson. This, according to historian Robert Krick, showed that Federal organization "was rather amorphous in Shield's advance."²

At approximately 6:00 a.m. and a mile from Port Republic the Federals halted. Blue-clad cavalymen awaited the arrival of their marching comrades. When the infantry arrived, officers instructed the soldiers to load their muskets, since the Confederates were now nearby. A soldier in the 7th Indiana remembered they "could see Jackson's troops and trains across the river." Furthermore, a soldier further down the line when the halt was called remembered being "in site of the enemee."³

Becoming even more brazen, a few cavalry troopers of the 1st Virginia (Union) took advantage of the morning mist shrouding the area around the river to dash upon the town. "We dashed up the road at a lively gallop almost to the town and wheeled quickly about and back again without seeing any force or anything else." One wonders where the Confederate cavalry vedettes were at this early morning hour.

While the Federals lurked and rested on the road toward Port Republic, Carroll reconnoitered the approaches to the Confederates. From his report after the ensuing engagement, he wrote about what he saw that early June morning. He "found the enemy's train parked on the other side... with a large quantity of beef cattle." This confirmed earlier reports of a lightly guarded Confederate position around Port Republic. The enterprising and aggressive West Pointer then turned to the commander of his accompanying artillery, Captain Lucius N. Robinson and expressed the opinion that the Federals should "go over and knock Hell out of them before the rebel army could come up" and support the miscellany of Confederates then in Port Republic.⁴

Down the road, with his headquarters at Madison Hall, was the famed Confederate general, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson. He was the honored guest of the local prominent citizen who owned the house, Dr. George Whitfield Kemper. Spread on the rolling grounds that bordered Port Republic was the camp of the Charlottesville Artillery, a new unit to the army and untested in combat. Spreading out from these green troops were the army's cattle and a 1,500 plus baggage and ordinance wagon train. If one looked closely, the "U.S." stamp was predominant on the canvas

² Robert L. Krick, *Conquering the Valley: Stonewall Jackson at Port Republic* (New York: Williams Morrow, 1996), 40 - 42.

³Ibid., 44

⁴ Ibid.

covers, showing how the successful Jackson's Confederates had been recently against their blue-clad foes.⁵

In his tent, the Reverend Robert Lewis Dabney prepared the sermon he was going to give the soldiers that day. Jackson looked forward to a day of rest on the Sabbath. Soldiers of the Confederate Army of the Valley looked forward to a day of religious services and rest. When the reverend asked Jackson about the prospects of a battle and whether to proceed with finishing preparations and to give his sermon, the Confederate commander responded, "I hope you will preach to the Stonewall Brigade, and I shall attend myself; that is, if we are not disturbed by the enemy." Unfortunately, the Federals had plans to do more than "disturb" Reverend Dabney's sermon that second Sunday in June.

This calm was broken by the pounding of horse's hooves up the dirt road leading to the front porch of the Kemper residence, where Jackson and staff officers were awaiting their mounts. Before his horse came to a complete stop, 16-year-old Henry Kerfoot shouted out his report, "*General, Federal have charged across the lower ford of the South River.... They are already in Port Republic!*"

Jackson, displaying his calm amid crisis, responded quickly and matter-of-factly, "*Go back and fight them.*" Those words ushered in the fighting that became known as the battle of Port Republic. Jackson soon mounted and spurred toward the town, galloping down Main Street where he met a cavalcade coming in the other direction. Fleeing Confederate cavalry, charged with defending the river crossings, were fleeing in haste. These cavalymen, members of the 2nd Virginia Cavalry, had been nominally in charge of patrolling the lower and upper fords on either ends of the town of Port Republic. Now they were skedaddling to remove themselves from their blue-clad antagonists.

Close on their heels were the advance party of Federal cavalry, raising a ruckus as they also used Main Street to enter Port Republic. Adding to the cacophony of that Sunday morning were the explosions of artillery rounds, fired from Federal artillery, zeroing in on the range and ensuring fleeing Confederates continued in their dispatch. Two artillery pieces and an accompaniment of approximately 150 cavalymen were now on Main Street with control over the North River Bridge, as Jackson tried to avoid being captured. Fortunately, Jackson avoided that ignominy but three of his staff officers were not that lucky. Dr. Hunter Holmes McGuire, Colonel Stapleton Crutchfield, and Lieutenant Edward Willis became captives of the Federals. Crutchfield was shortly thereafter interrogated by Carroll when the latter was interrupted by a blue-clad messenger bringing even more startling news. The wagon train, parked at Dr. Kemper's house had been noticed by the Federal cavalymen. Crutchfield did not give Carroll the satisfaction of

⁵ Rick Britton, "Caught Sleeping at the Wheel: How the Union Army Almost Nabbed Stonewall Jackson," in *HistoryNet* (4/3/2023), see <https://www.historynet.com/port-republic-stonewall-jackson/>, accessed September 11, 2025.

confirming this bit of news for his antagonists. Instead, he told Carroll, “You must find out that for yourself.” The Federal soldiers planned to do just that.

However, standing in their way was a determined junior officer of the 2nd Virginia Infantry. Captain Samuel Johnson Cramer Moore, in charge of a 24-man detachment of Company I had been tasked with guarding the upper ford on the opposite end of Port Republic from where the Federals struck. Now with the town compromised, Moore led his men back toward Dr. Kemper’s house. He did this directly, having earlier ascertained the whereabouts of army headquarters and what parts of the army were located nearby. Being a veteran soldier, he also kept a keen eye out for any defensive terrain that could be utilized if a situation arose. On the morning of June 8 this proactivity paid dividends for the Confederates. Moore had noticed Madison Hall with its wooden plank fence and when the commotion of the morning broke, led his command there. To reach the plank fence, Moore led his men out of town, took a 90 degree turn onto the Staunton Road and ordered his men into Dr. Kemper’s yards, taking position behind the fence. To add to the defensive strength, any approaching cavalymen intent on overtaking the wagons, a prize too tempting to resist, would be forced to turn right as it exited Port Republic and, in the process, pass along the fence line, exposing the command to Confederate fire.

With Confederate resistance starting to mount, Jackson made his way across the North River by way of the covered bridge coveted by Carroll, reaching more of his command. He initially reached the parked artillery commanded by Colonel William Thomas Poague. This battery, the Rockbridge Artillery, hailed from the next county south of where Port Republic was located. Jackson’s command was simple, load up and direct fire to the north part of the town to deter the Federal advance. Riding on Jackson met the 37th Virginia Infantry commanded this day by Colonel Samuel Vance Fulkerson. He gave another simple order, “Charge right through, colonel, charge right through.” Jackson emphasized the order by waving his cap, exhilarating the men of Virginia to gain formation quickly.

This is happening concurrently with Moore’s stand and the Confederate artillery blunting Carroll’s advance in the southern half of Port Republic. The initial scare for the Confederates had been handled. Faced with this combined enemy fire, the Federals withdrew from the town. To the west, action erupted at Cross Keys, a separate engagement which occupied General Richard Stoddert Ewell’s Division on June 8.

Although the initiative was initially with the Federals around Port Republic with their withdrawal to the northeast and General John C. Frémont’s advance stopped at Cross Keys, Jackson began to plan. Among his first orders was to convene a meeting with key subordinates as evening fell on June 8. Quickly thereafter Jackson ordered a foot bridge to be constructed using upside down wagons with boards laid on top, across the South River to facilitate the movement of infantry. Although not the sturdiest construction, the impromptu bridge allowed Jackson’s infantry to cross the waterway to combat James Shield’s soldiers the next day. Ewell was instructed to march the entirety of his division, minus Colonel John Patton’s Brigade, from the defensive works

at Cross Keys toward Port Republic, approximately five miles away, to ensure more Confederates would be available for the attack on June 9.

On the Federal side, Brigadier General Erastus Bernard Tyler had arrived with his brigade, and took position on the Lewiston property, two miles northeast of Port Republic. On that ground the Federals would begin the day of June 9 and receive the Confederate attack.

As the morning mist wore off on June 9, Confederate infantry, the Stonewall Brigade comprising approximately 1,500 men in the 2nd, 4th, 5th, 27th, and 33rd Virginia Regiments crossed over the makeshift wagon-sunken bridge and began to transition from marching to attack formation. Confronting them were approximately 3,000 Federal soldiers under the command of Tyler. Stretched out in front, on the east side of the South Fork from Lewis Mill to Lewiston, astride the road running into Port Republic was Tyler's Brigade itself, numbering close to 1,600 effectives that morning. In line from the Federal left to right were the following regiments, 1st Virginia (Union), 5th Ohio, 7th Ohio, 29th Ohio, and 7th Indiana.

What would soon be the focal point and the key terrain feature of the battle, was the location where the Lewis family had made charcoal for years. Federal artillery unlimbered on this rise which was named simply The Coaling. By the time of the Confederate advance, three batteries of Federal artillery were on this elevated position.

Traversing and appearing onto the plain, the first two regiments from the Stonewall Brigade, the 5th and 27th went into battle in the fields of Baugher Farm supported by the Rockbridge Artillery under Colonel Poague. When their Federal counterparts opened up, from Battery E, 4th United States Artillery and Batteries H and L of the 1st Ohio Artillery, the Union shells landed among the Confederate infantry, almost completely ignoring the ineffectual Confederate artillery fire, which firing from a depression in the ground was overshooting the Federals on the higher elevation.

Brigadier General Charles Sydney Winder, commander of the "Stonewall" Brigade had ordered the 5th and 27th to advance to remove them from waiting and just bearing the brunt of Federal artillery projectiles. The two veteran regiments advanced halfway to the Federal lines, using a farm fence as some cover and opened on the Federal infantry. Some of the latter had found cover in the outbuildings of the Lewiston property and kept up a constant fusillade of fire at the Federal counterparts. Their comrades had been outdone by the combined infantry regiments under Tyler. In the 7th Louisiana, Taylor wrote in his official report, "50 per cent. of the number carried into action" fell in the field outside Port Republic. A contemporary account puts the number loss to the Louisianans, including their top two officers at 162 which equaled what the other four units in the brigade loss on June 9 combined.⁶

⁶ Krick, *Conquering the Valley*, 375.

Moving onto the field and to the right of this action were the two other Virginia regiments from the “Stonewall” Brigade, the 2nd and 4th Virginia along with a few Confederate artillery pieces, which operated on their right flank, moving through the woods to try to outflank the Federal left flank.

As the two left companies of the 2nd Virginia approached a ravine while they traversed the woods the regimental commander, Colonel James Walkinshaw Allen ordered them to open fire on the Federal cannoneers. He had not anticipated the Federal infantry supporting the artillery who unleashed volleys in return at the Virginians. This allowed the Federal artillery to sweep the woods and ravine with canister. Under this combined fire, the 2nd Virginia broke back toward and through the woods. Colonel Allen rallied his regiment and used the woods as a temporary shelter until decisions on what to do next could be reached.

With the “Stonewall” Brigade’s regiments halted and Confederate artillery continuing to receive worse than they gave from their antagonists, the second brigade of the Confederate advance began to arrive on the field. Nicknamed the “Louisiana Tigers” due to their prowess on the battlefield and reputation off it, the brigade consisted of the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th Louisiana Infantry Regiments and Wheat’s Battalion (the original “Louisiana Tigers”).

Led by Brigadier General Richard Taylor, the command, minus the 7th Louisiana that was siphoned off by Jackson to buttress the Baugher Farm part of the Confederate line, ranged further to the Confederate left. The plan was to mask the movement from prying Federal eyes. Joining the 7th Louisiana as reinforcements in this sector was the 48th Virginia, the first of Colonel John Mercer Patton’s Brigade to arrive on the field. Overall command was still with Brigadier General Winder of the “Stonewall” Brigade.

Fire erupted along the fence line between the Virginians and soldiers from Indiana and Ohio. Later Colonel Harry Thompson Hays’ 7th Louisiana bolstered the Confederate line. A few of Hays’ more adventurous infantrymen clambered over the fence in the middle of the wheatfield but, under the fire of the Federal infantry and artillery, did not make it much further. The 27th Virginia commanded by Colonel Andrew Jackson Grigsby, was on the right of the 7th Louisiana.

After this the 7th Louisiana, with the 5th and 27th Virginia staved off a Federal counterthrust and then sallied forth in an advance of their own. More bold than practical, the Louisianans and Virginians were met with Federal artillery and small arms fire, that a soldier in the 7th Ohio remembered “made a fearful gap in the lines of the advancing column.”⁷ This instigated a renewed Federal advance and precipitated “an awful scene of carnage” as the two sides collided. The two most senior officers, Colonel Hays and Lieutenant Colonel Charles de Choiseul of the 7th Louisiana

⁷ Terry L. Jones, *Lee’s Tigers: The Louisiana Brigade in the Army of Northern Virginia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 87.

were both knocked out of action, the latter suffering a mortal wound. Tyler, reported his forces “mowed them down like grass before a well-served scythe” with a bit of exaggeration.⁸

Suffering a withering fire, the Louisianans, followed by the Virginians broke toward the rear where the rest of Ewell’s Division was forming on the field. While handfuls of Confederates rallied around a few artillery pieces the pivotal moment of the day arrived for the Southerners. However, fortune and reinforcements smiled on the wavering Confederate line, as six more regiments, the 44th, 52nd, and 58th Virginia Infantry from Brigadier General George Hume Steuart’s Brigade, commanded by Colonel William C. Scott, after the former’s wounding the day before at Cross Keys. Colonel James Walker brought the 13th, 25th, and 31st of Brigadier General Arnold Elzey’s Brigade, also wounded at Cross Keys and out of action.

A soldier of the 52nd Virginia left the following account as they angled onto the plain behind Winder’s withdrawing line, “through a fine field of wheat bordering on the river bottom, chin high...balls clipped the grain worse than reapers.” This foot soldier had a farming background or at least a dry sense of humor, remarking later the same account. “It was a very bad job of harvesting...a harvest of death it proved.” Colonel James Henry Skinner, who hailed from nearby Staunton, Virginia and in command of the 52nd, also remembered Federal bullets “cutting off the heads of the wheat.” Eventually over one hundred men of the 52nd would add their names to the casualty rolls that day.⁹

The Confederate reinforcements entered the fray as they came onto the field, with Colonel Walker’s command being split. The 13th Virginia’s progress was impeded by the brush and brambles that had caused Taylor’s men to seek out the forest trail. The 31st Virginia supported Winder and came under fire from Federals. One soldier of the 31st remembered that wheat field as “the hottest [place] I ever was in.” By the time the smoke cleared, and action ended, 220 men of the 31st would become casualties, slightly more than half that went into the engagement. Yet, the action in the “the fatal wheat field” between the seesawing engagements¹⁰

All this action allowed Winder to rally his broken regiments that were initially in the fighting and added precious minutes needed for Taylor to get the rest of his Louisianans into position. For the Federals, their momentum also took them to the much fought over fence, with most of the 29th Ohio remaining there waiting for ammunition replenishment. Private Allen Mason of Company C of that regiment captured the 7th Louisiana flag somewhere in that vicinity.¹¹ They were then met by the reinforcing regiments mentioned above and the action erupted again.

⁸ Krick, *Conquering the Valley*, 380.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 381-2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 385.

¹¹ Durham, *Rebel Fury*.

With an experienced eye, General Ewell surveyed the scene unfolding in the wheat field and bottom lands near the river and decided to mimic his commanding officer. He ordered two regiments, the 44th and 58th Virginia, right to left, to advance into the woods that had provided cover for other Confederate soldiers during the day. After tearing down fences along the roadside but keeping back a third of the soldiers to provide some modicum of defense, Ewell ordered the two regiments to advance. The charging Confederates “yelled more to keep our courage up than to frighten the enemy” wrote the adjutant of the 58th Virginia following the battle.¹²

This new assault struck the left flank of the 5th and 7th Ohio at the fence line in the middle of the field but also subjected the Confederates to a withering artillery fire from the direction of the “The Coaling.” As the Virginians of the 44th and 58th crossed the fence their lines became jumbled, and the assault having failed, the two units slowly retraced their steps back to the cover of the woods. Combined with this impetuous charge and the Confederate artillery concentration on blue-coated infantry, the Federal attack stalled at the fence line. Now the fate of the battle rested on 1,700 Louisianans about to unleash a devastating attack on “The Coaling.”

What every battlefield commander covets is luck. Once again, the fates of battle were on Jackson’s side, much like the day before when Moore and other stalwarts staved off the Federal incursion into Port Republic. Taylor’s other regiments and Wheat’s Battalion had continued their flanking movement. Following a forested trail, the Louisianans were able to deploy, undetected, on the other side of a deep gorge opposite the Federal left flank. Using the brush and whispered commands the Louisianans readied for battle.

“Screaming at the top of their voices” the “Tigers” emerged from the brush and slammed into the exposed Federal flank. As one Virginian, rallying from the Federal thrust through the Baugher Farm remembered, “a mighty shout on the mountain side” announced the arrival of “General Dick Taylor’s Louisianans debouching from the undergrowth.” Another veteran of the battle remembered the Louisianans struck a Federal battery “like a hawk on a chicken.” Surprised Federal artillerymen did not even have a chance to wheel their guns to face this new threat as the Confederate advance, unorganized as they disgorged from the gorge erupted into the blue-clad lines. Confederate soldiers laughing hysterically straddled the tubes and cheered their victory, prematurely. Moments later artillery fire erupted through their lines, as another of the Federal batteries, less than 350 yards away had had time to turn their guns and fire. With Federal infantry slowly turning and forming for a counterattack, Colonel William Raine Peck’s 9th Louisiana Infantry ordered anyone within ear shot to kill the artillery horses to prevent the recently captured pieces from being removed by the enemy.

This next phase of the battle pitted Tyler’s Ohioans against Taylor’s Louisianans as the first thrust by the Buckeyes liberated the captured guns and forced the Pelican State natives back to the gorge. Taylor rallied and his “Tigers” lunged forward again, precipitating hand-to-hand

¹² Ibid.

combat around the much fought over artillery pieces. As a testament to the carnage, five color guards of the 5th Ohio were shot down in rapid succession and the battle standard of the regiment captured. Yet still the Ohioans held.

As the “Tigers” regrouped, the thought rippled through their ranks. According to a brigade history, never had Taylor’s command met such resistance. As the Louisianans prepared for a third attempt, Taylor ordered the brigade’s musicians to buttress the thinning ranks. Taylor also had to deal with Federal pickets, of the 5th Ohio separated by the Confederate sweep through the forested trail and two companies were hastily dispatched to deal with this nuisance.

The final attack by the Louisianans did take the Federal artillery pieces, wresting them from the Ohioans but this time no cheering followed. Instead, Taylor’s men braced for the rest of Tyler’s command, which could be seen from the vantage point of “The Coaling” heading their way. For a second time the Louisianans were pushed off “The Coaling” by advancing Federals. The Louisianans returned to the safety of the woods and the gorge and were met by Ewell and Jackson, along with precious Confederate infantry reinforcements. The third advance, a “desperate rally” wrote Taylor afterwards surged across with the famous “Rebel Yell” emanating from the voices of thousands of Confederates, including the drummer boys. The artillery fell to the Confederates a third and final time.

This last action around “The Coaling” ended the engagement at Port Republic. Federal soldiers left the field, pursued approximately five miles by Confederates who scooped up a few hundred prisoners in the process. Tyler’s command rendezvoused with the rest of Shield’s command. When Confederates under Brigadier General Issac Trimble torched the bridge over the North River, this eliminated the chance of General Frémont coming to the succor of Tyler’s Federals. By 10:30 that morning the battle was over.¹³

Confederate casualties amounted to 816 men, while 1,002 Federals were killed, wounded, or captured in the fighting. The Confederate soldier had gained another victory for “Stonewall” Jackson. The action at Port Republic culminated the Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1862, cementing Jackson a place in the pantheon of Confederate military heroes, and his infantry the moniker “foot cavalry.” From mid-February 1862 until June 9, 1862, with the culmination of the battle of Port Republic, Jackson’s men fought six pitched battles: First Kernstown, Front Royal, First Winchester, McDowell, Cross Keys, and Port Republic along with numerous skirmishes. His command had traversed over 650 miles from the banks of the Potomac River to the mountain passes of the Appalachian and Blue Ridge Mountains. Multiple Federal generals had been stymied and careers ruined. He had saved the Shenandoah Valley for the Confederacy for another two years, ensuring that communication, supplies, and an avenue for invading the north remained in

¹³ Ibid. and Harry Searles, “The Battle of Port Republic, 1862,” in *American History Central: The Encyclopedia of American History*, (June 1, 2023), see <https://www.americanhistorycentral.com/entries/battle-of-port-republic/>, accessed September 11, 2025.

Southern hands. Even more importantly, Jackson and his men had revived the spirits of the Confederacy during a time of battlefield defeats and depressing news from other fronts. On June 17, Jackson's men began to leave the Shenandoah Valley.

The victorious Confederates left for duty east of the mountains as General Robert E. Lee formulated his attack plans to save Richmond, Virginia, and punish the Federal Army of the Potomac under General George Brinton McClellan. Less than eleven months later in the wilderness west of Chancellorsville, Jackson would be wounded, mortally, by friendly fire. After lying in state in Richmond, Jackson's remains would head west. This would be the next and final time Jackson returned to his beloved Valley in mid-May 1863. The Confederate general was laid to rest in Lexington, Virginia.
