

FROM CAPITOL HILL AND WEST POINT:  
AN EXAMINATION OF ULYSSES S. GRANT'S SUBORDINATE GENERALS

by

ERIC DUDLEY

B.A., California State University, Sacramento, 2009

A THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History  
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

2012

Approved by:

Major Professor  
Dr. Charles Sanders

# **Copyright**

ERIC DUDLEY

2012

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the relationships of Ulysses S. Grant and four of his subordinate generals. Ultimately, it is a command study of General Grant that analyzes how he managed his subordinates. The four individuals that this thesis examines are John Alexander McClelland, John Alexander Logan, James Birdseye McPherson, and Gouverneur Kemble Warren. These individuals provide an excellent balance between professional generals from West Point and volunteer generals with political backgrounds. The survey also balances the degrees of success experience by the four subordinates. The thesis traces each subordinate general during the Civil War, their relationship with Grant, and evaluates Grant's management of each individual. Finally, the thesis identifies certain characteristics that Grant sought in a subordinate general. Taken as a whole, the thesis provides several lessons on the politics of the Union Army's command structure during the Civil War, thoroughly covers the experiences of each individual subordinate while serving under Grant, and offers valuable insight on the overall generalship of Ulysses S. Grant. The thesis concludes that Grant was an effective manager of his subordinate generals and that his management also transcended his personal preference of West Point graduates. The thesis also identifies proper subordination, aggressive command style, the ability to effectively and efficiently carry out his orders, and trustworthiness as the qualities that Grant sought in his subordinates.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	v
Introduction – Generalship, the Civil War, and Ulysses S. Grant .....	1
Chapter 1 – John Alexander McClernand.....	8
Chapter 2 – John Alexander Logan .....	42
Chapter 3 – James Birdseye McPherson.....	65
Chapter 4 – Gouverneur Kemble Warren .....	88
Conclusion .....	112
Bibliography .....	119

## **Acknowledgements**

Credit for the completion of this thesis lies not solely with myself, but also with several other individuals. First, I would like to thank all three members on my committee. Dr. Lou Williams, Dr. Mark Parillo, and my major professor Dr. Charles Sanders all provided extremely useful comments and critiques that have contributed to the final product. Each member of my committee was a pleasure to work with throughout the process. Other professors at Kansas State University have also significantly contributed to my development as a writer and researcher. Of particular note are Dr. Donald Mrozek and Dr. Robert Linder. Other individuals at Kansas State University also are worthy of recognition. I would like to thank all of my fellow graduate students who have shared the experience with me through my first two years in Manhattan. Many of my peers have offered valuable advice and encouragement during my work on my thesis. I have truly developed close relationships with many individuals that I hope will last a lifetime. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the love and support I have constantly received from my family. I would particularly like to point out my grandparents, Frederic and Peggy deGanna, and William and Terry Boldt. These four individuals have provided constant support over the years, and their love is truly appreciated. Other family members worth noting are my brother Evan Dudley and his wife Reina, who have also provided much needed encouragement over the years. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance received from my parents, Gary and Janet Dudley. They have provided not only the support necessary to help me through my graduate studies, but also have assisted in endless proofreading and editing. This was a much needed service that helped tremendously in the process of writing this thesis. I am truly indebted to all the individuals acknowledged above.

## **Introduction – Generalship, the Civil War, and Ulysses S. Grant**

He was the victor of Donelson, Shiloh, Vicksburg, Chattanooga, and Appomattox. He has been called a warrior, a genius, a drunk, and a butcher. Following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln he was the most famous man in the United States. Most historians and Civil War buffs probably think they know everything there is to know about him. He is Ulysses S. Grant, and despite the numerous works that have been written on him there is still much to be learned about the man. One particular area that has received little attention by historians is Grant's management of his subordinate generals. This study attempts to resolve that deficiency. The main argument of this thesis contends that Grant was not only an effective manager of his subordinate generals, but that Grant's handling of his subordinates also transcended his personal preference of West Point graduates. Although Grant certainly preferred to work with professional generals, he also proved that he was capable of successfully working with politically appointed generals. This thesis also identifies certain qualities that Grant sought in his subordinates that included: proper subordination, aggressive command style, the ability to effectively and efficiently carry out his orders, and a dependability in which Grant could place his trust.

Whenever undertaking a study in military history, it is imperative to never overlook the importance of generalship. While many factors impact the conduct and outcome of warfare including technology, manufacturing capacity, home-front morale, and, indeed, luck, one should always consider the significance of military leadership. As noted by Napoleon Bonaparte,

“It was not the legions which crossed the Rubicon, but Caesar.”<sup>1</sup> Certain individuals throughout history have captured the attention of generations of military historians. Countless books have been written on leaders such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Hannibal Barca, Frederick the Great, and Napoleon Bonaparte. A historian does not necessarily need to accept a “great man theory” of history to acknowledge that certain individuals throughout history have possessed a talent for the art of war. Among the many aspects of consideration, quality of generalship is of chief importance in shaping the course of warfare.

The American Civil War provides a fascinating study in generalship. However, in United States history and popular memory the study of Civil War generals has experienced serious change over time. Since 1865, much of Civil War historiography has been dominated by “Lost Cause” mythology. The phenomenon of the Lost Cause can be traced back to Robert E. Lee’s farewell address to his troops following his capitulation at Appomattox Courthouse. Lee told his men that “the Army of Northern Virginia has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources.”<sup>2</sup> The “overwhelming numbers and resources” argument was propagated in later years by authors such as Edward A. Pollard in *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (1866), Jubal Early in a series of articles for the *Southern Historical Society* in the 1870’s, and John Brown Gordon in his memoirs, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (1903). One result of the Lost Cause interpretation of the Civil War was an elevation of Confederate generals, such as Robert E. Lee and Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson to godlike positions of reverence.<sup>3</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman reaffirmed the mythical interpretation of Lee

---

<sup>1</sup> Napoleon quoted in Albert Castel, *Victors in Blue: How Union Generals Fought the Confederates, Battled Each Other, and Won the Civil War* (Lawrence: University of Press of Kansas, 2011), 1.

<sup>2</sup> James M. McPherson, “American Victory, American Defeat.” In Gabor S. Boritt, *Why the Confederacy Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Wilson Reagan, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980).

in his four-volume work, *R. E. Lee: A Biography* (1934), and *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command* (1942-1944). The effect of Freeman and other Lost Cause authors was a mythical interpretation of Lee and other Confederate generals.

Lost Cause historians had an entirely different effect on the history of Union commanders. Southerners posited that William Tecumseh Sherman operated outside the rules of war commonly accepted in the nineteenth century. Most importantly, Ulysses S. Grant was not perceived as approaching Robert E. Lee's military talent, for after all, he was simply required to apply his overwhelming manpower and resources against the South. His most common depiction was as a "butcher" and a "drunk," two accusations that also surrounded him during the war.

Eventually, Lost Cause interpretations began to be replaced by more factual history. In the mid-twentieth century writers such as Bruce Catton, Kenneth P. Williams, and T. Harry Williams resuscitated the popular image of Grant. Ethan S. Rafuse believes that "Catton and the Williamses emphatically proclaimed in their work... Grant was not... a drunken butcher who achieved victory through superior numbers and clumsy, World War I-style attrition, but a truly great general."<sup>4</sup> At least in scholarship, Grant was finally receiving full credit for his successes during the war.

What can truly be described as "modern" Grant scholarship started with William S. McFeely's *Grant: A Biography* (1981).<sup>5</sup> McFeely's work represented the inevitable backlash against the pro-Grant mania that dominated the mid-twentieth century. McFeely challenged recent scholarship, which, in his estimation, overstated Grant's great military ability. Rafuse

---

<sup>4</sup> Ethan S. Rafuse, "Still a Mystery? General Grant and the Historians, 1981-2006," *Journal of Military History* 71, no. 3 (July 2007), 851.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 850.



writes that “McFeely found little that was inspired or brilliant in his generalship, but rather determination, a well-placed confidence in superior numbers, and a regrettable, albeit necessary, callousness to the human costs of war.”<sup>6</sup> McFeely particularly points to the Overland Campaign to exemplify Grant’s lack of finesse. He finds that the Overland Campaign was “a nightmare of inhumanity and inept military strategy that ranks with the worst such episodes in the history of warfare... a hideous disaster in every respect save one—it worked.”<sup>7</sup> While McFeely’s interpretation was well received by many historians as a solid scholarly work and a refreshing alternative to earlier Grant biographies, other critics, particularly James M. McPherson and Brooks D. Simpson, severely challenged McFeely’s interpretation of Grant as too harsh.<sup>8</sup> As a result of McFeely’s work, a drastic increase of Grant biographies exploded onto the scene. Between 1990 and 2010, Brooks D. Simpson, Geoffrey Perret, Jean Edward Smith, Edward G. Longacre, and Edward H. Bonekemper III offered balanced alternatives to McFeely that included far more flattering accounts of Grant’s generalship.<sup>9</sup>

It would seem with the revival of Grant’s image from the Lost Cause interpretation and the extensive analysis devoted to his military career in recent years that little remains to be written about his generalship. However, one aspect of Grant’s generalship has received surprisingly little attention: his handling of his subordinate generals. A general’s management of his lieutenants has long been regarded as a crucial aspect of command. Carl von Clausewitz wrote that generals should “make it a rule to select officers upon whom [they] can rely, making

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 853.

<sup>7</sup> William S. McFeely, *Grant: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), 161-162.

<sup>8</sup> Rafuse, 855-856.

<sup>9</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace: Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Brooks D. Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph over Adversity, 1822-1865* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000); Geoffrey Perret, *Ulysses S. Grant: Soldier and President* (New York: Random House, 1997); Jean Edward Smith, *Grant* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002); Edward G. Longacre, *General Ulysses S. Grant: The Soldier and the Man* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2007); Edward H. Bonekemper III, *Ulysses S. Grant: A Victor, Not a Butcher: The Military Genius of the Man Who Won the Civil War* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2010).

every other consideration give way to that.” He continues, “[W]hen [generals] want to carry on a War which causes a great strain upon [their] powers, then subordinate Generals and even their troops (if they are not used to War) will often find obstacles which they represent as insuperable. They will find the march too long, the fatigue too great, the subsistence impracticable.”<sup>10</sup> It remains the task of the commanding general to understand which subordinates he can rely upon and which he needs to replace. Ancient Chinese theorist Sun Tzu wrote, “[K]now the enemy, know yourself; your victory will never be endangered.”<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the most important aspect of “knowing yourself” is knowing which subordinates can be trusted in a position of authority. In order to accomplish a thorough study of Grant’s generalship, the management of his subordinates must be examined.

Historians have attempted to approach the issue of Grant’s lieutenants. In *Grant and Sherman: The Friendship That Won the Civil War* (2006), Charles Bracelen Flood provided an excellent account of the friendship between Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman and the impact it had on the outcome of the Civil War. By far, Sherman is the “Grant lieutenant” who has received the most attention from historians. Additionally, in *Grant and His Generals* (1953), Clarence Edward Macartney examined several of Grant’s subordinates. Although well intentioned, Macartney’s book failed to capture several important aspects of Grant’s relationships with his subordinates. Instead of viewing Grant’s generals as a whole, Macartney presented his work as a collection of individual surveys that failed to draw overarching conclusions regarding Grant. The most glaring omission was the lack of any extensive discussion of Grant’s personal preferences concerning his subordinates. Macartney’s work also

---

<sup>10</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War, Vol. 3* Translated by Colonel J.J.H. Graham (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1908), 224.

<sup>11</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* Translated and with an Introduction by Samuel B. Griffith (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 129.

lacked any major discussion on the distinction between Grant's political and professional subordinates. Finally, *Grant and His Generals* not only lacked a conclusion, but also any direct comparisons between the individuals examined.

The other work that deserves praise for its attempt to analyze Grant's management of his subordinates is *Grant's Lieutenants* (2001), a two-volume collection of essays edited by Steven E. Woodward. Woodward understood the importance of acknowledging Grant's subordinates in a command study, noting that Grant "did not get there all by himself. Along the way he had to find and learn to depend upon able subordinates. He had to learn how to use these men and how to get rid of them if he found he could not use them." Ultimately, Woodward concluded that Grant's handling of his subordinates "proved extraordinarily successful, and that success was no small part of the larger picture of Grant's victorious generalship. Clearly these men and their relationships with Grant are worthwhile subjects for closely focused study."<sup>12</sup>

Although *Grant's Lieutenants* provided a commendable analysis of Grant's handling of his subordinates, it is a collection of essays by individual authors writing about only one of Grant's lieutenants. As a result, it is difficult to draw overarching conclusions based on several different generals. Most importantly, Woodward did not provide a conclusion that identified the specific aspects that Grant sought in a subordinate general. Consequently, there exists an abundant need for further discourse on Grant's lieutenants.

It would be impossible to cover in detail all of the generals who served under Ulysses S. Grant during the Civil War. Therefore, one must carefully select certain individuals who possessed specific qualities that were representative of other generals serving under Grant. For example, throughout the war Grant dealt with professional soldiers as well as political officers.

---

<sup>12</sup> Steven E. Woodward, *Grant's Lieutenants: From Cairo to Vicksburg* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 1.

The term professional officer refers to generals that graduated from West Point, were usually in the Army at the outbreak of the war, and were career soldiers. The term political officer refers to non-West Point graduates, who were placed in command of volunteer units either through the personal creation of that unit or as a result of political patronage, and who usually possessed a background in politics. It would be insufficient to examine only West Pointers or only political generals. In addition, Grant experienced varying degrees of success with his subordinates. Some generals proved extremely capable and produced outstanding results on the battlefield, while others were less successful. It is important not only to examine how Grant dealt with his successful subordinates, but also how he handled diversity. Therefore, after careful consideration the four generals selected for this study are John Alexander McClernand, John Alexander Logan, James Birdseye McPherson, and Gouverneur Kemble Warren. These four men provide a balance between professional and political generals as well as a balance in levels of success. Despite being the most widely known of Grant's lieutenants, William T. Sherman and Philip Sheridan do not hold a central role in this survey, and yet their influence is still evident throughout the study. A thorough assessment of these four generals and their relationship with Grant will yield a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Grant's management of his lieutenants.

## Chapter 1 – John Alexander McClernand

McClernand biographer Christopher C. Myers writes that “John A. McClernand serves as a mirror through which historians can view other individuals.... Through McClernand one can again learn...how Grant understood wartime politics. There is much we can learn from a study of John A. McClernand that balances politics and war.”<sup>13</sup>

In some ways Ulysses S. Grant and John A. McClernand’s entry into the Civil War was similar. Both men viewed the conflict as a way of advancing themselves. Born in Point Pleasant, Ohio in 1822 to a moderately wealthy tanner, Grant enjoyed a comfortable childhood before receiving his appointment to West Point, which was largely the desire of his father. Prior to the firing on Fort Sumter Grant had failed at most of his undertaking. After graduating West Point and serving in the Army during the Mexican War, Grant experienced a series of misfortunes. At first, Grant remained in the Army, serving in California until he resigned due to feelings of loneliness and a desire to be closer to his family. Throughout the mid to late 1850’s Grant failed at several business ventures, including operating a small farm near St. Louis, Missouri, working as a bill collector in St. Louis, and finally working as an assistant in his father’s tannery shop in Galena, Illinois. Grant was still struggling to make this business a success when the secession crisis occurred. The Civil War offered him an opportunity for advancement.

Unlike Grant, McClernand experienced a very successful career in the ten years leading up to the outbreak of hostilities. After serving a period in the Illinois general assembly, McClernand was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. A prominent Democrat from

---

<sup>13</sup> Christopher C. Meyers, *Union General John A. McClernand and the Politics of Command* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2010), 2.

Illinois, McClelland became an ally and spokesman for Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas. He assisted Douglas in passing the Compromise of 1850, and campaigned fervently for Douglas in the election of 1860. By the time of Douglas's death in 1861, McClelland was poised to assume the Democratic leadership position in the state of Illinois.<sup>14</sup> However, his ascendancy was delayed by the outbreak of war. Like so many other politicians, McClelland viewed the war as an opportunity for advancement. In this regard, McClelland's ambition most likely surpassed even Grant's. Already possessing an influential political office, McClelland undoubtedly eyed a possible future presidential run.

The other similarity in Grant and McClelland's rise to command was their reliance on political connections. Based on his experience in the Mexican War, Grant seemed a likely candidate to command Illinois men. The level of command, however, remained to be seen. Grant first met his future political confidant, Congressman Elihu Washburne, at a Galena town hall meeting of volunteers forming an infantry company. At Washburne's request Grant presided over the meeting and was in turn asked to be the company's captain. Grant respectfully declined, believing he was qualified to command a regiment. He traveled to the state capital of Springfield to petition Governor Richard Yates for just such a position. After ignoring him at first, eventually Yates placed Grant in charge of the Twenty-First Illinois. Soon after assuming command, Grant convinced nearly all of his men to reenlist for three years. The task of reenlistment was assisted in large part by patriotic speeches delivered by Illinois congressmen John A. Logan and John A. McClelland.<sup>15</sup> McClelland's speech led to the first meeting between the two men. Initially, Grant was unsure about allowing Logan and McClelland to speak in front of his regiment, but as Grant recalled in his memoirs, McClelland's reputation

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>15</sup> Castel, 30-31.

was already known to him, as was the fact that McClernand “had early taken strong grounds for the maintenance of the Union and had been praised accordingly by the Republican papers.”<sup>16</sup> At the time, Grant could not have known their two futures would be so heavily intertwined.

In August 1861, Grant was surprised to read in a St. Louis paper of his nomination to the rank of brigadier general. Grant wrote, “I found the President had asked the Illinois delegation of Congress to recommend some citizens of the State for the position of brigadier-general, and that they had recommended me as first on a list of seven.” He continued, “I was very much surprised because...my acquaintance with [Congressman Washburne] was very limited and I did not know of anything I had done to inspire such confidence.”<sup>17</sup> However, Washburne had been impressed by his meeting with Grant and led in the advocacy for his appointment. Grant further improved his political connections with the selection of John A. Rawlins to head his staff. In addition to being Grant’s neighbor and friend, Rawlins was also close to Congressman Washburne, on whom he relied throughout the war.<sup>18</sup> By August 1861, then, Grant had risen to the rank of brigadier general due almost entirely to the political assistance of men such as Governor Yates and Congressman Washburne.

Unlike Grant, who needed to forge political ties as he went, McClernand was prepared to cash in on years of political connections. By 1861, McClernand already had ties with Governor Yates, Senators Lyman Trumbull and Orville H. Browning, and, perhaps most importantly, President Abraham Lincoln. Being a Democrat, McClernand had clashed with Lincoln several times in the past, including during the 1860 election. Lincoln, ever the political master, understood the importance of maintaining strong ties with Northern Democrats. Of particular

---

<sup>16</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant* (1885-1886; repr., New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 89.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>18</sup> Castel., 32.

importance to Lincoln was Southern Illinois, where the anti-Union sentiment was so pronounced that the *Chicago Tribune* reported the possibility that “the southern portion [of Illinois] may be tacked on to the Southern Confederacy.”<sup>19</sup> The *Cairo City Gazette* proclaimed that “the sympathies of our people are mainly with the South.”<sup>20</sup> McClernand was outspoken regarding his feelings against secession, and Lincoln understood how important an ally he could be in the coming struggle. Lincoln noted to Republican House member Josiah Grinnell, “There is General McClernand from my state, whom they say I use better than a radical.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the same list that was submitted to the President for brigadier generalships with the name of Ulysses S. Grant also included John A. McClernand. Grant’s commission was backdated to precede McClernand’s, making Grant the superior officer in the coming campaigns.

Upon receiving his command, Grant moved his headquarters to Cairo, Illinois. There is little evidence to indicate that Grant had anything less than a good first impression of McClernand. At one point in late October, 1861 Grant was called away to St. Louis. He wrote McClernand, “[I]n my absence the command of this District is in your hands. I am satisfied that it could not be in better.” Grant signed his telegram, as he often did, “very respectfully your [obedient servant]”<sup>22</sup> It also appears McClernand initially had great respect for Grant. He responded to Grant’s telegram,

Your favor of this date is this moment received. I regret the necessity which calls you away so unexpectedly and suddenly. I acknowledge the obligation imposed by the confidence which you are pleased to repose in me. While I cannot expect to equal, or even approximate the merit of your military administration you may

---

<sup>19</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 23 April 1861, 1; 30 April 1861, 1; Quoted in Richard L. Kiper, *Major General John Alexander McClernand: Politician in Uniform* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1999), 22.

<sup>20</sup> *Cairo City Gazette*, 6 December 1861; Quoted in Kiper, 22.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, edited by John Y. Simon. 31 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), Vol. 3, 67.



rest assured that I will do all in my power to justify your expectations of me and to insure success.<sup>23</sup>

It appeared as if Grant and his subordinate had a perfect working relationship. However, Grant would have been most displeased if he had known of McClernand's private communications with General-in-Chief George Brinton McClellan. McClernand wrote to McClellan congratulating him on his new appointment and requesting, "[P]lease give me a chance to do something."<sup>24</sup> By bypassing his superiors and writing directly to the General-In-Chief, McClernand committed the cardinal sin of breaking the chain of command.

As it turned out, McClernand received his first combat opportunity not from McClellan, but from Grant. On 7 November 1861, Grant and McClernand clashed with a Confederate force at Belmont, Missouri. The Battle of Belmont was a fairly insignificant battle, except for the fact that it provided many Union troops and officers with their first combat experience. McClernand performed bravely throughout the contest, leading his men from the front ranks. John A. Logan later reported, "I saw General McClernand, with hat in hand, leading as gallant a charge as ever was made by any troops unskilled in the arts of war."<sup>25</sup> After initially defeating the Confederate force the Union troops' discipline broke down. Albert Castel describes the scene, writing, "assuming the battle was over and they had won it, instead of pursuing the fleeing Rebels, Union soldiers began ransacking the enemy camp or gathering to listen to various officers, notably [McClernand], deliver victory speeches."<sup>26</sup> Grant later recalled that "the moment the camp was reached our men laid down their arms and commenced rummaging the tents to pick up trophies. Some of the higher officers were little better than the privates. They galloped about from one

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>24</sup> *OR*, vol. 3, 278, 283, 286-287; Kiper, 41; McClernand to McClellan, November 5, 1861, McClernand MSS. Quoted in Victor Hicken, *From Vandalia to Vicksburg: The Political and Military Career of John A. McClernand* (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1955), 162;

<sup>25</sup> *OR*, vol. 3: 288, 280; Kiper, 45.

<sup>26</sup> Castel, 35.

cluster of men to another and at every halt delivered a short eulogy upon the Union cause and the achievements of the command.”<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, the Confederates had reformed and prepared a counterattack. The Union troops were in no condition to defend against the enemy assault, and soon a Union retreat turned into a rout. The Union troops returned to their transports and evacuated Belmont.

Grant did not apportion any blame to McClernand for the setback at Belmont, probably because Grant was urgently trying to depict Belmont as a Union victory. Grant wrote a letter to his father, Jessie Root Grant, the day after the battle, which was later published in the *Cincinnati Gazette*.

Taking into account the object of the expedition the victory was most complete. It has given me a confidence in the Officers and men of this command, that will enable me to lead them in any future engagement without fear of result. [General] McClernand, (who by the way acted with great coolness and courage throughout, and proved that he is a soldier as well as statesman) and my self each had our Horses shot under us.<sup>28</sup>

Grant actually had cause to be defensive. Both the *Chicago Tribune* and the *St. Louis Missouri Daily Democrat* referred to the Battle of Belmont as a Union defeat, and Senator James Harlan of Iowa led a charge to have Grant removed from command.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, McClernand was quickly depicted by Northern newspapers as the hero of the battle. The *New York Herald* wrote that McClernand set “an example of heroism by plunging headlong into the rebel ranks and making himself a road of blood.”<sup>30</sup> The *Chicago Evening Journal* labeled McClernand “among the bravest of the brave.”<sup>31</sup> While Grant consistently stood by his subordinate, not all agreed with the assessment of McClernand. Grant’s chief of staff, John Rawlins, in particular, believed

---

<sup>27</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 102.

<sup>28</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol 3., 138; *Cincinnati Gazette*, 11 Nov 1861.

<sup>29</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 9 Nov. 1861, 2; *St. Louis Missouri Democrat*, 8 Nov. 1861; Kiper, 41.

<sup>30</sup> *New York Herald*, 19 Nov. 1861, 1; Kiper, 47.

<sup>31</sup> *Chicago Evening Journal*, 8 Nov. 1861, 1; Kiper, 47.

McClermand was supplying the papers with the reports of his actions at Belmont. At one point, he apparently erupted: “God damn it! It’s insubordination! McClermand says—. McClermand did—. After his great victory McClermand—. The bastard! The damned, slinking, Judas bastard!”<sup>32</sup> Rawlins’s views of McClermand would never change, and his strong influence on Grant undoubtedly affected the general’s future assessment of McClermand.

Following the Battle of Belmont, McClermand’s confidence was soaring. McClermand’s battle report was full of self-congratulatory detail, and was nearly three times as long as Grant’s. In addition, he forwarded a copy of his report to General McClellan.<sup>33</sup> Soon afterwards he received a letter from President Lincoln, who wrote, “[Y]ou have had a battle, and without being able to judge as to the precise measure of its value, I think it is safe to say that you, and all with you, have done honor to yourselves and the flag, and service to the country.”<sup>34</sup> To this fresh encouragement from the president, McClermand responded with a letter of his own. He wrote, “If I had power I could and would do something. To cinch the rebellion it needs to be grappled with in dead earnestness. We should fight and push forward, and push forward and fight again. Will Europe wait much longer? Will she forbear the recognition of the Southern Confederacy much longer?”<sup>35</sup> McClermand made the most of the Battle of Belmont, and looked forward to winning additional glory in the next campaign.

Much of the rest of the winter of 1861-1862 passed without event, but by February 1862 Grant was planning a bold move on Forts Henry and Donelson. By this time Grant was commanding the District of Cairo, which included three divisions, one of which was McClermand’s. Grant planned to move these forces against the two Confederate forts on the

---

<sup>32</sup> Rawlins quoted in Kiper, 48.

<sup>33</sup> *OR*, Vol. 3, 277-283; Hicken, 165.

<sup>34</sup> Lincoln to McClermand, quoted in Nicolay and Hay, *op. cit.*, V, p. 114; Hicken, 165.

<sup>35</sup> McClermand to Lincoln, January 28, 1862, R.T. Lincoln MSS; Quoted in Hicken, 157.

Cumberland and Tennessee rivers. The forts were vital not only to the command of the rivers, but also control of Western Tennessee. The outcome of Grant's movements would affect the future of the war in the West.

At one point during the campaign Grant ordered McClernand "under the guidance" of the newly arrived Lieutenant Colonel James McPherson to "take a position on the roads from Fort Henry to Fort [Donelson]." McPherson was an engineer who had graduated from West Point and specialized in terrain assessment. However, McClernand viewed McPherson as a possible threat to his authority. He responded to Grant, "Field Order No. 1 is just received, and will be promptly and successfully carried into effect as possible. Of course, the words 'guidance of Lt. Col. McPherson' were not intended to interfere with my authority as commander."<sup>36</sup>

McClernand always moved quickly to deflect any perceived diminishment of his authority.

The majority of the Confederate garrison at Fort Henry evacuated before the Union army could surround them. McClernand quickly wrote a letter to Lincoln calling the capture of Fort Henry "perhaps the most complete victory achieved during the war."<sup>37</sup> He refrained from mentioning that his division took virtually no part in the contest. Following the fall of Fort Henry, Grant faced the decision of how to proceed in the campaign. In a rare instance, Grant convened his subordinates in a council of war to discuss future operations. The meeting took place on 10 February aboard the *Tigress*. Grant and his three division commanders, Lewis Wallace, Charles F. Smith, and McClernand, were present, and according to Wallace, the purpose of the meeting was to decide whether to march immediately on Fort Donelson or to wait for reinforcements. All four men agreed to proceed immediately. Then McClernand, to the

---

<sup>36</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 4, 150; Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 4, 151; McClernand Papers.

<sup>37</sup> McClernand to Lincoln, Feb. 8, 1862, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Quoted in Meyers, 80.

displeasure of Grant, read a paper detailing his suggestions for the federal movement.<sup>38</sup> In the future Grant refrained from holding such councils of war, in part due to his growing self-confidence, but also in hopes of avoiding a repeat of the 10 February incident.

By 14 February the federal force had Fort Donelson surrounded. During the night the Confederate commanders planned a breakout against Grant's right wing, which happened to be McClernand's division. The next morning found Grant on board Admiral Foote's flagship with no one left in command of the field. The Confederate attack took place at 6:00 a.m. and succeeded in pushing back McClernand's troops. Grant later wrote that when he arrived on the field he "saw the men standing in knots talking in the most excited manner. No officer seemed to be giving any directions."<sup>39</sup> He approached Wallace and McClernand and overheard McClernand mutter, "This army wants a head." Unhappy with his subordinate's morning performance and the state of his right wing, Grant responded, "It seems so."<sup>40</sup> Grant heard reports that the Confederates were carrying haversacks filled with rations and correctly determined that their attack was a breakout attempt. He commented to Colonel J. D. Webster, a member of his staff, "Some of our men are pretty badly demoralized, but the enemy must be more so, for he has attempted to force his way out, but has fallen back: the one who attacks first now will be victorious." Grant, along with Colonel Webster, rode amongst McClernand's troops telling them to "fill your cartridge-boxes, quick, and get into line; the enemy is trying to escape and he must not be permitted to do so." Grant later wrote, "This acted like a charm. The men only wanted some one to give them a command."<sup>41</sup> In reality, the Confederates had already missed their chance to break out and instead returned to Fort Donelson. Grant decided to launch

---

<sup>38</sup> Lewis Wallace, *An Autobiography* vol. 1, (New York: Harper, 1906), 375-377.

<sup>39</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 115.

<sup>40</sup> Meyers, 85.

<sup>41</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 115.

a counterattack, with General Smith on his left wing and McClernand on his right wing.

McClernand, with the support of General Wallace's division, retook the ground lost earlier in the day. Of General Smith's attack, Grant wrote, "The outer line of rifle-pits was passed, and the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> General Smith, with much of his division, bivouacked within the lines of the enemy. There was now no doubt but that the Confederates must surrender or be captured the next day."<sup>42</sup>

The next morning Grant received a letter from the Confederate commander informing him of the Confederates' possible capitulation and a suggested armistice. To this, Grant responded, "No terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted."<sup>43</sup> The Confederates had no option but to comply. The Fort Henry and Donelson campaign resulted in making Grant a popular hero in the North. Many people referred to him as "Unconditional Surrender" Grant. Stories of him smoking during the fighting of 15 February resulted in Grant receiving many cigars from an admiring Northern public.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, McClernand desperately desired to capitalize on the Union success at Fort Donelson. By 17 February, he had issued a congratulatory order to his division. In it he claimed, "The death-knell of rebellion is sounded...It will be your claim to a place in the affection of your countrymen and upon a blazoned page in history."<sup>45</sup> McClernand forwarded a copy of his order to Lincoln and included a letter that bordered on insubordination. He claimed that his division "was not properly supported" and that the victory had covered "a number of serious mistakes" but avoided any mention of Grant. He ended the letter by advising the

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>44</sup> Castel, 51.

<sup>45</sup> Field Order No. 145, February 17, 1862, John A. McClernand Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library; Quoted in Meyers, 86.

President that the army “should now push on to Memphis and Nashville.”<sup>46</sup> It was not McClelland’s place to be making suggestions about the future campaign to the President, nor was it appropriate to bypass the proper chain-of-command by writing directly to the commander-in-chief. However, McClelland was not concerned with proper military protocol. He was primarily concerned with his own personal advancement and believed that writing to Lincoln was the best strategy to achieve his goals.

McClelland’s official report of the battle annoyed Grant even further. The report claimed that McClelland’s division bore “the brunt and burden of the battle” and “sustained much the greatest loss.” He also listed the spoils from the surrender, writing “our trophies corresponded with the magnitude of the victory.”<sup>47</sup> While it is true that McClelland’s division suffered the majority of the casualties from the Confederate attacks, he failed to give any credit to the other two divisions for the Union’s victory. It was, after all, Smith’s division’s counterattack that was most responsible for forcing the Confederate surrender. McClelland also took credit for the coordinated counterattack, claiming he suggested the idea to Grant. Grant forwarded McClelland’s report to his superior Henry Halleck, noting,

I transmit herewith the report of the action of the First Division.... I have no special comments to make on it, further than that the report is a little highly colored as to the conduct of the First Division and I failed to hear the suggestions spoken of about the propriety of attacking the enemy around the lines on Saturday. No suggestions were made by General McClelland at the time spoken of.<sup>48</sup>

Grant was unhappy with McClelland’s attempt to claim credit for the idea of a coordinated counterattack. Lew Wallace, who was also present at the meeting, supported Grant’s claim that

---

<sup>46</sup> John A. McClelland to Abraham Lincoln, February 18, 1862, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Quoted in Kiper, 89; Meyers, 86.

<sup>47</sup> *OR*, Vol. 7: 180; Kiper, 89.

<sup>48</sup> *OR*, Vol. 7: 170; Kiper, 90.

McClelland had made no suggestions.<sup>49</sup> By the end of the Fort Donelson campaign, Grant had grown weary of McClelland's political machinations. In a letter to General William T. Sherman on 19 February, that was in response to Sherman's letter congratulating Grant on his recent successes and suggesting that Grant deserved of promotion to major general, Grant wrote, "I...hope that should an opportunity occur you will win for yourself the promotion, which you are kind enough to say belongs to me. I care nothing for promotion so long as our arms are successful, and no political appointments are made."<sup>50</sup> His final sentence speaks volumes to Grant's opinion of politicians in uniform, and his assessment had no doubt been influenced by his recent interactions with McClelland.

Over the following months the relationship between Grant and McClelland did not improve. The Union forces were being criticized by the Northern press for seizing enemy slaves from Confederates. Lincoln had already faced several problems early in the war involving independent commanders confiscating slaves from the enemy. Such actions should have been the prerogative of Lincoln, not generals in the field, and shortly after the fall of Fort Donelson Grant directed McClelland, "Hereafter expeditions will not be sent to the country for the purpose of Arresting citizens and taking their property without first having authority from these Head Quarters." Such action, he explained, "leads to constant mistakes and [embarrassment] to have our men [running] through the country interpreting confiscation acts and only strengthens the enthusiasm against us whilst it has a demoralizing [influence] upon our own troops."<sup>51</sup> A simple acknowledgment of the order would have sufficed, but McClelland instead responded defensively.

---

<sup>49</sup> Wallace, *An Autobiography*, Vol. 1: 411-412.

<sup>50</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 4: 249.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.



Your communication condemning expeditions for the seizure of citizens and private property is [received]. I am not aware that any such expeditions have been ordered; certainly they have not by me; on the contrary I condemn them. Denying any complicity in any such order, you will pardon me for repelling the implication that I am guilty. Such expeditions as have been ordered by me, since the battle were for the purpose of reconnaissance up the river and to capture fugitive rebels and enemy's property; in all which I trust I have your approbation as well as my order.<sup>52</sup>

Even while protesting his innocence, McClelland also confirmed issuing orders that permitted the confiscation of enemy property that Grant prohibited.

Nor was the dispute regarding confiscation soon resolved. On 28 March, Grant wrote McClelland, "Complaints have been made that your command on leaving here carried off with them to Pittsburg a number of Negroes, [belonging] to Citizens of this place and vicinity. This is a violation of orders from Head Quarters of the Dept, and of my orders. You will please enforce the standing orders, and if the parties who have violated them, can be discovered, arrest and prefer charges against them."<sup>53</sup> Again, McClelland had an opportunity to respond with a simple acknowledgement of Grant's order, but again he chose to challenge his commander. He started his letter by denying the charges: "Your communication of this date conveys the first and only intelligence I have received upon the subject to which it relates. If the fact alleged, be true, it deserves condemnation and its authors the punishment due for the violation of an express order." McClelland then argued that in order for slaves to be returned to their owners, an official claim needed to be made. He continued, "If it be your wish that they should be returned to their claimants, it may be suggested: whether it is not necessary that you should give a letter of authority to the claimants to come, identify, and take them away." Then, in words that must certainly have annoyed Grant more than the previous lines, "In my view of the late article of war

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 437-438.

enacted by Congress, I could not do it, particularly, if the negroes are fugitives coming into camp of their own motion.”<sup>54</sup> McClelland referred to the Confiscation Act of 1861 that permitted the confiscation of any property that was used to support the rebellion. These were the arguments of a politician making the case that Grant’s authority was superseded by acts of Congress. From Grant’s perspective, he had received orders from his superiors, he had relayed those orders to his subordinate, and he expected his orders to be executed without complaint or dispute. The issue of confiscation was the first of many matters over which Grant and McClelland were to clash.

Grant’s command next moved to Pittsburg Landing, where very soon he was challenged by McClelland’s insubordination yet again. On 26 March, Grant issued Special Orders No. 36, naming General Smith, “the senior officer of the forces at Pittsburg...to command that post.”<sup>55</sup> Correctly believing his brigadier generalship predated Smith’s, McClelland wrote to Grant, stating that “no earthly power” could make him recognize Smith’s authority.<sup>56</sup> Bickering over rank was a common occurrence during the Civil War and was certainly not exclusive to political generals. Although Grant did send a letter to Halleck to resolve the issue, his immediate remedy was to move to Pittsburg and take command himself.<sup>57</sup>

Once in command at Pittsburg Landing, Grant and McClelland butted heads once more. One problem was that the Union troops were constantly discharging their weapons, and Grant wrote to McClelland, “Complaints are made of promiscuous firing by men of your [Division] by which several men have already been [shot.] My orders as well as your own Division [orders] forbid this.” Grant added in a postscript that “Four men have been wounded this morning in

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 438.

<sup>55</sup> Special Orders No. 36, March 26, 1862, McClelland Collection; Quoted in Kiper, 101.

<sup>56</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 4, 430-431; Meyers, 92.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

Gen. [Sherman's] camp by firing from the 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>58</sup> True to form, McClernand defensively replied, "The complaint made 'of promiscuous firing by men of your (my) Division by which several men have already been shot,' is without foundation. On the contrary the men of my division, with the rarest exceptions, have fired under orders. I cannot say so much for all others." Even with that, McClernand was not done, adding,

it will be necessary to permit [firing]—the men having no ball-screws, and firing being the only mode of preserving the efficiency of their guns. The men under my command will not take alarm at the proper and harmless discharge of arms, for the purpose I have named, and I trust that my neighbors will not suffer inconvenience from it. I repeat the denial that any have been thus killed by any of my men. I claim that my command has been exemplary in this respect, and expect them to remain so.<sup>59</sup>

McClernand denied that four men had been killed, despite the fact that Grant had only claimed four men had been wounded. However, the significance of McClernand's response is that it exemplified the growing gulf between Grant and McClernand. By this point in the war, it was evident to Grant that McClernand would never accept his role as a willing subordinate, an essential factor in a relationship between a commander and his lieutenant.

Whether he liked it or not, Grant was forced to operate with McClernand during another major engagement, the Battle of Shiloh. The fighting that occurred on 6-7 April was the bloodiest combat to that point in the war. Grant's forces at Pittsburg Landing were struck by a surprise attack from Confederate forces under the command of General Albert Sydney Johnston. The initial fighting of 6 April nearly succeeded in driving Grant's men back against the Tennessee River, until reinforcements allowed Grant to launch a fierce counterattack the following day. The battle resulted in a Union victory opening the road to Corinth, Mississippi, and also contributed to the Union capture of Memphis, Tennessee.

---

<sup>58</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 5, 37-38.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

At Pittsburg Landing Grant's three divisions of McClernand, Wallace, and Smith had been strengthened by the addition of divisions commanded by General William T. Sherman, General Stephen A. Hurlbut, General W. H. L. Wallace, and General Benjamin M. Prentiss. To this formidable force Grant was also supported by the independent army of Don Carlos Buell, which made him confident of a decisive victory. As Grant later recalled, "the fact is, I regarded the campaign we were engaged in as an offensive one and had no idea that the enemy would leave strong [entrenchments] to take the initiative when he knew he would be attacked where he was if he remained."<sup>60</sup> However, Grant's counterpart, Confederate General Albert Sydney Johnston, planned to do exactly what Grant did not expect.

On the morning of 6 April Johnston caught the Union army unprepared. The brunt of the Confederate attack first struck Sherman's division, which was positioned on McClernand's right. Sherman was initially pushed back, but McClernand's men reinforced him, and the two divisions were able to reestablish a strong defensive line. According to Grant, some of the hardest fighting was sustained by Sherman and McClernand's divisions.<sup>61</sup> For the 10 hours of fighting on the first day of the Battle of Shiloh, McClernand narrowly avoided total defeat. Throughout the fighting, McClernand displayed commendable bravery, often leading his men from the front. Lt. Col. Thomas E. G. Ransom recorded McClernand "bravely rallying and pushing forward an Ohio regiment." He was also observed by the commander of the Forty-Third Illinois as "present in the thickest of the fight."<sup>62</sup> Whatever his shortcomings as a commander, it is difficult to deny McClernand's personal courage. During the night, Grant's army was reinforced by Buell's fresh Army of the Ohio, and the next morning Grant ordered a counterattack across the line that

---

<sup>60</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 128.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>62</sup> *OR*, Vol. 10, 1:130, 137, 145, 266, 288-289; Kiper, 109.

resulted in the rout of the Confederate army. The Battle of Shiloh was another victory for the Union.

Typical of the political general from Illinois, McClelland wrote a report that highlighted his division's role. Once again, McClelland circumvented the chain-of-command and forwarded his report directly to Lincoln. He noted that his division "as usual, has borne or shared in bearing the brunt" of the fighting. McClelland also criticized Grant, writing, "It was a great mistake that we did not pursue [the enemy] Monday night and Tuesday."<sup>63</sup> McClelland seemed to have no fear of reprisals for his direct insubordination.

Grant disputed certain details in McClelland's the official report on the Battle of Shiloh. Grant thought McClelland reported "too much of other Divisions remote from the 1<sup>st</sup> and from which reports are received conflicting somewhat from his statements."<sup>64</sup> However, Grant was in no position to fight with his subordinate. Following the Battle of Shiloh, Grant came under severe criticism as rumors had circulated that he was not only surprised at Pittsburg Landing but also drunk during the fighting. Halleck arrived shortly after the battle and took immediate command. Sherman wrote, "It soon became manifest that [Halleck's] mind had been prejudiced by the rumors which had gone forth to the detriment of General Grant; for in a few days he issued an order, reorganizing and rearranging the whole army." Grant, he wrote "was named 'second in command' ...with no clear, well-defined command or authority."<sup>65</sup> Grant's future in the army seemed uncertain.

Taking command in person, Halleck started a protracted march toward strategically important Corinth, Mississippi. On 30 April, Halleck placed McClelland in command of the

---

<sup>63</sup> *OR*, Vol. 10, I:113-114; Kiper, 115.

<sup>64</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 5, 89.

<sup>65</sup> William T. Sherman, *Memoirs of General William T. Sherman* (1875; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), 250.

Reserve Corps, made up of three divisions. Technically, this was a promotion for McClernand, giving him a command of a corps instead of a division. However, the Reserve Corps rarely saw action, limiting the possible future advancement of McClernand. Meanwhile, Halleck continued cautiously toward Corinth, in what Grant referred to as “a siege from the start to the close.”<sup>66</sup> The Federals proved too strong for the Confederates, who were forced to evacuate the city on 30 May. Following the fall of Corinth, McClernand wrote to Lincoln requesting an independent command. He specifically desired “Arkansas South of the Arkansas river, between Louisiana Texas and the Indian Nation,” and he asked Lincoln to “let one volunteer officer try his capabilities.”<sup>67</sup> Instead of receiving an independent command, however, McClernand’s Reserve Corps was dissolved on 3 July.

McClernand was upset by the news of his de facto demotion and threatened to resign. He notified Grant, “My state of incertitude is most embarrassing. I will ask to be relieved unless my official relations & responsibilities shall be defined.”<sup>68</sup> McClernand then wrote to U.S. Representative Elihu B. Washburne on 9 July 1862, asking to be sent to Richmond with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> divisions from the Army of the Tennessee. When it appeared as if none of these entreaties would come to fruition, McClernand finally turned to Lincoln and Governor Yates in hopes of returning to Illinois to help raise troops. He informed Yates, “I think I could offer some information and assistance in regard to the refilling of our old regiments.... Ask the Secretary of War to order me to visit you at Springfield for that purpose.”<sup>69</sup> The move was a gamble, because by giving up his position, McClernand risked never returning to an active field command.

---

<sup>66</sup> Grant quoted in Meyers, 98.

<sup>67</sup> John A. McClernand to Abraham Lincoln, June 20, 1862, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Meyers, 99-100.

<sup>68</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 5, 154.

<sup>69</sup> McClernand to Yates, August 12, 1862, Yates Collection; quoted in Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 5, 331.

Upon hearing of McClelland's requests, Halleck became quite upset. He scolded McClelland, "The War Dept has directed that under existing circumstances no leaves of absence be granted except in extraordinary cases. Since this order was issued I have refused leaves to all applications from officers in [General] Grant's army & and I cannot make your case an exception." He continued, "Permit me, [General], to call your attention to the fact that in sending this application directly to the President, instead of transmitting it through the prescribed channels, you have violated the Army regulations. This is not the first instance of the kind, for I remember to have reminded you of this Regulation some months ago." He concluded, "Unless officers observe the Regulations themselves how can they enforce their [observance] upon others? A young officer was a few weeks ago tried by a court martial & sentenced to be dismissed, for precisely the same thing as this. Are Major [Generals] less bound by the law & Regulations than their subordinate?"<sup>70</sup> Halleck was not going to tolerate insubordination, but his strong language was little more than a parting shot at McClelland. On 25 August, Grant notified McClelland, "By direction just received from Maj. Gen Halleck you will report [to] Springfield Ills. and assist Governor Yates in the organization of volunteers."<sup>71</sup> McClelland's fate was now in his own hands.

Following McClelland's return to Illinois, it appeared as if he and Grant were on a collision course. In July 1862, Halleck was promoted to General-in-Chief of the Union armies, and Grant replaced him as commander in the West. Grant's primary objective was to capture Vicksburg. Grant understood that "Vicksburg was important to the enemy because it occupied the first high ground coming close to the river below Memphis.... Vicksburg was the only

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>71</sup> Ulysses S. Grant to John A. McClelland, August 25, 1862, John A. McClelland Papers, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library; Quoted in Meyers, 101.

channel...connecting the parts of the Confederacy divided by the Mississippi. So long as it was held by the enemy, the free navigation of the river was prevented.”<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, he carefully planned a campaign to capture the Confederate stronghold.

Meanwhile, McClernand was busy in Illinois and Washington, D.C. He toured many Illinois cities, giving speeches and inspecting troops. McClernand also took the opportunity to criticize West Pointers whenever possible. During a speech in Chicago in early September, McClernand said, “Any commander who relies wholly upon STRATEGY must fail.... We want the right man to lead us; a man who will appoint a subordinate officer on account of his merits, and not because he is a graduate of a particular school. Neither [Caesar], nor Cromwell were graduates of West Point.”<sup>73</sup> Later that month, Governor Yates invited McClernand to join him on a trip to Washington, D.C. McClernand viewed this as an opportunity to gain an independent command by taking his case directly to the president. Once in the capital, McClernand first met with Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase. Chase liked McClernand’s proposal and mentioned it to Lincoln in the next cabinet meeting. Apparently, during the meeting Lincoln “said he thought him brave and capable, but too desirous to be independent of every body else.”<sup>74</sup> On 30 September, McClernand finally received his meeting with the President, and after McClernand finished outlining his plan, Lincoln invited him on a tour of the Antietam battlefield. Over the next several days, McClernand not only continued promoting his ideas to Lincoln but also petitioned McClellan. His trip proved a success, for in a 7 October cabinet

---

<sup>72</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 165.

<sup>73</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, September 8, 1862; Hicken, 204-205.

<sup>74</sup> David Donald, ed., *Inside Lincoln’s Cabinet: The Civil War Diaries of Salmon Chase* (New York: Longman’s, Green, 1954), 161; John Niven, ed., *The Salmon P. Chase Papers*, Vol. 1 (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1993), 404; Quoted in Meyers, 104.



meeting, Lincoln stated that he wanted to organize an expedition with the purpose of opening the Mississippi, and that the expedition would be under the command of McClernand.<sup>75</sup>

McClernand had completely won over Lincoln, so that when Admiral David Dixon Porter told the President he believed Grant or Sherman would be the best to command the expedition against Vicksburg, Lincoln replied, “I have in mind a better general than either of them, Grant and Sherman; that is McClernand, an old and intimate friend of mine.” When Porter offered, “I don’t know him, Mr. President,” Lincoln responded, “What, don’t know McClernand? Why, he saved the battle of Shiloh, when the case seemed hopeless!” When Porter disputed Lincoln’s claim, the President reiterated, “No McClernand did it; he is a natural-born general.”<sup>76</sup> Whatever reservations Lincoln had held prior to his time with McClernand in 1862, they seemed no longer to be a concern.

It appeared McClernand would secure the independent command he desired, for only Halleck and Grant stood in his way. Orders were drawn up by Halleck for the Vicksburg expedition under the command of McClernand, but he was careful in the wording of the document. The final paragraph stated that “the forces so organized will remain subject to the designation of the general-in-chief, and be employed according to such exigencies as the service in the judgment may require.” The stipulation left a major loophole for Halleck, one which apparently slipped by McClernand. McClernand would have his independent command only if Halleck approved and if Grant did not require his troops. Historian Bruce Catton believes Lincoln, ever the lawyer, intentionally allowed Halleck this flexibility.<sup>77</sup> Whether or not Lincoln was truly committed to McClernand, the ambiguity of the order allowed Halleck to control

---

<sup>75</sup> Meyers, 105.

<sup>76</sup> Incident described in Hicken, 214.

<sup>77</sup> Bruce Catton, *Grant Moves South* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), 326-327.

McClermand in the coming campaign, and the result was that Grant and Halleck, two men who had their past differences, were now united against the politician McClermand.

While McClermand was making the final preparation for his expedition, Grant and Halleck were preparing to make McClermand's role irrelevant. On 10 November 1862, Grant wrote Halleck asking, "Am I to understand that I lay still here while an Expedition is fitted out from Memphis or do you want me to push as far South as possible? Am I to have Sherman move subject to my order or is he & his forces reserved for some special service? Will not more forces be sent here?" The next day Grant received the reply he sought from Halleck, "You have command of all troops sent to your Dept, and have permission to fight the enemy when you please."<sup>78</sup> Grant had heard rumors of McClermand's authorization to command and determined to have Sherman capture Vicksburg before McClermand could arrive. On 8 December 1862, Grant wrote to Sherman,

You will proceed with as little delay as practicable to Memphis, Ten. Taking with you one Division of your present command. On your arrival at Memphis you will assume command of all the troops there, and that portion of Gen. Curtis' forces at present East of the Mississippi river and organize them into Brigades and Divisions in your own way. As soon as possible move with them down the river to the vicinity of Vicksburg and with the cooperation of the Gunboat fleet under command of Flag Officer Porter proceed to the reduction of that place in such manner as [circumstances] and your own [judgment] may dictate.<sup>79</sup>

Grant later admitted that the true purpose of this order was to forestall McClermand. He wrote in his postwar memoirs, "My action in sending Sherman back was expedited by a desire to get him in command of the forces separated from my direct supervision. I feared that delay might bring McClermand, who was his senior and who had authority from the President and Secretary of War to exercise that particular command,—and independently." Grant added, "I doubted

---

<sup>78</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 6, 288.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 406-407.

McClelland's fitness; and I had good reason to believe that in forestalling him I was by no means giving offense to those whose authority to command was above both him and me."<sup>80</sup>

Grant's last reference most likely refers to Halleck, and his willingness to allow Grant a greater amount of freedom from scrutiny.

Halleck bolstered his support for Grant by telegraphing him, "A letter from Gen McClelland, just rec'd states that he expects to go forward in a few days. Sherman has already gone. The enterprise would be much safer in charge of the latter."<sup>81</sup> Grant's response was unambiguous about his opinion of McClelland. He wrote, "I am sorry to say it but I would regard it as particularly unfortunate to have either McClelland or Wallace sent to me. The latter I could manage if he had less rank, but the former is unmanageable and incompetent."<sup>82</sup> Halleck replied, "It is the wish of the President that [General] McClelland's Corps shall constitute a part of the river expedition and that he shall have the immediate command under your direction."<sup>83</sup>

This telegram was actually forwarded to McClelland by Colonel John C. Kelton on 21 December. On 18 December, Grant had written to McClelland, "I have been directed this moment by telegraph from the Gen. in Chief of the Army to divide the forces of this Department into four Army Corps, one of which to be commanded by yourself, and that to form a part of the expedition on Vicksburg."<sup>84</sup> McClelland must have felt Grant was attempting to wrestle command of the expedition away from him, and so he wrote,

I avail myself of the first moment, to communicate the accompanying papers: No 1. Is the order of the Secretary of War recognizing the Miss. Expedition, and assigning me to the command of it. The President's [endorsement] thereon manifests the interest he feels in the Expedition. No. 2., is the copy of an order issued by the [General] In Chief to you, which I send lest the original has failed to

---

<sup>80</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 168.

<sup>81</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 7, 6.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-62.

reach you. This order, while giving to me the immediate command of the Expedition, makes it a part of your general command.... I have the honor to ask your instructions in the premises, and that you will be kind enough to afford me every proper facility in reaching my command.<sup>85</sup>

While McClelland was accepting Grant as his direct superior, he was making it clear that the President and the Secretary of War had assigned the command of the Mississippi Expedition to him.

As the campaign progressed, Grant, who made his headquarters at Holly Springs, struggled to stay informed of the expedition against Vicksburg. On 31 December 1862, Grant received the misinformation that Vicksburg had fallen.<sup>86</sup> However, the first weeks of 1863 made it clear that Vicksburg had not fallen. In fact, Sherman's forces had been repulsed at Chickasaw Bayou, and he was forced to retreat north to await McClelland. Meanwhile, Grant was suffering problems of his own. On 20 December, General Earl Van Dorn captured the Union supply base at Holly Springs, forcing Grant to drastically alter his plan for the campaign.<sup>87</sup> Van Dorn's attack coincided with raids by General Nathan Bedford Forrest that severely disrupted Grant's communications and supply lines. By 11 January, McClelland had connected with Sherman and planned a new operation against the Post of Arkansas, a small Confederate fort located on the Arkansas River.

With the rebel attacks against his communications, Grant was desperate to stay informed of McClelland's movements. On 10 January, Grant wrote McClelland, "Since Gen. Sherman left here I have been unable to learn anything official from the expedition which you now command. Your wants and requirements all have to be guessed at.... This expedition must not fail.... But I want to be advised of what has been done; what there is to contend against, and an

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>87</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 169.

estimate of what is required.... I would like to have a full report immediately for my guidance as to what is to be done.”<sup>88</sup> McClernand sent Grant a telegram arguing that his plan to move against the Post of Arkansas was vital to “[t]he importance; nay, duty of actively and usefully employing our arms, not only for the purpose of subduing the rebellion, but to secure some compensation for previous expense and loss attending the expedition.” McClernand further believed that his plan would counteract “the moral effect of the failure of the attack near [Vicksburg] and the re-inspiration of the forces repulsed, by making them the champions of new, important and successful [enterprises].”<sup>89</sup> To Grant, however, it appeared McClernand wanted to fight a battle simply to fight a battle, whether the Post of Arkansas was vital or not. He therefore rejected McClernand’s plan and attempted to stop the expedition before it started. On 11 January, wrote, “Unless absolutely necessary for the object of your expedition you will abstain from all moves not connected with it. I do not approve of your move on the ‘Post of Arkansas’ whilst the other is in abeyance. It will lead to the loss of men without a result.” Grant continued, “It might answer for some of the purposes you suggest but certainly not as a Military movement looking to the accomplishment of the one great result, the capture of Vicksburg.”<sup>90</sup> Grant also informed Halleck that “[General] McClernand has fallen back to White river and gone on a wild goose chase to the [post] of Arkansas. I am ready to reinforce, but must await further information before knowing what to do.”<sup>91</sup> Grant undoubtedly knew of Halleck’s displeasure with McClernand and was perhaps seeking the authority to remove him from command. That authority arrived the next day, when Halleck telegraphed, “You are hereby authorized to relieve

---

<sup>88</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 7, 207.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 211-212.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-211.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

[General] McClernand from command of the Expedition against Vicksburg, giving it to the next in rank, or taking it yourself.”<sup>92</sup>

Grant immediately prepared a message to McClernand that read, “In accordance with authority from [Head Quarters] of the Army Washington D.C., you are hereby relieved from the Command of the Expedition against Vicksburg and will turn over the same to your next in rank.”<sup>93</sup> However, the message was never sent, because Grant received word of the capture of the Post of Arkansas, in a telegram in which McClernand boasted “our success here is more extensive than I at first supposed.”<sup>94</sup> Grant’s condemnation of the expedition had been delayed, and when McClernand finally did receive the message, he wasted no time in firing back: “I take the responsibility of the expedition against Post Arkansas, and had anticipated your approval of the complete and signal success which crowned it, rather than your condemnation.” In addition to this letter, McClernand wrote to President Lincoln complaining of being persecuted against by a “clique of West-Pointers.”<sup>95</sup>

In this instance Grant was wrong to condemn McClernand, for the idea for moving on the Post of Arkansas was primarily Sherman’s. On 17 January, Sherman wrote Grant informing him of his opinion of the action. In his memoirs Grant acknowledged his error, writing, “when the result [of the taking of the Post of Arkansas] was understood I regarded it as very important. Five thousand Confederate troops left in the rear might have caused us much trouble and loss of property while navigating the Mississippi.”<sup>96</sup> Despite the miscommunication between the two men, Grant ultimately decided against removing McClernand, and the politician continued on with the expedition.

---

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>96</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 172.

Grant may have decided against removing McClernand from command, but he was still not comfortable with him leading the expedition. On 17 January, Grant visited McClernand's command. He had previously received messages from both Sherman and Porter urging him to take personal command. Of his visit Grant wrote, "It was here made evident to me that both the army and the navy were so distrustful of McClernand's fitness to command that, while they would do all they could to insure success, this distrust was an element of weakness. It would have been criminal to send troops under these circumstances into such danger."<sup>97</sup> Three days later Grant notified Halleck of his concerns involving McClernand and his intention to take personal command of the expedition. As Grant already had Halleck's blessing not only to take command of the expedition, but to relieve McClernand of command, the most likely explanation for this telegram is that it was politically difficult for Grant to remove McClernand from command following his success at the Post of Arkansas, and he was now building a case for McClernand's future removal based on the lack of confidence expressed by Sherman and Porter.

On 30 January, Grant issued General Orders No. 13, which announced that he would assume "immediate command of the expedition against Vicksburg" and "Army Corps Commanders will resume the immediate command of their respective Corps," receiving "orders direct from these Headquarters."<sup>98</sup> The order was a major blow to McClernand, as he went from commanding an independent army to only a single corps. Predictably, McClernand responded angrily to the order, writing to Grant, "General orders No 13 is this moment received. I hasten to inquire whether its purpose is to relieve me from the command of all, or any portion, of the forces composing the Miss. River Expedition, or, in other words, whether its purpose it to limit my command to the 13<sup>th</sup> Army Corps." McClernand ended his message in a challenging tone. "I

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>98</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 7, 265.

am led to make this inquiry, because while such seems to be the intention, it conflicts with the order of the Secretary of War, made under the personal direction of the President...also; with the order of the [General] In Chief, to you..."<sup>99</sup> Grant later referred to the message as "more in the nature of a reprimand than a protest." Grant demonstrated his impressive political savvy, writing, "It was highly insubordinate, but I overlooked it, as I believed, for the good of the service. General McClelland was a politician of very considerable prominence in his State."<sup>100</sup> He might have added that McClelland was also now in the President's favor.

In an attempt to explain himself to McClelland, Grant wrote a response the next day. "I regard the President as the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and will obey every order of his, but as yet I have seen no order to prevent my taking immediate command in the field, and since the dispatch [referred] to in your note I have received another from the Gen. in-Chief of the Army authorizing me directly to take command of this Army."<sup>101</sup> For the moment, McClelland had to accept Grant's decision. He responded on 1 February,

I acquiesced in the order, for the purpose of avoiding a conflict of authority, in the presence of the enemy—but, for reasons set forth in my dispatch of yesterday, (which for anything disclosed I still hold good,) I protest against its competency and justice; and respectfully request that this, my protest, together, with the accompanying paper may be forwarded to the General in Chief, and through him to the Secretary of War and the President. I request this, not only in respect for the President and Secretary, under whose express authority I claim the right to command the Expedition, but in justice to myself as its author and active promoter.<sup>102</sup>

Grant agreed to McClelland's request, forwarded his order and all correspondences to Washington, noting,

Gen. McClelland was assigned to duty in this Dept. with instructions to me to assign him command of an Army Corps operating on the Miss. River and to give

---

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>100</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 173.

<sup>101</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 7, 264.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 267.



him the chief command under my direction. This I did, but subsequently receiving authority to assign the command to any one I thought most competent, or to take it myself I determined to at least be present with the expedition. If Gen. Sherman had been left in command here such is my confidence in him that I would not have thought my presence necessary. But, whether I do Gen. McClernand injustice or not, I have not [confidence] in his ability as a soldier to conduct an expedition of the magnitude of this one successfully. In this opinion I have no doubt but I am born out by a majority of the officers of the expedition though I have not questioned one of them on the subject. I respectfully submit this whole matter to the Gen. in Chief and the President. Whatever the decision made by them I will cheerfully submit to and give a hearty support.<sup>103</sup>

McClermand's fate was now in the hands of his superiors. Yet he apparently did not trust Grant to forward the dispute to Washington. This he did himself, charging Lincoln to "[p]lease cause it to be signified to me whether [General] Grant or myself will have *immediate* command of the Miss. river Expedition."<sup>104</sup> Demonstrating his own political savvy, Lincoln declined to intervene.

Following Grant's assumption of command, the campaign turned from a military expedition into an engineering project. Grant believed he could undermine the military significance of Vicksburg by diverting the Mississippi River away from the rebel stronghold. The canal project occupied the army's time for the next several months, and although unsuccessful, it did keep the army active until the ground campaign could resume in the spring. Throughout February and March, McClernand tirelessly petitioned Lincoln and Governor Yates for an independent command, but to no avail. Meanwhile, Grant envisioned an operation that would prove to be the most daring of his military career. He planned to march the army south of Vicksburg, have Admiral Porter and the navy run the gauntlet of the Vicksburg guns, transport the army across the Mississippi, and break free of his supply lines in order to assault Vicksburg

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>104</sup> McClernand to Lincoln, February 1, 1863, Robert Todd Lincoln Papers, CI, 21431-2, 21488, 21489; Quoted in Kiper, 197.

from the land side. It was a very risky plan, and one in which McClernand would be required to play a large role. Grant's three corps included McClernand's, Sherman's, and McPherson's.

The first part of Grant's plan worked to perfection, and his troops were soon operating on the Vicksburg side of the river. However, a new element was introduced into the dynamics of Grant's command. Newly arrived at Grant's headquarters was Charles A. Dana. Recently appointed Assistant Secretary of War, Dana was charged officially to investigate payments to and by the government in the Western armies. Unofficially, he was there to spy for the President and the Secretary of War on the relationship between Grant and McClernand.<sup>105</sup> Dana's assignment was in part because McClernand's campaign against Grant continued to escalate. In mid-March, McClernand wrote to Lincoln, "On the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, 1863, [General] Grant I am informed was gloriously drunk and in bed sick all next day. If you [are] averse to drunken [Generals] I can furnish the name of officers of high standing to substantiate the above."<sup>106</sup> Although McClernand could not have known it, instead of condemning Grant, Dana would become one of his most enthusiastic supporters and closest colleagues.

Once across the Mississippi River, Grant masterfully conducted his campaign, fighting several battles before settling in for a siege around Vicksburg. McClernand generally performed well during the campaign, but both Grant and Dana took notice of his slowness. Dana particularly was astonished to discover McClernand's wife accompanying the army, which he believed added to the delays.<sup>107</sup> However, Grant's frustration with McClernand peaked during the actual siege of Vicksburg. After an initial attack on 17 May failed to take the Confederate

---

<sup>105</sup> Kiper, 206; Hicken, 247.

<sup>106</sup> McClernand to Lincoln, March 15, 1863, Lincoln Collection; Quoted in Kiper, 207.

<sup>107</sup> *OR*, Vol. 24, I:80; Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 8, 254-255; Kiper, 215.

position at Vicksburg, Grant decided to make one more attempt to carry the works on 22 May. Grant planned a coordinated attack from all three of his corps.

Shortly after the attack began, McClernand signaled to Grant, “I am hotly engaged. The enemy are pressing me on the right and left. If McPherson would attack it would make a diversion.”<sup>108</sup> Unconvinced by McClernand’s message Grant responded, “If your advance is weak strengthen it by drawing from your reserves or other parts of the lines”<sup>109</sup> Unfazed, McClernand replied, “We have gained the enemy’s entrenchments at several points.... Would it not be best to concentrate the whole or part of his Command on this point.” This he followed with, “We have part possession of two Forts, and the stars and stripes are floating over them. A vigorous push ought to be made all along the line.”<sup>110</sup> Grant later wrote, “I occupied a position from which I believed I could see as well as he what took place in his front, and I did not see the success he reported. But his request for reinforcements being repeated I could not ignore it.”<sup>111</sup> In reality, McClernand did not gain possession of two forts, but merely the outer lines. Therefore, McPherson and Sherman’s attacks resulted only in increased casualties.

When Grant discovered the truth he prepared to relieve McClernand. Dana telegraphed Stanton on 24 May, writing,

Yesterday morning [Grant] had determined to relieve General McClernand, on account of his false dispatch of the day before stating that he held two of the enemy’s forts, but he changed his mind, concluding that it would be better on the whole to leave McClernand in his present command till the siege of Vicksburg is concluded, after which he will induce McClernand to ask for a leave of absence. Meanwhile he (General Grant) will especially supervise all of McClernand’s operations, and will place no reliance on his reports unless otherwise corroborated.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 8, 253.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>111</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 210.

<sup>112</sup> *OR*, Vol. 24, I:87; Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 8, 255.

Grant's decision to retain McClernand did not, however, signal any lessening of his intense disapproval of the political general. The same day he wrote to Halleck,

The assault was made simultaneously by the three Army Corps at 10 o'clock a.m. The loss on our side was not very heavy at first but receiving repeated dispatches from Gen. McClernand saying that he was hard pressed on his Right & Left and calling for reinforcements, I gave him all of McPherson's Corps but four Brigades and caused Sherman to press the enemy on our right which caused us to double our losses for the day. The whole loss for the day will probably reach 1500 killed & wounded. Gen. [McClernand's] dispatches misled me as to the real state of facts and caused much of this loss. He is entirely unfit for the position of Corps Commander both on the march and on the battle field. Looking after his Corps give me much labor, and infinitely more uneasiness, than all the remainder of my Dept.<sup>113</sup>

During the following month, it became evident that Grant and McClernand could no longer work together. When James Wilson of Grant's staff delivered a routine order to McClernand, the general exploded, "I'll be God damned if I'll do it—I am tired of being dictated to—I won't stand it any longer, and you can go back and tell General Grant!" When informed of McClernand's insubordinate outburst, Grant vowed to "get rid of McClernand the first chance I get."<sup>114</sup> His opportunity came on 17 June, when Sherman called his attention to a congratulatory order published by McClernand. Sherman wrote, "It certainly gives me no pleasure or satisfaction to notice such a catalogue of nonsense, such an effusion of vain glory and hypocrisy...It orders nothing, but is in the nature of an address to Soldiers, manifestly designed for publication, for ulterior political purposes.—It perverts the Truth to the ends of flattery and Self-glorification;—and contains many untruths."<sup>115</sup> Congratulatory orders were nothing new to McClernand, but this one constituted yet another act of insubordination aimed directly at Grant:

The Thirteenth Army Corps, acknowledging the good intentions of all, would scorn indulgence in weak regrets and idle recriminations. If, while the enemy was

---

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 260-261.

<sup>114</sup> James H. Wilson, *Under the Old Flag* (New York: D. Appleton, 1912), Vol. 1, 182-183; Kiper, 268.

<sup>115</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 8, 429-430.

massing to crush it, assistance was asked for by a diversion at other points, or by re-enforcement, it only asked what in one case Major-General Grant had specifically and peremptorily ordered, namely, simultaneous and persistent attack all along our lines...and...by massing a strong force in time upon a weakened point, would have probably ensured success.<sup>116</sup>

McClermand's had once more credited his own command for all the Union success, while leveling all the blame for the failure at Sherman, McPherson, and Grant.

On 17 June, Grant sent a telegram to McClermand, included a newspaper copy of his order and asked if the order was a true copy. The next day McClermand replied “[T]he newspaper slip is a correct copy of my congratulatory Order No 72. I am prepared to maintain its statements.”<sup>117</sup> The same day Grant had Rawlins issue Special Orders No. 164, which stated, “Major General John A. McClermand is hereby [relieved] from the command of the 13<sup>th</sup> Army Corps. He will proceed to any point he may select in the State of Illinois, and report by letter to Head Quarters of the Army, for orders.”<sup>118</sup> Grant had Wilson deliver his order to McClermand in person. McClermand was expecting this reaction from Grant, for he greeted Wilson wearing his full dress uniform with his general's sword lying on the table. After receiving the order, he burst out, “Well sir! I am relieved! By God sir, we are both relieved!”<sup>119</sup> McClermand quickly wrote to Grant, “Your order relieving me...is [received]. Having been appointed by the President to Command of the Corps, under a definite act of Congress, I might justly challenge your authority in the premises, but forebear to do so, at present.” He added, “I am quite willing that any statement of fact in my Congratulatory order to the 13<sup>th</sup> Army Corps, to which you think just exception may be taken, should be made the subject of investigation, not doubting the result.”<sup>120</sup>

Less than three weeks after Grant's decision, he received the surrender from the Confederate

---

<sup>116</sup> *OR*, Vol. 24, I: 159-163; Kiper, 268-269.

<sup>117</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 8, 385.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 385.

<sup>119</sup> Catton, *Grant Moves South*, 467.

<sup>120</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 8, 385.

garrison at Vicksburg. Grant's star was on the rise, and he would before long be promoted to the rank of lieutenant general and command of all the Union armies. McClelland spent the rest of the war in insignificant commands. He remained in politics following the war but never rose to the heights of his own ambition.<sup>121</sup>

McClelland and Grant's account provides an opportunity to assess Grant's relationship with a unique type of subordinate. Although, in the end the two men were unable to reconcile their differences, Grant initially demonstrated an open mind toward McClelland. He was certainly impressed by McClelland's bravery as he expressed to his father following the Battle of Belmont. So, what was it about McClelland that displeased Grant? He was upset with McClelland's constant politicking and quest for personal advancement at the expense of his military responsibilities. Although certainly not politically naïve, as demonstrated by his relationships with Washburne and Lincoln, Grant had a low tolerance for most political generals who often perceived their service primarily as an opportunity to advance their political careers. However, most importantly, Grant could not endure McClelland's constant insubordination. By frequently communicating with Governor Yates and President Lincoln, McClelland frivolously dismissed the proper chain-of-command. Undoubtedly, Grant would have relieved McClelland sooner, but by waiting for the proper moment Grant further demonstrated his own political savvy. In the end, Grant desired generals whom he could trust. McPherson and Sherman were two individuals who fit that description. McClelland was a wild card in whom Grant was never able to place his full faith and confidence.

---

<sup>121</sup> Meyers, 157, 169-171.

## Chapter 2 – John Alexander Logan

Examination of Ulysses S. Grant's relationship with John A. Logan during the Civil War proves fascinating. After exploring the breakdown between Grant and McClelland, one would reasonably expect a similar story with Logan. Indeed, Logan was a Democratic Congressman from Illinois, an ambitious political general interested in his own advancement, and even a close colleague of McClelland. However, where Grant and McClelland's relationship failed, Grant and Logan's relationship thrived. The two men worked very well together throughout the war, and became close friends following the conflict. The obvious question for the historian is why did Grant struggle to cooperate with one Illinois politician while working effectively with another? The answers are primarily found in Grant and Logan's four years of shared experiences during the Civil War.

Much like McClelland, Logan had a long political career prior to the Civil War. After serving in the Mexican-American War, he studied law and became a successful lawyer. He served in the Illinois state legislature during the early 1850's and won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1858. Similar to McClelland, and indeed most Democrats from Illinois, Logan strongly supported Stephen A. Douglas in his election campaigns against Lincoln in 1858 and 1860. Logan was also a political protégé and close associate of McClelland's.<sup>122</sup> He gained renown for his support of the Fugitive Slave Act. In one debate, Logan stated, "You call it the dirty work of the Democratic party to catch fugitive slaves for the southern people. We are willing to perform that dirty work." As a result, he received the nickname "Dirty Work

---

<sup>122</sup> Hicken, 160.

Logan.”<sup>123</sup> The name stuck for the next couple years, but it is not the nickname for which John Logan is most remembered. That title came during the war when his troops respectfully bestowed upon him the nickname “Black-Jack.”

Following Lincoln’s election in 1860, Logan’s political views at first appeared ambiguous. He initially attempted to take a moderate approach to the secession issue, denouncing both Northern abolitionists and Southern secessionists, and declaring that the “election of Mr. Lincoln, deplorable as it may be, affords no justification or excuse for overthrowing the republic.”<sup>124</sup> Following the firing on Fort Sumter, Logan remained uncharacteristically silent. Like McClelland, he was from Southern Illinois, a region strongly sympathetic to the Southern cause, and his reluctance to speak out reflected the views of the region he represented. Despite later claims by both Logan and his wife that his loyalties to the Union were solidified following the firing on Fort Sumter, the truth is more complicated. Indeed, Logan even appeared to break with Douglas, who claimed, “There can be no neutrals in this war, only patriots or traitors.” Logan expressed his private feelings on 9 May 1861, writing, “I opposed war upon the south & invasion last winter as being certain disunion forever, I am still of the same opinion.... [Douglas] took the same ground then that I did, now he tells me that he is for capturing Richmond and prosecuting a war of subjugation if necessary to compel obedience. I can not nor will not agree to it.”<sup>125</sup> What caused Logan to change his mind? Logan had a keen political intellect, and as historian John Y. Simon concluded, “Logan’s long-delayed decision made sound political sense.”<sup>126</sup> Southern Illinois’ loyalty to the Union was still in doubt in early 1861, and it was in Logan’s best interest to wait and see how the situation would resolve

---

<sup>123</sup> John Y. Simon’s foreword to James Pickett Jones, *Black Jack: John A. Logan and Southern Illinois in the Civil War Era* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), xii.

<sup>124</sup> Logan quoted in Jones, *Black Jack*, xii.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, xii-xiii.

<sup>126</sup> Simon’s forward to Jones, *Black Jack*, xvi.



itself. As soon as it became clear that Southern Illinois would remain firmly with the Union, Logan enthusiastically endorsed the Union's cause.

Grant first met Logan during the reenlistment ceremony for the Twenty-First Illinois Regiment in 1861. In his memoirs Grant admitted to his uncertainty on first meeting Logan. Grant wrote, "When I first met Logan my impressions were those formed from reading denunciations of him." Grant added, "McClermand, on the other hand had early taken strong grounds for maintenance of the Union and had been praised accordingly by the Republican papers."<sup>127</sup> Ironically, it was the presence of McClermand, not Logan, that convinced Grant to allow the two men to address his regiment. Grant's decision was well rewarded, for Logan delivered "a speech which he has hardly [equaled] since for force and eloquence. It breathed a loyalty and devotion to the Union which inspired my men to such a point that they would have volunteered to remain in the army as long as an enemy of the country continued to bear arms against it. They entered the United States service almost to a man."<sup>128</sup>

At the end of June, Logan departed Illinois for Washington, D.C., and his wife recalled that before her husband departed, "he tried to prepare [his constituency] for what was coming—the severing of party allegiance and enlistment in the army."<sup>129</sup> Once in the nation's capital Logan attended to several tasks required by his position in the House of Representatives, but he was not content to remain in his political duties for long. He obtained permission from General Winfield Scott to attach himself to the Second Michigan and marched with that regiment into battle at Manassas Junction. Despite promising his wife Mary to remain "at a respectful distance to be out of danger," Logan participated in at least one Federal charge during the battle.

---

<sup>127</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 89.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>129</sup> Mary Logan, *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife: An Autobiography* (1913; repr., Cabondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 91.

Although he spent most of the battle assisting wounded men to the rear of the fighting, Logan had received his first taste of combat and was now determined to return to Illinois, raise a regiment of volunteers, and formally enlist in the army.<sup>130</sup>

Following his return to Illinois, Logan received a colonelcy and command of the Thirty-First Illinois Regiment. Soon his regiment was integrated into the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, which was commanded by Logan's close friend and political colleague John McClernand. Logan's regiment soon experienced its first combat at the Battle of Belmont. Logan's regiment entered the fray alongside Colonel Napoleon B. Buford's Twenty-Seventh Illinois. At one point during the army's advance, Buford challenged Logan for first place in the advance, and when he admonished Logan to "remember, if you please, that I have the position of honor," Logan replied, "I don't care a damn where I am, so long as I get into this fight."<sup>131</sup> The Thirty-First Regiment eventually entered the battle, suffered many casualties, but assisted in carrying the field. Although many of Grant's troops lost their organization and order and began pillaging the enemy's camp following the victory, Logan maintained that "only one regiment of our troops, the 31<sup>st</sup> Illinois had retained its formation in ranks."<sup>132</sup> When Union political generals, including McClernand, used the victory as an opportunity to deliver patriotic speeches to the troops, Logan overcame the temptation, and no charges of enhancing his own contributions were ever leveled against him.<sup>133</sup>

The Union victory at Belmont was short-lived as the Confederates were quick to reform and reappeared to surround the Union troops. Grant ordered his commanders to break through

---

<sup>130</sup> John A. Logan to Mary Logan, July 6, 1861, Papers of John A. Logan, Library of Congress; Quoted in Jones, 95-97.

<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Jones, 111.

<sup>132</sup> John A. Logan, *The Volunteer Soldier of America with Memoir of the Author and Military Reminiscences from General Logan's Private Journal* (Chicago and New York: R.S. Peale & Company, Publishers. 1887), 623.

<sup>133</sup> Jones, 113.

the Confederate lines, and embark onto their transports. The Thirty-First Illinois was placed at the head of the breakout column, and as Gary Ecelbarger, Logan's biographer, wrote, for the rest of the day men "would witness, in its embryonic state, the hallmark of Logan's leadership—an inspirational commander who rose above the crash and commotion of battle to carry men through panic and despair."<sup>134</sup> Logan successfully spearheaded the breakout, much to the relief of Grant.

Despite claims by both the North and the South that the Battle of Belmont was their victory, Logan was convinced that victory belonged to the Union. He described his line of reasoning, writing,

It had been the constant claim of the Southern people that one of their men could whip five Northerners. The battle of Belmont, if it did not demonstrate to the rebels themselves that one Union soldier could whip two Confederates, proved to the satisfaction of our own men that they were at least equal to the enemy man to man. The battle gave many, if not the most of our men then engaged, their first smell of powder. It inspired confidence in their own abilities as soldiers, as well as in the skill of their officers. It taught a lesson concerning the value of discipline which our men remembered and repeated to others upon almost every subsequent battle-field, for their position at Belmont, owing to their own lack of caution, had been very perilous.<sup>135</sup>

Most importantly, the battle not only provided valuable experience for the Union troops, but also for Logan. It was the first time he had commanded men under fire, and he had performed admirably.

Once back at Cairo, Grant told Logan, "Colonel, you handle your men well." In an apparent jovial mood, and already knowing the answer, Grant jokingly asked, "Were you educated at a military school?" Logan responded that he was actually a lawyer, to which Grant

---

<sup>134</sup> Gary Ecelbarger, *Black Jack Logan: An Extraordinary Life in Peace and War* (Guilford: The Lyons Press, 2005), 96.

<sup>135</sup> Logan, *Volunteer Soldier*, 625.

replied, “I am very sorry for that” and then walked away.<sup>136</sup> Grant still had no love for political generals, but he seemed to have an affinity for Logan.

The next opportunity for Logan to distinguish himself came during the Fort Henry and Fort Donelson campaign. Logan once again commanded his Thirty-First Illinois Regiment, still under the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, which was now a part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division commanded by McClelland. The taking of Fort Henry, and the march to Fort Donelson occurred without much combat, but the Confederate breakout attempt from Fort Donelson on 15 February hit the Thirty-First Regiment hard. Logan’s regiment was not expecting the onslaught that morning. Throughout the early fighting, Logan was forward on his horse urging his regiment to hold, and it was there that Logan was struck in the left shoulder by a rebel ball. His staff urged the colonel to retire, but he refused. Instead, he had his wound bandaged and returned directly to his regiment.<sup>137</sup> Logan was determined to stand his ground, and when he noticed the Union line to his right had collapsed, Logan reformed his men on that flank at a right angle. Riding his horse behind his line, he shouted, “Boys! Give us death, but not dishonor!”<sup>138</sup> Logan continued to rally his men until hit by another ball in his thigh. By this point in the battle, the Thirty-First had exhausted their ammunition, and Logan had no choice but to order a withdrawal. General Gideon Pillow, the commander of the Confederate attackers, later stated, “had it not been for [Logan’s] regiment...[we] would have made a Bull Run of it.”<sup>139</sup> After his regiment’s withdrawal, Logan collapsed, undoubtedly from loss of blood and total exhaustion. When the surgeon arrived to check for a pulse, none was found. It was widely reported that Colonel John A. Logan had been

---

<sup>136</sup> Described in Ecelbarger, 98.

<sup>137</sup> *OR*, Vol. VII, I: 177; Jones, 126.

<sup>138</sup> Logan quoted in Jones, 126.

<sup>139</sup> Pillow quoted in Jones, 127.

killed, and although the rumors were false, the Illinois Congressman was in critical condition and required extended hospitalization for his recovery.<sup>140</sup>

The surest method of discovering Grant's opinion of a subordinate general is by examining what he wrote about that individual in a recommendation for promotion. Immediately following the fall of Fort Donelson, Grant pressed for Logan's promotion to brigadier general. On 22 February, Grant wrote to Congressman Elihu B. Washburne,

Among the [Colonels] Commanding these regiments, or any others, a braver or more gallant man is not to be found than [Colonel] John A. Logan. To him perhaps more than any other one man is to be attributed the unanimity with which south Illinois has gone into this war. His capacity for filling any position [you] are aware of. You perhaps remember my telling you that I never would recommend the appointment of any man, for any position, on personal grounds but solely on grounds that the service would be benefited, in my [judgment], by the appointment recommended. [Colonel] Logan I consider eminently qualified and equally deserving of promotion[,] his gallantry having stood the test of Belmont and Fort Donelson, at the latter of which he was severely wounded. Should Col. Logan be promoted I want him left with the Division of the Army I may have the honor of commanding, nor do I believe such a disposition would be disagreeable to him.<sup>141</sup>

It is noteworthy that Grant specifically asked for Logan to remain under his command following promotion. Although commanders routinely recommended promotion for deserving officers, they rarely specified where that individual might serve following promotion.

Washburne forwarded Grant's request to President Lincoln with his own endorsement, and less than a month later Grant wrote to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, "I would particularly mention the names of Cols. J. D. Webster, Morgan L Smith, W. H. L. Wallace and John Logan.... The two latter are from civil pursuits but I have no hesitation in fully endorsing them as in every way qualified for the position of Brigadier General, and think they have fully earned the position on

---

<sup>140</sup> *Jonesboro Gazette*, February 15, 1862; Ecelbarger, 106.

<sup>141</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 4, 274-275.

the field of battle.”<sup>142</sup> Following the fall of Fort Donelson, John A. Logan was Grant’s man, and Grant would support him for the rest of the war.

Logan received his promotion in late March 1862, and, apparently, the promotion was enough to convince Logan to commit fully to his new profession as a soldier. He resigned his position in the United States Congress and returned to the army to command the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade. His long recovery from his wounds at Fort Donelson caused him to miss the Battle of Shiloh. By the time he returned to the army, Grant was no longer in command, but the relationship between the two generals continued to grow. Logan’s wife noted, “Grant and Logan were on the most intimate terms, and, being aggressive soldiers, they became restive under Halleck’s over cautious tactics.... Convinced that the Confederates were evacuating Corinth...he went to Grant and begged him to let him feel the enemy and attack them...but General Halleck would have no suggestions from Grant or Logan.”<sup>143</sup> In the end, Logan was correct about the Confederate evacuation, and although Halleck captured Corinth, he missed an opportunity to deal the Confederate army another blow. Though deprived of the attack he desired, Logan proved an effective brigade commander throughout the remainder of the campaign.<sup>144</sup>

As Logan and Grant’s relationship strengthened over the next several months, Logan’s longtime relationship with McClelland deteriorated. Throughout July the Union army was forced to combat local guerillas in Tennessee. At one point McClelland ordered most of Logan’s force, which was currently garrisoning Jackson, Tennessee, to respond to reports of rebels at Bolivar. McClelland left Logan with only two regiments to defend the town, and Logan’s objection to the order was bolstered on 28 July when rebel guerillas burned surrounding

---

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 275; Ibid., 357.

<sup>143</sup> Logan, *Reminiscences*, 129.

<sup>144</sup> *OR*, Vol. 10, I: 743; Jones, 138.

bridges and railroads. In an angry message to Grant, Logan fumed, “My forces have all been sent to Bolivar, against my protest save two small [regiments,] not enough to do [picket] duty.... This morning the road has been attacked this side of Humboldt, & the bridges burned. I am sending all the force I have to repair & hold it. What will become of this place you can imagine. I shall hold it or be buried in its ashes.”<sup>145</sup> Grant immediately telegraphed McClernand to return a portion of Logan’s troops to Jackson.

The incident of 28 July infuriated McClernand, prompting a heated exchange in which McClernand referred to Logan’s telegram to Grant on 28 July as a “gratuitous complaint” and reiterated that guerillas were attacking throughout Tennessee and Logan was failing to come to others’ aid.<sup>146</sup> Logan shot back, “If I am to blame I can bear my part as well as any man.... I have no complaints to make of any kind, but will do my duty.” The two former Democratic allies from Illinois were forming an intense dislike for each other, and the stress was building on Logan.<sup>147</sup> On 21 August, he wrote his wife, “I am nearly worked to death and must get relief soon or I will break down.”<sup>148</sup> He requested a twenty-day leave and was soon headed north to Illinois.

Upon his return to his home state, Logan was approached to run once again for Congress, perhaps as a Republican, but Logan was not yet interested in returning to politics. Instead, he hoped to spend the time with his family. Logan’s timing, however, was not great. Logan was not the only political general who was growing restless with Grant’s army in Tennessee. It was precisely at this time that McClernand petitioned to be reassigned to raise troops in Illinois and was privately seeking an independent command. Grant’s order to McClernand read, “By

---

<sup>145</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 5, 248.

<sup>146</sup> *OR*, Vol. XVII, II: 133; Jones, 142.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 142; *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>148</sup> John A. Logan to Mary Logan, August 21, 1862, Logan Papers; Quoted in Jones, 143.

directions just received from Maj. Gen Halleck you will report [to] Springfield [Illinois], and assist, [Governor] Yates in the organization of volunteers, turn over your command to Brig Gen J A Logan if he has not left.”<sup>149</sup> Unfortunately, Logan had already departed for his leave. A great opportunity was presented Logan to command a much larger force than any of his previous commands. However, Logan displayed no desire to return quickly to Grant’s army. He wrote to Grant, “My family & affairs generally are now in such a situation that if an extension of my leave is not granted [deleterious] result will follow.” He continued, “If I am compelled to make a sacrifice by returning on Monday [an] injustice will be done me. I therefore beg of you to grant me an extension of at least a week or 10 days longer or have it done.” The next day Grant responded, “[Y]ou can remain a week longer, but your services are much needed.”<sup>150</sup> Logan risked losing the favor of his commander. Grant was already suspicious of political generals, and if he believed Logan had ulterior motives then he could have lost faith in him for good. Luckily for Logan, this was not the case. Upon his arrival, Logan assumed command of the entire Jackson district, a total strength of twenty-three regiments.

Soon after Logan’s return, he was put in command of a division. Meanwhile, Grant anxiously sought to launch his campaign against Vicksburg. Following Sherman’s repulse at Chickasaw Bayou and the rebel raid at Holly Springs, Grant realized the campaign to capture Vicksburg would take longer than originally expected. Over the next several months Logan continued to impress his superiors, especially Grant. It also appears that Logan started having more of an influence on Grant. In early 1863, Colonel Silas Noble wrote to Senator Lyman Trumbull of Illinois, apparently concerned over Grant’s political affiliation. Nobel informed Trumbull that Grant was “unduly influenced by [General] John A. Logan” and that “there is not,

---

<sup>149</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 5, 330.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 331-332.



among all his Generals, that I know of, one single leading Republican.”<sup>151</sup> Logan’s political affiliation was still in question, and Trumbull was perhaps concerned about the possibility of Grant challenging Lincoln in the next year’s presidential election. Considering the rapid politicization of professional soldiers, as evidenced by George B. McClellan, Trumbull’s concerns were not unfounded.

By early 1863, Logan was gaining his favor so much so that Grant decided a brigadier generalship was insufficient for Logan. The issue of Logan’s promotion was actually brought to Grant’s attention after seeing that Napoleon Bonaparte Buford, who had also served under Grant in the West, was being promoted to the rank of major general. Grant wrote directly to President Lincoln on 9 February:

[S]eeing the names said to have been handed in to the Senate for confirmation for [Generals] I deem it my duty to call your attention to the effect some of these promotions will have in this Dept. I see the name of [Napoleon Bonaparte] Buford for [Major General]. He would [scarcely] make a respectable Hospital nurse if put in petticoats, and certain is unfit for any other Military position. He has always been a dead weight to carry becoming more burthensome with his increased rank. There are here worthy men to promote who not only would fill their positions with credit to themselves and profitably to their country, but [whose] promotion would add weight to our cause where it is needed and give [renewed] confidence to a large number of brave soldiers. Conspicuous among this latter class is [Brigadier General] J.A. Logan. He has proven himself a most valuable officer and worthy of every [confidence.] He is entitled to and can be trusted with a command equal to what increased rank would entitle him to. There is not a more patriotic soldier, braver man, or one more deserving of promotion in this Dept. than Gen. Logan. I have mentioned these two cases as strongly contrasting and spoken of them fully...”<sup>152</sup>

Grant was taking a major leap of faith for Logan. Promotion to the rank of major general would place him in command of more troops than he had ever commanded in combat. These were apparently the reservations held by Lincoln and his cabinet and the reason Buford’s name was

---

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>152</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 7, 301.

included for promotion and Logan's was not. Although Logan had performed admirably at Fort Donelson and proved an effective brigadier, he did not experience much combat throughout the rest of 1862.<sup>153</sup> Rawlins echoed Grant's opinion in a message to Congressman Washburne. He wrote on 9 February, "Logan deserves promotion for his unflinching patriotism and desire to whip the enemy by any rout or means practicable. He should be made a Major General by all means."<sup>154</sup> Logan's biographer, Gary Ecelbarger, believes that "Logan's promotion would have been at least delayed and may never have occurred without Grant's intervention, a remarkable occurrence given that Grant had witnessed him only once on a battlefield prior to 1863. Major General Logan had much to prove in the upcoming campaign to justify Grant's faith in his leadership."<sup>155</sup> Logan's opportunity came during the Vicksburg campaign.

It did not take long for Logan to gain the support of his men. He had always been popular with the Thirty-First Illinois Regiment and quickly won over his new 3<sup>rd</sup> Division of McPherson's XVII Corps. Logan was fond of calling his troops "My Boys," and he often received spontaneous cheers from his men.<sup>156</sup> Congressman Washburne, who frequented Grant's army during late 1862 and 1863, took note of Logan's popularity. In April he wrote to Lincoln, "Logan has a magnificent division, and I think he is the most popular division commander in the army. There is certainly no man whose heart is more earnestly in the cause than his."<sup>157</sup> Logan seemed to have the confidence of everyone who mattered: his commanding officer, his men, and even the President. However, Logan's true skill as a general would be severely tested in the coming campaign. The same night Washburne wrote his letter to Lincoln, Grant ordered Logan's division across the Mississippi River, and the campaign for Vicksburg was underway.

---

<sup>153</sup> Ecelbarger, 125.

<sup>154</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 7, 303.

<sup>155</sup> Ecelbarger, 126.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 128; Bruce Catton, *Grant Takes Command* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1969), 159.

<sup>157</sup> Elihu Washburne to Abraham Lincoln, April 30, 1863, Lincoln Papers; Quoted in Ecelbarger, 129.

The campaign did not start well for Logan. During the late night crossing, two of his transport steamers collided, resulting in his loss of close to twenty-five percent of his artillery. However, he refused to allow the incident to affect the confidence of himself or his men. Logan completed the remainder of the crossing and arrived in time to take part in the Battle of Port Gibson. Logan's timely arrival contributed to the Union victory, which was necessary for a successful start to Grant's campaign. Washburne summarized Logan's role in the battle for Lincoln, writing, "Logan was magnificent inspiring everywhere the most unbound enthusiasm among his troops."<sup>158</sup> The Battle of Port Gibson was only the opening round of the Vicksburg campaign, but Logan had performed admirably.

Logan's next major combat came during the Battle of Raymond on 12 May. At this particular engagement, Logan's division was caught off guard and ambushed by a large Confederate force. At first Logan's men started to panic, and the Union positions were very chaotic. Then Logan personally took command. Grant later recalled, "Logan got his division in position for assault...and attacked with vigor, carrying the enemy's position easily.... McPherson lost 66 killed, 339 wounded, and 37 missing—nearly or quite all from Logan's division." Grant continued with perhaps the most flattering compliment of his entire *Personal Memoirs*: "I regarded Logan...as being as competent [a] division [commander] as could be found in or out of the army and...equal to a much higher command."<sup>159</sup> Grant thus considered the Battle of Raymond confirmation of the faith he had previously placed in Logan. James Pickett Jones notes that the Battle of Raymond "reflected [Logan's] dynamic leadership and his growing ability as a tactician."<sup>160</sup>

---

<sup>158</sup> Elihu Washburne to Abraham Lincoln, May 1, 1863, Lincoln Papers; Quoted in Ecelbarger, 131-132.

<sup>159</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 198.

<sup>160</sup> Jones, 163.

Logan's next major engagement, and perhaps the decisive battle of the campaign, occurred at Champion Hill. Confederate General John C. Pemberton decided to make a stand against Grant on a defensive ridge just east of Vicksburg. Just prior to leading his men into battle, Logan shouted, "We are about to fight the battle for Vicksburg!"<sup>161</sup> Logan's division once again played a vital role in the battle. Grant wrote, "[A] direct forward movement carried [Logan] over open fields, in rear of the enemy and in a line parallel with them.... We had cut off the retreat of the enemy." Grant believed the only reason his army was not able to achieve a total victory was McClelland's performance. He wrote, "Had McClelland come up with reasonable promptness...I cannot see how Pemberton could have escaped with any organized force. As it was he lost over three thousand killed and wounded and about three thousand captured in battle and in pursuit.... Logan alone captured 1,300 prisoners and eleven guns."<sup>162</sup> During the fighting Logan continuously demonstrated the characteristics that had gained Grant's respect. He inspired his troops and fought with them at the front. At one point during the battle, Grant told an aide, "Go down to Logan and tell him he is making history to-day."<sup>163</sup> The Battle of Champion Hill was a resounding Union victory and the pinnacle of the campaign for Major General John A. Logan.

Following the victory at Champion Hill, the Union army advanced to the outer works of Vicksburg but failed to take the city with an attack on 17 May. However, Grant was determined to attempt to take Vicksburg with one more coordinated assault. The order to attack on 22 May was scheduled for 10:00 a.m. Logan's division was quickly repulsed but, following McClelland's false claim of taking two Confederate forts, was ordered to attack again. Logan's

---

<sup>161</sup> Quoted in Jones, 166.

<sup>162</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 204-205.

<sup>163</sup> Grant quoted in Ecelbarger, 141.

wife later wrote, “General Logan disagreed with General Grant about the wisdom of this assault, doubting the truth of the information which had been given General Grant, but as General Logan never faltered or hesitated to execute his orders, the First Brigade, Third Division, of the Seventeenth Army Corps, with General Logan leading, started up the rugged sides of the hills surrounding Vicksburg.”<sup>164</sup> She concluded that “General Logan considered 22 May one of the most disastrous and fearful undertakings of any siege during his service.”<sup>165</sup> Mary Logan’s postwar might be interpreted as simply a defense of her husband. However, Grant, Sherman, and McPherson also doubted the accuracy of McClelland’s messages. Unfortunately for Logan, the heavy fighting of 22 May was the final major engagement of what had been to that point an extremely well commanded campaign. Logan’s division now settled into a siege with the rest of Grant’s forces.

Grant received the surrender of the Vicksburg garrison on 4 July 1863. The same day he honored Logan’s service in the campaign in Special Order No. 180: “[Major General] J.A. Logan is assigned temporarily to the command of the city of Vicksburg, and will march his Division within the entrenchments of the enemy to a suitable camp ground.”<sup>166</sup> Logan’s division thus received the honor of being the first Union troops to enter the rebel city. The military careers of the two political generals from Illinois had now completely taken separate paths. McClelland was relieved from command, to spend the rest of the war in obscurity. Meanwhile, Logan was the hero of the day and under consideration for further advancement.

Before Logan could take full advantage of his recent successes, he decided to return to Illinois. His wife wrote, “General Logan was wanted to help win victories for the party in the

---

<sup>164</sup> Logan, *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife*, 138.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>166</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 8, 465.

local elections.”<sup>167</sup> Grant’s reaction to Logan’s decision further exemplified the confidence he held in his subordinate. If an untrustworthy politician, like McClelland, had left the army to return for a campaign season, Grant would have greeted the decision with uncertainty. However, with Logan, Grant wrote,

Dear Sir: I sent you ten days’ extension of leave, and will give you as many more as you require. I have read your speeches in Illinois, and feel that you are really doing more good there than you can possibly do whilst the army of your command is lying idle. Stay while you feel such good results are being worked by your absence, and I will extend your leave to cover your absence. In the meantime, should any movement of your command be contemplated I will notify you as early as possible of it.<sup>168</sup>

Logan was free to campaign for the time being, but soon his services were required back with the army.

Following William T. Sherman’s promotion to the command of the Army of the Tennessee, Logan was a candidate to take command of his old outfit, the XV Corps. On 26 October, Grant telegraphed Halleck, “I would respectfully [recommend] [Major General] John A Logan as a suitable commander for [Sherman’s] Corps.” The next day, Captain Ely S. Parker, a member of Grant’s staff issued Special Field Orders No. 4, which directed Logan to assume command of the XV Army Corps.<sup>169</sup> Unfortunately for Logan, he was delayed in taking over command of his new corps until early December. He therefore missed the Battle of Chattanooga, the last major battle fought by Grant in the West. Although for the remainder of the war Logan no longer served directly under Grant, the two men continued to have a very close relationship.

---

<sup>167</sup> Logan, *Reminiscences of a Soldier’s Wife*, 141.

<sup>168</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 9, 176; *Washington Chronicle*, Nov. 7, 1867.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 518.

Following the Battle of Chattanooga, Grant received promotion to the rank of lieutenant general and was placed in command of all the Union armies. He soon moved his headquarters to Virginia and the eastern theater. However, Logan remained in the West, under the command of Sherman, who replaced Grant as overall commander. The Battle of Chattanooga, which Logan had missed, was the last major battle before winter set in and the armies halted their respective campaigns. However, Grant and Sherman had large plans for the coming spring of 1864. The two men hoped to bring the Confederacy to its knees with coordinated campaigns in Georgia and Virginia. In Sherman's campaign to capture Atlanta, Logan further advanced his reputation as a skilled commander.

Before the Atlanta Campaign began, Logan nearly lost command of the XV Corps. In March 1864, Lincoln was seeking a command for General Francis P. Blair. General Sherman had recently vacated command of the Army of the Tennessee, a position then filled by General James B. McPherson. On 15 March, Lincoln telegraphed Grant, "Gen. McPherson having been assigned to the command of a Department, could not Gen. Frank Blair without difficulty or detriment to the service, be assigned to command the Corps he commanded a while last Autumn?"<sup>170</sup> The Corps Lincoln referred to was the XV Corps, which Blair had commanded during the Battle of Chattanooga but was now commanded by Logan. The next day Grant informed Lincoln, "[General] Logan commands the Corps referred to in your dispatch," but added that he would consult with Sherman over the transfer. The same day he wrote directly to Blair, "Why not the seventeenth[,] the command of which is now vacant instead of the fifteenth Corps?" Word quickly reached Logan that a change of command was being considered, and he desperately wanted to avoid such a transfer. Logan had not only gained the respect of his men,

---

<sup>170</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 10, 241-242.

but as he wrote to his wife, “I think I have the best corps in the army.”<sup>171</sup> He wrote to Grant’s chief of staff, Rawlins, “I am informed that it is contemplated to change my command to the seventeenth Corps. I hope this may not be done I am now [in] the field with my corps fully organized and ready for any thing The seventeenth will be to reorganize. I do not desire the change at this late date Hope earnestly that it will not be made.”<sup>172</sup> He also sent a similar letter directly to Lincoln. Considering that Grant and Logan were in agreement on the issue, Grant would have overlooked this breach in the chain-of-command, and may have even encouraged Logan to write to the president. Due to Logan’s strong relationship with not only President Lincoln but now possibly the second most powerful man in the United States, Ulysses S. Grant, he was able to maintain command of the XV Corps.

In the Atlanta campaign Logan had to prove that he was worthy to command the XV Corps and that he was capable of handling the new responsibility. From the start, Logan met, and possibly exceeded expectations. Confederate General Joseph Johnston opted to fight a defensive campaign, and Sherman hoped to seize any opportunity that could present itself to deal the rebels a decisive blow. At one point early in the campaign, Logan discovered an isolated body of Confederate troops occupying the town of Resaca. McPherson approached the town cautiously, refusing to entertain Logan’s claims that he could take the town with his corps alone. An officer who overheard Logan arguing with McPherson later wrote, “From pleading, [Logan] advanced to protestations, and then to curses ‘both loud and deep,’ and these became almost bitter denunciations of McPherson.”<sup>173</sup> Although certainly not as strong as his friendship with Grant, Logan and McPherson had a solid relationship, and this particular outburst, despite its

---

<sup>171</sup> John A. Logan to Mary Logan, April 6, 1864, Logan Papers; Ecelbarger, 165.

<sup>172</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 10, 241-242.

<sup>173</sup> Originally printed in the *New York Tribune* and republished in “Logan at Resaca,” *The National Tribune*, June 19, 1884; Quoted in Ecelbarger, 169.



element of insubordination, did not threaten to destroy their rapport. McPherson forgave Logan in large part because he was correct. Sherman later sided with Logan and commented, “Well Mac, you have missed the great opportunity of your life.”<sup>174</sup> As a result of McPherson’s poor decision, the Battle of Resaca turned out to be less than decisive. However, Logan successfully commanded his corps and took a central role in driving the Confederates from the town.

As the campaign progressed, Logan continued to perform admirably, all the while winning not only the respect but the adoration of his men. The XV Corps was a group of hardened soldiers who had been through most of the fighting in the western theater, and prided themselves on being “Sherman’s Men.” One Illinois officer wrote, “The men think more of Sherman than any other general who ever commanded them, but they did not cheer him.... I never heard a general cheered in my life.”<sup>175</sup> The XV Corps had never cheered anyone, until General Logan. During the campaign, Logan’s leadership completely won over his entire corps. During the Battle of Dallas, Logan received another wound, again in his left arm. Mary Logan wrote, “He paid little attention to the wound received at Dallas, feeling that there was no time to be off duty for a single hour.”<sup>176</sup> The low point of the campaign for both Sherman and Logan occurred at Kennesaw Mountain. Sherman determined to attack Johnston’s formidable defensive positions. Mary wrote, “The attack of the Fifteenth Corps on Kennesaw Mountain...was one of the most daring and tragic in history. It was made in obedience to orders against the advice of General Logan, who considered the impossible feat little short of madness, an opinion in which General McPherson coincided, but both were subordinate.”<sup>177</sup> Logan’s attack was repulsed with heavy losses, and Sherman’s offensive concluded in failure. However, thus far in the campaign

---

<sup>174</sup> Sherman quoted in Ecelbarger, 169.

<sup>175</sup> Quoted in Ecelbarger, 173.

<sup>176</sup> Logan, *Reminiscences of a Soldier’s Wife*, 155.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-156.

Logan had performed admirably as a corps commander. He soon had the opportunity to demonstrate his ability to command an army.

The Confederate general Joseph Johnston was replaced by the aggressive John Bell Hood, who planned a surprise attack against Sherman's army outside Atlanta. During the subsequent Battle of Atlanta General James B. McPherson, commander of the Army of the Tennessee, was killed. Once Sherman learned of McPherson's death, he quickly ordered Logan to assume command of the Army of the Tennessee and drive back the enemy.<sup>178</sup> Logan wasted no time in seizing control of the situation. Apparently enraged over the death of his commander, Logan was heard swearing that "he would have McPherson's body if he sacrificed every man in the 15<sup>th</sup> Corps."<sup>179</sup> Mary Logan relayed her romantic version of subsequent events:

General Logan rode with magic swiftness from one end of the line to the other, rallying the troops with the tragic cry of 'McPherson and revenge!' and appealing to officers and men to do or die.... The irresistible force and intrepid valor of the Union army, led by a dauntless leader, compelled the enemy to fall back. The day was ours, and McPherson was revenged, solely through General Logan's matchless genius, indomitable courage, and leadership of men—men who would have followed him to the jaws of death. He fought the battle without orders, winning a victory when the tide of battle was almost overwhelming against him.<sup>180</sup>

Although Mary Logan was clearly out to glorify her husband's actions following the war, her depiction of events was not far from the truth. Logan's command received the brunt of Hood's assault and repulsed it brilliantly. The Army of the Tennessee was fighting to avenge McPherson, but also for their new commander. At one point in the battle the Federal troops marched forward chanting "Black Jack! Black Jack!"<sup>181</sup> There is little doubt that Logan's inspirational leadership proved crucial during the battle. One soldier recalled, "If it had not been

---

<sup>178</sup> Sherman, II, 77.

<sup>179</sup> Quoted in Jones, 214-215.

<sup>180</sup> Logan, *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife*, 158.

<sup>181</sup> Jones, 216.

for John A. Logan the Battle of Atlanta would in all probability be whistled now in a different tune.” Another captain stated, “That day was a grand victory for Logan and every soldier thinks of him as he looks on that occasion when the Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Army Corps, obedient to his electric voice, changed from disorganized forces to a victorious army.”<sup>182</sup>

Although occupied elsewhere, word soon reached Grant of Logan’s heroic actions. He later recalled Logan’s “great vigor” that enabled the Army of the Tennessee “to resist all assaults and inflict a great deal of damage upon the enemy.”<sup>183</sup> Less than a week later, Logan further demonstrated his fine generalship at the Battle of Ezra Church. Despite Grant’s firm faith in Logan, others were still not convinced.

In the aftermath of the Battle of Atlanta, one New York newspaperman claimed that “neither Grant nor Sherman were [the Army of the Tennessee’s] representatives. The real representative man of that remarkable army was General John A. Logan, of Illinois.”<sup>184</sup>

However, Sherman was unwilling to give Logan permanent command of the Army of the Tennessee. Sherman stated, “General Logan had taken command of the Army of the Tennessee by virtue of his seniority, and had done well; but I did not consider him equal to the command of three corps.” Sherman regarded Logan as a “[volunteer], that looked to personal fame and glory as auxiliary and secondary to [his] political ambition, and not as [a professional soldier].”<sup>185</sup>

Unfortunately for Logan, he had never developed a close relationship with Sherman, as he had done with Grant. In addition, Sherman was much more prejudiced against political generals than Grant. Undeniably, Grant was wary of political appointments and preferred West Pointers, but

---

<sup>182</sup> “Several Reminiscences. Stories Told of Incidents in Gen. Logan’s Career,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 27, 1886; Ecelbarger, 181.

<sup>183</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 295.

<sup>184</sup> Quoted in Ecelbarger, 182.

<sup>185</sup> Sherman, II, 85-86.

he was willing to entertain high rank for a politician if he believed he warranted the appointment.

Grant wrote in his *Personal Memoirs*,

I will not pretend to question the motive which actuated Sherman in taking an officer from another army to supersede General Logan. I have no doubt, whatever, that he did this for what he considered would be to the good of the service, which was more important than the personal feelings of any individual should not be aggrieved; though I doubt whether he had an officer with him who could have filled the place as Logan would have done. Differences of opinion must exist between the best of friends as to policies in war, and of judgment as to men's fitness. The officer who has the command, however, should be allowed to judge of the fitness of the officers under him.<sup>186</sup>

Grant was not alone in his disappointment over Sherman's decision. Logan, too, was unhappy.

However, instead of immediately resigning in protest (as General Joseph Hooker had done),

Logan served as commander of the XV Corps until the successful completion of the campaign.

Logan did not accompany Sherman's Army during their subsequent "March to the Sea." President Lincoln required his services elsewhere. Specifically, Lincoln wanted Logan to return to Illinois to secure Republican victories in the coming 1864 elections. Over the next several months Logan campaigned for the Republican Party almost as well as he had commanded his troops. Throughout October and November of 1864, Grant actively sought a new position in which to place Logan.<sup>187</sup> Although Sherman deemed Logan incapable of commanding an army, Grant held a different opinion. When Grant grew frustrated with General George H. Thomas' performance at Nashville, he turned to Logan to replace him. Logan departed to take command of the Army of the Cumberland. However, before he could arrive, Thomas won the Battle of Nashville, and Logan's services were no longer required. Logan briefly returned to Washington before finally returning to the command of his old XV Corps during their march through the Carolinas. Logan served in this position until the end of the war.

---

<sup>186</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 376.

<sup>187</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 12, 292; *Ibid.*, 329.

The relationship between Logan and Grant was extremely revealing of Grant's command style during the war. Although no advocate of political generals, Grant proved willing to consider any subordinate who demonstrated an ability as a commander. Logan's early battles confirmed an unquestionable degree of personal courage. However, even McClelland, Grant's nemesis, demonstrated battlefield courage by leading from the front ranks. What was different about Logan? First, Logan consistently displayed a skill and understanding of tactical battlefield command. He was skilled with troop movements and strong while fighting on the defensive. Second, Logan was loved by his men. Troops' willingness to follow their commander was an extremely important factor during the Civil War. Although there were certainly incompetent generals who commanded equal adoration from their troops, Grant was well aware of Logan's fitness for command. Finally, throughout the war Logan demonstrated an undying loyalty toward Grant. Ultimately, it was his constant commitment that allowed Grant to overlook the fact that Logan was also a politician. With McClelland, Grant always needed to be aware of his subordinate's continuous attempts to undermine him. Grant never feared similar actions from Logan. In the end, Logan's qualities proved to be the necessary ingredients for a successful political general serving under Grant.

## Chapter 3 – James Birdseye McPherson

John A. Logan was certainly the exception to Grant's opinion of political generals. Grant generally preferred the services of professional generals who had graduated from West Point. Throughout the war Grant promoted West Pointers to positions of significance. The most commonly known generals who achieved success under Grant were William Tecumseh Sherman and Philip Sheridan. Both men became popular heroes during the war, served in prominent positions following the war, and have lived on in popular memory and history. However, one of Grant's victorious West Point subordinates, who has seemingly been forgotten in most Civil War histories, was James Birdseye McPherson. In *Forgotten Hero: General James B. McPherson*, Elizabeth J. Whaley writes that McPherson's "accomplishments during the Civil War appeared on the pages of every newspaper and were known to every American.... Through the irony of fate, few historians today mention of his name, and Americans as a whole have never heard it."<sup>188</sup> Sherman and Sheridan have had dozens of biographies and monographs written about their Civil War service. McPherson, surprisingly, has had very little written in comparison. After a thorough exploration of McPherson's services during the war, it becomes clear that he was not only a talented officer but also one of the Union's most successful generals. Grant often compared McPherson with Sherman, and expected great things from him after the Civil War ended. Indeed, McPherson's relationship with Grant even rivaled that of Sherman. Therefore, not only is an examination of McPherson useful to learn of his accomplishments during the war, but it also serves to learn more about Grant and his management of his subordinate generals.

---

<sup>188</sup> Elizabeth J. Whaley, *Forgotten Hero: General James B. McPherson* (New York: Exposition Press, 1955), preface.

McPherson's prewar career was far different from McClernand's or Logan's, whose primary occupations were in politics. McPherson's life revolved around the army. Although he surprisingly decided not to participate in the Mexican American War, McPherson later attended West Point, where he thrived. In the class of 1853, which included John Bell Hood, John M. Schofield, Oliver O. Howard, Philip H. Sheridan, and J.E.B. Stuart, McPherson graduated first. Denis Hart Mahan later wrote that McPherson was "among the ablest men sent forth from the institution;... his brilliant after-career in the field surprised no one who had known him intimately."<sup>189</sup> Following his graduation, McPherson taught for a year at West Point, and then was assigned to engineering headquarters in New York. Here, McPherson boarded with William T. Sherman and introduced Henry Halleck to his future wife. In 1857, McPherson was assigned to build the defenses of Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. In California McPherson met his future fiancée, Emily Hoffman, the daughter of a strongly pro-Confederate Baltimore family. With the outbreak of war, McPherson desperately sought an engineering command in the field. After failing to gain a command in McClellan's Army of the Potomac, McPherson turned to Halleck, who was forming the Department of the Missouri at St. Louis. Halleck gave McPherson the rank of lieutenant colonel and sent him to work under Grant.

Apparently McPherson was under confidential orders from Halleck to observe Grant's behavior and in particular to monitor his drinking habits.<sup>190</sup> McPherson interviewed Grant's surgeon, Dr. John H. Brinton, who later wrote, "I knew [the rumors] were false, and assured him that to my knowledge there was no liquor on the staff that the contents of my pocket flask was the whole supply and that I had been cautioned by Gen. Grant as to its disposal, being positively

---

<sup>189</sup> Denis Hart Mahan, *Hours at Home*, 2, 6 (April 1866): 436; Quoted in Tamara A. Smith, "A Matter of Trust: Grant and James B. McPherson," in Steven E. Woodward, *Grant's Lieutenants: From Cairo to Vicksburg* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 153-154.

<sup>190</sup> Catton, *Grant Moves South*, 149.

forbidden to give any to any of the staff, except in medical urgency.”<sup>191</sup> McPherson later reported to Halleck that Grant was sober and that the rumors were false.<sup>192</sup> Grant and McPherson immediately took to each other, growing a strong personal connection. Throughout the campaign for Forts Henry and Donelson, McPherson acted more like one of Grant’s staff officers than an engineer. Grant was extremely impressed by his work during the campaign, and wrote Halleck requesting McPherson’s services in any future movement as a “personal favor.”<sup>193</sup>

Grant received his wish of retaining McPherson’s services during the coming months and during the all-important Battle of Shiloh. Upon reaching Pittsburg Landing, Grant turned to McPherson to handle the army’s defenses. Grant later wrote, “When all reinforcements should have arrived I expected to take the initiative by marching on Corinth, and had no expectation of needing fortifications, though this subject was taken into consideration.” The traditional story of the Battle of Shiloh is that Grant was surprised by the Confederate attack and had taken no defensive precautions.<sup>194</sup> While it is certainly true that Grant did not expect General Albert Sydney Johnston to attack, as expressed by his own postwar account, Grant actually did consider the Army’s defenses. Grant continued,

McPherson, my only engineer, was directed to lay out a line to [entrench]. He did so, but reported that it would have to be made in rear of the line of encampment as it then ran.... The fact is, I regarded the campaign we were engaged as an offensive one and had no idea that the enemy would leave strong [entrenchments] to take the initiative when he knew he would be attacked where he was if he remained. This view, however, did not prevent every precaution being taken and every effort made to keep advised of all movements of the enemy.<sup>195</sup>

---

<sup>191</sup> John H. Brinton, *Personal Memoirs of John H. Brinton* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1914), 131; Thomas Waldsmith, *General James B. McPherson: The Star-Crossed Knight of the Union* (Tiffin, OH: Booksurge LLC, 2007), 65-66.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 66; Smith, 151.

<sup>193</sup> Grant to Halleck, February 16, 1862; Smith, 154.

<sup>194</sup> See James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992) for traditional telling of the Battle of Shiloh.

<sup>195</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 128-129.



It would be understandable for historians to assign blame for the resulting Confederate attack and the Union army's failure to entrench on McPherson. After all, he was Grant's engineer, and defenses were his specialty. However, as evidenced by Grant's postwar account, McPherson did inform Grant of the best line of entrenchment for the army's position at Pittsburg landing. Therefore, blame for the army's failure to entrench should not be placed on McPherson.

During the following two days of battle, McPherson performed admirably. McPherson spent the first day of fighting working from verbal instructions from Grant. He positioned divisions on the field of battle and desperately sought out Lew Wallace's lost division. On the second day McPherson stayed at Grant's side, witnessing firsthand his commander's actions on the battlefield. Tamara A. Smith writes, "Grant's refusal to retreat after the terrible losses of the first day impressed McPherson, who grew closer to both him and Sherman amid the carnage. After Shiloh, McPherson adopted Grant as his mentor, seeking Sherman's friendship but Grant's approval."<sup>196</sup> In a post-battle letter to Captain N. H. McLean, Grant praised the actions of the members of his staff:

My personal Staff are all deserving of particular mention, they having been engaged during the entire two days in conveying orders to every part of the field...Lt. Col McPherson attached to my staff as Chief Engineer deserves more than a passing notice for his activity and courage. All the grounds beyond our Camps for miles have been [reconnoitered] by him, and plats carefully prepared under his supervision, give accurate information of the nature of approaches to our lines. During the two days battle he was constantly in the saddle leading troops as they arrived to points where their service were required. During the engagement he had one horse shot under him.<sup>197</sup>

---

<sup>196</sup> Tamara Moser Melia, "James B. McPherson and the Ideals of the Old Army" (PhD diss., University of Southern Illinois, 1987), 45-46; Smith, 152.

<sup>197</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 5, 34-35.

For his actions at Fort Henry and Fort Donelson and now at the Battle of Shiloh, McPherson received a promotion to the rank of brigadier general. McPherson's newfound closeness with Grant was evidenced by Julia, Grant's wife, sewing the general's first stars onto his uniform.<sup>198</sup>

Freshly promoted to brigadier general, McPherson now needed a position in which he could serve. Such a position was found when on 4 June 1862, Special Field Order No. 86 assigned McPherson to command an engineer brigade and appointed him general superintendent of military railroads.<sup>199</sup> For an engineer of McPherson's caliber, such an assignment was ideal. Not surprisingly, he was very effective at his new position. He reorganized Confederate railroads, in the process reopening over 350 miles of track, and fully staffed the new line with efficient personnel.<sup>200</sup> However, while McPherson's new position should have appealed to an engineer, it was insufficient for a combat commander, a position to which he aspired. Once Halleck was promoted and headed to Washington, McPherson petitioned Grant for just such an assignment. McPherson received his wish following a Confederate attack against General William S. Rosecrans at Corinth, Mississippi.

On 30 October, Grant submitted his report of the actions surrounding the Battle of Corinth. He wrote,

On the 3<sup>rd</sup>, I ordered [General] Hurlbut who had been previously ordered to be in readiness to move at any moment, to march upon the enemy's rear by way of Pocahontas; also, sent two Regiments from here under Colonel Stevenson, of the 7<sup>th</sup> Mo., to join Colonel Lawler at the Bridge, six miles south of Bethel, and put the whole under General McPherson, with directions to reach Corinth at the earliest possible moment...As before stated, four of these were sent under General McPherson to the former place[(Corinth)] and formed the advance in the pursuit.<sup>201</sup>

---

<sup>198</sup> Julia Dent Grant, *The Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), 105; Smith, 155.

<sup>199</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 5, 298.

<sup>200</sup> Smith, 155.

<sup>201</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 6, 223-224.

McPherson hotly engaged the Confederate force, driving it from the field. Shortly after the engagement, Grant sought to keep McPherson in a combat command. On 5 October, he wrote Halleck, “I would state in this connection that Gen. McPherson is exceedingly anxious to take an active command and I think it a great misfortune to have such a man without an important military command. I would feel more strengthened to-day if I could place McPherson in command of a Division than I would to receive a whole Brigade of the new levies.”<sup>202</sup>

McPherson had only commanded troops in one short engagement, and yet Grant felt he was capable of an even higher command. Two days later he wrote Halleck, “If possible have McPherson made Major [General]. He should be made at once to take rank above others who may be promoted for the late battles.”<sup>203</sup> Halleck and Secretary of War Stanton quickly approved McPherson’s appointment. Clearly, McPherson’s relationship with Grant helped in his rapid advancement. When informed of his new promotion he replied, “I don’t know what for.”<sup>204</sup> Yet, Grant was not the only general with a high opinion of McPherson. On 7 October, Rosecrans wrote Grant, “[A] civilian must take the place of McPherson. He is needed in the field. He adds twenty [percent] to my troops he commands.” Grant replied, “[General] Halleck has been written and telegraphed to several days since on the subject of McPherson. I want you to give him a [Division].”<sup>205</sup> Whether through impressive networking or actual merit, McPherson was provided an opportunity to further demonstrate his ability as a field commander.

Once in command of his division, McPherson faced new challenges. He expressed concerns over his qualifications for command. On 20 October, he wrote his mother, “Little did I think...that I should ever be a Major General in the Army of the United States, but so it is. My

---

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>204</sup> McPherson quoted in Smith, 155.

<sup>205</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 6, 132; Ibid., 131.

appointment was a perfect surprise, as I did not think I had earned it.”<sup>206</sup> Grant, however, was confident of McPherson’s qualifications. Shortly after the appointment he telegraphed Rosecrans, “Order McPherson to report to me on his arrival at Corinth. I want to give him an important command at Bolivar.”<sup>207</sup> The important command to which Grant referred was a division of Westerners with poor discipline. Therefore, McPherson’s first task was to whip his division into shape. On 25 October, Grant wrote to McPherson, “Three of the men [under Major] Mudd straggled from their command whilst out, and went to several houses and pillaged everything they could carry away...If these men can be identified have them put in irons and brought to trial.”<sup>208</sup> The episode demonstrates the sharp contrast between McPherson and McClelland. Every one of Grant’s accusations leveled against McClelland’s command was always rebuffed with a defensive denial. McPherson’s handling of the situation was much more to Grant’s liking. He responded, “Dispatch received in relation to outrages of three men of Major [Mudd’s] command and the matter will be thoroughly investigated.”<sup>209</sup> Such a response, possessing the proper respect and subordination, was what Grant expected from a professional officer.

In the following weeks, McPherson played an important role in Grant’s campaign against Vicksburg. Grant’s plan called for an advance down the Mississippi Central Railroad toward Vicksburg. McPherson was given command of Grant’s left wing.<sup>210</sup> During the early stages of the campaign, McPherson executed his command exceptionally. At Lamar, Mississippi, McPherson deployed his forces so that the Confederates believed they were surrounded by the

---

<sup>206</sup> James McPherson to Cynthia McPherson, October 20, 1862; Whaley, 122.

<sup>207</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 6, 148.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>210</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 165.

entire Union army and evacuated the strategically important town.<sup>211</sup> McPherson's leadership so impressed Grant that he promptly made him the army's second in command. When the Confederates attacked and destroyed Grant's supply depot at Holly Springs, Grant ordered McPherson to cover the rear of the army's retreat.

During the early stages of the Vicksburg campaign, Grant received word that McPherson's promotion was suffering setbacks in the confirmation process. He wasted no time in campaigning on McPherson's behalf. On 15 November, Grant wrote to his cousin Silas A. Hudson, "I am glad that you Senators [presumably Iowa Senators James Harlan and James W. Grimes] are better disposed towards the confirmation of McPherson. He belongs to a class of men that we have [too] few of. We cannot afford to [lose] them. Such men as McPherson...are worth more each than a Brigade of troops under such commanders as some that have been promoted."<sup>212</sup> When over a month later the confirmation had still not passed the Senate, Grant wrote to Halleck, "Urge the confirmation of McPherson—he commands a wing of this army & it is of vast importance to the service that he should retain it."<sup>213</sup> The next day he wrote Halleck again:

I learn that there will probably be an effort made to defeat the confirmation of all the recent promotions. There are many of them I have no interest in, but in the case of McPherson I am deeply interested. He is now second in command with the Army in the Field [behind Sherman] and should his name be brought up, and rejected I would feel the loss more than taking a Division from me. He is worth more than a Division of men in his present position.<sup>214</sup>

Grant's decision to write to Halleck in this particular instance, instead of directly to Congressman Washburne or President Lincoln, as he had done concerning Logan's promotions, is puzzling. However, it is likely Grant realized that Halleck was a personal friend of McPherson

---

<sup>211</sup> Smith, 156; Melia, "James B. McPherson," 68-73, 82-83.

<sup>212</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 6, 320.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, 32.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

and would be more likely to intervene on his behalf. In addition, McPherson was a professional general, so he wrote to Halleck, whereas Logan was a political general, so he wrote to Washburne and Lincoln, demonstrating his own political ability. The promotion was finally confirmed 10 March 1863. That day Grant wrote to Washburne, “McPherson is one of my best men and is fully to be trusted. Sherman stands in the same [category]. In these two men I have a host. They are worth more than a full Brigade each.”<sup>215</sup> McPherson was quickly becoming one of Grant’s most trusted subordinates, and Grant stood behind him for the remainder of the war.

While Grant campaigned for McPherson’s confirmation, McPherson remained loyal to Grant during a troubling time, the conflict over McClellan’s apparently independent and competing command. Once informed of McClellan’s role in the Vicksburg campaign on 19 December, Grant wrote McPherson, “A dispatch from Gen. Halleck received late last night, directs me to divide my forces into four Army Corps one of which to be commanded by [Major General] McClellan, and he to have the chief command of the Vicksburg expedition, but under my direction.” He added, “I was in hopes the expedition would be off by this time and it may be that they are about starting.”<sup>216</sup> There was little question where McPherson’s loyalty lay, but if Grant was unsure, his faith in McPherson was confirmed in a letter the following day.

McPherson wrote, “[I]n consequence of *orders* from Washington placing *General McClellan* in charge of the Expedition *under you*, that I would *if in your place* proceed to Memphis & take command of it myself.” McPherson also desired personally to accompany Grant, writing, “It is the great feature of the Campaign and its execution rightfully belongs to you. In case you go I would like to accompany you with two Divisions Laumans & Logans—but am ready for any

---

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 409.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 69.

place or position to which you may assign me.”<sup>217</sup> Grant had an internal battle to fight in the coming months, but it was clear that McPherson would be a loyal supporter during that time.

Following his retreat from Holly Springs, Grant did not waste time before planning to reengage the enemy and lay the groundwork for taking Vicksburg. On 16 January, Grant wrote to McPherson, ordering him to “come into Memphis and take immediately charge of troops designated to form part of the river expedition.”<sup>218</sup> McPherson responded, “I am just in receipt of orders assigning me to the command of a portion of the forces to operate against Vicksburg. I cannot express to you the gratification it gives me, and I shall most assuredly do my utmost to merit your confidence.”<sup>219</sup> However, the campaign that Grant planned for the winter months was not the ideal assignment for a combat commander. In fact, it was even a nightmare command for an engineer. Grant desired his troops to bypass the Vicksburg defenses by constructing a series of waterworks and canals. McPherson’s specific assignment was to dig a canal from Lake Providence to the Mississippi, cutting through a swamp-filled area. Despite the difficulties, the only canal attempt that succeeded was McPherson’s, but the canal only accommodated shallow-draft boats.<sup>220</sup> It is difficult to determine if Grant truly held out hope for success in the canal project. He wrote in his memoirs, “I let the work go on, believing employment was better than idleness for the men. Then, too, it served as a cover for other efforts which gave a better prospect of success. This work was abandoned after the canal proved a failure.”<sup>221</sup> Once spring arrived in 1863, Grant prepared to launch another campaign against Vicksburg.

By 1 May, all of Grant’s command had crossed the Mississippi River. McPherson’s first objective was Port Gibson. Grant described Port Gibson as “is the starting point of roads to

---

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>220</sup> Smith, 156-157.

<sup>221</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 176.

Grand Gulf, Vicksburg and Jackson.”<sup>222</sup> McPherson next distinguished himself at the Battle of Raymond, where John A. Logan’s division performed extremely well. Indeed, all of Logan’s successes throughout the campaign reflected well on McPherson, considering Logan’s division was a part of McPherson’s corps.

Following the Battle of Raymond a noteworthy incident took place. McPherson was approached by his adjutant general, who provided him with a pre-drafted message to send to Grant. It read, “Have met the enemy in superior force, but have defeated him disastrously, and am now in full pursuit.” McPherson, not believing the battle had been so one-sided, tore up the letter and drafted a new one that read, “We met the enemy about three today; have had a hard fight but up to this time have the advantage.”<sup>223</sup> The incident says much about McPherson. He did not want to provide Grant with any kind of false claims which could have an impact on the future of the campaign. This attitude stands in direct contrast to the overinflated claims McClelland made concerning the assaults of 22 May. McPherson did not seek personal glory through misleading proclamations or grandiose statements. Such a quality was certainly a characteristic that Grant sought in a subordinate.

Following the successful Battle of Raymond, McPherson proceeded to Clinton and then onto Jackson, the capital of Mississippi, before turning back toward Vicksburg and meeting the Confederate army at Champion Hill. Grant wrote of the Battle of Champion Hill that “[W]here Pemberton had chosen his position to receive us, whether taken by accident or design, was well selected. It is one of the highest points in that section, and commanded all the ground in range.”<sup>224</sup> However strong the Confederate positions might have been, Grant still decided to

---

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>223</sup> Quoted in Whaley, 129.

<sup>224</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 202.



attack the enemy where he stood. McPherson's corps constituted Grant's right wing and attempted to flank Pemberton's strong positions. During the battle, McPherson commanded his own corps, which was assisted by Hovey's division from McClelland's command. The engagement that followed was a hotly contested issue between McPherson and the Confederate defenses. Grant desperately attempted to have the rest of McClelland's men attack the enemy. Despite McClelland's failures to capitalize on the opportunity to deliver a decisive blow to Pemberton, McPherson's men succeeded in winning a victory for Grant's army.

McPherson's relationship with McClelland was strained following the Battle of Champion Hill, but it came to a breaking point following the 22 May assaults on Vicksburg and the subsequent events. McClelland's exaggerated claims of success and McPherson's bloody assaults that they had prompted upset McPherson. However, it was McClelland's congratulatory order that truly brought McPherson's blood to a boil. He fired off what must have been one of his longest messages to Grant:

After a careful perusal of the Order, I cannot help arriving at the conclusion, that it was written more to influence Public Sentiment at the North, and impress the Public mind with the magnificent strategy, Superior Tactics, and brilliant deeds of the Major [General] commanding the 13<sup>th</sup> Army Corps, than to congratulate his troops, upon their well merited successes. There is a vaingloriousness about the Order, an ingenious attempt to write himself down, the hero, the master mind, giving life and direction to Military operations in this Quarter, inconsistent with the high toned principles of the Soldier... Though 'born a Warrior,' as he himself stated, he has evidently forgotten one of the most essential qualities, viz: that elevated, refined sense of honor, which, while guarding his own rights with jealous care, at all times, renders justice to others.

McPherson then turned directly to the events of 22 May:

It little becomes Major General McClelland to complain of want of cooperation on the part of other Corps, in the assault on the enemy's works on [May 22] when 1218 men of my command were placed 'hors de combat' in their resolute and daring attempt to carry the positions assigned to them, and fully one third of these men... fell in front of *his own lines*, where they were left, after being sent two miles to *support him*, to sustain the whole brunt of the battle, from 5 P.M. until after dark, *his own men being recalled*. If Gen'l McClelland's assaulting

columns, were not immediately supported, when they moved against the enemy's [entrenchments], and few of the men succeeded in getting in, it most assuredly was his *own fault*, and *not* the fault of *any other* Corps commander.

McClelland's attempt to shift blame for the failures of 22 May was what seemed to upset McPherson the most. He concluded his letter, "The assault failed, not in my opinion from any want of cooperation or bravery on the part of our troops, but from the strength of the works, the difficulty of getting close up to them under cover, and the determined character of the assailed."<sup>225</sup> McPherson certainly already knew Grant's opinion of McClelland and his desire to remove him from command at the earliest possible convenience. It is possible that McPherson was trying to provide Grant with the opportunity, or simply that he was so upset that he needed an outlet for his anger. Either way, he wanted to make sure that his opinion and the reputation of his command would be well recorded and documented. Following the incident, Grant removed McClelland from command. McPherson, however, had more fighting ahead of him.

Vicksburg surrendered to Grant on 4 July 1863. Grant, Sherman, and McPherson were the three men who stood to gain the most from their recent successes in the West. Grant made sure that his two most trusted subordinates would gain their proper accolades. On 22 July, Grant wrote to Abraham Lincoln,

I would most respectfully but urgently recommend the promotion of Maj. Gen. Wm. T. Sherman, now commanding the 15<sup>th</sup> Army Corps, and Maj. Gen. J. B. McPherson, commanding the 17<sup>th</sup> Army Corps to the positions of Brig. Gen. in the regular Army. The first reason for this is their great fitness for any command that it may ever become necessary to [entrust] to them. Second, their great purity of character and disinterestedness in everything except the faithful performance of their duty and the success of every one engaged in the great battle for the preservation of the Union. Third[,] they have honorably won this distinction upon many well fought battle fields.

---

<sup>225</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 8, 431.

Grant followed his request by outlining the two men's services thus far in the war. For McPherson, he highlighted the Second Battle of Corinth, the advance through Mississippi, the Battle of Raymond, the Battle of Champion Hill, and the siege of Vicksburg. Grant concluded, "He is one of our ablest Engineers and most skillful Generals. The promotion of such men as Sherman and McPherson always add strength to our Arms."<sup>226</sup> Grant was determined to see Sherman and McPherson rewarded for their long and loyal service to him and the Union cause.

Another interesting exchange took place on 22 July 1863. Grant's letter of that date to Abraham Lincoln was prompted by a letter he had received from Halleck eleven days prior. The letter read, "Meade has been appointed a Brigadier [General] in the regular Army at the same time that you were made a Major [General]. There is still one vacant Brig Generalcy...I am of the opinion that Sherman & McPherson have rendered the best service & should come in first. If you think so, write an official letter to that effect, urging their appointment to the first vacancies." In a surprisingly friendly manner, since Grant and Halleck had repeatedly butted heads while serving together in the West, Halleck concluded the letter, "Give my kindest regards to my old friends among your officers. I sincerely wish I was with you again in the west. I am utterly sick of this political Hell."<sup>227</sup> Although Halleck asked Grant to give his regards to his old friends, of whom McPherson and Sherman were certainly two, he mentioned nothing about showing them his letter. However, that was exactly what Grant did. He wrote McPherson on 22 July, "I send you a private letter just received from "Old Brains"[(Halleck)] which I send for your perusal. Return it by bearer. There is a portion of the letter which probably should not be repeated. The whole letter is *private & confidential* but I know there is no objection to you and

---

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., Vol.9, 96-99.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 99.

Sherman seeing it. So far as you and Sherman are concerned I will do my part this very day.”<sup>228</sup>

Grant’s decision to share the letter with McPherson confirms the strong relationship between the two men that had taken hold by this point in the war. The same day McPherson responded to Grant,

I appreciate most highly the favor you have shown me in sending ‘Old Brains,’ letter for perusal—It is another of the repeated acts of kindness which you have always shown me, and it will ever be my duty as well as pleasure to try to merit your confidence. I certainly had no idea before, that my name was thought of in connection with a Brig-ship in the Regular Army, though of course it is very gratifying to know that it is so, Sherman richly deserves the position and I earnestly hope he will get it.<sup>229</sup>

On 4 August, Halleck informed Grant of Sherman and McPherson’s appointments as brigadier generals in the regular army. They were officially nominated 7 January, and confirmed on 1 March 1864.<sup>230</sup> McPherson’s performance on the battlefield, as well as his gaining Grant’s confidence, had apparently paid off.

Following McPherson’s nomination in early January 1864, his confirmation seemed in doubt. Grant received a message from Halleck on 22 December 1863, which warned that “an effort will be made to defeat, in the Senate, the nomination of McPherson, on the ground that he is semi secesh, [has Southern sympathies] &c. You know how absurd this is. The true course of the opposition is the jealousy of other officers who want the place, but who have not rendered half as good services.” He continued, “I [don’t] think [McPherson] has a single friend or acquaintance in the Senate. I therefore suggest that you write to some of your friends on the subject.”<sup>231</sup> The charges were raised as a result of McPherson’s actions as commander of Vicksburg. Following the surrender of Vicksburg, Grant had placed McPherson in command of

---

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 101-102.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., Vol. 10, 36.

the city and surrounding districts. McPherson adopted a humane style of government and sought reconciliation with the city's inhabitants. Such a policy did not sit well with many northern newspapers and radicals in Congress. When informed of the charges of being a Southern sympathizer, McPherson was surprised. He wrote, "I have done nothing to justify the suspicions of rebel sympathy, save what the dictates of humanity suggest. When the time comes that to be a soldier a man has to overlook the claims of humanity, then I do not want to be a soldier."<sup>232</sup>

Grant came to McPherson's defense and wrote to the Chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs. He stated that McPherson and Sherman

are both men of the purest integrity and greatest capacity as soldiers.... Either of them is qualified to be trusted alone with our largest Armies. This is a quality not possessed by many even of our best soldiers. They are both, particularly McPherson, young enough to do the country service in future wars if we should be so unfortunate as to be involved in any within the next ten or twenty years.... They may be relied on for an honest and faithful performance of their duties regardless of what may be their private views of the policy pursued. Neither will they ever discourage, by word or deed, others from a faithful performance of their duties. In a word they are not men to discuss policy whilst their country requires their services. Neither of these officers are aware that a word is being said in their favor and I know them well enough to assert that they would not ask intervention of any one even if they knew, without it, they would be defeated in their confirmation.<sup>233</sup>

Grant's kind words helped reassure enough Congressmen to pass the confirmation of McPherson's promotion.

In the early months of 1864, Grant faced a dilemma regarding the best employment of a general of McPherson's talents. Due to his position as the commander of Vicksburg, McPherson had missed the Union's impressive victory at the Battle of Chattanooga. Shortly after Vicksburg had capitulated, Grant had contemplated a move against Mobile, Alabama. He wrote Halleck on 24 July, "It seems to me that Mobile is the point deserving the most immediate attention....

---

<sup>232</sup> Quoted in Whaley, 135.

<sup>233</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 10, 35-36.

Either Sherman or McPherson would be good men to entrust such an expedition to. Between the two I would have no choice and the army does not afford an officer superior to either in my estimation.”<sup>234</sup> However, the Mobile expedition did not come to fruition, and McPherson was left in Vicksburg. On 20 January, Sherman wrote to Grant on the issue of McPherson. He stated, “I do think McPherson is too young and active to be kept at a Post like Vicksburg, and I will be perfectly willing to approve of a change that would take him to a more active field.”<sup>235</sup> Grant agreed with Sherman but could find no suitable command for his young subordinate until he was promoted to Lieutenant General and headed for the eastern theater. General Orders No. 98, issued 12 March 1864, announced Grant’s assignment to command the armies of the United States, placed Sherman in command of Grant’s former position in the West, the Military Division of the Mississippi, and placed McPherson in Sherman’s former command of the Army of the Tennessee.<sup>236</sup> Grant could now confidently head east to fight Robert E. Lee, knowing he left the western theater of operations in the hands of his two most trusted subordinates.

Before departing for Washington, Grant wanted to inform Sherman and McPherson of the high opinion he held of the two men. Grant wrote a letter to Sherman:

The bill reviving the grade of [Lieutenant General] in the Army has become law and my name has been sent to the Senate for the place. I now receive orders to report to Washington... Whilst I have been eminently successful in this War, in at least gaining the confidence of the public, no one feels more than me how much of this success is due to the energy, skill, and harmonious [putting] forth of that energy and skill, of those who it has been my good fortune to have occupying a subordinate position under me. There are many officers whom these remarks are applicable to a greater or less degree, proportionate to their ability as soldiers, but what I want is to express my thanks to you and McPherson as *the men* to whom, above all others, I feel indebted for whatever I have had of success. How far your advice and suggestions have been of assistance you know. How far your execution of whatever has been given you to do entitles you to the reward I am

---

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., Vol. 9, 109.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., Vol. 10, 21.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 195-195.

receiving you cannot know as well as me. I feel all the gratitude this letter would express, giving it the most flattering construction. The word *you* I use in the plural intending it for [McPherson] also. I should write to him, and will some day, but starting in the morning I do not know that I will find time just now.<sup>237</sup>

In both Sherman and McPherson, Grant had gained not only two trusted subordinate generals but also two very close friends. Sherman responded to Grant's flattering letter, "I have your more than kind and characteristic letter...I will send a copy to General McPherson at once. You do yourself injustice and us too much honor in assigning to us so large a share of the merits which have led to your high advancement."<sup>238</sup> Grant soon departed for Washington, where in the following months he would spar with Robert E. Lee during the bloody Overland Campaign. McPherson, now under the command of Sherman, soon began the final campaign of his life.

The Atlanta campaign did not start well for McPherson. As already discussed, McPherson had an opportunity early in the campaign to severely damage the Confederate army at Resaca, Georgia. General Logan urged his superior to allow him to attack the detached rebel force, but McPherson instead cautiously withdrew. Sherman recalled that McPherson "had in hand twenty-three thousand of the best men of the army, and could have walked into Resaca...and there have easily withstood the attack of all of Johnston's army.... Had he done so I am certain that Johnston would not have ventured to attack him...but would have retreated...and we should have captured half his army." McPherson's caution allowed Johnston to retreat before Sherman's army could deliver a decisive blow. Sherman believed that "such an opportunity does not occur twice in a single life, but at the critical moment McPherson seems to have been a little cautious."<sup>239</sup> Surprisingly for a subordinate of Grant and Sherman, McPherson's greatest flaw as a general seemed to be his cautiousness. However, such a defect is

---

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 186-187.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 186-187.

<sup>239</sup> Sherman, II: 34.

not the worst character trait for a general. After all, the failure at Resaca, which was probably McPherson's low point during the Civil War, was a missed opportunity but not a disastrous defeat for his army.

McPherson's failure at Resaca also illuminates one of the chief differences between Grant and Sherman. McPherson may have been a cautious general, but he was especially cautious when orders permitted little flexibility. Grant's orders allowed interpretation and room to maneuver for his subordinates. He always made sure that his generals understood his objectives, but he allowed the actual application to rest with his subordinates, particularly Sherman and McPherson. Under such a system McPherson thrived and was anything but cautious. However, Sherman was much more meticulous with his orders. He tried to predict all possible contingencies and provide instructions for how to handle each and every situation. For example, for McPherson's advance toward Resaca Sherman instructed him "to draw back four or five miles, to Snake Creek Gap, make it secure, and wait for orders" if he found the town strongly occupied.<sup>240</sup> Indeed, Sherman even admitted in his *Memoirs* that McPherson's actions were "perfectly justified by his orders."<sup>241</sup> Therefore, it appears that Sherman's command style, and his excessively detailed orders, were additional reasons for McPherson's hesitancy. After all, McPherson had proved that he was perfectly capable of aggressive action under Grant during the previous campaign.

Over the next months McPherson hoped to make up for his failures at Resaca. Throughout a campaign of maneuver between Sherman and Johnston, McPherson performed brilliantly. His army was often used to flank Johnston and force him to retreat toward Atlanta. Certainly, Sherman deserves most of the credit for reaching Atlanta with relatively little

---

<sup>240</sup> Quoted in Smith, 161.

<sup>241</sup> Sherman, II: 34.



bloodshed, and yet, much recognition must also go to McPherson for the superb handling of his army. Tamara A. Smith describes the Atlanta campaign: “Over and over, Sherman flanked Johnston with McPherson’s army, the ‘whip-lash’ of Sherman’s force. As Sherman steadily pressed Johnston back toward Atlanta, he left the safety of his most endangered flanks entirely in McPherson’s hands, seemingly oblivious of the need for adequate cavalry protection, while McPherson showed a more restrained exercise of the caution that Sherman lacked.”<sup>242</sup> The combination of McPherson and Sherman proved very effective against Johnston’s own extreme cautiousness, and by June he had retreated all the way to Atlanta.

The situation drastically changed, however, when the aggressive John Bell Hood replaced Johnston in command of the Confederate army. McPherson believed he knew Hood’s intentions and warned Sherman of a possible flank attack against the left of Sherman’s army, which had been weakened. Sherman later wrote, “McPherson had also been of the same class at West Point with Hood...we agreed that we ought to be unusually cautious and prepared at all times...because Hood, though not deemed much of a scholar, or of great mental capacity, was undoubtedly a brave, determined, and rash man.”<sup>243</sup> Trusting his instincts, McPherson ordered Grenville M. Dodge’s corps to where he believed the Confederate attack would take place. Following the Battle of Atlanta, Francis P. Blair claimed that “the Lord placed Dodge in the right place on the 22 July.”<sup>244</sup> The true reason for the placement of Dodge on 22 July was the keen sense of McPherson. The decision ultimately saved Sherman’s army from possible defeat, but during the fighting McPherson encountered a line of Confederate skirmishers. Realizing he was

---

<sup>242</sup> Smith, 163.

<sup>243</sup> Sherman, II: 75.

<sup>244</sup> Quoted in Smith, 164.

facing enemy troops and unwilling to surrender, McPherson removed his hat, bowed to the enemy and wheeled his horse back toward safety. He was shot in the back and killed.

McPherson was the highest ranking Union officer and the only Union commander of an army killed during the Civil War. He was killed at a time when his star was on the rise. Smith claims that “if captured, he would have lived to become, at the very least, general of the army after Sherman.”<sup>245</sup> Sherman himself echoed such thoughts: “The army and the country have sustained a great loss by the death of McPherson. I had expected him to finish the war. Grant and I are likely to be killed or set aside after failure to meet popular expectation, and McPherson would have come into chief command at the right time to end the war. He had no enemies.”<sup>246</sup> When Sherman announced McPherson’s death to his men, he lionized his beloved friend, “General McPherson fell in battle, booted and spurred as the gallant knight and gentleman should wish.”<sup>247</sup> The loss hit Sherman hard, bringing tears to the rugged western general.

There was another Union general who felt the loss equally as hard. According to an eyewitness, when Grant received the dispatch, “[H]is mouth twitched and his eyes closed as if he were shutting out the baleful words. Then the tears came and one followed the other down his bronzed cheeks as he sat there without a word of comment.”<sup>248</sup> Following his initial reaction, Grant appeared somewhat hardened to the subject. In a telegram sent the following day, Grant mentioned the death of McPherson without any emotion, “I have news from Atlanta [at] 9 P.M. last night.... The fighting had all been favorable to us. McPherson was killed and Gushman wounded but neither life nor limb was in danger. This however was several days ago.”<sup>249</sup> However, soon Grant expressed his true feelings toward McPherson. On 3 August, Lydia

---

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>246</sup> Willard Warner to the editor of the *Tribune*, April 8, 1876, Sherman Papers; Quoted in Smith, 152.

<sup>247</sup> Quoted in Smith, 164.

<sup>248</sup> Quoted in Waldsmith, 309.

<sup>249</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 11, 292.

Slocum, McPherson's grandmother, wrote a letter to Grant, which was subsequently published on 29 August along with Grant's reply. Slocum wrote,

I hope you will pardon me for troubling you with the perusal of these few lines from the trembling hand of the aged grandma of our beloved General James B. McPherson, who fell in battle. When it was announced at his funeral, from the public print, that when General Grant heard of his death, he went into his tent and wept like a child, my heart went out in thanks to you for the interest you manifested in him while he was with you.... when we heard the Commander-in-Chief could weep with us, too, we felt, sir, that you have been as a father to him, and this whole nation is mourning his early death.... And now, dear friend, a few lines from you would be gratefully received by the afflicted friends. I pray that the God of battles may be with you, and go forth with your armies till the rebellion shall cease, the Union be restored, and the old flag wave over our entire land.<sup>250</sup>

Grant penned what must have been an emotionally difficult reply:

My Dear Madam: Your very welcome letter of the 3d instant has reached me. I am glad to know the relatives of the lamented Major General McPherson are aware of the more than friendship existing between him and myself. A nation grieves at the loss of one so dear to our nation's cause. It is a selfish grief, because the nation had more to expect from him than from almost any one living. I join in this selfish grief, and add the grief of personal love for the departed. He formed for some time one of my military family. I knew him well. To know him was but to love him. If may be some consolation to you, his aged grandmother, to know that every officer and every soldier who served under your grandson felt the highest reverence for his patriotism, his zeal, his great, almost unequalled ability, his amiability, and all the manly virtues that can adorn a commander. Your bereavement is great, but cannot exceed mine.<sup>251</sup>

As expressed by Grant's own words, the relationship between him and McPherson was far more than that of a subordinate and a superior. It was truly as if Grant had lost a family member.

There is no denying the strong bond that existed between Grant and McPherson. The relationship between the two men rivaled that of Grant and Sherman. Yet, Grant also valued McPherson's talents as a subordinate officer. To start with, McPherson was a career soldier who graduated West Point with honors and demonstrated a love for army culture. Grant was not a

---

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 397-398; *Washington Chronicle*, August 29, 1864.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

commander who limited his subordinates to West Pointers, but McPherson's history certainly did not hurt his chances. In addition, McPherson handled himself very well on the field of battle. He first demonstrated his talent to Grant during the Fort Henry and Donelson campaign and again during the Battle of Shiloh. Although at the time McPherson was only an engineering officer, Grant witnessed firsthand his courage under fire and skill at handling troop movements. McPherson had acted as a de facto member of Grant's staff throughout those engagements. It was as a result of these actions that Grant knew he could trust McPherson with a larger body of troops. Once McPherson commanded larger units, he further demonstrated his ability to lead. Grant even recognized the cautious nature in McPherson, and often exploited this trait by having him cover retreats or lead advances. When left to his own discretion, McPherson proved a skilled commander, even aggressive when needed. Another trait that Grant admired in McPherson was his loyalty. He knew he could always rely on his two most trusted subordinates, McPherson and Sherman. Grant also admired that McPherson was not driven by ambition, as some other generals often were. McPherson's humble nature was reflected by his responses to his various promotions, when he often claimed that he was undeserving of such recognition. In the end, it was Grant and McPherson's friendship that allowed the two men to work so well together. The Civil War was filled with so much infighting between generals that such a friendship was a rarity. Ultimately, Grant and McPherson had one of the truly special relationships between commander and subordinate, which allowed them to achieve great things on the battlefield.

## Chapter 4 – Gouverneur Kemble Warren

The first criterion to be considered when evaluating Grant's relationship with a subordinate general should be whether the general was a politician or a West Point graduate. Undoubtedly, Grant was more favorable toward West Pointers than politicians. His personal letters, postwar memoirs, and actions during the war all support that position. However, as John A. Logan demonstrated, Grant also had an open mind regarding politicians. Meanwhile, James B. McPherson seemed to provide the perfect criteria for a "Grant subordinate." He was a graduate of West Point, a skilled engineer, and a talented field commander. It would seem that another general with similar qualifications would also appeal to Grant. Enter the peculiar case of Gouverneur Kemble Warren.

Warren was born in Cold Spring, New York in 1830, not far from the United States Military Academy at West Point. At an early age Warren demonstrated an aptitude for math and science, and it soon became clear that the best way to develop his skills lay with the strong engineering curriculum at West Point. Therefore, in 1846, at the age of 16, Warren entered the academy. He proved an able student and a fine scholar, and four years later graduated second in his class of 45 cadets. Like McPherson and most promising engineers, Warren came under the tutelage of Denis Hart Mahan.<sup>252</sup> Following his graduation, Warren received a commission with the Corps of Topographical Engineers. He spent the next decade surveying the Mississippi River and a possible route for a transcontinental railroad and mapping the trans-Mississippi West. Warren also accompanied William Harney, a cavalry commander that led a punitive expedition against the Sioux Indians, as one of his engineers and soon experienced his first combat fighting

---

<sup>252</sup> David M. Jordan, *Happiness Is Not My Companion: The Life of General G.K. Warren* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 5.

the Sioux. The fight was extremely one-sided, resulting in the deaths of eighty-five natives, and Warren later wrote that “the sight...was heart rending—wounded women [and] children crying and moaning, horribly mangled by the bullets.” He also noted that he “was disgusted with the tales of valor afterwards told on the field, for [there] were but few who killed anything but a flying foe.”<sup>253</sup> Following the expedition, Warren returned to New York and briefly taught mathematics at West Point. The outbreak of the Civil War thrust Warren back into the throes of combat.

Warren began the war as a lieutenant colonel in the Fifth New York Regiment. He commanded the regiment during the Siege of Yorktown during the Peninsula Campaign, and later commanded a brigade during the Seven Days Battle, the Second Battle of Bull Run, and the Battle of Fredericksburg. When Joseph Hooker took command of the Army of the Potomac, he recognized Warren’s skills as an engineer and named him his chief topographical engineer and later his chief engineer. Warren performed well in his new position during the Battle of Chancellorsville, and when George Gordon Meade was named commander of the Army of the Potomac one of his first actions was to offer the position of his chief of staff to Warren. An engineer himself, Meade recognized Warren’s talents and potential in a staff position, but Warren sought a field command and declined the offer. He wrote to his wife Emily, “I was spoken to about being Chief of Staff but I prefer not to take it. I may continue as Chief [Engineer], or I may get command of a Division.”<sup>254</sup> The pinnacle of Warren’s career came during the second day of fighting at Gettysburg. On 2 July 1863, Warren’s skill as an engineer paid its dividends. While inspecting the Union battlefield position on 2 July, 1863, Warren

---

<sup>253</sup> Warren Journal, September 3, 1855, Gouverneur Kemble Warren Papers, New York State Library; Quoted in Jordan, 18.

<sup>254</sup> Gouverneur Kemble Warren to Emily Warren, June 28, 1863, Warren Papers; Quoted in Jordan, 87.

discovered that Little Round Top was unmanned. Warren later wrote, “I saw that this was the key of the whole position,” and he worked desperately to move Union troops in position on the hill.<sup>255</sup> His task was accomplished just in time, and the Union army repulsed a Confederate attack and held the hill for the remainder of the battle. Armistead Long, Lee’s secretary, wrote that “the prompt energy of a single officer, General Warren, chief engineer, rescued Meade’s army from imminent peril.”<sup>256</sup> For his actions at Gettysburg, Warren was promoted to the rank of major general and given command of an infantry corps. Warren experienced very little action before Grant, recently appointed lieutenant general and commander of all the armies of the United States, moved his headquarters to the Army of the Potomac.

Warren’s early career was similar to James McPherson’s. Both men graduated with honors from West Point, served in significant engineering positions prior to the Civil War, performed valuable engineering service during the Civil War, and earned a field command as a result of their battlefield performances. Grant initial impression of Warren was so favorable that he wrote, “At that time my judgment was that Warren was the man I would suggest to succeed Meade should anything happen to that gallant soldier to take him from the field.” Grant also noted “Warren was a gallant soldier, an able man; and he was beside thoroughly imbued with the solemnity and importance of the duty he had to perform.”<sup>257</sup> Over the coming months, Grant’s opinion of Warren “the man” did not change, but his opinion of Warren “the general,” underwent a drastic transformation.

Grant planned to open the Overland Campaign of 1864 by crossing the Rapidan River, placing his army between the Army of Northern Virginia and Richmond, and defeating Lee in a

---

<sup>255</sup> Warren quoted in Jordan, 92.

<sup>256</sup> Long quoted in Jordan, 95.

<sup>257</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 316.

decisive battle. Robert E. Lee, of course, had other plans and attacked the Army of the Potomac as it was passing through a densely forested area of Virginia known as “the Wilderness.” On 5-6 May the two armies clashed in one of the fiercest engagements of the war. Early on 5 May, Meade notified Grant that “The enemy have appeared in force on the Orange pike, and are now reported forming line of battle...I have directed General Warren to attack them at once with his whole force.”<sup>258</sup> Grant replied, “If any opportunity presents itself for pitching into a part of Lee’s army, do so without giving time for disposition.”<sup>259</sup> Meade ordered Warren to attack immediately, but Warren was hesitant to advance because he was uncertain of the size or location of the enemy force.

The enemy force in question was Richard S. Ewell’s II Corps, and in order to launch a successful assault Warren would have needed his entire corps and most likely the assistance of General John Sedgwick’s corps as well. As Warren later wrote, “[Grant and Meade] thought it only an observing brigade of the enemy opposed to me that we might scoop and that by taking time they would get away,” but “we had no certain means of knowing [the enemy strength]...It would do well to move only with matters well in hand.” Warren reminded Meade “that the 6<sup>th</sup> Corps was coming up on my right and that if time would be given them to get in position, as soon as they announced this by attacking I could move with my whole force against their front.” To Warren’s protests, however, Meade responded, “We are waiting for you,” and left with no other option Warren ordered the advance of his corps. Warren called the order to attack without support of Sedgwick “the most fatal blunder of the campaign.”<sup>260</sup>

---

<sup>258</sup> George Gordon Meade to Ulysses S. Grant, May 5, 1864, *OR*, Vol. 36, II: 403.

<sup>259</sup> Ulysses S. Grant to George Gordon Meade, May 5, 1864, *Ibid*.

<sup>260</sup> Gouverneur K. Warren to Charles H. Porter, November 21, 1875, Warren Papers; Quoted in Jordan, 131; Gordon C. Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness, May 5-5, 1864* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1994), 141.



Warren reluctantly ordered Griffin's division to advance against the Confederate force. The division encountered the enemy in a clearing known as Saunders Field, one of the only open spaces in the entire area. However, due to the dense woods surrounding the remainder of the battlefield, proper coordination proved difficult. For the remainder of the day, Warren fed his corps piecemeal into the teeth of the enemy. He never was able to properly coordinate an attack with all parts of his command. Historian, Gordon C. Rhea, an authority of the Overland Campaign, concludes that Warren was justified in his initial protests against attacking Ewell before the arrival of Sedgwick. Had Grant heeded Warren's advice, Ewell may have been crushed, and Lee's army severely crippled.<sup>261</sup> However, Rhea also finds that during the battle "Warren displayed a disconcerting mix of caution and stubbornness." He insisted on holding a significant force in reserve and he never fully engaged the Confederates with his entire command.<sup>262</sup> Although postwar analysis has supported a number of Warren's decisions, Grant and Meade judged his style of command as hesitant and indecisive.

Another of Warren's characteristics deserving mention was his physical appearance. Horace Porter, a member of Grant's staff, described Warren during the first day of the Battle of the Wilderness. "He was mounted on a fine-looking white horse," Porter wrote, and "was neatly uniformed, and wore the yellow sash of a general officer. He was one of the few officers who wore their sashes in a campaign, or paid much attention to their dress."<sup>263</sup> What effect did Warren's dress have on Grant? Grant was not a commander to be influenced solely by a general's attire, but if Warren's dress was significant enough for Porter to note in his memoirs, it undoubtedly was a point of discussion around Grant's headquarters. Porter's description of

---

<sup>261</sup> Rhea, 432-433.

<sup>262</sup> Rhea, 432-433; *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>263</sup> Horace Porter, *Campaigning with Grant: A Firsthand Account of the Daring Battlefield Command of the Union's Greatest General* (1897; repr., New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 47.,

Warren stood in stark contrast to his description of one of Grant's other corps commanders, Winfield Scott Hancock. At one point during the Battle of the Wilderness, Porter described, "[Hancock's] s face was flushed with the excitement of victory, his eyes were lighted by the fire of battle, his flaxen hair was thrust back from his temples, his right arm extended to its full length in pointing out certain positions as he gave his orders, and his commanding form towered still higher as he rose in his stirrups."<sup>264</sup> These contrasting descriptions help illuminate the key difference between Warren and other commanders.

The second day of fighting in the Wilderness did not improve Warren's standing in the eyes of Grant. When presented the casualty numbers for his corps, Warren commented, "It will never do...to make a showing of such heavy losses."<sup>265</sup> Warren decided to "cook the numbers," and submitted a false report indicating fewer casualties than the corps actually suffered. His false report could have had an impact on Grant's planning for the next day. Concerned over the bloody losses of his corps on 5 May Warren was hesitant to fully employ his command in the fighting of the following day. When ordered to advance by Meade, Warren responded, "Griffin has moved up close to the enemy's position and drives him into his lines...I think it best to not make the final assault until the preparations are made."<sup>266</sup> However, Warren refused to ever order the final assault, a decision that did not go unnoticed by Grant and Meade. It is likely that his full-blown attack would not have succeeded, but Warren's hesitancy on 6 May illustrates his cautious command style.

Following Grant's description of Battle of the Wilderness in his *Personal Memoirs* he addresses Warren's shortcomings as a general. He wrote,

---

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>265</sup> Quoted in Jordan, 136.

<sup>266</sup> Gouverneur K. Warren to A. A. Humphreys, May 6, 1864, *OR*, Vol. 36, II: 450.

Warren's difficulty was twofold: when he received an order to do anything, it would at once occur to his mind how all the balance of the army should be engaged so as properly to co-operate with him. His ideas were generally good, but he would forget that the person giving him orders had thought of others at the time he had of him. In like manner, when he did get ready to execute an order, after giving most intelligent instructions to division commanders, he would go in with one division, holding the others in reserve until he could superintend their movements in person also, forgetting that division commanders could execute an order without his presence. His difficulty was constitutional and beyond his control. He was an officer of superior ability, quick perceptions, and personal courage to accomplish anything that could be done with a small command.<sup>267</sup>

Grant's criticisms reveal much regarding his opinion of Warren's incompetence as a general.

First, Grant believed that Warren put too much thought into his orders before executing them.

The chief attribute of a subordinate general is to promptly carry out the commands of his superior. On this point, Grant's criticisms were warranted. Conversely, Warren did not place enough trust in his own subordinate generals, and attempted to micromanage each of his divisions. The result was often uncoordinated and piecemeal attacks. Finally, Grant believed that Warren, like many Civil War generals, was a competent and talented officer who had been promoted beyond his abilities. Grant believed that Warren would have made an excellent brigade or division commander but that command of a corps was beyond him.

Despite Grant's opinion of Warren's performance during the Battle of the Wilderness, he was not ready to remove him from command of the V Corps. Grant's new plan was to march rapidly to Spotsylvania Court House and position his army between Lee and Richmond. To lead the advance, Grant selected Warren's V Corps. Warren started his march as darkness fell on 7 May with the hopes of reaching Spotsylvania Court House as soon as possible. However, due to several delays, including an entanglement between the V Corps and Sheridan's cavalry, Warren did not reach his objective before the enemy. Neither Sheridan nor Warren forgot the incident.

---

<sup>267</sup> Grant. *Personal Memoirs*, 315-316.

Wash Roebling later wrote, “Sheridan’s hatred of Warren dates back to the night march from the Wilderness to [Spotsylvania] when Sheridan’s cavalry got in the way and prevented the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps from reaching [Spotsylvania] in time. Warren complained of him at [Head Quarters] and Sheridan never forgot it.”<sup>268</sup> As he approached Spotsylvania Court House Warren came upon Confederate General John C. Robinson’s strong fortifications at Laurel Hill. Exhausted by a full night of marching and believing he was facing only cavalry, Warren once again sent in his brigades piecemeal against the Confederates.<sup>269</sup> The attacks failed in carrying the enemy’s position.

Later that day Meade inspected the Union lines and road out to Warren’s position. By this time Sedgwick’s corps had reached the battlefield. Meade ordered, “Warren, I want you to cooperate with Sedgwick and see what can be done.” Visibly irritated, Warren responded,

General Meade, I’ll be damned if I’ll cooperate with Sedgwick or anybody else. You are the commander of this army and can give your orders and I will obey them; or you can put Sedgwick in command and he can give the orders and I will obey them; or you can put me in command and I will give the orders and Sedgwick will obey them; but I’ll be God damned if I’ll cooperate with General Sedgwick or anybody else.<sup>270</sup>

The strain of four consecutive days of fighting and marching had taken its toll on Warren.

Meade, coming straight from an argument with Sheridan, did not want a fight with Warren and let the incident pass.

The next day Warren wrote a letter to Meade, in which he took aim at the other Army of the Potomac corps commanders. He claimed the failures of 8 May were not his fault. Warren argued that if Sedgwick had arrived sooner, then his attacks could have been successful. He wrote, “I don’t think our other two corps commanders are capable. General Sedgwick does

---

<sup>268</sup> Roebling quoted in Jordan, 346.

<sup>269</sup> Jordan, 144.

<sup>270</sup> Wilson, Vol. 1, 395-396.

nothing of himself. I have lost confidence in General Hancock's capability."<sup>271</sup> Only one thing prevented Warren from sending the letter to Meade. Just about the same time Warren was writing the message, General Sedgwick was killed. Rhea notes that "For once, [Warren] exercised sound discretion, folding the letter and placing it in his papers."<sup>272</sup> However, the letter still raises the question of why Warren was criticizing his fellow corps commanders. Of the three corps commanders in the Army of the Potomac, Warren was the newest to command and least experienced. In addition, his first actions as a corps commander were less than impressive. Yet, he was writing to his superior raising doubts about Sedgwick and Hancock. The whole incident exemplified Warren's refusal to take responsibility for his own actions and his tendency to shift blame onto others.

On 10 May, Warren once again launched an attack against Laurel Hill. The V Corps did not achieve any more success in these attacks than with the original attacks of 8 May. Warren's failures were causing him to lose even more favor among Grant's inner circle. Charles A. Dana wrote of the fighting on 10 May, "I witnessed it in Warren's front, where it was executed with the caution and absence of comprehensive ensemble which seem to characterize that officer."<sup>273</sup> The following day did not see any heavy fighting in Warren's front. However, Grant planned on 12 May being the decisive day of the engagement. Grant hoped to assault a Confederate salient known as the Mule Shoe with Hancock's Corps, while Warren once again attacked the Confederates on Laurel Hill.

The initial attacks of Hancock's Corps temporarily succeeded in breaking through the Confederate positions at the Mule Shoe. Grant and Meade desperately wanted Warren to follow

---

<sup>271</sup> Gouverneur K. Warren to George Gordon Meade, May 9, 1864, Warren Papers; Gordon C. Rhea, *The Battles for Spotsylvania Court House and the Road to Yellow Tavern, May 7-12, 1864* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 95.

<sup>272</sup> Rhea, *The Battles for Spotsylvania*, 95.

<sup>273</sup> Charles Dana to Edwin Stanton, May 11, 1864, *OR*, Vol. 36, I: 66-67.

up on Hancock's success and pressure the enemy to his front. Warren's troops were hesitant to attack a position that had already proven its defensive strength, and he did little to push his men into an all-out attack. He reported, "I cannot advance my men farther at present.... The enemy's line here appears to be strongly held."<sup>274</sup> Grant and Meade were infuriated by Warren's hesitancy: "The order of the major-general commanding is peremptory that you attack at once at all hazards with your whole force if necessary.... Don't hesitate to attack with the bayonet. Meade has assumed the responsibility, and will take the consequences."<sup>275</sup> Although still uncertain of any chance for success, Warren reluctantly ordered the advance of all three of his divisions. The Union troops advanced vigorously but were repulsed twice, with large casualties. Warren, now joined by Meade's chief of staff Andrew Humphreys, called off any further attacks. However, Meade was not satisfied and still wanted further assaults. He wrote to Grant, "Warren seems reluctant to attack." Once again, Grant did not hesitate to take swift action. He responded, "If Warren fails to attack promptly, send Humphreys to command his corps and relieve him."<sup>276</sup> Unknown to Grant, Humphreys was already with Warren, and agreeing against further assaults. When word reached headquarters of these facts, Grant and Meade decided against relieving Warren from command. Warren's standing with Grant was quickly deteriorating, and on 12 May he narrowly avoided being removed from command.

Following the Battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse, Grant decided once again to attempt to maneuver the Army of the Potomac between Lee and Richmond. Lee matched every one of Grant's moves, checking the Federals at the North Anna River and Cold Harbor. Tensions between Warren and his superiors had not lessened during this time. Dana wrote that Grant and

---

<sup>274</sup> Gouverneur Warren to A. A. Humphreys, May 12, 1864, *OR*, Vol. 36, II: 662-663.

<sup>275</sup> A. A. Humphreys to Gouverneur Warren, May 12, 1864, *OR*, Vol. 36, II: 663.

<sup>276</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 10, 433.

Meade were “intensely disgusted with these failures of . . . Warren,” and that “a radical change must be made, no matter how unpleasant it may be to make it.”<sup>277</sup> The next day Meade penned a letter to Grant:

I find myself, most reluctantly and with great pain, compelled to ask the [Lieutenant General Commanding] to relieve from duty with this army, [Major General] G. K. Warren, [Commanding] 5<sup>th</sup> Corps. The [Lieutenant General Commanding] is well aware, from numerous conversations of my opinion of Warren, and of the efforts I have made to *place* and *sustain* that officer in his present Command; but I regret to say that since his accession to command—General Warren whilst he has fully [shown] all the good qualities I had given him credit for, has developed a serious defect against which I have vainly struggled in the hope that time and other causes would remove, but which circumstances now lead me to believe is [incorrigible] and is a matter of constitutional organization. . . . The defect with [General] Warren consists in too great reliance on his own judgment, and in an apparent impossibility on his part to yield his judgment so as to promptly execute orders, where these orders should happen not to receive his sanction or be in accordance with his views. . . . This defect has been a source of serious embarrassment to me, but my appreciation of [General] Warren’s good qualities, and my strong personal regard for him have been such, that I have forborne to notice it, and have hoped that [General] Warren would see himself the necessity of trying to correct it. . . . The [Lieutenant General Commanding], is aware that he authorized the relieving of [General] Warren at [Spotsylvania], but that I resisted hoping I should be able to overcome the difficulty. I now acknowledge my inability to do so and ask that he be at once relieved from command—If he could be assigned to some independent and separate command he would do very well, for he is full of resources, of great coolness and firmness—It is only the difficulty he labors under of yielding his judgment to that of his superior officer, which impairs his efficiency.<sup>278</sup>

After pouring out his thoughts onto paper, Meade apparently had a change of heart, and decided not to send the letter to Grant. The reasons for Meade’s decision are unclear, but he most likely could not think of a better alternative to Warren to command the V Corps. He also had a strong friendship with Warren and likely hoped their differences could be reconciled. Had Meade followed through with his request, Grant undoubtedly would have agreed to the removal of Warren. Once again, Warren narrowly avoided being relieved.

---

<sup>277</sup> Charles Dana to Edwin Stanton, June 1, 1864, *OR*, Vol. 36, I: 85.

<sup>278</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 11, 104-106.

Following Grant's bloody repulse at Cold Harbor, he hoped one last time to outmaneuver his adversary. His new objective was Petersburg, a rail junction and key to Richmond. However, before any advance began, Warren had another run-in with Grant's cavalry commander. Sheridan disliked Warren following the incident on the road to Spotsylvania, and their relationship was further strained by a conflict on 5 June. In a routine movement to the rear of the Cold Harbor battlefield, part of Warren's Corps became entangled with Sheridan's cavalry. Warren complained, "I am not capable of maintaining any position whatever, if that is all the co-operation I am to have."<sup>279</sup> Ever on the defensive, Sheridan responded, "[I]nfantry commanders are very quick to give the alarm when their flanks are uncovered, but manifest inexcusable stupidity about the safety of cavalry flanks."<sup>280</sup> Warren was quickly alienating himself from every one of Grant's most trusted advisors and subordinates.

In order to outrace Lee to Petersburg, Grant hoped to disengage from Cold Harbor, use Warren's corps to feint an attack toward Richmond, and move the other corps south of the James River toward Petersburg. The movement worked perfectly, and Lee was completely caught off guard. However, once the lead elements of the Army of the Potomac reached the outskirts of Petersburg they failed to attack the poorly defended city. By 18 June, the delays allowed Lee's army to take firm possession of Petersburg. Grant still planned an assault on the city. Grant planned on including Warren's corps in the attack on 18 June. However, when notified about the intended assault, Warren claimed he was delayed and would not be able to participate in any attacks at the planned hour. When Warren sent another message claiming he needed still more time, Meade responded, "I am greatly astonished at your dispatch of 2 P.M. What additional orders to attack you require I cannot imagine. My orders have been explicit and are now

---

<sup>279</sup> Gouverneur Warren to A. A. Humphreys, June 5, 1864, *OR*, Vol. 36, III: 609.

<sup>280</sup> Phillip Sheridan to A. A. Humphreys, June 5, 1864, *OR*, Vol. 36, III: 628.



repeated, that you...immediately assault the enemy with all your force, and if there is any further delay the responsibility and consequences will rest with you.”<sup>281</sup> Warren’s attack was eventually carried out, achieving initial success but failing to penetrate the mainline of the rebel force.

Warren’s relationship with Meade, which in 1863 appeared very strong, was completely destroyed. Warren wrote to his wife, “A rupture is probable between me and [General] Meade who has become very irritable and unreasonable of late...I am so well satisfied with my efforts and integrity—that I would not fear to run against [General] Grant if necessary. At any rate I will not allow myself to be made anyone’s scapegoat and you must be...prepared to see me disgraced.”<sup>282</sup> As Warren expressed in his letter, there was very little distinction between a falling out with Meade and a falling out with Grant. The two men had been working closely together since the start of the Overland Campaign, and Meade had significant influence with Grant.

Warren’s opinion of Grant’s talents as a commanding general became clear in a letter written to his wife on 25 June:

I fear we have not yet the Generalship we should have.... I dread to think of the disaster that is necessary to make the American people think so, the popular idea of [General] Grant is I believe very wrong but still it governs all men more or less here.... To sit unconcerned on a log away from the battle field, whittling, to be a man on horseback or smoking a cigar seems to exhaust the admiration of the country, and if this is really just, then Nero fiddling over burning Rome was sublime...and then disregarding the useless slaughter of thousands of noblest soldiers, the country grows jubilant, and watches the smoke wreathes from Grant’s cigar as if they saw therefrom a way to propitiate a God.<sup>283</sup>

The letter was the first time Warren expressed his true feelings toward the new commanding general. It appears Warren was jealous of the respect and admiration Grant received from his

---

<sup>281</sup> George Gordon Meade to Gouverneur Warren, June 18, 1864, *OR*, Vol. 40, II: 179.

<sup>282</sup> Gouverneur Warren to Emily Warren, June 20, 1864, Warren Papers; Quoted in Jordan, 168-169.

<sup>283</sup> Gouverneur Warren to Emily Warren, June 25, 1864, Warren Papers; Quoted in Jordan, 171.

troops and the northern public, which he believed was undeserved. However, it is important to point out that Warren only expressed his opinion to his wife in a private letter. He did not act insubordinately and break the chain-of-command, petitioning for Grant's removal, such as McClernand did during the Vicksburg campaign. Still, the letter demonstrates Warren's apparent lack of faith in his commander. Warren's opinion could also explain why he often hesitated in carrying out his orders.

Following the failed attacks of 18 June, Grant besieged Lee's Army of Northern Virginia within Petersburg. Yet, Grant also remained open to an assault if an opportunity presented itself. On 3 July, Grant wrote to Meade, "Do you think it possible, by a bold and decisive attack, to break through the enemy's center, say in General Warren's front somewhere."<sup>284</sup> Before offering his advice to Grant, Meade consulted with Warren, whose response speaks a great deal about the deterioration of Warren's relationship with the high command of the Army of the Potomac. He wrote, "I shall have to make a careful personal examination today before I can give a proper opinion on so important a question...I would rather the opinion of some one independent of me should decide the question, as circumstances in the past leave me without much strength in declining any proposed attack whatever."<sup>285</sup> His response indicates that Warren was well aware of Grant and Meade's opinion of him, for he had surmised that if he recommended against an assault, Grant and Meade would think even less of him. The next day, Warren again recommended an independent opinion "so that the opinion can rest on more military grounds and not hereafter be a question of individual willingness, ability, or boldness."<sup>286</sup> These letters indicate that he was aware of Grant's opinion that he lacked

---

<sup>284</sup> Ulysses S. Grant to George Gordon Meade, July 3, 1864, *OR*, Vol. 40, II: 599.

<sup>285</sup> Gouverneur Warren to George Gordon Meade, July 3, 1864, *OR*, Vol. 40, II: 604.

<sup>286</sup> Gouverneur Warren to George Gordon Meade, July 4, 1864, *OR*, Vol. 40, II: 624.

aggression or boldness. In the end, the proposed assault never took place, but the event demonstrates Warren's lessening influence within the Army of the Potomac.

Grant's next attempt to carry the Confederate works at Petersburg resulted in the Battle of the Crater. The plan, as designed and executed by General Ambrose Burnside, was for a large mine to breach the enemy's entrenchments and allow for a Union breakthrough. Instead, the attacks resulted in a Union slaughter within the crater formed by the mine. After the failed attack, Grant knew his only option was to continue with the siege. He knew a successful siege required cutting off the Weldon and Petersburg Railroad. Grant later wrote "[T]his road was very important to the enemy. The limits from which his supplies had been drawn were already very much contracted, and I knew that he must fight desperately to protect it."<sup>287</sup> For this task, Grant selected Warren. On 18 August, Warren reached the railroad at Globe Tavern and started tearing up track. Lee, realizing the importance of the line, dispatched A.P. Hill to disrupt Warren's movements. Hill attacked Warren, initially pushing back the Union troops. Warren launched a vigorous counterattack, regained the lost ground, and strongly entrenched. Subsequent attacks by the rebel force failed to dislodge Warren from his position. On 19 August, Grant wrote to Meade, "I am pleased to see the promptness with which Gen. Warren attacked the enemy when he [came] out. I hope he will not hesitate in such cases to abandon his lines and take every man to fight a battle and trust to regaining them afterwards or to getting better."<sup>288</sup> While Warren was aware of Grant's message to Meade, he believed he deserved far more credit for his actions. Following the battle he wrote his wife that he had "no confidence in [General] Grant's abilities to use an army.... We cannot afford to prove the incapacity of our commanders at such a cost of men and means. So I do hope that I am mistaken in my estimate of

---

<sup>287</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 364.

<sup>288</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 12, 47.

his ability.”<sup>289</sup> Even in victory, it appears Warren and Grant could not reconcile their differences.

The Siege of Petersburg continued throughout the winter of 1865. Throughout this time, Warren had several leaves to visit his wife but remained in command of the V Corps. However, Grant still entertained ideas for disposing of Warren. In February 1865, General George Crook, the commander of the Department of West Virginia, was captured by rebel irregulars. Grant’s first thought for the vacated position was Warren. He telegraphed Stanton, “Warren or Humphreys either would be good men to put in command of the Dept. of West Va. Warren I would suggest.”<sup>290</sup> Only one thing stood in Grant’s way of disposing of Warren from his command. Phillip Sheridan was still operating in the Shenandoah Valley, and Grant wrote to him, “If you want any change from this, telegraph me at once before assignments are made.”<sup>291</sup> Sheridan had already formed his opinion of Warren based on Spotsylvania and Cold Harbor. He quickly telegraphed Grant, “I would prefer [General] Gibbon to either [General] Humphreys, or Warren, if you can let me have him—if not I prefer Humphreys to Warren.”<sup>292</sup> In this instance Grant allowed the wishes of his trusted subordinate to override his own personal wish to be rid of Warren. For the time being, Warren remained in command of the V Corps.

By late March 1865, the Siege of Petersburg had taken its toll on the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee’s only hope to continue the war was to break out of the Petersburg defenses and unite with Joseph Johnston’s army in North Carolina. Following a failed Confederate attack against Fort Stedman, Grant attempted to turn Lee’s right flank and cut off his final supply line, the South Side Railroad. He directed Warren’s corps to occupy the White Oak Road. Warren’s

---

<sup>289</sup> Gouverneur Warren to Emily Warren, August 22, 1864, Warren Papers; Quoted in Jordan, 185.

<sup>290</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 14, 5.

<sup>291</sup> Ulysses S. Grant to Phillip Sheridan, February 21, 1865, *OR*, Vol. 46, II: 130.

<sup>292</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 14, 20.

advance was met by a Confederate counterattack that struck at one of Warren's divisions and then another before being stopped. The attack was a setback for Warren, and Grant grimly wrote, "I do not understand why Warren permitted his corps to be fought in detail."<sup>293</sup> The Battle of White Oak Road occurred on 31 March and was fresh in Grant's mind prior to climactic Battle of Five Forks.

At Five Forks, Confederate General George Pickett commanded an isolated contingent of Lee's army, which Grant hoped to defeat with Sheridan's cavalry force and Warren's V Corps. On 31 March, Sheridan wrote to Grant, "If the ground would permit I believe I could, with the Sixth Corps, turn the enemy's left or break through his lines, but I would not like the Fifth Corps to make such an attempt."<sup>294</sup> Not only had Sheridan worked with the VI Corps in the Shenandoah Valley campaign, but he obviously still maintained a grudge against Warren. Following Sheridan's request, Grant met with his cavalry commander, where they apparently discussed their mutual distain for Warren's generalship.<sup>295</sup> However, Warren's corps was the only reasonable option in assisting Sheridan at Five Forks, so Grant ordered Warren to march south to join Sheridan's attack against Pickett. Grant recalled the situation in his *Personal Memoirs*: "[Warren] was very slow in moving, some of his troops not starting until after 5 o'clock next morning. When he did move it was done very deliberately...he found the stream swollen from the recent rains so that he regarded it as not fordable. Sheridan of course knew of his coming, and being impatient to get the troops up as soon as possible, sent orders to him to hasten."<sup>296</sup> In reality, Warren faced a difficult task of disengaging from the enemy and marching

---

<sup>293</sup> Ulysses S. Grant to George Gordon Meade, March 31, 1865, *OR*, Vol. 46, III: 337.

<sup>294</sup> Phillip Sheridan to Ulysses S. Grant, March 31, 1865, *OR*, Vol. 46, III: 380.

<sup>295</sup> Jordan, 218.

<sup>296</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 413.

through the night in difficult terrain. However, harsh conditions did not prevent Sheridan from being upset with Warren's slow pace.

On the morning of 1 April, Warren finally reached his destination at Five Forks. Grant wrote in his memoirs:

I was so much dissatisfied with Warren's dilatory movements in the battle of White Oak Road and in his failure to reach Sheridan in time, that I was very much afraid that at the last moment he would fail Sheridan. He was a man of fine intelligence, great earnestness, quick perception, and could make his dispositions as quickly as any officer, under difficulties where he was forced to act. But I had before discovered a defect which was beyond his control, that was very prejudicial to his usefulness in emergencies like the one just before us. He could see every danger at a glance before he had encountered it. He would not only make preparations to meet the danger which might occur, but he would inform his commanding officer what others should do while he was executing his move. I had sent a staff officer to General Sheridan to call his attention to these defects, and to say that as much as I liked General Warren, now was not a time when we could let our personal feelings for any one stand in the way of success; and if his removal was necessary to success, not to hesitate.<sup>297</sup>

Grant apparently feared that Warren was not up to the task of commanding the V Corps at the Battle of Five Forks, and gave Sheridan the authority to relieve him from command if he deemed it necessary. Knowing full well Sheridan's feelings toward Warren, Grant was essentially consenting to the inevitable removal of Warren. Sheridan wrote in his memoirs, "I had received...authority from General Grant to relieve [Warren], but I did not wish to do it, particularly on the eve of battle."<sup>298</sup> Sheridan's postwar comments are difficult to believe, for Warren was certainly on an extremely short leash. Whatever success the V Corps might have achieved during the coming battle, Warren's fate seemed to be sealed.

Sheridan intended to attack Pickett's center with his cavalry force and have Warren's V Corps attack Pickett's left flank and rear. However, Sheridan believed that Pickett's left flank

---

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 414.

<sup>298</sup> Phillip Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of P.H. Sheridan* (1888; repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), II: 373.

extended much further than was actually the case. Therefore, the instructions delivered to Warren, which detailed the positions of the enemy, were flawed. Of Warren's three divisions, Ayres's was the first of Warren's troops to engage the enemy. As Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain led his brigade into battle, Sheridan exclaimed, "By God, that's what I want to see, general officers at the front!"<sup>299</sup> Sheridan's comment was an indirect insult to Warren, who rarely led his troops from the front. As Ayres's division fought the rebels, Griffin and Crawford's divisions marched away from the fighting. Had the enemy been where Sheridan claimed, the divisions would have hit Pickett's left flank. Instead, they marched aimlessly away from the battle.

Warren desperately tried to get his other two divisions engaged in the fighting. Griffin's division was originally designated the reserve. However, when Griffin noticed a gap forming between Ayres and Crawford, he ordered his troops forward into the attack. The final division to be engaged was Crawford's. Sheridan by now was also aware of Crawford's situation. He recalled, "I sent word to General Warren to have Crawford recalled; for the direction he was following was not only a mistaken one, but, in case the assault at the return failed, he ran great risk of capture. Warren could not be found."<sup>300</sup> His inability to locate Warren gave Sheridan the impression that he was off to the rear, disengaged from the fighting. Horace Porter, who accompanied Sheridan during most of the fighting, wrote, "Sheridan became exceedingly annoyed at this circumstance, complained that Warren was not giving sufficient personal supervision to the infantry, and sent nearly all his staff-officers to the Fifth Corps to see that the mistakes made were corrected."<sup>301</sup> In reality, Warren was personally locating Crawford and redirecting him toward the rear of the enemy's line. Crawford's division eventually reached the

---

<sup>299</sup> Quoted in Jordan, 229.

<sup>300</sup> Sheridan, II: 375.

<sup>301</sup> Porter, 298.

Ford Road, which was Pickett's main line of retreat. Sheridan's frontal offensive, as well as Warren's flank attack, succeeded in dislodging Pickett's men and forcing a retreat. Many of the rebels fell directly into Crawford's waiting division. The battle could not have gone better for the Union.

Following the victory, Warren sent his staff to inform Sheridan, "the enemy's lines are broken and I am in full pursuit." Hearing this, Sheridan angrily replied, "Tell General Warren, by God, that I say he wasn't at the front; that's all I've got to say to him!"<sup>302</sup> Warren's staff officers were surprised by Sheridan's reaction but recorded his response and returned to the commander of the V Corps. The Battle of Five Forks was over, and it was an astounding Union success. Around 7 p.m. James A. Forsyth of Sheridan's staff delivered a message to Warren. It read, "[Major General] Warren, [commanding] 5<sup>th</sup> [Army Corps], is relieved from duty, and will report at once for orders to [Lieutenant General] Grant, [Commanding] armies of the United States."<sup>303</sup> In disbelief, Warren rode to Sheridan to see if there had been a mistake. Warren urged him to reconsider, but Sheridan hotly responded, "Reconsider, hell! I never reconsider my decisions! Obey the order!"<sup>304</sup> A dejected Warren went to Grant's headquarters to discover that the idea of his relief had originated with Grant himself. Grant later recalled, "I was very sorry that it had been done, and regretted still more that I had not long before taken occasion to assign him to another field of duty."<sup>305</sup> Grant allowed Warren, unlike most officers relieved of command, to remain with the Army of the Potomac. Lee's army was severely crippled and only days away from surrender, and Gouverneur Warren found his career with the Army of the Potomac at an end.

---

<sup>302</sup> Testimony of Frederick T. Locke and Holman S. Melcher at the Warren Court of Inquiry, May 24 and 29, 1880, *New York Times*, May 25, 30, 1880; Jordan, 230.

<sup>303</sup> *OR*, Vol. 46: III: 420.

<sup>304</sup> Gouverneur Warren to Edwin Stanton, April 1865, Warren Papers; Quoted in Jordan, 232.

<sup>305</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 414.



After his removal, Warren devoted himself to clearing his name of what he perceived as a unjust offense. Oddly enough, George Meade was one officer who came to Warren's defense. On 18 April, Meade wrote to Grant, "Your attention is called to the necessity of a permanent commander being assigned to the 5<sup>th</sup> corps.—My views upon this point have been made known to you—Should you be disposed to reassign [Major General] Warren I shall make no objection thereto."<sup>306</sup> Surprisingly, Meade, who had his share of run-ins with Warren, now was arguing for his reinstatement as commander of V Corps. Grant, however, was not inclined to agree with Meade's suggestion. He replied, "Your dispatch calling attention to the necessity of a permanent commander for the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps is received. You will please continue it in the temporary command of [General] Griffin for the present. Orders will be sent to General Warren in a few days."<sup>307</sup> Warren was eventually assigned to command of the Department of Mississippi.

Following his removal from command, Warren turned his attention to receiving an official court of inquiry. Warren wrote to John A. Rawlins on 9 April,

The order of [Major General] Sheridan taking from me the Command of my Corps on the Evening of the first (1) April after the Victory was won assigns no cause & leaves me open to the inference now finding expression in the public prints & which are in every way to my prejudice I am unconscious of having done any thing improper or unbecoming to my position or the Character of a soldier or neglecting any order or duty I therefore respectfully request a full investigation of the matter as soon as the [exigencies] of the service will admit.... I do not intend by it nor desire to press the matter upon the Consideration of the [Lieutenant General] until he can give it his attention without interfering with more important duties. The Consideration already shown me...gives me the assurance he will not deem it an intrusion to solicit the opportunity to Vindicate the honor and reputation of a faithful soldier of the Union who waits in silence an unmerited injury till such time as his superior shall be ready to give him a hearing.<sup>308</sup>

---

<sup>306</sup> Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 14, 406.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 406.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 15, 22.

Eventually Grant replied, “Your note requesting authority to publish your application for an investigation...is received. It is impossible at this time to give the Court and witnesses necessary for the investigation, but I see nothing in your application which I see objectionable to have published.”<sup>309</sup> Warren did not receive his hearing for another fourteen years.

Warren’s court of inquiry finally convened in 1879, after Grant’s presidency. For two years Warren struggled to regain his honor. Unfortunately for the former commander of the V Corps, Warren died before the final judgment was passed. Although the findings were vague, they generally cleared Warren of blame for the events surrounding his removal. However, the opinions that dominated the public’s memory of the whole ordeal came from the Judge-Advocate-General and the General of the Army. David G. Swaim, Judge Advocate General of the United States Army in 1881, wrote,

I think it will be seen from the evidence that reasonable grounds existed justifying the statements contained in the reports of Generals Grant and Sheridan affecting General Warren, and that the act of General Sheridan in relieving General Warren from command as he did was the exercise of a discretion with which he was clothed, and in so doing there is nothing to show that he was actuated by other than patriotic and justifiable motives.<sup>310</sup>

Swaim’s opinion differed from the findings of the court. Warren’s fate was sealed by Sherman, who in 1881 as General of the Army wrote,

No one has questioned the patriotism, integrity, and great intelligence of General Warren. These are attested by a long record of most excellent service, but in the clash of arms at and near Five Forks, March 31 and April 1, 1865, his personal activity fell short of the standard fixed by General Sheridan, on whom alone rested the great responsibility for that and succeeding days. My conclusion is that General Sheridan was perfectly justified in his action in this case, and he must be fully and entirely sustained if the United States expects great victories by her armies in the future.<sup>311</sup>

---

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>310</sup> *Findings of the Court of Inquiry, and Reviews of the Judge-Advocate-General and of the General of the Army, in the Case of Major-General G.K. Warren, Gouverneur Kemble Warren, United States Army. Court of Inquiry (Warren: 1879-1881)* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 57-58.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 59-60.

Even in death, Warren never received the vindication for his actions at Five Forks that he so desperately desired.

Many historians believe that Warren did not receive fair treatment from Grant or Sheridan in the closing days of the Civil War. However, Warren's case still provides a useful example of Grant's management of his subordinate generals. Grant should not be faulted for the timing of the removal of Warren. Although it would be easy for a contemporary observer to point out that the war was only days from ending, that was not known to Grant at the time. If he truly believed Warren was not fit for further command of a corps, then he was absolutely justified in his actions. In fact, one could argue that Grant deserves criticism for waiting as long as he did to remove Warren from command. Grant contemplated the action throughout the Overland Campaign but ultimately opted against Warren's removal.

In the end, Grant did what he felt was necessary for the good of the army. Which of Warren's characteristics as a general caused Grant to feel his removal was necessary? First and foremost, Warren lacked the aggression and boldness that Grant preferred in a subordinate general. All too often during battle, Warren hesitated in ordering assaults or wavered over decisions. Warren was also very deliberate in his movements, marches, and deployments. Warren's lack of aggression was not enough to doom his service under Grant but it certainly did not help his prospects. The second of Warren's faults was his habit of second guessing his commanding officers. It was this characteristic that Grant mentioned in his memoirs when he explained why he authorized Sheridan to relieve Warren. Warren frequently sought affirmation of orders he received and often offered his commanders advice on the best way to proceed. Such actions certainly did not sit well with Grant. He wanted a general who would quickly follow through with the orders he received without question. The final trait that doomed Warren's

working relationship with Grant was his concern for his troops' lives. Such was a common problem among many Civil War generals. Warren truly cared for his soldiers and hated seeing them killed needlessly. It was for this reason that he often sought a way to conserve the lives of his men. Warren's views of Grant's generalship, regarding the unnecessary loss of life, were outlined in his letters to his wife. Unfortunately for Warren, his outlook was incompatible with Grant's generalship and his final strategy for fighting a war of attrition. In the end, Warren's characteristics proved too conflicting for a successful partnership with Grant.

## Conclusion

One of the central responsibilities of a commanding general is the management of his subordinates. An effective commander should be able to identify those of his subordinates who are competent and remove those who are unfit for command. A commander also reaps benefits from having solid relationships with those under his command. If a commander has close personal connections with his subordinates, they will most likely, though not always, work well together on the battlefield. Although much can be learned by studying a general's relationships with his key subordinates, this particular feature of generalship is rarely studied in much detail. However, an examination of Ulysses S. Grant handling of his subordinates reveals a great deal about his own generalship. This study looks at Grant's management of four individuals. Every case was unique and needed to be examined individually. However, once viewed as a whole, there are certain conclusions that one can make.

One of the obvious premises of this particular study was to compare political generals and West Pointers under Grant's command. Undoubtedly, Grant possessed a bias against political generals. He had a low tolerance for John A. McClernand, whose political ambition motivated his entire military career. McClernand viewed his Civil War service as a possible way into the White House. Yet, it must also be noted that Grant possessed an open mind on the issue of politicians. In the case of John A. Logan, Grant not only became close personal friends with a politician but also allowed him to hold a high position of authority. Unlike William T. Sherman, who following Logan's greatest victory at the Battle of Atlanta refused to place Logan in permanent command of the Army of the Tennessee, Grant had enough confidence to trust Logan in a high command. When a replacement was needed for George H. Thomas at Nashville in 1864, Logan was the person Grant selected.

In addition to politicians, Grant also possessed an open mind concerning West Pointers. Although Grant preferred professional generals to politicians, graduation from the military academy did not guarantee one success as Grant's subordinate. The cases of the two military academy graduates examined in this study are sharply contrasting. James B. McPherson and Gouverneur Warren had many similar qualifications for command. Each graduated with honors from West Point, and served well in prewar positions as engineers. Both men started the war as engineering officers until commendable Civil War battlefield performances gained them combat commands. However, McPherson grew to be one of Grant's most trusted and reliable subordinates, while Warren never gained Grant's total confidence. Therefore, while Grant preferred West Point graduates, it was not a prerequisite to succeed as one of his subordinates.

Another aspect worthy of analysis was the personal friendships Grant developed with his subordinates. William Tecumseh Sherman, Phillip Sheridan, James B. McPherson, and John A. Logan were chief among these individuals. This raises the question of whether he allowed his friendships to influence his professional assessment of subordinates. He readily appointed McPherson to command of a division although McPherson had no combat command experience, and at Five Forks he delegated his trusted friend Sheridan complete authority over Warren's fate. At times, Grant certainly allowed his close friends more leeway than other generals. However, Sherman, Sheridan, McPherson, and Logan were all effective field commanders who deserved a certain amount of latitude and freedom. While Grant claimed a strong personal connection to Warren, he refused to allow his feelings to get in the way of doing what he believed was necessary for the good of the army. Like most successful commanders Grant was able to detach his personal feelings from his responsibilities as a commander.

After analyzing Grant's relationship with McClelland, Logan, McPherson, and Warren it becomes easier to identify certain characteristics that Grant sought in a subordinate general. First, Grant could not tolerate insubordination. The obvious general who thoroughly embodied an insubordinate attitude was John A. McClelland. Following nearly every battle, McClelland wrote to the President and other politically significant individuals, boasting of his command's accomplishments and suggesting plans for future operations. In addition, when the relationship between Grant and McClelland deteriorated, that latter was quick to write to Washington "detailing" Grant's drinking habits and other faults. Such actions were completely out of line, and not what Grant sought in a subordinate.

Meanwhile, McPherson and Logan, on the other hand, both epitomized the loyal subordinate officer. Both men followed Grant's orders without question and never sought to undermine their commander. Warren's record of loyalty is a more difficult case to judge. Although Warren expressed serious doubts regarding Grant's abilities as a commander, his concerns were expressed only to his wife in private. However, Grant may have viewed Warren's tendency to hesitate and question orders as a form of insubordination, and Grant required his generals to follow his orders without hesitation. On that point, Warren definitely fell short.

An additional trait that Grant sought in his subordinate generals was aggression, but the degree of aggressiveness varied. McPherson, for example, demonstrated at times that he was perfectly capable of aggressive actions, but in most instances he was more cautious than most of Grant's favorites. Therefore, Grant responded to this by placing McPherson where he could get the most out of his command style, such as guarding the rear of a retreat. One reason for Grant's fondness for John A. Logan was his ability to make bold and aggressive decisions. Logan often led his troops from the front ranks and was never afraid to make daring field decisions. The

antithesis of the aggressive general that Grant preferred was, of course, Gouverneur Warren. If there was one overriding problem that contributed most to Warren's relief, it was his lack of aggressiveness. Throughout the Overland Campaign, Warren ran afoul of Grant for what his commander considered continuous indecisiveness and hesitancy. The two men's command styles were simply incompatible, and it is quite curious that Grant allowed Warren to continue under his command as long as he did.

At one point during the fighting on the second day of the Battle of the Wilderness a general rushed into Grant's headquarters. He stated, "General Grant, this is a crisis that cannot be looked upon too seriously. I know Lee's methods well by past experience; he will throw his whole army between us and the Rapidan, and cut us off completely from our communications." Grant responded, "Oh, I am heartily tired of hearing about what Lee is going to do. Some of you always seem to think he is suddenly going to turn a double somersault, and land in our rear and on both of our flanks at the same time. Go back to your command, and try to think what we are going to do ourselves, instead of what Lee is going to do."<sup>312</sup> Grant's statement is often quoted by historians to portray his demeanor at the Battle of the Wilderness and throughout the Overland Campaign. Yet, Grant's words speak volumes to the qualities he sought in a subordinate general. Grant wanted generals who would take the initiative on their own, and not be tentative based on the actions of the enemy. Sherman, Sheridan, McPherson, and Logan were all generals who demonstrated an ability to seize the initiative and act aggressively. Warren proved during the Battle of the Wilderness that he was not the aggressive type of general which Grant preferred.

---

<sup>312</sup> Porter, 64-65.



Another factor that was crucial to Grant's style of command was his ability to trust his subordinates. This reliability that Grant required was beyond simply trusting his subordinate to not undermine his authority or breach the proper chain-of-command, but also involved performance on the battlefield. Grant's discretionary orders often left his subordinates with room to maneuver and a large amount of freedom from scrutiny. Grant always commanded his troops from the rear, thus never getting too involved with one particular part of his command. Yet, Grant only allowed the levels of freedom enjoyed by McPherson and Sherman when his subordinate had earned his trust. In the cases of McClellan and Warren, both of whom Grant felt were untrustworthy, he needed to be much more explicit with his orders and monitor their actions on the battlefield.

It is important to note that the qualities that Grant sought in his subordinate generals were not necessarily the required qualities for success under any situation. Obviously, Grant sought qualities that would yield success under his command style. For example, Warren could have proved a thoroughly competent corps commander under the command of less aggressive general, such as General Meade. This point is also illustrated by McPherson's initial setback during the Atlanta Campaign, while he was trying to adjust to Sherman's extremely detailed orders. Some of the qualities that Grant sought, such as proper subordination and trustworthiness, are fairly standard traits that would work well with other commanders, but Grant was primarily concerned with having subordinates that worked well under his leadership style.

One accusation that critics of Grant leveled at him during the Civil War was that he possessed a personal bias for generals who had fought in the western theater. Many officers in the Army of the Potomac, including its commander George Meade, believed Grant would fill key positions with western officers whom Grant felt more comfortable commanding. However, this

was not the case. Grant understood the importance of keeping certain individuals in place in the Army of the Potomac, and he very sparingly brought westerners, such as Phillip Sheridan, to fight in Virginia. The claim that Gouverneur Warren's removal resulted from Grant's western theater bias is ludicrous. To the contrary, a serious study of Grant's time in the West shows that he had numerous quarrels with western subordinates. Therefore, there is little substance behind the claim that Grant manifested a western bias while commanding the Army of the Potomac.

A final factor that determined the relationships between Grant and his subordinates was that Grant was finely attuned to the political realities he faced. During the Civil War, as during many of the United States major conflicts, generals often needed political connections and political savvy to be successful. Indeed, Grant only received his original appointment as a result of Governor Richard Yates's favor. Throughout the war, Grant built a strong relationship with Congressman Washburne, President Lincoln, and other powerful politicians. He also understood contributions of politicians like McClelland and Logan, and this shaped his relationship with them. He certainly would have relieved McClelland prior to June 1863, but he understood that the political situation did not allow him to do so. After all, McClelland's independent command was a pet project of Lincoln, and the last thing Grant needed in 1863 was to turn Lincoln against him. Once Grant built the necessary support of Henry Halleck, Elihu Washburne, and Charles A. Dana, however, he was able to relieve McClelland without fear of repercussions. By the time of McClelland's removal, Grant had even won the support of President Lincoln.

History now acknowledges Ulysses S. Grant as one of the Union's greatest generals and the man most responsible for subduing the Confederacy. His talents as a strategist and tactician are widely accepted. However, Grant's management of his subordinate generals is a topic that until recently has received very little attention. Such a study provides useful insights and

valuable conclusions regarding Grant. The subject matter offers much room for further analysis, and hopefully future historians will deem the field worthy of additional research and examination.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

#### Papers and Collections

*Abraham Lincoln Papers*, Library of Congress.

Chase, Salmon P. *The Salmon P. Chase Papers*, edited by John Niven. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1993.

*Findings of the Court of Inquiry, and Reviews of the Judge-Advocate-General and of the General of the Army, in the Case of Major-General G.K. Warren, Gouverneur Kemble Warren, United States Army. Court of Inquiry (Warren: 1879-1881)*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883.

*Gouverneur Kemble Warren Papers*, New York State Library.

Grant, Ulysses S. *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, edited by John Y. Simon. 31 vols. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967.

*James B. McPherson Papers*, Library of Congress.

*James B. McPherson Family Papers*, Toledo Lucas County Historical Society.

*John A. McClernand Papers*, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

*Official Records of the War of Rebellion*. 128 vols. CD-ROM, Silver Spring: H-Bar Enterprises, 1996.

*Papers of John A. Logan*, Library of Congress.

#### Memoirs and Reminiscences

Brinton, John H. *Personal Memoirs of John H. Brinton*. New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1914.

Chase, Salmon P. *Inside Lincoln's Cabinet: The Civil War Diaries of Salmon Chase*. Edited by David Donald. New York: Longman's, Green, 1954.

Grant, Julia Dent. *The Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1975.

Grant, Ulysses S. *Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant*. 1885-1886. Reprint, New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007.

Logan, Mary. *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife: An Autobiography*. 1913. Reprint, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997.

Porter, Horace. *Campaigning with Grant: A Firsthand Account of the Daring Battlefield Command of the Union's Greatest General*. 1897. Reprint, New York: Bantam Books, 1991.

Sheridan, Phillip H. *Personal Memoirs of P.H. Sheridan*. 1888. Reprint New York: Da Capo Press, 1992.

Sherman, William T. *Memoirs of General William T. Sherman*. 1875. Reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1984.

Wallace, Lewis. *An Autobiography*. New York: Harper, 1906.

Wilson, James H. *Under the Old Flag*. New York: D. Appleton, 1912.

#### Books

Logan, John A. *The Volunteer Soldier of America with Memoir of the Author and Military Reminiscences from General Logan's Private Journal*. Chicago and New York: R.S. Peale & Company, Publishers. 1887.

Pollard, Edward A. *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates*. New York: E.B. Treat & Co., 1866.

#### Newspapers

*Cairo City Gazette*

*Chicago Evening Journal*

*Chicago Tribune*

*Cincinnati Gazette*

*Jonesboro Gazette*

*The National Tribune*

*New York Herald*

*New York Times*

*New York Tribune*

*Washington Chronicle*

## Secondary Sources

### Articles

Rafuse, Ethan S. "Still a Mystery? General Grant and the Historians, 1981-2006." *Journal of Military History* 71, no. 3 (July 2007): 849-874.

### Books

Bonekemper III, Edward H. *Ulysses S. Grant: A Victor, Not a Butcher: The Military Genius of the Man Who Won the Civil War*. Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2010.

Boritt, Gabor S. *Why the Confederacy Lost*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Castel, Albert. *Victors in Blue: How Union Generals Fought the Confederates, Battled Each Other, and Won the Civil War*. Lawrence: University of Press of Kansas, 2011.

Catton, Bruce. *U.S. Grant and the American Military Tradition*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1954.

———. *Grant Moves South*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1960.

———. *Grant Takes Command*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1969.

Clausewitz, Carl von. *On War, Vol. 3*, Translated by Colonel J.J.H. Graham. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1908.

Ecelbarger, Gary. *Black Jack Logan: An Extraordinary Life in Peace and War*. Guilford: The Lyons Press, 2005.

Freeman, Douglas Southall. *R. E. Lee: A Biography* (4 volumes). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934.

———. *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command* (3 volumes). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942-1944.

Jones, James Pickett. *Black Jack: John A. Logan and Southern Illinois in the Civil War Era*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995.

- Jordan, David M. *Happiness Is Not My Companion: The Life of General G.K. Warren*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Kiper, Richard L. *Major General John Alexander McClernand: Politician in Uniform*. Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1999.
- Longacre, Edward G. *General Ulysses S. Grant: The Soldier and the Man*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2007.
- McFeely, William S. *Grant: A Biography*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1981.
- McPherson, James M. *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992.
- Macartney, Clarence Edward. *Grant and His Generals*. New York: The McBride Company, 1953.
- Meyers, Christopher C. *Union General John A. McClernand and the Politics of Command*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2010.
- Perret, Geoffrey. *Ulysses S. Grant: Soldier and President*. New York: Random House, 1997.
- Reagan, Charles Wilson. *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980.
- Rhea, Gordon C. *The Battles for Spotsylvania Court House and the Road to Yellow Tavern, May 7-12, 1864*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997.
- . *The Battle of the Wilderness, May 5-5, 1864*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1994.
- Simpson, Brooks D. *Let Us Have Peace: Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861- 1868*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.
- . *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph over Adversity, 1822-1865*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.
- Smith, Jean Edward. *Grant*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002.
- Tzu, Sun. *The Art of War*, Translated and with an Introduction by Samuel B. Griffith. London: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Waldsmith, Thomas. *General James B. McPherson: The Star-Crossed Knight of the Union*. Tiffin, OH: Booksurge LLC, 2007.

Whaley, Elizabeth J. *Forgotten Hero: General James B. McPherson*. New York: Exposition Press, 1955.

Williams, Kenneth P. *Lincoln Finds a General: A Military Study of the Civil War*, 5 vols. New York: Macmillan, 1949-59.

Woodward, Steven E. *Grant's Lieutenants: From Cairo to Vicksburg*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001.

———. *Grant's Lieutenants: From Chattanooga to Appomattox*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008.

#### Theses and Dissertations

Hicken, Victor. "From Vandalia to Vicksburg: The Political and Military Career of John A. McClernand." PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1955.

Melia, Tamara Moser. "The Gallant Knight: The Life and Early Career of James Birdseye McPherson." Masters Thesis, University of Southern Illinois, 1979.

———. "James B. McPherson and the Ideals of the Old Army." PhD diss., University of Southern Illinois, 1987.