

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Other Armies

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The Prussian military theorist Carl Von Clausewitz called war “politics by other means”.¹ Armies are the instruments by which the political goals of contending governments are accomplished.

In the U.S. Civil War, the Union Army of the Potomac and Confederate Army of Northern Virginia were the largest armies of the respective governments, and they made war in the eastern theater of operations that included the both seats of government. A single decisive victory or defeat by either of them could have potentially ended the war at any time. Studying these armies provides a framework for understanding the Civil War.

But for the war aims of either side to be accomplished a variety of other land forces were required. These forces included armies of maneuver—large permanently organized forces similar to the eastern armies, but typically of smaller scale than seen in the regions surrounding the capitals. These armies also included significant forces whose purpose was to guard large swaths of territory or logistical networks, and important garrisons. Such armies were often called upon to consolidate to fight battles but then return to their core function of area security. Also important to understanding the continental war were temporary expeditionary forces. These were usually quite small, but their operations often resulted in major outcomes of national importance, either in the balance of military power or the sometimes equally important impact on politics, society, or military and civilian morale.

Finally, the U.S. Civil War featured a significant and important land force whose contributions to the outcome of the war were as powerful for social reasons as for military. This was the Union’s Department of United States Colored Troops. While black troops did contribute crucially to the campaigns of major and minor armies of maneuver, they also provided essential security for newly freed refugees from slavery. As the USCT’s were typically men drawn from these newly freed communities they provided an institutional bedrock to the nascent and ill-defined freedom that followed the overthrow of slavery. The Union’s black troops were both important elements of the national armies and an army of liberation. Their actions contributed to the end of slavery while advancing the cause of freedom in a reunited country.

¹ Carl Von Clausewitz, Col. J. J. Graham, trans., *On War* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1918), 24. The commonly paraphrased quote reads “War is a mere continuation of policy by other means.”

Understanding the other armies that fought the Civil War requires understanding the reasons why a variety of military forces were created by both sides. Examining those reasons provides clarity as to how and why the war was fought the way it was.

Major Armies of Maneuver

The major armies of maneuver were large and comparatively permanent organizations. The names and battles are well-known, as are the names and reputations of their commanders. Their campaigns dictated the broad outcome of the war and the success or failure of the contending causes.

Similar to these were smaller armies of maneuver that operated in more remote areas. Some of these were ultimately subsumed into the major armies or split from them as the needs of their governments called for the consolidation or dispersion of forces. The stories of the smaller armies are usually best understood within the context of the large forces with which they were associated.

The Army of the Potomac

The Union's most powerful force was The Army of the Potomac. This army operated in Virginia except when the actions of their enemies drew them north of their namesake river. The Army of the Potomac is often viewed as a powerful but unfortunate organization cursed either with a series of incompetent commanders or meddling politicians depending on one's point of view. They are principally associated with commanders such as Generals George Brinton McClellan, Joseph Hooker, George Gordon Meade, and General Ulysses S. Grant. This army ultimately prevailed in their offensive mission of capturing the Confederate capital at Richmond, overthrowing President Jefferson Davis' government, and defeating the Confederacy's principal army.

A number of smaller maneuver armies operated adjacent to the Army of the Potomac and most of these were eventually subsumed into it. On occasion detachments were made from this principal army to others, and in the later part of 1864 a large detachment was stood up as an independent army. Among these are the various armies operating in the Shenandoah Valley in early 1862, Major General John Pope's Army of Virginia in the summer of 1862, and Major General Benjamin Franklin Butler's Army of the James in 1864. In late 1864 General Philip Sheridan led detachments from the Army of the Potomac back into the Valley and this semi-independent force was styled the Army of the Shenandoah. The histories of all of these forces are best understood as part of the history of the Army of the Potomac.

The Army of Northern Virginia

The principal Confederate army, the Army of Northern Virginia under General Robert E. Lee operated mostly inside Virginia with the mission to defend the Confederate seat of government. In order to accomplish this defensive mission President Davis and General Lee also

frequently subsumed once independent forces into this command and sometimes detached portions of it to semi-independent missions of their own. Lieutenant General Thomas Jonathan “Stonewall” Jackson’s army in the Shenandoah Valley eventually joined Lee’s force, as did armies that defended the Atlantic coast. On occasion—twice from 1863 into 1864—Lee created large detachments from the Army of Northern Virginia to operate in Tidewater Virginia and to reinforce General Braxton Bragg’s Army of Tennessee in Georgia. As was the case with the smaller Union armies in the Virginia theater, the stories of these minor armies and major detachments are told properly as chapters in the story of Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia.

In order to understand the other armies in the wider scope of the war one must expand the horizon beyond Virginia. The war beyond the Appalachian Mountains decided the fates of peoples and regions far beyond the defense of capital cities. These decisions tended to have effects more far reaching than the simple possession of cities.

The Army of the Tennessee

The Union Army of the Tennessee was composed of various forces that came together early in the war to seize control of the major transportation routes in the western Confederacy. This army, under command of Major General U. S. Grant began its career as an expeditionary force aimed at conquering the lower Tennessee River, winning the battles of Forts Henry and Donelson and the Battle of Shiloh under their soon-to-be famous leader. After some temporary reorganizations, in which other expeditionary armies such as John Pope’s Army of the Mississippi joined them, The Army of the Tennessee came into permanent existence in November of 1862. Its first major objective was the opening of the Mississippi River and the sundering of the Confederacy in two which was accomplished on July 4, 1863, with the capture of Vicksburg. The Army of the Tennessee then expanded its operations far beyond the region suggested by its name, assisting in the capture of Atlanta. It then marched through Georgia to the sea under Major General William Tecumseh Sherman and finished the war in North Carolina.

Throughout its existence the Army of the Tennessee was repeatedly given the mission of capturing major transportation routes for the Union while denying the same to the Confederacy. Under command of General Grant and Navy commanders like Admirals Andrew Hull Foote and David Dixon Porter, it operated often as a water-borne land force in successful combined operations to conquer the Tennessee and Mississippi Rivers. In 1864 the army served as a component of William T. Sherman’s army that cut through northern Georgia and captured Atlanta, at once seizing control of railroad routes while finally denying the Confederates their crucial regional railroad hub. They continued their war on transportation until the end of the war by scarring the south with ruined rail lines, burned bridges and destroyed rail yards. The “Sherman Necktie”—warped rails twisted around telegraph poles—became symbols of their transit of regions like Georgia and the Carolinas.

The Army of the Tennessee gained a level of alleged infamy by denying resources to southern civilians. Their war upon military infrastructure also destroyed civilian transportation and economic resources. Railyards and mills destroyed to harm the Confederate army also caused starvation for southern civilians. The Army of the Tennessee was eventually portrayed by a generation of historians as an instrument of Total War, supposedly presaging a twentieth century of unrestrained war upon civilians. Such assumptions mis-characterize the nature of nineteenth century war and the activities of this army. Military operations aimed at destroying an enemy's ability to wage war were common in the nineteenth century, and soldiers of The Army of the Tennessee were not unique in their abuses against individual civilians. As Sherman's armies marched through Georgia and the Carolinas in 1864-1865, their operations against infrastructure often harmed civilians, sometimes as an indirect result of intentional destruction, and sometimes because of indiscipline among the troops.

The soldiers of this army established a unique character that reinforced their identity as independent citizen-soldiers. They considered themselves practical warriors and reveled in a comparatively loose sense of command and control. They took a casual attitude toward military decorum, especially when it came to their uniforms and parade ground drill. On the other hand, they prided themselves on the cohesion of their units, their self-discipline and the level of intelligence among the enlisted men that gave everyone in the army a sense of unified purpose.²

The Army of the Ohio and the Army of the Cumberland

President Lincoln was said to have remarked early in the war that he would like to have God on the side of the Union, but he must have Kentucky. The clever statement was true in both political and strategic terms. Securing the loyalty of the pro-slavery border state required a military occupation that tamped down potential internal uprisings and provided a springboard for military operations into what Thomas Lawrence Connelley called The Heartland of the Confederacy—Tennessee, northern Alabama and Georgia.³ The forces dedicated to these missions were armies called the Army of the Ohio or The Army of the Cumberland over the course of the war. Their experiences led them to establish a reputation of being at once a hard luck army while also winning crucial victories and succeeding in the mission of conquering the Confederate heartland.

During the first year of the war these troops spent most of their time on their first mission—securing the state of Kentucky. In the first months the state tried to maintain military neutrality along with loyalty. When Confederate forces moved into Kentucky in the late summer of 1861 so did the Union. Under the command of Brigadier Generals Robert Anderson and William Tecumseh

² Eric Michael Burke, *Soldiers from Experience: The Forging of Sherman's Fifteenth Army Corps 1862-1863* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2023), 3. Burke's study of the XV Corps element of the Army of the Tennessee effectively identifies the Tactical Culture of the unit and provides what should be an influential template for historians to describe tactical culture in other large formations.

³ Thomas Lawrence Connelley, *Army of the Heartland: The Army of Tennessee, 1861-1862 and Autumn of Glory: The Army of Tennessee, 1862-1865*, 2 vols. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 1:3.

Sherman the armies maintained a stalemate with their rivals. Under the command of Major General Don Carlos Buell, the Kentucky forces adopted the title The Army of the Ohio. A portion of that force under Major General George Henry Thomas won the small but important victory at Mill Springs in January of 1862. When General U.S. Grant and his expedition up the Tennessee river captured Forts Henry and Donelson, General Buell was enabled to follow-up Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston's retreating army and capture Nashville.

Buell and most of his army then cooperated with Grant in the last stages of his campaign, adding decisive reinforcement at the Battle of Shiloh and Siege of Corinth. A Confederate flanking move compelled a retreat to the Ohio River in the late summer of 1862. Reinforced with new levies Buell was able to take the offensive in October and fought the important battle at Perryville—a tactically indecisive fight that nevertheless helped to compel a Confederate retreat into Tennessee.

President Lincoln and his administration always valued the political mission of taking territory away from the Confederates more than did Buell. When the conservative general failed to move his forces into eastern Tennessee and relieve Unionists there Lincoln replaced him with Major General William Starke Rosecrans, who rechristened the force The Army of the Cumberland.

Rosecrans also balked at launching a campaign into the mountains, but his work to restore the quality of the army's logistics and the morale of the troops led to a hard-fought victory at the Battle of Stones River December 31, 1862 - January 2, 1863. Rosecrans' operations in the first half of 1863 were characterized by careful preparation and notable success. Still, he stubbornly focused on his enemies and not on the political mission of securing territory occupied by friendly civilians. A defeat at the battle of Chickamauga in late September again brought the Army of the Cumberland into a state of crisis. Lincoln placed the whole army, along with detachments from the Army of the Potomac and Army of the Tennessee under General Grant and replaced Rosecrans with Thomas. Under Thomas' direction the Army of the Cumberland again rallied and won a great victory at Chattanooga in November.

Under Thomas the Army of the Cumberland continued as an element of General Sherman's group of armies that took Atlanta. Part of Thomas' army marched to the sea with Sherman. The greater part returned to what had been the Confederate heartland and decisively defeated the last attempts by the rebels to regain that strategically crucial region at the battles of Franklin and Nashville.

Ultimately the Union Army of the Cumberland completed their mission of conquering the Confederate breadbasket region of Tennessee and North Alabama. They even eventually helped relieve the Unionist mountaineers of eastern Tennessee. In doing so they fought the largest and bloodiest battles to occur in the western theater. Even so the veterans of this army felt that their services were undervalued by the nation and by historians. Generals Buell, Rosecrans, and Thomas all endured post-war controversy in trying to defend their records and that of the army.

In terms of historical perception, the Army of the Ohio and Army of the Cumberland have suffered from the abstractly political nature of their mission. While the Army of the Potomac fought enormous battles either in defense of Washington or against Richmond, and while the Army of the Tennessee scorched their way across the Confederacy, the Army of the Cumberland fought a series of large and bloody battles for the political objectives of securing Kentucky for the Union, denying Tennessee to the Confederacy, and liberating Unionists from Confederate governance. Such varied missions made the contributions of these soldiers to victory more complicated to understand, and the challenges to the reputations of their commanders more persistent.

The Army of Tennessee

Historian Thomas Lawrence Connelly called the Army of Tennessee the Confederacy's Army of the Heartland. Connelly described the purpose of this principal western army as defending the agricultural base of the South and her armies. The regions of central Tennessee, Northern Alabama, and parts of Georgia were indeed critical to Confederate fortunes because of the combination of the abundance of foodstuffs they produced and a transportation infrastructure—river and railroad—that was advanced for the South. Defending both the breadbasket and the means of getting food supplies to Southern armies was the primary goal of the Army of Tennessee, while projecting Confederate power to the Ohio River was an important secondary mission. Accomplishing these missions ultimately turned out to be impossible, and the story of this ill-starred army demonstrates the long odds faced by the Confederacy provided the Union prosecuted the war in earnest.

The Confederate government placed the defense of the national capital above the defense of the Confederate heartland in strategic importance. President Jefferson Davis demonstrated these priorities from the beginning of the war by denying resources to the western army and trying to make up for that by assigning command to the man he considered the greatest talent among his generals, Albert Sidney Johnston.

General Johnston's experience and talent were not equal to the disparity in resources between his force and that of his enemies. After Johnston's death at the Battle of Shiloh none of his successors proved able to reverse the army's fortunes.

The Army of Tennessee came into being as the small force assigned to defend an attenuated line of defense from the Mississippi River to the Cumberland Gap. For the better part of the first year of the war this thin line and the conservatism of Union commanders combined as the only protection to the Confederate heartland. Johnston's repeated pleas to Richmond for more men and resources were continually rebuffed with demands that he send more men and arms to Virginia. When the Union went on the offensive in early 1862 Johnston's line was immediately broken at Mill Springs in the east and Forts Henry and Donelson in the west. These defeats drove the Confederates out of both Kentucky and Tennessee and drove Johnston to desperation.

These reversals did cause the Confederate government to reinforce Johnston, but they also drove the Confederate commander to the proverbial wall at Corinth, Mississippi. As historian Timothy B. Smith notes Johnston used his reinforced army—briefly dubbed The Army of the Mississippi—to gamble against long odds and take the offensive. Johnston rolled the iron dice of battle at Shiloh on April 6-7, 1862, and lost the battle along with his life.⁴

With General P. G. T. Beauregard as their new commander the army retreated from Corinth by June. Under General Braxton Bragg they marched into eastern Tennessee and launched a campaign to retake Kentucky. Bragg's mission was twofold, to recover the Confederate heartland and to liberate Kentucky. When Kentuckians failed to rise up in support of the rebellion, and then when Buell fought Bragg to a standstill at Perryville, The Army of Tennessee retreated to middle Tennessee.

Bragg's redemption of the Confederate heartland lasted only a few months. When Rosecrans moved his Army of the Cumberland against Bragg at Murfreesboro the two armies fought one of the great battles of the war at Stones River. Savage fighting by determined Confederate soldiers could not save the region for long. By the summer of 1863 Bragg was driven into Northwest Georgia and gave up Chattanooga.

Again, Richmond reinforced the western army only at the moment of greatest crisis. Bragg's strengthened force almost destroyed Rosecrans at Chickamauga, but as always, full victory eluded the Army of Tennessee. A profound drubbing at the Battle of Chattanooga brought the army under the command of General Joseph Eggleston Johnston by 1864.

Johnston restored the army's morale and efficiency but could not generate enough force to take the offensive. The 1864 Atlanta campaign was characterized, under Johnston's command, by defense and delay. Late July found the army under command of Lieutenant General John Bell Hood and their desperate attempts to stave off the capture of Atlanta led to a series of bloody defeats.

Hood's own campaigns to recover Tennessee devolved into a Quixotic disaster. Slaughter at Franklin was followed by defeat at Nashville.

The Army of Tennessee did not see the end of the war as a unified command. Parts of the ill-starred army surrendered in North Carolina, while other parts were captured at Mobile or surrendered at Demopolis, Alabama.

The memory of the Confederate Army of Tennessee is that of an under-manned and under-resourced force asked to defend far more territory than they were capable of occupying. Their attempts to defend, and then to redeem those territories define the unbalanced priorities of the

⁴ Timothy B. Smith, *The Iron Dice of Battle: Albert Sidney Johnston and the Civil War in the West* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2023), xiii.

Confederate war effort. The bravery and endurance of the western Confederate soldiers could not change the long odds against them.

Expeditionary Armies

The large armies of maneuver constitute the most recognizable of the named military forces of the Union and Confederacy. Other much smaller forces were often brought together for specific campaigns. These campaigns were occasionally designed to accomplish political goals that were of much greater scale than the under-resourced armies could reasonably be expected to accomplish. These expeditionary armies often only existed for short periods of time, and at the conclusion of the campaigns the soldiers were redeployed for other purposes.

The smallest army with the biggest mission of the Civil War was probably the expeditionary cavalry brigade of Confederate Brigadier General Henry Hopkins Sibley. Sibley's brigade was created in 1861-1862 from Texas volunteers for the purpose of conquering Federal territories in New Mexico and Arizona, and then ultimately expanding Confederate control to the Pacific Ocean. The fact that Sibley's campaign fell far short of that objective does not lessen the stakes that both governments had in the outcome of the expedition.

The Sibley campaign began with a small raiding battalion under Lieutenant Colonel John Baylor that rode the Butterfield Mail Route to New Mexico in 1861. Baylor attempted to fly the Confederate flag and establish political control over the territory with a minimal force.

Sibley followed in the Winter and Spring of 1862, and as the Federals under Brigadier General Edward Richard Sprigg Canby rushed reinforcements to the territory a series of crucial battles played out. Sibley gained successes at the Battle of Valverde and on a ride north along the Rio Grande River as far as Santa Fe. His force was well beyond any possibility of resupply when Canby's Colorado volunteers destroyed the Confederate supply train at the decisive Battle of Glorieta Pass. Sibley's disastrous retreat from Arizona and New Mexico ended Jefferson Davis' dreams of a trans-continental empire for slavery. The failure of his expedition represents possibly the largest strategic consequence resulting from the smallest military engagements seen in the war.

Similarly important expeditions played out for the Union in the first months of the war. First, Union Major General Ambrose Everts Burnside cooperated with the U.S. Navy to seize crucial islands off the coast of North Carolina and South Carolina. The seizure of New Bern, North Carolina, by the Burnside Expedition resulted in the permanent occupation of that strategic town. These adventures, which by-and-large did not result in major battles, established bases for potential attacks by the army into the Confederate interior, and for supplying the Navy's blockading squadrons. A similar combined operation under General Benjamin Butler and Admiral David Farragut resulted in the seizure of New Orleans in April of 1862. Butler's forces of The Department of the Gulf captured the Confederacy's most important city without a major land battle. Such

expeditions and the armies that conducted them represent another very important yet little regarded aspect of military organization during the Civil War.

Innumerable other expeditions played lesser strategic roles in the war, but the forces involved were just as committed to the war as any others. Examples of these include Major General Nathaniel Prentice Banks' Red River Campaign forces, the army Confederate Major General Sterling Price led into Missouri in late 1864, and large and small scale cavalry raids led by the likes of Confederates John Hunt Morgan, Nathan Bedford Forrest, or Union General James Harrison Wilson.

Area Armies and Garrisons

An army in the field maneuvering to fight and defeat their enemy always requires security in the rear. Lines of communication and sources of supply must be protected for the army to fight. Likewise, the political purpose of having an army is to provide protection to some territory or community. That territory and those communities may be near the fighting or far away. The need for protection remains and these protective forces sometimes become important parts of the fighting armies. Since all armies do require rear area security, we will consider a few examples of area armies and garrisons without trying to describe them all.

The most recognizable defensive armies are those that at some point fought to defend their garrison. An example would be the Confederate force committed to the defense of the fortress of Vicksburg, Mississippi from mid-1862 through mid-1863. Lacking any concise army title, these forces, for the most part under command of Lieutenant General John Clifford Pemberton, were labeled The Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana. The lack of a pithy nom de guerre indicates the administrative negligence that Richmond had for this army. Neither Pemberton, nor any other commander in that theater, ever had the resources to properly defend Vicksburg or the Mississippi Valley. Even Pemberton's authority stopped at the river, and the delta of Trans-Mississippi Louisiana visible from his headquarters was under another commander. By comparison his opponent, Grant, enjoyed authority that straddled the river and simplified command. When Grant launched his Inland Campaign of May 1863 Pemberton lacked the power, authority, and talent to save Vicksburg.

By contrast the Union employed a very powerful rear area army to defend Washington while The Army of the Potomac took the field against the Army of Northern Virginia. These units were called Heavy Artillery regiments and provide an example of a dedicated security force that also represented a crucial reinforcement pool for a field army. A federal heavy artillery regiment, as opposed to a typical infantry regiment, included men trained to any job that might be required for the defense of a fort. Heavy artillerists, infantry, light artillerists and engineers were all represented in a regiment of heavy artillery. These regiments usually contained many times as many soldiers as a traditional infantry regiment. For most of the war the often-beleaguered Army of the Potomac struggled in the field while enormous forces were kept back to defend Washington.

In 1864 General Grant ordered the Heavies, as they were called, into the field and their reinforcement proved essential to the ultimate success of the 1864-1865 campaigns. In these campaigns the uncommonly large heavy artillery regiments suffered enormous casualties. Ultimately, the career of a Union heavy artillery soldier proved as hazardous as that of the infantry.

Finally, an important rear area army would come from the forces that were required to provide security in areas beset by guerilla warfare. While such forces were required across the country by both sides, the loyal forces fighting the insurgency in Missouri provide a good representative example. As a loyal slave state Missouri had a population that was violently divided among pro-Union and pro-Confederate identities. Pro-Confederate guerillas provided a persistent threat, not only to the control of the Union army but to personal enemies in their own communities.

In 1862 General Henry Halleck attempted to suppress the guerrilla violence by creating a counter-insurgency force called The Missouri State Militia (MSM). The MSM—counter to what was typical of other state militias—was a force of regularly enlisted, fully trained and equipped cavalry regiments. MSM regiments were restricted to service within the state and typically operated in small raiding detachments based out of garrisons that occupied towns. The MSM regiments rarely fought as full units, but they matched the guerillas blow-for-blow in terms of the brutality of their warfare. When the MSM failed to provide adequate security to maintain a level of civil order—such as during the guerilla seasons in the spring and summer—Union authorities created the Enrolled Missouri Militia (EMM), part-time citizen soldiers conscripted to protect their communities and like a civilian posse called forth by a sheriff. Some of these EMM units were called on so frequently that the army was forced to reorganize them as semi-permanent regiments and labeled them Provisional Enrolled Missouri Militia. This Byzantine administrative organization reflected the challenges provided by the guerillas, civilian combatants who emerged from the community, struck at the army or at their neighbors, and then disappeared into the brush. The counterinsurgents of Missouri provide an example of soldiers who served through the war, fought and died by the thousands, but almost never appeared on any major battlefield as typically recognized soldiers.

Rear area and garrison armies represent a type of Civil War force that is not normally thought of as an army. However, their missions were important and the experiences of the soldiers in these forces could be as harrowing as that of any other Federal or Confederate soldier.

An Army of Liberation: The Department of United States Colored Troops

Most of the armies that fought the war on both sides can be defined by their strategic or their political objectives. Lee and Grant struggled against each other to win battlefield victories. Albert Sidney Johnston, Braxton Bragg and other southerners fought to defend the heartland of the Confederacy while Grant, Sherman, Rosecrans and Thomas fought to deny that critical strategic resource to their enemies. Area and garrison armies fought to hold strategic points or

suppress insurgencies. The USCT regiments were distributed among the Union armies but collectively they played roles in all these objectives while also achieving a unique social victory.

At the beginning of the war President Lincoln and his administration wished for a limited and non-revolutionary resolution of the rebellion that restricted the war to a struggle among white men for the future of a nation that still had slavery. During that time strong interests in the North, including but not limited to Abolition movements, urged Lincoln to make use of black men to help win the war. Most importantly, as Union armies moved into the south the enslaved rallied to them, both as refugees from slavery and as patriots determined to assist in the preservation of a Union they saw as their best hope of achieving freedom.

Following the January 1, 1863, enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation various types of segregated black armies were created independent of each other by people who were excited to bring black men into the war. Union armies occupying Confederate territory created regiments of black troops representing rebellious states such as South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama or Tennessee. Massachusetts famously created organizations from free African American men of the north. Kansas anticipated the Emancipation Proclamation with the organization of the 1st Kansas Colored Infantry which began recruiting in August 1862 and first saw combat in October 1862.

In the Spring of 1864, the War Department consolidated most of the independent forces into the Department of United States Colored Troops. Massachusetts and Connecticut famously maintained their regiments of colored state volunteers.

Regiments of USCTs appeared on the orders of battle of every major Union army before the end of the war. USCTs fought in major battles from Richmond to the Indian Territories. Black Union volunteers marched into Richmond at the end of the war and helped compel the surrender of Lee's army at Appomattox.

However, USCT troops played another significant role in the revolution that ultimately came from the Civil War. Their role as guardians in the rear area armies of the Union provided security for Americans fleeing slavery to establish communities and identities as free people. Contraband camps established across the south required protection from Confederate raiders or civilian enslavers. The USCT troops provided this security and did so by drawing on the strength of men from those communities. Just two examples include the contraband camps at Corinth, Mississippi and Grand Junction, Tennessee. Each of these camps produced regiments for the USCTs. The Alabamians at Corinth organized the 55th USCT and the west Tennesseans at Grand Junction created the 59th USCT. Each of these regiments provided security for their communities, and then later took the field to fight for freedom as elements of field armies. At the end of the war these regiments were among the men who garrisoned Memphis and the African American population there looked upon them with pride as they paraded through the streets and protected their communities. It is unfortunate but revealing that the tragedy of the subsequent massacres of

freed people in Memphis came only after the transfer or discharge of USCT regiments from the city.

These scenes of black Americans protecting the new-won freedom of black communities across the South reveals a revolutionary type of Civil War army. These forces were rarely recognized at the time, and even now the public remembrance of the USCT seems to be separate from that of Union soldiers who fought on famous fields. However, the victories they won at places like Beaufort, South Carolina, Helena, Arkansas, New Orleans, Corinth or Memphis represent an important social achievement that rivals military victories at Gettysburg or Vicksburg in the history of the war.

Conclusion

Governments require armies to serve diverse roles in achieving their political aims. When looking at the Civil War it is easy to recognize the roles large field armies played. Large field armies fought famous battles, and their commanders had their names forged in bronze of prominent monuments. However, other armies proved as important to the outcome of the war, be that in the preservation of the Union or the attempt by the Confederates to establish an independent slaveholding republic. These other armies protected garrisons, suppressed insurgencies and enabled the liberation of enslaved Americans. Understanding that bigger picture provides a richer understanding of the Civil War.
