

The Confederate Advantages at the Beginning of the Civil War

Contrary to popular belief, the Confederacy actually had many advantages at the beginning of the American Civil War. The chief reason that the North won the war was its massive production advantage over the South. The other main reason that they won the war was a massive manpower advantage over the South. Although these two advantages ultimately led them to win the war, these advantages were not as pronounced at the beginning of the war. Their advantages were disrupted, however, by poor leadership and organization. Early in the Civil War, the South was successful because of confidence, superior organization, leadership, and a more militarist way of life.

In the period leading up to, and during, the American Civil War, the South was more militaristic than the North. Many families in the South hunted for food, which taught the Southerners how to sneak through woods, and shoot well. Most male Southerners learned to shoot at an early age, and who by the time they were old enough to join the army, had impeccable aim. Furthermore, most of America's prestigious military academies were situated in the South. Because of that, more people from the South went to these academies. When the war started, many of those felt that their loyalty was to their birthplace, the South, and not with the United States' government. The South won most of the battles at the beginning of the Civil War, surprising the North, who had thought that they would quickly win the war. The war truly began when the Confederates attacked the Union garrison at Fort Sumter, in South Carolina. They bombarded the fort with cannon, and on April 14th, 1861, the United States forces at Fort Sumter surrendered. The first battle of the war had been won by the Confederates; the only casualty of the battle was a Confederate horse. The news of this stunning victory quickly moved throughout the South, and boosted the already high confidence of those in the South.

The Southerners were confident in their military skill, while they thought of the Northerners as city dwellers who couldn't hold their own in combat. The militaristic southern way of life helped prompt this, along with the astounding victory at Fort Sumter. Confederate ranks swelled as patriotic Southerners answered Jefferson Davis' call for 100,000 men to fight against the Union. Confident soldiers usually fight better than demoralized ones. This is evident at the battle of Bull Run.

One early southern victory was the battle of Bull Run, or First Manassas, as the Confederates called it. The battle began when Union General Irvin McDowell moved south toward Richmond, and was stopped by Confederate General Pierre Beauregard. McDowell came up with a good plan: a small group of men would distract the Confederates, making them think that they were the main attack force; while the main attack force outflanked the Confederates. At first, it seemed like this strategy had worked, the Confederates took the bait, and moved to block the decoy force. But they soon discovered that they were being outflanked. The Confederates used railroads to quickly transport their troops to where they were needed; the first time this was ever done in history. The battle ended in a Confederate victory, with the Union retreating to Washington D.C. having about one thousand more casualties than the Confederacy. This was a tremendous morale boost to the South, and was quite demoralizing to the North. Again, the South grew even more confident in its fighting ability.

The army was divided into three main parts, in two of these, the Union had an advantage, but in the third, and perhaps most important, the South held the advantage. The first and largest part of the army was the infantry. It consisted of foot soldiers, and the United States had a production advantage here: they could produce guns, gunpowder, boots, and other equipment faster than the South could. The next part of the military was the artillery. This consisted mostly of "big guns" and cannons. Again, the North had a production advantage here as well. The last part of the army, but perhaps the most important was the cavalry. Mounted horsemen with

guns, he cavalry could do scouting missions, could raid supply lines, or could help outflank an enemy in battle. Because of their way of life, most confederates had better aim than their Union counterparts. Many Southerners also rode from town to town, rather than either walking, or taking a train; as people did in the North. This made them quite good riders, as well as making it likely that they would own good horses. The Confederate army could not afford horses, so southern cavalymen used their own. These horses were far better than those used by the North, bought cheaply by the Union army. Furthermore, the Confederate cavalymen were used to their mounts, while the Union soldiers were not. This all added up to a far superior confederate cavalry, which had a huge impact on the war. The Confederate cavalry did many scouting missions, disrupted transportation of Union supplies, and attacked communication stations. The latter two caused the North to refocus their troops from attacking the Confederates to defending supplies, and means of communication. This helped to neutralize one of the Union's advantages, and was a great help to the South.

Although confident, militaristic Southerners filled the ranks of the Confederate army, its greatest advantage lay in its leadership. One of these generals fought in the battle of Bull Run: Thomas J. Jackson. At West Point, he struggled to keep his grades up, but graduated in 1846. He went on to fight bravely in the Mexican War. Around this time, he became a pious Christian, and slightly eccentric. He never again, smoked, drank, or played card. He left the army in 1851 to become a teacher at VMI (the Virginia Military Institute). He later left VMI to join the Confederate army. At the battle of Bull Run, he managed to stop a Union attack to effectively that he was given the nickname "Stonewall" by Bernard Bee. He became one of the Confederacy's most effective generals, and his leadership proved to be a great advantage over the North. An even greater presence in the Confederate army was General Robert E. Lee. Lee had graduated from West Point in 1829, and received three awards in the Mexican War. Lee was later in charge of West point for a few years. He opposed secession, but his loyalty lay with his home state of Virginia. President Abraham Lincoln asked him to command the Union army, but he turned it because he was a Virginian first.

On the other side of the war, was General George B. McClellan. McClellan graduated from West Point at the top of his class in 1846, the same year as "Stonewall" Jackson. He received three awards in the Mexican War. He was put in charge of the Ohio militia at the beginning of the Civil War. In 1861 he was put in charge of all American armies. Although McClellan was a great general, he suffered from what President Lincoln called the "slows." His overcautious tactics managed to delay the United States from marching south quickly. It gave the opportunity for Lee, and other generals to push north, and even engage the Union on its own territory. Considering the large advantages that the South had at the beginning of the civil war, it is interesting as to what would have happened if the South had pushed these advantages just a little farther. If they had, the outcome of the war could have been different. If it had been, the United States would have been much smaller, and would not have been a world leader. The outcome of World War Two could have been different, or, if it had not, the outcome of the cold war certainly would have been. If the confederates had pushed their early advantages just a small bit more, the world would be very different today.