George B. McClellan
The Disposable Patriot

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Preface

It is my firm belief that individuals who love liberty need to be exposed to the lives of great and good American patriots. The life of General George Brinton McClellan is worthy of just such attention, for it helps to remind us that truly great Americans are those who seek to do what is in the best interest of God and country.

In this biographical sketch of the famous Civil War general, George B. McClellan, I have attempted to portray his military genius, uprightness of conduct, and firm belief in an overruling Providence. These traits of character formed the cornerstone upon which McClellan's legacy was founded, and upon which young people of our day would do well to build.

This book is respectfully presented to the public in the hope that it will bless the lives of all who read it.

Michael J. McHugh
Arlington Heights, Illinois

Contents

Introduction

A certain degree of patience and persistence is required when studying the life of General George Brinton McClellan. After all, this military legend is unquestionably one of the most complex and controversial figures in all of American history. The difficulty in understanding the life of General McClellan is due, in part, to the fact that his career was at its height during the turbulent period of the War Between the States—a time when passions were commonly apt to distract the true nature of people and events.

McClellan, both during and after his life, has been subjected to a great deal of partisan analysis. This conservative and patriotic soldier has been both idolized as a military genius and condemned as a cowardly "do-nothing" failure. Those parties who identify with his view of the war tend to give him almost universal praise, while individuals who dislike his wartime politics and tactics commonly attempt to vilify his every thought and action. One of the goals of the following text is to set forth a balanced and true history of a great American without resorting to extremes.

In addition to the military exploits of George McClellan, this biography will delve into a careful analysis of his character and religious convictions. It is the view of the author that a clear understanding of any personality of history is not possible without first considering his spiritual principles and priorities. Virtually all references to George McClellan in print today either ignore or denigrate the profound influence that Christianity had upon his career.

At the age of thirty-four, George McClellan was suddenly named commander of the largest army in the Union and would soon thereafter be named supreme commander of all the Northern armies. These events, and the battles that followed, would thrust

General McClellan into a constant sea of conflict both on and off the battlefield.

A great deal of the public and private correspondence issued by General McClellan survived the war, and, consequently, provides students of history with a solid basis on which to evaluate his wartime experiences and attitudes. The vast majority of the material which comprises this biography is taken directly from the writings of McClellan himself as well as from other official government reports or records. Helpful commentary is also included from individuals who fought alongside General McClellan.

It was George Washington who wrote the following rule for living when he was a young man, "When a person does all that he can do to succeed in a noble endeavor, and yet fails, do not blame him for trying." As we will soon note, this wise proverb has not been applied to the man known as George Brinton McClellan. Historians have commonly enjoyed trashing the memory of this godly, principled military leader because he took on a noble and difficult endeavor while failing to live up to their expectations.

May Almighty God use this biography to honor the memory of a decent and talented soldier, who risked his career, his family's security, his reputation, and even his life to do what he felt the Lord had called him to do—preserve the Union and with it the God-given liberties of its citizens.

Chapter Two

Little Mac Enters West Point

1842–1846

Shortly after arriving at the Military Academy, George began to feel depressed and homesick. He wrote his parents in Philadelphia that he felt as alone and abandoned "as if in a boat in the middle of the Atlantic." Perhaps his young age accounted for some of his homesickness, but it is even more likely that his sadness was due to his lack of satisfaction with his performance during his initial marching and riding drills. He occasionally wrote about how disgusted he was to be the smallest cadet in his class and how he resented having to endure the harsh orders of smug upperclassmen who cared little if he succeeded.

Slowly, however, he began to gain confidence as his marching and physical prowess began to improve. By the opening of his academic or classroom studies in September 1842, George McClellan was beginning to feel at home at the Military Academy.

For most cadets, the first year of study at West Point was nothing less than agony. Each day presented nine or ten hours of intense study in advanced mathematics and French, along with two or three hours of drills and field exercises. George McClellan, however, was not your average cadet; his early education and gifted mind made the rigorous academic challenges at the Academy seem quite manageable. Before the end of Cadet McClellan's first year, many cadets and instructors were speculating that George would wind up at the top of his class.

Only eighty-three of the original 134 cadets, who comprised the class of 1846, survived the first year at West Point. Several notable classmates, such as Thomas J. Jackson and Ambrose P. Hill were barely able to pass the first year program due to their lack of early education and poor study skills.

Little Mac, as he was sometimes called, not only survived his first year at the Academy, he began to excel as a boy wonder. His excellent family background and training made him into a gentleman, and he soon began to mix with the more cultured cadets at West Point. It is interesting to note that Cadet McClellan seemed to prefer the companionship of cadets from the Southern states. "Almost all my associates—indeed all of them—are Southerners; I am sorry to say that the manners, feelings, and opinions of the Southerners are far, far preferable to those of the majority of the Northerners at this place," wrote McClellan to his brother John. Indeed, with the exception of the issue of a state's right to secede from the Union, there never was much to separate George McClellan's views from the average Southerner.

Cadet McClellan had only one primary gripe at this point in his West Point experience, and he was certainly not alone in his complaint—the food! Stale bread, hard peas, and tough meat were difficult for most cadets to endure. Many of the cadets came from prosperous farms or wealthy families and were not accustomed to "army chow." It was not uncommon for students to write home requesting apples, cheese, or anything fresh that could supplement the "trash" that they were confronted with each day in the mess hall.

West Point in the 1840s

During the second year of study, cadets completed more geometry and calculus classes in preparation for the advanced engineering and science courses that would confront them in their last two years at the Academy. French language studies continued for the primary purpose of equipping cadets to be able to read French military and engineering reports. Cadets also received two years of drawing instruction to prepare them for future work in the field of military and civilian engineering. Drawing was one of the few classes in which McClellan did not move to the top of his class.

Not surprisingly, the major theme of Academy life was order and discipline. Reveille could be heard at five in the morning. A drum was used to signal the key activities of each day. Even the call for church or chapel services, where attendance was required of faculty and cadets alike, was by drum. A long and detailed code of regulations "more rigorous than those of the book of Deuteronomy" faced the cadet daily. Each and every breach of Academy rules typically brought the erring cadet a demerit or two. More than a few cadets were sent home as a result of excessive demerits.

Cadets at West Point in the 1840's

The even-tempered and disciplined character of George McClellan kept him out of demerit trouble. Erasmus Keyes, an artillery instructor at the Academy, was so impressed with Little Mac that he wrote, "a pleasanter pupil was never called to the blackboard." Dabney Maury, one of McClellan's friends from Virginia, commented that his classmate

had "every evidence of gentle nature and high culture, and his countenance was as charming as his demeanor was modest and winning."

During his third year of study, McClellan was still chasing Charles Stewart for the top position in the class of 1846. Cadet McClellan complained to his mother that "I do not get marked as well for as good (or better) recitation, as the man above me … if I were already above him, I could distance him, I think." Little Mac determined to wind up at the top of his class before his fourth year began.

Many of the letters and comments that were written by George McClellan during this point in his life reveal a chronic tendency to dwell on the fact that life is not always fair or equitable. This character flaw, perhaps stemming from the prideful notion that he was destined for greatness, followed him much of his adult life. It sometimes made him interpret the comments or actions of others in a childish manner, as if every circumstance in life was merely calculated to help or hurt the interests of George McClellan, Jr.

His lack of maturity was also compounded by a superficial commitment to the Christian faith that was largely perfunctory. The church services he attended and his general outward moral tendencies were, in large measure, the result of good habits that were engraved in him while under his parents' direct care. McClellan himself admits that he occasionally came drunk to some of the special church services that were presented during the Christmas season at West Point. It was not until the age of thirty-two that George McClellan was brought to a fuller and deeper commitment to the Christian faith.

The fourth and final year quickly unfolded for the class of 1846. This year was commonly regarded by senior cadets as the most interesting part of their course of study at West Point. Considerable time was spent studying infantry and artillery tactics, ethics, constitutional and international law, logic, military engineering, and the science of war. George McClellan was extremely fond of studying the science of war and made good use of his French language skills to pore over popular French military journals.

During the spring of McClellan's final year, he began to think about what branch of military service would be appropriate for him. He was quite certain that he would graduate at or near the top of his class and would, therefore, have his choice of assignments. At this same time, rumors of war were beginning to move through West Point as government leaders in the United States began to argue with Mexico about the territory of Texas.

Although Cadet McClellan vowed to finish first in his class, he would have to settle for second place behind the gifted Charles Stewart. As the year drew to a close, fifty-nine cadets had survived the four-year ordeal at West Point. This was the largest graduating

The Texan Annexation of 1845

class in West Point's forty-four-year history. The backwards man from Virginia, Thomas Jackson, surprised everyone by finishing seventeenth in his class. Many of his classmates remarked that, "if we stay here another year, Old Jack will be head of the class."

The stern and earnest Jackson would have surprised many of his friends at West Point, if they had known what he told his sister at the time of graduation. He wrote her stating, "It grieves me to think that in a short time, I must be separated from amiable and meritorious friends whom an acquaintance of years has endeared to me by many ties." Jackson but expressed the feelings that were on the hearts of many of the class of 1846. Like most graduating classes from West Point, they were apprehensive because of the new duties and cares that loomed before their youthful faces. They were, however, excited on account of the opportunities that lay before them.

The graduates of 1846 would now take their military career, with all of its cares, into the ranks of the United States Army. Each graduate would receive the rank of brevet (brə•vēt′) second lieutenant until he could be formally commissioned into the regular army officer corps as openings became available.

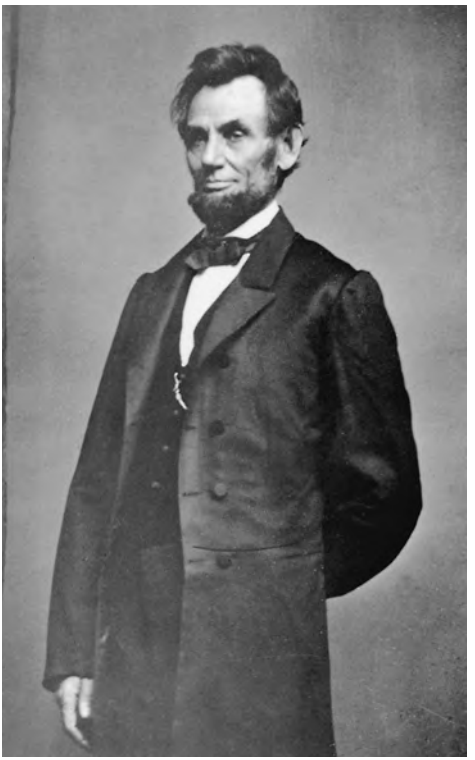
As valedictorian of the Dialectic Society, McClellan was privileged to present the keynote speech before this prestigious group on the eve of graduation in June 1846. During his address, he reminded the audience that literary pursuits were "essential to the man who would bear the character of an accomplished and polished gentleman …" The main theme of his speech, however, was preoccupied with admonitions regarding the dangers of the growing sectionalism that was beginning to gain momentum in the United States. He warned his listeners that:

> If party or sectional spirit should rise so high as to bring upon us the horrors of civil war,… let the army, united as one man, throw its weight into the scale, and the result cannot be doubtful.… Let us hope that the army will ever incline to the conservative party, to that one whose motto shall be 'The Union, one and indivisible'.

McClellan concluded his talk, as would Abraham Lincoln during the War Between the States, with a phrase from the Gospel of Mark— "A house divided against itself, must surely fall."

The thoughts of all Americans quickly turned to war in May 1846 as President James Polk requested that Congress declare the United States at war with Mexico. McClellan, after hearing the news, wrote to his sister Frederica,

> Hip! hip! Hurrah! War at last sure enough! Ain't it glorious!… Well, it appears that our wishes have at last been gratified and we shall soon have the intense satisfaction of fighting the crowd—mosquitoes and Mexicans.… You have no idea in what a state of excitement we have been here.



Abraham Lincoln

Like most youthful graduates from West Point, George McClellan would view the Mexican War as a gift from God, particularly designed to advance the military careers of needy junior officers. One thing was for sure: it was much easier to get promoted during wartime conditions than in times of peace.

It would only take a few weeks for George McClellan to secure a commission as second lieutenant in an engineering company—just the type of assessment desired by Little Mac as he readied himself for a nice little war in Mexico.

Chapter Five

The Railroad Man

1857–1860

While George McClellan was finishing up his military commission report during the last half of 1856, he was also hunting for a job in the civilian marketplace. Through the help of an old army buddy, G. W. Smith, and a wealthy New York lawyer named Samuel Barlow, McClellan secured a job as chief engineer for the Illinois Central Railroad. Mac started with the railroad in late January 1857 and moved to their central office in Chicago. Just one year after joining this company, engineer Mac was promoted to the position of vice president of the railroad.

When George McClellan was not occupied with his inspection tours of the railroad line, he would relax with a cigar at the Chicago Light Guard militia headquarters or write his friend Miss Ellen Marcy. Even though Mac was a successful business executive with a maid and personal chef, he knew that something was still missing. George wrote to his friend, Ellen, during this time confessing his loneliness:

> Can't you find among your acquaintances some quiet young woman of a moral turn of mind, who can sew on buttons, look happy when I come home, drive off my neuralgia, and make herself generally useful (including going to the market) who will come out on speculation…?

Quite naturally, McClellan missed the companionship of his military friends, almost as much as he did the companionship of a wife. He was barely in Chicago six months before he began to investigate the possibility of rejoining the military ranks. Mac watched the papers with interest as they wrote about the growing crisis in the Utah territory with the Mormons. Late in 1857, McClellan traveled to Washington for the express purpose of lobbying for the right to

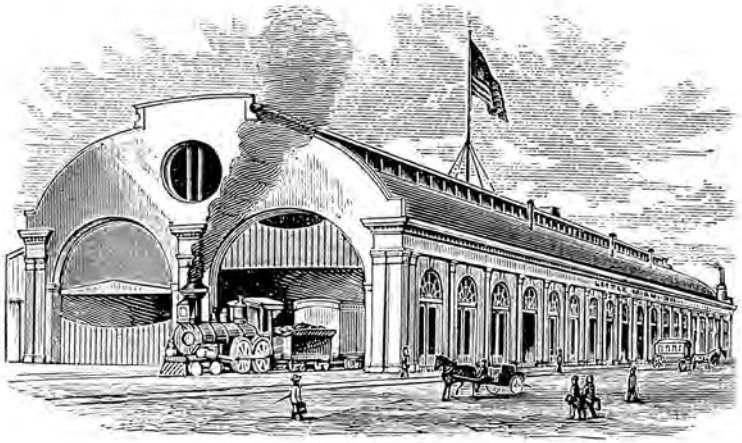
command one of the regiments that would be sent to suppress the Mormon rebellion.

During this same year, Mac would also be preoccupied with a serious financial crisis that affected his railroad called the Panic of 1857. A panic in the stock market caused many banks and security firms to close and caused general unrest in the economy. The administrative skills of George McClellan were put to the test during this crisis. He was under constant pressure to cut costs, lay off workers, and scale back operations in general. Unlike many railroads during this time, the Illinois Central Company was saved from bankruptcy due to the wise and levelheaded leadership of McClellan. By the end of 1858, the Illinois Central had weathered the financial storm and was able to resume dividend payments to its shareholders.

Mr. G. W. Smith, an old friend of McClellan, informed him that the board of directors was most unhappy with the prospect of his resigning from the railroad. They felt that the railroad needed a stable leadership base to reassure the public and the stockholders that their company was indeed moving forward. McClellan responded to this revelation by expressing his true sentiments to businessman and friend, Samuel Barlow:

> Railroading is all very well… but I like the old business better and if you can get me back into the service, I trust I do not flatter myself, when I say that you will make a pretty good soldier out of a bad railroad man.… Life is too short to waste bickering about cross ties and contracts—I cannot learn to love it. In God's name, give me all the help you can—I should die out here in another year.

Another factor in George McClellan's renewed interest in military life was due to the exploits of his former commander and friend, Randolph Marcy. In March 1858, Marcy led a thrilling rescue mission during the dead of winter to resupply three army regiments who were trapped in Utah. This expedition, which drew national attention, did much to rekindle his desire to put on the uniform of his country once again. For better or for worse, however, the military confrontation with the Mormons remained bloodless and



Railroad station in the mid–1800s

slowly faded away. As a consequence, the military officials at Washington elected not to enlist McClellan's support. He would have to settle for being a successful and wealthy businessman for at least a while longer.

Even though the railroad business was not a tremendous thrill to George McClellan, it certainly had its benefits. His steady income permitted him to purchase a large home on Chicago's lakefront. He generously agreed to share his home with an old West Point friend named Ambrose Burnside, who came to him in search of employment after having gone bankrupt. Mac not only opened his home to this gentleman and his wife, but found a position for "Burn" at the railroad. These men would become best friends as the years passed and would both become Union generals during the War Between the States.

McClellan also had the opportunity to become acquainted with a private detective named Allan Pinkerton who was under contract with the railroad to protect their property. This detective would eventually become active with the Union army during the Civil War as a secret service or intelligence officer. As a general in the Union army, McClellan would rely heavily upon the information gathered by Pinkerton's men. During Mac's railroad days, he also came into

contact with a middle-aged lawyer from Springfield named Abraham Lincoln, who handled several legal cases for the Illinois Central. For the most part, George McClellan was unimpressed with the lanky lawyer named Lincoln. The indifference that Mac felt may have been driven by the fact that the two men walked in very different social and political realms.

Ambrose Powell Hill

George McClellan was a strong supporter of the conservative Democratic cause and openly supported Stephen A. Douglas in his 1858 bid for the senatorial seat in Illinois. As you may guess, Douglas ran against Lincoln during this political contest. On one occasion, if not more, Mac loaned Douglas his private train car to travel to political events throughout Illinois. George McClellan recorded in his memoirs how he actually escorted Douglas to the location of one of his famous debates with Abraham Lincoln. During the debate, McClellan wrote, "Douglas's speech was compact, logical and powerful—Mr. Lincoln's disjointed, and rather a mass of anecdotes than of arguments. I did not think that there was any approach to equality in the oratorical powers of the two men." Not surprisingly, conservative George voted with Douglas during the campaign.

While Mac was keeping busy climbing up the corporate ladder, his long lost love, Ellen Marcy, was keeping more than busy trying to juggle her long list of would be husbands. By the middle of 1859, Ellen had received nine proposals for marriage, including the disastrous overture by McClellan some years before. One of these proposals, by West Point graduate Ambrose Powell Hill, was actually

accepted by Ellen Marcy during 1856, only to be later nullified by parental disapproval. It would take a strange twist of Providence to turn the "let's be friends and pen pals" relationship that existed between Mac and Ellen Marcy into a genuine love relationship.

A few months later, October 1859 to be exact, the hand of Providence did indeed bring the estranged couple into close contact once again. Ellen's dad, Randolph Marcy, was transferred to a new post at St. Paul, Minnesota, and he decided to take his family with him. As soon as Mac heard the news, he sent off an invitation for the Marcys to stay at his home a few days while they traveled through the Chicago area. Randolph Marcy had not seen McClellan in years, but they had kept in touch by mail. The fact that McClellan had left the service had only increased his suitability for marriage in the eyes of Mr. Marcy. This fact was shared with Ellen on more than one occasion. At any event, the Marcys were glad to have received McClellan's invitation and would plan to stop in Chicago for a short visit.

Ellen Marcy and Mac

When Ellen Marcy stepped down from the train on October 20, she noticed a very different George McClellan. He was more dignified and more mature in his new role as a prominent businessman with a mansion on Lake Michigan. It was also obvious to Ellen that one thing had not changed about old George: he still loved her intensely. He had never really loved anyone beside his dear Nelly.

Four days later, after a pleasant round of talks and walks, the Marcy family boarded Mac's private rail car bound for St. Paul. This

time, however, George climbed aboard himself and continued the courtship of Miss Nelly. He was not going to let her get away, not now, or ever. In less than 48 hours, on the way to St. Paul, George McClellan sought to unite himself to Ellen Marcy once again. He proposed and she accepted, with the full approval of her loving parents! It was, indeed, a miracle of God's grace that this couple could be united in Christian love.

The news of their engagement could hardly be described as shocking, but it was nevertheless received enthusiastically by virtually all. George McClellan's mother, who always had possessed the utmost respect for little Nelly, wrote her an encouraging letter stating in part: "Dear Miss Nelly, I know Mary and I need not now offer great protestations of affections, for, from the earliest times of our acquaintance, our hearts warmed to you, and you have ever since been thought and spoken of by us both, as one to be dearly loved."

As George McClellan returned to Chicago, he determined to write daily to his betrothed during the seven months of their engagement. Many of the letters that Mac wrote his bride were preserved and reveal a tremendous spiritual change in McClellan's view of life.

As McClellan contemplated marriage and life in general, he truly experienced a substantial evangelical regeneration that dramatically affected his worldview. From the days of his youth, Mac knew Jesus Christ to be the Savior. Now, for the first time, perhaps, he knew Jesus to be his personal Savior and Lord. God used the influence of Ellen Marcy to deepen his commitment to the Christian faith. Mac soon began to embrace a Bible-centered or Calvinistic view of faith. It was a faith that acknowledged the total sovereign control of Christ over every individual, nation, and event of history. No longer would George feel hopeless or indulge a pessimistic view of the future. His times, and Ellen's as well, were understood to be in God's Almighty hands—and that was just where he wanted them to be.

The wedding was held at Calvary Protestant Episcopal Church in New York City on May 22, 1860. The minister who performed the

service was Rev. Francis H. Hawks. He was joined by a host of high profile witnesses which included General Winfield Scott, a former governor of Connecticut, Joseph E. Johnston, and of course, A. P. Hill. After the reception, the happy couple boarded the train for Chicago. McClellan would later write that his wedding day was the best day of his life. He wrote his mother in the spirit of marital bliss with this encouraging news, "You can scarcely imagine how changed everything seems to me now.… I believe I am the happiest man that ever lived and am sure that I have the dearest wife in all the world." After twenty-five years of marriage, George McClellan would still be able to joyfully echo these words.

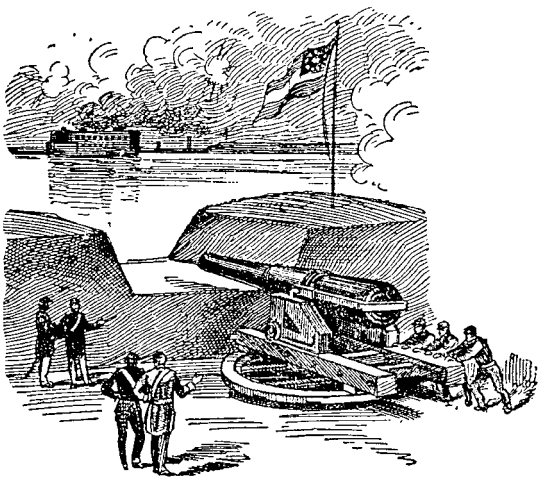
In August 1860, Mac decided to take advantage of a new position that was offered to him by longtime friend and railroad tycoon, Samuel Barlow. George and Nelly moved from Chicago to Cincinnati as George began to assume his new position as the president of the eastern division of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad. Mac rented a comfortable home in Cincinnati and was soon enjoying the challenges of a new job in a new city. As usual, McClellan soon made his share of enemies at the railroad by what he termed his "naturally defiant disposition." The childish habit of becoming obstinate in the face of criticism or opposition would continue to plague Mac during most of his adult life, although he did make noticeable progress over this character flaw after his conversion to Christ.

Ellen and George McClellan would only be blessed with slightly under one year together before the ugly spectacle of war would temporarily disrupt their happy home. With the recent election of Abraham Lincoln to the office of President, the sectional conflict deepened throughout the United States. George watched with disgust as the state of South Carolina seceded from the Union in late 1860. He also noted how the extremists in New England shamelessly fanned the flames of hatred and distrust in an effort to shame the South into abandoning its position on slavery and state sovereignty. Mac wrote his brother-in-law, who lived in Alabama, stating that he was still mildly optimistic that a political compromise could

be worked out between the North and the South. He felt that the only possible way to avoid civil war was to somehow neutralize the fanatical "ultras" among the abolitionists and the secessionist crowds. McClellan took the threat of civil war seriously enough to build a clause into his home's rental agreement that would "release me from the obligation in the event of war." George McClellan would always remain convinced that extremists in the North and South were responsible for the bloody tragedy known as the War Between the States.

Notwithstanding McClellan's view of who started the war and why, when push came to shove, Mac would cast his lot with the Union. In mid-April, when the South Carolina military fired on federally-controlled Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, McClellan told his longtime friend Fitz John Porter, "I throw to one side now all questions as to the past—political parties, etc.,…—the government is in danger, our flag insulted, and we must stand by it."

For a change, Mac would not have to go out looking for a military command. As one who was considered "chock full of big war science," George Brinton McClellan would soon have his pick of choice military positions within the Union army.



Fort Sumter

Chapter Six

A Call to Arms

1861

When Fort Sumter surrendered to the Confederate forces in South Carolina during April 1861, George McClellan was enjoying a prosperous career and a happy home life in Cincinnati. Few railroad administrators in the country could boast a larger salary than McClellan. His annual salary was $10,000, which was a significant sum for this period.

In addition to his financial and domestic blessings, George McClellan could hardly have relished the thought of waging war against many of his old classmates and comrades in the South. Mac, for instance, was already aware of the fact that his good friend from New Orleans, P. G. T. Beauregard, had recently been commissioned a general in the Confederate army. It was Beauregard who directed the South Carolina forces against the Federal troops stationed at Fort Sumter. Nevertheless, in spite of old friendships, wealth, and domestic tranquillity, Mac would not hesitate to pick up his sword.

For a patriot like George McClellan, there never was any question as to whether he would forsake worldly pleasure for the sake of his country. Like millions of Americans, North and South, he would willingly risk his life and fortune because he was convicted that the honor of his country was at stake. In McClellan's case, he also possessed a sincere personal conviction that he was called of God to save the Union, and with it, Christian civil order in North America.

During the opening days of the war, McClellan received official contacts from the states of Pennsylvania, New York, and Ohio requesting him to take command of their state militias. Although Mac had a difficult time choosing between these three posts, he soon took the position of major general of the Ohio volunteers. Within a matter of days, General McClellan also received a commission in the regular army from General Winfield Scott in Washing-

ton which confirmed him as major general of the Department of the Ohio. This command eventually included about 20,000 volunteers from the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, far-western Pennsylvania, and a large portion of western Virginia.

On April 15, Abraham Lincoln called for a volunteer force of 75,000 men to invade the Southern states in the hopes of putting a quick end to the Confederacy. This act caused four more Southern states, including Virginia, to secede from the Union. It was President Lincoln who determined to make his stand at Fort Sumter and insisted that this Federal fort be resupplied, if necessary, by force. For better or worse, the Confederate forces "took the bait" and forced the Federal troops to evacuate Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. The firing on Fort Sumter began one of the saddest chapters in American history, as Americans would soon be killing each other wholesale.

Major General McClellan

Not surprisingly, the incident at Fort Sumter and the actions of the Lincoln administration soon turned the peaceful states into great camps preparing for war. General McClellan worked closely with the governor of Ohio and the War Department in Washington in an attempt to mobilize, equip, and train the thousands of Union soldiers that would be needed to defeat the Confederate forces. One of the chief difficulties that McClellan faced during this period of organization stemmed from the fact that many of the experienced officers in the regular army had enlisted in the Confederate cause. Consequently, General McClellan would not be able to secure the

support of skilled soldiers like Robert E. Lee, Joseph Johnson, James Longstreet, A. P. Hill, and P. G. T. Beauregard. This fact made it doubly difficult for General McClellan to quickly and adequately prepare his volunteers for combat duty.

The newly-appointed head of the Department of the Ohio, George McClellan, would also soon learn of the pathetic condition of the state armories. McClellan inspected the military equipment and arms that were in storage in the Ohio armories and found little more than a few tired cannons and piles of worn-out rifles and field gear. As a result, Major General McClellan sent a detailed requisition to Washington for thousands of new uniforms, cannons, rifles, and tents. Slowly but surely, the equipment of war began to stream into the new military camps that were established in Ohio by General McClellan.

As any experienced commander can testify, it takes more than good equipment and arms to make a successful army. George McClellan, in particular, was keenly aware that his mob of new recruits needed a steady dose of good discipline and training before they would be prepared for battle. McClellan wrote his first general order to his new volunteer soldiers from the city of Columbus, Ohio, on April 25, 1861, stating the following:

> *To Ohio Volunteer Militia*
>
> *General Order, Head Quarters, Ohio Volunteer Militia*
> *No. 1[Columbus] April 25th, 1861*
>
> *By the direction of the Governor of Ohio, the undersigned hereby assumes command of the Ohio Volunteer Militia mustered into the service of the United States.*
>
> *In doing so, he desires to call the attention of the officers and men to the fact, that discipline and instruction are of as much importance in war as mere courage. He asks for and expects the cheerful cooperation of the entire command in his efforts to establish discipline and efficiency, the surest guarantees of success.*
>
> *Until the organization is perfected, many inconveniences must be endured, for the sudden [urgency], which has made it necessary to call*

so largely upon your patriotism, has rendered it impossible for the authorities to make, in an instant, the requisite preparation.

We do not enter upon this war as a pastime, but with the stern determination to repel the insults offered to our flag, and uphold the honor and integrity of our Union.

In the coming struggle, we have not only battles to fight, but hardships and privations to endure, fatigue to encounter.

The General Commanding does not doubt, that the spirit which has prompted you to leave your homes and those most dear to you, will support you firmly in the future.

He asks your willing obedience and full confidence—having obtained that, he feels sure that he can conduct you to glory, and to victories that will ensure safety to your homes and lasting response to the country.

Geo. B. McClellan
Major General O.V.M.

It was the intention of General McClellan to secure every advantage for his growing army, and it was in that spirit that he secretly sent a letter to the Chicago-based private detective, Allan Pinkerton. McClellan wrote:

To Allan Pinkerton

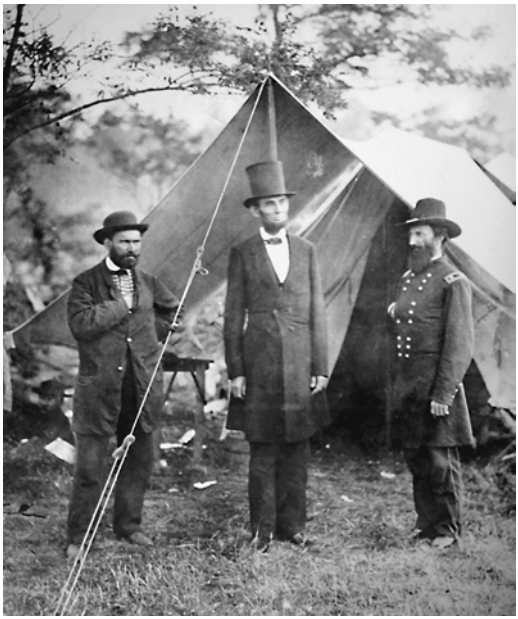
Allan Pinkerton, Esq.

Dear Sir:—Columbus, Ohio, April 24, 1861.

I wish to see you with the least possible delay, to make arrangements with you of an important nature. I will be either here or in Cincinnati for the next few days—here to-morrow—Cincinnati next day. In this city you will find me at the Capitol, at Cincinnati at my residence. If you telegraph me, better use your first name alone. Let no one know that you come to see me, and keep as quiet as possible.

Very truly yours,

Geo. B. McClellan
Maj. Gen'l Comd'g Ohio Vols.



Allan Pinkerton, President Lincoln, and General John A. McClernand

The reason for the secrecy was that McClellan was poised to offer Pinkerton the directorship of his intelligence-gathering operations. Mac well understood the importance of good military intelligence to his future command strategies. For obvious reasons, the general did not wish to reveal his intentions to utilize the services of this well-known detective for fear it would compromise his future effectiveness as a spy. As the war expanded, General McClellan would eventually permit Pinkerton to run a vast intelligence agency and spy ring in an effort to obtain important military intelligence, such as Southern troop strengths and proposed battle plans.

As it turned out, the confidence that McClellan placed in Pinkerton's intelligence work was consistently misplaced and extremely damaging to his efforts as a field commander. Pinkerton consistently estimated Confederate troop strengths at twice their actual size. This misleading intelligence caused McClellan to approach every battle with undue caution and ultimately gained him the undeserved reputation of being an indecisive bumbler.

While General McClellan sought to put together an effective intelligence team, he continued to oversee the training and equipping of his troops. As McClellan prepared to move his headquarters to the city of Cincinnati, he brought Major Randolph Marcy into

his administrative circle as paymaster and chief-of-staff. Major Marcy provided McClellan with a great deal of assistance and moral support during his turbulent period as a Union general.

By the end of May 1861, McClellan was in a position to send a few of his better trained and equipped volunteer regiments against the small Confederate forces that occupied western Virginia. A brief skirmish was fought at the tiny town of Philippi on June 3 and resulted in the total rout of the Confederate positions. Six hundred ill-equipped Confederate soldiers fled their emplacements in Philippi and ran away from the Union troops shortly after the opening volley of cannon fire. These unseasoned Southerners were apparently disinterested in facing cannons and modern rifles with little more than old flint-lock pistols and rusty muskets. When the news of this engagement reached General McClellan in Cincinnati, he was pleased to hear about the Confederate rout known as the "Philippi Races." This was the first land battle of the war and the first victory for General McClellan.

Although the news of this first Union victory sent smiles across the faces of many in Washington, it was far less appreciated in Richmond. General Robert E. Lee sent his own adjutant, Brigadier General Robert S. Garnett, to reorganize and reinvigorate the Confederate forces in western Virginia. The Southern cause would be greatly hindered if western Virginia fell under the control of Union forces, and Lee was determined to fight when and where he could.

On June 14, the stern General Garnett reached the mountain regions of Virginia. He quickly split his forces into two separate regiments. One of these regiments, consisting of about 1,000 men, was sent to a key mountain pass on the western edge of Rich Mountain. The remaining troops, about 4,000 in all, were sent to confront the Union garrison at Philippi. The Confederate forces under Garnett slowly moved into their positions and were dug in by June 20th.

The same day that Garnett's troops dug in around Philippi and Rich Mountain, McClellan decided that it was time for him to

travel by train to the mountains of western Virginia. On June 20, Mac kissed his wife Nelly good-by and headed for the battlefield.

A few days later, Nelly, who was six months pregnant, received a letter from her husband describing how his journey to the front was "one continual ovation all along the road and at every station where we stopped." He went on to add, "crowds had assembled to see the 'Young Napoleon'. Gray-headed old men and women; mothers holding up their children to take my hand, girls, boys, all sorts, cheering and crying, God bless you! I never went through such a scene in my life and never expect to go through such another one."

On June 25, 1861, Major General McClellan wrote his men upon arriving at his new field headquarters at Grafton, Virginia. He reminded his troops to…

> Bear in mind that you are in the country of friends, not of enemies; that you are here to protect, not to destroy. Take nothing, destroy nothing, unless you are ordered to do so by your General officers. Remember that I have pledged my word to the people of Western Virginia, that their rights in person and property shall be respected. I ask every one of you to make good this promise in its broadest sense. We come here to save, not to upturn. I do not appeal to the fear of punishment, but to your appreciation of the sacredness of the cause in which we are engaged. Carry with you into battle the conviction that you are right, and that God is on your side.
>
> Your enemies have violated every moral law—neither God nor man can sustain them. They have without cause rebelled against a mild and paternal Government; they have seized upon public and private property; they have outraged the persons of Northern men merely because they loved the Union; they have placed themselves beneath contempt, unless they can retrieve some honor on the field of battle. You will pursue a different course. You will be honest, brave, and merciful; you will respect the right of private opinion; you will punish no man for opinion's sake. Show to the world that you differ from our enemies in the points of honor, honesty and respect for private opinion, and that we inaugurate no reign of terror where we go.

> Soldiers! I have heard that there was danger here. I fear now but one thing—that you will not find foemen worthy of your steel. I know that I can rely upon you.
>
> *Geo. B. McClellan*
> *Major Gen'l Commanding*

As the days of early July dawned upon the Union forces, McClellan was busy making final preparations for his offensive against the Confederate forces. He issued his plans to his field commanders, which included an attack with 7,000 soldiers and light artillery against the enemy that was dug in around Rich Mountain. His major objectives were to route the enemy at Rich Mountain while pressing on to occupy the town of Beverly, which was located in the rear of the Confederate forces under Garnett. This plan was intended to cut off and entrap the entire force of Confederates in western Virginia. McClellan was confident that he could defeat the enemy if he could catch them in his "net." "I expect to thrash the infamous scamps before a week is over—all I fear is that I can't catch them!" exclaimed the young Union general.

As McClellan moved his troops into position, he wrote his wife a letter on July 5 that revealed his understandable nervousness. He wrote, "I realize now the dreadful responsibility on me—the lives of my men—the reputation of my country and the success of our cause.… I shall feel my way and be very cautious, for I recognize the fact that everything requires success in my first operations. You need not be at all alarmed as to the result—God is on our side."

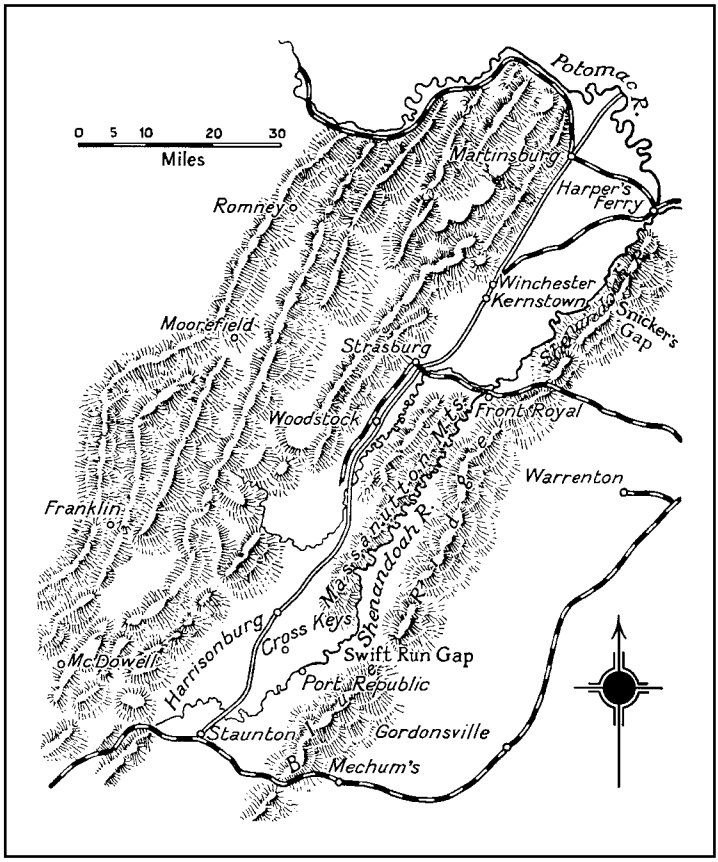
On July 11, McClellan sent a brigade of infantry under the command of General Rosecrans to the enemy's left flank around Rich Mountain. As soon as Rosecrans's men engaged the Confederate troops led by Colonel John Pegram, the noise of battle would signal McClellan to attack with two brigades in the enemy's front. Heavy rains, however, delayed the assault led by General Rosecrans and also led to a great deal of confusion as McClellan was only able to receive sporadic reports from the field. As a consequence, the frontal assault planned by McClellan was postponed until July 12. News

from the fighting around Rich Mountain finally reached the camp of Commander McClellan and was, in fact, better than expected.

The success of Rosecrans's engagement on the Confederates' left flank was nearly complete and the enemy was in disarray. By July 13, the battered Confederates under Colonel Pegram forwarded a message to General McClellan which announced their willingness to surrender. Two thirds of Pegram's original force of 1,300, including 600 officers, were either killed or eventually surrendered. When news of the rout reached the Confederate commander Garnett, who was with his forces at Laurel Hill several miles away, he immediately gave orders for his men to evacuate their positions. Garnett knew that a speedy retreat was the only opportunity that his troops had to avoid being entrapped and destroyed.

As the Confederates began to retreat, McClellan ordered a brigade under General Morris to pursue the enemy in the hopes of destroying at least a portion of their forces. A sharp skirmish was fought on July 13 between the Union forces and the rear guard of General Garnett's men. During this brief but bloody engagement, General Garnett fell mortally wounded as he sought to rally his beleaguered host.

The following day, McClellan telegraphed Washington to inform General Winfield Scott of the good news that "Our success is complete and secession is killed in this country." Efforts were naturally made by McClellan's men to cut off the main body of Garnett's forces before they could reach the safety of the Shenandoah Valley. Poor coordination and general inexperience, however, caused the final offensive against the retreating Confederates to be largely ineffective. General Robert E. Lee would lose the western part of Virginia to the Union forces, but would salvage a great number of the troops and equipment that were sent into this region. This fact, in Lee's view, was but a small consolation in light of the military and political implications resulting from the loss of a portion of his beloved Virginia. Lee himself would make one last attempt in late July 1861, to reclaim western Virginia. His efforts, however, would not be any more effectual that those of his predecessor. In less than



Map of the Shenandoah Valley

two years, the pro-Union minded people of western Virginia would separate to become the new state of West Virginia.

Almost overnight, the thirty-four year old general from Philadelphia, George Brinton McClellan, had become the first genuine hero of the Union army. The North was hungry for good news from the battlefield, and the small but strategic victory that McClellan's forces obtained in western Virginia was received with great enthusiasm—even euphoria. The United States Congress passed a joint resolution that expressed the thankfulness of the nation for the military achievements of George McClellan and his army.

President Lincoln was clearly pleased with the reports of this victory that were personally dropped off to him by Major Randolph Marcy. A number of Confederate battle flags were also presented to the President which were captured during the fighting in Virginia. Randolph Marcy also paid a visit to the general-in-chief Winfield Scott, informing him of the desire that McClellan had to make "a movement through Kentucky, Western Tennessee and Northern Alabama which would be decisive of the war." As General Scott and President Lincoln contemplated their next military offensive against the South, which they hoped would bring the war to a swift close, the Confederate army was preparing to meet them with great determination.

In the middle of July 1861, McClellan received a communication from Winfield Scott which outlined a plan for the next major, and he hoped, decisive battle. This plan called for McClellan to move east into the Shenandoah Valley so as to combine forces with General Robert Patterson's troops for an all out attack upon the Confederate forces under Joe Johnston. During the same time frame, a large Union army under the command of Irving McDowell would leave their camp at Washington and march twenty-five miles to attack the Southern forces at Manassas Junction.

This plan, and the naive optimism that prompted it, would soon be smashed by the clever maneuverings of Mac's old friends P. G. T. Beauregard and Joseph Johnston. While McDowell's army moved toward Manassas Junction on July 20, General Joe Johnston quietly moved most of his army from the Shenandoah Valley to join his forces with General Beauregard, who was stationed at Manassas. As a consequence, the combined Confederate forces would be ready to meet the attack of the Union army under McDowell.

The confident Union army attacked the Confederate forces, who were dug in along an area known as Bull Run. The first wave of infantry managed to press the Confederates all along the line during the morning of July 21. At many points on the battlefield, the Southerners were beginning to loose ground, and General Beauregard feared that his men would break and run. Suddenly, at a strate-

gic point in the Confederate line, an experienced line officer named Thomas J. Jackson appeared out of the smoke to call for his brigade to stand fast. This brigade responded to the call and charged upon the exposed Union troops with bayonets and wild cheers. Minutes later, the reinforcements commanded by Joseph Johnston arrived on the battlefield and began to charge upon the Union line with reckless abandon. By day's end, the entire army under McDowell was in full retreat back to Washington. Hundreds of valuable rifles and several cannons fell into the hands of the victorious Confederates, along with vast amounts of food and equipment.

The Battle of Bull Run or First Manassas totally demoralized the Northern army. For days after the battle, thousands of Union soldiers slowly made their way back to their capital at Washington. The bright hopes of Union victory and a quick end to the war were forever dashed in pieces. On the other hand, the South was elated at this turn of events. The Battle of Bull Run would create a host of heroes within the Confederacy. It would establish Thomas J. Jackson in particular as a genuine military hero and earn him the name of "Stonewall" for his courageous stand before the charging enemy.

The Union Secretary of War Cameron found it convenient to blame most of the defeat at Bull Run upon General McDowell, who was quickly released from command. The North required a new leader who could reorganize their broken army. A telegram was sent on July 22 to the only man who was considered qualified to rebuild the Union forces surrounding Washington, and that man was none other than George Brinton McClellan. The telegram received by Mac at the town of Beverly read, "Circumstances make your presence here necessary. Charge Rosecrans or some other general with your present department and come hither without delay."

While General McClellan sped his way toward Washington, the capital was already bracing for what many Northern leaders felt was a probable attack by the Confederates. Pure chaos reigned in the once peaceful city of Washington as leaders throughout the North prayed for someone to come and set things in order.