

## The Britons who died for the Stars and Stripes: How thousands of volunteers gave their lives in America's Civil War

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- **Submarines, machine guns, bombs... and bloodshed on an epic scale. Now a new book reveals the suffering of soldiers who crossed the Atlantic to fight**

At the height of the battle, sparks from artillery shells lit the underbrush, transforming the scrubby wilderness into a roaring furnace.

Men from both sides of the war were lost, confused and trapped together in a living hell as the scrub pine in the woods flared up with a sickening roar.

Soldiers could see their comrades waving frantically at them from inside the inferno.

The carnage was so horrific that sworn enemies joined forces to rescue the doomed men. Two implacable foes fought together to try to save a trapped youth. 'The fire was all around him,' recalled one.



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**'The dead seemed to be piled heaps upon heaps': The four-year struggle between the North and South cost the lives of 620,000 soldiers and 50,000 civilians**

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They could see his face: 'His eyes were big and blue, and his hair like raw silk surrounded by a wreath of fire. I heard him scream: "Oh Mother, Oh God."'

The two men burned their arms trying to pull him out of the flames and were forced to retreat. They watched helplessly as the screaming boy turned into a human torch.

It was May 1863, two years into the American Civil War, which had pitched President Abraham Lincoln and his anti-slavery North (the Federals) against the pro-slavery South (the Confederates).



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**British volunteer: One man caught up in the carnage was Henry George Hore, an ordinary bank clerk from Sussex who had sailed to the U.S. in April to join the Northern army**

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And this battle — the Battle of Chancellorsville — was meant to be Lincoln's crushing blow against the South. But although the Northern public was thirsting for victory, it did not come that day.

Lincoln's general, hand-picked for the task of crushing the South once and for all, was caught by surprise and his army slaughtered in the impenetrable Virginia woodland known as the Wilderness.

Once in the Wilderness, it was all too easy to become disoriented. Regiments became separated; friend shot friend; troops wandered around in circles with no idea where they were going. And when the scrubland caught fire, the horror was unimaginable.

One man caught up in the carnage was Henry George Hore, an ordinary bank clerk from Sussex who had sailed to the U.S. in April to join the Northern army. He was appalled as he watched the mounting fatalities.

'Good God, my dear girl, it was awful,' he wrote to his cousin, Olivia, back home in England. 'The dead seemed piled heaps upon heaps.'

That day Hore killed a man for the first time. It was a Southerner whom he had seen plunge a sword into the chest of one of his close friends.

'Killing him did not take 30 seconds. I sighted him along the barrel of my revolver and if I had not killed him the first time would have shot him again.'

The American Civil War was unspeakably brutal and the number of casualties unprecedented. The conflict was the first to rely on the deadly technology of modern warfare: submarines, machine guns, aerial surveillance, trains, trenches and land mines.

The four-year struggle between the North and the South would cost the lives of more than 620,000 soldiers and 50,000 civilians.



**Heavy losses: The Battle of Antietam on September, 1862, near Sharpsburg, Maryland, saw the bloodiest day of fighting, between General McClellan's Federals and General Lee's Confederates, with more than 20,000 casualties - many of them British**

Even to this day, the defeated South still bears the emotional scars of the war and its people discuss the war as though it were a recent occurrence.

It is, of course, common knowledge that the origins of the American Civil War lie in slavery — or, more particularly, in the anger of the Southern states at attempts by politicians in the North to block the expansion of slavery in the south.

When the Southern states declared independence from the North, forming themselves into a confederacy, President Lincoln's administration declared their secession illegal — and hostilities between the two sides began on April 12, 1861.

What is far less well known, however, is the pivotal role played by Britain in the war — and that tens of thousands of Britons took part in it, some losing their lives in horrific circumstances, others witnessing levels of carnage and torture they could never have imagined.



**Bloody conflict: Scores of dead were left strewn across the South, where some of the most bitter fighting occurred - but lynch mobs also ran amok in New York**

Officially, Lord Palmerston's Liberal government announced that Britain would remain neutral. It was a decision that incensed both the Federals and the Confederates, each of whom accused Britain of betrayal.

The Federals in the North threatened to invade the British protectorate of Canada in retaliation. The Confederates in the South warned they would withhold all cotton exports to Britain's burgeoning textile industry.

But however much Lord Palmerston tried to keep out of the war, the British people were all too eager to join in.

There were, after all, more than three million British immigrants living in the U.S. at the time — despite the fact that a bitter Anglophobia rooted in British colonial rule almost 100 years earlier was still widespread.



**In memoriam: A statue of President Abraham Lincoln sits atop a statue in Edinburgh commemorating the losses of Scotsmen fighting in the U.S. Civil War**

And at home, not only was slavery a deeply emotive political topic since being abolished in England three decades earlier, but so, too, was cotton. The livelihoods of 900,000 workers — nearly one in five of the entire national workforce — depended in one way or another on cotton from the Southern states.

The result was that thousands of Britons disobeyed the Government's neutrality injunction to volunteer for either the Federal or Confederate army — anti-slavery protesters and mercenaries, in the main, joined the North.

Idealists who saw the 'plucky' Southern states as the underdog fighting for justifiable independence, along with soldiers of fortune, signed up with the South.

Merchant ships regularly sailed from Liverpool to the South, running past the Federal blockade of Southern ports, to bring guns and supplies to the Confederates.

To the North's fury, the Confederates even managed to persuade British dockyards to build fighting ships for them — ships that would wreak havoc on the North's navy.

The list of British volunteers includes famous individuals, such as the explorer Henry Morton Stanley (the finder of Mr Livingstone) who initially fought for the South, and the celebrated actor Sir Charles Wyndham, who chose the North. But there were scores of less celebrated but courageous men and women — such as Henry George Hore — who volunteered their services right from the beginning.

The first major battle of the war, the Battle of Bull Run, in July 1861, had regiments on both sides that were made up almost entirely of British volunteers.

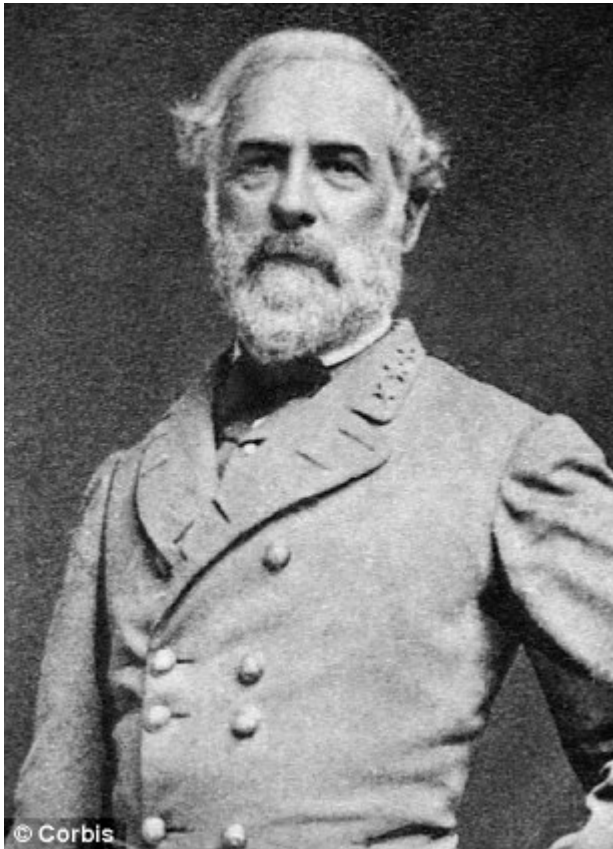
Two famous New York regiments were called the Irish Brigade (Ireland was then under British rule) and the New York Highlanders, drawn from Scotland. There was even, for a short time, a regiment called the New York British Volunteers.

Bull Run was an appalling scene of chaos and bloody horror. A soldier on the Union side talked of his army being hit by a 'perfect hail storm of bullets, round shot and shell... tearing through our ranks and scattering death and confusion everywhere'.

He remembered 'trees spattered with blood and the ground strewn with dead bodies', bombs ripping soldiers apart and baggage wagons becoming tangled up with artillery as muddled forces withdrew, blocking the retreat and leaving the fleeing soldiers a sitting duck.

In the early stages of the war, the Confederates of the South, under the brilliant General Robert E. Lee, appeared to have the upper hand.

President Lincoln was so exasperated he was sacking his generals faster than he could find their replacements.



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**Battle of wits:** In the early stages of the war, the Confederates of the South, under General Robert E. Lee (left), appeared to have the upper hand. But he eventually met his match in U.S. General Ulysses S. Grant (right)

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In January 1863, Lincoln ordered General 'Fighting Joe' Hooker to take charge of the main U.S. army — and just before the Battle of Chancellorsville, Hooker boasted: 'May God have mercy on General Lee, for I will have none.'

As it turned out, it was Hooker who needed not just God's mercy, but Lincoln's. The magnitude of the Federal defeat at Chancellorsville was numbing: 17,000 casualties to the Confederates' 13,000, without having gained the slightest advantage.

President Lincoln was horror-struck when he heard the news, exclaiming: 'My God, what will the country say?'

Lincoln was right to be worried. The country was growing tired of the war — and not even two subsequent victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg could stem the national resentment against conscription, known as the Draft.

On July 13 that summer, rioting against the Draft broke out in several cities, but the worst was in New York, where they turned into a murderous pogrom waged by Irish immigrants against black New Yorkers who threatened their jobs.

A British military observer, Lt-Colonel Arthur Fremantle, recorded how he saw a crowd chase down a black man, shouting: 'Down with the bloody nigger! Kill all niggers!'

Staff at the British Consulate rescued Ann Anderson, a Barbadian ship's cook, from the hands of the mob by - dragging her inside and locking the doors.



Protest: In July 1863, rioting against conscription - known as the Draft - broke out in several cities

But other blacks were less fortunate. Three thousand rioters stormed the Colored Orphan Asylum looking for victims.

The children had all fled except for one little girl, who was found cowering under her bed. She was dragged out and beaten to death.

The violence spread to other parts of New York. One black victim was dragged through the streets by his genitals. Another was stomped on, knifed and then hanged from a lamppost.

When a white officer, Colonel Henry O'Brien, tried to stop the violence, the mob turned its full rage on him. He was stabbed, beaten and stoned. When he still showed signs of life, the mob gouged out his eyes and cut off his tongue.

Still not yet dead, O'Brien was dragged into a nearby house where the torture continued until his body was mutilated beyond recognition.

By that evening there were bodies swinging from lamp posts all over the city. Fires were everywhere.

The New York Hospital for Women and Children was threatened because its British founder, Dr Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman to qualify as a doctor, insisted on treating all patients regardless of race.

Dr Blackwell ordered the servants to close the shutters and bar the doors. Every light was extinguished, leaving the patients in darkness as the muffled but unmistakable shouts of a lynch mob torturing its victim could be heard through the walls.

Some of the white patients became hysterical, begging Dr Blackwell to save the hospital by expelling the black occupants. She refused, and spent the night delivering the baby of one of the black patients.

Mobs prowled the waterfront, attacking British vessels known to have black crew-members. The British Consul General telegraphed the British embassy in Washington for help. HMS Challenger was dispatched, but the warship would not reach New York for at least 24 hours.



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**Not taking sides: Lord Palmerston's Liberal government announced that Britain would remain neutral. It was a decision that incensed both the Federals and the Confederates, each of whom accused Britain of betrayal**

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Fearing there would be mass slaughter by then, the Consul asked the commander of a French frigate to allow all British blacks in the city to take refuge.

The French warship steamed into New York harbour, opened its gun ports to show the baying mob on the quay it meant business, and allowed 71 black British sailors aboard.

There were two more days of anarchy until 10,000 U.S. troops poured into the city. By noon on July 16, Elizabeth Blackwell was able to unlock the doors of the hospital and resume business.

Early estimates put the death toll at up to 1,000, and more than 300 buildings had been destroyed.

Such horrific scenes played into the hands of Southern propagandists in Britain, where British volunteers rushed to the South's cause.

Captain Henry Wemyss Feilden, a former officer in the Black Watch and a decorated veteran of the Indian Mutiny, was one of them.

He signed up to defend the city of Charleston against repeated attempts by the U.S. navy to capture it. By 1863 he was also madly in love with a Southern belle named Julia. 'Whatever happens, if I am alive you will be protected,' he promised her.



Feilden's love for Julia remained steadfast, but his admiration for the South was severely dented in the summer of 1864 after Federal prisoners in Charleston were deployed as human shields, and placed in the middle of the strike zone of the U.S. bombardment of the city.

The increasing cruelty of the war witnessed by Feilden was not only practised by the South, however. Mary Sophia Hill, a British schoolteacher who had become a Confederate nurse after her twin brother, Sam, enlisted in the - Southern army, was one of the many civilian victims of Northern brutality after she was imprisoned.

The more she demanded to see the British Consul, the more the Federal prison authorities tried to break her spirit. 'I often wonder since [how] I kept my senses,' she wrote later, 'for many have lost their reason for less cruelty.'

After a couple of months in prison, Mary succeeded in getting a letter to the British Ambassador Lord Lyons in Washington. Lord Lyons was already locked in a furious row with the U.S. Government over the use of torture with water cannons against alleged British deserters from the U.S. army. Lord Lyons was outraged by the State Department's explanation that a cold shower was pleasant in the summer.

Turning water cannons on prisoners was inhumane and illegal, he bluntly wrote to the Secretary of State on July 25.

Nor was this his only complaint, Lord Lyons also had reports from the New York consulate of British subjects being hung by their thumbs until they confessed to desertion.

Thanks to his unceasing campaign, these prisoners — including Mary Sophia Hill — were eventually released.

But by then the South was on its knees. Robert E. Lee had met his match in U.S. General Ulysses S. Grant.

After a ten-month siege, Richmond — the capital of the Confederacy — fell to Grant on April 3, 1865. Lee - surrendered a week later and the war was over. Tragically, President Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth just ten days later.

U.S. fury with Britain did not die down with the end of hostilities.

The contribution by British volunteers to the North's cause was forgotten. Instead, all Washington cared about was getting an apology and reparations for the deprivations of those Confederate raiders built in British dockyards.

After seven years of wrangling, the British government agreed to pay the U.S. \$15million in damages (£236million today).

But the victory was not all one-way. The redoubtable Mary Sophia Hill sued the U.S. Government for false imprisonment in an international court — and won. But it was small recompense for the horrors inflicted on so many Britons in America's most brutal war.

- *A World On Fire: An Epic History Of Two Nations Divided*, by Amanda Foreman (published by Allen Lane, £30). To order a copy at £27 (p&p free), call 0845 155 0720.