"WV Commemorates 150th Anniversary of the Civil War" – WV Tourism

By: Andrea Bond

This year (2011) marks the 150th anniversary of the start of the American Civil War. The harrowing battle raged for four years, pitting brother against brother at the cost of more than 600,000 lives. Out of the war, however, there rose a new state, and the only one created as a direct result of the war – West Virginia. **"West Virginia is rich in Civil War heritage. History buffs will find much to interest them here,"** said Betty Carver, commissioner of the West Virginia Division of Tourism. "For instance, the First Campaign of the war was waged in West Virginia. The state's Civil War-era towns, battlefields and cemeteries are a hugely popular itinerary for driving tours."

Whether you're a scholar, a historian, or just an interested party, commemorate this monumental anniversary with a walk or drive through history. **The following events are a guideline to help plan your tour.**

The First Campaign

West Virginia, born of a nation divided, was the setting for **the First Campaign of America's Civil War. Although still part of Virginia in 1861, many citizens of the western half of the state were loyal to the Union.** By late May of 1861, Union Gen. George B. McClellan, commanding the Department of the Ohio, launched the First Campaign – ordering troops to cross the Ohio River and secure western Virginia for the Union. The resulting battles were fought in West Virginia's mountains, in what is now Barbour, Taylor, Tucker, Randolph and Pocahontas counties.

During June and July of 1861, McClellan's army won the inaugural Union victories of the Civil War. Federal troops now occupied western Virginia as loyal delegates met in Wheeling to form the Restored Government of Virginia, a Union government to oppose the Confederate one in Richmond. In August, Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee tried – and failed – to reclaim that part of Virginia, and by 1862 the conflict had shifted east. **The First Campaign proved to be decisive: In 1863, the western counties under Union control became the new state of West Virginia.**

The Battle of Philippi

The Battle of Philippi was fought on June 3, 1861, at Philippi, Va., in what is now Barbour County, W.Va. It was **the first organized land action in the war and was part of McClellan's campaign.**

McClellan ordered 3,000 troops under Brig. Gen. Thomas A. Morris into western Virginia in a two-pronged advance. **The principal advance, of 1,600 men under Brig. Gen. Benjamin F. Kelley, pushed toward Grafton. The other advance, of 1,400 men under Brig. Gen. Ebenezer Dumont, took Webster. When McClellan's forces occupied Grafton, Confederates retreated 18 miles to Philippi. The two forces departed by train to converge on Philippi. They arrived before dawn on June 3, surprising the Confederates. After firing a few shots at advancing Union troops, the Confederates broke lines and fled south, some still in their bed clothes. As a result, some mockingly refer to the battle as the**

"Races at Philippi."
A covered bridge spanned the Tygart Valley River in Philippi and was an important segment of the vital Beverly-Fairmont Turnpike during the war. Today, the Philippi Covered Bridge is the oldest and longest covered bridge in West Virginia and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Places to see, things to do

The following sites and events associated with the First Campaign are accessible to tourists and provide an entertaining and educational experience for the whole family:

- **The Battle of Philippi** was fought on June 3, 1861 in Barbour County and is the site of the first land battle – and amputation – of the Civil War. On June 3-5, 2011, the battle will be commemorated in the annual Blue and Gray Reunion historical re-enactment. Visitors also may trace the area's Civil War history through Philippi's Historical Museum, Blue and Gray Park, and the downtown historical district.
- **The Battle of Rich Mountain** took place on July 11, 1861, in Randolph County. A re-enactment and other events commemorating the battle will take place Jul 8-11, 2011.
- **The First Campaign** led to many Civil War "firsts," including the first battle, amputee, first general killed, and first use of telegraph in the war. A symposium and tour of First Campaign sites will take place Jul. 5-8, 2011, hosted by Rich Mountain Battlefield Foundation.
- **The Battle of Laurel Hill** took place on July 7, 1861, in Barbour County. A re-enactment and other events relating to the battle will take place July 15-17.
- **Grafton National Cemetery** in Taylor County is the burial site of the first Union officer killed in the war, T. Bailey Brown. At 8 p.m. May 27, 2011, re-enactors will lead a lantern-guided, living history tour of the cemetery.
- **Historic Beverly** in Randolph County was a gathering place for Virginia Confederate troops. Following the Union victory at Rich Mountain, many Southern supporters fled south, and the Federals took control of the town. Beverly offers public museums, private historical attractions and more.
- **The Battle of Camp Allegheny** took place on Dec. 13, 1861, in Pocahontas County. Confederate forces under Col. Edward Johnson occupied the summit of Allegheny Mountain to defend the Staunton-Parkersburg Pike. At dawn on Dec. 13, they were attacked by Union forces under Brig. Gen. Robert H. Milroy.
- **The Battle of Cheat Mountain** took place Sept. 12–15, 1861, in Pocahontas and Randolph counties. Confederate forces led an unsuccessful attack against Federal troops at **Fort Milroy**, also known as **Cheat Summit Fort**. At an elevation of 4,085 feet, Cheat Summit Fort was the highest Union camp in the war. Earthworks from the old fort remain today. A re-enactment and other events commemorating the battle will take place Sept. 3-4, 2011.
- **The Battle of Corrick's Ford** took place on July 13, 1861, on the Cheat River in Tucker County. It is here where Confederate Brig. Gen. Robert S. Garnett became the first general officer killed in the war.

Some West Virginia 'Civil War firsts'

- First Campaign of the Civil War: Began May 27, 1861
- First trains used to carry soldiers into battle on American soil: May 1861
- First officer killed: Robert S. Garnett, C.S.A.: July 13, 1861 (Corricks Ford – Parsons)
- First enlisted man in United States service killed by Confederate Soldier: T. Bailey Brown – May 22, 1861 (Buried at Grafton National Cemetery)
- First amputation of the Civil War: James E. Hanger – June 3, 1861
- First land battle of the Civil War: Philippi – June 3, 1861
- First Union government restored in a Confederate state: Wheeling – June 20, 1863
- First time Robert E. Lee leads troops into battle as a commanding general – Sept. 1861
- First use of telegraph by an American army in the field – June 1861
- First Federal officer wounded by a Confederate: Colonel Benjamin Kelley – June 3, 1861

- First use of indirect firing method: Fayetteville, WV – May 1863
  - *Sources:*
    Lesser, H. (2004). Rebels at the Gate
    WV Division of Culture and History – **http://www.wvculture.org/history/journal_wvh/wvh14-2.html**

McNeill's Rangers

John Hanson McNeill of Moorefield, Hardy County was **commander of a Confederate company** in the Missouri State Guard. Although captured and imprisoned in St. Louis, he escaped to Richmond, Va., where he **obtained permission to form an independent unit in the western counties of Virginia to disrupt Union activities** in the area. **On Sept. 5, 1862, McNeill became captain of Company E of the 18th Virginia Cavalry, more commonly known as McNeill's Rangers.**
McNeill's Rangers was **an independent irregular Confederate military company** commissioned under the Partisan Ranger Act. Along with raids on railroads and wagon trains, **McNeill first proposed the operation on the B&O Railroad in western Virginia that became the Jones-Imboden Raid.**

Civil War Trails

The **Civil War Trails is a multistate program that identifies, interprets and creates driving tours of Civil War sites.** The program interprets more than 1,100 Civil War sites throughout West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina and Tennessee. **In West Virginia, there are about 150 sites in development that will feature Civil War Trails program interpretive panels.** The West Virginia Civil War Trails map is due out in April.
"We get a lot of requests for information about Civil War sites in the state," Carver said. "The Division of Tourism is excited to be able to bring this program to West Virginia."
The program is administered by a nonprofit corporation and supported by local communities, state tourism offices and state departments of transportation. In 2001, the National Trust for Historic Preservation identified the Civil War Trails program as one of the most successful and sustainable heritage tourism programs in the nation.

'Honey in the Rock'

Theatre West Virginia **premiered "Honey in the Rock" in 1961. The outdoor drama chronicles the tumultuous birth of the Mountain State through the lives of some of its real and imagined residents. "Honey in the Rock" derives its name from the natural gas wells that the Indians discovered in what is now West Virginia.** The show, presented annually every summer at Cliffside Amphitheatre in Grandview, is billed as a "romping, rollicking, vibrant historical performance filled with drama, intrigue, music, comedy and romance."