



The Civil War 1861-1862

*For The Common Defense
Allen Millet & Peter Maslowski*

Since both sides fought for unlimited objectives—the North for reunion and (eventually) emancipation, the South for independence and slavery's preservation—a compromise solution was impossible. No short, restrained war could convince either side to yield; only a prolonged and brutal struggle would resolve the issue.

As the North and South pursued their objectives, sheer numbers of men and industrial capacity were extremely significant. One Confederate general wrote that the war became one "in which the whole population and whole production of a country (the soldiers and the subsistence of armies) are to be put on a war footing, where every institution is to be made auxiliary to war, where every citizen and every industry is to have for the time but the one attribute—that of contributing to the public defense." Neither belligerent could depend upon improvised measures to equip, feed, and transport its huge armies. Men with administrative skills working behind the lines were equal in importance to men at the front. Furthermore, the coordination of logistical and strategic matters on a vast scale could not be left to individual states. Massive mobilization required an unprecedented degree of centralized national control over military policy.

I

The North's war-making resources were much greater than the Confederacy's. Roughly speaking, in 1861 the Union could draw upon a white population of 20 million, the South upon 6 million. Two other demographic factors influenced the numerical balance. First, the South contained 3.5 million slaves who were initially a military asset, laboring in fields and factories and thereby releasing a high percentage of white males for military service. However, after 1862-1863, when the North began enlisting black troops, the slaves progressively became a northern asset. Second, between 1861 and 1865 more than 800,000 immigrants arrived in the North, including a high proportion of males liable for military service. Approximately 20 to 25 percent of the Union Army's men were foreign-born. Ultimately more than 2 million men served in the Union Army, which reached its peak strength of about 1 million late in the war. Perhaps 750,000 men fought in the Confederate Army, which had a maximum strength of 464,500 in late 1863.* This nearly total mobilization of southern white males created a dilemma. Fattening the thin gray ranks limited the number of workers in agriculture, mines, foundries, and supply bureaus, risking such reduced output that the soldiers could not be fed and supplied.

*Not all of these men on either side were "present for duty." For example, out of the 464,500 Confederates, only 233,500 were "present for duty."

At 4:30 A.M. on April 12, 1861, a lightning-like flash and thunderous roar shattered the predawn stillness at Charleston, South Carolina. A mortar shell arced across the sky, its burning fuse etching a parabolic path toward Fort Sumter. Moments after the shell exploded, guns ringing the harbor began battering the fort as if "an army of devils were swooping around it." For thirty-four hours artillery commanded by General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard fired at Sumter, setting numerous fires and knocking huge masonry flakes in all directions. Miraculously, the seemingly murderous barrage killed none of the fort's soldiers and workmen. But the commanding officer, Major Robert Anderson, who had been Beauregard's artillery instructor at West Point, knew the good luck could not continue. Having satisfied the demands of duty and honor, he ordered the Stars and Stripes lowered and the white flag raised. The Civil War had begun.

No one knew exactly what caused the war, although thoughtful explanations included the moral issue of slavery, the practical question of slavery's expansion into the territories, and the constitutional problem of states' rights versus national authority. Whatever the causes, Fort Sumter showed that a generation of escalating sectional tension had finally reached the flash point. Nor did anyone foresee exactly what the war would be like. Most people optimistically predicted a brief conflict waged with the romantic heroism of a Sir Walter Scott novel. Instead, the outlines of modern total warfare emerged during a four-year ordeal.

The Confederacy did not have the financial structure to wage a long war. It had few banking experts and institutions, had very little specie at its disposal, and had its wealth invested primarily in land and slaves, which were hard to convert into liquid capital. For income the South traditionally sold cotton to the North and to Europe, but the war interrupted this trade. These financial weaknesses undermined the South's ability to pay for the war by fiscally responsible means. Taxation produced less than 5 percent of the Confederacy's income. The Confederate Constitution prohibited protective tariffs, and although the Congress enacted a variety of tax measures, they produced little revenue. The South also tried to borrow money at home and abroad, but few southerners had money to invest, and foreigners had doubts about the new nation's survival. In all, bonds produced less than 33 percent of government income. By necessity rather than choice, Secretary of the Treasury Christopher Memminger turned to the printing press, churning out more than \$1.5 billion in paper money that represented approximately two-thirds of Confederate wartime revenue. As in the Revolution, overabundant paper money combined with severe commodity shortages to create rampant inflation.

Compared to the South, inflation was not so severe in the North, which also financed the war through taxation, loans, and paper money. However, drawing upon its superior fiscal strength, the Union relied primarily upon taxes and borrowing, the former yielding approximately 21 percent of government income, the latter 63 percent. Beginning in 1862 Congress also authorized the Treasury Department to print paper money, called "greenbacks." During the war it issued \$450 million in greenbacks, but this represented only one-sixth of government expenditures.

The North's industrial superiority was also impressive. In 1860 the southern states had 110,000 manufacturing establishments, while the northern states had only 18,000. The total value of manufactured goods in Virginia, Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi was less than \$85 million, but New York's alone was almost \$380 million. However, these numbers do not completely reveal the South's industrial weakness. Southern states relied on northern technological know-how and skilled labor, and many skilled laborers went back north. The Confederacy's raw-materials base could not support needed industrial expansion. For instance, during the year ending June 1, 1860, the states forming the Confederacy produced 36,790 tons of pig iron, but the figure for Pennsylvania alone was 580,049 tons. Furthermore, Confederate mines and factories, clustered in the Upper South and in coastal cities, were vulnerable to enemy assault.

Railroads were the indispensable element in Civil War transportation, but the South contained only 9,000 of the 30,000 miles of track in 1860.

Again, these figures do not fully expose the disparity. Most southern lines were short and single track. The numerous and competitive railroad companies used different track gauges, and when rival lines entered a city, they invariably remained unconnected. Gaps existed in seemingly continuous lines, tracks and bridges were often poorly constructed, and repair facilities were negligible. Locomotives, rolling stock, and rails were scarce, and the South could not produce them during the war. The government's reluctance to supervise the railroads compounded all these problems. In May 1863 Congress granted the government broad authority over the railroads, but President Jefferson Davis hesitated to wield the power. Not until early 1865, far too late, did the Confederacy finally take control of the railroads.

The South did not have a railroad network that tied its scant industrial base together or readily permitted long-distance strategic movements. Only one genuine trunk line, running from Memphis through Corinth, Chattanooga, and Lynchburg to Richmond, linked the Mississippi Valley with Virginia. A second trunk line from Vicksburg to Atlanta, where it branched to Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah, remained unfinished. Four lateral lines crossed those two "main" railroads. One ran from Memphis to Jackson to New Orleans; another stretched from Columbus, Kentucky, through Corinth to Mobile; a third connected Louisville, Nashville, Chattanooga, and Atlanta; the fourth hopped along the seaboard from Savannah to Charleston to Wilmington, then ran north to Petersburg and Richmond. Should the North sever any of these fragile arteries, the result would be disastrous.

Northern railroads formed a much better network and suffered less than their southern counterparts from different gauges, poor terminal facilities, gaps, shoddy workmanship, and shortages. The North's industrial facilities allowed it to produce ample rolling stock and rails. Equally important, President Abraham Lincoln did not have Davis's sensitivity about government interference with railroads. In January 1862 Congress authorized Lincoln to take possession of any railroads and place them under military control whenever public safety warranted it. The next month Lincoln appointed Daniel C. McCallum director of the United States Military Railroads, and in May the President took formal possession of all railroads. However, he intimated that if a company sustained the war effort, he would not actually seize the railroad and direct its internal affairs. The President also saw to it that cooperative lines received government aid. He secured such a high degree of cooperation that McCallum's organization, with but a few exceptions, only operated railroads captured or built in Confederate territory.

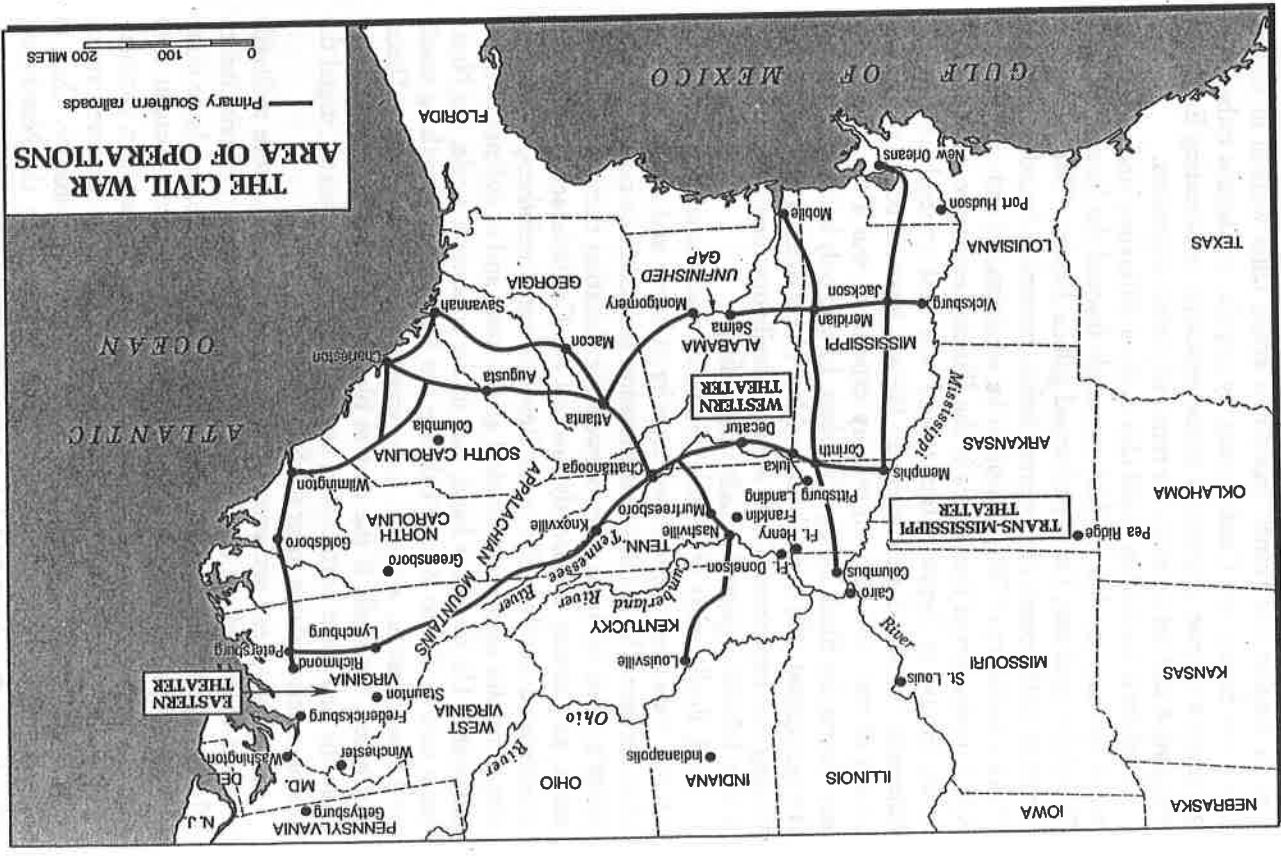
Northern water and wagon transportation was also better. Yankee sea power restricted Confederate coastal traffic, and Union gunboats

soon plied most of the great western rivers. The South had few barges and steamboats and could not build very many; the northern situation was the opposite. Despite the importance of railroads and steamboats, armies straying from the railroad and wharf depended upon horse- and mule-drawn wagons. When Confederate wagons fell into disrepair, shortages of iron tires and leather goods delayed or prevented repair or replacement. When Union wagons broke down, quartermasters simply requisitioned new ones.

Divisiveness within southern society exacerbated its manpower and resource problems. Southern Unionists were especially numerous in the Appalachian highland where, vowed a Knoxville newspaper editor, they would "fight Secession leaders till Hell froze over, and then fight them on the ice." This was no idle boast. Viewing the mountain Unionists as a traitorous wedge thrusting into the Confederacy's heartland, the South conducted military operations into the region, but could not eradicate the Loyalists. For example, two mounted regiments escaped from North Carolina to fight for the Union, thousands of east Tennesseans joined blue-coated units, and northern Alabama Unionists formed the Federal 1st Alabama Cavalry. Before the war ended, more than 100,000 Southern Unionists fought for the North, with every Confederate state except South Carolina providing at least a battalion of white soldiers for the Union Army. Given the South's limited manpower and the North's seemingly insatiable need for soldiers, this "missing" Southern army that turned up in the enemy's ranks was a crucial element in the ultimate Confederate defeat.

States rights enthusiasts also disrupted southern harmony. The Confederate Constitution guaranteed state sovereignty. Unwilling to surrender much state power, prominent politicians such as Vice President Alexander H. Stephens and Governors Joseph E. Brown of Georgia and Zebulon B. Vance of North Carolina resisted the centralization of authority necessary for efficient warmaking.

Although facing long odds, the Confederate cause was far from hopeless. Many imponderables made northern advantages less imposing than they seemed. One of the greatest uncertainties was the fate of four border slave states that had not seceded. Delaware's resources were minimal, but Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri contained 2.5 million whites and extensive agriculture and industrial resources. Should these states join the Confederacy, the manpower and resources imbalance would be partially redressed. Another unknown was the war's length. The North required considerable time to convert its war-making potential into actual military power. A short war would render the North's manpower and material superiority superfluous. Foreign intervention was also possible;



the South expected English and perhaps French assistance. Supplying four-fifths of the cotton used in European mills, the South felt confident that the English and French economies would falter without its cotton. When war began, the Confederacy, by popular consensus rather than government decree, imposed a cotton embargo, anticipating European recognition and aid in return for renewed cotton shipments.

High-level leadership could also make a difference, and a comparison of the commanders in chief seemingly favored the South. An 1828 West Point graduate, Davis performed gallant Mexican War service and served in both houses of Congress before becoming President Franklin Pierce's Secretary of War, a position he administered with considerable skill. Lincoln served four terms in the Illinois Legislature and one term in the House of Representatives and was best remembered for his humorous yarns and great strength. He was ignorant of the theory and history of war, and his own military experience was a fifty-day militia stint during the Black Hawk War, when, he said only half jokingly, he led charges against wild onion beds and lost blood battling mosquitoes. By training and experience Davis seemed ideally qualified to lead a nation at war; Lincoln appeared equally unqualified.

And, finally, what of morale? Statistics and accounting ledgers do not win wars, but courage and tenacity at home and at the front are often decisive. The South's determination seemed more certain than the North's. Men on both sides viewed the situation through the past's prism, and history apparently favored the Confederacy. Southerners considered themselves akin to the Revolutionary forefathers, fighting for lofty principles against a tyrannical government and in defense of home and hearth. On the other hand, cast in the conqueror's role, the North had a task similar to Britain's during the Revolution. How long would northerners sustain a war to force southern states back into a Union they hated, especially if the cost in blood and treasure became high? From the first some northerners, especially Peace Democrats, urged the Lincoln administration to let the South go.

The widespread sentiment that southerners were more militarily inclined than Yankees reinforced the South's sense of invincibility. Whether Confederates were more militant is debatable, but large numbers of people on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line thought they were. Many antebellum Americans believed that northeastern commercialism sapped manly virtues, while plantation life accustomed young men to live outdoors, to ride and shoot, and to enjoy violence. Thus, in the eastern theater where Union armies came from the Northeast, southerners may have had a psychological edge. When a Confederate boasted that he could whip ten Yankees, many Yankees believed him.

II

As telegraph lines spread the news of Fort Sumter across the sun-drenched nation, the Lincoln and Davis administrations pondered their strategic options. Strategy flows from an amalgam of factors. National policy is of primary importance, but strategists must also consider geography, local political pressure, military theory and training, resources and logistics, foreign opinion, and enemy intentions. The North's initial policy objective was to reunite the Union by conquest and subjugation if necessary, which required offensive operations and complete military victory. For the South, which only needed to defend itself, a stalemated war that eroded northern determination and brought foreign assistance would suffice. Thus the strategic equation was simply stated. Could the North conquer the Confederacy before the South convinced the northern populace and the British government that it was unconquerable?

As the combatants surveyed the battlefield, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Kansas prairies and more than 3,500 miles along the coast, four main theaters were evident. Compressed between Chesapeake Bay and the Appalachians, the eastern theater consisted of two subtheaters: the Shenandoah Valley, and the remainder of Virginia east of the mountains. The Shenandoah was a bountiful southern granary and an excellent invasion route into the North, allowing Confederate forces to threaten Washington and other cities, as well as two vital northern transportation systems, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. By contrast, the Valley was a strategic dead end for northern forces, channeling them deeper into the mountains. In eastern Virginia, four large rivers (the James, York, Rappahannock, and Potomac) and several lesser streams flowed west to east, dividing the region between Washington and Richmond. These waterways made superb defensive positions against an army coming overland, but provided potential deep penetration routes if northern invaders came by sea. Thus, while each combatant had inviting possibilities for conducting end runs around the enemy's right flank, a direct approach toward Richmond or Washington would involve desperate fighting. With both capitals located in the eastern theater, events there exerted an especially strong pull on national emotions and strategy.

Lying between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River, the expansive western theater also had two subtheaters: middle and east Tennessee, and the Mississippi River line. Here geography favored the Union, since no natural barriers—unless Kentucky seceded—barred an advance. The Cumberland, Tennessee, and Mississippi Rivers flowed north to south, puncturing any defensive line. The third theater was the