

Talking Points

Evolving Battlefields

Every battlefield is an evolving battlefield—whether on land, at sea, in the air or in cyberspace—if only as each combatant must adjust to the other's thrust and parry. Over time, new and existing technologies lead to the development of new or revised weapons that, in their turn, bring about the development and modification of tactics for the efficient application of the weapons, and, in response, the search for effective defenses against them.

- The American Civil War had to be won on land because the continued existence of the Confederate armies underpinned the claim of political independence asserted by the rebellious state. But interrupting the commerce of the southern states with the world at large was essential to denying the Confederates the materiel and supplies they needed to sustain their armies. Accordingly, one of the earliest steps taken by the Federal government was to declare a blockade of the southern coast and ports.
- The world at large took a keen interest in the Civil War because the United States, and in the main the southern states, supplied nearly all the world's raw cotton. Thus, the parties interested in the maintenance or interdiction of the commerce of the Confederates with the world at large were not just the Confederate and Federal governments, but the consumers of raw cotton, such as European cotton dealers and cotton mills, and the European governments interested in protecting their own national interests and the interests of their subjects. As a result, the war along the Confederate coast, the evolving

battlefield is not just the parry and thrust of combatants but is complicated by the additional parties with their own distinct interests.

- Britain threatened war with the Federal government early in the Civil War, and seriously contemplated it at points thereafter. However, the growing size of the Federal Army and Navy, and the awareness of the vulnerability of the British possessions in North America (Canada)—plus the development of the flotilla of monitor vessels capable of sinking most British naval vessels—eventually deterred them taking such a step.
- The start of the Civil war found both combatants ill prepared for the scale of warfare that soon arose between them both on land and in coastal waters, hence the need by both navies to buy, build, and improvise forces suitable to impose a blockade and to resist its imposition.
- The technological improvisations led to the first battle between ironclad vessels, to the construction by the Federals of a large number of monitor type vessels that they employed as part of larger blockading squadrons to stop the traffic into Confederate ports and then to invade them, to the Confederates' failed attempt to build a gunboat flotilla, and to their somewhat successful attempt to curb the aggressiveness of Federal Navy with underwater mines called "torpedoes" at the time.
- Having fewer resources with which to wage war, the Confederates made a serious mistake early on in not planning for a lengthy war. Over time, it took greater control of their cotton to use it to finance their war effort. Similarly, they also tried to assert greater control over blockade running and undertook blockade running for their own account.