

## U.S. History: Preparing for the Advanced Placement Exam

268

politicians with a strong popular base. The ultimate hope of the South was that the people of the North would turn against Lincoln and the Republicans and quit the war because it was too costly.

### *The Confederate States of America*

The constitution of the Confederacy was modeled after the U.S. Constitution, but it provided a nonsuccessive six-year term for the president and vice president and presidential item veto. Its constitution denied the Confederate congress the powers to levy a protective tariff and to appropriate funds for internal improvements, but it did prohibit the foreign slave trade. President Jefferson Davis tried to increase his executive powers during the war, but southern governors resisted attempts at centralization, some holding back men and resources to protect their own states. At one point, Vice President Alexander H. Stephens, in defense of states' rights, even urged the secession of Georgia in response to the "despotic" actions of the Confederate government.

The Confederacy always faced a serious shortage of money. It tried loans, income taxes (including a 10 percent tax in-kind on farm produce), and even impressment of private property, but these revenues paid for only a small percentage of the war's costs. The government was forced to issue more than \$1 billion in inflationary paper money, which reduced the value of a Confederate dollar to less than two cents by the closing days of the war. The Confederate congress nationalized the railroads and encouraged industrial development. The Confederacy sustained nearly 1 million troops at its peak, but a war of attrition doomed its efforts. The real surprise is that the South was able to persist for four years.

### **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. "On to Richmond!" was the optimistic cry, but as Americans soon learned, it would take almost four years of ferocious fighting before northern troops finally did march into the Confederate capital.

**First Battle of Bull Run.** In the first major battle of the war (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 forces seemed close to victory, Confederate reinforcements under General Thomas (Stonewall) Jackson counterattacked and sent the inexperienced Union troops in disorderly and panicky flight back to Washington (together with civilian curiosity-seekers and picnickers). The battle ended the illusion of a short war and also promoted the myth that the Rebels were invincible in battle.

**Union strategy.** General-in-Chief Winfield Scott, veteran of the 1812 and Mexican wars, devised a three-part strategy for winning a long war:

- Use the U.S. navy to blockade southern ports (the Anaconda Plan, as it was called) and thereby cut off essential supplies from reaching the South
- Divide the Confederacy in two by taking control of the Mississippi River
- 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 ultimately all three aspects of Scott's plan were important in achieving northern victory.

After the Union's defeat at Bull Run, federal armies experienced a succession of crushing defeats as they attempted various campaigns in Virginia, each less successful than the one before.

**Peninsula campaign.** General George B. 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 sorely tested Lincoln's patience, McClellan's army invaded Virginia in March 1862. The Union army was stopped as a result of brilliant tactical moves by Confederate General Robert E. Lee, who emerged as the commander of the South's eastern forces. After five months, McClellan was forced to retreat and was 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. He drew Pope into a trap, then struck the enemy's flank, and sent the Union army backward to Bull Run. Pope withdrew to the defenses of Washington.

**Antietam.** Following up his victory at Bull Run, Lee led his army across the Potomac into enemy territory in Maryland. In doing so, he hoped that a major Confederate victory in the North would convince Britain to give official recognition and support to the Confederacy. By this time (September 1862), Lincoln had restored McClellan to command of the Union army. McClellan had the advantage of knowing 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 either 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. The president complained that his general had a "bad case of the slows." While technically a draw, Antietam in the long run proved to be a

## 270 U.S. History: Preparing for the Advanced Placement Exam

decisive battle, because it stopped the Confederates from getting what they so urgently needed—open recognition and aid from a foreign power. Lincoln too found enough encouragement in the results of Antietam to claim it as a Union victory. Grasping at a rare opportunity to make a bold change in policy, Lincoln used the partial triumph of Union arms to announce plans for the Emancipation Proclamation (see below, page 272).

**Fredericksburg.** 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. Both Union and Confederate generals were slow to learn that improved weaponry, especially the deadly fire from enemy artillery, took the romance out of heroic charges against entrenched positions. By the end of 1862, the awful 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 and 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 and 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 and renamed the *Virginia*) that could attack and sink the Union's wooden ships almost 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 *Monitor-Merrimac* duel was also important for another reason. The ease with which these two ironclads destroyed wooden sailing ships was to revolutionize the future of naval warfare.

**Grant in the West.** The 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 a West Point graduate, Ulysses S. Grant, who had joined up for the war after an unsuccessful civilian career. Striking south 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 (a branch of the Mississippi). These stunning 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 and 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 indeed prove to be "king" and induce Britain or France, or both, to give direct aid to the South's war effort. Besides depending on southern cotton for their textile mills, wealthy British industrialists and members of the British aristocracy looked forward with pleasure to the breakup of the American democratic experiment. From the North's point of view, it was critically important to prevent the Confederacy from gaining the foreign support and recognition that it so desperately needed.

### 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 steamer, 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 United States 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 and Slidell were duly set free, but after again sailing for Europe, they failed to obtain full recognition of the Confederacy from either Britain 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, Great Britain eventually agreed to pay the United States \$15.5 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 United States.