

federacy be followed by military assistance and intervention—against the blockade, for example? As they pondered these questions and absorbed the results of the congressional elections, while Confederate armies stood poised for attack outside Baltimore and Louisville, Lincoln and Seward concluded that they had no choice.

On a gloomy New Year's Day 1863, a melancholy Lincoln called Republican congressional leaders and state governors to the White House. "This is not the duty I had hoped to discharge today," he told them. "Last July I decided to issue a proclamation freeing the slaves in rebel states, to take effect today," he continued sadly. "There is no chance of that now. Would *my word* free the slaves, when I cannot even enforce the Constitution in the rebel States?" Instead, "We are faced with a situation in which the whole world seems to be against us. Last summer, after McClellan was driven back from Richmond, I said that in spite of that setback, 'I expect to maintain this contest until successful, or till I die, or am conquered, or my term expires, or Congress or the country forsakes me.' Gentlemen, the people expressed their opinion in the last election. The country has forsaken us, and the next Congress will be against us. Whether or not we admit we are conquered, we must admit that we have failed to conquer the rebellion. Today I will issue a proclamation accepting the insurgents' offer of an armistice. Secretary Seward will accept the good offices of foreign powers for mediation." The president's voice choked as he concluded: "Gentlemen, the United States no longer exists as one nation, indivisible."



STEPHEN W. SEARS

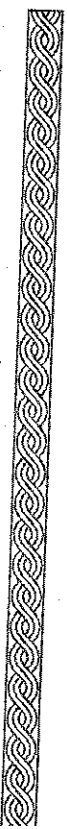
A CONFEDERATE CANNON AND OTHER SCENARIOS

*How the Civil War Might Have
Turned Out Differently*

The what ifs of the American Civil War may be more difficult to gauge than those of our Revolution—already the times and the technology of war were more complex—but they are plentiful enough. A nation permanently divided was a real prospect during the first two years of the war, and one that certainly fueled Southern ardor for battle. If, as James M. McPherson speculates in the previous chapter, the Lost Order hadn't been lost, that might have been the inevitable outcome of Robert E. Lee's first invasion of the North. Or, as Stephen W. Sears describes in this chapter, if Robert E. Lee had pulled off a double envelopment of a large part of George B. McClellan's Union army on day six of the Seven Days' Battles in June 1862, it might well have led to the end of hostilities and negotiations for "an arrangement upon the basis of separation." But the rebellion (as the North thought of it) might just as easily have ended not long after it began. Sometimes, Sears notes, if there is any inherent logic to military operations, outcomes should have gone another way. Sometimes, too, the difference can be as slight as the path of a bullet and whether its target gets out of the way in time. As we have seen before, milliseconds can influence cer-

turies. But in other cases, an event that seems likely to bring a swing in historical direction—Sears offers by way of example the victory of McClellan over Lincoln in the presidential election of 1864—may produce the curious phenomenon of the “second order counterfactual.” In other words, enormous change can in the end, merely lead us back to where we might have been all along.

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The Civil War—like every war—was marked by a number of pivotal moments, moments in which the balance tipped suspensefully to produce a victor or a vanquished and subsequently a crucial change in the war's direction. At these moments it was the decisions or actions of soldiers and statesmen (and in one instance here, voters) that resulted in the consequences that history records for us. But outcomes and consequences could just as easily have gone another way—sometimes, if there is any inherent logic to military operations, *should* have gone another way.

Each of the five scenarios that follow held the promise (at that moment, at least) of affecting the war profoundly or, in the case of the last one, the aftermath of the war. None of them requires a great leap of imagination to believe its premise. Without improbably distorting actual events—in the first scenario, for example, Jefferson Davis was a witness to the 1861 fighting at Bull Run—and without putting unspoken words into the mouths of the actors, then, imagine that at this handful of critical Civil War moments it turned out this way instead of that way . . .

Battle at Bull Run, or the Rebellion of '61

“You are green, it is true,” Mr. Lincoln said to Irvin McDowell, commander of the newly recruited Federal army at Washington, “but they are green, also; you are all green alike.” It was a remarkably prescient observation. On July 21, 1861, when McDowell's raw troops joined battle with the equally raw troops of the newly proclaimed Confederate States of America, along the banks of Bull Run west of the capital, the outcome would be decided by which of these green armies broke and ran first.

The decisive moment occurred in late afternoon. After six hours of

confused maneuvering and bloody fighting, the men of both armies were nearing the limit of their endurance. The Confederates, pressed slowly but steadily back by General McDowell's flanking movement, formed a last-ditch defense on Henry House Hill. At the core of their line was a brigade of Virginians being held rigidly to their task by a flinty brigadier named Thomas J. Jackson. Charge and countercharge swept across the hilltop, but the Virginians stood fast. Then, suddenly, a Federal volley found General Jackson and he was down, struck by three bullets, his left arm mangled. He was carried to the rear and out of the battle, his moment of glory fated to be forgotten.

Without Jackson's stalwart leadership as a rallying point, his Virginians began to waver. Seeing this, the regiments on both their flanks gave way. Once again the Federals came on, and this time they would not be stopped. The center of the Confederate line broke open and fell away. Abruptly everyone was running for the rear and safety. Behind the shattered front, fearful teamsters jammed their supply wagons into the crossroads village of New Market, where shells from the U.S. batteries found them and turned the jam to pandemonium. Fear was transmuted into panic. "The larger part of the men are a confused mob, entirely demoralized," the field commander of the beaten army had to admit. "It was the opinion of all the commanders that no stand could be made . . ."

That in the end proved crucial—there was nowhere close by for the routed Confederates to take a stand, no natural barrier behind which the panicked men might be calmed and rallied. Had the battle gone the other way, had it been the raw Federals who broke and ran, they would have had the nearby Potomac and Washington's rudimentary defenses as a rallying point. As it was, for the Confederates fleeing the battlefield, the closest major defensive feature where they might attempt a stand was the Rappahannock, some twenty-five miles to the south. Hardly more than a corporal's guard would reach the river.

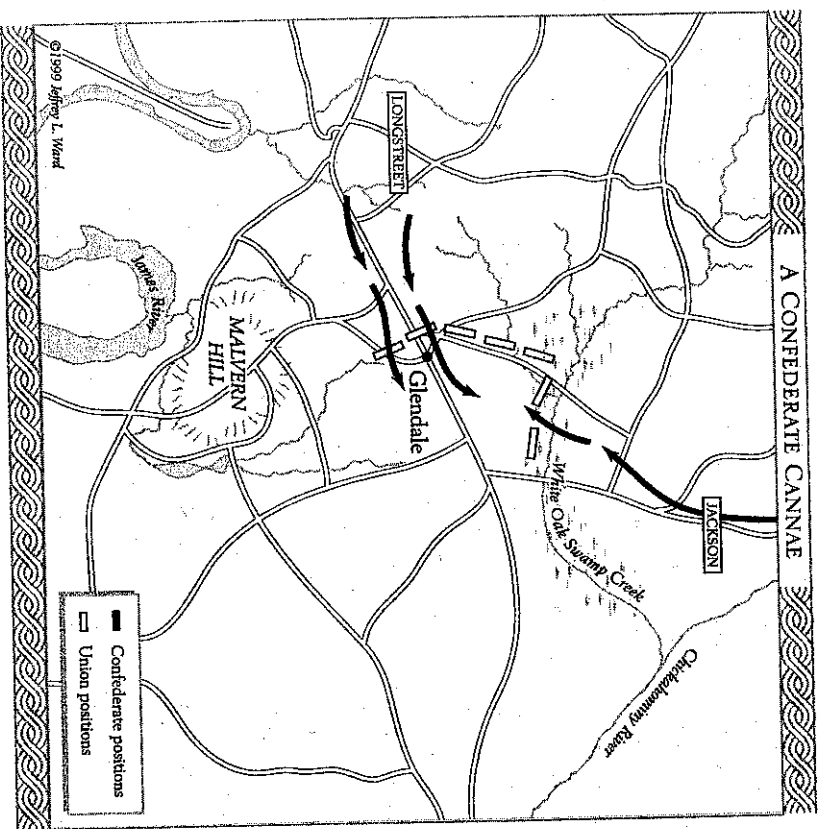
The Federal brigades that had done the fighting were as disorganized in victory as their foes in defeat. However, General McDowell had two divisions available in reserve to throw into the pursuit. As the flight con-

tinued through the night, exhausted, discouraged rebels by the thousands threw down their arms and surrendered to the pursuers. The most noteworthy prisoner was the president of the Confederate States. Jefferson Davis had rushed up from Richmond to witness the battle, and he was captured as he rode out into the mass of fleeing rebels to try and halt the rout.

By the second day after the battle, the ranking rebel generals, Joseph E. Johnston and P. G. T. Beauregard, had dragged what remained of their forces across the Rappahannock. On the twenty-first they had given battle at Bull Run with something over 30,000 men; hardly a quarter of that number now remained under effective command. Even though they were joined by a reserve force from Fredericksburg, just then the armed might of the Confederate States totaled barely 10,000 troops. McDowell and his legions, forming up opposite along the riverbank, were being reinforced hourly by fresh regiments from the North. No fresh regiments were forthcoming from the South.

It was only too clear to Johnston and Beauregard that within a matter of days, perhaps within a matter of hours, the enemy in overwhelming force would plunge across the Rappahannock to stamp out what remained of the rebellion's armed forces. With President Davis languishing in Old Capitol prison in Washington, the two generals took decision-making into their own hands. Neither was a revolutionary; both were traditionalists in matters of military form: When every choice promises only defeat, there is but one honorable choice. They sent to McDowell under a flag of truce to request an armistice. With a nod of approval from President Lincoln, McDowell granted it. So ended the military phase of what would come to be known as the Rebellion of '61.

Diplomacy now replaced arms. Stepping again into the limelight were Kentucky Senator John J. Crittenden and the Senate's Committee of Thirteen, who had labored fruitlessly for a compromise settlement between the Secessionists and the Unionists at the turn of the year. This time the Southerners had to play their hand without trumps. From the White House, Mr. Lincoln dictated the terms of settlement. The eleven



states of the Confederacy must rescind their articles of secession and rejoin the Union. Their armed forces must disband, and all federal property be restored. While of course slavery would not be interfered with in those states where it had been constitutionally established, its extension beyond their borders would henceforth be strictly prohibited. The Congress would enact the necessary legislation, and the Committee of Thirteen was charged with crafting a long-range plan for compensated emancipation.

With the remnant of the C.S.A. army firmly in McDowell's grip, and with the memory of the debacle at Bull Run fresh in every mind, Rich-

A CONFEDERATE CANNAE AND OTHER SCENARIOS

mond had no choice but to accept the terms of settlement and reconstruction. There was agitation in the North for the leaders of the Rebellion of '61 to be hanged for treason, starting with Mr. Davis. President Lincoln would have none of it. After all, with further warfare now averted, he faced a presidential term certain to focus on the most delicate political negotiations aimed at finding a peaceful way out of the morass that was American slavery. An embittered former Confederacy would make that task all but impossible. "Let 'em up easy," was Lincoln's homely injunction.

Of course it did not happen that way. Only nicked by a bullet, General Jackson famously held steadfast to the position on Henry House Hill—"There is Jackson standing like a stone wall!"—and in the end it was McDowell's green troops who broke and ran. The victorious Confederate army—in due course to be christened the Army of Northern Virginia—looked forward to winning independence for the South in its next campaign.

That next campaign was fought on the Virginia Peninsula, where McDowell's replacement, George B. McClellan, advanced on Richmond. The Peninsula Campaign reached its climax in the Seven Days' Battles, which opened in the last week of June 1862. Robert E. Lee—who had replaced Joseph E. Johnston, wounded at Seven Pines—attacked McClellan relentlessly, driving him back from the gates of Richmond. On June 30, at the crossroads hamlet of Glendale, Lee delivered what he intended to be the decisive blow of the campaign.

General Lee Achieves His Cannae

As Lee's biographer, Douglas Southall Freeman, would put it, General Lee "had only that one day for a Cannae. . . ." It was day six of the Seven Days', and McClellan's Army of the Potomac was in rapid flight toward the James River. The routes to the river funneled through Glendale. Hot on McClellan's heels came Stonewall Jackson with four divisions. Thrusting in toward the flank of the retreating Yankees were three divisions un-

der James Longstreet. Although McClellan's army was the larger of the two overall, at the Glendale chokepoint it was Lee who could bring superior force to bear against the extended enemy columns. A flank attack there by Longstreet held promise of cutting the Federal army in half; indeed, Hannibal's classic conquest at Cannae in 216 B.C.—history's watchword for a crushing military defeat—might be duplicated. Porter Alexander, that most astute of Confederate historians, said there were but a handful of moments in the Civil War when "we were within reach of military successes so great that we might have hoped to end the war with our independence. . . . This chance of June 30th '62 impresses me as the best of all."

As it happened, Lee missed this best chance by the slimmest of margins, and the Yankees escaped to fight another day. After watching Longstreet's flank assault come up just short, Lee wrote bitterly, "Could the other commands have co-operated in the action the result would have proved most disastrous to the enemy." The primary offender was Stonewall Jackson. Sunk in a state of profound lethargy that day, Jackson failed to move against the Federal rear guard, which was thus able to send strong reinforcements in the nick of time to seal off Longstreet's breakthrough.

The day might easily have taken a different course. In fact, had Jackson been his usual self on June 30, 1862, it almost certainly would have taken a different course.



After three months' intensive campaigning in the Shenandoah Valley, after his dash to the Peninsula and straight into the Seven Days' fighting there, Stonewall Jackson was utterly exhausted. On day five—Sunday, June 29—with his command held inactive under Lee's orders, Jackson recognized the perilous state of his own physical and mental health. Abandoning his usual strict Sabbath evolutions, he gave orders that he was not to be disturbed and slept half the clock away. Consequently,

when he faced the pivotal events at Glendale on June 30, Stonewall Jackson was refreshed and alert and eager for the test.

That morning Jackson caught up with the Yankees' rear guard, under William Franklin, at a broken bridge over the White Oak Swamp watercourse north of Glendale. Jackson's reconnoiter uncovered the considerable strength of the enemy position and set his thoughts (as usual) to a flanking movement. Enterprising subordinates found two downstream fords where infantry might cross. Jackson pounced on the opportunity. Under cover of a tremendous artillery barrage at the bridge site, he directed three brigades to cross and take Franklin's Yankees in flank and rear.

As Franklin's rear guard joined battle against this threat, Lee directed Longstreet to launch his offensive against the Federals defending the Glendale crossroads to the south. Soon the hard-pressed Glendale defenders were calling on Franklin for help. He could send them none; indeed, he even refused to return two brigades sent him "on loan" from Glendale earlier.

Longstreet smashed cleanly through the center of the extended Union line. Pushing aside the inconsequential reserves, he turned his spearhead northward, toward Franklin's embattled rear guard. When Franklin turned to meet this new threat, Jackson stormed the White Oak Swamp crossing in full force. A good half of the Federal army was cut off and engulfed by converging forces.

The Federals' plight was made all the worse by a muddled high command. Before the battle opened, General McClellan, distraught and demoralized by the turn his campaign was taking, had deserted his troops at Glendale and ridden off to join the army's advance guard on the James, well distant from the fighting. He left no one in charge, and so the defense of the "Glendale Pocket" became simply every general for himself. "Fighting Joe" Hooker, south of the break in the line, got his division away. Phil Kearny boldly attacked and broke through the closing ring. Their two divisions, along with the four that earlier had reached Malvern

Hill on the James, now comprised the fighting strength of the Army of the Potomac. Darkness found the other five divisions trapped at Glendale and in the margins of White Oak Swamp. Lee tightened the ring during the night, and the next day, July 1, accepted the Federals' surrender. Including battle casualties, Glendale cost the Yankees 46,000 men and all their equipment. General Lee had achieved his Cannae—or at least half of it.

McClellan scrambled away to Harrison's Landing on the James with what remained of his forces. Already convinced that Lee's army was 200,000 strong (more than twice its actual count), the Young Napoleon was unstrung by the reports from Glendale. His grand campaign had ended in a Waterloo. Telling his second in command, Fitz John Porter, to surrender on the best terms possible, he sailed off in a gunboat for exile. He would not gain even that haven. Court-martialed on charges of dereliction of duty at Glendale, McClellan was convicted on the furious testimony of Generals Hooker and Kearny and cashiered.

As for General Lee, he was treated to a Romanlike triumph in Richmond. Calmly he recruited his army and re-equipped it with the rich military spoils seized from the Army of the Potomac. He knew he now faced only loud-talking General John Pope and his Army of Virginia, a patchwork assembled from the remaining Federal forces in the East. In late July, Lee set off northward. His instructions to Stonewall Jackson, leading the spearhead, were to "suppress" the braggart Pope.

The outmanned Pope did not wait to be suppressed, but fled to the defenses of Washington. Lee followed rapidly and put the city and its ragtag collection of defenders under siege. The Potomac was closed both above and below the capital, and all rail connections severed. Then, laboriously, the Confederates began to bring up the massive siege train they had seized from McClellan on the Peninsula. Watching all this from London, Prime Minister Palmerston addressed a note to his foreign secretary. The Federals had received "a very great smashing," he noted and asked, "Would it not be time for us to consider whether in such a state of things

England and France might not address the contending parties and recommend an arrangement upon the basis of separation?"

The British-French offer arrived aboard the next packet, and behind it, the Lincoln administration knew, lay the threat of full recognition of the Confederacy by Europe's powers. The administration realized, too, that if it brought forces from the Western theater to try and lift the siege of Washington—a dubious prospect at best against the brilliant Lee—the Rebels there would march straight to the Ohio and into the heartland. When in September General Lee sternly granted but three days to evacuate all civilians from the capital before he opened with his siege guns, the reply was a call for a suspension of hostilities so as to negotiate "an arrangement upon the basis of separation." Lee's Cannae had now produced everything he expected of it.



The most celebrated tactical surprise of the Civil War was, of course, Stonewall Jackson's successful flanking march and attack on Joe Hooker at Chancellorsville. Looking back on it, Hooker was unrepentant about his management of the battle. Jackson's movement, he wrote afterward, "under the circumstances admitted of not a ray of probability of successful execution. Ninety-nine chances out of a hundred Genl Jackson's corps would have been destroyed." To be sure, Hooker was hardly an unbiased observer. Yet he had a point. General Hooker had taken specific steps to avoid and to counter just such a surprise attack that May 2, 1863. If those orders to guard his right had been carried out as he intended them to be, how different the outcome might have been.

The Victor of Chancellorsville

On the morning of May 2, the sixth day of his campaign, Joe Hooker was brimming with confidence. Having fixed Lee in place at Fredericksburg with a holding force and then secretly crossed the Rappahannock up-

stream with his main body, his campaign plan showed every sign of working perfectly. He had drawn Lee out of his imposing fortifications and was threatening his flank and rear. The plan now was to force Lee to attack him in his chosen position, around the Chancellorsville crossroads.

Hooker's forces were posted in expectation of a defensive battle. His weakest corps, the Eleventh, with its less-than-stellar commander, O. O. Howard, held the right flank, farthest from the expected scene of action. To be on the safe side, however, Hooker had ordered up from the Fredericksburg front John Reynolds's First Corps, one of the best in the army, to brace Howard's position. To this point in the campaign the one serious malfunction had been in communications between the two wings of the army—couriers got lost in the woods, and the telegraphic link to the Fredericksburg front failed to work. But in this instance, for a welcome change, the link worked perfectly. Reynolds received his orders promptly, and by midafternoon on May 2 the First Corps was solidly anchoring the army's right flank.

During the morning an enemy column was sighted crossing an opening in the woods off to the south, and word of it was passed up to headquarters. Hooker was quick to warn Howard: "We have good reason to suppose that the enemy is moving to our right." Look to your exposed flank, Howard was told; mass your reserves "in order that you may be prepared for him in whatever direction he advances."

Otis Howard had only recently been promoted to command of the Eleventh Corps, and it seems that in this first action he determined to be especially conscientious about obeying orders. At the end point of his line, then, he quickly formed a long right angle facing west, throwing up log breastworks and posting his artillery. To the rear he positioned substantial reserves of men and guns. In early afternoon, as the First Corps began arriving on the scene, he made sure his line was securely tied to Reynolds's. When Howard replied to Hooker's warning, "I am taking measures to resist an attack from the west," he meant every word of it. At 5:30 that afternoon, when Stonewall Jackson gave the word to his flanking force—"You can go forward then"—his first wave of attackers

struck like an avalanche. Howard's line bent and in places even broke, but there was no surprise and no panic. Reserves, already on the alert, were moved into the gaps. Reynolds, too, absorbed the blows, and then pitched into the flank of the attackers. By the time darkness finally ended the fighting, Jackson could claim gains of only some 200 yards. When that night he was accidentally felled by a volley from his own men, he was searching in vain for some gap in the solid enemy front.

May 3, the pivotal day of the campaign, went all Joe Hooker's way. Cavalryman Jeb Stuart, who took over for the wounded Jackson, attacked repeatedly but fruitlessly in an attempt to close the huge gap between the two wings of the Confederate army. Coolly meeting these assaults, Hooker parried every blow of Stuart's and then counterattacked with two fresh corps. Stuart reeled back in defeat.

No choice remained for Lee now but to give up the fight and order a withdrawal. Taking severe losses in extricating his army from the Chancellorsville front, he fell back south toward Richmond along his railroad supply line. Hooker pursued, and the continuous fighting that spring of 1863 came to be known as the Overland Campaign—Lee stubbornly defending each river line between Fredericksburg and Richmond, Hooker patiently outflanking each line. By July, Lee and his proud Army of Northern Virginia were pinned in the trenches before Richmond. Joe Hooker, now promoted to lieutenant general, confidently managed the besieging army.

That July 1863 saw Grant's capture of Vicksburg and the opening of the Mississippi. By November, under Grant's management, the Chattanooga gateway to the Deep South was in Union hands. In the face of Hooker's steady successes in the East and Grant's in the West, Confederate morale sagged. Quickly pressing his advantage, Grant marched straight for Atlanta, took it, then cut a swath through Georgia to the coast. Spring 1864 witnessed the final campaigns. While Grant drove north through the Carolinas, at Richmond Hooker snipped off Lee's rail supply lines one by one. On April 9, 1864, at Appomattox Court House, Lee's desperate effort to escape fell short, and he surrendered to Joe

Hooker. Soon afterward, Joe Johnston surrendered to Grant in North Carolina, and the great rebellion was history.

Grant's and Hooker's partisans urged their heroes to seek the presidency in the fall. But Grant had already assured Mr. Lincoln that he would not challenge his reelection. Nor would Joe Hooker, who expressed only contempt for politics. "I will not accept if nominated and will not serve if elected," he announced loudly.

Historians of the war would rank Grant first among the Union's generals, but by consensus they credited "Fighting Joe" Hooker with conducting at Chancellorsville the most perfectly executed campaign of the entire three-year war.



On August 24, 1863, President Davis telegraphed Robert E. Lee to come to Richmond from his camps on the Rappahannock to consult on grand strategy. In the East, Lee's army, despite its Gettysburg defeat, seemed able to stand off any fresh Federal threats. But in the Western theater, particularly in Tennessee, the Confederacy was in dire straits. Mr. Davis wanted Lee to send troops west from his army—and he wanted Lee himself to go West with them and take over command of the Army of Tennessee from the incompetent Braxton Bragg. As Davis put it, Lee's "presence in the western army would be worth more than the addition of a corps."

While properly deferential to the president, Lee made it clear that he was not interested in the Western command. "I did not intend to decline the service," he told Davis, "but merely to express the opinion that the duty could be better performed by the officers already in that department." At the time, Davis seems to have felt it would be a mistake to force any such change on his unwilling (and indispensable) lieutenant, and he let the matter drop. Instead, it would be Longstreet who commanded the troops sent West, and the Army of Tennessee continued its march to grim ruin under Braxton Bragg.

What if, however, Davis had adopted his commander in chief's

stance and *ordered* Lee to go West, "for the good of the service"? Might the war in that theater then have taken a different course? . . .

A New General for the West

Mr. Davis, having somewhat nervously exercised his ultimate authority in the matter of this momentous command change, was wise enough to leave it up to General Lee what troops he would take West with him, and, more important, who would command the Army of Northern Virginia in his absence. Of that army's three corps commanders, James Longstreet, A. P. Hill, and Dick Ewell, only Longstreet had Lee's full confidence. Lee promptly chose him for the place.

Paradoxically, it was Longstreet who had argued long and vigorously for sending his corps from the Army of Northern Virginia to the Army of Tennessee—hoping, in the bargain, to be awarded command of the Western army himself. Now, thrust into Lee's place instead, he was insistent on having his trusted corps remain with him. Lee agreed, and rather than Longstreet's corps going West, it was the corps of Dick Ewell. Ewell's first battle as corps commander had been Gettysburg, where he had acted indecisively. Lee thought it best to take Ewell West with him and through careful supervision perhaps embolden him. Ewell had earlier performed capably enough under Stonewall Jackson's tight control, perhaps all he needed was a shorter rein.

Lee had expressed concern that the Western army's high command might not accept him as an "outsider." He need not have worried. Bragg had so alienated his lieutenants that they welcomed Lee with open arms. When he took over the command, he found immediate opportunity to employ his aggressive martial nature. Bragg's army had been maneuvered out of Chattanooga and out of Tennessee entirely, yet now the incautious Federals under William Rosecrans were ripe for a counterstroke. Bragg had planned such a stroke, but it was Lee who carried it out, at Chickamauga. On September 20, the second day of the battle, acting on a direct order from Lee, Dick Ewell's reinforcing corps from the East delivered

the decisive blow. Rosecrans's Army of the Cumberland was split in half and by nightfall was retreating helter-skelter for Chattanooga.

Early the next morning, the Confederate cavalryman Nathan Bedford Forrest ranged ahead to Missionary Ridge overlooking Chattanooga and saw the chaotic situation of the fleeing Federal columns. He hurried dispatches back to headquarters: "I think they are evacuating as hard as they can go . . . I think we ought to press forward as rapidly as possible." With a single brigade of infantry, Forrest promised, he could take Chattanooga: "Every hour is worth a thousand men."

Braxton Bragg had been wont to let such shining opportunities slip away. Not Robert E. Lee. He recognized in Forrest the same sure judgment that marked Jeb Stuart in the Eastern army, and he leaped at the advice. He rushed forward every man who could carry a gun. The army would outrun its supplies, he was warned. They could resupply from captured Yankee stocks, said Lee, just as he had resupplied his Army of Northern Virginia in the Chancellorsville victory.

Over the next few days, the battered Army of the Cumberland was decimated. For one of the few times in the war, a victory in the field turned into a virtual battle of annihilation. George Thomas, whose stubborn stand at Chickamauga had been the one bright spot for the Union in that battle, stubbornly directed the retreat of the remnant of Rosecrans's army after that general was captured. Lee regained Chattanooga, and in eastern Tennessee, the now outmanned Federal force under Ambrose Burnside beat a hasty retreat. By October, Tennessee, vital gateway to the Deep South, was once again securely in Confederate hands.

Having restored affairs in the Western theater, at least until the next campaigning season in the spring, General Lee petitioned Davis to give the Army of Tennessee to Joseph E. Johnston and to let him return to his beloved Army of Northern Virginia. Longstreet had done well enough checking General Meade's halfhearted moves in Virginia—the Army of the Potomac, too, had had to dispatch troops to the Western theater—but Lee considered Longstreet far too defensive-minded. Robert E. Lee still believed that Confederate independence could only be achieved in

the Eastern theater, and he wanted to direct that effort. Mr. Davis could hardly refuse his most spectacularly successful general.

Alas for the Confederacy, there was only one Robert E. Lee—and also only one cautious-to-a-fault Joe Johnston. In the spring of 1864, the Union might be forced to start all over in Tennessee, but this time it was U. S. Grant who was in charge of the effort from the beginning. With his force and Sherman's, along with Thomas's tattered command reinforced to corps strength from Northern reserves, Grant reprised the brilliant maneuvering he had displayed at Vicksburg. First, he fainted the nervous Johnston right out of Chattanooga, then without pause he pressed him back relentlessly toward Atlanta. As early as September 2, 1864, Grant would telegraph President Lincoln, "Atlanta is ours, and fairly won."

Lee's command presence in the Western theater and his bright victories at Chickamauga and Chattanooga were now all for naught—gone with the wind, it would be said. In the end, all he achieved was to bring U. S. Grant to the fore, unfettered and where he was needed most.



In late August 1864 the Democrats met in convention in Chicago to nominate their candidate for president. It was all but certain that General McClellan would be the nominee, and even among Republicans there were many who expected the general to be elected. One of those was Abraham Lincoln. A few days before the convention, he had his Cabinet members sign a "blind memorandum," the contents of which only he knew. He did not expect to be re-elected, he wrote, and therefore it must become the administration's duty to save the Union before the new president-elect's inauguration, "as he will have secured his election on such ground that he can not possibly save it afterwards."

The Democrats, however, proceeded to commit political suicide. At the convention, a peace-at-any-price Copperhead faction, outmaneuvering the McClellanites, seized control of the platform committee and rammed through a peace plank that termed the war a failure and called for an armistice without conditions. The general, duly nominated, found

himself a war Democrat running on a peace platform. Although he repudiated the peace plank, it was a fatal handicap. The soldier vote, in particular, turned overwhelmingly against him. Sherman's capture of Atlanta made a sham of the Democrats' war-is-a-failure argument. On November 8, McClellan lost by 2.2 million to 1.8 million in the popular vote, and by 212 to 21 in the electoral college.

What if, however, the Democrats had acted sanely at Chicago? What if the majority at the convention kept control of events and wrote into the platform a strong war plank for General McClellan to run upon? Surely that would have made a difference on November 8.

Our Seventeenth President

George McClellan proved not to be as politically naive as many had thought. He understood what needed to be done to exploit the pessimism in the North and gain him the presidency. First and foremost, he had to take both New York and Pennsylvania, the two most populous states, with fully half (plus one) of the 117 electoral votes he needed for victory. The Democrats also had traditional strengths in the border states—Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky, Missouri. They were thought to have good prospects in two New England states—Connecticut and New Hampshire—and in New Jersey, McClellan's adopted state. Finally, Indiana and Illinois, with their substantial Southern constituencies, were worthwhile campaign targets. If General McClellan could capture New York and Pennsylvania, he would need but 58 more electoral votes; these "focus states" contained 79.

Sherman's capture of Atlanta, coming on the heels of McClellan's nomination, was immediately made the occasion for high celebration by war Democrats. As one party leader put it, they must be sure that McClellan people "burnt as much powder as the Republicans in celebrating the victories announced from time to time." McClellan wrote Sherman, "Your campaign will go down in history as one of the memorable ones of the world," and made sure the press got copies. The Democrats' strategy

was to present General McClellan, the senior general on the active list, driven from command after his great victory at Antietam by a radicalized Republican administration, as a superbly qualified commander in chief in contrast to the bumbling civilian Lincoln. McClellan would see the war through surely and swiftly and professionally. One of his staff members told the press, "The General stated that should he be elected, he expected to be very unpopular the first year, as he should use every power possible to close the war at once, should enforce the draft strictly, and listen to no remonstrance until the rebellion was effectually quashed." That attracted much favorable notice among soldier voters.

Democratic campaigners hit hard at what they called the tyrannies of the Lincoln administration, with its trampling of such individual liberties as the habeas corpus privilege. They pointed to "abolitionist fanaticism" and social and economic chaos and costly trickeries in financing the war. It was pointed out that the Army of the Potomac, McClellan's old command, was bogged down in trench warfare under his successors, and after a bloody summer of staggering casualty lists was no closer to Richmond than McClellan had been in 1862. McClellan had opposed emancipation, but had done so privately; now both he and the platform were silent on the slavery question. Personally he was most comfortable focusing on the soldier vote, including the McClellan Legion, organized on the home front from thousands of discharged soldiers and men on sick leave and furlough.

In October, there were bellwether state elections in Ohio, Indiana, and Pennsylvania. In Ohio the notorious Copperhead Clement Valligham, who had attempted to disrupt the Chicago convention, was fresh in voters' minds and Republicans held the state. But Democrats scored narrow victories in Indiana and Pennsylvania; in the latter the soldier vote went decisively for the obviously still-popular onetime commander of the Army of the Potomac.

Both sides predicted a close outcome on November 8. Even Mr. Lincoln conceded New York and Pennsylvania to McClellan, although calculating a narrow six-vote electoral victory for himself. McClellan wrote

ten days before the election, "All the news I hear is *very* favorable. There is every reason to be most hopeful."

The general's forecast was the more accurate of the two. On Election Day he lost in the popular vote, but won nine states in the Electoral College, 120 to 113. He gained both New York and Pennsylvania on the soldier vote, especially from Army of the Potomac loyalists. He picked up Delaware, Kentucky, and New Jersey and had paper-thin margins in Connecticut and New Hampshire. His war stand gained him Indiana and Illinois. Election analysts pointed to the strong war plank in the Chicago platform as the decisive factor for the Democrats.

It would be nearly four months until president-elect McClellan was inaugurated, but he promptly made a point of visiting or sending strongly worded statements to Union army commanders that came March 4 the new president intended to be a vigorous, active commander in chief. In effect, he would once again be general in chief of all the armies, only this time without any superior to contradict him. So it happened. When Lee surrendered his army at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865, President McClellan was there at Grant's side.

By then, Abraham Lincoln was home in Springfield, Illinois, yet another in a string of one-term presidents going back to the time of Andrew Jackson. Lincoln would be remembered favorably as a president who had stood fast for the Union in 1861, and who spoke and wrote well, but in the end as a president who could not persuade the people to let him see the war through on his own terms.

Ironically, his successor, who in Lincoln's August blind memorandum was predicted to be incapable of saving the Union, saved it probably as effectively as a reelected Lincoln could have. To be sure, President McClellan faced several months of battle with the still-Republican Thirty-Eighth Congress over the process of reconstructing the Union. However, George McClellan had always done better fighting his battles with words and on paper than on battlefields, and so it would prove now.

VIETNAM IN AMERICA, 1865

♦ TOM WICKER ♦

Soon after dawn on Sunday, April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee's hungry, exhausted Army of Northern Virginia was surrounded by the overwhelming Federal forces of U. S. Grant near Appomattox, Virginia. Sitting on a log with a trusted subordinate, General Porter Alexander, Lee said he saw no way out except surrender.

Shocked, Alexander urged an alternative—that Lee order his army "to scatter in the woods and bushes . . ." to spare "the men who have fought under you for four years . . . the mortification of having you ask Grant for terms and having him reply, 'Unconditional Surrender. . .'" Two-thirds of Lee's troops, Alexander estimated, would "scatter like rabbits and partridges," could not be caught, and could carry on the war.

That would be only about 10,000 men, Lee replied, a number "too insignificant to accomplish the least good." But suppose, he said, that "I should take your suggestion . . . The men would have no rations and would be under no discipline . . . they would have to plunder and rob . . . the country would be full of lawless bands . . . and a state of society would ensue from which it would take the country years to recover. Then the enemy's cavalry would pursue . . . and wherever they went there would be fresh rapine and destruction.

"No," the old general said. "We have now simply to look the fact in the face that the Confederacy has failed." The men should "quietly and quickly" go home, "plant crops and begin to repair the ravages of war." As for himself, "you young men might afford to go bush-whacking [but] the only proper and dignified course for me would be to surrender myself and take the consequences."

Thus did Robert E. Lee, revered for his leadership in war, make perhaps his greatest contribution—to peace. He spared the country the divisive guerrilla warfare that undoubtedly would have resulted from Alexander's despairing idea—a mean and destructive struggle that would have delayed national reconciliation for years to come.

◆ *Tom Wicker, a former columnist for the New York Times, is the author of several historical novels.*



ROBERT COWLEY

THE WHAT IF'S OF 1914

The World War That Should Never Have Been

The conventional, and lasting, impression most of us have of World War I is the lethal stasis of the Western Front trenches. But we can now see that many questions about the kind of war it would be had been answered by the time the first trenches were dug in the fall of 1914, a time that was in fact consumed by movement and maneuver. The trenches merely ratified what the events of the first months had largely decided, pointing the century in a direction that seemed unthinkable when the year began.

Those first months of the war in 1914 reveal all manner of counterfactual outcomes. What would have happened if Great Britain had stayed out of the war? Could Germany have won? And might the world have been the better for a German victory? Could the war have ended about the time Europeans originally thought it would be over: before the leaves fell? What if the United States had never been drawn in? What would our century have been like without World War I—or with a smaller and shortened version that involved only continental powers? Most important: Did the war have to become a world war?