

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Weather & The American Civil War

By Meg Groeling

Resources

If you can read only one book

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Krick, Robert K.	<i>Civil War Weather in Virginia</i> . Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007.

Books and Articles

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Drake, Brian Allen ed.	<i>The Blue, the Gray, and the Green: Toward an Environmental History of the Civil War</i> . Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015.
Hurt, Douglas R.	<i>Agriculture and the Confederacy: Policy, Productivity, and Power in the Civil War South</i> . Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
Kemmerly, Phillip R.	“Environment and the Course of Battle: Flooding at Shiloh (6-7 April 1862),” in <i>Journal of Military History</i> 79, No. 4 (October 2015): 1079-1108.
Meier, Kathryn Shively	<i>Nature's Civil War: Common Soldiers and the Environment in 1862 Virginia</i> . Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013.
Petty, Adam H.	“Wilderness, Weather, and Waging War in the Mine Run Campaign,” in <i>Civil War History</i> 63, No.1 (March 2017): 7-35
Taylor, Amy Murrell	“How a Cold Snap in Kentucky Led to Freedom for Thousands: An Environmental Story of Emancipation,” in Stephen Berry,

	ed. <i>Weirding the War: Stories from the Civil War's Ragged Edges</i> . Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011, 191-214.
Winters, Harold A.	<i>Battling the Elements: Weather and Terrain in the Conduct of War</i> . Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, chap. 1.

Organizations

Web Resources

URL	Name and description
https://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/noaa-n/climate/climate_weather.html	NASA Weather website, "What's the Difference Between Weather and Climate?", 2005.
https://www.weather.gov/timeline	History of the National Weather Service
https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Weather_During_the_Civil_War	Kathryn Shively Meier, "Weather During the Civil War," in Encyclopedia Virginia
https://markerhunter.wordpress.com/2011/08/27/earthquakes-and-hurricanes-acw/	Craig Swain, "Earthquakes and Hurricanes! Natural Disasters and the Civil War," at markerhunter.wordpress.com, 2011.
https://emergingcivilwar.com/2016/09/16/the-fog-of-war-when-modern-weather-gives-us-a-history-lesson/	Kevin Pawlak, "The Fog of War—When Modern Weather Gives Us a History Lesson," at Emerging Civil War, 2016.
https://www.civilwar.org/learn/primary-sources/desperate-snow-battle	"A Desperate Snow Battle," at American Battlefield Trust
https://digpodcast.org/2017/11/26/little-ice-age/	Marissa Rhodes, "The Little Ice Age: Weird Weather, Witchcraft, Famine and Fashion," at digpodcast.org, 2017.

Other Sources

Scholars

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Topic Précis

Weather was one of the biggest factors in the American Civil War. It affected every part of the conflict. The American Civil War took place at the very tail end of what is called the Little Ice Age. Annual fluctuations in weather were both terrible and constant and winters were much colder than today. One year could bring an intensely cold winter and biting easterly winds, while the next year might deliver heavy rains and raging heat. Official weather recording devices were established in the 1850s by the Smithsonian Institution and many Civil War era men and women recorded daily weather-related information in diaries and letters so that it is possible to get a general idea of the weather in a variety of places during the years of the war. Weather shaped battles and campaigns. In the Seven Days constant rain, swollen rivers forced changed tactics and the rain and cold demoralized men and resulted in a stew of malaria, typhoid, dysentery for the Union forces retreating to Harrison’s landing. In another example, during the engagements at Mill Springs and Chantilly, the actual fighting capability of the soldiers was impeded by heavy rains, which made the ammunition for their small arms and artillery useless and prevented men from participating in the fighting or requiring them to attempt hand-to-hand combat. Additionally, an unusual atmospheric phenomenon called an acoustic shadow is recorded as having masked the sounds of battle. This prevented both sides from using sound to identify areas of combat, preventing some units from combining against enemy forces and causing others to be nearly overwhelmed because there was no way to tell that an enemy unit was in close proximity. Heat was as devastating to Civil War soldiers as rain and cold particularly for armies operating in the deserts of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. Weather also affected the operations of navies, an example being the loss of the USS *Monitor* in 1862 during a storm. Soldiers on both sides wrote about the weather constantly and complained just about as often, but however much soldiers suffered, it was worse for prisoners of war. At Andersonville and other prison camps, the miserable little shanties and other thrown-together shelters were no help at all for exposed, starving men. Many died of diseases related to exposure, and others simply froze to death. One of the most notable effects of weather on armies was Burnside’s Mud March of January 20-21, 1863. The Federal forces marched out into a countryside swept by a heavy storm that turned roads into swamps and turned back once the going became impossible. The Civil War was greatly affected by the weather, whether the armies were those of the Trans-Mississippi, the Far West, the Deep South, or Virginia. Illness in the ranks, a result of both seasons and weather, decimated all armies and impacted every aspect of soldier life, from the planning of grand battles to the digging of latrines.
