STONEWALL JACKSON’S

VALLEY CAMPAIGN

SHENANDOAH

1862

PETER COZZENS

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS
CHAPEL HILL
for my beloved

ANTONIA,

for my sister,

PAMELA DIMOND,

and in

LOVING MEMORY

OF OUR MOTHER,

AUDREY H. COZZENS,

1925–2005
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My acknowledgments are few but most heartfelt. I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to Gary Gallagher, editor of the Civil War America series, and David Perry, senior editor at the University of North Carolina Press, for their confidence in me and their unbounded patience, as this manuscript took far longer to write than anyone had expected.

I also sincerely thank my dear friend, Rob Girardi, a superb editor of numerous Civil War titles, for his careful reading of the manuscript and his insightful suggestions.

Lastly, I offer my most profound thanks to my beloved Antonia Feldman for helping see this book to completion.
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The Shenandoah Valley campaign of 1862 evokes images of indefatigable Confederate infantry making rapid marches under the steady hand of Maj. Gen. Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson; of bold strikes against hapless Yankees whose commanders were inept fools, dangling from wires pulled in Washington, D.C.; and of a pre-orchestrated strategic plan that made Confederate victory inevitable.

There is truth in much of this. From his tactical defeat but strategic victory at Kernstown in March 1862 until his final two victories at Cross Keys and Port Republic in early June 1862, Jackson accomplished the broad goals that his immediate commander, Gen. Joseph E. (Joe) Johnston, and later Maj. Gen. Robert E. Lee, as general in chief and military adviser to Confederate president Jefferson Davis, set out for him. The first of these was to detain Federal forces in the Valley that might otherwise support Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan’s army on the Peninsula, and the second was to relieve pressure on Fredericksburg, where 40,000 Union troops were concentrated to join McClellan’s offensive against Richmond. Jackson accomplished these objectives in impressive style, making optimal use of interior lines to concentrate his small army, which never numbered more than 16,000 men, despite the fact that the total Union strength in the region fluctuated between 30,000 and 70,000 during May and June 1862, the months of his greatest successes.

How was this possible? The existing major works on the Shenandoah Valley campaign of 1862 provide only partial answers because they tell the story almost exclusively from the Confederate point of view. The sole modern work
devoted to the campaign is Robert G. Tanner’s *Stonewall in the Valley*, published in 1976 and reissued twenty years later. The single other study was undertaken in the 1880s by William Allan, a member of Jackson’s staff, and titled *History of the Campaign of Gen. T. J. (Stonewall) Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia*. Tanner gave as the stated purpose of both his original and revised book the “recounting of the campaign from the Confederate viewpoint, a task first undertaken by William Allan.” Apart from his own confession, the extent of Tanner’s bias is demonstrated by the fact that every manuscript source he consulted and all but three printed primary sources are Confederate. Such a one-sided approach to a military campaign serves no good purpose; it is impossible to judge the true greatness, if indeed such a word is appropriate, of Jackson’s accomplishments in the Valley without an equally thorough understanding of the campaign from the Union perspective.

Apart from the works of Tanner and Allan, the only other significant studies have been microhistories of one or more engagements of the Valley campaign. The best of these are Gary L. Ecelbarger’s “*We Are in for It!*: The First Battle of Kernstown,” and Robert K. Krick’s *Conquering the Valley: Stonewall Jackson at Port Republic*. Both tell the story of these battles well, but neither approaches the campaign as a whole.

Most recently Gary W. Gallagher edited a series of essays, *The Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1862*, for this press. The eight studies contained therein are excellent, but they do not seek to present a picture of the campaign in its totality. Topics range from the relatively esoteric—“Placed on the Pages of History in Blood: Reporting on and Remembering the 12th Georgia Infantry in the 1862 Valley Campaign,” “Turner Ashby’s Appeal,” and “Maryland’s Ablest Confederate: General Charles S. Winder of the Stonewall Brigade”—to two superb, groundbreaking essays that represent the first modern efforts at approaching the campaign from the Federal perspective—Gallagher’s own “‘You Must Either Attack Richmond or Give Up the Job and Come to the Defence of Washington’: Abraham Lincoln and the Shenandoah Campaign,” and William J. Miller’s “Such Men as Shields, Banks, and Frémont: Federal Command in Western Virginia, March–June 1862.” But while excellent, both are by design only starting points to a fuller understanding of the Valley campaign.

It has been my purpose to write the first balanced, and I trust comprehensive, history of the 1862 Shenandoah Valley campaign, giving equal voice to both Union and Confederate sources. In no other manner can the degree of Jackson’s success properly be judged. Fellow corps commander Lt. Gen. James
Longstreet addressed this question obliquely when he wrote long after the war that "Jackson was a very skillful man against such men as Shields, Banks, and Frémont, but when pitted against the best of the Federal commanders he did not appear so well."¹

I find myself in broad agreement with William Miller in concluding that the Union generals sent to oppose Jackson—with the exception of Brig. Gen. James Shields, who was laid up with an incapacitating wound throughout the Battle of Kernstown, and then went on to embarrass himself in a tentative and confused march down Page (Luray) Valley in June 1862—performed reasonably well in view of the many factors working against them. Among these were the absence of an overall commander, chronic supply problems caused in part by persistent torrential rains, and well-intentioned but too often ill-informed meddling from Washington. President Abraham Lincoln did not, as Jackson biographers and earlier campaign studies would have it, panic at any stage in the campaign, but neither did he add positively to its conduct.

Lincoln played a far more active role in the management of the campaign on the Federal side than did President Jefferson Davis on the Southern side. Indeed, while Lincoln kept a keen eye on every detail during the critical last week of May and first week of June, at no point during the campaign did Davis apparently take anything but a passing interest in affairs in the Shenandoah Valley; the evidence suggests that he allowed Johnston and Robert E. Lee broadly to oversee Jackson’s conduct of the campaign.

I begin my narrative with Jackson assuming command of the Valley District in the waning days of 1861 and look at the Bath and Romney winter campaign in detail. A knowledge of Jackson’s shortcomings in the conduct of that ill-fated episode is critical to understanding how his army regarded him at the outset of the spring 1862 campaign, and to reveal early on flaws, or more charitably put, eccentricities in his command style. Among these, none were more damning, or potentially ruinous, than his determination always to keep his plans and objectives to himself, leaving his seconds-in-command to flail about in the dark.

But despite his faults Jackson did win the Valley campaign, and the impact of his victories was enormous, both strategically and psychologically. Jackson’s audacious attack at Kernstown derailed McClellan’s plans to have Maj. Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks’s corps cover the approaches to Washington toward Centreville and caused Lincoln and his military advisers to look more closely at McClellan’s dispositions for defending the capital while he embarked on his waterborne offensive against Richmond. What they saw troubled them. On