
LESSON 6

MID-19TH CENTURY WARFARE: AMERICAN CIVIL WAR (1861-1865)

This has been a war of missed opportunities. We have let them get away before. I do not wish to make that mistake again. We cannot continue to lose men...good officers.... We cannot trade casualties with an enemy that has much greater numbers and much greater resources. If we are to win this war, we must strike the decisive blow...force him to admit defeat.

-- General Robert E. Lee
Gods and Generals (pp. 353-354)

We are not only fighting hostile armies, but a hostile people, and must make old and young, rich and poor, feel the hard hand of war, as well as the organized armies.

-- Memoirs of General William T. Sherman
Vol. II, p. 227

Introduction

Purpose	This lesson covers the American Civil War, sometimes called the War Between the States. You will learn about the character and the impact the Civil War had on the American military tradition.
Why Study the Civil War?	The Civil War was the bloodiest war in the history of the United States. While that alone would be justification for military professionals to study it, the Civil War also was possibly the most significant event in the social and political development of the Nation.
Relationship to Other Instruction	This lesson builds on previous instruction provided on the evolution of the profession of arms and the conduct of war from the 17th to 19th centuries (lessons 2 and 3). It is a lead-in to lessons on conventional warfare in the 20th century (lessons 8 and 9). Topics and concepts introduced will reappear in the <i>Strategic Level of War</i> (8802) and <i>Operational Level of War</i> (8803) courses.
Study Time	This lesson, including the issues for consideration, will require about 3.5 hours of study.

Educational Objectives

Character Understand the character of the U.S. Civil War. [JPME Areas 3b, 3d, and 3e]

Past and Future Links Comprehend how the character of the U.S. Civil War was linked to past wars and the ways in which it was a harbinger of future wars. [JPME Areas 3b and 3d]

JPME Areas/ 3/b/0.5
Objectives/Hours 3/d/2.0
(accounting data) 3/e/0.5

Historical Background

Background

- The Civil War was the world's major conflict in length, cost, and casualties in the period between the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon and the First World War.
- The War Between the States also was a transitional conflict, one linking the Napoleonic era with the total wars of the 20th century; hence, it had elements of the previous era and was a precursor of what was to come. By 1865, over 3,900,000 slaves had been freed, and roughly 179,000 African Americans had served in the armed forces of the United States.

Costs

An estimated 600,000 died from many causes, including

- Union casualties: 110,070 battle deaths and 199,720 from disease
 - Confederate casualties: 74,524 battle deaths and 59,297 from disease
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Required Readings

The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy

Weigley, Russell F. *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company; reprinted, Indiana University Press. Read Chapters 6 and 7, "Napoleonic Strategy: R. E. Lee and the Confederacy," and "A Strategy of Annihilation: U.S. Grant and the Union," pp. 92 to 152. In the two required chapters, you get a glimpse of the character of the conflict. Chapter 6 initially compares the American Civil War with the American War of Independence. Weigley's view of Lee's style of generalship puts it in Napoleonic terms and axioms.

For Further Study

Supplemental Readings

The readings listed are **not** required. They are provided as recommended sources of additional information about topics in this lesson that may interest you. They will increase your knowledge and augment your understanding of this lesson.

- Fellman, Michael. *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri during the American Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Goodrich, Thomas. *Black Flag: Guerrilla Warfare on the Western Border, 1861-1865*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Hartwig, D. Scott. *A Killer Angels Companion*. Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 1996.
- Katchner, Philip. *The Civil War Source Book*. New York: Facts on File, 1992.
- McPherson, James M. *What They Fought For, 1861-1865*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Ibid. *The Causes and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Ibid. *Battle Cry of Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Ibid. *Drawn with a Sword: Reflections on the American Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Roland, Charles P. *The American Iliad: The Story of the Civil War*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1991.
- Shaara, Jeff. *God and Generals: A Novel of the Civil War*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1996.
- Shaara, Michael. *The Killer Angels*. New York: Random House, 1974.
- Symonds, Craig L. *A Battlefield Atlas of the Civil War*, 3rd ed. Baltimore: Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1983.

Issues for Consideration

Introduction

Be sure to focus on the key concepts as you analyze and interpret each reading; the time you have available probably does not permit you to do a detailed study of the American Civil War.

Keep in mind the Civil War revealed the problem of subjugating a "people in arms," even if they were an embryo nation that no one recognized.

Causes of the War

What caused the American Civil War and why did men of both sides flock to their respective colors? For what reason did men join, risk their lives, and die?

Character of the War

At the political level, Lincoln's forcing the South to initiate hostilities deprived it of many of the advantages of a moral defense.

- How would you characterize the American Civil War? Was it a limited or an unlimited war?
 - Did its character change, and, if so, why and how?
 - How did the Civil War reflect the military institutions of the nation in the mid-19th century?
 - How does the Civil War reflect the American approach to war?
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Theater(s) of Wars

- Military professionals study the Civil War with a primary focus on the eastern theater between 1861-63, where campaigns and battles of mobility had beginnings, climaxes, and ends.
 - Why do those campaigns and battles of 1864 and 1865, as well as those in the west, tend to receive a less glamorous treatment?
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Issues for Consideration, Continued

Clausewitz and the Civil War Length

- Why did it take the North so long to win? Or, why did it take the South so long to lose?
- Can you relate the military problem(s) of the Civil War to Clausewitz's discussion of the trinity in warfare and his concepts of policy and politics?

Technology

Leaders on both sides threw their armies into suicidal charges across open fields into massed musketry. Examples include Bragg at Shiloh (the hornet's nest) and Grant at Cold Harbor. Can you give other examples?

- What was the role of technology in the war?
- What role did technology have in enhancing the north's ability to wage war against the Confederacy?
- Did it also increase the North's vulnerability at this level of war?
- Did Grant's initial Vicksburg campaign illustrate this vulnerability, and if so, how? How did he resolve this dilemma?

Many Civil War leaders first experienced combat in the Mexican War. Had the defense become more powerful than the offense with the adoption of the *rifled* musket?
