Introduction

The American Civil War began on April 12, 1861, when Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard opened fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, and lasted until May 26, 1865, when the last Confederate army surrendered.

Although the North had many advantages, the war lasted for 4 long years.

The advantages on the side of the Union were:

- A population of 22,000,000 in 22 states, against a population of 9,000,000 in 11 states, of which almost 4,000,000 were slaves;
- A large share of the shipyards and a large merchant marine;
- A large share of the industry;
- Lincoln's position on slavery and democracy, which hindered any Southern hopes of foreign intervention;
- In the South, draft dodging and tax evasion were common. And, fortunes were made by profiteers who preferred to run luxuries, instead of war supplies, through the blockade.

The advantages on the side of the Confederacy were:

- A number of valuable products much wanted in Europe;
- Excellent officers;
- A better strategic position. The South did not need to conquer the North, and could operate with shorter interior lines, thus making better use of its fewer men.

The North placed roughly 2.2 million men in uniform (180,000 of them blacks), of whom about 640,000 were killed, wounded in battle, or died of disease. Of these, 360,000 died, two-thirds from illnesses such as dysentery, diarrhea, measles, malaria, and typhoid.

The South placed 750,000 to 850,000 men in uniform, of which 450,000 were killed, wounded in battle, or died of disease. Of these, it is estimated that more than 250,000 died, the same percentages in battle or of disease.

This war took more than 600,000 lives, and the dead and wounded combined totaled about 1.1 million. It destroyed property valued at $5 billion, brought freedom to 4 million black slaves, and opened wounds that have not yet completely healed more than a century later.
Causes

1) The chief and immediate cause of the war was slavery. Southern states, including the 11 states that formed the Confederacy, depended on slavery to support their economy. Southerners used slave labor to produce crops, especially cotton.

Slavery was illegal in the Northern states, but only a small proportion of Northerners actively opposed it. The main debate between the North and the South on the eve of the war was whether slavery should be permitted in the Western territories recently acquired during the Mexican War (1846-1848), including New Mexico, part of California, and Utah.

During the first half of the 19th century, economic differences between the regions had slowly increased.

By 1860, cotton was the chief crop of the South, and it represented 57 percent of all U.S. exports. The profitability of cotton made the South completely dependent on the plantation system and its essential component, slavery.

The North was by then firmly established as an industrial society relying on labor rather than on slavery. Immigration was encouraged. Immigrants from Europe worked in factories, built the railroads of the North, and settled the West. Very few settled in the South.

2) The second cause was the level of taxation imposed on imported goods.

Before the Civil War, the federal government's chief source of revenue was the tariff. There were few other sources of revenue. For example, neither personal nor corporate income taxes existed.

The South resisted industrialization and manufactured little. Almost all manufactured goods had to be imported. Southerners therefore opposed high tariffs. Imminently rural, the South preferred to do without these improvements.

The manufacturing economy of the North demanded high tariffs to protect its own products from cheap foreign competition and to finance much needed federal works, such as roads and canals.

3) The third factor was the awareness of the differences between states, and a general patriotic predisposition to one's state rather than to the Union.

The expanding Northwest Territory was made up of the present-day states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota, and supported the Northeast's demands for high tariffs.

As Northern and Southern patterns of living diverged, so did their political ideas.

The North needed a central government to build an infrastructure of roads and railways, protect its complex trading and financial interests, and control the national currency.

The South felt no need to strengthen the federal government. In addition, Southern patriots feared that a strong central government might interfere with slavery.
When the vast territories in the West and Southwest, acquired through the Louisiana Purchase (the territory comprising present-day Arkansas, Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota west of the Mississippi River, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, nearly all of Kansas, the portions of Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado east of the Rocky Mountains, and Louisiana west of the Mississippi River but including the city of New Orleans), petitioned for statehood, the North and South began a long and bitter struggle over whether the territories would enter the Union as free or slave states.

The Mexican War in 1846-1848, by which the United States made good its annexation of Texas and acquired New Mexico, Arizona, California, and several of the present Rocky Mountain states, led to a new crisis.

In 1851, Congress reached a compromise over Missouri's admission (as a slave state), admitted Maine as a free state, and laying some boundaries on the territories where slavery was admitted.

The year after the Missouri Compromise, a literary event shook the country. Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote an antislavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, that was published serially in a newspaper in 1851 and in book form the year after. It was widely read in the United States and abroad and moved many to join the cause of abolition.

**Secession**

In 1860, Lincoln was elected. During the campaign, many Southerners had threatened that their states would secede from the Union if Lincoln was elected. This was because they feared that a Lincoln administration would threaten slavery.

As soon as it was certain that Lincoln had won the election, the South Carolina legislature summoned a special convention. It met on December 17, 1860, in Charleston. Three days later the convention unanimously passed an ordinance dissolving “the union now subsisting between South Carolina and other States.”

Similar conventions were held by other Southern states, and similar ordinances were adopted, although not by unanimous votes. The first states to follow South Carolina's course in 1861 were:

- Mississippi, January 9;
- Florida, January 10;
- Alabama, January 11;
- Georgia, January 19;
- Louisiana, January 26;
- Texas, February 1.

On February 4, delegates from the first six states to secede met in Montgomery, Alabama, to set up a provisional government for the Confederate States of America. Four days later they adopted a constitution, modeled to a large extent on the Constitution of the United States. On February 9, the provisional Confederate Congress elected Jefferson Davis of Mississippi provisional president and Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia provisional vice president.
Both men were to hold office until February 22, 1862. On that date, after an uncontested election in November 1861, Davis and Stephens were given permanent status.

When Lincoln took the oath of office on March 4, 1861, seven states had seceded and organized a working government. Southern leaders believed that their action was lawful, but Lincoln and a majority of Northerners refused to accept the right of Southern states to secede.

In April, Lincoln called for states to send militias for national service to suppress the rebellion. The upper South refused to send their militias to coerce the seceded states. Instead they joined the lower South in secession:

- Virginia on April 17th;
- Arkansas, May 6;
- North Carolina, May 20;
- Tennessee, June 8.

**Fort Sumter**

As the Southern states seceded, they seized and occupied most of the federal forts within their borders or off their shores. Only four remained in the hands of the Union. Fort Sumter stood guard in the mouth of the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. The other three forts were in Florida: Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas, Fort Pickens in Pensacola Bay, and Fort Taylor at Key West. Of the four, Sumter was the most important.

On April 11, 1861, General P. G. T. Beauregard, commanding the Confederate troops in Charleston, served Anderson with a demand that he surrender the fort. Anderson refused, but he stated that lack of supplies would compel him to give up the fort by April 15. His reply was so hedged with qualifications that Beauregard considered it unsatisfactory, and, at 4:30 AM on April 12, he ordered his batteries to open fire on the fort.

For a day and a half, Anderson returned the fire. The relief expedition, weakened by storms and without the tugs it needed, appeared at the bar of the harbor, but made no effort to land men. On the second day, with Sumter badly damaged by fire, Anderson surrendered the fort.

**Strategies**

The Southern strategy was to drag the war out until the North thought it not worthwhile to fight anymore.

The northern strategy was to squeeze the south. A combined force of naval and army units would sweep down the Mississippi River, dividing the Confederacy's eastern and western states. At the same time, the Union navy would institute a blockade to deny the Confederacy access to European manufactured goods. Should the South continue to resist even after the loss of the Mississippi and the closing of its ports, Scott envisioned a major invasion into the heart of the Confederacy. He estimated it would take two to three years and 300,000 men to carry out this strategy.
The United States Navy applied increasing pressure along the Confederate coasts, Northern forces took control of the Mississippi River by the middle of 1863, and large armies marched into Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, and the Carolinas, eventually forcing a Confederate surrender in the spring of 1865.

Although a total blockade was almost impossible, given the South's coastline, which stretched 5600 km (3500 mi) and contained nearly 200 harbors and mouths of navigable rivers, by 1864 it was very effective.

Technology

Technological advances helped both sides deal with the great distances over which the armies fought.

The Civil War was the first large conflict that featured railroads and the telegraph.

Recent advances in military technology such as the rifle musket was carried on both sides. Having a range of around 220 m they replaced the 90 m range muskets. Combined with field fortifications, rifle muskets changed military tactics by making charges against defensive positions more difficult.

Other new technologies included:
- Ironclad warships;
- Manned balloons for aerial reconnaissance on battlefields, used by the North;
- First sinking of a warship by a submarine, the CSS Hunley;
- Repeating weapons, carried mainly by the Northern cavalry.

The war

1861 - Both sides prepared for what would become a much longer war than either at first imagined.

On the battlefield, the Confederates won victories in Virginia at the First Battle of Bull Run in mid-July, and in Missouri at Wilson's Creek in August.

Despite these setbacks, the Union army and navy took steps to begin operations along the upper Mississippi River and along the southern Atlantic coast. The goal was to seize control of the Mississippi River and institute a naval blockade of the Confederacy.

The Trent Affair presented the Lincoln administration with a major diplomatic crisis that threatened to involve Britain in the American war.

1862 - Furious military action flared in both the eastern and western theaters.

The Union took Tennessee and New Orleans in April, failed to take Vicksburg and Richmond, but repelled Lee's invasion of the North. The naval blockade became effective, reducing the cotton exports from $191 million in 1861 to $4 million in 1862.

The Confederacy failed to take Missouri (April), and Kentucky (late summer).
Congress abolished slavery in 1862 in the District of Columbia and prohibited slavery in all territories. This would make the war not against the independence of the south, but against slavery, and therefore barred France and England from supporting the Confederacy.

1863 - The Union failed again to take Vicksburg in the spring. In the summer, they drove the Confederate army out of Tennessee, captured Vicksburg, gaining control of the Mississippi River, and won the Battle of Gettysburg, repelling Lee's invasion.

The Emancipation Proclamation went into effect on January 1, and soon thereafter the North began recruiting black soldiers on a large scale.

Shortages of food and material goods became quite severe in the Confederacy, which experienced bread riots at several locations.

1864 - Grant was appointed general-in-chief of the Union army. Sherman failed to take Atlanta that summer. Later, they took Mobile in August, Atlanta in September, and repelled a small invading Confederate army that had reached the outskirts of Washington in July. In November and December, Sherman conducted a destructive march across the interior of Georgia. The Northern blockade tightened.

Lincoln was reelected, guaranteeing that the North would continue the war vigorously.

1865 - The U.S. House of Representatives passed the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, abolishing slavery on January 31.

The Union moved toward victory during the first four months of 1865. Lee surrendered at Appomattox Court House on April 9.

Lincoln was shot on April 14 and died the next day.

In late April, Sherman accepted the surrender of the last major field army in the South at Durham Station, North Carolina.

Naval Warfare

This war was mainly fought on land, but naval activities were extremely important strategic factors. Both sides took advantage of the technological innovations resulting from the industrial revolution.

The North had a large share of industry and shipyards, a much larger population (22 against 9 million in the South, which included 4 million slaves). The South had a larger share of officers and English support.

Besides the common warships, five types of specific craft were utilized:

- Blockade runners
- Commerce raiders
- Ironclads
- Gunboats
- Submarines
Blockade runners

President Lincoln proclaimed the blockade on 19 April 1861. At the time, the US Navy consisted only of 90 vessels, of which only 8 were in the US.

The navy bought 136 ships, built 52, and commissioned 76 before January 1862.

If at the beginning of the war the Union lacked ships to make the blockade effective, it soon became very difficult to supply the Confederacy.

In 1862, as many as 250 sailing vessels succeeded in running the blockade. In 1863, only 145 managed to pass the Union blockade. In 1863, that number decreased to 55. In 1864, it dropped to 14.

In 1860, the south had exported $191 million of cotton. In 1862, the cotton exports amounted only to $4 million.

To run the blockade, speed was essential, and several English firms engaged in blockade running. It was a highly profitable business that consisted mainly of supplying second-class products at exorbitant prices. Blockade runners, mostly British, made fortunes by landing cargoes of munitions and scarce goods at Southern ports.

The cargo was shipped from England in large vessels bound to Bermuda, Nassau, or Havana. There the goods were transshipped to fast, shallow-draft vessels and sent to Confederate ports.

In the beginning, these firms purchased fast steamers designed for channel or river service, but as the rates at which they were captured increased they decided to build specialized craft.

Blockade runners were fast steamers with very shallow drafts, powerful engines, collapsible masts and spars, and telescopic smoke stacks.

The statistics show their efficiency: an estimated 300 vessels made 1000 voyages, and 1300 attempts to run the blockade. Of these 300 vessels 136 eventually got caught, and of these 85 were destroyed.

The *Denbigh* (1860-1865)

Built in England in 1860 it was a fast and powerful steamship.

In 1863, it was purchased for the trade between Havana and Mobile, Alabama, making 7 successful trips with a crew of 20 people: 1 master, 2 mates, 2 engineers, 6 seamen, 7 firemen, 1 cook and 1 steward.

In 1864, the Union fleet closed Mobile, and the *Denbigh* rerouted to Galveston, Texas, making 6 successful trips.

In 1865, the *Denbigh* ran aground with a load of cotton for Havana, on April 19, 10 days after the end of the war, and 5 days after the Lincoln assassination.
Commerce raiders

Although the Confederacy had no navy, it still found ways to cripple Northern commerce. In spite of its lack of shipyards, it managed to equip a number of ships for service at sea. It also ordered the construction or purchase of other ships in England.

Over the protests of the Union government, three English-built ships, the Florida, the Alabama, and the Shenandoah, were delivered to Confederate naval officers and given the task of destroying the U.S. merchant fleet. These three raiders alone inflicted damage estimated at $16.6 million on Union shipping. The loss, while serious, was trivial in comparison to the effect of the Union blockade on the Southern economy.

The Alabama (1862-1864)

The Confederate cruiser Alabama, since its commissioning in May 1862, had sunk or captured more than $6.5 million worth of Union merchant ships and cargoes. On June 11, 1864, the Alabama entered the harbor at Cherbourg, France, to land prisoners and be repaired. Three days later the USS Kearsarge, which had been tracking the raider, came into port to pick up the Alabama's prisoners. Ordered to withdraw beyond the territorial limits, Captain John A. Winslow of the Kearsarge waited for his prey. Captain Raphael Semmes of the Alabama sent out word that as soon as he had taken on coal he would come out and fight. The duel began on the morning of June 19, and ended less than two hours later when the Alabama, mortally wounded, slipped stern first into the sea. The Kearsarge had destroyed the Confederacy's greatest single menace to Northern commerce.

The Florida (1862-1864)

The Florida, second among the great Confederate raiders, was captured in violation of international law in the harbor at Bahia (now Salvador), Brazil, in October 1864.

The Shenandoah (1862-1865)

The Shenandoah, which had been taking prize vessels, chiefly whalers, in the Pacific, did not learn that the war was over until August 2, 1865. It succeeded in making its way to Liverpool, England, in November 1865, and there its captain turned it over to the English authorities.

Ironclads

Ironclads were steam vessels with the upper works and casemates protected by a 10 cm layer of iron plate, already in use in Europe.

The southern fleet deficiencies were minimized by the inventiveness of its officers. After the success of the CSS Virginia, the South ordered the construction of 50 ironclads,
mainly for river and harbor defense. Around half of these were completed and placed into service.

The North responded by building a total of 27 armored ships.

The **CSS VIRGINIA** (1862)

In March 1862, the first ironclad, **CSS VIRGINIA**, attacked and destroyed the frigates **USS CUMBERLAND** and **USS CONGRESS**, and damaged the **USS MINNESOTA** without suffering any damages.

The **CSS VIRGINIA** had been built from the hull of the **USS MERRIMACK**, which had fallen in Southern hands when Virginia joined the Confederation.

The **USS MONITOR** (1862)

The day after the **CSS VIRGINIA** damaged 3 Union ships, another ironclad, the **USS MONITOR**, fought the Confederate vessel for 4 hours without serious damages on either side. Followed two months of maneuvering without consequences, the **CSS VIRGINIA** was abandoned and burned after McClellan's Union invasion.

The **MONITOR** was designed by an engineer from New York named Ericsson. It had a low freeboard, showing above water only the turret that housed its only gun.

The **USS MONITOR** sunk off cape Hatteras while being towed toward Beaufort, South Carolina.

It was found in 1973 by archaeologists. Declared a National Maritime Sanctuary in 1975 (the 1st), it was surveyed, mapped, and partially excavated in the late 1970s.

The **USS CAIRO** (1862)

The **USS CAIRO** was designed by a retired civil engineer named James Eads in 1861.

It was a flat-bottomed, light-draft stern-wheeler with a tonnage of 512 tons, and mounted 3 8-in. guns, 6 32-pounders, 4 42-pounders, and 1 12-pounder.

From January to December 1862, the **USS CAIRO** served in the Mississippi River and its tributaries, participating in the occupation of Clarksville and Nashville. Then, during the summer, the **CAIRO** participated in the battle that destroyed all the Confederate River Defense Fleet off Memphis, Tennessee. In early December, it was ordered to follow to the Yazoo River to participate in the attack on Vicksburg. There, it was sunk by an electrically detonated mine in December 1862.

The **CAIRO** was found in 1956, and it was badly broken in 1962 by a contractor hired to raise its hull in one piece. After being abandoned for many years, what was left from its hull was reassembled in 1977 at the Vicksburg National Military Park.
Gunboats

Gunboats were an old and cheap solution for river and coastal defense, and the Confederate Secretary of the Navy ordered the construction of 100 such craft in 1861. Carrying only two guns, these steamboats were 30 to 37 m long.

The Union also ordered the construction of gunboats, many with iron hulls.

CONFEDERATE GUNBOAT CHATTahoochee (1863)

Built in a temporary shipyard in Georgia the CHATTahoochee was launched in 1863, and sunk soon after in the Chattahoochee River. It was 40 m long, had two propellers powered by two engines.

The CHATTahoochee was declared an obstruction in 1960, and salvaged by a contractor. Part of the hull was placed in the James Woodruff Confederate Naval Museum. In 1863, it was surveyed by a team of archaeologists from East Carolina University.

UNION GUNBOAT PICKET (1861-1862)

The PICKET was one of many Union gunboats. It was a metal barge named JOHN F. WINSLOW transformed into a gunboat. Its metal hull was planked over and a steam engine installed with a single propeller. Although 40 m long, it was the smallest vessel of the fleet sent to invade North Carolina. The PICKET was lost during an engagement in Washington, North Carolina, when its boiler exploded.

It was salvaged in the 19th century. In 1973, it was found by sport divers and salvaged again. Its iron hull is intact.

Submarines

It is thought that during the American Civil War at least 24 submarines were built, 18 for the Confederacy, 6 for the Union.

At least in 1832, a French engineer named Brutus de Villeroi built a submarine. As soon as the war began in May 1861, a submarine was seized by the Philadelphia harbor police! It had been built in 1859 by Mr. de Villeroi, and we don't know what it was doing in Philadelphia.

The Union was quick to commission the construction of a submarine from Mr. de Villeroi, and the ALLIGATOR was ready in April 1862. Shipped to Hampton Roads, it was however declared unfit for service and sunk soon after while being towed around Cape Hatteras.

In the South, a man named Horace L. Hunley financed two engineers, James McClintock and Baxter Watson to build a submarine. It was called PIONEER, and was propelled by a hand-cranked propeller. The PIONEER was given a letter of Marque and classified as a privateer. However, it had to be scuttled before seeing any action, when New Orleans was evacuated.
Hunley, McClintock, and Watson moved to Mobile and built another submarine powered by an electro-magnetic engine supplied with batteries. This one was also lost, sunk while being towed.

**The CSS HUNLEY (1663-1664)**

A third submarine was made in 1663 from a boiler 7.6 m long to which were added tapered ends. Again powered by a hand-cranked propeller, it had a spar torpedo mounted at the bow. This submarine was sent to Charleston by rail. There, trying to sink the USS Ironsides, it sunk in the swell created by a passing steamship. Only its captain survived.

After being raised and its crew removed, it sunk again during a training session, diving so sharply that its bow got stuck in the bottom, killing crew and captain, Mr. Hunley included. Raised from the bottom and once again emptied of its crew – an awful task considering the size of the hatches – the submarine was christened *HUNLEY* and sent out on yet another mission.

Once again it sunk, killing all the crew. However, this time it managed to sink a Union war vessel, the *USS HOUSATONIC*, on 17 February 1864, right before sinking forever.

The **CSS HUNLEY** was found in 1995 and is currently under excavation and conservation.

**Readings for this class**


