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MUTUAL TRUST AND CONFIDENCE: THE REQUIREMENT FOR A HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND THE WARFIGHTER

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ROBERT M. O'BRIEN, MS

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President Abraham Lincoln had been in office for 39 days when the U.S. civil war began. His senior army officer, 75 years old, was not vigorous enough to meet the demands of the conduct of a civil war. A 34 year old West Point graduate, Major General George B. McClellan, was called to Washington to command the Army of the Potomac, mobilize a small army, and eventually serve as General in Chief. Displaying an enormous and unjustified ego, a shocking lack of courtesy for the President, and a marked procrastination and overcautiousness in the preparation for and conduct of campaigns and engagements, McClellan lost the confidence of his superiors as months passed without movement of the Union army. Most conspicuous among McClellan's shortcomings was his unwillingness to establish a harmonious working relationship with the President and share a vision of the policy and strategy for the restoration and preservation of the Union. The significance of that failure was that President Lincoln fired McClellan, leaving the Union no closer to victory than when McClellan had first come to the capital. Following many months of futile endeavors to find a competent General in Chief, Lincoln promoted U. S. Grant to Lieutenant General and General in Chief. Grant displayed a refreshing ability to communicate with the President, follow orders, accept the resources provided, and exercise leadership and courage in combat. Most significantly, Grant was a perfect junior partner in the senior-subordinate relationship with the President, subordinating himself to the President's policy and strategic concepts while doing what was necessary to defeat the rebel armies. The Lincoln-Grant team stands as a model for illustrating the value of harmonious soldier-statesman, senior-subordinate relationships, especially in the conduct and conclusion of war.

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MUTUAL TRUST AND CONFIDENCE:
THE REQUIREMENT FOR A HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND THE WARFIGHTER

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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U. S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013
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MUTUAL TRUST AND CONFIDENCE:
THE REQUIREMENT FOR A HARMONIOUS WORKING RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND THE WARFIGHTER

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the course of the entire United States Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln's constant objective was the total restoration and preservation of the Union.¹ He believed that no state could lawfully leave the Union without the consent of the other states, and that it was his and the government's duty to maintain the Union.²

At the beginning of the war, the aging Major General Winfield Scott was serving as the General in Chief, the senior Army officer in the War Department. Primarily because of his advanced age, Scott was replaced by MG George B. McClellan on November 1, 1861. Lincoln relieved McClellan as General in Chief in March, 1862, and the President and his Secretary of War, Edward M. Stanton, jointly performed the duties of the General in Chief until MG Henry W. Halleck was brought in to perform as the senior general in July, 1862. It soon became clear that Halleck was not really equal to the requirements of the position either, but Lincoln kept him on in the job with a reduced scope of responsibilities until Lieutenant General Ulysses

S. Grant was sworn in as the General in Chief on March 10, 1864.

The purpose of this paper is to define and describe the relationship between President Lincoln and his two most prominent Generals in Chief, first McClellan and then Grant.

A number of accounts of President Lincoln's search for an effective General in Chief have been compiled by very distinguished historians. For the most part, these works have focused on the President's search for a competent military strategist and senior combat leader. What has not been addressed is the significance of the interpersonal relationship between the President and his General in Chief in the conduct of the war to restore and preserve the Union. For the purposes of this discussion, that interpersonal relationship, or simply, relationship, includes the following elements:

- o Sharing of a vision (ends).
- o Recognition of proper respective roles in the senior-subordinate partnership, with particular attention to the responsibilities and prerogatives of each in the conduct and execution of policy (ways).
- o Sense of teamwork and similar or complementary temperaments.
- o Subordination of personal aspirations to the accomplishment of the agreed upon partnership goals.

- o Recognition of the difficulties of each other's responsibilities.

- o Mutual support, especially the senior's support of the subordinate in times of adversity.

- o Mutual respect, trust, and confidence.

In many respects, this relationship is like a good marriage, more than just existing together in harmony. In its higher forms, the relationship would be one where there would be a synergistic dynamic, one where both parties would get energy from each other as goals are set and accomplished, and as setbacks and adversity are overcome. Recognizing and accepting one's errors or responsibility for failure would be essential. Blaming the other party, without being open to sharing ownership of a fault, would have no place in the relationship.

This paper compares and contrasts the relationship of President Lincoln with Generals McClellan and Grant to show the necessity for, and value of, a relationship which is characterized by mutual respect, trust, and confidence. The successful direction, conduct, and conclusion of war requires more than competence as a policy maker on the part of the President, and more than competence as a military strategist and senior leader on the part of the senior military officer. There must also be a mutual respect and confidence between the Commander in Chief and his senior military officer so that each of them can devote full time

and energy to their respective responsibilities--in productive harmony--without becoming unnecessarily involved in or concerned with the interests and prerogatives which are properly the domain of the other.

ENDNOTES

¹Melville W. Fuller and Teunis S. Hamlin, comps., Words of Lincoln (Rahway, New Jersey: The Mershon Company Press, 1895), p. 133.

²Ian Elliott, ed., Abraham Lincoln 1809-1865: Chronology-Documents-Bibliographical Aids (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1970), p. 13.

CHAPTER II

LINCOLN AND MCCLELLAN

The New President and A Civil War

Although it quickly became a purely academic point for him, Lincoln's preparedness for acting as Commander in Chief was absolutely minimal. He had assumed the office of President only the month before the rebels fired on Fort Sumter, and had had very little opportunity to explore the various military and non-military ramifications of war with the Southern states, if and when such a rebellion might be initiated.

In his first Inaugural on March 4, 1861, Lincoln had told the states of the South,

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors.¹

Until April 11, 1861, the day of the rebel firing on the Federal fort in Charleston harbor, the idea of a civil war was not only a contradiction in terms, it was also too horrible to contemplate for most of the people in the North.² Lincoln's first task was to bring the people of the North united into the struggle. Although the North had some difficulty in rising *en masse*, it entered the war with a degree of enthusiasm which was much greater than the most

optimistic had believed possible the month before, thanks to the statecraft of Mr. Lincoln.³ To his great credit, Lincoln recognized that the most important task at hand was to first consolidate the national will of the North, which would, in turn, promote success and eventual victory on the battlefield.

To accomplish this unification, the western Virginia area was secured for the North by statehood separate from the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the so-called border states of Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland were saved for the Union by quickly initiated and insightful presidential action.

This done, Lincoln turned his attention to the situation within his War and Navy Departments.

Major General Winfield Scott was the General in Chief of the Army at the start of the war, as he had been for the previous twenty years. Once a very able soldier and strategist, at the age of 75, he was no longer able to muster the physical and intellectual vigor required to capably provide military advise to the President and mobilize a small army of some 16,000 soldiers.

Demonstrating a naïveté about things military, and in spite of the presence of Scott, who should have known better, on April 15, 1861, Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers for a period of only three months. Why Scott permitted his President to do such a thing--in the face of

requirements for force organizing, training, equipping, fielding, etc.--is not clear.

At about this same time, events were unfolding which would lead to two significant milestones along the North's pursuit of victory.

Major General George B. McClellan came to Lincoln's attention, and that of the rest of the North, by winning two small victories in western Virginia. The first was on June 3, 1861 at the town of Philippi, which the press turned into a major achievement. This was followed by a rout of a rebel force of 4,500 men at Rich Mountain, near Beverly. These actions cleared western Virginia of rebel forces, and fed a nation hungry for good war news. They also led the senior leadership of the North to think that MG Irvin McDowell's Union army near Washington could do as well against the rebel army which was in and around Manassas Junction, about twenty-five miles southwest of Washington along a river called Bull Run.

Unfortunately, Lincoln allowed himself to be pressured into dispatching his three-month volunteers into battle before their term expired, with the result being the Union defeat at Bull Run on July 21, 1861. It became very suddenly and painfully apparent that McDowell's Union soldiers were sadly lacking in the training and discipline necessary to perform effectively in combat as they were

routed by the rebel forces in the presence of hundreds of spectators who had come out to picnic and watch the battle.

The rebel victory at Bull Run in 1861 made the South feel proud, jubilant, and self-satisfied. Victory appeared to be easy. The North, on the other hand, was mortified by the defeat and stung by ridicule. The embarrassment of defeat was the catalyst which made the Union pull itself together, raise armies, stir up public support, and prepare for the war in earnest.⁴

Following that first major engagement, and learning from the error of his first call for volunteers, the President called for 500,000 volunteers for a term of three years.

At the same time, with the support of favorable public opinion and General Scott, Lincoln called for General McClellan to command the Union troops around Washington.

The New General In Chief

A West Point Army engineer from 1846 to early 1857, McClellan had left the Army to become an officer with the Illinois Central Railroad Company, eventually became president of the Eastern Division of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad Company, and was an active supporter of William O. Douglas, Lincoln's chief political opponent in then recent years. He was commissioned a major general of volunteers in Ohio on April 23, 1861, and received the same

grade in the United States Army and placed in command of the Department of the Ohio on May 14, 1861.

When called to Washington, McClellan was a handsome man, only thirty-four years old, with a pleasing manner. He was sure that the telegram directing him to report to Washington was the call of destiny, and that he would be the savior of the Union.⁵

McClellan's most conspicuous skills were those of organization, training, and winning the respect and affection of his soldiers. Arriving in Washington at the end of the three month term for the initial conscripts, he quickly and efficiently established well laid out military camps, reorganized logistical operations, and established a rigorous drill program for the new recruits. There were frequent reviews, with McClellan, known affectionately as "Little Mac," personally trooping the lines to inspect the new units.

The press in Washington called McClellan the "Young Napoleon," perhaps in partial reference to his flamboyant proclamations to his soldiers.⁶ He made them feel like soldiers. They responded by giving McClellan their confidence and affection. It appeared that these new recruits would develop into a well drilled and disciplined army, leaving behind the informality of the militia.⁷

Scott resigned at the end of October, with some behind-the-scenes "assistance" from McClellan, and McClellan was named General in Chief of the Army on November 1, 1861.

Public expectations of the dashing McClellan were high.⁸ As summer turned to fall, and the Army which McClellan had organized did not move to combat with the rebel forces in Virginia, expectations changed first to impatience and then to outspoken criticism.⁹

Although McClellan was an excellent organizer and administrator, he was very poor at planning or leading a military campaign. The confidence and energy he exhibited in training the army turned to overcautiousness and procrastination as the time to move out and engage the enemy approached. Every obstacle became magnified, especially the size of the enemy army. Conditions that existed only in his vivid imagination caused McClellan to develop grandiose designs which had absolutely nothing to do with the realities of the strategic situation. While firmly convinced that the situation he had created in his own mind was real, he would devote unwarranted time and attention to the slightest detail, waiting for the smallest problem to be corrected before returning his attention to meeting the enemy.¹⁰

McClellan's greatest deficiency as a soldier and a leader was the perpetual exaggeration of the size of the enemy force. Allen Pinkerton, a private detective, had been

hired to provide intelligence information on the enemy army. Pinkerton told McClellan that the Confederates had some 126,000 soldiers in Virginia, and that the rebel force at Manassas numbered about 85,000 men. These figures almost doubled the actual size of the Confederate forces. Either Pinkerton was a total incompetent or he sensed that McClellan actually wanted the size of the rebel army magnified beyond its real size as an excuse for inaction. In either case, McClellan believed the numbers Pinkerton gave him. Since he estimated that the largest Union force he could take from Washington to fight was about 76,000, McClellan insisted that he was not yet ready to advance.¹¹

McClellan's other reasons for delay late in 1861 were the roads which were getting bad with the winter wet weather, the need for more training, and an alleged lack of cooperation by subordinate commanders. As McClellan pondered the obstacles which continually confronted him, most of which existed only in his fertile imagination, he believed that he was really a hero, that the President was withholding the resources necessary to fight and win the war, and that he would be blamed if the Union failed.¹²

As public impatience with McClellan's lack of progress mounted, Lincoln shielded his General in Chief, telling him, "You must not fight until you are ready." Lincoln obviously did not want to see another debacle like Bull Run.¹³

In December, 1861, McClellan became ill with typhoid fever for a time. Lincoln, coming under increased public pressure and becoming more anxious to see some kind of action, issued a series of orders which he hoped would stimulate some military activity.

The first of these, the President's General War Order No. 1, issued January 27, 1862, fixed February 22, 1862 as the day " . . . for a general movement of the [specified] Land and Naval forces of the United States," and directed that " . . . all other forces, both Land and Naval . . . obey existing orders . . . and be ready to obey additional orders when duly given."¹⁴

The second order, President's Special War Order No. 1, directed the following:

Presidents special
War Order, No. 1

Executive Mansion
Washington January 31, 1862

Ordered that all disposable force of the Army of the Potomac, after providing safely for the defense of Washington, be formed into an expedition, for the immediate objective of seizing and occupying a point upon the Rail Road South Westward of what is known as Manassas Junction, . . . before, or on, the 22nd. day of February next.

Abraham Lincoln¹⁵

Why did Lincoln publish such orders, which some believe(d) to be quite foolish? The reason lies in the nature of the working relationship between President Lincoln and General McClellan.

Lincoln gave all possible encouragement to McClellan to be on friendly and confidential terms.¹⁶ In addition, Lincoln was firm in resisting the pressures of public

opinion and the Congress to get on with fighting the war until McClellan was fully prepared to do so.

Unfortunately, McClellan never seemed to make the least effort to establish and maintain a harmonious working relationship with the President.¹⁷ In spite of strong support from the Commander in Chief, McClellan did not assume the role of the President's military advisor as he should have. Although he was correct in telling the President he needed six months to train and organize a newly conscripted army, he did not provide the President with the military information and education which would have enabled Lincoln to more effectively resist the demands of the press and Congress.

As time passed, the failures of both Lincoln and McClellan became more clearly defined. What distinguished the two men was that Lincoln was able to recognize and correct his early mistakes, while McClellan was unable to do either.

In sharp contrast to the President's courteous, deferential, and unpretentious manner, McClellan's interpersonal style in his dealings with the President was conspicuously rude and discourteous.

At the same time, McClellan acted as if he were completely oblivious to the pressure on the President to get on with the defeat of the rebel forces while securing the city of Washington. McClellan's overcautiousness and lack

of appreciation for the President's position became abundantly clear by the early spring of 1862. Those shortcomings were compounded by the development of an active distrust and hostility on the part of radical Republican leaders in Washington, including the new Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton. These men grew uneasy with what appeared to be McClellan's unwillingness to fight. Some even believed that he was a pro-Confederate, and a potential traitor who was content to let the Confederates win the war.¹⁸

McClellan wrote of what he believed to be a radical Republican conspiracy to ruin him in his memoirs. He was convinced that since he had not agreed to become a "party tool," the politicians were sowing seeds of distrust in the President's mind which cost McClellan the support of the Commander in Chief in early 1862.¹⁹ (See Appendix.)

Finally, a completely exasperated Lincoln lost all patience with McClellan's failure to even present a plan for the conduct of the war, as well as his chronic delays, and on January 31, 1862 issued Special War Order No. 1 for the Army of the Potomac to initiate an advance on Richmond by way of Manassas Junction. McClellan disagreed with the President's proposal and submitted an alternate plan of his own, insisting on taking his army to Fort Monroe, Virginia by boat, and then up the Virginia Peninsula to capture Richmond. Like his predecessor Scott, McClellan hoped to

accomplish victory by maneuver, with Richmond, not the rebel army, as the objective.²⁰

On February 3, 1862, the President wrote the following letter to McClellan:

Executive Mansion
Major General McClellan Washington, Feb. 3, 1862.

My dear Sir: You and I have distinct, and different plans for a movement of the Army of the Potomac--yours to be down the Chesapeake, up the Rappahannock to Urbana, and across land to the terminus of the Railroad on the York River--, mine to move directly to a point on the Railroad South West of Manassas.

If you will give me satisfactory answers to the following questions, I shall gladly yield my plan to yours.

1st. Does not your plan involve a greatly larger expenditure of time, and money than mine?

2nd. Wherein is a victory more certain by your plans than mine?

3rd. Wherein is a victory more valuable by your plan than mine?

4th. In fact would it not be less valuable, in this, that it would break no great line of the enemy's [sic] communications, while mine would?

5th. In case of disaster, would not a safe retreat be more difficult by your plan than by mine?

Yours truly

A. Lincoln²¹

On February 27, 1862, as he was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with McClellan, the President was heard to say, "The general impression is daily gaining ground that the General [McClellan] does not intend to do anything."²²

There are some who have been critical of Lincoln for proposing a military plan of his own to the General in Chief. There is some validity to the observations that Lincoln should have outlined his national policy to McClellan and then asked his General in Chief how he was going to support that policy militarily. If unsatisfied

with the General's response, the President could have either ordered a new plan to be developed or could have changed his General in Chief. While the President did not apparently take that particular course of action, he did, nevertheless, take actions which led to some improvement in the situation.

On March 8, 1862, he issued President's General War Orders No. 2 and No. 3. The former reorganized the Army of the Potomac into four corps. The latter order directed that the Army of the Potomac would make no movement from the Washington area without leaving an appropriate security force for the capital, that no more than half of the Army of the Potomac would be moved away from Washington until the Potomac River was free of rebel batteries and other activity, and that any movement upon Chesapeake Bay ordered by General McClellan would be initiated as early as March 18.

Lastly, on March 11, 1862 Lincoln relieved McClellan of his duties as General in Chief, leaving him in command of the Army of the Potomac. This decision by Lincoln was, at least in part, due to McClellan's failure to perform his duties as the military advisor to the President. It was also probably due to the President's recognition that it was impossible to have one man simultaneously and effectively serve as the advisor to the President, commander of all of the Union Army forces, and commander of the Army of the Potomac.

From the time of McClellan's relief in March, 1862 until Halleck took that post in July, Lincoln and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton personally directed the armies.

Lincoln and Stanton agreed to McClellan's plan for the Peninsula campaign, but very reluctantly because it would leave Washington exposed to a sudden thrust by the rebel forces located to the south and west. Nevertheless, McClellan was allowed to start his campaign with the condition that he leave sufficient troops behind to secure Washington. McClellan agreed, but apparently did not take his instructions very seriously, because Lincoln and Stanton soon discovered that the defense force left behind was not as large as agreed upon before the campaign. They took McDowell's corps from McClellan's Army of the Potomac and placed it between Washington and Fredericksburg. Consequently, McClellan began his Peninsula Campaign with 35,000 less men than the 130,000 he expected to have.

President Lincoln On General McClellan

What, then, was the nature of the relationship between Lincoln and McClellan?

Interestingly, the relationship between Lincoln and McClellan began several years before the Civil War when McClellan was vice-president of the Illinois Central Railroad and Lincoln was working as an attorney for the railroad. In his memoirs, McClellan commented that he had

been with Lincoln on a number of occasions when and where an important case was being tried.

After being ordered to Washington, and then becoming General in Chief, McClellan was conspicuously discourteous and rude toward the President. This behavior on the part of McClellan, no doubt, influenced the relationship in a very negative way. The General could credit the President only with the statement, "He is honest and means well," and a concession that Lincoln had gone out of his way to be civil to him.²³ Apparently, McClellan's birth in a well-to-do Philadelphia family and attendance at the best schools before attending West Point made him feel immensely superior to the President of such modest beginnings who had defeated the General's friend, Douglas, in 1860. McClellan viewed Lincoln as a person of inferior antecedents and abilities, and an occasionally hostile or boring oaf who was also, unfortunately, his superior.²⁴

The contrast between McClellan's lack of courtesy toward the President, and Lincoln's nearly infinite patience and humility, are clearly evident in the following story.

McClellan got very upset one day in November, 1861, when the President insisted that the war could not be won until the Union controlled the Mississippi River valley. That evening, as was his usual custom, Lincoln called on McClellan at the General's quarters to obtain the latest news from the various commands in the field. McClellan

ignored the call and went to bed, with the President being told that McClellan was not at home. Lincoln knew McClellan was at home, only saying later that he would be willing to " . . . hold McClellan's horse, if he will only bring us success." In spite of the President's professed willingness to hold the General's horse, thereafter McClellan was summoned to the White House whenever the President wanted to see him.²⁵

McClellan's side of the relationship between himself and the President seemed to be increasingly affected by his perception of the intentions and influence of the so-called radical Republicans. In the minds of McClellan and his close associates, there was a conspiracy on the part of the radicals to insure that McClellan would fail as a Union general, and lose his popularity. The rationale for this view was McClellan's belief that the leaders of the radical branch preferred political control over one section of a divided country rather than being in the minority in a restored and preserved Union. If McClellan was successful in defeating the Confederates in 1862, the Union would be restored, and McClellan would be in a very good position to be a post-war presidential candidate. Therefore, in McClellan's mind, it was necessary for the radicals to conspire to have him relieved and discredited by any means necessary. This alleged conspiracy included the placement of Stanton in charge of the War Department to deceive,

mislead, and influence the President toward the relief of McClellan. The conspiracy was also blamed for the withdrawal of McDowell's corps from McClellan's Army of the Potomac at the start of the Peninsula campaign, which, in McClellan's mind, doomed the campaign to eventual failure. (See Appendix.)

Lincoln relieved McClellan as General in Chief in President's War Order No. 3, dated March 11, 1862.

McClellan's reaction, as recorded in his memoirs, was as follows:

The intelligence [reports of his relief] took me entirely by surprise, and the order proved to be one of the steps taken to tie my hands in order to secure the failure of the approaching [peninsula] campaign.

Though unaware of the President's intention to remove me from the position of general-in-chief, I cheerfully acceded to the disposition he saw fit to make of my services, and so informed him in a note on the 12th of March:

Unofficial

Fairfax Court-House
March 12, 1862

His Excellency A. Lincoln, President:

My Dear Sir: I have just seen Gov. Dennison, who has detailed to me the conversation he held with you yesterday and to-day.

I beg to say that I cordially endorse all that he has said to you in my behalf, and that I thank you most sincerely for the official confidence and kind personal feelings you entertain for me.

I believe that I said to you some weeks since, in connection with some Western matters, that no feeling of self-interest or ambition should ever prevent me from devoting myself to your service. I am glad to have the opportunity to prove it, and you will find that, under present circumstances, I shall work just as cheerfully as before, and that no consideration of self will in any manner interfere with the discharge of my public duties. Again thanking you for the

official and personal kindness you have so often
evinced towards me,

I am, most sincerely your friend,

Geo. B. McClellan.²⁶

This was McClellan's final communication with the President during or concerning McClellan's tenure as General in Chief.

The following remark made in Washington on April 9, 1862 reflects the President's continued frustration with McClellan, even after the latter's relief as General in Chief.

It is called the Army of the Potomac but it is only McClellan's bodyguard. . . . If McClellan is not using the Army, I should like to borrow it for a while.²⁷

In spite of the occasionally acerbic tone of Lincoln's comments about, and messages to, McClellan, in the final analysis, one could nevertheless depend upon the unfailing kindness of the President.

Major General McClellan.

Washington,

My dear Sir:

April 9, 1862

Your dispatches complaining that you are not properly sustained, while they do not offend me, do pain me very much. . . .

I beg to assure you that I have never written you, or spoken to you in greater kindness of feeling than now, nor with a fuller purpose to sustain you, so far as in my most anxious judgement, I consistently can. But you must act. Yours very truly,

A. Lincoln²⁸

After Pope's rout at the Second Bull Run on August 29-30, McClellan took 95,000 Army of the Potomac soldiers into western Maryland to find General Robert E. Lee, who had entered Maryland on September 5, 1862. Counting on the overcautious and deliberate McClellan to move slowly, Lee was willing to risk splitting his rebel force of barely 50,000 to accomplish several different objectives in western Maryland. In the meantime, McClellan had the unbelievably good fortune of finding a lost copy of Lee's orders. As Lee expected, even with the rebel plan in hand, McClellan moved too slowly and allowed Lee to reassemble his forces at Sharpsburg, Maryland before becoming engaged. McClellan had once again failed to take advantage of an opportunity to destroy the Army of Northern Virginia because of his characteristic procrastination, uncoordinated commitment of forces, and failure to seize full advantage of the decisive moment. Lee escaped into the Shenandoah Valley following the bloodiest encounter of the war--the Battle of Antietam.

Typically, McClellan believed that he had defeated a numerically superior force, when actually he had allowed a smaller force to escape. To add insult to injury, he told the press and the President that he had driven Lee's "greatly superior" invasion force back across the Potomac. McClellan then refused to follow Halleck's orders to move until his army had rested, reequipped, and reinforced, adding, "I have done all that can be asked in twice saving

the country." Lincoln knew that McClellan had lost a great strategic opportunity, and was not sure which two times McClellan was referencing.²⁹

Lincoln wrote McClellan a long letter, which suggested some very good strategy, and made the following points:

Major General McClellan	Executive Mansion,
My dear Sir	Washington, Oct. 13, 1862.
You remember my speaking to you of what I called your over-cautiousness. Are you not over-cautious when you assume that you cannot do what the enemy is constantly doing? Should you not claim to be at least his equal in prowess, and act upon the claim? . . .	
If we cannot beat the enemy where he is now, we never can, he again being within the entrenchments of Richmond. . . .	
Yours truly	A. Lincoln. ³⁰

With McClellan still refusing to move, the President wrote the following:

	Washington City, D.C.
Majr. Genl. McClellan	Oct. 24 [25]. 1862
I have just read your dispatch about sore tongued and fatigued [sic] horses. Will you pardon me for asking what the horses of your army have done since the battle of Antietam that fatigue anything?	
	A. Lincoln ³¹

Finally, on October 26, McClellan's army crossed the Potomac east of Harpers Ferry, advancing slowly in the general direction of Lee's retiring forces. Lincoln and Halleck instructed McClellan to report his plans, but the General replied that he had no plans, and could do nothing because Jackson's forces threatened his line of communications. (Jackson had been left in the valley while Lee and Longstreet moved east of the Blue Ridge Mountains.)

Seeing that it was McClellan who should have been the threat to Jackson's rear, the President concluded that he could not realistically hope for any action from McClellan. McClellan was relieved on November 5, 1862.

Lincoln was learning that relief of an ineffective commander, though unpleasant, was sometimes necessary. (He had also just replaced Buell with Rosecrans in the West.)

I said I would remove him if he let Lee's army get away from him, and I must do so. He has got the slows. . . .³²

McClellan received the order on November 7, and proceeded as ordered to Trenton, New Jersey to await further instructions.

A Failed Partnership

It is interesting to note that McClellan's memoirs report that his relationship with the President was generally very pleasant and very close until the illness McClellan experienced in December, 1861. He saw himself as influential with the President, and stated that he had never heard anyone in authority express the slightest disapproval of his performance of duty as General in Chief. (See Appendix.)

To provide a balanced account of McClellan's overall performance of duty, it must be noted that McClellan was working as General in Chief with several serious disadvantages which made his task rather impossible:

o He was only 34 years old when he came to Washington. At such a relatively early age, it is highly unlikely that he had had the leadership or management experience to realistically equip him with the skills necessary to accomplish all that was expected of him.

o His experience in the Mexican War came in 1846, right after he graduated from West Point as an officer in the Corps of Engineers. That service in Scott's modest force of only 14,000 as a very junior officer did not prepare him for the scale and ferocity of the combat which would begin 15 years later.

o The expectations and responsibilities which were heaped upon him when he was made General in Chief were totally unrealistic. Retrospectively, it should have been more readily apparent that it was humanly impossible for one man to properly perform the combined duties of military advisor to the President, commander of all Union army military departments, commander of the Army of the Potomac, and chief organizer and trainer of an army which would grow from 16,000 to about 1,000,000.³³

o McClellan's West Point education was primarily one of civil engineering, not military strategy or military staff work. What little military strategy that was taught at West Point was from Jomini's interpretation of Napoleonic strategy. (Clausewitz was not translated into English until 1873.) McClellan knew very little, if anything, of the

bloodshed, devastation, and human suffering which characterized Napoleonic warfare. Instead, McClellan followed the Jominian theory of control of geographic places, instead of destruction of the enemy armed forces, as the principal objective in war.³⁴

Generally, it seems clear that McClellan's dismissals were due to a lack of trust and confidence on the part of the President. This lack of a good working relationship was caused by the following shortcomings on McClellan's part:

- o An attitude and conduct indicating a belief that he was superior to the President in every way--family background, education, ability, etc.

- o A nauseatingly obsequious and patronizing manner at other times, especially in his correspondence to the President.

- o A combination of marked overcautiousness and procrastination when it was time to move his army into combat--a total lack of aggressiveness. (Note Antietam.)

- o A severe tendency to overestimate the number and size of the problems he faced in preparing for combat.

- o Frequent complaints that he did not have sufficient resources to perform his duties.

- o A complete lack of sensitivity to the pressure the President was getting from Congress and the public to make progress in the defeat of the Confederacy and the restoration of the Union.

- o A total failure to effectively educate and advise the President about what is necessary to properly raise, train, equip, and field a large army.

- o An apparent belief that he was really a hero whose "brilliant" efforts were being thwarted by a President who was not providing sufficient resources.

- o A firm conviction that a radical group of Republicans was determined to insure his failure and humiliation to suit their own aspirations.

In the final analysis, one major flaw in McClellan's character made a mutual trust and confidence relationship with the President impossible. That flaw was McClellan's enormous ego, which led to his belief that he was the savior of the Union and worthy of replacing President Lincoln in the White House. The enormity of McClellan's ego might have been tolerated by a President with a similar self-image, but the simple and unassuming Lincoln was not that kind of man.

All of these relationship influences contributed to the failure of President Lincoln and General McClellan to share a common vision and strategy. Without this specific agreement on policy and strategy, their partnership failed, and it was only a matter of time before McClellan was fired and relieved of all of his duties.

McClellan would be Lincoln's Democratic opponent for the Presidency in 1864, would be decisively defeated (212 electoral votes to 21), and would resign his commission on

election day, November 8, 1864. He retired to New Jersey, and was elected Governor of that state in 1877. Retiring to private life after one term, McClellan spent his later years traveling abroad in Europe, Egypt, and Palestine. He died on October 29, 1885 at the age of 58.

ENDNOTES

¹Frederick B. Maurice, Statesmen and Soldiers of the Civil War: A Study of the Conduct of War (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1926), p. 61.

²Ibid., p. 59.

³Ibid., p. 59-61.

⁴Henry Kyd Douglas, I Rode With Stonewall (St. Simons Island, Georgia: Mockingbird Books, Inc., 1983), p. 22.

⁵T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and His Generals (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1952), pp. 24, 26-27.

⁶Maurice, pp. 66-67.

⁷Bruce Catton, The Civil War (New York: The Fairfax Press, 1980), pp 52-53.

⁸Maurice, p. 67.

⁹Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁰Williams, pp. 27, 49.

¹¹Ibid., p. 50.

¹²Ibid., p. 51.

¹³Maurice, p. 68.

¹⁴Roy P. Basler, ed., The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, 8 vols. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953) 5:111-112.

¹⁵Basler, 5:115.

¹⁶Maurice, p. 72.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Catton, p. 60.

¹⁹George B. McClellan, McClellan's Own Story (New York: Charles L. Webster & Company, 1887), p. 154.

²⁰Williams, p. 51.

²¹Basler, 5:118-119.

²²Ian Elliott, ed., Abraham Lincoln 1809-1865: Chronology-Documents-Bibliographical Aids (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1970), p. 19.

²³Maurice, p. 67.

²⁴Williams, p. 25.

²⁵Paul M. Angle and Earl Schenck Miers, eds., The Living Lincoln: The Man, His Mind, His Times, and the War He Fought, Reconstructed from His Own Writings (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1955), p. 446.

²⁶McClellan, pp. 225-226.

²⁷Complete Works, vol. 7, quoted in Caroline Thomas Harnsberger, comp., The Lincoln Treasury (Chicago: Wilcox & Follett Co., 1950), p. 13.

²⁸Basler, 5:184-185.

²⁹Trevor Nevitt Dupuy, The Military Life of Abraham Lincoln: Commander in Chief (New York, New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1969), p. 98.

³⁰Basler, 5:460-461.

³¹Ibid., 5:474.

³²Dupuy, p. 99.

³³Russell F. Weigley, The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 130.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 82-83.

CHAPTER III
LINCOLN'S DEVELOPMENT AS A STRATEGIST

Early Lessons

While McClellan was apparently incapable of recognizing his shortcomings and correcting them, Lincoln was quick to learn from his own initial errors. Demonstrating the same fine intellectual powers which had made him an outstanding trial lawyer and political debater, Lincoln undertook a program of self-study in the field of military strategy. Able to envision the big picture of the war from the beginning, he quickly became a fine strategist.

At the beginning of the war, Lincoln showed his strategic thinking superiority by resisting the cries of "On to Richmond." That resistance was prudent and necessary for two reasons:

- o There was no Union army to move "on to Richmond."
- o It was necessary to carry on the war in such a way that the strength of the entire Union would be brought to bear on the rebels.

This latter tenet meant reopening the Mississippi River region and keeping it open. (Recall the story of McClellan being upset with Lincoln in November, 1861 because the President insisted that the war could not be won without Union control of the Mississippi valley.) Actually, then,

what Lincoln did was adopt and adhere to Scott's plan for the military and economic strangulation of the Confederacy, a plan which pejoratively became known in the media of 1861 as the "Anaconda Plan."

Lincoln's education as a military man began on July 21, 1862, after he had ordered McDowell's 90-day volunteer militia to attack Beauregard's position between Manassas and Centerville, Virginia. "You are green, it is true," Lincoln acknowledged to McDowell. "But they are green also; you are all green alike."¹ Notified that a telegraphic report announcing the beginning of the battle had arrived at the War Department offices at the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 17th Street, Lincoln hurried over to General Scott's office, where the General in Chief assured the President that the Union forces would be victorious. Reinforced by 12,000 fresh rebel troops from the Shenandoah Valley just as McDowell began his sweeping envelopment of Beauregard, the Confederate forces rallied, and the green Union soldiers lost heart, broke ranks, and retreated back to Washington in complete disarray.

In time, with self-study and experience with McClellan and Halleck (which would turn into total exasperation), Lincoln began to reach several conclusions which were critical to the successful pursuit of the war:

o He himself was capable of making better strategic decisions than McClellan or any other Union military man who had come to his attention by that time.

o The proper objective of an army is not a place on the map, such as a capital; the proper objective is the enemy army.

Unfortunately, McClellan and the men chosen to replace him as commander of the Army of the Potomac, and as General in Chief, were similarly and completely absorbed by their quest for the Napoleonic climactic battle. So many of the Union commanders in the East--McClellan, Pope, Burnside, and Hooker--were incapable of perceiving any strategic design beyond either the capture of Richmond or the grand battle. The "battle" became so synonymous with the "campaign" and even the "war," that when they lost a battle, they did not know what to do next and withdrew into a paralysis until they were replaced."

What was still needed was someone with the military training and experience to translate policy direction into the unique military language of training, tactics, logistics, administration, etc. With ten or more completely independent commands, Lincoln and Stanton lacked the background to get the job done in the ranks. Further, they were not yet knowledgeable enough to recognize the need for, and organizational form of, a properly structured chain of command and an efficient staff organization."

Realizing that neither he nor Stanton were qualified to make detailed military plans or issue military orders, on July 11, 1862, Lincoln moved Major General Henry W. Halleck from command of the Department of the Mississippi to General in Chief. A widely known soldier-scholar in the field of military strategy, Halleck was Lincoln's hope for being the general who could translate his national policy and strategy into victories on the battlefield. Unfortunately, Halleck the scholar was not the leader Lincoln needed. This became evident soon after he took office when he could not recover from the disappointment of the Union defeat at the Second Bull Run in late August, and thereafter shrank from his responsibility and authority as General in Chief. After that loss, Halleck showed that he wanted to serve only as the technical advisor and staff critic for the President. The President would have to find another man to provide any kind of military leadership in the role of General in Chief.

The search would continue in vain for another year and a half. At Antietam, McClellan squandered a great strategic opportunity, absorbing terrible losses, and letting Lee escape. Lincoln relieved Buell from command in Kentucky and McClellan from command in Virginia. The Union was embarrassed at Fredericksburg and Burnside was relieved. Another Union defeat took place at Chancellorsville. Then, the fortunes of war began to turn in favor of the Union. Following the replacement of Hooker with Meade, the Union

forces prevailed against Lee in extremely heavy fighting at Gettysburg, and Grant captured Vicksburg. The victory at Vicksburg opened the Mississippi River and split the Confederacy. In combination, Vicksburg and Gettysburg decisively shattered Confederate hopes for foreign recognition and aid. Unfortunately, Chickamauga would be yet another Union fiasco.

Lincoln Emerges as the Supreme Strategist

Some authors, most notably Russell F. Weigley, leave the distinct impression that Ulysses S. Grant was the sole originator of the so-called "Strategy of Annihilation." Weigley states that Lincoln found it difficult to do much for military victory beyond offering support to the successive generals who came to his attention, hoping that one of them would have a plan to win battles or even the war.⁴ To support this position, much is made of the following instructions which were given to Meade by Grant as they embarked upon the spring campaign of 1864 against Lee's Army of Northern Virginia: "Lee's army will be your objective point. Wherever Lee goes, there you will go also."⁵ That order was sent to Meade on April 9, 1864, and has been widely cited as evidence that Grant delivered Lincoln from a presidential inability to facilitate a Union victory on the battlefield.

Inexplicably, such accounts do not give Lincoln credit for his considerable skills as a military strategist, especially in a time when virtually all thought on military strategy was still dominated by the idea of the Napoleonic climactic battle and/or capture of the enemy capital.

The following notes, written only days after the First Bull Run, illustrate how quickly Lincoln began to develop and document a sound strategy to support his objective of restoring the Union by defeating the Confederacy:

July 23, 1861

1 Let the plan for making the Blockade effective be pushed forward with all possible dispatch.

2 Let the volunteer forces at Fort-Monroe & vicinity--under Genl. Butler--be constantly drilled, disciplined, and instructed without more for the present.

3. Let Baltimore be held, as now, with a gentle, but firm, and certain hand.

4 Let the force now under Patterson, or Banks, be strengthened, and made secure in it's position [sic].

5. Let the forces in Western Virginia act, till further orders, according to instructions, or orders from Gen. McClellan.

6. [Let] Gen. Fremont push forward his organization, and operations [sic] in the West as rapidly as possible, giving rather special attention to Missouri.

7 Let the forces late before Manassas, except the three months men, be reorganized as rapidly as possible, in their camps here and about Arlington.

8. Let the three months forces, who decline to enter the longer service, be discharged as rapidly as circumstances will permit.

9 Let the new volunteer forces be brought forward as fast as possible; and especially into the camps on the two sides of the river here.

July 27, 1861

When the foregoing shall have been substantially attended to--

1. Let Manassas junction (or some point on one side or other of the railroads near it); and Strasburg, be seized, and permanently held, with an open line from Washington to Manassas; and and [sic] open line from Harper's Ferry to Strasburg--the military men to find the way of doing these.

2. This done, a joint movement from Cairo on Memphis; and from Cincinnati on East Tennessee.*

Lincoln's development as a strategist included an early recognition that the North had a much greater manpower pool and greater industrial resources than did the South. This would enable the North to take the war to the South and win a war of attrition, if that became necessary. That, in turn, would require engaging the enemy in combat and never letting go, until the battle was won and the war terminated.

The President's own development of the idea of fixing and fighting the enemy was adequately expressed some time prior to Grant assuming the responsibilities as General in Chief:

Brig. Genl. Buell.

My dear Sir:

Executive Mansion,

Washington, Jan. 13, 1862.

. . . I state my general idea of this war to be that we have the greater numbers, and the enemy has the greater facility of concentrating forces upon points of collision; 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 different points, at the same time; so that we can safely attack one, or both, if he makes no change; and if he weakens one to strengthen the other, forbear to attack the strengthened one, but seize, and hold the weakened one, gaining so much. . . .

A. Lincoln⁷

Lincoln shows that he was developing quite well as

a strategist in the following telegraph message to Hooker. Lee had begun his 1863 invasion of the North on a route that circled west of Washington. Hooker, then commanding the Union Army of the Potomac, proposed to counter Lee by striking Richmond. Lincoln gave different instructions. Note the date, and the wording regarding Lee's army and the strategic significance of Richmond.

United States Military Telegraph
 "Cypher" War Department. Washington DC.
 Major General Hooker June 10, 1863. [6:40 P.M.]
 Your long dispatch of to-day is just received. If left to me I would not go south of the Rappahannock, upon Lee's moving North of it. If you had Richmond invested to-day, you would not be able to take it in twenty days; meanwhile, your communications, and with them, your army would be ruined. I think Lee's Army, and not Richmond, is your true objective point. If he comes toward the Upper Potomac, follow on his flank, and on the inside track, shortening your lines, whilst he lengthens his. Fight him when opportunity offers. If he stays where he is, fret him, and fret him. A. Lincoln*

Those instructions led to the victory over Lee's army at Gettysburg, the strategic significance of which has already been noted. While Lincoln did not fight the actual battle, he appeared to be alone in recognizing the importance of fighting the enemy armies and destroying them. Some of his generals still needed to learn that lesson for themselves.

After the relief of Chatanooga in late November, 1863, Grant began to broaden his thinking from his own area of responsibility in the West to the formulation of a grander strategy. This may have been the result of a

growing sense of self-confidence; a desire to demonstrate that he could think in broader, strategic terms; or perhaps both. Nevertheless, Grant began to offer his advice to the President and Halleck. Grant's plan for the West was disapproved by Lincoln because it was too complex and called for more than the available number of forces. In the East, Grant proposed that a force of 60,000 soldiers be landed on the coast of North Carolina to cut the railroad lines connecting Richmond with the rest of the South, forcing the Confederates to abandon the capital to protect their communications. Among the plan's several weaknesses, the worst was the seizure of Richmond, not the destruction of Lee's army, as the principal objective. A later discussion with Lincoln would establish that the President's strategy was one of destruction of enemy armies, not the capture of capitals."

These observations are made in an endeavor to place the respective talents of Lincoln and Grant into proper perspective. In the final analysis, it seems clear that Lincoln was the master architect of the military strategy for the north. Lincoln's influence on Grant's strategic thinking was clearly evident in the campaigns that were fought in the East after Grant became General in Chief. After conferring with the President, Grant abandoned his idea to put forces into North Carolina. His new plan was to make Lee's army, not Richmond, the objective. Grant was the

field commander with the vision and leadership to implement Lincoln's strategy on the battlefield in such a way that a new type of strategy was established in the process, one which became known as the "strategy of annihilation." Both men are to be generously commended for their skill in conceptualizing their respective roles, and for working together so harmoniously.

ENDNOTES

¹Trevor Nevitt Dupuy, The Military Life of Abraham Lincoln: Commander in Chief (New York, New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1969), p. 36.

²Russell F. Weigley, The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 135.

³Dupuy, pp. 62-63.

⁴Weigley, p. 136.

⁵Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant, 2 vols. (New York: Charles L. Webster & Company, 1885-1886) 2:135.

⁶Roy P. Basler, ed., The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, 8 vols. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953) 4:456-457.

⁷Basler, 5:98.

⁸Basler, 6:257.

⁹T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and His Generals (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1952), pp. 291-296.

CHAPTER IV

LINCOLN AND GRANT

The Rise of Ulysses S. Grant

Finally, after much trial and error in the selection of general officers, Lincoln appointed Grant to overall command in the West on October 17, 1863. Following Grant's defeat of Bragg at Chatanooga and his rescue of Burnside at Knoxville, the President's attention was increasingly drawn to Grant as his most competent and successful field commander. He demonstrated qualities which had been so conspicuously absent for so long in all of the other Union generals who had come to the President's attention: following orders, fighting with whatever resources were placed at his disposal, energetic leadership, initiative, courage, and an ability to learn from mistakes. At long last, for the first time in the war, the President found an officer with the necessary qualities to serve as his General in Chief.

Ulysses Simpson Grant was as much like Abraham Lincoln as George McClellan had been different from the President. Although quite different in physical stature and appearance, their personality and temperamental similarities included humility, courtesy, kindness, and a strong sense of duty and country. They became a team, as close to a

perfectly matched set of civilian and military war leaders as can be found in history. Between them, they combined all of the attributes of the great captains of history.¹

Like Lincoln, who had moved from Kentucky to Indiana in 1816, Grant was a mid-westerner, born in Point Pleasant, Ohio on April 27, 1822. He graduated from West Point in 1843, distinguished himself in service under Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott in the War with Mexico, serving after that war in California and Oregon until he resigned his commission in 1854. He became engaged in farming and real estate in Saint Louis for a time before going into business with his father in Galena, Illinois until the war.

When war broke out, Grant was commissioned a colonel in the 21st Illinois Volunteer Infantry, rising later to brigadier general. As the war went on, Grant gained experience in increasingly larger and more complex units, getting the benefit of a progressive set of learning situations which would be ideal training for the position of General in Chief. This progressive experience was a much better training ground than suddenly being placed in charge of a large and growing army as McClellan had been.

Until they first met in March, 1864, Lincoln's relationship with Ulysses S. Grant consisted only of letters of encouragement or congratulations from the Commander in Chief to one of his numerous field commanders. With Grant's, and the Union's, first victories at Fort Henry and

Fort Donelson, Lincoln began to notice that Grant was active while others were inactive, and he was attacking rather than retreating. When some sought Grant's relief after his difficult victory at Shiloh in April, 1862, Lincoln replied: "I cannot spare this man. He fights."²

When Grant was accused of intemperant use of alcohol, Lincoln, a total abstainer, responded by saying, "If I knew what brand of whiskey he drinks I would send a barrel or so to some other generals."³ The President later established that the charges against Grant for excessive drinking were unfounded.

Grant did not have a flair for positive media coverage that other Union generals had sometimes shown. Grant himself wrote: "Because I would not divulge my ultimate plans to visitors, they pronounced me idle, incompetent, and unfit to command . . . and clamored for my removal." This comment was stimulated by negative press reports about Grant almost a year after Grant had taken terrible casualties at Shiloh. Lincoln is to have said: "I think Grant has hardly a friend except myself."⁴ Grant acknowledged the President's support during that period in his Personal Memoirs as follows: "I had never met Mr. Lincoln, but his support was constant."⁵

Grant was appointed as General in Chief on March 10, 1864, and promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General, a grade which had been used only twice previously in the

history of the U. S. military. His call to Washington at that time marked the first time that he and the President had ever met. That meeting took place at about 9:30 PM on the evening of March 8, 1864 at a White House reception to which Grant had been invited. Later in the evening, Lincoln told Grant that the promotion to three-star rank would take place the next day. Following a short prepared speech of his own, Lincoln asked Grant to be prepared to make some appropriate remarks which would ease any jealousy on the part of the other, more senior, general officers, and which would please the soldiers of the Army of the Potomac. Grant was promoted the next day (March 9, 1864) at 1 PM. For some unknown reason, his remarks did not include the points requested by the President. On March 10, the War Department issued orders relieving Halleck as General in Chief and appointing Grant to that position.

At first, Grant thought that he would locate his headquarters in the West. After arriving in Washington, he recognized that he should remain in the East for several good reasons, not the least of which included better communications with the President, and the fact that the most significant of the rebel forces, Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, was in the East. Thus, the stage was set for the establishment of a new and highly effective command and control arrangement. Halleck became Chief of Staff, remaining at the War Department to serve as the

communication link between Grant and the President and between Grant and the other commanders. Halleck was the ideal man for this new position because of his unique ability to interpret Lincoln's strategic concepts to Grant and to interpret Grant's military language to Lincoln, minimizing the kinds of misunderstandings that had taken place between Lincoln and McClellan.⁷

Grant located himself away from Washington, initially at Culpeper Court House, Virginia with MG Meade's Army of the Potomac. (This location was only a few miles south of where the same army had been three years earlier.⁸)

The New Partnership

Lincoln's trust and confidence in Grant is shown by the March, 1864 discontinuation of the previously frequent and voluminous correspondence between Lincoln and his other generals. Most of Grant's correspondence went to Halleck, and Grant rarely exchanged letters with the President. The President and his General in Chief communicated by means of telegraph, and by means of weekly visits by Grant to the President to review the general features of the General's plans, or visits by Lincoln to Grant's command post in the field.

Lincoln, now freed from feeling that he had to prod and prompt his field commanders with suggestions for military maneuvers, was able to concentrate on his role as leader of a nation at war. For the first time in the Civil

War, the President and his General in Chief were able to devote full time and energy to their respective responsibilities without becoming unnecessarily involved in or concerned with the interests of the other. At the same time, Lincoln did not simply leave the entire military operation to Grant, as he continued to read every report and telegraph sent in from the General in Chief.⁹

This new arrangement of Commander in Chief, General in Chief, and Chief of Staff worked very well, giving the United States a modern system of command which was superior to anything achieved in Europe until von Moltke devised the Prussian staff of 1866 and 1870.¹⁰

In his memoirs, Grant describes the first conversation he had with the President about the conduct of the war:

All he wanted or had ever wanted was someone who would take responsibility and act, and call on him for all the assistance he needed, pledging himself to use all the power of the Government in rendering such assistance. . . .

. . . . The President told me he did not want to know what I proposed to do.¹¹

Giving that much freedom to one of his generals, even the General in Chief, was a genuine act of faith on the part of the President, and a very strong expression of the President's confidence in Grant.

Grant goes on to report that even with the President's pledge to remain uninvolved with the General's plans, Lincoln submitted a campaign plan of his own for

Grant's consideration. However, historians Hay, Conger and T. H. Williams disagree with this recollection of Grant's, which was written more than twenty years after the fact. Williams acknowledges that Lincoln gave Grant unprecedented strategic latitude. When asked about Grant's prerogatives Lincoln responded with these words: "Do you hire a man to do your work and then do it yourself?"¹² The President then reportedly said:

Grant is the first General I have had. You know how it has been with all the rest. . . . They all wanted me to be the General. . . . I am glad to find a man who can go ahead without me.¹³

Williams goes on to say that Lincoln did not mean that he did not want to know what Grant's plans were, or that Grant was given all responsibility for strategic planning. What was really happening, Williams writes, was that Lincoln meant that he had no interest in the details of Grant's plans.

Unfortunately, the only other account of how Lincoln and Grant discussed policy and strategy which is probably reliable (i.e., nonspeculative) is provided from the personal diary of John Hay, personal secretary to the President. In a conversation between the President and General Grant, Lincoln remarked that Grant's proposal to use the full strength of the army in a simultaneous movement all along the line reminded him of his repeated, and neglected, suggestions to Buell, Halleck, et al, to move at once on the enemy line to take full advantage of the Union's superior

numbers. Grant said that it was his intention to use every available man, "those not fighting could help the fighting." The President responded to Grant's proposal with great pleasure, adding, "Those not skinning can hold a leg."¹⁴

Nicolay and Hay, the President's secretaries, do not mention anything else about or from private discussions between Lincoln and Grant on the subject of strategy. One is thus forced to draw conclusions about the relationship of Lincoln and Grant on the subject of strategy from other sources.

Conger goes about this in a very convincing way. He notes that Grant had numerous discussions with Halleck, who probably understood the President's ideas better than anyone else. Calling to mind Grant's initial proposal to penetrate the Confederacy from North Carolina, Conger asserts that what Grant actually did was carry out the plan Lincoln had been trying to get accomplished since early in the war, even paraphrasing Lincoln's June, 1863 instructions to Hooker in his own instructions to Meade in 1864. In several other respects, Grant's plans reflected the views of Lincoln: Grant called for the simultaneous movement of the army on all fronts; President's General War Order No. 1 in January, 1862 did the same. Grant called for the destruction of the enemy's capability to make war; Lincoln had actually adopted the Anaconda Plan to do the same thing. Grant proposed a

continuous hammering of the enemy; Lincoln had made the same proposals earlier.¹⁵

It appears that Lincoln knew of Grant's plans in general terms, and approved. The primary source evidence is insufficient to judge whether Grant shaped his plans to meet Lincoln's views, or came to that way of thinking quite independently. With the trust and confidence he had in Grant, it would have been like Lincoln to give Grant wide latitude. At the same time, it would have been like the soldierly Grant to carry out the strategy of his superior to the last detail.¹⁶

It seems, then, that Lincoln knew exactly what he wanted to do as early as 1861 (post Bull Run notes of July, 1861), and that Grant agreed with the President's strategy and followed it to the letter, adding his own considerable talents in its implementation on the battlefield.

Lincoln Watches Closely

There is not any question about Lincoln's close and constant interest in the battlefield progress of the war. Beginning with the First Battle of Bull Run, the President developed the practice of visiting the War Department offices every day to review the telegraph traffic and update his information on the disposition of the troops in the field. He read every line of Grant's reports to Halleck and followed every movement of troops in the field.

Just prior to Grant's departure to take the fight to Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, Lincoln wrote the following note to Grant.

Executive Mansion Washington,
Lieutenant General Grant. April 30, 1864

Not expecting to see you again before the Spring campaign opens, I wish to express in this way, my entire satisfaction with what you have done up to this time, so far as I understand it. The particulars of your plans I neither know, or seek to know. You are vigilant and self-reliant; and, pleased with this, I wish not to obtrude any constraints or restraints upon you. While I am very anxious that any great disaster, or the capture of our men in great numbers, shall be avoided, I know these points are less likely to escape your attention than they would be mine. If there is anything wanting which is within my power to give, do not fail to let me know it.

And now with a brave Army, and a just cause, may God sustain you. Yours very truly A. Lincoln¹⁷

Certainly, this letter described the very healthy state of the relationship between the President and his General in Chief, while also implying that Lincoln knew what Grant's general strategy was and was perfectly content to have Grant execute the plan in whatever way the general saw fit. It certainly appears that Lincoln had provided the "what" and was leaving the "how" up to Grant.

On May 4, 1864, Grant and Meade's Army of the Potomac crossed the Rapidan River in Virginia toward Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. It's mission was not simple but very straightforward: find and fight Lee's army until one was the victor and one was the vanquished. Richmond was a consideration but not the objective. At the same time,

Grant's able subordinate, MG William T. Sherman, was moving toward Atlanta.

Lincoln's daily monitoring of the progress of the war is evident from his telegrams of encouragement, and his occasional questions to Grant about specific situations which concerned the Commander in Chief.

By mid-June, Grant had not been able to decisively engage Lee north of Richmond, but had only driven the rebel army closer to their capital. Not wanting to engage in siege warfare around Richmond, Grant wanted to draw Lee out for a fight. If Grant could capture Petersburg, with its railroad line hub connecting Richmond with the rest of the eastern Confederacy, Lee would have to leave Richmond to fight for his communications, giving Grant the battle he wanted. As Grant and Meade's army crossed the James River while Lee was still expecting an attack to the north, Lincoln telegraphed: "I begin to see it; you will succeed. God bless you all."¹⁰ Unfortunately, Meade and his subordinates did not aggressively follow Grant's instructions, and Lee moved his army into Petersburg in time to thwart Grant's plan.

While the President watched Grant's actions approvingly, he also watched them closely and continuously because he fully appreciated that he held the ultimate responsibility for the outcome of the war effort.

In July, rebel LTG Jubal Early had crossed the Potomac and seriously threatened Washington before being defeated by a quickly dispatched force from Grant. This was due, in part, to the inability of the four military department commanders in and around Washington to coordinate their efforts. Grant persuaded the President to consolidate these departments under the command of young MG Phillip H. Sheridan. Grant's instructions to Sheridan were to go where Early went and follow the rebel force to the death. Disappointed by so many Union generals other than Grant, Lincoln telegraphed Grant to " . . . watch it [the situation with Sheridan] every day, and hour, and force it."¹⁹ Realizing that the President was correct in insisting on close personal supervision over Sheridan, Grant telegraphed Lincoln that he would depart for Washington in two hours and spend a day with the Union forces at Sheridan's location. Grant secretly traveled to meet Sheridan to give him clear instructions on what was to be done--destroy Early's army and destroy the Shenandoah Valley's capability to further sustain Lee's armies. Grant then traveled to Washington to report his actions to Lincoln, and then returned to his field headquarters in Virginia.

The point of this anecdote is to show that Lincoln was still monitoring the military situation very closely. He had an excellent grasp of the big picture, probably better than anyone else, and was correct in reminding Grant

that the General in Chief had broader responsibilities than simply supervising the campaign against Lee in Virginia.

The following account of communication between Lincoln and Grant illustrates the continued and progressively superb status of their relationship. The President sent the following telegram message to the General on July 20, 1864:

Lieut. Genl. Grant	Executive Mansion,
City Point, Va	Washington, July 20, 1864.
Yours of yesterday, about a call for 300,000 is received. I suppose you had not seen the call for 500,000, made the day before, and which, I suppose, covers the case. Always glad to have your suggestions.	
	A. Lincoln ²⁰

In November, Sherman proposed his march eastward from Atlanta to Savannah. Not wanting to leave rebel forces free to operate unhindered in Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee, Grant had some initial reservations about Sherman's proposal. The President shared Grant's concerns, but trusted Grant to make the final decision, and Sherman's march to the Atlantic seacoast was approved.

In these instances and every similar instance, the President trusted Grant's judgment, and never had cause to regret that confidence. Their mutual regard for one another was clearly evident.

Sheridan destroyed Early's army and the Shenandoah Valley's capability to support Lee's army, and Sherman marched to Savannah and then northward, demonstrating the inability of the Confederacy to defend itself. In northern

Virginia, Grant and Meade's Army of the Potomac continued to force Lee to fight a defensive struggle in and around Petersburg which the South could not win.

At Grant's invitation, the President made an extended visit (March 25-April 8) to the General's City Point, Virginia field headquarters to be present for what were believed to be the closing days of the war. Union forces occupied Richmond and Petersburg on April 3. Lincoln met Grant at Petersburg, and said, "Do you know, general, that I have had a sort of sneaking idea for some days that you intended to do something like this."²¹ It is easy to imagine the smiles, hardy handshakes, and warm congratulations between the two men who had finally brought the war to a close.

President Lincoln visited Richmond the next day, spent the night there, and returned to City Point.

On April 7, the Commander in Chief sent his last important order of the war to his General in Chief:

Lieut Gen. Grant	City-Point, April 7. 11 AM. 1865
Gen. Sherman says 'If the thing is pressed I think that Lee will surrender.' Let the thing be pressed.	A. Lincoln. ²²

Seeing that the war was really and finally over, President Lincoln left for Washington on the River Queen on April 8th. Lee surrendered at Appomattox Court House on April 9th, and in North Carolina, Sherman accepted the surrender of Johnston and the only other effective rebel force several days later.

General Grant declined an invitation from the President to accompany the Lincolns to the theater on April 14. General and Mrs. Grant respectfully declined so that they could travel that evening to visit their children who were in school in Burlington, New Jersey. When General Grant reached Philadelphia, he was informed that the President had been assassinated.

General Grant On President Lincoln

Grant wrote the following about Abraham Lincoln:

It would be impossible for me to describe the feeling that overcame me at the news of . . . the assassination of the President. I knew his goodness of heart, his generosity, his yielding disposition, his desire to have everybody happy, and above all his desire to see all the people of the United States enter again upon the full privileges of citizenship with equality among all.²³

All things are said to be wisely directed, and for the best interest of all concerned [Romans 8:28]. This reflection does not, however abate in the slightest our sense of bereavement in the untimely loss of so good and great a man as Abraham Lincoln.²⁴

Mr. Lincoln gained influence over men by making them feel that it was a pleasure to serve him. He preferred yielding his own wish to gratify others, rather than to insist upon having his own way. It distressed him to disappoint others. In matters of

public duty, however, he had what he wished, but in the least offensive way.²⁵

Mr. Lincoln was not timid, and he was willing to trust his generals in making and executing their plans.²⁶

A man of great ability, pure patriotism, unselfish nature, full of forgiveness to his enemies, bearing malice toward none, he proved to be the man above all others for the struggle through which the nation had to pass to place itself among the greatest in the family of nations. His fame will grow brighter as time passes and his great work is better understood.²⁷

Abraham Lincoln truly personified the Clausewitzian idea that an acquaintance with military affairs is not the principal qualification for a director of war but that " . . . a remarkable, superior mind and strength of character" are better qualifications.²⁸

ENDNOTES

¹Trevor Nevitt Dupuy, The Military Life of Abraham Lincoln: Commander in Chief (New York, New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1969), p. xii.

²Frederick B. Maurice, Statesmen and Soldiers of the Civil War: A Study of the Conduct of War (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1926), p. 92.

³John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Abraham Lincoln: A History, 10 vols. (New York: The Century Company, 1890) 7:154.

⁴Maurice, pp. 92-93.

⁵Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant, 2 vols. (New York: Charles L. Webster & Company, 1885-1886) 1:460.

⁶T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and His Generals (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1952), pp. 299-300.

⁷Ibid., p. 301.

⁸Bruce Catton, The Civil War (New York: The Fairfax Press, 1980), p. 206.

⁹Maurice, p. 99.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 97.

¹¹Grant 2:122-123.

¹²Williams, p. 305.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Nicolay and Hay 8:348.

¹⁵Arthur L. Conger, President Lincoln as War Statesman (Madison, Wisconsin: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1917), 134-135.

¹⁶Ibid., 136-137.

¹⁷Roy P. Basler, ed., The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, 8 vols, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953) 7:324.

¹⁸Basler 7:393.

¹⁹Ibid., 7:476.

²⁰Ibid., 7:452.

²¹Grant 2:458-459.

²²Basler 8:392.

²³Grant 2:508-509.

²⁴Ibid. 2:523.

²⁵Ibid. 2:536.

²⁶Ibid. 2:537.

²⁷Melville W. Fuller and Teunis S. Hamlin, comps., Words of Lincoln (Rahway, New Jersey: The Mershon Company Press, 1895), p. 184.

²⁸Williams, p. 7.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

What has been learned from this comparative look into the relationships between Abraham Lincoln and his Generals in Chief, George B. McClellan and Ulysses S. Grant?

What was the impact of those relationships on the Union conduct of the war?

What implications, if any, are there for the contemporary Commander in Chief and the Commander of a theater of war?

Lincoln and McClellan

It seems clear that Lincoln and McClellan never came to an agreement on either policy or strategy. The apparent reasons for that failure to agree have been noted previously, but merit repetition to insure an understanding of the importance of the relationship dynamic between the President and the Warfighter.

- o McClellan saw himself as the "savior" of the Union when he was called to Washington in 1861.

- o McClellan also saw himself as superior to the President, not as the junior partner in their senior-subordinate relationship.

o As the "savior" and as one "superior" to the President, McClellan saw no need to seek policy guidance or other advice from the President, to provide the President with a military plan for the defeat of the rebel armies, or to associate with him any more than was absolutely necessary. There was no apparent appreciation of the pressure that the President was getting from the press and Congress.

o The General saw himself as a "hero," confronted by the imagined numerical superiority of the rebel army, the perceived radical Republican conspiracy to see him defeated on the battlefield, the perceived failure of the President to provide the resources he needed to win the war, and the belief that he would be blamed if the Union failed to defeat the rebel armies.

He was never able to see the reality of his own overcautiousness, procrastination, and unrealistic campaign planning and warfighting. The result of this unfortunate situation was that McClellan's ego never permitted him to recognize his legitimate responsibilities to the President to serve as the junior partner in the relationship and as the President's military advisor. In turn, the first apparent requirement for an effective and harmonious relationship based on mutual trust and confidence--the sharing of a vision or mutual understanding of the desired ends of the war--was absent. Without that common policy

understanding, there could be no successful combination of endeavors which would win the war.

Without that vital first step, none of the other essentials discussed in Chapter I matter or need to be addressed. Since McClellan showed so little inclination to establish a harmonious relationship with the President, the relationship process never really got started, and eventually had to be terminated by the President. McClellan's behavior was clearly counterproductive, and did irreparable damage to any chance for a harmonious relationship with his Commander in Chief.

McClellan's apparent agenda was to build an army, win the war by capturing Richmond, and declare himself as Savior of the Union and heir apparent to the White House. There was no place for the President in his plan except to serve as the provider of resources for the fulfillment of McClellan's destiny.

This failed relationship between the President and General McClellan finally resulted in McClellan's relief and the continuation of the President's search for a General in Chief who could effectively participate in the partnership. At the same time, the experience with McClellan was beneficial because it caused the President to engage in a military history and strategy self-development program which made him the premier strategist of the war.

Lincoln and Grant

When Grant assumed the office of General in Chief in March, 1864, he subordinated himself completely to the policy and strategic thinking of President Lincoln. There was none of the grandiosity or eccentric behavior of McClellan. At the same time, Grant possessed and exercised courage, tenacity, and decisiveness which McClellan never demonstrated in the preparation for or conduct of a campaign or battle. The 1864 campaign to defeat the rebel armies began as soon as the spring wet weather permitted, and did not let up until the Confederacy collapsed one year later.

It should not go unnoted, also, that the successes brought about by the Lincoln-Grant partnership insured the reelection of President Lincoln in late 1864, thus insuring the continuation of the course to restore and preserve the Union.

Lincoln and Grant were superbly successful in their partnership because they shared the vision of a restored and preserved Union; recognized their respective senior-subordinate roles, responsibilities, and prerogatives in the strategy to accomplish the objective of the war; worked together as an effective and harmonious team; totally subordinated themselves to the restoration of the Union; recognized the difficulties of each others responsibilities; supported each other; and demonstrated genuine respect, trust, and confidence in each other. Both men were

unassuming, courteous, completely dedicated to the defeat of the rebel forces, were extremely well suited temperamentally to working with each other, and serve as a model statesman-soldier team for today's senior leaders.

There are some implications for today's leaders.

First, this study of the value of a harmonious relationship between statesman and soldier clearly demonstrates that more than good statesmanship and soldierly skills are required to successfully conduct and conclude a war, especially one as painful as a civil war. The skills of the statesman and the soldier must be held together in mutually supporting harmony like the foundation and the framework of a large building are held together by cement. In war, that cement is the harmonious working relationship between the President and the Warfighter. The President is the architect, and the Warfighter is the building contractor who brings the architect's drawings to life.

Finally, the President must be as certain as possible that the top military leaders he appoints (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Commanders in Chief (CINCs), for example) are the kind of leaders with whom he can have a Lincoln-Grant kind of relationship, especially in the event of war.

APPENDIX

MCCLELLAN'S MEMOIRS

W. C. Prime, the author of the introductory Biographical Sketch in McClellan's book, describes the radical Republican conspiracy as follows:

The success of McClellan in 1862 would have been doubly fatal to the politicians. The old Union would have been restored and the general would command the political situation. Therefore McClellan must not be successful. His popularity must be destroyed. Whatever of falsehood could be invented must be published concerning him. His successes must be decried. Above all, he must not be allowed to win a decisive victory. Neither a quick ending of the war nor a victorious campaign by McClellan would enure to party success.

Prime goes on to say that since Lincoln would not adopt the radical position, or discharge McClellan, it became necessary for the radicals to put their man, Stanton, in charge of the War Department to " . . . do what the President would not." Thereby, " . . . the President himself could be deceived, mislead, to some extent managed."

McClellan's own perceptions are as follows:

I believe that the leaders of the radical branch of the Republican party preferred political control in one section of a divided country to being in the minority in a restored union.

Not only did these people desire the abolition of slavery, but its abolition in such a manner and under such circumstances that the slaves would at once be endowed with the electoral franchise, while the intelligent white man of the South should be deprived of it, and permanent control thus be secured through

the votes of the ignorant slaves, composing so large a portion of the population of the seceded states.

Influenced by these motives, they succeeded but too well in sowing the seeds of distrust in Mr. Lincoln's mind, so that, even before I actually commenced the Peninsular campaign, I had lost that cordial support of the executive which was necessary to attain success. It may be said that under these circumstances it was my duty to resign my command. But I had become warmly attached to the soldiers, who already had learned to love me well; all my pride was wrapped up in the army that I had created, and I knew of no commander at all likely to be assigned to it in my place who would be competent to conduct its operations.

Nor did I at that time fully realize the length to which these men were prepared to go in carrying out their schemes. For instance, I did not suspect, until the orders reached me, that Fort Monroe and the 1st Corps would be withdrawn from my control [during the Peninsula campaign]; and when these orders arrived they found me too far committed to permit me to withdraw with honor.

The difficulties of my position in Washington commenced when I was first confined to my bed with typhoid fever . . . for some three weeks, and culminated soon after Mr. Stanton became Secretary of War. Up to this time there had been no serious difficulty; there were slight murmurs of impatience at the delay in moving, but all sensible and well-informed men saw the impossibility of entering upon a campaign at that season [winter], and no party was as yet openly formed against me.

The radicals never again lost their influence with the President, and henceforth directed all their efforts to prevent my achieving success.

McClellan's written impressions of his relationship with the president were as follows:

My relations with Mr. Lincoln were generally very pleasant, and I seldom had trouble with him when we could meet face to face. The difficulty always arose behind my back. I believe that he liked me personally, and certainly he was always much influenced by me when we were together. During the

early part of my command in Washington he often consulted with me before taking important steps or appointing general officers.

Officially my association with the President was very close until the severe attack of illness in December, 1861. I was often sent for to attend formal and informal cabinet meetings, and at all hours when the President desired to consult with me on any subject; and he often came to my house, frequently late at night, to learn the last news before retiring. His fame as a narrator of anecdotes was fully deserved, and he always had something apropos on the spur of the moment.

The President ignored all questions of weather, state of roads, and preparation, and gave orders impossible of execution.

While here [Fairfax Court-House] I learned through the public news papers that I was displaced in the command of the United States armies. It may well be to state that no one in authority had ever expressed to me the slightest disappropriation of my action in that capacity, nor had I received any information of a purpose to change my position.¹

ENDNOTES

¹George B. McClellan, McClellan's Own Story (New York: Charles L. Webster & Company, 1887), pp. 8, 154-155, 159-162, 224-225.

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