

Timeline of Civil War

The American Civil War was fought between the southern states and the northern states. The southern states didn't want the North telling them what to do or making laws they didn't want. As a result, many southern states decided to break away and form their own country called the Confederacy. The North, however, wanted to stay as one united country; and so a war began. The Civil War, and the major events leading up to the war, lasted from 1860 to 1865.

Events Before the War

Harpers Ferry Raid (October 16, 1859) - Abolitionist John Brown attempts to start a slave rebellion by taking over the Harpers Ferry arsenal. The uprising is quickly put down and John Brown is hanged for treason. Many people in the North, however, consider him a hero.

Abraham Lincoln Elected President (November 6, 1860) - Abraham Lincoln was from the northern part of the country and wanted to put an end to slavery. The southern states didn't want him president or making laws that would affect them.

South Carolina Secedes (Dec. 20, 1860) - South Carolina became the first state to secede, or leave, the United States. They decided to make their own country rather than be part of the USA. Within a few months several other states including Georgia, Mississippi, Texas, Florida, Alabama, and Louisiana would also leave the Union.

The Confederation is formed (Feb. 9, 1861) - The southern states form their own country called the Confederate States of America. Jefferson Davis is their president.

Abraham Lincoln becomes President (March 4, 1861) - Now that President Lincoln is in office, he wants to restore the Union. In other words, get all the states back into the same country.

The Civil War

The Civil War Begins (April 12, 1861) - The South attacks Fort Sumter South Carolina and starts the war.

More States leave the Union (April 1861) - within a short period of time Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas all leave the Union to join the Confederacy.

Union Blockade (April 19, 1861) - Abraham Lincoln announces the Union Blockade where the Union Navy will attempt to keep supplies from entering or leaving the Confederacy. This blockade will weaken the Confederacy later in the war.

Many Battles of 1861 and 1862 - Throughout 1861 and 1862 there were many battles where lots of soldiers from both sides were wounded and killed. Some of the major battles include the First and Second Battles of Bull Run, The Battle of Shiloh, The Battle of Antietam, and the Battle of Fredericksburg. There was also the famous sea battle between the two ironclad battleships the Monitor and the Merrimac. These ships had iron or steel plates on their sides for armor making them much stronger and changing war on the seas forever.

Emancipation Proclamation (Jan. 1, 1863) - President Lincoln issues an executive order freeing many slaves and laying the groundwork for the Thirteenth Amendment.

The Battle of Gettysburg (July 1, 1863) - A major battle where the North not only wins the battle, but starts to win the Civil War.

Sherman Captures Atlanta (Sept. 2, 1864) - General Sherman captures the city of Atlanta, Georgia. Later in the year he would march to the sea and capture Savannah, Ga. On his way he would destroy and burn much of the land his army passed through.

The Civil War Ends

General Robert E. Lee surrenders (April 4, 1865) - General Lee, the leader of the Confederate Army, surrenders to General Ulysses S. Grant at The Appomattox Court House in Virginia.

President Lincoln is assassinated (April 14, 1865) - While attending the Ford's Theatre, President Lincoln is shot and killed by John Wilkes Booth.

Reconstruction of the South (1865-1877) - The South is occupied by Federal troops while state governments, economies, and infrastructure are rebuilt.

Weapons and Technology

There were many different weapons and technologies used during the Civil War. Some of them were used in a major war for the first time. These new technologies and weapons changed the future of war including the tactics used on the battlefield and the way wars were fought.

Rifles and Muskets

Most soldiers on the battlefield fought with guns. At the start of the war, many soldiers used old style guns called muskets. Muskets had smooth bores (the inside of the barrel) and this made them inaccurate for distances longer than 40 yards or so. These muskets also took a long time to reload and were unreliable (they sometimes didn't fire).

However, it wasn't long into the war before many of the soldiers were armed with rifles. Rifles have shallow spiral grooves cut into the barrel to make the bullet spin. This makes them more accurate for a longer range than muskets. Other advancements to the rifle occurred during the war including more reliable firing mechanisms and repeating rifles.

Swords, Knives, and Bayonets

Sometimes the soldiers would end up in close hand-to-hand combat where they no longer had time to load their rifles. Much of the time they would use a knife-like spike that was attached to the end of their rifle called a bayonet. If they dropped their rifle, then they may have a large knife they would use to fight with. Officers often had swords or pistols that they would use in close combat.

Cannon

Cannons were used by both sides during the war. Cannons were best at destroying enemy fortifications. They could fire either a large solid cannon ball or a bunch of smaller iron balls. Some cannon could knock down a wall or other fortification from up to 1000 yards away. The most popular cannon on both sides

was a French-designed 12-pound howitzer cannon called the Napoleon. It usually took a crew of four soldiers to operate a cannon.

Submarines and Ironclads

New technology in naval warfare included ironclads and submarines. The Civil War was the first major war that involved ironclad ships. These were ships that were protected by steel or iron armor plates. They were nearly impossible to sink with conventional weapons and forever changed the way ships were used in battle. At the same time, the Civil War introduced submarines into naval warfare. The first submarine to sink an enemy ship was the Confederate submarine H.L. Hunley which sunk the Union ship the USS Housatonic on February 17, 1864.

Balloons

One interesting new technology used by the Union was the hot-air balloon. Balloonists would fly above enemy troops to determine their movements, numbers, and locations. The South soon figured out ways to combat the balloonists including camouflage and ways of shooting them down.

Telegraph

The invention of the telegraph changed the way wars were fought. President Lincoln and the Union military leaders were able to communicate in real time using the telegraph. They had updated information on enemy troop strengths and battle results. This gave them an advantage over the South which did not have the same communications infrastructure.

Railroads

Railroads also had a major impact on the war. Railroads enabled armies to move large numbers of troops long distances very quickly. Again, the more advanced industry of the North gave the Union an advantage in transportation as there were more railroad tracks in the North than in the South.

Interesting Facts

- The Union Army of 2,100,000 soldiers was nearly twice the size of the Confederate Army of 1,064,000.
- It was the deadliest war in American history. There were around 210,000 soldiers killed in action and 625,000 total dead.
- Thirty percent of all Southern white males between the ages of 18 and 40 died in the war.
- Around 9 million people lived in the Southern states at the time of the Civil War. Around 3.4m were slaves.
- Sixty six percent of the deaths in the war were due to disease.
- In the Second Battle of Bull run many of the wounded were left on the battle field for 3 to 4 days.
- John and George Crittenden were brothers who were both generals during the war. John for the North and George for the South!
- Lincoln's famous Gettysburg address was only 269 words long.
- Stonewall Jackson, one of the South's greatest generals, was killed by friendly fire.

- Lincoln dreamed of getting assassinated only a few days before he was killed by John Wilkes Booth.
- Only 1 in 4 Southern farmers owned slaves, but it was the rich and powerful farmers who owned them.
- In the first few battles each side did not have regular uniforms. This made it tough to figure out who was who. Later the Union would wear dark blue uniforms and the Confederates gray coats and pants.
- Many of the Southern men already knew how to shoot a gun from hunting. The Northern men tended to work in factories and many didn't know how to fire a gun.
- Bayonets were sharp blades attached to the end of rifles.
- President Lincoln asked Robert E. Lee to command the Union forces, but Lee was loyal to Virginia and fought for the South.
- After the war, General Lee was so appreciative of General Grant's terms and behavior when he surrendered that he would not allow a bad word said about Grant in his presence.
- During Sherman's March to the Sea, the Union soldiers would heat up rail road ties and then bend them around tree trunks. They were nicknamed "Sherman's neckties".
- After John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln, he jumped from the box and broke his leg. However, he still managed to stand up on the stage and yell out the Virginia State Motto "Sic semper tyrannis" which means "Thus always to tyrants".
- Clara Barton was a famous nurse to the Union Troops. She was called the "Angel of the Battlefields" and founded the American Red Cross.

What was it like to live during the Civil War?

Life during the 1800s in America was already difficult for many people. Of course there were rich factory owners in the North and plantation owners in the South, but the average farmer and his family worked extremely hard just to survive.

When the Civil War started, living conditions became even more difficult for the average American. Many of the men joined the army or were drafted. The women were left at home to work the farm or to find jobs and support the family on their own.

Poor Men Went to War

Many poor men thought that fighting in the army was an opportunity for adventure and excitement. This seemed much better than the drudgery of the hard work of everyday life. They soon found out that war was both boring and terrifying.

Both sides of the war eventually instituted a draft. This was when men were randomly chosen to enter the army whether they wanted to or not. However, the rich were able to legally avoid the draft. In the North they could pay a fee of \$300 or pay someone else to take their place. In the South, men who owned more than twenty slaves, didn't have to fight.

Women at Home

With so many men gone to war, women had to take up new jobs. They worked the fields on farms and at factories producing goods for the armies. Some women served as nurses in the army, helping wounded soldiers recover. Women had to work very hard to provide for their families. Often not only their husbands were at war, but also their older sons and fathers.

War in the South

Life in the South during the Civil War was even more difficult than in the North. The Union had blockaded many of the ports of the South, causing shortages of food and other items that people needed. Also, most of the war took place in the South. Families lived in constant fear of getting overrun by an army. When General Sherman took the Union army from Atlanta to Savannah he burned and destroyed much of the land and farms along the way. It was a scary time.

Children in the Army

Although the Union army required that soldiers be at least 18 years old, many of the soldiers were under 18. Young boys often joined the army as drummer boys or bugle boys. They also helped to do chores around the army campsites. Officially these young boys didn't fight, but once a battle began many entered the fighting. One ten year old boy named Johnny Clem became famous when he put down his drum during the Battle of Shiloh, picked up a gun, and shot a colonel of the Confederate army.

Interesting Facts about Life During the Civil War

- Kids still went to school during the Civil War. A lot of what they learned was propaganda aimed at instilling patriotism towards either the Union or the Confederacy.
- Many groups worked to raise money for the armies and hospitals. Women and children held fairs and fundraising events and prepared care packages for soldiers they knew.
- Newspapers were popular on the home front during the war as people hoped to find out news of loved ones who were in the army.
- There were riots in New York City in 1863 over the unfairness of the draft towards poor people. By the end of the riots 105 people had died.
- People in the South became so hungry there was a Bread Riot in Richmond, Virginia where people protested the lack of food.
- There were around 30 million people living in the United States during the Civil War, 21 million in the North and 9 million in the South. Of these, over 3 million fought as soldiers in the war, 2.1 million for the North and 1 million for the South.

Life as a Soldier During the Civil War

The life of a soldier during the civil war wasn't easy. Not only did soldiers face the possibility of getting killed in battle, their daily lives were full of hardships. They had to deal with hunger, bad weather, poor clothing, and even boredom between battles.

A Typical Day

Soldiers were woken at dawn to begin their day. They had drills in the morning and afternoon where they practiced for battle. Each soldier had to know his place in the unit so the army would fight as a group. Fighting together and quickly obeying the commands of the officers was a key to victory.

Between the drills, soldiers would do chores such as cooking their meals, fixing their uniforms, or cleaning equipment. If they had some free time they might play games such as poker or dominoes. They also enjoyed singing songs and writing letters to home. At night some soldiers would have guard duty. This could make for a long and tiring day.

Medical Conditions

The soldiers of the civil war had to deal with terrible medical conditions. Doctors didn't know about infections. They didn't even bother to wash their hands! Many soldiers died from infections and disease. Even a small wound could end up infected and cause a soldier to die.

The idea of medicine during this time was very primitive. They had little knowledge of pain killers or anesthetics. During major battles there were far more wounded soldiers than doctors. There was little doctors could do for wounds to the torso, but for wounds to the arms and legs, they would often amputate.

How old were they?

There were soldiers of all ages that fought during the war. The average age for the Union Army was around 25 years old. The minimum age to join the army was 18 years old, however, it's thought that many young boys lied about their age and, by the end of the war, there were thousands of soldiers as young as 15 years old.

What did they eat?

The soldiers of the Civil War were often hungry. They mostly ate hard crackers made from flour, water, and salt called hardtack. Sometimes they would get salt pork or corn meal to eat. To supplement their meals, soldiers would forage from the land around them. They would hunt game and collect fruits, berries, and nuts whenever they could. By the end of the war, many soldiers in the Confederate army were on the verge of starvation.

Were they paid?

A private in the Union army made \$13 a month, while a three star general made over \$700 a month. Soldiers in the Confederate army made less with privates earning \$11 a month. Payments were slow and irregular, however, with soldiers sometimes waiting over 6 months to get paid.

Facts about Life as a Soldier During the Civil War

- During the fall, they would work on their winter camp where they would stay at one place for the long winter months.
- Soldiers were drafted, but the rich could make a payment if they wanted to avoid fighting.
- If life as a soldier was bad, life as a prisoner was worse. Conditions were so bad that thousands of soldiers died while being held as prisoner.
- By the end of the war around 10% of the Union army consisted of African American soldiers.

Civil War Uniforms

As you can imagine in a battle between tens of thousands of men, things can get confusing. It even becomes difficult to know which soldier is on which side. The main way to tell the difference is by the uniforms.

You've probably heard of the blue and the grey when people refer to the civil war sides. The Northern Union armies wore navy blue and the Southern Confederate armies wore grey. However, the uniforms weren't exactly "uniform" at the start of the war.

At the Start of the War

When the Civil War first began, neither side thought it would turn into a major conflict. They weren't ready for a major war against each other. One of the things they weren't ready for was having uniforms for the armies.

At first, uniforms were provided to the soldiers by the states and local cities. The materials, colors, and styles were all different. The north tried to get their soldiers to all wear navy blue uniforms, but they often ran out of blue cloth and had to use grey. The materials and styles were different too, depending on where a soldier came from.

Confusion on the Battlefield

The lack of consistent uniforms led to confusion on the battlefield. In some early battles soldiers often shot people from their own side. Eventually, the uniforms became more standard with the Union army wearing navy colored uniforms and the Confederates wearing grey.

Union Uniforms

The Union uniform consisted of a dark blue wool coat with light blue trousers and a dark cap called a forage cap. They typically wore shoes that went up to their ankles called "brogans".

The coat often had bright buttons that sometimes indicated the rank of the soldier or what state they represented. Other markings on the coat like piping or badges usually indicated the rank of the soldier.

Confederate Uniforms

The Confederate Uniforms were less standard than the Union's. At the start of the war, many Confederate soldiers just wore their own clothes into battle. Eventually they settled on a uniform that had a waist length grey coat and light blue trousers.

Due to costs and a lack of materials during the war, many Confederate soldiers did not have adequate uniforms. They often wore combinations of what they could find and steal as well as their own clothes. They also didn't have very good shoes and sometimes had to go without any shoes at all.

Weapons

The typical soldier had a musket or rifle and possibly a knife or a sword for close combat. Some rifles had bayonets at the end that they would use for close combat. Officers often had pistols and a sword to fight with.

Other Gear

Soldiers carried their other gear in a backpack called a knapsack. They carried a blanket, a fry pan for cooking, and a canteen for water. Other items often included a comb, a sewing kit to repair their uniforms, silverware, a Bible, and a pocket knife.

Interesting Facts about Civil War Uniforms

- The uniforms were mostly made from wool, which was very hot during the summers. Many soldiers suffered from heat exhaustion on long marches as a result.
- The Union Army settled on rules for an official uniform in 1862. It wasn't until 1863 that the Confederate Army began to use a standard uniform design.
- The Confederates chose gray dye for their uniforms because it was inexpensive to make.
- Sometimes the grey coats of the Confederates were trimmed with green or yellow.

Women

The lives of women changed dramatically during the American Civil War. They played important roles both at home and on the battlefield. On the home front, women for both sides had to manage the household while their husbands and sons were off fighting battles. On the battlefield, women helped to supply the soldiers, provide medical care, and worked as spies. Some women even fought as soldiers.

Life at Home

Managing the Home - With many of the adult men off to war, it was up to women to manage the home by themselves. In many cases this included running the farms or businesses that their husbands left behind.

Raising Money - Women also raised money for the war effort. They organized raffles and fairs and used the money to help pay for war supplies.

Taking on Men's Jobs - Many women took on jobs that had been traditionally men's jobs before the war. They worked in factories and in government positions that were vacated when men left to fight. This changed the perception of women's roles in daily life and helped to move forward the women's rights movement in the United States.

Caring for Soldiers in Camp

Women also helped to care for the soldiers while they were camped and preparing for battle. They sewed uniforms, provided blankets, mended shoes, washed clothes, and cooked for the soldiers.

Nurses

Perhaps the most important role women played during the war was providing medical care for sick and wounded soldiers. Thousands of women worked as nurses throughout the war. The Union had the most organized nursing and relief efforts organized by women such as Dorothea Dix and Clara Barton. These women fed the sick, kept their bandages clean, and assisted doctors when needed.

Spies

Some of the top spies for both sides during the Civil War were women. They were typically women who lived or worked on one side, but secretly supported the other side. They included slave women in the South who passed on troop movements and information to the North. They also included women in the North who supported the South and were able to persuade officers to tell them important information that would help the South. Some women even ran spy rings from their homes where they would pass on information given to them from local spies.

Women as Soldiers

Although women were not allowed to fight as soldiers, many women still managed to join the army and fight. They did this by disguising themselves as men. They would cut their hair short and wear bulky clothes. Since the soldiers slept in their clothes and rarely changed clothes or bathed, many women were able to remain undetected and fight alongside the men for quite a while. If a woman was discovered, she was usually just sent home without being punished.

Children During the Civil War

The Civil War impacted the lives of everyone in the United States and this was no different for the children at the time. Some children actually served in the army as soldiers, while others witnessed the horror of war from afar. Many children had to grow up quickly, taking on new responsibilities at home or on the warfront.

Boys in the Army

Although soldiers were officially supposed to be at least 18 years old, both sides needed soldiers and were willing to look the other way when it came to age. As a result thousands of young boys between the ages of 13 and 17 fought in the Civil War. Many of these boys were killed or wounded in battle.

Drummer Boys and Messengers

The youngest of the boy soldiers usually ended up being drummers or messengers. Boys as young as 10 years old are on record as serving as drummers during the Civil War. Drummers were used for communication on the battlefield. Different drum rolls signaled different commands like "retreat" or "attack." Other boys were used as messengers. They were usually fast runners who would bravely run important battle messages from one commander to another.

Johnny Clem

The most famous of the boy soldiers during the Civil War was Johnny Clem. Johnny first tried to join the Union Army at the age of 9, but was rejected because of his age and size. However, he didn't give up. He followed along with the 22nd Michigan regiment until they adopted him as their drummer. He officially joined the Union Army two years later at the age of 13. He became famous when he shot a Confederate officer and escaped during a battle at Chickamauga, GA. Throughout the war Johnny's adventures and exploits became legendary. He continued on as a soldier after the war rising to the rank of Brigadier General.

Children in the Army Camps

Some children served in the army camps. They would help wash dishes, fix meals, and set up the camp when it moved. These children were in less danger than the soldiers doing the fighting, but were often near the front lines.

Children at Home

War wasn't easy for the children at home, either. Most children had a relative who was off fighting the war such as a father, brother, or uncle. They had to work extra hard and sometimes take on the jobs of adults to help make ends meet. They also lived in fear that their father or brother may never return.

Children in the South

Children living in the South had an added fear because much of the fighting took place in the South. If their home was near a battle, they would hear gunfire and cannon through the night. They may also see soldiers marching by on their way to fight or returning from a battle. They hoped the enemy soldiers wouldn't destroy their crops or their home.

Interesting Facts about Children in the Civil War

- Some boys would put a note with the number 18 in their shoes when applying for the army. This way they could say "I'm over 18" without really lying.
- Johnny Clem was the last veteran of the Civil War to retire from the U.S. Armed Forces in 1915.
- The Civil War is sometimes called "The Boys' War" because so many young men fought as soldiers.
- Some historians estimate that as many as 20% of the soldiers who fought in the Civil War were under the age of 18.

Civil War Medicine

You may think that some Civil War soldiers were glad to get wounded. After all, they would be able to relax in a nice clean hospital and get looked after by expert doctors instead of fighting. However, this was not the case at all during the Civil War. The last place any soldier wanted to end up was in a Civil War field hospital.

What were the hospitals like?

Civil War field hospitals were horrible places. They were typically set up in barns or homes nearby the battlefield. They quickly became dirty places full of disease and suffering. Sometimes there wasn't enough room for all the wounded and they were just lined up on the ground outside.

Were the doctors trained?

Many of the doctors serving during the Civil War had very little training and the training they did receive wasn't very good. Doctors were unaware of how diseases spread. They didn't wash their hands or clean their medical instruments between surgeries.

Infection

The biggest concern for the wounded was infection. Due to the poor sanitary conditions of the hospitals and the doctors, many wounds became horribly infected. There were no antibiotics like Penicillin at the time, either. Many soldiers became sick and died from infections.

Treatments

Because there weren't any antibiotics to help cure infections, the only real treatment for wounds was amputation. The wounded arm, leg, or finger would just be cut off. This was the main type of surgery that doctors performed. They became very proficient at amputation.

Was there anesthetic during surgery?

Fortunately, there were some forms of anesthesia at the time. Doctors generally used drugs such as chloroform or ether to sedate patients before amputation.

Women as Nurses

Thousands of women on both sides of the war volunteered to work as nurses in the hospitals. They assisted the doctors, dressed wounds, and helped to feed the wounded.

Disease

Of the 620,000 soldiers who died during the Civil War, around 400,000 of them died from disease and not from fighting. They died from a variety of diseases including dysentery, typhoid, malaria, and tuberculosis.

Weapons Over Medicine

The era of the Civil War was a time when weapons were far more advanced than medicine. While medicine had not advanced much since the middle ages, weapons had become very proficient at killing

and causing horrible wounds. Medicine would advance significantly over the next several years, but it was too late for those wounded during the Civil War.

Battle of Shiloh

The Battle of Shiloh was fought between the Union and the Confederacy during the Civil War. It was fought over two days from April 6 to April 7 in 1862. It took place in southwestern Tennessee and it was the first major battle to take place in the western theater of war.

Who were the leaders?

The Union army was led by Generals Ulysses S. Grant and Don Carlos Buell. The Confederate army was led by Generals Albert Sidney Johnston and P.G.T. Beauregard.

Leading up to the Battle

Prior to the Battle of Shiloh, General Grant had captured Fort Henry and Fort Donelson. These victories secured Kentucky for the Union and forced the Confederate army under General Johnston to retreat from western Tennessee.

General Grant decided to set up camp at Pittsburg Landing on the banks of the Tennessee River where he waited for reinforcements from General Buell and spent time training his new soldiers.

The Confederates Plan an Attack

Confederate General Albert Johnston knew that Grant was waiting for General Buell and his reinforcements to arrive. He decided to surprise attack Grant before the two Union armies could join together. He was afraid that once the armies joined together, they would be too big and strong for his much smaller army.

The Battle Begins

On the morning of April 6, 1862, the Confederate army attacked the Union army at Pittsburg Landing. Many of the soldiers from both sides were new recruits and the Union lines quickly broke. The initial attack of the Confederates was very successful.

The Hornet's Nest

Some of the Union lines managed to hold, however. One famous line that held was in a sunken road that became known as the Hornet's Nest. Here a few Union soldiers held back the Confederates while reinforcements from General Buell's army began to arrive. It took a day of fierce fighting, but by the evening of April 6th, the Union soldiers had reestablished lines of defense. The Confederates had won the day, but not the battle.

General Johnston is Killed

Despite the great success of the Confederate army on the first day of the battle, they did suffer one great loss in that General Albert Johnston was killed on the battlefield. He was shot in the leg and didn't realize how seriously he had been injured until he had lost too much blood and it was too late.

The Battle Continues

The second day of the battle General P.G.T. Beauregard took command of the Confederate troops. He did not realize at first that Union reinforcements had arrived from Buell's army. The Confederates continued to attack and fight until Beauregard realized that they were hopelessly outnumbered and ordered his soldiers to retreat.

Results

The Union army had around 66,000 soldiers versus the Confederates 45,000. By the end of the two days of fighting the Union had suffered 13,000 casualties including 1,700 dead. The Confederates had suffered 10,000 casualties and 1,700 dead.

Facts About the Battle of Shiloh

- General Albert Sidney Johnston was the highest ranking officer on either side killed during the Civil War. Confederate President Jefferson Davis considered his death a huge blow to the South's efforts in the war.
- At the time the Battle of Shiloh was fought, it was the costliest battle in terms of casualties and deaths in American history.
- Grant was initially blamed for the Union army not being prepared for the Confederate attack and many people wanted him to be removed from command. President Lincoln, however, defended him saying "I cannot spare this man; he fights".
- Grant's officers wanted to retreat after the first day of fighting. Grant had other ideas saying "Retreat? No. I propose to attack at daylight and whip them."

Siege of Vicksburg

The Siege of Vicksburg was a major victory for the Union during the Civil War. The Union Army surrounded the city of Vicksburg, Mississippi and eventually took control. The siege took much longer than your typical battle. It began on May 18, 1863 and lasted over a month until July 4, 1863.

Who were the commanders?

The commander for the Union forces was General Ulysses S. Grant. Grant led the Army of Tennessee and had over 35,000 men under his command. Other Union generals included William T. Sherman and John McClernand.

The leader of the Confederates was General John Pemberton who commanded the South's Army of the Mississippi. He had only 18,000 soldiers under his command.

Why was Vicksburg important?

The city of Vicksburg is located on the Mississippi River. It was the last major port on the river held by the South. If the North could take Vicksburg, the Confederacy would be cut off from supply lines to the west. Also, rebel states such as Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas would be isolated from the rest of the South.

Before the Battle

The Siege of Vicksburg was the end of a long series of battles in the western theatre of the Civil War called the Vicksburg Campaign. The Union Army, led by General Grant, had won a number of battles against the Confederates pushing them back towards Vicksburg. They also captured the city of Jackson, the capital of Mississippi.

Grant approached the city slowly, forcing the Confederates to retreat before him. While approaching the city, he captured the local railroad and secured his own supply lines while isolating the city of Vicksburg.

The Battle

On May 18, 1863, Grant's army approached Vicksburg. The Confederate Army of General Pemberton were dug in. They were going to be nearly impossible to defeat while hiding behind the defenses of the city. Over the first couple of days, Grant tried to break into the city by overwhelming them with his superior numbers. It didn't work. Many Union soldiers lost their lives and the Confederates still held the city.

Grant then decided to lay siege to the city. He would bomb them constantly and wait until they ran out of food. He knew that eventually they would have to surrender.

The conditions in the city got worse and worse over the next several weeks. The people in the city began to run out of food. They started to eat anything available including the horses, dogs, and cats. Near the end they were even eating rats and tree bark. Because of malnutrition, many of the soldiers became sick from diseases like scurvy, dysentery, and malaria.

In addition to not having food, the city was constantly being bombed. People couldn't safely walk the streets or live in their houses. They had to hide day and night in their basements or dug out caves in the hills.

On July 4, 1863, the Confederates had had enough. General Pemberton surrendered to Grant.

Results

The Siege of Vicksburg was a great victory for the Union. It gave control of the Mississippi River to the Union. Around the same time, the Confederate army under General Robert E. Lee was defeated at the Battle of Gettysburg. These two victories marked the major turning point of the Civil War in favor of the Union.

Interesting Facts about the Siege of Vicksburg

- Grant at first demanded unconditional surrender. He later relented and the captured prisoners were "paroled" instead of taken prisoner. This meant they promised not to fight again (although many of them did).
- Legend has it that the people of Vicksburg did not celebrate the 4th of July for the next 80 years as this was the day they surrendered to Grant. Many historians, however, say this is not the case.