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Civil War Facts

ANSWERS TO YOUR CIVIL WAR QUESTIONS

Many elements of Civil War scholarship are still hotly debated. The facts on this page are based on the soundest information available.

Q. When was the Civil War fought?

The war began when Confederate warships bombarded Union soldiers at **Fort Sumter**, South Carolina on April 12, 1861. The war ended in Spring, 1865. **Robert E. Lee** surrendered the last major Confederate army to **Ulysses S. Grant** at **Appomattox Courthouse** on April 9, 1865. The last battle was fought at **Palmito Ranch**, Texas, on May 13, 1865. Click [here](#) for a Civil War timeline.



The bombardment of Fort Sumter (Library of Congress)

Q. Where was the Civil War fought?

The Civil War was fought in **thousands of different places**, from southern Pennsylvania to Texas; from New Mexico to the Florida coast. The majority of the fighting took place in the states of Virginia and Tennessee. The Civil War was also contested on the Atlantic Ocean as far off as the coast of France, the Gulf of Mexico, and the brown water of the Mississippi River and its tributaries.

[Battles of the Civil War](#) | [Civil War Navies](#)

Q. How many soldiers fought in the Civil War?

At the beginning of the war the Northern states had a combined population of 22 million people. The Southern states had a combined population of about 9 million. This disparity was reflected in the size of the armies in the field. The Union forces outnumbered the Confederates roughly two to one.

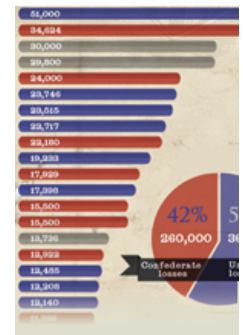


Q. How many soldiers died in the Civil War?

Approximately **620,000 soldiers** died from combat, accident, starvation, and disease during the Civil War. This number comes from an 1889 study of the war performed by William F. Fox and Thomas Leonard Livermore. Both

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of the Civil War »

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39,000

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Email Address

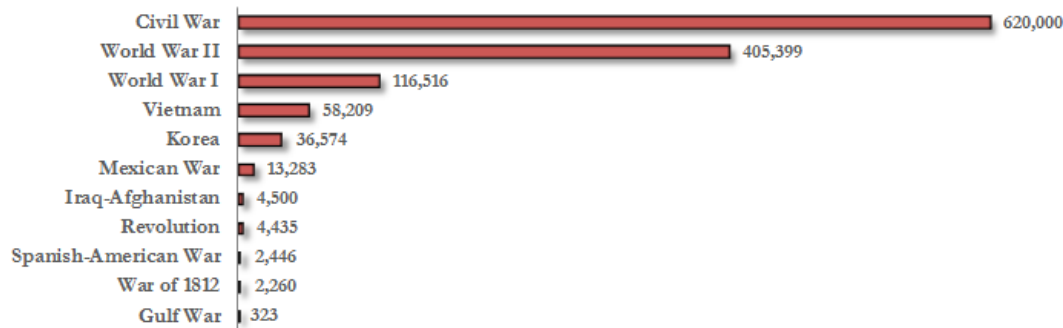
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men fought for the Union. Their estimate is derived from an exhaustive study of the combat and casualty records generated by the armies over five years of fighting. A **recent study** puts the number of dead as high as 850,000.

Q. How many soldiers died in the Civil War as compared to other American wars?

Roughly 1,264,000 American soldiers have died in the nation's wars--620,000 in the Civil War and 644,000 in all other conflicts. It was only as recently as the Vietnam War that the amount of American deaths in foreign wars eclipsed the number who died in the Civil War.



Q. Who won the Civil War?

The Northern armies were victorious, and the rebellious states returned to the Union.

Q. Who ran in the election of 1860?

The election of 1860 was one of the most unusual in American history. In a four-way race brought on by a split in the Democratic Party, **Abraham Lincoln's** name did not even appear on the ballot in most Southern states. In the **electoral college**, Lincoln solidly carried the free states of the Northeast and Northwest. Breckenridge won the slaveholding states, with the exception of Tennessee, Virginia and Kentucky in the Upper South, which went to Bell. Douglas, though he made a solid showing in the popular vote, only took electoral votes from Missouri and New Jersey.

Abraham Lincoln of Illinois, Republican Party: 39.8%

Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, Northern
Democratic Party: 29.5%

John C. Breckenridge of Kentucky,
Southern Democratic Party: 18.1%

John Bell of Tennessee, Constitutional
Union Party: 12.6%



Abraham Lincoln delivers his first inaugural address on March 4, 1861. (Library of Congress)

Q. When did the Southern states secede from the Union?

South Carolina - December 20, 1860

Mississippi - January 9, 1861

Florida - January 10, 1861

Alabama - January 11, 1861

Georgia - January 19, 1861

Louisiana - January 26, 1861

Texas - February 1, 1861

Virginia - April 17, 1861

Arkansas - May 6, 1861

North Carolina - May 20, 1861

Tennessee - June 8, 1861

Q. Was secession legal?

No, although it was not ruled illegal until after the war. This was a complex question at the time, with able legal minds to be found arguing both sides, but the United States Supreme Court, in **Texas v. White**, 74 U.S. 700 (1868), determined that secession was unconstitutional. Chief Justice Salmon Chase wrote in his majority opinion that, "The ordinance of secession...and all the acts of legislature intended to give effect to that ordinance, were absolutely null. They were utterly without operation in law."

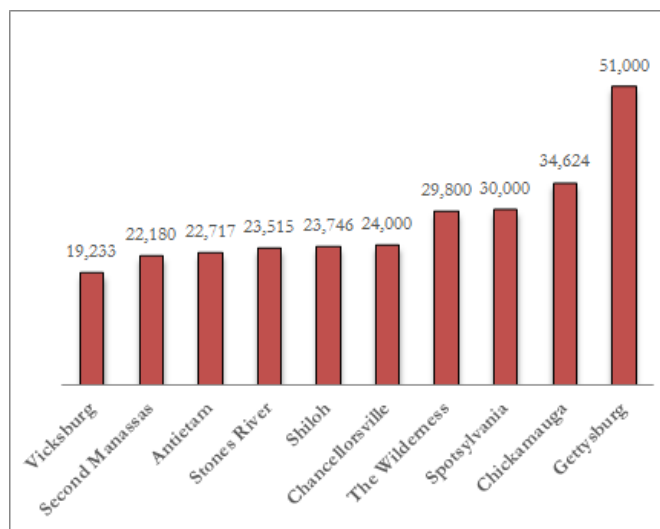
Q. What caused the Civil War?

While many still debate the ultimate **causes of the Civil War**, Pulitzer Prize-winning author James McPherson writes that, "The Civil War started because of uncompromising differences between the free and slave states over the power of the national government to prohibit slavery in the territories that had not yet become states. When Abraham Lincoln won election in 1860 as the first Republican president on a platform pledging to keep slavery out of the territories, seven slave states in the deep South seceded and formed a new nation, the Confederate States of America. The incoming Lincoln administration and most of the Northern people refused to recognize the legitimacy of secession. They feared that it would discredit democracy and create a fatal precedent that would eventually fragment the no-longer United States into several small, squabbling countries."

Trigger Events of the Civil War

Q. What were the bloodiest battles of the Civil War?

Gettysburg--51,000 casualties
 Chickamauga--34,624 casualties
 Spotsylvania--30,000 casualties
 The Wilderness--29,800 casualties
 Chancellorsville--24,000 casualties
 Shiloh--23,746 casualties
 Stones River--23,515 casualties
 Antietam--22,717 casualties
 Second Manassas--22,180 casualties
 Vicksburg--19,233 casualties

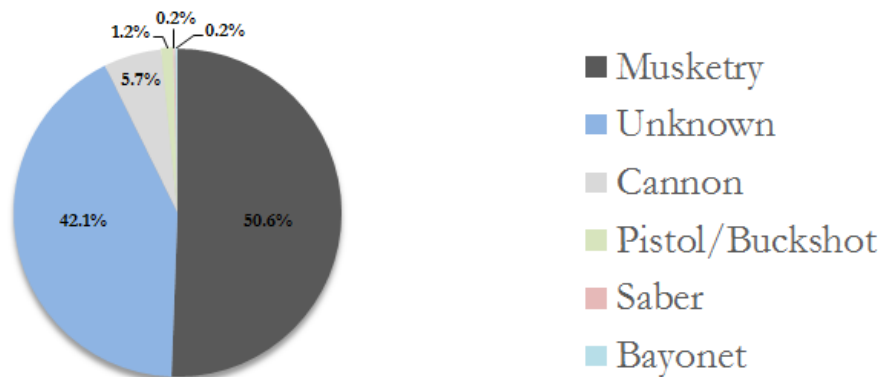


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Q. What is a casualty?

Too often, people take 'casualty' and 'fatality' to be **interchangeable terms**. In fact, a casualty is "a military person lost through death, wounds, injury, sickness, internment, or capture or through being missing in action." Essentially, a casualty is any soldier who goes into a fight and does not return fit to take part in the next battle. Many soldiers, especially in the Confederate ranks, became casualties several times: some soldiers were captured multiple times; some were wounded in non-consecutive engagements.

Q. What caused casualties during a battle?



Source: *The New Civil War Handbook*, Mark Hughes. (Statistics for Union soldiers only.)

Q. What happened to the dead?

Typically, soldiers were buried where they fell on the battlefield. Others were buried near the hospitals where they died. At most battlefields the dead were exhumed and moved to National or Confederate cemeteries, but because there were so many bodies, and because of the time and effort it took to disinter them, there are undoubtedly thousands if not tens of thousands of Civil War soldiers in unknown battlefield graves.



GO IN DEPTH

Historian Pete Carmichael describes the process of finding, burying, and reburying the dead after battles. He also discusses the significance of having a "decent burial," and efforts to lay soldiers to rest in military cemeteries in the years after the war. *This video is part of the Civil War Trust's In4 video series, which presents short videos on basic Civil War topics.*

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Q. What happened to prisoners?

More than 400,000 soldiers were captured over the course of the Civil War. In the first years of the conflict, equal numbers of captured troops were regularly exchanged for one another, helping to keep the total number of prisoners manageable for both sides. Over the course of the war, however, that practice faded from use. By the end of the war, the plight of prisoners of war on both sides had become bleak indeed. Thousands of Southerners died in the freezing camp at Elmira, New York, and the camp at Andersonville, Georgia, which held Union prisoners, has become one of the most infamous in the history of war. Nearly as many men died in captivity during the Civil War as died fighting in Vietnam.

Q. How advanced was medicine during the Civil War?

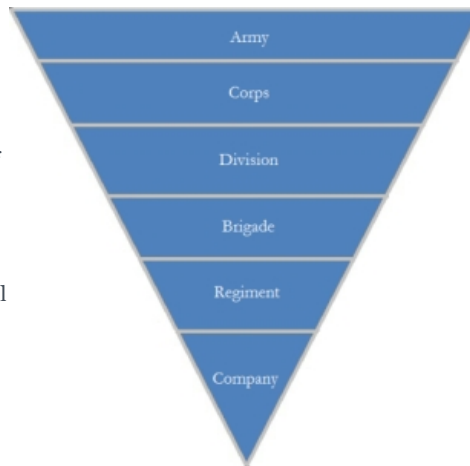
Two thirds of those killed in the Civil War died of disease. Germ theory had not been widely accepted in the medical world at the time of the Civil War and modern antiseptics, which could have greatly reduced the spread of bacteria and the outbreak of disease, did not exist. As George Worthington Adams famously wrote, "The Civil War was fought in the very last years of the medical middle ages." Chloroform, ether and whiskey were the main anesthetics. Still, many survived their wounds and had only the dedicated doctors and nurses and their selfless efforts to thank. Medicine is an ever-evolving science. Unfortunately for those who fought in the Civil War, the technology of warfare had surpassed **the technology of health care**.



A Union field hospital at Savage Station, Virginia in 1862. (Library of Congress)

Q. How was the army organized?

The largest military unit is the army, which is sub-divided into smaller commands. Although organization varied between the armies, the largest sub-section of a given army was the corps, which was typically divided into two or more divisions, each composed of two or more brigades, which were each made up of two or more regiments, with each regiment containing roughly ten companies of ideally 100 men (but more typically near 30). Companies themselves were subdivided into platoons and squads before the army finally reached the level of the individual soldier. Armies were sometimes grouped together in "departments" that were defined by geography and operational objective.



GO IN DEPTH

Historian Garry Adelman explains how the Union and Confederate armies organized and led their infantry, cavalry, and artillery units. *This video is part of the Civil War Trust's In4 video series, which presents short videos on basic Civil War topics.*

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Q. How much were soldiers paid?

A white Union private made **thirteen dollars a month**; his black counterpart made seven dollars until Congress rectified the discrepancy in 1864. A Confederate private ostensibly made eleven dollars a month, but often went long stretches with no pay at all.

Q. What role did African-Americans play in the war effort?

With the issuance of the **Emancipation Proclamation** in September 1862, African-Americans - both free and runaway slaves - came forward to volunteer for the Union cause in substantial numbers. Beginning in October, approximately 180,000 African-Americans, comprising 163 units, served in the U.S. Army, and 18,000 in the Navy. That month, the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers repulsed a Confederate attack at Island Mound, Missouri. Men of the **U.S.C.T.** (United States Colored Troops) units went on to distinguish themselves on battlefields east and west - at **Port Hudson**, Louisiana; **Honey Springs**, Oklahoma; **Fort Wagner**, South Carolina; **New Market Heights**, Virginia. African Americans constituted 10% of the entire Union Army by the end of the war, and nearly 40,000 died over the course of the war.



GO IN DEPTH

Historian Hari Jones summarizes the experience of African American Civil War soldiers, from emancipation to the authorization of United States Colored Troops to their experiences on the battlefield. *This video is part of the Civil War Trust's In4 video series, which presents short videos on basic Civil War topics.*

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Q. What did soldiers do in their free time?

When they were not drilling, which made up a considerable portion of their time in camp, soldiers **passed the time** writing letters, playing games like checkers, dominoes and poker, drinking, smoking, whittling, making music and praying. One soldier summed it up when he wrote to his wife, "Soldiering is 99% boredom and 1% sheer terror."

Civil War Winter Encampments

Q. What did soldiers eat?

Civil War soldiers' fare varied substantially from army to army and throughout the course of the war for both sides. For the most part, neither side ate particularly well. Hardtack and coffee were the staples, in addition to salt pork, corn meal and whatever fruits, vegetables and berries could be collected on the march. Many Confederate soldiers were in a state of near-starvation by the war's end.



A Union soldier poses in front of a "fresh" shipment of hardtack. (Library of Congress)

Q. What was the average soldier's age?

The average Union soldier was 25.8 years old; there is no definite information on the average age of Confederate soldiers, but by the end of the war old men and young boys, who otherwise would have stayed home, were being pressed into service. **The average soldier** on both sides was a white, native-born, protestant farmer.

Q. Did anybody win the Medal of Honor in the Civil War?

Yes. There were 1522 Medals of Honor issued to Northern troops, black and white, over the course of the war. The Confederate Army did not have combat medals. Robert E. Lee explained that the highest honor possible was to be "mentioned in dispatches," in other words, to be included in an officer's report for particularly gallant conduct. **John Singleton Mosby**, the "Grey Ghost," was mentioned in dispatches more than any other Confederate soldier.

Q. Were there naval battles in the Civil War?

Yes, the North and South **waged war** on the Atlantic Ocean, in the Gulf of Mexico, and in the rivers of the mainland. Cotton trade with Europe was vital to the Southern war effort, which led Union General-in-Chief Winfield Scott to order a strangling blockade known as the "Anaconda Plan." While Southern blockade runners tested this screen, engineers were inventing the first **ironclad warships** the world had ever seen. On the rivers, gunboats, shore batteries, and island fortresses entered the battle as both sides fought for control of inland arteries that were essential to the fast transport of men and material. The Civil War at sea, mostly notably with the development of the ironclads, changed the trajectory of naval warfare around the globe.

Civil War Navies



The duel of the ironclads U.S.S. Monitor and the C.S.S. Virginia drew international attention. (Library of Congress)

Q. What was the range of Civil War artillery?

Smoothbore cannons, such as the 12-pounder Napoleon, had a range of around three-quarters of a mile; rifled cannons, such as the 10-pounder Parrott, had a range of one and a half miles, or about double that of a smoothbore. Some larger cannons and imported pieces could fire even farther.



GO IN DEPTH

Historian Garry Adelman describes the different types of Civil War cannons and ammunition, and explains how they were fired. *This video is part of the Civil War Trust's In4 video series, which presents short videos on basic Civil War topics.*

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Q. How did the draft work?

The Confederacy instituted the first draft in American history in April of 1862. It was clear that the South, with a total population of 9 million (including 4 million slaves), would have to muster all of its manpower to repel the North, which had an 1860 population of around 22 million. The Confederate draft exempted those who owned twenty slaves or more, however, arousing resentment amongst the poor whites who constituted the vast majority of the army. Abraham Lincoln instituted a draft on the Northern states a year later, likewise calling on all able-bodied 18-35 year old men to serve. There were exemptions in the North, too, if those drafted could pay a significant fee or provide a substitute.

Q. Why are there alternate names for Civil War battles?

Union commanders typically named battles after the nearest river or creek. Confederates typically named battles after the nearest city or town. But these rules did not always apply; they were highly dependent on the names employed by the victors, the public and the media.

Q. Are there photographs of Civil War battles?

Photography was a **new art form** when the Civil War broke out. The cameras and chemicals available at the time were too unwieldy and unstable to accommodate the chaos of a battlefield. Nevertheless, a few photographs of Civil War combat do exist, including images of artillery bombardments, gunboat broadsides, and battle smoke at Nashville and Fredericksburg. Thousands of other Civil War photographs can be found online at the [Library of Congress](#).



This view shows Union ironclads firing heavy ordnance near Charleston Harbor. (Library of Congress)

Q. Were there black Confederate soldiers?

Slaves and free blacks were present in the Confederate lines as handservants and manual laborers. On March 14, 1865 the Confederate military issued General Orders No. 14, which provided for the raising of black combat

regiments, but there is no official military documentation that indicates these orders were carried out or that any black soldiers were ever properly enlisted in the Confederate army. There are a few photographs of blacks in Confederate uniforms, but these appear to be hoaxes.

Q. What are some of the best Civil War books?

Battle Cry of Freedom by James McPherson -- Considered by many to be the finest single-volume history of the Civil War era.

A Stillness at Appomattox by Bruce Catton -- The third and final volume of Catton's critically-acclaimed Civil War trilogy; winner of the Pulitzer Prize.

The Civil War: A Narrative by Shelby Foote -- Three volumes, three thousand pages and more than a million words.

The Killer Angels by Michael Shaara -- The best Civil War novel of the 20th century and the inspiration behind Ken Burns' epic documentary.

Company Aytch by Sam Watkins -- An illuminating Confederate memoir by a Tennessean who fought practically everywhere in the Western theater

The Civil War Trust's comprehensive bookstore can be found [here](#).

Q. How much battlefield land has the Civil War Trust saved?

More than **34,000 acres** and counting!

Q. How can I get involved in Civil War battlefield preservation?

Click [here](#)!

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