Chapter 16: The Civil War Begins, 1861-1862

Section 1: War Erupts

Main Idea: The secession of the Southern states quickly led to armed conflict between the North and the South.

Southern states began seceding from the Union. State officials took over most of the federal forts inside their borders. Major Robert Anderson attempted to hold on to Fort Sumter at Charleston, South Carolina. However, his troops soon ran low on supplies.

President Abraham Lincoln decided to send supplies. Confederate leaders responded by attacking the fort on April 12, 1861. Major Anderson soon surrendered. The Civil War had begun.

President Lincoln called on Northerners to put down the Southern rebellion. As a result, many Northern men joined the army. States such as Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas did not want to fight against their neighbors. These states seceded from the Union and fought for the Confederacy. The Confederacy moved its capital to Richmond, Virginia.

Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri were slave states that bordered the North. These border states were important for their location and resources. Keeping Maryland in the Union was especially important. Without Maryland, Washington, D.C., would be cut off from the Union. Pro-Union leaders kept Maryland in the Union by gaining control of the state’s legislature. Kentucky, Missouri, and Delaware also stayed in the Union. In the end, 24 states made up the Union. Eleven joined the Confederacy.

The Union appeared to have significant advantages, including more than twice as many citizens and more than 80 percent of the nation’s factories. The North also had President Lincoln, a very able leader.
The Confederacy’s advantages included Robert E. Lee, a talented and respected military leader. In addition, Southern soldiers were ready to fight hard to defend their homes and families.

The South did not want to conquer the North but instead fought for its independence. Southerners looked to King Cotton to win foreign support. When war broke out, Southern planters withheld cotton from the world market. They hoped that this would force France and Britain to aid the Confederate cause. However, these nations had a surplus of cotton and did not get involved.

The North’s goal was to bring the Southern states back into the Union. To do this, the North developed the Anaconda Plan. This strategy called for the Union’s navy to blockade the South’s coastline. In a blockade, armed forces prevent the transportation of goods or people into or out of an area. The plan also included gaining control of the Mississippi River, which would split the Confederacy in two.

In the summer of 1861, Lincoln ordered an invasion of Virginia in order to conquer Richmond. Northern troops clashed with Southern soldiers near a river called Bull Run. In the North, this battle became known as the First Battle of Bull Run. When the Confederates won the battle, the North realized it had underestimated its opponent. As a result, President Lincoln began preparing for a long war.

**Section 2: Life in the Army**

**Main Idea:** Both Union and Confederate soldiers endured many hardships serving in the army during the Civil War.

A majority of soldiers in the Civil War were between 18 and 30. Many viewed the war as an exciting adventure. Although most soldiers in the war were born in the United States, immigrants from other countries served on both sides, as did Native Americans.
Many African Americans wanted to fight in the war as a way to end slavery. At first, neither army accepted African Americans. As the conflict wore on, the North let African Americans serve.

In all, about three million Americans fought in the Civil War. Roughly 2 million soldiers served the Union. Just under a million served the Confederacy. Union soldiers wore blue uniforms. The Confederates wore gray and yellowish brown.

Many soldiers were volunteers. They enlisted seeking adventure or fought out of loyalty. Others signed up for the recruitment money.

Volunteers trained in local army camps. They learned to stand correctly, march in formation, and handle their guns. Between drills, soldiers performed numerous chores.

Most soldiers in army camps received plenty of food. On the battlefield, however, the soldiers’ diet became more limited. Some soldiers went hungry because supply trains could not reach them.

Soldiers endured terrible conditions. The battlefields often were wet, muddy, and cold. Many camps were unclean and the soldiers themselves often were filthy. They usually went weeks without bathing. Their bodies and clothing became overrun with fleas and lice.

Hygiene—conditions and practices that promote health—was poor, resulting in widespread sickness. Diseases killed more soldiers than battle wounds.

The Civil War witnessed numerous advances in military technology. One example was the development of the rifle, a gun with a grooved barrel that causes a bullet to spin through the air. This spin gives a bullet more distance and accuracy. A minié ball is a bullet with a hollow base. Rifles with minié balls could shoot farther and more accurately than old-fashioned muskets.
Another advancement was the development of the ironclad, a warship covered with iron. These ships could withstand attack better than wooden ships. In the first ironclad battle, the Confederate *Merrimack (Virginia)* fought the Union *Monitor*. The battle ended in a tie.

**Section 3: No End in Sight**

**Main Idea:** In the first two years of the war, neither side gained a decisive victory over the other.

The Union army won victories in the West under Union general Ulysses S. Grant. In 1862, Grant captured two Confederate river forts in Tennessee—Fort Henry and Fort Donelson.

The seizure of Fort Henry opened up a river highway into the heart of the South. Soon, Union troops marched into Tennessee’s capital, Nashville.

As a result of Grant’s victories, the Confederate troops along the Western front retreated. Grant followed. The two sides met in April 1862 near Shiloh Church in Tennessee. The Battle of Shiloh turned out to be the bloodiest battle yet. The North won—but at a terrible cost. The number of dead and wounded Union soldiers surpassed 13,000. The Confederates lost nearly 11,000 out 41,000 soldiers.

Another setback for the Confederacy occurred in April of 1862. A Union fleet led by David Farragut captured New Orleans. This meant that the Union controlled most of the Mississippi River. The North was well on its way to cutting the Confederacy in two.

Fighting increased in the East during the spring of 1862. After many delays, Union General George McClellan attempted to capture Richmond. In June, Confederate General Robert E. Lee prepared to turn McClellan’s army back. The two sides fought a series of clashes known as the Seven Days’ Battles. In the end, the Confederate troops forced the Union army to retreat.
Encouraged, Lee decided to invade the Union. In September 1862, he took his army into Maryland. Lee hoped that such a victory would force Lincoln to talk peace. In addition, the invasion would give Virginia farmers a break from the war during harvest season. Finally, a successful invasion of the North might convince Europe to side with the South.

Lee drew up plans for his Northern campaign. A Confederate officer accidentally left a copy of the plans behind at a campsite. A Union soldier found the plans and told his commanders.

General McClellan now knew Lee’s campaign plans and decided to attack Lee’s army. The two sides met in September 1862 at Antietam Creek in Maryland. This battle was the bloodiest day in all of American history. About 25,000 men were killed or wounded.

When Lee withdrew to Virginia, McClellan did not follow and missed a chance to finish off the wounded Southern army. President Lincoln fired McClellan.