



The Tyrants' Foe

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Military Utility of Railroads

One of the often repeated statements about the conflict of 1861 to 1865 was it bridged the old and modern methods of warfare. One of the aspects of the truth of this statement is the role played by railroads in the war. The use of railroads was new, as the railroad started to become in use through the 1840s and 1850s, linking towns of major importance. This made the supply of armies easier, and facilitated the forming of larger bodies of troops into an army. Previously, in the Napoleonic Wars, the limitations of the amount of supplies that could travel by wagon, and number of wagons that could use existing roads, limited the size of a force that could operate in a geographic area. Therefore when Napoleon needed to move his entire force, it was broken down into Corps d'Armee which could move and maintain the ability to supply themselves via wagon train. The various Corps would then concentrate at the location of a battle, and then once again disperse. Railroads allowed for more supplies to be moved per day.

Both Union and Confederate forces relied on the railroad. The Union had the advantage of the creation of the USMRR (United States Military Rail Road) that followed the various armies in the field. This resulted in a supply terminal at the end of the rail behind the army, and the use of the regimental wagons to then move supplies from the terminal to

the regiments in the field. For the Union, the railroad followed the army. The Confederacy operated at a disadvantage in this instance, and the army was tied to the railroad for supply. This explains much of where Confederate armies had to position themselves and fight. Richmond was more than a capitol; it was an important rail junction. Atlanta was a key rail junction as well. The loss of a rail junction meant that the army had to withdraw to the next location to where it could be supplied.

However the Confederacy did undertake one innovation that was noticed elsewhere by professional soldiers. Confederates routinely traveled by rail. The Texas Brigade illustrated this concept in two important ways. First, units of the Brigade were formed, and then marched to Houston. At Houston, they boarded trains, which took the troops to Richmond, where the Texas Brigade was organized. This saved a tremendous amount of wear on the troops and their equipment. But more importantly, movement by rail saved time. It was this concept that caught the attention of the German General Staff.

In September of 1863, Gen. Lee took a bold risk. He detached a Corps from the Army of Northern Virginia to strengthen the Army of Tennessee. Nine days after departure, these ANV units participated in the battle of Chickamauga, and then returned to Virginia before the Union Army of the Potomac could take advantage of the weakened condition of the ANV. In the modern military parlance, the Confederates had used railroads as a force multiplier. The German General Staff took this lesson from our war to heart and made it a part of their war planning. Captain Justus Scheibert was attached to the Army of Northern Virginia from the Prussian Army (author of *Seven Months in the Rebel States* – English translation), and returned to Prussia with a clear idea of the military utility of railroads.

A separate staff section of the Prussian Army was set up to coordinate the use of railroads for the support of military operations. In wartime, this office would have the authority to schedule and control all train movement within the empire. The office coordinated with the railroad companies and incorporated the capabilities of the railroads into mobilization planning. This was a contrast to the overall Prussian assessment of the North American conflict, which was considered to be incompetently fought by “two armed mobs”.

German military thinking was heavily influenced by the problems posed by a “two front war”, meaning that the German states had strong potential adversaries to the west (France) and the east (Russia). Conflict with one of the adversaries, would tempt the other to attack and take territory from the empire. Thus, the Army had to be capable of fighting two opponents in a large scale war. The Franco Prussian war of 1870 – 1871 was a proof of concept of how railroads could be used to allow the German states to win the two front war. France declared war on Prussia on the 19th of July. By the 10th of August, the German states had mobilized almost 1.2 million men, and almost 500,000 of them had been moved by rail to the French border. Even today, that would be a major feat for any military power.

The German victory in the Franco Prussian War, led to an even greater reliance on railroads for the next war plan. The Germans were certain that France would attack at some time to recover territory lost in the Franco Prussian War, and forming an alliance with Russia would guarantee a two front war. Germany intended to win such a war by use of the railroad, repeating what Gen. Lee had done with the ANV in 1863. The German Army would conduct a surprise sweep through neutral Netherlands and Belgium, outflank the French, and defeat them in weeks (actual combat in the Franco Prussian war lasted a bit over 90 days). Then the French railway system would be commandeered, and the mass of the German Army would be transferred east to fight Russia. German war planners believed it would take some months for Russia to mobilize its army and move it to the border, so if the timetable was met, the German Army would be in place in time to deal with a mobilized Russia, which now faced with French defeat, would be more likely to negotiate a settlement or face defeat by the main force of the German Empire.

An almost standard joke in France during the late 1800s and early 1900s, were German “tourists” in France who seemed fascinated by French railroads. They exhibited great curiosity about the amount of time trains took to get from town to town in France and how many train cars engines could pull. All of this information was built into the German war plan in order to sequence and schedule events. One of the tragedies of the First World War was that the German Army was so locked into the schedule it had set for war, it was able to dictate to the Emperor how many days he had to negotiate a peace settlement before the attack had to take place, or the plan would go off schedule, and the railroads would not be able to deliver the troops to the eastern front in time.

The Texas Rifles – keeping history alive.
Capt. T. Attaway



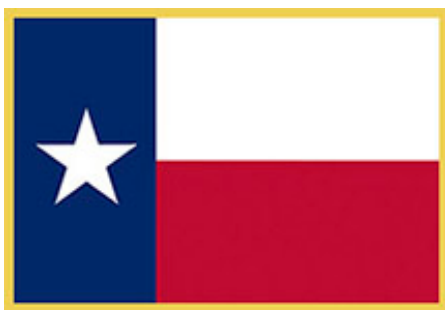
Editor's Note:

Thinking that I had all the articles that were to be submitted I sent out the newsletter early. This was due to the effects of bad birdseed that produced an unwarranted euphoria and belief of ‘mission accomplished’. This article was to be included if I had only followed my own deadline, a controversial move reminiscent of Gen. Sickles at Gettysburg perhaps. – The Crow





Thanks to everyone who contributed to the making of this edition of the Tyrants' Foe Newsletter. Without you it would be nothing. Deadline for submissions for the next newsletter is scheduled for March 31, 2019.



To Tyrants Never Yield

UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Event	Location	Rating	Impression
January 19, 2019	Annual Muster	Winedale, TX	MAX	CS

