Organization of the Military during the Civil War

Squad 7-12 men  |  Sergeant (NCO)  |  usually 8
Platoon 3-5 squads  |  Lieutenant  |  about 40
Company 4-8 Platoons  |  Captain  |  about 200
Battalion 3-8 companies  |  Major  |  600-1000
Regiment 3-4 battalions  |  Lt. Colonel  |  1000-2500
Brigade at least 2 Regiments  |  Brigadier General  |  2000-5000
Division several brigades (usually 3)  |  Major General  |  10,000-20,000
Corps several divisions  |  Lt. General  |  20,000-60,000
Army 2 or more corps  |  General of the Army  |  50,000 and up

Infantry

Traditionally, infantry have been divided into two types, those with blade weapons and those with projectile weapons. Traditionally, they were named for the weapon they carried, with archers, axe-men, pike-men etc. being the names of units.

The advent of firearms did not change this, thus units called Arquebusiers and Musketeers were common. However, the invention of the Bayonet under Martinet made all other blade weapons obsolete, as now every soldier could carry both. Therefore, names of units changed to reflect their function rather than their armament.

Cavalry

The cavalry unit was equipped with the rifle and sword. This allowed them the ability to dismount and fight as infantry by matching the firepower of the enemy rifles. They served two primary roles. The first was to seize key territory in the enemy rear, and hold it until the main body arrived. The second role was to fill gaps in the line created by enemy action…and thus deny the enemy the ability to exploit a breakthrough.

Cavalry had two important roles. One was reconnaissance before a battle. The second was screening your own army as it moved, preventing counter and surprise attacks and securing a line of retreat.

Artillery

A Line Battery

The Line battery was a grouping of four to twelve cannon that could fire several types of projectiles, basically along a line of sight. High ground was essential to their effectiveness. This was the main type of artillery used in most battles. They usually fired a shot or shell weighing eight or twelve pounds, and thus cannon were identified by the weight of the projectile fired.

A Siege Battery

The Siege battery was a grouping of cannon that would today be called mortars. They fired ordinance in a parabolic curve to attack enemy positions, especially fortresses. Usually they fired 24 pound shot or larger. Eventually, incendiary and anti-personnel shells were invented to aid in their assault on fixed positions.

Horse Artillery

Horse Artillery consisted of lighter batteries, usually firing four and six pound shot rather than eight or twelve. They were designed to be easily limbered, allowing this artillery to keep up with cavalry, giving additional fire power to recon units or dragoons trying to seize key points in the rear. Additionally, they could be quickly limbered and moved forward to exploit a breach in an enemy position.
Ordnance

Shot (a cannon ball)
Most cannon’s fired a solid lead ball. These heavy balls, when fired, ripped through enemy troops tearing limbs and crushing bones. They were used against positions to destroy walls and field works. At long distance, they could be fired into formations, skipping along the ground and breaking arms and legs as they went. They were especially damaging to infantry columns.

Grape or Grape Shot
Grape shot was an anti-personnel weapon. Usually a cluster of many small balls the size of a walnut, held together by twine or mesh that would burn or rip apart when fired. It was designed to “spray” against an advancing enemy, killing and wounding as many soldiers as possible, with each individual ball capable of ripping through several men.

Shell (an exploding ball)
The ball was actually a hollow shell, filled with smaller balls. The shell, fired at distant formations, exploded on impact and showered shell fragments and balls on enemy personnel. It was invented by the British Major John Shrapnel.

Incendiary
A shell filled with a flammable liquid designed to burn after exploding. Incendiary shot was effective against wooden structures…especially ships.

Chain
Essentially two cannon balls connected by a steel chain. When fired, the second ball was slower than the first, which caused the two balls to rotate around one another, severing anything in their path. Chain shot was highly effective against rigging in ships.

Types of Formations

Line Formation:
In line formation, the soldiers are aligned shoulder to shoulder in a wide deployment, usually only three ranks deep.
Infantry in line provides maximum fire power, allowing two thirds to be loading while one third is firing.
Artillery in line provides maximum fire power, allowing crews to fire at will.
Cavalry in line provides maximum shock value, allowing each soldier to use their blade weapon. More importantly, it is the best “defensive” posture for cavalry, because any projectile will only be able to hit a single horseman.

Column Formation:
In column formation, the soldiers are aligned shoulder to shoulder in a narrow deployment, usually only six, eight, or twelve wide, but very deep.
Infantry in column provides maximum mobility and maximum shock value, allowing those in front to penetrate a line and expand as those following can widen the breach.
Artillery cannot fire in column, and only do this to move.
Cavalry in column provides maximum fire power at a single point by allowing a column to fire in passing. However, Cavalry in column is extremely vulnerable to firepower, especially artillery.

Square Formation:
In square formation, the soldiers are aligned shoulder to shoulder in short lines that form a square around a central piece…usually the commander or an artillery piece, which provides maximum protection.

Infantry in square provides the best defense against a bladed enemy…such as cavalry, but is vulnerable to artillery.

Cavalry cannot form a square.

Artillery cannot form square without an “infantry” outer wall.

The Anaconda Plan

Lincoln asked General Winfield Scott to come up with a plan to defeat the South, and to lead the Army. Scott created the plan, but refused to lead the army. This plan was the first comprehensive grand-strategic plans on how to win a war.

The plan includes:
1. Blockade: capture the key ports, especially New Orleans, to deny the South revenue from exports and the import of arms. This would mean amphibious operations.
2. Liberate Slaves: by liberating slaves it would undermine the Confederate economy, denying them the workers needed to keep farms functioning and hurting their food supply. Scorched earth policy was first suggested.
3. Seize the Mississippi: by cutting the Confederacy in half, it would create two smaller wars and deny the East the cattle of Texas while denying the West the manpower and ammunition of the East.
4. Chop the Confederacy into pieces: by conquering smaller parts, such as individual states, it would destroy the unity of the enemy and facilitate the conquered regions re-entry into the union.
5. Capture Richmond and the Leaders: the leaders and the capital needed to be captured, showing the power of the union over individual states and individuals. Those individuals needed to be tried for treason.
6. Destroy the Armies in the Field: by destroying the Confederate Armies, you destroyed their ability to resist, and again showed the power of the Union. This would make the war shorter, and in the end, less bloody.