

**Living Off the Wasteland: The Environment and the Union Army of Virginia during the
Second Bull Run Campaign**

Mike Burns

Dissertation Prospectus
Department of History
Texas Christian University

Shortly after taking command of the newly created Union Army of Virginia in July 1862, Major General John Pope issued a number of general orders to his soldiers implementing a new policy of supplying the army through regional production, primarily environmental production. In General Orders, nos. 5 and 6, Pope ordered, “the troops of this command will subsist upon the country in which their operations are carried on.” He added, “no supply or baggage trains of any description will be used unless so stated specifically in the order for the movement.” The army would rely almost exclusively on local food sources for both the men and horses.¹ When marching through Northern Virginia with the 122nd New York Infantry, however, Sanford Truesdell described the destruction of the region to his sister. He found “the surrounding countryside to be ‘almost completely deserted’ and ‘ruined.’” As the unit approached Culpepper, Virginia, almost thirty miles southeast of Washington, D.C., he noted that he “had not seen ‘a field of grain of any kind.’”² Pope’s orders and Truesdell’s description of Northern Virginia invokes an interesting question about the Army of Virginia’s experience in the region: with a completely desolated countryside, how was the army to live off the land as Pope had ordered?

Prior to the U.S. Civil War, Americans had rarely seen the level of destruction they witnessed during the years between April 1861 and April 1865. As the Union and Confederate Armies marched through the fields of Virginia, Tennessee, Mississippi, Georgia, and the Carolinas, the subsequent fighting resulted in the devastation of hundreds of thousands of human bodies and the loss of almost 700,000 lives. Although these aspects of the fighting have become a common part of campaign and battle studies of the U.S. Civil War, few historians have fully explored the resulting effects that the fighting and marching had on the environment during those

¹ General Orders, No. 5 and No. 6, July 18, 1862, *War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1880–1901), ser. 1, vol. 12, pt. 2, p. 50.

² Sanford Truesdell to his sister, quoted in William G. Thomas, *The Iron Way: Railroads, the Civil War, and the Making of Modern America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011), 101.

four years. Yet, as some historians may jokingly argue, the Civil War was fought outside meaning that the environment in which the soldiers marched and fought had a connection to what took place on the battlefields.

Pope's orders and the Army of Virginia's Second Bull Run Campaign in Northern Virginia provide an opportunity to expand on this topic. Prior to the Second Battle of Bull Run on 28, 29, and 30 August 1862, Pope's army marched their way through the region in an initial attempt to join Union general George B. McClellan's Army of the Potomac outside of Richmond. After Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton ordered Pope to end this movement and place his men in a defensive position to block any Confederate advance against Washington, the Army of Virginia needed to supply itself, based on Pope's orders, through the agricultural production of Northern Virginia. Yet, the desolation caused by the Confederate occupation of the region in 1861 made Pope reliant on supplies from Washington rather than on the environment providing the necessary subsistence for his army. Therefore, an examination of the Second Bull Run Campaign, a military maneuver through an exhausted countryside, shows how nature played a role in Union logistics and civil-military policy in Virginia during the Civil War. This provides an opportunity to expand both on the burgeoning field of environmental-military history, especially of the Civil War, and the origins of total, or hard, war policies during the conflict.

Although a large and significant battle, one that influenced the release of the initial Emancipation Proclamation and Confederate General Robert E. Lee's decision to invade Union held Maryland in September 1862, the Second Battle of Bull Run—also known as Second Manassas—and the campaign has received little attention. Only National Park Service historian John J. Hennessey has produced a comprehensive study of the Second Bull Run campaign and battle. Yet, Hennessey primarily centers his study on the details pertaining to the fighting and the

army's movements that took place during the battle. He incorporates little specificity on the environment's role in the campaign as well as little exploration of the logistics involved in the movement. Additionally, he discusses Pope's general orders and its connection to early concepts of hard war policies, but has no dialogue on how the environment influenced them. Historian Mark Grimsley also addresses the Second Bull Run Campaign and early efforts at creating hard war against the Confederacy. In his chapter on Pope's orders, Grimsley shows how these general orders contributed to future hard war policies that the Union armies implemented in 1863, 1864, and 1865. Yet, he explores Pope's influence in a single section within this chapter and does not examine the relationship between the environment and Pope's policies.³

Few historians have examined the environment in the state of Virginia during the Civil War. Kathryn Shively Meier explores the effect the Virginia environment had on the health of the soldiers in 1862 but focuses on the Peninsula Campaign east of Richmond and the campaign in the Shenandoah Valley in the months before Second Bull Run. She overlooks Northern Virginia and does not discuss the logistical issues that emerged from changes in the environment. In addition, only Lisa M. Brady's examines how Union leaders incorporated nature into their strategy in areas of abundant agricultural production as well as how military strategy during the Civil War impacted the environment. Despite the importance of logistics during the war, just Ella Lonn and William G. Thomas have explored military logistics in the conflict. Although they examine this topic, it is not the central issue of their studies. Instead they examine the role of salt and the railroads, respectively, in the war. There remains an opening in the historiography of

³ John J. Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run: The Campaign and Battle of Second Manassas* (1993; repr. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999); Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy Toward Southern Civilians, 1861–1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

both environmental-military and logistical studies of the Civil War. Hopefully, an examination of the Second Bull Run Campaign will contribute to these fields.⁴

Project Summary

Between 1861 and 1864, Northern Virginia became the central point of concentration for the Union and Confederate forces east of the Appalachian Mountains. In the fifty miles between Washington, D.C., and Fredericksburg, Virginia—the area most associated with Northern Virginia during the Civil War—the two forces fought nine major battles resulting in thousands of casualties in each of them. Many of these battles, with the exception of Second Bull Run, have received multiple examinations dealing with the results of the battles and their impact on the greater narrative of the Civil War. Throughout the four years of conflict, Northern Virginia was either a constant place of contact between the two forces or occupied by them.

This prospective dissertation, tentatively titled “Living Off the Wasteland: The Environment and the Union Army of Virginia during the Second Bull Run Campaign,” will hopefully address the issues that arose out of a Union force maneuvering through a region that was desolated before they had even entered the area. An examination of the Second Bull Run Campaign and the environment in which it took place would touch on the relationship between nature, Union logistics, and its civil-military policies in Northern Virginia, while also expanding our understanding of the American Civil War overall. Primarily, a study of the environment during the Second Bull Run Campaign can show the impact armies, and the soldiers in them, had on the environment as well as how the environment, in kind, influenced the decisions of the Union army in Northern Virginia.

⁴ Kathryn Shively Meier, *Nature's Civil War: Common Soldiers and the Environment in 1862 Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Lisa M. Brady, *War Upon the Land: Military Strategy and the Transformation of Southern Landscapes during the American Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012); Ella Lonn, *Salt as a Factor in the Confederacy* (1933; repr., Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1965); and Thomas, *The Iron Way*.

The presence of such large armies in Northern Virginia, with the smallest at any one point between 1861 and 1862 numbering approximately 20,000 men, caused enormous changes to the region ecologically throughout the war and, possibly, even after the conflict ended. Prior to the Civil War, Northern Virginia was home to a number of profitable plantations and farms—including the famed Mount Vernon, home of George Washington—and large areas of forests. By March of 1862, however, the presence of the Confederate occupiers in the first year of the Civil War would reverse the fertility of the land. While in winter quarters, for example, Confederate soldiers between July 1861 and March 1862 constructed numerous wooden structures to protect themselves from the cold weather. This stripped down much of the forests in the area, leaving the fields barren. Even before the Union armies had moved through the region, a single Confederate force had caused ecological damage to Northern Virginia.

Despite this apparent destruction of the environment near Bull Run, Major General John Pope, the commander of the Union Army of Virginia during the Second Bull Run campaign, established policies that ordered his men to live off the land. In this policy, Pope believed, the army would rely almost exclusively on local food sources for both the men and horses. Pope's subsistence orders would also deprive local Confederates of food to feed themselves, their families, and possibly their army. This order followed similar policies from the Union campaigns along the Mississippi River in 1862 and 1863. As Lisa M. Brady argues in *War Upon the Land*, for example, Major General Ulysses S. Grant primarily relied on southern agriculture to feed his army during the campaign around Vicksburg, Mississippi, between April 1862 and July 1863, and eventually turned it into a centerpiece of his policies in future campaigns. Later, Brady notes, Major Generals William T. Sherman and Phillip H. Sheridan adopted similar orders during their campaigns in Georgia and the Carolinas and the Shenandoah Valley in western Virginia,

respectively. With this, the majority of Union forces were able to use the environment around them to fulfill the supply of subsistence necessary to feed their armies.

Pope, however, never fully implemented his policy in Northern Virginia. Despite having ordered his army to move without relying on supply wagons, he created a large depot for supplies, including food, at the Manassas railroad junction only miles south of where the Second Battle of Bull Run would take place. In fact, this supply depot directly led to the Union and Confederates returning to the lands around Bull Run to fight the second battle as Lieutenant General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson’s Confederate force out maneuvered the Army of Virginia and consumed or destroyed all these supplies, causing Pope to send his army back to Manassas and kicking off the second battle on August 28, 1862. The presence of the supply depot at Manassas leads to an important question for this campaign: why, if his soldiers were to rely on living off the land in Northern Virginia, did Pope still require a large supply depot, including large quantities of food, and the logistical line connected with Washington, D.C.?

As written earlier, Union soldier Sanford Truesdell described the environment of Northern Virginia as completely desolated, which made Pope’s army more reliant on shipping supplies into the state rather than living off the agricultural production of Virginia farmers. With the Confederate occupation and consumption of the land’s products in Northern Virginia in the ten months between June 1861 and March 1862, the Army of Virginia had no subsistence available to them as they moved into the region. The presence of a large Civil War army led to major changes in the environment even when no fighting was taking place, showing the enormous impact soldiers had on the land.

In addition, examining how the soldiers impacted nature will hopefully reflect how nature influenced Pope’s decision making during the campaign. Initially believing the troops could

sustain themselves on the land in Northern Virginia, the lack of agriculture in the region most likely caused Pope to adjust his logistical system. The need to supply his troops made him reliant on railroads bringing supplies to his army. This provides an opportunity to examine the problems related to supplying a large force (approximately 50,000 men) in an enemy territory, especially when nature was not providing additional sustenance.

Since the Confederates had altered the region ecologically, it also impacted the logistics and policies of the Union force that occupied it after the Confederates. Logistically, the Army of Virginia became reliant on the railroads in Northern Virginia. The Orange and Alexandria Railroad connected Manassas Junction with Washington, D.C., making it the major supply line of Pope's force during his campaign in the summer of 1862. The reliance on a single supply route, however, wreaked havoc on nineteenth century armies, something that could emerge from this study. Having to protect the railroad while also preventing the line from extending past its limitations in the region, Pope's army could not have been as mobile as he initially hoped when he first released his orders to live off the land and marched into Virginia. The movement of supplies has received little attention from Civil War historians, but was a major part of the conflict for both sides.

Based on preliminary research in the *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Pope wrote additional orders that indicate how the armies logistic were directly impacted by the reliance on railroads supplying the Union troops due to the lack of natural provisions. His General Orders, nos. 7, 11, and 13 provided a framework for dealing with guerrilla activity that could take place against the Army of Virginia, especially with actions related to the railroads. Pope declared that any person living in the region near his force was to be held responsible for any damage done to his logistical lines or for any attacks on his army. In

response to damages to the roads and rail lines, Confederate civilians within 5 miles of the area would be coerced into repairing the damages and paying for the lost supplies. Without the ability to live off the land, as a result of the desolation caused by the presence of a Confederate force in the year prior to the Second Bull Run Campaign, Pope had to adjust his policies in order to protect his supply line from Confederate guerrilla activity.

Conclusion

Thus, the environment played a significant role in the actions of the Union force during the Second Bull Run campaign as Pope had to modify his logistical plans—becoming reliant on the supplies he received from Washington, D.C., rather than on the subsistence of the southern states like his counterparts west of the Appalachians—and his civil-military policies. Had the environment of Northern Virginia remained abundant with agricultural production, Pope’s force may have become entirely reliant on the fruit of Southern farmers’ labor. Although this would have been a piece of hard war policy as defined by previous historians, it also could have influenced Pope’s decision to implement increasingly harsher policies after his army became dependent on a supply line connected to the railroads. This examination would provide the opportunity to expand on previous examinations of the relationship between the environment and the army during the Civil War, the logistical issues an army faced when marching through an enemy’s territory, and the origins of what some historians have termed “total war.”

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