

What Were the Advantages of Each Side?

In the end, a war is usually won by the side having the most men, resources, and supplies. Let us compare the strength of the North and the South.

The North had certain advantages. (1) More than twice as many people lived in the North as in the South - 22 million in the North and 9 million in the South. Of the 9 million people in the South, two out of every five were blacks, most of whom were slaves. Slaves were not expected to fight. The slaves, however, might do the work at home and thus release white men to join the army. (2) Not only did the North have more people, but it had more resources and supplies. Most of the factories which could make guns, ammunition, uniforms, and the thousands of articles needed in war, were in the North. The North had more railroads to move goods and more men to do the fighting. It also had more shipping. (3) Furthermore, the United States government, its army, and its navy were already established and working. The South had to build these things as it went along.

On the other hand, the South possessed certain advantages over the North. (1) For one thing, the South was fighting for the most part on its own soil. Men fight harder when they are defending their homes than when they are invading enemy territory. Also, they know the territory much better than the invaders possibly could. (2) In addition, the South had many outstanding military leaders who had resigned from the United States Army to fight for the Confederacy. Among these men was Robert E. Lee. Although Lee belonged to an old southern family, he did not believe in slavery and had already freed his slaves. Lee was also against secession and opposed to the war. But he could not bring himself to bear arms against his beloved state, Virginia. When that state seceded, therefore, Lee cast his lot with the Confederacy. Thus the South gained a brilliant general – the ablest and most thoroughly experienced in the whole United States Army.

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Let us compare the strengths of the North and the South as they prepared for war. There were 22 million people in the North. The South had less than half that number, 9 million. Of these, about 3.5 million were black slaves. Many of these slaves continued to work on the farms and plantations. The North had more factories to manufacture guns, ammunition, and other things needed for war. The North had more railroads to move soldiers and supplies from place to place. The North had more ships and planned to use them to blockade southern ports. The government of the United States was a working government. The Confederate government was just beginning. Because of these strengths, the North expected to end the war quickly.

It might seem that all the advantages were on the side of the Union government. The South would face larger armies with superior equipment. But the South had some advantages, too. We have learned from reading about the Revolutionary War the advantage of fighting on home ground. During the Civil War, the fighting was largely in

the South. Southern armies were defending their homes and fields. They had skilled and intelligent leaders. Many Confederate generals had graduated from West Point. When war came, these generals left the United States Army to fight for their home states. Among these generals were Robert E. Lee, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, and Jeb Stuart.

Robert E. Lee was born in Virginia on January 19, 1807. He was two years older than Lincoln. He grew up in a comfortable home and later was a brilliant student at West Point. He got his early military experience in the Mexican War. At the beginning of the Civil War, Lee was asked to command the Union armies. He turned down the offer. He did not believe in slavery, but he did not want to lead an army against his state of Virginia. When Virginia seceded, Lee resigned from the United States Army and took command of Virginia's military forces. To Lee and other southerners, one's state was still more important than the national government.

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