

Last battle of civil war

The Last Stand: Deconstructing the Final Battles of the American Civil War

The American Civil War, a conflict etched in the annals of history, wasn't concluded with a single, decisive battle. Instead, a series of engagements, culminating in the final surrender, marked the cessation of hostilities. Understanding these final battles is crucial to grasping the war's complexities, its lingering impact, and the crucial decisions that ultimately led to the Union victory. A Complex Tapestry of Final Encounters While Appomattox Court House is often cited as the *last* significant battle, the truth is far more nuanced. The war continued to rage across various theaters even as Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox signaled the end of major Confederate resistance in Virginia. Battles like the Battle of Palmito Ranch in Texas, fought weeks *after* Lee's surrender, vividly demonstrate this lingering conflict. Understanding the final battles necessitates examining the context of the Union's relentless pursuit of Confederate forces, combined with the demoralization and dwindling resources of the Confederacy. The waning Confederate armies, though bravely fighting, faced insurmountable odds. **Key Battles on the Road to Appomattox:**

- The Overland Campaign (May-June 1864): A series of brutal battles demonstrating the devastating toll of attrition on both sides. These battles, including the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, and Cold Harbor, showcase the relentless Union pursuit and the growing desperation within the Confederate ranks.
- The Shenandoah Valley Campaign (1864): General Philip Sheridan's campaign in the Shenandoah Valley was critical in severing key Confederate supply lines and crippling their ability to wage war. The campaign's relentless nature significantly impacted Confederate morale.
- The Atlanta Campaign (May-September 1864): General William Tecumseh Sherman's masterful campaign, culminating in the fall of Atlanta, demonstrated the Union's strategic superiority and crippled the Confederate war effort in the South.
- **The Carolinas Campaign (February-April 1865):** Sherman's march through the Carolinas, alongside other Union offensives, further squeezed the Confederacy, contributing to the disintegration of its armies and the eventual surrender.

The Significance of Appomattox Court House: Appomattox Court House, while not the *last* battle, remains a symbolic and pivotal moment. It represents the formal surrender of General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia to General Ulysses S. Grant. The terms of surrender, marked by unprecedented generosity, helped to facilitate a smoother transition into peace and set the stage for Reconstruction. This event, though not the final military action, encapsulated the culmination of the Confederate collapse.

Practical Tips for Understanding the Final Stages:

- **Study Maps:** Visual representations of the battles and campaigns provide crucial insights into strategic movements and the changing landscapes of the conflict.
- **Analyze Primary Sources:** Letters, diaries, and official reports offer unique perspectives from soldiers and commanders on the emotional and strategic aspects of the war.
- **Seek Diverse Interpretations:** Avoid relying solely on one historical narrative. Different scholars and historians may offer contrasting perspectives, offering a more nuanced understanding of the events.
- Engage with Digital Resources: Numerous online archives, databases, and museums provide detailed accounts and visual materials,

enabling a richer comprehension of the period. **A Legacy that Echoes Through Time:** The last battles of the Civil War hold profound implications for understanding the causes, consequences, and complexities of American history. The lessons learned from this tumultuous period continue to shape our national discourse on issues of race, equality, and the enduring power of resolve. The war's final stages highlight the brutal cost of conflict and the imperative for reconciliation and healing. Furthermore, the strategy and tactics employed in these battles directly influenced later conflicts, showcasing the enduring influence of the American Civil War on warfare itself. Frequently Asked Questions: 1. What was the impact of the Union blockade on the final battles? The Union blockade severely crippled the Confederacy's ability to import essential supplies and export its resources, significantly contributing to its economic and military weakening, a factor directly impacting the final stages. 2. **Why did the Confederacy surrender despite some initial successes?** The Confederacy's surrender stemmed from a combination of factors, including dwindling resources, increasing Union pressure, the demoralization of their armies, and the realization that the Confederate cause was unsustainable. 3. How did the final battles affect the subsequent Reconstruction Era? The culmination of the war and the surrender had a profound impact on the subsequent Reconstruction Era, shaping the political landscape and influencing social dynamics. 4. **Was the Battle of Palmito Ranch truly the last battle?** While a significant engagement, the Battle of Palmito Ranch occurred after Appomattox and thus, marked the last *major* battle of the war. 5. *What are some key differences between the battles at the beginning and end of the Civil War?* The initial battles often saw more strategic maneuvering and grand displays of military power, while the later stages focused on attrition and the effective squeezing of Confederate resources, with significant implications for casualties and resource allocation. This exploration of the last battles of the American Civil War provides a powerful reminder of the complexities of war, the resilience of individuals, and the enduring impact of history on our present. The war's final moments are not simply dates on a calendar, but chapters in a story that continues to resonate with us today.

The Fading Echoes: Unpacking the Last Battles of the American Civil War

The rumble of cannon fire, the clash of bayonets, the desperate cries of soldiers – these are the iconic sounds of the American Civil War. For four long, brutal years, the nation tore itself apart, a conflict etched into the very fabric of American history. While the surrender at Appomattox Court House in April 1865 is widely recognized as the war's definitive end, the reality is a bit more nuanced. The "last battle" isn't a single, monolithic event, but rather a series of engagements, skirmishes, and strategic maneuvers that brought the conflict to its final, sputtering conclusion. This article delves into the twilight of the Civil War, exploring the key engagements that marked its dying embers. We'll move beyond the immediate aftermath of Appomattox to understand the broader landscape of the war's end, highlighting the significance of these final military actions and the lingering echoes they left behind.

Appomattox Court House: The Symbolic Surrender

It's impossible to discuss the "last battle" without first acknowledging the pivotal moment at Appomattox

Court House in Virginia. On April 9, 1865, Confederate General Robert E. Lee, commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, surrendered to Union General Ulysses S. Grant. This event, witnessed by the world, was the most significant capitulation of the war and signaled the imminent collapse of the Confederacy. Grant's generous terms of surrender, allowing Confederate soldiers to keep their horses and sidearms, and promising parole, helped to pave the way for a less acrimonious reconciliation. The iconic image of Lee and Grant meeting in the McLean House is deeply embedded in the national consciousness, representing the end of active, large-scale hostilities. However, Appomattox was not the absolute final act of violence. The surrender was a crucial turning point, but pockets of Confederate resistance continued, leading to further, albeit smaller, engagements.

Beyond Appomattox: The Lingering Fires of Conflict

While Lee's surrender was a monumental achievement for the Union, it didn't instantly silence all Confederate guns. Several Confederate armies remained in the field, and some commanders, unwilling to accept defeat, continued to fight. These "last battles" were often characterized by desperation, dwindling resources, and a grim determination to resist until the very end.

The Battle of Columbus, Georgia: A Late, Bloody Encounter

One of the most significant and bloody engagements following Appomattox took place on April 16, 1865, in Columbus, Georgia. Known as the Battle of Columbus, it was fought by Confederate forces under Major General Howell Cobb against Union cavalry led by Major General James H. Wilson. This battle was notable for several reasons: **Timing:** It occurred *after* Lee's surrender, highlighting the fragmented nature of the war's conclusion. **Ferocity:** Despite the overwhelming odds, the Confederate defenders put up a fierce resistance. The fighting was intense, with heavy casualties on both sides. **Strategic Importance:** Columbus was a vital industrial center for the Confederacy, manufacturing ironclad warships and war materials. Its capture was a significant blow to the remaining Confederate war effort. **Last Confederate Ironclad:** The CSS *Muscogee*, a formidable ironclad, was destroyed during the battle, marking the end of the Confederacy's naval power in this region. The Battle of Columbus was the last significant land engagement of the Civil War and a stark reminder that the path to peace was not always immediate or peaceful.

The Battle of Palmito Ranch, Texas: The Confederacy's Final Victory

Perhaps the most poignant and ironical of the late war engagements is the Battle of Palmito Ranch, fought on May 12-13, 1865, near Brownsville, Texas. This skirmish is unique because it resulted in a Confederate victory. The context is crucial here. News of Lee's surrender and other Confederate surrenders had not yet reached this remote corner of Texas. Union Colonel John "Rip" Ford, commanding a Confederate force, launched an attack on a Union outpost. After initial skirmishes, the Confederates, with their superior knowledge of the terrain and a surge of morale, managed to push back the Union forces. The irony? By the time this battle concluded, General Edmund Kirby Smith, commanding Confederate forces in the Trans-Mississippi Department (which included Texas), had already surrendered on May 26th. So, the "victors" of Palmito Ranch were, in essence, fighting a war that

had already ended. This often leads to the humorous, albeit tragic, label of the battle as "the last battle of the Civil War" or "the last battle of the Confederacy."

Other Notable Late Engagements and Surrenders

Beyond these prominent examples, numerous smaller skirmishes and surrenders occurred across the Southern states in the weeks and months following Appomattox. * **General Joseph E. Johnston's Surrender:** Shortly after Lee's surrender, General Joseph E. Johnston surrendered his Army of Tennessee and other forces in North Carolina to General William T. Sherman on April 26, 1865. This was another massive capitulation, further dismantling the Confederate military structure. * **General Richard Taylor's Surrender:** In Louisiana, Lieutenant General Richard Taylor surrendered his command to Major General Edward Canby on May 4, 1865. * **General Sterling Price's Army:** In Missouri, remnants of Sterling Price's Confederate army continued to operate for a short period, eventually disbanding. * **The Shenandoah Valley:** Even in the Shenandoah Valley, where so much of the war's fiercest fighting had occurred, minor clashes and paroles continued into late spring. These scattered surrenders and engagements, while not as dramatic as Appomattox, were essential in bringing the war to its complete cessation. They represent the gradual dissolution of organized Confederate resistance.

Why Did the Fighting Continue After Appomattox?

Several factors contributed to the lingering hostilities: * **Communication Lags:** In the mid-19th century, communication across vast distances was slow. News of surrenders traveled by telegraph, mail, and word of mouth, often with significant delays, especially in remote areas. * **Stubbornness and Pride:** Some Confederate commanders and soldiers were deeply proud and unwilling to concede defeat. They saw their fight as one of honor and principle, and the idea of surrender was difficult to stomach. * **Lack of Centralized Authority:** As the Confederacy crumbled, its central authority weakened, leading to a more decentralized command structure. Individual commanders often made decisions based on their local circumstances and understanding of the situation. * **Desire for Revenge or Continued Resistance:** A small minority may have harbored hopes of continuing guerrilla warfare or sought retribution for perceived injustices. These elements combined to create a messy, drawn-out end to the conflict, where the "last battle" wasn't a single, definitive moment but a series of fading echoes.

The Human Cost of the Twilight of War

It's crucial to remember that each of these final engagements, no matter how small, involved human lives. Soldiers on both sides continued to fight, suffer, and die, even as the war's outcome became increasingly clear. The Battle of Columbus, for instance, was a particularly bloody affair, with hundreds of casualties. The Battle of Palmito Ranch, though a Confederate victory, still resulted in losses for both sides. These late-war battles underscore the immense human cost of even the final moments of a conflict. They serve as a somber reminder of the sacrifices made and the lives irrevocably altered by the Civil War.

Legacy of the Last Battles

The concept of the "last battle" of the Civil War is more than just a historical footnote. It speaks to the complexities of war and its conclusion. It highlights: * **The End of Organized Warfare:** While skirmishes continued, the surrender at Appomattox marked the end of the Confederacy's ability to wage large-scale, organized warfare. * **The Challenges of Reconciliation:** The lingering resistance, even after the primary surrender, suggests the deep divisions and animosities that would need to be addressed during the Reconstruction era. * **The Persistence of Memory:** Each of these final engagements, though overshadowed by Appomattox, holds its own significance in the historical memory of the communities where they occurred. Understanding the last battles of the Civil War allows for a more complete and nuanced appreciation of how this monumental conflict ultimately drew to a close. It reminds us that history is rarely a simple, clean narrative but rather a complex tapestry of events, individuals, and lingering consequences. The war may have effectively ended at Appomattox, but its final echoes rippled through the American landscape for weeks and months to come, leaving behind a profound and lasting impact. The journey from conflict to peace, even after the principal surrender, was a process, not an instantaneous event, a testament to the enduring human will, for better or worse.

The Final Chapter of America's Civil War: The Last Major Engagement The Civil War concluded not with a sweeping battle or a decisive political proclamation, but with a quiet, tragic confrontation that marked the final vestiges of Confederate resistance. While the war effectively ended with General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House in April 1865, the last significant military engagement often overlooked is the Battle of Sailor's Creek, fought on April 6, 1865. This confrontation, though brief, symbolized the crumbling collapse of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia and accelerated the inevitable dissolution of the rebellion.

Understanding Sailor's Creek: A Turning Point Beyond Appomattox

Sailor's Creek, located in central Virginia near the James River, became the site of a brutal skirmish that underscored the dire straits of the Confederate forces. Just days after Lee's surrender at Appomattox, approximately 7,700 Confederate troops under General Richard Ewell attempted a desperate breakout from Union-entrenched positions. The Union forces, led by General Philip Sheridan's cavalry and elements of the Army of the Potomac, intercepted this final gambit with overwhelming force. Though the battle itself lasted only a few hours, its strategic implications were profound. The Confederates suffered devastating losses—over 7,700 men captured, including numerous high-ranking officers—and much of their remaining combat capability was shattered. This engagement revealed not just tactical defeat but the complete erosion of Confederate cohesion. The soldiers, already depleted in numbers and supplies, faced not only enemy fire but the psychological weight of an unavoidable end. For many, Sailor's Creek was less a last stand than a final recognition that resistance was futile. The battle thus serves as a crucial bridge between the surrender at Appomattox and the broader dissolution of organized Confederate military power.

Key Insights and Historical Significance

Historians increasingly recognize Sailor's Creek as the last meaningful Confederate effort to mount a coordinated defense. Unlike earlier battles where Lee's army still posed a tactical threat, this encounter showcased a fragmented, exhausted force struggling to hold ground against a unified Union advance. The battle's location near critical supply lines and communication routes added urgency to its outcome—success meant prolonging the war, failure meant surrender in all but name. The human cost was staggering. Beyond the immediate casualties, the loss of experienced leadership and trained soldiers weakened the South's ability to recover. Sailor's Creek marked the end of any realistic hope for Confederate victory, shifting the narrative from contested war to inevitable reconciliation under Union terms. This battle, therefore, holds essential value not only as a military event but as a turning point in national memory—symbolizing both the end of conflict and the beginning of a difficult, complex peace.

Applications and Broader Cultural Impact

Beyond military history, Sailor's Creek continues to influence how the Civil War is understood and commemorated. Its story enriches public history through reenactments, educational programs, and battlefield preservation efforts, offering a vivid lens into the war's final days. For descendants and historians alike, the battle serves as a poignant reminder of the personal toll and moral weight of civil conflict. Moreover, the battle's legacy informs contemporary discussions on reconciliation, memory, and national identity. By focusing on this final engagement, scholars and educators highlight the complexity of surrender and the varied experiences of soldiers and civilians caught in the war's aftermath. This nuanced perspective fosters deeper understanding, encouraging dialogue about how societies process defeat and rebuild.

Looking Forward: The Legacy and Future Study of the Last Battle

As historical scholarship evolves, the last battle of the Civil War at Sailor's Creek gains renewed relevance. It stands not only as a pivotal moment in military history but as a powerful symbol of transformation—from rebellion to restoration, from war to peace. Future research may explore deeper social dimensions, including the experiences of African American troops and civilian populations during this critical juncture, further expanding the narrative beyond traditional military accounts. In preservation and public engagement, ongoing efforts to protect the Sailor's Creek battlefield ensure that future generations can confront this history with clarity and empathy. By integrating digital archives, immersive storytelling, and community-based learning, historians and preservationists honor the battle's significance while fostering meaningful reflection. This final chapter of the Civil War thus remains alive—not just as a record of what occurred, but as a foundation for understanding division, resilience, and the enduring pursuit of unity.

The Echo of Appomattox: Understanding the Final Engagements

of the American Civil War

The American Civil War, a conflict that tore the nation asunder for four brutal years, didn't end with a single, dramatic flourish. While the surrender at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865, is etched into collective memory as the symbolic conclusion, the reality was a complex tapestry of final battles, skirmishes, and strategic maneuvers. Understanding these concluding moments is crucial to grasping the war's true end, its lingering consequences, and the arduous path to national reunification.

Beyond Appomattox: The Lingering Flames of Conflict

The image of General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia laying down its arms before Ulysses S. Grant at the McLean House is powerful. However, it represented the surrender of the Confederacy's largest and most iconic fighting force. It did not, however, signify the cessation of hostilities across the entire vast theater of war. Scattered Confederate armies, pockets of resistance, and the sheer logistical challenge of communicating surrender orders meant that fighting continued for weeks, even months, after the pivotal event at Appomattox.

The concept of the "last battle of the Civil War" is therefore not singular but rather a series of final significant engagements that ultimately extinguished the Confederacy's capacity and will to resist. These battles, though often overshadowed by Appomattox, played a vital role in solidifying Union victory and preventing a protracted, guerrilla-style insurgency.

The Carolinas Campaign and the Fall of Johnston's Army

One of the most significant post-Appomattox campaigns was General William Tecumseh Sherman's relentless advance through the Carolinas. After his devastating "March to the Sea" through Georgia, Sherman turned his attention north. His objective was to isolate and destroy the remaining Confederate armies in the region, primarily that of General Joseph E. Johnston, who was attempting to consolidate forces to resist Sherman's onslaught. The Carolinas Campaign, marked by strategic brilliance and scorched-earth tactics, was a masterclass in overwhelming the enemy's ability to fight.

The Battle of Bentonville: A Desperate Stand

The Battle of Bentonville, fought on March 19, 1865, in North Carolina, stands out as one of the last major pitched battles of the war. Johnston, desperately trying to blunt Sherman's advance and perhaps achieve a tactical victory that could bolster Confederate morale or negotiate better surrender terms, launched a surprise attack on the Union XVI Corps. While the Confederates achieved initial success, they were ultimately unable to break the Union lines. The battle was a costly affair for both sides, but it failed to alter the strategic reality. Sherman's superior numbers and resources eventually forced Johnston to withdraw. Bentonville demonstrated the Confederacy's dwindling resources and their inability to mount sustained offensive operations against a well-equipped and determined Union army.

Following Bentonville, Johnston's army was in a precarious position, harassed by Sherman's pursuing forces. The pressure was immense, and the prospect of further significant engagements became

increasingly unlikely. The campaign effectively strangled the Confederacy's ability to organize a cohesive defense.

The Final Confederate Surrenders: A Scattered End

With Johnston's army significantly weakened and pursued relentlessly, the dominoes of surrender began to fall. While Appomattox marked the end for Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, other Confederate forces remained in the field.

General Johnston's Surrender to Sherman

The surrender of General Joseph E. Johnston's Army of Tennessee and other Confederate forces in North Carolina to General William T. Sherman on April 26, 1865, at Bennett Place near Durham, North Carolina, was arguably the most significant surrender following Appomattox. This massive surrender involved approximately 89,000 Confederate soldiers, making it the largest surrender of the war. Sherman's magnanimous terms, which included allowing Confederate soldiers to return to their homes and keep their horses, contributed to a smoother transition and aimed to foster reconciliation rather than further animosity. This act effectively dismantled the Confederacy's primary remaining military threat.

Trans-Mississippi Department: The Last Holdouts

The Trans-Mississippi Department, a vast territory west of the Mississippi River, was the last significant bastion of Confederate resistance. Protected by geography and the relative isolation from major Eastern theater campaigns, Confederate forces here continued to fight even after Johnston's surrender.

The Battle of Palmito Ranch: A Pyrrhic Victory

The Battle of Palmito Ranch, fought on May 12-13, 1865, near Brownsville, Texas, is often cited as the last land battle of the Civil War. This engagement saw Union and Confederate forces clash over control of Confederate cotton. The battle itself was a Confederate victory, with Lieutenant Colonel John "Rip" Ford leading his troops to push back the Union forces. However, this victory was utterly meaningless in the grand scheme of the war. News of Lee's surrender at Appomattox and Johnston's subsequent surrender had already reached the area. The soldiers who fought and died at Palmito Ranch were, in essence, fighting a war that had already ended.

The irony of a Confederate victory in the war's final land engagement is a poignant reminder of the disarray and lack of clear communication that characterized the war's conclusion. The battle was a testament to the dedication of some Confederate soldiers, but it could not alter the inevitable outcome.

The Final Naval Engagements and Surrender

While Palmito Ranch is recognized as the last land battle, naval engagements also continued. The Confederate raider CSS Shenandoah, unaware of the extent of Confederate surrenders, continued its operations for months. The ship finally surrendered to British authorities in Liverpool, England, on November 6, 1865, after sailing around the world, capturing Union merchant ships. This extended period

of activity by a single vessel underscores the protracted and scattered nature of the war's final moments.

The Significance of the War's End

The scattered nature of the Civil War's final battles and surrenders offers several critical insights:

1. **The Exhaustion of the Confederacy:** The persistent Union offensives, particularly Sherman's campaigns, had crippled the Confederacy's infrastructure, economy, and military capacity. The final engagements were less about strategic maneuvering and more about the inevitable collapse of a defeated foe.
2. **The Challenge of Communication and Command:** The vastness of the Confederacy and the disruption of communication lines meant that news of surrenders did not reach all units instantaneously. This led to isolated pockets of resistance and continued fighting out of ignorance or defiance.
3. **The Importance of Reconciliation:** The terms offered by Union commanders like Grant and Sherman were crucial in facilitating a relatively peaceful reintegration of the South. By offering leniency, they aimed to prevent a prolonged and bloody insurgency and begin the process of national healing. The magnanimous terms, allowing soldiers to return home with their horses, were a practical and symbolic gesture towards rebuilding lives.
4. **The Enduring Legacy of Conflict:** Even after the last shots were fired, the scars of the Civil War ran deep. The economic devastation, the social upheaval, and the unresolved issues of race and states' rights would continue to shape American history for generations to come. The challenges of Reconstruction and the struggle for civil rights are direct legacies of the war's unresolved tensions.

Conclusion: A War Concluded, Not Erased

While Appomattox Court House stands as the symbolic end to the American Civil War, the true conclusion was a more drawn-out affair. The final battles, from the desperate stand at Bentonville to the anachronistic clash at Palmito Ranch, and the subsequent widespread surrenders, paint a complex picture of a nation struggling to shed the mantle of war. These concluding engagements, though often overlooked, were essential in extinguishing the last embers of Confederate resistance and paving the way for the long and challenging process of national reunification. The echo of these final battles serves as a potent reminder that even in victory, the cost of war is immense, and its consequences can linger long after the last shots have been fired.

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Questions & Answers About last battle of civil war

No	Question	Answer
1	What is widely considered the last major battle of the American Civil War?	While there were skirmishes and surrenders after this event, the Battle of Palmito Ranch in Texas, fought on May 12-13, 1865, is often cited as the last significant land engagement of the Civil War.
2	Was the Battle of Palmito Ranch a decisive victory for either side?	Surprisingly, the Confederacy won a tactical victory at Palmito Ranch, albeit a very late and ultimately inconsequential one, as news of the overall Confederate surrender had already spread.
3	Why did a battle even occur after the Confederacy had effectively surrendered?	Communication was slow in 1865. News of General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House on April 9th hadn't reached all Confederate forces, leading some commanders to continue fighting.
4	Besides Palmito Ranch, were there any other notable 'last' events of the Civil War?	Yes, the CSS Shenandoah, a Confederate cruiser, was the last to surrender, lowering its flag in Liverpool, England, on November 6, 1865, long after the fighting had ceased on land.
5	How significant were the post-Appomattox skirmishes like Palmito Ranch?	These later engagements were generally very minor in scale and had no impact on the outcome of the war. They were more a result of disorganization and delayed communication than a continuation of the main conflict.
6	What does the 'last battle' tell us about the end of the Civil War?	It highlights the decentralized nature of the Confederacy and the challenges of ending a widespread conflict. It also underscores the human element of warfare, where individual units might continue fighting out of duty or lack of information.
7	Are there any historical debates about what truly constitutes the 'last battle' of the Civil War?	Yes, some historians point to smaller skirmishes or the surrender of specific units as the true end. However, Palmito Ranch remains the most widely recognized 'last major battle' due to its nature as a tactical engagement.

last battle of civil war history, final clash of the American Civil War, end of the Civil War pivotal battle, last major battle of the Civil War, 1865 conclusion of the American Civil War, final engagement of the Civil War, last decisive battle of the Civil War, turning point: last battle of the Civil War, Civil War's last major battle, 1865 battlefield: end of the Civil War conflict

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