**Major Battles: 1861–1863**

EVENTS

1861 South Carolina attacks Fort Sumter Confederacy defeats Union at First Battle of Bull Run

1862 Union defeats Confederacy at Shiloh and Antietam

1863 Lincoln issues Emancipation Proclamation Union defeats Confederacy at Gettysburg and Vicksburg Lincoln delivers Gettysburg Address

KEY PEOPLE

**Abraham Lincoln** -  16th U.S. president; ordered Union naval blockade of the South; delivered landmark Gettysburg Address

**Robert E. Lee** -  General who turned down Lincoln’s offer to command Union forces in favor of commanding the Army of Northern Virginia for the Confederacy

**George McClellan** -  Young general who commanded the Union’s Army of the Potomac but was later fired after criticizing Lincoln publicly and failing to engage Lee’s forces

**Ulysses S. Grant** -  Top Union general after McClellan’s termination; waged total war against the South starting in 1863, including major victory at Vicksburg

**Preparing for War**

After the seizure of **Fort Sumter** in April 1861, both the North and the South prepared for war. The North had a distinct **economic advantage**because almost all of the nation’s factories were been located in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states. The Union also had nearly twice the South’s **population**and thus a larger pool of young men to serve in the army.

**Lack of Leadership in the North**

However, the North’s new recruits were largely untrained, and most of the best military commanders had been from the South. **Abraham Lincoln** offered command of the main Union army to **Robert E. Lee**, but Lee, though he disapproved of secession, felt compelled to fight for his home state of Virginia.

**George McClellan**

Lincoln therefore ended up putting General **George McClellan**in command of the **Army of the Potomac**. “Little Mac,” as he was called, though still only in his thirties, was probably the most popular man in the army in his day. Despite McClellan’s popularity with the troops, however, he was poorly regarded among civilian leaders in Washington and had a reputation for having a rather large ego. Throughout the war, McClellan proved timid, and he always made some excuse to avoid engaging Lee’s **Army of Northern Virginia**.

**The First Battle of Bull Run**

War preparations took some time, so it was not until three months after Fort Sumter that Union and Confederate troops met again at the **First Battle of Bull Run** in Virginia, between Washington, D.C., and Richmond. Still believing that the war was a trifling matter that would be over quickly, a number of government officials and spectators from both sides came to “observe” the battle, some even packing picnic lunches. By the end of the day, Union forces had lost and were forced to retreat. The loss shocked Northerners out of their complacency and prompted them to prepare more seriously for the struggle ahead. Meanwhile, many Southerners interpreted the victory as an indicator of an early end to the war and as decisive proof that most Northerners didn’t have the will to fight.

**Shiloh**

Just as Northerners were shocked into reality by the First Battle of Bull Run, so too were Southerners by the **Battle of Shiloh**. In April1862, Union General **Ulysses S. Grant** engaged Confederate forces at Shiloh, Tennessee, in an incredibly bloody battle. Tens of thousands of men died. By the end of the bloodbath, Grant had won and demonstrated to the Confederates that Lincoln was serious about maintaining the Union. Southerners got the message and dug in for a longer war.

**Antietam**

Rather than wait around for the enemy to attack him, Lee made an aggressive push into the **border states** to try to defeat the Union on its own turf. He also hoped that a Confederate victory in Maryland would convince the state legislature to secede. In September 1862, Lee’s army met General **George McClellan**’s troops at the **Battle of Antietam**, which resulted in more than 23,000 casualties—the bloodiest single day of battle of the entire war. Lee was forced to retreat back to Confederate territory.

**New Union Leadership**

However, the overly cautious McClellan refused to pursue Lee into Virginia and deliver a fatal blow to the Confederate army. Lincoln was so angry at McClellan for passing up a chance to end the war that he fired McClellan and replaced him with another general. After terminating McClellan, Lincoln had to sift through a couple more generals before he finally settled on **Ulysses S. Grant**, who, unlike McClellan, knew that time was of the essence and that the war could not be allowed to drag on.

**The Emancipation Proclamation**

Despite McClellan’s failure to follow up, Lincoln nonetheless capitalized on the Antietam victory by issuing the **Emancipation Proclamation** that freed all slaves in the Confederacy. The immediate practical effects of the proclamation were limited: since it declared that slaves only in the secessionist states were free (*not* the**border states**, for Lincoln did not want to provoke them into secession), it was effectively unenforceable.

The proclamation did have a large political impact, though, because it tied the issue of slavery to the restoration of the Union. Indeed, reunification, not emancipation, remained Lincoln’s most important goal by far. He once remarked, “If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save this Union.” Lincoln received a lot of criticism from the **Peace Democrats** and other groups for wedding the goals of emancipation and reunification.

Despite the priority Lincoln placed on reunification, he knew that a reunified nation would not survive long if slavery still existed. Slavery had been at the root of every major sectional conflict since the 1780s, and the issue had to be addressed. Even though the Emancipation Proclamation failed to ban slavery in the border states, it did mark the symbolic beginning of the end for the “peculiar institution” for every state in the Union.

**The War at Sea**

While the armies battled on land, the Union and Confederate navies clashed on the high seas. At the very beginning of the war, Lincoln bypassed Congress and ordered a **naval blockade**of all Southern ports. The South’s economy relied almost entirely on cotton trade with Britain, so Lincoln hoped the blockade would strangle the Confederacy financially.

The Confederate navy, though small, proved a formidable adversary. The British-built Confederate warship ***Alabama***sank more than sixty Union ships before it was finally defeated. The South also created a major new naval weapon—the **ironclad**—when ingenious Confederate shipbuilders refitted the old warship **USS *Merrimack***with a steam engine and iron plates to make it impervious to bullets and cannonballs. The ship, renamed the *Virginia*, easily destroyed several Union ships and broke through the blockade. In response, the Union built an ironclad of its own, the**USS *Monitor***, that featured an innovative gun turret. The two ships met in March 1862 at the**Battle of the Ironclads**, which ended in a draw.

**Gettysburg**

Undaunted by his failure at Antietam, Lee marched into Northern territory again in the summer of 1863, this time into Pennsylvania. There, he met Union forces at the **Battle of Gettysburg** in early July. At the end of a bloody three-day struggle in which more than 50,000died, Lee was once again forced to retreat. The battle was a resounding victory for the North and a catastrophe for the South.

At the same time Lee was losing in the North, Grant was besieging the city of**Vicksburg**, Mississippi, in the West. Eventually, the trapped Confederates caved in to Grant’s demand for an unconditional surrender. This major victory at the**Battle of Vicksburg** gave the Union control of the Mississippi River and thus split the Confederacy in half.

**The Gettysburg Address**

Lincoln commemorated the Union victory at Gettysburg several months after the battle with a speech at the dedication of a national cemetery on the site. Though very brief, the **Gettysburg Address**was poignant and eloquent. In the speech, Lincoln argued that the Civil War was a test not only for the Union but for the entire world, for it would determine whether a nation conceived in democracy could “long endure.”

**EVENTS**

1864 Grant takes command of Union troops Lincoln is reelected Sherman begins March to the Sea

1865 Davis proposes Hampton Roads peace conference Robert E. Lee surrenders to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse

**KEY PEOPLE**

**Abraham Lincoln** -  16th U.S. president; overcame significant opposition in the election of 1864 and pursued policy of total war and unconditional surrender

**Jefferson Davis** -  President of the Confederacy; struggled to maintain unity among the Southern states; made unsuccessful bid for peace with the North prior to surrender

**William Tecumseh Sherman** -  Union general famous for his total war strategy; made devastating March to the Sea from Atlanta to Savannah in 1864

**Ulysses S. Grant** -  Union general who defeated Lee’s forces and negotiated surrender at Appomattox Court House, Virginia

**Robert E. Lee** -  Confederate general who surrendered unconditionally to Grant at Appomattox Court House

**George McClellan** -  Former Union general who ran unsuccessfully for president as a Peace Democrat against Lincoln in 1864

**Sherman’s March to the Sea**

President **Abraham Lincoln** and General **Ulysses S. Grant** chose to step up the war in 1864 after realizing that limited campaigns against Confederate forces were having little effect. Both knew that the war had to end quickly if the Union were to be restored. Grant therefore ordered his close friend and fellow general **William Tecumseh Sherman** to take a small force through the heart of the Deep South. That summer, Sherman embarked on his now-famous **March to the Sea**, defeated Confederate troops protecting **Atlanta**, Georgia, and then besieged the city. When the citizens of Atlanta failed to surrender, Sherman burned the city and then marched on to**Savannah**. Along the way, he destroyed railroads, burned homes, razed crops, and generally looted and pillaged the entire countryside—one witness said a tornado could not have done more damage. Sherman arrived in Savannah that December and accepted the city’s surrender, then marched northward to South Carolina.

**Limited War vs. Total War**

Prior to 1864, both Union and Confederate commanders had waged a rather **limited war**, with the armies usually fighting only each other, without inflicting damages on innocent civilians or private property. Lincoln, Grant, and Sherman realized, however, that they would have to use a new strategy to end the war, because it was the support of these very same civilians that was keeping the war going in the South. Only when Southern civilians demanded an end to the war would the Confederacy lose its will to fight. As a result, Lincoln, Grant, and Sherman decided to open up a **total war**in which no one was innocent and private property was fair game.

**Pressure on Lincoln**

As the fighting dragged on into late 1864, more and more pressure fell on Lincoln to end the war. He came under fire from a growing number of **Peace Democrats** who wanted to strike a deal with the South. Commonly referred to as “Copperheads,” after the poisonous snake, these Peace Democrats were particularly numerous in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, where there were many Confederate sympathizers. They believed that Lincoln and his generals had shown that they were incapable of restoring the Union, and many were also angry that Lincoln had made the war about slavery and emancipation. From the other side, **Radical Republicans** also attacked Lincoln, claiming that he was not harsh enough on the South.

**The Election of 1864**

Bitterness and uncertainty clouded the **election of 1864**. Despite opposition from the radicals, the **Republican Party** lukewarmly nominated Lincoln for a second term. In a surprise move, Lincoln chose as his running mate Democrat **Andrew Johnson**from the reconquered state of Tennessee, hoping that Johnson would win him votes from prowar Democrats in the North. Together they campaigned on a platform for the South’s unconditional surrender. Peace Democrats nominated Lincoln’s old foe General **George McClellan**, who wanted peace negotiations and settlement. In the end, Lincoln managed to win 55 percent of the popular vote.

**Importance of the Election**

The election of 1864 was crucial because its outcome would determine the entire direction of the war: if Lincoln won, the war would be fought until the South had surrendered unconditionally, but if McClellan won, there would almost surely be a settlement. The election, therefore, was also the Confederacy’s last hope for survival. Although Lincoln believed he would lose—even though the Union was finally winning, he thought that most Northerners were against continuation of the war—his reelection ultimately provided a clear mandate to demand **unconditional surrender**.

**The South’s Collapse**

The South, meanwhile, was spiraling into turmoil. The Union naval blockade, Sherman’s campaign in Georgia, lack of assistance from Britain, worsening class conflicts, and the collapse of the Southern economy were taking their toll. Thousands were deserting the army, thousands more were going hungry at home, and thousands of slaves were fleeing to Union lines. President **Jefferson Davis** tried desperately to hold the Confederate government together, but none of the states would cooperate. In the final month of the war, the Confederacy grew so desperate that it even began to offer slaves their freedom if they would enlist in the Confederate army.

**The Hampton Roads Conference**

Realizing the end was near, Davis requested peace negotiations in a final attempt to save the South. Lincoln agreed, and delegations from both sides met at the **Hampton Roads Conference** in February 1865. No peace agreement was reached, however, because Lincoln was insistent on the South’s unconditional surrender, while Davis demanded full independence.

**Union Victory at Appomattox**

In April 1865, **Ulysses S. Grant**’s forces broke through **Robert E. Lee**’s defenses and forced the Confederates to retreat. The Confederate forces burned their capital city, Richmond, behind them as they retreated in order to render it useless to the Union armies. His men malnourished and heavily outgunned, Lee chose to surrender. Several days later, on April 9, 1865, Lee surrendered to Grant formally and unconditionally at **Appomattox Courthouse**, Virginia. Grant accepted the surrender and provided the Southerners food for their march home. Jefferson Davis and other ranking Confederates, meanwhile, had been captured fleeing Virginia. The Civil War was over.