Despite the political gains represented by the Emancipation Proclamation, however, the North's military prospects in the East remained bleak as Lee's Army of Northern Virginia continued to maul Colored Troops, and 29,500 served in the Union Navy. Army recruited and trained had been urging since the beginning of armed conflict. Union forces already had been sheltering escaped slaves as "contraband" of war, but following the Emancipation Proclamation, the Union Army recruited and trained regiments of African-American soldiers that fought with distinction in battles from Virginia to the Mississippi. About 178,000 African Americans served in the U.S. Colored Troops, and 29,500 served in the Union Navy.

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the Union Army of the Potomac, first at Fredericksburg, Virginia, in December 1862 and then at Chancellorsville in May 1863. But Chancellorsville, although one of Lee's most brilliant military victories, was also one of his most costly. His most valued lieutenant, General "Stonewall" Jackson, was mistakenly shot and killed by his own men.

Gettysburg to Appomattox

Yet none of the Confederate victories was decisive. The Union simply marched new armies and tried again. Believing that the North's crushing defeat at Chancellorsville gave him his chance, Lee struck northward into Pennsylvania at the beginning of July 1863, almost reaching the state capital at Harrisburg. A strong Union force intercepted him at Gettysburg, where, in a titanic three day battle -- the largest of the Civil War -- the Confederates made a valiant effort to break the Union lines. They failed, and on July 4 Lee's army, after crippling losses, retreated behind the Potomac.

More than 3,000 Union soldiers and almost 4,000 Confederates died at Gettysburg; wounded and missing totaled more than 20,000 on each side. On November 19, 1863, Lincoln dedicated a new national cemetery there with perhaps the most famous address in U.S. history. He concluded his brief remarks with these words:

...we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

On the Mississippi, Union control had been blocked at Vicksburg, where the Confederates had strongly fortified themselves on bluffs too high for naval attack. In early 1863 Grant began to move below and around Vicksburg, subjecting it to a six-week siege. On July 4, he captured the town, together with the strongest Confederate Army in the West. The river was now entirely in Union hands. The Confederacy was broken in two, and it became almost impossible to bring supplies from Texas and Arkansas.

The Northern victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg in July 1863 marked the turning point of the war, although the bloodshed continued unabated for more than a year-and-a-half.

Lincoln brought Grant east and made him commander-in-chief of all Union forces. In May 1864 Grant advanced deep into Virginia and met Lee's Confederate Army in the three-day Battle of the Wilderness. Losses on both sides were heavy, but unlike other Union commanders, Grant refused to retreat. Instead, he attempted to outflank Lee, stretching the Confederate lines and pounding away with artillery and infantry attacks. "I propose to fight it out along this line if it takes all summer," the Union commander said at Spotsylvania, during five days of bloody trench warfare that characterized fighting on the eastern front for almost a year.

In the West, Union forces gained control of Tennessee in the fall of 1863 with victories at Chattanooga and nearby Lookout Mountain, opening the way for General William T. Sherman to invade Georgia. Sherman outmaneuvered several smaller Confederate armies, occupied the state capital of Atlanta, then marched to the Atlantic coast, systematically destroying railroads, factories, warehouses, and other facilities in his path. His men, cut off from their normal supply lines, ravaged the countryside for food. From the coast, Sherman marched northward; by February 1865, he had taken Charleston, South Carolina, where the first shots of the Civil War had been fired. Sherman, more than any other Union general, understood that destroying the will and morale of the South was as important as defeating its armies.

Grant, meanwhile, lay siege to Petersburg, Virginia, for nine months, before Lee, in March 1865, knew that he had to abandon both Petersburg and the Confederate capital of Richmond in an attempt to retreat south. But it was too late. On April 9, 1865, surrounded by huge Union armies, Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse. Although scattered fighting continued elsewhere for several months, the Civil War was over.

The terms of surrender at Appomattox were magnificent, and on his return from his meeting with Lee, Grant quieted the noisy demonstrations of his soldiers by reminding them: "The rebels are our countrymen again." The war for Southern independence had become the "lost cause," whose hero, Robert E. Lee, had won wide admiration through the brilliance of his leadership and his greatness in defeat.

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In this photograph taken at Antietam, dead Confederate soldiers lie on the ground near a fence on the Hagerstown Road.

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