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Mission to the Crimea: The American military commission to Europe and the Crimean War, 1855–1856

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Rice University, 1991

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RICE UNIVERSITY

MISSION TO THE CRIMEA:
THE AMERICAN MILITARY COMMISSION TO EUROPE
AND THE CRIMEAN WAR, 1855-1856

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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April, 1991
Abstract

MISSION TO THE CRIMEA:

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Matthew Moten

Secretary of War Jefferson Davis was a vigorous champion of reform, aiming to enlarge the army, to increase its capabilities, and to foster military professionalism. The Crimean War offered an opportunity to send a delegation of officers to Europe to study military establishments there and to observe the latest technological advances under the trial of combat. During 1855 and 1856, Major Richard Delafield, Major Alfred Mordecai, and Captain George B. McClellan spent a year traveling through Europe, inspecting military schools and facilities of the great powers, and touring the battlefields and camps of the Crimean War. The commission’s experiences in the war zone, along with their other observations in Europe, enabled them to compile encyclopedic reports that had immediate effect during the Civil War. Moreover, the reports transformed American military expertise and greatly enhanced the corporate identity of the army officer corps as a professional body.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No scholarly enterprise worthy of the name is wholly an individual effort. I would like to acknowledge the assistance of those who made my labors easier. First, the Sam Houston Fellowship of the Scottish Heritage Foundation of Houston enabled me to travel and extend the scope of my research. With that help I visited the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress and the Special Collections Division of the United States Military Academy Library at West Point. I would especially like to thank Ms. Judith Sibley at West Point for her expertise and kind attention.

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Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my wife, Margaret, and our two children, Stephanie Lois and Marshall Douglas, for their love and support. We expected this period of our lives to be less hectic than those years in the active army. We were mistaken. For their sacrifices, for their patience, for their interruptions ("Daddy, go to park!") I can only offer an inadequate "Thank you."

Despite all this good help, errors remain. It is obvious that my inability to capitalize on such assistance is culpable. I accept responsibility for any shortcomings, a small price to pay for my associations with all of these wonderful people.

M. M.  
Houston, Texas  
11 April 1991
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INTRODUCTION

JEFFERSON DAVIS, MILITARY PROFESSIONALISM, 
AND THE CRUCIBLE OF WAR

When Jefferson Davis became U.S. Secretary of War in 1853, the American military was beginning to show signs of growth as a profession—-but the process had been long, slow, and uneven. Despite the pacifist and anti-militarist predilections of a strong minority of the American public, the United States had possessed a standing army since the beginning of the Revolutionary War. The nation’s struggle for independence had bequeathed a number of traditions that set the United States Army apart from its European counterparts. First, the republican nature of the polity meant that the American military had never had a tradition of aristocratic monopoly on officers’ commissions. As a result, the officer corps was more egalitarian and open to men of talent than those of Europe. Further, the army had developed its fundamental structure during the Revolutionary War: a central organization, military administration, distinctions between staff and line, and a hierarchical system of ranks and positions. Despite this head start, American soldiers were slow to press their advantage. Officers tended to mimic European traditions that emphasized personal honor and physical courage at the expense of formal
training and technical competence. ¹

Furthermore, national antipathy toward the military in
general and career soldiers in particular retarded the
growth of military professionalism. Experiences with
British redcoats before and during the Revolution still
rankled long after Yorktown, poisoning American attitudes
toward any military force, regardless of its nationality.
But despite popular distrust of the military, the framers of
the Constitution did nothing to guarantee civilian control
of the armed forces. The reason for this lack was that
military professionalism and the subordination of a military
profession to political institutions were concepts unknown
to the eighteenth century. ²

In his seminal work on civil-military relations, The
Soldier and the State, Samuel P. Huntington defined three
fundamental components of professionalism. ³ The first is a

¹ Marcus Cunliffe, Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial
Spirit in America, 1775-1865 (Boston, 1968), 20-22.; William
B. Skelton, "Professionalization of the U.S. Army Officer
Corps During the Age of Jackson," Armed Forces and Society,

² Samuel P. Huntington, The Soldier and the State: The
Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations (Cambridge,

³ Huntington's definition of professionalism and its
applications to the military have become widely accepted among
both professional officers and professional historians. The
paragraphs that follow summarize Huntington's definition.
Huntington, 8-18. For a discussion of Huntington's
historiographical legacy, see Edward M. Coffman, "The Long
Shadow of The Soldier and the State," The Journal of Military
specialized body of knowledge in an essential field of endeavor--expertise. It is based upon a broad liberal education followed by specialized training offered and directed by the profession itself. Expertise sets the professional apart from the layman and provides universal standards for the measurement of competence within the profession. This knowledge is naturally intellectual, historical, and expansible. The expertise peculiar to the military profession is "the management of violence": organizing, equipping, and training military forces; planning their activities; and directing force operations in war and peace.

Every professional is a practicing expert, providing an essential service to society when required by society. Thus the professional’s responsibility, the second characteristic of professionalism, is to society. Competent and educated persons may possess intellectual skills necessary for their work, but they are professional only if they employ their expertise in a context of social responsibility. Further, the profession establishes ethical norms to guide and govern its members. For the military officer, the state represents society and it is to the state that the professional soldier is responsible. Indeed, the state must monopolize the military profession: where officers employ their expertise absent state control, the results are uniformly ruinous to society and the state.
The final characteristic of professionalism is a corporate identity as a group apart from laymen. Professionals share common bonds of training, discipline, and proficiency. Professional organizations, whether associations or bureaucracies, codify standards of competence and conduct, establishing the boundary between the profession and those who would aspire to membership without the requisite credentials. The officer corps is a public bureaucratized profession, often functioning as an autonomous social unit. Officers have fewer nonprofessional contacts than other professionals and distinguish themselves from the laity with uniforms and insignia of rank. Within the officer corps are both a hierarchy of rank and a hierarchy of office. Authority derives from office; eligibility for office derives from rank. Therefore, and because obedience to duly constituted authority is central to military professionalism, the professional character of the officer corps rests upon the priority of hierarchy of rank over hierarchy of office.

Liberal reformers in the Prussian army gave military professionalism its first impetus around 1806. Aided by the confluence of necessary political and societal conditions—the growth of population, technology, industry, urbanity, and nationalism—Gerhard von Scharnhorst and a coterie of followers established standards for entry and advancement in the Prussian officer corps, tied to a rigorous educational
system, and exemplified by a general staff system for controlling the army as a whole and its several field commands. These reforms displaced the time-honored system of commissioning the sons of Junker noblemen without regard to their intellectual capacity or achievements and retaining them without further training. Despite the fact that Scharnhorst and his followers had all fallen from favor by 1819, many of their reforms remained. The Prussian army stayed well ahead of its European and American contemporaries in professional development for almost a century.‘

The conditions for professionalism’s development were still in their infancy in early nineteenth century America. By an ironic twist, however, Thomas Jefferson, who loathed the notion of a standing army, gave the nation its most important spur toward a professional military. Jefferson conceived of defense by a nation in arms, a populace of citizen-soldiers. He wished to obliterate the distinction between civil and military. Finding Congress unwilling to assist him legislatively, he resigned himself to a small standing force and determined to establish a military

‘ Gordon A. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640–1945 (Oxford, 1955), 76–81; Huntington, 30–53. Some of the conditions that Huntington defines as necessary for the development of professionalism were less evident in Prussia than elsewhere in Europe—industry in England, for example. Two additional conditions, the growth of democracy and the notion that an officer owes his loyalty to the state, did not occur in Germany until after World War I.
academy in order to control the army. Jefferson believed an academy would give intellectual direction to the military by training young men to be superb engineers first and officers second. So educated, the graduates might provide service to the developing nation in or out of uniform, thus blurring the civil-military distinction. Jefferson’s plan would have had the effect of fostering responsibility and breeding a particular form of civil and military expertise, yet eliminating corporateness among the officer corps. 5

But the Military Academy got off to a slow start. It would have to await the arrival of Sylvanus Thayer in 1817 before it became the nation’s premier engineering school. Meantime, the War of 1812 intervened to penalize the nation for military unpreparedness. Though the institutions were in place, they were manned by vainglorious generals and blundering political leaders, none of whom emerged to restore order to the system. However, a few young officers rose to flag rank and proved their mettle in command of regular soldiers, providing two hopes for the future. The nation’s budding military leadership manifested itself during the war, even while their seniors were floundering. And the value of American regulars was proven during battles

at Chippewa and Lundy's Lane.  

After the war, John C. Calhoun became the first war secretary truly worthy of his office. He rationalized military systems, organizing army bureaus and codifying their duties. He simplified the lines of command in the army and made the whole responsive to his control. When Congress reduced military strength by 40 percent in 1821, Calhoun and his generals constructed a plan for the smaller army. This outline assumed, for the first time, the relative importance of regulars over militia in the next war. It trimmed the enlisted ranks and left the officer corps virtually intact to serve as a trained cadre for future mobilization. The regular army would become the nucleus of a land-defense system around which other forces would mobilize. By focusing on preparedness for future war, the plan explicitly acknowledged the value of military training and professional expertise. By establishing a cadre for an expansible army, Calhoun promoted corporateness among a body of officers who were expected to be more competent than the army of citizen-soldiers they would one day recruit, train, and command.  

The next twenty-five years saw advances—slow and

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uncertain though they were—of professionalism in the U.S. Army. As Thayer progressed in his reforms at West Point, standardizing the curriculum and instituting a rigid discipline, the source of an officer cadre became clear. The army soon reserved all new commissions for West Point graduates. The army's small size and lack of a retirement system meant that not all graduates received regular commissions; many received brevets instead. A number of West Pointers resigned rather than face the prospect of a stultifying frontier existence with little prospect for promotion. The army thereby lost an immeasurable wealth of talent. Those who stayed, however, began to form a nucleus of competence. Comprising less than 15 percent of the officer corps in 1817, academy graduates accounted for 64 percent of army commissions in 1830. By the Civil War, fully three-quarters of the officer corps were West Pointers. Furthermore, some officers began to think of the army as a career. The average length of commissioned service increased from six years in 1817 to seventeen years by 1830. Institutional stability improved and the officer corps began to acquire a sense of corporate unity, partly in response to societal ostracism, partly because of its common bonds. Officers started to think of themselves as military men, not as lawyers or politicians or, as Jefferson would have wished, engineers who happened to be officers for a
period of time.  

Also during the Jacksonian era an intellectual movement began developing in the officer corps, the chief catalyst of which was the Military Academy. Thayer was the guiding force behind the academy's curriculum and system of discipline. His efforts imparted to West Point graduates a body of shared experiences that formed their world views in addition to providing first-rate training as engineers. Alongside Thayer, a few other men made pedagogical marks on the officer corps through their influence on the academy curriculum. The academy's preeminent professor for several decades during and after Thayer's tenure was Dennis Hart Mahan. A professor of military history and civil engineering, Mahan had traveled overseas to study the military establishments of Europe, especially France. He taught his students the flexible application of military theory to warfare, giving special emphasis to the works of Baron Henri de Jomini, and later published his notes in a widely read pamphlet known as Out-Post. His influence on Civil War generalship is often overrated, but a generation of officers expressed respect for Mahan and his teachings.  

Mahan was not the only student of Europe. The army

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* James L. Morrison, Jr., "The Best School in the World:" West Point, the Pre-Civil War Years, 1833-1866 (Kent, Ohio, 1986), 15; Skelton, "Professionalization," 450-456, Weigley, 169.

* Skelton, "Professionalization," 457; Morrison, 47-49, 153.
sent numerous commissions to tour European schools, training sites, battlefields, and weapons factories. The U.S. military tended to revere their European counterparts, despite scorning their political institutions. While American visitors undoubtedly absorbed the bad with the good, the opportunity to participate as part of an international profession broadened the corporate horizons of the officer corps. From Europe and especially France, the commissions brought organizational structures, equipment, manuals, and professional journals. 10

Professional writing came into vogue in the U.S. military during the 1830s and 1840s. Periodicals such as the Military and Naval Magazine of the United States, the Army and Navy Chronicle, and the Military Magazine made their appearance. These journals attempted to provide an intellectual forum for the officer corps to stimulate debate and foster a sense of community. However, they made few intellectual marks. None of them survived more than seven years and they can hardly be compared to modern professional journals or even those of the late nineteenth century. 11

Several officers published more lengthy scholarly works. Winfield Scott wrote a handbook on infantry tactics after the War of 1812. Lieutenant Colonel Pierce Darrow soon followed with Cavalry Tactics. In 1825 Captain Trueman

11 Ibid., 458-459.
Cross compiled a compendium of legislation concerning the army, the first of many such collections. Mahan’s Out-Post was the standard in military theory until Henry W. Halleck, known as "Old Brains" to his classmates at West Point, wrote The Elements of Military Art and Science in 1846.  

It would be misleading, however, to exaggerate the extent of this trend. Officers often manifested a pervasive anti-intellectual bent, disdaining to read or to learn about their craft through any means other than experience. Typical were the comments of Brigadier General Edmund P. Gaines, who expressed disgust

with officers who have never seen the flash of an Enemy’s Cannon--who have acquired distinction only in the mazes of French Books, with only that imperfect knowledge of the French language which is better adapted to the Quackery of Charlatans, than the common-sense science of war.  

As Gaines’s remarks suggest, military works were often little more than American versions of French treatises, sometimes in translation, but reflecting no original thought on the part of their "authors." Attempts to enhance military education by establishing schools of practice for army branches were woefully short-lived. More successful, however, were a series of boards composed of ordnance, engineer, and artillery officers to study, test, and recommend weaponry and equipment for procurement by the

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12 Weigley, 151-152, 170-171; Morrison, 18; Skelton, "Professionalization," 452.

army. Nevertheless, this bright spot on the intellectual horizon did not a corpus of professional expertise make.  

Furthermore, the officer corps was a political lot—in a particular fashion. Officers intrigued for personal advancement and to promote the interests of one branch over the other. Interservice rivalry with the navy started in earnest during this period. Feuds and recriminations were the lot of officers, even at the highest levels, throughout their careers. And though the tendency to settle disputes by duelling decreased over the years, boards of inquiry were numerous enough to depress morale throughout the service. 

On the other hand, officers rarely entered the political arena as a united front expressing a military view in opposition to a political or civilian position. Estranged from civilian society, officers chose not to re-enter it for partisan political purposes. The vast majority of officers spurned partisan politics; many even refused to vote. Officers who campaigned for political office were generally volunteer or militia soldiers, though an occasional war hero ran for president. By and large, however, the officer corps slowly developed a self-perception as a politically neutral body that contributed to

\[14\] Ibid., 457-459.

its corporateness and helped foster a sense of reponsibility as an objective arm of national policy.  

That arm proved its mettle in the war with Mexico. In 1846 the United States invaded its southern neighbor and, to the surprise of many, soon dominated the conflict. Despite long supply lines and tenuous political support for the war, continually facing superior numbers, American forces mounted an amphibious operation against Vera Cruz that culminated in the capture of Mexico City six months later. U.S. strategy was bold, its commanders audacious, and its execution admirable. The effort was far from flawless, but the U.S. Army defeated the Mexican forces so decisively that finding a viable government with whom to discuss terms of surrender was one of the principal difficulties of the war. For a time, the United States armed forces seemed invincible.  

The Mexican War was also the first opportunity for West Point-trained officers to prove themselves under fire. The junior officer rolls in Mexico were a "who's who" of Civil War generals. And while several volunteer regiments acquitted themselves well, including Jefferson Davis's Mississippi Rifles, the legacy of the Mexican War was to remove serious doubt about the efficacy of maintaining a regular army. Less well established, however, was a policy


17 For the history of this conflict see K. Jack Bauer, The Mexican War, 1846-1848 (New York, 1974).
of granting commissions only after a rational process of special training. Many a politician-cum-officer commanded a volunteer unit, often advancing in rank more quickly than his regular army counterpart.

Moreover, despite military success in Mexico, serious problems surfaced in the military establishment. Political bickering between President Polk and his field commanders hampered the war effort and induced partisan tensions within the army officer corps. Such wrangling was inimical to the development of a professional military, and "subsequent Presidents and generals seem to have profited from the example." As academy graduates later rose in the army hierarchy they demonstrated an increasing disdain for political activity, especially within the service, believing it inconsistent with their responsibility to the state. 18

The army's headquarters in Washington had proven inadequate to the task of coordinating a war, especially one so far away. Winfield Scott, the brightest young officer to emerge from the War of 1812, now commanding general of the army, was an able administrator, but due to the independence of the War Department's several bureaus, he was forced to become a one-man general staff. Scott advised the president, composed war plans, estimated logistical demands, and supervised the execution of preparations for war. When

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18 Weigley, 175-178; Bauer, 73-74, 235; Huntington, 183, 185.
he left to go to Mexico and command the army in person, the War Department lost all sense of organization. The saving grace in Washington was Polk's personal competence and his willingness to set the constitutional precedent of an active, wartime commander-in-chief. 19

War Department bureaus were ineffective partly because their chiefs traditionally were superannuated officers serving for life, due to lack of a retirement system. The army's record after Scott's departure was one of slipshod logistical planning, misdirected effort, wasted time and money, and profiteering by ambitious suppliers. As events played out, the problems were not debilitating, but largely because of Scott's ability to improvise and subsist off the Mexican economy and Polk's personal involvement in the details of the military administration. The army suffered for want of a professional officer corps schooled in handling large forces and enlivened by youth in its senior ranks. The American general staff was still a far cry from the Prussian, even long after the Prussian progressives had been deposed and many of their reforms dismantled. 20

Defeated armies tend to change; successful ones tend to rest on their laurels. 21 When Jefferson Davis took office

19 Weigley, 178-179; Bauer, 73-74; Huntington, 185.

20 Weigley, 179-181.

21 Prussian reforms began in earnest only after the bitter defeat at Jena and Auerstadt in 1806 at the hands of Napoleon.
in 1853 little had been done to address the deficiencies manifested in the Mexican War. The new secretary set about to change that, plunging into his work with a reformer’s zeal. Davis was a military man of excellent reputation, whose only rival in ability and qualifications for the office in the nineteenth century was John C. Calhoun, secretary of war under James Monroe. An 1828 West Point graduate, Davis had served in the regular Army and commanded a volunteer regiment, the Mississippi Rifles, in the Mexican War. Davis’s Mississippians had provided the margin of victory at the Battle of Buena Vista, owing to the daring and courage of their commander. After the war, Davis was elected to the United States Senate, where he broadened his perspective serving as chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs. Franklin Pierce named his old friend and colleague secretary of war in March 1853.  

Davis tackled the problems of military administration, proposing the reorganization of the conservative and unresponsive War Department bureaus. He sought to define the relationship among the president, the secretary of war, and the commanding general of the army. To protect new territorial acquisitions Davis obtained an increase of army

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[23] Samuel P. Huntington has called the feud that ensued between Davis and Winfield Scott "one of the most vitriolic exchanges ever to enliven American public administration." Huntington, 210.
strength from fourteen to eighteen thousand men. He sent military engineers to explore and chart these new regions, and perhaps more significantly, to survey routes for a transcontinental railroad, which Davis championed as a military and national necessity. The secretary closely studied the curriculum at West Point and lengthened it from four to five years. And Davis oversaw a portfolio of other tasks not strictly under the headings of military reform or national defense. Under War Department direction, the Corps of Engineers built the Washington Aqueduct, enlarged the U.S. Capitol, and improved numerous rivers and harbors. 24

Davis was attuned to new ideas. For example, he sent a delegation to the Levant to ascertain the military usefulness of camels. A number of dromedaries came back to the United States as a result of this expedition, but the advent of the Civil War and the army’s reliance on railroads obviated the need for the desert animals. More importantly, the Ordnance Department began investigations into new types of artillery and small arms, including rifled and breech-loading designs. But the army awaited the results of European experiments before settling on new designs. 25

The most promising laboratory for military experiment


emerged in the Caucasus in 1854. 76 An uneasy balance of power among the great states of Europe had marked the years following the Congress of Vienna, and for decades the nations of Europe had jockeyed for strategic advantage in the Near East. By the 1850s Turkish weakness threatened to allow the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, creating a power vacuum and inviting diplomatic controversy and military struggle. Into the void sped Russia and France, vying for control of holy places in the Levant. The major results of this contest were Russia's increasing isolation from the rest of Europe and British anxiety over control of the Straits. By 1853 the tsar was pressing, as head of the Orthodox Church, for greater religious control over Orthodox clergy in the Ottoman Empire. The Turks, with British and French backing, refused the tsar's demands as an affront to their political sovereignty. Despite Austrian efforts to quiet tensions, the Ottoman Empire declared war on the Russians in late 1853, confident of British and French support. Russia bested the Turks in the naval battle of Sinop, enflaming war fever in London and Paris. Diplomatic efforts collapsed in late March 1854, bringing France and Britain into the war. Austria and Prussia remained neutral, though both had interests at stake.

76 For a history of the Crimean War see John Curtiss, 
Russia's Crimean War (Durham, N.C., 1979), or Andrew D. Lambert, The Crimean War: British grand strategy, 1853-1856 (Manchester, UK, 1990).
When France and Britain joined the conflict, the focus of action soon gravitated to the Crimean peninsula. In order to make the Straits secure, the Allies would have to neutralize Russian naval power on the Black Sea. Since Sebastopol was the Russian navy’s most important port, the Allies decided to attack there. On 7 September 1854 the Allies landed unopposed at Eupatoria, forty-eight miles north of Sebastopol. Over the next several months, they fought the Russians at the Alma River, at Balaklava—famous for the charges of the Light and Heavy Brigades—and at Inkermann, where the last large-scale offensive action for almost a year took place on 5 November 1854. Finally, the Allies drove the Russians toward and besieged them in Sebastopol. The Russians built admirable siege defenses under the direction of an able engineer named Totleben. The Allies, having shifted their lines of communication to the port of Balaklava, proved equal to the task of carrying out a lengthy siege, principally because of their pioneering use of steam-driven ships to transport and resupply their armies. The stage was set for a long war.

Jefferson Davis, like most army officers, maintained a keen professional interest in the Crimean War. Accounts of the military action frequently appeared in American newspapers. A Bostonian friend in London sent Davis maps,

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27 A British fleet menaced the Baltic coast of Russia throughout the war.
reports on the battles, and technical information concerning the performance of artillery and logistical systems in the Crimea. Another correspondent kept Davis abreast of diplomatic maneuvers incident to the war. In his annual report to the president in December 1854, Davis frequently referred to European armies and their solutions to military problems. He was especially interested in technological changes during the war. Crimean battles had proven the efficacy of well-constructed seacoast defenses "against the most powerful armaments that have ever been placed afloat," heavily armed, steam-driven Allied warships.  

Davis also discussed advances in small arms:

Though our arms have heretofore been considered the best in use, recent inventions in Europe have produced changes in small arms, which are now being used in war with such important results as have caused them to be noticed among the remarkable incidents of battles, and indicate that material modifications will be made in the future armament of troops.  

He sketched the technological advances that had been made, pointing out that there were several types of rifled small arms, some of breech-loading design. But it was impossible

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28 George Sumner to Jefferson Davis, 6 October 1854, Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers, and Speeches, Vol. II, Dunbar Rowland, Ed. (Jackson, Miss., 1923), 380 (Hereinafter cited as Rowland, II); George Sumner to Jefferson Davis, 10 November 1854, Davis Papers, Transylvania University, Lexington, Kentucky; George Sumner to Jefferson Davis, 1 March 1855, Rowland, II, 444-445; Edward B. Buchanan to Jefferson Davis 3 May 1855, Davis Papers, Transylvania University, Lexington, Kentucky; Annual Report to the President, Rowland, II, 409-410.

29 Rowland, II, 410.
to determine which was best-suited for use in the U.S. Army. Davis wanted to proceed slowly with procurement of these weapons, awaiting the results of army experiments "and the experience of war in Europe." \(^{30}\)

Jefferson Davis insisted on making the U.S. Army competitive with the best forces in Europe and making American shores invulnerable to attack. He strove to make sure the army kept up with changes in the military world. His report dealt forthrightly with problems of the military establishment, offering practical solutions requiring legislative and executive attention. Though he never used the language of professionalism, he aimed to enhance the corporateness and expertise of the officer corps. Indeed, Davis knew, unlike the officers in the Edmund Gaines tradition, that war presented an intellectual problem that lent itself to research: "Happily we may profit by the experience of others without suffering the evils that attend the practical solution of such problems." \(^{31}\)

It is impossible to say when Davis developed the idea of sending officers to Europe. As we have seen, such a delegation would not be the first and assuredly not the last. Yet the Crimean War afforded a unique opportunity for detached, professional study of powerful, industrializing nations in conflict. Perhaps the exercise of writing his

\(^{30}\) Rowland, II, 410-411.

\(^{31}\) Rowland, II, 389-418, 410.
report focused Davis's attention on the number of problems that might find solutions in Europe. At any rate, plans for a commission matured in late March 1855. On the thirtieth, telegraphers tapped out the following message to three of the army's most respected officers:

Washington.

Repair to this city without delay & report to the Adjutant General.

S. Cooper
Adjt. Genl.

---

32 Samuel Cooper to George B. McClellan, 30 March 1855, The Papers of George Brinton McClellan, Sr., Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, microfilm reel no. 3, frame 253. (Hereinafter cited as GBMP, e.g., GBMP 3: 253.)
CHAPTER ONE

THE COMMISSION:

"A TOUR OF MANY MILES AND MANY MONTHS"

Jefferson Davis left no record of his deliberations in selecting the commissioners, but it is possible that the officers he dispatched were not all his first choices. In late March 1855 he extended an offer to an old friend: "If you are in condition for a tour of many miles and many months and beyond seas, I would be glad to see you at your earliest convenience." 1 Colonel John K. F. Mansfield's reply is no longer extant, but his record commended him for a plum assignment. Second in his U.S. Military Academy class of 1822, he had advanced to the rank of Captain, Corps of Engineers, when the Mexican War broke out. Mansfield had served with great distinction as General Zachary Taylor's chief engineer, receiving brevet promotions "for gallant and meritorious conduct" at Fort Brown, Buena Vista, and Monterrey. In 1853 Jefferson Davis, a Mexican War colleague under Taylor and now Secretary of War, had promoted him colonel and inspector general of the army. Mansfield was serving in that capacity when he received Davis's request. 2

1 Jefferson Davis to John King Fenno Mansfield, 23 March 1855, Middlesex Co. Historical Society, Middletown, Conn.

2 Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. VI, Dumas Malone, Editor (New York, 1933), 257. (Hereinafter cited as DAB.); Register of Graduates and Former Cadets of the United States Military Academy (West Point, 1990), 249. (Hereinafter
Davis may also have invited Robert E. Lee, newly appointed lieutenant colonel of the Second Cavalry Regiment, to join the commission. Just after their departure, one of the commissioner’s wives gossiped to her husband that "Colonel Lee is in Washington and regrets exceedingly that he did not go with you. Mrs. Arch. Campbell told me that he would have liked it better than any other duty." The possibility of Lee’s wistfulness on missing the journey is not proof that he had been offered a place on the commission, but he probably knew of its existence and purpose. For Lee, immediate-past Superintendent of the Military Academy and paragon of professionalism, to have expressed regret at missing this opportunity indicates the perceived importance of the delegation.

The officers selected were of the same high caliber as Lee and Mansfield. Senior among them was Major Richard

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Sara Mordecai to Alfred Mordecai, 20 April 1855, Alfred Mordecai Papers, Volume 3, 736, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress. Hereinafter cited as AMP, e.g., AMP 3: 736. Mordecai’s letters to his wife were usually written over a period of days while he waited for the next outbound steamer to depart. Therefore, citations to his letters will note the inclusive dates of their composition.
Delafield, Corps of Engineers. The son of an English immigrant, Delafield was born in New York City on 1 September 1798. He entered the Military Academy in 1814 and graduated four years later at the head of his class.

As a new second lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers, Delafield spent a year with a team surveying the northern boundary of the United States. From there he proceeded to Virginia where he began to develop the expertise for which he would gain renown—seacoast fortifications. Delafield spent five years building Forts Monroe and Calhoun at the mouth of the James River near Norfolk and Hampton Roads. In 1824 he moved to the Mississippi, where for six years he commanded the defenses at Plaquemine Bend, conducted surveys of the Delta region, and directed improvements of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. In recognition of his work, he became superintending engineer for construction of the Cumberland Road, one of the first national highways. For six years he headed that project while simultaneously building and improving the defenses and harbors on the Delaware River and Bay. In 1833 he married Harriet Baldwin Covington, his lifelong companion and mother of their five children.

Delafield became superintendent of the Military Academy in 1838, serving there for the next seven years. The

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'Biographical data for Richard Delafield from Register, 247; George W. Cullum, Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy, Vol. I (Boston, 1891), 182-186; Lynda L. Crist, "Richard Delafield (1798-1873)", in Encyclopedia USA (July 1990); Morrison, 39-43.
assignment was both an honor and a challenge. Filling the shoes once occupied by Thayer was a thankless and often frustrating task. The superintendent commanded the garrison at West Point and was responsible for efficient administration of the post and the welfare and discipline of its officers and men. He was also president of the Military Academy’s academic board, composed of the heads of the academic departments, but he had only one vote and no veto. Since department heads were usually tenured, the superintendent had little power over them. The academic board reached decisions by majority vote and rarely took direction from the superintendent who, they all knew, would be assigned elsewhere in a few years.

Stifled by institutional barriers, Delafield found innovative ways to make his imprint on the academy. Although his only notable curriculum change was introducing horses for instruction in cavalry and light artillery, he put his engineering experience to good use improving barracks, buildings, and roads. His most lasting physical legacy was the beautiful "Chain Battery" walk on the banks of the Hudson.

Delafield made his most important mark on the academy by restoring standards of discipline. He punished violations of the regulations with such a heavy hand that one cadet felt he "deprived cadets of all the amusements and recreation he possibly could." He economized by scrimping on clothing for cadets, seeing to it that their arrears to the academy tailor

\[ ^5 \text{Morrison, 40.} \]
were as small as possible. Plebes were not allowed to purchase expensive overcoats before they had passed their examinations in January, no matter how cold it was in December. And compliance with rules was not just for cadets. Delafield insisted that department heads take on a full teaching load, just as regulations stipulated. Most were not doing so, and Delafield required a written explanation from each delinquent chairman for every infraction he discovered. He used similar administrative harassment to coerce compliance with another regulation requiring officers to attend Sunday chapel services. Nevertheless, Dennis H. Mahan assessed Delafield as an officer of "clearsightedness, promptitude...and a determination to examine everything with his own eyes." He could be reasonable and fair, listening to appeals of disciplinary judgments and suggestions for improving Academy procedures. But most cadets and officers disliked the stern superintendent. An Irish janitor observed that when Delafield departed West Point in 1845, "there was many a dry eye at the dock." 6

For the next eight years Delafield served as superintending engineer of the fortifications of New York harbor. He built Fort Richmond on Staten Island and oversaw improvements on the Hudson River. During this period Delafield was named to several professional committees, including the prestigious Army Board of Engineers, an honor

6 Morrison, 37-42.
to his reputation as an engineer and expert in seacoast and harbor defenses. He was chief engineer of the Department of Texas in 1853 and 1854, returning to New York a few months before his summons to serve on the Crimean commission.

The second-ranking commissioner was Major Alfred Mordecai. He was born to Jacob and Rebecca Mordecai on 3 January 1804 in Warrenton, North Carolina. Several of his twelve siblings became prominent in business, law, medicine, or education. Jacob Mordecai had been a merchant in Warrenton until business failure turned him to teaching. He opened the Female Academy in Warrenton in 1809. Alfred received his early education there and was an excellent student. Mordecai's preparation at his father's academy served him well, despite the distractions it may have offered to the only young man there. Fifteen-year-old Alfred found West Point's entrance exams little challenge when he arrived in June 1819. He continued his tradition of academic excellence and was invited during his final year to teach the lower classes. Of the eighty-six young men who entered West Point that summer, only thirty-five graduated on 4 July 1823, Mordecai standing

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first among them.

His high academic standing earned him the only commission given that year in the elite corps of engineers. Second Lieutenant Mordecai remained at West Point as acting assistant professor of natural and experimental philosophy, an indication of the faculty's high regard for his scholarship and its desperate need for instructors. After two years he was reassigned to Hampton Roads, Virginia, where he helped to build Forts Monroe and Calhoun. His performance there was exemplary, and in 1828 the chief of engineers selected Mordecai as his assistant—yet another recognition of his promise.

But for all his obvious talent, Mordecai was still a second lieutenant. The army had no retirement system, so a junior officer had few prospects for promotion unless a superior in his branch should decide to resign or happen to expire. Therefore, when an army reorganization in 1832 increased the size of the ordnance corps, Mordecai immediately applied for a captaincy. Despite stiff competition among officers throughout the army (including J.K.F. Mansfield), Second Lieutenant Mordecai became a captain of ordnance on 1 June 1832, the only engineer so honored. If the corps of engineers was the practical branch of the army, then ordnance was the scientific. For the next three decades Mordecai dedicated himself to testing weapons and gunpowder. He gained expertise in metallurgy and chemistry in a military field of
science that had no civilian application. His first duty in this new capacity, however, was to serve as military assistant to Secretary of War Lewis Cass. He traveled with Cass to his home in Michigan where, under the secretary’s direction, he wrote the first of many military treatises. *A Digest of Laws Relating to the Military Establishment of the United States* was a compilation of federal legislation pertaining to the army and the Department of War. Mordecai impressed the secretary as an officer who could think for himself. Cass greeted Mordecai after one trying day with, "Ah, Mr. Mordecai, I am always glad to see you, for you never come with your finger in your mouth." * After completing the Digest, Mordecai returned to Washington and took command of the arsenal there in 1833.

In September of that year Mordecai took a year’s leave of absence and sailed to Europe—not for relaxation, but for professional edification. He toured military schools, fortresses, and arsenals in England, France, Belgium, Prussia, Switzerland, and Italy. Among his stops were the French military school, St. Cyr, and l’Ecole Polytechnique. Before returning he bought military books and samples of ordnance for the War Department.

In the fall of 1834 Mordecai assumed command of the Frankford Arsenal near Philadelphia. It was there that he met and married Sara Hays. Mordecai found testing weapons

* Latrobe, 10.
and gunpowder time-consuming and sometimes tedious, but technologically fruitful. His efforts were of sufficient quality to warrant his appointment to the Ordnance and Artillery Board in 1835.

The organization of the army's artillery had been the subject of contentious debate since the founding of the republic. The bronze artillery pieces of the American Revolution had become obsolete by the turn of the century due to a need for greater firepower and mobility on the western frontier. In 1800 Secretary of War Henry Dearborn reassessed the artillery inventory with an eye toward remedying this deficiency. Since bronze weapons required large amounts of copper and tin, both in short supply in the United States, Dearborn decided that future artillery weapons should be made of cast iron, readily available from American furnaces. Over subsequent years several committees vainly attempted to standardize the calibre, weight, shapes, and dimensions of artillery pieces. More vexing was the unreliability of "mottled iron," or common cast iron weapons. For example, in 1837 twenty-one of eight-six cast iron six-pounder guns exploded during acceptance tests—a dangerous failure rate of 24 percent. Even more astounding was the fact that these results were not considered extraordinary. Army manuals dictated rejection of a manufactured lot of weapons only if
more than one-quarter failed acceptance tests. 9

In 1835 Secretary Cass created the Ordnance and Artillery Board to reorganize the army's field artillery inventory into a uniform system, standardizing the number and types of weapons in each battery. At the board's request Mordecai designed an artillery organization using only five types of bronze field pieces. The board recommended Mordecai's proposal to the secretary and he concurred. But the system proved too simple for the myriad requirements of field service. Within a few years, several new weapons came into the inventory (such as the lot mentioned above), returning the field artillery to its old disorganization. 10

To resolve this problem, Secretary of War Poinsett created another committee, the Ordnance Board, in 1839. Mordecai was then assistant to the chief of ordnance and became a member of the new board. Poinsett directed board members to resolve the bronze versus cast iron question once and for all. Not surprisingly, American iron founders used their influence in favor of cast iron weapons. Poinsett undoubtedly felt political pressure, but he wanted to make the system of artillery and ordnance supplies uniform and subject to industrial standardization.

The board had not progressed far in its deliberations

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10 Ibid., 26-27.
when Poinsett decided to send a delegation to Europe to study improvements in artillery. The junior members of the board, Major R.L. Baker, Captain Benjamin Huger, and Captain Mordecai, accompanied a former major of ordnance, William Wade, on a nine-month tour of England, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Germany, Belgium, and France. They observed military maneuvers and inspected numerous forts, foundries, and arsenals. The commission purchased hundreds of military books and an immense volume of ordnance supplies and equipment. Back in Washington, the officers convinced the Ordnance Board to accept bronze for the manufacture of all artillery pieces. Poinsett approved. This twenty-four-weapon system included six calibres of guns, five howitzers, two columbiads 11, and five mortars. Mordecai later published *Artillery for the United States Land Service*, which explained in detail the new system of artillery and the reasons for the board’s decisions.

Mordecai wrote prolifically on professional subjects. In 1841 he published the *Ordnance Manual*, which codified standards and procedures for testing, inspection, contracting, and procurement of weapons throughout the army. He published the *Report of Experiments on Gunpowder* in 1845, based on his own scientific work at Washington Arsenal with the ballistic pendulum, a new device for measuring projectile velocity and, thereby, the explosiveness of gunpowder. Mordecai produced

11 A columbiad was a long-barreled muzzle-loader, thick behind the trunnions and designed for high-angle fire.
the *Second Report of Experiments on Gunpowder* in 1849 and an updated edition of the *Ordnance Manual* in 1850. Three years later both the American Philosophical Society and the American Association for the Advancement of Science offered him membership in recognition of his scientific achievements.

Mordecai had been assigned to Washington Arsenal in 1842 and he remained there for most of the next fourteen years. When Congress failed to provide the customary civilian Board of Visitors of the Military Academy for 1843–1844, the secretary appointed Mordecai to a special board composed of military officers, affording him an opportunity to return to his alma mater for an inspection tour. At other times he stayed busy commanding the arsenal, conducting experiments, and writing treatises. He received a brevet promotion to major for his work in the production of weaponry and ammunition during the Mexican War. Secretary Davis sent him on a diplomatically sensitive mission to Mexico in 1853, where he investigated a $500,000 indemnity claim for damages to a silver mine, alleged to have been caused by the invading U.S. Army. Mordecai’s thorough investigation proved the claim fraudulent.

On 31 December 1854 Mordecai received a regular commission as major of ordnance after nearly twenty-three years as a captain. An accomplished writer, acclaimed scientist, and veteran of two professional trips to Europe, Mordecai was something of a "renaissance man" and eminently
qualified for the duty before him.

Twenty-nine-year-old George Brinton McClellan had been a captain of cavalry for less than a month when he received his summons to Washington. But despite his youth, he had already developed a solid reputation in the U.S. Army. Born in Philadelphia on 3 December 1826, McClellan was the third of George and Elizabeth Brinton McClellan's five children. His father was a surgeon, specializing in ophthalmology, who founded the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. He headed the school's faculty, edited a medical journal, and wrote extensively on surgery. Both mother and father insisted on providing their children with a first-rate, classical education. From private schools and private tutors young George gained a fluency in French and Latin and a broad familiarity with history. At eleven he enrolled in the University of Pennsylvania preparatory academy, entering the university itself two years later. An affinity for the military impelled him to seek an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy, which he quickly received. McClellan, at fifteen, was the youngest of 142 plebes to arrive on the Plain at West Point in the summer of 1842. The curriculum rarely challenged him and he consistently stood near the head of his class. In his final year he studied "Military and Civil

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17 Biographical data on McClellan from DAB, Vol. VI, 581-585; Register, 270; Stephen W. Sears, George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon (New York, 1988).
Engineering and the Science of War" under the tutelage of Dennis Hart Mahan. The brilliant professor was mentor and inspiration to McClellan; their friendship was long-lived.

The Mexican War was beginning as McClellan graduated second among fifty-eight in the class of 1846 and became a brevet second lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers. He fairly brimmed with excitement at the prospect of war in Mexico. Shortly after graduation, he joined a newly formed company of sappers and miners at West Point. They trained for a few months, then sailed for Brazos Santiago, near the mouth of the Rio Grande. In January 1847 McClellan’s company led a column that marched 400 miles from Matamoros to Tampico to join General Winfield Scott. McClellan landed with the first troops ashore at Vera Cruz, received a brevet promotion for gallantry in action at Contreras and Churubusco, and another after Chapultapec. The capture of Mexico City brought eight lazy months of occupation duty before McClellan and company returned to West Point in 1848.

For the next three years, he served nominally as an assistant professor of engineering, though his actual duties were with his company. He clashed often with Delafield’s successor as superintendent, Captain Henry Brewerton, over many issues of prerogative, including his absence from chapel services. His responsibilities were not taxing, for he found time to translate a French manual on bayonet exercise and test it with his company. In 1852 the army officially adopted the
manual. McClellan also enjoyed membership in Mahan's Napoleon Club, a group of young officers who met regularly and presented papers on the emperor's campaigns. McClellan profited intellectually and professionally from this association, which under Mahan's direction was almost a graduate seminar in military history. In June 1851 McClellan moved to Fort Delaware, an island bastion forty miles downriver from Philadelphia, where he worked as an assistant engineer constructing the fort. The pace of activity was slow enough that he taught himself German in his spare time. The War Department ordered him to Fort Smith, Arkansas, in March 1852 where he joined Captain Randolph B. Marcy on an expedition to explore the Red River. McClellan was second-in-command and chief engineer of the seventy-five man party. They followed the river to its sources and explored Palo Duro Canyon in the Texas Panhandle. Marcy named a small tributary "McClellan's Creek."

When he returned to Fort Smith in July, McClellan received orders to report to General Persifor F. Smith, commander of the military department of Texas. He served as Smith's chief engineer and accompanied him on an inspection tour of the frontier posts of the command. In October the army chief of engineers directed McClellan to make a survey of rivers and harbors on the Texas coast. It was an ambitious project, and McClellan handled his first independent command well. He completed the project in April 1853 and received
another choice assignment—deputy commander of a survey team seeking a railway route from Puget Sound to St. Paul, Minnesota. McClellan's independent charge was the western half of that exploration, from the coast through the Cascade Mountains. Governor Isaac Stevens of Washington Territory was in overall command of the survey team and led the party that explored westward from St. Paul. Prefiguring his later performance with the Army of the Potomac, McClellan displayed a caution in his reconnaissance that displeased Stevens. Due to bad weather McClellan stopped short and left unexplored several excellent passes through the Cascades. Nevertheless, he departed the Northwest with his reputation intact and arrived back in Washington, D.C. in April 1854.

In June Jefferson Davis personally selected McClellan for a secretive mission to survey the Dominican Republic for a suitable naval port. McClellan reported back that Samana Bay on the island's northern coast would give the U.S. a Caribbean base to rival the Royal Navy's in Jamaica. The secretary was pleased with his work—McClellan's star was on the rise. Davis gave him another assignment that kept the first lieutenant (he had been promoted while in the Cascades) under his direct supervision. McClellan collected data on the costs and construction of the nation's established railroads.

As part of his reform and reorganization of the army, Davis had convinced Congress to create four new regiments, two infantry and two cavalry. For hundreds of officers with
prospects of slow promotion, the new units were a professional
godsend. Competition for commissions in the regiments was
fierce and Davis received hundreds of letters from commission-
seekers and their supporters, McClellan among them. The new
regiments were officially organized March 3, 1855. McClellan
became a captain of cavalry the same day. He had not left to
join his new outfit when the adjutant general beckoned him
back to Washington.

These three officers of excellent reputation came
together in Washington in early April 1855. West Pointers
all, each had graduated at or near the top of his academy
class and won a commission in the elite corps of engineers.
Through branch transfers, Mordecai and McClellan also
represented the scientific wing of the army, ordnance, and the
field soldiers, cavalry. They were men of accomplishment and,
for all of their similarities, of diversity. McClellan was
younger than his fellows by a generation, but he was the only
combat veteran among them. Delafield, former chief of their
alma mater and respected engineer, had a reputation as a
martinet. Mordecai, with two tours of Europe and a lifetime
of scientific endeavor to his credit, seemed likely to lend
a cerebral center of gravity to the trio.

There is no evidence that the officers knew each other
well prior to their selection. Certainly McClellan and
Delafield were acquainted, since Delafield was superintendent
during the first three years of McClellan's cadetship. Also, Mordecai had served on the academy's board of visitors during the winter of 1843-1844, near the end of Delafield's tenure at West Point. They had certainly crossed paths then. It is doubtful that Mordecai and McClellan had ever attracted one another's attention, unless they met by chance while Mordecai was inspecting the Academy that year.

These three men represented the first two generations of an American officer corps that was beginning to think of itself as professional. Each in his own way—Mordecai in science, Delafield in engineering and education, McClellan in combat—had been engaged in the process of defining military professionalism. Together, they were about to embark upon a mission that would greatly advance that process of definition.
CHAPTER TWO

SOLDIERS, TOURISTS, AND DIPLOMATS

The three officers hastily assembled in Washington during the first week in April 1855. Although the summons from Adjutant General Cooper was cryptic, the trio discovered soon enough what Jefferson Davis had in store for them:

You have been selected to form a commission to visit Europe for the purpose of obtaining useful information with regard to the military service in general, and especially the practical working of the changes which have been introduced, of late years, into the military systems of the principal nations of Europe.¹

Davis's request for information was quite detailed. He desired to know about the organization of armies and war departments; logistics, including supply, distribution, and transport on land and sea; medical services, hospitals, and ambulances; clothing and camp equipment; small arms, including rifles, ammunition, and the specific arms used by cavalry; artillery used in field and siege operations, specifically the British Lancaster gun; changes in French artillery and rifled cannon; the construction of land and coastal fortifications; engineering operations, including siege trains, bridge trains, and types of ordnance used; and, finally, "the use of camels

for transportation."  

Davis wanted the commissioners to travel to the Crimea as soon as possible "for the purpose of observing active operations in that quarter." He implied that they should enter the allied lines first, then cross into the Russian camp in besieged Sebastopol. From there they could proceed to St. Petersburg in order to inspect operations in the Baltic. He asked that they tour military facilities in Russia, Prussia, Austria, France, and England on their return trip, realizing, however, that diplomatic affairs would in some measure dictate their plans. The secretary expected the officers to return to Washington by 1 November 1855, but would consider an extension should circumstances warrant one. For that reason, he directed Delafield, the senior officer, to correspond with him as the need arose.  

The secretary appointed Mordecai treasurer for the commission, furnished him with funds, and advised him to buy "new books, drawings, and patterns of arms and equipments" of military value as he saw fit. Davis asked Secretary of State William L. Marcy to write a letter of introduction to the State Department's bankers in London, the famous Baring Brothers and Co., Ltd., so that Mordecai might make use of

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2 Ibid., xiii-xiv.

3 Ibid., xii-xiv.
their services. Marcy further provided letters to the U.S. ambassadors in Europe asking them to assist the commission in every way possible.

Davis also asked the ambassadors from England, France, Russia, Prussia, and Austria to provide the commission with letters of introduction to their governments. To facilitate this request, Secretary and Mrs. Davis hosted a dinner in their home for the ambassadors and the commissioners. A few army generals were also present, including Davis’s nemesis, Winfield Scott. Varina Davis described Delafield as "an alert soldierly man with much of scientific acquirement, but a curt manner." Mordecai "was a Hebrew, . . . his mind was versatile, at times even playful, but his habits of thought were of the most serious problems, and so perfectly systematized as to make everything evolved from his fecund mind available for the use of mankind." Mrs. Davis found McClellan "quite young; and [he] looked younger than he really was from an inveterate habit of blushing when suddenly addressed; [he] gave us a most favorable impression." 

The ministers of Austria, Russia, and Prussia quickly

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1 Jefferson Davis to William L. Marcy, 4 April 1855, National Archives Microfilm No. 179, roll 145, frame 24. Baring Brothers also acted as a conduit for correspondence and was more efficient than any other channel the commissioners used, including the U.S. diplomatic network.

2 W.L. Marcy to "Diplomatic and Consular Agents," 3 April 1855, GBMP 44: 439.

complied with Davis's request for letters of introduction. The British ambassador forwarded a sealed letter to Lord Clarendon, British foreign secretary. But the French minister was less forthcoming. Davis complained that:

before replying to my request for letters of introduction, [he] addressed me a note asking whether our officers were to go to the camp and army of the Allies and to no other place whatever. Upon my replying that I wished their observations to be as wide as the field of active operations, he sent me a sealed letter of introduction to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of his Government. The distrust and apprehension which was exhibited, was so little called for by the character of the Officers, the position of our Government, and the present state of military science as certainly to make no favorable impression on me. 7

The trepidation of the French is a mystery. There may have been a lingering distrust of the U.S. following the publication of the Ostend Manifesto. 8 The French may simply have been cautious about security because they were at war. Whatever the reason, French reluctance to assist the commission would become a constant irritant and endless source of delay and distraction.

Nevertheless, armed with Davis's instructions and sundry letters to ease their progress, the three officers set out for

7 Jefferson Davis to James Buchanan, 9 April 1855, James Buchanan Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

8 In October 1854, the U.S. ambassadors to Spain, France, and England met at Ostend to discuss maneuvers to force Spain to sell Cuba to the United States. They signed a document, which unfortunately became public, suggesting that if Spain refused to sell, the United States should "detach that island" by force. This evidence of American bellicosity alarmed many Europeans. See David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861 (New York, 1976), 190-193.
Boston, where they would embark on their journey across the Atlantic. In the short time since their appointment word of their mission had begun to circulate through the army. Delafield received a letter from an army surgeon in New York requesting specific information on military medical practices in Europe. Mordecai’s companion on a previous European tour, Benjamin Huger, hurried to Boston to see them off, but arrived too late. Someone Mordecai described only as an "ordnance person" tried to contact him in Washington, presumably to discuss their mission. He, too, missed the commission and so followed them to Europe and caught up with him in Paris. The officers were excited and optimistic about their journey, but also struck by the great responsibility they bore. McClellan admitted that he felt flattered by his place on the commission and would "try to do it credit." 

They sailed from Boston aboard the steamer Asia on Wednesday, 11 April 1855.

The trio arrived in Liverpool eleven days later after a passage that McClellan found "short, smooth & pleasant." Poor Mordecai, however, rarely left terra firma without some ill effects. He was grateful for a quick voyage and happy that

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9 Richard Satterlee to Richard Delafield, 9 April 1855, Delafield Collection, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York; Benjamin Huger to Sara Mordecai, 20 April 1855, AMP 3: 732; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11–16 May 1855, AMP 1: 120; George B. McClellan to Ellen Marcy, 6 April 1855 [marked incorrectly "1856"], GBM{P44: 596.
"on this one I had much less than the usual amount of suffering . . . . [B]ut you know nothing can render a sea voyage even tolerable to me." 10

The commissioners traveled to London the next day with an eye toward quickly arranging permission to visit the British forces in the Crimea. They suspected that the war was nearing a conclusion but were confident that it would not end before they could observe the denouement. The British had recently installed a telegraph linking field headquarters in Balaklava with the war ministry at Whitehall, so information about military operations was very current. Moreover, Londoners were excited over the arrival of Napoleon III, who had broadly hinted that he might go to the Crimea as generalissimo of the allied forces. Delafield surmised that "important operations [in the Crimea] may therefore be deferred until his arrival." 11

On the advice of James Buchanan, American ambassador to the Court of St. James's, the three officers called upon Lord Clarendon, the foreign secretary, on 27 April. He received

10 George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 22 April 1855, GBMP 3: 262; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22 April 1855, AMP 1: 106.

11 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22 April 1855, AMP 1: 106; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 22 April 1855, GBMP 3: 262; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 27 April 1855, GBMP 3: 270. Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 27 April 1855, National Archives Microfilm No. 567, Roll 513, frame 524. Because this particular roll of microfilm figures so heavily in Delafield's documentation of the commission's travels, it will hereinafter be cited by the shorthand, "DC," for Delafield Correspondence.
them kindly enough, but they soon found that diplomatic etiquette demanded action of them they had not expected. Complained McClellan:

[W]e are to be presented next Wednesday if still here (as there seems every prospect that we shall be) & I must be in full tog--it seems to be a great humbug to go to all this trouble for one glance at a Queen. . . . The mere fact of having been presented gives one much more consideration. 

They would be delayed for a time waiting for the wheels of the diplomatic bureaucracy to turn.

Meantime, Clarendon had granted them permission to tour military facilities in Britain. They observed a new type of naval vessel at a shipyard in Blackwall--"Steam Batteries with Iron Shields." "Floating batteries . . . ," Mordecai reported, "think of a vessel covered all over with an iron coat of mail 4 inches thick!" Delafield dispatched a special memo to Davis describing these forerunners of American ironclads. 

The officers also visited the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich on the first of May, where they witnessed tests of the "Lancaster gun" about which Davis had specifically inquired. The "Lancaster gun" was a giant, sixty-eight-pounder, rifled cannon with an elliptical bore. Reports from the Crimea

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12 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 27 April 1855, DC 524; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 May 1855, DC 527; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 27 April 1855, GBMP 3: 270.

13 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 May 1855, DC 536, 539-41; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 28 April-4 May 1855, AMP 1: 108.
indicated that the gun was not living up to its promise, and the commission found confirmation of that news at Woolwich. "The English officers say that [the "Lancaster guns"] are humbugs," gossiped McClellan. The ammunition was too expensive and the guns themselves were prone to burst. Mordecai later analyzed the "Lancaster" in detail in his official report.  

The delegation also found time for some relaxation during their fortnight in England. Delafield hired a Mr. Fischer, who was fluent in several European tongues, as travelling valet to accompany them on their journey. They dined with Sir John Burgoyne, who had just returned from the Crimea, where he had been serving as chief engineer to Lord Raglan. Later, they listened to a lecture on operations in the Crimea. Their travels took them to various attractions, including an opera, a zoo, and a House of Commons debate among Palmerston, Disraeli, Gladstone, and others. 

Spending so much time together allowed the officers to become better acquainted. The acerbic McClellan concluded that his companions were "two fogies":

Dickey is all right, but the other is sometimes


15 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 28 April–4 May 1855, AMP 1: 108-111; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 27 April 1855, GBMP 3: 270; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 2 May 1855, GBMP 3: 273.
very provoking—this infernal business of raising objections which cannot be supported merely for the purpose of making objection—Good Lord deliver us from all such. I keep very quiet & and generally end by having my own way—but have to do a little internal cussing by way of solace. 16

McClellan’s complaining revealed the stress of the generational gulf that separated him from his fellow officers. The captain may have cajoled the majors to activities they felt beyond their physical stamina. But his criticisms centered on Mordecai:

Of my two friends, one gives me nothing but trouble—he is a confirmed old fogie—raising objection to everything that Delafield & I propose—hemming & hausing at everything—he may once have been a good officer—but he is altogether too old & worthless now . . . 17

Mordecai held the pursestrings and may have been reluctant to spend as freely as McClellan would have wished. But as one scholar has suggested, the tension among the officers was not dysfunctional and may even have had some salutary effects. Perhaps the more mature and experienced officers provided needed judgment, while the energetic captain spurred his seniors to greater exertions than they might otherwise have undertaken. 18

Despite some delay the officers’ audience with the queen seems to have paid off. They received permission from the

16 George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 2 May 1855, GBMP 3: 273.

17 George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 29 April 1855, GBMP 44: 498.

Foreign Office to go to the Crimea without restriction: "the honor and character of American officers was a guarantee sufficient to justify it." Lord Clarendon was most courteous, acceded to every request, and gave them letters of introduction to Lord Raglan, commander of British forces in the Crimea, and Sir Edmund Lyons, commander of the British fleet in the Black Sea. Ambassador Buchanan seems to have been of little help to the commission in securing their aims, despite his promises to assist. In light of the recalcitrance of the French, Jefferson Davis had sent him a personal request to guide the officers through what appeared to be a potential diplomatic minefield. For reasons unexplained Buchanan ignored all entreaties to bring the power of his office to bear on the commission's behalf and left the trio with a most unfavorable impression. Still, the trip to London was successful, and the commissioners left for Paris on 6 May. 19

Delafield, Mordecai, McClellan, and their valet embarked from Dover for the voyage across the Channel to Calais. Even this short trip was "not without a touch of the old man of the sea" for Mordecai. After a night in Calais they took a train

19 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 May 1855, DC 535; Jefferson Davis to James Buchanan, 9 April 1855, James Buchanan Papers Historical Society of Pennsylvania; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 2 May 1855, GBMP 3: 273.
to Paris and arrived on the seventh. 20

The next morning the officers called on Ambassador John Y. Mason, who had just returned from Nice where he had been convalescing after a stroke. His ill health was partially to blame for what the commissioners felt was the poor quality of American representation in Europe. But they speculated on other reasons:

Our country is peculiarly unfortunate in its Diplomatic representatives abroad as far as we have yet seen--Mr. Buchanan is in bad odour in London & takes no interest in his duty. Mr. Mason has no influence or consideration here, but tries his best. The publication of that d---d Ostend conference has brought about a beautiful state of affairs--the minister of any insignificant little German or South American country has more influence than ours. 21

The French foreign minister had just resigned and no other French officials would help them. Mason prevailed upon them to postpone traveling to the Crimea until after they had an opportunity to speak with the new minister about their goals. The commissioners, frustrated and embarrassed at their predicament, were delayed for over two weeks while a new foreign minister took office and then traveled to London for a conference. They did not even have permission to visit the

20 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 8-10 May 1855, AMP 1: 116; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 10 May 1855, DC 447.

21 George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 22 May 1855, GBMP 3: 293; Mordecai echoed this sentiment and added that Ambassador Dodge in Spain, the driving force behind the Ostend Manifesto, was also a source of embarrassment. "I feel very much ashamed and annoyed at being mixed up with them." Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 26-28 May 1855, AMP 1: 125.
military facilities around Paris. "I am afraid," Mordecai confessed, "that the Secy of War & our mil[itary] friends will think that our operations partake of the languor of those of the Allies, & indeed such is the fact, for we are waiting on their movements, not in the field, but in the Cabinet." 22

With time on their hands and no opportunity to tour military facilities, the delegation accomplished little. Mordecai worried that they were spending too much money for too little gain. They did, however, send a number of military books back to Washington. They also discovered that the allies were preserving meat and vegetables and sending them to the Crimea. Delafield forwarded a specimen of this dessicated food to Davis. Later, the U.S. Army would successfully test these rations in the field. 23

To occupy their time they found numerous diversions. Mordecai acted as guide for his friends as they toured the sights of Paris—the Louvre, the Champs Elysées, the national Exposition, and Versailles. They went to museums, plays, and operas and all seem to have been well versed in the arts. They admired Parisian women and commented on their beauty in their letters home. Mordecai pushed the bounds of matrimonial

22 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 10 May 1855, DC 447; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 17 May 1855, DC 527; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-17 May 1855, AMP 1: 121; George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 21 May 1855, GBMP 44: 506.

23 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-17 May 1855, AMP 1: 119; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 17 May 1855, DC 527; Delafield Report, 90.
discretion when he candidly reported to his distant wife on a trip to the opera. Despite his appreciation of the performance, he said, "For my part, I believe I was barbarian enough to be more pleased at the twinkling of the girls' legs in the ballet, than at all the music." 24

The officers spent quieter evenings with a distinguished fellow-lodger at their hotel, Martin Van Buren. The former president was on a long vacation in Europe and had recently suffered the loss of his son and namesake. Needing companionship, he sought out the American officers on the floor above. "And how," boasted Mordecai, "do you suppose I spent last evening in Paris[?] Playing whist with Martin Van Buren at a franc a game! He sent us up word that if any of us were whist players he would be glad to see us." Whist games became regular occasions, and the officers and Van Buren grew quite fond of each other. 25

Despite their frustration the officers seem to have gotten along with one another rather well in Paris. This perception probably owes much to a lack of commentary from

24 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 8-10 May 1855, AMP 1: 114-117; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-12 May 1855, AMP 1: 118; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-16 May 1855, AMP 1: 119-121; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 18-24 May 1855, AMP 1: 122-123.

25 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 8-10 May 1855, AMP 1: 117; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 18-24 May 1855, AMP 1: 122; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-9 June 1855, AMP 1: 126; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 22 May 1855, GBMP 3: 293; John Niven, Martin Van Buren: The Romantic Age of American Politics (New York, 1983), 600-604.
McClellan on the subject. But even he enjoyed their joint outings and evenings with Van Buren. Mordecai pronounced their relations "perfectly harmonious & we are almost always together." Delafield was a man of "good taste and... great characteristic," and McClellan "very quick and intelligent. The best eye & organ of locality I almost ever saw." 26

Personal harmony was a great help in coping with the frustration of their diplomatic quandary. Finally, on 24 May Ambassador Mason secured them an appointment with the new foreign minister, Count Walewsky. Unfortunately, Walewsky informed them that, while they would be allowed to visit French works in the Crimea, he would require them to pledge not to visit any Russian sites thereafter. When Delafield explained that they needed to view the defenders as well as the attackers, the Count curtly informed him that the permission was a courtesy and could be withdrawn without giving any reason. The commissioners declined Walewsky's offer and made ready to leave Paris. 27

But where would they go? They had expected to travel from France directly to the Crimea, but given their troubles with the French, they determined that the prudent course would be to secure Russian permission to visit their lines first.

26 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 8-10 May 1855, AMP 1: 114; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-17 May 1855, AMP 1: 121.

27 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 27 May 1855, DC 543.
They decided to head for Berlin and seek Russian guidance about the best route into the Crimea from their side. 28

Before they could leave, however, Mason informed them that they were to be received by Emperor Napoleon III on Sunday, 27 May. This unexpected and undesired appointment delayed their departure three more days. As fate would have it, the emperor canceled the reception on Sunday due to the arrival of a royal dignitary. The appointment was rescheduled and the commissioners were presented to the emperor ("a dull stolid looking & rather awkward man") on Monday afternoon. "Nothing worth mentioning," scrawled Mordecai to his wife, "a little talk with the Emperor." They returned from the Tuilleries, packed hurriedly, and the next morning boarded a first class coach on an express train bound for Prussia. 29


28 Ibid.

29 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-17 May 1855, AMP 1: 121; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 18-24 May 1855, AMP 1: 123; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 26-28 May 1855, AMP 1: 125; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-9 June 1855, AMP 1: 126.
them safely in the Prussian capital. 30

There they met U.S. Ambassador Peter D. Vroom, who made a much more favorable impression on them than had his counterparts in France and England. Vroom took them directly to the Russian minister, who had anticipated their request and gave them letters for the Russian governor in Warsaw. The Russian minister assured them that they had authority from St. Petersburg to go to the Crimea, and the governor would expedite their journey. Vroom also escorted them to see the Prussian foreign minister, Baron von Manteuffel, whom they found most pleasant, courteous, and helpful. He extended them permission to visit all military installations in Prussia. The good reception buoyed the trio’s spirits. Since events in the Crimea seemed to warrant no hurrying, they elected to go to Warsaw and tour the area there, which was rumored to billet large garrisons of Russian troops. From Warsaw they would travel to Kiev and down the Dnieper to the Crimea. 31

The commissioners boarded a train on 4 June and proceeded toward Warsaw. At the Polish frontier border guards stopped the train and searched their belongings. "We thought the search very superfluous," Mordecai observed, "as they ought

30 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-9 June 1855, AMP 1: 126; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 3 June 1855, DC 548.

31 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-9 June 1855, AMP 1: 128, 138; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 3 June 1855, DC 548; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 10 June 1855, DC 552; George B. McClellan to Mary McClellan, 2 June 1855, GBMP 3: 300.
to be too glad if a person should carry anything into their miserable country." After two days' travel they arrived in Warsaw. There they donned their military uniforms, "which we expect to wear pretty constantly in Russia." The next day they called "at several police and governors' offices, as is the custom in this country." Pervasive autocracy oversaw their passage through Russian officialdom: "we are under a more rigid surveillance than heretofore." 32

The most important official in Warsaw was the Russian governor, Marshal Prince Paskievich, a revered old soldier and former foe of Napoleon. Unfortunately, he was on a hunting trip when they arrived, and an assistant could not grant any of their requests without the marshal's approval. Two days later Paskievich returned. He treated the delegation well, offered his assistance, and appointed an officer to escort them. The American officers were quite impressed with the marshal: "he has done more, fought more battles, occupied more exalted positions than any General now living." McClellan was especially taken with him:

He is a fine old soldier as I ever saw--no vanity, no pomposity (heaven forgive me--I was about to say "Scott-osity"!) . . . bears his years well . . . . I was so fortunate as to sit opposite the Marshal at table, & as he was very talkative and gracious had an excellent opportunity of bringing him out--he talks very well, & his manner to all

32 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-9 June 1855, AMP 1: 130, 136.
around him is most pleasant. 

Paskievičh lent them his opulent box at the opera that night, after which Mordecai cautioned his wife not to "believe all the stories McClellan will tell you about my behavior to the opera girls." Their escort officer took them to see the fortress at Modlin, a review of Cossack cavalry held in their honor, and a military hospital in Warsaw. Mordecai was so enthusiastic with the quality of their reception in Warsaw that he asked Sara, his wife, to show his letter to Secretary Davis and to let him and the Russian minister know how well they had been treated.

But despite their pleasure at the excellent treatment, they were still disappointed at their lack of progress. Aside from the thousand-man regiment of Cossack cavalry that had paraded for them and "perform[ed] feats with carabines, pistols and horses worthy of a circus," the commissioners found no large bodies of troops near Warsaw as they had been led to believe. Marshal Paskievičh regretfully informed them that, contrary to what they had been told, he had no authority to allow them to proceed to the Crimea. They would have to go

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32 George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 10 July 1855, GBMP 44: 516. McClellan was referring to Winfield Scott, commanding general of the U.S. Army.

34 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 10 June 1855, DC 552; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 7 June 1855, GBMP 3: 307, 312; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-9 June 1855, AMP 1: 131; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 12-13 June 1855, AMP 1: 140-143.
to St. Petersburg for that. ³⁵

To make matters worse, the commissioners received word from the Crimea that the French had made a successful attack on the Russian garrison in Sebastopol. ³⁶ McClellan, whose emotions, as usual, were closer to the surface than his companions', began "to fear that decisive events may take place before we can get there--so unfortunate have we been in our unavoidable detentions." There was "the consolation .. . that it was not in our power to alter the turn that matters have taken. The worst is that very much will be expected from us on our return-- & it will be devilish hard to fulfill the expectations." The young captain was especially concerned about his reputation and suffering the ignominy of having missed the war they had been sent to observe. He seemed to fear accusations of incompetence or, worse yet, cowardice: "[B]ut I do not despair & will get to Sebastopol & under fire there if I die the next minute. I would rather lose an arm than return without seeing that siege." Delafield was more sanguine, but he, too, expressed surprise and disappointment as he informed Davis that Paskievich "could not give us authority to go from here directly to the Crimea. . . . Our

³⁵ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 12-13 June 1855, AMP 1: 143; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 10 June 1855, DC 552.

³⁶ The attack had actually taken place on 6 June, when Allied forces had taken positions known as the Quarries and the Mamelon, south and southeast of Sebastopol. W. Baring Pemberton, Battles of the Crimean War (New York, 1962), 188-9.
passports are of no more avail than that given to any traveler. . . . The course now left us, is to proceed to St. Petersburg." They set out on 13 June. 37

For the first time on their journey they were forced to cover a long distance by horse-drawn coach. The macadamized road between Warsaw and St. Petersburg was new and well-tended, but nonetheless 783 miles long. A six-day trek across the Russian steppes offered little diversion save an occasional landmark. "We crossed the Niemen, the frontier of Russia," mused Mordecai, "within a few days of the date when Napoleon crossed it, with the grand army, in 1812. I hope we shall be more fortunate than he and that the American forces will get out of the country before the 13th Decr." 38

On 20 June, the day after their arrival, the commissioners called on U.S. Ambassador Thomas H. Seymour. He promised them his assistance and arranged an appointment with Foreign Minister Nesselrode on the 25th. Seymour escorted them to this meeting, at which they presented their requests to tour military facilities in Russia and to visit Sebastopol. Nesselrode, "a small but hale looking man of 75

37 George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 12 June 1855, GBMP 3: 315; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 7 June 1855, GBMP 3: 307, 312; George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 7 June 1855, GBMP 44: 509; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 10 June 1855, DC 552.

38 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 21 June 1855, DC 511; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 20-21 June 1855, AMP 1: 144-5.
years," was polite and promised to help. 39

The next day they attended a military review on the Champs de Mars for Tsar Alexander II. There they met Prince Dolgoroucki, Russian minister of war, who assigned them an escort for their stay in Russia, Lieutenant Colonel Obrescoff. After the review they met the emperor, "a tall, large figure, [with] a pleasing physiognomy & a very courteous manner," who received them warmly and offered to allow them to visit Cronstadt at their leisure. He closed the interview "with a declaration on his part of the hope the United States and Russia would continue always at peace and in friendship." 40

Bureaucratic responsibility for their requests devolved upon the chief of the *etat major* in the war ministry, Baron Lieven. The delegation delivered their requests in writing to him on 3 July and renewed their inquiries on the 6th and the 10th. For then unknown reasons the wheels of Russian government turned slowly, despite assurances from the highest authority in the land. 41

Meanwhile, the commissioners busied themselves with

39 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 27 June 1855, DC 517; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22-26 June 1855, AMP 1: 150.

40 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 27 June 1855, DC 517; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22-26 June 1855, AMP 1: 151; Cronstadt was an island garrison just off the Baltic coast from St. Petersburg that was being threatened by a British fleet.

41 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 12 July 1855, DC 556; William L. Marcy to Jefferson Davis, 20 June 1855, National Archives Microfilm No. 221, Roll 175, frame 309.
visits to various military installations. They took advantage of the emperor's offer and toured Cronstadt on several occasions. The Russian officers allowed them to inspect its construction from within and to sail around the island despite the presence of a British fleet lying at anchor a few miles away. The delegation attended several reviews and visited arsenals and military schools. They were greatly impressed with Russian soldiers and especially the training and development of officers. Delafield felt Russia was blessed with an excellent commissioning resource. "In all that we have seen of these schools," wrote Mordecai, "we have been delighted with them, as great instruments of civilization & improvement in this vast Empire." Russian military hospitals were so efficiently run that the usually critical McClellan declared that "it is impossible to obtain greater neatness, cleanliness & comfort for men." The commission developed an impression of a Russian military of such professionalism and prowess that it should have had no fear of the Allies."

Almost everywhere they found the Russians helpful, courteous and forthcoming. One exception came on a trip to Krasnoe Selo, a military encampment of some fifty thousand infantry and artillery sixteen miles from St. Petersburg.

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"Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 27 June 1855, DC 517; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 12 July 1855, DC 556; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22-28 June 1855, AMP 1: 148-151; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22-24 July 1855, AMP 2: 165; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 4 July 1855, GBMP 3: 304."
There the commanding general refused them entry despite a written pass from the ministry of war. "We reckon the Emperor will be mighty mad when he hears of our trip," predicted Mordecai. Four days later they returned after Obrescoff had consulted with officials in St. Petersburg. On the second visit they were warmly received and conducted to every part of the camp. "We neither called upon nor saw the General who refused permission to visit the camp on the 11th." 43

Obrescoff, aide-de-camp to the minister of war, was a gracious and well-connected host. He conducted them to every military establishment imaginable and ensured that they received "red carpet" treatment. The Americans' uniforms, adorned as they were with large epaulettes, made Obrescoff's job easier since the Russians often mistook gray-haired Mordecai and Delafield for generals. One day Obrescoff decided to have some fun with his guests. He introduced the two majors to the students at a naval school as Admiral Napier, commander of the British Baltic fleet, and Lord Raglan, commander of British forces in the Crimea. The spectacle of these eminent "captives" produced a sensation at the school. The American officers became quite fond of Obrescoff and even had a group portrait taken with him. This daguerreotype is the only extant visual record of the three

43 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 12 July 1855, DC 556: Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 18 July 1855, DC 563.
commissioners together. "

The commissioners got on less well with one another while in St. Petersburg, if McClellan is to be believed. He was ill during part of their stay, so he may have been more vitriolic than usual.

Pshaw--I wish that "wet blanket" would keep out of my room, I shall be in the dumps for the rest of the evening. One of my old majors is the most perfect damper upon anything like good humor that I ever saw in my life--the very sight of him gives me the blue devils, & my only pleasure is to break out occasionally & give him a piece of my mind, or get up a small quarrel. But old Dicky is a comparative trump--I get on very well with him--the other one is always discontented, always finding fault, always looking at the black side of things & ever despondent. 45

Although McClellan considered Mordecai a "wet blanket," the major's own correspondence manifested a brighter outlook than McClellan's. While McClellan was growling that "thus far the annoyance has far exceeded the pleasure [on the journey]," Mordecai described the same circumstances as "little more than a pleasure trip." Both lamented a lack of real accomplishment, but the tone of their observations is remarkably different. It would be interesting to have Delafield's personal observations, but because his surviving correspondence went exclusively to Davis, his military superior, his remarks seem more guarded and circumspect. At

45 George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 10 July 1855, GBMP 44: 516.
any rate, McClellan's and Mordecai's letters leave room for
debate about who was the "wet blanket." 

Mordecai was even capable of waxing poetic about the
scenery they encountered. Among the scenes whose beauty he
extolled was the view of Moscow from Sparrow Hills, where he
counted "442 domes & steeples which could be distinguished
from that one point!" On 19 July the officers had traveled
the four hundred miles to Moscow by train. Obrescoff escorted
them to numerous arsenals, schools, and hospitals. The
cumulative effect of their travels was a most favorable
impression of the efficacy of Russian government. After eight
days the commissioners returned to St. Petersburg. "

In one respect the decision to travel to Moscow was
peculiar, coming as it did after Baron Lieven had informed
the commission that they would not be welcomed in the Russian
garrison in Sebastopol. The tsar had granted almost all other
American requests. But in deference to the wishes of Prince
Gorchakov, his commander in the Crimea, Alexander refused
permission to enter the besieged city. " Since the main

"Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 June-4 July 1855,
AMP 2: 154; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 7 June
1855, GBMP 3: 307, 312; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22-
28 June 1855, AMP 1: 150.

"Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22-24 July, AMP 2:
164, 169; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 16 August
1855, DC 571.

"Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 18 July 1855, DC 563. For similar reasons the tsar denied permission to visit
Ravel and Sweaborg.
purpose of going to St. Petersburg had been the hope of securing that permission, it seems that the commission might have considered retracing their steps and moving expeditiously to the Crimea to visit only the Allied side. However, military events did not seem to dictate any haste. The Russian populace was quite confident about the course of the war, despite the menacing presence of the British fleet just off the coast. The commissioners' observations of the Russian military indicated that it was superior in every way to the Allies. And the Americans learned that the Russians had repulsed another Allied assault on Sebastopol on 18 June. Although the details were sketchy, the city seemed secure for the present. Even if it were not, there was still plenty of war left to see. As one Russian official assured Mordecai, "If the Allies should take Sebastopol & get possession of the Crimea . . . it is only then that the war will begin for us, in a serious manner." Given the improbability of their returning to Russia proper after their trip to the Black Sea, the decision to visit Moscow in July was prudent."

Nevertheless, as they returned to St. Petersburg and prepared to leave Russia, notes of concern entered the commissioners' dispatches. News of their travels had begun

"Richard DelafIELD to Jefferson Davis, 21 June 1855, DC 513; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 4 July 1855, GBMP 3: 334; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 20-21 June 1855, AMP 1: 147; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22-28 June 1855, AMP 1: 148; Richard DelafIELD to Jefferson Davis, 18 July 1855, DC 563; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 June-4 July 1855, AMP 2: 152."
to appear in U.S. newspapers. One article had it that the officers were in Russia to offer their swords to the service of the tsar. Another revealed some of the diplomatic problems they had had with the French. A third revealed that the delegation had not obtained Russian permission to visit Sebastopol. McClellan cautioned his correspondents to keep their letters in strictest confidence lest a "leak" jeopardize their mission. Moreover, Mordecai and McClellan seemed to worry that the pace of their travel would cause them to miss important events in the Crimea. True, the battle of 18 June had been a Russian victory and little had changed tactically. Still, it was a battle missed. Mordecai was "in a very bad humor that we should have missed seeing the very operations to which our attention was most especially directed." He hoped that "the Sec'y of War will have approved of our course, tho' I know that he will be chagrined at the disappointment." And what of Davis? Why did he not correspond with the commission? "I looked with some expectation of seeing in your letter some remark from the Sec'y of War relative to our doings in Paris, but was disappointed. Do you never hear of his saying anything about us?" 50

Delafield informed Davis that they would travel from St. Petersburg through northern Prussia, touring fortresses there,

50 Undated newspaper clippings, AMP 3: 748, and in AMP Box 1, a collection of loose papers; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 18 July 1855, GBMP 3: 362; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 June-4 July 1855, AMP 2: 152; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-18 July 1855, AMP 2: 163.
and then go to Berlin. From Berlin they would continue on to Vienna and Trieste and then sail to Constantinople and, finally, to the Crimea. The others feared this circuitous route would cause them to miss important events. Their fears would be borne out.  

\[51\] Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 9-12 September 1855, AMP 2: 193.
CHAPTER THREE
"WITH WIDER & CLEARER IDEAS"

On 20 August 1855 Mordecai penned a personal letter to Jefferson Davis:

We have not been fortunate enough to obtain permission to see some of the most interesting military positions in Russia which were mentioned in your instructions. Although regretting this unexpected result of participating in the disappointment, which I know you will feel, that we were not in the Crimea during the important operations in June last, I think that our visit to Russia has been far from fruitless. ¹

The commission now understood Russian military power, an institution much misunderstood. The Russians were drilled in obedience and constantly at war. They possessed a large and excellent army with several admirable components. Mordecai forwarded a map that showed the positions of all Russian troops, graphically demonstrating their strength of numbers. But as he continued to expound on the reasons the U.S. mission should not be considered a failure, he betrayed a growing feeling that he was beginning to doubt his own argument. "The news just received of the operations of the fleet at Sweaborg make me regret still more than [that?] we could not go there to verify the results." ² In a letter to his wife of the same

¹ Alfred Mordecai to Jefferson Davis, 20 August 1855, DC 601.

² Ibid. On 9-10 August 1855 a combined French-English fleet bombarded Sweaborg. While not destroying its batteries, the attack ruined Sweaborg as a naval base. Lambert, 281-295.
date Mordecai admitted being quite anxious to know how the Sec’y of War takes the answer we got at St. Petersburg. . . . I wish you would speak a little more about what is said of us at home, not the idle stories & newspaper reports, but what people about you who have sense seem to think & expect. We hear that a good deal of interest is felt & inquiries made & you say that my letters are giving me [unintelligible] & c. Do you mean me, or the commission[?] 3

Mordecai need not have worried about Davis’s assessment of their progress. Sara Mordecai had been lending her husband’s letters to the secretary (at least those that did not dwell on the talents of "opera girls"), for which Davis was most appreciative. Davis was careful to compliment the officers to Mrs. Mordecai and expressed approval of the decisions the commissioners had made, which remarks she happily passed on to her husband. The secretary was even rumored to have had confidence that the commission would somehow be able to overcome Tsar Alexander’s misgivings and to gain admission to Sebastopol after all. Even more flattering was the news that the president was interested in their mission. "I went. . . to the President’s last week," wrote Sara Mordecai. "Mr. Pierce said he had seen a few of them [your letters]; Mr. Davis had shown him, & that they were very interesting." Mordecai was relieved to find that the commission still

3 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 26 July-29 August 1855, AMP 2: 184-5.
enjoyed good standing at home.  

They left St. Petersburg by horse-drawn coach on 2 August en route to northern Prussia, arriving at Konigsberg six days later. The trip was less pleasant than other legs of their trek, especially when "a few of the springs of our coach broke down under the Majors & I [McClellan] could not help grinning with delight to look at their faces when we could stop at a post house. I was in the front part & quite comfortable--with my usual good luck!" The trio toured Konigsberg's fortress, then under construction, and enjoyed professional camaraderie with Prussian officers for three days before continuing their journey by train. For a fortnight they traveled through Danzig, Posen, Swinemunde, and Schwedt, visiting fortresses, coast defenses and a cavalry school.  

On 25 August the delegation arrived in Berlin, called again on Ambassador Vroom, and commenced another spell of awaiting the maneuvers of diplomats. Despite having received earlier permission to tour military works in Berlin "on making known our wishes," the commission languished several days even after presenting the foreign minister with a formal request.

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4 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 26 July-29 August 1855, AMP 2: 173, 189; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 13-15 September 1855, AMP 2: 194; Jefferson Davis to Sara Mordecai, 9 July 1855, AMP 3: 739; Sara Mordecai to Alfred Mordecai, 16 August 1855, AMP 3: 741; Sara Mordecai to Alfred Mordecai, 15 November 1855, AMP 3: 773.

5 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 September 1855, DC 577; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 19 August 1855, GBMP 3: 385; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 26 July-29 August 1855, AMP 2: 177; Delafield Report, xix.
Mordecai and McClellan passed the time by taking daily lessons in German. The trio did some sightseeing, bought military books, attended the opera, and endured crowds of Germans who assembled to gape at their uniforms. The period wore on their nerves, because they were worried about accomplishing the primary task of seeing operations in the Crimea. McClellan complained about the slowness of his "miserable companions making] up their minds as to what they will do to day." Only after a plea to the minister of war did they receive an answer to their requests. They received permission to tour eleven military establishments in Berlin and nearby Spandau, not including an arsenal making the new needle gun, which the Prussians preferred to keep secret. The delegation then toured military facilities for another week.  

From Berlin, Delafield assessed their progress and informed Davis of their travel plans:

From the recent events in the Crimea and the active preparations on the side of the allies it seems probable that some great crisis may occur near Sebastopol before the setting in of the winter. We shall therefore make every effort to reach Constantinople at the earliest possible moment.  

McClellan was also concerned, noting on 4 September that they

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6 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 September 1855, DC 577; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 3 June 1855, DC 548; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 26 July-29 August 1855, AMP 2: 189; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 4 September 1855, AMP 2: 190; George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 26 August 1855, GBMP 44: 528; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 4 September 1855, GBMP 3: 398.

7 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 September 1855, DC 577.
were "[s]till in Berlin--only a few days longer, I hope, as events are threatening a crisis in the Crimea & we are anxious to lose no time in getting there." The crisis occurred much sooner than either of them imagined. Four days later the Allies assaulted the garrison, siezed the Malakhov, the central and all-important bastion, and forced the evacuation of the southern side of Sebastopol. This tactical success effectively ended active operations in the Crimean War. 8

Now the commission's internal rift began to manifest itself in earnest. Characteristically, McClellan blamed both his colleagues for the apparent failure:

We have just heard of the capture of Malakoff [sic] & regret that we could not have been there sooner. . . . I fear that the slip I feared between the cup & the lip has occurred & that we are too late. We can however, push on and try it. But these d---d old fogies!! I hope that I may never be tied to two corpses again--it is a hell upon earth--but thank heaven can't last forever. 9

Mordecai, for once, was as agitated as McClellan. In a hand that betrayed the intensity of his emotion, he wrote Sara:

The news received here last night of the destruction of Sebastopol & its abandonment by the Russians completes my dissatisfaction with respect to the course of our operations. It seems ridiculous and will be thought so at home, that we should have come to Europe for the purpose of seeing the siege operations, should have been here during all the interesting events that have taken place thru this summer & should have witnessed none of them. I can only say that the delays which have

8 George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 4 September 1855, GBMP 3: 398; Curtiss, 450-459.

9 George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 9 September 1855, GBMP 3: 404.
taken place on our journey, since our refusal by the Russian Government, have not been with my consent. We are ready to leave here to-day for Dresden & Vienna & I hope we may still be able to see the results of the operations in the Crimea, if not their progress. 10

He did not mention Delafield by name. But the usually correct Mordecai nevertheless clearly condemned the decisions of his senior officer. Both Mordecai and McClellan feared the failure of their mission, the embarrassment of returning home having failed, and the prospect of the long and fruitless journey that still lay ahead, whatever course they were to take. Criticism of Delafield seems more credible in this instance than it did in Russia. The commissioners fully expected to return to western Europe on the way back to the United States. The tempo of military events in the Crimea had accelerated considerably since they had been in Prussia, and the commissioners had felt a need for haste. Notwithstanding their concern, they spent two weeks in Berlin waiting on diplomats and touring installations that could have been inspected after their return from the war. The pace of nineteenth-century travel was slow, but the circumstances seem

10 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 9-12 September, AMP 2: 193. Sara Mordecai replied that she deeply regretted their missing "the terrible conflict," and reported that she had "not heard any blame or censure fall upon you for not being at Sebastopol." She feared that Davis would regret their absence, but she did not know his mind. She had refrained from her usual practice of showing Davis her letters from Mordecai, partly because of Mordecai’s criticism of Delafield. Alfred later congratulated her on her discretion. Sara Mordecai to Alfred Mordecai, 30 September 1855, AMP 3: 757-8; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 4-12 November 1855, AMP 2: 234.
to have warranted more urgency in this instance.

Finally, the commission left Berlin on 12 September, traveling through Dresden and Prague on the way to Vienna. Mordecai was still "sadly disappointed. . . owing to unaccountable official delays and bad management." But he pleasantly recounted visits to an armory, an arsenal, a military school, a military museum, and a performance of the opera during two days in Dresden ("The 'opera girls' were very modest in their movements.") He even regretted missing an opportunity to view the Dresden artworks due to the temporary closure of the gallery. Perhaps the commission had decided that speed was no longer essential in the wake of southern Sebastopol's fall. 11

They arrived in Vienna on 16 September and called on U.S. Minister Henry R. Jackson the next day. Jackson received permission from the foreign minister, Count Buol von Schauenstein, for the American officers to visit Austrian military establishments upon their return from the Crimea. During two days in Vienna the delegation saw the Vienna Arsenal, the royal palace of Schloss Schonbrunn, and the Napoleonic battlefields of Essling and Wagram. Driving to the battlefields they came to a river tributary not shown on the map. McClellan took command and, from memory of his studies of the battles, guided them to the appropriate location,

11 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 13-17 September 1855, AMP 2: 194-197.
impressing his brother officers with both his knowledge of military history and his keen sense of terrain. The outing did them all good and McClellan again dared to hope that they would see "some active operations in the direction of the Tchernaya or the north side of the bay."  

Continuing on to Trieste, the three West Point-trained engineers marveled at the construction of the magnificent Semmering railroad that wound its way through the Austrian Alps, bearing them safely past deadly precipices and breathtaking vistas to the port city. They arrived on 20 September and prepared for the last legs of their trek. "My own opinion is that the time for us to go to the Crimea is past," declared Mordecai, "but my opinion does not prevail, & I go, not unwillingly. . . ."  

The commission embarked from Trieste with no more diplomatic ammunition than the permits Lord Clarendon had issued them during their stay in London. The attempt to gain entrance to Russian lines had failed in St. Petersburg. Having at first declined French permission to enter their lines, coming as it did with intolerable restrictions, the commissioners recanted their refusal and renewed their request to the French government. While in Berlin Delafield had

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12 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 13-17 September 1855, AMP 2: 198-200; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 17-21 September 1855, AMP 2: 201; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 14-19 September 1855, GBMP 3: 409.

13 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 17-21 September 1855, AMP 2: 202-207; Delafield Report, xx1.
written to Ambassador Mason asking him again to intercede with the foreign ministry in their behalf. Mason met with Foreign Minister Count Walewsky and wrote back that the delagation could expect some word from the French soon. But the progress of the mails was slow and the commissioners did not receive Mason's reply before leaving Berlin. It is plausible to attribute some of their loitering en route to waiting for Mason's letter. The news from Walewsky was good: the commissioners would be allowed to enter French lines subject to the same conditions as before. Those restrictions were now effectively moot, as the Americans had no Russian authorization to enter Sebastopol and had no need to return to any other Russian-held territory. But the officers were ignorant of the foreign minister's decision. They left Trieste not knowing how they would be received by the French army, but, as Delafield put it, "trusting to the courtesy of Marshal Pelissier [the French commander] for the facilities we might find necessary in the French camp." 14

"You can readily anticipate the principal occurrences of a sea voyage of which I am the narrator," grumbled Mordecai.

14 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 September 1855, DC 577; John Y. Mason to Delafield, Mordecai and McClellan, 2 September 1855, Richard Delafield Collection, United States Military Academy Library, West Point, New York. Hereinafter cited as Delafield Collection; Count Walewsky to John Y. Mason, 17 September 1855, Delafield Collection; John Y. Mason to Count Walewsky, 18 September 1855, Delafield Collection; Count Walewsky to Marshal Pelissier, 22 September 1855, Delafield Collection; Delafield Report, xix.
After a beautiful departure from Trieste aboard the steamer Adria on 21 September, the wind had changed to give them some rough seas. Mordecai stayed in his berth for two days until he was "able to go & lie about on deck." They sailed out of the Adriatic and around the tip of Peloponnesus, enjoying better weather as they went. The steamer put in at the ports of Corfu and Piraeus, but due to a quarantine against cholera the commissioners were not allowed to go ashore. The Turks imposed no quarantine, and so the officers had a brief stay on land at Smyrna after a week at sea. They arrived at Constantinople on 30 September, but were disappointed at the long-awaited vista: "the scene before us by no means obliterated the recollection of Moscow."  

Though Constantinople was not the beautiful sight the trio expected, it was nonetheless an exotic city, at once primitive and cosmopolitan. Sara Mordecai, mindful of her husband’s reports about European opera girls, was "dying to hear what you think of the beautiful Turkish women--mind you are not to be a Turk, because you are in Turkey." Mordecai and McClellan rode through teeming masses in dust-choked streets to visit the local attractions. Both were most impressed with a performance of "whirling dervishes," whose athletic feats were as astounding as those of the Cossack cavalry. But Mordecai found them "a most melancholy &

15 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 21-27 September 1855, AMP 2: 208; Alfred Mordecai to Laura Mordecai, 28-30 September 1855, AMP 2: 212-215.
degrading exhibition of absurd superstition." Poor weather, unrelenting poverty, and crowded conditions combined to give the officers an unpleasant impression of the city. 16

As was their custom, the delegation called upon United States officials in Turkey, mostly as a matter of courtesy. The secretary of legation escorted them to call on Reshid Mustapha pasha, the Seraskier, or minister of war. He invited them to smoke pipes seven feet long and to drink strong Turkish coffee. Only McClellan was in the habit of smoking; the rest of them "took small whiffs and blew great clouds. . . . The effect of this 'Indian' reception was very much impaired by the European costume which the official people & their servants all adopted, in place of their own savage magnificence." From there they went "to the 'Sublime Porte' itself, to call on Ali Pasha, the Grand Vizier," and repeated the exercise. Although they had met two of the most powerful men in Turkey, nothing came of their visits, principally because nothing was ventured. 17

There was little of military significance in Constantinople to interest the commission. On two occasions they travelled to the English hospital in Scutari, just outside Constantinople, where "Miss Nightingale & her lady

16 Sara Mordecai to Alfred Mordecai, 24 October 1855, AMP 3: 761; Alfred Mordecai to Laura Mordecai, 28-30 September 1855, AMP 2: 216; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 30 September 1855, GBMP 3: 419.

17 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 3-6 October 1855, AMP 2: 219-220.
nurses have carried on their operations." The principal reason for delaying departure to the Crimea was waiting for word from Ambassador Mason, which had still not caught up to them. Delafield informed Davis that they would remain in Constantinople until 3 October, at which time they would sail for Balaklava and deal with the French military independently. As it turned out, they waited until 6 October, when the Royal Navy offered them passage to the Crimea aboard the steamer **Prince of Arabs**. There was still no word from the French. 18

"It appears that nothing of interest has occurred at Sebastopol since the evacuation of the Southern side, & there can scarcely be a doubt but we shall be there in ample time for the next step of the campaign," predicted Delafield. The commissioners were still anxious to know Davis's feelings after their absence from the battle of 8 September. Though Davis did not communicate with them directly, he reassured Sara Mordecai when returning one of Alfred's letters.

It would have been most unreasonable in me to have been dissatisfied with the officers for pursuing the course which seemed most likely to succeed when it was adopted. There are few men who might with more propriety be held responsible for any ignorance of the past than Major Mordecai, but to know the future belongs not to mortal man and over nothing is there a more impenetrable veil than the politics of modern Europe. Foiled in the attempt to witness the attack and defence of Sebastopol, they may yet see the great scene of the campaign and in reviewing the operations before the Tower gather all which will contribute to our

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18 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 3-6 October 1855, AMP 2: 222; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis (written in McClellan's hand), 1 October 1855, DC 584.
military knowledge as effectually as if no delay had occurred. 19

Welcome as these sentiments would have been to the delegation, they sailed in ignorance of them. Still, they were hopeful of success in their mission "to the seat of war." 20

McClellan was playful as he described their preparations to cross the Black Sea:

We take all our camp equipments &c—not to mention a cook & a groom in addition to our courier—so we will have quite a little army of our own—almost as large as the "English contingent"—for so I hear the French designate the English Army." 21

Even Mordecai found the two-day voyage pleasant. They reached Balaklava early on the morning of 8 October, but had to wait in the crowded harbor until evening before they could disembark. The docks were a scene of apparent confusion as men, supplies, and animals of all kinds milled about. Somehow, order emerged from chaos.

British commanding general Sir James Simpson sent aides-de-camp with extra horses to conduct the commissioners to their quarters at Cathcart's Hill, "the great point of observation for lookers-on during the siege & from which the whole field of operations is spread out before you." The

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19 Jefferson Davis to Sara Mordecai, 5 October 1855, AMP 4: 615; The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 5, 124-5.

20 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis (in McClellan's hand), 1 October 1855, DC 584.

21 George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 30 September 1855, GBMP 3: 419.
British quartermaster provided them with a hut, a stove, cots, and provisions, "so you see us quite magnificent." 22 Simpson saw to it that British officers escorted the Americans wherever they cared to go. The delegation attended British reviews and worship services and dined with Simpson himself on at least one occasion. 23

Not surprisingly, the French were much less hospitable. The trio called on Marshal Pelissier soon after their arrival, but General Martinprey, the marshal’s chief of staff, told them that he was not available. Martinprey gave them "printed permits, to visit the French trenches & Sebastopol, that are granted to all unsuspected persons." After a fortnight in the Crimea, the delegation received the long-awaited response from Count Walewsky. However,

the terms on which the permission to visit the French Army in the Crimea was to be granted were quite essentially changed. . . . You will observe, sir, the wide difference between an engagement not to visit "the Russian camp in the Crimea," & one prohibiting us from at any time hereafter visiting any dependency of Russia. . . .

22 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-12 October 1855, AMP 2: 224-226. Generals and correspondents used Cathcart’s Hill as a vantage point during the important operations of the siege. See William H. Russell, Russell’s Dispatches from the Crimea, 1854-1856, Nicolas Bentley, ed. (New York, 1966).

23 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-12 October 1855, AMP 2: 226; journal entries, 14, 20 October 1855, AMP 7; dinner invitation to George B. McClellan from "LtCol Chapman", 18 October 1855, GBMP 3: 454; invitation to a "review of a brigade of Chasseurs d’Afrique" and breakfast afterward with General Morris, 18 October 1855, GBMP 3: 455. General La Marmora, commanding the Sardinian forces, also provided the delegation with an officer escort during visits to his camps. Delafield Report, xix.
In addition to the circumstances just mentioned a more important fact came to our knowledge while in the Crimea—viz: that the very same permission we had asked was granted by the authorities in the Crimea to many people, & even to officers of our own service (Maj Wayne, Capt Porter & Mr Heap of the Army) without any conditions being imposed.

In view of these conditions we determined not to present the letter to Marshal Pelissier, & did not enter any of the French camps after we received it on 25th Octr. . . . [W]e consider ourselves as bound in good faith to carry out our original understanding not to visit the Russian Camps in the Crimea—but nothing further. 24

The commissioners never saw Pelissier. They paid two courtesy calls, but were not allowed to see him. Martinprey promised to arrange an appointment, but the Americans left the Crimea without another word from the French. 25

Despite the French obstacle the commission saw a great deal of the Crimea. "The daily exercise of riding 12 or 15 miles over this rough country keeps both body & mind in excellent condition," reported Mordecai. The officers ranged over the battlefields of Inkermann, Tchernaya, Traktir Bridge, and Balaklava, viewing former sites of great carnage and envisioning how the battles had developed. The use of

24 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis (in McClellan’s hand), 5 November 1855, DC 586. Jefferson Davis had placed Major Henry C. Wayne at the head of a commission "for importing camels for ‘Army transportation and for other military purposes.’" The Crimean commission met Wayne and company in Constantinople and again in the Crimea. Porter and Heap were officers of the navy, not the army, as McClellan said. Rowland, Vol. II, 461; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 30 September 1855, GBMP 3: 419; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-20 October 1855, AMP 2: 230; Delafield Report, xx.

25 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis (in McClellan’s hand), 5 October 1855, DC 586.
artillery fire had been unprecedented in its scope. Mordecai estimated that, even in this time of relative quiet, both sides were firing "at least 500 or 600 shots a day.... The English alone, who occupied but a small part of the works of attack, have used more than 250,000 cannon balls!" Incessant artillery duels gave McClellan his wish of coming under fire:

As there were 5 of us mounted in company, the Russians seemed to think us a mark worth shooting at. So some few shells burst near enough to remind me a little of Vera Cruz. Thank heaven that I shall not return without having been under fire, even if it were a trifling matter indeed. 26

That episode, much as it satisfied McClellan, was not the closest they came to injury. During one excursion a mine exploded nearby, killing five Frenchmen and showing "that death was still latent beneath the ground already so gorged with victims." 27

Death owed its ubiquity in the Crimean War to advancements in military technology. Artillery improvements afforded gunners greater ranges and faster rates of fire. Moreover, Allied steamers had enabled the navies to supply ammunition to the armies faster and more efficiently by sea than Russian ox-carts could by land. Nevertheless, in the early battles the Russians had been able to provide themselves

26 George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 12 October 1855, GBMP 3: 431.

27 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-20 October 1855, AMP 2: 228-9; Journal entries: 13 October, 18 October, 23 October 1855, AMP 7; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452.
with enough ammunition to challenge the Allies. As a result, the commissioners saw several quite impressive scenes of past artillery battles. "In the 'valley of death' in one place our horses actually walked over a pavement of Russian cannon balls laid as close as the paving stones in the street before your door & and this not done by hand." 28

The second advance was in rifled small arms. The effects of these weapons were not nearly so noticeable to the commissioners. Being unable to witness a true battle, they failed to observe the awesome power of rifled weaponry in the hands of well-drilled infantry. Only an occasional soldier's cap, drilled through by a "minié" ball, gave a hint at the devastation worked by these new rifles. 29 In his journal, Mordecai recorded impressions of the new British weapons while in the battle area:

Nearly all the troops furnished with these muskets [Enfields]. . . . From Col. Kennedy--Enfield musket much improved as to range, accuracy & effect. trouble found with the ball at first from want of accuracy in making. those with iron culots liable to be separated in two. new ball adopted for them with wooden plug, not rec'd out here, but said to be perfectly satisfactory in practice. firing 300 rounds without failing & ranging even 1500 yards. 30


29 George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452.

30 Alfred Mordecai, journal entry, 11 October 1855, AMP 7.
The description of these lethal British weapons was detached and dispassionate, not betraying the emotion one would have felt having seen their use in battle. A range of fifteen hundred yards was worthy of note, since the standard smoothbore musket was ineffective beyond two hundred yards, but it excited no awe or fear in the major.

One of the chief effects of these advancements in weaponry was to force the armies to dig below the surface of the ground. The siegeworks and defenses of Sebastopol were reminiscent of eighteenth-century warfare. "At every step," wrote Mordecai, "my admiration for the wonderful defence of the Russians is increased by seeing the evidence of great skill & labor in the construction of their works & great perseverance in their defence." McClellan analyzed the battle of 8 September on the strength of his post facto observations. He concluded that the French success in taking the vaunted Malakhov owed as much to entrenchments that had snaked over several months to within twenty yards of the Russian lines as it did to the infantry assault that occurred on that day. 

Only in the ruins of Sebastopol itself did the American officers get a true appreciation for the awful devastation worked by modern warfare. Sebastopol was "such a scene of ruin and destruction... in place of what was lately a

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31 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-20 October 1855, AMP 2: 230; Goerge B. McClellan to John McClellan, 12 October 1855, GBMP 3: 431.
beautiful city." McClellan averred that Pompeii is not more desolate than Sebastopol. . . not one [house is] habitable, few have any fragment of a roof, & not one solitary inhabitant is left. . . . fragments of shells everywhere scattered about.

You see at a glance what a bloody & determined strife was there enacted, & are half surprised that you do not still see in heaps around you the dead bodies of the gallant French & brave English, & the thrice heroic Russians. The earth everywhere ploughed & reploughed up by shot & shell--exploded magazines--ruined traverses--broken guns, disabled carriages--charred timber--uniforms & accoutrements, all torn and bloody. . . .

The "smell of mortality" enveloped the broken city. Sebastopol writhed in filth, disease, and vermin. During one ride McClellan unwisely elected to inspect a Russian bunker:

How Rusky lived in his bombproofs I can't imagine. . . . I went into one on one occasion & merely remained a moment. Just long enough to see the interior arrangements & general dimensions (for I had been forewarned of consequences & jocosely remarked "I'll go one flea on it anyhow."[]) When I came up to Mother Earth, my pants were literally black with the wretches.

The delegation spent the next several nights in their hut "in sanguinary contest with the fleas." Yet the physical discomfiture visited upon them by the fleas paled in comparison to the awful sights of destruction.

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32 George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452.

33 George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452.

34 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-12 October 1855, AMP 2: 227; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-20 October 1855, AMP 2: 230; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 2: 452.
Mordecai called the scenes "extraordinary," "bewildering," and "incredible." The officers sensed that they were at the site of a watershed event in the history of warfare. "It was really an epoch in one's life time to walk through the remains of that ruined city," wrote McClellan. "The impression it made upon me can never be erased." 35

Military camps of that day were unhealthy places at best; many more soldiers died in the Crimea of disease than of wounds. On 22 October Mordecai fell ill. Four days later he was well enough to inform Sara "that since last I wrote, I have been suffering with the disease of the camp, of all camps. Nothing like cholera, however." The proper major was too gentlemanly to name his malady while it persisted for a fortnight. Once back in Constantinople and again on his feet he confessed that he had been suffering from bilious diarrhea, "not overcome as readily as I hoped." Indeed, the disease immobilized Mordecai for the remainder of their stay in Sebastopol, forcing the other officers to make special arrangements for his overland transportation to the port at Balaklava. For a day or two, the major convalesced at a field hospital in the rear of British lines, attended by Florence Nightingale, "a lady with a very pleasant & good face--still young--pretty. . . . Her manner very modest & ladylike."

35 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11 October 1855, AMP 2: 227; George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 14 January 1856, GBMP 44: 563.
While visiting the hospital, Delafield thanked her as "an American soldier... for the beneficial influence she had awakened in behalf of the medical branch of my profession." 36

Not surprisingly, Mordecai's assessment of the journey to the Crimea was grim. "I regret the whole Expedition as a ridiculous failure & most heartily wish that I had not been connected with it." Mordecai may be forgiven this outburst in consideration of his illness. There is no question that he received less benefit from the tour of the war zone than his companions. McClellan satisfied his desires to see the battlefields and filled notebooks with his impressions. He pronounced himself changed by his experiences. Delafield sent Davis two letters on the subject of the Crimea. One was an unofficial appraisal of the military situation. (The Allies were to dig in for the winter; the Russians could still hold out in Sebastopol.) The other, an official report of their progress, dwelt on diplomatic travails with the French and then offered the following assessment: "It is believed that as a general rule the information contemplated in our instructions has been procured to a useful extent." That terse sentence, while positive, was hardly a ringing cry of

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36 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 21-26 October 1855, AMP 2: 232; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 4 November 1855, AMP 2: 234; Patrick Fraser to Florence Nightingale, 29 October 1855, AMP 3: 766; George B. McClellan, journal entries, 28 and 30 October 1855, GBMP 76: 596-597; Delafield Report, 75.
success. It was also a severe understatement. 37

The delegation boarded the British steamer Brandon in crowded Balaklava harbor on 31 October. One can only imagine the already-ill Mordecai's misery as they loitered two days at anchor before departing. The steamer put in at Constantinople on 4 November and the commission prepared for the long trek home. 39

While in Constantinople the delegation caught up on their correspondence, sent Davis a number of photographs of Sebastopol and the surrounding area, toured a Turkish arsenal and the Sultan's palace, and awaited departure of the next steamer. They elected to return to Vienna by way of the scenic and historic Danube. Boarding the Persia, they departed Constantinople on 13 November. What ensued was "a chapter of accidents & a series of mishaps that are almost enough to form a second Odyssey [sic]." 39

37 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 4 November 1855, AMP 2: 235; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis (in McClellan's hand), "Unofficial," 5 November 1855, DC 589; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis (in McClellan's hand), 5 November 1855, DC 586.

38 Alfred Mordecai, journal entries, 31 October, 2 November, 4 November 1855, AMP 7; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 4 November 1855, AMP 2: 234; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 November 1855, DC 586.

39 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 11 November 1855, DC 593; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 11 November 1855, GBMP 3: 466; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 18 December 1855, GBMP 3: 472; Alfred Mordecai, journal entry, 13 November 1855, AMP 7.
"The unsteadiness of my hand is due to long confinement on shipboard," grumbled Mordecai. They had traveled as far as Varna on the Black Sea coast when the steam engine’s cylinder cracked. Together with three or four hundred Turks, they lay at anchor and awaited the arrival of another steamer. A week passed before the steamer Arciduco Ludivoco arrived. They boarded her and continued as far as Silistria at the mouth of the Danube only to discover that the vessel’s draft was too deep for the shallow river. Turning about, they arrived back in Constantinople on 29 November, over two weeks after they had departed. Mordecai alone found a small consolation on this misadventure. "The sea was rough & I suffered as usual from seasickness; but it had the effect of completely curing me of the illness I had previously." Indeed, the inveterate landlubber felt the "voyage seemed to season me to the sea." 40

The trio left Constantinople once again on 3 December aboard the Egypto, this time retracing the path that had brought them to the Crimea. The quarantine that had kept them shipbound in September was still in effect. A relatively uneventful, ten-day voyage deposited them back at Trieste. By 16 December they had returned to Vienna, marveling once

40 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 November-17 December 1855, AMP 2: 242; Alfred Mordecai, journal entries, 13-29 November 1855, AMP 7; George B. McClellan to Arthur McClellan, 22 December 1855, GBMP 3: 483; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 18 December 1855, GBMP 3: 472; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 3 December 1855, DC 598.
again on their journey at the Alpine scenery and the masterpiece of engineering that was the Semmering railroad. "

Austria had much to offer the weary trio. During the following month they found the Austrians exceptionally forthcoming and hospitable.

Nowhere have all our requests been so promptly complied with--nowhere have all things been so freely thrown open to us--nowhere has more trouble been taken to show us everything. Everything we have asked for... has been promptly furnished. "

They filled their days with visits to barracks, hospitals, and riding schools for artillery and cavalry. The new year found them in Wiener Neustadt at the Austrian military academy where they became acquainted with the academic buildings, the cadets, and the curriculum. Nearby was a huge new academy for engineers and artillery, whose façade was six hundred yards long. There, McClellan found

very valuable information in relation to the Austrian system of saps... much better than the others & so simple that I think myself a great fool for not having thought of it myself when engaged in such things... it shows the effect of routine upon the mind--the thing I allude to is after all not new--but consists in adapting as the rule what others have made the exceptional case. "

" Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 November-17 December 1855, AMP 2: 243-246; Alfred Mordecai, journal entries, 3-16 December 1855, AMP 7.

" George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 29 December 1855, GBMP 3: 492.

" George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 1 January 1856, GBMP 3: 500. McClellan's discovery was rather esoteric. It concerned a more efficient and faster method of constructing saps, or trenches. George B. McClellan, The Armies of Europe,
Unwittingly, those engineers validated for McClellan the worth of the entire journey to Europe. The specific piece of military arcana that he gleaned from watching the troops was relatively unimportant. Crucial, however, was the exercise of gathering information from several professional sources, compiling them, thinking about them—in essence, eliminating "the effect of routine upon the mind." McClellan would "return from my travels with wider & clearer ideas, & kinder feelings towards the old world, than I had when I started." "

The most fascinating visit of all was to the immense Vienna Arsenal, which took them five days to tour. "[T]he vastness of the military preparations, collected in one spot, is perfectly bewildering." The Viennese threw open the works of this arms laboratory, discussing technical details of gunpowder and metallurgy to Mordecai's delight. The ordnance major's journal contains twenty-three pages of sketches and technical notes from these visits. Vienna Arsenal developed small arms and artillery pieces for field, siege, garrison, and seacoast. It also housed some six thousand troops and was so constructed as to make it a formidable garrison. The


"Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 19-24 December 1855, AMP 2: 250-2; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 25-30 December 1855, AMP 2: 254-6; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-10 January 1856, AMP 2: 258-9; Alfred Mordecai, journal entries, 16 December 1855-11 January 1856, AMP 7; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 10 January 1856, DC 610; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 29 December 1856, GBMP 3: 492."
architects of the arsenal happily furnished the Americans a "duplicate set of some 15 elegant photographs, very expensive, & refused to take anything for them." 45

Although their official schedule kept them busy, the officers were immediately caught up in the social circles of diplomatic Vienna. Through the good offices of the affable Ambassador Jackson, the trio soon befriended Count Buol von Schauenstein, the foreign minister. Between these two diplomats, the delegation seldom had a night's rest during the busy Christmas social season. They attended receptions, dinners, and a wedding, rubbing elbows with the nobility of Austria and such international notables as Prince Gortschakoff, a marshal of the Russian army. Ambassador Jackson, who did his best to introduce the commission to official Vienna, was "perfectly astonished at the attentions bestowed upon" them. The highlight of their stay in the capital was a court ball on 9 January 1856. They were presented to the Emperor Franz Josef and Empress Elizabeth. The empress was both strikingly beautiful and charming. Franz Josef "took more than usual notice of us--had something to say to each of us--knew where we had been & c & c." He even complimented them on the photographs of Sebastopol, "which

45 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 19-24 December 1855, AMP 2: 250-1; Alfred Mordecai, journal entries, 19-20 December 1855, AMP 7; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 10 January 1856, DC 610; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 29 December 1855, GBMP 3: 492; Those photos were included in the Delafield Report.
have attracted great attention here." They left Vienna with "unalloyed satisfaction with the treatment which we have received. . . from the Emperor to the court officials." In fact, their reception in the Austrian capital spoiled them for the rest of the trip. Before leaving on 13 January they took farewell cards to their new friends, including Buol. "We did not think it necessary to extend this civility to Frank since he had not sent us a written card for his 'picayune' ball." "

Leaving Vienna, the delegation accelerated the pace of their travel considerably. They returned to Trieste by the same rails that had borne them twice before, beginning a seven-week trek through central and western Europe. First they toured the cities of Venice, Verona, Mantua, Milan, and Genoa. Visiting the military works and sights of Venice consumed almost a week. Elsewhere, the delegation tarried no longer than a couple of days. Their daily rounds continued to include fortresses, hospitals, and arsenals, while the nights brought opera, theater, and formal dinners. In Verona their most gracious host was ninety-year-old Marshal Count

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George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 29 December 1855, GBMP 3: 492; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 1 January 1856, GBMP 3: 500; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 9 January 1856, GBMP 3: 510; George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 14 January 1856, GBMP 44: 563; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 19-24 December 1855, AMP 2: 250-253; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 25-30 December 1855, AMP 2: 254-256; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-10 January 1856, AMP 2: 258-264; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 13-19 January 1856, AMP 2: 256.
Radetzky, an old foe of Napoleon, perhaps the only bright star in the Austrian constellation during the campaign of 1809. The marshal continued to extend the Austrian hospitality the Americans had come to expect while in Vienna, showing them the extensive works of the city which formed a fortified encampment for one hundred thousand men.  

Predictably and abruptly, the reception changed when the delegation crossed into France. At first the French seemed simply subdued in comparison to the Austrians. But as the officers traveled from Nice through Toulon, Marseilles, Lyon, Dijon, and Belfort, the French, especially the French military, began to appear almost hostile to them. "We have found almost everything less agreeable in France than elsewhere—worse roads, worse inns, worse attendance, less politeness & attention on the part of officials (none at all indeed) & so far a less interesting country." French officials were often unwilling to honor the permits the commission had received from the war ministry. When the French did admit the delegation, they either provided inadequate guides or none at all. These insults rankled all the more for the immediate contrast with Austrian hospitality. Whether this reception began to color their perceptions or the

French military were indeed less disciplined than others, the commission formed a miserable impression of Gallic soldiery. 

At Strasbourg matters began to improve. Once in Prussia the commission again found itself in helpful and courteous hands. They sailed down the Rhine, touring the works at Rastadt and Coblenz with proper escort. Their authority for touring at Coblenz did not permit them to inspect the entire fortress, the commandant promptly wired Berlin for more extensive permission, which he just as quickly received.

In the ancient arms-making city of Liège, the Belgians showed them a cannon foundry, an armory, and numerous small arms factories. Due to demand created by the Crimean War, Liège had produced 562,000 small arms in 1854 alone. The trio traveled by rail to Brussels, from which McClellan and Delafield took a day trip to Waterloo. Mordecai stayed behind to visit another arsenal, where he met a Colonel Bowman "of the Belgian artillery, an officer of great ability well known to me by reputation & who was 'very glad to meet Major

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48 Alfred Mordecai, journal entries, 31 January-10 February 1856, AMP 7; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 31 January-4 February 1856, AMP 2: 278; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 7-12 February 1856, AMP 2: 280-281; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-19 February 1856, AMP 2: 285-289; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 18 February 1856, GBMP 3: 540; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 17 February 1856, DC 617.

Mordecai whose name is also well known in Belgium!"  

On 2 March the delegation returned to Paris, where the marshal commanding offered them the run of the city, but no guide, "so we must find our own way & introduce ourselves everywhere. . . . This is what he calls 'furnishing us with all the necessary facilities to visit the mil[itar]y establishments, & c.'" The commissioners began to wonder if something unspoken was responsible for their ill favor.  

In Constantinople the French had jokingly boasted of seizing that city "without firing a shot." Along with the English, the French had amassed a sizable sea and land force that, while it had its hands full fighting the Russians, was more than equal to the task. Indeed, when the American officers arrived back in Paris, a peace conference was in session in the French capital, tangible evidence of the prowess of Allied arms. There were rumors prior to their arrival that the French or the English or both, flushed with victory over Russia, would like to continue their aggrandizement in an aggressive war against the United States while the armies and fleets were in fighting trim. On 18 February McClellan informed his mother that "[t]he probability


51 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 February-5 March 1856, AMP 2: 295; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 March 1856, DC 623.
of war with England begins to look so strong that it is almost
time to think of getting across the ocean before it breaks out
& stops communication." 52

Convinced that this threat was real, McClellan penned "a
military sermon" to former secretary of state Senator John M.
Clayton in which he advised the old family friend to use his
influence to arm the United States against such an attack.
He suggested improving American fortifications, anchorages,
"8" & 10" guns & carriages, . . . shot, shells & powder." The
captain went on to propose a number of specific reforms
urgently needed if the nation were to be prepared for war. 53

The views I have expressed have been mentioned
& strengthened by the very favorable opportunities
I have enjoyed, during the past year, of examining
the military preparations & establishments of the
great powers of Europe. The great object of being
sent to Europe, was to compare our own condition
with theirs--I would be wanting in my duty to my
country did I not say what I think, when it may be
of service.

All that I have written to you is done
confidentially. . . . 54

52 George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 11 November
1855, GBMP 3: 466; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 18
December 1855, GBMP 3: 472; George B. McClellan to John
McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452; Alfred Mordecai to
Sara Mordecai, 29 February-5 March 1856, AMP 2: 296; J.H.
Dillon to George B. McClellan, 19 January 1856, GBMP 44: 567;
George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 18 February 1856,
GBMP 3: 540.

53 George B. McClellan to "My dear little one," 4 March
1856, GBMP 3: 557; George B. McClellan to John M. Clayton, 18
February 1856, GBMP 3: 548-552.

54 George B. McClellan to John M. Clayton, 18 February
1856, GBMP 3: 548. McClellan was most fortunate that Clayton
kept his letter confidential--Jefferson Davis, stickler for
protocol, would assuredly have looked askance at an officer's
Given their unpleasant reception and the fact that their permits from the minister of war were frequently spurned, the officers appealed to Ambassador Mason for assistance. He arranged an appointment for them with Marshal Vaillant, minister of war, who had issued their permits. During the ensuing interview Vaillant questioned the permission the Americans had received and professed not to remember that he had personally tendered it. He refused to give the commission certain drawings of artillery pieces, though the United States had already extended the French the same courtesy. And he even suggested that an armed clash between French and American forces was imminent. The minister closed the extraordinary interview by extending innocuous courtesies and then, "Until we begin to fire our guns, I wish you good day." 55

Despite their troubles, the commission found some Frenchmen helpful. In addition to visiting forts, schools, and hospitals "without any guide but our own knowledge," they passed two days in company with Captain Claude Minié, inventor of the rifle and ammunition that bore his name. McClellan also went, by invitation, to a cavalry school at Saumur, spending four days there under the instruction of Monsieur correspondence with a senator on such matters.

55 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 April 1856, DC 689; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 7-13 March 1856, AMP 2: 299. Jefferson Davis asked Secretary of State William L. Marcy to investigate "the rude & offensive treatment of the commission by the French Minister of War." Jefferson Davis to William L. Marcy, 22 April 1856, DC 695.
Baucher, who had developed an innovative method of equitation training for cavalry. Baucher offered to extend the course to a full month of individual instruction. McClellan asked the War Department for permission to stay behind to attend the school, but returned to travel with his companions while he awaited word.  

However, in his only letter to the commission while they were abroad Davis suggested that they expedite their travels.

I have received your letter dated at Vienna the 10th ultimo and all your previous dispatches. I am gratified to hear of the extensive opportunities you and your companions have enjoyed of inspecting works and articles of professional interest, and am anxious for your return so soon as you shall have completed the further examinations which you may deem necessary.  

The commissioners were, after all, several months past 1 November 1855, the return date proposed in their original instructions. Nevertheless, Davis clearly gave them the latitude to do what they considered necessary to complete

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56 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 7-13 March 1856, AMP 2: 298-299; Charles Radziminski to Jefferson Davis, 8 October 1855, GBMP 3: 437; Samuel Cooper to George B. McClellan, 24 January 1856, GBMP 3: 532; George B. McClellan to Samuel Cooper, 3 March 1856, GBMP 44: 577; George B. McClellan to Samuel Cooper, 4 March 1856, GBMP 3: 562; George B. McClellan to "My dear little one," 4 March 1856, GBMP 3: 557; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 March 1856, DC 623; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 April 1856, DC 689. This record of correspondence shows that McClellan first learned of the French cavalry school at Saumur from the War Department. A U.S. Army lieutenant wrote to Jefferson Davis suggesting that the commission visit the school. Cooper forwarded the request to McClellan.

57 Jefferson Davis to Richard Delafield, 9 February 1856, DC 615.
their mission. The secretary’s letter "has determined me [McClellan] to return with the others." They decided not to stay much longer in France and England, "as we have received to-day from the Secy. of War a sort of reminder that we are to return ‘when we have finished.’" The interview with Vaillant a few days later confirmed this decision. 58

"I have never felt any regret at leaving Paris... how charming a place it ought to be," lamented Mordecai. They went first to Cherbourg, where they had surprisingly little difficulty. The fortress chief of staff lent them a barge to tour "the works in the harbor, which are on the greatest scale of any operations of the kind." After three days in Cherbourg the delegation continued on to Havre and crossed the Channel that night, arriving in London on 24 March. 59

The following day the commission called on Buchanan’s successor as U.S. ambassador to Britain, George M. Dallas, former vice-president of the United States. They asked him to request the permits necessary for them to tour numerous military facilities they had not seen the previous year. Dallas agreed to ask the prime minister, Lord Palmerston.

58 George B. McClellan to "My dear little one," 4 March 1856, GBMP 3: 557; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 February-5 March 1856, AMP 2: 296; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 7-13 March 1856, AMP 2: 299; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 April 1856, DC 689.

59 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-19 March 1856, AMP 2: 301; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 21-28 March 1856, AMP 2: 302; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 April 1856, DC 689.
Little had changed to speed British bureaucrats since their first stop. Though rumors of impending war with Britain had abated, the delegation still felt badly treated by the slow maneuverings of British government. The commissioners waited over two weeks for the permits. 60

In the interim they amused themselves in various ways. McClellan and Mordecai went to Madame Toussaud's wax museum. The officers attended the theater and opera on several nights. They took in the London zoo, the natural history museum, and the Crystal Palace in Sydenham. Delafield and McClellan even managed a quick excursion to Edinburgh. 61

The commission had arranged passage from Liverpool when their permits arrived. With scarcely a week before departure, they raced to see all they could. They hurried to see the Enfield arms factory, newly outfitted with American machinery, then "flew up to Manchester to look at another great machine shop there." They traveled to the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich, but were denied entrance for lack of proper authorization. Authorities resolved the problem and the delegation returned

60 Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 April 1856, DC 689; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 21-28 March 1856, AMP 2: 303; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 February-5 March 1856, AMP 2: 296; George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 26 March 1856, GBMP 44: 589; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-18 April 1856, AMP 2: 315.

61 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 21-28 March, AMP 2: 303; Alfred Mordecai to Laura Mordecai, 2 April 1856, AMP 2: 309; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 4 April 1856, GBMP 3: 567; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 10 April 1856, GBMP 3: 568.
to receive a guided tour the next day. They visited two shipyards, but declined an invitation to a "grand naval review" at Portsmouth, scheduled to occur after their departure. In Liverpool they found "several pretty letters from high authorities, who appeared to have waked up just too late, offering facilities to see various places, & c." 62

The delegation boarded the steamer Persia for the final leg of their nearly twenty-thousand-mile journey on 19 April. Nine days later, the long-suffering Mordecai noted: "Our voyage has combined all the favorable circumstances that might render it agreeable. . . but, unhappily, nothing affords me a dispensation from the horrors of seasickness." He was home in Philadelphia for dinner the next night, 29 April 1856, just over a year after departing from Boston. 63

62 After the British bureaucracy decided to entertain the commission, doors flew open across the country. But the delegation was out of time. Delafield Report, xxiii; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 April 1856, DC 689; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 23 May 1856, National Archives Microfilm No. 567, roll 536, frames 167-188; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-18 April 1856, AMP 2: 315-316; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 30 March-2 April 1856, AMP 2: 306-308.

63 Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 28-29 April 1856, AMP 2: 321.
CHAPTER FOUR
"TO IMPART INFORMATION TO THE PROFESSION"

After a few days' rest, the commissioners met with Jefferson Davis in Washington to discuss the trip and procedures for preparing their reports. Davis soon provided the delegation with regulations to govern their work. The commission would establish an office in Washington, holding its meetings and storing all books, maps, and other materials there. The secretary agreed to allow Delafield and McClellan to work at their homes in New York and Philadelphia, respectively, so long as the official headquarters of the commission remained in Washington. ¹

Delafield decided that there would be little need for the commissioners to meet frequently to discuss their work. Each member would write his report on the subjects he felt most confident to address. Given their different interests and branches of the army, it was likely that there would be little duplication of effort. When it appeared that Mordecai and

¹ The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 6, xlv; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 29 April 1856, DC 630; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 16 May 1856, DC 632; Jefferson Davis to Richard Delafield, 20 May 1856, DC 636; Richard Delafield to George B. McClellan, 28 May 1856, GBMP 3: 584; Richard Delafield to George B. McClellan, 30 May 1856, GBMP 3: 587; George B. McClellan to Richard Delafield, 9 June 1856, Delafield Collection; George B. McClellan to Jefferson Davis, 19 June 1856, GBMP 3: 598; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 23 June 1856, National Archives Microfilm No. 221, roll 178, frames 129-31; Jefferson Davis to Richard Delafield, 23 June 1856, Delafield Collection.
McClellan were traversing the same ground (to their mutual displeasure), Delafield played the diplomat. He felt there was no need for collaboration or determining a majority viewpoint on any matter at issue:

> If we differ better that our views be stated and the observed facts with them. . . . Hence I say, work away--write what in your judgement is calculated to impart information to the profession. And each of us doing the same will be the more instructed to learn what each of us thought and how each saw the same things in a different light.

And so, they worked away, each in his own area of interest, each at his own pace.

McClellan was able to work faster than the majors because he was allowed to focus entirely on his report. The others were both quickly assigned other duties that required much attention. Delafield first resumed command of the New York harbor defenses, then in September 1856 returned to West Point for a second tour as superintendent of the Military Academy. The War Department tasked Mordecai with revising the army’s regulations. That assignment was barely completed in February 1857 when he assumed command of Watervliet Arsenal in Troy, New York, the army’s principal arsenal of construction. As a result, McClellan finished his work in January 1857, while

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2 Richard Delafield to George B. McClellan, 28 May 1856, GBMP 3: 584; Alfred Mordecai to George B. McClellan, 6 September 1856, GBMP 5: 027; George B. McClellan to Richard Delafield, 15 September 1856, Delafield Collection.

3 Richard Delafield to George B. McClellan, 21 July 1856, GBMP 4: 019.
the majors did not complete their reports until much later: Mordecai in March 1858 and Delafield in November 1860. 4

After settling in Philadelphia, McClellan began to teach himself Russian. In a few months time he mastered the language and translated Russian army regulations and a manual of cavalry tactics. These comprised the bulk of his report to the secretary of war. He added sketches of engineer, infantry, and cavalry troops of the European nations they had visited. The result was a richly detailed portrait of the armies of Europe with descriptions of their organizations, tactics, training, recruiting practices, equipment, arms, stables, barracks, rations and uniforms, complete with diagrams and portraits. More than a dispassionate recital, the book also urged the United States to emulate the best components of the European systems. 5

Because he was specifically interested in cavalry, McClellan spent a bit more time on that subject, comparing the Europeans to one another and all of them to the United States Cavalry. When he first returned from Europe, McClellan

4 Richard Delafield to George B. McClellan, 28 May 1856, GBMP 3: 584; Register, 247; Falk, "Soldier-Technologist," 492-493; George B. McClellan to Jefferson Davis, 24 January 1857, National Archives Microfilm No. 567, roll 563, frame 74; Mordecai Report, 1; Delafield Report, xxiv.

5 George B. McClellan to Richard Delafield, 9 June 1856, Delafield Collection; George B. McClellan to Jefferson Davis, 31 December 1856, GBMP 4: 092; McClellan Report, passim.
received several letters from his friend and superior officer in the First Cavalry Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph E. Johnston. Johnston was quite dissatisfied with affairs in his regiment and in the United States Cavalry in general. The principal source of his unrest was his commanding officer, Colonel Edwin V. Sumner. The regiment had no useful tactical manual and relied too much on Sumner's own experience and limited energies for its training. Johnston advised McClellan not to hurry to join them in Kansas.

The result of your expedition should be put into print as soon as practicable, for the benefit of the Army & you must of course attend to what pertains to cavalry. . . . So take advantage of your interviews with the Sec. in Washington to impress upon him the necessity of something more reliable, for the management of horses and horsemen, than the knowledge & intelligence of superior officers, which at present are very unreliable. We are without cavalry regulations and must have them--or we shall never have cavalry. This regiment has not begun to be so yet--& can not until we have a system to control its head. You have yet to learn how ignorant a man can keep himself who relies, for knowledge, upon experience, & yet never observes or remembers.

Johnston, like McClellan, was a relative newcomer to the cavalry, having transferred when the new regiments were formed in 1855. He desired to reform the branch and to give it vitality through systematic training, energetic leadership, and first-rate soldiers. Although McClellan did not act on all of his friend's suggestions, Johnston clearly influenced

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6 Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 21 March 1856, GBMP 44: 582.
the young captain in many details and in the general impression that the cavalry sorely needed reform. As Johnston put it, "My hopes of U.S. Cavalry are in your efforts--so bestir yourself."  

McClellan stirred. In his report on United States Cavalry, he compared European and American systems, pushing an agenda of reform, the most vital part of which was training. The French Cavalry School at Saumur was "the most perfect and extensive institution of the kind in Europe,--perhaps the only one really deserving the title." Accordingly, McClellan argued that the United States should establish a cavalry school and model it on Saumur.  

He also urged the adoption of new cavalry equipment. First, he recommended a new cavalry sabre:

Ours are too heavy and badly balanced; so bad are they, that many of our cavalry officers are disposed upon the sabre as an useless weapon. As this is without doubt [sic] the true weapon of cavalry, too

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7 McClellan Report, 116-200, 295-489; Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 30 March 1856, GBMP 44: 593; Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 13 April 1856, GBMP 44: 599; Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 10 August 1856, GBMP 4: 010. The relationship between these two men is most intriguing because they would, within six years, face each other in battle as commanders of large armies. Johnston seems to have had almost a fatherly love for the young captain. When McClellan resigned his commission, Johnston wrote a poignant letter expressing the personal loss he felt: "there is no one left in the regiment or army to take your place. I wish I was young enough to resign, too." Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 2 January 1856, GBMP 45: 044.

8 McClellan Report, 364, 391.
much pains cannot be bestowed upon its manufacture. 9

The army tested but did not adopt McClellan’s proposed model. However, in 1861 it did accept another light sabre. 10

McClellan also made a detailed proposal for a new type of saddle and horse equipment based on a Prussian cavalry saddle of Hungarian design. McClellan asked that he be allowed to modify the design, oversee its construction, and offer it to the army for adoption. Davis agreed. The army tested McClellan’s saddle in the West along with several other new designs. A board of cavalry officers reviewed the tests in January 1859 and selected McClellan’s as the army standard. Mounted soldiers rode McClellan saddles until 1943, when horse cavalry passed from the scene. 11

McClellan published the Russian cavalry tactics which he had translated, having
deavored to adapt them to our own organization, preserving the original arrangement, and adding only a few minor details suggested by the recollections of former reading & of service in the field. It is more than probable that they will be found to fill an important gap in our military literature, and they are undoubtedly based upon true military

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9 George B. McClellan to Jefferson Davis, 3 October 1856, GBMP 4: 023, endorsed and approved, Jefferson Davis, 4 November 1856.


11 George B. McClellan to Jefferson Davis, 3 October 1856, GBMP 4: 023, endorsed and approved, Jefferson Davis, 4 November 1856; Steffen, 53–63.
principles. 

Like most military thinkers of his day, McClellan paid principal attention to the role of cavalry in combat, rather than in reconnaissance. Indeed, he declared that "the strength of cavalry is in the 'spurs and saddles,'" meaning the cavalry charge, a belief consistent with his assertion that the sabre was "the true weapon of cavalry." The army never officially adopted McClellan's manual, but because of its wide distribution with the rest of his report and his own later eminence, the manual received great attention. It is significant that McClellan's principal innovation was a single-rank formation, which Philip St. George Cooke also included in his semi-official tactical manual in 1861. Cooke intended the single rank to eliminate the confusion caused when two successive, galloping ranks became intermingled in contact with the enemy. 

Perhaps the most intriguing part of McClellan's report...

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12 George B. McClellan to Jefferson Davis, 31 December 1856, GMBP 4: 692.

13 McClellan Report, 385-489, 390, 387; Stephen Z. Starr, The Union Cavalry in the Civil War, Vol. 1 (Baton Rouge, 1979), 19; Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson, Attack and Die: Civil War Tactics and the Southern Heritage (University, Alabama, 1982), 62-68. McClellan mentioned that "the instruction in two lines should be provided for." Edward Hagerman has interpreted this to mean that his Regulations "espoused conventional two-rank tactics." But earlier, McClellan had written, "THE FORMATION OUGHT TO BE IN ONE RANK." (Capitals his.) It is clear to me that McClellan thought the fundamental tactical formation should be a single rank. See Edward Hagerman, The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare: Ideas, Organization, and Field Command (Bloomington, Indiana, 1988), 57.
is its introduction, wherein the captain critiqued the armies in the Crimea and the generalship on both sides, especially Admiral Prince Menshikov. McClellan felt it was folly to place an admiral in command of the Russian land forces. However, he was most impressed with the defenses at Sebastopol, and gave full credit to the Russian engineer, Colonel E. I. Totalben. Although the Russian lines were not perfect, they had been constructed in great haste and under constant Allied fire: "it was a source of astonishment that such gigantic results could have been achieved with such paltry means." Totalben had established a brilliant reputation. "His labor and their results will be handed down in history as the most triumphant and enduring monument of the value of fortifications." Nevertheless, McClellan rebutted the "popular fallacy" that temporary fortifications had proven superior to permanent ones at Sebastopol. In fact, the Russian defenses proved quite the opposite, and their ability to hold out so long was less a tribute to the earthworks than to the valor of the Russian soldier. McClellan made no mention of the soldier's rifled weapons. 

At the end of a brief history of the operations in the Crimea, McClellan offered general advice to his country based

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McClellan Report, 9-35, 21-2, 24-5. McClellan did mention "[t]he famous rifle-pits" in front of Russian lines, and describes their construction in some detail. But he did not draw attention to the factor that made them famous: the rifles within them. Only a very few Russian skirmishers carried rifled weapons, but those few weapons were effective. Mordecai Report, 157-158.
on the lessons of that war. The United States was wise to have a system of coastal defenses and should work to improve them. The siege of Sebastopol would have failed in the age of sail; the steamer had enabled the Allies to move and support a far larger army than the Russians had expected to face. That same capability posed a threat to American shores. McClellan also noted that courage alone could not defeat a modern European army

but that it [courage] must be rendered manageable by discipline, and directed by that consummate and mechanical military skill which can only be acquired by a course of education instituted for the special purpose, and by long habit. 15

In other words, the United States needed a professional army, albeit a small one, of a high proportion of officers and non-commissioned officers so that it could expand quickly to train recruits in time of war. McClellan had little faith in the abilities of officers commissioned directly from civilian life in time of war. His service with such volunteers in Mexico had established his belief in the necessity of professional training for military leaders. The American army needed a trained cadre. 16

In his report McClellan displayed a keen intellect and an eye for detail in the training and equippage of armies, the same traits that would mark him as a genius when he molded the the Army of the Potomac in the early days of the Civil War.

15 Ibid., 34.
16 Ibid., 12, 34-5.
It is impossible to read his letters and reports without being struck by the keenness of his mind. But in his review of Crimean operations, McClellan again betrayed the caution he had manifested in the Cascades and which would later earn him poor marks as a battlefield commander. He chastised the Allies for violating "one of the clearest rules of war; that is, to undertake no important operation without full and reliable information as to the obstacles to be overcome, and the means of resistance in the hands of the enemy." This chary doctrine warred with the offensive tactics he advocated for cavalry. Yet, it is difficult to find an instance of Major General McClellan violating this circumspect dictum.  

Mordecai's report is an encyclopedia of artillery and ordnance science in Europe. Little information of technical value escaped his critical and perceptive eye.

As manager of the commission's Washington offices, it was Mordecai's lot to be the librarian who cared for the hundreds of books, papers, maps, and sketches the delegation had sent back from Europe. Mordecai included a complete list of these materials in his report, arranging the material from each nation alphabetically. He catalogued a great number of tactical manuals and technical treatises, but far fewer theoretical works on the art of war. Most officers were acquainted with military theorists, such as Jomini, so there

17 Ibid., 28.
would have been no need to collect their works. However, the American army was unfamiliar with Carl von Clausewitz’s *Vom Kriege*. If the commissioners came in contact with that seminal work, they failed to acquire a copy of it.  

A long section of the report detailed the military organizations of the countries they had visited. This chapter was the bone of contention between Mordecai and McClellan, because they both wrote on the subject. McClellan was much more thorough than Mordecai in his treatment of the Russian army, but otherwise their observations are similar.  

Mordecai reviewed the operations at Sebastopol with special attention to artillery. He found that there had been little innovation to improve the quality of artillery during the siege. However, "immunity from attack at home, the undisturbed command of the seas, and the possession of heavily-armed ships and transports" allowed the Allies to bring more than two thousand artillery pieces to bear on the garrison of Sebastopol. The destruction wrought by such an unprecedented quantity of artillery was the truly remarkable aspect of the conflict. Interestingly, in the face of these bombardments the Russian bombproof shelters seem to have held up rather well.  

Most of Mordecai’s report is a technical recital of the

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18 *Mordecai Report*, 5-12.

19 Ibid., 13-59.

20 Ibid., 61-68, 61.
most recent developments in ordnance in the nations of Europe. A chapter deals with the arsenals of ordnance construction in the various countries, with special attention to the grand Vienna Arsenal. Other sections treat such subjects as "fuzes for common shells," "shrapnel shells or spherical case shot," and "cannon of large caliber." In each chapter Mordecai methodically traces the recent history of his subject, then discusses current inventories of weapons in each country and the experiments that each has most recently conducted. 21

Mordecai described a novelty that came to be known as a "monster gun" in the United States. "Monster guns" were mortars or guns of ten, twelve, or even thirteen inches in diameter that hurled projectiles of enormous weight. But there were several problems: transporting the huge pieces, constructing them so that they were strong enough to withstand the explosive charge of firing such large shells, and the expense of building the "monsters." Mordecai briefly described European experiments with "monster guns" in his report, but was not enamored of them. When he returned to duty on the Ordnance Board he discouraged American moves toward large caliber artillery. 22

The final two chapters of the report are among the most interesting. One covers small arms in general and the other is a translation of a German essay on rifled small arms. The


22 Ibid., 117-119.
latter includes a quite detailed history of the subject, discussing the experiments of armies and inventors from all over Europe in minute detail. There are cogent descriptions of the difficulties involved in manufacturing rifled weapons to be accurate at long ranges, safe to fire, and easy to load. The "system of Minié" was the state of the art for muzzle-loading rifles, and the chapter describes several weapons designed around the "minie ball." The essay also treats the problem of developing a satisfactory breech-loader, finding obvious merit to such an innovation. The "needle gun" of Prussia was a possible solution, but it had its drawbacks. There was no clear, scientific indication of the best way to manufacture a breech-loading weapon.  

Mordecai noted that few rifles were in use in the Crimea, so the war "did not allow a full trial of the effect of the new arms, and of their influence on the tactics of armies." But he did see the effect during the siege at Sebastopol of the few rifles that were employed:

the extraordinary means used by the besiegers and besieged to protect their gunners from rifle-shots, which could be fired with sufficient precision to enter an embrasure at 500 or 600 yards, and which were effective at even a much greater distance.  

These extraordinary means consisted chiefly of a rope mantelet or shield suspended above the gun covering the embrasure with a space cut to allow passage of the gun. A circular muff

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23 Ibid., 157-232.

24 Ibid., 176.
attached to the gun barrel to covering the open space. And, for all this effort, it was understood that the mantelet provided protection only against small arms fire, not against artillery. Still, Mordecai’s observation of this technique included no clarion call for rewriting tactics as a result of the lethality of rifled weapons. Mordecai saw the effects of rifles only in static defense and did not fully grasp the revolutionary effect of the weapon on maneuver warfare. Nevertheless, as a scientist he could see the technical significance of rifled small arms and provided a marvelously detailed account of their history in his report. 25

One innovation in American artillery that sprang directly from Mordecai’s pen was the use of wrought-iron carriages for fixed artillery. Since 1839 the United States Army had used wooden carriages for its garrison artillery. Wood tended to warp or rot in the weather over long periods, rendering the carriages unserviceable. The Russians and Prussians had solved this problem with wrought-iron carriages, though they were heavy and expensive. Mordecai felt, however, "that with the facilities we have for shaping rolled iron for building purposes, a less cumbersome and more economical method of applying that material to the construction of gun carriages will be devised." The Ordnance Board authorized tests of wrought-iron carriages. An adaptation of the European system

25 Ibid., 64, 176.
was adopted and in place for the beginning of the Civil War.  

Mordecai set aside a special chapter for "New Systems of Field Artillery" in which he discussed the most important development to come from any of the commissioners' reports. The French had developed a light version of the twelve-pounder gun that was consequently more mobile. The new piece was designated a "canon-obusier," or gun-howitzer, because it could fire ammunition—shot, shell, or canister—intended for either guns or howitzers. It was more rugged and durable than the twelve-pounder howitzer and had greater capability than the old eight-pounder, solid-shot firing gun. It combined the best of both weapons without the limitations of either. In addition, having a versatile gun of a single caliber meant that resupplying artillery batteries with ammunition was greatly simplified. Mordecai's report is credited with the introduction of the gun-howitzer concept to the United States. Mordecai also helped to guide the new weapon through tests for the Ordnance Board. The U.S. Army accepted the piece as the "light 12-pounder gun, Model of 1857," but it soon became known as the "Napoleon." It made the army's six-pounder guns and twelve-pounder howitzers obsolete and became the most effective artillery piece on both sides of the Civil War.  

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27 Mordecai Report, 141-145; Hazlett, et al., 28-29, 88-108; Falk, 488-492; Howitzers were artillery weapons that bridged the gap between high-muzzle-velocity, flat trajectory guns and high-angle firing mortars. They were intended to lob
In a "Letter to the Secretary of War" that introduced his report, Delafield quickly arrived at the heart of the matter:

The contest that commenced, in 1854, between the principal military and naval powers of Europe, gave rise, during its progress, to the belief that the art of war had undergone some material changes since the days of Napoleon and Wellington. . .

On examination, this change will be found mainly in the increased magnitude of the engines of war, and the perfection to which they have been brought by the unceasing application of talent and skill to their improvement, accomplished by the accuracy and rapidity of workmanship by the machinery of the arsenals of the present day, and that few new principles have been introduced with much success in the late contest. 28

In that vein Delafield brought little that was new in his report, although he discovered a novelty or two. What he did best, however, was to compile a wealth of military information and to govern it with an unrelenting admonition for the United States to get its military house in order. All of the reports warn the United States to prepare for war, but none more powerfully, cogently, and comprehensively than Delafield's.

In plain language Delafield affirmed what Mordecai and McClellan had already said. The use of "monster guns" and rifled small arms had become "the settled policy and practice of all the military powers of Europe." Unlike Mordecai, Delafield felt that eight- and ten-inch guns were effective explosive or incendiary projectiles into troop formations or fortifications. The "Napoleon" combined the capabilities of gun and howitzer.

28 Delafield Report, 1.
and ought to be introduced in the United States coast artillery. This was an instance in which the readers of the reports had the advantage of a professional difference of opinion within the commission, for Delafield viewed the problem from the perspective of an engineer constructing seacoast defenses, while Mordecai looked at the huge weapons with the critical eye of a scientist and arsenal commander. 29

Delafield also reviewed the effects of rifled and breech-loading weapons, the Napoleon, rifled field artillery, and fixed gun carriages, though in less detail than Mordecai. He generally arrived at the same conclusions as his fellow commissioner, except for the efficacy of "monster guns." 30

Delafield devoted most of his report to the field of his principal expertise, military engineering. He reviewed all of the fortifications he had toured in Europe, paying special attention to seacoast and harbor defenses, an area in which he felt the United States was especially weak. He depicted the defenses at Sebastopol, Cronstadt, and Cherbourg in exhaustive detail, noting that proper seacoast fortifications had withstood the most powerful fleet in the world, but were finally overwhelmed from the landward side by the enemy army. He went on to note that the United States was not nearly as well-armed and prepared along its entire seacoast as the

29 Ibid., 5-6.
30 Ibid., 6-18.
Russians had been at Sebastopol alone. 31

Delafield continued on to the "Theory and Practice of Modern Systems of Fortification," wherein he discussed the principal European schools of engineering thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This essay was both history and a review of current engineering trends, one principal argument of which was that the French had no monopoly on the science of engineering and fortification, especially since Vauban's death. But in its most important theme, the treatise marveled at the enormous expenditure of national treasure that the nations of Europe had expended to fortify themselves against attack. 32

In addition to military engineering Delafield surveyed numerous aspects of logistics in the Crimea and in the military establishments of Europe. Among the subjects he covered in detail were military medicine, including hospitals (wherein he cited Florence Nightingale for her "commanding influence" on the medical branch of the military profession), hospital ships, and ambulances. Brief essays range over the subjects of tentage, food storage and preparation (specifically the new process of canning desiccated food), military barracks for infantry and cavalry, and, of course,

31 Ibid., 18-58, 122-168, 55.

32 Ibid., 176-247. Vauban (1633-1707), marshal of France, military engineer, and royal adviser, was the master of fortification and siegecraft in his day. His designs for the defense of France were sacrosanct long after his death.
arsenals, of which the Vienna Arsenal was the finest.  

Delafield realized the import of steam engines in military transportation. He detailed the use of steamships for the transport of men, equipment, and horses from France and England to the Black Sea, without which the Allies could not have hoped to fight the war. And he made the only mention in any of the reports of railroad steam engines used by the British to move thousands of tons of supplies from Balaklava harbor up the hill to the army camped before Sebastopol. It was beyond question that the Allies could not have supported their troops from the home countries if not for railroads to take supplies to the ports. But this first use of the railroad "in the presence of an enemy" was just as crucial to the British logistical effort in the Crimea.  

The use of electricity was another novelty in the art of war. The telegraph connected the armies to their capitals and the officers found it most useful in conveying to their governments their needs, but more of a nuisance when those governments also used the device to transmit orders "that more circumstantial information, only to be gained in the presence of the enemy, would have shown to be highly inexpedient." The English also communicated by telegraph between headquarters, trenches, and depots. Explosives benefited from

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33 Delafield Report, 58-97, 248-277. For references to Nightingale see 61, 68, 75, 273.

34 Ibid., 97-107, 58.
electricity as much as did communication. The Allies employed voltaic batteries to detonate mines at Sebastopol. And Delafield translated the work of a Spanish engineer on the newer uses of electricity with explosives, complete with numerous plates, figures, and formulae. 35

As we have already seen, all of the commissioners were greatly impressed with the "floating batteries sheathed in wrought iron" that they had seen in London. Although Delafield's report was not the first mention of ironclad ships in the United States, it was notable for its detailed treatment of the subject. Delafield described the arms, armament, construction, and crews of English and French ships, integrating several drawings into the text. 36

It is worthy of mention that one of the most striking aspects of Delafield's report is its beauty. All of the reports rely to a large degree on drawings and figures. But Delafield also illustrated his text with hundreds of vividly detailed sketches of fortresses, maps of battlefields, architectural designs, and photographs of the devastated city and harbor of Sebastopol.

Throughout his report Delafield provided practical information for heeding his warning that the United States needed to prepare for war if it intended to enjoy peace. The commission had learned during its year abroad that the powers

36 Ibid., 168-176.
of Europe had constantly to beware of one another’s military strength. European nations were clearly impoverishing themselves in apprehension of each other. And because, Delafield argued, the United States represented a form of government that by its existence posed a threat to the ruling order in Europe, American shores were not immune from attack. Although the United States possessed tremendous resources, she was unprepared to defend against an offensive that several European nations were capable of launching.  

I am more impressed than ever with our comparative want of preparation and military knowledge in the country, and that the Secretary of War will do a great good service to the nation by increasing the materiel and munitions, means of defense, and the diffusion of military information in every possible way that our institutions will permit, without creating any more of a standing army than the growth of the country calls for, preparatory to that great struggle which sooner or later may be forced upon us, and to resist which, with our present means, we are comparatively unprepared.  

Congress published all of the reports. McClellan submitted his volume first and Congress authorized the printing of five thousand copies of it, one thousand specifically for War Department use. In 1861, when McClellan had achieved much greater fame, Lippincott republished his report as The Armies of Europe and his Regulations and Instructions for the Field Service of the U.S. Cavalry in Time of War in a separate volume. In 1860 the U.S. Senate

37 Ibid., 1-3.
38 Ibid., 3.
published ten thousand copies of the Delafield and Mordecai
reports. The next year, not to be outdone, the House of
Representatives printed twenty thousand more. 39

The first official reaction to the commission’s
accomplishments came in Jefferson Davis’s annual report to the
President. Though Davis had not yet received a completed
report from any of the commissioners, he had asked Delafield
for advice on how to treat the delegation’s journey in his
message. This document clearly reveals the degree to which
the secretary had been influenced by the findings of the
delegation. Davis briefly chronicled the travels of the
commission, highlighting the military facilities they were
able to see and praising those nations that were particularly
helpful to the commissioners, damning by omission the French
government. He also strongly encouraged the improvement of
American seacoast defenses, echoing Delafield’s sentiments:

The failure of the formidable naval armaments of the
allies against the fortified places in the Black sea
[sic] and the Baltic would seem to show conclusively
that properly constructed fortifications are a sure
reliance against the most formidable fleets; whilst
these operations, at the same time, exhibit the
ability with which a maritime nation may, from a
condition of profound peace, fit out expeditions of

39 U.S. Government Publications, U.S. Serial Set No. 916,
35th Congress, Special Session Senate, Senate Executive
Document 1, 4-14 March 1857, 3; U.S. Government Publications,
U.S. Serial Set No. 1037, 36th Congress, 1st Session Senate,
Senate Executive Documents 59 and 60.
great magnitude to operate on a distant enemy. 40

The United States was no longer immune, if she ever had been, from the threat of attack from Europe. Industrialization had magnified the engines of war. It was, therefore, incumbent upon the United States to buttress the citadels of defense. For a nation still preening with the ease of military victory over Mexico, whose focus was almost entirely on domestic conflicts and the continental frontier, and whose ministers in Europe had so recently felt confident enough to flaunt national prowess in a belligerent manifesto, this was unpleasant medicine. 41

Within the U.S. Army the importance of the commission and its work was an article of faith. Officers from almost every branch sent requests to the delegation for technical information about European military practices. Richard Satterlee inquired about battlefield medical support. Charles Radziminski desired to know more on the subject of French cavalry training. Joseph E. Johnston asked if McClellan had "seen any cavalry barracks like those occupied by our dragoons in Mexico? Two stories--men above--Stables below--I wish we had such." Ordnance chief Henry K. Craig forwarded a suggestion that Mordecai inquire into a Briton’s offer to sell the secret of an "asphixiant shell." Some of the requests

40 The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 6, 77.

41 Jefferson Davis to Richard Delafield, 6 November 1856, Delafield Collection; The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 6, 77-79.
spurred fruitful inquiry; some came to nought. But the collective curiosity and interest on the part of the army officer corps indicates a thirst for professional knowledge that demanded quenching. 42

At least three officers recognized the importance of the commissioners’ reports not by asking for information, but by providing input from their own pet schemes. We have already seen how Joseph E. Johnston tried to influence McClellan in the writing of his report, enjoying some limited success in the effort. John A. Burn fired suggestions at McClellan about artillery organization, perhaps unmindful that Mordecai was his proper target. Dabney H. Maury twice offered advice to McClellan concerning cavalry and mounted infantry tactics. These men could have attempted to publish their own manuals, but they felt that their ideas would carry more professional weight coming from the pen of a Crimean commissioner. 43

If measured by the standard of material additions to the army inventory and organization, the commission provided several innovations although none, save perhaps the "Napoleon," were transforming advances. Delafield returned

42 Richard Satterlee to Richard Delafield, 9 April 1855, Delafield Collection; Charles Radziminski to Jefferson Davis, 8 October 1855, GBMP 3: 437; Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 2 December 1855, GBMP 44: 545; Henry K. Craig to Jefferson Davis, 22 March 1856, National Archives Microfilm No. 221, roll 167, frame 76.

43 John A. Burn to George B. McClellan, 1 August 1856, GBMP 4: 008; D. H. Maury to George B. McClellan, 2 December 1856, GBMP 4: 081; D. H. Maury to George B. McClellan, 29 December 1856, GBMP 45: 036.
with a knowledge of dessicated food, the care and transport of the wounded, and the infancy of the military uses of the railroad and telegraph. McClellan published his cavalry regulations and developed the last saddle the U.S. Cavalry would ever need. A French observer of the Civil War saw Union horses just back from raids that "were all thin, mostly broken-down in front... with some broken knees." But none of the horses had a saddle rub. The Frenchman took a McClellan saddle back to Europe for use in the French cavalry. Mordecai could claim credit for the renovation of garrison artillery gun carriages, replacing the rotting wood with wrought iron. But his impact upon the course of the Civil War was greatest among the commissioners because of his introduction of the twelve-pounder gun-howitzer.

What were the commission's shortcomings? What did they fail to notice or perceive? One might fault them for having seen the telegraph and railroad in military use for the first time without foreseeing the revolutionary effects each of them would soon have on warfare. But as Davis said to Sara Mordecai, "[T]o know the future belongs not to mortal man." The immediate success of both these inventions was closely tied to the nature of the Civil War, which employed millions of men over half a continent. The commissioners, who came back from Europe warning of a threat from overseas, could not

possibly have anticipated the tremendous internal strife with all its attendant military transformations that soon came. "

A more serious charge is that the delegation missed the significance of a phenomenon that was under their noses, the Prussian general staff. In a few paragraphs Mordecai passed over the hallmarks of Prussian professionalism, the organization of the general staff and the methods of selecting and training general staff officers. Neither Delafield nor McClellan even made mention of the Prussian general staff. Edward Hagerman has suggested that these oversights resulted from theoretical blind spots, especially on McClellan's part, stemming from "an American ideological aversion to the centralized and permanent military organization necessary to make the staff system work." Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones argue that the technically educated officers were too interested in mechanistic detail to digest "the most important new military development then on the European continent." "

Although there is evidence that the American officer corps shared a national aversion to a standing army, Delafield and McClellan both emphasized in their reports the necessity for the United States to prepare itself against an attack from Europe. They called for better training and dissemination of

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professional military information. McClellan specifically argued for a more professional officer corps. Indeed, it would have been in his self-interest for the U.S. Army to institute a general staff program wherein the brightest young officers were singled out for the most rewarding positions and rapid promotion.

The commission overlooked the Prussian general staff for a number of reasons. In the first place, they never talked to the chief of the general staff or visited the Kriegsakademie. Even if they had done so, none of the commissioners had ever served at a level high enough to appreciate the complexities of general field command. But the principal reason for the commission's oversight was that the general staff had not yet proven itself. The Prussians had yet to begin dominating Europe militarily. That group of reforming officers who had inspired the Prussian military enlightenment—Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, and Clausewitz—were all dead and politically discredited. The general who would bring the general staff to maturity, Helmuth von Moltke, became its chief only in 1857, a year after the delegation had returned to the United States. Moreover, Prussia was still in political turmoil in the 1850s and did not yet project the military confidence of a nation to be emulated in matters so fundamental. This is not to say that a general staff system would not have benefitted the United States. A vigorous program might even have borne fruit during the Civil
War. But it is too harsh to criticize the commission for failure to recognize the future of a concept that had yet to establish itself in the present. 47

The most important criticism of the commission is that they did not discern the importance of rifled small arms on tactical warfare. As we have seen, McClellan's critique of the defenses of Sebastopol gave credit to the valor and discipline of Russian soldiers without a word in praise of their weapons. Summarizing the Crimean campaign, he made several recommendations for the improvement of the American army, never mentioning rifled weapons. The commission saw only the results of battle in the Crimea, not the battles themselves. They observed the bombproofs, trenches, and rifle-pits. They knew of the greater range and accuracy of rifled small arms. But possessing facts about battle and weaponry is a far cry from witnessing combat. Perhaps McClellan's desire not to leave the Crimea without coming under fire was not so frivolous and quixotic as it seems. The commissioners' accounts of Crimean fortifications and European weapons were detached and analytical. They did not and could not have grasped the import of rifled weapons based upon second-hand reports and inspections of old battlefields. 48


48 McWhiney and Jamieson, 57. Edward Hagerman argues that McClellan did comprehend the import of rifled small arms upon tactics, but McClellan never credited Allied rifles with the superiority over Russian muskets that now seems apparent. He
Jay Luvaas has concluded that observing battle is a difficult task. Many European armies sent observers to the American Civil War with charters very similar to the Crimean commission. Time and again trained soldiers who witnessed destruction and carnage in the Civil War failed to comprehend the same lessons that eluded Delafield, Mordecai, and McClellan in the Crimea. Instead, observers tended to confirm their preconceptions—they saw what they expected to see. The same was true in the Crimea. It is interesting to read the works of General Sir Edward B. Hamley, an observer of the Civil War and, more importantly for our purposes, a combatant in the Crimea. In *The War in the Crimea*, published in 1900, Hamley described how British forces had overwhelmed Russian formations of superior numbers at the Battle of Inkermann:

This was a moral effect; but there was also a material cause conducing to the result. The Russian riflemen, as we soon had reason to know, were armed with a weapon quite equal to our Minié; but the mass of the infantry still wielded a musket not superior to the old Brown Bess firelock, which the Minié had replaced, whereas our troops, except those of the Fourth Division, had the rifle. Therefore, long before a Russian column had got near enough to make its fire tell, it began to suffer from a fire that was very destructive, not only because of the longer range and more effective aim, but because the bullets were propelled with a force capable of sending them through more than one

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Russian soldiers, not the rifled weapons of a few skirmishers in rifle-pits, with a stiff defense of Sebastopol. See Hagerman, 33, and *McClellan Report*, 24-5, 32-3.
man's body. 49

He leaves no room for doubt about the superiority of British rifled arms. However, in The Story of the Campaign of Sebastopol, written in 1855, then-Lieutenant Colonel Hamley had devoted two chapters to the Battle of Inkermann without reference to the rifle. It was only in hindsight and with information about both sides of the conflict that he was able to analyze the effects of rifled weapons. 50

Luvaas notes that there were exceptions to the rule. There were a few perceptive observers who saw through the fog of war and grasped the distinctness of modern combat, only to see their conclusions go unread or unheeded, for the bloody lessons of the Civil War had to be relearned during the First World War. In the main, however, military observers with much greater opportunities to analyze the conditions of combat in the United States than the commission ever had in the Crimea also failed to draw proper conclusions. 51

The great legacy of the Crimean commission was the corpus

49 Edward B. Hamley, The War in the Crimea (London, 1900), 146. Hamley goes on to say that, regardless of such devastating fire, the Russians, "once launched upon their career, ought by their mere impetus to have everywhere penetrated our line..." The Russians were poorly led, but even with the benefit of hindsight, Hamley underestimated the effect of rifled weapons.


51 Luvaas, 231-233.
of professional knowledge it yielded—the reports themselves. Peter S. Michie, an early biographer of McClellan, noted that *The Armies of Europe* "produced its effect on the minds of officers" in the army. Mordecai's volume served as a sourcebook on artillery and small arms during the Civil War, useful because both sides used vast quantities of European arms. The federal government even tried to halt distribution of the Delafield report for fear that its valuable descriptions of advancements in military engineering would aid the South. Construction of southern fortifications during the war indicates that the fear was well founded. 52

U. S. Grant gave some indication of the reception of the reports among individual officers. He noted in his *Memoirs* that shortly after assuming command of the 21st Illinois, he sat down to read the first chapter of Hardee's *Tactics*, a subject he had found difficult while a cadet at West Point. Grant tried to put his reading into practice with his regiment the next day:

> I soon saw that if I attempted to follow the lesson I had studied I would have to clear away some of the houses and garden fences to make room. I perceived at once, however, that Hardee's tactics—a mere translation from the French with Hardee's name attached—was nothing more than common sense and the progress of the age applied to Scott's system. . . . I do not believe that the officers of the regiment ever discovered that I had never

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studied the tactics that I used. 53

But shortly after he relegated Hardee to the depths of his footlocker, Grant wrote a letter to his wife Julia:
"If you have an opportunity I wish you would send me McClellands [sic] report of battles in the Crimea. You will find it about the house." Grant obviously valued McClellan's ideas much more highly than Hardee's and considered them worthy of his valuable time as he prepared for war. 54

But perhaps more important than immediate applications of the reports to the conditions of the Civil War was the intellectual example they set for an immature profession. American military literature had too often been little more than the uncritical translation of foreign, usually French, texts. Grant complained specifically of such pilfering in Hardee's case. Delafield expressed the same professional dismay in his report, criticizing America's lionization of all things French. That criticism, coming as it did from an officer educated in the army's Francophile tradition and based upon a comparative study of the military establishments of every great power in Europe, marked a startling departure in American military thought. As Russell Weigley has concluded, each of the Crimean reports "ranks as a landmark in the new


54 Ibid., 166-167, 966.
American military literature." They achieved such eminence because the commissioners had done their homework, assiduously collecting information from all over Europe, then critically comparing and analyzing it in comparison to the state of the art of war in the United States. The presentation of their findings to the public, but especially to their fellow officers, constituted a quantum jump in accumulation of a body of specialized knowledge essential to the development of expertise, a sine qua non of professionalism. By documenting warfare's increasing complexity, the reports also demonstrated that only dedicated, trained, and competent professionals could aspire to excellence as military leaders, thereby enhancing a sense of professional corporateness among the officer corps. Delafield's intention was "to impart information to the profession." Through that effort, he helped to define it. 55

55 Weigley, 191; Huntington, 8.
EPILOGUE

Major Alfred Mordecai was still in command of Watervliet Arsenal in April 1861, when the chief of ordnance ordered him to Fort Monroe, Virginia, to inspect the final versions of wrought-iron artillery carriages. Delayed by a storm, he did not reach Fort Monroe until 11 April. Beauregard fired on Fort Sumter the next day. Mordecai examined and approved the carriage design and hastened back to New York.

There he faced an agonizing decision, a dilemma of divided loyalties shared by southerners throughout the army. Rather than betray his home state or the nation he had served so honorably and so long, Mordecai resigned his commission after almost thirty-eight years in uniform. At that time the army had no retired list, so Mordecai had to begin anew to support his family. 1 They moved to Philadelphia, Sara’s hometown, where he found a job teaching mathematics and waited for the terrible war to end.

In 1865 an old army friend invited him to go to Mexico. Colonel Andrew Talcott was chief engineer of the Vera Cruz and Mexican Railway and hired Mordecai as his principal assistant. Mordecai spent eighteen months in Mexico City before financial difficulties and political upheaval forced the railroad to

1 The army instituted a retirement system for officers on 3 August 1861, three months too late for Mordecai. But because the regulation stipulated that an officer had to have served forty years or to have suffered physical incapacity in service, he would still have been ineligible. Weigley, 230.
close. He returned to his family in Philadelphia and became secretary-treasurer for the Pennsylvania Canal Company, a position that afforded him the financial comfort that had eluded him throughout his years of service to the army.

At the 1884 reunion of the United States Military Academy Mordecai presided as oldest graduate present, an honor he would enjoy for the next several years. He and Sara celebrated their golden wedding anniversary in Philadelphia on 1 June 1886. Mordecai died on 23 October 1887 at the age of eighty-three. ²

Richard Delafield had been gone from West Point for five days in early 1861 when he was abruptly recalled to his post. P. G. T. Beauregard had relieved Delafield as superintendent on 23 January 1861, but the new secretary of war, Joseph Holt, decided that the academy needed more politically reliable leadership. Delafield returned to West Point for a month until another superintendent could be found.

In March, the sixty-three-year-old Delafield went to work for the governor of New York as chief engineer for The Narrows in New York harbor, Governor's Island, and the fort at Sandy Hook. Delafield also assisted in organizing new regiments from New York State and directed the supplying of ordnance

stores to state garrisons, for which the army awarded him regular promotions to lieutenant colonel and colonel.

When Joseph G. Totten died in 1864, Delafield succeeded him as army chief of engineers with a promotion to brigadier general. He remained in Washington as chief throughout the remainder of the war, commanding the Corps of Engineers and the Engineer Bureau. He received a brevet promotion to major general on 13 March 1865 for "faithful, meritorious, and distinguished services in the Engineer Department during the Rebellion." Delafield retired in 1866 after forty-eight years of service.

General Delafield busied himself in retirement with service on a number of boards. One commission was dedicated to the improvement of Boston harbor, another to defeating coastal erosion at Sandy Hook. He also served on the lighthouse board and as regent of the Smithsonian Institution. Delafield died in Washington on 5 November 1873.  

It is impossible to do justice to the lives and careers of any of these men in a short epilogue, but McClellan most of all. Biographies of him abound, the latest and the best of which is Stephen W. Sears’s George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon. McClellan resigned from the army to take a position

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with the Illinois Central Railroad in 1857. In 1861 he became a major general of volunteers in Pennsylvania. After a series of strategic reverses Lincoln made him general-in-chief of the Union army. But McClellan had "the slows," and the President sacked him after Antietam in the fall of 1862.

At thirty-seven years of age McClellan became the Democratic candidate for President. His campaign was confused and the candidate never truly endorsed his own party's platform. Lincoln thrashed him. McClellan soon sailed to Europe for three-and-a-half years of self-exile, living comfortably as a result of a few years as railroad executive and a few months as a politician. He returned to the United States to dabble in business and politics. In 1877 the Democratic Party of New Jersey nominated him for governor, giving McClellan the only political victory of his life. He served effectively for a three-year term in an office that hardly taxed his energies. McClellan wrote his memoirs and several articles on warfare and spoke at veterans' events, enjoying a better reputation in the hindsight of his audiences than he had while in command. The general's fifty-eight-year-old heart failed him on 29 October 1885. 4

An intriguing question concerns the effect of the expedition to Europe on McClellan's generalship. British Major General Sir George Bell, an early observer of the Civil

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4 Biographical information on McClellan from Sears, 344-406.
War, was both unequivocal and unilluminating. "General McClellan," Sir George declared, "learned something in the Crimea." What that something was he left to conjecture.

Stephen Sears has concluded that part of McClellan's attraction to the kingmakers of the Union army was his standing as a prewar military intellectual, a reputation won through his service in Europe and bolstered by subsequent publication of his work. An old army friend, J. K. Duncan, crudely but correctly averred that McClellan had returned from Europe "chock full of big war science." Sears also suggests that one legacy from the trip to Europe was the general's fondness for pomp and ceremony reminiscent of a grand review of the French Imperial Guard he had seen in the Crimea.

On occasion it seems that McClellan's Crimean experience hung directly over the battlefield. During March 1862 McClellan transported his army from Alexandria to the Peninsula by sailing down the Potomac and the Chesapeake, attempting to gain a strategic march on the Confederates. This movement may have owed something to his observations of the Allies on the Black Sea and the ease with which they transported their troops and shifted their line of communications from north of Sebastopol to the south. He wrote to his wife Ellen during the Peninsular campaign, "I do believe that I am avoiding the faults of the Allies at

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5 Luvaas, 15.

6 Sears, 66-67, 134.
Sebastopol & quietly preparing for a great success."  

However, his opponent and old friend Joe Johnston was well acquainted with McClellan's trip to the Crimea and the lessons he had learned there. Required to defend Richmond and outnumbered in men and artillery, Johnston drew a parallel between his situation and that of the Russian disadvantages in Sebastopol. Knowing McClellan's familiarity with the Allied success, Johnston determined that Richmond's salvation lay in the tactical initiative and he attacked the Federals at Seven Pines. The battle was indecisive.  

McClellan left few clues as to the effect of the Crimean War on his thinking. To his brother John he compared Sebastopol to Pompeii in describing "a bloody & determined strife." But he offered no insight into how his views about warfare had changed. After two months' reflection he poured out his feelings to Mrs. Mary Marcy, continuing the analogy to Pompeii:

The impression it made upon me can never be erased. I realised then what war might be if brought home to us. Ruin and desolation reigned there supreme--a new Pompeii, crushed by the ruthless hand of man instead of the power of God. . . . It was really an epoch in one's life time to walk through the remains of that ruined city--no living beings to be seen but a few sentries--no sound to be heard save their warning cry, followed by the angry crush of the bursting shells continually coming from the north side. I hope that our own country may never witness the death

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7 George B. McClellan to Ellen McClellan, 19 April 1862, quoted in Sears, 180.

8 Hattaway and Jones, 187-189; Sears, 201.
struggle that what [sic] met my eye in the Malakoff
[sic] so plainly. 9

McClellan always wrote with more emotion to women than to men. The tone of this letter may offer more insight into McClellan’s feelings than the more analytical prose he sent to his brother. If so, the clear impression it leaves is one of a visceral revulsion at the carnage he had seen, a man who would be loath to order other men into such a battle. 10

In his critique of Crimean War generalship, McClellan repeatedly decried a lack of aggressive spirit, a failure to press the fight when there was an advantage to be exploited. Timidity, he argued, cost each side decisive success in a number of battles. However, in June 1861 he sent a dispatch to Washington, one of many explaining his own slowness to move: "I will not throw these men of mine into the teeth of artillery & intrenchments, if it is possible to avoid it." Perhaps visions of "a new Pompeii" and "the death struggle" at the Malakhov lingered in his memory. McClellan the general had learned a lesson from Sebastopol, but it was one that McClellan the critic would not have accepted if offered by an Allied general. 11

On a strategic level, however, McClellan felt that the

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9 George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 14 January 1856, GBMP 44: 563.

10 George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452.

11 McClellan Report, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 31; Sears, 85.
Allies had originally been poorly prepared for war in the Crimea, neglecting "one of the clearest rules of war." McClellan condemned the undertaking of any major operation "without full and reliable information," a rule the Allies had obviously violated through poor logistical preparations in the early days of the war. Time and again during his own command McClellan patronizingly rehearsed this argument in dispatches to Lincoln and the War Department. This caution contributed as much as any single factor to his sacking in 1862.  

Jay Luvaas has said that most European observers of the American Civil War came and saw what they wanted to see—they reinforced the precepts of their own dogma and training. The same is true in a personal way of McClellan. Stephen Sears notes that he was overly cautious when leading the railroad expedition in the Cascades in 1853. Despite a willingness to criticize timidity in others, McClellan was already a conservative soldier when he reached Balaklava. The scenes of bloodshed and destruction he had examined in the Crimea did little to change him. Indeed, he never told Mrs. Marcy or anyone else that his experiences had transformed him, only that "the impression it made upon me can never be erased." That impression was all the more indelible because it overlay a natural bent for military caution.  

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12 McClellan Report, 28; Sears, 338.

13 Luvaas, 232-233; Sears, 37-41.
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