

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.

The Education of an Operational Commander:  
Ulysses S. Grant, 1861-1863

by

William J. Hart

Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military 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.

Signature:

*William J. Hart*

15 November 1997

DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 4

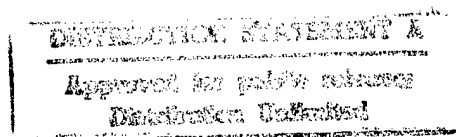
Paper directed by  
George W. Jackson, Captain, U.S. Navy  
Chairman, Joint Military Operations Department

*Mackubin Owens* 5 Feb 97

Faculty Advisor  
Prof. Mackubin Owens

Date

19970520 177



## REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                   |                                                                             |            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Report Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                   |                                                                             |            |
| 2. Security Classification Authority:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                   |                                                                             |            |
| 3. Declassification/Downgrading Schedule:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                   |                                                                             |            |
| 4. Distribution/Availability of Report: DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                   |                                                                             |            |
| 5. Name of Performing Organization:<br>JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                   |                                                                             |            |
| 6. Office Symbol: NWC CODE 1D                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                   | 7. Address: NAVAL WAR COLLEGE<br>686 CUSHING ROAD<br>NEWPORT, RI 02841-1207 |            |
| 8. Title (Include Security Classification):<br>THE EDUCATION OF AN OPERATIONAL COMMANDER: ULYSSES S. GRANT, 1861-1863 (U)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                   |                                                                             |            |
| 9. Personal Authors:<br>WILLIAM J. HART, LCDR, USN                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                   |                                                                             |            |
| 10. Type of Report: FINAL                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                   | 11. Date of Report: 07 FEBRUARY 1997                                        |            |
| 12. Page Count: 23                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                   |                                                                             |            |
| 13. Supplementary Notation: A paper submitted to the Faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the JMO Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                   |                                                                             |            |
| 14. Ten key words that relate to your paper:<br>OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP, OPERATIONAL ART, OPERATIONAL TRAINING, OPERATIONAL FACTORS, PRINCIPLES OF WAR, CIVIL WAR, ULYSSES GRANT, MISSISSIPPI CAMPAIGN, UNION STRATEGY, DEPARTMENT OF TENNESSEE                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                   |                                                                             |            |
| 15. Abstract: This paper conducts a chronological examination of the impact operational education and experience had towards the success of U.S. Grant as an operational commander, focusing on involvement during the initial two years of the American Civil War in the Western (Mississippi) Theater. The origins of Union Strategy, and Grant's evolution as an operational commander, is seen through operational experiences in early Civil War battles at Belmont, Forts Henry and Donelson, Shiloh, and Vicksburg.<br><br>Discussion cites the complementary nature of a firm moral foundation towards credibility as an operational leader and commander, highlighting experience as a key in the commander's education in balancing the operational factors of time, space, and forces. A keen understanding of operational functions and use of the principles of war naturally produces a vision for victory and it's accompanying strategy. Whether a limited or total war, exclusive use of the principles will not guarantee victory. Victory, and the means by which it is achieved, relies on an experienced operational commander. |                   |                                                                             |            |
| 16. Distribution / Availability of Abstract:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Unclassified<br>X | Same As Rpt                                                                 | DTIC Users |
| 17. Abstract Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                   |                                                                             |            |
| 18. Name of Responsible Individual: CHAIRMAN, JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                   |                                                                             |            |
| 19. Telephone: 841-6461                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                   | 20. Office Symbol: C                                                        |            |

### Abstract of

#### The Education of an Operational Commander: Ulysses S. Grant, 1861-1863

The paper conducts a chronological examination of the impact operational education and experience had towards the rise of U.S. Grant as an operational commander, focusing on involvement during the initial two years of the American Civil War in the Western (Mississippi) Theater. The origins of Union Strategy, and Grant's evolution as an operational commander, is seen through operational experiences in early Civil War battles at Belmont, Forts Henry and Donelson, Shiloh, and Vicksburg.

Discussion cites the complementary nature of a firm moral foundation towards credibility as an operational leader and commander, highlighting experience as a key in the commander's education in balancing the operational factors of time, space, and force. A keen understanding of operational functions and use of the principles of war naturally produces a vision for victory and its accompanying strategy. Whether a limited or total war, exclusive use of the principles will not guarantee victory. Victory, and the means by which it is achieved, relies on the operational commander.

He kept one vision before him throughout --that of the slow strangling of the chief Confederate army, to which all resources direct and indirect were to be devoted.<sup>1</sup>

Lieut. Colonel Alfred H. Burne  
*Grant, Lee, and Sherman*

## *Introduction*

Lieutenant Colonel Burne's twenty-eight words summarize the United States' and Grant's vision of objective, strategy, and means for bringing the American Civil War to an end, a strategy whose evolution was the result of a bloody and disjointed two year education for the Union's national-military strategists. In 1864, the means for accomplishing the objective were placed in the stewardship of Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, newly appointed General in Chief of Armies of the United States whose victories in the west won the confidence of President Abraham Lincoln.

Ulysses Grant rose from a position on the governor's staff in Illinois at the outbreak of the war and subsequent appointment as commanding officer of a regiment of volunteers to that of General in Chief of the Union Armies in a relatively short period of time. Grant won the faith of his nation's leaders, the trust of his peers and subordinates, and the respect of a nation. What lessons had Grant extracted from his early years in the west and on the Mississippi to support his success as an operational commander and military leader? How did Grant gain the vision that would lead to the evolution of a strategy that would reunite the United States and its forces in purpose?

Through chronological examination of Grant's background and campaigns in the western theater, we will gain an appreciation for the superb operational training he received in battle, command, and planning experience during his first two years in the war. Closing with his siege on Vicksburg, we

see Grant drawing upon past lessons, utilizing lessons in command and operational principles which will ultimately lead to victory and influence national strategy for the remainder of the war. Grant's leadership background is built primarily upon professional education, strongly influenced by role models during his tour in Mexico.

### *Background in Operational Leadership*

The development of a military leader depends as much on moral attributes and character as on those learned through professional experience and schooling. These moral attributes are carved from values learned during childhood and gained through the maturation process. Rather than discuss Grant's upbringing at length, which is not the aim of this paper, we can take the word of Sylvanus Cadwallader, a war correspondent for the *Chicago Times* attached to Grant's Headquarters from 1862-65, who summarizes Grant's characteristic attributes in a first hand account . . . *Three Years with Grant:*

He was pure in speech and heart...Through all my intercourse with him I never heard an oath (or any substitute for one) escape his lips. He abominated "smutty" stories ... He was honest. His few blemishes of character were incident to our common humanity; and instead of seriously damaging him in the estimation of right-minded men, will tend to emphasize his virtues, which were many and strongly pronounced.<sup>2</sup>

Cadwallader's portrait describes the characteristics that earned Grant the respect of his subordinates. With a firm moral foundation in place, Grant used two years of escalating responsibility and experience in combat to develop as a military leader and national hero -- two years which were essential to his maturation as an operational commander and the development of his country's strategy to bring victory to the United States in the war for the preservation of the Union.

Grant's evolution as an operational leader and his use of operational art would enable him to clearly discriminate between tactical and operational objective, distinguishing himself among Civil War commanders, and ultimately earning him the post as General in Chief. His practical application of operational functions and understanding of operational factors were direct products of his experiences as a subordinate commander in the west. We will closely examine those lessons which contributed to his operational success, first highlighting observations as a junior officer in the Mexican War.

### *Foundations of an Operational Commander: The Mexican War*

An 1840 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Grant gained combat experience as an officer in the Mexican-American War. He learned a great deal from the individuals with and under whom he served, providing material upon which he drew during his subsequent duties in the western theater of the Civil War. Grant derived valuable lessons from his tour in Mexico, lessons in character and operations that would benefit him as a commander and the United States in the fight for the preservation of the Union.

### *Operational Protection, Reach, and Logistics in Mexico*

The schooling of Ulysses Grant began under two prominent Mexican-American War generals, Winfield Scott and Zachary Taylor. Grant held "great esteem"<sup>3</sup> for Scott, his pride in uniform, precise language, and staff-driven battlefield management. Scott represented the epitome of plans and strategy, invading a "...populous country, penetrating... into the interior, with a force at no time equal to one-half of that opposed to him...without a base...the enemy

was always entrenched, always on the defensive, yet he won every battle, he captured the capital, and conquered the government."<sup>4</sup> Where Scott's imposing formality and stature demanded respect, Zachary Taylor earned his through actions and personal behavior.

Zachary Taylor, a frocked brigadier general, instilled confidence in Grant, his appearance and character closely resembling Grant's, providing a cornerstone upon which a young officer could build. Reviewing Taylor's qualities in his memoirs, Grant describes his appearance and conduct:

General Taylor...dressed himself entirely for comfort...moved about the field in which he was operating to see through his own eyes the situation. Often he would be without staff officers... he could put his meaning so plainly that there could be no mistaking it. He knew how to express what he wanted to say in the fewest well-chosen words, but would not sacrifice meaning to the construction of high sounding sentences.<sup>5</sup>

Above all lessons in leadership, he saw a ranking officer of high morals earn and retain respect.

Grant, assigned as a commissary officer and adjutant in Mexico, experienced first hand the necessity for administrative accuracy in logistics and communications planning during extended force movement. He learned the ability of a force to live off the land, the resilience of soldiers in adverse conditions, and the necessity for advance planning to keep the troops on the move outfitted with an adequate supply of horses and mules. Grant's experiences in overcoming material adversity would prove invaluable in formulating a national strategy, whereas his professional acquaintances familiarized him with future battlefield opponents.

His 1840 graduation from West Point and Mexican War experience introduced him to many personalities that would dominate the Civil War era in addition to Scott and Taylor. In admitting that his experience in the Mexican War "was of great advantage"<sup>6</sup> afterwards, Grant's memoirs do not lack

examples of prominent soldiers who would play significant roles on both sides during the Civil War. A short list of recognizable names during the conflict includes: Gardner, Meade, Lee, Beauregard, McClellan, Johnston, Pemberton, Ewell, and Crittenden. Operationally, Grant had an understanding of the opposing commanders and could use this advantage to anticipate movement and reactions of enemy forces. Grant elaborates on his advantage:

I do not pretend to say that all movements, or even any of them, were made with special reference to the characteristics of the commander against whom they were directed. But my appreciation of my enemies was certainly affected by this knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

### *An Apprenticeship in Missouri*

There is one West Pointer, I think in Missouri, little known, and whom I hope the Northern people will not find out. I mean Sam Grant. I knew him well at the Academy and in Mexico. I should fear him more than any of their officers I have yet heard of. He is not a man of genius, but he is clear-headed, quick, and daring.<sup>8</sup>

General R. S. Ewell, C.S.A.

As Ewell uttered these words, Grant was assuming command of the 21st Illinois, a volunteer regiment, assigned to protect lines of communication in semi-hostile areas of Missouri. Here he received his first combat orders against a small rebel force twenty five miles south of his position under Colonel Thomas Harris in Florida, Missouri. Upon his arrival, Grant discovered Harris had abandoned his position. Grant recalls in his memoirs that he "never experienced trepidation upon confronting an enemy, though I always felt more or less anxiety. I never forgot that he had as much reason to fear my forces as I had his."<sup>9</sup> Grant's recognition for the type of fight in which he found himself and the revelation that the enemy felt the same emotions would allow him to anticipate enemy reaction, remaining focused on victory and in formulating the strategy that would win the war.

Grant, promoted to Brigadier General after only two months of service, doubted the abilities of "ninety days' men,"<sup>10</sup> and was very wary of rumor and intelligence. Concerned with his regiment's readiness<sup>11</sup>, he meticulously directed the drill and discipline of his troops, reconnaissance of terrain and enemy force disposition, and passed estimates of enemy intentions to his superiors. Soon after Grant's arrival and assumption of command at Ironton, Missouri he sent his initial assessment to superiors stating that he was prepared to conduct offensive operations against the enemy. General John Fremont, Commander of the Department of Missouri, ordered Grant to split his forces in the face of a numerically superior enemy. Luckily for Grant, the Confederates took the offensive first, occupying a neighboring small town. Grant informed Fremont of the rebel move, whose reaction and exaggerated call for reinforcements to governors throughout the west would accumulate forces in Missouri, placing a strategic mass of manpower on the Mississippi, decisively influencing later engagements along the Mississippi.

Grant began his ascent from obscurity while in command of the District of Southeast Missouri in Jefferson City, Missouri. Arthur Longaker cites the criticality of Grant's foundation and in professional growth towards a significant role for the Union in *The Rise of U. S. Grant*: "...we note the development of his character and of his understanding of the basic principles of military operations and leadership."<sup>12</sup>

### *Operational Factors at Fort Henry and Fort Donelson*

The art of war is simple enough. Find out where your enemy is. Get at him as soon as you can. Strike at him as hard as you can and as often as you can, and keep moving on.<sup>13</sup>

Ulysses S. Grant

Grant came to appreciate the factors of space, time, and force during a series of offensive actions at Belmont, Fort Henry, and Fort Donelson. In Missouri he watched Colonel Harris use *time* and *space* to disperse his *forces*, allowing them to fight another day. The effect on his troops' morale was less than rewarding and Grant had taken notice. In his personal life, Ulysses Grant rarely strayed from his objective, whether his objective was the other side of a swollen stream or victory in battle<sup>14</sup>. He would not allow this to happen again, effectively utilizing reconnaissance, maneuver, and surprise.

### *Anticipation, Surprise, and Leverage at Belmont*

The rivers flowing in the region of the Mississippi provide the commercial life blood to bordering states; Cairo, Illinois was no exception, lying on the junction of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, lending communications and transportation control to the occupying force. One day after arriving there, Grant initiated and carried out the seizure of neutral Paducah, Kentucky, a strategic gain for the North which would lead to restricting Confederate use of Kentucky's abundance of raw materials, river transportation, and manpower.

General Fremont, occupied with subduing rebel forces in Missouri, ordered Grant to stage a demonstration to prevent reinforcement from Columbus, Kentucky. Moving from Cairo, in concert with troops from Paducah and with the aid of northern river fleet gunboats, Grant conducted a raid on Belmont, across the river from Columbus. Outnumbered nearly two to one during the raid, Grant surprised the Confederates, erasing any thought of reinforcement from Columbus, and defeated the southern forces even though they possessed seasoned unit commanders and confident veteran regiments.

The lasting lesson of Belmont occurred following the raid. Celebrating and badly intermixed, Grant's regiments took to souvenir hunting without paying attention to the enemy's movement. Grant, watching as Confederates massed on transports and moved across the river towards his disorganized force, barely managed to escape with his troops on naval transports. Two factors played a role in his fortunate escape: first, tall corn obscured the enemy's sight. The second was the accuracy and effect of covering fires from gunboats escorting the departure. Grant learned valuable lessons in operational protection and the necessity for keeping troops in reserve.<sup>15</sup>

### *Strategy and Major General John Halleck*

In November, Major General John Halleck relieved General Fremont as Commander of the Department of Missouri, redesignating Grant's command as the District of Cairo, and renaming the Department of Missouri the Western Department. Halleck's approach and application of Jomini's principles (he had written a book on Jomini's principles of concentration entitled *Elements of Military Art and Science*) would complement Grant's offensively-oriented mind set. Halleck's interpretations and inclination towards "the practice of using interior lines of operations, a strong base of supply, fortifications, concentration on decisive points, a campaign of positions -- *all derived from the ideal of limited war* -- recurred time and again during the four years struggle."<sup>16</sup> Halleck's tactics, and the ineffectiveness of a campaign of positions, would refocus national efforts towards defeating the Confederacy as a whole through total conquest of the land, its rebellious population, and the rallying instrument through which it was heard -- Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.

Halleck's contributions would extend beyond the battlefields of the west to those in Washington, D.C. Subsequently appointed as Chief of Staff of the Army, he would provide Grant a buffer between the political and military arms of national military strategy, allowing Grant to direct the fight without the distractions of Washington. Halleck was best able to support Grant and his armies through his theory of command, best stated by Stephen E. Ambrose in *Halleck: Lincoln's Chief of Staff*.

Control of a situation passed from his hands as he sent a subordinate out on a mission. Halleck held that a "General in command of an army in the field is the best judge of existing conditions," and that for the departmental commander to dictate to the field general on the basis of incomplete information would be disastrous. The departmental commander's duties...involved outlining the operation before it began and supporting the field commander with reinforcements and supplies...<sup>17</sup>

Halleck's contributions to strategy swayed from his steadfast belief in Jominian principles upon his assignment to Washington in late 1862. He convinced Lincoln that in the east, where the two capitals lie one hundred miles from each other, the war must be one "of concentration against Lee's army and that the Confederate army, not Richmond, was the true objective."<sup>18</sup> In the west, Halleck adhered to his Jominian interpretations, insisting the war should continue to be fought with an aim of capturing Confederate strongholds. The fall of Vicksburg, Nashville, Chattanooga, and Atlanta among others, when taken, would leave the Confederate Army with no bases for supply or communication. Through his campaigns on the Mississippi and Tennessee Rivers, Grant would grow to appreciate the necessity for taking control of these vital communications and logistics centers in a combined conquest strategy.

### *Simultaneity and Balance at Fort Henry*

In January 1862, Grant conducted a demonstration to discourage Confederate reinforcement at Bowling Green. General C. F. Smith, one of Grant's subordinates, reported upon return that Grant could seize Fort Henry. Grant, who had taken the opportunity to personally survey the area during the demonstration, put his staff to work "devoting his whole attention to the planning of future operations...."<sup>19</sup> Grant, after repeated attempts for permission to move on the fort, received Halleck's approval only after enlisting the help of Commodore A. H. Foote who would provide gunboats for the assault.

Grant disembarked below the fort along the Tennessee River, out of artillery range. The softening of Fort Henry's defenses, conducted by Foote's gunboats, began in late morning; Grant's infantry did not reach Fort Henry for four hours or Fort Heiman (overlooking Henry on the west bank) until nightfall. Grant's force movements and space-time<sup>20</sup> calculations for near-simultaneous assault missed the mark (due greatly in part due to muddy roads and thick forest), but the final result was not affected. The overwhelming effectiveness of his fires, and some intelligence on the part of the enemy, left only the shell of a defense: the garrison had retreated to Fort Donelson eleven miles to the east, deserting Fort Heiman, leaving only a small defensive force at Fort Henry. Confident of his troop's capabilities, Grant looked east.

### *Timing and Tempo at Fort Donelson*

Fort Donelson would prove to be a much more difficult operation: it was an elevated fort with a garrison of 21,000 soldiers and well protected by encircling rifle pits. Grant wanted to attack as early as possible, before it could be reinforced. Following weather delays, which slowed Grant's

movement but afforded time for reconnaissance, Grant advanced on the 14th of January.

Grant's force numbered 27,000. The initial fires from federal gunboats were not elevated sufficiently, diminishing their effectiveness, forcing Commodore Foote to fall back, the bulk of his vessels disabled by accurate defensive fire. Disappointed, Grant directed Union forces to harden their defenses while he met with the injured Foote on his flagship.

Upon his return, Grant found a disorganized and demoralized force that had been overrun on one flank and, having run out of ammunition, had retreated in disarray. The brigade that was overrun was saved by veteran troops in adjacent brigades who stepped in, slowing the Confederate offensive. Grant, with four of his ten infantry brigades out of commission, was fortunate that the Confederate forces had also become intermixed and pulled back to reorganize and concentrate within the fort. Recognizing that southern forces had not continued their offensive, he seized the opportunity and attacked, catching Confederate forces of guard; Union troops rapidly passed defending rifle pits and took position outside the fort. Faced with certain defeat, two ranking Confederate generals stole away during the night with 3,000 troops, leaving the third in command, Brigadier General S. B. Buckner to transmit a proposal for armistice the following morning. Grant replied that "no terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted."<sup>21</sup> Buckner capitulated, handing over a force of nearly 15,000 troops.

The moves at Henry and Belmont illustrate Grant's "art of war" and its reliance on *timing and tempo*. Milan Vego worded it differently than Grant, but conveys the same message: "... every gain of time is to the advantage of the defender...The less time is available for mobilization, deployment, and

concentration, the more likely it is that the attacker will catch the defender unprepared."<sup>22</sup> The lessons of Belmont were readily tested at Donelson.

### *Refinements in Command and Control: Shiloh*

The entire operation against Forts Henry and Donelson had been carried out whilst the three commanders involved (Halleck of the Western department, General Don Buell of the Department of the Ohio, and the General-in-Chief, George McClellan) bickered amongst themselves about troop strengths, reinforcements, and geographic responsibility. Halleck, quite conscious of his political standing, used Grant's windfall to telegram McClellan, asking to "Give me command in the West."<sup>23</sup> Denied by McClellan, Halleck's efforts to unify command in the west would continue, although the changes would not occur until he left the theater. Although a revolutionary idea with much merit, his ideas for *unification of command* were seen as political by his peers, but not by President Lincoln. Disappointed in the war's outcome thus far and extremely unhappy with the bickering amongst his commanders, the President redesignated Halleck as the Commander of the Department of the Mississippi and McClellan as Commander of the Army of the Potomac.

### *Command and Culmination*

Grant, meanwhile had positioned his army of Tennessee at Pittsburg Landing, Mississippi with the intent of taking Corinth, an important railroad junction that connected the Mississippi and the east with the cotton states in the south. He planned to place Buell's Army of the Ohio, numbering about 40,000 (bringing Union totals to near 60,000), at Hamburg eight miles to the east. Grant saw no requirement for fortifications, planning to take the

offensive upon Buell's arrival. On the sixth of April, Grant was attacked at Pittsburg Landing, taking heavy losses and was pushed back to the Tennessee River; three combat veteran divisions were called in as reinforcements, but arrived too late to have any effect on the day's battle, their commander having doubting verbal orders from Grant's aide to commit the reserves.

General Sherman was holding at a log meeting house called Shiloh, on a ridge overlooking two creeks that emptied into the Tennessee River. Relentless attacks by the Confederates resulted in severe losses to both sides, but they took the Union lines which were manned, for the most part, by new recruits "barely able to load their muskets"<sup>24</sup> and officers often equally ignorant. Buell's Army of Ohio, arriving from Savannah for the original offensive on Corinth, found thousands of northern deserters hiding under the bluffs from the fight. Buell threatened them with fire from his own gunboats if they did not return to their regiments. Grant's back to the river, his divisions "shattered and depleted in numbers from the terrible battle of the day,"<sup>25</sup> were relieved by Buell's force and protected by federal gunboats which repulsed flanking movements by the Confederates overnight.

Arthur Conger, in *The Rise of U.S. Grant*, criticizes Grant for not properly organizing his forces, or staff, for large operations. In directing six divisions at Shiloh, Grant got involved in the tactical direction of his division commanders instead of easing his communications by forming three corps of two divisions each. Conger also notes that Grant, relentless in his pursuit of enemy intentions and strength at Corinth, had failed to interrogate prisoners of war and place spies in order to gain information vital to his vulnerability to attack at Shiloh.<sup>26</sup>

Grant recognized that the situation was very similar to that at Donelson, where each side had reached their respective culminating point, defined as

when "an attacker's combat power no longer exceeds that of the defender," and "a defender...no longer has the capability to go on the counter-offensive or defend successfully."<sup>27</sup> Grant related the lessons of Donelson to Sherman, telling him that the "same tactics would win at Shiloh."<sup>28</sup> With fresh reinforcements and logistics lines to support them, Grant overcame his culmination point of the evening before, seized the initiative, and won back lost territory from a fatigued Confederate force. In doing so, Grant comes to a strategic conclusion.

### *The Confederate Center of Gravity*

Grant laments that his forces were too weary to pursue the retreating forces, missing one of two objectives. Grant had succeeded in driving them from their front, but failed to capture or destroy as great a part as possible of their "men and material."<sup>29</sup> Grant's states his fledgling strategy following the Union's fortunate victory at Shiloh:

...But when Confederate armies were collected which not only attempted to hold a line farther south....but assumed the offensive and made such a gallant effort to regain what had been lost, then, indeed, I gave up all idea of saving the Union except for complete conquest...After this, I...consume everything that could be used to support or supply armies.<sup>30</sup>

Halleck took command following Shiloh, placing Grant as his second in command. Outnumbering the rebels nearly two to one at Corinth, Halleck built fortifications and prepared for an attack based upon his Jominian interpretations. The assault, on the 30th of May, found Corinth abandoned. Halleck, victimized by operational deception, had been led to believe that rail traffic in and out of Corinth was reinforcing the enemy when it was, indeed, pulling out. Although a strategic logistical and transportation gain, little

value towards uplifting morale (except to the Confederates) and even less progress was made towards vanquishing rebel armies. The effect on morale is discussed by Grant in his memoirs, citing that union troops were disappointed at the result, and the underlying center of gravity was no longer at Corinth: "They could not see how the mere occupation of places was to close the war while large and effective rebel armies existed."<sup>31</sup> Here, we can see where Grant and Halleck begin to recognize the pitfalls in Union strategy. There was one more lesson for Halleck and Grant -- at Vicksburg.

### *Vicksburg: Boldness and Perseverance*

The ensuing summer's battles left the Confederates in retreat, the Mississippi nearly lost with the surrender of New Orleans to David Farragut, and Grant confident again following victories at Corinth and Iuka, Mississippi. Southern forces had amassed in Vicksburg, Mississippi, a logistical stronghold, lying on high ground over the Mississippi River which assured freedom of navigation upon its waters and at the junction of railroads. Grant ordered Sherman to move on Vicksburg, through Jackson, Mississippi only to be rebuffed at Chickasaw Bluffs.

The assault on Vicksburg would be difficult, for it offered little tactical advantage for invaders, whether river-borne, approaching defenses upon a bluff from poor footing, or over land, contending with bayous and swamp land. Time and again Grant attempted to take Vicksburg by moving his command south through canals or bayous, but was turned back each time by Confederate artillery.

Grant developed a bold plan, drawing upon every lesson he had experienced thus far. He would move his forces south and, aided by a diversionary attack from the north by Sherman, cross the Mississippi River to

the enemy's (east) side with the help of Admiral Porters' fleet. Grant would then meet with reinforcements and attack from the rear, where the Confederates would not expect him.

The landing was accomplished south of Vicksburg at Bruinsburg where Grant faced a dilemma: reinforcements would not arrive for at least ten days, postponing his advance which would jeopardize his position and remove the element of surprise. His alternative was to request permission from General Halleck to lead a single, un-reinforced assault north on Vicksburg; this, too, would take time. Grant chose, against the urgings of General Sherman, to cut his logistics and communication ties and venture into the enemy's interior, choosing to notify Halleck of his move, rather than ask for permission. With a force of 30,000, Grant embarked on his three week march, winning battles en route to and at Jackson, Mississippi. The Confederates made a stand at Champion's Hill outside Vicksburg, using reinforcements from Pemberton's garrison within, but were defeated. Grant took Vicksburg under siege following several failed attacks at the end of May.

The siege would last nearly one and one-half months with Admiral Porter's fleet providing constant bombardment. The southern stronghold of Vicksburg, a strategic key to conquest of the rebellion, surrendered on July Fourth.

### *Conclusion*

Suffice it to say, the close of the siege of Vicksburg found us with an army unsurpassed, in proportion to its numbers, taken as a whole of officers and men. A military education was acquired which no other school could have given.<sup>32</sup>

Ulysses S. Grant

At Vicksburg we see the qualities of a uniquely talented operational commander and leader, drawing upon valuable lesson and experiences in molding tactics and strategy.

Grant's command of the *operational factors* of space, time, and force are evident in Vicksburg's execution; so sensitive is he to the factor of *time* that he puts his entire force at risk to gain and keep this advantage. On the negative side of utilizing operational factors, Grant's use of the *time / force* relationship in assembling forces sometimes puts him at a disadvantage. We see this at Belmont, Shiloh, and Vicksburg. It is Grant's leadership and keen ability in using operational art that leads to Union victory when defeat seems upon them.

If one was only given one aspect of operational art to define Grant's victories, it would be *timing and tempo*. By never affording the enemy a chance to regroup, even if it meant pushing his own men when they needed rest or reorganization, he picked his battles, choosing a tired, disorganized, and surprised enemy. Grant won victories by creating these situations through steadfast, confident operational leadership, bringing into play aspects of operational art that favored his troops: *balance, leverage, decisive points, and culmination*.

Synergy -- it was there, embodied and proven in nearly every battle in the campaign along the Mississippi. Grant praised Navy support throughout his actions. In referring to the Porter's assistance, Grant states that without it, "the campaign could not have been successfully made with twice the number of men engaged."<sup>33</sup>

Grant gradually grew, in both staff size and responsibility. His ability to clearly articulate intentions and orders, lessons he learned during his administrative and supply days in Mexico, led to efficiency in the execution of

operational functions. General Taylor had taught him the importance of intelligence; Scott (and the lessons of Shiloh) demonstrated proper command and control functions. Grant's experience in Mexico and his march on Vicksburg would emphasize the feasibility of conquest and tactics, his march on Vicksburg serving as a blueprint for Sherman's march through the south. The slow, methodical dismemberment of the South's ability to rebel began at Vicksburg.

---

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Alfred H. Burne, Grant, Lee and Sherman (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 202
- <sup>2</sup> Sylvanus Cadwallader, Three Years with Grant (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1956), p. 353
- <sup>3</sup> Grant, Ulysses, Memoirs and Selected Letters (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1990), p. 1062
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 113
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 94
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 129
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 129
- <sup>8</sup> John F. C. Fuller, Grant and Lee (London: Eyre and Spottiswode, Ltd., 1933), p. 59
- <sup>9</sup> Grant, p. 65
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 169
- <sup>11</sup> Grant was concerned with the discipline of volunteers. Recruited under different enlistment contracts, although law required three years of service, Grant exhibits frustration in discussion of Taylor's success in Mexico: "A better army, man for man, never faced an enemy than the one commanded by General Taylor in the earliest two engagements of the Mexican War." Grant cites that confidence and professionalism were instilled by "so many disciplined men and professionally educated officers," and that these conditions would occur again, probably referring to comments in his memoirs following Vicksburg.
- <sup>12</sup> Arthur Conger, The Rise of U.S. Grant (New York: The Century Co., 1931), p. 30
- <sup>13</sup> Fuller, p. 78
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 63
- <sup>15</sup> Conger, p. 92
- <sup>16</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, Halleck: Lincoln's Chief of Staff (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962), p. 7

- 
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 38
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 159
- <sup>19</sup> Conger, p. 46
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 157
- <sup>21</sup> Grant, p. 208
- <sup>22</sup> Milan Vego, "Operational Art" (Newport, RI: Naval War College, 1996), p. 7
- <sup>23</sup> Ambrose, p. 33
- <sup>24</sup> Grant, p. 228
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 233
- <sup>26</sup> Conger, pp. 233-236
- <sup>27</sup> Joint Publication 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995), p. III-22
- <sup>28</sup> Grant, p. 234
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 244
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 246
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 255
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 385
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 386

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ambrose, Stephen E. Halleck: Lincoln's Chief of Staff. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962.
- Burne, Alfred H. Lee, Grant and Sherman. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939.
- Cadwallader, Sylvanus Three Years with Grant. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1956.
- Catton, Bruce Grant Takes Command. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, Inc., 1968.
- Conger, Arthur L. The Rise of U. S. Grant. New York: The Century Company, 1931.
- Fuller, John F. C. Grant and Lee. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode. Ltd., 1933.
- Grant, Ulysses S. Memoirs and Selected Letters. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1990
- Joint Publication 3-0: Doctrine for Joint Operations. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995.
- Rubel, Robert C. "Operational Level Leadership." Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 1996
- Vego, Milan C. "Operational Art." Newport, RI: Naval War College, 1996
- "Operational Factors." Newport, RI: Naval War College, 1996
- Ward, Geoffrey C. The Civil War. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1990.