

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE OFFICE OF
THE COMMANDING GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY, 1821 TO 1861

by

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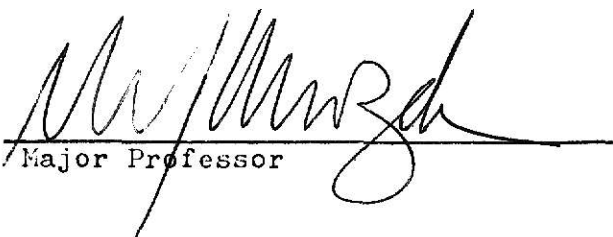
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THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE OFFICE OF
THE COMMANDING GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY, 1821 TO 1861

I. INTRODUCTION

The office of the Commanding General of the United States Army had an accidental genesis as a by-product of legislative action in March of 1821.¹ The primary purpose of the congressional act was to reduce the size of the regular army. Neither the Congress nor the Secretary of War had examined in advance the possible role of a Commanding General; therefore, the act of Congress did not designate the duties of its first incumbent.

The Commanding Generals who served between 1821 and 1861 established the duties of the office. They assumed office on orders that designated them to command the Army; yet, the authority and the responsibility of the Commanding General in fulfilling his obligation were never completely defined. For that matter, no one specified what "command of the Army" included. The result was constant tension between the Commanding Generals and both the Secretaries of War and the chiefs of the bureaus of the War Department. The primary issue centered on unity of command.

Unity of command proved to be a critical problem in the Army as the 20th century began. After the Spanish-American War, the Secretary of War Elihu Root instituted an exceptional series of reforms within the War Department which were designed to reshape the Army into an instrument of national power capable of coping with modern warfare. Secretary Root considered the division of authority between the Commanding

General and the Secretary to be the chief weakness to be solved in order to accomplish his goal.² This issue was resolved following the last war of the 19th century, but it had been defined before the Civil War.

The purpose of this report is to trace the evolution of the office of the Commanding General from its beginnings in 1821 to the eve of the Civil War. The primary focus is on the three general officers -- Jacob Jennings Brown, Alexander Macomb, and Winfield Scott -- who occupied the office during this period and the influence of their actions in office on determining the extent of unity of command.

II. ORIGIN OF THE OFFICE

The disasters of the War of 1812 provided meaningful lessons for the members of the Madison administration and for the Congress. The United States had been unprepared for war. There was a consensus among the members of the executive and legislative branches that the situation should never occur again.³ The reforms of the military establishment in the post-war years demonstrated the strength of this viewpoint.

President Madison advised the Congress in a special message immediately after the war that "a certain degree of preparation for war is not only indispensable to avert disasters in the onset, but also the best security for the continuance for peace." The Chief Executive recommended "the maintenance of an adequate regular force."⁴ Congress approved in March of that year a standing army of 10,000 officers and men, a total in marked contrast to the 3,220 officers and men in the regular peacetime army under President Jefferson.⁵

President Madison's Secretary of War William H. Crawford echoed

the theme of readiness for future war. Crawford recommended to Congress that the general staff should be retained in peacetime. The general staff had been created by Congress in the spring of 1813. The purpose of the staff was to accomplish administrative and technical tasks, "housekeeping services." Its members included the quartermaster general, the commissary general of ordnance, the paymaster, and the assistant topographical engineer; and, each officer reported directly to the Secretary.⁶ The general staff did not resemble the system instituted by Secretary Elihu Root in 1903. The original intent in 1813 was to relieve the Secretary of War from the burdens of administrative routine during the conduct of the war. Crawford believed that the general staff should be a permanent institution because the lessons of the war convinced him of the "necessity of giving to the military establishment, in time of peace, the organization which it must have to render it efficient in a state of war."⁷ In April of 1816, Congress passed legislation approving the retention of the general staff.

President Monroe pursued the program of reform instituted during the Madison administration. In his inaugural address of 1817, the new President informed the nation that the Army should "garrison and preserve our fortifications and ... meet the first invasion of a foreign foe, and, while constituting the elements of a greater force, ... preserve the science as well as all the necessary implements of war in a state to be brought into activity in the event of war."⁸ The emphasis remained on readiness for future war.

The new Secretary of War John C. Calhoun prepared the program to implement the President's policy. Actions undertaken during the first

three years in office included conducting the first systematic survey of the coast line to identify strategic locations for seacoast fortifications; the compilation of a standard manual for the administration and tactical training of the Army; encouragement and financial support of the efforts of Sylvanus Thayer to rejuvenate the Academy at West Point; and finally bringing all members of the general staff to Washington under the direct jurisdiction of the Secretary of War.⁹

For a period of five years following the end of the War of 1812, two Secretaries of War instituted a program of military reform. The justification for the program was the general notion that the Army must be prepared for future war, even if no clear and immediate threat were at hand. The Congress approved the reforms. The changes made in the War Department revealed what the Secretary of War meant by preparedness in terms of organization. The War Department consisted of the general staff and the Army. Both elements were under the direct supervision of the Secretary.¹⁰ The size of the Army was three times larger than the pre-war level. Two major generals were authorized, and they commanded the two geographical divisions in which the units of the Army were located.¹¹ No one in either the Madison or the Monroe administration advocated a single Commanding General of the Army. The experience of the War of 1812 had revealed the need for greater coordination within the military establishment; however, reform measures focused on the size of the Army and the administrative system. Even in the officer corps there were few advocates for a common military superior.¹² The office of Commanding General would originate with legislation by Congress to restore frugality to the national government.

In May of 1820 the House of Representatives passed a resolution submitted by Henry Clay calling for the Secretary of War to present a plan for the reduction of the Army from 10,000 to 6,000 officers and men.¹³ The climax of war-inspired reforms had passed. The near catastrophes of war and the unprecedented economic boom which followed the end of the war were key political considerations permitting the maintenance of a comparatively large standing army. In turn, the effects of the Panic of 1819 gave the economizers in the House of Representatives a crucial argument for the decrease of federal expenditures. The War Department, the largest executive agency, with unsettled accounts of \$45,000,000, presented a sure target.¹⁴ In December, Secretary Calhoun complied with the orders of the House.

The Secretary proposed an unique plan which would permit the directed reductions, while maintaining an organization based on the principle that "at the commencement of hostilities, there should be nothing either to new model or to create."¹⁵ This was Calhoun's "Expansible Army" plan, which ranks as one of the outstanding American state papers on military affairs. For the balance of the century, military leaders testifying before Congress on the purpose of the Army would use Calhoun's plan as a point of departure. At the turn of the century, Secretary Root would advocate principles of organization which agreed with Calhoun's that the true object of any army must be "to provide for war."¹⁶ Even Congressman Thomas Cobb, who opposed the plan in 1820, acknowledged that it was the "ablest, most ingenious, and, upon the whole, the best defence (sic) of a standing army which I have seen in print."¹⁷

Calhoun advocated the reduction of the enlisted ranks. This

would permit the retention of a large number of officers on active duty where they could maintain their professional expertise. The regular structure of the Army would be retained on a cadre or skeleton basis. In the event of war, the Army could be expanded by recruits to a total of 19,000 men. By effecting the reductions in this way, the Army could retain prepared, trained leaders.

Congress rejected Calhoun's proposals on March 2, 1821. Congress did not, however, dismiss the validity or importance of the concept of preparedness.¹⁸ Calhoun had consulted his general officers for advice before preparing the plan. All of them had opposed a reduction in strength. If their reasoning did not prevail, the generals had recommended the reductions of enlisted men. The experiences of the past war convinced them that only by retaining the officers could the problems of mobilization be resolved. Thus, Calhoun asserted "the qualifications of the officers are essentially superior to those of the soldiers, and are more difficult to be acquired."¹⁹ He maintained that "war is an art."²⁰ The reductions of the officers by Congress did not change the convictions of the senior military leaders.

The act of Congress retained the general staff. Calhoun had previously maintained in 1818 that "no part of our military organization requires more attention in peace than the general staff." Calhoun believed that "if (the general staff) neglected in peace, when there is leisure, it will be impossible, in the midst of the hurry and bustle of war, to bring it to perfection."²¹ The necessity of a general staff again had been validated by Congress as well.

This reduction of the size of the peacetime Army was the only

cutback to occur during the period 1821 to 1861. The only changes in strength would be to increase the force. These changes would be justified on the basis of the role of the Army in supporting the westward expansion of the nation.²² In the post-war era, large numbers of citizens moved west of the Appalachian Mountains. In 1810, one of every seven Americans lived in that region. In 1820, the figure had increased to one of every four. By 1850, over half of the population of the United States would reside to the west of the Appalachian Mountains.²³ The issue of preparedness may have no longer represented to Congress the major justification for a peacetime Army, but future attempts to reduce the Army would not succeed. The Army's role in the settlement of the West would provide the justification for a peacetime force.

The legislation of 1821 eliminated one of the two major generals. The purpose of the act was to reduce the size of the Army, not to centralize command. Neither the Congress nor Secretary Calhoun had examined in advance the possible role of a single Commanding General. Thus, the act of Congress of March 2, 1821, marked the birth of the office of the Commanding General; however, Congress had not designated the duties of the incumbent.²⁴

The provisions of the act went into effect on June 1.²⁵ The Secretary of War served as the constitutional assistant to the President in his role as Commander-in-Chief. Beneath the Secretary were three distinct organizational elements: the Commanding General, the general staff, and the Army. The organization of the War Department appeared to provide the Secretary of War with the management tools for the efficient control of the Army. Unity of effort, however, was more like an illusion.

The effort of Calhoun had been to create an administrative system through which he, as Secretary of War, could exert strong, positive control of the Army. His design of the organization reflected the Secretary's role as the central focus of military authority within the War Department. Through the general staff and the two military departmental commanders, Calhoun would effect the efficient operation of the department. On the one hand, the general staff, with their bureaus in Washington and staff officers in the field with the line commanders, would provide technical channels for firm control of such tasks as disbursements, map making, inspections, health care of the force, and logistical support of the field Army. The regulations of the Army for 1821 depicted this role of the general staff; however, the new regulations did not specify the relationship between the line commander and the staff departments, which in time was to reveal one weakness of the system relative to unity of effort.²⁶

On the other hand, command of the Army would be discharged through the two geographical commands into which the country had been divided. The line of the Army -- the fighting units such as infantry, cavalry, and artillery -- was located in territorial commands under the jurisdiction of line commanders. The generals in charge of the two military departments²⁷ supervised subordinate commanders, who in turn had charge of garrisons and posts. In practice, line commanders had a significant degree of autonomy because of the isolation of their stations, but the post-war system had been designed to enhance the central control of the line. Again, the regulations of 1821 reflected this intent of Calhoun. But, the regulations were written before the office of the Commanding

General was authorized by virtue of an act to reduce federal spending. Where would the Commanding General fit in Calhoun's system?²⁸

Congress provided the title. Secretary Calhoun called the Commanding General to the War Department, gave him an office and issued orders designating him "to command the Army." No one prescribed his duties, and no one questioned the potential effects of the ambiguity of his authority and responsibility relative to the Secretary, the general staff, or the rest of the Army.

The incumbents who occupied the new office between 1821 and 1861 would establish the duties of the Commanding General. They were career soldiers and famous veterans of the War of 1812. In the aftermath of that war, they had chosen to remain in the peacetime Army. They had been actively engaged in the reorganizational efforts that had taken place in the immediate years after the war. Each one believed that regulars won wars; and, during periods of peace, the critical task was to prepare the Army for the next war. Their actions in office reflected this belief and had a significant impact on the definition of the issue of unity of command.

III. MAJOR GENERAL JACOB JENNINGS BROWN, 1821-1828

President Monroe selected Jacob Jennings Brown to remain as the sole major general. Andrew Jackson, the other major general in service, accepted an offer by the President to serve as the Governor of the Florida Territory.²⁹ Brown's first duty was to preside over a board charged to select the other officers for retention in the service. This task was undoubtedly an unpleasant responsibility. Brown agreed fully with

the need for a standing army of at least 10,000 officers and men; and the forced reductions caused him great concern. In response to Calhoun's request for advice on how to honor Congress's request in 1820, Brown wrote:

It is not without reluctance that I have for a moment taken into consideration the reduction of the military establishment, so little adequate do I consider it to the actual exigencies of the country.... The protection of our western settlements, & the occupation of post already established, the maintenance of which is of obvious and generally admitted necessity ... afford employment for the full numbers of our military force with its present dimensions.... In this change (reluctantly provided) I do not contemplate a reduction of the number of Officers: I conceive it of the highest importance to retain as many as possible. Military experience is too laborious & tedious of acquisition to be sacrificed (sic) without urgent necessity, when once attained.³⁰

Brown had no problem accepting Calhoun's reasoning in support of a standing army. His service as chairman of the board of general officers charged with nominating officers for retention illustrates the point. The prerequisite for a nomination for retention was service in the War of 1812. The only way an exception was granted pertained to the date of commission. If the commission was granted after the war and it was based on attendance at the Academy at West Point, the officer was eligible for retention. Brown valued experience. This observation stands out in a review of his prior service in the military.³¹

Jacob Brown's military education began as a commander in the militia in New York in 1809, and he became an expert leader in combat between 1812 and 1815. Brown demonstrated unlimited vigor, aggressiveness, and single-mindedness in coming to grips with the enemy. His famous subordinate, Winfield Scott, proclaimed that Brown "was always treading on the heels or stamping on the toes of the enemy."³²

Brown learned his lessons. Regulars won wars. As a brigadier general at Sackett's harbor in 1813, his militia broke and ran. His regulars held. Brown received a commission in the regulars as a brigadier general subsequent to that experience. Although he served under General James Wilkinson in the abortive invasion to capture Montreal, the fiasco did his reputation no harm, and he received a promotion to major general. Later, Brown commanded the forces at Chippewa and Lundy's Lane on the Niagara frontier. His troops, trained and disciplined by Brigadier General Scott, earned professional immortality. He always remembered the importance of training and discipline.³³

Brown also learned that to lead combat troops required more than training and discipline; the men had to be fed and equipped. During the war, Brown discovered that the Army's supply system was as dangerous as the enemy. Indeed, the problems in maintaining a force had sparked the creation of the general staff in 1813. The new organization, however, did not improve the performance of the civilian contractors. Field commanders continued to receive inferior services and materiel, such as summer uniforms for troops on the northwestern frontier in the middle of winter, tents which leaked during rainy days, and muskets without spare parts.³⁴ Brown, for example, could not field a new volunteer regiment in 1814 for almost three months. He had to wait between March and May for the unit while a search was conducted for muskets, field equipment and other supplies.³⁵ Brown placed the blame for the failures in supply operations on the lack of Army control of deliveries of supplies and inadequate armories. He had so informed Calhoun during the reorganization of the Army, and he agreed with the new supply system instituted

in 1818 -- removal of the responsibility of delivering and issuing supplies from the contractors and requiring delivery by contractors to military depots, where bulk deliveries were inspected and issued by staff departments. Brown believed that the general staff, as organized by Calhoun, had to be retained; and the general staff, with the new supply system, provided the critical changes that had been dictated by his experience during the war.³⁶

Brown had to wait until 1822 before he assumed an active role as the Commanding General. He had suffered an almost fatal stroke in the fall of 1821 while preparing for the move to Washington.³⁷ By the time Brown arrived in the capital, his position had come under attack in the Congress. William Eustis, the Chairman of the House Military Affairs Committee and the former Secretary of War from 1809 to 1812, had cleared a bill calling for the further reduction of the Army and the elimination of the position of major general.³⁸ Retrenchment continued as a chief characteristic of federal policy, but this time it was an issue in the campaign for the Presidency (1824). Secretary Calhoun was a leading contender.

Calhoun accepted the office of Secretary of War after President Monroe had been turned down by Henry Clay, William Lowndes, Governor Isaac Shelby, and others. For Calhoun, however, the nomination presented the opportunity to demonstrate his abilities as an administrator in addition to those he had shown as a legislator. The "War Hawk" had experienced humiliation in the first years of the war, but the sudden "popularity" of the war at its end had renewed his nationalist faith as well as his political ambition. Calhoun's accomplishments as Secretary of

War had enhanced his prospects for the Presidency. By 1822, the leading contenders included Clay, Secretary of the Treasury Crawford, and Calhoun. Votes in Congress often represented the strength of the potential candidates, rather than reasoned positions on the intrinsic merits of issues.³⁹

On this occasion, Eustis conceded that the proposal for cutbacks in the size of the Army might not be necessary. John Quincy Adams recorded in his diary in June that Eustis claimed that "he would have broken Calhoun at the last Session of Congress (if possible) and that he might yet do it at the next."⁴⁰ The office of Commanding General did not stand out as the future target of congressional action until Brown's death in 1828.

The general's health undoubtedly affected his performance in the six years he lived after 1822. He spent a large portion of his time in Washington poring over reports from the line units and preparing reports for the Secretary of War and the Congress. From the information gathered through such activities and through infrequent inspection trips to the posts and detachments scattered across the United States, Brown fulfilled the task of an advisor to civil authority. Brown's efforts for the first time gave the Secretary of War and the President a full time professional officer to keep them informed on the status of the Army and on policy matters concerning military affairs.⁴¹ The significance of Brown's advisory role emerged in his support for schools of practice.

Brown maintained that to send a graduate of the Academy to the frontier for an indefinite period was detrimental to the morale of the officer as well as the readiness of the Army. In March of 1823, Brown

told Calhoun that if there could be no school where the officers could practice their tactical skills, then "it would seem to be almost in vain that military education is fostered, if it is to terminate with the course of studies at West Point."⁴² Calhoun agreed because in 1818 and 1820 he had advocated a similar argument in Congress, but it had been rejected. Brown's proposal, however, provided the means to open a school of practice without requiring additional monies or manpower.⁴³

Brown had long expressed concern that the line of the Army was being scattered throughout the country. This dispersal permitted the Army to perform many useful tasks connected with civic works and frontier security; however, Brown's concern centered on the effect of the dispersion on unit training and discipline.⁴⁴ His assessment of the defense needs of the nation had given Brown a possible solution to the problem of unit integrity and the lack of a school of practice. Brown wrote to Calhoun:

I have deemed it my duty to communicate for your consideration suggestions, which have occurred to me in reflecting on the local condition of the Army and the state of its discipline ... if the small posts within the external line of defence (sic) in the North West be abandoned and the garrisons united to their Regiments, which I would advise, as soon as it can conveniently be done -- the posts on the Atlantic coast, which are not of indispensable utility, be relinquished and the garrisons concentrated for the organization of a school of practice; the Army will then possess all the facilities for the preservation of its discipline, the improvement of its science and the extension of its character, which are attainable under the difficulties incident to its limited numbers and the vast territory, over which it is spread.⁴⁵

Calhoun ordered the establishment of the Army's Artillery School of Practice at Fort Monroe in 1824. The plan for the school reflected Brown's concern for preparedness for future war. After graduating from West

Point, each lieutenant of artillery was to receive a year of additional training at the school of practice. All artillery companies would pass through the school by method of annual rotation. The companies would serve as the faculty, as well as train in the art of artillery employment.⁴⁶ The success of the school, however, presented a new problem for the Commanding General and the Secretary of War. Who would "command" the school?

Secretary Calhoun asserted his authority by placing the school under his direct control. Brown did not agree with the decision. The general was convinced that the Secretary, as a civilian, did not have the expertise to administer a professional military school. He told John Quincy Adams that Calhoun's action might be politically motivated. Brown felt that Calhoun's action illustrated an excessive concern for "turning everything into instruments for the promotion of his own popularity."⁴⁷ The general persisted in his objection until he won his point, and the Artillery School of Practice was placed under his direct supervision by Calhoun. The Commanding General now had something clearly to "command." The fact that Calhoun's term of office would end with the elections and his elevation to the office of Vice President undoubtedly made his initial decision easier to reverse. In 1827, the Infantry School of Practice was opened and placed under the jurisdiction of Brown.⁴⁸

There were several practical considerations that precluded Brown from serving as commander of troops in the field. First, his health would not permit extended duty under the harsh conditions of the frontier. Second, time and distance dictated a large degree of decentralization of command and control. Given the state of transportation during

Brown's tenure of office, if, for example, he traveled in a coach on the Cumberland Road, he could make only an average of seven miles per hour. If Brigadier General Scott faced a threat to the security of the people in his area of operations, he could hardly afford to refer the matter to the War Department for guidance. A third reason why Brown could not serve as commander in the field was the lack of a problem sufficient to require the Commanding General to take to the field to command either the entire Army or a portion of it. When Lieutenant Colonel Henry Leavenworth, for example, engaged the Arikara Indians in June of 1823, his action represented the largest "combat" of the period that Brown served as Commanding General.⁴⁹ These considerations provide the most practical explanation of why Brown did not establish a precedent by assuming command of troops in the field. He did, however, exert control over subordinate commanders of the two military departments.

Brown's control was effected in two ways. First, he received the written reports of the commanders, inspected personally or received the inspection reports of the inspector general, and won personal respect by his seniority and central location at the War Department.⁵⁰ Second, he controlled routine troop movements. In 1827, for example, Brown directed the rotation of troop units involving units in New England, the South, and the Northwest. The principal consideration for his decision was the health of the soldiers in the South. One unit in the six years of its tour had lost 16 officers and 220 enlisted men -- mostly from yellow fever. The subordinate commanders did not challenge Brown's authority to order the moves, but the Congress inquired about them because of the cost. Brown reported to Congress that the moves were in the public's

best interest and that the authority for such moves lay within the discretionary powers of the Commander-in-Chief to delegate tasks to the Commanding General. Congress accepted the explanation.⁵¹

Jacob Brown died in office on February 24, 1828.⁵² His seven years on the job had set the precedent for the role of the Commanding General. Brown remained in Washington for the vast majority of his time in office. His primary role had been as an advisor to the Secretary of War. In that capacity, he had pressed for the training and discipline of the Army. Although practical considerations kept Brown from taking to the field to command troops, he did exercise control over subordinate commanders through a reporting system and direction of troop movements. The reality of unity of command never materialized during his tour, although his debate with Calhoun revealed the tension surrounding the office which would play an important part in the career of his successors.

Brown's death precipitated a three month debate over his replacement. The debate occurred in the Senate and in the cabinet of President Adams. The issue debated in the cabinet focused on the long standing quarrel between Brigadier Generals Winfield Scott and Edmund P. Gaines, the commanders of the two military departments. For years they had feuded interminably over a question of rank. Both officers had been promoted to Colonel and Brigadier General on the same date. Gaines maintained that he was the senior because his name appeared before Scott's on the register of the Army and he had six more years of total service than Scott had. Scott countered with a claim of seniority based on his brevet promotion to major general antedating Gaines's. By 1828 both men had presented their sides of the question too often and too

strongly for the President. Although he may have been concerned about undue publicity by selecting either Scott or Gaines over the other, President Adams was more alarmed by the way the officers had carried on their dispute in public, contrary to the regulations of the Army. Also, there were other candidates for Brown's former job. Senator William Henry Harrison was willing to be considered for the vacancy; and Secretary of the Treasury Richard Rush recommended Colonel Alexander Macomb, his son-in-law, for the office. By March, Adams may have been pleased if the debate in the Congress had abolished the position of Commanding General and, thereby, resolved the problem of selecting a replacement for Brown. This, however, would not be the case.⁵³

On March 19, 1828, the Committee on Military Affairs of the Senate reported that there was a need for the office of the Commanding General; and, significantly, the report contained the first definition of the duties of the incumbent issued by either house of the Congress.⁵⁴ On April 14, 1828, President Adams decided to nominate Colonel Macomb as Brown's successor. Adams recorded the reason for his choice in his diary. Adams felt that a choice of Scott would have meant a reward for undignified behavior and punishment of Gaines for the same reason. Macomb provided a more suitable alternative. His nomination involved less political risk; his professional reputation and conduct of engineering duties had earned high praise, and his candidacy had been pursued unoffendingly. The Senate confirmed Macomb as the new Commanding General on May 24, 1828.⁵⁵

IV. MAJOR GENERAL ALEXANDER MACOMB, 1828-1841

Alexander Macomb inherited an office whose duties had accumulated through experience. The Senate's definition of the office in March had generally included the tasks Brown had performed; and it had given an added degree of legitimacy to those duties.

Macomb, like Brown, had spent many years in New York and earned his military reputation in that state. Congress, the state of New York, and New York City had all bestowed honors on Macomb for his role as the commander of land forces in the defense of Plattsburg in 1814. After the war, Macomb remained in service. He served on the board charged with the mobilization in 1812, as an assistant adjutant general in Washington, and his combat duty between 1812 and 1814 all reinforced his view that the officer corps should be retained during periods of peace. In November of 1819, he had written Calhoun that the senior major general should serve in Washington where he could relieve the Secretary of War of administrative details and provide the Secretary with professional advice. Macomb stated that during periods of war, the officer would then lead the principal army in battle.⁵⁶ Macomb had been the only general at the time to voice such an opinion, and Calhoun had merely thanked him for the advice. Macomb thought about this subject during his service on boards of officers charged with formulation of post-war military policies and organization. His tour as the Commanding General provided him the opportunity to explore his concepts on Army administration through practice.

The cutbacks in the size of the Army in 1821 had forced Macomb to

choose between accepting a reduction from brigadier general to colonel or leaving the Army. Macomb chose the Army. He wrote Calhoun of his decision.

I have thus concluded one of the most painful tasks of my military life -- that of voluntarily consenting to a degradation of rank, which may impair both the honour (sic) and rewards of that life; but I am justified in doing it by higher reasons than can be drawn from ambition; and trust that, as I have now expressed my just feeling to those to whom they could be expressed with the most propriety and effect, I shall soon lose all recollections of the past in the quiet performance of my duties.⁵⁷

Macomb accepted an offer by Calhoun to serve in Washington as the Chief of the Corps of Engineers. He remained in the position until his promotion in May of 1828.⁵⁸ The new Commanding General undoubtedly experienced some degree of satisfaction in his elevation over Scott and Gaines; however, his immediate performance of his new duties suggested no improper pride.

Macomb's conception of office began to appear in practice within months of his assuming office. The clearest signs of a new approach to the job came in the response to another debate in the Congress on the utility of the Commanding General. Secretary of War Peter Porter, who came to the Department in 1828, reported to the House of Representatives in January of 1829 that there remained a valid requirement for a senior officer of the Army to serve in Washington. According to Porter, the Commanding General's advice was required by the President and Secretary of War, and he relieved the officials from the details of daily routine in administering the War Department. The new thrust of the report hinged on the implication that the Commanding General supervised all daily affairs of the Army, not just those that pertained to the line units.⁵⁹

In 1830, a clearer manifestation of this concept emerged in the attempt to define proper channels for communications and to determine the immediate supervisor of the Adjutant-General, Colonel Roger Jones. Macomb had no doubt on the issues. He directed Jones to pass all communications through the Commanding General. Jones felt that this constituted a violation of departmental principles, and he based his argument on the procedures followed during the latter years of Brown's tenure. In those days, Jones had served in two general roles, administrative assistant to the Secretary, and the same to the Commanding General. He pressed his argument with the President and the Secretary, but the issue remained unresolved. His performance in office continued to contradict Macomb's instructions, and Macomb ordered a court-martial. Jones was found guilty, and the issue was settled for the time being.⁶⁰ Over the decades, however, the adjutant-generals regained their autonomy; the final solution came in 1912 with the forced retirement of Major General Fred C. Ainsworth.⁶¹

On July 25, 1831, General Macomb moved to strengthen his hand. He wrote a letter to the newly appointed Secretary of War Lewis Cass, informing him of the harmful effect of the independence of the general staff on the unity of effort. He maintained that the Secretary of War was concerned with more important affairs than routine supervision of the chiefs of the staff departments and, as a result, that the general staff were without any control. Macomb based his claim on control over the general staff in the interest of unity.⁶²

Macomb's concept of office crystallized. In 1831, he issued orders that required all staff chiefs to keep him informed of the affairs

of their offices, and they were directed to keep him informed of their travels outside of the capital. In 1832, a permanent board of officers was established by the Secretary of War. The purpose of the board was to consider those administrative and technical questions that the Secretary thought important enough to require expert advice. The Secretary appointed the Commanding General as the chairman of the board. All staff chiefs were included in its membership. When the Superintendent of West Point objected to an inspection directed by the Commanding General because his facility belonged to the Corps of Engineers, Macomb vigorously defended his authority to inspect all elements of the Army.⁶³ Macomb indeed believed that the Commanding General commanded the whole of the Army, and he believed that subordinate units must maintain their affairs in accordance with the direction of the Commanding General.

While Macomb sought to assert the authority of his office, Congress continued to question its validity. In 1834, the challenge to the need for the office came to an end. President Andrew Jackson's Secretary of War, Lewis Cass, reported to the House of Representatives that the Commanding General was essential to the unity of command and reaffirmed that his place was in Washington, which permitted supervision and administration of the Army as a whole. These duties required a military officer to advise civil authority on the conduct of military operations and to serve as the link between the military and the civil authorities. Evidently persuaded, Congress did not raise this issue again before the Civil War.⁶⁴

Macomb had established a new pattern for the office of the Commanding General. From 1828 until the report of Cass in 1834, Macomb had

increasingly carved out a place in the hierarchy of the War Department. His ability to accomplish this depended upon the support of the Secretaries of War. The report of Secretary Porter in 1829, his letter to incoming Secretary Cass in 1831 and Cass's defense of the office of Commanding General in 1834 all indicated that Macomb did have their support in assuming the number two position in the War Department. His court-martial of Colonel Jones, his appointment as chairman of the permanent board of officers, and his orders to the general staff further indicated that Macomb had a clear place in the chain of command. In 1835, he and his aide, Lieutenant Samuel Cooper, pushed to consolidate his position.⁶⁵

Macomb and Cooper revised the regulations of the Army in 1835. The final product reflected Macomb's experience in office. The powers of the Commanding General were comprehensive in scope. The military control of the Army belonged to Macomb as the Commanding General. The only exceptions pertained to fiscal matters which were governed by the rules of the Treasury Department and discharged by the general staff under the direct jurisdiction of the Secretary of War. Even so, the Commanding General had the responsibility of ensuring that all costs were based on correct data and that purchases of materiel and services met the intent of public law and departmental rules. The staff also had to provide, on order, the necessary assistance to assure the Commanding General the requisite expertise in making such decisions. Further, the Commanding General possessed the right to direct inspections on any aspect of the operations of the Army. Especially mentioned were the staff departments and subordinate installations under the control of those departments. In short, all military affairs, with only the exceptions relative to Treas-

ury procedures, came under the direct control of Macomb as the Commanding General.⁶⁶

Technically, Macomb's position and authority seemed complete. The engineer's love for geometric precision could be seen in his concept of the line of command and the relationship of organizational elements. The Secretaries of War had taken no offense at his pursuit of the best expression in his view of unity of effort even though, if it were enforced, they would lose direct personal control of the general staff. Macomb was an influential man. His personal charm, connections with leading political figures in the administration such as Martin Van Buren, and his association of many years with the Corps of Engineers while its acceptance increased in popularity due to its civic works all combined to enhance Macomb's pursuit of administrative power. But the actual impact of Macomb on the general staff was minimal. The Secretaries of War did not give Macomb disciplinary powers over the general staff.⁶⁷ The tradition of independence could not be eliminated by written words. The specialized knowledge accumulated in the bureaus constituted power. The role of the Army on the frontier increased in volume and complexity. Delegation of authority, formal or de facto, was essential to efficient operation of the administrative and technical branches. The bureau system of the War Department seemed like a good model to follow in administration in general, and it would be employed by the State and Navy Departments.⁶⁸ Macomb could speak of the threat of the bureaus to unity of effort, but he could not obtain the real power to neutralize that threat.

Most of the Army in the 1830s performed tasks related to the

westward expansion of the nation. The growth of the population in New England and the South slackened as the lands west of the Appalachian Mountains grew greatly in numbers. Public demands for protection and aid in opening the West received favorable attention at the national level, and the Army was the agency with the greatest capability to respond. Troops built roads, constructed new forts, served in small detachments along the outer reaches of settlements, explored unfamiliar terrain, and made maps. President Jackson's decision to remove the Indians west of the Mississippi River resulted in Indian affairs demanding most of the Army's attention and resources by the mid-1830s. The Black Hawk War and the Second Seminole War revealed the nature of Macomb's performance as Commanding General during a time of hostilities.

Secretary of War Cass had a personal interest in the Black Hawk War that transcended his official duties. The first Secretary to come from the West, Cass took charge of the operation. He and President Jackson decided that the field commander should be General Scott. He would command the units of the Army in the conflict and report directly to Cass who would be located in Detroit monitoring the process of the operation. Macomb was to remain in Washington to superintend normal operations in the War Department.⁶⁹ The precedent of Brown's remaining in Washington when there was no serious conflict that required the direct action of the War Department, now applied to Macomb in the midst of conflict. The situation varied somewhat during the Seminole War.

During the conflict in Florida and Georgia, Macomb did not visit the battle area until 1839, four years after the conflict had begun. He inspected units and commanders involved in the conflict and performed a

diplomatic mission with the Indians; however, he attempted to avoid the impression of assuming command.⁷⁰ Macomb's action appeared to be in concert with his recommendation for the role of the Commanding General which he made to Calhoun in November of 1819 -- during periods of war, the Commanding General would lead the principal Army in battle. Indian warfare was unconventional; west European powers represented the potential enemies who could wage conventional warfare.⁷¹ The implication from Macomb's action was the Commanding General would command the Army in the field only during conventional war; at any rate, he did not change the precedent established by Brown.

In 1837, Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett's annual report to the Congress revealed the degree of control Macomb exercised over the general staff. Poinsett reported that the bureaus were virtually autonomous. He maintained that the situation was contrary to good principles of military operations because the Secretary of War was the only one who had the supervisory authority. Poinsett recommended a reorganization of the general staff. He wanted to put the new staff under a brigadier general, who would serve as a chief of staff. The staff corps would perform the tasks of the bureaus, and the brigadier general would coordinate the operations of the general staff. Congress took no action on Poinsett's recommendation. General Macomb never possessed effective control over the general staff.⁷²

While in office, Macomb in effect defined the issue of unity of command. He had attempted to exert total control over the Army, including the general staff. His concept of office was logical; and it had been approved in the reports of the Secretaries, supported in writing by

the President upon approval of the regulations of the Army in 1836, and Macomb's concept went unchallenged by Congress. Secretary Cass had used Macomb's notion of unity of command in defending the office of the Commanding General before Congress, and Cass's argument resulted in the final acceptance by Congress of the need for a Commanding General. Still, Macomb was unable to attain effective control of the general staff. When he died in office on June 25, 1841⁷³ there was little substantial difference between the responsibility and authority he left to his successor -- Winfield Scott -- and that he had inherited from Jacob Brown. Probably Macomb's most significant role had been as an advisor.

V. MAJOR GENERAL WINFIELD SCOTT, 1841-1861

Winfield Scott attained the rank of major general at the age of 55 years. He entered the Army at 22, sat out one year in 1810 following a court-martial for calling General Wilkinson a traitor as great as Aaron Burr, and received a promotion to brigadier general at the age of 28. Following the peace treaty with England in 1815, Scott wrote the first standard set of tactical drill regulations, served on boards of officers which recommended policies for the peacetime military establishment, and toured western Europe and Great Britain. Scott's fame as the young general at the Battles of Lundy's Lane and Chippewa made his tour in France and England more enjoyable. He took time to gather as many books as possible on the military art and to observe as many foreign armies as time permitted. Upon his return to the United States, Scott found that his fame earned in the War of 1812 had continued to rise. Scott was obviously pleased that, in the reductions of the Army in 1821, he was

retained as a brigadier general:

The notification, that I am to be retained in the Army, on its impending reduction, is the more flattering, inasmuch as I have neither directly, nor indirectly, taken any step with an express view to such result. The past must now go for what it was worth. The future will be more within my power. I, therefore, do not doubt by increased zeal & assiduity, I shall be able to justify the favourable (sic) opinion, the President & yourself have been pleased to accord to me.⁷⁴

Somewhere between the glories of his achievements in war and 1841, Scott's ambition drove him to aspire to the Presidency. He always attempted, in his own view, to maintain a distinct separation between politics and military affairs; but, in the second quarter of the 19th century, the issue of political activism by military personnel had not been settled. In many respects, politics represented the leading form of entertainment for the populace; and the debate on the propriety of involvement of the military in politics had just begun.⁷⁵

In 1822, after experiencing the frustrations of selecting officers to remain in the Army and contemplating the future of both the Army and his role in it, Scott advised President Monroe that he desired to leave the Army. Scott requested a diplomatic post, soon overcame the urge to leave the Army, and joined in the political maneuvering for the nomination for President in 1824. Scott supported Calhoun who had promised him that in the event of General Brown's death he would become the Commanding General.⁷⁶

Scott continued his military career and acquired increasing recognition as a military officer of merit and as a potential candidate for the White House, as in his roles in the Black Hawk War, the Second Seminole War, the Nullification Crisis, and the removal of the Cherokee

Indians. By 1839, Scott was a plausible candidate of the Whig party. Yet, he was still very involved in his duties as a departmental commander. In this latter role, Scott had recommended to General Macomb in 1839 that training camps be established to retain and discipline the soldiers. He was concerned that the long Indian wars had degraded the conventional tactical skills of the units of the Army.⁷⁷

William Henry Harrison won the Whig nomination in 1840 and then the Presidential election. The accession of Democrat John Tyler to the Presidency following the death of Harrison meant that Scott had an opportunity to seek to lead the Whig party in the election of 1844. Scott was politically naive, but he had been drawn into the Presidential arena of prospective candidates. He would not back out now that he had a chance of leading the Whig party in the next election. His longtime aide, Erasmus D. Keyes, said that Scott's ruling passion was ambition; it swayed his every action in public life. The desire to do great deeds, to rise by action and accomplishment to the heights of glory and achievement, ruled his life. Scott was flattered by the thought of being President; he was flattered by the thought of being the Commanding General. He wanted to attain both offices; and, from his viewpoint in June of 1841, both offices were available.⁷⁸

Scott staked his claim for the office of Commanding General. He and Gaines were the senior generals in the Army, and both men sought to fill Macomb's vacancy. Scott wrote Secretary of War John Bell and demanded that he be appointed Commanding General. Neither Bell nor Tyler wanted to see the revival of the Scott and Gaines quarrel over the seniority issue, and Scott's political support was significantly stronger

than Gaines. Scott was nominated and confirmed as the new Commanding General within 10 days of Macomb's death.⁷⁹

When Scott assumed the office of Commanding General, he did so to command the entire Army. During the first three years of his tenure, Scott served under three Secretaries of War. In this regard, he supplied continuity and authority at the top level of the military; but, as a potential candidate for the Presidency, his actions were viewed with suspicion by President Tyler. Their relationship did not generate the best conditions for positive action on behalf of the Army.⁸⁰

The Army of the period continued to serve as the chief federal tool of westward expansion. The Indian wars in the southeast ground to an end. The "natural right" of the United States to expand increasingly focused on the potentialities of the territories to the west of the Mississippi River. "Manifest Destiny" became a political slogan of the Democratic party as the elections of 1844 approached.⁸¹

Scott lost the nomination of the Whig party to Henry Clay; and, in turn, Clay lost the election to James K. Polk. Polk's victory did not calm the new President's political suspicions of his Commanding General, and these suspicions inhibited their working relationship during the planning and conduct of the Mexican War.⁸²

President Polk, with the advice of his cabinet, determined the strategy for the Mexican War. Polk wanted decisive military action to win a "quick war." General Scott believed that a deliberate, detailed plan of operations had to be completed before he could depart Washington. Polk apparently expected Scott to leave for the field immediately and join the force being raised for the war. He interpreted Scott's

delay as unnecessary and as political opposition. On May 25, 1846, Polk had Secretary of War William L. Marcy to direct Scott to remain in Washington and coordinate preparations for the war. Polk selected Zachary Taylor as the senior field commander. Scott was greatly disappointed by his orders; however, he worked 14-15 hours a day coordinating and planning the war effort. The Army, although marching to success under the current plans, could not force the Mexican government to accept a short war. During the review of the strategy by President Polk, Scott won the President's consent to lead the expedition against the Mexican capital. Scott's plans for the invasion of Vera Cruz and, then, to invade Mexico City fulfilled Polk's concept of how to end the war. Polk tried to find the means to appoint someone to command the expedition other than Scott, who he still suspected because of his Whig background. However, Scott was the leading general of the era; and his plans were well prepared. On November 19, 1846, with the approval of the majority of the cabinet, Polk appointed Scott to command the expedition. Scott wasted little time in leaving Washington. His subsequent implementation of the new strategy achieved the goal of forcing the Mexican government to accept the terms of the United States for a peace settlement.⁸³

The Commanding General had led the primary force in the field for the first time during the history of the office. Scott, however, did not command the entire Army during the war. Centralized control of the Army was conducted by Polk from the White House. While in Washington, Scott was virtually an one man staff; and the President commanded the Army. Once Scott departed for Vera Cruz, Polk continued to command; but he had no single military advisor. Secretary Marcy was considered

by Polk to be inadequate for the job, "overwhelmed with his labours and responsibilities."⁸⁴

Polk used the cabinet as his coordination agency, and he personally transacted much of the daily business of the War Department. For example, in the spring of 1847, Polk intervened on the question of the purchase of mules or wagons for transporting supplies. He was disturbed that the quartermaster general continued to buy wagons over a year after Polk had been advised by the same official that mules were best suited for transportation. Polk condemned the procedure, especially since mules could be acquired in Mexico for one-fourth the price. That same year Polk wanted to promote some noncommissioned officers to officer rank in honor of their distinguished conduct in battle. The adjutant general stubbornly delayed in providing Marcy with a list of vacancies in the officer corps, apparently because of a preference among the regulars for West Point graduates. Polk sent for the adjutant general and gave him a clear order to provide the list of officer vacancies. These occurrences illustrated Polk's direct supervision of the staff departments and the necessity for his intervention to assure unity of effort. The President felt continually upset over what he considered to be habits of procrastination and extravagance; therefore, he spent a great deal of time dealing with routine matters concerning the Army. Had it not been for Polk's method of conducting the war, the lack of adequate machinery for the overall direction of strategy and operations would probably have resulted in disasters during the Mexican War.⁸⁵

General Scott did not return to his office in Washington until 1850. The position remained actually vacant between the Polk's recall

of Scott in 1848 to appear before a board of inquiry and the swearing in of Zachary Taylor as President in 1849. Taylor and Scott were political opponents for the Whig nomination for President in 1848. Scott maintained that he could not serve as Commanding General while a subordinate general remained in service as President-elect. After Taylor took the oath of office as President, Scott remained in New York; but he resumed his duties as Commanding General. After Taylor's death in office and Millard Fillmore's succession, Scott returned to Washington.⁸⁶

In 1850, General Scott and Secretary of War George W. Crawford recommended to Congress that the Army be increased in size. The post-war requirements of the peacetime Army had increased the work and complexity of accomplishing peacetime tasks. The national domain had doubled. The number of Indians under American control had doubled. In 1845, twelve posts along a relatively compact frontier constituted the line of defense. Now, about one million square miles had been added to the territory of the United States. New routes had to be explored; new roads had to be constructed; and new means had to be devised to support the Army on the frontier. Congress approved an increase in the size of the force to 14,000 officers and men. The Army of the 1850s spent most of its time and effort in attempts to resolve the problems associated with Indian affairs in the new territories.⁸⁷ The Commanding General spent most of his time during the decade in New York; and, as a result, he removed himself from the center of the Army and any hopes that he ever entertained of gaining control over the general staff.⁸⁸

The reason for Scott's return to New York again centered on the Presidential elections. In 1852, Scott ran for the Presidency on the

Whig ticket. Another veteran of the Mexican War, Franklin Pierce, headed the Democratic ticket. Pierce won a resounding victory in the fall, but the difference in the popular vote came to less than 250,000 out of approximately 4,000,000 votes. Scott could not bear the prospect of serving in Washington so close to the victor. Nor did he like the fact that the new Secretary of War was Jefferson Davis.⁸⁹

In 1851, as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Military Affairs, Davis had opposed a resolution to elevate Scott to the rank of brevet lieutenant general. In the War Department, Davis continued the opposition until President Pierce overruled his Secretary. After Congress finally authorized the new rank in 1855, the President nominated Scott for the honor. The legislation had back dated the effective date of the promotion to the date that Scott led the American Army over the shores to Vera Cruz. Scott sought the back pay, which had been intended in the legislation, and the heights of the mutual disgust of Scott and Davis came into full view. The exchange of correspondence between the two men expressed common hatred and typified their working relationship.⁹⁰

Secretary of War Davis resided in Washington with the general staff. The Commanding General worked in New York with a staff of one. In spite of their differences and separation of offices, Scott and Davis both sought reforms in the Army. Their recommendations for changes included a larger force, a new composition of the force, higher pay, a retirement system, a new promotion system, new strategy for defense west of the Mississippi River,⁹¹ and increased support for West Point. Each man also championed separate causes. Scott, for example, sought to promote the Army Asylum Board. Davis sponsored experiments with camels in

the southwest and the adoption of a new rifle. If Scott disagreed with Davis, the Secretary normally won. The animosity between the two men undoubtedly damaged the performance of both.⁹²

In 1857, the last year of Davis's tenure, the regulations of the Army were revised. Davis directed the elimination of all references to the Commanding General. In a sense, General Scott's position resembled General Brown's in June of 1821. Both men were on orders as Commanding General, but the regulations made no reference to their office. Scott's role was as ambiguous as Brown's role had been. The major difference between the situations of those two Commanding Generals was that the potential for conflict that Brown faced was realized in the dramatic quarrels between Davis and Scott.⁹³

When the Civil War began, Winfield Scott had served as the Commanding General for twenty years. He had spent at least ten of those years outside of Washington. Now at age 75, the celebrated combat officer worked diligently in Washington to prepare the Army for war for the third time in his career. The hopes of the administration for a short war did not affect his preparations for a long one. His relationship with President Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of War Simon Cameron were harmonious; yet, Scott, as with others in the capital, was a Virginian by birth and had continually to assert his loyalty to the union. Increasingly, the younger General George McClellan pressed for Scott's retirement. Old age, infirmities, conflicts with McClellan, and the complexities of preparing for a war between citizens of the same country proved too much. On October 31, 1861, Scott requested permission to retire.⁹⁴

VI. CONCLUSION

By the beginning of the Civil War the issue of unity of command had been defined. The roots of the controversy that characterized the relationship of Secretary Davis and General Scott lay in the divided authority among the Secretary, the Commanding General, and the general staff. There was no single official or institutional aid for the overall coordination of military affairs. In effect, multiple lines of communications led from the War Department to the Army in the field; and the division of authority within the War Department inhibited moves by anyone to change the situation. Indeed, for the times, the administrative system of the War Department provided the best model for management within the executive department. Many executive agencies pursued that model in an effort to improve the efficiency of its organization. The Commanding Generals, however, did not agree that the existing system provided the best model for the conduct of military administration. The concept of Macomb most vividly expressed the areas of disagreement. His notion of the role of the Commanding General depicted a logical solution to the problems of the administrative system relative to unity of command; however, neither he nor Scott could enforce compliance with the ideas which were adopted in the regulations of the Army after 1835.

During the Civil War, Generals Ulysses S. Grant and Henry W. Halleck and President Abraham Lincoln were to form the first modern system of command that rectified the ambiguous nature of the role of the Commanding General.⁹⁵ President Grant, however, permitted the return of the pre-war organization which survived until the institution of the modern general staff system by Secretary Root in 1903.⁹⁶

By the time Winfield Scott retired in the fall of 1861, the debate over the question of authority and responsibility had destroyed the most significant role the Commanding General had fulfilled: advisor to civil authority. In no way should this fact detract from Scott's outstanding record as a combat leader; however, his exile from Washington precluded even the opportunity for a working relationship with the Secretary of War. The achievement of such an effective relationship had to wait for other people in other times.

NOTES

1. The congressional act of March 2, 1821, authorized one major general. This was the senior position in the organizational structure of the Army until February of 1864. The officers who served as major general between 1821 and 1861 were referred to by various titles -- the "Commanding General," the "Major General Commanding the Army," the "Commander of the Army," or the "General in Chief." The term "Commanding General" is used in this paper to designate the position occupied by the major general during the years 1821-1861.
2. Maurice Matloff (ed.), American Military History (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1969), pp. 346-348.
3. John K. Mahon, The War of 1812 (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1972), pp. 384-386; T. Harry Williams, Americans at War: The Development of the American Military System (New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 31-33; Russell F. Weigley, History of the United States Army (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1967), pp. 115-119, 132-133.
4. Quoted in Warren W. Hassler, Jr., The President as Commander in Chief (Menlo Park, California: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1971), p. 46.
5. Matloff, op. cit., p. 149.
6. Williams, Americans at War, p. 38.
7. Matloff, op. cit., pp. 150-151. The term "general staff" first appeared in congressional legislation in March of 1813. The structure of the staff was modified in 1816, 1818, and 1821; however, it remained substantially as created in 1813 throughout the period covered by this paper. See Williams, Americans at War, pp. 38-39; Leonard D. White, The Jeffersonians: A Study in Administrative History, 1801-1829 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), pp. 236-240, 246-248.
8. Quoted in Walter Millis, American Military Thought (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1966), p. 89.
9. White, The Jeffersonians, pp. 246-249.
10. Weigley, History of the United States Army, p. 135.
11. The War Department divided the country into two geographical regions in May of 1815 for purposes of command and administration of the Army.

The regions were designated the Division of the North and the Division of the South, and each command was headed by a major general. The Division of the North consisted of the region north of Virginia and the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi River. The balance of the territory belonged to the Division of the South. In 1821, the geographical divisions were realigned into eastern and western commands and designated departments. The dividing line ran from the southernmost tip of Florida to the northwestern extremity of Lake Superior. See Henry Beers, The Western Military Frontier, 1815-1846 (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania: Times and News Publishing Company, 1935), pp. 28, 48.

12. There was no request by the administration for a single commander; however, General Scott wrote General Brown in 1819 that he wished the senior of the two major generals would be assigned as the single commander, under the President. See William B. Skelton, "The Commanding General and the Problem of Command in the United States Army, 1821-1841," Military Affairs, Vol XXXIV, No. 4 (December 1970), p. 117; also, see page 19 of this paper.
13. Weigley, History of the United States Army, p. 140.
14. The approximate total of unsettled accounts when Calhoun entered office was \$45,000,000. By 1824, Calhoun had largely settled the accounts and reduced an annual loss of three percent of disbursements to almost zero through his reform of the administrative system. White, The Jeffersonians, p. 249.
15. Quoted in Millis, op. cit., p. 95.
16. These sources apply to this and the next paragraph. Among the discussions of Calhoun's "Expansible Army", see Millis, op. cit., pp. 90-102; Russell F. Weigley, Towards an American Army: Military Thought from Washington to Marshall (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 30-37.
17. Quoted in Edgar Bruce Wesley, Guarding the Frontier: A Study of Frontier Defense from 1815 to 1825 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1970), p. 85.
18. Weigley, Towards an American Army, pp. 35-36.
19. Weigley, History of the United States Army, p. 141.
20. Quoted in Millis, op. cit., p. 93.
21. Quoted in Weigley, History of the United States Army, p. 134.

22. The specific figures by year for the strength of the Army may be found in Weigley, History of the United States Army, pp. 566-567. Congress authorized increases in general response to the Black Hawk War, the Second Seminole War, and the increased size of the western frontier following the Mexican War. See Beers, op. cit., pp. 129-130.
23. Richard N. Current, T. Harry Williams and Frank Freidel, American History: A Survey (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), p. 299; Rebecca Brooks Gruver, An American History (2 vols., Menlo Park, California: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1976), I, p. 353.
24. C. J. Bernardo and E. H. Bacon, American Military Policy (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: The Stackpole Company, 1961), p. 252.
25. William Addleman Ganoe, The History of the United States Army (New York: D. Appleton Century Company, Inc., 1942), p. 159.
26. For an additional discussion of the relationship between line and staff, see Weigley, History of the United States Army, pp. 135-137. Also, Matloff, op. cit., pp. 291-292.
27. See Wesley, op. cit., pp. 104-105, 113, for the role of the departmental commanders in administration of the Army.
28. Skelton, "Commanding General and Problem of Command," p. 118.
29. W. Edwin Hemphill (ed.), The Papers of John C. Calhoun (9 vols. to date, Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 1971), VI, p. x.
30. Ibid., V, pp. 377-378.
31. Charles Winslow Elliott, Winfield Scott: The Soldier and the Man (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 193.
32. Ibid., p. 148.
33. There is no biography of Brown. For a general discussion of Brown's experience in the military, see Weigley, History of the United States Army, pp. 123-124, 129-130; R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, Military Heritage of America (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1956), pp. 129-131; Mahon, op. cit., pp. 93, 141, 146, 258-260, 274-277; T(homas) M(arshall) S(paulding), "Brown, Jacob Jennings," Dictionary of American Biography, Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, editors (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928-1936), pp. 124-126.
34. Weigley, History of the United States Army, pp. 119-124; White, The Jeffersonians, pp. 224-232.

35. Mahon, op. cit., pp. 259-260.
36. Hemphill, op. cit., V, pp. 379-380; White, The Jeffersonians, pp. 231-232; Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nationalist, 1782-1828 (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1944), p. 226.
37. Hemphill, op. cit., VI, p. 450.
38. Ibid., VII, p. xix.
39. Wiltse, op. cit., pp. 240-241, 247-250.
40. Quoted in Hemphill, op. cit., VII, p. xix.
41. Skelton, "Commanding General and Problem of Command," p. 121.
42. Hemphill, op. cit., VII, p. 536.
43. White, The Jeffersonians, pp. 258-259.
44. Wesley, op. cit., p. 116.
45. Hemphill, op. cit., VII, pp. 534-536.
46. Weigley, History of the United States Army, pp. 152-153; White, The Jeffersonians, pp. 258-259.
47. Skelton, "Commanding General and Problem of Command," p. 118.
48. Weigley, History of the United States Army, p. 153; Beers, op. cit.,
49. Ganoë, op. cit., p. 163; Wesley, op. cit., pp. 105-106, 116.
50. Wesley, op. cit., pp. 114-117.
51. Ganoë, op. cit., p. 167; Skelton, "Commanding General and Problem of Command," pp. 118-119.
52. Spaulding, op. cit., p. 124.
53. For a discussion of the debate over Brown's successor within the cabinet, see Elliott, op. cit., pp. 227-228, 242-246. For an account of Harrison's bid for the office of the Commanding General, see Freeman Cleaves, Old Tippecanoe: William Henry Harrison and His Times (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1969), pp. 259-260.
54. Skelton, "Commanding General and the Problem of Command," p. 119.
55. Ibid., p. 119; Elliott, op. cit., pp. 245-246.

56. Hemphill, op. cit., IV, p. 332; Skelton, "Commanding General and Problem of Command," p. 118.
57. Hemphill, op. cit., V, p. 708.
58. There is no biography of Macomb. For a discussion of Macomb's military background, see Weigley, History of the United States Army, pp. 168, 170; Skelton, "Commanding General and Problem of Command," pp. 117-119; Elliott, op. cit., p. 193; T(homas) M(arshall) S(paulding), "Macomb, Alexander," Dictionary of American Biography, Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, editors (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928-1936), pp. 155-157.
59. Skelton, "Commanding General and Problem of Command," p. 119.
60. Ibid., p. 119; Robert F. Stohlman, Jr., The Powerless Position: The Commanding General of the Army of the United States, 1864-1903 (Manhattan, Kansas: Military Affairs, 1975), pp. 11-12.
61. Matloff, op. cit., p. 349.
62. Stohlman, op. cit., pp. 10-11.
63. Ibid., p. 12; Skelton, "Commanding General and Problem of Command," pp. 119-120.
64. Leonard D. White, The Jacksonians: A Study in Administrative History 1829-1861 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954), pp. 192-193.
65. Stohlman, op. cit., p. 13.
66. Ibid., pp. 13-14.
67. Skelton, "Commanding General and Problem of Command," p. 120.
68. For a discussion of the growth of the bureau system and the consequences of specialization and centralization in federal administration, see White, The Jacksonians, pp. 533-540.
69. Elliott, op. cit., pp. 261-272.
70. Ganoe, op. cit., pp. 186-187; Skelton, "Commanding General and Problem of Command," p. 121.
71. William B. Skelton, "Professionalization in the U.S. Army Officer Corps During the Age of Jackson," Armed Forces and Society, Vol I, No. 4 (August 1975), pp. 461-462; Weigley, American Way of War, pp. 67-68.
72. Skelton, "Commanding General and Problem of Command," p. 120; Stohlman, op. cit., p. 14.

73. Weigley, History of the United States Army, p. 170.
74. Hemphill, op. cit., VII, p. 676.
75. Elliott, op. cit., pp. 231-234.
76. The most complete biography of Scott is the one by Elliott, op. cit.; also, see Winfield Scott, Memoirs of Lieut.-General Scott, LL. D., Written by Himself (2 vols., New York: Sheldon and Company, 1864).
77. Elliott, op. cit., pp. 261-262, 276-285, 291-321, 346-355, 370-371.
78. Ibid., p. 395.; Marcus Cunliffe, Soldiers & Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775-1865 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1973), p. 304.
79. Elliott, op. cit., pp. 399-400.
80. Stohlman, op. cit., p. 16; Elliott, op. cit., pp. 412-413; White, The Jacksonians, p. 191.
81. For a discussion of the role of the Army in westward expansion, see Leo E. Oliva, "The Army and Continental Expansion," The United States Army in Peacetime: Essays in Honor of the Bicentennial, 1775-1975, Robin Highman and Carol Brandt, editors (Manhattan, Kansas: Military Affairs/Aerospace Historian Publishing, 1975), pp. 21-59.
82. Elliott, op. cit., pp. 420-421; Jack K. Bauer, The Mexican War, 1846-1848 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1974), pp. 70-71, 73; Weigley, History of the United States Army, pp. 177-178.
83. Bauer, op. cit., pp. 232-237; Elliott, op. cit., pp. 419-440; Weigley, History of the United States Army, pp. 175-178.
84. Quoted in White, The Jacksonians, p. 264.
85. Bauer, op. cit., pp. 259-260; White, The Jacksonians, pp. 57-66; Weigley, History of the United States Army, pp. 179-180.
86. Elliott, op. cit., pp. 597-602.
87. Robert M. Utley, Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and The Indian, 1848-1865 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1973), p. 12.
88. Stohlman, op. cit., p. 17.
89. Elliott, op. cit., pp. 647-649.

90. White, The Jacksonians, pp. 194-196.
91. Weigley, History of the United States Army, pp. 189-191; Elliott, op. cit., pp. 660-661. Davis and Scott advocated a new strategy for frontier defense. The new territories had increased the expense of security for the frontier; and the two men, along with the quartermaster general, Jesup, wanted to employ Stephen Watts Kearny's concept of roving patrols. Basically, the idea was to concentrate the troops in key locations from which large patrols would conduct operations throughout the frontier. Davis attempted to pursue the idea in 1854, but the lack of troops precluded full implementation of the new strategy. See Utley, op. cit., pp. 53-55.
92. Weigley, History of the United States Army, pp. 189-196; Elliott, op. cit., pp. 600-609.
93. The deletion of all references to the Commanding General in the regulations of 1857 did not remove Scott from "command". See Stohlman, op. cit., pp. 19-20.
94. Elliott. op. cit., pp. 739-740.
95. T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and His Generals (New York: Vintage Books, 1952), pp. 302-303.
96. Stohlman, op. cit., pp. 54-55; Matloff, op. cit., 346-348.

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THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE OFFICE OF
THE COMMANDING GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY, 1821 TO 1861

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

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The office of the Commanding General of the United States Army had an accidental genesis as a by-product of legislative action in March of 1821. The primary purpose of the congressional act was to reduce the size of the regular army. Neither the Congress nor the Secretary of War had examined in advance the possible role of a Commanding General; therefore, the act of Congress did not designate the duties of its first incumbent.

The Commanding Generals who served between 1821 and 1861 established the duties of the office. They assumed office on orders that designated them to command the Army; yet, the authority and the responsibility of the Commanding General in fulfilling his obligation were never completely defined. For that matter, no one specified what "command of the Army" included. The result was constant tension between the Commanding Generals and both the Secretaries of War and the chiefs of the bureaus of the War Department. The primary issue centered on unity of command.

Unity of command proved to be a critical problem in the Army as the 20th century began. After the Spanish-American War, the Secretary of War Elihu Root instituted an exceptional series of reforms within the War Department which were designed to reshape the Army into an instrument of national power capable of coping with modern warfare. Secretary Root considered the division of authority between the Commanding General and the Secretary to be the chief weakness to be solved in order to accomplish his goal. This issue was resolved following the last war of the 19th century, but it had been defined before the Civil War.

The purpose of this report is to trace the evolution of the office of the Commanding General from its beginnings in 1821 to the eve of the Civil War. The primary focus is on the three general officers -- Jacob Jennings Brown, Alexander Macomb, and Winfield Scott -- who occupied the office during this period and the influence of their actions in office on determining the extent of unity of command.