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SUCCESSFUL OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN SPITE OF THE BOSS  
A LOOK AT GENERALS SHERIDAN AND GRANT

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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ABSTRACT OF SUCCESSFUL OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN SPITE OF THE BOSS  
A LOOK AT GENERALS SHERIDAN AND GRANT

Successful operational leadership is not always function of supportive or competent reporting seniors. Successful operational leaders can prosper in less than ideal command structures. The cases of General P.H. Sheridan and General U. S. Grant provide excellent leadership models for study of operational commanders in "dysfunctional" command relationships. Using current literature on operational leadership to help define critical traits of operational leaders, the successful generalship of Generals Sheridan and Grant are examined.

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## Introduction

The effectiveness of an operational commander directly impacts the performance of his armies. History is full of examples of operational commanders who were essential to the success of military campaigns. It is also replete with examples of operational commanders who sowed the seeds for their own downfall. The operational leadership of these individuals was critical to their triumph or failure. Indeed as Dr. Vego of the Naval War College states, "Operational leadership is perhaps one of the most critical elements in the practical application of operational art."<sup>1</sup>

Defining the essence of successful operational leadership is less than precise. While there is a great body of work that speaks to the essential elements of operational leadership and generalship, there is no unanimity on the subject. Some even confess mystification when tasked to provide conclusions. As General Patton stated, "Leadership is the thing that wins battles. I have it-but I'll be damned if I can define it."<sup>2</sup> Patton, along with others, illustrates that successful operational leadership exists at many levels in a chain of command. It is not surprising that successful operational leaders thrive in command relationships characterized by competence, professionalism and mutual support. What is surprising are the historical examples of brilliant operational leaders who prospered in dysfunctional command environments. Upon studying these cases, it is apparent that **successful operational leadership is not of necessity a function of the effectiveness/support of the immediate superior. Successful operational leaders can effectively overcome and adapt to shortcomings in their chain of command.**

The Civil War provides many examples of both effective and deficient operational leadership. The torturous search of Lincoln for a general that would bring victory is well known to students of the Civil War. Less well known, and overshadowed by the legacy of Lee, were the shortcomings in generalship throughout the ranks of Confederate flag officers. Studying this

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<sup>1</sup> Milan Vego, "Operational Leadership," *Operational Art: A Book of Readings* (Newport RI: Naval War College, 1995), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Werner W. Banisch, "Leadership at the Operational Level," *Army*, August 1987, p. 51.

period, what is perhaps most beneficial in understanding operational leadership, is examining operational commanders who were victorious and critical to the war's termination. Clearly with war termination as a criteria, the roster of eligible generals quickly narrows to the Union Generals Sheridan, Grant and Sherman. When one factors in the degree of meteoric rise in spite of the incompetence and/or lack of support of ones immediate superiors, the performances of Sheridan and Grant are rendered even more remarkable.

This paper will study General Philip Sheridan and General Ulysses S. Grant. In the case of Sheridan, the focus will be primarily on his service under General Don Carlos Buell and General William Rosecrans and end at the start of his service in the Army of the Potomac. In the case of Grant, the focus will be on his service under General Henry Wager Halleck until Grant's assumption of duties as General-in-chief.

#### **Attributes of the Operational Leader**

Any meaningful study of operational leadership should attempt to first provide an overview of those attributes that are prerequisites for success. As stated above, precise definitions are elusive. However, certain character traits and characteristics are evident in many writings on the subject of operational leadership. The most important of these attributes are: 1) boldness; 2) being operationally knowledgeable, but not bounded by doctrine; 3) strong operational will; 4) ability to communicate; 5) correct use and care of subordinates; 6) integrity; and, 7) operational soundness.

Dr. Vego provides a listing of personality traits that should be incumbent in a successful operational commander. Included in his listing is the view, that the

"...operational commander must possess, among other things, the ability to accomplish assigned missions without the need to be supervised by a superior commander. He must be tough-minded, acting decisively and independently in those situations where contact with superiors is impractical or impossible. This in turn requires a high degree of moral courage, self-reliance. It also involves a willingness to assume responsibility and take risks to do 'the right thing at the right time.'<sup>3</sup>"

The above implies a desirability of boldness in an effective operational leader. History is replete

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<sup>3</sup> Vego, pp. 2-3.

with examples of commanders who typified boldness. As Werner Banisch states the "...truly great commander must resist the tendency to play it safe."<sup>4</sup> Effective commanders should not be ignorant of the operational arts. Nor should they be hamstrung by doctrine. Maj. Gerner puts it well, when he states that "...commanders must guard against the temptation to require doctrine or material to solve the puzzle of friction in war."<sup>5</sup> The commander should have a clear and reflective mind. As Clausewitz states, the "...higher up the chain of command, the greater is the need for boldness to be supported by a reflective mind, so that boldness does not degenerate into purposeless bursts of blind passion."<sup>6</sup>

Key to the success of an operational commander is his will. An operational commander's will can be characterized by "... resolve and determination."<sup>7</sup> It is a truly intangible characteristic that has wide breadth. It encompasses the ability to act swiftly and decisively. It is clearly felt by those in subordinate positions. Implicit in this characteristic are the abilities to be flexible and to acknowledge the competency of subordinates. As BGen Henderson states, the "...good commander is wise in admitting to his staff and his troops that he is not an authority on everything."<sup>8</sup> There is a fine line between the positive effects of determination and the negative effects of obstinacy.

The operational commanders's will has little value if it is not communicated. The communication of will is accomplished coincident with the communication of the commander's vision and intent. This communication of commander's intent is critical in ensuring unity of

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<sup>4</sup> Banisch, p.54.

<sup>5</sup> Mark H. Gerner, "Leadership at the Operational Level," *Military Review*, June 1987, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz. On War (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 190.

<sup>7</sup> Philip L. Brinkley The Operational Commander's Will: An Intangible Element of Victory (Fort Levenworth KS: U.S. Army Command and Staff College. School of Advanced Military Studies, 1987), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> F.P. Henderson, "Commandership: The Art of Command," *Marine Corps Gazette*, January 1992, pp. 42.

effort.<sup>9</sup> This intent coupled with effective training of subordinates enhances the potential for success in a conflict.

An obvious attribute of successful operational leadership is integrity. Entailed in this integrity is fealty to superiors, looking out for subordinates and imparting support, respect and adherence (where practical) to lawful orders. Implicit in a commander's integrity is the requirement that the commander be both trustworthy and trusting.<sup>10</sup> Trustworthy to execute a superior commander's intent and trusting of subordinates (as practical) to allow them sufficient latitude to execute his intent.

Finally, an operational commander must have operational soundness and think operationally. Effective operational leaders know their theater and know their men. Their attention and focus is at the point of main effort. History abounds with examples of armies whose success potential was enhanced by the presence of their commander.<sup>11</sup> Operational soundness is also a maturing process. As an effective operational leader matures, his thought process should continue to expand. It should encompass not only the current operational situation, but anticipate the future.

The above is, by no means, a definitive description of the successful operational leader. As BGen Henderson states, "...there can be 'no one size fits all' in the practice of command."<sup>12</sup> However, it does provide a useful context for discussing the successful operational leadership examples of Generals Sheridan and Grant.

#### **General Philip H. Sheridan**

General Sheridan's ascendancy during the war was undeniably meteoric. He came east in 1861 from the Oregon territory as a Captain in the Regular Army. After joining the Thirteenth Infantry Regiment, his first action in the war effort was to audit the confused accounts of the relieved General Fremont. Accomplishing his task with obvious proficiency, he was tagged by

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<sup>9</sup> Vego, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Vego, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Banisch, p. 55.

<sup>12</sup> Henderson, p. 41.

General Halleck as a promising staff officer. He would next serve in the Army of Southwest Missouri as Chief Quartermaster and Chief Commissary for Subsistence. Though a proficient logistician, he ran afoul on an unappreciative General Curtis. Relieved at his own request, Sheridan saw 1862 arrive in a disheartened state. Fate (and a little self promotion) interceded and Sheridan was able to secure command of the Second Michigan Cavalry and a colonelcy in the volunteers. By autumn of 1862, he was a Brigadier General in the volunteers. No longer thought of as just a promising staff officer, he was fast solidifying a reputation as a competent soldier who knew how to fight. By war's end he was arguably one of the finest cavalry officers in history and was held in the highest esteem by the then General of the Army Grant. Indeed Grant was quoted as ranking "...Sheridan with Napoleon and Frederick and the great commanders of history."<sup>13</sup> Though he flourished in the east under Grant, the foundation for his reputation was laid during his service in the armies of the west. Service, in particular, under two operational commanders whose battlefield performance has been adjudged by historians as deficient.

#### **Sheridan's Seniors: Buell and Rosecrans**

Widely regarded at the start of the war as one of the Army's finest officer's, General Don Carlos Buell was far from decisive on the actual battlefield. He was "...McClellan without charm or glamour."<sup>14</sup> He was studious and methodical in nature and a stern disciplinarian. He was a taciturn individual, who was not given to forming intimate relationships. In spite of this, he held the confidence and respect of those who knew him.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, he shared the same inability to press the attack and gain results that was the hallmark of General McClellan.

His performance in Kentucky and Tennessee frustrated President Lincoln to no end. While

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<sup>13</sup> Clarence Edward Macartney, Grant and His Generals (New York: The McBride Company, 1953), p. 111.

<sup>14</sup> T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and His Generals (New York: Vintage Books, 1952), p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> Williams p. 41; Ulysses S. Grant, Ulysses S. Grant: Memoirs and Selected Letters (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1990), p. 240.

his planning was meticulous and his concerns over lines of supply very real, he was not decisive or responsive to Lincoln's concern about Eastern Tennessee. Indeed his concern for "railroad repair" in order to maintain lines of communication, allowed his adversary Confederate General Bragg to "...reorganize and increase his army to such an extent that he was able to contest the possession of Middle Tennessee and Kentucky."<sup>16</sup> Buell's slowness to act nearly afforded Bragg the opportunity to beat him to Louisville and seriously threaten Cincinnati. It was a curious campaign of maneuver rather than fighting between Buell and Bragg that allowed the Union forces to barely beat the Confederates to Louisville. It was a campaign that nearly resulted in his being relieved from command; saved primarily by General Thomas' request not to relieve him.

When Buell did engage Bragg's forces at the Battle of Perryville in October 1862, his battlefield performance lost the confidence of his Commander-in-chief. Sheridan observed after an interview, in the evening of October 7th, "...that General Buell and his staff-officers were unconscious of the magnitude of the battle that had just been fought."<sup>17</sup> Further ineptitude was evident the next day, when Union General McCook's men bore the brunt of a Confederate assault, while northern forces under Generals Thomas and Crittenden lay idle nearby awaiting orders from Buell. Buell's failure to pursue Bragg's forces after the bloody battle was reminiscent of McClelland after Antietam. As Buell might have expected, Lincoln relieved him.<sup>18</sup>

Rosecrans assumed command with the reputation of a fighter. He emerged from the battles of Corinth and Iuka with the reputation in Washington as a capable commander. However, it

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<sup>16</sup> P.H. Sheridan, Personal Memoirs of P.H. Sheridan, Vol. 1 (New York: Charles L. Webster & Company, 1888) p. 180.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 199.

<sup>18</sup> Williams, pp. 183-185; Shelby Foote, The Civil War: A Narrative, Fort Sumter to Perryville (New York: Vintage Books, 1986) pp. 740-744.

should be noted that Grant felt his performance at Iuka and as a subordinate to be lacking.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, with a penchant for self promotion, mercurial personality and some interesting eccentricities, he was a colorful replacement for the dour Buell.

Rosecrans was given to "councils of war." He had a tendency to immerse himself in details. Not a decisive individual, he seemingly lost some of his nerve after the Battle of Stone's River (Murfeesboro). He became plagued with the same "slows" that had infected other Union generals. After much urging and correspondence (often acrimonious), Rosecrans finally launched renewed operations against Bragg in the summer of 1863.<sup>20</sup>

It was the bloody Battle of Chickamauga that may have best illustrated Rosecrans' lack mettle. Conflict with Bragg on September 19, 1863 left Rosecrans distressed. Poor staff work and his own ignorance of his troop dispositions, the next day, allowed a dangerous gap to develop in the Federal line. The result was a crushing blow to the Union army. Rather than going to the center of action (General Thomas' corps), Rosecrans left the battlefield to set up a "defense" of Chattanooga. In the process, he left Thomas alone to face the Confederates. Thomas, the "Rock of Chickamauga", held his own and was able to retire from the field the next day.

Within two days of the Battle of Chickamauga, Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland was dug in at Chattanooga, nearly encircled by the Confederates. Bragg's forces held the high ground of Missionary Ridge and Lookout Mountain. A siege had begun and gloom prevailed. Lincoln felt that after Chickamauga, "...Rosecrans had lost his nerve and acted 'confused and stunned like a duck hit on the head."<sup>21</sup> Given the authority by Washington, Grant relieved Rosecrans with Thomas and then set out for Chattanooga. It is true that Rosecrans had ideas for breaking the siege, but as Grant stated, "My only wonder was that he had not carried them

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<sup>19</sup> Grant, pp. 276-77, 280-282.

<sup>20</sup> Williams, pp. 247-51.

<sup>21</sup> Williams, p. 285.

out."<sup>22</sup>

### Sheridan as Operational Leader

A harbinger of Sheridan's battlefield performance could be seen when he went into action with his first calvary brigade at the Battle of Boonesville near Corinth, Mississippi. This occurred when he was assigned to the Army of the Mississippi. There against a force three times his size, he divided his numbers and surprised the enemy; carrying the day. It was an action that got him his first star. It was a bold action and boldness was an obvious attribute of General Sheridan. So was his refusal to be always doctrinaire.

However, it was not just his boldness that brought his success, but additional traits and characteristics he would display for the duration of the Civil War. He would be effective regardless of his reporting senior. He would always, for instance, endeavor to take care of his men, stating that,

"I had striven unceasingly to have them well fed and well clothed, had personally looked after the selection of their camps and had maintained such a discipline as to allay former irritation. Men who march, scout, and fight and suffer all the hardships that fall the lot of soldiers in the field, in order to do vigorous work must have the best bodily sustenance, and every comfort that can be provided."<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, during the siege of Chattanooga when the Union forces were subsisting on half rations, Sheridan's forces were supplemented with additional provisions for which he had arranged.<sup>24</sup>

Sheridan displayed exceptional operational soundness. He always endeavored to have a complete understanding of his theater. He mastered topography as early as Boonesville, gaining a thorough understanding of local roads, trails and rivers. His intelligence throughout the war was always first rate. This is typified by his relationship with his scout James Card while attached to the Army of the Cumberland.

Sheridan's operational will in a conflict was always readily apparent. His will was

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<sup>22</sup> Grant, p. 410.

<sup>23</sup> Sheridan, pp. 153-4.

<sup>24</sup> Richard O'Connor, Sheridan The Inevitable (Indianapolis-New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1953) pp. 124-125.

determination, not obstinacy. He placed himself at the point of main effort and understood the evolving situation. His men saw and knew his desires. "The paladin of Perryville", acquired a reputation among his men as a "fighting general" who "cared more for victory than he did for bullets."<sup>25</sup> This happened in spite of an operational commander who did not understand the magnitude of the battle. At Stone River, he acquired the reputation as the "perfect tornado in battle". His men clearly understood that he did not intend to flinch and they understood his intentions. General Grant even credits Sheridan, as a subordinate commander, as saving Rosecrans' army.<sup>26</sup> His superb operational will even served him in the dark hours of the Battle of Chickamauga. In spite of obvious bungling of his superiors and futile sacrifice and decimation of his forces, he acquitted himself well and successfully reformed, made it to Rossville and subsequently to the defenses of Chattanooga. The defense of Rossville Gap was critical to the safe withdrawal of all remaining Union forces to Chattanooga. In the period of recrimination that followed Chickamauga, Sheridan could look his contemporaries square in the eye, knowing his integrity was unquestioned and his resoluteness well established.

Sheridan's success, in spite of the deficient leadership of Buell and Rosecrans, can be attributed to his strong operational will and his integrity. He was not hamstrung by the battlefield indecision or ineptness of either of the two generals. He followed the orders of his seniors, but was not afraid to exercise initiative. When admonished at Perryville "...not to bring on an engagement...", he replied that he was not bringing on an engagement, "...but that the enemy evidently intended to do so...."<sup>27</sup> He then maneuvered his forces to secure positions that also allowed them to give supporting fire to General McCook's First Corps. At Stone's River, ordered to hold his position until the Union Army could be "bent back", Sheridan's forces made a ferocious stand at the end of Round Forest. He obeyed the order to the letter. However, Sheridan alone determined when to counterattack and, finally, when to withdraw.

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<sup>25</sup> O'Connor, pp. 82-3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 99.

<sup>27</sup> Sheridan, pp. 195-6.

Finally, it was Thomas' and Sheridan's entreaties that convinced Rosecrans to continue at the Battle of Stone's River.<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, Sheridan performed well under deficient commanders because he was true to his own leadership style and did not compromise his integrity. His superb performance under lackluster leadership, made his legendary performance under Grant in Virginia unsurprising.

### **General Ulysses S. Grant**

General Grant's rise from business failure to General of the Army is the stuff of legends. Nonetheless, he remains enigmatic to many observers. To the casual student of the Civil War, his operational leadership abilities would appear to pale next to the gallant Robert E. Lee. Serious scholarship disputes this view and instead shows Grant as one of the operational greats of history. General Grant clearly understood the required relationship between strategy and the operational arts. Never a "hornblower", Grant matured as operational commander from his initial "intuitive performance" at Belmont to the genius of Vicksburg. Continuing to evolve even after Vicksburg, he was Lincoln's shining star. His performance was even more remarkable given the lackluster and/or inconsistent support he received from his immediate superior, General Halleck.

### **Grant's Senior: Halleck**

A translator of Jomini and an academic success at West Point, "Old Brains" acquired his nickname as much for his hat size as his supposed intelligence. Upon getting communication from Halleck that he didn't know yet what to do after the fall of Fort Donelson, McClellan pronounced that he was the most hopelessly stupid man he had met in high position.<sup>29</sup> His success had been derived largely from the accomplishment of others; accomplishments for which he was not shy about taking credit. After Grant's success at Fort Donelson, Halleck was quick

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<sup>28</sup> O'Connor, p. 97.

<sup>29</sup> J.F.C Fuller, The Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958; reprint ed., Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint Co, 1990) p. 92

to claim credit for the success, though he had been lukewarm to the plan.<sup>30</sup>

Treachery and intrigue were not foreign to him. His near sacking of Grant, that he subsequently attempted to conceal, speak volumes to his character. His was a generalship more adept at politics than the operational arts. This, and subsequent, mistreatment of Grant nearly resulted in the loss of a fine general.

His performance as an operational commander does not stand up to close scrutiny. Upon assuming direct control of the Army from Grant at Pittsburg Landing (Shiloh), he commenced a "siege like" advance toward the strategically valuable Corinth, eschewing direct engagements with the Confederates. He did this rather than striking quickly. He succeeded in occupying Corinth, but allowed his opponent to slip away.<sup>31</sup> It was Halleck's promotion to General in chief that rescued Grant from the obscurity of being his second in command. Ironically, Halleck perhaps found his niche when he served as a "go-between" for Grant and Lincoln, when Grant became General of the Army.<sup>32</sup>

#### **The Operational Leadership of General Grant**

For Grant, the Civil War was a constant iterative process that guided his maturation as a successful operational leader. He discovered early in his movements against the Confederate Colonel Harris, that upon feeling his own anxiety that his enemy "...had as much reason to fear my forces as I had his. The lesson was valuable."<sup>33</sup> His early performance at the battle of Belmont belied an amateur generalship, but it also indicated an instinct to fight.<sup>34</sup> He would be a operational commander who would learn from his mistakes and not be prone to repeat them. His failure to conduct sound reconnaissance at Belmont, for instance, would not be

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<sup>30</sup> Macartney, p. 153.

<sup>31</sup> Grant, pp. 250-8

<sup>32</sup> Williams, pp. 301-302.

<sup>33</sup> Grant, pp. 164-165.

<sup>34</sup> Fuller, The Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant, p. 73.

repeated at Fort Henry.<sup>35</sup>

Grant's operational will is well documented. Determination and self-reliance were his cornerstones. His presence on the field at dire moments was a lightening rod for his troops. At Fort Donelson, when General McClelland's 1st Division was reeling in defeat, Grant stubbornly would not accept defeat. Calmly telling his officers that "...the right must be retaken", he then rallied his forces.<sup>36</sup> Met with calamity at Pittsburg Landing during the Battle of Shiloh and nursing a lame leg, he did not panic. Instead he, among other actions, organized ammunition trains, reformed stragglers, assessed the situation at the front, ordered troop movements in support of engaged division commanders and readied his forces to assume the offensive in the morning.<sup>37</sup> That Grant did not pursue (or more exactly make preparations to pursue) Beauregard when he quit the field, is a mistake that Grant freely admits. However, his decision not to pursue was influenced by his close observation of the condition of his forces and the condition of the water logged roads.<sup>38</sup>

Though determined, Grant was not obstinate in his approach to warfare. He accepted all friendly advice in the proper vein when it was offered and then acted as he saw appropriate. He valued competent subordinates and sought not to leave them hamstrung with needless detail.<sup>39</sup>

A strength of General Grant was that he was not a slave to doctrines of the day. Not given to pedantry as Halleck was, he displayed flexibility of thought when current methods were not working. Met with initial failure during his Vicksburg campaign, he discarded accepted doctrine and tried new approaches. Fully aware of the significance of logistics, he maneuvered his forces

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<sup>35</sup> James Marshall-Cornwall, Grant as Military Commander (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1970) p. 56.

<sup>36</sup> Fuller, Grant and Lee, p. 72.

<sup>37</sup> Fuller, The Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant, pp. 106-11.

<sup>38</sup> Grant, pp. 237-8.

<sup>39</sup> Fuller, Grant and Lee, pp. 73-4.

to gain advantage knowing he was cutting his lines of supply. A bold move, it was nonetheless a calculated one, he correctly felt his forces could subsist by foraging. With this move he defeated the armies of Johnston and Pemberton five times in battle, inflicting greater casualties on his adversary, prevented their joining and isolated one (Pemberton) in Vicksburg under siege conditions.<sup>40</sup> His reputation among some historians as a practitioner of bludgeon tactics, does not stand up to close examination. His was a natural military mind that clearly grasped the concepts of maneuver and proper distribution of forces and could put them to use.<sup>41</sup>

Grant was a decisive operational leader. It has been said that he was at his calmest and best, when things were at their worst. He made decisions. Knowing that it was operationally foolhardy to wait for ideal conditions, his natural inclination was to press the enemy. Unlike McClellan and many other generals of the day, Grant operated with the forces he was provided without great complaint. He was quick to size up a battlefield and determine a course of action. His understanding of battlefields was apparent even in his younger days when he impressed fellow junior officers at Fort Vancouver in 1853, with detailed accounts of engagements in the Mexican-American War.<sup>42</sup>

Ever the consistent taskmaster, Grant also took care of his men and subordinate officers. Grant's establishment of the "Cracker Line" during the siege of Union forces at Chattanooga, along with his presence, did much to lift the flagging morale of those forces. It did much to restore the fighting spirit of that army, which may have manifested itself at Missionary Ridge. As soon as was practical at Vicksburg, Grant reestablished supply lines to allow "hard tack" to get through (to the delight of his forces). The welfare of his forces was never far from his mind.

General Grant allowed his subordinates to operate without a tight rein. He gave them their taskings, less petty instructions, and held them accountable. He did not "micro-manage" his

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<sup>40</sup> Marshall-Cornwall, p. 114.

<sup>41</sup> Fuller, The Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant, pp.194-5.

<sup>42</sup> Fuller, Grant and Lee, pp. 66-7.

commanders. He was very good at communicating his operational intent. Not relying on his staff to excess, he wrote out clear orders to his subordinates that they could understand (often under difficult conditions).<sup>43</sup> Indeed, this approach toward his men was critical in his military success and allowed him to approach the battlefield with a clear mind.

Grant in military life had untarnished integrity. Refusing to play politics to get better assignments, he accepted, without complaint to centers of power, those jobs given him.<sup>44</sup> He was honest and dealt with people fairly. He could be trusted to follow orders and inculcated that trait into his subordinates. Indeed, it was his reliability that caused Lincoln to hold him in such high ever-increasing esteem.

Key elements in Grant's success in his difficult relationship with Halleck, were his strong operational will, self-reliance and integrity. Grant was very conscientious about the execution of orders. However, he was not a commander who was adverse to exercising initiative. Once a campaign began, Grant was his own man. There were none of the constant demands for more resources, as were heard from McClellan or Buell. Correctly observing that "...as far as my experience with General Halleck went it was very much easier for him to refuse a favor than to grant one,"<sup>45</sup> Grant probably would have been sympathetic to the old maxim "...that it is easier to seek forgiveness, than ask permission." If Halleck had fully understood the bold nature of Grant's maneuvers to cut his supply lines at Vicksburg, he might have vetoed the plan. As it was, he became a prime supporter of Grant during the dark days of the siege of Vicksburg. Ultimately, Grant's personal integrity allowed him to survive the demoralizing antics of General Halleck. His personal vision of how to engage and fight the enemy and the good counsel of friends, such as General Sherman, sustained him. That Grant did not succeed in resigning was fortunate.

### Conclusion

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, pp. 74-77.

<sup>44</sup> Grant, pp. 304-5.

<sup>45</sup> Grant, p. 389.

Effective operational leaders can succeed without the active or effective support of their superior. This was clearly illustrated in the cases of Sheridan and Grant. Both men worked for undeniably deficient superiors, yet both continued to progress as operational leaders. Both men matured operationally. Sheridan was able to couple his tenacity with an increased knowledge of operations. Grant, who was always pugnacious, developed an operational acumen that approached genius.

Key to their survival and eventual success were leadership traits that each displayed consistently throughout their development. They both possessed a steadfast operational will, that manifested itself as keen determination (not obstinacy). They were effective at communicating their determination to their forces. They intuitively understood the point of main effort and the effect of their presence on their troops. They took care of their troops and their subordinate officers. Both men had of high integrity and did not compromise their values. They were trustworthy and trusted their subordinates. These traits served them well.

Neither Grant or Sheridan were slaves to doctrine. Instead they were flexible in their approach to tactics and operational art. They both learned from their mistakes and continued to develop. Most important, both men were capable of boldness. Not afraid to act, they could fight. They were decisive. Both generals were obvious examples of superb operational leaders.

Both Sheridan and Grant show that successful operational leaders can develop methods to reconcile unsatisfactory command relationships with seniors. Disobedience to orders was not tolerated by either man. However in the absence of orders, both were ready to exercise initiative. Both men had strong determined operational will that helped sustain them. Finally, both men had integrity that was above compromise.

Ultimately, Sheridan and Grant point to a possible path for future operational commanders who find themselves in unsatisfactory command structures. It is a path of common sense. The only credible path for an operational commander, is to practice consistent sound operational leadership regardless of the "cards one is dealt." In other words, sound operational leadership, in spite of the boss.

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