

## ON CIVIL WAR TURNING POINTS

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With the understandable motive of wanting to weave compelling narratives, historians generally seem to delight in designating turning points (TPs). For academically unsupported reasons, Civil War experts widely seem to enjoy it even more, or at least feel an urgency to categorize key moments. This paper analyzes Civil War TPs from both contemporary and modern stances. Its goal is to offer criteria for determining TPs and propose a streamlined list of them that better reflects shifts in the war's momentum.

From the literature and a casual online search of "Civil War turning points" one finds more than ten results and after a few selections they start to repeat. One can hardly watch a Civil War lecture on C-Span without hearing of yet another, as if each historian must punctuate his speech by stating, "This was a turning point of the Civil War." It seems to lend a note of authority and gravitas to their exposition. Their examples usually seem logical yet not all can be truly significant; if they were, thirteen TPs for a war that lasted four years would yield one approximately every 3.5 months. It is as if the narrative were on a moving train with these moments whizzing by like crossing bells in a 1930's movie. Is it reasonable for a conflict of only four years on one continent to acquire such a frequency of TPs? Does it indicate that historians and authors have no guidelines for their determination? Or do scholars disgorge them because they sound compelling, which of course renders meaningless the accumulation of TPs?

This paper proposes a new way of looking at Civil War TPs. It draws on aspects of the definition and from a World War II (WWII) book on a similar topic, *The Ninety Days: Five Battles that Changed the World*. Comparisons to other conflicts will highlight the need for tighter controls on what is designated a Civil War TP, and suggest that, based on geography and scale, individual incidents are insufficient to fill the role. Although it will propose a period in the war that best matches the number of TPs in others, it will not attempt to refute individual TPs that appear in various sources; the reader is instead invited to compare those events to the criteria proposed herein.

For comparisons, this paper correlates actions and persons to those in other wars, a technique uncommon in Civil War historiography with the notable exceptions of works by Fletcher Pratt and John Keegan. But this approach can often help cast new light on Civil War topics and serve to explain them better than in isolation. Although many historians think that the American Civil War was fought in a historical vacuum and is unique among world conflicts with *absolutely* no comparison, the similarities are there if one is willing to both look and accept what they reveal.

### **WHAT IS A TURNING POINT?**

A standard definition for "turning point" would include instances when a very significant change occurs, decisive moments, and times when the course of events is altered to a different path than initially perceived. Included also are historical occurrences involving a country or large population which swiftly change their traditional pattern of behavior or order. This is especially true for events considered important for general human history, such as the invention of the wheel or discovery of penicillin. In

these cases the state of mankind after the event is significantly different from before it. Also in such circumstances, the point results in a one-way change, i.e., no one can un-invent the wheel or un-discover penicillin. (2)

Another feature about TPs is that they require the benefit of hindsight and are not always obvious to observers of the time. (3) The Battles of Gettysburg in July 1863 and Midway in June 1942 were considered significant when they occurred, but each war took years before ending. It was only with time and hindsight that later observers realized their lasting effect as TPs. In particular, the status of scientific breakthroughs such as penicillin or the invention of the transistor is often obscured, often even to their discoverers. This is one reason that academic Nobel Prizes are sometimes awarded decades after publication of the original research: for example, one winner of the 2005 prize in economics published his theory in 1960.

A lag between an event and its historical impact might exist and must also be considered. Sometimes advancements require the actions of others years later to reach socio-cultural fruition. Despite its discovery by Alexander Fleming in 1928, and although seeing limited medical use in England throughout the 1930s, the penicillin bacterium was not produced industrially for almost 15 years until the United States (U.S) did so for WWII.

War, however, imposes additional criteria. The balance can swing back and forth between combatants until one side wins. Therefore, definitions involving "significant change" or "decisive moment" might be incomplete. Does the declaration of a TP involve a victory at the start for the side that eventually loses, or only an event that

changes the balance of the war and presages its conclusion, i.e., when it becomes clear to the historian that one side will win and does?

Regarding war, what is not necessarily a TP? Clearly, not every large engagement qualifies even if it sets a record for size or casualties. For instance, the Battle of the Ardennes in WWII, known as the Battle of the Bulge, from December 1944 to January 1945, was the largest battle ever fought by the U.S. Army. However, it is not normally cited as a TP, mainly because Germany was losing on all fronts prior to the battle; therefore, there was no situation to turn around. Therefore, it delayed, *but did not cause*, Germany's surrender four months later. The Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862 was another big battle. But other than keeping the Federals out of Richmond, it accomplished almost nothing for either side despite the combined 18,000 casualties.

Not every critical battle is a TP, either. The battle for Tarawa, one of the Gilbert Islands, in November 1943 is an example. Although vitally important, by WWII standards it was a small battle. It lasted only four days and involved about 40,000 men on both sides on an area less than half the size of Central Park in New York City. Its airfields provided cover for the invasion of the Marshall Islands, which had to be taken before even later operations in the Marianas Islands. In addition, the U.S. Marine Corps and the Navy analyzed each aspect of the operation—tactics, bombardment, timing, equipment, communications, and so forth—to improve the many landings still to come. But it is not considered a TP, as the war still had almost two years to go.

Neither are decisive battles, in the true sense that the victor is clear, necessarily TPs. The engagements on all the Pacific Islands certainly qualify—Tarawa, Saipan, and Iwo Jima, to name a few. Yet none of these has so far been deemed a TP. Similarly,

Second Manassas in August 1862 and Chancellorsville in May 1863 offered no doubt as to the winner. None of these are cited as TPs for either war because the overarching flow of the conflict was unchanged after each of them. An extreme example is the Battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812. It was fought on in January 1815 three weeks after the Treaty of Ghent was signed ending the war: though decisive, it had absolutely no effect on the war which had already ended formally.

Opening battles are also not good candidates for TPs for many reasons. First, a war must begin somewhere, so labeling them as TPs would be a distinction with no meaning. Second, one side winning the opening battle does not necessarily start a trend that leads directly to victory, especially if the war is long. Finally, their victors do not necessarily win wars, and rarely from any direct result of that initial win. For example, in the American Revolutionary War (ARW), Lexington and Concord in April 1775, although they stand tall in American history, are not listed as TPs. Pearl Harbor, the opening battle for the U.S. in WWII, and a terrific defeat, is a curious exception here: in the context of the six-year war that started in 1939, its entry was a colossal boost for the Allied cause.

Technical advancements or inventions in war are not automatic TPs. Ships clad with iron were made in England and France before the Civil War, but had not been used in combat. The Battle of Hampton Roads in March 1862 between the Federal *Monitor* and the Confederate *Virginia* was the first between two ironclads: significant, but not considered a TP. It changed nothing strategically, simply confirming the *status quo* of the Federal blockade squadron dominating Hampton Roads. However, as a TP in naval warfare in general, it is paramount. Similarly, mating the American P-51 fighter with the

British Rolls Royce Merlin engine was a significant technical innovation that converted the P-51 from a good plane with limitations to a dominating fighter. Although the technical advancement is important, its offensive use in the skies over Germany is what turned the tide of the air war to the Allies' favor.

Finally, there is the grandest invention of the war, the atomic bomb. No one in 1940 could have predicted the technological advancements in any military or naval field during the war, but the atomic bomb was clearly a colossal leap in science and technology. Yet, the dropping of these devastating weapons in August 1945 is not considered a TP because the Japanese Empire was essentially spent. The Japanese Imperial Navy was mostly destroyed, its merchant fleet lay at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, and fleets of American of B-29s roamed at will over Japan; armadas of U.S. surface ships even shelled targets on the Japanese coast. Whereas the bombs did help the emperor decide to end the war, they were dropped when the empire was running on fumes. While similar to the ironclads in that they are not considered a TP, in the context of the Cold War and its aftermath, the development and use of atomic bombs were certainly more paramount to world history.

Within their analyses, historians should look at a conflict and the pendulum of advantage and disadvantage to determine honestly and academically what are its TPs. This is more difficult than it appears. The multitude of data available to the modern historian associated with events today—written, photographic, financial, even opinion polls—is not available for, say the Thirty Years War in the 1600s or the Panic of 1797. (4) Whereas it is not certain what criteria anyone uses to determine TPs, as they are indeed both subjective and undisciplined, what is clear is that historians declare events as

TPs to assign significance. (5) This is perhaps the only thing about them that one can state confidently. Another statement is that TPs adhere to the standard of definition employed by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart when confronted with defining pornography: “I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material . . . but I know it when I see it.” (6)

### **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The first historical perspective is that of the veterans who fought, saw their comrades die, returned to the battlefields, and later built their monuments. They knew what they did and what it meant. They must have a say in this. Their monumentation speaks for itself. There should be no doubt that Civil War combatants thought the two most important battles were Gettysburg and Vicksburg: each National Park contains over 1300 statues, buildings, and other structures. Battlefield parks for other engagements contain scores of such monumentation but nowhere near these numbers.

On the surface, therefore, both Gettysburg and Vicksburg seem like good candidates for TPs, and the disagreement among historians between them affirms this. Some think that Vicksburg is *the* TP because it split the Confederacy in half and others think that Gettysburg is *the* TP because it stopped the Army of Northern Virginia and saved Washington. In addition to their obvious military aspects—one army surrendered and another defeated—both events had psychological impacts on the populations of North and South, with the Mississippi River open and the North invigorated. Historians have argued both sides convincingly.

But why the disagreement? Part of the reason lies with each historian's area of interest, East or West, and the desire to emphasize that part of the war. An associated reason is perhaps a corresponding ignorance of the sector of less expertise, so authorities familiar with the Western Sector might not be as learned of the Eastern. One unsavory reason might be hubris, where a historian highlights a certain part of the war that seems so important to him that he labels it a TP.

Two good historical reasons exist for the disagreement: one temporal, the other systemic. The first is the coincidence of the Confederate retreat from Gettysburg and the surrender of Vicksburg, both occurring on July 4, 1863. With a large temporal separation, say on the order of months, one could see clearly the event with the larger impact. Overlapping as they do, this is almost impossible. Another reason is the failure to look at the war as a whole, to maintain a parochial perch on one's view of the war. A later section, *Analysis of Civil War Turning Points*, covers these insufficiencies and offers a solution. Otherwise, to understand why thirteen TPs might be considered excessive, a comparison with the historical determination of other American wars is instructive.

Four American wars should be handled first. The War of 1812 involved three entities, the United States, England, and the Indian allies of both sides. It lasted two-and-one-half years and involved no more than approximately 100,000 regulars in the two major armies, with the Indians and militias adding approximately the same number of men to both sides. There were major battles on land, and on lakes bordering Canada, and the British burned Washington, but there was no overt TP on the order of a Stalingrad during the duration of the war. (Fort McHenry occurred after Washington was burned, so it prevented nothing, and British forces left for New Orleans.) And, as mentioned

previously, the battle that might have been a turning point was the Battle of New Orleans, but this occurred after the treaty was signed rendering its influence inert. The Spanish-American War lasted only six months with no Spanish victories, a difficult situation for any TP assignment.

The other two wars are Korea and Vietnam, at approximately three and fourteen years (for U.S. involvement), respectively. Unlike the other wars with clear military objectives where victory was the defeat or capitulation of the opponent, these wars had limited political objectives consistent with the policy of containment (of Communism) prevalent during the Cold War. These limited political objectives and close oversight from Washington resulted in severe constraints on how the military could conduct the war. The limits on where the war would extend (no bombing China during the Korean War) and the weapons allowed (no atomic weapons in either conflict) cause comparisons with the others to be difficult and unfair. They are therefore not included in the tally of turning points.

The ARW lasted 7.5 years and was concentrated mostly in the thirteen colonies east of the Appalachian Mountains. It involved three major combatants, England, the Colonies, and France, and no more than 100,000 soldiers on both sides. It serves as an example of parsimony in the historical determination of its TPs. What appears in books, Internet searches, and in classrooms across the country is only one event, the Battle of Saratoga in October 1777. Others of import were the Battle of Trenton in December 1776, the Battle of Monmouth in 1778, and the British southern campaigns starting in 1778. The result of Trenton was to push the British and Hessians out of New Jersey, but they still held New York and much of the coast. The Continental Army was still

untrained in European battle tactics and would be unable to meet the British in major battles without them. Monmouth was the first engagement in which the Colonials used modern European tactics learned from General Frederick von Steuben at Valley Forge the previous winter, but the battle did not push the British out of New York. The southern campaigns were an attempt to suppress the rebellion by appealing to and enlisting Loyalists in the southern colonies. A series of smaller engagements led the British to retreat to Yorktown where they eventually surrendered to a combined American-French army in October 1781. Saratoga, however, stands as the clear winner in the field.

World War I (WWI) is another conflict for which the judgment of its TPs is economical or even penurious given its parameters. It lasted about 4.5 years and engulfed most of Europe and parts of the Middle East, involving 22 combatant nations and upwards of 70 million soldiers. Yet TPs are difficult to find and hardly conclusive: there is no manifest offering of a Gettysburg or Midway here. Like the Civil War, it was largely a land war, but there is no clear winner either on land or sea. The fighting on the more important Western Front reached an early stalemate. And despite possessing large sections of trenches and idle armies, the Eastern Front involved more maneuver than the Western Front and many battles, but produced no knockout punch. The Russian Revolution, which *removed* a combatant, is often listed as a TP—debatable, despite its solid status as a TP in world history—as is the entry of the U.S., which *added* a combatant inconclusively.

The Battle of Jutland was the war's largest naval battle: its result was that the German High Seas Fleet never again ventured out to meet the Royal Navy's Grand Fleet. Thus, with neither force destroyed, it merely confirmed the stalemate between the two

powers. The U.S. entered the war too late to bring its industrial might to as full force as it would 25 years later, but its entrance tipped the balance. It was the combination of starvation of the people among the Central Powers and the addition of potentially two million American soldiers to the Western Front that forced Germany to sue for peace. So WWI brings two TPs to the table: the Russian Revolution and the entry of the United States.

World War II, on the other hand, presents particular hurdles in determining TPs. The first is that the U.S. did not enter when it started. Because fighting had already started in its two major theaters, Asia in 1931 and then Europe in 1939, the Pearl Harbor attack could be seen as a TP in the overall conflict. The second hurdle is that America's enemies in the Atlantic and the Pacific operated for the most part independently: the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor surprised the Germans too. This, and the size of the operational areas in each theater, caused America to prosecute the war almost independently in these regions. They of course were connected in the Germany First policy of President Franklin Roosevelt and subsequent allocation of resources. But in truth, the invasion of North Africa in October 1942 had no impact on the battle of Guadalcanal, and it does not appear in the list below using the six-year period from 1939 to 1945.

At its furthest extent, WWII lasted about 14 years and engulfed most of the planet in some form or another. It involved 25 major combatant nations and over 120 million soldiers total. The U.S. was involved from December 1941 to September 1945, less than four years. It involved tremendous campaigns and battles on land, at sea, and in the air. For instance, the 8th Air Force in its campaign against Germany from 1942 to

1945 suffered more combat deaths than the entire U.S. Marine Corps. Different durations and separate theaters—Africa, Europe, Atlantic, Pacific, and China-India-Burma—beyond the two coasts complicate the determination of TPs:

1. Great Britain and France declare war (Europe, 1939)
2. The Battle of Britain (Europe, 1940)
3. The Battle of Moscow (Europe, 1941)
4. Pearl Harbor (Pacific, 1941)
5. The Battle of Midway (Pacific, 1942)
6. The Battle of Guadalcanal (Pacific, 1942-3)
7. The Battle of Stalingrad (Europe, 1942)
8. The Battle of Kursk (Europe, 1943)
9. Allies hunt U-Boats (Europe, 1943)
10. Long range escort fighters (Europe, 1944)
11. D-Day (Europe, 1944)

The reader should note the following:

1. Only three of the 11 WWII TPs involve the Pacific Theater, an indication of both Allied priority to first defeat Germany and Italy and historical emphasis on this part of the conflict. Pearl Harbor is listed not because it was a Japanese victory, but because it brought a dominant force into the global conflict: in this sense it is similar to the WWI TP of U.S. entry. Midway stopped the Japanese advance, but did not result immediately in offensive operations against them. This waited for Guadalcanal, in August 1942, which lasted six months and involved numerous naval battles around the island, the result of which was the true end of Japanese expansion in the Pacific.

2. Only one of the 11 TPs is an Axis victory, namely, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, which could be stated alternately "The U.S. enters the war."

3. Three of the TPs are Soviet victories over the Germans: Moscow, Stalingrad, and Kursk. The Russian front was responsible for most German combat deaths, upwards of 90%. Soviet deaths, military and civilian, total officially about 20 million, but the real number is unknown. Albert Speer, Hitler's architect and armaments minister, wrote, "Our enemies rightly regarded this disaster at Stalingrad as a turning point in the war." (7)

Correspondingly, only one TP is a non-Soviet land victory, D-Day, reflecting the relatively short duration (compared to the Russian front) from the invasion to victory in Europe 11 months later. One could argue that Kursk is the only TP among the three because afterwards, the Germans were on the strategic defensive against the Russians, which is not true for Moscow and Stalingrad.

4. Curiously, one TP is technological, long-range escort fighters, referring to the development and deployment of the American P-51 Mustang fitted with the British Rolls Royce Merlin engine. This weapon made possible the defeat of the German Luftwaffe and consequently led to American air dominance on D-Day. Note further that the technological TP is *not* the atomic bomb.

5. Except for Pearl Harbor, no TP involves a starting battle or an initial invasion. For example, not included is the German invasion of Poland or the start of Operation Barbarossa, which culminated in The Battle of Moscow. Those on the list are the results of invasions: England and France entering the war, ensuring that it would expand far beyond a bilateral conflict and that the German defeat outside Moscow.

6. No TP involves a specific person, military or political. For instance, there is no "General Georgi Zhukov assumes command of all Soviet forces" or "General Erwin Rommel dies." Despite their historical importance, no WWII political figure or general appears to receive the unbridled adulation of historians as do corresponding Civil War personalities, especially General Thomas Jackson. To their credit, WWII historians seem to seldom succumb to anyone's aura or mystique. World War II, with 120 million soldiers and two oceans was simply too large to be affected by one person. A candidate here could be "The election of Franklin Roosevelt for a third term" based on subsequent passage of the Lend Lease Act and the overall military preparedness he established prior to Pearl Harbor. This, however, is not on the list, which looks complete.

### **CIVIL WAR TURNING POINTS**

The most commonly cited turning points are (8):

1. Confederate victory in First Battle of Bull Run (July 1861)
2. Confederate invasion of Kentucky (September 1861)
3. Union capture of Forts Henry and Donelson (February 1862)
4. Union capture of New Orleans (April 1862)
5. General Lee assumes command of Army of Northern Virginia (1862)
6. Union victory in Battle of Antietam (September 1862)
7. Stonewall Jackson's death (May 1863)
8. Union victory in Battle of Gettysburg (July 1863)
9. Union capture of Vicksburg (July 1863)
10. Union victory in Third Battle of Chattanooga (November 1863)

11. Grant's appointment as Union general-in-chief (March 1864)
12. Union capture of Atlanta (September 1864)
13. Lincoln's reelection (November 1864)

The reader should note the following:

1. Of the thirteen TPs, only three refer to Southern accomplishment: one early victory (Bull Run), one early campaign (Invasion of Kentucky), and one command change (Lee). This means that the list of TPs appears to have avoided usage as a vehicle by Southern apologists for rewriting the war in favor of the Confederacy. One can question, however, whether a small starting battle (Bull Run) and a blunted invasion (Kentucky) really count as TPs.

2. Jackson's death as a TP relies on the baseless and unverifiable assumption that had he lived, he would have attacked and taken Cemetery Hill two months later at Gettysburg. This assertion can never be proved, although advocates continue to maintain its veracity to this day for a purpose which remains unclear.

3. The nine remaining TPs refer to Union accomplishment, which makes sense because the North won. The last six TPs starting with Gettysburg in 1863 represent this trend; excluding the invalid TP of Jackson's death, the string of Union accomplishment reaches back to Antietam in 1862. The analysis of each year of the war below explains this.

4. None of these points, however, answers the question of what was *the* single turning point of the war. This can be determined with the benefit of hindsight, however, on which hinges the determination of TPs.

A tabulation of TPs in the four wars previously discussed yields the data in Table

1. The parameters chosen, duration, countries, and soldiers, appeared to be obvious metrics common to the description of all conflicts. They also have the benefit of being readily available.

HISTORICAL DATA				COMPUTED VALUES		
WAR	DURATION (YEARS)	MAJOR COUNTRIES INVOLVED	SOLDIERS (MILLIONS)	TPs	TPs/ YEAR	TPs / MILLION SOLDIERS
ARW	7.5	3	0.1	1	0.13	10.00
CW	4.0	2	3.2	<b>13</b>	<b>3.25</b>	<b>4.06</b>
WWI	4.5	22	70.0	2	0.44	0.03
WWII	6.0	25	120.0	11	1.83	0.09

**Table 1. Statistical comparison of Civil War turning points to other U.S. Wars**

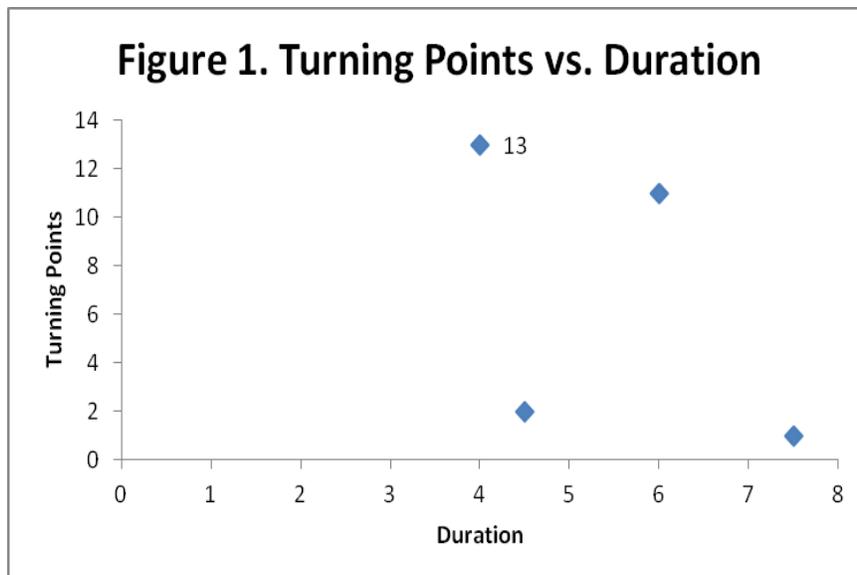
The numbers in bold show how the determination of Civil War TPs is skewed upward. One must first accept the TP/Million Soldiers value of 10.00 for the ARW as an arithmetic anomaly. If a war should have a minimum of one TP, then the number of soldiers is irrelevant. In the case of the ARW, the number of soldiers is surprisingly small when compared to the other wars and produces a skewed value for this parameter. This is unavoidable but does require explanation.

Other than this anomaly, the values for the two world wars appear consistent both in the rate of TPs per year and per the number of soldiers. They are within reasonable bounds and any multiplicative difference can be explained. For instance, although the number of soldiers involved in WWII is not quite double that of WWI, the number of TPs

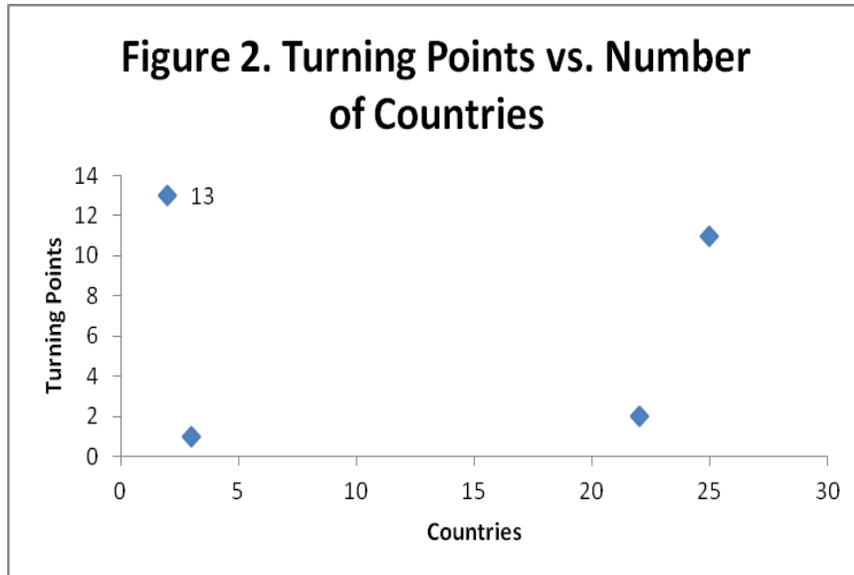
is fivefold. A partial explanation is that WWII was a much more mobile war than was WWI. The well-known WWI Western Front in France, where the outcome was eventually decided, was relatively static for most of the conflict. Automotive transport was relatively new, and tanks and airplanes were still in their infancy as weapons, and most transport was on foot. The technological advances in ships, cannons, and machine guns made this war more lethal but not more rapid. The rest of the explanation is stated above: the far-reaching extent of WWII with essentially two separate wars in two major theaters, the Atlantic and the Pacific.

Simple graphs can be drawn from the data in Table 1. The Civil War point appears on each graph along with its value of 13. For each graph, one can imagine a straight line through the three points and the origin (0,0) to best represent the three points. Using this, one might estimate the expected number of Civil War TPs.

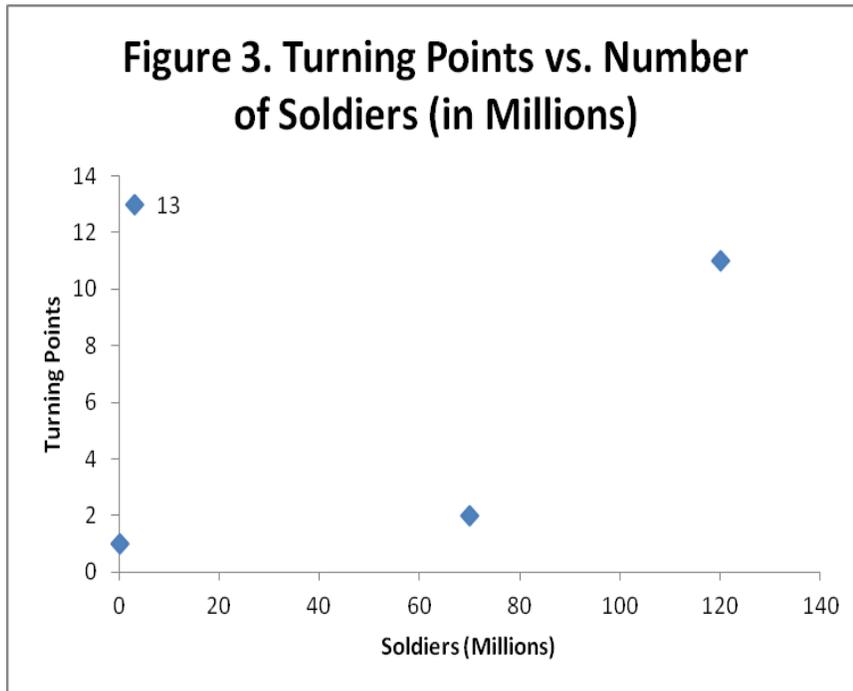
1. Number of TPs versus Duration (Figure 1). At duration of four years, the expected Civil War value would be approximately four TPs.



2. Number of TPs versus Major Countries Involved (Figure 2). At two major countries, the expected Civil War value would be approximately one TP.



3. Number of TPs versus Number of Soldiers (Figure 3). The values for the ARW (.1 million and 1 TP) skew the graph away from the origin, but they must be included for completeness. Given this, at 3 million soldiers, the expected Civil War value would be approximately one TP.



Averaging the CW expected values (4, 1, and 1) produces an expected number between two or three, far less than the thirteen found from texts and online. As shown above, the number of TPs ascribed to this war is far greater. One must ask if the Civil War really merits the number of TPs that it has acquired from historians over the years and whether those that have been offered are legitimate.

### AN ALTERNATE APPROACH

The book *The Ninety Days: Five Battles that Changed the World* by Thomas N. Carmichael attacks this problem for WWII and offers an interesting resolution. As stated above, because of scale and geography, it is difficult to name *the* single TP for the war. Carmichael recognizes this and offers not a single TP but a *period* after which the course

of the war was decided. Before this period the Axis powers had the momentum; after, the Allies had and never lost it. He writes:

"Thus, on October 4, 1942, the world stage was set for the ninety-day drama that would literally determine the course of civilization. The purpose of this book is to show how the tide dramatically and inexorably turned against the Axis during that period." (9)

"At the end of those ninety days, by January 1, 1943, it would be a very different war." (10)

This ninety-day period included five major engagements, the sum of which, and not one individually, changed the momentum of the war:

1. Guadalcanal — Invaded on August 7, 1942, by U.S. Marines, who resisted numerous land and seaborne attempts by the Japanese to expel them. By the end of the period Japanese high command prepared to evacuate all land forces from the island, leaving the lower Solomon Island chain to the Americans.

2. El Alamein — On October 23, 1942, the British 8th Army assaulted the German Afrika Corps in a massive set piece attack. This battle, which lasted three weeks and in which the Germans were defeated with staggering losses in men and armor, started their retreat from Egypt westward across North Africa.

3. Operation Torch — The Americans landed in western North Africa on November 8, 1942. With the British moving toward them, this invasion formed a pincer with the retreating Germans in the middle. By the end of the period, the Germans were trapped in Tunis and surrendered in May 1943.

4. Stalingrad — Germany's second major invasion of Russia started on June 28, 1942. The 6th Army reached Stalingrad in late August, starting a street battle for the city in which the Soviet army fought fiercely for every yard. They counterattacked on

November 19, 1942, and within a week completely surrounded the 6th Army. By the end of the period, the Russian winter and forces had repelled all German attempts to save their trapped men, who surrendered in February 1943.

5. The Barents Sea — On December 22, 1942, convoy JW.51B comprising 14 transports and a naval escort, sailed from Scotland with Murmansk, Russia, as its destination. On December 30, its escort of two cruisers and five destroyers repelled an attack from a small fleet of German surface craft which included one pocket battleship, one heavy cruiser, and six destroyers. No merchant ship was damaged, and they continued on safely to Murmansk. (11)

The reader should note the following:

1. Of the five engagements, only one occurred in the Pacific Theater, Guadalcanal, and the rest in the war against Hitler. This is understandable given the Allied priority of Germany First and the relative strength of the Japanese Navy and the U.S. Navies eight months after Pearl Harbor. Note that it is *not* Midway.

2. The contention is sound that at the end of the ninety-day period, the war was different. For both Germany and Japan, the conflict thenceforth was defensive. It is true that both made large countermoves in the ensuing two and a half years—Kursk, the Bulge, and Leyte Gulf come to mind—but these actions delayed, at great loss to both sides, the eventual Allied victories.

3. The start of the period, October 4, 1942, is slightly more than one month after the midpoint of the war. This is ten months after Pearl Harbor, when the mobilization of American manpower and industry was just starting to hit its stride, a trend that culminated in industrial production of a quantity and quality undreamed of in 1940. If

one considers the start of the war in September 1939, this period begins just over one month after its exact midpoint.

4. Only two of the commonly cited TPs appear in Carmichael's list, Guadalcanal and Stalingrad. One might guess that such an important period would include standard TPs, but it might be considered unexpected for such a small number to appear. One of his choices, the Barents Sea, has the highest potential to surprise novices who do not know that the Battle of the Atlantic was the longest of the entire conflict, extending over the entire six years. Its importance is understated and often ignored, but the entire war depended on defeating German U-Boats.

5. The variety of combatants, theaters, and battle types (sea, land, and air) confirms the aforementioned list of problems with determining TPs. World War II is simply too big to find one action that can be called *the* turning point.

### **ANALYSIS OF CIVIL WAR TURNING POINTS**

One can apply Carmichael's concept to the Civil War with reasonable result. Parallels between the Civil War and WWII support this approach:

1. The size of the country dictated that two massive armies would never meet in one colossal battle to slug it out and determine the victor. The distances involved are Washington, D.C. to Santa Fe, New Mexico, over 1,800 miles; Washington, D.C., to New Orleans, Louisiana, over 1,000 miles. By comparison, the distance from Lisbon, Portugal, to Moscow, Russia, is around 2,400 miles and crossed eight or nine countries in the 1860s.

2. Geography dictated the primary operational areas: the Mississippi and the proximity of the capital cities, Washington and Richmond. Like the two major independent WWII theaters, for the Civil War this resulted in two major areas of operation: Virginia and elsewhere. The vast area west of the Mississippi was called the Trans-Mississippi, which witnessed many battles, including some important ones like Pea Ridge, but the number of forces committed there by both sides meant that the overall conflict would not be won there.

3. Further, both the North and South were divided into military departments, each with its own commander. For most of the war, each operated independently with almost no synchronization. Whereas in the North this ended with the appointment of Ulysses Grant as commander-in-chief of the army in March 1864, the South never achieved the same level of control or coordination.

If the Civil War, therefore, lends itself to a TP period similar to that proposed by Carmichael for WWII, then the next task is to determine it by finding a period after which the victor was clear. A good way to do this is to draw the temporal extent of each major campaign on a line for the year it occurred, as shown in Figure 4. Then analyze each campaign as to the attacker and victor to determine in which year the balance of victories tips to one side. (Two samples are highlighted in red to distinguish them from the background calendar.)

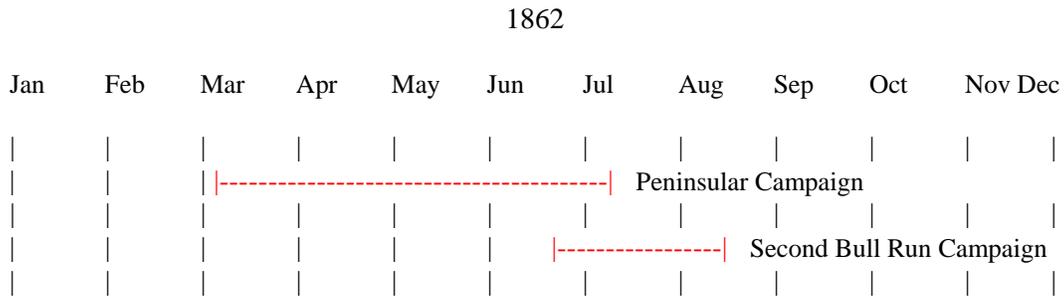


Figure 4. Example of calendar depiction of military campaigns.

Drawing every major campaign over all four years and "stacking" the years produces a diagram similar to a Gantt chart for project schedules with lines, some overlapping as shown above, for different activities. One may use a single chart for the entire war or two, one for the Eastern Theater and the other for the Western. Fortuitously, *The Civil War Dictionary* does the latter on its two inner covers. (12)

It is clear from Lieutenant Colonel Mark Boatner's two diagrams that militarily, 1861 and 1865 produce no TPs. The year 1861 holds only four activities: First Bull Run, Wilson's Creek, Lexington, and Belmont, and none offers anything approaching a TP. By 1865 the only two major operations are the Army of the Potomac in Virginia and Sherman's campaign in the Carolinas. These are clearly Federal initiatives, and the war of course ended in April and May 1865 as different Confederate armies surrendered to Federal forces.

The year 1862 offers the largest number of major campaigns and it ended with no clear indicator of the final victor. The list in Table 2 illustrates this mixture of initiative and failure.

<b>THEATER</b>	<b>START MONTH</b>	<b>1862 CAMPAIGN</b>	<b>ATTACKER</b>	<b>VICTOR</b>
Eastern	March	Peninsular	Federals	Confederates
Eastern	May	Jackson's Valley	Confederates	Confederates
Eastern	June	Second Bull Run	Federals	Confederates
Eastern	September	Antietam	Confederates	Federals*
Eastern	October	Fredericksburg	Federals	Confederates
Western	February	Forts Henry, Donelson	Federals	Confederates
Western	March	Shiloh	Federals**	Federals
Western	May	Advance on Corinth	Federals	Federals
Western	June	Advance on Chattanooga	Federals	Confederates
Western	March, April, May	Pea Ridge, New Orleans, and Operations North to Vicksburg	Federals	Federals
Western	August	Bragg's offensive to Tennessee	Confederates	Federals
Western	October	Grant's first offensive to Vicksburg	Federals	Confederates

**Table 2. Campaigns in 1862 listed chronologically by start month in each theater.**

\*Depending on the source, Antietam is sometimes argued a draw. However, because Lee ended his northward invasion after this battle, this analysis treats it as a Federal victory.

\*\*Although the Confederates attacked at Shiloh, it was in response to the Federal campaign; therefore, the Attacker is listed as Federals.

The year 1862 saw an array of battles of unexpected magnitude and horror that stunned both soldier and civilian of both sides, but did little to resolve the military situation. Counts of the Attacker and Victor columns in Table 2 highlight this:

Attacker Federal	= 9	Victor Federal	= 5
Attacker Confederate	= 3	Victor Confederate	= 7

These numbers show that the North was manifestly on the offensive with three times the number of offensives as the South. However, increased offense did not produce commensurate victories. Despite overwhelming resources, the North ended behind in successful campaigns by two. The chart shows also that the South won four of five offensives in the East, but in the West the North won four and the South, three, indicating that Lincoln was correct in looking there for hope. The year 1862 saw the North striving to end the rebellion and the South succeeding in preventing this.

The year 1863 offers fewer campaigns than 1862 but Union objectives become clear, especially in the West. The list in Table 3 illustrates this concentration of force.

<b>THEATER</b>	<b>START MONTH</b>	<b>1863 CAMPAIGN</b>	<b>ATTACKER</b>	<b>VICTOR</b>
Eastern	April	Chancellorsville	Federals	Confederates
Eastern	June	Gettysburg	Confederates	Federals
Eastern	October	Bristoe Station	Confederates	Federals
Eastern	November	Mine Run	Federals	Confederates
Western	October 1863	Vicksburg	Federals	Federals
Western	March	Port Hudson	Federals	Federals
Western	August	Chickamauga	Federals	Confederates
Western	August	Knoxville	Federals	Federals
Western	September	Chattanooga	Federals	Federals

**Table 3. Campaigns in 1863 listed chronologically by start month in each theater.**

One could call the situation in the East after Gettysburg a stalemate. Lee was in Virginia, but General Longstreet and two of his divisions were supporting the Army of Tennessee in the Chickamauga campaign. Lee and General Meade met briefly at Bristoe Station and Mine Run, but after Gettysburg, which depleted both armies, the East saw no major campaigns through that year. In the West, however, the situation was different. The first part of the year saw constant action for control of the Mississippi. This ended with the surrender of Vicksburg in July. The axis of advance then moved to Tennessee, the capture of which brought the Federals closer to Georgia and the industrial and rail center of Atlanta. Counts of the Attacker and Victor columns in Table 3 highlight this:

Attacker Federal = 7                      Victor Federal = 6

Attacker Confederate = 2                      Victor Confederate = 3

These numbers show that the North was beginning to exert military influence on the South which was more on the defensive. The chart shows also that the North and South equal with two victories in the East and that the North won four of five in the West, indicating that Northern military capability had improved but was not yet overwhelming. The year 1863 saw the North the eventual winner with almost all industrial and military capabilities in place, but with no apparent plan for victory.

The year 1864 offers six campaigns, five of which are Federal, far fewer than the previous two years. The difference in 1864 is that newly promoted Lieutenant General Grant commands all Union armies. With the Mississippi under Federal control, Grant's plan was to concentrate all military resources of the country into coordinated offensives to defeat the two major armies of the rebellion in Georgia and Virginia. The Red River campaign was ordered by General Henry Halleck before Grant became overall army commander and was not part of Grant's strategy. It is the only campaign that started prior to May 4. It was poorly conceived, planned, and executed, and consequently failed. Hood's invasion of Tennessee after the fall of Atlanta suffered from identical deficiencies, with the additional misfortune of meeting General George Thomas at Nashville. The list in Table 4 illustrates this.

<b>THEATER</b>		<b>1864 CAMPAIGN</b>	<b>ATTACKER</b>	<b>VICTOR</b>
Eastern	May	Petersburg (Army of the James)	Federals	Confederates
Eastern	May	Overland*	Federals	Federals
Eastern	May	Shenandoah Valley	Federals	Federals
Western	March	Red River	Federals	Confederates
Western	May	Atlanta	Federals	Federals
Western	October	Invasion of Tennessee	Confederates	Federals

**Table 4. Campaigns in 1864 listed chronologically by start month in each theater.**

\*The term "Overland" for the campaign against the ANV is not the term Boatner used: this term was substituted because it appears now in general usage.

The year 1864 introduced the Grant's concept of how an industrial country makes war. The strategy was simple: hitting the South with simultaneous offensives so it could not recover in any area and destroying its capacity to make war. Counts of the Attacker and Victor columns in Table 4 highlight this:

Attacker Federal	= 5	Victor Federal	= 4
Attacker Confederate	= 1	Victor Confederate	= 2

These numbers show that the North was manifestly on the offensive on all fronts; however, this clearly did not produce quick victory. The South, not yet overwhelmed, still disputed the issue successfully. However, unlike earlier Confederate victories like Fredericksburg, the two Confederate successes were against two relatively minor attacks.

The aforementioned Red River campaign was an orphan offensive of dubious result, and the first Petersburg campaign was initially part of the overall Federal offensive in May but was poorly led by General Benjamin Butler, quickly trapped in the Bermuda Hundred peninsula by a relatively small number of Confederates. By now, the Federal army could work around them and continue, which is what happened when Grant crossed the James River toward Petersburg in June 1864.

Although progress was slow and for long periods in stalemate, the only thing that could thwart a Union victory would be public opinion or the presidential election. Because the North indubitably and decisively held the military initiative, 1864 is not a fertile ground for TPs. The evidence, therefore, appears to favor 1863 as the year holding *the* TP of the war, whatever that is.

Once again, despite the disagreement among historians, the Gettysburg-Vicksburg combination (GVC) appears to be the best candidate for the war's TP. However, any proposed solution must address the two aforementioned reasons for their dispute, namely, their coincidence and the need to look systemically at the war. Carmichael's approach in *The Ninety Days* leads to a possible resolution that is not that difficult to apply to the Civil War. Just as his three-month period included only one standard TP, Stalingrad, it is necessary to look around the GVC for a battle that showed either Federal superiority or Confederate inferiority. The only major engagement before the GVC is Chancellorsville, a Confederate victory that embarrassed General Joseph Hooker and sent the AOP back across the Rapidan River; however, Lee failed to destroy the Federal Army. If the direct aftermath of this battle was the Southern initiative that

resulted in Gettysburg, then the search prior to the GVC offers nothing. Therefore, one must look between July 1 and September 30.

The only major battle in this period is Chickamauga, which is a Confederate victory. According to Fletcher Pratt, this battle is far more important than most think, to wit:

"In the last analysis, the rock on which the new republic was split was the Rock of Chickamauga. Technically, the battle was a victory; actually it was a defeat, the most crushing, the most decisive any Southern army suffered." (13)

His reasons: the South chose the ground, its generals were among their best (D. H. Hill, John Bell Hood, Longstreet), and they enjoyed the advantage of General Thomas Wood's mistake. Despite much loss of life, the Federal army was neither destroyed nor crippled. In the end, despite all the Confederate advantages, the battle merely confirmed the Army of the Cumberland's possession of Chattanooga: "Chickamauga really accomplished little more than a confirmation of Gettysburg." (14) It should also be noted that Chickamauga provided Grant's final stepping stone at the Battle of Chattanooga two months later before his promotion to lieutenant general and command of all Federal armies.

This is a novel way of looking at Chickamauga, which is not normally on standard TP lists. Coupled with the GVC, one has a period containing Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and Chickamauga that changed the course of the Civil War. Using Carmichael's words, on July 1, 1863, "the world stage was set for the ninety-day drama that would literally determine the course of civilization." It might not have been exactly

that long, but near the end of this period on September 20, 1863, "it would be a very different war."

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

This paper looked at Civil War turning points, attempting first to generically define a TP and determine if any manifest criteria were followed in naming them. There appears to be none, leaving their determination to the discretion of historians. It then compared the popularly cited Civil War TPs to that of other American conflicts to determine if their number is consistent based on simple guidelines such as duration, countries involved, and the number of soldiers. They are not, and the Civil War has far more TPs than expected based on the parameters.

In addition, this paper adapted a scheme to determine the period where the Civil War changed inexorably, to determine its true turning point. Traditionally, opinion on this paradigm shifts between Gettysburg and Vicksburg, but much of this disagreement arises from parochialism, their perfectly coincident timing, and the lack of a systemic view of the war. This scheme was applied originally to WWII, and under the assumption that the Civil War is comparable to that conflict, it offers an alternative method to assess Civil War turning points.

Analysis of major Civil War campaigns by year shows that this period must occur in 1863, which produces a time frame encompassing Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and Chickamauga. After then, the initiative and major victories swung to the North, a momentum that never reversed. Only three bits of unfinished business remain, two academic, the other historical.

The first is the matter of criteria for declaring a TP. The aforementioned NASA article on them, although emphasizing events space exploration, provides a useful framework for academics to measure proposed TPs. This is especially true for Dr. Launius's ten "Maxims of Turning Points in Space History." (15) Compared to his criteria, it appears that the list of well-known Civil War TPs might have been compiled with no consistent framework. As such, many TPs might result from "amateurish analysis." (16)

The skeptic might contend with some pique that the NASA article is about space and not about the American Civil War. However, just as this conflict can be compared logically to others to force conclusions, indicating that our fight was special but not necessarily unique, the criteria for space TPs (with some modification as indicated above) are more applicable to the Civil War than not. They certainly cannot hurt. Besides, it is unclear what conditions, if any, are used for the declaration of TPs for any period, peacetime or otherwise.

The second bit is an admonition and a plea to avoid academic hubris. Historians should continue to note what is important or critical about events such as battles, but must strive to restrain themselves from declaring a TP just because they think it so. Students of other wars seem to exercise restraint here. The Civil War historian must ask the correct questions about their topic to discern honestly if it meets any criteria, NASA's or not, before defining it as a TP. It is important to restate that what makes an event important might not qualify it as a TP. Jackson's death is an example of this.

The third unfinished item is the matter of reconciling the list of Civil War TPs above with the mathematically expected number. Assuming that the computed expectation is three, candidates for proper TPs are:

1. Union victory in Battle of Gettysburg (July 1863)
2. Union capture of Vicksburg (July 1863)
3. Grant turns south after Battle of the Wilderness (May 1864)

The first two are well-established and have been discussed at length; therefore, no explanation is required. The reason for the last one is simple: more important than Grant's appointment as commander of the army or his plan to coordinate all offensives against the Confederacy is what he did with it, his singular act of not turning back. For the first time, after a hard two-day battle against the ANV, the Army of the Potomac turned south never again to retreat north. Lee knew the meaning of this, and more importantly, so did the Union soldiers.

The list is lacking, however, as the war lasted four years, with the North frustrated for the first two despite its growing strength. To account for this, a good TP candidate is a version of "General Lee assumes command of Army of Northern Virginia (1862)." Reworded to "Confederates victory in Seven Days' Battles (1862)," it provides balance to Grant's turning south in 1864. One could say that the Civil War lasted as long as it did because of Lee and as short as it did because of Grant. A good proposed list is therefore:

1. Confederate victory in Seven Days' Battles (1862)
2. Union victory in Battle of Gettysburg (July 1863)
3. Union capture of Vicksburg (July 1863)

4. Grant turns south after Battle of the Wilderness (May 1864)

However, as discussed above, the dominance of the Gettysburg-Vicksburg combination, with its combined influence on the war as a single TP, provides good reason for considering them as one. The final proposed list, therefore, is reduced to the three predicted by the data above:

1. Confederate victory in Seven Days' Battles (June 1862)
2. Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg (July 1863)
3. Grant turns south after Battle of the Wilderness (May 1864)

This list covers the Confederacy's ascendancy, which lasted roughly through the first two years of the war fueled largely by Lee's brilliance and Northern ineptitude. After this the momentum shifted, with the double Union victories in July 1863. These have each been considered enough of a shift to be the final TP—had the North continued unabated to final victory—but events proved that they are more representative of this period in combination. It took Grant's acuity and determination to fully end the war, as shown in the last TP. This list is simple, compact, and free of minor events that showed promise but eventually led nowhere.

Grant and Lee were outstanding generals, and dedicated, quiet, and unassuming: they wore plain uniforms, thought clearly, and were not given to flourish or flummery. Civil war historians should treat their conflict similarly and retreat from the flourish of proclaiming unnecessary and confusing turning points.

## REFERENCES

Most of the historical information in this paper is of a general nature, and can be found in most works on the subject; therefore, no footnotes are provided for these data.

Footnotes do appear for quotes and for the more obscure items herein.

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