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THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Thomas E. Griess, Series Editor

The American Civil War

Timothy H. Donovan, Jr.
Roy K. Flint
Arthur V. Grant, Jr.
Gerald P. Stadler

Thomas E. Griess
Series Editor

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To the former members of the Department of History who have found a "soldier's resting place beneath a soldier's blow."

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Finally, all of our families had to suffer through the whine of minie balls and the rattle of musketry that we took home with us each night. Their unwavering support was a welcome salve to the wounds of the day.

Timothy H. Donovan, Jr.
Roy K. Flint
Arthur V. Grant, Jr.
Gerald P. Stadler

West Point, New York

Foreword

For over a century, cadets at the United States Military Academy have studied the military campaigns of the American Civil War in varying degrees of detail. It was not until 1938, however, that T. Dodson Stamps, professor and head of the Department of Military Art and Engineering, introduced an atlas of battle maps to support that study; that atlas was specially devised to accompany the text then in use, Matthew Forney Steele's *American Campaigns*. The concept of a closely integrated narrative and graphical portrayal has been a feature of the course entitled History of the Military Art since that time.

In 1959, Vincent J. Esposito, Stamps' successor as head of the Department of Military Art and Engineering, adopted for cadet use the unique two-volume *West Point Atlas of American Wars,* which Esposito had edited. It served its purpose well. In 1967, however, changes in the course in the History of the Military Art required the development of a new text. Course-long themes, a broader treatment of military history, and less emphasis on operational detail were among the changes that dictated new textual and teaching approaches.

The American Civil War was conceived as a text that would present developments in the military art in the 1860s, using the war's campaigns as the primary instructional vehicle, but encompassing broader themes than the purely operational ones. The text was also designed to stress the totality of the war and to show the relationship between events unfolding in the Eastern and Western Theaters of Operations. Finally, the pivotal 1863 Vicksburg Campaign was selected for treatment in more detail in order to provide cadets with the opportunity to study one aspect of the war in greater depth.

Four faculty members of the Department of History at the United States Military Academy shared in the writing of this text. After Roy K. Flint introduces the major issues of the war and sets the stage for the intense conflict of sectional interests, Gerald P. Stadler takes the reader from the initial blunders at First Bull Run through the turn of the tide in the West at Vicksburg. In Chapter 7, Timothy H. Donovan, Jr. describes Lee's splendid victories at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. The final chapters by Arthur V. Grant, Jr. recount the turn of the tide in the East at Gettysburg and follow the rise of Grant from his resounding victory at Chattanooga to the final drama at Appomattox.

Utilizing some primary source materials and many sound secondary sources, these authors have written a thoughtful and stimulating narrative that examines the military lessons of the war critically and combines operational and institutional treatments of military history. The Department of History and a large number of students are indebted to them for their efforts, which were made under the pressure of time and with minimal resources.

Gerald Stadler and Arthur Grant, relying in part but not solely upon the Esposito atlas, designed the maps that appear in the supporting campaign atlas. The Department of History is indebted to Mr. Edward J. Krasnoborski, who supervised the entire map-drafting effort and brilliantly performed most of the cartographic work.

The present edition of *The American Civil War* is essentially the text that was published at the Military Academy in 1977. As editor, I have attempted to clarify certain passages for the general reader, amplify purely military terminology, and improve the evenness of the narrative. The editor is grateful for the advice and suggestions rendered by Rudy Shur and Joanne Abrams of Avery Publishing Group, Inc. Their assistance was timely and helpful. Ms. Abrams immeasurably improved the narrative through her painstaking editing, corrections of lapses in syntax, and penetrating questions related to clarity of expression.

Thomas E. Griess
Series Editor

Introduction

America's Civil War may well have been the last romantic war. Images of sweaty, trail-hardened soldiers, inured to the rigors of seemingly endless marches, led by aristocratic officers, and pitted against each other in great battles of flashing brilliance, fill the minds of many who live in the automobile age of the twentieth century. Somehow, perceptions of that war are dominated by visions of gallant heroes mounted on bigger-than-life horses caught up in a tragic struggle. Southerners, some still rankled by defeat, glory in the exploits of Robert E. Lee, "Stonewall" Jackson, and "Jeb" Stuart; northerners find ample evidence of a strong union and vigorous economic system in the determination and innovativeness of Lincoln, Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan, and the wartime productivity of the North. Both points of view are bolstered by the justness of each side's cause. So compelling is the charm of the war that serious scholars and laymen for over a hundred years have joined together to perpetuate its history—and its mythology—in endless study, in popular novels and films, and in regular meetings of countless Civil War Round Tables spread throughout the United States and the world. Perhaps more than any other event in American history, the Civil War has become a part of our national folklore, our truly common experience, affecting Anglo-Americans, European immigrants, and blacks alike. In this regard, it is unique. To serious students of the military art, the war is unique in other ways as well.

In the pages of this text, the reader will still find the heroes, the villains, the explosive violence, the brilliant successes, and the monumental blunders, for one cannot write about the Civil War without capturing some of the excitement that enthralls us all. The romantic mythology and folklore, however, have been set aside when possible in favor of a view of the war as part of the long sweep of military history and the evolution of the military art. From these pages, there emerges a picture of a populous democracy that was split by intense and competitive nationalistic fervor, determined not to compromise on the issues, armed with mass-produced weapons, supplied by ever-expanding supply bases, fighting over great distances, and led in battle by an emerging elite of professional officers. In short, the authors have illuminated the evolutionary meaning of a war that was fought roughly midway between the Napoleonic and World War I periods, during the great transformation from muskets to machineguns. It is in these terms that the reader should view the Civil War. If in the process the heroes lose some of their luster, the purposes of education will have been served.

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The Nation Divided 1

In the history of the military art, the American Civil War shares a place of distinction with the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. In each of these two periods, social, political, economic, technological, and military factors came together to transform warfare, so that those who survived from the onset were fighting in a wholly new style by the end of the conflict. After experiencing initial success against the undisciplined French Revolutionary armies, the small, highly disciplined formations, arranged according to the practice of Frederick the Great, reeled back from the disciplined fury of the corps of Napoleon. Thereafter, mass armies, spurred on by nationalist zeal and organized and led to achieve the greatest possible offensive power, dominated the battlefields of Europe. By the time General Bonaparte had become Emperor Napoleon I, he had harnessed the potential of French nationalism and converted it into military power to be used for the destruction of his nation's enemies. The democratization of war was to change the nature of war and international relations forever after.

Similarly, the American Civil War profoundly changed warfare. Exploiting equally intense nationalist fervor, rival governments raised mass armies to fight for a victory that in the end would mean the destruction of either the Union or the Confederacy. But whereas Napoleon's armies fought with weapons little different from those used by Gustavus Adolphus, Marlborough, and Frederick, American armies carried rifles and artillery of greater, though still imperfect, effect. Mass armies armed with mass-produced weapons of vastly increased lethality crippled each other at long range until they finally had to dig themselves into the ground to escape complete destruction. Although overlooked by a number of observers at the time, the offensive power that was so efficiently developed by Napoleon, and later emulated by Federal forces at Bull Run and Confederate forces at Shiloh, was stymied by the heavy firepower that technology had made possible. Warfare had entered a new era, one in which the production of rapid-fire weapons made the defensive force behind entrenchments ascendant over the enemy force maneuvering toward it in the open. Nor was this the only change in tactical relationships.

The American Civil War illustrates an even more fundamental change in the nature of war caused by democratization and the Industrial Revolution. As Walter Millis has pointed out, war was losing its one redeeming virtue: the ability to reach a rapid decision.[1] At his best, Napoleon humbled Prussia and her army in just over seven weeks; it took Union forces four years to reach a similar point in the Civil War. During that time, each side increased its commitment, and while the opposing peoples grew discouraged, they refused to quit. Time after time, the armies hurled themselves at each other, recoiled to resupply themselves with more men and machines, and struck again. It was only when the Confederacy could send no more men and machines that the issue was finally settled. While there were technical military reasons for the failure to reach a Napoleonic decision, part of the explanation lay in the nature of the American people. Of great importance, too, were the physical characteristics of the land over which the war was fought.

The Theaters of War

By European standards, America was a vast and primitive land. *(See Atlas Map No. 2.)* Its most striking feature was the immensity of the territory that lay within the nation's borders. The two main theaters of war—northern Virginia and the valley of the Mississippi River—were about 700 miles apart at the northern ends. In 1861, General Albert Sidney Johnston, commanding the Confederate defenses between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River, tried to cover a front 400 miles long. When penetrating that line during his

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two-year campaign from Paducah, Kentucky to Vicksburg, Mississippi, Major General Ulysses S. Grant faced a march greater in distance than that from Berlin to Warsaw. One of the military ironies of the war is that with all of the geographical space available, the Confederacy chose to sacrifice the protection that distance offered by moving its capital from Montgomery, Alabama to Richmond, Virginia, which was situated only 100 miles south of the national capital in Washington, D.C.

Complicating problems born of the great distances were obstacles to the movement of armies. Mountains and high hills covered much of the area, forming a natural division between what came to be known as the Eastern and Western Theaters of Operations. The Appalachian Mountain chain ran all the way from Pennsylvania through Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas, northern Georgia, and Alabama. With few passes for either railroad or foot movement, the huge barrier forced the belligerents to create two fronts and, in many ways, to fight two wars.

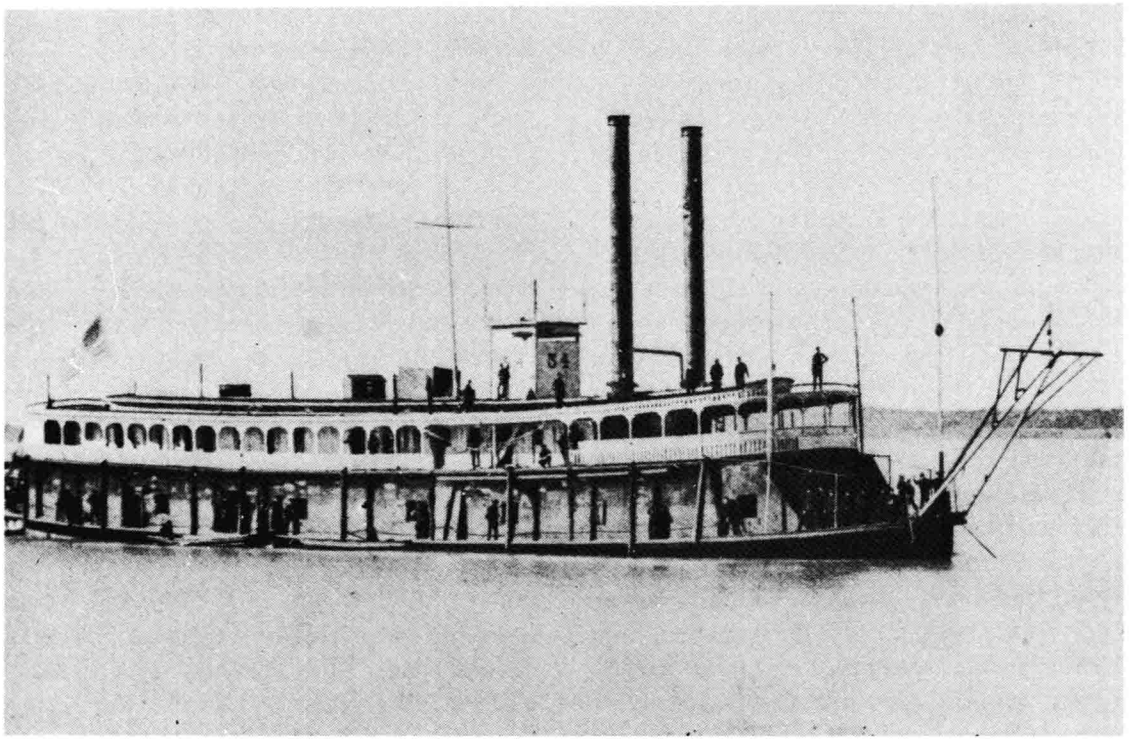
In the East, Federal and Confederate forces opposed each other in the 100-mile stretch of land between Washington and Richmond that was bounded by the Chesapeake Bay to the east and the Allegheny and Blue Ridge Mountains to the west. Because the mountain barrier ran in a northeasterly-to-southwesterly direction, the width of the Eastern Theater narrowed in northern Virginia. In the low country, the land was forested where not cleared for farming. Even the farms were relatively small. According to one observer, space could rarely be found for employing more than six or seven artillery batteries in Virginia. Similarly, the scarcity of large open areas normally prevented the maneuvering of cavalry in the traditional charge of opposing lines.[2] Obstacles to movement were also created by large forests. The most notable of these was the Wilderness of central Virginia, which became the scene of heavy fighting in 1863 and 1864. On the western flank, the Shenandoah Valley, lying between the Allegheny and Blue Ridge Mountains, provided the Confederacy with a rich source of food as well as a friendly and well concealed avenue of approach into Maryland and Pennsylvania. On the eastern flank, the waters of the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean provided the Union Navy with easy movement along the coast and up the major rivers that flowed into the bay. These rivers—the Potomac, the Rappahannock, the York, and the James—ran from the western mountains to the east and, along with their swampy tangled tributaries, formed obstacles to north-south movement, thereby confining crossings to well known and easily observed fords. Generally, then, the terrain east of the Appalachian Mountain barrier favored defense on land and naval operations along the eastern seaboard.

West of the Appalachian barrier, the nature of the major terrain features radically altered the strategic situation. There, the wooded mountain ridges plunged far south to their foothills between Birmingham, Alabama and Atlanta, Georgia. Although cut by a few narrow passes to the north, the rugged mountains were broken in an east-west direction only by the valley of the Tennessee River at Chattanooga, Tennessee. In order for major armies to reach the lower Confederacy and to link the Eastern and Western Theaters, control of a line between Chattanooga and Atlanta was necessary to skirt the southern end of the Appalachian barrier. West of the mountains, three major rivers trisected the theater. The Cumberland River, the easternmost, drained northern Tennessee and southern Kentucky, dropped south to Nashville, Tennessee, and then flowed north to the Ohio River at Smithland, Kentucky. Just a few miles to the west, at Paducah, was the mouth of the Tennessee River, which followed a lengthy course from the mountains of east Tennessee through Knoxville, Chattanooga, Huntsville, and Florence, Alabama, finally winding north to the Ohio River. The last of the great western rivers was the Mississippi, which flowed south through St. Louis, was joined by the Ohio at Cairo, Illinois, and then meandered south to New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico. Rather than serving as barriers to north-south movement, as did the eastern rivers, the Cumberland, Tennessee, and Mississippi served as highways for the side that could dominate them. Further, the Mississippi separated Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas from the rest of the Confederacy, serving as a significant hindrance to east-west movement. Because of the river system, the terrain in the West favored offensive operations in either a northerly or southerly direction.

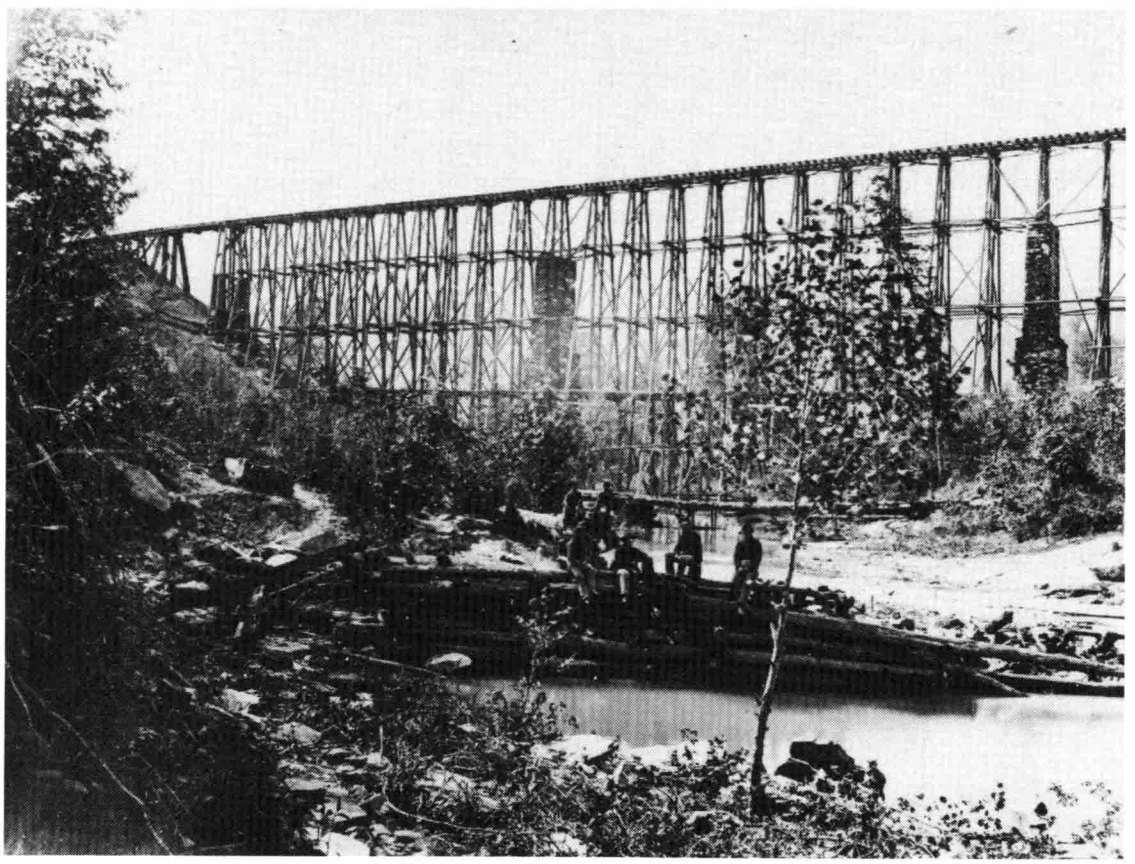
Transport and Mobility

To circumvent the geographic obstacles and to traverse the great distances, the combatants had to be able to exploit existing transportation systems. In this capability, Federal forces far exceeded the Confederates. River craft of all sorts were pressed into service as transports and gunboats. During the war, newly designed iron-clad boats—with colorful names such as the "Pook Turtle"—enabled the Federal command to employ combined ground and naval forces along the rivers, deep in the southernmost regions of the Confederacy. Because of superior industrial capacity, the North was also able to exploit the nation's railroad systems.

On the eve of the Civil War, there were three principal railroad systems in the United States. *(See Atlas Map No. 2.)* The first was an east-west system of multiple railroad lines running north of the Ohio River and connecting the old Northwest Territory and the trans-Mississippi West with the east. This system was retained intact by the North and, along with the northern rivers, the canals, and the Great Lakes, provided



A Union Gunboat



The Construction of Railroad Bridges Becomes an Important Adjunct to Strategic Mobility

a high-capacity transportation network that greatly speeded the movement of armies and supplies between theaters. It also provided the principal means of transporting western produce to eastern markets, a profitable spinoff of secession that led to midwestern demands to reopen the Mississippi River to less costly transportation. The second system lay along the eastern seaboard and connected, however inefficiently, Chattanooga, Atlanta, and Richmond. Prewar lines between Richmond and Washington, as well as east-west lines throughout Virginia, aided both sides in the struggle that occurred in the area between the two capitals. The third system ran parallel to the Mississippi River, through the state of Mississippi. This system aided armies operating in the Mississippi Valley. Few east-west lines connected the southern systems, and only one line ran through the mountain barrier, connecting Richmond with Chattanooga and the Mississippi River at Memphis. Further, southern railroad systems were built of different gauges, necessitating the unloading and reloading of cargo while it was enroute to its destination. Even so, before hostilities were underway, Confederate military analysts concluded that the southern railroad system, however sparse and nonstandard, provided better lateral communications than that possessed by the North, and thus accorded to the Confederacy the advantage of interior lines.*

Although both armies were regularly to move over great distances by utilizing steampower, once at their destinations, mobility was once again reduced to that of walking men and horses. There was no improvement in tactical transportation comparable to that in the strategic arena. Roads were still narrow, dusty, and restricted in dry weather. Rain frequently reduced them to mud. River crossings, wet or dry, presented major logistical problems. In actuality, the most common means of conveyance was the horse.

Social and Political Issues

Populating the vast country were vigorous and industrious people who had somehow decided that only war could solve their fundamental problems. From a population of about 4 million during the American Revolution, the country had grown to over 31 million by 1860.[3] Most of this growth was a result of the creation of large families. About 4 million people, however, had come by way of immigration in the 20 years before the breakout of the war. A good deal of the rapid expansion in population was centered west of the Appalachian chain. Significantly, most of the increase had taken place in the northern states, and was concomitant to the growth of towns and cities. By 1860, New York City had a population of over a half-million and was followed in size by Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore on the east coast, and Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Chicago in the West. By 1861, the expanding population west of the Appalachians had led to a predictable phenomenon: the Union had grown from 13 to 33 states. The political implications are clear when one realizes that the expansion in northern population was accompanied by the creation of more and more states with northern attitudes and sentiments. In 1861, this meant anti-slavery sentiment.

Slavery and its part in bringing on secession and the Civil War are complex issues that cannot be dealt with either traditionally or simplistically. Causes of the war are also tied to the growth of America's population, urban migration, religious revivalism and reforming zeal, racism, constitutional questions, and perhaps most of all, territorial expansion.[4]

As the United States grew politically, its leaders dealt with political problems by compromising on practical issues. Usually, these compromises were struck by the two political parties that represented the majority of Americans. This proved to be an effective way to resolve questions of tariffs, internal improvements, banking, and other such issues. By maintaining a balance between the interests of the North, the South, and the West, political issues could be settled relatively easily within the framework of the Constitution and by a crisscrossing of economic, social, and sectional divisions. Stability was reinforced because a vast majority of the population shared a common heritage, experience, and ideals. Further, most people lived independently, without any direct contact with their government. The conflict became more emotional, however, as the nation grew and the imbalance in population increased the political power of the North—and those western states that were offshoots of the North—at the expense of the South. Changing attitudes among the fast growing northern population, buttressed by prosperity, fostered a northern nationalism. There was a newly awakened spirit of participation in this sectional growth that demanded more than just a vote; it demanded the freedom to change those things that were seen as being wrong. More importantly, northern nationalism insisted upon majority rule.

In the South, cotton and slavery had become the bedrock of the economic, social, and political structure of the section. Although cotton was a minor crop and slavery was virtually moribund by 1800, interest revived after the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney. Thereafter, the growth of the cotton economy and the South's dependence upon it was dramatic. In 1800, the cotton crop had been but 70,000 bales; in 1860, it amounted to 4,000,000 bales.[5] As cotton production came

*Interior lines is a term that describes the condition of a force that can reinforce its separated units more rapidly than separated opposing units can reinforce each other. The condition exists when the force occupies a central position relative to its enemy, or when it possesses superior lateral communications.

New York City, the Most Highly Populated Northern City in 1860

A Typical Southern City in 1856

to rely on the use of slave labor, the two became interdependent. As a result, southern cotton growers invested much capital in slaves; eventually, not only agriculture, but the entire social system, depended upon slavery.

As this process cemented itself into the "southern way of life," northern reformers began to attack slavery on grounds of immorality. Defenders of slavery, eschewing apology, created arguments for the preservation of the "peculiar institution," for behind the economic importance of slavery was its role in the social system. In 1860, out of a population of 9 million in the slave states, there were 3.5 million slaves, and only 383,000 white slaveowners. Half of the owners held fewer than 5 slaves, and only 48,000 owned 20 or more slaves.[6] From these figures, it is clear that the social and economic system for which a million white southerners fought was one created for a small minority of slaveowning farmers and planters. Slavery, then, must have meant a great deal even to those white men who owned no slaves at all. To explain this sentiment, some scholars suggest that the existence of slavery provided social status to all white men, no matter how low their station, and that slaveownership was a way to improve one's position within one's community.

Regardless of personal reasons for fighting for a slave system, the combined forces of northern criticism, political pressure, and defensiveness set southerners more and more apart from northerners and westerners. By the eve of the Civil War, the South had developed its own nationalism, which was based on a sense of distinctiveness. It was agrarian, aristocratic, and scornful of the competitive and materialistic culture of the North. Southern politicians fought against the growing strength of the northern states by constructing a strong senatorial block in Congress that more often than not won its point by compromise. As a strategy for ultimate victory—that is, the avoidance of defeat—these politicians exploited the national obsession with Manifest Destiny, seeking to increase the number of slaveholding states by winning constitutional support for the extension of slavery into the western territories. After the Missouri Compromise of 1820 prohibited slavery north of the 36°30′ latitudinal meridian, southerners looked to Texas, the territories acquired from Mexico, Cuba, and finally the Kansas-Nebraska territories for congressional reinforcement. By the 1850s, the question of slavery had become a political issue and a subject of popular debate, and therefore was all the more dangerous.[7] In the end, the new political forces that had grown in the North would no longer compromise with the defenders of slavery. The issue upon which they made a stand was the extension of slavery to the territories, and the medium through which their views were expressed was the Republican Party. According to Peter J. Parish:

> The slavery issue burst through this effective but limited piece of political machinery. It blew to pieces the party system, and the normal pattern of bargain and compromise. It destroyed the Whig party, split the Democratic party wide open, and created a new party, the Republicans, sectional rather than national. . . .[8]

Based on a platform representing northern viewpoints, Abraham Lincoln's election as President on the Republican ticket in 1860 was the explosive element that finally caused secession. With a Republican in the White House, southern nationalists saw no hope within the Union. They decided to go their own way.

Secession and Fort Sumter

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union. In a little over a month, it was followed by Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. Not waiting for Lincoln's inauguration, on February 4, delegates of the seceded states met at Montgomery, Alabama to draw up a constitution and establish a government. Even after his inauguration on March 4, 1861, President Lincoln patiently bided his time, hoping for a reconciliation with the seceded states. In this hope he was to suffer disappointment, for a series of explosive events was occurring too quickly to permit the luxury of delay.

During the months following secession, most Federal administrative responsibilities passed peacefully from the control of the national government to that of the seceded state governments. States quietly undertook delivery of the mails, operated arsenals, took over military posts, and assumed other Federal functions whenever it was clear to Federal authorities that resistance was impossible. The transfer of coastal fortifications was, however, a different matter, for the Federal Government retained its ability to defend them by using the Navy. The two most important posts remaining under Federal control in the South were Fort Pickens at Pensacola, Florida and Fort Sumter at Charleston, South Carolina. Of the two, Fort Sumter, located in the heart of the secessionist stronghold, attracted the greatest interest and promised to provoke a test of wills between the new President and the leaders of the secession movement.

Although opposed by some of his advisers—including Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, still serving as the Commanding General of the Army—Lincoln decided to go to the aid of the garrison in Fort Sumter rather than avoid a showdown. After receiving word from Major Robert Anderson, commander of Fort Sumter, that he could hold out for only six more weeks, Lincoln considered the options. Military

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