

A NATION DIVIDED

The American Civil War

ABRAHAM LINCOLN and his Union generals

All photos National Archives

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With the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861, Civil War became a reality for the United States. Each side in the conflict was forced to assess its strengths and weaknesses in search of the best strategy for victory.

The material resources for making war greatly favored the Union. Most of the nation's heavy industry, including almost all of its firearms

production, was located in the North. The Union claimed great advantages in railroad **infrastructure** and its vastly superior navy dominated the seas. Perhaps most importantly, the Union's much greater population provided a larger pool of potential soldiers for building armies and replacing **casualties**.

President Abraham Lincoln's task was to find generals who could use these great advantages to triumph over the Confederacy.

Unfortunately, his search for **competent** generals continued for most of the war.

Many of the army's better officers, including Robert E. Lee, joined the Confederacy. Those who remained loyal to the Union included aging veterans of the Mexican War, such as Winfield Scott, and younger men with little experience.

Few officers were capable of leading the disorganized Union army in the field. This fact was demonstrated at the Battle of Bull Run, when

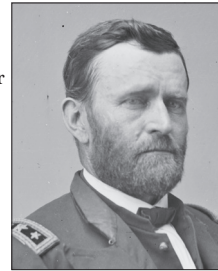
the Confederates **routed** the Union forces 30 miles south of Washington. After that **fiasco**, Lincoln began the search for a worthy commander. His search carried him to former Mexican War officers who were no longer **enlisted**, such as George McClellan.

Upon his return to the military, the 34-year-old McClellan quickly rose through the ranks to become second in command only to Winfield Scott.

McClellan took command of the Army of the Potomac with high expectations, but he consistently refused to move boldly against Lee and the Confederate Army.

McClellan attempted to capture the Confederate capital at Richmond but failed partly because he was timid to act and quick to retreat. He believed he was saving men's lives. Lincoln argued that he was costing lives by prolonging the war. McClellan finally exhausted Lincoln's **patience** at Antietam, Md., in September 1862 when he failed to follow and crush Lee's defeated army. Lincoln removed him from command.

What followed was a revolving door



Ulysses S. Grant

at the head of the Army of the Potomac. Lincoln appointed Ambrose Burnside to command and ordered him to take **decisive** action. Burnside's repeated assaults at Fredericksburg were turned back by Lee, causing Burnside to resign. General Joseph Hooker was the next general to disappoint Lincoln, losing at Chancellorsville despite outnumbering Lee's army two to one.

Lincoln's search for a capable general next led him to appoint George Meade in time for a battle at Gettysburg, Penn. Meade performed strongly at Gettysburg, defeating Lee in a bloody three-day battle that was probably the turning point of the war. The victory drove Lee from the North for the last time and set up the ultimate defeat of the Confederacy.

Like his **predecessors**, however, Meade failed to act decisively enough for Lincoln. Lee's retreating army became trapped against the flooded banks of the Potomac River and Lincoln urged Meade to follow and destroy them. Instead, Lee's army escaped across the river 10 days later.

As news of the Gettysburg victory spread through the ecstatic North, another Union victory made headlines. The town of Vicksburg, Miss., fell, giving the Union total control of the Mississippi River. The Union Army had always had greater success in the West, and here was an opportunity to promote the general responsible.

Ulysses S. Grant turned out to be exactly what Lincoln wanted: a bold commander who used manpower to his advantage. Grant led repeated assaults against Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia, each time emerging bloodied but intact. Rather than retreat as previous generals had, Grant continued to advance. He replaced his casualties while Lee didn't have the manpower to overcome his own losses.

By waging war directly against Lee's army, Grant drove the Confederacy to desperation. Plagued by shortages and **desertion**, Lee was forced to surrender to Grant at Appomattox Court House, Va., ending the Civil War. In Grant, Lincoln finally found his trusted general.

LEARN MORE!

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Joseph Hooker



Ambrose Burnside



George Meade



George McClellan

Did You Know?

George McClellan ran for President in 1864 as a Democrat, challenging Abraham Lincoln who had removed him from command of the Army of the Potomac. Lincoln feared that he would lose to McClellan, and it looked possible for a while as some voters became tired of Lincoln's war efforts. In the end, however, Lincoln defeated McClellan by a large margin.



TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1854

The Kansas-Nebraska Act leads to the "Bleeding Kansas" border war and the formation of the Republican Party.

1859

John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry increases tensions between the North and the South.

1860

Abraham Lincoln is elected President. South Carolina secedes from the Union.

1861

The Confederate States of America is formed. Fort Sumter is captured and the Civil War begins.

1862

Missouri is successfully defended by the Union at Pea Ridge, Ark. Union victory at Antietam leads Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation.

1863

Victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg turn the war in favor of the Union.

1865

Lee surrenders at Appomattox. Lincoln is assassinated at Ford's Theater.

1867

Radical Reconstruction begins in the South.

1877

The Compromise of 1877 ends Reconstruction. Without military support, Reconstruction governments collapse in the South.