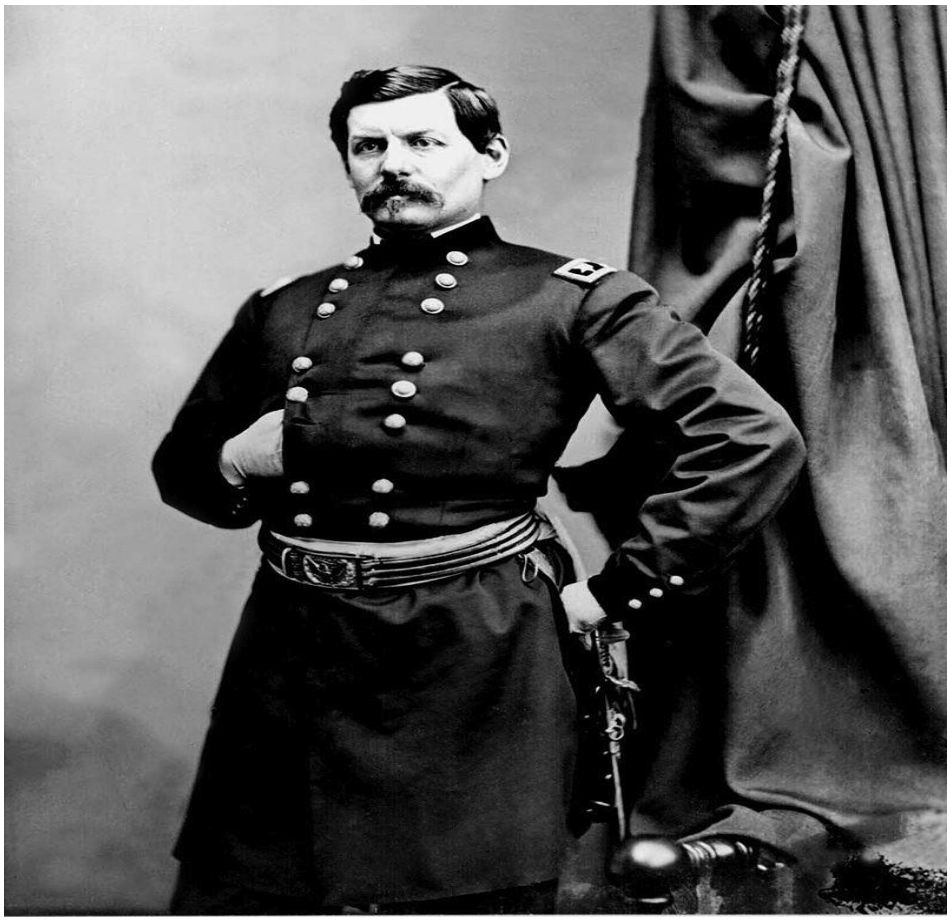

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THE UNDERAPPRECIATED STRATEGIC GENIUS OF GEORGE B. MCCLELLAN

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"The stride of a giant" deemed one European observer of the American Civil War's 1862 Peninsula Campaign.[1] Civil War historians and buffs alike perhaps most remember the Peninsula Campaign for the ascendancy of Robert E. Lee as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, Stonewall Jackson's brilliant Valley Campaign diversion, or the timidity of the Union commander of the Army of the Potomac, Major General George B. McClellan. McClellan, who many historians accuse of having an impractical strategy, was actually an astute strategist who employed operational maneuver in a bid to compel his adversary to react from a position

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of disadvantage or quit. McClellan's purpose at operational maneuver was to bring the Confederates to battle on terms favorable to the Union and then through decisive victory bring about conciliation. As the only large-scale operation to take advantage of the strategic mobility conferred by the Union command of the sea, the1862 Peninsula Campaign stands as one of the Civil War's most truly imaginative campaigns. Although McClellan remains a controversial figure and his battlefield record shaky, his strategic abilities deserve reconsideration. If not an able tactician, McClellan was a superior strategist who appreciated the importance of geography, how to overcome it and use it to advantage. He also was one of the few Civil War generals who recognized early on the changing character of late nineteenth century warfare in favor of the tactical defense. Finally, McClellan understood how escalating levels of violence could harden an adversary's resistance, prolong conflict, make war termination difficult, and create an unsettled peace. Therefore, he sought to avoid inflaming passions on both sides by bringing the war to a quick end through a campaign of decision. The principal failure of the Peninsula Campaign stemmed from poor civil-military relations for which both Lincoln and McClellan were responsible and from the lack of operational execution of a relatively sound strategic scheme.

Genesis of the Peninsula Campaign

As a cadet, and later a faculty member at West Point, McClellan had been exposed to the campaigns of Napoleon under the tutelage of Dennis Hart Mahan. Mahan interpreted the campaigns of Napoleon through the theories of the Swiss military thinker Barron Henri Jomini. Jomini reduced the methods of Napoleonic warfare to rational principles, systems, and geometrical diagrams while avoiding the complex, fungible, and unpredictable nature of warfare recognized by his then unknown contemporary, Karl von Clausewitz. Jomini emphasized maneuver, concentration, and interior lines as the keys to Napoleon's success. Although Jomini's theoretical constructs formed the basis his strategic formulations, McClellan was also not immune to the doctrinal and technological developments taking place in warfare during the mid-nineteenth century.[2]

Two key influences on McClellan's later Civil War thinking were his experiences as a lieutenant under General Scott in Mexico and as an observer of the last stage of the Crimean War.[3] Like McClellan's Peninsula Campaign, General Winfield Scott's campaign on Mexico City featured an amphibious assault followed by careful preparation and a march on the enemy capital. Scott's use of a waterborne invasion route proved much more secure and logistically manageable compared to the relatively harsh desert route facing General Taylor in Northern Mexico. At the outset of the campaign, Scott seized the port of Vera Cruz as a secure base of operations, a fact not lost on McClellan, a student of Jomini. McClellan also noted the problems posed by untrained volunteers, their lack of camp discipline, training, professionalism, and in some cases lack of the will to fight.[4] Similar to experience in Mexico, the Crimean War (1854-1856) left certain indelible impressions on McClellan. Jefferson Davis, then Secretary of War, sent McClellan as part of a military commission to study European developments. By the time the commission finally arrived in the Crimea, the conflict was nearly over. At this point, the allies had eliminated most of their infamous logistical problems. McClellan undoubtedly noted Sevastopol's extensive entrenchments and the complex allied logistics framework that included supply via sea and rail transport, and hospitals.[5] The Army of the Potomac's superb organization and preparation—especially in the areas of artillery, engineering, and logistics—caused McClellan to remark shortly after debarkation on the Peninsula, "I do believe that I am avoiding the faults of the Allies at Sebastopol and preparing the way for a great success."[6]

McClellan's "careful preparations" did not reflect timidity on his part but rather a full appreciation that the time spent to train, prepare, organize, and equip would ultimately shorten the war and reduce casualties. In February 1862, McClellan wrote to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, "If at

the expense of thirty days delay we can gain a decisive victory which will probably end the war, it is far cheaper than to gain a battle tomorrow that produces no final results, & may require years of warfare & expenditure to follow up."[7]

McClellan's early experiences were reinforced by the engineering curriculum of West Point and the teachings of Mahan. Henry Halleck, Lincoln's future chief of staff, wrote in his distillation of Jomini entitled *Elements of Military Art and Science* (1846), "[W]hen placed behind a breastwork, they [undisciplined forces] even overrate their security. They can then coolly look upon the approaching columns, and unmoved by glittering armor and bristling bayonets, will exert all their skill in the use of their weapons."[8] From Mahan, the pre-Civil War professionals educated at West Point learned that homespun volunteers were no match in the open against well-trained regulars. Contemporary notions held that the place for volunteers was behind barricades like their predecessors at Bunker Hill, Saratoga, and New Orleans. Historian Paddy Griffith's characterization of the professional education of Civil War generals as "the West Point ideal of a French general looked less like Jomini than like Vauban wearing Napoleon's hat" was certainly an apropos description of McClellan.[9] Thus, McClellan's strategy during the Peninsula Campaign was to be a nineteenth century hybrid combining the seemingly contradictory concepts of the operational offensive with the tactical use of siege craft and entrenchments.

McClellan's fixation on the siege as the decisive form of conflict was not groundless, at least in the later half of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries. Significantly, many post 1850 conflicts—those following the advent of the rifled-musket—were decided not on the battlefield but by siege. The Crimean War centered on the siege of Sevastopol. Decisive sieges during the France-Prussian War (1870-1871) included Metz, Belfort, and Paris. The crucial action of the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78) was the siege of Plevna, and the siege of Port Arthur decided the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) on land. Similarly, some historians have viewed the First World War (1914-1918) as one giant siege.[10] In the American Civil War, a conflict not noted for its decisive battles of annihilation, the sanguinary sieges of Vicksburg and Petersburg stand out as the only truly decisive actions of the war.[11] Petersburg would teach even Grant to respect the brutal but inevitable conclusiveness of siege warfare.

McClellan's pre-war military experiences undoubtedly fashioned what was to ultimately become the Peninsula Campaign, but these certainly were not the only factors shaping McClellan's strategic thinking. The geostrategic realities of the Virginia Theater also lent credibility to an amphibious approach via the Chesapeake Bay and the tributaries leading toward Richmond. The most notable terrain feature in Virginia was perhaps the Shenandoah Valley, which cut through the state from southwest to northeast. The valley had the effect of a diagonal reducing the area in which armies could maneuver as it ran further north. Thus, at a line drawn from east to west at Manassas, the distance to the Valley was about 60 miles, while at Richmond it was 100 miles and opened significantly wider after that. Notably, the main watercourses (Rappahannock, Mattaponi, and Pamunkey) ran from northwest to southeast to the Chesapeake Bay, cutting across the avenues of advance from the north to south favoring the defender. In addition, any advance from the north toward Richmond would have to rely on a single railroad as the main route of supply. Railroads were considerably more vulnerable lines of supply, lending themselves to enemy interdiction far more so than waterways. McClellan summed up the perils of the "Washington" approach in a letter to Stanton dated 31 January 1862:

> …[A Union victory at Manassas] would be confined to the possession of the field of battle, the evacuation of the line of the upper Potomac by the enemy, and the moral effect of the victory – important results it is true, *but not decisive of the war* [italics added], nor securing the destruction of the enemy's main Army; for he could fall back upon other positions, and fight us again and again…We would find a very and tedious matter to follow him [the enemy] up there

> [Richmond] – for he would destroy railroad bridges and otherwise impede our progress through a region where the roads are bad.[12]

On the other hand, McClellan argued that changing lines of operation to the lower Chesapeake Bay offered an attractive alternative yielding decisive results:

> A movement in force on that line [lower Chesapeake Bay] obliges the enemy to abandon his entrenched positions at Manassas, in order to hasten to cover Richmond and Norfolk. He *must* do this, for should he permit us to occupy Richmond his destruction can be averted only by entirely defeating us in a battle in which he must be the assailant. This movement if successful gives us the Capital, the communications, the supplies of the Rebels; Norfolk would fall; all the waters of the Chesapeake would be ours; all Virginia would be in our power; and the enemy forced to abandon Tennessee and North Carolina.[13]

McClellan's plan was one of operational offensive and tactical defense, taking advantage of Union asymmetric advantages in strategic mobility, artillery, and engineering to offset the relative weakness of the volunteer infantry. Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston warned of this strategy: "[McClellan will] depend for success on artillery and engineering. We can compete with him in neither. We must therefore…take the offensive."[14] In early June 1862 with the Army of the Potomac knocking at Richmond's gate, Lee advised President Davis on how the Confederates were being backed into a corner by McClellan's methodical approach: "McClellan will make this a battle of posts. He will take position from position, under cover of his heavy guns and we cannot get at him without storming his works."[15] In 1870, this same strategy would reap huge rewards for the Prussians as they used operational maneuver to place their armies in a tactically advantageous position vis-a-vie the French. The results were Prussian victories at Sedan, Belfort, Metz, and ultimately Paris.[16]

Historians continue to debate the political importance of capturing Richmond and other geographical objectives. Upon closer examination, nevertheless, one sees that particularly in the West, the Civil War was a contest over key geographical locations with significant transportation networks and hubs: Henry-Donelson, Nashville, Corinth, New Orleans, Vicksburg, Chattanooga, and Atlanta. The geographical reality presented by the distances involved made these transportation centers vital to the success of any Union invasion of the Confederacy.[17] These geographical locations were not centers of gravity per say, but their threatened capture did cause the armies on both sides to fight. In the east, at least to McClellan, Richmond was not an end unto itself, but rather a means to an end. McClellan was correct in his assumption that threatening the Southern capital would force the Confederates to fight. Throughout the Civil War, Confederate generals invariably interposed their forces between Richmond and advancing Union armies. Richmond was a visible representation of the political viability of the rebellion and the Confederate will to fight.[18] But even more than Richmond's political importance, McClellan noted its military and geographical significance at the mouth of the diagonal formed by the Shenandoah. Possession of Richmond would open up a wide front against the Confederates in the east, too wide in fact for the smaller sized Confederate armies to effectively defend. Contrary to some historical interpretations, this strategic rationale for the Peninsula campaign did not disappear when, in February 1862, Johnston retired from Manassas to positions behind the Rappahannock during the famous "Quaker Guns Incident." Later in the war Union Generals would discover just how difficult the "Washington" approach was: Burnside at Fredericksburg, Hooker at Chancellorsville, Meade at Mine Run, and Grant at the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, and Cold Harbor.[19]

Rise of Civil-Military Discord

So it was with sound strategic logic on March 11, 1862, that McClellan embarked on the Peninsula Campaign, although not before he learned by a chance reading in a newspaper that Lincoln had relieved him of his duties as general in chief. By this act, Lincoln relegated McClellan to command only that portion of the Army of the Potomac designated for the Peninsula. Instead of commanding all Union forces in Virginia and North Carolina, now outside of McClellan's span of control were some 35,000 troops under Banks and Fremont in the Shenandoah and an additional 38,000 designated for the defense of Washington.[20] The Union base of operations on the Peninsula, Fort Monroe and its garrison of 10,000 men under the command of the uncooperative General Wool, were also independent of McClellan's command. Lincoln's decision to relieve McClellan of his duties on the eve of a major campaign was amateurish. Now without a general-in-chief, the two Midwestern lawyers, Lincoln and Stanton, assumed strategic direction of the war.[21] Lincoln somehow reasoned that McClellan would be better able to focus his attention on the forthcoming campaign. Another blow to the unity of command of the operation was Lincoln's General War Order No. 3 which, instead of appointing a single commander for the operation, vaguely ordered "that the army and navy cooperate," thus ensuring the lack of joint collaboration so necessary to McClellan's strategy.

By any measure, the task set before McClellan was staggering. Lincoln and Stanton's meddling made it all the more so. At 35 years of age, George Britain McClellan found himself commanding the largest American army ever assembled up to that time. In a remarkable feat of transportation and logistics, from 27 February to 5 April 1862, 113 steamers and 276 other vessels transported 121,500 men, 14,592 animals, 1,150 wagons, 44 artillery batteries, as well as supplies and other materials required for such an army, from the outskirts of Washington to Fort Monroe on the James Peninsula.[22] The Union defeat at First Bull Run had occurred in July 1861, and in roughly six months time, McClellan had built this army essentially from scratch. That McClellan was able to organize, train, equip, and deploy such a large army in so short a period of time was a tremendous accomplishment by any standard.

McClellan's original concept had been to conduct amphibious pincer movements along the James and York rivers to bypass, cut-off, and destroy any Confederates barring the James Peninsula from Union advance.[23] To execute these amphibious maneuvers, McClellan had assigned McDowell's I Corps, but on the very day he arrived in Yorktown, McClellan found that the president had withdrawn McDowell's forces from his command. At any rate, the lack of joint command stemming from Lincoln's order, coupled with the navy's fear of shore batteries and the threat of the Confederate ironclad *Virginia*, prevented the plan's execution. Despite these difficulties, it was apparent to many observers at the time (Lincoln included) that McClellan should have immediately made a frontal assault on the ill prepared and undermanned Confederate defenses at Yorktown.[24] As it was, McClellan wasted an entire month preparing for a siege that never happened. Johnston, however, realizing that McClellan would eventually prevail by land or water, was compelled to withdrawal his army.

The wisdom of Lincoln's decision to hold back McDowell's I Corps of 35,000 men (fully one third of McClellan's striking power) from participation in the Peninsula and deploy it in the defense of Washington is hotly debated among historians. Of the 73,000 troops already mentioned above in the Shenandoah and the vicinity of Washington, only 18,000 admittedly second-rate troops were stationed in the defenses of Washington itself. However, McClellan's concept for the protection of Washington was not a static one but that of the mobile defense. Union forces placed on the various avenues of approach could concentrate and counter any movement by Confederate forces in the direction of Washington. The defenses of Washington contained an elaborate system of fortifications bristling with 408 guns, making it by 1862 the most heavily defended city on the face of the earth.[25] Moreover, the 73,000 Union troops remaining in Northern Virginia and the approaches to Washington numbered close

to the entire Confederate army in Virginia at that time. For his celebrated Valley Campaign, Jackson employed at most 18,000 men. Having failed to appoint a single commander for operations in the valley, and in the absence of McClellan, Lincoln played armchair strategist from Washington and attempted unsuccessfully to coordinate the efforts of Banks, Fremont, and McDowell. For the duration of the Peninsula campaign, McDowell's Corps would spend the entire time marching between the Valley and the Peninsula without aiding either Union effort. Jackson's Valley Campaign from May 1 to June 9, 1862, during which his small force stymied over 70,000 Union troops, ranks among one of the most effective economy of force measures ever executed.[26] In effect, through their own inexperience and McClellan's inability to gain their wholehearted support for his plan, Lincoln and Stanton had drastically diluted McClellan's operational concept of a hammer blow on the Confederacy.

If Lincoln had misgivings about the forthcoming campaign, he should have decided against it rather than giving his general half-hearted support thus diluting McClellan's confidence as well as his forces. If history is to fault McClellan, it should be for not gaining the full confidence of his commander in chief whom he derided as the "original gorilla," a characterization, in fact, borrowed from Stanton. The fact that Lincoln was in the difficult position of holding together a fragile political coalition ranging from Democrats to Radical Republicans never seems to have occurred to McClellan. The political realities of a democracy made it essential that Lincoln secure public support by answering the constituents' call for military results. His concern for Washington is understandable in light of what capture of the nation's capital by the Confederacy would have symbolized both domestically and abroad. Had McClellan explained the importance of properly training and equipping an army, Lincoln, the consummate politician, could have perhaps calmed the public clamor for action. McClellan could have alleviated Lincoln's concerns about the capital by explaining his defensive concept. Because of Lincoln's inexperience and McClellan's ego, this detailed crosswalk between political aims and military strategy tragically never occurred.

Historians have frequently lambasted McClellan for his inaction due to his claims that he was vastly outnumbered. Certainly these claims were outlandish and did much to harm McClellan's own cause and his relationship with his commander in chief. The question remains: did the watering down of McClellan's forces really matter? To put it differently, did McClellan have sufficient troop strength to *decisively* engage and defeat the enemy? Exacerbating the issue of numbers was Stanton's uncanny decision to halt the recruiting of volunteers on the very eve of the Peninsula Campaign with the inevitable prospect of heavy casualties due to battle and disease. Thus, the steady flow of replacements required to wage a decisive campaign was interrupted by Stanton's recklessness and lack of foresight.[27] Unfortunately, McClellan also happened to face the largest army *ever* fielded by the Confederacy, numbering at its zenith during the Peninsula campaign some 85,000 soldiers. By comparison, the army Lee marched into Maryland later in 1862 numbered 55,000. At the Confederate "High Tide" at Gettysburg, Lee fielded a total of 63,000. From July 1863 onward, the Army of Northern Virginia only shrank in size. By 1864, when Grant faced Lee in Virginia, the Army of Northern Virginia had suffered from three years of attrition warfare. With the loss of McDowell's Corps, McClellan simply did not have the manpower needed for a decisive campaign in 1862 given the preponderance of forces necessary for the eventual Union victory in 1865.[28]

By the time Grant took command in 1864, Lincoln had matured as a commander in chief. When Grant proposed practically to denude Washington's defenses of troops to form replacement units for the badly depleted regiments in the Army of the Potomac, Lincoln readily approved his request.[29] Not only did Grant have direct supervision over the Army of the Potomac, but also his position as general in chief gave him control over nearly all Union forces, enabling him to direct pressure on all fronts of the Confederacy, including the protection of Washington by dispatching General Phil Sheridan to deal with

the Confederate threat emanating from the Shenandoah Valley. He also had at least some degree of latitude in appointing and firing generals, a luxury not bestowed on the hapless McClellan. Lincoln, tempered by three years of war, imparted upon Grant a freedom of action and unity of command not experienced by McClellan. That Lincoln denied McClellan the same deference in 1862 was due to the unfortunate relationship that existed between the inexperienced commander in chief and his vainglorious general.

On to Richmond!

After Johnston's withdrawal from the defenses at Yorktown, McClellan advanced methodically up the peninsula and got within eight miles of Richmond. Realizing that the Confederates could not compete with Union artillery and engineering if McClellan put Richmond under siege, Johnston decided to counterattack. On May 31, 1862 Johnston launched his Confederate army on Union forces at Seven Pines. Johnston was seriously wounded during the battle, and subsequently President Davis appointed Lee as the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia. Although outnumbered, Lee acted decisively and aggressively attacked McClellan's army in a series of inconclusive and mismanaged battles (collectively called the Seven Days). While Lee attacked savagely, McClellan managed a fighting retreat that proved very costly to his enemy, finally ending his withdrawal at Harrison's Landing on the banks of the James. Losses on both sides were high with Union casualties at roughly 16,000 (including 6,000 missing) while the Confederates lost some 20,000 killed or wounded.[30] McClellan had inflicted higher casualties on the Confederates, but Lee had succeeded in his aim of driving the Army of the Potomac from the gates of Richmond. The Union would not come that close to Richmond again until the city's capture in 1865.

From Seven Pines to Harrison's Landing, McClellan had gotten what he wanted, a series of tactically defensive battles in which his opponent suffered disproportionately. Unfortunately, McClellan never capitalized on his success. On several occasions, the Confederates were thrown off balance through a combination of poorly coordinated staff work and failed assaults, presenting McClellan with excellent opportunities to counterattack. Instead of persevering in his drive toward Richmond, however, McClellan beat a hasty retreat in the face of danger. McClellan's main object seems to have been preservation of his army. In his strategic calculations, McClellan perhaps forgot that the ultimate purpose of the army was to fight and take casualties when warranted. Had McClellan demonstrated determined resoluteness by counterattack instead of withdrawal, it is likely that Lincoln would have reinforced this success. At a minimum, McClellan should have held his ground and maintained a strong defensive position somewhere closer to Richmond.

From its position at Harrison's Landing, a mere 25 miles from Richmond, the Army of the Potomac still remained a threat to the Confederate capital and kept Lee's army in a defensive posture. Toward the end of July 1862, Lincoln sent his newly appointed general in chief, General Henry Halleck, to confer with General McClellan at Harrison's Landing. McClellan characteristically requested reinforcements but also proposed that the Army of the Potomac sever Richmond from its vital rail communications to the south by operating against Petersburg along the James River line. As it happened, McClellan's proposal mirrored Grant's war ending operations two years later in 1864. This time, McClellan's exaggeration of the numbers facing him backfired, and Lincoln instead ordered McClellan to withdraw his army from the James and return to Washington. Lincoln and Halleck reasoned that if such numbers really opposed McClellan, further reinforcement would make no difference. Although McClellan's campaign from start to finish lasted only four months, by 1864 the "On to Richmond" mentality of 1862 was gone and a war hardened Lincoln now reconciled to attrition warfare, permitted Grant ten months to besiege Petersburg. McClellan later summed up this sad state

of affairs in his autobiography *McClellan's Own Story*: It was not until two years later that [the Army of the Potomac] found itself under its last commander at substantially the same point on the bank of the James. It was as evident in 1862 as in 1865 that there was the true defense of Washington, and that it was on the of the James that the fate of the Union was to be decided.[31] Lincoln's unfortunate decision to withdraw the Army of the Potomac based on McClellan's inflated estimates of his opponent put a premature end to the Peninsula Campaign had the effect of surrendering the strategic initiative to Lee.[32] The result was Second Manassas and Lee's first invasion of the North. Historian J.F.C. fuller remarked: "Thus ended probably the most interesting and instructive campaigns of the war."[33]

Conclusion

That history's verdict of McClellan remains generally unfavorable is due in part to Lincoln's deserved place in history as the great emancipator. Lincoln's subsequent iconography has placed him above criticism while his opponents are correspondingly vilified. Therefore, McClellan's place in the historical record owes as much to his Democratic candidacy against Lincoln in the election of 1864 as it does to any military failure. Although he was an excellent strategist, McClellan was no Marshall or Eisenhower when it came to civil-military relationships. A politically astute officer would have taken the time to educate his commander in chief fully gaining his confidence. McClellan's inflation of the numbers of troops opposing him and his lack of operational aggressiveness did more to undermine his standing in the eyes of Lincoln than did anything else. Historian T. Harry Williams was correct when he said, "More than anybody, he [McClellan] was responsible for failure of the Peninsula Campaign."[34] Although McClellan was clearly not the optimal battlefield commander, the Lincoln administration had also contributed to the failure by needlessly draining forces away form the main effort in order to defend the capital. Grant said of McClellan, "The test which was applied to him would be terrible to any man."[35] William Swinton, the first hand chronicler of the Army of the Potomac, provides perhaps the most balanced assessment of McClellan's ability as a commander:

> He was assuredly not a great general; for he had the pedantry of war rather than the inspiration of war. His talent was eminently that of the cabinet; and his proper place was in Washington as general-in-chief. Here his ability to plan campaigns and form large strategic combinations, which was remarkable, would have had full scope…But his power as a tactician was much inferior to his talent as a strategist, and he executed less boldly than he conceived…It was a misfortune that he [McClellan] became so prominent a figure at the commencement of the contest; for it was inevitable that the first leaders should be sacrificed to the nation's ignorance of war.[36]

Perhaps because of McClellan's place in the historical record and the ultimate success of the strategy of Grant and Sherman, the Peninsula campaign of 1862 has not received the attention it deserves. However, the view of some historians that McClellan somehow misjudged the nature of the Civil War as a limited war, and that Grant and Sherman were realists who correctly judged that the war's "Clausewitzian" totality is a mistaken one. McClellan's "conciliatory" strategy recognized precisely the element of escalation of violence so fully expressed by Clausewitz in *On War.* If we accept Clausewitz's statement that war is policy by other means, it follows that decisive battle brings with it the prospect of the greatest returns at the lowest costs in terms of time and resources. Violence is limited because, as much as possible, the tendency toward unlimited violence is held in check by the quick result. However, when decisiveness fails, pent-up aspirations built upon the expected result quickly lead to disappointment, frustration, and the "calculated and spontaneous response to deeper and baser cruelties" in the escalation of conflict designed to break the enemy's will to fight.[37] Escalation of

violence due to the interaction of military means and political ends is one of the enduring insights presented in Clausewitz's *On War*.[38]

The strategy that McClellan outlined in August 1861, in a letter to Lincoln and Stanton, was not in fact limited in scope and called for a sweeping invasion of the South.[39] Realizing, nevertheless, that the excessive use of violence would galvanize Southern resistance and make post conflict restoration of the Union difficult, McClellan urged that the war be prosecuted upon the "highest principles of Christian civilization." Lincoln never had a conversation with McClellan about shifting war aims and clearly did not abandon conciliation until the autumn of 1862 when tenacious Southern resistance finally convinced him of the need for a harsh war policy that included an emancipation of slaves as a source of labor supporting the Confederacy's economy, and thus its war effort.[40] Therefore, an evaluation of both military means and political ends reveals that McClellan's strategy was correct for winning the war in 1862. The strategy relied on meticulous preparation, offensive operations, and pitted Union strength against Confederate weakness.[41]

The Peninsula Campaign demonstrates how strategic concerns evolving from the interaction of political aims and military means often impose operational constraints. The Peninsula Campaign's failure had tremendous political and military consequences. It ended the North's attempt at a conciliatory policy offered by the prospects of a relatively quick, decisive victory. Thereafter, the Civil War transformed into a total, industrialized war in which attrition and exhaustion became the preferred strategies and came to define the "American Way of War" well into the twentieth century.[42]

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[1] William Swinton, *The Army of the Potomac*, New York, Smithmark, 1995, p. 100.
[2] Stephen E. Ambrose, *Halleck: Lincoln's Chief of Staff*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1962, pp. 5-6; Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon*, New York, Ticknor and Fields, 1988, pp. 9-10.
[3] Rowena Reed, *Combined Operations in the Civil War*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1993, pp. 34-36.
[4] Sears, *The Young Napoleon*, pp. 15-16, 25-26.
[5] *Ibid*., p. 48; *Reed*, pp. 34-36.
[6] Stephen W. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, New York, Da Capo Press, 1992, p. 245.
[7] *Ibid*., p. 169; Ethan S. Rafuse, "McClellan, von Clausewitz, and the Politics of War," *Columbiad*, Fall 1997, p. 7.
[8] Quoted in Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Civil War*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987, p. 126.
[9] *Ibid*., p. 203.
[10] Paul Kacskemeti, *Strategic Surrender: The Politics of Victory and Defeat*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), 7. On the later point, Kecskemeti proposed that World Wars I and II were essentially gigantic siege operations, "directed against the entire war-making strength of the enemy nation…in which decision was sought and attained by gradual attrition of the enemy's entire manpower and materiel reserves, and by choking off his supplies."
[11] The Battle of Nashville, which resulted in a Union victory, was the Civil War's only battle of annihilation. One could argue its decisiveness, however, since Confederate General Hood essentially destroyed the combat effectiveness of his own army several weeks earlier at the Battle of Franklin.
[12] Sears, *The Civil War Papers*, pp. 166-67.

[13] *Ibid*., p. 167.
[14] Quoted in J.F.C. Fuller, *A Military History of the Western World: From the Seven Days Battle, 1862 to the Battle of Leyte Gulf, 1944*, New York, Funk and Wagnalls, 1956, p. 24.
[15] Quoted in Reed, p. 175.
[16] Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War*, New York, Routledge, 1961, p. 7.
[17] Thomas J. Rowland, *George B. McClellan and Civil War History: In the Shadow of Grant and Sherman*, Kent, Kent State University Press, 1998, p. 205. Williamson Murray, "What Took the North So Long?," *The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, American Historical Publications, 1994.
[18] Rafuse, p. 3.
[19] By contrast, Grant's campaign from the Wilderness to Cold Harbor achieved nothing save the attrition of Lee's army. Using maneuver from the sea, McClellan brought Union forces to the same location on the bank of the James with relatively little loss of life.
[20] Swinton, p. 92. Also, George B. McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story*, New York, Charles and Webster, 1887, pp. 240-241. By Swinton's calculation McClellan left behind roughly 20,000 men in the vicinity of Warrenton and Manassas, another 18,000 in Washington, and an additional 35,000 under Banks in the Shenandoah.
[21] Clifford Dowdey, *The Seven Days: The Emergence of Robert E. Lee*, New York, The Fairfax Press, 1978, p. 36.
[22] George B. McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story*, New York, Charles and Webster, 1887, p. 238.
[23] Sears, *The Civil War Papers*, p. 215.
[24] *Ibid*., p. 234.
[25] Dowdey, p. 48.
[26] Historians have engaged in endless "nose counting" regarding the numbers of troops left by McClellan to guard Washington and its approaches. However, nearly all agree that Banks and Fremont had some 35,000 troops while McDowell had 35,000. It seems reasonable that an at least additional 20,000 troops were stationed in and around the defenses of Washington if not the 38,000 reported by McClellan.
[27] *General Order No. 33* reproduced in McClellan, p. 258. McClellan's criticism of this incident and of the "spasmodic" volunteer call-ups and the draft during the war as a whole are completely on target. The Union preference to raise new regiments rather than incorporate replacements into veteran ones had a dramatic impact on combat effectiveness.
[28] From the Wilderness to Cold Harbor, force ratios favored Grant over Lee roughly 1.8:1. At the siege of Petersburg, Union manpower advantage was a much as 2.3:1. By comparison, McClellan faced Johnston with a 1.7:1 advantage and by the time Jackson arrived to reinforce Lee, the Union advantage slimmed to 1.2:1.
[29] Bruce Catton, *A Stillness at Appomattox*, New York, Doubleday, 1953, pp. 57-58. Catton applauded this action describing it as "the far-reaching hand with which Grant hauled men out of the safe dugouts in Washington and brought them into the army."
[30] Fuller, p. 45.
[31] McClellan, p. 440.
[32] T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*, New York, Vintage Books, 1952, p. 146.
[33] Fuller, p. 46.
[34] *Ibid*., p.
[35] Quoted in Rowland, p. 166.
[36] Swinton, p. 228.
[37] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Peret, rev ed., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 77, 87-89.
[38] Rafuse, p. 4.

[39] Sears, *The Civil War Papers*, 71-74.
[40] Russell F. Weigley, "The American Military and the Principle of Civilian Control from McClellan to Powell," *The Journal of Military History*, October 1993, p. 34. See also Mark Gimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1995.
[41] These insights are from Rafuse.
[42] See Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1973. Weigley suggested that annihilation emerged as the quintessential American strategy with Grant during the Civil War. Weigley argued that Grant was the first to realize that Napoleonic decisiveness was no longer possible and therefore practiced strategy of annihilation in a "new dimension" by seeking total destruction of the enemy army through continuous engagement and attacks on the enemy army's supporting infrastructure. Consequently, Weigley concluded that strategy of annihilation became typically the "American Way of War" in subsequent conflicts. Borrowing from military historian Hans Delbruck, West Point's *Definitions and Doctrine of the Military Art* loosely states that a strategy of annihilation "seeks complete destruction of the enemy army." A strategy of attrition's aim is to "erode the enemy combat forces." A strategy of exhaustion is normally directed at the enemy's nonmilitary means and seeks to destroy the enemy's will and capacity to resist. In this sense, Grant's "trading casualties" with Lee in 1864 in more akin to attrition strategy and similar to Falkenhayn's concept at Verdun in the First World War. Sherman's March to the Sea and subsequent march through the Carolinas attacked the enemy's will and capacity to resist and were clearly a strategy of exhaustion. Historian Martin Blumenson and others differ from Weigley's observation that American strategic culture is essentially enemy oriented. Contrary to popular folkloric images of the American military hero, most successful American generals have not been chiseled in the likeness of Lee and Patton both seekers of decisive battle, but rather Grant, Eisenhower, and Westmoreland. Eisenhower's "Broad Front" strategy in World War Two was an area rather than enemy oriented strategy while circumstances relegated both Grant and Westmoreland to strategies of attrition. See Thomas E. Griess, ed., *Definitions and Doctrine of the Military Art*, New Jersey, Avery Publishing Group, 1985 and Martin Blumenson, "A Deaf Ear to Clausewitz: Allied Operational Objectives in World War II," *Parameters*, U.S. Army War College, Summer 1993.