

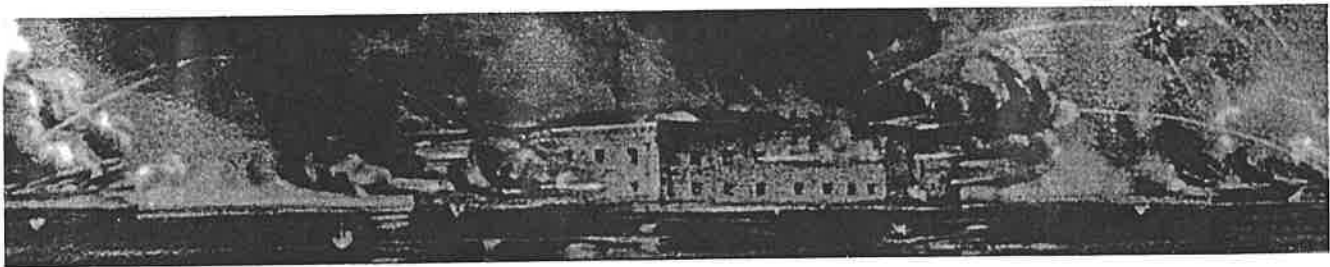
Civil War Facts

ANSWERS TO YOUR CIVIL WAR QUESTIONS

Many elements of Civil War scholarship are still hotly debated. The facts on this page are based on the soundest information available.

Q. When was the Civil War fought?

The war began when Confederate warships bombarded Union soldiers at Fort Sumter, South Carolina on April 12, 1861. The war ended in Spring, 1865. Robert E. Lee surrendered the last major Confederate army to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse on April 9, 1865. The last battle was fought at Palmito Ranch, Texas, on May 13, 1865. [Click here for a Civil War timeline.](#)



The bombardment of Fort Sumter (Library of Congress)

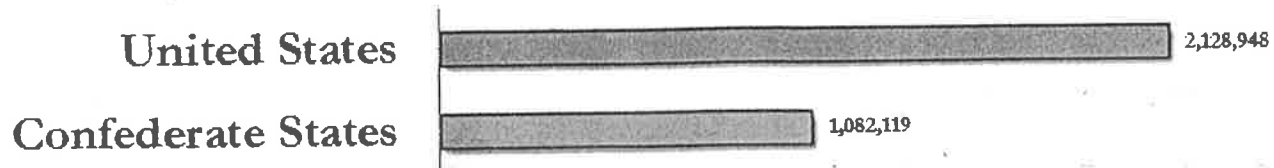
Q. Where was the Civil War fought?

The Civil War was fought in thousands of different places, from southern Pennsylvania to Texas; from New Mexico to the Florida coast. The majority of the fighting took place in the states of Virginia and Tennessee. The Civil War was also contested on the Atlantic Ocean as far off as the coast of France, the Gulf of Mexico, and the brown water of the Mississippi River and its tributaries.

Battles of the Civil War | Civil War Navies

Q. How many soldiers fought in the Civil War?

At the beginning of the war the Northern states had a combined population of 22 million people. The Southern states had a combined population of about 9 million. This disparity was reflected in the size of the armies in the field. The Union forces outnumbered the Confederates roughly two to one.



Q. How many soldiers died in the Civil War?

Approximately 620,000 soldiers died from combat, accident, starvation, and disease during the Civil War. This number comes from an 1889 study of the war performed by William F. Fox and Thomas Leonard Livermore. Both men fought for the Union. Their estimate is derived from an exhaustive study of the combat and casualty records generated by the armies over five years of fighting. A recent study puts the number of dead as high as 850,000.

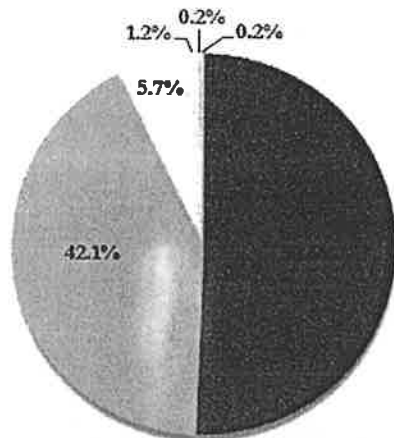
Q. What is a casualty?

Too often, people take 'casualty' and 'fatality' to be interchangeable terms. In fact, a casualty is "a military person lost through death, wounds, injury, sickness, internment, or capture or through being missing in action."

Essentially, a casualty is any soldier who goes into a fight and does not return fit to take part in the next battle.

Many soldiers, especially in the Confederate ranks, became casualties several times: some soldiers were captured multiple times; some were wounded in non-consecutive engagements.

Q. What caused casualties during a battle?



- Musketry
- Unknown
- Cannon
- Pistol/Buckshot
- Saber
- Bayonet

Source: *The New Civil War Handbook*, Mark Hughes. (Statistics for Union soldiers only.)

Q. What happened to the dead?

Typically, soldiers were buried where they fell on the battlefield. Others were buried near the hospitals where they died. At most battlefields the dead were exhumed and moved to National or Confederate cemeteries, but because there were so many bodies, and because of the time and effort it took to disinter them, there are undoubtedly thousands if not tens of thousands of Civil War soldiers in unknown battlefield graves.



GO IN DEPTH

Historian Pete Carmichael describes the process of finding, burying, and reburying the dead after battles. He also discusses the significance of having a "decent burial," and efforts to lay soldiers to rest in military cemeteries in the years after the war. *This video is part of the Civil War Trust's In4 video series, which presents short videos on basic Civil War topics.*

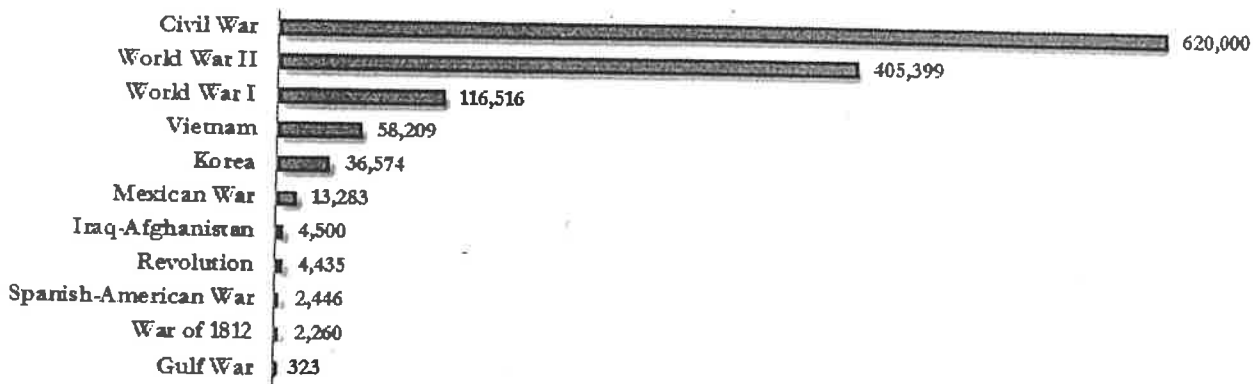
[Watch the Video »](#)

Q. What happened to prisoners?

More than 400,000 soldiers were captured over the course of the Civil War. In the first years of the conflict, equal numbers of captured troops were regularly exchanged for one another, helping to keep the total number of prisoners manageable for both sides. Over the course of the war, however, that practice faded from use. By the end of the war, the plight of prisoners of war on both sides had become bleak indeed. Thousands of Southerners died in the freezing camp at Elmira, New York, and the camp at Andersonville, Georgia, which held Union prisoners, has become one of the most infamous in the history of war. Nearly as many men died in captivity during the Civil War as died fighting in Vietnam.

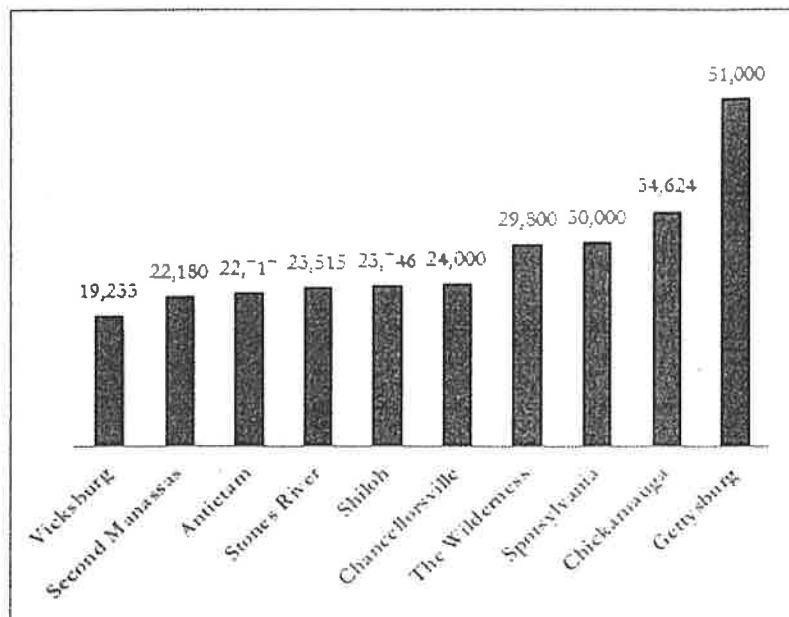
Q. How many soldiers died in the Civil War as compared to other American wars?

Roughly 1,264,000 American soldiers have died in the nation's wars--620,000 in the Civil War and 644,000 in all other conflicts. It was only as recently as the Vietnam War that the amount of American deaths in foreign wars eclipsed the number who died in the Civil War.



Q. What were the bloodiest battles of the Civil War?

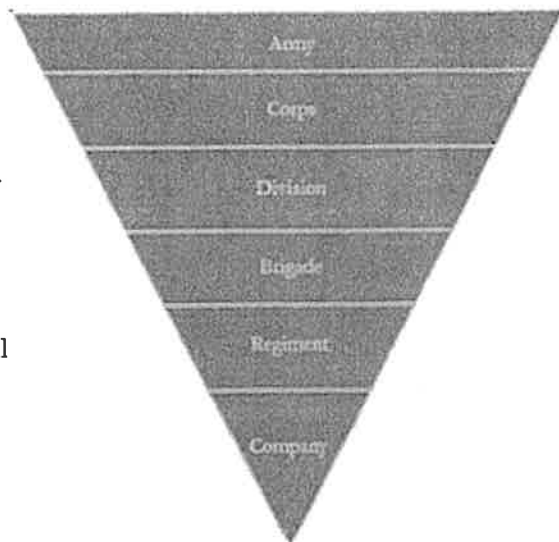
Gettysburg--51,000 casualties
 Chickamauga--34,624 casualties
 Spotsylvania--30,000 casualties
 The Wilderness--29,800 casualties
 Chancellorsville--24,000 casualties
 Shiloh--23,746 casualties
 Stones River--23,515 casualties
 Antietam--22,717 casualties
 Second Manassas--22,180 casualties
 Vicksburg--19,233 casualties



See our Civil War Infographic

Q. How was the army organized?

The largest military unit is the army, which is sub-divided into smaller commands. Although organization varied between the armies, the largest sub-section of a given army was the corps, which was typically divided into two or more divisions, each composed of two or more brigades, which were each made up of two or more regiments, with each regiment containing roughly ten companies of ideally 100 men (but more typically near 30). Companies themselves were subdivided into platoons and squads before the army finally reached the level of the individual soldier. Armies were sometimes grouped together in "departments" that were defined by geography and operational objective.



Q. What role did African-Americans play in the war effort?

With the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation in September 1862, African-Americans - both free and runaway slaves - came forward to volunteer for the Union cause in substantial numbers. Beginning in October, approximately 180,000 African-Americans, comprising 163 units, served in the U.S. Army, and 18,000 in the Navy. That month, the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers repulsed a Confederate attack at Island Mound, Missouri. Men of the U.S.C.T. (United States Colored Troops) units went on to distinguish themselves on battlefields east and west - at Port Hudson, Louisiana; Honey Springs, Oklahoma; Fort Wagner, South Carolina; New Market Heights, Virginia. African Americans constituted 10% of the entire Union Army by the end of the war, and nearly 40,000 died over the course of the war.

Q. What did soldiers do in their free time?

When they were not drilling, which made up a considerable portion of their time in camp, soldiers passed the time writing letters, playing games like checkers, dominoes and poker, drinking, smoking, whittling, making music and praying. One soldier summed it up when he wrote to his wife, "Soldiering is 99% boredom and 1% sheer terror."

Civil War Winter Encampments

Q. What did soldiers eat?

Civil War soldiers' fare varied substantially from army to army and throughout the course of the war for both sides. For the most part, neither side ate particularly well. Hardtack and coffee were the staples, in addition to salt pork, corn meal and whatever fruits, vegetables and berries could be collected on the march. Many Confederate soldiers were in a state of near-starvation by the war's end.



A Union soldier poses in front of a "fresh" shipment of hardtack. (Library of Congress)

Q. What was the average soldier's age?

The average Union soldier was 25.8 years old; there is no definite information on the average age of Confederate soldiers, but by the end of the war old men and young boys, who otherwise would have stayed home, were being pressed into service. The average soldier on both sides was a white, native-born, protestant farmer.

Q. Did anybody win the Medal of Honor in the Civil War?

Yes. There were 1522 Medals of Honor issued to Northern troops, black and white, over the course of the war. The Confederate Army did not have combat medals. Robert E. Lee explained that the highest honor possible was to be