

# THE CIVIL WAR, 1864–1865

From Bull Run to Chattanooga, the Union armies had fought their battles without benefit of either a grand strategy or a supreme field commander. Even after the great victories of 1863, the situation in 1864 reflected this lack of unity of command. During the final year of the war the people of the North grew restless; and as the election of 1864 approached, many of them advocated a policy of making peace with the Confederacy. President Abraham Lincoln never wavered. Committed to the policy of destroying the armed power of the Confederacy, he sought a general who could pull together all the threads of an emerging strategy and then concentrate the Union armies and their supporting naval power against the secessionists. After Vicksburg in July 1863, Lincoln leaned more and more toward Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant as the man whose strategic thinking and resolution could lead the Union armies to final victory.

## Unity of Command

Acting largely as his own General in Chief, although Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck had been given that title after George B. McClellan's removal in early 1862, Mr. Lincoln had watched the Confederates fight from one victory to another inside their cockpit of northern Virginia. In the Western Theater, Union armies, often operating independently of one another, had scored great victories at key terrain points. But their hold on the communications base at Nashville was always in jeopardy as long as the elusive armies of the Confederacy could escape to fight another day at another key point. The twin, uncoordinated victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, 900 miles apart, only pointed out the North's need for an overall strategic plan and a general who could carry it out.

Having cleared the Mississippi River, Grant wrote to Halleck and the President in the late summer of 1863 about the opportunities now open to his army. Grant first called for the consolidation of the autonomous western departments and the coordination of their individual



*President Lincoln*

armies. After this great step, he proposed to isolate the area west of the line Chattanooga-Atlanta-Montgomery-Mobile. Within this region, Grant urged a “massive rear attack” that would take Union armies in the Gulf Department under Maj. Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks and Grant’s Army of the Tennessee to Mobile and up the Alabama River to Montgomery. The U.S. Navy would play a major role in this attack. Simultaneously, Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans was to advance overland through Chattanooga to Atlanta. All military resources within this isolated area would be destroyed.

Lincoln vetoed Grant’s plan in part by deferring the Mobile-Montgomery phase. The President favored a demonstration by Banks up the Red River to Shreveport to show the American flag to the French occupying Mexico. Napoleon III had sent French soldiers to that country to install Maximilian, archduke of Austria, as emperor, taking advantage of the U.S. preoccupation with the Civil War. This was a clear violation of the Monroe Doctrine, but Lincoln could do little more than protest and demonstrate at the time. Banks’ Department of the Gulf was left out of the consolidation of the other western commands under Grant in October 1863.

Grant’s plan was further stymied after the Union defeat at Chickamauga and the subsequent need to break the siege at Chattanooga. After his own victory at Chattanooga in November, however, Grant wasted few hours in writing the President what he thought the next strategic moves should be. As a possible winter attack, Grant revived the touchy Mobile campaign while the Chattanooga victors were gathering strength for a spring offensive to Atlanta. Grant reasoned that Lee would vacate Virginia and shift strength toward Atlanta. For the Mobile-Montgomery plan, Grant asked for Banks’ resources in the Gulf Department. Lincoln again balked because the Texas seacoast would be abandoned. Grant’s rebuttal explained that Napoleon III would really be impressed with a large Army-Navy operation against Mobile Bay. The Red River campaign, Grant believed, would not provide as dramatic a demonstration. The President told Grant again that he had to heed the demands of Union diplomacy, but at the same time he encouraged Grant to enlarge his strategic proposals to include estimates for a grand Federal offensive for the coming spring of 1864.

Grant’s plan of January 1864 projected a four-pronged continental attack. In concert, the four armies were to move on Atlanta, on Mobile (after Banks took Shreveport), on General Robert E. Lee’s communications by a campaign across the middle of North Carolina on the axis New Bern–Neuse River–Goldsboro–Raleigh–Greensboro, and on Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia in the hope of defeating it in an open battle. Lincoln opposed the North Carolina phase, fearing that Grant’s diversion of 60,000 effective bayonets from formations covering Washington was too dangerous. Lincoln knew that Lee’s eyes were always fixed on the vast amount of supplies in the depots around the Washington area.

Though Lincoln scuttled some of Grant’s professional schemes, he never lost his esteem for Grant’s enthusiasm and intelligence. In February 1864 Congress revived Winfield Scott’s old rank of lieutenant general; and Grant was promoted on March 9, making him senior to all Union officers. Lincoln relieved Halleck as General in Chief and ordered Grant to Washington to assume Halleck’s post; Halleck

remained as Lincoln's military adviser and Chief of Staff, but his position was decidedly inferior to Grant's. During March the President, the new General in Chief, and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton ironed out command arrangements that had plagued every President since the War of 1812. Lincoln and Stanton relinquished powerful command, staff, and communications tools to Grant. Stanton, greatly impressed with Grant's public acclaim, cautioned his General Staff Bureau chiefs to heed Grant's needs and timetables.

General in Chief Grant reported directly to the President and the Secretary of War, keeping them informed about the broad aspects of his strategic plans and telling them in advance of his armies' needs. However, Grant removed himself from the politics of Washington and established his headquarters in northern Virginia with the Army of the Potomac. Though he planned to go quickly to trouble spots, Grant elected to accompany the Army of the Potomac under Maj. Gen. George G. Meade to assess Lee's moves and their effects on the other columns of the Union Army. By rail or steamboat, Grant was never far from Lincoln, and in turn the President visited Grant frequently. To tie his far-flung commands together, Grant employed a vast telegraph system.

In a continental theater of war larger than Napoleon's at its zenith, Grant's job, administratively, eventually embraced four military divisions, totaling seventeen subcommands wherein 500,000 combat soldiers would be employed. At Washington, Halleck operated a war room for Grant. Halleck eased his heavy administrative burden of studying the several Army commanders' detailed field directives by preparing brief digests, thus saving the General in Chief many hours of reading detailed reports. Halleck also kept Grant informed about supply levels at base depots and advance dumps in Nashville, St. Louis, City Point, Washington, Philadelphia, Louisville, and New York City. Under Stanton, Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs, the most informed logistician and supply manager of his day, dispatched men and munitions to Grant's subcommands according to a strategic timetable. As the spring offensive progressed, Stanton, Halleck, and Meigs gave Grant a rear-area team that grasped the delicate balance between theater objectives and the logistical support required to achieve them.

Grant spent the month of April on the Rapidan front developing his final strategic plan for ending the war. In essence, he recapped all his views on the advantages to be gained from his victories in the Western Theater. He added some thoughts about moving several Federal armies, aided by naval power when necessary, toward a common center in a vast, concentrated effort. He planned to stop the Confederates from using their interior lines. He intended to maneuver Lee away from the Rapidan Wilderness and defeat the Army of Northern Virginia in open terrain by a decisive battle. Another Union force collected from the Atlantic seaport towns of the Deep South was to cut the James–Appomattox River line to sever Lee's rail and road links with the other parts of the Confederacy. Simultaneously, Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman's group of armies would execute a wide wheeling movement through the South to complete the envelopment of the whole country east of the Mississippi. Banks was still scheduled to make the attack through Mobile. Sherman's and Banks' assaults were meant to fix the



*Kepie, or Forage Cap, Belonging to General Grant*



## SHERMAN

“War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it,” wrote William T. Sherman (1820–1891) to the mayor of Atlanta as he ordered all civilians out of the city before occupying it. Sherman prosecuted the war zealously. His troops began the year 1864 by tearing up 205 miles of railroad line in the state of Mississippi (“the most complete destruction of railroads ever beheld,” Sherman reported) and ended it with the famous March to the Sea from Atlanta to Savannah. Sherman was popular with the troops, partly because he was far more successful than most Union generals and partly because his nervous temperament inclined him to stop and chat with anyone along the route of march, whether teamster, enlisted man, or officer. His letters and memoranda, both during the Civil War and after (he served as Commanding General of the Army from 1869 to 1883), show exemplary concern for the well-being of his soldiers.

rebels on the periphery while Grant struck at the center, or, as Lincoln described the plan, “Those not skinning can hold a leg.”

By mid-April 1864 Grant had issued specific orders to each commander of the four Federal armies that were to execute the grand strategy. In round numbers the Union armies were sending 300,000 combat troops against 150,000 Confederates defending the invasion paths. Meade’s Army of the Potomac and Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside’s independent IX Corps, a combined force of 120,000 men, constituted the major attack column under Grant’s overall direction. The enemy had 63,000 troops facing Grant along the Rapidan. Two subsidiary thrusts were to support Meade’s efforts. Commanding a force of 33,000 men, Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler with his Army of the James was to skirt the south bank of the James, menace Richmond, take it if possible, and destroy the railroads below Petersburg. Acting as a right guard in the Shenandoah Valley, Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel’s 23,000 Federals were to advance on Lee’s rail hub at Lynchburg, Virginia. With the northern Virginia triangle under attack, in the continental center of the line, Sherman’s 100,000 men were to march on Atlanta, annihilate General Joseph E. Johnston’s 65,000 soldiers, and devastate the resources of central Georgia. On the continental right of the line, Banks was to disengage as soon as possible along the Red River and with Rear Adm. David C. Farragut’s blockading squadron in the Gulf of Mexico make a limited amphibious landing against Mobile. The day for advance would be announced early in May.

In rising from regimental command to General in Chief, Grant had learned much from experience; if he sometimes made mistakes, he rarely repeated them. Not a profound student of the literature of warfare, he had become by the eve of his grand campaign one of those rare leaders who combine the talents of the strategist, tactician, and logistician and who marry those talents to the principle of the offensive. His operations, especially those around Vicksburg, were models of the execution of the principles of war. He was calm in crisis; reversals and disappointments

did not unhinge his cool judgment. He had what some have called “three o’clock in the morning” courage, keeping his composure even in those moments in the middle of the night when fears could often overpower lesser commanders. Grant also had mastered the dry-as-dust details of the logistical system and used common sense in deciding when to use the horse-drawn wagon, the railroad, or the steamboat in his strategic moves. Above all, Grant understood and applied the principle of modern war that the destruction of the enemy’s economic resources—his ability to sustain his forces—is as necessary as the annihilation of his armies.

## Lee Cornered at Richmond

On the morning of May 4, 1864, Meade and Sherman moved out to execute Grant’s grand strategy. The combat strength of the Army of the Potomac, slimmed down from seven unwieldy corps, consisted of three infantry corps of 25,000 rifles each and a cavalry corps. Commanding the 12,000-man cavalry corps was Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan, an energetic leader whom Grant brought east on Halleck’s recommendation. Meade had dispersed his cavalry, using troopers as messengers, pickets, and train guards; but young Sheridan, after considerable argument, eventually succeeded in concentrating all of his sabers as a separate combat arm. Grant reorganized Burnside’s IX Corps of 20,000 infantrymen, held it as a strategic reserve for a time, and then assigned the IX Corps to Meade’s army. Lee’s army, now 70,000 strong, was also organized into a cavalry and three infantry corps.



*Grant’s Council of War near Massaponax Church in Virginia, May 21, 1864.  
General Grant is standing behind the bench, looking over General Meade’s  
shoulder at a map.*

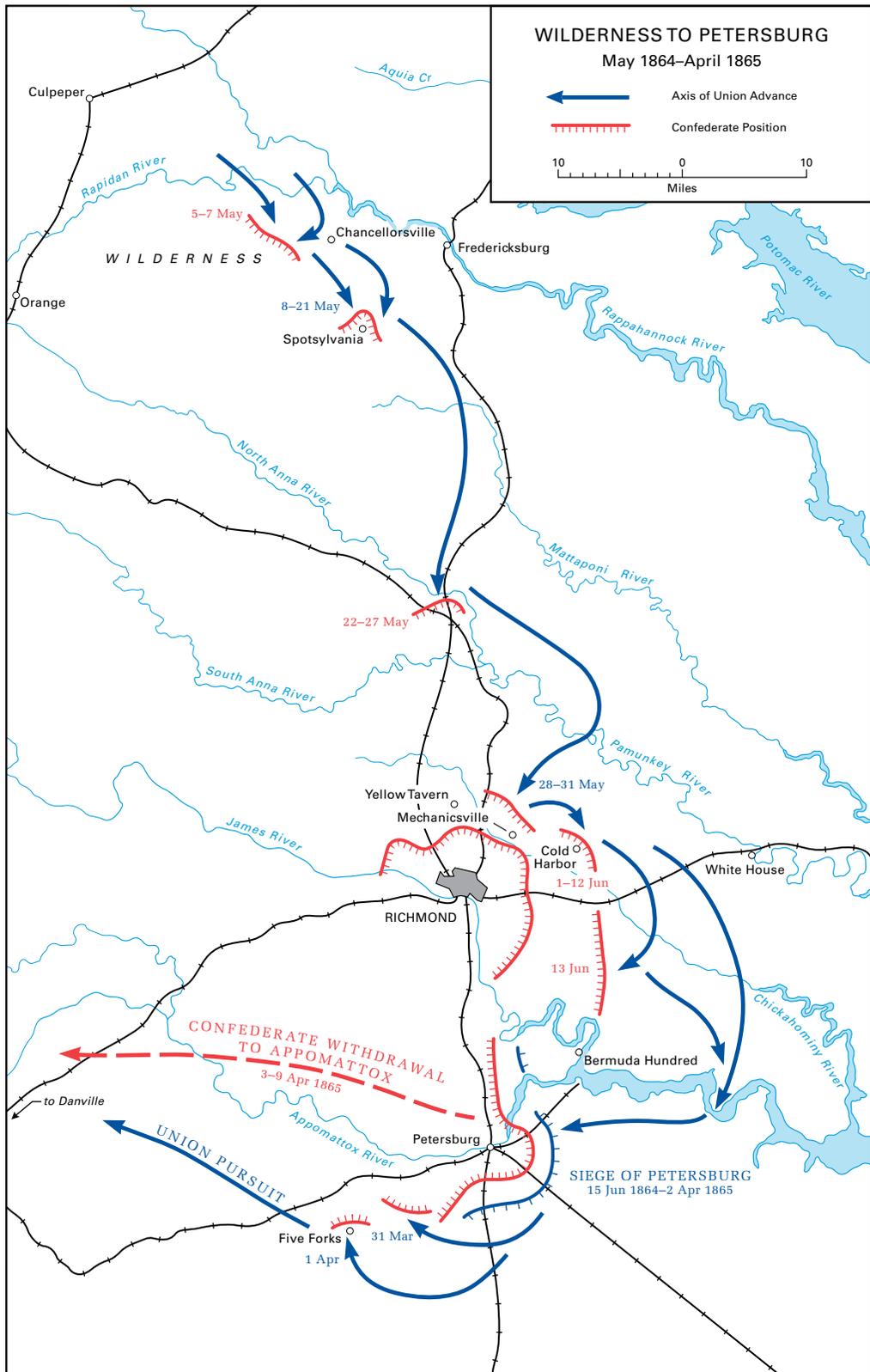
Grant and Lee were at the height of their careers, and this was their first contest of wills. Having the initiative, Grant crossed the Rapidan and decided to go by Lee's right, rather than his left. (*Map 35*) First, Grant wanted to rid himself of his reliance on the insecure Alexandria and Orange Railroads for supplies. Second, he wanted to end the Army of the Potomac's dependence on a train of 4,000 wagons (the Army's mobility was hobbled by having to care for 60,000 animals). Finally, Grant wanted to use the advantages of Virginia's tidewater rivers and base his depots on the Chesapeake Bay. He was willing to accept the risk inherent in moving obliquely across Lee's front in northern Virginia. He also hoped to find a weakness to his front that would allow him to slip around Lee's flank and get between him and Richmond.

With little room for maneuver, Grant was forced to advance through the Wilderness, where Hooker had come to grief the year before. As the army column halted near Chancellorsville to allow the wagon trains to pass the Rapidan, on May 5 Lee struck at Meade's right flank. Grant and Meade swung their corps into line and hit back. The fighting in the Battle of the Wilderness, consisting of assault, defense, and counterattack, was close and desperate in tangled woods and thickets. Artillery could not be brought to bear. The dry woods caught fire, and some of the wounded died miserably in the flame and smoke. On May 6 Lee attacked again. Lt. Gen. James Longstreet's I Corps, arriving late in battle but as always in perfect march order, drove the Federals back. Longstreet himself received a severe neck wound, inflicted in error by his own men, which took him out of action until October 1864. Lee, at a decisive moment in the battle, his fighting blood aroused to a white heat, moved forward personally and looked as if he wanted to lead an assault in person; but men of the Texas brigade with whom Lee was riding persuaded the Southern leader to go to the rear and direct the battle as their army commander. On May 7 neither side renewed the fight. The indecisive battle cost the Union nearly 17,000 casualties and the South some 10,000.

Now came the critical test of Grant's execution of strategy. He had been worsted, though not really beaten, by Lee, a greater antagonist than General Braxton Bragg, General Albert S. Johnston, or Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton. After an encounter with Lee, each of the former Army of the Potomac commanders, McClellan, Burnside, and Hooker, had retired north of the Rappahannock River and postponed any further clashes with that great tactician. But Grant was of a different breed. He calmly ordered his lead corps to move south toward Spotsylvania as rapidly as possible to get around Lee's flank and interpose the Army of the Potomac between Lee and Richmond, hoping to achieve by mobility what he had not been able to do with battle.

Lee detected Grant's march and, using roads generally parallel to Grant's, also raced toward the key road junction at Spotsylvania. Maj. Gen. J. E. B. Stuart's cavalry harassed and slowed Grant; Lee arrived first and quickly built strong earth-and-log trenches over commanding ground that covered the roads leading to Richmond. In this cross-roads race, Sheridan's cavalry would have been useful; but Meade had dissipated the cavalry corps' strength by deploying two divisions of horse to guard his already well-protected trains. Sheridan and Meade argued once again over the use of cavalry, and the General in Chief

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Map 35

## COLD HARBOR

After several days of inconclusive sparring at North Anna, General Grant maneuvered his men southward in yet another attempt to outflank General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. On May 31, 1864, General Sheridan's cavalry seized a vital crossroads near Cold Harbor. By gaining possession of Cold Harbor itself, Grant would be able to maneuver his army between Lee and the Confederate capital of Richmond. Late on June 1, the Union VI and XVIII Corps launched an assault that met with partial success. A follow-on Federal assault was delayed twenty-four hours as Grant waited for the II Corps to arrive. At dawn on June 3, the II, VI, and XVIII Corps attacked and were repulsed after briefly penetrating the enemy defensive line. Union casualties exceeded 7,000, while Confederate losses were 1,500. Cold Harbor pointed out once again the folly of frontal assaults against fortified positions.

backed Sheridan, allowing him to concentrate his cavalry arm. Grant gave Sheridan a free hand to stop Stuart's raids. Leading his corps south on May 9 in a long ride toward Richmond, its objective a decisive charge against Stuart, Sheridan did the job. He fought a running series of engagements that culminated in a victory at Yellow Tavern, just six miles north of Richmond, on May 11; the gallant Stuart was mortally wounded. The South was already short of horses and mules, and Sheridan's raid ended forever the offensive power of Lee's mounted arm. Lee, in addition, had lost another irreplaceable commander.

For four days beginning May 9 Meade struck in force at Lee's positions around Spotsylvania Court House but was beaten back each time. Twice the Federals broke through the trenches and divided Lee's army, but in each case the attackers became disorganized. Supporting infantry did not or could not close in, and Confederate counterattacks were delivered with such ferocity that the breakthroughs could be neither exploited nor held. On the morning of the eleventh, Grant wrote Halleck: "I propose to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer." He seemed as good as his word when the next day Grant launched an attack with twenty-four brigades under Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock, II Corps commander, against a narrow segment of the Confederate trench line. The attack, in an area known as the Bloody Angle or the Mule Shoe, broke the position wide open; and Union troops captured an entire Confederate division and two Confederate generals. Lee, however, recovered his equilibrium and reestablished his defensive line. On May 20, having decided the entrenchments were too strong to capture, Grant side-slipped south again, still trying to envelop Lee's right flank. His persistence led one Confederate to say of Grant, "we have met a man this time, who either does not know when he is whipped or who cares not if he loses his whole Army."

With smaller numbers, Lee skillfully avoided Grant's trap and refused to leave entrenched positions to be destroyed in open battle. Lee retired to the North Anna River and dug in. Grant did not attack the position directly but severed Confederate rail lines to the north and west of Lee before moving southeast again. Grant continued to move to his left in a daring and difficult tactical maneuver. Butler had meanwhile advanced up the peninsula toward Richmond, but General

P. G. T. Beauregard outmaneuvered him in May and bottled up Butler's men at Bermuda Hundred between the James and Appomattox Rivers. Eventually Butler and Banks, who did not take Mobile, were removed from command for their failure to carry out their assignments in the grand strategy.

Lee easily made his way into the Richmond defenses with his right flank on the Chickahominy and his center at Cold Harbor, the site of the Gaines' Mill action in 1862. The front extended for eight miles. A number of attacks on June 1 and 2 ended in Union repulses. However, on June 3 Grant thought he detected a weakness in the Confederate position and assaulted Lee's center at Cold Harbor. Though bravely executed, the attack was badly planned. The Confederates repulsed it with gory efficiency. In only a few short hours, Grant lost over 7,000 Union casualties; he later regretted that he had ever made the attempt. Cold Harbor climaxed a month of heavy fighting in which Grant's forces had 55,000 casualties against 32,000 for Lee. However, Grant was able to make good his losses within days of the battle, whereas Lee had no way to replace his.

After Cold Harbor, Grant executed a brilliant maneuver in the face of the enemy. He assembled all his corps on the north bank of the deep, wide James by June 14 and, stealing a march on Lee, sent them rapidly across a 2,100-foot pontoon bridge to the south bank. Once across, Grant began a move on lightly defended Petersburg. However, the maneuver came to nothing due to General Beauregard's stubborn defense of Confederate positions around Petersburg and General Butler's failure to prosecute a prompt supporting attack. The frustrated attacks slowed Grant enough to allow Lee to rush back and secure this vital city. Establishing a new and modern base depot at nearby City Point, complete with a rail line linking the depot with the front lines, Grant on June 18 undertook siege operations at Petersburg below Richmond, an effort that continued into the next year.

After forty-four days of continuous maneuver and fighting, Grant had finally fixed Lee in a condition of position warfare. This was now a war of trenches and sieges, conducted ironically enough by two masters of mobile warfare. Such warfare favored the side with the greater numbers and best logistics: the Union. Mortars were used extensively, and heavy siege guns were brought up on railway cars. Grant still sought to get around Lee's right and hold against Lee's left to prevent

## THE CRATER

To breach the Confederate trenches at Petersburg, Union troops tunneled forward and placed a mine containing four tons of black powder under the opposite lines. An all-black infantry division trained for the assault; but the Army of the Potomac's General Meade, worried about political consequences if the black troops took heavy casualties, substituted an untrained white division the day before the mine was to blow. The first attack on July 30, 1864, went awry, and the black division had to enter the battle anyway; but by that time the Confederate defenders had recovered from initial shock and held their position around the thirty-foot-deep crater. Total Union casualties for the day were 3,798, nearly one-fifth of those engaged, for no gain.

him from shortening his line and achieving a higher degree of concentration. When Lee moved his lines to counter Grant, the two commanders were in effect maneuvering their fortifications to try and gain an advantage. However, Lee had earlier declared that he had to keep Grant from getting to the James River and fixing him in position. "If he gets there," he stated, "it will become a siege, and then it will be a mere question of time." Grant was now on the James, and the siege was firmly in place.

To help break the deadlock, Lee decided to ease the pressure with one of his perennial raids up the Shenandoah Valley toward Washington. In early July Confederate Maj. Gen. Jubal A. Early's corps advanced against Maj. Gen. David Hunter, who had replaced Sigel. Hunter, upon receiving confused orders from Halleck, retired north down the valley. When he reached the Potomac, he turned west into the safety of the Appalachians and uncovered Washington. Early saw his chance and drove through Maryland. Delayed by a Union force on July 9 near Frederick, he reached the northern outskirts of Washington on July 11 and skirmished briskly in the vicinity of Fort Stevens. President Lincoln and Quartermaster General Meigs were interested spectators. At City Point, Grant had calmly received the news of Early's raid. Using his interior waterway, he embarked the men of his VI Corps for the capital, where they landed on the eleventh. When Early realized he was engaging troops from the Army of the Potomac, he managed to escape the next day.

Grant decided that Early had eluded the Union's superior forces because they had not been under a single commander. He abolished four separate departments and formed them into one that embraced Washington, western Maryland, and the Shenandoah Valley. In August Sheridan was put in command with orders to follow Early to the death. Sheridan spent the remainder of the year in the valley, employing and coordinating his infantry, cavalry, and artillery in a manner that has won the admiration of military students ever since. He met and defeated Early at Winchester and Fisher's Hill in September and shattered him at Cedar Creek in October. To stop further raids and prevent Lee from feeding his army on the crops of that fertile region, Sheridan devastated the Shenandoah Valley.

### **Sherman's Great Wheel to the East**

On March 17, 1864, Grant had met with Sherman at Nashville and told him his role in the grand strategy. Sherman, like Grant, held two commands. As Division of the Mississippi Commander, he was responsible for the operation and defense of a vast logistical system that reached from a communications zone at St. Louis, Louisville, and Cincinnati to center on a large base depot at Nashville. Strategically, Nashville on the Cumberland River rivaled Washington, D.C., in importance. A ninety-mile military railroad, built and operated by Union troops, gave Nashville access to steamboats plying the Tennessee River. Connected with Louisville by rail, Nashville became one vast storehouse and corral. If the city were destroyed, the Federal forces would have to fall back to the Ohio River line. Wearing his other hat, Sherman was a field commander with three armies under his direction.

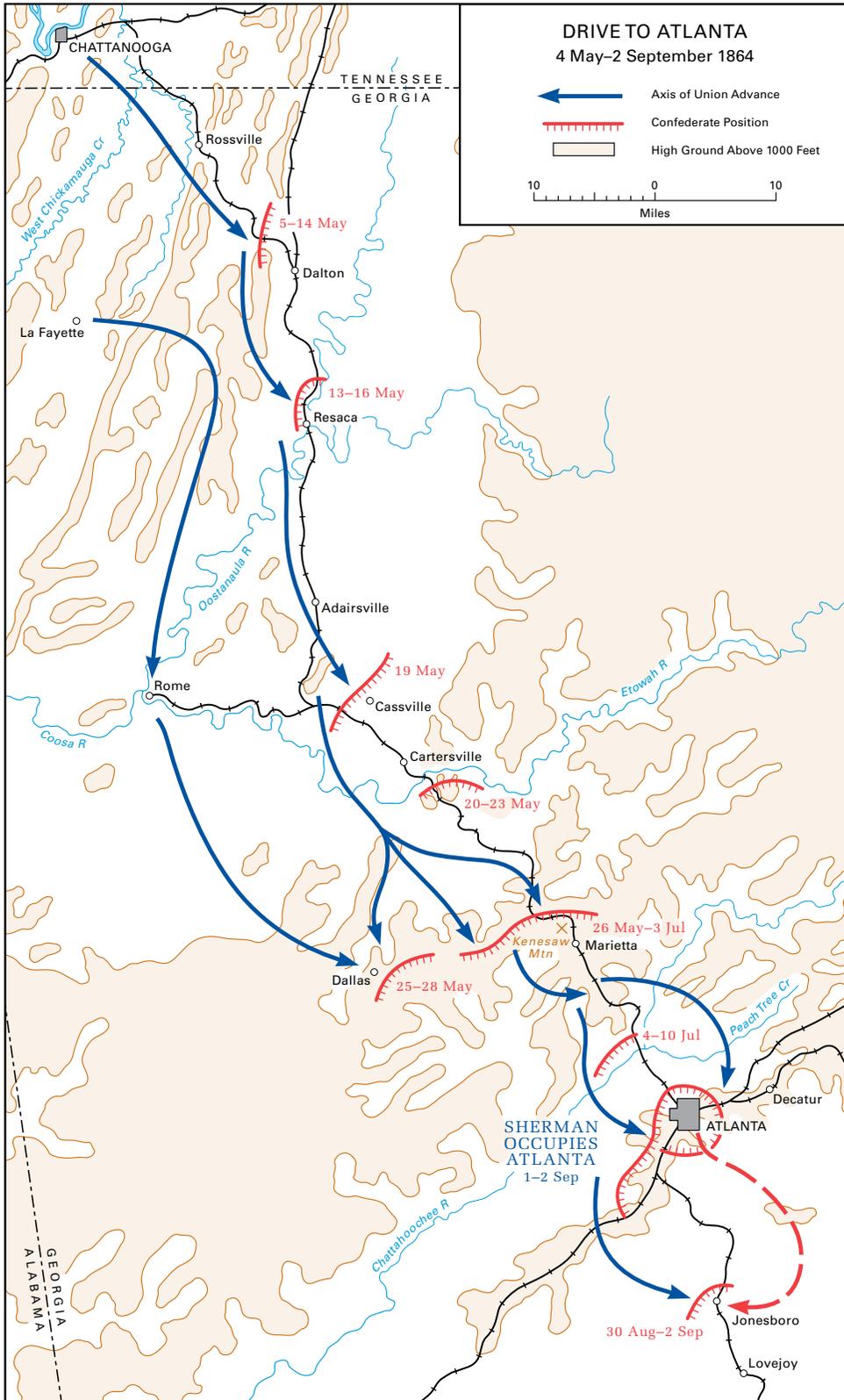
With the promise of the return of his two crack divisions from the Red River expedition by May 1864 and with a splendid administrative system working behind him, Sherman was ready to leave Chattanooga in the direction of Atlanta. (See Map 36.) His mission was to destroy Johnston's armies and capture Atlanta, after Richmond the most important industrial center in the Confederacy. With 254 guns, Sherman matched his three small armies, and a separate cavalry command—a total force of more than 100,000 men—against Johnston's Army of Tennessee and Polk's Army of Mississippi, including Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler's cavalry, 65,000 men.



Sheridan's Ride  
*Buchanan T. Reed, n.d.*

Sherman moved out on May 4, 1864, the same day the Army of the Potomac crossed the Rappahannock. Johnston, realizing how seriously he was outnumbered, decided to go on the defensive, preserve his forces intact, hold Atlanta, and delay Sherman as long as possible. There was always the hope that the North would grow weary of the costly struggle and that some advocate of peaceful settlement might defeat President Lincoln in the election of 1864. From May 4 through mid-July the two forces maneuvered against each other. There were daily fights but few large-scale actions. As Sherman pushed south, Johnston would take up a strong position and force Sherman to halt, deploy, and reconnoiter. Sherman would then outflank Johnston, who in turn would retire to a new line and start the process all over again. On June 27 Sherman, unable to maneuver because the roads were muddy and seriously concerned by the unrest in his armies brought about by constant and apparently fruitless marching, decided to assault Johnston at Kenesaw Mountain. This attack against prepared positions, like the costly failure at Cold Harbor, was beaten back at the cost of 3,000 Union casualties. Sherman returned to maneuver and slowly but surely forced Johnston back to positions in front of Atlanta.

Johnston had done his part well. He had accomplished his missions and had so slowed Sherman that Sherman covered only 100 miles in seventy-four days. Johnston, his forces intact, was holding strong positions in front of Atlanta, his main base; but by this time President Jefferson Davis had grown impatient with Johnston and his tactics of cautious delay. In July he replaced him with Lt. Gen. John B. Hood, a much more impetuous commander.



Map 36

On July 20, while Sherman was executing a wide turning movement around the northeast side of Atlanta, Hood left his fortifications and attacked at Peach Tree Creek. When Sherman beat him off, Hood pulled back into the city. While Sherman made ready to invest, Hood attacked again and failed again. Sherman then tried cavalry raids to cut the railroads, just as Johnston had during the advance from Chattanooga, but Sherman's raids had as little success as Johnston's. Sherman then began extending fortifications on August 31. Hood, who had dissipated his striking power in his assaults, gave up and retired to northwest Alabama. Sherman marched into Atlanta on the first two days of September, depriving the South of one of its key cities and railroad junctions. Sherman hoped that if Mobile could be taken, a shorter line for his supplies by way of Montgomery, Alabama, or still better by the lower Chattahoochee to Columbus, Georgia, would open. Tightening the noose still further, Admiral Farragut had entered Mobile Bay on August 5, 1864, with four Monitors and fourteen other ships but had no troops to take Mobile itself. Nevertheless, the capture of the harbor left the South with only one major port: Wilmington, North Carolina.

The fall of Atlanta gave President Lincoln's campaign for reelection in 1864 a tremendous boost. In addition, the psychological lift given the Union by Admiral Farragut's personal heroism in the battle of Mobile Bay greatly added to Lincoln's prestige.

Atlanta was only a halfway point in Sherman's vast wheel from the Western Theater toward the rear of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Abandoning the idea of catching up with Hood, Sherman by telegraph outlined his next strategic move to Lincoln and Grant in early September 1864. Sherman's two proposals proved him an able strategist as well as a consummately bold and aggressive commander. To defend Nashville, he suggested that he send two corps, 30,000 men, back to Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas. That commander would raise and train more men and be in position to hold Tennessee if Hood came north. To carry the offensive against the economic heart of the Confederacy, Sherman recommended that he himself take four corps (62,000 men), cut his own communications, live off the country, and march to the seacoast through Georgia, devastating and laying waste all farms, railroads, and storehouses in his path. Whether he arrived at Pensacola, Charleston, or Savannah, Sherman reasoned he could hold a port, make

## ATLANTA TO THE SEA AND INTO THE CAROLINAS

General Sherman led an army of 62,000 men on a massive raid through Georgia and South Carolina in late 1864 and early 1865. More than 90 percent of his enlisted force were combat veterans committed to victory, even if it meant war against noncombatants. Avoiding long, vulnerable logistics lines, Sherman's troops moved fast by living off the land. Destroying Southern morale and crops shortened the war. At times cutting a 250-mile-wide path, the Union army decimated parts of Georgia and then created even more havoc in South Carolina, the heart of secession. It was an epic march that helped to break the back of the rebellion.

contact with the U.S. Navy, and be refitted by Stanton and Meigs. Meigs promised to do the logistical job; and Lincoln and Grant, though their reaction to the plan was less than enthusiastic, accepted it in a show of confidence in Sherman.

Before marching out of Atlanta, Sherman's engineers put the torch to selected buildings and destroyed all railroads in the vicinity. On November 12, moving away from the Nashville depots toward Savannah, the Division of the Mississippi troops broke telegraphic contact with Grant. They had twenty days' emergency rations in their wagons but planned to replenish them by living off the country. Operating on a sixty-mile-wide front unimpeded by any Confederate force, Sherman's army systematically burned or destroyed what it did not need. The march became something of a rowdy excursion, but the destruction of private homes and towns has perhaps been exaggerated by popular myth. Sherman concentrated on destroying Confederate warehouses, depots, railroad lines, and other elements that assisted the Confederate war effort. His thrust deep into the Confederacy also liberated thousands of slaves, many of whom followed the Army in its march to the sea. Sherman's campaign, like Sheridan's in the Shenandoah, anticipated the economic warfare and strategic aerial bombardments of the twentieth century.

On December 10 Sherman, having broken the classic pattern by moving away from his logistical base, arrived in front of Savannah. Confederate forces evacuated the seaport on December 21, and Sherman offered it to the nation as a Christmas present. Awaiting him offshore was Meigs' floating seatrains, which enabled him to execute the last phase of Grant's strategy: a thrust north toward the line of the James River.

### **Thomas Protects the Nashville Base**

Sherman, as the Western Theater commander, did not learn of Nashville's fate until he reached Savannah. He had planned Nashville's defense well enough by sending his IV and XXII Corps under Maj. Gen. John M. Schofield to screen Hood's northward move from Florence, Alabama. Schofield was to allow Thomas some time to assemble 50,000 men and strengthen Nashville. The aggressive Hood with his 30,000 men had lost a golden opportunity to trap Schofield at Spring Hill, Tennessee, on November 29, 1864. Unopposed, the Union troops made a night march across Hood's front to escape capture. Bitterly disappointed, Hood overtook Schofield the next day at Franklin.

At this point Hood could have upset Grant's timetable. Booty at Nashville might carry Hood to the Ohio or allow him to concentrate with Lee before Richmond. But Franklin turned into one of the Confederacy's most tragic battles. It commenced about 3:30 P.M. on November 30 and ended at dusk as Hood threw 18,000 of his veterans against a solidly entrenched force of Federals. Like Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg, Hood's frontal assault gained nothing. He lost over 6,000 men, about 15 percent of his total Army, including thirteen general officers. At nightfall Schofield brought his troops in behind Thomas' defenses at Nashville.

Hood was in a precarious position. He had been far weaker than Thomas to begin with; the battle of Franklin had further depleted



Reveille on a Winter Morning, *Henry Bacon, ca. 1868*

his army; and, even worse, his men had lost confidence in their commander. The Federals in Nashville were securely emplaced in a fortified city that they had been occupying for three years. Hood could do little more than encamp on high ground a few miles south of Nashville and wait. He could not storm the city; his force was too small to lay siege; to sidestep and go north was an open invitation to Thomas to attack his flank and rear; and to retreat meant disintegration of his army. He could only watch Thomas' moves.

Thomas, the Rock of Chickamauga, belonged to the "last boot-lace" school of soldiering; he wanted every detail of supplies in place before beginning any offensive operation. In comparison with Grant and Sherman, he was slow; but he was also thorough. He had gathered and trained men and horses and was prepared to attack Hood on December 10, but an ice storm the day before made movement impossible. Grant and his superiors in Washington fretted at the delay, and the General in Chief actually started west to remove Thomas. But on December 15 Thomas struck like a sledgehammer in an attack that military students have regarded as virtually faultless.

Thomas' tactical plan was a masterly, coordinated attack. His heavily weighted main effort drove against Hood's left flank while a secondary attack aimed simultaneously at Hood's right. Thomas provided an adequate reserve and used cavalry to screen his flank and extend the



*Anne Bell, a Nurse, Caring for Wounded Union Soldiers*

envelopment of the enemy left. Hood, on the other hand, was over-extended; and his thin line was concave to the enemy, denying him the advantage of interior lines. Hood's reserve was inadequate, and his cavalry was absent on a minor mission.

The two-day battle proceeded according to Thomas' plan as the Federals fixed Hood's right while slashing savagely around the Confederate left flank. They broke Hood's first line on December 15, forcing the Southerners to retire to a new line two miles to the rear. The Federals repeated their maneuver on the sixteenth, and by nightfall the three-sided battle had disintegrated into a rout of Hood's army. Broken and defeated, it streamed southward, protected from hotly pursuing Union cavalry only by the intrepid rear-guard action of Maj. Gen. Nathan B. Forrest's horsemen. The shattered Army of Tennessee reached Tupelo, Mississippi, on January 10, 1865, but no longer existed as an effective fighting force. Hood was relieved of command, and his scattered units were assigned to other areas of combat. The decisive battle of Nashville had eliminated one of the two great armies of the Confederacy from a shrinking chessboard.

### **Lee's Last 100 Days**

President Lincoln was delighted with Savannah as a Christmas present: In his congratulatory letter to Sherman and Grant, the Commander in Chief said that he would leave the final phases of the war to his two leading professional soldiers. Accordingly, from City Point, on December 27, 1864, Grant directed Sherman to march overland toward Richmond. At 3:00 P.M. on December 31, Sherman agreed to execute this last phase of Grant's continental sweep. In the final 100 days of the war, the two generals would clearly demonstrate the art of making the principles of warfare come alive and would prove that each principle was something more than a platitude. The commanders had a common objective: Grant and Meade would continue to hammer Lee. Sherman was to execute a devastating invasion northward through the Carolinas toward a juncture with Meade's Army of the Potomac, then on the line

of the James River. Their strategy was simple. It called for the massing of strength and exemplified an economy of force. It would place Lee in an untenable position, cutting him off from all other Confederate commanders and trapping him between two Union armies. Surprise would be achieved by reuniting all of Sherman's original corps when Schofield, moving from central Tennessee by rail, river, and ocean transport, arrived at the Carolina capes. Solidly based on a centralized logistical system with protected Atlantic supply ships at their side, Grant and Sherman were ready to end Lee's stay in Richmond.

Robert E. Lee, the master tactician, divining his end, wrote to Davis that the Confederates would have to concentrate their forces for a last-ditch stand. In February 1865 the Confederate Congress conferred supreme command of all Confederate armies on Lee, an empty honor. Lee could no longer control events. Sherman moved through Columbia, South Carolina, in a destructive campaign much harsher than that visited on Georgia. Even the Union troops felt that South Carolina had started the war and should be punished for it. In February, Sherman took Wilmington, North Carolina, the Confederacy's last available port, and then pushed on. Johnston, newly reappointed to a command, had the mission of stopping Sherman's forces but could not. He interposed his small army of about 21,000 effectives in the path of two of Sherman's corps at Bentonville, North Carolina, on March 19. His initial attack gained some ground, but by the next day more of Sherman's forces were on the scene and Johnston had to continue his retreat. There would be no further major attempts to stop Sherman.

At Richmond and Petersburg toward the end of March, Grant renewed his efforts along a 38-mile front to get at Lee's right (west) flank. By now Sheridan's cavalry and the VI Corps had returned from the Shenandoah Valley, and the total force immediately under Grant numbered 101,000 infantry, 14,700 cavalry, and 9,000 artillery. Lee had 46,000 infantry, 6,000 cavalry, and 5,000 artillery.

On March 29 Grant began his move to the left. Sheridan and the cavalry pushed out ahead by way of Dinwiddie Court House in order to strike at Burke's Station, the intersection of the Southside and Danville Railroads, while Grant's main body moved to envelop Lee's right. But Lee, alerted to the threat, moved west. Lt. Gen. Ambrose P. Hill, who never stood on the defense if there was a chance to attack, took his corps out of its trenches and assaulted the Union left in the swampy forests around White Oak Road. He pushed Maj. Gen. Gouverneur K. Warren's V Corps back at first, but Warren counterattacked and by March 31 had driven Hill back to his trenches. On that day Sheridan advanced toward Five Forks, a road junction southwest of Petersburg, and there encountered a strong Confederate force—cavalry plus two infantry divisions under Maj. Gen. George E. Pickett—which Lee had dispatched to forestall Sheridan. Pickett attacked and drove Sheridan back to Dinwiddie Court House, but there Sheridan dug in and halted him. Pickett then entrenched at Five Forks instead of pulling back to make contact with Hill, whose failure to destroy Warren had left a gap between him and Pickett, with Warren's corps in between. Sheridan, still formally the commander of the Army of the Shenandoah, had authority from Grant to take control of any nearby infantry corps of the Army of the Potomac. He wanted Warren to fall upon Pickett's

## ULYSSES S. GRANT (1822–1885)

Born Hiram Ulysses Grant and nicknamed Sam Grant during his early military experience in Mexico after graduation from West Point in 1843, Ulysses S. Grant bounced back from setbacks all of his life. His heavy drinking prompted his resignation from the Army in 1854 to avoid court-martial. He failed in a number of civilian jobs and was able to regain a commission in 1861 as a colonel of a volunteer regiment from Illinois only with the help of a local Congressman. He suffered military reversals at Belmont, Missouri, in 1861 and was caught by surprise at Shiloh the following year. Yet he also gained fame for his capture of Forts Henry and Donelson and his great victories at Vicksburg, Chattanooga, and over Robert E. Lee in a masterful campaign that in effect won the war. His memoirs, which he wrote as he lay dying to provide money for his nearly destitute family, are a masterpiece and show him as a caring, thoughtful, and simple man who was also a determined military commander. He is one of America's greatest generals.



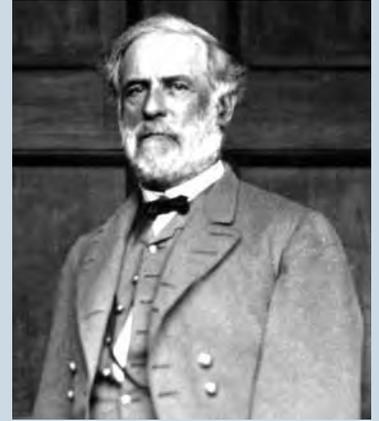
exposed rear and destroy him, but Warren moved too slowly and Pickett consolidated his position. On April 1 Sheridan attacked again but failed to destroy Pickett because Warren had moved his corps too slowly and put most of it in the wrong place. Late in the afternoon, however, the Union attack struck Pickett's position in full force on both flanks. His position outflanked, Pickett ordered a retreat, but not quickly enough to avoid losing almost half his force of 10,000 as prisoners.

Grant renewed his attack against Lee's right on April 2. The assault broke the Confederate line and forced it back northward. The Federals took the line of the Southside Railroad, and the Confederates withdrew toward Petersburg. Lee then pulled Longstreet's corps away from the shambles of Richmond to hold the line, and in this day's action General Hill was killed. With his forces stretched thin, Lee had to abandon Richmond and the Petersburg fortifications. He struck out and raced west toward the Danville Railroad, hoping to get to Lynchburg or Danville, break loose, and eventually join forces with Johnston. But Grant had Lee in the open at last. He pursued relentlessly and speedily, with troops behind (east of) Lee and south of him on his left flank, while Sheridan dashed ahead with the cavalry to head Lee off. A running fight ensued from April 2 through 6. Lt. Gen. Richard S. Ewell's corps was surrounded and captured at Saylor's Creek. Lee's rations ran out; his men began deserting and straggling. Finally, Sheridan galloped his men to Appomattox Court House, squarely athwart Lee's line of retreat.

Lee resolved that he could accomplish nothing more by fighting. He met Grant at the McLean House in Appomattox on April 9, 1865. The handsome, well-tailored Lee, the very epitome of Southern chivalry, asked Grant for terms. Reserving all political questions for his own decision, Lincoln had authorized Grant to treat only on purely military matters. Grant, though less impressive in his bearing than Lee, was equally chivalrous. He accepted Lee's surrender, allowed 28,356 paroled

## ROBERT E. LEE (1807–1870)

Four years after refusing the field command of the Union Army because he could not draw his sword against his native state of Virginia, Lee surrendered at Appomattox and, ironically, began his ascent to the status of perhaps the most admired figure in American military history. A modest, Christian gentleman, he was also a combative, bold, and skillful Napoleonic tactician who repeatedly turned back larger Federal forces in their efforts to capture the Confederate capital, Richmond. To Southerners, and indeed many Northerners, he remains the legendary symbol of the “Lost Cause,” defeated in the end only by superior numbers and resources.



Confederates to keep their horses and mules, furnished rations to the Army of Northern Virginia, and forbade the soldiers of the Army of the Potomac to cheer or fire salutes to celebrate the victory over their old antagonists. Johnston surrendered to Sherman on April 26. The last major trans-Mississippi force gave up the struggle on May 26, and the grim fighting was over.

### Dimensions of the War

Viewing the war in its broadest context, a historian could fairly conclude that a determined general of the North had bested a legendary general of the South, probably the most brilliant tactician on either side, because the Union could bring to bear a decisive superiority in economic resources and manpower. Lee’s mastery of the art of warfare staved off defeat for four long years, but the outcome was never really in doubt. Grant and Lincoln held too many high cards; and during the last year of the war, the relations between the Union’s Commander in Chief and his General in Chief set an unexcelled example of civil-military coordination. This coordination was essential to prosecuting a multitheater war characterized by the slow, yet steady expansion of the area brought back under Federal control over the course of four years of struggle. (*See Map 37.*)

In this costly war, the Union Army lost 138,154 men killed in battle. This figure seems large, but it is only slightly more than half the number (221,374) who died of other causes, principally disease, bringing the total Union dead to 359,528. Men wounded in action numbered 280,040. Figures for the Confederacy are incomplete, but at least 94,000 were killed in battle, 70,000 died of other causes, and an estimated 30,000 died in Northern prisons.

With the advent of conscription, mass armies, and long casualty lists, the individual soldier seemed destined to lose his identity and dignity. These were the days before regulation serial numbers and dog tags (although some soldiers made individual tags from coins or scraps of paper). But by the third year of the war various innovations had been introduced to enhance the soldier’s lot. Union forces were wearing corps

## ANDERSONVILLE AND ELMIRA PRISON CAMPS

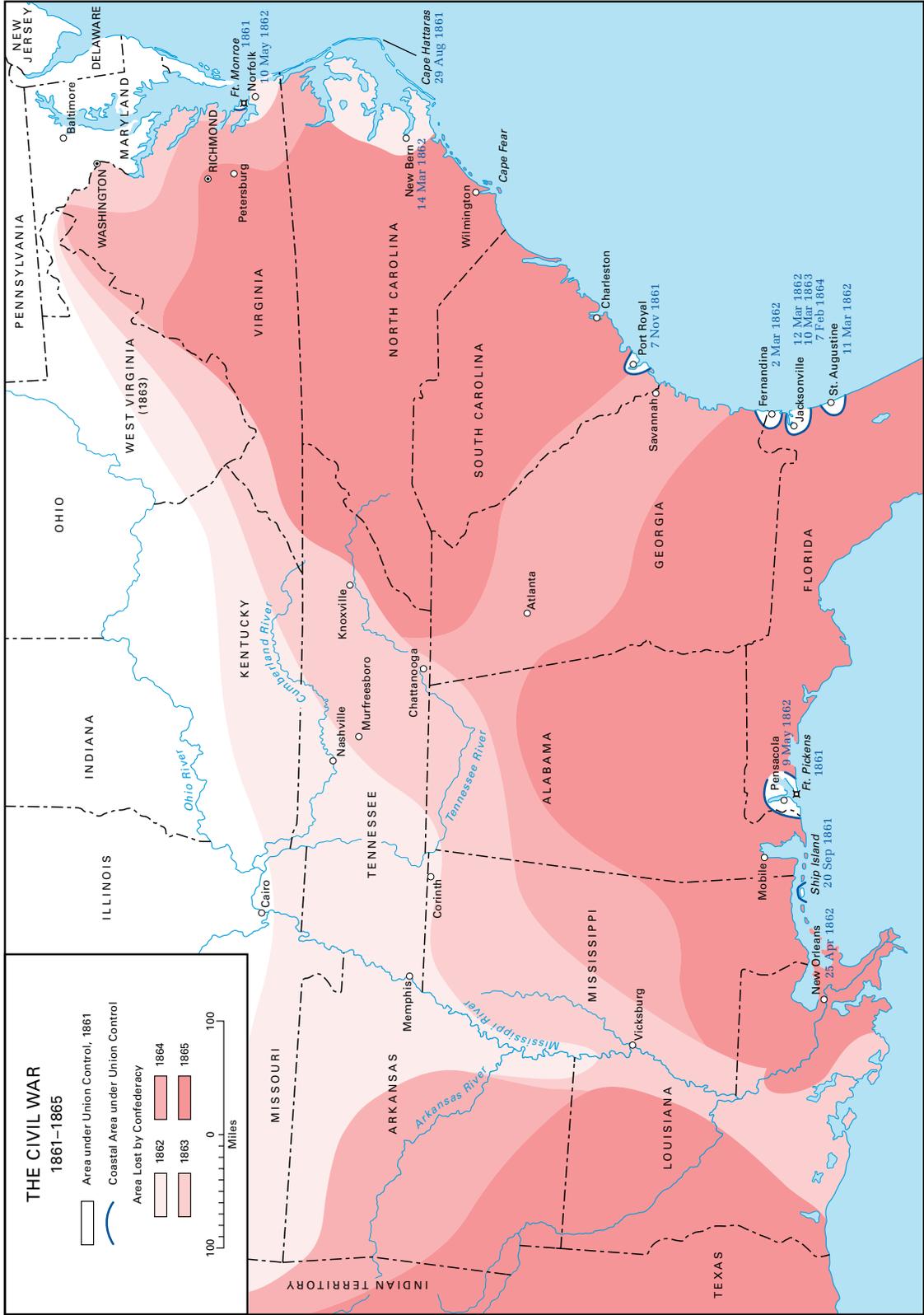
Andersonville Prison in southern Georgia and Elmira Prison in south-central New York State became notorious during the final year of the Civil War for their deplorable living conditions and the high mortality rate of their inmates. Both camps suffered from severe overcrowding, rampant disease, and a lack of building supplies and food, the result mostly of wartime shortages and mismanagement rather than of deliberate malice (although in Andersonville there was evidence of the latter). Of the 45,613 Union prisoners held at Andersonville nearly 13,000 died; while at Elmira, nearly 3,000 of the 12,000 Confederates kept there perished. For his role the warden at Andersonville, Capt. Henry Wirz, was hanged in November 1865.

badges that heightened unit identification, esprit de corps, and pride in organization. The year 1863 saw the first award of the highest U.S. decoration, the Medal of Honor. Congress had authorized it on July 12, 1862, and in 1863 Secretary Stanton gave the first medals to Pvt. Jacob Parrott and five other soldiers. They had demonstrated extraordinary valor in a daring raid behind the Confederate lines near Chattanooga. The Medal of Honor remains the highest honor the United States can bestow on any individual in the armed services.

Throughout the western world, the nineteenth century, with its many humanitarian movements, evidenced a general improvement in the treatment of the individual soldier; and the U.S. soldier was no exception. The more severe forms of corporal punishment were abolished in the U.S. Army in 1861. Although Civil War medical science was primitive in comparison with that of today, an effort was made to extend medical services in the Army beyond the mere treatment of battle wounds. As an auxiliary to the regular medical service, the volunteer U.S. Sanitary Commission fitted out hospital ships and hospital units; provided male and, for the first time in the U.S. Army, female nurses; and furnished clothing and foods fancier than the regular rations. Similarly, the U.S. Christian Commission augmented the efforts of the regimental chaplains and even provided, besides songbooks and Bibles, some coffee bars and reading rooms.

The Civil War forced changes in the traditional policies governing the burial of soldiers. On July 17, 1862, Congress authorized the President to establish national cemeteries “for the soldiers who shall die in the service of the country.” While little was done during the war to implement this Congressional action, several battlefield cemeteries (Antietam, Gettysburg, Chattanooga, Stones River, and Knoxville) were set up “as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives” in lieu of some nameless corner of a forgotten field.

The great conflict had also forced changes in ideas about the obligation of citizens to perform military service. Attrition in manpower had forced both South and North to turn to conscription to keep their armies up to effective strength. The Confederate government had enacted a draft law as early as April 1862. Late in that year Union governors were no longer able to raise enough troops for the Federal armies; and on March 3, 1863, Congress passed the Enrollment Act, an outright assertion of national conscription by the central government.



Map 37

This law made able-bodied males between twenty and forty-five years of age liable for national military service. The Enrollment Act was not popular, as bloody draft riots in New York demonstrated after Gettysburg. Both the Confederate and the U.S. laws were undemocratic: they did not apply equally to all individuals. They provided for exemptions that allowed many to escape military service entirely. Comparatively few men were ever drafted into the Federal service, but by stimulating men to volunteer the Enrollment Act had its desired effect.

The principal importance of the Enrollment Act of 1863, however, does not lie in the effect it had on manpower procurement for the Civil War. This measure established firmly the principle that every citizen is obligated to defend the nation and that the Federal government can impose that obligation directly on the citizen without the mediation of the states. In addition, the act recognized that the previous system of total reliance on militia and volunteers would not suffice in a modern, total war.

As the western world's largest and longest conflict of the nineteenth century except the Napoleonic wars, the American Civil War has been argued about and analyzed since the fighting stopped. It continues to excite the imagination because it was full of paradox. Old-fashioned in that infantry attacked in the open in dense formations, it also foreshadowed modern total war. Though not all the ingredients were new, railroads, telegraph communications, steamships, balloons, armor plate, rifled weapons, wire entanglements, the submarine, large-scale photography, and torpedoes—all products of the burgeoning industrial revolution—gave new and awesome dimensions to armed conflict. It was also America's deadliest war and greatest national struggle to define what we were as a nation. The final determination was clear. America could not have endured "half-slave and half-free." With the curse of slavery lifted and the long struggle of many of our nation's newest citizens for their full civil rights just under way, the American Army turned to other unpleasant tasks: the occupation of the defeated Southern states and the long campaign to "settle" the Indian problem on the frontier.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. By 1864, what strategic options remained for the Confederacy?
2. Compare Grant's 1864 campaign with Scott's Anaconda Plan of 1861. What are the similarities and differences?
3. Was Sherman's and Sheridan's destruction of crops, warehouses and factories necessary? Why or why not? What was an alternative Union strategy to compel Southern submission?
4. To what degree did the very principle the Confederates claimed they were fighting for ("states rights") undermine their war effort?
5. Grant and Lee can be considered two of the greatest generals in American history. What were their strengths and weaknesses?
6. Thesis: The American Civil War was the first modern war. Why is this true? Why is this false?

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