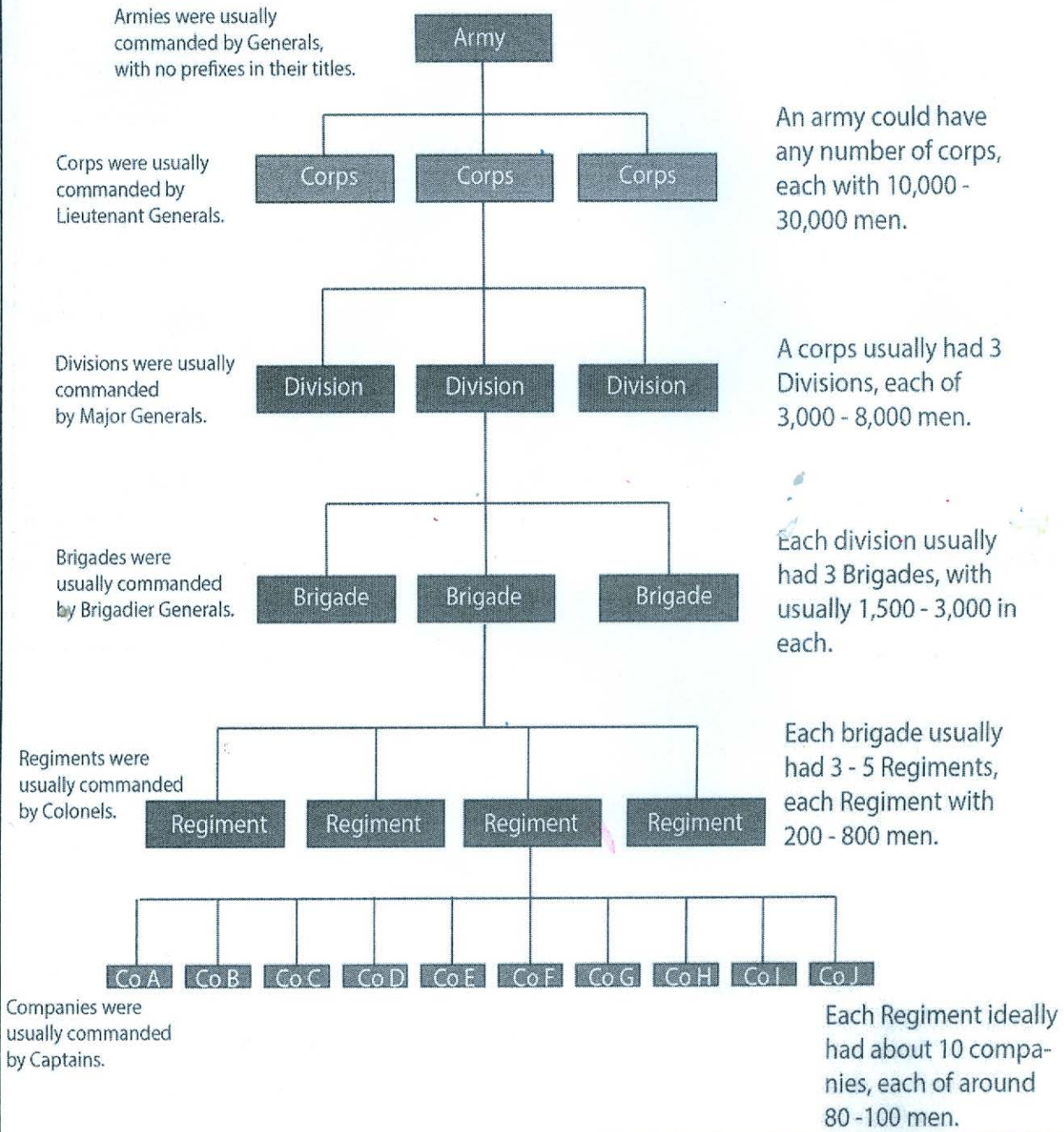


# Tactics

## Theoretical Organization of Civil War Armies

This is the "ideal" army organization. But often there were major variances, especially early in the war. For example, in the Battle of Shiloh, the Union Army had no Corps, and half the Confederate Corps had no Divisions.



Army organization chart from Jack L. Kunkel's Shiloh, p.163.

## I. Background

### A. Strategy- a large military plan

#### 1 Examples:

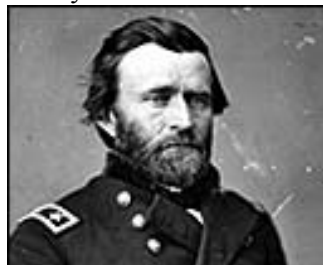
- Starve out the enemy,
- Hit an opponent's army (which in the case of the Civil War was spread out over multiple states) simultaneously at multiple points to prevent an army in one state from being moved to reinforced an attacked fellow army in another neighboring state. **(See map to the right)**

#### Grant's strategy to defeat the Confederacy 1864



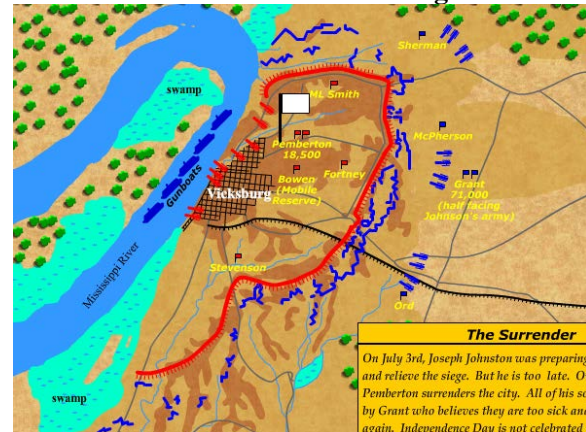
**B. Tactics-** Methods used to implement a **strategy** (a larger military plan);. the movement and maneuver of military forces and materials on the battlefield to implement a strategy

1. If the Union/Grant's **strategy** was to starve out the Reb army at the port city **Vicksburg** along the **Mississippi River**, the **tactics** might be to surround the enemy, cut off the railroad lines and road ways leading into the city, blockade access to the city by river, and to bombard the enemy from the river.



US Grant

#### Grant's Tactics to Take Vicksburg Summer 1863



## 2. Organization of troops for tactics: File(s), Ranks, and Columns

**a. File-** Like a file folder, a **file** is a single entity. In military terms it refers to one soldier. "**Files of soldiers**" simply means there are multiple (more than one) soldiers.

**b. A rank** is a line of **files (soldiers)** lined up either horizontally or vertically. If lined up vertically, the rank is referred to as a **column**. If marching down a narrow road with dense woods on both sides of the road, an army would have to march in vertical formation (in column) to march down the road. Depending on the width of the road, the army might march in single column, double columns, triple columns or more.

## II. Ancient Battle Tactics

**A. Most primitive/ ancient tactics** usually consisted of each army rushing at the other and fighting it out **frontally** (i.e. **frontal assault**) until one side retreated.

**B. Advancement in Ancient Tactics: Strengthen one part of one's line and pushing the attack where "local" superiority existed. Concentration of forces**

1. 371 BC. The Thebians defeated the formidable Spartan Army at Battle of Leuctra by strengthening their line into **columns** facing the enemy

\_\_\_\_\_ *Spartan Line* This horizontal line of troops is called **ranks**



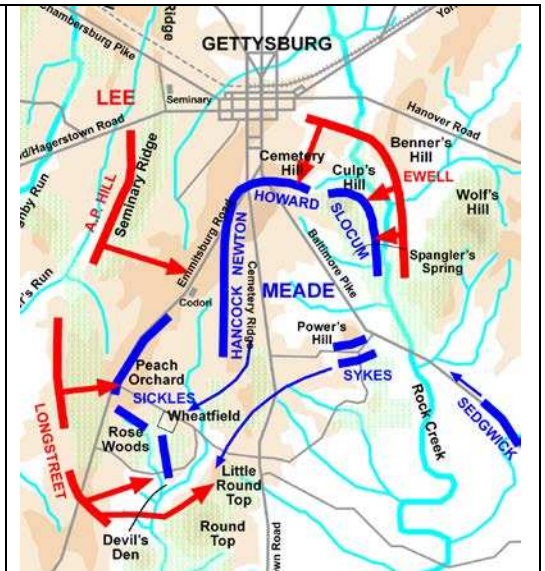


Defender \_\_\_\_\_

Attacker \_\_\_\_\_



1. Example: **Lee's plan** for attack on south end of Union line at **Gettysburg**.
2. Why it's effective: Just as a boxer/wrestler is more vulnerable/ less able to defend his side, so too is an army. A body of men arrayed to fight in one facing the front cannot readily turn and defend themselves when attacked from the side. (There were no radios or walkie talkies to facilitate communication on the battlefield.)

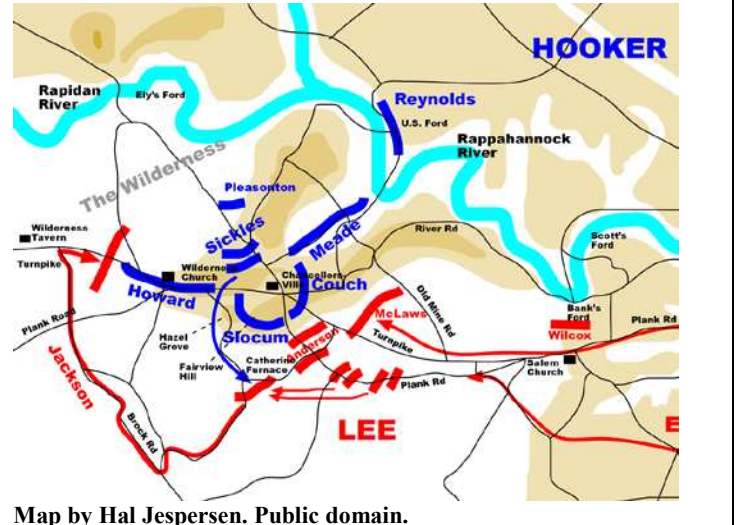


3. If a flank attack gets in the rear of the enemy, this constitutes an **envelopment** (McArthur at **Inchon** in Korean War. Jackson at **Chancellorsville**)

### McArthur moves by water from Pusan to Inchon



### Jackson Flank March at Chancellorsville



### B. Advantages of flank attacks:

1. **Enfilade fire** (firing at ones opponents flank/side by guns/artillery). A cannon fired down the length of a fully flanked line of men could kill dozens of men with 1 shot.
2. It is very difficult for the attacked army to **redeploy** (re align) so as to fight both the front and the rear simultaneously
3. **Retreat** is much more difficult because the attacker may be blocking whole, or part of the escape route.

### C. Disadvantages with a flank attack

1. A flank attack is difficult to execute because of the immense coordination and time required to move around the enemy's line. (It took **Jackson** a half day to get around Union right at **Chancellorsville**. He ultimately ran out of daylight.)

## IV. Defenses Against Flank Attacks

A. **Redeployment (rearranging )** of part or all of the defending army

1. Examples:

“**Refusing**” (rearranging one’s own troops to block the attack of your opponent) one’s own flank to deter (prevent) an opponent’s flanking maneuver.

Defense \_\_\_\_\_

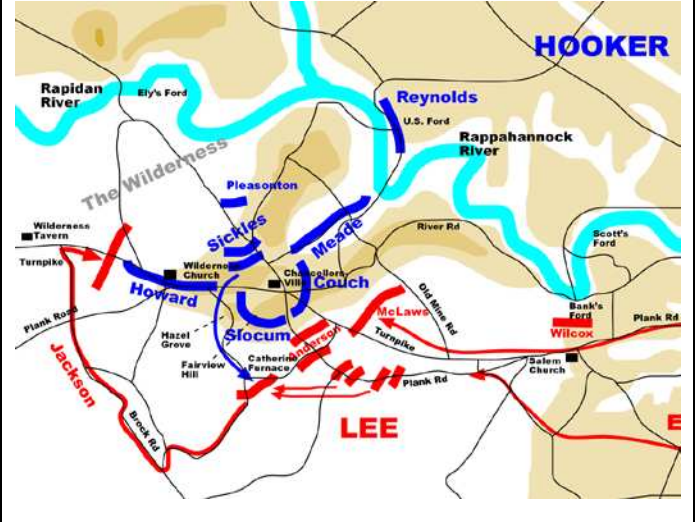
Offense \_\_\_\_\_

a. To prevent this defensive tactic by its opponent, the attacking army will usually try to distract the enemy by making a **feint /demonstration** (i.e. a “fake attack.”) Engaging in this kind of distraction (as **Lee** tried to do at by feinting at **Hooker’s** front at **Chancellorsville** while **Jackson** tried to get around **Hooker’s** flank..

b. A “play action pass” in football uses a similar tactic. By faking a hand off to the full back, the quarterback temporarily freezes the defensive line backers in position.

Map by Hal Jespersen. Public domain.

Lee feints at Hooker at Chancellorsville



V. **Offense vs. Defense** (Going in the offensive is usually chosen by the stronger party; going on defense by the weaker party.)

A. **Defense is typically a superior form of combat (but was usually not chosen in Civil War as it was originally regarded as “unmanly.”)**

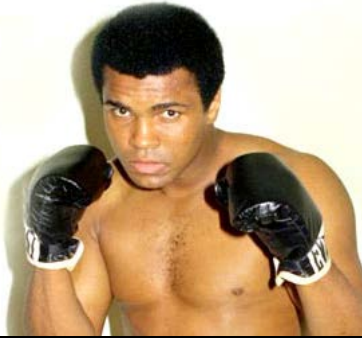
1. The defender can choose his ground (e.g. a hill, a stone wall, behind a river) and exploit the advantages offered by it.
2. The defender can improve on mother nature by the building obstacles and fortifications to provide cover from enemy fire and make it more difficult for an enemy to attack.
3. Defender typically knows the terrain better (e.g. most of the warfare on the Eastern Theatre was in Virginia which the defending Confederates knew far better than the attacking Union troops )
4. Defender has advantage in his ability to retreat:
  - Can choose the timing and direction of the retreat
  - The retreating army usually moves over friendly and familiar territory
  - The pursuer must contend with rear guards who may either fight or create obstacles such as broken bridges

\* 5. Developments in weapons favor the defender (**see below VI.**)

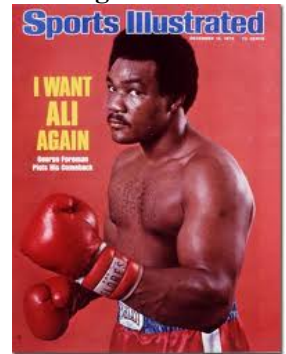
6. **Lee** frequently employed an “offensive defense” strategy. Here **Lee** would put his army into a defensive posture with the clear intent of counterattacking (offensive) with his entire army when the ideal opportunity presented.

a. World Boxing Champion **Muhammed Ali**'s employed this offensive defense strategy in a title match against the then champion **George Foreman**. The fight occurred at night in an outdoor stadium in the sweltering summer heat of Zaire, Africa (now called the Republic of the Congo.) Here Ali use is now famous **Rope- a-dope** (variation of "dope on a rope") tactic on Foreman with great effectiveness.

**Muhammed Ali**



**George Foreman**



b. In this legendary "**Rumble in the Jungle**," Ali deliberately assumed a defensive position, holding his arms tightly against his face and leaning against the ropes, allowing champion **George Foreman** to repeatedly strike him (in the arms). Eventually **Foreman's** arms grew tired and at that point, Ali counter attacked. Foreman's arms were so tired from fruitlessly hitting Ali that he could no keep them raised high enough to protect his head from Ali's punches. Ali went on to win the fight in a knock out in the 8<sup>th</sup> round.

**Go to the 1:50 seconds remaining point in the 3minute round**  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10ZlxV9KWgY>

**Foreman pins Ali against the ropes**



\*\*\* Note: Muhammed Ali now suffers from severe Parkinson's disease from head trauma received in numerous boxing matches.

**B. Why, despite its disadvantages, was an offensive strategy used by Civil War Generals and fighting on the defensive avoided**

1. During the early and mid 1800's, the tactics of **Napoleon** were considered to be "cutting edge" by almost all military strategists. These tactics (which had worked well for Napoleon in the **Napoleonic Wars**) emphasized the importance of taking the offensive to overwhelm and terrorize one's enemy into retreating or surrendering. Favorite "overwhelming" tactics included the use of "hard charging" frontal or flank assaults, or massing soldiers together and overwhelming one's opponent with superior numbers at a particular point of attack. The tactic of massing soldiers together (called **concentration of forces**) served two purposes. As mentioned above (in section I) concentrating one's forces was designed to overwhelm an opponent with superior numbers at a particular point in an opponent's line. Secondly, massing soldiers together helped compensate for the **inaccuracy** of the typical weapon of the day, a **smooth bore musket**. Massed soldiers who fired their guns together were bound to hit something, even when with inaccurate muskets.

a. The inaccuracy of muskets in the 1700's was responsible for the wise warning: "Don't shoot till you see the whites of their eyes."

2. Many officers believed fighting on the defensive and digging entrenchments were unmanly and detrimental to morale.

a. **Lee** was criticized for taking the defensive in holding off the Union attacks on Richmond in 1862. He was derided as **Granny Lee** and the "**King of Spades**" (a spade is a shovel... used for digging a trench)

b. After maneuvering with Joe Johnston thru Georgia, **Sherman** launched an ill fated attack on well entrenched Rebs at Kennesaw Mt in part because he feared that after constant maneuvering, his men might be losing their "fighting edge."

**VI. Improvements in Muskets (and their mass production) and bullets makes taking the defensive even more Advantageous. Nonetheless, Civil War Generals would continue using out-dated offensive tactics**

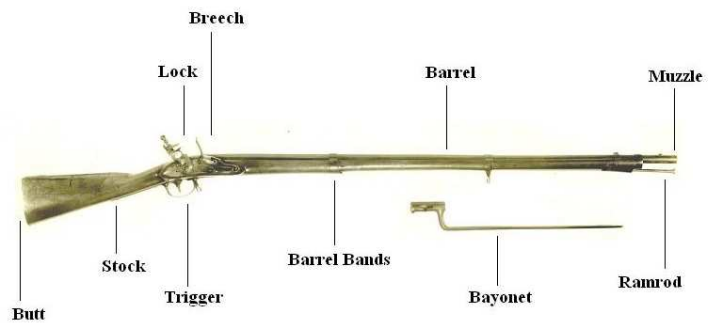
**A. The Musket (as taken from Wikipedia which is very accurate in this particular instance.)**



The phrase "lock, stock, and barrel" (which means the whole thing) refers to the three parts of a musket. The stock is the wooden base. The barrel is the tube where the musket ball/projectile accelerates and exits the weapon. The lock is the mechanism that causes the weapon to fire.

Most muskets were designed to be used with a bayonet, which is a triangular spike or blade designed to fit onto the end of the musket's barrel, allowing the musket to be used as a pike or spear.

#### Parts of a Musket



### B. Creation of Rifled Musket shifts the advantage from the attacking to the defending army during the Civil War.

1. In the 1600's, German gunsmiths discovered that cutting **spiral grooves**( in a process called **rifling**) in a gun barrel produced a spin on the bullet which gave it better accuracy and distance (similar to fast ball vs. a knuckleball.) Although this new technology was available long before the Civil War, each gun had to be individually hand crafted which was very expensive. It would take 200 years before the mass production techniques of the Industrial Revolution would make these new guns both accessible and "economical."

a. By the mid 1850's, all US government arsenals were producing **rifled muskets**. It would, however, take time until most soldiers actually got them (ie not until 1863 -1864). As the Civil War progressed, more rifled muskets become available to both Union and Confederate soldiers. (At the end of the Civil War, approximately 60% of Union troops and 40% of Red troops (who obtained them primarily by "capturing" them from Union soldiers) had rifled muskets. The difficulty for Reb soldiers was procuring ammunition for these stolen (Union) weapons.

#### 2. Problems with rifled muskets

a. In order for rifled musket to work properly the standard "bullet" (it was actually a round ball made of lead) had to be hammered down the barrel with a rammer (a ramming rod) in order for it to be effective (ie have a tight enough fit for the rifling inside the barrel grip the ball and produce an effective and accurate spin). Because of the time and hassle involved with hammering a ball into the barrel of rifled musket, it wasn't practical. (Besides, what happens if you lose your mallet?)

### B. Creation of Minie' Bullet and breech loading and repeating rifles revolutionize warfare.

1. French captain, **Claude Minet (pronounced Min-ay)** who was working for British Military created a **cone shaped bullet** with circular grooves at its base that would slide easily down a rifled musket barrel (instead of having to be hammered). When fired, the soft lead bottom of the cone-shaped bullet would expand at its base causing its grooved edges to "grip" the rifling inside the gun barrel. The effect was to give the cone shaped bullet symmetrical spin causing greater accuracy ( much like a well thrown football compared to throwing a beach ball/knuckle ball.)

2. With a **rifled musket** and an improved minie ball, soldiers could now accurately hit a target over 350 yards away (vs. the previous 75-100 with a smooth bore musket). As a result, a defender could get off not 1-2 shots in the time interval of a frontal assault, but as many as 5. Because of the difficulty encountered in firing while attacking, the advantage in a frontal assault now shifted from the attacking party to the defender.\*

\*Prior to the creation of the rifled musket (and its mass production during the Civil War), the advantage in a battle usually lay with the more aggressive army. As muskets were not accurate beyond 75 yards, both the attacking and defending forces would wait until the attacking force got within 75 yards before shooting. Once the attacking force had fired, it would charge the defenders 75 yards away. As most attackers could sprint this 75 yards (and bayonet or club their opponent) quicker than the defending force could reload their muskets, the attackers usually had an advantage.

3. As the Civil War progressed, more and more soldiers were issued **rifled** muskets, thus making the use of **massed** infantry in a frontal assault a poor tactic:

- A large mass of men attacking could now easily be picked off from a long distance using a rifled musket with a minie ball/bullet.
- An **entrenched** enemy behind earthworks/breastworks/entrenchments would have plenty of time to reload if the attacking enemy is now within accurate range from 300 yards instead of the previous 75-100.

4. As the war progressed, more troops received breech (from the breech/ the rear of the gun as opposed to from the end of the rifle barrel) loading and repeating weapons which could be loaded and fired even more quickly than barrel loading muskets. This further increased the casualties resulting from frontal assaults over open ground. See DVD "Guns of the Civil War," Section 2

**5. Summary:** Military training at **West Point** emphasized staying on the offense and the benefits of attacking (versus staying on the defensive). Combat experiences in the **Mexican War** confirmed this.

What revolutionized the battlefield was the mass introduction of rifled weapons in the 1850s. Up until the 1850's the smoothbore weapon was the only weapon available. Because of its poor accuracy at long ranges, most attacks involved soldiers sprinting the last 100 yards of an attack and assaulting their opponents with bayonets. That changed during the Civil War, as rifled weapons (in the hands of defenders) and improvements in artillery (by the defenders) made such sprints over open ground suicidal. With defenders using these new weapons, attacking troops rarely get close enough to their human targets to use the bayonet.

Nonetheless it took much time for officers on both sides to adjust their thinking and tactics once they saw the devastating power of rifled weapons. The inability to adapt was more common on the Confederate side who took the tactical offensive 70 percent of the time in major battles, and continued to do so even when their human resources were depleted and defeat loomed. The long term cost of this to the Confederacy would be paid in much blood.

### **C. The un-rifled ("smooth bore") musket vs. the rifled musket. The problem of bad shooting (with rifled muskets)**

1. The effectiveness of use of the rifled muskets in battle during the Civil War has sometimes been exaggerated.

a. Relatively speaking, the number of battlefield deaths directly caused by (unrifled) muskets during 1861-62 was greater than those caused by rifled muskets in 1864-65.

b. Regardless of what musket was being used (ie un-rifled or rifled) Typically it took between 500 and 750 bullets to cause 10 battlefield deaths. Why?

- Most Civil War soldiers had never fired a gun before in their lives.
- Their training in "boot camp" and in the field dealt primarily with marching not marksmanship. Soldiers were not trained how to take into consideration the effects of wind and elevation when shooting nor how to counter the normal tendency to shoot high. (Neither were they trained to conserve ammunition during the physical and emotional heat of battle.)

**Excellent 4 minute review of Civil War tactics and the effect of the minie ball and rifled musket:**

**<http://www.civilwar.org/education/in4/infantry-tactics.html>**

**D. The Bayonet (with some review information on rifle technology)** as taken from Civil War Cards by Stephen Foster... paraphrased in few spots.)

*1. At the beginning of the Civil War the battlefield tactics that were accepted and taught were those of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe. In Napoleon's day, infantry warfare was based in a large part on the bayonet charge. The muskets of that era were only accurate for approximately 100 yards. As a result, an attacking force could expect to march to 100 yards of an enemy's position in relative safety and then cross last 100 yards in a furious charge. During this furious charge the attacker would rely most upon the bayonet to roust the enemy out of his position. In making the charge, the attacking force could expect to receive but one volley from the slowly loaded muskets of that day. As that one volley from the enemy was usually insufficient to deter the charge, the attacking force frequently prevailed.*

*2. In the Civil War, however, the charge of large numbers of infantry was often disastrous for the attacking forces. This was clearly evident in such famous battles as Malvern Hill, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, and Franklin. These charges all failed because firearms had improved between the wars of Napoleon and the Civil War. Now rifled muskets had both increased range and accuracy and targets could be hit at ranges up to 400 yards instead of just 100. Enemy soldiers firing from the protective cover of trenches now had time to get off 4-8 accurate shots as the attacking force advanced across the 400 yard "killing zone." The result of this change in rifle technology was that the advantage in warfare now passed from the attacking force to the defending force. The only problem with this change was that it took a long time for*



some Civil War generals to learn this lesson and change their tactics. Succumbing to the human tendency to do avoid change, they continued to order frontal assaults even though they were likely to fail.

3. As a result of the changes in warfare, on Civil War battlefields, the bayonet turned out to be a relic, responsible for few battlefield wounds. Though there were many mass charges in Civil War battles, there were few hand-to-hand bayonet fights, and those were usually of short duration. Although infantry soldiers were issued bayonets and received bayonet drill, they found the weapon most useful for other purposes. Bayonets made excellent tent stakes and candle holders, and when a charge petered out, they were useful for digging holes to hide in.

**Fascinating Fact:** Bayonets accounted for less than 4 percent of battlefield wounds; artillery fire caused 5 percent. Bullets, on the other hand, caused more than 90 percent of the wounds

**VII. Factors ---besides Civil War commanders resistance to change in the face of improved musket and ballistics (i.e. having to do with bullets) ----- that caused opposing forces in the Civil War to fight at close range and thus raised the probability of casualties.)**

**A. Effect of terrain (land features)**

1. Most Civil War battles were fought in places where **terrain** or natural features (hills, uneven land) obscured wide or long range visibility. This included wooded area or cornfields, sunken roads, and densely overgrown depressions in the ground. (e.g. Antietam, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Chickamauga...) As a result, troops frequently had to get within a short distance of one another before they could shoot accurately.

**B. Lack of marksmanship**

1. As mentioned above, most soldiers (particularly in Union) had no prior experience shooting a rifle. Target practice in boot camp or in camp once in the field was considered a waste of valuable (expensive) ammunition.  
2. In the early years of the war, most soldiers were equipped with smooth bore muskets which everyone knew were inaccurate. Because of this, the logic of commanders at the time was "Why waste time and ammo on target practice when even an accurate marksman will miss what he is aiming at because of the poor accuracy of his musket?" To be effective, commanders believed soldiers, standing **elbow to elbow**, had to get close enough to the enemy to shoot a wall of lead at him. This took great discipline, as the whole time a soldier was trying to get close enough to fire at the enemy, he, himself, was under constant enemy fire. To achieve such incredible discipline, both boot camp and camp life in the field were consumed with constant drilling. Such drilling conditioned soldiers to march in unison to within firing distance of the enemy, stand erect and elbow to elbow, and then methodically fire, reload, and fire again at the enemy..... all while being under both enemy rifle and artillery fire.

**VIII. Principles of War (the principles of a good battle plan. Similar to a good game plan in sports.)**

**A. Objective: Have a decisive and obtainable goal and allocate the appropriate amount of resources to achieve it.**

1. The United States in the Iraq War. The United States had a good plan for defeating Saddam Hussein, but no plan for dealing with the ethnic/sectarian violence in Iraq after having one the military conflict.

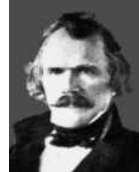
**B. Unity of command**

1. The need for all forces to cooperate for the successful accomplishment of command "For every task there should be unity of effort under one responsible commander." (From current US Army's *Field Service Operations Manual* which is required reading for all West Point cadets.)

a. Example. At the start of the Civil War in the western theatre, all Confederate forces were under the command of **Albert Sydney Johnston**.

By contrast, Union forces in the western theatre were divided among **Henry Halleck** and **John Carlos Buell**.

**A.S. Johnston**



**Don Carlos Buell**



**Henry Halleck**

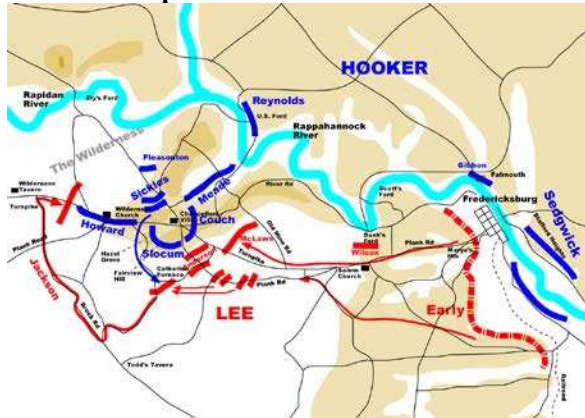


**C. Principle of surprise: Accomplish your purpose before the enemy can effectively react**

1. Jackson at Chancellorsville. Chamberlain's surprise bayonet charge down Little Round Top.

2. Surprising the enemy confers a practical benefit: one's opponent is more vulnerable when he is not prepared.

**Jackson Surprise Flank Attack at Chancellorsville**



Map by Hal Jespersen. Public Domain

**Chamberlain's Surprise Bayonet Charge at Gettysburg**



Art by Mort Kunstler. Used with Permission

**D. Principle of economy of force. The use of the resources (manpower and materials) at hand to achieve the objective without undue waste of resources. Idea that no more force should be used than is necessary to accomplish the objective.**

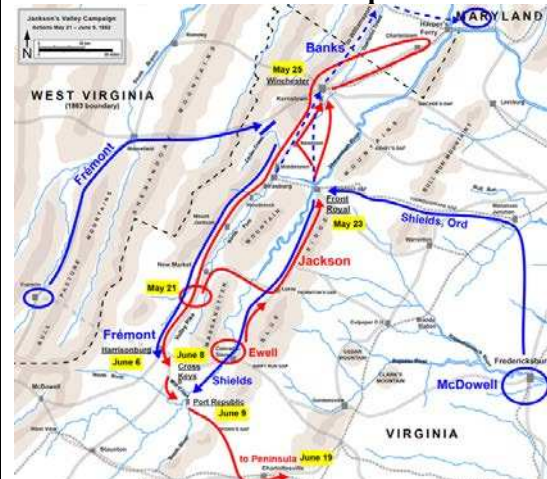
1. Jackson in Shenandoah Valley May 1862.



Thomas Jackson

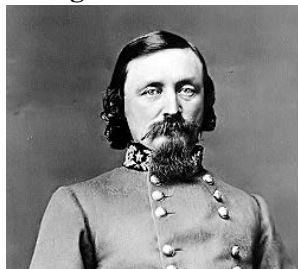
Map by Hal Jespersen. Public domain

**Union and Confederate troops in Shenandoah Valley**



**E. Principle of concentration/ mass (of one's troops). Achieve military superiority at the decisive place**

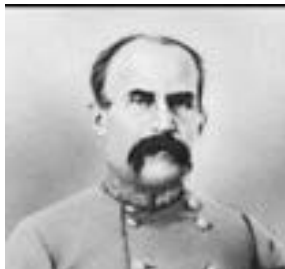
George Pickett



William Trimble

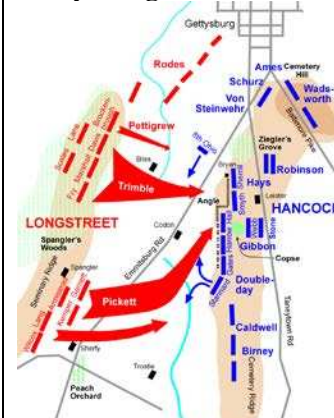


Isaac Trimble



Map courtesy of Hal Jespersen. Public domain

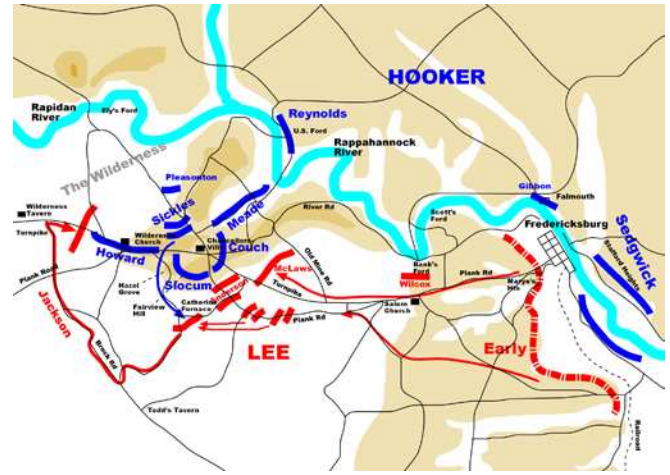
**Pickett, Pettigrew, Trimble charge at Gettysburg.**



1. The most fundamental mean of attaining superiority at the point of concentration is to deceive the enemy regarding what the true point of concentration will be. This would be similar to play action in football, or a basketball player looking one way and passing another in basketball. In military jargon such a "deceptive motion," would be referred to as a **feint** or a **demonstration**.

Typically this occurs when you attack one part of your enemy's line with a small number of troops. The hope is that your opponent will react to this minor attack by rushing reinforcements to this point in his line from other portions of his line. While your opponent is reacting to this minor attack at the minor point of attack, you launch a major attack at a different point.

### Jackson's Flank March and Attack at Chancellorsville

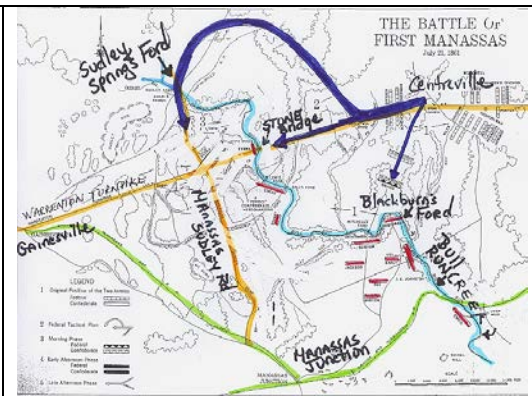


**F. Principle of Simplicity.** The avoidance of complicated movements (e.g. First Bull Run) and the use of direct unambiguous orders. (KISS. Keep It Simple, "Stupid")

1. McDowell at **First Bull Run** violated the principle of simplicity since his troops were too green to execute properly the maneuver he called for.



Irwin McDowell



**G. Offensive.** The usual way to in is through the exercise of initiative. (This isn't always true e.g. Vietnam, the Pickett, Pettigrew, Trimble assault at Gettysburg wasn't true in Vietnam)

1. After falling back toward Richmond at the start of the Peninsula Campaign (April – June 1862), the Confederates went on the offensive in the Seven Days Battles and won..
2. Despite repeated setbacks in trying to "get at" the Confederates in Vicksburg, Grant finally ran the guns at Vicksburg and successfully sieged the Confederate army into submission.

**H. Maneuver/Movement.** The skillful movement of one's troops

1. "Position your military resources to favor the accomplishment of your mission. Maneuver in itself can produce no decisive results [as Hooker at Chancellorsville failed to realize] but if properly employed it makes decisive results possible through the application of the principles of the offensive, mass, economy of force, and surprise." It is by maneuver that a superior general defeats a stronger adversary

From current US Army's **Field Service Operations Manual** which is required reading for all West Point cadets.)

### Hooker Maneuvers Behind Lee at Chancellorsville



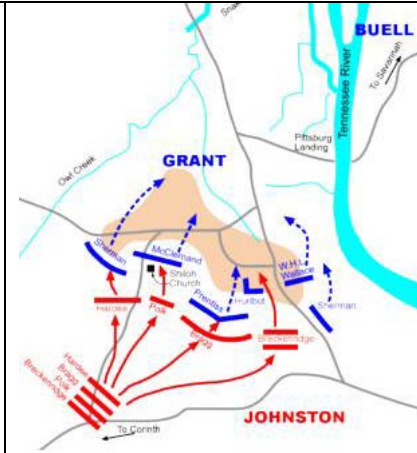
Map by Media Magic. Used with permission.



**I. Security.** "Never permit the enemy to acquire an unpredicted advantage," Another definition would be "to take steps to prevent a surprise." A unit in bivouac, for example, uses outposts and patrols for security. Grant's lack of security Lack of security at **Shiloh, Tennessee** resulted in the seeming surprise of his troops on the first day of the battle.



US Grant



**J. Cooperation.** Successful team work through appropriate coordination of forces. (vs. 5 independent superstars on basketball team).

**(K. Other methods of attaining victory): adopt a logistical objective.** Deprive your opponent of supplies, horses, transport, replacement of men, food, water, ammunition, first aid, clothing, equipment). In military jargon, supplies are referred to as lines of communication because communication between a force fighting in the field and its supply base or political headquarters typically follow the same line.

1. Anaconda plan; blockade
2. Grant's first overland campaign on **Vicksburg** ended by raid of **Nathan B. Forrest** on Grant's supply lines.
3. Sherman's March to the Sea
4. Phil Sheridan's 1864 Shenandoah Valley Campaign

**Sherman's March to the Sea**



**VIII. Organization of Armies** (as taken from James M. McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom. p. 330 note 23.)

A Civil War rifle **company**, commanded by a captain, consisted of **100** men.

There were ten companies in an infantry **regiment** (commanded by a colonel), and four regiments in a **brigade** (commanded by a brigadier general).

Three, sometimes four, brigades constituted a **division**, commanded by either a brigadier or a major general.

Two or more divisions formed a **corps**, commanded by a major general. Armies, such as the Army of the Potomac or the Army of the Ohio, consisted of several corps, and were also commanded by major generals.

Theoretically, the full strength of a **regiment** was **1,000 men**; a **brigade 4,000**; a **division 12,000**; and a **corps 24,000** or more; but throughout the war most Union units were at half-strength or less.

Confederate divisions and corps (the later commanded by lieutenant generals) tended to be larger than their Union counterparts because a Southern division frequently contained four brigades and a corps four divisions.