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At the outbreak of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) called for 75,000 volunteers to suppress the Confederacy. The secession of eleven southern states and the bombardment of Fort Sumter officially began the Civil War. Because of the United States' reliance on an expandable army during wartime, Lincoln was mandated to release a proclamation calling for volunteers. Most men who called southern states home had withdrawn from the Union to fight against it, and while each Confederate soldier had different motives for their enlistment, their withdrawal meant that the Union lacked men to fight for their army. Prior to the Civil War, standing armies were small and limited, mainly stationed out on frontiers to secure the lands from the Indians. The issue of whether the country needed a powerful or a minimal standing army had been controversial since the founding of America, and had been regularly debated between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists. To suffice the need for soldiers to fight in the Civil War, Lincoln found it essential to call for volunteers; he had needed 75,000 men but received twice that number. With volunteers numbering up to the hundred-thousands, the Union Army primarily consisted of citizen-soldiers who had little or no military experience. Neither professionally trained nor permanent at soldiering, these citizen-soldiers would face challenges

throughout the war that could jeopardize a Union victory. Lincoln's volunteers enhanced the Union's chance of victory, but they did not guarantee it, especially with Lincoln's problems with his generals. With both these challenges and advantages for the Union, secession of eleven states would result in the American Civil War and necessitate Lincoln's call for a militia of 75,000 men, though it did not guarantee a Union victory.

Fourteen days before Lincoln called for a militia, the country suffered through the bombardment of Fort Sumter. Lincoln was determined to preserve the Union and refused to abandon the Fort. He wrote in his message to William H. Seward (1801-1872), "I immediately gave General Scott, directing him to employ every means in his power to strengthen and hold the forts, comprises the exact domestic policy you now urge, with the single exception, that it does not propose to abandon Fort Sumpter."[1] Lincoln's plan fell short. On April 13, 1861, the President was forced to surrender the fort to the Confederates. A second wave of secession followed as Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee left the Union, resulting in eleven states forming the new Confederate States of America. The addition of the four newly seceded states meant that more men would eventually withdraw from the Union. Initially Lincoln did not acknowledge the Confederate States of America as its own country, sternly proclaiming to a Committee from the Virginia Convention that "military posts and property situated within the states, which claim to have seceded, as yet belonging to the Government of the United States, as much as they did before the supposed secession."[2] From the start, Lincoln had wanted to avoid a Civil War, but the secession of eleven states indicated that a Civil War was inevitable so long as the Union was to be preserved. Though the United States had a larger standing army in

[1] Roy P. Bassler et al., eds., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 316.
[2] Ibid., 330.

comparison to the time of President Thomas Jefferson (1723-1826), secession severely impacted the number of soldiers the country had, which is why a call for volunteers became necessary.

The United States had traditionally been opposed to having a powerful standing army, and most of its troops were stationed on the frontiers. The concept of a standing army can be linked back to the time of George Washington (1732-1799) and Alexander Hamilton (1755-1804), who had "established in their lifetimes the basic parameters for American military policy...the primacy of civilian control, a dual military system...a well-articulated system of military education, and an office-heavy regular army designed to expand quickly in wartime."[3] The ratification of the Constitution also allowed the nation to raise armies, according to Article I Sec. 8, where the Articles of Confederation previously banned it. Lincoln's call for volunteers was based on Hamilton's notion of an expandable army composed of citizen-soldiers who, during wartime, would fight alongside a small group of professionals, by "simply adding enlisted men to existing companies."[4] The concept of the expandable army continued to be prevalent at the time of the Civil War and was maintained during the conflict. The expandable army also proved that "The wave of volunteerism did in a sense vindicate the popular belief that a substantial standing army was unnecessary, because large numbers of citizen-soldiers had actually rallied to the colors in a time of crisis."[5] The large number of volunteers was evidence that the idea of an expandable army best served the interests of the country.

Because slavery was the central issue of the war, the motives of most Confederate soldiers inevitably tied back to it, and each one had personal views on slavery. Lieutenant William Cowper Nelson of Mississippi wrote, "I have thought that this war was ordered by

[3] Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh, *West Pointers and the Civil War: The Old Army in War and Peace* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 12-13.
[4] Ibid., 16.
[5] Ibid., 118.

Providence, as a means of settling definitely and conclusively the question of slavery."[6] Many but not all had returned to their states to fight for the preservation of slavery. Nelson relied on God to answer the question of slavery, willing to be open to the destruction of slavery as well as its preservation. South Carolinian Samuel Elias Mays wrote, "What are we fighting for? Why should I take up arms against the Union?"[7] Many Confederate soldiers found themselves in the same situation, not necessarily fighting to preserve slavery, but instead fighting for the liberty to keep their way of life. As the war continued on, the Confederates' motive became more unified; "By 1861, Confederate soldiers saw that their greatest abolitionist was not Harriet Beecher Stowe or John Brown, but Abraham Lincoln himself."[8] Lincoln's election would be a defining point of the Civil War, as the Antebellum South realized the likelihood of abolition from this new president. Even though there were numerous non-slaveholding Confederate soldiers, many of them fought for slavery, as "to varying degrees, the independence of the individual, personal honor, the values and traditions of their community, private sacrifice for the public good, obedience to a Christian hierarchy, and preservation of the institution of slavery"[9] motivated these soldiers. On the condition that the issue of slavery was to be resolved, men who considered the Confederate states home went back to their states to fight the war, and Lincoln sought volunteers by issuing a draft.

While the Union's determination to abolish slavery was also obvious, the personal motives of the Union soldiers sometimes overlapped with the Confederates. The Union army fought for the abolition of slavery in essence, but "at the heart of that disagreement...Individual

[6] Colin Edward Woodward, "'The Question of Slavery' Confederate Soldiers and the Sothern Cause, 1861-1862," in *Marching Masters: Slavery, Race, and the Confederate Army during the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 21.
[7] Woodward, "Question of Slavery," 12.
[8] Ibid., 23-24.
[9] Andrew S. Bledsoe, *Citizen Officers: The Union and Confederate Volunteer Junior Officer Corps in the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 4.

liberty, freedom, and self-government, according to republican tradition, provided a common identity and shared history that all Americans could, and did claim."[10] A common theme that played out is the yearning for individual liberty and self-government, with the North wanting to abolish slavery, and the South wanting to preserve it. Written in his diary on August 25, 1862, Rufus Kingsley of the 8th Vermont Regiment said, "Thank God I enlisted when I did, and where I did! Thank God for the opportunity of preaching Abolitionism to slaveholders, and to slaves: of making men dissatisfied with the condition they are in; because, until dissatisfied with their present state, they can never be led to a better."[11] Just like Southeners, Union soldiers had differing views on slavery; however, as the war progressed the Union soldiers tended to have a more unified view regarding the issue. One soldier from the Midwest said, "You have no idea of the changes that have taken place in the minds of the soldiers in the last two months...to face the sum of all evils, and cause of the war...men of all parties seem unanimous in the belief that to permanently establish the Union, [we must]...first wipe [out] the institution of slavery."[12] Over the course of war, these Union soldiers embraced emancipation as their perception of slavery transformed, not only believing that slavery was the cause of the war, but the destruction of slavery would also be the only way to end the war.

These performances of the volunteers often endangered a Union victory but the blame cannot be put on them as many had never been professionally trained. The defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run had been a terrible blow for the Union. Brevet Brigadier General Francis S. Fiske of the Second New Hampshire Regiment remembered the many mistakes the Union army

[10] Ibid., 3.
[11] David C. Rankin, *Diary of a Christian Soldier: Rufus Kinsley and the Civil War*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 104.
[12] Chandra Manning, "A 'Vexed Question' White Union Soldiers on Slavery and Race." in *The View from the Ground: Experiences of Civil War Soldiers*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 34.

had made. "The day was one of mistakes and blunders on the Union side from the very beginning," Fiske wrote. "The tardiness of [Brigadier General Daniel] Tyler's division in the early morning...caused the long delay of [Colonel David] Hunter's division...and gave the Rebels time to prepare to meet the attack on their left flank. The misdirection of Henitzelman's division, the delay in placing [Colonel Andrew] Porter's brigade, left Burnside's brigade to bear the brunt of the first hour's fighting alone. The advance of the batteries of [Captain Charles] Griffin and [J.B.] Ricketts, before assurance of adequate support, was a fatal mistake, and last of all the failure to bring up the reserves and hold them at Stone Bridge left the retreating columns to face about and protect their rear as best they could."[13] Many of these mistakes caused significant casualties. The Union army outnumbered the Confederates by thousands, and the Union enjoyed a much more extensive supply than the Confederates. This seemed to guarantee a victory for the North, but the First Battle of Bull Run demonstrated that the Union merely had an advantage, not a guaranteed victory. Lieutenant Eugene Carter expressed his views of the battle, "You will hear great stories about the bravery of this and that regiment of volunteers...but believe me, most of them acted like cowards in my division."[14] The price of having an expandable army was this: the lack of experience of citizen-soldiers was a major problem for the North, but blame for the Union's failure cannot be laid specifically on these volunteers.

Lincoln's difficulty in finding a good general also complicated the Union effort. Aside from the challenges that came from these citizen-soldiers, some West Pointers also proved to be terrible generals. Lincoln's relationship with George B. McClellan (1826-1885) quickly deteriorated, though he was impressive in many ways. McClellan's reluctance to take command

[13] Francis S. Fiske, "At the Battle of Bull Run with the Second New Hampshire Regiment," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, ed. Peter Cozzens (University of Illinois Press, 2004), 60-61.
[14] Bledsoe, *Citizen Officers*, 138.

irritated President Lincoln as the Union lost opportunities for a victory. McClellan continuously overestimated the Confederates, and during the Peninsula campaign, this failure to take Richmond infuriated the President. Lincoln voiced his desperation and frustration to McClellan in his letters. "And, once more let me tell you, it is indispensable to *you* that you strike a blow. *I* am powerless to help this,"[15] McClellan's reluctance to pursue his advantages clearly jeopardized the Northern victory. Lincoln continued in his letter to McClellan that "The country will not fail to note–is now noting–that the present hesitation to move upon an intrenched enemy, is but the story of Manassas repeated."[16] Lincoln's difficulty to find a general became one of his toughest challenges throughout the war. Once he removed McClellan, he had to rely on generals like Robert Sheridan and Ambrose Burnside before finding Ulysses S. Grant (1822-1885), whose leadership led to the Union victory.

The Union army seemed to evolve once Grant was put in command. A year prior to Grant's promotion as a Major General, Lincoln congratulated him on his excellent achievement. "I do not remember that you and I ever met personally. I write this now as a grateful acknowledgement for the almost inestimable service you have done the country,"[17] Lincoln wrote to Grant. On March 10, 1864, Lincoln announced "Lieutenant-General Ulysses S. Grant, U.S. Army, is assigned to the command of the armies of the United States."[18] The Union achieved victory in 1865 after Grant took command of the Union Army. Though the South had General Robert E. Lee (1807-1870) for most of the war, leadership problems were a common occurrence in the Confederate Army. The death of Stonewall Jackson (1824-1863) and Major

[15] Bassler et al., *CW*, 185.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 326.
[18] Ibid., 236.

General Braxton Bragg's (1817-1876) unpopular leadership style compromised the Confederate effort.

The enthusiasm of volunteers to fight for liberty and freedom played a major role for the Union army in the Civil War. Lincoln's call for volunteers proved to be necessary, as he needed the army to expand rapidly after the secession. Yet, the misconception that the Union would have won the Civil War regardless, due to their advantages of men and finances, had continued to prevail. The challenges that the Union faced, demonstrated that the Union victory did not come easily; they might have lost as easily as the South might have won. Many thought that the war would end with a quick Union victory, but the Northern defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run demonstrated the fallacy of that theory and showed that a southern victory was possible. The Union's eventual victory was not merely a consequence of superior industrial and financial advantages, but more a result of its commitment to end slavery, to preserve the Union, strategic planning, and the arrival of the competent General Ulysses S. Grant, with whom Lincoln could work.

About the author

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