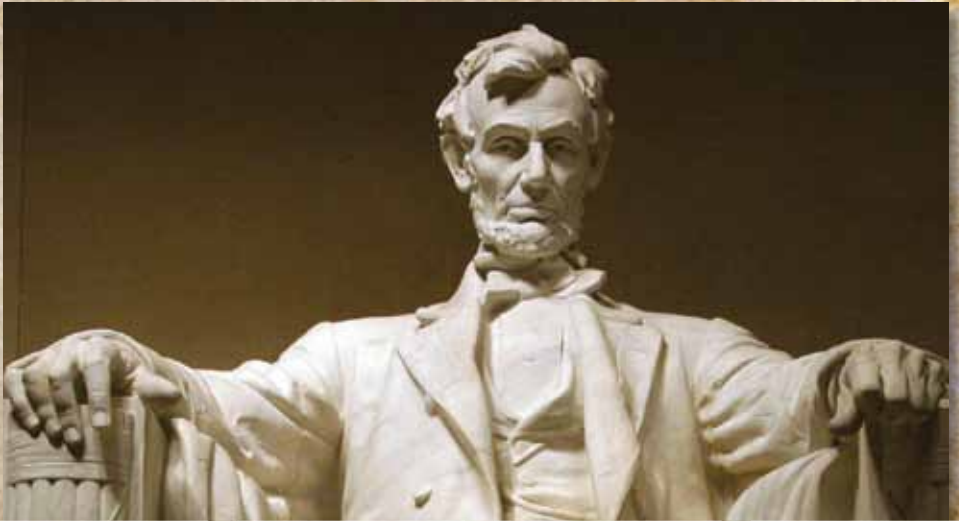


UNION GENERALS

President Lincoln's Ulster-Scots commanders



INTRODUCTION

In 1946 Raymond W. Goldsmith, the German-born American economist, claimed that the Allies won the Second World War because their combined GDP (the value of all the goods and services produced within a country in a given period) was greater than that of the Axis powers. This was a view which enjoyed widespread acceptance at the time, in large measure because of the popularity of economic determinism in the mid-twentieth century as the way of explaining the forces that shaped the course of history.

However, while no one would deny that the economic strength of the Allies was an important factor in winning the global conflict, it would be naive and simplistic to imagine that it was the only factor or even the most important one.

In *Why the Allies Won* (London, 2006), Richard Overy makes the crucial point that

The line between material resources and victory on the battlefield is anything but a straight one. The history of war is littered with examples of smaller, materially disadvantaged states defeating a larger, richer enemy.

In the spring of 1942, after listening to politicians in Washington DC talking glibly about the inevitable economic defeat of the Axis powers, General Eisenhower confided to his diary that ‘not one man in twenty

in the government realises what a grisly, dirty, tough business we are in. They think we can buy victory’.

A century earlier, Karl Marx was keen student of the American Civil War and, although comfortably ensconced in the reading room of the British Museum in London, wrote (in German) for *Die Presse*, a review published in Vienna. As a materialist and an economic determinist, Marx confidently predicted the inevitable military triumph of the North over the South. The North had a potential manpower superiority of more than three to one. During most of the conflict the Union had two men in the field for every man the Confederacy could muster. In economic resources and logistics the Union’s advantage was even greater.

Marx’s detailed analysis of the conflict was impressive and in many respects uncannily accurate but he took insufficient account of the fighting necessary to produce the Union victory he predicted or, to borrow Eisenhower’s words, how ‘grisly, dirty [and] tough’ the conflict would prove to be.

Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States, in his bid to preserve the American Union and to end southern secession, had great difficulty in finding generals who could translate the North’s undoubted economic and material advantages into success on the battlefield.

Although a mild mannered man, Robert E. Lee, the South's greatest general and the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, the Confederacy's most successful army, was, by any standard, an extremely aggressive general and one with a highly developed ability to assess his opponents' dispositions and intentions from painstaking intelligence, not least that provided through the efforts of J. E. B. Stuart, and then to outwit them. Thus, Lee managed to confound both a succession of Union generals and the economic determinists. Lee feared that someday Lincoln would eventually stumble upon some general whose thought processes would be a closed book to him. It never happened and was never likely to happen. Lee understood perfectly the operation of Ulysses S. Grant's mind but by the spring of 1864 Lee's problem was that he no longer possessed neither the manpower nor the *matériel* to withstand indefinitely Grant's unrelenting war of attrition.

By 1864 Lincoln had in turn put his confidence in Irvin McDowell, George B. McClellan, Ambrose Burnside, Joseph Hooker (over whom Lee won a stunning victory at Chancellorsville in May 1863) and George Meade (who managed to defeat Lee at Gettysburg in July 1863 but exasperated Lincoln by failing to exploit his success). Finally, Lincoln brought Ulysses S. Grant, fresh from his triumphs at Vicksburg and Chattanooga, back east from the Western theatre. The prolific twentieth-century British military historian, military theorist and strategist J. F. C. Fuller described Grant as 'the greatest general of his age and one of the greatest strategists of any age'. If Abraham Lincoln was the Union's political saviour, Ulysses S. Grant saved the Union militarily. Lincoln's apt riposte to those who objected to Grant's fondness for the bottle was: 'I wish some of you would tell me the brand of whiskey that Grant drinks. I would like to send a barrel of it to my other generals'.

McDowell, McClellan, Burnside and, of course, Grant were of Scottish and Ulster-Scots ancestry. McDowell's family is described as Scotch-Irish. Ephraim McDowell, the founder of the family in America, came to Pennsylvania in 1735 and later migrated to the Valley of Virginia. The family then crossed the mountains into Kentucky. As we will see Irvin McDowell was born in Ohio.

George Brinton McClellan was born in Philadelphia, a city with a strong Ulster-Scots presence in the eighteenth century. In 1731 the lieutenant governor of Pennsylvania acknowledged that the colony had 'considerable numbers' of Germans and people from 'the north of Ireland' among its inhabitants. On the eve of the American Revolution Benjamin Franklin estimated that the Scotch-Irish and their descendants accounted for a third of Pennsylvania's population of 350,000 and that they occupied more than half the seats in the colonial assembly. The *American Dictionary of Biography* claims that McClellan's family 'came from Scotland to New England in the early eighteenth century' but the same publication states that G. B. McClellan's first cousin, Henry Brainerd McClellan, chief-of-staff to J. E. B. Stuart

and then to Wade Hampton, was also born in Philadelphia and was of 'distinguished Scotch-Irish and English ancestry'. It



Patriotic cover honouring the arrival of Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan in Washington, D.C. on 26 July 1861.

would seem G. B. McClellan was of Ulster-Scots ancestry but chose to emphasize his Scottish ancestry rather than that of his Ulster-Scots forbearers. G. B. McClellan and H. B. McClellan's great grandfather, Samuel McClellan served throughout the War of Independence with the Connecticut militia and attained the rank of brigadier-general. Both G. B. McClellan and H. B. McClellan were the sons of brothers who were distinguished members of the medical profession in 'the City of Brotherly Love'. The fact that the two cousins served in the Union and Confederate armies simply serves to demonstrate how the Civil War divided families. H. B. McClellan was the author of *The Life and Campaigns of Major-General J. E. B. Stuart* (1895), long regarded as the standard work on the flamboyant Confederate cavalry general.

Of Ambrose Burnside's ancestry, Augustus Woodbury, the author of *Major General Ambrose E. Burnside and the Ninth Army Corps*, wrote: 'In his veins flowed the blood of those heroic men who, at Bannockburn and Flodden Field and on many a well fought battlefield in both hemispheres, have proved that the Scotch are among the best soldiers in the world'. The *American Dictionary of Biography* states that Burnside's great-grand father came from Scotland to South Carolina circa 1750. Subsequent generations settled in Kentucky and Indiana, Burnside, being born in Liberty, Indiana. However, the *American Dictionary of Biography* overlooks the fact that many Scottish Burnsides have lived in Ulster since the 17th century. Ambrose Everett Burnside is in fact a great grand uncle of David Burnside, the former Ulster Unionist MP and MLA, whose family hail from the townlands of Seacon and Ballyrashane in north Antrim.

In his *Autobiography* Grant claimed: 'My family is American, and has been for generations, in all its branches, direct and collateral'. He informed his readers that 'Matthew Grant, the founder of the branch in America, of which I am a descendant, reached Dorchester,

Massachusetts, in May 1630' and provides extensive detail about Jesse R. Grant and his father's family.

In 1768 John Simpson, U. S. Grant's maternal grandfather, set out from the townland of Dergenagh, near Ballygawley, County Tyrone, to make a new life for himself in the American colonies. In 1819 the Simpsons moved from Pennsylvania and settled in Ohio. In June 1821 Jesse R. Grant married Hannah Simpson, John Simpson's third child, and the future lieutenant general and commander of all of the Union Armies and the 18th President of the United States was born on 27 April at Point Pleasant, Clermont County, Ohio. After Grant left the White House, he embarked on a round-the-world tour which lasted two years. In January 1879 he paid a brief visit to Ulster towards the end of his world-tour. Although he did not visit County Tyrone, he did visit Londonderry, Coleraine, Ballymena and Belfast.

IRVIN McDOWELL

and the First Battle of Bull Run/Manassas, 21 July 1861

Irvin McDowell was born on 15 October 1815 in Columbus, Ohio. He studied at the College de Troyes, in France, and graduated from West Point in 1838, 23rd in his class of 45, was commissioned a second lieutenant and was posted to the 1st U.S. Artillery, serving on the Canadian border. One of his classmates was Pierre Beauregard, who would command the Confederate forces at First Bull Run.



During the Mexican War, he served as *aide-de-camp* to General John Wood. He achieved the rank of captain and served in the Adjutant General's department after the war. While in that department he was promoted to major on 31 May 1856. McDowell was promoted to brigadier general on 14 May 1861, and given command of the Army of Northeastern Virginia, despite never having commanded troops in combat.

McDowell's meteoric rise perhaps reflects the fact that Lincoln did not have a great many professional soldiers from which to choose. In other words, McDowell substantially owed his position to the mass defection of regular army officers to the Confederacy. Admittedly, he was also well connected politically and a protégé of Salmon P. Chase, the Treasury Secretary, who had previously been the Governor of Ohio.

On paper McDowell was impressively well qualified for the role. He had attended a French military academy and had served a year with the French army. Before the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 the French army was widely, if erroneously, held to be the finest in

the world. Both sides in the Civil War agreed that Germans made poor soldiers, an assessment which seems completely risible in light of German military performance in the two World Wars. McDowell had been an instructor at West Point and had taught tactics. Although completely devoid of any sense of humour, he was a genuinely modest and conscientious officer. His most obvious shortcoming was his lack of experience of command in the field.

McDowell struck many contemporaries more as a gourmet (or even gourmand) rather than as a soldier. A staff officer who dined with him in 1861 recalled that he was 'so absorbed in the dishes before him that he had little time for conversation ... he gobbled the larger portion of every dish within reach'. Unusually for a gourmet, he was teetotal.

The opening shots of the American Civil War took place on 12 April 1861 when Confederate forces opened fire on the Union garrison at Fort Sumter, North Carolina. In June 1861 first skirmish of Civil War occurred at Big Bethel, Virginia, a Confederate victory.

By the early summer of 1861 Northern public opinion was clamouring for a march against Richmond, Virginia, the capital of the Confederacy, in the belief that the capture of Richmond would bring the war to a swift conclusion.

McDowell was obliged to bow to this mounting pressure. He was seriously perturbed that his troops were untested, were unaccustomed to the rigours of a forced march and lacked combat experience. He forcefully made this point to Abraham Lincoln but President Lincoln sought to reassure him by observing: 'You are green, it is true, but they are green also; you are all green alike.' In a sense Lincoln was correct: the outcome of a battle is frequently determined by which side makes the least mistakes.

In mid July 35,000 Union troops marched out of Washington en route

for Richmond. The army's mood was optimistic but its progress could be described as leisurely. The fact that soldiers regularly broke ranks to pick blackberries simply underscores the Union army's lack of discipline and professionalism.

The Confederate forces moved north to intercept McDowell's army and the two armies converged in the vicinity of Bull Run creek.

The 'roar of artillery' could be heard in the White House. Hundreds of people – including at least ten congressmen and six US senators – came from Washington in their carriages and with picnic lunches to view the spectacle. In their innocence and naivety they had no appreciation of the horrors of warfare.

McDowell opened the battle with a determined assault on Pierre Beauregard's Confederate army and most of the early fighting went McDowell's way and a series of upbeat reports were relayed to Lincoln throughout the early afternoon.

Trying to rally his broken brigade, General Bernard Bee of South Carolina allegedly exhorted his troops to re-form by shouting: 'There is Jackson standing like a stone wall. Let us determine to die here, and we will conquer. Rally behind the Virginians.'



Gen. Irvin McDowell (left) with
Gen. George B. McClellan

However, Major Burnett Rhett, chief of staff to General Johnston, placed a radically different construction on this incident. According to Major Rhett, Bee was furious at Jackson's failure to relieve his hard-pressed troops and that he gestured angrily at Jackson's troops standing immobile behind the crest of the hill, bitterly observing: 'Look at Jackson standing there like a damned stone wall!'

As Bee was mortally wounded almost immediately, we do not have the benefit of his testimony on the matter.

Whatever Bee said and irrespective of whatever point he wished to convey, Jackson's brigade halted the Union assault and suffered more casualties that day than any southern brigade. Jackson earned himself the soubriquet 'Stonewall' and his men became known as the 'Stonewall' brigade.

The battle swayed back and forth until 3:00 pm. Under the guidance and direction of General Joseph E. Johnston, Beauregard had been switching troops from his right to his left. This turned the tide of battle and Union troops panicked and fled the scene in disorder. The first man to realize that the Confederacy had secured a victory was 'Stonewall' Jackson who was having a minor wound dressed at field hospital at the time: 'We have them whipped. They ran like sheep. Give me five thousand fresh men and I will be in Washington City tomorrow!' However, Beauregard and Johnston failed to press home their advantage.

William Howard Russell, the London *Times*' veteran war correspondent, looked out of window of his Washington hotel (which was not really where a celebrated war correspondent ought to have been) to see

a steady stream of men covered in mud, soaked through with rain, who were pouring irregularly, without any semblance of order, up

Pennsylvania Avenue towards the Capitol. A dense stream of vapour rose from the multitude ... Many of them were without knapsacks, crossbelts and firelocks. Some had neither greatcoats nor shoes, others were covered in blankets.

A young Union officer told Russell they had been 'pretty well whipped in Virginia'.

Union casualties amounted to 460 killed, 1,124 wounded, and 1,312 missing or captured. Confederate casualties were 387 killed, 1,582 wounded, and 13 missing.



The battle's greatest impact was psychological. Throughout the South the battle was hailed as a great victory. The fact that Confederate Army, despite its numerical inferiority, had defeated the Union force encouraged the belief in the South that victory over 'the spineless Yankees' was ultimately possible. In the North the humiliation of defeat stiffened resolve and forced the Yankees to take the war seriously.

In his own estimation (and with some justice) McDowell believed he was blameless. Lincoln received news of the defeat 'in silence without the slightest change of feature or expression' but concluded that McDowell had to be replaced. Lincoln moved quickly and decisively. In the very early hours of 22 July (the morning after the battle) a telegram was sent to George Brinton McClellan in western Virginia with orders to come to Washington and to take command of what would become the Army of the Potomac.

However, it would be a serious error to suppose that First Bull Run was a Confederate victory because Pierre Beauregard was a better general than Irvin McDowell. Beauregard was certainly a more fortunate general but impeccable intelligence, supplied by Rose Greenhow, the Washington society hostess and Confederate spy, may well have been the crucial element in McDowell's defeat, giving Beauregard the edge over his West Point classmate.

Greenhow was able to supply the date of McDowell's departure, the exact route he was proposing to take and when he intended to attack. Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, chairman of the Military Affairs Committee, who was so completely besotted by Greenhow that he had sworn that he would do anything for her, was almost certainly her source.

W. H. Russell's account of the Union collapse at First Bull Run for the London *Times* generated a tremendous amount of controversy throughout the Northern states. Northern newspapers unjustly denounced Russell as a liar and Confederate sympathizer and accused him of inciting panic within the ranks of the Union army. Irvin McDowell, whom Russell personally liked and admired, commiserated with the British journalist, confessing that 'he was very much rejoiced to find that I was as much abused.'

GEORGE BRINTON McCLELLAN

and the Battle of Antietam, 17 September 1862

George Brinton McClellan was and still is widely regarded as an enigma. Statesmen and politicians – Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the 32nd President of the United States, springs to mind as an outstanding example – are often viewed as enigmatic because that is the nature of politics. Soldiers, on the other hand, are rarely enigmatic. Nevertheless, Robert E. Lee, on being asked (by his cousin) who was ‘the ablest general on the Union side’ during the Civil War, replied emphatically: ‘McClellan, by all odds!’ Asked to evaluate McClellan as a general, Ulysses S. Grant replied: ‘McClellan is to me one of the mysteries



of the war.’ Why did McClellan provoke such responses? Why does he continue to mystify historians to this day? Abraham Lincoln offered the most astute evaluation of McClellan of all: ‘If he can’t fight himself, he excels in making others ready to fight.’

Born in 1826 into one of Philadelphia’s first families, McClellan attended the University of Pennsylvania before entering West Point. Thomas J. Jackson, better known to history as ‘Stonewall’, was a classmate. Whereas Jackson ‘fought his way to fifty-first place’ at West Point, McClellan ‘worked hard only as necessary to get by’ and graduated second in his class in 1846. While at West Point McClellan wrote home: ‘I am sorry to say that the manners, feelings & opinions of the Southerners are far, far preferable to those of a majority of Northerners at this place. I may be mistaken, but I like them better’.

Like so many of his contemporaries, he saw service in the Mexican War. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he welcomed the war.

Between 1848 and 1851 he taught military engineering at West Point. In 1855 he was a member of the Military Commission which visited the Crimea where he was impressed by the Russian defence of Sevastopol and critical of Allied (i.e. British and French) generals for their failure to capitalize on their opportunities, an observation rich in irony in the light of subsequent events.

In 1857 McClellan resigned from the army to embark on a career as chief engineer for the Illinois Central Railroad. By 1861 he was President of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad.

Resuming his military career with the outbreak of the Civil War, he got off to a good start in West Virginia where he defeated Confederate forces under Robert E. Lee and acquired a reputation, by no means wholly undeserved, as ‘the Young Napoleon of the West’. Unfortunately this nickname only encouraged his very considerable vanity. Dashing and multi-talented, modesty formed no part of McClellan’s make-up. Intellectually, he had nothing to be modest about.

On assuming responsibility for the Union’s military forces after the defeat at First Battle of Bull Run/Manassas, McClellan set about creating the new 150,000-strong Army of the Potomac. He took a dispirited army after First Bull Run and equipped it, drilled it and transformed it into an effective unit. This was a stunning achievement. Unfortunately, this was never matched by evidence that McClellan knew how to command and deploy his genuinely impressive Army in battle.

An advocate of fighting a limited war, McClellan set out his military philosophy in a letter to Lincoln. War he contended

...should be conducted upon the highest principles known to Christian Civilizations. It should not be a War looking to the subjugation of the people of any state, in any event. It should not be, at all, a War upon

population, but against armed forces and political organizations. Neither confiscation of property, political executions of persons, territorial organization of states, or forcible abolition of slavery should be contemplated for a moment.

This philosophy was unlikely to deliver victory, a point fully appreciated by Lincoln.



McClellan riding through Frederick, Maryland on 12 September 1862

McClellan was genuinely solicitous for the men under his command and their welfare. They in turn viewed him with great affection and referred to him as 'Little Mac'. His concern for the lives of his troops found expression in a strong desire to avoid casualties. Unlike U. S. Grant, he did not believe in waging an unrelenting and continuous war of attrition against the enemy. Arguably, if McClellan had been more aggressive in the early stages of the war, he might have shortened the conflict by several years and saved more lives.

While McClellan excelled as a logistician, he lacked confidence and imagination operationally. He was 'slow and indecisive' and was 'incapable of dynamic action even when all the cards were in his hands'. He refused to accept responsibility and tended to blame everybody except himself for his failures.

For example, his campaigns in Virginia and Maryland were (in the words of the British military historian Brian Holden Reid) 'marked by brilliance of strategic conception' but were 'unfortunately marred by 'mediocrity of tactical execution'. Above all the Battle of Antietam (or Sharpsburg as it was called by the South) revealed McClellan's serious limitations.

17 September 1862, the date of the Battle of Antietam, remains the bloodiest single day in American military history. Total casualties were four times greater than those inflicted on the US Army on Omaha Beach on 6 June 1944 and greater than the assault on Iwo Jima on 19 February 1945. There is no agreement on the exact figures but it is generally reckoned that the Union sustained approximately 12,400 casualties and the Confederacy's casualties exceeded 10,300 but probably not much more than that number. Antietam was a very costly battle and this owed much to the fact that it was fought over a very small and compact battlefield.

Robert E. Lee committed 45,000 men to the battle but McClellan committed only 60,000 of an available strength of 78,000. McClellan even knew that he had a numerical advantage because a careless Confederate officer left behind at a vacated Confederate campsite a copy of Lee's orders and plan of battle wrapped around some cigars. McClellan boasted: 'Here is a paper with which, if I cannot whip Bobby Lee, I will be willing to go home.' But McClellan failed to exploit this valuable intelligence.

Tactically, Antietam was a Confederate victory because Lee fought

an army significantly larger than his own to a standstill. Strategically, it was a Union victory because McClellan halted Lee's invasion of Maryland. Lee recognized that there was nothing to gain – and much to lose – by remaining in Maryland.

McClellan deserves credit for his strategic victory but he failed to win the decisive victory President Lincoln had expected. McClellan lacked the nerve to pursue and destroy Robert E. Lee's retreating Army of Northern Virginia. Instead he allowed Lee to cross the Potomac unmolested.

Many contemporaries felt, with justice, that McClellan had lost a tantalizing opportunity. A newspaper reporter was not alone in wishing that McClellan had attacked again on 18 September: 'We could have driven them into the river or captured them ... It was one of the supreme moments when by daring something, the destiny of the nation might have been changed'.

McClellan was a commander given to meticulous planning and preparation but his meticulousness denied him the ability to cope with an extremely aggressive opponent (like Lee) in a fast-moving battle.

Despite McClellan's possession of Lee's 'lost order', he persisted in overestimating the strength of Lee's force and declined to commit all his troops to battle, so that a significant proportion of his army never engaged the enemy at all. By failing to concentrate his forces effectively McClellan allowed Lee to move his force across the battlefield to repulse three Union thrusts, launched separately and sequentially against the Confederate left, centre and right.

After Antietam McClellan wrote to his wife Ellen:

Those in whose judgment I rely tell me that I fought the battle splendidly and that it was a masterpiece of art. ... I feel I have done all that can be asked in twice saving the country. ... I feel some little pride in having,

with a beaten & demoralized army, defeated Lee so utterly. ... Well, one of these days history will I trust do me justice.



Abraham Lincoln in McClellan's tent after the Battle of Antietam

Lincoln did not share McClellan's smug assessment. Lincoln correctly concluded that McClellan lacked the 'killer instinct' and was incapable of 'put[ting] things through', to employ Lincoln's observation, or, as we might say, of bringing an encounter with the enemy to a successful conclusion. While McClellan has his admirers in the historical profession, on the whole, McClellan's reputation has not been vindicated by historians

In October 1862 Lincoln visited the Army of the Potomac in the hope of prodding George B. McClellan into renewed action against Robert E. Lee. As the President and a companion surveyed the Army's camp

headquarters one morning, he asked his friend what he saw. He replied: 'The Army of the Potomac.' Lincoln said: 'You are mistaken. That is General McClellan's bodyguard.' In November McClellan paid the price for his inactivity: Lincoln sacked him and replaced him with Ambrose Burnside.

A number of considerations account for the failure of the relationship between McClellan and the President. As we have already noted, McClellan had a patrician background and had attended the best private schools in Philadelphia, the University of Pennsylvania and West Point. Lincoln, by contrast, was a backwoodsman, had received very little formal schooling, and lacked polish and social refinement. McClellan privately described the President as a 'well meaning

baboon' and dismissed him as his 'social, intellectual, and moral inferior'. As a result, he disregarded the Commander-in-Chief's opinions and advice, much of which was sound.

Serious political differences also existed between Lincoln and McClellan. Whereas Lincoln was a Republican, McClellan was a Democrat. Although McClellan was opposed to southern secession, he

Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan memorial, Washington, D.C.



viewed slavery as an institution recognized in the US Constitution, and therefore entitled to Federal protection wherever it existed, which was indeed Lincoln's formal position until August 1862.

Imperfect though McClellan's victory was at Antietam, it was sufficient to allow Lincoln to publish the preliminary text of the Emancipation Proclamation on 23 September which was to take effect on 1 January 1863. Lincoln explained: 'When Lee came over the river I made a solemn vow before God, that if General Lee was driven back ... I would crown the result by the declaration of freedom to the slaves'.

McClellan was the Democratic Party's Presidential candidate in 1864. His electoral platform called for an immediate armistice and no more talk about emancipation and the abolition of slavery. McClellan wrote:

I believe that a vast majority of our people, whether in the Army & Navy or at home, would with me hail with unbounded joy the permanent restoration of peace on the basis of the Federal Union of the States without the effusion of another drop of blood.

At the time McClellan made this statement, Lincoln's prospects of securing a second term were bleak: the North was weary of the war and no end of the conflict was in sight. In August 1864 Lincoln wrote to a friend: 'You think I don't know I am going to be beaten, but *I do* and unless some great change takes place *badly beaten*.' Yet on election day, 8 November 1864, McClellan lost. Although McClellan was personally very popular with the Army, he failed to secure their votes. Lincoln won almost 75% of the military vote and 70% of the votes of the Army of the Potomac. Overall, McClellan won 45% of the popular vote and won only three states: Kentucky, Delaware, and his home state of New Jersey. Lincoln won in 22 states. In the Electoral College Lincoln secured 212 votes, McClellan only 21.

Two Union victories in the summer of 1864 had radically transformed

Lincoln's electoral prospects and enabled him to secure re-election: Rear Admiral David Farragut's naval victory in the Battle of Mobile Bay on 5 August and William Tecumseh Sherman's victory over J. B. Hood at Atlanta and capture of that important railway hub and industrial centre on 2 September. Many years later Alexander McClure, the Pennsylvania journalist, politician and historian, conceded that 'there was no period from January 1864, until the 3rd of September of the same year when McClellan would not have defeated Lincoln.'

In 1868 McClellan was briefly considered as a possible Democrat candidate for the Presidency but once it became clear that U. S. Grant would be the Republican nominee, the idea was quickly and quietly dropped. The 18th President proved to be much more successful general than he was as a politician. With McClellan, the successful chief executive of a railway company and the creator of the Army of the Potomac, it might well have been the other way round but this proposition must remain pure conjecture because McClellan never occupied the White House. Nevertheless, between 1878 and 1881 he did serve as Governor of New Jersey.

McClellan died in 1885 of a heart attack. His memoirs, *McClellan's Own Story*, were published posthumously in 1887. These did nothing to rehabilitate his reputation. John C. Ropes and Jacob D. Cox, two eminent nineteenth-century historians of the Civil War, 'demolished McClellan's contentions point by point'. The twentieth-century historian Allan Nevins unkindly observed: 'Students of history must always be grateful McClellan so frankly exposed his own weaknesses in this posthumous book'. And his reputation was no better served by his correspondence. Doris Kearns Goodwin, the author of the much admired *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (2005), has concluded that McClellan's correspondence reveals a tendency for self-aggrandizement and unwarranted self-congratulation.

AMBROSE BURNSIDE

and the Battle of Fredericksburg, 13 December 1862

Ambrose Everett Burnside is best remembered for his distinctive facial hair (his luxuriant whiskers swept down the sides of his face and joined to form a bushy moustache – 'the Burnside cut' – from which the word 'sideburns' is derived) and his disastrous defeat at the Battle of Fredericksburg on 13 December 1862. This is unfair, as history often is, because he conducted successful campaigns raiding Confederate installations in North Carolina between September 1861 and July 1862 and East Tennessee in the latter months of 1863 (which went some way to restoring his military reputation after Fredericksburg).

The capture of the city of Knoxville realized one of Lincoln's fondest dreams. While Burnside was personally brave and widely popular, he unfortunately lacked the acumen of a great commander. Nevertheless, he also enjoyed a varied and largely successful career in business (as a railroad executive, inventor and industrialist) and in politics (serving as governor of Rhode Island between 1866 and 1869 and a US Senator for the state between 1875 and 1881).

Burnside graduated from West Point in 1847 and was commissioned into the artillery. He served in the Mexican War but without seeing combat and served against the Indians before resigning his commission in 1855.

In civilian life he began manufacturing firearms at Bristol, Rhode Island, and in 1856 he invented a breech-loading carbine which fired





Burnside pictured with Officers from 1st Rhode Island militia at Camp Sprague, Rhode Island, 1861

a metallic cartridge. A well-made but expensive weapon, it did not meet with immediate success. However, with the advent of the Civil War the weapon came into its own but by then Burnside's company had gone into liquidation and the carbine was being manufactured by his creditors.

Between 1855 and 1857 Burnside was major general of the Rhode Island militia. Soon after the outbreak of the Civil War, as colonel he took command of a Rhode Island militia regiment. He was later promoted to brigadier general and fought, as we have already noted, in the North Carolina coastal campaign.

In 1862 he was promoted to major general and was transferred to the Virginia theatre of war. At the Battle of Antietam (17 September 1862) he was in command of McClellan's left wing. Burnside's performance at Antietam has been the subject of adverse criticism, not all of it justified.

It would, however, seem that Burnside failed to reconnoitre adequately

the area, and instead of taking advantage of several easy fording places out of range of the enemy, his troops were forced into repeated assaults across the narrow bridge (now known as 'Burnside bridge') which was dominated by Confederate sharpshooters on the high ground. By noon, McClellan was losing patience. He sent a succession of couriers to encourage Burnside to advance. McClellan ordered one aide: 'Tell him if it costs 10,000 men he must go now'. McClellan then increased the pressure by sending his inspector general to confront Burnside, who reacted indignantly: 'McClellan appears to think I am not trying my best to carry this bridge; you are the third or fourth one who has been to me this morning with similar orders.' The delay enabled Major General A. P. Hill's Confederate 'light division' to complete a difficult 17-mile march from Harpers Ferry and repulse the Union breakthrough. McClellan refused Burnside's requests for reinforcements, and the battle ended in a tactical stalemate.

On 7 November 1862 Lincoln removed McClellan as commander of the Army of the Potomac for his failure to pursue Robert E. Lee's retreat from Antietam and, despite Burnside's protests, Lincoln appointed him as his replacement.

Lincoln pressured Burnside to take aggressive action and on 14 November approved his plan to capture Richmond, the Confederate capital. This entailed Burnside moving the Army of the Potomac from around Sharpsburg to Fredericksburg on the Rappahannock River. To enjoy any prospect of success Burnside needed to move quickly and mount a surprise crossing of Rappahannock. He advanced on Fredericksburg with commendable rapidity but bridging the river required pontoons. For whatever reason, three weeks were wasted in securing these and the element of surprise was lost.

The fatal delay permitted Robert E. Lee to fortify Marye's Heights just west of the town. It took Union engineers, who suffered heavy

casualties from the deadly sniping of Brigadier General Barksdale's Mississippians, two days to bridge the river.

Battle commenced on the morning of 13 December. Major General Sumner launched nine completely unsuccessful attacks against a stone wall and a sunken road held by James Longstreet's Corps, supported by Confederate artillery fire from Marye's Heights.

The Confederates enjoyed every advantage – a commanding position and, protection from return fire – and were thus able to inflict horrendous casualties on the advancing Union troops at minimal risk to themselves. Union troops encountered 'a sheet of fire.' E. P. Alexander, a Confederate artillery commander, had correctly anticipated: 'A chicken could not live on that field when we open up on it'. It was a bitterly cold day rendered even more unpleasant by frequent snow showers. For several hours wounded Union troops lay pinned to the frozen ground without cover. Those who shifted cramped limbs sustained fresh wounds as they did so.

Assaults south of the town, which were supposed to be the main attack, were also mismanaged, and initial Union breakthroughs went unsupported.

Distressed by the failure of his plan and by the enormous casualties of his repeated, futile frontal assaults, Burnside wanted to lead an assault by his old 9th Corps the following day. Fortunately, his Corps commanders talked him out of it.

Union casualties of 12, 653 at Fredericksburg were extremely heavy, especially considering that the brunt of the fighting was borne by only five divisions out of an army of 116,000 men. Most of the Union dead lay in front of the sunken road beneath Marye's Heights. A newspaper reporter noted: 'It can hardly be in human nature for men to show more valor or generals to manifest less judgment'. By contrast,



Burnside Bridge at Antietam

Confederate casualties were light: 5,377 out of an army of 78,000 men.

Burnside fully accepted responsibility for the disaster. Major General

Darius Couch saw him at 2:00 am after the battle. He subsequently wrote: '... one knowing him so long and well as myself could see that he wished his body was also lying in front of Marye's Heights. I never felt so badly for a man in my life.'

When informed of what had happened at Fredericksburg, President Lincoln told a friend: 'If there is worse place than Hell, I am in it'. For the South, Fredericksburg was a tremendous fillip to morale after Lee's retreat and unsuccessful invasion of Maryland. Furthermore, Richmond was no longer in imminent danger.

In January 1863, Burnside, who was a fighter, launched a second offensive against Lee, but the aptly named 'Mud March' became bogged down in winter rains before anything could be accomplished. The Confederates jeered that Burnside was 'stuck in the mud.' In the aftermath of this brief but unsuccessful campaign, Burnside asked that several officers, who were openly insubordinate, be relieved of duty and court-martialled. He also offered to resign. Lincoln, who admired Burnside's personal qualities (and probably also appreciated that he was on the verge of a breakdown), refused to allow him to resign his commission but replaced him on January 26 with Major General Joseph Hooker, a bitter rival of Burnside's and one of those officers who had conspired against him. Hooker boasted: 'May God have mercy on General Lee, for I shall have none.' At Chancellorsville Lee achieved his greatest and most stunning victory as a field commander – over Hooker.

ULYSSES S. GRANT

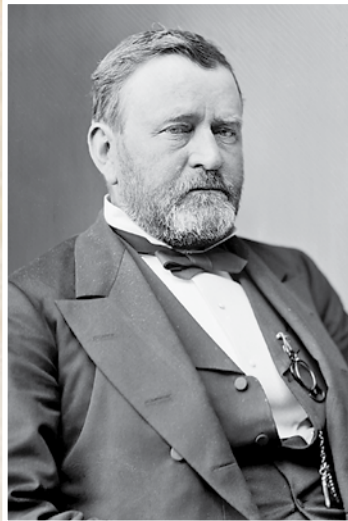
the military saviour of the Union

In his much admired history of the American Civil War John Keegan observed:

It [the South] could only win victories by superior military leadership, since it had no hope of bettering the North in numbers, in the output of military goods, or in superiority of military technology. As many well-placed men in the North knew, since so many of them had been at West Point with their opponents, the South possessed a remarkable number of talented commanders.

As we have seen, for a long time Lincoln struggled in vain to find a man capable of defeating the South's impressive military leadership, especially Robert E. Lee.

Keegan claimed the South 'lacked the intellectual power to develop a war-winning strategy'. Ironically, from the very beginning of the conflict the North did have a 'war-winning strategy' in the elderly and infirm General Winfield Scott's insufficiently appreciated 'Anaconda Strategy'. Scott contended that an effective 'blockade' of Southern ports, a strong thrust down the Mississippi Valley with a large force, and the establishment of a line of strong Unionist positions there would cut the Confederacy in two and bring it to its knees. Although derided by political ignoramuses with no grasp of military matters, eventually something approximating to the 'Anaconda Strategy' brought Southern secession to an end. The man who effectively started to implement such a strategy was Grant and he ultimately proved to be the man capable of delivering Lincoln the military victories, for which he had long yearned.



Born Hiram Ulysses Grant, the son of a tanner, in Point Pleasant, Ohio, on 27 April 1822, Grant had no wish to be a soldier and only followed a career in the army through family pressure. History knows him as Ulysses S. Grant because Congressman Thomas L. Hamer registered him as Ulysses Simpson Grant as a replacement for a West Point cadet who had dropped out. Simpson was the name of Grant's Ballygawley ancestors. At West Point his fellow cadets facetiously decided that Grant's newly acquired-initials - 'U. S.' rather than 'H. U.' - stood for 'Uncle Sam', and throughout the Army he became known as 'Sam' Grant. The 'S', Grant insisted, did not 'stand for anything'.

West Point then offered its students training unrivalled in the western hemisphere in mathematics, science and technology. As Grant possessed a formidable intellect, the syllabus presented the young Grant with no difficulties. He boasted that he never revised for examinations. He graduated from West Point in 1843, coming 21st out of a class of 59. If he had applied himself and taken his studies rather more seriously, he would have easily been in the top six.

Although an excellent horseman, he was sent to serve in the infantry rather than the cavalry. Promotion in an army the size of the US Army was painfully slow but he distinguished himself in the Mexican War, a conflict which he believed to be immoral, and attained the rank of captain.

A mind-numbing posting to California and a painful separation from Julia Dent, his wife, and their four children, drove Grant to take refuge in binge drinking. In 1854, in order to avoid the threat of court martial, he resigned his commission. Although Grant was not an alcoholic, he would turn to drink when separated from his wife or under severe strain. Happily, he could cope with a great deal of strain and normally was perfectly sober.



In civilian life Grant was an abject failure. He had failed as a farmer and in commerce and had ended up working as a clerk in his father's tannery, a humiliating reversal of fortune for him.

The outbreak of the Civil War gave him a second chance and was to demonstrate that military command in war was his true vocation. Within three years this obscure clerk in Galena, Illinois, rose to command of the Union's armies, and just over a year later secured the defeat of the Confederacy.

Grant's initial contribution to the cause of the Union was to raise and train a volunteer unit in his home town. For this, the state governor made him colonel of the 21st Illinois Regiment. Six months later he was a brigadier general and had successfully engaged the Confederate forces near Cairo, Illinois.

Grant spent the first half of the conflict serving in the war's Western Theatre, where he acquired a reputation as a conspicuously aggressive general. On 6 February 1862 Grant captured Fort Henry, which opened the Tennessee River to Union traffic. Grant then turned

his attention to Fort Donelson, capture of which on 15 February opened up the Cumberland River as an avenue for the invasion of the South. Confederate commander at Fort Donelson was Simon Bolivar Buckner, who had been at West Point with Grant (and indeed had lent him money). Buckner sought to open negotiations for surrender, suggesting an armistice as a preliminary step. Buckner received the following response:

Sir: Yours of this date proposing Armistice, and appointment of Commissioners, to settle terms of Capitulation is just received. No terms except unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted.

I propose to move immediately upon your works.

I am Sir: very respectfully

Your obedient servant

U.S. Grant

Brigadier General

Although dismayed by Grant's 'ungenerous and unchivalrous terms', Buckner surrendered his garrison (11,500 men, 40 cannon and much equipment), the first of three Confederate armies that would surrender to Grant in the course of the conflict. The terms he offered the Rebels gained him another nickname: 'Unconditional Surrender' Grant.

Although he was criticised for his conduct of the Union Forces at Shiloh (or Pittsburg Landing), Tennessee, on 6-7 April 1862, Grant gave the Union its first major victory in the field. In the immediate aftermath of the battle, Northern newspapers vilified Grant for his performance on the first day of the battle. It was falsely alleged that Grant had been drunk, and that this had contributed to many of his men being bayoneted in their tents because of Grant's lack of defensive preparedness. Much of this criticism was fuelled by the professional

jealousy of less talented colleagues who resented Grant's success. Some of it was also shaped by the heavy casualties sustained. Shiloh was the first seriously bloody battle of the Civil War: Union casualties were 13,047 (1,754 killed, 8,408 wounded, and 2,885 missing) and Confederate casualties were 10,699 (1,728 killed, 8,012 wounded, and 959 missing or captured).

In the words of the historian Allen C. Guelzo: 'Caught in a limbo between fame and disgrace, Grant was given what amounted to occupation duties in northern Mississippi for several months until he finally gained approval for an operation that would move overland against Vicksburg – and thereby redeem himself'.

Lincoln thought Vicksburg, Mississippi, was impregnable. The failure of two major assaults (on 19 May and 22 May 1863), which were repulsed with heavy casualties, went a long way in vindicating Lincoln's view. Lincoln believed that Grant should bypass the city and secure the remainder of the Mississippi down to Orleans.

Nevertheless, before the end of May Grant succeeded in landing troops just below the city, pinning its defenders into a siege, and compelling their surrender on the Fourth of July, the day after Robert E. Lee's defeat at Gettysburg. It is alleged that Independence Day was not celebrated again in Vicksburg until 1945. The capture of Vicksburg gave the Union control of the Mississippi River, split the Confederacy in two, and opened the way for further Union victories. Lincoln responded to Grant's telegraph informing him of the capture of Vicksburg by mildly observing: 'The Father of Waters [the name by which Native Americans referred to the Mississippi] again goes unvexed to the sea.'

In September General William S. Rosecrans led a Union army into a Confederate trap at Chickamauga, in northern Georgia, and sustained one of the worst Union defeats of the war in the west (19-20 September

1863). Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland lost a total of 16,170 out of 56,965 men.

Furthermore, the remainder of Rosecrans's army was besieged in the Tennessee River town of Chattanooga. It looked as if the Confederacy was on the brink of pulling off a Vicksburg in reverse. However, Grant retrieved the situation by forcing open a supply line to Chattanooga along Tennessee River. Grant's success earned him the gratitude of Abraham Lincoln.



Battle of Missionary Ridge, 25 November 1863 (as depicted on McCormick Harvesting Machine Company commemorative print.) Cyrus McCormick, the founder of the company, had Ulster-Scots antecedents from Ballygawley, Co. Tyrone, where U.S. Grant's maternal ancestors, the Simpsons, had lived prior to emigrating to the United States.

In November Grant, having been given overall command of the Union forces in the Western Theatre the previous month, drove the besieging Confederate force away from Chattanooga in a great battle waged along Missionary Ridge.

Lincoln had long been toying with idea of bringing Grant east to take on Robert E. Lee. Grant's capture of Vicksburg and his relief of Chattanooga within a year essentially made Lincoln's decision for him and assisted him overcome his instinctive wariness of those with a reputation of being fond of the bottle.

In December Congress revived the rank of lieutenant general (previously created only for George Washington) and in the spring of 1864 Grant came to Washington to receive his commission and to assume supreme command over all US armies.



Although privately a gentle and kindly man, Grant understood that war was brutally simple: what mattered was the body count. He wasted no time in embarking on a campaign of attrition against Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. The campaign lasted exactly a year

and was punctuated by several extremely bloody battles, notably at Spotsylvania (8 -19 May 1864) and Cold Harbor (1-12 June 1864).

For example, at dawn on 3 June, three Union corps attacked the Confederate works at the southern end of the line at Cold Harbor and were repulsed with heavy casualties. In his *Personal Memoirs*, published in two volumes in 1885 and 1886 and one of the classics of military literature, Grant wrote: 'I have always regretted that the last assault at Cold Harbor was ever made. ... No advantage whatever was gained to compensate for the heavy loss we sustained'. Grant lost between 10,000 and 13,000 men in twelve days.

Although Grant suffered a number of tactical defeats (most notably Cold Harbor), Grant's year-long campaign was a strategic success for the Union. By engaging Lee's forces and not allowing them to escape, Grant forced Lee into a siege at Petersburg in just over eight weeks and inflicted proportionately higher losses on Lee's army, although not numerically. Lee's losses, although lower in absolute numbers, were higher in percentage terms (over 50%) than Grant's (about 45%)

Grant's war of attrition ground down the Confederates. On the afternoon of 9 April 1865 Robert E. Lee surrendered the remnants of the once proud Army of Northern Virginia to Grant at Appomattox. Recognising the importance of securing national reconciliation, Grant offered his defeated opponents generous peace terms. In doing so, Grant was complying with President Lincoln's wishes as expressed to Grant and W. T. Sherman on 28 March.

Grant told Lee that his officers and men could go home 'not to be disturbed by US authority so long as they observe their paroles and the laws in force where they may reside', a formula which guaranteed former Confederate soldiers immunity from prosecution for treason. Grant agreed, at Lee's request, that his men could retain both their horses and mules to enable them 'to put in a crop to carry themselves

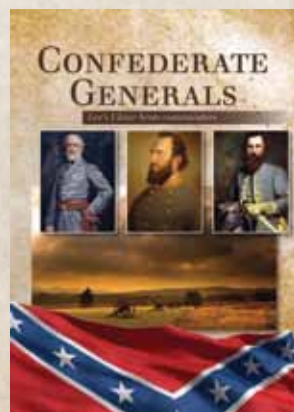
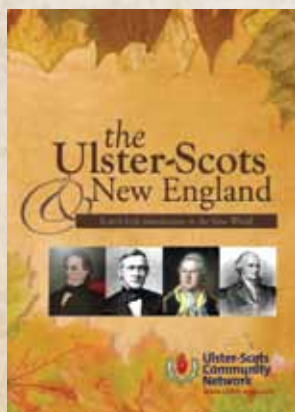
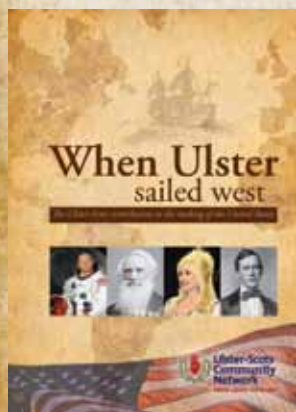
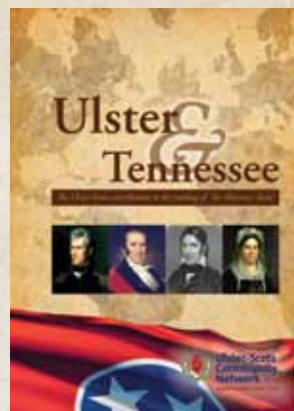
and their families through the next winter'. Lee responded: 'This will have the best possible effect upon the men and do much toward conciliating our people.' Finally, Grant sent three days' rations for 25,000 men to Lee's famished army. As James M. McPherson has observed: 'This perhaps did something to ease both the psychological as well as the physical pain of Lee's soldiers.'

Before the Civil War Shelby Foote has pointed out that Americans spoke of their country in terms of 'the United States are ...' Significantly, *postbellum* [post-war] usage became 'the United States is ...' Although not grammatically accurate, this was indicative of a shift away from the individual states and towards a renewed emphasis on the Union, which Lincoln politically and Grant militarily had secured and preserved.

Ulysses S. Grant Mausoleum in Riverside Park, Manhattan, New York



SOME OF OUR OTHER PUBLICATIONS
WHICH MAY BE OF INTEREST:



ALL PUBLICATIONS
ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE
www.ulster-scots.com

KEEP UP-TO-DATE WITH
ALL THAT GOES ON IN THE
ULSTER- SCOTS COMMUNITY NETWORK



FOLLOW US ON
FACEBOOK

Abraham Lincoln, in his bid to preserve the American Union and to end southern secession, had great difficulty in finding generals who could translate the North's overwhelming economic and material advantages over the South into success on the battlefield.

By 1864 Lincoln had been disappointed by a succession of generals before turning to Ulysses S. Grant. Lincoln, a non-drinker, had an instinctive wariness of those with a reputation of being fond of the bottle but Grant's triumphs at Vicksburg and Chattanooga helped him overcome his doubts. Lincoln's riposte to those who objected to Grant on account of his alleged alcoholism was apt: 'I wish some of you would tell me the brand of whiskey that Grant drinks. I would like to send a barrel of it to my other generals'.

If Lincoln was the Union's political saviour, Grant prove to be the man who saved the Union militarily.



**Ulster-Scots
Community
Network**

www.ulster-scots.com

68-72 Great Victoria Street Belfast BT2 7BB

T: 028 9043 6710 F: 028 9033 0715

E: info@ulster-scots.com W: www.ulster-scots.com

