

THE CIVIL WAR 1861-1865

Neither North nor South foresaw that secession would bring about almost total war. The struggle that followed employed for the first time such technology of recent warfare as the submarine, the iron-clad ships, the machine gun, the repeating rifle, observation balloons, trench fighting, telegraphy, and railroads. It was the world's greatest war between the Napoleonic Wars and World War I. It was also the most consequential event since the achievement of American independence, for it moved agriculture out put business in power in Washington, now the capital of a country ruled by a single, supreme government. It is the most compelling, the most dramatic event in the nation's history.

THE SECESSION PROBLEM

Despite the specific guarantee of slavery where now existed in the Republican platform, the slave states felt they had to exercise the right of secession that some had claimed (Jefferson and Madison's Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions). Since the Southern dominated Democratic Party had lost the presidency and the Congress, the South felt it could no longer control the federal government's policies and had to safeguard its most important economic institution, slavery.

THE SECESSION MOVEMENT

South Carolina adopted, in December 1860, its "Ordinance of Secession" in a convention elected by the people. By late February 1861, six other states of the lower South followed her lead. They now chose delegates to meet at Montgomery, Alabama, to organize the Confederate States of America. Jefferson Davis of Mississippi was made President and Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia, Vice President. They adopted a constitution exactly like that of the United States, but with these main differences: 1) the right to own slaves and from them from one state to another was guaranteed; 2) state sovereignty was recognized but nothing said about the right of secession; 3) protective tariffs were prohibited; and 4) the term of the president was limited to six years.

CAUSES OF SECESSION AND WAR

The South justified secession because of various alleged infringements upon their constitutional rights by the North. Their complaints were based upon the events of the previous decade: the abolitionist propaganda against the South's key institution of slavery, the activities of the underground railroad, the obvious violation of the North against the Fugitive Slave Act, John Brown's raid, and the election of Lincoln by a purely sectional and one hostile to slavery. The admission during the fifties of the new states of California, Minnesota and Oregon gave the free states a clear majority in the Senate. Soon no new slave states would be admitted and when 2/3 of the states were free, a constitutional amendment outlawing slavery in the United States could easily be adopted.

All Southern grievances related to slavery. No mention at the time was made of states' rights. However, the belief of the South that states had the right to declare acts of Congress null and void had been held for so long that many in the South just accepted as a right. For the present debate the causes of the Civil War depended upon economic and moral considerations relating to slavery; it is most likely the war may not have occurred if slavery had not existed, because the main problem between the sections prior to 1840 was over the tariffs, an issue that had been solved. However, when the question turned to allowing slavery in the territories there seemed to be no solution that either side could agree to. The secession movement created a separate de facto government with differing interests that was bound to result in military struggle. Once the fighting began, the preservation of the Union

NORTHERN RESPONSE TO SECESSION

A large minority of Northern opinion was willing to let the South depart in peace and was opposed to the use of force to preserve the Union. Many believed the quarrel might be patched up with compromise and the South returned to the Union. President Buchanan sympathized with the South's argument. He,

however, believed the South did not have the right to leave the Union, but he also believed the Constitution did not give him the power to do anything about.

The Crittendon Compromise was one of numerous plans considered in hopes of satisfying the South. This compromise was proposed by J.J. Crittendon of Kentucky and advocated “permanent amendments” to the Constitution. These would have provided: 1) for the protection of slavery in the states where it was legal; 2) approval for the domestic slave trade; 3) that the United States government guarantee payment for slaves escaping the South; 4) that Congress not abolish slavery in the District of Columbia without the consent of Virginia and Maryland; 5) for reviving the Missouri Compromise line. Lincoln had little to say during the transition of the Presidency, but he vocally opposed any extension of slavery in the territories. The unwillingness of either side to compromise doomed this and other attempts to save the Union without war.

THE PROBLEM OF FORT SUMTER

Federal military property in the South was immediately taken over by the Southern States. These attempts were generally easy with Buchanan refusing to take action against the states. Attention concentrated on Fort Sumter located on a defensible island in the important Southern port of Charleston, South Carolina. Many of the military personnel stationed at the fort were of Northern origin and refused to be taken over by the South. The South could not permit the Federals to retain this fort within the important seaport. Lincoln expressed a conciliatory tone in his inaugural address. He decided to handle this delicate situation by maintaining the federal troops but to avoid any offensive measures. Lincoln knew he could not act as the aggressor in this situation and lose the support of those Northerners who wished to let the South go without the use of force and giving those states that had slavery but remained in the Union a cause for joining the South. Southern “fire eaters” in Charleston fired the first shots (April 12, 1861) at the fort. The fort was surrounded and forced to surrender on the 14th. On the 15th Lincoln asked for volunteers and declared a blockade of Southern ports. Both sides prepared for war.

In May and June, the states of Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina and Tennessee seceded. The Northwest counties of Virginia seceded from Virginia and organized themselves as West Virginia and were accepted into the Union in 1863. Other states that had slavery but did not secede were Missouri, Kentucky and Maryland.

ADVANTAGES OF THE NORTH

A Northern victory was favored by several factors. 1) The North had a population almost three times as large as the South (which was also over one-third slaves) and large numbers of immigrants who were willing to fight against the morality of slavery. 2) The industrial resources of the North were both great and diversified. During the previous decade the North had used to their advantage the great economic boom that swept the Nation, while the South remained focused on producing crops. The wealth of the North allowed them to better afford the cost of the war. The South was forced to trade wheat and corn to England in exchange for war good, leaving the South short on the supply of food in the later stages of the war. 3) The weakness of the Confederate government was advantageous to the North. The North avoided constitutional scruples and gave Lincoln unusual powers in prosecuting the war. The Confederate government emphasized the rights of the states and individual liberties at a time when discipline and sacrifice were needed. 4) The shipbuilding abilities in New England gave the North a stronger Navy which would be used to blockade the South.

ADVANTAGES OF THE SOUTH

The South had few advantages in the war. 1) The South believed the cotton they provided to England and France would mean these countries would try to break a Northern blockade. Also, the South was hoping Britain’s fear of the United States’ growing world economic power would be halted with a Southern victory. 2) The South had Army personnel of superior training. 3) The South had a stronger motivation for war. They were fighting for what they believed was their economic survival. This was stronger than the North’s motivation for fighting for the preservation of the Union.

NORTHERN GOVERNMENT DURING THE WAR

Because of the unified economic interests, the North was able to adequately unify its government for the war. Economically the government enacted a high tariff to hurt southern cotton importation and keep Northern goods high in demand, enacted a low rate income tax to bring money into the government, and created a unified paper currency with the National Banking Act. This act further outlawed the issuing of private bank notes in the United States.

The North also gave the government unprecedented, and possibly unconstitutional, powers to execute the War of Southern Secession. A Conscription Act in 1863 required counties to supply quotas of men for army service. This resulted in draft riots in New York City. To halt this problem, Lincoln enacted martial law, suspended the writ of habeas corpus in many places to silence protestors of the war. In addition, many people were able to avoid military service by hiring someone to fight in their place.

SOUTHERN GOVERNMENT DURING THE WAR

In contrast to the unity and economic prosperity of the North during the War for Southern Independence, conditions in the South grew progressively worse as the war continued.

The Confederate government was not as effective as it might have been. President Davis quarreled with his subordinates; he continuously meddled in the conduct of the war. Vice President Alexander Stephens was a stickler for the rights of the states to conduct the war.

Towards the end of the war widespread draft evasion occurred. When the North marched into the South and disrupted production and transportation, the economy of the South crumbled.

THE FIRST BATTLE OF BULL RUN

The first important engagement of the war brought Union defeat at the Battle of Bull Run (July 1861) in Virginia just southwest of D.C. With the Washington social elite on hand in the hills nearby, the battle showed how unprepared for war both sides were in war. It was realized the war would not be a short one as everyone in the North assumed it would be.

After the battle, General Winfield Scott, the old Mexican War hero, devised the Union strategy for fighting and defeating the South. It was called the Anaconda Plan. It was a three-pronged attack, one from the North upon the Confederate capital, Richmond, the second a naval blockade of the southern coast to deny the South foreign goods and weapons, and the third, a drive down the Mississippi, then the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, thus surrounding the South and crushing its ability and will to resist, as the Anaconda snake crushed its prey.

THE FIRST DRIVE TO RICHMOND

In 1862 plans called for General George C. McClellan to land forces by sea on the peninsula between the James and York Rivers and march toward Richmond. General Irwin McDowell led another large army at the same time from Washington toward Richmond, which would leave D.C. vulnerable. General Robert E. Lee brilliantly countered this strategy by dispatching a force under General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson toward D.C. Lincoln was forced to recall McDowell's army to protect the capital. Lee then defeated McClellan in the Seven Days Battle and McClellan was forced back.

THE WAR AT SEA

Northern control of the federal navy yielded great advantages from the beginning. Northern strategy of blockading Southern ports went into effect immediately. Its purpose were both to prevent the export of cotton and prevent the importation of essential war goods. At first the South itself forbade the exportation of cotton, hoping to force Britain and France to break the blockade. The North at first lacked enough ships to fully enact the blockade but ships were rapidly being added to the patrols.

The South made a clever effort to break the blockade by covering a wooden vessel with iron plates to withstand cannon balls. The Union also prepared ships known as ironclads. This foretold the coming of iron and steel navies. With higher availability of iron minerals in the North, its navy was able to build more such ships to protect its cheaper wooden ones. The result was a successful blockade of the South,

which starved the South not only of war supplies but civilian necessities. Britain and France's wood shipped navies were useless in breaking the blockade.

THE BATTLE OF ANTIETAM

In September 1862, Lee crossed the Potomac in an offensive move into Maryland and toward Washington. McClellan moved his forces to check Lee's planned invasion and met Lee's forces at Antietam Creek in Maryland and won a crucial victory in a bloody engagement. Lee succeeded in escaping, however. This was the first crucial eastern victory for the North, which gave them a diplomatic advantage over the South. Lincoln used this advantage to issue his Emancipation Proclamation from a position of strength and thereby ensure England would not take an active role on the side of the Confederacy. McClellan, however, did not take advantage of his success and follow the Confederate Army to Richmond. This failure led Lincoln to remove him from the army and place him with General Ambrose Burnside.

THE WAR IN THE WEST

The third phase of the Anaconda Plan was placed under the charges of Ulysses S. Grant. His successes in the West earned him rapid promotion and eventually control of the eastern army.

Grant in February 1862, captured Fort Henry on the Tennessee River and Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River. These victories opened the way for the invasion of the South. Grant advanced into Tennessee to capture the important railroad center of Corinth in April 1862. In the advance and capture of Corinth, Grant fought the bloody Battle of Shiloh where the Confederate General Sidney Johnston was killed. The Confederates were forced to evacuate Corinth and the less able General Henry Halleck took command of the Confederate forces in the West. In the summer of 1862 New Orleans was captured by Admiral David Farragut who then moved up the Mississippi to capture Natchez. His attempt to capture Vicksburg, the command center on the river for the Confederacy, did not succeed. However, he kept the city under siege for several months.

In July 1863, Grant finally took Vicksburg. Now Union gunboats, controlling the entire Mississippi, severed the Confederacy. In September, Grant took the important railroad junction of Chattanooga in the victories at Chickamauga and Lookout Mountain. These victories earned Grant a promotion to the eastern theatre and General William T. Sherman took charge of the army in the West.

THE EASTERN THEATRE

In December 1862, at the Battle of Fredericksburg, Lee halted General Burnside's advance to Richmond. This resulted in Lincoln replacing Burnside with General Thomas Hooker. At Chancellorsville (where "Stonewall" Jackson was killed) Lee defeated Hooker's advance to Richmond.

Lee carried the war into enemy territory because his men needed shoes stored at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Lee moved on Gettysburg with a force of 80,000 men. But in an historic three day battle, General George Meade defeated Lee's army and forced it back to Virginia. This was the turning point in the war. With the Union victory, Europe ended its pledges to help the Confederacy. Now, Northern victory was just a matter of time.

After Gettysburg, Grant was placed in charge of the forces in the East and followed Lee back to Richmond. In the ensuing Wilderness Campaigns, Grant progressively moved Lee back to Richmond with a series of left flank moves. Lee had an answer for each of Grant's moves, but was running out of supplies, men and time and was soon forced to entrench himself in Richmond.

SHERMAN'S MARCH TO THE SEA

Sherman's aim was to divide the South even further by marching southeast to Savannah on the Atlantic. In September 1864, with 100,000 men he took Atlanta. In the march to Savannah he carried out a scorched earth policy of destroying everything in sight. His troops lived off the countryside. He wanted to destroy the production capabilities of the South and end the war more quickly. From Savannah, Sherman marched northward into South Carolina and North Carolina destroying more cities and resources. In late

April, he forced the surrender of General Joseph Johnston, the Confederates man in charge of the Southern army.

THE ELECTION OF 1864

Lincoln ran under the National Union Party label with a War Democrat, Andrew Johnson of Tennessee, as his running mate.

The Democrats nominated General George McClellan who had been removed from his command by Lincoln. The party platform favored a negotiated peace with the South; however, McClellan himself favored preservation of the Union. The North was tired of war and the martial law and it seemed Lincoln would be defeated in August of 1864, but the Wilderness Campaigns and the success of Sherman restored the confidence of the Americans to finish the war. Lincoln won reelection by 212 electoral votes to only 21 for McClellan.

SOUTHERN SURRENDER

In April 1865, trapped in Richmond by Grant in the North and Sherman in the South, Lee tried to break out of Richmond since he was running out of everything needed to win the war. When Lee's attempted breakthrough to escape Richmond failed, he surrendered to Grant at the famous meeting at Appomattox Courthouse. This ended the fighting of the Civil War.