

Chapter Thirty

“Go Forward, and Give Us Victories”:

From the Mud March to Gettysburg

(January-July 1863)

Late 1862 and early 1863 found Lincoln and his constituents once again mired in the Slough of Despond. “At no time during the war was the depression among the people of the North so great as in the spring of 1863,” according to Maine Congressman James G. Blaine.¹ Another Representative from Maine reported that in January “nine tenths of the men in Washington, in Congress & out, said it was no use to try any further.”² As 1862 drew to a close, George William Curtis remarked that everything “is very black,” and journalist Benjamin Perley Poore noted that the year was ending “somewhat gloomily, and no one appears hopeful enough to discern dry land upon which our storm-tossed ark of State may rest, while many think that we are drifting – drifting – drifting – toward a cataract which may engulf our national existence.”³ “Exhaustion steals over the country,” Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs observed. “Confidence and hope

¹ James G. Blaine, Twenty Years of Congress: From Lincoln to Garfield (2 vols.; Norwich, Connecticut: Henry Bill, 1884-86), 1:488.

² Frederick Pike to J. S. Pike, Machias, 11 October 1863, Pike Papers, University of Maine.

³ George William Curtis to Charles Eliot Norton [North Shore, New York], 28 December 1862, George William Curtis Papers, Harvard University; Washington correspondence, 31 December 1862, Boston Evening Journal, 2 January 1863.

are dying.”⁴ In January, Henry B. Stanton confessed that he “was more gloomy than ever,” for it seemed clear to him that the nation was “rapidly going to destruction” and was “never so badly off as at this moment.” He told Susan B. Anthony that Radicals like Owen Lovejoy and John P. Hale “have pretty much given up the struggle in despair. You have no idea how dark the cloud is which hangs over us.”⁵ The following month, William O. Stoddard wrote from the White House that “the growth of a discontented spirit in portions of the North” was more “ominous than anything else.”⁶

That discontent led to sharp criticism of Stanton, whom Lincoln defended repeatedly. To those who suggested that Nathaniel P. Banks be made secretary of war, Lincoln tactfully replied: “General Banks is doubtless a very able man, and a very good man for the place, perhaps; but how do I know that he will do any better than Stanton? You see, I know what Stanton has done, and think he has done pretty well, all things considered. There are not many men who are fit for Stanton’s place. I guess we may as well not trade until we know we are making a good bargain.”⁷ To other critics of the war secretary Lincoln cited Democratic newspapers which had been denouncing Stanton: “See how these anti-war journals hound him on – they are my bitter enemies also, and shall I take advice of them about the reconstruction of my cabinet?”⁸

⁴ Montgomery Meigs to Ambrose E. Burnside, Washington, 30 December 1862, OR, I, 21:917.

⁵ Henry B. Anthony to Gerrit Smith, New York, 23 January 1863, May Anti-Slavery Manuscript Collection, Cornell University; Stanton to Susan B. Anthony, 16 January 1863, in Ida Husted Harper, The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony (3 vols.; Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill, 1898-1908), 1:226.

⁶ Washington correspondence, 16 February, New York Examiner, 19 February 1863, in Michael Burlingame, ed., Dispatches from Lincoln's White House: The Anonymous Civil War Journalism of Presidential Secretary William O. Stoddard (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 137.

⁷ William O. Stoddard, “White House Sketches No. 12,” New York Citizen, 12 November 1866, in Stoddard, Inside the White House in War Times: Memoirs and Reports of Lincoln's Secretary, ed. Michael Burlingame (1890; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 194.

⁸ Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 11 March, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 16 March 1863.

DISCONTENT: PRESIDENTIAL POPULARITY EBBS

Lincoln's own popularity also sagged. David Davis thought that if it were peacetime, the administration "would be the most completely broken down one, that was ever known."⁹ From Washington, Richard Henry Dana reported that the "lack of respect for the Prest, in all parties, is unconcealed," and in nearby Baltimore, John Pendleton Kennedy asked: "Is there any thing in history to parallel the extraordinary dilemma we are in? The finest army of brave men almost ever collected in one body: the most willing and noble people that ever sustained a good cause – a propitious season for operations – for we never had had so beautiful a winter as this – abundance of all kinds of munitions; every thing necessary for success – and all this mighty equipment brought to a still-stand, checkmated, not by the superior vigor or skill of the enemy, but by the ineptitude of the cabinet! What a contemptible exhibition of jealous factions in the Senate, what incapacity in the General in Chief, what trifling with this tremendous emergency in the President!"¹⁰ After a visit to Missouri, Lincoln's friend Hawkins Taylor of Iowa reported that there was a "general feeling [of] contempt entertained by the people of the West towards the administration for its want of vigor" as well as "a widespread feeling of despair for the success of our Army and a strong disposition for the North West to unite and take care of herself."¹¹

⁹ David Davis to W. W. Orme, Washington, 16 February 1863, Orme Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁰ Dana to [J. K. Schubert?], Washington, 23 February 1863, Dana Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; John Pendleton Kennedy to Robert C. Winthrop, Baltimore, 4 January 1863, Winthrop Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

¹¹ Hawkins Taylor to Lyman Trumbull, Washington 26 January 1863, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

Constituents mused to Ohio Senator John Sherman that while Lincoln probably meant well, it was not clear that he “has ability sufficient for this crisis” and noted that the “people are beginning to denounce our President as an imbecile – made on too small a scale for his position.”¹² One Buckeye expressed the fervent wish that “Lincoln had the military genius, the firmness and decision of Napoleon the first.”¹³ A former Whig congressman from Ohio despairingly warned that “unless something is soon done to change the current of events our national destruction is inevitable. The multiplicity of Executive blunders coupled with the failures of our armies are producing the effect upon our people which is fast driving them to a sort of hopeless indifference.”¹⁴ Murat Halstead of the Cincinnati Commercial charged that “the foolish, drunken, stupid Grant” could not “organize or control or fight an army.” Even worse, in Halstead’s view, was Lincoln’s “weak, puling, piddling humanitarianism” that kept him from authorizing the execution of deserters.¹⁵ The president, he declared, was little more than “an awful, woeful ass” and a “damned fool.”¹⁶ A treasury official in New Orleans feared that Lincoln was “too good” and wished to see him replaced with a “strong war man” like

¹² Daniel Hamilton to Sherman, Milan, Ohio, 25 December 1862, and S. S. L’Hommedieu to Sherman, Cincinnati, 18 January 1863, John Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

¹³ Davis Chambers to John Sherman, Zanesville, 15 November 1862, John Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁴ Lewis D. Campbell to William B. Campbell, 20 January 1863, Campbell Family Papers, Duke University, in William C. Harris, “Conservative Unionists in 1864,” Civil War History 38 (1992): 303.

¹⁵ Halstead to Chase, Cincinnati, 19 February 1863, in the Cincinnati Enquirer, 28 September 1885.

¹⁶ Halstead to John Sherman, 8 February 1863, Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

Benjamin F. Butler.¹⁷ Also expressing the wish that Ben Butler had been elected president instead of Lincoln, Thurlow Weed told John Bigelow: “We are in a bad way.”¹⁸

Even allies in Illinois were becoming critical. Dismissively, Joseph Medill of the Chicago Tribune wrote that “Lincoln is only half awake, and never will do much better than he has done. He will do the right thing always too late and just when it does no good.”¹⁹ In Quincy, Jackson Grimshaw growled that the administration “is kind to all but its friends. It has dug up snakes and it can[']t kill them, it has fostered d[amne]d rascals & crushed honest men. If it were not that our country, our homes, our all is at stake . . . Lincoln, Baker, Bailhache Edwards etc. might go to -----.”²⁰

Elsewhere it was also becoming popular to condemn the “imbecile Administration.”²¹ A Rhode Island literary connoisseur complained that the administration had been “so incapable, so prodigal, so ineffective, that ambitious & selfish partisans, & disloyal men, gained a ground for organisation of parties.”²² In February, the abolitionist Jane Grey Swisshelm complained that “when committees wait upon the President to urge strong measures, he tells them a story. A delegation waited on him some time ago, on important business, and he told them four anecdotes! A Western Senator visited him on official business and reciprocated by telling an anecdote the

¹⁷ George S. Denison to James Denison, New Orleans, 3 January 1863, 6 September 1864, George S. Denison Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁸ Weed to John Bigelow, Albany, 16 January 1863, Bigelow, Retrospections of an Active Life (5 vols.; New York: Baker & Taylor, 1909-13), 1:596.

¹⁹ Medill to Elihu B. Washburne, Chicago, 14 January 1863, Elihu B. Washburne Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁰ Jackson Grimshaw to Ozias M. Hatch, Quincy, 12 February 1863, Hatch Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

²¹ Bradford R. Wood to George G. Fogg, Copenhagen, 11 February 1863, Fogg Papers New Hampshire Historical Society.

²² Judith Kennedy Johnson, ed., The Journals of Charles King Newcomb (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 1946), 192 (entry for 23 February 1863).

President had not before heard. After he rose to leave Mr. Lincoln remarked: ‘Wait a moment; I want you to give me the notes of that story!’ The notes were given, carefully taken down and filed away on his desk.’²³

Republican congressmen also disdained Lincoln. In January, they laughed aloud at the reading of a presidential message and declined to refer it to a select committee.²⁴ Noah Brooks reported that Lincoln “does not have the cordial and uniform support of his political friends.” Though they might agree with him on issues of emancipation, confiscation, and the suspension of habeas corpus, nonetheless there ran beneath this superficial harmony “an undercurrent of dissatisfaction and an open manifestation of the spirit of captious criticism.” Brooks frequently heard “Republicans abuse the President and the Cabinet, as they would not allow a political opponent to do.” With dismay, Brooks also witnessed “Republicans, who would vote for sustaining the President in any of his more important acts, deliberately squelch out a message from the White House, or treat it with undisguised contempt.”²⁵ In late January, William P. Cutler of Ohio confided to his diary that “all is dark and it would almost seem that God works for the rebels and keeps alive their cause. . . . How striking is the want of a leader. The nation is without a head.”²⁶ Henry L. Dawes concurred, telling his wife that “[n]othing lifts as yet the dark cloud which rests on our cause. The Army is palsied, the government imbecile, and the

²³ Washington correspondence, 10 February, St. Cloud, Minnesota, Democrat, 26 February 1863, in Arthur J. Larsen, ed., Crusader and Feminist: Letters of Jane Grey Swisshelm, 1858-1865 (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1934), 173.

²⁴ Sam Wilkeson to Sydney Howard Gay, [Washington], 24 January [1863], Gay Papers, Columbia University.

²⁵ Washington correspondence, 4 February, Sacramento Daily Union, 3 March 1863, in Michael Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed: Civil War Dispatches of Noah Brooks (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 22. See also Washington correspondence, 16 January, Boston Evening Journal, 19 January 1863.

²⁶ Cutler diary, entry for 26 January 1863, in Julia Perkins Cutler, Life and Times of Ephraim Cutler (Cincinnati: R. Clarke, 1890), 300.

nation distracted.” Lincoln, Dawes sneered, “is an imbecile and should be sent to the school for feeble minded youth.”²⁷ A Missourian wrote from Washington that leading men in the capital “are beginning to speak of the President in tones of mingled pity, contempt and scorn. Few if any look to him for relief in this 'winter of our discontent.' He is regarded as a debauched man politically.”²⁸

One such critic, Conservative Unionist Congressman John W. Crisfield of Maryland, reported in late January that the “conviction of the President[']s incapacity is every day becoming more universal.” In Crisfield’s view, the “election of Lincoln, the blundering ignorance of his administration, and the want of statesmanship, in the management of this civil war . . . have done more [to] discredit the capacity of man for self-government” than “all the emperors, kings, and despots” in history.²⁹

Crisfield’s Radical colleague, Martin F. Conway of Kansas, publicly denounced Lincoln as “a politician of a past age” who was “anti-slavery, but of a genial Southern type.” He “has not made war upon the South in any proper sense,” nor could he be considered “a Northern man in any sense; neither by birth, education, political or personal sympathies, or by any belief in the superiority of Northern civilization, or its right to rule this continent. The idea of Northern nationality and domination is hateful to him.”³⁰ Conway was partially right; much as he hated slavery, Lincoln was a nationalist who did not view the South as a region populated by moral pariahs.

²⁷ Dawes to his wife, Washington, 1, 12 February 1863, Dawes Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁸ Charles Gibson to Hamilton Gamble, 4 January 1863, Gamble Papers, Missouri Historical Society.

²⁹ John W. Crisfield to his wife, Washington, 23 January 1863, Crisfield Papers, Maryland Historical Society.

³⁰ Boston Evening Journal, 2 February 1863.

Senators as well as congressmen were growing disenchanted. In January, William Pitt Fessenden denounced Lincoln's "entire want of executive ability" and scornfully remarked that "there never was such a shambling, half and half set of incapables collected in one government before since the world began."³¹ He predicted that "unless we speedily achieve some decided military successes, the President will find himself compelled by public opinion to reorganize his Cabinet," for confidence in the administration "is rapidly wasting away, and the people will not much longer sustain a war so unfortunately conducted."³² With more venom, Ohio Senator John Sherman wrote his brother about "our monkey President": "How fervently I wish Lincoln was out of the way. Any body would do better. I was among the first of his political friends to acknowledge how fearfully we were mistaken in him. He has not a single quality befitting his place. I could name a thousand instances of this He is unstable as water – afraid of a child & yet sometimes stubborn as a mule. I never shall cease to regret the part I took in his election and am willing to pay a heavy penance for this sin. This error I fear will be a fatal one as he his unfit to control events and it is fearful to think what may come during his time."³³

Yet Senator Sherman publicly defended Lincoln: "We do no good to our cause by a constant crimination of the President, by arraigning him . . . as a tyrant and imbecile. Sir, he is the instrument in the hands of Almighty God, holding the executive power of this Government for four years." Somewhat patronizingly, he added: "If he is a weak

³¹ William Pitt Fessenden to his family, Washington, 24, 10 January 1863, Francis Fessenden, Life and Public Services of William Pitt Fessenden (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1907), 1:265.

³² William Pitt Fessenden to William Cullen Bryant, Washington, 17 January 1863, Bryant-Godwin Papers, New York Public Library.

³³ John Sherman to William T. Sherman, Mansfield, Ohio, 7 May 1863, William T. Sherman Papers, Library of Congress.

man, we must support him; if we allow his authority to be subdued and overrun, we destroy the authority of the Government.”³⁴ The new secretary of the interior, John Palmer Usher, warned that such harsh criticism imperiled the war effort. He assured a leading Indiana banker that there was “no other way of saving the country, but to yield the most implicit confidence in the integrity of each other, to strengthen and uphold the President, to not suppose that he is actuated by base or unworthy motives. We but weaken ourselves in doing that and encourage ourselves in error, for there is not on earth a more guileless man, and but few of more wisdom. It is by and through him that the nation is to be saved at all. Abraham Lincoln with all his energies is seeking to maintain the life of the nation. Whoever attacks and paralyzes him in that effort is the foe of his country.”³⁵

PELION HEAPED ON OSSA: PRESIDENTIAL WOES MOUNT

On January 25, when a group of abolitionists called at the White House to urge that Frémont be given a command, Lincoln analyzed the sources of Northern discontent.³⁶ To Wendell Phillips, who insisted that the public was dissatisfied with the way in which the Emancipation Proclamation was being implemented, the president replied: “the masses of the country generally are only dissatisfied at our lack of military success. Defeat and failure in the field make everything seem wrong.” Bitterly he added: “Most of us here present have been long working in minorities, and may have got into a

³⁴ Washington correspondence, 5 February, Boston Evening Journal, 9 February 1863.

³⁵ Usher to Allen Hamilton, Washington, 4 February 1863, copy, Richard W. Thompson Papers, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne.

³⁶ Washington correspondence, 26 January, Boston Evening Journal, 28 January 1863. Among the callers were Wendell Phillips, Moncure Conway, Oakes Ames, George Luther Stearns, and Frank Bird. Frank Preston Stearns, The Life and Public Services of George Luther Stearns (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1907), 277.

habit of being dissatisfied.” When some of his guests objected to this characterization, Lincoln said: “At any rate, it has been very rare that an opportunity of ‘running’ this administration has been lost.”³⁷ When the delegation chided him for not issuing the Emancipation Proclamation earlier, he said the public had not been ready to support it. If that were so, objected Moncure Conway, then why had conservative papers like the Chicago Times, Boston Post, and New York Herald supported Frémont’s emancipation order? The president replied that he had been unaware of that fact. According to Conway’s journal, “there was a burst of surprise around the room at this ignorance which was brutal. When assured that it was so – and that we could bring (if necessary) the files of those papers to prove it, he was staggered completely & sank back in his chair in silence.” Conway speculated that the president “was surrounded a mile thick with Kentuckians who would not let him know the truth” and expressed doubts about the honesty of Nicolay, “who superintends his reading.” Asked if Ben Butler would be restored to command in Louisiana, Lincoln said that “he meant to return Butler to N. Orleans as soon as it could be done without hurting Gen. Banks’ feelings!” Conway sarcastically exclaimed: “What a fine watchword would be ‘Liberty, Union and Banks’ feelings!”³⁸ (Soon afterward, in a lecture titled “The Vacant Throne of Washington,” Conway told a Boston audience: “we find no man, in the station of power and influence, adequate to the work.”)³⁹

³⁷ Moncure D. Conway, Autobiography: Memories and Experiences (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904), 1:379.

³⁸ Conway journal, 5 February 1863, in John d’Entremont, Southern Emancipator: Moncure Conway, the American Years, 1832-1865 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 91-92.

³⁹ Victor B. Howard, Religion and the Radical Republican Movement, 1860-1870 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 57.

Others participants in that meeting found Lincoln more impressive than Conway did. George Luther Stearns said: “It is of no use to disparage his ability. There we were, with some able talkers among us, and we had the best position too; but the President held his ground against us.” Frank Bird acknowledged that Lincoln “is the shrewdest man I ever met; but not at all of a Kentuckian. He is an old-fashioned Yankee in a Western dress.”⁴⁰

MERCY: DEALING WITH THE MINNESOTA SIOUX UPRISING

Discontent with the administration was especially strong in the West, where Lincoln’s handling of an uprising by Minnesota Sioux (also known as Dakota) in the summer and fall of 1862 enraged many citizens.⁴¹ The Indians, angry at white encroachment on their territory, at the failure of the government to deliver promised supplies and money, and at the notorious corruption of Indian agents and traders, launched savage attacks on white men, women, and children along the frontier, killing hundreds and driving over 30,000 from their homes.⁴² It was the bloodiest massacre of civilians on U.S. soil prior to September 11, 2001. Settlers demanded protection, prompting Governor Alexander Ramsey to appeal to Lincoln for troops.

John Pope, who was dispatched to restore order, issued a stern declaration: “It is my purpose utterly to exterminate the Sioux if I have the power to do so They are to

⁴⁰ Stearns, Life of Stearns, 280.

⁴¹ For an overview of this story, see David Miller, “Lincoln and the Sioux Outbreak,” Allan Nevins and Irving Stone, eds., Lincoln: A Contemporary Portrait (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1962), 111-30; Gary Clayton Anderson, Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota-White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650-1862 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Kenneth Carley, The Dakota War of 1862 (2nd ed.; St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001); Michael Clodfelter, The Dakota War: The United States Army versus the Sioux, 1862-1865 (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1998), 35-61; Alvin Josephy, The Civil War in the American West (New York: Knopf, 1991), 95-154; C. M. Oehler, The Great Sioux Uprising (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 3-209.

⁴² George A. S. Crooker to Lincoln, St. Paul, 7 October 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Around 600 to 800 white settlers were killed.

be treated as maniacs or wild beasts, and by no means as people with whom treaties or compromises can be made.”⁴³ When the administration warned him to make no unreasonable demands for troops and supplies, Pope responded: “You have no idea of the wide, universal and uncontrollable pain everywhere in this country. Over 500 people have been murdered Minnesota alone and 300 women and children are now in captivity. The most horrible massacres have been committed; children nailed alive to trees, women violated and then disemboweled – everything that horrible ingenuity could devise.”⁴⁴

Lincoln ordered thousands of paroled prisoners-of-war to the scene. “Arm them and send them away just as fast as the Railroad will carry them,” he instructed Stanton.⁴⁵ When the Confederates refused to continue paroling captives unless the Union agreed not to deploy them as Indian fighters, Lincoln threatened to “send the prisoners back with a distinct notice that we will recognize no paroles given our prisoners by the rebels as extending beyond a prohibition against fighting them.”⁴⁶ But eventually the administration decided that dispatching parolees to combat Indians violated the prisoner exchange cartel, and so the plan was scrapped.⁴⁷

Under the leadership of Minnesota Congressman Henry H. Sibley, militiamen and regular troops put down the Sioux rebellion by early October. As he conducted war crimes trials that led to a death sentence for 303 Sioux men, Sibley was urged by Pope not to “allow any false sympathy for the Indians to prevent you from acting with the

⁴³ Pope to Henry H. Sibley, St. Paul, 28 September 1862, OR, I, 13:686.

⁴⁴ Pope to Halleck, St. Paul, 23 September 1863, OR, I, 13:663.

⁴⁵ Lincoln to Stanton, Washington, 20 September 1862, Basler ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:432.

⁴⁶ Lincoln to Halleck, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 3 October 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:449; Lincoln to Ross, Washington, 25 September 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁷ Edward Bates to Lincoln, Washington, 17 October 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

utmost rigor.” Sibley told his wife that “the press is very much concerned, lest I should prove too tender-hearted.”⁴⁸

Lincoln was under intense pressure to expel all Indians from Minnesota. Governor Ramsey reported that his constituents had come “to regard this perfidious and cruel race with a degree of distrust and apprehension which will not tolerate their presence in their neighborhood in any number or in any condition.”⁴⁹

Faced with a potential mass execution of over 300 men, Lincoln “resolved that such an outrage, as the indiscriminate hanging of these Indians most certainly would be, shall not take place.”⁵⁰ On November 10, he instructed Pope to “forward, as soon as possible, the full and complete record of these convictions” and to prepare “a careful statement.”⁵¹ In response, the general warned that white Minnesotans “are exasperated to the last degree, and if the guilty are not all executed I think it nearly impossible to prevent the indiscriminate massacre of all the Indians – old men, women, and children.” The soldiers, too, would be likely to resort to vigilante justice if the executions were not carried out, Pope added.⁵² Governor Ramsey joined the chorus demanding that the convicted Indians be hanged. “I hope,” he wrote the president, “the execution of every Sioux Indian condemned by the military court will at once be ordered. It would be wrong upon principle and policy to refuse this. Private revenge would on all this border take the

⁴⁸ David A. Nichols, Lincoln and the Indians: Civil War Policy and Politics (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978), 95, 98.

⁴⁹ Nichols, Lincoln and the Indians, 96.

⁵⁰ Washington Daily Morning Chronicle, 12 November 1862.

⁵¹ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:493. Lincoln may have been acting in response to a letter of that date from William P. Dole, commissioner of Indian affairs, to the secretary of the interior protesting against a mass execution. New York Tribune, 8 December 1862.

⁵² John Pope to Lincoln, St. Paul, 11 November 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

place of official judgement on these Indians.”⁵³ Fiercely the Minnesota abolitionist-feminist Jane Grey Swisshelm condemned the Indians as “crocodiles,” asserted that they had “just as much right to life as a hyena,” and urged the government to “[e]xterminate the wild beasts and make peace with the devil before and all his host sooner than with these red-jawed tigers whose fangs are dripping with the blood of innocents.”⁵⁴ A Minnesota newspaper warned against any leniency in dealing with the Sioux: “If the Government wants wholesale hanging by the acre; if it wants the Western plains turned into a wide Golgotha of dead Indians; if it wants them hunted down like wild beasts from the face of the continent, it had better refuse to perform the act of justice which the people of this State demand.”⁵⁵ In early December, the Minnesota congressional delegation vigorously protested to Lincoln against clemency for the convicted prisoners.⁵⁶ Especially emphatic was Senator Morton Wilkinson, who introduced a resolution demanding that the president inform the senate about the Indian war and the proposed execution of condemned prisoners. In a gruesome speech, Wilkinson recounted stories of atrocities perpetrated by the Sioux. The senate passed his resolution. Like Pope, Congressman Cyrus Aldrich warned Lincoln that if all the Indians found guilty were not executed, his constituents would “dispose of them in their own way.”⁵⁷

⁵³ Ramsey to Lincoln, St. Paul, 10 November 1862, OR, I, 1:13, 787.

⁵⁴ Jane Grey Swisshelm, Half a Century (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg, 1880), 223; Sylvia D. Hoffert, Jane Grey Swisshelm: An Unconventional Life, 1815-1884 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 152. See also Sylvia D. Hoffert, “Gender and Vigilantism on the Minnesota Frontier: Jane Grey Swisshelm and the U.S.-Dakota Conflict of 1862,” Western Historical Quarterly 29 (1998): 343-62.

⁵⁵ Unidentified Minnesota newspaper copied in the Washington correspondence, 22 November, New York Times, 23 November 1862.

⁵⁶ Cyrus Aldrich, Morton S. Wilkinson, and William Windom to Lincoln, Washington, 3 December 1862, Washington Evening Star, 5 December 1862.

⁵⁷ Washington correspondence, 28 November, New York Tribune, 29 November 1862.

As the president and two Interior Department lawyers, Francis Ruggles and George Whiting, scrutinized the records, they discovered that some trials had lasted only fifteen minutes, that hearsay evidence had been admitted, that due process had been ignored, and that counsel had not been provided the defendants. Ruggles and Whiting urged that many of the condemned men be pardoned. While considering what to do, the president received letters from Minnesotans insisting that no mercy be shown to the “turking savages.” A physician in St. Paul painted a lurid picture for him: “Mr. President, if a being in the shape of a human, but with that shape horribly disfigured with paint & feathers to make its presence more horrible, should enter your home in the dead hours of night, & approach your pillow with a glittering tomahawk in one hand, & a scalping knife in the other, his eyes gleaming with a thirst for blood, you would spring from your bed in terror, and flee for you life; . . . there you would see the torch applied to the house your hands had built . . . your wife, or your daughter, though she might not yet have seen twelve sweet summers . . . ravished before your eyes, & carried into a captivity worse than death.” If he had seen such horrors, would not the president demand revenge?⁵⁸

Newspapers also predicted that “if these convicted murderers are dealt with more leniently than other murderers,” lynching would result.⁵⁹ Civic and religious leaders joined the outcry. One missionary to the Sioux advised Lincoln “to execute the great majority of those who have been condemned” lest “the innocent as well as the guilty” be killed by vengeful settlers.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Thaddeus Williams to Lincoln, St. Paul, 22 November 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁹ Nichols, Lincoln and the Indians, 102-3.

⁶⁰ Stephen R. Riggs to Lincoln, Saint Anthony, 17 November 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Nichols, Lincoln and the Indians, 103.

Some clergymen appealed for restraint. A religious delegation from Pennsylvania urged Lincoln to spare the prisoners, and Episcopal Bishop Henry B. Whipple wrote that though the “leaders must be punished,” nevertheless “we cannot afford by an act of wanton cruelty to purchase a long Indian war – nor by injustice on other matters purchase the anger of God.”⁶¹ In the spring of 1862, Whipple had recommended more humane treatment of the Minnesota Sioux. Lincoln promptly asked the secretary of the interior to investigate, which he did and suggested numerous reforms.⁶²

Endorsing Whipple’s unpopular view was Commissioner of Indian Affairs William P. Dole, who told Interior Secretary Caleb B. Smith that to execute all the condemned men would “be contrary to the spirit of the age, and our character as a great magnanimous and Christian people.” Smith concurred.⁶³

Gideon Welles was correct in thinking that the “greatly exasperated” congressional delegation from Minnesota would fail to pressure Lincoln into executing all the convicted Sioux.⁶⁴ The New York Tribune reported that the threat made by Aldrich and his Minnesota colleagues “is not received with favor, and will not influence the Executive action.”⁶⁵ The situation resembled the one Lincoln had faced thirty years earlier during the Black Hawk War, when his fellow militiamen wished to kill an Indian bearing a safe-conduct pass; then Lincoln had courageously stopped them. He wrote

⁶¹ Cyrus Aldrich, Morton S. Wilkinson, and William Windom to Lincoln, Washington, 3 December 1862, Washington Evening Star, 5 December 1862; Nichols, Lincoln and the Indians, 104. On Whipple, see Andrew Scott Brake, “Man in the Middle: The Reform and Influence of Henry Benjamin Whipple, the First Episcopal Bishop of Minnesota” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toledo, 2002).

⁶² Washington correspondence, 7 April, New York Evening Post, 8 April 1862.

⁶³ Dole to Smith, Washington, 10 November 1862, New York Tribune, 8 December 1862.

⁶⁴ Howard K. Beale and Alan W. Brownsword, eds., Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson (3 vols.; New York: W.W. Norton, 1960), 1:186 (entry for 4 December 1862).

⁶⁵ Washington correspondence, 5 December, New York Tribune, 6 December 1862.

Sibley authorizing the execution of only thirty-nine of the three hundred and three condemned Indians (the thirty-seven who had been found guilty of murder and the two convicted of rape). In response to Wilkinson's resolution, he explained his reasoning to the senate: "Anxious to not act with so much clemency as to encourage another outbreak on one hand, nor with so much severity as to be real cruelty on the other, I ordered a careful examination of the records of the trials to be made, in view of first ordering the execution of such as had been proved guilty of violating females." He further sought to discriminate between those involved in massacres and those involved only in battles.⁶⁶

As execution day for the condemned Indians drew near, Lincoln instructed Nicolay, who had been in Minnesota on a trouble-shooting mission during the uprising, to warn Sibley not to hang Chas-kay-don, whose name was similar to one of the condemned men.⁶⁷ At the last minute, the president pardoned Round Wind, who had helped some whites escape. On December 26, the convicted rapists and killers died on the gallows while a large, peaceful crowd of more than 5,000 looked on. In 1864, Alexander Ramsey "jocularly" told Lincoln that if he had executed all three hundred and three Indians, he would have won more backing for his successful reelection bid. "I could not afford to hang men for votes," came the reply.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Lincoln to the senate, Washington, 11 December 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:551.

⁶⁷ Nicolay to Henry H. Sibley, Washington, 9 December 1862, in Michael Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House: Letters, Memoranda, and Other Writings of John G. Nicolay, 1860-1865 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 94; Lincoln had been alerted to this case by Stephen R. Riggs. See Riggs to Lincoln, Saint Anthony, Minnesota, 17 November 1862, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Unfortunately, the innocent Chaskadan was executed instead of the guilty party (with a similar name) who had murdered and disemboweled a pregnant woman. Sarah F. Wakefield to Lincoln, St. Paul, 23 March 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁶⁸ Ramsey diary, 23 November 1864, in Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher, eds., Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 372.

Minnesotans denounced the president's decision. In February, Jane Grey Swisshelm told a Washington audience that if "justice is not done," whites in Minnesota "will go to shooting Indians whenever these government pets get out from under Uncle Sam's wing. Our people will hunt them, shoot them, set traps for them, put out poisoned bait for them – kill them by every means we would use to exterminate panthers. We cannot breathe the same air with those demon violators of women, crucifiers of infants. Every Minnesota man, who has a soul and can get a rifle, will go to shooting Indians; and he who hesitates will be black-balled by every Minnesota woman and posted as a coward in every Minnesota home."⁶⁹ When Mrs. Swisshelm urged Secretary of the Interior John Palmer Usher to recommend to the president that Indian prisoners be executed in retaliation for Sioux depredations in 1863, Usher replied: "Why it is impossible to get him to arrest and imprison one of the secesh women who are here – the wives of officers in the rebel army, and hold them as hostages for the Union women imprisoned in the South. We have tried again, and again, and cannot get him to do it. – The President will hang nobody!"⁷⁰

To placate Minnesota voters, Lincoln pledged that the government would help compensate victims of depredations and would support the removal of Indians from their state. Eventually Congress appropriated money for compensation and provided that the Sioux and the Winnebagos would be removed.

⁶⁹ Washington correspondence by Jane Grey Swisshelm, 23 February, St. Cloud, Minnesota, Democrat, 5 March 1863, in Larsen, ed., Crusader and Feminist, 184.

⁷⁰ Washington correspondence by Jane Grey Swisshelm, 1 May, St. Cloud, Minnesota, Democrat, 14 May 1863, Larsen, ed., Crusader and Feminist, 225; Swisshelm, Half a Century, 234; Clodfelter, Dakota War, 71-79.

In sparing the lives of 264 Sioux, Lincoln had been influenced by Bishop Henry B. Whipple, who also lobbied the president on the need to reform the corrupt Indian agency system. Lincoln told a friend that the bishop “came here the other day and talked with me about the rascality of this Indian business until I felt it down to my boots.” In reply to Whipple’s appeal, the president characteristically recounted a story: “Bishop, a man thought that monkeys could pick cotton better than negroes could because they were quicker and their fingers smaller. He turned a lot of them into his cotton field, but he found that it took two overseers to watch one monkey. It needs more than one honest man to watch one Indian agent.” He pledged that “[i]f we get through this war, and if I live, this Indian system shall be reformed.”⁷¹ Similarly, in the winter of 1863-64 he told Joseph La Barge, a steamboat captain who protested against corrupt government Indian agents: “wait until I get this Rebellion off my hands, and I will take up this question and see that justice is done the Indian.”⁷² He also promised Father John Beason, a noted Indian clergyman, “that as soon as the war was settled his attention should be given to the Indians and it should not cease until justice to their and my satisfaction was secured.”⁷³ In his 1862 annual message, Lincoln urged Congress to change the system. “With all my heart I thank you for your recommendation to have our whole Indian system reformed,” Whipple wrote the president. “It is a stupendous piece of wickedness and as we fear God ought to be changed.” Though Lincoln did not live to see his recommendation

⁷¹ Henry B. Whipple, Light and Shadows of a Long Episcopate: Being Reminiscences and Recollections of the Right Reverend Henry Benjamin Whipple (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 136-37.

⁷² Hiram M. Chittenden, History of Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River: Life and Adventures of Joseph La Barge (New York: F. P. Harper, 1903), 342.

⁷³ John Beason to Henry W. Bellows, Philadelphia, [1862], Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

implemented, he gave a significant boost to the movement which eventually overthrew the corrupt system.⁷⁴

In 1864, Lincoln pardoned two dozen of the 264 Sioux who, after being spared the death penalty, had been incarcerated.⁷⁵ That same year he intervened to spare the life of Pocatello, chief of a Shoshoni band in Utah.⁷⁶

FIGHTING JOE: REPLACING BURNSIDE WITH HOOKER

On the momentous first day of 1863, Lincoln had more on his mind than the Emancipation Proclamation; he must decide what to do about the demoralized Army of the Potomac. Lincoln's anxiety for that army was exacerbated by his fear that Union forces in the West might also suffer defeat. He had good reason, for on December 29, General William T. Sherman had led a disastrous assault at Chickasaw Bluffs, a few miles north of the Confederate bastion of Vicksburg on the Mississippi River, and two days later, Confederates recaptured the port of Galveston, Texas, which they held for the rest of the war.

Simultaneously, Braxton Bragg attacked the Army of the Cumberland, led by General William S. ("Old Rosy") Rosecrans, at Stones River, Tennessee. The battle raged for three days, during which the White House was "in a state of feverish anxiety."⁷⁷ If Rosecrans had been defeated, the effect on Northern morale – already badly depressed by

⁷⁴ Nichols, Lincoln and the Indians, 144-46; Edmund Jefferson Danziger, Indians and Bureaucrats: Administering the Reservation Policy During the Civil War (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 198-206; Harry Kelsey, "Abraham Lincoln and American Indian Policy," Lincoln Herald 77 (1975): 139-48.

⁷⁵ List of Sioux Indians pardoned, 30 April 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁷⁶ Jeffery S. King, "'Do Not Execute Chief Pocatello': President Lincoln Acts to Save the Shoshoni Chief," Utah Historical Quarterly 53 (1984): 237-47.

⁷⁷ Nicolay to Therenia Bates, Washington, 4 January 1863, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 102.

setbacks at Fredericksburg, Chickasaw Bluffs, and Galveston – would have been catastrophic. But at Stones River the Union was not defeated. Though the outcome was hardly a resounding victory, by January 2 Bragg had at least been driven from the field. (Later, when the president referred to the battle as a triumph, Grant said that Stones River was not exactly a victory. "A few such fights would have ruined us," he remarked.)⁷⁸ With vast relief, Lincoln congratulated Old Rosy: "God bless you and all with you!" Months later he wrote that general: "you gave us a hard earned victory which, had there been a defeat instead, the nation could scarcely have lived over." Rosecrans' success had checked "a dangerous sentiment which was spreading in the north."⁷⁹ A year after the battle, the president told James A. Garfield that the nation was "deeply indebted" to Rosecrans "for its salvation from almost fatal disaster," for if "that battle had been lost it is difficult to see where our fortunes would have landed." It was "one of the most if not the most important proofs of support the country" had in the war so far.⁸⁰

Back in the East, Burnside, prodded by Halleck, intended to move against the enemy on December 31. Two days before that, a pair of his subordinate generals, John Newton and John Cochrane, hastened to the White House to protest. In response, Lincoln wired Burnside: "I have good reason for saying you must not make a general movement of the army without letting me know."⁸¹ When Burnside demanded an explanation, Lincoln told him of the visit by Newton and Cochrane (without mentioning their names). In addition to those generals, Joseph Hooker and William B. Franklin opposed Burnside's

⁷⁸ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 2:280 (entry for 14 April 1865).

⁷⁹ Lincoln to Rosecrans, Washington, 5 January, 31 August 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:39, 424-25.

⁸⁰ Lincoln said this to Garfield on 17 December 1863. Garfield to Rosecrans, 18 December 1863, in Allan Nevins, The War for the Union (4 vols.; New York: Scribner, 1959-1971), 3:203-4.

⁸¹ Lincoln to Burnside, Washington, 30 December 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:22.

plans. When Burnside spelled out those plans to him, Lincoln remained non-committal, merely saying he would discuss the matter with Stanton and Halleck.

The frustrated president took time from his busy schedule on New Years Day to pen a blunt letter to the general-in-chief: “Gen. Burnside wishes to cross the Rappahannock with his army, but his Grand Division commanders all oppose the movement. If in such a difficulty as this you do not help, you fail me precisely in the point for which I sought your assistance. You know what Gen. Burnside's plan is; and it is my wish that you go with him to the ground, examine it as far as practicable, confer with the officers, getting their judgment, and ascertaining their temper, in a word, gather all the elements for forming a judgment of your own; and then tell Gen. Burnside that you do approve, or that you do not approve his plan. Your military skill is useless to me, if you will not do this.” At long last the president was chastising Old Brains for refusing to do his job. Taking understandable umbrage, Halleck promptly submitted his resignation, which was rejected. To salve the general-in-chief's wounded feelings, Lincoln retracted the letter, endorsing it: “Withdrawn, because considered harsh by Gen. Halleck.”⁸² Harsh it was, but fully justified.

Halleck did urge Burnside to cross the Rappahannock and engage the enemy, emphasizing that “our first object was, not ‘Richmond,’ but the defeat or scattering of his army.”⁸³

Like Halleck, Burnside felt slighted and gave the president a letter offering to resign because his subordinate commanders had lost confidence in him.⁸⁴ After reading it,

⁸² Lincoln to Halleck, Washington, 1 January 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:31.

⁸³ Halleck to Burnside, Washington, 7 January 1863 [misdated 1862], Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

Lincoln handed the missive back without comment. Burnside decided to launch yet another campaign and so notified the administration; he also sent an undated letter of resignation to be used by the president whenever he saw fit. Lincoln urged the general to be “cautious, and do not understand that the government, or country, is driving you. I do not yet see how I could profit by changing the command of the A. P. & if I did, I should not wish to do it by accepting the resignation of your commission.”⁸⁵

As discontent welled up within the troops, Burnside prepared to send them across the Rappahannock once again. When he did so on January 20, they promptly bogged down in a fierce rain storm that persisted for three days. As the mud grew deeper, the advance -- known as the “Mud March” -- perforce halted, and the army fell back to its camps. Hooker, ever the malcontent, openly criticized his commander. Burnside, fed up with such insubordination, lashed out, dismissing four generals (including Hooker, Newton, and Cochrane) and relieving five others.

Many thought it was Burnside who should be relieved. “I have no doubt that the President is as well convinced as I am that this Army will do nothing as it is,” William P. Fessenden told his son, “but he has not force of character requisite for its improvement.”⁸⁶

But in fact Lincoln did have “the requisite force of character” to make the necessary change. On January 24, Burnside demanded that Lincoln support his astounding order, though the president had not been consulted about the dismissal of the

⁸⁴ OR, I, 21:941.

⁸⁵ Lincoln to Burnside, Washington, 8 January 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:49.

⁸⁶ Fessenden to his son William, Washington, 10 January 1863, Fessenden Papers, Bowdoin College.

four generals. Next day, when they met again, Lincoln announced that Joseph Hooker was to be the new commander of the Army of the Potomac. Burnside offered to resign his commission, but the president declined to accept it; instead he granted the general a one-month furlough and transferred him to the Department of the Ohio.

Hooker had behaved badly toward Burnside and was known as a hard drinker, chronic intriguer, indiscreet talker, compulsive womanizer, and reckless gambler. One officer described his headquarters as “a combination of barroom and brothel.”⁸⁷ Nevertheless, Hooker was an obvious choice to take charge of the Army of the Potomac. When the editor of the New York Times complained about his attempts to undermine Burnside, Lincoln replied: “That is all true. Hooker does talk badly, but the trouble is, he is stronger with the country today than any other man.”⁸⁸ The other Grand Division commanders were unsuitable: William B. Franklin had been disgraced by his lackluster conduct at Fredericksburg, and the sixty-six-year-old E. V. Sumner was too infirm. (Because both of those generals resented Hooker and would therefore probably not cooperate fully with him, they were relieved of their commands.)⁸⁹ Moreover, Lincoln informed a friend of Franklin that the general’s “loyalty is suspected.”⁹⁰ Chase liked Hooker for his willingness to condemn McClellan and his purported sympathy with the Radicals.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Charles Francis Adams, 1835-1915: An Autobiography (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), 161.

⁸⁸ “Excerpts from the Journal of Henry J. Raymond,” Scribner's Monthly 19 (March 1880): 705.

⁸⁹ Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:619 (entry for 26 January 1863).

⁹⁰ W. B. Franklin to Richard Henry Dana, York, Pennsylvania, 3 June 1863, Dana Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁹¹ John Niven, Salmon P. Chase: A Biography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 307.

Lincoln made his decision without consulting Halleck or Stanton, both of whom favored George Gordon Meade, even though Hooker outranked him. While in California before the war, Halleck and Hooker had clashed, leading to strained relations. To accommodate Hooker, Lincoln accepted his request that he be allowed to report directly to the president without going through the general-in-chief.⁹²

Known as “Fighting Joe,” Hooker had earned a reputation for “dash courage & skill.”⁹³ He was, as Noah Brooks portrayed him, exceptionally handsome, “tall, shapely, well dressed, though not natty in appearance; his fair red and white complexion glowing the health, his bright blue eyes sparkling with intelligence and animation, and his auburn hair tossed back upon his well shaped head. His nose was aquiline, and the expression of his somewhat small mouth was one of much sweetness, though rather irresolute.”

Hooker, in Brooks’ view, was “a gay cavalier, alert and confident, overflowing with animal spirits, and cheery as a boy.”⁹⁴ A division commander thought that anyone “would feel like cheering when he rode by at the head of his staff.”⁹⁵

In naming Hooker, Lincoln read aloud to that general one of his most eloquent letters, a document illustrative of his deep paternal streak.⁹⁶ Like a wise, benevolent father, he praised Hooker while gently chastising him for insubordination toward superior officers: “I have placed you at the head of the Army of the Potomac. Of course I have

⁹² John F. Marszalek, Commander of All Lincoln’s Armies: A Life of General Henry W. Halleck (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 165-66.

⁹³ James G. Blaine to E. B. Washburne, Auburn, Maine, 6 May 1863, Elihu B. Washburne Papers, Library of Congress.

⁹⁴ Noah Brooks, Washington, D. C., in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Herbert Mitgang (1895; Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 56.

⁹⁵ Carl Schurz, The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz (3 vols.; New York: McClure, 1907-1908), 2:403.

⁹⁶ Army correspondence by A. R. W., near Falmouth, 9 May, Boston Evening Journal, 12 May 1863. On Lincoln’s paternal streak, see Michael Burlingame, The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1994), 73-91.

done this upon what appear to me to be sufficient reasons. And yet I think it best for you to know that there are some things in regard to which, I am not quite satisfied with you. I believe you to be a brave and a skilful soldier, which, of course, I like. I also believe you do not mix politics with your profession, in which you are right. You have confidence in yourself, which is a valuable, if not an indispensable quality. You are ambitious, which, within reasonable bounds, does good rather than harm. But I think that during Gen. Burnside's command of the Army, you have taken counsel of your ambition, and thwarted him as much as you could, in which you did a great wrong to the country, and to a most meritorious and honorable brother officer. I have heard, in such way as to believe it, of your recently saying that both the Army and the Government needed a Dictator. Of course it was not for this, but in spite of it, that I have given you the command. Only those generals who gain successes, can set up dictators. What I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship. The government will support you to the utmost of it's ability, which is neither more nor less than it has done and will do for all commanders. I much fear that the spirit which you have aided to infuse into the Army, of criticising their Commander, and withholding confidence from him, will now turn upon you. I shall assist you as far as I can, to put it down. Neither you, nor Napoleon, if he were alive again, could get any good out of an army, while such a spirit prevails in it." In closing, Lincoln urged Hooker to "beware of rashness. Beware of rashness, but with energy, and sleepless vigilance, go forward, and give us victories."⁹⁷

Hooker thought it was "just such a letter as a father might write to a son. It is a beautiful letter, and although I think he was harder on me than I deserved, I will say that I

⁹⁷ Lincoln to Hooker, Washington, 26 January 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:78-79.

love the man who wrote it.”⁹⁸ (As John G. Nicolay remarked, “it would be difficult to find a severer piece of friendly criticism.”)⁹⁹ Boastfully, Hooker told some fellow officers: “After I have been to Richmond I shall have the letter published in the newspapers. It will be amusing.”¹⁰⁰

Anson Henry, to whom Hooker showed the presidential missive, thought it “ought to be printed in letters of gold,” for it “breathes a spirit of Patriotic devotion to the Country and a spirit of frankness & candor worthy of Mr Lincoln’s character, and is peculiarly his own.”¹⁰¹

NAVY FAILURE: THE REPULSE AT CHARLESTON

The appointment of Hooker boded well, but as the general prepared for a spring offensive, the lack of military success discouraged Congress, the public, and the administration. In February, Nicolay sarcastically grouched to his fiancée that the Army of the Potomac “is for the present stuck in the mud, as it has been during nearly its whole existence. We hope however that it may yet do something, by accident at least, if not by design. I think we all doubt its ability to help in the great struggle more because the sort of fatality which has hitherto attended it, than by any just estimate of its strength and discipline.”¹⁰² A month later he told her apropos of the capture of one of General William S. Rosecrans’ brigades: “Of course carelessness or inefficiency must have been the cause.

⁹⁸ Noah Brooks in Ida M. Tarbell, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (2 vols.; New York: McClure, Phillips, 1900), 2:136-37.

⁹⁹ Nicolay to Robert Todd Lincoln, 1878 [no day or month indicated], in Helen Nicolay, Lincoln’s Secretary: A Biography of John G. Nicolay (New York: Longmans, Green, 1949), 278.

¹⁰⁰ Henry C. Whitney, Life of Lincoln (2 vols.; New York: Baker & Taylor, 1908), 2:171; Noah Brooks, Abraham Lincoln and the Downfall of American Slavery (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1894), 356-357.

¹⁰¹ Henry to his wife, Washington, 12 April 1863, Henry Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁰² Nicolay to Therenia Bates, Washington, 8 February 1863, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 104.

It is very hard not entirely lose one's patience at this succession of adverse accidents which seems to have no end."¹⁰³ Along the Mississippi River, Union forces appeared stymied. "Grant's attempt to take Vicksburg looks to me very much like a total failure," Nicolay lamented in April. "At Port Hudson we are held at bay."¹⁰⁴

Partially offsetting the lack of military success, New Hampshire and Connecticut voters provided two political victories that March.

Lincoln was tormented by the lack of progress. At a Union mass meeting on March 31, he appeared "very pale," "very thin," and "so careworn that one could but pity him."¹⁰⁵ After receiving bad news from the front one night, he could not sleep. The next morning, Schuyler Colfax "found him looking more than usually pale and careworn." In reply to the congressman's query about his spirits, he exclaimed: "How willingly would I exchange places to-day, with the soldier who sleeps on the ground in the Army of the Potomac!"¹⁰⁶ After visiting Washington and speaking with the president, Elizabeth Cady Stanton reported a rumor "that Abraham's shriveled appearance & poor health is owing to being underfed. Madame [Mary Lincoln] is an economist & the supplies at the White House are limited. In front of the Mansion she has fenced off a place where she pastures her cow, thus she sacrifices taste to thrift."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Nicolay to Theren Bates, Washington, 8 March 1863, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 105.

¹⁰⁴ Nicolay to Theren Bates, Washington, 5 April 1863, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 108.

¹⁰⁵ Washington correspondence, 1 April, St. Cloud, Minnesota, Democrat, 9 April 1863, in Larsen, ed., Crusader and Feminist, 207; diary of Julia S. Wheelock, 1862-1867, Civil War Collection, Lincoln Museum, Lincoln Memorial University, in Robert L. Kincaid, "Julia Susan Wheelock, The Florence Nightingale of Michigan During the Civil War," Lincoln Herald, vol. 46 no. 3 (October 1944): 44.

¹⁰⁶ Colfax, Life and Principles of Abraham Lincoln: Address Delivered at the Court House Square, at South Bend, April 24, 1865 (Philadelphia: J. B. Rodgers, 1865), 14. This conversation evidently took place in early 1863.

¹⁰⁷ Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Gerrit Smith, New York, 6 May 1863, Smith Papers, Syracuse University.

One March day, Lincoln gave vent to his frustration with underperforming commanders. When told that Confederate guerillas had captured General Edward H. Stoughton, he sarcastically remarked: “Oh, that doesn’t trouble me. I can make a better Brigadier, any time, in five minutes; but it did worry me to have all those horses taken. Why, sir, those horses cost us a hundred and twenty-five dollars a head!”¹⁰⁸

At the same time, Conservatives and Moderates pressed Lincoln to rescind the Emancipation Proclamation. They were convinced, as Senator John Sherman put it, that Negrophobia was causing significant backlash against Republicans. Democrats would “fight for the flag & the country,” Sherman told his brother, “but they hate niggers,” were “easily influenced by a party cry,” and “stick to their party while its organization is controlled by the [worst] set of traitors in this country North or South.”¹⁰⁹ Sherman received a warning from Murat Halstead of the Cincinnati Commercial that there was “a change in the current of public sentiment out west.” If the president “were not a damned fool, we could get along yet But what we want is not any more nigger.”¹¹⁰ On January 12, Sherman’s colleagues Orville H. Browning, James R. Doolittle, and Thomas Ewing agreed that Republicans “were on the brink of ruin, and could see no hope of an amendment in affairs unless the President would change his policy, and withdraw or greatly modify his proclamation.”¹¹¹ Radical Senator John P. Hale of New Hampshire acknowledged that the Republicans “had made a great mistake upon the slavery question,

¹⁰⁸ Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], ca. 7 March 1863, Cincinnati Gazette, n.d., scrapbook, Reid Family Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁰⁹ John Sherman to William T. Sherman, 18 May 1863, in V. Jacque Voegeli, Free but Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro during the Civil War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 82.

¹¹⁰ Murat Halstead to John Sherman, 8 February 1863, in Voegli, Free but Not Equal, 83.

¹¹¹ Theodore Calvin Pease and James G. Randall, eds., The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning (2 vols.; Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1925-33), 1:612-13 (entry for 12 January 1863).

and that it would have been better for the cause of the Country, and of emancipation if nothing had been said in regard to the negro since the war commenced.”¹¹² Seward doubted the efficacy of the Proclamation, regarding it “as useful abroad” but ineffective at home. Indeed, he thought “it was rather in spite of it that the actual emancipation had taken place.”¹¹³

Lincoln resisted pressure to withdraw the Proclamation, insisting that it was “a fixed thing” and “that he intended to adhere to it.”¹¹⁴ To a Pennsylvania congressman he remarked: “Suppose I had given a deed of my place in Springfield, having received equivalent therefor, could I recall that deed and retake it into my own possession? Just as impossible would it be for me to revoke this deed of emancipation.”¹¹⁵ In the summer of 1863, when urged to accept the return of North Carolina to the Union with slavery, Lincoln replied laconically: “My proclamation setting free the slaves of the rebel states was issued nearly a year ago.”¹¹⁶

Adding to Lincoln’s dismay, in February the French government, eager to placate manufacturers and laborers suffering from a cotton shortage, formally offered to help mediate the American conflict.¹¹⁷ Upon receipt this news, the president, according to

¹¹² This statement was made on 9 January 1863. Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:612 (entry for 10 January 1863).

¹¹³ Henry W. Bellows to his wife, Washington, 23 April 1863, Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

¹¹⁴ He told this to David Davis on 18 January 1863. Pease and Randall, eds., Browning Diary, 1:616 (entry for 19 January 1863).

¹¹⁵ William D. Kelley, speech in New York, n.d., in Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], 26 November, Cincinnati Gazette, 30 November 1863.

¹¹⁶ New York Evening Post, 27 August 1863.

¹¹⁷ Lynn M. Case and Warren F. Spencer, The United States and France: Civil War Diplomacy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 386-97; Daniel B. Carroll, Henri Mercier and the American Civil War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 251-74.

Benjamin Perley Poore, never looked “so careworn and dejected.”¹¹⁸ Angrily he declared that he “would be d[amne]d if he wouldn’t get 1,000,000 men if France dares to interfere.”¹¹⁹ More gently, Seward declined the French offer.

Amidst his many troubles, Lincoln managed to retain his sense of humor. At a reception in January, an army paymaster said to him: “Being here, Mr. Lincoln, I thought I’d call and pay my respects.” In reply, the president quipped: “From the complaints of the soldiers, I guess that’s about all any of you do pay.”¹²⁰

Most distressing to Lincoln was the Peace Democrats’ increasingly harsh criticism of the war effort.¹²¹ According to Charles Sumner, he feared “the ‘fire in the rear’ – meaning the Democracy, especially at the Northwest – more than our military chances.”¹²² When told that his situation resembled that of the French statesman, Cardinal Richelieu, Lincoln (who had seen Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s play Richelieu) replied: “Far from it, Richelieu never had a fire in his front and rear at the same time, as I have. Besides, he had a united constituency; I never have had. If ambition in Congress and jealousy in the army could be allayed, and all united in one common purpose, this infernal rebellion would soon be terminated.”¹²³

In February, when Commissioner of Public Buildings Benjamin Brown French suggested to the president that doubtless “he would feel glad when he could get some

¹¹⁸ Washington correspondence by Poore, 12 February, Boston Evening Journal, 14 February 1863.

¹¹⁹ Josephine Shaw Lowell diary, entry for 20 May 1863, copy, Allan Nevins Papers, Columbia University.

¹²⁰ Washington correspondence, 20 January, Boston Evening Journal, 22 January 1863.

¹²¹ Jennifer L. Weber, Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln’s Opponents in the North (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Frank L. Klement, The Copperheads in the Midwest (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

¹²² Sumner to Francis Lieber, Washington, 17 January 1863, Edward Lillie Pierce, Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner (4 vols.; Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1877-93), 4:114.

¹²³ Ward Hill Lamon, drafts and anecdotes, folder 6, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

rest,” he “replied that it was a pretty hard life for him.” French confided to his diary that Lincoln was “growing feeble. He wrote a note while I was present, and his hand trembled as I never saw it before, and he looked worn & haggard.”¹²⁴

Army jealousy was especially vexatious to Lincoln. On January 23, David Davis, who was badgering the president to give their mutual friend W. W. Orme a general’s stars, wrote that the “pressure upon Lincoln for officers & promotions is as great as ever. He sometimes gets very impatient. If ever a man sh[oul]d be sympathized with it is Lincoln.”¹²⁵ The president complained “that the changes and promotions in the Army of the Potomac cost him more anxiety than the campaigns.”¹²⁶

Such problems also plagued the western theater. A case in point was German-born General Franz Sigel, who in December 1861 huffily resigned when Samuel R. Curtis superseded him in command of southwest Missouri. Determined to placate Sigel and his many vociferous backers who held mass protest meetings and deluged the White House with petitions, Lincoln sent Gustave Koerner to St. Louis to straighten things out.¹²⁷ “The Germans are true and patriotic,” the president wrote Halleck, “and so far as

¹²⁴ Benjamin Brown French, Witness to the Young Republic: A Yankee's Journal, 1828-1870, ed. Donald B. Cole and John J. McDonough (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989), 417 (entry for 18 February 1863). See also Washington correspondence, 20 January, Boston Evening Journal, 22 January 1863.

¹²⁵ David Davis to Lenora Swett, Washington, 23 January 1863, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Davis told another friend that Lincoln “is not very patient now when the subject of officers are [sic] mentioned.” David Davis to William H. Hanna, Washington, 8 February 1863, ibid.

¹²⁶ Washington correspondence, 22 July 1863, Sacramento Daily Union, 13 August, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 60.

¹²⁷ Earl J. Hess, “Sigel’s Resignation: A Study in German-Americanism and the Civil War,” Civil War History 26 (1980): 5-17; Washington correspondence, 22 January, Chicago Tribune, 25 January 1862; Koerner to Lyman Trumbull, Belleville, Illinois, 26 January, 7 February 1862, Lyman Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress; Thomas J. McCormack, ed., Memoirs of Gustave Koerner, 1809-1896 (2 vols.; Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1909), 2:197-203.

they have got cross in Missouri it is upon mistake and misunderstanding.”¹²⁸ In March, though both Halleck and General John M. Schofield took a dim view of Sigel’s competence (his mistakes had led to the Union defeat at Wilson’s Creek in August 1861), Lincoln promoted the German brigadier to major general.¹²⁹ He did so at the urging of many congressmen and senators.¹³⁰ Earlier that month, Sigel had helped Curtis win the battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas, which ended the formal military threat to Missouri. (Curtis had no high opinion of Sigel. “I cannot understand him and do not wish to have the honor of commanding him,” he told Halleck.)¹³¹ In September, the hypersensitive German protested that a junior officer had been promoted over him.¹³² Lincoln directed the complaint to Halleck, whom Sigel accused of lying.¹³³

A month later Sigel dispatched an aide to the White House to protest once more against the administration’s mistreatment of him and his men. Lincoln urged that Sigel “do the best he could with the command he had” and “not to keep up this constant complaining” which made it appear that the general was “only anxious about himself.” The president emphasized that he “was tired of this constant hacking,” which “gave him more trouble than anything else.” He added that “he had given equal or greater cause of

¹²⁸ Lincoln to Halleck, Washington, 15 January 1862, Roy P. Basler et al., eds., The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (8 vols. plus index; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 5:100.

¹²⁹ Schofield admired Sigel’s command of military theory and history but lamented that “in tactics, great & small, logistics and discipline he is greatly deficient.” Schofield to Halleck, St. Louis, 13 February 1862, copy, Curtis Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.

¹³⁰ Stephen D. Engle, Yankee Dutchman: The Life of Franz Sigel (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), 90-99.

¹³¹ Curtis to Halleck, Pea Ridge, 10 March 1862, Curtis Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.

¹³² Washington correspondence, 29 September, New York Tribune, 30 September 1862.

¹³³ Jacob Picard, “Life of Franz Sigel,” copy of excerpt, Allan Nevins Papers, Columbia University.

complaint to other officers,” but “they had not complained.”¹³⁴ Soon thereafter, when yet another caller tried to plead Sigel’s case, Lincoln exclaimed: “Don’t talk to me any longer about that man!”¹³⁵ In January 1863, the president rebuked Sigel but soon apologized, saying: “If I do get up a little temper I have no sufficient time to keep it up.”¹³⁶ Lincoln feared “that Sigel would never forget that he and his Germans are stepsons.”¹³⁷

The president tolerated Sigel’s behavior because the general was popular with his countrymen, who formed an important voting block.¹³⁸ (In 1864, Sigel would finally be dismissed after losing the battle of New Market in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley.) Lincoln decided to promote another German, Alexander Schimmelfennig, for the same reason. When Stanton objected that other more worthy Germans should be advanced before Schimmelfennig, Lincoln replied: “Never mind about that, his name will make up for any difference there may be, and I’ll take the risk of his coming out all right.” Laughingly, he repeated the general’s unmistakably Teutonic surname, emphasizing each syllable, especially the final one: “Schim-mil-fen-NIG must be appointed.”¹³⁹

Other squabbles among generals exasperated Lincoln. David Hunter and John G. Foster quarreled about which of them would control a part of Foster’s corps that

¹³⁴ Colonel George G. Lyon to Sigel, Fairfax Courthouse, [Virginia], 10 October 1862, Sigel Papers, New-York Historical Society.

¹³⁵ Caspar Butz to Sigel, Chicago, 25 December 1862, Sigel Papers, New-York Historical Society.

¹³⁶ Lincoln to Sigel, Washington, 26 January, 5 February 1863, in Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:79-80, 93.

¹³⁷ Washington correspondence by Noah Brooks, 12 April, Sacramento Daily Union, 8 May 1863, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 44.

¹³⁸ Hess, “Sigel’s Resignation,” 12-17; Gustav Koerner to Lyman Trumbull, Belleville, 2 January 1862 [misdated 1861], Lyman Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

¹³⁹ James B. Fry in Allen Thorndike Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln, by Distinguished Men of His Time (New York: North American, 1886), 391-92.

happened to be situated in Hunter's department. John M. Schofield threatened to resign his command in Missouri because Samuel R. Curtis would not authorize him to undertake offensive action. Curtis in turn objected to orders transferring some of his troops to the Vicksburg front. To Lincoln's relief, Grant conducted the Vicksburg campaign without grumbling. The president said he liked Grant -- whom he described as "a copious worker, and fighter, but a very meagre writer, or telegrapher" -- because he "doesn't worry and bother me. He isn't shrieking for reinforcements all the time. He takes what troops we can safely give him . . . and does the best he can with what he has got."¹⁴⁰ Grant's best turned out to be quite good indeed.

Lincoln was particularly exasperated by Admiral Samuel F. Du Pont's campaign against Charleston, which was the brainchild of Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus V. Fox. Convinced that the monitors were invulnerable, Fox argued that a few of them could run past the forts guarding Charleston and compel the city to surrender. Ever since the failure of his plan to relieve Sumter, Fox longed to avenge the humiliation he felt. When he proposed to send an ironclad fleet against the storm center of secessionism, Lincoln responded enthusiastically. He was eager to have a success to offset the disaster at Fredericksburg and the setbacks at Vicksburg and Galveston; he did not want to wait until the May offensive in Virginia for something to bolster Northern morale. Fox told Du Pont: "We must have Charleston The Pres't is most anxious and you know the people are. . . . Finances, politics, foreign relations, all seem to ask for Charleston before

¹⁴⁰ Lincoln to Burnside, Washington, 27 July 1863, in Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:350; Albert D. Richardson, A Personal History of Ulysses S. Grant (Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1868), 336-37.

Congress adjourns, so as to shape legislation.”¹⁴¹ Fox was especially eager to erase memories of the navy’s poor showing at Galveston in January.

Du Pont raised legitimate objections, which Fox -- like an infatuated lover when told of his sweetheart’s flaws -- blithely ignored.¹⁴² The admiral recommended that the army and navy carry out the assignment jointly; troops could capture some of the forts, reducing the gauntlet that the ships must run. When Fox and Welles vetoed that idea, Du Pont understandably requested additional monitors.

Lincoln was led to believe that the Charleston assault would take place that winter.¹⁴³ At a meeting in mid-February, he was astounded to learn from General John G. Foster that the Charleston campaign would be a joint army-navy effort. Lincoln had assumed it would be an all-navy affair. He was also dismayed by a request for further plating of the ironclads. Suspecting that the admiral had lost faith in his chances of success, Lincoln insisted that Fox visit South Carolina to confer with Du Pont.¹⁴⁴ Fox begged off, arguing that he did not wish to injure the admiral’s hypersensitive pride, but he did implore Du Pont not to let the army disrupt the navy’s plans. He also informed the admiral that Lincoln and Welles “are very much struck with this programme” and that the joint army-navy project, involving a siege, “meets with disfavor.”¹⁴⁵ A siege! Shades of

¹⁴¹ William J. Sullivan, “Gustavus Vasa Fox and Naval Administration” (PhD dissertation, Catholic University, 1977), 192; the second part of this quote comes from Fox to Du Pont, 16 February 1863, in Robert Means Thompson and Richard Wainwright, eds., Confidential Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, 1861-1865 (2 vols.; New York: Printed for the Naval History Society by the De Vinne Press, 1918-19), 1:180. Cf. Ari Hoogenboom, Gustavus Vasa Fox of the Union Navy: A Biography (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

¹⁴² Sullivan, “Gustavus Vasa Fox and Naval Administration,” 191-92.

¹⁴³ On February 2, General Foster notified Lincoln that the navy would attack within two weeks.

¹⁴⁴ Du Pont to his wife, 11 June 1863, John D. Hayes, ed., Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from his Civil War Letters (3 vols.; Ithaca, N.Y.: Published for the Eleutherian Mills Historical Library by the Cornell University Press, 1969), 3:173.

¹⁴⁵ Fox to Du Pont, Washington, 16, 20 February 1863, Hayes, ed., Du Pont Letters, 2:450.

Yorktown and McClellan's dithering on the Peninsula! Lincoln would not stand for it, nor would the public!¹⁴⁶ On March 20, the president instructed Du Pont's aide to inform the admiral: "I fear neither you nor your officers appreciate the supreme importance to us of Time; the more you prepare, the more the enemy will be prepared."¹⁴⁷ A week later he complained that "Du Pont was asking for one ironclad after another, as fast as they were built."¹⁴⁸

In fact, Du Pont rightly thought that monitors were ill-suited for attacking forts, no matter how effective they proved in naval battles. The admiral held the administration in contempt: "our rulers . . . only think of a blow being struck to help them politically," he told his wife on the eve of battle. "They know no more what the bravest hearts here think and feel about the matter than, when alongside a comfortable fire, they remember a man outside in a snowdrift. The ignorance about Charleston is appalling on their part, for it is the only way to account for the impatience which seems to manifest itself."¹⁴⁹

Lincoln, he wrote, "is evidently a most mediocre man and unfortunately interferes a great deal with matters he should leave to his subordinates and agents."¹⁵⁰

Fox's wildly optimistic prognostications helped overcome presidential doubts. On more than one occasion, Lincoln told the assistant secretary of the navy: "I should be very anxious about this job if you did not feel so sure of your people being successful."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Du Pont to his wife, Port Royal, 27 March, 11 June 1863, Hayes, ed., Du Pont Letters, 2:519, 3:173.

¹⁴⁷ A. D. Richardson to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 20 March 1863, Sydney Howard Gay Papers, Columbia University.

¹⁴⁸ Madeleine Vinton Dahlgren, Memoir of John A. Dahlgren, Rear-Admiral United States Navy (Boston: J. R. Osgood, 1882), 389 (diary entry for 29 March 1863).

¹⁴⁹ Hayes, ed., Du Pont Letters, 2:524.

¹⁵⁰ Du Pont to his wife, Port Royal, 27 March 1863, Hayes, ed., Du Pont Letters, 2:516-17.

¹⁵¹ Fox to Du Pont, 12 February 1863, Thompson and Wainwright, eds., Confidential Correspondence of Fox, 1:178.

If Du Pont had shared with the administration more candidly his misgivings about the assault, the president may have reconsidered its viability. As it was, Lincoln feared that Du Pont lacked the aggressive spirit of an old salt like David Farragut, whose fleet had captured New Orleans a year earlier. To Welles, Lincoln pessimistically observed that Du Pont “is everlastingly asking for more . . . ironclads. He will do nothing with any. He has intelligence and system, and will maintain a good blockade” but “he will never take Sumter or get to Charleston.”¹⁵² Welles agreed, judging that the admiral “shrinks from responsibility, dreads the conflict he has sought, yet is unwilling that any other should undertake it, is afraid the reputation of Du Pont will suffer. This jeopardizes the whole – makes a botched thing of it.”¹⁵³

Lincoln instructed Du Pont to send his ironclads against Charleston or, if he doubted his ability to succeed there, transfer them west to assist in the Vicksburg campaign. Before the telegram reached Du Pont, however, he had assaulted Charleston on April 7 with eight monitors and a huge armored frigate, the New Ironsides. After a furious encounter of little more than half an hour, they withdrew. One monitor, the Keokuk, was sunk. As Lincoln awaited news of the attack, he was skeptical. “What will you wager that half our iron-clads are at the bottom of Charleston Harbor?” he asked Noah Brooks. “The people will expect big things when they hear of this; but it is too late – too late!” he exclaimed.¹⁵⁴ As word of the failure began coming in, he “appeared more

¹⁵² Gideon Welles, Lincoln and Seward (New York: Sheldon, 1874), 200.

¹⁵³ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:236 (entry for 16 February 1863).

¹⁵⁴ Noah Brooks, “Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 212-13.

anxious and, if possible, more careworn than ever, though he has never had any faith in an attack upon Charleston by sea forces alone,” noted Brooks.¹⁵⁵

On April 12, when he learned of the Union repulse, Lincoln told journalists at the Navy Department that he “was not pleased with the results,” then left the building “with a downcast, haggard, bewildered look, unshaven, with neckcloth all awry – the very picture of a man whose wits had left him.”¹⁵⁶ He had assumed that “the attack might last for days and even weeks and be a gradual process.”¹⁵⁷ The next day, he told Albert G. Browne of Massachusetts that as he read the grim news, “almost his only consolation was extracted from the thought that it proved that the Northern harbors were capable of being more quickly made defensible against foreign attack than had been supposed.”¹⁵⁸ Summing up his disappointment, Lincoln observed that “the six months’ preparation for Charleston was a very long grace for the thin plate of soup served in the two hours of fighting.”¹⁵⁹ He had not supposed that the ironclads “would give up Charleston after a fight of forty minutes.”¹⁶⁰ On April 15, Charles Sumner reported that the president seemed “gloomy.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ Washington correspondence, 12 April, Sacramento Daily Union, 8 May 1863, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 43.

¹⁵⁶ Gerald S. Henig, Henry Winter Davis: Antebellum and Civil War Congressman from Maryland (New York: Twayne, 1973), 178.

¹⁵⁷ Henry Winter Davis to Du Pont, 2 May 1863, Hayes, ed., Du Pont Letters, 1:181.

¹⁵⁸ “President Lincoln’s Notion for Harbor Defense,” unidentified clipping, [1885], Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁵⁹ Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 14 April 1863, Sydney Howard Gay Papers, Columbia University.

¹⁶⁰ Dahlgren, Memoir of Dahlgren, 390 (diary entry for 26 April 1863).

¹⁶¹ Adams S. Hill to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 15 April 1863, Sydney Howard Gay Papers, Columbia University.

The following day, Nicolay expressed what his boss was probably thinking: the young secretary was puzzled by Du Pont's decision to withdraw so abruptly, "for after all the damage done us was very slight (the Keokuk being a comparatively weak vessel, not built on the Monitor plan.) To counterbalance the sinking of our ship and the trifling derangement of some of the Monitors, we had tested their comparative invulnerability and had found and secured possession of a safe and important anchorage inside Charleston Bar, from which we could greatly lessen the line of blockade, and more important than all it substantially commanded a part at least of Morris Island enabling us to gain a lodgment there by landing troops, and beginning a series of siege operations that might of themselves render Fort Sumpter untenable. This advantage was partially thrown away by the subsequent withdrawal of the whole iron-clad fleet, leaving the enemy undisturbed in the work of erecting new batteries, which they began, ever before we left, to protect that only weak point in their defences."¹⁶²

Shortly after receiving the bad news, Lincoln conferred with Halleck about continuing the Charleston campaign. The president asked "why it was not possible to land a strong infantry force upon Morris Island, under cover of the gunboats, to cooperate with the navy in the attack upon the works at Cummings Point." Then "Sumter could be reduced, and, by gradual approaches, we could get within range of the city." Old Brains pooh-poohed the idea, insisting that troops "could do nothing once they got there." When Fox joined them and seconded Lincoln's proposal, Halleck continued to demur. According to Noah Brooks, "though he treated the suggestions of Lincoln with respect,"

¹⁶² Nicolay to Theresia Bates, Washington, 16 April 1863, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 109.

the general-in-chief “evidently entertained a profound contempt for his generalship.”¹⁶³ (On another occasion, when Halleck “absolutely insulted the President,” Lincoln allegedly “resolved to [re]move” him for such an “act of personal indignity.” But he curbed his temper and retained the services of Old Brains, for he saw no obviously suitable replacement.)¹⁶⁴

Lincoln ordered Du Pont to hold his position inside the Charleston bar and prevent the Confederates from erecting more batteries on the islands at the harbor’s entrance; both the admiral and General Hunter were to renew the attack that, in the president’s words, should “be a real one (though not a desperate one).”¹⁶⁵ By the time Lincoln’s telegram reached Du Pont, the ironclads had already withdrawn. The thin-skinned admiral, unwilling to renew the assault, took offense at what he considered the president’s implied censure and asked to be relieved.¹⁶⁶

As Lincoln considered this request, he received a letter from John Hay stoutly defending Du Pont. (Hay was on a visit to South Carolina.)¹⁶⁷ In early May, Congressman Henry Winter Davis, a good friend of the admiral, met with the president, who had kind words for Du Pont. As Davis reported to the admiral, the commander-in-chief said that “that no one stood higher than you with him and the department; that you were the idol of the navy and the favorite of Mr. Welles and enjoyed their full

¹⁶³ Washington correspondence, 1 January, Sacramento Daily Union, 4 February 1864, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 100-1.

¹⁶⁴ T. J. Barnett to S. L. M. Barlow, Washington, 12, 27 October 1862, Barlow Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Marszalek, Halleck, 165, 174.

¹⁶⁵ Lincoln to Du Pont, Washington, 13 April 1863; Lincoln to Hunter and Du Pont, Washington, 14 April 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:170, 173-74.

¹⁶⁶ Du Pont to Welles, 16 April 1863, Hayes, ed., Du Pont Letters, 3:37-39.

¹⁶⁷ Hay to Lincoln, Stono River, South Carolina, 10 April 1863, in Michael Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln’s Side: John Hay’s Civil War Correspondence and Selected Writings (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 34-36.

confidence; neither had ever felt the slightest abatement of it; they knew you had done all that in your opinion was possible, and they had never dropped a word of censure or discontent respecting you.”¹⁶⁸

This attempt to placate the touchy admiral failed; Du Pont would not be consoled. Eager to salvage his reputation, he heedlessly lashed out at critics and thus helped scuttle his career.¹⁶⁹ A letter he wrote to the navy department on April 16 seemed to Lincoln to disparage his administration. In June, Welles accepted his request to be relieved. Months later, when Du Pont denounced the navy secretary, Welles in reply enumerated the admiral’s offenses: “Your prompt abandonment of the harbor of Charleston after a brief attack -- your disinclination to occupy the harbor -- your declarations that the monitors could not remain there with safety -- your doubts and misgivings in relation to those vessels -- your opposition to a naval attack -- your omission to suggest or advise any system of naval proceedings -- your constant complaints -- the distrust that painfully pervaded your correspondence, that seemed to overshadow public duty -- your assaults upon editors instead of assaults upon rebel batteries -- your neglect of any reconnaissance of the harbor obstructions, or if such was ever made, your neglect to inform the Department of the fact -- these, with your querulous and censorious charges which subsequently, during four months' leisure, have been garnered up and cherished.”¹⁷⁰ Privately he called Du Pont “an intriguer, selfish[,] aspiring and disappointed.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Henry Winter Davis to Du Pont, 2 May 1863, Hayes, ed., Du Pont Letters, 3:80-82.

¹⁶⁹ Kevin J. Weddle, Lincoln’s Tragic Admiral: The Life of Samuel Francis Du Pont (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 200-3.

¹⁷⁰ Welles to Du Pont, Washington, 4 November 1863, Hayes, ed., Du Pont Letters, 3:258.

¹⁷¹ Welles to his son Edgar, Washington, 13 December 1863, Welles Papers, Library of Congress.

BURNSIDE BLUNDERS AGAIN

While Hooker was whipping the Army of the Potomac into shape for a spring offensive, Burnside in his new position as head of the Department of the Ohio created yet another headache for Lincoln by arresting ex-Congressman Clement L. Vallandigham of Dayton, Ohio, a prominent leader of the so-called Peace Democrats.¹⁷² Dubbed by their opponents “Copperheads,” after the poisonous snake that strikes without warning, Peace Democrats were concentrated in the lower Midwest and in large cities. They generally backed compromises that would bring about a negotiated restoration of the Union with slavery intact.¹⁷³ War Democrats, on the other hand, tended to support the administration’s military policies. Each faction deplored arbitrary arrests and emancipation, using as their slogan: “The Constitution as it is and the Union as it was.” (An Ohio Democrat added a pendent to this slogan: “and the Niggers where they are.”)¹⁷⁴ During the winter of Northern discontent, the Emancipation Proclamation, the draft, and the suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus greatly strengthened their appeal.

As a leader of the antiwar forces, the forty-two-year-old Vallandigham had notable strengths. According to Noah Brooks, he was “well built,” with a “fresh and fair” complexion, a “small head, regular and somewhat delicate features, and dark hair slightly sprinkled with gray.” Though deploring his ideology, Brooks found the Ohioan “a most

¹⁷² Frank L. Klement, The Limits of Dissent: Clement L. Vallandigham & the Civil War (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970); Joanna D. Cowden, ‘Heaven Will Frown on Such a Cause as This’: Six Democrats Who Opposed Lincoln’s War (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2001), 155-94; Weber, Copperheads, passim.

¹⁷³ Joel H. Silbey, A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860-1868 (New York: Norton, 1977), 105-10; Cowden, ‘Heaven Will Frown on Such a Cause as This,’ passim.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas O. Howe to his brother William, 2 July 1862, in Klement, Limits of Dissent, 106.

personable man,” a “most agreeable and delightful talker,” a “genial and pleasant companion, a steadfast friend, and a man well versed in literature, history, and politics.” As a speaker he was “smooth, plausible, and polished,” though when delivering a formal speech “he often became greatly excited, his face wore an expression at times almost repulsive, and his voice rose with a wild shriek; his hands fluttered convulsively in the air, and the manner of the man underwent a physical transformation.” Peace Democrats in the House of Representatives paid him great deference. “At a word from him, or a wave of his hand,” they “would incontinently scud into the lobbies or cloakrooms; or his signal would bring them all back when they were needed in their seats.”¹⁷⁵ Not every journalist was so complimentary; Horace White called Vallandigham a man who was as “cold as ice and hard as iron” and whose character exhibited “neither humor nor persuasion nor conciliation.”¹⁷⁶

Even before the bombardment of Fort Sumter, Vallandigham had made his mark as a Peace Democrat. In November 1860, he told a crowd in New York: “If any one or more of the States of this Union should at any time secede for reasons of the sufficiency and justice of which . . . they alone may judge, much as I should deplore it, I never would as a Representative in the Congress of the United States vote one dollar of money whereby one drop of American blood should be shed in a civil war.” A month thereafter, he allegedly declared that “no armed force should march through his District to aid in putting down Southern rebellion.” In Congress, Vallandigham declined to support

¹⁷⁵ Brooks, Washington, D.C., in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Mitgang, 28-29.

¹⁷⁶ Horace White, The Life of Lyman Trumbull (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 203.

resolutions commending Major Robert Anderson, refused to offer thanks to the men who fought at First Bull Run, and supported the Fugitive Slave Act and slavery.¹⁷⁷

In 1862, Lincoln helped defeat Vallandigham's reelection bid by recruiting a strong opponent to run against him, Robert C. Schenck, a general wounded at the Second Battle of Bull Run. Lincoln had known Schenck when they both served in the U.S. House of Representatives years earlier. As he was recovering in Washington, Schenck was approached by Stanton, Chase, and the president, all of whom urged him to enter the lists against Vallandigham. To increase Schenck's prestige, Lincoln promoted him to major general. Schenck won with the help of the Ohio legislature, which redrew the boundaries of the Dayton congressional district, lopping off a heavily Democratic county and adding one with a Republican majority. This may have sealed Vallandigham's doom, for he had carried the district two years earlier by only a slim majority.¹⁷⁸

Vallandigham could be exceptionally vituperative. On January 14, 1863, seeking to become the chief leader of the Peace Democrats, he told the House that he saw "nothing before us but universal political and social revolution, anarchy and bloodshed, compared with which the Reign of Terror in France was a merciful visitation." He declared that "the South could never be conquered – never," and argued that "the secret but real purpose of the war was to abolish slavery in the States" and to turn "our present democratical form of government into an imperial despotism." Proudly he announced that from the day that Fort Sumter was bombarded, "I did not support the war; and to-day I bless God that not the smell of so much as one drop of its blood is upon my garments."

¹⁷⁷ Arnold Shankman, "Solider Votes and Clement L. Vallandigham in the 1863 Ohio Gubernatorial Election," Ohio History 82 (1973): 89-91.

¹⁷⁸ Klement, Limits of Dissent, 103-13.

Grandiloquently he condemned the administration for trying to whip the Confederates “back into love and fellowship at the point of the bayonet.” He maintained that “history will record that, after nearly six thousand years of folly and wickedness in every form and administration of government, theocratic, democratic, monarchic, oligarchic, despotic, and mixed, it was reserved to American statesmanship, in the nineteenth century of the Christian era, to try the grand experiment, on a scale the most costly and gigantic in its proportions, of creating love by force and developing fraternal affection by war; and history will record, too, on the same page, the utter, disastrous, and most bloody failure of the experiment.”¹⁷⁹ While running for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in the spring of 1863, Vallandigham continued to assail the Lincoln administration in such terms.

In April, Burnside issued General Orders Number 38 stating that “the habit of declaring sympathy for the enemy will not be allowed in this department. Persons committing such offenses will be at once arrested,” tried by military courts “as spies or traitors, and, if convicted, will suffer death” or will be “sent beyond our lines into the lines of their friends.” No “treason, expressed or implied,” would be tolerated.¹⁸⁰ Impulsively, Burnside had the vain, fiery, dogmatic former congressman arrested.

Even before Vallandigham was apprehended, Order Number 38 had aroused strong protests, even from Burnside’s staff. Captain James Madison Cutts told Lincoln that the order “has kindled the fires of hatred and contention, and Burnside is foolishly and unwisely excited, and if continued in command will disgrace himself, you, and the Country, as he did at Fredericksburg.” The arrest of Vallandigham, said the captain, “has

¹⁷⁹ Congressional Globe, 37th Congress, 2nd session, appendix 52-60.

¹⁸⁰ OR, I, 23, 2:237-238.

inflicted a lasting injury upon your administration.”¹⁸¹ It was one thing for Burnside to resort to such draconian measures in North Carolina, which he had done earlier, but quite another in Ohio. Several embarrassing arrests of innocent people had discredited both the order and its author. After Lincoln intervened to postpone the death sentence of one alleged traitor, Burnside stayed the execution of many men convicted under Order 38.

But the general showed no such reserve in dealing with Vallandigham, who made a particularly inflammatory speech on May 1, denouncing the administration of “King Lincoln” in general and Order 38 in particular. In his closing remarks, Vallandigham warned his audience “that an attempt would shortly be made to enforce the Conscription act; that 'they should remember that this war was not a war for the preservation of the Union;' that 'it was a wicked abolition war' and that if those in authority were allowed to accomplish their purposes the people would be deprived of their liberties and a monarchy established; but that as for him he was resolved that he would never be a priest to minister upon the altar upon which his country was being sacrificed.”¹⁸² Four days later, soldiers apprehended the Democratic firebrand; soon thereafter a military commission found him guilty of violating Order 38 and sentenced him to confinement for the rest of the war.

Thus the obstreperous orator became a martyr whose treatment was widely denounced by many Democrats. Burnside’s action, New York Governor Horatio Seymour wrote, “has brought dishonor upon our country; it is full of danger to our persons and to our homes; it bears upon its front a conscious violation of law and justice.” It “is not merely a step toward revolution, it is revolution. It will not only lead to

¹⁸¹ James Madison Cutts to Lincoln, Cincinnati, 20, 26 July 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁸² OR, II, 5:637.

military despotism -- it establishes military despotism. . . . If it is upheld, our liberties are overthrown.”¹⁸³ On May 16, Seymour’s message was read at a giant Albany rally where resolutions were adopted denouncing “the recent assumption of a military commander to seize and try a citizen of Ohio . . . for no other reason than words addressed to a public meeting in criticism of the course of the Administration, and in condemnation of the military orders of that general.” The New Yorkers urged Lincoln to “be true to the Constitution” and to “recognize and maintain the rights of the States, and the liberties of the citizen.”¹⁸⁴ An unusually choleric Democrat told an Indianapolis crowd that the president deserved assassination: “Let us remind Lincoln that Caesar had his Brutus and Charles the First his Cromwell. Let us also remind the George the Third of the present day that he, too, may have his Cromwell or his Brutus.”¹⁸⁵

Even some Republicans condemned what they called Burnside’s “blunder” and “great mistake.”¹⁸⁶ A strong supporter of the Lincoln administration, former Wisconsin governor and New York Senator Nathaniel P. Tallmadge, warned of “civil war in the loyal states” if Vollandigham were not released.¹⁸⁷ Harper’s Weekly observed correctly that “Vollandigham was fast talking himself into the deepest political grave ever dug when Burnside resurrected him.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Appleton’s Annual Cyclopædia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1863 (New York: D. Appleton, 1864), 689.

¹⁸⁴ Appleton’s Annual Cyclopædia 1863 799-800.

¹⁸⁵ New York Herald, 19 May 1863, in Klement, Limits of Dissent, 180.

¹⁸⁶ National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), and New York Independent, n.d., quoted in The Crisis (Columbus), 27 May 1863.

¹⁸⁷ Nathaniel P. Tallmadge to William H. Seward, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, 24 May 1863, Lincoln, Papers Library of Congress.

¹⁸⁸ Harpers Weekly, 30 May 1863.

Upon Vallandigham's arrival in Cincinnati, where he was incarcerated, he issued an address to his fellow Buckeyes: "I am here in a military bastille for no other offense than my political opinions, and the defense of them, and of the rights of the people, and of your constitutional liberties."¹⁸⁹ The Democrats of Ohio responded by unanimously choosing him as their gubernatorial candidate.

In federal court, when Vallandigham's attorney asked for a writ of habeas corpus, Burnside emphatically defended his action, arguing that just as it was his duty "to avoid saying anything that would weaken the army by preventing a single recruit from joining the ranks, by bringing the laws of Congress into disrepute, or by causing dissatisfaction in the ranks," so too it was "the duty of every citizen in the Department to avoid the same evil." Using a hypothetical example, he maintained that if he found "a man from the enemy's country distributing, in my camps, speeches of their public men that tended to demoralize the troops, or to destroy their confidence in the constituted authorities of the Government, I would have him tried and hung, if found guilty, and all the rules of modern warfare would sustain me. Why should such speeches from our own public men be allowed?" His duty, Burnside protested, required him "to stop license and intemperate discussion, which tend to weaken the authority of the Government and army."¹⁹⁰

Upholding the power of the president and his subordinates to arrest Vallandigham, the court refused to issue a writ of habeas corpus.¹⁹¹

Surprised and dismayed by Burnside's action, Lincoln sought to undo the damage it caused. Rightly fearing that he could not overrule the general without embarrassing him

¹⁸⁹ Appleton's Annual Cyclopædia 1863, 474.

¹⁹⁰ Appleton's Annual Cyclopædia 1863, 481.

¹⁹¹ Klement, Limits of Dissent, 152-72.

and simultaneously encouraging bitter dissent, the president at first had Stanton send him a telegram approving his action: “In your determination to support the authority of the Government and to suppress treason in your Department, you may count on the firm support of the President.”¹⁹² The cabinet, however, demurred; upon learning of their dissatisfaction, Burnside offered yet again to resign. Lincoln replied that all cabinet members “regretted the necessity of arresting . . . Vallandigham, some, perhaps, doubting that there was a real necessity for it – but, being done, all were for seeing you through with it.”¹⁹³ On May 19, Lincoln shrewdly undercut Vallandigham’s martyr status by commuting his sentence and, in keeping with a provision of Order 38, directing that the prisoner “be put beyond our military lines,” and warning that if he returned to the North he would be “kept in close confinement for the term specified in his sentence.”¹⁹⁴ (Others had been similarly banished, including the notorious spy, Rose O’Neal Greenhow, and the Missouri newspaper editor Edmund J. Ellis.) Accordingly, Vallandigham was turned over to puzzled Confederates in Tennessee. After meeting with Jefferson Davis and other Southern leaders, he made his way to Canada where he issued stirring if bootless addresses.¹⁹⁵

Lincoln’s modification of Vallandigham’s sentence represented one step in defusing the crisis caused by Burnside. Another was his prompt decision to revoke the general’s June 1 order shutting down the vitriolic Chicago Times.¹⁹⁶ That journal had

¹⁹² Stanton to Burnside, Washington, 8 May 1863, OR, I, 23, 2:316..

¹⁹³ Lincoln to Burnside, Washington, 29 May 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:237.

¹⁹⁴ Edward McPherson, The Political History of the United States of America During the Great Rebellion (Washington: Philp & Solomons, 1865), 162.

¹⁹⁵ Klement, Limits of Dissent, 173-228.

¹⁹⁶ Justin E. Walsh, To Print the News and Raise Hell!: A Biography of Wilbur F. Storey (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 174.

fiercely denounced the administration, especially after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. In February 1863, it declared that the “only way to compel the administration to withdraw its emancipation proclamation and kindred policies is for the democracy of the country to absolutely and unqualifiedly refuse to support the war for the enforcement of these policies.”¹⁹⁷ In 1864, the paper strongly hinted that Lincoln should be assassinated: it was necessary, ran an editorial, for “ourselves and to posterity to relieve the nation in some way of a most intolerable weight of tyranny.” Elections were “the first legitimate resort for relief,” but should they prove unavailing, “then the next step is plain and inevitable. We leave its character to the development of the future.”¹⁹⁸ When some of Grant’s subordinates wanted to silence the Times, the general agreed that it “should have been suppressed long since by authority from Washington,” but in the absence of such authority, it was wise to forbear. Suppression was only “calculated to give the paper a notoriety evidently sought, and which probably would increase the sale of it.”¹⁹⁹

When Lincoln learned of Burnside’s highhanded act, he immediately had Stanton suggest to the general that he might want to rescind the order. Stanton explained to Burnside that the president believed the “irritation produced by such acts is . . . likely to do more harm than the publication would do.” Though he “approves of your motives and desires to give you cordial and efficient support,” and “while military movements are left to your judgment,” nevertheless “upon administration questions such as the arrest of

¹⁹⁷ Chicago Times, 28 February 1863, in Craig D. Tenney, “Major General A. E. Burnside and the First Amendment: A Case Study of Civil War Freedom of Expression” (PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 1977), 70.

¹⁹⁸ Walsh, To Print the News and Raise Hell, 188-94.

¹⁹⁹ Grant to Stephen Hurlbut, 13 February 1863, QR, I, 24, 3:50.

civilians and the suppression of newspapers not requiring immediate action, the President desires to be previously consulted.”²⁰⁰ On June 3, several prominent Chicagoans, including the mayor, urged Lincoln to overrule Burnside, and Senator Lyman Trumbull, along with Republican Congressman Isaac N. Arnold, implored the president to give the appeal “serious & prompt consideration.”²⁰¹ The president’s decision to honor these requests made him seem much less insensitive to First Amendment rights.²⁰² Because Lincoln acted so quickly, the Times was able to resume publication after a hiatus of only one day.

Yet another step minimizing the effect of Burnside’s blunders was Lincoln’s public letter addressed to the organizers of the May 16 Albany protest meeting, chaired by the industrialist Erastus Corning. In that important document, he defended the arrest of Vallandigham and suspension of habeas corpus. Asserting that the government must execute deserters to maintain its armies intact, he argued that it was equally necessary to punish those who encouraged desertion. “Must I shoot a simple-minded soldier boy who deserts, while I must not touch a hair of a wily agitator who induces him to desert?” he asked rhetorically. Whoever “dissuades one man from volunteering, or induces one soldier to desert, weakens the Union cause as much as he who kills a union soldier in battle.” To be sure, in peacetime, the suspension of habeas corpus would be unconstitutional. But the Constitution provides that the “privilege of the writ of Habeas

²⁰⁰ Stanton to Burnside, 1 June 1863, OR, II, 5:723-724.

²⁰¹ Isaac N. Arnold and Lyman Trumbull to Lincoln, Chicago, 3 June 1863, forwarding F. C. Sherman and several others to Lincoln, Chicago, 3 June 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁰² Craig D. Tenney, “To Suppress or Not to Suppress: Lincoln and the Chicago Times,” Civil War History 27 (1981): 247-59; Tenney, “Burnside and the First Amendment,” 194-241.

Corpus shall not be suspended, unless when in cases of Rebellion or Invasion, the public Safety may require it.”

The secessionists, Lincoln argued, expected constitutional scruples to hamper the government’s attempt to uphold the Union. They planned to cry “Liberty of speech,” “Liberty of the press,” and “*Habeas corpus*” in order “to keep on foot amongst us a most efficient corps of spies, informers, supplyers, and aiders and abettors of their cause in a thousand ways.” While those charges were being debated, the rebels’ “spies and others might remain at large to help on their cause.” Alternatively, if the president “should suspend the writ, without ruinous waste of time, instances of arresting innocent persons might occur, as are always likely to occur in such cases; and then a clamor could be raised.” Fully aware that the rebels would avail themselves of such tactics, Lincoln insisted that he nevertheless “was slow to adopt the strong measures,” for he was “thoroughly imbued with a reverence for the guaranteed rights of individuals.” As the war progressed, however, he was forced to adopt measures “indispensable to the public Safety,” measures which he believed were “within the exceptions of the constitution.” Civilian courts were “utterly incompetent” to handle the vast number of cases that such a “clear, flagrant, and gigantic case of Rebellion” generated, and juries “too frequently have at least one member, more ready to hang the panel than to hang the traitor.” Moreover, men enticing soldiers to desert might behave in such a way as to commit no crime that civil courts would recognize. The power to suspend “is allowed by the constitution on purpose that, men may be arrested and held, who can not be proved to be guilty of defined crime, ‘when, in cases of Rebellion or Invasion the public Safety may require it.’” During a rebellion, “arrests are made, not so much for what has been done, as

for what probably would be done.” And who should be arrested? “The man who stands by and says nothing, when the peril of his government is discussed, can not be misunderstood. If not hindered, he is sure to help the enemy.” Worse still, “if he talks ambiguously -- talks for his country with ‘buts’ and ‘ifs’ and ‘ands.’”

It would have been advisable, Lincoln argued, if at the outbreak of hostilities the government had arrested men like John C. Breckinridge, Robert E. Lee, Joseph E. Johnston, John B. Magruder, William B. Preston, Simon B. Buckner, and Franklin Buchanan, all high-ranking military leaders in the Confederacy. “Every one of them if arrested would have been discharged on Habeas Corpus, were the writ allowed to operate. In view of these and similar cases, I think the time not unlikely to come when I shall be blamed for having made too few arrests rather than too many.”

Lincoln denied the Albany protestors’ argument that military arrests could not be made “outside of the lines of necessary military occupation, and the scenes of insurrection.” The Constitution, he pointed out, “makes no such distinction.” Such arrests were justified wherever “in cases of Rebellion or Invasion, the public Safety may require them.” Far from the front lines there was a grave military danger presented by “mischievous interference with the raising and supplying of armies” and “the enticing men out of the army.” Vallandigham clearly belonged in that category of eligible detainees, Lincoln argued. “Mr. Vallandigham avows his hostility to the war on the part of the Union; and his arrest was made because he was laboring, with some effect, to prevent the raising of troops, to encourage desertions from the army, and to leave the rebellion without an adequate military force to suppress it. He was not arrested because he was damaging the political prospects of the administration, or the personal interests of

the commanding general; but because he was damaging the army, upon the existence, and vigor of which, the life of the nation depends. He was warring upon the military; and this gave the military constitutional jurisdiction to lay hands upon him.” Orators can indirectly encourage soldier boys to desert “by getting a father, or brother, or friend, into a public meeting, and there working upon his feeling, till he is persuaded to write the soldier boy, that he is fighting in a bad cause, for a wicked administration of a contemptible government, too weak to arrest and punish him if he shall desert. I think that in such a case, to silence the agitator, and save the boy, is not only constitutional, but, withal, a great mercy.”

To support his argument that there was no danger that the extraordinary measures taken during war would set dangerous precedents for peacetime, Lincoln graphically insisted that he could “no more be persuaded that the government can constitutionally take no strong measure in time of rebellion, because it can be shown that the same could not be lawfully taken in time of peace, than I can be persuaded that a particular drug is not good medicine for a sick man, because it can be shown to not be good food for a well one.” During the War of 1812, Andrew Jackson had suspended the writ of habeas corpus and arrested a judge as well as critics of his action. After the war, when that same judge fined Jackson \$1000, he paid it; years later Democrats led by Stephen A. Douglas persuaded Congress to rescind the fine. Jackson’s precedent did not undermine the Bill of Rights and pave the way to postwar despotism.

Lincoln denied that any partisan motive underlay Vollandigham’s arrest. After all, he pointed out, Burnside was a Democrat, as was the judge who refused to grant habeas

corpus, and “of all those democrats who are nobly exposing their lives and shedding their blood on the battle-field, I have learned that many approve the course taken with Mr. Vallandigham while I have not heard of a single one condemning it.”

Lincoln conceded that if he had been in Burnside’s position, he might not have arrested Vallandigham, but while he would not shirk the ultimate responsibility for the arrest, he believed that “as a general rule, the commander in the field is the better judge of the necessity in any particular case.” He would gladly release Vallandigham as soon as he believed “the public safety will not suffer by it.” In conclusion, Lincoln expressed the belief that as the war continued, the necessity for such strong measures would diminish. But, he insisted, “I must continue to do so much as may seem to be required by the public safety.”²⁰³

Some of Lincoln’s arguments were logically and constitutionally weak, especially his contention that anyone “who stands by and says nothing, when the peril of his government is discussed . . . is sure to help the enemy.” The New York World with some justice asked: “Was anything so extraordinary ever before uttered by the chief magistrate of a free country? Men are torn from their home and immured in bastilles for the shocking crime of silence!”²⁰⁴ Still, the Corning letter’s homey rhetoric succeeded in allaying many public doubts. George William Curtis called it “altogether excellent” and said the president’s timing was “another instance of his remarkable sagacity.”²⁰⁵ Nicolay

²⁰³ Lincoln to Erastus Corning et al., Washington [12 June] 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:260-69.

²⁰⁴ New York World, 16 June 1863.

²⁰⁵ George William Curtis to Charles Eliot Norton, [North Shore, New York], 19 June 1863, George William Curtis Papers, Harvard University.

and Hay noted that few of Lincoln’s state papers “produced a stronger impression upon the public mind.”²⁰⁶

On June 30, Erastus Corning and the Albany committee issued a reply scolding Lincoln’s “pretensions to more than regal authority” and the “misty and clouded forms of expression in which those pretensions are set forth.” Vehemently they deplored the “gigantic and monstrous heresy” that the Constitution contained “a principle or germ of arbitrary power, which in time of war expands at once into an absolute sovereignty, wielded by one man; so that liberty perishes, or is dependent on his will, his discretion or his caprice.”²⁰⁷

A delegation of Ohio Democrats, unpersuaded by Lincoln’s letter to Corning, read the president a fifteen-page rebuttal of that document.²⁰⁸ In reply, Lincoln denied ever saying that “the constitution is different in time of insurrection or invasion from what it is in time of peace & public security.” Rather, he had “expressed the opinion that the constitution is different, in its application in cases of Rebellion or Invasion, involving the Public Safety, from what it is in times of profound peace and public security; and this opinion I adhere to, simply because, by the constitution itself, things may be done in the one case which may not be done in the other.”²⁰⁹ Lincoln failed to answer the Ohioans’ telling contention that Vallandigham was entitled to a civil trial under the provisions of the Second Confiscation Act and the March 3, 1863, law authorizing the president to

²⁰⁶ John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Abraham Lincoln: A History (10 vols.; New York: Century, 1890), 7:349.

²⁰⁷ Appletons’ Annual Cyclopædia for 1863, 803.

²⁰⁸ Washington correspondence, 25, 26 June, New York Tribune, 26, 27 June 1863.

²⁰⁹ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:300-306.

Lincoln's public letters once again helped to win over public opinion. A visit to several Midwestern cities convinced Hiram Barney that he had "overrated the disloyal element at the northwest." In June, he reported that opposition leaders were vocal but "the great majority are with the Administration and disposed to support the President in a vigorous enforcement of the laws against Copperheads."²¹⁰

RELIEF: VISITING HOOKER'S ARMY

While the dramas in Ohio and at Charleston were playing themselves out, Hooker planned a spring offensive for the Army of the Potomac. "There is a good deal expected of him [Hooker] & hoped from him," David Davis observed. "He is the last chance."²¹¹ In early April, accompanied by the First Lady and several others, including Noah Brooks, Lincoln visited the general at Falmouth to learn more about the upcoming campaign.

As was his wont on such excursions, Lincoln inspected the troops. While at a grand infantry review, the president returned the salute of officers by merely touching his hat but removed that item as he passed by enlisted men.²¹² A soldier in the Fifth Corps wrote that "I don't know whether he took off his hat to me or not, but he took it off."²¹³ Another observed that the president "looked care-worn and anxious, and we thought there must be a 'heap of trouble on the old man's mind.'"²¹⁴ To some soldiers he seemed "very thin and pale, so much so that many people remarked that there was a fair chance of

²¹⁰ Barney to Chase, New York, 16 June 1863, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

²¹¹ David Davis to William H. Hanna, Washington, 8 February 1863, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

²¹² Washington correspondence, 12 April, Sacramento Daily Union, 8 May 1863, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 43.

²¹³ Stephen W. Sears, Chancellorsville (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 115.

²¹⁴ Letter by Walter Carter, 27 April 1863, Robert Goldthwaite Carter, Four Brothers in Blue; or, Sunshine and Shadows of the War of the Rebellion, A Story of the Great Civil War from Bull Run to Appomattox (Washington: Gibson Brothers, 1913), 235.

Hamlin being our President soon.”²¹⁵ That opinion was echoed by other troopers who reported that the president appeared “thin and careworn” and “pale and careworn yet not dispirited.”²¹⁶ One soldier was especially moved by Lincoln’s appearance, writing that he “looks poorly. . . thin and in bad health . . . he is to all outward appearances much careworn, and anxiety is fast wearing him out, poor man; I could but pity as I looked at him, and remembered the weight of responsibility resting upon his burdened mind; what an ordeal he has passed through, and what is yet before him! All I can say is, Poor Abe!”²¹⁷

Lincoln cut a comical figure as he inspected the Fifth Corps, sitting astride a pony so small that his toes almost scraped the ground. Because he did not strap down his pants legs, they rode up exposing long underwear. His black suit was entirely mud-spattered.²¹⁸ But, as an Indiana soldier remarked, the “fact that Mr. Lincoln is a very awkward horseman did not lessen the Soldiers admiration for him as a man and as president.”²¹⁹

On a different occasion, Lincoln asked a corps commander as they watched a grand review: “what do you suppose will become of all these men when the war is over?” The general was heartened “that somebody had an idea that the war would sometime

²¹⁵ Stephen Minot Weld, War Diary and Letters of Stephen Minot Weld (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1912), 170 (diary entry for 5 April 1863).

²¹⁶ Emil and Ruth Rosenblatt, eds., Hard Marching Every Day: The Civil War Letters of Private Wilbur Fisk, 1861-1865 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 64; Joseph Hopkins Twichell to his father, near Falmouth, 12 April 1863, Peter Messent and Steve Courtney, eds., The Civil War letters of Joseph Hopkins Twichell: A Chaplain’s Story (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 226.

²¹⁷ Undated letter in Carter, Four Brothers in Blue, 237. For similar comments from others, see William C. Davis, Lincoln’s Men: How President Lincoln Became Father to an Army and a Nation (New York: Free Press, 1999), 142-43.

²¹⁸ Captain Josiah C. Williams to his father, Stafford Court House, 15 April 1863, typed copy, Williams Papers, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis; reminiscences of Robert G. Carter in Carter, Four Brothers in Blue, 235-36.

²¹⁹ Richard S. Skidmore, ed., The Civil War Journal of Billy Davis: From Hopewell, Indiana to Port Republic, Virginia (Greencastle, Indiana: Nugget Publishers, 1989), 134, in Davis, Lincoln’s Men, 65.

end.”²²⁰ As Lincoln rode in an army ambulance to another review, he asked the driver, who was profanely urging on the mules: “Excuse me, my friend, are you an Episcopalian?” The startled teamster replied that he was a Methodist. “Well, I thought you must be an Episcopalian, because you swear just like Governor Seward, who is a churchwarden,” quipped the president. The driver used no more profanity for the rest of the trip.²²¹

At hospitals Lincoln shook hands and left a kind word with many of the wounded men. Brooks reported that as he “moved softly from between beds, his face shining with sympathy and his voice often low with emotion,” often the patients “shed a tear of sad pleasure as they returned the kind salutation of the President and gazed after him with a new glow upon their faces.” To Brooks it was no wonder that “a thundering cheer burst from the long lines of men” as Lincoln rode past them on his way back to headquarters.²²²

PARDONER-IN-CHIEF: DEALING WITH CONDEMNED SOLDIERS

Lincoln’s merciful treatment of troops condemned to death increased his popularity with the army. On September 4, 1861, Private William Scott, an unsophisticated Vermont country boy who had fallen asleep on sentry duty, was sentenced to die before a firing squad in five days. When Lincoln received appeals for clemency from the officers of Scott’s regiment as well as from leading Washington clergymen, he assured them that he would consider the matter carefully. The death

²²⁰ Darius N. Couch in Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, ed. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (4 vols.; New York: Century, 1887-88), 3:155, 120.

²²¹ Brooks, Washington in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Mitgang, 55.

²²² Washington correspondence, 12 April, Sacramento Daily Union, 8 May 1863, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 41-42.

sentence was widely criticized in the city. According to a journalist, “the general expression was that to shoot the soldier would be a terrible mistake. Mutineers have been let off with a term at Tortugas as laborers. Rebels captured, fighting against the Government, are released on parole, but a zealous soldier, for sleeping at his post, must receive the extreme penalty. It was felt that to carry it into execution would at once stop all recruiting.”²²³ The day before the scheduled execution, McClellan, who had approved the sentence, announced that “the President of the United States has expressed a wish that as this is the first condemnation to death in this army for this crime, mercy may be extended to the criminal. This fact, viewed in connection with the inexperience of the condemned as a soldier, his previous good conduct and general good character, and the urgent entreaties made in his behalf, have determined the Major General to grant the pardon so earnestly prayed for.”²²⁴ The press lauded this decision as “a high tribute to the great goodness of our excellent President.”²²⁵

Seven months later, Private Scott was killed in action. In his last moments he enjoined a comrade to tell Lincoln “that I thank him for his generous regard for me, when a poor soldier under the sentence of death. Tell him that I died for my country with six bullets shot into me, by my enemies and his enemies and my country’s enemies. And oh, tell him, that I hope that God will guide and direct him and take care of him in all the

²²³ Washington correspondence by C., 9 September, Chicago Tribune, 14 September 1861.

²²⁴ Mrs. J. Blakeslee Frost, The Rebellion in the United States; or, The War of 1861 (2 vols.; Hartford: G. C. Rand & Avery, 1862-1863), 2:353.

²²⁵ Washington Sunday Morning Chronicle in Carl Sandburg, Abraham Lincoln: The War Years (4 vols.; New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1939), 1:531.

scenes through which he may be called to pass. Yes, God bless President Lincoln for he will one day give him victory over all our enemies.”²²⁶

Lincoln’s willingness to reprieve death sentences for sleeping sentinels, deserters, and others became legendary, and for good reason. When Massachusetts Congressman Henry L. Dawes urged him to spare the life of a nineteen-year-old constituent guilty of desertion, the president replied “that the War Department insisted that the severest punishment for desertion was absolutely necessary to save the army from demoralization.” He added: “But when I think of these mere lads, who had never before left their homes, enlisting in the enthusiasm of the moment for a war of which they had no conception and then in the camp or on the battle field a thousand miles from home, longing for its rest and safety, I have so much sympathy for him that I cannot condemn him to die for forgetting the obligations of the soldier in the longing for home life. There is death and woe enough in this war without such a sacrifice.”²²⁷

One day in 1863, after spending six hours with Lincoln reviewing court martial proceedings, John Hay confided to his diary: “I was amused at the eagerness with which the President caught at any fact which would justify him in saving the life of a condemned soldier. . . . Cases of cowardice he was specially averse to punishing with death. He said it would frighten the poor devils too terribly, to shoot them. On the case of a soldier who had once deserted & reenlisted he endorsed, ‘Let him fight instead of shooting him.’ One fellow who had deserted & escaped after conviction into Mexico, he sentenced, saying ‘We will condemn him as they used to sell hogs in Indiana, as they

²²⁶ Philadelphia Inquirer, n.d., copied in the New York Commercial Advertiser, 21 April 1862; Paschal P. Ripley to Lincoln, Montpelier, Vermont, 9 January 1865, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²²⁷ Dawes, “A Study of Abraham Lincoln,” typescript, pp. 53-57, Dawes Papers, Library of Congress.

run.”²²⁸ Lincoln called such sessions “butcher days.”²²⁹ Late one day at the military telegraph office, he said: “Tomorrow night I shall have a terrible headache.” When asked why, he sadly replied: “Tomorrow is hangman’s day and I shall have to act upon death sentences.”²³⁰ Joseph Holt, judge advocate general of the army, recalled that when reviewing courts martial cases, Lincoln “shrank with evident pain from even the idea of shedding human blood In every case he always leaned to the side of mercy. His constant desire was to save life.”²³¹

Lincoln also extended clemency to over 300 prisoners convicted in civil courts. He especially favored those who had served in the military, who had spouses or sons in the service, or who indicated a desire to join the army. Among the most common beneficiaries of presidential mercy were the young, those who had women as intercessors pleading their cases, those who appeared penitent, and those who displayed “good conduct.”²³²

Army officers often complained that presidential pardons and reprieves undermined military discipline. When chided for lacking the sternness of an Andrew

²²⁸ Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettliger, eds., Inside Lincoln’s White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 64 (entry for 18 July 1863).

²²⁹ William O. Stoddard, “White House Sketch No. 7,” New York Citizen, 29 September 1866, in Stoddard, Inside the White House in War Times, ed. Burlingame, 171.

²³⁰ General George Stoneman in Osborn H. Oldroyd, ed., The Lincoln Memorial: Album Immortelles (New York: G. W. Carlton, 1883), 221.

²³¹ Holt, interview with Nicolay, Washington, 29 October 1875, in Michael Burlingame, ed., An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay’s Interviews and Essays (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 69.

²³² Jonathan T. Dorris, “President Lincoln’s Clemency,” Lincoln Herald 55 (1953): 2-12; P.S. Ruckman, Jr., David Kincaid, “Inside Lincoln’s Clemency Decision Making,” Presidential Studies Quarterly 29 (1999): 84-99; Thomas P. Lowry, Don’t Shoot That Boy!: Abraham Lincoln and Military Justice (Mason City, IA: Savas, 1999).

Jackson, Lincoln replied: “I am just as God made me, and cannot change.”²³³ One day a political ally observed him grant a pardon in response to a mother’s plea on behalf of her son. After she left, the president remarked: “Perhaps I have done wrong, but at all events I have made that poor woman happy.”²³⁴ Lincoln’s mercy also paid political dividends, for members of Congress felt grateful to the president whenever he reprieved a constituent, an act that predisposed the beneficiary, his family, and his friends to vote Republican.

Though Lincoln’s mercy was legendary, it had limits. Joseph Holt reported that there “was only one class of crimes I always found him prompt to punish – a crime which occurs more or less frequently about all armies – namely, outrages upon women. He never hesitated to approve the sentence in these cases.”²³⁵ The president also showed little compassion for thieves, murderers, and Confederate recruiters plying their trade in the North. Hay noted that the president “was only merciless in cases where meanness or cruelty were shown.”²³⁶ Over the course of the war Lincoln approved death sentences for 267 soldiers.

In rejecting pleas for mercy, Lincoln sometimes displayed anger. When a man and a woman sought to have a convicted spy pardoned, he listened to their story with ever-dwindling patience. He finally interrupted, exclaiming sternly: “There is not a word of this true! And you know it as well as I do. He was a spy, he has been a spy, he ought to have been hanged as a spy. From the fuss you folks are making about him, who

²³³ Colfax, Life and Principles of Lincoln, 17.

²³⁴ Reminiscences of J. H. Van Alen in Van Alen to the editors of the New York Evening Post, New York, 22 April, New York Evening Post, 11 May 1865.

²³⁵ Holt interviewed by Nicolay, Washington, 29 October 1875, in Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 69-70.

²³⁶ Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 64 (entry for 18 July 1863).

are none too loyal, I am convinced he was more valuable to the cause of the enemy than we have yet suspected. You are the third set of persons that has been to me to get him pardoned. Now I'll tell you what – if any of you come bothering me any more about his being set at liberty, that will decide his fate. I will have him hanged, as he deserves to be. You ought to bless your stars that he got off with a whole neck; and if you don't want so see him hanged as high as Haman, don't you come to me again about him."²³⁷ When a Presbyterian minister asked him to pardon a deserter, Lincoln snapped: "Not a word more I can do nothing in the matter. I will not interfere. You should not come here trying to undermine the morale of my armies. Those increasing desertions must be stopped. If you had stopped to think, you would not have come on this foolish errand. So go back to Pittsburgh and try to be a more loyal citizen." Eventually, however, he relented and pardoned the soldier.²³⁸

Lincoln's willingness to issue pardons sometimes led him to clash with Stanton. A notable example of such friction occurred when Henry L. Dawes appealed on behalf of a jailed quartermaster who was dying of consumption, according to a statement signed by two physicians.

"Do you believe that statement?" Lincoln asked the Massachusetts congressman.

"Certainly," replied Dawes.

"Then say so here," the president instructed, pointing to the back of the document alleging that the prisoner was terminally ill. Lincoln then endorsed it: "Let this man be discharged."

²³⁷ Mary Livermore, My Story of the War (Hartford: A. D. Worthington, 1889), 568.

²³⁸ John D. Paxton, Lynchburg, Va., "Abraham Lincoln at Bay," manuscript, J. G. Randall Papers, Library of Congress.

“Neither you nor I can afford to let that man die in prison,” said the president, who agreed to submit the document to Stanton.

The next day, however, Lincoln rebuffed a similar plea by a Michigan congressman, explaining that he had issued a pardon at Dawes’s request and just taken it to Stanton. The gruff war secretary refused to comply, arguing that the prisoner was “the biggest rascal in the army” and that his appeal was patently bogus. “I begin to think I haven’t much influence with this Administration,” the president quipped.

When informed of this exchange, Dawes hastened to the White House and urged that an emissary be sent to the prison to investigate Stanton’s charge. Lincoln agreed, saying if Dawes was willing to take the risk, so would he, for “he had rather two well men should escape through deception, than to live in doubt whether he had not let one man die of consumption in a cell, rather than believe his story.” The prisoner was released and lived many years thereafter, confirming Stanton’s suspicion.²³⁹

FIRST LADY: VISITING THE FRONT AND HOSPITALS

At Falmouth, Mrs. Lincoln, like her husband, visited hospitals. She also distributed “little comforts to the sick, without any display or ostentation.”²⁴⁰ In Washington, too, she often made “Good Samaritan visits” to hospitals. On one occasion, Lincoln gave her \$1000 out of his own pocket to buy Christmas turkeys for the hospitalized troops and helped her distribute them.²⁴¹ She won praise for “the generous devotion with which she has tenderly cared for the sick and wounded soldiers.” Pro-

²³⁹ Dawes, “A Study of Abraham Lincoln,” typescript, pp. 53-57, Dawes Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁴⁰ John Sedgwick to his sister, 12 April 1863, Correspondence of John Sedgwick, Major-General (2 vols.; [New York]: De Vinne Press, 1902-03), 2:90.

²⁴¹ Washington correspondence, 5, 24 December, New York Herald, 6, 25 December 1862; Washington correspondence, 25, 27 December, New York Times, 26, 28 December 1862.

Confederate elements in the capital might sneer at her as the “hospital matron,” but Unionists applauded “her errands of mercy to those brave men who are cheered by her visits and benefited by her liberal donations.”²⁴²

During her 1863 visit to the front, Mrs. Lincoln became enraged when she heard that at a post-review collation, one which she had not attended, several generals’ wives had kissed her husband after obtaining permission to do so from General Daniel Sickles. Among them was the beautiful spouse of General Felix Salm-Salm. The notoriously jealous First Lady blamed Sickles for that indiscretion and for a quarter of an hour she berated the president, who replied: “But, mother, hear me.”

“Don’t mother me, and as for General Sickles, he will hear what I think of him and his lady guests,” came the indignant reply. “It was well for him that I was not there at the time.”

As the First Couple returned to Washington, escorted by Sickles, the president sought to melt the freeze which his wife affected toward the general. “I never knew until last night that you were a very pious man,” Lincoln remarked to Sickles, who protested that he did not merit such a description. “Not at all,” quipped the president. “Mother says you are the greatest Psalmist in the army. She says you are more than a Psalmist, you are a Salm-Salmist.” The pun had the desired effect.²⁴³

THE SPRING OFFENSIVE

Though Lincoln had originally planned to stay at Falmouth for only a day, he enjoyed himself so much that he remained nearly a week in order to inspect each corps.

²⁴² Washington correspondence by Ben: Perley Poore, 2 February, Boston Evening Journal, 4 February 1863; Washington Sunday Chronicle, 15 June 1862.

²⁴³ Julia Lorrillard Butterfield, ed., A Biographical Memorial of General Daniel Butterfield (New York: Grafton Press, 1904), 160-62.

He found it “a great relief to get away from Washington and the politicians.”²⁴⁴ Yet, as he told Noah Brooks, no matter what he did, “nothing could touch the tired spot within, which was all tired.”²⁴⁵ He expressed to General Egbert Viele a wish that “George Washington or some of those old patriots were here in my place so that I could have a little rest.”²⁴⁶ To one White House caller, Lincoln looked like “a New York omnibus beast at night who had been driven all day” during an August heat spell.²⁴⁷

But Lincoln did not visit the front merely in quest of relaxation. With Hooker and his corps commanders, he reviewed plans for the upcoming campaign and grew disturbed when the generals debated whether to get to Richmond by passing around Lee’s right flank or his left. So he penned a memorandum noting that the presence of Lee’s army on the opposite bank of the Rappahannock meant that there was “no eligible route for us into Richmond.” Therefore Hooker should consider that “our prime object is the enemies’ army in front of us, and not with, or about, Richmond – at all, unless it be incidental to the main object.” Since the Army of the Potomac had shorter supply lines than the enemy, “we can fret him more than he can us.” So Hooker should not attack Lee frontally but rather “continually harass and menace him, so that he shall have no leisure, no safety in sending away detachments. If he weakens himself, then pitch into him.”²⁴⁸ This advice

²⁴⁴ Brooks, Washington in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Mitgang, 55.

²⁴⁵ Washington correspondence, 12 April, Sacramento Daily Union, 8 May 1863, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 43.

²⁴⁶ Egbert Viele, “Lincoln as a Story-Teller,” in William Hayes Ward, ed., Abraham Lincoln: Tributes from His Associates (New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1895), 124.

²⁴⁷ Sam Wood to Bradford R. Wood, n.p., n.d., quoted in Bradford Wood to George G. Fogg, Copenhagen, Denmark, 20 October 1863, Fogg Papers, New Hampshire Historical Society.

²⁴⁸ Memorandum on Hooker’s campaign against Richmond, [ca. 6-10 April 1863], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:164.

was in keeping with Lincoln's approach to the war in the eastern theater: the goal should be the destruction of the enemy's army, not the conquest of territory.

Anson G. Henry, who accompanied his old friend Lincoln to Falmouth, observed the generals conferring with the president and was struck by Hooker's "most exalted opinion of Mr Lincoln's sound judgment & practical sense." Henry predicted that Fighting Joe would "act in accordance with his suggestions in good faith for the reason that they meet his own views in the main."²⁴⁹ In reality, however, the general thought Lincoln was "not much of a soldier." Referring to the president, Halleck, and Stanton, Fighting Joe said that it was "a preposterous irregularity" to have "three heads of military affairs at the Capital." When that trio arrived at Falmouth, Hooker "seemed annoyed," fearing that they brought "some new views or military recommendations just as he had perfected his arrangements."²⁵⁰ The general told Lincoln that "he would not submit to being interfered with."²⁵¹

Disturbed by Hooker's statements that were often prefaced by such remarks as "when I get to Richmond" and "after we have taken Richmond," Lincoln confided to Noah Brooks that "the most depressing thing" about the general was that "he is overconfident."²⁵² When he learned of Fighting Joe's boast that after he had captured the Confederate capital he would publish Lincoln's letter advising him to beware of rashness, the president exclaimed: "Poor Hooker! I am afraid he is incorrigible."²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Henry to his wife, Washington, 12 April 1863, Henry Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

²⁵⁰ Henry W. Bellows to his wife and daughter, Washington, 19 April 1863, Henry W. Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

²⁵¹ Sedgwick, Correspondence of Sedgwick, 2:90-91.

²⁵² Brooks, Washington in Lincoln's Time, ed. Mitgang, 56.

²⁵³ Noah Brooks, Abraham Lincoln and the Downfall of American Slavery (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1896), 356-57.

Lincoln had observed evidence of Hooker's cockiness earlier. In the summer of 1861, Scott and McClellan had thwarted his intention to give Fighting Joe a regimental command. But shortly after First Bull Run, the president overruled those generals, for he admired a veteran like Hooker who had won three brevets in the Mexican War and who traveled all the way from California to offer his services. "I thought I'd take the responsibility, and try the fellow," he said. He gave him a chance after Hooker, then a lieutenant colonel, called at the White House and tearfully declared: "I was at Bull Run the other day, Mr. President, and it is no vanity or boasting in me to say that I am a — sight better General than you, Sir, had on that field!" Lincoln recalled that Hooker's "eye was steady and clear, his manner not half so confident as his words, and altogether he had the air of a man of sense and intelligence who thoroughly believed in himself, and who would at least try to make his words good. I was impressed with him, and rising out of my chair, walked up to him and putting my hand on his shoulder, said: 'Colonel, not Lieut. Col. Hooker, stay! I have use for you, and a regiment for you to command!'" Hooker's subsequent record won the president's respect. "In every position in which he had been put," he declared, "Gen. Hooker has equaled the expectations which his self-confidence excited."²⁵⁴ That cocksure quality led Hooker to state just before he launched his offensive in late April: "My plans are perfect, and when I start to carry them out, may God have mercy on General Lee, for I will have none."²⁵⁵

On April 10, Lincoln's last day at Falmouth, he spoke with Hooker and his senior corps commander, Darius N. Couch. Evidently fearing that they might repeat

²⁵⁴ "A Word about Hooker," Chicago Tribune, 5 February 1863; Washington correspondence, 28 January 1863, ibid. Cf. Walter H. Hebert, Fighting Joe Hooker (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1944), 47-49. Lincoln spoke about this episode a few months after it occurred.

²⁵⁵ T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and His Generals (New York: Knopf, 1952), 232.

McClellan's blunder at Antietam, he said: "I want to impress upon you two gentlemen, in your next fight put in all of your men."²⁵⁶ If the president feared that Hooker might be too timid, he also feared his recklessness. "They told me in Washington to hurry up General Hooker," he remarked during this visit; "but when he once gets started there will be more necessity for treading on the tail of his coat to keep him from moving too rashly."²⁵⁷

Back at the White House, Lincoln was in high spirits but worried about the slow progress of General George Stoneman's cavalry, which had been ordered to cut Lee's supply lines. On April 15, the president expressed "considerable uneasiness" to Hooker, who had notified him that heavy rains were delaying Stoneman. "The rain and mud, of course, were to be calculated upon," Lincoln sternly observed. "Gen. S. is not moving rapidly enough to make the expedition come to any thing. He has now been out three days, two of which were unusually fine weather, and all three without hindrance from the enemy, and yet he is not twenty five miles from where he started. To reach his point, he still has sixty to go; another river, the Rapidan, to cross, and will be hindered by the enemy. By arithmetic, how many days will it take him to do it? I do not know that any better can be done, but I greatly fear it is another failure already. Write me often. I am very anxious."²⁵⁸ When Hooker replied that the weather could not be controlled and that Stoneman had done nothing worthy of censure, Lincoln on April 19 hastened to Falmouth with Halleck and conferred with the commander. (No record of their conference survives.)

²⁵⁶ Couch in Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, ed. Johnson and Buel, 3:155.

²⁵⁷ Army correspondence by A. R. W., near Falmouth, 9 May, Boston Evening Journal, 12 May 1863.

²⁵⁸ Lincoln to Hooker, Washington, 15 April 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:175.

The rains continued, upsetting Hooker's plans. At just that time, one Francis L. Capen called at the White House offering his services as a "Certified Meteorologist & Expert in Computing the Changes in the Weather." On April 28, Lincoln scornfully endorsed Capen's letter, in which he claimed to be able to save thousands of lives and millions of dollars: "It seems to me Mr. Capen knows nothing about the weather, in advance. He told me three days ago that it would not rain again till the 30th. of April or 1st. of May. It is raining now & has been for ten hours. I can not spare any more time to Mr. Capen."²⁵⁹

(Crackpot inventors annoyed Lincoln regularly. One sought his assistance in persuading the War Department to use his "universal solvent" which could dissolve anything. After patiently listening to this gentleman extol the virtues of his product, Lincoln deflated him with a simple question: "What do you propose to keep it in?")²⁶⁰

In late April, another caller asked Lincoln for a pass to Richmond. "My dear sir," replied the president, "I would be most happy to oblige you if my passes were respected; but the fact is I have within the last two years given passes to more than two hundred and fifty thousand men to go to Richmond, and not one of them has go ether yet in any legitimate way."²⁶¹

Hooker revised his plans ingeniously, proposing to send some troops against Fredericksburg as a feint, throw most of his forces across the river well above the town, and menace Lee's communications. That would force the Confederates to abandon their

²⁵⁹ Memorandum, 28 April 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:190-91.

²⁶⁰ Robert Todd Lincoln told this story to E. A. S. Clarke. Clarke to W. P. Palmer, New York, 3 April 1914, Palmer Collection, Western Reserve Historical Society.

²⁶¹ Washington correspondence, 2 May, Sacramento Daily Union, 27 May 1863, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 49.

strongly entrenched position and either retreat or fight in the open, where superior Union numbers and artillery could prevail. Upon receiving Hooker's dispatch about this new strategy, Lincoln replied with characteristic modesty: "While I am anxious, please do not suppose I am impatient, or waste a moment's thought on me, to your own hindrance, or discomfort."²⁶²

As Hooker poised to strike, Lincoln seemed "cheerful & hopeful" to Robert C. Winthrop. The president told the former speaker of the U.S. House that "he had lost no flesh, notwithstanding all his cares, & that he weighed about 180 pounds still."²⁶³ D. W. Bartlett reported that the president had "seen his hours of despondency" but now was "hopeful and courageous. This is worth half an army to the country and the cause. A bold courageous president at this crisis of our affairs is everything to us."²⁶⁴

Lincoln's hopes were soon dashed, for Lee did not cooperate with Hooker plans. Instead of waiting on the defensive, he boldly attacked, dividing his numerically inferior force, and between May 2 and 6 he smashed the Army of the Potomac at Chancellorsville. As the fighting raged, Lincoln told Welles that "he had a feverish anxiety to get the facts" and "was constantly up and down, for nothing reliable came from the front."²⁶⁵ At first, he "was in great glee that the enemies pickets were for once taken by surprised & captured."²⁶⁶ On May 3, Hooker received a concussion when a shell struck a column of the Chancellor House as he leaned against it. When informed of this

²⁶² Lincoln to Hooker, Washington, 28 April 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:189-90.

²⁶³ Robert C. Winthrop, Sr., to Robert C. Winthrop, Jr., New York, 27 April 1863, Winthrop Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

²⁶⁴ Washington correspondence by Van [D. W. Bartlett], 11 March, Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 14 March 1863.

²⁶⁵ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:291 (entry for 4 May 1863).

²⁶⁶ Lincoln told this to F. P. Blair Sr. on May 3, when Confederate prisoners arrived in Washington.

injury, the anxious president wired Hooker's chief of staff, Daniel Butterfield, asking: "Where is General Hooker? Where is Sedgwick? Where is Stoneman?" Butterfield replied vaguely that Lee was between Hooker and Sedgwick and that Stoneman had not been heard from.²⁶⁷ Impatiently the president inquired: "Was Sickles in it? Was Couch in it? Was Reynolds in it? Where is Reynolds? Is Sedgwick fighting Lee's rear? or fighting in the entrenchments around Fredericksburg?"²⁶⁸ Butterfield could not say. That day Nicolay reported, "We know very little as yet as to what was attempted, or what has been accomplished For the present we are obliged to content ourselves in patience, with a silent prayer for the success of our arms."²⁶⁹

Nicolay's prayer went unanswered. As the fighting continued, Lincoln had to rely on newspapers for information. After sustaining his concussion, Hooker halted his advance and permitted Lee to seize the initiative. On May 6, the Union army retreated back across the Rappahannock, having taken 17,000 casualties to Lee's 13,000. The only consolation to Union forces was the death of Stonewall Jackson, who was accidentally shot by his own men. (When John W. Forney published kind remarks about the fallen Confederate chieftain, Lincoln wrote the journalist: "I honor you for your generosity to one who, though contending against us in a guilty cause, was, nevertheless, a gallant man. Let us forget his sins over his fresh made grave.")²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Butterfield to Lincoln, Head Quarters of the Army of the Potomac, 3 May 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁶⁸ Lincoln to Daniel Butterfield, Washington, 3 May 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, First Supplement, 186-87.

²⁶⁹ Nicolay to Therenia Bates, Washington, 3, 4 May 1863, in Burlingame, ed., With Lincoln in the White House, 110-12.

²⁷⁰ Reminiscences of John W. Forney in a lecture delivered in November 1865 before the Ladies' Soldiers' Aid Society of Weldon, Pennsylvania, New York Evening Post, 30 November 1865.

When a dispatch reporting the defeat arrived at the White House, Lincoln was stunned.²⁷¹ “Had a thunderbolt fallen upon the President he could not have been more overwhelmed,” Noah Brooks told the readers of the Sacramento Union. “One newly risen from the dead could not have looked more ghostlike.” At the president’s request, Brooks read the fateful document aloud. Lincoln, “his face ashy gray in hue and his eyes streaming with tears,” paced the room exclaiming: “My God! my God! What will the country say? What will the country say?” To Brooks, Lincoln never seemed “so broken, so dispirited.” He “refused to be comforted, for his grief was great.”²⁷² On May 7, John Sherman reported that Lincoln “is subject to the deepest depression of spirits amounting to Monomania. He looked upon Hooker as his ‘last card.’”²⁷³ To Bishop Charles Gordon Ames, Lincoln sadly remarked: “I am the loneliest man in America.”²⁷⁴

As Lincoln anticipated, the country had a lot to say about the defeat. Along with Hooker, Stanton, and Halleck, he received harsh criticism. Wendell Phillips told a New York audience: “Lincoln and Halleck, -- they sit in Washington, commanders in chief, exercising that disastrous influence which even a Bonaparte would exercise on a battle, if he tried to fight it by telegraph, a hundred miles distant.”²⁷⁵ (Phillips’s contempt for Lincoln shone through his assertion two months earlier that a “man for President would

²⁷¹ Daniel Butterfield to Lincoln, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 6 May 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁷² Washington correspondence, 8 May, Sacramento Daily Union, 5 June 1863, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 50; Brooks, Lincoln and the Downfall of American Slavery, 358; Brooks, Washington in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Mitgang, 60-61.

²⁷³ John Sherman to William T. Sherman, Mansfield, Ohio, 7 May 1863, William T. Sherman Papers Library of Congress.

²⁷⁴ William Henry Smith claimed that he heard Ames tell this story in Washington in 1863. “Lincoln as the Loneliest Man,” clipping from the Drayter [?] Gleaner, 2 November 1937, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

²⁷⁵ Marszalek, Halleck, 172-73.

have put down the rebellion in six months!”²⁷⁶ After reading that February speech, Henry W. Bellows asked a friend: “Don[’]t such loose talk, however eloquent & true on general principles, do a great deal of harm, by preventing people from seeing that it is government of law & usage, not an ideal kingdom, we live in?”²⁷⁷ Joseph Medill called Halleck “the most detested and odious man in the Administration,” an “inveterate, proslavery, westpoint fogy – universally hated in and out of the army.” According to Medill, it was “the daily wonder of the whole country” that Lincoln “clings to that odious old Blunderhead.”²⁷⁸ When told that Halleck “is universally execrated by the lay people,” Lincoln replied: “Well, I guess that’s about so. I don’t know that he has any friends, and so I think that a man who has no friends needs to be taken care of.”²⁷⁹

Lincoln was particularly upset because Hooker had not committed all his men. The president believed that if Fighting Joe had reinforced General John Sedgwick when Lee dangerously split his forces, he might have won a great victory and ended the war.²⁸⁰ Lincoln also opined that if Hooker “had been killed by the shot which knocked over the pillar that stunned him, we should have been successful.”²⁸¹

Immediately on hearing the bad news, Lincoln hurried to the Army of the Potomac. There he was charitable to Hooker. According to General George Gordon

²⁷⁶ Boston Traveller, n.d., copied in the New York World, 29 May 1863.

²⁷⁷ Bellows to Mrs. Schuyler, New York, 3 February 1863, Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

²⁷⁸ Medill to Nicolay, Niagara Falls, 17 August 1863, Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁷⁹ Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], 29 October, Cincinnati Gazette, 3 November 1863. When Noah Brooks told Lincoln “that Halleck was disliked because many people supposed that he was too timid and hesitating in his military conduct,” the president, with “a grave, almost severe expression,” remarked “that he was Halleck’s friend because nobody else was.” Brooks, Washington in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Mitgang, 131.

²⁸⁰ Henry Champion Deming, Eulogy of Abraham Lincoln: Before the General Assembly of Connecticut, at Allyn Hall, Hartford, Thursday, June 8th, 1865 (Hartford: A.N. Clark, 1865), 40-41.

²⁸¹ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:336 (entry for 20 June 1863).

Meade, the president said “that the result was in his judgment unfortunate” but “that he did not blame anyone,” for he “believed everyone had done all in his power” and “that the disaster was one that could not be helped.” Yet he “thought its effect, both at home and abroad, would be more serious and injurious than any previous act of the war.”²⁸²

Upon arriving at Hooker’s headquarters on May 7, Lincoln handed him a letter asking: “What next? If possible I would be very glad of another movement early enough to give us some benefit from the fact of the enemies communications being broken, but neither for this reason or any other, do I wish anything done in desperation or rashness. An early movement would also help to supersede the bad moral effect of the recent one, which is sure to be considerably injurious. Have you already in your mind a plan wholly, or partially formed? If you have, prosecute it without interference from me. If you have not, please inform me, so that I, incompetent as I may be, can try [to] assist in the formation of some plan for the Army.”²⁸³ Fighting Joe replied immediately that he wanted to stay on the Rappahannock and renew the campaign once his army was again prepared to advance. Lincoln returned to Washington satisfied that the troops had “suffered no defeat or loss of esprit du corps, but have made a change in the programme (a forced one, to be sure) which promises just as well as did the opening of the campaign.”²⁸⁴

On May 13, Hooker wrote the president that even though the enemy now outnumbered him, he would attack the next day. Lincoln, doubtless reminded of

²⁸² Meade to his wife, 8 May 1863, in George Gordon Meade, ed., The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade (2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), 1:372.

²⁸³ Lincoln to Hooker, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 7 May 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:201.

²⁸⁴ Washington correspondence, 8 May, Sacramento Daily Union, 5 June 1863, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 51.

McClellan's overestimate of Confederate troop strength, summoned the general to Washington where he handed him yet another letter, this time pointing out that the Confederates were no longer as vulnerable as they had been a week earlier and that therefore it "does not now appear probable to me that you can gain any thing by an early renewal of the attempt to cross the Rappahannock. I therefore shall not complain, if you do no more, for a time, than to keep the enemy at bay, and out of other mischief, by menaces and occasional cavalry raids, if practicable; and to put your own army in good condition again. Still, if in your own clear judgment, you can renew the attack successfully, I do not mean to restrain you. Bearing upon this last point, I must tell you I have some painful intimations that some of your corps and Division Commanders are not giving you their entire confidence. This would be ruinous, if true; and you should therefore, first of all, ascertain the real facts beyond all possibility of doubt."²⁸⁵

Hooker's immediate subordinates were indeed complaining about him, just as he had complained about Burnside. Lincoln's prediction that "the spirit which you have aided to infuse into the Army, of criticising their Commander, and withholding confidence from him, will now turn upon you" was proving accurate. The commander of the Twelfth Corps, Henry W. Slocum, and Darius N. Couch of the Second Corps (who thought Hooker lacked the "weight of character" necessary in an army commander) organized a revolt against Fighting Joe which failed when Meade of the Fifth Corps, their choice to head the army, refused to cooperate.²⁸⁶ Daniel Sickles, an old friend of Hooker's, was the only corps commander still loyal to him.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ Lincoln to Hooker, Washington, 14 May 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:217.

²⁸⁶ Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, ed. Johnson and Buel, 3:119.

²⁸⁷ Stephen W. Sears, Gettysburg (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 25-26.

Despite these complaints, Lincoln hesitated to replace Fighting Joe, for he “felt that justice to Hooker and to the country demanded that he should have one more trial at least before he was removed.”²⁸⁸ As Welles noted in mid-June, the president “has a personal liking for Hooker and clings to him when others give way.”²⁸⁹ When General John Reynolds denounced Hooker, Lincoln replied “that he was not disposed to throw away a gun because it missed fire once” and that “he would pick the lock and try it again.”²⁹⁰ Hooker begged the president not to shelve him as he had done to McClellan. “I am satisfied with your conduct,” Lincoln assured him. “I tried McClellan twenty times; I see no reason why I can’t try you at least twice.”²⁹¹ In fairness to Hooker, it must be said that the corps commanders of the Army of the Potomac were as responsible as their commander for the defeat at Chancellorsville.²⁹²

Lincoln made a mistake in not replacing Hooker immediately after that setback.²⁹³ Evidence suggests that the president may have decided to choose a new commander, in conjunction with Halleck and Stanton, but for some reason delayed.²⁹⁴ Perhaps he feared that public confidence would be shaken if he seemed inordinately hasty in picking the fifth man within a year to head the Army of the Potomac. That rapid turnover disturbed some Republicans, including an official in the Pacific Northwest who reported that many

²⁸⁸ Washington correspondence, 4 July, Sacramento Daily Union, 28 July 1863, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 56.

²⁸⁹ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:329 (entry for 14 June 1863).

²⁹⁰ Meade, Meade, 1:385.

²⁹¹ Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], 25 May 1863, Cincinnati Gazette, n.d., scrapbook, Reid Family Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁹² Sears, Chancellorsville, 436-38.

²⁹³ Nevins, War for the Union, 3:97-98

²⁹⁴ Charles F. Benjamin, “Hooker’s Appointment and Removal,” Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, ed. Johnson and Buel, 3:241-42.

of the “truest and staunchest Union-men hereabouts, begin to doubt Mr Lincoln[’]s capacity How can he suffer himself to be made a perfect weather cock, in the hands of others, is more than I can account for, but certain it is, he makes too many changes in our commanding Generals. . . . The Union cause receives a stub every time Mr Lincoln shows his vacillating disposition, by the removal of a Commanding General.”²⁹⁵ A Pennsylvanian also found that “this frequent changing of commanders has destroyed confidence.”²⁹⁶

Further undermining confidence in the administration was the victory of conservative forces in Washington municipal elections on June 1. “Nothing could better illustrate the shambling management of the President and his incongruous Cabinet,” observed a correspondent of the Boston Commonwealth. Lincoln “said he wouldn’t lift a hand on either side” and thus helped insure that candidates hostile to emancipation would triumph.²⁹⁷

THE SOUTHERN TIDE CRESTS: GETTYSBURG

On June 2, when asked if a Confederate raid was imminent, the president replied “that all indications were that there would be nothing of the sort, and that an advance by the rebels could not possibly take place so as to put them on this side of the Rappahannock unless Hooker was very much mistaken, and was to be again out-generated.”²⁹⁸ But in fact, shortly thereafter, Lee began his second invasion of the North,

²⁹⁵ Leander Jay S. Turnkey to Matthew Simpson, Olympia, Washington Territory, 23 February 1863, Simpson Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁹⁶ James [Hill?] to Edward McPherson, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, 19 December 1862, Edward McPherson Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁹⁷ Washington correspondence, 5 June, Boston Commonwealth, 12 June 1863.

²⁹⁸ Washington correspondence, 4 July, Sacramento Daily Union, 28 July 1863, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 56.

again using the Shenandoah Valley as a corridor into Maryland as he had done nine months earlier.

On June 5, when Hooker asked permission to attack the Confederate rear at Fredericksburg, Lincoln urged the general instead to concentrate on the main body of the Army of Northern Virginia, not its tail: “in case you find Lee coming to the North of the Rappahannock, I would by no means cross to the South of it. If he should leave a rear force at Fredericksburg, tempting you to fall upon it, it would fight in intrenchments, and have you at disadvantage, and so, man for man, worst you at that point, while his main force would in some way be getting an advantage of you Northward.” Using rustic imagery, he warned against “any risk of being entangled upon the river, like an ox jumped half over a fence, and liable to be torn by dogs, front and rear, without a fair chance to gore one way or kick the other.” If the Confederates crossed the river, Hooker should “keep on the same side & fight him, or act on the defence, according as might be my estimate of his strength relatively to my own.” With characteristic modesty, the president closed saying “these are mere suggestions which I desire to be controlled by the judgment of yourself and Gen. Halleck.”²⁹⁹

Ignoring this advice, Hooker on June 10 proposed to forget about Lee and march toward Richmond. Lincoln, who thought “it would be a very poor exchange to give Washington for Richmond,” immediately vetoed that suggestion.³⁰⁰ “If left to me, I would not go South of the Rappahannock, upon Lee's moving North of it,” the president wrote. “If you had Richmond invested to-day, you would not be able to take it in twenty days; meanwhile, your communications, and with them, your army would be ruined. I

²⁹⁹ Lincoln to Hooker, Washington, 5 June 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:249.

³⁰⁰ Marszalek, Halleck, 175.

think Lee's Army, and not Richmond, is your true objective point. If he comes towards the Upper Potomac, follow on his flank, and on the inside track, shortening your lines, whilst he lengthens his. Fight him when opportunity offers. If he stays where he is, fret him, and fret him.”³⁰¹

Alarmed by Hooker's evident unwillingness to confront the enemy, Lincoln planned to visit the front to consult with him. But he aborted that trip when Stanton and Halleck warned that it was too perilous to visit the general's ever-shifting headquarters when that area could become the scene of battle.

Fighting Joe eventually decided to take Lincoln's advice and shadow Lee as he moved north down the Valley. Lincoln feared that General Robert H. Milroy at Winchester would be ignominiously seized, just as the Harpers Ferry garrison had been taken during Lee's earlier thrust into the North. On June 14, the president quietly told Welles that “he was feeling very bad; that he feared Milroy and his command were captured, or would be.” When Welles asked why Milroy did not fall back, Lincoln explained “that our folks appeared to know but little how things are, and showed no evidence that they ever availed themselves of any advantage.” Sadly Welles reflected that Lincoln “is kept in ignorance and defers to the General-in-Chief, though not pleased that he is not fully advised of events as they occur. There is a modest distrust of himself, of which advantage is taken.”³⁰²

(In September 1862, James A. Garfield had similarly observed that Lincoln “is almost a child in the hand[s] of his generals. Indeed he recently told a delegation from Chicago that he could not grant a certain request of theirs, which [he] regarded perfectly

³⁰¹ Lincoln to Hooker, Washington, 10 June 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:257.

³⁰² Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:328-29 (entry for 14 June 1863).

proper to be granted, unless General Halleck concurred. But he would give them a letter to the General introducing them and their business. What shameful humiliation when the President becomes a petitioner before one of his subordinates.”³⁰³

On June 14, the president telegraphed Milroy’s superior, Robert C. Schenck: “Get Milroy from Winchester to Harper’s Ferry if possible. He will be gobbled up, if he remains, if he is not already past salvation.”³⁰⁴ Simultaneously he wired Hooker: “So far as we can make out here, the enemy have Milroy surrounded at Winchester, and [Erastus B.] Tyler at Martinsburg. If they could hold out a few days, could you help them? If the head of Lee’s army is at Martinsburg and the tail of it on the Plank road between Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, the animal must be very slim somewhere. Could you not break him?”³⁰⁵ But it was too late; the following day Confederates routed Milroy, killing and capturing over half of his 8,000-man force.

As the Confederates tramped northward, Lincoln thought Hooker began to resemble McClellan more and more. Fighting Joe complained (as Little Mac did) that he was outnumbered (he was not) and that the administration did not support him wholeheartedly (it did).³⁰⁶ The president said “that he had got rid of McC[lellan] because he let Lee get the better of him in the race to Richmond” and hinted “that if Hooker got beat in the present race – he would make short work of him.”³⁰⁷ On June 16, Hooker fired off a bitter telegram: “You have long been aware, Mr. President, that I have not enjoyed

³⁰³ Garfield to J. Harrison Rhodes, Washington, 22 September 1862, in Frederick D. Williams, ed., The Wild Life of the Army: Civil War Letters of James A. Garfield (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1964), 138-39.

³⁰⁴ Lincoln to Schenck, Washington, 14 June 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:274.

³⁰⁵ Lincoln to Hooker, Washington, 14 June 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:273.

³⁰⁶ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:348 (entry for 28 June 1863).

³⁰⁷ Elizabeth Blair Lee to her husband, Silver Spring, 23 June 1863, Virginia Jeans Laas, ed., Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 276.

the confidence of the major-general commanding the army [Halleck], and I can assure you so long as this continues we may look in vain for success.”³⁰⁸

Lincoln replied bluntly: “To remove all misunderstanding, I now place you in the strict military relation to Gen. Halleck, of a commander of one of the armies, to the General-in-Chief of all the armies. I have not intended differently; but as it seems to be differently understood, I shall direct him to give you orders, and you to obey them.”³⁰⁹ To soften the blow, he sent a more conciliatory letter: “When you say I have long been aware that you do not enjoy the confidence of the major-general commanding, you state the case much too strongly. You do not lack his confidence in any degree to do you any harm. On seeing him, after telegraphing you this morning, I found him more nearly agreeing with you than I was myself. Surely you do not mean to understand that I am withholding my confidence from you when I happen to express an opinion (certainly never discourteously) differing from one of your own. I believe Halleck is dissatisfied with you to this extent only, that he knows that you write and telegraph (‘report,’ as he calls it) to me. I think he is wrong to find fault with this; but I do not think he withholds any support from you on account of it. If you and he would use the same frankness to one another, and to me, that I use to both of you, there would be no difficulty. I need and must have the professional skill of both, and yet these suspicions tend to deprive me of both. I believe you are aware that since you took command of the army I have not believed you had any chance to effect anything till now. As it looks to me, Lee's now returning toward Harper's Ferry gives you back the chance that I thought McClellan lost last fall. Quite possibly I was wrong both then and now; but, in the great responsibility

³⁰⁸ Joseph Hooker to Lincoln, Fairfax Station, 16 June 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁰⁹ Lincoln to Hooker, Washington, 16 June 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:282.

resting upon me, I cannot be entirely silent. Now, all I ask is that you will be in such mood that we can get into our action the best cordial judgment of yourself and General Halleck, with my poor mite added, if indeed he and you shall think it entitled to any consideration at all.”³¹⁰

A week later, Hooker visited Washington to confer with Lincoln and doubtless to ask for reinforcements. At a cabinet meeting later that day, the president appeared so “sad and careworn” that Welles was “painfully impressed.”³¹¹ Despite his fears that Fighting Joe might fail, Lincoln tried to remain optimistic. On June 26, he said: “We cannot help beating them, if we have the man. How much depends in military matters on one master mind! Hooker may commit the same fault as McClellan and lose his chance. We shall soon see, but it appears to me he can’t help but win.”³¹²

Soon Lincoln thought differently. When Hooker insisted that the 10,000 troops guarding Harpers Ferry be sent to join his army, Halleck vetoed the idea. (The general-in-chief was acting spitefully against his old foe. When Hooker’s successor asked for those troops, Halleck cheerfully acquiesced.)³¹³ On June 27, Fighting Joe impulsively resigned his command in protest.

(Stanton later told a military historian that the Maryland Heights had been fortified at great cost and that Hooker had been instructed on June 24 to hold that position. Shortly thereafter, Fighting Joe directed the commander of that garrison to abandon it. When Stanton and Halleck learned of this, they countermanded the order,

³¹⁰ Lincoln to Hooker, Washington, 16 June 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:281.

³¹¹ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:340 (entry for 23 June 1863).

³¹² Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:344 (entry for 26 June 1863).

³¹³ Marszalek, Halleck, 176.

thinking that there had been some misunderstanding. Stanton said that if Hooker had asked them first, they would have approved his request to evacuate the Heights.)³¹⁴

Upon reading Hooker's dispatch, which Stanton handed to him, Lincoln's "face became like lead." To the war secretary's query, "What shall be done?" the president replied: "Accept his resignation."³¹⁵ When Chase, who had strongly supported Hooker, protested, Lincoln cut him off abruptly: "The acceptance of an army resignation is not a matter for your department."³¹⁶ Lincoln and Stanton discussed a replacement for Hooker.

As Lee invaded Pennsylvania, panicky residents of that state and neighboring New Jersey urged that McClellan be restored to command.³¹⁷ A. K. McClure telegraphed the White House: "Our people are paralyzed for want of confidence & leadership & unless they can be inspired with hope we shall fail to do anything worthy of our State or Govt[.] I am fully persuaded that to call McClellan to a command here would be the best thing that could be done[.] He could rally troops from Penna & I am well assured that New York & New Jersey would also respond to his call with great alacrity[.] with his efficiency in organizing men & the confidence he would inspire early & effectual relief might be afforded us & great service rendered to the Army of the Potomac[.] Unless we are in some way rescued from the hopelessness now prevailing we shall have practically an inefficient conscription & be powerless to help either ourselves or the National Govt[.] After free consultation with trusted friends of the Administration I hesitate not to urge

³¹⁴ John C. Ropes, "A Conversation with Edwin M. Stanton [in late September 1869]," manuscript dated Boston, 8 February 1870, Horatio Woodman Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³¹⁵ George S. Boutwell in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 128.

³¹⁶ Nevins, War for the Union, 3:95.

³¹⁷ John E. Thomson to Lincoln, Philadelphia, 28 June 1863; Joel Parker to Lincoln, Trenton, 29 June 1863; William D. Kelley to Lincoln, Washington, 30 June 1863; John E. Thomson to Lincoln, Washington, 30 June 1863; Philadelphia; Philadelphia Common Council to Lincoln, 2 July 1863; Joseph P. Bradley and Marcus L. Ward to Lincoln, Trenton, 2 July 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

that McClellan be called here-- He can render us & you the best service & in the present crisis no other considerations should prevail[;] without military success we can have no political success no matter who command[s.]”³¹⁸

Tersely Lincoln asked McClure in reply: “Do we gain anything by opening one leak to stop another? Do we gain any thing by quieting one clamor, merely to open another, and probably a larger one?”³¹⁹

If not McClellan, then who? An obvious choice would have been one of the corps commanders in the Army of the Potomac. The president had already asked Darius Couch, who declined because of poor health. John F. Reynolds had complained bitterly about Hooker but refused to take his place. Winfield Scott Hancock and John Sedgwick had expressed no interest in commanding the army. By process of elimination, the choice for commander settled on George Gordon Meade, a senior corps commander who had distinguished himself in earlier campaigns. When Stanton mentioned that the general was a Pennsylvanian, Lincoln predicted that, like a rooster, he would “fight well on his own dunghill.”³²⁰ One soldier likened the choleric general to “a damned old goggle-eyed snapping turtle.”³²¹ Another regarded him as “conservative and cautious to the last degree, good qualities in a defensive general, but liable to degenerate into timidity when an aggressive or bold offensive becomes imperative.”³²² Though industrious and

³¹⁸ Alexander K. McClure to Lincoln, Philadelphia, 30 June 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

³¹⁹ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:311.

³²⁰ Statement of John Harper in George C. Gorham, Life and Public Services of Edwin M. Stanton (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899), 2:99.

³²¹ Horace Porter, Campaigning with Grant (New York: Century, 1897), 248.

³²² Marszalek, Halleck, 175-76.

personally fearless, the reserved Meade lacked charisma. The other corps commanders, however, thought highly of him.

To Noah Brooks, Lincoln said “that he regarded Hooker very much as a father might regard a son who was lame, or who had some other incurable physical infirmity. His love for his son would be even intensified by the reflection that the lad could never be a strong and successful man.” When Brooks shared this with Hooker, the tearful general replied: “Well, the President may regard me as a cripple; but if he will give me a chance, I will yet show him that I know how to fight.”³²³ Lincoln wanted to assign Hooker to command a corps in the Army of the Potomac, but nothing came of it for months. To Meade, the president wrote in late July: “I have not thrown Gen. Hooker away.”³²⁴ In the autumn, as a corps commander in the western theater, Hooker would partially redeem himself.

Meade accurately anticipated that Lee, who had divided his forces as he entered Pennsylvania unopposed, would have to concentrate them as the Army of the Potomac drew near. From different directions the Confederates began streaming toward the small town of Gettysburg. There, during the first three days of July, the bloodiest battle of the war was fought. Lee lost fully a third of his men (28,000) while Meade lost a fifth of his (23,000). The Army of the Potomac, occupying high ground, fended off repeated attacks, including the fabled charge of George Pickett’s division on July 3. The following day, Lee’s shattered army began retreating toward the Potomac.

While awaiting news from the battlefield, Lincoln spent many anxious hours in the telegraph office. One evening he rode out to review troops commanded by General T.

³²³ Brooks, Washington in Lincoln’s Time, 60.

³²⁴ Lincoln to Meade, Washington, 27 July 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:350.

R. Tannatt. There he asked the regimental band to play the familiar hymn, “Lead Kindly Light.” As he listened, his face grew sad and tears came to his eyes, perhaps prompted by the text: “Lead thou me on/ Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see/ The distant scene, -- one step enough for me.”³²⁵

Word of the victory filled Lincoln’s heart with joy, though Meade’s order congratulating his troops did not. The general said their job was now to “drive from our soil every vestige of the presence of the invader.” When Lincoln read this proclamation, his heart sank. James B. Fry saw that an “expression of disappointment settled upon his face” and that “his hands dropped on his knees.” In “tones of anguish” the president exclaimed: “Drive the invader from our soil! My God! Is that all?”³²⁶ Lincoln called it “a dreadful reminiscences of McClellan. The same spirit that moved McC. to claim a great victory because P[ennsylvania] and M[aryland] were safe.” Exasperated, he asked: “Will our Generals never get that idea out of their heads? The whole country is our soil.”³²⁷ On July 6 he wrote to Halleck: “I left the telegraph office a good deal dissatisfied. You know I did not like the phrase, in Orders, No. 68, I believe, ‘Drive the invaders from our soil.’ Since that, I see a dispatch from General [William H.] French, saying the enemy is crossing his wounded over the river in flats, without saying why he does not stop it, or even intimating a thought that it ought to be stopped. Still later, another dispatch from General [Alfred] Pleasonton, by direction of General Meade, to General French, stating that the main army is halted because it is believed the rebels are concentrating ‘on the road toward Hagerstown, beyond Fairfield,’ and is not to move until it is ascertained that

³²⁵ Reminiscences of Tannatt, typescript dated 1913, F. F. Browne Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago.

³²⁶ Fry in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 402.

³²⁷ Burlingame and Ettliger, eds., Hay Diary, 62 (entry for 14 July 1863).

the rebels intend to evacuate Cumberland Valley. These things all appear to me to be connected with a purpose to cover Baltimore and Washington, and to get the enemy across the river again without a further collision, and they do not appear connected with a purpose to prevent his crossing and to destroy him. I do fear the former purpose is acted upon and the latter is rejected. If you are satisfied the latter purpose is entertained and is judiciously pursued, I am content. If you are not so satisfied, please look to it.”³²⁸

Later, the president asked Meade: “Do you know, General, what your attitude towards Lee after the battle of Gettysburg reminded me of?”

“No, Mr. President – what is it?”

“I’ll be hanged if I could think of anything but an old woman trying to shoo her geese across the creek.”³²⁹

Halleck promptly notified Meade that if the Confederates were in fact crossing the Potomac, he should engage the portion still on the north bank: “the importance of attacking the part on this side is incalculable. Such an opportunity may not occur again.” Even if Lee’s troops had not begun passing over the river, Meade should gather his forces and attack. After describing the reinforcements that were hurrying to the Army of the Potomac, Halleck told Meade: “You will have forces sufficient to render your victory certain. My only fear now is that the enemy may escape by crossing the river.”³³⁰ But with characteristic unwillingness to give a direct command (a failing that exasperated

³²⁸ Lincoln to Halleck, Washington, 6 July 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:318.

³²⁹ William A. Croffut, An American Procession, 1855-1914: A Personal Chronicle of Famous Men (Boston: Little, Brown, 1931), 102.

³³⁰ Halleck to Meade, Washington, 8 July 1863, OR, I, 27, 1:84.

Lincoln), Halleck added: “Do not be influenced by any dispatch from here against your own judgment. Regard them as suggestions only.”³³¹

Meade replied that he would press on as soon as he could concentrate and supply his forces. But, he warned, “I expect to find the enemy in a strong position, well covered with artillery. I do not desire to imitate his example at Gettysburg, and assault a position where the chances were so greatly against success. I wish in advance to moderate the expectations of those who, in ignorance of the difficulties to be encountered, may expect too much. All that I can do under the circumstances, I pledge this army to do.”³³²

Lincoln believed that Meade could deliver the coup de grâce to the Army of Northern Virginia before it escaped across the Potomac.³³³ Thus, he thought, Meade would end the war, in conjunction with Grant’s capture of Vicksburg on July 4. At a White House fireworks display on Independence Day, Lincoln exclaimed to Elizabeth Blair Lee: “Meade would pursue Lee instantly but he has to stop to get food for his men!”³³⁴ Lincoln “watched the progress of the Army with growing impatience, hopes struggling with fear,” as heavy rains delayed Lee’s retreat to the Potomac.³³⁵

The president spent much time at the War Department, where telegrapher Albert B. Chandler observed him closely. Lincoln’s “anxiety seemed as great as it had been during the battle itself,” Chandler recalled; the president “walked up and down the floor, his face grave and anxious, wringing his hands and showing every sign of deep solicitude. As the telegrams came in, he traced the positions of the two armies on the

³³¹ Marszalek, Halleck, 179.

³³² OR, I, 27, 1:84.

³³³ Deming, Eulogy of Lincoln, 40-41.

³³⁴ Elizabeth Blair Lee to her husband, Washington, 4 July 1863, Laas, ed., Wartime Washington, 283.

³³⁵ Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 62 (entry for 14 July 1863).

map, and several times called me up to point out their location, seeming to feel the need of talking to some one. Finally, a telegram came from Meade saying that under such and such circumstances he would engage the enemy at such and such a time. ‘Yes,’ said the president bitterly, ‘he will be ready to fight a magnificent battle when there is no enemy there to fight!’”³³⁶

On July 7, the “much discouraged” president, “with a countenance indicating sadness and despondency,” told his cabinet “that Meade still lingered at Gettysburg, when he should have been at Hagerstown or near the Potomac, to cut off the retreating army of Lee. While unwilling to complain and willing and anxious to give all praise to the general for the great battle and victory, he feared the old idea of driving the Rebels out of Pennsylvania and Maryland, instead of capturing them, was still prevalent among the officers. He hoped this was not so” and “said he had spoken to Halleck and urged that the right tone and spirit should be infused into officers and men,” and that Meade “especially should be reminded of his . . . wishes.” When Halleck demurred with “a short and curt reply,” Lincoln said: “I drop the subject.” He still felt that he must yield to Old Brains: “It being strictly a military question, it is proper I should defer to Halleck, whom I have called here to counsel, advise, and direct in these matters, where he is an expert.”³³⁷

Frustrated, Lincoln issued a desperate order. His son Robert recollected that he “summoned Gen. [Herman] Haupt, in whom he had great Confidence as a bridge builder, and asked him how long in view of the materials which might be . . . available to under

³³⁶ Albert B. Chandler, “Lincoln and the Telegrapher,” American Heritage 12 (1961): 32-34.

³³⁷ Montgomery Blair to his father, 8 July 1863, in Nevins, War for the Union, 3:113; Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:363-64 (entry for 7 July 1863).

Lee, would it take him to devise the means and get his army across the river.” Haupt estimated that it would require at most twenty-four hours. The president “at once sent an order to Gen. Meade,” a document probably carried north by Vice President Hannibal Hamlin, “directing him to attack Lee’s army with all his force immediately, and that if he was successful in the attack he might destroy the order but if he was unsuccessful he might preserve it for his vindication.”³³⁸

On July 12, Meade caught up with Lee at Williamsport, where he could have attacked that day or the next. When he reported that he would convene a council of war, Halleck telegraphed: “Call no council of war. It is proverbial that councils of war never fight.”³³⁹ Meade ignored that sage advice, and, as Old Brains had predicted, a majority of the corps commanders opposed an assault. On the night of July 13, the Confederates began crossing the river and finished doing so the next day.

When Lincoln received word of this development, his “grief and anger were something sorrowful to behold,” according to the messenger who delivered the bad news.³⁴⁰ On July 14, John Hay recorded in his diary: “This morning the Presdt seemed depressed by Meade’s dispatches of last night. They were so cautiously & almost timidly worded – talking about reconnoitering to find the enemy’s weak place and other such.”

Lincoln “said he feared that he would do nothing.” Around midday, when Lee’s escape

³³⁸ Robert Todd Lincoln interviewed by Nicolay, 5 January 1885, in Burlingame, ed., Oral History, 88-89. See also Gabor S. Boritt, “‘Unfinished Business’: Lincoln, Meade, and Gettysburg,” in Boritt, ed., Lincoln’s Generals (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 79-120. The New York Tribune reported that Lincoln “sent two dispatches to Gen. Meade a day or two before the escape of the enemy across the river, in both of which he urged the necessity of an immediate attack. In one of these dispatches he said he thought all the appearances indicated that no other occasion would speedily arise offering circumstances so favorable to us and so unfavorable to the enemy. He therefore wished a battle to be delivered at once.” No such missives appear in Lincoln’s Collected Works. Washington correspondence, 17 July, New York Tribune, 18 July 1863.

³³⁹ Marszalek, Halleck, 179.

³⁴⁰ Brooks, Washington in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Mitgang, 94.

was confirmed, the “deeply grieved” president said: “We only had to stretch forth our hands & they were ours. And nothing I could say or do could make the Army move.”³⁴¹

His son Robert reported that Lincoln “grieved silently but deeply about the escape of Lee.

He said, ‘If I had gone up there I could have whipped them myself.’” (In fact, some newspapers had been urging him to take command of the army and lead it in the field.)

For the only time in his life, Robert saw tears in his father’s eyes.³⁴² Lincoln had justifiably feared that it would be a repeat of Antietam with the Army of the Potomac failing to cut off the Confederate retreat.

Halleck sent Meade a stern telegram conveying the president’s displeasure: “I need hardly say to you that the escape of Lee’s army without another battle has created great dissatisfaction in the mind of the President, and it will require an active and energetic pursuit on your part to remove the impression that it has not been sufficiently active heretofore.”³⁴³

Understandably stung by this rebuke, Meade offered to resign: “Having performed my duty conscientiously and to the best of my ability, the censure of the President conveyed in your dispatch of 1 p.m. this day, is, in my judgment, so undeserved that I feel compelled most respectfully to ask to be immediately relieved from the command of this army.”³⁴⁴ Halleck replied: “My telegram, stating the disappointment of the President at the escape of Lee’s army, was not intended as a censure, but as a stimulus

³⁴¹ Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 62 (entry for 14 July 1863).

³⁴² Robert Todd Lincoln interviewed by Nicolay, 5 January 1885, in Burlingame, ed., Oral History, 88-89; Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 63 (entry for 15 July 1863).

³⁴³ OR, I, 27, 1:92.

³⁴⁴ OR, I, 27, 1:93.

to an active pursuit. It is not deemed a sufficient cause for your application to be relieved.”³⁴⁵

Lincoln tried to soften the blow further in an extraordinary letter to the aggrieved general. He began with an expression of sincere gratitude: “I am very---very---grateful to you for the magnificent success you gave the cause of the country at Gettysburg; and I am sorry now to be the author of the slightest pain to you.” After this conciliatory opening, Lincoln became stern: “I was in such deep distress myself that I could not restrain some expression of it. I had been oppressed nearly ever since the battles at Gettysburg, by what appeared to be evidences that yourself, and Gen. Couch, and Gen. Smith, were not seeking a collision with the enemy, but were trying to get him across the river without another battle. What these evidences were, if you please, I hope to tell you at some time, when we shall both feel better. The case, summarily stated is this. You fought and beat the enemy at Gettysburg; and, of course, to say the least, his loss was as great as yours. He retreated; and you did not, as it seemed to me, pressingly pursue him; but a flood in the river detained him, till, by slow degrees, you were again upon him. You had at least twenty thousand veteran troops directly with you, and as many more raw ones within supporting distance, all in addition to those who fought with you at Gettysburg; while it was not possible that he had received a single recruit; and yet you stood and let the flood run down, bridges be built, and the enemy move away at his leisure, without attacking him. And Couch and Smith! The latter left Carlisle in time, upon all ordinary calculation, to have aided you in the last battle at Gettysburg; but he did not arrive. At the end of more than ten days, I believe twelve, under constant urging, he reached

³⁴⁵ OR, I, 27, 1:93-94.

Hagerstown from Carlisle, which is not an inch over fiftyfive miles, if so much. And Couch's movement was very little different.”

In one of the harshest passages Lincoln ever penned, he told Meade how much his failure to attack Lee would hurt the Union cause: “I do not believe you appreciate the magnitude of the misfortune involved in Lee's escape. He was within your easy grasp, and to have closed upon him would, in connection with our other late successes, have ended the war. As it is, the war will be prolonged indefinitely. If you could not safely attack Lee last monday, how can you possibly do so South of the river, when you can take with you very few more than two thirds of the force you then had in hand? It would be unreasonable to expect, and I do not expect you can now effect much. Your golden opportunity is gone, and I am distressed immeasurably because of it.”³⁴⁶

This stinging letter Lincoln filed away with the endorsement: “To Gen. Meade, never sent, or signed.” But he did tell the general, “The fruit seemed so ripe, so ready for plucking, that it was very hard to lose it.”³⁴⁷

The following day the president wrote Simon Cameron, who thought it disgraceful that Lee was allowed to escape: “I would give much to be relieved of the impression that Meade, Couch, Smith and all, since the battle of Gettysburg, have striven only to get Lee over the river without another fight.”³⁴⁸ A week later, he was in a better mood. “I was deeply mortified by the escape of Lee,” Lincoln told one of Meade’s corps

³⁴⁶ Lincoln to Meade, Washington, 14 July 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:327-28.

³⁴⁷ William Swinton, Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac (New York: C.B. Richardson, 1866), 371n.

³⁴⁸ Cameron to Chase, Lochliel, 16 July 1863, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Lincoln to Cameron, Washington, 15 July 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:329-30.

commanders. “A few days having passed,” he added, “I am now profoundly grateful for what was done, without criticism for what was not done.”³⁴⁹

As time went by, however, Lincoln continued to be exasperated by Meade’s habitual caution. On July 18, he told Hay: “Our Army had the war in the hollow of their hand & they would not close it We had gone through all the labor of tilling & planting an enormous crop & when it was ripe we did not harvest it.” He feared that the army wanted to allow the Confederates to slip back into Virginia unmolested. “There is bad faith somewhere,” he darkly speculated to Gideon Welles. “Meade has been pressed and urged, but only one of his generals was for an immediate attack. . . . What does it mean, Mr. Welles? Great God! what does it mean.”³⁵⁰ On July 26, he told Welles: “I have no faith that Meade will attack Lee; nothing looks like it to me. I believe he can never have another as good opportunity as that which he trifled away. Everything since has dragged with him.”³⁵¹ In September, when Welles asked what that general was doing, Lincoln replied: “It is the same old story of this Army of the Potomac. Imbecility, inefficiency – don’t want to do – is defending the Capital.” He then groaned, “Oh, it is terrible, terrible this weakness, this indifference of our Potomac generals, with such armies of good and brave men.”³⁵²

Lincoln was not alone in his view that Meade could have ended the war with a vigorous pursuit. “Had Meade finished Lee before he had crossed the Potomac, as he might have done & he should have done, . . . we should now be at the end of the war,”

³⁴⁹ Lincoln to O. O. Howard, Washington, 21 July 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:341.

³⁵⁰ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:370-371 (entry for 14 July 1863).

³⁵¹ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:383 (entry for 26 July 1863).

³⁵² Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:439 (entry for 21 September 1863).

wrote Charles A. Dana on July 29.³⁵³ Whitelaw Reid called Lee's escape "the greatest blunder of the war," and David Davis deemed it "one of the great disasters & humiliations of the war."³⁵⁴

In fact, if Meade had begun pursuing the Army of Northern Virginia by July 8, Lee may well have been forced to surrender.³⁵⁵ In fairness to Meade, it should be noted that he had been in charge of the army for only three days when the battle began and he hardly knew the capabilities of any corps other than his own. His best corps commanders had been killed, along with over 3,000 other Union soldiers, among them many brigade colonels. Moreover, Lee's position at Williamsport was strong, and it was easier for a defeated army to retreat than it was for a victorious army to pursue, especially after such an epic battle as Gettysburg.³⁵⁶ Still, if Grant or Philip Sheridan had been in command, Lee would probably not have escaped.

For all his keen disappointment, Lincoln on July 19 felt cheerful enough to pen a bit of doggerel titled "Gen. Lee[']s invasion of the North written by himself":

"In eighteen sixty three, with pomp, and mighty swell,
Me and Jeff's Confederacy, went forth to sack Phil-del,

³⁵³ Dana to James Shepard Pike, 29 July 1863, Pike Papers, University of Maine, in Benjamin P. Thomas and Harold M. Hyman, Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln's Secretary of War (New York: Knopf, 1962), 275.

³⁵⁴ Washington correspondence, 17 July 1863, Cincinnati Gazette, n.d., Reid Family Papers, scrapbook, Library of Congress; David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Bloomington, Illinois, 19 August 1863, Davis Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁵⁵ Sears, Gettysburg, 496; Nevins, War for the Union, 3:113, 115; Kenneth P. Williams, Lincoln Finds a General: A Military Study of the Civil War (5 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1949-59), 3:730-56.

³⁵⁶ Sears, Gettysburg, 495-96; Coddington, Gettysburg Campaign, 572.

The Yankees they got arter us, and giv us particular hell,
And we skedaddled back again, and didn't sack Phil-del.”³⁵⁷

In assessing credit for the victory at Gettysburg, Lincoln expressed reluctance to single out anyone in particular. “There was glory enough at Gettysburg to go all round, from Meade to the humblest man in the ranks,” he told Daniel Sickles.³⁵⁸

Ironically, on that fateful July 4 Confederate Vice-President Alexander H. Stephens arrived at Fort Monroe with a letter from Jefferson Davis for Lincoln regarding prisoner exchanges. When he asked permission to proceed to Washington, Lincoln flatly refused.³⁵⁹ Jefferson Davis then issued a hysterical proclamation designed to bolster Confederate morale. He alleged that the Lincoln administration’s “malignant rage aims at nothing less than the extermination of yourselves, your wives, and children. They seek to destroy what they cannot plunder. They propose as the spoils of victory that your homes shall be partitioned among the wretches whose atrocious cruelties have stamped infamy on their Government. They design to incite servile insurrection and light the fires of incendiarism wherever they can reach your homes, and they debauch the inferior race, hitherto docile and contented, by promising indulgence of the vilest passions as the price of treachery. Conscious of their inability to prevail by legitimate warfare, not daring to make peace lest they should be hurled from their seats of power, the men who now rule in Washington refuse even to confer on the subject of putting an end to outrages which disgrace our age, or to listen to a suggestion for conducting the war according to the

³⁵⁷ Verses on Lee’s invasion of the North, [19 July 1863], Roy P. Basler, ed., Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, First Supplement (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974), 194.

³⁵⁸ Peter Cozzens, ed., Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, Volume 6 (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 2004), 264.

³⁵⁹ OR, II, 6:74-85, 94-95.

usages of civilization.”³⁶⁰ Lincoln ignored the advice of friends to deny those wild charges.³⁶¹

OPENING THE MISSISSIPPI

While generals in the Army of the Potomac disappointed Lincoln badly, their counterparts in the western theater, especially Ulysses S. Grant, gladdened his heart. He had not always been sanguine about Grant’s campaign against Vicksburg, which had received a severe check in December. In March, the president complained that Union forces “were doing nothing at Vicksburg,” even though Grant promised that “I will have Vicksburg this month, or fall in the attempt.”³⁶² The general had made several unsuccessful bayou expeditions against the Confederate citadel; the first was an effort to dig a canal across the peninsula fronting the city, an enterprise which Lincoln thought “of no account.” He expressed wonder “that a sensible man would do it” and thought “that all these side expeditions thro[ugh] the country [were] dangerous” because “if the Rebels can blockade us on the Mississippi, which is a mile wide, they can certainly stop us on the little streams not much wider than our gunboats; & shut us up so we can’t get back again.” He added that his “only hope about the matter is that the Military commanders on the ground know prospects and possibilities better than he can.”³⁶³ He predicted the failure of the canal scheme and speculated that an expedition up the Yazoo “would do no good” and might even prove harmful, for “we run a great risk of losing all our transports

³⁶⁰ OR, IV, 2:687.

³⁶¹ Amos Tuck to Lincoln, Boston, 9 August 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁶² Marszalek, Halleck, 169.

³⁶³ Dahlgren, Memoir, 389; Albert D. Richardson to Sydney Howard Gay, Washington, 20 March 1863, Sydney Howard Gay Papers, Columbia University; Albert D. Richardson, The Secret Service: The Field, the Dungeon, and the Escape (Hartford: American Publishing, 1865), 324-325.

& steamers.”³⁶⁴ Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox reported that Lincoln “is rather disgusted with the flanking expeditions, and predicted their failure from the first.”³⁶⁵

The president told Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas that he feared Grant was not taking the proper steps to capture Vicksburg and that he lacked the necessary energy. In April, Lincoln’s Illinois friends Jesse K. Dubois, Ozias M. Hatch, and David L. Phillips visited the Vicksburg front and reported that Grant was not fit for his position, for he seemed to be drifting without any plan.³⁶⁶

To learn more about Grant, Lincoln sent General Thomas to investigate conditions in the Army of the Tennessee. For the same purpose he also dispatched Assistant Secretary of War Charles A. Dana, former managing editor of the New York Tribune. Officially, Dana went merely as a “special commissioner of the War Department to investigate and report upon the condition of the pay service in the Western Armies.” In April, he began regularly sending favorable dispatches from Grant’s headquarters describing the general’s plans and the state of the army. “I never knew such transparent sincerity combined with such mental resources,” Dana wrote.³⁶⁷

In the autumn of 1862, Lincoln had created a problem for Grant by authorizing John A. McClernand, a prominent Illinois Democrat, to recruit an army and march down

³⁶⁴ He told this to Anson G. Henry. Henry to his wife, Washington, 12 April 1863, Henry Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

³⁶⁵ Fox to D. G. Farragut, Washington, 2 April 1863, in Thompson and Wainwright, eds., Correspondence of Fox, 1:331.

³⁶⁶ Undated typed memo signed by J. W. [Southwert], Jesse K. Dubois Papers, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis. They apparently undertook this inspection trip at the behest of Illinois Governor Richard Yates, who had been prompted by Lincoln to make the request.

³⁶⁷ Charles Anderson Dana, Recollections of the Civil War: With the Leaders at Washington and in the Field in the Sixties (New York: D. Appleton, 1898), 20-21; Thomas and Hyman, Stanton, 267-69.

the Mississippi toward Vicksburg. The vague orders made it unclear whether he or Grant would be in control. In addition, General N. P. Banks, in charge of the Department of the Gulf and headquartered in New Orleans, was ordered to move up the Mississippi toward Vicksburg. Lines of authority and jurisdiction were muddled. When the president finally put Grant in charge, the hyper-ambitious, arrogant, querulous McClernand protested bitterly and urged that Halleck be fired. Lincoln pleaded with him to stop complaining: “I have too many family controversies, (so to speak) already on my hands, to voluntarily, or so long as I can avoid it, take up another. You are now doing well -- well for the country, and well for yourself -- much better than you could possibly be, if engaged in open war with Gen. Halleck. Allow me to beg, that for your sake, for my sake, & for the country's sake, you give your whole attention to the better work.”³⁶⁸ Demoted to a corps command, McClernand remained so querulous and insubordinate that eventually Grant dismissed him.

In late April, when Grant stopped making “side expeditions” and boldly threw his army across the Mississippi, he began a brilliant campaign leading to the capture of Vicksburg on Independence Day. Upon learning that the general had moved south of that citadel and that David D. Porter had successfully run his fleet of gunboats past the Vicksburg batteries, Lincoln exclaimed: “This is more important than anything which is occurring in Virginia!”³⁶⁹

When Grant reached the east bank of the river, below Vicksburg, he could have either moved toward that city or headed south to link up with Banks, whose goal was to take Port Hudson. Lincoln hoped he would choose the latter course, but he did not,

³⁶⁸ Lincoln to McClernand, Washington, 22 January 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:70.

³⁶⁹ Washington correspondence by D. W. Bartlett, 6 June, New York Independent, 11 June 1863.

despite Halleck's urging.³⁷⁰ In May, as Grant daringly marched his army from triumph to triumph in Mississippi, Lincoln said: "I have had stronger influence brought against Grant, praying for his removal, since the battle of Pittsburg Landing, than for any other object, coming too from good men." (A year earlier, when Grant was caught unprepared for the Confederate onslaught at Shiloh -- also known as Pittsburg Landing -- he was roundly criticized, even though the Rebels were eventually driven from the field.) But, Lincoln added, "now look at his campaign since May 1. Where is anything like it in the Old World that equals it? It stamps him as the greatest general of the age, if not of the world."³⁷¹ On May 23, he wrote that Grant's campaign was "one of the most brilliant in the world."³⁷²

According to popular rumor, Lincoln asked critics of Grant's alleged drunkenness what brand of whiskey the general used, so he could send some to his other generals. The president denied that he had made that witty riposte, speculating that it was probably ascribed to him "to give it currency." In fact, he pointed out, it was based on King George III's purported response to those who charged that General Wolfe was insane: "I wish he would bite some of my other generals then."³⁷³ (This anecdote appears in Joe Miller's Complete Jest Book, a favorite of Lincoln's.) Modestly, Lincoln disclaimed credit for many other stories attributed to him, calling himself "only a retail dealer." He said "that as near as he could reckon, about one-sixth of those [stories] which were credited to him

³⁷⁰ Marszalek, Halleck, 176.

³⁷¹ Washington correspondence, 25 May 1863, Philadelphia Inquirer, Fehrenbacher and Fehrenbacher, eds., Recollected Words of Lincoln, 11.

³⁷² Lincoln to Isaac N. Arnold, Washington, 26 May 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:230.

³⁷³ Albert B. Chandler in Ward, ed., Lincoln: Tributes from His Associates, 220.

were old acquaintances; all the rest of them were the productions of other and better story-tellers than himself.”³⁷⁴

On July 7, Gideon Welles rushed into the White House with a dispatch announcing the surrender of Vicksburg and “in his excess of enthusiasm” almost knocked Lincoln over.³⁷⁵ Hugging Welles tightly, the president exclaimed: “what can we do for the Secretary of the Navy for this glorious intelligence? He is always giving us good news. I cannot, in words, tell you my joy over this result. It is great, Mr. Welles, it is great!”³⁷⁶

That evening Lincoln addressed serenaders at the White House: “I am very glad indeed to see you to-night, and yet I will not say I thank you for this call, but I do most sincerely thank Almighty God for the occasion on which you have called. [Cheers.] How long ago is it? -- eighty odd years -- since on the Fourth of July for the first time in the history of the world a nation by its representatives, assembled and declared as a self-evident truth that ‘all men are created equal.’ [Cheers.] That was the birthday of the United States of America. Since then the Fourth of July has had several peculiar recognitions. The two most distinguished men in the framing and support of the Declaration were Thomas Jefferson and John Adams -- the one having penned it and the other sustained it the most forcibly in debate -- the only two of the fifty-five who sustained [signed?] it being elected President of the United States. Precisely fifty years after they put their hands to the paper it pleased Almighty God to take both from the stage of action. This was indeed an extraordinary and remarkable event in our history.

³⁷⁴ Brooks, “Personal Recollections of Lincoln,” in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 217.

³⁷⁵ Washington correspondence, 8 July, Sacramento Daily Union, 1 August 1863, in Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed, 58.

³⁷⁶ Beale, ed., Welles Diary, 1:364-365 (entry for 7 July 1863).

Another President, five years after, was called from this stage of existence on the same day and month of the year; and now, on this last Fourth of July just passed, when we have a gigantic Rebellion, at the bottom of which is an effort to overthrow the principle that all men were created equal, we have the surrender of a most powerful position and army on that very day, [cheers] and not only so, but in a succession of battles in Pennsylvania, near to us, through three days, so rapidly fought that they might be called one great battle on the 1st, 2d and 3d of the month of July; and on the 4th the cohorts of those who opposed the declaration that all men are created equal, ‘turned tail’ and run. [Long and continued cheers.]”³⁷⁷

Democrats sneeringly called Lincoln’s remarks “miserable and puerile trash” which “humiliated and disgraced” the people and asserted that the president “never opens his mouth without committing a blunder, and never seizes a pen that he does not write something that causes his friends to blush for his incapacity.”³⁷⁸ They were particularly incensed at Lincoln’s colloquialism. One called it “a burning disgrace to the Nation. The Pres. of this Republic – talking about ‘turning tail’ – shame, shame, shame!!!”³⁷⁹

When he learned that the Boston Evening Journal, a Republican journal, had criticized his use of “turned tail and run,” Lincoln said: “Some very nice Boston folks, I am grieved to hear, were very much outraged by that phrase which they thought improper. So I resolved to make no more impromptu speeches if I could help it.”³⁸⁰ This, in fact, was the longest set of off-the-cuff remarks he made during the war, and it

³⁷⁷ Response to a serenade, 7 July 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:319-20.

³⁷⁸ Charles Ray Wilson, “The Cincinnati Daily Enquirer and Civil War Politics: A Study of Copperhead Opinion” (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1934), 224.

³⁷⁹ G. Dean to S. S. Cox, n.p., 10 July 1863, Cox Papers, Brown University.

³⁸⁰ Brooks, “Personal Reminiscences of Lincoln,” Scribner’s Monthly 15 (1877-1878): 567.

foreshadowed the address he would deliver in November at Gettysburg (which Democrats would also ridicule).

With characteristic modesty, Lincoln congratulated Grant: “I do not remember that you and I ever met personally. I write this now as a grateful acknowledgment for the almost inestimable service you have done the country. I wish to say a word further. When you first reached the vicinity of Vicksburg, I thought you should do, what you finally did--march the troops across the neck, run the batteries with the transports, and thus go below; and I never had any faith, except a general hope that you knew better than I, that the Yazoo Pass expedition, and the like, could succeed. When you got below, and took Port-Gibson, Grand Gulf, and vicinity, I thought you should go down the river and join Gen. Banks; and when you turned Northward East of the Big Black, I feared it was a mistake. I now wish to make the personal acknowledgment that you were right, and I was wrong.”³⁸¹ When Jesse K. Dubois told Lincoln that Grant should not have paroled the Confederate army which surrendered at Vicksburg, he replied: “Dubois, General Grant has done so well, and we are all so pleased at the taking of Vicksburg, let us not quarrel with him about that matter.”³⁸²

PORT HUDSON CAMPAIGN

The Vicksburg campaign had not entirely opened the Mississippi, for 200 miles to the south Confederates at Port Hudson still threatened river traffic. The movement against that stronghold was undertaken by General N. P. Banks, who in November 1862 had been appointed to command the Department of the Gulf, headquartered in New Orleans. Banks got off to a bad start in his new assignment. After receiving secret orders

³⁸¹ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:326.

³⁸² Chicago Republican, n.d., copied in the New York Evening Post, 14 June 1865.

in late October to raise a force for an expedition to New Orleans, he went about organizing it poorly.³⁸³ When he requisitioned 600 wagons and 300 ambulances (and 4350 horses and mules to pull them), the quartermaster-general protested that that to meet such demands would delay the mission for months and would “require such a fleet of transports as has never sailed at one time from a port.”³⁸⁴

Lincoln, who was anxious that the expedition get underway promptly, scolded Banks: “this expanding, and piling up of impedimenta, has been, so far, almost our ruin, and will be our final ruin if it is not abandoned.” It would take many weeks to gather and ship all the material requested, which was not even needed in Louisiana. If Banks did not scale back his plan to something like the modest one he had originally proposed, the “expedition is a failure before you start.” Eager to have Banks underway before Congress reconvened in early December, Lincoln sensibly pointed out to the general that he “would be better off any where, and especially where you are going, for not having a thousand wagons, doing nothing but hauling forage to feed the animals that draw them, and taking at least two thousand men to care for the wagons and animals, who otherwise might be two thousand good soldiers.” Tactfully the president urged Banks not to regard his letter as “ill-natured,” for “it is the very reverse. The simple publication of this requisition would ruin you.”³⁸⁵

Banks explained that he had no intention of waiting until the requisition was filled, and that he had asked for so much equipment for the long run and could sail well

³⁸³ Fred Harvey Harrington, Fighting Politician (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1948), 86-88.

³⁸⁴ Montgomery Meigs to Halleck, Washington, 22 November 1862, Banks Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁸⁵ Lincoln to Banks, Washington, 22 November 1862, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:505-506.

before everything he had requested could be provided.³⁸⁶ He finally got underway on December 4. When a Pennsylvania congressman denounced Banks as a failure, Lincoln demurred: “Well, that is harsh,” he said, but acknowledged that the general “hasn’t come up to my expectations.”

“Then, sir, why don’t you remove him?”

“Well, sir, one principal reason for not doing so is that it would hurt Gen. Banks’ feelings very much!”³⁸⁷

(Asked by Moncure Conway if Ben Butler would be restored to command in Louisiana, Lincoln said that “he meant to return Butler to N. Orleans as soon as it could be done without hurting Gen. Banks’ feelings!” Conway sarcastically exclaimed: “What a fine watchword would be ‘Liberty, Union and Banks’ feelings!’”)³⁸⁸

When Banks reached Louisiana, he failed to understand that the administration wanted above all to secure the Mississippi. Throughout the spring, Halleck urged Banks to cooperate with Grant’s Vicksburg campaign. The “government is exceedingly disappointed that you and Genl Grant are not acting in conjunction,” Old Brains told the general.³⁸⁹ Finally in May, Banks’ Army of the Gulf began a siege of Port Hudson which dragged on into July. Five days after the surrender of Vicksburg, the Port Hudson garrison capitulated. Once again, as Lincoln would later put it, the “Father of Waters”

³⁸⁶ Banks to Stanton, New York, 24 November 1862, Banks Papers, Library of Congress. Halleck telegraphed him on December 1: “The President was determined to send the Fort Monroe expedition forward without further delay. It will be ordered tomorrow. Answer whether you will join it personally or not.” Halleck to Banks, New York, 1 December, Banks Papers, Library of Congress. On December 2, Halleck told Banks: “It is very important that you should go personally as early as possible. I leave you to imagine the reasons.” Copy, ibid.

³⁸⁷ Washington correspondence by Agate [Whitelaw Reid], ca. 7 March 1863, Cincinnati Gazette, n.d., clipping in scrapbook, Reid Family Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁸⁸ Conway journal, 5 February 1863, in John d’Entremont, Southern Emancipator: Moncure Conway, the American Years, 1832-1865 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 91-92.

³⁸⁹ Marszalek, Halleck, 177.

could flow “unvexed to the sea.”³⁹⁰ The president gratefully told Banks that the “final stroke in opening the Mississippi never should, and I think never will, be forgotten.”³⁹¹

The North reveled in the victories at Port Hudson, Vicksburg, and Gettysburg. “How marvelously the clouds seem to part!” exclaimed George William Curtis. “Three armies under three true and skillful leaders and upon three points successful! I think that for the first time we have a real confidence in our Generals.”³⁹²

VINDICATION: THE SUCCESSFUL PERFORMANCE OF BLACK TROOPS

A notable feature of Banks’ campaign was the part played by black combat troops. Their use represented a departure from Lincoln’s original plan to assign black soldiers only supporting roles. To Charles Sumner the president explained his intention “to employ African troops to hold the Mississippi River and also other posts in the warm climates, so that our white soldiers may be employed elsewhere.”³⁹³ He believed that the “immense black population resident on the great river will, when freed and armed, be amply sufficient to protect peaceful commerce from molestation.” Blacks could also “garrison the forts below New-Orleans and on the coast which are exposed to the diseases of a Southern climate.”³⁹⁴

On May 27, 1863, the First and Third Infantry of the Corps d’Afrique, which had been recruited by Butler, along with Banks’ own First Engineers, distinguished themselves in a gallant if unsuccessful assault on the Confederate works at Port Hudson.

³⁹⁰ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:409.

³⁹¹ Lincoln to Banks, Washington, 5 August 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:364.

³⁹² George William Curtis to Charles Eliot Norton, North Shore, New York, 12 July 1863, George William Curtis Papers, Harvard University.

³⁹³ Sumner to John Murray Forbes, Washington, 25 December 1862, in Sarah Forbes Hughes, ed., Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899), 1:349.

³⁹⁴ Washington correspondence, 24, 25 December, New York Tribune, 25, 26 December 1862.

In his official report, Banks said: “Whatever doubt may have existed heretofore as to the efficiency of organizations of this character, the history of this day proves conclusively to those who were in condition to observe the conduct of these regiments that the Government will find in this class of troops effective supporters and defenders. The severe test to which they were subjected, and the determined manner in which they encountered the enemy, leaves upon my mind no doubt of their ultimate success. They require only good officers, commands of limited numbers, and careful discipline to make them excellent soldiers.”³⁹⁵ Commenting on this document, the New York Times observed: “this official testimony settles the question that the negro race can fight with great prowess. Those black soldiers had never before been in any severe engagement. They were comparatively raw troops, and were yet subjected to the most awful ordeal that ever veterans have to experience – the charging upon fortifications through the crash of belching batteries. . . . It is no longer possible to doubt the bravery and steadiness of the colored race, when rightly led.”³⁹⁶

Eleven days later at Milliken’s Bend, Louisiana, black troops heroically fended off Confederate attacks. Charles A. Dana, who visited the site shortly afterward, recalled that “the bravery of the blacks in the battle at Milliken’s Bend completely revolutionized the sentiment of the army with regard to the employment of negro troops. I heard prominent officers who formerly in private had sneered at the idea of the negroes fighting express themselves after that as heartily in favor of it.”³⁹⁷ The Union commander of the

³⁹⁵ OR, III, 3, 1:439.

³⁹⁶ New York Times, 11 June 1863.

³⁹⁷ Dana, Recollections, 86.

District of Northeast Louisiana thought it “impossible for men to show greater bravery than the Negro troops in that fight.”³⁹⁸

A week after the fall of Port Hudson, a black regiment in South Carolina covered itself with glory at the battle of Fort Wagner, part of the ongoing campaign against Charleston. The Fifty-fourth Massachusetts bravely charged the Confederate batteries, crossing a narrow sandy strip that was raked by heavy artillery and small arms fire. Despite taking heavy casualties, the unit pressed on, reaching the parapet before being driven back because support units failed to appear. Northern newspapers lauded the accomplishment of the black soldiers. Later the New York Tribune noted that it was “not too much to say that if this Massachusetts Fifty-fourth had faltered when its trial came, two hundred thousand colored troops for whom it was a pioneer would never have been put into the field, or would not have been put in for another year, which could have been equivalent to protracting the war into 1866. But it did not falter. It made Fort Wagner such a name to the colored race as Bunker Hill has been for ninety years to the white Yankees.”³⁹⁹

The conduct of these black soldiers earned the respect of military leaders, including Grant, who in August told Lincoln: “I have given the subject of arming the negro my hearty support. This, with the emancipation of the negro, is the heaviest blow yet given the Confederacy.” By “arming the negro we have added a powerful ally. They will make good soldiers and taking them from the enemy weakens him in the same proportion they strengthen us. I am therefore most decidedly in favor of pushing this

³⁹⁸ Benjamin Quarrels, The Negro in the Civil War (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953), 224.

³⁹⁹ New York Tribune, 8 September 1865.

policy to the enlistment of a force sufficient to hold all the South falling into our hands and to aid in capturing more.”⁴⁰⁰

When Confederates threatened to execute or enslave captured black soldiers, the New York Tribune complained that Lincoln did nothing to stop them. The president called the subject of retaliation “one of the most vexing which has arisen during the war.”⁴⁰¹ One abolitionist officer, angry that “the President was very weak on the subject of protecting black troops and their officers,” expressed the wish that Lincoln “had said a rebel soldier shall die for every negro soldier sold into slavery.”⁴⁰² Responding to that criticism, he protested to a group of clergy: “I am very ungenerously attacked” and asked plaintively, “What could I do?”⁴⁰³

One thing he did do was to issue an order of retaliation. On July 30, 1863, he wrote Stanton: “It is the duty of every government to give protection to its citizens, of whatever class, color, or condition, and especially to those who are duly organized as soldiers in the public service. The law of nations and the usages and customs of war as carried on by civilized powers, permit no distinction as to color in the treatment of prisoners of war as public enemies. To sell or enslave any captured person, on account of his color, and for no offence against the laws of war, is a relapse into barbarism and a crime against the civilization of the age. The government of the United States will give the same protection to all its soldiers, and if the enemy shall sell or enslave anyone

⁴⁰⁰ Grant to Lincoln, Cairo, Illinois, 23 August 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁰¹ Washington correspondence, 20 March, New York World, 21 March 1863.

⁴⁰² Charles Russell Lowell to John Murray Forbes, Centreville, 13 September 1863, and to Josephine Lowell, Washington, 3 August [1863], Edward W. Emerson, Life and Letters of Charles Russell Lowell, Captain, Sixth United States Cavalry, Colonel Second Massachusetts Cavalry, Brigadier-General United States Volunteers (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1907), 296, 290.

⁴⁰³ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 5:421.

because of his color, the offense shall be punished by retaliation upon the enemy's prisoners in our possession. It is therefore ordered that for every soldier of the United States killed in violation of the laws of war, a rebel soldier shall be executed; and for every one enslaved by the enemy or sold into slavery, a rebel soldier shall be placed at hard labor on the public works and continued at such labor until the other shall be released and receive the treatment due to a prisoner of war."⁴⁰⁴

Democrats protested that slaves who joined the Union army were different from free blacks who had done so. They argued that if General Burnside was justified in hanging two Confederate officers for recruiting in Kentucky, then the Confederates were justified in executing Union officers for recruiting slaves.

Despite the prospect of being murdered in cold blood or enslaved if captured, blacks joined the army in large numbers. Many, however, were angry not only because they were paid less than white troops but also because they could serve only as enlisted men, not officers. "We have an imbecile administration, and the most imbecile management that is possible to conceive of," wrote the black novelist William Wells Brown.⁴⁰⁵ Another black leader despairingly remarked that Lincoln "had pronounced a death-knell to our peaceful hopes."⁴⁰⁶

A prominent recruiter, Massachusetts businessman and abolitionist George Luther Stearns, suggested to Frederick Douglass that he lobby the administration to do more to protect black POW's. Taking that advice, on August 10, 1863, the black orator called on

⁴⁰⁴ Order of retaliation, 30 July 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:357.

⁴⁰⁵ Weekly Anglo African, 17 August 1863, in Donald Yacovone, "The Pay Crisis and the 'Lincoln Despotism,'" in Martin H. Blatt, Thomas J. Brown, and Donald Yacovone, eds., Hope & Glory: Essays on the Legacy of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment (Amherst: University of Massachusetts in association with Massachusetts Historical Society, 2001), 45.

⁴⁰⁶ An unidentified black quoted in Yacovone, "Pay Crisis and the 'Lincoln Despotism,'" 46.

Stanton and then, accompanied by Kansas Senator Samuel C. Pomeroy, visited the White House.⁴⁰⁷ Douglass reported that he was “received cordially” by Lincoln, who rose and extended his hand. “I have never seen a more transparent countenance,” Douglass wrote two days later. “There was not the slightest shadow of embarrassment.”

When he began to explain who he was, Lincoln put him at ease, saying: “I know you; I have read about you, and Mr. Seward has told me about you.” Douglass later said that he felt “quite at home in his presence.”

Hoping to get the president to talk in general terms about his policies regarding blacks, including the pay differential and the refusal to allow blacks to become officers, Douglass thanked Lincoln for the order of retaliation. This tactic worked. As Douglass reported, Lincoln “instantly . . . proceeded with . . . an earnestness and fluency of which I had not suspected him, to vindicate his policy respecting the whole slavery question and especially that in reference to employing colored troops.” Responding to criticism of his administration, the president said: “I have been charged with vacillation even by so good a man as Jno. Sherman of Ohio, but I think the charge cannot be sustained. No man can say that having once taken the position I have contradicted it or retreated from it.” This comment Douglass interpreted as “an assurance that whoever else might abandon his antislavery policy President Lincoln would stand firm.” In justifying his hesitancy to endorse the recruitment of black troops and to issue the order of retaliation, Lincoln (according to Douglass) “said that the country needed talking up to that point. He hesitated in regard to it when he felt that the country was not ready for it. He knew that the colored man throughout this country was a despised man, a hated man, and he knew

⁴⁰⁷ Charles E. Heller, Portrait of an Abolitionist: A Biography of George Luther Stearns, 1809-1867 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996), 156-57.

that if he at first came out with such a proclamation, all the hatred which is poured on the head of the negro race would be visited on his Administration. He said that there was preparatory work needed, and that that preparatory work had been done.” He described that “preparatory work” accomplished by black troops: “Remember this, Mr. Douglass; remember that Milliken’s Bend, Port Hudson, and Fort Wagner are recent events; and that these were necessary to prepare the way for this very proclamation of mine.” If he had issued it earlier, he said, “such was the state of public popular prejudice that an outcry would have been raised against the measure. It would be said ‘Ah! We thought it would come to this. White men are to be killed for negroes.’”

Douglass found this argument “reasonable.” In a letter describing this conversation, he wrote: “My whole interview with the President was gratifying and did much to assure me that slavery would not survive the War and that the country would survive both slavery and the War.”⁴⁰⁸ In December, Douglass told a Philadelphia audience that while in the White House, “I felt big.”⁴⁰⁹

Lincoln’s order of retaliation was never implemented, even though Confederates did kill some black prisoners in cold blood, most notoriously at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, in April, 1864. After accounts of that massacre sparked public outrage, Lincoln told an audience in Baltimore that no retaliation would be undertaken while the matter was being investigated, but that if the reports turned out to be true, “the retribution shall . . . surely

⁴⁰⁸ This account relies most heavily on Douglass to George Luther Stearns, Philadelphia, 12 August 1863, copy, Records of the Free Military School for Command of Colored Regiments, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and Douglass’s speech of 4 December 1863, in John W. Blassingame et al., eds., The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews (5 vols.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979-1992), 3:606-608.

⁴⁰⁹ Douglass’s speech of 4 December 1863, Blassingame et al., eds., Douglass Papers, Series One, 3:606.

come. It will be matter of grave consideration in what exact course to apply the retribution; but . . . it must come.”

But it did not come. After the Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War reported that the allegations were true, the cabinet discussed possible responses. Opinion was divided, with Seward, Chase, Stanton, and Usher supporting an eye-for-an-eye policy and Blair, Bates, and Welles opposed. As Lincoln put it, the “difficulty is not in stating the principle, but in practically applying it.” Blood, he said, “can not restore blood, and government should not act for revenge.”⁴¹⁰ When Frederick Douglass called for the execution of Confederate prisoners, Lincoln replied that retaliation “was a terrible remedy, and one which it was very difficult to apply; that, if once begun, there was no telling where it would end; that if he could get hold of the Confederate soldiers who had been guilty of treating colored soldiers as felons he could easily retaliate, but the thought of hanging men for a crime perpetrated by others was revolting to his feelings. He thought that the rebels themselves would stop such barbarous warfare; that less evil would be done if retaliation were not resorted to and that he had already received information that colored soldiers were being treated as prisoners of war.”⁴¹¹

On May 17, 1864, after mulling over the matter, Lincoln ordered Stanton to notify Confederate authorities that if they did not abandon their policy, the Union would set aside a number of Rebel prisoners and “take such action as may then appear expedient

⁴¹⁰ Address at Sanitary Fair, Baltimore, 18 April 1864; Lincoln to Stanton, Washington, 17 May 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:302-303, 345.

⁴¹¹ Frederick Douglass, Life and Times of Frederick Douglass (Hartford: Park, 1881), 348-349.

and just.”⁴¹² That threat proved idle, however, for Grant’s spring offensive distracted attention away from the subject of retaliation.

When news reached Washington that the Confederates were using thousands of captured black troops to help fortify Mobile instead of exchanging them for Rebel prisoners, Lincoln was enraged and disgusted.⁴¹³ The Union army retaliated by employing Rebel prisoners of war for similar purposes.

In 1863, Lincoln approved the execution of a Virginia physician, David M. Wright, who had shot a Union army officer commanding black troops. Incensed by the very idea of former slaves in uniform marching down the sidewalks of Norfolk, the doctor whipped out a pistol and murdered Lieutenant Anson L. Sanborn. When a military commission condemned Wright to death, Lincoln carefully reviewed the trial record, spoke with the defendant’s attorney, read the numerous petitions testifying to the doctor’s respectability, ordered a special examination be made of the condemned man’s mental condition (he had pleaded temporary insanity), and then, after satisfying himself that the accused had received a fair trial and that he was never insane, approved the death sentence. Despite intense pressure to pardon Wright, Lincoln stood by his decision and the doctor was hanged.

Black soldiers meanwhile protested against the lack of equal pay. In 1863, Lincoln told Frederick Douglass that, given the strong Negrophobia prevailing in the earlier stages of the war, “the fact that they [black troops] were not to receive the same pay as white soldiers seemed a necessary concession to smooth the way to their

⁴¹² Lincoln to Stanton, Washington, 17 May 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:345-346.

⁴¹³ W. A. Croffut, ed., Fifty Years in Camp and Field: Diary of Major-General Ethan Allen Hitchcock, U.S.A. (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1909), 457-58.

employment at all as soldiers.” But, the president added hopefully, “ultimately they would receive the same.”⁴¹⁴ His prediction was more or less accurate. In late 1863, a bill equalizing the pay of white and black troops was introduced into Congress, where it encountered stiff opposition. A leading Democratic newspaper protested that to “claim that the indolent, servile negro is the equal in courage, enterprise and fire to the foremost race in all the world, is a libel upon the name of an American citizen. . . . It is unjust in every way to the white soldier to put him on a level with the black.”⁴¹⁵ Finally, in June 1864 Congress mandated equal pay but made it retroactive only to the first of that year for blacks who had been liberated during the war; for those who had been free as of April 19, 1861, no such limitation was applied.

The victories at Gettysburg, Vicksburg and Port Hudson represented a major turning point in the war. Edward Bates called the successful campaign in Mississippi “the crowning act of the war,” and predicted that it “will go farther towards the suppression of the rebellion than twenty victories in the open field. It breaks the heart of the rebellion.”⁴¹⁶ He accurately observed that “the rebellion west of the great river, will hardly need to be conquered in the field – it must die out, of mere inanition.”⁴¹⁷ Indeed, three of the eleven Confederate states – Arkansas, Texas, and Louisiana – were cut off. In addition, a gaping hole in the blockade was plugged. (Goods imported into Mexico often crossed into Texas and then on to Confederate armies further east.)

⁴¹⁴ Douglass, Life and Times, 423.

⁴¹⁵ New York World, 11 December 1863.

⁴¹⁶ Bates to Chase, St. Louis, 19 July 1863, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁴¹⁷ Bates to Welles, Washington, 6 June 1863, Lincoln Collection, Yale University.

No longer could the Confederacy aspire to win independence on the battlefield. Its principal hope was that the Northern public would grow weary of the war and insist on a compromise peace.