



History 7042

Additional Specimen Question Paper 2J (A-level)

Question 03 Student 1

Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0

Specimen answer plus commentary

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

Paper 2J (A-level): Additional specimen question paper

03 How significant were the Union's superior resources to their victory in the Civil War?

[25 marks]

Student response

The Union won the American Civil War after 4 years of hard fighting which left 620,000 Americans dead. The Union had certainly had the advantage in terms of resources, the Union had: a significantly bigger population (22 million in the Union compared to 9 million in the Confederacy, of which 5.5 million were white); the Union had 10 times the industrial capacity of the Confederacy; the Union had massive naval supremacy; the Union had greater wealth and significantly greater capacity to produce food. The Union's victory was however not simply down to resources, the Confederacy made military mistakes and failed to adopt the best possible tactics, which aided Union victory. The Union arguably had the stronger political leadership and arguably the wars outstanding military leaders in Grant and Sherman. Overall all these elements helped lead to the Union's victory but it was the overwhelming in-balance in resources ultimately that led to the Union's victory. They held such an advantage that the Union was able to overcome setbacks and was better able to cope with a long war of attrition.

The difference in the size of population gave the Union a massive advantage in the Civil War. In basic numbers the Union outnumbered the Confederacy 22 million people to 9 million people. The reality of the difference in these figures was actually even more stark is that 3.5 million of these people were slaves. The ratio of free male population in 1860 was 4.4 to 1 in favour of the Union. This meant that the confederacy had much fewer men available for military service. There were many battles which saw high casualties on both sides but did not prove to be decisive in themselves. The Union was much better able to cope with the high casualty rates than the Confederacy. General Lee often fought much bigger Union forces for example at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, in both cases he inflicted greater losses than he endured but the war attrition being fought wore down the Confederate Army. Their problems in this regard were made even worse following the Emancipation Proclamation, which by promising the Confederacy's slaves freedom led to damaging loss of manpower. It also meant that men were drawn away from the front lines to concentrate on internal security and prevent any potential slave rebellion. The Emancipation Proclamation also gave fresh impetus to the recruitment drive in the North especially amongst the black community. The impact of all this can be demonstrated by the fact that in 1864 the Confederacy had 90% of its free men in military service compared to just 44% in the Union states. This shows how overstretch the Confederacy was and this further escalated the gap between the two sides in terms of both industrial and food production.

The level of industrial production in the North massively outstripped that in the South. The gap between the Union and Confederacy was made even greater by the fact that many border states joined the Union and these were the Southern states with some of the highest level of industrial capacity in the South. Factory production in the Union was fourteen times higher than in the Confederacy, iron production fifteen times higher and coal production 38 times higher.

Such a great industrial advantage transferred through to military production with the Union able to produce 32 times more firearms. This level of advantage was bound to have a significant impact in a war that would stretch over 4 years. The Union would have had even greater advantages in terms of weaponry had they introduced repeater rifles in 1861 rather than 1864-5. There was the significant Tredegar iron works in Richmond which did ensure that the South was able to produce the key materials for war such as munitions and armour plating for ironclads. As the war drew on metal and skilled labour became harder to come by and the level of production was damaged. The Union saw no such problems and the production of munitions steadily increased during the war.

The Confederacy had a much smaller railroad compared to the Union. The extensive Union railroad system made it easy for the Union army in the early stages of the war to move their troops quickly to where they were required and bring in recruits from distant states to the theatres of war. The comparative lack of a railroad system in the South hampered the Confederacy's ability to quickly move troops and goods to where they were needed. The comparative advantage the Union had can be argued to become less significant later in the war when the theatres of war moved deep into Confederate territory and they suffered significant issues with their supply line.

The Union also had a massive advantage in terms of naval resources 25 times the tonnage of naval ships. This enabled the Union to blockade the Confederacy and prevent the free export of cotton and importing of munitions and weapons. This significantly weakened the South that was already inferior in terms of production. The blockade made it hard for the Confederacy to make up their shortfall in supplies and production and although goods did get through the blockade it was fairly secure. The Confederacy's failure to gain the support of Britain or France to tackle the blockade meant that as the war drew on they were at an increasing disadvantage and one that meant they could not sustain the war effort effectively.

The Union's victory was not however simply down to the advantage it held in resources, there were a number of other factors including mistakes by the Confederacy, the strength of the Union's military and Political leadership. It should be remembered that in many ways the Confederacy held advantages in terms of it simply needed to defend its territory rather than fight an aggressive war, they were defending their own lands and homes meaning they had greater knowledge of the terrain and greater motivation and they had the large slave population available for work meaning the freemen could concentrate on fighting.

Whilst General Lee certainly believed that the key to the Confederate army's defeat was 'overwhelming numbers and resources' it can be argued that the Confederate defeat was down to Confederate mistakes and some historians such as Beringer have even question the will of the Confederacy. It is possible to point to Confederate mistakes at key moments such as Vicksburg and Gettysburg, where Lee himself admitted that he got his tactics wrong. When the Confederates did have the upper-hand for example following the First Manassas they failed to full take advantage. This can be used to suggest that it was not simply the difference in resources that led to Confederate defeat, especially as a series of Confederate successes many have damaged the desire of many in the Union to fight on.

The 'offensive-defensive' strategy pursued by Lee can be seen to have been unnecessarily aggressive especially in 1862-3 when there was a very high casualty rate amongst the Confederate army. Lee here can be seen as failing to take the differences in resources into account and unnecessarily losing men in risky attacks. The South did not have to take the fight

to the Union and simply needed to defend their territory. Lee seems to have taken what can be seen as unnecessary risks in pursuit of victory. On the other hand it can be suggested that Lee acted as he did because he saw that the differences in resources would mean that if the war dragged on that defeat was inevitable. This made him take risks as he saw the need for a knock out blow. Lee certainly came very close to achieving this on several occasions and was certainly a very able general. It would seem to be overly harsh to lay blame defeat on Lee's military leadership when he led his men against such overwhelming odds.

It has been suggested that the Confederacy would have been better off adopting guerrilla warfare rather than conventional armies to defend their land. The tactic could well have proved effectively but would have damaged Confederate moral and involved giving up areas of territory. This tactic would have damaged the chances of the Confederacy in gaining recognition by Britain and France. The fact that such tactics have been suggested as a potentially better method for the Confederacy to fight again demonstrates the in-balance of resources being ke to the Confederacy's defeat.

The Confederacy's defeat has been blamed on a lack of will by historians such as Beringer and Hattaway. It can be argued that the Confederacy simply collapsed rather than being genuinely defeated. The home front and men on the front line seemed to have conceded defeat before it had conclusively come there was no marked guerrilla resistance following April 1865. This argument does however seem to be flawed as the Southern soldiers faced terrible conditions and generally remained loyal to the end. The Confederacy arguably showed great internal strength but simply could not compete with resources of the Union.

Other strengths of the Union must also be considered most notably the political leadership of Lincoln and military skills of Grant and Sherman. Lincoln oversaw the successful running of the war and was vital at various stages notably in keeping key states in the upper-south in the Union, his inspiring words in the Gettysburg address and his bold move with the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln offered the Union a degree of leadership that Davis failed to give the South and this difference was an important factor in deciding the outcome of the War. The military leadership in particular of Grant was key in the Union victory. He is generally accepted as being the most exceptional general of the war.

Whilst other factors played their part in leading to a Union victory it is clear that the massive superiority of resources at the Union's disposal was the key factor. Only a swift Confederate victory through a decisive early blow could have overcome this difference. When that did not occur, Union victory became in effect a matter of time.

Commentary – Level 5

This is an exemplary response. It is very detailed, has comprehensive range and is consistently focused. It may be questioned whether such an answer fully represents what might be possible under exam conditions, but it is very clearly a top Level 5 answer. Whilst exemplary, however, it needs to be emphasised that answers which are less full than this could still achieve full marks.