

# The civil war and appalachia

[War](#), [Civil War](#)



Eric Lane English 1020 Tim Parker 11/9/12 TheCivil Warand Appalachian Geography Did Appalachian geography have an effect on the civil war? Every major war in history has two things in common: a winner and a loser. There are many factors of war that decide the winner and the loser, some going unnoticed. The geography of a war has an impacting affect on the war and is sometimes overlooked, often leading to one side's downfall (Falls 5). Appalachia has a fluctuating geography, for it ranges from eroded down, plain-like areas, to mountains areas of up to almost 7000 feet (" The Appalachians").

The Civil War had many battles located in Appalachia, an area stretching from southern parts of New York, all the way down to northern Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi(" The Appalachians"). Appalachian geography was home to many battlefields of the Civil War, but could this geography actually have had an overall impact? Throughout history, many substantial wars have been disputed on various types of terrain around the world. Halvard Bugaug and Scott Gates support this and have made a claim in the article, " The Geography of Civil War", that geographical factors play a critical role in determining how a war is fought and who will prevail.

The two most important factors they give are terrain and climate. In the article, Bugaug and Gates both reference the book History of Warfare, written by John Keegan, to give examples of how these factors effect wars. Keegan gives many samples of previous generals who have ignored these factors and lead to their catastrophic downfall. One commonly known example given is the French army lead by Napoleon. Napoleon lead his

fearfully large army into Russia, not taking into account Russia's fiercely cold weather.

Although they fought, and won, battles located in Russia, the cold weather began to take its toll on Napoleon's army, causing them to be greatly weakened. This weakened state of his army, in turn, led to the French being defeated and losing the war (Bugaug 418). However, the geography does not always have a negative effect. Keegan also gives samples of 'gifted' generals who took these factors into account, allowing them to use these factors to their advantage (Bugaug 419). Cyril Falls, professor of Military History at the University of Oxford, acknowledges this as well in her journal *Geography and War Strategy*.

The journal discusses how world geography should be a subject of study for a commander and how this geography should shape their war strategies. Mapping out and understanding the terrain of a battleground before the battle begins is crucial to achieve military success (Falls 5). A general understanding of the battleground gives opportunities to change and adjust military strategies and tactics, which could give an army the edge needed to be victorious (Falls 6). Falls then adds that using the available natural resources located in the geography of an area has its benefits as well.

These resources can be distributed accordingly, supplying the army and possibly allowing them to stretch their campaign (Falls 9). Alex J. La Rocque, writer of the journal "The Role of Geography in Military planning" has a similar viewpoint. La Rocque acknowledges that the existence of this relationship between geography and military science is not new. He says that environmental factors, such as relief, climate and weather, vegetation, <https://assignbuster.com/the-civil-war-and-appalachia/>

drainage characteristics, and cultural features can cause military tactic and strategic problems.

These elements of the environment have played important roles in all wars from those in which the stone hammer was the principal weapon down to the present time (La Rocque 70). La Rocque states that the essential difference between the requirement of geography in tactical planning and strategic planning is similar to the same difference that exists between mapping areal categories on large-scale maps and mapping areal categories on small scale maps. The mapper's requirement in presenting information on maps at different scales is determined by his objective.

Appalachia has many different geographical conditions that make it eligible to have an effect on the civil war. The appalachian area has many mountain ranges and plain-like areas. The entire system is almost 2000 miles long and 300 miles wide and ranges from northern Mississippi all the way to southern New York ("The Appalachians"). These mountains are known as a "barrier" running east to west as it forms a series of alternating ridgelines and valleys oriented in opposition to any road running east-west.

The Appalachian Plateau is the westernmost part of appalachia and is bounded by a steep slope on the east called the Allegheny Front ("Appalachia and the Ozarks"). This front is the most significant barrier to western movement in the country of the Rocky Mountains ("Appalachia and the Ozarks"). The topography of this region has been created largely through steam erosion of the horizontal beds of the interior lowland. The following map will show the appalachian region. Many encounters of the civil war were

located in this region, as shown in the map Civil War Battlefield map following.

Comparison of the two maps shows that many battles were located in appalachia and its geography, giving it potential to have an effect on the war. Wilma A. Dunaway, in his archive, " Slavery and Emancipation in the Mountain South: Sources, Evidence and Methods", provides examples of how the Union(the North) and the Confederates(the South) strategically used the Appalachian area. Dunaway states that the mountainous areas of West Virginia allowed for guerrilla warfare attacks. Both armies grew fatigued from traveling up and down the mountains, leaving them open for attack(Dunaway).

In addition, both armies targeted various sites within the region as strategic occupancy points because they were located on major rivers, were railroad junctures, or were the sites of important resources such as the national rifle works, saltworks, mineral springs, or mines(Dunaway). Farms and livestock were also destroyed and/or pillaged to also be somewhat beneficial to the armies(" Appalachia"). One specific battle located in Appalachia is the Battle of Gettysburg. The battle was located in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and lasted for a total of 3 days.

After the first day the Confederate army was outnumbering the Union and looked as if a victory was inevitable. The Union, after a surprising loss on the first day, was devastated that they had lost nearly half of their troops and retreated up to Cemetery Hill and Gulp's Hill. There they prepared as much as possible with the little time they had for an oncoming Confederate attack.

Barricades and various other fortifications were built on the higher grounds, giving Union troops the advantage that was pivotal in the battle.

The Confederate soldiers now had to fight the rest of the gruesome battle now traveling uphill. The video from the History Channel, " The Battle of Gettysburg", showed images of many soldiers struggling to fight the battle at this disadvantage. They had trouble seeing distances up the hills and were even known to have had friendly fire on themselves thinking that it was the enemy. After the second day of battle the union was still shorthanded and outnumbered, although they fought off the confederate push.

The Confederate General, Robert E. Lee, made the decision to lead a large force to attack the Union line. Union artillery, who had an extreme range advantage, had what was called " target practice" on the confederate troops, greatly weakening the force. By the time they were in range of the Union line, Confederate troops had been torn apart to the point that retreat was the only option, giving the Union the victory of the Battle of Gettysburg. The battle was the bloodiest ever fought on american soil.

The Battle of Gettysburg rallied the North and is what turned the tide of the Civil War. They had the confidence that they could defeat the fearful general Robert E. Lee. The geography of appalachia provided the North with the edge that they needed to take the battle which, in turn, shaped the outcome of the Civil War. Wars are an important part of history that have shaped the way we live today. War has many factors that decide the winner and the loser, and geography is one that should not be forgotten.

Geography has caused aided many armies to victory, and taken many armies to defeat. Appalachian geography varies much over its large span and proved to be a major factor. The Battle of Gettysburg was a pivotal battle that the North won, due to the large hills that they used to their advantage. Should that geographical advantage be taken away, odds are that the South, outnumbering the North, would have won that battle and changed history. This leads to the question, did Appalachian geography have an affect on the Civil War?