**American Civil War – Overview 1861-8165**

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**Overview #1 (Slide 2)**

**Situation 1862**

**Troop Strengths and Distributions in Thousands**

Union Confederacy

Location:

**Eastern Theater**

N. Virginia 150K – McClellan, Army of the Potomac 50K - Jos. Johnson

**Western Theater**

(All under A.S. Johnston)

Trans-Mississippi 30K 20K – VanDorn

Mississippi Line 20K – G rant @ Cairo, Ill. 17K - Polk @ Columbus, Ga

Kentucky/Tenn. 8K – Thomas @ Barbourville 4K – Zollicoffer @ Cumb. Gap

Cumberland/Tenn, R. 60K – Buell @ Louisville (Dept. OH) 25K – Hardee @ Bowling Grn.

5K @ Forts Henry and Donelson

**Analysis:** Given the disparities in troop strengths between the two sides outlined in the previous table, the challenge for the Confederacy was, how should they position the troops that they did have for the best possible defense of southern territory against the substantially larger number of Federal forces? Once Federal intentions became clearer, would the Confederates have enough time to transfer forces to places under more direct threat?

The Confederate situation was improved somewhat by the poor level of cooperation between the Union generals in the field. The previous November Halleck declined to assist Buell (They were commanders of different departments at the time) in his advance into central Tennessee because he was preoccupied pacifying Missouri. The Union also failed to exploit initial successes like Wilson Creek and Pea Ridge because it was unable to reinforce success with addition forces that could follow-up decisively and pursue the smaller reeling enemy forces.

While better coordination and the just-in-time arrival of reinforcements finally improved the Union situation at Shiloh, the effort only salvaged the battle as a hard-won Union victory. The improved effort was still insufficient for conducting an effective and decisive pursuit. Throughout 1862, the Union continued to miss many opportunities to decisively defeat small Confederate forces in the west. This was because there was no effective national military command authority (*unity of command*) between these field commanders and the President which could effectively craft an overall campaign strategy for the theater in a format that clearly laid out priorities and allocated resources (*unity of effort*) in a way that mandated department commander’s compliance and cooperation as required (*mass*).

(Millett and Maslowski, 182-187)

**Overview #2 (Slide 4)**

**Re-shuffling the Deck - 1862:**

**The Search for Effective Leaders and Winning Strategies**

**Discussion:** In the western theater, both the Union and the Confederacy struggled to find command structures that were capable of covering the vast distances and individuals who could craft effective strategies and plans.

**Analysis:**

**Confederate Challenges**

Until late 1862, Jefferson Davis had done little to promote coordination and *unity of effort* between his two army commanders in the west; Bragg in Tennessee and Pemberton in Mississippi. The earlier defeat at Shiloh and increasing Union activity along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers convinced him that greater *economy of force* could be obtained through improving unity of command in the theater. In November, Davis formed the Department of the West and placed Bragg and Pemberton’s armies in it under the command of Joseph Johnston who had recovered from his earlier wounding at Fair Oaks. Davis firmly believed that Vicksburg was vital to the Confederacy’s survival and hoped that a more coordinated and unified defense would ensure the city’s retention. While Davis’ reorganization was some improvement, the new command suffered from four critical constraints:

Department of the West – Constraints

1. Vast area of responsibility; poor transportation and communication network between subordinate commands made timely concentration of forces difficult to achieve

2. Johnston’s authority over Bragg and Pemberton was unclear; Bragg and Pemberton retained the right to communicate directly with Davis in Richmond.

3. Johnston did not have the same strategic vision as Davis; Davis believed that holding Vicksburg and the Mississippi River (i.e. denying the Union forces free movement up and down the entire river) was essential to the Confederacy’s survival; Johnston believed that middle and east Tennessee were more critical than the river or the city.

4. Johnson and Pemberton could not agree on a common strategy. Pemberton’s views about the importance of Vicksburg and the river were more in line with those of Davis.

(Millett & Maslowski, 216-217; McPherson, 576)

Summary: These four difficulties formed serious “cracks” in the Confederate strategy for the west. Grant was finally able to exploit these constraints in his successful Vicksburg campaign of 1863—much as Lee had been able to exploit the disconnects between the generals of the Union armies in the east in 1862. What these examples illustrate is that an important part of successful generalship involves knowing your opponent’s priorities and the areas in which he is weakly supported and misaligned with the rest of the command structure and efforts and then crafting strategies that can exploit these disconnects.

**Union Challenges**

By the end of 1862, the Union had also endured its share of lack-luster and ineffectual leadership. Like the Confederacy, Union efforts suffered from a lack of unity of effort resulting from too many army departments and no overall army commander for either of the two theaters or the entire Union war effort.

Lincoln attempted to remedy this problem in July 1862 by transferring Halleck from the western theater to the General-in-Chief position that had been vacated by the retirement of Winfield Scott the previous fall and poorly served in the interim by the double-hat’ed McClellan. While Halleck was an able advisor to the president, he was disappointing as a strategist and as a commander who was expected to take charge of the festering priority conflicts and nip dysfunctional rivalries between subordinate commanders.

McClellan’s continued performance in his now singular role as the commander of the Army of the Potomac remained plodding and wanting of decisive engagements. At its root was McClellan’s conception of how civil warfare should be conducted. McClellan’s view differed markedly from that of the president who believed that the Confederates needed to be pained to the point that their will to continue the war was destroyed. In November 1862, Lincoln replaced McClellan with Burnside as the commander of the Army of the Potomac. While Burnside had shown great personal courage at Antietam, he too was replaced after a scant four months, which contained a devastating battle at Fredericksburg and a disastrous “Mud March” that highlighted his lack of aggressive vision and self-confidence.

The western theater was not without its leadership challenges as well. Having found Buell too cautious and slow, Lincoln replaced him on 27 October 1862 with Rosecrans as the head of the Army of the Cumberland. Under great pressure to move and get results, Rosecrans took as long as he dared to carefully organize his force and build up supplies. Two months later, on the day after Christmas, his army moved out to engage Bragg’s Army of Tennessee. While the ensuing Battle of Stones River (31 Dec 1862-2 Jan 1863) was a close victory for the Union, it was at great cost to both armies, with casualty rates of over 30% for both sides. As a result, it was six months before Rosecrans believed his army was sufficiently recovered to resume the offensive—hardly the script for the aggressive and decisive warfare that Lincoln was seeking.

The first glimmer of change in methodology and leadership style emerged in April 1862 in the western theater at the Battle of Shiloh. There, five divisions of Grant’s Army of Western Tennessee were attacked by the army of Albert Sidney Johnston. After taking a severe beating on the first day, Grant informed his demoralized subordinates who were considering retreating, that they would “Lick ’em in the morning, though.” His grim determination to do whatever it took to prevail marked him as man who thought differently from his risk-averse peers and predecessors.

After three hard tries and his dogged victory at Vicksburg, Lincoln pronounced that “Grant is my man and I am his the rest of the war.” Unlike other generals, Grant constantly refused to be over-awed by Lee’s reputation for military daring and chastised one of his subordinate generals at the Battle of the Wilderness, when he told him, “Oh, I am heartily tired of hearing what Lee is going to do. … Go back to your command and try to think what we are going to do ourselves, instead of what Lee is going to do.” It was Grant’s determined character and willingness to risks failure and try new approaches, again and again, that singled him out for a rise to the top of the Union leadership after all other senior officers had been given their due opportunities.

(Millett & Maslowski, 198; McPherson, 410, 584, 638; Warner, *Blue,* 410-411; Doughty, 125-126, 202)

Instructors Note: U.S. Grant is an excellent case study in good leadership. One other example of Grant’s insight into command you may want to use comes from his Personal Memoirs. This relates a story of Grant’s movements (as a regimental commander) against Confederate Colonel Thomas Harris early in the war:

As we approached the brow of the hill from which it was expected we could see Harris’ camp, and possibly find his men ready formed to meet us, my heart kept getting higher and higher until it felt to me as though it was in my throat. I would have given anything then to have been back in Illinois, but I had not the moral courage to halt and consider what to do; I kept right on….The place where Harris had been encamped a few days before was still there…, but the troops were gone. My heart resumed its place. It occurred to me at once that Harris had been as much afraid of me as I had been of him. This was a view of the question I had never taken before; but it was one I never forgot afterwards.

**Overview #3 (Slide 5)**

**The Vicksburg Campaign(s)**

**Background:** Vicksburg was undoubtedly one of the toughest challenges the Union faced over the course of the war. Dubbed “the Key to the Confederacy,” the city occupied high ground (*key terrain)* overlooking a particularly treacherous twisting bend on the Mississippi River. This location permitted the defenders to effectively block the river with their fields of fire which was particularly devastating to slow-moving northbound river traffic, though cleverly maneuvered southbound vessels had a chance to slip thorough with the help of the swift current.

**The failed efforts to reach Vicksburg**

**Original Attempt – The Overland Campaign (approach from the northeast along the railroad line), Nov-Dec 1862**

Grant’s “Overland Campaign” was really a two-pronged approachto Vicksburg. On 2 November, Grant with 42,000 troops proceeded south from Corinth along the Mississippi Central Railroad to attack Vicksburg from the northeast. While 32,000 troops under Sherman moved down river by boat on 20 December to attack Vicksburg from the northwest.

The plan started to falter when Pemberton sent Van Dorn on 18 December to conduct a raid to destroy Union supplies and their Mississippi Central LOC. Van Dorn’s cavalry struck on 20 December and burned a vast Union supply point at Holly Springs causing Grant to call off the overland advance from the northeast. In the meantime Sherman conducted his assault on Vicksburg on 29 December as directed but the attack failed because in the meantime, Pemberton was able to reinforce his defense of the city with three more brigades from Granada and middle Tennessee. Sherman then withdrew across the river to Milliken’s Bend while Grant pulled back to the Tallahatchie, and both considered how they might find new approaches to strike at Vicksburg in the new year.

At this point, Grant joined him and began a series of attempts to either bypass or capture Vicksburg. Listed here and on the map are the three major attempts:

**Attempt #1 – Canal building scheme (approach from west-side, using Mississippi River by-pass), Jan-Mar 1863**

While regrouping at Milliken’s Bend, Grant and Sherman resolved to try what they could to make the Mississippi and its associated water courses more supportive of their need to reach the city from other, less easily defended directions. To this ends, they devised several watercourse altering schemes. On the west side of the Mississippi, they hoped to get out of range of the deadly artillery fire covering the river by connecting two bows of the river to the west with a canal.

**Attempt #2 – Lake Providence scheme (approach from west-side, using Mississippi River by-pass), Jan-Mar 1863**

Another similar option was to connect Lake Providence, a short distance to the northwest of the city, with a series of bayous paralleling the Mississippi to the west and then feeding into the Red River before it joined the Mississippi further downstream. Eventually both schemes failed because spring flooding broke levees prematurely and made it impossible to remove trees and snags that blocked navigation of the potential new waterways.

**Attempt #3 – Yazoo River Expedition and Steele bayou waterways (approach from the north utilizing flooded lands and existing waterways), Jan-Mar 1863**

Another option was to try a similar scheme on the northeast side of the river by breaking a 100 foot thick levee at Yazoo Pass and letting the water of Mississippi once again flow into the Yazoo River and bottom land that had been reclaimed for cotton plantations. Pemberton and his defenders had suspected that such a plan might be attempted by the Federal and they preemptively felled numerous huge trees to make clearing a navigable waterway as difficult as possible. Taking advantage of an optimal piece of ground, the defenders constructed a well embanked fort between the Tallahatchie and Yazoo Rivers that halted Union efforts to advance by this route. The expedition was finally abandoned on March 28th after another column’s effort to relieve it by way of Steele bayou was similarly thwarted.

**The Final (Successful) Plan to reach Vicksburg**

While none of the previous efforts directly contributed to the Union capture of Vicksburg, they were valuable in other ways. They bought Grant time to craft the plan that ultimately succeeded. Additionally, when the last of them was obviously abandoned, the Confederates erroneously believed that Grant was giving up. This contributed to their surprise when he slipped the Union gunboats and transports downstream under the noses of the Vicksburg defenders in the middle of the night on April 20th.

By these failed efforts, Grant also learned something about the nature of his adversary Pemberton and his willingness to detach forces to counter every potential threat, whether real or minimal. Grant made good use of this knowledge when he sent out three diversionary raids that help him move his remaining forces overland on the west bank of the Mississippi without undue attention from Pemberton. This in turn allowed him to ferry a substantial force back across the river below Vicksburg on the vessels he slipped past the city in the night. By this complicated and cleaver *maneuvering*, Grant was able to eliminate other Confederate elements that could reinforce Vicksburg before he conducted his successful assault and siege of the city from a more advantageous direction.

**Overview #4 (Slide 7)**

**The Confederate’s strategy for 1862-1863**

**Were Bragg and Lee correct to attack North in both the East and West? Did these campaigns support the Confederate objective of independence?**

\*\*\* Instructor Note**:** There is no right answer here, but this question can be presented to students to spur the below discussion. You can list these on a blackboard as students discuss. This discussion could occur twice – once at the end of Antietam/Perryville with just initial ideas and again after Gettysburg/Vicksburg/Chickamauga with more detail.

Talking Points:

+Confederates take the initiative (POW – Offensive)

+Confederates get out of their war torn land (Particularly relief of VA)

+Possibly get the support/recognition from a foreign country (Europe)

(more important in ’62)

+A decisive victory on a battlefield may break the will of the north.

+Threaten Washington

+Cut Union Rail Lines

-Appears to violate their Defensive Strategy

-Potential to Raise Northern Moral to defend their territory

-Border States do not turn toward their cause (poor intel)

-Did they have enough assets to attack (obtainable?) or were they just throwing troops away.

Analysis:

Most of the Confederate’s reasons for attacking into the North, were, by 1863 increasingly of dubious and temporary value. While it was still true that by taking the initiative, the Confederates were more likely to chose the terms of their engagements and it did provide a brief respite for war-torn Virginia, the costs associated with these campaigns were tremendous, particularly in irreplaceable manpower.

With everyday that passed and the concurrent improvements in the Union blockade it was increasingly unlikely that a foreign power in Europe would side with the Confederacy. This was especially true when their domestic populations came out strongly against any such support after Union war aims were linked to the Emancipation Proclamation effective on 1 January 1863.

While “Copperhead” sentiments were growing, in the North as the war dragged on, they never rose to such a level that they seriously threatened the national will to prosecute the war to its stated objective, restoration of the Union. Confederate hopes and campaigns pinned on this justification were not realistic.

Similarly, while cutting Union rail lines may have made Confederates feel as if they were making military progress, the reality by 1863 was that these actions were little more than short term disruptions that were readily corrected by the USMRR and the vast industrial resources at the Union’s disposal. Corresponding destruction of Confederate rail lines was more serious and long lasting due to material shortages and lack of centralized repair authority.

**Overview #5 (Slide 7)**

**Which theater was the main effort for the Confederacy? (Was there one?) How were forces allocated? Should forces have been allocated differently?** Again, as with Overview #4, no right answer here.

Talking Points:

\*Lee wanted to remain the main effort defending Richmond.

+ Lee’s felt that the drive north would divert Union troops from Vicksburg – Sending troops via rail, they would not get there in time.

+The Capital, more industry, more population (recruits) were located in the east.

+Media and Moral may dictate a strong stand in the east.

+The West has more space to trade than the East (which thus requires stronger/rigid defense)

\*Johnston/Bragg felt that more forces should be allocated to the West. Many even wanted Lee to be the commander of the West.

+West was the life blood (resources) of the Confederacy

+New Orleans/Memphis/Nashville were large cities

+Mississippi. Not only was this river important to keep connection with the western states, but control of even a portion of it cut the North-western Union states off from the sea (thus hurting their economy).

\*Could internal lines have been used to shift troops?

- Longstreet at Chickamauga seems to prove that it was not possible to rapidly/effectively shift. He arrives just in time, but at great effort, and not with a full Corps.

- Plus we see that the Union has a better capability and can shift troops east and west faster: Sherman and Hooker’s reinforcement of Chattanooga.

**Overview #6 (Slide 8)**

**Grant’s strategy for 1864**

By spring 1864, Grant was promoted to lieutenant general and appointed General-in-Chief. When he came east to execute his new duties, he made his headquarters with the Army of the Potomac. He left Meade the Potomac army’s field commander and made it clear that he intended to command and coordinate the efforts of all the Union armies in a way that had not been previously done. For his strategy to work, he had to insure the advances on all fronts were coordinated. To do this, he devised unambiguous objectives and instructions for his subordinate commanders. While his working relationship with Sherman was the most finely attuned (and he could feel confident that Sherman would accomplish his goals with minimal guidance) and Meade was a reliable career professional, his other three subordinate commanders were political generals of varying abilities and he still had to find a way to effectively incorporate their considerable manpower and resources into the overall Union effort.

Grant issued his general the following orders:

Meade: “Lee’s army will be your objective point… Wherever Lee goes, there you go also.”

Butler: Advance up the James River, cut the railroad between Petersburg and Richmond, threaten Richmond from the south

Sigel: Move up the valley, pin down its defenders and cut off Lee’s communications with the region

Sherman: “Move against Johnston’s army, to break it up, and to get into the interior of the enemy’s country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their war resources.”

Banks: Capture Mobile, then push northward to prevent Johnston from being reinforced by forces from Alabama

These objectives were attempted with varying degrees of success, but at least it was a strategic plan that promoted a new level of cooperation and reinforcing support between the different commands.

(McPherson, 718, 722)