

The Military Situation in 1862, by Ed Kennedy

1862, unlike 1861, started-off with a 'bang' and a massive military effort on all fronts. 1861 was largely a time of organization and training for both the Confederates and the Federals. By 1862, both sides determined that even though they were formed, organized and somewhat trained, there remained a deficit in all those aspects as the size of the armies continued to grow. Both sides depended heavily on volunteers...almost all of them completely inexperienced and untrained in military affairs. On 16 April 1862, the Confederates instituted the first American draft to try and fill the depleted ranks emptied by the 1-year volunteers. Short enlistment periods for the initial volunteers demonstrated the belief on both sides that the war would be short. The Union Army continued to enlist only volunteers...at least until 1863 when they also instituted a draft to fill the depleted ranks.

The strategic situation for the Confederacy was relatively straight-forward. They wanted to separate from the United States and form their own country. When Lincoln called for 75,000 soldiers to invade the Southern states and force them back into the Union, four more states immediately separated (Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas), not specifically because of the issue of slavery but because they believed that the Constitution had been violated by the North using military force to force a political solution. In the North, the populace took Lincoln's claim in his letter to the New York Tribune editor, Horace Greeley that "...paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery." Restoration of the "union" was the major factor for recruiting in the north and the hundreds of recruiting posters enticed young men to join for that specific reason. They did not mention slavery. The name of the U.S. Army became the "Union Army" because of this. The Confederates did not wish to be forced back into the "Union" and were forced to conduct a strategic defense to prevent "reunion" by military force.

The Union military forces had a formidable task. The only way they could restore "Union" was to invade the South and force it to submit. Strategically, they would have to go on the offense. Immense resources would be needed, including an army of way-more than the initial 75,000 volunteers. Additionally, the control of the coastline of the South was a significant issue as it extended over 3,000 miles providing numerous inlets and harbors for ships necessary for Southern trade and increasing the Union Navy's problems for interdiction. The incredibly small U.S. Navy had to grow quickly, and, had to develop a parallel force to fight on the nation's hugely valuable interior waterways...the "Brown Water Navy". They were able to do this by quickly obtaining re-purposing commercial civilian water craft and then instituting a tremendous ship-building program. By 1862, the naval blockade began to take a toll on the Southern ability to obtain much needed war materiel and supplies.

With the close of 1861 indicating that the war was going to be a long one, the Union forces would have to conduct offensives on a broad front. The army was divided largely along geographic lines to handle the huge expanse of territories that required armies to operate independently of each other. This

decentralization of effort was somewhat controlled from the War Department and the “General-In-Chief”. Frequently, the president himself led in a manner that gave centralized control. This imperfect system was used for the first time in American military history and had no precedent. The advent of the new telegraph gave impetus to the system allowing high level direction, interference and micromanagement to the distress of some field commanders. However, the over-arching Union “Anaconda” strategy was understood by field commanders even if they could not work directly in concert with one another to execute it.

The “Anaconda Plan” of dividing the Confederacy meant attacking the South on multiple and widely separated fronts. In the center of the country, Grant was given relatively free hand to attack Tennessee through Forts Henry and Donelson, recognizing the importance of the interior river system. In Virginia, the predilection with the attack to capture the capitol of Richmond (a Napoleonic concept which many senior officers had been exposed to in their schooling) led to MajGen George McClellan’s Peninsula Campaign. Grant’s campaign in February subsequently led to the capture of the first Confederate state’s capitol at Nashville, Tennessee. McClellan began his Peninsula Campaign at the same general time, thus causing the Confederates to fight on a broad number of fronts, stretching their resources more thinly.

On the water, the Union Navy bottled-up the Confederates who turned to using “raiders” to fight away from the coastline, largely on the high seas. In March 1862, naval warfare took a significant turn as both sides debuted their ironclad ships. Their battle at Hampton Roads between the CSS Virginia (formerly the “Merrimac”) and the USS Monitor signaled a widespread building effort of ironclad ships, mostly to be used on the interior waterways. Although the CSS Virginia sank and damaged several wooden ships, its fight with the USS Monitor ended in a ‘draw’ with both ships damaged but neither sunk. These naval actions were not directly connected to, nor coordinated with, land operations.

With the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson and the capture of Nashville, General Grant was emboldened to strike southward into the heart of the Confederacy in the west. In March, he intended to move into Mississippi. By using the Tennessee River, he would move large numbers of troops supported logistically on the river system. He chose a location where the Tennessee flows north-south and turns east-ward to act as a “base” from which to supply his army. His intended base would be on the north side of the Tennessee River to protect his army from a sudden move by the Confederates. However, his subordinates found that a location near Shiloh at Pittsburgh landing might prove advantageous and encamped there. Recognizing the threat to the city of Corinth in north Mississippi, General Albert S. Johnston moved his army northward to meet the threat. Surprised by Johnston’s army on 6 April, Grant barely staved-off defeat and only the arrival of three divisions of the Army of the Ohio under MajGen Don Carlos Buell insured victory on 7 April. This allowed for the march on, and capture of Corinth, thus threatening the Southern lines of communications and posing Grant for a further drive south.

In the Eastern Theater, “On To Richmond” became the battle cry for the Army of the Potomac. MajGen George McClellan intended to shorten the approach to

Richmond by driving up the most direct peninsula leading to the capitol from the coast. Using the command of the sea lines of communications (SLOCs), he brought his forces south through the Chesapeake Bay, landed on the Virginia coast developing extensive logistic bases. Using the interior rivers of Virginia as avenues of approach to supplement the land approaches, McClellan endeavored to move towards Richmond. President Lincoln began to doubt McClellan's concepts due to McClellan's glacially slow movements.

From the March through July a number of engagements and battles occurred, eventually halting the Union forces' drive up the peninsula (covered in detail by Emil Posey's excellent LRT presentation on the Peninsula Campaign). Familiar names from the American Revolution became new battle site names again in 1862. Confederate Brig Gen John Magruder skillfully sited the "Warwick Line" which broke the early momentum of McClellan's advance, making McClellan's movements even slower. The result was McClellan's leadership shortcoming of deliberate and slow movement manifested in his extensive preparations while the Confederates conducted a withdrawal. McClellan was cautiously moving at a much slower pace than originally envisioned with the result that the Confederates had a chance to get "inside his decision cycle" and react. At Williamsburg, a major battle unfolded and success was achieved tactically by Union forces but the Confederates were able to trade space for time and shorten their logistical line while the Union forces lengthened theirs.

The Union Navy had difficulty navigating Virginia's interior waterways with large ships designed for open seas. Attempting to move up the York River to conduct amphibious landings, Union forces endeavored to block the withdrawal of General Johnston's forces by double envelopments. Moving up the rivers parallel to the Confederates' withdrawals, Union forces planned to land between the withdrawing Confederates and Richmond. The battle of the ironclads in March threw the Union Navy into a panic as they understood the threat to their wooden fleet, hence its impact on coastal naval operations. Their fear was briefly assuaged by the Monitor's performance but they needed more ironclads like the Monitor for river operations.

In March, further to the west, Maj Gen T.J. Jackson began his "Valley Campaign" culminating in tactical and operational victories and saving the Shenandoah Valley for the Confederacy. He was then able to transfer his troops to join General Lee outside of Richmond for the Seven Days battles while forcing Union troops to remain "fixed" in Western Virginia.

In the deep South, Admiral Farragut's Gulf Blockading Squadron captured New Orleans in April and began working their way up the Mississippi River having much more success than his naval counter-parts in Virginia. Flag Officer Charles H. Davis moved with his squadron from Memphis and linked-up at Vicksburg with Farragut. During May through August, unsuccessful attempts were made to neutralize Vicksburg and force its surrender. The Union Navy returned to Memphis and New Orleans leaving Vicksburg until Grant's return in late December.

In Virginia the amphibious landing at Eltham's Landing on the York and at Drewry's Bluff on the James, the Union Navy attained its operational reach but

could not go further. Confederate batteries on the rivers combined with the narrowing river widths terminated naval involvement and ground troops would have to be used to continue the advance. By the first of May, dual parallel attacks up the York and James Rivers posed a significant chance of success of reaching Richmond without fighting up the peninsula. General Joe Johnston's plan to move his forces more quickly in their withdrawal than the Union forces could react was continued by General R.E. Lee when he replaced Johnston who was wounded 31 May during the Battle of Fair Oaks (Seven Pines). The Confederates began to consolidate on the outer defenses of Richmond under Lee's command. Despite tough fighting enroute, McClellan's army actually reached the outskirts of Richmond, a significant accomplishment.

To this time, the Union combined naval and land forces had conducted a skillful operational level of maneuver that posed them to threaten the Confederate capitol. While General Johnston's forte was the defense, General Robert E. Lee's modus operandi was the offense. When Lee took command, the Confederates were pushed onto the offense. The result was by late June, during the Seven Days Battles Lee halted and forced McClellan's forces to a stand-still. McClellan then withdrew his forces back down the peninsula. Richmond was temporarily saved and both armies remained viable.

While it was not the political objective of the South to seize or control Union territory, General Lee recognized that victory was unobtainable by just defending and not losing. The Confederate government wanted the war to end favorably with Union forces out of the areas they had invaded in the South. With Union forces occupying Kentucky and central Tennessee, much manpower and agricultural assets were denied to the Confederates. The Union forces were able to control the major logistical hubs such as Nashville and Memphis, thus making supply replenishment for the Confederates much more difficult. By late spring, Union forces occupied northern Alabama on the Tennessee River, causing major problems for the Confederates in both manpower and resource losses. Interdiction of Confederate traffic on the Tennessee River and the rail lines from Memphis to Chattanooga occurred. Northern Alabama and southern Tennessee erupted into irregular warfare and in April 1862, the Confederate government instituted the Partisan Ranger Act. This sanctioned irregular units (mostly cavalry) to gain commissions with the purpose of fighting irregular warfare in Union occupied areas.

In August, General Bragg struck-out from Chattanooga to move into Kentucky and drive the Union forces out by threatening their lines of communications and drawing Union forces from west Tennessee to the north. President Jefferson Davis hoped that General Lee's invasion of Maryland would profit from Union forces being fixed in Kentucky rather than redeploying eastward to assist the Army of the Potomac, thus allowing Lee better odds of success. On 17 September, General Lee and McClellan fought one of the bloodiest battles in the war at Sharpsburg (Antietam). The end result was the Union forces displacement from the Peninsula, concentration of the Army of the Potomac into Maryland to thwart the offensive (thus away from the Peninsula), Lee's withdrawal back to

Virginia, and the relief of McClellan by President Lincoln for his failure to pursue the Confederates at the end of September.

While the whites were battling each other in their conflict, the Indian tribes, due to a number of reasons, took advantage of the war to rise-up as army units were sent east. In Minnesota, the 1862 uprising was by the Sioux tribes and threatened the Union's ability to prosecute the war elsewhere as it was serious enough to cause concern that other tribes would sympathetically join the uprising. It was quickly quelled but it was a serious enough threat to cause concern in Washington which still had to allocate troops to guard the frontier.

While unable to work well in concert with General Kirby Smith due to a badly formulated command structure, Bragg gained a marginal tactical victory at Perryville on 8 October but an operational-level defeat. Unwilling to follow-up at Perryville, Bragg withdrew out of Kentucky, leaving it to the Union forces. The Confederates got no more than 10% of planned recruits but did obtain a huge amount of supplies. The end result was that the "Heartland Offensive" was an operational-level failure. Lincoln removed MajGen Buell from command for his lack of aggressiveness in pursuing Bragg and replaced him with MajGen Rosecrans.

At the strategic-level, as the winter of 1862 approached, the Confederates were forced back onto the defensive as the Union military continued to build its strength and resources. Forced to defend a perimeter which Union forces could attack at a number of points, the issue of where to conduct an "economy of force" and where to concentrate its limited forces became a huge issue for the Confederate commanders. Confederates (defenders) could not defend everywhere and the initiative lay with the Union (offensive) forces. The use of railroads became significantly more important in moving troops and supplies. The Union "broke the code" by centralizing rail operations assisted by the standardization in the north of rail lines while the Confederates' "state's rights" help preclude centralized control and standardization. One of the issues in secession was the individual states' belief that they should control, rather than a centralized, Federal government, their own individual states' commerce and standards which led to the private rail companies laying multiple gauges of rail to the detriment of efficiency.

In November, MajGen Ambrose Burnside, McClellan's replacement, moved to cross the Rappahannock and advance on Richmond from Fredericksburg, Virginia in an attempt to satisfy President Lincoln's desire to conduct offensives. In a series of poorly coordinated staff actions, lack of horses necessary to move pontoon bridges, and lack of motivation, Burnside moved so slowly as to telegraph his intentions thereby allowing the Confederates to occupy the key terrain of Marye's Heights overlooking the crossing sites on the Rappahannock. In a bizarre action, Burnside conducted a series of frontal attacks from a river line and in four days suffered massive losses. Fredericksburg was not the last major action of the year but it was a huge loss for the Union forces who withdrew.

On the Mississippi, MajGen Sherman landed at Chickasaw Bayou on the Yazoo River approaches north of Vicksburg. Attacking in foul weather after Christmas his troops fought the weather and terrain. Sherman's troops, advancing across

swampland, in the open, were engaged by defending Confederates entrenched at the base of the Walnut Hills. Unable to gain the higher ground to bypass the Confederates, Sherman was defeated. His troops re-boarded the transports and steamed down the Yazoo, then back up the Mississippi to their camps. It was a terrible ending to a bad year but it still was not over.

The last week of December found MajGen William Rosecrans defending his base of operations at Murfreesboro in central Tennessee. Attacked by Bragg's Army of Tennessee, Rosecrans came close to a defeat but the Confederates, despite their élan, did not break the Union lines. Rosecrans consolidated his positions and thwarted repeated attacks that caused Bragg to break-off contact in defeat and withdraw to Tullahoma.

The military actions of 1862 were incredibly wide-spread geographically, reaching from New Mexico to Maryland, and from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico on land, and from the Gulf of Mexico to the North Atlantic on sea. Military operational tempo increased significantly as the Union forces tried to achieve a major victory. Neither side, without a modern planning staff and doctrine, could efficiently and effectively coordinate and, more importantly, synchronize the efforts of the different theaters yet. Both sides learned much in 1862 through their experiences and one thing was for certain, far from being a short conflict, the war was dragging-on to a massively bloody affair that had no foreseeable end in sight. Both armies were becoming more professional and capable but the complexion of the war was about to change significantly due to the politics.