

## Chapter Five: the American Civil War

### **1. The Confederacy and the Union:**

When the Civil War began in 1861, neither North nor South foresaw that the fighting would take four long years, a tremendous amount of money and resources, and the lives of over 600,000 soldiers. 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.

### **2. The War: From Bull Run to Antietam:**

At first, President Lincoln turned for Advice on war strategy to the General-in-Chief of the U.S. Army, Winfield Scott, a veteran of the Mexican war. Scott believed that the Union must prepare for a long struggle. He proposed a plan called 'the Anaconda Plan' - a snake crushing its prey- aiming at starving the South into submission by combining a stringent blockade with the gradual tightening of military pressure all along the Confederate land frontier.

However, Northern public opinion was impatient for quick results and demanded an immediate advance to Richmond, the Confederate capital city; so either by responding to this public opinion or feeling that a quick thrust at the rebel army would put an end to the insurrection, Lincoln ordered General Irvin McDowell to take the offensive in Virginia. The opposing armies met at Bull Run on July 21, 1861, 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. 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.

While conflicts remained quiet in the East, they made real progress in the Mississippi Valley, which proved to be a decisive theatre in the war. The Union armies in the West were organized in two commands: one in Louisville, Kentucky, under Don Carlos Buell, the other a Saint Louis, Missouri, under Henry W. Halleck. In February 1862, Ulysses S. Grant, commanding part of Halleck's army captured two Confederate key posts, Fort Henry on the Tennessee River and Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River. Those victories smashed the centre of the Confederate defensive line and opened the way for a Federal advance southward. Union forces continued their southward advance, fighting numerous battles, and by June 1862, they had won control of the Mississippi River as far down as Memphis, Tennessee.

In the East, McClellan's offensive finally got under way in March 1862. Instead of marching overland to Richmond, he sought to reach the Confederate capital by transporting his army down the Chesapeake Bay to the Virginia coast and then sailing along the James River. Two months later, he was within five miles to Richmond. His invasion of the city was stopped by Lee's army in the Seven Days' battles. Following McClellan's retreat, Lee tried to march northward, fighting Union armies at the second battle of Bull Run, and crossing the Potomac River, bringing thus for the first time the war into the North.

### **3. The Emancipation Proclamation:**

Since the beginning of the war, Lincoln had been under abolitionist pressure to attack slavery; but, although his hatred of the institution was never in doubt, he had to the presidency pledged to a policy of non-interference with slavery where it already existed. Thus, at first he opposed the demand for emancipation by continuing to execute the Fugitive Slave Act and rejecting the demands of some Union generals to free the slaves within their command.

However, as the months passed without a clear outcome for the war, pressure for dealing with the slave issue became so great among Northern public opinion as well as members of Congress that Lincoln could no more ignore that question. In the July 1862, he prepared an Emancipation Proclamation\* (read the document provided) that was issued on September 22, 1862, following Union victory at the battle of

Antietam. The Proclamation declared that on January 1, 1863, unless the Confederacy surrendered in the meantime, all persons held as slaves in those territories still in rebellion would be forever free.

The Proclamation gave the war a new purpose: it became a war for human freedom rather than just for preserving the Union as it had been so far. As Union armies were extending their grip on the South, the emancipation of slaves became a reality. In addition, the Proclamation broke the opposition of the recruitment of black soldiers. Altogether 186,000 blacks served in the Union armies, many of them former slaves.

#### **4. From Gettysburg to Appomattox:**

In the spring of 1863, General Joseph Hooker, one of those who replaced McClellan, tried a second attempt to capture the Confederate capital; but once more Richmond was well defended by Lee. The two armies met at the Battle of Chancellorsville and fought one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War in May 1863.

Following Chancellorsville, General Lee invaded the North, believing that if the Confederacy could win a victory on Northern soil the North might be prepared to abandon the war. In early June 1863, he advanced up the Maryland, crossed the Potomac River and headed for Pennsylvania; but near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, he was faced by Union armies in the greatest battle of the war (July 1-3). Both sides suffered heavy losses: Union casualties were 23,000, those of the Confederacy 28,000. Lee was forced to march back to Virginia; he would never be strong enough to take the offensive.

Union victory at Gettysburg was followed by another one. In April, General Grant, with the help of General William Sherman, started marching east, capturing one Confederate city after another, and ended by establishing a six-week siege of the city of Vicksburg; the siege ended when 30,000 Confederate soldiers were forced to surrender. Vicksburg, a key to the control of the River. Four days later, on July 8, 1863, Port Hudson, the last Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi was also captured, giving the Union an entire control of the river and splitting the Confederacy into two. The latter half of 1863 saw further decisive battles in the West, all of which won by Union armies, ending with the victory at the town of Chattanooga in Tennessee.

#### **5. 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 addition, Great Britain was reluctant, as a great sea power that had traditionally relied upon the blockade weapon, to question Lincoln's authority to use it.

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.

#### **6. Grant Versus Lee:**

Grant's victory in the West persuaded Lincoln that he was the general that could win the war he had been looking for. In March 1864, Lincoln recalled Grant to Washington to assume command of all Union armies.

Grant's strategic plan was based on two simultaneous campaigns: he himself would lead an army to capture Richmond, while Sherman would strike at the Confederate army guarding the city of Atlanta, Georgia. Grant's Virginia campaign started on May 3, and had as a purpose to completely destroy Lee's army but his adversary met him with a superb defensive campaign. A month of savage battles, during which he lost 60,000 soldiers, forced Grant to change his strategy and settle for a siege that would last nine months.

Meanwhile Sherman's efforts brought a major success; on September 2, 1864, he captured Atlanta and from there went deep into Georgia, destroying everything useful to the enemy such as railroads, bridges, cotton gins, food stores, etc. (scorched-earth policy). By the end of December, Sherman reached the Atlantic

coast, slicing into two what remained of the Confederacy, depriving thus Lee's army most of its food supplies. From there he went north into the Carolinas, capturing their main seaports.

On February 3, 1864, Confederate President, Jefferson Davis, met with the newly re-elected Lincoln for peace talks but the latter failed because the only Union offer to stop the war was the dissolution to the Confederacy and the abolition of slavery.

To avoid being surrounded and escaped the war of attrition led by Grant, at the beginning of April 1864, Lee and his army evacuate Richmond heading west, but they found their escape route barred and were forced to surrender to Grant at Appomattox Court House, in southern Virginia. This was the end of the Civil War; Lincoln did not live to witness it as he was shot on April 14 in a Washington theatre by a fanatical Confederate sympathizer, John Wilkes Booth.