

By the Kansas Historical Society

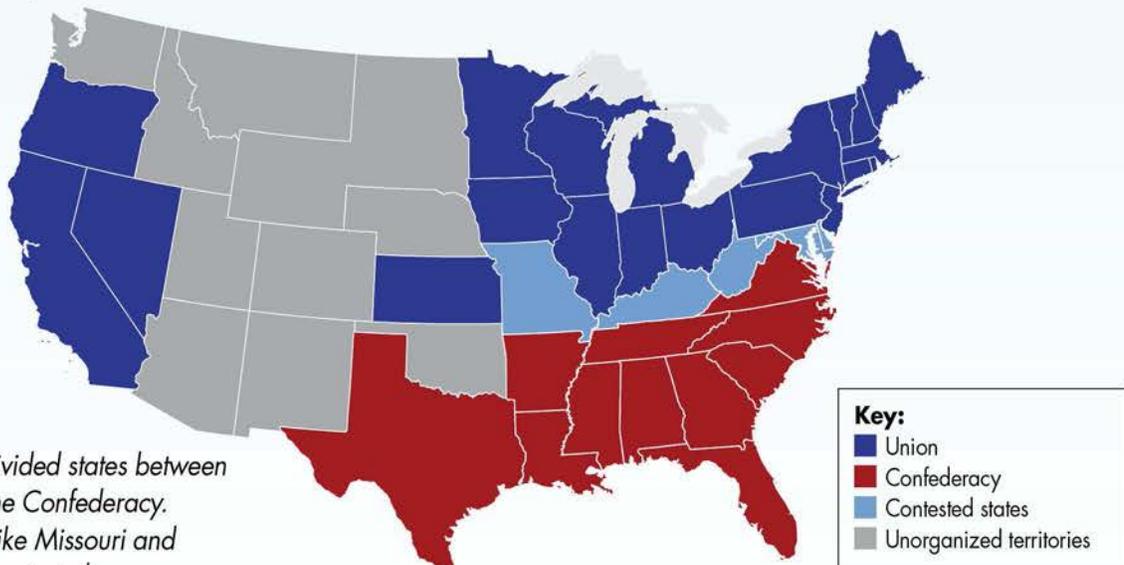
The Call for Volunteers

The Civil War divided the nation. It also split an army of men who had fought together under one flag, including West Point graduates like Generals Robert E. Lee, William Tecumseh Sherman, and James Longstreet. They now found themselves divided, fighting on opposite sides: the North, or Union, and the South, or Confederacy. They also needed to raise armies to fight the oncoming war.

For the Union this meant adjusting how it raised an army. The Union army consisted of only 16,000 men. It was called the "regular" army because it was the existing federal force under the command of President Abraham Lincoln. From the first days of the war Lincoln knew he needed more soldiers.

In addition to the regular army each state had a militia. Under the U.S. Constitution each state was allowed to recruit, train, and equip a militia to protect the state and its people. It was a standing reserve army, its soldiers only called up when needed for three-month assignments. The militia was the forerunner of today's national guard.

Even with all the state militias Lincoln needed still more soldiers. States began organizing volunteer regiments to supplement the regular army. They were different from the militia. They were organized by private citizens in each state. Regiments elected their own officers, outfitted the men (although volunteers had to supply their own horses and personal items), and then the request went to the governor for approval. If approved by the governor, the new regiment was offered up to the federal government for "mustering in," or officially joining the federal army.



The Civil War divided states between the Union and the Confederacy. "Border states" like Missouri and Kentucky were contested.

Volunteer regiments were made of between 450 to 1,000 men. They were organized and mustered in very quickly. They did not receive as much training as troops in the regular army. Volunteers signed up to serve for three years with pay.

At the start of the war, when President Lincoln called for volunteer soldiers, the new state of Kansas had only 30,000 men between the ages of 18 and 45 who were considered eligible for service. The federal army leadership hesitated to ask Kansas for more than one regiment because it was a new, sparsely populated state. Kansans surprised the federal army by signing up eight regiments in four months.



Members of the Eighth Kansas Volunteer Infantry