As soon as the first shots of the Civil War were fired, war fever seemed to sweep the country. Neither the Union nor the Confederacy was completely prepared for war, but each had advantages over the other. President Jefferson Davis immediately used the power given to him by the Confederate Constitution and asked for 100,000 volunteers to fight against the Union. Winning the first battle at Fort Sumter convinced many Southerners that the Civil War could be quickly won in a few months.

Confederate Advantages

The Confederate Army was very confident in its fighting ability. Southerners were used to being outside working and walking the borders of their huge plantations. They were also very comfortable carrying guns and riding horses. Northerners, on the other hand, lived in cities and worked in factories. They took trains from place to place.

The Confederacy also had Richmond, Virginia. Shortly after taking over Fort Sumter, the Confederacy moved its capital from Montgomery, Alabama, to the city of Richmond. Richmond had railroad lines to the port cities of New Orleans in Louisiana, Savannah in Georgia, and Charleston in South Carolina. Richmond was also home to one of the largest gun making factories in the United States. The Confederacy would have all of the cannons and ammunition it could possibly need for the war effort.

The Confederacy decided early on that it could not successfully fight the Civil War in the North. It chose instead to wait for the Union Army to invade the South. Fighting the war on its own soil would be a huge advantage for the Confederate Army. The Confederate troops knew the terrain and the best hiding places. In addition, the Union did not have very good maps of the South.

The Union Army was limited and out of date. Its weapons were old and the Union didn’t have enough cannons to fight a war. The Union Navy had 42 ships, but most of these were unfit for combat. Even the Union’s commanders were outdated. The two most experienced officers in the Union Army were over the age of 70.
ROBERT E. LEE

When the Civil War started, over 300 officers resigned from the United States Army to join the Confederate Army. Leaders like Robert E. Lee were the Confederacy’s biggest weapons.

Robert Edward Lee was born in Virginia on January 19, 1807. His father, Henry Lee, was known as “Light Horse Henry” during the Revolutionary War.

Robert grew up on his family’s plantation in Virginia. He entered West Point Military Academy at the age of 18. His classmates admired him for his intelligence and leadership abilities. In 1829, Robert graduated with honors and became a lieutenant in the United States Army.

By the time the Civil War broke out, Robert E. Lee had already served the United States in many ways. He had been a leader in the Mexican War, the superintendent of West Point, and a lieutenant colonel in charge of protecting the settlers in Texas from Native American raids.

Although Lee was raised in Virginia, he was not in favor of slavery or separation from the United States. President Lincoln knew this and offered Robert E. Lee the job of commanding the Union Army. Lee turned down President Lincoln’s offer and promised to stay loyal to Virginia.

When Virginia seceded from the Union, Robert E. Lee kept his promise and resigned from the Union Army. He volunteered his services to the Confederacy. Robert E. Lee served first as an advisor to Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Later, he was appointed commander of the entire Confederate Army.
Within 48 hours of the Union’s surrender at Fort Sumter, President Abraham Lincoln asked for 75,000 volunteers to help battle the Confederacy and bring the Union back together. President Lincoln and his supporters were confident that the Confederacy could be defeated in a short amount of time.

**Union Advantages**

The North held most of the country’s wealth, farm land, and railroad lines. The biggest banks with most of the nation’s money were located in the North. The economy in the North included manufacturing, cattle, corn, wheat, and hogs. The Union Army had everything it needed to supply its soldiers.

The Union had twice as many states with a population of 22 million people. There were only 11 Confederate states with a total population of nine million. Three million of these people were black slaves. With all of its population and wealth, the Union could easily build a bigger and stronger army.

The North had more than 100,000 factories. Those factories made weapons for the Union Army. The farms in the North grew mostly food, while the huge plantations in the South grew a lot of cotton. The North was better prepared to feed its army. The North also had canals and 22,000 miles of railroad lines. These could be used to move soldiers and weapons from one battle to another.

**The Union’s Leaders**

When the Civil War started, the Union Army included only 1,080 officers and 15,000 soldiers. Many of the best commanders in the United States Army lived in the South. As their states seceded from the Union, these men joined the Confederate Army. During the war, 142 of the Union’s officers became generals. Though the Union Army was small at the beginning of the war, most of the Union’s commanders had several years of military experience.
GEORGE B. McCLELLAN

George Brinton McClellan was a young West Point graduate who had served in the Mexican War. During the first part of the Civil War, McClellan was promoted to major general and put in charge of training thousands of Union volunteers in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Pennsylvania, western Virginia, and Missouri. Within a very short amount of time, McClellan outranked everyone except Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, the general in command of the entire Union Army.

After proving his leadership skills in two battles, President Lincoln immediately put General McClellan in charge of defending the Union’s capital in Washington, D.C. General McClellan formed the Army of the Potomac with himself as commander. He defended the capital by building 48 forts with 480 guns and 7,200 soldiers.

General McClellan was in constant conflict with Lieutenant General Winfield Scott. The two disagreed on the strategy for winning the war. Lieutenant General Scott didn’t believe that the Civil War would be a quick victory for the Union. He planned to set up a blockade of all Southern ports and keep the Confederacy from getting food or supplies to its soldiers.

General McClellan, on the other hand, wanted to expand the Union Army to 273,000 men and crush the Confederate Army in one short battle.

GENERAL IN CHIEF

On November 1, 1861, Lieutenant General Winfield Scott retired from the Union Army. President Lincoln put General McClellan in charge of the entire Union Army. Unfortunately, President Lincoln quickly became angry with General McClellan’s desire to build the Union Army and his slowness to actually attack. McClellan wouldn’t share his war plans with his men or the officers serving under him.

In addition, General McClellan didn’t believe that slaves should be set free. He viewed slaves as personal property and didn’t think the government had any right to take away someone’s personal property. McClellan promised the Confederacy that any slaves trying to escape would be returned to the South.

General McClellan’s slowness to move and his views on slavery could not be tolerated by President Lincoln and the Union Army. Early in the war, President Lincoln removed McClellan from general in chief of the Union Army. McClellan was sent back to lead the Army of the Potomac.
ULYSSES S. GRANT

Ulysses Simpson Grant had been born in the Ohio River village of Point Pleasant. In 1843, at the age of 21, Grant graduated from West Point Military Academy. He had no interest in a military career. Instead, Ulysses wanted to teach mathematics to college students.

The Mexican War spoiled Grant’s plans of teaching. It also forced him to delay marriage to his sweetheart, Julia Dent. By the end of the war, Grant had proven himself as a brave soldier. He earned the rank of first lieutenant.

As soon as the Mexican War was over, Ulysses married Julia. Together they had four children. In 1854, Grant left the United States Army and settled with his young family in St. Louis, Missouri.

When the Civil War started, Ulysses S. Grant was almost 39 years old. He was against slavery and angry that the Southern states had seceded from the Union. Grant volunteered to fight for the Union Army.

Within the first year of the war, Grant earned rank as a general. He led his Union troops in several successful battles against the Confederacy.

General Grant was known as a tough talking leader who accepted nothing less than “unconditional and immediate surrender” from the enemy. During the summer of 1862, Grant was promoted to major general.

In 1864, Ulysses S. Grant took command of the entire Union Army. Under General Grant’s leadership, the Union waged a total war on General Robert E. Lee and his Confederate troops. The Union destroyed everything in its path. This included homes, farms, crops, and railroads. During the final year of the Civil War, battles raged between the North and South. Thousands of lives were lost under General Grant’s command.