FIRST YEARS OF A LONG WAR: 1861-1862

Northerners at first expected the war to last no more than a few weeks. Lincoln called up the first volunteers for an enlistment period of only 90 days. It would take 4 years of fighting before northern troops finally marched into the Confederate capital in Richmond, Virginia.

FIRST BATTLE OF BULL RUN

- In the first major battle of the war in July 1861, 30,000 federal troops marched from Washington, D.C., to attack Confederate forces positioned near Bull Run Creek at Manassas Junction, Virginia.
- Just as the Union force seemed close to victory, Confederate reinforcements under General Thomas (Stonewall) Jackson counterattacked and sent the inexperienced Union troops in panic flight back to Washington along with civilians on a picnic.
- The battle ended the illusion of a short war and also promoted the myth that the Rebels were invincible in battle.

UNION STRATEGY

- General Winfield Scott, veteran of the 1812 and Mexican wars, devised a 3-part strategy for winning a long war:
  1. The Anaconda Plan of using the U.S. Navy to blockade southern ports & cut off essential supplies from reaching the South.
  2. Divide the Confederacy in two by taking control of the Mississippi River.
  3. Raise and train an army 500,000 strong to take Richmond.
- As it happened, the first two parts of the strategy were easier to achieve than the third, but each part was important to victory.

UNION LOSES SEVERAL KEY BATTLES IN VIRGINIA AFTER THEIR LOSS AT BULL RUN

PENINSULA CAMPAIGN:

General George McClellan, the new commander of the Union army in the East, insisted that his troops be given a long period of training and discipline before going into battle. Finally, after many delays that tested Lincoln’s patience, McClellan’s army invaded Virginia in March 1862.

Union army was stopped as a result of moves by General Robert E. Lee, who emerged as the commander of the South’s forces. After 5 months, McClellan was forced to retreat & ordered back to the Potomac, where he was replaced by General John Pope.

SECOND BATTLE OF BULL RUN

Lee took advantage of the change in Union generals to strike quickly at Pope’s army in northern Virginia. Lee drew Pope into a trap, then struck the enemy’s flank, and sent the Union army backward to Bull Run where General Pope withdrew to the defenses of Washington D.C.

BATTLE OF ANTIETAM CHANGES THE COURSE OF THE CIVIL WAR

- Following up his victory at Bull Run, Lee led his army across the Potomac into enemy territory in Maryland.
- Lee hoped a big Confederate victory in the North would convince Britain to give official recognition & support to the South.
- By this time in September 1862, Lincoln had restored McClellan to command of the Union army.
- McClellan knew Lee’s battle plan, because a copy of it had been dropped accidentally by a Confederate officer.
- The Union army intercepted the invading Confederates at Antietam Creek in the Maryland town of Sharpsburg.
- Here the bloodiest single day of combat in the entire war took place, a day in which over 22,000 men were killed or wounded.
- Unable to break through Union lines, Lee’s army retreated to Virginia.
- Disappointed with McClellan for failing to pursue Lee’s weakened and retreating army, Lincoln removed him for a final time as commander of the Union army.
- Lincoln complained that his general had a bad case of the slows.
- While technically a draw, Antietam in the long run proved to be a decisive battle, because it stopped the Confederates from getting what they so urgently needed (open recognition and aid from a foreign power).
- Lincoln found enough encouragement in the results of Antietam to claim it as a Union victory.
- Seeing an opportunity to make a change in policy, Lincoln used the partial triumph of Union arms to announce plans for the Emancipation Proclamation.

BATTLE OF FREDERICKSBURG & OTHER BATTLES IN 1862

Replacing McClellan with the more aggressive General Ambrose Burnside, Lincoln discovered that a strategy of reckless attack could have even worse consequences than McClellan’s strategy of caution and inaction. In December 1862, a large Union army under Burnside attacked Lee’s army at Fredericksburg, Virginia, and suffered immense losses: 12,000 dead or wounded compared to 5,000 Confederate casualties. By the end of 1862, the magnitude of the war was all too clear, with no prospect of military victory for either side. The second year of war, 1862, was a disastrous one for the North except for two engagements, one at sea & the other on the rivers of the West.
MONITOR VS. MERRIMAC
- The North’s hopes for winning the war depended upon its ability to maximize its economic & naval advantages by shutting down the South’s sources of supply
- Establishing an effective blockade of southern ports (the Anaconda Plan) was crucial to this objective
- During McClellan’s Peninsula campaign, the North’s blockade strategy was placed in jeopardy by the Confederate ironclad ship the Merrimac (a former Union ship, rebuilt & renamed the Virginia) that could attack and sink the Union’s wooden ships at will.
- The Union navy countered with an ironclad of its own, the Monitor, which fought a five-hour duel with the southern ironclad near Hampton Roads, Virginia, in March 1862.
- Although the battle ended in a draw, the Monitor prevented the South’s formidable new weapon, an ironclad ship, from seriously challenging the U.S. naval blockade.
- The ease with which these two ironclads destroyed wooden sailing ships was to revolutionize the future of naval warfare.

GRANT IN THE WEST
Battle of the ironclads occurred at about the same time as a far bloodier encounter in western Tennessee, a Confederate state. The North’s campaign for control of the Mississippi River was partly under the command of Ulysses Grant. Striking sought from Illinois in early 1862, Grant used a combination of gunboats and army maneuvers to capture Fort Henry and Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River (which was a branch of the Mississippi River). These victories, in which 14,000 Confederates were taken prisoner, opened up the state of Mississippi to Union attack. A few weeks later, a Confederate army under Albert Johnston surprised Grant at Shiloh, Tennessee, but the Union army held its ground and finally forced the Confederates to retreat after terrible losses on both sides (over 23,000 dead & wounded). Grant’s drive down the Mississippi was complemented in April 1862 by the capture of New Orleans by the Union navy under David Farragut.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DIPLOMACY
- The South’s hopes for securing its independence hinged as much on its diplomats as on its soldiers.
- Confederate leaders fully expected that cotton would induce Britain or France to give direct aid to the South’s war effort.
- Besides depending on southern cotton for their textile mills, wealthy British industrialists hoped America would break up.
- From the North’s point of view, it was important to prevent the Confederacy from gaining the foreign support & recognition.

TRENT AFFAIR
- Britain came close to siding with the Confederacy in late 1861 over an incident at sea.
- Confederate diplomats James Mason and John Slidell were traveling to England on a British ship (The Trent), on a mission to gain recognition for their government.
- A Union warship stopped the British ship, removed Mason and Slidell, and brought them to the U.S. as prisoners of war.
- Britain threatened war over the incident unless the two diplomats were released.
- Although he faced severe public criticism for doing so, Lincoln gave in to British demands.
- Mason & Slidell were freed, but after sailing for Europe, they failed to get recognition of the Confederacy from Brit. or France.

CONFEDERATE RAIDERS
- The South was able to gain enough recognition as a belligerent to purchase warships from British shipyards.
- Confederate commerce-raiders did serious harm to U.S. merchant ships.
- One of them, the Alabama, captured over 60 vessels before being sunk off the coast of France by a Union warship.
- After the war, Britain agreed to pay the U.S. around $15 million for damages caused by the South’s commerce-raiders.
- The U.S. minister to Britain, Charles Francis Adams, prevented a potentially much more serious threat.
- Learning that the Confederacy had arranged to purchase Laird rams (ships with iron rams) from Britain for use against the North’s naval blockade, Adams persuaded the British government to cancel the sale rather than risk war with the U.S.

FAILURE OF COTTON DIPLOMACY
- Cotton didn’t have the power to dictate another nation’s foreign policy since Europe found ways of getting cotton from others.
- By the time shortages of southern cotton hit the British textile industry, shipments of cotton began arriving from Egypt & India.
- Materials other than cotton could be used for textiles, and the woolen & linen industries took advantage of their opportunity.
- Two other factors went into Britain’s decision not to recognize the Confederacy.
1. Lee’s loss at Antietam played a role, without a decisive Confederate military victory, the British gov’t wouldn’t risk recognition.
2. Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation (Jan.1863) made the end of slavery an objective of the North which appealed to Britain’s working class.
- While conservative leaders of Britain were sympathetic to the South, they could not defy the pronorthern, antislavery feelings of the British majority.