GEORGE B. McCLELLAN REEVALUATED

By

Lewis Baltzell Mayhew

AN ABSTRACT

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Lewis Baltzell Mayhew

AN ABSTRACT

Of all the historical controversies concerning the American Civil War, none has generated more vehemence on the part of its protagonists than the polemics concerning the life and military service of Major General George B. McClellan. Because of strong feelings which have tended to place writers on the period in either a pro- or anti-McClellan position, the General's career has rarely been studied in terms of its intrinsic merits. Instead, interpretations of McClellan's role have been based upon the attitudes of individual writers toward related but not necessarily relevant personalities or events. Too frequently, opinions of the Peninsular Campaign of 1862 have been governed by whether a writer was strongly favorable or unfavorable toward Lincoln, or was sympathetic or antagonistic toward the Confederate position, instead of being limited to what McClellan as a military commander actually succeeded or failed in doing. This study is an attempt to reassess the contributions of McClellan as a responsible military leader who participated in a major war at a particular period in history. For the most part, attention has been focused upon his decisions and actions which were crucial in the conduct of operations, although some emphasis has necessarily been given to his personal relationships with the several key political figures who shared with him the responsibility for the safety of the Republic.

After the disastrous defeat of the Union army at Bull Run in the late summer of 1861 McClellan, at the call of Lincoln, assumed responsibility for the defense of the capital. Having provided for its safety by the creation of a strong, inter-locking series of forts, McClellan organized

and trained the arriving levies of troops into a keen-edged, fighting tool--the Army of the Potomac. In spite of objections on the part of Lincoln and Secretary of War Stanton, McClellan launched his army on an offensive designed to flank the Confederate lines by attacking Richmond from the east. This well conceived plan was not implemented fully, however, for at the last moment Lincoln withheld the troops which the General had planned to use as his mass of maneuver. In spite of the handicap thus imposed on him by his government, McClellan succeeded in driving his army close to the defenses of Richmond and had launched the attack designed to take that place when the Confederate general Lee commenced a spoiling attack. The Army of the Potomac parried the blow and occupied a new position on the James River from which operations could be undertaken against Richmond's axis of communications to the Southern hinterland. Before such an offensive could begin, however, Lincoln, on the advice of Stanton and the ineffective Halleck, recalled the troops to the vicinity of Washington where they were placed under the command of John Pope, leaving McClellan commanding an army with no troops. Although his strength was augmented by the addition of the veterans from the Peninsular Campaign, Pope lost control of his force and was defeated by the Confederates in the second battle of Bull Run. In the face of this second major setback McClellan was again called upon to save the capital.

The victorious Lee, meanwhile, began an invasion of Maryland. Acting quickly on the intelligence contained in a copy of Lee's march order, McClellan defeated Lee in two important actions: one at South Mountain and the other along the Antietam. As a result of these two setbacks Lee was

driven back into Virginia. McClellan, after a period for reorganizing his troops, was able to begin his second offensive. When Lee interposed his divisions between Richmond and the advancing Federal army, Lincoln relieved McClellan from command, replacing him with the senior corps commander Burnside whose ineptness had cost so dearly at Antietam.

From a study of these campaigns one conclusion stands clear. McClellan, in spite of the fact that he did not destroy Lee's army, must be judged to have been one of the most successful, capable leaders to command Union troops during the American Civil War. Had his government not interfered at several crucial points, the war between the States might well have ended several years sooner than it did.

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TO DOROTHY

who should be numbered among those
widows whose husbands have fallen
victim to the Civil War

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INTRODUCTION

Of all the historical controversies concerning the American Civil War, none has generated more vehemence on the part of its protagonists than the polemics pro and con the life and military service of Major General George B. McClellan. In spite of strong feelings which have tended to place writers of the period in either a pro or anti-McClellan position, the General's career has rarely been studied in terms of its intrinsic merits. Instead, interpretations of McClellan's role have been based upon the attitudes of individual writers toward related but not necessarily relevant personalities or events. Too frequently, opinions of the Peninsular Campaign of 1862 have been governed by whether a writer was strongly favorable or unfavorable toward Lincoln, or was sympathetic or antagonistic toward the Confederate position, instead of being limited by what McClellan, as a military commander actually succeeded or failed in doing. This study is a report of an attempt to reassess the contributions of McClellan as a responsible military leader who participated in a major war at a particular period in history. For the most part attention has been focused upon his decisions and actions which were crucial in the conduct of operations, although some emphasis has necessarily been given to his personal relationships with the several key political figures, who shared with him the responsibility for the safety of the Republic.

Since the subject has been studied and reported in considerable detail before, some statement explaining why still another work on McClellan has been prepared may be in order. From the time in 1938 when the writer's attention was called to the relative unimportance of the reason Lincoln gave

for relieving McClellan, following the battle of Antietam, a suspicion was aroused that many interpretations of the Lincoln-McClellan theme left out of consideration important facets of the story. In the fall of 1862 the Confederate's attempted invasion of Maryland was foiled and Lee was driven, by military defeat, back into Virginia. After a period of reorganization and reequiping, McClellan's Army of the Potomac resumed its offensive, moving south along a line east of the Shenandoah valley. When Lee took the only course open to him and inter-posed his army between the Federal troops and Richmond, Lincoln relieved McClellan from command. This version either implies that Lincoln was a fool, which he certainly was not, or that there was more to the story than was told.

The belief that McClellan's career needed to be restudied from a military point of view was confirmed by reading General Grant's Memoirs. After having fought an overland campaign south toward Richmond in the spring of 1864, until stopped by a bloody repulse at Cold Harbor, Grant changed his strategic conception of his mission and began to operate against Richmond from bases on the James river. In effect he vindicated McClellan by doing this for he adopted precisely the same plan which McClellan was implementing in the late summer of 1862 when Lincoln recalled the Army of the Potomac to the vicinity of Washington.

With the exception of the Lincoln papers from the Library of Congress this study has been based upon documents which have long been available, although frequently unused by writers about the period. The contribution made, if any, consists of studying those documents to determine but one question, i.e., in what respects did McClellan succeed or fail as the head of an army.

To do this, frequent comparisons are made between the way McClellan solved his problems and the way other generals, faced with similar circumstances, have solved theirs. Aside from the first obvious point that McClellan was the only Federal commander who opposed Lee and never sustained a major defeat, attention is drawn to such factors as the similarity between McClellan's conception of war and that of the British Commander of World War II, Montgomery.

That this is by no means a definitive work is, of course, obvious. The main lines of the interpretation are believed to be sound but monographic studies are needed on such a thing as the evolution of the staff work of the Army of the Potomac. As is true of this project the documents for such a study are, in the main, available. They require, however, to be juxtaposed in such a way that fresh insight can be obtained.

The writer would be woefully remiss if he did not take this opportunity of acknowledging and thanking the various members of the faculty of Michigan State College for their advice and helpful criticism during the preparation of the study. Dr. Madison Kuhn not only spent hours reading and rereading the manuscript at the expense of his own research, but was always available to discuss problems encountered in its preparation. Dr. Walter Fee, Head of the Department of History, gave time from his overly-burdened schedule to read and evaluate the manuscript. Dr. Robert Brown, with his constant insistence that a writer say what he means and that what he means be limited to the evidence involved, provided his usual thorough and insightful criticism. Dr. John B. Harrison and Dr. Harry Kimber, as members of the writer's advisory committee gave frequent and thoughtful

aid in planning a doctoral program which would allow a study of McClellan to be joined with preparation for a career in general education. Dr. Paul L. Dressel, Chairman of the Board of Examiners, should be thanked for encouraging the writer, who holds appointment on the Board, to pursue a study so far afield from educational research as one in military history. Some mention should also be made of the sympathetic role played by the writer's colleagues on the Board of Examiners who have heard about the trials of McClellan these past three years.

CHAPTER I

SETTING THE STAGE

Two men, Abraham Lincoln and George B. McClellan, between them possibly possessing talents necessary to restore the American Union in 1862, were unable to understand each other. Because they were products of such widely differing backgrounds they were unable to employ their combined talents to maximum advantage. In so failing each to appreciate the other they both failed in their respective tasks, and years of unnecessary suffering and bloodshed for an entire nation resulted. Had these two been in greater rapport such events as Burnside's bloody attack at Fredricksburg, Gettysburg, Cold Harbor, the Alabama Claims, Appomatox, Reconstruction, Lincoln's assassination, K.K.K. raids and the Solid South need never have transpired. For if these two men had been able to understand, trust, and support each other as completely as—say Grant and Sherman—the American Civil War might well have ended before January of 1863. Instead, neither understood the other and neither granted the other the kind of support prosecution of a major war required of military and political leaders. The war then had to drag its dreary way on into a still drearier "reconstruction."

In order to see how these differences became so apparent and so vitally important for the nation it is necessary to examine briefly the kind of person each was. It is also necessary to give some attention to the nature of the upheaval which brought their lives together.

Under more normal conditions or even during war with an outside enemy the differences between McClellan and Lincoln might have existed unobserved and without significance. Given, however, a civil struggle involving whole complexes of feelings, loyalties, and basic philosophies, men on the same side, who were none-the-less polar in their beliefs, were bound to conflict. The three variables, then--McClellan, Lincoln, and the war--must be examined in some slight detail before any discussion of the military campaigns of 1861-62 will be truly meaningful.

George Brinton McClellan was born into a highly cultivated professional family in Philadelphia, December 3, 1826. His father, George McClellan, had graduated from Yale in 1816 and from the medical school of the University of Pennsylvania in 1819. He soon rose in importance in Philadelphia and served on various civic enterprises. He was, for example, one of the founders in 1825 of the Jefferson Medical College. The mother, Elizabeth S. Brinton, provided a happy home life after which the general probably patterned his own marriage.

Young George was given a sound, classical, preparatory education, learning Greek as well as Latin. In 1840, he entered the University of Pennsylvania but two years later withdrew. As was true of many other young men of the time, he attended the United States Military Academy at West Point, partly because it provided free college training which might be of use in any of a number of pursuits. At the age of sixteen he thus joined as a classmate the cream of Southern aristocracy which had made West Point a kind of male finishing school for them preparatory to their business of ruling the South and, incidentally, the nation. McClellan

McClellan was actually too young for admission to the Academy, but because of his unusually strong physique and his keen intellect the age requirement was waived. These Southern classmates influenced his thinking and his social outlook more than a little. During the Civil War his letters to his wife contain many references to Southern officers whom he had known and called friend. He was, in fact, always more intimate with Southerners than with his compatriots from the free states. He became particularly friendly with Gustavus W. Smith, who later was to command the defenses of Richmond for a few days after Joseph E. Johnston was wounded at Fair Oaks.

In his studies McClellan excelled. His particular bent was in mathematics, but he also was a linguist of no mean merit. To his already adequate knowledge of French, Latin, and Greek, he added Spanish and German while a cadet. He was an excellent horseman and swordsman. On June 30, 1846, he graduated second in the class at the bottom of which graduated George Pickett, who at Gettysburg was to lead the flower of Confederate manhood to its own Gotterdämmerung. To attain such a position was no mean achievement, for the competition for position at West Point was intense and the attrition great. A cadet's graduating position then as now determined not only his branch of service but also his position on the promotion list. Another classmate was that dour, dyspeptic Virginian with whose career McClellan's was to be so inextricably woven; Thomas J. Jackson. This class graduated as the nation was embarking on its war with Mexico, and McClellan was most anxious to travel south where fame and glory were available to young second lieutenants in the regular army. In this respect he was different from a

young officer who graduated several years before McClellan; U. S. Grant hated the war and did not relish participating in it.

McClellan was assigned, as was his right because of his high position in his graduating class, to a company of engineers and sailed for Mexico September 24, 1846. Shortly after arriving he became ill, and his service during the remainder of 1846 was nominal. He was not, however, incapacitated sufficiently to prevent forming an intense aversion to volunteer officers and volunteer troops. This aversion he maintained on into his service in the Civil War and was directed with especial force at political generals, i.e., those men without military experience who owed their rank only to political considerations. His fondest affections, as commander of the Army of the Potomac, were reserved for Syke's regulars of Porter's corps.

As the American army apporached Vera Cruz, McClellan was called upon to serve as an engineer officer under the chief of engineers, Col. Joseph E. Totten. Along with him were other engineer officers who were to gain their greatest reputations on other fields--Robert E. Lee, P.G.T. Beauregard, G. W. Smith, and Benjamin Huger. McClellan's impressions of the country through which the army passed as well as of army operations he recorded in his diary, which now serves as a major source concerning Scott's operations. At the battle of Coutreras, McClellan, with Robert E. Lee, laid the gun positions for John B. Magruder and was breveted First Lieutenant for his part. For the battle of Chapultepec he was breveted Captain. After the army's entry into Mexico City, September 14, 1847, McClellan, Lee, Beauregard, and Smith were thanked in orders by

Totten for their meritorious engineering services. The following June he returned to the States, twenty-one years old, and with a brilliant record behind him.

His next duty assignment was at West Point with an engineer company. The boredom of peace-time army life soon began to generate within him a desire for greener fields and broader pastures. Finding transfer for the moment out of the question, he began to read widely, particularly in the fields of history and political theory. His reading of commentary on the United States Constitution coupled with his friendship for Southerners made a firm state rights man of him. This political philosophy became more and more important to him as time went on. Part of the enmity he engendered as a general during the Civil War was because it permeated all his actions and attitudes. He had grave misgivings, for example, about sending Federal or Ohio troops into western Virginia because that action violated the state rights of the western Virginians.

To avoid more routine duty, he applied for a position as instructor at the newly created Virginia Military Institute, but Thomas J. Jackson won the position. In 1851 he went to Fort Delaware, and from there in 1852 was assigned to an exploring expedition in the Red River region under Captain (later General) Randolph B. Marcy. This same Marcy it was who later became McClellan's Chief of Staff as well as his father-in-law. This duty was followed by an assignment on harbor improvements in Texas; then by direction of Jefferson Davis, the then Secretary of War, he was sent to survey the Pacific Northwest for possible railroad lines. While on this mission he renewed acquaintanceship with Grant, whose morale was

slowly disintegrating on the west coast. Grant was charged with giving McClellan all aid possible, and did so. He also, however, got drunk and managed to disgust McClellan thoroughly. Davis was so impressed with McClellan's report that he sent him to San Domingo, from where the young engineer officer reported favorably on the harbor at Samana Bay.

In 1855 McClellan transferred his branch of service and became a cavalry captain, assigned for his first duty under Col. E. V. Sumner, who in later times was to serve as the senior corps commander of the Army of the Potomac. This same Sumner was in command part of the day at Malvern Hill, and it was partly on his advice that McClellan withheld a final attack on the Confederate left at Antietam. In transferring, McClellan was following in the footsteps of Robert E. Lee, who, after serving in the Engineers, turned to the mounted arm as holding forth more chance for advancement.

At the age of twenty-nine, one of the youngest and brightest captains in the American army, McClellan was selected to go to the Crimea to study European military methods. He was to accompany Majors Richard Delafield and Alfred Mordecai. From the States they went to England, thence to France and Russia. While in Russian territory they were entertained lavishly, but were refused permission to go to the front. After visiting Moscow they returned to western Europe by way of Prussia, visiting en route various Prussian fortifications and the Prussian cavalry school. From Prussia they headed south through Vienna and Constantinople and at last arrived before Sebastopol where they were cordially treated by their British hosts, particularly General Simpson, then in command of the

British forces. McClellan returned via Italy, France, Germany, England, and finally Scotland, sailing for home in April, 1856.

While abroad, McClellan was introduced to the highly aristocratic military and governmental circles in Europe and found himself much at home with them. His classical training, personal charm, linguistic adroitness, and tremendous vitality all appealed to his European friends, and their manners, intelligence, and culture struck a responsive chord in him. He observed the care with which the Prussians organized their forces and the snap with which the garrison-trained French regulars made their movements. The seige of Sebastopol also made its impression. Perhaps later, as he drew his lines tighter at Yorktown, he recalled the British, French, and Italian ventures against Russia. He became convinced that much of European equipment was superior to American counterparts. He adapted a Hungarian saddle for American purposes, and the McClellan saddle became standard. The French-type uniform came into use in the American army and the Prussian system of organization, particularly the use of a large specialized staff, he later adapted for the Army of the Potomac.

He made a careful study of European theorists and prepared a Manual on the Art of War, as well as a translation of the French Manual on Bayonet Exercises. His report on his observations of European methods, brought out in 1857, was considered "a model of conciseness and accurate information and added to his already brilliant reputation."[1]

1 George B. McClellan, McClellan's Own Story, New York, Charles L. Webster & Co., 1887, 2, hereafter cited as McClellan, Own Story.

The army in the pre-war period had reached its very nadir in appeal to young men of talent. Promotions were slow, duty was deadening in its routine, and life was lonely. Grant, forced to be away from his wife, would turn to drink. Lee almost broke his heart over the slowness of promotion, and, had not war been in his very soul and had he not received some assignments such as that of Superintendent of West Point, he might possibly have left the army. Leonidas Polk had entered the ministry and risen to be Bishop of Louisiana. This peace-time army then ceased, as it did for many, to have appeal for McClellan. He accepted a position as chief engineer for the Illinois Central Railroad at a starting salary of $3,000 and a promise of a prompt raise to $5,000. With the Illinois Central he rose rapidly, soon becoming a vice-president of the line. During this period he made his home in Chicago. He entertained Stephen A. Douglas, and in 1858, during the Lincoln-Douglas debates, loaned his private car to Douglas which carried the "'Little Giant' past Lincoln's sidetracked caboose."[1] In 1860 he moved from Chicago to Cincinnati as head of the eastern division of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad at a salary of $10,000 a year.

Just before moving to Ohio, McClellan married Nellie Marcy, daughter of his old commanding officer. Although he had known her since the days of the Red River expedition, and they had been close friends, no great love was experienced by either of them. Nellie had for a time been engaged to A. P. Hill, for whom both Jackson and Lee were to call out in their dying

1 Carl Sandburg, Abraham Lincoln The War Years, I, New York, Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1939, 317, hereafter cited as Sandburg, War Years.

moments. But Hill's suit finally languished, partly, one can guess, because McClellan, the rising man, pressed his. Nellie probably did not love him at first, however, her parents helped persuade her that McClellan was the best match. He was rich and would grow richer, was cultivated and had aristocratic sentiments. His family was of the best, and above all, he was a Christian gentleman. The couple was married in Calvary Episcopal Church in New York on May 22, 1860. The following May was to see him maneuvering blue-clad soldiers on the borders of West Virginia.[1]

McClellan's life, especially after his marriage to the devout Nellie Marcy, was controlled by one quality above all others; his religion. To McClellan, to a much greater extent than was usual even for the times, God and Jesus Christ were real personal forces upon whom he depended for guidance at all times. His Christianity was deep and all-pervasive. His complete faith in the immortality of the soul gave him strength to withstand the hazards of the battlefield and the barbs of the politicians. In letters to his wife he reveals this pious nature to its fullest. In his Harrison's Landing letter written "on the brink of eternity"[2] he revealed himself to

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1 This summary of McClellan's life is based chiefly upon H. J. Eckenrode, George B. McClellan, Chapel Hill, the University of North Carolina Press, 1941. A more complete biographical sketch may be found in William Starr Meyers, A Study in Personality: General George Brinton McClellan, 1934. Professor Meyers attempts to show that certain qualities McClellan later demonstrated as a general originated in McClellan's youth and early manhood. The work represents one of the most severe indictments of McClellan available.

2 McClellan, Own Story, 489.

Lincoln as a man firm in his orthodox faith in God. His Christianity may well have influenced his use of his army after it had been organized. He would rather take Yorktown by seige than run the risk of killing men in unnecessary assaults. No butcher was McClellan. This same Christianity may have made him slow to suspect evil of others. It was but gradually that he came to learn that men could and would usurp the agencies of government for their own selfish purposes--either money, power, or position. For a time he judged all men by his own standards. He was a young man rising in the world with a beautiful wife and a fine Christian home. He gave that up for what he considered to be his patriotic duty. That others looked upon war as an opportunity for personal gain was incomprehensible to him.

McClellan, then, as he approached his destined encounter with Lincoln was a success. He was short, well built, with an amazing personal magnetism. He was regarded as one of the brightest products of the old army. He was an easterner who had fallen under the spell of the old world. He was polished in manner, gracious in deportment and skilled in the arts of correspondence and conversation. He radiated competence--which was actually to hinder him, for he looked as though he could accomplish the impossible--and people were disappointed when he failed. He was well read in political theory although as an army officer he had refrained from voting. His vote for Douglas in 1860 was the first time he exercised the franchise. His entire career was such as to make him supremely confident of his abilities. Everything he had ever attempted had succeeded. He was a scholar, a veteran soldier, an accomplished writer, a skilled administrator, and a courtly Christian gentleman. He had actually never known real adversity, nor for

that matter, after the Civil War was he to know it again. Not having experienced adversity, he found the effects of it incomprehensible in others. Having lived his life above the people, he could not understand how any man could obey the dictates of the people rather than those of his own judgment. He was an aristocrat and found more democratically oriented men to be unpleasant. His faith was in skilled leadership and disciplined obedience to its instructions. He was in almost every respect antithetical to Lincoln, who was a product of a completely different world.

Whoever attempts to describe Lincoln's fundamental beliefs is automatically on dangerous ground and whoever would attempt such analysis within a few paragraphs is deliberately inviting the lightning to strike. Yet so crucial to the McClellan story was the President that some statements about the Illinois man must be made to throw into clear relief the differences between the democrat Lincoln and the aristocrat McClellan.

Lincoln was a man of the west on whom the prairie country had left its indelible mark. In place of preparatory schools, home libraries, West Point, aristocratic friends, travel abroad and family-encouraged marriage, Lincoln's training was meagre. His home was typical of a backwoods, rural community. His friends and relatives, not poor by any means, were a rough breed of men whose language lacked the polish found in eastern communities of the well-to-do. His library was borrowed and his travel was confined to the valley of the Mississippi. His marriage resulted from an off again - on again courtship carried on through the good offices of friends and almost in spite of himself.

In place of the relatively unsophisticated political life of the peace-time army, Lincoln early became at home in the complex world of Illinois politics. This political experience, together with his career as a lawyer, cut deeply into his personality. Cabinet officers came to be "pumpkins" to him, one to be balanced against the other. The national government was frequently conducted on a basis of practical politics rather than according to deep and abiding principle although basic questions were usually decided in terms of fundamental ideals of justice and humanity. If an important vote was to be taken, the full range of federal patronage was available to obtain needed votes. Rather than risk failures of policy as a result of debates on principle, Lincoln would act in the absence of authority and seek approval after the fact. Papers and documents prepared for military commanders were more like lawyer's briefs, seeking justification for previously determined courses of action than probing inquiries initiated to obtain the greatest possible measure of truth.[1] Once elected in 1860, the presidential second-term bug had bitten deep into Lincoln. He was, for example, unable to trust the rising star of Grant in 1864 until he had become convinced that Grant would not be a candidate for the presidency. As McClellan's popularity grew in 1861-62, Lincoln saw in him a rival for the presidency and either consciously or unconsciously disliked him because of this fear.

Nor was his military experience such that he could at once appreciate the benefits officers might have obtained from West Point. His brief

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1 In explaining the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus Lincoln asked, "Are all the laws but one to go unexecuted, and the government itself go to pieces lest that one be violated?" with the clear implication that he would violate even the most important to save the Union.

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career as a volunteer in the Black Hawk War was the actual extent of his military service. Frequently, however, brief volunteer service convinces the civilian that there is very little to military science that a normally intelligent person cannot master in a very short while. During the Civil War he manifested more than a slight predilection for the opinions of civilians-turned-generals over and frequently against the opinions of the professional soldiers--that is until the shock of three years of war finally impressed upon him the need to trust men who knew, understood, and could apply the fundamentals of war. The complaint of General James S. Wadsworth, an early Free-Soiler and a founder of the Republican party, that the defenses of Washington were inadequate, was sufficient cause for Lincoln casually to investigate the matter, overrule McClellan, and withhold McDowell's corps from the Peninsula. Colonel Baker, an ex-Senator from Oregon, was killed at Ball's Bluff through sheer carelessness. His memory was not blamed for the defeat his command suffered but McClellan was made the scapegoat. The first request Lincoln ever refused Grant after that officer assumed command of all the armies was because a political objection had been raised to the officer in question. He early became convinced that the Constitutional provision making the President Commander-in-Chief might, if the occasion demanded, be literally applied. Only by bitter experience did he learn that that provision was only a manifestation of the ancient Anglo-Saxon principle that the military power is subordinate to the civil power. Lincoln achieved greatness as a war leader by allowing Grant full freedom to execute in military terms the broad policy developed by Lincoln the President. When Lincoln attempted to wield active, technical military

power he failed. His broad strategic concepts were ignored by his generals as being impractical. He and Stanton, his Secretary of War, were unsuccessful in directing troops in stopping Jackson in May, 1862 and they were in a large measure responsible for recalling the Army of the Potomac from its advanced position on the James River it was not to hold again for several years.

Lincoln began the study of military theory shortly after General McDowell failed at Manassas Junction in the late summer of 1861. Out of his reading and as a result of his own personality he evolved a definite, if somewhat illogical, philosophy of war. He assumed that the numerical weight of the North would ultimately be telling and that it could best be brought to bear on the Confederate armies by direct movements, taking the enemy wherever he was found. Looking at the map of the United States, he assumed that the armies of the North could begin to march straight south. The Army of the Potomac could move overland from Washington to Richmond while the armies of the west could move down the Mississippi Valley to the Gulf of Mexico. These maneuvers would, he believed, end the war.[1] His second assumption was that once men were under arms they could reasonably be expected to fight successful battles. The examples of the American Revolution, the French levee en masse of 1792 and the Black Hawk War possibly were in his mind; at any rate, his insistence upon rapid direct action, whether due only to external political pressures or to his own beliefs, did damage to the Union cause. Thirdly, he assumed a separation between military

[1] See below, 81.

objectives and political objectives. As late as the spring of 1865, he still believed that political questions should be considered only after military decision had been reached. He worried then for fear that Sherman would undertake political discussions in the Carolinas. In this respect he, Grant, Sheridan, and Sherman all represented a new theory of war that was different from McClellan's theories.[1] These men who achieved victory in 1865 represented a divorce of warfare from politics and, it is strongly suspected, from morality. They were the advocates of total war, unconditional surrender,[2] war on the enemy's power to make war. They forgot that after war people must again live with each other—that war was political action by other means. It is interesting in this connection to compare McClellan's over-all plan with that adopted by Sherman and Grant. He wanted a large army to fight one battle and then to impress the South with the good will and the might of the North. Sherman's destruction through Georgia was predicated upon a desire to end the war by making waste the heart of the Confederacy. Fourthly, Lincoln developed a penchant for strength figures and the implications he believed justified by his reading of them. He was, during the McClellan period, unable to understand the differences between strength revealed on reports and strength present on

1 These three men with the support of Lincoln evolved the campaign of 1864-65 which involved devastating the Shenandoah valley and the heart of Georgia as a means of breaking the Confederate will to fight. In doing so they foreshadowed the total war of the twentieth century. McClellan on the other hand consistently refused to make war on civilians.

2 It is true that McClellan asked for unconditional surrender from the forces at Rich Mountain. His entire record, however, supports the belief that he did not wish to make war upon civilians, that he did not wish to destroy if he could accomplish his objective in other ways and that he did not wish to be harsh with a weakened enemy.

a firing line. From a particular strength return he would frequently reason out a complete line of attack on the Confederates where none was actually justified in terms of troops present for duty. McClellan, on the other hand, was in a position to know the steady drain upon man power by desertion, casualties, details and maintaining an adequate supply system.

Lincoln was a nineteenth century liberal and as such was McClellan's opposite. This nineteenth century liberalism was composed of several factors and should not be confused with the twentieth century variety. It involved a close association with vigorous nationalism. It implied some of the concern of the earlier romanticists for the well-being of downtrodden peoples. It was based upon the highest possible regard for the individual and his rights. The classic expressions of nineteenth century liberals were uttered in recasting, to fit the times, the words of such documents as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man. Private property was sacred and formed one of the fundamental bases for this liberalism. The state should be strong enough to aid the welfare of as many people as possible. It might even infringe for a time upon the fundamental rights of people if their well-being demanded it. Political liberty was the hallmark characterizing this breed of men. They were firmly convinced that if political liberty were insured, economic and social well-being must result. Lincoln exemplified these liberals who were in the ascendancy, in Europe as well as in America, during the 1860's and 70's, before they gave way for a time to the forces of agrarian conservatism.

Perhaps Lincoln's outstanding characteristic was his dynamic Americanism. Not the Americanism of the bigot, for Lincoln on repeated occasions argued for the rights of foreign-born Americans and opposed vigorously the 100% Americanism of the Know-Nothings--but a fundamental belief in the validity of the democratic experiment which the United States had undertaken. The Civil War was to him the crucial test of that experiment. His nationalism implied a belief in strengthening the Federal government. As an exponent of public works, i.e., internal improvements, his career dated from his days as a member of the Illinois state legislature, and during his tenure as President he advocated such things as the Homestead Act, Land Grant Colleges, and grants for cross continental railroads. McClellan's nationalism was more circumspect. There existed, to his way of thinking, many activities in which the national government had no justification to engage. Even in a civil war the national government had no right to touch private property. The Emancipation Proclamation was therefore wrong.

Lincoln's faith in the truths of the great documents of the history of Anglo-Saxon political liberty is amply demonstrated in his career as a lawyer and in his public speeches. At no time as a lawyer was he quite so effective as when pleading a cause on the grounds of fundamental justice. Herndon cites repeated examples of where Lincoln would throw over a case if he believed justice lay with the other side. He was frequently upset by the technicalities of the law and would seek to free his case from them. Then he could base his arguments upon principles of fundamental justice and so sway the court. In such a plea as this one he reached

full stature:

> Time rolls by, the heroes of '76 have passed away and are encamped on the other shore. The soldier has gone to rest, and now, crippled, blind, and broken, his widow comes to you and to me, gentlemen of the jury, to right her wrongs.... Out here on the prairies of Illinois, many hundreds of miles from the scenes of her childhood, she appeals to us, who enjoy the privileges achieved for us by the patriots of the Revolution, for our sympathetic aid and manly protection. All I ask is, shall we befriend her.[1]

Nor in the other characteristics of nineteenth century liberalism was Lincoln lacking. His concern for humanity--black or white--was outstanding. He refused, for example, to approve execution of soldiers charged with cowardice before the enemy. Human nature being what it was, he could accept the fact that "heels" would frequently win in an argument with the head, when minnie balls whined about. His gloom on the fields of Antietam and his hope that Grant could end the war without that "one last battle" were rooted in his hatred of bloodletting. While his ideas on emancipation had a rationale based upon military expediency, the humane element of his nature was also expressed by them. Private property was sacred so long as concern for it did not impinge upon human rights and liberty. Yet the very military policies he projected were those most likely to result in a liberal spilling of the blood of friend and foe alike. McClellan's aristocratic Christianity gave force to greater actual saving of human life than did Lincoln's liberalism.

Lincoln's religious beliefs were those of the orthodox liberal. He was firmly convinced of a divine order in the universe, yet his reason led

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1 Herndon, Life of Lincoln, The World Publishing Co., 1942, 275.

him to reject any sort of religious orthodoxy. He read and argued about Paine's Age of Reason and at times tried to prove that the Christian religion was man-made. His religion was more of a social consciousness than a mystical experience, "When I do good I feel good, when I do bad I feel bad, and that's my religion."[1]

These two men, then, so opposite in background and temperament, were thrust into positions requiring immense confidence in each other before either had matured sufficiently to permit that confidence. Nor were the times such as to render growth of confidence easy. The outbreak of the American Civil War was attended by violent forms of fanaticism accentuating differences between persons which in other times probably would have gone unnoticed. McClellan, the aristocrat, the state rights man, the orthodox, the polished, the successful, became suspect. McClellan's emphasis on organization, accepting delay in campaigning as necessary, could cause him to be accused of treason, and of planning to establish a military dictatorship. His chivalry, manifest in such a thing as throwing a guard around the historic White House on the peninsula, could cause people to accuse him of pro-southern sympathies. His penchant for foreign phrases and foreign nobility allowed his enemies to level the charge of un-American against him. And by the same token, Lincoln's outstanding characteristics were such that in the light of the times McClellan could not understand nor appreciate them. McClellan saw the need for more men on the battlefield. Lincoln could only see the task of obtaining those

1 Ibid., 355.

men or, once obtained, the immediate use of them. Lincoln's intelligence was such that he liked to illustrate his arguments with pointed stories, regardless of their color. These tales represented only lack of breeding to McClellan. Lincoln saw the need for practical politics and for politically-chosen military officers who could help broaden the base of participation in the war effort. To McClellan this was a sign of weakness and unwillingness to employ the most competent generals available. Lincoln, thinking in terms of individual human beings, and being subjected to the supplications of the public, would, from time to time, except cases from the application of McClellan's orders. To McClellan this appeared as evidence of unwillingness to support generals in the field. McClellan, with the exception of confidences given to Generals Porter, Franklin, and sometimes Sumner, was inclined to keep his own counsel. Lincoln gained strength from talking to people, and, in talking to many people was not always discreet about matters of military security. Here again was an opportunity for disagreement. These differences were in time to mean that McClellan and Lincoln had to part.

The election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency of the United States on November 6, 1860, was the signal rather than the cause for a whole series of actions and reactions culminating in the disruption of the Federal Union. It is not the purpose of this work to present any detailed treatment of any of the issues involved in those actions. It is only to indicate some of the problems which bore most significantly upon the military campaigns of 1861-62, for, to a large extent, McClellan was relieved in 1862 because of major differences between himself and the Lincoln administration as to the

nature of the war in which they were engaged. Primary among those issues was the very nature of the war itself. To a great many people of the North the matter was simple. The Union had been a good political organism, inspiring loyalty in the hearts of people and having had an illustrious history which should be preserved and perpetuated. Various radical and fanatical people both in the North and South had conspired for selfish reasons to destroy the Union and to establish a smaller autonomous state, and so the Confederacy was established. It became the duty of the Union-loving men to bend their best efforts to the re-establishment of the Union, assuming that if that were done, the latent reason and common sense in the nation would be capable of solving the vexatious problems associated with the outbreak of war. In this respect Lincoln and McClellan held similar views at the outbreak of the war. As time went on, Lincoln's point of view shifted, partly, at least, because his party shifted, while McClellan's notions remained more constant.

To others the war was a device by which slavery could be abolished in the United States. It made little difference to these men that Lincoln and other moderate leaders did not share this belief. The Union had been broken. It should only be restored on the basis of abolition of slavery. It made little difference to some of these men how long the war raged or how much it cost in blood, broken homes, destroyed property, or dollars so long as the coveted end were achieved. Generals, such as McClellan, who seemed willing to end the war as quickly and as painlessly as possible and so restore the Union as it existed in 1858 were suspect. Politicians who favored this moderate position were castigated. To such men, John Brown

was a symbol of greatness and enlightenment rather than an exceedingly low kind of criminal. It was unfortunate for McClellan that Edwin Stanton, who became Secretary of War in late 1861, went clearly into the camp of these men. In part, at least, the hatred this man was to manifest for the commander of the Army of the Potomac resulted from that officer's distrust of the radicals.

There were, of course, regional, social, and economic pressures involved. To many, the Southern "slavocracy" was the antithesis of American democracy. Southern planters, and in many Northern eyes there were no other kinds of Southerner, had evolved a way of life contrary to the Protestant ethic of work. Such a condition smacked of old-world aristocracy and was hated as the European gentry had been hated. The Southern concept of the gentleman did not find favor in a number of homes in the North. Nor did the prevailing economic pattern of the South appeal to Northern workers whose very security was believed bound up with protective tariffs. Southern desires for freer trade for the sake of cotton, only increased the fears Northern industrialists had of a continuation of Southern domination at Washington. The war expressed for some their resentment of these things.

One issue that loomed large in the minds of contemporaries but even larger in the eyes of subsequent generations was the conflict between state rights men and those who saw the future of America linked to a strong national government. The lessons of Calhoun had been learned equally well by men of the North and South. Even among those who favored restoration of the Union were frequently to be found men who believed that in principle the Confederate states had much logic in their favor. The

tradition of the Hartford Convention was by no means dead in the North. In this respect the period 1860-65 was a period of intense transition for America. In 1860 a large percentage of the total population probably had state rights inclinations. As the war developed, however, the state rights philosophy was given the pragmatic test of war, found wanting, and so in the main discarded. For some, such as Robert E. Lee of Virginia, the transition could only come after military defeat of the state rights principle. For others, such as Horace Greeley of New York, vacillation as to the right of the Southern region to depart the Union in peace was to characterize his actions and words throughout the war. McClellan's views changed steadily during the war as evidenced by his changing concepts of the way in which the war should be waged. From contemplating only arming citizens of states his beliefs shifted to approval to a direct draft of men from the North. But throughout he persistently clung to the idea that the war should be fought only to preserve the Union in its old form.

On Monday, March 4, 1861, Lincoln was inaugurated as the sixteenth president of the United States. His inauguration was accomplished amid the highest tensions. States of the deep South already had passed ordinances of secession and the border states were in turmoil as to what their actions should be. Federal control of essential activities in the seceded states had been broken, Federal arsenals had been taken over by state officials, and Federal financial reserves had been diverted into state funds.[1]

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1 J. G. Randall, Lincoln the President, New York, Dodd Mead & Co., 1945, I, 315.

However, in a few isolated but highly strategic points the small Federal army had retained control. Forts Pickins, Taylor, and Jefferson along the Florida coast and Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina Harbor were under Union control, but of these Sumter was by far the most important politically. Standing there sullen and defiant, it served as a constant reminder to the hot-headed men living in the seat of secession that all of their dreams had not been consummated. There had been three federal forts in Charleston Harbor, but by March, Moultrie and Castle Pinckney were manned by South Carolinians.

On March 6, 1861, the Lincoln administration discovered that Major Robert Anderson had only supplies enough to remain in Fort Sumter another six weeks, and by April 15 it was clear that Anderson's garrison had either to be fed or evacuated. Lincoln's advisers in this matter were divided in their counsel. Some believed that Sumter should be provisioned and strengthened, others that it should be provisioned alone, while still others believed that any relief of Sumter would be unwise since it would appear to Southern authorities as an overt act and would very probably lead to war. Lincoln, in soliciting opinion in this instance, exercised his prerogative of asking for written opinions from his cabinet members. The final solution, however, was his. He decided that he would attempt to provision Sumter while at the same time he would reinforce Fort Pickens on the Florida coast, a much less explosive situation. This way he could perhaps maintain Union authority and yet not appear overtly antagonistic to the South Carolinians. The execution of these plans, however, were bungled by conflicting orders. The upshot was that at 3:20 A.M., April 12, notice was served on Major

Anderson that fire would be opened on Sumter within an hour. At 4:30 firing began and continued until Anderson surrendered. He marched his troops out on Sunday afternoon, April 14, with "colors flying and drums beating, bringing away company and private property, and saluting...[his] flag with fifty guns."[1]

Lincoln's response to these events was a proclamation calling on the States to furnish milita to the number of 75,000 men to suppress the combinations in insurrection, "to cause the laws to be duly executed," and for the Congress to meet in special session July 4, 1861. It came as a bolt of lightning to the North, clearing the air and uniting a people behind its government. Those who experienced Lincoln's first proclamation must have felt very much as Americans did on Monday, December 8, 1941, after the Japanese attack had consolidated the nation for war. The period of indecision had ended.

Along the border, however, feelings were different. Virginia reluctantly voted an ordinance of secession on April 17. By May 7, Arkansas and Tennessee had quit the Union; North Carolina, previously strong in Union sentiment passed its ordinance of secession without a dissenting vote. In Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri, the question of secession hung in the balance for months until the question was resolved by force of arms, vigorous executive action and legislative procedures favoring the Union. The die had been cast and the opening curtain drawn for a struggle that was not to end until, amid the smoking ruins of Atlanta, Richmond, and

1 Ibid., 342.

Petersburg, the Confederate will to fight expired. It was in the borderland of Western Virginia that McClellan was to play out his first role in the conflict.

Lincoln's call for troops found a nation unprepared for any sort of military activity outside of lightly garrisoning frontier posts and doing internal police duty. In December, 1860, the army consisted of 1,108 officers and 15,259 enlisted men. These troops were located chiefly west of the Mississippi River from where the Buchanan government had made no effort to recall them to the more threatened east. From this small total must be subtracted the number of officers who resigned and "went South." The capital city was virtually without defenses. However, more in spite of Buchanan's government than because of it, volunteer forces of District citizens were raised and eventually provided with small arms. It was such volunteer forces, under oath to protect the Federal government, that served as the primary military covering force to insure the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln as President.[1]

The command of this small force was in the hands of Virginia-born Winfield Scott with his headquarters in the Winders Building opposite the War Department. Scott had been born in 1786, had fought at Niagara Falls in the War of 1812, had commanded the successful attack from the coast into Mexico City, and in 1852 had been the unsuccessful Whig candidate for the presidency. A tremendous man--six foot, five inches tall, weighing

1 Charles P. Stone was made Inspector-General in charge of these forces. Battles & Leaders, New York, The Century Co., 1884-87, I, 7-25. Hereafter cited as B. & L.

over three hundred pounds "Old Fuss and Feathers" loved the Union and hated Jefferson Davis.[1] Some suspected that in order to heighten the effectiveness of his appearance when decked out in full regalia he selected aides short in stature. He had given the necessary orders to Stone to organize volunteer companies and had brought to Washington a small number of regulars who were to insure that the change of presidents took place according to law. He had, on his own authority, stopped the shipments of arms to the states which had already declared themselves free and had unsuccessfully urged the Buchanan administration to take effective action in respect to the Forts in Florida and in South Carolina. Scott was of the opinion that the Lincoln government would be an improvement over the old and he hoped that whatever that government did do would be in the direction of restoring the Union. He believed that the victorious party would be well served to exchange the name Republican for Union Party in order to encourage the return of the Southern states. If that policy were not followed, he believed the government should exert its fullest authority in places not yet definitely denied to it, or that the seceded states ought to be conquered by an invading army 300,000 strong under the command of a "young and able general--a Wolfe, a Desaix or a Hoche."[2] A last possibility was to "say to the seceded states--wayward sisters, depart in peace."[3] But Scott was old and although his intentions were sound and

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1 Ibid., I, 1[illegible].

2 Edward Kearns, The Lincoln Papers, New York, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1948, II, 4[illegible].

3 Ibid.

honorable he was feeble and ill. He could no longer mount a horse and he frequently could be caught napping while an officer was explaining something to him. He was to prove a stumbling block in the path of the rising McClellan and eventually, at his own request, was retired with the full pay and rank of Lieutenant General. No one else was to obtain that rank until Congress recreated it for Grant, although McClellan succeeded to command of the Federal armies.

As Lincoln's proclamation was released to the nation there was no one person who might reasonably be expected to fill Scott's place. Scott himself had suggested Robert E. Lee, but that officer, painful as it was for him, could not accept command of troops whose mission it would be to coerce the South. When his own state withdrew from the Union, Lee's code allowed him no other recourse than to follow her. Other officers who might have helped Scott in the arduous duties of command made the same decision. Joseph E. Johnston, the Quartermaster-General of the old army, Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard (the man who, according to natives of his own Louisiana, spoke well of Lee), an engineer and widely regarded as one of the old army, John Bankhead Magruder, who on the day before he "went South" is reported to have assured Lincoln of his fidelity to the Union, and former Paymaster James Longstreet also left.[1]

Lincoln's call was for 75,000 troops to be enlisted for three months by the governors of the states. There immediately began such an uproar

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1 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, New York, Charles Scribners' Sons, 1942, I, xxxii-xliv.

the continent had never experienced. Any one who wished to, set about organizing companies or regiments with the result that an amazing variety of exotic sounding and appearing units quickly came into a precarious existence. "The 'Excelsior Brigade,' the 'Buena Vista Guards,' the New York 'Fire Zouaves' (led by the dashing Ellsworth)"[1] to name but a few. These units, as quickly as they were organized and clothed into some kind of military garb were offered to the Federal government through the person of Simon Cameron, the Secretary of War. Cameron had absolutely no conception of what was involved in mobilizing an army, and many of the blunders which cost the Federal government precious time were attributable to him. Regular officers, who should have been formed into cadres upon which could be built a strong volunteer force, were kept, over the objections of Scott and later McClellan, with regular units. Instead of being officers having had professional training, regimental and brigade officers of volunteer units were civilians many of whom had never heard a gun "fired in anger." Since no one had had much military experience, company and regimental officers were placedin their positions by popular election of the soldiers. In spite of obvious limitations, however, this system did not fare too badly since anyone with even the faintest military reputation was regarded with awe. Men who were graduates of West Point or were veterans of the Mexican War were almost certain to become officers. Generals were appointed

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1 J. G. Randall, Civil War & Reconstruction, Boston, D.C. Heath & Co., 1937, 265.

by the President and confirmed by the Senate, but in practice were selected by the governors of the states.

While the states drove themselves into a frenzy enlisting troops, dispatching purchasing agents in all directions to secure arms and equipment and forcing southern sympathizers to conform to northern mores, Lincoln's government found itself virtually cut off from the area it represented. Located as it was between Maryland, strong in southern tradition, and Virginia, soon to become the heart and head of the Confederacy, Washington was easy to isolate. On April 19, the Sixth Massachusetts regiment passed through Baltimore and in doing so precipitated a riot in which four of the troops were killed and many others wounded. The regiment finally got through to Washington and was quartered in the Capitol. After the riot, troops were shunted around Baltimore for fear of generating a first-class riot at the least or of driving Maryland into the Confederacy at the most. Progress was slow and as the telegraph lines had been cut, the people in Washington were completely ignorant as to what was happening in the North. The city was almost completely without defenders, and the government momentarily feared a lunge northward across the Potomac by Confederate troops.

Such isolation of the city was devastating to the morale of the inhabitants. Government men went about their routine duties with long faces, stopping from time to time to pass on or receive the latest rumor. Houses and business places were quiet; in fact, everything was quiet except for the occasional clatter of small detachments of cavalry in the streets and the pace of sentinels about the Executive Mansion. From time to time

telegraph operators could hear faint clickings of secessionist messages, and these only served to heighten the unnatural calm of the city. The last shipment of mail had told stories of wild excitement throughout the North, of the departure of New York's Seventh regiment, of Governor Sprague's sailing with his Rhode Islanders, of a monster mass meeting in Union Square, and of the host of other manifestations of patriotism. But none of this were real to Lincoln. Speaking to soldiers of the Massachusetts Sixth wounded in the Baltimore outbreak, he expressed his gloom:

> I don't believe there is any North. The Seventh regiment is a myth. R. Island is not known in our geography any longer. You are the only Northern realities.[1]

But on the same day, the Seventh New York and the Seventh Massachusetts started overland from Annapolis to their railhead. By noon the troops arrived in Washington and with their arrival the bottleneck was broken. Thereafter troops flowed into Washington and the capital was again in contact with its nation.[2] The combined work of installing a new party in power and of mobilization for a war moved on. Lincoln's task was getting well under way while McClellan's, the first phase developing in the west, was just commencing.

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1 Tyler Dennett, Lincoln and the Civil War in the Diaries and Letters of John Hay, New York, Dodd Mead & Co., 1939, 11. Hereafter cited as Hay, Diaries.

2 Ibid., 12.

CHAPTER II

WAR, A CONTINUATION OF POLITICS

As an important railroad official, as a well-known Democrat of the Douglas persuasion, and as an ex-military man of outstanding record, George B. McClellan was much in demand during the hectic days following Lincoln's April call to arms. As a prominent native son, his services were desired by Governor Curtin of Pennsylvania, and in New York he was being considered for the post of commander of that state's forces. While en route there to talk over military matters, he was asked to stop at Columbus, Ohio to talk to Governor Dennison.[1] He was met at the Columbus railroad station and taken at once to the State House by Jacob D. Cox, a member of the Ohio legislature and the senior military adviser to Governor Dennison. McClellan appeared at this time as a quiet, modest man under medium height. His body was muscularly formed and his well-poised, splendidly-shaped head sat atop heavy shoulders well conditioned to military posture. Even in his plain traveling dress, McClellan gave the impression of supreme confidence in himself and his ability to cope with any situation.[2]

Dennison described to McClellan the pitiful condition of Ohio's military resources and asked him, pending enabling legislation to be acted upon that very day, to accept command of all Ohio troops with the

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1 McClellan, Own Story, 40.
2 B. & L., I, 89.

rank of Major-General of Ohio Volunteers. It is interesting in this connection to realize that Dennison's first choice for the position was Irvin McDowell, who was prevented from accepting because of regular army duties. Dennison's idea in naming a commander-in-chief for Ohio forces was to free himself from the tremendous weight of administrative duty organizing a state militia involved. He wanted to delegate to McClellan full responsibility for organizing, supplying, and fighting Ohio troops as well as coordinating their efforts with those of other states and with the national government. With this understood, McClellan accepted the appointment and at once entered upon his duties with vigor.

A survey of Ohio's resources revealed that Governor Dennison, if anything, had been guilty of understating the case in describing them as pitiful. There were, on April 23, 1,880 small arms and 31 field guns.[1] The small arms were, in general, smooth bore muskets of ancient design, and the field pieces were rusted and corroded from too much firing of blank ammunition for ceremonials. Equipment was in even worse condition. An inspection of the state arsenal revealed only a pile of cavalry harnesses rotting and mildewed with age--"a fine stock of munitions on which to begin a great war."[2] Assuming they must start from scratch, Cox and McClellan began to plan for raising and equipping 10,000 men and ways those men could best be used in a grand design for ending the rebellion. As they talked that spring day, McClellan began to describe a strategic plan he later

1 George B. McClellan, Report on the Organization & Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac, New York, Sheldon & Co., Publishers, 1864, 7. Hereafter cited as McClellan, Report.

2 B. & L., I, 90.

forwarded to General Scott for consideration by the national government. The area between the Mississippi and the Alleghenies and north of the Ohio River should, he believed, form one strategic field under the command of one man. He assumed that hostilities in this field would break out along the Ohio River, but he hoped that political action could postpone such an outbreak in order to allow the northwest time to prepare and to permit Washington to be relieved from its precarious position. For the west, he proposed occupying Cairo, Illinois, Sandoval, Ohio, places along the Illinois Central below Vincennes, Seymore (so as to observe Louisville), Cincinnati, and Chillicothe. With an active wing of this western army he suggested crossing the Ohio River at Gallipolis and moving up the valley of the Great Kanawha on Richmond, coordinated with a move on Cumberland and possibly a raid on Louisville. The Richmond movement should be promptly undertaken and have as one of its essential objectives the relief of Washington. If Kentucky elected to leave the Union, he suggested employing a force of some 80,000 troops to cross the Ohio River at Cincinnati and march straight to Nashville, Tennessee. If this movement were successful so that Kentucky and Tennessee were brought under Federal control, a movement, in concert with a similar one organized in the east toward Charleston, could be made on Montgomery, Alabama. He did not believe the North should remain passively on the defensive. If it proved impossible to arm the troops required for the second plan he suggested the first plan, i.e., down the Great Kanawha valley, be attempted. It was, however, "absolutely necessary that the Gen. Govt. should strain

every nerve to supply the west with Arms, Ammunition and Equipments."[1]

General Scott, pressed as he was in planning ways of utilizing the new troops, was not happy to receive such advice from a young upstart, and endorsed the note along to Lincoln with comments tearing the plan to pieces. McClellan, he suggested, planned his operations to employ... "men whose term of service would expire by the time he had collected and organized them." The march "upon Richmond from the Ohio would probably insure the revolt of Western Virginia.... The general eschews water transportation by the Ohio and Mississippi.... His plan is to subdue the Seceded States, by piecemeal, instead of enveloping them all (nearly) at once, by a cordon of posts on the Mississippi to its mouth, from its junction with the Ohio, and by blockading ships of war on the seaboard."[2]

McClellan's plan at this early stage was admittedly rough and immature. Yet it did have the redeeming feature of representing thinking in broad strategic terms rather than in terms of local engagements only. In addition, it contained the germ of what was to become one of his fundamental beliefs, i.e., that the defense of Washington could be best accomplished by offensive operations against the Confederate army. In this instance he was suggesting that any threat Virginia troops posed to Washington could be countered by a drive through western Virginia on Richmond. Also implicit in his plan was the notion that the designation of a supreme field commander was essential to carry out any design for victory. There is no

1 Mearns, The Lincoln Papers, II, 599-600.
2 Ibid., 601.

reason to suppose that at such an early date McClellan visualized himself in that role. He had been a captain in the old army and he had accepted a rank much higher than his age and relative rank would have allowed him to aspire. He was, of course, interested in securing as much support as possible for his own particular sphere of activity; hence his emphasis upon the western movement. When transferred east, he was equally solicitous about securing sufficient force to make the major effort from that area.

McCLELLAN'S EARLY STRATEGIC PLAN

Faced with a pressing need to provide for the growing swarm of volunteer companies and regiments which began daily to pour into Columbus, McClellan ordered General Cox to a place on the outskirts of Cincinnati to establish a permanent training camp. At that place, designated

Camp Dennison, Cox and Captain Rosecrans established a reception center and developed a training program based on Hardee's Tactics and whatever else volunteer officers thought troops should know. The regiment and a half which Cox took with him to Camp Dennison built their own quarters and subsequently arriving units were required to do the same thing. Each regiment established its own camp and was made responsible for its own administration. Troops were drilled without arms, since none were available, and schools were established within each regiment to teach volunteer officers something of the mysteries of drill and command. During the two weeks following Cox's arrival, all Ohio troops, excepting those sent on to Washington, were received at Camp Dennison. Brigades were organized and the command of the whole devolved upon General J. H. Bates. McClellan had at first intended moving to Camp Dennison, but the press of administrative duty kept him in Columbus.[1]

A problem which plagued McClellan during these formative days was the absolute lack of an adequate staff to handle the details of establishing, training, equipping and supplying a field army. There had been nothing in the old regular army remotely resembling a general staff. Units were in general small, and commanders could deal directly with each other on all matters, whether administrative or operational. Now with a real need for staff work of a high order, there was just no tradition for it in the American army. The government's policy denied to these new units the only people who had the slightest "know-how" as to details of making returns,

1 B. & L., I, 96.

commanding drills, and instructing in the use of weapons. Eventually, of course, the policy was changed, but during the time when regular army staff officers would have been invaluable there were none to be had. McClellan had early sensed the need for a staff. On the very day of his appointment to the command of Ohio troops he wrote to General Scott asking for the detail of staff officers.[1] He repeated his request somewhat later, but as Washington seemed disinclined to grant his request, he began a concealed recruitment of a staff on which he could depend. Captain Gordon Granger, who was in Cincinnati on temporary recruiting duty, was made inspector-general. Captain Lawrence Williams became an aide and Major Seth Williams the assistant adjutant general. McClellan's father-in-law, Randolph Marcy, was made paymaster and stayed on to become chief of staff of the Army of the Potomac.[2] A number of the officers who joined McClellan during his tenure with the Ohio troops stayed with him and formed the nucleus for the splendid staff of the Army of the Potomac.

Gradually some order in the defenses of the nation began to evolve, more, it is true, by the efforts of such men as McClellan in forcing the War Department to make decisions than through the initiative of Cameron and Scott. The nation was divided into military departments and commanders appointed. On May 3, 1861 the Department of the Ohio was created, consisting of the states of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. McClellan was assigned command of the department and given the rank of Major-General United States

1 B. & L., I, 94.
2 McClellan, Own Story, 43-45.

Army. His mission was to insure the defense of his department and to reclaim any questionable ground in the name of the Union. He received his copy of the order on May 13 and assumed command on that date. Earlier, however, he had begun to act on the basis of unofficial evidence of his appointment. He got in touch with the governors of the three states forming his department (Morton-Indiana, Yates-Illinois, and Dennison-Ohio) to encourage them to speed up recruitment of troops as rapidly as the availability of equipment would allow. On matters of coordinating the activities of the states and on matters involving relationships with the border states, McClellan was forced to act pretty much on his own responsibility. The lack of staff and the lack of effective military leadership in Washington placed heavy responsibility on field commanders. Such a matter as securing cavalry and artillery for his department proved to be especially vexatious to him. Requests sent to Scott for field batteries were either unanswered or else replied to with the statement that the department did not need them. Finally, upon McClellan's recommendation, the governors of the three states organized, on their own responsibility, gun batteries and units of cavalry. Three batteries of unmounted artillery passed through Cincinnati and there McClellan detained them, sending an officer to Washington asking permission to keep and mount them. Scott was more than a little upset about the request and told Captain Getty, the officer from Ohio, that he knew "more about artillery than General McClellan does, and it is not for him to teach me."[1]

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1 McClellan, Own Story, 47.

While putting his enlarged command in order, McClellan and Marcy were required to be on the road a good deal visiting installations, holding conferences with state officials, and straightening out difficulties as they developed in recruitment, supply, or training. While he was away from Columbus on one of these visits, U. S. Grant paid a visit to his headquarters to see if McClellan could use him on his staff. Marcy believed McClellan could and told Grant to wait until the general's return. Before that time, however, Grant received word that he could command a regiment of Illinois troops, and so resumed a military career that was to end with command of the entire United States Army.[1] On these visits several trouble spots appeared to claim McClellan's attention. His solution to the problems he discovered form the history of the latter period of his command in the west.

One such trouble spot was Kentucky, which, although not in his department, remained as a possible danger on the border of the states comprising McClellan's command. Kentucky was one of those states in which the secessionist feeling was effectively countered by either strong Union sentiments or a willingness to compromise. The leaders of Kentucky, Governor Magoffin, Senator Crittenden, Breckinridge, and others, were in favor of compromise rather than of accepting either of the extreme positions. There were, it is true, some extreme secessionists who attempted to call a state convention to take Kentucky out of the Union. Unionists opposed such a move, and pro-Southern public opinion was not strong enough to force the legislature to convene a convention. With the firing on Fort Sumter and the calls for

1 Ibid., 47.

troops, first by Lincoln and then by the Confederate secretary of war, Kentucky drifted toward a position of neutrality between the two sections. This condition lasted roughly from May to September, 1861, and placed a difficult problem in the laps of field commanders who without knowledge of Lincoln's political aims had to fit actions into policy of their own improvisation.[1]

Several weeks before taking the field against the Confederates in western Virginia, McClellan was paid a friendly call by Simon B. Buckner, at that time commander of the Kentucky militia, to talk over the situation in Kentucky and to find out what the Union forces would do in event the secessionist troops then being organized by General Pillow were to stage a raid into Kentucky. Buckner, having secessionist sympathies, was most anxious that the Union troops stay out of Kentucky and so assured McClellan that if Pillow did attack, the Kentuckians would drive him out of the state. McClellan warned Buckner: "You had better be quick about it, Simon, for if I learn that the rebels are in Kentucky, I will, with or without orders, drive them out without delay." He went on to warn Buckner that the government had granted no power to guarantee the neutrality of Kentucky but that he certainly could not respect even quasi-neutrality if Confederate troops entered the state. The implications of his statements, however, were such as to lead the Kentuckians to believe the North would not invade unless the South did first,[2] thus helping to quiet fears that the new Republican administration was determined to ride

1 Randall, Civil War & Reconstruction, 319-320.
2 McClellan, Own Story, 49.

rough shod over the liberties of its political opponents.

During May, McClellan wrote to Lincoln discussing affairs in the West and praising Lincoln's policy of distributing arms to Kentucky Unionists, for that proved to them that the Federal government had no intention of subjugating them. He warned of the delicate situation developing in western Kentucky, as a convention then being held at Mayfield might at any time declare the western part of the state separate from Kentucky and annexed to Pennsylvania. If that action were taken, Confederate troops could be expected to move in, thus forcing the armed Union men to precipitate a crisis by driving Pillow back out.[1] By his analysis of both of these situations regarding Kentucky, McClellan proved himself keenly aware of the political needs of the situation and of ways the military arm could best be used to accomplish what he supposed were the political objectives. In times of stress, military men are too frequently inclined to act first and to ask questions later. McClellan demonstrated that he could defer action if suitable political issues were at stake. He felt deeply the need however, for more specific instructions from Washington.

> Rest assured that I will exert all my energies to carry out what I suppose to be your policy, and that I will be glad to be informed if I have misconceived your views.[2]

A problem which jointly confronted McClellan and old General Robert Patterson, commanding the Department of Pennsylvania, was the Confederate occupation of Harpers Ferry and their control of a part of the Baltimore and Ohio railroad tracks. From April 18 on, the Confederates had occupied

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1 Mearns, The Lincoln Papers, 625.
2 Ibid., 626, (Italics mine).

Harpers Ferry and were in position to regulate the flow of traffic along the B. & O. tracks. These troops were under the command of Colonel T. J. Jackson and were charged with the responsibility of observing the Union forces in Pennsylvania and Maryland and protecting the Confederate main body at Winchester.

General Patterson eventually began very tentative operations against this salient, but soon became convinced that he was faced by superior forces and so halted his advance. He wired his position to McClellan and asked for aid. McClellan at once wired General Scott of Patterson's plea for help and suggested that troops from the Department of the Ohio move down the B. & O. They could then join with Patterson's troops in clearing out the line--Cumberland, Williamsport, Harpers Ferry--and drive into the Shenandoah valley. Scott's reply was again highly discouraging: "the region beyond Piedmont is not within General McClellan's command. When his opinion is desired about matters there it will be asked for."[1] It should be kept in mind that Confederate troops moving from the Shenandoah valley were the determining factors in McDowell's defeat at the first battle of Bull Run. McClellan's idea of strengthening Patterson sufficiently to permit an offensive contained real insight into the military situation.

A third and perhaps major problem which presented itself to McClellan was related in political principle to the Kentucky affair and by strategic considerations to the Confederate positions based upon Harpers Ferry. The people living in the western counties of Virginia were not sympathetic to secession. A number of these men from the mountain regions even desired

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1 McClellan, Own Story, 47.

to establish a separate state which would be loyal to the Union. They were not, however, in agreement as to how they could best make good their desires. Some wanted an actual invasion by Federal troops to forestall a similar action by the authorities at Richmond. Others were convinced that such overt proceedings would but alienate the growing Union sentiment in the region. A better way, they believed, lay in local groups obtaining arms and equipment from the Federal government and defending themselves against secessionists. As this region had been assigned to the Department of the Ohio on May 9, McClellan was forced to ponder these alternatives. His own state rights sympathies caused him to favor allowing the western Virginians to make good their own revolution with arms supplied by him. He was content to rest along the borders of the Ohio so long as the Richmond authorities made no hostile move and so long as the region was not adopted as the main line of attack upon Richmond by the War Department. His only hostile move was to transfer some troops from Camp Dennison to places a little closer to the border of the state, but that was all.

The new commander of the Virginia troops, Robert E. Lee, had also considered the mountain counties and how best they could be kept under the authority of Virginia. Lee arrived at the same conclusion as McClellan, i.e., that any display of force from outside the area would only serve to drive the western people into the opposite camp. But since there had to be some sort of garrison in the region, if only to oppose the Ohio troops, he ordered Major Alonzo Loring of Wheeling to recruit a volunteer force at that place and Major Francis M. Boykin to do the same at

Grafton. Colonel George A. Porterfield of Jackson's Harpers Ferry command was to combine these two forces into a regiment to be reinforced by troops detached from Harpers Ferry. The command was to occupy various points along the B. & O. tracks and to help keep the population of West Virginia loyal to the state. Porterfield was to concentrate at Grafton, Parkersburg, and Moundsville.

Recruiting efforts were unsuccessful and when Porterfield arrived at Grafton on May 14 to assume command he found no troops. He pointed out that there was great "disaffection...and opposition to the lawful action of the state authorities is certainly contemplated."[1] Lee then became convinced that outside force would be required and so ordered state units from Staunton to Grafton and enjoined the commander at Harpers Ferry to lend all assistance possible to accomplish the assigned missions.[2] These in addition to the companies which had been raised at Pruntytown, Philippi, and Clarksburg he believed ought to be sufficient.[3] On May 25, Porterfield assumed the initiative by ordering the destruction of bridges on the B. & O. main line as far west as possible. Willey, the officer responsible, complied and that evening demolished two bridges over Buffalo Creek. On the 27th he burned important bridges between Clarksburg and Parkersburg.[4]

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1 Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1 Series, Volume II, 843. Hereafter cited in the form Offic. Rec., 1 ser., II, 843.

2 Ibid., 874.

3 Ibid., 855.

4 F. P. Summers, The Baltimore & Ohio in the Civil War, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939, 72.

McClellan, while well aware of these movements on the part of Virginia forces, was not greatly concerned. He assumed that the operations could not prelude a Confederate offensive into Ohio and he still wanted to refrain, if at all possible, from injuring the sensibilities of the western Virginians. Scott, however, received word of the Confederate activities and on May 24 wired that he had..."certain intelligence that at least two companies of Virginia troops have reached Grafton evidently with the purpose of overawing the friends of the Union in Western Virginia. Can you counteract the influence of that detachment? Act promptly...."[1] McClellan replied at once that he would clear the entire region if that were desired, but he received no reply; nor, for that matter, did he receive any subsequent order concerning sending troops into western Virginia. Scott's cryptic message of the 24th might have referred to furnishing more arms to the inhabitants, conducting a propaganda campaign, or overt military operations. Clarification was sadly needed. McClellan's campaign in that sector was actually undertaken completely on his own responsibility.[2] In the light of the delicate political questions involved, one can only wonder at his willingness to assume such a heavy responsibility, for his invasion of western Virginia might well have resulted in a _levee en masse_ against him or a complete repudiation of him by his government.

Nevertheless, McClellan began at once to plan two expeditions, one to Grafton and the other to the Kanawaha valley. He was somewhat hindered

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1 _Offic. Rec._, 1 ser., II, 648.
2 McClellan, _Report_, 13.

in his preparations since he was also in the process of re-enlisting three-month men for terms of three years. Many units were kept out of the west Virginia campaign because of the reorganization the re-enlistments made necessary. While at Camp Dennison on the afternoon of May 26, he received word of Porterfield's bridge-burning expedition. This was the overt act for which he had been waiting to justify crossing the west Virginia frontiers. He returned to Cincinnati at once and dispatched orders putting in motion the elements of his frontier forces. Colonel B. T. Kelly was at Wheeling with a partly equipped regiment of west Virginia volunteers. From there Kelly was ordered to march down the B. & O. tracks in the direction of Fairmount to prevent any further damage to railroad bridges and to repair bridges already burned out. Colonel Irwin was dispatched with the 16th Ohio Volunteers from Bellaire into Virginia to cooperate with Kelly. Colonel Stedman was ordered to take his own regiment, the 14th Ohio, the 18th Ohio and Barnett's State Battery to take possession of Parkersburg on the morning of May 27, then to move on to Grafton.[1]

To insure that his movements were understood by the civilian population, he addressed to them a Proclamation dated May 26:

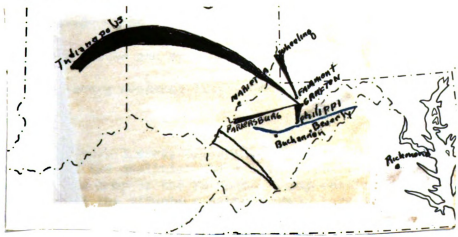
> Virginians! The general government has long enough endured the machinations of a few factious rebels in your midst.... Having failed...to deprive you of...your...rights, they now seek to...force you to...submit to the yoke of...the Southern Confederacy. They are...ruining your...railways. The general government has...abstained from sending troops across the Ohio...although urged to....It determined to await the result of the late election....As soon as the result of the election was known, the traitors commenced their work of destruction. The general government cannot close its ears to the demand you have made for assistance....Troops...come as your friends

1 McClellan, Report, 14-15.

and brothers....Your homes...families...property are safe... all your rights shall be...respected....I call upon you to fly to arms and support the central government....Proclaim to the world that...you remain true to the stars and stripes![1]

To fire the hearts of his soldiers he addressed them in these terms:

Soldiers!--You are ordered to cross the frontier, and enter upon the soil of Virginia.
Your mission is to restore peace and confidence, to protect the majesty of the law, and to rescue our brethern from the grasp of armed traitors. You are to act in concert with Virginia troops, and to support their advance. I place under the safeguard of your honor, the persons and property of the Virginians. I know that you will respect their feelings and all their rights.
Preserve the strictest discipline;--remember that each of you holds in his keeping, the honor of Ohio and the Union. If you are called upon to overcome armed opposition, I know that your courage is equal to the task;--but remember, that your only foes are the armed traitors,--and show mercy even to them when they are in your power, for many of them are misguided. When, under your protection the loyal men of Western Virginia have been enabled to organize and arm, they can protect themselves, and you can then return to your homes, with the proud satisfaction of having saved a gallant people from destruction.[2]



McCLELLAN'S WEST VIRGINIAN
CAMPAIGN OF SPRING
1861

1 Ibid., 16.
2 McClellan, Report, 16-17.

Kelly left Wheeling at about 7:00 A.M. on the 27th and Irwin and Stedman left their positions at about 10:00 the same morning. General Thomas A. Morris was alerted in Indianapolis to be ready to move his Indiana volunteers from there on receipt of telegraphic orders. Not knowing the abilities or discretion of the officers who were to carry out his orders, McClellan sent supplementary instructions to Kelly warning him to be careful and not to engage the enemy unless he were sure of victory. He was not to proceed to Grafton except on specific orders or intelligence that Stedman had already occupied it. He was enjoined to maintain the greatest secrecy and to keep in constant telegraphic contact with Cincinnati.[1]

Kelly arrived at the burned-out bridges and promptly set to work repairing them. At the same time he moved an advanced guard to the important bridge over the Monongahela River at Fairmont. At 11:00 A.M., May 30, he moved on and reached Grafton by 2:30 that afternoon, finding that the Confederates had evacuated it before his arrival. Stedman arrived at Clarksburg somewhat later, having been delayed by the destruction

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., II, 45-46. In this order McClellan demonstrated many of the qualities which later were to characterize him as commander of the Army of the Potomac. Fully realizing the limitations of green troops and the effects a setback could have on their morale as well as the political fortune in his state, he ordered caution. Also believing that only he could handle his campaign if he controlled it step by step, he placed a restraining line on Kelly. Later, during the Peninsular and Maryland campaigns, McClellan also retained complete control during the preliminary phases, although once a battle was joined McClellan, as did Lee, allowed his subordinates to conduct the battle. Only once did he ever issue a general march order, for once such an order was executed the commanding general lost control over events, thus running the risk of precipitating a battle before he was ready.

of the bridges in his path. Guards were at once placed around all recovered bridges while reinforcements were hurried forward from Ohio and Indiana. Morris was ordered to bring the 6th, 7th, and 9th Indiana regiments and to assume command at Grafton. He arrived on May 31, and at once began plans for pushing on toward Philippi.[1]

Morris found that Colonel Kelly had organized an expedition for the night of the 31st against the enemy, who had retreated to Philippi. Morris, however, deferred the attack. On June 2, he ordered Kelly to a point six miles east of Grafton from which he was to move overland by the shortest possible manner, coming before the town of Philippi at 4:00 A.M. the next morning. A second column under Colonel Dumont was sent to Webster on the evening of the 2nd from where, together with Stedman's command, it was to move on Philippi at the same time as Kelly. During the night a heavy storm blew up and the men were not able to keep to their schedule. The attack was made, however, and the village occupied, but the bulk of the Southern force made good their escape. During the fight Colonel Kelly was wounded, at first it was believed mortally, although subsequent examination proved it to be superficial. As soon as Philippi was taken, the Union troops prepared it for defense and as a base from which future operations could be launched.[2] During the next several weeks, as more units were trained and equipped at Camp Dennison, they were pushed forward to Morris who used them in guarding the

1 McClellan, Report, 18.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., II, 67-68.

railroad to his rear and in building up for subsequent movements.[1]

Lee was now placed in a difficult position by the Union movements. If the Federal advance continued south through Beverly, it would place them astride the Staunton-Parkersburg stage road which, southeast of Beverly, made junction with the various roads crossing the Alleghenies. Unless opposed by sufficient forces, Federal columns could exploit these crossings and get in the rear of all Confederate troops in the lower Shenandoah valley. Lee elected to make a major effort to prevent this from happening. To command the build-up of troops at Beverly, Lee's adjutant-general, Robert S. Garnett, was dispatched to the west, although he was irreplaceable in Richmond. Garnett had graduated from West Point in 1841 and after the death of his wife and child had sublimated all his desires into working at his profession. He had been Major of the 9th Infantry and was highly respected for his abilities as an officer. When Virginia passed the ordinance of secession he promptly resigned from the United States Army and was made Adjutant-General to Lee with the rank of Colonel. His new command entitled him to and he received promotion to Brigadier-General. Arriving in the West, Garnett quickly organized two regiments and on June 15 occupied Rich Mountain and Laurel Hill, thus covering Beverly and the roads leading to Staunton and Franklin. While not believing that he could attack the Union troops, he did believe he could contain them and thus relieve other parts of the state. To this end he began training his raw troops and schooling the volunteer officers.[2]

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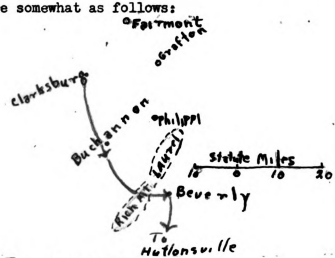
1 McClellan, Report, 18.
2 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 24-27.

As June wore on, McClellan bent every effort to supply his deficiencies in transportation and in cavalry. By the time intelligence reached him of Garnett's activities, his army was sufficiently equipped that he felt ready to resume the offensive. On June 20 he left Cincinnati for Parkersburg, Virginia, arriving there on the 21st. That day and the next he spent in hurrying up transportation. On the 22nd, leaving General Rosecrans at Parkersburg, he went to Grafton to view at first hand the situation.[1] He found conditions fairly favorable. There were reports of a fairly strong detachment at Romney but he assumed that Patterson could attack with enough vigor to offer a support for his own operations. He over-estimated the size of the force on Laurel Mountain but correctly assumed the mission of that force to be purely defensive. From the way things looked, he believed his command could be ready inside of several days for an advance on the line Clarksburg--Buckhannon--Beverly, thus turning the estimated heavy Confederate forces on Laurel Mountain. Once this was done, he proposed solidifying his gains.[2] His plans illustrated on a map were somewhat as follows:



1 McClellan, Report, 19.
2 Offic. Rec., I ser., II, 195.

That done he issued two other proclamations, one to the inhabitants of Western Virginia and the other to the soldiers of the Army of the West. The one reviewed the major points of his earlier proclamation, then pointed out that civilians had been engaging in guerilla warfare. He therefore warned all persons who were found guilty of such acts that they would be ..."dealt with in their persons and property according to the severest rules of military law." To his soldiers he enjoined "strictest discipline," and "heroic courage." "Remember that I have pledged my word to the people of West Virginia that their rights in person and property shall be respected." ..."Soldiers! I have heard that there was danger here. I have come to place myself at your head and to share it with you. I fear now but one thing—that you will not find foemen worthy of your steel. I know that I can rely upon you."[1]

That off his chest, he ordered Cox to move troops out from Camp Dennison, crossing the Ohio River, occupying Point Pleasant. Cox was to remain on the defensive with the assigned mission of holding down enemy forces at Charleston while McClellan with the main body would try to outflank Beverly.[2] Before he could make this flanking movement, however, he found that the troops at Buckhannon needed attention. His supplies were coming to him erratically because of a want of transportation and he had to rectify this. Since part of his self-assigned mission in West Virginia was to hold for the Union cause territory once gained, he had to devote some little attention to fortifying and garrisoning positions along the Cheat River, at Grafton,

1 Ibid., 196-197.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., II, 197.

Webster, Clarksburg, and Parkersburg as well as crucial points along the railroad. This was no raid he was staging but an invasion designed to liberate for the Union a portion of Virginia. A slow conduct of the campaign was not flashy but was effective.

On July 5 he wrote to the War Department of his difficulties as well as his plans. He pointed out that he had sent out several parties to feel out the enemy and knew of his location on Rich Mountain. He wanted if possible, to turn the position to the south, and thus occupy the Beverly road in his rear. If possible he wanted to repeat Scott's classic maneuver of Cerro Gordo, i.e., of completely outflanking the enemy's rear by means of a little-used side path in the mountains. He went on to ask that the adjutant general assure Scott that no prospect of a brilliant victory would induce him to depart from his intention of gaining success by maneuvering rather than by fighting. "I will not throw these raw men of mine into the teeth of artillery and intrenchments if it is possible to avoid it.[1] Say to the General, too, that I am trying to follow a lesson long ago learned from him; i.e., not to move until I know that everything is ready, and then to move with the utmost rapidity and energy."[2]

1 Italics mine. This sentence is perhaps crucial in an understanding of McClellan's entire concept of command. It is, as a matter of fact, a concept which has a distinctly American flavor, i.e., with immense national resources a general should use materiel and maneuver to gain points in a fight rather than sacrifice lives of soldiers. This attitude, which governed all McClellan's command decisions, goes far to explain his slowness before Yorktown and his caution at Antietam.

2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., II, 198-199.

On July 6, McClellan began his advance against Garnett by ordering two regiments under Colonel Robert L. McCook of Ohio to the Middle Fork Bridge about half way to Beverly. General Morris at the same time was moved from Philippi to a position in front of Garnett's defenses on Laurel Mountain. Three days later McClellan concentrated his main body at Roaring Creek about two miles from the Confederate position astride Rich Mountain. Convinced that the Rich Mountain defenses were too strong to attempt a frontal attack, McClellan welcomed the advice of a young man who lived nearby, and who thought he could lead the Union troops to the rear of Rich Mountain by a little-known road leading around the Confederate left flank. It was such a narrow path that artillery could not be used but infantry could manage. McClellan believed if his riflemen were to strike the Southern troops suddenly in the flank there was good reason to hope that the entire position might be over-run. He planned for the main body, which he himself would command, to attack frontally from Roaring Creek when they heard sounds of the flankers firing.

General W. S. Rosecrans volunteered to lead the flanking party and, after nearly alerting the enemy by a reveille sounded in one of the regimental camps at midnight, got his column underway. After ten hours of severe marching, Rosecrans reached Hart's farm to the rear and right of the Confederate Pegram's position. Early on the afternoon of July 11 the Union attack commenced, and after a hot fire fight lasting several hours a sharp Union charge broke the back of Pegram's defenses. As the Southern troops retired to good positions on the very crest of the hill overlooking Roaring Creek, Rosecrans allowed his men to rest on their

field while he sent word to McClellan of the outcome of the day's events. When day broke on the 12th, Pegram's positions had been abandoned and Rosecrans occupied the Confederate camp.[1]

Meanwhile, at a little before noon on the 11th, McClellan formed the regiments (five in number) remaining at Roaring Creek in position to attack. Hearing nothing from the flankers, the attack troops rested. Finally, sounds of firing were heard, but as it was sporadic and did not advance, the frontal attack was delayed. McClellan has been severely criticised for not having commenced his attack as soon as he heard firing. And perhaps the criticism may have some justification. Before passing judgment, however, McClellan's concept of this battle should be reviewed. He adopted a flanking movement with the express purpose of saving lives which would be lost in a frontal attack. A flanking attack only serves its purpose when sufficient of the defenders of the enemy front are withdrawing to enable a successful assault. Since the firing he heard was only sporadic, McClellan had no way of telling whether or when the flanking movement would become effective. Rather than rushing to a premature attack, he waited, assuming that Rosecrans would send runners back giving the situation. Rosecrans, it must be argued, was the most culpable if someone must assume blame, for it is an axiom of war that intelligence flows from front to rear, with each subordinate leader responsible for keeping his superior informed. McClellan, however, must bear a share of the blame for not maintaining proper liaison between the wings of his command. A textbook solution would call for McClellan to have sent aides along with Rosecrans with

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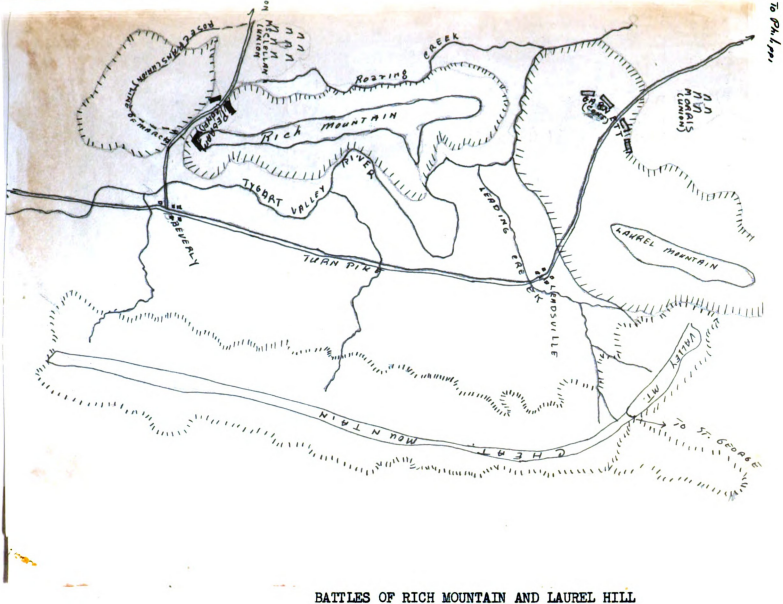
1 B. & L., V. 1, 131-132.



BATTLES OF RICH MOUNTAIN AND LAUREL HILL

orders to send back messages at periodic intervals. Reliance upon gunfire as a means of communication was an error, although throughout the 19th century it was considered as an orthodox means of signalling for operations.

While waiting, McClellan dispatched an officer to locate gun positions from which the two batteries of artillery could be employed. After one was found, men were put to work readying it for the guns. The following morning, as troops were moving into position, word was received that the Confederates had evacuated their position on Rich Mountain. Shortly thereafter, Rosecrans' runner arrived to inform the commanding general of the events of the day before.[1] Leaving Rosecrans to care for the captured position, McClellan pushed on into Beverly and took up positions to protect himself at that place.

Pegram, after having given up Rich Mountain, tried to join Garnett on Laurel Hill but was unable to do so. On the 13th, therefore, he surrendered 33 officers and 560 men.

On Laurel Mountain, meanwhile, General Garnett received word that the Rich Mountain position had collapsed, and so, during the night of July 11-12, began a retreat toward Beverly. Informed incorrectly that that place was occupied by McClellan's main body, he made his way toward Leadsville. The extreme darkness of the night prevented the Unionists under Morris from learning of the evacuation, so it was late the following afternoon before Union troops moved into Leadsville. At 4:00 A.M. on the 13th, Morris began a pursuit which overtook Garnett's rear guard at about noon at the

1 McClellan, Report, 31.

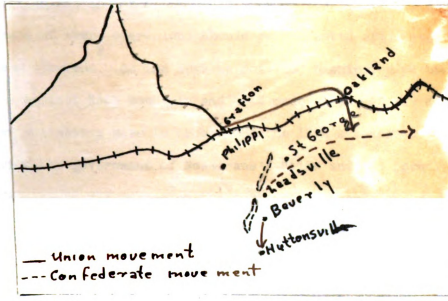
main fork of the Cheat River. In the fight that ensued Garnett was killed and the rear guard dispersed. Morris' troops rested at this point.[1]

After occupying Beverly, McClellan marched to Huttonsville with five regiments sending word to Rosecrans to move his brigade from Rich Mountain to Beverly. McClellan's objective in this maneuver was to gain the Cheat Mountain pass, thus cutting off enemy forces reported along that way to the relief of Garnett. Finding no signs of an enemy, he left three of the regiments there as a covering force and returned to Beverly with the other two.

On the 12th, McClellan had sent word to General Hill at Grafton that the Laurel Hill position had been abandoned and that the forces under General Garnett were in retreat toward eastern Virginia via Leadsville and St. George, and ordered him to take the field to cut off the retreat.[2] It was McClellan's intention that this wide maneuver could be accomplished by using trains on the B. & O. tracks, thus compensating for the distances involved. This order Hill received on the 13th and he at once began to collect his troops scattered along the two railroad lines to Parkersburg and Wheeling. For want of transport, troops were unable to leave Grafton until 4:00 P.M. on the 13th. As quickly as troops arrived at Oakland they were dispatched south toward the Red House Junction, which had already been occupied by Union forces. Before concentration could be effected, however, the Confederate troops had passed Red House. A pursuit was undertaken but without results and was finally called off because of the fatigue

1 Ibid., 32-33.
2 Ibid., 33.

of the troops and upon orders of McClellan. This was not until the 16th. These troops were returned to Oakland on the 19th.[1] The sketch reproduced below presents in general the movements of the several columns of McClellan's forces.



McCLELLAN'S ATTEMPTS TO CAPTURE
GARNETT'S FORCES

As these events came to an end, McClellan turned his attention to the Kanawha Valley. Cox, the general in command, had begun his movement down that valley but made poor progress, partly because he did not have adequate cavalry. On the 17th he requested McClellan to send reeinforcements and again on the 19th. After studying the situation, McClellan resolved to go to the lower Kanawha valley via Suttonsville, Summerville, and Dogwood Ridge with the objective of cutting off the troops opposing Cox.

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., II, 224-228.

Six regiments were alerted for the movement, but before it could be undertaken McClellan was ordered to Washington.[1]

During the western Virginia operations McClellan did not fail to keep the War Department and the press informed of his activities. On July 7 he notified Washington of McCook's advance toward Beverly and then raised the issue of where operations should be attempted after western Virginia had been cleared.[2] On the 10th he notified Washington of the proposed advance against Rich Mountain and also made a request for more troops if further operations were in order. On the 12th a telegram was dispatched notifying the government of Rosecrans' action and its issue. Again on the 12th Washington was posted on the capture of Beverly and was also notified that Garnett's force must have been composed of 10,000 men. Washington received these messages of victory most happily and wired that they (Scott, the Cabinet, and the President) "were Charmed" with McClellan's work. They did not doubt that he would in time sweep the rebels from western Virginia, but they did not mean to precipitate him as he was "fast enough."[3] To the press, McClellan released stories about the campaign which thrilled a North eager for victories. The Napoleonic flourish of the several proclamations issued and very real results of the campaign boosted McClellan's stock with the American people. Many began to regard him as a man to lead the forces of the republic in a quick victory over the rebels.

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1 McClellan, Report, 35.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., II, 201.
3 Ibid., 204.

The campaign in western Virginia, from the standpoint of numbers of troops involved, was insignificant, but in several other respects was highly important. McClellan had, by judicious handling of political and military problems, removed an important area from Confederate control. In invading an area in which the people were extremely jealous of their local rights, he was hailed as a deliverer rather than as an invader. Further, he had made good his campaign with scant loss of life. He had handled green troops in such a way that they sustained difficult marches and their baptism of fire without breaking. This speaks much for a commander's skill.

The point is sometimes made that McClellan was hardly justified in claiming victory in western Virginia since the victories in that area were actually gained by subordinates. Such criticism misses the essential point of generalship. A general of an independent army should be required to make a minimum number of decisions, but those decisions are crucial. For example, only one major decision needed to be made in 1915-16 by the French as the Germans attempted to force Verdun. That was to defend it. After that decision was made, subordinate officers could be allowed to execute it. McClellan's crucial decisions were (1) to cross into western Virginia, (2) to assail the Confederates in front of Beverly and (3) to invade the Kanawha valley. Once those decisions were made and subordinates assigned who could carry them out, McClellan's major work was over. Thereafter his responsibility consisted of insuring that strategic objectives which gave rise to the decisions were actually achieved.

Another thesis which has frequently been advanced holds that in the west Virginian campaign, McClellan demonstrated personal weaknesses which were to appear again and again in other fields. Before one can label his acts as characteristic, and certainly before labeling them as weaknesses, however, they should be closely examined in the framework of their own times.

1. McClellan overestimated the forces opposing him, according to his own testimony. He credited Garnett with some 10,000 troops, when actually there were but about 4,000 Confederates in the region. As a matter of fact, McClellan nearly always gave the South credit for more men than they actually had. While it cannot be proven, one begins to wonder if this might not have been a ruse, either consciously or unconsciously attempted, to secure the kind of forces he believed were essential to gain a quick victory. His force in western Virginia numbered about 20,000 troops, of which some 5,000 were under Hill guarding the railroad. With only a superiority of 5,000 troops he was quite willing to undertake an offensive and carry it to its conclusion. This superiority would, of course, have to be discounted by the very fact that the Confederates were in a position to defend every foot of territory. Later, as shall be discussed in greater detail, McClellan told Washington of 200,000 troops facing him, but was willing, with every hope of success, to undertake an offensive from the James River base with only 139,000 men. On April 7, his estimate to Washington was that Johnston had at least 100,000 men before Yorktown. In the same letter he claimed his forces consisted of only 85,000 men for duty. Yet he was willing to take Johnston under seige with little or no fear for a breakout.

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Then again it is quite possible that his exaggeration was a result of a desire for his exploits to seem greater than they actually were. It is not suggested that McClellan deliberately falsified strength estimates, but the desires, suggested above, may have so shaped his attitudes that he was willing to accept strength figures at their highest level.

2. McClellan delayed launching his attack after he arrived at Buckhannon and again at Roaring Creek when vigorous action might have ended the campaign earlier. Of the charge of delay McClellan is, of course, guilty, but as to the possible results of such delay one must make guesses only with extreme caution. His delay at Buckhannon was for legitimate reasons. The country over which his troops travelled was rough and wild. Roads were few and he had, if he were to clear west Virginia, to secure every foot of territory he gained. Thus he was forced to wait until he had enough wagons to move his army and its supply, and he had to make good the security of his rear. This sort of activity requires time and he did not have an organized communications zone which could do it for him. As a matter of fact, his advance was not actually slow. His rate of advance from May 27 to June 12 was approximately 2.8 miles a day. With a highly trained mechanized army, the German forces in 1914 between August 4 and September 5 (Meaux on the Marne) averaged only 7 miles per day. Sherman in his advance from Atlanta with no opposition and seasoned troops averaged only 10 miles a day. Lee's advance into Maryland in 1863 proceeded at the rate of about 3.5 miles per day.

3. McClellan was a political general thinking more of high-sounding proclamations than he was of fighting. Certainly McClellan carried a

printing press with him and issued high-flown proclamations to the natives as well as to his own troops. He was face to face with an explosive political question. Invasion of western Virginia was as loaded with potential trouble for men of the North as was the Anglo-American invasion of French Africa in November, 1942. His mission was as much to quiet the fears of the population as it was to defeat the enemy. What better way to appeal to them than through proclamations?

Judged on his record, McClellan actually stood at the top of the Union generals in 1861. He had demonstrated an ability to conceive of war in broad terms, proven his ability to organize raw levies of troops into a reasonably competent army and had led that army to victory.

CHAPTER III

LINCOLN FINDS A GENERAL

While McClellan was organizing and fighting his army of midwestern volunteers, Lincoln was being faced with all of the problems of beginning a new administration intensified by the need to expand all governmental services to cope with the war effort. His efforts to form a cabinet had been successful, but during these early months he had to establish his leadership over these men, most of whom had some reason to feel that they really should be president. As leader of a new, victorious, and greedy political party, he was forced to give personal attention to the disposal of the spoils, an onerous job under ordinary circumstances, but doubly so since the war effort had created so many new posts to be filled. "The grounds, halls, stairways, closets" were, according to Seward, filled with applicants who rendered entering and leaving the White House most difficult even for those who had official business to conduct. In the sphere of foreign affairs, Lincoln, working in close harmony with his Secretary of State, had to formulate policy which would defeat the efforts of the South to gain recognition from the European powers. In the sphere of the executive-legislative relationships, he had to decide how much of the initial mobilization he could undertake on his own responsibility and how much he had to take to Congress. Contrary to expectations, he did not call Congress into special session at once, postponing until July 4 that important occasion. When Congress did assemble, he had to ask for approval of much that he had done, such as calling out large elements of the state militia, suggest needed legislation, and perhaps most important of all,

state the purposes of the war in such a way as to consolidate the divergent political forces of the North.

By far Lincoln's most important task in the military sphere was to obtain adequate leadership. At the highest level neither the Secretary of War nor the Commanding General had the ability necessary to prosecute a major war. Simon Cameron was purely a political appointee who enjoyed the confidence of very few people and certainly not that of the President. He was at a complete loss as to how to conduct his office, but he apparently had the redeeming feature of not resenting outside assistance. For these critical months, Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, attempted to maintain some kind of order in the War Office—Chase it was who drafted the orders enlarging the regular army and creating the voluntary army. He recommended strong means for quelling the secessionist movement in Maryland and much of the thinking in reference to the western campaigns was his.[1] Cameron was slovenly in operating his office and apparently did not even bother to keep files. As one observer said:

> In any official matter he would ask you to give its status and what he had last said about it...he would look about, find a scrap of paper, borrow your pencil, make a note, put the paper in one pocket of his trousers and your pencil in the other.[2]

Scott in lucid moments possibly had some notion of the immense task in front of him but those moments were rare for his age and infirmities had dulled his once sharp military talents. He would from time to time

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1 Fred A. Shannon, The Organization and Administration of the Union Army 1861-65, Cleveland, The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1928, I, 27.
2 Sandburg, The War Years, I, 434.

propose to the President or Secretary of War various movements, but they do not appear to have been part of an overall plan. Nor was he able to assume the initiative in executing necessary steps for the defense of Washington. He became convinced early in May that Confederate batteries, if posted along Arlington Heights, could command not only the Executive mansion but a goodly portion of the rest of the city. On May 3 he notified the President of the possibility. It was not until three weeks later that several regiments were actually dispatched to secure the region.[1] Frequently when Scott was able to move sufficiently to issue orders, Cameron was just as likely to issue contrary orders on the same subject. Chase believed that half of Scott's orders and half of Cameron's orders would be obeyed, thus neutralizing each other.[2] In the matter of keeping track of the number of new arrivals to the forces in Washington, Lincoln resorted to asking Vice-President Hamlin to write a daily letter on the subject. The War Department could not tell, and General Scott was usually in the dark on the entire matter.

Even with such incompetent leadership at the highest level, Lincoln's task would have been much easier and the war effort moved along more effectively had there been available a cadre of tested officers, willing to assume responsibility, and around whom could be built the armies of the North. But, as has been pointed out, the pre-war regular army was not a place to attract men of the caliber needed. Many of the officers with good Mexican War records as junior officers were out of the army. The loyal ones, it is

1 Mearns, The Lincoln Papers, II, 602.
2 Hay, Diaries, 7.

true, returned to active duty, but the years of civilian life had prevented professional growth, hence some time elapsed before these officers were fully capable of assuming major command. Other officers, who had remained in the army, were too frequently kept as junior officers in regular units during the formative months. Then, too, a large number of the most skilled of the professionally trained officers had "gone South."

Because of this shortage of trained officers and because of political considerations, Lincoln's appointments to positions of command appeared to have little rhyme or reason to them. Men were appointed to the grade of general officer by virtue of every conceivable sort of reason. Benjamin Butler gained his because no one seemed willing to challenge the political power he claimed to wield. Fremont, because of a very real political following, was given an independent command. A New York merchant paid $20,000 to raise a regiment and in return was made its Colonel and was eventually promoted to Brigadier General. Carl Schurz, after a brief career in the diplomatic service, was commissioned to the ranks of general officers. Senator Baker of Oregon, killed at Ball's Bluff as a Colonel in a useless display of heroism a raw recruit should have balked at, had in his pocket a commission as Major General. The number of newly appointed officers, particularly generals, in tinsel and gold lace was so great on Pennsylvania Avenue that it was a severe trial for private soldiers to walk there. As one common soldier put it, "Brigadier-generals were more numerous there than I ever knew them to be at the front. These officers...ought to have been sent to the front rank of battle, to serve as privates until they

had learned the duties of a soldier."[1]

Certainly some of these officers developed, during the course of four years of war, into first-rate professionals. A larger number, however, with their great political influence, were a source of worry to all field commanders from McDowell to Grant. Eventually, many had to be given posts far from the sounds of guns fired in anger where they could harm little of the war effort and could still be personally satisfied that the government had adequately made use of their talents.

Out of this welter of sources, regular army, retired officers, and political generals, Lincoln selected the first of the long series of officers who were to command the forces around Washington. On May 14, 1861, Major Irvin McDowell was appointed brigadier-general. He was 43 years old and had received a wide and liberal education in France and later at West Point. His Mexican War record was distinguished and was held in high regard by Scott, on whose staff he had at one time served. Prior to his being assigned to command the army around Washington, he was serving in the War Department where he attracted favorable attention of the President and the Secretary of War. Following the Union expedition to Alexandria and Arlington Heights in May, those places were fortified and prepared to receive a build-up of troops. On May 27, McDowell was placed in command of the troops on the south of the Potomac.[2] He was opposed by Confederate forces in defensive positions in the vicinity of Manassas Junction under

1 B. & L., I, 158.
2 Ibid., I, 171.

the immediate command of Beauregard fresh from winning laurels at Charleston by firing on Fort Sumter. To the west, in the Shenandoah Valley, were other Confederate troops under General Joseph E. Johnston opposing Department of Pennsylvania troops under the aged and incompetent Robert Patterson. Harpers Ferry was securely under Southern control, although Johnston had grave fears that his garrison there could be over-run any time Patterson made a serious offensive move.

Shortly after assuming command, McDowell was asked to submit "an estimate of the number and composition of a column to be pushed toward Manassas Junction and perhaps the Gap, say in four or five days to favor Patterson's attack upon Harpers Ferry." Although his raw troops had not been brigaded as yet, he replied that with 12,000 infantry, two batteries of artillery, and six or eight troops of cavalry plus a reserve of 5,000 men, he might undertake such a move. Fortunately for the Union cause, Johnston evacuated Harpers Ferry and so the advance was not ordered at this time. On the 24th of June, however, McDowell was asked to submit a plan for offensive operations against an estimated 25,000 Southern troops located at Manassas Junction, but was warned to keep in mind the possibility that Johnston might evade Patterson's force, cross out of the Shenandoah valley, and reenforce Beauregard.[1] McDowell estimated that if Patterson kept Johnston occupied, the offensive could be mounted with about 35,000 men, but warned that his troops were exceedingly green. He requested that as

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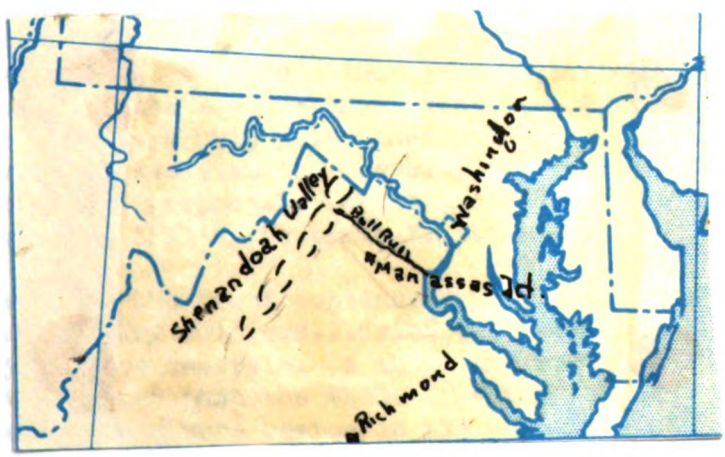
1 B. & L., I, 173-174.

many regular officers as possible be collected and placed in command of the relatively small brigades.[1]

McDowell planned an excellent campaign and on July 16 began moving his troops toward the Confederate positions. By the 18th, he had occupied Centreville after having driven in Beauregard's outposts to Bull Run, a small river flowing in a southeasterly direction about halfway between Centreville and Manassas Junction, a distance of about five miles. Compelled to wait for his provision wagons, McDowell made several feints against the Confederate defenses along the Bull Run on the 18th and became convinced that a frontal attack with his green troops would be too costly. Therefore, on the 19th and 20th he attempted to discover means of turning the Confederates out of their positions. He finally decided to make this effort around the Confederate left flank, hoping that such a maneuver might place the Union forces astride the Confederate axis of communications running toward the Valley of Virginia.



REGION INVOLVED IN THE BATTLE OF BULL RUN

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., II, 719-721.

His execution of this plan was poorly done, although the movements were sufficiently aggressive to give good reason to hope for victory. By noon on the 21st, the turning movement was well under way and the Confederate troops were driven from the strong positions they occupied on their own left. By mid-afternoon, however, the favorable condition of affairs had changed. Beauregard's troops had been reenforced by the troops from the Shenandoah and were thus enabled to outflank the Union line and to undertake a counter offensive. The Federal troops, despite heroic efforts of their commanders, began to fade out of the fight.

Back across Bull Run trooped the tired blue-jackets, ignoring pleas of units assigned to cover the withdrawal to stand and make a fight. There was no panic, however, until the retreating troops met crowds of civilians who had come out from Washington to watch McDowell win a victory. Then, fired upon by artillery on the road east of Bull Run, a panic took hold.[1] William H. Russel, correspondent of the London Times, witnessed this rout and recorded his observations:

> But, every moment the crowd increased, drivers and men cried out with the most vehement gestures, "Turn back! Turn back! We are whipped." They seized the heads of the horses and swore at the opposing drivers....A breathless...officer (gasped)..."Why it means we are pretty badly whipped, that's the truth."....
>
> The crowd from the front continually increased...augmented when some cavalry soldiers...cried out "Make way there—make way for the General". A third officer, however, confirmed the report that the whole army was in retreat and that the Federals were beaten on all points....
>
> There was nothing left for it but to go with the current one could not stem....On arriving at the place where a

1 B. & L., I, 167-192.

> small riverlet crossed the road the throng increased still more....The ground...was...covered with arms, clothing... accoutrements...left...under the hoofs of men and horses....[1]

Soon after noon Lincoln began to receive reports from the telegraph stations closest to the battlefield. Toward three o'clock the President went to Scott's office, and finding the General asleep woke him to talk over the news. Scott pointed out that the reports were not to be taken too seriously but that he was very confident of success. Lincoln left, and Scott settled down for another nap. Upon hearing good news later in the day from one of Scott's aides, Lincoln decided to take his usual evening drive. He was away from the White House when Secretary Seward came asking for him to tell him that all previous reports were false, that the army was in full retreat upon Washington. When the President returned, he and his cabinet went to Scott's office to wait for final official word from Scott and to try to decide what needed to be done to protect the capital. Troops were hurried to McDowell's support. Baltimore was alerted, and wires were sent to all recruiting offices urging them to speed shipment of newly organized regiments.

Following this meeting, Lincoln returned to the White House where he spent the remainder of the night interviewing eye witnesses of the defeat. As the night wore on, dispatches grew worse in tone. McDowell first suggested that he would hold Centreville. His next stated "the larger part of the men are a confused mob, entirely demoralized," but that he would hold at Fairfax Court House. His third report gave that his only alternative was to fall back on the Potomac.

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1 Paul M. Angle, The Lincoln Reader, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1947, 369-373.

Monday morning in a drizzling rain which lasted the next thirty-six hours, troops began to come over the bridges spanning the Potomac. By noon, however, the worst news was in and in view of Beauregard's inactivity, the future looked brighter. The forts protecting Washington were manned, and it was found that losses had been lighter than had been expected. On the following day, Lincoln visited troops in the forts and camps about Arlington Heights and addressed to them words of cheer and confidence.[1]

At 8:00 P.M. on Sunday, July 21, Scott wired McClellan that McDowell had been checked and that he was to come to the Shenandoah Valley with such troops as could be spared from western Virginia.[2] McClellan replied that he was "much pained" by the order. His three months' men were homesick, tired of their officers, and determined to go home at once. When he suggested earlier a move on Staunton, he had counted on those disaffected regiments and upon McDowell being strong enough to hold a good portion of the enemy east of the Shenandoah. In place of the move ordered by Scott he proposed leaving forces at strategic points in West Virginia and then joining Patterson's troops with the remainder of his force. Depending on the condition of troops still in Ohio, he believed he might join Patterson with 15,000 men and the move could be made in six or seven days. He would await Scott's decision, but meanwhile he called off his Kanawha expedition.[3]

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1 Ibid., 373-376.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., I, 749.
3 Ibid., 752.

Scott replied ordering McClellan to maintain his present position. Then during the 22nd, the adjutant general wired McClellan that "Circumstances make your presence here necessary. Charge Rosecrans or some other general with your present department and come hither without delay."[1] Scott added a subsequent order for him to bring no troops.[2]

The very act of bringing McClellan to Washington warrants some analysis, for it contained within it some of the very seeds of discontent which later were to make impossible McClellan's further tenure with the Army of the Potomac. Townsend, a member of Scott's personal staff, later wrote that the order bringing McClellan east was sent without the knowledge of the Commanding General. In fact, Scott was fully intending ordering McClellan to undertake operations in the Shenandoah Valley when the Secretary of War caused the "Circumstances make your presence here necessary..." telegram to be sent.[3] Scott himself revealed something of the truth in October when he engaged in a controversy with McClellan over channels of communication: "Indeed, if I did not call for him, I heartily approved of the suggestion, and gave it the most cordial support."[4] As a matter of fact, Scott was never satisfied with McClellan in the east. He was, of course, aware that his age and infirmities would probably make necessary his early retirement. He hoped, as so many men

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1 Ibid., 753.
2 Ibid., 755.
3 E. D. Townsend, Anecdotes of the Civil War in the United States, New York, D. Appleton & Co., 1884, 62.
4 Ibid., 63.

do in similar circumstances, to have some choice as to his successor. Having reached a venerable age, he was inclined to place a high premium upon age as one essential qualification for command. Halleck, some ten years McClellan's senior, was Scott's choice. McClellan was perfectly satisfactory in some subordinate role, but for the command of the entire army, a person of riper experience was needed.

McClellan was called east for several reasons. The date of his commission as Major-General made him one of the senior officers of the army. He had won the only major success of the war and had in the space of a few days become the idol of many people of the North. His name was constantly discussed in Washington as the one man who could probably organize and win the speedy victory over the South that the North was demanding. Lincoln, never one to discount public opinion, was certainly aware of the popularity McClellan had achieved. It was no more than sound political acumen to take advantage for the administration of McClellan's popularity.

But in addition, there were other reasons for selecting McClellan. At this period in the war, the moderate Lincoln was doing everything possible to broaden the base of participation in the war. Whenever possible, important Democrats were assigned responsible positions in order to marshal behind the government the large masses of the Democracy living in the North. Stephen A. Douglas had set the tone for the cooperation of Democrats and Lincoln did everything possible to exploit the support thus insured. McClellan was an important Democrat of state rights sympathies. It was therefore highly important that he be linked to the national cause. Further, McClellan's victories in western Virginia had been accomplished on the orders

of Governor Dennison of Ohio with state troops from Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. As such, the victories of Philippi, Rich, and Laurel Mountains in a sense represented victory for the state rights principle. Lincoln, during the entire course of the war, was to build up the national principle at the expense of the state rights one. In part this was accomplished by taking over from the states their military functions, such as the raising, paying, and equipping troops.[1] In part it was accomplished by putting into Federal positions men who were winning or might win victories for the states. McClellan, by coming to Washington, actually tended to give credit, in the eyes of the nation, for the western Virginian campaign to the national government.

Then, too, McClellan's conservative position on the slavery question made him a favorite among the conservative members of Lincoln's official family. The Blairs backed not only his being called to Washington, but his being maintained in command even after he had made undying enemies of the radical clique headed by Stanton. But at this early period in the war the radicals were not in the ascendency. In addition, as an adopted Ohioan, McClellan was recommended by Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase.

The very means, however, by which McClellan was selected to command in the east were later used to destroy him as a commander. McDowell was relieved from command because he lost a battle to a large extent through the fault of others. McClellan was later to be similarly castigated because of events over which he had no control. McClellan was brought

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1 This thesis is advanced in William B. Hesseltine, Lincoln and the War Governors, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1948.

to Washington in part, at least, because of political considerations. When, a year later, the political picture had altered considerably, McClellan was let go. McClellan's successes in the summer of 1861 overshadowed all other military activities in the nation. By 1862, however, the slow process by which he was attempting to destroy the South was outclassed in the eyes of the public by western victories such as Island No. 10 and Forts Henry and Donelson. Thus the kind of popularity which brought him to command later helped force his relief from command. Lincoln, in 1862, had not yet learned the lessons which later allowed him to retain Grant and Sherman in spite of public opinion.

In McClellan, Lincoln had, without knowing it, found a general who might, had he been given adequate political support, ended the war earlier than 1865. The history of the succeeding sixteen months was a history of McClellan's attempts to carry out his assigned missions while being thwarted on every side by men, to whose personal advantage it was, to prevent Lincoln from realizing that he had in fact found the leader he needed.

CHAPTER IV

McCLELLAN ARRIVES

On July 26, McClellan, tired, dirty, and without too much of an idea as to why he had been called from western Virginia, arrived in Washington. He called at once upon General Scott in his quarters and had a long conversation with him. As he was leaving, Townsend, the assistant adjutant general, pointed out a few of the dangers which lay in wait for any high ranking officer on duty in Washington, and then told him to report to the War Department for specific orders. The following morning, McClellan stopped at the War Department but was quickly sent on to the White House with the intelligence that none other than the President wanted to see him. That morning Lincoln verbally placed McClellan in direct command over Washington and of the forces in and around that place. He suggested that McClellan might return in the afternoon to meet with the members of the cabinet to discuss the military situation. Shortly before the time for the cabinet meeting, McClellan was talking with Scott. The Lieutenant-General, hearing of the proposed meeting, objected to the propriety of McClellan's accepting an invitation to which the Lieutenant-General himself was not invited. Instead of attending the meeting, McClellan was instructed to see what he could do about returning to their units the many stragglers roaming the streets. The President was more amused than displeased when he heard of the incident.

McClellan thus found himself in command of the largest single body of Union troops in the country and charged with defending the political heart of the nation. In addition, although Scott may have had some doubts

that it was done, McClellan was given instructions to organize his troops so as to put them in condition at the earliest possible moment, to resume offensive operations against the Confederates.

In giving these instructions to McClellan, Lincoln had in mind a fairly definite sequence of steps he had outlined on paper after the worst news of the Bull Run disaster was in. These steps in substance were:

1. To push forward as rapidly as possible the plan for making the blockade effective.

2. To give vigorous training but no reenforcements to the volunteer force under General Butler at Fort Monroe.

3. To hold Baltimore with a "gentle but firm hand."

4. To give enough additional strength to make the force under Patterson, or, if he were relieved, under Banks secure from a concentration in the Shenandoah by Johnston and Beauregard.

5. For the time to leave the forces operating in western Virginia under the supervision of General McClellan, although that officer would remain in Washington.

6. Fremont should push forward his work of organization and operations designed to open up the west.

7. To reorganize the troops which had fought at Manassas, excluding from the new units men who had enlisted for three months and who refused to re-enlist for the duration of the war.

8. To concentrate around Washington as quickly as possible the new units being formed in the loyal states.[1]

When these steps had been taken, Lincoln believed that several offensive movements could be undertaken. The area in the vicinity of Manassas and Strasburg was to be cleared of Confederate troops and a drive south from

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1 Nicolay & Hay, The Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln, VI, 331-332, hereafter cited as Lincoln, Works.

Cairo and Cincinnati begun. Thus Lincoln set for McClellan the broad strategic principles which were to govern the conduct of the war. In the framework so advanced can be found the fundamentals of all Lincoln's subsequent military planning. Never was he able to forego the notion that the main zone of operations for the east should lie directly south of Washington. In spite of ideas to the contrary suggested by every general who commanded in the east, Lincoln clung to this plan. Whether or not McClellan raised objections to Lincoln's plan at their first meeting is not recorded. The record is quite clear, however, that later McClellan wanted to alter this plan, and ran into serious difficulty in the effort.

After leaving Scott on the afternoon of the 27th, McClellan made a quick tour of the city and some of the forts on the Maryland side of the Potomac. He found that little preparation had been made for the defense of the capital. Major avenues of approach were totally unguarded, and the absentee rate in most units was extremely high; these absentees being bivouaced in the streets, hotels and bars of Washington—well fortified with drink. Some even had returned to their homes in the far northern states. More careful investigation revealed an utter disregard for discipline in many units. Officers and men would leave camp whenever they desired and return only if they desired. Most of the soldiers were completely unsophisticated in the niceties of military courtesy. "It was no unusual thing to see a sentry, when an officer in uniform passed his post, seated on a stone, with his musket between his feet. On the approach of the officer, aware that some complimentary recognition was

expected, he would awkwardly raise his hand to his cap, while continued sitting."[1]

Not only did McClellan find the troops of McDowell's command disorganized, but he also found very little preparation for an organized defense of the city. Washington was particularly vulnerable to attack if the hills on the south bank of the Potomac were not controlled absolutely by Union troops. But mere possession of the hills was insufficient. A comprehensive defense plan was required according to which all elements of the defending forces could contribute their fire. Main approaches needed protection, and those strong points needed to be connected to one another; otherwise, a skillful enemy could elude contact with the defense until he was actually on the flanks and rear of batteries posted to stop him. He also found that many of the troops had encamped on the banks of the Potomac, frequently leaving the hills south of them unoccupied, or at best covered by only a skeleton force with no defensive works. Several forts on the south of the river had, it is true, been completed, such as Fort Ellsworth near Alexandria, Forts Runyon and Allan at the end of the Long Bridge, and Fort Corcoran at the head of Aqueduct Bridge. Several small entrenchments had been commenced on Arlington Heights, but none of these had been established according to a general defensive plan.

With units so mixed and with specific responsibility so undefined, the command structure could only be chaotic. McDowell had been relieved,

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1 Townsend, Anecdotes of the Civil War, 61.

and as the brigades under him had been only temporary, they quickly fell apart. This disintegration of major units was accelerated by virtue of many regiments departing because the three month enlistments of the troops had expired. Their places were being taken by newly arrived regiments which had to be incorporated into virtually non-existent brigades. Stanton wondered if, even if McClellan had the ability of Caesar, Alexander, or Napoleon, he could accomplish much, so great was the confusion.[1]

In view of the critical nature of the military situation, it was McClellan's first responsibility to survey the possible lines of attack and to prepare an over-all defensive arrangement based upon such considerations as the expected attrition due to the termination of many three month enlistments. He removed the regular troops from the Virginia side and used them as a provost-guard or military police force to help restore order in the city and as a reserve force to be used to bolster any threatened portion of the line. He also removed from the line the most shaken of the regiments which had fought at Manassas. These were to be trained on the Washington side along with newly formed units until they could be trusted to go back into the line.[2] By withdrawing these forces, the total of some 50,000 infantry over which McClellan assumed command on July 27 was sadly depleted, and McClellan had good reason to fear that for a few days, at least, his defenses might prove insufficient if Johnston and Beauregard mounted a serious attack.

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1 B. F. Lauriston, F. Ballard, The Diary of a Public Man and a Page of Political Correspondence Stanton to Buchanan, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1946, 128.

2 McClellan, Own Story, 68-70.

Troops were gradually returned to their organizations, passes were regularized and immediate steps were taken to improve the discipline of the army. Troops which mutinied were sent to the Dry Tortugas to do hard labor until they had learned the rudiments of good military order. Liberal use of arrest, court martial and in cases involving mutiny of large groups of men, of regular troops armed with ball ammunition, quickly improved the tone of the army. The appointment of a provost-marshal and assignment of regular troops to military police duty provided a successful means of ridding Washington of unauthorized visits of officers and men from the garrisons around the capital.

Within days, McClellan had accomplished miracles in restoring order to the disorganized troops routed at Bull Run and to the newly arrived detachments of recruits from the North. On August 22, Hay was able to record in his diary that "Everything seems going right. Discipline is perfecting. The Dry Tortugas have squelched mutiny. The drills and reviews keep the men alive....McClellan is growing jolly."[1]

Professor Williams, in commenting upon McClellan's achievement of restoring order to such a condition, says:

> But anyone who knows how easy it is to get soldiers back to their normal mess lines and their proper organizations will think that McClellan had already shown his habit of over-complimenting himself when he closed his letter of August 4.[2]

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1 Hay, Diary, 25.

2 K. P. Williams, Lincoln Finds a General, New York, The MacMillan Co., 1949, I, 125. This letter to which Williams refers is an often quoted letter from McClellan to his wife which he ends by saying, "I have restored order very completely already." McClellan, Own Story, 84.

In making such a statement, designed to detract from McClellan's reputation, Williams indulges in a sophistry unwarranted by either the facts of the situation in 1861 or by experience of others in similar situations. The troops with which McClellan had to deal were not "draftees" of World War I. They were young men who had volunteered to serve for a specified time under officers not schooled at Plattsburg but elected by themselves. They were men who were undisciplined and in many cases quite willing to get their mess where they found it. There was really not much reason for them to find their own units when any mess line, private home, or hotel dining room would serve. It must be remembered that the use of corps or divisional patches and regimental insignia had not yet come into vogue. There was no way of detecting to what organization any particular soldier belonged. McClellan was entitled to a little boasting just by virtue of having cleared the streets of Washington of unauthorized uniformed visitors. And, as a matter of fact, his boasting was confined to private letters to his wife and were never intended for the gaze of the public. In such letters, McClellan said only what any other young man might have said in similar circumstances. He had come into a confused military situation and could see that after he assumed command troops no longer did the unlawful things they had been doing when he arrived in Washington. The cause and effect were clear to him.

Once the most immediate steps had been taken to restore order in the capital, McClellan turned his attention to the longer range considerations. On August 4, at Lincoln's request, McClellan prepared a lengthy report containing specific recommendations on the conduct of the war. In this report

he distinguished between the objectives of the North in the struggle to restore the Union from what they would have been if it were with another nation: "We have not only to defeat their armed and organized forces in the field, but to display such an overwhelming strength as will convince all our antagonists, especially those of the governing aristocratic class, of the utter impossibility of resistance."

The war, McClellan believed, should be fought in a manner consistent with the philosophy of defeating Confederate armies, taking strong places, protecting private property (of all classes) and civilians, treating leniently private soldiers, but above all displaying to the South overwhelming force. Since the Confederates had chosen Virginia as the heart of the Confederacy, the first great struggle should take place there, but while preparing for it, efforts should be made to engage the enemy elsewhere. To this end he recommended that a strong movement be made down the Mississippi River, and that Missouri be brought under Federal control and if Kentucky remained loyal, a movement be made through it to eastern Tennessee.

For the east he believed that Baltimore and Fort Monroe should be maintained by suitable garrisons. The importance of Harpers Ferry would, he felt, diminish as the size of the Union forces along the lower Potomac increased. No intelligent enemy leader would risk troops at or north of there because of the great danger of their being cut off by a strong Northern column from the vicinity of Washington. The force needed in the east he estimated at 273,000 troops, to be so deployed for offensive operations as to make maximum use of ocean and river transportation.

By creating diversions along the coast, the Confederates could be kept off balance and by means of limited actions along railroad lines, Southern communications could be disrupted.

This report ended with a clear statement of his notions of what would be needed to accomplish the objectives and cogent reasons for the requirements:

> The force I have recommended is large, the expense is great.... A smaller force might accomplish the object in view....The question... is...shall we crush the rebellion at one blow...or...leave it for a legacy to our descendants.
>
> The force asked for the main army under my command cannot be regarded as unduly large. Every mile we advance carries us further from our base of operations, and renders detachments necessary to cover our communications, while the enemy will be constantly concentrating as he falls back....It is perhaps unnecessary to state, that in addition to the forces named in this memorandum, strong reserves should be formed, ready to supply any losses that may occur.[1]

The report, particularly the last paragraph, presents as succinctly as any description could, McClellan's philosophy of war. Realizing the vast resources of the region for which he fought, he was anxious that those resources be brought to bear to the fullest in solving the military problem facing him. If the American soldier has a talent discrete from those possessed by soldiers of other lands, it lies in the ability to solve the logistical problems involved in directing the full weight of American resources onto a battlefield. By and large, with the possible exception of Lee and Jackson, American generals have never achieved tactical brilliance. Their successes have come because they found means of providing overwhelming

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1 McClellan, Report, 43.

amounts of supplies and men at critical points and of protecting the long lines of communications such logistical problems implied. Grant's greatest triumph was the Vicksburg campaign, in which the tactical handling of troops was incidental to finding a way by which the troops and supplies could be moved south of the Confederate strong point. The American army made its contribution to the Allies in 1917-18 by being able to establish and maintain lines of communications to bring to Europe the only things which could prevent German victory, i.e., men and supplies. The Allied victory over Germany in 1944-45 was not so much superior tactical manipulation of troops as it was being able to supply, over the beaches, the vast numbers of men involved in western Europe. France was cleared of Germans not so much because General Patton had a flair for mobile warfare as because American ingenuity could create and maintain innovations such as the "Red Ball Highway."

McClellan saw, much more clearly than anyone else at the time, that the defeat of the South would require large masses of men and supplies over constantly expanding reaches of territory. With each foot of ground occupied would come the need for more troops to guard the supply and communications lines. McClellan was severely criticized for being overly concerned with bases of supply and lines of communications. Yet these were the considerations which eventually won the war. Sherman could cut loose from his bases of supply only because Grant, anchored to his, could contain the major striking force of the Confederacy. Brogan, in analyzing the American character, saw in McClellan the perfect embodiment of the American way of waging war:

> But there is one American soldier who has few monuments and little popular fame. Nevertheless it is George Brinton McClellan—at thirty-four General in Chief of the Union armies, and a year later unemployed, in personal and political disgrace—who is the typical American successful soldier; his way of war is the American way of war, and, even if he did not win the Civil War, it was won in his spirit and by his methods.[1]

McClellan was never able to put his ideas into effect because outside pressures for premature movements and fears for the safety of Washington interfered. Grant was fortunate in having a Lincoln who had learned much through four years of war which might have been unnecessary had McClellan's notions been effectively implemented.

The fact that McClellan should be asked by Lincoln to submit a paper on the conduct of the war strongly suggests that at this period McClellan was expected to deal directly with political leaders rather than through General Scott. This was a most unusual procedure and provides evidence of the inexperience of the government with waging war and of the cloudy command situation which existed in Washington. In view of this understanding it was but natural that McClellan should cross swords with General Scott. Scott had been in direct charge of the army in and about Washington; hence McClellan's criticisms of the defensive measures to political officials were in effect criticisms of Scott himself. McClellan, feeling as he did that action was needed, was bound to tread on the toes of the Lieutenant General whose age and infirmities prevented him from exerting vigorous leadership. In taking immediate action whenever that appeared appropriate, McClellan was not always diplomatic. The moving of a regiment, for example, might

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1 D. W. Brogan, The American Character, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1944, 149-150.

appear to be a desirable action. McClellan would order it to be done, failing many times to notify Scott. When civil officials would ask the ancient warrior a question about the movement Scott, of course, would be in the dark. Scott wrote a number of orders on the subject, one even suggesting court martialing McClellan for failure to observe official channels but without avail.[1] In addition to the matter of official communication, McClellan and Scott disagreed over the exact name of McClellan's troops. The younger officer wanted his division designated as an army. Scott could see little to be gained by such a procedure. McClellan, feeling free to go to cabinet officers with his problems, since the President had opened the way, pleaded and eventually made good his case. Scott was not happy with the outcome.

The altercation between the two was fanned to white heat very shortly after McClellan's arrival in Washington. McClellan was led to believe, by intelligence gathered from a variety of sources, some credible and others highly suspect, that the Confederate troops intended an early attack on the capital with an estimated 100,000 troops. He recommended to Scott that forces all over the country be reduced so that the troops for the defense of Washington could be increased to a size equivalent to the Southern army. He added that:

> A sense of duty which I cannot resist compels me to state that in my opinion military necessity demands that the departments of Northeastern Virginia, Washington, the Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, including Baltimore and the one including Fort Monroe, should be merged into one

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1 Townsend, Anecdotes of the Civil War, 63-65.

> department, under the immediate control of the commander of the main army of operations and which should be known and designated as such....[1]

Scott reacted violently to the letter. He at once wrote to the Secretary of War complaining that in conference McClellan neither had mentioned such fears nor any desire to augment his command. Scott indicated that in his opinion Washington was absolutely safe and that McClellan's fears were groundless. He then asked that, since his age and infirmities prevented active command, he be retired from the army. He hoped, however, that he might retain command until General Halleck, whose presence would give Scott "increased confidence in the safety of the Union", should arrive.

At this point Lincoln entered the controversy by asking McClellan to withdraw his letter. This the General was happy to do with the understanding that his only purpose in sending the letter had been to inform the War Department of his estimate of the situation.

In spite of personal presidential urging, Scott, however, refused to withdraw his letter asking for retirement. He believed that McClellan's original note had been written as a direct result of personal consultations with members of the Cabinet without reference to the commander-in-chief. He further disliked the way McClellan moved troops without notifying the War Department.

> ...With such supports [of members of the Cabinet] on his part, it would be idle for me as it would be against the dignity of my years, to be filing daily complaints against an ambitious

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser. XI, III, 3-4.

> junior, who independent of the extrinsic advantages alluded to, has, unquestionably, very high qualifications for military command. I trust they may achieve crowning victories in behalf of the Union.[1]

In evaluating this altercation between the two generals, several factors should be kept in mind. McClellan was obviously putting on record his desire to have the division of the Potomac renamed an army. Scott objected to this proposal because under the existing system of regulations he saw difficulty in administering any army organization. He objected to forming divisions within an army because he had employed only brigades in Mexico and brigades had functioned quite efficiently there. In criticizing the scanty defenses of Washington and in recommending reducing other commands, McClellan was taking the Lieutenant General to task for his over-all strategic planning and for failure to provide for better local protection. On both scores Scott's pride—and "Old Fuss and Feathers" had plenty of it—was wounded. His reaction was characteristically violent.

While Scott appeared complacent about the safety of Washington, McClellan could not adopt the same attitude. Not only for political reasons but for highly important strategic reasons, McClellan was fearful about the position of the capital. A major factor in his plans for organizing an army rested on the hope that the Confederates would not attack. Given such a respite from operations, he believed he could quickly place an offensive army in the field. He had, however, ample reasons for fearing that this hope might not be realized. While Johnston

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XII, III, 6.

and Beauregard were not intending an offensive, for they knew how badly organized their troops were following the fight at Manassas Junction, the politicians in Richmond were of a different frame of mind. Responsible leaders spoke of marshalling a force of 500,000 to surge into Pennsylvania within six weeks. The President, Jefferson Davis, himself was outspoken in demanding major offensive operations.[1] It was largely from Richmond sources, through operatives of Pinkerton's detective agency and through leading Richmond newspapers that McClellan's intelligence came. At this stage of the war, staff officers had not been trained to sift through such advices, compare them with reports coming directly from the front, and arrive at a valid estimation of enemy capabilities. Denied adequate intelligence, McClellan, if he were to do his job properly, had to accept the most alarming evidence of enemy intention at its face value until it was invalidated by better evidence. His letter to Scott was just a report of conditions as existing intelligence revealed them, and a suggested course of action. In this connection McClellan is open to criticism for his failure to obtain precise intelligence and as a matter of fact for continuing to base estimates of the military situation upon faulty reports. No defense can be made for this failure except to point out that he made no poorer showing with respect to obtaining military information than other generals of the period. Lee's intelligence as to the sympathies of the people of Maryland helped him decide on an invasion in the fall of 1862. His informants misled him and Marylanders did not

1 A. H. Bill, The Beleaguered City, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1946, 73-75.

rise to the Confederate cause. Further it can be indicated that intelligence has and continues to be the weak point of the American army. Until World War II officers were inclined to regard intelligence assignments as somewhat degrading and to be avoided if at all possible. McClellan's failure in obtaining precise information is in keeping with later American failure to detect Japanese intentions in 1941.

Despite Scott's very outspoken objections, McClellan's command was increased gradually until it attained the status of a field army. On August 17, the Departments of Washington, Northeastern Virginia, the valley of the Shenandoah, all of Maryland and Delaware were organized into the Department of the Potomac.[1] On August 20, McClellan translated that order into a statement creating the Army of the Potomac, assumed command of it and announced his staff.[2] This done, he turned his attention to other pressing matters.

To train the raw levies of troops daily descending upon Washington and its environs, McClellan adopted what in later times came to be known as an infantry replacement training center. Newly arrived troops were quickly formed into provisional brigades and stationed in camps along the Maryland shore. There they were issued equipment, instructed and brought effectively under military control. The responsibility for this training job was first assigned to General F. J. Porter, then General A. E. Burnside, and finally to General Casey. Because of their special needs, the artillery recruits were assigned to General M. T. Barry for

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., V, 567.
2 Ibid., 575.

training and the cavalry were assigned to General George Stoneman for similar purposes. As soon as troops had finished their "basic training" they were transferred to the south side of the Potomac to one of the brigades in the line.[1] Here they obtained experience in facing an enemy and going on various kinds of patrol activities.

In general, writers, even though critics of McClellan, have been willing to concede that he did an excellent job of training the army and getting it ready to fight. The common belief has been that while he could not fight effectively, he created a tool with which others could. Professor Williams,[2] however, does not even allow the Union general that credit. He argues that McClellan prepared his troops for parade ground display but that in the presence of untold possibilities for field training failed to take advantage of his opportunities. Here again one should proceed cautiously before accepting this criticism as being valid. The very task of teaching men to stay alive while living under field or even garrison conditions is a major one. Men from cities, small towns and farms with no military experience do not quickly adjust to army diet and to army routine. Still more difficult is the task of training these men in the use of implements of war. City boys had to be made into horsemen and artillery men. Country boys, accustomed only to the authority of their fathers, had to be trained over long and difficult weeks of drill to obey orders of a superior whether they liked him or not and whether he made sense or not. This did not come easy. It is a credit to someone that these men were able to launch a major

1 McClellan, Own Story, 113.
2 Op. Cit., Lincoln Finds a General.

amphibious offensive in less than a year after they were organized. Professor Williams, seeking to show that McClellan spent too many months training his troops, also points out that even in World War II the average training infantry troops received before going into combat was only something over three months—which is so. What he does not mention is that those troops bringing the average down to three months were replacements going into well-trained, battle-tested units. McClellan had no battlewise cadres around which to build his army. The regular army troops, as has been pointed out, were kept in regular army units instead of being distributed through the volunteer forces. Then, too, states, during the early years of the war, filled the government's requisitions for more troops by sending new units complete with new, untrained, and untried officers. After Bull Run, for example, McClellan lost many units which had actually had battle experience and received absolutely green units in their places. In World War II the pattern was for a division to be created around a cadre of soldiers with previous experience. The division would spend between a year and a year and a half training before going into combat. At periodic intervals the losses of the division would be made up from newly trained recruits. It was assumed that personal contact with the veterans of the division would quickly enable these recruits to adjust to battle conditions. The leadership of the division remained, insofar as possible, constant. By starting from scratch McClellan was lucky to have accomplished as much as he did. Equally as important as the plans for training individual soldiers were the plans for organizing the various arms and services of

the army into an autonomous whole capable of sustaining itself for prolonged periods in the field. That McClellan was successful was evidenced time after time when the Federal troops demonstrated superior technique to the Confederates—a superiority which, had it been supported by more adequate political-military leadership, might have ended the war in the east much earlier than it actually did. In supply, in signal communication, in artillery, and in medical service, Union technical excellence was in evidence from the beginning of the Peninsular campaign onward. In part this was due, of course, to the existence of greater materiel in the Northern army. But materiel can be a burden to a commander rather than an asset if it is not used effectively.

McClellan devoted much thought and long hours of supervision to insuring that these arms and services were effective. Perhaps his major achievement in this sphere of activity involved developing artillery from a little-respected branch into one of the most effective and uniformly successful elements of the army. He worked on the theory that if the infantry was queen of battle, certainly the royal consort was the artillery and no effort was too great in grooming it for its marriage. The "long arm" was established within the framework of several basic principles:

1. Artillery should be in proportion of 2½ pieces to 1,000 men.
2. Artillery should in general be of the type then in manufacture.
3. Artillery batteries should, if possible, each consist of six guns and never less than four guns.
4. Four batteries of field artillery should be organic to each division, one of which should be regular army artillery. The commander of the regular battery would be the division artillery officer. When divisions were grouped together,

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one-half of all divisional artillery should revert to corps to form corps artillery.

5. Army reserve artillery should consist of 100 guns.

6. In campaigns each gun should have available at least 400 rounds of ammunition.

7. In addition to army reserve of field artillery there should be a siege train of 50 guns.

To gain some appreciation of McClellan's foresight, it is interesting to compare these principles with those governing artillery in the American army in World War II.

1. Each division should contain as organic artillery four battalions. One battalion was for division reserve and the other three distributed to the three infantry regiments.

2. Each corps should have some artillery directly under the command of the corps commander. This reserve could either come from the divisions or be assigned from units specifically designated as corps artillery.

3. Each army should maintain a reserve of heavy artillery to be used at the discretion of the army commander, either by assignment to corps or divisions or as an independent branch.

Lee's use of artillery never approximated the effectiveness of McClellan's in part because he entrusted its organization and training either to subordinate commanders or to his infirm and ineffective chief of artillery. When McClellan arrived in Washington in 1861 the artillery consisted of ninety-two batteries of 520 guns, 12,500 men, and 11,000 horses. The devastation the tiered guns at Malvern effected in Lee's ranks was possible only because a little man insisted, in the face of tremendous pressure, on enough time to accumulate and train an effective "long arm."[1]

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1 McClellan, Report, 55-57.

Considerable time and attention McClellan also devoted to building up the services. Because of a shortage of officers, he placed the engineering units under army control, although he had some notion that the divisions needed such specialized troops. Units as they were trained and equipped were detailed from army reserve for specific assignments, upon the completion of which they reverted to army control. The medical corps, although physicians were reluctant to enter it, was gradually expanded first by Surgeon Charles S. Tripler and then by Surgeon Jonathan Letterman. Tripler was responsible for the accumulation of supplies, the training of doctors and provisions for sanitation during the Peninsular campaigns. Letterman organized the ambulance corps, a system of field hospitals, and a system for supplying brigades with medical materiel. The duties now divided between general staff section G-4, the Quartermaster corps, and the Transportation corps in the Civil War all rested with the Quartermaster corps. Although the lack of officers was a formidable obstacle, it was overcome by the unstinting work of McClellan's two quartermasters, General Van Vliet and Colonel Ingalls.

The army ordnance was faced with great and perplexing difficulties. At the outbreak of the Civil War, rifled ordnance was just coming into use and much time was required experimenting with different makes before concentrating on some types for mass production. In addition, troops from the northern states brought with them a confusing variety of small arms requiring different kinds of ammunition. When war broke out, the several states sent purchasers abroad to buy weapons. Much of what they bought was unserviceable and what was of use required unceasing effort of the

ordnance service to maintain in operation. Many of McClellan's personal efforts were directed toward perfecting the service of this branch. The signal corps was divided into a telegraphic section and a section concentrating on other methods. Major A. J. Myer was appointed chief signal officer, and trained men in each regiment to maintain effective communication. Major T. J. Eckert was the chief of the telegraphic section, and Professor Lowe was in charge of the balloons which served to help keep the army informed of Confederate activities.

To men of the twentieth century, accustomed to a veritable galaxy of staff titles in connection with armies, the creation of such departments as McClellan provided for will appear highly unsophisticated. It should be recalled, however, that the concept of a general staff was virgin to America and not too much farther advanced in Europe. The notion of a general staff grew historically out of the French office of Quartermaster General and was expanded by the Prussian military men following principles laid down by the Prussian Chief of Staff, Von Clausewitz. In Prussia, however, there existed a tradition of a military bureaucracy while there was none in America. Much credit belongs to McClellan because he saw the need for an adequate staff and took steps to provide it. In this respect also he was far in advance of Lee, who never fully demonstrated that he understood the professional qualities staff officers should have. Jackson also was McClellan's inferior in this respect. He could never realize that ministers might not make effective chiefs of staff.

McClellan, however, was no devotee of an elite corps of staff

officers whose entire careers were spent in staff positions. He believed that a system should be set up whereby officers would successively move from line to staff, to school, to line assignments.[1]

The functioning of this staff was coordinated by McClellan's Chief of Staff Marcy. In one respect, however, this was not a satisfactory arrangement, for Marcy's responsibilities were severely limited. McClellan was afraid to entrust too much responsibility to any officer. Thus, when he was away from headquarters, Marcy had to act more as a message-clearing center than a true executive. From time to time this was to have serious consequences, for McClellan was taken ill at several crucial moments in the operations of 1862. During those times the army was virtually without a head, since Marcy was unaccustomed to making decisions concerning the army. McClellan was never able to see this as a weak point in his technique of command. Even when ill with typhoid fever, he believed he could continue to direct the affairs of his staff and of his army.

In addition to organizing and planning generally for the early deployment of the army, McClellan was concerned with various secondary operations particularly along the eastern seaboard of the Confederate states. In October General Ambrose E. Burnside, while chatting about the war, suggested forming a special amphibious corps to operate against Southern coastal installations. McClellan was taken with the idea, and asked Burnside to prepare a written proposal which could be given staff and political consideration. In general, the plan as Burnside outlined it was to organize a division of about 12,000 to 15,000 men from Northern seacoast towns. This division would be equipped with vessels so that it could be thrown at various

1 McClellan, Own Story, 121.

points along the coast from which it could threaten the Southern rear. The plan was approved and on October 23, orders were issued creating the unit at Annapolis. By the 12th of December the unit was sufficiently trained and had enough transportation to warrant making an effort. On the 5th of January, after a series of most vexatious delays, troops began to go aboard transports. The loaded vessels rendezvoused off Fort Monroe on the morning of January 9 and on the 11th put out to sea. After a month of the most hectic sort of voyaging, the convoy arrived off Roanoke Island. The attack against Roanoke was begun early on the morning of February 5 and the landings were finally accomplished on the 8th. After a rest on Roanoke Island, the division re-embarked and attacked New Berne on the mainland. The rest of the spring was used in reducing the forts in the vicinity.[1]

All other activities, however, were incidental to McClellan's main preoccupation of how best to employ the army which was growing under his care. He had to consider as a possibility that the Confederate forces might strike him at almost any time. If that happened he had to be prepared to counter the blow. But even more important, he had to devise means of moving his troops to the offensive. To do this he tried by every means at his disposal to impress the government with the need for a large army. In letters to Chase and to senators as well as to Lincoln, he constantly emphasized the same theme. He wanted as much of the regular army as possible. He wanted other theaters to be held quiet while he

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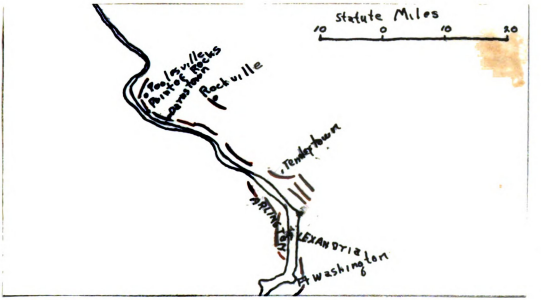
1 B. & L., I, 660-668.

readied his blow. He wanted complete control of the officer personnel under him so as to be free from having key men suddenly removed by War Department order. In other words, his estimate of the situation along the Potomac front was a textbook one, and he was seeking to come as close as possible to a textbook solution to the problem.[1]

While trying to obtain the desired means, he disposed of his troops as shown on the map below.



DEFENSES OF WASHINGTON OCTOBER 1861

From these positions, McClellan could make armed reconnaissances toward the enemy position to build up his store of intelligence, to keep the enemy so unbalanced that a Confederate attack would not be possible and to give the public reports showing progress was being made.

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., V, 587-588.

One of these probing movements was under the command of General McCall who moved a body of troops toward Drainsville in late October.

On October 20, McClellan ordered General Stone, then with headquarters at Poolesville, to keep a sharp lookout toward Leesville. His mission was to discover whether another armed reconnaissance toward Drainsville under General McCall was having any effect on the Confederate concentrations of troops. Stone was authorized to make slight demonstrations to assist McCall's mission of keeping the area clear for map-making activity.[1]

Upon receipt of McClellan's order to make a demonstration, Stone moved a re-enforced brigade of infantry, some cavalry, and a ranger detachment to Edward's Ferry (see page 106). Two regiments were ordered to a small island in the Potomac called Harrison's Island and one regiment was ordered to Conrad's Ferry. The officer in charge of the re-enforced brigade was instructed to deploy his troops in full view of the Confederates and to shell the woods concealing enemy installations. The ruse succeeded and the Confederates retired, allowing the Union troops to return to their camps on the Maryland shore by nightfall.

About 10:00 on the evening of the 20th, Stone received intelligence that a small detachment of Confederate troops was located several miles outside of Leesburg. This appeared as fair prey to him and he ordered troops to cross from Harrison's Island to destroy the detachment. Supporting troops for the movement were instructed to re-cross the river at Edward's Ferry.

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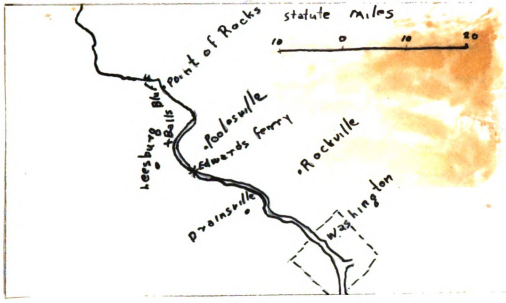
1 McClellan, Report, 77.



BALL'S BLUFF OPERATION

While these orders were being carried out, Stone was hatching bigger plans. He believed that Colonel Edward Baker, who had been dispatched to Ball's Bluff, could lead a successful attack and that the enemy would retreat down the Leesburg road. The troops which had crossed at Edward's Ferry were expected to attack up the Leesville road as soon as news of Baker's success was received. This attack was designed to destroy the Confederates after Baker had thrashed them.[1] But things did not go the way Stone had planned.

The troops which crossed to Ball's Bluff quickly ran into trouble and the Confederates mounted an effective counterattack during which the Union formations were disrupted and the Union commander Baker was killed.

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., V, 393-398.

Late in the afternoon and evening, the Union soldiers made their way, some by boat and others by swimming, to Harrison's Island, from which the offensive had started. A beachhead was, however, maintained at Edward's Ferry.

On the 22nd, McClellan visited Poolesville to learn the details of what had transpired. On the 23rd, after a personal visit to the Virginia beachhead, he decided that the position was untenable. Believing a withdrawal in daylight too dangerous, he secured the beachhead until nightfall. Then the troops began to re-cross the river and by 4:00 A.M. the last Federal soldiers were on Maryland ground.[1]

A sordid aftermath to this engagement was the treatment afforded General Stone. On January 28, 1862, Stanton signed an unnumbered order from the War Department calling for the relief of Stone from command and his arrest. After having made some attempt to find out why the order had been issued, McClellan, on Febraury 8,1862, ordered his Provost-Marshal to arrest Stone and send him under guard to Fort Lafayette. The order specified that he should be held without communication with anyone.[2] Stone was kept under arrest for 189 days and was then released but without orders for further duty. At no time were copies of charges against him prepared or served on him.[3]

The battle of Ball's Bluff in its essentials was a simple operation involving few men such as happens everyday in warfare. McClellan had been engaging in the kind of activity all commanders must attempt, even though

1 McClellan, Report, 82.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., V, 341.
3 Ibid., 344.

it be bloody. To get information, small units of troops had to probe at various points along the enemy's lines. There was no thought in McClellan's mind of an offensive. He merely needed to know certain things. His local commander, however, made a mistake. It was not a large mistake as errors in war go, but he made it. He accomplished his mission and then, acting on a hunch, pushed troops into a place in which they might be repulsed. It was Stone's bad luck that this happened.

Now in almost any other situation the losses would have been accepted as part of the war and nothing more would have been heard about it. Colonel Baker, however, was a Republican senator who was popular with Lincoln. His death seemed to point to ineptness of military officers and to the fact that in two months since the battle of Bull Run no major operation had been undertaken. Although Lincoln did not seem to hold Baker's death against McClellan, others did. In talking over the matter with Lincoln, McClellan said, "There is many a good fellow that wears the shoulder straps going under the sod before this thing is over. There is no loss too great to be repaired. If I should get knocked on the head, Mr. President, you will put another man immediately in my shoes." The President replied, "I want you to take care of yourself."[1]

But others—the Jacobins, such as Trumbull, Chandler, and Wade—were not so charitable. Perhaps circumstance had something to do with it, but perhaps Baker's death served to spark their activities. At any rate, on October 26 the President was presented with complaints about the inactivity of McClellan. Wade, for example, wanted McClellan to fight an unsuccessful

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1 Hay, Diaries, 30.

battle rather than delay longer. Fortunately, at this time Lincoln was unconvinced and so stood behind his general. Talking to McClellan later he said, "At the same time, General, you must not fight till you are ready."[1]

The battle of Ball's Bluff actually ended the first period of McClellan's command. He had restored order to the shaken forces of McDowell. He had engaged the venerable Scott in official combat and had not been defeated. He had made giant strides in creating that tool which was eventually to win the war for the North—the Army of the Potomac. He had also gained the animosity of two powerful groups which were later to be his undoing. One was the new Secretary of War, Stanton, and the other was the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, sometimes styled the Jacobin Club. The storm was beginning to brew which would break about "Little Mac's" head.

1 Ibid., 31.

CHAPTER V

ALL QUIET ON THE POTOMAC

On October 18, in view of the vexed command situation in Washington due to the difficulties between McClellan and Scott, Lincoln decided that Scott should no longer command. He prepared a letter alluding to Scott's earlier request to be retired and stating that while the government would still have need of his services, there would be no objection if the septuagenarian wanted to retire to civil life. On October 31, Scott wrote again asking retirement and Lincoln accepted the request by going to see the general in the company of the cabinet. The President made a short speech which together with the official order ended the long, faithful, and worthy public career of Winfield Scott.[1]

McClellan, to whom the removal of Scott was a much to be desired event, wrote touchingly of his parting with the general. At four in the morning on November 3, he escorted Scott to the depot in a pouring rain. Describing the scene to his wife, he wrote:

> It may be that at some distant day I, too, shall totter away from Washington, a worn-out soldier, with naught to do but make my peace with God. The sight of this morning was a lesson to me which I hope not soon to forget. I saw the end of a long active, and ambitious life, the end of the career of the first soldier of his nation; and it was a feeble old man scarce able to walk; hardly anyone there to see him off but his successor. Should I ever become vainglorious and ambitious, remind me of the spectacle....[2]

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1 Randall, Lincoln The President, I, 394.
2 McClellan, Own Story, 173.

Earlier, on the evening of November 1, Lincoln and a party called on McClellan to discuss the General's assumption of the command vacated by Scott. McClellan read the group his general order announcing the retirement of Scott and his own assumption of command. Lincoln thanked him for the tone of the order and told him he was greatly relieved by it. The President added that he was perfectly satisfied giving McClellan command of the army if he could be sure that the vast increase of responsibility "would not embarrass" the general. McClellan's answer was characteristic.

> It is a great relief, Sir. I feel as if several tons were taken from my shoulders today. I am now in contact with you, and the Secretary. I am not embarrassed by intervention.

Lincoln pointed out that the command of the Army of the Potomac and the supreme command of the armies would entail vast labor, but McClellan replied, "I can do it all."[1]

Now in command, McClellan's entire mode of operation had to change. While organizing the Army of the Potomac, he had spent long hours each day in the saddle, visiting troops, checking new and proposed installations and offering advice and encouragement to his officers who were whipping raw recruits into effective soldiers. Now he found himself more and more shackled to a desk, considering on paper and in the abstract the affairs of a vast military establishment. He lost much of the personal contact with the rank and file which he had so assiduously developed. In place of dealing almost exclusively with military men, albeit of different vintages, he found it necessary to deal more and more frequently with

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1 Hay, Diaries, 32-33.

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political leaders and about political matters. Lincoln, because of his intense concentration on military affairs, became more of a headache to the young commander than a helper or support. The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War became bothersome, and even McClellan's staunch supporters such as Chase occupied excessive amounts of the General's time because the nature of a supreme commander's duties were so related to political affairs. The "Trent" affair required McClellan's thought, where had he been only an army commander such an episode would have interested him only as a civilian. That he was able to attend to his varied and complex duties attests to his tremendous physical and mental vitality. But human nerves can stand only a limited amount of such strain before revealing it. A goodly part of McClellan's irritations at the government may well be explained by the simple fact that he was tired. One may well see why Lincoln's lawyer-like questionings late at night appeared silly to a man who had spent part of that morning talking with irrate Congressmen, another part sending telegrams to armies in various parts of the country about complex subjects; who had spent the afternoon visiting installations along the Potomac, after which reviewing staff plans for training and operations. Fatigue, coupled with McClellan's personality which was inclined to resent interference made for touchy reltaionships with the President.

McClellan had come from western Virginia to command a group of troops which were largely without organization. He had lain the foundation for a structure, both staff and line, which was to stand up under all the abuse such men as Pope, Burnside, and Hooker could give it. Yet he innocently

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believed that there was in existence some over-all strategic plan which he could implement when he entered on his new duties. Of course, there was no such plan. Lincoln, it is true, had some notion of broad over-all planning, but the military branch had done virtually nothing. There were bodies of troops located in different parts of the country, but until their energies were harnessed by some unified scheme, their efforts were bound to be almost futile. Nor had the personnel selected as high commanders been given much consideration by the War Office. Neither Cameron nor Scott had interested himself in such matters. McClellan was thus forced to begin to rethink the entire problem of command.

The Army of the Potomac had grown under the watchful eyes of McClellan and the lavishness of the northern people to be a creditable fighting unit. There were many who began to wonder to what use McClellan would put it. So, in addition to pondering on operations in the Mississippi valley, the new commander had crucial questions to answer concerning the use of the eastern troops and how they could be fitted into over-all strategy.

McClellan reasoned that the Army of the Potomac would be in no condition for offensive operations until late in November, 1861, and that even then it would be insufficiently trained to be of much use against fortified places. By that time the roads had become impassable for large units. This, added to the fact that he believed no tangible gains could be accomplished by a movement toward the Confederate positions in northern Virginia, led him to the conclusion to defer active operations in the east until spring, concentrating instead in other more promising zones.[1] This point of view represented a decided shift from that he expressed in a letter

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1 McClellan, Own Story, 199.

to the Secretary of War late in October. At that time he argued that it was highly essential for the Army of the Potomac to go on the offensive that fall. The advance, he believed, should be set no later than November 25 and have as its major objective the crushing of the rebel army at Manassas Junction.[1]

Several factors had been injected into the situation between late October and late November to change the general's mind. He had found, contrary to expectations, that there was no single theme of organization running through the nation's military effort. This had to be supplied. Then, too, he discovered that the government was unable to supply the needs he wanted for his offensive. His supplies, of ordnance and cavalry, were still inadequate in November. Troops he wanted transferred from other secotrs could not be spared, and the rate of recruitment of new units fell below anticipations. The command situation in the west along the Mississippi had deteriorated during early November to such an extent that those troops could not be expected to function unassisted even in a defensive role. In this last respect, General Fremont, the commander at St. Louis, while probably not personally culpable, had allowed his department to be exploited by all sorts of unscrupulous men. Because of the corruption in his department and because of certain political activities, he had been relieved of command November 2. General W. T. Sherman, thinking over the problems of the war in the west, had been thrown in the depths of a personal depression and eventually had to be relieved. Buell was assigned to take his place.

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1 McClellan, Report, 49.

In addition to the need for reorganizing the entire military effort of the nation, the idea that the true line of operations for the eastern army should be by the James, York or Rappahannock rivers was talked about and given consideration in staff conferences. Barnard, the chief of engineers on McClellan's staff, mentioned in a memorandum dated December 1, 1861 that such an idea had often occurred.[1] The casual way in which the statement is phrased leads one to believe that it had been a fairly common topic of conversation.

While probably no one of these factors was crucial in convincing McClellan to postpone operations, the total effect was to cause him to view with considerable misgivings any major offensive in 1861. Quite possibly, though, he kept an open mind throughout the late fall and winter to the possibilities of an advance of the Army of the Potomac. None-the-less, the idea grew on him that an advance south from Washington would be ill-advised, and this belief conditioned his decisions and his planning for the other theaters. Military men frequently must make use of intuitions in making decisions. These intuitions are actually insights developed through years of study of military matters and close contact with a specific military situation. Only by considering such insights can one explain why two successful commanders, presented with almost identical conditions, will make radically different plans. McClellan's decision to postpone action in the east until spring, as well as his armies' unspoken decision to go into winter quarters, may well only be explained as having

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., V, 671.

been intuitive or from insight into a total situation with no one critical determining factor. In terms of what McClellan eventually tried to do, the intuition was probably sound, but in terms of his "good press" it was probably bad.

While thus gradually reaching the important decision concerning postponement of the opening of the eastern campaign, McClellan gave serious thought to affairs in the west. To the troubled department of Missouri he assigned Major-General H. W. Halleck. He pointed out to Halleck the difficulty and complexity of his duties, which involved much more than usually faced a military commander. The amount of disloyalty in the area was great, and careful screening of the officers and men wearing the Union uniform was necessary in order to get rid of Southern sympathizers. Halleck would need to take drastic steps to end the corruption which had existed under Fremont, arresting those officers and civilians he found engaging in unauthorized activities. With respect to purely military affairs, McClellan suggested that Halleck fortify and hold such places as Rolla, Sedalia, and other points in the state, patroling constantly but concentrating his main body near the Mississippi to be ready for offensive operations.[1]

Because he had acquired the reputation for being insane, W. T. Sherman had been relieved of command of the Department of the Ohio, and D. C. Buell was assigned that post. McClellan wrote to Buell analyzing the situation and indicating that that part of Kentucky west of the Cumberland River had been assigned to the Department of Missouri, so that Buell was

1 McClellan, Report, 87-88.

to confine his efforts to the eastern parts of Kentucky. In that area, Buell was to bear in mind that political considerations were of overwhelming importance, that the only issue for which the war was being fought was the preservation of the Union and the upholding of the constitutional authority of the government. Buell must impress the people of Kentucky that their domestic institutions would not be touched. Since a majority of the inhabitants of eastern Tennessee appeared in favor of the Union, he suggested that Buell remain on the defensive along the line Louisville-Nashville, while throwing his forces on Walker's Gap or Knoxville to occupy the railroad at that point.[1]

During this period of inactivity along the Potomac, events were developing which were to impinge deeply on the career of McClellan. Secretary of War Cameron had vindicated earlier predictions by being completely incompetent as a cabinet officer, and Lincoln decided that a change must be made. To this end, Cassius M. Clay was granted a reprieve from the diplomatic post at St. Petersburg in order to assume more martial responsibilities. With this post vacant, Lincoln could accept Cameron's resignation and, to satisfy the political forces the man from Pennsylvania represented, appoint him minister to Russia. To Cameron's place was assigned Edwin M. Stanton of Pennsylvania. Stanton was an 1860 Democrat and had served as a cabinet officer in the declining days of the Buchanan administration. He had known Lincoln as a lawyer through a rather unfortunate trial in which Stanton stole the scene. He held Lincoln in short

1 Ibid., 89-90.

esteem, and McClellan records that seldom did he talk about the President in terms other than slanderous ones.[1]

Stanton's appointment came as a surprise to the rest of Lincoln's cabinet except for Seward, who had become acquainted with him while he was a member of the Buchanan administration.[2] He brought to the post a number of important talents and qualifications of great value to a minister of state, and some which would have better suited a John Brown. He was honest, a good organizer, and a man to whom duty to his post became in time an over-riding passion. He was a man of strong prejudices and of immense pride in the prerogatives of whatever office he held. But in addition Stanton was a physical coward having an inordinate fear of death. A great fear governing his life during the entire Civil War was that the Confederate host, such a few miles from the defenses of Washington, might one day capture the capital. Never, during four long years of war, was he to feel secure so long as the Union main body was away from directly in front of the capital. Even when Grant was able to exercise supreme military command, this fear of Stanton's was a force to be reckoned with. Grant found that only by circumventing the war office was he able to make strategic dispositions of such forces as those under Sheridan in the Shenandoah.[3]

The role Stanton played in eventually breaking McClellan would be difficult to over-estimate. McClellan's troubles with the administration began almost as soon as Stanton came into office and lasted until the

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1 McClellan, Own Story, 152.
2 Welles, Diary, 58.
3 Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant, New York, Charles L. Webster & Co., 1885, II, 317.

General was finally relieved in November of 1862. Any attempt to justify McClellan must serve to discredit Stanton, just as the traditional picture of McClellan glorifies or at least condones the role of the Secretary. One can, this writer believes, see Lincoln and McClellan each growing in stature as the war progressed, but one cannot see in Stanton the same kind of development.

In a sense, Stanton's role as a bête noire in McClellan's life is difficult to explain. Both men had been Democrats and now both occupied strategic positions in an administration whose very Republicanism had helped fling the nation into civil war. McClellan had, however, never met or probably ever heard of Stanton before reaching Washington in 1861. Not many months after his arrival in Washington, Stanton was recommended to him as a safe legal adviser. From that point on Stanton appeared to McClellan as pressing his friendship. And McClellan must have returned the amicable feeling, for he frequently was a visitor at Stanton's house while hiding out from "browsing presidents." Stanton, during their conversations, never referred to Lincoln in terms other than of extreme derision. Lincoln was the "original gorilla." Du Chaillu was a fool to wander all the way to Africa to find wild animals when he could have found the equivalent in Springfield, Illinois, according to Stanton. The Republican party was dishonest and devoid of all ability.[1]

Lincoln became aware of the ripening friendship and when he was fully decided that he would appoint Stanton as Secretary of War, he asked McClellan's opinion, mentioning that he wanted to appoint a war minister

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1 McClellan, Own Story, 151-152.

with whom McClellan could get along. McClellan, of course, approved of the choice. When the post was offered to him, Stanton called on McClellan to ask his advice about accepting or rejecting the offer. Stanton said that he was in somewhat of a quandry about accepting. Acceptance would involve great personal sacrifices, but if he could help put down the rebellion he was willing to devote all of his time and intellect to the undertaking. He told McClellan that he believed together they could quickly end the war. If McClellan wanted him to, he would accept.

After assuming office, Stanton's entire attitude toward McClellan changed and he avoided him rather than seeking his friendship. Even the ordinary business between a commanding general and his civilian chief became strained and difficult. In place of talking over political affairs with McClellan as he had done before entering the administration, Stanton now began to be seen in the company of Wade, Chandler, and others representing a different point of view toward the war than McClellan's.

A full explanation of Stanton's character does not properly belong in a study of McClellan as a commander, but because the Secretary's dealings with the commanding general were so crucial in the early conduct of the war, some analysis must be attempted. The first and most obvious consideration might be that McClellan and Stanton both had a good bit of "copperheadism" in them. They without doubt enjoyed every moment of their discussions as they raked over the coals the physical characteristics of the President and his party's ideological creed. After joining the Republican administration, Stanton may well have begun to fear McClellan because the general knew too much of the Secretary's earlier attitudes. Getting

rid of McClellan by discrediting him was a way to prevent his own disloyalty from being brought before the public gaze.

A second consideration involves an element of physical cowardice in Stanton's character which has been mentioned before. Stanton's coolness toward McClellan dates almost exactly from the time McClellan's plans for an envelopment movement down the coast were maturing. Implicit in a plan based upon using the James or York rivers was a weakening of the forces in front of Washington, with the possible dangers such a course entailed. Those changes, of course, implied personal danger for Edwin Stanton and his enmity to the plan at once became apparent.

A third consideration involves Stanton's abolitionism. McClellan suggests that Stanton was convinced, by the extreme anti-slavery men, that a war ending with slavery still established in the South was no victory at all. War conducted along the lines laid down by McClellan would not accomplish such an end, since, according to McClellan and those who believed as he did, once the Southern army was defeated, the Union was restored. Such a result was most certainly not to be encouraged by the abolitionists, so McClellan had to be denied the support which might possibly have ended the war without altering Southern institutions. McClellan always believed, and there is some reason for agreeing with him, that Stanton planted seeds of distrust of the general's conduct of the war in Lincoln's mind and encouraged the President in those acts which most embarrassed McClellan, i.e., the Presidential War Orders.

Still a fourth consideration hinged upon Stanton's jealousy of military men who appeared to usurp any of the prerogatives of the Secretary of

War. McClellan, because he was considerably more officious than most, was more likely to irritate Stanton than a person of a retiring nature such as Burnside or Meade. At the time McClellan crossed swords with "Mars", as Lincoln sometimes called Stanton, he did not have the kind of prestige with which Grant later could combat the jealous pride of Stanton. In fairness to Stanton, however, it should be pointed out that McClellan was a most difficult person with whom to work. He had quarrelled with Scott, he quarrelled with Stanton, and before his command of the army ended, he managed to quarrel with many of the most important political leaders in Washington as well as with a goodly number of his generals, political as well as military.

The American constitutional system is such that a secretary of war can be made ineffective, provided the President who is the commander-in-chief has confidence in the military commander. However, McClellan could not claim Lincoln's confidence, partly because of differences in the two men and partly because a powerful group of members of the House and Senate opposed the general. This group was able to make its claims official through a congressional agency called the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, and Lincoln, because legislative cooperation was necessary, had to listen to its recommendations. By allying himself with this group, Stanton insured himself a control over the destinies of the army which he, acting alone, could not have accomplished.

The precise reasons why Stanton broke with McClellan are not known, chiefly because the Secretary of War was such an expert at concealing his true feelings. Within hours of the time he called on McClellan to ask the

General's advice about accepting the Secretaryship of War, he said to Mr. and Mrs. Don Piatt, "Yes, I am going to be Secretary of War to Old Abe." When asked what he proposed doing he replied, "Do? I intend to accomplish three things. I will make Abe Lincoln President of the United States. I will force this man McClellan to fight or throw up; and last but not least, I will pick Lorenzo Thomas [Adjutant-General] up with a pair of tongs and drop him from the nearest window."[1] Even until the very last of McClellan's first tenure as Commander of the Army of the Potomac, when Stanton was doing his best to have the general relieved, he could still write on July 5, "I can therefore only say, my dear general, in this brief moment, that there is no cause in my heart or conduct for the cloud that wicked men have raised between us for their own base and selfish purposes. No man had ever a truer friend than I have been to you and shall continue to be."[2] In arriving at an interpretation then, one must examine the entire complex of relationships between the two men and accept the theory which most harmonizes with all available evidence. In the opinion of this writer the picture sketched of Stanton is a valid one.

This Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War was appointed in December, 1861, and became, during the next four years, one of the greatest burdens the administration had to bear. It also, however, was the bane of the existence of those who sought to make excessive profits out of the war

1 Sandburg, The War Years, I, 446.
2 McClellan, Own Story, 476.

as well as the terror of generals and other officers who did less than their duty as conceived by the committee. Its membership was strong in political shrewdness, extreme abolitionism, Republicanism, and vindictive hatred of things Southern. Its membership was almost completely lacking in humanitarianism, humanism, and the brand of the nineteenth century liberalism Lincoln himself represented. The chairman, Benjamin Franklin Wade of Ohio, was the most impatient of the whole pragmatic lot. Senator Zachariah Chandler of Michigan, Lyman Trumbull of Illinois, and Andrew Johnson each brought strong talents and strong prejudices to their duties as members of a mid-century "Committee of Public Safety." Thaddeus Stevens, floor-leader of the House and chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee was another member of this "Jacobin" group. His contributions of intellect and venom were great and his cold blue hatred of the South made him a natural enemy of anyone who even demonstrated Christian charity toward the enemy.[1]

Although the committee did not come into official existence until December, 1861, its membership was at work much earlier. In late October, Trumbull, Chandler, and Wade began to worry Lincoln and to press for another battle. Wade even preferred an unsuccessful fight to delay on the part of the army. Lincoln and McClellan were both troubled by this sort of impatience. At this period, however, Lincoln was able and willing to support the more deliberate policy of the young general. As time went on, Lincoln's hand was weakened and the radical faction was able to insist

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1 An excellent summary is presented in Sandburg, The War Years, I, 388-400.

upon generals more closely representing its point of view. In talking about the demands of the group Lincoln told McClellan, "At the same time, General, you must not fight till you are ready."[1]

Possibly to make clear to the country that he did not subscribe to the over-zealous military notions of the committee, Lincoln devoted part of his December, 1861 speech to Congress to military commanders. After paying a neat compliment to the retired Scott, Lincoln pointed out that McClellan had been placed in supreme command. General Scott and the people of the nation had repeatedly recommended the officer and "hence there is better reason to hope there will be given him the confidence and cordial support thus by fair implication promised, and without which he [McClellan] cannot with so full efficiency serve the country."[2] Then Lincoln made a remark which has been variously interpreted by advocates of both sides of the McClellan controversy.

> It has been said that one bad general is better than two good ones, and the saying is true if taken to mean no more than an army is better directed by a single mind, though inferior, than by two superior ones at variance and cross purposes with each other.

All Lincoln actually did in this remark was to state in a roundabout way the need for a unified command. There can be no implication that he considered, at this time, McClellan as an inferior general. There is, however, ample evidence to the contrary. The choice of words was unfortunate when considered in the light of developments of 1862, and has given critics of McClellan ammunition for their arguments.

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1 Hay, Diaries, 31.
2 Lincoln, Works, (Federal Edition), V, 405.

McClellan's manifold activities as commander-in-chief took their toll from his extremely vital physique. His long hours spent in conference, on horseback and in individual planning weakened his constitution, and in December, 1861 he fell ill with typhoid fever. This illness is rather difficult to assess as a factor in the McClellan story. McClellan himself claimed that while he was bedridden during the course of the illness he never once lost capacity to command and that he directed the various staff heads in their duties as before. Others have argued that during the weeks of McClellan's illness the Army of the Potomac was virtually without a commander and that the entire army of the United States drifted along with no leadership. Such a contention is based in part upon McClellan's habit of keeping his own counsel and retaining personal command responsibility for many of the details of his office. Those who advance this theory argue that even McClellan's father-in-law, General Marcy, was afraid to take any action without McClellan's specific approval and that during this illness the commander was in no condition to give such approval.

One suspects that there are elements of truth in both versions. McClellan was never a person to delegate responsibility or authority to subordinates. He wanted, and usually was able, to keep track of most of the details concerning the army. When he became ill a potent force was withdrawn from active participation in affairs of the army. He probably was able to keep somewhat abreast of developments, but lacking perfect health, the vigor of his decisions was probably less than usual. Thus the business of organization, training, and planning was undoubtedly slowed somewhat, although considering the time of the year and that no active winter operations were

actually planned, it is difficult to attach much importance to it. It was unfortunate that at the time this slow-up of activities became apparent the nation had begun to protest against the entire fall having passed without a major military movement, and that while McClellan was ill the Committee on the Conduct of the War had begun to exert its ceaseless pressure on Lincoln. These domestic pressures forced Lincoln into considering technical military matters from which this last stemmed an entire sequence of events culminating eventually in the negation of the effectiveness of McClellan's plans.

McClellan's illness made a lasting impression upon Lincoln. Throughout the fall of 1861 he had paid McClellan many a visit to talk over army matters instead of calling the general to the White House to see him. When McClellan was taken sick the President continued making calls but as often as not found the general asleep. Consequently Lincoln was unable to talk over military matters with his top commander at the very time when pressure from public opinion and from Congress was mounting. The treasury was finding it difficult to secure the funds the ever-expanding armies required, and there was always present the danger of British and French recognition of the Confederacy. Lincoln needed something concrete in the way of military developments and had no place to go to secure them nor anyone to whom he could talk about campaign plans.

On January 10, 1862, in desperation, Lincoln called Generals McDowell and Franklin, Secretary Seward, Secretary Welles, and the assistant Secretary of War to an evening meeting. The President, greatly disturbed by the state

of affairs, spoke of the condition of the treasury, the delicate foreign situation, the critical struggle in Missouri, and the lack of harmony between Generals Buell and Halleck. If something were not done soon, he said, the "bottom would be out of the whole affair—and if General McClellan did not want to use the army, he would like to borrow it, provided he could see how it could be made to do something."[1] The group, after discussing possible uses for the army, broke up without accomplishing much except to agree to meet several days later with more of the senior commanders of the Army of the Potomac.

McClellan, advised of the proposed meeting, got out of bed and went to the White House Sunday morning, January 12, to attend it. Lincoln invited him to attend another meeting to be held the next day to discuss plans for future operations. McClellan, prompt as usual, found Secretaries Seward, Chase, and Blair and Generals McDowell, Franklin, and Meigs already assembled. There was rather desultory talk going on about topics of general interest, but apparently no attempt was made to bring the meeting to order. There was a good bit of whispering among members of the group, with the President and Secretary Chase talking quietly at the end of the table. Finally, Chase announced that he understood the purpose of the meeting was to allow McClellan to explain to them all his offensive plans for their approval. McClellan replied that that was news to him and that he couldn't quite see how the Secretary of the Treasury could ask him anything, as only the President and the Secretary of War were legally entitled to quiz him about military affairs. Lincoln next

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1 Sandburg, The War Years, I, 418.

attempted to get the meeting going, stating, "Well, General McClellan, I think you had better tell us your plans." McClellan reacted to this violently and stated that if the President had so little confidence in him as to need the opinions of others, who were unqualified to judge, then the President ought to relieve him. No general, he added, would reveal his plans to such a group as that present, knowing that within hours knowledge of the plans would be spread all over Washington. He went on to add that actually both the President and the Secretary of Treasury knew in general his plans. He must, he argued, refuse to divulge his plans unless ordered to do so in writing by the President. After a little more desultory talk, Lincoln adjourned the meeting.[1] Before leaving the White House, McClellan went up to the President and asked him to have confidence in his judgment and not to be influenced by people who had no right to advise him upon military matters.

This unhappy episode in a very real sense marked the turning point in McClellan's relationships with Lincoln. No longer was "Little Mac" regarded as the hope of the nation. Rather he had become a person with whom many had become dissatisfied but for whom there was no replacement available. The two men, Lincoln and McClellan, had met in what was at best an embarrassing situation and neither had succeeded in imposing his will on the other. The differences between the two men from then on became so apparent that henceforth those differences would overshadow the commonness of purpose which had thus far characterized both of their actions.

McClellan was certainly at fault in the rude manner in which he

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1 McClellan, Own Story, 156-158.

treated the President and the high officials at the meeting. On the other hand, he was probably justified in fearing leaks in intelligence. Lincoln was an incorrigible gossip and information imparted to him was very likely to be quickly in the hands of the Confederate authorities. By the time of the Grant era he had corrected this difficulty by refusing to know about precise military plans.

As to whether McClellan did or did not have a plan at the time of this meeting is not clear. He was in the process of developing an entirely new concept of the war in the east. He was shifting from an earlier-held belief in an overland attack via Manassas Junction to one involving water transportation. On December 10, 1861, McClellan submitted the following letter to the President:

> I enclose the paper you left with me, filled as you requested. In arriving at the numbers given I have left the minimum number in garrison and observation.
>
> Information received recently leads me to believe that the enemy could meet us in front with equal forces nearly, and I have now my mind actively turned toward another plan of campaign that I do not think at all anticipated by the enemy nor by many of our own people.[1]

He was, of course, open to criticism for not confiding in his senior commanders, but his restraint in this respect might have been commended had things gone differently. T. J. Jackson also kept his own counsel, and neither his subordinates nor his enemy were able to know just what he would do. All in all, the meetings of January could best never have taken place. McClellan lost the full suppport of Lincoln, the critics of McClellan obtained fuel for their campaign, and the army was moved not one inch closer to

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 6.

fighting the enemy.

While in Washington McClellan was thus incurring the enmity of powerful men and losing the confidence of his President, all was not serene on the other side of the Potomac. After the Battles of Bull Run and Manassas Junction, the Confederate high command was undergoing the same sort of personnel troubles as plagued the North. Beauregard, having flashed across the sky of Confederate public opinion, quickly faded and was transferred to the west. Johnston, who was left in command of the Southern army blocking the several eastern overland routes to the South, began to engage in the same kinds of controversies with his government as McClellan did with his. President Jefferson Davis had been trained as a soldier and fancied his greatest talents lay in that direction. In this opinion he was strengthened by the advice of a man who in turn was Secretary of War then Secretary of State. Judah Benjamin was to Johnston everything which Stanton was to become for McClellan. Intensely loyal to Davis, he conceived of his role as Secretary of War as being virtually that of Chief of Staff to a President who was in fact a military commander-in-chief. With Benjamin and with Davis, Johnston was to wage many a wordy battle over all manner of things from the granting, from Richmond, of furloughs to troops needed in the line, to whether or not the army should have been withdrawn from Manassas Junction to a safer, more defensible line.

Johnston, after the August days passed, was faced with a difficult tactical mission. With an army which was scarcely adequate in numbers and highly inadequate in equipment, he was assigned the mission of

defending the Shenandoah Valley, the overland approaches to Richmond and the lower Potomac, i.e., below Washington. The Shenandoah district was entrusted to Major General T. J. Jackson, who, upon arrival in the valley, began to whip his troops into shape and to plot an offensive to help keep the growing Union might off balance. Jackson conceived a plan for the capturing of the city of Romney, but in the process of implementing it managed to acquire not only a reputation for being slightly crazy but the personal attention of Benjamin. Benjamin attempted to issue operational orders from Richmond, and Jackson reacted violently by attempting to resign. He was only dissuaded from doing so by arguments stressing the harm such a step would do the cause of the South and by promises that Richmond would not interfere.

Johnston himself faced McClellan's rapidly-growing army threatening to overwhelm the Southerners at any time the protection afforded by muddy roads was removed. Johnston believed that McClellan's strength would enable him to advance along any one of several routes with equally good chances of victory once the roads were free. He believed that his own army should take up positions farther south but was prevented from doing so by the same mud which kept the Union troops from attacking. He was thus faced with an awful dilemma. To wait until the end of winter was to run the risk of an overwhelming attack by McClellan. To move south before the end of winter would probably involve immense losses in supplies, for guns and wagons simply could not be moved through the mire. In the end, Johnston made the movement, accepting the losses in equipment rather than facing the Northern hosts.[1] McClellan, had he but known, had thoroughly frightened

[1] The point of view expressed here is that of Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 99-147.

Johnston just by the very size of his army and its equipment. It is interesting that although each commander had strong evidence that leaks of information were taking place, neither general obtained the knowledge of the other that was crucial.

During this period of quiet before the spring campaigns began, McClellan must be credited with some high achievement as well as debited with serious blunders. He continued the organization and training of his army, thus preparing it for what it would need to endure. He gradually perceived that an overland campaign might be the least effective of the possible approaches open to him. He opposed, with all his might, efforts to force him into a premature advance. In these three respects his judgment was sound.

On the other hand, he made three serious errors, in part, it should be mentioned, because of the peculiar atmosphere of wartime Washington.

He antagonized the President without whose support, in the American democracy, the best-laid plans would be meaningless. Even before his illness he was scarcely courteous to Lincoln, on one occasion even refusing to come downstairs to see him. If he was to end the war quickly, and there is good reason to believe that this was his desire, the support of all portions of the government was necessary. McClellan failed to retain the support of the executive branch and in so doing failed one of his essential missions.

He managed to mass against him a solid political block which would not rest until his "hide" had been nailed to the "barn door." It is not for nothing that military men are expected to stay clear of political

affairs. Theirs is duty which must represent the entire country. McClellan, during the period when he needed bi-partisan support, openly consorted with outspoken critics of the administration. The fact that one of them later joined the administration and turned on him is beside the point. In addition, he openly took sides in the inter-cabinet bickerings and in the end lost the support of all sides.

As an administrator, he spread himself too thin. Conceivably he could have commanded the armies of the United States and one of the field armies. But to have done so would have involved more delegation of authority than he was willing to make. McClellan never learned that most details should be the province of subordinates. He frequently concerned himself with the small at the expense of the large. While commander of the Army of the Potomac, he was able to exercise personal leadership which was sacrificed after November 1 and nothing was developed to take its place. His direct command responsibility over both the entire army and the Army of the Potomac was largely personal. When he was taken ill, no one was trained to take his place, and while making very little real difference, the public confidence in him was never as high after his illness as before.

CHAPTER VI

LINCOLN ASSUMES COMMAND

During January, 1862, Lincoln altered completely his methods for dealing with his generals. Until that time he had in the main left technical matters of tactics and strategy to the judgment of his commanders. From January, 1862 until Grant assumed command of the armies, the President's personal hand was involved in all major decisions concerning the army and the uses to which it was put. In fact, so direct was the President's role in army affairs that it appeared to many that he had suddenly become conscious of the constitutional provision making the chief executive commander-in-chief and had decided to become the actual military commander. Such a radical shift in policy has been the basis for one of the most intriguing questions in Civil War history. There are almost as many different explanations offered for the change as there are books dealing with the subject. These explanations range all the way from suggesting that Lincoln's attention was called to the full import of the constitutional provision by a pretty young woman, (Miss Carroll of Maryland), to suggesting that Lincoln fell under the influence of forces desiring to alter the entire purpose of the war. A great many such interpretations may be ignored, but several need to be examined because they have been crucial in the traditional view of McClellan.

Perhaps the most frequently advanced thesis is that Lincoln, faced with terrific pressures for action coming from Congress and from the

nation, finally dispaired of McClellan's ever assuming the offensive.[1] In order to force the army to act, the President first studied military subjects in great detail and then began to exercise definite command responsibilities. This thesis involves the suggestion that Lincoln assumed those responsibilities with reluctance and exercised them only until Grant became the commander-in-chief. At that time, Lincoln is said to have relinquished his direct control over the affairs of the army.

Another interpretation suggests that during the Civil War there were a great many revolutions taking place at the same time. One of these was between an incipient clique of generals which, given the opportunity, could develop into a perpetual officer caste, strong enough to control the nation and the political branch of the government.[2] Lincoln, seeing the dangers in allowing generals to rule, at last exercised his authority in favor of civilian constitutional government. McClellan had to go because, at the time of Lincoln's decision, he represented the high point of military hegemony in the government. A modification of this thesis suggests that Lincoln actually exercised military command during the McClellan period. The point is made that during the early months of McClellan's command the War Department was so under McClellan's power that the legitimate demands of the civilian government could be obtained only by taking extreme actions.[3] Thus Lincoln's series of general and special war orders

1 Sandburg, The War Years, I, 413-422.
2 Bruce Catton, Mr. Lincoln's Army, New York, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1951, 83-88.
3 Williams, Lincoln Finds a General, I, 157-158.

were issued only to re-establish a proper separation of power between that exercised by field commanders and that of the War Department under a civilian head. Once balance was re-established, the war orders stopped and so did Lincoln's intervention.

Another notion frequently found is that Lincoln's assumption of virtual command came as a result of Stanton's urging. This theory is based on the hypothesis that Stanton loved power for its own sake. When he became chief of the war office he found his office devoid of power. In order to obtain the power he craved, he influenced Lincoln against McClellan with the idea that if McClellan's control were broken, the Secretary of War could step into the power vacuum thus created.[1] This thesis also has been modified by other writers. According to some, Stanton was used by the extreme anti-slavery politicians to get rid of military commanders who were not "right" on slavery. Stanton's group then used Lincoln to break McClellan by encouraging the President to exert the power the constitution provides the civilian chief of state.

All of these points of view have sufficient truth to them to be plausible. Yet they all seem inappropriate by imputing motives and planning to men for which there is no real evidence. Rather, Lincoln's intense interest in military affairs would seem to be a manifestation of the amateur's preoccupation with high strategy. It was an interest which had been demonstrated before the events of January 1862 had developed and was demonstrated repeatedly even after Grant became commander. This interest

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1 J. H. Campbell, McClellan, New York, The Neale Publishing Co., 1916, 90.

was converted into action partly because of the very real differences existing between Lincoln and McClellan. Until Lincoln's relations with McClellan became strained during the general's illness, these differences between the two men were subordinated to the cause of saving the Union. Once a breach had occurred, however, the differences increased in importance and the two virtually ceased communicating with each other. In addition, the demands of the nation for action lent an urgency to these personal feelings of Lincoln, with the result that he at last began to differ openly with McClellan's point of view and to use his position as president to implement his own ideas with orders.

It should be pointed out that had Lincoln been asked why he virtually assumed command of the armies, he probably could have answered very honestly that he had not done so. He probably believed that he was only exerting pressure to have the military accomplish proper political objectives. Such things as predilection for military matters, or being influenced by personal differences from another man are for the most part motives which exist below the level of consciousness. But existence below the level of consciousness does not make motives any the less important in governing human behavior. Lincoln, possessing the potential motivation to differ with McClellan and to interfere in military matters, was susceptible to suggestions of his advisors who sought to encourage such behavior for various personal ends. A Lincoln who was sympathetic to McClellan's point of view would have rejected suggestions made by Stanton or the Joint Committee as being inappropriate. Being unsympathetic, Lincoln was influenced.

Lincoln's first major public effort as a military commander was the

publication, without notice, of the President's General War Order No. 1. Issued on January 27, it was written without consultation with anyone, although before issuing it the President read it to the cabinet, not for its sanction but for its information.[1] Since it was such an unusual document, it is reproduced here.

> Ordered, That the 22d day of February, 1862, be the day for a general movement of the land and naval forces of the United States against the insurgent forces.
>
> That especially the army at and about Fortress Monroe, the Army of the Potomac, the Army of Western Virginia, the army near Munfordville, Kentucky, the army and flotilla at Cairo, and a naval force in the Gulf of Mexico, be ready for a movement on that day.
>
> That all other forces, both land and naval, with their respective commanders, obey existing orders for the time, and be ready to obey additional orders when duly given.
>
> That the heads of departments, and especially the Secretaries of War and of the Navy, with all their subordinates, and the General-in-Cheif, with all other commanders and subordinates of land and naval forces, will severally be held to their strict and full responsibilities for the prompt execution of this order.[2]

Four days later, as though to implement his General Order, Lincoln issued a President's Special War Order No. 1 in which it was

> Ordered, That all the disposable force of the Army of the Potomac, after providing safely for the defence of Washington, be formed into an expedition for the immediate object of seizing and occupying a point upon the railroad south westward of what is known as Manassas Junction, all details to be in the discretion of the commander-in-chief and the expedition to move before or on the 22d day of February next.[3]

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1 Hay, Diary, 36.
2 Lincoln, Works, (Federal), V, 424.
3 Ibid., 425.

McClellan reacted violently to these two unusual orders, asking Lincoln if the orders must be regarded as final or whether he would be allowed to submit, in writing, objections to the plan and the reason for preferring another one. Permission was granted, and McClellan prepared a long letter to the Secretary of War, but before it was submitted, Lincoln had addressed a letter to the general calling specific attention to the different conceptions of offensive plans.

> You and I have distinct and different plans for a movement of the army of the Potomac, Yours to be done by the Chesapeake, up the Rapphannock to Urbana, and across and to the terminus of the railroad on the York River: mine to move directly to a point on the railroad southwest of Manassas.
>
> If you will give me satisfactory answers to the following questions, I shall gladly yield my plan to yours.
>
> 1st. Does not your plan involve a greatly larger expenditure of time and money than mine?
>
> 2d. Wherein is a victory more certain by your plan than mine?
>
> 3d. Wherein is a victory more valuable by your plan than mine?
>
> 4th. In fact would it not be less valuable in this; that it would break no great line of the enemy's communications, while mine would.
>
> 5th. In case of disaster, would not a retreat be more difficult by your plan than mine?[1]

McClellan's letter was a rather elaborate report outlining the relative merits of each of the several invasion routes available. After presenting a resume of his activities from the time of his arrival in Washington, paying particular attention to his feat of restoring order after the debacle of Bull Run, he pointed out the fact of the splendid ring of

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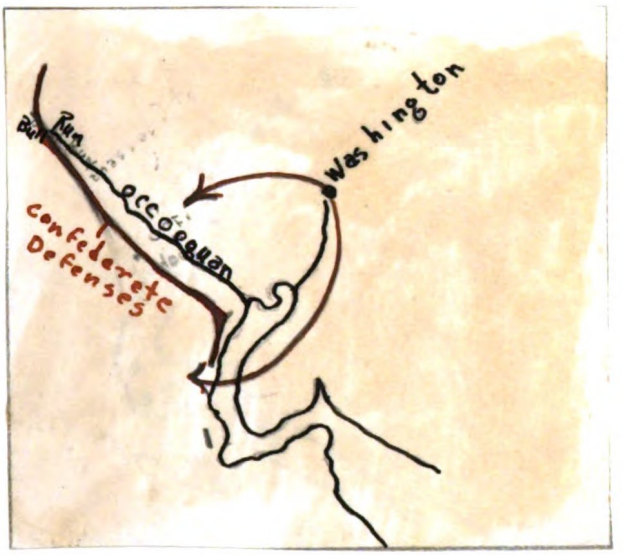
1 McClellan, Report, 97-98.

fortresses which now provided a base for the defense of Washington and the fighting trim into which the Army of the Potomac had been whipped. Many months before, he argued, his army had been in condition to repell an attack, but (and this point eluded the political leaders constantly) a defensive army was not the same as one capable of mounting an offensive against a well-trained, capably led, and well-fortified enemy, especially if it possessed the elan which only victory could give it. He needed, he said, large increments of new troops so that when the army did take the field, its results would be decisive. He regarded the true Union policy to consist of:

> fully preparing ourselves and then seeking for the most decisive results. I do not wish to waste life in useless battles, but prefer to strike at the heart.

Lincoln's plan, he pointed out, anticipated a direct attack upon the prepared positions of Johnston at Centreville and Manassas or else a single or double envelopment of them. An attack might be unleashed against the Confederate right flank by the line of the Occoquan, crossing the Potomac below that river near the positions of the Southern batteries on the south bank of the Potomac. This movement would serve to uncover the lower Potomac and render it free for Federal navigation. It would also provide for new bases on the south of the Potomac from which subsequent maneuvers could be attempted against the Confederate axis of communications. Once the line of the Occoquan had been gained a column could march on Dumfrie to cover the Union left from possible attack from the direction of Acquia. This could be followed by the occupation of Bacon Race Church and the cross roads near the mouth of Bull Run. Following the securing of the fords over Bull Run,

Brentsville could be attacked to prevent the Union right wing from being split from the main body. This complete maneuver, if successful, could have the effect of turning the entire Confederate position.



McCLELLAN'S INTERPRETATION OF LINCOLN'S PLAN

McClellan's plan, on the other hand, postulated a base of operations somewhere in the lower Chesapeake Bay with an initial landing probably to be made at Urbana on the lower Rappahannock. This landing would be exploited by a rapid march to the peninsula cutting McGruder's defending forces from their base of supplies with Richmond. If, for some reason, Urbana proved to be unavailable as a base, Mobjack Bay or Fort Monroe could well become the concentration point. Water transportation was available for any of the bases mentioned and Union soldiers could be convoyed almost to their fields of battle rather than being required to march

overland through Virginia mud. If the Urbana base were selected, approximately four divisions would be employed there while the bulk of the army was trnsported to the south side of the Rappahannock along the general line Cape Lookout—Heathsville.[1]

McCLELLAN'S PLANS

1 McClellan, Own Story, 234-235.

McClellan objected to Lincoln's plan for several reasons. He believed that the fords of the Occoquan below the mouth of the Bull Run were so well guarded by Confederates that even the crossings of the Occoquan would be resisted stoutly. Since the fords were guarded, any offensive should probably be along a broad front all along the Occoquan, which posed the danger of uncovering a flank to attack. All subsequent moves would have to be accomplished most rapidly; otherwise the enemy, operating from interior lines, could concentrate at weak points in the Union attack. Thus speed, deemed so necessary, might be impossible for the attacking Federal lines because of the dismal quality of the roads resulting from the excess of snow and rain. In view of the weather and the strength of the enemy, McClellan thought that the only gains possible from the President's plan would be the possession of a battle field, the evacuation of the line of the upper Potomac, and a morale boost from a victory. The Confederate main line of communication would not have been cut, and the enemy main body would be available to delay every step of the long overland route to Richmond still remaining to be traversed.[1]

At least two of McClellan's fears were well documented in fact. The first concerned the delaying quality of Virginia mud. From all reports, compared with Virginia mud, the substance English troops encountered in Flanders in 1914-1918 was a concrete highway. This mud was to be a consideration all through the war and has been overlooked when writers have attempted to explain why the Confederate troops could always move faster in retreat than the Union forces could in advance. Virginia mud was

1 Ibid., 233.

largely to blame. The Union forces, by the very nature of the operation they were attempting, had to move immense quantities of stores. These, in buckboard wagons, just would not roll over the seas of mud the Virginians called roads. Yet they had to be moved if supply lines were to be secured and supply lines had to be secure if the rebellion were to be crushed completely.

The second fear, that concerning the strength of the Confederate defenses along the line of the Occoquan, can be vindicated by a study of the Confederate correspondence during this period. As early as November 13, 1861, Beauregard had written to General Whiting, who commanded near Dumfries, of the importance of the line of the Occoquan.[1] On the 14th, G. W. Smith also wrote to Whiting of intelligence reports suggesting a possible thrust along the Occoquan. Smith said, however, that his own command was in good condition and ready to support Whiting.[2] On the 16th, Johnston wrote to acting Secretary of War Benjamin:

> My object in laying these letters before you is to show the importance of additional re-enforcements to enable Brigadier-General Whiting to defeat such attempts of the enemy as he expects....It is necessary therefore, in order to prevent the apprehended landing of the enemy, that we should have as nearly as possible a sufficient number of troops to repel the enemy on the Occoquan or the bank of the Potomac....Should the enemy establish a new base on the river below the Occoquan...it would be impossible to hold this position....[3]

On the 16th, Whiting reported intelligence to the effect that the enemy would probably attack as soon as their flotilla could be organized.

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., V, 951.
2 Ibid., 953.
3 Ibid., 955-956.

If a crossing (of the Occoquan) were made, he thought he would be able to strike the enemy left flank in the vicinity of Kankey's farm on the Neabsco.[1] On the 18th, President Davis ordered Johnston to give Dumfries and Fredricksburg his personal attention in view of their tremendous importance to the Union advance.[2]

Among the records there is not much concern expressed for the region of the Chesapeake. Apparently, Confederate thinking was concentrated on ways of defending from an overland attack. All preparations were made to render a Union advance in that quarter a costly one. On January 17, for example, Johnston received this advice from one of his subordinates.

> If General McClellan advances, it will certainly be irrespective of our batteries; and if he cannot turn the position at Centreville by crossing the Occoquan, he must meet that part of your command squarely, and I do not doubt you will destroy him. If, however, you wish any cooperation from my command, I can be with you at very short notice, for we can march almost at a moment's notice.[3]

The general strategic considerations which gave rise to the President's War Order were not the only military matters with which Lincoln concerned himself. One thing which particularly vexed him and went a long way to persuade him that McClellan lacked a fighting heart was the presence, throughout the winter of 1861-1862, of Confederate artillery mounted along the south bank of the Potomac below Washington. These batteries had gone into position shortly after the Union repulse at Bull Run and were placed with the view to intercepting water transportation up the Potomac into Washington.

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1 Ibid., 957.
2 Ibid., 963.
3 Ibid., 1035.

To Lincoln they served as a constant insult and a reminder to all observers, both foreign and domestic, that the sway of the Federal government did not hold over an entire nation. He began to think of how he could deny these positions to the Southerners.

McClellan had anticipated the erection of such batteries, but at first assumed that they would be established as a prelude to a Confederate offensive into Maryland. On August 12, 1861, he had requested naval forces to be assigned in the Potomac to help prevent such an attack.[1] On September 27, 1861, he ordered the Chief-Engineer of the Army, J. G. Barnard, to reconnoiter down the Potomac to determine what positions the enemy had occupied and which he might be expected to occupy, and to recommend possible counter-measures. Barnard found that there were a large number of possible sites for establishing batteries which could possibly intercept Union water traffic and that some guns had already been established, but that the only place from which intercepting fire might truly be effective was at Mathias Point. His conclusion, based on his observations, was that the establishment of some batteries might be prevented but that in general nothing could deny intercepting fire from some places along the river except a general offensive which would place command of the entire south bank in the hands of Federal troops. The North could no more prevent Confederate batteries appearing along the Potomac than the South could prevent Union defenses at Arlington and Alexandria. In view of those conclusions, he recommended that until the enemy proved itself able to molest seriously

1 McClellan, Report, 110.

navigation of the Potomac nothing should be done except counter-battery fire against those few places within range of shore batteries.[1]

During the succeeding weeks, the Union commanders on the north side of the Potomac observed the establishment of new batteries opposite them. Nothing much was done to stop their firing, since the results seemed highly ineffective. By October 27, the threat to Maryland which McClellan had feared had largely dissipated, and so the only real reason to attempt major counter-battery fire or an invasion would be to open the river to shipping.[2] Hooker, commanding the division opposite the Confederate gun positions, reported that as the Confederates were establishing more new batteries on the opposite shore, he must assume that they planned on remaining on the defensive.[3] On October 30, Hooker reported the enemy still busy. He was satisfied "that it will require an immense expenditure of time, labor, and material to silence the batteries now erected by the rebels to dispute the navigation of the Potomac at this point, and, if my opinion were asked, would not advise it."[4] On November 4, Hooker reported the enemy to have forces superior to his own, but by the 8th he reported a reduction in the rebel force, as though the Confederate leaders were anticipating a Union river crossing. Throughout this period of watchful waiting, Hooker sent back reports to the effect that ships were able to move up and down the river with relative impunity, since the Southern fire was highly inaccurate.

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1 Offic. Rec., I ser., V, 607-608.
2 Ibid., 630.
3 Ibid., 632.
4 Ibid., 634.

On January 12, 1862, for example, he reported that during his stay in the region, the batteries had fired not less than 5,000 rounds of ammunition with only one hit and it not fatal to the struck vessel.[1]

Sometime in middle January, in response to constant urging by the President, tentative plans for an attack against the batteries were made. Hooker made a proposal involving a method of attacking the enemy with the primary object of destroying the batteries and giving the Union people free access to the river.[2] By February 15, Hooker was about ready to begin his attack, although he had to postpone it somewhat in order to secure the co-operation of the naval forces operating in the Potomac.[3] On the 20th, he reported he had the means to accomplish his attack, but on February 27, Chief of Staff Marcy was ordered by McClellan to revoke Hooker's authority for the attack, since Lincoln had agreed to McClellan's general scheme of envelopment. The subsequent withdrawal of the Confederate forces from the south bank of the Potomac when the position at Manassas was evacuated vindicated McClellan's early decision not to molest the batteries. Lincoln, however, still remained vitally concerned about the batteries and in his General Order No. 3 he specifically instructed the reduction of those places before active operations were undertaken elsewhere.[4] It is interesting that this order was published on the very day the Confederate forces evacuated the area.

Having tried his hand at ordering grand strategy and at forcing plans

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1 Ibid., 698.
2 Ibid., 709
3 Ibid., 722-723.
4 Lincoln, Works, VII, 118.

for tactical operations, Lincoln next turned to the command structure of the Army of the Potomac. McClellan, it will be recalled, had found the army consisting only of brigades and had to force, over the objections of Scott, a reorganization into divisions. These units he believed would be of sufficient size for training and for early operations. After the army had taken the field and divisional commanders had had an opportunity to demonstrate fitness for high command, McClellan planned on creating army corps and assigning the best generals to those large tactical units. Lincoln, however, was of the opinion that the corps structure should be created before the army left the defenses of Washington. His opinion was strengthened by those of a number of generals with whom he talked during McClellan's illness and by those of the members of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. It was the firm belief of these political gentlemen that McClellan wanted to wait and place certain of his pets in these responsible command positions, none of whom were "right" on the slavery question in the eyes of the radicals. To prevent this disaster, Lincoln was encouraged to create army corps and to place in command of them men who could be trusted. Finally, on March 8, Lincoln acted by publishing the President's War Order No. 2. According to its terms, McClellan was to create four army corps and to assign Generals McDowell, Sumner, Heintzelman, and Keyes to command of them. He was to leave the defenses of Washington to James S. Wadsworth, a political general of good Republican faith, and the Shenandoah Valley to the New Englander, N. P. Banks.[1]

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1 Lincoln, Works, VII, 116-117.

Lincoln had every constitutional right to order this structure for the army, but having exercised it, he must bear the full responsibility of its effects. It was a definite slap in the face to McClellan, for it took out of his hands an essential prerogative of command. In addition, it saddled McClellan with senior commanders whose decisions were to be crucial in the months ahead. In a very real sense, Lincoln must share with McClellan full responsibility for the decision not to continue the attack on the Confederate left at Antietam, for it was Sumner who was the senior officer on the field and it was his recommendation to break off the fight. But such matters must come out in their proper sequence.

Possibly Lincoln finally became convinced of the need to override McClellan's objections to a corps organization because of apparent mishandling of an operation in the vicinity of Harpers Ferry by the commander-in-chief. Certainly if Lincoln had begun to entertain serious doubts as to McClellan's real fitness for command, a cursory examination of the events of the Union offensive into Virginia via Harpers Ferry in late February would have strengthened such doubts.

The Shenandoah Valley gave Lincoln almost as much concern as did the batteries along the Potomac. From positions in this valley, Confederate troops could vitally influence or even control the main stem of the Baltimore and Ohio railroad, and as it was the principle artery connecting Washington with the West, political leaders believed that every effort should be expended to clear the valley of the enemy. In addition, Lincoln could not forget that Johnston had come out of the valley in order to turn the tide at Bull Run. Further, the rich Shenandoah was a granary supplying not only the troops in it, but most of the troops defending Richmond as

well. It was a veritable highway along which Confederates could aim thrusts at Washington. Lincoln was therefore anxious that the abortive offensive begun by the aged Patterson in July should be resumed as soon as possible.

On October 28, the Confederate commander at Manassas Junction ordered General T. J. Jackson to Winchester in the Shenandoah to assume command of that district. By the middle of November, Jackson had accumulated a force of about ten thousand men, including the troops of his own "Stonewall" Brigade. Although during that winter Jackson's only movement of note had been an offensive against Bath and Romney, to destroy the Baltimore and Ohio tracks and a dam or two near Hancock on the Chesapeake and Ohio, the presence of his force was a major worry to Lincoln.[1]

To guard against the threat of Jackson and, if possible, to keep his force off balance, Union forces under Banks were stationed on the Maryland side with headquarters at Frederick, Maryland. At the insistence of Lincoln, throughout the fall of 1861 plans and counterplans were developed for a Union invasion of Virginia launched from Harpers Ferry and designed to clear the Shenandoah sufficiently to restore through traffic over the Baltimore and Ohio tracks. On December 7 Banks reported his division as recovering from illnesses which had plagued it earlier but that the opening of the railway was a feasible project which would require use of the entire division. Although at Harpers Ferry the Potomac was about 600 feet wide, with both banks extremely difficult of access, the river about a mile

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1 B. & L., II, 282.

upstream from Harpers Ferry appeared more accommodating. An officer of McClellan's staff reported that he believed a number of boats could be accumulated in a canal running from the Maryland side into the river. Whenever the army was ready to begin its offensive, these flatboats could be brought into the Potomac by means of locks in the canal. These boats then could serve as the foundation for a bridge across into Virginia sufficiently large to enable a large size force to be moved quickly into Virginia. If a large force were concentrated in Virginia very shortly after creation of the bridge, a major offensive might be undertaken against Jackson.

Although such an idea sounded plausible, McClellan was not convinced that any major effort should be made until the entire Army of the Potomac headed south. His thinking in this respect was considerably influenced by Banks, who was in a position to assess properly the possibilities of success. Although Banks had at first been in favor of a divisional offensive from Harpers Ferry, he gradually altered his opinion.

> I am clearly of the opinion that it is impractical to reconstruct the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad while the enemy holds possession of all the country south of its line. He must be expelled either by a decisive contest on this line or on that in front of Washington. More recent events have led me to believe that he will resist the reconstruction with all his power.[1]

In spite of such evidence as that presented by Banks as to the difficulty of the undertaking, McClellan was constantly urged to carry out the offensive. The President's War Order No. 1 had been issued and both Lincoln and Stanton pressed the commanding general to move. To their pleas for

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., V., 704.

offensives in the Shenandoah Valley, along the lower Potomac, and against Manassas, McClellan's answer was always the same. Offensives could be undertaken in any of the proposed sectors, but cleaning out the batteries on the south side of the Potomac or opening the Baltimore and Ohio railroad only would be temporary in their effects unless sufficient force were concentrated in either area to prevent the Confederates from restoring their fortunes by carrying on the same sort of activities elsewhere.[1] Such a concentration of force could not intelligently be made if the major commitments of the army were to be filled.

Lincoln, however, was adamant in his demands, and in February ordered McClellan to attempt to restore the railroad. McClellan and Banks conferred on plans to accomplish the mission, which involved preparing troops in and around Washington to move through Harpers Ferry to exploit the crossing as soon as sufficient bridging was in. Banks' troops were to cross the river by pontoon bridges and occupy Loudoun Heights on the Virginia shore. As soon as they were sufficiently supplied to cover more elaborate operations the canal boat bridge would be erected. The railroad company would then begin work on the permanent structure.[2] Banks' entire command would move on the Charlestown road to occupy Winchester, since it was believed that Jackson would withdraw from that place to Richmond or Manassas.[3] McClellan reluctantly approved the attempt.

McClellan wanted to observe the initial bridge crossings, but before leaving for Harpers Ferry to do so, he warned Lincoln that the river might

1 McClellan, Report, 113.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., V, 725-726
3 Ibid., 726.

prove too formidable an obstacle. If that were true, then he would place only enough troops on the Virginia shore to cover the railroad workers who would rebuild the railroad bridge at their leisure. Only after that work was completed could the move toward Winchester be undertaken.[1] On February 26, then, the engineer troops began their work. A group of men would erect a wooden abutment on the shore. Another group would row a scow upstream, moor it, then let it drift down opposite the abutment. Planks were then put on from the abutment to the scow which served as a new abutment for the next scow. This process was carried on until the bridge stretched clear to the Virginia shore. A long cable was then stretched from shore to shore and the upper end of each scow was attached to the cable. Once the bridge was completed, troops were marched across under some rifle fire from the hills beyond, but the Union troops soon eliminated this menace.[2]

By 10:20 on the night of the 26th, McClellan was able to report to the anxious Stanton that the initial step had been taken and there were about 8,500 troops on the Virginia side. Loudoun, Bolivar and Maryland Heights had all been seized, and preparations were in progress for putting up the larger bridge the next day.[3] This optimistic report, however, was spoiled the following day when McClellan reported the sad news that the lift locks in the canal were too small for the especially-prepared canal boats to be put into the Potomac for use in the bridge. All troop movements dependent upon the early completion of the major bridge were cancelled

1 McClellan, Report, 113.
2 B. & L., II, 155-156.
3 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., V, 727.

and McClellan took steps to secure what ground he had gained with the troops already south of the river. McClellan's statement assigns railroad employees, his engineer officers and finally himself responsibility for the blunder of building boats too large:

> It had always been represented to the engineers by the military railroad employees and others that the lock was large enough, and, the difference being too small to be detected by the eye, no one had thought of measuring it or suspected any difficulty.[1]

All this, of course, was deeply disappointing to Lincoln. Through Stanton he inquired as to just what McClellan proposed doing with the troops he had crossed. McClellan replied that he proposed to occupy Charlestown and Bunker Hill to cover the rebuilding of the railroad. With the narrow pontoon bridge it was impossible to supply a large enough force to make a successful move on Winchester. In view of other projected operations, McClellan was unwilling to attempt more. Having made sure that his limited gains were secure, the commanding general returned to Washington to placate the irate President and Secretary of War. He presented a brief note to Stanton and was assured that the President would be satisfied with all that had been done.[2]

Lincoln's assumption of command, which he was not to relinquish during the remainder of McClellan's service with the Army of the Potomac, had resulted in no successes but had created an environment of confusion and ill feeling which were to have serious repercussions as the campaigns of 1862 wore on. His first general war order and the special war order had resulted in no movement whatsoever. His insistence, against sound military advice to

1 McClellan, Own Story, 193.
2 McClellan, Report, 115.

the contrary, upon an offensive against the lower Potomac ended in no action. His plan for an invasion of the Shenandoah Valley resulted in nothing concrete although he certainly was not completely to blame for the fiasco of bad planning involved.

McClellan, however, must be assigned considerable blame for these ventures failing. Ill-advised as it was, the President's War Order No. 1 was a legal order from a commanding officer to a subordinate. The subordinate, if the theory which binds military practice was to hold, should have obeyed or else resigned his position in favor of someone who could execute the President's orders. The same sort of analysis can be made for the orders to clear the south bank of the Potomac. Once McClellan's objections to the plan had been given to Lincoln, the general's responsibilities were shifted to the President. If he persisted in asking for an offensive, McClellan should have made the effort.

The invasion of Virginia places McClellan in an even poorer light. Not only was he slow about executing the President's orders; he failed in an essential detail of command, i.e., that of checking on those small but crucial factors which spell the difference between military success and failure. The fact that boats were too large to go through a canal locks is the sort of detail which in most situations can be left to staff officers to handle. When an entire campaign, however, hinges upon getting boats through, the commanding general should have done some personal checking—especially when the general was an engineer officer to begin with. Once the major plan failed, however, McClellan's decisions were sound in turning it into a limited action and giving his entire attention to the major spring offensive.

CHAPTER VII

ORDERS, COUNTERORDERS, AND DISORDERS

Lincoln's first major excursion into technical military command resulted in absolutely nothing happening save written exchanges of views with McClellan and a growing conviction in the President's and general's minds that the other could not quite be trusted. Lincoln became more and more attentive to the appeals of Stanton and the Joint Committee, and McClellan became convinced that Stanton represented an insidious force which had come between himself and Lincoln. The general's letters home during this period reflect the bitterness he felt toward the politicians and he kept more and more his own counsels, thus restimulating Lincoln's suspicions of him.

This coolness between the two was made intensely clear by an episode occurring as an aftermath of the Harpers Ferry debacle. Early on the morning of March 8, the President sent for McClellan. (No longer did Lincoln call at the general's house as had been his custom earlier.) Lincoln wanted to talk, he said, about "a very ugly matter." He said that he had heard that McClellan's plan of campaign, i.e., to move the army via water to some place on the Confederate flank, was specifically designed to open Washington to capture by the Southern armies.

McClellan was thunderstruck by this declaration. He jumped from his chair and insisted that Lincoln "take back" the statement he had just made. No one, claimed McClellan, could use the word treason in connection with his name. Lincoln became considerably agitated at this explosion and protested that he did not for a moment believe such a story, but that he was

only repeating what he had heard. McClellan then cautioned the President of the United States that in the future he should be more careful in his choice of language in talking to or about the commander of the army.[1]

This sordid little story is at once a commentary upon the estrangement between the chief of state and his principle military officer, and a commentary upon the times in which these men had to operate. They were times of hysterical hatreds. Men were labeled as traitors because of lack of allegiance to a political party, to a nation, or to a man. Some men would rather sacrifice an army or even the republic in order to uphold an abstract principle such as that involved in the abolitionist credo. In being willing to do such things, men were equally willing to see similar motives in others. It was McClellan's misfortune to be the victim of such bitter suspicions.

On the other side of the battle lines, decisions were being made by the Confederates which were to precipitate finally an offensive move by the Army of the Potomac. Jefferson Davis had at last realized the difficult position General Johnston occupied at Manassas Junction and had sanctioned a withdrawal of the army to the line of the Rappahannock whenever Johnston believed such a move to be desirable and expedient. He cautioned Johnston, however, that if a retreat were ordered, every effort should be made to save the large supplies of food, forage, and heavy weapons which had been accumulated at Manassas Junction. Johnston was unable to comply with Davis' precaution because the muddy roads which kept McClellan from attacking also

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1 McClellan, Own Story, 196.

prevented the Confederates moving equipment and long supply trains. Toward the last of February Johnston noted increased Federal activity. The abortive attempt at Harpers Ferry and the probing of Hooker's guns along the lower Potomac were interpreted as evidence of an early offensive which either would force Jackson to retreat up the Shenandoah Valley or drive in the defenses from the Potomac to the line of the Occoquan. Either eventuality would result in making the position at Manassas untenable. In view of these considerations, Johnston alerted his command and on March 8 began a very poorly organized and conducted withdrawal from the Manassas Junction --Centreville area and from the posts along the lower Potomac.

Thus McClellan's developing power in the form of the Army of the Potomac had accomplished one of Lincoln's primary objectives without bloodshed. The public and the politicians, however, were not impressed. They saw in the retreat only the fact that the Confederates were getting away without a battle. When it was subsequently found that parts of Johnston's positions were guarded by logs arranged to resemble cannon called "Quaker guns", enemies of McClellan became more convinced that the general was too prone to be overawed by the Confederates where no danger actually existed. Generals in the twentieth century are more fortunate in having a sophisticated public opinion trained to realize the effectiveness of camouflage. The records of World War II do not reveal that Field Marshal Von Rundstedt suffered any great loss of prestige because he kept a complete German Army immobilized in the Pas de Calais area because of fear of a second landing by an actually non-existent First United States Army Group.

News of Johnston's withdrawal reached McClellan very quickly and he at once undertook one of the strangest and most discussed movements of the war. He at once ordered a march directly south from Washington for Manassas. Critics of the general have variously interpreted the move as evidence that McClellan actually had no plan, acting entirely in terms of expediency, or that it was a ruse to avoid compliance with Lincoln's orders creating army corps. McClellan's own explanation was that he was at that time working on the details of moving the army by water. As transportation was not yet available, he believed the enemy evacuation of Manassas presented him with an opportunity for a shakedown march to get rid of unnecessary equipment and to toughen his troops. He stated later that he believed he had ample time to make the march and to get his troops to the Potomac in time to meet their transports.

The movement, however, can only be considered and evaluated in the light of certain other developments taking place at the same time. At the same meeting at which Lincoln mentioned the treason charge to McClellan, he also renewed expressions of his dissatisfaction at the failure of Harpers Ferry offensive to develop.[1] McClellan tried to justify all that was done and to explain what was not done, pointing out that the Secretary of War had previously assured him that Lincoln had been satisfied. He left Lincoln, believing that he had really satisfied the President, and went directly to a planning meeting of division commanders. Shortly after McClellan's visit on the 8th, Lincoln issued the President's General War Order No. 2, referred to above, directing the commanding general to organize that part of the Army of the Potomac about to enter active operations into four

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1 McClellan, Report, 116.

army corps. Later the same day there appeared President's General War Order No. 3 providing that no change of base of operations should be attempted without first leaving Washington secure. It further specified that no more than two army corps (about 50,000 men) should be moved to any new base of operations until the navigation of the lower Potomac had been made possible by driving off the Confederate batteries located on the south bank. The army and the navy were ordered to cooperate in this venture. McClellan was further ordered to begin his advance not later than March 18.[1]

On this same March 8, the reconditioned ironclad ship Merrimac appeared off Old Point Comfort and attacked the Federal squadron, destroying three Union ships during its day of glory. The alarm of the North, in places reaching panic proportions, was somewhat quieted when the following day the "Yankee Cheese Box on a Raft" called the Monitor fought the Merrimac to a draw, sending her at day's end back to her moorings, from which she never again ventured.[2]

Early on March 9, McClellan began to receive intelligence to the effect that Johnston was withdrawing his troops from their advanced positions along the upper Potomac, at Centreville—Manassas and along the lower Potomac. Late that evening, orders were issued for a general movement of the entire Union army in the direction of Manassas Junction. At the same time he issued these orders, McClellan notified the Secretary of War that the execution of the order involving army corps would have to be delayed. Stanton at first refused authority for such delay, but after McClellan cited the

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., V, 50.
2 Ibid., 51.

need for prompt movement, and promised to execute the order as soon as Manassas Junction had been reached, the Secretary of War approved.[1]

On the morning of the 10th, the long lines of blue clad troops swung over the Long Bridge, passed the forts commanding the bridge on the Virginia side and plunged into a veritable sea of mud. All that day the troops plodded on. About four the following afternoon, the main elements of infantry reached Manassas Junction and then began the march back to Washington in a heavy downpour of rain. On the 12th they arrived back in Washington ready for embarkation.

In the absence of any contrary evidence, it must be assumed that McClellan's reasons for making this march were as he stated them. That is, such a march gave him time to shake the kinks out of the troops long used to the conveniences of post life especially since his water movement need not be delayed by such a movement. Further, it just might have been possible to have thrown a retreating enemy off balance if a strike at him were delivered quickly enough. Of course, the mud prevented this but had faster progress been made it is possible that a profitable offensive might have developed in the vicinity of Manassas. This last factor is of sufficient importance to have warranted failing to execute the President's order concerning corps organization.

Lincoln's order restricting the size of McClellan's invasion troops can be viewed only as another example of ill advised presidential use of authority. Lincoln at no time favored the water route to Richmond. He

1 Ibid., 5.

repeatedly raised objections to it and at the same time made every facility possible should McClellan shift to a plan involving an overland attack. Certainly, limiting the troops to 50,000 was virtually the same as cancelling authority for the move.

In spite of such obvious reluctance on the part of Lincoln and Stanton to approve an offensive involving a change of base, McClellan persisted in planning it. Quite possibly he believed that since the conditions which had existed at the time Lincoln issued his order regarding a change of base no longer existed, his entire army might be landed some place nearer the Confederate capital. At any rate, McClellan recalled the main body of his army to the vicinity of Alexandria, leaving a part of Sumner's corps at Manassas to hold that place. Strong reconnaissances under General Howard were dispatched in the direction of the Rappahannock bridge which was cleared of the enemy. It was, however, destroyed by the retreating Confederates.[1] Thus by that date the line of the Rappahannock-Manassas Gap railroad was free from the menace by large bodies of the enemy.

On March 13 McClellan held a council of war at Fairfax Courthouse to discuss future operations in the light of Lincoln's war order of the 8th. Corps commanders approved in principle an offensive to be directed up the peninsula from Fort Monroe, provided:

1. That the enemy's vessel, Merrimac, could be neutralized.
2. That means of transportation sufficient for an immediate transfer of the force to its new base could be ready at Washington and Alexandria, to move down the Potomac.

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1 McClellan, Report, 127.

3. That a naval auxiliary force could be had to silence, or aid in silencing the enemy's batteries on the York River.

4. That the force to be left to cover Washington should be such as to give an entire feeling of security for its safety from menace.

If those qualifications could not be met, the generals recommended that an overland offensive should be mounted. In the opinion of three of the corps commanders, a covering force for Washington of 25,000 men would be sufficient to give Lincoln the security he desired for the capital. Sumner held out for 40,000.

The report of this meeting was forwarded to Washington and elicited a most interesting reply from Stanton:

> The President, having considered the plan of operations agreed upon by yourself and the commanders of army corps, makes no objection to the same, but gives the following directions as to its execution:
>
> 1st. Leave such force at Manassas Junction as shall make it entirely certain that the enemy shall not repossess himself of that position and line of communication.
>
> 2nd. Leave Washington entirely secure.
>
> 3rd. Move the remainder of the force down the Potomac—choosing a new base at Fortress Monroe, or anywhere between here and there; or at all events move such remainder of the army at once in pursuit of the enemy by some route.[1]

It should be noticed that no approval was given—only a passive "no objection." It should also be noticed that strict compliance with paragraphs 2 and 3 would have involved immobilizing the entire army, since that would have been the only way of insuring that the enemy did not repossess the place. Now, of course, Lincoln did not intend tying the Army of the Potomac

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to one spot. The point is that anything less than use of the full army there involved some degree of chance. McClellan, as we shall see, interpreted the possible movements of the enemy differently from the way in which Lincoln and Stanton did. McClellan minimized the dangers of a possible Confederate attack on the capital, while Lincoln tended to maximize those dangers. McClellan was willing to act on the basis of his interpretation, and, Lincoln did act on the basis of his.

Once approval of the plan, albeit grudgingly given, was obtained, McClellan proceeded to implement it. He ordered General Banks to post his command in the vicinity of Manassas in strongly entrenched positions. He was to rebuild the railroad from Manassas to Washington and from Manassas to Strasburg. When that work was completed, he was instructed to secure it by means of strong detachments at various strategic points such as the point where the railroad crossed the Shenandoah River. Grand guards or strong centers of resistance were to be established at Warrenton Junction or Warrenton itself, and block houses were to be built at all bridges. Cavalry was to be employed in vigorous scouting. On the same date, he notified General J. S. Wadsworth, who had been assigned to command of the military district of Washington, D. C., of the limits of that officer's command. He was to send to the south of the Potomac all troops not needed for police and garrison duty in and around Washington. He was ordered to maintain the repair of the forts and to insure the training of the troops.[1]

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1 McClellan, Report, 125-132.

Jackson had been operating with an under-strength Confederate division in the Shenandoah during the winter and spring of 1861. His command had been so reduced during those months that he actually did not have the troops necessary to defend his district. At his headquarters up the valley he learned that Banks had begun to withdraw from the Shenandoah in order to take up defensive positions at Manassas. Jackson resolved to stop this maneuver by a strong demonstration against the town of Winchester, then occupied by Shields with a fairly substantial force. On the 23rd of March he occupied a ridge near Kernstown about four miles to the south of Winchester. Shields promptly attacked and after several hours of bitter fighting forced the Confederates to withdraw toward Swift Run Gap.[1]

While these events were transpiring in the valley, the troops under Sumner near Manassas were not inactive. On the 24th, McClellan sent a rather vague telegram to Sumner asking if he could handle the logistics of a march on toward Warrenton. Sumner misinterpreted this question as being an order to move toward Warrenton and began the execution of the order. When he wired for confirmation he was told to stay at Warrenton, from which place he would be relieved to return to Washington prior to embarkation.[2] By the 29th, Sumner had taken Warrenton Junction and was pressing on Warrenton itself. At this point he was informed that Albercrombie's brigade of Banks' division was nearing Warrenton and that when it should arrive, Blenker's German division should be sent back to

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1 B. & L., II, 283-284.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, 33.

Washington.[1] This small element of Banks' total command was all that was available for the defense of the region around Manassas Junction, since Banks himself had to remain in the Shenandoah until the threat posed by Jackson's attack of the 23rd had been met.[2] To make up the deficiency in troops at Manassas and Warrenton, McClellan ordered 4,000 troops from the defenses of Washington proper to Manassas as well as three regiments which previously had been on railroad guard duty under General Dix.[3]

McClellan had thus been able to maintain his strength in the two regions which posed any general threat to Washington and at the same time had continued the marshalling of units for shipment to the peninsula. However, on March 31, 1862, President Lincoln felt obliged to order Blenker's German division away from Sumner's corps and the Army of the Potomac in order that it might be assigned to General Fremont. This development made necessary some re-shuffling of units. In seeking clarification before actually altering his plans, McClellan was informed by Stanton that:

> The order in respect to Blenker is not designed to hinder or delay the movement of Richardson or any other force. He can remain wherever you desire him as long as required for your movements, and in any position you desire. The order is simply to place him in position for reinforcing Fremont as soon as your dispositions will permit, and he may go to Harpers Ferry, by such route and at such time, as you shall direct—state your own wishes as to the movement—when and how it shall be made.[4]

Armed with this authority, McClellan could write to Banks on the 1st of April that Blenker had been ordered to Strasburg but could operate under

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1 Ibid., 48.
2 McClellan, Own Story, 240.
3 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 47, 55.
4 McClellan, Report, 142.

Banks' orders as long as needed. In this same letter he indicated that it was not likely that Johnston would reinforce Jackson; hence Banks' mission was to throw Jackson back down the valley as far as possible and then insure that he did not return. With Blenker's division Banks had sufficient troops with which to accomplish his mission and thus the path of the gravest danger to Washington was closed to Confederate invasion. Further disposition of Banks' force was not decided upon since McClellan fully expected to retain the valley under his command, hence could make decisions as the need for them developed.[1]

Believing that his dispositions of troops and his provisions for the fortifying of Manassas Junction were sufficient to guarantee a reasonable safety to Washington, McClellan wrote to the Adjutant General of the state of things. In this report he listed the following as being involved in the defenses of the government:

General Dix for the defense of Baltimore	-- 5,000	
Garrisons of the forts around Washington	-- 10,000	
Other troops under General Wadsworth	-- 11,400	
Guarding railroads in Maryland	-- 3,359	
General Abercrombie at Warrenton	-- 7,780	12 pieces of artillery
Troops now in the state awaiting shipment to Washington	-- 3,500	
Troops to remain on the lower Potomac	-- 1,350	
Troops in the Shenandoah including Blenker	-- 35,467	
Field guns with horses and equipment in Washington	-- 32	

[2]

In addition to these troops McClellan also considered that launching an attack at Richmond possessed a tremendous defensive value. That attack

1 Ibid., 138.
2 Ibid., 143.

would have the effect of drawing every available person to the defenses of Davis' capital. The only purpose troops such as those of Jackson could serve would be to draw the attention of those who otherwise might be on the peninsula. McClellan believed that once the offensive against Richmond began the valley threat would disappear, for Jackson's forces would be recalled to ward off the main Union threat. Coupled with all this was the fact that the defenses of Washington were strong and the fact that the danger of a threat from Manassas just was not real. Johnston had moved too completely to be coming back very soon.

The Confederate General Imboden, in writing of Jackson's Shenandoah campaign, claimed that Johnston could actually give no aid to Jackson in the valley since all troops had to be kept between the Union attack and Richmond. In fact, the only salvation for the Confederacy lay in Jackson being able to hold back Fremont, Banks, and McDowell long enough to allow Johnston to try swords with McClellan before McClellan was reinforced.[1]

On April 2, 1862, Stanton appointed Generals Thomas and Hitchcock to examine certain papers and to report to him if the President's War Order No. 3 (referred to above) had been complied with insofar as the defenses of Washington were concerned. The documents they were to consider were the War Order, the Report of the meeting of corps commanders at Fairfax Courthouse on March 13, General McClellan's report of April 1, 1862 on the defenses of Washington, and a complaint of General Wadsworth dated

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1 B. & L., II, 285.

April 2, 1862 that he only had 19,022 men available for the defense of Washington. This two-man board within the day reached the conclusion that in terms of the agreement between the corps commanders the troops for the defense of Washington were inadequate. On the basis of the findings and recommendations of this board, Lincoln issued an order on April 3 requiring that either the corps of McDowell or the corps of Sumner remain in front of Washington.[1]

That the board's recommendations were invalid appears from the most casual inspection of their work. It was required to peruse certain documents and from the evidence contained in them decide a most grave question. On April 2, 1862, McClellan reported that there were 55,000 men available for the defenses of Washington exclusive of Wadsworth's troops in Washington. On the same date, Wadsworth reported only 19,022 men for the defenses of the city. The board of officers made no attempt to determine which statement was true. Wadsworth's complaint was accepted and Lincoln's subsequent action given a quasi-professional basis.

There are two major kinds of offensive operations in war, either one of which may be successfully employed and each of which has had highly competent proponents throughout the history of warfare. One type is the set-piece offensive which depends upon all details of the attack to be worked out in advance and the means to accomplish the attack all available beforehand. During the preparatory phases, generals engineering such offensives are reluctant to see any minor actions undertaken which might upset the grand design. A recent example of a successful general employing the set-piece

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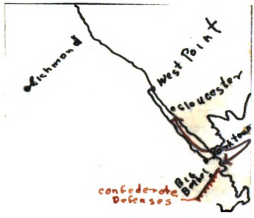
1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 57-65.

offensive was that of Sir Bernard Laws Montgomery who commanded the British troops in North Africa and again in Northwest Europe during World War II. His passion for tidiness on a battlefield was incomprehensible to American leaders, but Montgomery did accomplish missions. At the time of the German counter-offensive in December, 1944, Montgomery was assigned the command of the northern flank opposing the German penetration. He kept many units out of the fight during the first hectic days so that his "administrative tail" could be tidied and he could prepare a major counter thrust. His actions contrasted strongly with the allied troops on the southern flank under the command of the American General Omar Bradley, whose offensive instrument was the tank expert, George Patton. Patton accomplished his mission of withdrawing divisions from his own front, shifting them north and attacking them against the German penetration as quickly as individual units reached the zone of battle. Actual battle had thus been going on for some days before Patton had enough people to work out a comprehensive method for using his corps. McClellan and Montgomery, in retrospect, had much in common and in no place is this similarity as clearly demonstrated as in the move to the peninsula in the spring of 1862. McClellan had in mind a set-piece offensive and was unwilling to have major operations undertaken until all elements were ready to act simultaneously. This unwillingness to act with less than his full army, of course, did not endear him to the political figures in Washington who were under such pressure from public opinion for quick returns on the investment in men, guns, uniforms, and the like. This fear of McClellan's total philosophy of war was another factor responsible for Lincoln's constant interfering in the

plans of the Union commander to such an extent that the war as McClellan visualized its prosecution could not be fought. Lincoln actually represented a military mentality similar to that of Patton. Both men could anticipate great returns from vigorous actions. Neither man could see reason for another kind of war. Patton was not in a position to prevent Montgomery from carrying on war in his own way. Lincoln was, however, in a position to modify McClellan's techniques. Where he failed was in not modifying them to the extent of relieving McClellan at once or in not modifying them at all. Either McClellan's plan should have been tried in its totality or Lincoln's ideas should have been completely implemented. To compromise between the two brought none of the advantages of either plan and all of the disadvantages.

The March 13 council of the corps commanders had approved offensive operations on the peninsula between the York and the James Rivers from Old Point Comfort toward Richmond provided certain conditions were met. This decision was approved in principle by the President. In attempting to meet the qualifications his corps commanders placed on the plan, and since Johnston's withdrawal from Manassas Junction, McClellan abandoned his original plan of moving to Urbana and adopted Fort Monroe as his base of operations. Since the southern batteries along the lower Potomac had been withdrawn on March 8 and 9, he decided to embark the troops from Alexandria rather than from Annapolis as had originally been planned. McClellan at first planned to send McDowell's corps first as a unit to be landed four miles south of Yorktown in order to turn the southern positions at Ship Point, Howard's Bridge, and Big Bethel. If that place proved inap-

propriate, McDowell was to land on the Gloucester side of the York and then to move on West Point.



PLANS FOR McDOWELL'S CORPS

This plan, however, had to be modified, since transportation was unavailable in sufficient quantity to move a corps at a time. It was then decided to move divisions to Fort Monroe for concentration. As the units moved from there up the peninsula, McDowell's corps would be reshipped to accomplish its flanking mission. Implementing this plan, Hamilton's division embarked on March 17 with the following order.

> You will, on your arrival at Fort Monroe, report to General Wool, and request him to assign you ground for camping your division. You will remain at Fort Monroe until further orders from General McClellan. Should General Wool require the services of your division in repelling an attack, you will obey his orders and use every effort to carry it out.[1]

On the 22nd, Fitz John Porter's division was embarked and General Heinzelman ordered to accompany it with orders to move the divisions then at Fort

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, I, 5-6.

Monroe several miles out from that place. He was to push strong reconnaissances toward Yorktown but was to make no important move until McClellan arrived. The remaining troops, except McDowell's corps, were embarked as quickly as transportation could be provided until April 1, when McClellan himself and his forward headquarters embarked on the steamer Commodore. He arrived at Fort Monroe the following day.[1]

During the last of March, McClellan and Lincoln were both vexed by the troublesome relationship of command of a geographic area with command of operational units. It will be recalled that McClellan had been placed in command of the United States Army in place of Scott, who was retired. At the same time, McClellan was retained in active command of a field army. This action had some advantages, and some obvious disadvantages. By concentrating the command of the various departments under one man, the active field armies were assured of a cooperative service of supply. But by placing responsibility for the entire army on McClellan's shoulders, the Army of the Potomac lost the personal leadership which had been so influential in welding it into a fighting unit. In place of concentrating his energies on the one army, McClellan had to plan for and supervise the operations and administration of units all over the country, and all of this without the aid of a combined chief of staff group capable of giving thoughtful advice. By leaving McClellan in command of a field army, Lincoln tempted McClellan more than any man could withstand. There is a tendency among military men to work unceasingly to increase the number

1 Ibid., 6-7.

of troops with which they must accomplish their missions. It is usually expected that army commanders will offer very valid reasons why their units should be made stronger even at the expense of other commanders. The extravagant claims for more men, guns and supplies made by McArthur and Eisenhower during World War II are illustrative. Now, by making McClellan the commander of the armies of the United States, Lincoln placed upon him the responsibility for establishing balance between the various zones of operations. In making him commander of one zone of operation, Lincoln placed McClellan in active competition with other commanders for existing resources of men and supplies. Much of the difficulty experienced during the planning stages of the peninsular campaign was caused by this duality of McClellan's position. Many of the mooted questions concerning that campaign can be explained only in terms of Lincoln or McClellan trying to reconcile that duality.

On March 12, following the march of the army to the recently evacuated Manassas Junction, McClellan was notified by telegraph by a member of his headquarter's rear echelon that the President's War Order No. 3 dated March 11 had been published. That order relieved McClellan from the command of all departments save that of the Potomac and of all troops save the Army of the Potomac. The last paragraph of that order required all department commanders to report directly to the Secretary of War.[1] Thus the political leaders were placed in supreme military command of the forces of the republic with no military man being assigned a sufficiently responsible position to coordinate the affairs of the army. The Department of the

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., V, 54.

Potomac, as defined in General Order No. 15, August 17, 1861, included the whole of Maryland, Delaware, as well as Washington, D. C.[1] On February 1, 1862, General Order No. 9 extended the Department of the Potomac to include Pennsylvania and New Jersey.[2] Now the region around Fortress Monroe had always been a questionable area. On November 1, 1861, Lincoln notified McClellan of the general's appointment to command of all of the armies of the nation with a P.S. to the effect that Wool's command should be excepted from the command assigned to McClellan.[3] When the Army of the Potomac began to move to that region, McClellan found that dealing with another independent commander about such things as a base of operations was not the most successful undertaking possible. As early as March 18, Stanton had notified Wool of the movement and asked that he cooperate. However, even the most cooperative persons cannot prevent vexatious incidents. Wool, acting in all good faith, denied landing facilities to elements of McClellan's command. To prevent a recurrence of such an event, McClellan requested command responsibility for the Fort and its environs, which request was granted. Then, on April 4, in the wake of the famous order relieving McDowell from the Army of the Potomac, two new departments were created, the commanders of which were to report directly to the War Department. The Department of the Shenandoah was given to Banks and the Department of the Rappahannock was given to McDowell. Fort Monroe and its vicinity was placed under Wool without reference to McClellan's command. Thus, three days after his arrival on the peninsula, McClellan lost command

1 Ibid., 567.
2 Ibid., 712.
3 McClellan, Own Story, 200.

over the territory through which his supplies and troops had to move. Now this would not have been a particularly bad arrangement had some general been appointed over both the commander of the field army and the commander of the zone of communications. Such, however, was not done. Wool and McClellan had no common superior except the Secretary of War, who should never have fit into the operational chain of command at all. The command structure of the American forces in Europe during World War II makes much better sense. General Eisenhower was chief of the field armies in his capacity as supreme commander Allied Expeditionary Forces and was the communications zone commander in his capacity as Commander of the United States Forces in Europe.

An evaluation of whether or not McClellan left Washington, D. C. and its environs adequately protected must be made in the light of the command changes outlined above. The actual implementation of McClellan's defensive system never took place. He was relieved of his responsibilities before he could determine the ultimate disposition of Banks' troops in the Shenandoah, or how to provide the needed covering forces at Manassas Junction and Warrenton.

In addition to the various administrative activities incident to the move to the peninsula, McClellan had other major worries. His staff was not adept at the difficult job of embarking troops, and McClellan was forced to give much personal attention to that work, especially in the initial stages.[1] His corps commanders were as new to their duties as he was new

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 10.

to employing corps organization, so he frequently resorted to exercising command directly on division commanders and even on regimental commanders. This habit seems to be characteristic of inexperienced men placed in important positions of command. They become so concerned with the precise execution of their orders that they become involved with the how of execution instead of restricting their attention to the more general aspects of execution, i.e., the fact that something must be done by a certain time. This weakness plagued McClellan throughout his period of active command. He never learned to assign general objectives to his corps commanders and then allow them to use their own devices to accomplish them. It has been shown that to the other theater commanders he could and did issue general orders, but he was too close to his own corps commanders to allow them such prerogatives.

Prior to his departure for the peninsula, Hooker had been ordered to occupy the south bank of the Potomac. McClellan was required to give much personal attention to this movement to prevent Hooker from becoming too aggressive, with the danger of committing the army in the wrong zone. Sumner required the same sort of attention in his operations against Warrenton Junction. Even Fitz John Porter, the one person to whom McClellan confided his plans, wanted to move too quickly after his arrival on the peninsula. He made a reconnaissance in force in the direction of Big Bethel, finding only a light cavalry picket. McClellan was just a little put out at this for fear any premature movement might have lost the Union forces the element of tactical surprise which McClellan felt was so essential.[1]

1 Ibid., 42-43.

McClellan boarded ship on April 1. On April 3 Lincoln issued a note from the White House which has been one of the most controversial points of the entire campaign:

> The Secretary of War will order that one or the other of the corps of General McDowell and General Sumner remain in front of Washington until further orders from the Department, to operate at or in the direction of Manassas Junction, or otherwise, as occasion may require, that the other corps not so ordered to remain go forward to General McClellan as speedily as possible; that General McClellan commence his forward movements from his new base at once, and that such incidental modifications as the foregoing may render proper be also made.[1]

On the 4th, Adjutant General Thomas issued the necessary orders executing the President's directive. The effects of this order on the campaign will be shown. As to why the order was issued much has been written. Proponents of McClellan have claimed that the order was part of a plot to cause the entire operation to fail, thus discrediting McClellan and opening the way for the accession of a radical general. This view must be discarded. The order is perfectly explainable when one considers the frame of reference from which Lincoln operated. He was unconvinced as to the wisdom of the move to the peninsula. He was subject to extreme political pressures to force an attack and at the same time keep Washington defended. He had undertaken the study of military science and had actually undertaken, through his Secretary of War, the conduct of the war. In doing this he opened himself to possible examination by the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War with all the political dynamite that that involved. He had taken the steps which to him were appropriate, i.e., asking officers to examine the defenses of

1 Ibid., 66.

Washington, and when they suggested that the defenses were inadequate he took direct steps to rectify the condition. He was at this point so convinced that he was right that the thought of examining further into the case just did not appeal to him. McClellan would have to make the best of the troops he had.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST REAL TEST

From its very inception, McClellan's plan of campaign seemed doomed to failure. Even after leaving Washington with its countless intrigues, the Army of the Potomac was to feel the effects of the various animosities rampant in the capital. The first misfortune which befell, however, was not of the politicians' brewing. It was rather one of the misfortunes of a war in which intelligence services were not yet perfected.

Upon arriving at Fort Monroe, McClellan found five divisions and a separate brigade of infantry, some regiments of cavalry, and the army reserve of artillery already disembarked. He also found that General Wool, commander of Fort Monroe, had accumulated information concerning the topography of the peninsula up which the army would be advancing and certain intelligence concerning the defenses of the Confederate Army. In one respect this information was grossly false, and this one respect was crucial in McClellan's tactical planning. Wool reported the Warwick River as running parallel to the general line of march McClellan would follow in his advance on Richmond. Actually, however, the river crossed the proposed line of march and served as a formidable defense almost across the entire peninsula.[1]

McClellan is open to criticism for this failure of intelligence on several grounds. Since he had engaged in open and bitter controversy with the President over the proper zone of operations, McClellan should have

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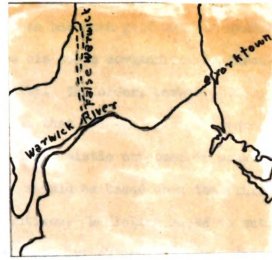
1 McClellan, Report, 154-156.

given personal attention to obtaining and checking every scrap of information about the region in which he was to fight. Detailing several of the bright young men who adorned his headquarters to studying the last campaign of the Revolutionary War might have given the commander of the Union forces a much better picture of what he might encounter than the hearsay of spies on which he actually did depend.

McClellan's failure in this respect cannot be explained except in terms of the tremendous ignorance all people had of the terrain of the country outside their own local area and in terms of failure of human beings in general to take advantage of the information history makes available to them. In this latter connection, Americans have notoriously conducted military and political operations without much reference to the experience of those who had been there before. It will be shown that Jackson, who perhaps had the keenest geographical sense of any leader—Northern or Southern—failed during the Seven Days battles to live up to expectations because he was unaware of certain salient geographic features of his native Virginia. Early American attempts at military government in Europe during World War II were failures which could possibly have been prevented had the experiences of the Army of Occupation after World War I been studied. In this last example there was in existence, but unknown to most high ranking general officers, a monograph describing in great detail the problems the army had encountered in dealing with occupied Germany. All of this does not excuse McClellan, but it may in some respects place his error in judgment in better perspective. The map on the next page shows the anticipated and the real course of the river.



VICINITY OF THE WARWICK

On the strength of this false information, McClellan issued a march order sending his available troops forward by two parallel lines, the theory of it being that each column would facilitate the approach of the other until at last the march objective, i.e., the defenses across the peninsula, particularly at Yorktown, would be untenable for the Confederates. Porter's division was ordered over the New Market and New Bridge road to Big Bethel and Howard's Bridge with a detachment proceeding to Ship's Point. Porter's advance was to be followed by Hamilton's and Sedgwick's division. Keyes' IV corps was to move by the James River road followed by the reserve artillery.[1] Porter's move on Big Bethel was expected to flank the works at Young's Mill, thus opening the way for Keyes' advance on Warwick Courthouse, which would also flank the works at Ship's Point and

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 63.

Howard's Bridge.[1]

McClellan's plan had both good and bad qualities to it. Had he issued his orders to his corps commanders for execution, it would have been good in its simplicity. The order, however, violated a fundamental of military planning, i.e., that the timing of subsequent movements should not be based upon the most optimistic outcomes of maneuver. Rather, timing, if it is at all crucial, should be based upon the achievement of only the most reasonable of objectives. McClellan based an entire march order upon the assumption that certain key objectives would fall as quickly as they were turned. The German military expert of the same period, Helmut Von Moltke, has postulated that no commander is justified in planning in advance the development of a battle beyond the initial engagement.

Nevertheless, the advance commenced as planned and proceeded until halted by enemy action on the evening of April 5. Heintzelman's corps found itself under heavy artillery fire from the defenses of Yorktown, while Keyes, commanding the left wing, came under the fire from Confederate troops covering the Warwick River from the vicinity of Lee's Mill. The day's advance had been slow because of rain and muddy roads, and this last obstacle was enough to bog the attack down completely. Front line commanders, and on the 7th McClellan himself, made detailed examinations of the enemy positions and found rather dismaying conditions. The Warwick River was controlled by Confederate guns and near its mouth by gunboats. Possible fords had been rendered impassable by dams with defensive works built to cover approaches to each dam. Yorktown itself was well fortified,

1 McClellan, Own Story, 260.

and these works were linked into the defense system along the Warwick River stretching off toward the James. These defenses appeared to be constantly re-enforced from Norfolk and from Richmond and were rendered more formidable by the heavy wooded areas and swamps lying along the river bed.[1] Faced with such obstacles and believing he had effective on the peninsula only about 53,000 troops, McClellan had to decide whether to breach the line by assault or whether to attempt some slower means of overcoming the obstacle. His decision against an attack has provided focus for endless controversy since then. Critics of McClellan have agreed that he should at least have risked an initial attack, falling back on the slower seige operations only if it failed. Quite possibly such an attack might have succeeded, since we now know that large segments of the Southern lines were at this moment lightly held. On the other hand, had the attack been made and failed, the results could well have been catastrophic for the Union cause at the most and for McClellan's whole concept of the war at the least. McClellan's caution in weighing all factors mitigated against a precipitate attack where the odds favored a repulse.

McClellan, in making such a crucial decision, had much to support his point of view. He believed that either he faced, or would face before his attack could be gotten underway, the entire defensive strength of the Confederate forces which had late been at Manassas Junction.[2] He had assumed from the very beginning of his strategic planning that he would have such an enemy to defeat, but in the planning phases he had assumed on having one

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 10-11.
2 Ibid., 11.

entire corps as a mass of maneuver with which he could outflank the enemy. In the peninsular situation he had planned on using McDowell's corps in this capacity, moving it far up the York River in the event that such a development as the hold-up at the Warwick took place. Almost simultaneously with receipt of the news that Heintzelman and Keyes had been stopped, he received word that McDowell's I corps had been taken from his command to be held for the defenses of Washington. McClellan at once protested to Washington, pointing out that such a move negated completely the strategic frame of reference upon which the campaign rested. He indicated that any action undertaken would have to be a much more limited affair than had originally been planned. When Lincoln remained adamant, McClellan was forced to choose between an attack which he had never planned or a seige when actually the originally planned envelopment was undoubtedly the best plan.

On the heels of the order relieving McDowell's corps came on which struck McClellan as particularly stupid and revealing of the casual way in which political leaders were regarding his offensive. General Order No. 33 dated April 3 from the Adjutant General's office instructed that all recruiting stations be closed, their equipment sold, and the proceeds from the sales to go into funds for the training of volunteer regiments.[1] McClellan believed that when an army took the field a steady flow of re-enforcements was essential if the army was to function effectively. He believed that by the spring of 1862 there were more than enough units already in existence to crush the rebellion provided they were maintained at top strength. In effect, McClellan had advocated the sort of system the American Army in World War II found so effective, i.e., maintaining a limited number of divisions by a replacement system, thus providing recruits with the leavening effect of quick and intimate association with veterans of

1 McClellan, Own Story, 258.

combat. Such an idea was smothered by the War Department order, and McClellan was once again forced to the conclusion that there were powers in Washington determined not to support his army.

As though these blows were not enough, McClellan also received word that the Navy could not give him the support on the York he had been expecting. Because the disabled Merrimac had to be watched with all available vessels, none could be spared, according to the Navy, to shell Yorktown nor to make the run past Yorktown to operate against Confederate lines of communications.[1]

In spite of such setbacks, however, a decision might have been made to assault the line had the commanders and staff officers who would be involved believed an attack could succeed. They did not, however, and their reports from the front revealed a grave fear as to the outcome of an assault. Brigadier General Winfield Scott Hancock, no man to shun a fight, made a reconnaissance in force on April 6 of the lines to the south of Yorktown. He reported:

> I...proceeded...to make a reconnaissance....We found the enemy in possession of the whole length of the stream... field works were developed....The stream is a succession of pools....The banks higher than on this side....During the afternoon...movement of troops were observed marching down the stream behind the works....It is believed that yesterday that point could have been easily taken....The circumstances were entirely changed afterwards, for the movement of several regiments of troops beyond the forts was observed by our line of skirmishers....[2]

General Keyes, commanding the IV Corps, reported:

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1 Ibid., 264.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, I, 308-309.

> I was thus enabled in the first day to comprehend with tolerable clearness the position of the enemy from a short distance above Lee's Mill down to James River. He is in a strongly fortified position behind Warwick River, the fords in which have been destoryed by dams, and the approaches to which are through dense forests, swamps, and marshes. No part of his line as far as discovered can be taken by assault without enormous waste of life.[1]

Keyes also wrote to Senator Harris that the campaign in which he was participating was certainly not that for which he had voted at the council of war in March. He outlined his conception of that plan and how each of the conditions had been violated. He described the difficulties encountered on the muddy advance up the peninsula, the difficult defenses guarding the line of the Warwick, and particularly the difficulties of operating under the complex command structure the War Department had evolved.[2]

Even the elements seemed to be collaborating with the enemy and the political leaders of the Union in causing discomfort to the army commander. On the 6th, a violent rainstorm broke and continued until the 10th, leaving the roads impassable. Water transportation was so slowed that front line troops facing the enemy along the Warwick were almost isolated. It was not until the 10th that new supply depots could be established and the supply train made to function again. During those four days the number of troops in the line had to be reduced considerably more than usual since so many were required to corduroy the roads and to manhandle the supplies.[3]

> The baggage-trains were a notable spectacle. To each baggage-wagon were attached four or six mules, driven usually by a colored man, with only one rein, or line and that line attached

1 Ibid., 359.
2 Ibid., 269-270.
3 Ibid., 275.

> to the bit of the near leading mule, while the driver rode in a saddle upon the near wheel mule. Each train was accompanied by a guard, and while the guard urged the drivers, the drivers urged the mules. The drivers were usually expert, and understood well the wayward, sportive natures of the creatures over whose destinies they presided. On our way to Yorktown pontoon and baggage trains were sometimes blocked for miles, and the heaviest trains were often unloaded by the guard to facilitate their removal from the mud....[1]

By April 10 enough troops had actually moved into the line to give it some semblance of an order of battle. Heintzelman's corps, composed of Porter's, Hooker's, and Hamilton's divisions, fronted Yorktown, the line extending from Wormley's Creek to the Warwick Road opposite Wynn's Mill. Sumner's corps, one division only having arrived, was on the left of Hamilton's division. Keyes' corps, composed of Smith's, Couch's, and Casey's divisions, was on the extreme left, extending from Sumner past the one gun battery, and Lee's Mill. These commanders were enjoined to maintain constant reconnaissance to determine if it was at all possible to punch a hole in the rebel defenses and get through and cut the communications between Williamsburg and Yorktown.[2]

McClellan planned then to invest Yorktown by bringing heavy artillery as close as possible to the various enemy positions and when all was ready to open fire all along the line. The heaviest batteries were to be concentrated against the Southern positions between Wormley's Creek and the York River. He believed that the Confederates thus weakened could be taken by assault. To this end he set quickly to work building and repairing roads so that his heavy ordnance could be moved and by the 17th was able to commence

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1 B. & L., II, 191-192.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, I, 12.

installation of some of the batteries.[1]

During the remainder of April, McClellan devoted his energies to the various details connected with developing the seige, preparations for subsequent operations, and, of course, his constant war with the government over supplies and men. He soon found that a multitude of duties, particularly those involved in maintaining morale of the troops, prevented him from effectively prosecuting the work of building battery emplacements, and on April 27 designated General Fitz John Porter as the director of the seige operations. After that he could feel freer from detail and give more of his attention to other matters.[2] His arguments with the government were continuous. He complained constantly about the loss of McDowell's corps and pleaded that even if he were refused the entire corps, he urgently needed Franklin's division of that corps. His arguments elicited from Lincoln several of the most pungent rejoinders that master of prose ever penned. On April 9, Lincoln wrote concerning a variety of subjects connected with the operation. He explained his reasons for keeping McDowell's corps in front of Washington and made reference to the pressures which forced him to take Blenker's division. He questioned McClellan's strength returns, and pointed out that there appeared to be a considerable mystery concerning the number of troops on the peninsula. About delay in coming to actual grips with the enemy, he wrote:

> By delay the enemy will relatively gain upon you—that is, he will gain faster by fortifications and reenforcements than you can by reenforcements alone. And once more let

1 Ibid., 17.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 125.

> me tell you it is indispensable to you that you strike a blow. I am powerless to help this. You will do me the justice that I always insisted that going down the bay in search of a field instead of fighting at or near Manassas, was only shifting and not surmounting a difficulty; that we would find the same enemy and the same or equal intrenchments at either place. The country will not fail to note, is now noting, that the present hesitation to move upon an intrenched enemy is but the story of Manassas repeated.
>
> I beg to assure you that I have never written you or spoken to you in greater kindness of feeling than now, nor with a fuller purpose to sustain you, so far as, in my most anxious judgment, I consistently can. But you must act.[1]

McClellan now became convinced that he might further his offensive up the peninsula by capturing Gloucester Point on the northern bank of the York opposite Yorktown. He had originally planned on gunboats operating against that place, but when the Navy could not spare the necessary vessels he resolved to employ troops. To this end he proposed that Franklin's division of McDowell's corps be sent him. The idea was accepted by Stanton and the President, and on the 11th, Stanton notified McClellan that Franklin was on his way to Alexandria to embark for the peninsula.[2] McClellan then got in touch with Flag Officer Goldsborough, commanding off Hampton Roads, to make arrangements for landing Franklin's division. Goldsborough made several suggestions concerning the matter and finally recommended landing at Gloucester along the sand beaches.[3] On April 14, McClellan wired Lincoln that he had seen Franklin,[4] and on the 15th wired Stanton that he had selected a good landing place for Franklin. On April 28 letters

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, I, 15.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 90.
3 Ibid., 92-93.
4 Ibid., 98.

were still being exchanged with the Navy relative to landing Franklin. On May 4, Franklin's troops were still aboard ship so they were able to move up the river toward West Point.[1] McClellan claimed that he had anticipated using Franklin against Servern but came to the conclusion that one division was insufficient for the purpose, then decided to attack Gloucester. He said in his report that for the most part Franklin's regiments were kept on shipboard until arrangements could be made to land them.[2] This handling of Franklin does much to discredit McClellan's complaints about McDowell. Either it demonstrates an inability to employ troops at his disposal or it demonstrates highly shrewd military judgment. It is quite likely that with his propensity for trying to do all things himself McClellan was just unable to get around to issuing the necessary orders for Franklin. His plan for the use of Franklin's division was sound, but he just couldn't get the execution of the plan accomplished. Had he been less of an autocrat on such matters he might have set Franklin up as the commander of a task force with a mission of occupying Gloucester Point. This would in effect have provided three task forces for the different jobs to be done. Porter, it has been indicated, commanded the seige operations and Sumner commanded the left wing of the army engaged in keeping the Confederates off balance.[3] In failing to set up some sort of an effective command arrangement, McClellan failed, although it is doubtful if any use of Franklin could have forced an earlier withdrawal of the Confederates from Yorktown.

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1 Ibid., 134.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, I, 18.
3 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 113.

On April 28, McClellan was still asking for more equipment, this time demanding 30 pounder Parrotts, since he was "very short of that excellent gun"[1] and on the 1st of May, Lincoln replied that:

> Your call for Parrott guns from Washington alarms me, chiefly because it argues indefinite procrastination. Is anything to be done?[2]

On the 4th of May, McClellan, the most surprised of all, was able to wire that "Yorktown was in our possession."[3]

Once again, then, McClellan had, by maneuver and a slow build-up of troops, forced Johnston to evacuate a position although the desired result came sooner and easier than expected. And once again McClellan was unable to reap any credit for the development either from the public or the government. To them the situation on May 4 appeared as another example of the Confederate forces being one jump ahead of the cautious Union commander. The fact that the road toward Richmond was open at relatively no cost in blood seemed unimportant. What was important was that a big battle had been expected and none had taken place. The public, and for that matter the administration, had forgotten, if it ever knew, that war has form, consisting of the inter-relationships between the three major variables of space, time, and man and material goods. A general, in developing his plan of campaign, must weigh, either consciously or unconsciously, these three variables and manipulate them so that the form of the campaign or battle is appropriate for the purposes for which it is fought. Frequently the space factor is the overwhelming consideration.

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1 Ibid., 126.
2 Ibid., 130.
3 Ibid., 133.

To save space almost any amount of human loss and loss in time can be tolerated. Such a situation as that of the Allies' beachhead at Anzio, Italy in World War II is an example of space alone being the major consideration. Men, time, and materiel could well be sacrificed if the beachhead could be maintained. To the Russians, however, in the summer of 1941, space was expendable as was time so long as the precious Red Army could be maintained. Late in the Civil War, with Grant fighting out the war south of Richmond gaining space or time was considerably less important than grinding down the remainder of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. In 1862, however, things appeared in a different light. The war then was being fought for space, i.e., the exercise of Federal control over an area which had been separated from the Union. It was also necessary to conserve manpower so vitally needed in so many places. The nation had not yet grown accustomed to long, long casualty lists. Space then had to be gained and men's lives saved. By making constant those two variables, McClellan's one factor which he could safely sacrifice was time. But in arranging his campaign to suit the real needs of the nation he opened himself to criticism by men who did not understand that the only way to save life and gain space was to sacrifice time.

Early on the morning of the 4th of May, McClellan ordered Brigadier-General Stoneman to pursue the retreating Confederates in the direction of Williamsburg with cavalry and light artillery. He was to be followed by Hooker's infantry division moving along the Yorktown-Williamsburg road and Smith's division along the Lee's Mill-Williamsburg road. Following these troops, divisions under Kearny, Couch, and Casey were put en route in their

support. To command the pursuit troops, General Sumner was ordered to the front.[1]

Here was an aggressive McClellan quickly taking advantage of a sudden development. His plan was good. He would send out cavalry to re-establish contact with the enemy and would re-enforce the cavalry with sufficient infantry to damage the enemy wherever he was brought to bay. Several things, however, were wrong. The senior officer placed in command of the pursuit was an older officer, extremely brave and extremely able to command a troop of cavalry but completely lacking in ability to handle a force of five infantry divisions and a cavalry force. Sumner had been one of the corps commanders selected for high command without McClellan's knowledge. McClellan also added to the confusion by fearing to intrust completely the pursuit operation to the elderly general. McClellan, as was his failing, issued some orders directly to the division commanders and some to the senior corps commander. As a result, the troops were not used as effectively as they might have been had either McClellan acted on the corps commander alone or on the division commanders alone.

Six miles from Yorktown, Stoneman came upon enemy pickets and two miles farther inland he came upon the rear of the Southern rear guard. After driving in these forces he moved rapidly toward the junction of the Yorktown-Lee's Mill road two miles from Williamsburg, finding upon arrival at the junction a strong enemy rear guard protected by earth works. He at once prepared for action, although realizing that he would need infantry support

1 McClellan, Report, 178.

to overrun the Confederate rear guard. While waiting the arrival of the riflemen from Hooker's division located some two miles away, he used his horsemen to make demonstrations to hold the enemy in check. The cavalrymen, however, were soon brought under artillery fire, and, since Hooker's division had been delayed on the road by the troops of Smith's division, Stoneman retired from his advanced position.

Simultaneously with the advance of his main body to the road junction, Stoneman had directed a portion of his force to move south to the Lee's Mill road to clear it of enemy troops before the arrival of Smith. After crossing to that road, Emory, the detachment commander, encountered and drove in the direction of the James River some of Stuart's cavalry, then asked for infantry support, which Hooker attempted, unsuccessfully, to send him.[1]

Hooker, after receipt of his orders to cooperate with Stoneman in the pursuit, marched from Yorktown at about noon on May 4. Having marched about six miles, he learned that Stoneman was engaged and was in need of support. Hooker galloped to the front to estimate the situation but found that Smith's division had unexpectedly filed into the road in advance of his division and would hold up Hooker's advance some three or four hours.[2] Smith had ordered the change from the Lee's Mill road to the Yorktown road because he claimed to have found the first road impassable.[3] Believing that Smith would be all the support Stoneman would need, Hooker moved to the Hampton road, thence to the west. This advance moved off about dark and was pressed forward until

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, I, 424-425.
2 Ibid., 464-465.
3 Ibid., 526.

drenching rains and bad roads exhausted the men. He stopped his advance at about 11:00, then moved out again, arriving within sight of Williamsburg at about 5:30. He found that his further advance was prevented by a series of redoubts of which Fort McGruder was the strongest. Hooker resolved to attack at once with the twofold mission of keeping the enemy off balance and of occupying advanced positions from which larger attacks could be launched.[1]

Here, then, was a situation developing directly attributable to the kind of corps leaders with which Lincoln had saddled McClellan. In place of some one person exerting his own will over a fluid battlefield, division commanders were arranging the order of battle to suit themselves. The conditions of the roads could not have been predicted in advance, but certainly Sumner should have been in a position to decide what changes in the original plan could be made and how they should be accomplished.

Smith, meanwhile, had made good his crossing to the Yorktown road and on orders of General Sumner moved along that road, reaching Stoneman's headquarters at about 5:30 that evening. At 6:30 his division moved into the attack with three columns abreast. Finding the terrain too difficult, he brought the attack to a halt and went into bivouac. During the night, preparations were made for the division to attack the following morning. At daylight, however, the division was ordered to withdraw so that the troops could secure the rations they had failed to obtain the night before.

Having dispatched what he considered to be ample forces for the pursuit, McClellan devoted the bulk of the day of May 4 to the work involved in going

1 Ibid., 464-465.

over from static to open warfare. After reporting his condition to Washington, alerting four divisions to follow those of Hooker, Smith, Couch, Kearny, and Casey, if needed, he turned his attention to exploiting his break by moving the already loaded troops of Franklin's division up the York to cut off Johnston's retreat. At no time during the day did he become alarmed about the developments at the front, although from time to time he received word that a strong rear guard action was being fought.

This calm, almost disinterested air McClellan assumed is one of the greatest paradoxes in his complex personality. While planning a campaign or a battle he would concern himself with all varieties of details. He would exercise his leadership on small units without reference to intervening headquarters. He would worry about small items of supply which should properly be left to his quartermaster. He would take infinite pains to visit small detachments just off picket duty in order to build up morale. Yet when his orders were issued which would lead to battle and his troops were on their way he would sit back and either observe or else busy himself with other activities. All of this is, of course, in keeping with his total idea of war. He believed in restraining his troops from action until the field was ready. Then having thought out how the fight should develop he was content, unless something went radically wrong, to allow his plans to materialize. During the activities of May 4 he heard nothing which would indicate any serious malfunctioning of the pursuit, since the advancing Union troops could be expected to run into rear guard opposition.

The details of the fight at Williamsburg need not be described in any great detail here. McClellan's generalship was demonstrated only twice

during the two-day campaign beginning May 4. The first has already been described in part as being the ordering of the pursuit in strong enough force to bring a good portion of Johnston's troops to a stop. Johnston, after evacuating Yorktown, was intent upon withdrawing all of his troops to within the shadows of Richmond where he hoped would also be concentrated large increments from the rest of the Confederacy. He had left only a light covering force in the defenses around Williamsburg. When those troops were threatened with disaster from the heavy cavalry and infantry McClellan had thrown into the pursuit, Johnston was forced to detach large elements from his main body to return and man the fortifications around Williamsburg. It was thus a re-enforced Confederate force Sumner faced early on the morning of May 5.

Sumner, although on the ground, did not conduct the battle of the 5th. Rather, it was conducted by a brigade on the extreme right under Hancock, who managed to seize a number of Confederate strong points before being ordered to retire, and a division on the extreme left under Hooker. Hooker's troops began an assault at about 7:30 in the morning with the objective of seizing Fort Magruder, the strongest point in the Confederate line. The entire line was successful until it reached just beyond the Yorktown road where the attack stalled until afternoon. Shortly after one o'clock, the Confederate troops under the general command of Longstreet mounted a series of heavy attacks against Hooker's spent division. The Federal division, however, was able to hold on until troops, dispatched personally by the army commander, came to their relief.

McClellan's second demonstration of generalship came toward the end of the battle on the 5th. He had, it will be recalled, remained behind at Yorktown to arrange the details of shipping Franklin's division up the York. When he was at last notified of the seriousness of the fight at Williamsburg, he rode forward, arriving on the battlefield between four and five on the afternoon of the 5th. He quickly ordered troops in between Hooker's hard-pressed men and a very nebulous center. The right he strengthened with a division and then advanced some troops in the center of the line to seize ground from which a new attack could be made. These dispositions made, he reconnoitred the battle line in greater detail and made preparations to bring up artillery with which to soften the Confederates before the next Union attack. Then, although correctly assuming that the Confederates would withdraw during the night, he ordered two more divisions from Yorktown to march to the front so as to have ample force with which to renew the attack if that became necessary.

Quite apart from the military decisions which were sound, McClellan contributed materially to the ending of the day's battle. He was, throughout the period of his active command, a truly popular leader. His troops worshipped him and would make any exertion he chose to ask of them. This popularity was not something that was instinctive. Rather, it was the result of long months of painstaking effort to build up the morale of the army. It came as a result of promptly looking after the needs of the troops and more especially of appearing before them when the going was rough and when they had done something of which to be proud. If McClellan was with the army, the soldiers believed nothing could go very wrong. When he was not with the army,

nothing could ever go right. The battle of Williamsburg is illustrative. For the first time since the first battle of Bull Run large units of the army were engaged in a major contest. During the first day and a half of that action the decisions had been ineffective and the troops felt themselves being wasted by men who did not understand military science. After having beenmauled by strong Confederate defense and stabbed by sharp Confederate counterattack, the spirits of the troops were low. Then came the muddy but nonetheless impressive figure of "Little Mac." As he trooped the battle line, his staff straggling badly, the soldiers cheered wildly and began to feel better. They felt they had fought a good fight, that their efforts were appreciated and given another opportunity the next day would certainly whip the Southerners. After the battle, McClellan took care to visit the camps of the regiments which had been engaged and let them know that he appreciated what they had done.

> I have come to thank you for your bravery and good conduct in the action of yesterday....You acted like veterans! Veterans of many battles could not have done better.[1]

After the Confederate forces withdrew from Williamsburg on the night of May 5, McClellan was faced with several possible courses of action, meanwhile keeping his army well concentrated and in contact with the retreating Confederates. He could continue his advance overland toward Richmond, he could advance part of his army overland while moving part of it by water up the York as far as the Navy could go, he could plan on crossing the lower Chickahominy River to approach Richmond from the southeast, or he could

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1 Catton, Mr. Lincoln's Army, 119.

plan on re-basing his army this time on the James River with the idea of operating against Richmond from the south. His actions during the period May 6-22 indicate that he was in doubt as to which course he would follow. He ordered two divisions—Franklin's and Sedgwick's—to move by boat up the York River near West Point. He ordered Stoneman to use his cavalry to reconnoiter along the lower Chickahominy to determine if that approach were feasible for a land advance.[1] Meanwhile, he requested the Navy to send gunboats up the James River and sent a cavalry squadron overland to the James to determine to what degree that area was clear of the enemy. While investigating these various alternatives, it was necessary to keep the bulk of the supplies afloat, although such practice immobilized much transportation. McClellan believed that such practice was necessary, that when a base of operations once was decided upon, then vessels could be released.[2]

On May 8, the army had secured New Kent Courthouse, Cumberland, and White House, and was being supplied from Eltham just above West Point.[3] The vicinity of West Point had been secured by Franklin after successfully defending against a sharp Confederate attack on May 7 which was delivered on the morning following his debarkation.[4] Thus the very inertia of the army moving after the retreating Confederates was helping McClellan to decide upon at least an initial movement overland.

While McClellan was closing up to the Chickahominy, Major General Wool

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 148-149.
2 Ibid., 149.
3 Ibid., 150.
4 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, I, 615-617.

organized a force at Fort Monroe and on May 10 landed a force to capture Norfolk, Virginia. By 5:00 P.M. on the same evening the city was surrendered to him by the mayor of the city, and a military governor was appointed.[1] On the 11th, with Norfolk safely in Federal hands, the ironclad Merrimac was blown up by the Confederates and with these two events the way was clear for McClellan to change his base of operations over to the James River if he so desired. He, however, continued his advance and on May 13 four divisions had reached Cumberland and begun to use it as a temporary supply depot. The rest of the army was concentrated along the line Cumberland-Eltham and New Kent Courthouse. On the 14th and 15th three divisions were pushed north and occupied White House, five miles from Cumberland.[2]

During the advance McClellan was engaged in another one of those discussions with the War Department in which he demonstrated his fear of entrusting major responsibility to others, particularly when they were selected because of qualifications other than fitness of field command. He requested permission to reorganize the army corps, wishing either to return to the division organization or to replace incompetent commanders of corps. He pointed out that the fumbling on May 5 before Williamsburg was due to poor corps commanders. He was authorized to suspend temporarily his corps structure and also was sent one of Lincoln's classicly pointed letters. Lincoln informed him that many people believed the opposition to corps organization was due to McClellan's desire to pamper Porter. Lincoln pointed out that his relief of Hamilton had cost him some of his best friends in the Senate. Lincoln

1 Ibid.,
2 McClellan, Report, 187.

then said:

> Are you strong enough--are you strong enough, even with my help--to set your foot upon the necks of Sumner, Heintzelman and Keyes all at once? This is a practical and very serious question for you.[1]

In so writing McClellan, Lincoln reverted to his political role. The question of rightness or wrongness of McClellan's charges does not enter the discussion. The crucial point of Lincoln's letter is that McClellan might alienate political forces in Washington by relieving the generals who had failed. If McClellan wanted to keep his post, Lincoln clearly intimated that the general must be careful.

Armed with Lincoln's authority, McClellan created two new corps, the V corps under Porter and the VI corps under Franklin.[2] The corps compositions were as follows:

> II corps Sumner, divisions Sedgwick and Richardson
> III corps Heintzelman, divisions Kearny and Hooker
> IV corps Keyes, divisions Couch and Casey
> V corps Porter, divisions Morell, Sykes and reserve artillery under Hunt
> VI corps Franklin, divisions Smith and Slocum

In spite of heavy rains on the 15th and 16th, headquarters were moved to White House and other elements of the army were concentrated at that place. Late on the 16th, the weather changed and so McClellan elected to rest his army while waiting for the ground to dry. At this time the advance guard had advanced nearly to the Chickahominy, the V and VI corps resting at White House, while the II, III, and IV corps were resting near New Kent Courthouse.[3]

At this point occurred another one of those events which are still so

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 153-155.
2 McClellan, Report, 187.
3 McClellan, Own Story, 341-342.

mooted that the entire issue of the justice of Lincoln's subsequent activities concerning McClellan must be judged in terms of it. McClellan had repeatedly protested McDowell's corps being withheld from the peninsula. On May 14 he wrote a long letter to Lincoln in which he argued that the enemy was concentrating all available force for a fight in front of Richmond. His own forces had been reduced by casualties, sickness, garrison duties, and the like. He then asked for more troops, pointing out that even if he did not use them in taking Richmond, their presence would serve to overawe the Confederates with the might and the determination of the Union. He continued that he would fight the enemy with what he had but that he could use more people to good advantage. The more he had, he believed, the better would be his combinations. In Stanton's reply, the Secretary of War pointed out that the President was still unwilling to uncover Washington. However, he would order McDowell to march overland to participate in the attack on Richmond, keeping always between the Confederates and Washington. McClellan was to give no order which would force McDowell to uncover Washington. McDowell was to draw supplies from West Point as soon as a junction had been effected with McClellan.[1]

Being in some doubt as to the full impact of this order, McClellan asked for clarification. He first presented a brief account of the movements of the army as it was closing up on the Chickahominy between Bottom's Bridge and New Bridge, and then questioned the wisdom of sending McDowell overland. He would rather, he said, have McDowell come by water. Then he

1 Ibid., 345-346.

asked if a junction were to be effected, what command arrangements would be made. He desired that McDowell be clearly placed under his orders and that he be held strictly accountable for compliance with the President's instructions. He went on to argue that he had no personal feelings which could possibly lead him to violate the President's instruction.[1] Lincoln's reply on the 24th gave McClellan the authority he asked for and told him that the movement would begin on Monday, May 26.

McClellan later argued that Lincoln's orders to McDowell forced the army to remain based on the York River when it could have changed base to the James River. Then after having been committed to the York by McDowell's projected move, the army was forced to fight with reduced forces on unfavorable ground because Jackson's activities in the Shenandoah Valley forced Lincoln into revoking the orders for McDowell's move south. The records do not support McClellan's contention in this respect. Certainly the general had toyed with the idea of moving to the James, but he had not decided to do so. Indeed, at no time prior to the 18th of May had he made any effort to shift the direction of attack. His movements from the 18th to the 24th were no different than they would have been had Lincoln refused to allow McDowell to even think of moving south. It would appear that McClellan's arguments were based on hindsight after he had seen the advantages the move to the James actually gave him.

The Chickahominy River, toward which the Union army was moving, was the last major obstacle confronting McClellan before actually becoming involved with the defenses of Richmond proper. It was a river rising some

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1 B. & L., II, 174-175.

15 miles northwest of Richmond and uniting with the James River about 40 miles below Richmond. McClellan's army was concentrating between Meadow and Bottom's Bridges over the Chickahominy and serving as the eastern approaches to Richmond. At ordinary stage the river was some 40 feet wide, fringed with a dense growth of heavy forest trees and bordered by low marsh lands. Neither bank of the river was of solid ground. The river, however, was subject to great variations in level. A single violent storm was enough to cause it to overflow its banks, inundating completely the eastern shore. The western banks of the river were overlooked by bluffs which when occupied by Confederate artillery opposite the various bridges made river crossings at those places most hazardous. Seeing clearly the problem thus posed, the Union leaders had to search for other places from which the river could be crossed.[1] By the 23rd, satisfactory bridge sites had been located in the vicinity of Bottom's Bridge and men were put to work building four spans across which the army would cross at the first opportunity.[2]

On May 26, as McClellan was attempting to get his army concentrated on the right bank of the Chickahominy in a position to cross, he received word that a force of the enemy was concentrating in the vicinity of Hanover Court-house. His attention had earlier been called to this region as being crucial if McDowell were to move southward to join in the assault upon Richmond. Lincoln had written on the 24th that McDowell's corps would begin the move south on the 26th. He asked if McClellan, as an aid to McDowell's force,

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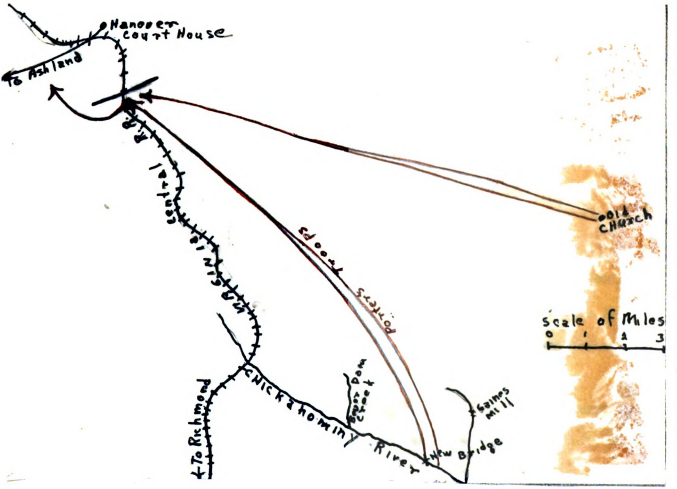
1 B. & L., II, 174-175.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 188.

could send a force north from the peninsula to cut off the small Confederate force opposing McDowell at Fredricksburg. If this movement were successful, McClellan would not only have prevented 15,000 men from joining in the defenses of Richmond but would also have developed a secondary line of communications over which part of McDowell's corps could be supplied.

McClellan first dispatched a cavalry force under Stoneman to cut railroad lines along the Virginia Central railroad between Hanover Courthouse and the Chickahominy. He then ordered Porter's V corps to move on Hanover Courthouse to dislodge any enemy force to be found in that region. Thus he was extending a powerful arm of his force northward which could serve as a connecting link between the I corps and the rest of the army if McDowell were allowed to move and which could prevent the Confederates getting into the Union rear if McDowell were held up because of the crisis then developing in the Shenandoah Valley.

On the morning of May 27, Porter marched from New Bridge with an advance guard and the division of Morrell. At the same time, Warren's brigade was ordered to march from Old Church. The troops under Porter's personal command were to attack frontally, while Warren was to serve as a flank attack. Porter's troops struggled along in a driving rainstorm until within two miles of Hanover Courthouse where they made contact with the enemy. Skirmishers were deployed on the direct road to Hanover Courthouse to engage the enemy until Morell's division could be brought up. A squadron of cavalry and a section of artillery were dispatched on the Ashland road, and soon became engaged with a Confederate force trying to outflank the Union troops. This Union detachment along the Ashland road was reinforced

and eventually was able to drive the enemy towards Hanover Courthouse. Once this was accomplished, Porter put his main body again in motion when suddenly he received word that enemy forces were approaching from his rear. He at once faced around and committed his various elements driving the enemy toward Ashland.



HANOVER COURTHOUSE

The next day was spent burying dead, collecting prisoners and materiel, and destroying Confederate public property. Reconnaissances were made to

Ashland and the Fredericksburg and Virginia Central railroad. More prisoners were captured at Ashland, and the Fredericksburg railroad bridge crossing the South Anna river was destroyed. When he believed he had completed all of the mission assigned to him, Porter countermarched his troops to their position with the bulk of the army.[1]

McClellan after visiting the scene of Porter's activities, sent a glowing dispatch to the President announcing a complete rout of the enemy and claiming that he had cut all communications except for the Fredericksburg and Richmond railroad. He further added that since the major battle was to be fought in front of Richmond, Porter was moving back to his old location.[2] Again on the 28th, McClellan emphasized Porter's victory in a dispatch to the President, to which Lincoln replied that he was happy but puzzled. If it was a complete rout, why was the Fredericksburg-Richmond line not cut and if it was not cut, had anything actually been done. To his rather petty note, McClellan forwarded a pleading sort of reply stating that Porter had relieved the right flank of the army, had routed a Confederate force, and had taken many prisoners and much supply. The victory was "one of the handsomest things in the war, both in itself and its results."[3]

The battle at Hanover Courthouse had been neatly planned and executed and accomplished the objective for which it had been fought. Yet in the McClellan story it was only another factor causing misunderstanding between Lincoln and McClellan. The fight had been made by Fitz John Porter, who

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, I, 684.
2 McClellan, Report, 208-209.
3 Ibid., 212.

certainly was a favorite of the army commander. However, praise of him and the relatively minor campaign which he had conducted only served to irritate Lincoln, faced as he was with worries as to the safety of the capital. Lincoln's vexation had been given some release on the 24th when he wrote:

> I think the time is near when you must either attack Richmond or give up the job and come to the defense of Washington.[1]

Then came the extravagant claims of Porter's victory and Lincoln exploded by asking "had anything actually been done."

The reason, of course, why Lincoln was in such short temper during those last days in May was because he believed Washington to be threatened by a rampaging force in the Shenandoah under Jackson. Since McClellan had been relieved of command of all the armies, there was no military man in Washington who could give the orders coordinating the various campaigns in progress. As long as nothing unusual transpired, this situation was not likely to cause trouble. Stanton and Lincoln together with the elderly generals heading offices in the War Department could keep track of operations moving at a slow pace and all in the right direction. Once the tempo of events accelerated, however, such a command structure could not stand the strain. Lincoln then found himself in the position of trying to keep track of a fast breaking operation in the Shenandoah, to handle the large independent I corps and to control the movements of McClellan's army. His constant state of unrest is understandable.

General T. J. Jackson had been operating in the Shenandoah Valley with

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1 Lincoln, Works, VII, 183.

the assigned mission of keeping between the Union forces under Banks and the Confederate troops under Johnston withdrawing from Manassas Junction for the protection of Richmond.[1] As Johnston withdrew toward Richmond, he left General R. S. Ewell commanding 6,500 infantry and 500 cavalry on the Rappahannock with orders to cooperate with Jackson or to retire south of the Rapidan if Jackson withdrew down the valley. As the Union troops under Banks, simultaneously with McClellan's move to the peninsula, slowly advanced down the Shenandoah from Winchester to Strasburg, Jackson began to formulate an offensive plan which would more than comply with the defensive mission assigned him. To help implement this plan he brought Ewell's forces from the positions in which Johnston had left them east of the Blue Ridge mountains into the valley. Ewell was instructed to observe Banks while Jackson took his own valley troops on the opening phase of his offensive. The Union General Fremont had been operating against a small Confederate force under General Edward Johnson in the vicinity of McDowell. Jackson saw an opportunity to slip quietly to the relief of Johnston, then after beating Fremont he could return and strike at Banks some place along the Union line of communications. This phase then began on April 30.

During the absence of Jackson, Ewell at Conrad's Store became the recipient of many conflicting orders. As Jackson's own campaign developed, he sent dispatch after dispatch asking that Ewell's plans conform to his activities and most recent thinking. At the same time, Johnston was making his withdrawal from Yorktown, Williamsburg, and the other lines along the peninsula. As McClellan grew closer to Richmond, Johnston came more and more to desire a concentration east of Richmond of all available forces,

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1 McClellan, Report, 212.

including Ewell's. Thus his orders, based on old intelligence from the peninsula, warned Ewell of an early move to the east. Robert E. Lee, then military adviser to President Davis, also made suggestions and issued orders, to the complete confusion of Ewell. As Ewell was in the midst of these conflicting orders, he received word that Shield's division of Banks' forces was to leave the valley to reinforce McDowell, already getting ready to head south to McClellan's aid. Ewell's orders were to remain and watch Banks' main body, which he did, but reluctantly. Then on May 13 and 14 he received word that Banks was preparing to withdraw up the valley prior to crossing over to replace McDowell.

Now here was a situation made to order for Jackson's particular kind of military mind. He had stopped Fremont at McDowell and had captured much equipment. Banks had weakened himself by sending Shields out of the valley. Jackson reasoned if he could cut Banks' communication, he could then strike him some place along the valley and defeat him, but Ewell had received orders from Johnston which seemed to require his immediate departure for Richmond. To circumvent this development, Jackson sent a telegram to Lee asking for authority to keep Ewell and to attack Banks. Upon receipt of the desired authority, Jackson issued seemingly meaningless orders, which resulted in the concentration of his complete force in the hills overlooking Front Royal on May 23. His force quickly overran the town, then began a pursuit of the Unionists toward Cedarville. After occupying Cedarville on the evening of May 23, Jackson began to plan his next movement. Guessing that Banks would withdraw from Strasburg toward Winchester, he decided to strike the Union forces while they were on the march. To this end, he split his forces,

sending one wing directly on the road from Cedarville toward Winchester, while the other wing would plan on crossing the moutains at Middletown, striking the Union people if they were en route and turning south or north, depending on where further intelligence placed Banks. This general plan was carried into almost perfect effect. On the afternoon of the 24th, Banks' rear guard and wagons were struck, and on the morning of the 25th, after a grueling night's march, Jackson drove the Federal troops out of Winchester with great loss. Lack of cavalry prevented a complete pursuit, but Banks was driven back and across the Potomac River.[1] Jackson's thrust at Banks was at once reflected in orders concerning the Army of the Potomac. On May 24 at 4:00 P.M., the following order was sent to McClellan.

> In consequence of General Banks' critical position, I have been compelled to suspend General McDowell's movements to join you. The enemy are making a desperate push upon Harper's Ferry and we are trying to throw General Fremont's force and part of General McDowell's in their rear.[2]

On the next day Lincoln sent a longer telegram reviewing Jackson's operations. He pointed out that he must do all possible to prevent Jackson crossing the Potomac at Harpers Ferry or above. McDowell, he indicated, was moving to the vicinity of Port Royal with about 20,000 troops. He ended:

> This is now our situation. If McDowell's force was now beyond our reach we should be entirely helpless. Apprehensions of something like this, and no unwillingness to sustain you has always been my reason for withholding McDowell's forces from you. Please understand this, and do the best you can with the forces you have.[3]

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1 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, Vol. I, 395-410.
2 McClellan, Report, 200.
3 Ibid., 202.

Again on the 25th Lincoln intimated that the enemy was driving north. He said he thought the movement was a general one such as could not be if he were concentrating for a desperate defense of Richmond.

Thus Jackson accomplished the thing McClellan feared most--the recall of McDowell, leaving the Army of the Potomac to face the growing strength of the defenders of Richmond without the help of the I corps. As time was to show, Jackson was able to detach McDowell and then make his own way south, participating the defense of the capital.

The first real test was then over. McClellan had, in spite of all opposition, clung to his plan of attacking Richmond from the east instead of from the north. In carrying out that plan he had brought his army to a position close enough for the troops to be able to hear the church bells chime in Richmond. More important, the army reached that point without serious losses. True, the movement had been slow and lacked the dash of some of Jackson's raids, but the point was that Union troops were poised, ready to hurl themselves upon the arsenal, the nerve center, and the very symbol of the Confederacy.

In making the campaign, McClellan had demonstrated some glaring weaknesses. Still being a relatively inexperienced commander, he was inclined to assume too much detailed responsibility himself, preferring to give orders directly to division and brigade commanders rather than to corps or task-force chiefs. Having a definite philosophy of how an army commander should handle troops, McClellan spent great amounts of time preparing for a fight and then relegated command of the battle to his subordinates, even though he did not trust their judgment. Thus Sumner was sent on the pursuit of

Johnston after the fall of Yorktown even though McClellan believed him incapable of corps responsibility. Of course, in his relations with the government, McClellan was most in error. Whether a general likes it or not, the military is, under the American system, subordinate to the civil power. A general, regardless of how sound his plans are, cannot hope to achieve success if he antagonizes the civil government. McClellan, unfortunately for himself and the entire Union cause, never learned this fact. He fought his government with the same vigor with which his troops fought the Confederates. By so fighting, McClellan lost the support he most vitally needed to win the war with a knockout punch.

Along with the weaknesses, McClellan also demonstrated the great strengths so characteristic of successful generals. His over-all strategic plan was sound. His solving of the logistical problems of the move up the peninsula were in the best American tradition. He at no time took useless risks but constantly maneuvered to catch Johnston in an error. He did not hold to a rigid concept of how he might approach Richmond, but rather investigated a variety of approaches. When faced, a month later, with the need to change bases, this prior planning paid dividends. Perhaps the biggest single tribute which could be paid to McClellan for this phase of the war would be that opposed to the strategic planning of Robert E. Lee (although Lee was not in command of troops), he was able to divine the objectives Lee had in mind. He saw clearly that Jackson did not have a large enough force in the Shenandoah Valley to maintain a sustained offensive against Washington. He saw too, that the only major purpose to be served by the attacks against Fremont and Banks would be to draw off Union troops from the tightening cordon about Richmond. McClellan made these views explicit to Lincoln, but was overruled.

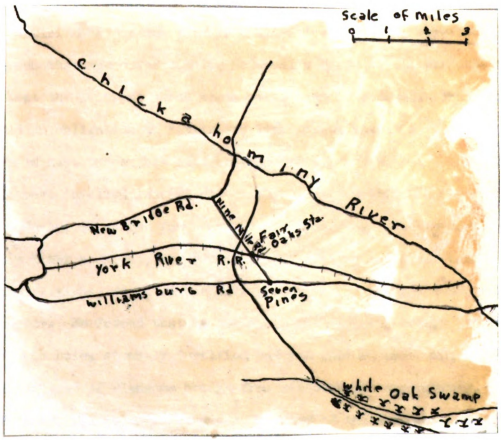
CHAPTER IX

PROBING THE DEFENSES OF RICHMOND

While McClellan was thus carrying on a losing battle with Washington for reinforcement by McDowell's corps, he began a series of operations along the Chickahominy River designed to place the army in a position for an all-out assault on the Confederate capital once McDowell's move was resumed. Between the 23rd and 25th of April, General C. D. Keyes was ordered to cross the river with elements of his IV corps and to take up and fortify a position in the vicinity of a road junction called the Seven Pines. This place, around which was constructed a strong line of rifle pits, was the junction of the Nine Mile road, coming from the northwest, with the main road from Richmond to Williamsburg. The positions were about seven miles from the center of Richmond. Once Keyes was in position, McClellan ordered a second corps, the III under General Heintzelman, to cross and to take up positions some two miles in advance of the Bottom's Bridge with the twofold mission of serving as the left flank protection of the army and of guarding the crossings through the White Oak swamp by means of which Confederates might possibly get in rear of the Union Army. Heintzelman, as the senior of the two corps commanders south of the river, was placed in command of both corps with the assigned mission of holding to the positions at Seven Pines at all costs. The major latitude his instructions allowed was permission to uncover the crossings of the White Oak swamp if he found it necessary to concentrate his troops at Seven Pines.

Once the extreme right flank of the army had been secured for a time by Porter's action at Hanover Courthouse, McClellan began to extend the

forces south of the Chickahominy so as to form an enclave into which the bulk of the army could concentrate. Keyes was instructed to extend his line from Seven Pines to the Fair Oaks Station on the Richmond and York railroad. Around the entire Union position, running from White Oak swamp to the Chickahominy was strung a line of pickets approximately as indicated on the map.[1]



REGION OF SEVEN PINES

1 McClellan, Report, 213-214.

On the face of it this disposition of his troops appears to have been such as to deliberately ask for an attack on the two corps across the river. While the left flank of the army was solidly based on the White Oak swamp, the right flank, ending just beyond Fair Oaks, was in the air and offered the Confederates a wonderful opportunity to attack from that direction, split the Army of the Potomac in half and drive the portion of it south of the river back against the swollen Chickahominy.

McClellan's reasons for his disposition, however, were sound. He reasoned that the order sending McDowell's corps to him was only suspended and that the I corps' march south would soon be resumed. Thus he believed he had an obligation to retain his line approximately as it was on the 26th. He could have thrown his entire army over the river, but to have done so would have involved leaving his supply lines, at this time running from White House, uncovered for a possible raid by the enemy forces. Had these supply lines been cut, and had the river again flooded its banks, his army, without rations, would either have had to strike rapidly for Richmond or surrender. He feared that he could not push quickly enough on to Richmond as it was being strongly fortified and was guarded by a rapidly increasing army composed of elements brought from all over the Confederacy. His only alternative was to do as he did.[1] In view of the results of the engagement at Seven Pines, he should not be criticized for his plan, for he was able to reinforce his exposed corps during the first days' engagement and to drive the Confederates from the field during the second day. The biggest single tactical error lay in not placing at least a division so as to oc-

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, I, 30-31.

cupy the gap between Keyes' right flank and the Chickahominy.

Meanwhile, in the Confederate camp General Johnston had received word in the evening of May 24 that General McDowell was moving south from Fredericksburg with about 40,000 troops to assist in taking the Confederate capital. Johnston decided to attack McClellan before this junction could take place since once it was accomplished, Richmond would fall. He elected to attack McClellan's right flank which was located on the north side of the Chickahominy and to that end began concentration of the troops to be involved. While in the process of giving the necessary orders, General J. E. B. Stuart brought in reports that McDowell had returned to Fredericksburg. This intelligence led to a change of plan. Instead of attacking north of the Chickahominy, Johnston resolved to strike at the two corps on the south of that river, making the Williamsburg road the axis for his attack.[1] As to Johnston's precise plans for the attack, there is some dispute. Johnston later claimed that he had ordered General Longstreet and General D. H. Hill to advance down the Williamsburg road while General Huger was to advance down the Charles City road to protect the right flank of the attack. G. W. Smith was to occupy a position so as to protect Longstreet's right flank and to guard against a Union reinforcement of the troops south of the river. G. W. Smith, however, contended later that Longstreet was to attack down the Nine Mile road, Hill down the Williamsburg Stage road, and Huger down the Charles City road in a three-pronged attack with the main weight to fall on the Union right flank.[2] This misunderstanding of orders may well have been crucial

1 B. & L., II, 211.
2 Ibid., 225.

for the Northern cause, for, as will be seen, if the right flank had been struck earlier, the results of the entire battle might have been altered.

During the night of May 30, heavy rains fell, filling rifle pits, rendering almost impassable the roads and seriously threatening the bridges by which the very life of the III and IV corps depended. At about 10:00 A.M. on the 31st, an aide from Johnston's staff was captured by Union pickets. Although this officer revealed very little about possible actions of the Southerners, his very presence, so near to the front, testified to imminent operations, and Union men were ordered under arms by 11:00 A.M.[1] Two cannon shots, crossing Keyes' headquarters, lent added emphasis to his conclusion that a major attack was to come. At about 12:30, Casey's division, in advance of Seven Pines, was seriously assaulted and the pickets and members of the regiments sent to strengthen them came streaming back into the main defensive lines of the division. As the Confederate attack progressed, Casey's full division became involved to such an extent that he had to request Keyes for aid, which was quickly sent in the form of regiments belonging to General Couch's divisional reserve. These troops were distributed to the right and left of Casey's position in order to prevent it from being outflanked and to prevent its guns from being captured. Keyes also sent word to Heintzelman that the corps was engaged and asked for reinforcements. By this time the Confederate attack had deployed to such an extent that if further reinforcements were to be used they had to move north as far as Fair Oaks.

While the fight was thus developing all along the Union front, Keyes

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1 McClellan, Own Story, 378.

devoted his personal attention to preparing a second line of defense to be used when the first gave way. To this end he placed reserve artillery and infantry as well as detachments of stragglers on both sides of Williamsburg road at its junction with the Nine Mile road. As these arrangements were being completed, elements of Kearny's division, which had come up from reserve positions near White Oak swamp, attacked on the Union left, thus forcing a drift of the Confederate attack toward Fair Oaks. Nonetheless, the Confederate attacks continued. The second defensive line which Keyes had developed was held until the troops were so severely pressed that they were forced back to still a third line, which was the final one of the day. This development came at about 6:00 P.M.[1]

Heintzelman, at about 1:00 P.M., heard firing from the vicinity of Seven Pines and sent two aides to the front to find out what was happening. At about 2:00 P.M. he received word from Keyes of the attack on Casey and was asked to send several brigades if they were available. General Birney's brigade of Kearny's division was ordered forward. At the same time, two other of Kearny's brigades were ordered to move forward along the Williamsburg road. At about 2:30 his aides returned, bearing news that Casey's division was being driven in and that the road in rear of his position was filled with stragglers. Heintzelman then ordered the rest of his corps then available to move to support the growing fight and sent word to Sumner on the northern bank of the river that assistance was needed. Then after having ridden to the front and conferring with Keyes, Heintzelman devoted himself to directing his arriving brigades into the fight. These troops

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, I, 872-879.

were for the most part of Kearny's division, none of Hooker's being engaged during the first day. During the evening, Heintzelman reformed his lines so as to be ready for the next day's fight. In general, these lines were between a mile and a mile and a half in rear of the ones held by Casey when the fight began.[1]

McClellan, hearing early reports of the developing action, alerted Sumner's corps, then in position north of the Chickahominy. Sumner quickly moved his two divisions to the river banks and there waited for further instructions. At 2:30 P.M. he received orders to cross the Chickahominy and to place his corps in action. The two divisions quickly moved over their bridges and marched directly toward the sounds of firing. Sedgwick's division was the first to reach the line which had been established by Couch somewhat to the east of Fair Oaks Station. These troops quickly went into action, one regiment going to the right as flank protection while the others made an attack to relieve the pressure on Couch. By evening the Union position was considerably stabilized and the troops placed in positions along the railroad tracks from which they could receive the Confederate attacks expected the next day.

The following morning the Confederate troops began a series of uncoordinated attacks up and down the lines on which the fighting had ceased the night before. Until about mid-morning the Southern troops maintained their initiative but then the Union troops under several of the most aggressive division commanders began heavy counterattacks. Red-faced, explosive-tempered, French, and handsome, gallant, hard-drinking Hooker led their men

1 Ibid., 812-817.

in some extremely heavy fighting, eventually driving the Confederates from all of the places they had gained on the previous day's fighting.[1] The night of June 1 fell on Union troops in the same positions from which they had been driven the noon before. The following morning, Hooker's division advanced several miles toward Richmond, but soon returned to the lines occupied by the rest of the army.

McClellan's personal conduct during the two-days' battle was both consistent with his notions of war and appropriate for an army commander. He had placed the senior corps commander south of the river in charge and he expected him to fight the battle his own way. As soon as McClellan heard sounds of firing, he alerted a reserve corps and sent it to the aid of Heintzelman in ample time to stop the Confederate attack. The proof of his generalship, of course, can be seen in the relative ease with which Johnston's threat was defeated. McClellan's report to the government, however, elicited unwarranted sarcasm from Lincoln.

> You are probably engaged with the enemy. I suppose he made the attack.[2] Stand well on your guard, hold all your ground, or yield any only inch by inch and in good order. This morning we merge General Wool's department into yours giving you command of the whole, and sending General Dix to Fort Monroe and General Wool to Fort McHenry. We also send General Sigel to report to you for duty.[3]

After the battle was over, the wounded cared for, and as many of the dead buried as could be found, McClellan turned his attention to the morale of his troops. "Soldiers of the Army of the Potomac" he addressed them:

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, I, 763-766, 817.
2 Italics mine.
3 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 205.

> I have fulfilled at least a part of my promise to you. You are now face to face with the rebels who are held at bay in front of their capital. The final and decisive battle is at hand. Unless you belie your past history, the result cannot be for a moment doubtful. If the troops who labored so faithfully and fought so gallantly at Yorktown, and who so bravely won the hard fights at Williamsburg, West Point, Hanover Courthouse, and Fair Oaks now prove themselves worthy of their antecedents, the victory is surely ours.
>
> The events of every day prove your superiority. Wherever you have met the enemy you have beaten him. Wherever you have used the bayonet he has given way in panic and disorder. I ask of you now one last crowning effort. The enemy has staked his all on the issue of the coming battle. Let us meet him, crush him here, in the very centre of the rebellion.
>
> Soldiers! I will be with you in this battle, and share its dangers with you. Our confidence in each other is now founded upon the past. Let us strike the blow which is to restore peace and union to this distracted land. Upon your valor, discipline, and mutual confidence, the result depends.[1]

As to more operational matters, McClellan pursued his policy of slowly building up a striking force south of the river. For this he has been severely criticized by those who believe he should have gone over to the offensive as soon as the Confederates withdrew on the evening of June 1. Such critics believe he could have overrun the defenses of Richmond before they could be properly manned by the defeated Confederates. Such an idea is intriguing if one overlooks the facts with which McClellan was actually faced. The rains had flooded the Chickahominy to such an extent that the temporary bridges were washed away. Sumner's corps, while crossing on May 31, had to splash in water knee deep above the bridge surfaces. On

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1 The Life, Campaigns and Public Services of General McClellan, Philadelphia, T. B. Peterson & Brothers, 1864, 68-69.

June 1 when McClellan attempted to return to the north bank of the river after the battle, he found the approaches to the bridges submerged and large sections of the bridges washed away. In addition, the approaches to the New and Mechanicsville bridges were also under water. These facts meant that the only way by which troops from the northern shore could be joined with the three corps south of the river would be by marching them from Mechanicsville to Bottom's Bridge, thence up to the vicinity of Fair Oaks. With the roads in the shape they were, such a march would have consumed the better part of two days, which was time enough for the enemy to man his forts.

Even had a quick crossing been possible, however, an assault would have been dangerous, for it must be remembered the Army of the Potomac was moving places with the intent to stay. This meant that vast quantities of supplies had to be accumulated and guarded. A precipitate advance upon Richmond would have left the lines of communication and the supply depot at White House open to Confederate attack. John Pope was to demonstrate within the year the foolishness of moving too far in front of his base of supplies. Then, too, as long as McDowell was partly expected, McClellan had to retain a good sized force north of the Chickahominy to facilitate McDowell's advance if it were ever started. The advance on Richmond could not be undertaken alone by the three corps which had fought at Fair Oaks nor could the two remaining corps be used effectively. McClellan's decision, viewed from these angles, must be judged to have been sound.

In one respect, McClellan's conduct was, however, seriously in error. On June 1 he wired Stanton that Casey's division (the one which had borne

the first shock of the Confederate attack) had given way unaccountably and disunitedly.[1] This remark led to an investigation which revealed that Casey's division had been composed of the poorest trained men in the army. In addition, morale in the division was low because of sickness and poor work assignments. McClellan, as an army commander who made a fetish of details, was undoubtedly aware of this situation. Yet he allowed a weak unit to be assigned the most crucial position in the army's defensive perimeter. This post should have been assigned to a division such as that of Hooker or Kearny, both of which were rapidly gaining reputations for high morale and combat effectiveness.

The period of consolidation of position after an advance is an especially difficult one for any army. The tremendous need for maintaining the initiative is opposed squarely by the need to replenish supplies, connect lines, re-establish command channels and to replace casualties. The enemy can at most any time revert from defense to at least a limited offense, thus disrupting the effects of many days' preparation. The attack of the German Sixth Army on a thinly held sector of the American line in December, 1944 is illustrative. That attack anticipated by just a matter of hours the resumption of the general offensive by Allied troops. All of those offensive plans had to be changed and several months were required before the last of the German penetration was rectified. McClellan was in such a position in June, 1862.

The first major difficulty with which he had to contend was of personal nature. From the Mexican War onwards, McClellan had been afflicted

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, I, 749.

with periodic intestinal upsets. On the day the battle of Seven Pines began, he was sick in bed. Because he believed his presence necessary on the field, he left his sick bed long enough to visit the battle field on the second day of the fight. Returning to his headquarters, he again went to bed in an effort to shake his illness. While never sick enough to relinquish command, he still was unable to exercise the vigorous sort of personal command which was his personal forte. He remained on light duty until the eleventh, and during the period his own morale, usually exceedingly high, drooped. In a letter to his wife he reflected his low morale:

> It is again raining hard, and has been for several hours. I feel almost discouraged—that is, I would do so did I not feel that it must all be for the best, and that God has some great purpose in view through all this. It is certain that there has not been for years and years such a season; it does not come by chance. I am quite checked by it....[1]

Perhaps had McClellan felt better during these early June days, he might have matured his palns for the advance on Richmond more quickly than was done.

A second major problem was the perennial one of reinforcements. His losses at Seven Pines, although not actually so great as his estimate, he placed at between five and seven thousand men. In addition, his lengthening lines of communications were requiring more and more men to handle. He notified the War Department of his needs and was promised immediate reinforcements by five new regiments due to leave Baltimore on June 7. In view of the fact that new regiments suffered such attrition, through sickness,

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1 McClellan, Own Story, 402.

desertion, and the like, on their way to a fighting zone, the five regiments were but a drop in the bucket to his needs. If the regiments began their move with an average strength of 700 they could be expected to possess an average strength of little more than 500 men by the time they reached the peninsula. Thus the government was offering 2,500 reinforcements to cover losses of upwards of 5,000. McClellan suggested all manner of means by which more men might be obtained for the army, even suggestion that some of the forces of the west be brought east for the attack on Richmond.

It was unfortunate that his concern over reinforcements should have led McClellan to give the government another demonstration of his military pride. McCall's division of McDowell's corps had been ordered to join the Army of the Potomac. McDowell asked that this division be so located as to enable it to revert under the control of the I corps at the first opportunity. McClellan promptly notified the War Department:

> That request does not breathe the proper spirit; whatever troops come to me must be disposed of so as to do the most good. I do not feel that in such circumstances as those in which I am now placed, General McD. should wish the general interests to be sacrificed for the purpose of increasing his command.
>
> If I cannot fully control all his troops, I want none of them, but would prefer to fight the battle with what I have, and let others be responsible for the results....[1]

Such a rejoinder was not likely to increase the general's popularity with those who regarded him as a rather ineffective prima donna anyway.

A third problem requiring solution before the advance on Richmond involved adjusting the Union order of battle on the south bank of the Chicka-

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1 McClellan, Report, 232.

hominy so that sufficient force was there to resume the advance. The front in the vicinity of Seven Pines was heavily reinforced. Franklin's VI corps was transferred and posted on the right of the Federal line. To the left of Franklin were the two corps of Sumner and Heintzelman, while Keyes' corps was maintained in reserve. Porter's V corps remained on the north of the Chickahominy, and General Casey commanded the guard detachment at the supply depot at White House. Sumner, as the senior corps commander south of the Chickahominy, was placed in command of all troops on that side of the river. McClellan retained his own headquarters north of the stream. For the time being, McClellan commanded his own zone of communications by virtue of the transfer of the command of Fort Monroe to General Dix and the placing of that officer under McClellan's orders.

Still a fourth problem or group of problems involved the administration of the army, which had shown weak spots during the early phases of the campaign. Such matters as faulty fuses on artillery shells, inefficient evacuation of dischargees, excessive attrition of horse and mule flesh due to improper distribution of rations and the creation of corps artillery reserve all required the personal attention of the army commander. To guard against leakage of information, he attempted to regulate, under army control, the entrance of civilian personnel into the combat zone. And, of course, the morale of the troops had to be kept high. Before each unit left the north bank for the enclave south of the Chickahominy, they were paraded in full dress before the army commander and given a short speech. Even cantankerous officers had to be dealt with. Sumner, after the battle of Fair Oaks, had taken a spot for his headquarters which was subjected to artillery fire. He repeatedly asked for permission to advance and capture the troublesome battery. McClellan repeatedly refused permission on the ground that such

an attack might precipitate a premature general engagement. McClellan suggested instead that Sumner move his headquarters, which Sumner refused to do until given a direct order to move.[1]

As McClellan was thus engaged tidying up after the battle of Seven Pines and preparing for the next move on the Confederate capital, events had transpired in the Southern camp which were to add materially to the difficulties of the Army of the Potomac, Johnston had been wounded and after a brief shift of command of the army to G. W. Smith, Robert E. Lee became the field commander. In Lee, the Army of Northern Viginia gained possibly the greatest military mind the American nation has ever produced. He was to lead his army, inferior in almost every respect save those of leadership and morale to the Army of the Potomac, through three and one-half years of bitter war. It was to McClellan's disadvantage that he was opposed by Lee at a time when the Confederate regiments were fullest and before Lee's talented lieutenants had been decimated by battle. It is, however, the greatest single factor to McClellan's credit that he was able to oppose Lee at the full tide of Confederate power without sustaining a defeat.

Lee's particular forte was vigorous offensive warfare, believing that he could best defend the Confederacy by striking hard at the Federal troops rather than waiting for the Unionists to strike first. No sooner had he succeeded to the command of the army than he began to ponder how best to wrest the initiative from McClellan. Studying his maps, Lee gradually came to the conclusion that he could strike quickly at the one Union corps lying

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1 Frank Moore, The Civil War in Song and Story, New York, P. F. Collier, 1889, 180.

north of the Chickahominy, which would force McClellan to withdraw the units south of the river. Before finally deciding upon such an operation, however, Lee needed to know how far north Porter's corps actually extended and whether there was room north of the Union positions to concentrate troops enough to crush the exposed corps by a surprise attack.

To obtain the needed information, Lee dispatched his young cavalry leader, J. E. B. Stuart, on an armed reconnaissance. Stuart's alert mind saw in his mission an opportunity for a great triumph over the Union army. He decided that not only could he determine the extent of the Union outposts protecting Porter's corps, but that also he could ride clear around the Union army, perhaps even destroying the depot at White House. So, on June 12, Stuart and a body of some 1,200 troopers moved out of their camps. Between that date and June 15, Stuart's command rode completely around the Union army, destroying a few stores and obtaining the information Lee needed.

McClellan's casual reaction to this raid must be assigned as a failure to evaluate properly an important bit of military intelligence. His one mention of the raid to the War Department was to notify it that "The stampede of last night has passed away."[1] Apparently, he did not attempt to seek reasons why a relatively small force of the enemy had attempted such a hazardous undertaking. A commander, properly alert to the importance of intelligence, needs constantly to assess sudden unexpected movements of the enemy in the light of possible changes in the order of the campaign. McClellan should have seen in Stuart's raid the precise notion which Lee was pondering. Having done so, he might have anticipated the Southern attack which burst so furiously around his right flank later in the month.

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1 McClellan, Report, 231.

To confirm the evidence which Stuart's raid made available, McClellan's troops captured a soldier who claimed to have deserted Jackson's army, which was then believed to be operating in the Shenandoah Valley. This deserter carried the story that Jackson's troops were enroute from the valley to the vicinity of Richmond with the assigned mission of attacking McClellan's rear. This report was forwarded to Washington for interpretation and elicited one of Stanton's most shrewd military papers. Stanton reasoned that Jackson was deliberately circulating stories of moves in different directions with the intent to deceive the Union army. Probably, Stanton suspected, Jackson's real movement was to Richmond. By the time that McClellan saw Stanton's interpretation, hwoever, he had obtained other corroborative information indicating the certainty of Jackson's approach.

Meanwhile, the Union preparations for an advance continued. McClellan planned on a major attack taking place on the 26th or 27th of June. In order for the troops who were to participate in the attack to have a good point of departure, he ordered the troops of Heintzelman's corps, supported by Keyes' troops, to a heavy woods extending a little over a quarter of a mile to their front. From positions thus gained, a better notion of what had to be overcome by the major attack could be obtained. Between 8:00 and 9:00 A.M. on the 25th, Heintzelman's troops began their advance, encountering heavy resistence almost at once. However, by nightfall the limited objectives had all been attained and McClellan could wire Washington that all was quiet. But not for long was it quiet, for on the next day, Lee succeeded in wresting the initiative from the slowly advancing Union armies. So violent was the onslaught that McClellan was fortunate to escape

without sustaining a major defeat.

While he failed to interpret Stuart's raid correctly, McClellan did keep fairly close track of troop movements in Richmond. On the 20th he reported that troops were moving into Richmond from all over the South and that there was no reason to suppose that there was any Confederate intention of evacuating Richmond. In this same letter to the President, McClellan asked permission to lay forth a statement of his views as to the state of military affairs in the entire country. Although on the 22nd he informed Lincoln that the statement would not be submitted for a time, there is reasonable certainty that it was prepared and that it was the paper handed to the President shortly after the Seven Days' battles.

CHAPTER X

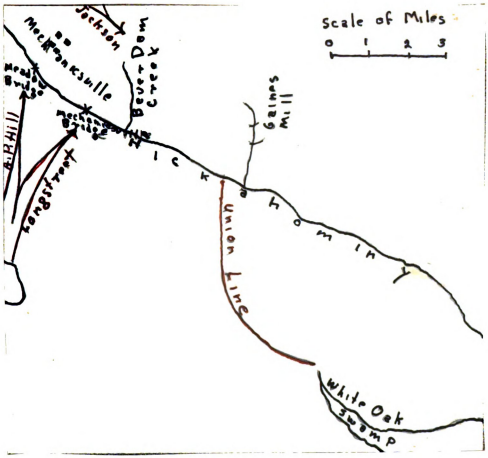
THE SEVEN DAYS

While McClellan was ironing out the difficulties in his position prior to his next major move, General Lee evolved a plan of attack designed to relieve Richmond. Rather than attack the Union left, he resolved to smash at the one corps remaining north of the Chickahominy. He reasoned that such a blow would drive the one corps back against the Chickahominy and force the other four corps either to withdraw from the vicinity of Richmond or else come out of their emplacements for a fight in the open, with the advantage in favor of the Confederates. Lee also reasoned that striking at the Union right would enable him to cut through the Union supply and communications axis running from White House. Of course, such a plan had dangers. McClellan, assailed north of the Chickahominy, could either sacrifice his one corps and push on to Richmond with the four already south of the river, or he could quickly cross Porter's corps south of the river and strike the lightly held defenses of Richmond with his entire army. Lee, however, was willing to take such a chance, believing that even if McClellan elected to attack Richmond, the troops under Huger and Macgruder, left to contain the Union front, were sufficient to delay the attack until the bulk of the Southern forces could be recrossed to their aid. Further, Lee did not believe that McClellan would take such a chance, for to have done so involved cutting loose from supplies and from the entire strategic concept upon which McClellan was operating. McClellan's actual actions, however, were not anticipated by the Confederate

leader, although the possibility of shifting the base had been suggested as an alternative for the Federal troops to adopt. In preparation for the assault, Lee ordered Jackson to move from the Shenandoah Valley. Jackson, in compliance, moved his army, surrounded by the utmost secrecy, in the direction of Richmond. His purposely circulated rumors kept the Union authorities in a turmoil until several days before the actual attack commenced.

On Monday, the 23rd of June, Lee called a meeting of Generals Longstreet, Jackson, A. P. Hill, and D. H. Hill at army headquarters on the Mechanicsville road. Lee stated that Whiting had been sent to the Shenandoah and that the newspapers had been informed of heavy additional reinforcements having been sent there. The reason for the deception, of course, was to conceal the fact that Jackson's valley army was within several marching days of the Chickahominy. Lee told the generals that he had resolved to strike McClellan's army on the north of the Chickahominy and that the four divisions whose commanders were present were selected to do the job. He then retired to the next room, leaving his four generals to work out the details. As Jackson had the longest march to make, he was allowed to set the time for the attack. Overly optimistic, it was set at daylight on the 26th. Lee returned and gave approval to the general plan by which A. P. Hill was to cross the Chickahominy at Meadow Bridge, Longstreet at the Mechanicsville Bridge, and D. H. Hill to follow Longstreet. Jackson was to cross the Chickahominy some seven miles or so above Mechanicsville, to turn the Union right flank. The entire attack was to begin when Jackson was in position and had made liaison with General Branch, who would be

protecting Lee's left. The map below shows the proposed plan of attack.



ATTACK AGAINST PORTER'S CORPS

The following day, Lee confirmed the verbal agreements with the following order:

> At 3 o'clock Thursday morning, the 26th instant, General Jackson will advance on the road leading to Pole Green Church, communicating his march to General Branch, who will immediately cross the Chickahominy and take the road leading to Mechanicsville. As soon as the movements of these columns are discovered, General A. P. Hill, with the rest of his division, will cross the Chickahominy near Meadow Bridge....The enemy being driven from Mechanicsville, and the passage across the bridge opened, General Longstreet, with his division and that of General D. H. Hill,

> will cross the Chickahominy at or near that point—General D. H. Hill moving to the support of General Jackson, and General Longstreet supporting General A. P. Hill—the four divisions keeping in communication with each other, and moving en echelon on separate roads, if practicable, the left division in advance, with skirmishers and sharpshooters extending their front, will sweep down the Chickahominy, and endeavor to drive the enemy from his position above New Bridge, General Jackson bearing well to his left, turning Beaver Dam Creek, and taking the direction toward Cold Harbor, etc.[1]

From all of the evidence he had accumulated, McClellan at last became convinced that Lee, reinforced by Jackson, was about to attack the right flank of the Union army. After notifying Fitz John Porter, commanding the right flank corps, John Dix, commanding at Fort Monroe, and Burnside, located on the North Carolina Coast[2] of the probable attack, McClellan issued a diatribe at the authorities in Washington. He was, he stated, about to be attacked by heavy Confederate forces estimated at about 200,000 troops. If those reports proved true, he warned Washington that he would have a difficult time with his inferior numbers. He would, however, do the best he could and would gladly die with his army if it were overwhelmed. If disaster resulted, he believed that no responsibility could be assigned to him for he had done all in his power to warn the government of the need for more troops.[3]

This off his chest, he turned to more practical matters. As early as the 23rd he had begun seriously to consider shifting his base of supplies from the York River, where it could not be adequately protected, to some

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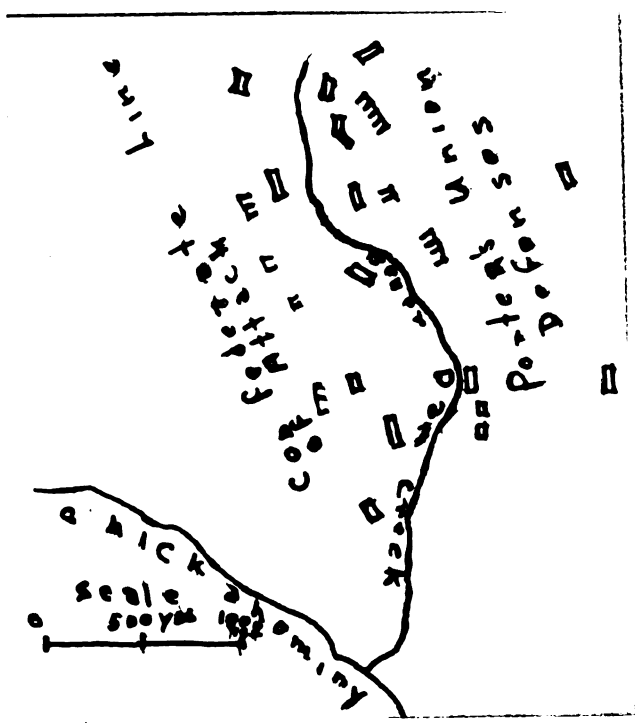
1 B. & L., II, 351-352.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 253, 254, 257.
3 McClellan, Report, 238.

place on the James under the sheltering protection of the Union gunboats. Troops were dispatched overland to select suitable locations for a supply depot and some supplies were ordered from the York to the James without ever having been unloaded. Whether McClellan would use the new base was to depend upon the outcomes of the campaign then commencing. If the defenses proved too formidable, the shift would be made. If, on the other hand, the Union advance continued, White House would continue to be the place over which the life of the army poured in the form of piles of ammunition, bacon, and clothing. In addition, he gave personal attention to the defensive arrangements Porter had made north of the Chickahominy. He went over the corps' dipositions, carefully checking the specific positions of brigades, regiments, and even artillery batteries. The entire defensive position, shown on the map on the next page, was covered by a line of outposts west of Mechanicsville toward Meadow Bridge and by cavalry pickets to the right rear of the corps front.

At midnight of the 25th, McClellan was enough convinced of the imminence of Lee's attack that he wired Porter that Jackson's troops were approaching and for Porter to prepare for battle. To this end, Porter alerted his troops, sent the wagons rearward and ordered the main defenses manned. Early the following morning, McClellan's suspicions were confirmed by increased activity along Porter's front, particularly in front of Reynold's troops. By noon it had become apparent that the Confederates were intending to cross the Chickahominy in force. Porter's general plan called for his pickets to make a strong demonstration well in advance of the main line of defenses. When the Confederates had been forced to deploy

prematurely, the pickets were to withdraw to the main defenses. McClellan, in turn, also made plans and preparations. In an order to Porter, he wrote:

> Your dispositions of your troops are approved by the commanding general....If you are attacked, be careful to state as promptly as possible the number, composition, and position of the enemy. The troops on this side will be held ready either to support you directly or to attack the enemy in their front. If the force attacking you is large, the general would prefer the latter course, counting upon your skill and the admirable troops under your command to hold their own against superior numbers long enough for him to make the decisive movement which will determine the fate of Richmond.[1]



UNION POSITIONS JUNE 25, 1862.

Porter's selection of a defensive line along Beaver Dam Creek was a happy one. The banks of the valley were steep and forces advancing could be

1 B. & L., II, 328.

fired upon from the flanks as well as the front. The stream was over waist deep, hence difficult for men and more so for artillery to pass. After visiting this front and making sure that all was ready, Porter returned to his headquarters to listen to telegraphic reports from the other elements of the army.

At about 2:00 P.M. a single cannon boomed in the vicinity of Mechanicsville announcing the crossings of the Confederates. At once the well-laid plans were implemented and the divisions occupied their positions. At about 3:00 P. M. the enemy began to cross almost simultaneously at Mechanicsville, Meadow Bridge, and above. The Union outposts then began to retire to the east bank of Beaver Dam Creek. After passing Mechanicsville, the attacking force divided into two columns, one taking the road to the right to Ellerson's Mill, while the larger group came into the valley of Beaver Dam Creek. When these troops came within effective small arms range, Union infantry and artillery opened fire with devastating effect. The enemy were driven back. The second column struck against Seymour at Ellerson's Mill, but Seymour's direct and Reynold's flanking fire drove them back. Late in the afternoon the Confederates again launched an assault, but it was broken quite easily and the Confederates were again forced to withdraw.[1]

Early during the fire fight on the 26th, McClellan had gone to Porter's headquarters, where the two generals discussed future plans. In their discussions they were influenced to a considerable extent by reports of Jackson's approach, which would make the Beaver Dam position untenable. McClellan left Porter's headquarters at about 1:00 A.M. on the 27th with the understanding that as soon as he reached his headquarters to check on other

1 Ibid., 330.

developments he would inform Porter of the orders for the next day.

McClellan became convinced that the Beaver Dam Creek position, while successfully defended thus far had its right flank too much in the air and was too far from the main body for prolonged defense. He therefore resolved to bring as much material as possible to the south bank of the river and to withdraw the V corps to a position in a semi-circle guarding the bridges across the river. In this position the flanks would be reasonably secure and the corps would be within supporting distance of the entire army. This plan would allow time for perfecting plans for the movement to the James River.[1] At least part of the decision was based upon reports McClellan received from the other corps commanders concerning the enemy forces in front of their respective positions. Early on the 26th a circular was sent to the corps on the south bank asking how many troops they could spare for the aid of Porter. Heintzelman replied that he could spare two brigades but that they probably would not be in condition to fight. Keyes replied that he could spare none, as it appeared that the forces which were opposing him had not diminished.

The position McClellan selected for the new defenses was east of Powhite Creek about six miles from Beaver Dam Creek. The line of battle was semi-circular with the flanks resting on the Chickahominy. The mid-section rested on the high ground east of the creek. Part of the front was covered by the ravine of the creek and the east bank of the stream afforded ample cover for infantry and artillery. Before sunrise on the 27th the troops had all been withdrawn from Beaver Dam Creek and were deployed in their new positions.[2]

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1 McClellan, Report, 245.
2 B. & L., II, 331.

In addition to possessing great natural strength, the new position of Porter's corps was manned in a most efficient way. Seige guns which had been used on the 26th were withdrawn south of the Chickahominy. From positions protected by Franklin's corps they were used effectively to give flank protection to Porter during the engagement of the 27th. The two divisions of Morrell and Sykes were assigned the perimeter of the enclave with their own reserves strengthened by army artillery. Gaps in the infantry line were plugged with additional sections of guns. McCall's division was kept in corps reserve while Cooke's cavalry was again assigned a flank-protection mission.

Although his full corps was available, Porter quickly saw that his troops were still too few to handle the entire area assigned him. He requested additional men from McClellan, who, although quite willing to provide them, was prevented from doing so because of fears of commanders south of the river. Franklin had been instructed to send Slocum's corps to Porter's aid but the order was cancelled when Franklin represented his position as being in danger of being overrun. Thus Porter was forced to fight the bulk of Lee's army with his own corps alone.

The question naturally arises as to why McClellan did not reinforce Porter, especially after the engagement of the 26th and revealed the extent of Lee's attack. The answer to this question is twofold. Firstly, to have pulled divisions south of the river would have negated much of McClellan's strategic planning. He intended pushing on to Richmond either from the line of the Chickahominy or from a position along the James. To have withdrawn troops would have done exactly as Lee wished and would possibly have so

unhinged the entire campaign as to force a retreat back toward Yorktown. Secondly, McClellan could ill afford to weaken his troops south of the Chickahominy when all of the dispatches from that sector indicated the presence of the enemy in heavy numbers. McClellan's estimates of an enemy force of 200,000 men forced him to keep maximum force at every point at which contact with the enemy had been established. Postwar studies have revealed that his estimate was incorrect. At the time, however, McClellan had to make his estimates on the intelligence he had available. He knew the size of the forces facing Porter. Commanders south of the river reported in such a way as to point to almost equally strong units there. Combining these two pieces of information confirmed his earlier guesses based upon the reports of Pinkerton's detectives. Under these circumstances, McClellan's decision to give Porter as strong a position as possible and to let him fight his battle must be judged sound. To have played a hunch, although possibly paying dividends in the form of a victory, was too dangerous for McClellan to attempt in view of the critical political situation of the Union government.

After seeing to the dispositions of his troops, Porter established his command post at Adams House, from which he could observe a goodly part of his defense. He fully realized the odds his corps faced, but, believing that the life of the campaign, the army, and even the nation depended on his fight, he resolved to hold his ground at least during the 27th.[1]

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1 B. & L., II, 331-336.

Once the disposition of Porter's corps was under way, McClellan needed to give considerable thought to his next moves. He had made up his mind by this time that a change of base was essential. He was concerned about his supplies at White House and took pains to see that they were cleared out insofar as possible. He asked that all future reinforcements be sent to Fort Monroe until the situation could be clarified.[1]

When the action of the 26th was over, Lee called his division commanders together at Lumpkin House to review the situation, although Jackson could not be present. Orders were issued for resumption of the offensive the next morning. When it was launched only feeble resistance was encountered and soon the divisions of Longstreet, A. P. Hill, and D. H. Hill were across Beaver Dam Creek in pursuit of what was supposed was a fleeing enemy. At Gaines Mill, where Lee had expected the Unionists to make their stand, only a rear guard was found which was quickly dispersed. On the Confederates moved to the crossroads of New Cold Harbor. From the woods to the south of that point came a crash of Union artillery, and the Confederate forces realized that they had struck the enemy in perhaps the most defensible position in the entire area.[2]

A. P. Hill committed his division first, deploying his brigades as they arrived. Each brigade hurled itself against the strong Union lines held by Martin and Morell and each was driven back by terrific artillery fire. This procedure lasted from about 2:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. when there came a lull, giving the Union defenders a chance to replenish their

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 265.
2 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 517-520.

ammunition. During the lull, Porter sent a second request to McClellan for aid. Slocum arrived in response to this plea and was used to piece out the line. French and Meagher's brigades of Sumner's corps did not arrive until near dark.

Again the fire fight broke out all along the line, this time, however, involving almost the entire Union position. Longstreet had deployed his division and was trying to help A. P. Hill finish off the affair. Then far to the left, D. H. Hill came up and the Union line was further extended. Back and forth the fight roared; now the Confederates would make some slight gain, only to lose it shortly thereafter to Union counterattack. At 6:00 P.M. the attack died out, only to be resumed a half hour later. That assault was repulsed all along the line. By this time the sun had sunk below the horizon and Porter had begun to think that the worst was over and that he could retire under cover of darkness. Then as the shades of evening were beginning to fall, the entire Confederate line, this time with Jackson's division in position, began to crackle. This last assault was successful, for Hood's Texans managed to cross the swamp which had been holding up the activities all day and entered the Union position. With the position thus broken, the entire line was forced to withdraw, reforming in rear of the Adams House behind Sykes' division and the brigades of French and Meagher.

These two days are perhaps crucial in an evaluation of the entire seven days' battle. If McClellan was justified in his conduct on June 26 and 27, then a good case can be made out for him for the remainder of the campaign. On the face of the evidence, it is fairly easy to criticize him

for not employing the full weight of his army against Lee, for while he finally took definite steps to reinforce Porter, he at no time considered such a drastic step as recalling a full corps to aid in the fight. McClellan himself argues that

> To have done more [recall more troops from the south bank of the river] even though Porter's reverse had been prevented, would have had the still more disastrous result of imperilling the whole movement across the Peninsula.[1]

We know now that his four corps were actually faced by numerically inferior Confederate forces which had the benefit of defensive positions. McClellan, however, was forced to believe that the forces opposing him on the south of the Chickahominy were at least equal to his own since the testimony of his corps commanders and the testimony of his secret service agents supported such a belief. In addition, the Confederates kept up such realistic demonstrations as to keep unbalanced the Union line throughout both days. In this activity John Macgruder was an artist.

It is quite easy for armchair strategists to look at a map and reach the conclusion that a way to complete victory lay open. It is just as easy for subordinate commanders to reach the same conclusion, especially if they can make the stroke. In the fall of 1944 the American General, Patton, brought all sorts of pressure on the Supreme Commander for supplies necessary to sustain a dash into Germany. Eisenhower, however, was obliged to consider matters of over-all strategy in refusing Patton's request. His concept of the entire campaign was based upon the destruction of the German armies along the entire front. Such a purpose would not have been served

1 McClellan, Report, 254.

had Patton been allowed his head. Rather than do the flashy the supreme commander elected to build solidly so that when a breakthrough was made, it would be decisive. In many respects, McClellan was in the same position. There was great pressure for him to do the flashy. He could quite easily either issue orders for the all-out support of Porter or for an all-out offensive against Richmond. In either case, his own strategic concept of the war would not have been furthered. His own concept involved moving south in such numbers and with such weight as to defeat the enemy and to impress him with the full majesty of the Union strength. He tried to do this by operating from a base on the York River, but found that the region to the east of Richmond, the tenacity of its defenders, and the loss of effectiveness through Jackson's threats in the valley prevented this design from being accomplished from that position. He thus resolved to shift his base of operations to the James River.

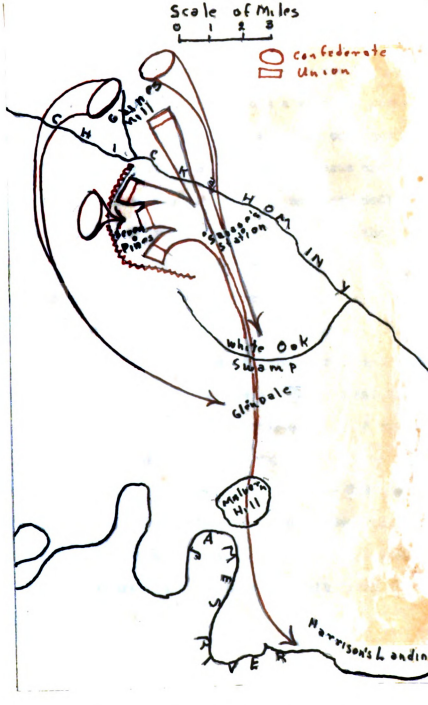
The night of June 27 and the day of June 28 were times of feverish activity for the Union troops. McClellan had become convinced that McDowell would never come to him and that his only salvation lay in withdrawing to the area of the James River some 14 miles to the south. The problems involved were manifold and it was to their solution that McClellan devoted his talents. He needed, of course, to insure that he would be adequately supplied from the James and he early began sending supplies from the York around to the vicinity of Harrison's Bar on the James. At sunset on the 28th, the big supply depot at White House was abandoned to the enemy after General Casey had embarked the defense troops and after some 400 loaded vessels had been sent down the York. White House itself

was burned--this in spite of all of McClellan's previous efforts to save it and the avalanche of criticism his efforts occasioned.[1] For supplies which had moved down the pipe-line toward combat areas, McClellan made other dispositions. All men were to carry three days' rations in their knapsacks. Wagons from all corps were to be sent to Savage's Station to be filled with essential supplies and ammunition. To make room, all unnecessary tents and officers' baggage were to be destroyed. All wounded except the walking wounded were to be left, under the care of medical officers amply provided with supplies of all sorts.[2] Livestock was driven overland to the new base. So important was the sending of supplies that McClellan himself spent a great part of the day at Savage Station expediting the logistical flow.

His tactical problem was several-fold. The path to the James River led over a difficult piece of terrain called the White Oak swamp. This region was quite passable during dry seasons, but during wet seasons the many roads which crossed the swamp became well nigh unpassable. (See map.) McClellan's first objective was to move his army and its trains through this swamp without having Lee fall on his rear. Once the swamp was passed his next job was to traverse the seven road miles from the high ground south of the swamp to positions on the James River under the cover of Union gunboats. This last phase of the move was especially dangerous, since Lee had good roads leading from Richmond from which he could launch attacks at the Federal flanks. The conceptual map on the next page

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 274.
2 Ibid., 272-273.

points out the essentials of the strategy involved.



TACTICAL PROBLEMS JUNE 27, 1862

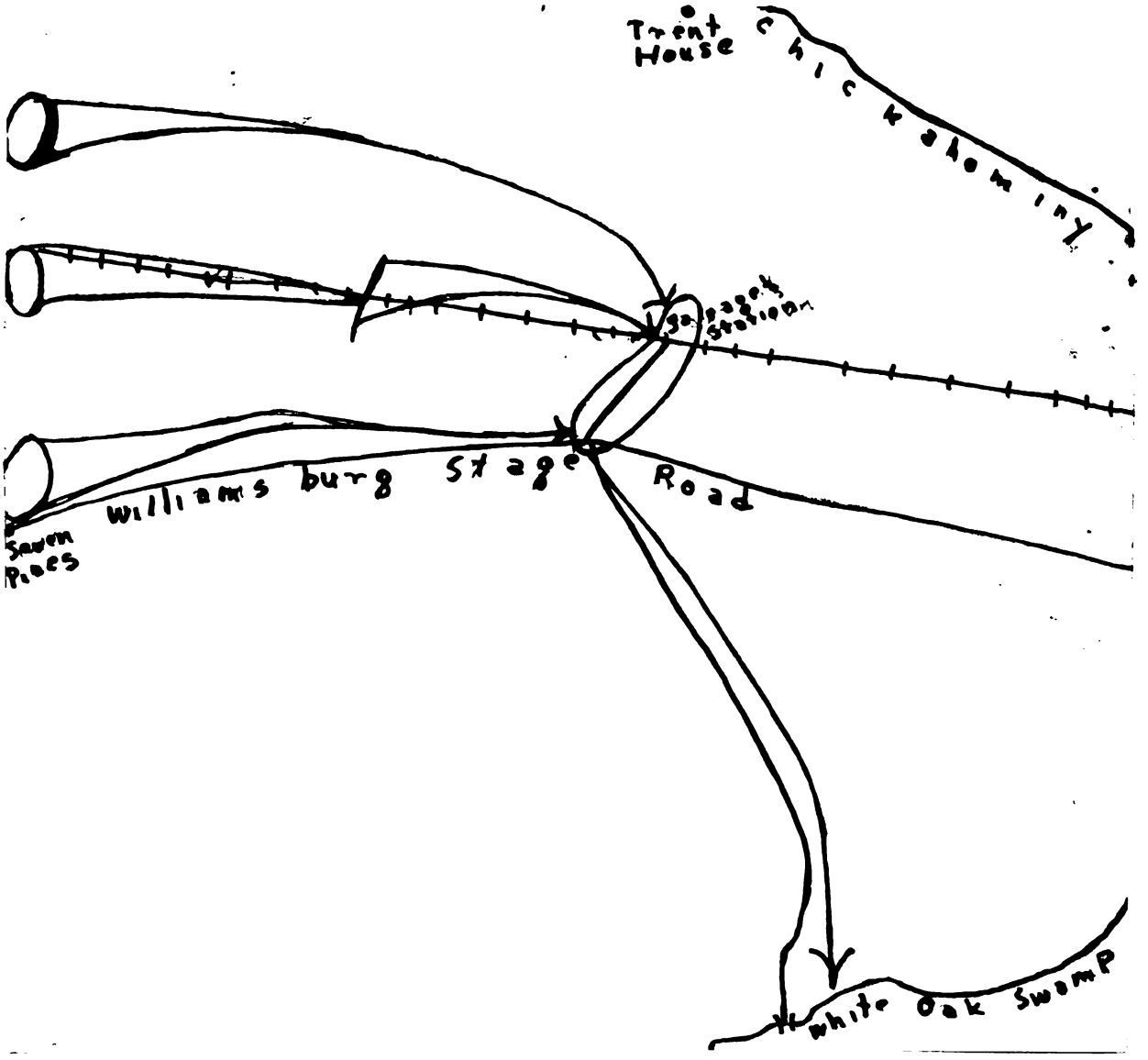
Lee's problem, on the other hand, was equally difficult. As of the morning of June 28, he could not be sure whether McClellan would move farther down the Chickahominy, recross his five corps and strike to re-establish his supply lines up the peninsula or whether he would move to the James. Thus, Lee could not institute a vigorous pursuit until the situation had become clarified. Once he became convinced that the James River was McClellan's destination, Lee had to issue orders getting the bulk of his army south of the Chickahominy and onto McClellan's flanks as he emerged from the White Oak swamp. He gave up the idea of striking McClellan from the rear since the nature of the terrain was such as to make it particularly adaptable for rear guard actions. The way Lee solved his problems throws much light on his own military philosophy and on the capabilities of his subordinates who had to execute the plan. He assigned Jackson the most difficult of the roles. That general was to repair the Grapevine Bridge which Porter had destroyed. Then he was to move along the Chickahominy, sweeping it clear of any Union troops in the area. Longstreet and D. H. Hill were to move to the Charles City and New Market roads and so end up astride McClellan's flank. Macgruder and Huger, who had held McClellan's four corps at bay during the 26th and 27th, were to pursue the Federals and then to make junction with the left flank of Longstreet once he was in position.

At a meeting held late at night at Trent House, McClellan issued the march orders to his corps commanders. Each commander was furnished a map giving the position each was to occupy until the next evening when the

entire army was expected to have crossed the White Oak swamp.[1] Keyes was ordered to disengage his corps and to move across the swamp before daybreak the following morning. He was then to occupy positions from which he could cover the crossings of the rest of the army.[2] Keyes moved, but found that the bridges, destroyed by Hooker earlier in June, had to be rebuilt, so it was several hours after daybreak before the first troops could be crossed. Two of his brigades, however, were south of the swamp, together with several batteries of artillery. These troops were in position guarding the Charles City, New Market, and Quaker roads. By nightfall the rest of his corps was over.[3] Porter's corps, so cut up from Mechanicsville and Gaines Mill, was also crossed over during the day of June 28 and also took up defensive positions. Franklin's corps, occupying the right flank position of the army was ordered to withdraw his corps and to cover the concentration of Sumner and Heintzelman at Savage Station. This was done and an abortive attack by two Georgia regiments was repulsed in the process.[4] Sumner's and Heintzelman's corps and Slocum's division of Franklin's corps were ordered to occupy an arc covering Savage Station. They were to remain all during the day of the 29th and then to fall back across the swamp.[5] Sumner abandoned his works at Fair Oaks at daylight on the morning of the 29th and proceeded to the principal depot at Orchard Station where McClellan had ordered the destruction of all government property. Following the

1 B. & L., II, 369.
2 McClellan, Report, 255.
3 Offic. Rec., I ser., XI, II, 192.
4 B. & L., II, 367.
5 McClellan, Report, 256.

accomplishment of this chore the corps was marched to Allen's field and into bivouac.[1] Heintzelman went to Savage Station on the morning of June 28. He remained throughout that day and the next.[2]



CONCENTRATION AT SAVAGE'S STATION

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, II, 50.
2 Ibid., 98.

While these complex movements were being planned and executed, McClellan took time to write a most curious letter to the Secretary of War. Some analysis of it is in order because of the use critics of McClellan have made of it.[1] "I now know," he said, "the whole history of the day. The corps on the south bank repulsed several strong attacks. The one corps on the other bank was overwhelmed just after I had brought my last reserves in." Now this is obviously an overstatement. There were troops on the south bank of the Chickahominy which could have been employed—troops which saw no action during the day. However, given the validity of McClellan's reasons for not reinforcing Porter, McClellan's statement is not too far from being accurate. The losses he said had been high. He believed that the battle would prove to have been the most desperate of the war. Then he said "Had I (20,000) twenty thousand, or even (10,000) ten thousand fresh troops to use tomorrow, I could take Richmond, but I have not a man in reserve, and shall be glad to cover my retreat, and save the material and personnel of the army." The question, of course, arises as to whether this was just rhetoric or did McClellan actually believe it. One can never be sure, but one can make some guesses. He, as has been emphasized in this work, advocated the set-piece offense in which all troops had a predetermined role to play. He, for a long time, had counted upon McDowell's corps as his mass for maneuver. His plans for a knockout blow always were based upon some such force. He perhaps was only underscoring his need for such a reserve.

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1 Williams, Lincoln Finds a General.

He then repeated that he was not responsible for the loss of the battle. He still hoped, however, to retrieve the Union fortunes, but to do so he was convinced that the government would have to view the war with the same seriousness that he did. The government must send him large reinforcements at once. In this one must suspect that he was more right than wrong. 105,000 troops was none to many for the task with which he was faced. Grant, during the campaign of the summer of 1864, had more troops under his command and yet his fight took all summer. McClellan must be regarded as an alarmist were it not for the fact that his judgment was, in almost every essential respect, vindicated by the subsequent conduct of the war under Grant with the full support of the government. He ended thusly:

> I feel too earnestly tonight, I have seen too many dead and wounded comrades, to feel otherwise than that the government has not sustained this army. If you do not do so now, the game is lost.
>
> If I save this army now, I tell you plainly that I owe no thanks to you, or to any other persons in Washington. You have done your best to sacrifice this army.[1]

These were strong words, yet reading them one must remember that the very fact that Porter was alone on the north bank of the Chickahominy was because of Washington's vacillating policy in reference to McDowell. Had not McClellan been forced to extend that hand to the north in anticipation of McDowell's often ordered junction the change of base might have been accomplished much earlier or the entire army might have been massed on the south of the Chickahominy. McClellan was upset; the telegram was written

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1 McClellan, Report, 258.

as Porter's cut-up units were streaming across Grapevine Bridge; it was bound to reflect that great emotion.

The telegram was, nevertheless, unfair, although the last portion was never received by the Washington authorities. Lincoln and Stanton were doing everything possible to help the army. Lincoln wired Burnside to go at once to the aid of McClellan and Stanton sent more specific instructions for the move. Lincoln also notified Goldsborough that the enemy had broken communications with McClellan and that he should do everything possible to aid the army and to establish communications via the James. General Dix at Fort Monroe was also given the same instructions. Stanton wired Halleck ordering 25,000 men from the west to aid McClellan, specifying the route these troops were to travel. All of these were worthwhile efforts. The only trouble was--they were taken too late. McClellan had recommended such action a month earlier when, had the recommendations been followed, the course of the peninsular campaign might have been altered.

Early on Sunday morning, June 29, McClellan moved his command post from Savage's Station across White Oak swamp. A good portion of that day he spent examining the ground where he believed he would fight once his army crossed the swamp. In crossing the White Oak swamp, he found that a number of tangles had resulted from too many troops and supplies on the poor roads at the same time. These difficulties he straightened out, then turned his attention to the approaches from Richmond, giving orders as to posting of troops and to the placing of obstacles. After examining the ground nearer the James, he reached the conclusion that Malvern Hill was the key to the entire area. He arranged for signal communication

between Malvern Hill and Haxall's plantation, then went aboard Rodgers' gunboat to discuss supply matters. It was Rodgers' opinion that the army should retire to a position below City Point, as the channel closer to Richmond was so near the southern shore that transports could not operate if the hostile shore were defended. Rodgers recommended Harrison's Landing as the best place for concentration of the army.[1]

McClellan's disposition of his troops was such that he could offer maximum protection to elements coming through White Oak swamp. Porter was moved, together with Keyes, closer to the James River to occupy positions near Turkey Bend. The other corps were to hold their ground during the day of June 29 and pass the White Oak swamp that night. Franklin's corps was to cover the final passage of the swamp.[2]

The fighting on June 29 took place at two places--Allen's Farm and Savage's Station. At daybreak on the 29th, Sumner's corps evacuated the works at Fair Oaks and marched via Orchard Station to Allen's Farm. His two divisions were formed to the right of the railroad facing Richmond with Richardson on the right and Sedgwick on the left. At about 9:00 A.M. enemy forces came up to Allen's farm and commenced a furious fire fight against the right flank of the corps. Sumner at once replied with three batteries and infantry fire from French's brigade of Richardson's division. One regiment of French's brigade had occupied a farm house near the point of Confederate attack and from that place finally repulsed the Southern efforts by about 11:00 A.M.[3]

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1 McClellan, Own Story, 429.
2 Ibid., 428.
3 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, II, 50.

At about the time of Sumner's fight, Franklin received word that Confederate troops had occupied Trent's house. Together he and Smith rode to Savage's Station but found no troops at that place. He notified Sumner of this fact, also telling him that he would move Smith's division to fill the gap. Sumner sent back word that as quickly as he could become disengaged at Allen's he would move to Savage's Station. At about this time, Heintzelman rode up and after hearing of the arrangements said he would bring his corps to Savage's Station.[1] A little after noon Sumner's corps appeared and Sumner assumed command of the field.[2] Sumner said later in his report that he ordered Heintzelman to hold the Williamsburg road while he put his own and Franklin's corps in order of battle between the Williamsburg road and the railroad. The left of these two corps rested on a heavy patch of woods while the right curved around and followed the railroad tracks for a short distance.

The day was hot and sultry, and the troops had nothing much to do except wait for either an attack or for nightfall when they could continue their withdrawal. The place had been an intermediate supply depot and large quantities of jettisoned supplies were burning. From time to time shells would burst as the fire reached them. The place also had served as a collecting point for wounded, and about 2,500 Union troops were in hospital tents in the area. Just before 4:00 P.M. Sedgwick and Franklin rode over to one of the hospitals to visit wounded and from there started to visit Heintzelman, whom they supposed was astride the Williamsburg road

1 B. & L., II, 370-371.
2 McClellan, Report, 260.

to their left. As they drew near where they supposed him to be they were fired upon by artillery. A few moments later they received a signal that strong forces of infantry were moving up the railroad accompanied by a railroad car with a rifled cannon mounted on it. Franklin at once reported to Sumner for orders. Sumner ordered Burns to attack the woods near the road, but this was broken up by Confederate artillery. The enemy then launched an infantry attack and managed to break Burns' line. Sumner, however, placed himself at the head of two regiments and charged the gap made in Burns' line. The enemy was finally driven from the woods. Then on the left, Brooks' brigade of Smith's division moved forward along the Williamsburg road. He drove the enemy back, but sustained rather heavy losses.[1] This action continued until after dark.

When the enemy had begun his attack, Sumner fully expected the corps under Heintzelman to have replied. Not until some time later did he discover that Heintzelman had retreated with his entire corps for White Oak swamp. Heintzelman's failure, however, was due to an incorrect evaluation of the situation. He had talked to Sumner earlier in the afternoon and had been invited to help select positions at Savage's Station. Before Heintzelman could go to Savage's Station, he had to return to his own corps to take care of his flank uncovered by Sumner's withdrawal from Allen's farm. After getting his corps on the road, he rode back to Savage's Station, but finding the area quite packed with troops, he assumed that his corps would not be needed. As an aide from McClellan's headquarters came up about this time to serve as guide through White Oak swamp, Heintzelman withdrew his corps.

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1 B. & L., II, 373.

In doing this, of course, Heintzelman was remiss, since Sumner was the senior officer. On the other hand, Sumner's staff work was faulty in not detecting the absence of Heintzelman's corps until the battle actually started. It is doubtful, however, whether the error made any real difference. Macgruder, who commanded the Confederate troops, spent the entire afternoon in fear of a Federal attack and only loosed his attack after pre-emptory orders from Lee. Even then he employed only one division and two other regiments, a force with which Sumner and Franklin were quite capable of dealing.

About a half hour after the fight, Franklin asked Sumner for permission to move out for White Oak swamp. Sumner refused on the ground that he never left a victorious field. Franklin remonstrated and pointed out that he had a clear order from McClellan to move out. Sumner still said no, pointing out that McClellan had issued the order before the fight and that the Union victory changed the entire situation. Just as an impasse seemed to develop, an aide from McClellan came up, indicating that McClellan knew there had been a fight and that he still wanted the withdrawal carried out. This convinced Sumner and he granted permission to Franklin to leave.[1]

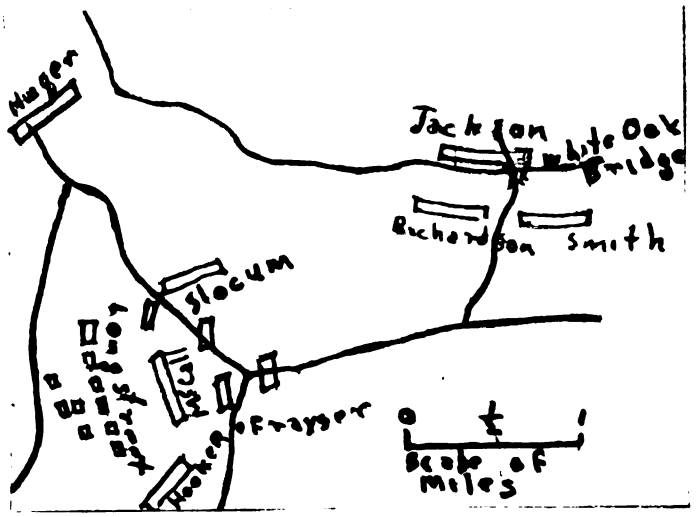
In Washington, Lincoln and Stanton placed the most favorable interpretation on the silence from the Peninsula. A memorandum was sent to Seward, at that time in New York, describing the events of the 26th and 27th and pointing up intelligence that McClellan might be fighting in Richmond. Stanton added several points predicting that McClellan would be in Richmond in two days.[2] Such optimism is characteristic of those who study military

1 B. & L., II, 375.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 274-275.

operations from maps alone. In the spring of 1940 many first-rate military men predicted that the French would cut through the German arm probing toward Abbeville and thus stop the invasion of France. Even those who are in constant contact with battle sometimes fall victim to this over-optimism created by a study of maps. General Patton, at the time of the German breakthrough in December, 1944, suggested allowing the Germans to push all the way to Paris and then cutting the column in half, overlooking, of course, the logistical considerations. The German offensive in 1914 that raced through Belgium was stopped because the German commanders did what Lincoln would have had McClellan do—outrun supplies. Quite possibly a break could have been made for Richmond, but Lee, of course, would have prevented it from being anything more than a costly victory with no real consequences.

Between the end of the battle of Gaines Mill and the opening of the battle of Malvern Hill on July 1, the most crucial engagement was that fought at Glendale or Frayser's farm south of White Oak swamp. At this point, McClellan's retreating army had not yet achieved the protection of Union gunboats on the James. Running past that point, his long line of wagons and heavy artillery were most vulnerable. Lee had quickly seen that if McClellan changed to a base on the James, this region must be the logical point of concentration for the Confederates if their efforts to stop McClellan were to succeed. To this end, Jackson was to cut down along the south bank of the Chickahominy. Macgruder was to follow on the rear of the retreating Union forces. The rest of the troops were to make a wide sweep and come in on the Union flank via the Charles City, Central and New Market roads. When Macgruder demonstrated his incapacity at the battle

of Savage's Station, Jackson was assigned his mission and Macgruder's forces were sent to cooperate in the main effort south of the swamp. If these forces could concentrate so as to bring their full weight to bear on the Union host, McClellan's fine army might be destroyed with, of course, untold political implications. Lee's plan was brilliant in conception and casts great credit upon his aggressiveness, but in evolving the plan insufficient attention was devoted to the details by which it had to be executed. Jackson was assigned the kind of mission at which he was especially adroit. But Jackson and his men were tired. He just did not have sufficient vigor to execute the design Lee had in mind. The timing of the attack on the flank by Longstreet had to be exactly adjusted to that of Jackson on the rear, yet Lee did not coordinate the work of his two lieutenants. Then Lee confidently expected the morale of the Union troops to have been shaken. Yet they replied in kind to the very bloodiest attacks the Confederates could deliver. McClellan was able to occupy good defensive ground and to arm it with just the right number of men to fight the defense and then to slip away during the night. Such tactics prove that McClellan was not adverse to taking chances when the returns to be gained were worth while. By taking these chances he was able to gain much time and to save the bulk of his equipment. Much is often made of the way Lee could read McClellan like a book. One wonders if McClellan might not have been equally literate in reading the enigmatic mind of Lee. Certainly McClellan invariably selected positions Lee felt he had to attack and with the one exception of Gaines Mill, Lee was always foiled in his attempts to secure his objectives.



SITUATION AT FRAYSER'S FARM

By five in the morning on the 30th, all of the elements of the Army of the Potomac had crossed the White Oak swamp and the bridges were destroyed. Some time later in the morning, McClellan took Franklin on a brief tour of the positions around Glendale. They met Sumner and Heintzelman at about 11:00 A.M. for a conference at which McClellan outlined the plans for the next several days. Franklin was given command of the rear guard which had gone into position opposite White Oak swamp bridge. After caring for these matters, McClellan went on to the James to make further arrangements for the concentration of his army and its supplies under the cover of the James River gunboats.

Franklin returned to the banks of the White Oak swamp bridge where two divisions were formed for defense against what was to prove Jackson's entire corps (although not so designated at this stage in the war). Smith's division had crossed the bridge at 3:00 A.M. and went into position

on the left of the road leading from the bridge toward the James. Some artillery was already in position.[1] Richardson's division crossed the bridge and, after destroying it, went into position on the left of Smith's division. As Franklin approached the rear guard positions, a heavy artillery fire from the Confederate side broke out. Jackson had closed up his corps and had massed thirty guns with which he now began to shell the Union positions. The Federals took cover except for the members of Caldwell's brigade, which stayed in the open to guard the Northern guns replying to Jackson's fire. Aside from those in Caldwell's brigade, casualties were light. About fifty wagons, however, were caught in the open and were destroyed. Gradually the Confederate fire grew lighter and except for an abortive effort by cavalry to capture the Union guns, Jackson's operations virtually ended for the day.[2] During the hottest period of Jackson's bombardment, Franklin sent a call for help, and Sumner responded by sending two brigades. When it was realized that Jackson's demonstration was only artillery, the two brigades were returned to Sumner, who used them to good effect in stemming Longstreet's attacks at Frayser's farm.[3]

Thus an essential part of Lee's plan for concentrating on the Federal flank and rear south of the White Oak swamp was blocked by Union thoroughness in destroying bridges and rapidity in occupy strong defensive positions. When Jackson made an abortive demonstration in the direction of Brackett's ford on the Union left, two brigades were quickly dispatched

1 B. & L., II, 375.
2 Ibid., 378.
3 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, II, 51.

from the Union main body to check the attempt. When no longer useful, those brigades were turned back to add weight to the defense along the flanks.

Jackson's activities during this day have been the subject of endless discussion. His fellow officers believed he had done considerably less than he might have in furthering Lee's attack. Franklin claimed that had Jackson either pressed across the river in force in spite of losses or had gone to the end of White Oak swamp and then around it, Lee might have gained a victory. Henderson contends, however, that Jackson was without blame.[1] The initiative for any change in Lee's orders must have come from him, not independent of him. Whatever the relative merits of this polemical battle are, it is not the purpose of this writer to consider them. It is, however, interesting to notice that all of the periods when Jackson demonstrated less than his usual vigor were periods when he was faced by the planning of McClellan. Jackson was late at Mechanicsville, his presence on the Union right flank at Gaines Mill failed to have the effect of lengthening the Union lines; at Savage's Station he failed to join the attack, and at White Oak swamp bridge he was stopped by some burned-out timbers and two Federal divisions. In each situation, the planning of McClellan was apparent, even if the commanding general was some place else.

The Union position at Glendale was essentially a column consisting of two corps; Heintzelman's in front with Sumner supporting from a second

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1 G. F. R. Henderson, Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War, New York, Grosset & Dunlap, [n.d.,] 380-381.

line. There were four divisions on the line. Slocum's division covered the Charles City road. Kearny's right connected with Slocum's left. Heintzelman had planned on using Hooker next, but McCall's division had been halted on the New Market road and so Hooker was forced to give way to the left.[1]

At about 2:00 P.M. the pickets protecting Slocum's left front were driven in and an assault developed. However, it was quickly checked by artillery fire. About the same time, a heavy attack was launched against McCall's position. This attack, made under the cover of artillery, was repulsed and quickly turned into a fire fight lasting about two hours. At about four in the afternoon, the Confederates broke off the engagement and a heavy attack was made farther to the right against Kearny's position. Wave after wave of Southern lines advanced, although Kearny poured a most murderous artillery fire upon the attackers. Finally it was perceived that artillery would not suffice and the 37th New York regiment made a determined counterattack. The Southern front line was driven back far enough again to be brought under the fire of artillery.[2] Again the direction of attack shifted, and McCall's division was struck, a full brigade being directed at Randall's regular artillery. This assault was successful and McCall's troops were forced to fall back, being covered as they did so by artillery and infantry fire from Sedgwick's division supporting them. Hooker then began to drift to the right, covering the position vacated by McCall's men. At the same time, the two brigades

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, II, 100.
2 Ibid., 163.

which had been with Franklin came on the field and were employed to close the gap made between Hooker and Kearny. A further Southern attack was made on the left flank of Kearny, but it was driven back. As darkness fell, the attacks resolved into artillery firing lasting until 10:00 or 11:00 P.M.

At nightfall, Franklin at White Oak swamp assumed that his mission had been completed and after notifying Sumner of his intention, began to move his command toward the James. General Smith had, earlier in the day, investigated roads and found one that ran straight to Malvern Hill. Along this road Smith's division moved, followed an hour later by Richardson's division. The troops reached the James just before daylight.[1] Sumner received Franklin's note and so was forced to begin his own withdrawal, reaching the James early in the morning.

Meanwhile, McClellan, on the James River, received reports of the day's activities, sent runners to Heintzelman and Sumner to withdraw. These runners found those two corps already en route.

About 4:00 P.M. the enemy began to appear on Porter's front at Malvern Hill. At about 5:00 a Southern advance was begun, but quickly was stopped by fire from the gunboats and from artillery on Malvern Hill.[2]

The seven days' battles came to a roaring, blazing climax and finale on the slopes of Malvern Hill as Lee threw his army at the strongly defended Union position and was repulsed. In one sense, the battle of July 1 demonstrated in bold terms Lee's outstanding characteristics as a strategist and

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1 B. & L., II, 379.
2 McClellan, Report, 269.

as a tactician. The design by which Lee finally brought his army together before the slopes was masterly, although, as has been shown, poorly executed. Once his strategic design had been accomplished, however, Lee demonstrated a weakness in execution which was later to be so tragically shown at Gettysburg. In spite of warnings passed on to him from a native of the vicinity as to the impregnable character of the hill, Lee persisted in making an assault that was costly and gained nothing except loss of life. Much has been written of the way Lee studied the various opponents and then fitted his tactics to them. By July 1, it should have been clear to Lee that McClellan's objective was to secure a safe base of operations on the James River, easy of access to water transport. Malvern Hill would not serve, since the channel of the James had so narrowed down as to make it difficult for transports to be safe from artillery fire from the south of the river. The position at Harrison's Landing was the logical objective for the Union army. Thus, in failing to destroy that army at Frayser's farm, Lee would have been well served to have allowed McClellan to finish his movement. If McClellan was inclined to over-estimate the strength of the enemy, so Lee was inclined to underestimate the defensive talents of his opposite number.

On the afternoon of June 29, McClellan ordered Porter to move that night by road to Malvern Hill, there to select a position behind which the army and all its trains could be withdrawn. General Keyes was to move by a different road to form his right and rear.[1] Malvern Hill is an

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1 B. & L., II, 407.

elevated plateau about a mile and a half long by three-quarters of a mile wide. It had been well cleared of timber and was criss-crossed by several roads. In front of the hill are a number of ravines. The ground sloped gently toward the north and east to the woodland, thus providing clear ranges for artillery. To the northwest, the hill falls off more steeply into a ravine which extends to the James River. The enemy's position after the battle of Frayser's farm was such that his most obvious line of attack would be from the direction of Richmond and down the Quaker road from the White Oak swamp. This axis would probably strike the Union left flank, hence that portion was strengthened more than the right wing. Porter's corps of Sykes and Morell's divisions were assigned the left flank, together with the artillery reserve. Next to Porter was placed Couch's division, then Kearny, Hooker, Sedgwick, Richardson, Smith, Slocum, and the remainder of Keyes' corps. McCall was placed in army reserve in rear of Porter and Couch. The artillery was spotted so that some sixty guns could fire concentrations on almost every point. In addition to the field artillery, ten heavy weapons had been mounted on the very crest of the hill. To protect the left flank of the army, a small brigade and artillery was placed quite low on the edge of the hill protecting in the direction of Richmond via the River Road.[1] On the river, Rodgers placed his gunboats so that they could lend their fire to the defense.

About 3:00 P.M. Monday, June 30, Confederate troops were seen approaching by the river road, but their attack was driven off by artillery and gunboat fire. That night the troops stayed in position as the army concentrated.

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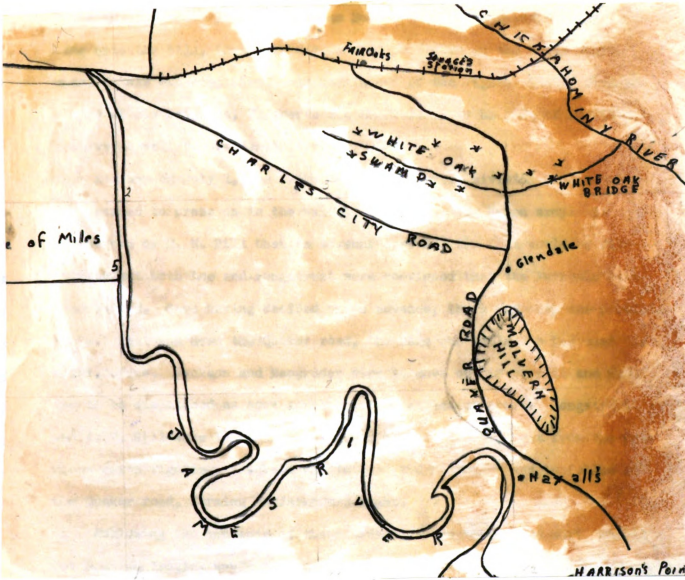
1 McClellan, Report, 270.



MALVERN HILL

Early Tuesday morning, McClellan rode the field and directed that certain changes be made in the defensive positions so as to take better advantage of the terrain. The artillery on the line was reorganized and made responsible to General Griffin. Infantry were placed in between the

batteries for their protection.[1] As Sumner's and Heintzelman's corps came onto the hill, they were directed to positions on the Union right where it was expected they would remain out of the fight. Sumner furnished two of his brigades, Meagher's and Caldwell's, to be part of Porter's reserve as well as some artillery.[2]

At dawn on July 1, Lee talked with his various division commanders and decided to press on in the wake of the retreating Union army. He was warned by D. H. Hill that an advance over Malvern Hill would be disastrous but both Lee and Longstreet were convinced that the Federals were demoralized. Once having decided on an advance, there was only one possible route. That was down the Quaker road, the same one McClellan had used the night before. Jackson and Macgruder were to move out in pursuit and Huger was to be dispatched as soon as he appeared at headquarters. Longstreet and A. P. Hill were to be in reserve, as they were both spent from the previous day's fighting. Jackson was to lead and Macgruder was to follow on the Quaker road, forming on Jackson's right.

Following the issuance of these orders, there took place what, had it not been so tragic, would have been a virtual comedy of errors. Macgruder, who was supposed to share with Jackson the burden of the attack, got lost on another Quaker road leading off away from the direction of the enemy. He arrived on the field of Malvern too late to be effective, but in plenty of time to create confusion. Jackson had struggled through the swamps and forests at the base of Malvern Hill and had at last found positions for his

1 B. & L., II, 413-414.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, II, 52.

artillery.[1]

By 8:00 A.M. pickets in front of Couch's division detected signs of the Confederate approach and at 9:00 A.M. Berdan's sharpshooters had been driven in.[2] Then about 10:00 A.M. the enemy began to probe with artillery and infantry fire up and down the length of Porter's and Couch's front. This fire did little damage and was not returned to any appreciable extent. It was an essential of Porter's plan to use his artillery insofar as possible in repelling attacks, and that arm, was able, in the opening phases, to repel infantry attacks made in brigade size, upon Morell and Couch.[3] For the Union cause it may have been too bad that Porter was not present at Gettysburg to direct the use of artillery.

All afternoon an artillery fire was kept up during the course of which the Union guns overpowered the few the Confederates were able to fight. It was a fine afternoon—hot, but with a cooling breeze—and the troops waited the expected onslaught by the Southern troops with much patience and fortitude. Finally, about 4:30 in the afternoon, there came a lull in the firing something similar to that preceding the attack at Gaines Mill. This was followed by heavy artillery preparation from nearly the entire Confederate front. Soon after, a heavy attack was launched at Griffin's brigade, but artillery stopped it and that enemy formed a firing line where its movement had been arrested.[4] Then followed spasmodic attacks by regiments and brigades against both Morell and Couch. These were cut down by shrapnel, grape,

1 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 588-594.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, II, 203.
3 B. & L., II, 415.
4 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, II, 203.

and canister, while the infantry held its fire to be used later at short ranges.[1] Frequently during this stage of the fight Union regiments would become so filled with enthusiasm that they would leave their positions to drive off attacks with short range rifle fire and bayonet.

During this lull at 4:30, Porter had taken precautions in event the enemy did break through, and so sent batteries of artillery to the gorge back of Crew House, through which the enemy must pass if they broke the Union position. At the same time, he sent a call for help from Sumner, who responded by sending Meagher from his own and Sickles from Heintzelman's corps. Both of these brigades were thrown into the fight shortly after 7:00 P.M. as the Confederates seemed to be gathering for a new assault. Porter himself led Meagher's brigade into position and saw that Sickles went into the fight.[2] Shortly afterwards, Porter and Heintzelman pushed some of the reserve artillery forward and blazed away at the broken attackers.

Almost at the crisis of the battle, the gunboats on the James River opened fire, but were firing short and killing the defending troops. Good signal service work flashed the message to the boats "For God's sake stop firing." This was done.[3]

From the southern side, attacks, particularly artillery and rifle fire, were maintained until after 8:30 in the evening when the last shots were fired. When the field became silent except for the moans of some 5,000 Confederates wounded on the field, the Union army found itself in a position

1 B. & L., II, 417.
2 Ibid., 421.
3 Ibid., 422.

either to remain on Malvern or to continue implementing the strategic plan of its commander, i.e., movement to Harrison's Landing.

Porter returned to his headquarters at Malvern House at about 9:00 P.M. and sent off a note to McClellan recommending that the retreat of the army be halted at that point. He believed that that ground could be held and that it might be possible to pass over from it to the offensive.[1] McClellan, however, was convinced of the need for reaching a point where supplies could be brought to him with certainty. Harrison's Bar was selected as the new position for the army and so orders were issued for the new concentration.[2]

The order prescribed a movement to the left and rear with Keyes' corps, on the extreme right flank, to cover the retreat. It had been sent through Porter's headquarters, who sent them on to the proper officers. By daybreak on July 2, the troops were well on their way, reaching Harrison's Landing during the second amidst a driving rainstorm.[3] The last of the wagons did not reach Harrison's Bar until after dark on July 3 followed by Keyes' rear guard.[4] The Confederates attempted no pursuit. The heavy rainstorm on the second and uncertainty regarding McClellan's position prompted Lee to remain in the vicinity of Malvern until July 3.[5]

Lee's defeat at Malvern Hill virtually ended the peninsular campaign. McClellan had maneuvered and fought his way to within a few miles of the

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1 Ibid., 423.
2 McClellan, Report, 233.
3 B. & L., II, 423.
4 McClellan, Report, 274.
5 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 604.

Confederate capital, then, finding further advance blocked by a strong Confederate offense, shifted his base of operations south to the James River. The opposition in the north at once raised a storm of protest, contending that McClellan had been defeated and should be relieved. Such protests, however, were not justified either by the facts of the situation in 1862 or by comparison with other developments later in the war. Lee had conceived of an offensive the major objective of which was to destroy McClellan or force him back up the peninsula to Fort Monroe. Neither of these objectives was achieved, for the strong Union defenses were more destructive to Lee's troops than the Confederate attacks to the Union army. In addition, McClellan sensed Lee's second objective and foiled its achievement by moving to a position from which the advance on Richmond could be resumed whenever sufficient strength could be accumulated.

McClellan's successes were doubly significant in view of the faulty cooperation he received from the central government. The Federal government, by its crucial military decisions, rendered the Confederate cause inestimable aid. These decisions, catalogued, would make a veritable handbook of possible errors in the conduct of war, ranging as they did from denying a field commander the minimum force he deemed essential to make the campaign to writing sarcastic notes indicating a general disapproval of the conduct of operations. Perhaps McClellan's results would have been the same had he received the strongest support from his government. It must be presumed, however, in view of what he was able to achieve and in view of his over-all planning, that, granted even a token of cooperation, Richmond would have fallen in the early fall of 1862.

CHAPTER XI

McCLELLAN UNHORSED

McClellan's design for the change of base was nearly completed during the day of July 2, although the last of his 40 mile column of wagons did not come under the protection of the gunboats until the evening of July 3. The army, as can be imagined, was exhausted, having fought each day and marched each night since the 25th of June. As the corps pulled into their concentration areas, generals and other officers alike failed to carry out the instructions of the commanding general regarding security. This situation was finally corrected by July 4 when Stuart, in advance of his own infantry support, occupied high ground commanding McClellan's position and began to shell it. McClellan himself posted Smith to retake Stuart's position, and then assigned corps commanders more specific positions to make the enclave secure.[1]

McClellan regarded July 2 as crucial. If his worn troops were not attacked during the driving rains of that day, he believed he could be ready to repulse any attack.[2] However, he was also concerned about his wagon trains. Keyes had been assigned rear guard duty, but McClellan, feeling that Keyes might need additional support, ordered part of the army cavalry to return to Malvern to protect the wagons. Any wagons which could not be saved were, of course, to be destroyed.[3] The heavy artillery was regarded as a great deal more important than some of the wagons.[4] In addition to his immediate concerns, McClellan was, as usual, bothered with the

1 McClellan, Own Story, 444.
2 Offic. Rec., I ser., XI, III, 288.
3 Ibid., 288.
4 Ibid., 289.

problem of replacements. His losses had been heavy—at first guess between five and seven thousand men. In addition, straggling had been fairly serious during the long marches. On July 3 he estimated his effective force as being somewhere around 50,000 men. He wrote to Stanton once again, and mentioned his belief that half-way measures were not enough. He would need, in order to re-attack Richmond, some 100,000 more troops; the country's salvation, he thought, depended upon action on a gigantic scale.[1]

On July 4 things looked a little better to the commanding general. He wrote on that date a fairly long letter to the President giving a resume of the Seven Days, particularly Malvern Hill. He described his position, pointing out that it could be carried frontally only by overwhelming numbers. He warned, however, that as yet his communications by the James were not secure.[2] The south bank could be seized by an alert Confederacy and his enclave could be bottled up by a determined foe. Lincoln apparently understood the situation and informed McClellan that he had better go on the defensive for a time. If the James River position was not tenable, then a further shift should be made.[3]

McClellan was also cognizant of the needs of the entire theater of operations. He wrote to Lincoln that the newly-formed Army of Virginia ought to keep cavalry well out in the direction of Richmond to detect any move on Lee's part to attack Washington rather than the Army of the Potomac. If Lee did attempt such an attack, McClellan promised the President that he would

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1 Ibid., 292.
2 McClellan, Report, 277-278.
3 Ibid., 278-279.

move vigorously on Richmond to divert it.[1]

One bone of contention held by detractors of McClellan was the Proclamation the general published to his command on July 4, 1862. They claim that such a proclamation was out of place inasmuch as no forward movement of the army had been achieved. Some analysis of the document might well be in order. He said:

> Soldiers of the Army of the Potomac:
>
> Your achievements of the last ten days have illustrated the valor and endurance of the American soldier. Attacked by vastly superior forces, and without hope of re-enforcements, you have succeeded in changing your base of operations by a flank movement, always regarded as the most hazardous of military expedients. You have saved all your material, all your trains, and all your guns, except a few lost in battle, taking in return guns and colors from the enemy. Upon your march you have been assailed day after day with desperate fury by men of the same race and nation skillfully massed and led; and under every disadvantage of numbers, and necessarily of position also, you have in every conflict beaten back your foes with enormous slaughter.
>
> Your conduct ranks you among the celebrated armies of history. No one will now question that each of you may always say with pride, "I belonged to the Army of the Potomac!"
>
> You have reached this new base complete in organization and unimpaired in spirit. The enemy may at any moment attack you. We are prepared to receive them. I have personally established your lines. Let them come, and we will convert their repulse into a final defeat. Your Government is strengthening you with the resources of a great people.
>
> On this our nation's birthday we declare to our foes, who are rebels against the best interests of mankind, that this army shall enter the capital of their so-called Confederacy; that our National Constitution shall prevail, and that the Union, which can alone insure internal peace and external

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 294.

> security to each State, must and shall be preserved, cost what it may in time, treasure, and blood.[1]

Compare it with the following order issued by General Dwight Eisenhower on December 22, 1944 under circumstances somewhat analogous.

> By rushing out from his fixed defenses the enemy may give us the chance to turn his great gamble into his worst defeat. So I call upon every man, of all the Allies, to rise now to new heights of courage, of resolution and of effort. Let every one hold before him a single thought--to destroy the enemy on the ground, in the air, everywhere--destroy him! United in this determination and with unshakable faith in the cause for which we fight, we will, with God's help, go forward to our greatest victory.[2]

The government during these several days blew hot and cold on the need for reinforcing McClellan. Stanton informed him that 5,000 men had been sent from McDowell's corps, while 25,000 would be forthcoming from Corinth.[3] Lincoln informed him that Burnside would reinforce him as well as Hunter, but that the troops from Corinth could not be spared.[4] Both men promised Chief-of-Staff Marcy that aid would be sent--10,000 from Hunter, 11,000 from the defenses of Washington, and even 10,000 from Halleck.[5] And yet there was a note of reluctance about the matter which foreshadowed future developments. Lincoln wrote on the second that he hoped the army was having some rest. In this hope he wanted "to reason" with McClellan a moment. He could not possibly fill McClellan's requisition for 50,000 men. In fact he said he had not, outside the Army of the Potomac, 75,000 troops east of the

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 299.
2 D. Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, New York, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1948, 354-355.
3 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 281.
4 Ibid., 291.
5 Ibid., 294.

mountains. The idea of sending 50,000 men was "absurd." He said further that McClellan should be relieved of any feeling that Lincoln blamed him for not doing more. However, he added, don't ask impossiblities of me.[1] And yet was it possible that Lincoln had all along been asking impossibilities of McClellan by insisting upon an inadequately mounted offensive?

As the dangers of immediate attack began to fade, McClellan turned his attention to various administrative chores. In order to insure medical aid with regiments at all times, the position of brigade surgeon was abolished. Instead, surgeons were detailed to each regiment and enjoined not to leave their regiments at all during the course of operations. This, in effect, created what in the present day American army would be a battalion aid station. The next echelon of medical service was the corps medical reserve corps acting as an evacuation hospital. The corps surgeon was made the accountable officer for all medical matters arising within the corps.[2] To insure each corps commander adequate cavalry for local needs, one squadron of cavalry was assigned to each corps. The rest of the army cavalry was posted so as to keep the army commander properly informed of all enemy activity in the vicinity.[3] To insure the army commander better knowledge of the internal workings of the entire command, the Inspector-General was given very specific instructions as to frequent visits to units. The Inspector-General was granted leave to use aides from the army staff if needed for this purpose. "The discipline, instruction, equipment, health and comfort of the troops, the character of the supplies furnished the

1 Ibid., 286.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 307.
3 Ibid., 307-308.

troops, their quantity and quality, the police and healthfulness of camps" were all subjects to be covered in such inspection. Reports usually were to be verbal to the Chief-of-Staff.[1]

In a civilian American army, the virus of politics seems to be in the blood of everyone. A growing abuse in McClellan's army was the practice of each individual to want to "hand-carry" papers bearing on personal matters which required action at army headquarters. With the need for planning the next phases of the campaign, staff officers should not be bothered by such individual conferences. McClellan issued a general order to stop the practice.[2]

While he made constant demands upon the Washington government for more men, McClellan was not idle in trying to salvage as many as he could from his own resources. He acted promptly to stop the practice of lightly wounded men being evacuated clear to the transports. He further tried to prevent the discharge of men whose wounds were not permanently incapacitating. He asked authority to send soldiers to each locality from which regiments had been recruited, with the hope of picking up deserters and returning them to duty. He also placed on special duty several of his brigade commanders to recruit replacements. He strongly urged that any replacements sent in the future by the states should be sent to fill vacancies in existing units rather than as members of newly created units. In this respect he foreshadowed the system of replacements made so effective in World War II. A limited number of divisions were created in 1941-1943. Thereafter,

1 Ibid., 324-325.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 339.

many of them were kept in the line for upwards of several hundred days. Such prolonged sessions under fire with the pressure on the enemy which resulted was possible only by refilling each unit every several days. McClellan very early saw the benefits of such a system. With it he could take the field quite early after receipt of newly enlisted increments of troops.[1] In this same connection he believed that he could obtain better officers by promoting from the ranks rather than by receiving newly commissioned officers with the new levies.[2] He also made successful efforts to retrieve prisoners of war, exchanging prisoners with the Confederates.[3]

So much has been written about the rather close alliance "Stonewall" Jackson believed he had with God that little attention has been given to McClellan's devoutness. He, as well as "Stonewall", constantly invoked the aid of the divinity and he, as well as Jackson, used the authority of his office to insure church attendance. He believed that not only was complete rest on Sunday good for the souls of men, but men and animals both needed the rest for their physical persons as well.[4] Nor was this all there was to McClellan's Christianity. He believed his wounded as well as wounded of the Confederacy who were in Lee's custody had needs beyond those which could be supplied by Confederate resources. To rectify this, he caused to be sent to Lee's camp a boatload of hospital supplies, food, brandy, and the like. In doing so he correctly sensed that he might be criticized by the abolitionists to whom any aid to the enemy was treason.

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1 Ibid., 338.
2 Ibid., 323.
3 Ibid., 320.
4 McClellan, Own Story, 445.

He also made special efforts to visit all wounded who were daily being returned from Richmond.[1]

On July 22, Stanton had issued an executive order authorizing military commanders to seize any real or personal property in the states of Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and Arkansas necessary for military purposes. It also directed the employment of Negroes from those areas and the payment to them of wages and provided for accurate record keeping for future compensation. On August 9, McClellan published a general order interpreting this document to the command. After giving very specific instructions as to the matters covered by the order, he went on to say:

> The general commanding takes this occasion to remind the officers and soldiers of this army that we are engaged in supporting the Constitution and laws of the United States and in suppressing rebellion against their authority; that we are not engaged in a war of rapine, revenge or subjugation; that this is not a contest against populations, but against armed forces and political organizations; that it is a struggle carried on within the United States and should be conducted by us upon the highest principles known to Christian civilization.[2]

In writing this, McClellan reveals himself to have represented a different school of military thought from more modern leaders, and, of course, part of his unpopularity stemmed from this fact. McClellan saw quite clearly that war was only a political tool--that after the guns stopped, people had to go on living together. As a political tool, war should be concerned with only political objectives and should not be directed against individual

1 Ibid., 455.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 364.

persons or their property. There was growing up, however, in Europe and in America a generation of military leaders who placed their sole reliance upon military victory gained by any means possible. Only after victory could the matter of political ends be considered. Unconditional surrender, war of devastation, complete destruction of the enemy's capacity or will to wage war, war to the death were all phrases of the newer school. Sherman clearly represented this newer generation, as did Grant. True, in victory they were magnanimous, but the thought of political matters only after victory. The new school had, during the twentieth century, been victorious over the older notions. By the second World War, even a great political leader so absorbed this new doctrine as to call for unconditional surrender of an entire nation without apparently pondering very long the political implications of such a position. McClellan was probably old-fashioned in his views on warfare; yet who is to say he was wrong? Too much bitterness has been generated in a world in which unconditional surrender has become the legitimate object of war.

The purposes of McClellan's various administrative measures was, of course, to prepare his army to take the field again at the earliest opportunity. As early as July 5 he wrote to Adjutant General Thomas that the army was rapidly reaching the point where a resumption of the offensive was possible. "You may rest assured," he told Thomas, "that Richmond will be taken if I am properly supported. I will not fall back another mile."[1] Letters to McClellan's wife breathe the same spirit. On the 10th he told her that if properly supported, he would yet take Richmond—that he was not

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 299.

discouraged—that he was in better health than he had been in months.[1] On the 13th, he still hoped to take Richmond that summer unless the government committed some extraordinary blunder. He added, though, that he had no faith in the administration.[2] On July 7 in a long letter to General Pope, who had been brought east to command troops around Washington, he pointed out that his army was in good shape and getting stronger. He needed reinforcements but doubted whether he could even restrain the offensive spirit of his rejuvenated army long enough to receive them. He suggested that Pope might well make some move to divert part of the pressure the Army of the Potomac faced from Richmond.[3] As he thought of resuming the offensive, Petersburg and the main rail connections into Richmond from the south began to loom larger and larger in his mind. If he could secure a footing on the south bank of the James, he could perhaps strike south of Richmond and cut that city from its vital source of supplies. To this end he requested ferry boats from the government with which he could move infantry.[4] He followed this by an alert order to the corps commanders to conduct shortage inspections and to prepare their respective organizations for a resumption of active operations.[5] With such an idea in mind, he thought that if the forces promised him from Burnside and from Hunter were sent, he could most certainly take the Confederate capital during the remainder of the summer. If he decided to move from the James River via

1 McClellan, Own Story, 446.
2 Ibid., 448.
3 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 307.
4 Ibid., 310.
5 Ibid., 318.

Malvern Hill up the Charles City, Middle and New Market roads on Richmond, Burnside would be expected to occupy the south bank of the James, thus providing flank protection and tying up any troops which might be concentrating at Petersburg. If, on the other hand, the move of the entire army were toward Petersburg, Burnside's troops would serve to deepen the base of attack.[1]

But while McClellan was becoming more optimistic about the prospects, his plans were being criticized by some of his subordinates. General Keyes, after the Seven Days' battle, became almost hysterical in pleading for his own plan for the future use of the Army of the Potomac. On June 30, after reaching Haxall's plantation, he sent word to General Dix that he had arrived safely and that Dix should notify the reporters so as to ease the public mind.[2] On June 10, he directed a long letter to Lincoln, pointing out that the failure to reach Richmond had given a serious outlook to the army. He reasoned that the area occupied by the army at Harrison's Landing was of such a nature as to destroy the army through heat and sickness. Moreover, the enemy, he thought, could quickly cut off the entire position. In order to move over to offense, the army would need 100,000 reinforcements. No one, he said, would recommend less. And since that number was too large to be supplied, he recommended the withdrawal to Washington, and the passage of a draft act. The move should be made certainly within 48 hours.[3] On the 21st he addressed a similar tirade to Meigs and another on the 27th. This time he voiced the opinion that there were at least 200,000 troops in

1 McClellan, Report, 284 and Own Story, 449.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 283.
3 Ibid., 314.

and about Washington.[1] Barnard, upon whose opinion McClellan had come to depend for some of the crucial matters pertaining to plans, brought pressure to bear on the Washington authorities for a change.

Meanwhile, in Washington, President Lincoln had been beset by a terrific campaign to oust McClellan. The radical members of Wade's and Chandler's committee on the Conduct of the War, Stanton and Chase, began to exert pressure on the President to achieve this end. As a prelude to the full scale attack, John Pope had been foisted off on the President as being a general who could win victories. On June 26 he was brought east to take command of all the various troops around Washington and in the Shenandoah, with his force being named the Army of Virginia. Pope held ideas that were dear to the hearts of the radicals. On July 14 Pope addressed a proclamation to his troops that redounded in bombast and wild clichés. By special assignment of the President, of course, all such transfers are by special assignment, he assumed command and then spent two weeks finding where the troops were. He had come from the West where they had always seen the backs of the enemy. He had come from an army whose business it had been to find the enemy and attack--never defend. He presumed he had been called East to do the same thing. It was his purpose to do that and to do it speedily. He then sarcastically referred to "taking strong positions," "lines of retreat," and "bases of supplies." "Let us," he said, "study the probable lines of retreat of our opponents, and leave our own to take care of themselves."[2] Some said this address had been written by Stanton as a way of

1 Ibid., 339.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III.

hitting at McClellan.[1]

In a severe quandary in the face of political pressure, concern over possible foreign recognition of the Confederacy, shortage of money, and approaching emancipation, Lincoln decided to visit McClellan at Harrison's Bar to decide what next should be done. That Lincoln had a fair idea as to what would be done even before his visit seems obvious. The questions he asked while there,all seemed designed to elicit the kinds of responses he wanted. The most pointed one was "If it were desired to get the army away from here, could it be safely effected?"[2] General Keyes and Franklin agreed to the move, but the rest opposed it in the strongest terms. Sumner said "We would give up the cause if we do it." Heintzelman thought it "would ruin the country." Porter's response was "move the army and ruin the country."[3] Now while Lincoln did not commit himself to withdrawing the army, the implications of his questions stood clear for McClellan to observe. From the time of Lincoln's visit onward, McClellan's letters to his wife indicated that he believed quite confidently that the Washington government would recall the army. Nor were Lincoln's questions the only evidence McClellan had that some change in policy was to be made. Stanton had wired Dix on the 7th that no cavalry force should move out of Fort Monroe until the President arrived.[4] On July 9, Stanton asked Dix for a statement of the precise strength of units which had been sent McClellan, as though he

1 Jacob D. Cox, Military Reminiscences of the Civil War, I, 222.
2 Nicolay & Hay, Lincoln's Works, VII, 262-266.
3 Ibid., VII, 263.
4 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 305.

needed that evidence in preparing a brief.[1] On July 11 Lincoln issued an order making General Henry W. Halleck commander of all the land forces of the United States and instructing him to come to Washington as soon as he could be released from his own department.[2] On the 13th, Lincoln sent a very pointed letter to McClellan asking what had happened to the 160,000 troops that had gone to the Army of the Potomac. He suggested that if McClellan could get back the 50,000 unaccounted for troops he could go on to Richmond.[3] As though McClellan didn't know that. All he wanted was the proper support in getting them back and keeping them. In his reply to Lincoln, McClellan pointed out something that no civilian can ever realize and that is strength figures lie more times than they reveal a true situation. Even with up-to-date electrographic equipment, the commander of the United States army in 1950 would be unable to tell where all of his men were. All he could give would be a good guess. Morning reports in the American army have been in the custody of first sergeants and a study of a number of reports reveals that about half the remarks deal with corrections of mistakes made. And each mistake, of course, helps skew strength figures. McClellan could see this difficulty, but Lincoln apparently could not.

On July 15, Stanton wrote Dix asking that Hunter be placed under Burnside and that Hunter's transports should be kept at Fort Monroe.[4] On the same day, Burnside wrote McClellan that he had been ordered to stay at Fort

1 Ibid., 309.
2 Ibid., 314.
3 Ibid., 319.
4 Ibid., 322.

Monroe for five or six days and that he didn't know what it meant. He did know, he added, that McClellan had lots of enemies in Washington.[1] On the 21st, Lincoln wrote to McClellan "This is Monday. I hope to be able to tell you on Thursday what is to be done with Burnside."[2]

In the face of such evidence, can it be doubted that McClellan felt most insecure in taking any very definite steps to resume his operations at once? The criticism that McClellan deliberately waited an entire month before even attempting to attack is just not justified. He arrived with the last of his army on July 3. On July 7 he received from Lincoln the strongest kind of proof that future operations on the peninsula were not to be attempted. McClellan, it should be emphasized, was willing to resume the offensive, but only if it could be resumed on such a scale as to give some assurances of success. Lincoln was unwilling to give those assurances. McClellan at this point became convinced that there was a plan afoot to deny him troops and then to remove him from command for not moving. In the light of subsequent developments, who shall say he was wrong?

While on board the transport which had brought the President to Harrison's Bar, McClellan handed Lincoln on July 7 a letter concerning several important matters. Perhaps as much controversy has raged over this letter as about any other single episode. McClellan handed the letter to Lincoln while the two men were alone. Lincoln read the letter, thanked the general, and put it in his pocket.[3] The letter was not released to the press, nor did McClellan advertise the fact he had given it. Several days later he did

1 McClellan, Own Story, 472.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 330.
3 McClellan, Own Story, 487.

mention to Stanton that a letter had been prepared and had been handed to the President. Stanton could ask the President to see it if he wished.

Mr. President,—

You have been fully informed that the rebel army is in our front, with the purpose of overwhelming us by attacking our positions or reducing us by blocking our river communications. I can not but regard our condition as critical, and I earnestly desire, in view of possible contingencies, to lay before your Excellency, for your private consideration, my general views concerning the existing state of the rebellion, although they do not strictly relate to the situation of this army, or strictly come within the scope of my official duties. These views amount to convictions, and are deeply impressed upon my mind and heart. Our cause must never be abandoned; it is the cause of free institutions and self government. The Constitution and the Union must be preserved, whatever may be the cost in time, treasure and blood. If secession is successful other dissolutions are clearly to be seen in the future. Let neither military disaster, political faction, nor foreign war, shake your settled purpose to enforce the equal operation of the laws of the United States upon the people of every State.

The time has come when the government must determine upon a civil and military policy covering the whole ground of our national trouble. The responsibility of determining, declaring and supporting such civil and military policy, and of directing the whole course of national affairs in regard to the rebellion must now be assumed and exercised by you, or our cause will be lost. The Constitution gives you power sufficient even for the present terrible exigency.

This rebellion has assumed the character of war; as such it should be regarded; and it should be conducted upon the highest principles known to Christian civilization. It should not be a war looking to the subjugation of the people of any state in any event. It should not be at all a war upon population, but against armed forces and political organizations. Neither confiscation of property, political executions of persons, territorial organization of states, or forcible abolition of slavery should be contemplated for a moment. In prosecuting the war, all private property and unarmed persons should be strictly protected, subject only to the necessity of military operations. All private property taken for military use should be paid or receipted for: pillage and waste should be treated as high crimes: all unnecessary trespass sternly prohibited, and offensive demeanor by the military towards citizens promptly rebuked. Military arrests should not be tolerated, except in places where active hostilities exist, and oaths not required by enactments constitutionally made,

should be neither demanded nor received. Military power should not be allowed to interfere with the relations of servitude, either by supporting or impairing the authority of the master, except for repressing disorder, as in other cases. Slaves contraband under the act of Congress, seeking military protection, should receive it. The right of the government to appropriate permanently to its own service, claims to slave labor, should be asserted, and the right of the owner to compensation therefor should be recognized.

This principle might be extended, upon grounds of military necessity and security, to all the slaves within a particular State, thus working manumission in such State; and in Missouri, perhaps in Western Virginia also, and possibly even in Maryland, the expediency of such a measure is only a question of time.

A system of policy thus constitutional and conservative, and pervaded by the influences of Christianity and freedom, would receive the support of almost all truly loyal men, would deeply impress the rebel masses and all foreign nations, and it might be humbly hoped that it would commend itself to the favor of the Almighty.

Unless the principles governing the future conduct of our struggle shall be made known and approved, the effort to obtain requisite forces will be almost hopeless. A declaration of radical views, especially upon slavery, will rapidly disintegrate our present armies.

The policy of the government must be supported by concentrations of military power. The national forces should not be dispersed in expeditions, posts of occupation, and numerous armies, but should be mainly collected into masses, and brought to bear upon the armies of the confederate states. Those armies thoroughly defeated, the political structure which they support would soon cease to exist.

In carrying out any system of policy which you may form, you will require a commander-in-chief of the army; one who possesses your confidence, understands your views, and who is competent to execute your orders by directing the military forces of the nation to the accomplishment of the objects by you proposed. I do not ask that place for myself. I am willing to serve you in such position as you may assign me, and I will do so as faithfully as ever subordinate served superior.

> I may be on the brink of eternity, and as I hope for forgiveness from my Maker, I have written this letter with sincerity towards you, and from love for my country.[1]

Some writers have argued that in writing this, McClellan overstepped the bounds of propriety. Others have argued that by the writing of the letter McClellan was entering the political arena. Others contend that McClellan's handing the letter to Lincoln amounted to gross insubordination which should have been punished by court martial. In making such judgments, however, such writers overlook the general situation which existed in 1862. They also overlook the fact that, earlier, Lincoln had stated in response to an inquiry from McClellan that he would welcome an expression of the general's views. It should also be kept in mind that the character of the entire war had not as yet changed to what it was in 1864-1865. McClellan was advancing a proposition for the solution to a still mooted question. And in writing the letter, McClellan was dealing with things which vitally concerned his army. A commander must be aware of the effects of such things as politics on morale if he is to be able to use his army effectively. McClellan firmly believed that if the character of the war changed into a war to free slaves, the morale of his army would suffer and he might not be able to carry out his assigned missions.

Repeatedly in this work, recourse had been taken to comparison with other situations which were comparable to those faced by McClellan. One can judge rightness or wrongness only in relative terms. If a particular incident stands unique from among many similar situations, one meaning only remains clear. If, on the other hand, other men, judged successful in the

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1 McClellan, Report, 280-282.

same or similar conditions, made the same or similar decision, one must assume something as to the correctness of the decision. In early July, 1945, General Eisenhower received word that the several chief political figures of the Allied powers would meet at Potsdam to discuss high political and military matters. General Eisenhower met the American President at Antwerp and presented his ideas. First he urged that the civilian authorities should take over the military government of Germany. In the long run, he believed, "American concepts and traditions would be best served by the State Department's assuming over-all responsibility in Germany."[1] He also told the President that he believed the United States should not ask Russia to join in the Pacific War. He also advised Mr. Truman that the United States should preserve some flexibility in the termination of lend-lease so that the Allied nations would have time to make some adjustments before that aid was terminated. On a highly controversial matter—the rehabilitation of the Ruhr industrial area—Eisenhower made specific recommendations to the President, this at a time when high government officials held quite opposite points of view. Now Eisenhower had every right to make such recommendations. He did not, however, have any more justification for doing so than did McClellan in his Harrison's Bar letter.

While McClellan was struggling to reorganize his staff, gain reinforcements, and the authority such reinforcements implied to resume the offensive, his antagonist was having his troubles. During the Seven Days, Confederate reputations had been made, some tarnished, and some outright destroyed. Lee's

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1 Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, 441.

job was to reorganize his command structure and weld it into a coherent fighting tool. At the same time, urged by his own predilections as well as the aggressive reasoning of "Stonewall" Jackson, he wanted to hit the Federals again before they had the chance to recoup their losses. Lee was faced with three masses of the enemy with which he must deal. McClellan, at Harrison's Landing, was rapidly regaining the offensive spirit. At Fort Monroe, the forces under Burnside and Hunter served as an unknown factor. Pope, in general command of the various forces in northern Virginia, was a genuine threat. Pope could at any time march in the direction of Centreville. He might even concentrate his forces, march via Fredericksburg and reopen the threat of reinforcing McClellan which had caused Lee to fight the Seven Days. Lee's decision was to hold a major portion of his command near Richmond, guarding against McClellan's possible approach. With Jackson's command he decided to threaten Pope and, if possible, force the Washington government to recall McClellan's troops to the defense of the capital. On July 13, orders were issued sending Jackson and Ewell to Gordonsville and six days later Jackson arrived there. On July 27, A. P. Hill, partly because of a clash with Longstreet, was ordered to the Shenandoah to join Jackson's command.[1] As for the rest of the army, it waited. After the sad details of burying the dead and caring for the wounded had been accomplished, the army settled into something like a garrison duty. Troops had been raised in the deep South. These had to be enlisted into the Confederate Service and integrated into the seasoned regiments of the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee had also given some attention to the forti-

1 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, I, 668.

fication of Petersburg and Drewry's Bluff.[1]

On July 27, General Halleck paid a visit to McClellan, ostensibly to determine whether there was some way for the Army of the Potomac to resume its offensive. If none were available, then he wanted to determine the best way by which the Army of Virginia could be concentrated with the Army of the Potomac on some new line of operations. He asked McClellan what he planned to do and that general presented his slowly maturing plan of crossing the James River and attacking Petersburg, thus cutting off the enemy's main line of communication with the deep south. To this plan Halleck raised some objections. He pointed out that McClellan must either attack Richmond directly or else plan to withdraw from the James. He then asked McClellan how many additional troops he would need to resume the offensive. McClellan's first estimate was 30,000, but when Halleck pointed out that the President would only authorize 20,000 more, McClellan countered with a proposal to rest the army where it was until its full needs could be met. Halleck then indicated that such a procedure was unacceptable—that McClellan should consult with his major commanders and come to some decision the following morning. The following day, McClellan agreed to try an attack with 20,000 reinforcements, estimating that he had about 90,000 effectives at that time who were present and ready for duty.[2]

Halleck's visit, on top of the earlier one by Lincoln, convinced McClellan that he was to be withdrawn from the Peninsula. A letter to his wife dated July 28 pointed out that he was still on his back, waiting a

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1 A good account of Richmond and the army during this period is found in Bill, The Beleaguered City.

2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 337-338.

decision from Washington.[1] He became more and more convinced of the existence of a conspiracy among the political leaders to oust him from his position. He did not completely despair, however, and on the 30th wired Halleck of his idea of attacking on both banks of the James if reinforced.[2] In another letter he hoped it would be soon decided what to do with this army, as much valuable time was being lost.[3] On the same day, however, he gained fresh insight into the intentions of the Washington government. Halleck ordered the evacuation of all sick and wounded.[4] As McClellan did not at once respond, Halleck wired again on August 2, to which McClellan replied that before he could comply he needed to know the future of his army, as that would make some difference in the wounded he selected for evacuation. If he were going to attack, for example, his walking wounded could be required to do guard duty along the lines of communication as they convalesced.[5] On the 2nd, prophetic of the final order, Burnside wired that it looked like McClellan was to be withdrawn and it looked as though Barnard had a great deal to do with getting such a decision made.[6] On the 3rd, Halleck wired McClellan, who received the order on the 4th, that it had been determined to withdraw the army. McClellan was ordered to take steps to do this, removing material and transport first. The move was to be concealed from the officers. McClellan was authorized to call on the Navy for help. He was instructed to leave sufficient force at Fort Monroe and Norfolk to secure those places.[7]

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1 McClellan, Own Story, 457.
2 Offic. Rec., I ser., XI, III, 342.
3 Ibid., 342.
4 McClellan, Report, 287.
5 Ibid., 293.
6 McClellan, Own Story, 472.
7 McClellan, Report, 295.

Not knowing what ideas the Washington government had, nor knowing of any particular reason for extreme speed in compliance with the order, McClellan wrote a long protest to Halleck. He was convinced that the move of his army to Aquia Creek would prove disastrous to the Union cause. He feared it would be a fatal blow. During the several days his preparations for the move would require, he hoped that some consideration would be given to rescinding the order. The army was in an excellent position on the James with bridgeheads on either bank giving opportunity to act in any of several directions. The presence of the gunboats made the army's communications secure. The army was only 25 miles from Richmond, and information as to the enemy's position indicated that an advance could possibly proceed 15 or 18 miles before meeting heavy resistance. Such an attack could be supplied by water to within 12 miles of Richmond. Whereas at Aquia Creek the army would be 75 miles from Richmond, with overland transport needed all the way. To withdraw the army it would have to march some 70 miles to Fort Monroe because that method appeared more practical than to attempt to move the entire way by water.

He pointed out that such a retreat would have a demoralizing effect on the army and would depress the people of the nation still further. Then, too, withdrawing from so close to the Confederate capital might hasten European recognition of the Confederacy.

> Here, directly in front of this army, is the heart of the rebellion. It is here that our resources should be collected to strike the blow which will determine the fate of this nation. All points of secondary importance elsewhere should be abandoned and every available man brought here....It is here on the bank of the James River that the fate of the Union should be decided....If my counsel does

> not prevail, I will with a sad heart obey your orders to the utmost of my power, devoting to the movement...whatever skill I may possess....[1]

Halleck replied the next day that he hated to issue the order, but that it could not be rescinded—thus implying that it was essentially political in character.[2] He followed this communication with a long letter on the 6th pointing out that McClellan could not have been "more pained at receiving my order than I was at the necessity of issuing it." He had been advised by high officers to order the withdrawal much earlier. Even after a personal interview with McClellan he said he tried every means at his disposal to avoid withdrawing the army and delayed his decision as long as he dared. It was not a hasty decision. It was one which caused him more anxiety than any other act of his life. However, after full and mature consideration of all the pros and cons, the order was issued. To his mind there was no alternative. He then discussed some of the reasons for the decision. Lee, according to McClellan's estimates, had about 200,000, while McClellan had about 90,000 and Pope 40,000. Neither Pope nor McClellan could reinforce the other. If Pope's army were weakened, Washington, Maryland, and Pennsylvania were uncovered. If McClellan were weakened only to strengthen Pope, the Army of the Potomac would be too weak even to hold its present position. "In other words, the Army of the Potomac is split in two parts with the entire force of the enemy in between." He could not understand why a withdrawal should result in any demoralization unless the officers themselves assisted in the demoralization. The change

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XII, II, 8-9.
2 McClellan, Report, 298.

of front from an extreme position at Hanover Courthouse to McClellan's present position did not demoralize the troops in spite of heavy fighting. Then, concentrating at Fredericksburg brought 40,000 fresh troops to the Army of the Potomac and brought it within 60 miles of Richmond, which would probably be better than a concentration at Yorktown some three or four miles more distant from Richmond than Fredericksburg. He believed that the political effects would be unfavorable at first, but that the public would quickly see the need for the decision. As to keeping the Army of the Potomac where it was until it could be reinforced, such a decision would "almost destroy it in that climate. The months of August and September are almost fatal to whites who live on that part of the James River."[1] Even, however, if the climate were favorable and if McClellan were reinforced, the delay in taking Fort Darling might take so long that Lee could fall on Pope and destroy him with no possible hope of aid from McClellan. He pointed out that a majority of officers whose opinions had been reported to him favored the withdrawal. Even some who originally favored the line of the Peninsula now advised its abandonment. He ended by saying it was not his place to determine why the forces were split. It was his concern to bring them back together again.[2]

Now here is the crucial point in the entire drama. Obviously, the decision of Halleck to withdraw the Army of the Potomac was made by political leaders, for Halleck was the highest of the military men, and he spoke of not wanting to issue the order. Nor for that matter did he recommend any policy. His report to the Secretary of War on his visit to McClellan's headquarters was little more than a stenographic record of the conversations

1 Ibid., 300-301.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XII, II, 9-11.

between the two generals. Halleck only executed a policy dictated to him by Stanton and by Lincoln. They, in turn, were motivated by many reasons, which must be examined in detail.

1. Political considerations. McClellan had become persona non grata with influential members of the Republican party. He did not believe that the war should be fought to free slaves but rather that it should be fought only to restore the Union as it had existed in 1860. Nor should the war be fought to increase the power of the central government. McClellan was a state rights man and had even manifested qualms about an unsolicited invasion of western Virginia.

McClellan with such heretical views, had, nonetheless, become an immensely popular figure. True, his popularity declined somewhat when he failed to gain the overnight results so many had been expecting. But he retained much popularity in the country and a great deal of popularity with the army. In fact, this popularity made some of his enemies wonder if it would be at all possible to relieve him of command without careful laying of a sequence of events only the last of which would be the final relief of the general from command. In the minds of some, the withdrawal of the army was only a step in the preparation for the final breaking of McClellan. A previous step had, of course, been bringing Halleck to Washington. To these men, the concentration of the Armies of the Potomac and of Virginia represented the way some other general might replace McClellan with the minimum amount of publicity. And it could all be done under the guise of military necessity. Men such as Chandler, Wade, and Stanton

were all of this frame of mind.[1]

2. Military considerations. We now know several things which were unknown in 1862. The heart of the rebellion was, as McClellan said, in Richmond. The best defense of Washington was at Richmond, not in front of Washington. As long as McClellan stood poised at Harrison's Landing, Lee could not join Jackson. True, he could reinforce him, but not to the extent of making an invasion of the north possible. Only when Lee knew of a certainty that McClellan was to withdraw could he throw his veterans northward. Thus even a stalemate for the rest of the summer might have been possible had McClellan's army only been left where it was. By withdrawing it, Lincoln attracted Lee's fire. But many were afraid that men would die just waiting on the banks of the James in spite of the fact that Letterman, McClellan's surgeon reported: "The diseases prevailing in our own army are generally of a mild type and are not increasing...."[2] Instead of increasing, the sick rate of the Army of the Potomac was actually decreasing as the army began to withdraw. Grant later validated the opinion that an army could spend all summer in that region and still be fit for active operations.

Halleck had said that the bulk of military opinion favored withdrawal. Actually, of the five corps commanders, only Keyes and Franklin favored removal of the army. The others believed the Union cause could best be served by keeping the army where it was. The withdrawal was predicated on a plan calling for an overland movement against Richmond. We now can be

1 Welles, Diary, 94-99.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 349.

reasonably sure that an overland campaign against Richmond had very little chance of success against a person of Lee's ability, fighting as he was from interior lines. Pope, Burnside, Hooker, and finally Grant and Meade undertook frontal attacks and all failed. It was only when Grant changed to the plan roughed out two years earlier by McClellan that Richmond was taken—and Grant had the power to order reinforcements, and did so, from any place in the country.

3. Personal considerations. McClellan, in spite of very obvious talents, had an uncanny ability to rub Lincoln and his political colleagues the wrong way. It has already been pointed out that McClellan and Lincoln held to different philosophies of war. McClellan was not at all slow in pleading his case, and this very pleading finally began to wear on the President. To almost all of the ideas suggested by the President, McClellan took exception. Thus Lincoln's General and Special War Orders No. 1 were met with long objections by the general. When the offensive plans of McClellan did not materialize as had been hoped, the general heaped blame upon the head of the President. Lincoln considered himself no slouch at the old game of politics, yet the young upstart general presumed to give instructions on political matters. Abraham Lincoln had a very clear conception of the rights and responsibilities he had as President. Indeed, the Civil War was precipitated by Lincoln's insistence upon doing those things he had sworn to do as President. Secretary of State Seward had at one time presumed to act as Lincoln's prime minister. Such a presumption Lincoln could not tolerate and by very diplomatic but nonetheless effective action managed to convey his irritation to Seward. No more so was he

willing to countenance presumptions by McClellan. McClellan had repeatedly taken a condescending attitude toward Lincoln. While probably not consciously, that superior attitude undoubtedly prejudiced Lincoln to such an extent that he was receptive to ideas presented for the ostensible good of the country, yet actually effective in getting rid of McClellan.

In response to Halleck's directive that strong reconnaissances should be made in the direction of Richmond and in response to his own idea of moving, if possible along both banks of the James River, McClellan dispatched several probing forces on the 3rd of August. Hooker's division was ordered to Malvern Hill with instructions to turn that place if at all possible. Averill's cavalry was dispatched toward Savage's Station to screen Hooker's right flank. At the same time, troops were sent to the south bank of the James to secure Coggin's Point and to clear timber from it to provide better fields of fire for artillery. The troops under Averill found and drove off a regiment of Confederate cavalry near White Oak swamp bridge. The troops sent to Coggin's Point drove off a force of about 550 Confederate cavalry and burned their camp.[1] Hooker failed in his attempt on the 3rd to secure Malvern Hill, but on the 4th he was successful in driving the enemy back toward Richmond, capturing some 100 men while losing only three killed. The mass of the enemy was able to escape in the deep fog toward New Market. Several brigades of enemy infantry were reported concentrating about four miles from Malvern, and Hooker was concerned lest he be attacked the following morning. To many, the advantage gained by reoccupying Malvern Hill and the information concerning Confederate defenses between that place and

1 McClellan, Report, 286.

Richmond gave hope that a resumption of the offensive might be undertaken. Sumner wrote to General Cochrane in the War Department the opinion that with 20,000 more troops the Army of the Potomac could march to Richmond.[1] McClellan himself believed it to be an advantageous spot to cover the advance.[2] But before these hopes could be turned into actualities, McClellan had received Halleck's order of the third calling for the immediate withdrawal of the army. Since he was enjoined to secrecy he could not tell Hooker exactly why he could not be supported. He invented a tale of being unable to support Hooker while still holding Harrison's Landing. Malver Hill would have to be relinquished. Sumner's corps, which had been ordered in support of Hooker, was halted while Hooker withdrew.[3]

While these activities were taking place, Halleck, somewhat chagrined that his orders regarding evacuation of sick and cavalry had not been complied with wired a pre-emptory order demanding a regiment of cavalry and several batteries of artillery be sent to Burnside. McClellan snapped back that with Hooker still at Malvern he could not afford to send either artillery or cavalry, but that he would obey orders as soon as circumstances would permit.[4] He had, he added, been able to send off 1,200 sick, but there was no more transportation available at the moment. In replying thusly, McClellan was carrying out his responsibilities as an army or theater commander. A precipitate withdrawal of any troops while there was the possibility that Hooker might have committed the entire army to a fight

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 356.
2 McClellan, Report, 288-289.
3 Ibid., 291.
4 Ibid., 292.

would have been negligent. McClellan was an army commander in the field, filled with a deep sense of duty and believing that a major defeat to his army would disrupt the Union. Given his particular frame of reference, compliance with Halleck's orders involved taking foolish and unnecessary chances.

Between August 7 and 18 McClellan devoted his full attention to moving his army and its supplies from Harrison's Landing. During the entire time, Halleck bombarded him with telegrams demanding faster action. Yet it is doubtful if any faster action was possible. McClellan's quartermaster, after a thorough survey, gave his opinion that no more than 5,000 infantry could be transported from Harrison's Landing if the sick and supplies were moved by water. Within several days he might be able to ship 10,000 infantry provided, of course, that ships were returned promptly. If, on the other hand, infantry were marched to Fort Monroe, Newport News, and Yorktown, some 25,000 could be shipped at one time from there because vessels drawing too much for the James could be used.[1] Part of the reason why more troops could not be moved was that ships were frequently reported which were already loaded with supplies or were in use as hospital ships. Then, too, some of the vessels were just not fitted to handle horses, so there was substantial delay in sending cavalry. Besides the limitations of the shipping itself, the wharf facilities at Harrison's Landing were limited, allowing only one vessel at a time to load. The wharf facilities were in continuous use as long as there were vessels to load. Anyone who saw the tremendous

1 McClellan, Report, 303-304.

fleet of vessels off the coast of France in 1944 waiting for a chance to unload can recognize how limited landing facilities will slow down an operation.

Halleck, however, had no conception of the difficulties McClellan was encountering and consequently wrote on the 9th that considering the amount of transportation McClellan had been furnished, the delay in moving troops was unsatisfactory.[1] On the 10th he wanted daily reports of progress made in the movement. In spite of all McClellan could tell him, Halleck remained unconvinced.

On the 11th, Pleasanton's cavalry, operating from the vicinity of Haxall's plantation, became convinced that the enemy in the direction of Richmond had become very weak and could be dealt a crushing blow with a maximum of two corps. There were, he guessed, not more than 36,000 men between them and Richmond and those could not easily be reinforced.[2] McClellan at once sent this intelligence along to Stanton, suggesting that such an attack might be made which would serve to draw the enemy away from Pope. To do it, however, he would need some covering force to guard communications.[3]

On the 12th Halleck again wired McClellan asking for more speed and pointing out by comparison the speed with which Burnside had moved from Fort Monroe to Aquia Creek. Such a comparison was, of course, unfair since there was a housekeeping detail at Fort Monroe to handle excess supplies. Burnside's men had just disembarked from these transports, which were still available. Burnside had infantry alone, with no cavalry to worry about.

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1 Ibid., 304.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 369.
3 Ibid., 372-374.

In addition, Burnside had no enemy to concern him. Any evaluation of the move from the Peninsula must not lose sight of the fact that each day brought news of some enemy activity in the neighborhood. McClellan could not move out as though he were on a parade ground. He had to assume the possibility of being attacked, so had to plan on moving so that at any time his troops could be concentrated. Even an enemy force of 36,000 could spoil a poorly planned withdrawal. Then too, the entire base of supplies had to be evacuated as well. A more apt comparison would have been possible had Burnside been required to evacuate Fort Monroe as well as his troops.

McClellan at this point came to the conclusion that he and Halleck were misunderstanding each other. He decided to go in person to the telegraph station, call Halleck to the Washington station and exchange views with him. On his arrival at Jamestown Island he found the electricity off and so went on to Fort Monroe, thence to the eastern shore of the Chesapeake where he arrived late in the evening and sent a wire asking Halleck to come to his office as he wished to talk with him. He then sent a wire bringing Halleck up-to-date. Halleck replied that there was no change of plans and that McClellan was to continue his evacuation. Halleck then left the telegraph office and went to bed. McClellan, just a little put out, wired that his orders would be obeyed, but that he had hoped for a more lengthy exchange of views, having come so far.[1] Thus it appears that Halleck, given an opportunity to get matters straightened out, did not bother to take time.

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1 McClellan, Report, 313.

Before leaving for his talks with Halleck, McClellan had approved the administrative orders for the withdrawal. Divisional trains were to precede the divisions, protected by an advance guard. Corps artillery was to travel with the train of lead divisions. Provisions were made to insure the rapid march of the army by ordering all disabled wagons and the like to be dropped off. Stragglers were to be kept up. Men were not allowed to break ranks. Corps commanders were responsible for local security each night.[1]

On the night of the 14th and morning of the 15th, Porter's and Heintzelman's corps moved out en route for Yorktown by two different routes. The last of McCall's division was embarked to go by water.[2] On the 15th, Coggin's Point was evacuated with Porter reported across the Chickahominy and Heintzelman at James bridge. Army trains were to move that evening.[3] Thomas, the Adjutant General of the army, visited Harrison's Bar that day and reported the movement progressing nicely. No one, he thought, could have made the move as skillfully or in less time.[4]

On the 16th the last of the army cleared Harrison's Landing, followed by McClellan's staff. On the same day, Porter, who had been ordered to stop at Williamsburg until the army cleared the Chickahominy, obtained intelligence that there were no troops between his position and Richmond, that Lee was en route to help Jackson smash Pope. Disregarding his orders, Porter pushed along for Fort Monroe so as to get to Pope's aid more quickly.[5] By

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 376-377.
2 McClellan, Report, 314.
3 Ibid., 315.
4 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XII, III, 579.
5 Ibid., 579.

the 18th, all elements had cleared the Chickahominy and the pontoon bridge over which it crossed was taken down and sent on to Fort Monroe. This bridge had been thrown earlier when it appeared to McClellan that his army would have to move overland.

Once Porter and Heintzelman began to embark, McClellan thought his army could probably proceed a little more leisurely, provided, of course, all transports at dock were filled promptly. His peace of mind was disturbed on the 19th when Halleck sent him word that the enemy was crossing the Rapidan in great force.[1] McClellan responded by ordering his corps commanders to make every effort to reach their march objectives on time.[2] At the same time, he complied with Halleck's orders to garrison Yorktown and Fort Monroe by sending Keyes' corps to Yorktown to fortify the place.[3] Keyes viewed this assignment as a mean one, given to him because he favored the move to Washington in opposition to McClellan. On the 25th of August he wrote to Lincoln asking the President to look out for his interests.[4]

Between the 20th and the 23rd the bulk of the army was loaded on ships at either Hampton Roads, Newport News, Fort Monroe, or Yorktown and headed for Aquia Creek. Even on this relatively simple move ships were reported without supplies of water, so that much time was lost making good this deficiency. Corps commanders were ordered to report to Burnside upon arrival. As for McClellan, he tried to find out what Halleck's plans were. Unsuccess-

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1 Ibid., 599.
2 Ibid., 599, 606, 607.
3 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 379.
4 Ibid., 382-383.

ful in that venture, he wired Halleck saying he was reporting for orders. Should he go to Aquia or should he report to Washington. Not receiving orders, he went to Aquia, arriving there on the 24th.[1]

By asking where he should go, McClellan had reference to a letter Halleck had sent him on August 7. Halleck stated that the withdrawal of the Army of the Potomac was his own doing and was willing to risk his reputation on it. His intention was, he said, that McClellan would be in command once the troops were all concentrated. He was afraid that Pope and Burnside were not safe nor would they be until McClellan assumed personal command.[2]

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XII, III, 645.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XI, III, 359-360.

CHAPTER XII

FAILURE OF THE RADICALS' PLAN

The combination of "elbow-rubbing" Henry Halleck as commanding general of the Union armies and "headquarters-in-the-saddle" John Pope as a field commander presented Lee with the perfect opportunity of driving the Union forces from Virginia. Halleck, by the venture into grand strategy of withdrawing McClellan from the peninsula, at the same time ordering Pope to advance, presented Lee with a golden opportunity to concentrate on Pope and destroy him. Pope, by his stupid tactical handling of his army, gave Lee and Jackson a ready-made stage on which to display their particular brand of tactical fireworks.

The campaign of the Army of Virginia actually began when Halleck ordered Pope to advance southward from Manassas Junction against forces concentrated around Gordonsville under Jackson.[1] On the 6th of August Jackson received word that Pope's advance was preceded by an advance guard approaching Culpeper. He believed that a rapid march might enable him to reach Culpeper before the Union main body and to destroy the advance guard, thus throwing the Federal offensive off balance before it could get well under way. In spite of the speedy issuance of orders, however, Jackson's march was poorly executed and painfully slow. It was not until noon of the 9th that Confederate scouts made contact with the Union advance party, deployed some seven miles south of Culpeper along the shoulders of Cedar Mountain. As soon as contact was made, and after a most casual inspection of the ground, Jackson issued orders for the fight, which raged all afternoon and late into

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XII, II, 6.

the night before the Confederate troops finally won the field. Realizing that the forces he had encountered were stronger than he had been led to expect, Jackson withdrew his troops to the vicinity of Gordonsville in hopes that Pope could be enticed into a rash attack.[1]

While Jackson was thus taking the measure of Pope's army, Lee watched McClellan prepare to resume the offensive, then break it off and start withdrawing his troops back up the peninsula. By August 13, Lee was convinced that McClellan was evacuating his entire position and so resolved to reinforce Jackson for an effort against Pope before McClellan's veterans could join the Army of Virginia. Leaving a token force around Richmond under G. W. Smith, Lee rapidly marched the rest of his army northward, arriving at Gordonsville on August 15. Here he found that Pope had foolishly occupied an advanced position between the Rappahannock and the Rapidan rivers. Lodged there out of supporting distance of any Northern troops, Pope offered Lee an excellant attack target. If Confederate troops could be maneuvered to Pope's rear, the bridges over the Rappahannock could be destroyed and Pope's army driven back against the south bank of that river. With this plan in mind, Lee ordered his troops over the Rapidan. Poor coordination of cavalry, however, allowed Pope time to discover his danger and to withdraw north of the Rappahannock, destroying the bridge after him.

His quarry having escaped, Lee closed his troops up to the Rappahannock and pondered his next move. He realized full well that McClellan's troops would be quickly reinforcing Pope. His problem, then, was to maneuver Pope

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1 Lee's Lieutenants, II, 7-51.

as far to the west as possible and to attack him before Army of the Potomac men were in Pope's line of battle. During the next several days, then, Lee made attempts at various points along the Rappahannock to break through Pope's lines or to force him to withdraw. A raid by Stuart resulted only in capturing some of Pope's clothes, while a crossing by Early's men resulted in no gain at all. Then on August 24, as McClellan was arriving at Aquia Creek, Lee visited Jackson at his headquarters and laid plans for a breathtaking offensive. Jackson was to withdraw his troops from the line and to march far enough to the west to clear Pope's right flank. Then he was to cross the Rappahannock and march rapidly for some point along the Orange and Alexandria railroad in rear of Pope's army. The remainder of the army was to hold the line of the Rappahannock until Jackson had had a good start, then was to follow his path, rejoining his troops somewhere along Pope's flank.

Jackson began his march at dawn on the 25th and by nightfall had cleared the Rappahannock and was approaching Thoroughfare Gap in the Bull Run Mountains. This Gap, had it been defended, could have held up Jackson's advance, but as it was free from Union troops it was passed early on the 26th. By dawn of August 27, Jackson's hungry veterans had seized Pope's supply depot at Manassas Junction and began a plundering session which lasted all morning.

Pope, at last realizing how he had been out-maneuvered, decided to abandon the line of the Rappahannock and to intersperse heavy forces between Jackson and Thoroughfare Gap, through which Confederate reinforcements would have to come. If this were done, Jackson would be cut off and could be destroyed. To accomplish this, a heavy Federal force under McDowell and Reno

was established between Jackson and his support, but Jackson, meanwhile, had moved from Manassas Junction to Graveton on the Warrenton Turnpike several miles south of Centreville. Pope then issued a series of interesting orders bringing McDowell to Manassas Junction and concentrating major forces at Bristol Station, all of which had the total effect of removing the block between Jackson and Lee which had been established that morning. On the morning of the 28th, Pope himself arrived at Manassas Junction as the last of Jackson's troops were evacuating the place. He at once issued orders concentrating the army at Centreville. Complying with these orders, advance Union troops under Kearny made contact with Jackson's rear guard, but as darkness fell the action quickly ended and Jackson continued on the turnpike toward Graveton.

On the 29th, Jackson, occupying a strong position along an old railroad embankment which ran parallel to the Warrenton Turnpike, was attacked by Union troops under Sigel, Hooker, and Kearny. Although suffering heavy losses, Pope insisted that the attacks of these units be continued during the afternoon, since he believed troops under McDowell and Fitz John Porter would soon be along from Manassas Junction to swell the attack. By 4:30 P.M. McDowell was able to get into action, but Porter failed to reach the battlefield. Assuming, however, that both Porter and McDowell were present, Pope ordered a renewal of the attacks on Jackson at 5:30 P.M. As troops of Longstreet's corps had come through the Bull Run Mountains and had begun to reinforce Jackson, the action was broken off and all troops rested in position.

Pope was convinced that had Porter come on the field in sufficient time, Jackson might have been crushed on the 29th. So deeply did he feel this that

he charged Porter with failing to obey orders. After McClellan was finally relieved of command of the Army of the Potomac, Porter was tried by courts-martial, convicted and discharged the service for failing to support Pope. This nasty little episode is of importance in the McClellan story chiefly because of the light it sheds on the forces pitted against McClellan. From a strictly military point of view, Porter had done nothing unworthy or dishonorable. Pope had lost control of his troops by the evening of the 28th. Thereafter, he had no knowledge of events taking place away from his immediate position. He had ordered Porter to move on Centreville and then acted as though those orders had been carried out. Actually, Porter, on his march, had run into Longstreet's corps, consisting of 30,000 veterans on their way to the relief of Jackson. Porter's presence, some distance from the main fight at Graveton, was the only thing which prevented Longstreet from sweeping down on the left rear of Pope's main body and destroying it. Once Longstreet determined that his way was blocked, he moved on to join Jackson's left flank. Porter also joined the Union main body.[1]

On other counts, however, Porter was on dangerous ground.[2] He disliked Pope as did many of the officers of the Army of the Potomac. He believed him to be and said that he was an ass and absolutely incapable of command. This was an especially dangerous feeling to have, since Pope was "right" on

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1 B. & L., II, 522-523. At Porter's retrial he was completely vindicated and restored to full military rank largely on the basis of testimony of Longstreet himself.

2 An interesting sidelight is to be found in the Lincoln papers in the form of a letter from Pope to the President complaining bitterly that while he, Pope, was still only a captain in the regular army, Porter was a colonel and had been recommended for promotion to general. Pope believed he should receive a star instead of Porter.

the slavery question and had been selected as the tool by which McClellan's relief from command was to be accomplished. When the tool failed to do the work for which it was selected, a scapegoat had to be found, since to admit error on Pope's part was equivalent to the radical leaders admitting error on their part. As long as McClellan had a voice in army affairs, Porter was safe, but once McClellan's relief had been accomplished, Porter was doomed. Perhaps Porter's greatest sin, however, was his friendship for McClellan. He was tried and convicted by a packed military court because in the eyes of Stanton and certain radical leaders his conviction would help to discredit McClellan. It was not until the passions of the war and reconstruction period had cooled that justice was done to this gallant and talented officer and he was restored to command.[1]

During the night of August 29-30, Lee concentrated the rest of his army around Jackson's position and, on the morning of the 30th, waited any move Pope might make, secure in the belief that his defenses were sound. Between noon and 2:00 P.M., Pope began a useless attack centering his effort on Jackson's corps in the hope of a breakthrough. During this phase, Pope acted as though Longstreet's veterans were miles away. They were not, however, and as the fight on Jackson's front intensified, Longstreet loosed artillery fire squarely on the left flank of the attacking Federals. The direct fire of Longstreet's batteries was so devasting that the Union lines faltered, then stopped. As this development took place, Longstreet launched his infantry brigades, driving the Federal troops from the field before them. The rout, some observers said, was worse than at the first battle at Bull Run.

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1 This story has been told in some detail by Otto Eisenschiml in The Celebrated Case of Fitz John Porter.

While Pope was thus losing control of his troops in the Manassas Junction-Centreville area, McClellan was placed in a most awkward position. It will be recalled that he had been given strong intimation that he would be assigned to command of the combined forces as soon as their junction had been completed. His inquiry of the 24th asking for information as to the enemy and Pope's troops was answered by Halleck in almost despairing tones. He did not know either where Pope or the enemy was. Then on the 26th, Halleck wired McClellan that he had some information that the enemy was concentrating large forces in the Shenandoah. As for McClellan, he was ordered to leave Burnside in command at Aquia Creek and come to Alexandria where some irregularities had been reported. McClellan sailed for Alexandria and reported his arrival there at 8:00 on the morning of the 27th. McClellan found the town fairly quiet, but filled with convalescent soldiers. He made inspections of the various service elements in the town and reported favorable activity. Sumner's corps he ordered disembarked at Aquia rather than at Alexandria, since it could that way reach Rappahannock Station earlier. Franklin's corps he prepared to move to the help of Pope and his personal cavalry escort was sent to aid Burnside.

While he was thus tending to administrative details, he also sought to accumulate intelligence which he promised to send on to Halleck as soon as he obtained it. He sent wires to both Porter and Heintzelman to the end of learning what was happening. He ordered Burnside to send no trains to Porter without escort since the troops which had raided Bull Run could very probably be in Pope's rear ready to pounce upon any exposed materiel.

The more he thought about the exposed position of Burnside at Fredericksburg, the more concerned he became. Those troops would be cut off if Pope were unsuccessful around Manassas and McClellan had a strong hunch that he would be. With such foreboding in mind, he suggested that Sumner's corps be brought to Alexandria to move out toward Manassas with Franklin. If Pope were defeated, those two corps would be in position to man the forts of Washington.

He began a personal inspection of those forts to see that they were in condition for defense. Then he became alarmed at the condition of Franklin's corps. The repeated pressures Stanton and Lincoln had put on him for speedy departure from the peninsula had forced him to dispatch some troops without cavalry or artillery. Without cavalry or artillery he wondered if it was wise to dispatch a corps to relieve a general whose whereabouts was not known and who very possibly had been cut off from Washington by strong rebel forces. On the following day after Franklin had departed for the front, McClellan was obliged to halt his advance because of strong intelligence of enemy infiltrations.

On the 28th, fearing a cavalry raid into the city, Halleck ordered Sumner's corps to be placed in defense of the capital, particularly at the Chain bridge. On the 29th, after the previous day's activity of expediting help to the pressed Pope, McClellan received word to send wagons and ammunition to Franklin as fast as they arrived. Lincoln wired "What news from direction of Manassas Junction? What generally." To this last McClellan gave a very forthright answer, together with his suggestions as to courses of action. He was convinced that one of two courses should be adopted.

1st to concentrate all our available forces to open communication with Pope.

2nd to leave Pope to get out of his scrape, and at once use all our means to make the capital perfectly safe. No middle ground will now answer.

Tell me what you wish me to do and I will do all in my power to accomplish it. I wish to know what my orders and authority are. I ask for nothing, but will obey whatever orders you give. I only ask a prompt decision, that I may at once give the necessary orders. It will not do to delay any longer.[1]

As McClellan's position became more and more anomalous, his temper grew increasingly short. Halleck's telegrams grew progressively uncertain in tone and yet at the same time more offensive to McClellan. He objected to McClellan's holding up Franklin at Annandale, to which McClellan replied, "Please give specific orders for the movement of Franklin. As for tomorrow's movements, I desire definite instructions, as it is not agreeable to me to be accused of disobeying orders, when I have simply exercised the discretion you committed to me."[2]

On the 30th, Halleck wanted ammunition for Pope and McClellan but was forced to say he knew nothing of the calibre of Pope's artillery. McClellan could only load up all wagons and send out with whatever was on hand. "I will also send my only remaining squadron of cavalry with General Sumner. I can do no more. You now have every man of the Army of the Potomac who is within my reach."[3]

Late that night McClellan reported no news. He then asked permission to ride out to be with his troops who were in battle. Even though he did

1 McClellan, Report, 331.
2 Ibid., 334.
3 Ibid., 337.

not command, he believed the army would fight the better for his presence. "Please reply tonight." Halleck, tired from worry, did not answer until the next day when he said, in substance, that he could not answer without first seeing the President.

On the 31st, McClellan wrote that under war department order of the day before he had no command and no control over anyone. The commanding officers of the works were not responsible to him. He had corrected evils he happened to see, but under his orders he had no right to give any instructions. Halleck replied that he had not seen the order as published but would write the following morning. For the time being, McClellan was to retain everything not under the control of Pope. He begged of McClellan to assist him in this crisis. He was, he said, "entirely tired out."[1] The order referred to is quoted below.

War Department, Aug. 30, 1862.

> The following are the commanders of the armies operating in Virginia:
>
> General Burnside commands his own corps, except those that have been temporarily detached and assigned to General Pope.
>
> General McClellan commands that portion of the Army of the Potomac that has not been sent forward to General Pope's command. [Actually involving no troops whatsoever.]
>
> General Pope commands the Army of Virginia, and all the forces temporarily attached to it.
>
> All the forces are under the command of Maj.-Gen. Halleck, General-in-Chief.

This order points up a major revolution developing in Washington even as Pope's army was being out-maneuvered and outfought at Manassas Junction,

1 McClellan, Report, 340.

Centreville, and Graveton. Stanton, from the time he had become Secretary of War, had been working to rid the army of McClellan. Although his letters to McClellan had breathed a spirit of loyalty and friendship, Stanton had begun to talk unfavorably about the general the very next day after having accepted the war portfolio. His antagonism intensified as McClellan persisted in his plan for offensive operations on the peninsula and reached a fever heat when the Army of the Potomac changed its base from the York to the James River. Working with radical members of Congress, Stanton evolved a plan by which McClellan could be relieved from duty with the army without causing a great outcry in the army and among the public. The first steps had already been taken by late August. Halleck was in command in the War Department and Pope was in the field. McClellan's divisions were gradually sent to Pope until by the 31st, McClellan had at his command a force of less than a hundred men. At this point, Stanton was ready to issue final orders. Early reports from Centreville led him to believe that Pope was winning a substantial victory over the Confederates. With this intelligence, Stanton believed he was safe in relieving McClellan from duty in orders and insulting him at the same time. The order cited above was the result.

Then came the bad news that instead of a victory, John Pope had gained the Union a crushing defeat. Stanton had to rely on a secondary scheme which he had already put into operation in an effort to force McClellan out. Stanton and Chase had decided that if it became necessary, they would organize the cabinet into forcing Lincoln to remove McClellan. Stanton drafted a letter to the President which was to be submitted over as many cabinet

signatures as could be obtained. This letter, in the form first drafted by Stanton, read:

> The undersigned feel compelled by a profound sense of duty to the government and the people of the United States, and to yourself as your constitutional advisers, respectfully to recommend the immediate removal of George B. McClellan from any command in the armies of the United States. We are constrained to urge this by the conviction that after a sad and humiliating trial of twelve months and by the frightful and useless sacrifice of the lives of many thousand brave men and the waste of many millions of national means, he has proved to be incompetent for any important military command, and also because by recent disobedience of superior orders and inactivity, he has twice imperilled the fate of the army commanded by General Pope and while he continues in command will daily hazard the fate of our armies, exhibiting no sign of a disposition or capacity to restore by courage and diligence the national honor that has been so deeply tarnished in the eyes of the world by his military failures. We are unwilling to be accessory to the destruction of our armies, the protraction of the war, the waste of our national resources, and the overthrow of the government, which we believe must be the inevitable consequences of George B. McClellan being continued in command, and seek, therefore, by his prompt removal to afford an opportunity to capable officers under God's providence to preserve our national existence.[1]

In order to be effective, Stanton and Chase believed this document should be signed by as many and as powerful cabinet officers as possible. Seward was out of town and Blair still believed in McClellan. Chase then agreed to solicit the signature of Welles. The Secretary of the Navy refused on the grounds that the assumptions contained in the document could not be proven and besides the technique of submitting an ultimatum to the President was inappropriate.[2] On the 31st, Stanton himself tried to talk Welles into signing, but with the same effect, so on Monday, September 1 Welles was presented a new letter, designed to accomplish the same ends

1 Burton J. Hendrick, Lincoln's War Cabinet, Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1946, 308.

2 Diary of Gideon Welles, I, 93-94.

but written in the clear reasoned consitutional words of Bates rather than the pleadingly urgent statements of Stanton. While Welles believed the letter was a great improvement, the method was still repugnant to him. Unable to obtain the required support, Stanton and Chase did not present their letter to the President. Indeed, such an action would have been most out of order, since, while Stanton was plotting McClellan's complete removal, Lincoln had taken certain steps designed to give McClellan command of large bodies of troops again. Lincoln announced his decision in cabinet meeting on the 2nd.[1]

Such activities on the part of high government officials goes a long way in demonstrating the hysterical melieu of Washington in 1862. Such hysteria prevented any rational attempt to understand with what military issues the field commanders had been faced. As it turned out, Stanton's efforts to oust McClellan during July and August failed because of the failure of his military protege and because Lincoln asserted his domination of the cabinet. The Secretary of War, however, was not one to give up the fight and so continued relentlessly to work for McClellan's relief until in November of 1862 he finally secured the desired goal. But before that event transpired, McClellan was again given an opportunity to demonstrate that his military acumen was more than a match for the brilliant Lee. And the radical forces were again given the opportunity to demonstrate their implacable hatred for the Democratic military chief.

After repeated attempts had been made to obtain some orders from Halleck, McClellan was finally granted an interview with the commanding general

1 Ibid., 104.

on September 1. McClellan was assigned command of the defenses of Washington but was strictly enjoined from exercising any control over troops with or en route to Pope's command.[1] McClellan accepted his new duties and then told Halleck that Pope's army had been decisively defeated. When Halleck expressed doubts as to the accuracy of McClellan's intelligence, McClellan suggested the rather obvious expedient of Halleck's checking for himself. Although the commanding general and his chief of staff did not believe they could spare the time from their offices, the adjutant general, Colonel Kelton, was finally dispatched. As a precaution, McClellan warned Kelton to seek information at places other than Pope's headquarters if a reliable report were desired.[2]

That afternoon the troubled Lincoln sent for McClellan. He had reason to believe, the President stated, that the Army of the Potomac was not cooperating with Pope. Would McClellan, he asked, use his influence in correcting this matter. McClellan was, of course, shocked by the President's suggestion, believing he must have been misinformed. No matter how the Army of the Potomac might view Pope as a person, McClellan was confident that the army would do its full duty for the new commander. At Lincoln's insistence, however, McClellan agreed to wire Porter and other of his personal friends asking them to extend full cooperation to Pope. This rather amazing telegram urged Porter, for McClellan's sake and that of the country, to lend the "fullest and most cordial cooperation to General Pope" as in that week of crisis the destinies of the country and the honor of the army

1 McClellan, Report, 343.
2 McClellan, Own Story, 534.

were at stake.[1]

The following morning, Lincoln and Halleck called on McClellan as the general was at breakfast. Kelton had returned from the front and confirmed the gloomy intelligence of Pope's rout. Lincoln, believing that some 30,000 stragglers were clogging the road into Washington and that the capital was bound to fall, asked McClellan if he would "under the circumstances" and as a favor to the President, resume command and do the best that could be done. McClellan, of course, accepted this responsibility and tried to quiet the fears of the upset President by telling him the capital could be saved. Although neither Lincoln nor Halleck believed this, they were content to leave the matter in McClellan's hands, ordering him to stop and collect stragglers, put the defenses of Washington in order and assume command of Pope's army as it came within the vicinity of Washington.[2]

This little drama sheds great light on the character of both the President and McClellan and reveals some of the pressures under which both labored. Lincoln's reference to "under the circumstances" would seem to imply that both he and McClellan realized that the general had been shabbily treated. His asking McClellan to assume command "as a favor to me" would seem to imply a realization that although he had a legal right to command McClellan, he had no moral right to order the general after having been the authority by which McClellan had been stripped of power. His placing the fate of Washington in McClellan's hands would seem to imply a trust in the general's military judgment in spite of strong predilections against him. There was no other officer

1 McClellan, Report, 344.
2 McClellan, Own Story, 535.

in the Union camp with sufficient ability to weld the defeated and disorganized brigades of Pope's army into a tool ready to fling any advance of the Confederates back into Virginia. The fact that Halleck accompanied Lincoln but allowed the President to issue the orders serves to underscore the change which had come about in the conduct of the war. Civilians were now conducting the technical phases of the war. McClellan's characteristic response of willingness to assume command emphasizes his entire philosophy. He was a soldier who, regardless of how badly his government treated him, was obliged to risk all if that government commanded. His government did command and he accepted its orders even though he realized that, in view of the war hysteria, a failure might mean his being tried by courts-martial.

McClellan at once set to work with his staff preparing to organize the troops for a defense of Washington. Orders were sent to Pope prescribing routes for various elements of the command to approach Washington. During the course of this hectic morning, McClellan had occasion to requisition small arms from the Washington arsenal. It was unfilled because the frightened Secretary of War had ordered the contents of the arsenal to be shipped from the city to prevent seizure by the Confederates. After some negotiations, the Secretary's order was countermanded.[1] The incident serves to show the fear that gripped high government officials as McClellan struggled to restore order. Such panic makes all the more praiseworthy the general's achievements.

Even as McClellan was faced with major obstacles to successful achievement of his objective, so was Lincoln subjected to extreme pressures. He

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1 McClellan, Own Story, 536.

realized that restoring McClellan to command could very well precipitate such a crisis that his cabinet would dissolve, the members taking with them large segments of popular support from the administration. Passions of some cabinet officers had reached such heat that Lincoln's fears were well grounded. General surprise was manifest at cabinet meeting on September 2 when Stanton, his voice trembling with emotion, informed the members of McClellan's restoration to command. Lincoln arrived just as Stanton finished making his announcement and assumed full responsibility for McClellan's orders. Lincoln explained that while McClellan had some weaknesses, yet there was no one who so commanded the confidence of the army and no one who could so well man the defenses of the capital. Chase and Stanton both strongly remonstrated with the President, Chase claiming the move would be a national calamity while Stanton declared that Lincoln's direct intervention into the chain of command virtually relieved everyone of responsibility for the defense of Washington.[1] One major element of Lincoln's greatness was that he was able to ride out this incipient palace revolt, thus retaining his power over his advisers. Lesser men, Buchanan for example, have been unable to overcome strong advisers and Lincoln's cabinet was composed of strong men.

Late that day two orders were issued regularizing the actions taken by Lincoln in restoring McClellan to command. The first appeared by order of the Secretary of War. Stanton, not wishing to be a party to elevating McClellan, caused that order to be withdrawn and one by order of Halleck

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1 Welles, Diary, 104.

substituted for it.[1]

> Maj.-Gen. McClellan will have command of the fortifications of Washington and of all the troops for the defense of the capital.
>
> By order of Maj.-Gen. Halleck
> E. D. Townsend
> Asst. Adj.-Gen.

McClellan, meanwhile, was completing his preparations prior to starting for the front to assume control of the army. Just as he was leaving, a messenger came from Halleck informing him that he should not exercise command until the troops had actually reached the immediate vicinity of the fortifications. McClellan therefore waited until afternoon before riding out to the most advanced of the detached works.

Taking with him some of his aides and a small cavalry escort, he rode at once to Munson's Hill, reaching there at about the same time as some of the infantry of King's division. These were halted and put into position. Shortly afterwards, Generals Pope and McDowell approached, surrounded by a regiment of cavalry. McClellan inquired as to where the artillery firing was coming from. Pope thought it was probably against Sumner, acting on the rear guard, but could give no precise information. He asked leave to go on to Washington, which was granted. McClellan, meanwhile, heading for the firing. Before departing, however, he dispatched his aides and orderlies with instructions to troops coming in by the Alexandria and Central roads. Then, with Colburn and three orderlies, he started across country. By the time the party reached Langley road from whence had come sounds of

1 Townsend, Anecdotes of the Civil War, 68.

firing, the artillery stopped. It was after dark when he came upon the first troops and then took place one of the real drams of the war.[1] Captain William H. Powell of the 4th U. S. Infantry was resting along the road to Washington when he spied horsemen in the gloom. Turning to his commander, he said:

> 'Colonel, if I did not know that General McClellan had been relieved of all command, I should say that he was one of that party,' adding immediately, 'I do really believe it is he!'
>
> 'Nonsense,' said the colonel; 'what would General McClellan be doing out in this lonely place, at this time of night, without an escort?'
>
> The two horsemen passed on to where the men of the column were lying, standing, or sitting, and were soon lost in the shadowy gloom. But a few moments had elapsed, however, when Captain John D. Wilkins, of the 3d Infantry (now colonel of the 5th) came running toward Colonel Buchanan, crying out:
>
> 'Colonel! Colonel! General McClellan is here!'
>
> The enlisted men caught the sound! Whoever was awake aroused his neighbor. Eyes were rubbed, and those tired fellows, as the news passed down the column, jumped to their feet, and sent up such a hurrah as the Army of the Potomac had never heard before. Shout upon shout went out into the stillness of the night; and as it was taken up along the road and repeated by regiment, brigade, division, and corps, we could hear the roar dying away in the distance. The effect of this man's presence upon the Army of the Potomac—in sunshine or rain, in darkness or in daylight, in victory or defeat—was electrical, and too wonderful to make it worth while attempting to give a reason for it. Just two weeks from this time this defeated army, under the leadership of McClellan, won the battles of South Mountain and Antietam, having marched ten days out of the two weeks in order to do it.[2]

McClellan then satisfied himself that Sumner was pursuing his march unmolested, so sent on to inform him that a change of command had actually taken place. McClellan then returned by Chain Bridge road to a little house near

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1 McClellan, Own Story, 537.
2 B. & L., II, 490.

Langley where he found Porter. The two spent several hours in conversation, then McClellan returned to Washington. By daybreak the troops were all within the defenses of Washington and ready to repel any attacks.[1]

In a sense, McClellan's fortunes had made a full cycle. A year before, he had been called to Washington to assume command of a badly defeated mob of untrained men in uniform. He had organized and trained those men and had led them forth into a well-conceived campaign. He had maneuvered them to as close to Richmond as Union troops were to get until 1864 and had then kept them organized as the brightest of the Confederate generals attempted to destroy the Federal army. Instead of releasing his grip on the throat of the Confederate capital, he merely took a slightly different bite and prepared to complete the strangulation of the Virginia metropolis. His plans were spoiled and his hopes dashed when Lincoln, forced by political pressures ordered the army back to the vicinity of Washington. Lincoln's support and Pope's defeat both contributed to the defeat of the conspiracy aimed at relieving McClellan, and he was again called to restore order to a defeated, demoralized army. But this time his stock of support from political leaders was pitifully small. He was to retain his command only until the danger to the capital had passed. Then he was cast off.

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1 McClellan, Own Story, 538.

CHAPTER XIII

SOUTH MOUNTAIN AND ANTIETAM

From late June until September, 1862, the Confederates under the command of Robert E. Lee, aided by the Lincoln administration's attempts at military strategy, had defeated the efforts of the Army of the Potomac to lodge itself close to Richmond. They had further cleared Virginia, except in the western part of the state, of Federal troops. Now, having defeated the Union forces under Pope and driven them back in disorder upon the defenses of Washington, Lee began to ponder his future actions.

Several courses were open to him. He could resume the defensive in Virginia and allow some of his battle-wise veterans to be shipped to the trans-Mississippi area to help in reclaiming Missouri for the South. This course, in the minds of many of his troops, was the only ethical path to follow. The war, in their eyes, was a defensive one, fought to protect Southern culture. To go from the strategic defense over to an offensive against the North wrenched the purposes for which men endured the kinds of hardships they had been experiencing. To head north, in the face of this sort of opinion, was to risk encouraging straggling and large-scale desertion. Indeed, once the move was made, Lee was handicapped by precisely this sort of thing.

On the other hand, there were immense anticipated gains to be had from a successful invasion of the North. His troops were low on food and clothing. Raids into such places as Hagerstown, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, or Baltimore might provide the means with which to re-equip his ragged and barefooted soldiers. Then, too, the prestige of the North abroad was at

low ebb. Northern armies in the east had been prevented from obtaining their objective. If Lee could demonstrate the ability of the Confederacy to invade the North, European powers and England might recognize the Confederacy, and might possibly even intervene in the war.

With such a stake to play for, coupled with his estimate of the Union ability and willingness to resist, Lee and his president decided to risk a movement north of the Potomac. Since the defenses of Washington were too strong for an attack against that place, Lee elected to cross the Potomac farther upstream, leaving the defenders of the Federal capital to wonder where he had gone.

Between the 4th and 7th of September, then, Lee crossed his army into Maryland. It was in a very real sense a dramatic moment as the first grey-clad soldiers crossed the river to the thrilling music of "Maryland, My Maryland." The generals all hoped that these troops would appear to the Marylanders as liberators and to this end tried to make the best impression possible. On the 8th, as the army was concentrating around Frederick, Lee addressed a proclamation to the people of Maryland, styling the invading army as liberators of that southern state. But the address did not have the desired effect. Recruits did not come in and supplies from the vicinity of Frederick soon ran low. Lee then had to consider an early removal from there.

He elected to move west to the vicinity of Hagerstown, but to do so would place the Union garrison at Harpers Ferry squarely astride his axis of communications. Lee had believed that Harpers Ferry would be evacuated when he crossed into Maryland. Because of the confused command picture in

Washington, however, this was not done. Lee then decided to move part of his command to Hagerstown while the rest of his forces went to reduce Harpers Ferry. When that chore was accomplished, all troops were to be reconcentrated at Hagerstown with a free Shenandoah valley at their backs down which they could retreat if such became necessary.

This plan Lee reduced to writing in Special Order 191 Headquarters, Army of Northern Virginia.

> The army will resume its march to-morrow, taking the Hagerstown road. General Jackson's command will form the advance, and after passing Middletown, with such portion as he may select, will take the route towards Sharpsburg, cross the Potomac at the most convenient point, and by Friday night take possession of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, capture such of the enemy as may be at Martinsburg, and intercept such as may attempt to escape from Harper's Ferry.
>
> General Longstreet's command will pursue the same road as far as Boonsboro', where it will halt with the reserve, supply and baggage trains of the army.
>
> General Mc Laws, with his own division and that of General R. H. Anderson, will follow General Longstreet. On reaching Middletown, he will take the route to Harper's Ferry, and by Friday morning possess himself of the Maryland Heights, and endeavor to capture the enemy at Harper's Ferry and vicinity.
>
> General Walker, with his division, after accomplishing the object in which he is now engaged, will cross the Potomac at Cheek's Ford, ascend its right bank to Lovettsville, take possession of Loudon Heights if practicable, by Friday morning, Keys' ford on his left, and the road between the end of the mountain and the Potomac on his right. He will, as far as practicable, cooperate with General McLaws and General Jackson, in intercepting the retreat of the enemy.
>
> General D. H. Hill's division will form the rear guard of the army, pursuing the road taken by the main body. The reserve artillery, ordnance, and supply trains, &c., will precede General Hill.
>
> General Stuart will detach a squadron of cavalry to accompany the commands of General Longstreet, Jackson, and McLaws, and with

the main body of the cavalry will cover the route of the army, and bring up all stragglers that may have been left behind.

The commands of General Jackson, McLaws, and Walker, after accomplishing the objects for which they have been detached, will join the main body of the army at Boonsboro or Hagerstown.

Each regiment on the march, will habitually carry its axes in the regimental ordnance wagons, for the use of the men at their encampments to procure wood, &c.

By command of Gen. R. E. Lee,
R. H. Chilton,
A. A. General.

Maj.-Gen. D. H. Hill,
Comd'g. Division.[1]

After assuming command of Pope's retreating forces, McClellan struggled to reassert his authority through recreated channels of command. His own position was anomalous, since the official order placing him in command restricted his activities to the defenses of Washington proper. While Lincoln envisaged McClellan in his old role of commander of the Army of the Potomac, the written order did not make this clear, and much explaining had to be done to insure strict compliance with orders. In addition to his own position, McClellan had to consider how his responsibilities related to those of Pope. Pope was unclear as to whether he was subordinate to McClellan or retained independent power. On the 2nd, the day of decision, Halleck did nothing to alleviate the confusion, but the next day ordered Pope to Washington and informed him that for the time being McClellan was in general charge. On the 5th, Halleck got around to notifying McClellan that Pope had been relieved and that some other shifts in corps organization had been made, notably the relief of McDowell from duty with the I corps.[2] In considering these

1 McClellan, Report, 353-354.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XII, 808.

events, it should be remembered that McClellan was tacitly charged with the accomplishment of two tremendous objectives, without his knowing whether or not he had the authority to fulfill his responsibilities. He was to make Washington safe and at the same time place the army on such a footing as to enable it to go over to the offensive should the occasion offer. That he was able to accomplish so much speaks volumes about his skill, bravery, and patriotism. In similar circumstances other men have resigned rather than face an impossible situation.

On September 3 the Confederates disappeared from in front of Washington and McClellan began to receive intelligence that Lee was crossing the upper Potomac into Maryland. These reports required some major shifts of units, since it would now be necessary to cover not only Washington but the approaches to Baltimore and Philadelphia as well. To this end, cavalry was ordered to maintain contact with the enemy and the various Union corps were moved so as to screen the capital from the west and to be in a position to strike at the Confederates if the occasion offered. On the 3rd, the II and XII corps were moved to Tenallytown, and the IX corps to a point on 7th Street near Washington. On the 5th, the II and XII corps were again moved, this time to the vicinity of Rockville. On the 6th the I and IX corps were ordered to Leesboro and the VI corps and one division of the V corps moved out to Tenallytown.[1]

As soon as these early dispositions were made, McClellan reported to Halleck, who wanted to know who would command the three advance corps.

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1 McClellan, Report, 349.

McClellan said that no one had been designated since he was going to take command himself. Halleck then pointed out that McClellan's command was limited to the defenses of Washington and did not extend to any active field army.[1]

At about this same period, Secretary of State Seward called on McClellan to inquire as to the status of Harpers Ferry. McClellan said he believed, in view of Lee's presence north of the Potomac, that Harpers Ferry ought to be evacuated and its garrison united with the main army. He reasoned that the Harpers Ferry garrison could not hinder the enemy from crossing the Potomac and could only serve as an easy target for a Confederate raid. Seward was much impressed and asked McClellan to go with him at once to place his point of view before Halleck. The two men found that Halleck had retired for the night, but got him up nonetheless. Halleck was not impressed with McClellan's reasoning, stating that everything was under control and that the garrison should not be withdrawn.[2] In view of the subsequent developments of the campaign, the situation at Harpers Ferry requires some analysis.

One of the classic principles of warfare is that of concentration. To defeat an enemy, a commander must be able to concentrate overwhelming superiority at critical points while at the same time so maneuvering the enemy into reducing his forces there. Since such concentrations cannot be maintained at all places along an extended fighting front, a commander must be willing to risk leaving light forces in some sectors in order to

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1 B. & L., II, 551.
2 Ibid., 552.

have sufficient men to concentrate on his major objective. Perhaps the clearest example of this principle was the German Schlieffen Plan for offensive operations against France. The terms of this plan called for concentrating overwhelming strength north of the French city of Metz while encouraging heavy French assaults against inferior German forces south of that place. McClellan's entire notion of warfare was predicated upon this principle. He had argued that heavy concentration in the east was essential leaving lighter forces elsewhere to attract as much enemy attention as possible. Carrying this principle into the tactical considerations in September, 1862, he believed that leaving small isolated garrisons exposed was only to invite useless loss of men and supplies. The troops which could so quickly become captives of the Confederates could do more good with the main body of the Union army. Especially was this true since Harpers Ferry was a place which could not be held with an enemy in possession of the valley north of it. If Lee could get north of Harpers Ferry, he could capture it. If McClellan could drive Lee out of the region north of Harpers Ferry, he could also reclaim that place. Lee himself firmly believed that the Federal forces would evacuate Harpers Ferry and was as much surprised as McClellan was to discover that it had been ordered held.

Some point has been made that the presence of Union forces at Harpers Ferry caused Lee to split his forces, thus presenting McClellan an opportunity to crush the Confederate forces in detail, and that because this happened, Halleck's reasoning was sound.[1] This is specious reasoning, for Lee might just as well have allowed the Harpers Ferry garrison to "die on

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1 Williams, Lincoln Finds a General, I, 373.

the vine." The force there was just too small to do any damage to Lee's rear. The fact that Lee risked splitting his forces to capture Harpers Ferry speaks more about Lee's personality than it does about Halleck's wisdom. Lee could not resist the opportunity to collect supplies and pick up a few prisoners when it appeared to him that the enemy had made a serious blunder. Halleck's unorthodox decision may have made a difference in the Maryland campaign but there is no evidence that in making it, he expected the result of a false move by the Confederate general. Further, it can be argued that in the long run continued unorthodox decisions can not help but mitigate against the side making them. We are told that Hitler made many decisions in the early part of World War II which, while successful, were contrary to basic principles of war. His continued period of active command eventually ended with the defeat of the German army. Generals may vary the techniques of war, and should if they are to be victorious, but to violate fundamental principles of strategy for long must always result in defeat.

By the 7th of September, Lee's advance to Frederick was nearly complete and it became essential for the Union forces to do something to oppose him. As no commander had been appointed to take the field with the Federal forces McClellan resolved to take the field himself, even though he had no authority to do so. He paid his departing calls at the White House, War Department, and the home of Seward, and moved out of Washington. After his relief from command of the Army of the Potomac, McClellan was charged with having assumed command without authority and for nefarious purposes. McClellan himself believed that he fought the battles of South Mountain and Antietam with

a halter around his neck, for had he been defeated, he could very well have been tried for illegal exercise of command,[1] and with radicals in power, would probably have been executed.

Between the 7th and 13th of September, McClellan cautiously moved his troops forward in an advancing arc with his left based always upon the Potomac so as to prevent any flanking movement by the enemy to get between him and Washington. There were several reasons for caution. McClellan had no way of discovering what Lee's intentions were. The Confederate leader could be maneuvering for a strike against Baltimore. He could be trying to get McClellan to strike hard to the west, allowing the blow to fall on thin air, while the Southerners attacked Washington. Or, he could be only clearing the Shenandoah valley, occupying the Federal troops while the harvests were gathered farther south. To have made a reconnaissance in sufficient force to have pierced Lee's screens could very well have caused a meeting engagement to develop before the Federal troops were sufficiently reorganized. In addition, the nervous Halleck kept up a constant flow of contradictory communications to McClellan, first urging caution, then action. He feared that McClellan would advance too fast and thus be drawn off balance and that McClellan would move so slowly as to fail to close with the enemy.

On September 10, McClellan received word that Lee was at Frederick but did not receive any indication as to what his intentions were. On the 11th, Burnside was ordered to make a strong demonstration across the National Road and the B. & O. tracks toward New Market. If it appeared that the

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1 B. & L., II, 552.

enemy had moved toward Hagerstown, Burnside was to move rapidly on Frederick. All other corps were advanced so that Burnside's troops did not form a salient in the line which could be pinched off. On the 12th, Union troops entered Frederick and on the 13th, main elements from both the right wing and the center of the Union line passed through that city.[1] It was on the 13th that a stroke of good fortune occurred.

About noon on the 13th of September, the 27th Indiana Volunteers of the XII corps stacked arms on ground which had recently been occupied by D. H. Hill's Confederate division. Very shortly after halting a first sergeant and a private, B. W. Mitchell, brought to their colonel a packet of three cigars wrapped by a paper which appeared to be an official order of Robert E. Lee. The order was at once taken to the division headquarters. There an officer was able to verify the authenticity of the signature of Colonel Chilton, Lee's adjutant general, who had marked the order official. This order proved to be Lee's Special Order 191,[2] giving directions for a movement designed to capture Harpers Ferry, occupy Hagerstown, and reconcentrate the army at that place. It was at once transmitted to McClellan's headquarters, where it became the basis for action.[3]

This order, once McClellan had it, made it possible to know fairly exactly what Lee's plans were—that is, if the order were not a ruse. The order was found shortly after noon and by early afternoon was at army headquarters. McClellan's first step, taken at 3:00 P.M., was to notify his cavalry commander, Pleasanton, of the march route Lee had proposed to follow.

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1 McClellan, Report, 352-353.
2 Op. cit.
3 B. & L., II, 603.

Pleasanton was to ascertain whether that route had actually been followed. During the remainder of the afternoon and evening, orders were sent to the various corps commanders calling for an advance to begin the following morning. In issuing these orders, McClellan had two objectives to accomplish. One was to relieve the garrison at Harpers Ferry and the other was to enter a wedge between the troops supposed to be at Boonsboro or Hagerstown and those around Harpers Ferry. McClellan has been severely criticized for not having moved on the 13th rather than waiting until the 14th. Such criticism would probably be justified were it not for the fact that he could not afford to act precipitately, in view of the political and military situation and in view of the fact that formulation of a plan based upon the Lee order probably could not be accomplished in much less than four or five hours. McClellan, it must always be remembered, was not a division commander, but an army commader with troops spread over a long front. In order to get them in accelerated motion, even in the direction they had been moving, required some staff planning to determine if the roads could handle the numbers of troops to be put over them in a short time. It required reconsideration of the supply requests for the next 24 or 48 hours, and it required establishment of liaison between the elements to be committed.

By 6:20 on the evening of September 13, McClellan had formulated his plan. In a letter of instructions to General Franklin at Buckeyestown, he outlined the general tactics to be followed. Burnside, commanding the IX corps under Reno and the I corps under Hooker, was to move out that night or early the next morning toward Turner's pass in South Mountain. Sumner, commanding his own II corps and the XII corps of Williams, was to follow.

Both units were to use Boonsboro as their objective, with the view of defeating Longstreet, who was supposed to be there. Franklin, supported by Couch's division, was to head for Crampton's Gap with the objective of cutting off the retreat of McLaws, who was aiding Jackson in taking Harpers Ferry. If Crampton's pass were found to be occupied, Franklin was ordered to make all preparations for an attack and to commence the assault as soon as he heard heavy firing from the north around Turner's Gap. Once the pass was gained, Franklin was to turn south, defeat McLaws, and relieve Colonel Miles at Harpers Ferry. As a possible but not probable objective, Franklin was to swing north toward Sharpsburg or Williamsport to block the escape of Longstreet toward the Potomac.[1]

The battle of South Mountain which took place on the next day, the 14th, actually consisted of two battles fought for passes through the Blue Ridge mountains so that the Federal troops could get through them to prevent union of the separate wings of the Confederate army.

Franklin's phase of the operations was conducted without heavy loss, but somewhat too late to accomplish the objectives which had been set for him. At about noon on the 14th, he arrived at Burkettsville to find the enemy guarding both sides of the road leading into Crampton's pass. The corps was formed astride the road and the advance begun which slowly drove the Confederates to the crest of the pass, thence in rapid retreat down the other side. At the close of this action, Franklin was through the mountains within three and a half miles of Maryland Heights overlooking Harpers Ferry. Plans were made to continue the advance on the following morning. At 7:00

1 McClellan, Report, 360.

A.M. on the 15th, however, Franklin observed from the crest of the pass across Pleasant Valley to the west and decided from the formidable appearance of the Confederate lines not to attack toward Harpers Ferry. Later that day the Confederate forces withdrew from Harpers Ferry and Pleasant Valley toward Sharpsburg. Franklin spent the day reconcentrating his corps. The following evening, the 16th, he received orders from McClellan to move to Sharpsburg. He began that movement at 5:30 the next morning.[1]

While Franklin was thus engaged in crossing the Blue Ridge mountains at Crampton's Gap, Federal troops of the right wing under Burnside and troops of the center under Sumner were engaged for the possession of Turner's Gap. On the morning of the 13th Pleasanton's cavalry had been ordered to move in the direction of Middletown to maintain contact with the enemy. In early afternoon he reached Turner's Gap where he found the enemy in what appeared to be a heavy concentration and with an apparent determination to defend the pass. Pleasanton sent a request back to Burnside for infantry support and permission to make a reconnaissance of the position.

As has been related, Lee's order fell into McClellan's hands early in the afternoon on the 13th and, not knowing what forces Pleasanton had encountered, the commanding general ordered a crossing of the Blue Ridge to determine if Lee's order was actually being carried out. On the night of the 13th, orders were issued at varying hours to each of the units, calling for movement the next morning. The orders to Hooker and Sykes were dis-

1 B. & L., II, 596.

patched at 11:30 P.M. requiring movement at daylight and 6:00 A.M. respectively. Sumner's order was dispatched at 8:45 P.M. calling for movement at 7:00 A.M. on the 14th.[1]

In the evening of September 13, General Cox, commanding one of the divisions of Burnside's corps, which was then under the command of Jesse L. Reno, was ordered to support Pleasanton's cavalry strike at Turner's Gap the next morning. At 6:00 A.M., then, on the 14th, Cox's lead brigade marched out of Middletown. The troops had not progressed far when they received indirect word that Confederates were in the pass in force. Cox then placed all of his division in motion so as to be able to support his lead brigade if it ran into trouble. He also sent word to Reno saying he expected trouble. Before Cox made contact with the enemy, he had received word from Reno that the rest of the IX corps would move at once to support the action. Instead of moving to Turner's Gap, Cox directed his troops to a pass some short distance to the south called Fox's Gap. There, about one-half mile from the top at about 9:00 A.M., Cox ran into a Confederate brigade under the command of Brigadier-General Garland. After a fierce fire fight, the Union troops overran Garland's position. Then, believing he still had heavy work cut out for him, Cox reformed his lines, not realizing that his fight had routed the Confederates. Before his lines were reformed, however, General G. B. Anderson arrived and attempted to regain the ground lost by Garland. Though this attack failed, Cox subsequently withdrew to await the arrival of fresh troops from the corps reserve.

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1 McClellan, Report, 365.

These troops, under Wilcox, arrived at about 2:00 P.M. and from then until the end of the fight the Union forces pushed on until at sunset all of the Confederate positions except one, astride a small knoll, were in Federal hands.[1]

While Cox was commencing the operations, other elements of McClellan's army were moving from their positions east of the Catoctin range of mountains. Hooker's corps left its position at about sunrise and by 1:00 P.M. had arrived at the Catoctin Creek. Upon a request from Reno and an order from McClellan, Hooker advanced one of his divisions, that under the command of George Meade, to the right of Reno's troops in order to create a diversion. As the rest of Hooker's corps arrived, they were committed to the left and right of Meade's division. The entire battle line broke into flame as the I corps steadily advanced up the slopes, until by nightfall it was on top of the crest of the mountain range commanding the road on both sides, which passed through Fox's Gap.

The II and XII corps under the command of Sumner arrived at South Mountain shortly before dark and did not take part in the actions of the day. Syke's division of regulars halted for the night at Middletown in army reserve. Thus the entire right and center of the army was concentrated on or near South Mountain in a position to attack again the following morning. At daylight, however, the advancing Union skirmishers found that the enemy had withdrawn.

The fight at South Mountain was a Union victory, but not of the dimensions McClellan claimed. It was a fight unexpected by the army commander,

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1 B. & L., II, 587-589.

since he believed that the passes would be relatively lightly held. This expectation goes far in explaining why the Union attacks were delivered at such widely spaced intervals. The troops were not present to make a concerted effort since South Mountain was not supposed to become the field of battle. Once the engagement was joined, however, McClellan's actions deserve praise. He quickly rode to the front and after sizing up the situation ordered the attack by Hooker's corps to relieve the pressure on Reno. As the other troops came up toward evening, he disposed of them so as to be able to present a concerted attack on the following morning. The fact that Cox's fight was not crowned with more striking success was due more to chance than to poor planning at the army headquarters.

The fight at South Mountain had come about as a result of McClellan's acting on the basis of Lee's last order and as a result of Lee altering the plans that order outlined. Lee had planned on holding both the columns of Longstreet and of D. H. Hill at Boonsboro in order to block any Union attempt to relieve Harpers Ferry. Then he received word of a possible Union thrust through Pennsylvania to Hagerstown. To investigate this rumor and to secure the store of flour and other supplies believed to be there, Lee ordered, over Longstreet's protests, Longstreet's corps to Hagerstown. D. H. Hill was to remain at Boonsboro as a rear guard with the mission of delaying the enemy. It was Lee's hope that McClellan would proceed cautiously toward the Blue Ridge mountains and that Hill, Longstreet, and Jackson could be concentrated some place to the west where they could operate against McClellan's lengthening lines of communications. In other words, it was not Lee's intention to guard for very long the passes over the Blue Ridge mountains.

McClellan was to be enticed to the west only after Jackson had accomplished his mission at Harpers Ferry.

During the night of September 13, the day before the battle of South Mountain, Hill received word from east of Turner's Gap that, judging from the camp fires, the entire Federal army had approached South Mountain. Hill relayed this information to Lee at Hagerstown. Lee at about the same time received other startling news. Stuart had been visited by a Southern sympathizer from Frederick who told him that McClellan had found a copy of the order by which Lee had separated his command. Stuart forwarded this information to Lee and then shifted his own forces south, believing Crampton's Gap to be the logical place for McClellan's main effort.

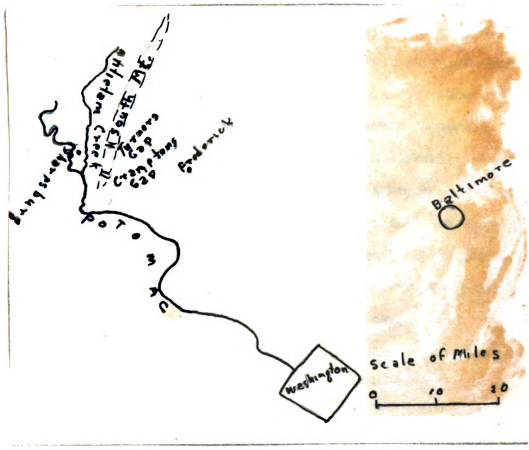
Lee still believed that he could spare time for Jackson to accomplish his mission, but to do so the passes to South Mountain would have to be defended. To this end, he ordered Hill to cooperate with Stuart in holding the passes. He further mentioned that Longstreet would return at once from Hagerstown to help in the defense.

Thus it can be seen that once again McClellan's maneuvers had forced Lee to fight on ground and with forces insufficient for the purposes. The fight at South Mountain, just as the fight at Malvern Hill, represented McClellan placing his troops where Lee was bound to collide with them. One wonders again which general demonstrated the better insight into the mind of his enemy.

After the battle of South Mountain, Lee began to receive the gloomy reports of his subordinates. Hood and Hill, both of whom had participated heavily in the day's work, advised withdrawal of the army. Added to these

recommendations came the knowledge that Sumner's fresh corps had moved into line and would be ready to start the proceedings the following morning. Lee was seriously considering the abandoning the Maryland campaign and even drafted a note to McLaws ordering him to give up his position in front of Harpers Ferry. Lee changed his mind, however, when he heard from Jackson that the following morning ought to see victory for the Confederate forces and that Jackson understood the need for concentration. Lee resolved to remain in Maryland, to entice McClellan to attack a position favorable to the Confederates and when fortune smiled to go over to the offensive and give McClellan a stinging defeat. To this end, he selected the little road junction of Sharpsburg as the point of concentration and ordered all troops there to take up a defensive position behind Antietam Creek. As soon as Jackson had received the surrender of the Union forces at Harpers Ferry, he began to move his troops north to the concentration point. During the morning of September 16 they arrived, thus adding new strength to Lee's defensive line.

Lee's selection of Sharpsburg as a concentration point had much to commend it. Located close to the junction of the Antietam Creek and the Potomac, it could be reached by Jackson moving north from Harpers Ferry. It was close enough to the Potomac so that Lee could retreat over that river into Virginia if defeated. It was far enough west from the Blue Ridge mountains that McClellan could be driven back against them if Lee was able to resume the offensive. Antietam Creek and the gentle hills to the west made for a fair defensive position, although the left flank of the army would have to rest pretty much in the air. The right flank, of course, had the Potomac to serve as flank protection. (See map.)



INVASION OF MARYLAND

While Lee was thus straining every effort to concentrate his troops at Sharpsburg, McClellan was working hard to exploit the victories of Crampton's and Turner's Gaps. Franklin was ordered to move toward Harpers Ferry to relieve that place. Sumner, Burnside, and Porter were ordered to move out on the road to Boonsboro. These three corps would then be in position to branch straight south to Rohrersville if Franklin needed help relieving Harpers Ferry or to head southwest if a concentration were ordered at Sharpsburg. The cavalry was to precede the leading elements of infantry as they moved in compliance with these orders.

As these orders were being executed, McClellan began to receive intelligence as to the movements of Lee. He heard that Harpers Ferry had been surrendered and that McLaw's Confederate troops had disappeared from in front of Franklin. He learned that Lee seemed to be concentrating at Sharpsburg. By mid-afternoon, his intelligence seemed accurate enough to begin accommodating his movements to those of Lee. Franklin was ordered to evacuate Rohrersville and to move directly to Sharpsburg. The other corps were given similar instructions in the hopes that Lee might be forced into a battle on the 15th. The maneuvers which McClellan's army had been forced to make, however, prevented the troops arriving at the point of concentration in time to undertake activity that day.

Late in the afternoon of the 15th, McClellan went to the head of the main body of his army to find that only two divisions, those of Richardson and Sykes, had arrived opposite Lee's position west of the Antietam Creek. Richardson had arrived first and deployed near the Antietam Creek on the right of the Sharpsburg road. Sykes had deployed on the left of the road. These two divisions were to be the base for the build-up. After making a hasty examination of the area, McClellan decided it was too late in the day to attempt offensive operations. He then began to direct the placing of artillery in the center and to select concentration points for his arriving corps on either side of the Sharpsburg turnpike.

At this point it is reasonable to inquire as to why McClellan did not bend every effort to have his troops ready for an attack the following morning, the 16th. Had he struck then he would have found Lee in an extremely weak condition without the brigades under Jackson, McLaws, and A. P. Hill.

Lee, so weakened, might have been destroyed and with his destruction the hopes of the Confederacy. McClellan gives unsatisfactory reasons for not attacking. He says that it was not until morning of the 16th that the last of the corps of his main body was in position. By that time he found that the Confederates had shifted the positions of some of their batteries sufficiently to warrant altering the position of some Union troops. His morning was given over to reconnoitering the new positions taken by the enemy, examining the ground, finding fords and clearing their approaches and hurrying up the supply and ammunition trains. These last had been crowded off the road by the combat arms in hopes of catching the enemy. The ammunition had to be brought up, since that of many of the troops had been expended in the fight on the 14th.

These reasons just do not satisfy. McClellan had arrived at the front early enough in the afternoon to have surveyed the ground and formed his attack plan. Then, instead of concentrating his corps on either side of the road, he might better have directed them to places from which his attack could have been launched the following morning. His staff might have been used to hurry up the corps so as to give the troops their rest in position, rather than along the road. The troops had had sufficient time on the night of the 14th to have replenished their ammunition. If the need for speed was sufficient to have forced supply vehicles off the road, then the troops so hurried forward should have been ready to fight at a moment's notice. If they were not so ready to fight, the hurrying was useless waste of energy.

However, in defense of McClellan several things must be said. His

information led him to believe that Lee was stronger than Lee actually was. Lee did occupy a strong defensive position. It would be well to prepare as carefully as possible before assailing it. Then, too, McClellan here, as during the entire campaign, was plagued by an uneven organizational structure. The forces he was using were from two separate armies. He had not yet welded the units into a smoothly functioning whole. To have directed his corps into attack positions late at night would have required a closer liaison than had as yet been built up. It must always be kept in mind that these events transpired only two weeks after McClellan had been given command of the defenses of Washington. In that time he had been required to feel carefully to determine Lee's movements. When he finally discovered what they were, he had moved quickly to the offensive and had fought a heavy engagement at South Mountain and had at once gone in close pursuit of the Confederates. Once having closed with the enemy, and in view of his penchant for the set-piece offensive, it is small wonder that he took the day of the 16th to get ready for the battle.

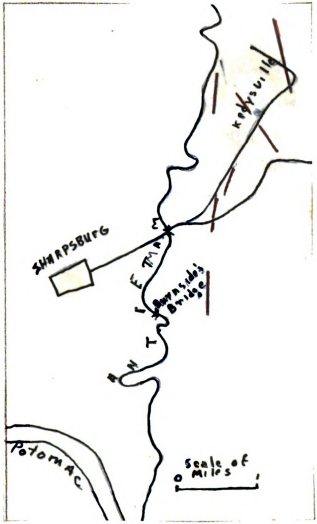
Another fact that is largely overlooked is the fundamental belief that possessed McClellan that the fate of the Union was actually in his hands. And as a matter of fact, it was. A precipitate action on his part was what Lee was hoping for. The chance of throwing McClellan off balance would have allowed Lee to make good his offensive operation. A Union defeat thus caused could probably have resulted in victory for the Confederacy and European intervention on its side. Given these conditions, McClellan was doing only the prudent thing in delaying action until he was ready.

To have plunged recklessly into battle might have resulted in a glorious and complete victory or it might have resulted in the death of the Union cause. To take a day longer to prepare may have cut down the odds of winning a victory of annihilation, but it also cut down the odds of total defeat in event the attack failed.

It may be argued that in the final analysis a great commander must face up to such choices and make his decision. It may be claimed that generals who fail to take chances lack a certain high moral courage which characterized such men as Robert E. Lee. McClellan, it can be argued, could not demonstrate the same kind of moral courage Lee did partly, at least, because he did not have the confidence of his government. McClellan was not justified in making an all or nothing gamble. Lee, on the other hand, possessing the complete confidence of his government, was justified in making such a play to win or lose all. It should be pointed out in this connection that none of Grant's decisions were quite as momentous as the ones McClellan was required to make. Much would have been lost had Grant's decision to bottle up Vicksburg from the south failed. But the Northern cause would not have failed as a result.

On the morning of the 16th, McClellan's troops were established as follows (see map). On the right on both sides of the Sharpsburg Turnpike were Sumner's and Hooker's corps. Richardson's division of Sumner's corps was closest to the river on the right side of the turnpike. Sykes' division of Porter's corps was on line with Richardson only to the left of the turnpike. The left of the line was occupied by Burnside's corps. In the rear of the right wing was stationed Mansfield's corps. The cavalry was massed

on the turnpike in rear of Keadysville. Artillery was massed on the ridge of hills overlooking the Antietam. To the south, in Pleasant valley, in front of Brownsville, Franklin's corps and Couch's division were located. Morell's division of Porter's corps and Humphrey's new division were both on the road to Sharpsburg.



UNION POSITIONS ON THE MORNING OF

SEPTEMBER 16, 1862

With these troops McClellan planned what was in effect a double evelopment. He planned on sending Hooker and Mansfield, supported by Sumner, and Franklin as soon as he arrived, around the left flank of the enemy. As soon as that phase began to develop satisfactorily, he was going to throw Burnside's corps across the Antietam and strike at the extreme right Confederate flank. When either one of these flanking movements appeared to be successful he intended throwing in his reserves so as to win the day.[1]

In implementing these plans, General Hooker was ordered to cross his I corps to the west bank of the Antietam and to attack so as to turn the Confederate left flank if possible. Mansfield's XII corps was ordered to cross the river in the wake of Hooker's corps during the night of the 16th. Sumner was to alert his corps for a movement across the following morning.[2]

As soon as Hooker saw his command under way for its crossing on the 16th, he rode to McClellan's headquarters to confer with the commanding general. He was told that after the attack started he could call for reinforcements as needed and upon their arrival was to have command of them. Shortly after leaving McClellan, as he was moving with his troops, Hooker was joined by the commanding general and staff, who had crossed the Antietam to see what progress was being made. At this interview, Hooker pointed out the danger of using one small corps against the entire Confederate army. Unless a major diversion were undertaken or unless he was reinforced, Hooker believed he would be "eaten up" by the enemy.[3]

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1 McClellan, Report, 377.
2 Ibid., 377.
3 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XIX, I, 217.

These two interviews are mentioned to show that McClellan did have an idea of a concerted attack on the enemy flank. His use of Hooker as the lead corps and his authorizing Hooker to assume command of reinforcements as they came up must be interpreted as evidence that Hooker was to command the right wing of the army. The fact that McClellan left his headquarters to watch this crucial movement get under way must be taken as evidence of good troop-leading technique on the part of the army commander.

Shortly after McClellan left Hooker, the skirmishers in front of the I corps became engaged with the enemy skirmishers and a light fire fight was carried on until dark, with the Confederate forces slowly retiring before the Union advance. That night the I corps rested on its arms and Mansfield's corps crossed the river and took up positions behind Hooker.

At daylight on the 17th, Hooker began his advance; Doubleday's division on the right and Rickett's division on the left. Meade was in reserve. Hooker's objective was to secure the high ground to the northwest of the Confederate main line. This advance had not gone far before the fire fight was again resumed, with the Confederate forces being driven back from a large cornfield to a row of trees, fences, and stone ledges on line with a white Dunker church. At about this point Hooker had to be taken from the field because of loss of blood from a wounded foot. Command devolved upon Meade.[1]

The two lead divisions soon ran into trouble and were driven back to a defensive line established by Meade's division. At this welcome moment

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1 Ibid., I ser., XIX, 218-219.

Mansfield's corps came onto the line to the left. An hour later Sumner's corps came into the fight and the I corps dropped back to reserve in order to reform and replenish ammunition.[1] Sumner's corps went into battle with Sedgwick's division in the lead. It very quickly got into trouble by virtue of a Confederate attack which interjected between Mansfield's corps and Sedgwick. The entire division fell back, but was soon rallied on a strong position near the cornfield which was maintained through the rest of the fight.[2]

Franklin's corps, which had made the fight at Crampton's Gap, was ordered at 4:30 on the 16th to march at once for Sharpsburg. This order Franklin says he received during the night of the 16th. At 5:30 the next morning he started two of his divisions on the road with Smith's unit in the lead. It arrived at the Union battle positions at about 10:00 A.M. and was ordered to the west side of the Antietam. Smith was very shortly ordered to go to the assistance of Sumner, who was at that moment being heavily pressed by Confederate attacks. At about 11:00 A.M. Franklin's second division under Slocum arrived, and immediately two of his brigades were formed for an attack into some woods near the white Dunker church. The third brigade was slow in getting up. When it arrived it was ordered to a reserve position in rear of Sumner's right in order to support an attack all along the line. Sumner, however, decided to postpone this attack for a while. Shortly afterwards, McClellan came up and looked over

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XIX, I, 270.
2 Ibid., 276.

the situation and decided that the Union position had gone far enough for the time. He ordered the entire line to halt in its positions. During the afternoon desultory fire fights broke out from time to time, but no further advance was made by the Union right wing.[1]

The phase of the battle which began at daybreak with Hooker's attack and ended when McClellan ordered a temporary halt to the operations on his right flank about noon was crucial in the battle. In halting the Union advance, McClellan probably negated the effects of a rather excellent plan which had been executed perfectly up to that point. In order to understand why he would throw away the fruits of a hard-earned victory, some consideration of what was taking place on the Confederate side is necessary.

Jackson had been assigned the left wing of the army guarding the road from Hagerstown, and Stuart was placed farther to the left, protecting the gap between the Potomac river and Jackson's rear. Jackson's infantry was arranged from left to right: Early, Jackson's own division, and Ewell's division under command of John R. Jones. To their right were the depleted units of D. H. Hill. The only reserves available for the entire wing were the two worn brigades under Hood.

The position thus so lightly defended had little in the way of natural defenses to compensate for the few troops. There were woods on either side of the Hagerstown turnpike on the west running down to the small Dunker church. To the east of the Hagerstown road was a field of corn into which Jackson marched some of his troops.

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1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XIX, I, 376-377.

It was against this lightly held, lightly protected position that Hooker's attack crashed, shattering at almost the first blow Jackson's division. This blow was parried by Hood's brigades, which filled the gap between D. H. Hill's lines, which had bent under the onslaught, and Ewell's division. Faced with such devastation, Jackson was forced to call on Lee to send the army reserve. Before Jackson's courier could make the request, however, Lee had dispatched Walker's division and promised also to send McLaw's.

Just as Walker's troops began to arrive, Hood was forced back, and so the reserves were committed to fill the gap left by Hood. McLaws following, Walker arrived in time to meet the impact of Sumner's fresh troops. Hood's feat of stopping the enemy had been duplicated, but in doing so, McLaws' troops had become badly disorganized.

Then the pressure on Jackson's wing lessened and D. H. Hill was struck by the left of Sumner's corps. This vigorous attack was slowly beaten by Hill, who then, with freshly arrived troops, struck out in limited counterattacks. Sumner's attack was followed by another, this time by fresh troops of Franklin's corps. In this effort the back of the Confederate resistance was broken. East of the Hagerstown road not 1,000 men were available to fend against a new onslaught. But as the next Union attack appeared to be developing, well-directed artillery fire and rifle fire from the left flank of Hill's line forced the Union troops to pause. The rifle fire came from a regiment, but it was of such volume and so well directed that it appeared to come from at least a brigade. As the Federals paused, a weak, two-regiment Confederate counterattack was launched. It was soon broken up and the

Federal troops smashed again, this time, however, without the drive which had characterized their previous attempts. It quickly collapsed and then, strangely enough, the battle on that part of the line died down. This was at the time McClellan had decided not to assault again.

From every standpoint, this decision of McClellan's must be judged to have been in error. The attacks of Hooker, Mansfield, and Sumner had accomplished their purpose. A fresh corps under Franklin was available, and Hooker's corps under Meade had had sufficient rest to serve as the wing reserve. Another resolute attack along a three-corps front would certainly have rolled back the Confederate wing, for there were no more reserves to place into the line. Such an attack would have imperilled Lee's army and the entire Confederacy.

In explanation of McClellan's course, however, several factors need to be kept in mind. He had seen his troops progress, but at a terrible cost. Many of his high-ranking officers had been killed or wounded. He had to make his judgment in the fog of confusion which characterizes a battlefield. It turned out that his decision was wrong. Grant later faced with a similar choice kept throwing in fresh troops at Cold Harbor and in the process destroyed two corps without appreciable gain. McClellan was faced with what appeared to be greater opposition than Grant was faced with. It was in keeping with McClellan's nature to exercise prudence and to withhold the last bloody assaults on the Confederate left. Rather, he allowed the battle to die down there in hopes that the second phase of his plan might be more productive.

General Burnside, nominally commanding one wing of the army, was

actually present with but one of his two corps—that which had been commanded by Reno until his death at South Mountain; Jacob Cox had assumed command of the corps. The other corps which usually worked under Burnside, Hooker's, was off on its attack mission on the right of the line. During the morning of September 16, the day before the main battle, McClellan had found Burnside's corps east of the Antietam and opposite a bridge just below the east-west road into Sharpsburg. The commanding general left orders for some changes in the position of Burnside's troops and for a reconnaissance to be made of the approaches to the bridge.[1] These activities were carried out and preliminary attack orders issued should the corps be required to cross the bridge. Each division was placed in the position from which it was to advance if the command were given.

At 7:00 the next morning, orders were issued for the corps to get as close to the Antietam as possible and then to await further orders. Burnside and Cox established their command posts upon a high knoll east of the bridge (later called the Burnside Bridge) near several batteries of artillery.

At 10:00 A.M. McClellan ordered Burnside to cross the IX corps and to attack the enemy, thus creating a diversion in favor of the battle being waged on the extreme right flank. Burnside at once transmitted the attack order to Cox, who was standing beside him. Cox left the hill immediately to get his corps into action.

The place selected for a crossing was most difficult. The terrain made it almost impossible to support Burnside's attack by artillery, yet the area

1 McClellan, Report, 375.

into which the Federal troops had to move was open to the Confederate batteries. In addition, the Southern riflemen had a good field of fire and were covered by good defensive positions.

The bridge crossing appeared so formidable that Burnside and Cox decided to attempt it only after turning the Confederate defenses by a crossing at a ford some distance downstream from the bridge. To this end, Rodman's division was ordered to march rapidly for the ford. As soon as this movement was under way, the first of a series of bloody attempts to cross the bridge was undertaken. Crook's brigade made the first attempt but no sooner had it come into the open on the bank of the stream by the bridge than it was brought under murderous fire. Crook reported that he could get no closer. This was followed by an equally unsuccessful attack by Nagle's brigade.

While these attempts were being made, McClellan sent repeated orders to hurry up with the crossings so that the pressure on the extreme right flank might be relieved. To comply, Cox organized two regimental columns to go across simultaneously and to spread to the left and right respectively as soon as the far shore was gained. Artillery was brought down from the hills so as to be able to deliver point blank fire on the far side of the bridge. When everything was ready, heavy rifle fire broke out all along the Union line and the two assault regiments hit the bridge. In short order both columns were over and seeking cover. The Confederates at once began to evacuate their position.

After gaining the heights west of the creek, the position was organized for the defense against counterattack. McClellan, however, sent orders to

press the attack further, but as the ammunition of the attacking troops had been exhausted, Cox sent back a request for the reserve division before pressing on. It was thus 3:00 P.M. before any further movement could be undertaken.

For the next advance, Wilcox's fresh division led the attack on the right with Rodman on the left. The brigades of the Kanawha division (Cox's own) were in reserve. This advance followed the high ground toward Sharpsburg. Very quickly a fire fight developed, with the Confederates fighting from behind stone fences and ridges and the Federal troops being required to cross open fields. By half past four in the afternoon, however, the attack had progressed to the outskirts of Sharpsburg with the Union troops astride the high ground to the southeast of the town. Ammunition had again run low and the attack had to stop until it could be replenished. The left wing (under Rodman) had become somewhat separated from Wilcox and ran into troops unexpectedly on his left front. These forces were those of A. P. Hill, just arrived from duties at Harpers Ferry. The attack Hill made on the left flank of the Union attacking column was repulsed, but the effort halted all forward movement.

Taking advantage of this short lull, Burnside's reserve division was sent in between Rodman and Wilcox and the entire line drifted toward the left, actually getting closer and closer to the flanks. The day's fighting ended very shortly with the Confederates holding a line along the road leading from Sharpsburg to the Potomac.[1]

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1 B. & L., II, 649-658.

While these events were transpiring, it will be recalled that Porter, commanding the army reserve and the army artillery, waited with the commanding general. In terms of McClellan's plan, Porter's troops were the logical ones to use in a strike against the center in event the two flank attacks were successful. Both attacks were successful, but still Porter's troops were not put into motion. This failure to use his reserve is another instance where McClellan failed to exploit the possibilities of his achievement. Again, however, it must be recalled that his estimates of Lee's troops were large and he was fighting this battle according to orthodox procedure. A reserve is to be used to deliver the knockout punch, or to cover a retreat. The advices McClellan received from Sumner on the right flank made a retreat a distinct possibility. The sudden appearance of A. P. Hill on the left flank of Burnside made a retreat appear quite possible in that quarter. Given the impressions of these two situations, McClellan would have been foolhardy to have thrown in the last reserves of the army.

The night of September 17 found both armies lying exhausted in the positions they had occupied as the battle sputtered to an end. It also found both commanders, Lee and McClellan, faced with the responsibility for momentous decisions. Lee called his various commanders in to report on the conditions of their commands and to make recommendations for future operations. Each told the same story. Their commands were shattered and the remnants exhausted. The only possible course for the army to follow would be a night withdrawal for the Potomac. Even Jackson, in whom the fires of offensive warfare usually burned so brightly, could only counsel retreat.

After hearing them all, Lee thought for a moment and then decided. The army would remain in position the following day, ready to repel an attack if the Federals wanted to make one. Each commander was to return to his unit to do what he could to strengthen his position. Lee for his part would get up the stragglers, in all about 6,000 of them.

McClellan, across the Antietam, was making an equally momentous decision. After carefully reviewing the condition of his units and considering all that was at stake, he elected to spend the next day in reorganizing so that on the 19th he could renew the attack. In reaching this decision he was influenced by some rather specific factors:

> 1. His troops were exhausted from having marched and fought from the morning of the 14th to the evening of the 17th.
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> 2. The supply wagons had been rearward and they needed to be brought closer in order to feed and ammunition the battle-weary troops.
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> 3. Several of the corps had suffered extremely heavy losses. Hooker's report, for example, showed that out of 13,093 men who started the assault, only 6,729 men were available. Meade, who had taken Hooker's place, reported on the next day that the I corps could probably be relied upon in defense but its morale was probably not good enough for an offensive, although it would make the effort if desired. Sumner's troops had also suffered and he recommended postponing operations.[1]
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> Burnside reported to McClellan during the evening of September 17 his corps as being in grave danger by remaining on the west side of the Antietam. McClellan at once informed him that it was imperative that his corps remain. Burnside then stated that in order to do so he would need heavy reinforcements, probably at least 5,000. McClellan then told him to go on back to his position and to retain it with the forces of his command.[2]

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1 McClellan, Report, 394.
2 McClellan, Own Story, 618-619.

4. Reinforcements for the army had come up in the form of Humphrey's division but as it had arrived only by forced marches, McClellan did not feel justified in relying upon it for an attack. Some comparisons have been made, in this connection, between A. P. Hill's forced march the day before, and the subsequent fight on Burnside's left flank. A tired support could be used for such a purpose where it could not be used to commence a full-scale offensive.

5. By far the most important consideration for failing to renew the fight the next day was probably a thoughtful consideration of the objective or mission of the army. McClellan had partially achieved that objective and one day's preparation would make quite sure its complete achievement. In a letter to his wife, written on the 20th, McClellan emphasizes that he had done what he was charged with doing, i.e., defending the North against a Southern invasion. He felt "some little pride in having, with a beaten and demoralized army, defeated Lee so utterly and saved the North so completely".[1]

The 18th was then spent in rectifying the havoc wrought by the fourteen hours of battle of the previous day. Dead were buried, troops supplied and orders issued preparatory to the next day's advance. Meade and Franklin were ordered to push out skirmishers early the following morning, and Pleasanton was ordered to scour the flanks to determine the extent of Lee's defenses. Burnside was reinforced with Morell's division in the expectation that, so strengthened, he could attack the next morning. Unknown to headquarters, however, Burnside withdrew his corps to east of the Antietam, leaving Morell to hold with a division the position Burnside had held with a corps.

During the night of the 18th-19th, Lee began to withdraw and by morning he had completely vacated the position at Sharpsburg and was crossing the Potomac back into Virginia. In an effort to hurt Lee on his retreat and to be prepared to defend if Lee should suddenly revert to the offensive, McClel-

1 Ibid., 613.

lan ordered several of his corps to places along the Potomac. Sumner was instructed to send Banks' corps toward Harpers Ferry with instructions to occupy Maryland Heights. Franklin was dispatched to Williamsport where Stuart was reported concentrating 10,000 horsemen. Pleasanton was ordered to Williamsport, but was specifically enjoined not to cross the Potomac. Porter was ordered to Shepardstown.

By and large, the pursuit was a rather hit or miss affair and was not carried on with any particular elan. Lee was allowed to proceed virtually unmolested up the Shenandoah and McClellan began to get ready for other affairs. Part of the reason for the failure of McClellan to institute a vigorous pursuit was that he fell ill on the 19th of September. Being ill, he could not give the close attention to details which was his normal habit. Thus the Maryland campaign ground to a halt.

In evaluating the campaign one is plagued with great and perplexing questions. McClellan had been presented with many opportunities for delivering a knock-out blow to the Army of Northern Virginia. Some of these he exploited and hurt Lee a great deal. Others, for one reason or another, he failed to utilize. One must consider in making an evaluation the objectives McClellan was assigned, the means with which he was given to accomplish those objectives and some means of demonstrating how well or poorly he achieved.

The single most important objective of McClellan and the Army of the Potomac was the defense of Washington and the northern cities of Baltimore, Harrisburg, and Philadelphia. To accomplish this he was given command responsibility which was clouded and troops which had been disorganized by

decisive defeat at Bull Run. That he accomplished his mission is clear, since Lee was thwarted from accomplishing much north of the Potomac save capturing Harpers Ferry. After a short stay north of the river, Lee was forced, by military defeat, to retire into Virginia.

In any military venture there is a sequence of objectives. The lowest is that objective the attainment of which is almost certain. The next objectives are those which are probable of attainment provided some freak of chance does not interfere. Then there are those objectives which can only be attained if a series of unexpected circumstances develop favorable to the achievement of the ends sought. Implicit in McClellan's assignment was the objective of destroying Lee's army if the occasion developed in which such a feat were possible. It was not expected, nor even very seriously hoped for.

From what we now know of the condition of Lee's troops at the end of the battle of Antietam, we can see that McClellan could possibly have destroyed Lee's army. That he did not, must not be marked against him too heavily, for he had not been given the means by which that objective could safely have been attempted. He had been given a hastily organized army consisting of elements of two field armies and containing thousands of raw recruits. He was further denied the advice and encouragement of a government solidly behind him. His military superior concentrated on sending carping telegrams complaining that McClellan was either going too fast or too slow.

In carrying evaluation further, one must examine what McClellan did against what others had or have done under similar circumstances. McClellan attacked Lee at South Mountain and attacked Lee again at Antietam. Meade

a year later met Lee head on at Gettysburg and waited for Lee to attack. McClellan estimated that further attacks on the night of September 17 would be too dangerous and costly. Grant made another decision at Cold Harbor and forever afterwards said it was the one battle he wished he had never fought. McClellan decided on the 13th the general plan of operations he would follow to accomplish his assigned objectives. He pursued that plan with vigor until his mission was achieved. Hooker made a masterful plan for an invasion of Virginia and then got cold feet and stopped his operation as it was beginning to succeed. McClellan remained serene during all of the fighting, directing his troops from a centrally located command post as an army commander should do. Pope became rattled and gave up a central command post, thus losing control of the battlefield.[1]

Another aspect to an evaluation of McClellan's Maryland campaign involves comparing what Lee did against him with what Lee did against other commanders. At second Bull Run, at Fredericksburg, at Chancellorsville, and for that matter at Gettysburg, Lee forced his enemy to fight on ground favorable to the Confederates. At South Mountain and at Antietam, Lee was forced by McClellan's maneuvers to fight on unfavorable ground. At second Bull Run

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1 These comparisons are made, not with the idea of defending McClellan's errors by citing errors of other men but rather with the intent of showing the magnitude of McClellan's successes when contrasted with other major operations of the Civil War. The point is that McClellan succeeded in achieving every important objective assigned to him. He failed only in destroying Lee's army. To blame him bitterly for not doing so is somewhat analogous to blaming the allied troops which made the Normandy invasion in 1944 for not destroying the German army at the same time they forced the beaches.

and at Chancellorsville, Lee split his forces and did not attempt to concentrate them until the actual battle had been joined. On his Maryland venture Lee, it is true, split his forces, but he did not attempt to concentrate them while a battle was under way. The pressure McClellan placed upon him was so great that he exerted every effort to concentrate before the battle began, a much easier task than the former.

The team of Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. Jackson is probably the greatess tactical combination in the history of the American army. While these two men worked together, they were always victorious except when opposed by George B. McClellan. Against Pope at second Bull Run a brilliant change of front was accomplished and a superior Federal army was routed. At Fredericksburg an heroic Union army broke itself against the defensive tactics of these two men. At Chancellorsville the perfect example of the single envelopment was executed. But on the peninsula and in Maryland the tactics of these two did not work. Lee split his army in Maryland, and McClellan, exploiting that fact, came within an inch of destroying the Army of Northern Virginia. On the peninsula Lee attacked with the specified objective of breaking McClellan against the Chickahominy. McClellan parried the blow and took up an even stronger position along the James than the one he had held based on the York. Gaines Mill to Malvern Hill cannot by any stretch of the imagination be considered Southern victories. Lee was foiled in each.[1]

From almost every standpoint, then, Antietam must be counted a Union victory and McClellan given great credit for having fought it. There were opportunities which the Union commander lost, but there were more which he

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1 A crucial question concerns the relative strengths of the Union and

exploited to the fullest.

Confederate armies. McClellan, on the basis of his morning reports placed his own force at 87,164 while estimating on the basis of an intelligence brief by N. P. Banks, Lee's army to have 97,445 troops. Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XIX, I, 67. Lee, on the other hand, placed his forces at 40,000 men. B. & L., II, 603. These two sets of figures need some interpretation. Union strength figures always included men present for duty who were engaged in guard detail, as well as artillery and cavalry, fatigue duty and the like. Hence to arrive at an accurate figure of those actually present on the battlefield one must subtract a certain percentage from the total listed as present. Palfrey in The Antietam and Fredericksburg, 71, estimates that 20% should be subtracted to account for these special duty men. Such computation brings McClellan's total down to 69,732 present for duty. On the other hand, Confederate strength figures were given exclusive of cavalry, artillery and men detailed to skirmisher duty. Thus Longstreet in B. & L., II, 674, states that the Army of Northern Virginia crossed into Maryland in September 1862 with 57,000 troops exclusive of cavalry and artillery. By adjusting Lee's claimed 40,000 troops upward with the same formula as used by Palfrey for the Federal army a strength figure of 48,000 is obtained. The greater numbers of the Union forces were more than compensated for by the strength of the Confederate defensive position.

CHAPTER XIV

AFTERMATH OF ANTIETAM

In 1864 Grant could delay capturing Petersburg from June 3, 1864 until the following spring while he waited for Sherman to do amazing things to Southern life and economy--yet Grant was not relieved for "having the slows". In December, 1864 Thomas achieved the unique distinction of being the only Federal commander ever to destroy a Confederate army. He gained this victory chiefly because he was able to resist government efforts to precipitate an attack before he was ready. He had arrived in Tennessee in early October and remained face to face with Hood until December 15. Fortunately for the Union cause, Thomas was able to fight the battle of Nashville before an ordered relief from command could be delivered to him. In September, 1862 McClellan defeated, and forced back into Virginia, the Confederates under Lee at the very high tide of Southern military power. One month and ten days later the Army of the Potomac was on the move again, headed south. Thirteen days after the Army had begun to advance, its commander was relieved because of inactivity, although the army had made good, steady progress.[1] Such comparisons suggest, at least, that the purely military reasons given for McClellan's relief were invalid, for in the sphere of tactics and strategy, the Army of the Potomac was engaged in successful operations. If the military reasons were invalid, then McClellan's reputation as a commander has been badly maligned by historians of the period.

During the course of events on November 7, 1862, as the Army of the Potomac continued its advance south into Virginia, McClellan heard that a high-

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1 See below, 377.

ranking officer from the War Department, Brigadier-General Buckingham, had arrived in the Army area. Since Buckingham did not report to Army headquarters, McClellan assumed that something quite special was afoot. Indeed, Buckingham's visit only served to confirm McClellan's long-held belief that a change in Army command was inevitable. During the two weeks since the Army had departed from Maryland, McClellan had made every effort to keep Burnside, the senior corps commander, posted on Army strategy so that he could take over command at a moment's notice. Late on the night of the 7th, Buckingham and Burnside came into McClellan's tent. After shaking the snow from their coats and making some small talk about the weather, they gave McClellan two orders, one signed by Halleck ordering McClellan to turn his command over to Burnside and then repair to Trenton, New Jersey, and the other, signed by Townsend, ordering McClellan relieved from command of the Army of the Potomac—by direction of the President. McClellan acknowledged the order by saying, "Well, Burnside, I turn the command over to you."[1] Then, after having agreed to stay on at headquarters for a few days in order to help Burnside become adjusted, McClellan turned to finishing a letter to his wife and to composing his farewell address to the Army. This address, couched as his other proclamations had been, in his rather dramatic, purple prose, was quite appropriate. He announced the change in command, thanked the troops for all they had done, and declared comradeship with them forever.

Several days later he departed from the Army, never again to exercise major command responsibilities in the American army, but having made a

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1 McClellan, Own Story, 652.

reputation which has remained as controversial to this day as it was in 1862. To many of the soldiers he was the only general fit to command the Army of the Potomac and to many of his officers he would have been justified in forming the Army and marching on Washington to assume, by force, the direction of the government. To many political leaders, however, relief from command was only the least of what should have happened. Republicans who saw McClellan's continued retention in command the reason for Democratic gains in the Congressional elections were loud in their opinion that shooting was too good for "Little Mac." To Lincoln the event brought sadness because it seemed to him that the Union cause was no farther along than it had been in October, 1861 and with a new general of doubtful capabilities he was not sure that it would advance. Yet Lincoln was glad, too, for relieving McClellan involved relieving himself from some of the immense pressures his cabinet, his party, and his nation had brought against him in efforts to break McClellan. To certain opposition leaders, there was also gladness, for McClellan, freed from military regulations regarding participation in political matters, would make an excellent candidate to run for President against Lincoln in 1864. Partly because McClellan did make a bid for the presidency, and partly because he had been involved in so many moot questions during the first year and a half of the Civil War his place in history has been secured, although the value to be assigned that place is still undecided. The question as to why he was relieved and as to whether or not his relief was justified are perennial ones, the answers to which must be deduced from the scarcity of pertinent evidence available.

Two years after the event, Lincoln claimed he relieved McClellan because he failed a test which the President had set for him. Following Antietam, Lee had retreated into the Shenandoah valley. Lincoln wanted McClellan to strike quickly toward Richmond along a route east of the Blue Ridge mountains. He decided that if McClellan moved so slowly as to allow Lee to intersperse major units between McClellan and Richmond the commander of the Army of the Potomac should be relieved. When the President heard that Longstreet's corps of Lee's army had reached Culpeper, directly in the path of the advancing Federal divisions, the order for McClellan's relief was issued.[1] Such a single explanation for such a momentous decision just does not satisfy even by comparisons with other similar situations. Meade allowed Lee to do precisely the same thing after Gettysburg, yet he was not relieved. Grant delayed operations in the spring of 1864 until May--yet he was not relieved. Lincoln was too profound a man to allow such a peripheral factor as Longstreet's reported shift of position to have influenced to any appreciable extent replacing a man in whom soldiers had confidence with one in whom they did not. The real reasons for McClellan's relief lay generally in the history of the Army of the Potomac from the fall of 1861 onward and specifically with the events following the battle of Antietam. During that period, the failure of McClellan and Lincoln to communicate with each other was made even more significant by the determined efforts of men in Washington to construe every act McClellan took as being wrong. Every command given and request made was given the worst possible interpretation by cabinet members,

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1 Hay, Diaries, 218-219.

Congressmen, newspaper writers and the people. Lincoln was constrained to act. That he did so not on the intrinsic merits of McClellan as a commander but on slanted interpretations of McClellan's motives is now quite clear.

The history of the purely military decisions and actions taken from September 17 onward is a recital of decisions and actions taken in good faith and upon valid reasons, all of which were capable of being shown to have been wrong by people who either did not or would not understand them. The armchair strategist could read that at Antietam, Porter had a full corps in reserve which, had it been used vigorously, might have destroyed Lee.[1] Such men, not having been present on the field, could never understand the dreadful responsibility McClellan felt for the safety of the Union cause. These same armchair strategists could and did interpret subsequent events in the same way.

After Antietam, McClellan surveyed the capabilities of his army and came to the conclusion that his troops were in no condition to go over to the offensive. Casualties had been high as a result of Pope's debacle at Bull Run and the battles of South Mountain and Antietam were reported to have been the bloodiest in American history. These losses were only gradually being replaced by new, untrained levies of troops. Then, too, the army was tired. Many of the veteran brigades from the peninsula had been marching or fighting since August 17. They needed a rest. Their clothing and equipment needed replacing and new weapons had to be provided. Many units were commanded by junior

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1 As a matter of fact Porter did not have a full corps. He had sent several brigades to assist in the fight on the Union right hence at the time his corps might have been used there were but a few over 4,000 troops ready for duty. Palfrey, The Antietam and Fredericksburg, 123.

officers who lacked the ability or experience to continue to command. With such facts as these in mind, McClellan wired Halleck that "as soon as the exigencies of the service would admit of it, this army should be reorganized."[1] Five days later he sent a longer, well-reasoned document to the War Department emphasizing the same theme. In view of the conditions of his army he intended holding it about where it was, i.e., along the upper Potomac, making sure, however, to secure Harpers Ferry. Once the danger of renewed Confederate attack was passed, he intended concentrating the Army near Harpers Ferry to be re-equipped, trained, and launched into a new offensive. To facilitate the recreation of his grand army, he suggested that troops from Washington be sent to him for training and integration into his organization. Poised on Lee's flank, as he was, he did not believe the Confederates would risk an attack on Washington.[2]

Here was a clear expression of military philosophy and of military intent. The War Department could either accept it as being valid or reject it. If accepted, it clearly involved the implication of inactivity for a while. If rejected, then McClellan should have been so informed and if he persisted in his point of view--relieved. The War Department temporized, however, and McClellan did not know for eleven days that his point of view was unacceptable to Washington. Even when he received orders to resume the offensive at once they came after a visit by Lincoln during which McClellan understood that the President was satisfied with all the General had done or proposed to do.

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1 McClellan, Report, 403.
2 Ibid., 405-406.

On October 1, Lincoln and a group of men from the west paid a surprise visit to the Army of the Potomac. The President reviewed troops, went over the battlefields of South Mountain and Antietam and held long discussions with McClellan. The General understood from these talks that for the most part Lincoln was satisfied with all that had been done. If he had any fault to find, the President said, it was with his proneness toward perfectionism. However, McClellan was the only man capable of managing the Union army and Lincoln intended giving him complete support. McClellan should continue preparing for his new campaign and not stir an inch until his troops were ready.[1] In spite of what McClellan understood the President to have said, however, Lincoln was not completely happy. Perhaps it was McClellan's frequent use of the phrase "my army" or perhaps it was the deep pessimism which ran through Lincoln's soul that made him go to a hill overlooking the sea of tents which represented the Army. What, he demanded from his companion, was that. Why, the Army of the Potomac, was the response. No, Lincoln mused, that was only what it was called. Actually it was nothing but General McClellan's bodyguard.

After Lincoln returned to Washington, McClellan's security in his belief that he had obtained presidential support was suddenly shattered by an order from Halleck directing, by order of the President, that McClellan cross the Potomac at once and give battle to the enemy or drive him south. The Army should not waste the good weather and clear roads. While the President would not presume to give specific orders, he would be most satisfied if McClellan would move so as to keep between Lee and Washington, i.e., the old presidential

1 McClellan, Own Story, 627-628.

favorite of the overland route.[1] Halleck added as an afterthought that both he and Stanton approved of the order.

This order marks the final turning point in McClellan's relations with the President. Each subsequent communication from Lincoln was loaded with sarcasm or sharp criticism for which McClellan had no reply. McClellan was never again able to show the President the rationale behind the military decisions taken nor was he ever again able to talk face-to-face with Lincoln, which, after all, is the only way differing points of view can ever be reconciled. Although it is easy to see this order of October 6 as a turning point, it is considerably more difficult to explain why it was. Why should Lincoln have appeared to McClellan on October 1 as being friendly, understanding, and quite willing for the army to be reorganized and then on October 6 to be implacably opposed to any rest for the Army before it crossed the river to give battle again. This question can never finally be answered since the sources do not provide evidence necessary to show what went on in Lincoln's mind. The transition, however, was so great as to lead to the suspicion that a major event had transpired between Lincoln's visit and the publication of Halleck's order. Since the transition was similar in character to an earlier change in presidential relations with the general, some insight may be gained by studying the two situations.

The year before, McClellan's relations with Lincoln were at their high tide. Then Stanton entered the cabinet and Lincoln at once began to assume a more directing role in army affairs. Instead of discussing with the general the military policy of the Republic, Lincoln began the ill-fated series

1 Ibid., 628.

of presidential general and special war orders. Following the second Bull Run there existed a period very much like the one that had existed before Cameron had been replaced. Stanton had made his supreme bid to have McClellan relieved and disgraced. It failed and the President, on his own authority, reinstated McClellan to command. During the Antietam campaign and shortly after, Stanton sulked and had little to do with the conduct of operations or with the President. It was during this period that Lincoln appeared satisfied with the work of the Army of the Potomac and willing to support McClellan even if it involved delay. But Stanton was not a man to sulk for long, especially if he stood a chance of regaining some degree of the power he had exercised. He therefore again began to take an active interest in what went on at McClellan's headquarters and to talk with Lincoln about his findings. The order of October 6 and the presidential war orders were of the same kind and they both bear unmistakably the imprint of Stanton's mind. Lincoln's point of view changed as Stanton reasserted his influence on army officers. Of course, this reassertion was easy to accomplish because not only did Stanton have rare administrative talents, but he also was arguing a point of view with reference to McClellan that was becoming increasingly popular with a large portion of the population of the North. In other words, Lincoln possibly would not have turned against McClellan without Stanton's influence, but Stanton alone was not powerful enough to sway Lincoln. Lincoln's single mistake after again discussing military matters with Stanton was in not relieving McClellan at once.

Regardless of how unwise McClellan deemed Halleck's order to be, he was good enough soldier to set about at once complying with it. Since it

called for immediate action, McClellan had to know what means were to be allowed him to execute the order. Cox's division, which had fought so valiantly at Burnside's bridge over the Antietam, had been ordered back to western Virginia from where it had come. McClellan wanted to know if the new order made any change in respect to that body of troops. He also needed to know the quality of troops he was to receive as reinforcements and the condition of several railroads which would have to be employed in any advance overland into Virginia.[1] When Halleck answered these questions, McClellan was able to wire him that he was taking steps to put the army in marching order as rapidly as possible.[2]

Before these intentions could be made good, however, McClellan encountered two rather serious obstacles. One of these was the shortage of supplies of clothing and equipment for the army and the second was a vigorous cavalry demonstration by General Stuart's Confederate horsemen. McClellan had expected longer time before resuming the offensive. He had not, therefore, been so diligent in maintaining all necessary clothing for his troops as he might otherwise have been. Halleck's order of October 6 made necessary more prompt receipt of clothing. To this end, McClellan, Marcy, and the chief quartermaster of the army flooded Washington with a veritable deluge of telegrams demanding the equipment necessary to resume the offensive. These sudden requests broke down for a few days the supply system and some units were even forced to cross into Virginia without having procured their winter clothing. By the 21st, the bottlenecks were, for the most part, over-

1 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XIX, II, 387.
2 Ibid., 394.

come and McClellan could wire to Halleck that the army was nearly supplied.[1] Critics of McClellan have argued that the army really did not require such complete resupplying of clothing and equipment. They argue that had McClellan been firmer with his troops they would not have been so prodigal with their clothing and it would have lasted longer. Both lines of argument end in the conclusion that excessive demand for supplies furnished just one more pretext for McClellan to delay going on the offensive. If this reasoning were true, i.e., that the demands for supplies were pretexts, one wonders why McClellan did cross into Virginia in late October. Certainly he was under no more pressure then than earlier in the month and he could have found, had he been searching for them, equally plausible reasons for delay. The point is that he made requests based upon valid information, some of which only he could know. When his requests were reasonably granted, he moved. As to the first part of the argument, i.e., that the troops did not need or else had wasted their clothing, that is a matter for a commander to decide. His is the responsibility. If he said his troops needed things and the things were available, he should have been granted them or else relieved for failure to provide for government property. Since he was continued in command for a time after his requests, those requests must be presumed to have been valid.

A second obstacle, while of only transitory importance, did consume several days of activity which could have been spent clearing up the supply difficulties. Lee was anxious to determine what the Army of the Potomac was

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1 McClellan, Report, 424-425.

doing and was equally anxious to break McClellan's supply connections with Hagerstown if possible. To achieve these objectives, he ordered Stuart to take a picked force of cavalry across the Potomac and into the rear of the Federal army. He gave Stuart discretionary orders allowing him to circle the entire Union army if that appeared wise. Stuart, overjoyed at the prospect of repeating his exploit of the previous spring, selected his men with care and crossed the Potomac into Maryland on October, 10 at McCoy's Ford—some five miles south of Williamsport. From there the raiders moved north toward Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, thence to Chambersburg. From there Stuart elected to circle McClellan's rear rather than returning the way he had come. By forced marching and frequent exchange of horses for fresh ones captured along the way, the column was able to recross the Potomac near the mouth of the Monocacy River on the afternoon of October 12 after having only minor contact with the Union forces. This expedition, while not accomplishing its major military objectives, did achieve an indirect benefit. Union public opinion believed that Stuart's forces should have been captured before they could return to Virginia. When efforts made to stop the raiders failed, there was a strong tendency to blame McClellan for delay. Lincoln, with his already strong convictions as to McClellan's dilatoriness, was more convinced than ever that the Union commander lacked a fighting heart. Relief of McClellan from command to which the raid contributed was regarded as a victory for the South.

While there was considerable delay in information about the raid reaching Army headquarters, McClellan issued orders which should have accomplished the destruction of Stuart's force. Cavalry located above the crossing at

McCoy's Ford was ordered to patrol south in event Stuart returned the way he had come. Other cavalry units under Pleasanton were dispatched south of the enclave occupied by the main army should the Confederates break for that area. Cox's division, en route to western Virginia, was stopped and held in readiness to go to the support of any cavalry encountering the raiders, while other commanders along the Potomac were alerted to watch all possible fords. Burnside was ordered to send two of his brigades by rail to a point near the mouth of the Monocacy. There they were to remain in cars with steam up so as to be able to move quickly to any place Stuart might appear. Stoneman's cavalry was given responsibility for the area below the Monocacy. A gap, however, developed at the mouth of the Monocacy, for Burnside's troops, instead of remaining in cars, moved into the town of Frederick where they waited until Stuart's men had crossed the Potomac to safety.[1] While McClellan must, as all commanders must, bear responsibility for the failure of his plans, some little must be said about Burnside's troops. Twice within thirty days troops under Burnside's command were responsible for the failure of Union strategy. At Antietam the delay in crossing the Antietam, and along the Potomac the move into Frederick were costly.

At this juncture Lincoln again attempted to recommend strategy to McClellan. In thinking about possible lines of implementing the order of October 6, McClellan became concerned about supply lines if he moved up the Shenandoah valley. The railroad from Harpers Ferry to Winchester had been destroyed by the retreating Confederates. As McClellan thought of using

1 McClellan, Report, 408-410.

Winchester as a base, he requested that rails be relaid as his army advanced. This was not a particularly unusual request, but it reached Lincoln's desk as did the bad news about the supply situation and about Stuart's raid. He became quite angry and loosed a broadside criticism of McClellan in a letter to the general on October 13. After severely criticizing McClellan for his overcautiousness and after refusing the railroad which had been asked for, Lincoln turned his attention to strategic matters.

One of the maxims of war, he reasoned, was to operate on the enemy axis of communications as much as possible. McClellan, he thought, always acted as though the enemy could do that but that the Army of the Potomac could not. McClellan, he continued, should not worry about Lee crossing into Pennsylvania because if that were done, Lee would be delivering his communications up to attack by the Federal army. This was an interesting thesis, coming from a man who for better than a year had argued against getting astride the enemy line of communication at the risk of uncovering a vulnerable political target.

Turning from defensive matters, Lincoln suggested that at that moment McClellan was actually closer to Richmond than the Confederates by the route Lee had to, and McClellan might, take to the Southern capital. Lee he saw as having to move by an arc to reach Richmond, while McClellan could move in almost a straight line. Lincoln then came back to his own preferences regarding the offensive. He believed the army should cross the Potomac below the Shenandoah which would at once menace Lee's communications. If Lee retreated, he should be followed either with the idea of fighting him or beating him to Richmond. If McClellan selected this route, he could be supplied at all points along the march from Washington, and above all, for the great part of

the march south he would be between Lee and Washington, enabling the greatest possible number of troops to be spared from the defenses of the capital. If Lee should be outrun in such a race toward Richmond and should turn on Washington, McClellan could, of course, turn at once and strike the Confederate rear.[1]

Unfortunately for McClellan's future as a commander of a Union army, Lincoln's letter did not have the desired effect of forcing the Army of the Potomac to move. Another unforeseen difficulty had arisen just as the supply problems had been mastered. Hoof and mouth disease had broken out in the Union cavalry and was literally decimating animals of that branch of the service. Horses would appear well one day and completely unfit for duty the next. If kept at rest, many of them could recover, but during an offensive, the cavalry could not remain at rest. McClellan therefore undertook to obtain more horses either by sending purchasers to the west or by asking that other commands be stripped. Since his requests for large increments of healthy animals had been refused, he wrote to Halleck on October 21 asking if, in view of the shortage of cavalry, Lincoln wanted the advance executed at once or whether it could be postponed until more horses were received. Halleck replied in a highly significant telegram that while there was no change in the order of October 6, yet the President was not demanding the impossible. If McClellan could not move, he certainly could show why and would not be expected to advance until he was able.[2]

This matter of horses had two interesting sequels. It enabled Lincoln

1 Lincoln, Works, VI, 157-158.
2 McClellan, Report, 424.

to send McClellan one of those pithy telegrams in the composition of which Lincoln was so skilled when he became angry.

> I have just read your dispatch about sore-tongued and fatigued horses. Will you pardon me for asking what the horses of your army have done since the battle of Antietam that fatigues anything.[1]

This, of course, riled McClellan as being an unnecessary display of temper and poor taste on the part of the President. Of infinitely greater significance was the effect the outbreak of hoof and mouth disease had on the Confederate army. Stuart's cavalrymen captured a large number of animals during the raid around the Army of the Potomac. Some of these had been exposed to the disease and hence exposed the cavalry of the Army of Northern Virginia to it. Within a few weeks large portions of Stuart's cavalry were immobilized and the animals lost could not be replaced. McClellan's advance into Virginia and Burnside's shift to Fredericksburg were facilitated by the shortage of cavalry horses in the Army of Northern Virginia. Of even greater importance was the fact that Stuart's cavalry never recovered from the blow the outbreak of this disease gave the mounted arm. In the summer of 1863 the cavalry was less efficient than it had been in the summer of 1862 and Lee was forced to fight a meeting engagement at a little college town of Gettysburg because the eyes of the army could not see as far as formerly. Lee, however, was not relieved because the cavalry of his army developed a contagious disease.

Believing that Halleck's wire had given him the authority to fix the date for the advance into Virginia based upon purely military considerations, McClellan decided upon November 1 as the earliest date a forward movement

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1 Lincoln, Works, VI, 161.

could be attempted and began to make plans accordingly.

As has been noted, McClellan at first thought of crossing the Potomac at Harpers Ferry and moving up the Shenandoah valley toward Richmond. In the face of strong pressure from Washington, however, and because the delays over supply had placed the advance so late in the season, he decided to select a line east of the Blue Ridge mountains. This plan particularly appealed to him since he had been promised large reinforcements if he would adopt that line. As he pondered such a move, he became concerned about the line of the Potomac after the main army had crossed into Virginia. As he estimated what was involved he came to the conclusion that the mountain passes out of the Shenandoah valley ought to be guarded rather than the line of the Potomac itself. Such mobile forces linked with the defenses of Manassas Junction should, he believed, be sufficient to guard Washington and Maryland.

While as a military engineer and as a patriotic man McClellan felt concerned about these places, they were actually not his responsibility. He was the commander of a field army and not the commander of any geographic area. Once his troops had crossed into Virginia he had no command responsibility for Maryland. This point of view he wrote to Halleck, at the same time suggesting that some steps should be taken by the War Department to fortify the region from Harpers Ferry to Washington. Halleck replied in characteristic fashion saying that he had never given orders to McClellan nor would he give them now. McClellan was completely free to advance against the enemy and equally free to use his discretion about fortifying places along the Potomac as he evacuated them—the only restriction was a

financial one. He was not to spend money for permanent fortifications.[1]

Had not the issue of this controversy between McClellan and his government been so tragic in lives lost and homes broken, it would be comical to read about. McClellan had been ordered to move—which was fine. Upon surveying his needs for such a move he found significant shortages. He requested that these be made good and for his pains was lectured to by the President about overcautiousness. He then decided when and how he was to move and informed the government of his plans, adding a suggestion that the War Department might well look to the defenses of Washington about which it had been concerned for so long. The War Department, through its inept chief, replied that such matters were not its concern. McClellan should use his own discretion so long as he did not spend public funds and so long as he used troops from his army to do the job. It was as though the War Department was determined to place McClellan in an impossible position. If McClellan left the line of the Potomac open he would be subject to criticism for failing to provide for the defenses of Washington and Maryland. If, on the other hand, he massed the defenses in such a way as to insure the protection of the capital, he would have no troops left for a major thrust at the enemy army. Even the words themselves sound similar to the pre-peninsular days the previous spring. The idea that the War Department might assume responsibility for the defenses of Maryland or else provide troops for that purpose was just never considered.

McClellan saw clearly the position he was in and so notified Halleck that while the dispositions made were not satisfactory, he was prepared to

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1 Ibid., 431.

detach some of his regiments to guard the line of the Potomac after the army had moved south. Upon receiving a noncommittal response from Halleck, McClellan issued orders to the XII army corps to guard Harpers Ferry and to General Morell to use his division in guarding above that place. Each officer was informed that while they had insufficient forces to accomplish their missions, they were expected to do everything in their power to control the areas assigned to them. This done, McClellan turned his attention to the impending offensive.

McClellan planned to move his army, well under control, across the Potomac and southeast toward Richmond, supplying it via Harpers Ferry and Berlin, then by the Manassas Gap railway when that place had been reached. His objective was to try and split forces left in the Shenandoah from those guarding the front of the army. If such a schism developed, one or the other wings might be defeated in detail. If the split did not develop, the Confederates would be forced to concentrate as far south as Gordonsville, thus allowing the Union forces to move down the Fredericksburg axis to Richmond or shift to the peninsula if the overland supply problems proved too difficult. This plan was, in effect, a compromise between Lincoln's long-desired overland approach and McClellan's flanking movement. For the early phases, Washington would be perfectly secure, since the army was moving along a broad front between Lee's troops and Washington. If the situation developed as McClellan hoped it would, the Confederates would be forced far enough south to allow McClellan to move overland to the peninsula so as to be supplied by water. Thus, in 1862, McClellan anticipated Grant's movements of 1864.

It was essential to McClellan's plans that he move his army in a solid

mass rather than sending out long slender arms deep into enemy territory. He again was maneuvering to occupy permanently territory for the Union cause. Such an aim, of course, necessitated a slower development of his plan, but it was nonetheless sound, and at the time of his relief, McClellan had demonstrated that he could implement it.

On October 26, therefore, the first divisions of the Army of the Potomac crossed into Virginia, well-screened by cavalry. At the same time, units up and down the Potomac began to depart from the places they had occupied since Antietam. By October 28, Army headquarters had reached Berlin in Virginia and cavalry was operating a good 20 miles to the south. By November 7, the day on which McClellan was relieved, infantry was at Warrenton, and Pleasanton's cavalry was operating toward Culpeper Courthouse. The army at this time was well closed up and under perfect control. Information at Army headquarters indicated the the enemy was spread out to the south and west in front of the advancing troops. Longstreet was reported near Culpeper and Jackson's forces were reported west of the Blue Ridge mountains. The two forces were connected by forces under Hill located at Chester and Thornton's Gap. Thus on November 7, McClellan was in position to divide the Confederate army by the simple expedient of continuing the march south. It was this same information that Longstreet was at Culpeper that Lincoln later claimed was the signal for relieving McClellan. As long as Lee's army remained in the Shenandoah valley while McClellan proceeded down toward Richmond, Lincoln stayed his hand. Once a major portion of the Army of Northern Virginia interposed between McClellan and Richmond, the blow fell.

As as has been suggested, however, the relief of McClellan cannot be

explained in purely military terms, although his decisions certainly irritated officials in Washington. Equally important, in understanding this event, were certain political developments which followed on the heels of the Union victory at Antietam.

During the summer of 1862, as McClellan was fighting on the peninsula, Northern public opinion began gradually mounting in a demand for the Lincoln administration to give new character to the war. There was substantial feeling that to continue the war for the preservation of the Union without doing something about slavery, would result in serious loss of enthusiasm and support. There was widespread belief that slavery was the root of the difficulties perplexing the nation and that an end of the war which did not alter the status of the "peculiar institution" would only lay the seeds for future dissension. Lincoln felt this growing groundswell and resolved upon a policy of emancipation. On July 22 the President broached the subject to his cabinet. After some consideration, however, Lincoln came to the conclusion that issuing a proclamation on the subject of freeing slaves would be regarded as an empty gesture unless it followed an important Union victory. Without victory a statement would look like the last gasp of a dying government rather than a policy which could be implemented. He resolved, therefore, to wait until he had a Union victory. This event, of course, came in the form of McClellan's fight at Antietam. As quickly as he heard of the magnitude of that battle, Lincoln called a special cabinet meeting for September 22. At this session, Lincoln read his proclamation to the department heads, not in the sense of seeking counsel, but to inform them of what he intended doing. The core of this document declared that on January 1, 1863 slaves

held in places then in rebellion against the Union were to be forever free. Areas which came back into the Union either voluntarily or as a result of Union victory before this date were to be exempt from the application of the decree.[1]

This policy was contrary to McClellan's principles, but believing as he did, in the Anglo-Saxon subordination of the military to the civil authority, he accepted the order as valid. Fearing, however, that discussion pro and con the proclamation might effect adversely the morale of his army, he issued the President's Proclamation together with some interpretive remarks of his own. The proclamation, he told his troops, gave him an opportunity to define the relation of the military to the civilian authority. The power of the civilian authority over the military had been specifically expressed by the Constitution and it was properly within the province of the civilian authority to indicate the political objectives for which the army fought. Discussion of those objectives by soldiers was inappropriate and would likely substitute a spirit of political faction for the more proper spirit of duty. If the soldiers disagreed with policy of the civilian government, they could vote against it at the proper time, as could all other citizens of the Republic.[2]

The order, on its face, was quite innocent. It only gave voice to a principle of long standing in the American army. To the radically Republican officials in Washington, the order appeared as evidence that McClellan was seriously considering entering politics. Such heresy could not go unchallenged, so the long-suffering President had to hear more long-winded

1 Randall, Lincoln the President, II, 151-162.
2 Offic. Rec., 1 ser., XIX, II, 395-396.

reasons why McClellan should be relieved. And, of course, some of the reasons found Lincoln receptive.

Thus Stanton's influence, unfavorable interpretation of McClellan's military decisions, and McClellan's interpretation of the Emancipation Proclamation all contributed to Lincoln's growing antagonism to his general. To these must be added the growing resentment of the public against the general. Lincoln heard, for example, that people were openly discussing a conversation between Major Key and Major Turner. Key, when asked why the rebel army was not bagged near Sharpsburg, replied that that was not the game. The object was for the two armies to wear themselves out, then a compromise peace made which would insure slavery. Lincoln, in this case, tried Key and dismissed him from the Union army. While Lincoln did not believe that McClellan was taking part in a conspiracy, many people did and exerted pressure to have him relieved.

The public also picked up a story about a conversation between Lincoln and Stanton. Stanton, so the story ran, told the President that McClellan was settling for the winter in Washington. "Has he sent for his wife?" asked Lincoln.

> "His wife is with him."
> "And that black-and-tan terrier?"
> "Is one of the family."

"Then he has gone into winter quarters and must be removed," the story quoted Lincoln as saying.[1] Again gossip reported Lincoln as saying to a person who had promised to return to Washington if he found the Army of the

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1 Sandburg, War Years, I, 599.

Potomac. "Oh, you will. It's there. That's just the difficulty." Hay reported to Nicolay and the story certainly found its way to Lincoln.

> You cannot imagine the earnestness of denunciation which fills the West in regard to McClellan. I have not heard one single man defend him. If he should be sent West to command our troops, his presence would demoralize the Army. His continuance in command in the East begins to shake the confidence of some of our best friends in the Government.
>
> Things look badly around here politically. The inaction of the Army and the ill success of our arms have a bad effect....[1]

This public resentment seemed to be most clearly manifest in the Congressional elections. In going over the reasons for Republican defeats at the polls, leader after leader told Lincoln that McClellan's inactivity was to blame. Get rid of McClellan, the cry ran, and the nation would unite behind the President. Of course, these were reports from Republicans to the chief of their party, but they furnished the kind of intelligence upon which the President of the United States had to base his decisions. The reports were effective until finally Lincoln decided he must act.

All of these factors influenced Lincoln in making his final decision to be rid of McClellan. Yet even the sum of all of them is insufficient in explaining that event. A more valid, all-inclusive explanation must be divorced from the personalities involved and be based upon principles and movements. The character of the war had altered. From having the single purpose of maintaining the Union, the emphasis had now shifted to where the purpose was actually changing the Union. Slavery was now to be destroyed and the compact theory of the nature of the Union forever silenced. McClellan, as

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1 Hay, Diaries, 51-52.

an exponent of the "preserve the Union" notion of the war, had become an anachronism and as such was bound to go. Had Lincoln not relieved him when he did, McClellan very probably would have resigned shortly anyway. Indeed, he was sorely tempted to do so when he read the publication of the Emancipation Proclamation. The radical members of the Republican party were gaining the ascendency. Lincoln had to give at some points if he was to prevent an explosion within his party. Letting McClellan go was one way he could give in to the radical movement and still maintain control of his party. Then again, McClellan represented forces which were inimical to American democracy. Had McClellan been able to impose his conception of the war on the civil government, precedent would have been established which could very well have led to the establishment of an officer caste. McClellan, in a very real sense, represented a challenge to American ideals of constitutional government. The men within the army who supported him were for the most part West Point trained officers who talked openly of marching on Washington. His defeat by Lincoln helped insure the ascendency of civilian constitutional government. McClellan represented for Lincoln the same threat that Douglas MacArthur has recently posed for Truman. Neither president could afford to retain the general and transmit to their successors the complete executive prerogative they inherited upon entering office.

As to McClellan's military fitness there can be little question. Lee regarded him as the most capable general he faced during the Civil War. Grant adopted, to complete the final destruction of the Confederacy, the same plan McClellan tried to implement during his year and a half in command. McClellan was the only general who was never defeated by Lee. McClellan,

Grant, and Sherman were the only Union commanders who saw clearly the logistical needs of the war and who acted to insure those needs being met. McClellan was a general who saw the military needs of the Civil War before his nation did.

CHAPTER XV

POINTS OF VIEW

The American Civil War and the Lincoln story have attracted more attention from American historians than has any other segment of their history. Each year books about the struggle between the North and the South outsell works about any other war in which United States troops have been engaged. Lincoln alone has been the subject of more than five thousand separate works. Yet in spite of such prolific outpourings the subject is far from being exhausted. Not only is the Civil War of such great intrinsic importance that each generation feels a compulsion to rewrite its history but new evidence is constantly coming to light which demands reevaluation of mooted points. Such an event as the opening of Robert Lincoln's collection of his father's papers was of national importance because of the anticipation that it might clear up some of the mysteries which have intrigued people since the distracted 1860's.

Chief among these mooted subjects stands the career of General George B. McClellan, who, during his short tenure as commander of the Army of the Potomac, managed to bequeath to posterity more intriguing possibilities for conjecture than any other important figure--civilian or military of the period. He was a general, judged successful by some of the most competent military men of his own and later times, who never won a clear-cut, decisive victory. He was also a general, judged a failure by many of his peers and by his government, who never suffered a major defeat although he fought bloody engagements against two of the most brilliant military minds ever produced by the American nation. In short, McClellan has been an enigma and since the basic facts about his service are known, he is likely to remain one.

Important questions about him are those involving interpretation which in the final analysis must be subjective in character. In general, existing interpretations have been conditioned, not by the evidence about McClellan, but by attitudes toward others with whom his career was linked. There has been some feeling, for example, that one could not be "for" Lincoln and "for" McClellan at the same time. Lincoln relieved McClellan, so the argument runs, hence one of the two must have been wrong. The idea has seldom been advanced that both Lincoln and McClellan might have been right about some things and wrong about others. There has also been the feeling that if General Lee had been a poor general, and for a time most southern generals were considered poor simply because they were defeated, McClellan also was a poor general. Attempts to assign Lee a brighter place in American military history have nearly always resulted in improving McClellan's niche as well.

All interpretations of McClellan's military service must be based on a relatively few sources although there is a considerably larger body of material which impinges upon the subject. First among these sources are the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, (137 V., 1897). This collection, compiled by the War Department, contains printed copies of the orders, reports, returns, and the like, of all the major operations of the Civil War. While some important documents are misplaced it is remarkably well organized considering the size of the collection. From this can be obtained, not what a participant said about a battle in the quiet of a post-war study, but what was actually said or ordered during the heat of combat or immediately afterwards.

Of almost equal stature is a collection of articles and essays about the campaigns written after the war by major participants. These essays were published by the Century Company in a four volume edition of Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, (1887) and although the testimony presented is sometimes suspect because the accounts were written so long after the event the set still furnishes the most compact body of reliable source material available. Similar in nature, although farther removed from being source materials are the books belonging to the series, Campaigns of the Civil War. Although written by participants, each of the volumes presents a history of some of the major campaigns and might more properly belong in a discussion of secondary accounts.

Alexander S. Webb's The Peninsula: McClellan's Campaign of 1862, (1881), is an account about this campaign written in a manner sympathetically critical of the Union commander. Due credit is given for the organization and training of the army but Webb, who at that time was serving with Porter's staff, believed that McClellan's planning and execution of battle were weak. On the crucial phase of the peninsular campaign, however, Webb was unequivocal. Lincoln he thought made a serious error in withholding McDowell's corps and was as much responsible as McClellan for the failure of the campaign to achieve the results expected from it.

Francis W. Palfrey, in his The Antietam and Fredricksburg, (1882), is much more critical of McClellan than Webb had been, particularly over the matter of delay. Antietam he saw as having been a field of lost opportunity. If McClellan had acted with more alacrity when Lee's lost order was found or if he had pushed the attack at Sharpsburg on the afternoon of

September 15 or if he had used Porter's fresh troops on the afternoon of September 17, the course of history would, Palfrey felt sure, have been altered favorably to the Union cause.

An even stronger indictment of McClellan's planning was recorded by his one-time chief of engineers J. G. Barnard, in The Peninsular Campaign and its Antecedents, (1864). Barnard criticized the plan of going by water to the peninsula but more especially McClellan's hopes of flanking Yorktown by driving a column to Half-Way House. No general, he argued, should have expected to find the enemy in any position other than in a strong defensive line across the peninsula.

Much information about the internal workings of the War Department has been recorded by E. D. Townsend in Anecdotes of the Civil War, (1883). Townsend was an aide to General Scott and eventually rose from an assistant adjutant general to the position of Adjutant General of the Army. Also of much value in this connection are the diaries of secretary John Hay. An earlier edition has been largely replaced by Tyler Dennett's Lincoln and the Civil War in the Diaries and Letters of John Hay, (1939). While no entries are recorded for several of the crucial days of the McClellan story; e.g.g. October 6, the date McClellan was ordered to resume the offensive against Lee, the work is an excellent source for information concerning progressive worsening of the relationship between Lincoln and McClellan. John T. Morse Jr., in his edition of the Diaries of Gideon Welles, (3 V., 1911), Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy throws much light on the role Stanton played in breaking McClellan. Welles' caustic pen provides bitterly etched portraits of many of the leaders who vied for position in Washington during the war years.

McClellan's side of the controversy has been thoroughly explained in two major collections of sources. McClellan's Own Story, (1887) contains copies of letters written to his wife, copies of the most important official documents and a complete resume of the General's conduct of military operations. McClellan's Report on the Organization and Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac, (1864), contains in one place many of the statements made in the reports included in the Official Records. In addition, it contains the commander's analysis of the West Virginia Campaign. There are also a number of short biographies written for the presidential campaign of 1864, which contain copies of letters and orders not elsewhere available. The Mexican War Diary of General George B. McClellan, edited by William Starr Myers, (1917) is revealing as to the developing personality of McClellan as a young professional officer. The beginnings of his distrust of volunteer soldiers he describes in considerable detail as well as some well developed opinions about military science and tactics. McClellan's papers are in the Library of Congress.

President Lincoln's private and official papers have been considered inadequate because of the control Robert Lincoln, the President's son, maintained over them. After screening the papers Robert Lincoln allowed his father's two secretaries John Nicolay and John Hay to use them in preparing their biography. He also granted them permission to issue a collection of documents subject completely, however, to his final approval. This collection, Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln has been the standard collection for use by anyone editing similar collections or writing about Lincoln. While it needs to be supplemented now with references to the newly opened

complete files of Lincoln papers it still remains basic for students of the Civil War and of Lincoln's life. A new edition has been prepared and published by the Lincoln Memorial University.

After Nicolay and Hay used them, Robert Lincoln's collection of papers were kept from public gaze and eventually given to the Library of Congress with the stipulation that they not be opened until twenty-one years after Robert Lincoln's death. The opening of the papers took place on July 26, 1947 in the presence of the foremost Lincoln scholars of the country. While a complete edition of them has not as yet been published, (one is under preparation by the Abraham Lincoln Association) some of the new documents have been compiled, together with a history of the papers themselves, by David C. Mearns, and printed under the title The Lincoln Papers, (1948). This edition, in common with the bulk of the papers themselves, reveals little new about Lincoln but does tell a great deal about the people who wrote to the President. Of major interest in connection with this study are the documents written to Lincoln from military men.

Of considerably less credibility than the Lincoln sources just mentioned is Herndons' Life of Lincoln (1930). Lincoln's last law partner accumulated a vast amount of material from people who had known Lincoln. Together with Jesse W. Weik he presented an earthy picture of Lincoln, designed to show the portrait created by Nicolay and Hay as too idealistic and far from the truth. Used with caution, however, the work has value particularly for the Illinois period of Lincoln's life. To be used with the same sort of caution is The Diary of a Public Man. This mysterious account by an unknown author of the days just before and during the inauguration of Lincoln has been published

with notes on its history by F. L. Bullard (1946) and provides an intriguing facet of the Lincoln theme.

These sources represent the major basis upon which a history of the military campaigns of 1861-1862 must be based. Some mention however, should be made of other material which is less basic or less reliable, but which nevertheless lends depth and color to an account of the period. As has been true of every modern war, the participants have felt a compulsion to record their own impressions of the events through which they lived. There are a large number of regimental histories, for the most part worthless in shedding clear light on actual events, but invaluable in revealing the nature of the men who fought. The United States has been a nation of avid newspaper readers and a study of newspaper comment about the controversy between Lincoln's government and its commander etch clearly the intensity of feeling both pro and con the General which existed. Personal memoirs, while rarely achieving the clarity and objectivity of Grant's two volume account, are important as are diaries of the humble and great soldiers. Considerable evidence, for example, about conditions behind the Southern lines is available in John B. Jones', A Rebel War Clerk's Diary at the Confederate States of America, (2 V., 1935). Of particular interest in the McClellan story is the work by Captain Robert E. Lee, Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee, (1904) for in it is recorded Lee's studied opinion that McClellan was the most capable of the Union generals he opposed (415).

Turning from the sources, students of the period are deluged by the amount of secondary material available. Since McClellan has been such a controversial figure each account takes a definite point of view with references

to the General's career: Each work can then be evaluated in terms of whether the author is pro or con McClellan.

McClellan's early life is perfunctorily treated by most of the writers who have dealt with his career. William Starr Meyers, however, in A Study in Personality: General George Brinton McClellan, (1934), has devoted considerable attention to the General's life before he rose to national prominence. Meyers, assuming that McClellan was, in the final analysis, a failure, finds personality weaknesses manifested early in his subject's life. These flaws in an otherwise admirable character he lists as indecision, lack of high moral courage, and timidity. This study of McClellan was undertaken with the full consent of the General's heirs and has made much use of private papers and McClellan's Mexican War diary. The case against McClellan on grounds of personal weakness, however, rests on shaky foundations since the fundamental assumptions, i.e., of military failure, remain unproven.

Giving considerably less space to McClellan's early life, H. J. Eckenrode and Bryan Conrad in their George B. McClellan: The Man Who Saved the Union, have described none of the defects Meyers detected. Instead, the General's early life is treated as having been excellent preparation for playing a major role in the destinies of his country. They hold that it was the fault of politicians that this role was not acted out to the end. The book originated in studies sponsored by the Virginia Conservation Commission and was written after thorough examination of the ground on which the battles were fought and of the official records of those conflicts. Since both writers are Southerners their enthusiasm for McClellan may be explained partly on grounds of sectional loyalties but more specifically upon finding little

military reason to explain the shabby treatment McClellan received from the Lincoln administration. Stanton emerges as the bete noir in the plot and is assigned the title of Satan. He is shown to have conspired against McClellan almost from the moment Cameron was replaced in the War Department. By making adroit use of sources, Professor Eckenrode was able to trace the acts of Stanton's conspiracy through the attempted palace revolution of August 1862 but he failed to establish equally soundly Stanton's motives for so conspiring. Although he failed in this respect he did a creditable job in his analysis of the purely military matters with which McClellan was faced. Of particular interest in this respect is the fact that Eckenrode shows why McClellan needed so many additional horses after Antietam and how the hoof and mouth disease, which caused the shortage, brought grief to the South after Stuarts' raid in October, 1862.

The western Virginian campaign of the spring and early summer of 1861 has been largely overlooked by writers on the Civil War. In terms of numbers of troops involved it was rather unimportant but in terms of showing McClellan's strengths and weaknesses it is microcosmic. The area in which that campaign was fought was serviced by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad and a history of that line has presented a relatively full account of McClellan's activities. Festus P. Summers in The Baltimore and Ohio in the Civil War, (1939), reached the conclusion that McClellan's actions were masterly and that in opening the area of western Virginia the commander of the Department of Ohio did his nation an important service. Professor Summers, in a considerably different vein from that of most writers about McClellan, states in reference to the Rich Mountain battle that: "The time was now at hand

when McClellan demonstrated that he could strike swiftly when the hour seemed propitious," (85). In reaching such conclusions the author made much use of manuscript material particularly the McClellan papers. His conclusions as to the quality of McClellan's strategic and tactical decisions have been seconded by Douglas S. Freeman in his three volume work Lee's Lieutenants, (1942), I, 37. Freeman, in explaining the loss of western Virginia to the Confederate cause, attributed the Union success to superior numbers, better equipment and "good Federal management".

No sooner had the first phase of the western Virginian campaign ended than McClellan was called to Washington to assume command of the troops in and around the capital. Even the General's most severe critics, with one major exception, have given him credit for assuming command of a heterogeneous mass of disorganized regiments and reestablishing order, out of which evolved the Army of the Potomac. The one exception, Kenneth P. Williams in his work Lincoln Finds a General, 2 V., (1949), stated:

> In truth, McClellan did not find "regiments cowering on the banks of the Potomac"....Actually he found already laid the basis for substantial reform and improvement; but he does not appear to have given proper credit to the work of the War Department or the army command. (118).

Professor Williams supports this contention by arguing that McClellan's claim concerns the disorganized state of the army was "a deliberate reflection upon officers with more combat experience than himself, who were better able to evaluate the gravity of the situation".

Of course McClellan's charge was a reflection on such officers. It was also a reflection upon President Lincoln, General Scott, and Secretary Cameron. Had there been no need to cast aspersions on officers around Washington there

would have been no need to summon McClellan from his activities in western Virginia. While we know now that there was little danger to Washington to be feared from the victorious Confederates, the officials in Washington in 1861 did not. They had every reason to be afraid, especially after seeing regiment after regiment disintegrate on the streets of the capital. Stanton, whom Williams credited with rare good judgment, thought that the capture of Washington seemed inevitable and Scott's aide Townsend was of the opinion that, "had a squad of men, mounted on black horses, appeared on the Long Bridge, or in the streets of the city, there would have been a stampede worthy of a flock of sheep". Professor Williams' artillery in this connection, was, as J. G. Randall put it, active but his lines were overextended.

McClellan's first weeks in command of the forces around Washington were the period of his greatest popularity with the government. During this time he was actively organizing his pitifully green recruits into soldiers capable of withstanding the rigors of campaigning and at the same time thinking through the imponderables of invasion tactics. Very shortly, however, the honeymoon was over and the General became the target for the snipping of the abolitionists wing of the Republican party. A major factor in stimulating this internecine warfare was the new Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton. Stanton's two chief biographers Frank A. Flower, Edwin McMasters Stanton, Lincoln's Great War Secretary, (1905) and George C. Gorham, Life and Public Services of Edwin M. Stanton, (2V., 1899), have both failed to interpret this man's character properly or to assess the role he played in forcing McClellan out. A shorter, but in my opinion, more valid picture of Stanton is presented

by Burton J. Hendrick, Lincoln's War Cabinet, (1946). Hendrick shows that until the ascension of Stanton to the war office the criticism by anti-McClellan forces of the conduct of the war was ineffectual. Because of a strange alliance, however, this Buchanan Democrat was accepted by such extreme radicals as Wade and Chandler and became their spokesman at court. From the very moment Stanton assumed office he became the implacable enemy of McClellan and Lincoln's attitude toward McClellan began to shift. In tracing this enmity Hendrick has gone to considerable effort to uncover the threads of Stanton's activities as far back as the failing days of the Buchanan administration. He found, for example, that Stanton was serving the Lincoln administration in the role of a spy in Buchanan's cabinet and that from the beginning of Lincoln's administration he conspired, albeit, somewhat strangely, to obtain the post of Secretary of War. Hendrick also has placed in convenient form the story of Stanton's efforts to oust McClellan after the change of base of the Army of the Potomac from the York to the James River.

As the winter of 1861-1862 came to a close McClellan had at last readied an army with which he was willing to give battle to the Confederacy and had evolved a plan by which the battle could be carried to the soil of the seceders. This plan called for leaving a light covering force in the defenses of Washington and moving the bulk of the army by boat to a position astride the flank of the defenders of Richmond. Over serious objection on the part of some of his officers and Lincoln and Stanton this plan was finally approved and the great venture started. No sooner had the leading corps reached their point of debarkation, on the peninsula between the York and the James Rivers,

than McClellan's force of maneuver, the I corps of McDowell, was taken by Lincoln to bolster the defenses of Washington. Thus finding himself without an essential part of his force McClellan had to alter the technique to be used in reducing the first obstacle on the road to Richmond i.e., the Confederate defenses of Yorktown. In describing this J. G. Randall, Civil War and Reconstruction, (1937), reached the conclusion that McClellan could probably have taken Yorktown by assault. After eight years additional research, however, Professor Randall modified his views on this subject and adopted a more sympathetic attitude toward the difficulties of taking Yorktown. In Lincoln the President (2 V., 1945) he recognized that the withholding of McDowell was a fatal error and that McClellan's siege of Yorktown was a sound decision.

This shift in point of view with respect to McClellan's capabilities is characteristic of the historiography of the Civil War period. For a number of years the most common interpretation of McClellan was that he was a magnificent organizer and trainer of armies but that he lacked the capacity to fight vigorous offensive warfare. To an appreciable extent this cliche had become fixed as a result of the monumental, "official" biography of Lincoln prepared by the President's two war-time secretaries. John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Abraham Lincoln: A History, (10 V., 1917) set out to appear to be fair to McClellan but at the same time to destroy his military reputation. Since these two men had access to the mass of Lincoln papers their views were accepted and their interpretations became standard. As Lee's greatness was gradually recognized, however, the notion that McClellan was incapable came to be questioned for the facts stood clear that he had

opposed Lee without sustaining a defeat at a time when the Confederate leader was at the peak of his power.

Professor Randall is, however, still in the avant garde of Civil War historians. The old legends die hard and many competent scholars still favor the Nicolay and Hay interpretation especially since it has such a volume of literature, based upon it, yet supporting it none-the-less. Lord Charnwood, Abraham Lincoln, (1916), for example, gives a clear, terse expression of the Nicolay and Hay thesis. McClellan, he thought, was a good man, a great trainer of men and a gentleman, yet he was one of the breed of men who "did not" on the battlefield. Lincoln selected McClellan when he needed an organizer and trainer and discarded him when he needed a fighter. Charnwood's analysis was so appealing that Paul M. Angle, The Lincoln Reader, (1947) incorporated it into a biography compiled from various works about Lincoln—either written contemporary to the Civil War or about the Civil War. Dr. Angle's book is a most handy symposium on Lincoln but he has failed to include works of any writer who could be considered pro or even sympathetic toward McClellan. A striking contrast as to the interpretation of history which can be obtained by telling a story solely from sources can be seen by comparing Dr. Angle's book with that of Otto Eisenschmil and Ralph Newman, The American Iliad, (1947). By quoting pro-McClellan sources the General evolves from their treatment as a significantly great, muchly maligned hero.

At last, just as McClellan's heavy batteries were about to open on the besieged Yorktown, General Johnston withdrew his Confederate troops back toward Richmond. McClellan slowly followed, closing up his supply lines as he moved. At last he concentrated his army along the muddy, sluggish

Chickahominy River, running diagonally to the southeast about seven miles in front of Richmond. There he rested, poised either to continue his advance on Richmond from the east and north if Lincoln released McDowell's corps or from the south and east via the James River if he were forced to fight it out without reinforcements. Clifford Dowdey, Experiment in Rebellion, (1947), has given us a stinging picture of the Confederate government during those precarious days when the capital of the infant slave republic seemed likely to fall to the blue-clad masses of men from the North. Mr. Dowdey discussed at considerable length the men in command of the opposing armies. "In neither of those men [Johnston and McClellan] was there the instinct to kill or the trained habit of hitting to hurt. They were crafty, military-wise counterpunchers, trying to feint the enemy out of position, lead him off balance. Either could be counted on to take advantage of the other's mistakes." (195). This notion has much to commend it for McClellan hated bloodletting. He had seen how Scott had saved American lives in Mexico by maneuvres and had resolved to do the same. Where possible he was willing to expend time and material if by doing so he could gain important objectives and save lives. His siege of Yorktown demonstrated this as did the deliberate closing-up of his army prior to its offensive against Richmond. Yet it is unfair to imply that he lacked the will to fight. The entire peninsular campaign was an offensive operation predicated on the assumption that one all-out fight at least would be required before the Southern capital could be taken. McClellan attacked Lee at Antietam. He did not as Meade did a year later, at Gettysburg, wait for Lee to attack. McClellan was not the ruthless sort of general Grant proved himself to be, but neither

was he timid. He was, as D. W. Brogan has indicated in his book The American Character, (1944), the most characteristically American of generals. He was most concerned, as all successful American generals have been, with matters of supply and communications. Brogan says, "even if he did not win the Civil War, it was won in his spirit and by his methods."

Having driven the Confederate forces back upon the defenses of Richmond, McClellan prepared for the major battle which he hoped would end with Union possession of the capital. His army had closed up to the Chickahominy River to the east of Richmond and two of the five corps lodged on the southwest bank. One other corps, under Fitz John Porter had been extended to the north in the direction of Hanover Courthouse in hopes of meeting McDowell's corps which Lincoln had promised would participate in the battle for Richmond. The course of events however, was suddenly altered when the Virginian, "Stonewall" Jackson burst into a frenzy of activity in the Shenandoah valley. His attacks and counterattacks threw Washington into hysterics and McDowell's corps, which was to be the deciding factor against Johnston, was ordered to the Shenandoah valley in defense of the Federal capital. The effects of this diversion on the outcomes of the peninsular campaign have been variously estimated by writers about the period depending on with whom their sympathies have lain. Jackson's British biographer, Col. G. F. R. Henderson, Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War, describes McClellan as suddenly finding himself deprived of the forces on which he had counted to secure his right flank and as a result being in a position which Johnston could attack at leisure. Walter Geer, Campaigns of the Civil War, (1926), has contended that Jackson's activities forced Lincoln to make his worst mistake in leaving McClellan "isolated when

he most needed help." Each of these two authors generally have adopted a critical point of view concerning McClellan's plans and operations hence their opinion in this connection cannot be regarded as biased in favor of the Union commander.

With McDowell's move south from Fredricksburg effectually stopped, Johnston, defending Richmond, decided to attack McClellan's two corps lying exposed on the Richmond side of the Chickahominy. This attack, which was dreadfully mishandled, was repulsed by the Union troops who first received it although they were aided in restoring their position by the timely arrival of a third corps, under Sumner, from north of the river. Considerable fault has been found with McClellan's actions during this engagement for he did not assume direct control over the troops involved, preferring to leave the direction of the fight to the corps commanders. Since this was his characteristic method of command, however, too much point should not be made of it in this single instance. Further fault has been found for McClellan's failure to go over at once to the offensive in a drive aimed at Richmond. The reasoning behind this point of view is that Johnston's forces were seriously disorganized after the second day of the Seven Pines and would have proven practically no obstacle to a Union advance. John C. Ropes, The Story of the Civil War, (4 V., 1898), has made a detailed study of this notion and largely discredits it. McClellan, he believed, might have been slightly overcautious but the point of protecting one's lines of communication had much to commend it.

Heavy rains followed the battle of Seven Pines and so both the Army of the Potomac and the Confederate Army, newly under the command of Robert E. Lee were both immobilized. As the ground gradually dried McClellan and Lee

both plotted attack: Lee with the objective of driving the Union troops back up the peninsula and McClellan with Richmond as his target. In pondering the needs for the assault, McClellan had reached the conclusion that he might have to shift his base of operations from the York to the James. In arriving at this estimate he was influenced by the belief that he was not to receive McDowell's corps hence the possibility of flanking Richmond from the north had largely disappeared. Why McDowell's corps was withheld at this crucial point has been discussed by a number of authors but none with more intensity of feeling than James Havelock Campbell in his book McClellan, (1917). Dean Campbell believed that Stanton refused to reinforce McClellan because of his desire to prolong the war until such a time as slavery could be terminated with it. The evidence for this interpretation, it should be pointed out, is not strong although at various times Stanton did make utterances which would at least give Campbell's idea a semblance of validity.

Lee with a sympathetic government, interior lines and adequate cavalry was able to initiate his offensive a few hours ahead of McClellan's thus forcing the Union commander to put into effect the previously laid plans for a change of base. McClellan relied upon the corps north of the Chickahominy to contain Lee's offensive and began almost at once to shift his other units southeast through a marshy area called the White Oak swamp to positions under the shelter of Union gunboats operating on the James. In view of the spirited delaying action Porter's troops fought for the first two of these seven days of battle, McClellan has been severely criticized for not having pushed an attack with his other troops straight toward Richmond. Williams, (op. cit.), believed that "For a resolute and able commander the road to

Richmond was open..." and Freeman, (op. cit.), apparently agreed with that sort of conclusion for he labeled McClellan's reasoning as to why the attack toward Richmond was not delivered, as "faulty". Ropes, (op. cit.), stated that McClellan was deceived by one of the oldest ruses of war out of making the advance which might have won the day. All of these opinions, however, have been conditioned by the stereotype idea that McClellan lacked agressiveness. If, however, the effects of that stereotype can be overcome sufficiently to regard objectively the conditions in June of 1862, then McClellan's own explanation must be accepted as valid. An invading army cannot advance into hostile territory with a vigorous and effective enemy on the flank or in the rear. To do so would be to invite disaster although with luck great things can frequently be gained by such audacity.

Once McClellan had decided to shift his troops from the vicinity of the York to the vicinity of the James the execution of that movement was accomplished brilliantly. Porter's corps was sent on through to Malvern Hill on the James, then the supply lines were dispatched and finally, in leapfrog fashion the other corps were withdrawn to the southeast. Most writers, regardless of their over-all estimate of McClellan have described this movment as skillfully maneuvered. The major point of difference between the pro-McClellan writers such as Eckenrode and the anti-McClellan writers such as Ropes lies in interpreting the implications of the move. To the former, the move was a change of base made desirable by greater insight into the strategic situation and by a realization that McDowell's troops were not to join the Army of the Potomac. To the latter the move was in every respect a retreat forced upon McClellan by an aggressive enemy.

To settle this issue, is, of course, patently impossible. However, attention can be called to the fact that the shift of base was neither expected nor desired by Lee. Lee spent all of the 28th of June wondering what McClellan was up to, firmly hoping that the Army of the Potomac would retreat back toward Fort Monroe. Attention can also be called to the fact that after the shift in base McClellan occupied virtually the same position that Grant did in the summer of 1864. Grant however was hailed as a victor.

Once McClellan was safe under the protecting guns of the Federal gunboats his old controversy with his government over the subject of reinforcements broke out again. Enemies of the General tried to convince Lincoln that the entire campaign had been a failure and that no reinforcements should be sent. Indeed, rather than reinforcing the army it should be withdrawn to the vicinity of Washington. Margaret Leech, in a well written, but highly slanted book called Reveille in Washington 1860-1865, (1941), came to the conclusion that these people were right. Lincoln finally knew, she argued, "that the hail of blood and fever which led from Yorktown to Malvern Hill had been marked to no purpose at all." Bruce Catton, in his book Mr. Lincoln's Army, (1951), although not sympathetic to McClellan in most respects, does not agree with Miss Leech's interpretation. Catton believed that from a purely military point of view the move to the James was a legitimate maneuver. His criticism of McClellan at this juncture of the war is more for political mistakes than for technical military failure. Up until the end of the Seven Days, he believes, McClellan made no major military errors although during the same period he managed to make almost every political and public relations error possible. He feels that McClellan's big military faults did not show up until the Maryland campaign.

Either rightly or wrongly, Lincoln listened most to those who wanted the army recalled and so finally McClellan was ordered to bring his veterans back to Washington. This he did in time to have all but a personal guard removed from his command and transferred under a big talking, small acting general who had been brought from the West. John Pope, with his headquarters in his saddle, organized the Army of Virginia and marched south only to march back north again with the hard hitting Lee right behind him. The fiasco of Pope's command ended with the bloody disaster near Manassas Junction. Pope was relieved and the safety of the Union entrusted again to McClellan. For the most part writers have been unanimous in their condemnation of Pope. Professor Williams, (op.cit.), has advanced the interesting hypothesis that Pope was one of the better Union generals, who, had he been given better support by McClellan and his friends, could have won a decided victory against Lee.

The Antietam campaign has received considerably more attention from writers than has the Peninsular campaign. Possibly this is because the battle of Antietam was so bloody or possibly because of its importance in connection with the Emancipation Proclamation. The controversial issues are those involved in McClellan's three alleged chances to destroy Lee. Critics of McClellan such as Carl Sandburg, in Abraham Lincoln: The War Years (4 V., 1939), Williams, (op. cit.), Catton, (op. cit.), and Charnwood, (op. cit.), all view McClellan's reluctance to force his troops as being little short of criminal. Supporters of the General have based their arguments on the fact that McClellan could not afford to push his offensive to the point of risking the objectives for which the campaign was being fought, on the fact that Lee's

attainment of his objectives was foiled and on the fact that Lincoln himself regarded the campaign as sufficiently great a victory as to warrant issuing the Emancipation Proclamation. Randall, in Lincoln the President, II, has presented a list of reasons why the Maryland campaign must be regarded as a Union success. His analysis, based upon a life-time of careful research, is one of the best available. Emory Upton in The Military Policy of the United States, (1907), analyzed in great detail the purely military considerations involved in the Maryland campaign. His studied conclusion was that, given the handicaps of a Commander-in-Chief such as Halleck and the political issues at stake, McClellan's conduct of operations was good. Had McClellan not been tied by the restraining orders of Halleck he possibly could have moved fast enough to have taken full advantage of the opportunities presented by finding Lee's order. Upton also believed that McClellan's failure to use Porter's troops at Antietam was more the fault of the War Department than of the field commander. He reasoned that McClellan had requested reinforcements so as to have freed Porter for action but they were not sent. In view of the threat Lee posed to Washington the last available troops of the Army of the Potomac could not be spent in an effort the outcome of which might be in doubt.

McClellan's career rapidly drew to its close after the Maryland campaign. He believed he had accomplished his mission and wanted to regroup and reequip his army before trying Lee again. Lincoln, seeing only the political needs of the situation tried to force McClellan to move before he was ready. When Lee was able to place his forces squarely astride the overland invasion route to Richmond, Lincoln relieved McClellan and replaced

him with Burnside. As an historical incident this matter has been given scant treatment by historians. In general, Lincoln's statement as to why he relieved McClellan has been accepted at face value. Insufficient attention has been given, partly because of a paucity of evidence, to the role Stanton and the radicals may have played in forcing Lincoln to employ a test which one could reasonably be expected to be met. Lincoln it will be recalled decided that if Lee left the Shenandoah and reached the region south of Centreville he would relieve McClellan. Now such a move should have been expected since Lee would not sit by and watch a Union force march undisturbed to Richmond. Since Lincoln was not stupid it must be assumed that he was willing to relieve McClellan earlier than the date of the actual order and was only waiting for a plausible pretext for doing so. Why Lincoln arrived at such a decision is still a moot question.

In addition to the secondary accounts already mentioned some reference should be made to several specialized works useful to the student of the military campaigns of the Civil War. Thomas L. Livermore in his Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America, 1861-1865, (1901), has attempted to settle some of the controversy over the numbers of troops actually involved in actual combat. This is a particularly significant work for the McClellan story since so many of the overt differences between McClellan and his government were over numbers of troops actually present for battle in the Army of the Potomac.

Fred A. Shannon has done a remarkable job in analyzing some of the administrative problems of the Union Army in his Organization and Administration of the Union Army, (1928 2 V.). This work has been seriously

criticized by Professor Williams, (op. cit.), because of factual errors and because of errors in interpretation they imply. Particularly irritating to Williams is the fact that Shannon would attempt to write such a work without having had extensive military experience. Yet Williams himself demonstrates that military experience can lead a writer astray. His own experience was in World War I and he constantly reads into situations in the 1860's the advances made between the Civil War and the war in which he participated. He further places the faith of a junior regular army officer in the Army Regulations forgetting that regulations applicable for subordinate commanders must not be rigid determiners of action for senior commanders. Thus a Pershing or McArthur were within their rights in challenging orders issued to them. They, being on the ground on which fighting was taking place, could better judge the appropriateness of orders than their War Department superiors. Of course, after having raised their objections, senior commanders are obligated to comply with directions they receive. McClellan exercised his prerogative of questioning orders but never once was he guilty of having failed to comply if the government persisted in its instructions.

Otto Eisenschiml in The Celebrated Case of Fitz John Porter, (1950), has presented to the public a readable account of the court-martial of Porter and its finding an innocent man guilty. George Fort Milton, in Conflict - The American Civil War, (1941), has added his voice to the already loud indictment of Stanton's shaping the conduct of the war to achieve radical ends. Matthew Torney Steele, in American Campaigns, (2 V., 1947), has given a resume of American battles from the Revolutionary War to the Spanish American War.