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Lessons in Leadership: Ulysses S. Grant

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Lessons in Leadership:

Ulysses S. Grant

A project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Liberal Studies

by

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Introduction

The concept of leadership can be viewed on both an objective and subjective level and, therefore, becomes a somewhat abstract topic where easy agreement is elusive. Leadership can be considered a person or a quality. Some people are considered leaders by virtue of their position within an organizational unit. A leader is many times described in accordance with a dominant trait or behavioral characteristic. This characteristic, either good or bad, can be descriptive of the leader such as: a strong or a weak leader, a tenacious or a subtle leader. Some leaders are depicted by their profession, such as, a political or military leader, a religious or community leader.

It seems natural that many of us share an obsession with the search for the definition of a good leader. A common discussion theme centers on the question of what makes a leader, the circumstance or the individual. More specifically, does the individual's innate character determine their leadership potential or do events provide the setting where leadership abilities are developed? Given unusual or extreme circumstances individuals react differently. Some exhibit leadership abilities, and others do not. When extreme circumstances occur, are there specific characteristics more essential than others that are fundamental for more effective leadership?

During the relatively short course of American history, the Civil War of 1861-1865 is considered one of the primary defining moments in the creation of the United

States as it exists today. This period of our history is important for many political, economic, and social reasons. The war itself was an extreme historical circumstance, because at the time it encompassed an entire fledgling nation defined at a population of 31 million in 34 states. The nation was philosophically divided over the issue of slavery, which led to geographic division. The states lined up on their respective sides. The result was a nation divided into North and South. What ensued was the American Civil War.

Most, if not all of us, consider Abraham Lincoln the principal leader during the period. However, during this intense time in our history many other great leaders emerged. None emerged from such an improbable background, and yet were so impactful to the final military outcome of the Civil War, than Ulysses S. Grant. It was his distinctive character attributes combined with the unique conditions of the time that produced the astounding results from the effective leadership of this man.

Ulysses S. Grant entered the Civil war in 1861 as a mustering agent for regiments from the state of Illinois. His initial chief officer assignment during the war was as colonel of the 21st Illinois infantry regiment.¹ In various capacities, he led military movements in the Western theatre for the first three years of the conflict. His successes earned him progressively greater responsibilities. In the spring of 1864, Grant was moved east. Lincoln placed him in command of all U.S. armies and named him Lieutenant General, a post not held since George Washington. He led the Northern armies to victory over the Southern enemy, which culminated in the surrender at Appomattox Court House on April 9th, 1865 ending four long years of intense conflict.

¹ Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 1 vol. (New York: Konecky, 1886), 145.

What personal attributes did Grant possess that others did not? How did these attributes combine with circumstances to make Grant so effective? The leadership attributes of Grant were not apparent in his youth. Traditional qualities associated with great leaders, such as high intellect, competitive nature, dominance, boldness, and passion were absent from his childhood character. By his own admission he carried a deep seated fear of failure. He was sensitive to what others thought of him and could not conceive of a successful career at West Point. He loved animals, in particular horses. As a young adult he saw much of North America via his experiences at West Point, service in the Mexican War, and afterwards in various posts in the Army for some six years. He wed, and became a devoted husband and father. This period was also marked by multiple defeats in business ventures, alcohol abuse, and dismissal from the army, all of which led Grant to the brink of destitution, and eventually dependence again as an adult on his father's patronage.

How was it that a man of thirty-nine, with these experiences as credentials, could prove so capable when called upon during this crucial time of the American Civil War? At the onset of the war, Grant would likely be viewed as below average in accomplishments. His background was checkered with multiple failures, yet he had a highly developed sense of duty. He believed in his country, and all it had given him. He wrote his father Jesse Grant, "Whatever may have been my opinions before, I have but one sentiment now. That is we have a Government, and laws and a flag and they must all be sustained. There are but two parties now, Traitors and Patriots and I want hereafter to

be ranked with the latter.”² His country had provided him an education at West Point, and he felt it his duty to offer his skill in his country’s time of need.

This commitment provides our first real contrast of Grant with others who shared similar Mexican War and West Point experiences, in particular Robert E. Lee. Some argue the greatest military leader the war produced was the Southern general, Robert E. Lee. Lee, known to possess an aristocratic pedigree, and known to have excelled at West Point, graduated at the head of his class while earning no demerits, a record still unsurpassed. He distinguished himself as a very competent engineer during the Mexican War, serving closely with Winfield Scott. At the onset of the Civil War, Lee had over twenty-five years of service with the Army, and by all standards a highly successful military career. Lee was fifty-four years old. Winfield Scott, then the General-in-Chief for Lincoln, recommended that Lincoln appoint Lee to command Union armies. Lincoln followed Scott’s suggestion and approached Lee with the assignment. Lee’s response has since become famous: “I cannot raise my hand against my birthplace, my home, my children....Save in defense of my native State, I never desire again to draw my sword.”³

How striking are both, the differences and similarities, of the responses by Grant and Lee. The difference in backgrounds of each man is obvious. One clearly expects Lee given the opportunity, to become a great leader. Few, if any, predict Grant will become so. The specifics of each man’s response to the call to duty were equally dissimilar. Grant was dedicated to the national constitution, laws and flag, while Lee was dedicated to his native state. However, a striking similarity emerges as one senses the deep commitment

² Jean Edward Smith, *Grant* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 101.

³ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1988), 280-81.

of each man to their respective ideals. Grant and Lee were not alone by any means in their deep commitment to their philosophy. It was the passionate response of the entire nation to the ideals at stake, which generated the intensity of the war. Both Grant and Lee were rather humble men, and counted among the many men motivated by belief, as opposed to self-promotion, fame or politics. An important distinction existed between Grant and Lee; Grant won the war.

What qualities did Grant possess to propel him forward to become the leader of all Northern armies and prevail over Lee? Was it just a matter of time, given the Northern resources and numerical superiority, or was it Grant that made the difference? I submit that Grant possessed and demonstrated unique innate qualities and viewpoints required for the circumstances that existed, to prevail over Lee, specifically, and the South in general.

One of the essential and fundamental perspectives of Grant as a military leader and somewhat unique to him, was his definition of successful battle. He believed his objective was the capture of the opposition army, not their territory. Therefore, he was not satisfied with maneuvers that gained ground. He believed in prevailing against the enemy, which was defined as the Southern Army. Geography and the army occasionally merged as objectives, as in the case of Vicksburg, however, Grant's first instinct was victory over the enemy army, as his mission.

Several key personality traits of Grant include his demonstrated sense of urgency, willingness to take risk, and dogged determination. Many other leaders lacked these traits, or possessed only one. The lack of urgency which existed in the Eastern theatre's

military leadership clearly frustrated President Lincoln. Never satisfied with winning a battle, Grant's first instinct was to "follow up" a victory. This attitude, not only demonstrated urgency, but also a resolute tenacity that kept pressure on the enemy. He knew the enemy was tired and spent, much like his own troops. However, the difference between his own troops and the opponent's troops after a major battle was psychological, and Grant had the insight to understand and exploit this knowledge. If Grant's troops had prevailed in a battle, although physically tired, his men had the added energy derived from the momentum of victory. The opponents on the other hand were both physically and psychologically on the run. Grant understood this as an advantage and he acted on it repeatedly. As commander in the East, Grant suffered a major setback in the Battle of the Wilderness. Once again, as in the first three years of the war under prior generals, the Army of the Potomac suffered the psychological and physical defeat at the hands of Robert E. Lee. In consummate Grant fashion, Grant followed the enemy and refused to retreat. To the surprise of his own troops, as well as Lee, Grant chased the enemy after his own defeat. The very principal of psychological defeat, Grant turned into his advantage. Retreat was so engrained in the psyche of the Army of the Potomac, that pursuit of Lee in the face of defeat became a huge psychological win for Grant. His own men, Lincoln, and the nation, expected Grant to fall back and retreat, as so many had done before him.

Although, pursuit in the face of defeat demonstrated Grant's determination, it eventually exposed him to criticism of being "a butcher" and insensitive to the terrifying death tolls. Marching repeatedly into the jaws of death during the summer and fall of 1864, Grant became responsible for startling casualty numbers among Northern troops. A

view of optimism evolved into a Northern public view of futility, and cruelty. Grant withstood the criticism, and in a message to Lincoln after his defeat at Wilderness Grant wrote, "Whatever happens, there will be no turning back."⁴

Finally, Lincoln had a military leader, who like him, had the fortitude to withstand the criticism and terror of the loss of human lives in order to press for the finish. This strength of conviction, courage, and determination was the material difference of Grant from prior Northern commanding generals. Lincoln had single-handedly shouldered the responsibility of the human cost of the war for three long years prior to Grant. Now he had a man, Ulysses S. Grant, who understood and shared this responsibility. Grant was committed to take responsibility for his role to bring the war to conclusion. He used all the Northern resources, man and material, available to him in concert to drive to the end, and he did so successfully.

Who is this man Grant, and how did he evolve into a successful leader? This paper will examine Grant's childhood, youth, and early adulthood to understand the shaping of the personality that made the man. It will focus on him maturing as a commander through the course of the Civil War as he applied his skills and talents during the conflict. The process of Grant's leadership development will reach fruition in the final campaign of 1864-65 that secured victory for the North.

⁴ Tom Wheeler, *Leadership Lessons from the Civil War*, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1999), 42.

Youth

He was born in Point Pleasant, Ohio on April 27, 1822, the eldest son of Jesse and Hannah Grant. Point Pleasant was approximately twenty-five miles east of Cincinnati. Grant was christened Hiram Ulysses Grant. His first name Hiram was given by his father. His middle name was given by his grandmother, who had read the works of Homer, and romanticized that her grandson should bear the name Ulysses. His mother wished to name him Albert Gallatin (for Jefferson's Treasury Secretary.)⁵ Possibly in his name we can see the relative impact each parent had on the destiny of their son, and the development of his character. His mother likely played a lesser role, while his father was dominant in the family structure. It seemed Hiram would be destined to seek his father's approval throughout his youth.

Jesse Grant owned and ran a tannery in Point Pleasant, Ohio. At the time a tannery was a trade where hides were made into leather by way of soaking in a "tanbark" solution.⁶ A year after Hiram's birth Jesse moved his young family to Georgetown, Ohio another twenty miles eastward, presumably to be closer to freshwater and oak bark, both necessary inputs to the tannery process.⁷ The Grant's could be considered pioneers of the time. The small towns of Point Pleasant and Georgetown boasted a population of about one thousand each. Jesse, by virtue of owning a tannery, performed a vital function for

⁵ Smith, *Grant*, 22.

⁶ Dictionary.com

⁷ Smith, *Grant*, 22.

the town, in addition to owning “considerable” land. Grant described the circumstances of his own father’s childhood whereby Jesse’s father (Grant’s paternal grandfather) was forced to split his family up after his wife’s death given, his inability to support them. Jesse was one of the seven children who by himself, roomed with a neighbor family. Grant respectfully reflected in his *Memoirs* that his father Jesse whose “...industry and independence were such, that I imagine his labor compensated for the expense of his maintenance.”⁸

As Grant grew up Jesse and Hannah added another five children to their family. Hiram (Ulysses) being the oldest child dutifully performed his chores which included,

...all the work done with horses, such as breaking up the land, furrowing, ploughing corn and potatoes, bringing in the crops when harvested, hauling all the wood, besides tending two or three horses, a cow or two, and sawing wood for stoves, etc. while still attending school. However, I detested the trade, preferring almost any other labor...⁹

Grant wrote with pride in his *Memoirs* that he could handle a team of horses at age eight. Although he could not load nor unload the wagons, he contributed to the process in a meaningful way by driving the wagon and team to and from the river, thereby helping Jesse in his work of annual land clearing. This he did at an early age of seven or eight. Grant loved animals, and this love might have been the source for a possible rift between father and son. Jesse’s profession after all, was based on the product of the slaughter of animals. The Grant family’s livelihood depended on the tannery. Even the Grant home was in close proximity to the tannery. Grant, however, admitted that he hated it. To a sensitive child who loved horses, striving to please his industrious and

⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 16.

⁹ USG, *Memoirs*, 20.

hard-working father, the working and living situation could not have evoked fond childhood memories.

Although Grant focused on agricultural chores while attending the local school, his fondest memories of this period seemed to be the enjoyment of his horses. Both his father Jesse, and mother Hannah, recognized his innate abilities with horses. One afternoon when Grant was about eight years of age, Jesse sent his son to buy a horse in another township. Grant was excited about the purchase, as he had coveted the animal from afar. Jesse provided Grant with clear instructions relative to the negotiations in an iterative format. If he says this, then offer that. Upon arrival at the sellers premises Grant outlined the specific instructions just the way his father had. Only he revealed the iterations all at once, conveying his bottom line allowance given to offer for the animal. Obviously no negotiation ensued. Grant procured the fine animal at the prescribed price, and proceeded back to Georgetown. “This transaction caused me great heartburning. The story got out among the boys of the village, and it was a long time before I heard the last of it.”¹⁰ Once Grant realized the joke was on him and his naiveté, he was thoroughly humiliated. It would not be the last time the emotion of humiliation would have a decided effect on Grant’s attitude and behavior.

As Grant described his childhood in his *Memoirs*, one acquires insight to Grant as an introvert. He was a sensitive child that got little attention from his practical and seemingly stoic parents. As a person Grant was reserved and quiet. He did not seek to be the center of attention. He performed his chores to avoid parental reprimand, and enjoyed his horses. In later years when writing of his parents he did so in a detached manner, and

¹⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 23.

with little emotion. He understood his father's authority in the household and obeyed his instructions.

When Grant was eighteen, unbeknownst to him, his father had written an old estranged friend and Ohio Congressman, Thomas L. Hamer, requesting that his son be considered for admission to West Point. Jesse received a positive response to his request and informed his son the application had been accepted. Grant surprised, and convinced he was not smart enough for West Point, protested vehemently. Jesse simply replied that he was to go. The discussion was closed, and the decision was made. Grant was headed to West Point.

Grant was certain he would never pass the entrance test, so he acquiesced to the decision, and decided to view the West Point trip as an adventure east. The trip included a ride on a steamer, and a visit to Philadelphia and New York City. Grant found the trip was enjoyable and exciting. Once he arrived at West Point the admission rolls showed a Ulysses S. Grant. It seemed that Congressman Hamer had requested Ulysses S. Grant be admitted. Hamer mistakenly thought that Ulysses was Grant's first name, and his mother's maiden name, Simpson, was surely his middle name. Hiram (Ulysses) attempted to get his name corrected, however, it never was. From this point forward he was known to most as Ulysses S. Grant.

Grant took the West Point entrance exam and passed, much to his surprise and dismay. Now he was forced to apply himself and stay in school. He must have felt trapped. He endured all the trials and traditions of being a first year plebe. Although Grant did not want to be at West Point, he never gave the idea he was homesick for his family or the farm in Ohio. Rather, what he feared most was being a failure at West

Point, and the possible humiliation associated with failure. In his *Memoirs*, Grant recounted the story of Dr. Bailey's son, who was admitted to West Point. Bailey was a close family friend from Georgetown. After a year at West Point, Bailey's son failed the exams. Bailey's son resigned and went to a private school. He attempted the West Point exams again, failed again, and was dismissed. Dr. Bailey embarrassed by his son's failure, would not allow his return back home to Ohio. Grant feared the same destiny would be his. This fear was accentuated when he later found out his own appointment filled the very opening created by Bailey's son¹¹.

Two hundred and fifty young men were enrolled in West Point in 1839 across all four classes. When Grant entered his first year, William Tecumseh Sherman and George H. Thomas were in their last year before graduation. Richard Ewell and William Rosecrans were also upper classmen. One year ahead of Grant, as second year students, were James Longstreet and John Pope. By the time Grant was a senior, a fifteen year old prodigy entered as a freshman. His name was George B. McClellan.

Sherman recalled the process of giving nicknames to his West Point classmates. For instance, Rosecrans became known as "Rosey" and Longstreet became known as "Pete". Grant was listed as U.S. Grant. The upper classmen ideated with United States Grant, then Uncle Sam Grant, which evolved to "Sam" Grant which stuck with Hiram, known at West Point as Ulysses, and soon nicknamed Sam Grant.

West Point was one of two schools in the young nation which trained men in civil engineering. Typically after graduation a cadet would be required to serve at least one year with the army. Since the institution's inception in 1802, and through Grant's time, less than half the graduating cadets sought an army career. Many were motivated to

¹¹ USG, *Memoirs*, 24.

attend West Point to gain the prestige associated with attending, which led to other opportunities. It was more typical that a cadet would serve one year, and then pursue another profession. For instance, Jefferson Davis, Albert Sidney Johnston and George Meade, were only a few who served the requisite year after attending West Point, only to resign to pursue other professions.¹²

Early on, Grant's ambition revolved around becoming a math professor at a respectable college back in Ohio. Grant studied at the minimum level to get through his examinations at West Point. He did not have any aspiration to remain in the army nor make it a career. He readily admitted he did not apply himself to perform the school work required at West Point, and sheepishly noted that he loved to use his time to read the novels of the day. Bored with being in his room, he would go to the school library and read fiction. As a sophomore Grant was "...promoted to cadet corporal, and to sergeant the next. 'The promotion was too much for me.' he wrote."¹³ The pressure associated with success, so disturbed Grant that he seemingly received demerits purposely in order to recede back to the more comfortable position of private. Indeed, he was one of the few cadets, that upon graduation was still a private, a status which seemed comfortable to him. Grant graduated twenty-first out of thirty-nine. The top of the class was usually reserved for civil engineer assignments in the army. Given his class standing and exceptional skills with horses, Grant requested a cavalry assignment. No openings were available, so he was placed with the 4th Infantry and transferred to Jefferson Barracks in Missouri.

¹² Smith, *Grant*, 23-25.

¹³ Smith, *Grant*, 27.

After graduation, and prior to the onset of his first service assignment in Missouri, Grant returned home to Ohio on leave. In his *Memoirs*, Grant recounted a rare break from his modest nature. Upon his return to his hometown from West Point, with anticipation and satisfaction, he donned his uniform and proceeded into town. Instead of receiving the admiration of the village, he was mocked and ridiculed by the townspeople. He immediately regretted wearing the uniform as a symbol of his accomplishment, and more importantly believed his conceit was the source of his humiliation. His unusual display of pride that the uniform signified, much like the purchase of the horse earlier in his life, led to unanticipated consequences. This incident apparently had such an impact on Grant, that he swore he would not wear a full dress uniform again. Indeed, Grant was renowned for dressing in uniform below his rank, and was even described by some as “slovenly” in appearance. At no time was this trait drawn into such stark contrast than at Appomattox, where Lee surrendered to Grant. Lee, in his full uniform displayed the formal air of command. Grant the victor, showed no sign of superiority by way of his dress, just the opposite. He had been riding and made no special preparation for the occasion.

At Grant’s first assignment to Jefferson Barracks in Missouri, he discovered classmate James Longstreet. Grant’s West Point roommate Fred Dent, family’s home was a mere five miles from Jefferson Barracks. Fred Dent, however, was stationed out west on a frontier post. Dent encouraged Grant to visit his family. Grant did so with regularity, and engaged in lengthy discussions with Dent’s father, Colonel Dent, about politics and current issues of the day. Colonel Dent, a former lawyer turned slave and plantation owner, was a proponent of slavery and “the southern way of life”. Grant was

accompanied by Longstreet on many of these visits, as Longstreet's mother was related to the Dents.¹⁴

During Grant's initial visits to the Dent household their eldest daughter Julia, was away at finishing school. Upon her return home in the spring, Grant and Julia began a platonic relationship. They enjoyed long talks and horse rides together. After six months in Missouri, Grant received orders to transfer to the Louisiana border adjacent to Texas, a contested Mexican territory desired for acquisition by the U.S. Upon receipt of these orders, both Grant and Julia realized the extent of their feelings for one another. The year was 1844, and they became secretly engaged. While on leave in 1845, Grant asked Colonel Dent for his permission to marry Julia. He agreed. Julia and Grant corresponded during the next three years of their engagement, while Grant served in the Mexican War. During this entire four year period Grant saw Julia only once.

¹⁴ Smith, Grant, 30.

Mexican War

Abraham Lincoln called it a war “unnecessarily and unconstitutionally begun by the President of the United States.”¹⁵ Ulysses Grant, in his *Memoirs*, described it as a “political war, and the administration conducting it desired to make party capital out of it.”¹⁶

Careful to criticize the Mexican War in December 1847 in a series of “spot” resolutions, nearly at the war’s close and certainly only when victory was imminent, Lincoln argued that President Polk had initiated the war without the consent of Congress thereby threatening to place “our Presidents where kings have always stood.”¹⁷ Ulysses Grant, again in his *Memoirs*, claimed that as a member of Zachary Taylor’s army, “We were sent to provoke a fight, but it was essential that Mexico should commence it. It was very doubtful whether Congress would declare war.”¹⁸

Although Grant offered his views in his *Memoirs* written some forty years after his Mexican War experience, it is instructive to note how similar were Grant’s and Lincoln’s views about this war. It is also valuable to appreciate, that the experiences of the participants of this war were widely regarded as lessons for future reference and application during the Civil War, in both the political and military realms.

¹⁵ David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 123.

¹⁶ USG, *Memoirs*, 74.

¹⁷ Donald, *Lincoln*, 126.

¹⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 45.

During the period of the Mexican War, Lincoln at thirty-seven, and Grant at twenty-three, were at different stages of maturity, and held vastly different roles. Abraham Lincoln was serving as congressman from the state of Illinois, while Ulysses Grant was serving as a quartermaster in the regular army under General Taylor. In his capacity as congressman, Abraham Lincoln disapproved of the Mexican War, yet was circumspect in his criticism. He criticized President Polk, and his instigation of the war, only at its close saying, “that all those who, because of knowing too *little*, or because of knowing too *much*, could not conscientiously approve the conduct of the President, in the beginning of it, should...as good citizens and patriots, remain silent..., at least till the war should be ended.”¹⁹

Grant reflected in his *Memoirs* on the philosophical justification of the Mexican War. He shared the same patriotic view held by Lincoln regarding the war. Grant struggled to reconcile his personal beliefs that the war was not justified, and indeed provoked by America, with the fact that he had actively participated. Grant wrote, “Experience proves that the man who obstructs a war in which his nation is engaged, no matter whether right or wrong, occupies no enviable place in life or history.”²⁰ Both men exemplified the concept historians term, “loyal opposition.”²¹

Lincoln knew he had a duty to support President Polk’s actions in Mexico from a national viewpoint. From a congressional perspective, he also believed it was his duty to criticize and question the authority upon which Polk acted, in effective execution of the checks and balances as stipulated in the constitution. An attitude prevailed among Whigs

¹⁹ Donald, *Lincoln*, 123.

²⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 45.

²¹ Mark E Neely Jr., *The Last Best Hope of Earth*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p.25.

that the war constituted a “southern conspiracy” initiated by Polk, a Democrat, designed to add territory and extend slavery into these acquired territories. Anti-southern sentiment was beginning to develop among the Whigs on the basis of this belief. Lincoln, however, did not share this view. Instead he challenged whether the constitutional powers allowed the president to initiate and execute the war.²² He specifically focused on where the first “spot” of blood was shed. Was it spilled on Mexican land, or on U.S. territory? The answer delineated the invader and aggressor from the legitimate defender.

Although in his *Memoirs* Grant wrote that his personal beliefs were inconsistent with the invasion of Mexico, at the time he performed his military duties adhering to all army standards and protocols. Being a graduate of West Point, Grant dutifully served in the capacity of quartermaster of the 4th infantry in Mexico, yet was anxious to marry Julia Dent, the sister of one of his classmates. Though preoccupied with thoughts of Julia at the time, and stationed at Corpus Christi, Texas, Grant was destined for three more long years of separation. He had proposed marriage to Julia prior to his departure. His own father, Jesse Grant, encouraged him to resign from the army and accept a position of professorship of mathematics at a “tolerably well endowed College in Hillsboro, Ohio.”²³ Grant wrote to Julia that he would gladly resign from the Army if this was her wish, and if it would overrule any reservations which remained with her father relative to his daughter becoming a soldier’s wife. Julia responded back to Grant that she did not wish to have him resign, yet she was reluctant to set a date for marriage. Grant deduced that she was still apprehensive of the transitory army lifestyle. After once more offering to

²² Neely, *Last Best Hope of Earth*, 25-27.

²³ U.S. Grant to Julia Dent, October 1845, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, ed. John Y. Simon (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967) I:59.

resign, his tone changed with his letter of March 3rd, 1846, a month prior to Taylor's invasion into the "disputed territory." Grant put aside his personal wish to join Julia. He wrote, "I could not think of such a thing now just at a time when it is probable that the services of every officer will be called into requisition."²⁴ He felt it his duty to prosecute the war and did so while acting in accordance with the objectives of the day which included the "conquest" of "Mexican" territory.

Three years after graduating from West Point, Ulysses Grant found himself marching into Mexico under the direction of General Zachary Taylor. Grant recounted that upon hearing the guns which signified the onset of the war, "I felt sorry that I had enlisted."²⁵ These comments provided a clue into determining Grant's motivation for participation in both the Mexican War and, later, the Civil War. It was a matter of duty, not a source of thrill or excitement. In a letter to Julia in May 1846, at the onset of the Mexican War, he wrote her not to fear, but to take heart, "It is just what we came here for and the sooner it begins the sooner it will end..."²⁶ Grant did not relish the experience of war. He did not wish to have it prolonged, and he knew that in order to have it end, it had to begin. During the Civil War years, over and over Grant's actions will exemplify this belief. He refused to stall, and instead marshaled his complete resource base in order to accomplish his objective. The byproduct of this approach was an intolerance of procrastination, which had in Grant's mind, no useful purpose.

Grant stood in contrast to some who sought to participate in the Mexican War to experience the excitement of action, or the chance to achieve glory. He wrote Julia after

²⁴ U.S. Grant to Julia Dent, March 3, 1846, *The Papers*, I:75.

²⁵ USG, *Memoirs*, 58.

²⁶ U.S. Grant to Julia Dent, May 3, 1846, *The Papers*, I:83.

the initial battles in Mexico, “There is no great sport in having bullets flying about one in every direction but I find they have less horror when among them than when in anticipation.”²⁷ He wrote this passage somewhat somberly, after he witnessed the wagonloads of dead from the aftermath of battle. He immediately grasped the immensity of the responsibility associated with command. Illusions of grandeur did not overshadow the reality of death for him. His perception of this reality was revealed in an empathetic reference to Taylor, who commanded three thousand men in Mexico, “I thought what a fearful responsibility General Taylor must feel. Commanding such a host and so far away from friends.”²⁸ What an interesting reflection from a man who would eventually have command of the entire U.S. Army, numbering in excess of half a million men.

By the time General Winfield Scott arrived in December 1846 at the port of Brazos de Santiago, Grant had already served in three successful battles under Taylor.²⁹ President James K. Polk sought to dilute the popularity of Taylor, by superseding his general command in Mexico. He assigned Winfield Scott to overall command. The political implications of the reassignment did not go unnoticed by Grant. Having served under Taylor, whom he respected and considered a competent commander, he was mindful of the motives behind the reassignment by Polk. Polk, and the Democratic administration, was troubled by the growing reputation of Taylor stemming from his successes in Mexico. Taylor was a Whig and, therefore, posed a political threat to the Democrats. Polk superseded Taylor’s Mexican command in order to temper Taylor’s fame.

²⁷U.S. Grant to Julia Dent, May 11, 1846, *The Papers*, I:86.

²⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 59.

²⁹ USG, *Memoirs*, 74.

Although both Scott and Taylor were Whigs, Polk betted that Scott could not muster the popularity that Taylor had aroused with his successes. Such was one of the lessons of the intertwining of politics and the military experience during the Mexican War. Grant observed their interdependence firsthand. Later, writing in his *Memoirs* about the incident, he did not sulk. He did not despair at its injustice or ineffectiveness. He appeared to accept it without acrimony, merely as fact. He refrained from judging Polk in his actions; he merely acted as a witness to the events.

His later observations are made more poignant by the fact that he respected both Taylor and Scott for different reasons. In his *Memoirs* he made an extensive comparison between the generals. He contrasted the two commanders, based on their respective styles and approaches to military operations. Taylor was without formal dress, while Scott was always fully dressed. Taylor was “hand-on” in the sense he would ride into action to see and assess it; Scott would rely on the reports of his staff. Regarding their method of communication, Scott “was precise in language” while Taylor

was not a conversationalist, but on paper he could put his meaning so plainly that there could be no mistaking it. He knew how to express what he wanted to say in the fewest well-chosen words, but would not sacrifice meaning to the construction of high-sounding sentences.³⁰

Grant wrote about both generals with high regard and admiration. Obviously these generals provided important role models for Grant in his early military development. The lessons he learned from them encompassed leadership style, strategic thinking and tactical execution. As Grant matured he came to emulate the style of Taylor most closely. Indeed, the descriptions Grant provided regarding Winfield Scott and

³⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 85.

Taylor appear as an interesting resemblance to a comparison between Halleck and Grant himself.

Although Scott assumed command in late 1846 for the purposes of diffusing political enthusiasm for Taylor, Scott was ready to stage an assault immediately on Vera Cruz with the intention of capturing Mexico City. Scott stripped Taylor of all his trained military troops, and left him solely with volunteers. Scott planned to have Taylor stand still to defend the territory under occupation. Taylor had other ideas, and with his army of volunteers moved upon, and conquered Buena Vista, upstaging Scott's invasion of Vera Cruz.

Concurrently, George McClellan entered Mexico via the port of Brazos de Santiago. During the Civil War, he became the first commander of the Army of the Potomac under Lincoln. McClellan was fresh from West Point's class of 1846. He had excellent standing, and graduated second in his class, which entitled him to an assignment with the "army's elite engineering corps".³¹ His destination was Vera Cruz, to serve under Winfield Scott.

Grant was transferred from Taylor's command to that of Scott, and reassigned to serve under General William J. Worth. At Vera Cruz, Grant was one of a force of twelve thousand, attempting to invade a country of millions. Although Scott was pressed to stay ahead of "yellow fever" season, he calculated a siege to Vera Cruz could be successful in time to avoid it. His decision in favor of siege, conquered the city with the least cost in terms of human life. Within twenty days the city surrendered. About five thousand prisoners were taken with the loss of sixty-four Americans.

³¹ John C. Waugh, *The Class of 1846*, (New York: Warner Books, 1994), 75.

Even as a young quartermaster without any military aspirations, the siege strategy had a big impression on Grant. The siege at Vera Cruz bears remarkable similarities to the siege Grant waged at Vicksburg, both cities bordered by water and within enemy territory. Clearly Scott gained the victory with very little loss of life in a relative sense, and in the face of dramatic odds against him.

After the surrender of Vera Cruz, Scott's army marched toward Mexico City, approximately two hundred and sixty miles inland. On its approach, Scott's American men encountered Santa Anna's Mexican army at Cerro Gordo. Santa Anna's troops were situated between mountain ranges, which Santa Anna mistakenly believed would force a frontal assault by Scott. Scott, however, constructed a pass designed by his engineers, McClellan and Lee among them, which resulted in an unexpected flanking maneuver by the Americans. Taken totally by surprise, Santa Anna's army and another three thousand prisoners surrendered. Continuing on toward the City of Mexico, Scott's army met resistance at Contreras. Like Cerro Gordo, Contreras was situated in a valley flanked by mountains. Grant recollected, "This affair like that of Cerro Gordo, was an engagement in which the officers of the engineer corps won special distinction."³² The battles at both Cerro Gordo and Contreras illustrated several lessons. First it was evident that a coordinated use of various disciplines, the army and the engineers, was needed to be successful. Secondly, and more important, these battles demonstrated that seemingly insurmountable obstacles posed by both terrain and troops could be overcome and victory achieved.

³² USG, *Memoirs*, 87.

With the victory at Contreras, Mexico City surrendered with little resistance, in another demonstration of success with minimal loss of life. Peace negotiations ensued, but stalled. Upon Mexican violations of the conditions of truce, Scott initiated an assault on Molino del Rey, a mill thought to be a foundry overlooking Mexico City a mile from the west. Grant was among the troops in Worth's brigade who stormed the mill. The mill was easily taken, and the Mexicans retreated toward Chapultepec immediately east of Molino del Rey, and to the west of Mexico City. It was five days later that U.S. troops attempted to take Chapultepec. After hard fighting and heavy loss of life, Chapultepec was won. US troops then turned toward Mexico City itself. Grant remembered it as "successful, but bloody."³³ Two more battles ensued before Scott and his army reached the "Halls of Montezumas."

Grant was young and impressionable during the Mexican War, and most of the letters in existence from this period are to Julia. His letters were dominated by the reaffirmation of his love for her, and indicated that an army career was not part of his future ambition. In his *Memoirs*, he maintained that his original ambition was to become a professor in mathematics. Given this frame of mind, it was not likely that Grant observed the military strategies and tactics of his Mexican War experience with an eye toward their future usefulness.

Grant was, however, keenly aware of his surroundings. He observed the Mexican people. He perceived them not only as the enemy to be conquered, but as a culture, and compared that culture with the American identity at the time. He wrote, "The people of Mexico are a very different race of people from ours. The better class are very proud and

³³ USG, *Memoirs*, 94.

tyrinize over the lower and much more numerous class as much as a hard master does over his negroes, and they submit to it quite humbly.”³⁴ This particular passage provided a glimpse into Grant’s view of the world around him. Not only did he see the Mexican people as the enemy through battle, but also as a people. He compared these people to himself, and those in America.

Grant’s letters to Julia conveyed little in the way of his views of military techniques or tactics. He did convey an attitude of confidence in victory regardless of circumstance. This attitude did not desert him during the Civil War years. Even though he knew the U.S. troops were outnumbered in Mexico, and within enemy territory, he wrote to Julia, “For my part I believe we are bound to beat the Mexicans whenever and wherever we meet them, no matter how large the numbers...But then where there are battles a great many must suffer, and for the sake of the little glory gained I do not care to see it.”³⁵ This letter was written in August 1846 while Grant was under Taylor’s command, reflected the confidence in success Grant possessed and empathy for its terrible results, without reference to the justification of either side.

As a way of summing up the circumstances of the war, Grant wrote to Julia in September 1847 while in Mexico City, after its surrender and virtually at the close of the war, “They fought us with evry advantage on their side. They doubled us in numbers, doubled us in more artillery, they behind strong Breast-works had evry advantage and then they were fighting for their homes.”³⁶ Grant experienced not only a battle, but a war, conducted on enemy soil, with enemy numerical superiority, and enemy defensive

³⁴ U.S. Grant to Julia Dent, June 26, 1846, *The Papers*, I:97.

³⁵ U.S. Grant to Julia Dent, August 14, 1846, *The Papers*, I:105.

³⁶ U.S. Grant to Julia Dent, September 1847, *Memoirs and Selected Letters*, ed. Mary Drake and William S. McFeeley (Camp PA:The Viking Press, 1990), 924.

advantages, yet the enemy was conquered. This lesson, if not part of Grant's conscious learning, was likely part of his unconscious realization, which guided him throughout the Civil War period.

Grant experienced the victory which resulted from these circumstances in Mexico. He realistically and practically understood the circumstances even then. When he found himself confronted with similar circumstances in the Civil War, he was not intimidated. He knew from experience success was possible in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds.

Reflecting in his *Memoirs*, Grant is a bit more formal in his summary of the circumstances of victory in the Mexican War. He depicted the events of the war by describing the military accomplishment of General Scott. He spoke respectfully of this accomplishment when he said of Scott,

He invaded a populous country, penetrating two hundred and sixty miles into the interior, with a force at no time equal to one-half of that opposed to him; he was without a base; the enemy was always entrenched, always on the defensive; yet he won every battle, he captured the capital, and conquered the government. Credit is due to the troops engaged, it is true, but the plans and the strategy were the general's.³⁷

Grant further cited two details which contributed to the success. First, "Every officer, from the highest to the lowest, was educated in his profession, not a West Point necessarily, but in the camp, in garrison, and many of them in Indian wars."³⁸ Secondly, the men "were brave men, and then drill and discipline brought out all there was in them."³⁹ Characteristic of Grant, he believed in timely and proper execution of one's job,

³⁷ US Grant, *Memoirs*, 101.

³⁸ US Grant, *Memoirs*, 101.

³⁹ US Grant, *Memoirs*, 101.

enhanced with the skill derived from discipline, but dependent on the courage to carry it out.

The military experience of the Mexican War was one shared by virtually all major commanders in the Civil War of 1861-1865. These men, who were once comrades, were destined to face one another as adversaries fifteen years later. Ulysses Grant, George McClellan, Robert E. Lee, Thomas Jackson, James Longstreet, and A.P. Hill were among the many that fought in both conflicts. They were West Point graduates who became pivotal contestants in the Civil War. As participants in the Mexican War each gained knowledge and experience which served as a basis for their future conduct, strategies and operations.

Grant recognized the value of his Mexican War experience when he wrote, “The acquaintance thus formed was of immense service to me in the war of the rebellion – I mean what I learned of the characters of those to whom I was afterwards opposed...my appreciation of my enemies was certainly affected by this knowledge.”⁴⁰ Specifically Grant spoke of this knowledge with respect to Robert E. Lee when he mentioned the “natural disposition of most people...to clothe a commander of a large army whom they do not know, with almost superhuman abilities.”⁴¹ Yet of Lee, Grant later recollected, “I had known him personally, and knew he was mortal;”⁴² Grant understood that war was comprised of both a psychological battlefield as well as a physical battlefield.

Even if Grant did not knowingly note the military tactics which yielded success, by virtue of the experience he did so intuitively, but so did Lee, McClellan, Jackson,

⁴⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 115-116.

⁴¹ USG, *Memoirs*, 116.

⁴² USG, *Memoirs*, 116.

Longstreet and others who were to participate later in the Civil War. Why would McClellan become known as a general who obsessed over the numerical size of the enemy? Why would Lee become a renowned risk taker? Why would Longstreet become an advocate of defensive strategies and tactics? Why would Grant become an aggressor with a propensity to initiate engagement and follow a retreating enemy regardless of circumstance? All these famous generals attended the same classes at West Point. They all faced similar experiences during the Mexican War. The difference in how one reacts and assimilates the same experience can only be attributed to the difference in perspective and character inherent to the individual himself. In his *Memoirs* and most importantly as exemplified in his actions during the Civil War, Grant revealed that he learned many military tactical and strategic lessons from his Mexican War experience. He utilized these lessons during the Civil War in his own unique Grant-like way.

Early Military Career and Civilian Life

After the Mexican War, Grant pined to return to Julia in St. Louis. He had been away four long years. After final peace terms were negotiated between Mexico and the United States, the 4th Infantry was sent back to Pascagoula, Mississippi. Right away Grant obtained a leave of absence to see Julia. At the onset to the Mexican War Grant was 22 years of age. Now he was 26. For a young man, he had seen much of his part of the world. From the Midwest where he was born, to West Point in New York where he was educated, and subsequently south to Missouri, Texas and Mexico during the war, not only did Grant see many unique places, his distinctive experiences were surely developing his character. He must have matured greatly during this time, and certainly his perspective of the world changed with his experiences.

His maturation was evidently apparent to others. Upon Grant's return to St. Louis in 1848 to reunite with Julia, her parents observed a change in Grant. He seemed "sturdier".⁴³ Julia and Grant were married on August 22, 1848. James Longstreet, Julia's cousin and close friend to Grant, served as Grant's best man.

After marriage and still with the 4th Infantry, Grant was assigned to Sackets Harbor, New York. Grant never explained in his *Memoirs* why he decided to remain in the army after his marriage to Julia, but he did. Not only did he remain in the military, he

⁴³ Smith, *Grant*, 73.

decided to leave behind his ambition to become a mathematics professor at either West Point or a small local college in Ohio. It appeared that after his experience in the Mexican War, he chose to pursue a career within the military.

At Sackets Harbor, situated near the Canadian border, Grant was assigned to a rifle company. Grant appealed this assignment. Given his background and experience, he felt he should serve as quartermaster. His appeal was accepted, and he was reassigned to Detroit. While Grant's appeal was in process, the newlyweds set up their first home in Sackets Harbor and remained a single winter. In the spring, they moved to Detroit and lived two years there. During their time in Detroit, their first son arrived. They named him Frederick after Julia's father. Shortly thereafter, the Grants received yet another assignment back to Sackets Harbor. There, they remained only one year.

In the spring of 1851 the 4th Infantry received orders to proceed to the pacific northwest via California. The California gold rush was in full progress. The date of departure was slated for July 5, 1852. Although Julia wanted to accompany Grant west, Grant insisted she remain behind, as she was eight months pregnant with their second child. Julia went to live with her parents in St. Louis while Grant departed for the west. Grant planned to send for her and his children once he had settled. Serving in the capacity of quartermaster, Grant began making preparations for the difficult journey.⁴⁴

The journey to California consisted of three parts. First, the company and their families departed from New York City on a steam ship. They sailed to the Isthmus of Panama, where they disembarked to travel the second part of the trip, overland to Panama City. In Panama, they boarded another steamship destined to complete the third leg of the

⁴⁴ USG, *Memoirs*, 116.

trip to the port at San Francisco, California. Grant, being quartermaster, was in charge of logistics for both soldiers, and their families for the trip.

Grant described the trip in his *Memoirs* as a grueling endeavor. The first leg of the journey transpired via the steamship *Ohio*. The ship was terribly overcrowded due to general passenger bookings in addition to the bookings for seven hundred soldiers and their families from the 4th infantry. The ship sailed for eight days in this overcrowded condition during the hot, humid summer as far as Aspinwall.⁴⁵

The second leg consisted of the overland journey from Aspinwall to Panama City. The regiments arrived in mid-July, which was the peak of the rainy season. This must have made for a most uncomfortable trip. The passengers disembarked at Aspinwall, and connected to rail as far as the Chagres River. At this point, small boats were used to get to Gorgona. These boats had a capacity of approximately thirty or forty passengers each, and were powered by humans, much like barges on the Mississippi. The regiment size dictated they would need many transports to coordinate the crossing. Upon arrival in Gorgona, mules would be used to cross the balance of the Isthmus to Panama City. The mules did not show up as scheduled. The rainy season had brought cholera with it, and sickness began to affect the travelers. Grant, as quartermaster, was responsible to find another source for the mules. While doing so, disease began to impact the mobility of some of the group. Grant procured mules from the local populace, and used them to get to Panama City. Due to sickness, he decided to split the group. The healthy portion of the group continued to Panama City, and waited for the steamship to San Francisco. Grant remained with the ill, and escorted those that survived sickness to Panama City about a

⁴⁵ USG, *Memoirs*, 117.

week later. “About one-third of the people with me died, either at Cruces or on the way to Panama.”⁴⁶

The group combined again in Panama City, for the third and final leg of the journey to San Francisco. The last leg was fairly uneventful, given the sickness and death associated with the first two parts of the expedition. About one hundred of those who left New York would not live to see San Francisco.

In retrospect Grant was surely relieved to know that he had not subjected Julia and his young son to the dangers associated with the trip west. Grant at age thirty, had now made his way to California. Although Grant was not the leader of the group, he assumed responsibility for the movement of the regiment, and ensured a positive outcome for many. His sense of duty went beyond the logistical needs of the group during the journey, as evident by his special care of the sick; he assumed responsibility for the well-being of the group as well. In a selfless move, he remained with the sick while he himself was well and fit to travel.

The group arrived in San Francisco in early September. The regiment proceeded north to Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River, “then in Oregon Territory.”⁴⁷ Grant spent approximately four years in the west. He described the living conditions as very expensive, and he was unable to save up enough money to bring his family to the area. Grant pursued various business ventures while stationed in the west. He saw many around him succeed in getting wealthy, yet every venture he pursued, failed. In one such venture, he and some fellow officers decided they had enough experience and physical

⁴⁶ USG, *Memoirs*, 119.

⁴⁷ USG, *Memoirs*, 121.

ability between them to grow potatoes. They planned to grow enough for themselves and sell the rest for profit. All went according to plan until the Columbia River flooded their crop; their loss was total. Grant tried other business ventures as well. He attempted to start a sutler's store, tried to raise cattle and hogs, attempted to transport and sell ice, attempted to cut and sell timber, and tried to enter the chicken business. Each and every venture ended up as a failure. Can anyone really have that much bad luck? These multiple failures indicated that Grant lacked either the business acumen, or common sense business savvy necessary to be successful. Yet, Grant possessed the faculties necessary to be a competent and successful quartermaster for the army. One would have thought these skills to have some transferability. Later in his army career, it will be Grant's expertise in creating discipline among his troops and his keen knowledge of supply lines and logistical requirements for massive numbers of men, that will carry Grant to the unprecedented success he realized later in the war. Grant was unable, however, to apply these same skills towards his own personal benefit in his private life.

While stationed in the Northwest, it appeared that a combination of factors influenced Grant's inability to achieve financial success. His lack of business acumen combined with unfortunate environmental circumstances both, impeded his projects. If weather and circumstance were in his favor, then more than likely he had chosen an untrustworthy business partner. The final result was always the same, loss and more personal debt.⁴⁸

A constant student of human behavior, Grant while in the Pacific Northwest, took the opportunity to observe the culture that surrounded him on the Columbia, much like he

⁴⁸ Smith, *Grant*, 81-82.

did during the Mexican War. He wrote about commerce conducted between Indians and white men. He noted that animal pelts were the predominant medium of exchange, however, a transition to coin was in progress. He witnessed the susceptibility of the Indian to measles and small pox. It is odd that Grant was such a conscientious student of diverse cultures and individuals, yet he could not recognize nor conceive of untrustworthy partners who would cheat and steal from him. This would be a recurring theme through his life. Grant could be too trusting of those within his inner circle.⁴⁹

In 1853, Grant was promoted to Captain. He was transferred to Humbolt Bay, California. Grant had spent two long years at Fort Vancouver on the Columbia. After his promotion and transfer to Humbolt Bay, Grant must have grown even more despondent given his absence from his family. Grant had a wife and two young sons, one of which he had never seen. It is at this time evidence first appears that Grant succumbed to drinking. In his *Memoirs* Grant made no mention of drinking, however he did admit to a terrible loneliness for his family. In his *Memoirs* he explained, “My family, all this while, was at the East. It consisted now of a wife and two children. I saw no chance of supporting them on the Pacific coast out of my pay as an army officer. I concluded, therefore to resign,…”⁵⁰

Throughout Grant’s career rumors hounded him regarding his inability to handle alcohol. Depending on the critic and circumstances, claims were leveled against Grant that he was a drunk, and with those claims came the accompanying charges of ineptitude, misjudgment, and lack of discipline. Although, few first- hand written accounts exist as

⁴⁹ Smith, *Grant*, 81.

⁵⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 125.

evidence bearing witness to Grant's issue with liquor, it was the assignment in California where these rumors first surfaced. Jean Smith in his biography of Grant does a very thorough job of researching this point.⁵¹

Grant was not a very large man, so he did not have to drink much liquor for it to have a significant effect. Grant, however, while on duty "at the pay table (was) slightly under the influence of alcohol."⁵² Once his superior discovered this, he allowed Grant to choose between immediate resignation or a court martial. This story was recounted by Rufus Ingalls, a friend as well as West Point classmate of Grant, who served with him while at Humboldt Bay. Ingalls indicated the reason for Grant's weakness was his absence from Julia and his family. Ingalls also confirmed that Grant's superior officer gave Grant the option to resign, while Ingalls admitted that he personally thought the consequence was "harsh."⁵³ Years later, Grant himself, in an unusual admission of his weakness, "... told educator John Eaton "the vice of intemperance had not a little to do with my decision to resign."⁵⁴

Thereafter, Grant abruptly resigned from the army. Grant made the voyage back to New York. In New York, he awaited a response from Julia regarding his resignation. When he received Julia's letter, which presumably approved of his departure from the military, he began arrangements to return to St. Louis. So disastrous was his experience in the west that, upon his return he had virtually no money for his New York hotel bills nor for the return passage to St. Louis.⁵⁵ While in New York, Simon Bolivar Buckner, a

⁵¹ Smith, *Grant*, 87.

⁵² Smith, *Grant*, 87.

⁵³ Smith, *Grant*, 87.

⁵⁴ Smith, *Grant*, 88.

⁵⁵ Smith, *Grant*, 89.

commissary officer at the time, assisted Grant with clearing his bills. Buckner also encouraged Grant to write his father, Jesse, for money for the trip home. Grant did so, and Jesse immediately responded with assistance.⁵⁶ Years later, the same Simon Buckner was the Confederate officer in command at Fort Donelson who surrendered to Grant.

At thirty-two years of age, leaving the military under a cloud of disgrace, and back in St. Louis with his wife Julia and his two children, Grant had virtually no money nor future prospects. He began again. The reunited couple decided to farm the sixty acres in Missouri given to Julia as a wedding present by her father. The land was wooded and uncultivated. Grant began work constructing a house that Julia rightly called, “Hardscrabble”. Grant intended to plant potatoes but did not have the seed money. He once again wrote his father for a loan. This time there was no answer to Grant, and no money. Grant did what he could. However, to make ends meet, Grant cut firewood and sold it in the streets of St. Louis.⁵⁷ What few crops Grant was able to raise did not bring any appreciable income as the market was depressed and he could not sell them. In 1857 Julia’s father by then widowed, decided to move into the city. He rented his farm to Julia and Grant. Once again, Grant planted all the acreage in various crops, but the weather was in opposition to his success. Grant was forced yet again to cut and sell firewood for food money. At one point he got so desperate that he sold his gold watch so he could provide for his family at Christmas. Grant had no choice but to give up farming and seek a better way to earn income. Grant decided to move to the city to seek employment. Julia and his family remained at the Dent’s White Haven farm, while Grant pursued a series of jobs in St. Louis, each of which resulted in failure.

⁵⁶ Smith, *Grant*, 89-90.

⁵⁷ Smith, *Grant*, 90.

Grant entered real estate with Colonel Dent's nephew. In this endeavor, "He was too tenderhearted to be a rent collector and too candid to sell real estate."⁵⁸ After his try at real estate, Grant applied for county engineer, but he did not get the job. He then applied for a job as a customs clerk. Although he succeeded in getting the assignment, he held this job a single month until his boss died. Grant was then replaced. At this point almost six years had passed since his return from California, and Grant was still penniless. Every attempt to earn a living had failed. He had no recourse left but to appeal to his father for a job in his tannery. Certainly Grant despised the idea of going back to the tannery. He asked Jesse for the job, and Jesse seeing the state of his son agreed. His father's business was thriving. Not only did he own the tannery he also owned six retail stores, one of which was located in Galena Illinois and run by Grant's two younger brothers. In May 1860, Grant became a clerk at the Galena store working for his brothers.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Smith, *Grant*, 94.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Grant*, 95.

Civil War through Shiloh

Grant was in Galena for a mere six months before the presidential election of 1860 was held that November. The country was rife with political discussion. Galena Illinois was no exception. Succession was all but certain with the election of Abraham Lincoln. Having knowledge of Grant's military background, the townspeople of Galena looked to Grant for his opinion and even asked him to preside over town meetings pertaining to the discussion.

Grant appeared to enjoy active participation in the discussion. Indeed, remembering back to his long discussions with Colonel Dent even prior to knowing Julia, Grant had a predisposition to engage in such discussion. He claimed he "was a Whig by education and a great admirer of Mr. Clay."⁶⁰ He noted that abolitionists were in both parties, however, believed ...the Mexican War, specifically with the annexation of Texas, "the inevitable conflict" commenced."⁶¹ It was the admission of Texas as a state that highlighted the impasse that existed between those advocating state rights as they pertained to the admission of Texas as a slave state versus the federal dictates that Texas join the Union as a free state.

Grant was not a staunch abolitionist. He owned three slaves while in White Haven and upon his move to Galena gave them their freedom. Grant was, however, a staunch

⁶⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 126.

⁶¹ USG, *Memoirs*, 127.

Union man. In the prior election of 1856, he explained in his *Memoirs*, the country was hot with the emotion attached to slavery. He reasoned that if a Democrat were elected, “there could be no pretext for secession for four years. . . .the passions of the people would subside in that time. . . .I therefore voted for James Buchanan for President.”⁶²

By 1860, it was obvious the emotion had not subsided as Grant had predicted. In his *Memoirs* Grant provided his personal view of the impetus of the conflict. Practically speaking, he believed that the “confederation” which determined the legality of slavery was indeed an infringement on state’s rights. He wrote that at the onset of the Union, the purpose for the creation of a “confederation was for mutual protection against a foreign foe, and the prevention of strife and war among themselves”.⁶³ Grant held a viewpoint that the Union existed to provide protection as well as law and order, not a surprising stand given his West Point background. Recall that Grant had participated in the Mexican War with conviction even though he believed it unjust in principle.

Grant had a preponderance to consider the “big picture”. Beyond Grant’s fundamental belief that the Union existed to ensure overall law and order, he internalized his own geographic definition of the Union. Possibly it was his life experiences in Ohio, New York, Missouri, Oregon, California, and Illinois that served to support his view of the Union as the combination of all states; his definition of the “confederation”. He understood the significance of the Union beyond the preeminence of one particular state.

Able to reflect on his opinions twenty years after the close of the Civil War when writing his *Memoirs*, Grant stated that the original Union, or “confederation” as he called

⁶² USG, *Memoirs*, 128.

⁶³ USG, *Memoirs*, 130.

it, was a voluntary organization of states, not created to stipulate rules of law; rather it existed for protection of law and maintenance of order. This belief also offered some insight into why other career military commanders felt the need to choose between Union and state allegiances. Grant reasoned the purpose of the Union evolved over time and, “The problem changed on the ratification of the Constitution by all the colonies”.⁶⁴ He concluded that state’s rights were surrendered with the ratification of the constitution, and furthermore, inferred the notion absurd that those territories and states that were purchased by Union funds, such as Florida and Texas, certainly had no right to secede from their new owner. The states’ rights argument had no basis given the Union had spent the money to purchase and, therefore, had the right to rule within the provisions of the constitution. Grant concluded his argument when he wrote, “Secession was illogical as well as impractical: it was revolution”.⁶⁵ Even with this written position, Grant conceded that the populace had a “right to revolution,” however, those who revolt must be prepared to live with the consequences of that action.

April 1861, hardly a month after Lincoln’s inauguration, the Civil War commenced with the attack on Ft. Sumter. There was an immediate call for volunteers in both the North and South. Grant like many others believed that “the war would be over in 90 days”. Grant wrote, “I continued to entertain these views until after the battle of Shiloh.”⁶⁶

The town of Galena, Illinois had enough volunteers for a company. At the time, custom dictated that the company vote for their commander. Grant wrote, “I declined the

⁶⁴ USG, *Memoirs*, 130.

⁶⁵ USG, *Memoirs*, 130.

⁶⁶ USG, *Memoirs*, 132.

captaincy before the balloting, but announced that I would aid the company in every way I could and would be found in the service in some position if there should be a war.”⁶⁷ Grant became the informal leader of the Galena Company and “superintended their drill.”⁶⁸ Grant accompanied the volunteers to Springfield where they went as a group to receive their assignment to a regiment. Governor Richard Yates of Illinois, asked Grant to stay in Springfield and assist with the mustering of Illinois volunteers. Grant gladly complied with his request. While in Springfield, Grant ran into John Pope. A former classmate from West Point who knew Grant, Pope suggested that Grant seek out a command. Grant officially applied to Colonel Lorenzo Thomas, then Adjunct General of the Army, ...”I feel myself competent to command a regiment,...”⁶⁹ Grant received no response from this inquiry.

In late May, Grant traveled to Covington, Kentucky to visit his parents. In Cincinnati, Ohio located just across the river, were the headquarters of major-general George B. McClellan. Grant took the opportunity to appeal to him in person for an assignment on his staff. He was unsuccessful, “I called on two successive days at his office but failed to see him on either occasion, and returned to Springfield.”⁷⁰ Upon Grant’s return to Springfield, Governor Yates of Illinois appointed him colonel of the 21st regiment of Illinois. Grant accepted this assignment and reentered the army on June 15, 1861.⁷¹

⁶⁷ USG, *Memoirs*, 138.

⁶⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 138.

⁶⁹ USG, *Memoirs*, 143.

⁷⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 144.

⁷¹ Smith, *Grant*, 107.

The 21st Illinois volunteer regiment had originally “elected” a colonel that failed to elicit discipline and respect. As a result the men had become unmanageable. Upon Grant’s arrival and assumption of command, they began to respond to discipline. “I found it very hard work for a few days to bring all the men into anything like subordination; but the great majority favored discipline, and by the application of a little regular army punishment all were reduced to as good discipline as one could ask.”⁷²

Grant was ordered to take his regiment to Quincy, Illinois. Although rail was available for transportation, Grant elected to have his men march. He believed it would be “good preparation.” While in Springfield, Grant’s oldest son Fred was with him. Fred was eleven at the time, but once ordered to Quincy, Grant sent Fred home to keep him out of harm’s way. Julia was “very much in favor” of Fred remaining with Grant, but by the time her letter with her approval reached him, Fred had already departed home to Galena.⁷³

In a now familiar story, Grant provided an account of his first conflict while in command at Quincy. He described the situation and the high degree of apprehension he felt, not only due to the anticipation of battle, but also by the weight of responsibility associated with command. He explained, “I had been in all the engagements in Mexico that was possible for one person to be in; but not in command.”⁷⁴ His first battle order as commander of the 21th Illinois infantry, was to engage in combat with Confederates under Colonel Thomas Harris. Harris and his men had camped near a creek in a valley

⁷² USG, *Memoirs*, 145.

⁷³ USG, *Memoirs*, 147.

⁷⁴ USG, *Memoirs*, 148.

bordered by tall bluffs of up to 100 feet. Grant recounted his emotions as he approached the crest of the bluff to meet Harris and his men,

As we approached the brow of the hill....,my heart kept getting higher and higher until it felt to me as though it were in my throat. ...The place where Harris had been encamped a few days before was still....the troops were gone. My heart resumed its place. It occurred to me at once that Harris had been as much afraid of me as I had been of him. This was a view of the question I had never taken before; but it was one I never forgot.....⁷⁵

This lesson was an important one for the fledgling commander and leader. Grant's sense of responsibility revolved around his duty to the battle's outcome, and to his men. In this description of events, Grant admitted to his own personal fear, and surmised the enemy had experienced the same. This discovery laid the foundation for the psychological warfare at which Grant became very adept. His empathy for his own troops, as well as anticipation of his enemy, was unique to Grant, and many times this understanding determined his next tactical or strategic move on the battlefield.

After his non-engagement of Harris, Grant moved his regiment to "the town of Mexico", Missouri. Here Grant assumed the command of three regiments. While encamped, he took the opportunity to practice drills. He secured a copy of Hardee's tactics, which he admittedly had not studied very thoroughly while at West Point. Grant decided to read and review one lesson each day. The following day he utilized the lesson as a drill on the field with his troops. He soon decided that Hardee's tactics were nothing more than common sense, and pursued drills according to his own instincts.

This narrative by Grant is an instance where we gain insight into the way he deliberated. Grant had an objective to create discipline in his men through the use of field

⁷⁵ USG, *Memoirs*, 149.

drills. He drew on basic principles he was taught at West Point. He attempted to utilize the rigid tactics endorsed by West Point, but once pursued, he trusted his own common sense to accomplish his goal. Grant did not get caught up in the specifics of Hardee. Grant did not let the means become more important than the purpose. This approach served him well in the future on the field.

Grant's common sense approach became a source of conflict between Grant and several West Point commanders who focused methods more than outcome. Early in his career, a very strained relationship took shape between Grant and his direct superior Henry W. Halleck. Halleck was known as "Old Brains" due to his intellectual approach to battle and war.

Halleck had written one of the principal American texts on the art of war,... published in 1846,... (where he) emphasized fortifications, interior lines of operation, a strong supply base, and the occupation of territory (a war of position) rather than the destruction of enemy armies.⁷⁶

Halleck approached the war in the west "by the book," in a very prescriptive manner. Grant was more practical in his approach. The two held differing viewpoints about the essential objective of the war. Grant viewed the objective as the enemy army. Halleck viewed the objective in geographical terms. Their fundamental disagreement in this regard, not only shaped their relationship and interactions, it impacted their respective decisions relative to the execution of strategies within the Western theatre.

While Grant practiced drills in the town of Mexico Missouri, he read in a St. Louis newspaper that he had been nominated by Illinois Congressman Elihu Washburn,

⁷⁶ Smith, *Grant*, 102.

for the promotion to brigadier general.⁷⁷ Surprised, but grateful, Grant proceeded to choose his staff. One man in particular, John A. Rawlins, became his “assistant adjunct-general...on my staff.”⁷⁸ Rawlins remained with Grant thorough out his life, as a loyal friend and assistant.

By now, Grant was in command of approximately twenty thousand troops, but still had not experienced actual battle. Throughout the war, Grant made mention of the psyche of the troops he was either leading or facing on the field. In some instances, it was apparent the psyche he cited reflected his own attitude, as well as that of his troops. In Paduach, he noted that his men, and most likely himself, had grown impatient. They had been drilling for months without enemy contact. In the span of three short months, Grant’s perspective had evolved from fear to eagerness for enemy contact.

Serving under General Fremont, commander of operations in the West, “I asked on one or two occasions to be allowed to move against Columbus.”⁷⁹ After Grant’s assessment of Columbus as “strongly fortified,” he trained his eye on Belmont, a “small camp...immediately opposite Columbus.”⁸⁰ Grant utilized navy transports to move his troops within the vicinity of Belmont. The Confederates must have believed that Columbus was his objective. Once the Confederates discovered Grant’s true objective they sent troops to battle the Illinois men. The battle ensued four hours before the Confederates relinquished their camp. Grant’s men reached the camp and looted (much like the Confederates did at Shiloh). Grant was displeased and attempted to get control of his men. While his men were looting the camp, the Confederates got between the Union

⁷⁷ Smith, *Grant*, 113.

⁷⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 152.

⁷⁹ USG, *Memoirs*, 160.

⁸⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 161.

men and their transports. In addition, rebel troops had been dispatched from Columbus. Grant ordered the camp burned to get control of his men. He got his men focused on the threat at hand. In effect, Grant and his men were surrounded. Although, this caused some alarm with the men, it did not deter Grant. He calmly “announced that we had cut our way in and could cut our way out just as well,…”⁸¹ The calm demeanor exemplified by Grant, as well as his expression of confidence and resolve, became a trademark of Grant’s leadership style. These characteristics were instrumental in his ability to effectively lead men. His approach instilled confidence in those around him to perform unimaginable deeds.

Grant backed up his announcement at Belmont with action. The Union cut their way out of their predicament and fought past the troops positioned between themselves and their transports. Although officially the Battle of Belmont was considered a Union victory, it was very nearly a defeat. Grant was a bit over his head when his men acted without discipline, and he narrowly escaped a larger engagement with the southern troops of Columbus. This was still very early in the war and both sides, North and South, evolved and matured over time. The Northern troops felt they had attained a victory, although Belmont was not occupied. Confederate losses were greater than Union losses. The general population in the North viewed the battle of Belmont as “a wholly unnecessary battle, barren of results,…”⁸² Grant thought otherwise. Grant stated that two objectives had been accomplished with Belmont: “The enemy gave up all idea of detaching troops from Columbus.” and “The National troops acquired a confidence in

⁸¹ USG, Memoirs, 164.

⁸² USG, Memoirs, 167.

themselves at Belmont that did not desert them through the war.”⁸³ Shortly after Belmont, Major-General H.W. Halleck took over Fremont’s command.

For the next three months the Union troops under Grant were idle. In February 1862, the Confederates occupied Ft. Henry on the Tennessee River and Ft. Donelson on the Cumberland River. The forts were positioned approximately eleven miles apart and controlled both river and rail logistical movement. Grant appealed to Halleck in person to attack Fort Henry, but Halleck denied his request. This exchange signaled the onset of the rocky relationship that existed between Grant and Halleck.

Demoralized, but unwilling to give up, Grant made another appeal a month later, this time with the written support of Commodore Andrew H. Foote of the US Navy. On February 1st, Grant was given permission to move upon Ft. Henry. By February 2nd, Grant was in motion.⁸⁴

An important characteristic of Grant’s leadership style was reflected in his propensity to act with urgency. On more than one occasion in his career, Grant was held back from movement by his superiors. Grant understood time was a valuable resource. He clearly believed that time allowed the enemy to prepare for attack. He believed in the element of surprise, and in the power of positive momentum. Grant believed, in the right circumstances, positive psychological momentum, could offset physical advantage of the opponent. Grant was unafraid to face numerically superior forces, if he engaged on his terms, on the field of battle. One of his weapons was swift, unanticipated action. He

⁸³ USG, memoirs, 166.

⁸⁴ USG, *Memoirs*, 170.

drew upon important lessons he had learned from his Mexican War experience, where he witnessed this very technique used by both Taylor and Scott.

Grant moved first on Ft. Henry with C.F. Smith at his side. The fort was captured on Feb 7th, 1862 along with its 90 occupants. Grant next proposed to Halleck to move immediately upon Ft. Donelson. Halleck remained noncommittal on Grant's request. In classic Halleck fashion, he instructed Grant to fortify Ft. Henry, and directed other troops from within Halleck's western command to move toward Grant as reinforcements. Halleck's focus was defensive. He wanted to protect and defend the geographic position of Ft. Henry, and take time to reinforce in anticipation of battle at Donelson. The instructions issued by Halleck conflicted with both Grant's instincts, and his assessment of current circumstances. Grant wished to move offensively even if it meant leaving Ft. Henry unoccupied. In addition, he wanted to immediately follow up his success at Ft. Henry, while he believed he had the advantage. Grant wrote of the frustration he felt at the time, in his *Memoirs*, "I was very impatient to get to Fort Donelson because I knew the importance of the place to the enemy and supposed he would reinforce it rapidly. I felt that 15,000 men on the 8th would be more effective than 50,000 a month later."⁸⁵

In another cooperative plan between Grant and Navy officer Foote, Grant began a drive upon Ft. Donelson. Grant's troops and Foote's navy were to act in close concert on Feb 13th. Grant's troops had formed a line in front of the fort. Foote's boats were to move down the river on the opposite side of the fort. The plan was for the navy to disable the Confederate artillery, allowing the full force of the Union troops to bear directly onto the Confederate line. Foote moved into position, but took a heavy beating and was forced to

⁸⁵ USG, *Memoirs*, 175.

retreat. Grant and Foote aborted the plan until Foote's damage could be assessed. Foote requested that Grant come see the extent of damage to his fleet. They discussed how much time they thought was required for repair, and planned for the next assault.

Grant visited Foote, believing the Confederates would remain in place. While he conferred with Foote about the fleet damage, Grant discovered the enemy had taken the offensive and heavy fighting was in progress.⁸⁶ The Confederates were attempting to fight their way out of Ft. Donelson, and had successfully broken through Grant's right line. The Confederates fell back to the fort, with the impression that the day's fight had ended in their favor. They were convinced they had won the day, and intended to march out of the fort along the road they had opened. Meanwhile, Grant resumed battlefield presence, and found his men disorganized and demoralized, with no ammunition. Grant commanded, ... "fill your cartridge-boxes, quick, and get into line; the enemy is trying to escape and he must not be permitted to do so." ... "The men only wanted someone to give them a command"⁸⁷

Grant believed the forces engaged at Donelson were numerically comparable. He deduced that the enemy's breakthrough on his right could only have occurred if the enemy had concentrated at that point of the line. This meant the enemy must have thin resistance at the opposite end. Grant promptly ordered C.F. Smith, positioned on the Union left, to attack his immediate front. Smith, a commander very compatible with Grant, acted at once, broke through and flanked the enemy. The Confederate surrender appeared imminent.

⁸⁶ USG, *Memoirs*, 180.

⁸⁷ USG, *Memoirs*, 181.

In a series of bizarre actions, Confederate General Floyd in command of the fort “..turned over command to Pillow, who declined it. It then devolved upon Buckner, who accepted the responsibility of the position.”⁸⁸ Simon Bolivar Buckner, the same New York commissary officer who had loaned Grant money eight years earlier upon Grant’s return from California penniless and in disgrace, but who was now a Confederate. Given their past relationship, Buckner believed Grant would be generous in his terms for surrender. Buckner wrote Grant with an appeal for negotiation. Although Grant was grateful to Buckner for his past kindness, he was nonnegotiable on surrender terms. Grant responded in kind to Buckner, that he would accept nothing short of “unconditional and immediate surrender.” Buckner responded that he felt no choice but to “...accept the ungenerous and unchivalrous terms which you propose.”⁸⁹ The day was February 16, 1862. Later that day reinforcements arrived as instructed by Halleck. William Tecumseh Sherman was in charge of these reinforcements and had rank in the field above Grant. Upon arrival, Sherman did not assume command, and instead, deferred to Grant.

Grant’s strategy of immediate action worked. Although, he underestimated the Confederates, and was surprised when they took initiative while he was absent from the field. Grant’s response was immediate and sure. He resumed command and conveyed confidence in his ability to overcome the situation. It was at Ft. Donelson that Grant earned the moniker of “unconditional surrender” Grant (U.S. Grant), and earned the admiration and respect from the Northern populace. He achieved the first meaningful Northern victory since the commencement of the war, nearly a year earlier. The

⁸⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 183

⁸⁹ USG, *Memoirs*, 184.

admiration would be short lived, once the battle of Shiloh occurred. That battle was a sobering experience for Grant, as well as the nation.

With his victory at Ft. Donelson, Grant was promoted to the rank of Major-General. His instinctively desired to follow this victory with immediate movement further south. He sent a message of his intentions to Halleck and indicated that in the absence of Halleck's objection, he would proceed with his plan.⁹⁰ Grant must have anticipated Halleck's reluctance to approve based on his prior indecisiveness. Grant did not want to be frustrated or held back by Halleck's procrastination. The unreliable, and slow speed of communications of the time, provided both men an excuse. Grant could act on his plan directly, and Halleck could disclaim accountability if things went wrong. Grant moved in the absence of any instruction or permission from Halleck. This was a risky move on Grant's part. He probably felt it was one he could afford, given his increased stature and popularity that followed with the capture of Ft. Donelson.⁹¹

Grant began his movement deeper into Tennessee. As he proceeded to Cairo, Illinois he received a written rebuke from Halleck. Halleck accused Grant of disobeying an order Halleck issued asking for a report on numerical troop status at Ft. Henry. Halleck also accused Grant of moving to Nashville without written consent. Grant, who had previously reported his troop status, was stunned and hurt with the message. "I turned over the command as directed, and then replied to General Halleck courteously, but asked to be relieved from further duty under him."⁹² Later, Grant learned that Halleck had not been receiving Grant's telegraph messages, nor had Grant received Halleck's repeated

⁹⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 188.

⁹¹ USG, *Memoirs*, 188-89.

⁹² USG, *Memoirs*, 194.

written requests for his troop strength. Halleck responded to Grant's application to be relieved of command, "Instead of relieving you, I wish you, as soon as your new army is in the field, to assume immediate command, and lead it to new victories."⁹³

Grant resumed his march into western Tennessee with vigor. Grant knew the Confederates were in Corinth, TN. His own troops were split between Crump's Landing and Pittsburg Landing along the Tennessee River. Grant moved at once to consolidate his forces. His objective was the army at Corinth. Corinth also was geographically significant for the south as it "...was the great strategic position at the West between Tennessee and the Mississippi rivers and between Nashville and Vicksburg."⁹⁴ In Corinth two major rails met. It was a key transfer point for Confederate transportation of supplies and men.

During the Civil War, generals and leaders on both sides held diverse views regarding the military and political strategies necessary to win the war. Many leaders, such as McClellan, Grant, even Lincoln felt, one crucial battle would determine the prevailing victor, either North or South, which itself would settle the future of the Union and of slavery. Few felt the temperament that existed among the populace and armies on either side, would sustain a long term struggle. Some leaders, such as Halleck, felt that geographic objectives would determine the eventual outcome of the war. Early in the war, the constant focus on Richmond was the objective of the Army of the Potomac in the east. Some leaders, like Grant, felt the armies themselves were the primary objective, and early in the war Grant subscribed to the belief, that one major conflict could conclude the war. For Grant, the objective of Corinth represented both a key geographic objective

⁹³ USG, *Memoirs*, 194.

⁹⁴ USG, *Memoirs*, 195.

by virtue of its logistical importance, as well as a key military personnel objective, where a significant defeat of a large army was possible. Grant was intent on movement into Corinth. Grant had not, however, anticipated an offensive initiative by the enemy ahead of him. The Confederates moved out of Corinth onto the Union position at Pittsburg Landing. This location would soon come to be known across the nation as Shiloh, named for the isolated church located in the proximity of the pending savage battle.⁹⁵

In his *Memoirs*, Grant wrote of his original plan. Before moving on Corinth, he wished to consolidate his own forces, the Army of the Tennessee, with Don Carlos Buell's Army of the Ohio of twenty thousand. Grant positioned his men numbering forty-eight thousand at Pittsburg Landing, roughly twenty miles north of Corinth. He intended to position Buell's army at Hamburg, another four miles north of Pittsburg Landing. Then Grant planned a coordinated move against the enemy at Corinth.⁹⁶ "When all reinforcements should have arrived I expected to take the initiative by marching on Corinth, and had no expectation of needing fortifications, though this subject was taken into consideration."⁹⁷

At the onset, Grant had his headquarters at Savannah on the Tennessee River several miles north of Pittsburg Landing. Grant waited for Buell to arrive from Nashville. It was early April, and the spring had brought heavy rains. The river was high and fast. On April 5th, one of Buell's forward divisions arrived in Savannah. Grant directed them to Pittsburg Landing. Grant remained in Savannah waiting for Buell.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ USG, *Memoirs*, 198.

⁹⁶ USG, *Memoirs*, 195.

⁹⁷ USG, *Memoirs*, 196.

⁹⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 198.

For the Army of the Tennessee the first day of the Battle of Shiloh, April 6th, 1862 began as a quiet morning. The Confederates under Albert Sidney Johnston initiated an attack upon the Federals. The surprise attack caught the Northern men barely out of bed, still in camp, and preparing breakfast. The North fell back, and the Confederates surged forward. Excited with their early success, the southern men became disorganized, looted the Federal camps, and eagerly devoured the uneaten breakfast before them. Grant, still in Savannah, heard the cannon roar and realized an attack upon Pittsburg Landing was in progress. He immediately left for the battlefield. He sent word to Lew Wallace, currently at Crump's Landing to move up to Pittsburgh. Upon his arrival at Pittsburg Landing, Grant found his army heavily engaged and the scene was chaotic.⁹⁹

After the initial surprise and retreat of the morning, Sherman gained control of the Union right flank, and formed a defensive line against the oncoming Confederates. He held the line through fierce fighting the rest of the day. Although most of the Union line had fallen back at the onset of the battle, General Benjamin Prentiss and his small division of 2200 men dug in, at what became known as the "Hornet's Nest." They fiercely defended their ground until totally surrounded on the first day. The first day's battle on April 6th, raged from early morning until after 5pm that evening.¹⁰⁰

With the Tennessee River along its rear, Grant's army was in jeopardy of being surrounded and captured. His line had broken, and his men had fled. Grant estimated that some four or five thousand men ran to the banks of the Tennessee in retreat and chaos during the first day of battle. He reflected in his *Memoirs* upon the matter, "Three of the

⁹⁹ USG, *Memoirs*, 199.

¹⁰⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 201.

five divisions engaged on Sunday were entirely raw,...Their officers were equally ignorant of their duties. ...In two cases, as I now remember, colonels led their regiments from the field on first hearing the enemy's bullets."¹⁰¹

He called these officers "constitutional cowards...but not so the officers and men led out of danger by them."¹⁰²

At the end of day one of the battle at Shiloh, the Northern army was badly beaten back. Grant however, was undeterred. The rains came with the evening, as Grant considered the day's events. Grant in the rear, under the cover of the hospital tent, could not bear the sounds of wounded men being treated. He was so disturbed by the sounds of pain from the wounded, that he removed himself, preferring to stand in the pouring rain under a tree. Sherman found Grant, and expected to discuss a strategy for retreat. Sherman said, "Well, Grant, we've had the devil's own day, haven't we?" To which Grant responded, "Yes. Lick 'em tomorrow though."¹⁰³ Grant gave no thought to retreat; in fact, he was determined to take back the initiative. Grant translated his leadership and determination into tangible action. He personally visited each division leader that evening to build their spirit, and solidify their commitment. Grant knew field commander confidence inspired the best performance from his army, but first he ensured his leaders shared his own determination. In his *Memoirs* he wrote,

So confident was I before firing had ceased on the 6th that the next day would bring victory to our arms if we could only take the initiative, that I visited each division commander in person before any reinforcements had reached the field. I

¹⁰¹ USG, *Memoirs*, 201.

¹⁰² USG, *Memoirs*, 201.

¹⁰³ Smith, *Grant*, 201.

directed them to throw out heavy lines of skirmishers...until they found the enemy,...and to engage the enemy as soon as found.¹⁰⁴

Twenty thousand of Buell's forces arrived onto the Landing during the night of April 6th. The second day of Shiloh, April 7th witnessed a rainy dawn, and a Federal initiative. The Confederates, confident in their prior day's victory were convinced that Grant would retreat. They made no preparations for a follow up attack. Johnston had been mortally wounded the prior day. Command transferred to Pierre G.T. Beauregard who was taken by surprise by the Northern initiative of the second day at Shiloh. "Monday's fight was a repeat of Sunday, in reverse."¹⁰⁵ Grant had his men prepared to initiate the fight by 5am, and bitter fighting ensued all day. The Federals fought to recapture the camps they left behind the morning before. Grant was clearly satisfied with the events of the second day. He wrote, "In a very short time the battle became general all along the line. This day everything was favorable to the Union side. We had now become the attacking party."¹⁰⁶ By mid-afternoon not only had the Federals recaptured the ground lost the prior day, the Confederates had been pushed back to the point of broad retreat.

The two intense days of fighting at Shiloh brought heavy casualties on both sides. The numbers shocked the country. The Confederates had 40,000 on the field. "Beauregard reported a loss of 10,699, of whom 1,728 were killed, 8012 wounded and 957 missing." The Northern casualties were similar, totaling 13,077, of which "...1,754 killed, 8,408 wounded and 2,885 missing."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ USG, *Memoirs*, 206.

¹⁰⁵ Smith, *Grant*, 202.

¹⁰⁶ USG, *Memoirs*, 207.

¹⁰⁷ USG, *Memoirs*, 217.

Although Shiloh represented a Union victory, Grant endured severe criticism, especially from the press. The criticism included the accusation that casualties were unnecessarily high, due to Grant's lack of preparation. Critics felt Grant should have been entrenched at Pittsburg Landing. Critics cited Grant's absence from the field at the onset of day one, as evidence of poor leadership, which contributed to the initial retreat and chaos on that day. The widespread criticism shouldered by Grant regarding the battle at Shiloh, led to speculation that Grant had been drinking, which explained his initial absence from the field. So intense was the disapproval of Grant after Shiloh that, "General Halleck moved his headquarters to Pittsburg landing and assumed command of the troops in the field...I was ignored as much as if I had been at the most distant point of territory within my jurisdiction..."¹⁰⁸

Criticism of Grant after Shiloh was not limited to the press. Pressure from inside the military was also intense. After the battle, Halleck told Grant to hold firm and Halleck personally made a visit to Pittsburgh Landing. Unfamiliar with battlefield action, Halleck saw the aftermath of the battle of Shiloh and concluded that Grant's command was shabby and "undisciplined".¹⁰⁹ Grant and Halleck did not share the basic philosophical approach to war. Grant believed "war meant fighting, and the object of the ...fighting was to destroy Beauregard's army."¹¹⁰ Halleck by contrast believed that the object of war was geography. He wrote "General battles are not to be fought" except

¹⁰⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 219.

¹⁰⁹ Smith, *Grant*, 207.

¹¹⁰ Smith, *Grant*, 207.

under compelling circumstances.”¹¹¹ Two more divergent views couldn’t exist. It was no wonder these two commanders frustrated one another.

Once at Shiloh, Halleck took command. Halleck moved slowly toward Corinth, with anticipation that Beauregard’s evacuation would be completed upon his arrival. After all, it was Halleck’s objective to gain geography. It took the Federals now numbering 120,000 thirty days to move twenty miles. Beauregard had abandoned Corinth and headed south to Tupelo. The Union moved into the city of Corinth. Grant perceived these movements as a failed opportunity to pursue the enemy; Halleck viewed the occupation of Corinth as a victory. Grant was so discouraged with his apparent demotion and lack of authority as second in command, that he planned to resign and return home. Sherman persuaded him to stay.¹¹² Grant felt the sting of humiliation associated with the demotion by Halleck in the field; however, he was unaware of the appreciation of President Lincoln five hundred miles away in Washington DC. Critics badgered Lincoln, and called for Grant’s removal given his lack of preparedness at Shiloh and the enormous casualties. Lincoln dismissed the recommendations and responded, “I can’t spare this man; he fights.”¹¹³

While Beauregard concentrated his forces in Tupelo, Halleck embarked on a strategy of demonstration without full engagement. He felt he could intimidate Beauregard into further retreat, “which is all that I desire”.¹¹⁴ Halleck preferred a strategy maneuvers. Grant preferred the fight. Grant had an “instinctive recognition that victory lay in the relentless pounding of a defeated army into surrender. This technique had yet to

¹¹¹ Smith, *Grant*, 207.

¹¹² Smith, *Grant*, 212.

¹¹³ Smith, *Grant*, 205.

¹¹⁴ Smith, *Grant*, 213.

gain a place in Union strategy.”¹¹⁵ Halleck’s ambition was to “become an army of occupation.”¹¹⁶ After his march into Corinth, Halleck decided to break apart his armies in pursuit of his occupation plan. He directed Buell to the vicinity of Chattanooga, John Pope was to stay in Corinth, and Grant was assigned back to Memphis. Grant proceeded with the Army of the Tennessee to Memphis.¹¹⁷

The Confederates made some changes after Corinth, too. Jefferson Davis, who also believed in geographical victory, viewed Beauregard’s retreat as a complete failure. He installed Braxton Bragg in his place, “like Grant, Bragg was a fighter.”¹¹⁸ While Confederate command changes were underway, McClellan was defeated in the Seven Day’s battles in Virginia. Lincoln summoned Halleck to Washington to become general in chief. As a result Grant was summoned from Memphis back to Corinth. His responsibility expanded and, although Halleck remained his superior, he gained much more autonomy.

Years later in his *Memoirs*, Grant answered those who criticized him for his conduct at Shiloh. Grant denied the first day of Shiloh started with total surprise and ended in near defeat. He cited the fighting in Hornet’s Nest as his evidence. Grant wrote,

...the story that he (Prentiss) and his command were surprised and captured in their camps is without foundation whatever. If it had been true, as currently reported at the time and yet believed by thousands of people, that Prentiss and his division had been captured in their beds, there would not have been an all day struggle, with the loss of thousands killed and wounded on the Confederate side.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Smith, *Grant*, 213.

¹¹⁶ Smith, *Grant*, 213.

¹¹⁷ Smith, *Grant*, 213.

¹¹⁸ Smith, *Grant*, .215.

¹¹⁹ USG, *Memoirs*, 201.

Even later in life, Grant refused to admit the first day of Shiloh was a complete surprise, and maintained the defense by Prentiss at the Hornet's Nest allowed his army to regroup and form a general defensive line, which prevented a complete route on the first day of battle.

Twenty years after the fact, Grant still felt the need to defend his decisions at Shiloh. In answer to the criticism levied basis his lack of preparedness, evidenced by an absence of entrenchments, he wrote, that entrenchments signified defensive tactics. He maintained his strategy at Pittsburg Landing was offensive in nature and, therefore, no entrenchments were necessary.

The fact is, I regarded the campaign we were engaged in as an offensive one and had no idea that the enemy would leave strong intrenchments to take the initiative when he knew he would be attacked where he was if he remained. This view, however, did not prevent every precaution being taken and every effort made to keep advised of all movements of the enemy.¹²⁰

Although Grant felt the need to answer his critics, he was sure of one thing, he knew the Northern victory at Shiloh, although costly in human life, gave confidence to his men, and provided an important precedent for his commanders regarding how Grant operated. "The result was a Union victory that gave the men who achieved it great confidence in themselves ever after."¹²¹ Throughout the war Grant aligned himself closely with commanders who thought similarly to himself; commanders who were bold, quick to pursue, and determined in their actions.

Halleck departed for Washington in mid-July 1862. Grant was given no official assignment, and was placed in charge of "West Tennessee and Kentucky west of the

¹²⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 196-97.

¹²¹ USG, *Memoirs*, 211.

Cumberland River” with headquarters located in Corinth. Meanwhile the balance of the “magnificent army of 120,000 men was so scattered that I was put entirely on the defensive...”¹²² Grant was so concerned by the disbursement of the Armies of the West that he wrote, this was, “...The most anxious period of the war,...during the time the Army of the Tennessee was guarding the territory acquired by the fall of Corinth and Memphis and before I was sufficiently, reinforced to take the offensive.”¹²³

This attitude reflected a coming of age for the General who had experienced Shiloh and the aftermath of Corinth. Grant placed a premium on offensive strategy executed with urgency. These traits had become more developed in him now that he understood and accepted the responsibility for the outcome. His inability to take immediate action due to lack of consolidated forces within his control, he viewed as severe vulnerability.

¹²² USG, *Memoirs*, 233.

¹²³ USG, *Memoirs*, 234.

Vicksburg Campaign

With the western armies broken apart, Halleck commanded movement in the western theatre from his desk in Washington. Between the months of April 1862 and September 1862, Grant obeyed orders to reinforce Buell who raced Braxton Bragg to Chattanooga. During this period, Grant gained greater status in the West along with William S. Rosecrans for successful offensive campaigns against Confederate Generals Earl Van Dorn and Sterling Price at Iuka and Corinth. In late October 1862 Grant was “placed in charge of the Department of the Tennessee.”¹²⁴ It was close to this time that Grant discovered Confederate General Pemberton in Holly Springs, and began to formulate a campaign to engage him. Simultaneously, a strategy was in development by the Federals for the purpose of opening the Mississippi River. If the North gained control of the Mississippi River, southern troop movement and supply lines would be severely impaired. The initiative began with the capture of New Orleans. With Northern possession of Memphis at the northern end of the river, and New Orleans at the southern tip, only Vicksburg and Port Hudson remained in between as major Southern points impeding this ambition.

The geographic importance of Vicksburg, Mississippi may appear obvious; located roughly midway between New Orleans and Memphis, it was positioned high on the edge of the eastern bluffs of the Mississippi River. Grant’s Vicksburg campaign

¹²⁴ USG, *Memoirs*, 249.

lasted over seven months, and culminated in a forty-seven day siege of the city's occupants, civilian and military alike. Grant's strategy changed several times over the course of the campaign. Siege was not a part of his original design. Grant's initial target was to destroy Pemberton's army. Grant appreciated, however, the geographic importance of Vicksburg and its logistical significance. The Vicksburg Campaign began with Grant's pursuit of Pemberton at Holly Springs in December 1862. When Pemberton moved his troops to Vicksburg, to take advantage of the natural defenses the city afforded, Grant initiated a series of operations to capture both the army and the city.

Grant faced significant logistical challenges during the Vicksburg campaign. He had two bases of operation, one at Memphis, TN and one at Corinth, MS. Grant's job was to coordinate the movements of over fifty thousand men, and the supplies they needed, food, clothes, and ammunition, over two hundred miles, into hostile territory, to fight to the death with the southern enemy. In his *Memoirs*, Grant cited the prevailing military norm: "...large bodies of troops must operate from a base of supplies which they always covered and guarded in all forward movements."¹²⁵ Grant operated according to this norm, at least at the onset of the Vicksburg campaign.

Although Grant had his eye on Vicksburg as a strategic objective, his actions were first directed against Pemberton. Over the course of the campaign, Grant's design changed as circumstances changed. Not only was Grant maturing in his command, but the relationships with those he depended on, developed over this time. This campaign illustrated Grant's strategic ability, along with his flexibility to adapt his tactical movement based on developing circumstances, in order to achieve his strategic objective.

¹²⁵ USG, *Memoirs*, 251.

On September 30th, 1862, Lt. General John C. Pemberton had succeeded Earl Van Dorn and been given as his assignment, “defense of the States of Mississippi and Louisiana east of the Mississippi” as directed by then Confederate Secretary of War, George Randolph.¹²⁶ Pemberton commanded an army numbering roughly thirty thousand, on Grant’s front at Holly Springs located between Shiloh and Memphis.

In characteristic Grant fashion, he initiated movement on Pemberton. Separately, Grant dispatched Sherman to march south along the rail route, east of the river to get in Pemberton’s rear. Grant found the terrain difficult to negotiate and could not effectively move his troops across the Tallahatchie River on Pemberton’s front. Frustrated by the inability to effectively execute his plan, Grant ordered Sherman back to Memphis and reconstructed his tactical design, “During the delay at Oxford in repairing railroads I learned that an expedition down the Mississippi now was inevitable and, desiring to have a competent commander in charge, I ordered Sherman on the 8th of December back to Memphis to take charge...”¹²⁷

Grant’s order of instruction to Sherman on this date directed him to retrace his steps to Memphis, and accumulate all the available troops in that city. Sherman was to transport his troops via Porter’s ships, down the Mississippi to Vicksburg. Grant had confidence in Sherman’s judgment and wrote, “...proceed with the reduction of that place in such manner as circumstances, and your own judgment, may dictate.”¹²⁸ Grant must have thought the “reduction” of Vicksburg would be accomplished with little difficulty, and a first step in his movement to defeat Pemberton. Although terrain

¹²⁶ Leonard Fullenkamp, Stephen Bowman, & Jay Luvaas, ed. *Guide to the Vicksburg Campaign*, (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 22.

¹²⁷ USG, *Memoirs*, 254.

¹²⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 254.

prevented Grant from moving offensively on Pemberton, he needed Sherman to get in back of Pemberton via Vicksburg. Meanwhile, Grant held Pemberton in check in his front. Grant's plan was to place Sherman in position with troops in Vicksburg to secure that point. Once Vicksburg was occupied, Grant expected Sherman to get into Pemberton's rear at Holly Springs. This was Grant's original plan to achieve the twofold objective of geographic occupation and destruction of the enemy army. Grant wrote, "I hoped to hold Pemberton in my front while Sherman should get in his rear and into Vicksburg."¹²⁹ His notes clearly indicated Pemberton's army was Grant's primary objective. Vicksburg the city was secondary to achieving this.

Sherman and Porter began the movement of some 33,000 troops down the Mississippi to the mouth of the Yazoo River just north of Vicksburg. They found the area impossible to penetrate; covered by low lying bayous. The terrain prevented Sherman from execution of Grant's instructions. Sherman and Porter abandoned the Yazoo and returned to Memphis. Meanwhile, Grant found it difficult to keep Pemberton in check. Grant suffered an embarrassing loss of supplies to Pemberton at Holly Springs. Afterward, Pemberton retreated from Holly Springs, and relinquished the town to Grant. Pemberton moved his troops to Vicksburg to take advantage of the high ground that the land provided.

The failure of Sherman to negotiate through the bayous of the Yazoo River, convinced Grant that an approach to Vicksburg, would need to be accomplished from either west or south of the city. No high ground existed north of the city, between Memphis and Vicksburg on the east side of the river. This ruled out an approach of

¹²⁹ USG, *Memoirs*, 256.

troops from that direction. In addition, the rains were incessant, and the deltas were flooded. In his *Memoirs* Grant wrote, “There seemed no possibility of a land movement before the end of March or later, and it would not do to lie idle...”¹³⁰

At this stage of the campaign, Grant amended his plan. The lesson Grant learned from Sherman’s repulse in the low lying bayous, hindered but did not stop Grant. Instead of abandoning the campaign, Grant did just the opposite. He was determined to achieve his result by an approach to the city from either the south or west. His objective remained the same, his tactics and timing, needed to be altered. Grant wrote, “The strategical way according to the rule, therefore, would have been to go back to Memphis; establish that as a base of supplies; fortify it...and move along the line of railroad, (east of the River) repairing as we advanced, to the Yallabusha, or to Jackson, Mississippi.”¹³¹

While he devised the next phase of the campaign, Grant contemplated the political mood of the country. He explained, “The elections of 1862 had gone against the party which was for the prosecution of the war to save the Union...”¹³² Grant felt the North in general, and his army specifically, would perceive a move back Memphis as a retreat, even though it matched the dictates of military “strategical norm.” In addition, Grant thought it would be bad for morale to be inactive until spring. He was determined to move. Grant’s political wisdom and instinctive reflex to his men’s needs trumped the dictates of military norm.

Grant reconnoitered the forward post at Young’s Point, Louisiana, and personally took command. He wrote, “The real work of the campaign and siege of Vicksburg now

¹³⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 263.

¹³¹ USG, *Memoirs*, 262.

¹³² USG, *Memoirs*, 262.

began. The problem was to secure a footing upon dry ground on the east side of the river from which the troops could operate against Vicksburg.”¹³³

With Pemberton’s army of thirty thousand positioned in and around Vicksburg, the Confederates utilized the superior terrain to defend their position. Grant’s original dual objective melded into one, defeat Pemberton at Vicksburg.

In late January 1863, Grant embarked on his second movement against Vicksburg. He directed his forces out of Memphis forward to Young’s Point, located on the west side of the Mississippi River below Milliken’s Bend, and roughly seventeen miles north of Vicksburg. Influenced by the terrain, weather, and politics, Grant launched what he described as a “...series of experiments to consume time, and to divert the attention of the enemy, of my troops and of the public generally.”¹³⁴ Grant claimed that he spent the next three months on activities designed to keep his men occupied and inspired, not necessarily designed to succeed. These “experiments” were comprised of a series of movements of troops along the western bank of the Mississippi River. Grant had it in his mind to scout a landing zone on the opposite side of the river, on relatively dry ground, and within the general vicinity of Vicksburg. He needed a landing zone to safely move in all his troops. It needed to be outside the reach of the artillery defenses established by the Confederates, on the high bluffs surrounding the city.

The first of these “experiments” was later termed “Grant’s Canal.”¹³⁵ The men were utilized to “...cut a ditch ten or twelve feet wide and about as deep, straight across

¹³³ USG, *Memoirs*, 262.

¹³⁴ USG, *Memoirs*, 264.

¹³⁵ Fullenkamp, *Guide to the Vicksburg Campaign*, 79.

from Young's Point to the river below."¹³⁶ The "ditch" was conceived with the hope that steamers could move troops into position under cover and hidden from the Confederate artillery on the bluffs. The canal was not successful. The river was so high that the canal flooded and could not be cut deep enough. While Grant worked on the canal at Young's Point, he had General James B. McPherson, a trusted general, attempt to cut a levee at Lake Providence, Louisiana, further south, and located directly across from Vicksburg. This effort met with the same result as the canal. The third "experiment" was to "...open a way through Moon Lake and the Yazoo Pass..."¹³⁷ Once again this effort proved fruitless due to the excessive rains and high water in the region. Grant's fourth "experiment" included the Navy and the navigation of the bayous north of Vicksburg. Porter and Sherman probed the bayous again, and met effective Confederate resistance. The steamers could barely navigate the shallow waters "...and thus ended in failure the fourth attempt to get in the rear of Vicksburg."¹³⁸ These experiments continued through the winter of 1863, each considered a failure. In the spring, the rains stopped, and Grant's new plan surfaced.

By spring 1863 Grant had probed Vicksburg from the north and been unsuccessful. He had probed Vicksburg from the west and been unsuccessful. He became determined to move against Vicksburg from the south. He was challenged to move his army below Vicksburg, cross the Mississippi, and initiate movement north toward his objective, all the while protecting his supply and communication line back to Memphis. His plan would move troops initially via roads and supplies via steamers on the river. To

¹³⁶ USG, *Memoirs*, 264.

¹³⁷ USG, *Memoirs*, 266.

¹³⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 269.

accomplish his plan, Grant needed Admiral Porter commander of the Navy. To accomplish his part of the plan, Porter faced a fourteen mile line of Confederate batteries along the Vicksburg bluffs.¹³⁹

Porter became an enthusiastic participant of Grant's plan and supervised the preparation of the steamers. On April 16th, Porter commenced his mission. Grant described the scene as, "...magnificent, but terrible."¹⁴⁰ All the transports were barraged with artillery fire. The fire continued for over two hours and virtually every vessel was hit. "My mind was much relieved when I learned that no one on the transports had been killed..."¹⁴¹

Eighteen days prior to Porter's run of the batteries, on March 29th, Grant dispatched four divisions (1 corps) under the command of John A. McClernand, on a march south toward New Carthage, Louisiana south of Vicksburg.¹⁴² The forward troops began to arrive by April 6th. Crossing the river at New Carthage proved impossible, given the broken levee and flooded roads within several miles. Grant personally surveyed the situation on April 17th, and agreed with McClernand's conclusion that a crossing further south would be necessary. It took until April 24th, eight days after the initial battery run, to determine Hard Times, Louisiana as the next best launch point. Directly across the river stood Grand Gulf, Mississippi. By this time, Grant had determined it was impossible to protect his supply line sixty miles long stretching from Memphis to Hard Times, over winding roads. He determined to send more transports with supplies past the Vicksburg

¹³⁹ USG, *Memoirs*, 272.

¹⁴⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 274.

¹⁴¹ USG, *Memoirs*, 274.

¹⁴² USG, *Memoirs*, 275.

batteries. He did so on April 22nd, where “...about half the barges got through with their needed freight.”¹⁴³

Grant drove forward through obstacle after obstacle, yet remained undeterred and optimistic. His initial tactical plans were unachievable, and were amended four times. He lengthened his supply lines until he concluded they could not be adequately defended, adjusted again, and directed supplies be brought down the river. Grant rarely used an obstacle as an excuse for inactivity. Rather, the obstacles he faced created a more urgent Grant.

Grant demonstrated a unique sense of urgency and determination during Vicksburg that set him apart from his contemporaries. In the process of his tactical adjustments, it became apparent that Grant gradually broke with tactical “norms”. He planned for ten days rations to be given to his troops crossing the Mississippi River, and in his orders of April 20, 1863 wrote, “...Commanders are authorized and enjoined to collect all the beef cattle, corn and other necessary supplies on the line of march; but wanton destruction of property,...insulting citizens, going into and searching houses without proper orders..., are positively prohibited.”¹⁴⁴

This marked Grant’s first formal departure from the traditional military supply line mentality. He issued orders which permitted troops to confiscate supplies as needed from southern soil. It is doubtful that Halleck, a risk adverse general and Grant’s superior, would have endorsed Grant’s break from tactical norms, let alone conceived of the use of southern land as a supplemental source of supplies.

¹⁴³ USG, *Memoirs*, 278.

¹⁴⁴ USG, *Memoirs*, 277.

Grant issued these orders with certain stipulations; his men were to conduct themselves, and treat southerners they encountered, with dignity and honor, without insult, and take only as necessary. These instructions provided insight into how Grant viewed his enemy. In the tone of the order, one can recognize an attitude that underscores the compatibility between Grant and President Lincoln. Up to this point there had been little, if any, direct communication between Grant and Lincoln. Grant issued these orders based on his own deep seated belief in the dignity of the enemy. One can surmise that Grant, like Lincoln, was conscious that the principal objective of the war, preservation of the Union, inherently meant respect of their brother citizens, which beyond the southern geography, defined the very entity of which they were vehement defenders.

By April 27th, having issued orders to seek sustenance via the land, with supplies via barges successfully placed below Vicksburg, and troops streaming toward Hard Times, Louisiana, Grant was anxious to move across the Mississippi River to Grand Gulf, Mississippi. He made preparations with the navy. The navy was to neutralize the Confederate artillery positioned south of Vicksburg placed in defense of Grand Gulf landing. Once Grant was signaled that the artillery had been silenced, he planned to move his troops via barges across the river. After troops had crossed the river, Grant planned immediate offensive actions against the rebels in that location. His orders issued directly to General McClellan read, "...The first object is to get a foothold where our troops can maintain themselves until such time as preparations can be made and troops collected for forward movement."¹⁴⁵ The movement across the river commenced on April 29th at 8am

¹⁴⁵ USG, *Memoirs*, 280.

in the morning, and continued for five and a half hours.¹⁴⁶ Simultaneously on April 27th, Grant instructed Sherman to move on the north of Vicksburg along the Yazoo, “to create a diversion” to confuse the rebels as to Grant’s real objective. “My object was to compel Pemberton to keep as much force about Vicksburg as I could, until I could secure a good footing on high land east of the river.”¹⁴⁷

Although, the feint by Sherman did cause confusion among the Confederates, the rebel artillery successfully defended Grand Gulf with enough vigor to prevent the signal for the transports to move troops safely across the river. Repelled yet again, Grant scouted another launch point further south. Bruinsburg, Mississippi was chosen as the new, and now third, point of debarkation. Rebel resistance did not extend this far south, and as a result, Grant moved his troops across the river with little opposition. It was April 30th. Virtually each day saw a new plan, and a new result. Grant was highly flexible, and characteristically determined to remain on the move. A major milestone in the campaign was achieved once the Union troops had crossed the Mississippi River. Grant wrote, “I was now in the enemy’s country, with a vast river and the stronghold of Vicksburg between me and my base of supplies. But I was on high ground on the same side of the river with the enemy.”¹⁴⁸

Grant viewed this day as a victory. He was now positioned to commence his major offensive campaign against the enemy. The winter of 1862, and spring 1863, was depicted by Union maneuvers and preparatory effort. Now that Northern troops were steadily crossing the Mississippi, the real work began. The reader can’t help but share

¹⁴⁶ USG, *Memoirs*, 281.

¹⁴⁷ USG, *Memoirs*, 282.

¹⁴⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 284.

Grant's enthusiasm when he wrote about this moment in his *Memoirs*, "All the campaigns, labor, hardships and exposures..., were for the accomplishment of this one objective."¹⁴⁹

Once Grant had his troops across the river, he sized up the situation. "My total force was then about thirty-three thousand."¹⁵⁰ He assessed the enemy at approximately sixty-thousand men, strewn across Grand Gulf, Haines Bluff, Jackson and Vicksburg, Mississippi.¹⁵¹ Grant wished to establish his base at Grand Gulf, but first he would have to drive the Confederates out. To accomplish this, he traveled toward Port Gibson, where he expected to meet enemy resistance. The battle of Port Gibson ensued. Grant drove the Confederates back to Vicksburg, and captured this position.

In a classic illustration of the urgent technique characteristic of Grant, he initiated the Battle of Port Gibson (Thompson's Hill) on the evening of April 30th and engaged with intensity on May 1st. Grant had McClelland's corps and only one of McPherson's divisions across the river. He pressed with these troops, to take a "foothold" at Port Gibson. Without stopping to accumulate all of his troops, he moved immediately. Two-thirds of McPherson's corps and all of Sherman was still on the west side of the river, and had not crossed. Regardless, Grant pressed McClelland to engage. McClelland did, and the Union carried Port Gibson. Simultaneously, Grant continued to aggressively move his troops across the river. Grant took the next day to secure his hold at Port Gibson. His troops rested and repaired bridges.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ USG, *Memoirs*, 284.

¹⁵⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 284.

¹⁵¹ USG, *Memoirs*, 284.

¹⁵² USG, *Memoirs*, 286.

It was normal during these times, for commanders to be accompanied by family members at the base of field operations, depending on the current campaign activity. Grant, a committed family man, had his eldest son Fred, with him during most of the Vicksburg campaign. Fred was thirteen years of age at the time. Grant left in the middle of the night, to attend to the Port Gibson conflict. Fred joined him the next day. Grant thought Fred's presence on the field, provided him an important life experience. "My son accompanied me throughout the campaign and siege, and caused no anxiety either to me or his mother, ...His age, then not quite thirteen, enabled him to take in all he saw, and to retain a recollection of it that would not be possible in more mature years."¹⁵³ Instead of shielding his oldest son from the horrors of war, Grant viewed Fred's presence as an opportunity for him to witness to history.

Grant had an established supply line which extended from Milliken's Bend, Louisiana, over seventy miles to Bruinsburg, Mississippi. Ever the logistician, Grant knew this supply line could not be sustained. He decided to prioritize what would be transported: ammunition. "Provisions could be taken from the country, but ammunition...is soon exhausted..."¹⁵⁴

Now that Grant had a firm hold at Bruinsburg and Port Gibson, he turned his attention toward Grand Gulf. Satisfied that the enemy had not consolidated and was in retreat, he felt he could carry Grand Gulf. He did so on May 3rd, and established his base. Meanwhile, Union General Nathaniel P. Banks, was only then beginning his movements toward Port Hudson, Louisiana located approximately one hundred miles north of New

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.288.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.288.

Orleans, and one hundred fifty miles south of Vicksburg. Grant's plan had relied on Banks reinforcements, however, Banks was not moving at the speed Grant expected. Grant calculated it would take Banks eight days to arrive at Port Hudson and then with only 15,000 troops. Not good enough for Grant, he wrote,

This news from Banks forced upon me a different plan of campaign from the one intended. To wait for his cooperation would have detained me at least a month.... The enemy would have strengthened his position and been reinforced... I therefore determined to move independently of Banks, cut loose from my base, destroy the rebel force in rear of Vicksburg and invest or capture the city.¹⁵⁵

What a truly pivotal point of the Vicksburg campaign. Grant gave up Grand Gulf as a supply base. No longer did he view supply from the enemy's land as a mere supplement to his supply train, he broke loose from his lines and used the land as his main source of sustenance. He knew Halleck disapproved, even his trusted friend Sherman, disapproved. Sherman counseled Grant that, he should wait until more roads could be constructed to bring up supplies for the men. Grant unwavering, and with resolve in his manner explained, "What I do expect is to get up what rations... we can, and make the country furnish the balance.... We started from Bruinsburg with an average of about two days' rations,... A delay would give the enemy time to reinforce and fortify."¹⁵⁶ On May 2nd, Union troops continued across the river, now from Hard Times directly to Grand Gulf.

Clearly Grant had violated tactical "norms", and acted contrary to the reluctant nature of Halleck, a man who believed in a war of maneuvers. Grant acted independent, and against the advice of his trusted friend, Sherman, whom Grant admired for his fight, aggressiveness, and urgency. When Grant made this key decision at

¹⁵⁵ USG, *Memoirs*, 290.

¹⁵⁶ USG, *Memoirs*, 291.

Vicksburg, there were many unknowns. Pemberton was in Vicksburg, but where was Joseph E. Johnston? Would Johnston engage, and how many troops did he have? Would Grant be blamed for being uncooperative if Banks failed at Port Hudson? Would Grant risk his men's effectiveness and success if they lacked rations? In the face of these substantial risks, and alone in his convictions, Grant pressed forward.

As Grant's troops made their way to the eastern side of the river, he sent forces due north from Port Gibson, to probe, and give the appearance of a direct movement onto Vicksburg. Three days later, on May 6th, after Sherman arrived at Grand Gulf, Grant dispatched McClerdand and McPherson northeast toward Raymond, Mississippi, in the direction of Jackson, Mississippi, the capital of the state.¹⁵⁷ Within six days of the river crossing, three corps were in position to take on battle at Raymond. Grant explained his strategy this way:

...Vicksburg could have been approached and besieged by the south side. It is not probable, however, that Pemberton would have permitted such a close besiegement. The broken nature of the ground would have enabled him to hold a strong defensible line...It was my plan, therefore, to get to the railroad east of Vicksburg, and approach from that direction.¹⁵⁸

The combination of geographic and logistical factors of the situation, were certainly critical inputs to the development of Grant's strategy. Given the opposition to his plan, Grant was forced to keep his own counsel as his strategy evolved. His personal observation, as well direct feedback from probes, must have been how he came to have such a good understanding of the surrounding terrain. This same man chose his troop debarkation points on the river, at least separate three times before Bruinsburg was ultimately selected, based upon terrain and enemy defenses. Grant's personal assessments

¹⁵⁷ USG, *Memoirs*, 292.

¹⁵⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 293.

were an important, if not the most important aspect in the determination of his overall strategy. Meanwhile, the weight of the responsibility, if the dreadful consequence of failure was realized, must have been heavy upon him.

Grant remained focused on his objective and constantly adjusted tactical field plans as necessary. After Grant determined to move on Jackson, he worried that Pemberton might maneuver his troops out of Vicksburg in an effort to get behind the Union force. Joseph E. Johnston was on the move up from Alabama, amassing troops and gathering reinforcements. Time was key. McPherson waged battle at Raymond and won the day. Grant now focused on the railroad at Jackson, in order to interrupt the Confederate supply line to Vicksburg. He determined to move as quickly as possible. His orders to all his generals, McClernand, McPherson and Sherman went out on May 13th, the very day Joseph E. Johnston arrived in Jackson.¹⁵⁹

Grant divided his command the following way: McPherson moved from Raymond to Clinton, Sherman moved into Raymond, and McClernand was at Edward's station, ready to move to Clinton. All three commands were ready to descend onto Jackson from 3 separate points. Given their respective positions, they could also turn to deal with Pemberton in the rear, if needed. Grant purposely positioned his commands separate from one another to improve responsiveness and flexibility. He also deliberately positioned his men between two enemy forces. A risky condition, however, Grant had the advantage of initiative.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ USG, *Memoirs*, 295.

¹⁶⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 296.

May 14th, the very morning after Johnston's arrival in Jackson, McPherson and Sherman simultaneously moved on Jackson. McClelland moved a division to Clinton in support, and an additional division to Raymond. Sherman and McPherson coordinated their attack for 11am. Johnston with only six thousand troops, ordered retreat. By evening, Grant was in the capital, enjoying the victory he predicted to Halleck the evening before. His losses were 41 men to the enemy's 845.¹⁶¹ Grant instructed Sherman to destroy the rail lines.

The southern command was certainly intimidated by Grant's movements. Upon his retreat from Jackson, Johnston sent a dispatch to Pemberton instructing, "If practicable, come up in his (Grant's) rear at once."¹⁶² Johnston wrote this order while he, himself, was in retreat. Grant learned of the dispatch, and its instructions, which allowed him to turn his sights on Bolton, where Pemberton had a scattered force. Johnston retreated a mere six miles north of Jackson. Johnston then stalled until Pemberton could reinforce *him*. Johnston must have posed a tempting target for Grant. Always one to follow up his victory, we might have expected Grant to pursue Johnston to destroy him. Rather, Grant anticipated that Pemberton would attempt to follow his commander's instructions with his troops at Bolton. Grant positioned his troops accordingly. Grant stayed on task. Destruction of supply lines out of Jackson began in anticipation of the impending conflict with Pemberton.

On May 14th, Johnston wrote Pemberton again, "As soon as the reinforcements are up, they must be united to the rest of the army. I am anxious to see a force assembled

¹⁶¹ USG, *Memoirs*, 298.

¹⁶² USG, *Memoirs*, 298.

that may be able to inflict a heavy blow upon the enemy.”¹⁶³ Grant, with his troops turned west toward Bolton engaged a portion of Pemberton’s men at Champions Hill.

Pemberton took a defensive position. Grant described Champion’s Hill as “..a hard contested battle.”¹⁶⁴ Pemberton began a retreat back to Vicksburg, ultimately in opposition to his orders from Johnston. Pemberton’s retreat increased Grant’s confidence. As the distance between Pemberton and Johnston grew, Grant felt more secure in his own position. Neither Pemberton, nor Johnston departed off defensive maneuvers, which provided Grant the offensive advantage he desired.

As Pemberton withdrew to Vicksburg, it was necessary for his forces to cross the Big Black River. Grant was in full pursuit. While in pursuit of Pemberton and after the victories of Raymond, Jackson and Champions Hill, Grant received an order from Halleck dated May 11th, “It ordered me to return to Grand Gulf and to cooperate from there with Banks against Port Hudson, and then to return with our combined forces to besiege Vicksburg. I told the officer that the order came too late, and that Halleck would not give it now if he knew our position.”¹⁶⁵

Pemberton continued his retreat into Vicksburg. By May 20th, Grant had the city surrounded. Aware that Johnston was still in his rear, and concerned that Johnston could become reinforced and threaten his own rear, Grant preferred an immediate battle for the city. He ordered coordinated attacks on May 22nd, in an attempt to defeat Pemberton. The

¹⁶³ USG, *Memoirs*, 299.

¹⁶⁴ USG, *Memoirs*, 303.

¹⁶⁵ USG, *Memoirs*, 307.

defensive position Pemberton had at Vicksburg proved too much for Grant to overcome with frontal assaults. “I now determined upon a regular siege”.¹⁶⁶

Within the course of twenty days, Grant’s accomplishments formed an impressive resume:

- “five distinct battles had been fought and won by Union forces”
- “the capital of the state (Mississippi) had fallen”
- “an average of about one hundred eighty miles had been marched...; but five days rations had been issued...”
- “..over six thousand prisoners had been captured, and as many more of the enemy had been killed or wounded...”
- “...twenty-seven heavy cannon and sixty-one field pieces had fallen into our hands;...”
- “...four hundred miles of the river, from Vicksburg to Port Hudson, had become ours.”¹⁶⁷

Grant estimated the force that accomplished these remarkable achievements, at approximately forty-three thousand in total.

In true Grant fashion, he was far from satisfied with the onset of the siege, and was anxious to complete the job of the capture of Pemberton, and the city of Vicksburg. Although Grant is renowned for his successful conduct of this siege, he was personally disappointed that he had to resort to this technique to accomplish his goal. He knew it would take too long, and he still had Johnston as possible threat, in his rear. Regardless he recognized that Pemberton had the geographic defensive advantage in Vicksburg. He knew the terrain was not conducive for any offensive action from Pemberton; that would

¹⁶⁶ USG, *Memoirs*, 312.

¹⁶⁷ USG, *Memoirs*, 312-313.

come from Johnston, if at all. He estimated Pemberton's troops numbered sixty thousand men.¹⁶⁸

Halleck recognized that Grant was positioned between Pemberton and Johnston, and arranged to send reinforcements to him right away. As a result, Grant's force swelled to seventy-one thousand.¹⁶⁹ Grant entrenched in a line fifteen miles long, and as close as possible to the enemy's line around Vicksburg. He set up an additional line of defense in his rear, facing east in anticipation of any movement by Johnston.¹⁷⁰ On or about June 22nd, Johnston began a movement on Grant's rear. He quickly retracted his movement, and "abstained from making an assault on us because it would simply have inflicted loss on both sides without accomplishing any result."¹⁷¹ Grant meanwhile, through continuous assaults, was moving closer to Pemberton's line at Vicksburg. Grant's siege was designed to affect both mind and body. Besides blocking supply lines to the city, Grant began a constant cannon barrage of the hills surrounding the city, night and day. Cognizant that civilians were in the city, Grant intended to break the spirit, as well as the body of the enemy, through constant pressure, ever mindful of the movements of Johnston.

By July 1st, Johnston had sent a message to Pemberton that on "...the 7th of the month an attempt would be made to create a diversion to enable him to cut his way out. Pemberton was a prisoner before this message reached him."¹⁷² On this same day, Pemberton canvassed his generals independently regarding an "evacuation" from the city. Given the reduced condition of the troops, his generals rejected the proposal for

¹⁶⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 313.

¹⁶⁹ USG, *Memoirs*, 321.

¹⁷⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 314.

¹⁷¹ USG, *Memoirs*, 322.

¹⁷² USG, *Memoirs*, 327.

evacuation, and recommended they surrender. On July 3rd, two of Pemberton's generals approached the Union line under white flags to discuss terms of surrender. Their request anticipated a suspension of hostilities for a period of time, and an appointment of three commissioners to negotiate surrender.

The independent minded Grant's negative response was predictable. His reply was swift, clear and concise: "Your note of this date is just received, proposing an armistice for several hours, for the purpose of arranging terms of capitulation through commissioners, to be appointed, etc. The useless effusion of blood you propose stopping by this course can be ended at any time you may choose, by the unconditional surrender of the city and garrison. Men who have shown so much endurance and courage as those now in Vicksburg, will always challenge the respect of an adversary, and I can assure you will be treated with all the respect due to prisoners of war. I do not favor the proposition of appointing commissioners to arrange the terms of capitulation, because I have no terms other than those indicated above."¹⁷³

Grant's response provides several insights about the way he defined success, and the methods he used to achieve it. First, the "unconditional surrender" provision was first successfully utilized at Ft. Donelson. Although, not the exclusive product of his own thoughts, Grant considered unconditional surrender the only acceptable result of the campaign. Second, Grant recognized with dignity the opponent, and cited their courage and strength. We saw this belief exemplified in his initial orders to forage the land, and we will see it at the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia, at Appomattox. The recognition of dignity of his enemy, however, did not preclude his demand for

¹⁷³ USG, *Memoirs*, 328.

unconditional surrender. Third, he laid the responsibility regarding continued casualties, back to the opposing general. The opposition had the choice to discontinue action, and halt further casualties. Grant's own objective was simple, surrender by the opponent. Lastly, Grant refused to command via a war counsel and third party negotiators. Although he respected his generals, and we saw this often in his references to Sherman, McClelland, and Sheridan, Grant held counsel with himself. He sought his general's insights and opinions, however, accepted for himself, the responsibility of decision-making, as well as the accountability for the eventual outcome. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the conduct of the Vicksburg campaign, yet the Vicksburg surrender process, will be the single instance when Grant yields to a recommendation from his generals.

Upon sending his written response to Pemberton, Grant suggested that he and Pemberton personally meet to talk that afternoon of July 3rd.¹⁷⁴ Pemberton agreed, and "...soon asked what terms I proposed to give his army if it surrendered. My answer was the same as proposed in my reply to his letter."¹⁷⁵ Pemberton "snappishly" moved to abruptly end the conversation. Southern General John Bowen in the vicinity, and a witness to the breakdown between Grant and Pemberton, proposed to Grant that he (Bowen) might discuss with a northern general some possibilities. Grant agreed, knowing he would not be bound by the outcome. Bowen suggested the southern army "...march out with the honors of war, carrying their small arms and field artillery. This was promptly and unceremoniously rejected."¹⁷⁶ Grant left the meeting place, and agreed to

¹⁷⁴ USG, *Memoirs*, 328.

¹⁷⁵ USG, *Memoirs*, 329.

¹⁷⁶ USG, *Memoirs*, 329.

provide “final terms by ten o’clock that night”.¹⁷⁷ Grant took an uncharacteristic turn; he canvassed his own generals for their opinion.

I informed them of the contents of Pemberton’s letters, of my reply and the substance of the interview, and that I was ready to hear any suggestion; but would hold the power of deciding entirely in my own hands. This was the nearest approach to a “council of war” I ever held. Against the general, and almost unanimous judgment of the council I sent the following letter:

...As soon as rolls can be made out, and paroles be signed by officers and men, you will be allowed to march out of our lines, the officers taking with them their side-arms and clothing, and the field, staff and cavalry officers one horse each. The rank and file will be allowed all their clothing, but no other property. If these conditions are accepted, any amount of rations you may deem necessary can be taken from the stores you now have...¹⁷⁸

Given the condition of the southern army, starved and without supplies or provisions of any kind, this was not a terribly generous submission by Grant. Pemberton, upon receiving these terms, pressed to negotiate something more. He sent a note to Grant accepting his terms, with the exception that a term be added that allowed “officers retaining their side arms and personal property”.¹⁷⁹ Grant promptly replied in the negative. Certainly, he believed that he had already conceded more than he had originally intended. Pemberton finally submitted, and on July 4th, the Union troops marched into Vicksburg to take possession of the city, and the southern army located there.

Grant wrote in his *Memoirs*, a justification for his deviation from his notorious “unconditional surrender” stance, “Had I insisted upon an unconditional surrender there would have been over thirty thousand men to transport to Cairo,...”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ USG, *Memoirs*, 329.

¹⁷⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 330.

¹⁷⁹ USG, *Memoirs*, 331.

¹⁸⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 330.

Ever the opportunist, Grant alerted Sherman while discussions ensued with Pemberton. Grant “..directed him to be ready to take the offensive against Johnston, drive him out of the state and destroy his army...”¹⁸¹ Grant knew he was on the brink of the capture of Pemberton. Rather than extended rest and celebration, Grant had his men ready to chase and destroy another major army, if the opportunity presented. Johnston informed of Pemberton’s surrender, promptly vacated Jackson. Sherman followed behind and took possession of the city.

After Sherman’s occupation of Jackson, Grant decided to pause. He witnessed the desperate living conditions within Vicksburg. He learned that families in Jackson, and Raymond, were “destitute”. He had Sherman return to Vicksburg, and instructed him, “...Impress upon the men the importance of going through the State in an orderly manner, abstaining from taking anything not absolutely necessary...They should try to create as favorable an impression as possible upon the people.”¹⁸²

In addition, he gave orders to provide southern families food and supplies “...from Bruinsburg to Jackson and back to Vicksburg...”¹⁸³ It was not apparent that Grant received these instructions from anyone in Washington. In fact, in his *Memoirs*, Grant wrote that the first response from Halleck after his telegraph which announced his victory at Vicksburg amounted to a note of reprimand for his decision to parole, instead of capture prisoners.¹⁸⁴ Certainly this criticism smarted Grant at the conclusion of a great campaign that resulted in the capture of the “key” to the west.

¹⁸¹ USG, *Memoirs*, 333.

¹⁸² USG, *Memoirs*, 340.

¹⁸³ USG, *Memoirs*, 340.

¹⁸⁴ USG, *Memoirs*, 336.

At the conclusion of the Vicksburg campaign, Grant made an appeal to Halleck to begin a movement of his army toward Mobile Alabama. “Halleck disapproved of my proposition to go against Mobile, so that I was obliged to settle down and see myself put again on the defensive...”¹⁸⁵ Grant kept his troops in and around Vicksburg for a little over two months. Halleck then ordered Grant to send reinforcements to William S. Rosecrans in Chattanooga. After battles at Chickamauga, Rosecrans fell back to Chattanooga and became the object of siege by Bragg. Rosecrans supply lines had been effectively cut off. Grant sent reinforcements to Chattanooga and personally arrived on the field by October, 23rd. Meanwhile, the Confederates began to consolidate forces to support Bragg. Longstreet was dispatched in this capacity. Facing strengthening rebel forces, Grant continued his own reinforcement with Sherman, Joseph Hooker and George H. Thomas. By November, Grant and his forces had successfully opened up supply lines and emptied the enemy from the field. The Chattanooga campaign was the last major campaign of 1863, “...both armies went into winter quarters, and early in March 1864, Lincoln called on Grant to take overall command of all Union forces.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ USG, *Memoirs*, 341.

¹⁸⁶ *The West Point Atlas of War*, ed. Brigadier General, Vincent J. Esposito (New York: Tess Press, 1995), 104.

Lieutenant – General

In a matter of fact way, with little elaboration, Grant recalled in his *Memoirs* his promotion to Lieutenant-General. The bill to reestablish the position of lieutenant-general was passed in Congress, Grant was nominated the next day, and he was confirmed the day after. He was called to Washington to receive his promotion in person from Abraham Lincoln. Grant wrote,

...in the presence of his Cabinet, my eldest son, those of my staff...and a few other visitors. The President said: 'General Grant, the nation's appreciation of what you have done, and its reliance upon you for what remains to be done in the existing great struggle, are now presented, with this commission constituting you lieutenant-general in the Army of the United States. With this high honor, devolves upon you, also, a corresponding responsibility. As the country herein trusts you, so, under God, it will sustain you. I scarcely need to add, that, with what I here speak for the nation, goes my own hearty personal concurrence.'¹⁸⁷

The ever humble Grant replied, "...I feel the full weight of the responsibilities now devolving on me; and I know that if they are met, it will be due to those armies, and above all, to the favor of that Providence which leads both nations and men."¹⁸⁸ After three years in the army, with arguably the most successes attributed to any northern general, promoted to a position of importance not seen since the days of George Washington, his humility did not waver. He attributed any future success to his troops

¹⁸⁷ USG, *Memoirs*, 403.

¹⁸⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 403-404.

and mostly to “Providence”. What a contrast to the egotistical McClellan, who declared “I can do it all” when Lincoln made him general-in chief early in the war.¹⁸⁹

Grant was presented his promotion by Lincoln March 9th. The very next day, March 10th, he proceeded to the Army of Potomac’s headquarters and began “directions for the preparations to be made for the spring campaign.”¹⁹⁰ Grant began development of a comprehensive Union strategy, designed to synchronize movements in both the western and eastern theatres. His goal was to execute the strategy through the coordination of simultaneous offensive movements. “Grant’s overall plan was to destroy the two largest remaining Confederate armies: Lee’s in Virginia, and Johnston’s in Georgia.”¹⁹¹

After taking command, Grant made an important first decision. He decided to locate his headquarters in the field alongside General George G. Meade and Army of the Potomac. Grant had operated in the western theatre for almost three years. Meade assumed Grant would transfer his trusted commanders from the west into the eastern theatre. Meade was wrong. Instead, Grant transferred command of the west to Sherman. Confident in the capabilities of his western commanders, Grant wrote Sherman general instructions with his goal,

You I propose to move against Johnston’s army, to break it up and to get into the interior of the enemy’s country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their war resources. I do not propose to lay down for you a plan of campaign, but simply lay down the work it is desirable to have done and leave you free to execute it in your own way.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and his Generals*, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1952), 44.

¹⁹⁰ USG, *Memoirs*, 404.

¹⁹¹ *West Point Atlas*, 104.

¹⁹² USG, *Memoirs*, 413.

Assured Sherman would carry out his assignment; Grant was now free to turn his attention east. In the east he had a whole new group of commanders and men to understand and direct. Within a month of assuming command, Grant issued instructions dated April 9th, 1864 to Meade in a much more detailed and prescriptive manner. However, he was concise and direct conveying the overall mission, "...Lee's army will be your objective point. Wherever Lee goes, there you will go also..."¹⁹³ Grant initiated the spring campaign of 1864, with the movement of his massive Army of the Potomac, 120,000 strong, once again south into Virginia. Grant commenced a series of flanking movements against Lee's army. Lee and his men were positioned securely south of the Rapidan River. To accomplish the flanking movements Grant envisioned, he moved his troops south toward the Rappahannock River. Grant's task was to get into the back of Lee via the Wilderness, an area reminiscent of defeat for the army of the Potomac from the spring of 1863 while at Chancellorsville under Joseph Hooker.

Upon learning of the Army of the Potomac's move below the Rapidan, Lee initiated his response with his by now seasoned commanders, James Longstreet, Ambrose P. Hill, and Richard Ewell. Although, outnumbered two to one, Lee knew he had the advantage of experience and terrain. He knew how to anticipate the Union forces. Lee took the offensive within the heavily wooded Wilderness. After two days of fierce fighting, the casualties ran high. The battle lines that separated the two armies were littered with killed and wounded men from both sides. By the evening of May 6th, the woods smoldered from the remnants of battle. "The woods were set on fire by the bursting shells, ...the wounded were either suffocated or burned to death....the battle still

¹⁹³ USG, *Memoirs*, 416.

raged, our men firing through the flames until it became too hot to remain longer....During the night all of Lee's army withdrew..."¹⁹⁴ So concluded the first deadly clash between General Lee and General Grant.

With an expectation of a subsequent and immediate flanking movement on Lee's right, Grant issued orders on May 7th to Meade, which directed him to proceed via a night march to Spottsylvania. Much has been made over the years about the implication of this order. Defeat and retreat was so engrained in the psyche of the Army of Potomac, the troops fully expected an order to return north after the stalemate at Wilderness. Not only had Grant issued orders to move further south, he had the bridges burned behind over the Rapidan. Retreat was not physically possible. In his *Memoirs*, Grant wrote about the reaction of the troops to his orders, "The greatest enthusiasm was manifested ...No doubt it was inspired by the fact that the movement was south. It indicated to them that they had passed through the "beginning of the end" in the battle just fought."¹⁹⁵ In typical Grant fashion he interpreted the troop's cheers, not as a personal tribute, but as a signal they understood the war's end had commenced. In actuality, the men were indeed cheering for their new leader, "Ignoring orders to keep silent lest the Confederates hear them, Federal troops cheer General Grant for his decision to press on to Richmond rather than withdraw after the Battle of the Wilderness."¹⁹⁶

Grant spent the next full year in relentless pursuit of Lee. From the Wilderness Grant chased Lee to Spottsylvania. Ten days of battles ensued between the two armies. Continuous movement marked the operations. Lines were drawn and redrawn. Each time

¹⁹⁴ USG, *Memoirs*, 457-458.

¹⁹⁵ USG, *Memoirs*, 461.

¹⁹⁶ *Echoes of Glory, Civil War Battle Atlas*, ed. Henry Woodhead (Alexandria: Time-Life, 1996)

Lee detected Union movement, he responded with a corresponding movement to avert the flank attack. Eventually, Lee moved south toward Cold Harbor. Grant in swift pursuit, met him there. “After three days of inconclusive sparring, Grant decided to launch a massive head-on attack,...By the end of the day, the opposing lines had stabilized within 100 yards of each other. Bitter static fighting continued....”¹⁹⁷ At Cold Harbor, Grant and Lee could not agree on terms for the interruption of battle to allow for the removal of dead and wounded from the field. The usual protocol dictated that one side or the other use a white flag to access the field. In a standoff of wills, neither Lee nor Grant would agree on use of the white flag. As a result the battle continued unabated. Many wounded died as a result. Grant recalled years later, “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.”¹⁹⁸

“The cost of one month of campaigning had been staggering. Grant had lost 50,000 men, Lee about 30,000...”¹⁹⁹ The nation recoiled in horror at the numbers. Grant faced immediate criticism. “Democrats began denouncing Grant as a ‘butcher’,...”²⁰⁰ The morale of the nation plummeted. Lincoln called for more volunteers. Lincoln braced for public vilification and possible defeat in the 1864 presidential election.

Grant, although sensitive to the criticism and political implications, continued undeterred. From Cold Harbor, Grant’s army moved “south of the James River” and a siege commenced at Petersburg. Beginning in June of 1864, the siege lasted nine months. While Grant was in siege, Sherman was pressing in on Johnston in Atlanta. The nation

¹⁹⁷ *Echoes of Glory Battle Atlas*, 150.

¹⁹⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 503.

¹⁹⁹ *Echoes of Glory Battle Atlas*, 150.

²⁰⁰ McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 742.

grew restless with anticipation. The casualties, the Petersburg siege, Sherman's still fruitless pursuit, the presidential elections, all combined together to create a nation on edge.

Grant continued his steady strangulation of Lee. Grant blocked Confederate supplies destined for Lee whenever possible. While in Petersburg, in the height of the summer, Grant permitted the pursuit of a plan to dig a tunnel targeted deep behind enemy lines, with the object to lay and detonate a mine. When the mine exploded, what resulted were a crater and 4,400 more northern casualties.²⁰¹ "The effort was a stupendous failure."²⁰² A month later, and in the nick of time on September 1st, Sherman announced his capture of Atlanta. Finally the North had a tangible victory. Upon confirmation of the victory, Grant ordered "a salute to be fired from every battery bearing on the enemy."²⁰³ The Army of the Potomac invested in Petersburg for the remainder of the fall and winter of 1864.

By March 1865, Grant dispatched Philip Sheridan's cavalry to Five Forks in order to intercept Lee's right flank. Sheridan, a tenacious fighter, successfully broke Lee's entrenchments. The Union, energized by Sheridan's success, followed up with further pressure on the rebels. Eventually, Lee's flank crumbled and he retreated from Petersburg.²⁰⁴ Now early April, Lee was forced to abandon the defense of Richmond. Jefferson Davis evacuated the city. The Union occupied Richmond the very next day. Grant recognized that Lee was severely weakened; Grant's response was swift pursuit. Lee aimed to reach the rail line at Danville to access supplies and transportation south.

²⁰¹ *Echoes of Glory Battle Atlas*, 174.

²⁰² USG, *Memoirs*, 527.

²⁰³ William S. McFeely, *Grant: A Biography*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), 185.

²⁰⁴ *Echoes of Glory Battle Atlas*, 182.

He intended to connect his troops with the remnants of Johnston's forces further south. Sheridan however, reached the rail line at Danville before Lee.²⁰⁵ Lee's efforts to secure supplies and transport thwarted, he recognized the futility of further resistance and surrendered on April 9th, 1865.

²⁰⁵ McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 846.

Conclusion

In April 1865, the Union heaved with a sigh of relief at the surrender of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox. Four long and intense years of war were finally over. The northern nation celebrated in its victory, and the south sulked in its loss. Although physical combat drew to a close, hostilities remained. Grant now a famous man and war hero, withdrew to his family. The nation was allowed only a moment's reflection, before the terrible assassination of their president, Abraham Lincoln.

How do men and dramatic circumstances as these, collide in the manner they do? With the exception of natural disasters, James MacGregor Burns claimed in his book *Leadership*, it is usually men who create circumstances. Specifically, he claimed an individual's intent is the compelling energy behind the causality of circumstances. He said this can be the result of a "great man's" intent, or the result of the collective intent of a population. Whether individual or collective, Burns claimed intent was the singular factor behind event causation. Burns wrote, "It is persons' *intent*, along with skill in exploiting power bases, that signalizes the most *human* factor in all the economic, social, military, and other "deterministic" forces that are said to make history. It is purpose that puts man into history."²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row Publisher's, 1978), 442.

On a broad scale, the civil war was brought about by the differences in intent or purpose between the populations in the north and the south, as they related to state's rights and slavery. On an individual level, the intent of each person, whether aligned with northern or southern purpose, determined the degree of conviction and motivation for their participation in the war.

Does this notion of intent help us solve the question of leadership as it relates to Grant? Was Grant a great leader who made circumstances, or did circumstances make Grant a great leader? This paper has attempted to provide evidence for the answers: yes, and both.

Without question Grant could not have accomplished what he did during the civil war without having uncompromising conviction, regarding the intent and purpose of the northern cause. His conviction served as the anchor for his determination, a truly remarkable trait exhibited by Grant throughout the conflict. He explained his sense of purpose for joining the war within the context of his sense of duty, sense of country, and sense for law and order. These beliefs grounded Grant. They were the foundation for his fervent participation in the war, and the basis for the particular circumstances of his own creation during the war. Grant substantially designed the military campaigns of Ft. Donelson, Vicksburg, and Wilderness, so he can to some degree be considered the architect of his circumstance. In numerous instances, Grant was reacting to circumstances around him, such as at Shiloh and Chattanooga.

Defining circumstance beyond simple physical characteristics, Grant also created relational interactions across a broad canvass of participants. These relationships cut

across all levels: with superiors like Halleck, and peers such as Farragut, Buell and Banks, and subordinates such as Sherman, McPherson and McClelland, and to no small extent the southern enemy. Each relationship was constructed to the extent possible by Grant in alignment to achieve his intended purpose. However, circumstance brought about the need for the relationship. And, each participant brought their own intended purpose to the occasion, which is why causality can become a convoluted matter.

In addition, to the grounding of purpose, Grant the man, possessed special qualities, that when combined with military circumstances that either he or others created, led him to achieve outstanding results during the Civil War. His results were less noteworthy in his personal pursuits. The chronology of Grant's early life, up to the onset of the Civil War, his military career during the war, and concluding with his impact at the war's culmination at Appomattox Courthouse in April 1865, has offered much insight to both the personal qualities and leadership attributes that are unique to Grant. These qualities, combined with circumstance, contributed to his effective and impactful leadership.

Grant's personal attributes pointed to a man with a sensitive youth, who loved animals and feared failure. He was obedient, and did not wish to disappoint his father. Early in life, he lacked self-confidence and even frittered away his time at West Point to bear out the prophecy of mediocrity he envisioned for himself. He loved his country and served as a matter of duty in the Mexican War. He was a student of man and nature. He married, and unabashedly loved his spouse. Loneliness was his demon, and alcohol was his poison. He was a very humble man, with ordinary ambition. His integrity was beyond reproach, and his trusting nature made him vulnerable.

Grant's personal attributes did little to ensure economic success to him and his family. His life was difficult, and he struggled to afford basic provisions for his family. Grant lacked the business acumen necessary for success. For a man with a fear of failure, his early adulthood was marked by numerous business failures and tainted with a dubious departure from the military. As a man approaching his mid-life, circumstances did not improve for Grant. Continually on the brink of destitution, the brightest aspect of his life was his spouse and family.

At the onset of the Civil War, another man emerged. His personal attributes remained steady, however, poor business savvy reversed into expert military savvy. Self-doubt gave way to confidence. Fear of failure was overwhelmed by the excitement of innovation and risk taking. Within the military realm and during the Civil War, Grant was comfortable creating his own circumstances, and frustrated when held back.

Once convinced that Grant shared northern intent or sense of purpose, and that he possessed key personal attributes of a genuine, steadfast man, the more specific question now becomes what attributes did Grant possess that made him a great military leader on the Civil War stage? The answer resides in the merging of purpose, circumstance and personal attributes.

Grant's personal experiences in the Mexican War served as his crucible for learning. The lessons at West Point were brought alive for Grant, and embodied by the diverse military styles, strategies, and techniques demonstrated by Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott. The humble Grant looked up to Taylor and Scott. He studied them, and they were his role models. Grant noticed everything from their style of dress: Taylor

casual and Scott formal, to their tactics on the battlefield: Taylor hands on and Scott removed, to their strategies: both aggressive attackers in the face of superior numbers. Grant appreciated Scott's strategic strength. Scott had developed a grand plan. His plans were designed to carry victory beyond a battle; rather they were designed to win the war.

These lessons were not lost on Grant as a young adult, and more importantly he was perceptive enough to know how to apply what he learned during the Civil War. Grant himself, preferred modest dress. He preferred being in the field, and always preferred to be on the offense. He was not intimidated by a superior numbers, nor hostile territory, nor unprotected supply lines. His first-hand experience of success in Mexico built his confidence. Other commanders like McClellan and Halleck, relied on Napoleonic lessons learned at West Point to set their strategies and conduct during the Civil War. Grant relied more heavily on his personal field experience in the Mexican War, which resulted in a key distinction between him and his peers.

Grant's confidence in success learned in the Mexican War, translated into a greater propensity to take risks. He became more willing to discount traditional military norms during the Civil War. His willingness to break from supply lines, to operate deep within enemy territory, and to attack in the face of a numerical superior force, were all tactics which originated with Grant's actual experiences in Mexico.

In addition to his classroom education and experiential knowledge in the Mexican War, Grant possessed a generous dose of common sense. At Ft. Donelson, "...he noticed that Rebel prisoners being led to the rear had full haversacks. ...Grant said, 'These men

are trying to escape. They have rations for a long march, not a fight.’”²⁰⁷ Grant deduced the Confederates were retreating. In response, Grant attacked. Grant took the information in front of him and used common sense to make it work to his benefit.

Grant was unique in that he took into account the psychological aspects associated with both his own men’s frame of mind, as well as that of the enemy. Grant’s natural tendency to observe men’s nature, led him to appreciate and empathize with most all contingents with whom he interacted. This was instinctively considered when he issued orders during the Civil War. Grant’s army seldom got stuck. He liked to be on the move. Even when he couldn’t move, as at Vicksburg, he moved anyway. Although it was important to move physically, Grant also appreciated the psychological importance of keeping his troops fit for action. Whether on a march, building a canal, or performing drills, Grant understood the significance of keeping his men physically and mentally active. Idleness and boredom were Grant’s enemies.

Moving kept Grant’s troops active, and kept his opponents unbalanced. Probably no other general except Lee appreciated as Grant did the power of time in his military arsenal. Grant was notorious for acting to “follow up” victories. He knew his opponent to be vulnerable both physically and psychologically after a defeat. He used the momentum of victory to his advantage. When Grant arrived on the field, he preferred offense, he preferred to initiate and he preferred to do so quickly. He believed that time given the enemy would be used to reinforce. As he stated at Ft. Donelson, “...15,000 men (now) would be more effective than 50,000 a month later.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Wheeler, *Leadership Lessons*, 123.

²⁰⁸ USG, *Memoirs*, 175.

Grant was strategic in the way he approached a campaign and later, the war. He had the capacity to visualize the “big picture”. His Vicksburg campaign serves as the best proof of this. Vicksburg is defined narrowly by some as the forty-seven day siege of the city itself. In fact, the campaign lasted over the course of seven months and was comprised of a series of movements designed to culminate in the capture of Pemberton and the city of Vicksburg.

Few saw the Vicksburg vision as clearly Grant. Sherman voiced his concern early in the campaign, even prior to crossing the Mississippi River. He counseled Grant against continuance. It took until May 1863, after four months and five victories, while on the outskirts of Vicksburg for Sherman, Grant’s closest commander to declare, “Until this moment I never thought your expedition a success. I could never see the end clearly until now.”²⁰⁹ Even the President himself, wrote Grant to recognize his superior vision during the Vicksburg campaign. Lincoln wrote, “...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 acknowledgement that you were right, and I was wrong.”²¹⁰

As a leader, Grant displayed a dogged determination, not seen in any other Union commander. His determination was on full display during the Vicksburg campaign. He relentlessly pursued Pemberton, regardless of the obstacles set in his way. His determination transferred into the eastern theatre when after Wilderness, Grant wrote

²⁰⁹ Smith, *Grant*, 252.

²¹⁰ Smith, *Grant*, 257.

Lincoln, “Whatever happens, there will be no turning back.”²¹¹ By this point, Grant’s reputation and credibility instilled a belief that the end, was indeed inevitable.

Grant accepted responsibility for his own actions. Seldom did he blame others for an undesired outcome. He could have stalled at Vicksburg, and decided he needed more reinforcements to proceed. He could have blamed Banks for the lost opportunity, given his sluggish approach to Port Hudson and movement up the river. Indeed, this was the tactic used by several other generals in the Civil War and why an attitude of personal accountability was one of the material distinctions of Grant. He would adapt to circumstances and create his own. This is just what happened at Vicksburg.

Grant was independent minded and did not let peer pressure impede him. With his most trusted lieutenant against him, Grant pushed on with conviction. Vicksburg is the point when Grant had matured to reach his full potential. That potential superseded the sensitivity and insecurity of his youth.

Throughout his life Grant maintained his humility. He believed himself to be a common man, and identified with and valued the common soldier. His *Memoirs* were written in 1865 while he was suffering with throat cancer, for the financial benefit of his family that would survive him. The dedication of his book reads, “These volumes are dedicated to the American soldier and sailor.” Ever respectful of his men, Grant attributed his success to those around him.

Ulysses S. Grant who at thirty-nine, had an uninspiring background as a tannery clerk, with a history of failed business ventures, penniless, weak to alcohol, and generally

²¹¹ Wheeler, *Leadership Lessons*, 42.

unaccomplished. His single bright spot was his devotion to his adoring family. At forty-three he was a national hero, Lieutenant General of all northern armies, commander of 600,000 men, and victor of the most dramatic war in the Union's short history. This undistinguished individual became one of the greatest military leaders of the United States.

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