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GEORGE BRINGTON McCLELLAN AND THE FORGOTTEN ALTERNATIVE:

An Introduction to the Conservative Strategy
in the Civil War: April – August 1861

by

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... In the highest branches of strategy ..., moral complications and a great diversity of quantities and relations are to be looked for .... At that point ..., strategy borders on political science.

-- Karl von Clausewitz,

On War, I, 167.

To rescue Civil War history from personal partisanship, to understand why the commanders behaved as they did, to relate the military events of the conflict to broader economic and social patterns in American life, one must look at warfare as a social institution. From the age of the cavemen to the day of the hydrogen bomb, men have warred, but the manner in which they have organized their forces, the weapons which they have used, and the objectives for which they have fought have varied enormously. In one period a war results in the extermination of enslavement of enemy populations; in another, the protection of civilian life and property except that which is directly required for the defeat of enemy troops. Each age has its own views about the nature of warfare. A commander's course of action depends not merely upon the resources at his disposal but upon the objectives that he believes to be professionally and morally defensible. One cannot understand the course of a war unless he first knows the theory of warfare behind the fighting.

-- David Donald

Lincoln Reconsidered, p. 86.
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PREFACE

It is more or less expected that any historian who offers a new study of a much battered topic must begin by apologizing, justifying, rationalizing, defending or at the very least explaining himself in strong and convincing language to an audience or predisposed skeptics. Instead of smashing the conventional mold and flying in the face of tradition, I have gone somewhat in the other direction. Recognizing the exceptionally shop-worn condition of the historical image of George Brinton McClellan, I have given over my first chapter to an explanation of the need for a new look at the General and to the construction of an interpretive frame for the work which follows. While this approach possibly makes for a somewhat less than seamless stylistic structure, it does have the advantage of removing any excuse for a long-winded introduction. What might not be out of place by way of preface and perspective, however, is a few words about where this paper came from and where, hopefully, it is going.

In the beginning I set out simply to take a new look at George McClellan. I had no particular thesis to prove, nor even questions that were more sharply defined than a general curiosity. I did suspect, however, that McClellan's historical image was not quite in focus. My puzzlement grew from the research for my master's thesis on the Maryland Campaign of 1862. Going into that study to look at the strategy, tactics, and command systems of both the Union and Confederate Armies, I carried with me the wholly traditional opinion that McClellan was a bad general of childish temperament and pompous mien. Yet, by the close of my research I had become dissatisfied
with the customary interpretations. They simply did not bear up under scrutiny.

Critics claim that McClellan should be understood largely on the basis of his assorted personality quirks. Supporters insist that the General's career only makes sense in terms of his persecution by politicians and the obstacles which others threw in his way. Neither of these themes, I discovered, really explained much about McClellan or his behavior in the Maryland Campaign of 1862. Something very large was missing. To be specific, let me illustrate with the famous incident of the finding of the "Lost Orders."

On September 9, Robert E. Lee divided his Army of Northern Virginia into five columns for special assignments, scattering them from Hagerstown to Harper's Ferry, believing he would reunite them before the Federal Army could intervene. Four days later, a Union soldier found Special Orders, No. 191, which gave full details of the fragmenting of the Confederate army, wrapped around three cigars, lying in the street in Frederick, Maryland. The "lost orders" were sent immediately to McClellan, who was then commanding the Army of the Potomac.

Now, the usual telling of the story is about like this: Prior to September 13, McClellan had been dazzled by the swiftness and brilliance of Lee's strategy. With his customary sluggishness, he advanced his army from the Washington defenses so slowly that Lee would have had ample time to carry out his plans. But, by luck and "extraordinary good fortune," Lee's plans fell into his hands. This was the turning point of the campaign. Unfortunately, McClellan,
still being McClellan, did not follow through with the necessary boldness, and Lee's army eventually escaped back into Virginia.

Notice there are two levels of interpretation in this story. First there is the value judgment that McClellan's conduct was wrong. I happen to think, based on my research, that McClellan was more right than wrong in the Maryland Campaign, but that is a point to be argued elsewhere. More important here is the explanation given for McClellan's conduct. And it is just here that the traditional interpretation falls apart under scrutiny. McClellan was not Lee's puppet in the Maryland Campaign. He pursued a conscious and purposeful strategy from start to finish. Perceiving Lee's strategic options, McClellan throttled them one by one. The campaign's turning point came as early as September 11th. And, on the evening of the 12th, Federal intelligence informed McClellan that Lee had split his army. The "lost orders," found the next morning, simply filled in the details. McClellan incorporated this new information into his planning, but he continued to follow the strategy with which he had started the campaign. In the end, he beat Lee at Lee's own game, and that was no mean achievement.

My estimate of McClellan as a strategist, which had not been high, rose considerably. Still, I did not then discern, nor do I now pretend in this paper, that he was a reincarnation of Napoleon, as the Northern press once acclaimed him to be. What I did conclude was that McClellan was much more a man of purpose, a man who exerted more rational control over his own behavior and over the conduct of the war as well, than either his critics or his supporters had allowed. McClellan knew what he was doing - or, more precisely, what he was trying to do; and both
his successes and his failures were wholly understandable without resorting to theories either of psychology or conspiracy. All that was necessary was to pay more considerate attention to McClellan's own viewpoint, his ideas, and his explanations.

Why was the accepted interpretation of McClellan's performance in the Maryland Campaign so at variance with the readily accessible facts? Had historians created a stereotype of McClellan based on his performance earlier in the war and then applied it uncritically to his actions in September of 1862? Or, was there a more serious flaw which ran through the entire historical treatment of the General? Such questions whetted my desire to undertake a new look at McClellan's entire military career, one which would emphasize policy and strategy and their connection with events on the battlefield.

One way to launch such a study, and in my opinion one of the best ways to gain perspective and at least a degree of objectivity at the start, is to survey the historiography of a subject before beginning research. In Chapter One, "McClellan Reconsidered," I have attempted to analyze the traditional viewpoints that historians have held toward McClellan. And the survey has confirmed my belief that he has not been in the past treated fully. The chief defect that I detected was that no one— not even his biographers—had taken McClellan seriously as a strategist. While critics have concentrated on his personality, apologists have emphasized, almost exclusively, his talents for organization and administration. That this omission by historians was a serious flaw became clear when I discovered that McClellan did propose and pursue (to the extent he was able) a fully developed strategy throughout his war career; that he, himself, took that strategy quite
seriously; and that it seemed to provide a reasonable explanation for many of the things he said and did during his tenure of command.

I have undertaken, therefore, as a long-range project, a reevaluation of the General's wartime career, under the working title of "George Brinton McClellan and the Conservative Strategy in the Civil War." While I could not hope to complete such a project as a doctoral dissertation, I could begin it. The entire topic falls naturally into five large volumes: (1) the origins of McClellan's strategy and his command in the Department of the Ohio; (2) the Department of the Potomac — including his creation of the Army of the Potomac; (3) his tenure as General-in-Chief and the launching of the grand offensive against the Confederacy in the Winter of 1861-62; (4) the Peninsular Campaign against Richmond; and (5) the Maryland Campaign to thwart Lee's first invasion of the North.

I believe that common sense required the first of these parts to be developed before the others. Hence this paper is a study of the background, origins, and early maturity of McClellan's strategy. Chapter Two, "The Conservative War, 1861-1862," surveys the historical context in which McClellan developed his strategy and introduces the general concept of the conservative policy which governed Northern thinking in the early war years; it also reevaluates the contributions of Scott and Lincoln during the opening months. Chapter Three, "On the Importance of Being McClellan," examines the career, education, and character of McClellan in an attempt to understand his ideas; the way in which he viewed the war; and where those views placed him in the Northern political spectrum. Chapter Four, "Experiment in
Conservatism," studies in some detail McClellan's first experiences in the war and the lessons he drew from them. The final chapter, "Inside McClellan's Strategy," is largely an analysis of the matured military program which McClellan advocated from August of 1861 until his removal, and is based upon the Memorandum he submitted to Lincoln shortly after his summons to Washington.

I might remark in concluding that, while it has been one of my chief concerns that this paper not become a lawyer's brief with special pleading, I suspect I have not entirely succeeded. In re-evaluating a much tarnished character, one unconsciously at points raises his voice in order to be heard; occasionally argues too loudly and at too great length; and may sometimes seem self-righteous at the expense of other historians. For such "brassiness" as may have crept in, I apologize.

After six years of tutelage, it is impossible for me to express in any adequate way my gratitude to President Frank E. Vandiver of Rice University. His guidance, his inspiration, and - what is even rarer in such relationships - his friendship, have been to me both stimulus and sustenance. My friend and graduate colleague, Richard Sommers, through long and detailed conversations has contributed greatly to whatever accuracy this work can lay claim. It is quite literally true that without the generous help and encouragement of my secretary (wife), Trudy, I could not have finished. Every graduate student should have one.

J.L.H.
Chapter One:

McClellan Reconsidered: An Introduction

1. McClellan and the Historians

It is impossible to write of the opening years of the American Civil War without confronting the enigma of George Brinton McClellan. Except possibly for Abraham Lincoln, none of the many prominent figures of that era has seemed, both in his own time and later, so controversial as "Little Mac." There have been nearly as many interpretations of the "Young Napoleon" as there have been of the Civil War itself. Views of him have widely varied, ranging from the ridiculous to the sublime and managing to touch most of the intermediate points. In 1864, an early biographer of this "problem child," surveying the extreme views held by McClellan's contemporaries, gasped in dismay: "By some persons he is considered the greatest strategist of the age. By others he is regarded as unfit to command even a hundred men." ¹

Yet, this statement is scarcely an exaggeration, as is attested in numerous letters, speeches, and diaries from the Civil War period. Sam Barlow, New York lawyer and politician, for example, waxed warmly eloquent in his praise of McClellan's greatness: "He is
the salt of the Earth. I know him to be as pure as the Chevalier Bayard; and I believe him equal to the great emergency in which he is called to perform so distinguished a part." Columbia University Professor Francis Lieber did not agree; and, although he found it difficult to draw a final assessment of the General, the choices he set forth were grim indeed: "McClellan may be: a coward .... Or he may be one of those people who possess everything except the faculty of resolving .... Or he may have a good deal of copper in his head, and shrink from decisive action against the wayward sisters. Or he may be a downright traitor .... Whatever he may be I think there is a large portion of the bona fide fool in his composition."²

Might it not be expected that the passing of time and the cooling of passions after the death of the participants would have narrowed the yawning gap between these views? But apparently this has not been the case. In the early twentieth century, while paens were sung to him as "a gifted, efficient, exemplary man, in every period and in every function of his life;"³ other writers fulminated that he had not "wanted to fight" and must have been "either a coward or disloyal."⁴ Nor has a third generation abandoned the extreme outposts. McClellan's most recent biographer, Warren Hassler, demands that the young general be recognized as The Shield of the Union and the man sine qua non the nation could not have been saved. Contemporaneously, Kenneth Williams, at the close of two volumes of stinging criticism, has replied, in effect: "Surely the verdict must be: McClellan was not a real general. McClellan was not even a disciplined soldier. McClellan was merely an attractive but vain and unstable man,
with considerable military knowledge, who sat a horse well and wanted to be President." 6

The counterplay of such extreme views is intriguing. How did McClellan become the center of such a controversy? Are the records so unclear and ambiguous that historians can legitimately draw from them conclusions that are nearly contradictory? Or, does interpreting McClellan require the student to touch upon issues too alive in his own conscience to permit an objective appraisal? Unfortunately, neither of these "easy" answers seems to fit very well. The records on McClellan are not less clear than Civil War records in general. Nor does McClellan properly qualify as one of those "universal symbols of an age," such as an Andrew Jackson, an Abraham Lincoln, or a Franklin Roosevelt, in the study of whose lives historians can debate such eternally moot points as the meaning of the American historical experience.

In fact, on the surface at least, there is no apparent reason why the controversy should continue in such heat and at such length. The unattractive possibility that Civil War historians are simply too quarrelsome for their own good is an irreverent explanation that may be set aside for appeal as last resort. In a quandary such as this, the historian turns with hope to historiography for insight and perspective. He anticipates that in an analysis of the writings of other historians and by comparing and contrasting the explanations they have given, he can gain a more objective overview of his topic.

Unfortunately, historiography is one of the least developed areas of Civil War scholarship. The most sophisticated and thorough examination is Thomas J. Pressly's Americans Interpret Their Civil War.
The only defect of this scholarly and fascinating monograph is its somewhat misleading title. Properly, it should have been called "Americans Interpret the Causes of Their Civil War." Historians fit into one or another of Pressly's schools according to their treatment of the causative agents which produced the war. Regrettably, this limits the value of his categories for historians who are pursuing questions of interpretation other than causation. The attitude which various historians have adopted toward the conduct of the war, for example, which are central to McClellan historiography, do not fit into Pressly's patterns at all.

One is left to do, therefore, as Marshall Fishwick and Louis Ruchames have done in their articles on Robert E. Lee and Charles Summer, to construct independently the most meaningful categories which the material itself suggests. Fishwick sought the origins and process whereby Lee had reached a sort of deification in southern historical literature. Ruchames, on the other hand, set out to discover why Summer, widely respected in his own day (even by many of his political enemies), over the years had fallen lower and lower in the esteem of historians. And, in the case of McClellan, the initial question is why there has been a continuing polarization among his interpreters into well-entrenched camps of pro and con.

Pursuit of this question through the mountainous literature which bears wholly or largely on McClellan has led to a number of surprising discoveries. Not the least of which is the conclusion that virtually all of the favorable or friendly interpretations of the General have come from outside the category which can be called,
strictly speaking, history itself. Over the years support for McClellan and his conduct in the war has derived chiefly from two published sources: biography and reminiscences.

As might be expected, McClellan's first andwarmest advocates have been his biographers. About a dozen works purport to tell the life of the "Young Napoleon," and viewed on the library shelf they are an interesting lot. Dime romance, campaign biography, lawyer's brief, and scholarly monograph, stand cheek to jowl. Four of the works (by Orville Victor, Markinfield Adley, George Hillard, and one authored anonymously) may nearly be dismissed as pot-boilers. Shallow and uncritical panegyrics, they give the student more insight into the reading habits of their era than they do their subject's life. Each does contain, however, incidents, quotations, and documents difficult and in some cases impossible to find elsewhere.

Another four works (by James Havelock Campbell, Clarence Macartney, co-authors H. J. Eckenrode and Bryan Conrad and Warren Hassler) are also noticeably biased and insufficiently critical of McClellan's role as general. This is especially lamentable in the case of Hassler's recent (1957) biography, which is documented and apparently based on some research in manuscript sources, as well as on wide reading. Yet, one turns from Hassler's work unconvinced that it was McClellan alone who caught the correct cadence, while the rest of the world, then and since, has been out of step with the drummer.

Finally, three biographies stand, in different ways, as superior to the others. The propaganda tract written by William Henry
Hurlbert for the election of 1864, in spite of its utter partisanship, gives a unique insight into McClellan's basic conservatism and the manner in which his opinions influenced his conduct of the war. General Peter Smith Michie's volume in Appleton's Great Commander Series is also valuable. Michie, who had been chief engineer of the Army of the James and was later professor in the Engineering Department at West Point, wrote of the military side of McClellan's life, especially the tactical and organizational details, with an expertise that must command the respect of the civilian historian. Finally, the best biography by a considerable margin is that of Princeton historian William Starr Myers. Published in 1934 after exhaustive research in manuscript and other primary sources, Myers' study, while friendly in tone, still is more critical than any of the others, with the exception of Michie's. Myers is most valuable on McClellan's private life and on his prewar and postwar careers. His work adds little to the story of the General's role in the Civil War.

The view of McClellan which emerges from these biographies (again except for Michie's, which is discussed below), may be summarized briefly: George Brinton McClellan was a Christian of unblemished virtue. He displayed throughout his life patriotism and integrity of the highest order. He was (probably) the military genius of his age. His grasp of military science was unsurpassed and his talents for administration unequaled by any other commander, North or South.

Of course, even the friendliest view must recognize McClellan's apparent failure. He did not win the war. But this failure, claim the biographers, was not his fault. He was too
innocent and too naive for the partisan and selfish world in which he had to operate. Because McClellan would not play politics with the country's fate, powerful men, especially Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and the clique of Radical Republicans in Congress, opposed him and his military programs out of personal spite and jealousy. In this interpretation, Lincoln is sometimes cast as one of the villains, but more often he is depicted as the well meaning but weak executive who cannot withstand political pressure and succumbs to Radical importuning.

The view that McClellan's failure derived not from faulty generalship but from political opposition has been summarized by Eckenrode and Conrad this way:

There was danger that McClellan would win the war and thereby gain such prestige as to imperil Lincoln's whole policy. It was recognized as early as the summer of 1862 that he might become a presidential candidate in the election of 1864. And with the glory of ending the war enveloping him, he would in all probability be a successful candidate .... McClellan as president might mean the balking emancipation, the return of the South to power, which would carry with it the hampering of that industrial development of the North which was by far the most important result of the War between the States. In other words, Lincoln could not afford to let McClellan win the war, knowing what the political consequences might be.

In conclusion, McClellan biography is deficient in two respects. Although several works contribute to understanding certain of his parts, none puts all of the pieces together to portray convincingly the whole man. Secondly, the high eulogistic tone which pervades the biographies
renders even their good points ineffective. McClellan, himself, suggested in his memoirs that his friends probably harmed him as much as his enemies. 18 Ironically, his friendly biographers may be guilty of the same offense. By exaggerating his virtues and rationalizing away his faults, they have set up their biographical hero as a strawman, which critics and historians in general find easy to dismiss without the consideration that some of the pro-McClellan arguments deserve.

The second major source of support for McClellan comes from his contemporaries, for the General fared surprisingly well in the writings of his comrades-in-arms. Civil War veterans were not usually so uncritical as the biographers, but most of them of all ranks found more to praise in McClellan's conduct than to blame. Three pro-McClellan themes play through the mass of memoirs, unit histories, and war papers which poured in such volume from the veterans' pens; three reasons they could not, whatever their politics, dismiss the memory of "Little Mac" with ungrateful words.

First, in near unison, they appreciated that "the forte of McClellan was organization." 19 They gave him almost entire credit for the creation of the Army of the Potomac, and they marvelled in his handiwork. The army which fought so well and so long, it seemed to them, must have been crafted by the hand of a master. Secondly, they remembered "that powerful magnetism in the man," who could by his very presence cause grown men to cry or to cheer until their voices broke. 20 And they felt certain that such charisma counted for something. "Let military critics or political enemies say
what they will," wrote General Francis Walker, "he who could so move upon the hearts of a great army, as the wind sways long rows of standing corn, was no ordinary man ...." 21

Finally, many of the veterans believed that McClellan understood the military requirements of a great war better than his civilian superiors. "Where was his equal," asked General Israel Stiles, "in technical knowledge of the needs of a great Army? ... Who from the first better understood the situation and its needs from a military point of view?" 22 Stiles and many of his fellows agreed that "no general of our army realized to a greater extent the need of making troops over into soldiers before commencing operations." 23 There was also a touch of tragedy in the story, concluded General Charles King, for McClellan was "to labor only that others might climb to eminence on the foundations he had laid." 24

The veterans did not usually discuss politics in their military writings, and consequently they explained McClellan's failure to crush the rebellion in the opening years of the war and his final removal from command differently than did his biographers. Most of them recognized that McClellan, the soldier, had faults. They admitted that his campaigns lacked "brilliant dash" and that on the battlefield he did not exert "sufficient promptness, thoroughness and vigor to achieve great and decisive results ...." 25 But most of the army men attached less importance to these faults than have many others. As ex-soldiers themselves, they displayed a greater appreciation for caution and its rewards than other McClellan critics have. In addition, few veterans seemed to feel such faults were fatal to McClellan's
-10- generalship or, in other words, made it impossible for him to lead the North to victory.

Basically, what they did believe was that McClellan was a casualty of the "earliness" of the opening months of the war. He commanded when, for two reasons, it was most difficult to command. Initially, there were bound to be mistakes, and, while many were his own, he was blamed for them all. If McClellan's star had risen more slowly (according to Alexander McClure), his fate would have been much happier. "Instead of floundering along in untried paths and committing errors for others to profit by, he would have seen others charged with the gravest responsibility that could be assigned to any military man, would have seen them blunder and fall, and would have been ripened, by his own experience and by the misfortunes of his superiors ...." Moreover, and this was the explanation many liked best, McClellan had faced the Confederacy in the spring tide of its strength, when its battalions were full and its spirit ardent.

So strong and pervasive were such views that even Francis Palfrey, a scathing critic of McClellan's tactical abilities, concluded his study of the Antietam campaign by writing: It may appear a strange statement to follow the other matter which this volume contains, but it is none the less true, that there are strong grounds for believing that he was the best commander the Army of the Potomac ever had .... While the Confederacy was young and fresh and rich, and its armies were numerous, McClellan fought a good, wary, damaging, respectable fight against it. He was not so quick in learning to attack as Joe Johnston and Lee and Jackson were, but South
Mountain and the Antietam showed that he had learned the lesson, and with longer possession of command, greater things might fairly have been expected of him. Not to mention such lamentable failures as Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, it is easy to believe that with him in command, the Army of the Potomac would never have seen such dark days as those of the Wilderness and Cold Harbor .... A growing familiarity with his history as a soldier increase the disposition to regard him with respect and gratitude, and to believe, while recognizing the limitations of his nature, that his failure to accomplish more was partly his misfortune and not altogether his fault.

Recently, there have been few writers, besides his biographers, whose interpretation of McClellan can be called friendly, although two interesting exceptions might be noted. Otto Eisenschiml, who has the reputation of eccentricity in some of his works, has ably summed up the pros and cons in a brief essay which concludes that McClellan had "great ability .... but his performance cannot be assessed precisely, because he was not given an opportunity to test his generalship under conditions that had been specified by himself, had been promised to him, but had never been complied with."  

Finally, James Garfield Randall, in his multi-volume biography of Abraham Lincoln, has drawn a carefully balanced but largely sympathetic assessment of McClellan.  

It may at first seem strange that the greatest Lincoln scholar found kind words for "Little Mac." But it will be recalled that Randall's conservative views on the causes of the war and his treatment of the Southern point of view have earned him the label of revisionist. It is possible that had other revisionist historians (such as Avery Craven and Roy Nichols) written more on the
conduct of the war itself, a new and fruitful interpretation of George McClellan might have been one of the chief results.

But the historical image of George McClellan has not been shaped in the hands of either his biographers or his comrades-in-arms. General historians writing on the broad course of the Civil War have determined his historical reputation. There is nothing unusual in this, because McClellan was the leading military figure in the North during the first year and a half of the war. His central role, as well as his sometimes curious conduct and his removal from command in November 1862, have made explaining him an unavoidable part of the story of the Civil War. Minor figures can sometimes escape the pervasive general interpretation applied to a period. They can even, especially if they are eccentric and colorful, be paraded as the exceptions which prove the general rule. But major personalities cannot escape. In fact, they must be made to illustrate the overall interpretation given to their era, otherwise that interpretation can scarcely be plausible. Consequently, the historical explanation of McClellan has derived from and formed an integral part of historians' fundamental assumptions concerning the conduct of the war. And their explanations have been almost uniformly unfavorable to McClellan.

The fact that the various opinions which historians have given of McClellan do not fall into contrasting "schools" is a reflection of the more basic fact that there has been a consensus in their views on the conduct of the war, at least since the 1890's. Or perhaps it would be more correct to say that there has been one mainstream
interpretation, from which a number of variations have branched. This mainstream might best be called the Union school of historical interpretation, to thereby avoid confusion with Pressly's Nationalist school, with which it is similar but broader in compass.

The Unionist interpretation is not difficult to identify. The unmistakable mark of the Union historian is his happiness with the final results of the Civil War. His enthusiasm may vary for the abolition of slavery and Lincoln's infusion of power into the office of the presidency, but he is likely to applaud anything which contributes to the great cause of the war, the maintenance of the Union. At the same time, the Unionist believes the Civil War was a great national tragedy, so he regrets its length and its high cost. He assumes that victory might have come sooner to Northern arms. The Union historian is usually impatient with the slow course of the war, therefore, and quick to criticize delays in its prosecution wherever he finds them.

The Union interpretation is remarkably similar to Lincoln's own views on the war - or at least to the views historians have attributed to him. It is natural that in this version the President should emerge hero, head and shoulders above all the other personalities of the era, since it is told almost from his own point of view: Lincoln's greatest problem was to find a general who would win the war for him. He suffered through a sorry lot of candidates until at last he discovered Ulysses S. Grant. Whereupon, the doom of the Confederacy was sealed. Kenneth Williams' five volumes, in which Lincoln Finds a General, is probably the most extreme and the most extended statement of this interpretation. The sentiment is so nearly
universal among historians, however, as to preclude discussion of all but a certain few which have been selected for their special pertinence to this study.

McClellan's role in the Union scenario is virtually predetermined. He is the first and sorriest of the candidates to try the patience of Lincoln. As early as 1890, John G. Nicolay and John Hay (the President's private secretaries, who claimed to write as historians and not as partisans), announced the time had arrived to render an objective verdict on Little Mac. While their objectivity was fraudulent, Nicolay and Hay did undeniably sound the keynote for the Union school. "Now that the fierce passions of the war, its suspicions and its animosities, have passed away," they wrote, "we are able to judge him more accurately and more justly ....

He was as far from being the traitor and craven that many thought him as from being the martyr and hero that others would like to have him appear. It would be unfair to deny that he rendered, to the full measure of his capacity sincere and honest service to the republic .... It was in his native inability to use great means to great ends that his failure as a general lay. It was in his temperament to exaggerate the obstacles in front of him, and this, added to his constitutional aversion to prompt decision, caused those endless delays which wasted the army, exasperated the country, and gave the enemy unbroken leisure ... We may well conclude that the candid historian of the future will have no sentiment but wonder when he comes to tell the story of his long mismanagement of a great, brave, and devoted army, [while] backed by a Government which strained every nerve to support him ....
Curiously, the faults which the Union historians find in McClellan are largely the same ones noted by the veterans in their writings. But the significant difference is this: to the historians these faults seem fatal and to render McClellan utterly the wrong man for the job. While most of them recognize the General's administrative talents, they judge him to have been constitutionally incapable of winning the war. The pattern has been to damn him with faint praise and then cast him in darkness because he was an obstacle to early termination of the war. James Ford Rhodes, probably the first prominent historian of the Union school, summed it up this way: "Although McClellan was a good organizer and had a high degree of patriotism, he lacked the brains to command a large field army." Guy Carleton Lee, later concluded the same, when he wrote, "He had done great things for the organization of the army, but he had proved conclusively, and at an enormous expense of means and opportunity, that he was not able to use the machine he had created."

But the finest — certainly the most ironic — statement of this theme has come from the early pen of T. Harry Williams (that is, before he changed his mind, as will be seen below). "A brilliant administrator and fine trainer of troops," Williams admitted, but McClellan "was at his best in getting an army ready to fight .... He forged out of the volunteer hosts ... the Army of the Potomac, one of the finest fighting armies in the history of War .... Its record will always stand as a tribute to McClellan's organizing abilities. No other army fought so well or so long under so many mediocre commanders — the first of whom was its creator."
This interpretation is so widely held today, ensconced in monograph, textbook, and encyclopedia, that it amounts nearly to an historical consensus on McClellan and belies his alleged reputation as a controversial figure. Recently, Time magazine set out to show that President Lyndon Johnson's trials with military stubbornness and incompetence in prosecuting the war in South Viet Nam had historical precedents. In a capsule essay entitled "The Lessons of Appomattox," the Time editors summarized the Unionist interpretation as it has passed into the national consciousness" "...Lincoln, who tested - and found wanting - more than half a dozen generals ... would have done better to take the field himself .... Against all logic and reason, the North seemed unable to win in the East .... Finally in March 1864 .. Grant was given charge of all the Northern Armies .... Lincoln had found his general, and though the war lasted another year, the outcome was never again seriously in doubt."35

In addition to this mainstream, two other distinct schools of thought on McClellan are widely held, although they are clearly variations on the Union interpretation and not contradictory to it. The first of these schools might fairly be called the psychological interpretation. Some historians have not been content to describe McClellan in the simple terms of the abilities he did or did not possess, but have gone on to conduct a post-mortem psychoanalysis of his behavior. To say, as Rhodes did, that the general "was by nature irresolute" has been for them not a final conclusion but an observation which challenges further investigation. McClellan puzzles these historians because of the "duality in his character"
which made him "so complex and so converse and so bewilderingly one thing and then another" that to them studying him is "like studying several men or several soldiers in one."³⁷ They have concluded, therefore, that McClellan "can never be understood if viewed only in a military context ... He is so different from all the others as to be unique and can be explained only in terms of his personality or psychology ...."³⁸

The psychological historians have accepted the more traditional view of McClellan's military faults, but they have discovered new explanations for them in the supposed quirks of his personality. To them McClellan is not just vain and ambitious but a man"eaten up with egotism"³⁹ or "a super-egotist." Thus also, the General's cautiousness becomes timidity and fear. In addition to schizophrenia, he is said to exhibit the symptoms of a persecution complex, a messianic complex, and neuroticism. "Almost literally [!] he lived in a world of make-believe that he peopled with a few friends and with many enemies who were bent on destroying him."⁴¹

The psychological interpretation did not originate as recently as might be expected. Historian John C. Ropes and General James B. Fry, although they lacked the sophisticated terminology, pioneered the approach in the late nineteenth century. Ropes opened the gate in 1887, when he reviewed McClellan's posthumous memoirs for the Atlantic Monthly. He was upset, as many others have been, by the letters from McClellan to his wife which were published in this volume called his Own Story. He decided that McClellan's mind was "so peculiarly constituted" that his imagination created "a great part
of the circumstances which appear to surround him." In these letters "McClellan is seen to live very much in a world of his own making." A major feature of this imaginary world was his belief that "he was the divinely appointed man by whom the country was to be saved." Concluded Ropes: "his egotism is simply colossal — there is no other word for it." 44

Seven years later James Fry, a war veteran of wide experience, including a brief tour on McClellan's staff, amplified Ropes' views on the mental quirks which had perverted the General's conduct during the war. In Fry's version, McClellan emerges as the victim of an unmistakable Messianic Complex. Observed Fry: 45

The belief that he had been called upon to "save the country" had seized upon him, and though by no means a bigot, the strong religious element in his character served to fasten the conviction and blind him to the obligations and influences which governed him at other times. Under the power of this hallucination he was insensible of his own weaknesses and errors, and of the merits and claims of others ....

Biographer Peter Smith Michie, although more restrained in his language, must also be classed in the psychological school. In the life he wrote in 1901, Michie decided that an "unaccountable weakness in McClellan's mental equipment" caused his failure as general. The "emotional and imaginative side of his nature," he concluded, "unduly affected his judgments with vacillating indecision, accentuated his constitutional timidity as a commander, weakened his
determination by strengthening his prudence, and eventually robbed him of the fruits of victory at the supreme moment."

More recently, the most determined advocate of the psychological approach has been T. Harry Williams. In the early 1940's, Professor Williams could catalog McClellan's faults and still conclude "-if the politicians had let him alone, he might have won the Civil War." It was hardly necessary for him to remark in the preface to the second edition of his *Lincoln and the Radicals* (1965), that he had since changed his mind. In the intervening years, in numerous works, Williams has become increasingly critical of McClellan and a full convert to the psychological interpretation.

Indeed, it has been Williams who has stated the theme in its bluntest language, using words that others have minced. According to him, McClellan believed the Northern masses "saw him as a savior, the man, the one man, who could protect them from danger. He developed a Messianic complex." Nor was that all. McClellan thought "the government had deliberately and almost from the start set out to destroy him. That McClellan could believe such a thing is indicative of his overdeveloped ego and his sense of persecution. But more, it reveals him as a man whose grasp of reality was so frail as to approach neuroticism." Williams summarized all of this by paraphrasing the earlier, extreme opinions of Kenneth P. Williams, and called it his own "final verdict":

McClellan was a real general, but he never grasped reality. McClellan was a truthful
soldier, but he could not see things in their true light. McClellan was an attractive but deluded man, with considerable military knowledge and little knowledge of his country, who sat a horse well and wanted life to be as he thought it should be.

It seems likely that this psychological approach will gain advocates and will increasingly influence the traditional interpretation of McClellan. Indication of this comes from Allan Nevins in his massive and yet unfinished chronicle of the Civil War, a work that is likely to be influential as a "classic" for many years. Echoing Ropes, Fry, and Williams, Nevins has depicted McClellan as "a victim not of incapacity or inexperience but of his character and temperament. Impatient of authority, querulous under criticism, religiously certain of divine guidance, deeply egotistical, he lacked the central quality of a great commander ...." 54

The second variation of the standard Union interpretation might be called the Modernist view. Widely held in a somewhat diluted form, this interpretation finds fullest expression in the writings of Bruce Catton, David Donald, and the multipartite T. Harry Williams. 55 The Modernists insist that the Civil War was a "new kind of war" and more. It was the "first of the modern wars." 57 They mean only in part by this that new weapons and techniques, such as repeating rifles, railroads, and trench warfare, were first tried in the Civil War. Their main point is that it was the first "total" or all-out war. 58 They see the struggle as having "unlimited objectives" and as engaging the unlimited passions of the participants on both sides.
According to Williams, Catton, and Donald, modern warfare must necessarily be waged under the axioms of Karl von Clausewitz, the nineteenth century Prussian military theorist. And all-out war must be conducted with all-out methods; or, as Catton has said, "to get in close and slug until something broke." Policy, aims, and strategy are all of secondary importance. The prime objective of the modern General must be the annihilation of the enemy army. In Clausewitz' words, destruction of the military arm of the enemy "takes the place of the [war's] final object," putting "it aside as something we can eliminate from our calculations." Applying this dictate to the North, Catton has observed, "Victory was more important than anything else. What it cost did not matter, and what it would finally mean could be settled later on ...." As for Northern generals, Catton believed, "They could afford mistakes, they could afford wastage, they could afford almost anything except the failure to make constant use of the power that was available to them."

It is not surprising that the Modernists have led in refurbishing the historical reputation of Ulysses S. Grant. In fact, the way they tell the story, he is something of a military genius because of his uncanny perception of the nature of modern war. Like most American soldiers, Grant had never read Clausewitz, but he was able to learn the same lessons on the field of battle itself. He and perhaps a few other generals who came to prominence later in the war, such as Sherman and Sheridan, made this breakthrough in perception. Most Civil War generals did not.
McClellan heads the list of commanders (which also includes Don Carlos Buell and to some extent Henry Halleck) who never grasped the progress being made in the science of war. Instead of paying attention to Clausewitz, they slavishly followed the obsolete advice of the Swiss theorist, Baron Henri Jomini. Catton has succinctly described the eighteenth century military doctrine which governed most West Pointers during the Civil War.

...most professional soldiers of that era... had been brought up in a doctrine that came down from the eighteenth century. Wars were usually fought for limited objectives, and they were fought in a limited way; they were primarily matters for the armies, and they were conducted up to the point where they began to cost more than they were likely to be worth, at which point they were brought to an end..., and... until the settlement was made it was wise to conduct affairs without causing too much breakage.

This meant that wars had to a certain extent become formalized. They were in a way like immense chess games, performed with intricate maneuvers that followed the book; going by the book, a good general always knew when he was licked and behaved accordingly. One of the most cerebral and highly educated of Northern soldiers, General Don Carlos Buell, told the court of inquiry which considered his case after he had been removed from the command of the Army of the Cumberland [Catton means Ohio] that it ought to be quite possible to conduct an entire campaign successfully without fighting a single battle. Make the right moves and you will win: you do not need to be especially combative, but you must be very careful, leaving as little as possible to chance, never moving until everything is ready, making those maneuvers and occupying those strategic points which will finally persuade your opponent that he had been beaten.

T. Harry Williams has added that, because the Civil War was of "unlimited objectives," it was "bound to be a rough, no-holds-
barred affair, a bloody and brutal struggle." But McClellan and Buell and their ilk did not understand this. They mistakenly clung to the belief that war could be leisurely, gentlemanly, and even humanely conducted. According to Williams:

They saw cities and territory as their objectives rather than the armies of the enemy. They hoped to accomplish their objectives by maneuvering rather than by fighting. McClellan boasted that the "brightest chaplets" in his history were Manasses and Yorktown both occupied after the Confederates had departed, because he had seized them by "pure military skill" and without the loss of life. When he had to lose lives, McClellan was almost undone. The "sickening sight" of the battlefield, he told his wife after Fair Oaks, took all the charms from victory. McClellan's mooning around the fieldanguishing over the dead may seem strange to the modern mind, but Jomini would have understood his reactions. Buell argued, in the spirit of Marshal Saxe, that campaigns could be carried out and won without engaging in a single big battle. Only when success was reasonably certain should a general risk battle, Buell said, adding: "War has a higher object than that of mere bloodshed."

In large measure, the Modernist has simply elaborated the Unionist interpretation, for when Lincoln finds Grant he also finds his modern strategist. Thus, the conclusion of a survey of McClellan historiography must be that McClellan does not deserve the reputation of being a controversial character in history. Despite the sound and fury which swirl around his name, he has really become the subject of a broad historical consensus. He was once controversial—during the war and so long as his contemporaries lived and wrote, the debate over his conduct was real. But for many years now the controversy has
been a sham kept barely flickering by an occasional but ineffective biographical eulogy. T. Harry Williams is undoubtedly correct in concluding that: "The most recent judgment [of McClellan] is that he was not a good general, was even a bad one..." In fact, that has been the judgment of the professional historian all along.

2. Reconsiderations

Neither accident, nor conspiracy, has produced this modern consensus on the historical reputation of George McClellan. On the contrary, the consensus has grown from logical and compelling causes, which alone or in combination have affected all historians' point of view. In the first place, anyone who writes of McClellan must confront the central fact that his is a story of failure - at the very least, it is certainly not a success story. Alexander McClure, Philadelphia politician and newspaperman, who was friend to both Lincoln and McClellan, understood the importance of this fact when he wrote: "Lincoln's position in history is secure, but it is doubtful whether the impartial historian of the future will give McClellan his full measure of justice. History records results - only achievements and failures. It will tell of McClellan that he was an unsuccessful military chieftain and that on his own record in an appeal to the country he was the most overwhelmingly defeated candidate for President in the history of the present great parties of the nation .."
When an historian deals with any individual who has apparently failed, it is always easier to accept the failure on its face and simply explain how it came about, than it is to challenge the appearance of failure and attempt to explain it away. The latter easily slips into tiresome rationalization. Most of McClellan's biographers have fallen into this trap, and the result in each case has been a sort of lawyer's brief, filled with special pleading which few others have found convincing. Undoubtedly, this partly explains the consensus that McClellan was a "bad general." If one constructs the story from the beginning to show that McClellan was a bad general, then his lack of success and his final removal in November 1862 snap logically into place and require no tortured explanations.

In the second place, McClellan's own writings have militated against him. Throughout his war-time dispatches and reports, as well as his post-war articles and memoirs, there runs a moral certitude and utter self-righteousness that incites the historian to accept or reject in toto his ideas. Faced with this dilemma, historians have chosen to discount not only his arguments but also his viewpoint. No evidence has been used so tellingly against McClellan as the letters which he wrote to his wife, Ellen, during 1861-1862. In these emotionally charged letters, McClellan insists that the politicians abuse and persecute him. He refers to Lincoln as the "original gorilla" and to Republicans in general as those "wretches in Washington." Most historians find the letters offensive, and they read them as candid revelations of the character defects which ruined the general's military career.
In the third place, McClellan's final removal from command in November, 1862, the most tangible sign of his ultimate lack of success, coincided with a dramatic and decisive shift in the course of the war itself. From that same autumn and early winter came the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, a new commitment to vigorous press- ing of the war, and the cabinet crisis which at last made Lincoln master in his own house. As milestones along the path to Northern victory, all of these are enthusiastically approved in the Unionist interpretation of the war. It is natural that McClellan's removal would be viewed as an important part of this turning point and that historians should find it hard to regret his passing.

Finally the most potent force working against McClellan has been the extent to which historians have interpolated the image of the General with that of Lincoln. Because the two eventually came into disagreement, it is assumed that one was right and the other wrong. In fact, historians have put McClellan and Lincoln on a sort of see-saw. When one is up, the other has got to be down. It is difficult to imagine anything that would be more devastating to any historical reputation. Abraham Lincoln is easily the strongest and most incorrigible figure in United States history. He is the axis around which the story of the war revolves. Although amateurs still run an occasional suicidal frontal assault, it has become increasingly rare for professional historians to be even moderately critical of him.
In the face of such pervasive agreement among historians and the admittedly compelling forces which have produced it, it might appear that McClellan's historical image has been settled. To "reconsider" McClellan may seem an unwanted waste of energy and an example of the "dog-chasing-tail" phenomenon sometimes manifest in Civil War scholarship. And yet, there are in fact good grounds for reopening the case. The chief result of the survey of McClellan literature has been to make plain that the current interpretation of the General, although not necessarily wrong, is incomplete.

Biographers and historians, friends and critics alike, have failed to explore one whole dimension of McClellan: his ideas and beliefs. Recent treatments of the General have seen no significance in his being a careful student of military theory. None have recognized that he tried conscientiously to translate the North's political war aims (as he understood them) into a workable military strategy. Indeed, historians have largely ignored the fact that McClellan did have serious political beliefs and a specific military strategy. Ironically, the Modernist interpretation has itself raised this very point by introducing Jomini and Clausewitz into Civil War history and by calling attention to the importance of ideas
in the conduct of War.\textsuperscript{74} And yet not even the Modernists have taken the
trouble to find out what McClellan's strategy was. This is the serious
weakness of the current interpretation. It begins with many valid and
indisputable observations on McClellan's conduct, but it goes on to rely
upon explanations of personality that are shallow, incomplete, and in
some instances inaccurate.

McClellan has emerged in history as a man devoid of intellec-
tual motivation, because through the years no one has undertaken a close
examination of his ideas or asked how his views shaped his conduct in the
war. Thus, McClellan has become an atom of contained, selfish motives,
dangling in space, detached from the larger philosophic and ideologic
forces of his milieu. Whether colored villainous or heroic, he has in
either case been depicted as a man wholly explainable in terms of his
own personality traits or the personality traits of others, especially
Lincoln, Stanton, and Halleck. Such explanations, whether essentially
right or wrong, do not by themselves justify a final verdict.

It should not be necessary, at least in this paper, to debate
the relative influence of the mind and its ideas in comparison to the
influence of instinct and emotion in shaping an individual's behavior.
It should be enough to concede that the historian must combine both to
produce a full characterization. Certainly, a man deserves, on one level,
to be judged by his own standards and expressed intentions; to have his-
tory balance his achievements against his intended objectives and his own
understanding of his responsibilities. While it would be naive to accept
the self-justifications of McClellan or any man as complete historical
explanation, surely it is too cynical to discount them altogether.
There is, after all, some connection between what a man thinks and says and how he acts, and historians who ignore that connection are more likely to produce a caricature than a characterization. And that is, in fact, what has happened to McClellan. Historians have caricatured him by exaggerating certain supposedly prominent traits of his personality into a full-blown interpretation of the man and his conduct. The result is a bad history in two ways; it is oversimplified in general and it is inaccurate in several of its parts.

For illustration of the oversimplification, one need look no further than the major recurring theme in the critics' assessment of McClellan's generalship: his slowness. Here again the viewpoint is that of Lincoln, who once remarked that McClellan "has got the slows". Almost unanimously, historians have agreed. There is nothing improper, of course, in an historian concluding that a military action was conducted more slowly than the circumstances of a particular situation permitted. But it is another thing altogether for the historian to judge the cause of the slowness to lie in the personality of the commander without ever inquiring what reasons he might have had for acting as he did. And yet this is what has happened to McClellan.

To write simply that "McClellan conducted the siege of Yorktown cautiously," for instance, could lead to a broad analysis of all the factors producing the caution. But to write, as is nearly always the case, that "the ever-cautious McClellan wasted nearly a month besieging Yorktown," is to combine description and explanation in a way that shuts out further inquiry. After such a statement, no one is left wondering why the siege lasted for a month. It was because the Union commander was
"by nature" slow.

Other personality traits alleged to McClellan, such as egotism, indecisiveness, timidity on the battlefield, and the inveterate exaggeration of obstacles, are used in the same oversimplified way to explain his actions as a military commander. Undoubtedly, all of these "by nature" explanations do have a place in any final judgment on McClellan, but they do not deserve the exclusive emphasis they have received in the past. Moreover, when presented by themselves as the sole explanation of McClellan's actions, they are not only oversimplified but also misrepresentative and inaccurate.

Once again the question of slowness will serve as typical illustration. Not only is slowness an inadequate explanation of McClellan's actions, it is also inaccurate as a total assessment of his generalship. To believe that slowness was part of the very fiber of McClellan's being, it is necessary to ignore or misrepresent five significant contradictions. In his first campaign in Western Virginia, not only was he not slow, but he acted with a vigor, efficiency and speed unrivaled by any other commander on either side during the same period. One month and three days after his appointment, McClellan had organized and equipped a field army, marched it into enemy country, and won a campaign. In another month and a half he secured the mountain counties of Virginia to the Union cause.

In his conduct of the Peninsula Campaign, McClellan has been roundly criticized for his slowness. Yet that campaign lasted scarcely two months from its start to its abortive finish. And on three separate occasions McClellan moved his army with what in fairness must be called alacrity: the four-day amphibious operation carrying the army to the
Yorktown peninsula; the fighting change of base during the last week of June; and the removal of the Army from the James at the close of the campaign. Granted that these were not movements directed against the enemy. But the West Virginia Campaign was. And so, too, was the Maryland Campaign.

Nowhere has the question of slowness been more abused than in the latter. On September 2, 1862, McClellan was reinstated to command the disorganized, dispirited, and chaotically intermingled fragments of five separate armies. Within a week a field army which was still sorting out its horses and wagons and leavened by a high percentage of raw troops that had been snatched directly from the mustering-in ceremonies, marched into Maryland. In another week McClellan brought Lee to bay at Antietam Creek and inflicted upon him the severest casualty rate ever suffered by the Army of Northern Virginia in the bloodiest day's battle of the entire war. 75

The fairest conclusion to be drawn from all of this would not be that McClellan was slow, but rather that sometimes he acted slowly and sometimes he acted rapidly; and that some other explanation in addition to slowness is needed to explain his military conduct. Much the same lesson can be drawn from another related example.

Basic to all schools of criticism of McClellan, and a supporting corollary to the slowness theme, is the assumption that the General constantly exaggerated the size of the enemy's armies. For some historians this exaggeration simply demonstrated McClellan's military incapacity, while for others it is conclusive proof that he lived in an imaginary and unreal world. In either case, it is assumed that McClellan was victimized
by exaggeration and that his strategy and tactics were distorted as the result of gross inaccuracies.

As proof, critics point to McClellan's refusal to assault Johnston's army at Manassas during the winter of 1861-1862; to his month long siege of Yorktown, while it was defended largely by the theatrics of John Bankhead Magruder; to his cautious approach to Richmond and change of base when under attack; to his slowness in exploiting the "miraculous" opportunity given him by finding Lee's "lost order" during the Maryland campaign; to his failure to renew attack against Lee's battered army the day after the battle of Antietam; and to his hesitation to undertake a new campaign in the autumn of 1862.

Whether McClellan indeed acted wrongly in all of these instances may be debated elsewhere. The point here is not the correctness of his conduct but its explanation. And there is cause for asking if McClellan's conduct may not have derived more from rational decision on his part, than from weakness, delusion, or hallucination.

In the first place, McClellan's intelligence-gathering apparatus --while far from perfect--was not so "wretched" as usually supposed.76 In many instances, his information about the enemy was much better than critics have allowed. He received reports of the "Quaker Guns" before Johnston evacuated Manassas, for example.77 And soon after his arrival at Fortress Monroe, he knew the approximately correct size of Magruder's army at Yorktown.78 In the Maryland Campaign he had news of the division of Lee's army before the "lost orders" were found.79 And, in his final, unfinished campaign against Lee in November, 1862, his intelligence system, operating better than any previous time, was providing him with
information superior to that which Lee was receiving. It is difficult to understand how "exaggeration" could be an accurate explanation of McClellan's military conduct in these situations.

In regard to the more general instances of his over-estimation of the enemy's numbers, especially in the fall and winter of 1861, critics have missed the significant fact that McClellan and his staff usually thought in terms of the total number of troops operating in an entire region or theater. Most of McClellan's intelligence reports, including those supplied to him by the much ridiculed Allan Pinkerton, dealt not only with Johnston's Manassas army, but with all the Confederate troops in Virginia, which because of interior lines and railroads could be brought into action against the Army of the Potomac. In reckoning his own army for the battlefield, however, McClellan could not employ the total number of troops under his command, because once he moved into the field he had to leave behind large detachments to garrison Washington and Baltimore, defend the line of the Potomac, protect his lengthening supply lines, and the like. Consequently in most of his estimates McClellan would pit a Northern field army against the available Confederate forces which might be brought against it. This may be a conservative way to plan a campaign, but it is not unrealistic. And, while there might be basis here for criticism of McClellan's generalship, there is hardly justification for talk of an "over-active imagination" or dark mutterings of schizophrenia.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to correct the faults in the current interpretation of McClellan by turning to the traditional works which have viewed him favorably. Biographers have, in a different way,
created their own caricature of McClellan, which is perhaps even shallower and less accurate than the critics'. Certainly, pro-McClellan writers have also made assumptions which upon examination raise more questions than they settle.

His defenders have commonly depicted McClellan as a politically innocent lamb who was devoured by the wolves of ravenous ambition that surrounded him. They insist that politics loomed large in the military story of the war. They point out that the general was a "firm Democrat," who had voted for Douglass in the presidential election of 1860.\textsuperscript{82} Called to serve the opposition administration, he soon became the natural target for the intrigue, jealousy, and mistrust of those who feared any great military success he might achieve would bring ruin to the Republican party, its programs, and its candidates. In other words, partisan politics did not stop at the war's edge. McClellan's party affiliation made him the wrong general to win the war, at least in the eyes of the Republican administration.

Certainly, there is scattered evidence to support this view in the numerous intrigues in cabinet and Congress and the carping, often nagging criticism of Republican newspaper editors. All, it would seem, aimed at undermining McClellan's reputation and consequently his political influence. McClellan himself acknowledged that Democratic leaders probably did him great harm by using his name for partisan ends, thereby causing the Republicans to fear that he "might prove a dangerous political rival."\textsuperscript{83}

No biographer has made this political approach to McClellan seem convincing, however, nor has any tried very hard to do so.\textsuperscript{84} The
weakness of the political interpretation has been its failure to answer satisfactorily the central question it raises: why did it matter that McClellan was a Democrat? Admirers of McClellan suggest that in an era of such intense partisan fury men bitterly opposed one another simply on the basis of conflicting party loyalties and personal political ambitions. For this simple explanation to be convincing, however, one would expect to find opposition to McClellan from the start, since he was a Democrat from the start; and to find all, or nearly all, Republicans opposed to him.

Such was not the case. Throughout most of 1861, from his first appointment by Governor William Dennison of Ohio (an old Free Soldier and ardent Republican) through at least the battle of Ball's Bluff in October, McClellan was the darling of the whole North. 85 As late as November of 1861, Benjamin Wade, Zachariah Chandler, Charles Summer, and others (usually considered furious partisans) were instrumental in forcing Winfield Scott's retirement and elevating McClellan in his place as General-in-Chief of the army. 86 When opposition to McClellan did begin to coalesce in late 1861, it came not from Republicans in general but from a narrow faction within the party. There was not widespread dissatisfaction with his generalship until the summer of 1862, after the Seven Days' battles.

More importantly, even if partisanship might explain this opposition to McClellan, it does not explain McClellan's military conduct in the war. On the surface, it seems absurd to ask if a Democratic general would direct a siege, or turn a flank, or even plan a campaign differently than would a Republican general. Presumably, there is a
proper way to do such things, and it should have no connection with a commander's politics.

Presumably, but not really, for it is just here that the importance of McClellan's ideas and beliefs in shaping his generalship becomes apparent. The trouble with the traditional political interpretation has been its too narrow definition of politics as partisanship: the pursuit of office, party loyalty, and the struggle between ins and outs. Politics can also have a broader meaning, involving a cluster of ideas about the nature of government and the way in which it should be run; and, in wartime, should include ideas concerning the reasons for the war and the objects being sought on the field of battle. Politics in this broader sense is indeed connected with both military theory and practice.

A reconsideration of McClellan should be justified, therefore, if it examines his political and military ideas as well as his conduct. And if it tries to answer questions such as these: What were McClellan's opinions on government and the Constitution? How did he view the war and its aims? What were his military theories and where did they come from? What was his specific strategy for winning the war? And did his strategy properly reflect the political aims and policy of his government and the people? A likely place to begin the search for answers to these questions would be an examination of the fundamental relationship between politics and the military in the conduct of war and of the roles of the politician and the soldier in wartime.
3. Statesmen and Generals

Georges Clemenceau, France's World War One political "tiger", allegedly insisted that "war is too important to leave to the generals." If Clemenceau meant by this that wars should not be controlled solely by abstract military principles, he could have made his conclusion absolute. War by its very nature cannot possibly be left to the generals. Politics, broadly defined as the affairs and interests of the State, is an irresistible force in the history of any war. The three most basic decisions of war are political: its declaration, its ultimate purpose, and its termination. It is not really a question of whether politics should influence war, but of how—whether political objectives do or do not assume their proper relationship to military realities.  

Theoretically, at least, experts say that relationship should be one of means and ends. Military strategy should be shaped to achieve the political aims of the war. As British writer, Basil Liddell-Hart, has pointed out: "...nations do not wage war for war's sake, but in pursuance of policy. The military objectives are only the means to a political end....[Hence] the military objective should be governed by the political objective, subject to the basic condition that policy does not demand what is militarily—that, is practically—impossible." Sir Frederick Maurice, who has been a close and perceptive student of the Civil War, drew the same distinction in simple language. "If analogy be needed" Maurice wrote, "I prefer that of parent and child."
It is the duty of policy to choose the road for strategy, to set it on its way, to provide means sufficient for the journey, to give timely counsel, to watch the youngster's progress carefully, to be prompt to give a hand should he stumble, to be ready to turn him in a new direction should a change of course seem necessary or opportune, but to resist the temptation to interfere save as a measure of real emergency, and then to make interference as little obvious as may be.

The twentieth century neither created, nor discovered, this theory of political-military relations. Nineteenth-century military authorities understood it and clearly described it in their writings. Both as theory and practice, therefore, it is pertinent to the history of the American Civil War. Curiously, the two great military theorists of that age, Henri Jomini and Karl von Clausewitz, are often described as opponents, because they offered diametrically contrasting views on the nature of war. Yet both writers agreed on the controlling role that politics should assume in determining military strategy.

It was, of course, the Modernists who introduced Jomini and Clausewitz into a discussion of Civil War history. But their use of the two nineteenth-century military theorists has been strangely narrow. It has been the purpose of David Donald and T. Harry Williams (and less directly Bruce Catton) to emphasize the differences between the two writers; to establish Jominian and Clausewitzian polar camps; and to relegate important Civil War generals to one or the other. The Modernists have not explored the many significant points on which Jomini and Clausewitz agreed. And possibly they have overdrawn the differences between the two.

The baron Henri Jomini is the man fallen from grace. In his own lifetime he was nearly a legend. Swiss born, he entered the French army
as private and rose to be brigadier-general and chief-of-staff to Marshall Ney. In 1813 he transferred his allegiance to the Czar and accepted commission as full general in the Russian Army. In 1804, while still a young soldier, Jomini began to write about war. He never stopped. His numerous published histories and essays translated past military actions into theories which students avidly studied. According to legend even Napoleon had acknowledged Jomini's intuitive grasp of Napoleonic strategy. No military writer was more widely read in the nineteenth century. His works were parroted by many and shamelessly pirated by others.  

In the United States, West Point indoctrinated its graduates in Jominian ideas for many years. One of the Academy's texts was the Baron's best-known work, *Summary of the Art of War*. It was Dennis Hart Mahan, Professor of Civil and Military Engineering and of the Art of War, who schooled the generation of officers who led both North and South in the Civil War. Mahan was an original thinker in his own right, but he also transmitted intact the ideas of Jomini in his lectures and in the one book he wrote in the thirty years before the war.  

It may not be literally true, as has been said, "that many a Civil War general went into battle with a sword in one hand and Jomini's *Summary of the Art of War* in the other." But the Modernists' assertion that Union and Confederate generals were profoundly steeped in Jomini cannot be doubted.  

Was the Jominian influence good or bad? The Modernists are certain it was harmful. They claim that Jomini did not truly understand Napoleonic warfare, but that he read it backwards into the eighteenth century; that because he never grasped the violent nature of war, he treated it as a game, in which finesse was more important than fighting.
He made war too geometric by writing so much of "lines of operations" and "zones of combat." He seemed to counsel the military student that to snatch a piece of enemy territory was as good a trump as crushing the enemy army. Because of their Jominian education generals such as McClellan and Buell, mistakenly believed they could defeat the South with dazzling slight-of-hand strategy and a minimum of battles. 93

Karl von Clausewitz is a different story altogether. He was the prophet not honored in his own time but discovered and canonized by later generations. It is easy to understand why Clausewitz was at first ignored. His career on the line and later as minor staff officer in the Prussian army during the Napoleonic wars was entirely routine. Later, when he settled down as director of the Military Academy at Berlin, he became lost in the Prussian bureaucracy. His only famous published work, a ponderous, three-volume, metaphysical essay entitled On War did not appear until after his death in 1831. There is no evidence that Clausewitz had any influence on American generals of the Civil War era. In fact, there is some doubt that he was known at all in this country before the war. 94

Yet today it is Clausewitz who is celebrated as the father of modern military strategy, while Jomini is all but forgotten. And it is Clausewitz's writings which are used by the Modernists to illumine the strategy and conduct of the Civil War. The Prussian's theories on war are usually presented as opposite, even contradictory to Jomini's. The core of the difference between the two writers is supposed to lie in Clausewitz's appreciation that violence is the essence of war, not finesse. The only successful strategy in total war is total combat. The
General should take the most direct approach; he should use the weight of his masses; and the only significant aim of his strategy should be to annihilate the enemy's army.

Later students have probably gone too far in emphasizing the contrast between Jomini and Clausewitz. Granted, the two men were of different temperaments and took widely varying approaches to the study of war. But the chief difference between the two may be simply the audiences for which they wrote. Jomini addressed himself exclusively to the soldier, and, while he recognized the importance of politics, he wrote largely of the military side of war. Clausewitz, however, dedicated his work to both the "Prince and the General" and constantly worried about the relationship between the political and the military. In fact, the two agreed on several points so fundamental that these may be more important than all of their differences combined.95

In the first place, both Jomini and Clausewitz agreed that military strategy must be subordinate to political policy during wartime. In his *Summary of the Art of War*, Jomini indicated his view of the relationship between politics and the military, when he defined the basic levels of decision making in war:96

Strategy decides where to act; logistics brings the troops to this point, grand tactics decides the manner of execution and the employment of the troops.

* * * * * * * * * *

Military policy embraces the political considerations relating to the operations of armies which belong to neither diplomacy, strategy, nor tactics.

And Clausewitz fully concurred: "...tactics is the theory of the use of
military forces in combat. Strategy is the theory of the use of combats for the object of the war."97

It is significant that Clausewitz, as well as Jomini, believed that policy should govern strategy, remembering that he is usually interpreted as the prophet of "absolute war." Writers since World War One, searching for the origins of the especially violent warfare practised in this century, have claimed to find in his On War the maxims demanding the unremitting use of force to achieve total victory.98 The following passage has often been quoted:99

Violence, that is to say, physical force..., is therefore the means; the compulsory submission of the enemy to our will is the ultimate object. In order to attain this object fully, the enemy must be disarmed, and disarmament becomes therefore the immediate object of hostilities in theory; it takes the place of the final object, and puts it aside as something we can eliminate from our calculations.

Certainly, when war is viewed in this way, it would seem almost to exist independently, possessing its own irresistible demands and its own unbreakable taboos. In such total war it would be the abstracted military situation which governs strategy; the political aim would be rendered simply as the complete defeat of the enemy; and all other political considerations would be postponed until the postwar reconstruction.

In fact, however, no one was more sensitive to the restrictions placed on a war by its context than Clausewitz, who insisted that war itself was nothing more than politics employing violence as means. "Is not war," he asked, "merely another kind of writing for political thoughts?
It has certainly a grammar of its own, but its logic is not peculiar to itself.\textsuperscript{100} And again he observed: "...War is only a part of political intercourse, therefore by no means an independent thing in itself."\textsuperscript{101}

It is of questionable propriety, therefore, to isolate the military conduct from other phases of the Civil War, as Bruce Catton, David Donald, T. Harry Williams, and others have done; and to analyze strategy as if its only aim were the destruction of the enemy army; and to rate generals solely on the basis of their moral fiber and their blood and iron determination. The aim of strategy is not a fixed and constant abstract but a variable determined by the larger aims for which the war itself is waged. To argue otherwise is especially questionable when Clausewitz is cited as authority for doing so. The Prussian theorist was unmistakably clear on this point in his repeated assertions to the contrary:\textsuperscript{102}

Now, if we reflect that War has its root in a political object, then naturally this original motive called it into existence should also continue the first and highest in its conduct.

...the political object, as the original motive of the war, will be the standard for determining both the aim of the military force and also the amount of effort to be made.

The subordination of the political point of view to the military would be contrary to common sense, for policy has declared the war; it is the intelligent faculty, war only the instrument, and not the reverse.

War is an instrument of policy; it must necessarily bear its character, it must measure with its scale; the conduct of war, in its great features, is therefore policy itself, which takes up the sword in place of the pen, but does not on that account cease to think according to its own laws.
The Modernists may have been led into a misreading of Clausewitz by not fully understanding his didactic style of writing. In his method of studying war Clausewitz was a sort of Platonist. He talked about the idea of a thing as its perfect form, which was not, however, ever realized in nature. Thus, his long passages on the violence and illimitable fury of war are prefaced by the statement that this is what war should be like ideally; and are concluded with the observation that they never work out that way in practice.\textsuperscript{103} He summarized all of this succinctly when he wrote:\textsuperscript{104}

Thus policy makes out of the all-overpowering element of War a mere instrument, changes the tremendous battlesword, which should be lifted with both hands and the whole power of the body to strike once for all, into a light handy weapon, which is even sometimes nothing more than a rapier to exchange thrusts and feints and parries.

The second fundamental point on which Jomini and Clausewitz agreed is a natural extension of the first. If the nature or character of any war is determined by its political objectives and modified by the military realities of the contest, it follows logically that every war requires its own strategy. Or, as Clausewitz put it, "wars must differ in character according to the nature of the motives and circumstances from which they proceed."\textsuperscript{105}

Both Jomini and Clausewitz recognized this and discussed the different kinds of war which they believed to be theoretically possible. Jomini, in his typically straightforward and concrete approach, divided political objectives and the wars they produce into six broad categories.
"A government goes to war he wrote: 106

1. To reclaim certain rights or defend them.
2. To protect and maintain the great interests of the state (as commerce, manufactures, or agriculture).
3. To maintain the balance of power.
4. To propagate political or religious theories, to crush them, or to defend them.
5. To increase the influence and power of the state by acquisition of territory.
6. To gratify a mania for conquest.

And, of course, Jomini concluded, each of "these different kinds of war influence in some degree the nature and extent of the efforts and operations necessary to wage them." 107

Clausewitz was in essential agreement, but here the difference between the Prussian and the Swiss, Jomini, is clearly indicated. Clausewitz characterized wars by the abstract and somewhat metaphysical concept of a "center of gravity" which he supposed existed in each: "All that theory can here say" he wrote, "is as follows: That the great point is to keep the over-ruling relations of both parties in view. Out of them a certain center of gravity, a center of power and movement, will form itself, on which everything depends; and against this center of gravity of the enemy, the concentrated blow of all the forces must be directed." 108 Despite the different language, the two theorists meant much the same thing, as is demonstrated in the examples Clausewitz chose to illustrate his concept. 109

Alexander had his center of gravity in his army, so had Gustavus Adolphus, Charles XII, and Frederick
the Great, and the career of any one of them would soon have been brought to a close by the destruction of his fighting force; in States torn by internal dissensions this center generally lies in the capital; in small States dependent on greater ones, it lies generally in the army of these allies, in a confederacy, it lies in the unity of interests; in a national insurrection, in the person of the chief leader, and in public opinion; against these points the blow must be directed.

The trouble with generalizations is, as the saying runs, they are only generally true. Categories that stand sharply apart on paper tend to overlap and blend indistinguishably into one another in practice. But certainly neither Jomini nor Clausewitz expected every war would drop neatly into their predetermined slots. They did expect, however, that every war would manifest an overriding goal or ultimate aim which would establish the proper strategy to be employed.

It was T. Harry Williams who once observed that the "rating of Civil War generals is a favorite American pastime." He found it curious that "in all the din hardly ever do the contestants attempt to set up any standards by which to measure generalship." Williams suggested that historians use strength of "character" to rate generals. And the suggestion is a good one, for a general’s moral strength, his ability to bend events to his will is tremendously important to his success, especially on the battlefield. But strength of character is not enough. Strength of intellect is also important.

What emerges from all of this is another yardstick which historians can apply to measure the performance of both the statesman and the general. Victory in the war is, of course, the most immediate gauge
of success. But it is also the fundamental responsibility of those charged with its conduct to find the proper means for achieving the aims that carried them into the war. In other words, it is possible to win a war in the wrong way. In fact, Clausewitz concluded that "the first, the grandest, and the most decisive act of judgment which the Statesman and General exercises is rightly to understand in this respect the war in which he engages ...." If war leaders are to be considered, even in part, as agents of war aims and policy, then it is not enough to judge any general, including McClellan, solely on the basis of an abstract military catechism. It is necessary also to examine the nature of the war, itself; what it demanded of its generals; and how well they understood and tried to implement its policy requirements.

Finally, a few definitions may be in order to make clear what view is taken of the relationship between politics and the military in this paper and what is meant by the roles of the statesman and the general. These are meant only as common-sense definitions, but they are based loosely on the writings of Jomini and Clausewitz. First, war aims are simply the goals which a nation seeks to gain from the hostilities. They are by nature political and exclusively the concern of the statesman. Clausewitz may be correct in believing that aims exist independently of individuals and arise on their own accord out of the political situation which produces the war. In which case it is the simple duty of the political leaders "rightly to understand" the aims and then, of course, work to obtain them.

War policy is the attitudes and programs adopted by the government to achieve the war aims. It embraces the mobilization of the economic,
physical, and human resources of the nation and includes the general
directions and restrictions given for their employment. Policy is the
responsibility of the statesman, but because he must consider not only
war aims but also war realities, he should formulate his policy with
the advice of experts in economics, military science, diplomacy, and other
fields. It is the duty of the statesman to make policy clear and of the
general to understand it thoroughly.

Strategy is the province of the soldier. In simplest terms it
should be the best large-scale plan which military experts can devise
within the guide-lines of the government's policy for achieving victory.
Incidentally, victory may or may not be annihilating the enemy's army,
but it is always gaining of the war aims, whatever they may be. Tactics
is the application of military force in battle and should be for the
carrying out of larger strategic purposes.

These definitions, like Clausewitzian definitions, indeed like
all definitions, are idealistic. One should not expect to find them
existing pure in nature or in history. Despite their overlapping, how-
ever, they are useful as categories and as units of measure. In some of
its forms such "overlapping" is both undesirable and dangerous. There is
danger, especially in a democracy, when the General begins to mold policy
in place of the statesman. And there is often disaster, when the politi-
cian, unschooled in military science, tries personally to draw up strategy
and direct tactics. Examples of both the danger and the disaster may be
found in the American Civil War.

One other point needs to be mentioned. Nations do not always
stay with the aims with which they start. War sometimes "liberates"
(as Clausewitz put it) powerful forces unforeseen or repressed at the outbreak of hostilities. In which case policy and strategy may need to be revised during the course of the war. Many historians believe that such a shift occurred during the Civil War. C. Vann Woodward expressed it well, when he wrote:

As the North progressed toward the framing of war objectives, America was inched along from right to left. It moved from hesitant support of a limited war with essentially negative aims toward a total war with positive and revolutionary aims. The character of the war changed from a pragmatic struggle for power to a crusade for ideas. The struggle took on many aspects of an ideological war, and in some minds became a holy war, fought and financed and supported by men who could feel themselves instruments of divine will.

Determining whether or not such a shift in Northern aims took place, and if it did how and why it came about, will eventually be a crucial point in the reinterpretation of George McClellan. But it is a question which lies beyond the limited compass of the present, introductory study. Here, the focus is on the conservative war of 1861-1862, the backdrop against which McClellan rose to authority and the climate in which he conceived his notions about strategy and his place in the conduct of the war.
Chapter Two:

The Conservative War, 1861-62

It is curious, as well as disappointing, that historians have paid so little attention to the relation between Northern war aims, the policy adopted by the Federal government to achieve these aims, and the military strategy proposed by Union generals to implement, in turn, the war policy. Historians of the Confederacy, especially Frank Vandiver and Archer Jones, have begun to analyze these relationships in respect to the Southern war effort with rewarding results, but no similar study has been made for the North. It will be a difficult project of massive proportions and delicate methodology. The limits of the present paper are such that it can do no more than point to the need and, in lieu of a thorough examination, offer a working hypothesis. Because strategy never derives entirely from abstractions, nor acts in a vacuum, it is unrealistic to study it as if it did, even when the background given must perforce be sketchy and provisional.

1. Northern War Aims

For the North the Civil War started as a conservative war of
"preservation." From December, 1860, to sometime in 1862, a large majority of Northerners seem to have agreed with Lincoln that "the paramount object in this struggle" was "to save the Union . . . under the Constitution." Essentially, they were committed to the status quo ante bellum, or "the Union as it was." Most Northerners, perhaps, simply did not think in terms of the war being a potential instrument of change for social or political institutions. But many who did think about it were firmly and vocally opposed. They wanted by force of arms to preserve and perpetuate the constitutional Union "in its integrity." By their reckoning they already possessed "the best Government in the world," and it was to defend it against any change that they rose in arms.

In the early months of the war, official pronouncements by the Federal government set forth the central war aim clearly. President Lincoln, in deciding the resort to force was necessary and calling on the states for militia, carefully prescribed the precise limits of its employment: "...in every event" he declared, "the utmost care will be observed, ... to avoid any devastation, any destruction of or interference with property, or any disturbance of peaceful citizens in any part of the country." Later, even after the defeat at Bull Run indicated how difficult victory would be to achieve, Congress saw fit to define aims of the struggle in unequivocally restrictive and conservative terms:  

Resolved: ... this war is not waged, on our part, in any spirit of oppression, nor for any purpose of conquest or subjugation, nor purpose of overthrowing or interfering with the rights or established institutions of those States, but to
defend and maintain the supremacy of the
Constitution and to preserve the Union, with
all the dignity, equality, and rights of the
several States unimpaired; and as soon as these
objects are accomplished the war ought to cease.

Of course, the question must be asked: did these statements
represent the sentiments of the Northern masses? Difficult as it some-
times is to interpret official views of governments, it is even more
difficult to discover and describe the motives of twenty million souls.
It is impossible to impose an opinion poll on the dead in any truly
scientific way. One can never be sure how accurately leaders reflect
public feelings, nor even how clearly individuals understand their own
motives.\textsuperscript{121} Certainly, it would be incorrect to speak of the North as a
monolith of uniform opinion at any time during the war. Still, it should
be possible to glimpse the shape of Northern Majority opinion - both
through groups that bring into a narrower focus the range of majority
views, and also by examining individually the smaller, more homogeneous
blocs which comprise the majority.

The Union Army might be the most important and most revealing
focal group. Before conscription in 1863 it was composed entirely of
volunteers, and the opinions held by the soldiers in the Federal ranks
would have largely reflected the views of the Northern majority who
supported the war. Whatever the North's war aims were, the men who volun-
teered to fight for them must be counted among those who were most com-
mitted to them. Equally important, the army might be considered a fair
cross-section sampling of the loyal states; not only so in terms of
geographic distribution, but also, though to a lesser extent, in terms
of social and economic classes.

What was the view from the ranks? For what did the average soldier in blue risk his life and health? Billy Yank it seems, at least in the early days of the war, was a decided conservative. He left hearth and heart to defend the Union and the Constitution; and, he not only disagreed with the abolitionists, but resented, sometimes violently, their attempt to make him fight for something he did not believe in. When the singing Hutchinson family visited the Army of the Potomac in the fall of 1861, as a sort of primitive U.S.O. to entertain the boys away from home, they nearly caused a riot by crooning anti-slavery lyrics to men who wanted to hear only of Mother, sweetheart, and the Union Forever.

In June 1862, the editor of the Camp paper of the 5th Pennsylvania Cavalry felt that his good name in the army required a blunt explanation of the banner he ran on his masthead: "The Union Forever and Freedom to All." "In construing this part of our outside heading let it be distinctly understood that 'white folks' are meant. We do not wish it even insinuated that we have any sympathy with abolitionism." An unnamed officer spoke for his fellows (and coincidently paraphrased McClellan's famous Harrison Bar letter), when he wrote to the Boston Post: "If this is a war merely for the emancipation, education and improvement of the slaves, let us know it, and let those fight who wish to. Our army would break up in twenty-four hours."

According to the historian who has read more soldiers' letters and diaries than anyone else, these incidents accurately reflect the views of ninety percent of the Federal Army. Bell Irwin Wiley has concluded that "some fought to free the slaves, but a polling of the rank
and file through their letters and diaries indicates that those whose primary object was the liberation of the Negroes comprised only a small part of the fighting forces. It seems doubtful that one soldier in ten at any time during the conflict had any real interest in emancipation per se."

The leadership of the army was even more conservative than the rank and file. From McClellan's plaintive appeal "to save us from the nigger," to Henry Halleck's angry charge that "Congress is so busy discussing the eternal nigger question" that it failed to prosecute the war properly, comes testimony exceptional only in its bluntness on the attitude of most of the generals in blue. On the eve of the war, William Tecumseh Sherman stated with characteristic directness, "I would not if I could abolish or modify slavery." Radical opinion among the military leaders of the North was relatively rare and largely confined to a handful of such well known "political generals" as John C. Fremont, Carl Schurz, and others.

In addition to focal groups such as the army, the Northern Majority, a mosaic of factions and interest alliances, might be approached through an examination of its components. Three large blocs held all, or nearly all of the citizens of the North: first, the loyal men of the border states; and second and third respectively, the Democrats and the Republicans of what might be called the "solid" North.

In the states of Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware, and in western Virginia, eastern Tennessee, and the District of Columbia lived nearly four million people, or about one-quarter of the whole population outside of the South. The support of at least a majority of
these border men was crucial for the Northern cause — as Lincoln clearly understood, when he wrote: "I think to lose Kentucky is nearly the same as to lose the whole game .... [The border states] against us, and the job on our hands is too large for us. We would as well consent to separation at once, including the surrender of this capitol."

Time revealed that a majority of the residents of the border areas did remain firmly loyal to the United States. But their commitment was to Union under the constitution and not to political or social change. On this truly dark and bloody ground, where animosities were bitterest and divisions crueller, sentiment among the loyal ran nearly as strong against abolitionism, as it did against disunion. Governor Thomas Holiday Hicks, who more than any other Marylander saved his state from secession, drew the issue starkly, when he wrote:

"I am a Southern man myself, but cannot be a traitor to the Government of my fathers, nor can I cooperate with those corruptly engaged to break up the Union. In the struggle, now that all hope of compromise is gone, my motto is: Death or victory for the Union. Then, if the abolitionists don't let our negroes alone, I will fight them."

Such views were not confined to the border states. Far from it. Hicks' sentiments echoed even in the New England hills, where the Concord New Hampshire Patriot declared that "... those who seek to turn this war into a crusade against slavery, or who thus represent it, are at heart and in effect as much traitors to their country and its Government as are the rebels who are openly engaged in the Devil's work of
attempts to overthrow that Government by force of arms." This was the voice of the Northern Democracy. And according to the way men voted in the presidential elections of 1860 and 1864 it spoke for nearly one half of the solid North.

An overwhelming majority of the Northern Democrats, or War Democrats as most called themselves, remained loyal to the government and gave their energetic and enthusiastic support to the suppression of the rebellion. They did not, at the same time, abandon their conservative views on the nature of the Union they fought to preserve; nor were they, in their own language, prepared to "subvert" the Constitution in the act of defending it. Democratic politicians such as John Adams Dix and John Alexander McClernand even volunteered to lead armies against the South, but their reasons were narrowly defined and their aims clearly conservative. To Dix, a New York Democrat and former member of the Buchanan cabinet, the whole slavery issue was "a matter entirely foreign to the great questions of political right and duty involved in the civil strife which has been brought upon us by disloyal and unscrupulous men." And, he added emphatically, "Our cause is a holy one and should be kept free from all taint."

The "holy cause" in Democratic eyes was maintenance of the Constitution unchanged. Devotion to the status quo stands the clearest theme in Democratic expressions on the aims of the war. When the New York World editorialized on the "Objects of the War," it assumed that "the purpose ... must be the preservation of the Union in its integrity."

And, when the Philadelphia Public Ledger asked rhetorically, "What Are We Fighting For?" it answered unhesitatingly:
... to preserve our republican institutions in their purity; to maintain our Union in its integrity; to establish the authority of the Constitution and laws over violence and anarchy; to secure popular rights against aristocratic assumptions; and to prove to the other nations of the earth whether we have a Government or not.

Significantly, neither of these papers could be called party organs. Both had remained independent in the election of 1860. Perhaps the finest statement of Democratic concern over the relationship between means and ends in the conduct of the war came from the more partisan pages of the Daily Ohio Statesman of Columbus:

The legitimate as well as the avowed object of the Federal Government, in initiating the present war movements, is to maintain the supremacy of the Constitution and laws and preserve the integrity of the Union. To maintain these necessarily involves the maintenance of the State Governments, and their constitutions and laws, so far as these are not contrary to the Constitution and laws of the United States. The Union cannot be preserved without preserving the States in their appropriate and constitutional spheres, for without these, there can be no Union, but only a single consolidated Republic or Empire. Hence, this is not, and must not be made a war upon any legitimate State Government or upon any constitutional State institution, as in that case it would become a war upon the Union itself, which it is the declared purpose of the Federal Government to maintain and defend.

The Democratic press, moreover, never believed it spoke only for members of its own party. It claimed, instead, to reflect the great majority opinion in the North. Declared the New York Herald: "The
people of the North are prepared for no such extremities as the brutal, bloodthirsty journals of the abolitionist school suggest. They have ... entered into a conflict with the South ... to preserve the unity and integrity of the republic against all traitors." And the New Hampshire Patriot insisted that "Whatever may have been the views of the people as to the causes of the war, or their opinions as to the proper remedy for the troubles out of which it has grown, there is no question that the great mass of them have responded to the summons to war with the distinct understanding that they were called upon to preserve national institutions and constitutional privileges, and not to destroy them."

The Democratic press may have been right. Certainly it would be wrong to read the fifty-five percent of the solid North which voted for Lincoln in 1860 and again in 1864 as an accurate indication of radical strength in the country. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that even in the Republican party, that political philosophy and that view of the war which must necessarily be called moderate, if not conservative, was in the majority. Men such as Orville Hickman Browning of Illinois, Edward Bates of Missouri, William Henry Seward of New York, Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania, Caleb Smith of Indiana, Gideon Welles of Connecticut, and the Blairs of Maryland and Missouri held varying shades of anti-slavery opinion and were thoroughly opposed to its extension into new territories; at the same time, however, they were also committed to maintain the "integrity" of the status quo.

How did these moderate Republicans view the objects of the war for the North? Most agreed with the Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican: "We yield in our hatred of slavery to no man, but the
destruction of slavery is not the object for which our armies were brought into the field." Certainly, Bates did, when he wrote to Lincoln, "Of course, I am for 'enforcing the laws,' with no object but to reinstate the authority of the Government, and restore the integrity of the nation." And Senator Browning drew general applause, when he declared on the floor of Congress: "For one, I should rejoice to see all the States in rebellion return to their allegiance; and if they return, lay down their arms and come back to their duties and their obligations they will be as fully protected, now and at all times ..., as they ever have been before, in all their rights, including the ownership, use and management of slaves."

There were many voices in the Republican press which, at least in the early part of the struggle, sounded a thoroughly conservative call for the support of the war. As the pro-Lincoln Daily Herald of Newburyport, Massachusetts explained: "The only grounds upon which we can justify ... so unnatural a war between twin States ... is ... its necessity to sustain a government for the good of the whole ... The object is not to overthrow, but to build up; not to destroy, but to restore. And the New York Times, another Lincoln paper, went even further, when it editorialized:

The war on the part of the people of the North is not against States or the institutions of any State. It is against treason and in defence of the best Government in the world .... What they demand of the seceding States is, not that they shall change their domestic institutions, their Constitutions, their policy or their laws, but they shall return to their allegiance to the Government ... When
peace shall have been conquered, and the seceding States restored to the Union, they will come back with all their rights unimpaired, their sovereignties fully guaranteed, and their domestic institutions as subject to their own control as are those of New York to-day.

Abraham Lincoln, himself, should probably be considered the leader of the moderate center of the Republican party. On numerous occasions he insisted his sole aim was to restore the Union. And, writing through Cameron to Butler, in August, 1861 he made clear what restoration meant to him at that time: "It is the desire of the President that all existing rights in all the States be fully respected and maintained. The war now prosecuted on the part of the Federal Government is a war for the Union and for the preservation of all constitutional rights of States and the citizens of the States in the Union." In its early phase Lincoln was genuinely committed to preventing the war from degenerating into a "violent and remorseless revolutionary struggle." During this time, it is likely that he would have, if it had been possible, established peace on the basis of the status quo ante bellum.

The difference between the War Democrats and the moderate Republicans on this point can perhaps be characterized as the sharp distinction between determination and desire. The Democrats stood utterly committed to a conservative course. On the other hand, the Republicans, as a new party in power for the first time, were understandable more receptive to the forces of change. For nearly a decade they had been the political "outs", criticizing incumbent programs and calling for new policies. Once winning control, they could not have been quite so com-
mitted to the status quo as the long entrenched Democrats who had
shaped it. In other words, the Republican commitment was looser and
freer than the Democrats; and, while they desired to keep the Union
"as it was," they were not fanatics about it. Nowhere is this distinc-
tion revealed more clearly than in the seemingly casual, but actually
quite pointed remarks which Lincoln addressed to John Hay on May 7, 1861:

[The President] said, 'Some of our Northerners
seem bewildered and dazzled by the excitement of
the hour. Doolittle seems inclined to think that
this war is to result in the entire abolition of
slavery. Old Col. Hamilton, a venerable and most
respectable gentleman, impressed upon me most
earnestly the propriety of enlisting the slaves
in our Army."

I told him his daily correspondence was
thickly interspersed by such suggestions.

"For my part," he said, "I consider the
central idea pervading this struggle is the
necessity that is upon us, of proving that popu-
lar government is not an absurdity. We must settle
this question now, whether in a free government
the minority have the right to break up the govern-
ment whenever they choose. If we fail it will go
far to prove the incapability of the people to
govern themselves. There may be one consideration
used in stay of such final judgment, but that is
not for us to use in advance .... Taking the govern-
ment as we found it we will see if the majority
can preserve it.

Rhetoric undoubtedly blurred this distinction between Democrats
and Republicans in the early days of the war. Close observers, listening
to the government's pronouncements and gauging the views of the Army,
the border Unionist, the War Democrats and the moderate Republicans,
which together totalled a large majority of Northern opinion, would have
been justified in concluding from their composite views that in the first
year and a half most Northerners held as their aim in waging the war the restoration of the Union as it had existed before the secession of the South.

There was, of course, a handful of radicals who would during the course of the war passionately demand otherwise. Men who asked that the war be made an instrument of social revolution. Men, like Benjamin Wade, who cried "... if the war continues 30 years and bankrupts the whole nation, I hope to God there will be no peace until we say there is no slave in this land." But such men were ever rare, as arch-radical Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, himself, admitted, when he wrote:

> Whether we shall find anybody with a sufficient grasp of mind and sufficient moral courage, to treat this as a radical revolution, and remodel our institutions, I doubt. It would involve the desolation of the South as well as emancipation; and a repeopling of half the continent. This ought to be done but it startles most men.

But even the strident, minority voices that called for more revolutionary goals for the war were largely silent during its first months. This may have been no more than a tactical repression of opinion. As Horace Greeley candidly admonished in the radical New York Tribune: "This War is in truth a War for the preservation of the Union, not for the destruction of Slavery; and it would alienate many ardent Unionists to pervert it into a War against Slavery." Whether the Radicals were motivated by conviction or political tactics, however, the result was the same. With the majority of Northerners genuinely conservative or
moderate and the minority silent or cooperative, there seemed to be in the North at the beginning of the conflict a consensus on war aims.

It was in this climate of opinion that early political policy evolved and the first military strategies proposed. If one expects to find, as both Jomini and Clausewitz supposed, that war is an instrument of politics, then it should not be surprising that this early policy was conciliatory and that these first strategies were conservative.

2. The Policy of Conciliation

When Clausewitz wrote of the "fog of war," he meant to describe the uncertainty and distortion which envelope a field commander's knowledge of the movements and intentions of his enemy. Often the phrase applies just as well, however, to the higher levels of command, where obscuring mists sometimes shroud the determination of policy and grand strategy. Under the best of circumstances, it is never easy for statesmen and generals to foresee at the start which attitudes and plans will best produce the results they desire. Under less than optimum conditions, there likely will be drift, or, at the very least, evolutionary change in the planning and the conduct of the war.

Northern leaders had more than the normal fogginess to part. In fact, it is sometimes forgotten how volatile and uncertain were the opening days of the rebellion. Not for nearly eight months did the final outline of the military situation emerge with reasonable distinctness. When South Carolina passed her Ordinance of Secession on December 20, 1860, it was not clear to Northerners that the problem would be more than it
had been in 1832, when the Federal government had forced a single, recalcitrant state back to her duties in the Union. Three weeks passed before the secession of Mississippi revealed the deeper gravity of the crisis. Then a month elapsed, while the other deep South states decided whether or not to follow suit. Both North and South marked time in February and March, during the transition from the Buchanan to the Lincoln administration. In April and May the upper South slowly left the Union. And, well into the summer of 1861, the very real possibility existed that Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri might also secede.

Hence the Civil War did not begin, as most wars do, with a declaration of hostilities between recognizably defined foes. More nearly, the Union in 1860-1861 represented an ice floe in warming waters, with large bits breaking off and drifting away, and with cracks appearing to threaten further disintegration. The pressing problem was to stay the break-up. Under these circumstances some form of conciliation was the only policy that made sense. Violent movement seemed more likely to hasten than halt the disintegration of the Union. No policy, of course, could be rigidly defined or inflexibly applied during a time of such rapid change. And the policy of conciliation was not static. It evolved through a number of phases in response to the current of events.

The policy of conciliation was most ambiguous, when it was also most partisan, in its initial phase, from December (1860) to February (1861). Partly because the Buchanan administration seemed weak and divided at a time when strength and unity was so obviously needed, criticism proliferated on all sides in the North. The Democrats, who were either really frightened or else were using the rhetoric of fright, seemed from
the start to take the crisis more seriously than the Republicans.
From the day of Lincoln's election, the Democrats conjured the horrors of internecine strife as the alternative to peaceful reconciliation. Most Democrats believed that the proper policy should combine both firmness and compromise. Samuel Barlow, New York lawyer and merchant, succinctly expressed the views of many in his party in a letter to Buchanan, dated December 31. Barlow warned the President that he should move immediately to strengthen the Federal forts and arsenals located in the South and in other ways demonstrate Northern determination to sustain the Union before the secession movement had gone too far. At the same time, Barlow insisted that it would be necessary for the North to make genuine concessions to the South or else coercion could not be avoided. And of course, he concluded, coercion would mean "strife, the \textsuperscript{163} parallel with which is not even to be found in history."

Some Republicans agreed with the Democratic view that compromise would be necessary. The New York \textit{Times} sent up the first trial balloon on November 14; and a week later Thurlow Weed publicly stated his belief that concessions would be required from the North. William Henry Seward, Weed's more visible partner in New York party politics, immediately disassociated himself from any belief in compromise, but he \textsuperscript{164} later changed his mind. In fact, he became one of the most ardent exponents of compromise. On January 27, Seward, by now Secretary of State designate and from his Washington post acting as liaison between the President and the President-elect, wrote to Lincoln, "... every thought that we think ought to be conciliatory forbearing and patient, and so open the way for the rising of the Union Party, in the seceding states
which will bring them back into the Union."

But most Republicans, including Lincoln, did not agree that conciliation required compromise. They believed that concessions, especially if given away too readily, might destroy their own party and so strengthen the hands of the Southern extremists that it would be impossible to deal with them in the future. Many Republicans believed that the time had arrived for a confrontation in the apparently interminable conflict between North and South. "The tug has to come," Lincoln wrote on December 11," and better now than at any time hereafter." Confrontation did not mean military coercion, however, but simply firmness and silence. Publicly, Lincoln said and wrote virtually nothing, while President-elect. Most likely he tried to convey the impression that he would not be stamped into compromise.

The differences between the Democrats and Republicans should not obscure the broad consensus which existed in the North and which was eventually reflected in the policies of the Buchanan administration. Northerners, regardless of party, wanted reconciliation, and most agreed on three fundamental points: it must be made plain to the South that the North intended to preserve the Union; there must be no precipitate resort to force or coercion; and, in the end, peaceful or "voluntary reconstruction" would depend upon the strength and effectiveness of Southern Unionists. Beyond these points, the Democrats, believing concessions necessary, supported with an almost fatalistic desperation such measures as the Crittenden resolutions, which would have revived and extended the Missouri Compromise line of demarcation; and the proposed Thirteenth amendment which (as an "unemendable amendment") would have guaranteed
slavery where it existed forever. The Republicans, believing con-
cession itself to be fatal, opposed all such attempts at compromise.

The policy of conciliation entered its second phase on March 4, with the inauguration of Lincoln as president. Ending his four month's silence with a carefully drawn address to the nation, Lincoln made it clear on taking office that he intended to pursue, at least temporarily, a course similar to that Buchanan had followed during his last weeks. He would do as little as possible to aggravate the crisis, and trust that some solution acceptable to both sides could be found. The passing of time, he hoped, would cool passions and bring wiser counsels to the fore in the South.

In his inaugural Lincoln tried hard to project an atmosphere that would foster reconciliation. To be acceptable to the North any solution would have to include the South's return to the Union under the Constitution and her recognition of the validity of his election, but beyond that Lincoln showed surprising flexibility. He was willing to guarantee the traditional concept of state rights, including the pro-
tection of slavery where it already existed. He may even have stretched his personal beliefs a bit, when he declared: "I have no purpose, directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so."

Lincoln perfectly understood the detrimental effect his use of force -- even though constitutionally correct -- might have on the South and the border states. Therefore, again temporarily, he forebore the use of force. The words he aimed at the South on this point, care-
fully phrased with the help of Senator Browning and Secretary Seward, although well-known, are worth reviewing:

... the Union ... will constitutionally defend, and maintain itself.

In doing this there needs to be no bloodshed or violence; and there shall be none, unless it be forced upon the national authority. The power confided to me, will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property, and places belonging to the government, and to collect the duties and imposts; but beyond what may be necessary for these objects, there will be no invasion — no using of force against, or among the people anywhere. Where hostility to the United States, in an interior locality, shall be so great and so universal, as to prevent competent resident citizens from holding the Federal offices, there will be no attempt to force obnoxious strangers among the people for that object. While the strict legal right may exist in the government to enforce the exercise of these offices, the attempt to do so would be so irritating, and so nearly impracticable with all, that I deem it better to forego, for the time, the uses of such offices.

Thus, the new President strongly asserted his constitutional authority, but, as David Potter has pointed out, he also confessed he did not intend to press that authority for the time being. This program of forebearance, or "masterly inactivity" as the New York Times termed it, allowed Lincoln to announce his ultimate intentions, while retaining a pragmatic flexibility in his immediate actions.

Later, when Lincoln undertook to explain the construction he put on conciliation in the opening days of his administration, he simply elaborated on his inaugural remarks:
The policy chosen looked to the exhaustion of all peaceful measures, before a resort to any stronger ones. It sought only to hold the public places and property, not already wrested from the Government, and to collect the revenue; relying for the rest on time, discussion, and the ballot-box. It promised a continuance of the mails, at government expense, to the very people who were resisting the government; and it gave repeated pledges against any disturbance to any of the people or any of their rights. Of all that which a president might constitutionally, and justifiably, do in such a case, everything was foreborne without which, it was believed possible to keep the government on foot.

Lincoln's initial, non-violent phase of the policy of conciliation could not last indefinitely, however. It had its own built-in timetable, although the President could not have begun to understand this fully until after his inauguration, when all of the information coming into the War Department became available to him. The Southern forts still garrisoned by Federal troops were like ticking bombs, set and bound eventually to explode. For the South, Forts Pickens and Sumter, but especially the latter, represented the most flagrant insult to her fledgling nationhood. Symbolically, possession of the forts had become necessary for the completion of Southern independence. For the North to insist upon holding them meant the eruption of violence was virtually unavoidable and that peaceful solution had to be found, if it were to be found at all, before too many days had passed.

There were Northerners who were so committed to the compromise approach that they were willing to sacrifice the forts to avoid a military confrontation. Winfield Scott suggested just this in mid-March, when called upon by the new President for advice. "Indeed," he argued, "the
giving up of Forts Sumter and Pickens may be best justified by the hope that we should thereby recover the State to which they geographically belong by the liberality of the act, besides retaining the eight doubtful States. Seward, at about the same time, suggested that Lincoln could neatly make his point with both North and South by withdrawing the garrison from Sumter and strengthening the one at Pickens, since the latter was less prominent in the public mind.

The President, himself, desperately wanted to hold all of the remaining Southern forts still occupied by Federal troops -- thus fulfilling the minimal pledge of his inaugural address. But according to the highest military advice available to him from Scott, Chief of Engineers Joseph Totten, Topographical Engineer Alexander Bache and others, Sumter could not be held for many more weeks. Lincoln finally decided that whatever the outcome in Charleston Harbor, it must not be a demonstration of the weakness of his administration. Here Lincoln displayed greater insight than Seward or Scott. He saw that the forts were as important symbolically to the North as they were to the South; symbols, that is, of the North's determination to preserve the Union. And, in this, he was probably correct. Thus came the clash of symbols -- and, in course, the sounding brass.

Victuals proved to be the catalyst. Sumter's supplies were slowly dwindling, and for Lincoln not to provision the fort was tantamount to surrendering it by default. Contrarily, if the South permitted provisioning she virtually forfeited any chance of taking the fort without the use of force. Given these premises the outcome was logical. On April 12, in response to news that a supply fleet was on its way,
Confederate guns opened on the fort in Charleston harbor. Thirty-eight hours later the garrison surrendered. Thus disappeared the last hope for a non-coercive settlement of the crisis. And, thus, came the North to the embarrassing and delicate task of using force to preserve the status quo. As Lincoln later observed, "... no choice was left but to call out the war power of the Government; and so to resist force, employed for its destruction, by force, for its preservation."

Violence is, if not destructive, at least inimical to the status quo. If Lincoln needed proof of this, it came with the secession of the upper South after the fall of Sumter. Northern leaders now faced the delicate problem of employing force with restraint, applying it in the proper amount and at the proper places. Clausewitz once noted that "A Prince or General who knows exactly how to organize his War according to his object and means, who does neither too little nor too much, gives by that the greatest proof of his genius." And, after Sumter, it was genius, indeed, that was required to find a suitable means for achieving the war aims of the North, a conciliatory way to coerce the South.

Curiously, the period from the surrender of Sumter in April to the battle of Bull Run in July is one of the least known of the war. Perhaps, both participants and historians have been too anxious in their writings "to get the ball opened" -- to get onto what seems to be the war proper. Admittedly, sources are scarce for this period; letters are few; and the reliable and familiar diarists have either not begun to transcribe their daily experiences, or else, reflecting the amateurishness of beginners, their entries are thin and not very helpful.

Lincoln seems to have turned first to the one simple program
at hand, a show of strength. Evidently, in the days of late April, he thought that if sufficient force were displayed, it would be possible to avoid its actual use on a wide scale. Sumter, by introducing violence, necessitated a redefinition of the policy of conciliation, but Lincoln seemed to believe that violence could yet be largely restrained and that the North might still achieve her aims simply by demonstrating her determination. The President, in calling for 75,000 three-month militiamen on April 15, could not have intended, at that time, to undertake serious military operations. And, with Virginia and the upper South hanging by a weak thread, he probably did not.

Lincoln clearly stated the limits to which he originally intended to use force against the South in his Militia Proclamation: "... the first service assigned to the forces hereby called forth will probably be to repossess the forts, places, and property which have been seized from the Union; and in every event, the utmost care will be observed, consistently with the objects aforesaid, to avoid any devastation, any destruction of, or interference with, property, or any disturbance of peaceful citizens in any part of the country." And, he defined his intentions even more conservatively, when, a week later, he wrote to Reverdy Johnson of Maryland:

I do say the sole purpose of bringing troops here is to defend this capital.
I do say I have no purpose to invade Virginia, with them or any other troops, as I understand the word invasion. But suppose Virginia sends her troops, or admits others through her borders, to assail this capital, am I not to repel them, even to the crossing of the Potomac if I can?

* * * * * * * * *
Again, are we not to hold Fort Monroe (for instance) if we can? I have no objection to declare a thousand times that I have no purpose to invade Virginia or any other State, but I do not mean to let them invade us without striking back.

The President's strategy of demonstration, the third redefinition of the policy of conciliation, looked to a large display of force, the defence of Washington and other places held by the North, and the possibility of an attempt to retake the Southern forts, although, this last point, he was still willing to deemphasize and even to postpone. Secretary of War Simon Cameron submitted a plan to the cabinet on April 14 which suggested to Lincoln an additional strategic option. Cameron's plan, probably drawn loosely from Scott's advice, called for a naval blockade of the Southern coast and the immediate capture of key Southern ports. Lincoln quickly seized upon this additional weapon of non-violent coercion, when on April 19 he proclaimed a blockade of the seceded states.

Conservatives and moderates especially approved of the blockade, seeing it as potentially the ideal solution. Attorney-General Bates, in a memorandum which probably reflected the President's own thinking at this time, wrote on April 15: "The plan of practically closing the ports of the insurgent States, and cutting off all their sea-ward commerce, seems to me the easiest cheapest and most humane method of restraining those States and destroying their confederation ...." Bates added that if the plan were "strictly and persistently enforced it would not necessarily lead to the shedding of a drop of blood," but would still "be very coercive and very promising of success."
Not for long, however, did Lincoln continue to believe that demonstration alone would be sufficient. The two weeks following the blockade proclamation are but dimly illumined to historians. It is clear that during this period the President came to understand that it would be necessary to apply force more directly than he had at first anticipated. But it is not exactly clear what induced the change.

Lincoln's only official reference to these twilight days appeared in a passage which was deleted from his Special Message to Congress of July 4, 1861. He wrote, "On more mature reflection, with observation on current events, it was concluded that the measures adopted were inadequate to the occasion, both by reason of the very limited time the militia would be held to serve, and the general insufficiency of numbers in the regular land and naval forces."

It may be surmised that the "current events" which stimulated "more mature reflection" included Jefferson Davis's call on April 16th for 32,000 Southern troops for a minimum of one year's service; the riots in the streets of Baltimore on the 19th; the fall of Harper's Ferry on the 18th; Virginia's secession on the 17th and that State's summoning forth of its land and naval forces on the 1st of May; and, in addition, the imminent secession of North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas. All of these worked to reveal the hitherto uncertain depth and breadth of the rebellion. Consequently, by May 3rd, Lincoln decided that to save the Union it would be necessary to apply armed force directly against the South through the use of the military. Realizing this would require more troops, enlisted for a longer period, he issued a second call to arms for the North.
And this time the language was more severe and the limitations on use less restrictive. In calling for three-year volunteers and an increase in the regular army and navy, the President explained:

Whereas existing exigencies demand immediate and adequate measures for the protection of the National Constitution and the preservation of the Nation Union by the suppression of the insurrectionary combinations now existing in several States for opposing the laws of the Union and obstructing the execution thereof, to which end a military force, in addition to that called forth by my proclamation of the fifteenth day of April, in the present year, appears to be indispensably necessary.

The firing on Sumter had introduced force into the political dispute. Now, in early May, on-rushing events sharpened the general question of how to use force-in-the-abstract to the more specific problem of how to apply the land and sea forces of the United States to achieve the political reunion of the nation and the reconciliation of its peoples. In other words, Lincoln's problem now became one of finding a suitable military strategy. And, clearly, it was the province of the professional soldiers to devise one for him.

The decision to use the armed forces to coerce the South did not, as is sometimes assumed, make the policy of conciliation, itself, obsolete. In fact, that policy continued to be pertinent and proper so long as Northern war aims remained unchanged. Nor were Northern generals being asked to perform an impossible task. Military men, well versed in the art of their profession, knew that there was more than one way to conduct warfare and that the proper path to victory was determined
by how victory, itself, was defined.

It was, of course, possible, when it was also desirable, to wage war fiercely; to spread destruction and desolation on every side, when the annihilation of the foe was sought. It was also po-ssible, however, to conduct war conservatively; to pacify and placate with one hand, while fighting with the other, when conciliation was the ultimate aim. A total war imposed few restraints on the manner of its waging. A limited war, on the other hand, implicitly demanded restrictions on its conduct.

A very few Federal Generals did understand this difference. They discerned also that the mood of the country, the declaration of Congress, and the proclamations of the President determined that some form of the Conservative strategy was the proper instrument for suppressing the rebellion. At this time it was not the army's task to destroy the South but to restore the Union, not its duty to subjugate a people in arms but to coerce them into reconciliation. Of Lincoln's commanders, at least three, Winfield Scott, George McClellan, and Don Carlos Buell, understood to some extent the responsibility placed upon them by the national war policy. And all three would try conscientiously to reconcile their use of force with the ultimate object of the war.

3. Scott's Dread, or the First Limited-War Strategy

The first specific program for the limited use of force to subdue the South came -- as properly it should have -- from Winfield Scott. As one of America's oldest and certainly her most distinguished living soldier, Scott possessed the experience to advise Lincoln, and as General-
in-Chief and commander of the United States Army, he had the duty to do so, as well. Three-quarters of a century spent alternately fighting hard and eating well had rendered the old soldier mountainous and physically infirm by 1861. His mind, nonetheless, was alert and sharp.

In fact, no one followed the deepening crisis in 1860-61 more closely than Scott. He poured over newspapers from all sections of the country, digested the heated debates from the floor of Congress as reported to him by long-suffering aides, and scavaged the national capital for bits and drifts of gossip and rumor from his throne-like chair at the head of his celebrated dining table; and, in this way, he more than compensated for his own immobility. Nor were there many better placed to gauge the currents of the times than he, who was privy to military and political circles and acquainted (more often than not intimately), with most of the men of influence from both the South and North.

From this vantage, Scott was able to see beyond the drift and to recognize the rapids which lay ahead. He thoroughly dreaded what he foresaw. As early as October, 1860 he began to fear the South was not bluffing and would secede if Lincoln were elected president. He also understood that rashness on either side would then precipitate civil war. Fervently, he hoped that his might be avoided. And he believed it could be if the Federal government would only follow the proper policy.

Personally, he supported John Bell, the compromise candidate of the Constitution Party for president, but with the growing likelihood of Lincoln's victory, Scott urgently pressed his own policy views on President James Buchanan in late October. Scott predicted the South in "an early act of rashness" might try to seize Federal forts and arsenals within her borders. Since he believed this would likely result in
war, he begged that "all these works should be immediately so garrisoned
as to make any attempt to take any one of them by surprise or coup de main
ridiculous.

From first to last Scott was determined to save the Union from
secession, but he was equally determined to save it from visiting other
forms of destruction upon itself, especially suicidal civil war. He
knew that Federal troops had to be sent into the rebellious areas before
the people had time to arm themselves or to prepare for war, otherwise
illimitable violence might be provoked. Later, after his first advice
was ignored, when a military confrontation did develop over Sumter and
Pickens, the old soldier sadly but logically recommended the forts be
abandoned.

Scott's own solution to the crisis, though eventually passing
through several stages, was itself largely consistent. Invariably, his
proposals derived from his fundamental belief that only a double-edged
policy of conciliation, stressing both firmness and moderation, could
save the nation from the rocks threatening on the one side and whirlpool
yawning on the other.

Scott submitted his first specific program to Buchanan even
before South Carolina had seceded. His earliest plan was more political
than military, although at the time this was not inappropriate.
Certainly, it was predictive. After urging that the Southern garrisons
be strengthened, he explained to the President:

With the army faithful to its allegiance,
and the navy probably equally so, and with a
Federal Executive, for the next twelve months,
of firmness and moderation, which the country has a right to expect — moderation being an element of power not less than firmness — there is good reason to hope that the danger of secession may be made to pass away without one conflict of arms, one execution, or one arrest for treason. In the mean time it is suggested that exports might be left perfectly free — and to avoid conflicts all duties on imports be collected outside of the cities, in forts or ships of war.

On a number of other occasions, Scott pressed similar views on Buchanan and Secretary of War John B. Floyd. And for a time he was cautiously optimistic. "General Scott," he wrote to Floyd on October 30, refering to himself in his customary, Caesarean third-person, "is all solicitude for the safety of the Union. He is, however, not without hope that all danger and difficulties will pass away, without leaving a scar or painful recollection behind."

But as time passed and the Southern states went out of the Union, organized their own government and began to arm themselves, Scott saw the North's strategic alternatives rapidly narrowing. Growing anxious and impatient, he came to see in the President-elect the last hope for averting disaster. "I wish to God that Mr. Lincoln was in office," he cried out to Congressman Elihu Washburne on one occasion. "I do not know him, but I believe him a true, honest and conservative man."

At last, Scott could restrain himself no longer, and opened communications with Lincoln (who was still in Springfield), through the ubiquitous William Seward, advance agent of the new administration in Washington. Lincoln respected Scott's ability, but he harbored pro-
longed doubts about his loyalty, perhaps because of the General's Southern birth. Even after repeated assurances by Washburne and Seward, Lincoln sent the Adjutant-General of Illinois, Thomas S. Mather, to visit Scott in late January. Mather returned to attest to "General Scott's positive and unreserved loyalty." Thereafter, Lincoln appeared to give "the local situation in Washington no further concern and went ahead with his preparations for the inaugural journey."

What concerned Scott, however, was not the safety of Washington, which he did not then believe to be seriously threatened. He worried instead about what general policy Lincoln intended to adopt. Later, uncertain that he was making a strong enough impression through his conversations with Seward, Scott finally wrote a letter on March 3rd with the intention that it be shown to Lincoln, who by then was in Washington.

With much good sense, the General told the President, on the eve of his inauguration, that in the crisis he was about to enter upon only four solutions were yet possible. Going to one extreme, he pointed out, the North could simply surrender and "Say to the seceded States — wayward sisters, depart in peace!" Or — and in Scott's mind this was the opposite extreme — Lincoln could try to "Conquer the seceded States by invading armies," and thereby plunge the nation into civil war. Scott scorned equally these radical policies. There was a safer way to coerce the South, he observed, and it constituted his third possibility. Lincoln might "collect the duties on foreign goods outside the ports of which this Government has lost the command or close such ports by acts of congress, and blockade them." The General, however, like Lincoln and most Northerners, was not yet ready to admit
that even this much force was necessary.

Finally, and with a sheer bluntness that must have been a bit
startling to the politician in Lincoln, the bluff old warrior pronounced
his verdict. The North must first exorcise its own devils -- those
cloven-hooved fanatics of the Republican Party. Abandon the very name,
he urged.

Throw off the old, & assume a new designation --
the Union party; -- adopt the conciliatory measures
proposed by Mr. Crittenden, or the Peace convention & my life upon it, we shall have not a new case of
secession, but, on the contrary, an early return
of many, if not all the states which have already
broken off from the Union. Without some equally
benign measures, the remaining slave holding states
will, probably join the Montgomery confederacy in
less than sixty days, when this city -- being
included in a foreign country -- would require
permanent Garrison of at least 35,000 troops to
protect the Government within it.

Here, of course, Scott was demanding that Lincoln make greater
concessions to the South than the President could possibly allow. Even
if his highly partisan supporters had encouraged him to abandon the
Republican Platform of 1860 and disband the party itself (the likelihood
of which was virtually nil), Lincoln could not have done so without at
the same time abandoning the democratic principle of majority rule. The
whole point at stake was whether or not the South could be kept in the
Union and under the Constitution. And, clearly, for the South to be
brought under the Constitution again, meant she would have to abide by
its legal and normal processes. Along with the perpetuity of the Union,
the South must accept the legality of Lincoln's election.
The very next day the situation changed drastically. While Chief Justice Taney administered the oath to Lincoln at the Capitol, news reached the War Department from Major Robert Anderson that Sumter could not be held longer than forty days at the outside. When asked by Lincoln about the feasibility of relieving Sumter, Scott replied, supported by all of his army advisors, that it was militarily impossible to assemble the necessary men and ships in the time available. Scott knew that Gustavus Fox and other naval officers were recommending that a small expedition be slipped into Sumter under cover of night, but he rejected this proposal as a risk not worth the temporary relief it would give. In summarizing these views for Cameron to submit to the Cabinet on March 15, he wrote:

It seems from the opinions of the Army officers who have expressed themselves on the subject — all within Fort Sumter, together with Generals Scott and Totten — that it is perhaps now impossible to succor that fort substantially, if at all, without capturing, by means of a large expedition of ships of war and troops, all the opposing batteries of South Carolina. In the mean time — six or ten months — Major Anderson would almost certainly have been obliged to surrender under assault or the approach of starvation; for even if an expedition like that proposed by G. V. Fox should succeed once in throwing in the succor of a few men and a few weeks' provisions, the necessity of repeating the latter supply would return again and again, including the yellow-fever season. An abandonment of the fort in a few weeks, sooner or later, would appear, therefore, to be a sure necessity, and if so, the sooner the more graceful on the part of the Government.

As usual, Scott had not confined his views to the strictly
military aspects of the situation. After concluding Sumter could not be held, he recommended it be given up "gracefully." It was later in this same memorandum that he suggested the administration's "liberality" in voluntarily abandoning Sumter and Pickens might help keep the border states in the Union. According to Postmaster-General Montgomery Blair, Scott's advice upset and shocked Lincoln. Following a dinner party that same night, the President called an emergency cabinet meeting to read the memorandum and ask for opinions. Blair was later certain it was the political overtones in Scott's note that so agitated Lincoln. If so, the President was naive and unrealistic to believe that the political and military aspects of the Sumter crisis could be separated. Scott saw that questions of policy and strategy were as closely connected as means and ends, and he was not wrong in giving his views on both. In any case, Blair was probably correct that this episode marked a turning point in the relationship between Lincoln and Scott; and that, thereafter, the President had less faith in the reliability of Scott's advice.

Actually, the differences between the two men were not so great as their disagreement over Sumter might suggest. Both men were advocates of conciliation, and both were concerned about the means used to achieve it. In early March moderation and restraint still seemed the likeliest path to reconciliation. Lincoln, also, at this point was unwilling to be responsible for the introduction of physical force into the delicately balanced situation.

During this opening phase, because Lincoln did not plan to use force, he did not require a comprehensive grand strategy from his
army chief. In numerous private conversations and through a series of "Daily Reports," Scott explained the technical aspects of the Sumter and Pickens situations; described the security measures taken for the defense of the capital; and passed on other odds and ends of military information. As yet Lincoln did not intend to use the army -- at least, 213 not outside of Charleston Harbor. And Scott had no intention of pressing such an idea upon him.

Then, with the bombardment and surrender of Sumter, came Lincoln's first change in policy, his decision to call out the three-months militiamen to demonstrate the North's determination. But it was not until near the first of May, after the further decision had been made to increase the armed forces and to use them, that a grand strategy, in a military sense, was called for. And it was then that Scott offered his famous "Anaconda" plan for subduing the South.

Scott's strategy was neither complicated, nor new. It embodied ideas that he had been advocating from the start, and which he now refined and directed to the practical questions of military application. On May 3rd, in a letter to George McClellan, commanding in Ohio, Scott explained succinctly what he proposed to do. At the time he evidently believed the administration had approved his strategy, for he wrote: "I have read and carefully considered your plan, for a campaign, and now send you my own views, supported by certain facts of which you should be advised." Then follows, without clear distinction between views and facts, these details:
First. It is the design of the Government to raise 25,000 additional regular troops, and 60,000 volunteers for three years.

Second. We rely greatly on the sure operation of a complete blockage of the Atlantic and Gulf ports soon to commence. In connection with such blockade we propose a powerful movement down the Mississippi to the ocean, with a cordon of posts at proper points, and the capture of Forts Jackson and Saint Philip; the object being to clear out and keep open this great line of communication in connection with the strict blockade of the sea-board, so as to envelop the insurgent States and bring them to terms with less bloodshed than by any other plan. I suppose there will be needed from twelve to twenty steam gun-boats, and a sufficient number of steam transports (say forty) to carry all the personnel (say 60,000 men) and material of the expedition; most of the gun boats to be in advance to open the way, and the remainder to follow and protect the rear of the expedition, &c. This army should be composed of our best regulars for the advance and with four months and a half of instruction in camps prior to (say) November 10. In the progress down the river all the enemy's batteries on it banks we of course would turn and capture, leaving a sufficient number of posts with complete garrisons to keep the river open behind the expedition. Finally, it will be necessary that New Orleans should be strongly occupied and securely held until the present difficulties are exposed.

In this letter to McClellan, Scott did not elaborate on the exact manner in which his cordon along the coast and up and down the Mississippi was expected to bring the South "to terms." To Lincoln, however, he revealed that the key to his plan was his continuing confidence in the eventual emergence of strong Union sentiment in the seceded states. He told the President:
If you will maintain a strict blockade on the sea-coast, collect your revenues on board cutters at the mouths of the harbors, and send a force down the Mississippi sufficiently strong to open and keep it free along its course to its mouth, you will thus cut off the luxuries to which the people are accustomed; and when they feel this pressure, not having been exasperated by attacks made on them within their respective States, the Union spirit will assert itself; those who are on the fence will descend on the Union side, and I will guarantee that in one year from this time all difficulties will be settled.

Scott was even willing to use the army to intervene in state politics, when the loyal Union men of the state invited him to do so. He specifically had in mind putting the Federal troops in Texas at the disposal of Sam Houston, but the aging hero of San Jacinto declined such outside assistance. It is questionable how conciliatory this use of the army would have been, especially in light of the later history of Tennessee, Maryland and the other border states. Scott also insisted that Southern commerce be allowed to flow unlimited on the Mississippi to forestall irritation and an extension of "the spirit of secession."

Bits and pieces of Scott's proposed strategy dribbled out to the public. The press, fastening on its most prominent features, likened the military envelopment of the coastline and the Mississippi to the coils of a giant snake, which constricting gradually was supposed to strangle the new Confederacy. At first, simply to describe the plan, but later to ridicule it, they called it the "Anaconda."

And historians, too, have scoffed at Scott's plan Admittedly,
viewing the war in retrospect, knowing full well the four years of hard and bloody fighting that lay ahead for the North, perhaps, it does seem to have been a naively soft and unpromising solution that the general urged upon Lincoln. Curiously, however, none of the critics has asked how Scott -- who was certainly no paper soldier -- could have decided upon a plan of this kind. It seems taken for granted that along with his gout, his frequent drowsiness, and his inability to mount a horse without a ladder, the Anaconda strategy was a manifestation of his addled senility.

Such a view is unjust to the crusty old soldier. The Anaconda was not after all a pipe-dream of Scott's old age. It was more nearly the experience distilled from his whole career. It perfectly expressed his lifelong political and military moderation. Certainly, Scott, who covered himself with battlefield glory in 1812, in the Floridas, and, most especially in his brilliant campaign against Mexico City, had fully proved himself courageous as an individual and hard-hitting as a commander. But such episodes give only half of the story. Interspersed and today largely forgotten are the wars that Scott did not fight; wars which were compromised and averted, due in part to Scott's tireless efforts; and due also in part to Scott's ability to harmonize political and military factors, policy and strategy, ends and means.

First, there were the Indian wars that did not occur in 1836-38, when Scott was able to persuade the Cherokee nation to accept peacefully their forced removal from their Georgia lands. Then, again, there was the war, or perhaps it was two wars, that America avoided with Britain in 1838-39 over the Caroline affair and the disputed Aroostock
district of Maine. At the time it was widely believed that Scott
deserved chief credit for these settlements. According to the Washington
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National Intelligencer:

The manner in which this gallant officer
[Scott] has acquitted himself within the
last year upon the Canada frontier, and
lately among the Cherokees, has excited the
universal admiration and gratitude of the
whole nation. Owing to his great popularity
in the North, his thorough knowledge of the
laws of his own country, as well as of those
which govern nations, united to his discretion,
his great tact and experience, he had saved the
country from a ruinous war with Great Britain.
And by his masterly skill and energy among the
Cherokees, united to this noble generosity and
humanity, he has not only effected what every-
body supposed could not be done without the
most heartrending scenes of butchery and blood-
shed, but he had effected it by obtaining the
esteem and confidence of the poor Cherokees
themselves. They look upon him as a benefactor
and friend, and one who has saved them from
entire destruction.

Exaggeration no doubt, but it is still ironic praise for a
man of war. In 1859, it might be aided, Scott repeated his Maine per-
formance, to a lesser degree, at the other end of the continent. Tempers
were inflamed over conflicting Anglo-American Claims to San Juan Island
in Puget Sound, when Scott arrived and was able with tact and patience
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to settle the question.

The most pertinent example from Scott's career, however,
would be the other civil war, the one which did not occur in 1832. Sent
by President Andrew Jackson to observe at first hand South Carolina's
threatened secession, Scott, himself, could have sparked the war, for he had the discretionary authority to use the Federal troops in Charleston harbor. Instead, by displaying firmness coupled with conciliation, he helped immeasurably to ease the tensions and turn the country aside from its course toward war. "My ruling wish," he wrote to the prominent nullifier William C. Preston, "is that neither party take a rash step, that might put all healing powers at defiance."

Benjamin Leigh, one of the special commissioners sent to South Carolina to find a peaceful solution, later paid high tribute to Scott by awarding him a large share of credit for the amicable settlement:

He thought, as I thought, that the first drop of blood shed in civil war — in civil war between the United States and one of the States — would prove an immedicable wound, which would end in a change of our institutions. He was resolved, if possible, to prevent a resort to arms and nothing could have been more judicious than his conduct. Far from being prone to take offence, he kept his temper under the strictest guard, and was most careful to avoid giving occasion for offense; yet he held himself ready to act if it should become necessary and he let it be known that he strictly understood the situation .... From the beginning to the end his conduct was as conciliatory as it was firm and sincere, evincing that he knew his duty and was resolved to perform it, and yet his principal object and purpose was peace. He was perfectly successful, when the least imprudence might have resulted in a serious collision.

Scott's Anaconda strategy, then, can scarcely be called a senile aberration. On the whole it was quite typical for him and characteristic of plans which had brought him success in the past. It might be questioned, therefore, if the Anaconda, itself, was so quixotic as is
usually supposed. It is a fact that Scott was not alone in seeing value in his strategy. Edward Bates, for one, clung to his belief in a similar plan long after the war had passed beyond the point of returning to it. In June of 1863, with manifest despair, Bates wrote in his diary: "If, at the beginning, we had seized great River, when there was nothing to prevent it -- fortified a few strong points, and with armed boats, patrolled its whole length, we might have restored the Union, without destroying the Country -- we might have spared rivers of blood, and great heaps of ashes."

"We might have restored the Union, without destroying the Country." It was a spectre to haunt the conservative mind. Scott had the foresight to see what Bates thought he saw in hindsight. For this reason, whether flawed or not, the Anaconda cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. In theory, it was nearly the perfect military strategy for achieving the early war aims of the North. In it Scott revealed he clearly understood the interdependent relationship between methods and results. He knew that honest preservation would not be possible, unless it were also possible to avoid the deep hostilities which naturally arise from the conduct of violent all-out war.

Scott did not propose the Anaconda because it would offer the shortest or the least expensive or the easiest way to subdue the South, although he was convinced it would be all three. He championed it because, as he said, it would bring the South "to terms with less bloodshed than by any other plan." In other words, Scott believed that restraint must be part of Northern policy. The Anaconda was a strategy of pacification, of sorts, intended by Scott to offer the North a way
to conduct a limited war. Perhaps, because of his greater experience, the aging general could better understand the consequences of the alternative. In any case, he found that alternative totally unacceptable.

As he saw it, if the North declined to conduct a "soft" war of conciliation, it must undertake to wage a "hard" war of invasion and conquest. Scott cautioned Lincoln in May against the dangers of the hard war approach: "... if you invade the South at any point," he warned, "I will guarantee that at the end of a year you will be further from a settlement than you are now." Earlier than that, however, he had recorded with chilling explicitness the results which he predicted would flow from the use of unrestrained violence.

Conquer the seceded States by invading armies. No doubt this might be done in two or three years by a young and able General -- a Wolfe, a Dessaic or a Hoche, with 300,000 disciplined men -- estimating a third for Garrison, & the loss of a yet greater number by skirmishes, sieges, battles & southern fevers. The destruction of life and property, on the other side, would be frightful -- however perfect the moral discipline of the invaders.

The conquest completed at that enormous waste of human life, to the north and northwest -- with at least $250 -- 000,000, added thereto, and oui bone? -- Fifteen devastated provinces -- not to be brought into harmony with the conquerors; but to be held, for generations, by heavy garrisons -- at an expense quadruple the net duties or taxes which it would be possible to extract from them -- followed by a Protector or an Emperor.

Scott was wrong, of course, in every single detail. But he was not entirely wrong in spirit. The fruits of the alternative were
in someways even more bitter than he foresaw. The war of conquest lasted four years, cost billions of dollars, and 635,000 lives. And, while the garrisons were minimal and stayed but half a generation in the South, the after-taste of the war was surely proved to be acrid, though in different form than as Scott dreaded it would be. Possibly, if more Northerners, including Lincoln, had seen the future through the eyes of this old man, they would have also seen the essential beauty of the Anaconda strategy. The point is: neither Scott nor his plan can properly be called irrelevant.

Two major criticisms have been levelled against Scott's strategy. Side by side they seem logically contrary to one another, but their sense is that the Anaconda was unrealistic. On the one hand, it is charged that Scott took the South's rebellion and the effort needed to suppress it too seriously; that his plan required far more time than the impatient patriots crying "on to Richmond" would allow. On the other, Scott is indicated for not taking the South seriously enough; because he ignored the Confederate field armies already forming and the steel in the Southern soul already glinting; and naively assumed it would be possible to subdue the South without hammering her into the dust.

The weakness of both criticisms is that they rest upon unproven and perhaps unprovable assumptions. No one has even shown that Northern impatience was irresistible, or that Scott's plan could not at least have been tried. To what extent, it might be asked, would impatience have impaired morale? Would a bloodless strategy have dampened Northern morale more than the casualty lists of the Wilderness battles? Would
Scott's way have been more frustrating or more depressing than Grant's? One should recall the decline of Northern morale in the late summer of 1864 before assuming these questions are easily disposed of. Certainly, the need for possession of New Orleans and the Mississippi might have kept some Northern shoulders to the wheel, even in the absence of the patriotic excitement which violence naturally rouses. The point is at best moot.

The other criticism, that Southern armies had to be destroyed before the South would come to terms, likewise rests on airy bottom. It might be questioned whether Southern determination would have burned so white-hot, if it had not been fanned by what Scott called "exasperating attacks." Would the blockade have mothered Southern national patriotism as did a victory like Bull Run or even a defeat like Shiloh? Would privations and ersatz have been so bearable if honor had not been directly and visibly at stake?

No historian has attempted to answer these questions, and probably no one can answer them with certainty. But for that very reason, it seems unfair to use them, as they have been, to dismiss the Anaconda as a curious sidelight of the war which was wholly impertinent to achieving victory. Especially, is this unfair, when victory is defined, as it should be, as the fulfillment of the North's war aims.

The flaw in Scott's strategy -- which was after all fatal -- was less subtle than any of these usual criticisms. Scott assumed that Federal troops could seize and hold the Mississippi River without thereby initiating a full-scale war. Possibly, the view from May of 1861 did suggest a flying column down the river might outrun heavy resistance.
But, remembering Scott's insistence that four or more months would be required to drill and equip the column, it does not seem likely he planned an immediate offensive.

It seems more reasonable to admit that Scott either failed to grasp or else tried to wish away the clear implications of the Confederate assault on Fort Sumter. The South, in the insecurity of its national infancy, was extremely sensitive and irrevocably committed to maintaining its territorial integrity. It was illogical to assume that Jefferson Davis, who had ordered the guns to open on Sumter, would allow the Mississippi to fall without putting up the stiffest resistance -- or, once the river had been taken, would not have massed the might of the Confederacy to challenge its possession.

What makes this particular flaw in the Anaconda proper fatal -- and not just apparent or unfortunate -- is this: as surely as any non-happening in history can be sure, Scott's strategy would have ignited the very war it sought to avoid. Given the opportunity, it is not likely Jefferson Davis and his constituents would have viewed Winfield Scott's army marching on the Mississippi any differently than they did view Irvin McDowell's army, when it marched on Bull Run. They would have resisted and that resistance would have sparked the horrors of civil war which Scott so dreaded.

4. Mr. Lincoln and the "Fasts"

No record exists of Lincoln's views on the Anaconda strategy. Evidently, however, Scott was wrong in thinking the President had fully
accepted his ideas. The General continued to spin his plans and in early June went so far as to begin collecting boats for his column on the Mississippi. But he never received official encouragement, and whatever Lincoln may have said to him privately is lost to history. Scott may have finally sensed that the President, by withholding endorsement, was casting about for an alternative strategy.

Lincoln did not reject the Anaconda because he understood its basic flaw and that it would not work at all. He rejected it because he believed that it would not work fast enough. There is this early indication of a tendency Lincoln would manifest at various times throughout the war. He urgently wanted the contest to be a "short and decisive one," and his impatience for an early victory sometimes led him to emphasize speed at the expense of other important military facts of life. There would be times when Lincoln was just as guilty of "over-hastiness" as some of his generals were of over-cautiousness. To turn about fairly the charge that the President once brought against McClellan ("He has got the 'slows,' Mr. Blair"), it can be said with equal justice of Lincoln, himself, occasionally be "got the fasts."

The first strategy which the President evolved on his own revealed both his early impatience and the bitterness over the fall of Sumter which lingered in him. Back in the twilight days of late April, when the necessity for using the army was first emerging, but when the only force contemplated was the three-months militia men, Lincoln told Caleb Smith, Secretary of the Interior, how he planned to suppress the insurrection. "I intend at present," he had said,... to fill Fortress
Monroe with men and stores, blockade the ports effectually, provide
for the entire safety of the Capital, keep them quietly employed in
this way, and then go down to Charleston and pay her the little debt we
are owing her."

The belief that South Carolina was chiefly responsible for the
nation's present troubles and the desire for a kind of revenge, especially
against Charleston, were views widely held in the North throughout the
war. But events soon focused attention on Virginia, Kentucky, and the
danger to the security of the national capital. Gradually but with in-
creasing tempo, the cry arose from all sides and parties for an immediate
movement into Virginia. While Scott urged McClellan and others to counsel
patience to the patriots who "urge instant and vigorous action, regard-
less ... of consequences ..."; Lincoln made no attempt to dampen the
fires in the enthusiastic Northerners who were crying with the New York
Tribune "Forward to Richmond." Indeed, since that banner headline did
not appear until late June, several weeks after Lincoln had ordered his
generals to prepare for the invasion of Virginia, it might be fairly
said he was one of its first advocates.

As early as late May, Lincoln concluded that an immediate
resolution of the crisis was both necessary and desirable. He could not,
therefore, accept the Anaconda approach, because an immediate resolution
could only result from an immediate confrontation. While recognizing
that the confusion of loyalties in Kentucky and Missouri made them un-
suitable battlegrounds for the moment, the President decided that the
issue might be forced in Virginia. Clearly, secessionism had conquered
the old Dominion state, when Jefferson Davis announced on May 26 that
the Confederate capital would be moved to Richmond. It is not likely
that fear for the safety of Washington caused Lincoln to decide upon an
early invasion of Virginia. With a respectable garrison in the city it-
self, troops guarding the rail lines through Maryland, and (after May 23)
the occupation of Alexandria and the south bank of the Potomac, the
District of Columbia was relatively secure. Instead, Lincoln's prime
object was the rapid dispersal of the rebel forces gathering at Richmond
and Manassas Junction.

It is important to understand, however, that in the President's
case the demand for immediate military movement arose from more than mere
impatience. Better than most Northerners, Lincoln seems to have realized
that a short war was the best guarantee for preserving the status quo ante
bellum. "A right result, at this time," he told Congress on July 4, 1861,
"will be worth more ... than ten times the money." On numerous occasions
he would warn the North that a long war risked unwelcome side-affects.
"If ... resistance continues," he wrote to Congress in March 1862, "the
war must also continue; and it is impossible to foresee all the incidents,
which may attend and all the ruin which may follow it. Such as may seem
indispensable, or may obviously promise great efficiency towards ending
the struggle, must and will come." More pithily, he made the same
point in August of the same year, when he mused: "Broken eggs can never
be mended, and the longer the breaking proceeds the more will be broken."

In Lincoln's eyes, therefore, immediate confrontation was a
conservative strategy. "The sooner the national authority can be restored,"
he told Horace Greeley, "the nearer the Union will be 'the Union as it was.'"
In other words, where Scott had emphasized the relationship between the method used to conduct the war and the results they would produce, Lincoln believed the key to results lay in the length of time required to subdue the South. While both held the same end in mind, they disagreed over the best means for achieving it. Where Scott would have squeezed, Lincoln wanted to blitz.

Unfortunately, Lincoln's strategic concept, like Scott's, was flawed. To bring on an immediate confrontation made sense only if it would also be a decisive confrontation. Otherwise, Lincoln's plan, again like Scott's, would produce exactly the opposite results it sought to gain. An early battlefield fiasco would surely destroy the aura of invincibility arising from the North's heavy preponderance in numbers and determination, and, its chief result must be to broaden and lengthen the war that followed.

Did Lincoln fully understand the risk involved in his over-hasty commitment of the army? The answer is not certain, but it is doubtful that he did. More likely he, like most non-army men in the North, greatly underrated the South's military capacity and her determination. The belief was widespread in the loyal states that Southern men were blow-hards but not die-hards. Few people foresaw that the Confederacy would put substantial and respectable armies into the field, or the effort that would be required to defeat them. And Lincoln was probably not one of them.

He may have shared in another view common in the North at the time which held that only prominent hot-heads were genuinely committed to the Confederate cause and that only they and not the Southern people
had to be defeated. Montgomery Blair wrote to the President that the "fundamental and fatal error" of the professional military men, especially Scott, was in looking "upon the contest as one between the whole people of the South and the people of the North."

It was Blair, in fact, who may have been the decisive influence on Lincoln's strategic thinking during May and June. In these early days, the whole Blair clan stood for vigorous, forceful, and immediate action by the Federal government. Remembering the success of Andrew Jackson, whom the elder Blair had served as advisor, and the efficacy of just the threat of force in 1832, the Blairs urged a similar policy upon Lincoln. As a member of the cabinet, Montgomery became the inside spokesman for his father and brother. His strong arguments for sending relief to Sumter had been justified by events; and his opposition to Scott had helped produce the estrangement between the President and the General. And throughout May it was he who pressed upon Lincoln an alternative to the Anaconda, insisting there would be no "disrespect to General Scott involved in the President's adopting his own policy instead of Scott's in the management of the war ...." Writing to Governor John Andrews of Massachusetts on May 11, Blair explained the struggle that was taking place over strategy within the administration:

I have great difficulty in impressing my policy upon the Administration in the condition of things here. The great obstruction in the way in the past and in the present is Gen. Scott. He does not appreciate as I do the condition of things in the South. He regards the whole Southern people as consolidated in hostility to the North and thinks of making war upon them as if making war upon a foreign government whereas the truth is that the conspirators who have got arms
in their hands under color of state authority are
scarcely more obnoxious to the North than they are
to the great masses of people at the South, but they
have armed themselves under color of one pretext
or another, so that even the armed men who would
desert from their policy have no longer any election,
and the unarmed masses — the Union men of the South —
are oversaw by the armed marauders that Jeff Davis
has sent throughout the country.

It would require but a very inconsiderable part
of the forces at our command to put down this band
of plunderers, if used vigorously, and as soon as
they are put down, the deliverers will be welcomed
in Virginia, as they now are in Maryland....

When he delved into specifics, Blair took the somewhat extreme
view that the war could be ended in less than two weeks:

My suggestion has been that we should at once
organize a Southern Army. To do this we should
select a leader for the Southern Army, give him
his staff, select the best, the most accomplished
of our officers to surround him, detail troops,
procure transports, and organize a great army that
should rendezvous at Hampton Roads and menace
Norfolk and Richmond. The band of marauders that
now pervade the State of Virginia would then rush
to meet the threatened invasion, the people of
Virginia would speak their real sentiments at
the approaching election, and their votes if not
our [bullets] ... would drive the marauders out
of the State on the 22d instant

Evidently, Blair thought that secession could be thwarted in
much the same manner as earlier threats to constituted authority in
United States history had been. Short-term militia and a "whiff of
grapeshot" had been all that was required to disperse the insurrection-
ary followers of Daniel Shay in 1786 and the western farmers in the
Whiskey Rebellion of 1794. Whether or not Lincoln fully accepted
Blair's rationale, he did follow the spirit if not the timing of Blair's strategy. And, in spite of the evidence of extensive Confederate military preparations, and in the teeth of the advice of all his generals, the President insisted that the Federal army, composed largely of the militia, should march into Virginia and disperse the secessionist rebels.

In doing this Lincoln either did not understand, or chose to ignore a basic fact of military life. It is always more difficult to give than it is to receive. An offensive war requires more men and better discipline than a defensive one can skimp along with. His remark to Irvin McDowell's protest against an early campaign is revealing: "You are green, it is true; but they are green, also; you are all green alike."

In rawness the two armies were indeed comparable, but in tasks to perform the difference was determinative.

The foundation for the invasion was laid on May 28, when the Department of Northeastern Virginia was created under Brigadier General Irvin McDowell. Encompassing little more than the area of Alexandria, the Department was for all practical purposes simply a field army. In early June, Lincoln requested a specific plan for a movement into Virginia. Scott temporized by ordering a plan drawn for the recapture of Harpers Ferry by Major General Robert Patterson of the Department of Pennsylvania, in which McDowell was to advance a column only as feint against Manassas.

When the Confederate evacuation of Harpers Ferry foiled this strategy, Lincoln ordered Scott to move McDowell directly into north-central Virginia. Under Scott's direction, McDowell submitted a proposal to turn the flank of Confederate General Pierre Beauregard's army at Manassas Junction, but he did so under protest. The plea was accepted
over the protest. With remarkable speed, considering the difficulties
he had to surmount, McDowell got his militia army together. Although
under positive orders to commence the campaign by July 8, unavoidable
delays held up the start for over a week.

The tactical details of the campaign need not be followed here.
Militia enlistments began to expire on the march, and some regiments
simply disbanded enroute. Those which remained met the enemy at Bull
Run on July 21st. After some initial success, the Federal army was
thoroughly routed and sent scurrying back to the safety of Washington.
The North was shocked by Bull Run, but fortunately it was a galvanizing
shock, causing Northerners to renew their efforts. Some began for the
first time to realize the magnitude of the task which lay ahead. "We
have now gone through three stages of this great political disease,"
wrote Charles Francis Adams. "The first was the cold fit, when it
seemed as if nothing would start the country. The second was the hot
one, when it seemed almost in the highest continual delirium, The
third is the process of waking to the awful reality before it."

Military men were shocked that Bull Run had been forced on
the army, but they were not surprised by its results. Old Sylvanus
Thayer, an early West Point instructor and one of the fathers of
military professionalism in the United States, had predicted the out-
come. Observing McDowell's invasion from his retirement at the
Military Academy, he had forewarned: "Let one division be driven to
rout and the whole pack will run like children from an apple orchard
when set upon by dogs." Thayer hoped the government would have
the good sense to let the South do the attacking in the early days of
the war. No one was more upset by Bull Run than Winfield Scott, who grieved that much of the blame was his. "I am the greatest coward in America," he confessed. "...I deserve removal because I did not stand up, when my army was not in condition for fighting and resist ... to the last." Bull Run was just cause for professional soldiers to reflect on the roles of the statesman and the general.

Lincoln is as much, probably more to blame than anyone for the fiasco at Bull Run. History has been kind to the President in this regard, by shifting the responsibility from his shoulders to those of the naively impatient Northern masses. Since recruitment and support were at floodtide, however, and there is no indication that impatience was souring patriotic enthusiasm, it is doubtful that this pressure was irresistible. More accurately, Bull Run was the result of the President's "fists", the result of his subordination of other military factors to the element of brevity. It may be that he did not realize the desperateness of his gamble until he had lost.

Bull Run marked Lincoln deeply. The drawn brow and aura of brooding sadness of the stereotype dates from July 1861. Two days after the battle he put down on paper his strategic views as revised by McDowell's rout. His "Memorandum of Military Policy Suggested by the Bull Run Defeat" is a sadly revealing document. Point by point, he refers to the major Federal armies in the field, Butler at Fortress Monroe, McClellan in western Virginia, Fremont in Missouri, and the rest; and in each case, he recommends drilling, disciplining, instructing, but there is no mention of offensive operations. Four days later, he added in postscript that eventually some point on the railroads near
Manassas should be seized and a movement into Tennessee should be commenced.

The strategy Lincoln set forth in the Memorandum was strangely hollow. It revealed the extent to which his pre-Bull Run strategy had emphasized the timing of military action and ignored method and location. Bull Run left Lincoln strategy-less. What he and the country most needed to find in late July of 1861, was not just a new general, but a new plan for the conduct of the war as well. He found both, when he ordered Major-General George McClellan to Washington from the Kanawha Valley of western Virginia. As remarkable as his victories had been McClellan's manner of achieving them. Western Virginia had been whelmed.
Chapter Three

The Importance of Being McClellan

From the vantage of a hundred years, there can be no doubt that Lincoln decided wisely when he called George McClellan from Western Virginia to clear away the rubble of Bull Run and set aright the Federal war machine. The novelty of Lincoln's act has been concealed behind the parade of generals up and down the ladder of command which became so commonplace later in the war. In the crisis of confidence following Bull Run, the President moved instinctively to keep hope alive and distress from turning to despair.

Northerners needed an immediate and clear demonstration that the check was temporary. They needed assurance that the lengthening black-bordered lists posted outside the telegraph offices had meaning beyond the personal grief of the present. What else could Lincoln have done? He might have announced that Scott would personally direct the next battle from a sedan-chair. He might have brought John Charles Fremont, the Pathfinder, to command at Washington. But nothing was better suited to stiffen Northern morale than the simple announcement that the "Hero of West Virginia" was on his way. Wildly cheering, euphoric crowds turned McClellan's journey to the national capital into a triumphal procession.266
Yet, also in retrospect, neither can there be any doubt that Lincoln's decision was fraught with momentous consequence to the conduct of war in its early phase. In bringing McClellan to Washington Lincoln bought more than he bargained for. Any man may bring certain peculiarities of self to the position he occupies, but in the case of McClellan there were special elements of character and thought which were to have extraordinary influence on the course of national history. While McClellan cannot be understood exclusively in terms of his personality traits, neither can his ideas and his behavior be understood without some attempt to define his character. In order to understand McClellan's role in the evolution of the conservative strategy, it is necessary to look first at the man, himself.

1. A Man for One Season

George Brinton McClellan was born on December 3, 1826, in the city of Philadelphia, the second son of Dr. George McClellan, a famous surgeon, and his wife Elizabeth Brinton. From an early age he manifested both a superior, possibly brilliant mind and a pleasant cheerful disposition. He wore his intelligence with such easy grace that he sometimes gave the impression of mental laziness. He was often distracted from his studies by more active pursuits and seldom seemed to exert his mental capacity to its full extent. His older sister later remembered him "as the brightest, merriest, most unselfish of boys, --tenderhearted --affectionate--full of spirits and life. Manly beyond his years, fond of books and study--also of fun and frolic, and always the 'soul of
Still, with all, he did love to read; and, often, cloistered in his grandfather's library, oblivious to hunger and summons alike, he would miss supper entirely. McClellan's capabilities were great enough to set him apart from other children his own age and mark him, in a minor way, a prodigy. At thirteen, he entered the University of Pennsylvania. Two years later, his appointment to West Point required a suspension of the rules, as he was still two years under the Military Academy's entrance age. Despite being two years younger than his classmates, McClellan did exceptionally well during his four years as cadet. Always near the top of his class, McClellan stood second in general merit at graduation in 1846, outshining such future notables as John G. Foster, Jesse Reno, Darius Couch, Truman Seymour, George Stoneman, Innis Palmer, George Pickett and T. J. (Stonewall) Jackson.

Interestingly, McClellan seemed to achieve this high standing without becoming a "book-worm" or introvert or exhibiting the nervous strain of competition. Erasmus Keyes, then an instructor at the Academy, "was struck with the facility with which he learned his lessons...," and remarked that "a pleasanter pupil was never called to the blackboard." After knowing McClellan only a month, John Darragh Wilkins wrote home to his mother in Pittsburgh to "introduce...my friend and room-mate G. B. McClellan, of the University of Pennsylvania, an uncommonly quick and talented young fellow and who will stand among the 'Five.' He is about sixteen years of age and is what may be called a 'Genius' at mathematics."

Charles Stewart, the cadet who graduated first in the class of
1846, remembered McClellan as: "a noble generous-hearted, clear-headed, enthusiastic, able fellow. There was not a mean thought in him. He was well educated, and, when he chose to be, brilliant. In every point, so far as I can recall, he was true and honorable, and our personal relations were always very pleasant as cadets." It was noted at the time of final examinations that McClellan alone of those competing for top academic rank "did not exhibit signs of mental exertion. He appeared to have confidence in his own ability to pass his examination with honor, and that confidence was not misplaced."

In May of 1846, Congress declared the existence of hostilities between the United States and Mexico, and McClellan's class graduated directly into the war. As a second lieutenant, McClellan participated in Winfield Scott's campaign against Mexico City. His almost reckless bravery, as exhibited at Contreras, Churubusco, and Chapultepec, won him official praise and three brevet promotions through the rank of captain. During the war, in the long idle periods which often fell upon the army, McClellan kept a diary. In private, he seems to have been a moody young man, given to brooding. But his exuberence never deserted him for long, and he usually soon found himself in the middle of a group of joking friends. He enjoyed an occasional all-night drinking session; and seems to have been aware that some of the young girls of Old Mexico were quite pretty.

McClellan emerged from the Mexican war with more than battlefield glory and good comradeship. His grasp of mathematics and the exact sciences and the ability he had demonstrated in applying them marked him in the eyes of his superiors as one of the most promising young engineers.
in the United States Army. In 1850, still but twenty-four, he advanced to command of the only field company of engineers, and, since based at West Point, joined the faculty there as well. 278

During the next five years, in addition to the routine and traditional engineering assignments at various military posts, McClellan was called upon to perform a number of extraordinary missions. On March 5, 1852, he was ordered to join Captain Randolph B. Marcy's expedition along the Red River in Arkansas. Later, he headed a special survey of the Texas Coast (1852-1853); and under direct orders of Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis, he completed a study of the nation's infant railroad system (1853). He was assigned, alone, the task of searching for a rail route through the Cascade Mountains, in Washington Territory (1853) and of surveying Samana Harbor, Santa Domingo, as a potential coaling station for the Navy. In 1855, McClellan was one of three officers chosen by Davis to tour European military installation and visit the battlefields of the Crimean War then in progress. On their journey, the commission visited London, Paris, Berlin, Constantinpole, St. Petersbury, Balaklava, and Sebastopol. 279

By this time McClellan had achieved a substantial reputation among the regulars in the army. Phil Kearny, who certainly was not given to exaggerated praise of others, observed "that his mathematical talents, good sense, safe calculations, and great system are universally al-

owed." 280 And Jacob Cox later recalled that it was commonly assumed that McClellan and Pierre Beauregard were the army's young comers. But McClellan had also gained recognition outside of the army and in 1857 the Illinois Central Railroad offered to hire him as their Chief Engineer. 281
Thirty years old and bored with the slow progress in a peace-time army, despite the exotic assignments which kept falling his way, McClellan resigned his commission as captain in the 1st cavalry and accepted the position. The following year he advanced to the vice-presidency of the line; and, two years later (1860) moved to Cincinnati to become president of the Eastern Division of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad, with an annual salary, then sumptuous, of $10,000. He took with him his bride of three months, Ellen Marcy McClellan, the daughter of his former commander in the Arkansas expedition.282

It was here that secession and Civil War found McClellan. His life to that point had been an almost perfect success story. By his charm and his intellect he had acquired a wide circle of friends and admirers.283 His youth and his achievements augured for him a splendid career. For McClellan, as for all Americans, the bombardment of Sumter shattered the predictability of the future. Cincinnati suddenly became a threatened city, perched on the edge of an exposed frontier, and its citizens turned to McClellan for military advice. He was later remembered as the one man to remain calm and collected during these feverish early days.284

With almost dizzying rapidity the crisis raised McClellan to high command. Six months after the fall of Sumter he succeeded Winfield Scott as General-in-Chief of the United States Army. One year later, by that time probably the most controversial figure in the country, he was relieved from active command. He never returned to the army. As the candidate of the Democratic Party, he opposed Lincoln in the presidential election of 1864 and was soundly defeated. He then left the country to live four years abroad in France and Germany. Afterward he served one
term as Governor of New Jersey. On October 29, 1885 he suffered a heart attack and died, at the relatively young age of fifty-eight.285

Such were the surface events of McClellan's life. They project a tragic sense of unfulfillment and a haunting spectre of "what might have been." Great opportunities were his; as great as any that have ever come to an American. Had he crushed the rebellion; had he used his then irresistible influence to abolish slavery, he would have become the greatest hero in national history. He did neither. And historians are left to puzzle whether these great objects were beyond his reach, or whether he touched them, but let them slip through his grasp. The fairest answer is probably this: McClellan possessed certain attributes which peculiarly fitted him for the role of greatness and which make the "might have been" all the more tantalizing; but he also possessed severe limitations which, combined with forces beyond his control, prevented him from realizing his ultimate opportunities and in the end made his removal from leadership necessary, if not inevitable. Both his assets and his liabilities deserve comment, for they help, in part, to explain his early successes and his final failure.

It would be a mistake not to begin by admitting that the interpretation of McClellan is not an easy task, because in life McClellan was not a simple man. Historians might take pause that some who knew him well found it difficult to render a conclusive judgment. Major-General Erasmus Darwin Keyes is a curious example in point. Keyes was a literate and articulate officer, with long years of service on Scott's staff and in high army circles, who had good cause to treat McClellan severly in his memoirs. As a Republican and abolitionist, Keyes found himself outside
McClellan's circle of confidants. He was unwarrantably humiliated during the Peninsula Campaign, by a provost-marshal guard acting under McClellan's orders, who insisted that he, a corps commander, return a confiscated bottle of Southern brandy, on pain of immediate arrest. And, when the Army of the Potomac was withdrawn from the James, Keyes was virtually demoted by being left behind with an insignificant command, a move which all but ruined his army career. Yet, in his memoirs, while freely discussing other generals he knew, Keyes held back his hand when he came to McClellan. "Halieck was stub and twist," he wrote, "Fremont was vanity incarnate; Rosecrans was polemical--but it is not possible to encase McClellan in a single phrase that will show him fully." In the end Keyes confessed simply that he did not understand McClellan. 286

Many others besides Keyes have observed contradictions in McClellan which are difficult to reconcile. One popular way to resolve these difficulties has been to argue that while McClellan was one kind of person normally, the crisis of 1861 brought the Mr. Hyde out of the Dr. Jekyll. It is said that it was McClellan's misfortune to start at the top. No less a personage than Ulysses Grant, among others, believed that the young general's spectacular rise, so early in the war, was also the ultimate cause of his downfall. Reminiscing in his retirement, the ex-President observed: "If McClellan had gone into the war as Sherman, Thomas, or Meade, had fought his way along and up, I have no reason to suppose that he would not have won as high a distinction as any of us." 287 That McClellan did catapult to power is beyond dispute. On April 22, 1861, he was an ex-captain of the U. S. Army. The next day by special act of the state legislature McClellan was appointed Major-General of
Ohio Volunteers. On May 13 he was commissioned the senior major-general of the regular army. And before six months had passed, he succeeded Scott as General-in-Chief of the United States Army. Military history offers few parallels of such phenomenal promotions.  

Critics have charged, with believable evidence to support their claims, this meteoric rise to fame and glory warped McClellan's character. At 34, too young by a year to be president, McClellan, in his own words, had "by some strange operation of magic...become the power in the land."  

Almost certainly the sudden deluge of sycophants, the obsequious deference of high government officials, and the trumpeting newspapers which heralded him the "Young Napoleon" and the "Savior of the Union," did upset the youthful general's balance of judgment. Did he not eventually come to value his own opinions too highly and to dismiss the criticism and suggestions of others without the careful consideration they deserved? Did he not, at times, trespass on the political preserve which the constitution limits to civilian authorities?  

Still, it may be questioned whether or not these excesses derived from a warping of McClellan's personality, or resulted more simply from the normal, human reaction to such grotesque hero-worship. Count Adam Gurowski, the arch-radical clerk of the War Department, insisted that, while he had seen many succumb to the perils of popularity, "No head was ever turned so quickly" as McClellan's. But at the same time, Erasmus Keyes, who heard Gurowski's comment, himself confessed that "if there had been, or is now on earth, a man whose head could not be turned by the show and adulation of which General McClellan was then the subject, I have not known him."
Of course, the rarified atmosphere of what Phil Kearny called "these times of egotism" did affect McClellan.\textsuperscript{291} Merely to live through a moment of supreme national crisis was excitement, but to be young and to hold a position of high responsibility exerted its own special pressures. Yet these Civil War experiences did not "war" McClellan's personality, rather they magnified and brought to early fruition traits that were perfectly natural to him. In a way, he was like a plant brought suddenly into a hot-house environment, where he matured too rapidly and in proportions larger than life.

Nevertheless, it makes sense to treat McClellan as a whole character before, during and after the war, while making proper allowances for exaggeration caused by the excited times, rather than to insist that his eighteen months Civil War career was a bizarre aberration in an otherwise normal life. In face, one of the most basic features of McClellan's character was the amazing consistency he displayed throughout his life. However far he may have strayed from what historians have since defined as normal, he almost never said or did anything which surprised or seemed uncharacteristic to those who knew him well. Regularity was with him a hallmark. Hence all that was good or bad, strong or weak, great or mean in his few months performance on the center stage of national history must be viewed as a distillation from the whole man and cannot be conveniently explained as either temporary or abnormal.

Historians have employed many terms in their attempt to understand and to explain the man, McClellan. But by undervaluing the impor-
tance of his mind, both friend and critic have overlooked an essential element of his character. By all accounts intelligent, George McClellan was also an intellectual and a man of ideas. This is not to suggest that he was a profound thinker or that he was a scholar devoted to the pure, contemplative life. He was neither. The driving, almost frenetic energy which propelled him through life made that impossible. McClellan could never sit still long enough to become a scholar. Yet, in the eyes of many of his contemporaries and to nearly all who knew him well, McClellan was an intellectual. One of his closest friends, William C. Prime, wartime editor of the New York Journal of Commerce and later professor of art at Princeton, commented at length on his intellectual qualities:

McClellan's experiences in life were varied. Educated as a soldier he had devoted his life to his profession, and was one of the most accomplished military scholars of the world. His military library was large, in various languages, always increasing, every book thoroughly studied. He continued these studies faithfully to his death. Military operations in every part of the world commanded his close observation. He supplied himself with maps and all information in current literature, followed movements of armies, kept himself familiar with every phase of campaigns, whether in Europe, in Afghanistan, in Egypt, or in South Africa. While this was his professional study, he occupied himself with almost equally thorough study of subjects very remote from military matters. He was a general student of the literature of the world. He read freely most of the languages of Europe, and kept up with the progress of thought and discussion in history, philosophy, and art. He was especially interested in archaeology, and, having all his life retained and used his knowledge of ancient languages, found abundant delight in reading archaeologic publications and in following the work of explorers. In all departments of scholarly reading he was constant and unwearying, and he never forgot what he had once learned. Fitted by his attainments for the society
of the learned, he had the marked characteristic of the true scholar—the desire to know more, and therefore the habit of seeking instead of offering information. Few suspected his mastery of subjects on which he only asked questions when thrown in contact with recognized masters. In general conversation he more frequently sought information than gave it; but when drawn out to give it his expression was concise, vigorous, clear.

There is, of course, exaggeration in Prime's eulogy, but there is also an indication of the dimensions of McClellan's involvement with ideas that has not been fully appreciated. Prime might have added that there was an inventive turn to the mind that produced the famous "McClellan saddle"—used by the United States cavalry so long as horses were. He might also have mentioned that McClellan's published writings, on a variety of subjects, comprised a respectable bibliography.

McClellan's intelligence was his first, perhaps his most basic asset, but almost equally important was his ability to affect other men. He was not a good public speaker. And in the presence of large groups, outside of the army, he was shy and somewhat awkward. What he seems to have possessed was that mysterious and intangible quality to attract men which has been called charisma. His popularity with the soldiers of the Army of the Potomac has become legendary. Both the extent and the significance of that charisma was demonstrated in September of 1862. There are few times when an historian can write honestly that one individual only could accomplish a certain task. But the infusion of spirit and organization into a field army able to thwart Lee's invasion is such an instance. At that point in history, no one but McClellan could have pulled it off.
McClellan's retirement from active service did not diminish his popularity. His public appearances drew immense crowds, and even the mention of his name seemed to work magic. At the state convention of New Jersey Democrats in 1874, when an obscure Mr. McClellan of Salem was nominated for the credentials committee, "the whole convention, mistaking the name for that of the famous hero of Antietam, rose to its feet and broke into the wildest demonstrations of enthusiasm." Two years later despite the fact that he had not previously been considered a candidate, a similar outburst stampeded the delegates into nominating him for the governorship. During the campaign, the General spoke to mass meetings that were "crowded to suffocation," while "throngs, eager to touch the tips of his fingers, surged around his carriage." He carried the state by 12,000 votes, allowing his opponent the fewest votes of any Republican gubernatorial candidate until that time.

McClellan's charm worked not only on men in mass, but also on individuals. Predictably, men with similar tastes and ideas, such as Prime, liked McClellan; even so the depth of their feeling was remarkable. Wrote George Ticknor Curtis: "I loved him as I have never loved any other man not of my own blood." There was a breadth to McClellan's attractiveness which could bridge political and military animosities, and move an old partisan foe like Alexander McClure to acknowledge "that no reasonably just man could have known him without yielding to him the highest measure of personal respect. He was one of the most excellent and lovable characters I have ever met...." It was Joseph E. Johnston, better known for his feuds than his friends, who corresponded regularly before the war with "Beloved McC" and travelled two hundred miles to attend his wedding.
After four years of combat on opposing sides, the friendship was continued until McClellan's death. Johnston, who was pall-bearer, wrote four days after the funeral: "This death has been to me like the loss of my last brother. That of no other could have been so afflicting to me...."301

It is impossible to say precisely what it was about McClellan that others found so attractive. Clues remain, but they are not, even in sum, satisfactory explanations.302 Partly, perhaps, it was the physical image he projected to others. Despite being under average height, he was a handsome man, athletically built and uncommonly strong.303 He possessed energy and endurance in abundance. However the movements of his army might be described, nothing would be more wrong than to characterize McClellan, himself, as slow, dilatory, or supine. No one in the army worked harder or longer than he did. Commonly, he would set out at day-break with a large staff to review, inspect and post his army. Twelve--fifteen--eighteen hours later, having changed mounts several times, leaving his exhausted aids strewn along the way, he would return alone to headquarters to work into the night on reports and orders.304 That he could expend such energy with such enthusiasm, and yet, at the same time, seem to be in complete control of himself and on top of the situation, must have impressed others that he was a man of extraordinary capabilities.305

Intelligence, charisma, energy are ingredients of greatness. Add to them the self-confidence which McClellan had in plenty and the sum comes near to being the perfect man needed to lead the country through civil war to victory. It was McClellan's misfortune, and perhaps the country's too, that his faults were as epic in proportion as his virtues. He was, indeed, fitted to make great contributions to his nation's history,
and he made some of them. But he was not suited to lead a country under-
going political convulsions to a victory which inevitably (or so it seems
in retrospect) involved progress to a higher moral plane. There was
simply not enough bend in the man. It is only a start to say that
McClellan was stubborn, strong-willed, inflexible, and occasionally self-
righteous. Such traits could as readily have been assets as liabilities
for great leadership. In fact, however, they were products of a deeper
strain in McClellan's character, which time and events were to prove a
handicap he could not overcome.

Historians who have noted in McClellan traces of the aristocrat
have come very close to finding the key to his personality. The term
"aristocrat" seems quaintly anomalous in the context of nineteenth-century
America and must be carefully qualified. Certainly, McClellan was not of
that "Gilded" aristocracy born unbred from the financial empires of the
industrial revolution. While he sometimes hobnobbed with such men, both
poverty and temperament kept him from being one of them. Nor was he a
society dandy. Despite the easy grace and occasional relish with which he
moved through cotillion, collation, quadrille, levee and soiree, his pri-
vate style of living was simple and unpretentious. During the autumn and
winter of 1861, while Washington's gala social life continued unembarrassed
by wartime conditions, McClellan was in great demand by prestige seeking
hostesses, but he accepted such invitations infrequently and never let
them interfere with his army work. His wife, Ellen, had remained in
Cincinnati until after the birth of their first child, a son, and did not
join her husband until mid-December. After her arrival McClellan was more
the quiet family man and even less the "social lion."
Blood and breeding, not wealth and position, determined McClellan's in born sense of aristocracy. He was consciously proud of his descent from the Scottish barons of Kirkcudbright in an ancestral line that included Governor William Bradford of Plymouth Colony, General Samuel McClellan of the Revolution, and his own father, Dr. George McClellan, a surgeon and teacher of wide reputation. He was an aristocrat of manners, as was perhaps best revealed in his natural sensitivity to propriety and form. At West Point, he discovered in his Southern classmates an air of "manners" which he found attractive. But in time he became critical of the "gasconading" and bluster of Southerners in general. The way in which something was done was very important to McClellan. The testimony of his second son, George Brinton McClellan, Jr., although admittedly biased, is enlightening in this respect. Almost fifty years after his father's death, "Max" McClellan, himself a septuagenarian, and former Congressman, ex-Mayor of New York City, and emeritus professor of history at Princeton, penned this remarkable cameo for his autobiography:

It is almost impossible for me to write impartially of my father. I cared so much for him and I revere his memory so profoundly that I have great difficulty in speaking of him except in superlatives. My father came into the world with the advantages of a distinguished ancestry, birth, and breeding. In accordance with the good old Scots tradition he was taught by his parents that "birth" imposes upon its fortunate possessor obligations and duties that must never for a moment be ignored, that there are certain things that a gentleman simply cannot do. He cannot stoop to meanness, pettiness, untruth or to financial, mental or moral dishonesty. The doctrine of noblesse oblige makes him almost unconsciously do the right thing at the right moment and in the right way.

If you like, my father was an aristocrat, but an aristocrat in the best sense of the word. He was simple, unpretentious and unaffected almost to the point of shyness. He thought himself no better than his fellows and readily overlooked in others shortcomings for which he could not forgive himself. He was the beau ideal of a grand seigneur, the greatest gentleman I have ever known.
Of course, McClellan, senior, did not always "do the right thing at the right moment and in the right way." In fact, if but half of his critics' accusations are fair, he must have had the knack of doing just the opposite. Still, judgment, good or bad, is not the same thing as motivation. And McClellan's "aristocratic" concern with correctness affected both his ideas and his conduct, even if it did not save him from error. As one keenly sensitive to form, he was also uncommonly aware of the relationship between the idea of a thing and the manner of achieving and maintaining it unperverted.

McClellan instinctively rejected the notion that ends could justify means. On the contrary, he believed that ends rather than excusing means, actually restricted them; and, the nobler the ends in view, the more important it became to achieve them in the correct way. This way of viewing things permeated McClellan's thinking, and it clearly stamped his ideas as conservative and his conduct as cautious. Still, it was not the conservatism, itself, which handicapped McClellan, but the unconscious and rather extreme way in which it controlled him.

To the very core of his being McClellan was conservative. His conservatism shaped the substance of his thinking and the manner of his behavior; it colored his interpretation of his experience and affected his relationships with other men. He was, in this respect, an ideologue: a man able to view things in one way only; a man who could act outside of his own moral and philosophical framework only with the greatest difficulty; and, although there is evidence that his ideas could change, they changed far too slowly in the rushing times which engulfed him.

Many of McClellan's political ideas were respectable and, as
will be argued below, most of his military strategy and plans were sound. But they were not, as he came to believe, the only basis on which the war could be won and the Union restored. His inability to bend was his greatest flaw; and it was great enough to countervail his many virtues. In his season McClellan was a great man, but he lived beyond his season.

2. McClellan and Politics

"Like his forebears," wrote George, Jr., "he was a Democrat. Daniel Webster was his father's patient and intimate friend, in fact the celebrated daguerreotype of 'Webster in the beaver hat' has taken in my grandfather's company. Nevertheless Dr. McClellan never swerved from the political faith of his fathers, and handed that faith on to his children."313

In the McClellan family, it seems that Democrats were born and not made. Writing of the son, Harold Syrett concluded that "to embrace his father's political creed seemed to him not only natural but inevitable. He did not decide to become a Democrat; he was a Democrat. He had strong convictions on the subject, but they were convictions arising from environment rather than from principle. The Democrats on occasion might be wrong, but to be a Democrat was right. Some people love their mothers because their mothers are lovable people; others love their mothers because any other attitude is inconceivable. To McClellan being a Republican was inconceivable."314

What was true of Max (the family nickname used to distinguish son from father) was equally true of "Little Mac." He too was a Democrat of the incorrigible, dyed-in-the-wool variety. "When the Civil War came," recalled Max, father "found it impossible to change his politics as a
matter of policy, as did so many Democrats of the period. The Democratic party meant so much to him that he lived and died a Democrat even though he disagreed with many of the policies of the party." Still, it would be wrong to assume that McClellan's unalterable identification with the Democrats meant that he was deeply involved in party affairs or even that he was much interested in political matters. He was neither.

For despite being a "strong Democrat," as he described himself, McClellan was far from being a politician. "I knew nothing about practical politics," he confessed near the end of his life, and his record supports his statement. Throughout his life he displayed a remarkable naivete in political matters, which his son delicately characterized as: "In politics my father was very trusting." The machinery of politics seemed to escape his understanding, while the compromise and intrigue of politicians usually offended his sense of propriety. It is doubtful McClellan at any time felt comfortable in the political arena, but he was especially repulsed by the wartime spectacle of partisanship working through patriotism.

To McClellan Washington was a veritable "sink of iniquity." Time and again, he described to his wife, in disgust mingled with dismay, the political conniving which engulfed him in the capital. Much that was probably just the normal working of politics, the seeking of self advancement, the log-rolling, the favor swapping, outraged McClellan as the "venality and bad faith" of "wretches... willing to sacrifice the country and its army for personal spite and personal aims." It was the men, themselves, and their actions, not party labels which offended McClellan, and, when warranted, he was as quick to call Democrats "miserable intriguers," as Republicans.
McClellan's eversion to politicians was well known to his friends, and early in the war they believed it a virtue. Later, however, it drove them to exasperation and despair that McClellan jeopardized himself and the cause by paying "too little attention" to the needs and demands of the politicians. After impatience began to show in the country from the long delay in preparing the army, the most common advice pressed upon him by anxious well-wishers was that he must be more "realistic" in his attitude toward politics. He was urged to ally himself with a strong political personality, such as Chase or Wade, who might support his military program if they could be sure of sharing the political rewards of his success. Francis Blair, Sr. had much the same point in mind in the spring of 1862, when he tried to arrange a position for his son, Frank, on McClellan's staff. Collaring Brigadier General Alfred Pleasonton, who was about to depart for the army on the peninsula, the elder Blair candidly admonished:

You are going to McClellan. You will have confidential relations with him. I like him, and I want him to succeed; but no general can succeed without proper relations with the Administration. Say to him from me that Frank P. Blair, Jr., can be a great service to him. I shall have access to the Administration, and can do much to keep McClellan right. Say to him that he ought to ask for the assignment of Blair to him, and to make him his chief of staff.

McClellan rebuffed such counsel even when it came from his old friend, Sam Barlow, who warned him at the end of the Peninsula Campaign that his position had become critical. The General must either find powerful political support for his conduct of the war or else expect to be removed from command. In despair, Barlow assured McClellan, "I do not
wish to influence your judgment, even if that were possible. I try to present the facts as I understand them before you. I know your aversion to the schemes, the tricks and even the policy of politicians. But you must remember that neither in this or in any other country can any man retain high place, or be of continued service to his country without mixing in some degree with politicians and meeting, if he does not adopt, the same general plans of success. I believe you can even "touch pitch and not be defiled."

McClellan did not, perhaps by his nature could not, follow such advice, and it is useless to speculate what might have happened had he been supported by an influential clique in Cabinet or Congress. Military professionalism came first with McClellan, and, whenever it came into conflict with political interests, the latter had to give way. He removed General Charles S. Hamilton from the command of a division, for example, despite the powerful political support Hamilton enjoyed. The removal sorely distressed Lincoln, who came under heavy pressure because of it. Some twenty-three senators and eighty-four representatives called on the President with a petition "to restore General Hamilton to his division." Lincoln pleaded with McClellan, warning him he had "thereby lost the confidence of at least one of (his) best friends in the Senate." McClellan believed that Hamilton was "not fit to command" and would not for a moment consider restoring him simply because some laymen (whoever they might be) believed it desirable.

Here again, the inability to bend - or at least to make a show of bending-hurt McClellan. It cost him support crucial to maintaining his position at the head of the army and to carrying out his military programs. By August of 1862, no one of influence in Washington championed McClellan
except the Blair family. And they did not believe in the general or his strategy; but feared that if the Republicans dropped him the Democrats would pick up a dangerous presidential candidate for 1864. 326

McClellan did in time become involved in partisan politics, but he ever remained a reluctant bedfellow. Perhaps, it would be accurate to say that, while he was always prepared to be the statesman, he was repelled by the politics involved in becoming one. Prior to 1864 only his great admiration for Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois had persuaded him even to vote. 327 He quickly squashed the attempt of Ohio Democrats to nominate him for governor in 1863, even though his good chances for carrying that state promised both sweet revenge against the Lincoln administration and a powerful political base for the future. 328

The larger offer that came in 1864, the Democratic presidential nomination, he accepted, because it came unanimously and unsolicited, and because he genuinely believed a new administration was needed to save the country from ruin. Had McClellan actively sought the nomination, he might have marshalled his supporters before-hand, captured control of the convention, and written a platform which would have greatly enhanced his chances for winning. His passiveness permitted the Peace Democrats to push through a plank which stigmatized the party beyond the repair of his letter of repudiation. 329 This disastrous experiment reenforced McClellan's native distaste for politics.

Two months after the election he exiled himself to Europe, in large part to avoid any further contact with political life. 330 He made every effort to discourage the talk which arose from time to time to return
him to public life; both the War Department and the ministry to England being mentioned.\textsuperscript{331} He purposefully delayed his stay abroad beyond the meeting of the Democratic convention in July 1868, hoping to avoid the sympathy that publicity of his return might arouse.\textsuperscript{332} That same year he declined to campaign for Horatio Seymour and the National Democratic ticket. Not until 1876 did McClellan consent even to speak for his party's candidates.\textsuperscript{333} Two years later, apparently without solicitation, he was elected Governor of New Jersey.\textsuperscript{334}

Some contemporaries and historians have claimed to see beneath this innocent political facade darker motives and secret plottings. It was only natural during the war that McClellan would attract his share of the motives and secret plottings. It was only natural during the war that McClellan would attract his share of the vicious gossip broadcast by the injured, the frustrated, and the jealous. Some of the wildest stories found witnesses to swear their truthfulness. It was said that McClellan's Virginia born wife shaped his pro-slavery attitudes; that he never intended to win the war, but to fight to a draw; that he had turned "pale as death" at the news of G. W. Smith's defection, fearing he would be captured en route with incriminating documents; that he had visited Lee's tent after Antietam, and the two had together plotted to combine their armies, to end the war, and to oust both incumbent governments.\textsuperscript{335} Of course, such chimera of treason are no longer believed, as they should not have been in the first place. Not for a moment in his career did McCellan ever waver in his loyalty.\textsuperscript{336}

A more pernicious story—because it has been more persistent—has viewed McClellan as a political conniver who used his military office to advance his presidential ambitions. After his removal from active command,
when the Democrats began to talk about him as a potential candidate for the election of 1864, the Republicans belatedly realized what had been the matter with McClellan all along; he had wanted the White House. They insisted that there was no other way to view his Official Report to the Secretary of War (written in 1863 and published in 1864), except as a piece of political propaganda aimed at discrediting the administration. Seen in this new light, the Harrison's Bar Letter had obviously been a partisan manifesto and a preview of McClellan's presidential platform. Then, too, it was heard that Democratic bosses had tempted the General with their support for the nomination as early as the autumn of 1861, encouraging his opposition to abolition and urging him to exploit his differences with Lincoln.

Actually, there is no substantial basis for believing that McClellan was a political schemer bent on capturing the White House. His own strong denials on this point have never been controverted. In fact, in 1861-62 McClellan barely knew Horatio Seymour, Fernando Wood or Samuel Cox, the bosses with whom he supposedly was plotting. He had never met Clement Vallandigham. These Democrats occasionally took junkets to visit their constituents in the army (as did their Republican counterparts), but there is no extant evidence to prove that their visits involved McClellan in partisan scheming. John Hay's diary record of intrigues between McClellan and Mayor Fernando Wood of New York City can be dismissed as campaign gossip and the product of partisan credulity. Significantly, Hay, himself, expressed surprise upon hearing the story, confessing he had not previously suspected McClellan "of any such deep-laid scheme of treachery and ambition."
The only one of McClellan's wartime associations which might need a few words of explanation is his intimate friendship with Samuel Latham Mitchell Barlow, the millionaire lawyer and railroad entrepreneur of New York City. Barlow, who has been described as a Democratic "wheel-horse", participated in party affairs from the local to the national level for over thirty years and during the war was in touch with various Democratic leaders, including August Belmont, the National Party Chairman. Moreover, there is no doubt that Barlow played a key role (his biographer says "kingmaker") in securing the presidential nomination for McClellan in 1864. During the two years of the General's active service, Barlow corresponded with him, visited the army twice, and on several occasions hosted his wife, Ellen, at his palatial home, No. 1 Madison Avenue.

Yet, apparently there was nothing improper in the McClellan-Barlow relationship in 1861-1862. The genuine fondness the two men had for each other pre-dated the war, growing from their work together on the Mississippi and Ohio Railroad. Their views on the war were similar and occasionally they discussed political issues in their letters. But they did not plot, neither did they scheme. Barlow, who was wholly ignorant of military matters, did not try to advise McClellan on strategy; and it is well he did not, considering the General's contempt for civilian meddling. On several occasions, Barlow did use his influence to attempt to bolster McClellan's sagging position. He wrote a number of letters to New York newspapers defending the General against his critics; and, in the spring of 1862, he tried to patch up the growing rift between McClellan and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, who was also an old friend.
It is also significant to note that during this early period of the war Barlow interpreted Lincoln's policies as basically conservative and gave his general, if unenthusiastic support of the administration. Rather than trying to exploit McClellan politically, Barlow was simply hoping to help an old friend for whom he had the greatest respect and admiration. In fine, McClellan was a soldier, not a politician; and his ambitions were military, not political. He saw the presidency as an honorarium which a successful general might expect from a grateful people. Hence, it was not a thing to be anticipated until after he had earned it. "My ambition was fully gratified," he later wrote, "by possession of command of the army, and, so long as I held that, nothing would have induced me to give it up for the Presidency." It is an honest statement and should be believed. The fact that he became the Democratic standard-bearer in 1864, in and by itself, proves nothing about his non-partisanship in 1861-1862.

Yet after all of this has been said and the canard about his scheming is laid to rest, it is still true that politics did substantially affect McClellan's military career, although in other, more subtle ways. In the first place, in spite of his personal inclinations, McClellan was a political figure for the greater part of his life. After his West Virginia victories, throngs crowded his every public appearance and inevitably politicians swarmed in his wake. His name became, like a powerful magnet, irresistibly attractive to candidates of his own party. Sorely beset War Democrats, leaderless after the death of Stephen A. Douglas and desperately hungering for political issues that were both substantial and patriotic, found in McClellan a symbol that promised unity
for the party and votes for its candidates. While McClellan can scarcely be blamed for his own political exploitation, since he did nothing to encourage it, he was partly responsible for its continuation, because he made no effort to squash it.

The very use of his name by aggressive Democrats such as Wood and "Sunset" Cox of Ohio, and the quickness with which Democratic Congressmen seized upon differences between the general and the administration to attack Republican policies, cost McClellan his rapport with the administration and lessened efficient cooperation between the two. Cox's acidly witty speeches in defence of McClellan convulsed his colleagues in the House and invigorated the emaciated Democratic minority, but they also contributed largely to the polarization of national politics into pro and anti-McClellan camps. And when a professional soldier becomes a political issue, his effectiveness is impaired, whether he is culpable or not. As McClellan candidly observed after the war: "Many of the Democratic leaders did me great harm by using my name for party purposes without my knowledge or consent; and, without intending it, probably did more than my armed enemies in the way of ruining my military career by giving the administration some reason to suppose that in the event of military success I might prove a dangerous political rival."

In the second place, McClellan, himself, did engage in a species of "politicking." It had nothing to do with candidacies and elections, and probably he did not even understand it to be politicking. But actually, he did undertake a form of lobbying, when he tried to enlist political influence to support his military programs. McClellan learned the value—in fact in some instances, the necessity—of such lobbying in the early
days of his command in Ohio. The most blatant example of his attempt to influence political affairs was his appearance on Capitol Hill in July 1861, to secure passage of a bill granting generals a larger staff. Later, he and others in his behalf sought to line up political counter-pressure to defend his long winter of preparation in 1861; to justify his use of regular siege approaches against Yorktown; and, in the most desperate attempt, to have McDowell's detached corps rejoined to the army on the peninsula.

McClellan's lobbying was non-partisan, however, and meant to advance his military programs, not his political ambitions. Indeed, he usually turned to Republicans who had influence in the administration, such as Chase, Seward, Dennison, the Blairs, and William Sprague (Governor of Rhode Island and Chase's son-in-law). Moreover, some of this politicking was done by McClellan's subordinates without his knowledge, as clearly was the case with Erasmus Keyes' letter to Senator Ira Harris of New York, defending the time consumed by the siege of Yorktown.

Still, whatever may be said in qualification, lobbying for whatever purpose hurt McClellan in the long run. It encouraged others to think of him in political terms and gave the appearance of violating the strict separation of the civilian and military establishments. McClellan assumed, perhaps unconsciously, that he could ride the political tiger and not be eaten. There is much significance in his somewhat naive boast that "during the whole period of my command I never did or wrote anything, or abstained from doing or writing anything, in view of its political effect upon myself."

There was a third way that politics affected McClellan's mili-
tary career, and it is much the most basic and important of all. His ingrained conservatism determined his view of the war and his own role in its conduct. The way McClellan interpreted the war governed absolutely his behavior in it. To understand McClellan and the strategy he evolved, therefore, it is less significant that he was a Democrat, than it is that he was a conservative. And more is to be learned from his political philosophy, than from his negligible partisan activities.

3. A Conservative View of the War

McClellan described himself as a "Democrat of the Douglas school," and, stripped of its overtones of partisanship and pragmatism, this description approximates his position in the political spectrum of 1860-1862. It would probably be easier and less confusing simply to call him a Northern states-rightest, however, as this term more nearly reflects both the content of his philosophy of government and his doctrinaire approach to politics. He shared two basic tenets with other advocates of states rights, North and South. He believed, first, in the inviolability of the letter of the Constitution, that it should be narrowly interpreted, and that the national government should be strictly limited to its expressed duties and powers. He believed, also, in the theory of divided sovereignty which held that each level of government (central, state, and local) had its sphere of authority, and in its sphere each was supreme.

The chief difference between McClellan and Southerners who held similar views before the war was that McClellan, in addition to being a
conservative, was also a thorough nationalist. His states rights views were not a cloak for regionalism or provincialism. For the first thirty years of his life, he thought of himself with some pride as a Pennsylvanian, but no state or area held particular claim to his allegiance. As was true of many Northern officers, his army travels had broadened his perspective, and he found he could live comfortably in Chicago, or Cincinnati, or New York. Evidently, his reputation, as well as his outlook, was national, because at the outbreak of war New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio offered him commands in their state militia. The fact that McClellan coolly weighed these offers and chose Ohio reveals a cosmopolitanism that most Southern officers, such as Robert E. Lee for example, utterly lacked.362

McClellan's interpretation of the sectional troubles which led to Sumter was uncomplicated and, in the context of the period, it was also moderate. He acknowledged that slavery was the "real knot of the question and the underlying cause of the war."363 But, he recognized that broad economic and cultural differences had caused the sections to drift apart and led to misunderstandings and faulty communication between their peoples. Both North and South, he believed, had contributed to the crisis, when each region allowed its extremists to assume control in 1860.364

He unreservedly rejected the Southern doctrine of secession, which he dismissed as "extreme states-rights". Even brandished as theory, secession threatened to carry the country back to the anarchy of the old Confederation period. Put into practice, of course, it destroyed the Union and the constitution. And McClellan would accept neither of these results.365 Almost equally pernicious, as he saw it however, was the "tendency of Northern Republicans towards a centralized power under which
the autocracy of the States would disappear." He did not doubt that the "truth lay midway between the extreme positions assumed by the controlling spirits at the time."366

The Union had to be held indestructible and perpetual; otherwise, there could be "no stability, no protection of person and property, no good government, no power to put down disorder at home or to resist oppression from without...."367 Still, "in a country so vast" as the United States, "with such great differences of topography and of climate, with a population so numerous and derived from such a variety of sources," and with "such diversity of habits, local laws, and material interests," McClellan believed it folly to expect the central government to "legislate satisfactorily" for the Union in all of its parts.368

"The only safe policy," he believed, was for "the general government to be strictly confined to the general powers and duties vested in it by the Old Constitution; while the individual states preserve all the sovereign rights and powers retained by them when the constitutional compact was formed."369 To McClellan, "the happiest condition of affairs", were the years before the war (as he remembered them, at least), "when the action of the general government, being strictly confined to its legitimate purposes, was so little felt by individual citizens that they almost forget its existence."370

Despite his ability to recognize valid points in the Southern argument and his insistence that elements in the North contributed to the crisis, McClellan never for a moment doubted the correct course to follow. The fact that he believed war should have been avoided became irrelevant once the war, itself, had begun. McClellan harbored no sympathy for the
Southern leadership, whom he held "directly accountable" for the resort to armed violence.\(^{371}\) And, from first to last, he viewed the Southern bid for independence as an illegitimate and immoral step backward from the progress of civilization. "Rebellion against a government like ours," he told the West Point cadets in 1864, "which contains the means of self-adjustment and a pacific remedy for evils, should never be confounded with a revolution against despotic power, which refuses redress of wrongs. Such a rebellion can not be justified upon ethical grounds, and the only alternative for our choice is its suppression or the destruction of our nationality."\(^{372}\)

George McClellan never marched with the unquestioning band of patriots who parade under the banner: "My Country, right or wrong." He did not go to war simply because his "fatherland" was threatened. He left his lucrative and comfortable civilian life and returned to soldiering for the sole purpose of defending the form of government to which he was personally and deeply committed, and constitutional Union. His clear understanding of the "great object of war" and the only grounds upon which it and his involvement in it could be justified was the "restoration" of the Union and the "preservation" of the Constitution.\(^{373}\) "You will please constantly bear in mind the precise issue...," he wrote to Don Carlos Buell. "We are fighting only to preserve the integrity of the Union and the constitutional authority of the General Government."\(^{374}\) And to Sam Barlow, he wrote: "I am fighting to preserve the integrity of the Union and power of the Government--on no other issue."\(^{375}\)

While McClellan never wavered in his firm commitment that the Union must be saved, neither could he ever quite bring himself to add:
"at all cost." For in politics and in war as in other phases of his life, "costs" were crucial to McClellan. If McClellan differed from the Northern majority, it was in his keen awareness of the relation between the methods and policies used to wage the war and the results that would be produced. As did most Northerners in the early years, including Scott and Lincoln, he understood reconciliation and not simply military victory to be the true aim of the war. And McClellan, believing that "policy should ever accompany the use of arms," insisted that the conduct of the war be in harmony with its aim.376

Responding to Thurlow Weed's invitation to speak at a mass Union rally in June of 1863, McClellan wrote: "I am clear...in the conclusion that the policy governing the conduct of the war should be one looking not only to military success, but also to ultimate re-union, and that it should consequently be such as to preserve the rights of all Union-loving citizens, wherever they may be, as far as compatible with military security." McClellan told Weed that his ideas "as to the prosecution of the war" had remained "substantially" unchanged from the beginning; and, he added, "these views I have made known officially."377 After the War, McClellan recalled: "as I always believed that we should fight to bring [the Southern States] back into the Union, and should treat them as members of the Union when so brought back, I held that it was a matter of sound policy to do nothing likely to render ultimate reconciliation and harmony impossible, unless such a course were imperative to secure military success."378

Speaking for McClellan, his campaign biographer William Henry Hurlbert of the New York World observed: since the "object of war" was
"simply the restriction of the South within the limits of its constitutional obligations, it was evident that if the war were not so conducted as to secure this object, with the least possible loss of life and property, and the least possible inflammation of popular feelings at the South, the war must inevitably aggravate the mischief it was expected to abate."\textsuperscript{379} No more than Lincoln did McClellan want the war to "degenerate into a violent and remorseless revolutionary struggle."\textsuperscript{380}

Even more than Lincoln did he believe that Northern and extreme measures, which [might] reach the loyal as well as the disloyal, were "indispensable" to military victory. McClellan, the conservative, opposed any governmental activity carried on outside the limits of the constitution, but the use of warfare as a tool of social reform was especially repugnant to him.\textsuperscript{381} He could not justify his own participation in a war waged for such ends. "I will not," he wrote to his wife, "fight for the abolitionists."\textsuperscript{382}

Of course, McClellan did later insist that he "would, no doubt, have acquiesced in any honorable measure absolutely necessary to bring about the desired results, even to the forcible and general abolition of slavery, if found to be a military necessity."\textsuperscript{383} But he never acknowledged that the "safety of the republic" at any time "during the war required or justified any departure from the provisions of the Constitution."\textsuperscript{384} To be sure, he never understood the military situation to require immediate, coercive emancipation. Viewing the course of the war from retirement, McClellan wrote to Francis Blair, Sr., in 1864: "I think that the original object of the war...has been lost sight of, or very widely departed from, and that other issues have been brought into
the foreground which either should be entirely secondary, or are wrong or impossible of attainment."385

McClellan later claimed that he had been "always opposed to the institution of slavery," and that he had regarded "it as a great evil."386 And he probably did. Certainly, there is in the following passage written to his wife, a genuine sympathy displayed for the contrabands of South Carolina:387

The negroes came flocking down to the river with their bundles in their hands; ready to take passage. There is something inexpressibly mournful to me in that--those poor, helpless, ignorant beings, with the wide world and its uncertainties before them; the poor serf, with his little bundle, ready to launch his boat on the wide ocean of life he knows so little of. When I think of some of the features of slavery I cannot help shuddering. Just think for one moment, and try to realize that at the will of some brutal master you and I might be separated forever! It is horrible; and when the day of adjustment comes I will, if successful, throw my sword into the scale to force an improvement in the condition of these poor blacks. I do think that some of the rights of humanity ought to be secured to the negroes. There should be no power to separate families, and the right to marriage ought to be secured to them....

Yet general emancipation would involve social upheaval on such a vast scale that McClellan felt he could not support "so sweeping and serious a measure" unless accompanied by "due precautions."388 He was dismayed and appalled by the radical view which emerged from his conversations with Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts and other "prominent abolitionists" in the autumn of 1861. Sumner demanded that emancipation should be immediate and detail "be left to take care of itself."
McClellan replied that "no real statesman" could take that view. He insisted "that four and a half million of uneducated slaves should not suddenly be manumitted without due precautions taken both to protect them and to guard against them"; and that, he added, "just there was the point where we differed radically and probably irreconcilably."389

The continuance of slavery, on the one hand, and its immediate abolition, on the other, were in McClellan's opinion the extremist positions. As might be expected, he occupied the middle ground. "My own view," he observed after the war, "was that emancipation should be accomplished gradually, and that the negroes should be fitted for it by certain preparatory steps in the way of education, recognition of the rights of family and marriage, prohibition against selling them without their own consent, the freedom of those born after a certain date, etc. I was always prepared to make it one of the essential conditions of peace that slavery should be abolished within a fixed and reasonable period. Had the arrangements of the terms of peace been in my hands I should certainly have insisted on this."390

McClellan honestly feared that the peremptory abolition of slavery would divide the North, harden the South, prolong the war, and complicate the peace. Before the fact he appealed bluntly to Barlow: "Help me to dodge the nigger. We want nothing to do with him. I am fighting to preserve the integrity of the Union and the power of the Government--on no other issue. To gain that end we cannot afford to mix up the negro question. It must be incidental and subsidiary."391 After the fact, he wrote to the elder Blair of his sincere regret that "the war has been permitted to take a course which unnecessarily embitters the
inimical feeling between the two sections, and much increases the difficulty of attaining the true objects for which we ought to fight." 392

McClellan also confided his sentiments on this delicate subject to Brigadier General John Cochrane of New York, who is a valuable witness because of his political background, especially his liberal views on emancipation and his early advocacy of the enlistment of Negro troops in the Union army. 393 Despite their philosophical disagreement, Cochrane and McClellan were intimate friends and often exchanged views on the course of the war. 394 Concerning his conversations with McClellan in 1862, Cochrane later remarked: 395

I often heard his unqualified condemnation of the institution of slavery: I mean that censure which, in its denunciation of any warrant for human bondage, stopped nevertheless, at the barrier which the Constitution raised for its protection. While hostile to the relation of slave and master, he evidently thought that the development of the opinion in action, would violate the organic law by which he proposed to be governed. I do not think that he fully accorded to manumission by the military arm the virtue of permanent emancipation.

Not surprisingly, McClellan initially responded to Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in despair and gloom. Writing privately three days after its appearance, he charged the President with "inaugurating servile war...and at one stroke of the pen changing our free institutions into a despotism." 396 According to his own earlier thinking, he should have at this time resigned his commission, for thereafter, by his own definition, he would be "fighting for the abolitionists." He did not. Instead, after several weeks of agonizing with his conscience,
he decided to remain in the army to fight for the Union, although he realized he would by this seem to give his implicit approval to the Proclamation. McClellan never considered repudiating Lincoln's policy, because he never believed his army command gave him that authority. He did decide to remain publicly silent, however, and thereby avoid giving his explicit support. But he could not ignore the ugly talk in the army among conservatives enraged by the President's widening of the goals of the war. Consequently, McClellan felt compelled to issue orders to the army, reminding officers and soldiers of the constitutional separation of the civilian and military and of their duty to obey their civilian commanders. McClellan has been unfairly criticized for this order by those who believed it should have included a forthright statement of support for the Emancipation Proclamation. But, of course, it was no more in McClellan's province to pass favorable public judgement on political decisions, than it was for him to disapprove them.

This topic should not be concluded without recognizing that even here, in an issue so central to his political philosophy, McClellan could show some growth. He never came to believe that Lincoln's decision was either wise or necessary, but he did finally accept emancipation as an accomplished fact. By October 11, John Cochrane could write to Chase that there was no longer any "substantial difference" between the Treasury Secretary and the General "on the slavery question." And, later in the north, McClellan confided to Ozias Hatch, the Republican Secretary of State of Illinois who was visiting his camp, that "the institution of slavery had gone up" and there was no point in looking backward.
There is an interesting passage, inserted in pencil in McClellan's handwriting, in the rough draft of his letter to the Democratic National Committee in September 1864, accepting the Party's presidential nomination. After once again affirming his opposition to slavery and his belief that the institution was inherently evil, he proclaimed his support of emancipation and his faith that it would eventually strengthen the country and bequeath to posterity a less complicated future. Still, he added, "I do not think that forcible abolition should be made an object of the war or a necessary condition of the peace and reunion." This was the benchmark of McClellan's progress on the question of slavery. He did not move so far or so fast as some of his contemporaries, but he did move.

Historians have not been kind to the stand taken by the Conservatives during the Civil War, perhaps in part because the tide of history, itself, has so completely engulfed most of the ideas they espoused. Admittedly, many of those ideas were archaic, especially their concept of an impotent national government, which had in itself helped to cause the war. Nevertheless, the Conservatives themselves, the majority of whom were Democrats, do not deserve the taint of treason which has trailed after their names into the pages of history. The sobriquet of Copperhead has been given too indiscriminately to the political opponents of Lincoln's war policies, while too little attention has been paid to the gamut of views within the opposition and the integrity of the men who held them.

There were radical conservatives, epitomized by Clement Vallandigham and Fernando Wood, who were thoroughly opposed to the war and who demanded an immediate and unconditional armistice. Until recently
historians had uncritically accepted the view concocted by contemporary Republican propagandists that these were "men whose hearts were black, whose blood was yellow, and whose minds were blank." Slowly a less severe judgment is evolving, as it is discovered that Vallandigham and his ilk were really, honest-to-goodness politicians acting in part from idealism, in part under pressure from their constituents, and in part out of selfishness and ambition. In any case, the Peace Democrats were always a small minority within their party, and their prominence in history is largely a tribute to Republican editors and orators.

Most Democrats were staunch Unionists, who recognized the necessity of using armed force to crush the rebellion. Some few stood right of center on this question, because they did not believe that force alone could restore the Union. Sam Barlow, for one, thought that war could carry the North only part of the way to victory. First, the South must be defeated on the battlefield to prove to her the futility of secession. Barlow believed it would then be necessary to negotiate the final settlement. As he saw it, unless the Southern viewpoint were incorporated into the construct of the peace, the same problems which caused the crisis would arise again and again to bedevil the country's future. Barlow understood the only alternative to be to so subjugate the South as to destroy not only her will to rebel but also to obliterate her viewpoint altogether; and this he rejected as being as immoral and unconstitutional as secession, itself.

The moderate conservatives comprised the center of the party's political spectrum and the majority of its leadership and rank and file. Unlike Barlow, they believed in and fought for a complete military victory. And it was here in the center that George McClellan stood, along with men
such as Reverdy Johnson, August Belmont, Horatio Seymour, Samuel Cox, Abram Hewitt, and many others who were fiercely loyal and determined nationalists. Along with some obsolete political ideals, some contradictions of logic, and a perhaps quixotic notion of returning to a vanished past, the moderate conservatives combined at least as much integrity and sincerity as their opponents and probably more political courage. Reverdy Johnson helped lend the fight for the amendment to abolish slavery; Belmont threw his whole influence into the scales to keep foreign governments and creditors friendly to the North and hostile to the Confederacy; Hewitt labored day and night to supply the iron for Union guns; and George McClellan went back to soldiering.

And yet, even the views of McClellan and those who thought as he did were not intellectually unrespectable, nor, if they are considered objectively were they wholly immoral. It might be said that during the Civil War Radicals and Conservatives were talking about different kinds of morals. Conservatives applauded Lincoln's intention to "subdue the anger, which had produced, and so long sustained a needless and cruel rebellion [and] to change the hearts of the insurgents...." But they insisted, during and after the war, that the Radicals had perverted that aim and made Lincoln's words a mockery by measures directly calculated to inflame the anger of the populations in rebellion and to harden the hearts of the insurgents against the government and the people of the Union!

Conservatives argued that the North should, in McClellan's words, "avoid harshness and violence...as far as possible" consistent with military victory." They feared the only possible result which a punitive
or hard-war policy could produce was either a war so prolonged it would exhaust the North, or else, leave a legacy of bitterness, even in victory, that would last for generations. Conservatives could not accept statements such as Lincoln's that "the dogmas of the quiet past were inadequate to the stormy present." They feared that "if the storm was to be protracted indefinitely, not the dogmas only, but the whole social order also of the quiet past must vanish before its violence." When Lincoln assured the country, in December of 1862, that "our strife pertains to ourselves, to the passing generations of men, and can, without convulsion, be hushed forever with the passing of one generation;" the Conservative replied that his "easy faith" ran counter to "the facts of history and the characteristics of mankind."

Against the immorality of slavery, they balanced the immorality of coercion. They measured the evils of the present against the potential evils of the future. The Conservative view, at its best, asked for a conduct of the war that was both "soldierlike and statesmanlike," arguing that "fermenting passions through indefinite years to come, is a crime against the human race which has an associated and progressive destiny. For men are not isolated to the point they occupy in space or time. They hold on one to the other; they act one on the other by ties and means which do not require their personal presence and which survive them, so that successive generations of men are inter-connected with each other and linked together by the act of succession." Of course, nearly everyone held opinions on the war and its conduct, and it must be asked why the private views of a soldier, who has the simple duty to obey the orders of his civilian superiors, would be of much
importance. The answer is that McClellan's duty was never "simple" in this respect. He came to chief command at the very opening of the war, before the North's war policy had been settled. Since he could not devise strategy or conduct operations without reference to policy, his own ideas filled the void left by the absence of government instructions. In this manner, at the very start, McClellan's private views became inseparably mingled with his official actions. It was in Ohio and West Virginia that the pattern was set for all that happened later.
Chapter Four:

**Experiment in Conservatism**

In the chaotic opening days of the war, while Grant, Sherman, Meade, Thomas and others struggled as colonels and at lower ranks to distribute arms and drill regiments and carry out various staff functions, McClellan was called upon to create an army and to deal in large political questions. Historians have traditionally seen McClellan as springing full blown into the Civil War from his West Virginia campaign, but this was true only in the sense of his image as war hero in the nation's press. Much more important to an understanding of his later development is the fact that his first role was that of a western marcher lord, a semi-autonomous commander on an exposed frontier, who not only executed but to some extent made his own policy.

It was in the conservative climate of the early war and derived from largely untypical experiences that McClellan conceived his ideas on strategy and evolved his image of his role as military commander. His views were molded in the Department of the Ohio, gradually hardening through the experimental campaign in western Virginia, and substantially set by late July and his summons to Washington. Within a week after his arrival, McClellan wrote a strategy memorandum for Lincoln which was to be a blueprint for his subsequent actions.
1. Salute to Arms

During the secession crisis, the West had toyed with ideas of compromise. William Dean Howells, speaking for the Abolitionists of the Western Reserve, echoed Horace Greeley's call for "peaceable separation" in the editorials of the Ohio State Journal. The Ohio legislature, despite its Republican majority, ratified the Corwin amendment to guarantee permanently slavery where it existed. And when the lawmakers of Kentucky and Tennessee visited Columbus, Ohioans on every side assured them that the Union must be preserved but that other issues were open to discussion. No steps were taken to put the state on a war footing.

The news that Southern guns had opened fire on Fort Sumter shocked Ohio with surprise and anger and fear. Ohioans rushed with "liberality, harmony, forgetfulness of party and self" to defend the Union and to protect their southern boundary which had suddenly become a frontier. In the legislature Republicans and Democrats closed ranks to hurry through laws appropriating one million -- then two million more dollars for defense, to organize the militia and appoint its officers, and to define treason against the state and provide for its punishment. Before the news of Sumter's fall had been confirmed, twenty companies had volunteered, and the first had reached Columbus by April 17. "What portion of the 75,000 militia you call for," Governor William Dennison anxiously telegraphed Lincoln, "do you give to Ohio? We will furnish the largest number you will receive. Great rejoicing here over your proclamation."
It was Dennison, of course, as chief executive, who had to shoulder the heaviest burden in these early days. All of the laws, the enlistments, the offers of service came to rest on his desk and to depend upon his organization and administration for rescue from misdirection and chaos. Like most governors in 1861, Dennison was ill-prepared for the gigantic task; and, looking to the national government for guidance, he bombarded Washington with requests for arms, munitions, officers, and above all, advice. For days at a time, however, communication between east and west was completely lost. And even when messages flowed smoothly along the telegraph wires the administration had little to offer except encouragement.

From May to June of 1861, the national authorities were almost wholly engrossed in affairs of the east, including the defense of the capital, the pacification of Maryland, and preparing the columns of McDowell and Patterson to advance in Virginia against Centreville and Harper's Ferry, respectively. Little attention was given the region west of Cumberland, Maryland. Scott's personal inclination to concentrate on the Mississippi River was thwarted by the new administration's concern for the safety of Washington and its anxious desire to disperse the rebel troops organizing in northeastern Virginia. During these three months the West was left to tend its own store.

Initially, the results in Ohio were confusion, wastage, and frustration. Dennison had been a dark-horse compromise candidate to fill the governor's chair vacated when Chase moved to the Senate, and he possessed neither the experience, nor the reputation to impress order on the tumultuous patriotism which convulsed the state. His first efforts
fell so far short of what his enthusiastic constituents expected that he soon became one of the most unpopular men in the state, a stigma that lingered to deny him a second term. Dennison was scarcely to blame. Without any chance for advance planning, the militia had suddenly descended upon Columbus and instantly a myriad of problems bloomed where there had been none. Unfortunately, the Governor's militia aids, characterized by Whitelaw Reid as "a staff in which it seemed as if the capacity of bad selection had been almost exhausted," contributed to the imbroglio.

Adjutant-General Henry Beebe Carrington accepted every organization that volunteered, soon exceeding the state's quota and far outstripping the capacity of the logistical branches to handle the deluge. In desperation, the Quartermaster hustled the arriving troops into hotels and boarding houses, and the Commissary-General contracted for caterers to serve them meals. Such plush arrangements cost exorbitant sums, but the over-crowding and the quality and service of the food was nevertheless so bad that the soldiers were soon clamoring their outrage.

At the urgent request of the War Department, two regiments were formed from the miscellaneous companies and without uniforms, or ammunition, or even guns, sent off by train to defend Washington "with their fists." The height of the folly seemed to come immediately thereafter with the arrival of thousands upon thousands of tent-poles which had been purchased by the Ohio agent in New York because of their attractive discount. Eventually, they would be useful, but at the time they seemed to the public symbolic of the absurdly misdirected efforts of the Dennison administration.
In these desperate circumstances, Dennison realized he must have competent, professional military advice. He seized young Lieutenant Orlando Poe of the regular army who happened to be passing through Columbus and set him to preparing Camp Jackson at the town's outskirts. When the Governor telegraphed Washington to have Poe permanently assigned to his staff, he received the curt response that the War Department was too busy to waste time detailing lieutenants. Dennison kept Poe, hoping the government would also be too busy to miss a stray subaltern. Still, what he needed most was a soldier of experience and reputation to take overall command of the state's militia. The law provided for three brigadiers and one major-general, and, since politicians (Newton Schleich, Joshua Bates and Jacob Cox) already filled the former, he believed it necessary that a professional be given the highest rank.

Hence, the Governor asked Adjutant Carrington to prepare a list of the addresses of all West Point graduates appointed from or currently living in Ohio. From all the names, Dennison at first chose Major Irwin McDowell, to whom he was related by marriage; but McDowell, actively employed as a member of Scott's staff and expecting rapid advance in the regulars, returned an ambiguous reply. The Governor then turned with some reluctance to George McClellan, whom he had but briefly met but whose name was being pressed by influential citizens of Cincinnati. McClellan would at least, he thought, be available. To Dennison's ultimate consternation, the ex-captain at first seemed pre-occupied and uninterested.
April of 1861 was an extraordinary month for young George McClellan. He began by returning temporarily to bachelorhood, when his bride of ten months went off with her parents, the Marcys, on a grand tour of the west. Then, in the midst of caring for unaccustomed domestic trivia, he encountered a crisis in the business of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad. For some time there had been friction between the Western and Eastern Divisions of the road. Henry Bacon, Vice President and Manager of the Western Office in St. Louis, charged that McClellan, as President of the Eastern branch had taken control of the entire railroad and paid too little attention to western needs and advice. Bacon seized the occasion when new rates and schedules were to be drawn up to precipitate a confrontation. The owners of the Ohio and Mississippi, "the eastern moneymen," including Sam Barlow and William H. Aspinwall, supported McClellan fully in this showdown; and, when it ended, Cincinnati had won over St. Louis as the central headquarters of the line. For a time, however, Bacon's peppery letters kept McClellan hopping.

In the midst of all this, the news from Sumter had plunged McClellan's neighbors into a state of near panic. The "Queen City," sprawling just across the Ohio River from Kentucky, had strong commercial ties with the South; but the citizens of Cincinnati feared more an imminent invasion than the eventual strangulation of their economy. While those unfit for military service because of age or sex met in mass rallies to pass patriotic resolutions, the city's militia tramped the streets in daily drills, hoping their martial tread would be heard across the river. The Guthrie Greys, its ranks filled from the "best
families," asked McClellan to be their commander, but he declined.

At the same time, a number of prominent lawyers and merchants, including Rutherford B. Hayes and Larz Anderson (brother of the Sumter hero), formed a bipartisan, ad hoc committee to meet the emergency. They also turned to McClellan for help. He advised them to remain calm and to meet the requisitions of the state and national government as quickly as possible, but that he did not think an invasion from Kentucky likely. McClellan must have impressed the committee quite favorably, because they concluded he was just the man to command the defenses of Cincinnati, perhaps even the entire Ohio militia. They sent telegrams to Chase urging his influence to get McClellan a Federal appointment and, using Aspinwall in New York as intermediary, pressed a similar message on Winfield Scott. They brought heaviest pressure to bear against Dennison, however; several members visited Columbus, and one went so far as to send the Governor a copy of McClellan's *Armies of Europe*.

Later, after McClellan had become the butt of malicious propaganda, several stories circulated about how he had received his first commission. According to one, McClellan manipulated his friends and ambitiously shouldered his way into Dennison's notice. Another account pictured McClellan as a miserable railroad executive, whom the owners were so anxious to dump that they forged documents to prove to Dennison that other Governors were seeking his services and that Ohio had better grab him quickly. There is no truth in these rumors. Officials of the Ohio and Mississippi, except possibly Henry Bacon, were pleased with McClellan and regretted to see him go. McClellan, himself, did nothing to secure the Ohio appointment, because, in fact, he preferred to serve
with the Pennsylvania troops. As for forged documents, they were hardly necessary, since there were plenty of real ones.

A career in business despite the money and prestige it brought him, had never quite satisfied McClellan, and on several occasions he contemplated returning to the army. Once the crisis broke in 1861, there was no doubt he would serve in the military in some capacity. The need to clear up railroad business prevented his rushing to volunteer, and he turned down early offers to command local militia units. Then messages began to arrive which whetted his enthusiasm and his ambitions.

On April 15, Fitz John Porter telegraphed from Washington that he must volunteer at once for an important command and lend his reputation to the Northern cause. "Such men as you," Porter wired, "and Cump Sherman and Burnside are needed to counterbalance the influence of Davis, Bragg, and Beauregard." The same day, Baldy Smith, another old army friend, informed him that the Cabinet was considering him for a regular brigadier-generalcy in the expanded army, but he suggested that McClellan volunteer for state service in advance.

On April 18, Governor Andrew Curtin offered to make McClellan commander-in-chief of the Pennsylvania militia. McClellan would certainly have accepted immediately, but he never received the offer. Curtin sent the telegram to Chicago, where it became lost, and he waited nearly a week for a reply before repeating his request. McClellan did receive a telegram from his older brother, John, a highly respected surgeon in Philadelphia, which aroused his curiosity. He wrote Ellen:

I received late this afternoon a telegram from John
as follows: "When will you be in here?" I replied, "For what am I wanted? Cannot come conveniently. If it is a matter of importance will come at once." My first fear was that my dear old mother was sick but Biddle suggested that it might have some connection with the armament of Pennsylvania and the calling out of her volunteers. I shall know in the morning and make my decision before I close this letter. Should there be any illness in the family I will go in at once. [If] it is connected with the military business I shall have to think. Should (which I do not expect) my good old state offer me a high position I may go on, obtain leave of absence from Aspinwall and try the fortunes of war once more. I feel that I owe much to my state. I am proud of it and would like to make it proud of me.

Subsequent information from Pennsylvania made it unclear whether McClellan was being offered the entire command or simply a position as chief engineer on the staff of Robert Patterson, under whom he had served in the Mexican War. Obviously preferring the former, McClellan telegraphed Porter in Washington, asking that "General Scott ... say a word to Governor Curtin in my behalf." Porter could assure Scott, McClellan wrote, that he had thrown "to one side all questions as to the past -- political parties, etc. The government is in danger; our flag insulted; and we must stand by it. Tho' I am told I can have a position with the Ohio troops I much prefer the Pennsylvania service. I hope to hear something definite from them today and will let you know at once. Help me as far as you can."

Four days passed without further word from the east, and meanwhile the pressure in Ohio continued to mount. As he must soon decide, McClellan concluded a trip to Harrisburg was necessary to clear up the matter. The Cincinnati committee persuaded him to stop in Columbus
at least long enough to consult with the harried Dennison and several members, including Larz Anderson accompanied him aboard the train. Jacob Dolson Cox, state senator and recently appointed Brigadier of militia, was waiting at the depot as the governor’s personal representative. Having heard rumors that McClellan was to be offered the Ohio command, Cox looked closely at the young traveller, and he liked what he saw. "He was," Cox later wrote, "rather under the medium height, but muscally formed, with broad shoulders and a well-poised head, active and graceful in motion. His whole appearance was quiet and modest, but when drawn out he showed no lack of confidence in himself."

Cox escorted McClellan to the statehouse and stayed for the meeting with Dennison. The interview, he recalled, was brief, candid and in earnest.

The destitution of the State of everything like military material and equipment was very plainly put, and the magnitude of the task of building up a small army out of nothing was not blinked. The governor spoke of the embarrassment he felt at every step from the lack of practical military experience in his staff, and of his desire to have some one on whom he could properly throw the details of military work. McClellan showed that he fully understood the difficulties there would be before him, and said that no man could wholly master them at once, although he had confidence that if a few weeks' time for preparation were given, he would be able to put the Ohio division into reasonable form for taking the field.

Whereupon, Dennison offered McClellan the command of the Ohio militia with the rank of major-general. Evidently deciding to take the bird in hand, McClellan accepted on the spot. Technically, he was
ineligible because still an out of state resident, but within hours a bill was introduced and passed through the legislature authorizing his commission. Without waiting for confirmation, McClellan plunged headlong into his awesome job, and in the waning hours of the 23rd accomplished a full day's work. He established temporary headquarters in a small room in the state house and surveyed papers on the military resources of Ohio and their current state of organization. Undaunted by what he read, McClellan nevertheless realized he must have help from Washington; so, on the night of his appointment, having as yet no adjutant, he drafted his first letter to Winfield Scott.

In this letter, McClellan demonstrated that his quick and fertile mind had put him immediately on top of the situation. In simple, telegraphic sentences, he succinctly summarized his position and his needs. His two great assets were the quality and enthusiasm of his troops. "I have never seen so fine a body of men collected together," he wrote. "The material is superb ...." Virtually everything else, however, was lacking. According to his survey, he started with 2,000 old muskets (converted flintlocks), 31 cannon (most of which could not be taken into the field), 120 tents, and a pile of mouldy accoutrements which crumbled at the touch in the State Arsenal.

"I find myself," he concluded without exaggeration, "in the position of a commander with nothing but men ...." He then outlined for Scott the arms, munitions, and equipment he would need; and, further, requested that Fitz John Porter, John Dickerson, Randolph Marcy, and Orlando Poe be assigned to his staff. He indicated he would establish an intelligence apparatus to watch Kentucky; and, also suggested that
some form of coordination of the western states' militia would be necessary for any combined operations, as, for example, a movement on Louisville to relieve Cincinnati.

The story of McClellan's first letter to Scott tells much about the opening days of the war -- not only in its writing, but also in its delivery. The telegraph had been out of touch with Washington for several days, and the letter could not be trusted to the ordinary mails. Hence, Dennison asked an old friend, Cincinnati lawyer Aaron F. Perry, who was in the state capital to volunteer his services, if he would undertake to carry the message to the War Department. Perry agreed, innocent of what the mission would entail. He reached Philadelphia routinely enough by train, but thereafter the journey became a farce. Travelling by horseback, cattleboat, and lumber car, Perry arrived in Washington two days later.

At first he could find no one of importance at the War Department, learning that Scott was at home in bed and would receive no callers. Perry finally got through to Cameron, but only to hand him the message and sit in the Secretary's office, while Cameron seemed too busy writing to make any reply or even conversation. As a final, desperate move Perry visited Chase at the Treasury, assuming he at least would be interested in Ohio's fate. Chase had little of substance to say, except that the government had no plan, was falling apart, and wished that he were President instead of Lincoln. Disgruntled, Perry returned by equally picturesque conveyances to Columbus. He reported to McClellan and Dennison that Washington was worse off than they were and that they should count on no appreciable help in the foreseeable future from that quarter.
Thus, McClellan entered upon his first Civil War command. Faced with huge responsibilities and the need for instant action, while receiving no instructions whatsoever from his superiors, he naturally turned inward to his own ideas for guidance, even to the point of defining for himself his role in the civilian-military hierarchy. The intensity of these early experiences burned lessons into his mind that changing times would not significantly alter. For better or worse, Ohio would shape McClellan.

2. Schooling in Ohio and the Borderlands

In the circumstances, McClellan did the only thing possible. He assumed he had whatever authority was necessary to carry out his responsibilities. Despite being only a "militia general," he placed direct orders, with the Federal arsenals in Pittsburgh and Troy, New York, for the arms and equipment he needed. He grabbed all of the regular officers that came within reach and put them to work on his staff. He also reached into the business world and tapped friends with special talents to help him. Appreciating the value of reliable information from the South, McClellan organized an intelligence gathering force and wired Allen Pinkerton in Chicago to come be its chief. Pinkerton (already signing himself "E. J. Allen") replied that he was temporarily indisposed, but he sent agents and advice. McClellan persuaded Anson Stager, President of Western Union, to organize the states telegraph lines for military service and act as unofficial supervisor of communications.
Another friend, William H. Clement of the Ohio and Mississippi, coordinat-
ed the railroads to facilitate troop movements and served as purchasing
agent for land, grain, and lumber.

The frantic first week was the worst. Constantly on the move
around the state, McClellan selected camp sites, reviewed troops, bought
supplies, established schedules and quotas, conferred with officials;
and, having no adjutant until Captain John Dickerson arrived from St.
Louis, he sent and replied to his own correspondence. In other words,
he had to fight his way through a thousand trivial details that are
usually handled by a general's staff. Still McClellan found the challenge
satisfying and the work congenial. As he remarked late one night to Poe,
soldiering certainly beat "managing railroads and adding up columns of
dollars and cents." By the first of May he had reduced the snarled
militia to a system of reasonable order.

Much work yet remained, but he was to be denied the luxury of
concentrating longer on a single state. The distracted War Department
seemed to find a one-word answer to the telegraphic barrage from the
west -- it was: McClellan. On May 3, he was named commander of the
newly created Department of the Ohio, comprising Ohio, Indiana, and
Illinois, and commissioned Major-General of United States Volunteers.

By the time that McClellan received official notice of this first promo-
tion on the 13th, he had again been advanced; this time, in the reorganiza-
tion of the army, to full rank of Major-General, and by date of his
commission only Scott was his senior. In addition, on May 9th his
department was expanded to include western Pennsylvania and western
Virginia. Incredibly, three weeks later Missouri also was added.
How all of this came about so rapidly is still not entirely clear. The establishment of the Department of the Ohio and McClellan's appointment to command with the rank of Major-General of volunteers was logical. The need for coordination in the West was obvious, as he had pointed out in his message to Scott; also, the importance of Ohio, combined with Chase's influence in the cabinet probably determined that the commander would come from the Buckeye state. Thereafter, logic was not involved. There is some indication that Scott pushed McClellan upward at this time, in order to spite several old rivals, John Wool and William Harney. It is also possible that Bates insisted Missouri be given to McClellan to blunt the power of the Blair Clan and their protege, Captain Nathaniel Lyon. In any case, the net effect was to put the West in McClellan's hands.

Virtually off the mark, therefore, McClellan's responsibilities were vast. In comparison to his, commands in the east were fragmented and small. At this time the Department of Virginia was, in reality, Fortress Monroe; Irwin McDowell's Department of Northeast Virginia not much more than Alexandria; Benjamin Butler commanded Annapolis as a separate department; as did Joseph K. F. Mansfield the district of Columbia. In addition, there were the Department of Pennsylvania under Robert Patterson and of the East under John Wool. All of these were supervised more or less personally by Scott, himself. In contrast, McClellan was given responsibility for an area that comprised roughly one-half the entire national theater of active operations and virtually a sub-nation in its extent.

In regard to this greater responsibility two things are
important to note. Unquestionably, McClellan did finally possess rank and authority commensurate with his immense military duties. On the other hand, he still received little guidance from his superiors as to the policy he should implement or the strategy he should pursue. In both of these crucial and delicate matters he was left largely to his own devices. Scott's letter of May 3rd, outlining the Anaconda strategy, despite its inference of official adoption, gave McClellan no concrete instructions to follow. Throughout this period Washington assumed that McClellan, on the scene, would know best what to do. At the same time, the governors of the key northwestern states, Richard Yates of Illinois, Oliver Morton of Indiana, as well as Dennison of Ohio, deferring to McClellan's knowledge in things related to war, seemed ready to follow his every suggestion.

From necessity, therefore, McClellan occupied at the very outset the strange and demanding dual role of the statesman-general. And, having once filled that role, he was never quite able to revert to being a simple soldier. To speak of a Napoleonic complex is not particularly instructive. McClellan never consciously sought to subvert the traditional relationship between the civilian and the military; nor, did he ever intend to act beyond the sanction of the Constitution and the laws of the land. The trouble was that in the confusion of the opening days it became necessary for McClellan to define his own duties and to interpret for himself his role in the making of policy and strategy. Just as Lincoln found it necessary to expand the powers of the Presidency in ways not specifically covered by the Constitution, McClellan found it necessary to enlarge the definition of general.
Had McClellan operated under more specific restraints, or had he met with even partial reverses, he might have emerged from the Department of the Ohio a different general. But it did not happen that way. Virtually everything he did resulted in success and eventually received blanket approval from Washington. Thus, he came to believe that, in Clausewitzian terms, he "rightly understood the war in which he engaged."

The lessons McClellan learned (or thought he learned) in Ohio deserve attention, because he saw them as insights into the proper conduct of the war.

To start with it is important to emphasize that McClellan was not called simply to command but to create a militia force, a new department, and finally a field army. It is usually assumed that because McClellan possessed special talents for administration, he was partial to this aspect of command and became too easily bogged down in its detail. This interpretation is not entirely fair. At first McClellan had no choice but to become involved in even the most trivial details.

Moreover, McClellan's feat in creating his Army of the West has not been fully appreciated, although it should rank as one of the great achievements of the Civil War. In nearly every category he lacked advantages that McDowell and other eastern commanders enjoyed at this time. Money, supplies, experienced officers, and the soldiers of the regular army were concentrated in the East. Yet, aided only by a small staff, McClellan created from nothing a full army in all of its parts. Considering his youth and relative inexperience, the competence he displayed in all departments, from basic training camps through ordinance, subsistence, the medical corps, and all the rest, bordered on genius.
Less than a month after he sat down to write his first letter to Scott, a month of unceasing labor and attention to detail, McClellan had a field army operating in enemy territory. Men around him at the time believed that no one but McClellan could have managed such a feat. He probably came to believe so himself. And, eventually, based on similar achievements he would perform in the future, and therefore grounded on fact, he came to see himself as the only man capable of understanding the total needs of the army.

He never learned, even after he had a large and able staff, to delegate authority for more trivial matters and to concentrate his own attention on the great questions which should engage the attention of the commander. His telegram to Cameron in May, requesting permission to use army nails to build a chapel, although an extreme example, is indicative of McClellan's involvement in all levels of military administration. It was a habit he was never able to shake. His confident assumption that he could fill the two most burdensome offices in the army at the same time -- general-in-chief and commander of the Army of the Potomac -- was probably the most tragic result of this unfortunate trait.

Another aspect of McClellan's experience in the West which helped to shape his attitudes was the full and often deferential cooperation offered by the civilian authorities. The western governors eagerly sought and followed the young general's advice on a wide variety of matters. Despite considerable pressure from excited citizens, the governors were anxious that the steps taken be the proper ones. At various times McClellan helped frame military legislation and gave coun-
sel on war finances; matters that were not strictly within his province as a soldier. He would later recall that he had "received the most energetic and cordial support from Governor Morton, Yates, and Dennison."

Thus, in the beginning, McClellan witnessed not only the vast outpouring of patriotism and enthusiasm from the Northern masses, but also the willingness of the political leaders with whom he dealt to exploit that enthusiasm to its fullest extent — and in accordance with his professional military advice. Undoubtedly, he came to Washington expecting that the Federal government would not do less in this respect than the western states. It was probably a bad frame of mind upon which to enter relations with civilians who were his direct superiors. Certainly, it was bound to cause McClellan trouble after the first flush of enthusiasm had worn away. Later, he doubted that Lincoln and the administration fully capitalized on the patriotism of the Northern people and their willingness to make sacrifices for a greater war effort. Whether McClellan was right or wrong in this belief, he derived it from his actual experiences during these early months.

Perhaps, the greatest lesson which McClellan learned from his first command was the extent to which political considerations unavoidably entered into conduct of this peculiar civil war. Curiously, it is possible that in this instance also he may have drawn the correct immediate conclusions from the early war situation, only to have them sour on him as the war continued. In the first place, it is obvious from the complaints of Democratic newspapers in Ohio that members of their party were being excluded from high commands, that McClellan was something of a political neuter at this period. McClellan's own complaint was that members of either party should be given important commands simply on this basis of
their political influence.

He was largely successful in forcing into retirement the militia generals, most of whom were politicians who had received positions as honorariums during peacetime. One of these men, Newton Schleich, whom McClellan virtually drove out of the service, was a leader of the Ohio legislature and one of the most powerful Democrats in the state. At the time McClellan's position was strong enough to protect him from serious repercussions from such actions. Unfortunately, while McClellan persisted in this attitude, which was certainly defensible from a strictly military view, his invulnerability to slighted politicians did not.

Finally, McClellan's experience in the Department of the Ohio involved him from the start in the broader political questions of war policy and its relation to strategy and the military conduct of the war. This is not to say that McClellan "meddled" in political questions at this time, or that he was motivated by personal interests. Again, he had no choice. Nowhere on his long frontier did McClellan actually face the "enemy". Nowhere did he confront a situation which would allow him to act as a general normally would; nowhere was the simply Clausewitzian axion to seek out the enemy and destroy him pertinent. McClellan's frontier was the borderland of divided loyalties, Missouri, Kentucky, and western Virginia, where secession was still under debate and enemies were not yet clearly distinguishable.

The Lincoln administration believed it was crucial that these areas be held to the Union cause. McClellan understood this. He also understood that a large conservative party in each of these states was committed to both states rights and the Union and would be offended by
outside interference before they had finished debate and reached their own conclusion. And he shaped his conduct accordingly. In his first letter to Scott of April 23, he indicated the keynote of his policy, when he wrote: "I will be careful to do nothing that can compromise the Government in any way with the inhabitants of Kentucky."

McClellan attempted to follow this policy scrupulously, although it was not always the easiest or most popular course for him to pursue. He resisted the demands from excited minorities in Kentucky and Virginia to send troops immediately into their states. Based on his intelligence reports and his correspondence with the chief pro-Union leaders in both states, McClellan judged that the majority of the loyal residents did not yet want interference from outside and that the time was not yet ripe for offensive actions. And, feeling it was "politic to avoid [even] any display of force immediately on the frontier," he successfully opposed the program of the three Northern governors for massing troops along the border and erecting extensive works that would frown upon the neutral territory.

The governors, particularly concerned about the vulnerability of their border cities - Cairo, Jefferson (opposite Louisville), Cincinnati and Marietta -- tried to persuade McClellan to construct heavy batteries and infantry trenches north of the Ohio and to send troops across the river to occupy important defensive positions. As early as May 10, Dennison pressed McClellan to seize Parkersburg. But McClellan refused, writing in reply: "Strange as the advice may seem from a young General, I advise delay for the present .... In Heaven's name don't precipitate matters .... Don't let the frontier men hurry you on." The governors forced the
issue on May 24, when they came together for a conference on the occasion of McClellan's review of troops in Indianapolis.

For the only important instance in which they sought to go against his advice, Morton, Yates and Dennison drew up a "Memorial" to Lincoln requesting authority to seize points in Kentucky at once. Yates personally carried the message to Washington, where he met with the President. Lincoln, however, tactfully sidestepped by referring the question to Scott. In his "Remarks on a Memorial," the Lieutenant-General simply threw the ball back to McClellan, and in so doing he revealed the large discretionary powers that had been given to the department commander. McClellan already "had been instructed," Scott noted, "to give reasonable aid to the friends of the Union across the Ohio and across the Mississippi. Under this authority he might, if he had thought it expedient, have occupied Columbus, but many of the wisest and best Union men in Kentucky have strongly intimated that thrusting protection upon their people is likely to do far more harm than good, and probably the danger can be better estimated at home than by friends abroad."

At the same time, McClellan realized that restraining the governors was not enough. The "very excited and almost dangerous condition" that existed among the Northern border residents made possible spontaneous eruption of violence that would embarrass border policy. He took time from his busy schedule, therefore, to open "full communication with the people," distributed some arms among them, and assured them that his troops stood ready to advance to their protection at a moment's notice.

McClellan's relations with Missouri were necessarily marginal. He was responsible for affairs in the state for less than a month, and
his already enormous burdens precluded his giving proper attention to new and distant problems. The governor, legislature and state militia of Missouri were openly pro-secessionist, while a large number, perhaps a majority of the citizens favored the Union cause. As part of the Department of the West, the state, had been commanded by Brigadier General William Selby Harney, who (possibly from pro-Southern sympathies), had concluded an agreement of mutual coexistence with militia general Sterling Price. Scott, who had been feuding with Harney since the Mexican war days, seized this questionable compromise as pretext for removing Harney and adding Missouri to McClellan's command. Beyond encouraging the organization of a rival pro-Union militia and supervising the defense of Cairo, McClellan had the good sense to leave affairs in the capable hands of Nathaniel Lyon — the young soldier who had become the rallying symbol for Missouri loyalists after his bold capture of confederate troops and arms in St. Louis in early May.

McClellan's involvement in the political affairs of Kentucky and western Virginia was more intimate and more consequential. Kentucky was never under his jurisdiction — in fact, in late May it was established as a separate department and assigned to Kentucky-born Robert Anderson, the popular hero of Sumter. Yet, because Anderson's failing health prevented him from taking active command and because Kentucky lay adjacent to the Department of the Ohio, McClellan was drawn into Kentucky politics. It is possible that many Kentuckians, disgusted with extremism in both North and South and appalled at the prospect of civil war, genuinely desired to remain neutral in the struggle. But leaders of both secessionist and Unionist factions used the cry of neutrality as a cover for their
efforts to push the state into their respective camps. Technically, of course, there could be no such thing as state neutrality, but McClellan (with the support of Lincoln and Scott) tacitly respected Kentucky's anomalous position without recognizing it officially.

McClellan's role although not decisive, was important in keeping Kentucky in the Union. He kept in close touch with the states' Unionist leaders, particularly Garrett Davis, assuring them he would drive out any Confederate forces that entered the state. Thus, loyal Kentuckians could at least be certain of the opportunity to decide their own fate. Beyond this he supported the formation of the Home Guard to counterbalance the influence of the pro-Southern state militia. And, perhaps most importantly, he joined with Lieutenant William Nelson in smuggling guns across the river to be distributed secretly to the Union men.

Interestingly, criticism of McClellan began to appear at this early date in some quarters of the North. Introducing the refrain later heard so frequently, some impatient critics charged that he was too cautious and slow in settling matters in the border area. McClellan was sensitive to the criticism, but he was firm in his belief that the only proper policy was to gain the support of a majority of the border state citizens. He wanted particularly to wait until the people had the opportunity to express their opinions at the ballot box, believing the result in Kentucky would be a new pro-Union legislature.

On May 10, he wrote to Scott: "I think we should watch for a little time longer the development of affairs in Kentucky before resorting to any threatening measures." And on June 4, after Anderson's bad health had removed him from the scene, McClellan advised Scott as
follows: "In view of the necessity of managing affairs in Kentucky with great delicacy until the elections have passed and a Union Legislature is in power, I would respectfully suggest that, for the present at least, no successor be appointed to Colonel Anderson, and that, as I am in quite close communication with the principal Union men, the matter be left for a time in my hands, the more particularly since any aid rendered to the Union party must come from my department."

On the following day, he told Scott he hoped his policy would not make it appear he was "given to procrastination -- but I feel so keenly the vital importance of keeping Kentucky in the Union, that I must urge delay until we know exactly what we are doing." McClellan believed that "satisfying" the border states was the first important step toward reconciliation and a potential means of avoiding a severe and protracted military struggle. On June 10, Assistant Adjutant-General Edward Townsend wired McClellan that Scott approved his "views and suggestions" regarding Kentucky.

Unfortunately, at about the same time a misunderstanding arose which partially damaged the policy of combined moderation and firmness which McClellan was trying so hard to project. He held several informal conversations with Simon Buckner, commander of the Kentucky state militia, during which the question arose as to what course would be pursued if Confederate troops invaded the state. McClellan indicated that if the intrusion were minor and promptly repelled by Buckner, he would not use such an incident as excuse for sending Federal troops into Kentucky. Buckner sent a letter to Governor Beriah Magoffin (which was immediately published) claiming McClellan had "guaranteed" the neutrality of Kentucky.
The incident caused temporary consternation among the pro-Unionist faction, although they soon were more than placated by the course which McClellan pursued in his campaign in western Virginia. McClellan's true position at this time was revealed to Senator Garrett Davis, who had asked the same question. "I replied" he later told Colonel E. D. Townsend, "that if there were time I would refer to General Scott for orders. If there were not time, then I would cross the Ohio with 20,000 men. If that were not enough with 30,000, and if necessary with 40,000; but that I would not stand by and see the loyal Union men of Kentucky crushed."

At first McClellan feared that despite all effort Kentucky would secede. His first strategy, sent to Scott on April 27, provided for this contingency. But by May 17, after it became unlikely that the old legislature (which Magoffin had called into special session) would pass an ordinance of secession, McClellan could announce "strong hopes that Kentucky will remain in the Union." Federal patience was eventually rewarded with the election of a pro-Union legislature in the summer. It cannot be said that McClellan saved Kentucky for the Union -- Kentuckians themselves did that. But he did contribute to the victory. He discharged with credit his first performance in the dual role of statesman and general. And, if he did not know it before, he was made aware of the interaction of war policy and military behavior.

Most of the schooling which McClellan derived from his first command was double-edged. It was a product of the peculiar climate of the early war, wherein it worked very well, but it did not necessarily provide permanent rules for the conduct of the longer struggle. And this was one lesson that McClellan did not learn. On the contrary, given the opportunity
to test his strategy successfully in the field, his victories in western Virginia seemed to confirm his experiences and justify his course of action.

3. Testing in Western Virginia

It was only four days after his appointment to command the Ohio militia that McClellan framed his first grand strategy. He hastened to forward his suggestions to Scott at this early date because it seemed that the national capital was in imminent danger and that a diversion in the west was imperative. Lawyer Aaron Perry had returned from the East at about this time with his discouraging report. When pressed with the question: "If a serious attack should be made on Washington now, what do you think the government would do?" Perry had reflected a moment and then replied: "It would leave Washington."

It was in this climate, on April 27, that McClellan wrote his second letter to Scott. He began by pointing out that more time was needed to equip and discipline his forces before he could undertake the decisive campaign to win the war. But, in the meantime, he suggested a limited offensive to help relieve Washington and gain time to make more extensive preparations. He preferred to operate in Virginia, a state already arrayed against the Federal government, rather than in Kentucky, where no decision had yet been reached.

With this in mind he proposed to send a strong column down the Great Kanawha River valley in western Virginia to Charleston and thence eastward against Richmond. He recognized the difficulties of operations in mountainous terrain; and, therefore, he proposed a preferred alternative
(if Kentucky should secede at an early date) to send the column against Nashville and central Tennessee. Whichever plans were immediately employed, McClellan suggested that ultimately operations between the Alleghenies and the Mississippi should be under one commander and be directed on one line against Knoxville, Chattanooga and Atlanta and on a second line against Memphis and New Orleans.

Events quickly made McClellan's emergency plans unnecessary. Within a week Washington was secure. Scott did not directly comment on the Kanawha movement, but in the meantime he had sent McClellan an outline of his Anaconda strategy which suggested that no major offensive should be undertaken until November. It was thereafter that McClellan developed his defensive posture. He abandoned altogether any intention of moving on Richmond by the circuitous mountain route. Increasingly, he came to view eastern Tennessee, where there was a strong pro-Union movement, as the target of his first operations. In the absence of any emergency, he felt bound to wait until his army was in better shape and the situation in either western Virginia or Kentucky had been resolved more favorably to the Union cause. He did not have to wait long for his opening.

There was widespread disaffection with secession in the mountainous western counties of Virginia. In fact, the pro-Union sentiment was probably stronger and more unified there than in Kentucky. Still, there were at first a large number of fence straddlers, and McClellan did not want to push them precipitately into decision. He kept well posted on events in the region by corresponding with the leading loyal citizens, drawing especially heavily on the advice of former Congressman John S.
Carlile. For a more objective appraisal, McClellan sent staff members Orlando Poe and Frederick Lander disguised as civilians on undercover missions to gauge the sentiment of the natives. On the basis of his information from these sources, McClellan judged that so long as there were no Confederate troops in the western counties there was no danger either to the loyal inhabitants, nor to the Ohio border. He refused, therefore, to cross the river prematurely, even under the urgent insistence of Dennison.

Two events during May cleared the way for action. The convention held in Wheeling on the 13th indicated that the Unionist leaders of the area were prepared to erect a new state government; and, in the referendum on the 23, a convincing majority of the mountain people rejected the Ordinance of Secession. At the same time Governor John Letcher had issued a proclamation calling out the state militia and designating the locations where it was to assemble. Three of these centers — Charleston, Parkersburg, and Grafton — were in western Virginia.

Panic ensued on both sides of the Ohio River. Ohioans feared invasion. McClellan worked to counteract this "great alarm" by moving several of his regiments closer to the border and by distributing more arms to the Home Guard. West Virginians feared they would be forced against their will into the Confederate army and that troops brought from the eastern part of the state would be used to coerce them. Carlile and other leaders appealed to Lincoln for assistance. On the 24th, both Cameron and Scott wired McClellan asking if there was anything he could do. The general replied "that if it were desired, the whole region could be cleared of secessionists." While Washington sent no further
instructions, McClellan prepared to cross the River and move on Grafton.

Almost immediately the Confederates gave McClellan an excuse to assume offensive operations. Colonel George Porterfield had gathered several hundred Southern troops at Grafton, and on the night of May 25th he sent out parties to destroy several Baltimore and Ohio Railroad bridges. This road was an important link between east and west, and McClellan regarded its disruption as an "act of hostility" which justified prompt and decisive response. On the 26th, therefore, several days earlier than planned, he commenced the first invasion and the first large scale operation of the war. The tactical details of the campaign need not be followed here. In the face of superior numbers, Porterfield's command retired to Philippi, where, on June 3, it was routed and dispersed. Nearly as important as the results, however, was the manner in which this brief campaign was conducted.

In spite of its haste, the movement was carefully thought out, and it proved to be a model of the conservative strategy in action. McClellan made every effort to pacify and conciliate the area as his army advanced. He strove to project an image of "liberation" rather than of "occupation." He used native Virginians, themselves, to carry the burden of the campaign, rushing Colonel Benjamin F. Kelley's regiment of loyal Virginians to spearhead the column moving on Grafton. McClellan was aware that the conduct and discipline of the troops would directly affect the attitude of the citizens.

Consequently, his instructions to Kelley were explicit: "You will exercise the utmost vigilance in preserving the discipline of your men, see that the property and rights of the inhabitants are in every respect carefully protected, and use every effort to conciliate the
people and strengthen the Union feeling." He said the same thing, more plainly in his "Address to the Soldiers of the Expedition":

SOLDIERS: You are ordered to cross the frontier and enter upon the soil of Virginia. Your mission is to restore peace and confidence, to protect the majesty of the law, and to rescue our brethren from the grasp of armed traitors. You are to act in concert with the Virginia troops, and to support their advance. I place under the safeguard of your honor the persons and property of the Virginians. I know that you will respect their feelings and all their rights. Preserve the strictest discipline; remember that each one of you holds in his keeping the honor of Ohio and of the Union.

If you are called upon to overcome armed opposition, I know that your courage is equal to the task; but remember that your only foes are the armed traitors, and show mercy even to them when they are in your power, for many of them are misguided. When under your protection the loyal men of Western Virginia have been enabled to organize and arm, they can protect themselves, and you can then return to your homes with the proud satisfaction of having preserved a gallant people from destruction.

In addition, McClellan believed it was imperative that an official explanation of the military operations be issued immediately to the inhabitants, to avoid false speculation and misunderstanding. He was probably correct in this. As there was insufficient time to consult with Washington, he published a proclamation entirely on his own authority. While his intentions were commendable, his language went far beyond what the situation required, being in effect a broad statement of political policy. His "Proclamation to the People of Western Virginia" read, in part, as follows:
The General Government has heretofore carefully abstained from sending troops across the Ohio, or even from posting them along its banks, although frequently urged by many of your prominent citizens to do so. I determined to await the result of the late election, desirous that no one might be able to say that the slightest effort had been made from this side to influence the free expression of your opinion, although the many agencies brought to bear upon you by the rebels were well known .... The General Government cannot close its ears to the demand you have made for assistance. I have ordered troops to cross the river. They come as your friends and brothers -- as enemies only to the armed rebels who are preying upon you. Your homes, your families, and your property are safe under our protection. All your rights shall be religiously respected.

Notwithstanding all that has been said by the traitors to induce you to believe that our advent among you will be signalized by interference with your slaves, understand one thing clearly -- not only will we abstain from all such interference, but we will, on the contrary, with an iron hand, crush any attempt at insurrection on their part. Now that we are in your midst, I call upon you to fly to arms and support the General Government.

Sever the connection that binds you to traitors. Proclaim to the world that the faith and loyalty so long boasted by the Old Dominion are still preserved in Western Virginia, and that you remain true to the Stars and Stripes.

These public statements made by McClellan in western Virginia have not received much historical attention. Chief criticism of them has concerned their pompous rhetoric, which it is assumed reveals some-thing of McClellan's personality. They deserve, however, fuller comment. In the first place, they are in line with McClellan's dual role as statesman and general which had developed in the department of the Ohio. In addition, they probably did reflect the attitude of the Lincoln Administration and the majority of Northerners in late May 1861. And finally,
they produced remarkably favorable results among the citizens of both western Virginia and Kentucky.

When all of this is said, however, it remains clear that McClellan exceeded his jurisdiction and overstepped the bounds separating civilian and military authority. He admitted as much to Lincoln, when on May 30, informing the President of the proclamation, he wrote: "-- it not being possible for me to refer the matter to Washington, I prepared it in great haste & on such a basis as my knowledge of your Excellency's previous course & opinions assured me would express your views -- I am confident that I have not erred in this very important matter -- if I have, a terrible mistake has been made, for the proclamation is regarded as expressing the views of the President, and I have not intimated that it was prepared without authority."

Regardless of his success, McClellan should have been rebuked for his illegal assumption of authority. Instead, he received general assurances that Washington approved his actions in western Virginia. The general did not hesitate, therefore, to issue a second set of proclama-
tions in late June, in much the same language. As he noted in his report:
"As I received no reply ..., nor any intimation from any quarter that my policy was disapproved, I assumed I was right, and acted accordingly."

During June, Lincoln and Scott matured plans for the invasion of eastern Virginia by McDowell and Patterson, but they sent no word of this to McClellan. In fact, no effort was made to correlate the actions of the forces in the various theaters at this time. Once again left to his own devices, McClellan formulated his own strategy. Logically, his next move was to the southwest, down the Kanawha Valley to Charleston, clearing
out the Virginia militia which were gathering there under ex-Governor Henry A. Wise. McClellan believed that this move would secure all of western Virginia and, also, provide a base of operations for supporting the Unionist men in eastern Tennessee. In effect this movement would out-flank Kentucky and hence might have beneficial results encouraging the loyalist sentiment in that state as well.

But McClellan was compelled to postpone these plans, when the Confederates made an attempt to regain the northwestern counties. Major-General Robert E. Lee, in command of Virginia troops, sent Robert Garnett from Staunton to replace Porterfield and recruit and reorganize the secessionist forces. McClellan decided to move against Garnett quickly, before he could be reenforced from the east. The campaign that followed lasted scarcely two weeks. Despite some hesitation on McClellan's part, it was a complete success, ending with the death of Garnett and the capture of a part of his army.

In the aftermath of victory, McClellan continued to pursue conciliation. Wounded Confederates were treated with the same care given to Union casualties, and all of the prisoners were soon paroled, after taking an oath they would never again bear arms against the United States. McClellan believed, as he had earlier written Scott, that it was his "duty as well as good policy under surrounding circumstances to deal leniently with the prisoners ...." It was a shrewd psychological gambit, calculated to win friends for the Union in a border area, even though some of the soldiers from Georgia and eastern Virginia could be counted on to violate their parole and reenlist for further service. Still, McClellan had received no instructions from Washington to discharge his prisoners. Here
was yet another instance in which he exceeded his authority as department commander to make decisions fraught with large political consequences.

On July 14th, McClellan telegraphed to Washington: "Garnett and forces routed; his baggage and one gun taken; his army demoralized; Garnett killed. We have annihilated the enemy in Western Virginia ... our success is complete, and secession is killed in this country." Even Henry Wise, McClellan's remaining opponent, substantially concurred in this verdict, when he wrote to Lee on August 1: "The Kanawha-Valley is wholly disaffected and traitorous .... You cannot persuade these people that Virginia can or will ever reconquer the northwest, and they are submitting, subdued, and debased."

The Northern public, overeager for good news, were jubilant at the report of McClellan's victories. The old hero of the Mexican war telegraphed to his erstwhile lieutenant of engineers: "The General-in-Chief, and what is more, the Cabinet, including the President, are charmed with your activity, valor, and consequent successes of Rich Mountain the 11th, and of Beverly this morning. We do not doubt that you will in due time sweep the rebels from Western Virginia, but we do not mean to precipitate you as you are fast enough."

There seemed to be pleasure not only with McClellan's results but also with his methods. According to the early anonymous biographer: "It was not, so went the talk of the hour, that he had won these victories, but it was the way in which he had won them, that was so encouraging ... he had organized his forces, he had matured his plans, he had drawn his net gradually around the foe: and then, when everything was ready, he had suddenly thrown off his appearance of inaction, rushed in from all quarters on
the enemy, and finished the work at a stroke." The Louisville Journal applauded McClellan's policy as the best path to a speedy and satisfactory victory:

It is a finished piece of work. It stands before us perfect and entire, wanting nothing; like a statue or picture just leaving the creative hand of the artist, and embodying his whole idea .... There is something extremely satisfactory in contemplating what might be called a piece of finished military workmanship by a masterhand. It is one thing done .... Thus shall we go on from one step to another. Eastern Virginia will next be McClellanized in the same finished style. The triumphant columns of the Grand Army of the United States will soon begin to move Southward from North East, and West, .... Then will the pseudo-Government at Richmond either repeat the flight at Harper's Ferry, Philippi, Martinsburg, and Beverly, or, if it stands its ground, fall as surely before the concentrating hosts of the Republic as if it were meshed and crushed in the folds of some entangling and overwhelming fate.

One week later the Confederates defeated McDowell's Army at Bull Run, turning Northern jubilation into despair. Without bothering to consult Scott, Lincolnordered McClellan to report to Washington immediately. On the morning of July 23 McClellan rode on horseback the forty-five miles from Beverly to Grafton. He was accompanied by William Rosecrans, who was to be the new commander of the Department of the Ohio. As they galloped along, McClellan carefully explained the conciliatory policy that had governed his strategy and earnestly recommended that Rosecrans pursue a similar course. At Grafton McClellan boarded a special express train that carried him to Wheeling, and thence to Pittsburgh and eastward across Pennsylvania. Along his route the people turned
out to cheer beside the tracks; and in Philadelphia, his native city, an immense throng insisted that he speak to them briefly. Even the sharp decline of the New York stock market was reversed.

Clearly, in bringing McClellan to Washington Lincoln was acquiring more than a new general. Stepping into the strategy vacuum that followed Bull Run, McClellan brought with him from the west views on the conduct of the war that he had developed on his own and that now had been tested in the field. That McClellan had a specific strategy at this time made him rare; that he had a successful strategy made him unique. So firmly had his ideas jelled by his summons to the capital that one week after his arrival he presented Lincoln a comprehensive strategy for a grand offensive to end the war. This strategy -- for "overwhelming" the South -- he would modify but never abandon.
August 2, 1861, marks the terminal date of the present study into the background, origins, and maturity of George McClellan's conservative strategy for winning the Civil War. On that date McClellan submitted to Lincoln the memorandum which was to be the most complete statement of his strategy for using the armed forces of the United States to end the rebellion. In this document McClellan's military ideas reached maturity. He would, thereafter, follow its major features as a blueprint for victory, never altering or departing very far from the program he therein outlined. The memorandum is, therefore, a convenient text for an analysis of McClellan's overall strategy, a suitable point at which to round off an examination of his early war career, and hopefully, a prologue and challenge to further study.

1. Vagaries of Command

Upon his arrival in Washington on July 26, McClellan discovered that he had been given a curious sort of promotion. The day before, General Orders No. 47, from the Adjutant-General's office had created the Military Division of the Potomac, a new super-level in the hierarchy above the department, and had named McClellan as commander. It sounded impressive, and it clearly designated him as the second ranking officer in
the United States Army. Still, in some ways it was a step backward. Geographically, his new command was tiny, encompassing only Washington and its environs. In effect, McClellan was restricted to the defenses of the national capital and the forces from which a field army was to be created. The scope of his command was, therefore, narrower than it had been in the west and more nearly confined to purely military administration.

What is more, McClellan had now been brought under the direct scrutiny of his civilian and military superiors. No longer would he find it possible to translate his ideas into actions simply on the merit of his own recommendation. In actual fact, McClellan had been promoted into a position of lesser authority. The freedom of action he had enjoyed in the west, because of sheer distance, sporadic communications, and the preoccupation of national officials, was severely circumscribed the moment of his arrival in Washington. Henceforth, McClellan became the focus of pressures and restrictions which blunted the decisiveness of his actions and burdened his movements with the full weight of bureaucratic red-tape.

All of this was quite normal and constitutional, of course. After all, it was his peculiar role in the west which had been abnormal. McClellan's promotion simply brought him within the traditional army chain of command and into the proper relationship with civilian, political control. Yet this meant for McClellan that he ought to learn a new role, a new way to operate and to carry out his responsibilities. Perhaps, the chief novelty of his new position was that it made his success dependent upon his ability to establish and maintain a lucid and intelligible dialogue with Lincoln, Cameron and Scott. It now became his duty to understand thoroughly the policy of the government, in order that he
might work within its guidelines. At the same time, he ought to make perfectly clear to his superiors the details of his military program, approximately what it would accomplish and when, and why it was the best course to be followed. While such an ideal relationship was McClellan's only sure path to success and the country's only hope for a relatively short war, it did not and perhaps could not have worked out that way.

Certainly, the relationship took the wrong direction at the very start. McClellan soon discovered that whatever his new role should have been in theory, it was in reality, ambiguous and ill-defined. In fact, the situation in Washington in July bore several resemblences to the one he had entered in Columbus in April. It seemed that virtually everything needed to be done and that he was to have the chief responsibility for doing it. The confusion in the army and its supply branches, its deficiency in discipline and need for reorganization was the most obvious but most superficial similarity. It was also the only problem that existed entirely within the scope of McClellan's command.

Hence, where his responsibility and his authority coincided, McClellan succeeded. For the second time, he demonstrated his extraordinary ability to impose an almost instant orderliness on confusion. The essence of what McClellan accomplished both in the Department of the Ohio and in creating the Army of the Potomac was to put everyone in their proper military place; to establish a precisely defined substructure with clear channels of command in which subordinates understood their positions and could get on with their business at hand. Unhappily, McClellan never enjoyed such a defined position himself.
Of course, he was to organize the army. But how was the army to be employed? To answer that he was simply to defeat the enemy ignores the connection between methods and results and begs the question of the military policy that is supposed to direct strategy toward the achievement of the political aim of the war. No less than his subordinates, McClellan also needed to understand exactly what his job was, but no clear definition ever came from his superiors. It was not entirely his fault, therefore, that he came to misconstrue his role in the military hierarchy and to evolve a strategy largely derived from his own military and political views. When policy does not direct strategy, then strategy will likely assume its own policy. 538

It was the deferential attitude of the administration, along with the public clamor for decisive leadership which helped initially to create the ambiguity of McClellan's new position. He must well have gathered from his first days in Washington that his role was greater than it really was. "I find myself in a new and strange position here," he wrote home to his wife just after reaching the capital. "President, cabinet, General Scott...all deferring to me. By some strange operation of magic, I seem to have become the power of the land."539 Within three days, he thought he had begun to understand what was expected of him. "All tell me that I am held responsible for the fate of the nation," he wrote Ellen, "and that all its resources shall be placed at my disposal. It is an immense task that I have on my hands...."540

Indeed it was, especially in light of the fact that he was not the President, or Secretary of War, or even the General-in-Chief, but merely the commanding officer of the Military Division of the Potomac.
McClellan accepted, more readily than most men would have perhaps, this inflated projection of his destiny. All his life people had been telling him that great achievements lay ahead for him, and his accomplishments in the Department of the Ohio had seemed to confirm their prophecy. While McClellan did not enter upon his new job with the intention of usurping authority, he did begin with an exaggerated view of his own importance to the national effort, especially in the area of the military-political policy governing the conduct of the war. Ironically, the constitutional hierarchy which should have corrected McClellan's misconstruction of his position actually encouraged and nurtured it.

McClellan discovered soon after his arrival in Washington that a vacuum existed at the highest level of the command chain which made his own position difficult and uncertain. Winfield Scott remained general-in-chief and nominal head of the United States Army, and as such was McClellan's immediate superior. In the normal working of things, it was Scott's position to coordinate policy and strategy and to direct the operations of the military establishment toward the victory defined by the President and Congress. Scott should have instructed McClellan on the general nature of his responsibilities, even while allowing him discretionary authority, and related his operations to those of other departmental commanders.

Tragically, however, Winfield Scott collapsed after Bull Run and simply ceased to function as generalissimo. In the final three months of his long and distinguished career, Scott sat with his great reputation and authority wrapped about him and did nothing. After the rejection of his Anaconda, he never conceived another plan for the conduct of the war. He
all but ceased to issue even the most routine general orders governing
the daily operations of the army from his headquarters. The contro-
versy that developed between McClellan and Scott derived chiefly from the
friction between a subordinate who was active and a superior who was jea-
lous of his authority, but who refused to exert positive guidance.

The specific points of disagreement between the two soldiers
were not very important. Scott first took umbrage at the intimacy which
developed between Lincoln and McClellan as an infraction of protocol.
Later, he also opposed McClellan's adoption of the name "Army of the
Potomac," preferring to continue with the old-style geographic designa-
tions by department; he tried to block the formation of divisions from the
independent brigades of regiments, which were then the largest existing
military organizations; and he objected to the erection of extensive for-
tifications around Washington.542

If there is a rational theme in these points of friction between
the two, beyond the conflict of personality, it may have been Scott's
stubborn desire to avoid a protracted war and a long series of "exasper-
ating battles." McClellan was obviously preparing a massive, aggressive
war machine to engage in the kind of hard war Scott had all along feared
would lead to national suicide. Unfortunately, Scott neither made clear
the basis for his objections, nor came forth with a viable alternative.543
In any case, Scott's failure to exert positive guidance created embarras-
ment and confusion in the chain of command and contributed to a three
month period of drift and waste in the Northern war effort.544

The Secretary of War was another tangled link in the chain.
If the Official Records accurately reflect his activities, Simon Cameron
had already become an administrative caretaker. After May of 1861, he did not participate to any significant extent in the framing of war policy, the mapping of strategy, or even in the direct running of the armies in the field. He confined himself largely to supervising the departmental bureaus in Washington and corresponding with the Governors on the questions of the organization and equipment of new troops.545

Cameron was not wrong in thus defining his position. In fact, a literal reading of the Military Administration Act of 1836 would justify his course. That Act had written into Army Regulations the distinction between the commanding general, who actually ran the army, and the civilian secretary, who supervised the political and financial aspects of the military establishment.546 Yet, as Russell Weigley has pointed out, a tradition counter to the act had grown out of a series of strong-will Secretaries, such as Jefferson Davis, who had insisted on their authority to participate in the direction of the Army. The officer corps, while not necessarily approving the custom, had come to expect it.547

The visible apparatus of the enlarged authority of the Secretary was the Adjutant-General’s Office. Originally, the Adjutant-General was the only source of general and special orders affecting the entire army, orders that were issued in the name of the commanding general. Gradually, Secretaries had begun to treat this office as simply another Washington bureau and to send their own orders to the army through the Adjutant-General. Infuriated by what he considered civilian trespassing, Scott had begun in the 1850’s to issue orders from his own office, under the heading "Headquarters of the Army," and signed by his military secretary, who was also an assistant-adjutant-general. Thus, when McClellan arrived
in the capital, there were two sources for army-wide orders, and it was unclear which had priority in strictly military matters. Unhappily, Cameron fell between the two stools. He came nowhere near actually asserting control over the army, but neither did he confine himself entirely to political and financial questions. From time to time he issued orders through Adjutant-General Lorenzo Thomas which did not direct the army but did interfere in its direction.\textsuperscript{548}

Some of the blame for the confusion in the higher echelons of the military hierarchy must also rest with Lincoln. The President, as commander-in-chief, had ample authority in the emergency to define everyone's position clearly, including his own, but he did not. Instead, he contributed to the confusion when he by-passed Cameron and Scott and opened a direct and intimate relationship with McClellan. Not only did Lincoln's frequent jaunts "to have a chat with George" fire Scott's wrath, they caused more permanent damage to the command chain by virtually compelling McClellan to step beyond his authority. For Lincoln did not by-pass channels to bring to McClellan guidance or instructions, he came instead to find out what "George" intended to do. And, when the President asked him for a plan, George, who had one, gave it to him.\textsuperscript{549}

On a number of occasions, Lincoln observed that it was his policy "to have no policy,"--a remark which historians such as David Donald have applauded as indication of Lincoln's political astuteness in maintaining a pragmatic flexibility.\textsuperscript{550} While such a posture undoubtedly did help Lincoln protect his flank and rear in politics, it made him a very difficult superior to work under. McClellan soon discovered that he was constantly invited to step out on a limb, but that the President, who had
no plan of his own, would not commit himself very far in supporting anyone else's.551 It was a tenuous position for the young general to occupy and one which he was ill-equipped to handle, because of the peculiar bent of his personality. Given the appearance of confusion and drift above him in the hierarchy, McClellan did not hesitate to assert his own ideas.552

Even so, McClellan's conduct scarcely warrants Ropes' acid comment that he acted as if "he was entitled to deal on an equal footing with the government, as a sort of contracting party."553 Sir Frederick Maurice showed more insight into this question, based on his study of both the Civil War and World War One, when he wrote: "The preparation of plans of campaign is a matter which must be left to the experts, who, in their turns, must satisfy their governments that their plans are in agreement with the wishes and policy of those Governments."554 Maurice did not say, however, what the general was to do when the "wishes and policy" of his government were not confided to him. And that in no small measure was McClellan's plight.

2. Strategic Assumptions

Still, in his new role McClellan did not first assert his ideas by default, as had been the case in Ohio, but this time by the express invitation of the President. Sometime around August 1, Lincoln asked him to prepare a general plan for the conduct of the war. The request was highly irregular not only because it by-passed normal channels, but also because it required McClellan to comment on matters that were none of his business. It seems never to have occurred to McClellan to demur. Instead,
he at once sat down to commit to paper his master program for crushing the rebellion.555

The Memorandum of August 2 which McClellan produced was an interesting and in several ways unique plan for coordinating and directing the armed forces to the achievement of the national war aims, which reflected the effect of broad political issues on military strategy and emphasized the relationship between ends and means. Because McClellan never changed from the views expressed therein, except on a few minor points, an analysis of the August Memorandum is really an analysis of McClellan's matured strategy. In the examination that follows, therefore, the Memorandum is the basic text, although later documents, such as the Harrison Bar letter are used to elucidate and amplify elements of his strategy.

To begin to understand McClellan's strategy it is necessary to recognize that he was attempting to achieve what he believed to be the war aims of the North and to carry out what he understood to be the policy of the Lincoln administration. Moreover, at least in 1861, his views on these questions were substantially the same as those of Lincoln and Scott. He too saw the crisis facing the nation as basically a constitutional one—to which violent force had been unfortunately but now irresistibly introduced. Its nature remained, nonetheless, political. He also viewed the aim of the war to be the "unity of this nation" and "the preservation of our institutions."556 And he recognized that the object of military strategy must therefore be "the real and entire restoration of the Union" with the least possible damage to its constitutional framework.557
As might be expected, therefore, the strategy McClellan authored was conservative, as Scott's and Lincoln's had been, in that it sought to coerce conciliation. Scott had hoped to employ the passage of time and economic pressure to pacify the South, but he had failed to take into account the hard fighting that the fall of Sumter had made unavoidable. Lincoln's plan was to blitz the Confederacy, using speed as the national preservative, but he detrimentally underestimated the time, preparation, and force which a blitzkrieg required. Basically, McClellan's strategy was a compromise between these two. He proposed to suppress the rebellion as quickly and with as little fighting, as the military situation would actually allow. In theory, at least, it was a coherent and sensible strategy. It reflected both policy objectives and military realities.

While McClellan shared with Lincoln and Scott similar views on the political nature of the crisis, his interpretation of the military situation differed sharply; and it was this which produced his unique strategy. Specifically, as will be developed in the next section of this chapter, McClellan proposed to achieve his middle way by "overwhelming" the South with the preponderant resources of the North. But before plunging into the details of geography and military movements which comprised the strategy, it would be better first to isolate the broad assumptions upon which it rested. There are six such "strategic assumptions" which McClellan made; all derived in mixed parts from his military education, his experiences in the Department of the Ohio, and the particular, conservative way in which he interpreted events and ideas; and all reflected his understanding of the military realities of the crisis.

The first assumption arose from McClellan's firm belief, held
from the beginning of the war, that the South would make, indeed was making a Herculean effort to achieve her independence. His every plan and action was predicated on this belief. He respected Southern determination and the peculiar military talents of Southern manhood. Consequently, he believed the South capable of raising large armies of excellent fighting quality. "I know full well the capacity of the generals opposed to me," he wrote to Barlow, "for by a singular chance they were my most intimate friends....I appreciate too the courage and discipline of the rebel troops. I believe I know the obstacles in our path." And, on another occasion, he wrote to Cameron: "The rebels have displayed energy, unanimity, and wisdom worthy of the most desperate days of the French revolution. Should we do less?"

Many professional soldiers shared this view, including Cump Sherman, who was all but driven to retirement by the public ridicule, when he predicted that two hundred thousand troops were needed in the Kentucky-Tennessee theater alone. Yet, it was McClellan, as commander of the Army of the Potomac and later General-in-Chief, who bore the brunt of civilian incredulity and scorn as spokesman of a view that most Northerners did not want to accept in the early years of the war. Later when the magnitude of crushing the rebellion was verified by events, few people remembered that McClellan had seen it from the beginning.

Undoubtedly, McClellan's estimate of the South's military capacity helps to explain his uncritical acceptance, in specific instances, of exaggerated reports of enemy numbers. What McClellan did not know—and could not have known at this early stage of the war—was the emaciating effect that states-rights and provincialism would produce on Confederate
military policy. Although the South strained every nerve—in fact, fragmentary statistics suggest a much greater effort than the North's—political pressures usually compelled Jefferson Davis to scatter his armies widely around the perimeter of the Confederacy. Davis was never able, therefore, to concentrate forces on the battlefield in such a way as to give the Confederacy full advantage of her extra effort. 562

It seems fair to point out, however, that McClellan, although wrong in specific instances when at the mercy of his primitive intelligence apparatus, was more nearly correct in his assessment of the time and effort that would be required to subdue the South than his contemporary critics, who arrived at smaller and more precise estimates of rebel forces at specific points in time and space, but operated on an erroneous and dangerous underestimation of the Confederate effort in general. 563

Because of his assessment of Southern determination, McClellan assumed, secondly, that a certain amount of hard fighting was unavoidable. "All talk of 'terms of peace' and 'conciliation' and 'compromise' with men arrayed in armed hostility toward the government," he insisted, "was simply ridiculous...." 564 He, unlike Scott, assumed that an essential ingredient of victory was "thoroughly defeating" the Southern armies. Squeezing and waiting would not be enough. It would be necessary "to move into...the enemy's country and crush the rebellion in its very heart." 565

By its very nature, this meant that the North must undertake full-scale, offensive war operations. And McClellan assumed, in the third place, that the offensive army must have appreciably larger forces than its opponents. McClellan accepted this not only as a military platitude, but also as clear lesson of the disaster at Bull Run. He later wrote 566
This result was plainly due to the fact that our army, raw, unorganized and inexperienced, attacked the enemy in his chosen position—had the case been reversed we should have been successful. The general result of all the affairs that have occurred has been to show that our troops are fully equal, and I am sure, superior to the rebels in courage. The policy of the rebels has been as a general rule to remain on the defensive and receive our attacks in their positions chosen and fortified beforehand.

I am glad to advert to the operations in Western Virginia as proving that even blind entrenchments—they can readily be beaten if the due relative proportion of force is maintained to compensate for advantages of position. Discipline and instruction—mutual confidence between generals and soldiers—all are necessary to secure success in attacking an enemy strongly entrenched. There is a vast difference between the true degree of preparation required to resist an attack successfully, and that needed to assault entrenched positions.

Curiously, the correctness of this particular assumption by McClellan might seem to be challenged by the history of the war itself. One immediately thinks of Robert E. Lee and "Stonewall" Jackson in this respect. Both were able to assume offensive operations and achieve stunning victories with equal or—in several instances—inferior odds. The inescapable question is: why could not McClellan have done the same? Lincoln and other contemporaries asked this question; and, historians since, have never ceased to press it. McClellan's answer to this question may or may not satisfy historians. But, especially in view of the charges made by the psychological school of interpreters, it is significant to note that he did in fact have an answer and that it was in agreement with the accepted military theory of his era.

In this respect, it is important to recognize, as did both McClellan and Lee the distinction between a full offensive and what the
Baron Henri Jomini called (unhappily) the "defensive-offensive." This latter is a strictly limited use of the offense to achieve essentially defensive objectives. Lee employed this strategy brilliantly in the Seven Days, Second Manassas, and Chancellorsville campaigns, where his immediate object was to thwart counter-campaigns of Federal commanders and his ultimate aim was to drive the National troops from the soil of Virginia. In his Shenandoah Valley Campaign, Jackson too was superb in his use of the offense in feinting against Washington and later in preventing the concentration of his enemy's armies in order to save his own. Directed by a superior mind the defensive-offensive or limited offensive could be successfully and brilliantly pursued even with inferior odds.

It is not clear, however, that there is much in the campaigns of Lee and Jackson that can be pertinently applied to McClellan and his conduct in an essentially different situation. Lee and Jackson proved only that against a determined foe their strategy could prolong ultimate defeat. They certainly did not prove it could achieve ultimate victory. Jackson, after all, did not secure the Shenandoah Valley, or even crushingly defeat his opponents' armies. Neither was Lee able to clear Virginia entirely or to keep secure the areas he occupied. Lee was never able to destroy the enemy he defeated; nor could he have followed up his victory if he had. He came closest at Second Manassas, and, there, the very completeness of his tactical success brought him strategic embarrassment. As Maurice has commented: "The greatest soldier of modern times could not do more than win victories in the field."

On two occasions Lee tried to wring bigger victories from his disadvantageous situation. He tried to stretch the textbook definition
of the limited-offensive into new and larger meaning. In fact, in his Maryland Campaign of 1862 and his Pennsylvania Campaign of 1863, he came very near assuming the full offensive. In the latter case, at Gettysburg, he had roughly equal numbers with the enemy. He demonstrated in both instances that even he—commonly held to be one of the most brilliant military minds of recent times—could not operate successfully in enemy territory and on exterior lines without a decisive numerical superiority.571

Both McClellan's objectives and his military situation were quite different. Unlike Lee's, his task was offensive in the fullest sense. He had to operate continuously in the country of the enemy and along exterior lines. Consequently, he judged it necessary to have decisively superior forces. He wanted numerical superiority in both the strategic and tactical senses, because operations were to be offensive on both levels. Whereas Lee had only to meet, and operate against the Federal army, McClellan had to detach a sufficient force to secure his base (Maryland and the District of Columbia), and continue to drop detachments along his route, as he advanced, to protect his lines of supply and communication and secure his flanks and rear against turning movements.572

Tactically, McClellan wanted superior strength in the field army which remained after all the detachments had been made, in order to assure the success of the offensive on the battlefield itself. McClellan wanted the superior tactical strength to permit him to maneuver in preference to a blind, head-long advance; to assault rather than defend; to crush, and not merely to push; and to follow up victories in such a way as would justify having offered battle in the first place.

On this last point, Don Carlos Buell, a close friend and very
like McClellan in his thinking, succinctly summarized the Jominian view which both generals shared of the place of battle in war. "My studies have taught me," Buell wrote in May of 1863:573 that battles are only to be fought for some important object; that success must be rendered reasonably certain if possible--the more certain the better; that if the result is reasonably uncertain, battle is only to be sought when very serious disadvantage must result from a failure to fight or when the advantages of a possible victory far outweigh the consequences of probable defeat. These rules suppose that war has a higher object than that of mere bloodshed, and military history points for study and commendation to campaigns which have been conducted over a large field of operations with important results and without a single general engagement. In my judgment the commander merits condemnation who, from ambition or ignorance or a weak submission to the dictate of popular clamor and without necessity or profit, has squandered the lives of his soldiers.

McClellan's appreciation of the enemy he faced and his understanding of the special requirements of offensive operations combined to produce the fourth element of his strategy. He assumed that the North must also "strain every nerve" to field large armies, equip them properly, discipline them thoroughly, and bring them to bear on the decisive points of the struggle.574 In the face of a determined Southern effort, McClellan believed it would be folly for the national government to do less. "The strength of the Army of the Potomac has been vastly overrated in public opinion," he wrote on November 8th. "It is now strong enough and well-disciplined enough to hold Washington against any attack--I care not in what numbers. But, leaving the necessary garrisons here, at Baltimore etc.--I cannot yet move in force equal to that which the enemy has in my
In statistics the North enjoyed a tremendous advantage in odds. McClellan wanted these paper odds translated into battlefield reality. In the early years of the war, however, the North came nowhere near realizing her manpower superiority. And McClellan—whether rightly or wrongly—came to believe that the Lincoln administration failed to capitalize on the patriotism and enthusiastic willingness of the loyal Northern people and, hence, did not properly and fully support the war effort.  

McClellan never received the decisive strength he believed desirable for the conduct of full offensive operations. And, by late 1861, it became increasingly clear to him that he probably never would. His evolution at that time of his peninsula strategy for amphibious operations against Richmond stemmed in part from his understanding of this. He therein sought to compensate by maneuver for the numbers he lacked. He assumed that this strategy would exert such direct pressure on Richmond that it would be feasible to retain a smaller force to protect Washington and Maryland, while, at the same time utilizing the North's naval superiority to reduce the number of men required to guard supply lines and flanks. He hoped in this way he could still undertake a full-scale offensive and bring it to a successful termination, even with the lesser number of men put at his disposal.  

The fifth element of McClellan's strategy followed logically from the others. Because McClellan's task was offensive in the fullest sense, it was never his strategic goal to simply thwart Confederate plans or even to achieve an immediate but temporary battlefield victory. "I always looked beyond the Army of the Potomac," he insisted. "I was never
satisfied in my own mind with a barren victory, but looked to combined and decisive operations." It was his aim to crush and permanently defeat the Southern military establishment. Consequently, his strategy was concerned almost exclusively with ultimate victory and not immediate success.

McClellan simply never considered it reasonable to propose or desirable to pursue a strategy such as Grant followed in 1864-65—a series of costly campaigns, hammer blows which pushed the Confederates step by step southward, grinding down their armies and wearing out their resources. This hammer-on-anvil approach is, it is true, a fully offensive strategy. But it was unacceptable to McClellan for two reasons that a man of his way of thinking could not resist.

First, it flagrantly violated the precept which West Point Professor Dennis Hart Mahan had driven home to his pupils and which, after all, was good civilian as well as military common sense: "To do the greatest damage to our enemy with the least exposure to ourselves," Mahan had insisted, "is a military axiom lost sight of only by ignorance of the true ends of victory." To McClellan, Mahan's injunction was virtually law. While on the one hand he wanted a "comparatively early termination" of the war, he was equally committed to preventing "a useless effusion of blood." Echoing Mahan, he defined victory to be "to gain success with the least possible loss."

This assumption would seem particularly pertinent in the employment of an army of citizen volunteers. Yet, the renewed cry for another advance against the Confederates at Manassas, swelling ever louder as 1861 drew to a close, ignored the principle of conserving force. As Senator
Benjamin Starke of Oregon observed, McClellan's "defamers are constantly croaking because he does not storm the enemy's entrenchments and carry them at the point of the bayonet." Who but arm-chair generals, he asked, could "talk as flippantly about the sacrifice of life..." McClellan must also have been pleased with encouragement from Francis Blair, Sr., who wrote to him in April, 1862: "If you can accomplish your object of reaching Richmond by a slower process than storming redoubts and batteries in earthworks, the country will applaud the achievement which gives success to its arms with greatest parsimony of the blood of its children."

It is in this light that McClellan's great satisfaction with his victory at Yorktown should be viewed. There was impatience in the North during the month-long siege, but McClellan probably believed that his success dissipated such criticism. Recent historians have overlooked a fact that could not have escaped McClellan. The United States Congress, on motion of Owen Lovejoy of Illinois, tendered to him its "sincere thanks" after Yorktown "for the displaying those high military qualities which secure important results with but little sacrifice of life." It must have seemed to the young general that, despite impatient critics, he was after all pursuing the proper course.

McClellan also rejected the hammer-on-anvil approach, however, simply because it was not a conservative strategy. It was, instead, a strategy of destruction properly suited to a "total war." To McClellan it seemed inappropriate—even dangerous—in a limited war that held among its chief goals the eventual reconciliation of the combatants. While going beyond both Scott and Lincoln in appreciating the effort that would be needed to subdue the South, McClellan believed that the time and cost
should be kept to the minimum required by the actual military circumstances. In McClellan's view, the two most dangerous pitfalls to be avoided in conducting the war were: to do too little in the way of preparation or too much in the way of execution.

The sixth and final element ties together, in itself, all the diverse strands of McClellan's strategic concepts. He believed that a major guideline for the conduct of Northern military operations ought to be the "reasonable certainty" of their success. As a phrase it appears, with variations, throughout his correspondence and strategy memoranda. For him it focused political objectives with military reality. It meant winning the war in the least time and at the lowest cost that was realistically possible through the intelligent application of the art of war. "I have ever regarded our true policy," he wrote, "as being that of fully preparing ourselves, and then striking for the most decisive results."586

"Reasonable certainty" also meant not hazarding the cause in a "premature advance" that might lead to another Bull Run disaster.587 Such disasters, piled on one another, would inevitably lengthen the war, increase the bitterness of its aftermath, and perhaps as well, jeopardize Northern morale and willingness to see it through to the end. Speaking for McClellan--and the conservative viewpoint generally--William Henry Hurlbert insisted "it was essential that no blow should be struck unless with a moral certainty of success; and that it would be better to spend many months in the preparation of an army which should be reasonably adequate to the enormous work it was to attempt, than to risk the indefinite prolongation and extension of the conflict by...an ill-advised opening of the war...."588
McClellan, himself, put it plainly, when just after his promotion to general-in-chief, he wrote: "My intention is simply this--I will pay no attention to popular clamor--quietly, and quickly as possible, make this army strong enough and effective enough to give me a reasonable certainty that, if I am able to handle the force, I will win the first battle." Later, he added, "I will just be sure that I have an army strong enough and well enough instructed to fight with reasonable chances of success. I do not ask for perfect certainty, [But I do think] that the interests of the country demand the 'festina lente' policy."[589]

These, then were the assumptions with which McClellan sat down to draw up the comprehensive war plan requested by Lincoln. He believed that they reflected the military realities of the situation which confronted the nation and that his program to be valid must be based upon them. By framing these elements into a single, harmonious strategy, McClellan displayed imagination and originality of a high order. His was the best of the several conservative strategies for winning the Civil War.

3. August Memorandum: The Strategy of Overwhelming

In place of Scott's "squeezing" and Lincoln's "blitz," McClellan believed it was possible and desirable to "overwhelm" the South, to suffocate her with Northern preponderance; to break her resistance in part by force and in part by psychology. In this way it would be possible to avoid a grinding war of exhaustion with its high cost to both sides. In this he
had the specific, though somewhat abbreviated advice of the Baron de Jomini to guide him. Reflecting upon the Napoleonic campaigns on the Iberian peninsula (1808-1814), where the French had sought to gain a political ally and not merely conquer a people, but had encountered the fierce opposition of the Spaniards, Jomini had warned that:

No army, however, disciplined, can contend successfully against such national resistance unless it be strong enough to hold all the essential points of the country, cover its communications, and at the same time furnish an active force sufficient to beat the enemy wherever he may present himself.

"If success be possible in such a war," Jomini concluded:

the following course will be most likely to insure it. Make a display of a mass of troops proportioned to the obstacles and resistance likely to be encountered, calm the popular passions in every possible way, exhaust them by time and patience, display courtesy, gentleness, and severity united, and (particularly), deal justly.

Although McClellan did not specifically acknowledge the influence of Jomini on this point, the debt he owed to the man whose ideas he had so thoroughly studied is obvious. In his two fullest statements of the general theory of overwhelming, the Jominian echo is strong. McClellan first explained the strategy to Lincoln in the Memorandum of August 2, in the opening paragraphs:

The object of the present war differs from those in which nations are usually engaged, mainly in this: that
the purpose of ordinary war is to conquer a peace and make a treaty on advantageous terms; in this contest it has become necessary to crush a population sufficiently numerous, intelligent, and warlike to constitute a nation. We have not only to defeat their armed and organized forces in the field, but to display such an overwhelming strength as will convince all our antagonists, especially those of the governing, aristocratic class, of the utter impossibility of resistance. Our late reverses make this imperative. Had we been successful in the recent battle (Manassas) it is possible that we might have been spared the labor and expense of a great effort; now we have no alternative. Their success will enable the political leaders of the rebels to convince the mass of their people that we are inferior to them in force and courage, and to command all their resources. The contest began with a class, now it is with a people; our military success alone can restore the former issue.

By thoroughly defeating their armies, taking their strong places, and pursuing a rigidly protective policy as to private property and unarmed persons, and a lenient course as to private soldiers, we may well hope for a permanent restoration of a peaceful Union. But in the first instance the authority of the government must be supported by overwhelming physical force.

...the military action of the government should be prompt and irresistible.

Later, in his famous Harrison's Bar letter of July 7, 1862, McClellan reviewed with equal plainness the strategy he had pressed upon the Lincoln administration for a year:593

This rebellion...should not be a war looking to the subjugation of the people of any state....It should not be at all a war upon population, but against armed forces and political organizations. Neither confiscation of property, political executions of persons, territorial organization of States, or forcible abolition of slavery should be contemplated for a moment. In prosecuting the war all private property and unarmed persons should be strictly protected, subject only to the necessity of military operations.

* * * * * * * * * * * * *

A system of policy thus constitutional and conser-
vative, and pervaded by the influences of Christianity and freedom, would receive the support of almost all truly loyal men, would deeply impress the rebel masses and all foreign nations, and it might be humbly hoped that it would commend itself to the favor of the Almighty.

In the general concept of overwhelming, McClellan would have had the North advance largely superior forces against the South; defeating armies; and seizing territory and holding it at all costs. The whole effect was to be of an irresistible grand offensive which would demoralize the enemy and increasingly weaken resistance. "I shall carry this thing on en grand," he wrote to Ellen on the night he handed the Memorandum to Lincoln, "and crush the rebels in one campaign....We need success and must have it. I will leave nothing undone to gain it." 594

The psychology of such an advance demanded that there be no see-saw success, no retraced steps, no let up in the constant application of pressure. 595 McClellan had appreciated this fact as early as the beginning of the western Virginia campaign, where he had sternly instructed Colonel Benjamin F. Kelley: "In your present movement you will be careful to run no unnecessary risk, for it is absolutely necessary that we should not meet even with a partial check at the outset." 596 Now, the first step would be to trip the fat off the Confederacy by seizing the border states. Then, Northern armies should move, as slowly as necessary but certainly as possible, against the political heart of the rebellion, Richmond.

McClellan did not only propose the general theory of overwhelming, however, he went on in the Memorandum to give a detailed point by point program for carrying it into effect. Probably the simplest way to
introduce McClellan's plan is to reproduce for analysis the abstract outline which he jotted down before beginning the much larger work. The following document is given verbatim et literatim from the original in McClellan's handwriting and, except for his comments on the blockade, represents the heart of his strategy of overwhelming:

1. Display of overwhelming strength.
2. Defeat their armies, capture strong place.
3. Protect private property and unarmed persons.
4. Leniency toward common soldiers.
5. Main effort in Virginia, supported by collateral operations
   A. Mississippi
   B. Missouri
   C. Eastern Tennessee and its railroads
   D. Passes into West Virginia
   E. Troops in West Virginia to be raised
   F. Open B & O railroad
   G. Hold Baltimore and Ft. Monroe
6. Troops in Missouri nearly enough to hold the state.
7. Strength of Mississippi column to be determined by President and commander.
8. 20,000 troops sufficient in Kentucky; in addition to those to be raised there, to hold it and East Tennessee.
9. 5 to 10,000 troops enough for West Virginia in addition to natives.
10. 273,000 with 600 guns for active army of operations, besides reserves.
11. Line of its operations so directed as to avail of water transportation.
12. Naval force and flanking expeditions on the coast.
13. Movement from Kansas on West Texas.
14. Column from California.
15. Alliance with Mexico and permission to use her territory.
16. Rebellion to be crushed in one campaign.

The first point to be drawn from McClellan's strategy is that, in spite of his emphasis on the Virginia theater, he was proposing a grand offensive on many fronts that would exert a continuous pressure on the
Confederates and prevent them from using their interior lines to shift and reshift their troops at will. It is surprising, therefore, that both Lincoln and many historians have assumed that Ulysses Grant was the first to suggest an offensive of simultaneous pressure along the Confederate perimeter. In the spring of 1864, after learning of Grant's plans, the President gleefully remarked that he "got" the idea: "Those not skinner could hold a leg."\textsuperscript{598} Actually, Lincoln had gotten the point as early as January 13, 1862, when we wrote to Don Carlos Buell that his "general idea of this war [was] that we have the \textit{greater} numbers, and the enemy has the \textit{greater} facility of concentrating forces upon the points of collision."

He had concluded then that "we must fail unless we can find some way of making our advantage an over-match for his; and that this can only be done by menacing him with superior forces at \textit{different} points, at the \textit{same} time."\textsuperscript{599}

In this statement, Lincoln was not only anticipating Grant's actions, but he was also summarizing the proposed actions that McClellan had been pressing upon him for some seven months. The major significant difference, between the two programs presented in May of 1864 and August of 1861, ignoring minor differences in geographical detail, was that Grant had the war machine with which to commence his operations immediately, a sufficient preponderance of troops to consider an overland, direct confrontation with the confederate armies, and a fortified and secure Washington at his rear which caused him little concern. McClellan could only promise that his grand offensive lay in the future, while he pleaded and cajoled for more men, tried to protract the period for training and discipline needed to produce an army capable of a sustained and decisive offen-
sive, and constructed the system of forts around the capital which would allow him to take most of his army with him into the field.

There was no way for McClellan to avoid the fact that the first phase of his program had to be a period of training and disciplining of his forces. Possibly he overestimated the amount of time he needed, but the history of other modern wars and the Civil War itself, suggests that eight months is not an excessively long time in which to turn a host of citizen volunteers into a field army whose operations must be offensive. McClellan had an army capable of the most desperate kind of defensive operations by September 1861, but he knew that same army would not for some months be ready to undertake the grand campaign to end the war. Public impatience and the failure of Lincoln to understand and support his program, finally forced McClellan to move before his army was large enough, although at great expense to his own reputation he was able to postpone the movement until the troops he had were reasonably well seasoned.

Ironically, McClellan contributed to his own embarrassment in this respect by his very talent in imposing an "instant orderliness" on the confusion he found in Washington upon his arrival. Instant orderliness in itself solves nothing, as McClellan well knew, except to create the military atmosphere in which to tackle the more basic problems of training and organization. Few people understood the fragility of "instant order," however. And many who saw or read about the quiet streets of the capital, the well laid out regimental camps in the suburbs, and the martial grandness of the massed reviews, were ready three weeks after McClellan's arrival to believe he had solved the country's military problems and to wonder why he did not get about the real business of war,
fighting battles.602

It is also possible that the size of the force McClellan re-
quested was larger than necessary. Once again, however, the course of
the war supports his argument. Eventually, many more than 273,000 troops
would be employed in the eastern theater, but they would be used in dribbles
over the next three years. McClellan put the choice before Lincoln plain-
ly, when, near the conclusion of the memorandum, he wrote:"The force I
have recommended is large; the expense is great. It is possible that a
smaller force might accomplish the object in view, but I understand it to
be the purpose of this great nation to re-establish the power of the
government and restore peace to its citizens in the shortest possible time.
The question to be decided is simply this: Shall we crush the rebellion at
one blow, terminate the war in one campaign, or shall we leave it as a
legacy for our descendants?"603

Perhaps, the most reasonable criticism of McClellan's strategy
would be that he should have made greater allowances for the rising public
impatience by undertaking dramatic interim operations to boost flagging
morale.604 This is a fair criticism, but it must be qualified. Not until
his promotion to general-in-chief in November did McClellan have command
of the prime areas where such collateral movements could be undertaken.
Secondly, since he did plan and launch interim operations while the main
army was being prepared, the question is not whether he should have done
something, but whether he should have done more.

In fact, the first phase of McClellan's strategy called for
movements to be made as soon as possible against those areas of the South
where Union sentiment was prominent. It was plain that Southern Unionism
needed outside help at an early date or it would wither and die. But beyond this, such border areas as Missouri, Kentucky, western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, western Virginia, and the eastern shores of Maryland and Virginia, offered a convenient preliminary stage for the grand offensive. To seize and thereafter, hold them without interruption would begin the demoralization of the South. In the early days, it was the most convenient way to originate the image of the irresistibility of Northern arms. It was also a convenient training-grounds for the raw levies.

Until McClellan advanced to the command of the Army on November 1, he lacked sufficient authority to initiate this first phase in its entirety, but he did what he could. In mid-August, his command was redesignated the Department of the Potomac and enlarged to include the Shenandoah Valley and the states of Maryland and Delaware. McClellan used his new authority to mount an expedition against the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay, an area where there was predominant Southern sympathy. While John Dix supervised the campaign from Baltimore, a native of Delaware, Henry Hayes Lockwood commanded in the field. In several significant ways the operation resembled the earlier one of McClellan in western Virginia. Dix employed a special Eastern Shore Brigade, composed entirely of natives, and sufficiently numerous "to overawe opposition." He issued a proclamation similar to McClellan's and took pains to pacify the population and assure them their property and rights would be protected. The campaign was successfully completed by late November, securing four Maryland and two Virginia counties to the Union.

Elsewhere, McClellan made less headway, although the fault was not his own. He had no control over western Virginia, but he remained
interested in the area, and, because of his special relationship with Rosecrans, he continued to make suggestions. He urged that the occupation be completed and that the mountain passes be fortified to prevent the Confederates from retaking any part of the region. He also pointed out that if the organization and training of native regiments could be rushed, a large number of Ohio and Indiana troops would then be freed for service in the main western theater.607

Probably, the most important point in this first phase of McClellan's strategy (but once again an area where he had no authority), was an expedition to Knoxville to support the staunch loyalist of eastern Tennessee. He had anticipated this move while in command of the Department of the Ohio, but he had been called to Washington before he could commence it. Not only would Northern occupation of this area rescue the Unionists from persecution, but its possession combined with eastern Kentucky and western Virginia would thrust a salient deep into the heart of the Confederacy and disrupt direct communication and supply routes between Richmond and the west.608

After replacing Scott, McClellan discovered that in spite of his urgings no preparations had been made for the move on eastern Tennessee. One of his first acts as General-in-Chief was to send Buell to command the Department of the Ohio with specific instructions to mount the expedition against Knoxville as soon as possible.609 McClellan never intended for this to be Buell's major campaign, but a preliminary movement undertaken while the western army was being prepared for the main drive against Nashville and Chattanooga. After reaching his command Buell resisted McClellan's instructions, however, insisting that the campaign against
Nashville must come first. As late as January 6, 1862 McClellan wrote: 610

There are few things I have more at heart than the prompt movement of a strong column into Eastern Tennessee. The political consequences of the delay of this movement will be much more serious than you seem to anticipate. If relief is not soon afforded these people we shall lose them entirely, and with them the power of inflicting the most severe blow upon the secession cause.

But Buell would not budge; and the movement McClellan had hoped would be one of the opening blows of the war was lost for two years. 611

The final point in McClellan's first phase, although minor, indicated his ability to focus political considerations and military objectives. He suggested a column be sent through the Indian Territory into Texas to support the Unionist sentiment which was strong among the German population of that state. He saw circumstances in west Texas as roughly similar to those in the mountainous counties of Virginia. The loyal Texas if properly supported and encouraged might "ultimately organize that section into a free State." Of almost equal importance, Texas would provide a convenient theater in which to utilize the "resources and warlike qualities of the Pacific States, as well as identifying them with our cause and connecting the bond of union between them and the general government."

McClellan, like Lincoln, stood ready to encourage secession in the larger cause of preserving the Union. His advocacy of this scheme underscores the fact that his states-rights views were not based on provincialism but on a positive belief in federalism. 612

McClellan never believed that this early phase, "trimming of
the fat," would do more than buy time for the North to raise and discipline her main armies; but if managed in the right way it would commence the demoralization of the South and pin down some of her troops. It is impossible to speculate what might have resulted, if McClellan had had the authority to coordinate Northern forces in the summer and fall of 1861 to carry out these plans. When he did assume control of the army, he did try to put them into effect, but by then the propitious moment had passed. The time was fast ripening for the major offensive to begin, and Northern impatience had reached the level where it imperiled not only his plans but his position as well.

The main phase of McClellan's strategy called for an overpowering drive against the Confederates in Virginia but he intended there to be several important movements in support. He planned for the chief collateral offensive to be by Buell against Nashville and eventually Chattanooga and to be launched simultaneously with the Virginia operations. McClellan also alluded in his August memorandum to the movement of an army down the Mississippi River. McClellan had no particular enthusiasm for sending a column down the Mississippi, but he believed that Scott and the government had already determined that it was to be made, so he simply incorporated it into his strategy. McClellan always doubted that the time and men which would be required to open the length of the Mississippi and then to defend if from counter-attack would produce results to justify the efforts. Later, when he discovered that no one was continuing to press for the movement, he discarded it in favor of expanding the mission of Butler's New Orlean's expedition to drive up the river at least as far as Vicksburg.
Also in conjunction with the major offensive by the Army of the Potomac, and just as important as Buell’s movement in Tennessee, McClellan proposed a series of detached expeditions that were ultimately to operate as large-scale flankers to the main column. These expeditions, combining land and naval forces, were to swoop down on select Confederate ports and coastal towns, seize and then hold them as enclaves against all counter-attacks. In his original plans McClellan named Wilmington, Charleston, Savannah, and New Orleans as potential targets. The administration gave more enthusiastic support to this part of the Memorandum than to any other. And the fruits of this proposal were realized in the successful campaigns by Ambrose Burnside against Roanoke Island and New Berne, North Carolina; by Thomas Sherman against Port Royal, South Carolina, and, later, Fort Pulaski, Georgia; and by Benjamin Butler against New Orleans and the mouth of the Mississippi River. 615

McClellan never intended that these be isolated expeditions, aimed simply at the occupation of a few square miles of Southern territory. He regarded them as integral parts of the grand offensive. If the sites were carefully chosen, their capture could strengthen the blockade measurably; they would pin down Confederate forces; and help to puncture the South’s Bull Run complex of invincibility. 616 In addition, and this was McClellan’s main intention, the forces in these enclaves would be in position to operate on the flank and eventually merge with the advance of the Army of the Potomac. A chief aim of the Burnside expedition was to pose a threat to Richmond from the south. After McClellan had closed grips with the rebel army in front of the city, Burnside was to advance by way of Weldon, North Carolina, and Petersburg to close the circle and cut the
numerous rail lines with the south. Unfortunately, when the appropriate moment arrived, McClellan was no longer in command of all the armies, and concert of action was lost in that direction.617

Interestingly, William Tecumseh Sherman pursued part of the same strategy in reverse direction late in the war. Marching north through Georgia and the Carolinas, Sherman profited from the flanking enclaves that McClellan had helped to establish. To McClellan, himself, however, these expeditions became a mixed blessing, when, prior to his assumption to the generalcy-in-chief, he saw the resources of the Army of the Potomac being drained off to support them. On one occasion, he went so far as to demand that there be no more expeditions, if they could only be drawn from the main effort.618 But he never lost faith in their ultimate usefulness and, while General-in-Chief, tried to coordinate them and bring them into harmony with the grand offensive.619

In the end of course, everything came down to the outcome in the east. McClellan never doubted that the main theater would be Virginia. Here in the cockpit between the national capitals the stakes were highest. Here the Confederacy had already concentrated the cream of her military effort. Here victory would be most valuable and defeat most injurious. It was the Army of the Potomac which must deliver the coup de grace to the rebellion; and it must be made fully ready before undertaking its advance. A major setback would virtually nullify the psychological impact of the grand offensive. There must be no more Bull Runs to distort the South's vision of its inevitable military defeat. The Army of the Potomac must seem and in fact be irresistible, when it moved. Hence, McClellan's determination (which so many contemporaries and historians have misread)
not to hazard any action which threatened to bring on a general engagement before he was ready for it, even the clearing the Potomac of Confederate batteries or pushing the Southern army back from Washington.\textsuperscript{620}

The ultimate object was to defeat the Confederate army near its capital. This, McClellan believed, was the victory worth waiting for. The way would then be open to seize Richmond and capture the rebel leaders or, at the very least, cause them to flee ignominiously into the hinterland.\textsuperscript{621} While this would certainly seal the doom of the Confederacy, McClellan did not assume it would necessarily end the war. He contemplated the further advance of the Army of the Potomac through the Carolinas and Georgia. Presumably, if the South had not already sought terms, the eastern and western offensive columns would merge in the vicinity of Chattanooga.

McClellan has been criticized for being overly concerned with places and geographical strongholds and imperceptive to the truth, allegedly Clausewitzian, that only the enemy's army is a proper military objective. On the contrary, so intent was McClellan upon crushing the armed might of the Confederacy where it was strongest, in Virginia, that he ignored the obvious military value of the Mississippi River. Few students have ever questioned the wisdom of the many months and large forces employed by the North to secure the river from New Orleans to St. Louis. Yet, palpably, this strategy of Lincoln, Halleck and Grant was directed against a "place," and their success, while it certainly injured the Confederacy, did not bring its imminent collapse.

McClellan disliked a Mississippi strategy because it presaged a long war of strangulation and piecemeal offensives. He believed that
knocking Virginia out of the war would produce greater and more immediate results than the isolation of the trans-Mississippi. After all, Richmond was far more than just a "place." It was the jugular vein of the fledgling Southern republic. Or, to put it in proper Clausewitzian terms, it was the "center of gravity" of the Confederacy. And just because Richmond was so important, the Confederates had no recourse but to defend it desperately. McClellan always assumed, therefore, that to move against Richmond meant to move against the main Confederate army. Unlike his critics, he did not see it as an "either/or". Moreover, a drive toward Richmond was the surest way to gain the initiative and throw the Confederates onto the defensive.622

Finally, as the last point in this analysis of McClellan's strategy of overwhelming, it should be noted that he did not at first spell out the details of the advance of the main column in the Virginia theater. The operations of the Army of the Potomac would be directed against the major rebel army and be eventually in the vicinity of Richmond. Beyond that, McClellan remained purposefully vague. Knowing that preparations would consume considerable time, he did not want to be tied to a specific military program that very likely would become absolute in the interim.623 He did express the hope in the August Memorandum that the "general line of operations should be so directed that water transportation can be availed of from point to point by means of the ocean and the rivers emptying into it."624

By late 1861, as the time for active operations neared, McClellan had become convinced that the direct overland approach against Manassas and Centerville would not only require a larger force than available to him but would also probably produce the wrong results even if successful.
The Confederate army would simply fall back to successive strong positions, turning the 120 miles from Washington to Richmond into one large battle-ground, dragging out the war, and raising its cost. While theoretically the North would have the initiative, the theater would be so large, with so much room for maneuver, that the Confederates could easily pass over to the tactical offense at any time.625

Instead, therefore, McClellan proposed to transport the Army of the Potomac by water to Urbana, at the mouth of the Rappahannock and about 45 miles due east of Richmond. He would thus have shorter lines to protect and more men for the active column. He could also reasonably expect to confront the enemy near the enemy capital much sooner and at a lower cost to his own army. While holding exterior lines, the North would still retain maximum maneuverability, the Confederate options would become successively narrower as their army neared Richmond. When Lincoln flatly rejected this movement, McClellan alternatively suggested a water route based on Fort Monroe and the Yorktown peninsula between the York and James rivers. And this latter plan, with the President's grudging consent, became the basis for the peninsula campaign of the spring of 1862.626

There was another dimension to McClellan's "strategy of overwhelming", beyond the routes marked out on the map for the advance and the time tables for the deployment of troops. There was also that aspect which dealt with the behavior or conduct of the military forces engaged in the grand offensive. This part of McClellan's strategy applied, in a primitive way, the techniques of pacification. The grand offensive was not only to
make resistance seem foolish, but, also, it was to be conducted in such a way as to make the alternative, returning to loyalty, seem easy and attractive.627

Here McClellan relied upon the same principles of conduct to pacify Southerners which had worked successfully in his western Virginia campaign and which he would support to the end of his career. First, he believed private soldiers as prisoners of war should be treated humanely; released as soon as possible; and the terms of their parole should be generous. Captured officers, on the other hand, as representatives of the Southern ruling class, should be governed by a stricter policy of exchange for their Northern counterparts.628

Secondly, McClellan insisted that the army should scrupulously respect the property and constitutional rights of the Southern natives who behaved well. He opposed all forms of confiscation, except that military necessity made unavoidable.629 Slaves, of course, were legally a form of property. And slavery, itself, was the most sensitive of all issues with white Southerners and the most likely, if handled wrongly, to produce bitterness and irreconciliation. Since McClellan also rejected the idea of returning fugitive slaves to their masters, a practice he discouraged whenever he discovered it, he believed the best idea was to keep contrabands away from Federal camps and the slavery question out of the war. Whenever the army found it necessary to employ slave labor, he believed the owners, if loyal, should be compensated.630

In the third place, however, McClellan would not extend such leniency to those who persisted in their treason. He demonstrated that he believed disloyalty behind the lines, including in the North, itself,
should be dealt with severely and summarily. In the instructions which he sent to Dix on August 20, 1861, for the policy to be followed in the volatile political situation in Maryland, McClellan wrote: "When there is a good reason to suppose that persons are giving aid and comfort to the enemy they should be arrested even where there is want of positive proof of their guilt." Certainly, he was as firm as Lincoln on this point. 631

Finally McClellan realized how imperative it was, in this respect also, to achieve and maintain the strongest discipline within the Federal ranks. Beyond its obvious military importance, discipline was necessary to prevent plunder and pillage and to reduce to the barest minimum the rancor arising from the relation between conquered and conquerer. McClellan made this policy perfectly clear to his subordinates. In all the latters of instruction he sent after he became General-in-Chief, the message was plainy stated. 632 One of those, sent to Don Carlos Buell on November 12, is worth quoting at length to show the careful language McClellan used: 633

In regard to political matters, bear in mind that we are fighting only to preserve the integrity of the Union and to uphold the power of the General Government. As far as military necessity will permit, religiously respect the constitutional rights of all. Preserve the strictest discipline among the troops, and while employing the utmost energy in military movements, be careful so to treat the unarmed inhabitants as to contract, not widen, the breach existing between us and the rebels.

I mean by this that it is the desire of the Government to avoid unnecessary irritation by causeless arrests and persecution of individuals. Where there is good reason to believe that persons are actually giving aid, comfort, or information to the enemy, it is of course necessary to arrest them, but I have always found that it is the tendency of subordinates to make
vexatious arrests on mere suspicion. You will find it well to direct that no arrest shall be made except by your order or that of your generals, unless in extraordinary cases, always holding the party making the arrest responsible for the propriety of his course. It should be our constant aim to make it apparent to all that their property, their comfort, and their personal safety will be best preserved by adhering to the cause of the Union.

Obviously, in this phase of the strategy of overwhelming McClellan went beyond purely military questions and entered the realm of political policy, much in the same way Scott had in his Anaconda. It would have been perfectly proper had the administration rebuked him, either for the content of the policy, itself, or simply on the grounds that he had exceeded his authority, but it did neither. Although some Congressmen and segments of the press heavily criticized McClellan's policy, Lincoln never indicated disapproval; and McClellan had to assume that either this was the administration's policy, or else the administration chose to have no policy and leave the question in his hands. 634

As the war grew longer and Northern bitterness and hostility grew warm, there was much resentment over this "soft" policy toward Southerners, which many say as mollycoddling traitors. 635 In fact, the second charge brought against Buell in his Court of Inquiry in the spring of 1863, was against his treatment of the "inhabitants of disaffected districts...familiarly known as the conciliatory policy." The Court acquitted him on this charge, because: "Whether good or bad in its effects, General Buell deserves neither blame nor applause for it, because it was at that time understood to be the policy of the Government. At least he could violate no orders on the subject, because there were none." 636 Of course
Buell may have had no orders, but he was simply following the instructions outlined specifically for him by McClellan. It was McClellan who operated without orders, instructions or guidance on this subject—and, for that matter on nearly every other subject.

What did finally happen to McClellan's strategy Memorandum? Lincoln took it with thanks on the evening of August 2nd. He read it to the cabinet the following day. Then, as had been the case with Scott's Anaconda, he is not known to have ever commented upon it directly again. Did his silence mean his consent? Did the fact that he allowed several parts of the strategy to be undertaken, such as the coastal expeditions, indicate his approval of the whole program? What inference was McClellan to draw from the conversations he had with the President in the autumn of 1861, when Lincoln would drop by headquarters for a chat? The exchange that took place on October 10th, as recorded by John Hay in his diary, was typical of several. "I intend to be careful," McClellan said, "and do as well as possible. Don't let them hurry me, is all I ask." And Lincoln replied, "You shall have your own way in the matter, I assure you." Just three weeks later, upon the retirement of Scott, the President promoted McClellan to be commanding general of the United States Army. It would be most interesting to know what thoughts passed through the young General's mind on that fateful November 1st, when he learned of his advancement. It would be even more interesting, however, to know what Lincoln was thinking, when he penned the orders.
4. Epilogue

Much the greater part of this study lies in the future. In point of time, the present paper covers but one-fifth of McClellan's career. To attempt any kind of final conclusions at this juncture would be an exercise in futility. It is not that the outcome of the story is not well known, of course, but that the interpretation of the events leading to the outcome require further research and further thought. This paper has sought to establish that McClellan acted with as much rationality as most men; that he did pursue a purposeful course during his army career; that he conceived an intelligent strategy for the achievement of the national war aims, which he understood to be the reconstruction of the Union and the restoration of the status quo ante bellum.

Was McClellan's strategy for overwhelming the Confederacy the best military and political course for the North to have pursued? Was it, for that matter, even a good, workable strategy? That kind of evaluation cannot be made in the abstract, or on the basis of an incomplete examination. It must await a fuller analysis of what happened to his plan in the course of time and events. One conclusion which is apparent is that "overwhelming", nor any conciliatory policy, was the strategy which eventually brought victory to Northern arms. What is not so readily apparent, however, is whether McClellan's plan--and with it the whole conservative approach--actually failed in a military sense, or was simply abandoned from political misunderstanding and expediency.
KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS USED IN NOTES AND

BIBLIOGRAPHIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AGO</td>
<td>Adjutant-General's Office.</td>
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<td>AHA</td>
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<td>MOLLUS</td>
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<td>Glimpses of the Nation's Struggle. Minnesota Commandery.</td>
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FOOTNOTES

Chapter One: McClellan Reconsidered

1. McClellan and the Historians

1. Most historians agree that McClellan is a controversial figure—at least they do when writing historiographical essays; see Hal Bridges, Civil War and Reconstruction, Pamphlet No. 5, Service Center for Teachers (Washington, 1957); David Donald, "Refighting the Civil War," chapter five in his Lincoln Reconsidered (New York, 1956); Don E. Fehrenbacher, "Disunion and Reunion." in The Reconstruction of American History (New York, 1962), pp. 98-118; and Otis A. Singletary, "Civil War and Reconstruction," in Interpreting and Teaching History (Washington, 1961), pp. 120-132. It was Thomas Harry Williams who called McClellan "the problem child of the Civil War." See Williams' Lincoln and His Generals (New York, 1952), p. 25. The quotation in the text is from an anonymous biography published by T. B. Peterson & Brothers, The Life, Campaigns and Public Services of General McClellan... (Philadelphia, c1864), p. 19.

2. Barlow to Henry Douglas Bacon, 17 January 1862, Barlow Coll. (CSmH); and Lieber to Charles Sumner, 28 April 1863, Lieber Coll. (CSmH).


5. Warren W. Hassler, Jr., General George B. McClellan: Shield of the Union (Baton Rouge, 1957).


8. Pressly's categories may be summarized as follows: (1) The wartime Propagandists, such as Horace Greeley and Edward A. Pollard. (2) The Post-war Apologists, with memoirs and reminiscences too numerous to mention. (3) The Nationalists, such as James Schouler, Jackn Burgess, James Ford Rhodes, Frederick Jackson Turner and Woodrow Wilson. (4) The Economic Determinists, including Charles A. Beard and James Allen. (5) The Revisionists, such as James G. Randall, Avery O. Craven, and David M. Potter. (6) The Neo-Nationalists, including Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Bernard De Voto, and probably Allan Nevins.


10. The phrase "about a dozen" is purposely vague. There are several editions of some of the works. Moreover, it is far from certain that all of the McClellan biographies have
been located. The Markinfield Adley books, for example, were not found in any bibliography known to the author. They simply "turned up" in a dealer's catalog and were purchased.


16. For example: "...McClellan was not only a most able organizer, drillmaster, and disciplinarian, but also a soldier of superior strategic and tactical ability as compared with many of the other prominent generals on both sides." Hassler, McClellan, p. xvi.

17. Eckenrode, McClellan, p. 237-238. Hassler put it this way: "Political enmity toward him was largely his undoing. The fact that McClellan was a Democrat, favoring gradual emancipation with compensation to the slave-owners, caused the Radical Republicans in Congress to see red." See Hassler, McClellan, p. xvi.


20. Appleton, "Malvern Hill," p. 42. The "Magnatism" that flowed between McClellan and the soldiers of the Army of the Potomac can be heavily documented from the veteran's writings. For two outstanding examples see volume 2 of Battles and Leaders of the Civil War..., eds. Robert


22. Israel N. Stiles, "On to Richmond," MOLLUS: 3 Illinois 52-53. In the early part of the war Stiles was adjutant of the 20th Indiana Infantry. He was captured during the Seven Days Campaign; after exchange he became Colonel of the 63rd Indiana; and at the close of the war breveted brigadier-general.

23. Stiles, "Richmond," p. 47. Writings of the creation of the Army of the Potomac in the winter of 1861, General Oliver Otis Howard was equally praiseful; see the Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard, Major General United States Army (New York, 1907), I, 171.

24. Charles King, "A Boy's Recollection of Our Great Generals," MOLLUS: 3 Wisconsin 131. King was the son of Major-General Rufus King; he was a volunteer aid on his father's staff; captain in the 5th U.S. Cavalry; and later breveted brigadier-general.


27. Palfrey, Antietam, pp. 134-135. Alexander McClure, also severe on McClellan in many points, concluded: "...no truthful historian can fail to say of him that he was one of the great military geniuses of his day, one of the purest of patriots, and one of the most loyal of men in the great battle for the preservation of the Union." McClure, Lincoln, p. 225.


29. James Garfield Randall, Lincoln, the President... (New York, 1945-1953), in 3 volumes; see especially in volume 2, Chapter 18: "Behind McClellan's Lines" (pp. 65-86); and Chapter 20: "The Breaking of McClellan" (pp. 108-125).

30. (cont.) from the note he sent to Nicolay (10 August 1885), while writing of the history was in progress: "As to my tone toward Porter and McClellan—that is an important matter. I have toiled and labored through ten chapters over him [McClellan]. I think I have left the impression of his mutinour imbecility, and I have done it in a perfectly courteous manner. Only in 'Harrison's Landing' have I used a single injurious adjective. It is of the utmost moment that we should seem fair to him, while we are destroying him." Quoted in William Roscoe Thayer, The Life and Letters of John Hay (Boston, 1908), II, 31. For further discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the Nicolay and Hay work, see Thomas, Portrait, pp. 104-105; and Randall, "Lincoln Theme," pp. 273-286.

31. 6 NAH 189-193.


34. T. Williams, Generals, p. 29.

35. 91 Time No. 14 (4 April 1968), 20.

36. Rhodes: 3 U.S. 386.


38. T. Williams, McClellan, pp. 24-25.


40. T. Williams, Generals, p. 46.

41. T. Williams, McClellan, p. 25.

42. Ropes review first appeared AM (April, 1887), It was later reprinted in 10 MHSMP 97-124.


44. Ropes, "McClellan," p. 99. A little later in the essay Ropes gives a colorful, pre-Freudian analysis of McClellan's mental mehanics, see p. 104.


46. What is here represented as Michie's views refers only to his opinions as stated in his biography of McClellan. In an earlier work, The Life and Letter of Emory Upton... (New
47. Michie, McClellan, p. 469.
48. Lincoln and the Radicals (Madison, Wis., 1941) p. 35.
50. In addition to the works by Williams previously cited see: Americans at War: The Development of the American Military System (Baton Rouge, La., 1950); and his essay: "The Military Leadership of North and South," in David Donald (ed.), Why the North Won the Civil War (Baton Rouge, La., 1960), pp. 33-54.
52. T. Williams, McClellan, p. 40
53. T. Williams, McClellan, p. 42.
55. For a listing of a variety of the works of Catton, Donald and T. William see the bibliography, below.
57. T. Williams, Americans, p. 55.
59. Catton has written: "Each side was fighting for an absolute; to compromise was to lose. The South was fighting for independence, the North for reunion." Catton, "Generalship," p. 4. And T. Williams adds: "The Civil War was a war of ideas and, inasmuch as neither side could compromise its political purposes, it was a war of unlimited objectives." T. Williams, "Leadership," p. 44. For a somewhat qualified version of the Modernist theme see Russell F. Weigley, Towards an American Army: Military Thought from Washington to Marshall (New York, 1962), pp. 79-81.
60. Catton, "Generalship," p. 5. Catton added: "Whether he realized the fact or not, the Federal soldier was fighting to enforce an unconditional surrender. It was his task, not merely to compel his foe to come to terms, but to obliterate a nation." (p. 6.)


64. T. Williams, Americans, p. 87; T. Williams, McClellan, pp. 98, 101-110. Sherman has presented the Modernists with a perplexing dilemma. He believed in Jomini, in manœuvre, and in avoiding battle, when possible. In fact, he was "startlingly" like McClellan. And yet Sherman was very much a successful general. For T. Harry Williams interesting attempt to explain this paradox, see his, McClellan, pp. 45-77; and his "Leadership," 52-53; see also Weigley, Army, pp. 89-93 (Grant) and 82-89 (Sherman).


67. T. Williams, "Leadership," p. 44.

68. T. Williams, "Leadership," p. 44; also his Americans, pp. 59-60; and, McClellan, p. 23.

69. T. Williams, McClellan, p. 11.

2. Reconsiderations

70. McClure, Lincoln, p. 225.

71. Constructing a story in such a way as to justify its ending is quite common in the writing of history. Even so it is a deterministic approach of questionable validity. One can wonder, for example, how the Ulysses Grant story would be told, if he had been removed from command after his first unsuccessful attempt to take Richmond. The events of Grant's career would remain unchanged in their factual content, but it is doubtful that historians would be able to look at Belmont, Henry and Donelson, Shiloh, the hassles with Halleck and the early stages of Vicksburg and see a general who was learning the realities of war on the battlefield, profiting from his mistakes, and making commendable progress in his growth as a great commander. For a candid appraisal of how unpromising Grant's early career seemed, at least on the surface, see T. Williams, McClellan, pp. 79-94.

72. Extracts of these letters in McClellan's hand are in vol. 7 of the 3rd ser. of the McClellan Papers in the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division. The quotations in the text are from: McClellan to his wife, 17 Nov. 1861 and 11 April 1862.
73. As Otis Singletary concluded after a survey of recent Civil War literature: "The Lincoln myth not only survives, it grows. Its tenacity has resulted at least partially from the fact that Mr. Lincoln has been accorded a unique and seemingly impregnable position by students of the period. No other character in our history has been so fortunate as he in having the historians work out a neat formula ('Everything he did was subordinated to his paramount objective—to preserve the Union') that explains away all the contradictions and inconsistencies of his career." Singletary, "Civil War." p. 126. See also, Thomas, Portrait; Potter, Lincoln Theme; and Randall, "Lincoln Theme," passim.

74. See David Donald's excellent statement in his Lincoln Reconsidered, p. 86; I have reproduced it as a prefatory quotation immediately after the title page, above.

75. I have undertaken a reevaluation of McClellan's role in the Antietam campaign in "Taken at the Flood: A Study of the Union and Confederate Command Systems at the Opening of the Maryland Campaign." Unpublished M. A. Thesis, Rice University ( Houston, Texas, 1966).

76. Michie, McClellan, p. 469.


78. OR: 11.3, 64.


80. William Farrar Smith, "The Military Situation in Northern Virginia, From the 1st to the 14th of November 1862," 3 MHSMP 104-121.

81. In manifest unfairness, some historians have done just the reverse, by pitting the total numbers of the Northern troops in the east against particular field armies of the Confederacy, such as Johnston's Army at Manassas. It is true, however, that Johnston had but part of his forces there, others were at Aquia, Fredericksburg, in the Shenandoah Valley, etc. The question of military intelligence is discussed at greater length in Chapter Six, below. For evidence of the statements made in the text above, see the following (all are intelligence reports): Pinkerton to McClellan, 15 November 1861, Pinkerton National Detective Agency Papers (DLC); Pinkerton to McClellan, 31 August 1861, 4 October 1861, 15 November 1861, 26 November 1861 et al., McClellan Papers (DLC).

82. MOS, p. 34.

83. MOS, p. 35.
84. Ropes believed that McClellan, himself, destroyed the political interpretation with the publication of his memoirs; see Ropes, "McClellan," p. 123.

85. George H. Porter, Ohio Politics in the Civil War Period (New York, 1911), p. 25. Dennison's relationship with McClellan during April-July, 1861 is examined in Chapters Four and Five, below. That Dennison remained a McClellan supporter longer than most Republicans is evident in the following: Randolph Barnes Marcy to McClellan, 11 March 1862; McClellan to Marcy, 12 March 1862; Anson Stager to McClellan, 12 March 1862; and William Dennison to McClellan, 14 March 1862; all in the McClellan Papers (DLC).

86. MG5, pp. 171-172; T. Williams, Radicals, p. 46; and Hans L. Trefousse, Benjamin Franklin Wade, Radical Republican from Ohio (New York, 1963), pp. 153-154. Salmon Chase was also a warm supporter of McClellan at this time, see Chase to Thomas M. Key, 1 November 1861; and on November 2, Count Adam Gurowski sent to McClellan his "vives et sinceras felicitations" on ousting Scott; both letters are in the McClellan Papers (DLC).

3. Statesmen and Generals


89. Maurice, Statesmen, p. 3.


91. Dennis Hart Mahan, An Elementary Treatise on Advanced-Guard, Out-Post, and Detachment Service of Troops... (New ed., N.Y., 1961). Discussions of Mahan may be found in: Dupuy, Military, pp. 191-194; Huntington, Soldier, pp. 218-221; and Weigley, Army pp. 38-53.


93. Sources for the Modernists interpretation of Clausewitz are given in footnotes 59 through 73, above. See also Donald, Lincoln, p. 94; and T. Williams, "Leadership," pp. 39-40.
94. For Clausewitz's career and writings see: Dupuy, Military, pp.182-188; Earle, Strategy, pp. 91-113; and Liddell-Hart, Strategy, pp.352-357. David Donald observing that Clausewitz wrote "in an obscure fashion in a difficult tongue" has concluded he had no measurable effect on Civil War strategy. Donald added: "The Library of Congress lists no American edition of any of Clausewitz's writings published before 1865. I have no discovered any Union or Confederate general who read Clausewitz." Donald, Lincoln, p.88, including footnote.

95. Dupuy, Military, pp.187-188.

96. Jomini, Summary, pp.66 and 53, respectively.

97. Clausewitz: 1 On War 86.


100. Clausewitz: 3 On War 122.

101. Clausewitz: 3 On War 121.

102. Clausewitz: 1 On War 22-23 and 11; and 3 On War 124-125 and 130, respectively.

103. The Platonism probably came via Clausewitz's study of Kant. This point is discussed to some extent in Hans Rothfels essay in Earle, Strategy, pp.101-104; and in Liddell-Hart, Strategy, p.354.

104. Clausewitz: 3 On War 122-123.


107. Jomini, Summary, p. 45

108. Clausewitz: 3 On War 106.


110. T. Williams, McClellan, pp. 3-4.

111. Clausewitz: 1 On War 25.

112. Clausewitz: 1 On War 23.

Chapter Two: The Conservative War, 1861-1862

114. See Vandiver's "Jefferson Davis and Confederate Strategy," in The American Tragedy (Hampden-Sydney College, Va., 1959), pp. 19-32; and his Rebel Brass: The Confederate Command System (Baton Rouge, La., 1956); and Jones, Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg (Baton Rouge, La., 1961); also pertinent in this respect is Grady McWhiney, "Who Whipped Whom? Confederate Defeat Reexamined," 11 CWB (1965), 5-26; Barron Deaderick, Strategy in the Civil War (Harrisburg, Pa., 1946), is really a rather shallow study of battle tactics and scarcely justifies its title. Jacob Dolson Cox, "Why the Men of '61 Fought for the Union," 69 AM (1892), 382-394 is much too general to be useful. The only work to partially fill the void is Herman Belz, Reconstructing the Union: Theory and Practice during the Civil War (Ithaca, N.Y., 1969).

1. Northern War Aims


117. New York Herald, 5 May 1861; New York World, 30 April 1861; and Philadelphia Public Ledger 7 June 1861.


119. Basler: 4 Lincoln 332; and 3 OR 1:0:68.

120. Congressional Globe, 37th Cong., 1st sess., 222. For a good view of this resolution from Capitol Hill, see Belz, Union, pp. 21-28. Popular reaction has not been studied.

121. Yet, historians are constantly forced to make this judgment on individuals; and to apply it en mass is a difference in degree and not in kind. As in the case of individuals, it seems a safe rule of thumb to accept explanations and expressed intentions, unless there is good reason to do otherwise. Sincerity, except in unusual cases, should not be a problem. Nor is quantity a problem, for numerous statements on the nature and object of the war abound in the newspapers, letters, diaries and other source materials of the period. What is difficult, however, is to gauge how representative the opinions of leaders and select individuals are of the public in general. Perhaps, someday a way will be found to set computers to work on the problem. Until then it will be necessary to rely upon the cruder uses of the primary sources. It should go without saying that such sources vary in reliability and are all biased to some ex-


126. McClellan to Samuel L. M. Barlow, 8 November 1861, Barlow Collection (CSMf); copy in McClellan Papers (DLC). T. Harry Williams misdates this November 1, *Generals*, p. 46.


129. A thorough study of this topic is much needed; some indication of political affinity may be gleaned from biographical dictionaries. Certainly the most useful and convenient, in this respect, is Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge, La., 1964).

130. According to the *Federal Census* of 1860 the total population of the United States was 31,443,321; which
130 (cont.) breaks down approximately as follows: "solid" South 8,354,000; "solid" North 19,128,000; and border areas 3,962,000. Included in border areas: Missouri 1,182,000; Kentucky 1,156,000; Maryland 687,000; Delaware 112,000; District of Columbia 75,000; western Virginia (est.) 400,000; and eastern Tennessee (est.) 350,000.


133. OR 51:11:458; see also, George L. P. Badcliffe, Governor Hicks of Maryland and the Civil War(Baltimore, 1901).

134. New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette, 8 May 1861; reprinted in 2 Northern Editorials 831.

135. The "solid north" of 1860 is here defined as: Me., N.H., Vt., Mass., R.I., Conn., N.Y., N.J., Pa., Ohio, Mich., Ind., Ill., Wis., Minn., Ia., Calif., and Ore. In these
135 (cont.) states in the election of 1860 Lincoln received 1,839,822 votes (54.4% of total); the other three candidates, Bell, Breckinridge and Douglas received 1,563,969 votes (45.6% of the total). It is striking that Lincoln increased his vote only 0.8% in these same states in 1864; his gain in the border areas was an impressive 48%, accounting for his national gain of 6.3%. McClellan's vote in 1864 was very close to that garnered by the three non-Republican candidates in 1860. In 1864 the "solid North" gave Lincoln 2,017 votes (55.2% of the total). I have worked out these figures from the state by state election tables in vol. 1 of Oscar Handlin's History of the United States (New York, 1967), 574 and 594.

136. There is no adequate study of the Northern Democracy during the Civil War. It is necessary to work piecemeal through state and local studies (see note 135 above and note 157 below), and through biographies and memoirs, in each case much too thin, such as the following: August Belmont, A Few Letters and Speeches of the Late Civil War (New York, 1870); Benjamin Franklin Butler, Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences... (Boston, 1862); Samuel Sullivan Cox, Eight Years in Congress, From 1857-1865; Memoir and Speeches (New York, 1865); idem, Union-Dissolution-Reunion; Three Decades of Federal Legislation, 1855 to 1885 (Providence, R.I., 1885); John Adams Dix, Memoirs..., Morgan Dix (ed.), 2 vols. (New York, 1883); Irving Katz, August Belmont: A Political Biography (New York, 1968); David Lindsey, "Sunset" Cox: Irrepressible Democrat (Detroit, 1959); Stewart Mitchell, Horatio Seymour of New York (Cambridge, Mass., 1938); Allan Nevins, Abram S. Hewitt, with Some Account of Peter Cooper (New York, 1953); Samuel A. Pleasants, Fernando Wood of New York (New York, 1948); Bernard Christian Steiner, Life of Reverdy Johnson (Baltimore, 1914); James L. Vallandigham, Life of Clement L. Vallandigham (New York, 1864); and, Thomas Harry Williams, "General Banks and the Radical Republicans in the Civil War," 12 NEQ (1939), 268-280.

137. 2 OR 1.0:765.


139. Philadelphia Public Ledger, 7 June 1861; reprinted in 2 Northern Editorials 845-846.

140. Daily Ohio Statesman, 18 June 1861; reprinted in 2 Northern Editorials 851-852.

141. New York Herald, 5 May 1861.


143. See note 138 above; the total population of the solid
143(cont.) north stood at near 19,128,000 in the census of 1850.


145. Springfield, Mass., Republican, 2 May 1861; quoted in Ware, Massachusetts, p. 76.

146. The Diary of Edward Bates, 1859-1866, ed. Howard K. Beale (Washington, 1933), p. 185; and also in vol. 2 David G. Mears (ed.), ...The Lincoln Papers (Garden City, N.Y., 1948), 555.


149. New York Times, 10 May 1861; also, see passim, Krummel, "Raymond"; and Brown, Raymond.

150. 2 OR 1.0; 761-762.

151. Basler: 5 Lincoln 48-49.

152. There is no significant argument among historians about the moderate conservatism of Lincoln during the first year of the war. His repeated statements are too clear to leave much doubt on the point; see, for example: Basler: 4 Lincoln 17, 152, 156, 160, 439-440 and 532; and Basler: 5 Lincoln 41, 145, 146 (n7), 169, 223-224 (n6), 388 and 421; and Basler: 7 Lincoln 499. The timing and extent of Lincoln's move toward more radical ideas is, however, currently much debated; see Ludwell H. Johnson, "Lincoln and Equal Rights: The Authenticity of the Wadsworth Letter." 32 JSH (1966), 83-87; and Johnson's replies to criticism, 13 CWH (1967), 66-73 and 283. Arguing for a more radical view of Lincoln's is Harold M. Hyman, "Lincoln and Equal Rights for Negroes: The Irrelevancy of the 'Wadsworth Letter,'" 12 CWH (1966), 258-266; and Hyman, letter to the editor in 13 CWH (1967), 282-283.


154. General support for the conclusion, above, on the early conservatism of the solid north derived from a survey of the following regional studies: CALIFORNIA: John J. Earle, "The Sentiment of the People of California with Respect to the Civil War," in vol. 1 of Annual Report, AHA (1907), 123-135.


155. For the general story of the Radicals, see; T. Williams, Radicals; and the excellent new study, Hans L. Trefousse, The Radical Republicans: Lincoln's Vanguard for Radical Justice (New York, 1969). Most of the outstanding leaders are the subject of recent and thorough biographies, some of which are later cited at appropriate places. There is current debate over how much the Radicals differed from the Moderate Republicans; David Donald argues that differences have been exaggerated; see his, "Devils Facing Zionward," in McWhiney, Grant, Lee, Lincoln and the Radicals, pp. 72-91; and his, The Politics of Reconstruction, 1863-1867 (Baton Rouge, La., 1965); T. Harry Williams upholds the more traditional view in "Lincoln and the Radicals: An Essay in Civil War History and Historiography," also in McWhiney, Grant etc., pp. 92-117.


159. When and how did the conservative phase of the Civil War end and the transformation to more revolutionary aims take place? Happily, this complicated question lies beyond the scope of this present paper. Eventually, my study must deal with this topic, however, and I have already begun to formulate an interpretation. It revolves chiefly around the notion that military events, especially Ball's Bluff and the Seven Days, played a larger role in causing the shift than has been heretofore appreciated.

2. The Policy of Conciliation

160. While this is common sense, it might be noted that Jomini had said the same thing; Summary, p.59.


162. The chronology of secession was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 20</td>
<td>South Carolina Secedes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 9</td>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>Secedes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 10</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 11</td>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 19</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 26</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 1</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 8</td>
<td>Provisional Confederate government formed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr. 17</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Secedes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 6</td>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 7</td>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 20</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 20</td>
<td>Kentucky declares neutrality.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jne. 12</td>
<td>Missouri declares war on the U. S.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 18</td>
<td>Kentucky secedes(Russelville Convention).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
163. Barlow to Buchanan, 31 December 1861, Barlow Coll. (CSmH). Another letter in this collection, Barlow to D. D. Withers, 10 December 1861, reviews in great detail the position taken by many Democrats during the secession crisis. Also see: Potter, *Lincoln*, pp.112-127; Stampp, *War*, pp.21 and 125-132.


165. Mearns: 2*Lincoln* 422.

166. This interpretation of Lincoln as President-elect is in essential agreement with that found in Potter, *Lincoln*, pp.134-187; Stampp, *War*, pp.179-203; and Randall: 1*Lincoln* 207-272. Curiously, an episode giving much insight into Lincoln's views during this period, seemingly escaped the notice of all three authors. In early February 1861, Henry Douglas Bacon, railroad official from St. Louis, visited Lincoln with a letter "signed by quite a number of the most influential and conservative gentlemen of the City of New York." On their behalf, Bacon urged Lincoln to take a public stand in favor of compromise before his inauguration. In what must have been a long and candid interview, Lincoln impressed Bacon with his honesty and patriotism. Bacon came away convinced that Lincoln was willing to compromise if necessary, but that he misjudged badly the state of affairs in the South. The effect of Bacon's testimony is to confirm the interpretation Potter has pieced together from other sources. Details of the interview are set forth in Bacon's letter to the editor, *Missouri Republican*, 22 April 1861; a copy of which is in the Bacon Coll.(CSmH); and is substantially summarized in Bacon's letter to Lincoln, 10 December 1861, Barlow Coll.(CSmH).


168. David Potter has concluded: "If the maintenance of the Union by compromise did not mean peace, as Lincoln saw it, it is equally true that the maintenance of the Union without compromise did not carry, for him and for many of his associates, any clear implication of war," See Potter, *Lincoln*, p.224.


170. Basler: 4*Lincoln* 266.


173. Anderson's letter to the Secretary of War, dated 28 February 1861, is in the Lincoln Papers(DLC).

175. OR 1.0; 201. Scott's "liberality" may have been re-enforced by his opinion that it was not militarily feasible to relieve the forts; see Erasmus Darwin Keyes, Fifty Years' Observations of Men and Events, Civil and Military (New York, 1884), p.416.

176. See Seward's Memorandum "in cabinet" for 29 March 1861, Mearns: 2 Lincoln 498-499. Neal Dow, claiming to speak for the Republicans of Maine, wrote Lincoln a curious letter, 13 March 1861, saying "the evacuation of Fort Sumter will be fully approved...." Mearns: 2 Lincoln 483-484.

177. The course pursued by Lincoln in the Sumter crisis has been much debated—particularly the question of whether or not he purposely precipitated war. My interpretation derives from the following points: (1) On March 5, Lincoln learned from Anderson's letter that Sumter could not be held much longer without support. (2) About March 15, Scott and others advised that it would not be possible to relieve Sumter in the time available. (3) Fox then suggested that a small expedition might slip provisions into the fort. (4) The alternative to the Fox plan was to let Sumter fall by default, and Lincoln decided that such a show of weakness was unacceptable. (5) There were two possible results of Fox's plan—first, if the expedition got through, the crisis would be pushed forward in time, giving Lincoln longer to try his policy of forebearance; or, secondly, the Confederates would open fire and probably start a war. (6) To prove Lincoln "manoeuvred" the start of war, it would be necessary to show that he was interested only—or even primarily—in the latter of these results. On the contrary, it seems likely that he wanted the former result, but was willing to risk the latter. This view is much closer to Potter's, than to Current's or Ramsdell's.


179. Clausewitz: 1 On War 66.

180. Probably the best is Randall: 1 Lincoln 351-379.

181. Basler: 4 Lincoln 332; and also, 3 OR 1.0, 68. Robert M. Johnston has concluded: "The [first] call for volunteers
181. (cont.) was clearly a political step; the merest tyro in the art of war could not have described it as a military measure in any serious sense. It was a plank in a popular platform, and unfortunately entailed a second plank to follow." See Johnston's Bull Run, Its Strategy and Tactics (New York, 1913), pp.18-19.

182. Basler: 4 Lincoln 332; and also, 3OR 1.0, 68.

183. Lincoln to Johnson, 24 April 1861, Basler: 4 Lincoln 343.


186. Basler: 4 Lincoln 338-339; and also 3OR 1.0, 89-90.

187. Bates, Diary, p.83; and also Mears: 2 Lincoln 555.

188. Basler: 4 Lincoln 429(n45).

189. 4OR 1.0, 221-222.

190. OR 2.0, 7-21.

191. OR 2.0, 3-6.

192. 4OR 1.0, 223 and 243-244.

193. Basler: 4 Lincoln 353-354; and also 3OR 1.0, 145-146.

194. The discussion of conservative or limited-war strategy of the 19th century, including Jomini's comments, is continued in Chapter Five, below.

3. Scott's Dread, or the First Limited-War Strategy

195. In addition to Keyes, Fifty Years, the general sources drawn upon in this section for Scott and his ideas were: his own, Memoirs of Lieut.-General Scott, LL.D. Written by Himself(2 vols., New York, 1864); and four biographies, arranged from most to least helpful: Charles Winslow Elliott, Winfield Scott, The Soldier and the Man(New York, 1937); Edward D. Mansfield, The Life and Services of General Winfield Scott(New York, 1852); Marcus Wright, General Scott (New York, 1894); and Laura Long, Puss 'n' Feathers, A Life of Winfield T. Scott(New York, 1944). Unfortunately, all of these treat Scott's work in the Civil War very lightly. Of much greater importance than any of the above are the memoirs of his aid Edward D. Townsend, Anecdotes of the Civil War in the United States(New York, 1884).

196. Keyes, Fifty Years, pp.427-428; and Townsend, Anecdotes, p.43 et seq.

198. From "Views" written for President Buchanan, 29 October 1860, Scott: 2 Memoirs 610; and Townsend, Anecdotes, p.252.

199. Scott: 2 Memoirs 610; and Townsend, Anecdotes, p.252; see also, Scott's addition to his "Views" in his letter to Secretary of War John B. Floyd, 30 October 1860, Scott: 2 Memoirs 613 and Townsend, Anecdotes, pp.253-254; and also his letter to Buchanan, 15 December 1860, and again of 28 December, in Scott: 2 Memoirs 616-619 and in Townsend, Anecdotes, pp.254-255.


201. OR 1.0, 201.

202. Scott: 2 Memoirs 611; and Townsend, Anecdotes, p.252. Italics are in the original.


204. Washburne to Lincoln, 17 December 1860, Mearns: 2 Lincoln 345.


207. Mearns: 2 Lincoln 456-457; Scott: 2 Memoirs 628. This phrase appeared in the press and at the time was largely misunderstood. Scott's adjutant later commented: "The famous sentence, "Say to the seceded States, "Wayward sisters, depart in peace,"" has been quoted as if it stood alone, to indicate that General Scott favored secession. This is evidently unfair." Townsend, Anecdotes, p. 6.

208. Mearns: 2 Lincoln 457; Scott: 2 Memoirs 627.

209. Scott offered these options to Lincoln arranged in order—as they were in his eyes—from best to worst: 1. compromise, 2. soft coercion, 3. invasion, and 4. surrender. I have reversed the order for clarity and dramatic effect.


211. OR 1.0, 200.

213. Scott submitted twenty-four of the "Daily Reports" to Lincoln from April 1-May 4, 1861, inclusive. They are published in Mearns: 2 Lincoln 511-603 (passim).

214. Hay, Diaries, p. 11.

215. As previously noted the blockade proclaimed four days later was also part of Lincoln's demonstration. It might seem that in this phase Lincoln had adopted Scott's soft war strategy of the March 3rd letter, although there is no direct evidence that he did so consciously. Incidentally, it is pointless to debate who deserves credit for the idea of the blockade. While it is true that Scott mentions the possibility of blockading Southern ports as early as October 1860, it is unlikely he originated the plan, but that it was simply "in the air"—especially since the idea was also widely discussed during the secession crisis of 1832. T. Harry Williams, in casting about for evidence of the President's "natural genius" as a strategist, awards the credit to Lincoln. He does so, however, without citing the basis for his claim. (T. Williams, Generals, p. 16.)

216. OR 51.1, 369-370; italics are mine. Townsend wrote the original draft of this letter, which he published as edited by Scott in Anecdotes, pp. 260-262. Scott first presented his plan, in brief form, on May 2, in an endorsement on McClellan's letter of April 27, which was submitted to Lincoln. See OR 51.1, 339; and Mearns: 2 Lincoln 600. See also Townsend's comments in Anecdotes, p. 58.

217. OR 51.1, 369-370. All italics in this quotation are mine; they are used to emphasize the impression Scott conveyed that his plan had been to some extent officially approved.


219. Scott to Colonel Carlos A. Waite, 19 March 1861, OR 1.0, 598-599.

220. Townsend (for Scott) to commanding officer of Illinois volunteers, at or near Cairo, Ill., 2 May 1861, OR 52.1, 137.

221. Maurice, Statesmen, p. 63; T. Williams, Americans, pp. 75-76; also Smith: 2 Blair 5. According to Allan Nevins: "Scott's plan was radically defective in concentrating attention on the territory of the Confederacy and the weakening of its people, when the Confederate armies were the true objects of attack....An antagonist is not knocked out by blows on his extremities." (Nevins: 2 Union 151-152.)


224. 27 September 1838; quoted in Wright, Scott, pp. 137-139.


228. Leigh to Edward Mansfield and quoted at length in the latter's biography of Scott, pp. 251-252; Scott reprinted the letter in 1 Memoirs 256.


230. Scott to McClellan, 3 May 1861, OR 51.1, 369.

231. Townsend, Anecdotes, p. 57.

232. Scott to Lincoln, 3 March 1861, Mearns: 2 Lincoln 457; and Scott: 2 Memoirs 627.

233. T. Harry Williams has concluded that: "It was more a diplomatic policy than a plan of strategic action." T. Williams, Generals, p. 18.

234. Townsend quotes Scott as saying "exasperated by attacks." (Anecdotes, p. 56.)

235. Scott to McClellan, 3 May 1861, OR 51.1, 369.

4. Lincoln and the "Fasts"

236. OR 52.1, 147-148, 157-168 and 168.

237. Studies of Lincoln as war director are abundant; see K. Williams, Lincoln and T. Williams, Generals, both passim, which are concerned in their entirety with the topic; see also Maurice, Statesmen, pp. 59-117; and idem, "Lincoln as a Strategist," 7 Forum (1926), 161-169; also Colin R. Ballard, The Military Genius of Abraham Lincoln (repr. ed., New York, 1952); Arthur L. Conger, "President Lincoln as War Statesman," WisHist, Proceedings (Madison, 1917), 106-140; and Francis Vinton Greene, "Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief," 46 SM (1909), 104-115.

238. T. Williams, Generals, p. 18.
239. Message to Congress, 4 July 1861, Basler: 4 Lincoln 431-432.

240. Lincoln's remark was to Francis P. Blair, Sr., in October, 1862; quoted in Smith: 2 Blair 144-145. Used by T. Harry Williams as title for chapter seven in Generals, pp. 147-178.


242. There is an interesting letter on this point from Charles D. Cleveland to Thomas Haines Dudley, 3 December 1862, in the Dudley Collection (CSmH).

243. OR 51.1:370.

244. This headline first appeared in the Tribune June 26, and it ran through July 4.

245. Townsend, Anecdotes, p. 57.

246. OR 2.0:37-44; and Basler: 4 Lincoln 385.


249. This sentence was deleted from Lincoln's famous letter to Greeley, 22 August 1862, Basler: 5 Lincoln 389 (n 2).

250. Basler: 5 Lincoln 388.

251. Sir Frederick Maurice has shrewdly observed: "Certainly the Power which, on entering war, strikes first and strikes quickly obtains great military advantages, but if those advantages are purchased at the price of political dissen- sion at home they may, they probably will, be found to have cost too much." (Maurice, Statesmen, pp. 59-60.)

252. MOS, p. 30.

253. M. Blair to Lincoln, 16 May 1861, Lincoln Papers(DLC).


255. M. Blair to Lincoln, 16 May 1861, Lincoln Papers(DLC).

256. M. Blair to Mass. Gov. John A. Andrew, 11 May 1861, Andrew Papers(NHi); quoted in Nevins: 2 Union 151-152.

257. It might also be noted that Lincoln was under some pressure to employ the three-months militiamen before their terms of enlistment expired. This consideration
257(continued) should have been negligible, however, after his July 4 call for three-year volunteers. (Johnston, Bull Run, pp. 18-19.) But more importantly, there can be no doubt that down to the very eve of Bull Run, Lincoln believed that one swift and decisive blow would still the hot-heads and free Southern Unionists to voluntarily reconvene the Union. (Basler: 4 Lincoln 437 and 444.)

258. Quoted by Irwin McDowell in Testimony, 26 December 1861, in vol. 2 of Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War (Washington, 1863-1865), 35. Hereinafter cited as: CCW.

259. Sources for a study of the Bull Run Campaign are in: OR 2.0:500-574 and 577 et seq., passim; OR 51.1:17-36; 2 CCW 3-251; and Robert Patterson, A Narrative of the Campaign in the Valley of the Shenandoah in 1861 (Philadelphia, 1865). The best study is Johnston, Bull Run; also useful are Dupuy, Military, pp. 219-224; Newton Martin Curtis, From Bull Run to Chancellorsville... (New York, 1906), pp. 38-51; and Charles Andrew Willoughby, Maneuver in War (Harrisburg, Pa., 1939), pp. 5-7.

260. OR 2.0:662 and 664; 2 CCW 35-47; Johnston, Bull Run, pp. 24-29


262. Thayer Papers (NWM); quoted in Dupuy, Military, p. 222.


264. T. Williams, Generals, p. 20; and Maurice, Statesmen, pp. 64-65.


Chapter Three: The Importance of Being McClellan

1. A Man for One Season

266. Both the sedan-chair and the Pathfinder had been suggested by the press, but there is no evidence that Lincoln considered either possibility. McClellan’s trip
266(cont.) to Washington is discussed in more detail, below.

267. There is no historical debate over any of the significant dates in McClellan's life; all have been well established and may be taken from any of the biographies. In this brief summary of McClellan's life, only Myers or Michie is cited unless special information recommends one of the other works. See, Myers, McClellan, pp. 5-6.

268. Quoted in Myers, McClellan, p.6.

269. Addey, McClellan, pp.22-23.

270. Michie, McClellan, p.7.

271. Michie, McClellan, p.12. At graduation McClellan was one year and nine months younger than any of his classmates; his actual academic standing entitled him to be first in the class, but conduct demerits dropped him into second place. (Addey, McClellan, pp.28-29.)

272. Keyes, Fifty Years, pp.440 and 197.

273. Letter of 26 October 1842, Wilkins Coll.(NN). Other references to McClellan in this collection, describing him as both gentleman and "genius", are in letters of 28 August and 9 September 1842; and 10 January 1843.

274. Quoted in Michie, McClellan, p.12.

275. Addey, McClellan, pp.28-29.

276. Michie, McClellan, pp. 14-23. There was a fourth brevet which McClellan declined, because he felt he did not deserve it.


278. Michie, McClellan, pp.24-25.

279. Michie, McClellan, pp.25-47. A brief evaluation of this commission and its professional contribution is in Weigley, Army, pp.68-75.


281. Jacob Dolson Cox, Military Reminiscences of the Civil War(New York, 1900), I, 9; see also, Michie, McClellan, pp. 51-52; and Myers, McClellan, pp.104-106.


284. Michie, McClellan, p. 69.

285. The post-war career is best covered in Myers, McClellan, pp. 466-502.

286. Keyes, Fifty Years, p. 440 et seq.

287. John Russell Young, Around the World with General Grant... (New York, 1879), II, 217.

288. 4 N&W 285.

289. Letter to Wife, 27 July 1861, McClellan Papers (DLC) MOS, p. 82.

290. Keyes, Fifty Years, p. 441.


292. There is the curious possibility that Lincoln did also; Francois Carpenter, Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln (New York, 1866), p. 227-228. (Hereinafter cited as: Carpenter, Lincoln.)

293. MOS, p. 18.

294. Michie, McClellan, p. 41.


296. This is my conclusion in Harsh, "Taken at the Flood."


299. George Ticknor Curtis, Life, Character, and Public Services of General George B. McClellan... (Boston, 1887), p. 8. Curtis had earlier paid tribute to his friend's memory in: McClellan's Last Service to the Republic... (New York, 1886).
301. Letter to Randolph B. Marcy, 5 November 1885, McClellan Papers(DLC). For additional insight into the McClellan-Johnston relationship there are numerous letters of the 1850's scattered through the early volumes of the McClellan Papers(DLC). Especially helpful is Johnston to McClellan, 19 March 1860, McClellan, Jr. Papers(DLC); and George B. McClellan, Jr., "Reminiscences of Geo. B. McClellan and Stonewall Jackson," in RAC(1893), 29-31.

302. On one occasion McClellan, himself, undertook to explain the phenomenon. In the midst of his Jersey campaign of 1876, he visited the Republican stronghold of Camden. Even here "crowds choked the streets to greet him...?" A travelling companion asked him: "What do you do to these people to make them so fond of you?" And McClellan replied: "I don't remember ever to have done more than my duty. A soldier is after all a human being, but then you remember sympathy begets sympathy, and when you like a man he likes you. When I hear the shouts of a crowd like this outside my carriage window, and realize that I am the occasion of it all, I feel as though I were traveling in an unknown world. It's like a dream, and I can scarcely bring myself to a full consciousness that it is real." (Sackett, Trenton, p.154.)

303. George, Jr., left this word-picture: "He was a very handsome man with regular features, grey eyes and bronzed skin. He wore a moustache and short imperial after the manner of French officers of his time. In youth his hair was dark brown, almost black, his beard was sandy. His height was 5 feet 8½ inches and his chest measurement 42 inches. His body was long and his legs short so that on a horse he looked much taller than he was. He had the reputation in his day of being the best rider and fencer in the army. He was very strong, especially in the hands. I have seen him tear a back of cards in two, and still have two quarter dollar pieces that he bent double for me with the fingers of his right hand." McClellan, Jr., Autobiography, p.60. For Prime's similar impressions, see MOS, p.26.

304. Instances are plentiful in McClellan's letters to his wife, which are often like diary entries. Typical is his letter of 11 March 1862, McClellan Papers(DLC) and MOS, pp.178-179; his hard-working, non-observance of Thanksgiving day is also testimony, see letter to wife, 29 November 1861, McClellan Papers(DLC) and not in MOS. His enormous energy was frequently mentioned in the press; for the impression this made on newspapermen, see Margaret Leech, Reveille in Washington, 1860-1865(New York, 1941), p.108; and William Howard Russell, My Diary North and South, ed. Fletcher Pratt(New York, 1954), p.247.
305. According to his son, McClellan's youthful vigor and cheerfulness never faded, Autobiography, pp.48 and 58; see also, Prime's comments in MOS, p.20.


307. McClellan to Wife, 29 November 1861, McClellan Papers (DLC); see also, Leech, Washington, pp.110-124; and MOS, p.174.

308. Myers, McClellan, pp.227-228.

309. McClellan traced his own ancestry, see undated memorandum, McClellan Papers (DLC); see also, Michie, McClellan, pp.1-5; and Myers, McClellan, p.3-5; material on the McClellan's of Scotland has been supplied to the author by Mr. Ian Rae of the National Archives, Edinburgh; who, incidentally, relates that Kirkudbright is pronounced: "ker koo bree."

310. McClellan to his brother, 11 January 1843, McClellan Papers (DLC); quoted in Myers, McClellan, p.12.

311. MOS, p.30.


2. McClellan and Politics

313. McClellan, Jr., Autobiography, p.60.


316. MOS, p.34.


318. On leaving Washington for the peninsula on April 1, 1862, McClellan wrote to his wife: "I feel very glad to get away from that sink of iniquity...." McClellan Papers (DLC); also, MOS, p.306.

319. McClellan to his wife, 31 October 1861 and 11 April 1862, McClellan Papers (DLC); also, MOS, pp.172 and 306.

320. Referring to the Peace Democrats, McClellan wrote to
320(cont.) S.L.M. Barlow, 16 March 1864, that he would not "be made a fool of by them." He added: "If these miserable intriguers think that they can use me for their purposes I will soon show them that they have mistaken their man—I am sick of the whole thing." McClellan Papers (DLC).

321. See the following letters: S.L.M. Barlow to August Belmont, 4 February 1862; Barlow to Colonel H. G. Stebbins, 23 February 1862; all in Barlow Coll. (CSmH). See also Barlow to McClellan, 9 August 1862, McClellan Papers (DLC); and Henry M. Naglee to Judge William D. Kelley, 27 September 1864, Fitz John Porter Papers (DLC).

322. Chase, Diaries, p. 169; MOS, p. 8; and Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson, ed. Howard K. Beale (New York, 1960), III, 675-676.


324. Barlow to McClellan, 9 August 1862, McClellan Papers (DLC).

325. Lincoln to McClellan, 9 May 1862; and again, 21 May, OR 11:3, 155 and 185; McClellan replied, OR 11:3, 185-186.

326. Barlow to McClellan, 17 June 1862, Barlow Coll. (CSmH); and Smith, 2 Blair.

327. MOS, p. 34.

328. Porter, Ohio, p. 170.

329. Myers, McClellan, pp. 433-467; see also, D. C. Birdsell, "McClellan and the Peace Party," 19 CM (1890), 638-639; Earl M. Rogers, "McClellan's Candidacy with the Army," 19 CM (1890), 959; and most importantly, Charles L. Wilson, "McClellan's Changing Views on the Peace Plank of 1864," 38 AHR (1933), 498-505.

330. Myers, McClellan, pp. 468-484; Michie, McClellan, pp. 452-453.

331. Myers, McClellan, pp. 482-488; Steiner, Johnson, pp. 231-232; McClellan, Jr., Autobiography, pp. 55-56.

332. McClellan to Barlow, 13 March 1868, McClellan Papers (DLC).

333. Smith, 2 Blair 420; also, Myers, McClellan, 491-492.

335. Charles D. Cleveland to Thomas H. Dudley, 3 December 1862, Dudley Coll (CUL); Francis Lieber to Henry W. Halleck, 10 September 1864; Lieber to Charles Sumner, 14 September 1864; and Halleck to Lieber, 12 September 1864, Lieber Coll. (CUL). See also, Nevins, 2 Union 230-231 (including n38); C. J. Norse to Ellen McClellan 4 March 1866, McClellan Papers (DLC); Myers, McClellan pp. 374-375; and Carl Schurz, Reminiscences of Carl Schurz (New York, 1907), II, 392-393.

336. McClellan took notice of these stories in his memoirs, only to deny them emphatically, MOS, p.38. As has been previously noted even Nicolay and Hay dismissed the possibility of McClellan's treason, MOS 189-193.


338. Swinton, McClellan, p.3. McClellan's report was first published by the Government as: Letter from the Secretary of the War, Transmitting the Report of Major General George B. McClellan upon the Organization of the Army of the Potomac, and Its Campaigns in Virginia and Maryland, from July 26, 1861, to November 7, 1862, House Ex. Doc. no. 15, 38th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, 1864). McClellan then had it commercially published, with additional materials, under the title: Report on the Organization and Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac: To which is Added an Account of the Campaign in Western Virginia (New York, 1864). These are hereinafter respectively cited as: McClellan, Wash. Report; and McClellan, N.Y. Report. The version published in the OR's (vols. 5.0, 11.1, and 19.1) is an exact copy of the Wash. Report. Original notes and galleys, with corrections, are in Containers 6 and 7 of the 3rd series, McClellan Papers (DLC).

339. This controversial letter was meant by McClellan for Lincoln's eyes only and not for public consumption; see, MOS, p.487-489 (including editor's note); Myers, McClellan, pp.306-311; Curtis, Last Service, pp.10-15; Donald, Lincoln, p.95.

340. McClellan to Charles C. Fulton, 27 May 1863, McClellan Papers (DLC); supported also by n341, following.

341. If McClellan had any significant relationship with Democratic Party leaders, it was not discovered by their biographers. None of the following studies, all of which are competent and based on original sources, including the
341(cont.) manuscript papers of their subjects, give hint of partisan collisions involving McClellan: Katz, Belmont; Lindsey, Cox; Mitchell, Seymour; Nevins, Hewitt; Pleasants, Wood; Steiner, Johnson; Vallandigham, Life. This statement is also supported by the present author's research in manuscript sources, a complete list of which appears in the bibliography, below. Here, special note might be taken of the search for McClellan related materials in the following: the Horatio Seymour Papers, the Civil War Miscellaneous papers, and the Miscellaneous Personal Papers of Fernando Wood, Samuel J. Tilden, Edward Everett and others(NHi); also, the McClellan-Cox Correspondence, and the Miscellaneous Personal Papers of Horatio Seymour, and others(DLC). See also the editorials of the New York Journal of Commerce, 27 February 1862; and the New York Tribune, 12 March 1862, which together indicate the insubstantiality of the contemporary rumors. After McClellan's removal from command, Seymour believed he should keep silent and not strike out at his enemies. He wrote Barlow, asking him to pass this advice along to the General, concluding with the remark: "I do not know him [McClellan] and do not feel at liberty to write to him." Seymour to Barlow, 15 November 1862, Barlow Coll.(CSmH).

342. Hay, Diaries, pp. 217-219. The story reached Hay fifth-hand; did not surface until two and a half years after the event; is not again mentioned by Hay in his diary; and is supported by no other source.

343. Hay, Diaries, p.218; see also, 6 N&H 180, where a much shorter, almost unrecognizable version of the story appears, without documentation. At this same point, Hay implies that McClellan was considering a public repudiation of the Emancipation Proclamation and was prevented only by the advice of William H. Aspinwall. Without attempting a full discussion of this question here (see below, section 3 of this chapter), it will simply be pointed out that Hay cites as his only evidence, McClellan to his wife, 5 October 1862, MOS, p.655. Reference to that letter indicates McClellan was merely considering resignation, not a public statement, and that Hay has quoted grossly out of context.

344. General sources on Barlow and his relationship with McClellan are: 1 DAB 613-615; 3 NCAB 259; Albert V. House, "The Samuel Latham Mitchel Barlow Papers in the Huntington Library," 28 HLG(1965), 341-352. And also, of course, the Barlow and Bacon Colls.(CSmH); and the McClellan Papers (DLC).

not, however at this time correspond regularly with Seymour, Wood, Cox, or Vallandigham.

346. **House, "Barlow," p. 349.**

347. For Barlow's visits see, McClellan to Barlow, 8 November 1861, Barlow to McClellan, 11 November 1861; and Barlow to McClellan, 25 February 1862; all three letters are in the Barlow Coll.(CSmH) and a copy of the first, with minor errors, is in the McClellan Papers(DLC). On 27 February 1862, the New York Tribune published a blistering editorial attack on Barlow, as a Southern sympathizer, to which he responded on February 18, in an open letter "To the Public," published simultaneously in the New York Journal of Commerce, Tribune, Herald, Times, and World. Barlow was denounced by the Tribune, 2 March, and by Harper's Weekly, 15 March 1862. Finally, it is interesting to note that Barlow desired, but did not make a third trip to visit McClellan, writing him on 17 June 1862: "If I had not feared that my presence in your camp would have brought down upon you the abolition press & the leaders of that party, I should have tried to see you last week, when you were unwell. But I have sometimes feared that even my friendship for you had really been of disservice, as it is eminently true that all of that class, except the few who know me, hate me, as the devil is said to, holy water." Barlow Coll.(CSmH)

348. As above noted Barlow and Stanton were close friends and confidants, before the latter joined the Lincoln administration. Just after his first visit to McClellan, Barlow wrote to Stanton: "I have been of course very careful not in any way to undertake to represent McClellan views, in any respect, while the fact that I saw so much of McClellan most effectually closes my mouth as the subject of his movements though in fact I really know nothing." Letter dated 21 November 1861, in Barlow Coll.(CSmH) On the Stanton-Barlow relationship see Benjamin P. Thomas and Harold M. Hyman, *Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln's Secretary of War* (New York, 1862), pp.131, 133, and 141.

349. Barlow to Henry J. Gardner, 26 November 1861; and Barlow to Henry Douglas Bacon, 1 December 1861; and Barlow to McClellan, 12 December 1861; all in Barlow Coll. (CSmH)

350. **MOS, p.35.**

351. Gideon Welles, one of McClellan's sharpest critics, noted in his diary that, although the General was "cautious dilatory, never prepared..." he was also "TOTALLY destitute of partisan zeal..."(Welles: 3 Diary 674.)

352. Dramatic instances of McClellan's impact on civilian crowds is plentifully documented, including Curtis, *McClellan*, pp.13-15; and in William Harrison Beach, *The
352 (cont.) First New York (Lincoln) Cavalry, From April 19, 1861, to July 7, 1863 (Milwaukee, 1902), pp. 312-314.

353. Lindsey, Cox, pp. 49-64.

354. MOS, p. 35.

355. See below, Chapters Four and Five.

356. McClellan to his wife, 30 July 1861, McClellan Papers (DLC); also in MOS, pp. 82-83.

357. Marcy to McClellan, 11 March 1862; McClellan to Marcy, 12 March; Anson Stager to McClellan, 12 March; Dennison to McClellan, 14 March; Marcy to McClellan, 7 May; Seward to McClellan, 15 May; McClellan to Seward, 17 May; Seward to McClellan, 17 May; McClellan to Seward, 18 May; all in the McClellan Papers (DLC). McClellan to Barlow, 23 June 1862, Barlow Coll. (CSM). And also, all in OR 11.3; William Sprague to Stanton, 6 May 1862 (p. 145); Seward to Lincoln, 14 May (p. 170); McClellan to Stanton, 15 May (p. 174); Seward to Stanton, 18 May (pp. 178-179); and William Faxon to G.V. Fox, 18 May (p. 179).

358. On the Keyes letter see: OR 11.1, 13-14; McClellan, N.Y. Report, pp. 165-169; and Keyes, Fifty Years, pp. 442-444. For other instances of lobbying by subordinates, see: Fitz John Porter to Manton Marble, 18 April 1862; and idem, 26 April, both in the Marble Papers (DLC); Henry M. Naglee to Senator’s M. S. Latham and H. M. Rice, 8 May 1862, OR 11.3, 150; and Edwin V. Sumner to John Cochrane, 5 August 1862, OR 11.3, 356.

359. MOS, p. 35. See also McClellan to the elder Blair, June 1864, McClellan Papers (DLC); quoted in Myers, McClellan, p. 435; and, in part, in Wilson, "McClellan," p. 499 n5.

3. A Conservative View of the War

360. MOS, p. 34.

361. MOS, pp. 31-33. Background for an understanding of this aspect of McClellan’s political thinking can be obtained from Walter Hartwell Bennett’s American Theories of Federalism (University, Ala., 1964). Bennett regretably pays little specific attention to the Northern version of states rights, but he does discuss the writings of George Ticknor Curtis on “divided sovereignty,” pp. 160-164. McClellan’s views were close to those of his friend Curtis, who wrote after the General’s death: “I have not known any man who was not specially trained in the philosophy of politics,
361 (cont.) whose views of public and constitutional ques-
tions were so sound and wise as his.” (Curtis, McClellan, p. 22.)

362. The circumstances of the various state offers to
McClellan and his acceptance of the Ohio commission is
discussed in Chapter Four, below, with references to
sources.

363. MOS, pp. 31 and 32.

364. MOS, p. 30.

365. MOS, pp. 31 and 32.

366. MOS, pp. 31 and 32. In regard to the place which such
an interpretation gives McClellan in Civil War histori-
ography, see Pressly, Interpret, pp. 72-73.

367. MOS, p. 31.

368. MOS, pp. 31-32.

369. MOS, p. 32.

370. MOS, p. 33.

371. MOS, p. 37.

372. West Point Orations (New York, 1864), p. 107; and
Hillard, McClellan, p. 389.

373. MOS, p. 35. McClellan frequently used the same or
similar words to express his concept of the war's aims;
for statements while in the army see following chapters;
for the period after his removal from active command, see
McClellan to Charles C. Fulton, 27 May 1863; to James T.
Brady, 11 June 1863; and to the Democratic Central Committee,
8 September 1864; all in McClellan Papers (DLC). See also,
Hurlbert, McClellan, p. 309.

374. Letter of 7 November 1861, OR 5.0, 38.

375. Letter of 8 November 1861, Barlow Coll. (CSMf); copy
in McClellan Papers (DLC).

376. McClellan to Francis Preston Blair, Sr., (no Day)
June 1864, McClellan Papers (DLC).

377. McClellan to Weci, 13 June 1863, Rice, Lincoln
p. XXXV (intro.). McClellan here refers to his procla-
ation in western Virginia, his strategy memorandum of 2
August 1861, and numerous letters, including the famous
one to Lincoln from Harrison's Bar; all of which are
377(cont.) discussed at appropriate places herein, below.

378. MOS, p.35. See also, Chase, Diaries, pp.101-102; Myers, McClellan, p.492; and McClellan to S.S. Cox, 14 July [1864], Madigan Coll. (NN.)


380. Basler: 5 Lincoln 48-49.

381. Basler: 5 Lincoln 49; and MOS, p.33.

382. Letter of [11th?] November 1861, McClellan Papers (DLC). This sentence is omitted in the printed version, MOS, pp.174-175.

383. MOS, p.35.

384. MOS, p.33.

385. Letter of (no day) June 1864, McClellan Papers (DLC).

386. MOS, p.33.

387. Letter of [11th?] November 1861, McClellan Papers (DLC). Two sentences omitted in the printed version (MOS, pp.174-175) are: 1. "I will never be an abolitionist." And, 2. "I will never fight for the abolitionists."

388. MOS, p.33.

389. MOS, p.33; and Trefousse, Wade, 153-155; T. Williams, Radicals, pp. 46-50.

390. MOS, p.34.

391. This passage from McClellan's letter to Barlow, 8 November 1861, Barlow Coll. (CSMr), is frequently quoted in part and out of context—as I myself have done on pp.58(n129) and 151(n375) above. Quoted in full, McClellan's meaning becomes clearer; and it is seen not to be, strictly speaking, a racist statement.

392. Letter of (no day) June 1864, McClellan Papers (DLC).

393. McClellan also confided his sentiments on this delicate subject to Brigadier General John Cochrane of New York, who is an especially valuable witness because of his background. Cochrane was a Democrat, before the war and as Congressman and delegate to the Charleston Convention, he was a firm conservative and advocate of state rights. But he was also the son-in-law of Gerrit Smith, and after Sumter he moved dramatically to the left of most
of his fellow party members. In November 1861, with the secret approval of Simon Cameron, Cochrane publicly advocated the enlistment of Negro troops in the Union army, in a speech before his own regiment that was widely both praised and denounced. In 1863 he was elected Attorney-General of New York on the Union (Republican) platform; and a year later was nominated Vice-President on the abortive radical ticket which sought to replace Lincoln with Fremont. After the war Cochrane joined with the Liberal Republicans who bolted to support Greeley in 1872. (8 MGAB 410; Warner, Generals in Blue, pp.86-87.)

New York Democrats drummed Cochrane out of the party in late 1861; see New York Journal of Commerce, 21 November 1861, and Barlow to Stanton, 27 November 1861, Barlow Coll. (CSmH). Yet on 21 October 1862, Cochrane was described as a "strong friend" of McClellan's and recommended as reliable; see Marcy to Barlow, Barlow Coll. (CSmH).

John Cochrane, American Civil War, Memoirs of Incidents...of the Rebellion (New York, 1879), pp.28-29.

McClellan to William H. Aspinwall, 26 September 1862, McClellan Miscellaneous Coll. (CSmH).

See the following letters of McClellan to his wife: 26 September 1862; 29 September; 5 October; no date, but ca. 28 October; and 31 October; all in McClellan Papers (DLC). None of the pertinent passages of these letters are in the printed versions, except partially in the 5 October letter (MOS, p.655).

On September 30, Fitz John Porter wrote to Manton Marble: "The Proclamation was ridiculed in the army—causing disgust, discontent, and expressions of disloyalty to the views of the administration, amounting, I have heard, to insubordination...." Marble Papers (DLC). See also Ozias Mather Hatch to Joseph Medill, 14 October 1862, Charles Henry Ray Coll. (CSmH).

General Orders, No. 163, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 7 October 1862, OR 19-2, 395-396. For the full story behind McClellan's intentions in publishing this order see, J. Cox, i Reminiscences 359-361; and Cochrane, Memories, p.29; Burnside the third participant in the meeting, apparently left no record; the incident is not mentioned in the authorized biography by Benjamin Perley Poore, The Life and Public Services of Ambrose E. Burnside, Soldier—Citizen—Statesman (Providence, R.I., 1882).

Chase, Diaries, p.171.

Ozias Mather Hatch to Joseph Medill (editor of the Chicago Tribune), 14 March 1862, Ray Coll. (CSmH).
402. Draft numbered 88912, no day September 1864, McClellan Papers (DLC).

403. As previously noted there is no recent adequate study of the War Democracy. The evolving, new image of the party comes primarily from biographies of its leaders (some of which are cited in n136 above) and from studies of state politics (see n132 and n154). Of central importance is Frank Klement's work on the Copperheads in the Middle West; although, of course, it is limited to the radical wing of the party, it helps by contrast to define the moderate majority.


405. Lesser luminaries of the radical wing, now all but forgotten to history, included such men as: Sens. Garrett Davis and Lazarus Powell and Cong. William H. Wadsworth of Ky.; ex-Gov. Thomas H. Seymour of Conn.; Sen. James A. Bayard of Del.; and Cong. George H. Pendleton and Alexander Long of Ohio, Benjamin G. Harris of Md., Daniel Voorhees of Ind., and William H. Richardson of Ill.; and also a number of highly vocal newspaper editors, such as Samuel Medary of the Columbus, O., Crisis. Bayard to Barlow, 6 December 1861, revealed some of the differences between radical and moderate Democrats, Barlow Coll. (CSmH). It is curious and probably unfair that the Peace Democrats have been wholly ignored in accounts of pacifism and non-violence in the United States history, such as Staughton Lynd (ed.), Nonviolence in America: A Documentary History (New York, 1966).

406. Barlow's views on the great political issues of the day are scattered throughout his voluminous ms. coll. at the Huntington Library. Some of its more important and revealing letters, for the period here under consideration, are as follows: to McClellan, 11 November 1861; to Caleb Smith, 23 November; to Bacon, 25 November; to Henry J. Gardner, 26 November; to Belmont, 30 November; to Bacon, 1 December; to Bacon, 22 January 1862; to Sam Ward, 26 March; and to Belmont, 13 May. All in the Barlow Coll. (CSmH). See also, Barlow's letter "To the Public," 28 February 1862, in the Journal of Commerce and other New York newspapers.

406. See Steiner, Johnson, pp.44 and 63; Katz, Belmont, pp.92-115; Belmont, Letters, passim; Wagandt, Maryland, pp.206-207; and Nevins, Hewitt, pp.192-228.

407. See Steiner, Johnson; Katz, Belmont; Mitchell, Seymour; Lindsey, Cox; and Nevins, Hewitt.


410. Hurlbert, McClellan, p306.
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418. See, for example, in Warner, Generals in Blue, p.184 (Grant); p.438(Sheridan); p.442(Sherman); p.316(Meade); p.501(Geo. Thomas); p. 57(Burnside); and p.243(Hooker).

1. Salute to Arms

419. Whitelaw Reid, Ohio in the War...(2 vols., New York and Columbus, 0. 1862-1893), I, 20-21; and Eugene Roseboom, The Civil War Era /In Ohio/, 1850-1872(Columbus, 0., 1944), pp.373-379. Reid's work is rich in detail, but it is written from an intensely partisan viewpoint and must be used with care; his fact is sometimes difficult to separate from his propaganda. Roseboom's briefer work is valuable as an objective antidote.


421. Reid: 1 Ohio 21-24, 25; Roseboom, Ohio, pp.379-380; and Cox: 1 Reminiscences 1-7. Cox read the early pages of his memoirs to the Ohio M.O.L.U.S., and they were later published under the titles "War Preparations in the North" and "McClellan in West Virginia" in 1 B&L 84-98 and 126-148.

422. Dennison to Lincoln, 15 April 1861, 3OR 1.0, 73; see a similar telegram dated 22 April, p.101.

423. 3OR 1.0, 73-104, passim.

424. Reid: 1 Ohio 23-31, 61; Roseboom, Ohio, pp.381, 391; and "Dennison" in 3 NCAB 141.
425. Reid: 1 Ohio 27.

426. Reid: 1 Ohio 25-31; Roseboom, Ohio, pp.381-385. Henry Beebee Carrington published a pamphlet defending his actions in these early days entitled: Ohio Militia and the West Virginia Campaign, 1861... (new ed., Boston, 1904), in which, see especially pp.7-11.

427. Roseboom, Ohio, p.384. The regiments designated the 1st and 2nd Ohio did not reach Washington quickly. The news that they were shunted about in Pennsylvania also caused dissatisfaction in Ohio. See also, Edward T. Downer, "Ohio Troops in the Field," 3CHH(1957), 256-257.

428. Reid: 1 Ohio 29; Roseboom, Ohio, p.381.

429. See letters of Poe to his fiance, Eleannor, dated 18, 19, 29, and 30 April 1861, in the Orlando Metcalf Poe Papers (DLC); also, Reid: 1 Ohio 31; and Cox: 1 Reminiscences 19-20.

430. Carrington, Ohio, p.15.

431. Reid: 1 Ohio 32-33 and 658-660.

432. Dennison had met McClellan at "a railroad convention a year or two before." (Reid: 1 Ohio 32; ) Reid also reports that upon Dennison's first request for an interview, McClellan sent Captain John Pope in his stead. There is no supporting evidence for this story, and, while Pope was in the area (Cox: 1 Reminiscences 20), it seems unlikely he ever acted as McClellan's agent.

433. See postscript in McClellan to Porter, 18 April 1861, John Page Nicholson Coll (CSmH); it is missing from the copy in the Porter Papers (DLC); see n445, below.

434. There are some twenty letters relevant to this point in the Barlow Coll (CSmH), all dated April and early May 1861.

435. Two excellent accounts of Cincinnati during these early days are: Henry Martyn Cist, "Cincinnati with the War Fever, 1861," 14MAH(1885), 138-147; and Charles R. Wilson, "Cincinnati a Southern Outpost in 1860-1861?" 2MVHR(1938), 473-482. Cist was a member of the committee of officers which offered to make McClellan major of the Guthrie Greys. Later, the Greys formed the nucleus of the 6th O.V.I., which asked McClellan to be its colonel, but by this time he had accepted the higher rank from Dennison. (Cist, "Cincinnati," p.145.)

436. 4MAH 281-282; 3OR 1.0, 97-98; Reid: 1 Ohio 32-33; and Myers, McClellan, pp.32-33.
437. Reid: 1 Ohio 34(note); where a particularly silly version of the second rumor is quoted at length from the Boston Commonwealth (no date given).

438. On 13 May 1861, Barlow wrote to McClellan that the owners had decided to insist upon Bacon's resignation, McClellan Papers(DLC).

439. See Myers, McClellan, pp.111-116; and letters from J.E. Johnston to McClellan, dated 7 and 29 April 1858, McClellan Papers(DLC).

440. Porter to McClellan, 15 April 1861, McClellan Papers (DLC). The men mentioned, all of whom McClellan knew well, are William Tecumseh Sherman, Ambrose E. Burnside, Jefferson Davis, Braxton Bragg, and Pierre G. T. Beauregard.

441. William Farrar Smith to McClellan, 15 April 1861, McClellan Papers(DLC).

442. The lost telegram has still not been found, but its story is given in a subsequent message from Curtin, dated April 24, which also had been lost for many years. It was found by the author along with many other valuable telegrams in the Records of United States Army Continental Commands (RG 393), in the National Archives. Hereinafter this source will be cited as: Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393).

443. McClellan to his wife, 18 April 1861; copy in McClellan's hand in the McClellan, Jr., Papers(DLC).

444. It is likely McClellan received a second wire from his brother which specifically mentioned the chief command in Pennsylvania, but no copy exists; the telegram from Patterson has not been found either; but McClellan to Patterson, 18 April... is obviously a reply; the latter is in the McClellan Miscellaneous Coll.(CSmH).

445. McClellan students have previously cited the copy of this telegram from McClellan to Porter, 18 April 1861, which is to be found in the Porter Papers(DLC), with a note in Porter's hand attesting to its authenticity. The author discovered the original in the Nicholson Coll. (CSmH), with a brief postscript that is not in the copy.

446. McClellan no longer possessed all the documents from this period, when he wrote his memoirs; and his remarks reflect his somewhat confused recollections, Mos, pp.40-41.


449. See telegrams to McClellan from Curtin, 23 and 24 April; from W. H. Clement, 23 April; and from John McClellan
449. (cont.) and Edward O. Bidwell, 24 April; all in the Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393). Also see, Cox: 1 Reminiscences 11.

450. Cox: 1 Reminiscences 9-11; MOS, pp. 41-44; McClellan N.Y. Report, pp. 6-7. McClellan had lost his copy of this letter to Scott and had to reconstruct it from memory. The original was later published in the addenda volume of the Official Records (see OR 51.1, 333-334).

451. The next morning, after surveying a nearly empty arsenal, McClellan remarked to Cox: "A fine stock of munitions on which to begin a great war." (Cox: 1 Reminiscences 10.)

452. All the details of this journey are taken from Aaron F. Perry, "A Chapter in Interstate Diplomacy," MOLLUS; 3 Ohio 333-363.

2. Schooling in Ohio and the Borderlands

453. John Symington to McClellan, 24 April; and Alfred Mordecai to McClellan, 25 April; both in the Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393).

454. George G. Meade to McClellan, 25 April; two telegrams from Poe to McClellan, 26 and 27 April, Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393); McClellan to Scott, 23 April, OR 51.1, 334. Letters of Poe to his wife, Eleanor, dated, 29 and 30 April and 1 May, Poe Papers (DLC). Cox: 1 Reminiscences 17-20; and McClellan, N.Y. Report, pp. 35-36. U.S. Grant travelled to Cincinnati to volunteer for McClellan's staff, but he was unable to find the fast moving General and returned to Illinois; Young: 2 Grant 213-215 and Grant, Personal Memoirs... (2 vols., New York, 1885), I, 241.

455. "Allen" to McClellan, 26, 28, and 29 April, Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393); Pinkerton to McClellan, 28 April, McClellan Papers (DLC); Dennison to McClellan, 10 May, Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393). See also, Allan Pinkerton, The Spy of the Rebellion... (New York, 1883), pp. 140-141 and 151-155; Richard Wilmer Rowan, The Story of the Secret Service (New York, 1937), pp. 276-277; and James D. Horan and Howard Swiggert, The Pinkerton Story (New York, 1951), pp. 94-95.

In addition to the sources cited in notes 456–460, above, some of McClellan's activities during this first week are revealed in the telegrams he received. The following, arranged by date and sender, are all from the Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393): April 24: two from Seth Williams. April 25: from Gordon Granger; Rosserans; Symington; and E. F. Fuller; also McClellan to Dennison. April 26: from E. Lippincott; Dickerson; George G. Waggaman. April 27: from Fuller; two from Lippincott; two from Rosserans; and two from E. W. Woodward. April 28: from Robert Patterson Rosserans; and two from Dennison. April 29: from Peter J. Sullivan; G. T. Austin; and four from Dennison. April 30: from Charles Whittlesey; and four from Dennison. Also see, in the McClellan Papers (DLC); General Orders No. 1, Headquarters Ohio Volunteer Militia, 25 April; and McClellan's letter to Robert Patterson, 29 April.

Poe to his wife, Eleanor, 1 May, Poe Papers (DLC).

General Order No. 14, A.G.O., OR 52.1, 137.

OR 51.1, 376; Reid: 1 Ohio 33; Addey, McClellan, p. 256.

General Order No. 19, A.G.O., OR 2.0, 633.

General Order No. 30, A.G.O., OR 3.0, 384.

Reid: 1 Ohio 33-34; Dennison to McClellan, 8 May, Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393).


See Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1891-1895), plates 162, 163 and 164; also various orders establishing the departments and communications between the commanders and Scott in vols. 2.0 and 51.1 of the OR's and in the Records of the Adjutant General's Office (DNA-RG 94) and the Records of the Headquarters of the Army (DNA-RG 108).

Scott to Dennison, 20 May, McClellan Papers (DLC). And in OR 51.1, see: Scott to McClellan, 3 May (pp. 369-370); Townsend to McClellan, 15 May (pp. 379-380); and Scott to McClellan, 21 May (pp. 386-387). Also see, Hurlbert, McClellan, pp. 87, 88, 95 and 309.

McClellan's work during this period may be traced

469. Republican Jacob Cox, not always friendly to McClellan, commented: "Where everybody had to learn a new business, it would have been miraculous if grave errors had not frequently occurred. Looking back at it, the wonder is that the blunders and mishaps had not been tenfold more numerous than they were. By the middle of May the confusion had given way to reasonable system..." ("Preparations," p.96.)

470. OR 51.1, 388; where also is found Cameron's famous reply: "The Lord's will be done." For Rosecrans's background information on this exchange, see his telegram to McClellan, 29 May, Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393); and letter of 6 June, McClellan Papers (DLC).

471. See Chase to McClellan, 30 November 1861, McClellan Papers (DLC).

472. McClellan, New York Report, p.11. See also, Donn Platt to McClellan, 26 April; Dennison to McClellan, 29, 30(2) April, and 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 17 and 19 May; G. Waggener to McClellan, three on 8 May; W. J. Flagg to McClellan, 9 May; Morton to McClellan, 13 and 14 May; Yates to McClellan, 13 and 14 May; Stager to McClellan, 14 May; even Curtis offered three Pennsylvania regiments on 20 May; all in Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393).

473. Porter, Ohio, pp.78-79.


475. OR 51.1, 333-334.

476. Dennison to McClellan, 6 May, McClellan Papers (DLC); Stager to McClellan, 20 May, Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393); McClellan to Townsend, 4 and 10 May, OR 51.1, 371 and 374; also, McClellan, N.Y. Report, pp.9-12.
477. McClellan to Dennison, 611 May, Reid: 1 Ohio 47; also, Yates to McClellan, 7, 8, and 13 May; B.M. Prentiss to McClellan, 12 May; S. Williams to McClellan, 17 May; E.D.L. Sweet to McClellan, 18 May; Dennison to McClellan, 12, 13, 18 and 21 May; all in Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393).

478. OR 52.1, 146-147; Reid: 1 Ohio 38; McClellan to Cameron, 24 May, OR 52.1, 146; and Dennison to McClellan, 22 May, Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393).

479. OR 52.1, 147-148.

480. OR 51.1, 371 and 374; also, McClellan, N.Y. Report, pp.11-12.

481. Parrish, Missouri, pp.15-32 and 48-49; Smith, Borderland, pp.221-262. On Harney see: 5 NCAB 288; and Warner, Generals in Blue, pp.208-209.

482. For McClellan's connection with Missouri affairs, see: McClellan to Benham, 16 and 23 May, in the Benham-MoNeil family Papers (DLC). Also: Lyon to McClellan, 9 and 12 May; Harney to McClellan, 14 and 20 May; S. Williams, 18, 21, 25 and 27 May; Benham to McClellan, 15, 16, 17, 18(2), 19, 20(3), 22 and 23 May; Prentiss to McClellan, 25 May; all in the Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393). And in OR 3.0, see: pp.11-12, 12-14, 376-377, 384, 385, 390, 391, 400 and 406. It is likely McClellan paid a visit to St. Louis around the 19th of June (p.385).

483. General Orders, No. 27, A.G.O., OR 4.0, 254 (note).

484. OR 52.1, 156-157; Warner, Generals in Blue, pp.7-8.


487. McClellan to T.C. English, 7 February; McClellan to Scott, 5 June; Marcy to McClellan, 19 June; and Memorandum to McClellan signed "D", June 1861; all in McClellan Papers (DLC).

488. OR 51.1, 375.
489. OR 52:1, 156.

490. McClellan to Scott, 5 June, McClellan Papers (DLC).

491. McClellan to T.C. English, 7 February 1861, McClellan Papers (DLC).

492. OR, 52:1, 161.

493. MOS, pp. 49, 58-99; OR 2:1, 674-675; OR 52:1, 182-183; and 185-184; Townsend, Anecdotes, pp. 35-36; Myers, McClellan, pp. 177-182; Smith, Borderland, pp. 280-282; Coulter, Kentucky, pp. 98-99; and Arndt M. Stickles, Simon Bolivar Buckner: Borderland Knight (Chapel Hill, 1940), pp. 58-59. Stickles does not settle the "who-said-what" in this affair; but he does maintain that the Buckner-McClellan agreement quieted fears of Governor Isham G. Harris of Tennessee and probably forestalled an early invasion of Kentucky from the south.

494. OR 51:1, 381; see also, McClellan to Scott, 10 May, OR 51:1, 380-381.

495. OR 51:1, 338-339.

496. OR 51:1 381.

3. Testing in Western Virginia


498. McClellan to Scott, 27 April, OR 51:1, 338-339; for Scott's reply see, May 3, OR 51:1, 369-370.

499. McClellan to Scott, 27 April, OR, 51:1, 338-339; McClellan, N.Y. Report, pp. 10-11; MOS, p. 44.


501. McClellan, N.Y. Report, pp. 11-12 and 20-21; MOS, pp. 49-50; also see William Rule, "The Loyalists of Tennessee in the Late War," MOLLUS, 2 Ohio 180-204. For evidence of McClellan's continuing interest in east Tennessee see his letters to Buell, 7 November 1861 (OR 5:0, 38); and 6 January 1862 (OR 7:10, 531).

502. At least McClellan thought "in Kentucky the struggle was much more bitter than in Western Virginia." (N.Y. Report, p. 9) The general sources used for this account of western Virginia are: Charles H. Ambler, Francis H. Pierpont, Union War Governor of Virginia and Father of West Virginia (Chapel Hill, 1937); Roy Watson Curry, "The Newspaper Press and the Civil War in West Virginia," WVAH (1945), 225-264; John J.
503: (cont.) Davis, "The Mind of a Copperhead: Letters of John J. Davis on the Secession Crisis and Statehood Politics in Western Virginia, 1860-1862," ed. F. Gerald Ham, 24 May (1963), 93-109; Theodore F. Lang, Loyal West Virginia... (Baltimore, 1895); Boyd B. Stutler, West Virginia in the Civil War (Charleston, W. Va., 1963); William Patrick Willey, An Inside View of the Formation of the State of West Virginia... (Wheeling, W. Va., 1901); and Smith, Borderland, pp. 185-220.

503: Carlile to McClellan, 30 May, 5 and 7 June, McClellan Papers (DLC). Carlile visited McClellan at his home in Cincinnati on 27 May, Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393). For a brief biography of Carlile see, Willey, West Virginia, pp. 207-210.

504: Poe to His wife, 2, 7, and 12 May, Poe Papers (DLC). Jesse S. Norton to McClellan, 31 May; McClellan Papers (DLC). Poe to McClellan, 9 May; and "unsigned" to McClellan, 26 May; both in the Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393). Also: McClellan to Scott, 4 May, OR 51.1, 370-371; and McClellan to Townsend, 14, 17 and 21 May, OR 51.1, 377-378, 380-381 and 383-386. McClellan, N.Y. Report, p. 12.

505: Dennison to McClellan, 11 May, Reid; 1 Ohio 47. Dennison to McClellan, 18 May, Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393). Dennison asked Scott to order troops into western Virginia as early as May 20. Scott replied: "The matters to which your excellency's telegram of this date refer...are within the competency of General McClellan, to whom please refer." McClellan Papers (DLC).

506: McClellan, N.Y. Report, p. 12. McClellan's early preparation for this event is covered in 507. Here, see also, Ambler, Pierpont, pp. 86-95; Stutler, West Virginia, pp. 11-12; Smith, Borderland, pp. 192-376.

507: McClellan, N.Y. Report, p. 12. For McClellan's early preparation for the invasion see: T.A. Myers to McClellan, 11 May, Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393); also, McClellan to Scott, 4 and 10 May, OR 51.1, 370-371 and 374-376.

508: Carlile to Dennison and McClellan, 19 May; Dennison to McClellan, 21 May, Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393). Scott to McClellan, 24 May, OR 2.0, 648; Also, McClellan, N.Y. Report, p. 12-13; and Ambler, Pierpont, pp. 91-92.

509: McClellan says he received the telegrams from Scott and Cameron on the 24th, N.Y. Report, p. 12-13, but the Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393), records three wires from Scott on the 24th and one from Cameron on the 25th.


511. The story of the bridges and events leading to their destruction are in: Stager to McClellan, 22 May; I.F. Stevens to McClellan, 22 May; B. Gates to McClellan, 25 May; two
511. (cont.) unsigned wires to McClellan, 26 May; B.F. Kelley to McClellan, 26 May; Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393).


513. There are a large number of messages from Colonels J. Irvine, B.F. Kelley, James B. Steedman and others, dated 26, 27 May and later, which give information on this campaign, Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393). Also see: McClellan to Lincoln, 30 May, Lincoln Papers (DLC); McClellan to Townsend, 27 and 30 May, 3 and 10 June, OR 2.0, 44-45, 49-50, 64-65, 65-66; T.A. Morris to McClellan, 7 June, OR 2.0, 66-68; Confederate documents are published in OR 2.0, 51-52, 68-74; finally, see, McClellan, N.Y. Report, pp.14-15. Good recollections are Cox: 1 Reminiscences 42-45; and Charles J. Rawling, History of the First Regiment Virginia Infantry... (Philadelphia, 1887). Phil Conley has written a brief study, "The First Land Battle of the Civil War," 20WVaH (1959), 20-23.

514. Smith, Borderland, pp.203-205; Rawling, 1st Va., pp.20-22; Lang, West Virginia, pp. 27-32.

515. OR 2.0, 45-48.

516. OR 2.0, 49; see also p. 46; and McClellan, N.Y. Report pp. 16-17; and MOS, pp. 52-53.

517. OR 2.0, 48-49; McClellan, N.Y. Report, pp.15-16; MOS, pp.50-51.

518. Cox: 1 Reminiscences 57. See also: T. Williams, Generals, p.28; and Russell, Diary, p.134.

519. McClellan to Lincoln, 30 May, Lincoln Papers (DLC); F.W. Lander to McClellan, 31 May, Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393); Gallipolis, W. Va., Journal, 6 June, clippings in the McClellan Papers (DLC); McClellan to Townsend, 30 May, OR 2.0, 49-50; Hurlbert, McClellan, p.100; and Lang, West Virginia, p.41.

520. Lincoln Papers (DLC); published in Mearns: 2 Lincoln 625.

521. McClellan, N.Y. Report, p.17. On June 23, McClellan issued a proclamation "To the Inhabitants of Western Virginia" (pp.21-22); and on June 25, "To the Soldiers of the Army of the West"(pp.22-23).

522. McClellan, N.Y. Report, pp.20-21. No documentary evidence contradicting McClellan's word has been found in the Records of the Office of the Secretary of War (DNA-RG 107); Adjutant-General's Office (DNA-RG 94); Headquarters of the Army (DNA-RG 108); the Ohio Telegram Book (DNA-RG 393); the McClellan Papers (DLC); the Official Records; or the sources describing the planning and execution of the First Bull Run campaign given in n259, above; also see, Robert Patterson, A Narrative
523. McClellan to Townsend, 1 and 11 June, OR 2.0, 656657 and 674; McClellan, N.Y. Report, pp. 18-21; and Cox: 1 Reminiscences 44-47.

524. There ample sources for a detailed study of the second West Virginia campaign, which the expanded version of this paper will attempt; see: several hundred documents dealing with the opening phase (thru June 19) in the Ohio Telegram Book (DNA RG 393); several thousand letters and reports in ser. I (vols. 13-19), ser. II (vols. 7-8), and ser. III (vols. 8-9), in the McClellan Papers (DLC); and twenty-four letters from Poe to his wife (dated 1 June-16 July), Poe Papers (DLC). For published reports and documents see: OR 2.0, 194-292 and correspondence passim later in the volume; and OR 51.1, 8-17 and correspondence passim late in the volume. First hand accounts include: 6 CCW 1-8 (sep. pag.); McClellan, N.Y. Report, pp. 128-137; Rawling, Ist Va., pp. 28-32; Charles W. Hill, Comments on Major Gen. McClellan's Account of His West Virginia Campaign (n.p., n.d.); Henry W. Benham, Recollection of the West Virginia Campaign (Boston, 1873); Judson N. Cross, "The Campaign of West Virginia in 1861," MOLLUS: 2 Minn. 146-172; E.R. Montfort, "From Crawford to McDowell through Tygart's Valley," MOLLUS: 2 Ohio 1-23; John Seatty, Memoirs of a Volunteer, 1861-1865, ed. Harvey S. Ford (New York, 1945), pp. 17-35; and Thomas Francis Galwey, The Valiant Hour... ed. Wilbur S. Nye (Harrisburg, Pa., 1961), pp. 3-9. Studies include: Reid: 1 Ohio 45-51; Thomas Harry Williams, Hayes of the Twenty-Third: The Civil War Volunteer Officer (New York, 1965), pp. 39-75; Robert B. Boehm, "The Battle of Rich Mountain, July 11, 1861," 20VWaH (1959), 5-15; and Dallies B. Shaffer, "Rich Mountain, Revisited," 28VWaH (1967), 16-34.

525. McClellan to Scott, 28 June, OR 2.0, 14.

526. McClellan to Scott, 14 July, OR 2.0, 204.

527. Wise to Lee, 1 August, OR 2.0, 1012.

528. Scott to McClellan, 13 July, OR 2.0, 204.


531. See in OR 2.0 the following: July 21, two telegrams from Scott to McClellan (pp. 746 and 749), one from McClellan to Scott (p. 752); July 22, two from Scott to McClellan (pp. 752-753 and 755), and Thomas to McClellan (p. 753). Also see, Townsend, Anecdotes, p. 62.
532. Addey, McClellan, pp. 255-256; 6 CCW 8; and McClellan to Rosecrans, 26 July, McClellan Papers (DLC).

533. T. Williams, Generals, p. 26; Addey, McClellan, pp. 255-256; and, Anon, McClellan, pp. 35-36.

Chapter Five: Inside McClellan's Strategy

1. Vagaries of Command

534. General Orders, No. 47, A.G.O., 25 July 1861, OR 2:0, 763. The same orders added slightly to several other departments. It is revealing of the situation at the time that when McClellan first received word to come to Washington, he assumed he was to march with his army to relieve the capital; only after further communication did he realize that he alone was to come for reassignment to a new command; see the sources cited in n531, above.

535. Nor was McClellan called to command a larger army; at least at first, there were no more than 50,000 troops about Washington, less than the number in the Department of the Ohio.


537. In the projected expansion of the present paper, an entire chapter will be devoted to McClellan's organization of the Union forces in the east, especially, the creation of the Army of the Potomac. In addition to the works cited in n536, above, the most important sources for that chapter (as they are now known) and which have been surveyed to substantiate the statements made in the text include: GENERAL: William Swinton, Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac... (New York, 1866); Francois Amasa Walker, History of the Second Army Corps... (New York, 1896). ADMINISTRATION: Charles Ellet, The Army of the Potomac and Its Mismanagement... (Washington, 1861); Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Regular and Volunteer Officers," 14 AM(1864), 348-357; Samuel R. Kamm, The Civil War Career of Thomas A. Scott (Philadelphia, 1940); Fred Albert Shannon, The Organization and Administration of the Union Army, 1861-1865 (2 vols., Cleveland, 1928). ARTILLERY: John Gross Barnard and William F. Barry, Report of the Engineer and Artillery
Operations of the Army of the Potomac... (New York, 1863); John Gibbon, Personal Recollections of the Civil War (New York, 1928); Lawman: Loan Naiswald, Grape and Cannon: the Story of the Field Artillery of the Army of the Potomac (New York, 1960); Charles G. Wainwright, A Diary of Battle... (ed. Allan Nevins, New York, 1962). CAVALRY: William Harrison Beach, The First New York (Lincoln) Cavalry... (Milwaukee, 1902); Walter Kemper, The Early Days of Our Cavalry in the Army of the Potomac. MOLLUS; 3 Wisconsin 60-89; Charles Dudley Rhodes, History of the Cavalry of the Army of the Potomac... (Kansas City, Mo., 1900). QUARTERMASTER: A. B. Warfield, The Quartermaster's Department, 1861-1864, 8 QMR (1928), 43-46; Russell Frank Weigley, Quartermaster General of the Union Army: A Biography of H. C. Heitz (New York, 1954). MEDICAL CORPS: George Worthington Adams, Doctors in Blue... (New York, 1952); Courtney R. Hall, Lessons of the War Between the States, pp. 72-94 in History of American Medicine: A Symposium (ed. Felix Ibanez, New York, 1959); Jonathan Letterman, Medical Recollections of the Army of the Potomac (New York, 1865); PROVOST MARSHALL: Marsena Rudolph Patrick, Inside Lincoln's Army: The Diary of... (ed. David S. Sparks, New York, 1964). In addition, the manuscript collections of the following persons, all located in the Library of Congress, are rich, untapped sources for a study of the organization and administration of the Union Army: Alexander Dallas Bucy; Nathaniel Prentiss Banks; William Buel Franklin; Henry Wager Halleck; James Allen Hardie; Samuel Peter Heintzelman; Henry Jackson Hunt; Philip Kearny; George Erinton McClellan; Orlando Metal; Poe; and Fitz John Porter. And finally, in the National Archives the Records of the A.G.O. (RG 94); U.S. Army Commands (RG 98); and U.S. Army Continental Commands (RG 98).

538. Here, of course, I am breaking sharply with the customary interpretation, which has been stated by T. Harry Williams, as follows: "He had everything reversed. Instead of strategy being an instrument to accomplish national policy, policy was to serve strategy. And George B. McClellan rather than Abraham Lincoln should determine the main outlines of both." (T. Williams, McClellan, pp. 30-31.) There simply can be no doubt, however, that McClellan did understand what his role in the hierarchy should be; see General Orders, No. 163, Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, issued to the Army of 7 October 1862, OR 19.2, 395.

539. McClellan to his wife, 27 July 1861, McClellan Papers (DLC); published in part, MOS, p. 82.

540. McClellan to his wife, 30 July 1861, McClellan Papers (DLC); published in part, MOS, p. 83.

541. For the correspondence published for the period 22 July—1 November 1861, and the marked decline therein of
541. (cont.) Scott's activity survey the following: OR 2.0, 752-770 and OR 5.0, 552-639; OR 3.0, 405-559; OR 4.0, 61-74; OR 4.0, 233-327; OR 4.0, 600-627; OR 1.0, 439-442 and OR 6.0, 168-189; OR 6.0, 655-672; and OR 51.1, 423-508 and 51.2, 185-197.

542. Townsend, Anecdotes, pp.60-63; also see the following letters from McClellan to his wife, McClellan Papers(DLC) and published in part in MOS: 27 July(p.82); 2 Aug.(p.83); 8 Aug.(p.84); 9 Aug.(p.85); 16 Aug.(pp.87-88); 27 Sept. (p.91); 6 Oct.(p.158); ca16 Oct.(p.170); 19 Oct.(p.170); 26 Oct.(pp.171-172); and 3 Nov.(p.173-174). Also see McClellan's brief account of his conflict with Scott in MOS, pp.113-114.

543. This is one conclusion that can be drawn from McClellan's letters to his wife, especially ones such as that dated ca16 October 1861, McClellan Papers(DLC); and MOS, p.170.

544. Despite their differences, McClellan continued to hold Scott in high respect, as is evident in the moving eulogies in his letter to Ellen, 3 November 1861, McClellan Papers(DLC) and MOS, pp.173-174; his annual report to the Secretary of War, McClellan Papers(DLC); and in his General Orders, No. 19, Headquarters of the Army, 1 November 1861, 3OR 1.0, 613-614; and Townsend, Anecdotes, pp.66-67. On at least three later occasions, McClellan courteously sent information to Scott in his retirement at West Point which would allow him to keep better abreast of events than simply reading the newspapers; see McClellan to Scott, 11 April and 4 May 1862, McClellan Papers(DLC), both long and detailed letters; and the telegram sent by McClellan after the battle of South Mountain, 15 September, OR 19.2, 295.

545. To trace Cameron's activities through his correspondence, see the references in n541, above, for Union correspondence in series one of the OR's. To which should be added: 3OR 1.0, 63-612. Also see, Bradley, Cameron, p.189-204; and specifically Cameron's plea to McClellan for guidance in the letter of 7 September 1861, MOS, p.105.

546. The pertinent portion of that Act is quoted in Huntington, Soldier, p.209.

547. Weigley, Army, pp.165-166; this subject is treated at greater length in what is probably the finest book on its topic: C. Joseph Bernardo and Eugene H. Bacon, American Military Policy, Its Development since 1775(Harrisburg, Pa., 1961), pp.214-216 and 251-256.

548. See, Fragment of a Memorandum, ca. November 1862, in the Charles Graham Halpine Coll.(CSM); Bernardo, Policy, pp.252-253.

549. Russell, Diary, p.246; McClellan to wife, 16 October
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549: (cont.) and ca. 25 November 1861, McClellan Papers (DLC) and in part in MOS, pp. 170 and 176–177; and Townsend, Anecdotes, pp. 63–54.


551: In writing this I discount the document penned by Lincoln on or about 1 October 1861, captioned: "Memorandum for a Plan of Campaign"; it is really little more than a summary of the current positions of Federal forces; and to the extent that it does discuss strategy, largely reflects the ideas which McClellan had given the President on August 2; its most revealing feature is its shallowness; see Basler: 4 Lincoln 544–545. For a contrary opinion, praising Lincoln as War director in eulogistic terms, see: Thomas Robson Hay, "President Lincoln and the Army of the Potomac," 10 Gar, 1926, 277–301.

552: T. Harry Williams has written: "The line between policy and strategy was dimly drawn; just as Lincoln believed he was capable of making strategy, so generals thought they were qualified to form policy." (See T. Williams, Generals, p. 28). However, after Bull Run and for the remainder of 1861 the President was doing neither.


554: Maurice, Statesmen, p. 77.

2. Strategic Assumptions

555: This Memorandum was first published, under the incorrect date August 4, in McClellan’s Washington Report, pp. 3–5; N.Y. Report, pp. 39–43; and in OR 5.0, 6–8. It also appears in MOS, pp. 101–105. An abstract outline and a final draft, both in McClellan’s hand, may be found in the McClellan Papers (DLC).

556: This is from another important strategy document, McClellan’s letter to Cameron, dated "latter part of October," 1861 and found in OR 5.0, 9–11.

557: Quoted in Myers, McClellan, p. 492.


559: McClellan to Barlow, 8 November 1861, Barlow Coll. (CSMI); copy in unknown hand in McClellan Papers (DLC).

560: The letter dated "latter part of October," OR 5.0, 11.

562. See Archer Jones, Confederate Strategy; Vandiver's "Jefferson Davis" and Rebel Brass, all cited in n114, above. Substantially the same view is taken in William Edward Dodd, Jefferson Davis (New York, 1907); Nathaniel Wright Stephenson, The Day of the Confederacy... (New Haven, 1919); and Frank Everson Vandiver, Basic History of the Confederacy (Princeton, 1962).

563. See n81 and n455, above. None of the current works on Civil War G-2 is satisfactory, and it will be necessary in the expanded version of this paper to devote a chapter or part of one to the evolution of Federal intelligence gathering. There is an abundance of materials in the McClellan and Pinkerton Papers (DLC) and in the National Archives.

564. McClellan to James T. Brady, 11 June 1863; and to Charles C. Fulton, 27 May 1863, McClellan Papers (DLC).

565. From the Memorandum, OR 5 0, 6 and 8; or MOS, pp. 101 and 105.

566. Annual Report of the Commanding General, U.S.A., to the Secretary of War, ca. 30 November 1861, McClellan Papers (DLC).

567. Lincoln first raised this pointed question with McDowell in the "you are all green" remark discussed in Chapter Two, above; he did so again with McClellan several times, including his famous letter of 13 October 1862, Basler, 5 Lincoln 460.


569. Good discussions of the influence of Jomini on Southern strategy are given in Archer Jones, Confederate Strategy, pp. 33-36; and Vandiver, "Jefferson Davis." Also see: Jefferson Davis, Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government (2 vols., New York, 1881), II, 132-133; and Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters and Speeches, ed. Dunbar Rowland (10 vols., Jackson, Miss., 1923), V, 132-133. A less perceptive discussion, marred by carelessness in its military history, is David Donald's "Refighting the Civil War," in Lincoln Reconsidered, pp. 82-102.

570. Maurice, Statesmen, pp. 56-57. The standard work on Lee, which as it is in nearly all other points, is excellent on his strategy, is Douglas Southall Freeman, R. E. Lee: A Biography (4 vols., New York, 1934-1935); and Charles P. Howland treats the same topic with less insight in "The Generalship of Robert E. Lee," in Grant, Lee, etc., ed.
570. (cont.) McWhiney, pp. 31-71. And on Jackson, see: Frank Everson Vandiver, Mighty Stonewall (New York, 1957); and George Francis Robert Henderson, Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War (2 vols., London and New York, 1898).

571. An examination of Lee's use of the defensive-offensive, particularly in the Maryland Campaign of 1862, is given in Harsh, "Taken at the Flood."

572. The major exception would be the Maryland Campaign of 1862, where McClellan's object and hence his conduct was quite different; see, Harsh, "Taken at the Flood." McClellan called his operations in that campaign "defensive-offensive"; see MOS, p. 642.

573. From statement of Major-General Don Carlos Buell in Review of the Evidence before His Military Commission, 5 May 1865, OR 26:1, 51.

574. Memorandum of 2 August, OR 5:0, 6-8 or MOS, pp. 101-105; and letter to Cameron, late October, OR 5:0, 9-11.

575. McClellan to Barlow, 8 November 1861, Barlow Coll. (CSM).

576. This, of course, is the main thrust of McClellan's famous "Harrison Bar Letter" to Lincoln, 7 July 1862, MOS, pp. 487-489.

577. McClellan to Stanton, 3 February 1862, OR 5:0, 42-45; and again on 19 March, OR 5:0, 57-58.


579. Mahan, Treatise, p. 31.

580. McClellan to Halleck, 1 August 1862, OR 11:3, 345-346. This virtually a second Harrison's Bar letter.

581. From McClellan's Proclamation to the Soldiers of the Army of the Potomac, 14 March 1862; a printed copy of this circular is in the Barlow Coll. (CSM); and it is printed in Adley, McClellan, p. 271. See n 584, below.

582. Starke to Barlow, 13 April 1862, Barlow Coll. (CSM). See also the orders Stanton issued to the army shortly after becoming Secretary of War, OR 7:0, 102.

583. Blair to McClellan, 12 April 1862, Smith 2 Blair 141.

584. The same is true of McClellan's delight in taking Manassas "with the loss of but one life," see his letter to Barlow, 16 March, Barlow Coll. (CSM); copy in McClellan Papers (DLC).

585. Hurlbert, McClellan, p. 227; see also, Bates, Diary,
585. (cont.) p. 254; McClellan to Lincoln, 23 April 1862, Lincoln Papers (DLC); typescript in the McClellan Papers (DLC); and McClellan to Burnside, 21 May, OR 9.0, 392.

586. E. Scott, "McClellan," p. 3.

587. McClellan to Cameron, late October 1861, OR 5.0, 11, where McClellan uses the phrase "premature movement."

588. Hurlbert, McClellan, p. 88.

589. McClellan to Barlow, 8 November 1861, Barlow Coll. (CSWR). And to include one more example, see: McClellan to Cameron, 8 September 1861, OR 5.0, 588-589. It should be evident, therefore, that this concept of "reasonable certainties" pervaded McClellan's strategic thinking throughout his Civil War career; and it is the contention of this paper that the concept provides an intellectual basis for an understanding of McClellan's behavior, better than a psychological one.

3. August Memorandum: The Strategy of Overwhelming


591. There is stronger evidence than coincidence of language that McClellan's strategy derived from the guidance of Jomini's thinking. McClellan frequently expressed his opinion that Jomini was the greatest military writer; he belonged to the Napoleon Club at the Military Academy, at which Dennis Hart Mahan presided, and where he studied the Corison's campaigns as interpreted by Jomini. During his self-exile in Europe after the war, McClellan visited Jomini, just before the latter's death. Details of this visit and an eulogistic appraisal of his career soon appeared in McClellan's "General Jomini," 7 Galatz (1869), 874-888. Moreover, Hurlbert, in the authorized campaign biography, quotes passages from Jomini (including the ones I give in the text) to explain what McClellan was attempting in his strategy. The only real question is whether the influence was conscious or not. See Hurlbert, McClellan, pp. 145-147.

592. Memorandum, 2 August, 1861, OR 5.0, 6 or MOS, p. 101.


594. McClellan to Ellen, 3 August 1861, McClellan Papers (DLC) and printed in part in MOS, p. 83. Also see Cump Sherman to his wife, 4 August, in Home Letters of General Sherman, ed. Mark A. D. Rowe (New York, 1909), p. 212.

595. See the circular to the Army of the Potomac, 17 February
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595. (cont.) 1862, in which McClellan announced the first fruits of his grand offensive, McClellan Papers (DLC). Interestingly, Governor Dennison of Ohio seems to have advocated a roughly similar policy from the start; see 3 OR i:0, 101.

596. McClellan to Kelley, 26 May 1861, OR 2:0, 45-46.

597. This outline is undated, and I have assumed it to be the abstract rough draft from which he composed the Memorandum from its location among his papers. In any case, it is in his own hand and does represent what he believed to be the essence of his strategy. It is located in the McClellan Papers (DLC), ser. I, vol. 23, fasc. 5238.

598. Hay, Diaries, pp. 178-179; quoted in T. Williams, Generals, pp. 308-309, where the impression is given that Grant's plan was original and that Lincoln suddenly grasped the whole point.

599. Basler: 5 Lincoln 98.

600. Maurice, Statesmen, p. 73. Probably the most reasonable assessment of this question of how long it should or could have taken to prepare the Army of the Potomac for offensive operations has been given by Thomas G. Frothingham, "The Peninsula Campaign of 1862," 57 FMHS (1923), 88-122. Captain Frothingham, with the example and experience of the Great War fresh in his memory, wrote: "It is strange at the present time, to read that from August, 1861, to March, 1862, was almost universally stigmatized as a period of long and inexorable delays!" (pp. 96-97).

601. McClellan to Ellin, 6 October 1861, McClellan Papers (DLC); or MOS, p. 168; and in his Annual Report as Commanding General to Cameron, 030 November, McClellan Papers (DLC).

602. The sort of silliness which McClellan and other professional soldiers had to put up with at this time is well illustrated in a story related by Senator John Sherman of Ohio, Recollections of Forty Years... (2 vols., New York, 1895), I, 317. The Radicals were the earliest and loudest in their impatience; see Chandler to his wife, 27 October 1861, Chandler Papers (DLC); and Wade to his wife, 25 October, Wade Papers (DLC); John Andrew to Cameron, 21 August, 3 OR i:0, 443; interesting for its post-war reflections is George W. Julian's Political Recollections, 1840-1872 (Chicago, 1884), pp. 205-204 and 210.

603. Memorandum, 2 August, OR 5:0, 8; or MOS, p. 105.

604. This is the underlying, critical theme of the book by McClellan's one-time Chief Engineer, John Gross Bernard, The Peninsula Campaign and Antecedents... (New York, 1864).

605. General Orders, No. 15, HGA, 17 August, 1861, OR 5:0, 567.
606. This almost unnoticed campaign will deserve fuller attention in the expanded study; at present materials seem scarce, but see Dix to Marcy, 8 November, OR 5.0, 431; and Dix's full report on operations, made to McClellan, 25 November, OR 5.0, 428-429. The proclamation is in OR 5.0, 431-432.

607. Memorandum, 2 August 1861, OR 5.0, 7; or MOS, p.102. Shortly after his arrival in Washington, McClellan wrote a long letter of advice to Rosecrans, incorporating this and other advice; 28 July, McClellan Papers(DLC).

608. See McClellan's statement after his retirement in MOS, p.49.

609. McClellan to Buell, 7 November 1861, OR 5.0, 38. This letter of instructions is one of McClellan's finest statements on the inter-relationship of politics and the military.

610. McClellan to Buell, 6 January 1862, OR 7.0, 531.

611. McClellan's belief in the military and political importance of east Tennessee has been supported from the Confederate viewpoint; see, Donald Sanger and Thomas Hay, James Longstreet: Soldier, Politician, Officeholder, and Writer(Baton Rouge, 1952), p.217.

612. Memorandum, 2 August 1861, OR 5.0, 7-8; or MOS, pp. 104-105. Also see: McClellan to Hunter, 11 December 1861, McClellan Miscellaneous Ms. Coll.(CSmH).

613. Memorandum, 2 August 1861, OR 5.0, 7; or MOS, p. 102. See also, in OR 5.0, McClellan to Buell, 7 and 12 November 1861, pp. 38 and 38-39; and idem in OR 7.0, as follows: 23, 27, and 29 November, 3 December 1861, and 6 and 13 January 1862, pp. 447, 450, 457-459, 468, 531, and 547.

614. Memorandum, 2 August 1861, OR 5.0, 7; or MOS, pp.102-103; see also, McClellan to Halleck, 11 November 1861, OR 5.0, 37-38; and correspondence passim in OR 7.0 and OR 8.0 for the winter 1861-1862; also, McClellan to Butler, 23 May 1862, OR, 5.0, 40.

619. (cont.) the Burnside expedition is much clearer. As early as 6 September 1861, McClellan asked Cameron for permission to form an auxiliary amphibious brigade to cooperate with the Army of the Potomac (OR 5:0, 36). And on the 12th of September, McClellan ordered Burnside to commence the organization of two such brigades (3 OR 1:0, 500). He issued detailed instructions for the movement on 7 January 1862 (OR 9:0, 352-353 or OR 5:0, 36-37); and maintained close touch with Burnside afterward (passim correspondence OR 9:0). It might be added that Burnside fully acknowledged McClellan's important role in his report to Adjutant-General Lorenzo Thomas, 16 March 1862, OR 9:0, 199. McClellan's initial request to Butler to formulate plans for operations against New Orleans have not been found; there existence is demonstrated, however, by Butler's reply in late November (OR 53:0, 507ff.); the final instructions, dated 23 February 1862, included McClellan's plan's to use the force as a thrust against the "soft under-belly" of the Confederacy and to eventuate in a column up the Mississippi at least at Vicksburg and Jackson (OR 5:0, 40).

620. McClellan to Ellen, 11(?) October 1861 McClellan Papers (DLC); or MOS, pp.169-170.

621. Fitz John Porter thought the same, as he indicated in his letter to Manton Marble, 26 April 1862, Marble Papers (DLC).

622. "Fighting Phil" Kearny, who differed with McClellan on many points, nonetheless agreed on the importance of Richmond, Kearny to Courtland Parker, 15 February 1862, Kearny Papers (DLC).

623. McClellan to Ellen, 6 October 1861, McClellan Papers (DLC); or MOS, p.168.

624. Memorandum, 2 August 1861, OR 5:0, 7; or MOS, p.104.

625. McClellan later remarked: "Any success gained at that time in front of Washington could not have been followed up, and a victory would have given us the barren possession of the field of battle, with a longer and more difficult line of supply during the rest of the winter." (MOS, p.199). It is interesting that Burnside when faced with a similar situation drew nearly the same conclusion (OR 19:2, 552). Finally, it might be noted, that there was no particular advantage for going overland because the terrain near Washington was better known. It was not. The maps McClellan inherited were almost equally wretched for any region of Virginia—around Manassas or around Yorktown; see McClellan to Alexander Dallas Bache, Chief of the Coast Survey, 10 January 1862, William Ehees Coll.(GSmH).
615. (cont.) Seely, "Early Operations in the Gulf," 2 pl. 13; and Benjamin Franklin Butler, Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences...Butler's Book (Boston, 1892). More general accounts may be found in Alfred Thayer Mahan, The Gulf and Inland Waters (New York, 1883); and Daniel Ammen, The Atlantic Coast (New York, 1883). A fourth but smaller phase of McClellan's coastal strategy, involved minor offensive operations in the Department of Key West; see McClellan to John Milton Brannan, 30 January 1862, OR 53:0, 74.

616. MOS, p.204. Also, see in the McClellan Papers (DLC) a cypher telegram, dated early August 1861, from Thomas T. Eckert, later famous as Lincoln's friend in the telegraph office.

617. On both the intentions and failure to coordinate Burnside's Corps with the campaign of the Army of the Potomac against Richmond see: MOS, p.204; McClellan to Cameron, 6 September 1861, OR 5:0, 36; to Burnside, 7 January 1862, OR 5:0, 36-37 and OR 9:0, 352-353; 12 February, OR 9:0, 362-363; 2 April, OR 9:0, 374; 20 April, OR 9:0, 379; on Burnside's visit to Fortress Monroe and to McClellan, about June 1, see OR 11:3, 221-222, 224; also, see, McClellan to Burnside, 20 June 1862, OR 11:3, 237; 25 June, OR 11:3, 252-253 and OR 9:0, 405; Burnside to McClellan, 28 June, OR 9:0, 405-406 and 406.

618. McClellan to Thomas A. Scott, 17 October 1861, OR 6:0, 179; Lincoln to Thomas West Sherman, 18 October, OR 6:0, 181; Lorenzo Thomas to Sherman, 27 November, OR 6:0, 192.

619. McClellan's contributions to these various expeditions, in terms of conception, extent of control, and continuing supervision is not yet fully determined. Eventually, this topic will fill an important part of the chapter on his tenure as General-in-Chief. The following can be said at this point in my research. McClellan's connection with the conception of Sherman's South Carolina expedition is uncertain but unlikely. A board of naval officers in two reports, July 5 and 13, recommended such operations (OR 53:0, 64ff) and Sherman received his first orders on August 2 (1 pl. 573), the same day McClellan submitted his strategy memorandum. This by no means precludes the possibility that McClellan even during his first week in Washington might have been instrumental in shaping plans for the move; but no evidence has been unearthed one way or the other. It is certain that McClellan later exerted considerable control over Sherman, including his movement on Pulaski (see McClellan's instructions to Sherman, 14 February 1862, OR 5:0, 39; and miscellaneous correspondence between the two in OR 6:0). McClellan's connection with
626. A full discussion of the evolution of McClellan's peninsular strategy will be undertaken in the expansion of this study; some of the more important sources are the following: McClellan to Stant n, 3 February 1862, OR 5:0, 42-45 or MOS, pp. 229-236; and a somewhat different version in Basler: 5 Lincoln 119-125; and the rough draft, dated 31 January, with many interesting deletions, in the McClellan Papers(DLC). Also: Lincoln to McClellan 3 February, OR 5:0, 41-42; and the Memorandum sent with this letter, OR 5:0, 713; McClellan to Stanton, 19 March, OR 5:0, 57-58; William Swinton, Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac (New York, 1866); Alexander Stewart Webb, The Peninsula: McClellan's Campaign of 1862 (New York, 1885); and Joseph Eggleston Johnston, Narrative of Military Operations (New York, 1874).

627. In this respect also, Don Carlos Buell's thinking ran remarkably parallel to McClellan's see OR 26:1, 59.

628. McClellan to Scott, 28 June 1861, 2 OR 2:0, 14; Memorandum, 2 August 1861, OR 5:0, 6 or MOS, p. 101; also, Bates to Lincoln, 5 July, 2 OR 2:0, 20-30.

629. Reference is made to Chapter Four, McClellan's proclamations in western Virginia, etc.; also to the Memorandum, 2 August 1861, OR 5:0, 6 or MOS, p. 101; McClellan's "Harrison Bar" letter to Lincoln, 7 July 1862, OR 11:1, 73-74 or MOS, pp. 487-489, which has been quoted extensively at the beginning of this chapter; and, McClellan to Halleck, 1 August 1862, "the second Harrison Bar letter," OR 11:3, 345-346. There is a great deal more material in the Official Records and in the McClellan Papers (DLC) to be exploited in developing this topic. Also see the curious and not entirely accurate story of McClellan causing his wounded to suffer in order to protect Southern property rights: Horace Green, "Lincoln Breaks McClellan's Promise," 81 CM (1911), 594-596. For a recent critical view of McClellan's "soft" policy see Frank Freidel, François Lieber: Nineteenth Century Liberal (Baton Rouge, La., 1947), pp. 327-328; and Freidel's General Orders 100 and Military Government," 32 MVHR (1946), 541-556. In his article, Freidel concluded that McClellan's policy was "more lenient than international law allowed..." (p. 545.)

630. McClellan's own statement of his policy in this respect is in MOS, p. 34. There is a plenitude of records in the Official Records, manuscript collections, and the National Archives for a full study of the actual day-to-day treatment of this question by McClellan and his subordinate officers. It needs to be pursued. The most readily accessible source, entitled "Military Treatment of Captured and Fugitive Slaves" (2 OR 1:0, 749-822). John Adams Dix revealed he understood the perplexity of the fugitive slave question, when he wrote to McClellan, 21 August 1861, 2 OR 1:0, 762.
631. Quote in text is from Colburn (for McClellan) to Dix, 20 August 1861, 2 OR 1.0, 589 or 2 OR 2.0, 46. On affairs in Maryland see also: Cameron to Banks, 11 September 1861, 2 OR 1.0, 676-679; Banks to Marcy, 20 September, 2 OR 1.0, 684; Marcy to Banks, 29 October, 2 OR 1.0, 608; and Seward to McClellan, 28 October, McClellan Papers (DLC); also: the section entitled: "Union Policy of Repression in Maryland," 2 OR 1.0, 563-748. On affairs in the District of Columbia see: Colburn to Andrew Porter, 6 and 7 August, 1861, 2 OR 2.0, 39; and McClellan to J. K. Mansfield, 12 August, 2 OR 2.0, 41. See also, War Department Executive Order No. 1, 14 February 1862, signed by Stanton, 2 OR 4.0, 221-223; and the interesting discussion in the correspondence between lawyer-soldier Jacob Dolson Cox and historian James Ford Rhodes, on the question of Lincoln's handling of political prisoners, with some reference to McClellan, and also the policy toward private property; Cox Papers (DLC).

632. See the letters cited in n 623, above.

633. McClellan to Buell, 12 November 1861, OR 4.0, 355.

634. While there is no evidence that Lincoln or Cameron directly approved or disapproved of McClellan's policy, there is evidence that both made comments to others which undidated they shared McClellan's views. For example, Lincoln to Orville Hickman Browning, 22 September 1861, Basler: 4 Lincoln 531; and Cameron to T. W. Sherman, 14 October 1861, 2 OR 1.0, 773. Whether or not McClellan knew of such letters, or whether similar remarks were made to him verbally cannot be known.

635. The Radical Republicans were most extreme in their denunciation; see T. Williams, "Radicals," p.105.

636. From "Opinion of the Commission," ca. 29 May 1863, OR 26.1, 8. Irwin McDowell faced similar charges before a "Court of Inquiry," which sat from 21 November 1862-21 February 1863 (OR 12.1, 36-332).

637. From an information in McClellan's hand on the outside of the retained copy of the Memorandum, McClellan Papers (DLC).

638. Hay, Diary, 10 October 1861, p.27; see also the entries for 17 October, p.29; and 26 October, p.31. About the same time, Lincoln wrote a letter to David Hunter, commanding the Department of the West, in which he clearly indicated he did not expect a major Union offensive before the coming of spring. (See letter dated 14 October 1861, Basler: 5 Lincoln 1.)
639. The note informing McClellan of his promotion, in Lincoln's hand, dated 1 November 1861, is in the McClellan Papers (DLC).
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