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Amateurs Go to War

I

War fever during the months after Sumter overrode sober reflections on the purpose of the fighting. Most people on both sides took for granted the purpose and justice of their cause. Yankees believed that they battled for flag and country. "We must fight now, not because we want to subjugate the South . . . but because we *must*," declared a Republican newspaper in Indianapolis. "The Nation has been defied. The National Government has been assailed. If either can be done with impunity . . . we are not a Nation, and our Government is a sham." The *Chicago Journal* proclaimed that the South had "outraged the Constitution, set at defiance all law, and trampled under foot that flag which has been the glorious and consecrated symbol of American Liberty." Nor did

northern Democratic editors fall behind their Republican rivals in patriotism. "We were born and bred under the stars and stripes," wrote a Pittsburgh Democrat. Although the South may have had just grievances against Republicans, "when the South becomes an enemy to the American system of government . . . and fires upon the flag . . . our influence goes for that flag, no matter whether a Republican or a Democrat holds it."¹

1. *Indianapolis Daily Journal*, April 27, 1861, *Chicago Daily Journal*, April 17, 1861, *Pittsburgh Post*, April 15, 1861, all quoted from Howard C. Perkins, ed., *Northern Editorials on Secession*, 2 vols. (New York, 1942), 814, 808, 739.

Scholars who have examined thousands of letters and diaries written by Union soldiers found them expressing similar motives; "fighting to maintain the best government on earth" was a common phrase. It was a "grate struggle for the Union, Constitution, and law," wrote a New Jersey soldier. "Our glorious institutions are likely to be destroyed. . . . We will be held responsible before God if we don't do our part in helping to transmit this boon of civil & religious

liberty down to succeeding generations." A midwestern recruit enlisted as "a duty I owe to my country and to my children to do what I can to preserve this government as I shudder to think what is ahead for them if this government should be overthrown." Americans of 1861 felt responsible to their forebears as well as to God and posterity. "I know . . . how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and sufferings of the Revolution," wrote a New England private to his wife on the eve of the first battle of Bull Run (Manassas). "I am willing—perfectly willing—to lay down all my joys in this life, to help maintain this government, and to pay that debt."²

One of Lincoln's qualities of greatness as president was his ability to articulate these war aims in pithy prose. "Our popular government has often been called an experiment," Lincoln told Congress on July 4, 1861. "Two points in it, our people have already settled—the successful *establishing*, and the successful *administering* of it. One still remains—its successful maintenance

against a formidable internal attempt to overthrow it. . . . This issue embraces more than the fate of these United States. It presents to the whole family of man, the question, whether a constitutional republic, or a democracy . . . can or cannot, maintain its territorial integrity, against its own domestic foes."³

The flag, the Union, the Constitution, and democracy—all were symbols or abstractions, but nonetheless powerful enough to evoke a willingness to fight and die for them. Southerners also fought for abstractions

2. Wiley, *Billy Yank*, 40; New Jersey and midwestern soldiers quoted in Randall Clair Jimerson, "A People Divided: The Civil War Interpreted by Participants," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1977, pp. 38–39; New England soldier quoted in William C. Davis, *Battle at Bull Run* (Garden City, 1977), 91–92. Two other studies contain numerous quotations from soldiers' letters making the same point: Reid Mitchell, "The Civil War Soldier: Ideology and Experience," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1985; and Earl J. Hess, "Liberty and Self-Control: Republican Values in the Civil War North," Ph.D. dissertation, Purdue University, 1986.

3. *CWL*, IV, 439, 426.

—state sovereignty, the right of secession, the Constitution as *they* interpreted it, the concept of a southern "nation" different from the American nation whose values had been corrupted by Yankees. "Thank God! we have a country at last," said Mississippian L. Q. C. Lamar in June 1861, a country "to live for, to pray for, to fight for, and if necessary, to die for." "Submission to the yoke of depotism," agreed army recruits from North Carolina and Georgia, would mean "servile subjugation and ruin." Another North Carolinian was "willing to give up my life in defence of my Home and Kindred. I had rather be dead than see the Yanks rule this country." He got his wish—at Gettysburg.⁴

Although southerners later bridled at the official northern name for the conflict—"The War of the Rebellion"—many of them proudly wore the label of rebel during the war itself. A New Orleans poet wrote these words a month after Sumter:

Yes, call them rebels! 'tis the name

Their patriot fathers bore,
And by such deeds they'll hallow it,
 As they have done before.

Jefferson Davis said repeatedly that the South was fighting for the same "sacred right of self-government" that the revolutionary fathers had fought for. In his first message to Congress after the fall of Sumter, Davis proclaimed that the Confederacy would "seek no conquest, no aggrandizement, no concession of any kind from the States with which we were lately confederated; all we ask is to be let alone."⁵

Both sides believed they were fighting to preserve the heritage of republican liberty; but Davis's last phrase ("all we ask is to be let alone") specified the most immediate, tangible Confederate war aim: defense against invasion. Regarding Union soldiers as vandals bent on plundering the South and liberating the slaves, many southerners literally believed they were fighting to defend home,

hearth, wives, and sisters. "Our men *must* prevail in combat, or lose their property, country, freedom, everything," wrote a southern diarist. "On the other hand, the enemy, in yielding the contest, may retire into their own country, and possess everything they enjoyed before the war began." A young English immigrant to Arkansas enlisted in the army after he was swept off his

4. Lamar quoted in E. Merton Coulter, *The Confederate States of America 1861–1865*; (Baton Rouge, 1950), 57; soldiers quoted in Jimerson, "A People Divided," 20, 23.

5. Coulter, *Confederate States*, 60; Rowland, Davis, V, 84.

feet by a recruitment meeting. He later wrote that his southern friends "said they would welcome a bloody grave rather than survive to see the proud foe violating their altars and their hearths." Southern women brought irresistible pressure on men to enlist. "If every man did not hasten to battle, they vowed they would themselves rush out and meet the Yankee vandals. In a land where women are worshipped by the men, such language made them war-mad."⁶ A Virginian was avid "to be in the front rank of the first

brigade that marches against the invading foe who now pollute the sacred soil of my beloved native state with their unholy tread." A Confederate soldier captured early in the war put it more simply. His tattered homespun uniform and even more homespun speech made it clear that he was not a member of the planter class. His captors asked why he, a nonslaveholder, was fighting to uphold slavery. He replied: "I'm fighting because you're down here."⁷

For this soldier, as for many other southerners, the war was not about slavery. But without slavery there would have been no Black Republicans to threaten the South's way of life, no special southern civilization to defend against Yankee invasion. This paradox plagued southern efforts to define their war aims. In particular, slavery handicapped Confederate foreign policy. The first southern commissioners to Britain reported in May 1861 that "the public mind here is entirely opposed to the Government of the Confederate States of America on the question of slavery. . . . The sincerity and universality of this feeling embarrass the Government in dealing

with the question of our recognition."⁸ In their explanations of war aims, therefore, Confederates rarely mentioned slavery except obliquely in reference to northern violations of southern rights. Rather, they portrayed the South as fighting for liberty and self-government—blithely unmindful of Samuel Johnson's piquant question about an earlier generation of American rebels: "How is it that we hear the loudest *yelps* for liberty among the drivers of negroes?"

For reasons of their own most northerners initially agreed that the war had nothing to do with slavery. In his message to the special session

6. Jones, *War Clerk's Diary* (Miers), 181; *The Autobiography of Sir Henry M. Stanley*, ed. Dorothy Stanley (Boston and London, 1909), 165.
7. Thomas B. Webber to his mother, June 15, 1861, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, United States Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pa.; Foote, *Civil War*, I, 65.
8. William L. Yancey and A. Dudley Mann to Robert Toombs, May 21, 1861, in James D. Richardson, comp., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Confederacy*, 2 vols. (Nashville, 1906), II, 37.

of Congress on July 4, 1861, Lincoln reaffirmed that he had "no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with slavery in the States where it exists." The Constitution protected slavery in those states; the Lincoln administration fought the war on the theory that secession was unconstitutional and therefore the southern states still lived under the Constitution. Congress concurred. On July 22 and 25 the House and Senate passed similar resolutions sponsored by John J. Crittenden of Kentucky and Andrew Johnson of Tennessee affirming that the United States fought with no intention "of overthrowing or interfering with the rights or established institutions of [the seceded] States" but only "to defend and maintain the supremacy of the Constitution and to preserve the Union with all the dignity, equality, and rights of the several States unimpaired."⁹

Republicans would soon change their minds about this. But in July 1861 even radicals who hoped that the war *would* destroy slavery voted for the Crittenden-Johnson resolutions (though three

radicals voted No and two dozen abstained). Most abolitionists at first also refrained from open criticism of the government's neutral course toward slavery. Assuming that the "death-grapple with the Southern slave oligarchy" must eventually destroy slavery itself, William Lloyd Garrison advised fellow abolitionists in April 1861 to " 'stand still, and see the salvation of God' rather than attempt to add anything to the general commotion."¹⁰

A concern for northern unity underlay this decision to keep a low profile on the slavery issue. Lincoln had won less than half of the popular vote in the Union states (including the border states) in 1860. Some of those who had voted for him, as well as all who had voted for his opponents, would have refused to countenance an antislavery war in 1861. By the same token, an explicit avowal that the defense of slavery was a primary Confederate war aim might have proven more divisive than unifying in the South. Both sides, therefore, shoved slavery under the rug as they concentrated their energies on mobilizing eager citizen soldiers and devising strategies

to use them.

II

The United States has usually prepared for its wars after getting into them. Never was this more true than in the Civil War. The country

9. *CWL*, IV, 263, 438–39; *CG*, 37 Cong., 1 Sess., 222–23, 258–62.

10. Garrison to Oliver Johnson, April 19, 1861, William Lloyd Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library.

was less ready for what proved to be its biggest war than for any other war in its history. In early 1861 most of the tiny 16,000-man army was scattered in seventy-nine frontier outposts west of the Mississippi. Nearly a third of its officers were resigning to go with the South. The War Department slumbered in ancient bureaucratic routine. Most of its clerks, as well as the four previous secretaries of war, had come from the South. All but one of the heads of the eight army bureaus had been in service since the War of 1812. General-

in-Chief Winfield Scott, seventy-four years old, suffered from dropsy and vertigo, and sometimes fell asleep during conferences. Many able young officers, frustrated by drab routine and cramped opportunities, had left the army for civilian careers. The "Winnebago Chief" reputation of Secretary of War Cameron did not augur well for his capacity to administer with efficiency and honesty the huge new war contracts in the offing.

The army had nothing resembling a general staff, no strategic plans, no program for mobilization. Although the army did have a Bureau of Topographical Engineers, it possessed few accurate maps of the South. When General Henry W. Halleck, commanding the Western Department in early 1862, wanted maps he had to buy them from a St. Louis bookstore. Only two officers had commanded as much as a brigade in combat, and both were over seventy. Most of the arms in government arsenals (including the 159,000 muskets seized by Confederate states) were old smoothbores, many of them flintlocks of antique vintage.

The navy was little better prepared for war. Of the forty-two ships in commission when Lincoln became president, most were patrolling waters thousands of miles from the United States. Fewer than a dozen warships were available for immediate service along the American coast. But there were some bright spots in the naval outlook. Although 373 of the navy's 1,554 officers and a few of its 7,600 seamen left to go with the South, the large merchant marine from which an expanded navy would draw experienced officers and sailors was overwhelmingly northern. Nearly all of the country's shipbuilding capacity was in the North. And the Navy Department, unlike the War Department, was blessed with outstanding leadership. Gideon Welles, whose long gray beard and stern countenance led Lincoln to call him Father Neptune, proved to be a capable administrator. But the real dynamism in the Navy Department came from Assistant Secretary Gustavus V. Fox, architect of the Fort Sumter expedition. Within weeks of Lincoln's proclamation of a blockade against Confederate ports on April 19,

the Union navy had bought or chartered scores of merchant ships, armed them, and dispatched them to blockade duty. By the end of 1861 more than 260 warships were on duty and 100 more (including three experimental ironclads) were under construction.

The northern naval outlook appeared especially bright in contrast to the southern. The Confederacy began life with no navy and few facilities for building one. The South possessed no adequate shipyards except the captured naval yard at Norfolk, and not a single machine shop capable of building an engine large enough to power a respectable warship. While lacking material resources, however, the Confederate navy possessed striking human resources, especially Secretary of the Navy Stephen R. Mallory and Commanders Raphael Semmes and James D. Bulloch.

Mallory was a former U.S. senator from Florida with experience as chairman of the Senate naval affairs committee. Although snubbed by high Richmond society because of his penchant for

women of questionable virtue, Mallory proved equal to the task of creating a navy from scratch. He bought tugboats, revenue cutters, and river steamboats to be converted into gunboats for harbor patrol. Recognizing that he could never challenge the Union navy on its own terms, Mallory decided to concentrate on a few specialized tasks that would utilize the South's limited assets to maximum advantage. He authorized the development of "torpedoes" (mines) to be planted at the mouths of harbors and rivers; by the end of the war such "infernal devices" had sunk or damaged forty-three Union warships. He encouraged the construction of "torpedo boats," small half-submerged cigar-shaped vessels carrying a contact mine on a bow-spar for attacking blockade ships. It was only one step from this concept to that of a fully submerged torpedo boat. The Confederacy sent into action the world's first combat submarine, the *C.S.S. Hunley*, which sank three times in trials, drowning the crew each time (including its inventor Horace Hunley) before sinking a blockade ship off Charleston in 1864 while going down itself for the

fourth and last time.

Mallory knew of British and French experiments with ironclad warships. He believed that the South's best chance to break the blockade was to build and buy several of these revolutionary vessels, equip them with iron rams, and send them out to sink the wooden blockade ships. In June 1861 Mallory authorized the rebuilding of the half-destroyed *U.S.S. Merrimack* as the Confederacy's first ironclad, rechristened the *C.S.S. Virginia*. Although work proceeded slowly because of shortages, the South invested much hope in this secret weapon (which was no secret to the Federals, whose intelligence agents penetrated loose southern security). The Confederacy began converting other vessels into ironclads, but its main source for these and other large warships was expected to be British shipyards. For the sensitive task of exploiting this source, Mallory selected James D. Bulloch of Georgia.

With fourteen years' experience in the U.S. navy and eight years

in commercial shipping, Bulloch knew ships as well as anyone in the South. He also possessed the tact, social graces, and business acumen needed for the job of getting warships built in a country whose neutrality laws threw up a thicket of obstacles. Arriving at Liverpool in June 1861, Bulloch quickly signed contracts for two steam/sail cruisers that eventually became the famed commerce raiders *Florida* and *Alabama*. In the fall of 1861 he bought a fast steamer, loaded it with 11,000 Enfield rifles, 400 barrels of gunpowder, several cannons, and large quantities of ammunition, took command of her himself, and ran the ship through the blockade into Savannah. The steamer was then converted into the ironclad ram *C.S.S. Atlanta*. Bulloch returned to England, where he continued his undercover efforts to build and buy warships. His activities prompted one enthusiastic historian to evaluate Bulloch's contributions to the Confederacy as next only to those of Robert E. Lee.¹¹

The commerce raiders built in Britain represented an important

part of Confederate naval strategy. In any war, the enemy's merchant shipping becomes fair game. The Confederates sent armed raiders to roam the oceans in search of northern vessels. At first the South depended on privateers for this activity. An ancient form of wartime piracy, privateering had been practiced with great success by Americans in the Revolution and the War of 1812. In 1861, Jefferson Davis proposed to turn this weapon against the Yankees. On April 17, Davis offered letters of marque to any southern shipowner who wished to turn privateer. About twenty such craft were soon cruising the sea lanes off the Atlantic coast, and by July they had captured two dozen prizes.

Panic seized northern merchants, whose cries forced the Union navy to divert ships from blockade duty to hunt down the "pirates." They enjoyed some success, but in doing so caused a crisis in the legal definition of the war. Refusing to recognize the Confederacy as a legitimate government, Lincoln on April 19, 1861, issued a proclamation threatening to treat captured privateer crews as pirates.

By midsummer a number of such crews languished in northern jails awaiting trial. Jefferson Davis

11. Philip Van Doren Stern, *When the Guns Roared: World Aspects of the American Civil War* (Garden City, N.Y., 1965), 249–50.

declared that for every privateer hanged for piracy he would have a Union prisoner of war executed. The showdown came when Philadelphia courts convicted several privateer officers in the fall of 1861. Davis had lots drawn among Union prisoners of war, and the losers—including a grandson of Paul Revere—were readied for retaliatory hanging. The country was spared this eye-for-an-eye bloodbath when the Lincoln administration backed down. Its legal position was untenable, for in the same proclamation that had branded the privateers as pirates Lincoln had also imposed a blockade against the Confederacy. This had implicitly recognized the conflict as a war rather than merely a domestic insurrection. The Union government's decision on February 3, 1862, to treat captured privateer crews as prisoners of war was another step in the same

direction.

By this time, Confederate privateers as such had disappeared from the seas. Their success had been short-lived, for the Union blockade made it difficult to bring prizes into southern ports, and neutral nations closed their ports to prizes. The Confederacy henceforth turned to commerce raiders—warships manned by naval personnel and designed to sink rather than to capture enemy shipping. The transition from privateering to commerce raiding began in June 1861, when the five-gun steam sloop *C.S.S. Sumter* evaded the blockade at the mouth of the Mississippi and headed toward the Atlantic. Her captain was Raphael Semmes of Alabama, a thirty-year veteran of the U.S. navy who now launched his career as the chief nemesis of that navy and terror of the American merchant marine. During the next six months the *Sumter* captured or burned eighteen vessels before Union warships finally bottled her up in the harbor at Gibraltar in January 1862. Semmes sold the *Sumter* to the British and made his way across Europe to England, where he took

command of the *C.S.S. Alabama* and went on to bigger achievements.

Despite ingenuity and innovations, however, the Confederate navy could never overcome Union supremacy on the high seas or along the coasts and rivers of the South. The Confederacy's main hopes rode with its army. A people proud of their martial prowess, southerners felt confident of their ability to whip the Yankees in a fair fight—or even an unfair one. The idea that one Southron could lick ten Yankees—or at least three—really did exist in 1861. "Just throw three or four shells among those blue-bellied Yankees," said a North Carolinian in May 1861, "and they'll scatter like sheep." In southern eyes the North was a nation of shopkeepers. It mattered not that the Union's industrial capacity was many times greater than the Confederacy's. "It was not the improved *arm*, but the improved *man*, which would win the day," said Henry Wise of Virginia. "Let brave men advance with flint locks and old-fashioned bayonets, on the popinjays of Northern cities . . . and he would answer for it with

his life, that the Yankees would break and run."¹²

Expecting a short and glorious war, southern boys rushed to join the colors before the fun was over. Even though the Confederacy had to organize a War Department and an army from the ground up, the South got an earlier start on mobilization than the North. As each state seceded, it took steps to consolidate and expand militia companies into active regiments. In theory the militia formed a ready reserve of trained citizen soldiers. But reality had never matched theory, and in recent decades the militia of most states had fallen into decay. By the 1850s the old idea of militia service as an obligation of all males had given way to the volunteer concept. Volunteer military companies with distinctive names—Tallapoosa Grays, Jasper Greens, Floyd Rifles, Lexington Wild Cats, Palmetto Guards, Fire Zouaves—sprang up in towns and cities across the country. In states that retained a militia framework, these companies were incorporated into the framework and became, in effect, the militia. The training, discipline, and equipment of these units varied

widely. Many of them spent more time drinking than drilling. Even those that made a pretense of practicing military maneuvers sometimes resembled drum and bugle corps more than fighting outfits. Nevertheless, it was these volunteer companies that first answered the call for troops in both South and North.

By early spring 1861 South Carolina had five thousand men under arms, most of them besieging Fort Sumter. Other southern states were not far behind. The Confederate Congress in February created a War Department, and President Davis appointed Leroy P. Walker of Alabama as Secretary of War. Though a politician like his Union counterpart Simon Cameron, Walker had a better reputation for honesty and efficiency. More important, perhaps, Jefferson Davis himself was a West Point graduate, a combat veteran of the Mexican War, and a former secretary of war in the U.S. government. Although Davis's fussy supervision of Confederate military matters eventually led to conflict with some army officers, the president's martial expertise helped speed southern mobilization

in 1861.

12. North Carolinian quoted in Nevins, War, I, 96; Wise quoted in Jones, War *Clerk's Diary* (Miers), 3.

On March 6 the Confederate Congress authorized an army of 100,000 volunteers for twelve months. Most of the militia regiments already organized were sworn into the Confederate army, while newly formed units scrambled for arms and equipment. At first the states, localities, and individuals rather than the Confederate government equipped these regiments. Although the South selected cadet gray as its official uniform color, each regiment initially supplied its own uniforms, so that Confederate armies were garbed in a confusing variety of clothing that defied the concept of "uniform." Cavalrymen and artillery batteries provided their own horses. Some volunteers brought their own weapons, ranging from bowie knives and Colt revolvers to shotguns and hunting rifles. Many recruits from planter families brought their slaves to wash clothes and cook for them. Volunteer companies, following the

venerable militia tradition, elected their own officers (captain and lieutenants). State governors officially appointed regimental officers (colonel, lieutenant colonel, and major), but in many regiments these officers were actually elected either by the men of the whole regiment or by the officers of all the companies. In practice, the election of officers was often a *pro forma* ratification of the role that a prominent planter, lawyer, or other individual had taken in recruiting a company or a regiment. Sometimes a wealthy man also paid for the uniforms and equipment of a unit he had recruited. Wade Hampton of South Carolina, reputed to be the richest planter in the South, enlisted a "legion" (a regiment-size combination of infantry, cavalry, and artillery) that he armed and equipped at his own expense—and of which, not coincidentally, he became colonel.

By the time Lincoln called for 75,000 men after the fall of Sumter, the South's do-it-yourself mobilization had already enrolled 60,000 men. But these soldiers were beginning to experience the problems of logistics and supply that would plague the southern war effort to

the end. Even after the accession of four upper-South states, the Confederacy had only one-ninth the industrial capacity of the Union. Northern states had manufactured 97 percent of the country's firearms in 1860, 94 percent of its cloth, 93 percent of its pig iron, and more than 90 percent of its boots and shoes. The Union had more than twice the density of railroads per square mile as the Confederacy, and several times the mileage of canals and macadamized roads. The South could produce enough food to feed itself, but the transport network, adequate at the beginning of the war to distribute this food, soon began to deteriorate because of a lack of replacement capacity. Nearly all of the rails had come from the North or from Britain; of 470 locomotives built in the United States during 1860, only nineteen had been made in the South.

The Confederate army's support services labored heroically to overcome these deficiencies. But with the exception of the Ordnance Bureau, their efforts always seemed too little and too late. The South experienced a hothouse industrialization during the war,

but the resulting plant was shallow-rooted and poor in yield. Quartermaster General Abraham Myers could never supply the army with enough tents, uniforms, blankets, shoes, or horses and wagons. Consequently Johnny Reb often had to sleep in the open under a captured blanket, to wear a tattered homespun butternut uniform, and to march and fight barefoot unless he could liberate shoes from a dead or captured Yankee.

Confederate soldiers groused about this in the time-honored manner of all armies. They complained even more about food—or rather the lack of it—for which they held Commissary-General Lucius B. Northrop responsible. Civilians also damned Northrop for the shortages of food at the front, the rising prices at home, and the transportation nightmares that left produce rotting in warehouses while the army starved. Perhaps because of his peevish, opinionated manner, Northrop became "the most cussed and vilified man in the Confederacy."¹³ Nevertheless, Jefferson Davis kept him in office until almost the end of the war, a consequence, it was whispered, of

cronyism stemming from their friendship as cadets at West Point. Northrop's unpopularity besmudged Davis when the war began to go badly for the South.

The Ordnance Bureau was the one bright spot of Confederate supply. When Josiah Gorgas accepted appointment as chief of ordnance in April 1861 he faced an apparently more hopeless task than did Myers or Northrop. The South already grew plenty of food, and the capacity to produce wagons, harness, shoes, and clothing seemed easier to develop than the industrial base to manufacture gunpowder, cannon, and rifles. No foundry in the South except the Tredegar Iron Works had the capability to manufacture heavy ordnance. There were no rifle works except small arsenals at Richmond and at Fayetteville, North Carolina, along with the captured machinery from the U.S. Armory at Harper's Ferry, which was transferred to Richmond. The du Pont plants in Delaware produced most of the country's gunpowder; the South had manufactured almost none, and this heavy, bulky product would be

difficult

13. Woodward, *Chesnut's Civil War*, 124.

to smuggle through the tightening blockade. The principal ingredient of gunpowder, saltpeter (potassium nitrate, or "niter"), was also imported.

But Gorgas proved to be a genius at organization and improvisation. He almost literally turned plowshares into swords.¹⁴ He sent Caleb Huse to Europe to purchase all available arms and ammunition. Huse was as good at this job as James Bulloch was at his task of building Confederate warships in England. The arms and other supplies Huse sent back through the blockade were crucial to Confederate survival during the war's first year. Meanwhile Gorgas began to establish armories and foundries in several states to manufacture small arms and artillery. He created a Mining and Niter Bureau headed by Isaac M. St. John, who located limestone caves containing saltpeter in the southern Appalachians, and appealed to

southern women to save the contents of chamber pots to be leached for niter. The Ordnance Bureau also built a huge gunpowder mill at Augusta, Georgia, which under the superintendency of George W. Rains began production in 1862. Ordnance officers roamed the South buying or seizing stills for their copper to make rifle percussion caps; they melted down church and plantation bells for bronze to build cannon; they gleaned southern battlefields for lead to remold into bullets and for damaged weapons to repair.

Gorgas, St. John, and Rains were unsung heroes of the Confederate war effort.¹⁵ The South suffered from deficiencies of everything else, but after the summer of 1862 it did not suffer seriously for want of ordnance—though the quality of Confederate artillery and shells was always a problem. Gorgas could write proudly in his diary on the third anniversary of his appointment: "Where three years ago we were not making a gun, a pistol nor a sabre, no shot nor shell (except at the Tredegar Works)—a pound of powder—we now make all these in quantities to meet the demands

of our large armies."¹⁶

14. See Frank E. Vandiver, *Ploughshares into Swords: Josiah Gorgas and Confederate Ordnance* (Austin, Texas, 1952). An excellent study of the Confederacy's chief ordnance plant, the Tredegar Iron Works, is Charles B. Dew, *Ironmaker to the Confederacy: Joseph R. Anderson and the Tredegar Iron Works* (New Haven, 1966).
15. Unsung, because while other men were winning glory and promotion on the battlefield, these officers—without whom the battles could not have been fought— languished in lower ranks. Gorgas was not promoted to brigadier general until November 10, 1864, St. John not until February 16, 1865, and Rains ended the war as a colonel.
16. Frank E. Vandiver, ed., *The Civil War Diary of General Josiah Gorgas* (University, Ala., 1947), 91.

But in 1861 these achievements still lay in the future. Shortages and administrative chaos seemed to characterize the Ordnance Bureau as much as any other department of the army. In a typical report, a southern staff officer in the Shenandoah Valley wrote on May 19 that the men were "unprovided, unequipped, unsupplied with ammunition and provisions. . . . The utter confusion and ignorance presiding in the councils of the authorities . . . is without a

parallel." Despite the inability to equip men already in the army, the Confederate Congress in May 1861 authorized the enlistment of up to 400,000 additional volunteers for three-year terms. Recruits came forward in such numbers that the War Department, by its own admission, had to turn away 200,000 for lack of arms and equipment. One reason for this shortage of arms was the hoarding by state governors of muskets seized from federal arsenals when the states seceded. Several governors insisted on retaining these weapons to arm regiments they kept at home (instead of sending them to the main fronts in Virginia or Tennessee) to defend state borders and guard against potential slave uprisings. This was an early manifestation of state's-rights sentiment that handicapped centralized efforts. As such it was hardly the Richmond government's fault, but soldiers in front-line armies wanted to blame somebody, and Secretary of War Walker was a natural scapegoat. "The opinion prevails throughout the army," wrote General Beauregard's aide-de-camp at Manassas on June 22, "that there is

great imbecility and shameful neglect in the War Department."¹⁷ Although Beauregard's army won the battle of Manassas a month later, criticism of Walker rose to a crescendo. Many southerners believed that the only thing preventing the Confederates from going on to capture Washington after the victory was the lack of supplies and transportation for which the War Department was responsible. Harassed by criticism and overwork, Walker resigned in September and was replaced by Judah P. Benjamin, the second of the five men who eventually served in the revolving-door office of war secretary.

III

Walker—like his successors—was a victim of circumstances more than of his own ineptitude. The same could not be said of his counterpart in Washington. Although Simon Cameron was also swamped by the rapid

¹⁷. Nevins, *War*, I, 115; *O.R.*, Ser. IV, Vol. 1, p. 497; James C. Chesnut to Mary Boykin Chesnut, June 22, in Woodward, *Chesnut's Civil War*, 90.

buildup of an army that exceeded the capacity of the bureaucracy to equip it, he was more deserving of personal censure than Walker.

The North started later than the South to raise an army. The Union had more than 3.5 times as many white men of military age as the Confederacy. But when adjustments are made for the disloyal, the unavailable (most men from the western territories and Pacific coast states), and for the release of white workers for the Confederate army by the existence of slavery in the South, the actual Union manpower superiority was about 2.5 to 1. From 1862 onward the Union army enjoyed approximately this superiority in numbers. But because of its earlier start in creating an army, the Confederacy in June 1861 came closer to matching the Union in mobilized manpower than at any other time in the war.

Lincoln's appeal for 75,000 ninety-day militiamen had been based on a law of 1795 providing for calling state militia into federal service. The government soon recognized that the war was likely to

last more than three months and to require more than 75,000 men. On May 3, Lincoln called for 42,000 three-year army volunteers and 18,000 sailors, besides expanding the regular army by an additional 23,000 men. The president did this without congressional authorization, citing his constitutional power as commander in chief. When Congress met in July it not only retroactively sanctioned Lincoln's actions but also authorized another one million three-year volunteers. In the meantime some states had enrolled *two-year* volunteers (about 30,000 men), which the War Department reluctantly accepted. By early 1862 more than 700,000 men had joined the Union army. Some 90,000 of them had enlisted in the ninety-day regiments whose time had expired. But many of these men had re-enlisted in three-year regiments, and several ninety-day regiments had converted themselves into three-year units.

These varying enlistments confused contemporaries as much as they have confused historians. Indeed, the Union recruitment process, like the Confederate, was marked by enterprise and vigor at

the local and state levels degenerating into confusion at the national level. Secretary of War Cameron's slipshod administrative procedures frustrated the brisk, businesslike governors. "Twenty-four hundred men in camp and less than half of them armed," Indiana's Governor Morton wrote to Cameron early in the war. "Why has there been such delay in sending arms? . . . No officer here yet to muster troops into service. Not a pound of powder or a single ball sent us, or any sort of equipment. Allow me to ask what is the cause of all this?" A few months later Ulysses S. Grant, commanding the Union base at Cairo, Illinois, voiced a typical complaint: "There is great deficiency in transportation. I have no ambulances. The clothing received has been almost universally of an inferior quality and deficient in quantity. The arms in the hands of the men are mostly the old flint-lock repaired. . . . The Quartermaster's Department has been carried on with so little funds that Government credit has become exhausted." By the end of June, Cameron was turning away offers of regiments. As Lincoln ruefully

admitted in his July 4 message to Congress, "one of the greatest perplexities of the government, is to avoid receiving troops faster than it can provide for them."¹⁸

States, cities, and individuals took up the slack left by the national government. Most governors convened their legislatures, which appropriated funds to equip and supply regiments at state expense until the army could absorb them. Governors sent purchasing agents to Europe, where they competed with each other and with Confederate agents to bid up the price of the Old World's surplus arms to supply the armies of the New. The states contracted with textile mills and shoe factories for uniforms and shoes. Municipalities raised money to organize and supply "their" regiments. Voluntary associations such as the Union Defense Committee of New York sprang into existence to recruit regiments, equip them, and charter ships or trains to transport them to Washington. A group of northern physicians and women formed the United States Sanitary Commission to supplement the inadequate

and outdated facilities of the Army Medical Bureau.

The earliest northern regiments, like the southern, were clad in a colorful variety of uniforms: blue from Massachusetts and Pennsylvania; gray from Wisconsin and Iowa; gray with emerald trim from Vermont; black trousers and red flannel shirts from Minnesota; and gaudy "Zouave" outfits from New York with their baggy red breeches, purple blouses, and red fezzes. The Union forces gathering in Washington looked like a circus on parade. The variety of uniforms in both Union and Confederate armies, and the similarity of some uniforms on opposite sides, caused tragic mixups in early battles when regiments mistook friends for enemies or enemies for friends. As fast as possible the northern government overcame this situation by clothing its soldiers in the standard light blue trousers and dark blue blouse of the regular army.

By the latter part of 1861 the War Department had taken over from the states the responsibility for feeding, clothing, and arming

Union

18. *O.R.*, Ser. III, Vol. 1, p. 89; Ser. I, Vol. 7, p. 442; *CWL*, IV, 432.

soldiers. But this process was marred by inefficiency, profiteering, and corruption. To fill contracts for hundreds of thousands of uniforms, textile manufacturers compressed the fibers of recycled woolen goods into a material called "shoddy." This noun soon became an adjective to describe uniforms that ripped after a few weeks of wear, shoes that fell apart, blankets that disintegrated, and poor workmanship in general on items necessary to equip an army of half a million men and to create its support services within a few short months. Railroads overcharged the government; some contractors sold muskets back to the army for \$20 each that they had earlier bought as surplus arms at \$3.50; sharp horse traders sold spavined animals to the army at outrageous prices. Simon Cameron became the target of just as well as unjust criticism of such transactions. He signed lucrative contracts without competitive bidding and gave a suspiciously large number of contracts to firms

in his home state of Pennsylvania. The War Department routed a great deal of military traffic over the Northern Central Railroad and the Pennsylvania Railroad in which Cameron and Assistant Secretary of War Thomas Scott had direct financial interests.

The House created an investigatory committee on contracts that issued a report in mid-1862 condemning Cameron's management. By then Lincoln had long since gotten rid of Cameron by sending him to St. Petersburg as minister to Russia. The new secretary of war was Edwin M. Stanton, a hard-working, gimlet-eyed lawyer from Ohio who had served briefly as attorney general in the Buchanan administration. A former Democrat with a low opinion of Lincoln, Stanton radically revised both his politics and his opinion after taking over the war office in January 1862. He also became famous for his incorruptible efficiency and brusque rudeness toward war contractors—and toward everyone else as well.

Even before Stanton swept into the War Department with a new

broom, the headlong, helter-skelter, seat-of-the pants mobilization of 1861 was just about over. The army's logistical apparatus had survived its shakedown trials and had even achieved a modicum of efficiency. The northern economy had geared up for war production on a scale that would make the Union army the best fed, most lavishly supplied army that had ever existed. Much of the credit for this belonged to Montgomery Meigs, who became quartermaster general of the army in June 1861. Meigs had graduated near the top of his West Point class and had achieved an outstanding record in the corps of engineers. He supervised a number of large projects including the building of the new Capitol dome and construction of the Potomac Aqueduct to bring water to Washington. His experience in dealing with contractors enabled him to impose some order and honesty on the chaos and corruption of early war contracts. Meigs insisted on competitive bidding whenever possible, instead of the cost-plus system favored by manufacturers who liked to inflate profits by padding costs.

Nearly everything needed by an army except weapons and food was supplied by the Quartermaster Bureau: uniforms, overcoats, shoes, knapsacks, haversacks, canteens, mess gear, blankets, tents, camp equipage, barracks, horses, mules, forage, harnesses, horseshoes and portable blacksmith shops, supply wagons, ships when the army could be supplied by water, coal or wood to fuel them, and supply depots for storage and distribution. The logistical demands of the Union army were much greater than those of its enemy. Most of the war was fought in the South where Confederate forces operated close to the source of many of their supplies. Invading northern armies, by contrast, had to maintain long supply lines of wagon trains, railroads, and port facilities. A Union army operating in enemy territory averaged one wagon for every forty men and one horse or mule (including cavalry and artillery horses) for every two or three men. A campaigning army of 100,000 men therefore required 2,500 supply wagons and at least 35,000 animals, and consumed 600 tons of supplies each day. Although in a few

noted cases—Grant in the Vicksburg campaign, Sherman in his march through Georgia and the Carolinas—Union armies cut loose from their bases and lived off the country, such campaigns were the exception.

Meigs furnished these requirements in a style that made him the unsung hero of northern victory. He oversaw the spending of \$1.5 billion, almost half of the direct cost of the Union war effort. He compelled field armies to abandon the large, heavy Sibley and Adams tents in favor of portable shelter tents known to Yankee soldiers as "dog tents"—and to their descendants as pup tents. The Quartermaster Bureau furnished clothing manufacturers with a series of graduated standard measurements for uniforms. This introduced a concept of "sizes" that was applied to men's civilian clothing after the war. The army's voracious demand for shoes prompted the widespread introduction of the new Blake-McKay machine for sewing uppers to soles. In these and many other ways, Meigs and his Bureau left a permanent mark on American society.

IV

In the North as in the South, volunteer regiments retained close ties to their states. Enlisted men elected many of their officers and governors appointed the rest. Companies and even whole regiments often consisted of recruits from a single township, city, or county. Companies from neighboring towns combined to form a regiment, which received a numerical designation in chronological order of organization: the 15th Massachusetts Infantry, the 2nd Pennsylvania Cavalry, the 4th Volunteer Battery of Ohio Artillery, and so on. Ethnic affinity also formed the basis of some companies and regiments: the 69th New York was one of many Irish regiments; the 79th New York were Highland Scots complete with kilted dress uniforms; numerous regiments contained mostly men of German extraction. Sometimes brothers, cousins, or fathers and sons belonged to the same company or regiment. Localities and ethnic groups retained a strong sense of identity with "their" regiments.

This helped to boost morale on both the home and fighting fronts, but it could mean sudden calamity for family or neighborhood if a regiment suffered 50 percent or more casualties in a single battle, as many did.

The normal complement of a regiment in both the Union and Confederate armies was a thousand men formed in ten companies. Within a few months, however, deaths and discharges because of sickness significantly reduced this number. Medical examinations of recruits were often superficial. A subsequent investigation of Union enlistment procedures in 1861 estimated that 25 percent of the recruits should have been rejected for medical reasons. Many of these men soon had to be invalided out of the army. Within a year of its organization a typical regiment was reduced to half or less of its original number by sickness, battle casualties, and desertions. Instead of recruiting old regiments up to strength, states preferred to organize new ones with new opportunities for patronage in the form of officers' commissions and pride in the number of regiments sent

by the state. Of 421,000 new three-year volunteers entering the Union army in 1862, only 50,000 joined existing regiments. Professional soldiers criticized this practice as inefficient and wasteful. It kept regiments far below strength and prevented the leavening of raw recruits by seasoned veterans. In 1862 and 1863, many old regiments went into combat with only two or three hundred men while new regiments suffered unnecessary casualties because of inexperience.

Professional soldiers also deplored the practice of electing officers in volunteer regiments. If one assumes that an army is a nonpolitical institution based on rigorous training, discipline, and unquestioning obedience to orders, the election of officers indeed made little sense. In the American tradition, however, citizen soldiers remained citizens even when they became soldiers. They voted for congressmen and governors; why should they not vote for captains and colonels? During the early stages of the do-it-yourself mobilization in 1861, would-be officers assumed that military skills

could be quickly learned. Hard experience soon began to erode this notion. Many officers who obtained commissions by political influence proved all too obviously incompetent. A soldier in a Pennsylvania regiment complained in the summer of 1861: "Col. Roberts has showed himself to be ignorant of the most simple company movements. There is a total lack of system about our regiment. . . . Nothing is attended to at the proper time, nobody looks ahead to the morrow. . . . We can only justly be called a mob & one not fit to face the enemy." Officers who panicked at Bull Run and left their men to fend for themselves were blamed for the rout of several Union regiments. "Better offend a thousand ambitious candidates for military rank," commented *Harper's Weekly*, "than have another flight led by colonels, majors, and captains."¹⁹

On July 22, the day after the defeat at Bull Run, the Union Congress authorized the creation of military boards to examine officers and remove those found to be unqualified. Over the next few months hundreds of officers were discharged or resigned

voluntarily rather than face an examining board. This did not end the practice of electing officers, nor of their appointment by governors for political reasons, but it went part way toward establishing minimum standards of competence for those appointed. As the war lengthened, promotion to officer's rank on the basis of merit became increasingly the rule in veteran regiments. By 1863 the Union army had pretty well ended the practice of electing officers.

This practice persisted longer in the Confederacy. Nor did the South establish examining boards for officers until October 1862. Yet Confederate officers, at least in the Virginia theater, probably did a better job than their Union counterparts during the first year or two of the war. Two factors help to explain this. First, Union General-in-Chief Win-field Scott decided to keep the small regular army together in 1861 rather than to disperse its units among the volunteer army. Hundreds of officers and non-coms in the regular army could have provided drill instructors and tactical leadership to

the volunteer regiments. But Scott

19. Wiley, *Billy Yank*, 26; *Harper's Weekly*, V (Aug. 10, 1861), 449.

kept them with the regulars, sometimes far away on the frontier, while raw volunteers bled and died under incompetent officers in Virginia. The South, by contrast, had no regular army. The 313 officers who resigned from the U.S. army to join the Confederacy contributed a crucial leaven of initial leadership to the southern armies.

Second, the South's military schools had turned out a large number of graduates who provided the Confederacy with a nucleus of trained officers. In 1860 of the eight military "colleges" in the entire country seven were in the slave states. Virginia Military Institute in Lexington and The Citadel in Charleston were justly proud of the part their alumni played in the war. One-third of the field officers of Virginia regiments in 1861 were V.M.I. alumni. Of the 1,902 men who had ever attended V.M.I., 1,781 fought for the

South. When Confederate regiments elected officers, they usually chose men with some military training. Most northern officers from civilian life had to learn their craft by experience, with its cost in defeat and casualties.

Political criteria played a role in the appointment of generals as well as lesser officers. In both North and South the president commissioned generals, subject to Senate confirmation. Lincoln and Davis found it necessary to consider factors of party, faction, and state as carefully in appointing generals as in naming cabinet officers or postmasters. Many politicians coveted a brigadier's star for themselves or their friends. Lincoln was particularly concerned to nurture Democratic support for the war, so he commissioned a large number of prominent Democrats as generals—among them Benjamin F. Butler, Daniel E. Sickles, John A. McClelland, and John A. Logan. To augment the loyalty of the North's large foreign-born population, Lincoln also rewarded ethnic leaders with generalships—Carl Schurz, Franz Sigel, Thomas Meagher, and

numerous others. Davis had to satisfy the aspirations for military glory of powerful state politicians; hence he named such men as Robert A. Toombs of Georgia and John B. Floyd and Henry A. Wise of Virginia as generals.

These appointments made political sense but sometimes produced military calamity. "It seems but little better than murder to give important commands to such men as Banks, Butler, McClelland, Sigel, and Lew Wallace," wrote the West Point professional Henry W. Halleck, "yet it seems impossible to prevent it."²⁰ "Political general" became almost a synonym for incompetency, especially in the North. But this

²⁰. *O.R.*, Ser. I, Vol. 34, pt. 3, pp. 332–33.

was often unfair. Some men appointed for political reasons became first-class Union corps commanders—Frank Blair and John Logan, for example. West Pointers Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman received their initial commissions through the political

influence of Congressman Elihu Washburne of Illinois and Senator John Sherman (William's brother) of Ohio. And in any case, West Point professionals held most of the top commands in both North and South—and some of them made a worse showing than the political generals. Generals appointed from civilian life sometimes complained bitterly that the "West Point clique" ran the armies as closed corporations, controlling promotions and reserving the best commands for themselves.

The appointment of political generals, like the election of company officers, was an essential part of the process by which a highly politicized society mobilized for war. Democracy often characterized the state of discipline in Civil War armies as well. As late as 1864 the inspector-general of the Army of Northern Virginia complained of "the difficulty of having orders properly and promptly executed. There is not that spirit of respect for and obedience to general orders which should pervade a military organization." Just because their neighbors from down the road back

home now wore shoulder straps, Johnny Reb and Billy Yank could see no reason why their orders should be obeyed unless the orders seemed reasonable. "We have tite Rools over us, the order was Red out in dress parade the other day that we all have to pull off our hats when we go to the coin or genrel," wrote a Georgia private. "You know that is one thing I wont do. I would rather see him in hell before I will pull off my hat to any man and tha Jest as well shoot me at the start." About the same time a Massachessetts private wrote that "drill & saluting officers & guard duty is played out."²¹

Many officers did little to inspire respect. Some had a penchant for drinking and carousing—which of course set a fine example for their men. In the summer of 1861 the 75th New York camped near Baltimore on its way to Washington. "Tonight not 200 men are in camp," wrote a diary-keeping member of the regiment despairingly. "Capt. Catlin, Capt. Hurburt, Lt. Cooper and one or two other officers are under arrest. A hundred men are drunk, a hundred more at houses of ill fame. . . . Col. Alford is very drunk all the time

now." In 1862 a North

21. *Ibid.*, Ser. I, Vol. 42, pt. 2, p. 1276; Steven H. Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (New York, 1983), 118; Wiley, *Billy Yank*, 220.

Carolina private wrote of his captain: "He put . . . [me] in the gard house one time & he got drunk again from Wilmington to Goldsboro on the train & we put him in the Sh-t House So we are even."²²

Such officers were in the minority, however, and over time a number of them were weeded out by resignation or by examining boards. The best officers from civilian life took seriously their new profession. Many of them burned the midnight oil studying manuals on drill and tactics. They avoided giving petty or unreasonable orders and compelled obedience to reasonable ones by dint of personality and intellect rather than by threats. They led by example, not prescript. And in combat they led from the front, not the rear. In both armies the proportion of officers killed in action

was about 15 percent higher than the proportion of enlisted men killed. Generals suffered the highest combat casualties; their chances of being killed in battle were 50 percent greater than the privates'.

Civil War regiments learned on the battlefield to fight, not in the training camp. In keeping with the initial lack of professionalism, the training of recruits was superficial. It consisted mainly of the manual of arms (but little target practice), company and regimental drill in basic maneuvers, and sometimes brigade drill and skirmishing tactics. Rarely did soldiers engage in division drill or mock combat. Indeed, brigades were not combined into divisions until July 1861 or later, nor divisions into corps until the spring and summer of 1862.²³ Regiments sometimes

22. Bruce Catton, *Mr. Lincoln's Army* (Garden City, N.Y., 1956), 64–65; Wiley, *Johnny Reb*, 242.

23. Both the Union and Confederate armies were organized in similar fashion. Four infantry regiments (later in the war sometimes five or six) formed a brigade,

commanded by a brigadier general. Three (sometimes four) brigades comprised a division, commanded by a brigadier or major general. Two or more divisions (usually three) constituted an army corps, commanded by a major general in the Union army and by a major or lieutenant general in the Confederacy. A small army might consist of a single corps; the principal armies consisted of two or more. In theory the full strength of an infantry regiment was 1,000 men; of a brigade, 4,000; of a division, 12,000 ; and of a corps, 24,000 or more. In practice the average size of each unit was a third to a half of the above numbers in the Union army. Confederate divisions and corps tended to be larger than their Union counterparts because a southern division often contained four brigades and a corps four divisions. Cavalry regiments often had twelve rather than ten companies (called "troops" in the cavalry). Cavalry regiments, brigades, or divisions were attached to divisions, corps, or armies as the tactical situation required. By 1863 Confederate cavalry divisions sometimes operated as a semi-independent corps, and by 1864 the Union cavalry followed suit, carrying such independent operations to an even higher level of development. Field artillery batteries (a battery consisted of four or six guns) were attached to brigades, divisions, or corps as the situation required. About 80 percent of the fighting men in the Union army were infantry, 14 percent cavalry, and 6 percent artillery. The Confederates had about the same proportion of artillery but a somewhat higher proportion of cavalry (nearly 20 percent).

went into combat only three weeks after they had been organized, with predictable results. General Helmuth von Moltke, chief of the Prussian general staff, denied having said that the American armies

of 1861 were nothing but armed mobs chasing each other around the countryside—but whether he said it or not, he and many other European professionals had reason to believe it. By 1862 or 1863, however, the school of experience had made rebel and Yankee veterans into tough, combat-wise soldiers whose powers of endurance and willingness to absorb punishment astonished many Europeans who had considered Americans all bluster and no grit. A British observer who visited the Antietam battlefield ten days after the fighting wrote that "in about seven or eight acres of wood there is not a tree which is not full of bullets and bits of shell. It is impossible to understand how anyone could live in such a fire as there must have been here."²⁴

V

Amateurism and confusion characterized the development of strategies as well as the mobilization of armies. Most officers had learned little of strategic theory. The curriculum at West Point

slighted strategic studies in favor of engineering, mathematics, fortification, army administration, and a smattering of tactics. The assignment of most officers to garrison and Indian-fighting duty on the frontier did little to encourage the study of strategy. Few if any Civil War generals had read Karl von Clausewitz, the foremost nineteenth-century writer on the art of war. A number of officers had read the writings of Antoine Henry Jomini, a Swiss-born member of Napoleon's staff who became the foremost interpreter of the great Corsican's campaigns. All West Point graduates had absorbed Jominian principles from the courses of Dennis Hart Mahan, who taught at the military academy for nearly half a century. Henry W. Halleck's *Elements of Military Art and Science* (1846), essentially a translation of Jomini, was used as a textbook at West Point. But Jomini's

24. Quoted in Jay Luvaas, *The Military Legacy of the Civil War: The European Inheritance* (Chicago, 1959), 18–19.

influence on Civil War strategy should not be exaggerated, as some

historians have done.²⁵ Many Jominian "principles" were common-sense ideas hardly original with Jomini: concentrate the mass of your own force against fractions of the enemy's; menace the enemy's communications while protecting your own; attack the enemy's weak point with your own strength; and so on. There is little evidence that Jomini's writings influenced Civil War strategy in a direct or tangible way; the most successful strategist of the war, Grant, confessed to having never read Jomini.

The trial and error of experience played a larger role than theory in shaping Civil War strategy. The experience of the Mexican War governed the thinking of most officers in 1861. But that easy victory against a weak foe in an era of smoothbore muskets taught some wrong lessons to Civil War commanders who faced a determined enemy armed (after 1861) largely with rifled muskets. The experience necessary to fight the Civil War had to be gained in the Civil War itself. As generals and civilian leaders learned from their mistakes, as war aims changed from limited to total war, as political

demands and civilian morale fluctuated, military strategy evolved and adjusted. The Civil War was pre-eminently a *political* war, a war of peoples rather than of professional armies. Therefore political leadership and public opinion weighed heavily in the formation of strategy.

In 1861 many Americans had a romantic, glamorous idea of war. "I am absent in a glorious cause," wrote a southern soldier to his homefolk in June 1861, "and glory in being in that cause." Many Confederate recruits echoed the Mississippian who said he had joined up "to fight the Yankies—all fun and frolic." A civilian traveling with the Confederate government from Montgomery to Richmond in May 1861 wrote that the trains "were crowded with troops, and all as jubilant, as if they were going to a frolic, instead of a fight."²⁶ A New York volunteer wrote home soon after enlisting that "I and the rest of the boys are in fine spirits . . . feeling like larks." Regiments departing for the front paraded before cheering, flag-waving crowds, with bands playing martial airs and visions of

glory dancing in their heads. "The war is making us all tenderly

25. For a perceptive critique of the "Jominian school," see Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson, *Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage* (University, Ala., 1982), 146–53.
26. Davis, *Battle at Bull Run*, 57; Wiley, *Johnny Reb*, 27; Hudson Strode, *Jefferson Davis: Confederate President* (New York, 1959), 89.

Black soldiers seated with white officers and freedmen's teachers standing behind them

Library of Congress

sentimental," wrote southern diarist Mary Boykin Chesnut in June 1861. So far it was "all parade, fife, and fine feathers."²⁷

Many people on both sides believed that the war would be short—one or two battles and the cowardly Yankees or slovenly rebels would give up. An Alabama soldier wrote in 1861 that the next year would bring peace "because we are going to kill the last Yankey before that time if there is any fight in them still. I believe that J. D. Walker's Brigade can whip 25,000 Yankees. I think I can whip 25 myself." Northerners were equally confident; as James Russell Lowell's fictional Yankee philosopher Hosea Biglow ruefully recalled:

I hoped, las' Spring, jest arter Sumter's shame
When every flagstaff flapped its tethered flame,
An' all the people, startled from their doubt,

Come musterin' to the flag with sech a shout,—
I hoped to see things settled 'fore this fall,
The Rebbles licked, Jeff Davis hanged, an' all.²⁸

With such confidence in quick success, thoughts of strategy seemed superfluous. Responsible leaders on both sides did not share the popular faith in a short war. Yet even they could not foresee the kind of conflict this war would become—a total war, requiring total mobilization of men and resources, destroying these men and resources on a massive scale, and ending only with unconditional surrender. In the spring of 1861 most northern leaders thought in terms of a limited war. Their purpose was not to conquer the South but to suppress insurrection and win back the latent loyalty of the southern people. The faith in southern unionism lingered long.

A war for limited goals required a strategy of limited means. General-in-Chief Winfield Scott devised such a strategy. As a Virginia unionist, Scott deprecated a war of conquest which even if

successful would produce "fifteen devastated provinces! [i.e., the slave states] not to be brought into harmony with their conquerors, but to be held for generations, by heavy garrisons, at an expense quadruple the net duties or taxes which it would be possible to extort from them." Instead of invading the South, Scott proposed to "envelop" it with a blockade by sea and a fleet of gunboats supported by soldiers along the Mississippi. Thus sealed off

[27](#). Wiley, *Billy Yank*, 27; Woodward, *Chesnut's Civil War*, 69.

[28](#). Alabamian quoted in McWhiney and Jamieson, *Attack and Die*, 170; Biglow in Nevins, *War*, I, 75.

from the world, the rebels would suffocate and the government "could bring them to terms with less bloodshed than by any other plan."[29](#)

Scott's method would take time—time for the navy to acquire enough ships to make the blockade effective, time to build the gunboats and train the men for the expedition down the Mississippi.

Scott recognized the chief drawback of his plan—"the impatience of our patriotic and loyal Union friends. They will urge instant and vigorous action, regardless, I fear, of the consequences."³⁰ Indeed they did. Northern public opinion demanded an invasion to "crush" the rebel army covering Manassas, a rail junction in northern Virginia linking the main lines to the Shenandoah Valley and the deep South. Newspapers scorned Scott's strategy as the "Anaconda Plan." The Confederate government having accepted Virginia's invitation to make Richmond its capital, the southern Congress scheduled its next session to begin there on July 20. Thereupon Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* blazoned forth with a standing headline:

FORWARD TO RICHMOND! FORWARD TO RICHMOND!

The Rebel Congress Must Not be
Allowed to Meet There on the
20th of July

BY THAT DATE THE PLACE MUST BE HELD
BY THE NATIONAL ARMY

Other newspapers picked up the cry of On to Richmond. Some hinted that Scott's Anaconda Plan signified a traitorous reluctance to invade his native state. Many northerners could not understand why a general who with fewer than 11,000 men had invaded a country of eight million people, marched 175 miles, defeated larger enemy armies, and captured their capital, would shy away from invading Virginia and fighting the enemy twenty-five miles from the United States capital. The stunning achievements of an offensive strategy in Mexico tended to make both Union and Confederate commanders offensive-minded in the early phases of the Civil War. The success of Lyon in Missouri and of

29. Charles Winslow Elliott, *Winfield Scott: The Soldier and the Man* (New York, 1937), 698; *O.R.*, Ser. I, Vol. 51, pt. 1, pp. 369–70.

30. *O.R.*, Ser. I, Vol. 51, pt. 1, p. 387.

McClellan in western Virginia seemed to confirm the value of

striking first and striking fast.

Scott remained unconvinced. He considered the ninety-day regiments raw and useless; the three-year regiments would need several months' training before they were ready for a campaign. But Scott was out of step with the political imperatives of 1861. Public pressure made it almost impossible for the government to delay military action on the main Virginia front. Scott's recommended blockade of southern seaports had begun, and his proposed move down the Mississippi became part of Union strategy in 1862. But events ultimately demonstrated that the North could win the war only by destroying the South's armies in the field. In that respect the popular clamor for "smashing" the rebels was based on sound if oversanguine instinct. Lincoln thought that an attack on the enemy at Manassas was worth a try. Such an attack came within his conception of limited war aims. If successful it might discredit the secessionists; it might lead to the capture of Richmond; but it would not destroy the social and economic system of the South; it would

not scorch southern earth.

By July 1861 about 35,000 Union troops had gathered in the Washington area. Their commander was General Irvin McDowell, a former officer on Scott's staff with no previous experience in field command. A teetotaler who compensated by consuming huge amounts of food, McDowell did not lack intelligence or energy—but he turned out to be a hard-luck general for whom nothing went right. In response to a directive from Lincoln, McDowell drew up a plan for a flank attack on the 20,000 Confederates defending Manassas junction. An essential part of the plan required the 15,000 Federals near Harper's Ferry under the command of Robert Patterson, a sixty-nine-year-old veteran of the War of 1812, to prevent the 11,000 Confederates confronting him from reinforcing Manassas.

McDowell's plan was a good one—for veteran troops with experienced officers. But McDowell lacked both. At a White House

strategy conference on June 29, he pleaded for postponement of the offensive until he could train the new three-year men. Scott once again urged his Anaconda Plan. But Quartermaster-General Meigs, when asked for his opinion, said that "I did not think we would ever end the war without beating the rebels. . . . It was better to whip them here than to go far into an unhealthy country to fight them [in Scott's proposed expedition down the Mississippi]. . . . To make the fight in Virginia was cheaper and better as the case now stood."³¹ Lincoln agreed. As for the rawness of McDowell's troops, Lincoln seemed to have read the mind of a rebel officer in Virginia who reported his men to be so deficient in "discipline and instruction" that it would be "difficult to use them in the field. . . . I would not give one company of regulars for the whole regiment." The president ordered McDowell to begin his offensive. "You are green, it is true," he said, "but they are green, also; you are all green alike."³²

The southern commander at Manassas was Pierre G. T.

Beauregard, the dapper, voluble hero of Fort Sumter, Napoleonic in manner and aspiration. Heading the rebel forces in the Shenandoah Valley was Joseph E. Johnston, a small, impeccably attired, ambitious but cautious man with a piercing gaze and an outsized sense of dignity. In their contrasting offensive- and defensive-mindedness, Beauregard and Johnston represented the polarities of southern strategic thinking. The basic war aim of the Confederacy, like that of the United States in the Revolution, was to defend a new nation from conquest. Confederates looked for inspiration to the heroes of 1776, who had triumphed over greater odds than southerners faced in 1861. The South could "win" the war by not losing; the North could win only by winning. The large territory of the Confederacy—750,000 square miles, as large as Russia west of Moscow, twice the size of the thirteen original United States—would make Lincoln's task as difficult as Napoleon's in 1812 or George III's in 1776. The military analyst of the *Times* of London offered the following comments early in the war:

It is one thing to drive the rebels from the south bank of the Potomac, or even to occupy Richmond, but another to reduce and hold in permanent subjection a tract of country nearly as large as Russia in Europe. . . . No war of independence ever terminated unsuccessfully except where the disparity of force was far greater than it is in this case. . . . Just as England during the revolution had to give up conquering the colonies so the North will have to give up conquering the South.³³

31. Russell F. Weigley, *Quartermaster General of the Union Army: A Biography of M. C. Meigs* (New York, 1959), 172.

32. Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command*, 3 vols. (New York, 1943–44), I, 13; T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals* (New York, 1952), 21.

33. *London Times*, July 18, 1861, Aug. 29, 1862.

Jefferson Davis agreed; early in the war he seems to have envisaged a strategy like that of George Washington in the

Revolution. Washington traded space for time; he retreated when necessary in the face of a stronger enemy; he counterattacked against isolated British outposts or detachments when such an attack promised success; above all, he tried to avoid full-scale battles that would have risked annihilation of his army and defeat of his cause. This has been called a strategy of attrition—a strategy of winning by not losing, of wearing out a better equipped foe and compelling him to give up by prolonging the war and making it too costly.³⁴

But two main factors prevented Davis from carrying out such a strategy except in a limited, sporadic fashion. Both factors stemmed from political as well as military realities. The first was a demand by governors, congressmen, and the public for troops to defend every portion of the Confederacy from penetration by "Lincoln's abolition hordes." Thus in 1861, small armies were dispersed around the Confederate perimeter along the Arkansas-Missouri border, at several points on the Gulf and Atlantic coasts, along the Tennessee-Kentucky border, and in the Shenandoah Valley and

western Virginia as well as at Manassas. Historians have criticized this "cordon defense" for dispersing manpower so thinly that Union forces were certain to break through somewhere, as they did at several points in 1862.³⁵

The second factor inhibiting a Washingtonian strategy of attrition was the temperament of the southern people. Believing that they could whip any number of Yankees, many southerners scorned the notion of "sitting down and waiting" for the Federals to attack. "The idea of waiting for blows, instead of inflicting them, is altogether unsuited to the genius of our people," declared the *Richmond Examiner*. "The aggressive policy is the truly defensive one. A column pushed forward into Ohio or Pennsylvania is worth more to us, as a defensive measure, than a whole tier of seacoast batteries from Norfolk to the Rio Grande."³⁶ The southern press clamored for an advance against Washington in the same tone that northern newspapers cried On to Richmond. Beauregard devised

³⁴. See especially Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of*

United States Military Strategy and Policy (Bloomington, 1973), 3–17, 96.

35. T. Harry Williams, "The Military Leadership of North and South," and David M. Potter, "Jefferson Davis and the Political Factors in Confederate Defeat," in David Donald, ed., *Why the North Won the Civil War* (New York, 1960), 45–46, 108–10.
36. *Richmond Examiner*, Sept. 27, 1861.

several bold plans for an offensive against McDowell. But the question became moot when Beauregard learned of McDowell's offensive against him.

The Confederates eventually synthesized these various strands of strategic theory and political reality into what Davis called an "offensive-defensive" strategy. This consisted of defending the Confederate homeland by using interior lines of communication (a Jominian but also common-sense concept) to concentrate dispersed forces against an invading army and, if opportunity offered, to go over to the offensive, even to the extent of invading the North. No one ever defined this strategy in a systematic, comprehensive fashion. Rather, it emerged from a series of major campaigns in the

Virginia-Maryland and Tennessee-Kentucky theaters during 1862, and culminated at Gettysburg in 1863. It almost emerged, in embryonic form, from the first battle of Manassas (Bull Run) in July 1861, a small battle by later Civil War standards but one that would have important psychological consequences in both the North and the South.

11

Farewell to the Ninety Days' War

I

General McDowell had good reason for his reluctance to march green troops "Forward to Richmond" in July 1861. Circumstances beyond his control plagued the campaign from its outset. Scheduled to begin July 8, the movement of McDowell's 30,000 men was delayed by shortages of supply wagons and by the necessity to organize late-arriving regiments into brigades and divisions. When the army finally began to move out on July 16, the terms of several ninety-day men were about to expire. Indeed, an infantry regiment and artillery battery went home on the eve of the ensuing battle. The longer enlistments of Confederate soldiers gave them a psychological advantage, for the recruit whose time was almost up seemed less motivated to fight.

Out in the Shenandoah Valley, General Robert Patterson likewise feared that the ninety-day recruits in his army of 15,000 would not stand fast in a real battle against Joseph E. Johnston's 11,000 Confederates. This was one of several reasons why Patterson failed in his task of pinning down Johnston in the Valley while McDowell attacked Beauregard at Manassas. Patterson was also confused by orders from Washington that left it unclear whether he should attack or merely maneuver against Johnston. Wrongly believing himself outnumbered by the enemy, Patterson chose the safer course of maneuver. Unfortunately, he maneuvered himself right out of the campaign. On July 18 and 19, Johnston's army gave him the slip, marched from Winchester to the railroad at Piedmont, and entrained for Manassas. With their arrival the Confederate forces at Manassas became equal in size to McDowell's invading army.

Beauregard had been forewarned of McDowell's advance by his espionage network in Washington, headed by Rose O'Neal Greenhow, a friend of several northern politicians but also a

Confederate spy. In the best romantic tradition, coded messages carried by southern belles riding fast steeds brought word of Union plans. Even with this advance knowledge, Johnston could not have reinforced Beauregard in time if McDowell's army had moved faster than a snail's pace. At this stage of the war, soldiers without marching experience carrying fifty pounds of equipment took three days to cover a distance that road-wise veterans later slogged in one day. At every turn in the road, troops halted to clear away trees felled by rebel axemen or to seek cover from rumored "masked batteries." Halts at the head of a column undulated accordion-like back to the rear, where men got tired of standing for hours in the July sun and wandered off to look for water or to pick blackberries. When the Yankees finally reached Centreville, three miles from the Confederate defenses behind Bull Run, they had eaten all their food and had to delay another day while more rations were brought up. Lacking trained cavalry, McDowell personally scouted enemy lines and discovered that rugged terrain and strong defenses on the

Confederate right ruled out his original plan to turn that flank. Another day went by as he planned an attack on the left flank and scouted the roads in that direction. While this was going on, the overworked railroad was bringing Johnston's troops to Manassas. By the time McDowell launched his assault on the morning of July 21, three Valley brigades had arrived and the fourth was on its way.

Despite all the delays, McDowell's attack came within an ace of success. Beauregard had distributed his troops along the south bank of Bull Run, a sluggish, tree-choked river a few miles north of Manassas. Confederate regiments guarded the railroad bridge on the right, the Warren-ton turnpike bridge six miles upstream on the left, and a half-dozen fords between the bridges. Expecting McDowell to attack toward the railroad, Beauregard placed nine of his ten and one-half brigades on that flank, from which he planned to anticipate the Yankees by launching his own surprise assault on the morning of July 21. Instead, the roar of artillery and crack of musketry several miles upstream shortly after sunrise indicated that

McDowell had sprung his surprise first.

The Union attacking column, 10,000 strong, had roused itself at 2:00 a.m. and stumbled through the underbrush and ruts of a cart track on a six-mile flanking march while other regiments made a feint at the turnpike bridge. The flanking column forded Bull Run two miles upriver from the bridge, where no Confederates expected them. The commander of rebel forces at the bridge was Colonel Nathan "Shanks" Evans (so-called because of his spindly legs), a hard-bitten, hard-drinking South Carolinian. Recognizing the Union shelling of the bridge as a feint and seeing the dust cloud from the flanking column to his left, Evans took most of his troops to meet the first Yankee brigade pouring across the fields. Evans slowed the Union attack long enough for two brigades of Confederate reinforcements to come up.

For two hours 4,500 rebels gave ground grudgingly to 10,000 Yankees north of the turnpike. Never before under fire, the men on

both sides fought surprisingly well. But lack of experience prevented northern officers from coordinating simultaneous assaults by different regiments. Nevertheless, the weight of numbers finally pushed the Confederates across the turnpike and up the slopes of Henry House Hill. Several southern regiments broke and fled to the rear; McDowell appeared to be on the verge of a smashing success. A multitude of northern reporters, congressmen, and other civilians had driven out from Washington to watch the battle. They could see little but smoke from their vantage point two miles from the fighting. But they cheered reports of Union victory, while telegrams to Washington raised high hopes in the White House.

The reports were premature. Johnston and Beauregard had sent additional reinforcements to the Confederate left and had arrived personally on the fighting front, where they helped rally broken Confederate units. For several hours during the afternoon, fierce but uncoordinated attacks and counterattacks surged back and forth across Henry House Hill (named for the home of Judith Henry, a

bedridden widow who insisted on remaining in her house and was killed by a shell). Men whom the war would make famous were in the thick of the fighting: on the Union side Ambrose E. Burnside, William Tecumseh Sherman, and Oliver O. Howard, each of whom commanded a brigade and would command an army before the war was over; on the Confederate side Beauregard and Johnston, the former in field command and the latter in overall command; along with James E. B. ("Jeb") Stuart, the dashing, romantic, bearded, plumed, and deadly efficient colonel of a cavalry regiment that broke one Union infantry attack with a headlong charge; Wade Hampton, whose South Carolina legion suffered heavy casualties; and Thomas J. Jackson, a former professor at V.M.I, now commanding a brigade of Virginians from the Shenandoah Valley. Humorless, secretive, eccentric, a stern disciplinarian without tolerance for human weaknesses, a devout Presbyterian who ascribed Confederate successes to the Lord and likened Yankees to the devil, Jackson became one of the war's best generals, a legend in

his own time.

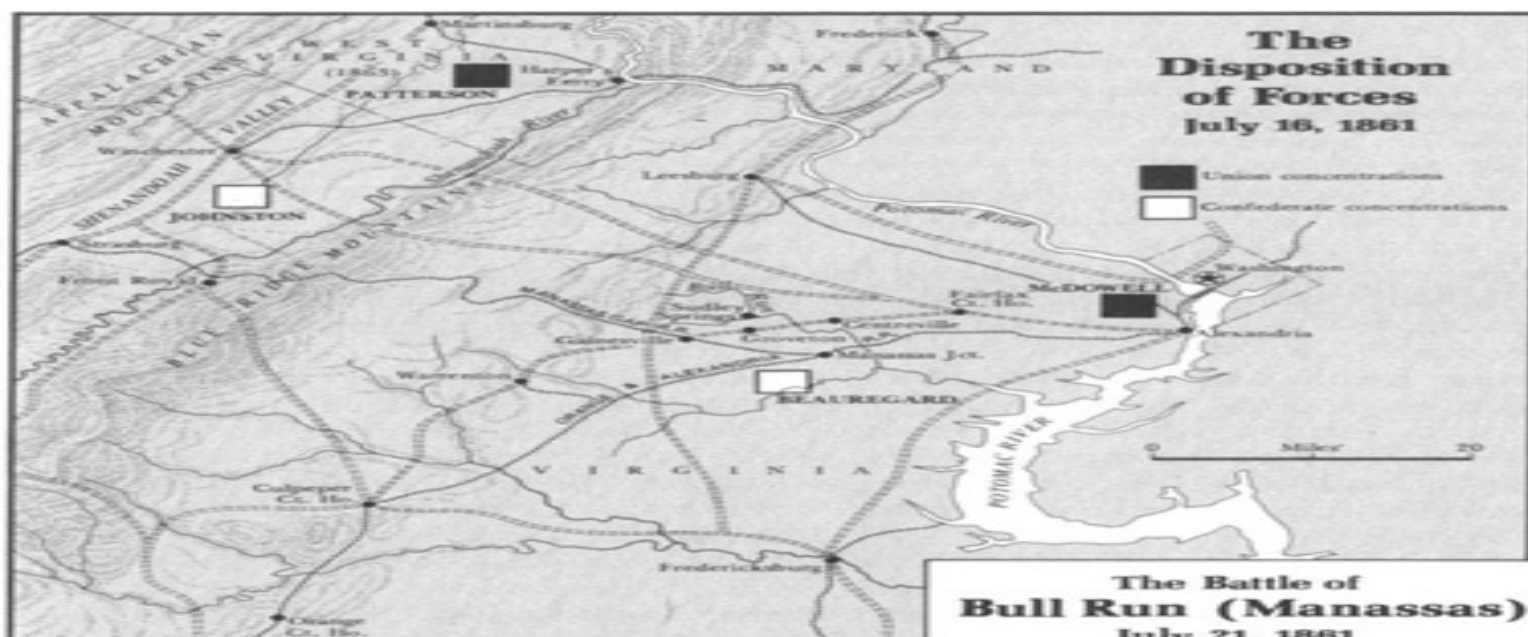
The legend began there on Henry House Hill. As the Confederate regiments that had fought in the morning retreated across the hill at noon, Jackson brought his fresh troops into line just behind the crest. General Barnard Bee of South Carolina, trying to rally his broken brigade, pointed to Jackson's men and shouted something like: "There is Jackson standing like a stone wall! Rally behind the Virginians!" But at least one observer placed a different construction on Bee's remark, claiming that the South Carolinian gestured angrily at Jackson's troops standing immobile behind the crest, and said: "*Look* at Jackson standing there like a damned stone wall!" Whatever Bee said—he could not settle the question by his own testimony, for a bullet killed him soon afterward—Jackson's brigade stopped the Union assault and suffered more casualties than any other southern brigade this day. Ever after, Jackson was known as "Stonewall" and his men who had stood fast at Manassas became the Stonewall Brigade.¹

Much confusion of uniforms occurred during the battle. On numerous occasions regiments withheld their fire for fear of hitting friends, or fired on friends by mistake. The same problem arose with the national flags carried by each regiment. With eleven stars on a blue field set in the corner of a flag with two red and one white horizontal bars, the Confederate "stars and bars" could be mistaken for the stars and stripes in the smoke and haze of battle. Afterwards Beauregard designed a new battle flag, with white stars embedded in a blue St. Andrew's Cross on a red field, which became the familiar banner of the Confederacy.²

One mixup in uniforms affected the outcome of the battle. At the height of the fighting for Henry House Hill, two Union artillery batteries were blasting gaps in the Confederate line. Suddenly a blue-clad

1. For a discussion of the controversy over what Bee really said, see Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command*, 3 vols. (New York, 1943–44), I, 733–34.

2. With the admission of Missouri and Kentucky to the Confederacy in late 1861, the Confederate flags acquired thirteen stars—which by coincidence evoked memories of the first American war for independence.



regiment emerged from the woods seventy yards to the right of two of the guns. Thinking the regiment might be its requested infantry support, the artillery withheld fire for fatal minutes while the regiment, which turned out to be the 33rd Virginia of Jackson's brigade, leveled muskets and fired. The guns were wiped out and the Union attack lost cohesion in that sector of the battlefield.

Indeed, by midafternoon the northern army lost what little cohesion it had everywhere, as regiments continued to fight in a disconnected manner, stragglers began melting to the rear, and McDowell failed to get two reserve brigades into the action. Johnston and Beauregard, by contrast, had brought up every unit within reach, including the last brigade from the Valley, just off the train and marching onto the field about 4:00 p.m. By that time the rebels had an equal number of men in the battle zone (about 18,000 were eventually engaged on each side) and a decisive superiority in fresh troops. Most of the Union regiments had been marching or fighting for the better part of fourteen hours with little food or water

on a brutally hot, sultry day. Seeing Confederate reinforcements appear in front of them, some northern soldiers asked: "Where are *our* reserves?" At this moment, sensing his advantage, Beauregard ordered a counterattack all along the line. As Confederate units surged forward a strange, eerie scream rent the air. Soon to be known as the rebel yell, this unearthly wail struck fear into the hearts of the enemy, then and later. "There is nothing like it on this side of the infernal region," recalled a northern veteran after the war. "The peculiar corkscrew sensation that it sends down your backbone under these circumstances can never be told. You have to feel it."³

Startled by this screaming counterattack the discouraged and exhausted Yankee soldiers, their three-month term almost up, suddenly decided they had fought enough. They began to fall back, slowly and with scattered resistance at first, but with increasing panic as their officers lost control, men became separated from their companies, and the last shred of discipline disappeared. The retreat

became a rout as men threw away guns, packs, and anything else that might slow them down in the wild scramble for the crossings of Bull Run. Some units of Sherman's brigade and several companies of regulars maintained their discipline and formed a rear guard that slowed the disorganized rebel pursuit.⁴

3. Bruce Catton, *Glory Road: The Bloody Route from Fredericksburg to Gettysburg* (Garden City, N.Y., 1952), 57.
4. Sherman's brigade suffered more casualties (including the death of Colonel James Cameron, brother of the secretary of war) and probably fought better than any other Union brigade. Sherman was rewarded by promotion to command of Union forces in Kentucky, where he underwent an attack of nerves and a demotion, as narrated in [Chapter 9](#), above.

Fleeing Union soldiers became entangled with panic-stricken civilians. Some congressmen tried in vain to stop wild-eyed soldiers, now miles from the battlefield, who had no intention of stopping short of the far side of the Potomac. "The further they ran, the more frightened they grew," stated one of the congressmen.

We called to them, tried to tell them there was no danger, called them to stop, implored them to stand. We called them cowards, denounced them in the most offensive terms, put out our heavy revolvers, and threatened to shoot them, but all in vain; a cruel, crazy, mad, hopeless panic possessed them, and communicated to everybody about in front and rear. The heat was awful, although now about six; the men were exhausted—their mouths gaped, their lips cracked and blackened with the powder of the cartridges they had bitten off in the battle, their eyes starting in frenzy; no mortal ever saw such a mass of ghastly wretches.⁵

Back on the other side of Bull Run, jubilant rebels celebrated their victory and rounded up hundreds of Union prisoners. Jefferson Davis himself had turned up at the moment of victory. A warrior at heart, Davis could not sit still in Richmond while the battle raged eighty miles away. He chartered a special train, obtained a horse

near Manassas, and rode with an aide toward the fighting in mid-afternoon through a swelling stream of wounded and stragglers who cried out "Go back! We are whipped!" Though Davis knew that the rear areas of a battlefield always presented a scene of disorder and defeat no matter what was going on at the front, he rode on with a sinking heart. Was this to be the fate of his Confederacy? As he neared Johnston's headquarters, however, the sounds of battle rolled away to the north. Johnston came forward with the news of southern triumph. Elated, Davis urged vigorous pursuit of the beaten enemy. Although some Confederate units had gone a mile or two beyond Bull Run, Johnston and Beauregard believed that no full-scale pursuit was possible. In Johnston's words, "our army was more disorganized by victory than that of the United States by defeat."⁶

When the magnitude of Confederate victory sank in during the following

5. Albert Riddle, quoted in Samuel S. Cox, *Three Decades of Federal Legislation, 1855–1885* (Providence, 1885), 158.

6. Johnston, "Responsibilities of the First Bull Run," *Battles and Leaders*, I, 252.

weeks, southern newspapers began to seek scapegoats for the failure to "follow up the victory and take Washington." An unseemly row burst out in which the partisans of each of the principals—Davis, Johnston, Beauregard—blamed one of the others for this "failure." Postwar memoirs by the three men continued the controversy. But the prospect of "taking" Washington in July 1861 was an illusion, as all three recognized at the time. McDowell formed a defensive line of unbloodied reserves at Centreville on the night of July 21. Early next morning a heavy rain began to turn the roads into soup. Confederate logistics were inadequate for a sustained advance even in good weather. The army depots at Manassas were almost bare of food. Despite a mood of panic in Washington, the rebels were not coming—and could not have come.

In July 1861 the controversy about failure to pursue lay in the future. The South erupted in joy over a victory that seemed to prove that one Southron could indeed lick any number of Yankees. It was

easy to forget that the numbers engaged were equal, that Confederate troops had fought on the defensive for most of the battle (easier than attacking, especially for green troops), and that the Yankees had come close to winning. In any case the battle of Manassas (or Bull Run, as the North named it⁷) was one of the most decisive tactical victories of the war. Although its strategic results came to seem barren to many in the South,

7. The Union and Confederacy gave different names to several Civil War battles:

<i>Union name</i>	<i>Confederate name</i>	<i>Date</i>
Bull Run	Manassas	July 21, 1861
Logan's Cross Roads	Mill Springs	Jan. 19, 1862

Pittsburg Landing	Shiloh	April 6–7, 1862
2nd Bull Run	2nd Manassas	Aug. 29–30, 1862
Antietam	Sharpsburg	Sept. 17, 1862
Chaplin Hills	Perryville	Oct. 8, 1862
Stone's River	Murfreesboro	Dec. 30, 1862 —Jan. 2, 1863
Opequon Creek	Winchester	Sept. 19, 1864

In each case but one (Shiloh) the Confederates named the battle after the town that served as their base, while the Union forces chose the landmark nearest to the fighting

or to their own lines, usually a river or stream. In the case of Shiloh (Pittsburg Landing), the South named the battle after a small church near the spot of their initial attack; the North named it after the river landing they fought to defend. In the cases of Shiloh, Perryville, and Winchester the North eventually accepted the Confederate name for the battle, and those names are used in this book. For each of the other battles, neither name has any intrinsic superiority over the other, so the names are used interchangeably.

the battle did postpone for eight months any further Union efforts to invade Virginia's heartland. And the price in casualties was small compared with later battles. About 400 Confederates were killed and 1,600 wounded, of whom some 225 would die of their wounds. The Union forces also lost about 625 killed and mortally wounded, 950 non-mortally wounded, and more than 1,200 captured.⁸

Perhaps the most profound consequences of the battle were psychological. But these consequences were full of paradox. The South's gleeful celebration generated a cockiness heedless of the Biblical injunction that pride goeth before a fall. Manassas was "*one of the decisive battles of the world*," wrote political leader Thomas

R. R. Cobb of Georgia. It "*has* secured our independence." Edmund Ruffin considered "this hard-fought battle virtually the close of the war." He thought Beauregard's next step should be "a dash upon Philadelphia, & the laying it in ashes . . . as full settlement & acquittance for the past northern outrages."⁹ The *Mobile Register* predicted that the Union army would "never again advance beyond cannon shot of Washington." The *Richmond Whig* went even further: "The breakdown of the Yankee race, their unfitness for empire, forces dominion on the South. We are compelled to take the sceptre of power. We must adapt ourselves to our new destiny."¹⁰

Immediately after the battle the shame and despair of many northerners almost caused them to agree with these southern assessments. "Today will be known as *BLACK MONDAY*," wrote a New Yorker when he heard the news. "We are utterly and disgracefully routed, beaten, whipped." Horace Greeley, whose *New York Tribune* had done so much to prod the government into premature action, endured a week of self-reproachful, sleepless

nights before writing a despondent letter to Lincoln: "On every brow sits sullen, scorching, black despair. . . . If it is best for the country and for mankind that we make peace with the rebels, and on their own terms, do not shrink even from that."¹¹

8. Civil War casualties cannot be known with exactitude because of incomplete or faulty reports. The figures cited here represent the best approximation from available evidence. Some of the Union captured were wounded. In Civil War battles about 15 percent of the wounded subsequently died of their wounds.
9. E. Merton Coulter, *The Confederate States of America 1861–1865* (Baton Rouge, 1950), 345; *The Diary of Edmund Ruffin*, Vol. II, *The Years of Hope April 1861–June 1863*, ed. William K. Scarborough (Baton Rouge, 1976), 96, 98.
10. *Mobile Register* quoted in J. Cutler Andrews, *The South Reports the Civil War* (Princeton, 1970), 92; *Richmond Whig* quoted in Nevins, *War*, I, 221.
11. Strong, *Diary*, 169; Greeley to Lincoln, July 29, 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

Yet the deep, long-lasting impact of Bull Run on the North was not defeatism, but renewed determination. The London *Times* correspondent predicted such a result the day after the battle: "This

prick in the great Northern balloon will let out a quantity of poisonous gas, and rouse the people to a sense of the nature of the conflict on which they have entered." In a sermon on a text from Proverbs—"adversity kills only where there is a weakness to be killed"—one of the North's leading clergymen expressed this new mood of grim resolution. It was echoed by a soldier in the ranks: "I shall see the thing played out, or die in the attempt." Even as Greeley was writing despairingly to Lincoln, an editorial in the *Tribune* by another hand maintained that "it is not characteristic of Americans to sit down despondently after a defeat. . . . Reverses, though stunning at first, by their recoil stimulate and quicken to unwonted exertion. . . . Let us go to work, then, with a will."¹²

Lincoln agreed with this editorial rather than with Greeley's letter. Though shaken by the news of Bull Run, the president and General Scott did not panic. They worked through the night to salvage some order from the chaos of defeat. "The fat is in the fire now," wrote Lincoln's private secretary, "and we shall have to crow small until

we can retrieve the disgrace somehow. The preparations for the war will be continued with increased vigor by the Government." The day after Bull Run, Lincoln signed a bill for the enlistment of 500,000 three-year men. Three days later he signed a second bill authorizing another 500,000.¹³ Volunteers thronged recruiting offices during the next few weeks; offers of new regiments poured in from northern governors; and soon the regiments themselves began to crowd into the training camps surrounding Washington, where they found a dynamic, magnetic general to command them: George B. McClellan.

At 2:00 a.m. on the morning after Bull Run, a telegram summoned McClellan to take command of this new army of three-year volunteers, soon to be named the Army of the Potomac. When McClellan arrived in Washington on July 26 he found "no army to command—only a

12. William Howard Russell, *My Diary North and South*, ed. Fletcher Pratt (New York, 1954), 234; sermon by Horace Bushnell cited in Bruce Catton, *The Coming Fury* (New

York, 1961), 468; soldier quoted in William C. Davis, *Battle at Bull Run* (Garden City, N.Y., 1977), 255; *New York Tribune*, July 30, 1861.

13. John Nicolay to his wife, July 23, 1861, quoted in Catton, *Coming Fury*, 469. The two enlistment laws are printed in *O.R.*, Ser. Ill, Vol. 1, pp. 380–83.

mere collection of regiments cowering on the banks of the Potomac, some perfectly raw, others dispirited by the recent defeat."¹⁴ Whatever self-serving overtones one might detect in these words, McClellan did accomplish all that was expected of him in his first two months of command. His military police rounded up stragglers and combed their officers out of Washington barrooms. His examining boards weeded incompetent officers out of the army. McClellan was a superb organizer and administrator. He was a professional with regard to training. He turned recruits into soldiers. He instilled discipline and pride in his men, who repaid him with an admiration they felt toward no other general. McClellan forged the Army of the Potomac into a fighting machine second to none—this was his important contribution to ultimate Union victory—but he

proved unable to run this machine at peak efficiency in the crisis of battle.

Not all southerners shared the post-Manassas conviction of Confederate invincibility. Mary Boykin Chesnut perceived that the victory "lulls us into a fool's paradise of conceit" while it "will wake every inch of [northern] manhood." A diary-keeping clerk in the Confederate War Department fumed a month after the battle: "We are resting on our oars, while the enemy is drilling and equipping 500,000 or 600,000 men." With the benefit of hindsight, participants on both sides agreed after the war that the one-sided southern triumph in the first big battle "proved the greatest misfortune that would have befallen the Confederacy." Such an interpretation has become orthodoxy in Civil War historiography.¹⁵

This orthodoxy contains much truth, but perhaps not the whole truth. The confidence gained by the men who won at Manassas imbued them with an *esprit de corps* that was reinforced by more

victories in the next two years. At the same time the Union defeat instilled a gnawing, half-acknowledged sense of martial inferiority among northern officers in the Virginia theater. Thus the battle of Manassas, and more importantly the collective southern and northern memories of it, became an important part of the psychology of war in the eastern theater. This psychology helps explain why McClellan, having created a powerful army, was

14. Quoted in Kenneth P. Williams, *Lincoln Finds a General*, 5 vols. (New York, 1949–59), I, 113.
15. Woodward, *Chesnut's Civil War*, 111; Jones, *War Clerk's Diary* (Miers), 43; Edward A. Pollard, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederacy* (New York, 1866), 152.

reluctant to commit it to all-out battle. He always feared, deep down, that the enemy was more powerful than he. And the Confederates, armed with the morale of victory, enjoyed an edge that went far toward evening the material odds against them in Virginia.¹⁶ Hence the paradox of Bull Run: its legacy of confidence

both hurt and helped the South; the humiliation and renewed determination both hurt and helped the North.

II

Two days after Bull Run, Lincoln penned a memorandum on future Union strategy. Efforts to make the blockade effective were to be pushed forward; Maryland was to be held "with a gentle [!], but firm, and certain hand"; Union troops in Virginia were to be reinforced, thoroughly trained, and prepared for a new invasion; the inept Patterson was to be replaced by a new commander of the army at Harper's Ferry (Nathaniel P. Banks); Union armies in the western theaters were to take the offensive, "giving rather special attention to Missouri."¹⁷

Lincoln had high expectations of his newly appointed commander of the Western Department (mainly Missouri), John C. Frémont. Famed as the Pathfinder of the West, Frémont's eleven years'

experience in the army's topographical corps gave him a military reputation unmatched by most other political generals. But the formidable difficulties of a Missouri command—a divided population, guerrilla warfare, political intrigue, war contract profiteering, impending Confederate invasions from Arkansas and Tennessee—quickly brought out the weaknesses in Frémont's character. He was showy rather than solid. His naiveté and his ambition to build quickly a large army and navy for a grand sweep down the Mississippi made him easy prey for contractors whose swollen profits produced a new crop of scandals. Frémont could have survived all this if he had produced victories. But instead, soon after he arrived in St. Louis on July 25, Union forces in Missouri suffered reverses that came as aftershocks to the earthquake at Bull Run.

Frémont's appointment brought Nathaniel Lyon under his command. After chasing Sterling Price's militia to the southwest corner of the state, Lyon's small army of 5,500 men occupied

Springfield at the

16. For an astute development of this thesis, see Michael C. C. Adams, *Our Masters the Rebels: A Speculation on Union Military Failure in the East, 1861–1865* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978).
17. *CWL*, IV, 457–58.

end of a precarious supply line nearly 200 miles from St. Louis. Lyon faced a motley southern force composed of Price's 8,000 Missourians and 5,000 other Confederate troops under General Ben McCulloch, a rough-hewn frontiersman who had won his spurs as an Indian fighter, Mexican War officer, and Texas Ranger. Price was eager to redeem Missouri from the Yankee and "Dutch" troops under Lyon. McCulloch distrusted the reliability of Price's Missourians, two or three thousand of whom lacked weapons while the rest carried an indiscriminate variety of hunting rifles, shotguns, and ancient muskets. McCulloch finally yielded, with great reluctance, to Price's entreaties for an offensive.

In the meantime, Lyon learned that Frémont could send him no

reinforcements. All Union troops seemed to be needed elsewhere to cope with guerrillas and to counter a rebel incursion into southeast Missouri that threatened the Union base at Cairo, Illinois. Outnumbered by more than two to one, with the ninety-day enlistments of half his men about to expire, Lyon's only choice seemed to be retreat. But the fiery red-haired general could not bear to yield southwest Missouri without a fight. He decided to attack McCulloch and Price before they could attack him.

Disregarding the maxims of military textbooks (just as Robert E. Lee later did to win his greatest victories), Lyon divided his small army in the face of a larger enemy and sent a flanking column of 1,200 men under Franz Sigel on a night march around to the south of the Confederate camp along Wilson's Creek, ten miles south of Springfield. While Sigel came up on the Confederate rear, Lyon would attack from the front with the main Union force. The Federals carried out this difficult maneuver successfully, achieving surprise in a two-pronged attack at sunrise on August 10. But

McCulloch and Price kept their poise and rallied their men for a stand-up, seesaw firefight at short range along the banks of Wilson's Creek and on the slopes of a nearby hill.

The battle was marked by two turning points that finally enabled the rebels to prevail. First, after initially driving back the Confederates on the southern flank, Sigel's attack came to a halt after another incident of mistaken identity. A Louisiana regiment clad in uniforms similar to the militia gray of Lyon's 1st Iowa approached close enough to Sigel's vanguard to pour in a murderous volley before the unionists recognized them as enemies. Sigel's attack disintegrated; a Confederate artillery barrage and infantry counterattack soon scattered his demoralized brigade to the four winds. The Louisianians and Arkansans in this part of the field then joined the Missourians fighting Lyon's main force, whom they now outnumbered by three to one. In the thick of the fighting, Lyon was twice wounded slightly and his horse was shot from under him before a bullet found his heart. This demoralized the unionists, who

in addition had almost run out of ammunition. Slowly they pulled back, yielding the battlefield to the enemy and withdrawing to Springfield unpursued by the equally battered southerners.

Each side in this bloody battle suffered about 1,300 casualties, a considerably higher proportion of losses than at Bull Run. Although the Confederates' tactical victory at Wilson's Creek was much less decisive than at Manassas and its impact on public opinion outside Missouri was small, its strategic consequences at first seemed greater. The Union forces retreated all the way to Rolla, 100 miles north of Springfield. Having gained confidence and prestige, Price marched northward to the Missouri River, gathering recruits on the way. With 18,000 troops he surrounded the 3,500-man garrison at Lexington, the largest city between St. Louis and Kansas City. Frémont scraped together a small force to reinforce the garrison, but it could not break through Price's ring. After three days of resistance, Lexington surrendered on September 20.

Price's reputation soared, while Frémont's plummeted. In two months of command he appeared to have lost half of Missouri. Confederate guerrillas stepped up their activities. The Blair family, once Frémont's sponsors, turned against him and began intriguing for his removal. And a bold step that Frémont had taken to reverse the decline of his fortunes backfired and helped to seal his fate.

On August 30 Frémont issued a startling proclamation. As commanding general he took over "the administrative powers of the State," declared martial law, announced the death penalty for guerrillas caught behind Union lines, confiscated the property and freed the slaves of all Confederate activists in Missouri.¹⁸ Two motives seem to have impelled this rash action: first, the felt need for draconian measures to suppress guerrillas and to intimidate rebel sympathizers; second, a desire to win favor with antislavery Republicans. Frémont accomplished his second goal, but at the cost of alienating Lincoln, who was engaged in sensitive efforts to keep Kentucky in the Union. The president wrote privately to Frémont

ordering him to shoot no guerrillas "without first having my approbation," for if he were to execute captured guerrillas indiscriminately, "the Confederates would very certainly shoot our best men in

18. *O.R.*, Ser. I, Vol. 3, pp. 466–67.

their hands, in retaliation; and so, man for man, indefinitely."¹⁹ Second, Lincoln warned Frémont that freeing the slaves of rebels would "alarm our Southern Union friends, and turn them against us—perhaps ruin our rather fair prospect for Kentucky." The president asked (not ordered) Frémont to modify this part of his proclamation to conform with an act passed by Congress on August 6, which confiscated only the property (including slaves) used directly in the Confederate war effort.²⁰

A wiser man would have treated Lincoln's request as an order. But with a kind of proconsular arrogance that did not sit well with Lincoln, Frémont refused to modify his proclamation without a

public order to do so. He also sent his high-spirited wife (daughter of the legendary Thomas Hart Benton) to Washington to persuade Lincoln of his error. Jessie Frémont offended the president by hinting at her husband's superior wisdom and greater prestige. She did Frémont's cause considerable harm. Even as she spoke, letters from border-state unionists were arriving at the White House expressing alarm and disaffection. "We could stand several defeats like that at Bulls Run, better than we can this proclamation if endorsed by the Administration," wrote Kentuckian Joshua Speed, Lincoln's oldest and best friend. "Do not allow us by the foolish action of a military popinjay to be driven from our present active loyalty." On the day after Jessie Benton Frémont's visit, Lincoln publicly ordered her husband to modify his emancipation edict.²¹

After this, Frémont's days as commander in Missouri were numbered. Knowing that he could save himself only by a military victory, he pulled together an army of 38,000 men and set forth to destroy Price's militia. Since capturing Lexington, Price had learned

the difference between an invasion and a raid. He lacked the manpower and logistical capacity to turn his raid into a successful occupation of captured territory. More than half of his troops melted away to harvest crops or to go off bushwhacking on their own. Price retreated again to the southwest

19. Even as Lincoln wrote these words, the rebel guerrilla chieftain M. Jeff Thompson in southeast Missouri issued a proclamation promising that for every man executed under Frémont's edict, he would "HANG, DRAW AND QUARTER a minion of said Abraham Lincoln." Jay Monaghan, *Civil War on the Western Border 1854–1865* (Boston, 1955), 185.
20. *CWL*, IV, 506.
21. Speed to Lincoln, Sept. 7, 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; *CWL*, IV, 517–18.

corner of the state. Before the Federals caught up with him, Lincoln removed Frémont from command. Union forces would eventually defeat and scatter Price's army, but when that happened Frémont would be far away in western Virginia about to embark on another failure.

III

Lincoln's revocation of Frémont's emancipation order and his removal of the general from command stirred up a controversy. The issue was slavery. During the weeks after congressional passage in July of the Crittenden-Johnson resolutions disavowing antislavery war aims, many Republicans began to change their minds. Abolitionists who had earlier remained silent began to speak out. An important catalyst of this change was the Union defeat at Bull Run. "The result of the battle was a fearful blow," wrote an abolitionist, but "I think it may prove the means of rousing this stupid country to the extent & difficulty of the work it has to do." A rebellion sustained *by* slavery in defense *of* slavery could be suppressed only by moving *against* slavery. As Frederick Douglass expressed this conviction: "To fight against slaveholders, without fighting against slavery, is but a half-hearted business, and paralyzes the hands engaged in it. . . . Fire must be met with water. .

. . War for the destruction of liberty must be met with war for the destruction of slavery."²²

Recognizing that racism or constitutionalism would prevent many northerners from accepting moral arguments for emancipation as a war aim, antislavery spokesmen developed the argument of "military necessity." Southerners boasted that slavery was "a tower of strength to the Confederacy" because it enabled the South "to place in the field a force so much larger in proportion to her population than the North." Precisely, agreed emancipationists. Slaves constituted more than half of the South's labor force. They raised food and built fortifications and hauled supplies for rebel armies. They worked in mines and munitions plants. Slave labor was so important to the southern war effort that the government impressed slaves into service before it began drafting white men as soldiers. "The very stomach of this rebellion is the negro in the form of a slave," said Douglass. "Arrest that hoe in the hands of the negro, and you smite the rebellion in the very seat of its life."²³

22. Moncure D. Conway to Ellen Conway, July 23, 1861, Moncure D. Conway Papers, Columbia University Library; *Douglass' Monthly*, Sept., May, 1861.

23. *Montgomery Advertiser*, Nov. 6, 1861; *Douglass' Monthly*, July 1861.

How could this be done under the Constitution, which protected slavery? Rebels had forfeited their constitutional rights, answered emancipationists. Their property was liable to confiscation as a punishment for treason. Moreover, while in theory the South was engaged in domestic insurrection, in practice it was waging a war. The Lincoln administration had already recognized this by proclaiming a blockade and by treating captured rebel soldiers as prisoners of war. Having thus conceded belligerent status to the Confederacy, the Union could also confiscate enemy property as a legitimate act of war.²⁴

Benjamin Butler was the first prominent figure to act on these arguments. Back in May, three slaves who had been working on southern fortifications escaped to Butler's lines at Fortress Monroe, Virginia. Their owner—a Confederate colonel—appeared next day

under flag of truce and, citing the fugitive slave law, demanded the return of his property. Butler replied that since Virginia claimed to be out of the Union, the fugitive slave law did not apply. He labeled the escaped slaves "contraband of war" and put them to work in his camp. Northern newspapers picked up the contraband of war phrase and thereafter the slaves who came into Union lines were known as contrabands.

The administration, after some hesitation, approved Butler's policy. By July nearly a thousand contrabands had rejoined the Union at Fortress Monroe. Their legal status was ambiguous. Butler decided to clarify it by addressing pointed questions to the War Department. In a letter of July 30 which soon appeared in the newspapers, he asked Secretary of War Cameron: "Are these men, women, and children, slaves? Are they free? . . . What has been the effect of the rebellion and a state of war upon [their] status? . . . If property, do they not become the property of the salvors? But we, their salvors, do not need and will not hold such property . . . has

not, therefore, all proprietary relation ceased?"²⁵

Hard questions, these, and explosive ones. While Butler wrote, Congress was wrestling with the same questions in debate on a bill to confiscate property used in aid of the rebellion. John J. Crittenden of Kentucky

24. For a lucid discussion of these questions, see James G. Randall, *Constitutional Problems under Lincoln*, rev. ed. (Urbana, 1951), [chaps. 12–16](#).

25. Jessie A. Marshall, ed., *Private and Official Correspondence of General Benjamin F. Butler during the Period of the Civil War*, 5 vols. (Norwood, Mass., 1917), I, 185–87. Other relevant correspondence between Butler and the War Department is conveniently reprinted in Ira Berlin et al., eds., *The Destruction of Slavery*, Vol. I of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861–1867* (Cambridge, 1985), 70–75.

insisted that Congress had no more right to legislate against slavery in the states during wartime than in peacetime. True, agreed Republicans, but Congress *can* punish treason by confiscation of property, a penalty that operated against the individual but not the institution. In this tentative, limited fashion the Republicans enacted

a confiscation act on August 6. Butler had his answer, such as it was. The contrabands were no longer slaves if—and only if—they had been employed directly by the Confederate armed services. But were they then free? The law did not say. This was hardly the ringing endorsement of emancipation that abolitionists had begun to call for. But it went too far for Democratic and border-state congressmen. All but three of them voted against the bill while all but six Republicans voted for it. This was the first breach in bipartisan support for Union war measures. It was a signal that if the conflict became an antislavery war it would thereby become a Republican war.

Such a prospect worried Lincoln in 1861. That was why he had revoked Frémont's emancipation edict, which went well beyond the confiscation act by applying to *all* slaves owned by rebels and by declaring those slaves *free*.²⁶ The president's action was unpopular with most Republicans. "It is said we must consult the border states," commented an influential Connecticut Republican. "Permit

me to say *damn* the border states. . . . A thousand Lincolns cannot stop the people from fighting slavery." Even Orville Browning, conservative senator from Illinois and Lincoln's close friend, criticized the revocation of Frémont's edict. Stung by this response, Lincoln chose to reply in a private letter to Browning. Frémont's action, he said, was "not within the range of *military* law, or necessity." He could have confiscated enemy property including slaves as Butler had done, "but it is not for him to fix their permanent future condition [by declaring them free]. That must be settled according to laws made by law-makers, and not by military proclamations." Browning had endorsed Frémont's policy as "the only means of saving the government." On the contrary, said Lincoln, "it is itself the surrender of government." When a company of Union soldiers from Kentucky heard about Frémont's edict, said Lincoln, they "threw down their arms

26. It should be noted that Butler's contraband policy also went beyond the confiscation act. Butler retained the wives and children of contrabands, even though they had not worked directly for the Confederate armed forces. For that matter, many of the male

slaves who had entered Union lines did not legitimately come under the specific terms of the act either.

and disbanded." If the order had not been modified, "the very arms we had furnished Kentucky would be turned against us. I think to lose Kentucky is nearly the same as to lose the whole game. Kentucky gone, we can not hold Missouri, nor, as I think, Maryland. These all against us, and the job on our hands is too large for us. We would as well consent to separation at once, including the surrender of this capitol." And in any case, "can it be pretended that it is any longer [a] . . . government of Constitution and laws, wherein a General, or a President, may make permanent rules of property by proclamation?"²⁷

One wonders if Lincoln remembered these words when a year later he did endeavor to make a permanent rule of property with his Emancipation Proclamation declaring the slaves "forever free." But a lifetime of change had been compressed into that one year. The slavery issue just would not fade away. The slaves themselves

would not let it fade away. By ones and twos, dozens and scores, they continued to convert themselves to "contrabands" by coming into Union lines. It proved extremely difficult for their owners to pry them out again, even in the unionist border states. Many northern regiments gave refuge to fugitives and refused to yield them up despite orders to do so.²⁸

Radical Republicans countenanced such action. And by October 1861 some radicals were urging not only freeing the contrabands but also arming them to fight for the Union. Secretary of War Cameron endorsed such action in his annual report: "Those who make war against the Government justly forfeit all rights of property. . . . It is as clearly a right of the Government to arm slaves, when it may become necessary, as it is to use gun-powder taken from the enemy."²⁹ Cameron released his report to the press on December 1 without prior approval from the president. When an astonished Lincoln read these words he ordered Cameron to recall the report and delete this paragraph. But some newspapers had

already published it. Cameron's precipitate action,

27. Joseph R. Hawley to Gideon Welles, Sept. 17, 1861, quoted in James G. Randall, *Lincoln the President*, 4 vols. (New York, 1946–54), II, 21; Lincoln to Browning, Sept. 22, 1861, *CWL*, IV, 531–32.
28. For rich detail on the continuing escapes of contrabands into Union lines and on the relationship between the army and the slaveholders who tried to retrieve their property, see Berlin et al., eds., *The Destruction of Slavery*, and Barbara J. Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, 1985).
29. John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, 10 vols. (New York, 1890), V, 125–26.

like Frémont's, contributed to a widening rift between Lincoln and the radical wing of his party. Soon Cameron, like Frémont, lost his job. In both cases the main reason for removal was inefficiency, not abolitionism, but few radicals believed that the slavery issue had nothing to do with it.

In his annual message on December 3, 1861, Lincoln said: "I have been anxious and careful" that the war "shall not degenerate into a

violent and remorseless revolutionary struggle." But abolitionists and some Republicans were already viewing it as a revolutionary conflict between two social systems. "WE ARE THE REVOLUTIONISTS!" wrote Virginia-born, New England-educated Moncure Conway in 1861. Although the Confederates "justify themselves under the right of revolution," Conway continued, their cause "is not a revolution but a rebellion against the noblest of revolutions." The North, wrote another abolitionist, must proclaim freedom as a war aim and thereby accomplish "*the glorious second American Revolution*."³⁰ Thaddeus Stevens, the grim-visaged Cromwellian leader of radical Republicans in the House, called for precisely the kind of violent, remorseless struggle Lincoln hoped to avoid: "Free every slave—slay every traitor—burn every rebel mansion, if these things be necessary to preserve this temple of freedom." We must "treat this [war] as a radical revolution," said Stevens, "and remodel our institutions." Stevens's colleagues were not prepared to go quite this far, but by December 1861 they had moved a long way beyond their

position of a few months earlier. On December 4, by a solid Republican vote, the House refused to reaffirm the Crittenden resolution disavowing an anti-slavery purpose in the war.³¹

IV

The slavery issue played a part in a growing Republican disenchantment with McClellan. But more important than slavery were McClellan's defects of character and generalship.

"McClellan is to me one of the mysteries of the war," said Ulysses S. Grant a dozen years after the conflict. Historians are still trying to solve

³⁰. *CWL*, V, 48–49; Moncure D. Conway, *The Rejected Stone: or, Insurrection vs. Resurrection in America* (Boston, 1861), 75–80, 110; *Principia*, May 4, 1861.

³¹. Stevens quoted in T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and the Radicals* (Madison, 1941), 12, and Margaret Shortreed, "The Anti-Slavery Radicals, 1840–1868," *Past and Present*, no. 16 (1959), 77; House action in *CG*, 37 Cong., 2 Sess., 15.

that mystery.³² Life seemed to have prepared McClellan for greatness. His birth into a well-to-do Philadelphia family and his education at the best private schools prepared him for admission to West Point by special permission when he was two years under the minimum age. After graduating second in his class, McClellan won renown at the age of twenty for engineering achievements in the Mexican War. His subsequent army career included assignment as an American observer of the Crimean War. In 1857 he resigned his commission to become chief engineer and vice president of a railroad at the age of thirty and president of another railroad two years later. In May 1861, at the age of thirty-four, he became the second-ranking general in the U. S. army and in July he took command of the North's principal field army. McClellan came to Washington, in the words of the London *Times* correspondent, as "the man on horseback" to save the Union; the press lionized him; a sober-minded contemporary wrote that "there is an indefinable *air of success* about him and something of the 'man of destiny.'" ³³

But perhaps McClellan's career had been too successful. He had never known, as Grant had, the despair of defeat or the humiliation of failure. He had never learned the lessons of adversity and humility. The adulation he experienced during the early weeks in Washington went to his head. McClellan's letters to his wife revealed the beginnings of a messiah complex. "I find myself in a strange position here: President, Cabinet, Genl. Scott & all deferring to me," he wrote the day after arriving in Washington. "By some strange operation of magic I seem to have become *the* power of the land." Three days later he visited Capitol Hill and was "quite overwhelmed by the congratulations I received and the respect with which I was treated." Congress seemed willing "to give me my way in everything." The next week McClellan reported that he had received "letter after letter—have conversation after conversation calling on me to save the nation—alluding to the Presidency, Dictatorship, etc." McClellan said he wanted no part of such powers, but he did revel in the cheers of his soldiers as he rode

along their lines—cheers that reinforced his Napoleonic self-image.
"You have no idea how the men

32. Quotation from Warren W. Hassler, Jr., *General George B. McClellan: Shield of the Union* (Baton Rouge, 1957), xv. For a good summary of writings on McClellan, see Joseph L. Harsh, "On the McClellan-Go-Round," in John T. Hubbell, ed., *Battles Lost and Won: Essays from Civil War History* (Westport, Conn., 1975). 55–72
33. Russell, *My Diary North and South*, 240; Nevins, *War*, I, 269.

brighten up now when I go among them. I can see every eye glisten. . . . You never heard such yelling. . . . I believe they love me. . . . God has placed a great work in my hands. . . . I was called to it; my previous life seems to have been unwittingly directed to this great end."³⁴

The first victim of McClellan's vainglory was General-in-Chief Scott. More than twice McClellan's age, Scott was America's foremost living soldier, a hero of two wars, second only to George Washington in military reputation. But Scott's fame belonged to past wars. McClellan aspired to be the hero of this one. A rivalry

with the "old general," as McClellan privately called Scott, soon developed. In truth, there could be only one head of the post-Bull Run military buildup. McClellan set about this task with great energy. He put in eighteen-hour days that achieved quick and visible results. McClellan communicated directly with the president, bypassing Scott. The latter, whose age and infirmities prevented him from doing more than a few hours of daily paperwork, grew piqued at being left out of things. McClellan complained that Scott was frustrating his plans to expand and prepare the army for an early offensive. "I am leaving nothing undone to increase our force," McClellan wrote to his wife in early August, "but that confounded old Gen'l always comes in my way. He is a perfect incubus. He understands nothing, appreciates nothing. . . . I do not know whether he is a *dotard* or a *traitor*. . . . If he *cannot* be taken out of my path, I . . . will resign and let the admin[istration] take care of itself. . . . The people call upon me to save the country—I *must* save it and cannot respect anything that is in the way."³⁵

Lincoln tried to mediate between the two generals, but only succeeded in delaying the inevitable. The president finally succumbed to pressure from Republican senators and allowed Scott to retire on November 1 "for reasons of health." McClellan succeeded him as general in chief. Lincoln cautioned McClellan that the dual jobs of general in chief and commander of the Army of the Potomac "will entail a vast labor upon you." Replied McClellan: "I can do it all."³⁶

³⁴. McClellan to Ellen Marcy McClellan, July 27, 30, Aug. 9, Oct. 31, 1861, McClellan Papers, Library of Congress. These letters to his wife consist of extracts from the originals, copied by McClellan himself sometime after the war. There is no way of knowing whether he edited these copies in any substantive way, for the originals no longer exist. The extracts are in Series C, Container 7 of the McClellan Papers. Edited versions of some of these letters were published in W. C. Prime, ed., *McClellan's Own Story* (New York, 1887).

³⁵. McClellan to Ellen Marcy McClellan, Aug. 8, 9, 1861, McClellan Papers.

³⁶. Dennett, *Lincoln/Hay*, 33.

The senators helped force Scott's retirement because McClellan

convinced them that the "old general" was mainly responsible for the army's inactivity. When McClellan had first arrived in Washington he expressed an intent to "carry this thing 'en grand' & crush the rebels in one campaign."³⁷ Republicans thought this had the right ring. But McClellan soon began to express fears that Beauregard was about to march forward with a huge army to crush *him*. A curious lack of confidence began to creep into McClellan's words and deeds, even as he continued to think of himself as God's chosen instrument to save the republic. The first signs appeared of a chronic tendency to overestimate enemy strength and to use this estimate as an excuse to remain on the defensive. In October, McClellan had 120,000 men while Beauregard and Johnston had only 45,000 in and near Manassas. But McClellan professed to believe that the enemy numbered 150,000 and was preparing to attack him.³⁸

The Confederates had pushed their picket posts within sight of Washington. They had also established batteries on the lower

Potomac to interdict river traffic to the capital. In late September the southerners withdrew from one exposed position on Munson's Hill a few miles southwest of Washington. When the Federals moved in, instead of the large cannon they had expected they found a log shaped and painted to

37. McClellan to Ellen Marcy McClellan, Aug. 2, 1861, McClellan Papers.

38. The head of McClellan's secret service, Allan Pinkerton, has long been notorious for providing the inflated estimates of Confederate troop numbers on which McClellan based his calculations. Pinkerton deserves some but perhaps not all of this notoriety. His activities embraced two spheres: espionage behind enemy lines and counter-espionage behind Union lines. As founder of the famous Pinkerton detective agency, he naturally employed numerous agents who had been trained as detectives. These men did a good job of ferreting out and arresting Confederate agents, for their previous experience fitted them for such work. As espionage agents they were less successful. They tended to accept too readily the rumors and gossip about rebel units and movements they picked up in Richmond and elsewhere. But even when they did acquire accurate information, their figures on Confederate numbers usually included *all* troops in a given theater (for example, all of Virginia east of the Blue Ridge Mountains). By the time these figures reached McClellan and he had digested them, they had become transmuted into the number of men *in Johnston's army alone*. It is not clear whether McClellan or Pinkerton was primarily responsible for this error. In any

case McClellan believed what he wanted to believe—that the enemy outnumbered him and he therefore could not undertake an offensive until he outnumbered the enemy—something that, given McClellan's psychology, was never likely to happen. For a good discussion of this question, see Edwin C. Fishel, "The Mythology of Civil War Intelligence," in Hubbell, ed., *Battles Lost and Won*, 83–106.

resemble a cannon. This "Quaker gun" embarrassed McClellan and called into question his reports of superior Confederate forces. The patience of northern people with the lack of action against the saucy rebels had begun to wear thin. The Quaker gun incident further dissipated the once-enormous reservoir of support and adulation for McClellan. As the fine, dry days of October wore away and the Army of the Potomac still made no advance, some Republicans began to suspect McClellan's competence and even his loyalty. The daily telegraphic bulletin, "All quiet along the Potomac," which had reassured northerners just after Bull Run, now became a phrase of derision aimed at McClellan. " 'Young Napoleon' is going down as fast as he went up," wrote an Indiana Republican after testing the pulse of public opinion. Lyman Trumbull said in November that if

McClellan's army went into winter quarters without fighting a battle "I very much fear the result would be recognition of the Confederacy by foreign governments [and] the demoralization of our own people. . . . Action, action is what we want and must have."³⁹

Action did temporarily break the quiet along the Potomac on October 21, but not the kind the North was hoping for. The rebels held the town of Leesburg, Virginia, forty miles upriver from Washington. Hoping to dislodge them, McClellan ordered General Charles P. Stone to make a "slight demonstration" from the Maryland side of the river while other Union regiments marched upriver on the Virginia side to threaten the Confederate flank. Stone assigned the mission to Colonel Edward Baker, a former Illinois politician and old friend of Lincoln, who had named his second son after him. Baker sent most of his brigade across the river, where it ran into a Confederate brigade posted in the woods at the top of a hundred-foot bank called Ball's Bluff. With no previous combat

experience, Baker and his men took poorly chosen positions. After some lively skirmishing, in which Baker was killed, the Confederates drove the Yankees in disorder down the bank and into the river, where some of those who escaped bullets were drowned. More than half of Baker's 1,700 men were killed, wounded, or captured.

This humiliating disaster evoked from Lincoln tears of grief for Baker's death and provoked among Republicans an angry search for a scapegoat. When Congress met in December it established a Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War to investigate the causes for defeat at Ball's Bluff and Bull Run. Benjamin Wade chaired the committee and radical Republicans dominated it. Damned by its critics as a "Jacobin"

[39](#). Nevins, *War*, I, 300; Williams, *Lincoln and the Radicals*, 45.

conspiracy to guillotine Democratic generals and praised by its defenders as a foe of inefficiency and corruption in the army, the

committee was a bit of both.⁴⁰ In its early months it did function something like a star chamber court in its quest for scapegoats. The committee's first victim was General Stone. This officer had acquired a proslavery reputation because of a bitter exchange of letters with Governor Andrew of Massachusetts concerning the return to slavery of contrabands who had sought refuge with Massachusetts regiments under Stone's command. Several witnesses before the committee vaguely described alleged contacts between Stone and Confederate officers. Even though this testimony built a case of treason against Stone, whom the committee suspected of sending his men into a trap, the general was given no opportunity to confront his accusers or even to read their testimony. While McClellan tried for a time to protect his subordinate, he soon realized that Stone was a surrogate for the committee's real target—himself. When additional dubious evidence of Stone's supposed dealings with the enemy came to McClellan, he turned it over to Secretary of War Stanton, who ordered Stone's arrest. For six

months this luckless—and probably innocent—general was imprisoned at Fort Lafayette. No formal charges were ever ever brought against him. He was finally released and restored to minor commands, but his career was ruined.⁴¹

Whether or not McClellan threw Stone to the wolves to protect himself,⁴² he had clearly gotten into deep political waters by the end of 1861. McClellan was a Democrat. Some of his closest army comrades in prewar days had been southerners, including Joseph Johnston whose army at Manassas McClellan seemed reluctant to attack. Although no admirer of slavery, McClellan liked abolitionists even less. He had political

⁴⁰. For criticism of the committee, see especially William W. Pierson, Jr., "The Committee on the Conduct of the Civil War," *AHR*, 23 (1918), 550–76; T. Harry Williams, "The Committee on the Conduct of the War," *Journal of the American Military History Institute*, 3 (1939), 139–56. For a defense of the committee, see Hans L. Trefousse, "The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War: A Reassessment," *CWH*, 10 (1964), 5–19; and Howard C. Westwood, "The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War—A Look at the Record," *Lincoln Herald*, 80 (1978), 3–15.

41. Committee on the Conduct of the War, *Reports*, 1863 (Washington, 1863), Vol. II; R. B. Irwin, "Ball's Bluff and the Arrest of General Stone," *Battles and Leaders*, II, 123–34; Williams, *Lincoln and the Radicals*, 94–104.
42. Stone himself came to believe this, and T. Harry Williams strongly suggests such an interpretation in *Lincoln and the Radicals*, 101, 104.

ties with New York Democrats who had begun to mention him as the party's next presidential candidate. To one of these Democrats, McClellan wrote in November: "Help me to dodge the nigger—we want nothing to do with him. *I* am fighting to preserve the integrity of the Union. . . . To gain that end we cannot afford to mix up the negro question."⁴³

Lincoln at this time would have agreed with McClellan's expression of war aims. The president also did his best to shield McClellan from the growing criticism of the army's inactivity. "I intend to be careful and do as well as possible," McClellan told Lincoln during one of their early discussions. "Just don't let them hurry me, is all I ask." Lincoln replied: "You shall have your own

way in the matter." The president borrowed books on military science from the Library of Congress and sat up late trying to master the elements of strategy. As an amateur he was willing to defer to McClellan the professional. At the same time, as a professional in his own field the president tried to educate the general in the realities of politics—especially the danger of ignoring political pressures in a people's war. At one of their frequent meetings, Lincoln tried to make McClellan see that the demands of Republican leaders for action were "a reality, and must be taken into account."⁴⁴

McClellan not only resisted such realities; in private he also expressed his contempt for all Republican politicians—including Lincoln. In letters to his wife he wrote that "I can't tell you how disgusted I am becoming with these wretched politicians—they are a most despicable set of men. . . . I am becoming daily more disgusted with this imbecile administration." The cabinet contained "some of the greatest geese I have ever seen. . . . Seward is the

meanest of them all—a meddlesome, officious, incompetent little puppy. . . . Welles is a garrulous old woman . . . Bates an old fool. . . . The presdt. is nothing more than a well meaning baboon . . . 'the original gorilla.' . . . It is sickening in the extreme . . . [to] see the weakness and unfitness of the poor beings who control the destinies of this great country."⁴⁵

One evening in November, Lincoln and Seward called on McClellan at home. He was out at a wedding party; when he returned an hour

⁴³. McClellan to Samuel L. M. Barlow, Nov. 8, 1861, S. L. M. Barlow Papers, Henry E. Huntington Library.

⁴⁴. Foote, *The Civil War*, I, 142; Williams, *Lincoln and the Radicals*, 45.

⁴⁵. McClellan to Ellen Marcy McClellan, Oct. 2, 7, 10, Nov. 2, 17, 1861, McClellan Papers.

later and learned of his visitors, McClellan ignored them and went upstairs. Half an hour later a servant informed the president and secretary of state that the general had gone to bed. Lincoln's private

secretary was furious, but the president reportedly said: "I will hold McClellan's horse if he will only bring us success."⁴⁶

But that was the rub. Military success could be achieved only by taking risks; McClellan seemed to shrink from the prospect. He lacked the mental and moral courage required of great generals—the will to *act*, to confront the terrible moment of truth on the battlefield. Having experienced nothing but success in his career, he was afraid to risk failure. He also suffered from what might be termed the "Bull Run syndrome"—a paralysis that prevented any movement against the Confederates until the army was thoroughly prepared. McClellan excelled at preparation, but it was never quite complete. The army was perpetually *almost* ready to move—but the enemy was always larger and better prepared.

To cover his fears, McClellan tried to shift the blame to others. "I am here in a terrible place," he had written in August. "The enemy have from 3 to 4 times my force [in fact, McClellan then had twice

the enemy's force]—the Presdt. is an idiot, the old General is in his dotage—they cannot or will not see the true state of affairs." In November, when McClellan had nearly three times the number of men and more than three times the weight of artillery as the Confederates in his front, he complained: "I cannot move without more means. . . . I have left nothing undone to make this army what it ought to be. . . . I am thwarted and deceived by these incapables at every turn. . . . It now begins to look as if we are condemned to a winter of inactivity. If it is so the fault will not be mine; there will be that consolation for my conscience, even if the world at large never knows it."⁴⁷

V

Jefferson Davis was also having problems with the *amour propre* of his generals. On August 31 the Confederate president named five men to the rank of full general.⁴⁸ Joseph E. Johnston and Pierre G. T. Beau-regard were fourth and fifth on the list, below Adjutant

General Samuel

46. Dennett, *Lincoln/Hay*, 34–35; Foote, *The Civil War*, I, 143.

47. McClellan to Ellen Marcy McClellan, Aug. 16, Nov. 2, 1861, McClellan Papers.

48. No Union officer at this time held a higher rank than major general, two grades below full general.

Cooper, Albert Sidney Johnston, and Robert E. Lee. When Joseph Johnston learned of this, he erupted in outrage. Not only was this ranking illegal, he informed Davis in a hotly worded letter, it was also an insult to his honor. He had outranked all of these men in the United States army, and by the terms of the law creating the Confederate grade of full general he still outranked them. Moreover, Cooper was a desk general (and a Yankee to boot, having been born and raised in New Jersey); A. S. Johnston had just arrived in the Confederacy after a slow trip from California and had not yet heard a shot fired in anger; Lee had won no battles and was even then floundering in West Virginia; while he, Joe Johnston, had won the battle of Manassas. Davis had committed a "violation of my rights

as an officer," Johnston told the president, "tarnished my fair fame as a soldier and a man," and "degraded one who has served laboriously from the commencement of the war . . . and borne a prominent part in the one great event of the war, for the benefit of persons [none] of whom has yet struck a blow for the Confederacy."⁴⁹

Insulted by the tone of Johnston's letter, Davis sent an icy reply: "Sir, I have just received and read your letter of the 12th instant. Its language is, as you say, unusual; its arguments and statements utterly one sided, and its insinuations as unfounded as they are unbecoming."⁵⁰ Not until later did Davis explain that he had ranked Johnston below Lee and A. S. Johnston because the latter two had held higher line commissions in the U. S. army than Joseph Johnston, whose rank as general had been a staff commission—a dubious rationale, which in any case did not apply to Cooper, who had also held a staff appointment in the old army.

The main effect of this graceless dispute was to plant a seed of hostility between Davis and Johnston that was to bear bitter fruit for the Confederacy. It also demonstrated an important difference between Davis and Lincoln as war leaders. A proud man sensitive of his honor, Davis could never forget a slight or forgive the man who committed it. Not for him was Lincoln's willingness to hold the horse of a haughty general if he would only win victories.

Davis also quarreled with Beauregard. The jaunty Louisianian's report on the battle of Manassas became public in October. It implied that Davis had delayed Johnston's reinforcement of Beauregard almost

[49](#). Johnston to Davis, Sept. 12, 1861, *O.R.*, Ser. IV, Vol. 1, pp. 605–8.

[50](#). Davis to Johnston, Sept. 14, 1861, *ibid.*, 611.

to the point of disaster. It noted Davis's rejection of Beauregard's grandiose plan for an offensive *before* the battle in a manner that caused the press to confuse this issue with the then-raging

controversy over responsibility for failing to follow up the victory by capturing Washington. Throughout the report Beauregard's flamboyant prose tended to magnify his own role. Miffed, Davis reprimanded the general for writing an account that "seemed to be an attempt to exalt yourself at my expense."⁵¹ One way to deal with Beauregard, who had grown restless in his role as second in command to Johnston in Virginia, was to send him as far away from Richmond as possible. In January 1862, Davis transferred Beauregard to the Tennessee-Kentucky theater, where he could try to help the other Johnston—Albert Sidney—cope with the buildup of Union forces in Kentucky.

Despite quarrels with his generals, Davis faced the New Year with more confidence than Lincoln. Since mid-July the Confederacy had won most of the important land battles in the war: Manassas, Wilson's Creek, Lexington (Mo.), Ball's Bluff. Although the Union navy had achieved some significant victories, these had not yet led anywhere. One of the apparent naval triumphs—the capture of

southern commissioners James Mason and John Slidell from the British ship *Trent*—had even produced a Yankee backdown in the face of British threats. Northern banks had suspended specie payments and the government faced a financial crisis.⁵² Northern morale was at its lowest ebb since the days after Bull Run. The London *Times* correspondent in Washington reported that every foreign diplomat but one agreed that "the Union is broken for ever, and the independence of the South virtually established."⁵³ The Army of the Potomac went into winter quarters having done nothing to dislodge enemy outposts within sight of that river; worse still, McClellan fell ill with typhoid fever in mid-December, leaving the army without a functioning commander for nearly a month. Lincoln had assigned two promising generals, Henry W. Halleck and Don Carlos Buell, to command of the Missouri and Kentucky theaters, but in January both reported an early advance impossible. "It is exceedingly discouraging," wrote Lincoln on a copy of Halleck's letter to him. "As

51. *Ibid.*, Ser. I, Vol. 2, pp. 484–504; Davis to Beauregard, Oct. 30, 1861, in Rowland, *Davis*, V, 156–57.

52. Naval affairs, the *Trent* crisis, and financial developments will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

53. Russell, *My Diary North and South*, 259.

everywhere else, nothing can be done." On the day he wrote these words, January 10, 1862, the president dropped into Quartermaster General Meigs's office. "General, what shall I do?" he asked despondently. "The people are impatient; Chase has no money; . . . the General of the Army has typhoid fever. The bottom is out of the tub. What shall I do?"⁵⁴

But January 1862 proved to be the darkness before dawn for the Union cause. Although other dark nights would follow, the four months after January turned out to be one of the brightest periods of the war for the North.

54. *CWL*, V, 95; "General M. C. Meigs on the Conduct of the Civil War," *AHR*, 26 (1921), 292.