

# THE CIVIL WAR, 1861

**D**uring the administration of President James Buchanan, 1857–1861, tensions over the issue of extending slavery into the western territories mounted alarmingly and the nation ran its seemingly inexorable course toward disunion. Along with slavery, the shifting social, economic, political, and constitutional problems of the fast-growing country fragmented its citizenry. After open warfare broke out in Kansas Territory among slaveholders, abolitionists, and opportunists, the battle lines of opinion hardened rapidly. Buchanan quieted Kansas by calling in the Regular Army, but it was too small and too scattered to suppress the struggles that were almost certain to break out in the border states.

In 1859 John Brown, who had won notoriety in “Bleeding Kansas,” seized the Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in a mad attempt to foment a slave uprising within that slaveholding state. Again Federal troops were called on to suppress the new outbreak, and pressures and emotions rose on the eve of the 1860 elections. Republican Abraham Lincoln was elected to succeed Buchanan; although he had failed to win a majority of the popular vote, he received 180 of the 303 electoral votes. The inauguration that was to vest in him the powers of the presidency would take place March 4, 1861. During this lame-duck period, Mr. Buchanan was unable to control events and the country continued to lose its cohesion.

## **Secession, Sumter, and Standing to Arms**

Abraham Lincoln’s election to the Presidency on November 6, 1860, triggered the long-simmering political crisis. Lincoln’s party was opposed to the expansion of slavery into the new western territories. This threatened both the economic and political interests of the South, since the Southern states depended on slavery to maintain their way of life and their power in Congress. South Carolina on December 20 enacted an ordinance declaring that “the union now subsisting between South Carolina and other States, under the name of the ‘United States



Above: *Noncommissioned Officer Frock Coat, ca. 1861*; Below: *Artillery Fuse or Primer Pouch Made by Watervliet Arsenal, ca. 1861*



of America,' is hereby dissolved." Within six weeks, six other deep-South states seceded from the Union and seized Federal property inside their borders, including military installations, save Fort Pickens outside Pensacola and Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. (*Map 22*) To the seven states that formed the Confederate States of America on February 18, 1861, at Montgomery, Alabama, the U.S. government's retention of the forts was equivalent to a warlike act. To provide his fledgling government with a military force, on March 6 the new Confederate Executive, Jefferson Davis, called for a 100,000-man volunteer force to serve for twelve months.

The creation of a rival War Department south of the 35th Parallel on February 21 shattered the composition of the Regular Army and disrupted its activities, particularly in Texas, where Maj. Gen. David E. Twiggs surrendered his entire command. With an actual strength of 1,080 officers and 14,926 enlisted men on June 30, 1860, the Regular Army was based on five-year enlistments. Recruited heavily from men of foreign birth, the U.S. Army consisted of 10 regiments of infantry, 4 of artillery, 2 of cavalry, 2 of dragoons, and 1 of mounted riflemen. It was not a unified striking force. The Regular Army was deployed within seven departments, six of them west of the Mississippi. Of 198 line companies, 183 were scattered in 79 isolated posts in the territories. The remaining 15 were in garrisons along the Canadian border and on the Atlantic coast. They were patently unprepared for the mission of forcibly returning the Southern states to the union.

Created by Secretary of War John C. Calhoun and expanded by Secretary of War Davis in 1853, the departments of the U.S. Army had become powerful institutions by the eve of the Civil War. Within each of the trans-Mississippi departments, a senior colonel or general officer by brevet commanded 2,000 officers and men. All the states east of the Mississippi constituted the Department of the East, where Bvt. Maj. Gen. John E. Wool controlled 929 regulars.

A department commander was responsible for mobilizing and training militia and volunteer forces called into Federal service and for coordinating his resources with any expeditionary force commander who operated inside his territory or crossed through his department. A department commander often doubled in command, having responsibility for the administration of his department as well as for conduct of operations in the field. He often had a dual staff arrangement, one for the department and another for the campaign. For strategic guidance and major decisions he looked to the President and General in Chief; for administrative support he channeled his requirements through the Secretary of War to the appropriate bureau chief. In the modern sense he had no corps of staff experts who could assist him in equating his strategic goals with his logistical needs. In many respects the departmental system was a major reason why the Union armies during the Civil War operated like a team of balky horses. A system well suited to the demands of maintaining a small peacetime force could not effectively organize and manage combat forces consisting of hundreds of thousands of soldiers.

The 1,676 numbered paragraphs of the U.S. Army Regulations governed the actions of a department commander. The provisions concerning Army organization and tactics were archaic in most cases



Map 22

despite Davis' efforts in 1857 to update the regulations to reflect the experience of the Mexican War. During the Civil War the Regulations would be slightly modified to incorporate the military laws passed by two wartime Congresses. In the South, these same regulations would govern the policy and procedures of the Confederate forces.

The roster of the Regular Army was altered considerably by Davis' action in creating the Confederate Army. Of the 1,080 in the active officer corps, 286 resigned or were dismissed and entered the Confederate service. (Conversely, only 26 enlisted men are known to have violated their oaths.) West Point graduates on the active list numbered 824; of these, 184 were among the officers who turned their backs on the United States and offered their swords to the Confederacy. Of the 900 graduates then in civil life, 114 returned to the Union Army and 99 others sought Southern commissions. General in Chief Winfield Scott and Col. George H. Thomas of Virginia were among the few prominent Southerners who fought for the Union. More serious than their numbers, however, was the high caliber of the officers who joined the Confederacy; many were regimental commanders, and three had commanded at departmental level.

With military preparations under way, Davis dispatched commissioners to Washington a few days after Lincoln's inauguration on March 4, 1861, to treat for the speedy takeover of Forts Sumter and Pickens. Informally reassured that the forts would not be provisioned without proper notice, the envoys returned to Montgomery expecting an uneventful evacuation of Sumter. President Lincoln had to move cautiously, for he knew Sumter's supplies were giving out. As each March day passed, Sumter aggravated the harshness of Lincoln's dilemma. In case of war, the fort had no strategic value. And if Lincoln reinforced it, Davis would have his act of provocation and Lincoln might drive eight more slaveholding states out of the Union. Yet if Sumter was not succored, the North might cool its enthusiasm for the Union concept and become accustomed to having a confederation south of the Mason-Dixon Line. There were no easy choices for the new President.

President Lincoln spent two weeks listening to the conflicting counsel of his constitutional advisers and made up his own mind on March 29 to resupply Fort Sumter with provisions only. No effort would be made to increase its military power. By sea he soon dispatched a token expedition and on April 8 notified South Carolina's governor of his decision. The next move was up to the local Confederate commander, Brig. Gen. Pierre G. T. Beauregard. On the eleventh, Maj. Robert Anderson, Sumter's commander, politely but firmly rejected a formal surrender demand. At 4:30 the next morning Confederate batteries began a 34-hour bombardment. Anderson's ninety-man garrison returned it in earnest, but Sumter's guns were no match for the concentric fire from Confederate artillery. Offered honorable terms on April 14, Anderson surrendered the Federal fort, saluted his U.S. flag with fifty guns, and, with his command, was conveyed to the fleet outside the harbor to be taken to New York City.

Unquestionably, the Confederates fired the first shot of the war and with that rash act removed many difficulties from Lincoln's path in his efforts to preserve the Union. On the fifteenth Lincoln personally penned a proclamation declaring the seven Southern states in insurrec-

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## THE BALLOON EXPERIMENT

On June 19, 1861, Thaddeus Lowe (1832–1913) ascended from the lawn of the White House in a tethered, hydrogen-filled spherical balloon and telegraphed his observations of the Confederate lines across the Potomac to the ground. It was a stunt—an effective one. Lowe, one of the country's leading balloonists before the war and passionately convinced that aerial reconnaissance would greatly aid military operations, needed high-level support to force balloons upon a skeptical Army hierarchy.

With the backing of President Lincoln, he achieved a trial. The Army rarely used balloons to their best advantage, and the experiment lapsed after Chancellorsville.



*View of Balloon Ascension, ca. 1862*

tion against the laws of the United States. To strangle the Confederacy, on the nineteenth Lincoln declared the entire coast from South Carolina to Texas under naval blockade. To augment the reduced Regular Army, Lincoln asked the governors of the loyal states for 75,000 militiamen to serve for three months, the maximum time permissible under existing laws. With a unanimity that astonished most people, the Northern states responded with 100,000 men. Within the eight slave states still in the Union, the call for militia to suppress the rebellion was angrily and promptly rejected; and the President's decision to coerce the Confederacy moved Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas to join it. The border states of Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware were still undecided; and each side moved cautiously to avoid pushing them into the other's camp.

As spring changed into summer the magnitude of the job that the Union had proclaimed for itself—the conquest of an area the size of western Europe, save Scandinavia and Italy, defended by a plucky and proud people and favored by military geography—was imperfectly understood. Although Lincoln later emerged as a diligent student of warfare, he was as yet unversed in the art. His only service in the military had been as a junior officer of volunteers during the Black Hawk war, and he had seen no combat action. His rival, Davis, from the outset knew his military men quite well and thoroughly understood the mechanics of building a fighting force. He had commanded a volunteer regiment in the Mexican War and was experienced at the national policy level due to his service as Secretary of War. Yet, as time passed, Davis would mismanage his government and its military affairs more and more.



*Union Volunteers in Camp*

Virginia's secession caused Col. Robert E. Lee, Scott's choice to be the Union's field leader, to resign his commission and offer his services to his state. The Confederates moved their capital to Richmond, Virginia, site of the largest iron works in the South and 100 miles south of the Union capital, Washington. On May 23 Union forces crossed into northern Virginia and occupied Arlington Heights and Alexandria. With Virginia and North Carolina in rebellion, Lincoln extended the naval blockade and called for a large volunteer army backed by an increased regular force.

Correctly anticipating that Congress in its session to open on July 4 would approve his actions, Lincoln, on his own authority, established 40 regiments of U.S. Volunteers (42,034 men) to serve three years or for the duration of the war. He ordered the Regular Army increased by 1 regiment of artillery, 1 of cavalry, and 8 of infantry (actually, 9 regiments were added), or 22,714 men, and the Navy by 18,000 sailors. The new regular infantry regiments were each to have 3 battalions of about 800 men, in contrast to the 1-battalion structure in the existing regular and volunteer regiments. However, because the recruits preferred the larger bonuses, laxer discipline, and easygoing atmosphere of the volunteers, most of the newly constituted regiments were never able to fill their additional battalions to authorized strength. The volunteer units were state units, not Federal or regular units.

The enthusiastic response to Lincoln's various calls forced him to ask the governors to scale down the induction of men. The overtaxed camps could not handle the increasing manpower. In raising the Army, Lincoln used methods that dated back to Washington's day. The combat efficiency and state of training of the new units varied from good to very poor. Some militia regiments were well trained and equipped, others were regiments in name only. The soldiers often elected their own company officers, and the governors commissioned majors and colonels. The President appointed generals. Although many of the newly

commissioned officers proved to be enthusiastic, devoted to duty, and eager to learn, incompetents were also appointed. Before the end of 1861, however, officers were being required to prove their qualifications before examining boards of regular officers; those found unfit were allowed to resign.

Frequently advised by governors and congressmen, Mr. Lincoln selected generals from among leading politicians to give himself a broader base of political support. Some political generals, such as John A. Logan and Francis P. Blair, Jr., distinguished themselves, whereas many others proved military hindrances. Lincoln gave a majority of the commissions in the first forty volunteer units to regulars on active duty, to former West Pointers like George B. McClellan (who had resigned to pursue a business career) or to those who had held volunteer commissions during the Mexican War. On the other hand, Davis never gave higher than a brigade command to a Confederate volunteer officer until he had proved himself in battle.

Both North and South failed to develop a good system to replace individuals in volunteer units. The Confederacy, though hamstrung by its insistence that Texans be commanded by Texans and Georgians by Georgians and by governors' insistent demands for retaining home guards, did devise a regimental system that stood up well until the closing days of the war. Except for Wisconsin, Illinois, and Vermont, the Union armies never had an efficient volunteer replacement system. As battle losses mounted and the ranks of veteran regiments thinned, commanders were forced to send men back to their home states on recruiting duty or face the disbandment of their regiments. Northern governors with patronage in mind preferred to raise new regiments, allowing battle-tested ones to decline to company proportions.

The enlisted Regular Army was kept intact for the duration of the war. Many critics believed that the Union should have used regulars to cadre the volunteer units. But this practice was initially impossible during the summer of 1861 for at least two reasons. Lincoln did not foresee a long war, and the majority of regulars were needed on the frontier until trained men could replace them. In addition, Lincoln's critics overlooked the breakdown in morale that would have accompanied the breakup of old line regiments, many of which had histories and honors dating back to the War of 1812. An officer holding a regular commission in 1861 had to resign to accept a commission in the volunteers

## THE BALTIMORE RIOTS

As a slave state with economic and cultural ties to both sections, Maryland required careful handling from Abraham Lincoln's government, which faced isolation if the state seceded. On April 19, 1861, while marching through Baltimore to catch the Washington train, four companies of the 6th Massachusetts Regiment traded shots with a mob. Four soldiers and twelve civilians died. Initially, President Lincoln agreed to route units away from Baltimore. When more units arrived in Washington, however, the government imposed military rule on Baltimore, imprisoning secessionists without trial and suppressing newspapers. The state legislature rejected secession, saving Maryland for the Union.

unless the War Department specifically released him. Most regulars were loath to resign, uncertain that they would be recalled to active duty after the war. Thus, during 1861 and part of 1862, promotion in the Regular Army was slow. All regulars could accept commissions in the volunteers by 1862, and in many cases the year they had spent in small-unit command seasoning had its reward in advancing them to higher commands. Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman, both U.S. Military Academy graduates returning from civilian life, asked specifically for volunteer regimental commands at first and soon advanced rapidly to general officer posts.

## **The Opponents**

As North and South lined up for battle, the preponderance of productive capacity, manpower, and agricultural potential clearly lay on the side of the North. Its crops were worth more annually than those of the South, which had concentrated on growing cotton, tobacco, and rice. Between February and May 1861 the Confederate authorities missed the opportunity to ship baled cotton to England and draw bills against it for the purchase of arms. In sea power, railroads, material wealth, and industrial capacity to produce iron and munitions, the North was vastly superior to the South. This disparity became even more pronounced as the ever-tightening blockade gradually cut off the Confederacy from foreign imports. The North had more mules and horses, a logistical advantage of great importance since supplies had to be carried to the troops from rail and riverheads.

The difference in manpower was also critical. According to the census of 1860, the population of the United States numbered 31,443,321. About 23 million of them were in the twenty-two Northern states and 9 million in the eleven states that later seceded. Of the latter total, 3.5 million were slaves. The size of the opposing armies would reflect this disparity. At one time or another about 2.1 million men would serve in the Northern armies, while 800,000–900,000 men would serve the South. Peak strength of the two forces would be about 1 million and 600,000, respectively.

Yet not all the advantages lay with the North. The South possessed good interior lines of communications; and its 3,550-mile coastline, embracing 189 harbors and navigable river mouths, was difficult to blockade effectively. Possessors of a rich military tradition in wars against the British, Spanish, Mexicans, and Indians, the Southerners initially managed to form redoubtable cavalry units more easily than the North and used them with considerable skill against the invading infantry. As the war moved along, the armies on both sides demonstrated high degrees of military skill and bravery. Man for man they became almost evenly matched, and their battles were among the bloodiest in modern history.

Jefferson Davis hoped that the sympathy or even the intervention of European powers might more than compensate for the Confederacy's lack of material resources. This hope, largely illusory from the start, became less and less likely of realization with the emancipation of the slaves, with every Union victory, and with the increasing effectiveness of the blockade.

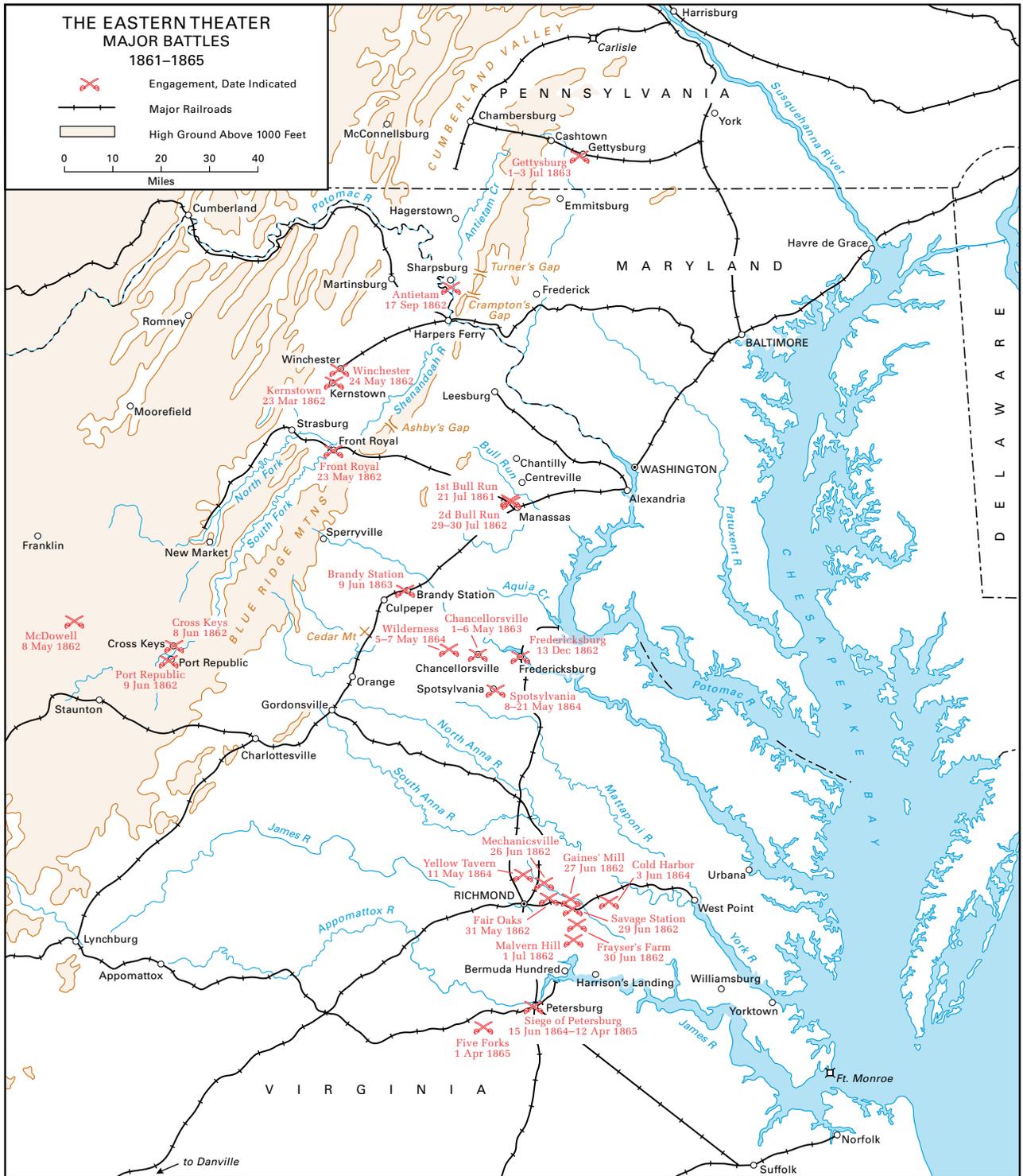
Militarily, the South's greatest advantage over the North was simply the fact that if not attacked it could win by doing nothing. To restore the Union the Federal forces would have to conquer the Confederacy. Thus the arena of action lay below the strategic line of the Potomac and Ohio Rivers. Here, geography divided the theater of war into three interrelated theaters of operations. The Eastern Theater lay between the Atlantic Ocean and the Appalachian Mountains; the Western Theater embraced the area from the Appalachians to the Mississippi; and the Trans-Mississippi Theater ran westward to the Pacific Ocean.

In the east, the triangular shape of northern Virginia made it a difficult target to attack and provided it some advantage. The northern apex of the state aimed like an arrow at the Federal capital. The Potomac River and the lower Chesapeake Bay formed the right leg of the triangle; its left bounded on the Blue Ridge and the adjacent Shenandoah Valley. The base of the triangle followed the basin of the James and Appomattox Rivers, whereon stood Richmond, halfway between the bay and the valley. For three-and-a-half years Federal commanders would be defeated on the legs and in the center of this triangle as they tried to take Richmond and defeat the Army of Northern Virginia. Operating on these interior lines, General Lee would strike any Union force attempting to invade and follow up with lightning invasions of the North to keep it off balance. In the three neighboring counties of Virginia within this triangle, more than half a million men would clash in mortal combat over the course of four years. More soldiers—Union and Confederate—would die in these three counties than in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the War with Mexico, and all the Indian Wars combined. (*See Map 23.*)

The hammer for swinging against the anvil of Union forces in Virginia came from the line of the Ohio River as Union forces moved along the invasion routes of the Green, Cumberland, Tennessee, and Mississippi Rivers. To breach the lower reaches of the Appalachians, the Federals needed the railroad centers at Nashville, Chattanooga, and Atlanta; with them they could strike north through the Carolinas toward the line of the James. But in the spring of 1861, the anvil and hammer concept had not yet occurred to the military leaders in Washington. Only the General in Chief, Scott, had a concrete strategic proposal for waging total war. He recommended that Lincoln take the time to train

## ANACONDA PLAN

General in Chief Winfield Scott devised his plan for the blockading and slow crushing of the rebellion, likened to a snake slowly strangling its prey, because he wanted to avoid a bloody and destructive war that would for generations estrange the South from the rest of the nation. He reckoned that the Confederacy would have no choice but to sue for peace and readmission to the Union once economic hardship spread throughout the South and Europe refused to grant diplomatic recognition to the rebellious southern states. Critics said such a plan might take years to work, if it ever did; thus the best strategy was a quick, decisive military campaign against Richmond. After four bloody years, the implementation of something very like the Anaconda Plan drove the South to its knees.



Map 23

an army of 85,000 men and that he enforce the naval blockade of the Confederacy. Then the Army was to advance down the Mississippi to divide and conquer the South. The press ridiculed the strategy, calling it the Anaconda Plan, analogous to an anaconda snake's slowly squeezing its prey to death. But few leaders examined the South in terms of its military geography or concentrated on a strategy to prevail over it. Instead, most thought in terms of political boundaries and a short war, perhaps even just one major battle, which would end with the capture of Richmond.

### **First Bull Run (First Manassas)**

In the early summer of 1861 the partly trained ninety-day militia, the almost untrained volunteers, and one newly organized battalion of regulars—a total force of 50,000 Federals commanded by Brig. Gen. Irvin McDowell—defended the nation's capital. Thirty miles to the southwest, covering the rail and road hub at Manassas, Virginia, General Beauregard posted 20,000 Confederates, to be joined by 2,000 more within a few days. To the left, on their defensive line along the Potomac, the Confederates stationed another 11,000 men under Brig. Gen. Joseph E. Johnston in the Shenandoah Valley town of Winchester. Opposing Johnston around Martinsburg, with the mission of keeping the Confederates in place, was Maj. Gen. Robert Patterson with 18,000 Federals. On the extreme right of the Confederate northern Virginia defense line was Col. John B. Magruder's force, which had recently repulsed Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler's Union troops at Big Bethel, Virginia, on 10 June and forced them back into their sanctuary at Fort Monroe.

Big Bethel, the first large-scale engagement of the Civil War, demonstrated that neither opponent was as yet well trained. The Confederates had started preparations earlier to protect northern Virginia and therefore might have had a slight edge on their opponents. General McDowell, only recently a major of regulars, had less than three months to weld his three types of units (militia, volunteer, and regular) into a single fighting force. He attempted to do too much himself, and there were few competent staff officers in the vicinity to help him. McDowell's largest tactical unit was a regiment until just before he marched out of Alexandria. Two to four brigades, plus a battery of regular artillery—the best arm against raw infantry—formed a division. In all, thirteen brigades were organized into five divisions. McDowell parceled out his forty-nine guns among his brigade commanders, who in turn attached them to their regiments. His total force for the advance was 35,732 men, but of these one division of 5,752 men dropped off to guard roads to the rear.

McDowell's advance against Beauregard on four parallel routes was hastened by Northern opinion, expressed in editorials and Congressional speeches, which demanded immediate action. Scott warned Lincoln against undertaking the "On to Richmond" campaign until McDowell's troops had become disciplined units. But Lincoln, eager to use the ninety-day militia before they departed, demanded an advance, fully aware that the Confederates were also unseasoned and cherishing the belief that one defeat would force the South to quit. Scott, influenced by false intelligence that Beauregard would move immediately on

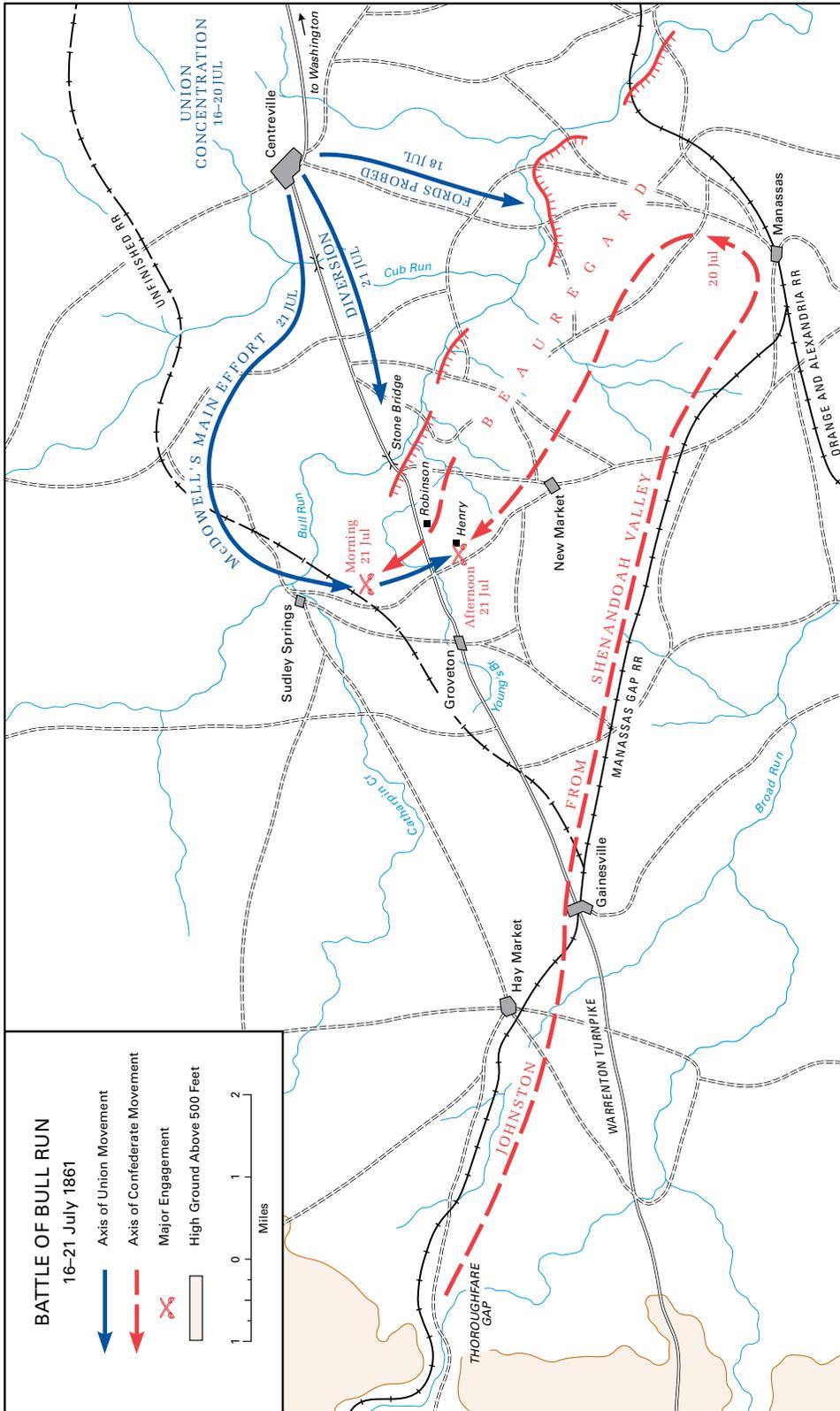
Lincoln, eager to use the ninety-day militia before they departed, demanded an advance, fully aware that the Confederates were also unseasoned and cherishing the belief that one defeat would force the South to quit.

Washington, acceded. McDowell's battle plan and preparations accelerated accordingly. The plan, accepted in late June, called for Butler and Patterson to prevent the Confederates facing them from reinforcing Beauregard while McDowell advanced against Manassas to outflank the Southern position. Scott called it a good plan on paper but knew Johnston was capable of frustrating it if given the chance. McDowell's success against the Confederate center depended upon a rapid thirty-mile march, if 35,000 Federals were to keep 22,000 Confederates from being reinforced.

On July 16, 1861, the largest army ever assembled on the North American continent up to that time advanced slowly on both sides of the Warrenton pike toward Bull Run. McDowell's marching orders were good, but the effect was ruined by one unwise caution to the brigade commanders: "It will not be pardonable in any commander ... to come upon a battery or breastwork without a knowledge of its position." The caution recalled to McDowell's subordinates the currently sensationalized bugbear of the press of the Federal forces' being fooled by "masked batteries." (The term originated at Sumter, where a certain battery was constructed, masked by a house that was demolished just before the guns opened fire.) Accordingly, 35,000 men moved with extreme caution just five miles on the seventeenth. The next day the Federals occupied Centreville, four miles east of Stone Bridge, which carried the Warrenton pike over Bull Run creek. (*Map 24*)

Beauregard's advance guards made no effort to delay the Federals but fell back across the battle line, now extending three miles along the west bank of Bull Run, which meandered from Stone Bridge southeast until it joined the Occoquan stream. The country was fairly rough, cut by streams and thickly wooded. It presented formidable obstacles to attacking raw troops, but a fair shelter for equally raw troops on the defensive. On the eighteenth, while McDowell's main body waited at Centreville for the trains to close up, the leading division demonstrated against Beauregard's right around Mitchell's Ford. The Federal infantry retired after a sharp musketry fight, and a 45-minute artillery duel ensued. It was the first exchange of four standard types of artillery ammunition for all muzzleloading guns, whether rifled or smoothbore. Solid shot, shell, spherical case or shrapnel, and canister from eight Federal guns firing 415 rounds were answered by seven Confederate pieces returning 310 rounds. Steadily withdrawing its guns, the oldest and best-drilled unit of the South, the Washington Light Artillery of New Orleans, broke off the fight against well-trained U.S. regular artillery. Both sides had used rifled artillery, which greatly increased the accuracy and gave a range more than double that of the smoothbores. Yet throughout the war rifled guns never supplanted the new, easily loaded Napoleons. In the fight, defective Confederate ammunition fired from three new 3-inch iron rifles would not fly point foremost but tumbled and lost range against McDowell's gunners. That the error went undetected for days reveals the haste in which Davis had procured his ordnance.

Sure that his green troops could not flank the Confederate right, McDowell tarried two more fateful days before he attacked in force. Engineers reconnoitered for an undefended ford north of Stone Bridge. Finding no vedettes at the ford near Sudley Springs, McDowell decided to envelop the Confederate left on July 21 and destroy the



Map 24

Manassas Gap Railroad to keep Johnston from reinforcing the outnumbered Beauregard. The idea was excellent, but the timing was slow.

While McDowell frittered away four-and-a-half days before he was ready to envelop in force, new tools of warfare swung the advantages of mobility, surprise, and mass at critical points toward Beauregard. On July 17 spies in Washington told of McDowell's departure from Alexandria. By electric telegraph Beauregard in turn alerted Richmond. Davis, also telegraphing, ordered commanders around Richmond, at Aquia Creek, and at Winchester to concentrate their available strength at Manassas. Johnston lost no time in deceiving Patterson by using Col. J. E. B. Stuart's cavalry as a screen and adroitly maneuvering his infantry away from the valley. Johnston selected the best overland routes for his artillery and cavalry marches and arranged for railroad officials to move his four infantry brigades. Brig. Gen. Thomas Jackson's lead brigade, accompanied by Johnston himself, covered fifty-seven miles in twenty-five hours by road and rail to reach Beauregard on the twentieth.

At daylight on the twenty-first McDowell unmasked the first phase of his attack plan. Three brigades of Brig. Gen. Daniel Tyler's division appeared before Stone Bridge; and a huge, 30-lb. Parrott rifle dragged into place by ten horses commenced a slow fire directed by six cannoners of the 2d U.S. Artillery. Five brigades in two divisions directly under McDowell's command meanwhile marched on an eight-mile circuitous route toward the undefended ford at Sudley Springs. McDowell's goal was the Confederate left rear and a chance to cut the railroad. The movement was not unobserved, however. At 9:00 A.M. a signal flag wigwag from the Henry house announced the point of the enveloping columns at Sudley's crossing, and the intelligence was immediately relayed to Beauregard and Johnston, three miles away on the Confederate right.

The first weight of the Federal attack fell against eleven Confederate companies and two guns. For an hour McDowell's regiments, firing one by one and moving forward cautiously in piecemeal fashion, tried to overrun Beauregard's left flank. The timid tactics gave Beauregard time to redeploy ten regiments across a three-mile front to form a second defensive line across the north face of the hill behind the Henry house. At 10:30 A.M., as the summer sun grew hotter, a portentous dust cloud ten miles northwest of Manassas heralded the arrival of Kirby Smith's brigade, the tail of Johnston's reinforcements from the Shenandoah Valley.

For two hours the roar of the battle swelled in volume. Federal musketry crashes and the thunder from the heavier pieces indicated that McDowell was now committing whole brigades supported by four batteries of artillery. North of the Warrenton turnpike, the Confederate infantry began to lose its brigade cohesion and fall back in disorder. As Beauregard and Johnston rode to the sound of battle, 10,000 Federals were punishing 7,000 Confederates in the vicinity of the Henry and Robinson houses. Johnston, though senior in command, turned the battle over to Beauregard and galloped off toward Manassas to direct the arrival of reinforcements. Brig. Gen. Barnard E. Bee's brigade was pushed back from its advanced position toward the flat-crested hill behind the Henry house, where Jackson's newly arrived brigade had formed. In rallying his routed troops, Bee shouted: "Look at Jackson's Brigade; it stands like a stone wall! Rally behind the Virginians!" (Out

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of these words came a nickname that Jackson would carry to his grave, and after his death in 1863 the Confederate War Department officially designated his unit the Stonewall Brigade.) Screened by a wooded area, three brigades regrouped behind Jackson's lines; and the rally became a great equalizer as McDowell's strength dissipated to 9,000 men with no immediate infantry reserves in sight.

The cloud of dust moved closer to Manassas Junction, but McDowell ignored it and allowed a lull to settle over his front for almost two hours. At 2:00 P.M., having deployed two batteries of regular artillery directly to his front around the Henry house with insufficient infantry protection, McDowell renewed the battle. By midafternoon the dust had blended sweaty uniforms into a common hue, and more and more cases of mistaken identity were confusing both sides in the smoke of the battle. Then, as part of the confusion, came a fateful episode. To the right front of McDowell's exposed artillery, a line of advancing blue-clad infantry, the 33d Regiment, Virginia Volunteers, suddenly appeared through the smoke. The Federal artillery commander ordered canister, but the chief artillery officer on McDowell's staff overruled the order, claiming that the oncoming blue uniforms belonged to friendly infantry arriving in support. The Virginians advanced to within seventy yards of the Federal guns, leveled their muskets, and let loose. The shock of their volley cut the artillery to shreds; and for the remainder of the day nine Federal guns stood silent, unserved, and helpless between the armies.

About 4:00 P.M., Beauregard, with two additional fresh brigades, advanced his entire line. Shorn of their artillery, the faltering Federal lines soon lost cohesion and began to pull back along the routes they knew; there was more and more confusion as they retired. East of Bull Run, Federal artillery, using Napoleon smoothbores in this initial pull-back from the field, proved to the unsuspecting Confederate cavalry, using classic saber-charging tactics, that a determined line of artillerymen could reduce cavalry to dead and sprawling infantry in minutes.

As in so many battles of the Civil War yet to come, there was no organized pursuit in strength to cut the enemy to ribbons while he fled from the immediate area of the battlefield. At Bull Run, the Federal withdrawal turned into a panic-stricken flight about 6:30 P.M., when Cub Run Bridge, about a mile west of Centreville, was blocked by overturned wagons. President Davis, just arrived from Richmond, had two daylight hours to arrive at a decision for pursuit. In council with Johnston and Beauregard, Davis instructed the whole Confederate right to advance against the Centreville road, but apparently his orders were never delivered or Beauregard neglected to follow them. Davis thus lost a splendid opportunity for seeing in person whether the unused infantry and artillery on the right of his line could have made a concerted effort to destroy McDowell's fleeing forces. Logistically, Federal booty taken over the next two days by the Confederates would have sustained them for days in an advance against Washington.

Strategically, Bull Run was important to the Confederates only because the center of their Virginia defenses had held. Tactically, the action highlights many of the problems and deficiencies that were typical of the first year of the war. Bull Run was a clash between large, ill-trained bodies of recruits who were slow in joining battle. The rumor

## SHIELD OF THE CAPITAL: THE WASHINGTON FORTS

In 1861, after the secession of the southern states, the city of Washington stood as a symbol of the Union. In the midst of hostile Virginia and unfriendly Maryland, northern leadership worried over the safety of their capital. After the disaster at Bull Run, General McClellan appointed Maj. John G. Barnard to supervise the construction of a fortification system for Washington. By the end of the year, Barnard had overcome manpower and terrain problems

to construct forty-eight forts around the city. With the fighting in northern Virginia from 1862–1864, the threat to the capital remained and its defenses were continually improved. By the end of the war, Washington had become the world's most heavily fortified city, surrounded by sixty-eight enclosed forts and batteries with over 900 guns, supported by another ninety-three batteries for field guns and twenty miles of trenches.



*Officers of 55th Infantry at Fort Gaines, near Tenley, D.C.*

of masked batteries frightened commanders; plans called for maneuvering the enemy out of position, but attacks were frontal; security principles were disregarded; tactical intelligence was nil; and reconnaissance was poorly executed. Soldiers were overloaded for battle. Neither commander was able to employ his whole force effectively. Of McDowell's 35,000 men, only 18,000 crossed Bull Run and casualties among these, including the missing, numbered about 2,708. Beauregard, with 32,000 men, ordered only 18,000 into action and lost 1,982.

Both commanders rode along the front, often interfering in small-unit actions. McDowell led his enveloping column instead of directing all his forces from the rear. Wisely, Johnston left the battlefield and went to the rear to hasten his Shenandoah Valley reserves. Regiments were committed piecemeal. Infantry failed to protect exposed artillery. Artillery was parceled out under infantry command; only on the retreat was the Union senior artillery officer on the scene allowed to manage his guns. He saved twenty-one guns of the forty-nine that McDowell had. Beauregard's orders were oral, vague, and confusing. Some were delivered, others were never followed.

### The Second Uprising in 1861

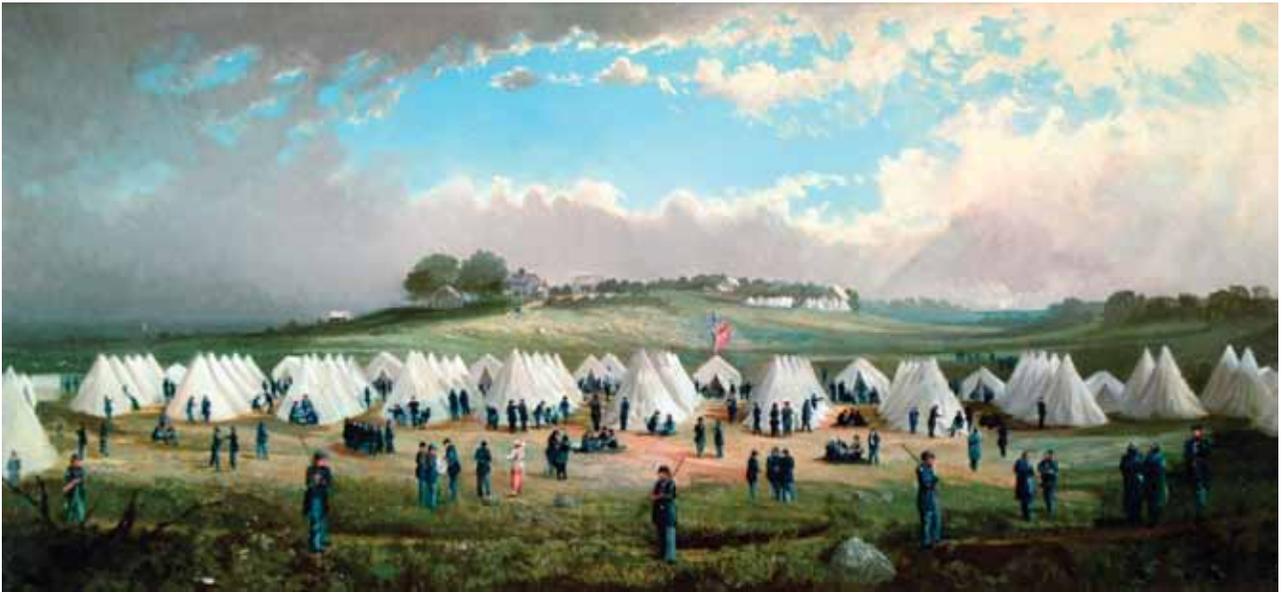
The Southern victory near Manassas had an immediate and long-range effect on the efforts of both the Northern and the Southern states. First, it compelled Northern leaders to face up to the nature and scope of the struggle and to begin the task of putting the Union

on a full war footing. Second, it made them more willing to heed the advice of professional soldiers directing military operations along a vast continental land front from Point Lookout, Maryland, to Fort Craig in central New Mexico. Third, Confederate leaders, after their feeling of invincibility quickly wore off, called for 400,000 volunteers, sought critical military items in Europe, and turned to planning operations that might swing the remaining slaveholding states and territories into the Confederacy. Finally, the most potent immediate influence of Bull Run was upon the European powers, which eyed the Confederacy as a belligerent with much potential for political intervention and as a source of revenue. Unless the U.S. Navy could make it unprofitable for private merchant ships to deliver arms to Southern ports and depart with agricultural goods, speculative capital would flow increasingly into the contraband trade.

Strategically, in 1861 the Navy made the most important contribution toward an ultimate Union victory. At considerable expense and in haste to make the blockade effective, the Navy by the end of the year had assembled 200 ships of every description, armed them after a fashion, and placed them on station. With new congressional acts regarding piracy, revenue, confiscation, and enforcement in hand, commanders of this motley fleet intercepted more and more swift blockade runners steaming out of Nassau, Bermuda, and Havana on their three-day run to Wilmington, North Carolina; Charleston, South Carolina; or Savannah, Georgia. In two round trips a blockade runner, even if lost on its third voyage, still produced a considerable profit to its owner. By the end of 1861 such profit was no longer easy, because the Navy had many new fast ships specially fitted for blockade duty in service.

After 1861 the naval character of the war changed. There was no Civil War on the high seas except for the exciting exploits of three or four Confederate cruisers that raided commercial shipping. As the war progressed, both opponents perfected the nature and construction of ships and naval ordnance for a war that would be fought in coastal waters or inside defensible harbors. The three main weapons, the rifled naval gun, the armored ram, and the torpedo mine, were developed and used in novel ways. To offset the defensive use of these weapons by the South, the U.S. Navy beginning in August 1861 landed more and more Army expeditionary forces and gradually gained footholds in the vicinity of Mobile, Savannah, Charleston, and Wilmington. By the end of the war, joint Navy-Army expeditions would convert the sea blockade into a military occupation and would seal off all major ports in the South. Even more important were the river fleets of the U.S. Navy on the Ohio, Missouri, and Mississippi Rivers. These fleets, operating closely with the local Army commanders, provided essential elements in the evolving Union strategy of splitting the Confederacy along the natural invasion routes of the river valleys.

The defeat at Bull Run was followed by “a second uprising” in the North that greatly surpassed the effort after Sumter’s surrender. President Lincoln and Congress set to with a will to raise and train the large Federal armies that would be required to defeat the South, to select competent Army field commanders, and to reorganize and strengthen the War Department. On July 22, 1861, Lincoln called for a 500,000-man force of three-year volunteers and during the rest of July



Army Camp #6, *Amos G. Chapman, n.d.*

quickly disbanded the ninety-day militia. The more experienced men entered the newly authorized volunteer force. Meanwhile, the volunteer quota and the increase of regulars, mobilized after Sumter, had so far progressed that camps and garrisons, established at strategic points along the 1,950-mile boundary with the border states and territories, were bustling with activity. As July ended, Congress authorized the volunteers to serve for the duration of the war and perfected their regimental organization. Four regiments were grouped into a brigade, and three brigades formed a division. The infantry corps structure would be fixed when the President directed. In effect, the Lincoln administration was building a Federal force, as opposed to one based on joint state-Federal control and support. State governors, given a quota according to a state's population, raised 1,000-man volunteer regiments, bought locally whatever the units needed, shipped them to federal training centers, and presented all bills to the U.S. government. Accordingly, Congress floated a national loan of \$250 million.

Pending the transformation of volunteer forces, both opponents necessarily suspended major military operations in the east for the remainder of 1861. President Lincoln conferred frequently with General Scott and his military advisers about steps already taken to strengthen Union forces along the continental front. Regular Army units were consolidating their position at Fort Craig and Fort Union to protect the upper Rio Grande valley against any Confederate columns coming from Texas. To protect communication lines to the Pacific and the southwest and to guard Federal supplies at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and St. Louis, Missouri, Union troops were deployed in eastern Kansas and across central Missouri.

In terms of territorial gain and long-term strategic value, the Western Theater of Operations was more active in 1861 than was the Eastern. Both Union and Confederacy coveted Kentucky and Missouri. The con-

fluence of the Tennessee, Cumberland, and Ohio Rivers lay within Kentucky; while the vast Mississippi-Missouri river network flowed through Missouri. Whoever controlled these two states and these rivers had a great strategic advantage. At the onset of hostilities, Kentucky adopted a policy of neutrality. The loss of Kentucky, in Lincoln's judgment, would be "nearly the same as to lose the whole game," so he carefully respected Kentucky's decision in May to remain neutral. But a Confederate force occupied the strategically important town of Columbus, Kentucky, overlooking the Mississippi River, on fears that Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, poised across the Ohio River at Cairo, Illinois, would do so first. The rebel move into Kentucky violated that state's neutrality stance, and Kentucky's legislature responded by requesting that Union forces remove the Confederate invaders. On September 6 Grant launched a joint Army-Navy operation into Kentucky and occupied the towns of Paducah and Southland at the mouth of the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers. This move prevented further Confederate advances in Kentucky and positioned Grant's forces for campaigns in 1862.

In Missouri, pro-Southern and Unionist sympathizers fought a violent campaign for control. A 6,000-man Federal force under Brig. Gen. Nathaniel Lyon defeated Southern militia to occupy the state capital at Jefferson City. A Confederate army of nearly 13,000 moved from Arkansas to destroy the smaller Union force. At Wilson's Creek, Lyon launched a preemptive strike against the rebel camp in the early morning of 10 August, dividing his numerically inferior troops and assaulting from the north and south. The Southern army quickly recovered and regrouped. Outgunned, the Union force fought off three Confederate counterattacks against Bloody Hill before it was able to break contact and withdraw. Based on the number of troops engaged, Wilson's Creek was the most costly Civil War battle in 1861, with the Confederates losing 1,222 killed and wounded. Union casualties were 1,317, including Lyon, the first general officer to be killed in the conflict. The victory at Wilson's Creek buoyed Confederate morale. But Union forces under Charles C. Fremont and later Henry W. Halleck occupied central Missouri and contained rebel forces in the southwestern corner of the state for the remainder of 1861.

A battle with equally long-term consequences was fought for western Virginia. Forty counties elected to secede from Virginia and asked for Federal troops to assist them in repelling any punitive expeditions emerging from the Shenandoah Valley. Between May and early July 1861, Ohio volunteers, under the command of Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, occupied the Grafton area of western Virginia, hoping to protect the railroad that linked the Ohio Valley with Baltimore. In a series of clashes at Philippi, Beverly, and along the Cheat River, McClellan's forces checked the invading Confederates, paving the way for West Virginia's entrance into the Union. Even the arrival of Jefferson Davis' principal military adviser and Commander of the Confederate forces in Virginia, not yet the Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, General Robert E. Lee, failed to reverse Union gains. Lee attempted to coordinate several overly ambitious offensives in the Tygart and Kanawha River valleys; but poor roads, dispirited troops, miserable weather, and shortages of supply led to a series of failures. He returned to Richmond after this failure of his first major campaign by the end of



*General McClellan's Field Glasses, ca. 1861*

October 1861. His reputation as a military commander suffered, while that of his principal foe, General McClellan, soared; some saw McClellan as the “hope of the North.”

Although the border strife intensified in the west, Scott attended to the more important front facing Virginia. The nation’s capital was imperiled, the Potomac was directly under Confederate guns, and Maryland and Delaware were being used as recruiting areas for the Southern cause. On July 22, Lincoln, following Scott’s advice, summoned McClellan, who was thirty-five years old at the time, to Washington, and assigned him command, under Scott, of all the troops in the Washington area. McClellan’s reputation was unrivaled, and the public had acclaimed him for his victories in western Virginia. On August 21 McClellan named his force the Army of the Potomac and commenced molding it, with considerable skill, into a formidable machine.

McClellan organized the Army of the Potomac into eleven 10,000-man divisions, each with three brigades of infantry, a cavalry regiment, and four six-gun batteries. In general the other Union armies adopted this structure, and the Confederates deviated from the model only in their cavalry organization. In the Army of Northern Virginia, for example, General Lee treated his cavalry as a tactical arm, grouped first as a division and later as a cavalry corps. Union cavalry consisted of little more than mounted infantry, carrying out a multitude of duties, such as serving as pickets, wagon train escorts, and couriers for the division commander. McClellan planned, once Lincoln activated the corps, to withdraw one-half of the artillery pieces from each infantry division and center them at corps level as a reserve to be deployed under army command. He insisted that the .58-caliber single-shot, muzzleloading Springfield rifle be the standard weapon of the infantry, and most of the Army of the Potomac possessed it when corps were organized on March 8, 1862.

McClellan completely transformed the military atmosphere around Washington before the end of 1861. He was an able administrator, but his critics doubted his abilities as a top field commander. And from the day McClellan activated the Army of the Potomac, he was politically active in trying to oust Winfield Scott. Finally, on November 1, the aged and harassed General in Chief, taking advantage of a new law, retired from the Army. That same day, acting on assurances that McClellan could handle two tasks concurrently, Lincoln made McClellan the General in Chief and retained him in command of the Army of the Potomac. By the ninth, basing his action on Scott’s earlier groundwork, McClellan carved out five new departments in the west, all commanded by Regular Army officers. In addition, he continued the work of the new Department of New England, where General Butler was already forming volunteer regiments for scheduled amphibious operations off the Carolina coast and in the Gulf of Mexico.

For the Union cause in Kentucky, the new General in Chief’s move came none too soon. After Kentucky declared for the Union on September 20, both sides rapidly concentrated forces in western Kentucky. Maj. Gen. Albert S. Johnston, recently appointed to command Confederate forces in the west, fortified Bowling Green and extended his defensive line to Columbus. Union troops immediately occupied Louisville and planned advances down the railroad to Nashville, Tennessee,



*Model 1861 Springfield Rifle, Caliber .58*

and eastward into the Appalachians. By November 15, the commanders of the Departments of the Ohio and the Missouri, dividing their operational boundaries in Kentucky along the Cumberland River, were exchanging strategic plans with McClellan in anticipation of a grand offensive in the spring of 1862.

The outpouring of troops and their preparations for battle disrupted the leisurely pace of the War Department. In haste to supply, equip, and deploy the second quota of volunteers, a score or more of states competed not only against one another but also against the Federal government. Profiteers demanded exorbitant prices for scarce items, which frequently turned out to be worthless. Unbridled graft and extravagance were reflected in the bills that the states presented to the War Department for payment. After Bull Run a concerted, widespread movement emerged for the dismissal of Secretary of War Simon Cameron, who had failed to manage his office efficiently. Cameron selected Edwin M. Stanton, former Attorney General in President Buchanan's Cabinet, as his special counsel to handle all legal arguments justifying the War Department's purchasing policies. Knowing that the cabinet post had considerable potential, Stanton worked hard to restore the War Department's prestige. Behind the scenes Stanton aided his fellow Democrat, McClellan, in outfitting the Army of the Potomac. As the summer faded, Stanton, having once scoffed at Lincoln early in the war, ingratiated himself with the President and his key Cabinet members by urging his pro-Union views. In January 1862 Lincoln replaced Cameron with Stanton, who immediately set out to make his cabinet position the most powerful in Lincoln's administration.

Self-confident, arrogant, abrupt, and contemptuous of incompetent military leaders, Stanton was also fiercely energetic, incorruptible, and efficient. Respecting few men and fearing none, he did his best to eliminate favoritism and see to it that war contracts were honestly negotiated and faithfully filled. Few men liked Stanton, but almost all high officials respected him. Stanton insisted that the Army receive whatever it needed, and the best available, so no campaign by any Union army would ever fail for want of supplies.

From the day that Stanton took office, the structure of the War Department was centralized to handle the growing volume of business. Each bureau chief reported directly to Stanton, but the responsibility became so heavy that he delegated procurement and distribution matters to three assistant secretaries. Because the Quartermaster General's Department transported men and materiel, operated the depot system, constructed camps, and handled the largest number of contracts, it soon became the most important agency of the General Staff. Hard-working, efficient, and loyal, Montgomery C. Meigs as Quartermaster General was an organizing genius and one of the few career officers to whom Stanton would listen. To complete his department, Stanton added three major bureaus during the war: the Judge Advocate General's Office in 1862; the Signal Department in 1863; and the Provost Marshal General's Bureau in 1863 to administer the draft (enrollment) act. In the same year the Corps of Topographical Engineers merged with the Corps of Engineers.

Stanton faced mobilization problems and home front crises of unprecedented magnitude. Loyal states were bringing half a million

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men under arms. Grain, wool, leather, lumber, metals, and fuel were being turned into food, clothing, vehicles, and guns, and thousands of draft animals were being purchased and shipped from every part of the North. A well-managed Federal authority was needed to assume the states' obligations, to train volunteer units in the use of their tools of war, and then to deploy them along a vast continental front. By exploiting the railroad, steamship, and telegraph, the War Department provided field commanders a novel type of mobility in their operations. Stanton's major task was to control all aspects of this outpouring of the nation's resources. If war contracts were tainted, the Union soldiers might despair. Moral as well as financial bankruptcy could easily wreck Union hopes of victory. In addition, Stanton had the job of suppressing subversion, of timing the delicate matter of enrolling African Americans in the Army, and of cooperating with a radical-dominated Congress, a strong-willed Cabinet, and a conservative-minded Army. With a lawyer's training, Stanton, like Lincoln, knew little about military affairs, and there was little time for him to learn. Anticipating that President Lincoln would soon call for War Department plans for the spring 1862 offensives, Stanton researched every document he could find on Army administration, consulted his bureau chiefs about readiness, and prepared himself to work with the General in Chief on strategic matters.

When he took office, Stanton found that the War Department had a rival in the form of the Joint Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War. The committee originated in an investigation of a badly executed reconnaissance at Ball's Bluff on the Potomac on October 21, 1861, in which volunteer officer and popular former Senator Col. Edward D. Baker, was killed. By subsequently searching out graft and inefficiency, the committee did valuable service, but it also vexed the President, Stanton, and most of the generals during the war. Composed of extreme antislavery men without military knowledge and experience, the committee probed the battles, tried to force all its views regarding statecraft and strategy on the President, and put forward its own candidates for high command. Suspicious of proslavery men and men of moderate views, it considered that the only generals fit for office were those who had been abolitionists before 1861.

As the year ended both North and South were earnestly preparing for a hard war. Both opponents were raising and training huge armies totaling nearly a million men. Fort Sumter and bloody Bull Run were over, and each side was gathering its resources for the even bloodier struggles to come.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How was the War Department organized in 1861? Discuss the administrative and tactical organization of the U.S. Army units at the onset of the Civil War.

2. What military and political challenges did Lincoln as Commander in Chief face after the secession of the Southern states? How did Fort Sumter change the situation?

3. What advantages and disadvantages did each side have at the beginning of the war? Discuss their relative importance to the ultimate outcome.

4. Discuss the campaign of First Bull Run. What were the goals of the two armies, and how did they seek to achieve them? Why did the Confederates win? Why did the Union lose?

5. How did McClellan reorganize the Union Army? Was the reorganization effective? What were its principal strengths and weaknesses?

6. Assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of the Union and Confederate war efforts at the end of 1861. Which side do you think was in the best overall position?

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