**The Civil War**

The Civil War started because of uncompromising differences between the free and slave states over the power of the national government to prohibit slavery in the territories that had not yet become states. When Abraham Lincoln won election in 1860 as the first Republican president on a platform pledging to keep slavery out of the territories, seven slave states in the Deep South seceded and formed a new nation ‘the Confederate States of America’. These were South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas.The incoming Lincoln administration and most of the Northern people refused to recognize the legitimacy of secession.

The event that triggered war came at Fort Sumter in Charleston Bay on April 12, 1861. Confederate forces threatened the federal-held Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina. On April 12, after Lincoln ordered a fleet to resupply Sumter, Confederate artillery fired the first shots of the Civil War. Sumter’s commander, Major Robert Anderson, surrendered after less than two days of bombardment, leaving the fort in the hands of Confederate forces. In response, Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to put down the Southern rebellion, a move that prompted four other southern states: **Virginia, Tennessee, Arkansas and North Carolina** to secede.

1. **Military Strategies, Northern vs. Southern**

The two parts were not evenly matched. The North had more in man power and economic resources. Its population was about 22 million compared to the South’s 9 million of which 3.5 million were slaves. In industrial production, the North enjoyed an enormous advantage because 4/5 of the nation’s factories lay in its limits together with most of its mineral wealth, its supply of meat and grain, its financial and banking resources and its shipping. While the North was able to become self-sufficient in war materials, the South had to rely heavily on Europe, importing what supplies it could through a tightened Union blockade. Nevertheless, the south had the advantage of home court since most battles took place in the south. They also possessed an exceptionally skilled general, Robert E. Lee.

When the Civil War began, leaders in both the North and the South thought that it would be a short war, but the two sides had very different military strategies regarding how to bring about a quick end to the conflict. In the North, the first proposed military strategy was General Winfield Scott’s Anaconda Plan, so named because the idea was to destroy the South by shutting off its supplies via a blockade, much as an anaconda snake squeezes the life out of its prey. Once this occurred, Scott suggested, the Union could take an army down the Mississippi River to split the weakened Confederacy in two. President Abraham Lincoln rejected this plan at first, because he knew that the Northern public wanted to see aggressive, immediate military action against the South in general and the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia, in particular. Later, however, he decided to blockade Southern ports, although he stuck to the plan of invading the South. With this strategy in mind, Lincoln ordered General George McClellan to advance on Richmond, capital of the confederacy.

In contrast, the Southern strategy was largely defensive rather than offensive. Going into the war, the Confederates believed that European dependence on cotton would be the key to their victory. Under this theory, sometimes referred to as the King Cotton strategy, England and France would get involved in the war in order to keep up their supplies of cotton, and their military strength would make it impossible for the Union to prevail. However, the Confederacy realized that these countries would not jump into the conflict right away, so in the meantime President Jefferson Davis adopted what he called an “offensive-defensive” military strategy. His idea was that the South build up its forces in key defensive positions to block Union attacks, but when attacked the Confederate armies would always fight aggressively enough to put the Union on the defensive.

1. **Battle of Bull Run and Antietam**

In the summer of 1861, Lincoln ordered General Irvin McDowell to take the offensive in Virginia. The opposing armies met at **Bull Run** on July 21, in the first major battle of the war. Union offensive failed and demoralized Federal troops marched back to Washington. This failure showed to the North the gravity of the conflict and the effort needed to win it. The short-term militia was disbanded and a huge new army of 500,000 volunteers was authorized, consisting of men enlisted for three years or the duration of the war. Gen. Irvin McDowell was replaced by General George McClellan who, by the autumn of 1861, had forged the newly created Army of the Potomac into a real fighting army; but he seemed in no hurry to lead his army into battle and remained inactive throughout the winter of 1861-62.

The Battle of Antietam, also called the Battle of Sharpsburg, occurred on September 17, 1862, at Antietam Creek near Sharpsburg, Maryland. It pitted Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia against Union General George McClellan’s Army of the Potomac and was the culmination of Lee’s attempt to invade the north. The battle’s outcome would be vital to shaping America’s future, and it remains the deadliest one-day battle in all of American military history.

There was a lot at stake for the Battle of Antietam. By mid-summer 1862, President Abraham Lincoln had the Emancipation Proclamation—a document declaring freedom for all slaves in the so-called rebellious states—ready to go. But after several unexpected and demoralizing Union losses, it became clear the Confederacy wasn’t going to be easy to crush. Lincoln’s cabinet feared releasing the Emancipation Proclamation at that time would seem desperate and be difficult to enforce, so Lincoln decided to wait until another decisive Union victory. Not until September 17, 1862, did they win a decisive victory at the Battle of Antietam in Maryland.

* **Significance of the proclamation**

The Emancipation Proclamation made emancipation an official part of the United States's military strategy. As the US army made its way across the South, it truly became an army of liberation. As enslaved people learned about the proclamation, they took an active role in freeing themselves from bondage, knowing that the army would defend them. Black men were accepted into the army to play their own part in ending slavery.

What's more, the Emancipation Proclamation made a promise: it promised that the United States was committed to ending slavery once and for all. It promised African Americans in the South that under no circumstances would they be returned to slavery if the United States won the war. Finally, it promised the Confederacy that there was no turning back the clock to before the war. The Emancipation Proclamation made the promise that the Civil War would change the United States forever.

1. **Europe and the Civil War:**

Since the beginning of the war, the South, conscious of its disadvantages, sought to secure European recognition and persuade Great Britain and France to intervene to obtain Southern independence. The South expected that Great Britain particularly would be forced by her dependence on Southern cotton to intervene to break the blockade. Southerners even tried to precipitate British intervention by placing an embargo on the export of cotton in 1861 and burning a large part of the year’s crop.

However, Southern expectations and faith in cotton were misplaced. Because of heavy exports during the previous two years, British manufacturers held large stocks of cotton when the war broke out. When shortages of raw cotton became acute, alternative supplies were beginning to arrive from India and Egypt.

In fact, European intervention did not come because of the economic reasons but it was because of the military situation. Great Britain and France were prepared to intervene only when the Confederacy seemed about to win, a thing that never really happened throughout the four years of fighting.

1. **The Battle of Gettysburg**

The Battle of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania (July 1–July 3, 1863), was the largest battle of the American Civil War as well as the largest battle ever fought in North America. In mid-June, Lee led his Army of Northern Virginia into Maryland and Pennsylvania in his second invasion of the North, hoping to take pressure off Virginia’s farms during the growing season and seeking a victory on Northern soil. The battle resulted in 23,049 casualties for the Union and 28,063 casualties for the confederate, more than a third of Lee’s army.

These largely irreplaceable losses to the South’s largest army, combined with the Confederate surrender of Vicksburg, Mississippi, on July 4, marked what is widely regarded as a turning point—perhaps the turning point—in the Civil War, although the conflict would continue for nearly two more years and witness several more major battles, including Chickamauga, Spotsylvania Courthouse, Monocacy, Nashville, etc.

1. **Toward a Union Victory (1864-65)**

In March 1864, Lincoln put Ulysses S. Grant in supreme command of the Union armies. Grant headed to Washington, where he led the Army of the Potomac towards Lee’s troops in northern Virginia. Despite heavy Union casualties in the Battle of the Wilderness and at Spotsylvania (both May 1864), at Cold Harbor (early June) and the key rail center of Petersburg (June), Grant pursued a strategy of attrition[[1]](#footnote-1), putting Petersburg under siege for the next nine months.

Meanwhile, exhausted by the Union siege of Petersburg and Richmond, Lee’s forces made a last attempt at resistance, attacking and captured the Federal-controlled Fort Stedman on March 25. An immediate counterattack reversed the victory, however, and on the night of April 2-3 Lee’s forces evacuated Richmond. For most of the next week, Grant and Meade pursued the Confederates along the Appomattox River, finally exhausting their possibilities for escape. Grant accepted Lee’s surrender at Appomattox Court House on April 9. On the eve of victory, the Union lost its great leader: The actor and Confederate sympathizer John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Lincoln at Ford’s Theatre in Washington on April 14. General William T. Sherman received General **Joseph E. Johnston**’s surrender at Durham Station, North Carolina on April 26, effectively ending the Civil War.

1. Attrition warfare is the term used to describe the sustained process of wearing down an opponent so as to force their physical collapse through continuous losses in personnel, equipment and supplies or to wear them down to such an extent that their will to fight collapses. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)