Visiting the Antietam Battlefield: A Look into the Lincoln Presidency

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Introduction

On October 1st 1862, Lincoln traveled from Washington D.C. to the Antietam battlefield to be with the Army of the Potomac and its Commander George B. McClellan. The bloodiest day in American history had occurred thirteen days prior and the Army that Lincoln bonded with had just earned a long sought after victory. The outcome remained bittersweet with so many Union soldiers dead or wounded and the fact that the Confederate Army had retreated instead of being crushed on Union territory. These four days have a fascinating narrative which stand on their own as an important moment in time for Lincoln and give insight into his character and Presidency. Furthermore the meeting’s broader implications shine a light onto Lincoln’s relationship with McClellan, the powerful photographic history of the Battle of Antietam, and a future scandal that will haunt Lincoln’s reelection campaign against McClellan in 1864.

Lincoln’s complex relationship with McClellan will be examined from McClellan’s arrival in Washington D.C. in the Spring of 1861 through his firing a month after the meeting. A shift in Lincoln’s tone toward McClellan soon after the meeting and the severance of their relationship was soon all but inevitable. The meeting in Antietam shows the political dimension of their relationship as McClellan, a Democrat, resists his Republican President’s key political proposal, the Emancipation Proclamation.

In a subsequent chapter, Alexander Gardner’s photos of the Battle of Antietam and those from the meeting will give a rare perspective into the visual history of Lincoln and the War. The reactions from those in New York who saw a gruesome battlefield for the first time and the photos that help shape Lincoln’s legacy for people at the time and for generations to come.
Lastly, the events of this visit were used by malicious political supporters of McClellan during the election of 1864 to imply that Lincoln was brutally disrespectful to his soldiers at the battlefield. Lincoln’s ability to stay unengaged in this scandal show a resiliency of character that needs to be a part of his legacy. The implications of the meeting at Antietam piece together an interesting and unique story of Lincoln’s presidency including the struggles he was grappling with and those he would endure in the future.
Chapter 1: The Victory at Antietam

By September 1862, the Confederate Army had invaded Union territory and southerners were elated at the thought of Maryland men leaving the Union. A Richmond newspaper claimed “The hour of Maryland’s deliverance, long deferred, has come at last... and a noble people long crushed under the heel of despotism, will soon have the opportunity of rising upon their tyrants”.\(^1\) However, the Confederate Army’s exhaustion was very apparent, and undoubtedly did not inspire enthusiasm. A woman from Shepherdstown said that Robert E. Lee’s Army “when I say that they were hungry, I convey no impression of the gaunt starvation that they looked from their cavernous eyes...that they could march or fight at all seemed incredible”.\(^2\) The reality greatly differed from Southern perception. In fact, Marylanders were unwelcoming to the Confederates and only few left the Union.\(^3\)

Since the Confederates had invaded Maryland, the imminent battle would be of huge consequence for either side. Both sides prepared for battle by picking the location of the battle, one of the only times this was possible during the war, and planning their tactics. The Union had already suffered consecutive defeats and now had the burden of defending their own territory. Before the battle started, McClellan missed two opportunities to win an advantage against Lee. On September 14th, and on September 16th, McClellan could have attacked Lee while his army


was separated into two parts. Instead McClellan waited until September 17th when the Army was reunited with the exception of one division. On September 15th, Lincoln sent a letter to McClellan wishing the Army luck in what both knew was an important battle saying, “Your dispatches of to-day received. God bless you, and all with you. Destroy the rebel army, if possible. A. LINCOLN.” Lincoln’s intentions were clear in that he wanted the army to fight aggressively and do all they could to end the war entirely. The day before the battle on September 16th 1862, Lee’s Army had between 25,000 and 30,000 troops and General George B. McClellan had between 55,000 and 60,000 with another 15,000 within six miles of the battlefield. McClellan planned to use three corps, those of Joseph Hooker, Joseph Mansfield’s XII Corps, and Edwin V. Sumner’s II Corps. McClellan intended to start the battle by having all three corps attack the Confederate left line, and for General Ambrose Burnside’s IX Corps to stand on the Confederate right and cut off Lee’s retreat to the Potomac ford. In addition to these troops on the field, four additional Union divisions, two from Fitz-John Porter’s V Corps and two more from Franklin’s VI Corps, as well as the entire cavalry waited in the reserve behind the right and center Union line.

As McPherson explained, McClellan’s plans may have been effective but they were not executed properly. First, the attacks on the right line went off in three phases rather than all at

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once, as it was intended. As a result, Lee was able to shift his available troops to meet the three corps, but he would have been overwhelmed by a single attack. Secondly, on the Union right, Burnside decided to cross a defended bridge, instead of utilizing unguarded areas. These mistakes gave Lee a great advantage that made the battle a much closer contest than the numbers suggested it would be.  

On the Union right, Joseph Hooker led the attack at dawn and faced General Jackson of the Confederacy. The Confederate Army waited for them in the West Woods near the Dunkard Church as Hooker came down Hagerstown Pike. Hooker was an aggressive and egotistical general and the two armies fought for an hour and a half as Hooker drove back Jackson’s troops. This progress further motivated the Union Army who already feared another defeat. A Union soldier explained “the truth is, when bullets are wacking against tree trunks and solid shot are cracking skulls like egg-shells, the consuming passion in the breast of the average man is to get out of the way. Between the physical fear of going forward and the moral fear of turning back, there is a predicament of exceptional awkwardness”.  

This statement exemplifies how mentally difficult and confusing war can be, especially men for who had not trained for a career in the military. James M. McPherson described the state of battle saying that it turned men into killing machines and that the whole landscape turned red in a state of frenzied madness.  

John Bell Hood’s division fought for the South under extremely difficult conditions. The morning of the battle the division had been given its first rations in three days. They were called into battle as they were cooking. A Union officer said that “it is beyond all wonder...how such men as the rebel troops can fight on as they do; that, filthy, sick, hungry, and miserable, they

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should prove such heros in fight, is past explanation”.\textsuperscript{9} Despite little food and exhaustion, they started the battle with a wild yell and fought with bravery.\textsuperscript{10} Major Rufus Dawes of the Sixth Wisconsin wrote about the Union army during this battle and said “The Men were loading and firing with demoniacal fury and shouting and laughing hysterically, and the whole field before us is covered with rebels fleeing for life, into the woods. Great numbers of them are shot while climbing over the high post and rail fences along the turnpike”.\textsuperscript{11} The death toll was extremely high, the First Texas regiment from Jackson’s troops lost eighty-two percent of its troops in just forty-five minutes of fighting. \textsuperscript{10}

A turning point in the battle came when Lee sent reinforcements from D. H. Hill’s division to the center line and Longstreet’s Corps on the right side of the line.\textsuperscript{12} They were able to inflict severe damage on the Union Army before the Union 12th Corps arrived. McClellan waited to send in the Union 12th, had he sent them in earlier before the reinforcements arrived the entire right line could have been possibly taken.\textsuperscript{12} The Union then broke the Confederate line near Dunkard Church and then a third wave of troops, Sumner’s II Corps, was sent to the line and they broke the line near West Wood. Sumner’s troops moved in tight columns which made them extremely effective in cutting through the line. However, Lee sent in a surprise counter-


attack, one from Harper’s Ferry that crushed Sumner’s troops.\(^{13}\) A private of the Fifteenth Massachusetts said “The rebs all began to fall back. Good said I, we have got um now... but at the same instant I heard a cry from the rear, ‘Fall Back...we are flanked on our left, the rebs are getting in our rear’ What. Great God can’t be possible. But I saw it was no joke, the bullets actually came from our rear.”\(^{14}\) The fighting on that side of the line ended in mutual stalemate as both the Union and the Confederacy backed away from battle.\(^{13}\) One that side of the line alone, five hours of ravage killing 12,000 men were dead or wounded.

At the center of the line, Sumner’s other two divisions attacked Confederates at Sunken Farm Road. The road was southeast of Dunkard Church and the carnage caused it to be named the Bloody Lane. The Union triumphed at 1:00pm after four hours of fighting.\(^{15}\) The last moments of the battle were described by Lieutenant Thomas Livermore of the 5th New Hampshire; “As the fight grew furious, the colonel cried out, ‘Put on the war paint,’” “We rubbed the torn end of the cartridges over our faces, streaking them with powder like a pack of Indians, and the colonel ...cried out ‘Give em the war whoop!’ and all of us joined him in the Indian war whoop until it must have rung out above all the thunder of the ordinance.”\(^{16}\) This was a huge opportunity to crush the Confederates after disappointing results on the right line. A southern officer referred to the center of the Confederate line and said “There was no body of Confederate


infantry in this part of the field that could have resisted a serious advance... Lee’s army was ruined, and the end of the Confederacy was in sight”. McClellan had the opportunity to use his reserve troops to attack the line further. General Franklin asked to go into battle, however, General Sumner reminded McClellan of the ambush earlier in the day and advised against the move. McClellan sided with Sumner and decided not to attack Lee.

On the Union left line, the southern Brigade Commander, Robert A. Toombs, fought General Burnside’s corps. Burnside controlled the bridge but suffered heavy losses for it. Three divisions drove the rebels toward Sharpsburg and were threatening to cut access to the only ford over the Potomac. A.P. Hill returned from Harpers Ferry in time to to fight with Toombs against Burnside. McClellan refused to send in his reserve troops, Fitz-John Porter’s 5th Corps. Porter told McClellan “Remember General...I command the last reserve of the last army of the Republic”. McClellan did not take the risk of sending in his reserves and the day ended with a mutual retreat. McClellan has 20,000 troops in battle but another 20,000 that never fought. Many aspects of the battle could have ended in favor of the Union, if McClellan boldly used these available troops instead of hesitating. At the end of the battle six thousand men were dead or dying, with another sixteen thousand that were wounded.

The next morning McClellan wrote to his wife Mary Ellen McClellan to describe the battle. He stated

We fought yesterday a terrible battle against the entire rebel army. The battle lasted 14 hours & was terrific-the fighting on both sides was superb. The general result was in our favor, that is to say we gained a great deal of ground & held it. It was a success, but whether decided victory depends upon what occurs today. I hope that God has given us a great success. It is all in his hands, where I am content to leave it. The spectacle yesterday was the grandest I could conceive of-nothing could be more sublime. Those in whose judgement I rely tell me that I fought the battle splendidly & that it was a masterpiece of art.21

McClellan was focused on the logistics of the battle and how it was executed, which one could expect from an experienced general. However, he seems much less interested in the final outcome than one would expect. The battle was set to continue and that was to be a factor in its conclusion but he gives no indication of his ambitions or what he was ultimately hoping to achieve. It does not seem that he had an idea of what he wanted because the next day, Lee was prepared to continue fighting but McClellan never attacked and Lee retreated. McClellan was ultimately satisfied with a well fought battle and having the Army retreat, and less interested in Lincoln’s instructions of destroying the Confederates.

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Chapter 2: Tracking Two Beloved Men

During the Battle of Antietam no two figures had more influence on Union morale and the course of the war than President Abraham Lincoln and his General-in-Chief George B. McClellan. Their relationship directly affected every aspect of the war and all of the men of the Army of the Potomac who admired them. Lincoln and McClellan, despite serving the same purpose, did not agree on strategy or have the same outlook on the war. Their relationship deteriorated over time and was coming to the breaking point by the time Lincoln visited McClellan after the Battle of Antietam. A long period of frustration among both parties led up to this point and greatly helps to explain the state of the army and of these two men when they met on the first of October in 1862.

Lincoln and McClellan’s differing backgrounds of military experience help to explain their different views of war. Lincoln totaled about eighteen months of formal education and held many different jobs before becoming a member of the Illinois State Legislature in 1834. Only three years later, after teaching himself law, he was admitted to the Bar Association. Lincoln served a single term in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1847 to 1849 and then lobbied for the Illinois Central Railroad. Lincoln became a member of the newly formed Republican party in 1856 and then won the presidential nomination and the presidency in a four-way election in 1860. During the election, in a conversation with Ward Hill Lamon, Mrs. Lincoln said that “He is to be President of the United States some day; if I had not thought so I never would have married him, for you can see he is not pretty. But look at him! Doesn’t he look as if he would

make a magnificent President.” Time proved Mrs Lincoln to be correct even though his circumstances were not necessarily in favor of him.

Other than a brief military service in the Black Hawk War of 1832, in which he never got the chance to participate in combat, Lincoln had no military experience. Despite only a brief political career at the start of his presidency, he understood the political implications of each battle and correctly viewed the Civil War as primarily a struggle of ideology. Ward Hill Lamon noted that “Mr. Lincoln was at one the ablest and the most adroit politician of modern times... Mr Lincoln was not the creature of circumstances. He made circumstances to suit the necessities of his own situation”. Lamon correctly described Lincoln’s adeptness that demonstrated itself throughout the war.

On the other hand, McClellan was highly educated and was equipped with a long military resume. As son of a prominent Philadelphia surgeon, he attended private schools and the University of Pennsylvania. McClellan accepted an appointment to West Point in 1842 and was ranked 2nd in the class of 1846. He was appointed a second lieutenant of engineers and served with Winfield Scott’s Army in the Mexican War where he did mostly engineering assignments. In 1855, McClellan traveled to Europe as a member of a commission to study military strategic and tactical developments, including operations during the Crimean War. He then accepted the position as the chief engineer of the Illinois Central Railroad, where Lincoln was one of the

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railroad’s attorneys. McClellan was one of the nation’s highest paid railroad executives, starting with Illinois and expanding to the Ohio & Mississippi Railroad.\(^{26}\) Sears observed that “McClellan was a conservative Democrat and an active supporter of Stephen A. Douglas in the 1858 Illinois senatorial contest to the extent of giving Douglas use of his private railway car for campaigning”.\(^{27}\) In addition, McClellan thought that Stephen Douglas was far superior to Lincoln in his oratory ability.\(^{27}\) It was known that at the time that McClellan was not in support of Lincoln and as an example a fellow Illinois Central director, John M. Douglas, felt comfortable enough to talk poorly about Lincoln to McClellan, knowing that he felt a similar way.\(^{23}\) While it is unknown how this directly affected their relationship, it is important to note that this is a clear indication that McClellan had previous negative feelings toward Lincoln, before their relationship during the Civil War.

At the beginning of the Civil War, he became the Major-General of the Ohio volunteers and soon commanded the entire U.S. Army’s Department of the Ohio. He received offers from New York and Pennsylvania as well.\(^{26}\) The fact that he was sought after is not surprising because he had ten Army assignments in nine years, which was more experience than many other officers by comparison.\(^{26}\) McClellan did not have a great amount of command experience but that was also very typical.\(^{26}\) In mid-May 1861, McClellan became Major-General of the Regular Army, a position that was second only to General-in-Chief Winfield Scott with whom he had worked before. McClellan was promoted at an incredibly fast pace, because Scott helped him rise to


power. McClellan’s military background made him a great strategist but he undervalued the political aspects of the war and the need to win battles. 28

Lincoln and McClellan formed a strong bond with the Army of the Potomac. One of the Army’s objectives was to serve as the primary defense for the Capitol. They held the fate of the Union cause in their hands and their actions were crucial for maintaining morale. Before the Army of the Potomac was formed, Lincoln forged a strong relationship with the men who reported for duty. From April 1861 to June 1861, states from all over the Union sent men to the capitol to become the soldiers of the newly forming Union Army, most of whom formed the Army of the Potomac. At the time the Capitol was barely a place that looked worthy of such defense, which seemed to match the lackluster group of men who were meant to defend it. 29

Abraham Lincoln immersed himself with the men and gained their respect and admiration. Lincoln stood at the back of the White House and welcomed the men who paraded by into the city. Since Lincoln looked homely and even awkward, the men looked at Lincoln as if he was one of them. The troops were able to grow close with him because Lincoln spent so much of his time among them. A lieutenant wrote in a letter that when the soldiers were offered a pail of water to pass around, that Lincoln took a sip just like the rest of them. 30 Another officer said


“It is really too bad to call him one of the ugliest men in the country for I have seldom seen a pleasanter or more kind hearted looking one and he has certainly a very striking face”.  

The parallels between Lincoln and his men are striking and the two would go down in history together with their legacies intertwined. Lincoln was almost just as new to the Presidency as the men were to their new role. He cared about the men and their well being as soldiers and as a fighting unit. The bond that they formed helped keep them persistent throughout the long and difficult war. Jeffry D. Wert explained “with them through it all was Lincoln, for if any army in the nation’s history belonged to the President, it would be theirs”. The bond that they had with Lincoln was on a personal level and it helped them stay true to the Union and continue fighting for a war that they found themselves completely unprepared to fight.

Upon his appointment to command the Departments of Washington and Northern Virginia, on July 27th, 1861, McClellan arrived in Washington DC to train his new troops. Sears explained that “for the first nineteen months McClellan was a vivid, virtually constant presence in the president’s management”. McClellan exuded confidence in his ability to train the men and remedy the problems facing the Union Army. McClellan brought much needed discipline to the 50,000 men in Washington DC. D’Wert described that “Drunken soldiers stumbled through the camps, absentee troops roamed the streets, “gangs of thieves” preyed on civilians, and __________________


foragers ransacked private homes and even churches”.  McClellan did a brilliant job of preparing the men for war and they grew to love and respect their commander. McClellan imposed martial law throughout the city developing new camps and putting soldiers to work creating city defenses. The men drilled and learned from six o clock in the morning to 9pm. McClellan had a great attention to detail and was truly committed to their success. McClellan “conferred with generals, and then rode forth to inspect camps and with watch the training each day”. He brought order and discipline to men that were not used to the idea of working in a military unit. They thought they would serve for a short amount of time and then return to their civilian life. Despite their attitude, McClellan instilled in them the righteousness of their cause and inspired the men. McClellan directed that “all work” except inspections should be suspended on Sundays because he recognized and wanted the men to believe they were fighting a holy cause. Ward Hill Lamon in his Recollections of Lincoln noted that “when McClellan took command of that army, the south was powerful in all the elements of successful warfare”. McClellan’s challenge was great, but, after a month of preparation, McClellan and Lincoln reviewed their newly formed troops that they both organized and inspired.

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The clashes between Lincoln and McClellan over strategy and especially the timeline for action started immediately. McClellan thought of himself as Lincoln’s military superior, for example, he referred to Lincoln as deferring to him, and believed he could be a dictator with the cabinet and Lincoln looking to him for leadership. On August 2nd, McClellan told Lincoln that he needed 273,000 men in 283 regiments of infantry cavalry and engineers and 100 field batteries. He knew that this amount of men would take months to recruit, which seemed suitable since he had no plans to take offensive action. Six days later, McClellan justified needing these troops because he estimated that the Confederate commander Johnston had at least one hundred thousand troops, moreover, only five weeks later the estimation jumped to 170,000. McClellan was certain that the South had been preparing for war and mobilizing its forces long before Fort Sumter because the Confederate generals, including Beauregard, Joseph Johnston, and G.W. Smith were old and respected friends of his. He expected them to use a large army to capture the capitol because that was what he would have done. McClellan’s estimations do not make sense and, when in early October, McClellan had field investigators tell him that the Confederates only had about 98,400 troops, he never forwarded this information to Lincoln. The army was the sole collector of intelligence, once the general issued a judgment of

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the enemy troops, it wasn’t a debated topic. McClellan consistently and deliberately exaggerated the numbers of confederate troops and it caused major arguments over timing and preparations between himself and Lincoln. The power struggle between the military commanders of the Army of the Potomac and government officials continued throughout the war.

McClellan had a longstanding history of defying superiors and authority, which translated into his defiance of Lincoln. McClellan started having problems with his superiors at West Point. Sears believed that “Once George McClellan formed his opinion about a subject or an individual, he seldom budged from it. He was prideful in his convictions, certain in his chosen course.” Directly after his appointment to command the Regular Army, he was fighting with Winfield Scott, his sole direct commander. McClellan’s poor relationship with Lincoln might not have been personal but instead reflected a lack of ability to listen and respect others. In addition, a lot of military commanders at the time looked down upon politicians and in particular political appointments. This feeling was widespread due to problematic appointments from the Mexican War. Ironically, McClellan was promoted so quickly due to his political connections. Nevertheless, McClellan called the President an “idiot”, “a rare bird”, and “the original gorilla”. Gentlemanly virtues were very important to McClellan and did not see them in

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Lincoln.\textsuperscript{49} He also referred to Lincoln’s cabinet saying that “they are the most despicable set of men”\textsuperscript{50}. Another element that added to his view of Lincoln was his political ideology. McClellan was a Democrat fighting against a Republican President and his cabinet. The Republicans were still a new party and it is reasonable to assume McClellan felt threatened by Lincoln and was unwilling to cooperate with the Republican administration. McClellan’s view of the President diminished over time and he failed to see that fundamentally he was an element in a political crisis, rather than that the President was a pawn in his own military struggle.

McClellan’s not only underestimated the political aspect of the war but that his overprotection of his men was actually hurting them. McClellan highly valued the lives of his men and when he went to battle he wanted to preserve as many lives as he could. His preservation of life is admirable but it caused him to delay going to battle. He would not engage the enemy without being certain of victory. McClellan underestimated how important activity was for his men. The Union cause was in the heart of his men and resided all over the North. When the men succeeded their spirit for the cause was enriched, and when they fought the Confederacy their hatred for them grew more. McClellan’s lack of action was hurting the enthusiasm of his men and it was more damaging than he understood.\textsuperscript{51}

Lincoln was thoroughly patient with McClellan and believed in his ability despite his caution. During the summer and into the fall of 1861, Lincoln dealt with the demands of the


\textsuperscript{50} Wert, Jeffry D.. \textit{The sword of Lincoln: the Army of the Potomac}. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 44.

public who were frustrated with McClellan’s caution.\textsuperscript{52} Lincoln spent a great deal of time talking with McClellan and doing his best to meet the demands of his general. For example, after the defeat at Ball’s Bluff in mid-October 1861, McClellan wrote a letter to Secretary of war, Simon Cameron, asking for almost double of his current 76,000 troops in order to advance against the confederacy at Centreville.\textsuperscript{53} He asked for these troops because he knew that the President needed a Union victory before they took to camp for the winter. Following the resignation of Winfield Scott, Lincoln appointed McClellan as his new General-in-Chief. On November 1st, 1861 Lincoln wrote to McClellan saying “Lieut. Genl. Scott having been, upon his own application, placed on the list of retired officers, with his advice, and the concurrence of the entire cabinet, I have designated you to command the whole Army. You will, therefore, assume this enlarged duty at once, conferring with me so far as necessary.”\textsuperscript{54} Lincoln appointed McClellan without contingencies and understanding that he McClellan would be making decisions on his own. He put his trust in McClellan to act and destroy the Confederates.

After receiving command, McClellan wrote a letter to his wife, Mary Ellen McClellan, explaining his feelings toward his new position. He saw his predecessor, General Winfield Scott, whom he had thought of as an ambitious man, and now saw him as feeble and old near at the end of his career and his life. The sight was very humbling to him, especially considering that the two worked closely together for many years. On November 3rd, McClellan wrote to his wife saying,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52} Wert, Jeffry D.. \textit{The sword of Lincoln: the Army of the Potomac.} (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 59.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Wert, Jeffry D.. \textit{The sword of Lincoln: the Army of the Potomac.} (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 48.
\end{itemize}
“Should I ever become vainglorious & ambitious remind me of that spectacle. I pray every night & every morning that I may become neither vain nor ambitious- that I may be neither depressed by disaster nor elated by success- & that I may keep one single object in view, the good of my country.”

In this letter it is clear that McClellan and Lincoln are differing in the course they will take in the war. Time proved that it was impossible for McClellan to show aggression when he was constantly avoiding failure or even overwhelming success.

When Lincoln, along with Secretary of State William Seward, John Hay, and one of Lincoln’s secretaries visited McClellan on November 13th 1861, the party was stood up by McClellan. The newly appointed commander, was at a wedding that evening and instead of meeting with the President after the wedding, he kept them waiting only to then be told that he had went to bed. Lincoln was the only member of the party who wasn’t insulted and he met with McClellan the next night.

There is no evidence in Lincoln’s writing that McClellan’s inconsiderate behavior bothered him. According to Sears, McClellan was contradictory in regards to Lincoln’s habit of dropping in on him because sometimes he acted very bothered and then other times barely at all.

On November 20th, 1861 Lincoln and McClellan presided over a review of the troops on the battlefield. The majority of the army was in attendance including 75,000 men with infantry and cavalry regiments. As in the review that occurred after the Battle of Antietam, the review


brought a great deal of spectators who wanted to see the army defending them. The review was at one o’clock in the afternoon and cannons were fired upon the arrival of Lincoln, McClellan, and the members of the Cabinet. Lincoln and McClellan rode on horseback for an hour past the troops and as they went by, they took off their hats and cheered for the men. After, the men paraded by Lincoln and McClellan, who were very pleased. It was a transformative moment for the Army as they realized they were part of a cause much bigger than themselves.58

On about December 1st, 1861 Lincoln presented his Occoquan plan to McClellan.59 His plan was that the Army of the Potomac would move in two columns and if either column was resisted than the others would attack the enemy from behind. This plan would have been effective because it was unlikely that both would be resisted at the same time. Sears believes that McClellan found a reason to disapprove of the plan because it came from Lincoln and rather than himself. McClellan said that the plan would fail because Johnston had 100,000 men and 50,000 more in reserve while he had 104,000 troops. McClellan responded and said he had his own strategy but refused to share it with anyone.60

The year 1861 ended in stalemate in the eastern and the western fronts of the war and Lincoln was losing his patience with his new General-in-Chief. On January 13th, McClellan came to the White House and told Lincoln that he had devised an operation but Lincoln was


never told the plan and McClellan refused to share with those at the meeting. However, the very next day he gave his plan to the New York Herald. It seems clear that McClellan saw Lincoln and the Cabinet to be enemies rather than allies. Lincoln appointed Edwin Stanton to be the Secretary of War, he was a Democrat and a confidant of McClellan’s but soon developed a good working relationship with the president. On January 27th Lincoln gave Order No. 1, directing “the land and naval forces of the United States” to undertake “a general movement” against the confederacy on February 22nd, the anniversary of George Washington’s birthday. On January 31st, Lincoln directed Army of the Potomac to advance on Joseph Johnston’s rebel army at Centreville. A few days later, McClellan came to White House to protest order and at the meeting he offered to give his objections in writing. A twenty-two page document of complaints to Lincoln, as well as rain, meant that movement was impossible before the deadline.

On March 8th, Lincoln meet with generals, including McClellan, at White House Lincoln approved McClellan’s Urbana plan. The plan was to position troops between Johnston and Richmond which would force Johnston to retreat and defend his capitol. The Urbana plan was a great example of McClellan’s commitment to preserving the life of his troops and the importance of strategy. Lincoln’s only contingency was that Washington D.C. remain heavily guarded.

Lincoln decided the commanders without consulting McClellan including McDowell, Sumner, Heintzelman, Erasmus, Keyes, and Nathaniel Banks. McClellan was displeased with the order and he wanted to choose the commanders himself after they proved themselves in the field. Additionally, Lincoln knew the army needed organization and created five infantry corps. McClellan pursued but they were all gone by the time they arrived on March 11th. At that point the army knew they had overestimated the power of the Confederate army, and it was a huge turning point in which they realized overcautiousness was unnecessary. March 12th McClellan saw in the newspaper that Lincoln relieved him from being General-in-Chief but that he was still the Commander of the Department of the Army of the Potomac. At first frustrated, McClellan was then appreciative of the decision after finding out Lincoln made the decision because he thought that the position would be too much if he was going down to Richmond, and that it could be undone if he was successful.

Lincoln and McClellan’s relationship took a turning point for the worse with the execution of McClellan’s Peninsula Campaign. Since Joseph E. Johnston retreated from Manassas, the Urbana plan was quickly changed to the Peninsula Campaign which meant an attack on Richmond through the Virginia Peninsula. During this campaign both Lincoln and McClellan betrayed the other. Lincoln agreed to the campaign on the contingency that the Capitol remain heavily guarded, but when he received the list of troops meant to stay behind, it fell short of what he had ordered. McClellan deliberately did not meet the requests of his president, and in order to protect the capitol, Lincoln kept back General McDowell’s First Corps.


When McClellan ran into problems and was overwhelmed by the Confederate troops, he blamed Lincoln for the failure to capture Richmond. McClellan’s frustration was apparent and he considered himself the victim of a coordinated government plot. He believed that Lincoln did not want to give him what he asked for, when in fact Lincoln had been very patient and as accommodating as he could. Furthermore, when his troops failed at Yorktown, McClellan casted the blame on the commanders that Lincoln had appointed. The lack of open communication and trust between McClellan and Lincoln ruined the Peninsula Campaign. The next attack was the Battle of Seven Pines, or the Battle of the Chickahominy, in which Johnston almost defeated McClellan and once again McClellan blamed Lincoln and his appointed commander Casey and for the rest of the war, Casey trained new soldiers without participating in battle.

The trust between Lincoln and McClellan continued to deteriorate but McClellan’s troops remained loyal to their commander. The soldiers did not blame McClellan for their failings, as they got close to danger they hated the Confederacy more. Steadfastness to duty and to country sustained the troops during this struggling time. Whenever McClellan visited his troops, they

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always greeted him with huge enthusiasm.\(^{72}\) He talked about the grandness of his army but didn’t act in a way that he believed in their talent.\(^{73}\)

**Chapter 3: The Last Attempt in Antietam**

On October 1st, 1862 President Abraham Lincoln visited the Antietam battlefield in Sharpsburg Maryland. The bloodiest day in American history had occurred just thirteen days earlier with 2,108 Union soldiers dead and anywhere between 1,546 to 2,700 Confederate soldiers dead. Two thousand more soldiers would eventually die from wounds inflicted on this day.\(^{74}\) The Battle of Antietam was a crucial Union victory that resulted in a Confederate retreat on September 18th, 1862. The next day, General McClellan, the leader of the Army of the Potomac wired a message to General Henry W. Halleck saying, “Our victory was complete. The enemy is driven back into Virginia”.\(^{75}\) While an important win for the Union, the outcome was not the complete victory McClellan boasted. McClellan could have pursued Lee’s army and possibly achieved the complete victory he described to Halleck. McClellan hesitation after the Battle of Antietam exemplified his wartime conduct. In addition to the failings on the battlefield, McClellan had yet to demonstrate the Army’s support for the Emancipation Proclamation. Since


the Army sustains the war, the Army’s support was crucial to the viability of Lincoln’s promise to emancipate the slaves. Lincoln’s visit was prompted by victory and frustration with his general. Lincoln came to Maryland in order to show his gratitude to the Army of the Potomac and to implore a sense of aggression and loyalty onto his commanding general.  

A few days after the battle on September 20th, McClellan confided in his wife and was thinking about his retirement and the legacy he would leave in the army. He wrote “I now feel that my military reputation is safe & that I can retire from the service for sufficient reasons without leaving any stain upon my reputation. I feel now that this last short campaign is a sufficient legacy for our child, so far. as honor is concerned.” McClellan’s concern for himself over the outcome of not only the battle but the war is alarming. The drive to crush the Confederacy and lead his Army to ultimate victory is lacking from his demeanor. This mentality would have frustrated Lincoln and is an example of how important this meeting would be for both men.

Another reason Lincoln visited General McClellan in October 1862 was to discuss support for the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln had been thinking about emancipation for months before it was issued in September. Emancipating Confederate slaves was a bold decision that needed the support of a battle victory and Lincoln saw the Battle of Antietam as his opportunity. As a result on September 22nd, 1862 at noon, Lincoln held a cabinet meeting that reshaped the war and the future of the country. Lincoln faced a great amount of criticism for


this decision, including opposition from his Army. Before the proclamation was issued, McClellan, a democrat, already expressed his personal disapproval of emancipation. A full week had gone by without McClellan issuing a General Order of support for the Emancipation Proclamation by the time Lincoln visited McClellan at Antietam. 79 Lincoln would wanted to ensure that as the Army of the Potomac’s Commander, McClellan, would publicly show support for Lincoln’s decision to emancipate the Southern slaves.

On October 1st, 1861 Lincoln boarded a 6:00 a.m. train from Washington to Harpers Ferry. He was accompanied by John McClernand, Ozias M. Hatch, Ward Hill Lamon, Joseph C.G. Kennedy, and John W. Garrett.80 Each one of these people were selected for a specific reason and helped shape the meeting. John McClernand was a friend of Lincoln’s while he served in the Illinois State Legislature. He was also a Democrat and a Major General in Illinois looking for more recruits.81 Lincoln invited him to join the trip in order to show that the Democratic part was supporting the Union Cause.82 Ozias M. Hatch was a friend of Lincoln’s who had also rode with him in his inaugural train.70 Lincoln helped him become the Illinois Secretary of State and Hatch helped Lincoln work toward his nomination for President.70 Lincoln invited Hatch in order to catch up on Illinois politics and talk with his friend that he hadn’t seen for eighteen months.70 Ward Hill Lamon was a Illinois politician and Lincoln’s body guard.70 Despite having opposite personalities the two were great friends and they had a great

relationship. Joseph C. G. Kennedy was the Superintendent of the Census and attended the visit to compare the North and the South’s power. Lastly, John W. Garrett was the President of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Garrett proposed the logistical plan for the trip to Lincoln which he accepted. Furthermore, Garrett aligned the Railroad with the Union and he was brought along on the trip as a demonstration of Lincoln’s gratitude for their loyalty.

During Lincoln’s first day in Antietam, he got acquainted to the area and met with his General in Chief. The New York Herald observed that “The President seemed to be in pretty good condition a little tired and exhausted perhaps by his journey, but not so much so as might have been anticipated”. Lincoln crossed the Potomac on a pontoon bridge and saw Harpers Ferry which Lincoln would have viewed as looking like a city of ruins. Lincoln’s train arrived at 1:30pm and the New York Herald stated that Mayor Kip and Captain Sumner awaited his arrival. The article added that he rode in an ambulance to General Edwin Sumner’s headquarters where “he was met by General McClellan with great enthusiasm”. The New York Daily Tribune wrote that the headquarters was an abandoned rebel resistance about a half a mile away from Shenandoah, however, the exact location of his headquarters was not specified.

General Edwin Sumner readied his troops when he received notice of Lincoln’s arrival earlier that afternoon. Sumner’s division commanders were instructed to form by brigade at the


85 New York Herald, "Our Harpers Ferry Correspondence," October 5, 1862.


crest of Bolivar heights with all of the troops facing west. The men formed three large columns and were quickly ready for review. Division commanders were given a note that said the President and General McClellan would probably ride through and that information was passed onto the units. Lincoln rode on one of Sumner’s horses and reviewed Sumner’s troops at about 4:00 p.m. Lincoln and McClellan were presented with a twenty-one gun salute. Lincoln demonstrated great respect for the soldiers and removed his hat as he passed every regiment. The New York Herald described the scene saying that bands played music and soldiers and citizens cheered for Lincoln and McClellan. The Memphis Daily Appeal added that seeing both General McClellan and President Lincoln pleased the troops. After the review, Lincoln went to the John Brown Engine House, and was fascinated by this historic landmark. Lieutenant Colonel Sweitzer, McClellan and others returned to Sumner’s headquarters for the evening. According to the New York Daily Tribune, many officers visited Lincoln that evening.

The next morning, on October 2nd, McClellan wrote a letter to his wife Mary Ellen McClellan talking about the President’s visit. With regards to Lincoln’s purpose for the visit McClellan wrote, “His ostensible purpose is to see the troops & the battle fields. I incline to

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90 New York Herald, "Our Harpers Ferry Correspondence," October 5, 1862.


think that the real purpose of his visit is to push me into a premature advance into Virginia.”  
McClellan said that they were not ready for action, giving his wife two different reasons for the lack of movement. He said that the experienced regiments were worn out, but the new troops were not yet ready for combat. McClellan seemed to be looking for troops that simply did not exist. McClellan was frustrated with Lincoln and wrote, “These people don’t know what an army requires & therefore act stupidly.”  
McClellan thought very little of any strategic opinion other than his own.

On the morning of October 2nd, Lincoln left Sumner’s headquarters and visited the Union Twelfth Corps at Loudon and Maryland Heights. He spoke with temporary commander of the Corps A.S. Williams who later wrote to his daughters “The President was here a few days since. I had quite a long talk with him, sitting on a pile of logs. He is really the most unaffected, simple-minded, honest, and frank man I have ever met. I wish he had a little more firmness.”  
At 12 noon, Lincoln left Harpers Ferry for the Antietam battlefield with General Burnside. Before departing, Lincoln saw Burnside’s troops steal bread from a vendor’s wagon, and were then scolded for their misbehavior.  
Following the incident, Lincoln traveled in an ambulance with Burnside and other generals, it was said to be a bizarre sight since there was so little room in the vehicle and Lincoln’s leg’s were doubled up. Lincoln went to McClellan’s headquarters, most likely a farm located a few miles south of Sharpsburg owned by Keith Myers. Upon arrival he

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96 Schildt, John W.. Four days in October. (Chewsville Md.: J.W. Schildt, 1978), 18.

rode over the battlefield with McClellan and other officers. The New York Herald expressed that “Lincoln was interested in everything related to our recent victory”. When they arrived at the Pry Farm, McClellan’s headquarters during the Battle of Antietam, McClellan explained to Lincoln what he saw that day. The Memphis Daily Appeal wrote that “the President manifested the greatest interest in everything connected with our recent victory”.

Lincoln planned to review the men of the First Corps after this ride with the officers, but instead he returned to McClellan’s headquarters for the night. The decision frustrated the soldiers and officers of the First Corps because they had waited for hours for him to visit. Marsena Patrick, an officer, said “We waited and waited. The President never came.” According to Jacob Cox, a division commander in the Ninth Corps, who was with Lincoln, said they traveled on Bloody Lane to the Middle Bridge on the back way to McClellan’s headquarters. That night Lincoln had dinner with McClellan and other officers. David Strothers, states “After dark the President and suite came in from the battlefield and went to dinner. Two bands vied with each other in discoursing sweet music while the laughter at the President’s hardy jokes filled up the intervals until I went to sleep”. The Memphis Daily Appeal, and The New York Herald wrote


that the 21st Calvary played for him that night and that “the President is in excellent health and spirits and highly pleased with the good condition of the troops”.  

On the morning of October 3rd, Lincoln woke up at sunrise and walked with Ozias Hatch before the start of a busy day. The two were mostly silent with thousands of troops still sleeping completely unaware that Lincoln was walking among them. Lincoln broke his silence when they reached a hill and he asked “Hatch, Hatch, what is all of this?” Hatch’s response “this is the Army of the Potomac.”, displeased Lincoln to which he said “No, Hatch, no. this is McClellan’s bodyguard.”

The Ninth Corps lined up at 8:00am and at 10:00am their Commander and Chief reviewed the status of his men. The review took place near the campsite of the 48th Pennsylvania, on Mills Road. Captain Martin’s battery fired a twenty-one gun salute and Lincoln rode up and down the front and rear ranks of each regiment. In an unusual manner, the President rode along the troops to save time so they did not need to march in front of him. Edward Lord of the Ninth New Hampshire wrote that there were sixteen regiments of infantry, one of cavalry and two six-gun batteries present at the review. General Burnside, and McClellan rode with Lincoln along with about fifty civilians and other officers and during the

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110 Schildt, John W.. *Four days in October*. (Chewsville Md.: J.W. Schildt, 1978), 34.
review bands played “Hail to the Chief”. General Burnside was so excited about this review that he forgot to wear his dress sword.\textsuperscript{111} Division commander Jacob Cox describes the review saying “We were reviewed by division, and I met the party with my staff, riding down the lines with them, and answering the inquires of the President and the general as to the history and experience of the different organizations as we passed them.”\textsuperscript{112}

After reviewing the Ninth Corps, Lincoln rode in an ambulance to Bakersville to review the Fifth and Sixth Corps.\textsuperscript{113} The ambulance ride became a source of controversy in Lincoln’s reelection campaign of 1864.\textsuperscript{114} The New York Times reported that Lincoln arrived at 11:30am and first reviewed General Sykes’ Division of Porter’s Fifth Corps. Lincoln rode on horseback with General McClellan on his right and General Porter on his left. Many spectators cheered for both McClellan and Lincoln. The New York Times added that people waved handkerchiefs and flags. They noted that their “candor and loyalty” pleased Lincoln.\textsuperscript{115} The New York Herald also said that “at the review of each corps the people collected in large numbers and manifested the greatest enthusiasm in meeting the President and Little Mac”.\textsuperscript{116}

The review was followed by a trip to back to McClellan’s headquarters and then a visit to Mount Airy. It is most likely that Lincoln traveled by ambulance, rather than horseback but this

\textsuperscript{111} Schildt, John W. \textit{Four days in October}. (Chewsville Md.: J.W. Schildt, 1978), 34.

\textsuperscript{112} Schildt, John W. \textit{Four days in October}. (Chewsville Md.: J.W. Schildt, 1978), 31.

\textsuperscript{113} Schildt, John W. \textit{Four days in October}. (Chewsville Md.: J.W. Schildt, 1978), 59.

\textsuperscript{114} Lamon, Ward Hill, and Dorothy Teillard. \textit{Recollections of Abraham Lincoln, 1847-1865}. (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and company, 1895), 145.


\textsuperscript{116} \textit{New York Herald}, "News from McClellan’s Army ," October 4, 1862.
Mount Airy was also known as the Grove home and it was used as the headquarters for Fitz-John Porter. Louisa Grove, a seven year old, remembered Lincoln visiting the house and telling her parents that he was sorry about damage done to their farm from the war. She described him as tall and kindly. Their house was being used as a hospital for wounded soldiers. Lincoln walked down a long hallway with soldiers on his left and his right. He came to confederate soldiers and told them that he wanted to take them by the hand. He explained that the war forced people to be enemies but that he had no malice toward them and felt sympathy for them. Soldiers lined up to shake his hand and those that could not leave their bed were shown extra appreciation and Lincoln and McClellan came to their side to wish them well. They promised that every effort would be taken to ensure they recovered. As John Schildt described this story he remarked that it was an emotional moment for all who witnessed the interaction and with tears among many.

The visit to Mount Airy concluded with what became a very famous photo shoot with Alexander Gardner. The photos have McClellan’s Headquarters as a caption which makes sense since the Grove home was the location of his headquarters during Lincoln’s visit. The chairs used in some of his photographs are still in possession of the Grove family today showing that this was the most likely location of these photos. Gardner’s photographs serve as the main visual representation of Lincoln’s visit and of the Battle of Antietam. Gardner shot photographs right after the battle and they shaped public reaction of the battle.

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October 3rd, 1861 was the busiest day of Lincoln’s trip to Antietam. The rest of the day was filled with officer reviews but the order of these reviews is still up to some debate. While still at Mount Airy Lincoln was able to review some troops of the Fifth Corps. As reported by the New York Times, General Reynolds’s troops, the First Corps, was the next regiment to be reviewed. The review took place at 3 p.m. near Moses Cox Farm and the Norfolk and Western Railroad. Mixed reviews came about from the soldiers, Charles Wainright was very upset saying that Lincoln showed little interest in the troops but another soldier George Hussey said that all of the men were pleased to see Lincoln. The New York Times reported that “Lincoln was welcomed with utmost reception”. Following the First Corps, Lincoln and McClellan visited General Franklin’s troops, the Sixth Corps, near Williamsport. Crowds cheered for Lincoln for the entire trip from Cox Farm to Williamsport. After a six hour review, the New York Times wrote that Lincoln was satisfied with “the discipline and appearance of the troops and is doubtless convinced of their bravery and patriotism”. That night, once it was dark, Lincoln returned to McClellan’s headquarters for the night.

October 4th, 1861 Lincoln left McClellan’s headquarters to start the last day of his visit. The presidential party left at about 10:00 a.m. and then took the Middle Bridge into Sharpsburg. The first stop was the home of Phillip Pry, McClellan’s headquarters during the battle. The farm

120 Schildt, John W.. *Four days in October.* (Chewsville Md.: J.W. Schildt, 1978), 47.


was over taken by soldiers, wagons and ambulances.\textsuperscript{123} The family offered Lincoln breakfast and a few days later they received a thank you note from the White House.\textsuperscript{124} Lincoln visited General Israel B. Richardson of the Second Corps who was critically wounded during the Battle and would eventually die in the same room that Lincoln saw him in on November 2nd.\textsuperscript{115} Lincoln left the Valley of Antietam for South Mountain where he made visits to three churches, the Duckard Church, The Reformed Church, and then St. Paul’s Lutheran. While at the Duckard Church, Lincoln promised to get help for the church and visited the Union soldiers in the balcony of the church. He also prayed at the church alter while her was there.\textsuperscript{125}

At South Mountain Lincoln parted ways with General McClellan, and then he went onto Frederick with Major-General McClernand, Col. L.S. Marther, chief of artillery of McClellan’s staff, Captain W. Rivers, Captain Derrickson, John Garret, Lamon, Hatch, and Superintendent Kennedy according to the Baltimore Sun.\textsuperscript{91} The party took two ambulances and arrived at Patrick Street at about 5:00pm where, despite some rain, crowds lined up to cheer for the President.\textsuperscript{126} Their procession was led by Col. Allen who was the Military Governor of the town, and the Presidential party was followed by part of the First Main Calvary. The procession ended at the home of Mrs. Nellie Ramsey on Record street so that President Lincoln could meet General George L. Hartsuff. Hartsuff was the main reason for Lincoln’s visit to Frederick because he was a West Point Graduate who, even after he was wounded in the Battle of Splash Mountain, commanded the XXIII Corps and took part in the siege of Petersburg. The only

\textsuperscript{123} Schildt, John W.. \textit{Four days in October}. (Chewsville Md.: J.W. Schildt, 1978), 49.
\textsuperscript{124} Schildt, John W.. \textit{Four days in October}. (Chewsville Md.: J.W. Schildt, 1978), 50.
\textsuperscript{125} Schildt, John W.. \textit{Four days in October}. (Chewsville Md.: J.W. Schildt, 1978), 52.
\textsuperscript{126} Schildt, John W.. \textit{Four days in October}. (Chewsville Md.: J.W. Schildt, 1978), 54.
account of the visit was from a woman writing in 1934 who was a seven year old slave at the
time, named Alice Fraiser. She wrote that the slaves in the house fed him and that she spoke with
him directly. He called her over to him and asked her age and gave her five cents. Caroline
Charlton, the house cook, sent her to buy Rapees Snuff at the local Bopst’s Store. She
remembered seeing Lincoln shake hands with all of the people in the room. 127

Lincoln stepped outside the house and gave a speech to the townsmen, including many
blacks who were cheering for him very loudly according to Edwin Marvin of the Fifth
Connecticut128, and said

In my present position it is hardly proper for me to make speeches. Every word
is so closely noted that it will not do to make a foolish one, and I cannot be
expected to be prepared to make a sensible one. If I were as I have been most of
my life, I might perhaps talk nonsense to you for half an hour, and it wouldn’t
hurt anyone. As it is, I can only return thanks for the compliments paid to our
cause. Please accept my sincere thanks for the compliment to our common
country.129

Edwin Marvin said that “despite the burden of his office, his appearance brought faith and hope
to others”. 118 Lincoln was in Frederick for approximately thirty minutes but made a
compassionate impression on the town.

Lincoln and his party left after the speech and got into an ambulance to the railroad
station. Charles F. Johnson, a member of Hawkins Zouaves of the Ninth New York Infantry,
stated that Lincoln was in a one horse buggy. He described the president as very worn with the
heavy burden he carries.96 Crowds grew larger as they got closer to the station and upon arrival
Lincoln gave the last speech of his visit. Lincoln stated, “I am surrounded by soldiers, and a little

farther off by the citizens of this good city of Frederick. Nevertheless I can only say, as I did five minutes ago, it is not proper for me to make speeches in my present position. I return thanks to our good soldiers for the services they have rendered, the energy they have shown, the hardships they have endured, and the blood they have shed for this Union of ours; and I also return thanks, not only for the soldiers, but to the good citizens of Frederick, and to the good men, women, and children in this land of ours, for their devotion to this glorious cause, and I say this with no malice in my heart to those who have done otherwise. May our children and children’s children for a thousand generations enjoy these benefits conferred up use by a united country, and have cause yet to rejoice under these glorious institutions, bequeathed to us by Washington and his compeers. Now, my friends, soldiers, and citizens, I can only say once more, farewell.”

After the speech, the crowds cheered for Lincoln as he boarded the train and waved his hat in appreciation until the train was no longer visible. Orson Curtis, a member of the Twenty-fourth Michigan, refereed to Lincoln saying “He stood at the rear of the train, bowing to us as it slowly moved by. His head was uncovered and he looked careworn from weighty matters upon his mind. We gave him some Michigan cheers as the train moved slowly by.” Then Lincoln returned home to Washington DC at about 10:00pm that night.

On the night after Lincoln left Antietam, McClellan wrote a letter to his wife, Mary Ellen McClellan and talked about his visit with the president. His letter seems to contradict his

130 Schildt, John W.. *Four days in October.* (Chewsville Md.: J.W. Schildt, 1978), 55.
131 Schildt, John W.. *Four days in October.* (Chewsville Md.: J.W. Schildt, 1978), 56.
132 Schildt, John W.. *Four days in October.* (Chewsville Md.: J.W. Schildt, 1978), 58.
133 Schildt, John W.. *Four days in October.* (Chewsville Md.: J.W. Schildt, 1978), 57.
previous feelings of personal victimization. He explained “He was very affable & I really think he does feel very kindly towards me personally.” McClellan wanted to justify his lack of aggression and believed that he succeeded. McClellan wrote that he and Lincoln were in agreement that the Union needed a quick victory. McClellan said that he would do his best that night and the next day to develop a campaign that will enable him to have a complete victory. However, the Battle of Antietam was the last battle of McClellan’s term as Commander of the Army of the Potomac.

While McClellan did not take immediate military action, three days after the meeting on October 7th, 1862 he responded to political pressure and addressed the Emancipation Proclamation. It is reasonable to assume that over the course of the visit Lincoln talked to McClellan about the importance of supporting the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln was already faced with the challenge of finding politicians who would support his proclamation. He certainly would not have wanted to leave doubt in the minds of his own party members or the Democrats that the military would follow the instruction of its Commander and Chief. The Emancipation Proclamation opened a new chapter for the country and Lincoln needed the North to be united and one step was securing the allegiance of his military. While one could only speculate as to what Lincoln actually said, it can be assumed that it was convincing enough to prompt McClellan to issue General Order 163, where he stated that the military existed to support the political endeavors of the government. McClellan explains, “The Constitution

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confides to the Civil Authorities legislative judicial and executive, the power and duty of making expounding & executing the federal laws. Armed forces are raised & supported simply to sustain the Civil Authorities.” 137 Understanding McClellan’s relationship with Lincoln makes this statement seem sarcastic. Whether he fully believed his statement or not, he did not demonstrate the kind of obedience to political power that he writes about, if he did he would have forced his Army to be more aggressive in accordance with Lincoln’s requests. McClellan’s order did little more than to say that they would continue to serve the Union because it was their duty. The Emancipation Proclamation was not mentioned, it was hardly a message of support for the ideals of the President, instead a vow to continue to serve. Lincoln was likely unhappy with McClellan’s order since it did not give a strong message of unity, but he never addressed it in writing to the General.138

The South and even soldiers in the Army of the Potomac saw General Order 163 as an empty statement. Southern Newspapers exaggerated McClellan’s lack of support and bragged about the disunity in the Union Army on the issue of slavery, going so far as to some implying that the Union Army was going to turn on each other. The Charleston Mercury wrote “McClellan’s army was thrown into a terrible ferment, which threatened to break into an open and general riot. The Republicans and Democrats were instantly arrayed in deadly hostility, the latter declaring that if the proclamation was not withdrawn they would throw down their arms, or if forced to use them, would turn on the Abolitionists.” 139 Adam Gurowski, a soldier of the Army


139 Charleston Mercury, “Trouble in the Yankee Camp”, October 14, 1862.
of the Potomac, responded to the order observing that “If this order is the result of Mr. Lincoln’s visit to the camp, and of the transaction with Mac-Napoleon, then the President has not thereby increased the dignity of his presidential character.”

Gurowski notes that Lincoln failed in his effort to convince McClellan to support the Emancipation Proclamation and that the Order does little to show the Army’s allegiance.

Despite McClellan’s failure to convince the public of the Army’s faith in the Emancipation Proclamation, on October 13th, Lincoln wrote a letter to McClellan about military strategy. He wrote “You remember my speaking to you of what I called your over-cautiousness. Are you not over-cautious when you assume that you can not do what the enemy is constantly doing? Should you not claim to be at least his equal in prowess, and act upon the claim?”

Lincoln referred to McClellan’s contradictory attitude that even though he spoke about his Army’s ability he refused to act on that premise. As stated previously, McClellan ended the battle of Antietam with more troops than Lee and yet let the enemy retreat. Lincoln was not even asking McClellan to work with the reality in front of him, and gave McClellan leeway agreeing that even if the armies’ were of equal ability, why he could not show the same aggression that other Union regiments and the Confederates displayed.

The letter showed Lincoln’s military prowess that he developed since taking the presidency. He gave McClellan specific instruction and ideas for how to continue the war saying

If he should prevent our seizing his communications, and move towards Richmond, I would press closely to him, fight him if a

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favorable opportunity should present, and, at least, try to beat him to Richmond on the inside track. I say ``try''; if we never try, we shall never succeed. If he make a stand at Winchester, moving neither North or South, I would fight him there, on the idea that if we can not beat him when he bears the wastage of coming to us, we never can when we bear the wastage of going to him. This proposition is a simple truth, and is too important to be lost sight of for a moment.  

Lincoln’s main goal was always to preserve the war by winning the war and Lincoln’s advice reflects these priorities. McClellan didn’t look past the immediate situation but Lincoln was trying to convince him of a long-term strategy. The letter continues on with more specific instructions on how to advance against the enemy and the reasoning behind each decision. Towards the end he once again tried to convince McClellan of the capability of the army by writing how they are up to the challenge that is in front of them and said that it would be unmanly to say that they cannot. Today the phrase “unmanly” is used as an insult but it seems that Lincoln means that it is a mischaracterization of the Army of the Potomac to under estimate their ability. At the end of the letter he noted that “This letter is in no sense an order. Yours truly A. LINCOLN”.  

It would have been reasonable to expect that after over a year and a half, Lincoln would be angry and very demanding but he continues to be respectful even though he has been ignored in the past by his general.

McClellan and Lincoln continued to write back and forth delaying action and growing more frustrated with each other. On October 17th, McClellan responded giving excuses to Lincoln even though he claimed to have taken his advice seriously. He wrote “I promise you that I will give to your views the fullest & most unprejudiced consideration, & that is my intention to


advance the moment my men are shod & my cavalry are sufficiently remounted to be serviceable.” Since McClellan seems compelled to explain that he will consider the President’s advice, this proves that many times in the past, it has at least seemed like he ignored Lincoln. He also goes on to say that he would not commit to a different course before explaining himself to Lincoln. Lincoln’s letter showed a lot of thought and gave a great amount of detail but McClellan had no positive feedback to offer and did not even pursue the conversation instead just giving the excuse of weakened troops. Lincoln responded, on October 24th, saying “I have just read your despatch about sore tongued and fatiegued horses. Will you pardon me for asking what the horses of your army have done since the battle of Antietam that fatigue anything?” McClellan responded by defending his troops and detailing some of their activities but the justification does still not seem warranted. In Lincoln’s next letter, he disproved McClellan’s reasoning but still encouraged him because Lincoln heard that he was about to cross the Potomac River. McClellan wrote again to the President on October 27th and requested new soldiers to fill the older ones with new men. Lincoln responded showing his alarm and frustration explaining that the army had been inactive for five weeks and he had received more horses and had a total of almost eight thousand. The basic question that Lincoln posed to McClellan was that if the current situation was unsuitable, when will it ever be enough to be aggressive? The content in the letters are repetitive and full of frustration that both men must have been experiencing.

Two more letters to McClellan asked for clarification about McClellan’s intentions for the advance and to get progress on the situation. Lincoln was trying to determine whether McClellan

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would move without the new regiments that he was requesting while still encouraging his process. At the end of October after creating new regiments with the troops requested rather than reinforcing the old regiments McClellan wrote in a great deal of anger saying “No greater mistake has been made than the total failure to reinforce the old regiments.” McClellan’s response shows a great deal of unprofessionalism and disrespect for Lincoln. McClellan continued to write to Lincoln giving updates on the armies status, as would be expected, but there does not seem to be proof that Lincoln responded, at least by form of a letter.

On November 7th, McClellan wrote to his wife who he frequently corresponded with explaining that he had been fired. He wrote

Another interruption- this time more important. It was in the shape of dear good old Burnside accompanied by Genl Buckingham, the Secy’s Adjt Genl-they brought with them the order relieving me from the command of the Army of the Potomac, & assigning Burnside to the command. No cause is given. I am ordered to turn over the command immediately & repair to Trenton N.J. & on my arrival there to report by telegraph for future orders! ... Of course I was much surprised - but as I read the order in the presence of Genl Buckingham, I am sure that not a muscle quivered nor was the slightest expression of feeling visible on my face, which he watched closely. ... Do not be at all worried - I am not. I have done the best I could for my country - to the last I have done my duty as I understand it. That I must have made mistakes I can not deny - I do not see any great blunders- but no one can judge himself. Our consolation must be that we have tried to do what was right - if we have failed it was not our fault.


McClellan’s letter to his wife reveals a great deal about his personality and his outlook on the war. It is evident that McClellan focused on his own personal effort in the war and dismissed himself of all blame because he gave effort. This belief is in sharp contrast to Lincoln’s mentality of preservation of the Union at all costs. Lincoln measured himself and the success of the war by whether or not they defeated the army and were one step closer to resolving the conflict. If the Union was not preserved at the end of his term, it seems reasonable to believe that Lincoln would have seen himself and the war as a failure. However, McClellan did not share this feeling which helps to explain why this partnership failed. Lincoln gave McClellan a great deal of his time and effort and worked to make the Union succeed with McClellan in command. However by November 1862, Lincoln’s patience had run out and General Ambrose Burnside was given command of the Army of the Potomac.
Chapter 4: Through the Eyes of Alexander Gardner

The Battle of Antietam and the meeting between Lincoln and McClellan were photographed by Alexander Gardner. Gardner served as an employee of a famous photographer, Mathew Brady. Brady had twenty photographers throughout the country to record the events of battle. Gardner was on staff with McClellan as an honorary Captain and therefore was on sight at the Battle of Antietam to photograph the aftermath of the battle. Gardner was in a great position to take photographs after the Battle of Antietam, these were the first photographs that depicted dead bodies on the battlefield. The pictures were taken to New York and displayed in Mathew Brady’s New York Gallery, Brady put a sign on the door and labeled the exhibition “The Dead of Antietam”. The New York Times said Brady was able to “bring home to us the terrible reality and earnestness of war. If he has not brought bodies and laid them in our door-yards and along streets, he has done something very like it…” These photographs greatly impacted people and were given the most media attention than any other series of photographs throughout the war (F 17). The Battle of Antietam remains the bloodiest day in American history and having these photos to serve as documentation makes them an important piece of our history and of the story surrounding the battle and the meeting.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, a writer for the Atlantic Monthly, was one of the many who came to New York to see these insightful photos. Since photography was a new form of art and


media, people were skeptical about the legitimacy of the work, therefore, Holmes wrote that he had been at the battle as well and remarked about how he had seen the things portrayed in the pictures. He reacted to the ghastly sight saying “These wrecks of manhood, thrown together in careless heaps or ranged in ghastly rows for burial, were alive but yesterday.”

Holmes referring to them as wrecks on manhood seem appropriate, since not only were all of the soldiers men, but a large motivation for going to war was a quest for glory. The scene was so tragic and those who witnessed it were completely shocked because they had never seen the costs of war in such a graphic way. Holmes remarked as well that most people could not make it through the entire exhibit. It is evident that these photographs questioned the people’s commitment to the war and moreover the idea of war. Holmes wrote “this dashing together of two frantic mobs to which we give the name .of armies. The end to be attained justifies the means, we are willing to believe”. This war seemed to question what people had believed in a fundamental way. These two mobs that he described represented the Union and Confederacy but they also were at one time countrymen who waged war on each other, making the cause seem more questionable.

The New York Times described the horror of the pictures and the scene at Antietam. The article is entitled “BRADY’S PHOTOGRAPHS.” Pictures of the Dead at Antietam.”

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152 Holmes, Oliver Wendell. "The Atlantic Monthly Volume 0012 Issue 69 (July 1863)." Making of America. http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=atla;cc=atla;rgn=full%20text;idno=atla0012-1;didno=atla0012-1;view=image;seq=0007;node=atla0012-1%3A2.

153 Holmes, Oliver Wendell. "The Atlantic Monthly Volume 0012 Issue 69 (July 1863)." Making of America. http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=atla;cc=atla;rgn=full%20text;idno=atla0012-1;didno=atla0012-1;view=image;seq=0007;node=atla0012-1%3A2.

The New York Times does not give Gardner the credit because at the time they did not know that Gardner was the photographer, they attributed them to his boss Mathew Brady. This insightful article explains how surreal and haunting these images were and how they impacted the city. The author starts by comparing the photos to what would happen if dead bodies were laid down in the streets of New York. The writer says that people may not care about the strangers that died in Maryland but if they were in the streets “conversation would be less lively, and the general air of pedestrians more subdued.”

It is surprising that people would not be more distraught. However, the comparison is made with the current system. The writer states that with the way war is fought, the dead are listed in the newspaper, and this has virtually no effect on the people. The people understand that a war costs lives but that reality is easily ignorable since the battlefield is miles and even states away. Referring to the newspaper lists of dead men the writer said “There is nothing very terrible to us, however, in in the list, though our sensations might be different if the newspaper carrier left the names on the battle-field and the bodies at our doors instead.”

The New York Times said that these photographs had the effect of putting those bodies on the people’s doorstep.

The New York Times continued on to describe about people’s reactions and the meaning behind the photos. Large crowds of people came to see them and could not stop looking at them in a strange fascination. It states, “You will see hushed, reverend groups standing around these weird copies of carnage, bending down to look in the pale faces of the dead, chained by the


strange spell that dwells in dead men's eyes." These photos were an experience for the individual as well as they community as they saw something they never had before. It is unbelievable that in the same moment of time this tragedy occurred as those people were living their lives. The article mentioned that the same sun shined while the men died and as they looked at the photos. It additionally said that the photos consisted of both Union and Confederate soldiers and after looking at the photos the men seem more similar than different. They laid side by side and had both agreed to give their lives for their country. The worst nightmare would be standing in the New York gallery and realizing a man in the picture was your husband, son, father, uncle or friend. Surely this was a reality for some and as the New York Times mentioned, no one would want to watch someone experience that harsh reality. These are the people that are left out the the tragedy of these pictures. The New York Times added “one phase that has escaped photographic skill it is the background of widows and orphans”. These people suffered the greatest but for the first time the rest of the country could see and feel a part of their tragedy and the costs of war.

Alexander Gardner further contributed to the history of the Civil War by capturing the only pictures that show Lincoln on the battlefield with his generals. Gardner shot what is referred to as the Lincoln Series which consist of four photos that were taken during the visit after the Battle of Antietam. The first two large group photographs were taken on October 3rd, 1862, one


of which was at McClellan’s Headquarters just prior to a review.\textsuperscript{160} This picture features twelve men, including those that traveled with him to Sharpsburg. From the left side of the picture, a soldier named Buck Juit is shown and he is looking off to the left, away from Lincoln. Ward Lamon is next to him and he is wearing a suit with a large top hat and what appears to be a cane, he is the only one in the picture who is seated. Next is Ozias Hatch who is wearing a light colored top hat and a suit. To the left of him is General Randolph B. Marcy who was McClellan’s chief of staff and his father-in-law. He has his arms crossed and is appearing to look frustrated or impatient. Captain Wright Rives, one of McClellan’s aids, is next to him. General McClemand is to Lincoln’s left and appears to be looking straight at him but Lincoln is not looking in his direction. Lincoln stands towards the middle of the picture in his suit and top hat and is looking towards the right off in the distance. Directly to his right stands Lieutenant Colonel Andrew P. Porter who was the commissary of subsistence. McClellan is on his right and in this picture his Porter’s right and Lincoln towers over both of them. Joseph Kennedy, in a light colored jacket, is next to McClellan and John Garrett is on Kennedy’s right in a light colored hat with a black band. Colonel Thomas S. Mather is on the far right and seems to be removed from the rest of the group a little off to the right. After the picture was taken, Lincoln and McClellan left for General John- Fitz Porter’s head quarters.\textsuperscript{161}

\textsuperscript{160} Frassanito, William A.. \textit{Antietam: the photographic legacy of America's bloodiest day}. (New York: Scribner, 1978), 276.

\textsuperscript{161} Frassanito, William A.. \textit{Antietam: the photographic legacy of America's bloodiest day}. (New York: Scribner, 1978), 276.
The second photograph taken that day was a much larger group picture entitled “Group - President Lincoln...at Headquarters of Fitz-John Porter, Antietam, October 3, 1862.” This picture became the most famous of the picture from the war and it was shot at Porter’s headquarters and in the background lies what almost surely is the Grove home. The Grove Farm served as part of the Fifth Corps headquarters after the battle of Antietam and doubled as a Confederate

The large group stands in front what appears to be three tents, two of which are easily defined but the third which is on the far left could be debated. Unfortunately, since there are more people in this picture and their appears to be more shadows, it is more difficult to distinguish a distinctive physical description for some of the men. On the far left stands Colonel Delos B. Sacket, McClellan’s inspector general, who during the battle on Antietam delivered McClellan’s final order to Burnside for him to capture the bridge that would soon be named after him (276). Captain George Monteith, a Fifth Corps staff officer, and Lieutenant Colonel Nelson B. Sweitzer, one of McClellan’s aids, stood to the right. Next is General George W. Morell, a commander of one division from the Fifth Corps, who has a long beard and a light colored belt. Colonel Alexander S. Webb, Fifth Corps Chief of Staff, is next and he is not wearing a hat and looking straight at the camera. McClellan is on his right and is stepped further up and is facing Lincoln and looking at him. A man named Adams, who was an army scout, is in the background wearing a light colored wide brimmed hat. On the right stand Dr. Jonathan Letterman, the medical director of the Army of the Potomac and an unknown man. Letterman is right between McClellan and Lincoln and Adams and the unknown man stand over his shoulders. Lincoln, once again, stands towards the middle of the group and is clearly the focus as he seems to be about a foot taller than the rest of his colleagues. On Lincoln’s right stand General Henry J. Hunt, McClellan’s chief of artillery and General Fitz-John Porter. Three men stand together almost inside the most prominent tent and are mostly shadow covered. One of these men is still unknown but the two others are Colonel Frederick T. Locke, assistant adjutant general of the Fifth Corps and General Andrew A. Humphreys a division commander in the Fifth Corps. Finally the last man is once again off to the right, seemingly separated from the group. He is Captain

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George A. Cluster, at the time an aid to McClellan, who fourteen years later died in the Battle of the Little Big Horn. He is standing looking straight at the camera wearing a black hat tilted to the side with a sword that stretches to the ground. Knowing his future significance gives the impression that he is making his debut on the stage of national importance in this picture. According to the Gardner catalog of 1863, an eight by 10 inch plate was used for this picture, which shows how large it is in comparison to today’s photographs, and another version available as an album card.  

These two group photos hold some of the most important leaders in the Union Army. The photos have helped shape the scenery of the Civil War for generations. Because of these photos, when someone thinks of Civil War camps the vision of white tent in fields come to mind. These photos also show Lincoln in his comfortable element. He connected with the soldiers and he must have been proud to be in their accompany again during the visit. However, in the photos, there is a distinction between him and the military men. He stands tall in a suit with many men in uniforms around him. Those around him are responsible for the military, whereas Lincoln, a politician, is responsible for the welfare of them all. In the photos, Lincoln seems a part of the group while also being separate from it.

Two additional photographs were taken but these focus on Lincoln and just one or two other individuals and they were both taken on October 4th, 1862. The first picture was taken in the morning with Lincoln standing in the middle and Allan Pinkerton on the left and General McClemand on the right. In the background is a tent and another behind it. There is a small

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either table or seat on right in front of the tent, trash or seemingly pieces of cloth or paper on the ground and a large cloth hangs in a tree on the left. Lincoln is looking off to the right and both men are looking at him. It is difficult to determine Lincoln’s emotions from his facial expression, but he seems relatively calm with both arms at his side. Pinkerton served as McClellan’s source of military intelligence and presumably felt similar frustration toward Lincoln as McClellan did because they were both adamant about the strength of the South. Pinkerton is wearing what looks to be a checkered shirt with a round top had and his right hand is inside his jacket. He is looking at Lincoln sternly and seems angry in the picture. General McClelmand is standing straight up with his right hand in his jacket looking admirably at the President.166

The last picture in the series is a photo with Lincoln and McClellan who are both seated inside a tent. On the ground at the lower left is one of the thirty-nine Confederate battle flags that were captured during the campaign.\textsuperscript{168} Both of the men are without their hats, Lincoln’s rests on a flag covered table that is behind him. We are looking at the profile of both men with McClellan sitting behind a table with what appears to be military related papers. The men are looking at each other and their emotions are unclear but Lincoln appears emotionally drained. This emotion


\textsuperscript{168} Frassanito, William A.. \textit{Antietam: the photographic legacy of America's bloodiest day}. (New York: Scribner, 1978), 279.
would be particularly appropriate after a four day trip but also particularly in the company of his most frustrating general. The beam of the tent divides the photo and serves as a visual representation of the division between these two men. At the time of these photos Lincoln could have been talking to McClellan about the Army of the Potomac’s lack of aggression or possibly the Emancipation Proclamation. At this point Lincoln was still working hard to make the partnership work. However his frustration is about to outweigh his ability to be patient and McClellan will soon be replaced. This photo captures a lot of the tension these two men must have been feeling, and for as far apart as they are from each other in the picture, their mentalities toward the war are even further apart from common ground.

**Chapter 5: The Unbelievable Scandal**

During the 1864 Presidential Election, McClellan the Democratic candidate twisted the visit that Lincoln took to the Antietam battlefield to try to convince the public of his allegiance to slaves over his own soldiers. While the accusations were completely false, they still caught attention in the Democratic media and reappeared throughout the campaign. McClellan’s had befriended the editors of the two most powerful Democratic newspapers of the time and used these connections to ensure support from the papers.\(^{169}\) Manton Marble was the editor for the *New York World*, a newspaper no longer in publication. Marble was an incredibly skilled man who took over the newspaper only two years prior to the election and transformed it from a

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religious publication to national importance. Its Democratic political affiliation was easy to
detect as it viciously attacked the Republican Party. The New York World wrote that during
Lincoln’s visit to the Antietam battlefield, while at the gravesites of soldiers, he had Ward Hill
Lamon sing the negro song, Picayune Butler. The newspaper took the kernel of truth that Lamon
sung for Lincoln and others in an ambulance ride during the visit, to create a story that
unfortunately people believed and continued to reference during the campaign.

Ward Hill Lamon received many letters talking about the incident but, one was given to
him by A.J. Perkins which directly quotes the New York World’s original account of the entire
incident. The article is entitled “One of Mr. Lincoln’s Jokes” and it says,

While the President was driving over the field in an ambulance, accompanied by Marshal Lamon, General McClellan, and another
officer, heavy details of men were engaged in the task of burying
the dead. The ambulance had just reached the neighborhood of the
old stone bridge, where the dead were piled highest, when Mr.
Lincoln suddenly slapping Marshal Lamon on the knee, exclaimed:
“Come, Lamon, give us that song of Picayune Butler; McClellan
has never heard it.” “Not now if you please,” said General
McClellan with a shudder; I would prefer to hear it some other
place and time 171

The New York World’s description of this event is so well crafted to shine McClellan in the best
possible light, that it seems like a campaign manager would have thought of it. First, there were
no soldiers lying wounded or dying on the battlefield during Lincoln’s visit. The visit happened
sixteen days later than the battle and even though it would have still been a disturbing sight, there
could never have been people clinging to life from the battle laying on the ground. Secondly,


even though they concede that McClellan was present, they make sure to include that he had
never heard the song and tried to stop Lincoln from this act. By saying he has never heard of the
song, the writer ties Lincoln to the culture of the slaves and separates McClellan from it. The
writer adds that McClellan shuddered at the thought of Lincoln being disrespectful. The reader
must presume that Lincoln did not listen to McClellan and Lamon sang anyway. A.J. Perkins
continues on in the letter to tell Lamon that the **New York World** had been publishing this article
every day for the past three months. He wrote the letter on September 10th and therefore the
**New York World** started publishing this article or similar versions since July.

The **New York World** wrote articles describing the incident that were then republished in
other newspapers. The **Star of the North**, a paper published in Pennsylvania published the
following excerpt from the **New York World** on July 27th, 1864

> We appeal to the staff officers who galloped behind the President when he visited the Battle-field of Antietam, and who increased their distance from him rather than listen longer to the lew nigger song o “Picayune Butler” which Mr. Lincoln called on Marshal Lamon to sing as he rode among the fresh graves and trenches where were buried the ten thousand dead soldiers of the Republic! When the testimony of all these gentle men is in we ill hear the Tribune defend the Republican party for electing a buffoon to the Presidency, and may have something further to say concerning American institutions which have permitted the Republican party to elect a buffoon and ruin a nation - N. Y. World

This scandal further fed into the fear that Lincoln was attempting to create a world of political
and social equality among African Americans and whites. The Emancipation Proclamation
scared people from both the North and the South and throughout the election Lincoln was

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targeted as the candidate for the blacks. Holmes County Farmer, which is based out of Ohio, ran an excerpt about this accusation in October only a month before the election.

Dead upon dead were huddled thick, The very air with dead was sick; Tho wounded waited, with ebbing life, Their turn for the surgeon's tired knife. But carelessly rode Old Abe along, And called In that scene for a negro song. Youth and Manhood lay weltering there, With the sweat of agony matting the hair; And the bravest In battle heard with awe The crushing sound of the busy saw, But carelessly rode Old Abe along, And Called in such a scene for a negro song. Mothers, daughters, sisters, wives. Knit by love to those precious lives; How must your hearts for news athirst, Have throbbed and sunk and bled, or burst. While carelessly rode Old Abe along. And called 'mid the-graves for a negro song.173

In this eighteen line poem the writer makes the scene sound as unbelievably horrific as possible and directly contradicts what is known about Lincoln’s personality. As described in a previous chapter, Lincoln had a deep bond with the men from the Army of the Potomac, spending a great deal of time with them before they left Washington D.C. for war. With our contemporary knowledge it is completely impossible to image Lincoln showing callous or disinterest in the death of his men. Secondly, Lincoln made the trip to Maryland to force McClellan into action but also to congratulate the Army on their victory, he was very concerned about their well being and their state. Overall the message of the poem is that Lincoln did not show concern for his soldiers and instead demonstrated his allegiance to the slaves in the South. Lincoln had just signed the Emancipation Proclamation and undoubtedly was thinking about the condition of the slaves in the South. However, Lincoln’s primary objective for the war remained to preserve the Union and

while on the battlefield and during his visit he showed his concern for his men and the state of his army.

More newspapers referenced this scandal in order to convince their readers of Lincoln’s cold heart. The *Daily Ohio Statesman*, in an article entitled “A Fact for the Historian” compared the role that McClellan played during the Battle of Antietam and Lincoln’s actions saying “After General McClellan had saved Washington from capture, by the bloody battle of Antietam... Lincoln appeared on the field and while it was covered with tens of thousands of corpses, he called upon Mammon to sing a comic negro song.”\(^{174}\) The newspaper completely disregarded the mistakes that McClellan made during the battle, favoring the falsified scandal. In early October, the newspaper ran an article from the *Marinetta Times*, which was one of the worst descriptions of this incident. It wrote that Lincoln laughed among the graves at the song and compared Lincoln to Nero, who danced while Rome was burning. The article called him, revolting, wicked, and cold-hearted, along with other terms.\(^{175}\) It is alarming to read such a negative article about one of America’s most beloved presidents.

When the *Daily Ohio Statesman* reported on a meeting for McClellan where the scandal was referenced and in regards to a celebration with Negroes. On September 20th, they reported about a McClellan Ratification Meeting that was taking place in Cincinnati where there was a procession for McClellan with people holding up banners with mottoes and pictures on them.\(^{176}\) One of the banners had Lincoln singing Picayune Butler with many wounded and dead soldiers.


in front of him, and a division in the background. The writer explains that Negroes were allowed to have a picnic on the White House grounds on a day of fasting. It is brought up that Sabbath School children were turned down for this opportunity in the past. The writer is clearly frustrated that Lincoln was accommodating blacks and was trying to make it look like they were the President’s top concern. The article was extremely offensive, accusing them of prostituting and disgracing the ground by selling fruits and cakes to their customers. They believe that the event took away the national character of the ground. By today’s standard the language that was used is an absurd analogy. The writer said that Lincoln was embraced by the african community saying “Negro flattery tickled the ears of the imperial jester with perhaps a more grateful music than even the uncouth melody of “Picyaune Butler” when bawled for his especial gratification over the corpse bestrewn field of Antietam”. The writer believes that having these African Americans come to the grounds made him just as happy as when he sang their song on the battlefield.

The Antietam battlefield scandal stands out as an incredibly cruel accusation, however it is important to note that comments about Abraham Lincoln were harsher than what we expect during an election today. The Holmes County Farmer gave a description of what one can expect from Abraham Lincoln writing “If you want more taxation - more conscriptions - more desolate families - more prostitution- more depraved morals - more crushed hopes - more ruined prospects - more heartless tyranny, vote for Abe, the author of them all.”


Abraham Lincoln invented the concept of crushed hopes is only one step away from a comical statement. However, Democratic papers used this type of exaggeration frequently. The article also said “if you would have the people rejoice as did the children of Israel over their deliverance, vote for George B McClellan - is is he, and he alone who can conduct us through this sea of blood to the promised land.”\textsuperscript{180} Candidates being portrayed as a savior is not alarming, but this Christian description takes this idea much further and it is clear that the paper does not attempt to portray either candidate in a realistic light.

In addition to newspaper articles, a political cartoon depicted this scandal during the reelection campaign. The cartoon is entitled “The Commander-in-Chief conciliating the soldier's votes on the battle field.”


\textsuperscript{181} "The Commander-in-Chief conciliating the soldier's votes on the battle field." The Commander-in-Chief conciliating the soldier's votes on the battle field. http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3b36102/.
votes on the battle field.” Lincoln and Lamon are pictured on a field of hills and trees with scattered men, that are either dead or wounded, lying on the ground. Four soldiers are visible helping their fellow soldiers, and two are dragging dead bodies. Lamon is in front and to the right of Lincoln with his hand over his nose, presumably to guard himself from the smell of the corpses. Lincoln however, has a straight face and is holding his hat, and is depicted as unbothered by what Lamon is smelling. Three soldiers on the ground are looking up at Lincoln with great disappointment, as Lincoln faces Lamon and says “Now Marshal, sing us “Picayune Butler” or something else that’s funny.” It is very clear that Lincoln is meant to be unbothered by the death around him and that instead we wants to sing with his friend, in an act that is very disrespectful to those around him.183

In Lamon’s Recollections of Lincoln, he describes the scandal and Lincoln’s response. Lamon states that this scandal was completely false but that it even continued past the reelection and did not stop until the president was killed.184 Lincoln refused to engage in the press’ harsh remarks with the justification that since his visit was well-intended, that it did not need any further vindication.185 When Lamon wanted Lincoln to respond to the accusations, Lincoln replied saying “No, Hill; there has already been too much about this falsehood. Let the thing

182 ”The Commander-in-Chief conciliating the soldier's votes on the battle field.” The Commander-in-Chief conciliating the soldier's votes on the battle field. http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3b36102/.

183 ”The Commander-in-Chief conciliating the soldier's votes on the battle field.” The Commander-in-Chief conciliating the soldier's votes on the battle field. http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3b36102/.


alone. If I have not established character enough to give the lie to this charge, I can only say that I am mistaken in my own estimate of myself.”

It seems that Lincoln understood that since the claim was so uncharacteristic of his temperament and feelings toward the army, that he would be giving it more credibility than it deserved if he responded to it.

Ward Hill Lamon did not have the same cool temperament that Lincoln possessed about the scandal and wanted to reply to this particular letter from A. J. Perkins. He drafted his reply and along with the original letter sent it to Lincoln for approval. Lamon’s letter showed his frustration with the newspaper and was blatant in its language. Lincoln responded saying “No, Lamon... I would not publish this reply; it is too belligerent in tone for so grave a matter... I would give the statement as you have here without the pepper and salt”.

Lincoln then wrote a reply for Lamon where he detailed the events of the day, the incident was said to have occurred, October 3rd, 1862. Lincoln wrote that in an ambulance ride to General Fitz-John Porter’s headquarters, Lamon did sing a long but clarified that it was not near the battlefield. He added that at the time no one objected to the singing, including McClellan. According to Lamon, Lincoln wrote this statement on September 12th, 1864 and he did so very carefully and without haste, despite never being sent to its intended recipient or being made public.

Even though the claims against Lincoln were outrageous, he responded with a level mind and still showed respect

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to those that questioned him. He understood that the gravity of the claim deserved a mournful rather than belligerent response.

Despite the bad press and this particular scandal, Lincoln won the reelection in a seemingly landslide election. Lincoln won by 411,428 votes and had 212 electoral votes next to McClellan’s 21. Even though McClellan only won three states, the election would have ended in his favor if 80,000 votes in key areas went his way.\textsuperscript{189} This is an important note to consider because Lincoln did not easily win this election. Lincoln’s supporters looked at the win as a blow to the confederacy just as any other battle. The \textit{Burlington Free Press}, a newspaper from Vermont, wrote “No more forcible blow has been struck by our brave armies in the field, since the rebellion broke out than was struck at the polls Tuesday.”\textsuperscript{190} While McClellan had been portrayed by Republicans as sympathetic to the Confederacy and opposed to the Emancipation Proclamation, both Democratic and Republican newspapers knew that Lincoln’s reelection meant the continuation of the Civil War. The Republicans portrayed the victory as a step toward freedom and the Democrats as a continuation of the destruction. The \textit{Democrat and Sentinel} wrote in an article titled “The Result - Our Duty” said “We must bow in submission to the popular will, and acquiesce in the result, however unfortunate it may be for our country. Any other course would put the Democracy in the wrong; and inflict greater evils upon the country than ever the rule of Lincoln, fatal as is that rule.”\textsuperscript{191} Other Democratic papers wrote that when


destruction was upon the Republican party there would be another ready to take its place.\textsuperscript{192}

While there was still opposition to Lincoln he decisively won the election despite the Antietam scandal.

The election of 1864 was the first time that soldiers could vote from the field and in no other circumstance could it seem more appropriate than for these two rivals. Lincoln was deeply invested in the soldier’s opinion of his leadership and said to the reporter Henry Wing in August of 1864 “Henry, I would rather be defeated with the soldier vote behind me than to be elected without it.”\textsuperscript{193} Not only did Lincoln care about their opinions but the entire Republican Party believed that the soldiers would vote in their favor.\textsuperscript{194} The reporter Lincoln was speaking to shared the same thought and replied to him “You will have it, Mr. Lincoln. You will have it. They’ll vote as they shoot.”\textsuperscript{195} The Democrats opposed the idea of having soldiers vote because they claimed that it would damage the integrity of free elections, with the fear of corruption and intrusion by the military and the federal government.\textsuperscript{196} It is also likely that Democrats understood that the soldiers would vote for Lincoln for two reasons. First, his personal connection with the soldiers. One German soldier from the Army of the Potomac said “I goes for Fader Abraham. Fader Abraham, he likes the soldier-boy. Ven he serves tree years he gives him


four hundred tollar, and reenlists him von veteran. Now Fader Abraham, he serves four years. We reenlist him four years more, and make von veteran of him”.\textsuperscript{197} The soldiers analogy is sentimental and shows a genuine respect and admiration for what Lincoln has done for them throughout the war. Second, the fact that the Democratic party was running on platform that favored negotiation with the Confederates. The platform was rooted in finishing the war peacefully and they did not include in their campaign a strategy to win the war.\textsuperscript{198} The Republicans, on the other hand, were promoting the continuation and eventual victory in the war. Since the soldiers made up a significant portion of the population, both parties worked tirelessly to convince soldiers to vote for them and also to give them access to their votes. Both parties claimed fraud against the other and faced a great deal of challenges making this process happen for the first time in history.\textsuperscript{199}

At the end of the election Lincoln walked away with the vote he wanted most. The Union soldiers overwhelmingly voted for Lincoln, and rejected McClellan stronger than any other demographic.\textsuperscript{200} In Sherman’s Army only two out of every ten soldiers and in Pennsylvania only six out of the possible fifty-one regiments voted for McClellan. Even in the Army of the Potomac, only three out of every ten soldiers voted for McClellan. The lack of support that the soldiers showed for McClellan and especially the Democratic party platform, was the victory that


Lincoln sought. Lincoln’s prediction that the people knew his character well enough that he didn’t need to respond to the scandal turned out to be correct.

Lincoln and McClellan’s differing personalities were can be seen throughout the reelection campaign. It is most likely that McClellan rode in the same ambulance as Lincoln on the way to General John Fitz-Porter’s headquarters on October 3rd, 1862. Therefore, he would have been well aware that the song Lamon sung was not at the battlefield and that as Lincoln wrote in the letter for Lamon, that Lincoln did not specifically ask for Picayune Butler. It is a reasonable assumption that the New York World received its information about the incident from McClellan, since he and its editor Manton Marble were friends. Whether McClellan invented the idea or it was his friend, McClellan continued to let the newspaper publish a story he knew was false. Even if McClellan was not in the ambulance with Lincoln, he spent a few months working with him in Washington D.C training the troops, as well as serving as his General-in-Chief until November 1862. McClellan knew how much respect Lincoln had for the troops and how interested he was in their well being, the idea he could laugh at a gravesite is completely uncharacteristic. Comparing Lincoln’s decision not to respond to such an accusation and McClellan’s acceptance of its use demonstrates Lincoln’s cool temperament as Commander-in-Chief, and McClellan’s disregard for Lincoln that he showed time and time again.
Conclusion

The bloodiest day in American history, a long sought after Union victory, and a struggling commander are three of the reasons Lincoln decided to visit his troops at Antietam in October, 1864. While multiple reasons brought Lincoln to Antietam, the meeting serves as a representation of much more. Through its examination one learns about Lincoln’s relationship with McClellan, the photographic history of the Battle of Antietam, and an 1864 Presidential election scandal that tried to disgrace Lincoln but ultimately failed. At the beginning of his command, Lincoln gave McClellan his full trust. He gave McClellan as many resources as he could, but as the war progressed it became evident that McClellan required more than what was possible to give. McClellan’s problem was that he did not have enough confidence in his army and always overestimated the ability of his opponent. On the other hand, Lincoln encouraged his Army to be aggressive with the hopes of ending the war. Lincoln led the Army by connecting with them. He spent time with them in the camp while they were training and visited them throughout the war. In addition to problems with the military, McClellan failed to show support for the Emancipation Proclamation. As a Democrat, he opposed Lincoln’s Republican policy which added further tension in their relationship. McClellan ultimately let down his Commander
in Chief by failing to destroy the Confederacy. One can see the tension that existed between these two men in the photos of Alexander Gardner. He captures what have become famous photos of Lincoln’s visit to Antietam and the battle itself. They serve as the visual history of this time period for Lincoln’s Presidency. In the 1864 Presidential election, McClellan used this meeting as an opportunity to insult Lincoln’s character and connection to the Army. Claiming that Lincoln laughed at the Antietam battlefield in the presence of Union soldiers, did not change Lincoln’s image in the public since he soundly won the election. Lincoln was correct in remaining unengaged in the scandal because his Presidency spoke for itself and the image of his personal character is unaffected by the scandal today. Compiling the reasons Lincoln came to see his troops and the effects of the visit represent a facet of the war that tells us a great deal about his connection to the Army of the Potomac and the patience and strength of character he exhibited in his Presidency.
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