

Which Innovation had the Largest Impact on the Civil War?



Union soldiers setting up lines of the Army telegraph (Library of Congress).

Overview: The Civil War physically tore the nation apart from 1861-1865, but it also changed American warfare forever. New ways of slaughter combined with antique fighting methods created a death toll never before seen. However, other new innovations would change American lives for the better. This DBQ asks the question: Which innovation had the largest impact on the Civil War?

- Document A: Minie Ball Bullet**
- Document B: Amputation**
- Document C: Telegraph**
- Document D: Railroads**
- Document E: Photography**

Document A--Minie Ball Bullet

“The force of a minie ball...striking any solid portion to a person is astonishing; it comes like a blow from a sledge hammer, and the recipient finds himself sprawling on the ground before he is conscious of being hit; then he feels about for the wound, the benumbing blow deadening sensation for a few moments. Unless struck in the head or about the heart, men mortally wounded live some time, often in great pain, and toss about upon the ground.”

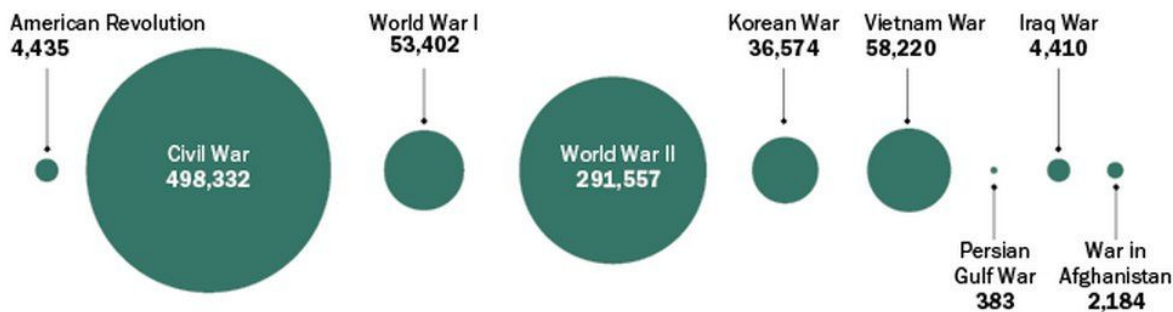
--Soldier from 35th Massachusetts, Union Army

“The third shell struck and killed my horse and bursting, blew him to pieces, knocked me down, of course, and tore off my right arm...”

--Pvt. Ezra E. Stickley, Company A, 5th Virginia Infantry, Confederate Army

Military Deaths in America's Major Wars

Number of American soldiers who died while fighting in major conflicts...



Note: Figures include 'battle deaths' and other deaths in theaters of conflict. Figures for American Revolution, World War I and World War II include 'battle deaths' only. All figures do not include deaths of those in service outside theaters of conflict. Civil War deaths include both Union and Confederate soldiers. Civil War deaths are based on incomplete returns.

Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; U.S. Department of Defense.

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1. Look at the quotes: How do the soldiers describe the impact of the minie ball bullet on the human body? Give at least THREE details.
2. Look at the graph: Which war had the most American soldiers who died?
3. Why do you think that so many American soldiers died in the Civil War?

Document B--Amputations

“Major General D. E. Sickles, U. S. Vols., was wounded on the evening of the second day of the battle of Gettysburg, by a twelve pounder solid shot, which shattered his right leg. General Sickles was on horseback at the time and unattended. Aid arriving promptly, he was removed a short distance to the rear, to a sheltered ravine, and amputation was performed low down in the thigh by Surgeon Thomas Sim, U. S. Vols. The patient was then sent to the rear, and the following day was transferred to Washington. The stump healed with great rapidity. On July 16th, the patient was able to ride about in a carriage. Early in September, 1863, the stump was completely [healed], and the general was able again to mount his horse.”

--Dr. Sim, *Army Medical Museum* (1886)

Amputation saved more lives than any other wartime medical procedure by instantly turning complex injuries into simple ones. Battlefield surgeons eventually took no more than six minutes to get each moaning man on the table, apply a handkerchief soaked in chloroform or ether, and make the deep cut. Union surgeons became the most skilled limb hackers in history. Even in deplorable conditions, they lost only about 25 percent of their patients—compared to a 75 percent mortality rate among similarly injured civilians at the time.

Source: *National Museum of Health and Medicine* (2015)

1. How was Major General Sickles wounded?
2. How did surgeon Thomas Sim treat General Sickles' wound?
3. How long did it take for General Sickles to heal?
4. Why did Civil War surgeons make amputations?
5. How many soldiers died from amputations compared to similarly injured civilians?
6. Do you believe that amputations were an effective way to save lives? Why or why not?

Document C--Telegraph

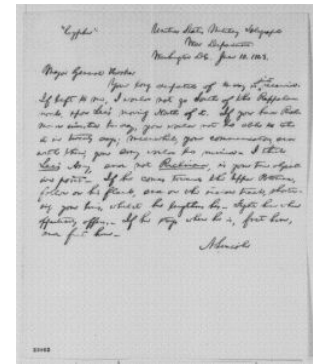
Facts about Telegram Use in the Civil War:

- In 1862, President Lincoln seized (took over) all of the telegraph lines in the North for military use.
- President Lincoln sent approximately 1,000 telegrams during the war.
- At the start of the war, there were 50,000 miles of telegraph lines in the entire U.S. Most lines were between large cities located in the North.
- As the Union army advanced into the South, they built new telegraph lines behind them.

Source: Wheeler, Tom. Mr. Lincoln's T-Mails: How Abraham Lincoln Used the Telegraph to Win the Civil War. HarperCollins Publishers, 2009.

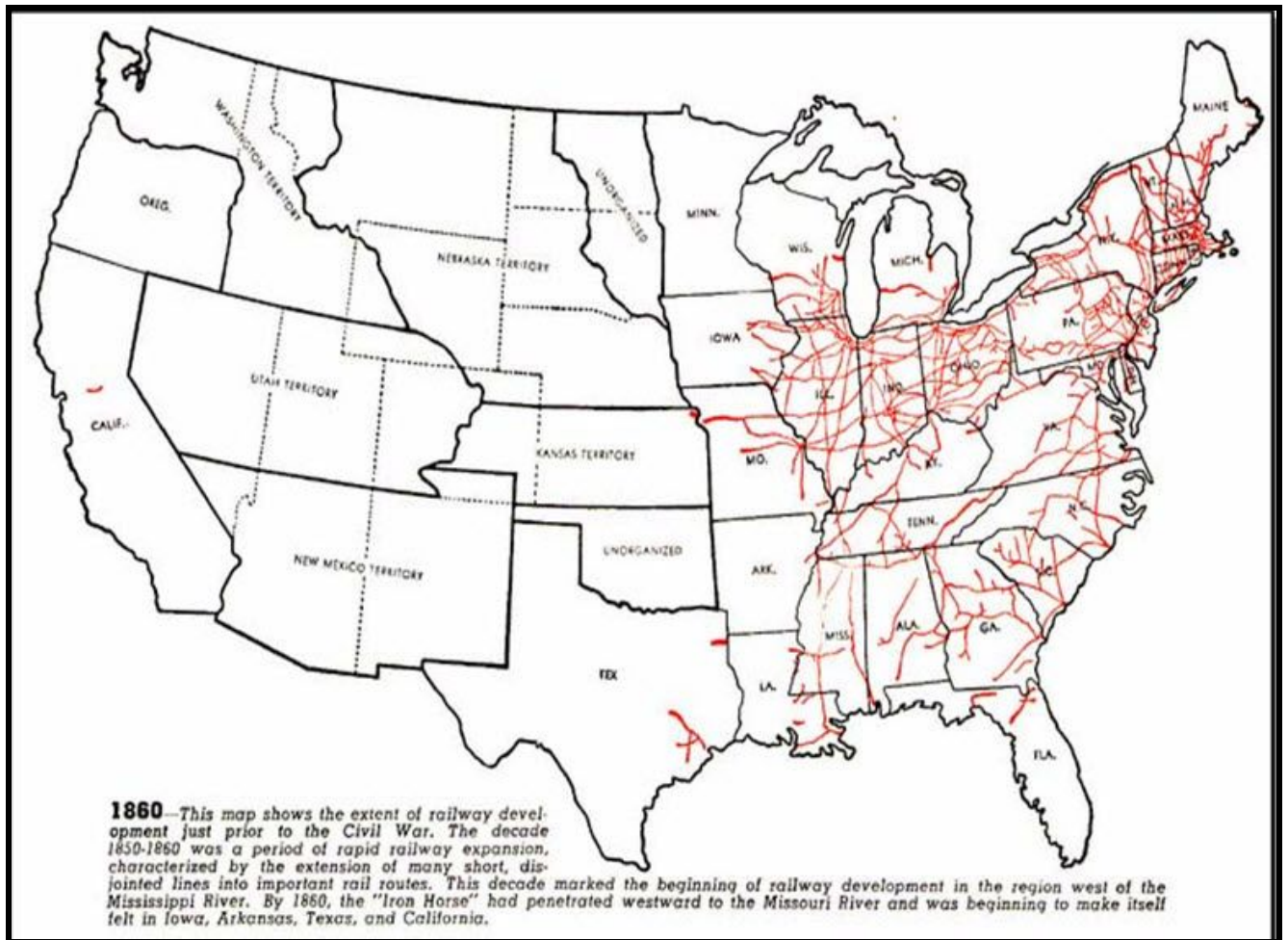
"I think Lee's Army, and not Richmond is your true objective point. If he comes towards the upper Potomac, follow on his flank...[F]ight him too, when opportunity offers. If he stay where he is, fret him and fret him."

--Telegram from President Lincoln to General Hooker, 1863, Courtesy of Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress



1. Which side (Union or Confederate) had more access to telegraph lines? How do you know?
2. In the telegram, what does President Lincoln say is the "true objective"?
3. In the telegram, what order did President Lincoln give to General Hooker?
4. How do you think telegrams helped President Lincoln lead his generals? Explain.

Document D--Railroads



1. Which side had more railroads? The Union or Confederacy?
2. Why do you think that more railroads were located in the North?
3. How could railroads have made fighting in a war easier? Explain.

Document E--Photography

A federal encampment at Cumberland Landing on the Virginia Peninsula, in May 1862, photographed by James F. Gibson--Library of Congress

1. What are the soldiers doing in the photo above?
2. Give two details about life in the encampment that you can infer from the photo.
3. If you were a family member of one of these soldiers, would the photo show you what life in the army was like? Why or why not? Explain.



Dunker Church at the Battle of Antietam photographed by Matthew Brady--Library of Congress

1. What do you think happened to the soldiers in the photo?
2. If you were alive during the time of the Civil War, how would you have felt about seeing this photo in the local newspaper? Why?
3. How do you believe photography made people feel about the Civil War?

