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LINCOLN'S SEARCH FOR A

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WINNING GENERAL

by John C. Gibson

March 18, 1959

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Eastern Illinois University

Charleston, Illinois

LINCOLN'S SEARCH FOR A WINNING GENERAL

by

John C. Gibson

This paper has been written as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education at Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois.

March 18, 1959

Approved:

Date: March 3, 1959

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## CHAPTER ONE

### LEADERSHIP AT THE ONSET OF THE CIVIL WAR

The southern state of South Carolina seceded from the Union in December 1860, after the election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency of the United States. By February 1861, she was joined by six other states; later four more followed, making eleven in all. Their total population was about nine million, while that of the twenty-three states remaining loyal to the Union was something over twenty million.<sup>1</sup>

Fort Sumter, built in a routine way to adorn the coast of a country that never expected to go to war, stood at the precise spot where the hurricane was going to break.<sup>2</sup>

At daybreak on the morning of April 12, 1861, General P. G. T. Beauregard began open hostilities by firing on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. It is interesting to note that Jefferson Davis might have sent a cargo of provisions to Fort Sumter and invited its garrison to remain as guests of the Confederacy. Had he done this he might have won the sympathy

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<sup>1</sup>Colin R. Ballard: The Military Genius of Abraham Lincoln. 1952. Oxford University Press. London. (1926). p. 34. Cited hereafter as Ballard.

<sup>2</sup>Bruce Catton: This Hallowed Ground. 1956. Doubleday and Co., Inc. Garden City, New York. p. 14. Cited hereafter as Catton, This Hallowed Ground.

of many pacifists in the North. His act would have kept him right in the eyes of foreigners, and most certainly it would have embarrassed Lincoln, who could neither withdraw his garrison nor leave it there under such conditions.<sup>3</sup>

Thus it came that Lincoln, who of all men hated war, was the one man on whose shoulders fell the responsibility for conducting the greatest civil war known. Called to the head of our nation in the hour of crisis, Lincoln had neither experience in administration nor any idea of military strategy, yet he was forced to assume control of both.<sup>4</sup> Ignorant of war, he wanted to use the knowledge of one who was supposed to be a master of the art. President Lincoln approached General Winfield Scott, the ancient warrior, with grateful humility. He requested a daily report of the military situation. Scott started sending the reports immediately and continued to do so for weeks.<sup>5</sup>

Thus it was General Scott who became the first head of the army for the Union cause in 1861. This army at the outbreak of hostilities numbered about 16,000 men. Of the 1200 officers that had been trained at West Point, about one third were Southerners, and, with few exceptions, loyally supported the South. With so few qualified officers available, Lincoln

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<sup>3</sup>Ballard, pp. 28-29.

<sup>4</sup>Ballard, pp. 33-36.

<sup>5</sup>T. Harry Williams: Lincoln And His Generals. 1952. Alfred A. Knopf. New York. p. 15. Cited hereafter as Williams.

<sup>6</sup>Ballard, p. 46.

necessarily made numerous political appointments to ambitious political chieftains with large personal followings, especially if they were Democrats. Among these were John A. Logan, Nathaniel B. Banks, John A. McClernand, and good ole Ben Butler. These selections saddled the army with some prize incompetents in high places, but they were good investments in national cohesion.<sup>7</sup>

General Scott was old and nearly senile; he was too fat and infirm to mount a horse or even to review his troops. All he could offer the government was his great reputation and his stout old heart.<sup>8</sup> However, the general was able enough to see the overall aspect of the war and the importance of the occupation of the Mississippi line. He suggested that a defensive position should be established around Washington while the main effort was made in the West.<sup>9</sup> Of General Scott's tenure as military chief, one good thing can be said. Upon his recommendation Henry W. Halleck was appointed directly a Major General and assigned to the department of the Missouri. In July 1862, he was promoted to general-in-chief of the armies of the United States. At that time he was transferred to Washington where he directed the movements of the generals in the field. He was

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<sup>7</sup>Williams, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup>Bruce Catton: Mr. Lincoln's Army. 1951. Doubleday and Co., Inc. Garden City, New York. p. 60. Cited hereafter as Catton, Mr. Lincoln's Army.

<sup>9</sup>Ballard, p. 175.



superseded by the appointment of General Grant in March 1864.<sup>10</sup>

The fighting had hardly started, yet the most momentous single decision had already been made. As far as the Federal government was concerned, it was to be a war to the finish. The Lincoln administration made this decision. Interestingly enough the country at large accepted it, instinctively and without stopping to reason about it. Of all the misunderstandings that produced the war, no single one had more tragic consequences than the fact that the men of the South had completely failed to realize how deeply the concept of nationality had taken root in the North.<sup>11</sup>

General Irvin McDowell was appointed as field commander under General Scott. Although powerful political figures had suggested McDowell as commander, the reasons for his appointment were military. However, the new general was to enter a career which ended in tragedy.

Around Washington the government was assembling an army made up mostly of volunteers that numbered slightly over 30,000 by early summer. Neither General Scott nor General McDowell had any idea of sending this green army into battle during the summer and fall of 1861. McDowell was oppressed with difficulties which were real. His command of an army over 30,000 gave him the distinction of being the first general in our country's history to hold such a position.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Dictionary of American Biography. 1932. v-8. pp. 151-152. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York.

<sup>11</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. pp. 35-36.

<sup>12</sup>Williams, p. 18.

Yet McDowell had no choice but to fight. Lincoln and his cabinet, as political authorities yielding to the country's demands and considering that the time of the three-month troops was about to expire, overruled Scott and McDowell.<sup>13</sup> Late in June, Scott, at the insistence of the President, gave McDowell verbal instructions to prepare a plan of action against the Confederate army at Manassas.

McDowell brought a plan to General Scott, and the two worked it over carefully. Scott approved the plan and on June 29th presented it to Lincoln. Lincoln directed McDowell to put his plan into execution. General Scott, however, was in favor of waiting until a larger and better trained and prepared army could win victories that would be decisive.<sup>14</sup> He knew that General Beauregard had 21,000 Confederate soldiers at Manassas Junction. Also another Confederate army was training under Joseph E. Johnston in the Shenandoah Valley. Plans were for a Union army under Robert Patterson, also in the Valley, to prevent Johnston's troops from joining Beauregard.<sup>15</sup>

On July 16, 1861, McDowell started an advance of 27 miles to Manassas in response to the popular demand that the Federal Government force a battle in Virginia. General Beauregard fell

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<sup>12</sup>Williams, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup>Carl Sandburg: Abraham Lincoln, The War Years. 4-v. 1939. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York. v-1. pp. 35-36. Cited hereafter as Sandburg, The War Years.

<sup>14</sup>Williams, pp. 19-21.

<sup>15</sup>Sandburg, The War Years. v-1. p. 301.

back and prepared for battle along the rough and wooded banks of the Bull Run, a tributary of the Potomac.<sup>16</sup> On July 21st McDowell's troops began the fighting by driving the Confederates from their position and then from one position to another; finally the Confederates formed a line that held, and with the aid of reinforcements which had arrived from the Valley they were able to counterattack. This counterattack completely routed the Union forces and started a wave of panic that did not subside until the men reached the fortifications surrounding Washington.<sup>17</sup> Had it not been for the arrival of fresh troops from the Shenandoah Valley and the exhaustion of the Union troops, McDowell could conceivably have won the battle. Actually about 18,000 men had been engaged on each side. The North had 460 killed and 1124 wounded while the South had 387 killed and 1582 wounded.<sup>18</sup>

As battles of the Civil War go, Manassas Junction was a very small one. However, it did serve as a warning to the North that the war would not be easily won. It was now apparent that the South would not give up without a struggle to the last man, and that is almost what happened.<sup>19</sup>

The people who had been loudest in clamoring for an

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<sup>16</sup>Benjamin P. Thomas: Abraham Lincoln. 1952. Alfred A. Knopf. New York. p. 271. Cited hereafter as Thomas.

<sup>17</sup>Tyler Dennett: Lincoln and the Civil War. In the Diaries and Letters of John Hay. Dodd, Mead & Co. New York. Fn. p. 24

<sup>18</sup>Ballard, pp. 51-53.

<sup>19</sup>My conjecture.

advance on Richmond now realized the importance of the warnings of Generals Scott and McDowell: the Government had sent half-trained boys on an impossible task; the results were, of course, disaster, a bad case of political disregard of professional advice.<sup>20</sup>

Old General Scott had a clear eye. Others could talk about the one swift blow that would end the rebellion, but he saw it differently. The Confederacy, he believed, would never be subdued piecemeal; it would have to be enveloped and throttled.

"Let the navy (said Scott) blockade the southern coast. The army, then, must drive down the Mississippi, open the river all the way to the Gulf, split the western states from the Confederacy and hold the Valley in such strength that the blockade of the Southland would be complete. With rebellion isolated, it could then be crushed at leisure."<sup>21</sup>

Scott's proposal was discussed at the White House, and became known as the "Anaconda Plan". It attempted to point out what was necessary before a really effective war could be waged. Although scoffed at, Scott's plan took root in the mind of Abraham Lincoln. In the end, the Anaconda idea became the basis for the Federal war effort.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ballard, p. 54.

<sup>21</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 52.

<sup>22</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 52.

Before making new plans Lincoln had to find a fresh army. There was, however, little difficulty in this since recruits came in faster than they could be trained. The problem was one of organization. For this task Lincoln sought the help of one George B. McClellan, a rising young General from Ohio, who took command of the troops around Washington on July 27, 1861. By early fall 1861, there were some 170,000 men in the Union army, all well-trained and equipped. The time had come to consider new plans. It was at this point that Lincoln came to the full realization that McDowell's job was too large for him to handle. At the same time he was probably beginning to have some doubts about General Scott too.<sup>23</sup>

Thus it became General McDowell's destiny to be the first of a long line of Generals to be entrusted with the reins of command and later be demoted or relieved of duties altogether. Lincoln's search for a general had now begun.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Williams, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup>My conjecture.

## CHAPTER TWO

### GENERAL GEORGE B. McCLELLAN

McClellan is the most controversial military figure of the Civil War; after ninety-four years, the controversy still rages. Lee is quoted as having characterized McClellan as the ablest of his opponents.<sup>1</sup> That McClellan was an able organizer, a close student of war, and beloved by his troops, few will deny. On the other hand his timidity, vacillation, procrastination and sensitiveness, his persecution mania, his arrogance toward Lincoln, and his monumental egotism suggest a psychopathic personality.<sup>2</sup>

"Little Mac", or the "Young Napoleon", as he was favorably called by his troops, was below medium height but muscularly compact, with red hair, red mustache, and an authoritative manner.<sup>3</sup> McClellan was extremely careful of the welfare of his men, and his almost tender carefulness of their lives contrasted afterwards with what appeared the ruthless carelessness of Grant.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Douglas Southall Freeman: *R. E. Lee*. 4v. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York. 1947. v. 4. p. 475.

<sup>2</sup>Henry S. Commanger: *The Blue and The Gray*. 2v. 1950. The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc. New York. v. 1. p. 193. Cited hereafter as Commanger.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas, p. 284.

He was thirty-five when the war started. A West Point graduate, he had done well in the Mexican War, and later he was sent to the Crimea by the War Department to watch the British and French fight the Russians. Then with the rank of captain, he had resigned from the army to go into business. A capable engineer, by the spring of 1861 he had become president of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad at ten-thousand-dollars-a-year, and was working and living in Cincinnati, Ohio. The War reached out for him without delay.<sup>5</sup>

In mid-April 1861, McClellan, who was a Pennsylvanian by birth, had received a message from Governor Andrew G. Curtin of Pennsylvania, inviting him to come to Harrisburg at once and take charge of the Pennsylvania troops. On his way to Harrisburg he stopped off at Columbus to advise the Governor of Ohio. This stopover made all the difference.

The Governor explained what he was up against. He had what looked like the impossible job of getting ten thousand men ready for the field, and there was no one around who knew the first thing about the military arts. Under these circumstances the Governor had no intentions of letting a good West Pointer slip through his fingers, and he then and there offered McClellan the command of the Ohio troops. McClellan accepted, moved into

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<sup>4</sup>Lord Charnwood: Abraham Lincoln. 1917. Garden City Publishing Co. Garden City, New York. p. 285. Cited hereafter as Charnwood.

<sup>5</sup>Catton, Mr. Lincoln's Army. p. 56

an office in the state house, and got down to work, a major-general of volunteers.<sup>6</sup>

As soon as the Ohio regiments were mustered into the United States service, McClellan found himself holding one of the key jobs in the whole army. Ohio was on the frontier. The western part of Virginia was just across the river and the Confederates had sent troops deep into the mountains. It was correctly supposed in Washington that this part of Virginia was strongly Unionist and it seemed important to drive them out.

By the end of May, McClellan found himself commanding a small force of sixteen regiments from Ohio, nine from Indiana, and two from Virginia. He moved up into the mountains, found two Confederate detachments drawn up in the passes, attacked one and caved it in, causing the other to retreat, and then moved on to the town of Beverly, taking prisoners and securing everything west of the Alleghenies for the Union, and making possible the eventual formation of the state of West Virginia.<sup>7</sup>

It had been neatly done; it was the North's first feat of arms and the country rejoiced at the news. The "annihilation", as he termed his victory in his dispatches, consisted in the retreat of the opposing forces and the loss by it of about a thousand men. Just before the battle McClellan issued a very egotistic statement to his troops which reads: "Soldiers! I have heard that there was danger here. I have come to place

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<sup>6</sup>Catton, Mr. Lincoln's Army. p. 57.

<sup>7</sup>Catton, Mr. Lincoln's Army. p. 58.



myself at your head and 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 count on you."<sup>8</sup>

This sort of thing went over big with the country at large, and just then, before anybody had forgotten about it, the news came in about the humiliating disaster to McDowell at Bull Run. So it was, that with very little actual military achievement to his credit, McClellan was called to Washington on July 27, 1861, to be given the command of the Army of the Potomac which was in the process of reorganization.

"He found Washington overrun with men in uniform who drifted about the streets (and jammed the saloons) in aimless confusion. He detailed regular army soldiers to police the place, got the wanderers back into camp, saw that the camps were properly laid out, ironed out the kinks in the commissary system so that everyone got plenty to eat, and in short, restored order."<sup>9</sup>

He was in the process of creating an army, and it had a name, a name that would cast long shadows and stir great memories before the end came--the Army of the Potomac. More often, though, the newspapers spoke of it simply as "McClellan's Army", and that was the way the men themselves thought of it. They were McClellan's men, and in spirit most of them would continue to be that as long as they lived.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Catton, Mr. Lincoln's Army. p. 59.

<sup>9</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 53.

<sup>10</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. pp. 53-54.

In his campaign in western Virginia, McClellan revealed most of the military and personal characteristics he would later manifest in his operation with a larger command. His preparations for battle were confident and energetic, but as the time came for action he became slow and timid.

During the summer and early fall, McClellan forged from the multitudes of volunteers placed at his command the Army of the Potomac, one of the finest fighting armies in the history of war. Whatever else he failed to do in the war, he created that army, and gave it a belief in itself that nothing could destroy. For this job Lincoln could not have picked a better man to reorganize McDowell's defeated troops.<sup>11</sup>

Upon arrival in Washington, McClellan soon came to the realization that old General Scott was more of a hindrance than a help. Undeniably Scott was an obstacle--a querulous fuss-budget--his greatness only a memory. The job could not be done unless a way could be found around the old gentleman. McClellan started to ignore and bypass the General-in-chief, communicating directly with Lincoln and the members of the cabinet.<sup>12</sup>

General Scott, finally realizing that he was being pushed into the background by an "Ambitious Junior", wrote a formal application requesting that he be placed on the retired list.

On November 1, 1861, Lincoln accepted Scott's request and

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<sup>11</sup>Williams, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup>Williams, p. 32.

placed McClellan in command of "the whole army".<sup>13</sup>

From the battle of Bull Run on July 21, 1861, to March 5, 1862, the Southern army, under General Joseph E. Johnston, lay quietly drilling at Manasses.

On April 2, 1862, McClellan started the celebrated Peninsula campaign. The movement of 100,000 men by water demanded a large number of ships, and the business of collecting them was begun in February. The progress up the Peninsula was very slow. He had not informed himself correctly as to the geography and the number of troops opposing him in Johnston's army. On May 31, nearly two months after arrival, Johnston attacked at a disadvantage and was defeated. A part of the army pursued the enemy to within four miles of Richmond, and had McClellan acted with energy he could have taken the city. The delay gave the enemy time to strengthen themselves in men and fortifications. During this engagement General Johnston was wounded and replaced as commander by the inspired Lee.<sup>14</sup>

By now other things were going wrong, most of them growing out of a bitter difference of opinion between General McClellan and the Lincoln administration.

A disagreement between a General and the government could have odd potentialities this spring of 1862. McClellan embodied the Democratic position. Any military program he might adopt could be considered a Democratic program, and it was all too easy

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<sup>13</sup>Williams, p. 43.

<sup>14</sup>Charnwood, pp. 294-297.

to consider a Democratic program as "rebellious" at this time.

Basicly the difference of opinion reflected divergent ideas on the kind of war the country was fighting. The administration had accepted it from the first as a revolutionary struggle, calling for hard blows struck quickly; McClellan always saw it as a traditional war-between-gentlemen affair, the sort in which a professional soldier could play straight. The administration wanted relentless combat but lacked military knowledge; McClellan had military knowledge but could not see that fundamentally this was a political war. It was becoming very hard for McClellan and Lincoln to agree about anything whatsoever.<sup>15</sup>

McClellan was slowly but surely inching his way toward Richmond during the month of June, 1862. From June 26 to July 2 there took place a series of engagements known as the Seven Days' Battle, in which the Union army was forced to retreat to a place known as Harrison's Landing. From this position of security, the army was slowly withdrawn and added to the forces of General John Pope and the Army of Virginia.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, Lincoln had appointed General Henry Halleck commander of all armies, the vacancy being caused by the absence of McClellan when he went to the Peninsula. During the time of the Peninsula campaign there were several small forces of Union soldiers in and around Washington and the Shenandoah

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<sup>15</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. pp. 132-133.

<sup>16</sup>Charnwood, pp. 297-299.

Valley, one of these a force of some 35-40,000 men under General McDowell. While the main part of the army was on the Peninsula it became necessary to appoint an overall commander of these forces. Upon the recommendation of General Halleck and in view of his success in the West, General John Pope was given the responsibility of organizing these scattered detachments into a fighting unit.<sup>17</sup>

Major General John Pope was an odd figure. Postmaster General Montgomery Blair had once remarked venomously that he was a cheat and a liar like all the rest of his tribe. While a disgruntled Blair was apt to be harsh in his judgment, Pope did have a pronounced ability to irritate people.

The War Department brought Pope east in a well-meant effort to inject a little vigor into the Virginia campaign. Some 50,000 troops were turned over to him, including those of McDowell. He was told to weld them into an army and go down and fight General Lee and his Confederate army.

Pope began moving down the line of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, preparing to descend on Richmond from the northwest, while McClellan's presence on the James forced the city's defenders to look toward the southeast. McClellan remained in his camp, making no offensive gestures, and Lee presently concluded that it would be safe to send Stonewall Jackson to look after Pope.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Thomas, pp. 335-336.

<sup>18</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. pp. 153-154.

Lee divided his army, sent Jackson on a wide swing to sever the Union communications and capture the supply depot at Manassas. After wreaking havoc behind the Northern lines, Jackson retreated northwest, fighting off pursuers in order to give Lee time to join him. On August 29, Pope caught up with Jackson near the old battle field of Bull Run. Pope then launched a series of costly attacks against a railroad embankment sheltering Jackson's troops. Instead of attacking, he should have been seeking a position for defense, for General Longstreet had circled west and was now massed on Pope's left flank. Pope simply could not believe that any of Lee's troops had had time to catch up with him and he ordered an all out attack, which was repulsed with heavy loss.

After this heavy defeat at Second Bull Run, Pope surmised that his position was worse than it was. He gave up hope before he needed to and asked to be drawn into the defenses around Washington.<sup>19</sup>

It was very clear that neither the army nor public opinion would tolerate Pope after the fiasco of Second Bull Run in which an army of 90,000 had been routed by 55,000 Confederates. On September 5, Lincoln relieved him of command, and over vigorous opposition from his Cabinet, reappointed McClellan to command of the now reunited Army of the Potomac. Lincoln was, however, determined that McClellan's command should be temporary because he believed the General incapable of offensive warfare.

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<sup>19</sup>Thomas, pp. 336-338.

A victory was needed for more reasons than one. Overseas the British Government seemed to be on the verge of recognizing the Confederacy as an independent nation--an act that would almost certainly bring effects as far-reaching and decisive as the French recognition of the American colonies had brought in 1778. The British Prime Minister and Cabinet seemed at last ready to take the step. They would wait, however, a little while longer to see what came of Lee's invasion of the North.<sup>20</sup>

Washington was now too strongly held to be attacked, but Lee determined to invade Maryland. At least this would keep Virginia safe during harvest time; his footsore troops might find new shoes in small-town stores; and the coming of his army might win him many recruits in slaveholding Maryland.

All of this occurred just as Abraham Lincoln was preparing to issue a proclamation of emancipation for Negro slaves. He had made up his mind during the summer. The base of the war would have to be broadened and an immeasurable new force would have to be injected into it. It would become now a social revolution, and there was no way to foretell the final consequences. At the very beginning Lincoln had accepted secession as a variety of revolution and had unhesitatingly used revolutionary measures to meet it; however, he clung tenaciously to the idea that the one ruling war aim was to restore the Union. He had steered carefully away from steps that would destroy the whole social fabric of the South. But it could not be done that

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<sup>20</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 158.

way. Come what might, Lincoln would free the slaves, as far as the stroke of a pen on a sheet of paper could.<sup>21</sup>

As Lee moved northward, the army of the Potomac hovered on his right flank, safeguarding Washington. On September 13, 1862, Lee's entire plan of operation fell into McClellan's hands when an Indiana private found a copy of an order wrapped around three cigars. Lee was dividing his forces, sending Jackson to Harper's Ferry in order to protect his communications, while the remainder of his troops moved toward Hagerstown where he could threaten Harrisburg and other Pennsylvania towns. With Lee's army widely dispersed, here was a chance to destroy it in detail. McClellan moved with unaccustomed speed for him, but still with extreme caution. With some 100,000 troops at his disposal, he thought Lee, whose whole strength did not amount to 50,000, must surely outnumber him.<sup>22</sup>

The Army of the Potomac caught up with Lee and Jackson near the town of Sharpsburg, Maryland, which lies close to a small stream called the Antietam. There on September 17 and 18, 1862, McClellan ordered an attack, to which he did not attempt to give his personal direction. His corps commanders led assaults on Lee's position at different times and in so disconnected a manner that each was repulsed singly. The overall effect was demoralizing to the Southerners. Had McClellan ordered one more attack and sent in the units he was holding in

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<sup>21</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. pp. 157-158.

<sup>22</sup>Thomas, pp. 339-340.



reserve in case they were needed for a possible rear guard action, he would have utterly swept Lee's army from the field.<sup>23</sup> McClellan was at the crisis of his career and he fumbled the moment completely.

Lee's men had taken a dreadful pounding. They had suffered astounding losses (more than ten thousand men between dawn and dusk--a good fourth of all the men he had on the field) but they had not quite been driven from Sharpsburg and the high ground. By every dictate of military logic, Lee would have to cross the Potomac and get back to Virginia as soon as darkness came. But Lee did not retreat. With fewer than thirty thousand infantrymen in his command, he calmly waited all day September 18 for McClellan to renew the fighting. (Of all the daring gamblers who ever wore an American military uniform, Lee unquestionably was the coolest.) His bluff worked, for McClellan pondered and waited for reinforcements and tomorrow, which never came. Lee ordered a retreat that night. Even McClellan was likely to attack if he was given time enough.<sup>24</sup>

Here was a victory over Lee, indisputably, even if a negative one. He had invaded the North with high hopes; he had been compelled to fight along the Antietam, and after the fight he had had to march back into Virginia. At enormous cost the army of the Potomac had won a strategic victory. However qualified this triumph might be, at least the invasion was over. There would be a new campaign now, and it would take place south

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<sup>23</sup>Catton, Mr. Lincoln's Army. pp. 312-314.

<sup>24</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. pp. 168-169.

of the Potomac. McClellan was looking ahead to it.<sup>25</sup>

Lincoln had promised to decree emancipation by the first of the new year. On December 1, 1862, he sent a message to congress suggesting the adoption of a constitutional amendment providing for gradual, fully-compensated emancipation all across the land, in loyal states and in rebellious states alike.

"Geography," said Lincoln, "was controlling; there could not be two nations here; the land itself would compel a reunion even if the attempt at secession won. Without slavery, the effort to force a separation could not long continue. Why not meet the inevitable halfway? Compensated emancipation would not cost as much as the war itself was costing; also it would kill no young men. To save their country, men must disentrall themselves from the dogmas of the past. To give freedom to the slave was to preserve it for all others."<sup>26</sup>

With the Emancipation Proclamation Lincoln would change the war, for himself as well as for everyone else. The war would now be pushed past settlement; the unconditional surrender which the government would always insist on would become something that the Confederate leaders would not even consider. In order that Lincoln might sign the Proclamation twenty-five thousand Americans, North and South had been shot.<sup>27</sup>

Lincoln watched McClellan eagerly, and came to the

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<sup>25</sup>Catton, Mr. Lincoln's Army. pp. 326-327.

<sup>26</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 184.

<sup>27</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. pp. 170-172.

Antietam to see things for himself. He went back to Washington in the full belief that McClellan would move at once. To be certain of this, Lincoln uttered a warning, and to avoid any misunderstanding, followed it with a definite order. This order was dated October 5, 1862. The one dismissing McClellan was dated November 5. It was very likely that Lincoln had fixed in his own mind a time limit of one month as a test; he had a habit of fixing beforehand the time for taking certain action. If in that month McClellan fought a battle or made a real attempt to force a battle on Lee, he would be retained in command; if it was to be a repetition of the Peninsula-preparation for tomorrow, absolute disregard for orders--then he must go.<sup>28</sup>

In the last analysis most of McClellan's difficulties stemmed from his failure to take Lincoln into his confidence, as Grant later did. Lincoln, after much deliberation, arrived at the opinion that McClellan was not fit for command of an army intended for offensive operations. This was an all-sufficient reason for dismissing him.

On November 7, 1862, General Burnside was called and very reluctantly assumed command of the Army of the Potomac. McClellan's career was finished. Never was he to receive another assignment.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ballard, p. 135.

<sup>29</sup>Williams, p. 177.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### LINCOLN LOOKS IN VAIN FOR SOMEONE TO WIN A VICTORY

Lincoln, in his search for a general, wanted a man who would make no fatal blunder. He must also be a man of undaunted enterprise; while he did not wish to expose the North to disaster he did mean to conquer the South.<sup>1</sup>

Events were to prove Lincoln's selection of General Burnside a poor one, but to the desperate President he seemed the best man available. A graduate of West Point, thirty eight years old, the new commander had a genial, pleasing manner and an imposing presence, enhanced by lush side whiskers. Having twice rejected an offer of the command of the Army of the Potomac, he assumed it with great misgivings, as a duty. An honest conscientious soldier, mindful of his own limitations, he told brother officers that he was not up to his job. History bears out the accuracy of his self-appraisal.<sup>2</sup>

The Army of the Potomac was at Warrenton, Virginia, just south of Manassas Junction, when Burnside assumed command. He then proposed to strike straight south through Fredericksburg for Richmond. This plan would have succeeded if Burnside had

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<sup>1</sup>Charnwood, p. 287.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas, p. 348.

had the full co-operation of General Halleck, as the Confederates under Longstreet were near Culpepper some thirty miles away and Jackson was in the Shenandoah Valley.

Burnside's whole plan hinged on the arrival of enough pontoons to construct three bridges across the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg. While Burnside waited impatiently, Lee collected his forces on the heights beyond the town.

Fredericksburg was deceptive. The Rappahannock which runs on an easterly course, turns south just above the town, and for a distance flows very nearly on a north-south line, with Fredericksburg lying on the west bank. To the west of the town there is a shallow open plain extending several miles downstream. Just beyond the plain lies a long chain of wooded hills which approximately parallels the river. This looks innocent enough since the hills are not high. To the south they trail off into gentle rolling country. But the hills are just high enough to make an ideal defensive position. Here on the crest Lee's army was securely posted.<sup>3</sup>

By the time the pontoon bridges were completed, Lee's position was almost impregnable against a frontal attack. It was here that Burnside made his fatal mistake. He failed to make new plans after the original situation changed. Even as late as the day before the battle, Lee was still unable to believe that the main assault was to be made here, and to the

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<sup>3</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 188.

last moment the Confederates thought that the crossing at Fredericksburg must be a ponderous feint.<sup>4</sup>

Having committed himself to an advance here, Burnside felt there was nothing left but to try the impossible, and this he ordered the army to do, for there was a great stubbornness in him--a great stubbornness and nothing more. He had said he would cross at Fredericksburg, and at Fredericksburg he would cross, even if destruction awaited him, as it most assuredly did.

"In all the war no army moved up against a tougher position than Burnside's army encountered here at Fredericksburg. Without a miracle, the Confederate position here could not be taken by storm."<sup>5</sup>

The battle of Fredericksburg on December 13, 1862, can be summed up with few words: a frontal attack against a well-prepared position. Rarely has less maneuver or finesse been seen in a general engagement.

The verdict of the battle was quite definite enough to make another change in command necessary, and this was openly voiced in the army itself.<sup>6</sup> On January 24, 1863, Burnside, feeling the growing resentment of his fellow officers, issued an ultimatum to President Lincoln that General Hooker and

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<sup>4</sup>Bruce Catton: Glory Road. 1952. Doubleday and Co., Inc. Garden City, New York. p. 51. Cited hereafter as Catton, Glory Road.

<sup>5</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. pp. 187-188.

<sup>6</sup>Ballard, p. 152.

several other staff officers be relieved from their duties. This ultimatum was accompanied by Burnside's resignation and stated in part that the President could accept the one that was best for the army and the country.<sup>7</sup>

Lincoln dismissed Burnside, and--somewhat reluctantly, as his letters reveal--appointed in his place "Fighting Joe" Hooker, whom Burnside declared to be "unfit to hold an important commission during a crisis like the present." It was perhaps the one time when Burnside's judgment proved sound.

Joseph Hooker was a slim and handsome man, with rosy cheeks and cold eyes, a hard-drinking, hard-living general with some coarseness of fiber. At his headquarters there was a glitter of arrogance, and in his speech in the spring of 1863 there was a contemptuous confidence in victory, a glib preacceptance of triumph that might just possibly hide a deep inner uncertainty.<sup>8</sup>

By the end of April 1863, Hooker had what he called "the finest army on the planet." Certainly it was the largest and best equipped that had ever been seen in America. Against Hooker's force of some 130,000 men Lee could muster less than 60,000, (for Longstreet's corps was miles away, south of the James River).

Hooker, like Burnside, was another man who had a river to cross--the Rappahannock. He knew he could count on the troops, for the Army of the Potomac had been tried and proven many

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<sup>7</sup>Williams, pp. 205-206.

<sup>8</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 238.

times. They could do just about anything their commander wanted them to do if he could use them to their full potential. The question mark was Joe Hooker.<sup>9</sup>

Hooker's strategy was admirable. Leaving Sedgwick with 40,000 men at Fredericksburg, he planned to move up the Rappahannock, cross over through the wilderness, catch Lee in a giant pincers movement, and overwhelm him. By the end of April Hooker had completed the reorganization of the army and except for a reserve corps was across the Rappahannock and prepared to move on Lee.

First Hooker sent General Stoneman off on a cavalry raid designed to disorganize Lee's communications and threaten Richmond. When he moved up the river to Chancellorsville he failed to catch Lee by surprise; when Slocum's corps moved down the plank road toward Fredericksburg it ran into well-entrenched Confederate opposition. Instead of giving battle, Hooker mysteriously withdrew to Chancellorsville, thus giving the initiative to Lee, who promptly seized and exploited it.

Once again Lee out-generated his adversary, using Hooker's own strategy. Instead of being caught in a pincer, he caught Hooker in a like maneuver, rolled him up on both flanks and pushed him back to the edge of the river; then he turned on the hapless Sedgwick and sent him hurtling back across the river.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 239.

<sup>10</sup>Commager, pp. 228-229.



Hooker's sudden withdrawal can be partially explained. Early in the battle he was wounded from the explosion of an artillery shell and was in shock. As a result he lost self-control and presence of mind and took his losses to be greater than they were, and drew his army back across the Rappahannock to Chancellorsville.<sup>11</sup>

Chancellorsville was a dearly bought victory. Confederate casualties were 18,156, of which almost eleven thousand were killed or wounded. In some ways it was the most spectacular victory of Lee's career, and yet this victory was sterile. Not only had it cost the Confederacy more than it could afford to pay in men and materials, but it had been the final engagement for Stonewall Jackson, who was literally irreplaceable.<sup>12</sup>

The rest of the spring the two armies faced each other across the Rappahannock. Then on June 5, 1863, Lee unexpectedly broke camp and headed north. Lincoln advised Hooker to follow the Confederates on the inside of the curve, thus protecting Washington and their lines of communication at all times.

By now the War Department's distrust of Hooker was solid. He was crippled by his failure at Chancellorsville and could not take the initiative. He, nor anyone else, could prevent what was coming.<sup>13</sup>

As the Army of the Potomac moved northward, a long and

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<sup>11</sup>Charnwood, p. 311.

<sup>12</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 244.

<sup>13</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 247.

low burning animosity between Hooker and Halleck flared. The immediate issue was a garrison of 10,000 men at Harper's Ferry. Hooker wanted this force to join his main body. On June 27, Hooker apparently lost his temper and demanded that the dispute be referred to the President, and without waiting for a reply, followed his first telegram with another, offering his resignation.<sup>14</sup>

Lincoln, whose own calm was unruffled even in his most despondent moments, had been watching the symptoms, and when the outbreak confirmed his suspicions, there was not the slightest hesitation in making up his mind. That same night Meade received orders to take up the command of the Army of the Potomac.<sup>15</sup>

Meade replaced Hooker on June 27, 1863, just three days before the opening of the battle of Gettysburg. This was unwelcome news, for the enlisted men still liked Hooker. But if most of the soldiers felt that the government had made a mistake in this change of commanders they kicked up no fuss over it. The ardent hero worship of the old volunteer days was gone now. The heroes had departed and the men themselves had lost their old need to make and worship heroes. The man at the top might be anybody; it no longer seemed to matter much.<sup>16</sup>

General Meade was a Pennsylvanian forty-seven years old,

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<sup>14</sup>Thomas, pp. 381-383.

<sup>15</sup>Ballard, p. 152.

<sup>16</sup>Catton, Glory Road. p. 282.

of good family, and very highly educated. He had commanded a division at Fredericksburg, where he was one of the few generals who earned renown. Tall and straight, he had an expression that has been described as somewhat reserved but somewhat irritable. He had none of the personality characteristics which had endeared McClellan to his men. However, Meade was a thorough and reliable soldier. The victory at Gettysburg which followed six days after his appointment, silenced any possible criticism which might have been made about his selection, and consolidated his position. He was to continue in command of the Army of the Potomac till the end of the war.<sup>17</sup>

It was a critical situation which General Meade was called upon to face when he took command at the end of June 1863. A Confederate army was on Northern soil, and the people of the North were panic-stricken. So intense was the criticism directed against all officers of the Army of the Potomac, that when handed his appointment as commander of that army General Meade at first mistook it for an order for his arrest.<sup>18</sup>

In June 1863, General Lee had decided to carry the war into the North by an invasion of Maryland and Pennsylvania. This, he thought, would strengthen the peace party of the North, which was loudly demanding peace at any price. It would also give Virginia a chance to rest from the ravages of war, and if successful it might win some of the European nations to rec-

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<sup>17</sup>Ballard, pp. 164-165.

<sup>18</sup>Williams, p. 260.

ognize the Confederacy as an independent nation. The time seemed ripe for the undertaking. The armies of the North were not in good condition. The terms of the men had expired, and Hooker was rendered ineffective by his defeat at Chancellorsville and General Meade was but newly appointed to fill the vacancy.

For two weeks General Lee had carried all before him. His troops had begun to cross the Potomac on June 15; they had marched through Maryland, entered Pennsylvania, and were advancing upon Harrisburg, the capital of the Keystone State. For a time the Northern leaders feared an attack on Washington, but when it became evident that invasion of Pennsylvania was Lee's object, Meade followed in hot pursuit.

"The battle of Gettysburg was more or less an act of fate; a three-day storm of terror, unplanned and uncontrollable, coming inevitably out of the things hard-pressed men had done in light of imperfect knowledge, the end result of actions that moved toward a fundamental goal....It was enormously destructive, its significance was not seen until long after it had ended, and it opened and closed with moments of heartbreaking drama."<sup>19</sup>

Gettysburg was a dot on the map marking a place where all the roads crossed; a pleasant little town lying amid rolling hills and broad shallow valleys, a blue mountain wall rising a score or more miles to the west.

"It had not been intended to deliver a general battle so

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<sup>19</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. pp. 248-250.



far from the base unless attacked," wrote General Lee. "But coming unexpectedly upon the whole Federal army, to withdraw through the mountains with our extensive trains would have been difficult and dangerous."<sup>20</sup> In a sense, the battle at Gettysburg was an accident; neither Lee nor Meade wanted a fight there, though once the fighting had begun Meade saw the advantages of the terrain south of the town for defensive fighting.

Advance parties of the Confederate and Union forces met in conflict on July 1st. Some of the Confederate cavalry were on their way to the village of Gettysburg to obtain shoes, as there was a serious shortage among the rank and file and numerous troops were barefooted. There they met an advance guard of Union cavalry and the battle was on. On this first day Lee did achieve some success and drove the northern troops from the steep heights that form Seminary Ridge. As all of this was taking place, several urgent messages were sent and Federal infantry began to arrive and give support to the action. The Southern forces were of sufficient number however, and continued to press home their advantage and succeeded in driving their adversaries out of the town and to the high ground just to the south. Here on Cemetery Ridge Meade made his stand.

By the evening of the first day the Federal troops who were left were beginning to reassemble on this high ground, grimly determined to hold on until the rest of the army came

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<sup>20</sup>Williams, p. 264.

up, but not at all sure they could do it.

It was possible that Lee could have gained a foothold on Cemetery Ridge that evening, since most of his scattered army was now on the scene. The Union forces were badly outnumbered. One final assault in the old Stonewall Jackson manner could conceivably have done it. However, he was fighting in the dark with most of his cavalry that might have told him where all of Meade's men were, still absent. And Jackson was in his grave. By the time the Southern generals had conferred, considered and weighed the risks, it was too late. The battle would have to be resumed the next day.<sup>21</sup>

July second found most of both armies at the scene. The day was made up of numerous separate attacks against the Federal positions on either end of Cemetery Ridge. Southern forces under General Richard Ewell tried to take Culp's Hill on the northern end of the Union line. They found the federals posted in solid breastworks of earth and felled trees. They struggled up the hillside, stumbled back down and tried again, won a foothold that threatened the Union army with disaster--and could not quite make it, as the chain lightning of the flashing guns laced the Southern line relentlessly.<sup>22</sup>

At the southern end of the Union line, around the Peach Orchard, the Confederate cause was a little more successful.

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<sup>21</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 251.

<sup>22</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. pp. 252-253.

Union General Dan Sickles posted his men on the Emmitsburg road against orders. Longstreet attacked Sickles at the Peach Orchard amid an intense artillery bombardment. There was hand to hand fighting with bayonets and musket butts. Sickles' corps was forced to give ground back to a high place known as Little Round Top and Big Round Top, the southern anchor of the Union line.<sup>23</sup>

On July third Lee renewed his attack. After a lull in the fighting in the late morning a terrific cannonade began at approximately 1:00 P.M. This was supposed to soften the Union lines for one final assault. Meade surmised correctly that the next big attack would be launched against the center of his line since Lee had tried both ends of the Union position without gaining any decisive advantage.

It is somewhat difficult to determine the exact time that lapsed before the infantry lines of General Pickett were put in motion after the artillery firing along Seminary Ridge had ended. The most conservative estimate is about one hour. This time lapse gave the Union lines enough time to bring up fresh guns from the artillery reserve and to mass fresh divisions of infantry in rear of the front lines. All this being true, is there any doubt as to the cause for the failure of General Lee's expectations?<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 253.

<sup>24</sup>Robert M. Stribling: Gettysburg Campaign and Campaigns of 1864 and 1865 in Virginia. 1905. The Franklin Press Co. Petersburg, Va. p. 60-61. Cited hereafter as Stribling.



The Union soldiers atop Cemetery Ridge saw an army moving out from the woods into the open field by ranks. Rank upon endless rank were drawn up with parade-ground precision, battle flags and all. General George Pickett's Virginians and ten thousand men from other commands were to begin his famous charge.<sup>25</sup>

Pickett's men were mowed down like grain. Great gaps appeared in their lines, but these were closed immediately. Their thinning ranks swept on until a small remnant, led by the gallant Armistead, crossed the Federal lines on the crest of Cemetery Ridge. The Stars and Bars waved over the Union defenses briefly. But the price had been great; the few who remained could not hold what they had won. Attacked on all sides, they threw down their arms and fled. Lee's great assault, one of the most desperate charges in all history, had failed.<sup>26</sup>

Pickett's charge was the highwater mark of the Confederacy. A total of 15,000 Southern soldiers started across that open wheat field which was one mile wide. A little more than a thousand made it back to their own lines. This was the turning point of the war; never again would Lee have strength enough to invade northern soil.<sup>27</sup> Union forces had suffered 4,000 killed, 12,000 wounded, and 4,000 prisoners, about 20,000 in all. The Rebels lost 5,500 killed, 21,000 wounded and about 9,000 prisoners, also 4,000 stragglers for a total

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<sup>25</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. pp. 251-257.

<sup>26</sup>Compton's, v-6. pp. 105-106.

<sup>27</sup>Catton, Glory Road. pp. 337-334.

of about 40,000. The battle of Gettysburg resulted in checking the progress and then in destroying the power of a well-disciplined and defiant Southern army.<sup>28</sup>

General Meade had fought with great tactical skill. He placed his men well, and used his reserves properly to bolster threatened places in his lines. However, he showed no aggressive spirit, and was content to fight a completely defensive battle.<sup>29</sup>

At Gettysburg, as at Antietam, Lee was unwilling to admit defeat, but stood his ground defiantly the next day, awaiting a Union attack. Perhaps Meade should have attacked, but he had suffered over 20,000 casualties and 15,000 desertions, and an attack might have led to a bloody repulse. On the afternoon of the fourth, Lee started his long retreat to Virginia. A heavy rain set in swelling the Potomac; not until the night of the thirteenth did Lee have his army on Confederate soil.<sup>30</sup>

Meade and the Federal army followed Lee with extreme caution very much aware that the Confederate army was still as dangerous as a wounded tiger. In the end both armies returned to Virginia. Another Confederate invasion had been repulsed.<sup>31</sup>

It would be too much to say that certain victory was within Meade's reach after Gettysburg, for there is no such thing

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<sup>28</sup>M. Jacobs: The Rebel Invasion of Maryland & Pennsylvania. 1864. J.B. Lippincott & Co. pp. 46-47.

<sup>29</sup>Williams, p. 264.

<sup>30</sup>Commager, p. 638.

<sup>31</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 257.

as a certainty in war--but it is a fact that he had a better chance then than ever presented itself to a Union commander either before or afterward. Lincoln, the amateur strategist, grasped it at the time, while his professional soldiers were congratulating themselves on "driving the invader from our soil."<sup>32</sup>

With high water at his back to prevent Lee from crossing, Meade was still unable to comprehend that the Confederates had been badly beaten and were in no shape to resume the offensive. Lincoln, on learning of Lee's escape to the south bank of the Potomac, said, "We had them within our grasp. We had only to stretch forth our hand and they were ours."<sup>33</sup>

On the day after Gettysburg the southern fortress of Vicksburg surrendered to General Grant. The North received the news with deep but sober joy. It was then realized that these two great events marked the turning point. The South would not be able to win the war by the use of military force.

Meade saw the President on October 23, 1863. They agreed that active operations for the year might as well be ended. It was undoubtedly on this occasion that Lincoln told Meade that after Gettysburg the General had reminded him of an old woman shooing geese across a creek.<sup>34</sup>

When the Army of the Potomac took up the offensive again the next spring it would have a new General-in-Chief

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<sup>32</sup>Ballard, p. 171.

<sup>33</sup>Williams, p. 268.

<sup>34</sup>Williams, pp. 288-289.

and at last be on the road to victory.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>My conjecture.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ULYSSES S. GRANT

At the outbreak of the war Ulysses S. Grant was working as a clerk in a leather store in the mining-boom town of Galena, Illinois. Whatever the bleak years that preceded his going to work for his father in 1860 had really meant to him, they had somehow seasoned him for the job ahead.

In May 1861, Grant was appointed colonel of the 21st. Illinois infantry. In August he was made a brigadier general of volunteers and given command of southeastern Missouri with headquarters at Cairo. From the start Grant's policy showed the aggressiveness which marked his whole career. He at once took possession of Paducah, Kentucky. On November 1st he routed the Confederate garrison at Belmont, Missouri, thus securing that state for the Union cause.

By the first of February 1862, Grant had conceived the importance of Forts Henry and Donelson in western Tennessee and submitted a plan to move upon them. The plan was finally approved by General Halleck and on February 6, after a very minor skirmish, the Confederates abandoned Ft. Henry and marched the twelve miles overland to Ft. Donelson. Ten days later, on February 17, Grant telegraphed General Halleck that Ft. Donelson had surrendered with about 14,000 prisoners. The defenders had asked for terms, and Grant, with determination that seemed so

singularly lacking in other Northern Generals, had replied, "No terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted. I propose to move immediately upon your works." The North had a new hero in "Unconditional Surrender" Grant, and Lincoln looked into the record of this thirty-nine years old short, stubby, whiskered, unmilitary looking man.<sup>1</sup> This double victory cracked the center of the Confederate line in Kentucky. With their flanks endangered, the Southern forces had to pull completely out of Kentucky and part of Tennessee.

Halleck was jubilant, for Grant was under his command and so Grant's triumph was his triumph. In relaying the news to Washington Halleck suggested that Grant, as well as Buell and Pope, be promoted to major general.

In Washington, Lincoln had been looking on with a canny scrutiny that missed very little; he had his own ideas as to who should be promoted. To the Senate Lincoln sent but one name, that of Ulysses S. Grant to be major general of volunteers. For after all, Grant, the dull plodder, had been the actual author of victory at Forts Henry and Donelson.<sup>2</sup>

After his victories along the Tennessee and Cumberland, Grant had moved his army up the Tennessee River and encamped at a place near Shiloh church called Pittsburg Landing, which was very close to the Mississippi state line. While awaiting further orders, his troops were vigorously attacked by Rebel

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas, pp. 306-307.

<sup>2</sup>Bruce Catton: U.S. Grant and The American Military Tradition. Little, Brown and Co., Boston. pp. 77-78. Cited hereafter as Catton, U.S. Grant.

General Albert Johnston. Grant and Halleck, in making plans for a move on Corinth, Mississippi, made but one small error. They very nonchalantly assumed that Johnston and Beauregard would sit still and wait to be attacked.

The Confederates at Corinth knew if they waited where they were they would be severely defeated. Their one hope was to smite the Yankees before their separate forces were consolidated into one large fighting unit for a final push into Mississippi.<sup>3</sup>

The first day's battle at Shiloh was a serious disaster to the Union army. Their position seemed to have been selected without any special reference to resisting an attack from the enemy, and they were all but driven from the field. Although the army fought most gallantly in various separate encounters, the day closed with Union forces at the river's edge. Fortunately, the advance of Buell's army formed a junction with Grant late in the afternoon, and that night all of Buell's army arrived. During the night the two Generals laid their plans for an offensive movement early the next morning. After another heavy battle the lost field was regained and the Confederates were broken up and compelled to retreat. The first reports from the Shiloh battle field created profound alarm throughout the entire country. It was freely charged that Grant had neglected his command by not digging entrenchments and that the

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<sup>3</sup>Catton, U. S. Grant. p. 83.

only reason he was not totally defeated was the timely arrival of Buell. Lincoln took official notice of these accusations and instructed Stanton to ask Halleck whether misconduct on the part of Grant or any other officer had contributed to the number of casualties at the battle of Shiloh. Numerous people of position requested Lincoln to remove Grant after this near disaster. Lincoln quietly replied with the timely comment, "I can't spare this man; he fights."<sup>4</sup>

On July 17, 1862, General Halleck left for Washington to fill the vacancy created when McClellan departed for the Peninsula and gave up the General-in-Chief duties.

In some ways General Halleck was very well suited to be General-in-Chief in the Civil War. He was a born gossip and a politician, and for this, if for no other reason, he readily understood that the administration's main problems were political rather than military. If a Buell had to be sacked and a Ben Butler had to be retained because of political pressure, Halleck could understand it and adjust to it, and he would soothe other generals with chatty, half-indiscreet letters of explanation.<sup>5</sup>

There was no replacement named for Halleck and the armies which he had scattered over all of Tennessee and Kentucky were no longer under a central command. The largest force was under Grant at Corinth, Mississippi. Thus it was that this moderate force could do little but sit tight and watch the foe until it

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<sup>4</sup>Paul M. Angle: The Lincoln Reader. 1947. Rutgers University Press. New Brunswick. pp. 400-402.

<sup>5</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 270.



either received more men or new orders.

Near the end of October Grant sent a suggestion to Halleck. He requested certain small reinforcements and the authority to abandon some of the small scattered posts that he was then holding. This done, he believed that he could move down the Mississippi Central Railroad--which ran from Tennessee down to Jackson, Mississippi, due east of Vicksburg--and force the Rebels to evacuate Vicksburg. Halleck wired his approval, and said that he wanted to see an active campaign on the Mississippi that fall.<sup>6</sup>

Grant's operations on Vicksburg began in November 1862. Advancing directly along the Mississippi Central Railroad toward Vicksburg, he detached Sherman with part of the force to proceed down the river to give a flanking movement on the town. In the meantime Southern cavalry cut Grant's communications and caused him to retreat to Corinth. Sherman, obeying orders, attacked the Fort and suffered a defeat. This was the first of a long series of failures at Vicksburg for Grant; however, he finally decided upon a brave and rather bold plan of action. He took his entire army to the west bank of the River and marched south of the town and then recrossed to the east bank and marched north to cut off Vicksburg from supplies and reinforcements. This done, all that remained to do was to sit and wait them out, for after several attacks upon the fortifications Grant soon realized that the

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<sup>6</sup>Catton, U. S. Grant. pp. 92-95.

only way they would be beaten was by siegecraft. The seige lasted from March until July 4, 1863. The capture of Vicksburg and the victory at Gettysburg marked the beginning of the end for the Rebels.<sup>7</sup>

Thirty thousand Southern soldiers surrendered at Vicksburg and marched off as paroled prisoners of war. From the President, Grant received a very warm and personal letter in which was stated in part that he had been promoted to a major general in the regular army.

After the fall of Vicksburg, Port Hudson to the south surrendered, lock stock, and barrel, on July 9, 1863. There were no longer any Confederate troops or fortifications anywhere along the Mississippi River.

The pattern of the conflict was developing just about as Winfield Scott had thought it might in the dim days before Bull Run. What had been accomplished needed no elaboration. It was the logical conclusion of all that had been done in the West since the war began. The Confederacy had been cracked now and other cracks would follow. Mr. Lincoln would use superlative words to describe Gettysburg, but Vicksburg could be summed up in one sentence: "The father of waters rolls unvexed to the sea."<sup>8</sup>

By the final week in September the picture in the West had almost completely changed. The victory of the Southerners

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<sup>7</sup>Charnwood, pp. 350-356.

<sup>8</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. pp. 264-265.

at Chickamauga threatened to cancel the gains made at Vicksburg. It was at this time that the Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, went to Indianapolis to confer with Grant and appoint him to command all armies in the West.

Grant went immediately to Chattanooga and replaced Rosecrans with Thomas. By late November he was ready to move upon the Rebels. The battle of Lookout Mountain lasted three days, and ended in an overwhelming victory, although it did not go at all as Grant had planned. Eastern Tennessee was now in Union possession. The second of Lincoln's great strategic objectives had been achieved, and like the first--the opening of the Mississippi--achieved by Grant.

Late in February, Congress passed a bill reviving the rank of lieutenant general and empowered the President to appoint one officer from the present group of major generals. Of course everyone knew that it would be Grant, and on March 9, 1864, he was officially commissioned lieutenant general and given supreme command of the country's armies.<sup>9</sup>

General Grant was a man of slim figure, only five feet eight inches in height and slightly stooped. He weighed a slight hundred and thirty-five pounds. He had a certain modesty and gentleness of manner which seemed to be more befitting the courtroom than the army camp. Like nearly all men who spoke little, he was a good listener. When not pressed by any matter of importance he was often slow in his movements, but when

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<sup>9</sup>Williams, pp. 290, 297, 299.

roused to activity he was quick in every motion, and worked with marvelous rapidity.

He was civil to all who came in contact with him, and never attempted to snub anyone, or treat anybody with less consideration because he held a lesser rank. He never criticized an officer harshly in the presence of others. If criticism was necessary it was never made an occasion to wound his feelings or humiliate him.

Grant was one of the few soldiers holding high rank who did not waste his time giving personal attention to petty details. In the performance of these duties he held his subordinates to a strict accountability, and kept his time free for thought. It was Grant's quiet and intense thinking that led to the prompt and vigorous actions which were constantly witnessed during the entire last year of the war.<sup>10</sup>

Now Grant was the top northern general. Broadly speaking he could make his headquarters where he chose and do as he pleased with the armies of the country, as the War Department and the White House were pledged to give him their full support.<sup>11</sup>

When he became General-in-Chief, Grant was about as perfectly trained and formed for the post as any general could be. He had under his command no less than seventeen different commanders and some 533,000 men--no small task for the little store clerk from Galena.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Commager, pp. 973-976.

<sup>11</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. pp. 313-314.

<sup>12</sup>Williams, pp. 303, 312.

"A physician on his staff once asked him about the art of war, expecting a dissertation on Jomini or some other world authority. Grant replied that the art of war was really simple enough; at the bottom, it meant to 'find out where your enemy is, get at him as soon as you can and strike him as hard as you can, and keep on moving.' This uncomplicated creed he had followed ever since Belmont and Fort Henry, and it precisely expressed the quality that Abraham Lincoln had been looking for in his generals for so long a time."<sup>13</sup>

There were no sweeping changes in organization or appointments after Grant's commission. Halleck was allowed to remain in Washington in a military capacity which would correspond to that of the "chief of staff" today. Meade remained officially at the head of the Army of the Potomac, issuing orders in accordance with the plans of Grant. Grant had asked Meade to stay on, having decided that it might lower morale to have a western general lead an eastern army.

At first Grant decided to make his headquarters in the West; at this point Lincoln interfered in military affairs and requested Grant to stay in the East, pointing out that it was here that the largest and most powerful Confederate army was operating under the superb leadership of one General R. E. Lee.

President Lincoln had at long last found his general and he trusted him almost completely because he believed the General to be a great soldier. Lincoln approved of Grant's strategy

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<sup>13</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 314.

and let the general execute it as he saw fit because Grant's plans were fundamentally the same as those of Lincoln.<sup>14</sup>

The Army of the Potomac, under General Grant, 122,000 strong on April 30, 1864, was encamped north of the Rapidan River. The Rebel army under Lee, numbering 62,000, lay south of the stream. The strategy of Grant's campaign against Lee is simple enough. His objective was not so much Richmond as Lee's army; his policy was to hammer away at it until it was decimated. Lee's task was to inflict such losses upon him that he would abandon the offensive or that the North would despair of victory and turn Lincoln out at the fall elections. With almost anyone else Lee's strategy might have worked, but in Grant he had an opponent who never knew when he was licked.<sup>15</sup>

The Army of the Potomac moved down into the tangled wilderness region below the Rapidan on May 4, 1864, trying to slip past Lee's right flank and force him to fight in the open country. Lee sent his troops in and a fantastic battle boiled for two days. After a loss of 17,000 men, Grant then marched south, as if the battle had been won and not lost. The soldiers were now on the road to the most sustained fighting of the war.<sup>16</sup>

The Second Battle of the Wilderness was not a defeat because Grant simply refused to admit that he had been beaten.

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<sup>14</sup>Williams, pp. 300, 303, 306, 332.

<sup>15</sup>Commager, p. 969.

<sup>16</sup>Catton, U. S. Grant. p. 122.

He kept on moving, and in a direction that would make continued fighting inevitable. This was the one great point he had stated in his brief philosophy of the strategy of war.<sup>17</sup>

Hanover Courthouse and Spotsylvania were long-drawn battles as deadly as anything in military history. Yet Lee always kept one step ahead, and the Federal soldiers were forever compelled to attack. Still Lee could do no more than stave off defeat. He was forced to fight the kind of war he could not win. Sooner or later he would be in a line around Richmond, forced to stand seige, and a seige could end only one way.

Cold Harbor was a mistake and showed a lack of finesse on the part of the commander. However, Grant had to try to overwhelm them here, for not to do so would have been an admission that Lee might possibly hold out long enough to force the North to come to terms. There was always the possibility that this might be the battle that would win the war.

After the battle of Cold Harbor, to all appearance, it was a deadlock. The Army of the Potomac could no longer sidle to its left as its left touched the Chickahominy River. One more side-slip would put it up against the trenches of Richmond. However, there was one more move that Grant could make.<sup>18</sup>

If he could possibly get the Army of the Potomac out of its trenches without the Southerners being aware of the maneuver they could leave the Cold Harbor sector and march southeast

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<sup>17</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 326.

<sup>18</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 330.

to the James River. Once across, the army could drive on to the small city of Petersburg which lay on the south bank of the Appomattox River some ten miles due south of Richmond. However, all this would be possible only if the engineers could build a pontoon bridge over a deep stream nearly a half mile wide. Petersburg was the place the Confederates had to hold if they planned to stay in Richmond. All but one of the railroads coming from the South with supplies and ammunition passed through here. If Lee meant to stay in Richmond and in the war he must retain possession of this city. A blow at Petersburg was a blow Lee must avoid no matter what it might cost.<sup>19</sup>

On June 15, 1864, Petersburg came under attack and the seige was about to begin. It is here that we see the modernity of Grant's mind. It is most apparent that his grasp of the war was becoming total and that the destruction of the enemy's economic resources was as effective and legitimate a form of warfare as the destruction of his armies. By mid-November 1864, General Sherman was ready to flame across Georgia. And in February of 1865 Sheridan had cleared the valley of Rebels and everything else. To Lee this economic warfare was needless and cruel to civilians. Lee was the last of the great old-fashioned generals, Grant the first of the modern.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile there was the situation at Petersburg itself. Grant's problem was far from simple. If he held Lee where he was, the North would finally win. But if there was any way

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<sup>19</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. p. 330.

<sup>20</sup>Williams, pp. 314, 340, 349.



to strike one hard blow that would end things quickly, that way had to be tried. Late in July 1864, it appeared that such a way might be at hand.

It seems that the 48th regiment from Pennsylvania was made up largely of men from the coal mining section of that state. This regiment held a section of trench and fortifications opposite a Confederate strong point.

Faced with idleness and boredom, this group presented their commander, General Burnside, with the idea of digging a mine tunnel under the trenches to the enemy's side. This was agreed upon. It was felt that the project would at least give them something to do and keep them busy for awhile, and there was a slight possibility that it might work.

The mine tunnel was nearly five hundred feet long. It was completed by the end of July and eight tons of powder had been placed at the end of it, ready to be touched off.

Just at dawn on July 30th the mine blew up and opened a 150-foot crater where the Rebel strong point had been. This gave the Federal army a clear shot at Petersburg.

Trench warfare made offensive movements all but impossible. However, the explosion of the mine had suddenly restored open warfare again. All Burnside's men had to do was to drive through the opening in order to cut Lee's army in half. But the chance was lost completely.

The mine could not have worked better, but the plans for exploiting it could not have been worse. Burnside was far to the rear, looking on from an artillery emplacement, and the

Union troops, instead of marching through to the rear of the Rebel lines, huddled aimlessly in the crater waiting for new orders. This was probably the one chance that was missed during the Civil War for which there was no excuse. Grant commented bitterly that he had never seen such a wide-open opportunity to overwhelm an entrenched position. As a result of a Court of Inquiry which looked into the failure of this battle General Burnside was removed from his command.<sup>21</sup>

The war in Virginia now took the appearance of a stalemate. Grant had the Rebels pinned down and there was nothing to do but wait and extend his lines and improve his fortifications. Little more took place at Petersburg from the battle of the Crater until late February 1865.

As the seige continued in the fall and winter of '64-'65 Grant was planning and executing his overall strategy for winning the war in the South. His Virginia campaign makes little sense unless viewed as a part of the total picture. Generals Thomas, Sherman and Sheridan were literally taking the South apart a piece at a time while Lee and his powerful army were held at bay by Grant and the Army of the Potomac.

Sherman, on his march from Atlanta to the sea, cut the then remaining South in two, leaving only the south part of Virginia and the Carolinas still in the Confederacy. By February 1st Sherman was ready to head north from Savannah, Georgia, up

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<sup>21</sup>Catton, This Hallowed Ground. pp. 333-336. Stribling, pp. 238-242.

through North and South Carolina to Virginia to help Grant at Petersburg and end the war. He did not quite make it on time, as Grant had begun to build up pressure on Lee by mid March.

The break came at the end of March 1865. Sherman and his 60,000 veterans were far into North Carolina at the time, still a great distance from Petersburg and Richmond. In the line around Petersburg things were moving toward a climax and the last major battle of the Civil War--the battle of Five Forks.<sup>22</sup>

On April 1, 1865, General Grant's army, led by Sheridan's infantry and cavalry, crashed around Lee's right and stood astride the last railroad connecting Richmond and the lower South. Lee could no longer stay in Petersburg and on April 2nd evacuated the town, retreating westward toward the small town of Appomattox, the site of a very historic meeting a week later.

President Lincoln had left Washington on March 23 for City Point. His motives for making the trip were numerous, but primarily he wanted to witness the final hour of victory.

On April 8, after the breakthrough, Lincoln boarded the steamer River Queen for the return trip to Washington. As he watched City Point slip away he might have been thinking of the weary years of defeat--of McClellan, Pope, Burnside, and Hooker--or of the hours of final victory and Grant, Sheridan, and Sherman. That day John Wilkes Booth registered at the National Hotel in Washington.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Catton, U. S. Grant. pp. 124-127. Catton, This Hallowed Ground. pp. 338-347, 360-362.

<sup>23</sup>Williams, pp. 352, 354.

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February 27, 1959

This is to certify that John Gibson successfully passed his final examination for his Master's Degree on February 27, 1959.

Signed:

  
  
