

ABSTRACT

CANFIELD, DANIEL. Opportunity Lost: The Development of Union Military Strategy: January 1861 to July 1862. (Under the direction of Joseph Glatthaar and Steven Vincent.)

This paper traces the inception and early development of the Union's military strategy during the first eighteen months of the American Civil War. It focuses on three historical questions. First, how did the United States plan to use its military forces to suppress the rebellion? Second, what was the role of Winfield Scott's famous "Anaconda" plan, if one ever actually existed, in shaping the Union's national military strategy? And finally, was there ever a plan to fully integrate the operational capabilities of the United States Navy into the overall strategic design?

This paper's principal argument is that the Union failed to develop and implement an effective military strategy during the first eighteen months of the war that sufficiently capitalized on Northern advantages and exploited several critical Confederate vulnerabilities. This failure was caused by the confluence of three underlying factors. First, the nation's military establishment suffered from inherent institutional weakness that diminished its proficiency and professional credibility in the eyes of its civilian masters. This prevented it from producing a sufficient number of officers capable of adapting to the changing nature of warfare in the late Nineteenth Century, as well as, countering, well intentioned, but nonetheless harmful, political interference during the planning and execution of early military operations. Second, the development of Union strategy was consistently hampered by the combination of unrealistic planning assumptions and political ambiguity with regard to war aims. Third, and most importantly, the Union high command suffered from an

inability of several of its key civilian and military leaders to work together or otherwise form strong command relationships based on trust and effective cooperation.

Perhaps the most significant shortfall in the development of the Union's initial military strategy was its failure to comprehend the importance of utilizing combined operations to seize Southern ports. The North enjoyed unrivaled command of the sea and an overwhelming advantage in strategic mobility. The South was almost totally devoid of the natural resources and manufacturing capacity necessary to make war on a large scale. It was heavily dependent on the importation of war material throughout the conflict. Rather than capitalizing on this critical vulnerability, the Union high command consistently diverted resources to defend Washington or seek a Napoleonic battle of annihilation with Confederate forces in Virginia. This strategic concept resulted in a military stalemate that actually played into Confederate hands, and came perilously close to giving the South the military victory it so desperately needed to erode Northern public opinion and gain international recognition.

**OPPORTUNITY LOST: THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNION MILITARY
STRATEGY: JANUARY 1861 TO JULY 1862.**

by

DANIEL THOMAS CANFIELD

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

HISTORY

Raleigh, North Carolina

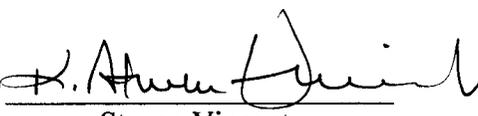
May 2007

APPROVED BY:


Joseph Caddell


Susanna Lee


Joseph Glatthaar
Co-chair of Advisory Committee


Steven Vincent
Co-chair of Advisory Committee

DEDICATION

To Stephanie, Thomas, Elizabeth, and Daniel. Every man should be so fortunate!

BIOGRAPHY

The author is an infantry officer in the United States Marine Corps. He served as the Marine Officer Instructor and associate professor of naval science at North Carolina State University from June 2004 to June 2007. The historical interpretations, arguments, and conclusions in this paper are his alone, and in no way reflect the views of the Department of Naval Science, the United States Marine Corps, or the Department of Defense.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No piece of writing is ever the province of a single individual. This is particularly true with this paper. It is doubtful whether I would have even applied, much less completed, graduate school if it hadn't been for the encouragement and mentorship of Dr. Joe Caddell. Besides possessing an exceptionally keen intellect, he also has the ability to make history fun and enjoyable. No minor accomplishment in the world of academia. His friendship over the past three years proved invaluable, and I count it as one of my most cherished possessions. Dr. Nancy Mitchell, the former Graduate Director at NC State was also an early mentor who bent over backwards to point me in the right direction and provide sage advice. Dr. Susanna Lee gave amiably of her time, and reviewed the manuscript on multiple occasions. Dr. Steven Vincent, a French intellectual historian by specialty, inspired me with his powerful intellect and ideas about the importance of trying to understand how people think.

This work, however, simply would not have been possible without Dr. Joseph Glatthaar. Rarely does a graduate student, much less one enrolled in the "rival school across town," get afforded the opportunity to work with a giant in his or her particular area of interest. A true professional in every sense of the word, Dr. Glatthaar unselfishly took me under his wing, and graciously offered to co-chair my thesis. His encouragement, deep knowledge of the war, and sage guidance proved invaluable. I never failed to leave his office uninspired or excited about Civil War history.

Finally, as the wife of an active duty Marine, Stephanie has become accustomed to irregular work hours, late night calls, and unplanned and hastily arranged deployments involving prolonged separations. She probably could not have known that the research and

writing associated with this project would evolve into a minor obsession requiring similar forbearance and understanding on her part. My beautiful and entertaining young children Thomas, Elizabeth, and Daniel also deserve particular mention. Though at times, I would have certainly preferred a little more tranquility in the early morning or late night hours when I was attempting to organize my thoughts or otherwise compose this paper, they have, in the end, provided the most valuable and enduring contribution to it. Perspective about what is really important in life.

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Preface:

“What matters ultimately in war is strategic success: attainment of our political aims and the protection of our national interests. History shows that national leaders, both political and military, who fail to understand this relationship, sow the seeds for ultimate failure—even when their armed forces achieve initial battlefield success. Battlefield brilliance seldom rescues a bad strategy.”¹

It has become almost obligatory for students writing about the American Civil War to first explain why. Conventional wisdom espouses that within a field so saturated with scholarship, there is little left to be discovered and even less to be argued. Yet a detailed examination of the historiography of the conflict reveals a surprising paucity of literature devoted to the initial development of Union military strategy. Like most students and historians interested in the military aspects of the war, I initially focused my attention on the principle historical actors and events associated with the war’s major land battles and campaigns. However, as my research expanded, it also evolved. Significant evidence began to accumulate that challenged many of my previously held assumptions about how the war was fought and conducted. In addition to broadening my perspective, the research associated with this project has dramatically altered the way I think about the war. It may have the potential to do so for others, as well.

The intellectual underpinnings of this study are rooted in the observations of several prominent scholars. Two of these, Theodore Ropp and J.F.C. Fuller, have become quasi-historical figures in their own right, and the third, Dr. Gary Gallagher from the University of Virginia, is one of the nation’s most accomplished and respected Civil War historians.

¹Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps. *Strategy: Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1-1*. (Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1997), p. 3.

Ropp and Fuller pointed out that the Confederacy possessed only ten ports with internal rail connections to the country's vast interior. Of these, only Mobile, Charleston, and Wilmington were still in Confederate hands by April 1862.² The fact that Union forces seized, or otherwise controlled, these crucial strategic locations, just ten months after Bull Run, appeared to be an under appreciated historical reality that warranted further examination.

In the beginning, I had no particular thesis to prove or disprove, only a professional curiosity about why it took the Union so long to complete a job that it had initially undertaken with such alacrity.³ This curiosity became even more pronounced when research associated with the blockade not only confirmed the widely held historical opinion that it was largely ineffective, but actually pointed to something more significant. While numerous scholars have produced impressive works documenting the blockade's porosity, few, with the notable exception of Richard Goff's classic, *Confederate Supply*, have actually attempted to link the vast amounts of war material coming in through the blockade to the Confederacy's ability to wage war. This, in turn, led to the realization that, comparatively speaking, the Navy's role in the conflict had been somewhat underdeveloped in the historical record. This observation was echoed by Dr. Gallagher who noted, "The role of the navy languishes among the most neglected aspects of northern strategic planning. Beyond perfunctory consideration of how the blockade

² Fuller claimed that there were only nine ports vice ten. He called the Union's failure to take Wilmington until January 1865 a "first rate blunder." J.F.C. Fuller, *The Conduct of War, 1789-1961; a Study of the Impact of the French, Industrial, and Russian Revolutions on War and its Conduct*. (Rutgers University Press, 1961), p. 101. Ropp correctly observed that the only way to "plug the leaks in the blockade" would have been for the Union to have captured the ports. Theodore Ropp, *War in the Modern World*. (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 190-191.

³ Despite possessing or otherwise controlling access to seven of the ten ports by April of 1862, the Union did not complete the task of sealing off the Confederacy from the outside world until January 15, 1865, when Fort Fisher, guarding the entrance to Wilmington was seized by amphibious assault.

figured in Winfield Scott's Anaconda Plan, most discussions of northern strategy virtually ignore its naval component. In light of the absence of a modern, manuscript-based study of the United States Navy during the Civil War, it should not be surprising, though it is lamentable, that no historian has written a specialized study about Union strategist and the navy."⁴

Given the enormous amount of literature covering the American Civil War, it is surprising that there has been so little scholarship that attempts to integrate naval and land based military operations into a single comprehensive view of the conflict. While most historians generally restrict their work to either land-based studies or further confine themselves, almost exclusively, to the blue waters of the blockade, the reality is that no objective strategic evaluation of the war can afford to segregate itself in such a manner.

While significant progress has been made since Dr. Gallagher's initial observations, there is still no full-length manuscript or primary source based study that fully integrates the efforts of both the War and Navy Departments, or otherwise attempts to piece together the development and initial formulation of Union strategy from the perspective of the historical actors in both departments.⁵ This apparent void in the historical literature became the catalyst for the detailed research that eventually led to this paper.

⁴ Gary W. Gallagher. "Blueprint for Victory," in James McPherson and William J. Cooper Jr., eds., *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand*. (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1998), p. 32.

⁵ Prior to Gallagher's observations, the standard works covering the Navy's role in the conflict were James Merrill's *The Rebel Shore; The Story of Union Sea Power in the Civil War*. (Little, Brown, 1957), and Bern Anderson's *By Sea and by River: The Naval History of the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 1962). Since Gallagher's comments, several pieces of quality scholarship have emerged. See William Fowler's *Under Two Flags: The American Navy in the Civil War* (New York: Norton, 1990), Ivan Musicant's *Divided Waters: The Naval History of the Civil War* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), and William Roberts thought provoking, scholarly, and concise macro history *Now for the Contest: Coastal and Oceanic Naval Operations in the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004). Of all the recent works, however, the efforts of Robert Browning clearly stand out. Browning authored *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear: The North Atlantic Blockading Squadron during the Civil* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993) and *Success is all that was Expected: The South Atlantic Blockading Squadron during the Civil War*

Though I suspect the Union's inability to develop an effective maritime-based military strategy that capitalized on the potential for amphibious operations may have unnecessarily prolonged the conflict, exaggerated its costs, and ultimately hampered the attainment of its long-term political objectives, time constraints and the difficulties associated with an argument that is largely counterfactual prevented me from undertaking such an ambitious enterprise at the present time. Realizing that such a complex argument would require linkage between the strategic conduct of the war and the post conflict phase of war termination and reconstruction, as well as many more years of research and writing, I have chosen, instead, to restrict the scope of this paper in an effort to fit it within the normal confines of a traditional masters thesis.

This work focuses on the initial development and formulation of Union military strategy during the first eighteen months of the war. While historians have traditionally incorporated limited discussions of Union strategy during this timeframe within the confined parameters of a particular biography, battle study, or campaign analysis, this thesis attempts to reconstruct the evolution of strategic thinking through the eyes of several sets of complex historical actors. Well-known figures like Winfield Scott, William Seward, George B. McClellan, Gideon Welles, Henry Halleck, and obviously Abraham Lincoln play prominent roles, but so too do lesser names like Edwin M. Stanton, Don Carlos Buell, Samuel Francis Du Pont, Gustavus Fox, Montgomery C. Meigs, Louis M. Goldsborough, and Montgomery Blair.

Though the methodology of attempting to integrate both the Army and the Navy's strategic efforts into a single comprehensive view of the conflict produces a more

(Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, Inc., 2002). These represent two of the most thoroughly researched and scholarly accounts of the Navy's role in the conflict.

accurate representation of the past, it also proves more difficult to organize and write. By choosing this approach, I have occasionally sacrificed depth and detail, for breadth and perspective. Most of the historical figures under examination and many of the controversies they generated are well known. I have endeavored, wherever possible, to avoid wasting the reader's time by rehashing or rendering yet another interpretation on old historical arguments. Rather, I have focused on the ideas and actions of the respective historical actors as they pertained to the development of Union military strategy.

This story, however, is not confined to a dry or esoteric discussion of military theory. Ultimately, it is about the historical actors themselves, human beings, who possessed all the strengths and frailties associated with the people of any historical epoch. Unfortunately for the Union, personality conflicts among key individuals and a general inability to cooperate often held sway over the soundness of their strategic thoughts or the military logic associated with their ideas.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose: This paper traces the inception and development of the Union's military strategy during the first eighteen months of the American Civil War. It focuses on three historical questions. First, how did the United States plan to use its military forces to suppress the rebellion? Second, what was the role of Winfield Scott's famous "Anaconda" plan, if one ever actually existed, in shaping the Union's national military strategy? And finally, was there ever a comprehensive plan to fully integrate the operational capabilities of the United States Navy into the overall strategic design?

Thesis: The principle argument is that the Union failed to develop and implement an effective military strategy during the first eighteen months of the war that sufficiently capitalized on Northern advantages and exploited several critical Confederate vulnerabilities. This failure was caused by the confluence of three principal factors. First, the nation's military establishment suffered from inherent institutional weakness that diminished its proficiency and professional credibility in the eyes of its civilian masters. This prevented it from producing a sufficient number of officers capable of adapting to the changing nature of warfare in the late nineteenth century, as well as countering well-intentioned but nonetheless harmful political interference during the planning and execution of early military operations. Second, the development of Union strategy was consistently hampered by the combination of unrealistic planning assumptions and political ambiguity with regard to war aims. Third, and most importantly, the Union high command suffered from an inability of several of its key civilian and military leaders to

work together or otherwise form strong command relationships based on trust and effective cooperation.

Perhaps the most significant strategic shortfall in the development of the Union's initial military strategy was its failure to comprehend the importance of utilizing combined operations to seize Southern ports. The North enjoyed unrivaled command of the sea and an overwhelming advantage in strategic mobility. The South was almost totally devoid of the natural resources and manufacturing capacity necessary to make war on a large scale. It was heavily dependent on the importation of war material throughout the conflict. Rather than capitalizing on this critical vulnerability, the Union high command consistently diverted resources to defend Washington or seek a Napoleonic battle of annihilation with Confederate forces in Virginia. This strategic concept resulted in a military stalemate that actually played into Confederate hands and came perilously close to giving the South the military victory it so desperately needed for international recognition and intervention

Organization and Scope: The principle challenge associated with this subject is organization. Attempting to reign in the complex activities of a diverse set of historical actors, operating within two separate departments is challenging. While it would, from an organizational standpoint, be far more convenient to organize the material topically, it would also have the potential to distort the reader's perspective on events. For example, a purely topical work on the Scott vs. McClellan feud would undoubtedly tell us that Scott submitted his initial letter of resignation on August 9, 1861, but it would likely fail to

point out that Scott was also in the throes of planning and supervising the Hatteras expedition at nearly the exact same time.⁶

Similarly, a work focused strictly on the Seven Days would surely tell us of McClellan's planning as it related to the Peninsula Campaign. It would, however, likely fail to mention his other activities as they related to his larger responsibilities as General-in-Chief. During the initial planning stages of the campaign, McClellan was not only overseeing the activities of the Army of the Potomac, but also attempting to simultaneously direct the Union war effort in the western theater. He was also in consultation with the Navy Department regarding Farragut's pending operations in and around New Orleans. There are many more examples, but for our purposes, it is enough to simply say that by viewing selective tactical or operational events individually, or in isolation, the historian runs the very real risk of losing the larger strategic perspective.

On the other hand, a purely chronological approach would render a kaleidoscope of people, events, and ideas which, while providing a much more realistic snapshot of the past, would undoubtedly leave the reader bewildered and confused. With the exception of the second chapter, which is intended to provide background and context for the paper's principle argument, I have endeavored to arrange the story chronologically. However, for the sake of clarity and continuity, there are some significant chronological overlaps. This is especially true in chapter six where a brief topical synopsis of the Navy's major contributions to the initial strategic direction of the war has been inserted. This may, on

⁶ For Scott's Resignation Letter, see Scott to Cameron, 9 Aug. 1861. U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion : A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901) Ser. I, 11, pt. III, p. 4. Cited hereafter as OR. For Scott's order initiating the army's participation in the Hatteras expedition see, Thomas Scott to Sherman, 2 Aug 1861, OR, Ser. I, 11, p. 168. Thomas Scott was the Adjutant General of the Army.

occasion, give the reader the unenviable sensation of going back in time within the body of the narrative. In an effort to mitigate confusion, a chronology of major strategic events has been included in Appendix A.

Problems Associated with the Study of Civil War Strategy: The principle argument in this paper is significantly influenced by three intrinsic problems associated with the study of Civil War strategy. These three issues will be identified and briefly discussed in order to construct a common intellectual framework for viewing the subject under examination.

The first and most basic problem encountered in this study is achieving a common understanding of what actually constitutes strategy. The term can mean different things to different people. This is not necessarily due to an overt lack of understanding, but more aptly explained by the fact that the three levels of war (tactical, operational, and strategic) often overlap and are, in fact, interconnected. Simply put, an event or decision could, quite correctly, be described as either “strategic” or “operational,” because it falls within the overlap associated with the levels of war (See Figure 1).

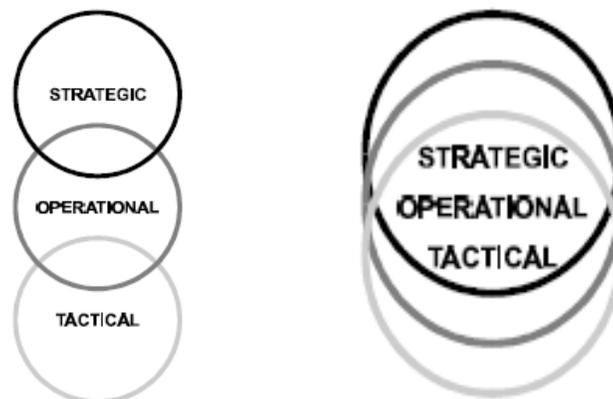


Figure 1: Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps. *Warfighting: Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1*. (Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1997), p. 29 and 31.

The problem of comprehension is further exasperated, because the definition of the word “strategy” has evolved over time. In researching the primary and secondary source material for this project, it became apparent that on many occasions the actual historical actors, as well as many subsequent historians, had different ideas about what actually constituted strategy. They frequently confused, interchanged, or liberally intermingled different terms and concepts. Taken collectively over time, this has the potential to distort historical interpretations and does little to properly clarify or frame the subject.

It is certainly not the intent of this paper to attempt to view the past through the lens of the present. However, if any objective understanding of the development of Union strategy is to be obtained, we must first be willing to agree on some workable intellectual model through which the subject can be properly viewed. For the purposes of this paper, the following terms and definitions will be used as a baseline to facilitate a common understanding and evaluate the issues under historical consideration.

War Aims: The goals and objectives a nation seeks to obtain from the war. They are by nature political and exclusively the concern of statesman.⁷

National Strategy: Also known as War Policy. Attitudes and policies adopted by the government in order to achieve the war aims. The art and science of developing and using the political, economic, and psychological powers of a nation, together with its armed forces, during peace and war, to secure national objectives. National Strategy is also the responsibility of the statesman, but because he must consider not only war aims but also war realities, he should formulate his policy with the advice of experts in economics, military science, diplomacy, and other fields. It is the duty of the statesman to make policy clear and of the general to understand it thoroughly.

Military Strategy: The art and science of employing the armed forces of a nation to secure objectives of national policy by the application of force or the threat of force. It is the province of the soldier. In simplest terms, it should be the best large-scale plan that

⁷ All definitions, unless otherwise noted, are taken from a combination of U.S. Department of Defense, *Joint Pub 1-02: The Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*. (Joint Staff, Washington, D.C., 2005) and Joseph L. Harsh "Battlesword and Rapier: Clausewitz, Jomini, and the American Civil War." *Military Affairs: The Journal of Military History, Including Theory and Technology* 38, no. 4 (Dec., 1974): pp. 135-136. Cited hereafter as "Battlesword and Rapier."

military experts can devise within the guidelines of the governments policy for achieving victory. Incidentally, victory may or may not be annihilating the enemy's armed forces, but is always obtaining the war aims.

Operational Level of War: Commonly referred to as the "Operational Art." The level of war at which campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted, and sustained to accomplish strategic objectives within theaters or areas of operations. Activities at this level link tactics and strategy by establishing operational objectives needed to accomplish the strategic objectives, sequencing events to achieve the operational objectives, initiating actions, and applying resources to bring about and sustain these events. These activities imply a broader dimension of time or space than do tactics; they ensure the logistic and administrative support of tactical forces, and provide the means by which tactical successes are exploited to achieve strategic objectives.

The Tactical Level of War: Also referred to as "tactics." The application of military force in battle. The level of war at which battles and engagements are planned and executed to accomplish military objectives assigned to tactical units or task forces. Activities at this level focus on the ordered arrangement and maneuver of combat elements in relation to each other and to the enemy to achieve combat objectives.

Expeditionary Operations: Operations conducted by an armed force organized and equipped to accomplish a specific objective in a foreign country. The missions of military expeditions can vary widely from simple humanitarian assistance to destroying an enemy government by defeating its armed forces in decisive combat operations. The defining characteristic of expeditionary operations is the projection of force into a foreign setting usually at a significant distance from home bases. Expeditionary operations involve the establishment of forward bases, land or sea, from which military power can be brought to bear on the situation. They require the temporary creation of a support apparatus necessary to sustain the operation to its conclusion. Logistics, the movement and maintenance of forces—the "mounting" of the expedition—is thus a central consideration in the conduct of expeditionary operations. The term "expeditionary" implies a temporary duration with the intention to withdraw from foreign soil after the accomplishment of the specified mission. In some cases an expeditionary force may accomplish its mission without the direct application of coercive force by merely establishing a visible and credible presence nearby. However, this indirect influence can result only from the perception of a nation's capability and willingness to physically establish military forces on foreign soil if necessary, and so the ability to project a physical presence remains central.⁸

Center of Gravity: Those characteristics, capabilities, localities, or sources of power from which a military force derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight.

⁸ This definition is a synopsis of the principle ideas from Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Operations: Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 3*. (Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1998), pp. 31-36.

Critical Vulnerability: A vulnerability that, if exploited, will do the most significant damage to the enemy's ability to resist us. Of all the vulnerabilities an armed force might choose to exploit, some are more critical to the enemy than others. Some may contribute significantly to the enemy's downfall while others may lead only to minimal gains. Therefore, every effort should be made to identify and focus friendly resources and efforts against only those vulnerabilities that are most critical to the enemy.⁹

The Relationship between Centers of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities: Center of gravity and critical vulnerability are complementary concepts. The former looks at the problem of how to attack the enemy system from the perspective of seeking a source of strength, the latter from the perspective of seeking weakness. A critical vulnerability is a pathway to attacking a center of gravity. Both have the same underlying purpose: to target our actions in such a way as to have the greatest effect on the enemy.¹⁰

It is important to note that the "operational level of war" as we comprehend it today (i.e. the link between the tactical and strategic) did not formally exist as a stand-alone doctrinal term in the nineteenth century. Similarly, phrases like "national," "military," or "grand" strategy were not in use. This does not mean, however, that the concepts and principles, as articulated in the definitions above, were not understood or capable of being applied, only that they were not formally defined or taught in the professional military education system of nineteenth century America.

The second problem associated with this paper is that strategy is not a fixed object. It evolves over time to meet the realities of a changing situation. This is particularly true once hostilities commence, because there exists by definition an independent and opposing will in war (i.e. the enemy), who is actively resisting the efforts of the other side. An examination of the Union's military strategy, particularly, suffers from this problem. Initially, the Lincoln administration's sole wartime objective was simply to preserve the Union. There was, at least officially, no thought or intent to forcibly end

⁹ Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps. *Warfighting: Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) I*. (Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1997), p. 47.

¹⁰ Ibid.

slavery in the southern states. The vast majority of Northerners were fighting to maintain the status quo ante bellum i.e. “the Union as it was.”¹¹ The original military strategy and the subsequent war plan, first developed by Winfield Scott and later modified by George B. McClellan, reflected this limited political objective.

The announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation in the fall of 1862 following the battle of Antietam changed all that. It signaled a dramatic change in the North’s wartime objectives, and essentially transformed the war from a limited conflict with modest political goals toward one of unlimited scope with a truly ambitious political end state. The Union’s new political objectives would require a significant escalation of force and a corresponding change in military strategy.

By the end of the war, the Union’s military strategy had evolved significantly from its origins in 1861.¹² This puts the writer in the unenviable position of attempting to capture a moving target. Therefore, in order to keep the scope of this paper within reasonable limits, and to circumvent the complexities of the aforementioned problem, this study will focus on the development of Union military strategy during the opening eighteen months of the war. This time horizon corresponds with two prominent and easily identifiable features on the historical landscape: Lincoln’s arrival in Washington during the crucial

¹¹ Joseph Harsh, “George Britton McClellan and the Forgotten Alternative: An Introduction to the Conservative Strategy of the Civil War: April-August 1861.” Ph.D. diss., (Rice University, 1970). p. 51. Cited hereafter as “*McClellan and the Forgotten Alternative*.” There is widespread scholarly consensus on this point. See also Lincoln to John A. Gilmore, 15 Dec. 1860. Michael Perman ed., *Major Problems in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Lexington, Massachusetts: 1991), p.122. Harsh’s unpublished dissertation is an important piece of historical scholarship. Though focused on McClellan, it is of great utility for anyone tracing the development and inception of Union military strategy.

¹² For an outstanding study that documents the evolution of Union war aims and policy see Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy Toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865*. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

six weeks before Sumter and the termination of McClellan's ill-fated Peninsula Campaign in early August 1862.

The third, and perhaps most vexing, problem with analysis of Civil War strategy is that most nineteenth century American military leaders could not see past the battlefield. In 1861 a country's military, economic, and diplomatic capabilities constituted the three elements of national power. Then, as is the case today, the thoughtful integration of all three far outweighed the sum of the individual components. In the mid nineteenth century, however, warfare was about to undergo a dramatic transformation.

This was due to several complex factors beyond the scope of this paper, but was primarily caused by powerful and rapid changes in the military art brought about by the industrial revolution. Gone were the days when a military leader could confine his strategic thoughts to the field of battle or plan of campaign. War was becoming a more complicated undertaking, involving many interrelated factors that were not purely military in character. The understanding, integration, and application of all elements of national power, not just battlefield brilliance, were becoming the keys to victory.

It is doubtful, with the possible exception of Winfield Scott, that any of the early Union leaders fully understood this in 1861. Furthermore, Napoleon's exploits and Jomini's subsequent writings tended to focus the Civil War strategist on the operational level of war. This generally resulted in a false belief that victory could be attained by a single decisive and climatic military battle. As a consequence, the "ghost of Napoleon" haunted both sides until the very end of the conflict.

Chapter 2: Possibilities and Pitfalls: Military Professionalism and the State of Strategic Thought in Nineteenth Century America.

The principle objective of this chapter is to examine a complex historical question, crucial to the paper's larger argument. What could or should have been reasonably expected from the nation's military leadership when it came to the application of the military art and the development of Union military strategy during the first eighteen months of the war? This chapter also attempts to refute the notion that it was not possible to conceive, plan, or conducted major amphibious operations or large-scale expeditionary campaigns during the conflict.

When assessing the capabilities and potential of the Union's military leadership to develop and implement sound strategic plans and policies in the opening months of the war, four historical questions clearly stand out. First, what was the state of professional military education in the nation's antebellum military establishment? Second, what, if any, strategic doctrine existed prior to the commencement of hostilities? Third, how was the army organized and trained during the antebellum period, and how did this affect the development of strategic plans and ideas? Finally, what was the professional reputation and standing of the Union's officer corps within Northern society, and how did this affect the initial strategic direction of the war?

Historians have traditionally made two assumptions regarding the importance of West Point and the role it played in shaping both the conduct and outcome of the war. First, they generally infer that the primary mission of the academy was to prepare young officers for combat. Second, the limited exposure the cadets actually received at West

Point, in the way of strategic thought, greatly affected their future application of the operational art during the war.¹³ Both of these assertions are exaggerated.

It is clear that West Point offered comparatively little in the way of strategic study during the antebellum period.¹⁴ Historians have generally considered the Civil & Military Engineering and Science of War, taught by Dennis H. Mahan, to have been the principle avenue by which the concepts and principles of nineteenth century strategic thought were conveyed to the large number of future Civil War generals who filed through the institution's doors during the antebellum period. Mahan was certainly an astute student of his profession, and the unquestionable epicenter of all strategic thinking being administered at the academy.¹⁵ It is less clear, however, how effective Mahan actually was in transmitting his ideas to the students at the academy in a way that significantly influenced their future conduct as general officers. Mahan's highly celebrated class was taught exclusively to the academy's seniors, and the vast majority of its content remained, like the academy itself, focused on field fortifications and military engineering.¹⁶ Furthermore, many of the war's most influential leaders, including Winfield Scott, Robert E. Lee, Joseph E. Johnston, and Jefferson Davis all passed through the academy's doors prior to Mahan's arrival at the institution.

The study of strategy was further diluted when one considers that within the paltry nine-hour block of instruction devoted to the "science of war," many more tactically

¹³ James L. Morrison Jr., "Educating the Civil War Generals: West Point, 1833-1861." *Military Affairs* 38, no. 3 (Oct., 1974), p. 108.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 109. A cursory review of the academy's recitation schedule reveals the paucity of actual military training that took place at the academy.

¹⁵ Harsh, "Battlesword and Rapier," p. 133.

¹⁶ Morrison, "Educating the Civil War Generals: West Point, 1833-1861," p. 109. In reality, Mahan's lectures included only a scant nine hours of instruction devoted to the actual "science of war." Additionally, this important subject, that has heretofore received the majority of historical attention, was covered at the very end of the spring semester, when the cadet's attention was likely focused on the warming weather, graduation, and thoughts of their future lives and assignments after West Point.

oriented and practical topics competed for time and attention.¹⁷ Given the miniscule amount of strategic theory within the overall curriculum, it is hard to imagine that the vast majority of young cadets coming out of the academy during the antebellum period possessed anything more than a basic curiosity with regard to the operational or strategic level of war. It also seems unrealistic to assume that these future Civil War generals, initially under Mahan's intellectual tutelage, would have remembered, much less been capable of applying, the specific contents of any lecture on military strategy administered to them in such low doses and so long ago in their youth. This is not to say that Mahan was not influential. Only that his influence likely had more to do with planting the seed of professional self study, rather than being the sole purveyor of antebellum strategic thinking.

Any criticism of the academy's curriculum or failure to adequately prepare its future leaders for the demands of the Civil War battlefield, however, must keep in mind that both the mission and training the cadets received at West Point reflected the role, expectations, and thinking of the American military at the time. Its focus was on coastal defense and the civil engineering skills the young republic needed to improve its emerging infrastructure. Admittedly, there were frontier outposts to be manned, trouble brewing along the southern border with Texas, and another war with England was always a distinct possibility, but any thoughts of large scale Napoleonic warfare breaking out on the North American continent or the precipitous requirement for a large standing American army was simply inconceivable to the vast majority of antebellum leaders, both

¹⁷ Ibid. These also included such germane or tactically oriented subjects as army organization, order of battle, reconnaissance, and outpost duty.

in and out of uniform. West Point was focused on graduating second lieutenants with training as civil engineers, not producing young Napoleons.¹⁸

What constituted American strategic thought or doctrine in the antebellum period? Though America had literally revolutionized the traditional European concept of warfare during its struggle for independence, the antebellum military, like most other emerging professions of the day, looked to the old world for answers and ideas. Napoleon was widely regarded as the soldier of the age. He had radically transformed and modernized warfare. His campaigns were of immense interest, and captivated the vast majority of Americans interested in the study of military science. The fact that Napoleon was contained and ultimately defeated by the combination of his own hubris and the intelligent application of sea power seemed to matter little to the men of the Point as they incorporated the study of the great captain into their daily routines.¹⁹ Until late in the antebellum period, the details of Napoleon's campaigns were only available in French and the principle authority on his exploits was a Swiss military theorist named Baron Henri Jomini.

Most discussion of Civil War strategic theory, therefore, usually begins with Jomini and his interpretations of Napoleon's campaigns. J.D. Hittle's famous observation, "that many a Civil War general went into battle with a sword in one hand a copy of Jomini's *Summary of the Art of War* in the other," while certainly hyperbole, was an accurate reflection of the importance that many historians have attributed to the Swiss military

¹⁸ Ibid., p.110.

¹⁹ Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan : The Young Napoleon*. (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1988), p.31 The principle manifestation of the influence of Napoleon on the faculty and cadets at West Point was Denis Hart Mahan's Napoleon Club. Faculty and students met regularly to present papers and discuss his campaigns. McClellan presented two papers for the club. It may be of interest for the reader to briefly consider, what, if any, effects Napoleon's campaigns, or more precisely, Jomini's theoretical interpretations of them, had on the U.S. military thought process during the antebellum period. Jomini's writings were land centric, and seem to have focused the student on the operational level of war.

theorist.²⁰ While it is generally accepted that he had the largest influence on American military thinking prior to and during the war, recent scholarship has tended to challenge both the size and extent of the Swiss theorist contribution to the formation of nineteenth century American military theory.²¹ The fact that his *Summary of the Art of War* was not introduced into the curriculum of West Point until 1859 seems to support the notion that Jominian influence has been slightly exaggerated. Adding more credence to this thesis was the fact that Grant admitted after the war that he had never read Jomini. As one contemporary scholar has so insightfully pointed out, Grant was probably not alone among the military professionals of his day.²²

Grant's admission aside, the extent of Jominian influence on the initial strategic direction of the war may have had more to do with who read Jomini, rather than how many. The Jominian influence appeared particularly strong with many of the most influential military professionals of the day, including Buell, Halleck, and McClellan.²³ These men quickly assumed key leadership positions within the Union high command early in the war, and were thus in a position to shape the initial strategic direction of the conflict. It is also important to note that any extensive knowledge of Jominian thought, though rooted in the West Point experience, was largely obtained as the direct result of a program of self-study on the part of the individual officer. While mitigating the "group

²⁰ Hittle's quote contained in Antoine Henri Jomini and J. D. Hittle, *Jomini and His Summary of the Art of War; a Condensed Version Edited, and with an Introduction*. (Harrisburg Pa., 1947), p. 2.

²¹ Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, *How the North Won: A Military History of the Civil War*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), p. 21, note 9. This footnote contains a superb explanation of this historical debate.

²² Timothy D. Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), p. 234.

²³ T. Harry Williams, "The Military Leadership of North and South," in David H. Donald ed., *Why the North Won the Civil War*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), pp.23-47. Williams argued that the Jominian influence was detrimental. For a different interpretation see Harsh, "Battlesword and Rapier."

think” mentality often associated with the strict interpretation of existing military doctrine, this obviously had the potential to backfire in the other direction, by rendering numerous individual interpretations.²⁴

Although some scholars have touted the influence of Jomini and Clausewitz on the development and execution of Civil War strategy, it was far more probable that a tangible historical actor, much closer to home, may have actually wielded a more significant influence on the American military, than either of the highly acclaimed European theorists.²⁵ Winfield Scott’s influence on the antebellum military establishment and its intellectual strategic thinking was immense.

²⁴ Unfortunately for the Union, this last point seemed to bear itself out during the crucial winter of 1861-62. Buell, Halleck, and McClellan all engaged in prolonged debates regarding the strategic direction of the war in the western theater. While personalities seem to have played a role, the clash of ideas was also, in part, based on different interpretations of Jominian strategy. For details on McClellan and Halleck’s divergent strategic designs see Stephen Ambrose, *Halleck: Lincoln's Chief of Staff*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962), pp. 23-40, and Ethan Rafuse, “McClellan and Halleck at War: The Struggle for control of the Union war Effort in the west, November 1861-March 1862” *Civil War History* 49.1 (2003) 32-51.

²⁵ The actual extent of Clausewitzian and Jominian influence on the conduct of the war remains controversial, and is shrouded in several divergent historical interpretations. See T. Harry Williams’s “The Military Leadership of North and South” in David Donald and Richard Nelson Current’s *Why the North Won the Civil War*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), pp.23-47 and David Donald’s “Re-fighting the Civil War” in his *Lincoln Reconsidered: Essays on the Civil War Era*. 3rd, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), pp. 88-102. Both Williams and Donald attributed the early ineffectiveness of the Union military effort to Jomini. They argued that by basing their strategic thinking on the Jominian model, generals like McClellan, Buell, and Halleck were, in effect, trapped in the past. Conversely, they saw Grant, not as a “butcher,” but rather, as the revolutionary new practitioner of Clausewitzian “total” warfare. Similarly, both men anointed Lincoln as the great military genius of the war because he was focused on the destruction of the rebel army from the very start. The idea, however, that Lincoln alone was able to foresee the changing nature of war and violence in the industrial age seemed shrouded in presentism. Though not mentioning Williams or Donald by name, Archer Jones argued that many historians had simply misinterpreted Jomini’s writings, and that slight differences between Jomini and Clausewitz had been greatly exaggerated. See, “Jomini and the Strategy of the American Civil War, A Reinterpretation.” *Military Affairs* 34, no. 4 (Dec., 1970): 127-131. Joseph Harsh argued that Williams and Donald’s interpretations were flawed because they allowed modern Clausewitzian theory to shape their historical interpretations of the past. Harsh pointed out that while the writings and theories contained in *On War* assumed iconic status in the twentieth century, there was no evidence that any of Clausewitz’s writings had any influence on American generals during the Civil War era. He also argued that Union war aims evolved over time. The notion, therefore, that men like McClellan, Halleck, or Buell could be faulted for not immediately embarking upon the prosecution of a “total war” seems revisionist at best or portrayed a fundamental lack of understanding about the relationship between war and policy at worst. See Joseph L., Harsh’s “Battlesword and Rapier: Clausewitz, Jomini, and the American Civil War.” *Military Affairs: The Journal of Military History, Including Theory and Technology* 38, no. 4 (Dec., 1974): 133-138. Williams

Winfield Scott entered the United States Army in 1808 as a captain of artillery. During his fifty three year career he served under every American president from Jefferson to Lincoln. After distinguishing himself in the War of 1812, he was promoted to brigadier general in 1814 at the ripe age of twenty seven. He would eventually command troops in the Mexican-American War, the Black Hawk War, and the Second Seminole War. Long a champion of professionalism, Scott played a monumental role in creating and overseeing the formation of the United States Army. After the War of 1812, he translated several French military manuals into the *Abstract of Infantry Tactics, Including Exercises and Manueuvres of Light-Infantry and Riflemen, for the Use of the Militia of the United States* in 1830. In 1840, he produced a three-volume work entitled, *Infantry Tactics, Or, Rules for the Exercise and Maneuvre of the United States Infantry*. This work became the standard drill manual for the regular army. In July of 1841, Scott assumed the duties of Commanding General of the Army, and in 1855, he recieved the unprecedented honor of a brevet promotion to the rank of lieutenant general.²⁶

Perhaps even more important than Scott's role in creating and forging a professional military establishment was the fact that there were over 130 future Civil War general officers that served under him in Mexico. For most of them, their respective experiences during that campaign constituted their only combat experience prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. Important future leaders including the likes of U.S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, Thomas J. Jackson, Joseph E. Johnston, George B. McClellan, Joe Hooker, Winfield

later published a subsequent article that attempted to refute Harsh, and down play his reliance on Clausewitz. See Williams, "The Return of Jomini--some Thoughts on Recent Civil War Writing." *Military Affairs* 39, no. 4 (Dec., 1975): 204.

²⁶ Allan Peskin, *Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms*. (Kent State University Press, 2003), emphasizes Scott's intellectual leadership and tremendous impact on the formation of the U.S. Army. Other valuable works on Scott include Timothy Johnson's, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), and Charles Elliott's classic, *Winfield Scott, the Soldier and the Man*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937.)

Scott Hancock, James Longstreet, D.H. Hill, and Richard Ewell all served under Scott's command in Mexico. Most, if not all, of these men were significantly affected by both their experiences and the example that Scott had displayed.²⁷

While the level of professional military education and the intellectual underpinnings of American strategic thought are important prerequisites for developing a comprehensive understanding about the American military establishment during the antebellum period, any ideas and potentialities associated with the formulation of initial Union strategy were ultimately governed by the realities of army organization. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities, the regular army consisted of approximately 17,000 officers and enlisted men organized around ten infantry, four artillery, and two cavalry regiments. This scant force was not a cohesive entity. It was spread paper thin along a series of isolated and widely dispersed frontier outposts.²⁸ Charged with keeping the peace and fending off Indian raids, the antebellum American Army was hardly capable of operating effectively above the regimental level.

Limited professional education, lack of a coherent and customized American strategic doctrine, and poor organization were not the only obstacles confronting the nation's military leadership. Ironically, it was professionalism itself that was under attack. Despite the prominent role many West Pointers played in the successful outcome of the Mexican War, a skeptical public and an uninformed political class assumed the application of the military art could be placed in the domain of any educated or politically influential

²⁷ Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, pp. 234-235.

²⁸ Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won: A Military History of the Civil War*, p. 9. There were also two regiments of dragoons and one of mounted riflemen. See also, Howard Meneely's outstanding work, *The War Department, 1861; a Study in Mobilization and Administration*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928).

civilian layman.²⁹ Of all the daunting problems confronting the Union military establishment upon the outbreak of hostilities, the low public opinion of the nation's officer corps may have been the most difficult to surmount. Though a detailed examination of the subject is beyond the scope of this paper, the lack of public trust and confidence, though non-quantifiable, clearly had a significant effect on the development of Union military strategy during the first eighteen months of the war.

Turning our attention to the subject of amphibious operations and large-scale expeditionary campaigns, some historians have argued that they were simply beyond the capabilities of the Union to plan and execute during the war. For example, William Roberts made the following observations regarding the potential for the employment of amphibious or expeditionary forces.

Analyses of Civil War amphibious operations suffer considerable from hindsight. Viewing the Civil War through the lens of Normandy or Inchon, it is easy to assume that the war could have been dramatically changed if only the commanders had seen the possibilities of an amphibious campaign. Certainly there were unrecognized possibilities, but more than strategic blindness was at work. Amphibious operations were limited by very real strategic and technological problems.³⁰

²⁹ See Harry Williams, "The Attack upon West Point during the Civil War." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 25, no. 4 (Mar., 1939): p. 492. Williams observed "Hardly had hostilities commenced before enthusiastic civilian commentators in the North began to criticize the regular army officers in command of the union forces for their seeming slowness of movement. The constant mass-criticism of military operations that was to be such a marked feature of the war and that was so characteristic of the prevailing American contempt for specialized training turned its guns upon West Point specialists as an object of particular attack. Defending the capabilities of the common man to decide the movements of the army, the most influential newspaper in the North later declared: "However imperfect the civil appreciation may be as to military science, common sense is an attribute which buttons and bullion do not alone confer; and common sense is quite as competent as tactical profundity to decide the questions of hastening or deferring operations against the rebels"

³⁰ William Roberts, *Now for the Contest : Coastal and Oceanic Naval Operations in the Civil War*. Great Campaigns of the Civil War. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), p. 36

Roberts further argued that there were three principle factors that prohibited amphibious operations. First, the geographical isolation and inaccessibility of the Union's initial blockade bases made them "ill-suited" to support subsequent overland movements into the heart of the Confederacy's interior. Second, amphibious operations were "technologically" problematic because of the difficulties associated with transporting large number of draft animals, so necessary for an army's mobility in the nineteenth century, over vast distances at sea. Third, he argued that problems associated with interservice cooperation significantly hindered joint operations. Finally, Roberts asserted "The only significant American amphibious experience, Winfield Scott's Mexican War campaign against Vera Cruz, success had been due more to Santa Anna's mistakes than to Scott's vision."³¹

While Roberts correctly identified many of the difficulties associated with amphibious operations, it is quite another matter to assert that these problems, in and of themselves, were the reasons amphibious operations were not, or could not have been, conducted during the war. Yes, the blockade bases were geographically isolated, but this was done by design and did not mean Union forces were prohibited from landing elsewhere or capable of seizing a major port. Nor should it imply that tactical isolation of the Union's initial landings was undesirable in the first place. In fact, geographical isolation of any amphibious landing area has long been one of the most important prerequisites when selecting any potential landing beach.³²

³¹ Ibid., pp. 36-37.

³² This is due to the fact that the most dangerous part of an amphibious operation is the ship to shore movement phase and the establishment of the initial defense of the landing beach. Forces are phased ashore incrementally, due to limited quantities of landing craft. There are usually never enough landing craft available to ferry the entire force and all of its logistical material ashore in a single wave. It takes a significant amount of time, therefore, to ferry enough combat power ashore to establish an adequate

Likewise, the assertion that the Union was somehow technological incapable of projecting power across its own beaches must be put in proper historical perspective. For example, how were the Romans or the Carthaginians able to project power across the Mediterranean during the Punic Wars in the 4th century BC? Were they any more technically advanced or any less dependant on the use of draft animals for their respective expeditionary campaigns than the Union was in 1861?³³

These historical questions emanating from antiquity should also be balanced with two sets of historical precedents much closer to the historical time frame under examination. On December 26, 1779, the British embarked 8,708 soldiers and 1,400 horses on eighty-eight transports and thirty men of war in New York Harbor. This sizable expeditionary force sailed through the South Atlantic in the dead of winter, and eventually seized Charleston (then called Charlestown) on May 12, 1780.³⁴ Similarly, the United States, under the direction of Winfield Scott, embarked 12,000 men on sixty transports, emanating from six different ports, during the winter of 1846-47. Eventually, this large expeditionary force, consisting of two regular divisions, one volunteer division, a siege train, and an entire cavalry regiment, successfully rendezvoused off the Isle de Lobos in late February 1847. On March 9, 1847, Scott and his naval counterpart, Commodore

defense in the face of a land-based defender. The establishment of the initial beachhead is a calculated risk that superior strategic mobility will allow the attacker to build enough combat power ashore before local troops can arrive in sufficient numbers to turn back the assault. For further amphibious theory see Joint Publication 3-02: *Joint Doctrine for Landing Force Operations*. (Joint Staff, Washington, D.C., 2001).

³³ For an excellent work on the conduct of the Punic Wars and the evolution of Roman sea and expeditionary power see, Adrian Goldsworthy, *The Punic Wars*. (London: Cassell, 2000).

³⁴ David Wilson, *The Southern Strategy: Britain's Conquest of South Carolina and Georgia, 1775-1780*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 193-241.

Connor USN, put all three divisions ashore in five hours with no casualties, and seized the fortress town of Vera Cruz on March 29, 1847.³⁵

Leadership in war is one of the most trying and difficult of human endeavors. One of the most distinguishing marks of that leadership is how well people in hastily assembled organizations, no matter how well equipped or staffed, can get along or otherwise cooperate effectively under the threat of death or grievous injury. It could be argued that at no time in American history was this challenge more severe than during the Civil War. Clearly, the establishment and maintenance of effective partnerships or command relationships among key Civil War leaders was crucial to the overall success of their respective organizations.³⁶

Roberts was certainly correct in pointing out both the problems and the importance associated with interservice cooperation. It is just as important to note, however, that these difficulties were not insurmountable or unique to combined operations involving the Army and the Navy. There were plenty of examples of effective cooperation between the two services throughout the duration of the war.³⁷ Furthermore, personality conflicts and poor command relationships were not the sole province of combined operations. They were endemic at all levels of command, and in both armies, throughout the entire span of the conflict.

In summary, examples of poor interservice cooperation undoubtedly occurred during the war, and tensions between the respective departments significantly hindered the

³⁵ Colonel John Fleming Polk. USA (Ret.) "Vera Cruz 1847: Lesson in Command," *Marine Corps Gazette* 63 (September 1979): 61-67

³⁶ Joseph Glatthaar, *Partners in Command: The Relationships between Leaders in the Civil War*. (New York: Free Press, 1994). Glatthaar's is the best work on this important, but strangely underdeveloped aspect of Civil War scholarship.

³⁷ See Glatthaar's treatment of Grant, Sherman, and Porter. *Ibid.*, pp. 163-190.

planning and execution of a certain number of combined operations. However, lack of interservice cooperation, in and of itself, was not a good enough reason to explain away or otherwise assume that combined operations could not have been undertaken or employed to their full potential during the conflict.

Finally, whether Winfield Scott's success in Mexico had more to do with Santa Anna's incompetence is a matter of conjecture not historical fact. What is clear is that Scott was able to muster, embark, and transport a sizable expeditionary force that eventually seized a coastal port over 1,800 miles from New York. He then turned his back on the sea and marched his undermanned army nearly 300 miles inland, winning seven major battles against numerically superior and entrenched opponents, all the while supplying his army along a tenuous supply route connected to the sea through guerilla infested territory. With 7,000 men he seized and occupied a hostile capital of 200,000 and governed the people in such a politically astute way as to prevent a wide spread guerilla war from erupting.³⁸

The Union certainly faced a more formidable opponent in 1861, but it also possessed impressive resources and enhanced capabilities. When compared to the difficulties associated with the historical precedents listed above, it would seem ludicrous to argue that Northern forces were incapable of conducting large-scale combined operations during the war. While there were challenges and risks associated with these operations, there were also recent historical precedents that clearly illustrated the enormous potential and great reward they offered. In the final analysis, Roberts's observations are no doubt correct, but they also represent thinly veiled excuses for inaction. At the end of the day,

³⁸ Peskin, *Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms*, p. 191.

there had to have been something more, something more complex, something better, to explain the fact that no large scale expeditionary campaign was ever launched from the sea, or that the North never realized the potential of even limited amphibious operations to achieve major strategic objectives until late in the war.

Was the Union military capable of conceiving an effective military strategy or developing a well thought out war plan consistent with Union policy objectives? That question will be answered in time. It should be noted here, however, that Winfield Scott, the principle architect of initial Union military strategy, had planned and conducted the decisive expeditionary campaign that culminated with the capture of Mexico City in 1847, without benefit of a formal military education.³⁹ He nonetheless, conceived and executed an unprecedented expeditionary campaign that ranked among one of the greatest martial achievements of his day.⁴⁰ If formal military education, even one so devoid of strategic thought as the antebellum curriculum at West Point, was the key to martial success, how was Scott able to conceive, much less plan and execute such an ambitious operation? Similarly, how did Scott overcome many, if not more, of the very problems that, supposedly, so inhibited the American military during the Civil War?

What was the American military capable of upon the outbreak of the Civil War? It had a small but experienced cadre of semi professional officers that had experienced the realities of combat and large-scale expeditionary operations first hand in Mexico. These

³⁹ Scott was commissioned prior to the establishment of West Point.

⁴⁰ Peskin, *Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms*, p.175 and p. 191. Commenting on Scott's decision to turn his back on the sea and move on Mexico City the Duke of Wellington quipped "a great military error" and observed that "Scott is lost...He can't take the city, and he can't fall back upon his base." On hearing the improbable news of Scott's success, he called his campaign "unsurpassed in military annals."

officers had been shown how to conduct combat operations, a long way from home, and operate over an extended and exposed supply line that was tenuously tied to the sea.⁴¹

They had also seen, first hand, the potential of strategic mobility and operational maneuver to achieve decisive political results.

Tactically, Scott had repeatedly employed maneuver to first gain a position of advantage, and then, ultimately, to defeat a series of numerically superior forces that initially enjoyed all the advantages of the tactical defense. Scott's young officers also obtained valuable experience dealing with a neutral or hostile population constituting a different religious and ethnic background than their own. Finally, they had been shown how to win the peace through the intelligent application of military force in combination with the adroit political administration of a foreign population.⁴²

Certainly, the antebellum military was unprepared for the Civil War. Given the enormous challenges confronting the Union military, it would appear unreasonable for any contemporary scholar to think Scott, or the Union's military leadership, capable of devising a sophisticated military strategy. Yet, there is a danger in taking this line of thinking too far.⁴³ Though warfare had begun to move rapidly into the modern age, when

⁴¹ The logistics of Scott's Mexican campaign has received scant historical attention. Ironically, the crucial ordnance requirements of Scott's army were supplied largely through the Herculean efforts of the future chief of Confederate ordnance, Josiah Gorgas. See Frank Vandiver's, *Ploughshares into Swords; Josiah Gorgas and Confederate Ordnance*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1952), pp. 15-32. Historians have failed to realize the crucial role Gorgas played in Scott's campaign against Mexico City.

⁴² For an interesting examination of America's post war activities see Justin H. Smith, "American Rule in Mexico." *The American Historical Review* 23, no. 2 (Jan., 1918), pp. 287-302.

⁴³ For instance, though the terms "sea power", "centers of gravity", "total war", "national strategy" etc. had not been officially coined in the military vernacular of the day, we should not assume that the ideas and concepts behind the terms were new or unattainable in 1861. Some historians have occasionally failed to place their analysis of the American Civil War within the larger context of military history. See Archer Jones's, *The Art of War in the Western World*. (London: Harrap, 1988). Many of the strategic principles that Jomini gleaned from Napoleon had, in reality, been employed since the dawn of recorded warfare. It was none other than the Greeks, who first developed and defined the terms strategy and tactics. Our conceptualization of strategy originates from the Greek word "strategos," which literally means the art and skill of the general. Likewise, the word tactics is derived from the Greek word "taktos," which means

it came to the strategic thought and ideas of the historical actors in nineteenth century America, it would fair to say that they were limited only by their knowledge, imagination, and awareness about the nature of the world they lived in. At the end of the day martial success rested on the integration of several complex factors, but anything was possible.

Yet, all this being said, a careful examination of the first eighteen months of the war clearly reveals that the Union failed to implement, not design, a sound and well thought out military strategy. It is one of the principle objectives of this paper to help figure out the complex reasons why this failure occurred.

ordered, or arranged. Similarly, both the Persians and the Greeks seemed to comprehend the concept of sea power when they battled at Salamis 480 BC. The Romans embraced the concept of total war when Scipio Aemilianus sacked Carthage in 146 BC. Logistical difficulties did not prevent Hannibal from taking his army over the Alps and descending on Southern Italy. Certainly Frederick understood the principle of rapid maneuver and interior lines. The Duke of Marlborough demonstrated an appreciation of maneuver at the Battle of Ramillies, May 23, 1706 etc.

Chapter 3: Prelude to Conflict

“Grand strategy must always remember that peace follows war.”

—B. H. Liddell Hart

In the Fifth Century B.C., Thucydides wrote: “it is a habit of mankind to entrust to careless hope what they long for, and to use sovereign reason to thrust aside what they do not desire.”⁴⁴ His observation could very well have applied to the United States in the years leading up to the American Civil War. The advent of the war was by no means a surprise: its character, duration, and intensity were. Though many had foreseen the coming storm, few wanted to contemplate the reality or the details of its execution. This was especially true among the nation’s military. With Southerners constituting nearly a quarter of the professional officer corps in 1860, as well as holding many key leadership positions within the military establishment, including the Secretary of War, any talk of military plans and preparations for a conflict between the states would have undoubtedly been viewed as premature, incendiary, and provocative so long as there was hope for a political solution to the countries woes.

All that began to change during the fall of 1860. On October 29, Winfield Scott, the legendary General-in-Chief of the U.S. Army, sent a letter to President Buchanan entitled “Views Suggested by the imminent Danger of a Disruption of the Union by the Secession of One or More of the Southern States.” Scott warned that the country was in danger of being fractured into not two, but as many as four separate confederations organized along geographical lines. He also realized, based on his “knowledge of our Southern

⁴⁴ Thucydides. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. Landmark Edition (New York: Touchstone, 1998), p. 282.

population” that there was “some danger of an early act of rashness on the preliminary to secession.” Scott focused Buchanan’s attention on the large number of isolated and undermanned Federal garrisons sprinkled throughout the South. Clearly anticipating the crisis that would ignite the greatest blood letting in American history, Scott told the President that, “these works should be immediately so garrisoned as to make any attempt to take any one of them, by surprise *or coup de main*, ridiculous.”⁴⁵

After a winter of vacillation, that saw Lincoln’s election in November and South Carolina’s formal departure from the Union a month later, the situation in the nation’s capital began to spiral out of control. The day before Lincoln’s inauguration on March 4, 1861, Scott thought it important enough to formally submit an unsolicited supplement to his original “Views” of the previous year to Lincoln’s incoming Secretary of State, William Seward. In this succinct two-page document regarding the “highly disordered condition” of the country, Scott outlined his thoughts on the current political and military dilemma facing the newly elected administration.⁴⁶

Scott’s supplement offered four military and political courses of action. First, the new administration could pursue a diplomatic option by accepting the “conciliatory measures” advocated in the Crittenden compromise, or “like measures” emanating from the Peace Convention. Scott strongly believed that, if Lincoln formally endorsed these recommendations, his “life upon it,” the key Border States then contemplating secession

⁴⁵ Scott to Buchanan, 29 October 1860, in *The Works of James Buchanan, Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence*. (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), Vol. XI, p. 303.

⁴⁶ Winfield Scott, *Memoirs of Lieut.-General Scott, LL.D.* (Freeport, N.Y: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), Vol. II, p. 626.

would immediately cease their deliberations. Furthermore, he felt the majority of states that had already seceded would, with time and patience, eventually return to the Union.⁴⁷

Scott's second option primarily involved the economic arm of national power. He hoped to avoid an all out war by applying limited military force to blockade southern ports. From a political perspective, this was certainly the easiest of the four options to initiate. However, the General-in-Chief gave no estimate of the required time, or even the likelihood of success, associated with the implementation of these economic sanctions.

The Scott's third option was to, "conquer the seceded States by invading armies." However, the grizzled old warrior displayed none of the false pretenses or self-delusion about the true costs associated with the military option that would later come to imbue many of the North's political elite with a false sense of optimism about the war. He began by stating: "No doubt this might be done in two or three years, by a young and able general-a Wolfe, a Desaix, or a Hoche, with three hundred thousand disciplined men [kept up to that number], estimating a third for garrisons, and the loss of yet greater number by skirmishes, sieges, battles, and Southern fevers," but he cautioned that the loss of life and property in the South would be "frightful."⁴⁸

Additionally, Scott estimated the cost of the military undertaking to be at least \$250,000,000. The General-in-Chief, however, saved his most ominous warning for last. He believed the political consequences of a Northern victory would leave, "fifteen devastated Provinces! Not be brought into harmony with their conquerors; but to be held

⁴⁷ Scott, *Memoirs of Lieut.-General Scott*, Vol. II, p. 626.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

for generations by heavy garrisons, at an expense quadruple the net duties or taxes which it would be possible to extort from them, followed by a Protector or an Emperor.”⁴⁹

Scott’s fourth and final option was to simply do nothing, “Say to the seceded States – Wayward Sisters, depart in peace!”⁵⁰ Interestingly, the aging general declined to take this opportunity to recommend or endorse any of the four proposed courses of action to the oncoming administration. It seems clear, however, both by the tone of his writing and the attention he devoted to the inherent problems associated with the military option, that Scott hoped to encourage the newly installed President to defuse the situation through diplomacy and negotiation.

Scott’s letter is revealing, not so much for the stark choices he laid before the administration, but rather in his assessment of the Southern enemy and the nature of the rebellion. Even at this early date, he was clearly looking beyond the enormity of the approaching war to the real question at hand. How was the North going to win the peace? Scott correctly surmised both the essence and scale of the political problem confronting the Union. Even if Northern arms proved victorious, how was the Union military going to convince southerners to peacefully rejoin the Union after it had defeated the Confederacy on the battlefield? He also correctly foresaw the immense political chaos that would unfold in the aftermath of the war, and prophetically warned of a prolonged post hostilities phase of occupation and reconstruction.

Scott’s letter highlighted one of the two deep seated and competing views of the approaching conflict. While Scott believed a political compromise was still possible, he nonetheless foresaw that once hostilities commenced the conflict would degenerate into a

⁴⁹ Scott, *Memoirs of Lieut.-General Scott*, Vol. II, p. 627.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 628.

long, drawn out, and bloody war of attrition between two opposite and irreconcilable peoples. Conversely, many of the key politicians and policy influencers in the North clung to the false belief that the war could be won in a relatively short period of time.⁵¹ One of the cornerstones of this thesis rested on the critical assumption that the majority, or at least a significant percentage, of the Southern people actually harbored pro-Union sentiment, and that this silent majority's political future was being hijacked by a small group of wealthy slave owning elites that constituted a disproportionate percentage of the antebellum South's political class.

From the very beginning of his presidency, Lincoln had allowed himself to believe this assumption. As late as July 4, 1861, the President told Congress, "It may well be doubted whether there is, today, a majority of the legally qualified voters of any State, except perhaps South Carolina, in favor of disunion. There is much reason to believe that the Union men are the majority in many, if not in every other one, of the so-called seceded States."⁵²

Certainly, Lincoln was not alone in this belief, and there was some compelling evidence to suggest its veracity, but at the end of the day, it remained an unproven assumption.⁵³ Significantly, it was a supposition not shared by his senior military advisor. The role these two conflicting perspectives played in shaping the initial strategic design and early conduct of the war cannot be underestimated. Lincoln's views, undoubtedly

⁵¹Gideon Welles, *The Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson*. (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1911), Vol. I, pp. 10-11.

⁵² Lincoln to Congress, 4 July 1861. *The Collected Works of Lincoln*, 9 vols., ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), Vol. IV, p. 437. Cited hereafter as, *The Collected Works of Lincoln*.

⁵³ For a brief synopsis of the extent of pro union sentiment in the upper south states, see Beringer, Hataway, and Jones, *Why the South Lost the Civil War*. (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1986), pp. 67-68.

fueled by the radicals within his own party, dictated quick and immediate military action to bolster and encourage the pro-Union populace in the South, and crush the unlawful insurrection before it had time to organize and become legitimate.

Scott's view, later shared by other "professional" soldiers like Halleck and McClellan, demanded prudence and patience in order to properly organize, train, and equip Union forces for the reality of large scale combat operations. It also appeared, at least in Scott's strategic thinking, that any delay in hostilities might also have the added benefit of allowing the other elements of national power time to exert their combined effects on the Confederacy's fledgling military capability before large scale combat operations became necessary.

The chasm created by these two diametrically opposed estimates of the nature, strength, and popular support enjoyed by the secessionist would form the single most fundamental and enduring obstacle to the successful development and implementation of a national military strategy during the first eighteen months of the war.

Scott's ominous warning aside, the first problem confronting the new administration in the spring of 1861 was what to do about government installations in the territory of the seceding states. The immediacy of this dilemma, not a long-term view of the larger strategic problem, seems to have occupied the vast majority of the new President's time in the critical weeks before all out hostilities commenced.⁵⁴ From the very start, the administration's attention was focused on Fort Sumter. The fact that two of the three most important military facilities in the South were located in Virginia, one of the key Border States that had yet to throw in its lot with the Confederacy, complicated the situation.

⁵⁴ Welles, *The Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson*, p. 12.

The armory at Harpers Ferry was one of the largest arms making facilities in the country, and the only one located in the South.⁵⁵ It had the capacity to turn out 15,000 small arms per year.⁵⁶ Given its location and the paucity of Southern munitions making capability, it should have been high on any list of possible relief or reinforcement. Fort Pickens, guarding the approaches to Pensacola Harbor, was also of immense military value. The strategically located fort controlled access to the Pensacola naval station, which in turn, was widely regarded as the key facility for controlling the Gulf of Mexico.⁵⁷ However, of all the Federal garrisons under immediate threat, the Norfolk naval base was, without question, the most valuable. It was the largest shipyard in the South, and was well stocked with large amounts of naval stores, powder, and ordnance. Additionally, its close proximity to Richmond gave it immense strategic importance to both sides. Ironically, Fort Sumter, a small garrison with little or no strategic value, became the center of public attention and the spark that ignited the war.

Despite the wave of secession that had swept over the Southern states, it was far from a political certainty that an actual shooting war would materialize. The day after Lincoln's inauguration on March 4, 1861, representatives from the Confederate government arrived in Washington to begin secret negotiations with the Secretary of State.⁵⁸ According to Gideon Welles, Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy, a sort of *de facto* gentleman's agreement existed between the outgoing Buchanan administration and the Confederate government in Montgomery.⁵⁹ Both sides had enacted, what amounted to, a

⁵⁵ Prior to the war, the Springfield Armory in Massachusetts was the other major arms producer in the U.S.

⁵⁶ Burton to Gorgas 20 July, 1861. OR, Ser..4, I, pp. 509-510.

⁵⁷ Virgil Jones, *The Civil War at Sea*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1960), p. 58.

⁵⁸ Charles Ramsdell, "Lincoln and Fort Sumter." *The Journal of Southern History* 3, no. 3 (Aug., 1937), p. 264.

⁵⁹ Welles, *The Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson*, p. 12.

preventative truce. No Union facilities would be seized, so long as no effort was made to reinforce them. While this informal arrangement allowed the Buchanan administration to exit the public stage, it was essentially a *fait accompli* for the Southern cause. It was only a matter of time before the Union would have to abandon the garrisons or otherwise allow their occupants to capitulate from lack of provisions.

This situation did not sit well with Lincoln or the majority of his newly installed cabinet. However, both Seward and Scott felt that any opportunity to bolster the garrisons had long since passed. They argued that any military attempt to reinforce the Federal posts would only serve to embolden the secessionists. Seward also believed that, if hostilities were to become a reality, it was better to let the Southerners initiate them.⁶⁰ Scott held the additional view, by virtue of his position, that reinforcement of some geographically isolated or indefensible posts would also be militarily impracticable, because they simply could not be held. Perhaps nowhere else were the tactical cards stacked more against the Union than at the man-made island in the center of Charleston Harbor.

Initially, Seward and Scott had seemingly managed to persuade Lincoln to resist the mounting political pressures to reinforce the garrison. Scott brought a host of army and navy officers before Lincoln and the cabinet. All extolled the tactical impossibilities of relieving or sustaining the beleaguered post. On March 13, however, Gustavus Fox, the brother-in-law of Lincoln's Postmaster-General, Montgomery Blair, approached the President with a proposal to relieve the garrison. Fox, a former naval officer, wanted to lead a small detachment of vessels in a clandestine effort to run past the guns ringing the entrance of Charleston Harbor in order to re-provision the fort. Though Lincoln was

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 9.

intrigued by the possibilities, Scott remained steadfast in his opposition. In response to Lincoln's growing curiosity about Fox's proposal, the Secretary of War asked Scott to prepare a memorandum for the President that summarized the War Department's views.⁶¹

Scott argued, "that it is perhaps now impossible to succor that fort substantially, if at all, without capturing, by means of a large expedition of ships of war and troops, all the opposing batteries of South Carolina." The general further stipulated that it would take between six and ten months to raise such an expeditionary force, by which time, "Major Anderson would almost certainly have been obliged to surrender under assault or the approach of starvation." Scott cautioned against Fox's audacious proposal, realizing that even if successful, it would have to be repeated indefinitely in order to sustain the garrison. The General-in-Chief, therefore, came to the unfortunate realization that: "An abandonment of the fort in a few weeks, sooner or later, would appear, therefore, to be a sure necessity, and if so, the sooner the more graceful on the part of the Government."⁶²

Scott, realizing the strategic insignificance of Sumter, clearly had his eye on the larger political objective: retaining the crucial Southern Border States for the Union. He felt, "the evacuation of both the forts would instantly soothe and give confidence to the eight remaining slaveholding States, and render their cordial adherence to this Union perpetual." The General-in-Chief advocated holding Forts Jefferson and Taylor, because the tactical situation was predicated, "on entirely different principles," but he reluctantly concluded "the giving up of Forts Sumter and Pickens may be best justified by the hope

⁶¹ Charles Ramsdell, "Lincoln and Fort Sumter," p. 267.

⁶² General Scott's Memoranda for the Secretary of War, 15 Mar 1861. OR, Ser. I, 1, pp. 200-201.

that we should thereby recover the State to which they geographically belong by the liberality of the act, besides retaining the eight doubtful States.”⁶³

On March 15, Lincoln asked for the written opinions of his cabinet regarding the proposed relief of Sumter. The entire cabinet, with the notable exception of Montgomery Blair, concurred with the General-in-Chief’s assessment. Reluctantly, Lincoln acquiesced and deferred to Scott’s military judgment.⁶⁴ All that quickly changed, however, when Blair’s father called on the President.⁶⁵

Despite the military realities on the ground, the younger Blair remained steadfast in his commitment to reinforce Sumter, so much so, that he was on the verge of resigning his cabinet post over the President’s decision. His father, however, persuaded him to withhold his letter of resignation until after he had a chance to speak with Lincoln. There is no precise record of the private meeting between the two men, but according to Welles’s subsequent account, the elder Blair, “warned the President that the abandonment of Sumter would be justly considered by the people, by the world, by history, as treason to the country.”⁶⁶ This strong admonition by a private citizen apparently caused the President to thrust aside the practical counsel of his chief diplomat and senior military advisors.

Having thus changed his mind with regard to Sumter, Lincoln communicated the decision to his cabinet secretaries individually as he happened to see them. The President’s policy reversal undoubtedly pleased the small circle of junior military officers consisting of Captain Montgomery Meigs (USA), Gustavus Fox, and Lt David Porter

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Chase voted for relief so long as it did not bring on an expensive war. The individual cabinet member’s responses can be found in *The Collected Works of Lincoln*, Vol. II, pp. 11-22.

⁶⁵ Welles, *The Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson*, p. 13.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

(USN) that had been urging prompt and vigorous military action. Welles would later write: “The extraordinary powers and authority with which Captain Meigs and Lieutenant Porter were invested in the spring of 1861 would have alarmed the country and weakened the public confidence in the administrative capacity of the Executive had the facts been known.”⁶⁷ An examination of subsequent events seems to confirm Welles’s observation, and clearly shows that these men played a more influential role in the shaping and execution of the Union’s initial military strategy than would otherwise be expected from individuals of their rank, experience level, and positions they held in the government.

The President’s change of heart was unwelcome news to both Seward and Scott. Realizing the President’s mind was now firmly made up; Seward attempted to mitigate the effects of the decision by urging the President to initiate a clandestine attempt to reinforce Fort Pickens. Both Seward and Scott had long argued that Fort Pickens, not Fort Sumter, was the more valuable of the two posts under immediate threat.⁶⁸ However, in a bizarre move that would come to symbolize the dysfunctional and disorganized state of affairs within the Union’s inner circle, Seward directed Meigs, Porter, and Scott’s military secretary, Lieutenant Colonel Erasmus Keyes, to work out a proposal to reinforce the fort off the Florida coast without the consent or knowledge of either the General-in-Chief or the Secretary of the Navy.

The plan consisted of sending one of the Union’s most powerful steamers, the U.S.S. *Powhatan* along with an additional transport carrying 600 troops, on a covert mission to reinforce the post. Seward, apparently satisfied with the efforts and expertise of his

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

⁶⁸ Welles, *The Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson*, p. 14.

young military planners, scheduled a meeting to discuss the proposal with Lincoln on the very same day.⁶⁹

Meigs briefed the President that if the plan had any hope of success it must be undertaken with absolute secrecy. When told that not even the Navy Department was to know about the endeavor, Lincoln is purported to have remarked: “What would Uncle Gideon say to that?” “However,” he quickly added, “I think I can smooth the old fellow over.” The President then went about signing a stream of official orders and correspondence that set the plan in motion. At one point, no doubt sensing the inherent duplicity of the proceedings, he looked up and said: “Gentlemen, I don’t know anything about your Navy rules, or your Army rules, only don’t let me burn my fingers. I expect Uncle Gid will blow up, but I don’t care.”⁷⁰

The Commandant of the New York Naval Yard, Captain Andrew H. Foote, was more than a little surprised when Lieutenant Porter arrived at his desk on April 2 with a direct order from the President, dated just the day prior, requiring that the U. S. S. *Powhatan* be made immediately ready to go to sea. The order also contained the following caveat: “You will fit out the *Powhatan* without delay. Lieutenant Porter will relieve Captain Mercer in command of her. She is bound on secret service, and you will under no circumstances communicate to the Navy Department the fact that she is fitting out.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Jones, *The Civil War at Sea*, pp. 58-59.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59. The extent of Lincoln’s knowledge and duplicity in the Pickens affair is a matter of historical controversy. This account of Lincoln’s language is taken from Jones’s book, which in turn, is based on Charles Boynton’s original work, *History of the Navy during the Rebellion* (New York, D. Appleton and Company, 1867). For a first person accounting, see David Porter, *The Naval History of the Civil War*. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998), pp. 99-103. For a more comprehensive explanation of the historical controversy, see John Niven, *Gideon Welles; Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 332-339.

⁷¹ Lincoln to the Commandant of the New York Navy Yard, 1 April 1861. *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894-1922) Ser. I, 9, p. 109. Cited hereafter as *ORN*.

This intriguing order, replacing a full navy Captain, in command of one of the most powerful steamers in the Union arsenal, with a relatively inexperienced and junior Lieutenant from Washington set off a strange set of events that actually transpired to hinder the relief of Sumter.⁷²

Unknown to Seward and his hand picked group of junior military planners, Welles was already in the process of issuing orders for the *Powhatan* to join Fox and the naval force then assembling for the mission to relieve Sumter. Similarly, on March 12, Scott had discreetly dispatched orders to Captain Vodges (USA) directing him to: “At the first favorable moment you will land with your company, reinforce Fort Pickens, and hold the same till further orders.”⁷³

Seward’s duplicity eventually surfaced and a heated confrontation between the Secretary of State and an enraged Secretary of the Navy ensued at the White House. The President, clearly uncomfortable with the way events had transpired, and no doubt looking to calm his naval Secretary, immediately remarked, “Give up the ship, Seward. We will get another”⁷⁴ Unfortunately for Welles and the naval expedition to Sumter it was too late.⁷⁵

⁷² David Dixon Porter played a major role in the naval war. He always seemed to be at the right place at the right time. Beginning the conflict as a Lieutenant, he commandeered the *USS Powhatan* and reinforced the strategically important garrison at Fort Pickens in the opening months of the war. Porter then rose rapidly through the ranks to command Farragut’s mortar flotilla at New Orleans, and continued to offer invaluable service to the Union cause throughout the duration of the war. He cooperated with both Grant and Sherman during their respective campaigns on the western rivers in the crucial years of the war, and culminated his service by overseeing the successful assault of Fort Fisher and the capture of Wilmington. Given his close personal relationship with both Grant and Sherman, and his proximity to almost every major naval action of the war, it remains surprising that his only two principle biographers are Noel Gerson *Yankee Admiral; a Biography of David Dixon Porter* (1968), and Chester Hearn *Admiral David Dixon Porter: The Civil War Years* Annapolis (1996).

⁷³ Scott to Captain Vodges, 12 March 1861, ORN, Series I, 4, p. 90.

⁷⁴ David Porter, *The Naval History of the Civil War*. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998), p. 103.

⁷⁵ Orders countermanding the President’s hand written degree and directing *Powhatan* to join the Sumter expedition arrived in New York 30 minutes after she had sailed with Lt Porter aboard in civilian clothes. Capt Mercer was covertly put ashore after the ship had left harbor. A small vessel was dispatched and

Though Sumter occupies the prominent spot on the historical stage, it was the loss of the Norfolk naval base on April 20, a full week after the dramatic events in Charleston Harbor that had the most significant strategic consequences. Welles had long advocated the reinforcement of Norfolk.⁷⁶ However, with the administration's attention focused squarely on the immediacy of Sumter, and the fact that Scott had neither the resources nor the desire to reinforce the base for fear of alienating Virginia; the key naval station was left to its fate.

Though the retreating Union forces managed to burn the naval base and scuttle the ships moored pier side, a report from Lieutenant Sinclair (CSN) to Stephen A. Mallory, the Confederate Secretary of the Navy, on April 22, 1861, revealed that despite, "the most abominable vandalism at the yard," the results of the Union's handy work was less impressive than might have otherwise been anticipated. The Confederates were thus able to recover a treasure trove of valuable ordinance and ammunition.⁷⁷

The capture and haphazard scuttling of the Norfolk naval base had two long-term consequences that significantly hindered the future execution of Union military operations in the Eastern Theater. First, many of the heavy guns were salvaged and quickly dispersed throughout the eastern Confederacy, where they bolstered weak or even

managed to catch up with the Powhatan, but Lt. Porter now in receipt of conflicting orders decided to retain command of the ship and continued to Pensacola. The Sumter expedition was thus deprived the services of *Powhatan's* powerful firepower during the confrontation in Charleston Harbor.

⁷⁶ Welles, *The Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson*, p. 41.

⁷⁷ Sinclair to Mallory, 22 April 1861. ORN, Ser. I, 4, p. 306. The report concluded that "About 4,000 shells thrown overboard; can be recovered. The Germantown's battery will be up and ready for service tomorrow. In ordnance building all small arms broken and thrown overboard will be fished up. The brass howitzers thrown overboard are up. The Merrimack has 2,200 10-pound cartridges in her magazine in water-tight tanks. The flag of Virginia floats over the yard. Only eight guns, 32-pounders, destroyed; about 1,000 or more from 11-inch to 32-pounders taken, and ready for our cause. Many of them are ready in batteries. We saved about 130 gun carriages; all saved at St. Helena [Va.]. Many thousands of shells and shot, from 11-inch to 32-pounders, safe. All the machinery uninjured. Magazine captured, with 2,000 barrels of powder and vast numbers of shells and quantities of fixed ammunition. An attempt made to blow up the dry dock failed"

non-existent, coastal defenses. This vital ordnance helped strengthen several Southern garrisons that would eventually come under direct Union attack later in the war. Second, the hull of the *Merrimac* was eventually transformed into the CSS *Virginia*. The building and threat of this Confederate iron clad had a major, although perhaps overstated, effect on the initial strategic direction of the war, and in some measure helped thwart McClellan's advance up the peninsula in the spring of 1862.⁷⁸

When news of the Union disaster in Norfolk hit the northern papers it quickly translated into political problems for the administration. Most of the public outrage was directed at Welles. The editor of the *New York Tribune*, Horace Greeley, would later write: "No man fit to command a sloop of war could have thought of skulking away from a possession so precious and important. This was the most shameful, cowardly, disastrous performance that stains the annals of the American Navy."⁷⁹

In fairness to Lincoln, Welles, and the rest of the cabinet, it is hard to imagine any President or new administration inheriting a more difficult or complex set of problems. However, the logic and circumstances surrounding this critical early time period are troublesome and significant for two reasons. First, the President, against the counsel of his military advisors and chief diplomat, initiated a military operation to relieve a strategically insignificant post in the middle of Charleston Harbor, which had little chance of success. It subsequently served no purpose other than to inflame the radical secessionist sentiment throughout the south; at the very time diplomatic negotiations were underway to diffuse the confrontation.

⁷⁸ In the spring of 1862 McClellan used a motley collection of 389 vessels to move over 121,000 troops, 14,592 animals, 1,224 wagons, and 44 artillery batteries to Fort Monroe for his move up the Peninsula to Richmond. For a succinct accounting of the effects the Merrimack played in the Union high command see, Steven Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign* (New York, 1992), pp. 15-16.

⁷⁹ Horace, Greeley. *The American Conflict* (Harford, Conn.: O.D. Case, 1864-66), vol. 1, p.473.

This is not say that there was any real hope of a peaceful reconciliation with the authorities in Charleston or the Deep South for that matter, only that the military arm of national power was not employed in concert with the diplomatic. Even at this late hour, Seward was attempting to mitigate the size and scope of the impending conflict by politically isolating the Confederate government in Montgomery from the undecided Border States. Had this effort been successful, the task of adequately supplying, equipping, and sustaining any Confederate army would have likely been impossible from the beginning.⁸⁰ The expedition to Sumter, followed immediately by Lincoln's call for volunteers to retake it, brought the key Border States of Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina into the war on the side of the Confederacy, and it united a heretofore divided Southern population. It also made the pro-Union political position expressed by a significant number of Southerners untenable.⁸¹

From a strategic perspective the Union's loss of these crucial Border States transformed the Confederacy from a "cotton growers conspiracy" into a nation that, while still significantly out manned and out gunned, had a puncher's chance of winning its independence. In the words of Richard Goff, "the ascension of Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee brought into the Confederacy the great bulk of the manufacturing and much of the food producing potential of the new nation, and these resources turned what would have been a forlorn hope of winning a war of attrition into a possibility."⁸²

The addition of Virginia was particularly important. The state that had produced Washington, Jefferson, and Madison gave instant political prestige to the cause. More

⁸⁰ Richard Goff, *Confederate Supply*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1969), p. 28.

⁸¹ Beringer, Hataway, and Jones, *Why the South Lost the Civil War*, p. 68. For a slightly different interpretation of the political ramifications of Lincoln's handling of the crisis, see James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 312-314.

⁸²Goff. *Confederate Supply*, p. 13.

importantly, Virginia had the largest population of any seceding state and a manufacturing capacity nearly as great as the combination of the original seven seceding states combined.⁸³ It also contained the most important industrial facility in the South. The Tredegar Iron Works, located in Richmond, gave the Confederacy its only significant internal means to produce the type of munitions and military grade ordnance that it would need to adequately supply its armed forces.

From a military perspective, the problem was not that Lincoln made the political decision to relieve Sumter, but that once initiated, the administration failed to anticipate the consequences and take adequate steps to reinforce the two Federal garrisons in the Upper South that actually held the most strategic value. The loss of Harpers Ferry and Norfolk shipyard gave the struggling munitions industry in the South a much-needed shot in the arm. The most enduring byproduct of the handling of the Sumter crisis, however, was the tone and precedent it set for the future functioning and cooperation within the Union high command itself.

By circumventing members of his own cabinet, empowering a small minority of junior officers with undue influence, and allowing Seward to intermingle liberally in the military affairs of the War and Navy Departments, Lincoln inadvertently established a set of dysfunctional relationships and an atmosphere of mistrust and duplicity that would hinder the Union war effort until late in the war.⁸⁴

⁸³ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, p. 280. See also Appendix C: Military Capacity of North and South.

⁸⁴ Ironically, McClellan, when appointed General in Chief, would later cite the same operational security issues that were the driving force behind the circumstances surrounding the covert nature of the Pickens mission to justify his own decision to keep the details of his pending military plans and preparations away from the members of the cabinet and the President himself.

Chapter 4: The Strategic Situation after the Evacuation of Fort Sumter

“Since men live upon the land and not upon the sea, great issues between nations at war have always been decided—except in the rarest cases—either by what your army can do against your enemy’s territory and national life or else by the fear of what the fleet makes it possible for your army to do.”

—Julian S. Corbett

In the spring of 1861 the fact that the South had no navy to speak of may not have been as discouraging to the Confederate authorities as one might think. Despite minor inconveniences, like having the capital burned in the War of 1812, the United States had managed to prevail in the face of overwhelming British sea power during the first two wars against her former colonial master. In order to mitigate British naval superiority, the Americans had adopted a commerce raiding strategy based on the practice of privateering.⁸⁵ With their economy highly dependent on foreign trade, and facing a similar strategic dilemma, it is not surprising that the Confederate government moved quickly to adopt like measures. On April 17, 1861, Jefferson Davis issued a proclamation regarding letters of marque.⁸⁶ By calling for volunteers to have their private ships commissioned into Confederate service, and then turning them loose to attack Union commercial shipping, he enacted a policy that had the potential to transform a perceived Northern strength into a critical vulnerability.

⁸⁵ William Fowler, *Under Two Flags: The American Navy in the Civil War*. (New York: Norton, 1990), p. 43.

⁸⁶ Proclamation by the President of the Confederate States of America, regarding letters of marque, 17 April 1861. ORN, Series I, 5, pp. 796-97.

In 1861 the American merchant marine was second in size only to Great Britain. As a sea faring nation, the United States was highly dependent on maritime commerce. If the Confederates were left unchecked and could muster enough commerce raiders into service, the economic and political consequences for the Union could be disastrous. From a strategic perspective, even the threat of Southern commerce raiding would force the Union Navy to pull ships from blockade duty to serve as escorts, or otherwise hunt down these Confederate pirates one by one. This would prove tedious, time consuming, and certainly would not constitute the most efficient use of limited maritime assets. Therefore, the Union's best defense was to bottle up potential raiders in their respective homeports before they could ever spring free to roam the international waters and free ports of the world preying on Union commerce.⁸⁷

Just two days after Davis's proclamation, Lincoln countered with one of his own. On April 19, he formally established the blockade of all southern ports from South Carolina to Texas.⁸⁸ This was followed by a second proclamation, issued a week later that extended the northern boundaries of the blockade to cover the shores of Virginia and North Carolina.⁸⁹ Welles, however, was opposed to Lincoln's strategic initiative from its inception. On August 5, he sent the President a sharply worded, four-page letter outlining his contradictory view of the newly established blockade, "I am embarrassed as to the instructions I am to give our naval officers in relation to the interdiction of commerce with the ports of the insurgent states."⁹⁰ The center of the disagreement rested in a legal

⁸⁷ Fowler, *Under Two Flags: The American Navy in the Civil War*, p. 51.

⁸⁸ Lincoln's Blockade Proclamation. 19 April 1861, ORN, Series I, Vol. V, p. 620.

⁸⁹ ORN, Series I, 5, p. 621.

⁹⁰ Welles to Lincoln, 5 Aug 1861. ORN, Series I, 6, pp. 53-56.

interpretation of the blockade that need not be elaborated on here, but may be viewed as yet another indicator of a Union high command at war with itself.⁹¹

Unfortunately for the Union, the President's Proclamation of Blockade was more threat than capability. Though the North had retained nearly all of the country's maritime assets, the Union Navy was scattered throughout the globe, and not nearly large enough to make the blockade a reality. A letter from Flag-Officer Stringham, the commander of the newly created Atlantic Blockading Squadron, dated June 29, 1861, revealed the extent of the problem confronting Welles and the Navy Department in the opening months of the war. As Stringham struggled to locate and organize the ships that would eventually comprise his squadron, he informed the secretary that there were only seven ships (three steamers and four sail) that were available for service in the Atlantic.⁹²

The paucity of Union maritime assets occurred at the very time they were needed most. Severely lacking almost all of the resources and necessities to make war, the Confederate government launched an aggressive campaign to purchase and ship large amounts of war material into the South via its principle ports cities. The Confederacy was literally in a race against time to outfit and equip its fledgling military forces before the Union invaded its territory or established an effective naval cordon. Unfortunately for the Northern cause, the Union Navy was neither strong enough nor in position to prevent the trickle of supplies from quickly turning into a torrent.

As a former Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis was particularly attuned to military matters. He clearly recognized that the Confederacy's lack of arms and ammunition

⁹¹ Welles thought that the Confederate ports should be "closed" vice blockaded. For a succinct and scholarly treatment of the issue see Stuart Anderson's, "1861: Blockade vs. Closing the Confederate Ports." *Military Affairs* 41, no. 4 (Dec., 1977), pp. 190-194.

⁹² Stringham to Welles, 29 June 1861 ORN, Series I, 5, pp. 753-54.

constituted one of its most dangerous strategic critical vulnerabilities. Moreover, the Confederate government initiated proactive actions to mitigate the problem prior to the commencement of hostilities! On February 21, 1861 Davis appointed Semmes, “an agent of the Confederate States,” and dispatched him north on a covert mission “to make purchases and contracts for machinery and munitions, or for the manufacture of arms and munitions of war.”⁹³

Similarly, just three days after the fall of Sumter, the Confederate government initiated one of the most strategically important, but little known acts of the war. Caleb Huse was ordered to “proceed to Europe, without unnecessary delay, as the agent of this Government, for the purchase of ordnance, arms, equipments, and military stores for its use. Detailed instructions as to the nature and extent of those purchases and as to their shipment, with a view to speedy and safe transit, will be given to you by the chief of the Bureau of Ordnance.”⁹⁴ Eventually, Huse and his colleagues would be responsible for purchasing and shipping vast amounts of desperately needed war material into the Confederacy through crucial port cities of Charleston and Wilmington.⁹⁵

⁹³ Davis to Semmes, 21 Feb 1861. OR, Ser IV, 1, pp. 106-107. The specificity of the letter is intriguing, and clearly illustrates both the Confederate governments’ realization about the immediacy of the pending conflict and the crucial dearth of certain manufacturing resources necessary to make war. “Of the proprietor of the Hazard Powder Company, in Connecticut, you will probably be able to obtain cannon and musket powder, the former to be of the coarsest grain, and also to engage with him for the establishment of a powder mill at some point in the limits of our territory. The quantity of powder to be supplied immediately will exceed his stock on hand, and the arrangement for further supply should, if possible, be by manufacture in our own territory. If this is not practicable, means must be sought for further shipments from any and all sources which are reliable. At the arsenal at Washington you will find an artificer named Wright, who has brought the cap-making machine to its present state of efficiency, and who might furnish a cap machine and accompany it to direct its operations. If not in this, I hope you may in some way be able to obtain a cap machine with little delay, and have it sent to the Mount Vernon Arsenal, Ala. We shall require a manufactory of friction-primers, and will, if possible, induce some capable person to establish one in our country.”

⁹⁴ Cooper to Huse, 15 April 1861. OR, Ser. IV, 1, p. 220.

⁹⁵ James Bulloch and Caleb Huse were two of the most important Confederate-purchasing agents sent to England in the opening months of the war. Both played a crucial role in financing, purchasing, and shipping large amounts of war material that ran the blockade. Their efforts played a crucial and

Initially, the small arms situation in the Confederacy teetered on desperation. A hastily conducted inventory by the newly appointed Chief of Confederate Ordnance, Josiah Gorgas, revealed only 159,010 total small arms of varying quality present within the former federal arsenals sprinkled throughout the seceding states. Most of these were in fact antiquated muskets of questionable utility.⁹⁶

The situation regarding the supply and manufacture of gunpowder was even worse. At the beginning of the war the entire supply of gunpowder in the South was barely sufficient for one month of active operations, and none was being manufactured within the Confederacy's geographical territory. During the Civil War gunpowder contained $\frac{3}{4}$ of its weight in saltpeter (potassium nitrate, or "niter"). Thus obtaining and preparing saltpeter became of immense importance to the Confederate war effort. In order for the gunpowder to be of proper strength, the saltpeter contained within it had to be refined to almost chemical purity. Fortunately for the Confederacy, limestone caves existed in Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and Arkansas that were rich in nitrate of lime. This could be converted to saltpeter by lixiviation and saturating with the lye of wood ashes, but this process would take time.⁹⁷

Ironically, a significant portion of the immediate gunpowder requirements of the Confederacy was met as a direct result of Union incompetence. Crucial stores of gunpowder were captured at Norfolk in April. These were rapidly distributed, and though

underappreciated role in sustaining the Southern war effort. Bulloch and Huse each wrote post war memoirs. Bulloch's work, *The Secret Service of the Confederate States in Europe, how the Confederate Cruisers were Equipped*, originally published in 1883, and Huse's account, *The Supplies for the Confederate Army, how they were obtained in Europe and how Paid for*, published in 1904, are important and intriguing first person accounts of a little known, and under developed, aspect of the war. Both memoirs offer invaluable perspective, and are good points of departure for anyone exploring the history of blockade running, and its overall significance to the Confederate war effort.

⁹⁶ Gorgas to Bartow, 7 May 1861. OR, Ser. IV, 1, p. 292.

⁹⁷ George Washington Rains, *History of the Confederate Powder Works*. (Newburgh, N. Y., 1882), p. 3.

small, “proved absolutely essential” in supplying Confederate forces marshaling in the Eastern Theater until additional sources of powder came on line. This finite amount, however, was of insufficient quantity to outfit Southern forces then assembling in the western half of the Confederacy. Fortunately for the Southern war effort, the Governor of Georgia had, on his own initiative, purchased a small amount of saltpeter and sulfur in Philadelphia just prior to Sumter. This crucial shipment arrived in Savannah just prior to the port being blockaded, and was used to supply A.J. Johnston’s Army of the Tennessee and the batteries at Fort Pillow, Island Number 10, and Memphis.⁹⁸

Echoing the Ordnance Department’s troubles, the Confederate Commissary General, reported to the Southern Secretary of War the bleak assessment that after inquiring, “among intelligent merchants, that the resources of the Southern States cannot supply the necessities of the Army of the Confederate States with the essential articles of cloth for uniform clothing, blankets, shoes, stockings, and flannel. I respectfully suggest that measures be taken to obtain these articles from Europe.”⁹⁹

In the spring of 1861, the Confederacy was in desperate need of the materials necessary to make war. Realizing that domestic production, would take time to come on line, Confederate leaders quickly turned to Europe for help. While we will probably never know exactly how many foreign arms and munitions entered the Confederacy during the crucial early months of the war, it seems certain, that a major effort to do so was clearly underway.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 3-5.

⁹⁹ Myers to Walker, 13 May 1861. ORA, Ser IV, 1, pp. 314-15.

¹⁰⁰ Both the OR and the ORN are chalked full of primary source correspondence illustrating this point. For example see Gorgas to Giddings, 16 July, 1861. ORN, Series I, 1, pp. 234-235. The letter read in part, “This bureau will receive from you any or all of the following articles at any point within the Confederate

It also appears that the Union Navy, through a combination of poor planning and a failure to anticipate events, inadvertently gave the Confederate authorities a much needed window of opportunity to import vast amounts of desperately needed war material during the crucial opening year of the war. These early foreign shipments undoubtedly played a major role in forming and sustaining the Confederacy's initial military capability before Southern industry was able to begin producing enough military grade ordnance to compensate for its initial shortfall.

While the Navy was not to blame for the meager number of available ships on hand, the service was responsible for where these ships were stationed. By failing to recall vessels early enough to be in home waters during the spring of 1861, the Union Navy unexplainably exacerbated its own strategic problems. The administration was also not without fault. Though the idea of a blockade had been around for some time, subsequent events would clearly illustrate that many within the cabinet never had a realistic appreciation for the required lead-time or the necessary assets to make it effective.

As the Union and Confederate armed forces accelerated their preparations for war in the summer of 1861, they were both confronted with tremendous challenges of organization and resource shortfalls. Strategy is ultimately about means and ends. Unfortunately, though many political leaders in Washington could clearly envision the ends, they had little, to no, comprehension of the means or the time required to achieve them. Much has been made of the supposed great wave of Northern public opinion that demanded immediate action, but in reality, these sentiments were based on emotion and

States, upon the proper inspection and at the rates specified: From 50,000 to 150,000 pounds rifle powder, 250,000 to 350,000 pounds musket powder, 50,000 to 150,000 pounds cannon powder.”

an incomplete understanding of military reality. As Allan Nevins observed, “They (the Northern public) forgot that excitement was not patriotism. They forgot that an ounce of planning, forethought, and coordination was worth many pounds of passionate demonstration.”¹⁰¹

The military capacities of both North and South are well known and need not be restated again here, except to say, that it would require time, and a certain amount of patience, for the Union to capitalize on its tremendous advantages in men and material.¹⁰² Certainly the Union would need to act quickly. Every day that passed also gave the Southerners time to organize and prepare. Politically, time would also lend legitimacy to the rebellion, especially in the eyes of the Southern people, and perhaps more importantly, in the eyes of the international community.

The line, however, between boldness and rashness is often thin and always governed by judgment. Ironically, when it came to amassing the type of means necessary to achieve its political ends, time was initially on the Union’s side, but if the harvest of superior resources was cut short, the fighting power of the Union army would not be commensurate with the North’s material advantages. The question, therefore, of how and when the Union should attack or otherwise attempt to impose its political will on the rebellious Southern States required a sophisticated comprehension of military strategy. Not a rush to ill conceived and poorly planned action.

¹⁰¹ Allan Nevins, *The Ordeal of the Union*. Vol. 5, *The War for the Union: The Improvised War*. (New York, 1959), p. 75. Cited hereafter as *The Improvised War*

¹⁰² For the most succinct summary of Northern material superiority see Nevins, *The War for the Union*. Vol. 1, *The Improvised War*, pp. 424-426. See also Beringer, Hataway, and Jones. *Why the South Lost the Civil War*, pp. 39-52.

Chapter 5: The “Anaconda” Plan and the Beginnings of a Strategic Direction

“For even if a decisive battle be the goal, the aim of strategy must be to bring about this battle under the most advantageous circumstances. And the more advantageous the circumstances, the less, proportionately, will be the fighting.”

—B. H. Liddell Hart

Most historians credit Scott’s letter to McClellan on May 3, 1861, as containing the essential elements of his famous “Anaconda Plan.” While this is certainly correct, it bears mentioning that Scott’s letter was actually a response to an initial inquiry submitted by McClellan.

On April 27, McClellan wrote to the General-in-Chief, proposing, “a plan of operations intended to relieve the pressure upon Washington and tending to bring the war to a speedy close.” He also requested that all forces currently scattered throughout the Northwest be organized under a single commander. Though McClellan did not formally lobby to be placed in command of this new consolidated department, it seems apparent by the tone of his correspondence that this eventuality was implied throughout.¹⁰³

After briefly outlining the tactical details of his initial defensive positions, McClellan proposed two offensive operational courses of action. First, and most preferred, he envisioned the newly established Northwest command operating in conjunction with another army operating on an “Eastern Line” in a coordinated operation against Richmond. McClellan’s army would move through the mountains of western Virginia

¹⁰³ McClellan to Scott, 27 April 1861. OR, Series I, 51, pt. I, pp. 338-339.

and assail the Confederate capital while the supporting army fixed rebel forces north of Richmond.¹⁰⁴

This plan, however, was predicated on Kentucky's neutrality. If she proved hostile, McClellan recommended a direct and independent move on Nashville in order to destroy the Confederate military strength in both Kentucky and Tennessee. McClellan then envisioned another overland move on Montgomery with an eventual operational end state of a link up with the eastern army in Pensacola, Mobile, or New Orleans. McClellan concluded his letter with a plea for action: "It seems clear that the forces of the Northwest should not remain quietly on the defensive"¹⁰⁵

Scott reviewed McClellan's proposal and passed it on to Lincoln, complete with a scathing endorsement that severely rebuked McClellan's military judgment and strategic thinking. It is interesting to note that Scott, as the General-in-Chief, was under no obligation to forward an operational concept from one of his subordinates to the President. Reading between the lines of the official correspondence, one senses that there may have been some ulterior motive.¹⁰⁶ This speculation aside, Scott clearly seized the opportunity to severely critique McClellan's proposal.

The General-in-Chief took McClellan's plan to task for three reasons. First, it foolishly relied on 3-month volunteers whose term of service would expire long before McClellan would be ready to undertake it. Secondly, he feared McClellan's movement through western Virginia would insight Pro-Confederate sympathy, at the worst possible

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ It seems likely that Scott may have already been feeling the influences of McClellan's powerful political connections and lobbying efforts in Washington. For a succinct appraisal of the power struggle that erupted between the two men, see Mark Grimsley, "Overthrown: The Truth Behind the McClellan-Scott Feud," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 19 (Nov. 1980), pp. 20-29.

time. Scott, correctly as it turned out, was of the opinion that if left to its own devices the population of western Virginia would break for the Union. Finally, Scott labeled McClellan's overall strategic concept as "piece-meal," and rebuked his subordinate for not weighing the logistical realities associated with such a plan of campaign

The general eschews water transportation by the Ohio and Mississippi in favor of long, tedious and breakdown (of men, horses, and wagons) marches. For his plan is to subdue the seceded States by piece-meal instead of enveloping them all (nearly) at once by a cordon of posts on the Mississippi to its mouth from its junction with the Ohio, and by blockading ships of war on the sea-board. For the cordon a number of men equal to one of the general's column would probably suffice, and the transportation of men and all supplies by water is about a fifth of the land cost, besides the immense saving in time¹⁰⁷

While Scott's endorsement was damning, and also foreshadowed the future personality collision between the two men, his initial reply to McClellan was cordial. His famous letter is contained in its entirety in Appendix B. Much has been written about the strategic concept that quickly became preserved for posterity as the "Anaconda Plan," therefore; it will only be briefly covered here.¹⁰⁸ Similar to his letter to Seward on March 3, the real significance of Scott's plan was not in the concept itself, but rather in its realistic estimation of time, space, and the enemy.

Scott's principle strategic objective was to isolate the Confederacy by seizing control of the Mississippi, in combination with a naval blockade. He envisioned a drive down the Mississippi River Valley no earlier than November of 1861.¹⁰⁹ While this reflected a

¹⁰⁷ Scott to Lincoln, 2 May 1861. ORA, Series I, Vol. LI Pt. I, p. 339. For an excellent discussion of McClellan's plan and the background regarding the formulation of the "Anaconda Plan" see, Ethan Rafuse, "Impractical? Unforgivable? Another Look at George B. McClellan's First Strategic Plan." *Ohio History* (Summer-Autumn 2001), pp. 153-164.

¹⁰⁸ For a brief, but intriguing assessment of Scott's strategic concept, see Theodore Rupp, "Anaconda Anyone?" *Military Affairs* 27 (Summer 1963): pp. 71-76.

¹⁰⁹ Scott's to McClellan, 3 May 1861. OR, Series I, 51, pt. I, pp. 369.

common sense desire to avoid the perils of disease, it also bought time for the Union forces to assemble and prepare. He was already acutely aware that the greatest danger to his strategic designs lay not from the enemy, but from “the impatience of our patriotic and loyal Union friends” who would “urge instant vigorous action, regardless, I fear, of consequences—that is, unwilling to wait for the slow instruction of (say) twelve or fifteen camps, for the rise of rivers, and the return of frosts to kill the virus of malignant fevers below Memphis.”¹¹⁰

Despite Scott’s vast military experience and iconic status, his strategic concept was far from popular with a large number of the political elite in Washington, including the Secretary of the Navy, who wrote: “I had in the early stages of the war, disapproved of the policy of General Scott, which was purely defensive,—non intercourse with the insurgents, shut them out from the world by blockade and military frontier lines, but not to invade their territory. The anaconda policy was, I then thought and still think, unwise for the country.”¹¹¹

Rather than simply dismissing Scott’s military strategy out of hand, because it did not immediately evict the Rebels from Arlington Heights or conveniently end the war with a single climatic battle, Welles’s dissent was based on a fundamentally different view of the strategic situation. In discussing the initial formulation of the Union’s military strategy with General Mansfield (USA), it became evident that the consensus within the army was that, “we must establish our military lines; frontiers between the belligerents as between the countries of continental Europe,” the Secretary of the Navy was clearly uncomfortable with this approach from the beginning, believing both Mansfield’s and the

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 370.

¹¹¹ Diary entry dated 25 February 1863. Welles, *The Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson.*, Vol. I, p. 242.

army's larger strategic ideas were directly attributable to the myopic teachings of West Point, that were based on a European or, more specifically, a Napoleonic paradigm. Furthermore, Welles believed the implementation of a continental strategy was not necessarily appropriate to conditions in America: "We become by the process rapidly two nations. All beyond the frontiers are considered... as enemies, although large sections and in some instances whole states have a union majority."¹¹²

While his argument was based on the same flawed political estimates of the nature and strength of the rebellion that clouded the judgment of many political leaders in Washington during the early days of the war, it remains noteworthy because it suggests that there may have been an alternative military strategy available to the Union. More importantly, at least according to Welles, it implies that the top leadership within the army was incapable of conceptualizing a maritime-based strategy that exploited the South's own internal political divisions while simultaneously capitalizing on the Union's superior strategic mobility and potential to project power ashore at a time and place of its choosing.¹¹³

Unfortunately for Scott, Welles was not the only cabinet member critical of the General-in-Chief's strategic concept. Unlike Welles, however, Montgomery Blair was not a politician to be trifled with. He clearly held strong ideological convictions, and was not immune from fostering dissent in effort to bend the President to his line of thinking.

¹¹² Diary entry dated 17 August 1862. Welles, *The Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson*, Vol. I, pp. 83-86.

¹¹³ For informative discussions of naval strategy and the application of sea power see Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Naval Strategy Compared and Contrasted with the Principles and Practice of Military Operations on Land : Lectures Delivered at the U.S. Naval War College, Newport, R.I., between the Years 1887 and 1911*. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975) and Julian Corbet, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (London; New York: Longmans, Green, 1918).

Writing to the Governor of Massachusetts on May 11, Blair complained, “I have great difficulty in impressing my policy upon the administration.” He viewed Scott as “the great obstruction,” the rebellion as nothing more than a small group of “armed marauders” who could be easily put down: “It would require but a very inconsiderable part of the forces at our command to put down this band of plunderers, if used vigorously, and as soon as they are put down, the deliverers will be welcomed in Virginia, as they are now in Maryland.” Blair’s naïve illusions of Union troops being greeted as liberators in Virginia were only surpassed by his unrealistic assessment of how long it would take to accomplish such a complex military mission.¹¹⁴

From its very inception, Scott’s plan was unfairly labeled “defensive.” However, if one views his strategic concept within the context of his original assessment of the war, outlined in his March 3 letter to Seward, Scott clearly envisioned large-scale devastation in the South. What Welles, Blair, many Radical Republicans, and Lincoln himself failed to realize was that it takes time to prepare, train, and equip a civilian army for the type of rigorous offensive campaigning that would be required for the Union to impose its political will on the South. Scott undoubtedly contributed to the confusion because he never took the time to formally write down all the specifics of his plan. Nonetheless, it is inconceivable that a man as experienced and well versed in the art of war would have expected victory to be achieved based solely on the attainment of the objectives outlined

¹¹⁴ Blair to Massachusetts Gov. John Andrew, 11 May 1861; quoted in Nevins, *The Improvised War*, pp.150-151. Blair wrote “My suggestion has been that we should at once organize a Southern Army. To do this we should select a leader for the Southern Army, give him his staff, select the best, the most accomplished of our officers to surround him, detail troops, procure transports, and organize a great army that should rendezvous at Hampton Roads and menace Norfolk and Richmond. The band of marauders that now pervade the state of Virginia would then rush to meet the threatened invasion, the people of Virginia would speak their real sentiments at the approaching election, and their votes if not our [bullets] ... would drive the marauders out of the state on the 22d instant.”

in his original letter to McClellan. It seems far more probable that Scott's initial thoughts and designs were only the first phase or stage of a larger overall war plan.

The General-in-Chief, by virtue of his experience and knowledge, knew better than anybody else in the Union high command that the true art of strategy was to set the conditions for victory by engineering the most advantageous time and place where battles were to be fought. While many of the armchair strategists in the North assumed the Union army could simply cross over the Potomac, beat the rebel army and end the war, Scott based his strategic designs on a more realistic appraisal of the political and military situation confronting the Union in the spring of 1861. His strategic thinking appears to have been based on the integrated analysis of several complex factors, including Northern war aims, Confederate capabilities and strategic dispositions, Union troop strength and proficiency, terrain and topography, and the combination of time, space, and logistics.

Union War Aims: Any military plan, regardless of the level of war, is rooted in an analysis of the mission. Scott's strategic designs in 1861 appear to have been no different. What were the Union's war aims in the spring of 1861? There is widespread consensus among historians that they were limited. Initial Union war aims could be succinctly summarized in Lincoln's own words, "preserve the Union." There were certainly voices that were advocating abolition and a reordering of southern society, but the military mission in 1861 was to maintain the Union, not to forcibly end slavery in the Southern states. This sentiment was shared by the vast majority of men rushing to fill the ranks of the Union army, and echoed in the halls of Congress the day after Bull Run.

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

and rights of the several States unimpaired; and as soon as these objects are accomplished the war ought to cease.¹¹⁵

Confederate Capabilities and Strategic Dispositions: The second factor that significantly influenced Scott's strategic thinking was a realistic assessment of the enemy's military dispositions. The Confederacy's lack of industrial infrastructure made defense of Richmond, particularly the Tredegar Iron Works, a military necessity. Similarly, political and economic considerations would force the Confederates to vigorously defend Virginia. To do this, the Southern leaders would be required to position a large army north of the capital. From a military perspective Union forces could easily exploit this opportunity. The need to defend Richmond would eventually force the Confederate government to drain valuable manpower and resources away from other important areas that needed protection. Consequently, it would be relatively easy to fix or otherwise tie down a sizable rebel force in Virginia without becoming decisively engaged. To be sure, the Union also had a political obligation to cover Washington, but the North also had something her Southern cousins did not: the ability to project power from the sea or via the inland waterways of the Mississippi.

Union Troop Strength and Proficiency: The third factor that shaped Scott's strategic thinking was the capability of his own troops and those of the enemy. The Union was simply not ready to undertake large-scale military operations in the late spring and early summer of 1861. Scott clearly understood the numerous and complex problems associated with a massive mobilization of civilian volunteers. The Union was in the

¹¹⁵ Congressional Globe, 37th Cong., 1st Sess., 222. Quoted in Harsh, "McClellan and the Forgotten Alternative," pp. 51-52.

process of assimilating a large number of men in a very short time.¹¹⁶ These civilians had to be organized, equipped, and given enough rudimentary training to make their employment anything short of mass murder. Therefore, any strategic concept would have to factor in a sufficient amount of time for Union forces to be properly assembled and prepared.

Most of the political leaders in Washington, including Lincoln himself, had a hard time coming to grips with this military reality. They argued that the Southerner's were just as unprepared and unorganized as the Union men now assembling on the banks of the Potomac. This was certainly true, but what the laymen failed to realize was that more would be required from the Union army because it would be employed offensively. Military professionals like Scott understood that the defense was the stronger form of combat. Offensive operations required movement. They put greater strains on logistics, intelligence, communication, individual discipline, and leadership. In short, while a conscript could be taught how to fire his weapon and man a static position in a relatively short period of time, the same could not be said for the attacker. He had to be thoroughly drilled, capable of changing formations on the move, and exercise individual discipline while on the march over unfamiliar terrain.

Terrain and Topography: Terrain played a major role in the development of Scott's strategic concept. The topography of the Eastern Theater was particularly problematic. Although the two respective capitals were only 110 miles apart, the direct overland route required the crossing of no less than six major river systems. This was not an easy task in the face of a determined enemy, but an especially difficult one for an army in 1861.

¹¹⁶ The classic work on the War Department's early efforts to organize is Howard Meneely's, *The War Department, 1861; a Study in Mobilization and Administration*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928).

These natural obstacles made formidable defensive positions and hampered the tactical and operational mobility of an attacker. Similarly, the thick vegetation in the eastern and central part of the Virginia severely restricted maneuver and greatly facilitated the tactical defense. It canalized and negated superior Union combat power in much the same way a city or urban area impedes operations today.¹¹⁷ Similarly, though the vegetation in the Shenandoah Valley was considerably less sparse, it was clearly evident, as later confirmed by Jackson's Valley Campaign, that the mountainous terrain in the western part of the state could also be utilized with great effect to negate the material and numerical advantages of any attacker.¹¹⁸

The problems associated with the terrain in the Eastern Theater were exasperated by the realization that there were only three practical operational avenues of approach available to Northern forces for a move on Richmond; the direct overland route, up the Shenandoah Valley, and an amphibious envelopment with a landing and movement somewhere along the peninsula formed by the James and York rivers. The Confederates thus enjoyed the benefit of operating on interior lines. The Southerners would be able to rapidly reinforce any of these exterior "fronts" from within much quicker than the Union could maneuver forces around the periphery. In essence, these three areas of operations

¹¹⁷ The most obvious example of this phenomenon was the battle of The Wilderness in May 1864.

¹¹⁸ Jackson's Valley Campaign has long been regarded as a masterpiece of speed and maneuver in the face of overwhelming odds. For a detailed account see, Robert Tanner, *Stonewall in the Valley: Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's Shenandoah Valley Campaign, Spring 1862*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976). For the command relationship between Lee and Jackson see Glatthaar, *Partners in Command*, pp. 7-50. For the strategic significance of the campaign see B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach*. 2nd revised ed. (London: 1967), pp. 126-128.

became mutually supporting positions for the Confederates while becoming mutually exclusive for the Union.¹¹⁹

The terrain in the Western Theater of operations, however, offered better strategic opportunities. There was significantly more room for maneuver. Though the land area was immense, mobility was greatly facilitated by the numerous river systems that knifed through key strategic areas of the western Confederacy. The Mississippi and its watershed could be used to rapidly transport large bodies of men and material deep into the South. Once disembarked, the army had numerous opportunities to isolate and overwhelm strategically isolated Confederate garrisons, all the while enjoying the full support and strategic mobility of the Union Navy.

The Combination of Time, Space, and Logistics: The combination of time, space, and logistics were also important factors in the Scott's plan. Much has been made about the size of the Confederacy. The land area was immense, totaling over 750,000 square miles.¹²⁰ Conducting prolonged military operation across such vast distances would be no easy task. While the locomotive offered intriguing new possibilities, Scott realized that the majority of the logistical heavy lifting, necessary to supply and sustain an invading army, would have to be done by waterborne transportation. Scott clearly saw the Mississippi and its tributaries as the great logistical highways that would sustain any sizable and prolonged invasion of the South or otherwise allow his forces to penetrate deep into the heart of the Confederacy.

¹¹⁹ This was demonstrated several times during the war. The two most obvious examples being Jackson's reinforcement of Lee during the Seven Days and McClellan and Pope's inability to cooperate or transfer forces in a timely manner during the subsequent campaign of Second Manassas.

¹²⁰ Gallagher, "Blueprint for Victory," p.8

Though the size of the Confederacy appeared daunting, if the Union could seize or otherwise gain control of New Orleans and the Mississippi, nearly half the land area of the Confederacy, consisting of Texas, Arkansas, and western Louisiana would be severed.¹²¹ Geography aside, the splitting of the Confederacy would render enormous economic and logistical effects on the Rebellion's ability to sustain itself.¹²²

Scott's original "Anaconda Plan" seemingly took all of these complex factors into account. It combined a strategic offensive in the west, where the terrain and topography supported it, with an operational and tactical defense in the restricted and confined terrain of the east. Once the Confederacy was isolated, the Union would be free to capitalize on its strategic mobility to prosecute decisive combat operations at a time and place of its choosing. Scott's strategic concept also demonstrated a sophisticated appreciation of the evolving nature of war. Rather than immediately seeking a decisive battle, he realized that the other elements of national power would have to be applied in conjunction with military force. Key among these was the economic arm. From the very beginning an essential component of his plan was the blockade.

Because McClellan replaced Scott as General-in-Chief in November of 1861, we will never know how Scott would have prosecuted the war if left to his own devices. The "Anaconda Plan," however, should not be viewed as a comprehensive or all inclusive entity designed to end the war outright. Rather, it probably represented the first phase of a larger strategic design. After achieving the operational and strategic objectives outlined in

¹²¹ For an illuminating discussion of Confederate geography see Robert Tanner, *Retreat to Victory? : Confederate Strategy Reconsidered*. (Wilmington, Del., 2001.) pp. 23-45

¹²² For example, Texas was by far the largest source of beef cattle in the Confederacy. For an authoritative overview of the Confederacy's economic potential see David Surdam, *Northern Naval Superiority and the Economics of the American Civil War*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 11-41.

his original correspondences, Scott would have been required to design a second phase (i.e. a subsequent campaign plan) if the Confederacy did not capitulate. It seems likely, but by no means certain, that Scott hoped to achieve a political solution that circumvented an all out war of annihilation by integrating the diplomatic arm of national power with the military and economic.

He clearly understood that the ultimate goal was to bring the South back into the Union, not to destroy it out right. Scott seemingly hoped to demonstrate Union resolve short of an all-out war of annihilation by economically isolating the entire South, and limiting the scope and intensity of the violence to geographically isolated areas of the Confederacy. While this presumably would not have been enough to attain the Union's political objectives, it set the conditions for political reconciliation. Faced with economic pressure, time, and the building threat of overwhelming military force, it is not unreasonable to assume the Union's political objectives could have been attained, particularly in the upper South states of Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

Historians, while generally respectful of the aged General-in-Chief, have tended to dismiss the "Anaconda Plan" as the feeble and unrealistic rumblings of gout stricken old man. Others have argued it wasn't a plan at all.¹²³ They are quick to point out that his strategic concept contained a fatal flaw; the requirement for time and patience was not in line with the political realities facing the administration in the spring of 1861.¹²⁴ This is an important historical perception rooted in Clausewitzian revisionism. It seems strange

¹²³ Theodore Ropp, "Anacondas Anyone?" *Military Affairs* 27, no. 2, Civil War Issue (Summer, 1963): 71-76. Ropp, seems to imply that Scott's "Anaconda Plan" was never a plan at all.

¹²⁴ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, pp. 333-335 is a typical treatment. See also Timothy Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), p. 225, and Peskin, *Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms*, 252-253. Peskin also takes Scott's plan to task for assuming that the Confederates would simply sit back and allow the great snake's coils to contract without taking and proactive military action.

that a five hundred-page book, examining such a complex subject as war itself, is often succinctly distilled into a few famous phrases.

Clausewitz succinctly defined war as a continuation of politics by other means, and argued that political ends govern the military means. Did he say, however, sound military principles are thrown to the way side in the name of public opinion disguised as politics? Is Clausewitz's the only, or even the correct, view?¹²⁵ Armed with hindsight in one hand and a copy of *On War* in another, Allan Nevins concluded: "Scott's plan was radically defective in concentrating attention on territory of the Confederacy and the weakening of its people, when the Confederate armies were the true object of attack...An antagonist is not knocked out by blows on the extremities."¹²⁶

The American Civil War eventually evolved into a struggle that nearly approached the Prussian theorist's abstract concept of war in the absolute, but did it need to?¹²⁷ The popularity of Clausewitz within military, political, and academic circles since the end of the Second World War has led many to link the conduct of modern war with the concept of total war or war in the absolute. Yet Clausewitz also said: "we must also be willing to wage such minimal wars, which consist in merely threatening the enemy, with negotiations held in reserve."¹²⁸ Though not privy to Clausewitz's writings, it seems likely, Scott's initial strategic concept had this thought in mind. At the very least, he probably hoped to postpone a total war of annihilation until such time as it was both a last resort and the Union had amassed enough overwhelming force to make its conduct and

¹²⁵ It may be helpful for the reader to compare Clausewitz theories with those of Sun Tzu.

¹²⁶ Nevins, *The Improvised War*, pp. 151-152.

¹²⁷ For a thought provoking and scholarly rebuttal of the Clausewitzian inspired interpretation of the Anaconda Plan see, Harsh, "George Britton McClellan and the Forgotten Alternative." pp. 87-93.

¹²⁸ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: The Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 604.

execution as short as possible. Scott, himself, was fully aware that holding back the floodgates of irrational public opinion was the critical vulnerability of his strategic concept from the very beginning. Though tempers were high and patience was low in the spring of 1861, he clearly hoped that cool, rational, and deliberate military reasoning would trump impassioned pleas for premature action.

Unfortunately for Scott, and the thousands of Northern men who had rushed to the colors, time was a luxury they were not afforded in the early summer of 1861. Though Scott had clearly anticipated the mounting political pressure for premature military action, in the end, he was unable to stem the tide. Our knowledge regarding Scott's strategic thinking and the brewing crisis in civil military relations in the spring of 1861 has been retarded by the fact that an 1847 fire destroyed many of his personal papers.¹²⁹ Nonetheless, there is compelling historical evidence to suggest that Scott was engaged in a desperate struggle to convince an uncertain, but increasingly anxious, administration to resist the "On to Richmond" cries in lieu of his measured and increasingly maligned "Anaconda Plan."¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Peskin. *Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms*, p. 311. There is no comprehensive collection of the General's papers. They are scattered throughout the country at a variety of different locations. The historian, therefore, faces the rather daunting challenge of attempting to piece together Scott's strategic thinking and activities from a patchwork collection of various sources.

¹³⁰ Charles Stone, "Washington in 1861." *Magazine of American History* 12 (July 1884): 57. One of the most intriguing accounts of Scott's efforts to secure approval for his military strategy came from Colonel Charles Stone. Stone had been selected to command the newly created 14th U.S. Infantry Regiment, but in May of 1861, he was still serving directly under Scott, as both the inspector-general and the commander of the District of Columbia troops. As one of Scott's principle staff officers and military aides, he was undoubtedly familiar with Scott's view of both the military situation confronting the Union in the spring of 1861 and the General-in-Chief's strategic concept to deal with it. In 1884 Stone published a detailed account of a meeting between Scott and several influential members of Lincoln's cabinet, including Seward, Chase, and Cameron. The accuracy and objectivity of Stone's first person accounting of such a crucial meeting, written twenty-three years after the event, must certainly be treated with a grain of salt. Nonetheless, aside from any literary bias or exaggeration that may, or may not, be present in Colonel Stone's version of events, the concepts presented in his accounting are consistent with other historical evidence.

On May 28, Brigadier General Irvin McDowell was selected to command the newly created Department of Northeastern Virginia. By early June, Lincoln directed Scott to produce a plan for a military movement into Virginia. Though undoubtedly displeased by the prospect, Scott dutifully proposed a plan to retake the Federal garrison at Harpers Ferry with Major General Robert Paterson's Department of Pennsylvania. McDowell's newly created department would play only a supporting role in the operation by making a limited objective attack designed to serve as nothing more than a feint for Paterson's advancing forces.¹³¹ Ironically, the Confederate evacuation of Harper's Ferry combined with Lincoln's impatience resulted in a role reversal. McDowell's feint now became the main effort, while Paterson was ordered to support McDowell's move on Manassas Junction by fixing Confederate forces in the northern Shenandoah Valley. Cooperation between the two Union armies was poor, and the entire affair badly managed. While the tactical defeat on the rolling hills of Manassas could be attributed to poor operational coordination, the disaster of Bull Run was rooted in something much larger.

Unfortunately, instead of adopting a military strategy that integrated the various elements of national power, exploited internal political divisions within the South, and gave the Army time to transform the large number of civilians then entering the Union ranks into basically proficient units, the Lincoln administration chose to galvanize and unite the Confederacy in a way that no Southern politician could have. On July 8, Lincoln, against the advice of his General-in-Chief, ordered Union forces under the command of Irwin McDowell to move on the Manassas rail junction in Northern

¹³¹ OR, Ser. I, 2, p. 662 and pp. 664-65.

Virginia.¹³² For all intents and purposes, this decision represented a formal rejection of the military strategy developed by Scott and the Union's military professionals. What prompted the President to disregard Scott's counsel?

Historians have traditionally asserted that the orders from the Commander in Chief to move on Manassas had more to do with the political consequences of exercising prudence, rather than an objective evaluation of the military situation or adherence to a well conceived strategy. Armed with twentieth century Clausewitzian hindsight, this interpretation reflects Lincoln's sublime political awareness, while Scott's prudence was myopic and purely military.¹³³

More recently, however, some historians have argued that Lincoln's decision to act, based on the supposed political pressures, heretofore, associated with the "On to Richmond" movement so prevalent in the northern press, may have been greatly exaggerated. Mark Grimsley pointed out that there were a number of prominent Northern newspapers that were advocating patience and preparation. There is also equally compelling evidence to support the thesis that loud voices within Lincoln's own party and cabinet were the catalyst behind the President's decision to force an early battle at Manassas, not the irrepressible desires of the body politic in the North.¹³⁴

Clearly the irrational exuberance of men like Blair won the day over the counsel of Lincoln's military advisors, but the President had choices. The decision was ultimately

¹³² Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, pp. 30-31.

¹³³ For a brief example of this interpretation and a succinct summary of the circumstances leading up to Lincoln's decision to force a showdown at Manassas, see McPherson. *Battle Cry of Freedom*, pp. 333-336. McPherson states "Scott was out of step with the political imperatives of 1861."

¹³⁴ Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, pp. 27-31.

his alone to make.¹³⁵ In the words of Joseph Harsh, “History has been kind to the President in this regard, by shifting the responsibility from his shoulders to those of the naively impatient Northern masses.” Lincoln’s decision may have reflected the impatience and nervous insecurity inherent in his own character, rather than a sublime or shrewd political calculation. At the very least it served as yet another example of “his subordination of other military factors to the element of brevity.”¹³⁶

While the political motivations behind the decision may be open to historical interpretation, there is little doubt that the premature defeat at Bull Run had enormous consequences on the subsequent execution of Union strategy. The noted soldier and historian J.F.C. Fuller concluded that, “it imbued the Southern politicians with an exaggerated idea of the prowess of their soldiers, and so led them to underestimate the fighting capacity of their enemy; and it so terrified Lincoln and his government that from

¹³⁵ For an example of how many of the Union’s military professionals felt about the “On to Richmond crowd,” and Lincoln’s decision to force a move on Manassas see, Charles Stone, “Washington in 1861.” *Magazine of American History* 12 (July 1884): 56-57. “Then commenced, in a portion of the newspaper press in the North, an ignorant, unreasoning cry: “On to Richmond!! On to Richmond! On to Richmond!!! Such warlike cries, which have in them the ring of true patriotism and sacrifice when uttered by men in the front line of an army in the presence of the enemy, may be, and usually are, when shouted by men a few hundred miles in the rear of the danger-line, mere clap trap and demagoguism at best; and they are apt to cause mischief and disorder, if not disaster, by forcing the hand of responsible authority. Such was the effect in 1861. These fierce cries came not from the soldiers who had taken their lives in their hands and voluntarily rushed to the front to guard and maintain the Government of their country. They came not from the officers who, with a full sense of the heavy responsibility which had fallen upon them, were striving day and night to organize and make efficient for the service of the country that mass of splendid material for an army which had voluntarily rushed to arms from every branch of society in the North, from every station, from every industry, from every profession, and were then arriving by tens of thousands to do battle for the land. These cries came from none of these. They came from men, who in safe positions and at a safe distance, made themselves active in urging *others* to go forward into danger, to shed their blood, widow their wives and orphan their children, but who placed so high an estimate on *their* own personal value and the importance of *their* own private affairs that they never deemed it *their* part to go vulgarly forth to stay the course of bullets, or make of their precious bodies a bulwark for the Government. Not content with staying at home, and there repairing honor at the hands of their fellow-citizens for their loud, patriotic cries, they desired also to direct in detail the course of the government; and having urged their warm blooded neighbors to volunteer to fight for them, tried also to force the Government to send these, their neighbors, immediately into battle, whether prepared or not.”

¹³⁶ Harsh, “McClellan and the Forgotten Alternative,” p 103. Harsh concluded his critique of Lincoln by stating “It may be that he did not realize the desperateness of his gamble until he had lost.”

then until 1864 the defense of Washington colored every federal operation east of the Alleghenies.”¹³⁷

From a military perspective, the Lincoln administration’s decision resulted in a premature commitment of Union forces before overwhelming combat power could be amassed and applied decisively. The defeat cemented Southern resolve and emboldened the Confederacy with a false belief it could achieve a military victory. This, in effect, led to a *de facto* policy of gradual military escalation in the east that came perilously close to costing the Union the war and seemingly contributed to a prolongation of hostilities. As subsequent events painfully illustrated, attempts to conduct land-based military operations in the restricted terrain and topography of northern Virginia were indecisive, excessively costly, and actually complemented Confederate strategic designs.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ J.F.C Fuller. *A Military History of the Western World.*(New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1954), Vol. III, p. 20.

¹³⁸ This is an area that will be further developed in any future expansion of this thesis, but suffice it to say, the string of stinging tactical defeats in the east during the early years of the war (i.e. First Bull Run, The Seven Days, Second Bull Run, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville) produced a casualty list and political consequences far out of proportion to any strategic value that may have occurred even if the Union would have prevailed tactically on the battlefield. As late as 1864, the Union army suffered over 55,000 casualties from the Wilderness to Cold Harbor during the first month alone of the Overland Campaign. This number was close to the approximate size of the entire Army of Northern Virginia.

Chapter 6: Uncharted Waters: The Naval Component of the Union Military Strategy

“Under all circumstances, a decisive naval superiority is to be considered a fundamental principle, and the basis upon which all hope of success must ultimately depend.”

—George Washington, 1780

There is a widely held historical perception that the Army and the Navy were consistently unable or unwilling to cooperate during the Civil War.¹³⁹ While there is certainly a substantial amount of evidence highlighting the friction between the two services, it is important to put this occasional squabbling in perspective. Much of it centered on resource shortfalls (i.e. lack of ships and troops) and the personality differences among individual commanders, rather than any institutional incompatibility or unwillingness to cooperate. Even in the best of times, there has been, and there likely always will be, tension between services with such peculiar perspectives. It is important to remember, however, that there were impressive examples of inter-service cooperation throughout the war.

The key to successful joint operations almost always rested in the relationship between the senior army and navy commanders. Strong command relations were based on trust, cooperation, effective communication, the occasional ability to compromise, and, above all else, professional courtesy and respect. At the end of the day, if a particular issue could not be resolved, both sides had to put mission accomplishment above service

¹³⁹Roberts, *Now for the Contest: Coastal and Oceanic Naval Operations in the Civil War*, p. 37.

interests. To its credit, the Lincoln administration displayed an early appreciation for the intricacies of command relationships in combined operations.¹⁴⁰

On October 12, 1861, Welles sent a letter to Flag-Officer Samuel DuPont appointing him as the commander of a naval task force then assembling to prosecute an amphibious operation: “The military force, which, under the direction of the Secretary of War, accompanies the naval expedition, will cooperate with you for the purpose of taking possession of and holding, as stated, at least two of the places that have been enumerated.”

After acknowledging that embarked expeditionary force remained under the overall direction of the Secretary of War, he then went through great pains to outline the specific command relationship by which he expected Du Pont to adhere to during the forthcoming campaign: “By a recent order of the President, a copy of which has been for-warded to you, flag officers rank as major-generals; but no officer of the Army or Navy, whatever may be his rank, can assume any direct command, independent of consent, over an officer of the other service, excepting only when land forces are expressly embarked in vessels of war to do the duty of Marines.”¹⁴¹ The Secretary closed by reminding Du Pont that, “The President expects and requires, however, the most cordial amid effectual cooperation between the officers of the two services in taking possession of and holding the posts amid positions on our Southern coast which are designated in these instructions,

¹⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that these arrangements are almost identical to the formal command relationships between the Commander Amphibious task Force (CATF) and the Commander Landing Forces (CLF) prescribed in modern amphibious doctrine see, Joint Doctrine and Education Division (JDED). *Joint Publication 3-02.1, Joint Doctrine for Landing Force Operations*. (Joint Staff, Washington, D.C., 1989), pp. II-5-II-12.

¹⁴¹ Welles to Dupont, 12 Oct 1861. ORN, Series I, 12, p. 215.

and will hold any commander of either branch to a strict responsibility for any failure to procure harmony and secure the objects proposed.”¹⁴²

Surprisingly, there is relatively little documented evidence of direct correspondence or interaction between Scott and Welles. This, however, had more to do with cabinet organization, rather than any endemic inability or unwillingness to cooperate. As a cabinet level secretary, Welles’s counterpart was the Secretary of War, initially Simon Cameron, later replaced by Edwin M. Stanton. Unlike the Army, the Navy had no admiral or senior naval officer running the day-to-day operations of the department.¹⁴³ This role eventually devolved to Gustavus Fox.¹⁴⁴ While Fox proved more than capable, this strange situation undoubtedly hampered strategic and operational level coordination between the two services. Nonetheless, there were many indicators that the two departments were cooperating effectively during the initial stages of the war.

As early as April 1861, the Navy was making plans and preparations to support the Army in the Western Theater. On April 29, Welles received a letter from James B. Eads outlining a plan for blockading the commerce of the seceding States on the Mississippi. Ead’s emphasized the strategic importance of Cairo, and further advocated that it should become the primary base of operations for sealing the Mississippi.¹⁴⁵ Welles reviewed the proposal and forwarded it to the Secretary of War on May 14. Cameron, in turn, enthusiastically forwarded the plan to McClellan on the very same day. He instructed the

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Roberts, *Now for the Contest: Coastal and Oceanic Naval Operations in the Civil War*, p. 39.

¹⁴⁴ Welles to Fox, 8 May 1861, in *Confidential Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox: Assistant Secretary of the Navy, 1861-1865*, 2 vols., ed. Robert Thompson and Louis H. Bolander (New York: Printed for the Naval history society, 1918)., I, p. 45. Cited hereafter as *Fox Correspondence*. Fox was appointed Chief Clerk of the Navy on May 8 1861. His role and influence will be developed and discussed later in the paper.

¹⁴⁵ Eads to Welles, 29 April 1861. ORN, Series I, 22, pp. 278-279.

general to evaluate its feasibility, and cooperate with Eads.¹⁴⁶ Welles reciprocated the inter-service cooperation by ordering Commander John Rodgers (USN) to Cincinnati, in order to assist McClellan in the design and implementation of Eads's operational concept.¹⁴⁷

The Navy's top leadership was clearly thinking about operating in the waters of the Mississippi, and cooperating in support of army operations in the Western Theater from the very beginning of the conflict. This was despite the fact that there seems to have been an implicit division of responsibility, arrived at early in the war, whereby the Navy would concentrate on the Atlantic coast while the Army was focused on the pending drive down the Mississippi. Ironically, neither service could accomplish its strategic objectives without the help of the other.

By the first week of May, Welles's attention returned to his principle theater of operations. On May 1, he appointed Flag Officer S.H. Stringham commander of the newly created Atlantic Blockading Squadron.¹⁴⁸ The Secretary then followed that announcement, less than a week later, by naming Flag Officer Mervine to command the squadron assigned to blockade the Gulf coast.¹⁴⁹ The organization and functioning of the

¹⁴⁶ Cameron to McClellan, 14 May 1861. ORN, Series I, 22, p. 279.

¹⁴⁷ Welles to Cmdr John Rodgers, 14 May 1861. ORN, Series I, 22, p. 280. Welle's instructions were specific and clearly defined the command relationship between the two services. "You will proceed to Cincinnati, Ohio, or the headquarters of General McClellan, where [ever] they may be, and report to that officer in regard to the expediency of establishing a naval armament on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, or either of them, with a view of blockading or interdicting communication and interchanges with the States that are in insurrection. This interior non intercourse is under the direction and regulation of the Army, and your movements will therefore be governed in a great degree by General McClellan, the officer in command, with whom you will put yourself in immediate communication. He will give such orders and requisitions as the case to him shall seem necessary, you acting in conjunction with and subordinate to him."

¹⁴⁸ Welles to Stringham 1 May 1861. ORN, Series I, 5, pp. 619-20.

¹⁴⁹ Welles to Mervine 7 May 1861. ORN, Series I, 16, pp. 519-20.

overburdened department was also greatly improved by Lincoln's appointment of Gustavas Fox to become the Chief Clerk of the Navy Department on May 8, 1861.¹⁵⁰

Fox, it will be recalled, had been the driving force behind the ill-fated attempt to relieve Sumter. Having failed in his primary mission at Charleston, he had nonetheless endeared himself to Lincoln. Shortly after Fox's return to Washington, the President wrote him a kind letter praising his efforts: "You and I both anticipated that the cause of the country would be advanced by making the attempt to provision Fort Sumter, even if it should fail; and it is no small consolation now to feel that our anticipation is justified by the result."¹⁵¹ Besides offering keen insights into the President's political calculations with regard to Sumter, the letter also provided the impetus for Fox's subsequent appointment to the newly created position of Chief Clerk of the Navy.

Three days later, on May 4, Fox forwarded the President's letter to his wife with strict orders to keep its contents secret. He also mentioned his forthcoming appointment: "The Pres wants me to take a ship in the navy, but Blair thinks I better go into the navy dept. as the naval war will be only one of blockade. So the Pres directed the transfer." While the influence of Blair is intriguing, the letters relevance to this study lies in what proved to be a consistent paradigm concerning the role of the navy throughout the conflict: "the naval war will be only one of blockade."¹⁵²

Fox, a former naval officer, quickly earned a reputation as a hard driving and efficient administrator. He rapidly won the trust and respect of Welles. Together both men formed a strong partnership that left Welles free to deal with the President and Congress, while Fox handled the day-to-day operations of the Navy. Fox's official title was misleading. In

¹⁵⁰ Welles to Fox, 8 May 1861. *Fox Correspondence*, I, 45.

¹⁵¹ Lincoln to Fox, 1 May 1861. *Fox Correspondence*, I, 37.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

reality he functioned as a cross between a modern day Chief of Naval Operations and an Under Secretary of the Navy, and as we shall see, he came to have a remarkable influence on the strategic direction and conduct of the war.¹⁵³

The Navy Department's first priority, in the late spring of 1861, was the establishment and maintenance of the blockade. Whereas the sailing ships of old were at the mercy of the wind, the Union's new modern steamers could, for the most part, operate somewhat independently of Mother Nature. However, the age of steam had also ushered in a major logistical problem. Steam ships required coal. The challenges of the blockade were already significant. They would be magnified considerably if the steamers comprising the Union blockading squadrons had to constantly sally back and forth between distant Northern harbors to replenish their stores. Realizing that a coaling station would have to be seized, but not knowing where, Welles appointed a four-member board to examine the issue.

On May 22, Fox sent Captain Samuel Du Pont, then serving as the Commandant of the Philadelphia Ship Yard, a letter asking him to serve on a forthcoming naval board being convened in Washington: "It is proposed to have a board of persons, say General Totten, Professor Bache, and Captain Du Pont, meet here and condense all the vast information in the Engineers Department, Coast Survey, and Navy, for the use of the blockading squadron."¹⁵⁴ Du Pont was a natural choice to serve as the senior naval

¹⁵³ Fox has yet to attract a dedicated biographer. Nonetheless, his role and activities can be ascertained by examining *Confidential Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox: Assistant Secretary of the Navy, 1861-1865* published on behalf of the Naval History Society in 1918. Similar to Welles's diary, this is an insightful collection of primary source material that has proven exceedingly useful to scholars and historians interested in the planning and conduct of the naval war from the Union perspective.

¹⁵⁴ Fox to Du Pont 22 May 1861 in *Samuel Francis Du Pont; a Selection from His Civil War Letters*, ed. John D. Hayes, vol. 1, *The Mission: 1860-1861*; vol. 2, *The Blockade: 1862-1863*; vol. 3, *The Repulse: 1863-1865* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press published for the Eleutherian Mills Historical Library, 1969), Vol. I, p. 71. Cited hereafter *SFDP Letters*

officer on the board. When the war erupted in the spring of 1861, Du Pont was one of the most respected and professionally accomplished naval officers in the department. He combined intellectual abilities with experience.¹⁵⁵

Initially, Du Pont seemed skeptical about the idea of a formal board, but after corresponding with Bache, an old personal friend, he became intrigued by the possibilities. Writing to Bache a week later about his experiences on blockade duty during the Mexican War Du Pont boasted: “In the Mexican War I probably blockaded more than any one officer in the Navy-and was involved in more correspondence, naval and civil, foreign and diplomatic, than you could conceive.” Du Pont’s experience gave him keen operational insights on the task ahead. Rather than allowing himself to be overwhelmed by the enormity of the undertaking, he clearly saw that Union sea power only needed to be concentrated along the South’s principle seafaring ports, “I see bungling, and the ideas are crude everywhere: the people are talking of two thousand miles of coast, etc. We have to cover the *ports of entry* -this is all the foreign interest has to require; all between these ports, of course, will have to be looked to, but this is our business; the law of nations touches only the former.”¹⁵⁶

The members of the naval board eventually assembled in Washington, and began their deliberations on June 27, in Bache’s office at the Smithsonian.¹⁵⁷ After first reviewing a brief set of instructions from Welles that outlined the board’s initial charter, the members quickly got down to work. On June 28, Du Pont described his initial

¹⁵⁵ The two best works on Du Pont are James Merrill, *Du Pont, the Making of an Admiral : A Biography of Samuel Francis Du Pont*. (New York, N.Y., 1986) and Kevin Weddle, *Lincoln's Tragic Admiral : The Life of Samuel Francis Du Pont*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005).

¹⁵⁶ Du Pont to Bache, 30 May 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 74.

¹⁵⁷ Kevin J. Weddle, “The Blockade Board of 1861 and Union Naval Strategy,” *Civil War History*, Vol. 48, no. 2, p. 134.

thoughts about the board's formation and future activities. In an insightful letter to his wife, he revealed that, while the original purpose was simply to select two coaling stations, Bache clearly had a much broader vision: "The Professor has an eye to what the French would call a *"memoire,"* covering the whole question of blockade, which would be a sort of "manual" for blockading."¹⁵⁸

Bache had led the Coast Survey Department for twenty years. He had a well-deserved reputation as an intelligent and efficient administrator. Under his leadership, the Coast Survey had provided invaluable service to the burgeoning young nation by surveying and mapping out the country's vast coastline and inland waterways. By the spring of 1861, however, Bache was becoming concerned that the tightening of congressional purse strings, and other wartime cost cutting, would dramatically reduce or eliminate his department altogether. Both Davis and Du Pont initially suspected that Bache, at least in some measure, had shrewdly instigated the board's creation as a covert effort to preserve and enhance the viability of his beleaguered department. While Bache's exact motivations, as they related to the preservation of the Coast Survey, remain unclear; he certainly appeared to have a much larger agenda than the selection of two isolated coaling stations.¹⁵⁹

Though Totten's duties as the Army's Chief Engineer precluded his participation on the board, another talented engineer assumed his spot. By all accounts Major Barnard was an up and coming, and extremely capable young officer. He also happened to be one of Winfield Scott's aides. While some historians have downplayed this crucial link, between the board and the General-in-Chief, as any sign of early inter-service

¹⁵⁸ Du Pont to Mrs Du Pont, 28 June 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 85-87.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

cooperation, the appointment of an army engineering officer, whether intentional or not, clearly fostered early cooperation and showed that the Army was integrated into the naval board's activities.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, Scott's strategic thinking regarding the application of overwhelming force appears to have been clearly transmitted to Du Pont early in the board's deliberations. On June 30, he commented, "I think the direction and success of the war depend on an overwhelming force and a great movement in the beginning; and this, I think, is General Scott's intention, that the first blow shall be so effectual as scarcely to require a second."¹⁶¹

On July 5, 1861, the naval board forwarded its first report to Welles. Though the document was focused on the selection and seizure of a coaling station along the South Atlantic coast in order to facilitate the logistical requirements of the blockading squadrons, it nonetheless hinted at grander designs. From the very start, the board distinguished between the seizure of an advanced naval base for the prosecution of a naval campaign (i.e. the blockade) and the projection of combat power ashore in the pursuit of larger strategic and operational objectives: "We separate in our minds the two enterprises of a purely military expedition and an expedition the principal design of which is the establishment of a naval station for promoting the efficiency of the blockade".¹⁶²

While the board recommended the seizure of Fernandina, Florida, for a variety of tactical considerations, it also noted its close proximity to the politically and strategically

¹⁶⁰ Major Barnard was asked to serve on the board on 26 July 1861. See Welles to Barnard, 26 June 1861. ORN, Series I, 12, p. 196. Scott was undoubtedly aware of the formation and activities of the naval board. It would have been highly unlikely that the General-in-Chief would not have been consulted prior to Welles's invitation to the Major Barnard.

¹⁶¹ Du Pont to Mrs Du Pont, 30 June 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 88.

¹⁶² First report of conference for the consideration of measures for effectively blockading the South Atlantic Coast, 5 July 1861. ORN, Series I, 12, p. 196.

important cities of Savannah, Charleston, Jacksonville, and Tallahassee. The report concluded with the recommendation that the move on Fernandina be taken in conjunction with a larger operation focused on strategic objectives: “Finally, we will repeat the remark made in the beginning of this report that we think this expedition to Fernandina should be undertaken simultaneously with a similar expedition having a purely military character.”¹⁶³

Just eight days after submitting their first report, the members released their second, entitled “Report of a conference in relation to occupation of points on the Atlantic coast.” Unlike the first report, it was broader in scope and made a concerted effort to explore the possibility of projecting naval power ashore in conjunction with larger strategic objectives. The board clearly began to see the strategic potential of an expeditionary operation directed against the Southern coast.

At the present moment, when most of the Southern troops are in Virginia or Tennessee, it is probable that, notwithstanding the contiguity of Savannah and Charleston, no very large bodies could be concentrated against us, but the operation would be likely to withdraw the troops from the north.¹⁶⁴

The putting of 12,000 or 15,000 men thus in the immediate neighborhood of Charleston and Savannah and the presence of a considerable fleet in this noble harbor would doubtless be a sore annoyance to the rebels, and necessitate the constant maintenance of large forces in those cities and on those shores. Yet the same force, naval and military, organized as an expedition and held in hand at New York for a blow anywhere, would threaten not only Savannah and Charleston, but the whole Southern coast.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 198. The tactical details for the selection of Fernandina included adequate draft (14'-20'), easily navigable main channel, safe/all weather anchorage, presence of existing infrastructure (if seized rapidly), and isolated with low population (i.e. island base)

¹⁶⁴ Report of conference for the consideration of measures for effectively blockading the South Atlantic Coast, 13 July 1861. OR, Series I, 53, p. 72. This report is not included in the ORN. As a result the reports are incorrectly numbered in the ORN. To mitigate confusion the reports are referred to by the chronological order they were submitted.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 73.

If, in the organization of such a force, its destination should be absolutely undefined, the threat would be equally against every important point of the Southern coast from Hatteras to the Rio Grande. The simple putting to sea of such a force, if it were only to return to its port, would cause general alarm, and the Gulf States could no longer permit their troops to swell the armies of Virginia. The force thus organized, after being, by frequent embarkations and disembarkations, used as a means of threat, and thus perfectly drilled to its intended service, might at last be permitted to strike its blow. Whether at New Orleans, or Mobile, or Pensacola, or Savannah, or Port Royal, or that focus of rebellion—the scene of the great indignity offered our flag—Charleston, might be decided at the last moment.¹⁶⁶

The naval board released its third report on July 16. Having concentrated their previous two efforts on the South Atlantic, the members now worked their way up the east coast of the Confederacy focusing on the shores of North Carolina. The board quickly realized that the coastal geography of these two respective regions was significantly different, and that each would require a unique set of solutions. The members recommended that the Atlantic Blockading Squadron, currently responsible for patrolling the entire east coast, be reorganized and subdivided into two separate commands. The first would cover Virginia's Cape Henry and extend 370 miles south to Cape Romain, in the vicinity of the border between North and South Carolina. The second command would encompass the 220 miles from Cape Romain to St Augustine, Florida.¹⁶⁷

While the board clearly saw the potential for large-scale, sea based expeditionary operations in and around the vicinity of Charleston and Savannah, its solution to the complex coastal topography of eastern North Carolina was far less obtrusive. Realizing that the regions access to the sea was confined to a relatively small number of shallow draft inlets and inland waterways, the board simply recommended that ten of these crucial

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Naval Board Report # 3, 16 July 1861. ORN Vol. 12, p. 198-201. This report is incorrectly labeled, Second report of conference for the consideration of measures for effectively blockading the South Atlantic Coast in the ORN.

channels be obstructed. The plan, in effect, was to simply bottle up the coast in this region. This course of action also had the added benefit of allowing the Union's limited assets (i.e. ships and troops) to be concentrated and employed in the shores and beaches near the crucial cities of Charleston and Savannah.¹⁶⁸

While the naval board was still in session circumstances changed rapidly in the nation's capital. Just five days after releasing their third report, McDowell was defeated at Bull Run on July 21, 1861. This stunning reversal on the outskirts of Washington set off a frantic set of events that dramatically altered the political and strategic landscape of the Union war effort. It also galvanized the importance of the board's deliberations, and interjected a strong sense of urgency within the Navy Department. The tension between the administration and the General-in-Chief in the aftermath of the defeat was clear for all to see. On the day after the battle, Du Pont confessed to his wife, "General Scott told the President that he ought to be dismissed for cowardice, that he had allowed himself to be forced into giving battle and had been beaten"¹⁶⁹ Two days later he further lamented that, "the demoralization of the Army here is complete."¹⁷⁰

While chaos reigned in the nation's capital, political pressure rapidly intensified on the administration. Public displeasure, however, was not confined to the War Department alone. Even before the disaster at Manassas, powerful voices within the commercial shipping industry of the Northeast had turned impatience, unrealistic expectations, and an imperfect understanding of military reality into loud admonishments directed at the

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Du Pont to Mrs Du Pont, 22 July 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 107. For another version of Scott's interview with the President immediately after the defeat at Bull Run see John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History* (New York:1886), vol. 4, pp. 358-59.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p.

administration. It did not take long for this strong public condemnation regarding the inefficiency of the blockade to reach the Navy Department.

Just three weeks into his tenure as Chief Clerk of the Navy Fox received a letter describing, “The growing discontent created in the public mind by the extraordinary and disheartening delays of the Navy Department.” The complaint promised, “meetings of the People, who will declare their want of confidence,” and concluded with the remarkable admonishment that: “A month has elapsed since the Blockade proclamation... [yet] every Port, south of the Chesapeake... is still open.”¹⁷¹

Similarly, the Secretary of State also received a number of complaints from commercial interests in the Northeast bemoaning the ineffectual state of the blockade and Southern privateering off the North Carolina coast.¹⁷² Another particularly irate businessman concluded with the exhortation: “Why can not those ports named be blockaded? God knows there are steamers enough in this country—guns, men, and materials enough to close them up as tight as a bottle.” Seward dutifully forwarded the letters on to Welles, “with the hope that such steps may be at once taken as to lead to the effectual blockade of all the ports in North and South Carolina.”¹⁷³ This initial criticism, even if it reflected a certain amount of ignorance, seems to have affected Fox and Welles deeply. Both men had strong personal connections to the Northeast, and both were very concerned about the public image and reputation of the department.

¹⁷¹ Crea to Fox, 29 May 1861. *Fox Correspondence*, Vol. I, p. 359.

¹⁷² Welles to Stringham, 17 July 1861. ORN, Ser. I, 6, pp. 6-7. The letter in part read “Recently, owing to the ineffectual state of the blockade of the ports of the State of North Carolina, residents of that State, in connection with sympathizers in this city, have chartered British vessels to load with naval stores at Beaufort, Wilmington, and other ports, taking a clearance for Nassau, New Providence, and there clearing regularly, and from thence bringing and disposing of the cargoes here, thus securing a large profit, to the prejudice of United States citizens who are law abiding and without a murmur submitting to the loss of business consequent upon the proclamation of the President declaring the ports blockaded.”

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

Welles wasted little time in reacting. On July 17, he forwarded copies of the complaints to Flag Officer Stringham, along with a strongly worded letter demanding a strict accounting of the activities and locations of the flag officer's vessels.¹⁷⁴ The Secretary concluded with a personal appeal to bottle up Confederate privateers operating out of Albemarle Sound by blocking Hatteras Inlet, and enclosed a detailed operational plan, developed by one of Stringham's own lieutenants, on how to do it.¹⁷⁵

This was the first sign of strain between Welles and Stringham. The flag officer was overburdened and under resourced. As the commander of all naval forces patrolling the entire Atlantic coast, he had just sixteen vessels and, as yet, no coaling stations along the southern coast. Stringham replied by gently reminding Welles that the information he sought regarding the location of his ships was already at the Department: "I have the honor to remind the Department that as I have dispatched vessels to different stations I have made report."¹⁷⁶ The flag officer, nonetheless, reiterated the exact location of every vessel in his command, and promised to review the proposal. After spending the evening of July 17 mulling over Lieutenant Lowry's operational concept, Stringham replied to Welles's inquiry on the following day.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Lowry originally submitted his operational concept directly to Welles on June 1, 1861. See Lt Lowry to Welles 1 June 1861 ORN, Ser. I, 5, p. 688. Initially, the Secretary acknowledged receipt of the plan with a rather curt response. After the war, however, Welles wrote Lowry a kind note expressing his gratitude and revealing the valuable contribution the young lieutenant had made "I omitted making acknowledgments to you in the summer of 1861 for valuable information which you communicated in June of that year, relative to the navigation of the inner waters of North Carolina, then much used by the rebels in depredating upon our commerce." Welles's concluded by explaining "The changes and activity of the operations of that period caused me to omit the thanks for the suggestions and information then communicated, but which were duly appreciated, and for which it is my pleasure and duty now to make this acknowledgment." See Welles to Lowry, 21 March 1864. ORN, Ser. I, 5, pp. 689-690.

¹⁷⁶ Stringham to Welles, 17 July 1861. ORN, Ser. I, 6, p. 5. His sixteen vessels were stretched paper thin along the entire coast from the Chesapeake Bay to Fernandina, Florida. These scant numbers were made even worse by the requirement for repairs and the necessity to constantly return to northern ports to replenish coal

The flag officer acknowledged the possibility of sealing the North Carolina coast, but was weary of hazarding his ships in the treacherous waters along the Outer Banks. He wanted ground troops in order to achieve a more permanent solution to the problem: “The inlets may, for the time being, be cleared, and while our ships are in sight nothing will venture out, but I am satisfied that only permanent benefit can result by the aid of a cooperating land force to occupy the forts, batteries, etc., at the mouths of the harbors.”¹⁷⁷

While Confederate privateering on the North Carolina coast was causing Welles much consternation, the Secretary’s attention was temporarily diverted elsewhere.¹⁷⁸ On the evening of July 25, he met with Fox and the board members to discuss their reports and recommendations. The strategic situation after Bull Run combined with the impending effects of winter weather on the blockading squadrons lent a sense of urgency to the proceedings. Fox had already emphasized to the President that the Atlantic Blockading Squadron could not stay at sea during the winter months without depots for coal, supplies, and repairs. At that very moment, the board’s first two reports, having been submitted through General Scott, were in the process of being reviewed by the cabinet. According to Du Pont, one of the chief objectives of the June 25 meeting with

¹⁷⁷ Stringham to Welles 18 July 1861. ORV, Ser. I, 6, p. 12.

¹⁷⁸ Welles to Stringham 22 July 1861. ORN, Ser.I, 6, p. 27. On the day after Bull Run, Welles forwarded still more complaints to Stringham. This time they originated through the Secretary of the Treasury’s office. On July 12, 1861, Hiram Barney, of the Custom-House Collectors Office in New York had written Chase “Two citizens of North Carolina have just passed through this city on their return home from Halifax, where they have chartered British vessels for a trade between Nassau, Bermudas, and ports on the coast of North Carolina. To Beaufort, Wilmington, and New Berne, or Ocracoke, the entrance is almost unobstructed, and no blockade has been enforced or even announced. Every day vessels are passing in or out of these ports, carrying whatever cargoes they choose. British bottoms are chartered by Carolinians and carry on this trade. At Georgetown, S. C., vessels enter and clear without obstruction. To this place the prize taken by the privateer Savannah is said to have been sent. Vessels are fitted out, armed, and sent from Ocracoke to capture coasters and whatever other craft they may fall in with. These shore privateers do not wait for letters of marque, but act without even the semblance of authority. They find no difficulty in taking their prizes into their unblockaded ports.”

Welles was to “keep the Secretary up to maintaining the naval authority in such expeditions. Where two thirds of the responsibility will be.”¹⁷⁹

Command relationships for the proposed expeditionary operations were clearly on the mind of the board members, but so too, was the leadership and decision-making authority in the department itself. Du Pont likely spoke for many others when he commented, “Mr. Fox, who is the Secretary and well it is (*car le bon vieillard qui a la place est entierement sans force, quoiqu’il ne manque pas d’intelligence*).”¹⁸⁰ Fox appeared, at least to the naval officers on the board, to be firmly in control of the operational planning and day-to-day administration of the department. He was connected through marriage to the politically powerful Blair family, and was certainly not bashful about using his influence with the President to further the operational or strategic interests of the Navy Department. Combined operations, however, would require inter department coordination and cooperation.

Both Welles and Fox astutely used the board’s initial reports to first draw attention to the urgent requirement for undertaking two expeditionary operations in order to establish coaling stations for the blockading squadrons. Having obtained their first objective, the two men shrewdly used the process to foster the type of inter-service cooperation necessary to procure the troops the Navy needed to seize and guard them. By routing the reports through the General-in-Chief, they not only gained his support, but also demonstrated the type of professional courtesy and coordination that had been sorely lacking during the initial months of the war.

¹⁷⁹ Du Pont to Mrs Du Pont, 26 July 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 111.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.113.

With the board seemingly successful in its efforts to gain approval for the seizure of two coaling stations, attention now turned to the issues of location and timing. Du Pont thought, “two expeditions will go at once and pounce upon two ports little suspected and watched.”¹⁸¹ His initial belief in both the immediacy and locations of the pending operations, however, would prove short lived.

On August 1, the board convened a special planning conference with General Scott and several key members of his staff. The aged General-in-Chief began the session by first expressing his admiration for the board’s work and activities to date. Scott, having already approved both the necessity and the concept of seizing two coaling stations somewhere along the coast, had initiated the combined planning conference to work out the details of execution. The officers of the combined staffs seem to have felt the heavy burden of time weighing on their proceedings. Fox had previously set a tentative target date of September 7. However, as Scott’s staff and the board members rolled up their sleeves and began to tackle the myriad of detailed staff work necessary to make the concept a reality, it quickly became apparent that such an ambitious timeline was simply unachievable.¹⁸²

Given the complexity of the operation, dearth of Union troops, and the limited availability of commercial and military shipping, an early September landing was unrealistic from the start. Scott’s experience and wise counsel unquestionably influenced the planners, and lent much needed perspective to the deliberations. It also provided the legitimacy and top cover Du Pont needed to fend off unrealistic expectations emanating from the Navy Department. Du Pont succinctly summarized both the decision and the

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Du Pont to Mrs Du Pont, 28 July 1861 and Du Pont to Mrs Du Pont ,1 Aug 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 116-117.

subsequent tension it engendered, “it was agreed that the 10th of October instead of the 7th of September was a better day-but the fast people, Fox and Co., are flaring up at what they call delay.”¹⁸³

Though Du Pont had originally wanted to go in August vice September, Scott’s wise counsel quickly swayed him.¹⁸⁴ The General pointed out that the health of the troops would be jeopardized by an early September landing in the brackish waters and sultry climate along the southeastern coast. This point was not lost on Du Pont, who later remarked, “Mosquitoes are worse than Minie balls.”¹⁸⁵

Despite Fox’s subsequent displeasure, as the conference broke up on the evening of August 1, preparations for the forthcoming expeditions were proceeding at a rapid pace. On the day after the joint planning conference, Scott sent Brigadier General Thomas W. Sherman the following order: “You will proceed to New York immediately and organize, in connection with Captain Du Pont, of the Navy, an expedition of 12,000 men. Its destination you and the naval commander will determine after you have sailed. You should sail at the earliest possible moment.”¹⁸⁶

Though the actual destination and naval commander had yet to be determined, Scott must have been pleased by this early example of efficient staff work and joint cooperation, as it related to his larger strategic designs. The board had already produced the majority of the detailed planning necessary to launch the expeditions. He delegated the decision of where to land to the Navy, but by providing a force of 12,000 men he also

¹⁸³ Du Pont to Mrs Du Pont, 1 Aug 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 117.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. Du Pont had advocated an earlier date in order to mitigate the risk of an Atlantic hurricane to the naval shipping.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Thomas Scott to Sherman, 2 Aug 1861. OR, Ser. I, 6, p. 168.

gave the expeditionary force flexibility. It now had more than enough men to simply secure two isolated coaling stations.

We are left to speculate whether Scott envisioned the pending landing operations to be the forerunner of a larger expeditionary campaign. Yet, given the contents of the widely studied board reports and Scott's own personal experience with combined operations, it is hard to imagine that the thought of these initial beachheads being used for the introduction of substantial follow on forces did not occur to Scott or the joint planners as they frantically prepared to outfit and embark America's largest expeditionary force since the Mexican War.¹⁸⁷

The final two board reports were completed on July 26 and August 9 respectively. The fourth report dealt almost exclusively with the coast of Georgia, while the final report focused on the Gulf of Mexico and New Orleans. Much has been made of the inception, conduct, and findings of the "Strategy Board," as it came to be called. However, care must be taken not to exaggerate its importance on the one hand, nor minimize it on the other.¹⁸⁸ While some historians have credited Welles's commissioning of the four member board as an innovative step that, in effect, established the first "joint" planning staff, others have argued that the formation of the board may have had more to

¹⁸⁷ These observations about Scott's thinking are based on his past experiences. Specifically, in July 1813 he embarked 200 men aboard the *General Pike*, and executed a series of amphibious raids against British supply depots along the coast of Lake Erie. Upon the outbreak of the Blackhawk War, Scott transported 800 regulars, 6 companies of mounted rangers, and the entire 1832 class of West Point 1800 miles from Fort Monroe, VA to Chicago in just 18 days. Of course, the most remarkable example of Scott's comprehension of expeditionary operations remains the organization and landing at Vera Cruz. See Peskin, *Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms*, pp. 32-33, 83, 145-152. The thinking of the respective board members has been previously documented in the text. They clearly envisioned the creation of a large expeditionary force designed to operate against or threaten the Confederacy's major port cities. See OR, OR, Series I, 53, pp. 72-73.

¹⁸⁸ For an assessment of the board reports on the naval strategy of the war see, Bern Anderson, "The Naval Strategy of the Civil War" *Military Affairs* Vol. 26, No. 1 (Summer 1963), pp. 11-21. Anderson was the first historian to label the naval board as "The Strategy Board."

do with old fashion Yankee capitalism and burecratic self interest rather than the Union Navy's desire to develop or implement innovative strategic ideas.¹⁸⁹ A detailed examination of the board's activities, however, seems to indicate that the truth is much more complex, and lies somewhere in the middle.

Evidence supports the view that Bache was the principle catalyst behind the board's inception.¹⁹⁰ And while, the board was originally conceived to examine and make recommendations on the selection and seizure of coaling stations in support of the blockade, it nonetheless, expanded and evolved its charter over time. While the board reports focused primarily on tactical and operational details of planning and executing the blockade, the reports also produced innovative and progressive strategic thought and recommendations.

Given the experience and intellectual abilities of the board's principle members, it is not surprising that they refused to confine themselves to the hydrographic details of the coast or with the simple selection of two coaling stations. As a man of exceptional intellectual abilities, Bache wanted to turn the board reports into a "memoir" that would serve as a sort of instructional or doctrinal manual, on how to conduct a blockade. As military men, Du Pont and Davis eventually became interested in transitioning the board's findings and recommendations into actual operational plans and directives. It is a little known historical fact that the board's last report was never completed. In September

¹⁸⁹ As the director of the Coast Survey, some historians have speculated that his efforts to initiate the board were an effort to justify and preserve his department, rather than a reflection of any sublime strategic vision on the part of the Navy Department. See, Weddle, "The Blockade Board of 1861 and Union Naval Strategy," p.127.

¹⁹⁰Du Pont to Mrs Du Pont, 28 June 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 85-87. The original idea for the creation of the board almost certainly rested with Bache, the grandson of Ben Franklin, who ran the Coastal Survey before the war. Fox, however, seems to have played a large role in actually translating the idea into action.

Du Pont pleaded with Fox to allow Davis to return to Washington in order to complete, what he viewed, as the Board's most important report.

we have one paper unfinished, which to us as individuals, and to the Department for convenience, it is most desirable to finish. It is the recapitulation or summary of our whole work, to furnish the basis of instructions to the different squadrons, while it will be the most attractive to the general reader. The large memoirs will attest our research, the summary will show the results-and complete the archives of the Department on a subject which will do honor to it hereafter.¹⁹¹

With Davis out of Washington and the other board members now dispersed, Fox simply ignored the request. Those that would assert the board reports played a major influence on the strategic direction of the war must also keep in mind that many of the most important findings were ignored or dramatically altered. For example, the board strongly cautioned against a naval attack on New Orleans.¹⁹² Fox, however, disregarded the board's recommendations and played a major role in engineering the naval *coup de main* that seized the South's most important city. Similarly, while Du Pont's request to translate the board findings into actionable strategic and operational directives attested to how far the board had evolved in its thinking, the fact that Fox dismissed the request reflected the reality that he was calling the shots in Washington.

Many of the board's ideas, especially those pertaining to larger combined operations, threatened Fox's control and conflicted with his vision of the Navy Department's role in determining the outcome of the war. While Fox must have undoubtedly felt vindicated

¹⁹¹ Du Pont to Fox, 29 Sept 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 158.

¹⁹² Naval Board Report # 5, entitled "First report of conference for the consideration of measures for effectually blockading the coast bordering on the Gulf of Mexico," 9 August 1861. ORN, Ser. I, Vol. 16, p. 627. The report cautioned "We regard its conquest as incompatible with the other nearer and more urgent naval and military operations in which the Government is now and will be for some time hereafter engaged. It is an enterprise of great moment, requiring the cooperation of a large number of vessels of war of a smaller class, but of formidable armament, a great many troops, and the conduct of sieges, and it will be accomplished with slow advances."

and empowered by Faragut's remarkable success at New Orleans in the spring of 1862, his failure to allow the board to complete its work in the fall of 1861 was a missed opportunity. A final report that integrated the various, and often competing, activities of the three separate blockading squadrons, and the various military departments under a common strategic direction or operational umbrella would have proved invaluable. This was a job, however, that Fox, undoubtedly, thought he could or should, do himself. By omitting the orders phase of the project, Fox neglected the most important part of the board's work, and ultimately set the stage for an inability to effectively prioritize resources and strategic objectives during the first eighteen months of the war.

Initially, however, the department wasted little time implementing many of the board's recommendations. On August 5, Welles sent Du Pont what amounted to a modern day initiating directive, appointing him as the commander of an amphibious task force for the forthcoming naval campaign against the sea coasts with the understanding that, "The invasion and occupation of the seacoasts of the states in rebellion, as proposed by the Navy Department, having been accepted by the Government."¹⁹³

By the second week of August, however, Welles's attention was back on the North Carolina coast. The New York Board of Underwriters forwarded a series of detailed statements containing actionable intelligence from Northern merchantmen that had recently fallen victim to Confederate Privateers operating in and around the Outer Banks. The reports warned that the Confederates were in the process of erecting fortifications along the coast. The business men also took the opportunity to remind Welles of the "large number of vessels with valuable cargoes, which, in the usual course of navigation,

¹⁹³ Welles to Du Pont, 3 Aug 1861. ORN, Ser. I, 2, p. 207.

pass in the vicinity of Cape Hatteras,” and concluded with the strong recommendation that “it is greatly to be desired that immediate steps be taken by the Government to prevent, as far as possible, any further captures by the pirates who sally out from those inlets.¹⁹⁴

This appears to have been the straw that broke the camels back for Welles. He had clearly had enough of the Confederate privateering activities along the North Carolina coast and, more importantly, the bad publicity it was generating for the department. On the following day Scott sent the commander of Union forces at Fort Monroe, General Wool, an initiating directive ordering him to cooperate with Flag Officer Stringham.

SIR: The General-in-Chief directs that after consultation with Commodore Stringham, U. S. Navy, you prepare a sufficient detachment to accompany an expedition, under Commander Stellwagen, against some batteries on Hatteras Inlet, North Carolina. It is desirable that a portion of the detachment fixed by your judgment should be regulars, and the remainder as far as possible selected volunteers. The detachment will return to Fort Monroe after the expedition.¹⁹⁵

Scott viewed the Hatteras expedition as a small and limited objective attack in support of the Navy’s effort to bottle up Confederate privateers operating along the North Carolina coast. At this very moment, however, he was also decisively engaged in a nasty power struggle with the newly arrived General George B. McClellan. With preparations now fully underway in support of the pending Port Royal expedition, he did not want, nor did he anticipate, a permanent or substantial commitment of Union ground forces on the coast of North Carolina.

While Wool hastened to cooperate with his naval counterpart, Flag Officer Stringham, he seemed taken aback by what he clearly viewed as an over centralized and

¹⁹⁴ NY Board of Underwriters to Welles, 12 Aug 1861. ORN, Ser. I, 6, pp. 77-80.

¹⁹⁵ Scott to Wool, 13 Aug 1861. OR, Ser. I, 4, p. 579.

under resourced set of instructions emanating from Washington. On August 24, he wrote back to the General-in-Chief complaining: “To operate on this coast with success (I mean between this and Florida) we want more troops. At any rate, I think we ought to have a much larger force in this department.” Wool clearly envisioned the strategic potential of expeditionary operations to alter the operational situation in Virginia, “If I had 20,000 or 23,000 men, in conjunction with the Navy, we could do much on this coast to bring back from Virginia the troops of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.” The general also bristled at what he saw as a tactical task that lacked a larger operational or strategic purpose, and concluded with the plea that, “the arrangements should be left to Commodore Stringham and myself. I do not think it can be done efficiently at Washington. We know better than any one at Washington attached to the Navy what we require for such expeditions.”¹⁹⁶

Both Wool and Stringham lacked situational awareness regarding the naval board’s planning and recommendations. They were also out of touch with the larger strategic direction of the war that was even then just beginning to take shape in Washington. What is interesting, however, is that both men envisioned the potential for the employment of large-scale expeditionary operations along the southern coasts at the very time such deliberations were formally being pursued in the nation’s capital. Nonetheless, by August 29, 1861, just sixteen days after first receiving the initiating directive from Washington, Union forces under Flag Officer S. H. Stringham and General B. F. Butler received the unconditional surrender of the Confederate forces manning Forts Hatteras and Clark.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Wool to Scott, 24 Aug 1861. OR, Ser. I, 4, p. 603.

¹⁹⁷ It is a little known historical fact that it was aboard the USS *Minnesota*, anchored off of Fort Hatteras on the North Carolina coast, a full six months before the events of Forts Henry and Donelson, that Flag Officer Stringham and General Butler, not U.S. Grant, first offered the now famous terms of

What had started out as a distraction, evolved into an important use of combined operations that was not originally anticipated, or planned for, by the board. Though the army played a minimal role in the assault, the operation resulted in the capture of more than 700 prisoners, 25 pieces of artillery, 1,000 stands of arms, a large quantity of ordnance stores and provisions, and liberated three Northern commercial vessels that had been taken as prizes.¹⁹⁸ More importantly, it also accomplished its principle strategic objective, the closing of Pamlico Sound to Southern privateers, and provided a much-needed short-term boost to the Navy Department's prestige and Northern morale.¹⁹⁹

Though Butler had been under strict orders not to permanently garrison the forts, he made a conscious decision to disobey his instructions once he realized the strategic significance of the position.²⁰⁰ After receiving the forts surrender, both Butler and Stringham quickly returned north. Butler made a beeline for Washington, and Stringham headed back to Hampton Roads. Butler's unexpected appearance in the nation's capital on the evening of September 1 caused quite a stir, and later led to charges that he was trying to steal the lion's share of the credit for the War Department.²⁰¹ Such acquisitions made in hindsight, however, seem superficial when compared to the facts. It is far more

"Unconditional Surrender" to capitulating Confederate forces. For The terms of capitulation see Butler to Barron, 29 Aug. 1861. OR, Ser. I, 4, p. 583.

¹⁹⁸ Butler's Hatteras Report, 30 Aug 61. OR, Ser. I, 4, pp. 581-586.

¹⁹⁹ Browning, *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, p. 14. Most historians also credit the expedition for seizing a staging base for Burnside's subsequent operations in eastern North Carolina the following year. See James Merrill, "The Hatteras Expedition, August, 1861." *North Carolina Historical Review* 29 (April 1952), p. 218. Viewed in the larger context of the Union war effort, however, the success of the expedition may have inadvertently set the stage for an incremental application of expeditionary force in eastern North Carolina that depleted limited Union resources and hindered long term strategic objectives.

²⁰⁰ Butler's Hatteras Report, 30 Aug 61. OR, Ser. I, 4, p. 584. Butler described his rationale for the decision, "On consultation with Flag-Officer Stringham and Commander Stellwagen I determined to leave the troops and hold the fort, because of the strength of the fortifications, its importance, and because, if again in the possession of the enemy, with a sufficient armament, of the very great difficulty of its capture, until I could get some further instructions from the Government. Commodore Stringham directs the steamers Monticello and Pawnee to remain inside, and these, with the men in the forts, are sufficient to hold the position against any force, which is likely or, indeed, possible to be sent against it"

²⁰¹ Browning, *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, p. 15.

likely that he rushed to Washington, with Stringham's consent, in order to communicate the urgency of the situation and seek official guidance regarding what both men clearly saw as a tremendous opportunity to further Union operational and strategic objectives along the coast.²⁰²

The unexpected ease of the Union's amphibious assault along the coast caught both sides by surprise. The Confederate Congress quickly passed a resolution calling for a detailed accounting of the events surrounding the Hatteras disaster. Eventually, Jefferson Davis was forced to admit in a private letter to the President of the Confederate Congress, "Preparations to put the coast of the State of North Carolina in a proper condition for defense are still in progress and will receive such additional attention as this occasion indicates to be necessary."²⁰³

Was the surprise assault at Hatteras the opening move of a larger expeditionary campaign designed to project Union military power further inland? Many of the citizens of North Carolina certainly thought so. One Raleigh resident commented, "The whole eastern part of the State is now exposed to the ravages of the merciless vandals... It is

²⁰² Butler's Hatteras Report, 30 Aug 61. OR, Ser. I, 4, pp. 581-586. Butler had made the following observations in his official report completed just the day prior. "The importance of the point cannot be overrated. When the channel is buoyed out any vessel may carry 15 feet of water over it with ease. Once inside, there is a safe harbor and anchorage in all weathers. From there the whole coast of Virginia and North Carolina, from Norfolk to Cape Lookout, is within our reach by light-draught vessels, which cannot possibly live at sea during the winter months. From it offensive operations may be made upon the whole coast of North Carolina to Bogue Inlet, extending many miles inland to Washington, New Berne, and Beaufort. In the language of the chief engineer of the rebels, Colonel Thompson, in an official report, "it is the key of the Albemarle." In my judgment, it is a station second in importance only to Fortress Monroe on this coast. As a depot for coaling and supplies for the blockading squadron it is invaluable. As a harbor for our coasting trade, or inlet from the winter storms or from pirates, it is of the first importance. By holding it, Hatteras light may again send forth its cheering ray to the storm-beaten mariner, of which the worse than vandalism of the rebels deprives him. It has but one drawback, a want of water; but that a condenser, like the one now in operation at Fortress Monroe, at a cost of a few hundred dollars, will relieve."

²⁰³ Davis to Cobb, 31 August 1861. ORN, Ser. I, 6, p. 137.

now plunged into a great deal of trouble.”²⁰⁴ Trepidation was not confined to the Tar Heel state; other Confederate representatives were forced to take stock of the vulnerability of their respective shores at the very moment the government in Richmond was calling for state troops to be sent there.²⁰⁵ Analysis of the Hatteras Expedition and its aftermath reveals both the vulnerability of the Southern coastline and the strategic potential for expeditionary operations to exploit political divisions within the Confederacy.

While the Union authorities contemplated what to do next with their unexpected success in North Carolina, McClellan’s presence in the nation’s capital quickly became a hindrance on the planning and execution of the Port Royal expedition. A brief overview of the Scott-McClellan feud will be presented in the next chapter, but for the purposes of continuity, it may be succinctly stated here that McClellan was actively engaged in a covert effort to usurp the General-in-Chief. One of McClellan’s principle tactics in this campaign was fear. In early August, McClellan had “propagated in high quarters” the notion that an attack on Washington was both imminent and that the capital was currently unsecured.²⁰⁶

Despite Scott’s efforts to reassure the President that Washington was under no immediate danger, McClellan’s accusations set off a near panic in Lincoln’s mind. On September 14, Scott was forced to fire off a hasty message to Sherman, who was busy

²⁰⁴ *Petersburg Express* (Petersburg, VA) quoted in Merrill, “The Hatteras Expedition, August, 1861,” p. 205.

²⁰⁵ Browning, *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, p. 20. The public apprehension created in North Carolina and throughout the South can be ascertained by a review of the regions newspapers. Merrill cites the following primary sources as evidence of the “panic” created by the Hatteras seizure: *Charleston Mercury*, *The Daily Richmond Examiner*, September 2, 1861; *Newbern Progress*, quoted in the *Sacramento Daily Union*, October 1, 1861. For additional background see Richard Sauer, *“A Succession of Honorable Victories”: The Burnside Expedition in North Carolina*. (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside, 1996).

²⁰⁶ Scotts Resignation Letter to Cameron 9 Aug 1861. OR. Ser. I, 11, pt..3, p. 4

preparing his expeditionary force in New York: “Come here with all your command without delay, leaving the smallest guard necessary to protect your camp.”²⁰⁷ The following day Scott told Du Pont that the Port Royal expedition was being postponed because there was a “panic” about the security of Washington that required the withholding of Sherman’s troops. Du Pont immediately sought confirmation from the Navy Department. Both Fox and Welles echoed the bad news, but assured Du Pont that the expedition would go forward. Scott, Welles, and Fox saw the “panic” for what it was; an unjustified overreaction that would soon pass. Summarizing the day’s frantic activities, Du Pont, simply noted “I believe this place is quite secure, yet they get such exaggerated reports of the numbers of the rebels that they will never stop reinforcing here.”²⁰⁸

On September 17, just two days after being told to stand down, Welles brought up the Port Royal expedition with “great spirit” before the cabinet and convinced Lincoln that it should be allowed to proceed. Lincoln’s sudden reversal on the expedition was an example of the self-imposed chaos and internal power struggle for ideas now emanating from within the Union high command itself. The President’s indecisiveness was a direct result of McClellan’s attempts to gain control of the strategic direction of the war by unseating the General-in-Chief. It was also a reflection of the increasing lack of confidence that Lincoln had in Scott. Lincoln not only reversed his decision at the cabinet meeting on the September 17, but according to Du Pont, actually hastened the expedition’s departure: “the President has directed that the expedition go forward *coute*

²⁰⁷ Townsend to Sherman, 14 Sept 1861. OR, Ser. I, 6, p. 171.

²⁰⁸ Du Pont to Mrs Du Pont, 15 Sept 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 147.

que coute, and indeed his vehemence has run into another extreme, for he declares it must sail in *ten* days.”²⁰⁹

On September 18, Lincoln’s intentions regarding the Port Royal expedition were formalized in a letter to the Secretary of War.²¹⁰ On that same day, the Navy Department, acting in accordance with the naval board’s recommendations, finally reorganized the Atlantic Blockading Squadron into two separate commands.²¹¹ Flag Officer Goldsborough was placed in command of the Northern Blockading Squadron, while Du Pont assumed responsibility for the Southern Blockading Squadron.²¹² Du Pont appeared satisfied that the board’s intellectual efforts were beginning to translate into action, but at the same time, he must have also felt the heavy burden of command bearing down on him. In addition to his responsibilities as the naval task force commander for the Port Royal expedition, he now bore the additional responsibility for directing the blockade along the strategically important southeastern coast of the Confederacy. The events of a hectic day culminated in a private meeting with McClellan at 9pm.²¹³

It is not clear who initiated the meeting or why, but Du Pont seems to have felt it necessary to consult with McClellan prior to his departure. The loss of Sherman’s Corps to the Port Royal expedition certainly could not have pleased McClellan, but their

²⁰⁹ Du Pont to Mrs. Du Pont, 17 Sept 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 149.

²¹⁰ Lincoln to Cameron, 18 Sept 1861. OR, Ser. I, 6, p. 171. The President clearly sensed the necessity to bring some clairvoyance to the situation when he wrote, “To guard against misunderstanding I think fit to say that the joint expedition of the Army and Navy, agreed upon some time since, and in which General T. W. Sherman was and is to bear a conspicuous part, is in nowise to be abandoned, but must be ready to move by the 1st of or very early in October. Let all preparations go forward accordingly.”

²¹¹ The reorganization was also facilitated by Flag Officer Stringham’s convenient request to be relieved, which Welles accepted without hesitation. See Welles to Stringham 18 Sept 1861 ORN, Ser. I, 6, pp. 231-32.

²¹² Command of the Atlantic Blockading Squadron was transferred to Flag Officer Goldsborough. See Welles to Goldsborough 18 Sept 1861. ORN, Ser. I, 6, pp. 233-34. For Du Pont’s orders to take command of the newly created South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, see Welles to Du Pont 18 Sept 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 152.

²¹³ Du Pont to Mrs. Du Pont 18 Sept 1861, *SFDP Letters* Vol. I, p. 151.

meeting appeared warm and cordial nonetheless. Du Pont took the opportunity to discuss grand strategy and question the young general on the perception that he was adverse to expeditionary operations. Du Pont came away from the meeting impressed by McClellan's grasp of grand strategy: "He thinks the war in the West should be mainly defensive—hold or own in the state governments in Missouri, Kentucky, and West Virginia. The great wave must roll from Washington, clear Virginia, and take every seaboard capital, one after the other." Du Pont was also satisfied that McClellan's views regarding the potential employment for sea based expeditionary operations was in line with his own, and those of the naval board, "McClellan promised earnestly—repelled with some feeling an impression that had got abroad that he was opposed to expeditions—but for the moment Washington was paramount."²¹⁴

The fact that this meeting occurred at all was symbolic of the confusion about who was actually running military affairs and guiding the strategic direction of the war in the fall of 1861. There appeared to be a widely held perception in many Washington circles that it was only a matter of time before McClellan, the all too apparent successor to Scott, would be formally installed as the General-in-Chief. However, Scott was still admirably attempting to discharge his duties and responsibilities as the nation's senior military officer. McClellan's inability to function within the established chain of command, and Lincoln's unwillingness to make him, eventually drove Scott over the edge. But, as evidenced by the forced recall of Sherman's Corps to Washington on September 14, McClellan's effort to establish a dual chain of command was affecting the operational and strategic direction of the war at a crucial time.

²¹⁴ Du Pont to Davis, 29 Sept 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 160.

In early September McClellan made an interesting and innovative proposal directly to the War Department. The request foreshadowed his future operational designs and served as an example of his propensity to work around Scott. McClellan sought permission to, “organize a force of two brigades of five regiments each of New England men for the general service, but particularly adapted to coast service.” McClellan also wanted “A naval officer to be attached to the staff of the commanding officer.”²¹⁵

Unfortunately, McClellan’s request was buried in the War Department’s ever growing piles of bureaucratic paperwork and correspondence. This, however, did not stop the young general from proceeding with the creation of his amphibious division. McClellan’s instincts and innovative thinking were correct, but his failure to run his ideas through the General-in-Chief resulted in confusion and missed opportunities for cooperation. Matters came to a head during a hastily arranged meeting on the evening of October 1. Fox, Seward, Lincoln, Cameron, and both the Assistant Secretaries of State and War assembled to have a final discussion on the Port Royal expedition with Du Pont and Sherman.

The need for the impromptu gathering in Seward’s office came as a surprise to Du Pont who remarked rather sarcastically in a subsequent letter to his good friend and fellow Board member, Henry Davis; “just as if it had not been settled six times that it was

²¹⁵ McClellan to Cameron 6 Sept 1861. OR, Ser. I, 5, pp. 586-87. McClellan’s proposal could be viewed as circumstantial evidence that he was contemplating a move on Richmond via the peninsula even at this early date. At the very least, he was preparing to incorporate a large expeditionary force into his operational planning. The letter also reflected McClellan’s obsession for detail. He wanted “The officers and men to be sufficiently conversant with boat service to manage steamers, sailing vessels, launches, barges, surfboats, floating batteries, &c. To charter or buy for the command a sufficient number of propellers or tug-boats for transportation of men and supplies, the machinery of which should be amply protected by timber, the vessels to have permanent experienced officers from the merchant service, but to be manned by details from the command.” He also observed “The flank companies of each regiment to be armed with Dahlgren boat guns and carbines with waterproof cartridges.”

a go.”²¹⁶ The fact that neither Scott nor Welles were in attendance was also revealing. Du Pont’s subsequent description of the meeting further illustrated the confused and dysfunctional state of affairs within the Union high command during the fall of 1861!²¹⁷ Despite months of planning and the President’s previous approval, Lincoln now decided that the Port Royal expedition would need to be abandoned because, “it would cost so much money.” Lincoln was eventually persuaded to change his mind, but then decided, in what Du Pont accurately described as “the haste of ignorance,” that the expedition must “go in *four days*.”²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Du Pont to Davis, 8 Oct 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 162.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.162-64. Confusion reigned regarding Burnside’s request for a naval liaison officer for his assembling expeditionary force. Neither the President, nor any of the assembled cabinet members were aware that any such force had been authorized. The majority of Du Pont’s letter is provided here for context and clarity “The discussion opens with inquires as to an expedition under General Burnside, Fox having mentioned that the General had applied to the Navy Department for a naval aide-de-camp and it was stated he was going somewhere with 8,000 men-but no one present knew about this, except that it was understood to be a pet enterprise with the President. The latter disclaims all knowledge of it with some warmth, gets his dander up a little, and requires the matter to be sifted instanter. Cameron hints Seward must have gotten it up, as he “regulated all the business of all the departments.” Finally, Scott, Assistant Secretary of War (smart fellow) comes with a paper, obtained from somebody on McClellan’s staff, to wit-“Expedition of 8,000 men, General McClellan to name the Commanding General names General Burnside.” Nobody ever saw this memorandum; Lincoln reiterates his declaration of never being asked or told a word on the subject, talks of going back to Illinois if his memory has become as treacherous as that. Cameron is equally innocent, Seward ditto. In the meantime Burnside had been running over the country raising *his* regiments. He telegraphs to have a Rhode Island regiment ordered to Washington, the War Department answers, “No, it must go to New York,” thinking of course it was one of Sherman’s; so it went, cross purposes for a week, which would doubtless have ended in some great snarl, but for the fortunate circumstance of Fox being roused to suspicion that something was going on to override *his* favorite expedition. Cameron had shifted his seat near me, and I quietly suggested that as we had been two months discussing another expedition, it would be wise to handle *one* at a time, and to get this one off first. This was agreed to, and Burnside, and the 8,000 troops, and McClellan’s memorandum were all buried. It was eleven o’clock by this time; oh, how sleepy I was! Just then McClellan walks in with a lighted cigar, bows respectfully, and takes a seat. L. thought they would have to give up the expedition: “It would cost so much money.” I said nothing but thought of all our work this summer-and of all the fixed determinations of the Cabinet. However, it was at last determined upon, to send it off; McClellan said he would furnish the men and take the new regiments in lieu, but declared he had but 114,000 men excluding Banks and Dix! Nine thousand men go from Washington to embark at Annapolis, and 5,000 go with me from here to Hampton Roads. This decided, then came the haste of ignorance as I call it-we must go in *four days*.”

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

The episode left Du Pont deeply insecure about the competency of those charged with formulating the strategic direction of the war.²¹⁹ His initial confidence in Fox had steadily eroded throughout the planning process. On September 15, he lamented: “One of his (Fox) characteristics is that he prefers planning and projects to execution-so you are always afraid he is going to propose some change.”²²⁰ Davis echoed these sentiments when he wrote back to Du Pont on September 25: “These uncertainties, caprices, or feeble workings (whatever they may be called) - these sudden changes in Fox’s mind sometimes cause me serious anxiety. They disturb confidence and lessen security.”²²¹

With just days before he was scheduled to sail, Du Pont still had not received final confirmation on the exact location of the landing. On October 12, Welles formally deferred the decision to him in a warm and encouraging letter that also reminded the flag officer of the all too obvious objective of the expedition: “it is necessary to take possession of certain important points upon our Southern coast where our squadrons may find shelter and have a depot, and from which the loyal citizens of those quarters may be protected.”²²²

The Board had originally recommended the seizure of Bulls Bay, South Carolina and Fernandina, Florida. It considered Port Royal too formidable an objective! This was a thought not lost on Du Pont who commented: "This expedition has grown like a mushroom, much beyond the original intentions and therefore raising undue

²¹⁹ Welles had appointed Du Pont as the naval commander for the forthcoming naval campaign on August, 5, writing “The invasion and occupation of the seacoasts of the states in rebellion, as proposed by the Navy Department, having been accepted by the Government.” See Welles to Du Pont, 5 Aug 1861. ORN, Vol. I, 2, p. 207.

²²⁰ Du Pont to Mrs. Du Pont, 15 Sept 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 147.

²²¹ Davis to Du Pont, 25 Sept 1861. Quoted in, *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 147, n. 1.

²²² Welles to Dupont 12 Oct 1861. ORN, Ser. I, 12, pp. 214-15. Welles deferred the final destination to Du Pont stating only “Bull’s Bay, St. Helena, Port Royal, and Fernandina are each arid all accessible and desirable points for the purposes indicated.”

expectations-so that the points originally intended will seem insignificant, I fear, to the proportions it has assumed. I think of attacking Port Royal though I hear of their having two hundred guns there.”²²³ Though Welles appeared comfortable delegating the final decision to Du Pont, Fox had other designs.

The Assistant Secretary felt that the expedition’s objective should be Port Royal.²²⁴ From the very beginning he had been instrumental in pushing more troops and more ships to Du Pont than originally intended. This, intern, put tremendous pressure on Du Pont to do more than just seize a couple of isolated coaling stations. Fox wanted Charleston and Savannah for the Navy! Port Royal with its deep and large anchorage was ideally situated to become a staging area for future operations against either city. As final preparations to put the long anticipated expedition to sea were being made, the Assistant Secretary clearly had this thought in mind, when he visited Du Pont in Hampton Roads on October 22.²²⁵

Even before Fox’s arrival, Du Pont was unsettled: “There is no question that Port Royal is the most important point to strike, and the most desirable to have first and hold, yet we did not think so in our conference and I must weigh well before I deviate.” He

²²³ Du Pont to Henry Du Pont, 15 Oct 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 164.

²²⁴ Du Pont to Mrs. Du Pont, 17 Oct 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 171, n. 7, “Fox, who later met with SFDP at Hampton Roads, persuaded him to take Port Royal, probably for the reason stated here. On a letter from SFDP referring to “the *big* place,” Fox noted: “Port Royal, that I insisted upon.” (SFDP to Fox, 24 Oct. 1861, Fox Papers, NY Historical Society). Du Pont was clearly apprehensive about the decision. See Du Pont to Fox 24 Oct 1861. *Fox Correspondence*, I, p. 58. Other than the hand written note on his personal copy of Du Pont’s letter announcing the final decision, Fox was careful not to document his desires. It will be recalled that Welles had formally deferred the decision to Du Pont. Fox could not, therefore, issue counter instructions to the flag officer, though it did not stop him from influencing the situation. Lost in the subsequent ease of Union victory, was the fact that Port Royal was considered heavily defended. At the time, the decision was a bold one that was also fraught with much risk.

²²⁵ Du Pont to Mrs. Du Pont, 23 Oct 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 180-182. Fox arrival date is not clear, but he was clearly in Hampton Roads on October 22. He departed the morning of October 23, and was not in attendance at the final planning conference held later that evening. Du Pont’s subsequent letter announcing the decision to take Port Royal was dated October 24. See, Du Pont to Fox 24 Oct 1861. *Fox Correspondence*, I, 58.

also saw the selection of Port Royal as a vital lodgment for follow on operations: “Port Royal alone admits the large ships-and gives us such a naval position on the sea coast of the enemy as our army is holding across the Potomac.”²²⁶ These military considerations aside, it appears highly likely that Fox, ever mindful of the public image of the Navy Department, also saw the opportunity to minimize the Army’s role in the pending expeditions. A point that Du Pont was keenly aware of when he observed, “At Port Royal the soldiers will have nothing to do-they are obliterate- though we did work out a distant landing for them when we investigated the subject; whether Sherman will agree to be a looker on is another element.”²²⁷

Unlike Fox, however, Du Pont had to live and work with his army counterparts. He also had a sincere interest in fostering and maintaining effective inter-service cooperation. On October 23, the day of Fox’s departure, Du Pont hosted a joint planning conference with generals Sherman, Wright, Stevens, and Viele aboard his flagship the USS *Wabash*. The objective was to determine the expedition’s final destination.²²⁸ The meeting went late into the evening, and with the issue still unresolved all parties agreed to reconvene the deliberations in the morning. On the October 24, a decision was finally reached. Having thus secured the army’s cooperation, Du Pont fired off a short letter officially informing Fox of the decision.²²⁹

²²⁶ Du Pont to Mrs. Du Pont, 17 Oct 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 170-71.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

²²⁸ For a description of the meeting and a summation of Du Pont’s concerns see Du Pont to his wife 23 & 24 Oct 1861 *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 182-184.

²²⁹ Du Pont to Fox 24 Oct 1861. *Fox Correspondence*, I, p. 58. The letter also seemed intended to manage expectations and convey the Army’s reservations. “A long and earnest conference last night with the Generals was followed by another this morning on the practicability of the *big* place. The necessity of occupying those points as stated in our memoirs on it & the extreme doubt I am sorry to say, on a closer look of getting this ship over the bar gave gravity not to say anxiety to the council-but I am happy to say that they all came in & we are about decided Sherman & I, to try, & he orders his great condenser to Hilton head with other matters- But I tell you it is a much greater job than you & I contemplated-the landing of

At long last Du Pont's expedition finally got underway on October 29. As the fifty vessel convoy, caring over 12,000 troops and an unknown number of sailors, rounded Cape Henry, and rendezvoused in the waters off the Virginia-North Carolina border, Du Pont took a moment to ponder the enormity of the undertaking, as well as, the challenges that had been overcome to make the expedition a reality. He was overcome by a sense of relief and excitement that temporarily overshadowed his earlier apprehensions regarding the pending threat of southern steal.²³⁰

On November 7, 1861, Du Pont's forces descended like a thunderclap on the Confederates manning the defenses of Forts Walker and Beauregard. The flag officer captured Port Royal Sound with surprising speed, and at little cost. Just two days later he described the unexpected ease and results of his success in a letter to Flag Officer Goldsborough, his counterpart in the newly created Northern Blockading Squadron, "You can form no idea of the terror we have spread in the whole Southern country. Beaufort is deserted; the gunboats were up yesterday to save the light vessels but they were burned the moment the forts surrendered, or rather were destroyed, for the enemy flew in panic leaving public and private property, letters, portfolios, all their regimental achieves, clothes, arms, etc.-they were grandly supplied, ammunition of the most perfect kind, etc. The contrabands are *wild* and sacking Beaufort, in return for being shot down because they would not leave with their masters."²³¹

Port Royal was a tremendous accomplishment for Northern arms. Less than six months after Bull Run, the Union had managed to put 12,000 troops on the doorstep of

troops and reserves to be brought by the enemy from Savannah & Charleston may be great embarrassments-I wish you could have been with us."

²³⁰Du Pont to Fox, 29 Oct 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 199. For an exact listing of the ships see, "Order of Sailing, Port Royal Expeditionary Corps and Fleet," *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 203.

²³¹Du Pont to Goldsborough, 9 Nov 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 229.

two of the South's most economically vital and politically important cities. But while Welles and Du Pont issued congratulatory orders, and Fox, no doubt, basked in the warm glow of public praise that followed his bold prodding, the element of strategic surprise and the advantageous operational position the Union had achieved was fretted away by inaction and a lack of imagination.²³²

Instead of rapidly exploiting its stunning success in South Carolina, the Union ostensibly spent the next six months trying to figure out what to do next. In the process the opportunity to seize Charleston early in the war was fretted away. The reasons for this strategic intransigence will be discussed in chapter nine, but suffice it to say for our purposes here, a significant strategic opportunity was lost.

Despite beginning the war with only twelve vessels in home waters, the Union Navy had, nonetheless, made its presence felt in a very short time. A naval board had been commissioned. Though created with myopic intentions, it quickly expanded its charter. The four-man board, chaired by the director of the Coast Survey, also included a prominent army engineering officer. It was a joint endeavor that fostered inter-service cooperation and conceived an operational concept for the employment of expeditionary forces in pursuit of strategic objectives. More importantly, it had the potential to translate ideas into action.

In less than seven months after the commencement of hostilities in Charleston Harbor, Union expeditionary forces had managed to seize two coastal enclaves in North and South Carolina at little cost. These operations illustrated the vulnerability of the

²³² For examples of Welles and Du Pont congratulatory orders see ORN Ser. I, 12, p. 290 and Welles to Du Pont 16 Nov 1861, *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 246. There appears to be no correspondence between the two men during this time frame that contemplates any exploitation of the Union's success at Port Royal further inland! Du Pont, however, clearly saw the potential and the fleeting opportunity.

Southern coastline and had the potential to exploit internal political divisions within the Confederacy. The most dangerous aspect of these operations for the Confederate authorities, however, was not the political pressures they engendered, but rather the fact that these Union beachheads were located within easy striking distance of Wilmington and Charleston. The seizure of one or both of these crucial port cities would have crippled the Confederacy's ability to supply its armed forces with the material and supplies necessary to defend itself against the growing Union menace.

Chapter 7: Power Struggle: The McClellan-Scott Feud and the Fight for Strategic Control

As in a building, which, however fair and beautiful the superstructure, is radically marred and imperfect if the foundation be insecure—so, if the strategy be wrong, the skill of the general on the battlefield, the valor of the soldier, the brilliancy of victory, however otherwise decisive, fail of their effect.

—A. T. Mahan

Just two days after the devastating Union defeat at Bull Run, President Lincoln produced a rather uninspiring nine-point document designed to communicate military policy. Clearly, the debacle on the rolling hills of Manassas had dashed any hopes of an immediate march on Richmond and a premature end to the war, but the real question was what to do now?

Memoranda of Military Policy Suggested by the Bull Run Defeat

1. Let the plan for making the Blockade effective be pushed forward with all possible dispatch
2. Let the volunteer forces at Fort-Monroe & vicinity-under Genl. Butler-be constantly drilled, disciplined, and instructed without more for the present.
3. Let Baltimore be held, as now, with a gentle, but firm, and certain hand
4. Let the force now under Paterson, or Banks, be strengthened, and made secure in it's position.
5. Let the forces in Western Virginia act, till further orders, according to instructions, or orders from Gen. McClellan.
6. Let Gen. Fremont push forward his organization, and operations in the West as rapidly as possible, giving rather special attention to Missouri
7. Let the forces late before Manassas, except the three months men, be reorganized as rapidly as possible, in their camps here and about Arlington.
8. Let the three months forces, who decline to enter the longer service, be discharged as rapidly as circumstances will permit.
9. Let the new volunteer forces be brought forward as fast as possible; and especially into the camps on the two sides of the river here.²³³

²³³ Memorandum of Military Policy Suggested by the Bull Run Defeat, 23 July 1861. *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 457.

Having apparently forced his General-in-Chief to fight a battle against his better judgment, Lincoln's new directive now seemed to embrace many of Scott's previously held views. The feeling in Washington had shifted from hasty attack and "On to Richmond" to one of prudence and deliberate preparation. While it looked like the Union was surrendering the strategic initiative, at least for the time being, the reality was that neither side was ready to fight. Both belligerents needed time to properly organize, train, and equip the large number of civilians that were, even then, only just beginning to assemble in their respective military organizations.

Scott, though obviously upset with his own judgment and lack of moral courage regarding the ill advised move on Manassas, must have also felt some small sense of vindication. After all, his wise counsel cautioning against a premature battle in Virginia until overwhelming force could be assembled and applied had proven correct. He likely hoped that the disaster would, at least temporarily; quell the irrational cries among some in the press and among the vocal minority within the halls of Congress that had precipitated the move in the first place.

On the other hand, Lincoln's memorandum failed to mention the corner stone of Scott's strategic concept, a decisive drive down the Mississippi. And while McDowell quickly became the scapegoat, Scott's conduct was not without reproach. His inability to coordinate the respective movements between Paterson and McDowell's armies reflected badly upon the General-in-Chief.²³⁴ Additionally, Scott's methodical strategic approach

²³⁴ In fairness to Scott, however, he clearly anticipated the Confederate reinforcement of Johnston with troops that were in front of Paterson. Furthermore, he warned Paterson of this and ordered him to make a more aggressive move up the valley. Paterson insisted, however, that no reinforcement had occurred and that he was facing a stout force to his front. See Scott to Patterson, 18 July 1861. OR, Ser. I, 2, p. 168. "I have certainly been expecting you to beat the enemy. If not, to hear that you had felt him strongly, or, at

had exasperated the impression, among a small but powerful group of Washington insiders, that he was simply too old to maintain his position and credibility as the President's principle military advisor.²³⁵ Rather than vindicating Scott's strategic concept, Bull Run ultimately signaled its demise. Ironically, it would be a rising young military star, not the press or the radicals within Lincoln's own party that ultimately engineered Scott's final exit from the public stage.

George Brinton McClellan was dispatched to Washington immediately after the Union debacle at Bull Run. The "Young Napoleon" arrived in the nation's capital with much fanfare and high expectations. McClellan assumed command of the newly created Division of the Potomac on July 27, just six days after the battle of Bull Run, and wasted little time getting to work.²³⁶ On August 2, he delivered a detailed memorandum directly to Lincoln. The document, prepared at the President's request, described his estimate of the military situation confronting the Union, and outlined his strategic designs.

McClellan's thinking had evolved significantly from his initial efforts to articulate military strategy in the spring. This was not the haphazard or ill-conceived letter that had been the subject of Scott's ridicule in May. Perhaps he had learned his lesson, or perhaps he simply had more time to put pen to paper, but what ever the reason, what emerged was

least, had occupied him by threats and demonstrations. You have been at least his equal, and, I suppose, superior, in numbers. Has he not stolen a march and sent reinforcements toward Manassas Junction?"

²³⁵ Johnson. *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory*, p. 225.

²³⁶ The official title of McClellan's new command was yet to be determined. See General Orders 47, 25 July 1861. OR, Ser. I, 2, p. 763. "The Department of Washington and the Department of Northeastern Virginia will constitute a geographical division, under Major-General McClellan, U. S. Army; headquarters, Washington." Upon McClellan's arrival it was subsequently named the Division of the Potomac until its formal re-designation as the Army of the Potomac. Historians have had trouble adequately explaining both the mission and the scope of this newly created military organization as it evolved within the existing Union military organization. On the surface it seemed to be a merger of two military departments, and as such, constituted a relatively small geographical area. At the same time, however, it appeared designed to be the principle arm of offensive action in the eastern theater. The confusion about where this command, and McClellan himself, fit in to the existing Union military table of organization led to the rift between Scott and McClellan, and adversely effected the development of Union military strategy during the first eighteen months of the war.

an extremely important and insightful document that has received scant historical attention.²³⁷ The letter is reproduced in its entirety in Appendix C, but for the sake of brevity only its key points will be analyzed here.

The reader familiar with Williams/Donald school of interpretation regarding the state of Union strategic thought prior to Grant's ascendancy would be hard pressed to make sense of McClellan's thinking. It was remarkably Clausewitzian.²³⁸ McClellan focused on the destruction of the Confederate armies by the application of decisive and overwhelming force. He, also, clearly identified the Southern center of gravity as the planter elite and aristocratic class that he believed was leading, financing, and inspiring the insurrection. While bemoaning the premature commitment of force at Bull Run, he now viewed the struggle as essentially a people's war.²³⁹

Though he expressed concern about maintaining the rights and property i.e. slaves, of southern non-combatants, this was consistent with the law of war at the time, and almost certainly done in an effort to prevent the conflict from degenerating into the type of costly and indecisive guerilla war that had bogged Napoleon down in Spain.

²³⁷ T. Harry Williams flatly dismissed McClellan's plan. He called it "defective in almost every respect. It was fundamentally wrong because it proposed to concentrate the military effort in one theater to the neglect of the others and because it would have made places instead of enemy armies the objectives." See T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*. (New York: Knopf, 1952), pp. 30-31. Williams's interpretation was not, however, supported by analysis or an astute comprehension of the application of strategic principles over time. See Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach*, pp. 126-136. Hart argues that Sherman's March to the Sea was the decisive campaign of the war and that it was aimed at places, not the destruction of the rebel army. Sherman achieved the latter, indirectly, by destroying Confederate manufacturing and attacking Southern moral. Williams's critique of McClellan's plan seemed based on the same Clausewitzian revisionism that so clouded his interpretation of Jomini. The best analysis of McClellan's strategic thinking remains Harsh, "George Britton McClellan and the Forgotten Alternative," pp. 185-226.

²³⁸ Since McClellan neither read nor studied Clausewitz, this seems to reinforce the scholarship of Archer Jones and Joseph Harsh who argued the differences between the two theorists had been exaggerated. Conversely, if we are to believe the Williams/Donald interpretation that espoused that Lincoln was the great military genius of the war, because he saw the great object of the war to be the rebel armies, it would appear that he almost certainly came to this understanding long after reading McClellan's August memo.

²³⁹ McClellan to Lincoln, 2 Aug, 1861. Stephen Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, pp. 71-72.

The object of the present war differs from those in which nations are usually engaged mainly in this, that the purpose of ordinary war is to conquer a peace and make a treaty on advantageous terms. In this contest it has become necessary to crush a population sufficiently numerous, intelligent, and warlike to constitute a nation. We have not only to defeat their armed and organized forces in the field, but to display such an overwhelming strength as will convince all our antagonists, especially those of the governing, aristocratic class, of the utter impossibility of resistance. Our late reverses make this course imperative. Had we been successful in the recent battle (Manassas), it is possible that we might have been spared the labor and expenses of a great effort. Now we have no alternative. Their success will enable the political leaders of the rebels to convince the mass of their people that we are inferior to them in force and courage, and to command all their resources. The contest began with a class; now it is with a people. Our military success can alone restore the former issue. By thoroughly defeating their armies, taking their strong places, and pursuing a rigidly protective policy as to private property and unarmed persons, and a lenient course as to private soldiers, we may well hope for a permanent restoration of a peaceful Union. But in the first instance the authority of the Government must be supported by overwhelming physical force.²⁴⁰

At first glance, McClellan's strategic concept appeared nearly identical to that of Scott. There was, however, one major deviation.²⁴¹ Unlike Scott, McClellan was all too eager to give battle in Virginia. This was a function of McClellan's personality and his military education.²⁴² While Scott, having already achieved martial glory in Mexico, realized that he was incapable of leading both a field army and simultaneously directing the larger Union war effort, McClellan harbored no such reservations. Furthermore, while Scott foresaw the difficulties associated with attempting to prosecute decisive military operations in Virginia, and wisely sought to avoid them, McClellan rather casually dismissed such concerns. By making his strategic main effort in Virginia, McClellan, in effect, engineered a reverse image of Scott's "Anaconda Plan."

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Comparing the differences between Scott's and McClellan's strategic thinking, Gideon Welles observed in 1863 "The anaconda policy was, I then thought and still think, unwise for the country. The policy of General McClellan has not been essentially different." See Welles, *The Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson*, Vol. I, p. 242.

²⁴² McClellan clearly envisioned himself as the preordained savior of the Union. His conception of strategy and warfare was also heavily modeled on his self acquired interpretation of the Napoleon's campaigns.

The rebels have chosen Virginia as their battle-field, and it seems proper for us to make the first great struggle there. But, while thus directing our main efforts, it is necessary to diminish the resistance there offered us by movements on other points both by land and water. Without entering at present into details, I would advise that a strong movement be made on the Mississippi, and that the rebels be driven out of Missouri. As soon as it becomes perfectly clear that Kentucky is cordially united with us, I would advise a movement through that State into Eastern Tennessee, for the purpose of assisting the Union men of that region, and of seizing the railroads leading from Memphis to the East. The possession of those roads by us, in connection with the movement on the Mississippi, would go far towards determining the evacuation of Virginia by the rebels.²⁴³

In the Eastern Theater, the Confederacy had only one viable operational avenue of approach for any sizable or sustained invasion of Northern territory. McClellan clearly anticipated that any Southern invasion would have to originate in the Shenandoah Valley, pass through or near the strategically located town of Harpers Ferry, and then force a crossing of the Potomac somewhere west of Washington. Rather than strengthening the defenses west of the nation's capital, however, he boldly accepted risk, believing that any such attempt by the rebels would be militarily foolish: "The importance of Harper's Ferry and the line of the Potomac in the direction of Leesburg will be very materially diminished as soon as our force in this vicinity becomes organized, strong, and efficient, because no capable general will cross the river north of this city when we have a strong army here ready to cut off his retreat."²⁴⁴

McClellan next turned his attention to describing the exact military requirements for the type of overwhelming force that would be necessary to achieve his strategic

²⁴³ McClellan to Lincoln, 2 Aug , 1861. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, p. 71.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73. Of course, Lee did attempt not one, but two, such moves. It is perhaps indicative of our historical perceptions of these two men that the modern student would likely be quick to chastise McClellan's thinking in 1861 as a reflection of his timidity and failure to anticipate Lee's bold generalship. Yet it is worth noting that on both occasions, Lee came precariously close to having his army cut off and destroyed. Viewed in this light, McClellan's original ideas don't appear so circumspect.

objectives: “When we have reorganized our main army here 10,000 men ought to be enough to protect the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the Potomac; 5,000 will garrison Baltimore, 3,000 Fort Monroe, and not more than 20,000 will be necessary at the utmost for the defense of Washington.” In addition to these forces, McClellan envisioned the creation of a 273,000-man army, consisting of 250 infantry regiments, 100 field batteries, 28 cavalry regiments, and 5 regiments of engineers.²⁴⁵ While he clearly laid before the President an accurate assessment of the military requirements for the pending struggle in the east, he neglected to provide a similar force model for the west. This almost certainly reflected his newfound emphasis on the Eastern Theater of operation.

Though not yet privy to the specifics of the naval board’s deliberations, McClellan undoubtedly envisioned the use of expeditionary forces to seize strategic objectives.

An essential feature of the plan of operations will, be the employment of a strong naval force, to protect the movement of a fleet of transports intended to convey a considerable body of troops from point to point of the enemy’s sea-coast, thus either creating diversions and rendering it necessary for them to detach largely from their main body in order to protect such of their cities as may be threatened, or else landing and forming establishments on their coast at any favorable places that opportunity might offer. This naval force should also co- operate with the main army in its efforts to seize the important seaboard towns of the rebels.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 73. McClellan’s estimate did not include the logistics requirements necessary to sustain such a force. “The force must be supplied with the necessary engineer and pontoon trains, and with transportation for everything save tents.” Additionally, McClellan clearly realized that he would have to rely on waterborne transportation i.e. the Navy to support the logistical requirements of the army’s movements: “Its general line of operations should be so directed that water transportation can be availed of from point to point by means of the ocean and the rivers emptying into it.”

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

Some historians, however, have exaggerated McClellan's amphibious ambitions.²⁴⁷

There was certainly opportunity, and McClellan undoubtedly had intent. But when the occasion that McClellan clearly anticipated, actually arose, he failed to seize it. A careful analysis of McClellan's thoughts regarding expeditionary operations also reveals his fatal flaw as a strategist. Everything had to revolve around him. Though his ideas were more than sound, they were actually quite extraordinary when viewed in proper historical perspective, the execution never materialized.

Rather than detaching a sizable expeditionary force to operate independently of his own army in pursuit of common strategic objectives, McClellan predicated any use of expeditionary forces on the condition that they were employed with, or directly in support of, the "main army." Furthermore, he envisioned a sequential, almost methodical, series of operations that would only take place after he had fought his Napoleonic battle of annihilation on the outskirts of Richmond, and had in fact seized the enemy's capital.²⁴⁸

It should not be surprising that as a former railroad superintendent, McClellan saw the importance of this new technology: "It cannot be ignored that the construction of railroads has introduced a new and very important element into war."²⁴⁹ He also realized its newfound influence on military strategy and operations from the start. What is more

²⁴⁷ See Rowena Reed's, *Combined Operations in the Civil War*. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1978), p. xvii. Reed stated "Had McClellan's brilliant strategy been fully implemented it would have ended the Civil War in 1862, as intended." Reed's work has assumed a rather influential place in the historiography of the war. It is the best, and coincidentally, the only, scholarly study focused on expeditionary operations. She argued that combined operations held the key to Union success and that McClellan, had he not been thwarted, would or could have used them to achieve victory. Though Reed's argument is intriguing and thought provoking, it is also controversial among many historians. Kevin Weddle, for example, described her study as "deeply flawed." Unfortunately, rather than focusing on a strict assessment of how or why the use of combined operations held so much promise, she became distracted with a lengthy defense of McClellan generalship at almost every turn. Her strong endorsement of McClellan, put her at odds with the vast majority of her colleagues, and, at times, was certainly overblown. Additionally, her attempts to prop McClellan up at the expense of Grant's strategic ideas and success seemed to betray a superficial understanding of the military conduct of the war.

²⁴⁸ McClellan to Lincoln, 2 Aug , 1861. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, p. 73.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

interesting, however, was that McClellan appeared astutely aware of one of the principle Confederate critical vulnerabilities. He seems to have realized that the very nature of the Confederacy would put internal strains on state governments to withhold troops from the national government if the Union could threaten local interests.²⁵⁰

McClellan concluded his memorandum with a stirring call to action that must have left the President hopeful that he had found the type of young, intelligent, and capable general that the country's grave situation demanded. One who would aggressively take the fight to the enemy, and replace the tiresome and over cautious grumblings of an aged General-in-Chief, with a youthful enthusiasm and bias for vigorous action.

The force I have recommended is large; the expense is great. It is possible that a smaller force might accomplish the object in view, but I understand it to be the purpose of this great nation to re-establish the power of its Government and restore peace to its citizens in the shortest possible time. The question to be decided is simply this: Shall we crush the rebellion at one blow, terminate the war in one campaign, or shall we leave it as a legacy for our descendants? When the extent of the possible line of operations is considered, the force asked for the main army under my command cannot be regarded as unduly large; every mile we advance carries us farther from our base of operations and renders detachments necessary to cover our communications, while the enemy will be constantly concentrating as he falls back. I propose, with the force which I have requested, not only to drive the enemy out of Virginia and occupy Richmond, but to occupy Charleston, Savannah, Montgomery, Pensacola, Mobile, and New Orleans; in other words, to move into the heart of the enemy's country and crush the rebellion in its very heart.²⁵¹

On August 8, McClellan sent a seemingly benign letter to the General-in-Chief requesting to combine the various military departments in and around Washington into a

²⁵⁰ Ibid. Anticipating the new found strategic importance of the rail roads McClellan observed, "the great facilities thus given for concentrating at particular positions large masses of troops from remote sections and by creating new strategic points and lines of operations. It is intended to overcome this difficulty by the partial operations suggested, and such others as the particular case -may require. We must endeavor to seize places on the railways in the rear of the enemy's points of concentration, and we must threaten their seaboard cities, in order that each State may be forced, by the necessity of its own defense, to diminish its contingent to the Confederate army."

²⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 74-75. The memo also appears in OR, Ser. I, 5, pp. 6-8, but is misdated 4 Aug, 1861.

single command. From a military perspective this unremarkable request seemed to make good sense, and was in keeping with the long held principle of unity of command. If McClellan had simply made the request in the name of good order and efficient organization, it would have been difficult for Scott to have taken any offense. But instead of justifying the reorganization in the name of military efficiency, McClellan took the opportunity to justify the move by making the statement that Washington was in “imminent danger.”²⁵²

This set Scott off in a way the young general could not have possibly understood. Scott had, after all, almost single handedly organized the defense of the capital during the dark days immediately before and after Lincoln’s inauguration, when there was real chaos and treachery in the air. Scott had also put down the insurrection in Baltimore that threatened the only overland line of communication to the rest of the Union. Going all the way back to the last months of the Buchanan administration, Scott had been one of the staunchest bulwarks for preservation of the Union.

When in Scott’s mind, the situation first called for firmness, Buchanan neglected his plea to reinforce the threatened Federal garrisons scattered throughout the South. Even before Lincoln’s inauguration, his loyalty to the Union had been questioned by the very administration he diligently strove to protect, and see installed.²⁵³ He had been overruled on Sumter and forced to fight a battle at Bull Run against his better judgment. His strategic concept had been ignored, and now a thirty something general, who had been an

²⁵² McClellan to Scott 8 Aug 1861. OR, Ser. I, 11, pt. 3, p. 3.

²⁵³ Peskin, *Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms*, p. 237. Because Scott was a native Virginian, there was much speculation that his loyalty might lie with the South. Both Chase and Lincoln were suspicious. The President elect sent a close personal friend to interview the general before coming to Washington. See Jesse Weilk, “How Lincoln was Convinced of General Scott’s Loyalty,” *Century Magazine* 81 (Feb 1911), p. 594.

obscure junior officer in his expedition to Mexico, was now attending cabinet meetings and providing military advice directly to the President.

Now the “Young Napoleon,” as the papers had christened him, indirectly accused the General-in-Chief of neglecting the defense of Washington itself. While things were far from ideal in the nation’s capital in the weeks following Bull Run, Washington was never in danger, and Scott knew it. He also knew that despite his vast experience and steadfast devotion to the Union it was time to go. The next day Scott submitted his letter of resignation to Cameron complaining that: “Major-General McClellan has propagated in high quarters the idea expressed in the letter before me, that Washington was not only "insecure," but in "imminent danger." Relying on our numbers, our forts, and the Potomac River, I am confident in the opposite opinion.” The General-in-Chief concluded with a succinct and unequivocal appraisal of the situation, “I have not the slightest apprehension for the safety of the Government here.”²⁵⁴

The ill will between the two men was certainly mutual. McClellan’s contempt for Scott during the fall of 1861 is well known and clearly illustrated by a number of revealing letters to his wife. Tensions between the two men were clearly on the rise even before McClellan’s August 8 letter to the General-in-Chief. On the very same day he submitted his letter to Scott, he also confessed his true feelings about the aged general to his wife.

²⁵⁴ Scotts Resignation Letter to Cameron 9 Aug 1861. OR, Ser. I, 11, pt. 3, p. 4. Lincoln refused to accept Scott’s initial letter of resignation. Scott, in turn, replying through the Secretary of War, respectfully refused the President’s request to pull his resignation. He gave three reasons to Cameron. Clearly, however, McClellan was the principle catalyst behind Scott’s original request “Major-General McClellan; while it is believed, and I may add known, that he is in frequent communication with portions of the Cabinet and on matters appertaining to me. That freedom of access and consultation have, very naturally, deluded the junior general into a feeling of indifference toward his senior” See Scott to Cameron, 12 Aug 1861. OR, Ser. I, 11, pt. 3, p. 5.

Had a long interview with Seward about my “pronunciamento” against Gen’l Scott’s policy-How does he think I can save this country when stopped by Gen’l Scott? I do not know whether he is a *dotard* or a *traitor*! I can’t tell which. He cannot or will not comprehend the condition in which we are placed and is certainly unequal to the emergency. If he cannot be taken out of my path I will not retain my position but resign and let the administration take care of itself.²⁵⁵

McClellan concluded his August 8 letter with the unbelievable statement that, “He (Scott) is a perfect imbecile. He understands nothing, appreciates nothing...” The young general continued his barrage on the following day, “General Scott is the greatest obstacle-he will not comprehend the danger and is either a traitor or an incompetent. I have to fight my way against him and have thrown a bomb shell that has created a perfect stampede in the cabinet- tomorrow the question will probably be decided by giving me absolute control independently of him. I suppose it will result in a mortal enmity on his part against me-but I have no choice-the people call upon me to save the country-I must save it and cannot respect anything that is in the way.”²⁵⁶

The circumstances and details surrounding the McClellan-Scott feud are well known and need not be restated here.²⁵⁷ McClellan clearly saw himself as the preordained savior of the Union, and engineered a covert attempt to remove the General-in-Chief. For our purposes, it is simply enough to say that the situation continued to deteriorate throughout the fall. On October 25, three radical republican senators Wade of Ohio, Chandler of Michigan, and Trumbull of Illinois confronted McClellan in a private meeting about the lack of offensive action in Virginia. Wade suggested that even a defeat would be

²⁵⁵ McClellan to Mary McClellan, 8 Aug, 1861. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, p. 81.

²⁵⁶ McClellan to Mary McClellan, 9 Aug, 1861. *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

²⁵⁷ The most succinct summary is Mark Grimsley, "Overthrown: The Truth Behind the McClellan-Scott Feud," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 19 (Nov. 1980), pp. 20-29.

preferable to further delay, because at least another failure would spur recruiting.

McClellan was taken aback, but tactfully reminded the senator that he “would rather have a few recruits before a victory than a great many after a defeat.”²⁵⁸

At some point in the conversation, McClellan must have pointed out to the senators that if they were displeased by the lack of Union activity, they should direct their complaints to Scott, who was, after all, still calling the shots as the General-in-Chief. Whether intentional or not, the senators left their meeting with McClellan convinced that Scott was the great impediment to the Union war effort. On the very next evening, the three senators arrived at the White House in order to “worry the administration into a battle.” Scott’s removal was also strongly encouraged.²⁵⁹ On October 31, Scott, citing his failing health, submitted another letter of resignation. This time it was accepted, and McClellan became the Commander of all U.S. armies on November 7, 1861.

McClellan was truly one of the great mysteries of the war. How could a man capable of such sophisticated and impressive strategic thought also be prone to such pettiness and paranoia when it came to his professional relations? Much has been written about this complex and controversial historical actor. McClellan was a man of great military instincts and ability. He also possessed tragic character flaws.²⁶⁰ While it is certainly not within the scope, nor the intent, of the present study to undertake a detailed examination

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. McClellan to Mrs. McClellan, 26 Oct 1861. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, p. 112.

²⁶⁰ For an interesting look at McClellan’s evolving place in the historiography of the war, see Joseph L. Harsh, “On the McClellan-Go-Round,” *Civil War History* 19 (June 1973): 101-18. For an examination of the role McClellan’s personality and character flaws played in the conflict see, Glatthaar, *Partners in Command*, pp. 51-94 and pp. 237-42.

of his personality defects, it must be stated here, however, that no accurate examination of his ideas can fail to at least acknowledge the latter.²⁶¹

The personality clash between the Union's top two generals in the fall of 1861 was one of the chief impediments to the development of an effective military strategy during the first eighteen months of the war. It had three major effects. First, Scott's "Anaconda Plan" was finally put to rest. The major implication was that a decisive battle with Confederate forces then massing in Virginia, and the early capture of Richmond, instead of a drive down the Mississippi, became the Union's strategic main effort.

Second, McClellan's political maneuvering to usurp Scott had reinvigorated the "On to Richmond" crowd, and inflamed civil military relations to the breaking point. Ironically for McClellan, the spark he used to unseat Scott would develop into a raging tempest that would ultimately consume his own efforts to engineer a victory.

Third, the internal squabbling could not have come at a worse time for the Union beachheads on the coast of North and South Carolina. What had started out with effective and promising levels of inter-service cooperation involving none other than the General-in-Chief, himself, came to a screeching halt as the aged general spent the majority of his time and intellectual energy fighting off McClellan and his growing number of critics in Washington. The infighting resulted in, what amounted to, a three-month operational pause for the Union war effort. Sadly for the Union, by the time McClellan was formally

²⁶¹ There is certainly overwhelming historical evidence to demonstrate that McClellan was a man possessed a smallness of character that was severely disproportionate to the sublime position he occupied. It should be noted, however, that most of the "evidence" comes from his personal, and one assumes, confidential, letters to his wife. While historians are quick to pounce on these letters as evidence of his true motivations, any objective interpretation must attempt to balance his personal "feelings" with his actual professional thoughts and actions. Today the word McClellan has become a synonym for cowardly inaction and pettiness. See Colin Powell's, *My American Journey* (New York, 1995), p.472 for a modern characterization of what the word McClellan has come to symbolize in American political and military circles.

installed, the reality of winter weather and the disorganization brought about by the dramatic change in leadership, further postponed any offensive action until the spring of 1862.

Ironically, the impetus behind the feuding may have had more to do with the well founded notion that, both Scott and McClellan, were, in actuality, simply too much alike to get along. Both men rose to power at a very young age. While this was certainly a function of their zeal and intelligence, it also instilled a certain rigid inflexibility to ideas and opinions other than their own. Though both portrayed an outward bearing worthy of their sublime positions, in private they could be easily moved to jealous, even petty, outbursts over rather trivial matters. Neither man responded well to criticism. Both were extremely skilled in the military art and science of their day, and both had an unfortunate propensity for self-importance. In Scott's case it was justified by accomplishment and experience. Their respective strategic ideas, views of the conflict, and interpretation of the constitution were similar, if not essentially the same.

At the risk of oversimplification, their relationship could be compared to one of aging father, and adolescent son. The former possessed of all the life experience and wisdom that was simply incapable of being transmitted to the junior. The latter, though respectful of what he could not know, was convinced, nonetheless, that his intelligence and the strength of his youth entitled him to assume control of his own destiny. Both men held stubbornly to the conviction that each knew best, and though both saw in each other what they longed to be, in the end the experience of the past was forced to give way to the unproven potential of the new.

Chapter 8: McClellan Struggles to Develop and Implement a Military Strategy

“To be practical, any plan must take account of the enemy’s power to frustrate it; the best chance of overcoming such obstruction is to have a plan that can be easily varied to fit the circumstances met; to keep such adaptability, while still keeping the initiative, the best way is to operate along a line which offers alternative objectives.”

—B. H. Liddell Hart

Historians have generally emphasized the mounting political and public pressure on the administration during the fall of 1861. To the layman in the streets, or in the halls of Congress, it appeared as if the government had done little to prosecute the war or even secure Washington in the months following the Bull Run disaster. The government’s inaction is often associated with McClellan, but when one considers the fact that he did not become General-in-Chief until November 1, it is hard to imagine that he could have realistically been expected to do more.²⁶²

With Scott now out of the way, McClellan, as the story goes, wasted the remainder of the fall and winter organizing, training, and equipping the Army of the Potomac. This interpretation, however, represents an oversimplification of events. As General-in-Chief, McClellan also inherited responsibility for the whole of the Union war effort. His first

²⁶² As discussed in the previous chapter, McClellan was not an innocent victim or without blame. Ironically, he laid the foundation for his own demise by blaming Scott for the Union’s inaction in the fall of 1861. As late as October 31, literally the day before he assumed the duties of General-in-Chief, he insinuated that a offensive action was still possible before winter. See McClellan to Cameron, 31 Oct 1861. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, pp. 114-115. From a military perspective, however, a movement on Northern Virginia in the dead of winter was problematic, if not outright unrealistic. Any critic, contemporary or otherwise, who thought McClellan could or should have marched his army overland during the winter of 1861-62 seriously underestimated the military difficulties associated with such a feat, and probably never spent a week in the field without shelter or adequate winter clothing. In using the issue to unseat Scott, McClellan was guilty of egregious duplicity, but his military judgment in resisting the subsequent pressure was sound. There were good reasons why nineteenth century armies went into winter quarters.

order of business was what to do about the recently seized Union foot hold at Hatteras. As previously noted, the expedition was originally undertaken in response to mounting political pressure from northern commercial interests, and designed to be limited in duration. It was initially conceived as nothing more than a limited objective raid designed to assist the Navy in bottling up Confederate privateers operating out of Pamlico Sound. Both Butler and Stringham, however, quickly realized both the strategic importance of the position, as well as, the potential opportunity for exploitation in eastern North Carolina. But both men were now gone, and nothing had been done or decided since.²⁶³

After consulting with the President, McClellan sent General Wool a letter on November 6 ordering him to hold Hatteras and briefly outlined the administration's rationale for the decision: "There are many political considerations of extreme importance which, in the opinion of the President, render it inexpedient to abandon the position at Hatteras Inlet. In a military point of view it is important to hold it, both to preserve our prestige and to maintain a base for ulterior operations projected in that direction."²⁶⁴

Shortly after making the determination to hold the Union position on the Outer Banks, McClellan and the administration received the good news of Du Pont's success in Port Royal Sound. However, rather than taking advantage of the newly secured Union beachhead to launch an inland campaign against one, or both, of the crucial port cities of Charleston or Savannah, McClellan seemed content to have Sherman sit idle. Burnside's

²⁶³ On September 5, 1861, the Secretary of War originally sent Wool the following set of vague instructions "Your letter of September 4 is received. The position at Cape Hatteras must be held, and you will adopt such measures, in connection with the Navy Department as may be necessary to effect the object. Your letter has been referred to the Commander-in-Chief, who will give detailed instructions." See Cameron to Wool, 5 Sept 1861. OR, Ser. I, 4, p. 606.

²⁶⁴ McClellan to Wool, 6 Nov 1861. OR, Ser. I, 4, pp. 627-28

newly created amphibious division would have been a natural choice to reinforce the 12,000 Union troops already operating in and around Port Royal, but the opportunity along the South Carolina coast, though present, was not in line with McClellan's own preconceived notions of the way the war would or needed to unfold.²⁶⁵

Despite McClellan's self-professed zeal for the use of expeditionary operations, his actions reflected a certain stubborn self-interest. At their September 18 meeting, McClellan had all but assured Du Pont that he intended to support both the Port Royal operation and the future employment of expeditionary forces. In just a little under a months time, however, this promise of cooperation appeared to wane considerably. On October 17, McClellan wrote the army's Adjutant General a terse letter flatly refusing to detach any more troops in support of the Port Royal Expedition.

I gave General Sherman all the regiments he asked for. At least two of those originally intended for him, and promised to me, have been diverted from me. The artillery promised me to replace Hamilton's battery have not been given to me. I will not consent to one other man being detached from this army for that expedition. I need far more than I now have to save this country, and cannot spare any disciplined regiment. Instead of diminishing this army, true policy would dictate its immediate increase to a large extent. It is the task of the Army of the Potomac to decide the question at issue. No outside expedition can effect the result. I hope that I will not again be asked to detach anybody.²⁶⁶

While this curt refusal to cooperate was almost certainly more a question of timing and synchronization, rather than any overt rejection of the use of combined operations, it nonetheless reflected McClellan's strategic priorities. His army's pending move on

²⁶⁵ See McClellan to Lincoln, Aug 2, 1861. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, pp. 71-75, McClellan to Cameron, 6 Sept 1861. OR, Ser. I, 5, pp. 586-87, and McClellan to Burnside, 7 Jan 1862, in Sears, ed., *Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, pp. 148-49. McClellan envisioned the use of expeditionary forces to cooperate and assist his own army as he marched down the eastern seaboard, not to be used independently in pursuit of strategic objectives. Though he had taken the rather innovative step of creating an expeditionary corps, he clearly intended that it remained under his own operational control and in support of his pending move on Richmond.

²⁶⁶ McClellan to T. Scott, 17 Oct 1861. OR, Ser. I, 6, p. 179.

Richmond was the strategic main effort, and any attempt to employ sea borne maneuver at other, more vulnerable, points along the Confederate coast would have to wait. Despite his initial pledge of support, once McClellan actually became General-in-Chief, his enthusiasm for combined operations was dampened by the realization that any troops necessary for such expeditions would likely be drawn from his own army.²⁶⁷

With the breaks now put on the unexpected success of the combined operations conceived and initiated before his appointment to General-in-Chief, McClellan now turned his attention to the west. Lincoln's decision to appoint John Fremont, the famous pathfinder and 1856 presidential candidate, to head the Department of the Missouri had resulted in a series of unfortunate military and political missteps that demanded his relief and reassignment.²⁶⁸ The intelligent and ambitious Henry Halleck was selected to replace Fremont.²⁶⁹

McClellan was painfully aware of the internal problems of the Department of Missouri. On November 11, he met with Halleck in Washington to discuss the troubled department. McClellan provided its new commander with a letter outlining his expectations, and reiterating the government's war aims: "In regard to the political conduct of affairs, you will please labor to impress upon the inhabitants of Missouri and

²⁶⁷ See, McClellan to T. Scott, 17 Oct 1861. OR, Ser. I, 6, p. 179. Though quoted above, the following is restated for emphasis: "It is the task of the Army of the Potomac to decide the question at issue. No outside expedition can effect the result. I hope that I will not again be asked to detach anybody."

²⁶⁸ The Department of Missouri was a significant assignment. Geographically it covered nearly a third of the country. It was also of immense political importance. Guerilla warfare had broken out in Missouri. The state was thus engaged in a nasty internal civil war of its own that left it teetering on the brink of falling into the Confederate camp. For the details and circumstances surrounding Fremont's appointment and his initial challenges administering the department see Nevins, *The Improvised War*, pp. 306-326. A detailed analysis of events in this department will be addressed in any future expansion of the current project.

²⁶⁹ For two outstanding works on Halleck see, Stephen E. Ambrose, *Halleck: Lincoln's Chief of Staff*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962) and John F. Marszalek, *Commander of all Lincoln's Armies : A Life of General Henry W. Halleck*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004).

the adjacent States that we are fighting solely for the integrity of the Union, to uphold the power of our National Government, and to restore to the nation the blessings of peace and good order.” McClellan concluded the letter with a vague warning order for Halleck to be prepared for future offensive operations by “concentrating the mass of the troops on or near the Mississippi, prepared for such ulterior operations as the public interests may demand.”²⁷⁰ Though offering no specific operational or strategic direction regarding future operations, McClellan clearly recognized that Halleck needed time to focus on cleaning up the internal affairs of his department before any offensive action could be taken. After spending a week pondering his new assignment and making the rounds in Washington, Halleck finally boarded a train for St Louis on November 18.²⁷¹

McClellan next turned his attention to an officer he knew well. On November 12, he sent a similar letter outlining his intentions to his good friend Don Carlos Buell. Unlike Halleck’s disorganized and troubled department, Buell’s appeared ready for offensive operations. McClellan quickly focused his subordinates attention on Eastern Tennessee: “The main point to which I desire to call your attention is the necessity of entering Eastern Tennessee as soon as it can be done with reasonable chances of success, and I hope that you will, with the least possible delay, organize a column for that purpose, sufficiently guarding at the same time the main avenues by which the rebels may invade Kentucky.” He also took the opportunity to remind Buell, as he had done with Halleck, just the day prior, about the government’s policy regarding the seceded states.²⁷²

²⁷⁰ McClellan to Halleck, 11 Nov. 1861. *Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, pp. 130-31.

²⁷¹ Ambrose, *Halleck: Lincoln's Chief of Staff*, pp. 11-14. Halleck assumed command of the department on November 20, 1861.

²⁷² McClellan to Buell, 12 Nov. 1861. *Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, pp. 131-32. McClellan reminded Buell, “In regard to political matters, bear in mind that we are fighting only to preserve the integrity of the Union and to uphold the power of the General Government. As far as military necessity will

On October 31, the day before his appointment as General-in-Chief, McClellan sent Cameron a lengthy letter that hinted prompt military action was still possible before the end of November.²⁷³ Just two weeks into his tenure as General-in-Chief, however, McClellan's perspective had changed dramatically. Now responsible for the entire Union war effort, including the coordination of policy objectives with military action, he could no longer use Scott as a shield to deflect criticism. In a preemptive effort to manage expectations regarding the timeliness of future military operations, he sent Cameron a detailed letter explaining his views regarding the causes of the Bull Run disaster. The letter was also a subtle plea for time and patience from the government.²⁷⁴ Unfortunately for McClellan, after an autumn of inaction that included his own criticisms of Scott's supposed timidity, patience was in short supply among the political elite in Washington.

On the evening of November 15, McClellan received an unexpected group of visitors at his temporary residence in the nation's capital. They included none other than the President himself, along with Welles, Fox, and the enterprising and ambitious David Dixon Porter.²⁷⁵ The Navy Department had been contemplating the seizure of New Orleans for some time. While everyone acknowledged the strategic value of the South's largest city and principle commercial port, it was thought that the stout forts guarding the southern approaches to the city were impassible.²⁷⁶ Fox and Porter argued otherwise.

permit, religiously respect the constitutional rights of all. Preserve the strictest discipline among the troops, and while employing the utmost energy in military movements, be careful so to treat the unarmed inhabitants as to contract, not widen, the breach existing between us and the rebels. I mean by this that it is the desire of the Government to avoid unnecessary irritation by causeless arrests and persecution of individuals.”

²⁷³ McClellan to Cameron, 31 Oct 1861. *Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, pp. 115-118.

²⁷⁴ McClellan to Cameron, 15 Nov. 1861. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²⁷⁵ Robert Schneller, *Farragut: America's First Admiral*. (Washington, D.C., 2002), p. 34.

²⁷⁶ Forts Jackson and St Philip were believed to be two of the strongest fortifications in the country. Conventional wisdom prior to the war espoused to “never attack a fort with a ship.” The introduction of

They believed that a naval squadron, operating in conjunction with a fleet of newly designed mortar boats, could run past the batteries and secure the city. At first, McClellan seemed skeptical, but according to Fox, the general “came readily into agreement” when he found out that the Navy required only 10,000 troops for the operation in lieu of 50,000.²⁷⁷

This late night parlor session was one of the most important and intriguing meetings of the entire war.²⁷⁸ While there remains some ambiguity about who actually originated the idea of seizing New Orleans by naval *coup de main*, what is clear is that all parties left McClellan’s residence on the evening of the November 15 committed to undertaking the operation.²⁷⁹ Shortly thereafter, McClellan dispatched Butler to the northeast to recruit 10,000 men for the pending operation. Welles eventually settled on a solid, but

steam and improvements in naval ordnance, however quickly rendered this paradigm obsolete. A notion that Fox was quick to pick up on.

²⁷⁷ Fox quoted in Chester Hearn’s, *The Capture of New Orleans, 1862*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), p. 100.

²⁷⁸ In the expected expansion of this paper an entire chapter will be devoted to the seizure of New Orleans and the impact it had on the strategic direction of the war. The early capture of the South’s largest city and principal commercial port split the Confederacy and almost certainly set the conditions that ultimately condemned the South to its fate. While almost every general naval history espouses or infers this argument few have actually done a detailed analysis or present sufficient evidence to support the claim. However, if one pieces together the patchwork of scholarship that is available, the validity of the argument seems undeniable. For a detailed and well-documented account of the economic and logistical significance of New Orleans see Surdam’s *Northern Naval Superiority and the Economics of the American Civil War*. Other secondary sources include Hearn’s, *The Capture of New Orleans, 1862*, and Charles Dufour and Carolyn A. Wallace, *The Night the War was Lost*. (Garden City, N.Y., 1960).

²⁷⁹ After the war, Butler, Fox, and Porter all attempted to take credit for the idea. See David Porter, “The Opening of the Lower Mississippi,” in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, Vol. 2, pp. 23-24. Gideon Welles, “Admiral Farragut and New Orleans. With an Account of the Origin and Command of the First Three Naval Expeditions of the War. First paper,” *The Galaxy*, vol. 12 (November-December 1871), pp. 669-683, and “The Second paper,” vol. 12 (November-December), pp. 817-32. See also, Anderson, *By Sea and by River*, pp. 116-117. Anderson credits Fox with being the driving force behind the expedition. While Fox’s efforts were certainly present and consistent with both his personality and his other Machiavellian attempts to secure glory for the Navy Department, it seems unlikely that the effort would have ever been approved without Porter’s innovative use of mortar boats.

relatively obscure, naval officer named David Glasgow Farragut to command the naval squadron tasked with making the brazen run on the South's largest city.²⁸⁰

With plans for the seizure of New Orleans now underway, the newly installed General-in-Chief turned his attention back to the situation in the west. McClellan's initial instructions for Buell to move on Eastern Tennessee were met with resistance. The two generals then engaged in a long, and drawn out, series of correspondence that appeared to strain the personal relations between the two former friends. On November 25, McClellan, frustrated with Buell's inaction, and no doubt tired of debating the merits of a move on Eastern Tennessee, took it upon himself to remind Buell of his desires: "I am still convinced that political and strategic considerations render a prompt movements in force on Eastern Tennessee imperative, the object to be gained is to cut the communication between the Mississippi Valley and Eastern Virginia; to protect our

²⁸⁰ Farragut was officially assigned to command the West Gulf Blockading Squadron on 9 Jan 1862. See ORN, Ser. I, 18, p. 5. For Farragut's orders to take New Orleans, see Welles to Farragut, 20 Jan 1862. ORN, Ser I, 18, pp. 7-8. It may be of interest for the reader to briefly contrast the clear and crisp set of instructions that Welles provided Farragut with the lack of direction that emanated from the War Department during the same period. Welles wrote "when these formidable mortars arrive, and you are completely ready, you will collect such vessels as can be spared from the blockade and proceed up the Mississippi River and reduce the defenses which guard the approaches to New Orleans, when you will appear off that city and take possession of it under the guns of your squadron, and hoist the American flag thereon keeping possession until troops can be sent to you. If the Mississippi expedition from Cairo shall not have descended the river, you will take advantage of the panic to push a strong force up the river to take all their defenses in the rear. You will also reduce the fortifications, which defend Mobile Bay and turn them over to the army to hold. As you have expressed yourself satisfied with the force given to you, and as many more powerful vessels will be added before you can commence operations, the Department and the country will require of you success." Having provided his commander with both the resources and a clear grasp of his intent, the Secretary focused his commander on the absolute importance of the strategic prize, and provided additional guidance on the administration of city after hostilities ceased. "There are other operations of minor importance which will commend themselves to your judgment and skill, but which must not be allowed to interfere with the great object in view, the certain capture of the city of New Orleans. Destroy the armed barriers which these deluded people have raised up against the power of the United States Government, and shoot down those who war against the Union, but cultivate with cordiality the first returning reason which is sure to follow your success."

Union friends in Tennessee, and re-established the Government of the Union in the eastern portion of that State.”²⁸¹

Hearing nothing back from his subordinate, McClellan promptly fired off another inquiry on the November 27 asking Buell why he was concentrating at Louisville in lieu of proceeding toward eastern Tennessee in accordance with McClellan’s previous instructions: “What is the reason for concentration of troops at Louisville? I urge movement at once on Eastern Tennessee, unless it is impossible. No letter from you for several days. Reply. I still trust to your judgment, though urging my own views.”²⁸² This time Buell responded immediately with a detailed plan of campaign that also attempted to justify his reasons for concentrating at Louisville.²⁸³ While the two generals argued back and forth about the proper course of action and the problems associated with a move on eastern Tennessee, news was equally troubling from Halleck’s department.

On December 6, McClellan received a bleak assessment of the readiness of the Department of Missouri. Halleck went through great pains to describe the fraud, corruption, and disorganized nature of the command he had inherited from Fremont. Halleck pleaded for more troops, and for more time: “I will restore order and rout the enemy if you will give me time and assistance. We are not prepared for any important expedition out of the State; it would imperil the safety of Missouri. Wait till we are ready.

²⁸¹ McClellan to Buell, 25 Nov 1861. OR, Ser. I, 7, p. 447. McClellan added, “Of course Louisville must be defended, but I think you will be able to do that while you move into Eastern Tennessee. If there are causes which render this course impossible, we must submit to the necessity; but I still feel sure that a movement on Knoxville is absolutely necessary, if it is possible to effect it”

²⁸² McClellan to Buell, 27 Nov. 1861. OR, Ser. I, 7, p. 450.

²⁸³ Buell to McClellan, 27 Nov. 1861. Ibid., p. 450

The “On to Richmond” policy here will produce another Bull Run disaster. You may rely on this.”²⁸⁴

McClellan was struggling to get his arms around the complex duties and vast responsibilities of his new and greatly expanded assignment. While the young general clearly harbored sound strategic ideas and designs, getting them implemented or executed was another matter all together. McClellan gave prompt orders and direction to both Buell and Halleck, but his propensity to caveat every instruction with wide latitude, and his lack of force with his new found subordinates, that were essentially his peers, seemed to prevent prompt and coordinated action. Often times in war, even the simplest of things can be difficult to achieve. Clausewitz defined the phenomena as friction. In the late autumn of 1861, McClellan was gaining both, a newfound respect for the duties of General-in-Chief and a first hand appreciation of what would eventually come to be called “Clausewitzian friction.”

In late December, McClellan fell ill with a severe case of typhoid fever. His illness could not have come at a worse time. Lincoln and the administration were already operating under the heavy strain of the Trent Affair. Additionally, with the passing of the fall campaigning season, the lack of military action to evict the rebels from Northern Virginia generated mounting political pressure that produced tangible results. On December 3, Congress, clearly dissatisfied with the administration’s leadership, established the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. With Congress now fully

²⁸⁴ Halleck to McClellan, 6 Dec. 1861. Ibid., pp. 408-410.

exercising its oversight responsibilities, the planning and conduct of the war would come under increased public and political scrutiny.²⁸⁵

With McClellan sick in quarters, Lincoln held a cabinet meeting on December 31 to discuss the situation. There was great concern in the cabinet about who was administering to the needs of the army during McClellan's illness. Several members encouraged the President to convene a special war council with other senior military officers to discuss the situation. Attorney General, Edward Bates, urged the President to personally intervene in the situation by assuming a more active role in the direction of military affairs.²⁸⁶ It was no secret in Washington that many officials felt that no man, even McClellan, was capable of fulfilling the colossal duties of General-in-Chief while simultaneously directing the Union's principle field army. Lincoln himself had been weary of overburdening the young general, but was seduced by McClellan's assurance that he could "do it all."²⁸⁷

Lincoln was clearly under great strain and increasingly frustrated. As McClellan labored to make a full recovery, the President made the decision to personally intervene in the execution of military operations. At some point immediately following the New

²⁸⁵ For an outstanding description of McClellan's illness and the effect it had on the Union war effort during this crucial time, see Ethan Rafuse, "Typhoid and Tumult: Lincoln's Response to General McClellan's Bout with Typhoid Fever during the Winter of 1861-62." *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* Vol. 18, Issue 2. Cited hereafter as, "Typhoid and Tumult." Historians have long debated whether the committee's work was an example of proper congressional oversight or harmful political meddling. The committee's work and its impact on the strategic direction of the war will be examined in any future expansion of this project. See William Pierson, "The Committee on the Conduct of the Civil War." *The American Historical Review* 23, no. 3 (Apr., 1918), pp. 550-576 and Brian Holden Reid, "Historians and the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War," *Civil War History* 38 (Dec. 1992), pp. 319-41. See also Bruce Tapp, *Over Lincoln's Shoulder: The Committee on the Conduct of the War*. (Lawrence, Kansas, 1998).

²⁸⁶ Edward Bates, *The Diary of Edward Bates, 1859-1866*, ed. Howard K. Beale (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), p. 219.

²⁸⁷ T. Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*, p. 44. McClellan's famous phrase "I can do it all" has served a lightning rod for subsequent historians, including Williams, who use it as a reflection of the young general's arrogance. The origins and the authenticity of the phrase can be traced to a single diary entry made by John Hay, Lincoln's personal secretary.

Years Eve cabinet meeting, Lincoln fired off a telegram to Halleck inquiring about the operational details and state of cooperation between himself and Buell: “General McClellan is sick. Are General Buell and yourself in concert? When he moves on Bowling Green, what hinders it being re-enforced from Columbus. A simultaneous movement by you on Columbus might prevent it.”²⁸⁸

This seemingly innocent request for information led to a disturbing series of correspondences over the next two weeks that both exemplified and foreshadowed the muddling and confusion within the Union high command. While McClellan must bear some responsibility for failing to keep Lincoln adequately informed, the President’s end run around McClellan marked a major turning point in the conduct of the war. His decision to interpose himself between the Union’s two principle field commanders in the Western Theater and the General-in-Chief, undermined McClellan’s authority, violated the principle of unity of command, and seriously confused the strategic situation.

On New Years Day 1862, Lincoln queried both Halleck and Buell about their pending operations. The responses from the respective western commanders seemed to confirm Lincoln’s suspicions and exasperated his deepest fears regarding McClellan’s inability to organize the Army of the Potomac while simultaneously overseeing the whole of the Union war effort. Buell replied: “There is no arrangement between General Halleck and myself. I have been informed by General McClellan that he would make suitable disposition for concerted action.” He also expressed his reservations about the safety of Kentucky if he was forced to move on Eastern Tennessee, “There is nothing to prevent Bowling Green being re-enforced from Columbus if a military force is not brought to

²⁸⁸ Lincoln to Halleck, 31 Dec. 1861. OR, Ser. I, 7, p. 524.

bear on the latter place.” Halleck’s response was equally troubling: “I have never received a word from General Buell. I am not ready to co-operate with him. Hope to do so in few weeks. Have written fully on this subject to Major-General McClellan. Too much haste will ruin everything.”²⁸⁹

On January 3, McClellan, clearly attempting to foster cross department coordination in pursuit of strategic objectives, told Halleck: “It is of the greatest importance that the rebel troops in Western Kentucky be prevented from moving to the support of the force in front of General Buell. To accomplish this an expedition should be sent up the Cumberland River, to act in concert with General Buell’s command,”²⁹⁰ Lincoln, however, was far from satisfied. On the January 4, he asked Buell: “Have arms gone forward for East Tennessee? Please tell me the progress and condition of the movement in that direction. Answer”²⁹¹

Buell responded to the President’s request by tactfully describing the military realities that prevented him from making an instantaneous movement on Eastern Tennessee. Unsure of who was now actually directing the Union war effort in Washington, he also took the opportunity to express his reservations about the Union’s strategic priorities in the west directly to the President: “While my preparations have had this movement constantly in view I will confess to your Excellency that I have been bound to it more by my sympathy for the people of East Tennessee and the anxiety with which you and the General-in-Chief have desired it than by my opinion of its wisdom as an unconditional measure.” Buell further lamented, “As earnestly as I wish to accomplish it, my judgment has from the first been decidedly against it, if it should render at all

²⁸⁹ Buell to Lincoln and Halleck to Lincoln, 1 Jan. 1862. OR, Ser. I, 7, p. 526.

²⁹⁰ McClellan to Halleck, 3 Jan. 1862. Ibid., pp. 527–28.

²⁹¹ Lincoln to Buell, 4 Jan. 1862. OR, Ser. I, 7, p. 530.

doubtful the success of a movement against the great power of the rebellion in the West, which is mainly arrayed on the line from Columbus to Bowling Green, and can speedily be concentrated at any point of that line which is attacked singly.²⁹²

Buell's candor seems to have surprised Lincoln, who at some point shortly thereafter must have either seen McClellan personally or forwarded the contents of Buell's telegram to the General-in-Chief. McClellan wrote to his friend on the following day stating, "I was extremely sorry to learn from your telegram to the President that you had from the beginning attached little or no importance to a movement in East Tennessee. I had not so understood your views, and it develops a radical difference between your views and my own, which I deeply regret."²⁹³ There was a hint of greatness in McClellan's tactful, but nonetheless, stinging admonishment. Buell took nearly a week to reply. Though he still clung to the belief that a move on Nashville was more important, and would clear eastern Tennessee by default, he now promised to "devote myself to it (the move on East Tennessee), contenting myself, as far as Bowling Green is concerned, with holding it in check and concealing my design as long as possible."²⁹⁴

After nearly two months of pushing and prodding Buell to embrace his strategic concept and execute his orders, it finally looked as if McClellan had achieved a breakthrough. The same could not be said for Halleck. On January 6, he complained bitterly to Buell: "Under these circumstances it would be madness for me to attempt any serious operation against Camp Beauregard or Columbus. Probably in the course of a few weeks I will be able to send additional troops to Cairo and Paducah to co-operate with

²⁹² Buell to Lincoln, 5 Jan. 1862. *Ibid.*, 531.

²⁹³ McClellan to Buell, 6 Jan. 1862. *OR*, Ser. I, 7, p. 531.

²⁹⁴ Buell to McClellan, 13 Jan. 1862. *Ibid.*, p. 548-49.

you, but at present it is impossible.”²⁹⁵ Like Buell, Halleck, also saw Lincoln’s personal intervention as an opportunity to express his views and espouse his knowledge of military theory directly to the Commander-in-Chief.

Replying to Lincoln’s initial inquiry, Halleck reiterated his displeasure with the operational situation, and complained directly to the President: “I know nothing of General Buell's intended operations, never having received any information in regard to the general plan of campaign.” He further warned the President that, “If it be intended that his column shall move on Bowling Green while another moves from Cairo or Paducah on Columbus or Camp Beauregard, it will be a repetition of the same strategies error which produced the disaster of central position will fail, as it always has failed, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. It is condemned by every military authority I have ever read.”²⁹⁶

Halleck failed, however, to present an alternate course of action to the President or otherwise express his views regarding what the proper plan should be. He also neglected to mention his early pleas for time and patience. It would be hard to believe that McClellan had not discussed his concept of grand strategy with Halleck at their face-to-face meeting in November. It would be even harder to believe that a man of Halleck’s standing and ambition would have been content to sit back and play a secondary or supporting role in the larger Union war effort.²⁹⁷

There was a fundamental, and rather simple, disagreement that prevented any effective cooperation between McClellan and Halleck. While McClellan clearly believed

²⁹⁵ Halleck to Buell, 6 Jan. 1862. *Ibid.*, p. 533.

²⁹⁶ Halleck to Lincoln, 6 Jan. 1862. OR, Ser. I, 7, p. 533.

²⁹⁷ Halleck had been Winfield Scott’s first choice to supersede him as General-in-Chief. McClellan’s presence in Washington and his political maneuverings, however, had initially won the day. See, McClellan to Mrs. McClellan, 19 Oct 1861. *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, p. 109.

the war would be won in the east, Halleck held the opposite view. McClellan viewed Buell's movement into eastern Tennessee as a crucial part of his larger strategic designs in Virginia. The General-in-Chief wanted Buell to isolate Confederate forces in Virginia by seizing the strategically crucial railhead at Knoxville: "My own general plans for the prosecution of the war make the speedy occupation of East Tennessee and its lines of railway matters of absolute necessity. Bowling Green and Nashville are in that connection of very secondary importance at the present moment."²⁹⁸

In addition to bolstering the supposed pro Union population of eastern Tennessee, the move would prevent Southern reinforcements from being rushed into Virginia during the prosecution of McClellan's climatic and decisive battle of annihilation somewhere on the outskirts of Richmond in the spring of 1862. He clearly articulated this view, both in his August memorandum to the President and in his subsequent correspondence to Buell: "My own advance cannot, according to my present views, be made until your troops are solidly established in the eastern portion of Tennessee. If that is not possible, a complete and prejudicial change in my own plans at once becomes necessary."²⁹⁹

Halleck, however, was of the opposite opinion. He saw Buell's operations as a crucial part of his own strategic designs to win the war in the west. While McClellan failed to anticipate the opportunity for Buell's forces to cooperate in concert with Halleck's until Lincoln's personal intervention, this was not necessarily due to any short sightedness on McClellan's part. It reflected two things. First, Halleck needed time to organize and prepare his disheveled department: "Halleck, from his own account, will not soon be in a condition to support properly a movement up the Cumberland. Why not make the

²⁹⁸ McClellan to Buell, 6 Jan. 1862. OR, Ser. I, 7, p. 531.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

movement independently of and without waiting for that?”³⁰⁰ Second, in McClellan’s mind, operations in the west had become secondary in importance to those in Virginia. Buell’s army would, therefore, be used to support his drive on Richmond. This was a proposition that certainly did not sit well with Halleck.

Correctly perceiving the opportunity to integrate the efforts of both Buell and Halleck, but not privy to McClellan’s early correspondence with the latter, the President now took matters into his own hands. On January 7, he wrote to Buell: “Please name as early a day as you safely can on or before which you can be ready to move southward in concert with Major-General Halleck. Delay is ruining us, and it is indispensable for me to have something definite. I send a like dispatch to Major-General Halleck.”³⁰¹ The President’s effort to personally energize the Union war effort in the west, however, ultimately culminated in frustration.

While Lincoln was busy attempting to coordinate operational details in the west, by January 7, McClellan was feeling well enough to issue Burnside preparatory orders for his pending expeditionary campaign in North Carolina. Though McClellan had offered precious little detail to the President, or the administration, regarding the future employment of the Army of the Potomac, he obviously planned to use Burnside’s expeditionary force to isolate the rebel capital from the south.

The temper of the people, the rebel force at hand, &c., will go far toward determining the question as to how far west the railroad can be safely occupied and held. Should circumstances render it advisable to seize and hold Raleigh, the main north and south line of railroad passing through Goldsborough should be so effectually destroyed for considerable distances north and south of that point as to render it impossible for the rebels to use it to your disadvantage. A great point would be gained in any event by the effectual destruction of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad.³⁰²

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Lincoln to Buell, 7 Jan. 1862. OR, Ser. I, 7, p. 535.

³⁰² McClellan to Burnside, 7 Jan. 1862. *Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, pp. 148-49.

This was vintage McClellan. Innovative and sound operational ideas, suggested, not forcefully directed. His orders to Burnside were sprinkled with just enough ambiguity to leave his subordinate confused and bewildered.³⁰³ McClellan's apparent propensity to decentralize operational decision making to the judgment of his subordinate commanders seemed to reflect an astute understanding of the nature of war. In some ways it resembled the command philosophy that would enable Lee to achieve some of his most spectacular battlefield successes. But there were important differences. There were no Jackson's, Stuart's, or Longstreet's leading Union forces in the spring of 1862. While the Union would eventually produce men like Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, and Thomas, their respective stars were then only beginning to ascend. At times McClellan's thinking and orders resembled a complex dialectic essay, carefully describing all sides of a military situation, from the sublime all the way down to trivial matters of insignificant detail. Though thoughtful, his orders were frequently plagued with indecision. On far too many occasions, this enabled his subordinates to rationalize inaction.

On January 10, Lincoln received a telegram from Halleck informing him that there was little chance of Halleck being able to support Buell's long anticipated move on eastern Tennessee. This news apparently exasperated the President to the point of depression. He sought comfort in the office of the Quarter Master General, Montgomery Meigs. According to Meigs, Lincoln entered his office in "great distress," and asked,

³⁰³ Ibid. McClellan concluded his bold operational directive with a rather lukewarm set of amplifying instructions: "I would advise great caution in moving so far into the interior as upon Raleigh. Having accomplished the objects mentioned the next point of interest would probably be Wilmington, the reduction of which may require that additional means shall be afforded you. I would urge great caution in regard to proclamation. In no case would I go beyond a moderate joint proclamation with the naval commander, which should say as little as possible about politics or the negro. Merely state that the true issue for which we are fighting is the preservation of the Union and upholding the laws of the General Government, and stating that all who conduct themselves properly will as far as possible be protected in their persons and property."

“General what shall I do? The people are impatient; Chase has no money and he tells me he can raise no more; the General of the Army has typhoid fever. The bottom is out of the tub. What shall I do?” The young Quarter Master General persuaded Lincoln to call a council of war, citing McClellan’s own, previously stated concerns that the Confederates on the outskirts of Washington “may attack on any day.”³⁰⁴

Lincoln seems to have felt awkward arranging this covert meeting without the General-in-Chief, but Meigs’s recommendation mirrored the advice his own cabinet had given him just ten days hence at their New Years Eve meeting. On the evening of January 10, Lincoln summoned Seward, Chase, the Assistant Secretary of War, Thomas Scott, and two of McClellan’s own subordinates, Irvin McDowell and William B. Franklin, to the White House.³⁰⁵

After discussing the country’s woes, Lincoln asked the two generals to develop a plan for employing the Army of the Potomac in offensive operations. The council reconvened on the January 11. McDowell proposed another direct move on Manassas, but the council was unable to reach a consensus on the best course of action. Lincoln ordered the group to reconvene the following day, and suggested that Meigs be brought into the proceedings. On January 12, however, McClellan caught wind of the secret deliberations and rushed to confront the President at the White House. Lincoln confirmed the occurrence of the previous meetings, and invited the general to attend the next session. He then promptly postponed that evenings scheduled session, and sent word to the

³⁰⁴ Montgomery C. Meigs, "General M. C. Meigs on the Conduct of the Civil War," *American Historical Review* 26 (Jan. 1921), p. 292.

³⁰⁵ Rafuse, “Typhoid and Tumult,” pp. 6-7.

respective council members that the General-in-Chief would be in attendance when the group reconvened on the following day.³⁰⁶

By all accounts the meeting on January 13 was an icy and uncomfortable session. According to Meigs, "The President opened the proceedings by making a statement of the cause of him calling the Council. Mr. Chase and Mr. Blair, if memory is accurate, both spoke. All looked to McClellan, who sat still with his head hanging down, and mute. The situation grew awkward."³⁰⁷ McDowell was asked to present his plans. He did so apologetically, realizing that he was now being used to publicly undermine his superior's lack of action in his very presence.³⁰⁸

McClellan refused to acknowledge the gesture. The General-in-Chief correctly viewed his subordinate's efforts as a severe breach of loyalty and military protocol, but after McClellan's own covert undermining of Scott, the moral superiority of his newfound position seemed somewhat apropos. McClellan was then pressed by Chase and Blair to disclose his own plans for the Army of the Potomac. The general flatly refused unless ordered to do so by the President. He cited operational security, "If I tell him my plans they will be in the New York Herald tomorrow morning." McClellan did, however, assure all present that Buell would soon be moving on East Tennessee. The promise of Buell's pending action seemed to satisfy Lincoln, who promptly adjourned the tense meeting.³⁰⁹

While McClellan may have been successful in standing his ground, he clearly emerged from the events of late December and early January severely weakened, both

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Meigs, "General M. C. Meigs on the Conduct of the Civil War," p. 292.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 293.

literally and figuratively. Physically, he eventually recovered from his illness, but his credibility and reputation as General-in-Chief was not so fortunate. The latter was in severe decline. He had now made new and powerful enemies including the likes of Chase, Blair, and Meigs. Later that night as he undoubtedly contemplated his first two months as the General-in-Chief, he reiterated to Buell both the weight on his shoulders, and the absolute necessity for him to move promptly.

You have no idea of the pressure brought to bear here upon the Government for a forward movement, it is so strong that it seems absolutely necessary to make the advance on Eastern Tennessee at once. I incline to this as a first step for many reasons. Your possession of the railroad there will surely prevent the main army in my front from being re-enforced and may force Johnston to detach. Its political effect will be very great. Halleck is not yet in condition to afford you the support you need when you undertake the movement on Bowling Green.³¹⁰

McClellan's growing frustration with the administration was tempered by the unexpected news on January 13 that Lincoln had finally decided to replace the embattled Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, with Edwin M. Stanton. McClellan initially greeted the move with great relief, commenting to a close personal friend on January 18 that, "Stanton's appointment was a most unexpected piece of good fortune, & I hope it will produce a good effect in the North."³¹¹ McClellan's initial optimism, however, would prove short lived. Though Cameron was widely acknowledged as inefficient, he was also largely uninvolved in either the strategic direction of the war or the operational details of the army's employment. Stanton, however, held a dramatically different view of both the post, and his role in the Union war effort.

Stanton's appointment had three major effects on the strategic conduct of the war. First, it hampered inter-service cooperation between the War Department and the Navy.

³¹⁰ McClellan to Buell, 13 Jan. 1862. OR, Ser. I, 7, p. 547.

³¹¹ McClellan to Barlow, 18 Jan. 1862. *Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, p. 154.

Stanton clearly viewed Welles's department, and the Navy's role in the war, as wholly subordinate to his and the Army's. Welles observed after the war that Stanton: "assumed that the Navy was secondary and subject to the control and direction of the military branch of the Government." Welles, however, insisted otherwise, and refused to yield, "If a movement originated in Washington, I claimed, if the Navy was to participate, I must be cognizant of it; if an expedition was undertaken by any general who needed the aid of the Navy, the admiral or senior naval officer on the station must be consulted and cooperation asked."³¹²

Second, the new Secretary moved quickly to end the widespread corruption and lack of fiduciary responsibility associated with the War Department's dysfunctional system of awarding government contracts. While this was certainly needed, his vigorous action had a significant and unintended consequence that severely hampered Union strategic success. On January 29, he ordered that all foreign purchasing of small arms be terminated.³¹³ This decision was one of the least noted and most significant strategic blunders of the entire war. It allowed Southern purchasing agents, then desperately trying to meet the needs of the Confederacy's wartime requirements, almost free reign of the European arms market. Union agents had, heretofore, been engaged in a concerted attempt to drive up market prices by purchasing all matters of arms, even those of poor quality. While this was politically unpopular with northeastern arms manufacturers, and

³¹² Welles. *The Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson*, Vol. I, p. 69.

³¹³ See Stanton's order, 29 Jan. 1862. OR, Ser. III, 1, pp. 869-870.

there were certainly cases of financial excesses, what appeared as wasteful government spending was, in effect, an astute use of the economic arm of national power.³¹⁴

The third and most immediate impact of Stanton's appointment was its effect on the relations between the General-in-Chief and the administration. Stanton was a war Democrat, who had gained a reputation as an able and diligent administrator while serving as Buchanan's Attorney General. McClellan initially believed that his appointment would serve as a much needed counterbalance to those voices in the administration that were pressing for prompt military action. Many of these same voices were also quietly advocating emancipation, a dramatic escalation of the Union's initial wartime objectives that McClellan vociferously opposed. If the General-in-Chief thought he was gaining a much-needed ally, however, he was quickly disappointed.³¹⁵

Though Stanton was a Democrat, he was also a Seward protégé who shared the radical Republican's impatience with McClellan and the Army of the Potomac. Rather than serving as a voice of reason or a buffer between an increasingly dissatisfied administration and McClellan, Stanton quickly became an instrument for the "On to Richmond" crowd that had been temporarily silenced in the aftermath of Bull Run. On January 13, Don Piatt, a close personal friend, asked the newly appointed secretary what his plans were for the War Department. Stanton replied, "I intend to accomplish three things. I will make Abe Lincoln President of the United States. I will force this man

³¹⁴ This thesis is admirably presented in Meneely's outstanding work, *The War Department, 1861; a Study in Mobilization and Administration*, pp. 280-308. This economic aspect of Union military strategy will be further developed in any potential expansion of the current study.

³¹⁵ For Stanton's background and initial dealings within Lincoln's cabinet see Welles, *The Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson*, Vol. I, pp. 54-61. For McClellan's views of emancipation and the political issue of slavery as it related to military affairs see, Harsh, "McClellan and the Forgotten Alternative," pp. 139-142.

McClellan to fight or throw up; and last but not least, I will pick Lorenzo Thomas up with a pair of tongs and drop him from the nearest window.”³¹⁶

By the end of January, Lincoln’s growing frustration manifested itself into a series of war orders that emanated directly from the President. The first, issued on January 27, called for a general movement by all of the Union’s land and naval forces: “Ordered that the 22nd day of February 1862, be the day for a general movement of the Land and Naval forces of the United States against the insurgent forces.”³¹⁷ Lincoln followed four days later with a second order directed squarely at the Army of the Potomac: “Ordered that all the disposable force of the Army of the Potomac, after providing safely for the defense of Washington, be formed into an expedition, for the immediate object of seizing and occupying a point upon the Rail Road South Westward of what is known of Manassas Junction, all details to be in the discretion of the general-in-chief, and the expedition to move before, or on, the 22nd day of February next.”³¹⁸

Lincoln’s original order on January 27 was, in large measure, a frantic delusion. It was not even addressed to the leaders of the respective military departments, but referred to such nebulous military entities as “The Army near Munfordsville,” “The Army at & about, Fortress Monroe,” and “The Army and Flotilla at Cairo.” While it demanded “respective commanders, obey existing orders, for the time, and be ready to obey additional orders when duly given,” and further warned that “the Heads of Departments, and especially the Secretaries of War and of the Navy, with all their subordinates; and the

³¹⁶ Fletcher Pratt, *Stanton, Lincoln's Secretary of War*. (New York: Norton, 1953), p. 133. Lorenzo Thomas was the Army’s Adjutant General. Stanton also wrote shortly after assuming his post that his principle objective was to make the army "fight or run away.... the champagne and oysters on the Potomac must be stopped." Quoted in Rafuse, “Typhoid and Tumult,” p. 14.

³¹⁷ General War Order No. 1, 27 Jan. 1862. *Collected Works of Lincoln*, V, pp. 111-12.

³¹⁸ Special War Order No. 1, 31 Jan 1862. *Collected Works of Lincoln*, V, p. 115.

General-in-Chief, with all other commanders and subordinates, of Land and Naval forces, will severally be held to their strict and full responsibilities, for the prompt execution of this order,” it failed to provide specifics.³¹⁹

What were the strategic objectives for the respective Union forces? The President had ordered Union forces to be prepared to move, but failed to mention where. There was no intent or overarching strategic concept behind the chief executive’s order, just a vague plea to move forward in the dead of winter.

From McClellan’s perspective, these orders must have bordered on the absurd. It was the General-in-Chief’s responsibility to develop and implement military strategy. Yet here was the President dictating the timing of a strategic offensive, seemingly without any thought of logistics or a realistic appreciation of time and space. Lincoln’s second order, establishing a specific tactical objective for the Army of the Potomac, was even more disturbing. Upon receiving it, McClellan went directly to see the President in an effort to plead his case. McClellan argued against a direct move on Manassas, and proposed a bold amphibious envelopment, by way of the York River, aimed squarely at the Confederate capital. Rather than fighting an indecisive battle for a railroad crossing on the outskirts of Washington, McClellan wanted to strike a blow at the very heart of the rebellion. The President responded in kind by asking McClellan to submit his views in writing.³²⁰

On February 3, McClellan wrote a lengthy letter to Stanton that attempted to place the President’s war orders within the context of recent events. McClellan’s contrite

³¹⁹ General War Order No. 1, 27 Jan 1862. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-12.

³²⁰ T. Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*, p. 63. George Brinton McClellan and William Cowper Prime, *McClellan's Own Story: The War for the Union, the Soldiers Who Fought it, the Civilians Who Directed it and His Relations to it and to them.* (New York: C. L. Webster, 1887), pp. 228-229. Cited hereafter as, *McClellan's Own Story*.

acceptance of culpability also appeared to be a subtle attempt to gain Stanton's support in the escalating feud between the nation's senior military officer and the Commander-in-Chief.³²¹ What McClellan did not know at the time, however, was that the idea behind the war orders originated, in part, from Stanton himself. The Navy had long been frustrated with what it perceived as lack of cooperation from McClellan in prosecuting the New Orleans expedition and subduing the Confederate batteries posted along the Potomac. These batteries hampered commercial shipping attempting to gain access to Washington, and were widely viewed as a great embarrassment to the nation. Unlike McClellan, however, Welles and Fox were very much attuned to the public outcry, and determined to do something about it.

In early January, both Welles and Stanton "united in requesting President Lincoln to issue his celebrated order of the 27th of January for a forward movement." According to Welles, "such an order had been suggested, before Mr. Stanton's appointment, by the Navy Department, which had become wearied with the delays and tardy action of the General-in-Chief."³²² Analysis of McClellan's thought process or reasoning during this

³²¹ McClellan to Stanton, Feb 3, 1862. OR, Ser. I, 5, pp. 42-45. The majority of McClellan's letter is contained here for clarity and context "When I was placed in command of the Armies of the United States I immediately turned my attention to the whole field of operations, regarding the Army of the Potomac as only one, while the most important, of the masses under my command. I confess that I did not then appreciate the total absence of a general plan, which had before existed, nor did I know that utter disorganization and want of preparation pervaded the Western armies. I took it for granted that they were nearly, if not quite, in condition to move towards the fulfillment of my plans. I acknowledge that I made a great mistake. I sent at once, with the approval of the Executive, officers I considered competent to command in Kentucky and Missouri. Their instructions looked to prompt movements. I soon found that the labor of creation and organization had to be performed there; transportation, arms, clothing, artillery, discipline, all were wanting. These things required time to procure them. The generals in command have done their work most creditably, but we are still delayed. I had hoped that a general advance could be made during the good weather of December. I was mistaken. My wish was to gain possession of the Eastern Tennessee Railroad as a preliminary movement, then to follow it up immediately by an attack on Nashville and Richmond, as nearly at the same time as possible. I have ever regarded our true policy as being that of fully preparing ourselves, and then seeking for the most decisive results. I do not wish to waste life in useless battles, but prefer to strike at the heart"

³²² Welles, *The Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson*, Vol. I, p. 61.

crucial moment in the conduct of the war is strangely absent in most historical accounts. Political historians viewing the conflict from Lincoln's perspective would be hard pressed to comprehend the general's intransigence.

Why was McClellan so hesitant or unwilling to clear the Confederate batteries on the Potomac or otherwise evict the rebels from Northern Virginia? There was likely much more at work than political naivety or an unwillingness to fight. The answer lies in the very high probability that McClellan wanted the Confederates on the Potomac in the first place. For his operational plan to be decisive, McClellan needed to catch the bulk of the Confederate forces by surprise. If he could rapidly embark and land his army behind the majority of the Southern forces and interpose himself between the rebel army and Richmond, he would have fallen on their lines of communication and supply, and likely achieved a stunning victory.³²³ The opportunity, however, for any such move, though initially present, never fully materialized. This was primarily due to the infighting within the Union high command itself. While McClellan pushed in one direction, Welles and Stanton pushed back harder in the other.

McClellan used the remainder of his February 3 letter to Stanton to outline his operational concept for the employment of the Army of the Potomac on the peninsula. The President, however, forwarded the following list of questions to McClellan even before Stanton had a chance to forward the details of the General-in-Chief's original plan to Lincoln.

³²³ The reader will immediately realize the similarity between McClellan's operational designs and that of Scott's landing at Vera Cruz in 1847. The reader interested in the potential for decisive amphibious maneuver may also wish to study Mac Arthur's famous landing at Inchon in November of 1950.

- 1st. Does not your plan involve a greatly larger expenditure of *time*, and *money* than mine?
- 2nd. Wherein is a victory *more certain* by your plan than mine?
- 3rd. Wherein is a victory *more valuable* by your plan than mine?
- 4th. In fact, would it not be *less* valuable, in this, that it would break no great line of the enemies communications, while mine would?
- 5th. In case of disaster, would not a safe retreat be more difficult by your plan than by mine?³²⁴

At this point matters went from bad to worse, as both men devoted precious time and energy working to persuade each other as to the proper course of action. While McClellan eventually prevailed, he never gained the full trust and confidence of the President. Additionally, while the two men bickered, the actual details of execution, as well as the direction of the larger Union war effort undoubtedly suffered. At the heart of the debate was the security of Washington. Ironically, the seed that McClellan had planted in Lincoln's mind to help unseat Scott had grown to fruition. It now overshadowed his own operational designs for the capture of Richmond. Yes, McClellan had done marvelous work with the spade. He had significantly increased the strength of the defensive fortifications in and around the nation's capital, but the irrational and

³²⁴ Lincoln to McClellan, 3 Feb 1862. *Collected Works of Lincoln*, Vol. V, p. 118. The President's letter began by stating "You and I have distinct, and different plans for a movement of the Army of the Potomac--yours to be down the Chesapeake, up the Rappahannock to Urbana, and across land to the terminus of the Railroad on the York River---, mine to move directly to a point on the Railroad South West of Manassas. If you will give me satisfactory answers to the following questions, I shall gladly yield my plan to yours." The following memorandum also accompanied the President's letter to General McClellan, dated February 3, 1862. Lincoln was clearly immersed in the tactical details of the pending campaign in Virginia. 1. Suppose the enemy should attack us in force before we reach the Ocoquan, what? In view of the possibility of this, might it not be safest to have our entire force to move together from above the Ocoquan. 2. Suppose the enemy, in force, shall dispute the crossing of the Ocoquan, what? In view of this, might it not be safest for us to cross the Ocoquan at Colchester rather than at the village of Ocoquan? This would cost the enemy two miles more of travel to meet us, but would, on the contrary, leave us two miles further from our ultimate destination. 3. Suppose we reach Maple valley without an attack, will we not be attacked there, in force, by the enemy marching by the several roads from Manassas? and if so, what?

enduring fear for the safety of Washington continued to hang over Union strategic and operational decision making until the end of the war.³²⁵

On March 8, Lincoln ordered “that no change of the base of operations of the Army of the Potomac shall be made without leaving in, and about Washington, such a force as, in the opinion of the General-in-chief, and the commanders of all the Army corps, shall leave said City entirely secure.” The President put further restrictions on McClellan’s pending movements stating that “not more than two Army corps, (about fifty thousand troops) of said Army of the Potomac, shall be moved *en route* for a new base of operations until the navigation of the Potomac, from Washington to the Chesapeake Bay shall be freed from enemies batteries and other obstructions, or, until the President shall hereafter give express permission.”³²⁶

The President also took the unprecedented step of reorganizing the Army of The Potomac and appointing its newly created corps commanders.³²⁷ Just three days later, as McClellan prepared to embark on his amphibious end run, aimed at destroying the Confederate army defending Richmond and seizing the Southern capital, Lincoln officially relieved McClellan of his duties as General-in-Chief: “Major General McClellan having personally taken the field at the head of the Army of the Potomac, until otherwise ordered, he is relieved from the command of the other Military departments, he retaining command of the Department of the Potomac.”³²⁸ What had started out as perhaps an innocent and well-intentioned effort to assist his ailing General-in-Chief on

³²⁵ As late as the fall of 1864, Grant had to detach troops from the siege of Petersburg to defend Washington from the feeble threat of an attack by Confederate forces under the command of Jubal Early operating in the Shenandoah Valley.

³²⁶ General War Order No. 3, 8 March 1862. *Collected Works of Lincoln*, Vol. V, p. 151.

³²⁷ General War Order No. 2, 8 March 1862. *Ibid.*, pp. 149-50.

³²⁸ General War Order No. 3, 11 March 1862. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

January 1, 1862 had now evolved into a full-blown attempt to personally direct the Union war effort. Lincoln nominated no general officer to assume the vacated post. The results were predictable.

The details and circumstances surrounding the planning and conduct of the Peninsula Campaign are fairly well known, and, as such, will only be briefly summarized here. A dispute quickly arose regarding the actual number of troops McClellan had left behind to make Washington “entirely secure.”³²⁹ Playing on Lincoln’s fears about the safety of Washington, Lee boldly unleashed Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley in a desperate attempt to tie down the scattered Union forces of Banks, Shields, and Fremont. It worked. Jackson’s tactical defeat at Kernstown on March 23 initiated one of the greatest examples of operational bungling and missed strategic opportunities in the history of the republic.³³⁰

With Stanton and the President attempting to run the day-to-day activities of the War Department and coordinate the operational details of Union forces now on the move,

³²⁹ On April 2, Stanton submitted the records of McClellan's troop movements to General Ethan A. Hitchcock, who was then presiding over the newly created War Board. The board had been established in order to provide advisory duties in the War Department. See Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, "The War Board, the Basis of the United States First General Staff." *Military Affairs* 46, no. 1 (Feb., 1982), pp. 1-5. It seems highly probable that this board was inspired by the creation and functioning of the Navy's Blockade Board. Stanton directed that Hitchcock and the members of the Board determine whether the terms of Lincoln's order to keep Washington "entirely secure" had been satisfied by McClellan's dispositions. The board quickly reviewed the troop records, and reported back on the same day that the President's order had not been obeyed. See OR, Ser. I, 11, pt. III, pp. 57-62.

³³⁰ Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, pp. 153-201 does an excellent job of framing the events in Virginia within the context of the overall strategic direction of the war, but does not emphasize the immense strategic opportunity that was lost by Lincoln's decision to withhold McDowell's corps or otherwise reinforce McClellan's army in a timely manner. By contrast, Liddell Hart observed that the prospects of success on the Peninsula, "were nullified by the President Lincoln's reluctance to accept a calculated risk-in consequence of which he kept back McDowell's corps for the direct protection of Washington. This deprived McClellan not only of part of his strength but of the element of distraction essential to the success of his plan." See Hart, *Strategy*, pp.126-127. For an outstanding analysis of Jackson's Valley Campaign, see Robert G. Tanner, *Stonewall in the Valley: Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's Shenandoah Valley Campaign, Spring 1862.*(Mechanicsville, PA: Stackpole Books, 1996).

chaos reigned.³³¹ Banks was kept from reinforcing McClellan, a division was withdrawn from The Army of the Potomac and sent to oppose Jackson, and McDowell's entire corps, some 40,000 strong, was withheld from McClellan and prevented from falling on the unguarded northern approaches of Richmond. The fact that Jackson, with barely 17,000 effectives, was able to not only fix these sizable Union forces in place, but eventually ended up in Richmond and fell on McClellan's open right flank, while McDowell and the rest of the aforementioned Union forces loitered in Fredericksburg or otherwise passed the time scattered throughout the upper Shenandoah Valley was a travesty beyond comprehension.³³²

With the civilian authorities in Washington overwhelmed by the magnitude of actually conducting active operations, it is little wonder that the inter-service cooperation McClellan asked Stanton to procure for his pending move on Richmond, largely failed to materialize. Now operating in the reduced capacity of Commanding General of the Army of The Potomac, McClellan lacked the formal authority to coordinate directly with the Navy. On March 19, he sent a detailed letter to Stanton further explaining his operational intentions, and asking for help. He informed the Secretary that, “for the prompt success of this campaign it is absolutely necessary that the Navy should at once throw its whole

³³¹ Eventually three separate and independent commands were established from the hodgepodge of Union forces in and around the valley. McDowell's Department of the Rappahannock, Banks's Department of the Shenandoah, and the Mountain Department under Fremont, who had succeeded Rosecrans on March 29. These separate commands reported direct to Washington, and there was no single general on the scene to coordinate their respective operations.

³³² Both McClellan and McDowell protested Lincoln's reaction to Jackson's operations. Both men argued that it was a feint designed to prevent Union forces from concentrating on Richmond. Lincoln belatedly came to this same realization three weeks later. See Lincoln to Fremont, 15 June 1862. OR, Ser. I, 12, pt.3, p. 661. “I think Jackson's game—his assigned work—now is to magnify the accounts of his numbers and reports of his movements, and thus by constant alarms keep three or four times as many of our troops away from Richmond as his own force amounts to. Thus he helps his friends at Richmond three or four times as much as if he were there.” Unfortunately, Lincoln's understanding that he had been duped came three weeks too late. In any future expansion of this work the events and circumstances surrounding this crucial timeframe and its strategic effects will be further developed.

available force, its most powerful vessels, against Yorktown. There is the most important point—there the knot to be cut. An immediate decision upon the subject-matter of this, communication is highly desirable, and seems called for by the exigencies of the occasion.”³³³

As McClellan formulated his plan, two courses of action emerged. First, his army could land “by moving directly from Fort Monroe as a base, and trusting to the roads for our supplies, at the same time landing a strong corps as near Yorktown as possible, in order to turn the rebel lines of defense south of Yorktown.” He then planned to “reduce Yorktown and Gloucester by a siege, in all probability involving a delay of weeks, perhaps.” It is interesting to note that McClellan clearly anticipated and informed the administration of the strong possibility of a lengthy delay in front of Yorktown.³³⁴

McClellan’s second option was “to make a combined naval and land attack upon Yorktown the first object of the campaign. This leads to the most rapid and decisive results.” This was the general’s preferred course of action, but it was far more complex, and it would require greater levels of inter-service cooperation. McClellan told Stanton that the Navy “should at once concentrate upon the York River all their available and most powerful batteries.” McClellan believed that the Navy could reduce the stout fortifications at Yorktown in short order “Its reduction should not in that case require many hours.” He would then be in a position to launch a strong corps sized attack “up the York, under cover of the Navy, directly upon West Point.” McClellan would then “establish our new base of operations at a distance of some 25 miles from Richmond,

³³³ McClellan to Stanton, 19 March 1862. OR, Ser. I, 5, p. 57.

³³⁴ Ibid. When McClellan actually paused to conduct the siege, Lincoln is said to have remarked that McClellan had a case of “the slows.”

with every facility for developing and bringing into play the whole of our available force on either or both banks of the James.”³³⁵

The inter-service cooperation that McClellan asked Stanton to procure never fully materialized. Though McClellan took matters into his own hands and attempted to coordinate the details of his move up the peninsula with his naval counterpart, the newly installed commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, Flag Officer Goldsborough, confusion reigned in Washington.

As late as April 23, Fox seemed painfully unaware of McClellan’s operational intentions, or the crucial role the commander of The Army of the Potomac had asked the Navy to play in the campaign. The Assistant Secretary told Goldsborough: “It is perfectly understood that the Army were to dash up the peninsula without the navy, and in fact we were never informed of the movement. I found out about it accidentally and did my best to turn it to Norfolk knowing the scant force we had, and the benefit the rebels would derive from the Merrimac. But as it was determined to go on to the peninsula we threw all the force we could towards you, and so continue to do-because the cry will be (it has already commenced) for the Navy to pull them out of the slough. The Navy have done it several times during the war for our army friends, but the golden opportunity is now present to save the Army, and immortalize the Navy.”³³⁶

It would appear that either Stanton failed to secure the cooperation of the Navy or Fox failed to give it. The reality, however, is much more complex. Prior to McClellan’s campaign, Welles and Fox had consistently focused Goldsborough’s attention on Wilmington and operations in eastern North Carolina. Goldsborough, clearly saw the

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Fox to Goldsborough, 23 Apr 1862. *Fox Correspondence*, I, p. 262.

opportunity to retake Norfolk from the south by exploiting Burnside's recent seizure of Roanoke Island. The flag officer wanted to project expeditionary power northward along the regions inter coastal waterways and seize Norfolk from the undefended southern approaches.³³⁷

Once the scope of McClellan's operations on the peninsula became clear, Welles and Fox hesitated to support it.³³⁸ Whether this was done because Stanton failed to adequately articulate McClellan's request, or out of a more sinister desire to ensure the Navy Department maintained its "prestige" in the aftermath of the Army's expected victory in Richmond is an interesting historical question that deserves more exploration.³³⁹

McClellan certainly missed an opportunity to effect this coordination personally before he left Washington, but the entire episode serves as yet another example of how individuals within the Union's high command and members of Lincoln's very own cabinet could not work together in pursuit of common strategic objectives. At the very moment The Army of the Potomac was driving on Richmond, Lincoln was stripping off forces to chase down Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley while Fox was covertly lobbying to make Norfolk the objective of McClellan's offensive. Once Norfolk fell and the threat of the Merrimac had been neutralized, Fox seemed preoccupied, not with inter-service

³³⁷ Goldsborough to Fox, 1 March 1862. *Ibid.*, pp. 245-246.

³³⁸ The Navy had good reason to hesitate. They were concerned about the CSS Merrimac. See Fox to Goldsborough, 24 March 1862. *Fox Correspondence*, I, p. 251 and Goldsborough to Fox, 28 Apr 1862. *Ibid.*, pp. 263-264. The Confederate ironclad still posed a significant threat to naval operations in support of McClellan's drive up the peninsula. Additionally, McClellan's request for support was at odds with those of Burnside, who was simultaneously complaining to Welles about gunboats being stripped from his forces as they moved on New Berne. The Navy lacked the resources to support both offensives, and seemed to initially lack a clear understanding that McClellan's drive on Richmond was now the Union main effort, while Burnside's operations were merely a supporting effort.

³³⁹ See Goldsborough to Fox, 21 Apr 1862. *Fox Correspondence*, I, pp. 259-262, Fox to Goldsborough, 17 May 1862. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 269-270, Goldsborough to Fox, 21 May 1862, two separate letters. *Ibid.*, pp. 271-274, Goldsborough to Fox, 22 May 1862. *Ibid.*, pp. 274-276.

cooperation that made the capture of Richmond the joint objective, but rather in ensuring that the Navy's "prestige" was maintained.³⁴⁰

On June 25, Jackson's forces linked up with Lee's on the Northern outskirts of Richmond, and fell on the Union flank at Oak Grove. The Seven Days had begun. At some point in late June the President, no doubt reacting to McClellan's initial frantic reports that exaggerated the threat to his army, made a hurried and covert trip to West Point to consult with Scott on the subject of a new General-in-Chief. Scott, as he had done prior to McClellan's initial appointment in the fall of 1861, recommended Halleck. This time Lincoln listened.³⁴¹

In early July, the President asked Halleck to detach a portion of his army to reinforce McClellan's beleaguered force then pinned down on the banks of the James: "Your several dispatches of yesterday to Secretary of War and myself received. I did say and now repeat, I would be exceedingly glad for some re-enforcements from you." Lincoln's indecisive plea for help was further diluted with the following caveat, "Still do not send a man if in your judgment it will endanger any point you deem important to hold or will force you to give up or weaken or delay the Chattanooga expedition." The President then asked his perspective General-in-Chief, "Please tell me could you not make me a flying visit for consultation without endangering the service in your department."³⁴²

In a move that barely obscured Halleck's contempt for the strategic importance of the eastern theater, the general refused to entertain the President's request for reinforcements, and told the Commander-in-Chief to source the required troops from somewhere else.

³⁴⁰Fox to Goldsborough, 17 May 1862.. Ibid., I, pp. 269-270. From his desk in Washington Fox wrote, "If I were you I would take all the gun boats you can muster and take Richmond with the Navy. It is a dash that would immortalize you, and cover the Navy with additional laurels."

³⁴¹Elliott. Winfield Scott, the Soldier and the Man, p. 755.

³⁴²Lincoln to Halleck, 2 July 1862. OR, Ser. I, 16, pt..2, p. 88.

I submitted the question of sending troops to Richmond to the principal officers of my command. They are unanimous in opinion that if this army is seriously diminished the Chattanooga expedition must be revoked or the hope of holding Southwest Tennessee abandoned. I must earnestly protest against surrendering what has cost us so much blood and treasure, and which, in a military point of view, is worth three Richmonds. It will be infinitely better to withdraw troops from the Shenandoah Valley, which at this time has no strategic importance³⁴³

Any disappointment Lincoln may have felt from Halleck's curt reply was likely overshadowed when the President received McClellan's famous Harrison's Landing Memorandum during his July 8 visit to the general on the banks of the James.³⁴⁴ Though the meeting was polite, the tension between the two must have been electric. After conducting a brief council of war in which Lincoln sought the opinions of each of McClellan's subordinate corps commanders, he departed for Washington. On his return, the President received a briefly worded reply from Halleck in response to his original request for the general to come back east for consultation: "If I were to go to Washington I could advise but one thing—to place all the forces in North Carolina, Virginia, and Washington under one head, and hold that head responsible for the result."³⁴⁵ On the very next day, July 11, 1862, Halleck was ordered to assume the vacated duties of General-in-Chief.³⁴⁶

If McClellan harbored any ill will toward Halleck, he certainly suppressed it in his August 1 letter to the new General-in-Chief. Though Halleck had initiated a process by which McClellan's own army was then being broken up and sent north piecemeal, the

³⁴³ Halleck to Lincoln, 5 July, 1862. OR, Ser. I, 17, pt 2, p. 71.

³⁴⁴ The Memorandum is contained in a letter from McClellan to Lincoln 7 July 1862. in *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, pp. 344-345. For the circumstances surrounding its purposes and creation see Sears, *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon*, pp. 227-228. Most historians interrupt this document as an unwelcome and unsolicited political meddling from a general who should have been more focused on accomplishing his assigned military mission. McClellan was certainly thinking and acting more like a General-in-Chief rather than the commander of the Union's largest field army then in the middle of a bloody battle on the outskirts of Richmond

³⁴⁵ Halleck to Lincoln, 10 July 1862. OR, Ser. I, 11, pt. 3, pp. 311-312.

³⁴⁶ Stanton to Halleck, 11 July 1862. *Ibid.*, p.314

dejected and bitter commander of the Army of the Potomac appeared to have nothing but empathy for Halleck: “My own experience enables me to appreciate most fully the difficulties and unpleasant features of your position. I have passed through it all and most cordially sympathize with you, for I regard your place, under present circumstances, as one of the most unpleasant under the Government.”³⁴⁷

Lincoln’s micromanagement was a manifestation of both his anxiety, and his lack of confidence in McClellan. It was also a function of poor army organization and an ill-defined set of civil military relationships that had never been thought through or tested. What exactly was the role of the Commander-in-Chief? Similarly, what were the duties and responsibilities of the General-in-Chief? Both McClellan and Lincoln were, in some measure, unfortunate victims of timing. There were no historical precedents to help either man define their relationship or guide their actions. Both men also fell victim to the false belief that they could function as General-in-Chief while, simultaneously administering to their other responsibilities. They both underestimated the complexity and enormity of the post.

What had started out as a stand off in Charleston Harbor had rapidly escalated into a war that was far too complex for any single man, civilian or military, to handle alone. Success would require teamwork and cooperation at the highest levels of government and within the military establishment. The fact that McClellan would not reveal his plans to the President because he did not trust Lincoln to maintain operational security, and Lincoln did not trust McClellan to execute his duties as General-in-Chief, must be viewed for what they were; pitiful examples of a dysfunctional personal relationship that

³⁴⁷ McClellan to Halleck, 1 Aug 1862. *Ibid.*, pp. 345-46.

prevented the Union from implementing a sound military strategy. Both men were clearly culpable.

Often overshadowed by the tumultuous events in Virginia and the crisis in civil military relations that erupted in the opening months of the New Year was the fact that the spring of 1862 actually brought a series of tactical victories and unprecedented strategic opportunities for Northern arms. On February 6 Union forces under Flag Officer A. H. Foote and U.S. Grant captured Fort Henry on the Tennessee River. This breached the initial Confederate positions protecting the resource rich state of Tennessee, and set the conditions for the projection of Union military power deep into the South. Just two days later on February 8, Burnside captured Roanoke Island.³⁴⁸ A back door avenue of approach to both Norfolk and Richmond had been opened. By March 3, Du Pont had seized Fernandina, Florida. The first full week of March also saw the USS *Monitor* defeat the CSS *Virginia* in the first ever battle between ironclads. By March 14, a joint amphibious assault under the command of Commander S. C. Rowan and General Burnside captured New Bern. The Union now had possession of a strategically located town in eastern North Carolina that enjoyed both access to the sea and rail connections to the interior.

The dramatic events of the spring culminated on April 24 when Farragut ran past Forts Jackson and St. Philip, destroyed a Confederate flotilla below New Orleans, and seized the South's largest and wealthiest city on April 25. On June 28, Farragut passed under the Confederate batteries at Vicksburg, and linked up with Flag Officer C. H. Davis's squadron three days later on July 1, 1862. The meeting of the Union's riverine and salt-water fleets essentially achieved Scott's original strategic objective of controlling

³⁴⁸ Detailed in ORA, Ser. I, 9, pp. 73-191 and ORN, Ser. I, 6, pp. 549-600.

the Mississippi. All of these noteworthy accomplishments had been obtained in spite of the chaos emanating from within the Union high command itself.

The string of Union tactical victories had an under appreciated, but substantial, strategic effect on the Confederacy. As Richard Goff observed in his classic work on Southern logistics, “The Union onslaught in the spring of 1862 devastated the Confederate war effort. The United States military machine wrenched away the border areas, the Mississippi valley, most of the coast and harbors, and transformed large areas of the Confederacy into a no-mans land subject to sporadic destruction.”³⁴⁹

There was opportunity for even greater strategic success along the coast. Union expeditionary operations on the shores of North Carolina and within Port Royal Sound severely restricted blockade running as a source of supply, and were tantalizingly close to crippling the flow of Southern supplies by seizing the coastal towns of Wilmington and Charleston. Unfortunately, though the intent and capability to do so was present, it was an opportunity that was made impossible because of the infighting in Washington.

The most significant strategic opportunity, however, rested on the shores of the James. The Union had placed a powerful and well-drilled army “at the gates of Richmond.” Supplied and supported by the powerful guns of Union Navy, this force was incapable of being dislodged. Furthermore, it was in a position to cross the James and move on the rebel capital from the South. The Union high command’s decision to withdraw the Army of the Potomac surrendered the strategic initiative to Robert E. Lee. It would take the Union two years of bitter fighting and a man named Grant to get it back. Unfortunately, by the time he did so, the Union found itself in essentially the same strategic position that it vacated in 1862.

³⁴⁹ Goff, *Confederate Supply*, p. 54.

On June 16, 1862, Flag Officer Goldsborough sadly observed, “The withdrawal of McDowell’s corps of 35,000 men from his command at the commencement of the campaign was a sad affair, and one that has occasioned McClellan great embarrassment, the loss of many valuable lives, and materially prolonged the taking of Richmond.”³⁵⁰ The seeds of this decision and McClellan’s subsequent disaster on the James, however, were spread long before he ever reached the peninsula. The tragedy to Union arms in the spring of 1862 was not that the flower of American youth lay shriveling on the banks of the Tennessee River at Shiloh or in the marshy battlefields of the Seven Days, but that the group of men the Northern people counted on to both define and secure the Union victory could simply not work together.

³⁵⁰ Goldsborough to Fox, 16 June 1862. *Fox Correspondence*, I, pp. 288-289.

Chapter 9: Opportunity Lost: A Critical Assessment of Northern Military Strategy

“A Military, Naval, Littoral War, when wisely prepared and discreetly conducted, is a terrible Sort of War. Happy for that People who are Sovereigns enough of the Sea to put it into Execution! For it comes like Thunder and lightning to some unprepared Part of the World.”

—Thomas More Molyneux, 1759

There are generally two common themes among historians who have studied the Navy’s role in the American Civil War. First, despite the porosity of the blockade, it played a significant, though unquantifiable, role in the final Union victory. Second, there is consensus that the entire military potential of the sea service was never fully utilized in pursuit of strategic objectives.

In his 1957 work examining the Union Navy’s role in the conflict, James Merrill concluded, “Federal expeditions failed to grasp their opportunities and conduct vigorous follow-up operations. Before further action was taken, the advantage of surprise, so vital in successful land-sea thrusts, was lost, and with it, the chance to capture major ports along the coasts.” He further argued, “Had the Federals rapidly followed up their initial victories, it is possible that the major coastal towns and cities would have fallen early in the war.” Merrill compared the potential of Union amphibious operations with that of a “terrible swift sword” that had been placed in Lincoln’s hand very early in the war. He concluded his study by lamenting the fact that it had been left “rusting in its scabbard in

1861.”³⁵¹ A host of other prominent scholars including the likes of Bern Anderson and Robert Browning have reached nearly identical conclusions.³⁵²

Yet, as evidenced by William Roberts’s observations earlier in this study, some contemporary scholars have taken issue with such counterfactual conclusions. While Roberts seems to have been guilty of turning difficulties into justifications for inaction, his instincts as a historian, regarding what I will now define here as the “opportunity lost thesis,” (i.e. the Union missed an opportunity to develop and implement an effective maritime-based strategy that had the potential to dramatically alter the course of the war) were undoubtedly correct. The two major problems associated with the “opportunity lost thesis,” as previously presented, are evidence and context.

Merrill, Anderson, and Browning were no doubt correct in pointing out, what in all sincerity, seems like a rather benign and intuitive conclusion to any modern student of the conflict looking back with the clairvoyance of hindsight. None of these exceptional scholars, however, presented enough historical evidence or strategic analysis within the body of their respective works to overcome the high counterfactual hurdle or otherwise escape the notion that their hypotheses were based more on a view of the present, rather than a realistic historical appraisal of the past. For the most part, their conclusions were reached at the end of lengthy studies that were focused strictly on the history of the Navy.

³⁵¹ James Merrill, *The Rebel Shore; The Story of Union Sea Power in the Civil War*. (Little, Brown, 1957), pp. 232-233.

³⁵² See Anderson, *By Sea and by River*, pp. 288-303. Browning’s observations are in *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear: The North Atlantic Blockading Squadron during the Civil War*, pp. 303-309, and *Success is all that was Expected: The South Atlantic Blockading Squadron during the Civil War*. (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, Inc., 2002), pp. 349-359.

In Browning's case, his works were even further restricted to the activities of a particular blockading squadron.³⁵³

Any argument, therefore, that attempts to justify the notion that the Navy could have played a more prominent strategic role in the conflict has to be integrated within the context of a larger analysis covering the strategic direction of the war. Having already provided a general overview of the former within the larger body of the thesis, this chapter will attempt to demonstrate that the Union missed an opportunity to develop and implement an effective maritime-based strategy that had the potential to dramatically alter the course of the war by demonstrating several basic points. First, the Confederacy's coastline was vulnerable to attack, and the seizure of specific Southern ports, i.e. Charleston and Wilmington, were realistic and militarily feasible options capable of being undertaken within the context of the larger Union war effort. Second, Federal leaders were cognizant of the former. Third, the South was extremely dependant on the importation of war material, and the seizure of Charleston and Wilmington earlier in the war would have materially altered the strategic situation.

The Southern coastline of the Confederacy was extremely vulnerable to attack

Both the size and the geography of the Confederate coastline have already been discussed as they related to the establishment and maintenance of the blockade. Viewed from a different perspective, however, the challenges generally associated with the task

³⁵³This last point is not meant, in any way, to serve as a critique or criticism of the outstanding works mentioned. Rather it is made to simply acknowledge that the naval historian can not view the Navy's role in strict isolation; rather, he or she must be capable of showing how it was part of the larger Union war effort. Future historians and scholars will not need to retrace Merrill, Anderson, and Browning's significant contributions to the historiography of the conflict. Rather, they only need integrate them within broader studies examining the larger strategic direction of the war.

could also render important strategic opportunities. Rather than attempting to assess the potential of Union amphibious operations from the external perspectives of geography, order of battle, or a combat power analysis of the respective belligerents, this chapter will attempt to view the problem through the eyes of the principle historical actor initially charged with defending the Southeastern coast of the Confederacy.

Robert E. Lee's role in the defense of the Confederacy's southeastern coast has been overshadowed by his later performance as commander of The Army of Northern Virginia. And while his tactical and operational abilities in that theater have become the stuff of legend, his efforts along the southern coasts over the winter of 1861-62, were no less important to the long-term hopes of the Confederacy.

Lee arrived in Charleston on November 7, 1861.³⁵⁴ He immediately embarked upon a hastily arranged inspection tour of his new command that encompassed the entire southeastern coast of the Confederacy, stretching from Charleston to Fernandina, Fla. By the end of November, Lee realized he was in a race against time to strengthen the coastal defenses before the Federals seized upon the opportunity to move inland. He also came to the stark realization that he simply lacked the men and material to adequately defend the entire coast. Foreshadowing the willingness to incur risk, keen military judgment, and the uncanny ability to anticipate the actions of his northern adversaries that would come to characterize his future handling of the Army of Northern Virginia, Lee wasted little time making hard decisions. On November 21, he reported back to the Confederacy's Adjutant and Inspector General.

The guns from the less important points have been removed, and are employed in strengthening those considered of greater consequence. The entrance to Cumberland

³⁵⁴ Douglas Southall, Freeman. *R. E. Lee, a Biography*. (New York: Scribner, 1934), Vol. I, p. 608.

Sound and Brunswick and the water approaches to Savannah and Charleston are the only points which it is proposed to defend. At all of these places there is much yet to be done, but every effort is being made to render them as strong as the nature of the positions and the means at hand will permit.³⁵⁵

Having decided to consolidate his limited assets at those points he felt most important, Lee next focused his attention on finding men to man the defenses. Upon his arrival in the Deep South, Lee had inherited just under 13,000 troops, and while this appeared to constitute a respectable sized force, the majority of his men were widely scattered between the Savannah River and Charleston.³⁵⁶ Initially, it had been assumed that the citizens of South Carolina and Georgia would quickly rally to the flag to defend their respective states, but the much-anticipated ground swell of volunteers failed to materialize. On December 3, Lee complained to the Confederate Secretary of War that not a single company of men had been raised since his arrival and the prospect for future recruiting looked bleak: “I fear that there will be great delay in organizing even such a force as can be armed, unless some measure can be restored to procure men.”³⁵⁷ Lee’s manpower problems were not confined to numbers alone. More critical, perhaps, was the lack of trained artillerist required to man the large caliber coastal defense guns necessary to counter Union gunboats.³⁵⁸

While Lee had done much to shore up the defenses along the southern coast of his department in a very short time, the job was still far from complete. In early January, he warned Confederate authorities in Richmond that: “Our works are not yet finished; their progress is slow; guns are required for their armament, and I have not received as many

³⁵⁵ Lee to Cooper, 21 Nov 1861. OR, Ser. I, 6, p. 327.

³⁵⁶ Freeman, *R. E. Lee, a Biography*, Vol. I, p. 609.

³⁵⁷ Lee to Benjamin. OR, Ser. I, 6, p. 335.

³⁵⁸ Lee to Cooper, 21 Nov 1861. *Ibid.*, p. 327.

troops from South Carolina and Georgia as I at first expected.” He further lamented, “The forces of the enemy are accumulating, and apparently increase faster than ours. I have feared, if handled with proportionate ability with his means of speedy transportation and concentration, it would be impossible to gather troops necessarily posted over a long line in sufficient strength, to oppose sudden movements.” Lee also seemed keenly aware of the tactical dilemma confronting his forces: “Wherever his fleet can be brought no opposition to his landing can be made except within range of our fixed batteries. We have nothing to oppose to its heavy guns, which sweep over the low banks of this country with irresistible force.”³⁵⁹

Lee clearly realized that his only recourse was to withdrawal his forces farther inland in the hopes of escaping the lethal firepower of the Union gunboats. While Northern leaders vacillated in Washington and Port Royal Sound, Lee quickly foresaw Union operational objectives: “I have thought his purpose would be to seize upon the Charleston and Savannah Railroad near the head of Broad River, sever the line of communication between those cities with one of his columns of land troops, and with his other two and his fleet by water envelop alternately each of those cities. This would be a difficult combination for us successfully to resist. I have been preparing to meet it with all the means in my power, and shall continue to the end. Any troops or guns that can be withdrawn from other points will greatly aid in this result.”³⁶⁰

A less experienced or proficient officer would have undoubtedly had difficulty making such astute observations in 1861, but Lee was no ordinary general. However, despite the vulnerability of his department, events were rapidly transpiring in other parts

³⁵⁹ Lee to Cooper, 8 Jan 1862. *Ibid.*, p. 367.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

of the Confederacy during the early spring 1862 that clearly illustrated the cruel strategic dilemma facing Southern leaders. On February 24, Lee received the following directive from the Confederate Secretary of War

The recent disaster to our arms in Tennessee forces the Government to the stern necessity of withdrawing its lines within more defensible limits, so as to enable us to meet with some equality the overpowering numbers of the enemy. The railroad line from Memphis to Richmond must be defended at all hazards. We can only do this by withdrawing troops from the seaboard. You are therefore requested to withdraw all such forces as are now employed in the defense of the seaboard of Florida, taking proper steps to secure the guns and munitions of war, and to send forward the troops to Tennessee, to report to General A. S. Johnston, by the most expeditious route. The only troops to be retained in Florida are such as may be necessary to defend the Apalachicola River, as the enemy could by that river at high water send his gunboats into the very middle of the State of Georgia. Let General Trapier put that river and harbor in a satisfactory state of defense and then further orders can be given to him; but I beg that there be no delay that you can possibly avoid in forwarding to Tennessee the troops now at Fernandina and on the eastern coast.³⁶¹

The tactical success of Grant and Foote's combined operations in Tennessee had thus rendered important strategic results. The Confederacy was forced to abandon Florida altogether. And while the strategic value of Florida was miniscule, the loss of manpower from a department that was charged with protecting the crucial ports of Charleston and Savannah was another matter altogether.

Despite Lee's Herculean efforts, the Confederacy's southeastern coasts were still extremely vulnerable. Union sea borne firepower had forced the southern general to essentially surrender the coast in the hopes of drawing Union forces further inland. Both Du Pont and Sherman realized this fairly early in the campaign. Writing to his superiors in Washington, Sherman correctly ascertained both the nature and intent of the Confederate dispositions along the coast: "The object of this line appears to be to resist an invasion of the main-land, and not to attack the occupied coast, which, from all that

³⁶¹ Benjamin to Lee, 24 Feb 1862. OR, Ser. I, 6, p. 398.

can be learned, the enemy have concluded they cannot maintain, and given up all idea of doing so.”³⁶²

Du Pont concurred with Sherman’s assessment, observing: “The enemy have left the coast defenses they put up and have fallen back on their rail roads for their base.” The flag officer further commented on the potential for combined operations noting: “the topography of the country between these railroads and the seacoast is most peculiar—a perfect network of water: rivers, creeks, estuaries, sounds, inlets, cuts, etc. A good size boat may go from Florida to Norfolk without ever seeing the coast; almost so with steamers.” With Union gunboats now in a position to support army operations further inland he concluded, “Savannah and Charleston must be taken, but it must be done *selon les regles* with a large force. So far we have been cutting at the extremities”³⁶³

Unfortunately, while leaders in Washington continued to fight among themselves, and McClellan planned for a climatic battle of annihilation somewhere between Yorktown and the outskirts of Richmond, the Union beachhead that had successfully driven an operational salient into the Confederacy’s vulnerable coastal flank and threatened two of its most important cities was allowed to flounder. The entire episode illustrated the potential for an integrated Union military strategy that fully capitalized on the use, or even the threat, of expeditionary operations in spring of 1862. Rather than taking advantage of the Confederate troop reductions brought about by successes in the

³⁶² Sherman to Thomas, 14 December 1861. *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204.

³⁶³ Du Pont to Whetten, 28 Dec 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 292-93. As early as December 2, 1861 Du Pont observed “the inland waters of South Carolina and Georgia connecting through both states to Florida? They offer great facilities to reach the capitals of these states, which *must* be taken. Armed boats and launches could give great protection, and cover crossing the streams, etc.—like the wonderful expeditions of the Spaniards in Holland so finely described by Motley.” See, Du Pont to James Wilson Grimes, 2 Dec 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 269

Tennessee, Union expeditionary power was rushing to Fernandina at the very moment the Confederates were pulling out.

As early as 1861 Union leaders knew the Southern coastline was vulnerable, and combined operations to seize the Confederacy's crucial port cities were militarily feasible.

Obscured in the confusion surrounding the Scott-McClellan feud and the crisis in civil military relations brought about by the inability of both Lincoln and McClellan to form an effective partnership, is the lost opportunity for Union arms along the southeast coast of the Confederacy. Both of the aforementioned personality conflicts prevented the Union from capitalizing on one of the greatest strategic opportunities of the war. While Welles and Fox were content reveling in the favorable publicity that the capture of Port Royal Sound gave the Navy Department, Du Pont was busy contemplating the future.³⁶⁴

The flag officer quickly recognized the strategic significance of his new found position on the Confederate coast: "The occupation of this wonderful sheet of water, with its tributary rivers, inlets, outlets, entrances and sounds, running in all directions, cutting off effectually all water communications between Savannah and Charleston, has been like driving a wedge into the flanks of the rebels between these two important cities."³⁶⁵ Just days after the successful assault Du Pont's friend and fellow board member, Henry Davis congratulated him on his accomplishment, but also took the opportunity to remind the flag officer about the naval board's original ideas regarding the projection of expeditionary power further inland in pursuit of major strategic objectives.

Burnside still lingers at Annapolis-as if the government wished Sherman to be driven into the sea before he is reinforced. However I do not think all South Carolina and

³⁶⁴ See ORN Ser. I, 12, p. 290 and Welles to Du Pont 16 Nov 1861, *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 246.

³⁶⁵ Du Pont to Morgan, 24 Dec 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 285.

Georgia can do that. But 50,000 men ought to be sent there, and they could take Charleston and Savannah and penetrate to the Tennessee line and the Mississippi River. I feel sure that when the shell is broken the egg will be found rotten if not empty.³⁶⁶

By early December, Du Pont became frustrated by what he correctly perceived as a missed opportunity to exploit the operational situation along the coast: “I wish I could speak to you of the operations contemplated by the Army here, but I do not know the plan of campaign. But I will venture an opinion, that if they move without preponderating numbers, it will be the same old story.” Echoing both Davis’s earlier sentiments and the findings and recommendations of the second board report, he further lamented, “I would say that the forces should be largely increased and a regular campaign in the South be commenced—say with 50,000 men. Could not six-months men be found? The rebels are evidently going to fall back on their railroad for a base, and there is great panic yet, with much Union feeling in Georgia.”³⁶⁷

Though Du Pont clearly recognized the opportunity to project Union expeditionary power further inland from Port Royal Sound, he also knew the Navy Department expected him to move on Fernandina. On December 6, he wrote Fox a letter that expressed his reservations about such a move: “We are you will see going more and more into the flanks of the rebels, driving them from these coast defenses and keeping up our prestige I think, - but alas my vessels are so spread and absorbed, that we have to *come out* of these places again.” Du Pont knew that he could take Fernandina, but he correctly anticipated that, with his limited resources, neither he, nor Sherman, would have enough men or ships to hold it.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ H.W. Davis to Du Pont, 15 Nov 1861. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

³⁶⁷ Du Pont to James Wilson Grimes, 2 Dec 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, p. 269.

³⁶⁸ Du Pont to Fox 6 Dec 1861. *Fox Correspondence*, I, p. 77.

The original purpose of the expedition had been to seize two coaling stations that could also be used as safe harbors for the blockading squadrons, but the seizure of Port Royal Sound seemed to dictate a reexamination of the Navy's initial strategic objectives. Port Royal Sound, when combined with the other interconnected inland waterways, was deep enough and large enough to serve as an entire fleet anchorage. The Navy did not need another coaling station or safe harbor. This fact was not lost on Sherman who observed in mid December 1861, "It may be hence inferred that the main object of the expedition has been already accomplished, and that the point of Fernandina is now of so secondary a character as to render it not only almost insignificant, but the operation of taking it actually prejudicial to the great work which the development of circumstances appears to have set before us."³⁶⁹

On December 14, Sherman wrote to the Army's Adjutant General clearly outlining the strategic opportunity available to Union forces, and bemoaning the political decision to undertake the Fernandina operation: "I am aware of the good effect that the capture of this place would have on the public mind, but the military is the only point of view that should be taken of it. It is no point from which to operate, and will probably fall of itself the moment Savannah is occupied by our forces, and therefore the resources of the Navy and Army here should be husbanded for a more important operation, viz, the attack of the enemy's line the moment preparations can be made."³⁷⁰ Sherman concluded his letter with a plea for reinforcements, and observed: "I am firmly convinced that an operation of this sort would not only give us Savannah, but, if successful and strong enough to follow

³⁶⁹ Sherman to Thomas, 14 December 1861. OR, Ser. I, 6, pp. 203-204.

³⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 204.

up time success, would shake the so-called Southern Confederacy to its very foundation.”³⁷¹

Though Du Pont shared the general’s observations in private, his initial correspondence to Fox on the matter was indecisive: “Sherman thinks Fernandina wholly secondary now, and it must fall with Savannah. While I want to take it, more because it entered the original program, and because it is a nice naval operation, I am much of the same opinion. With this harbor, St Helena, and Tybee Sound in the very centre of the stations we have as many harbors of refuge as I want-but I think it may help the Union people to hoist the flag there as soon as Davis closes up Charleston with the Stone vessels I will take the matter up.”³⁷²

Fox, however, had much clearer designs. On January 4, 1862, he wrote a terse letter to Du Pont lamenting what he perceived as Union inaction since the victory at Port Royal back in October. Fox urged the flag officer to follow up his initial success in South Carolina with a move down the coast to Fernandina, “the original plan ought to have been carried out because the political condition of things renders it imperative that we should possess all the Southern ports possible” While acknowledging Fox’s political calculations, Du Pont reminded the Assistant Secretary that “the original plan of the expedition contemplated the seizure and the occupation of two ports, as harbors of refuge; and that I have taken seven ports, and now actually hold five ports, of which three are in South Carolina, and two in Georgia; and of which five ports, three are held by me in conjunction with the army.”³⁷³

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Du Pont to Fox, 16 Dec 1861. *Fox Correspondence*, I, p. 79

³⁷³ Du Pont to Fox, 11 Jan 1862. Ibid., pp. 100-101.

Unfortunately for the larger Union war effort, the great opportunity along the coast of South Carolina occurred at the very moment the Union high command and the War Department were undergoing dramatic changes. McClellan had literally just assumed the position of General-in-Chief, and as he desperately tried to get his arms around the duties and responsibilities of his new post, he was simply not prepared or willing to exploit the strategic situation in Port Royal Sound. McClellan could have reinforced Sherman, or landed Union forces anywhere along the Confederacy's vast coastline with impunity. Though he clearly conceptualized the potential of expeditionary operations to achieve important strategic objectives, he failed to allocate assets accordingly. Sherman's requests for reinforcements and operational suggestions were brushed aside and obscured by the tumultuous events in Washington and McClellan's own efforts to direct all available Union resources to his army then mustering on the banks of the Potomac.

Sherman spent the winter months erecting fortifications, conducting minor operations along the sounds, and pleading for reinforcements. As Du Pont so aptly observed, "Sherman's troops were more than ample to occupy the possession here, yet not sufficient to open a campaign between the two largest rebel cities on the Atlantic coast, and no plan had been adopted in reference to one." The general was further handicapped by the inexperience of his troops. As time passed and public criticism mounted, Du Pont grew increasingly sympathetic to the general's unenviable situation noting: "The volunteers are really a study-they require excitement, are brave and reckless as pickets, growl because they are not led into battle, rush in with the spirit of a French Zouave and when under hot fire turn round and run."³⁷⁴

³⁷⁴ Du Pont to Whetten, 28 Dec 1861. *SFDP Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 292-93.

Public pressure began to mount as newspaper articles portrayed a lack of cooperation between the two services, and grew increasingly impatient with Sherman's apparent timidity along the coast. The stories drew several angry responses from Du Pont who quipped: "our people and press should be patient with the General, they have had to be long time patient with others who have had relatively much greater means to the end. Expeditionary corps in Europe are always "*hommes d'elite*"; the best regiments from the Potomac should have been sent."³⁷⁵

Though both men were clearly frustrated, personal relations between the two military professionals remained amicable. Sherman had unselfishly taken a back seat in the original decision to move on Port Royal, and patiently bided his time while Du Pont detached vessels in a feeble effort to obstruct one of the entrances into Charleston Harbor by sinking stone laden barges. Rather than receiving reinforcements, McClellan eventually ordered Sherman to detach troops in support of the Fernandina operation, and undertake a simultaneous operation to seize Fort Pulaski guarding the eastern approaches to the Savannah River.³⁷⁶ Though both operations were successful, Sherman became an indirect causality of McClellan's own demise in Washington. He was relieved of his command on April 3, 1862.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 294.

³⁷⁶ McClellan to Sherman, 6 Mar 1862. OR, Ser. I, 6, p. 238. Sherman's orders from the General-in-Chief were indecisive "If it will not interfere with any operation of greater importance that you may now have on hand, the General-in-Chief hopes that you will be able to arrange with Commodore DuPont for the prompt occupation of Fernandina, in accordance with the original plan of the expedition. It is supposed that this operation will not interfere with the reduction of Fort Pulaski, which is regarded as a matter of very great importance. The general would also be glad to have your views in regard to the best disposition to be made of your troops during the approaching unhealthy season, and whether any peculiar arrangements should be made to secure their health during the summer in regard to barracks, diet, etc."

³⁷⁷ Du Pont was not happy about Sherman's relief. He wrote the general a sincere and heartfelt letter praising his "vigorous and harmonious cooperation." Du Pont also noted the general's "unflagging zeal with which you have availed yourself of every means in your power to secure an effective tenure of this coast while preparing a base of operations which, with the reinforcements you had a right to look for,

The Navy, however, suffered from no such lack of direction or indecisiveness. Fox encouraged Du Pont to quickly move on Fernandina, Florida from the very start. This was done, however, with a view of increasing the Navy Department's "prestige" by capturing another coastal city i.e. Fernandina, rather than any sincere effort to further Union strategic objectives. Rather than advocating a combined expeditionary campaign to capture Charleston during the first year of the war, Fox seemed perfectly content to disperse Union expeditionary power in a thin veneer along the coast until enough ironclads could be fielded to take "the cradle of secession" by a naval *coup de main*.

The South was extremely dependent on the foreign importation of war material

As briefly outlined in chapter four above, the Confederacy wasted little time initiating a massive foreign purchasing program in order to acquire and ship vast amounts of desperately needed war material into Southern ports during the opening months of the war. However, the relationship between both the type and amount of material that came in through the blockade, and how essential it actually was to the Confederacy's ability to wage war has received scant historical attention. Most historians, while noting the initial dearth of small arms in the Confederacy, generally assume that the Herculean efforts of

would have led to more brilliant but in no manner more important results than those you have accomplished." Du Pont to Sherman, 3 April 1862. ORN, Ser. I, 12, p. 701. Sherman responded in kind, stating that "our intercourse and cooperation have been of the most perfect harmony, and of this I am proud, and all I regret is that I have never had the material and the means to afford that assistance in our combined operations that would have been productive of the most good to the service and most agreeable to myself. Rest assured, commodore, that I shall ever cherish the remembrance of our past official and social relations with pride and satisfaction." Sherman to Du Pont 3 Apr 1862. ORN, Ser. I, 12, p. 702. Sherman's replacement, Major General David Hunter wasted little time recalling the army's troops from Florida. He told Stanton "It is my opinion that this force is entirely too much scattered and is subject to be cut off in detail. I shall order an abandonment of Jacksonville, Fla." The new commander then concluded with his intent for the future. "I hope to be able to announce to you the fall of Pulaski. We then shall be able to hold the Savannah River with a small force and to concentrate on Charleston." Hunter to Stanton, 3 April 1862. OR, Ser. I, 6, pp. 263-64.

the enterprising Josiah Gorgas were able to offset and eventually mitigate the initial shortfall.³⁷⁸ While the story of how Gorgas attempted to “turn ploughshares into swords” is one of the remarkable achievements of the war, it should not obscure the fact the Confederacy was never able to produce more weapons than it imported.³⁷⁹

As early as August 1861, Confederate efforts to obtain and import small arms began to take on a sense of urgency that bordered on desperation. Writing directly to Caleb Huse, the Confederate Secretary of War, L. P. Walker, attempted to energize the Confederacy’s chief foreign purchasing agent in Europe, “notwithstanding three glorious victories have perched upon our banners. We want arms and must have them if they are to be had. I trust you will no longer confine yourselves to Great Britain and Belgium in your efforts, but that you will visit the different kingdoms in order to procure them.” Walker concluded by telling Huse that the South was “relying upon your exertions to procure for us arms, and upon your dexterity in shipping them in safety to some secure port from whence they will reach us at no distant day.”³⁸⁰

Walker had good reason to implore action from Huse. A hastily conducted inventory of former Federal arsenals conducted in May 1861 revealed that there were only 159,000 small arms, of varying quality, spread throughout the Southern states.³⁸¹ By April 1862, as Confederate forces hurried to meet McClellan’s much anticipated spring offensive, Lee, just back from his vital assignment in Charleston, complained to Gorgas that, “General Jackson has with him some 1,000 or 2,000 men without arms, and has requested

³⁷⁸ See James McPherson’s treatment of Gorgas in *Battle Cry of Freedom*, pp. 318-319.

³⁷⁹ Frank Vandiver, *Ploughshares into Swords; Josiah Gorgas and Confederate Ordnance*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1952) is the classic and authoritative accounting of Gorgas’s accomplishments and importance to the Southern war effort.

³⁸⁰ Walker to Huse 17 Aug 1861. OR, Ser IV, 3, pp. 564-65.

³⁸¹ Gorgas to Bartow, 7 May 1861. OR, Ser. IV, 1, p. 292.

that pikes be sent him. I have the honor to request that, if practicable, you will cause, say, 1,000 pikes to be forwarded to him via Staunton.”³⁸² Were the two greatest military minds in the Confederacy seriously contemplating the use of pikes against Union fire arms?

Largely through the efforts of Huse and Gorgas, relief was on the way. The Ordnance Bureau purchased five steamers, and had begun a systematic effort to trade guns for cotton.³⁸³ By the end of November 1863, Gorgas was able to report to the Confederate Secretary of War: “The number of small-arms imported through these steamers from September 30, 1862, to September 30, 1863, is 113,504. Large quantities of saltpeter, lead, cartridges, percussion caps, flannel and paper for cartridges, leather, hardware, &c., have also been received in them. Three 8-inch rifled and two 12 3/4 inch rifled Blakely guns have been imported. The weight of the latter, with its carriage complete, is about 55 tons.”³⁸⁴

Though much work had been done to create a domestic small arms manufacturing industry from the ground up, by the fall of 1864, the South’s dependence on the foreign importation of small arms, not only failed to diminish, but had actually become even more pronounced. Gorgas’s report to Seddon in October of 1864 contained none of the previous year’s optimism, and clearly illustrated this important point.

Small-arms.—The chief supply has been from importations, which, since the loss of the vessels belonging to this Bureau, have been very light, not to exceed, say, on this side of the Mississippi, 30,000 during the year included in this report. The number manufactured is about 20,000 instead of 50,000 to 60,000, as I anticipated. This reduced product is due to the interference of military operations, both of the enemy and of our own. The captures have been about 45,000 and the losses about

³⁸² Lee to Gorgas, 9 April 1862. OR, Ser I, 12, pt III, pp. 844-45

³⁸³ Four of the vessels were purchased abroad. They included the *Columbia*, *R. E. Lee*, *Merrimac*, and *Eugenic*. A fifth steamer, the *Phantom*, was purchased at home.

³⁸⁴ Gorgas to Seddon, 15 Nov 1863. OR, Ser. IV, 2, p. 956.

30,000, leaving a gain of 15,000. If we place the diminution of our military force at 50,000 men (including reserves, local forces, militia, &c.), the aggregate of their figures (30,000 improved + 20,000 made + 15,000 captured - 50,000 less troops) 115,000 will represent the waste of arms during the year. About 20,000 are now on the way from Europe and 50,000 more have been ordered purchased. A further purchase of at least 50,000 will be necessary for the coming year.³⁸⁵

In just a little under a year, the initial optimism that sprang from the Ordnance Bureau's blockade running activities had turned to a stark realization that domestic manufacturing was proving incapable of meeting the Confederacy's ever increasing needs. Additionally, the capture of the Bureaus blockade-runners had dramatically reduced imports from 113,000 to 30,000 in less than the span of a full calendar year.³⁸⁶

Though Gorgas was eventually able to revise his small arms numbers slightly upward by the end of the year, his final report of 1864 included an ominous warning about the future: "The supply of lead is derived from importation and the Wytheville lead mines. The other mines are insignificant, though the whole mineral region has been explored. Should Wilmington be closed and the Wytheville mines captured the Army could not be supplied with ammunition on the present scale; though the Bureau would not even then despair of opening avenues of supply for a reduced scale of operations."³⁸⁷ It seemed that, when it came to the crucial materials necessary for waging modern war, more was at stake in running the blockade than just the procurement of small arms.

While the importation of small arms was certainly vital to the Confederate war effort, the importation of Saltpeter, the major component of gunpowder, and lead were even

³⁸⁵ Gorgas to Seddon, 13 Oct 1864. ORA, Ser. IV, 3, p. 733.

³⁸⁶ Ibid. It should be noted that Gorgas's estimates regarding the future requirement of an additional 50,000 small arms for the following year were based on a hypothetical reduction of 50,000 soldiers in Confederate service. This unexplainable projected cut in Southern manpower was planned at very time overwhelming Union manpower was being massed on the country's frontiers. Did the Confederacy's leaders really think they could afford a troop reduction in 1865 after Lincoln's reelection in the fall of 1864?

³⁸⁷ Gorgas to Seddon 31 Dec 1864. OR, Ser IV, 3, pp. 986-88.

more crucial. Under instructions from the Gorgas, the Confederate Niter and Mining Bureau had initially prioritized its efforts on the home production of niter, lead, and sulfur respectively. However, by the summer of 1862 it was clear that lead was rapidly becoming the critical resource shortfall. In a letter to the Confederate Secretary of War, St John admitted: “The present yield from our mines averages between three and four tons per working day. This is not equal to the Army demand. The residue has thus far been more than met by importation and the collection of scrap lead, in which the Bureau agents have been quite active.”³⁸⁸ Moreover, logistical deficiencies impacted operational planning.

Writing to Davis in the aftermath of his stunning victory at Second Manassas, Lee told the Confederate President that logistical problems negated the opportunity to lay siege to Washington: “If I possessed the necessary munitions, I should be unable to supply provisions for the troops.” While lamenting the fact that, “The army is not properly equipped for an invasion of an enemy’s territory. It lacks much of the material of war, is feeble in transportation, the animals being much reduced, and the men are poorly provided with clothes, and in thousands of instances are destitute of shoes,” Lee told Davis that he had, for lack of provisions, no other choice but to move North into Union territory.³⁸⁹

After urging the President to bolster the Richmond defenses, “both by land and water” during the precious time his invasion of Maryland would surely buy, he closed with the following exhortation: “What occasions me most concern is the fear of getting out of ammunition. I beg you will instruct the Ordnance Department to spare no pains in

³⁸⁸ St John to Randolph, 31 July 1862. OR. Ser. IV, 2, pp. 26-30.

³⁸⁹ Lee to Davis, 3 Sept 1862. OR, Ser. I, 19, pt. 2, p. 590.

manufacturing a sufficient amount of the best kind, and to be particular, in preparing that for the artillery, to provide three times as much of the long-range ammunition as of that for smooth-bore or short- range guns.”³⁹⁰

While the Confederates were in real danger of shooting more bullets than they could make, the gunpowder situation was not much better. The drastic paucity of gunpowder that initially faced the Confederacy, having already been described above, makes it only necessary here, to offer a brief overview of the industry’s progress and continued dependence on blockade running throughout the duration of the war. George Washington Rains was the principle architect behind the creation of the Confederate Powder Works in Augusta Georgia, and the leading expert on powder production in the South. In November of 1861, he traveled to New Orleans in order to inquire about the possibility of foreign supply. After consulting with General Lovell, the commander of Confederate forces defending the city, the steam ship *Tennessee* was chartered and prepared to put out to sea. However, even at this early point in the war, the ship was unable to make the trip to Liverpool because of the Union blockade.³⁹¹

Fortunately for Rains and the larger Southern war effort, Confederate foreign purchasing agents were already in the process of shipping large amounts of saltpeter in through Charleston and Wilmington. Writing after the war Rains commented that this proved “adequate to our wants.” Like Gorgas, Rains was a man of energy and ability. Yet, once again, despite the amazing efforts of a military man turned industrialist, it did little to alter the fact that the South remained tethered to England for the importation of yet another critical material so necessary for the waging of modern war. Rains calculated

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ George Washington, Rains, *History of the Confederate Powder Works*. (Newburgh, N. Y., 1882), p. 6.

that the Confederate Powder Works received 2,700,000 pounds of saltpeter during the war from foreign importation i.e. blockade running through the ports of Charleston and Wilmington.³⁹²

In comparison, the total amount of saltpeter that was received at the Works from domestic mining amounted to 300,000 pounds for the same period. From its inception on April 10, 1862 to its closure on April 18, 1865, the Confederate Powder Works produced 2,750,000 pounds of gunpowder. Given the fact that 90 percent of all the saltpeter received at the Works originated from overseas, it is likely that the total amount of powder that can be directly attributed to the functioning and operation of the two principle southern ports was as much as 2,475,000 pounds.³⁹³

The fact that the Confederacy was initially extremely dependent on the foreign importation of small arms, saltpeter, iron, beef, and certain other critical commodities of war is only overshadowed by the little appreciated historical reality that the Southerner's became even more so as the war dragged on. By the second week of December 1864 Seddon informed Jefferson Davis that 1,507,000 pounds of lead, 1,933,000 pounds Saltpeter, 545,000 Boots and shoes, 8,632,000 pounds of meat, 69,000 rifles, and 520,000 pounds of coffee had been imported through the ports of Wilmington and Charleston between November 1, 1863 and December 10, 1864.³⁹⁴

Seddon, however, failed to mention that Union efforts to seize Charleston by naval *coup de main*, though unsuccessful, had severely restricted access to Charleston Harbor for Confederate blockade-runners. Ironically, the Union's operations in and around Charleston actually facilitated Confederate logistics by forcing runners further north to

³⁹² Ibid., pp. 5-6.

³⁹³ Ibid., p. 24. According to Rains his plant had 70,000 pounds of powder on hand at the end of the war.

³⁹⁴ Seddon to Davis, 10 Dec 1864. Ibid., p. 930.

the port of Wilmington. This actually shortened the overland supply line to Lee's beleaguered army then manning the entrenchments on the outskirts of Petersburg.³⁹⁵

On the last day of 1864, Gorgas's complained to Seddon about the paucity of financial resources available to purchase foreign weapons: "We have hitherto had no difficulty in importing arms through the blockaded sea-ports. The total importations for the year have been: Rifles 39,798 Pistols 1,716 Carbines 4,740. The want of funds necessary to purchase has greatly limited the importations of the expiring year. There are probably not more than 10,000 or 12,000 on the islands a waiting shipment."³⁹⁶ What he failed to realize, however, was that with Union amphibious forces finally bearing down on Fort Fisher, guarding the nautical approaches to Wilmington, his efforts would soon be irrelevant.

Nonetheless, Gorgas continued to cling to the false belief that his department could manufacture upwards of 55, 000 rifles per year if only he could get more men to work in the plants. At no time during the war did the reality of domestic production ever match Gorgas's estimates. While he had managed to increase production, it was never able to equal the dramatically increased demand that the actual conduct of combat operations produced, nor did domestic production ever rival the amount of weapons that were shipped in via the blockade.³⁹⁷ Though Gorgas performed his duties with zeal and efficiency, it did little to diminish the simple fact that the Confederacy was never able to manufacture more small arms than it imported, and was never close to reaching a level of

³⁹⁵ Goff, *Confederate Supply*, p. 141.

³⁹⁶ Gorgas to Seddon 31 Dec 1864. ORA Ser IV, III, 986-88.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

domestic production that could have allowed it to survive had the crucial ports of Charleston and Wilmington been taken earlier in the war.³⁹⁸

While historians generally accept the premise that the Civil War was the first modern war, considerably less attention has been focused on the vital role Confederate logistical difficulties played in determining the outcome.³⁹⁹ The waging of modern war requires the manufacture of modern weapons in large numbers, which in turn, requires an abundance of certain natural resources. How much material came in through the blockade? We will probably never know, but Stephen Wise observed: “By the summer of 1862, the flow of supplies enabled the Confederate armies to stand up to the numerically superior Federals. Because of the work of the men involved in blockade running, a supply lifeline was maintained until the very last months of the war. The Confederate soldiers had the equipment and food necessary to meet their adversaries. Defeat did not come from lack of material; instead the Confederacy simply no longer had the manpower to resist, and the nation collapsed.”⁴⁰⁰

Despite the incredible efforts of men like Gorgas and Rains to create and organize Southern manufacturing, the Confederates were never able to curb their dependence on foreign supply. Therefore, it seems as certain as any non-event in history can be; that had

³⁹⁸ Gorgas to Seddon, 13 Oct 1864. ORA, Ser. IV, 3, p. 733.

³⁹⁹ Beringer, Hattaway, Jones, and Still, *Why the South Lost the Civil War*, p. 9. “The fact is, no confederate army lost a major engagement because of the lack of arms, munitions, or other essential supplies.”

⁴⁰⁰ Stephen Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy: Blockade Running during the Civil War*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), p. 226. Wise wrote that “In terms of basic military necessities, the South imported at least 400,000 rifles, or more than 60 percent of the nation’s modern arms. About three million pounds of lead came through the blockade, which by Gorgas’s estimate amounted to one-third of the Army’s requirements. Besides these items, over 2,250,000 pounds of saltpeter, or two-thirds of this vital ingredient for powder, came from overseas. Without blockade running the nation’s military would have been without proper supplies of arms, bullets, and powder. Blockade running also supplied countless other essential items such as food, clothing, accoutrements, chemicals, paper, and medicine.”

the Union focused its military resources on taking just two coastal cities the course of the war would have been dramatically altered. The Confederacy may well have still retained a limited capability to manufacture a trivial amount of small arms, but these weapons would have had to been utilized as pikes or clubs, for they almost certainly would have lacked the gunpowder or the bullets to enable them to function as originally designed.

While Wise's assertion that the South was ultimately defeated because it simply ran out of men is debatable, and certainly beyond the scope of this work, his observations regarding the absolute necessity of blockade running to the Confederate war effort are well supported and grounded in undisputable historical evidence. It is also not surprising given the subject and scope of his work, that Wise paid homage to the southern men whose blockade running activities held open the "lifeline." But, in reality, it would seem far more correct to state that their success was only made possible by the Union's failure to seize these crucial ports earlier in the war.

Despite the size of the southern coastline, the Confederacy had only ten ports connected to the interior of the country by rail. Of these all but three were in Union hands by April 1862.⁴⁰¹ It seems reasonable to conclude that had the Union focused its military efforts on capturing or destroying the other three, the Confederacy would have found itself cut off and isolated from the outside world less than a year after Sumter. For the Union, it was an opportunity lost!

⁴⁰¹ Fuller, *The Conduct of War*, p. 101. See also Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, p. 127.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

“The roots of victory and defeat often have to be sought far from the battlefield, in political, social, and economic factors which explain why armies are constituted as they are, and why their leaders conduct them in the way they do.”

—Michael Howard

Given the limited scope of this paper, it would be dangerous to construct a set of too far reaching conclusions. The development of Union military strategy within the first eighteen months of the war was convoluted, nonlinear, and at times, a frustratingly complex affair. Nonetheless, some general observations in relation to the original historical questions posed in the introduction appear evident.

First, despite the unprecedented political chaos swirling in the nation’s capital and a complex set of problems within the military establishment itself, it seems apparent that the military leadership of the North, primarily through the experience and guiding hand of Winfield Scott, managed to sketch out a rough military strategy that was designed to achieve the Union’s original political objectives. Scott’s strategic concept attempted to minimize the loss of life and property by initially applying economic and political pressure, until such time as overwhelming force could be first, assembled, and then applied adroitly. Admittedly, Scott’s ideas would hardly fit our modern definition and expectations of a detailed war plan or a comprehensive military strategy, but it was nonetheless present, and communicated to the country’s political leadership in the spring of 1861. It was also rejected.

Scott’s successor, the young and ambitious George B. McClellan, also managed to design a comprehensive and well thought out military strategy that identified the South’s

center of gravity as its planter elite. Unlike Scott, McClellan attempted to focus Union combat power in the Eastern Theater, and sought to destroy the main Confederate army in a climatic battle of annihilation on the outskirts of Richmond. Though he clearly anticipated the use of expeditionary operations in pursuit of strategic objectives, his was not a maritime-based strategy. Instead, the “Young Napoleon” saw amphibious operations unfolding within the context of a predetermined timeline that was tied to his own march down the eastern seaboard. When the opportunity presented itself to project Union military power inland and seize Charleston in the fall of 1861, he failed to allocate adequate resources or provide the necessary leadership. McClellan’s strategic concept, though initially embraced, fell victim to unrealistic expectations about its timeliness and was eventually micromanaged to the point of failure.

Second, at least in the first eighteen months of the war, there is substantial evidence to suggest that the operational capabilities of the United States Navy were attempting to be fully integrated into the larger strategic design of the war.⁴⁰² The Navy took the unprecedented step of establishing a joint service naval board. Its members produced a series of well thought out and innovative reports that served as a basis for the employment of Union sea power throughout the war. The board also advocated the creation and employment of large-scale expeditionary forces that were capable of operating both along the coast and further inland in pursuit of strategic objectives. The Navy, apparently at Scott’s request, recruited and dispatched one of the country’s leading riverboat builders to the west in an effort to construct the gunboats necessary to transport and support the Army in its operations along the Confederacy’s western rivers. Scott’s

⁴⁰² It may be of interest to note that the War Department spent 2.7 Billion dollars during the conflict. This represented nearly nine times the 314 million spent by the Navy during the same period. Davis Dewey, *The Financial History of the United States*. 12th ed. (New York, 1936), p. 329.

conference with the members of the naval board on August 1, 1861, concerning the planning and the execution of the Port Royal expedition was an impressive early example of what was possible when the two services came together in pursuit of common strategic objectives.

Despite these early samplings of cooperation, many of which spawned impressive examples of joint tactical success, the strategic employment of the Navy never reached its full potential. This occurred for three reasons. First, with the minimization of Scott and his subsequent dismissal, the Union's military strategy went from a combined maritime-based policy to one that sought a land centric victory. Second, while McClellan clearly envisioned the astute use of combined operations, limited resources and his own decision to personally seek out and lead the Army of the Potomac in a decisive battle of annihilation in Virginia prevented the complete implementation of a maritime based strategy that effectively integrated expeditionary operations within Union grand strategy.

Third, the Navy, primarily through the influence and Machiavellian efforts of its Assistant Secretary, Gustavus Fox, habitually displayed a penchant to put the department's interests ahead of the nations. Though the Navy's principle commanders, Du Pont, Goldsborough, Stringham, Foote, and Goldsborough, consistently advocated the use of combined operations and cooperation with the Army at the tactical and operational levels, Fox pushed back. The Assistant Secretary sincerely felt that "The Navy must end the war! The Army cannot do it!"⁴⁰³ Rather than establishing a command climate that fostered and encouraged the attainment of common strategic objectives, he pressured Union naval commanders to make the department's "prestige," their focus of effort.

⁴⁰³ Fox to Goldsborough, 9 Nov 1861. *Fox Correspondence*, I, 203.

Strategy could be likened to the foundation of a house. Though relatively simple to construct, should it be flawed or designed without the ultimate vision of the structure it is intended to support clearly in mind, it will ultimately result in a catastrophic failure. As noted above, battlefield brilliance rarely rescues bad military strategy or flawed policy.

This paper's principle argument is that the Union failed to develop and implement an effective military strategy during the first eighteen months of the war that sufficiently capitalized on Northern advantages and exploited several critical Confederate vulnerabilities. When the war commenced in 1861 the Union enjoyed tremendous advantages in almost every category used to calculate military potential. Conversely, the Confederacy suffered from several critical vulnerabilities. All of these are fairly well known and have received abundant historical treatment. Yet by the summer of 1862, Lee had not only repelled McClellan's assault on Richmond, but had sent Union forces scurrying back into the nation's capital for the second time in as many years. He crossed over the Potomac, and was in a position to win a victory on Northern soil that threatened foreign intervention. How could this be?

The Confederates were certainly out manned, out gunned, and under supplied compared to their Union antagonist. Was the Southern fighting man superior to his Northern cousin? Were the Confederacy's officers simply better than their Northern counterparts? Did the Southerner enjoy a certain moral ascendancy over the Union soldier because he was fighting to repel what he viewed as an invader? While these theories are interesting and have sparked their fair share of historical debate, the principle reason Lee was in Maryland was because the Union failed to implement an effective military strategy.

There were several factors that contributed to the Union's inability to develop sound military plans and policies during the first eighteen months of the war. First, the limited proficiency and low professional credibility of the nation's officer corps certainly hindered the effort. It contributed to strained civil military relations, and was one of the underling sources of confusion and second-guessing between the people, the military, and the administration in the spring and fall of 1861. Scott was initially held in high esteem, but the combination of his age and the fact that there was no clear-cut successor, created confusion in the Union high command. After Scott, the talent pool from which to draw experienced and sage military expertise was surprising shallow.

Political calculations and unrealistic expectations often trumped sound military judgment and common sense. The endemic feeling inherent in the American consciousness that military professionalism was unneeded or overrated contributed to this problem. There is a price to be paid in a society that views the presence of a large standing army as a threat to the liberty of its citizenry. Even when the clouds of war are clearly distinguishable on the horizon, it is the nature of such societies to defer action until after the storm has broken. In many respects this is admirable, especially given the alternatives, but Lincoln and a small, but vocal, minority of Union political leaders failed to realize that the price for decades of martial neglect was patience, and that military capability could not be generated overnight.

Second, the very nature of the war, itself, resulted in political ambiguity and confusion over Union war aims. Many members of the Union high command, including Lincoln himself, based their initial strategic ideas on false assumptions and optimistic hopes. Men like Blair, who thought Union troops would be greeted as liberators, failed to

understand the facts on the ground as they actually were. Though there was significant pro-Union support in many areas of the Confederacy, the vast majority of it dried up once Northern soldiers actually set foot on Southern soil. Closet Unionists faced stark choices. Take up arms against their friends and neighbors, knowing full well they would eventually have to live with them when the war ended, reluctantly join the ranks of the insurgents, or attempt to maintain some type of benevolent neutrality in the face of Union occupation on one hand, and Confederate conscription agents on the other.

Similarly, even if Northern arms proved successful, how was the Union going to convince Southerners to peacefully rejoin the Union after hostilities ceased? There was no easy answer to this question, and it produced two schools of competing thought. The first, advocated by many radical republicans, insisted upon a hard war approach from the very beginning. The second, initially embraced by the majority of the nation's professional military, was based on the combination of conciliation with the selective application of overwhelming force. These two conflicting views of the conflict deeply affected the initial development of Union strategy.

The third major factor contributing to the Union's strategic woes was the absence of an integrated command and staff system. The nation's armed forces were decades behind their European counterparts, and were simply not designed or organized to wage a large-scale war over such vast distances. It would take time, experience, and leadership to eventually develop an effective system of command.

Ironically, of all the complex reasons hampering the development of Union military strategy, the greatest impediment was surprisingly mundane. It was human nature. People in the upper echelons of the collective civilian and military leadership that constituted the

Union high command simply could not get along or function effectively together. All of the aforementioned problems were obstacles that could be overcome, but several sets of personality conflicts proved insurmountable, and occurred at critical moments in the war. Though this paper has focused on several of the more prominent, Lincoln-Scott, Scott-McClellan, and Lincoln-McClellan, the reality was that there were many more. Almost all of these failed relations were a byproduct of a larger atmosphere within Lincoln's own cabinet, and reflected the President's unique leadership style.⁴⁰⁴ In the final analysis, this lack of trust and cooperation within the Union high command was not due to any lack of structure or organization. It was primarily due to a lack of leadership!

As one prominent scholar so accurately observed, "There is danger, especially in democracy, when the General begins to mold policy in place of the statesman. And there is often disaster, when the politician, unschooled in military science, tries personally to draw up strategy and direct tactics." Examples of both the danger and the disaster were the root causes of the Union's inability to implement an effective military strategy in the first eighteen months of the war.⁴⁰⁵

Both Scott and his strategic concept were shown the door by an administration that could not withstand the irrational cries of "On to Richmond" as they related to the development and implementation of a sound military strategy. This led to an unproductive and frustrating year and a half as the Lincoln administration pursued the

⁴⁰⁴ Some historians like David Donald have celebrated Lincoln's often repeated remark that it was his policy "to have no policy" as a reflection of his pragmatism and political genius. See David Donald, *Lincoln Reconsidered*, pp.128-143. Such flexibility of mind, while an indispensable asset for the politician, proved to be a dangerous liability for Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief during the first eighteen months of the war.

⁴⁰⁵ Harsh, "George Britton McClellan and the Forgotten Alternative," p. 48.

temptress of a quick Napoleonic victory in the east, often to the detriment of larger and more important strategic objectives.

Historians have been quick to dismiss Scott's strategic concept out of hand, but as Joseph Harsh so aptly pointed out: "No one has even shown that Northern impatience was irresistible, or that Scott's plan could not at least have been tried. To what extent, it might be asked, would impatience have impaired moral? Would a bloodless strategy have dampened Northern morale more than the casualty lists of the Wilderness battles?" Would Scott's way have been more frustrating or more depressing than Grant's? One should recall the decline of Northern morale in the late summer of 1864 before assuming these questions are easily disposed of."⁴⁰⁶

McClellan's reversal of Scott's initial strategic designs unintentionally set the precedent for a long term commitment of Union forces to a prolonged, bloody, and indecisive war of attrition in the restricted terrain of Virginia. Rather than working with Scott to develop and implement an effective military strategy that exploited Southern critical vulnerabilities and calmed the nerves of men like Chase, Wade, Blair, and other champions of the "On to Richmond" policy, McClellan's duplicity created an aura of false expectations about prompt military action that eventually led to his own downfall.

While the destruction of the enemy's principle field army and the capture of Richmond was certainly Clausewitzian, and undoubtedly pleased many in Washington, it was not a smart military strategy. Instead of attacking Confederate weakness, it attacked Southern strength. Instead of attacking a center of gravity, it inadvertently created one. By the summer of 1862, the Army of Northern Virginia had become the embodiment of

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 92-93.

Southern martial prowess and the will to resist. It also became the cog around which the Confederacy's hopes for independence revolved.

Perhaps the greatest strategic shortfall in the devolvement of Union military strategy was its failure to realize the potential for expeditionary operations along the coast. Northern public opinion and international recognition were the cornerstones of Southern strategy. Both required time. If the Confederacy could extend the conflict and elevate its cost, the Northern people might have grown war weary and tired. Similarly, if the South could demonstrate an ability to fend off superior Union manpower and industry, Britain or France may have intervened. Both would require sustained battlefield success through a series of tactical victories or might have been achieved by a single crushing blow to Union arms. Yet, there was one important point to remember. While the Confederacy needed to prolong the war and win military victories, time was not necessarily on its side. In fact, it was a double-edged sword that cut both ways. For every battlefield success that theoretically procured more time, it also allowed the ever-tightening economic noose around its neck to further constrict.

This was the great dichotomy of Southern strategy the Union failed to exploit. By disregarding Scott's plan and choosing to prosecute decisive ground combat operations in Virginia, before overwhelming force could be assembled and employed, the Lincoln administration attempted to prosecute a flawed military strategy that actually facilitated Southern war aims. Instead of executing a strategic holding action in the east, the Union continued to bludgeon itself against the best army the Confederacy was capable of producing in a theater that was naturally predisposed to the tactical and operational defense. Thus, the Union, foolishly guided by the combination of McClellan's grandiose

visions of martial glory, the impatience of an overzealous Commander-in-Chief, and the vocal admonishments of a small number of radical republicans, embarked upon a military strategy that actually managed to come precariously close to giving the South the string of military victories it so desperately needed to erode Northern support for the war and gain international recognition.

Throughout the war, the Union continually attempted to seek a decisive battle in the wrong theater, at the wrong time, against the wrong enemy. The Union was capable of seizing all the Southern ports early in the war. While this would have prevented offensive action in Virginia, it would have been in line with Scott's original strategic thinking, and as certain as any non event in history can be, would likely have crippled the Confederacy before it had a chance to develop its war making infrastructure.

The great tactical lesson that emerged from the war was the superiority of the defense. Time after time, whether it was at the Seven Days, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, Franklin, Cold Harbor, or the Mule Shoe the entrenched defenders were consistently able to decimate attacking formations. If the Union had seized the strategically vital port cities of Charleston, Wilmington, and Mobile earlier in the war, and then erected fortifications and assumed the tactical defense, the course and the cost of the conflict would have been dramatically altered. The Confederacy would have faced a cruel strategic dilemma. Either to assault these fortified bastions or suffer the slow strangulation Winfield Scott's Anaconda had so astutely tried to engineer.

Vast amounts of small arms, saltpeter, meat, and iron flowed through the blockade and poured into the coastal ports of Wilmington and Charleston throughout the duration of the war. These supplies were crucial to the Confederate war effort, and constituted the

South's principle critical vulnerability. Despite its own Herculean efforts, the South was never able to establish levels of domestic production that could allow it to wane itself off of its dependence on foreign supply. The Confederacy's coast was vulnerable. Union leaders knew it. Expeditionary operations to seize these ports and project power further inland were viable military options, which Northern leaders knew of early in the war. Given these aforementioned realities, it is simply inconceivable that the Confederate war machine would not have been stopped in its tracks long before the spring of 1865, had the Union high command made a concerted effort to seize two coastal cities.

Eventually the Union was forced to destroy the South through the application of military force in order to achieve its wartime objectives.⁴⁰⁷ Whether this was inevitable or not is an argument significantly beyond the scope of this paper, but as Walter Mills noted:

Perhaps the most significant thing about this war was the fact that it was not really decided by the armies. There was no "decisive" battle even at Petersburg. The South simply ran out of manpower—rather as Hitler's Germany did in 1945. It was at the same time, of course, running out of much else. It had been cut to pieces by the campaign on the Mississippi and the march through Georgia. Its war industry in Georgia and Alabama had been captured. The blockade had finally become effective; the fall of Fort Fisher on the Cape Fear in 1865 had closed the last outlet to the world. The last firm center of resistance in Virginia had nothing more to stand on. Lee, a Virginia aristocrat, recognized the situation as Hitler, the paranoiac, was never able to do. There was no other possible outcome. But the Army of Northern Virginia had not been defeated; it was surrendered."⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁷ Charles Roland, *The Confederacy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 195. The Confederacy eventually mustered nearly a 1,000,000 southern men into military service. More than one fourth of these men would die from wounds or disease. If viewed as a percentage of total population, Southern losses were nearly equivalent to those suffered by the major European powers during the two greatest blood lettings of the Twentieth Century. If the North would have suffered a similar percentage, Union war dead would have totaled somewhere around a 1,000,000 instead of 300,000, the colonies in their struggle with England would have lost 94,000 killed instead of 12,000, and the United States would have suffered 6,000,000 war dead instead of 300,000 during the Second World War.

⁴⁰⁸ Walter Mills, *Arms and Men: A Study in American Military History*. (Rutgers University Press, 1981). p. 48

It seems certain that Lee's army would have been surrendered much earlier had the Union simply seized two of the three remaining Confederate ports that were still open to the world in April 1862. However fortuitous the final outcome of the war looks to us today, we must be careful not to judge the strategic conduct of the conflict through the glasses of twentieth century Clausewitzian hindsight. Union strategy was flawed, not because it neglected to anticipate and implement the requirements of total war on its own population sooner, but rather, because it failed to develop the necessary military strategy to win a limited one earlier.⁴⁰⁹ The reasons for this failure were many and complex. In the final analysis, however, the principle cause was not one of organization, politics, or technology; it was simply a lack of leadership at the strategic level.

⁴⁰⁹ Harsh, "Battlesword and Rapier," p. 137. This was Harsh's principle argument which seems to have been inspired by C Van Woodward, "Equality: America's Deferred Commitment," *The American Scholar*, XXVII (Autumn, 1958), pp. 459-460.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Chronology of Significant Strategic Events (1861-1862)

1861

9 Jan: Mississippi secedes. *Star of the West* fired on when trying to provision Sumter

10 Jan: Florida secedes

11 Jan: Alabama secedes

19 Jan: Georgia secedes

26 Jan: Louisiana secedes

1 Feb: Texas secedes

9 Feb Jefferson Davis named President of the provisional Confederate government

4 March: Lincoln inaugurated. Gideon Welles becomes Secretary of the Navy

12 April: Fort Sumter attacked

15 April: Lincoln calls for 75,000 3-month volunteers

17 April: Virginia secedes. Jefferson Davis invites applications for letters of marque.

18 April: U.S. Arsenal at Harpers Ferry burned and abandoned. Confederates able to recover machinery capable of producing 15,000 small arms per year

19 April: Lincoln issues proclamation declaring blockade of Southern ports from South Carolina to Texas.

20 April: Norfolk Navy Yard abandoned by retreating Union forces.

20 April: Robert E. Lee resigns from the U.S. Army

27 April: Union blockade extended to cover the coast of North Carolina and Virginia

6 May: Arkansas secedes.

13 May: British issue Proclamation of Neutrality

20 May: North Carolina secedes.

29 May: Richmond becomes capital of the Confederacy

10 June: French issue Proclamation of Neutrality

24 June: Tennessee secedes

5 July: Blockade Board submits its first report

21 July: First Battle of Bull Run

27 July: McClellan replaces McDowell

1 August: Lincoln appoints Gustavus Fox as Assistant Secretary of the Navy.

29 August: Forts Hatteras and Clark unconditionally surrender to Union forces under the command of Flag Officer S. H. Stringham and General B. F. Butler. Pamlico Sound effectively closed.

17 September: Confederates evacuate Ship Island, Mississippi

18 September: Flag Officer Samuel F. Du Pont assumes command of the newly created South Atlantic Blockading Squadron. Flag Officer Louis M. Goldsborough assumes command of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron

1 October: Confederate naval forces capture steamer *Fanny* (later CSS *Fanny*) in Pamlico Sound with Union troops on board.

29 October: The Port Royal Expedition under the command of Flag Officer Du Pont and BGen Sherman sails from Hampton Roads Virginia

1 November: General George B. McClellan appointed General in Chief succeeding Winfield Scott.

7 November: Union naval forces under Flag Officer S. F. Du Pont capture Port Royal Sound.

8 November: Trent Affair, USS *San Jacinto*, under the command of Captain C. Wilkes, stopped British mail steamer *Trent* in Old Bahama Channel and removed Confederate Commissioners James Mason and John Slidell.

12 November: *Fingal* (later CSS *Atlanta*), purchased in England, entered Savannah laden with military supplies -- the first ship to run the blockade solely on Confederate government account.

20 November: Halleck assumes command of the Department of Missouri

1862

9 January: Flag Officer D. G. Farragut appointed to command the Western Gulf Blockading Squadron.

13 Jan: E.M. Stanton replaces Simon Cameron as Secretary of War

30 January USS *Monitor* launched

6 February: Naval forces under Flag Officer A. H. Foote and General Ulysses S. Grant capture the strategic Fort Henry on the Tennessee River. This breached the Confederate line and opened the flood gates for the flow of Union power deep into the South.

7-8 February: Joint amphibious expedition under the command of Flag Officer Goldsborough and Brigadier General A. E. Burnside capture Roanoke Island -- the key to Albemarle Sound.

16 February: Gunboats under Flag Officer A. H. Foote operating on the Cumberland River in conjunction with troops under Brigadier General U. S. Grant capture Fort Donelson.

25 February: Nashville is the first Confederate state capital to fall to Union forces

3 March: Union forces under the command of Flag Officer S. F. Du Pont take Fernandina, Florida.

8 March: Lincoln relieves McClellan of supreme command. McClellan retained command of the Army of the Potomac.

8 March: CSS *Virginia* attacks and destroys the wooden blockading ships USS *Cumberland* and *Congress* in Hampton Roads.

9 March: USS *Monitor* engages CSS *Virginia* in the first battle between ironclads.

14 March: Joint amphibious assault under command of Commander S. C. Rowan and Brigadier General A. E. Burnside capture New Bern, North Carolina

4 April: McClellan begins the Peninsula Campaign

6-7 April 1862: Battle of Shiloh.

7 April: Island No. 10, vital to the Confederate defense of the upper Mississippi, surrendered to the Union forces under the command of Flag Officer A. H. Foote.

11 April: Fort Pulaski, controlling the mouth of the Savannah River, capitulates to Union forces under the command of General Quincy A. Gillmore.

24 April: Flag Officer Farragut's fleet ran past Forts Jackson and St. Philip, and destroyed the defending Confederate flotilla below New Orleans.

25 April: New Orleans, the South's largest and wealthiest city, surrenders to Union forces under the command of Flag Officer Farragut.

3 May: General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson commences his Valley Campaign

10 May: Confederate forces destroy and then withdrawal from the Norfolk and Pensacola Navy Yards. Completes the forced Southern withdrawal from her coasts.

11 May: Confederates evacuate Norfolk. CSS *Virginia* scuttled by her crew off Craney Island in order to prevent her capture by advancing Union forces.

15 May: The James River Flotilla under Commander J. Rodgers advanced unsupported to within eight miles of Richmond before being turned back by batteries mounted on Drewry's Bluff.

31 May: The Battle of Seven Pines (Fair Oaks).

6 June: Union gunboats under Captain C. H. Davis and rams under the command of Colonel C. R. Ellet Jr., defeat Confederate gunboats and capture Memphis, Tennessee.

28 June: Flag Officer Farragut's fleet successfully ran the heavy batteries at Vicksburg.

26 June to 2 July: The Seven Days' Battles.

Mechanicsville (June 26-27), Gaines's Mill (June 27), Savage's Station (June 29), Frayser's Farm (June 30), and Malvern Hill (July 1). On July 2, the Confederates withdrew to Richmond, ending the Peninsular Campaign

1 July: Farragut's forces link up with those of Flag Officer C. H. Davis: the fresh and salt-water fleets met for the first time. The Union controls the Mississippi.

1-2 July: Flag Officer Goldsborough's fleet covers the withdrawal of Major General McClellan's army after the battle of Malvern Hill.

11 July: Major-General Henry Halleck was named general-in-chief of the Union army.

16 July: David Glasgow Farragut promoted to Rear Admiral, the first officer to hold that rank in the history of the U.S. Navy.

Appendix B: The “Anaconda Plan”

HEADQUARTERS OF THE ARMY,
Washington, May 3, 1861.
Major General GEORGE B. McCLELLAN,
Commanding Ohio Volunteers, Cincinnati, Ohio:

SIR: I have read and carefully considered your plan for a campaign,* and now send you confidentially my own views, supported by certain facts of which you should be advised.

First. It is the design of the Government to raise 25,000 additional regular troops, and 60,000 volunteers for three years. It will be inexpedient either to rely on the three-months' volunteers for extensive operations or to put in their hands the best class of arms we have in store. The term of service would expire by the commencement of a regular campaign and the terms not lost be returned mostly in a damaged condition. Hence I must strongly urge upon you to confine yourself strictly to the quota of three-months' men called for by the War Department.

Second. We rely greatly on the sure operation of a complete blockade of the Atlantic and Gulf ports soon to commence. In connection with such blockade we propose a powerful movement down the Mississippi to the ocean, with a cordon of posts at proper points and capture of Forts Jackson and Saint Philip; the object being to clear out and keep open this great line of communication in connection with the strict blockade of the sea-board, so as to envelop the insurgent States and bring them to terms with less bloodshed than be any other plan. I suppose there will be needed from twelve to twenty steam gun-boats, and a sufficient number of steam transports (say forty) to carry all the personnel (say 60,000 men) and material of the expedition; most of the gun-boats to be in advance to open the way, and the remainder to follow and protect the rear of the expedition, &c. This army, in which it is not improbable you may be invited to take an important part, should be composed of our best regulars for the advance and of three-years' volunteers, all well officered, and with four months and a half of instruction in camps prior to (say) November 10. In the progress down the river all the enemy's batteries on its banks we of course would turn and capture, leaving a sufficient number of posts with complete garrisons to keep the river open behind the expedition. Finally, it will be necessary that New Orleans should be strongly occupied and securely held until the present difficulties are composed.

Third. A word now as to the greatest obstacle in the way of this plan- the great danger now pressing upon us-the impatience of our patriotic and loyal Union friends. They will urge instant vigorous action, regardless, I fear, of consequences-that is, unwilling to wait for the slow instruction of (say) twelve or fifteen camps, for the rise of rivers, and the return of frosts to kill the virus of malignant fevers below Memphis. I fear this; but impress right views, on every proper occasion, upon the brave men who are hastening to the support of their Government. Lose no time, while necessary preparations for the great expedition are in progress, in organizing, drilling, and disciplining your three-months' men, many of whom, it is hoped, will be ultimately found enrolled under the call for

three-years' volunteers. Should an urgent and immediate occasion arise meantime for their services, they will be the more effective. I commend these views to your consideration, and shall be happy to hear the result.

With great respect, your, truly,

WINFIELD SCOTT.

Appendix C: McClellan to Lincoln, Aug 2, 1861

The object of the present war differs from those in which nations are usually engaged mainly in this, that the purpose of ordinary war is to conquer a peace and make a treaty on advantageous terms. In this contest it has become necessary to crush a population sufficiently numerous, intelligent, and warlike to constitute a nation. We have not only to defeat their armed and organized forces in the field, but to display such an overwhelming strength as will convince all our antagonists, especially those of the governing, aristocratic class, of the utter impossibility of resistance. Our late reverses make this course imperative. Had we been successful in the recent battle (Manassas), it is possible that we might have been spared the labor and expenses of a great effort.

Now we have no alternative. Their success will enable the political leaders of the rebels to convince the mass of their people that we are inferior to them in force and courage, and to command all their resources. The contest began with a class; now it is with a people. Our military success can alone restore the former issue.

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

Our foreign relations and financial credit also imperatively demand that the military action of the Government should be prompt and irresistible.

The rebels have chosen Virginia as their battle-field, and it seems proper for us to make the first great struggle there. But, while thus directing our main efforts, it is necessary to diminish the resistance there offered us by movements on other points both by land and water.

Without entering at present into details, I would advise that a strong movement be made on the Mississippi, and that the rebels be driven out of Missouri.

As soon as it becomes perfectly clear that Kentucky is cordially united with us, I would advise a movement through that State into Eastern Tennessee, for the purpose of assisting the Union men of that region, and of seizing the railroads leading from Memphis to the East. The possession of those roads by us, in connection with the movement on the Mississippi, would go far towards determining the evacuation of Virginia by the rebels. In the mean time all the passes into Western Virginia from the East should be securely guarded, but I would advise no movement from that quarter towards Richmond, unless the political condition of Kentucky renders it impossible or inexpedient for us to make the movement upon Eastern Tennessee through that State. Every effort should, however, be made to organize, equip, and arm as many troops as possible in Western Virginia, in order to render the Ohio and Indiana regiments available for other operations.

At as early a day as practicable it would be well to protect and reopen the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Baltimore and Fort Monroe should be occupied by garrisons sufficient to retain them in our possession.

The importance of Harper's Ferry and the line of the Potomac in the direction of Leesburg will be very materially diminished so soon as Our force in this vicinity becomes organized, strong, and efficient, because no capable general will cross the river north of this city when we have a strong army here ready to cut off his retreat.

To revert to the West: It is probable that no very large additions to the troops now in Missouri will be necessary to secure that State.

I presume that the force required for the movement down the Mississippi will be determined by its commander and the President. If Kentucky assumes the right position, not more than 20,000 will be needed, together with those that can be raised in that State and Eastern Tennessee, to secure the latter region and its railroads, as well as ultimately to occupy Nashville.

The western Virginia troops, with not more than 5,000 to 10,000 from Ohio and Indiana, should, under proper management, suffice for its protection.

When we have reorganized our main army here 10,000 men ought to be enough to protect the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the Potomac; 5,000 will garrison Baltimore, 3,000 Fort Monroe, and not more than 20,000 will be necessary at the utmost for the defense of Washington.

For the main army of operations I urge the following composition:

	Men.
250 regiments of infantry, say	225, 000
100 field batteries, 600 guns	15,000
28 regiments of cavalry	25,500
5 regiments engineer troops	7, 500
 Total	 273,000

The force must be supplied with the necessary engineer and pontoon trains, and with transportation for everything save tents. Its general line of operations should be so directed that water transportation can be availed of from point to point by means of the ocean and the rivers emptying into it. An essential feature of the plan of operations will, be the employment of a strong naval force, to protect the movement of a fleet of transports intended to convey a considerable body of troops from point to point of the enemy's sea-coast, thus either creating diversions and rendering it necessary for them to detach largely from their main body in order to protect such of their cities as may be threatened, or else landing and forming establishments on their coast at any favorable places that opportunity might offer. This naval force should also co- operate with the main army in its efforts to seize the important seaboard towns of the rebels.

It cannot be ignored that the construction of railroads has introduced a new and very important element into war, by the great facilities thus given for concentrating at particular positions large masses of troops from remote sections and creating new strategic points and lines of operations.

It is intended to overcome this difficulty by the partial operations suggested, and such others as the particular case -may require. We must endeavor to seize places on • the railways in the rear of the enemy's points of concentration, and we must threaten their

seaboard cities, in order that each State may be forced, by the necessity of its own defense, to diminish its contingent to the Confederate army.

The proposed movement down the Mississippi will produce important results in this connection. That advance and the progress of the main army at the East will materially assist each other by diminishing the resistance to be encountered by each.

The tendency of the Mississippi movement upon all questions connected with cotton is too well understood by the President and Cabinet to need any illustration from me.

There is another independent movement that has often been suggested, and which has always recommended itself to my judgment. I refer to a movement from Kansas and Nebraska through the Indian Territory upon Red River and Western Texas, for the purpose of protecting and developing the latent Union and free-State sentiment well known to predominate in Western Texas, and which, like a similar sentiment in Western Virginia, will, if protected, ultimately organize that section into a free State. How far it will be possible to support this movement by an advance through New Mexico from California is a matter which I have not sufficiently examined to be able to express a decided opinion. If at all practicable it is eminently desirable, as bringing into play the resources and warlike qualities of the Pacific States, as well as identifying them with our cause and cementing the bond of union between them and the General Government.

If it is not departing too far from my province, I will venture to suggest the policy of an intimate alliance and cordial understanding with Mexico; their sympathies and interests are with us—their antipathies exclusively against our enemies and their institutions. I think it would not be difficult to obtain from the Mexican Government the right to use, at least during the present contest, the road from Guaymas to New Mexico. This concession would very materially reduce the obstacles of the column moving from the Pacific. A similar permission to use their territory for the passage of troops between the Panuco and the Rio Grande would enable us to throw a column of troops by a good road from Tampico, or some of the small harbors north of it, upon and across the Rio Grande, without risk, and scarcely firing a shot.

To what extent, if any, it would be desirable to take into service and employ Mexican soldiers is a question entirely political, on which I do not venture to offer an opinion.

The force I have recommended is large; the expense is great. It is possible that a smaller force might accomplish the object in view, but I understand it to be the purpose of this great nation to re-establish the power of its Government and restore peace to its citizens in the shortest possible time.

The question to be decided is simply this: Shall we crush the rebellion at one blow, terminate the war in one campaign, or shall we leave it as a legacy for our descendants?

When the extent of the possible line of operations is considered, the force asked for the main army under my command cannot be regarded as unduly large; every mile we advance carries us farther from our base of operations and renders detachments necessary to cover our communications, while the enemy will be constantly concentrating as he falls back. I propose, with the force which I have requested, not only to drive the enemy out of Virginia and occupy Richmond, but to occupy Charleston, Savannah, Montgomery, Pensacola, Mobile, and New Orleans; in other words, to move into the heart of the enemy's country and crush the rebellion in its very heart.

By seizing and repairing the railroads as we advance the difficulties of transportation will be materially diminished. It is, perhaps, unnecessary to state that, in addition to the forces named in this memorandum, strong reserves should be formed, ready to supply any losses that may occur. In conclusion, I would submit that the exigencies of the Treasury may be lessened by making only partial payments to our troops when in the enemy's country, and by giving the obligations of the United States for such supplies as may there be obtained.