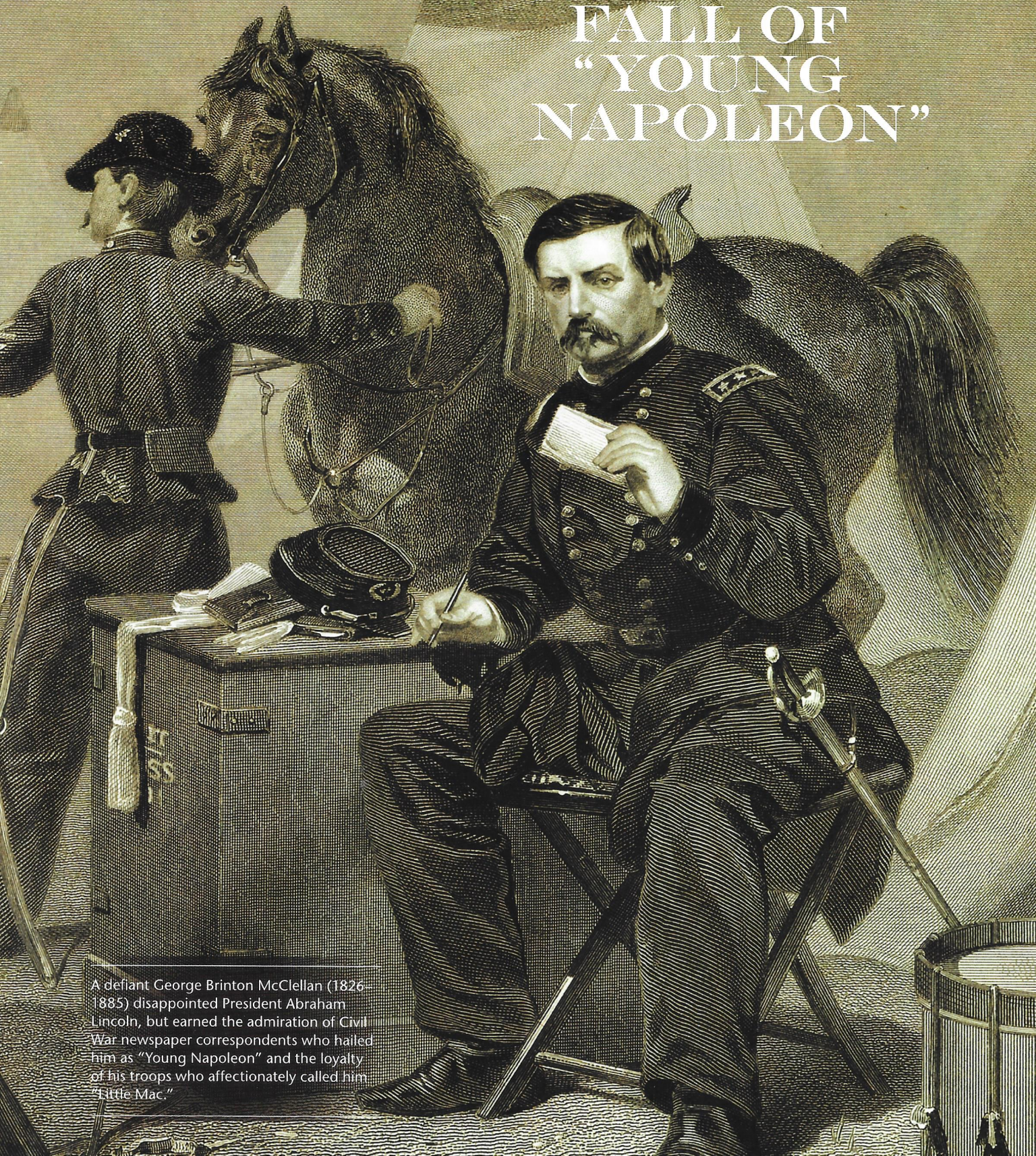


# THE RISE AND FALL OF "YOUNG NAPOLEON"



A defiant George Brinton McClellan (1826-1885) disappointed President Abraham Lincoln, but earned the admiration of Civil War newspaper correspondents who hailed him as "Young Napoleon" and the loyalty of his troops who affectionately called him "Little Mac."

## William C. Kashatus

On Wednesday evening, November 13, 1861, President Abraham Lincoln paid a visit to the residence of George Brinton McClellan (1826–1885), who he had recently appointed general in chief of the Union Army. Located on Lafayette Square, near the White House, McClellan's luxurious dwelling also served as his Washington, D.C., headquarters.

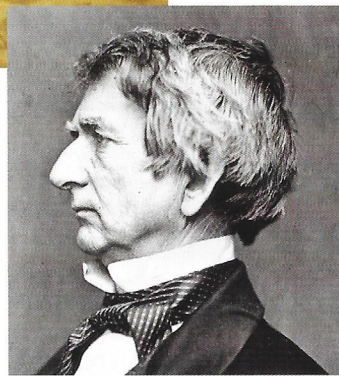
Accompanied by Secretary of State William H. Seward (1801–1872) and the president's personal assistant and private secretary, John M. Hay (1838–1905), Lincoln had grown impatient. The American Civil War had divided the nation, and public discontent with the inaction of the Union army had reached a feverish pitch. Federal troops had been routed by Confederate forces at the First Battle of Bull Run near Manassas, Virginia, four months earlier, on July 21. Only twenty-five miles from the nation's capital, the northern Virginia battleground became a scene of frenzy. Union soldiers fled toward Washington in terror and confusion, closely trailing the sightseers, journalists, and politicians who had expected to witness a decisive Union victory. If nothing else, Bull Run—the first major land battle of the Civil War—convinced Lincoln, as well as the North and the South, that victory would be neither quick nor easy.

Shortly after the defeat, Lincoln fired General Irwin McDowell (1818–1885) as commander in charge of the Army of Northeastern Virginia and replaced him with the thirty-four-year-old McClellan, an arrogant but talented major general whose brilliant organizational skills appeared to be the answer to the army's needs. McClellan took command of the Military Division of the Potomac on July 25. Less than two months later, on August 15, he organized the Army of the



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

In 1861 McClellan snubbed President Abraham Lincoln, his aide John M. Hay (above, center and left), and Secretary of State William H. Seward (right) who waited patiently to speak with him.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Potomac. The president promoted McClellan on November 5 to general in chief of the entire Union army.

McClellan was a handsome man with a head of thick, close-cropped auburn hair, a sandy mustache, and the hint of a goatee. Just five feet, eight inches in height, the dashing young officer had won the hearts of both soldiers and citizens by reorganizing the Union army and restoring its pride after the debacle at Bull Run. An admiring press awarded him the romantic title "Young Napoleon" after France's Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), widely considered the greatest military

genius of the nineteenth century. But McClellan was not a daring combat leader, having little desire for bold action. Instead, he sought to avoid unnecessary loss of life and property.

Convinced that the North must combine military victory with diplomacy in forcing the South to return to the Union, McClellan intended to win the war "by maneuvering rather than fighting." His philosophy placed him squarely at odds with Lincoln, who wanted to know the general's plans for an offensive action against the Confederacy.

Informed by a porter that McClellan was at a wedding but would be returning home shortly, the presidential party waited in the parlor for an hour. This was not the first time that Lincoln had waited for his general in chief. McClellan considered the president's visits "interruptions," and often kept him waiting. Nevertheless, Lincoln tolerated such flagrant breaches of protocol

because he believed the general positively influenced the army. Upon McClellan's arrival the porter informed him that the president and the secretary of state were awaiting him, but the haughty general passed by the parlor and ascended the stairs to his private quarters.

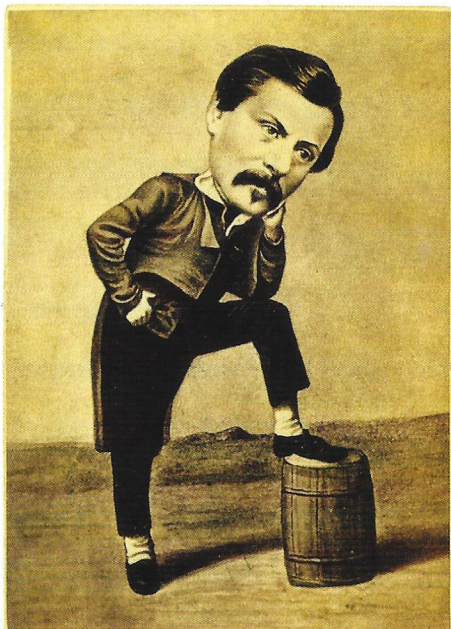
Another half hour went by. With each minute that passed Seward and Hay became more infuriated by McClellan's insolence. Finally, Lincoln sent word that he was still waiting, only to be informed that the general, "very much fatigued," had gone to bed. As the three men took their leave, Hay bitterly complained about McClellan's inexcusable and cavalier behavior. To his surprise, Lincoln "seemed not to have noticed it especially, saying it was better at this time not to be making points of etiquette and personal dignity," and that he would "gladly hold McClellan's horse if a victory could be achieved."

A native of Philadelphia, McClellan was a brilliant military engineer and highly capable of organizing troops. Considered the most promising general in the Union ranks at the beginning of the Civil War, he appeared—by both training and experience—to be ideally suited for the roles of general in chief and the commander of the Army of the Potomac. Once he secured those appointments, however, his erratic military conduct, inflated ego, and unchecked political ambitions resulted in a stalemate with the president. On March 11, 1862, McClellan was removed from the position of general in chief, leaving him in command of the Army of the Potomac. Lincoln ordered him relieved of the command of the Army of the Potomac on November 5, partly due to his failure to aggressively pursue Confederate General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia after the Battle of Antietam. Two years later, the Democratic Party nominated McClellan as its presidential candidate, but Lincoln defeated him by more than 400,000 votes, forcing him to retire from the national spotlight.



PHMC BUREAU OF THE STATE MUSEUM OF PENNSYLVANIA/PHOTO BY DON GILES

*General George McClellan, 1826–1885, painted posthumously by C.S. Kilpatrick in 1906.*



Strategy—or the way NOT to do it.

Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1863, by Charles Wheeler, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of New York.

MG-264/PA STATE ARCHIVES

Born on December 3, 1826, McClellan was the third of five children of George McClellan (1796–1847), a prominent surgical ophthalmologist and founder of Jefferson Medical College, and Elizabeth Brinton McClellan (1800–1889), the daughter of a leading Pennsylvania family. Young George attended Philadelphia's private schools until 1840 when, at the age of thirteen, he entered the University of Pennsylvania to study law. Two years

McClellan's hesitancy to engage the Confederate enemy in battle caused the president—and the nation—to question his military strategy.

later, he changed his goal to military service and set his sights on the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. Although the minimum age for entrance was sixteen, McClellan's father wrote to President John Tyler asking for his intercession, and the academy waived the age requirement to admit his fifteen-year-old son in 1842.

At West Point, McClellan was a studious, ambitious cadet who ingratiated himself with the sons of aristocratic Southerners. Years later, he contended that those friendships gave him "an appreciation for the Southern mind" and an "understanding of the political and military implications of the sectional differences that led to the Civil War." He also became deeply interested in military engineering, a subject that proved to be both the academic strength and weakness of West Point. During those early years, the military academy concentrated on producing engineers

and company officers for the regular army. As a result, the North did not cultivate the kind of combat-ready leadership in which Southern academies specialized. This would prove to be a major disadvantage for the Union army during the long war that lay ahead. Nevertheless, McClellan's military training cannot be underestimated. He graduated in 1846, second in his class of fifty-nine cadets, and was brevetted a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

McClellan received his first combat assignment during the Mexican War. He arrived near the mouth of the Rio Grande River in October 1846 during a temporary armistice. Stricken with dysentery and malaria, he spent the following month in a hospital bed complaining about the "Mexican disease" and that he had arrived "too late to be part of the American victory" at the Battle of Monterrey, fought September 21–24. After his recovery, the precocious officer served on reconnaissance missions for Lieutenant General Winfield Scott (1786–1866), a close friend of his father. He demonstrated bravery under enemy fire and exceptional ability in laying roads and constructing bridges for the marching army.

Not only was he rewarded with two promotions—first lieutenant and, later, captain—but his experience under Scott taught him important military and political lessons. McClellan learned to appreciate the value of flanking movements rather than the frontal assaults employed by Scott at Cerro Gordo, which were costly in terms of casualties. He witnessed the general's success in balancing political and military affairs, a talent that allowed the lieutenant general to rise to the top echelon of power in Washington, D.C. Scott was the Whig Party's candidate for the presidency in 1852. His ability to maintain good relations with the citizenry also impressed McClellan. When Scott's army invaded enemy territory he minimized property damage by strictly disciplining his soldiers. However, unlike Scott, McClellan developed a disdain for volunteer soldiers and officers, par-

ticularly politicians who cared nothing for discipline and training. He later put these lessons to use, for better and worse, during his command of the Union army during the Civil War.

After the Mexican War, McClellan returned to West Point in 1850 and assumed the laborious task of training cadets in military engineering but chafed at the boredom of peacetime garrison service. During the following five years he enjoyed periodic reprieves, including an expedition to discover the sources of the Red River and participation in the Pacific Railroad surveys of 1853 to select a route for a transcontinental railroad. The survey assignment was ordered by Secretary of War Jefferson Davis (1808–1889), also a graduate of West Point and a veteran of the Mexican War, who considered the young officer a protégé. Davis later became president of the

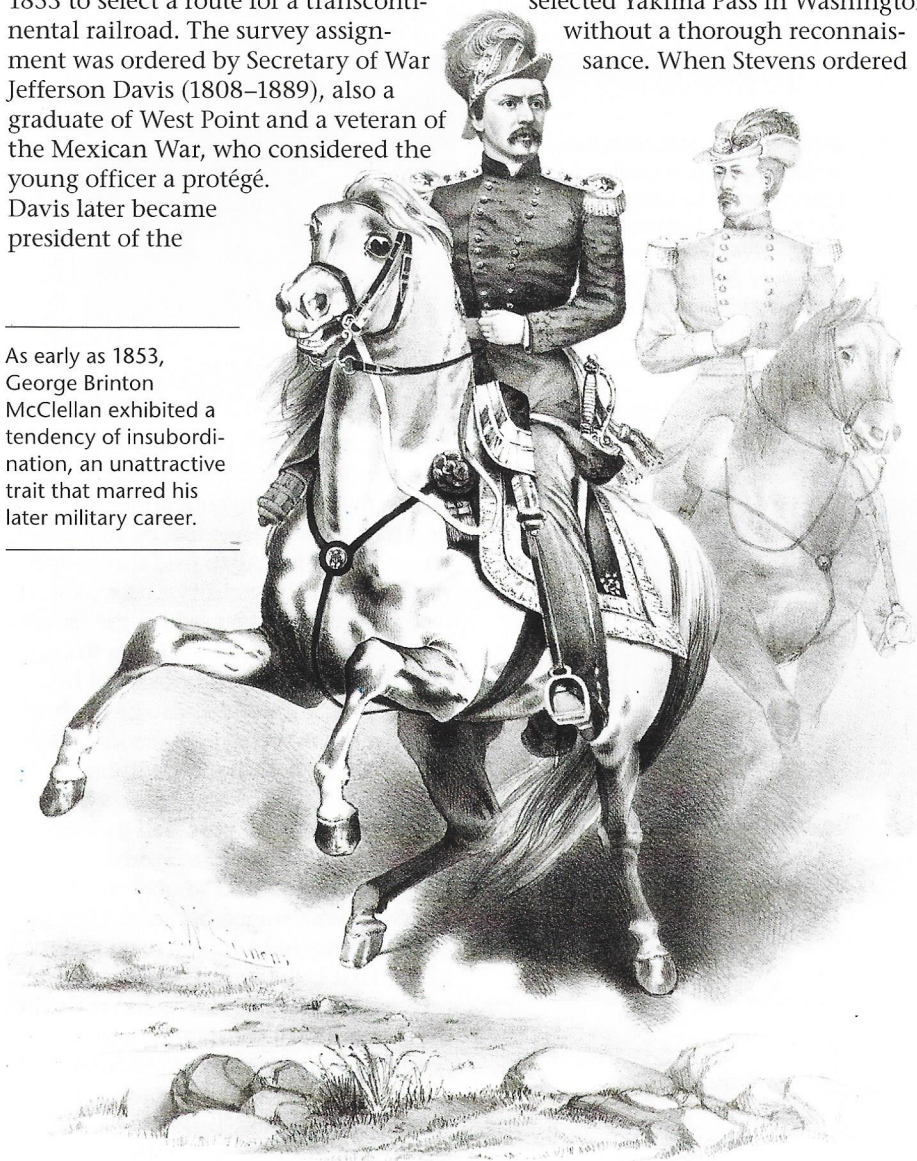
---

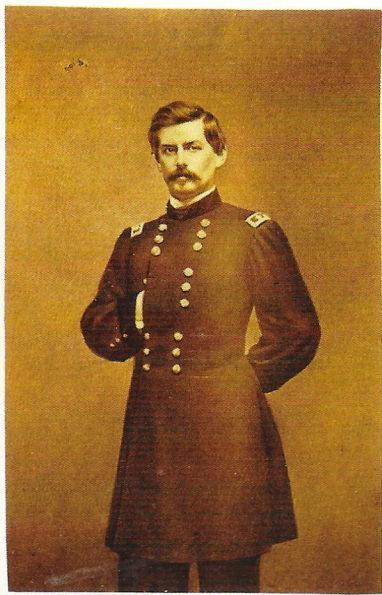
As early as 1853, George Brinton McClellan exhibited a tendency of insubordination, an unattractive trait that marred his later military career.

---

Confederate States of America for its entire history, from 1861 to 1865. The assignment to the survey also proved to foreshadow one of McClellan's least attractive qualities—a tendency for insubordination.

One target of his disdain was Isaac Stevens (1818–1862), the first governor of the Washington Territory. Stevens directed McClellan to scout various passes across the Cascade Range, extending from British Columbia through Washington and Oregon, to northern California, to determine the best route for a railroad. McClellan selected Yakima Pass in Washington without a thorough reconnaissance. When Stevens ordered





GEN'L. GEO. B. McCLELLAN.  
Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1861, by M. B. BRADY, in the Clerks' office of the District Court of the District of Columbia.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

McClellan was commemorated by photographs, including one (above) made by famed Civil War photographer Matthew B. Brady (1822–1896), considered the “Father of Photojournalism” by many, and numerous medals and medallions (below).



MG-264/PA STATE ARCHIVES

McClellan to lead a party through the pass in winter, McClellan refused, relying on faulty intelligence about the depth of snow in the area. He made matters worse by failing to find three superior passes in the vicinity, one which would eventually be used for the railroad line. Stevens ordered McClellan to turn over his expedition logbooks,<sup>1</sup> but he refused, most likely because he made a number of embarrassing personal comments throughout the expedition.

The highlight of McClellan’s antebellum service occurred in 1855 when he was assigned to study European armies and to observe the Crimean War, waged between 1853 and 1856. Promoted to captain and assigned to the First U.S. Cavalry Regiment, he traveled widely and interacted with the highest military commands and royal families of Europe. His observation of the 1854–1855 Siege of Sevastopol by British, French, and Turkish allied forces later influenced his decisions on the

Virginia Peninsula, convincing him that a slow, cautious approach was preferable to a sweeping attack of the Confederates. Upon returning to the United States in 1856, McClellan requested an assignment in Philadelphia to prepare his report, which contained a critical analysis of the siege and a lengthy description of the organization of the European armies. He also wrote a manual on cavalry tactics based on the Russian Empire’s cavalry regulations. Not only did the United States Army adopt McClellan’s cavalry manual, but also a saddle he designed after models in Prussia and Hungary. The so-called McClellan Saddle became standard issue for as long as the nation’s horse cavalry existed; it is currently used for ceremonies. These achievements cemented McClellan’s reputation for military scholarship, making him an attractive choice for high command when the Civil War began. With little prospect for promotion, however, McClellan became bored with the peacetime military service and resigned his commission on January 16, 1857. Capitalizing on his political connections and experience with military engineering, he became chief engineer and vice president of the Illinois Central Railroad Company. Under his leadership the rail line was extended to New Orleans. Three years later, he assumed the presidency of the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad Company, and helped it recover from the financial Panic of 1857.

Despite his success and lucrative salary, which amounted to \$10,000 per year—the equivalent of \$227,519 today—McClellan was frustrated with civilian employment. While he continued to assiduously study classical military strategy, he also became increasingly interested in politics. He made his initial foray into the political sphere as a supporter of Democrat Stephen A. Douglas (1813–1861) in the 1858 senate race and two years later supported Douglas’s presidential campaign. McClellan once boasted that he single-handedly defeated an attempt at



PHMC BUREAU OF THE STATE MUSEUM OF PENNSYLVANIA/PHOYO BY DON GILES

Republican voter fraud by ordering the delay of a passenger train carrying men to vote illegally in another county, which enabled Douglas to win the voting district. It was also during these years away from the military that McClellan began courting Ellen Mary Marcy (1836–1915), daughter of a former commander, Randolph B. Marcy (1812–1887), a graduate of West Point who fought in the Mexican War and led the Red River exploration. Although “Nelly” refused his first proposal of marriage, she and McClellan were wed in Calvary Church, New York City, on May 22, 1860.

After the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, in April 1861, McClellan returned to the U.S. Army on May 3. His rise was nothing less than meteoric. On May 14, he was appointed major general in the Regular Army and commander of the Department of the Ohio Militia, also on May 3. In June, McClellan sent twenty thousand troops under his command across the Ohio River into western Virginia, the anti-secessionist part of the commonwealth. He intended to drive out the Confederates who, a month earlier, had taken control of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, just west of Harpers Ferry. Commanding three times as many men as the enemy, McClellan easily routed the Southerners in a series of clashes and reclaimed the railroad. The victory captured the attention of the president, who summoned the victorious general to Washington on July 25, four days after the disastrous Union defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run. Shortly after, Lincoln made McClellan the commander of the main federal army in the East, second only to General Winfield Scott.

Lincoln hoped that between Scott’s battlefield experience and wisdom, and McClellan’s youthful vitality, he would have the kind of effective leadership necessary to defeat the Confederacy. Instead, the young officer’s rapid rise from a retired captain to major general led to an inflated ego which jeopardized the Union’s chances for success during the early stages of the war. Writing to his



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

George B. and Ellen Mary Marcy McClellan, who married in 1860, were photographed between 1860 and 1865.

wife, McClellan boasted that when he arrived in Washington to accept his new appointment he “found no army to command—only a mere collection of regiments cowering on the banks of the Potomac, some perfectly raw, others dispirited by the recent defeat [at the First Battle of Bull Run]. The city was almost in condition to have been taken by a dash of regiment or cavalry.” Even though this was an exaggeration, Washington, D.C., was vulnerable to attack by the Confederates. While federal troops still controlled the narrow strip of Virginia running from Alexandria to Georgetown, approaches to the city on the Maryland side were inadequately guarded. Only two-thirds of the Union army’s fifty-one thousand soldiers were properly trained and ready for duty. Under these circumstances, McClellan was to ensure the safety of the nation’s capital and organize a new army that would march to Richmond, Virginia, which had recently replaced Montgomery, Alabama, as the capital of the Confederate States of America.

Detail of a Civil War envelope bearing the portrait of Major General McClellan. A form of propaganda, these envelopes, imprinted with portraits, caricatures, slogans, allegories, and vignettes, were used to inspire patriotism, loyalty, and support for the war.



During the following eight months, McClellan assumed a firm hand in training and reorganizing the Army of the Potomac. He established rigorous discipline and discharged unfit officers. The transformation was so remarkable that the press hailed McClellan as the “man to save the country.” Some enthusiasts even promoted him as the next president. Surrounded by a grateful public and an adoring press, McClellan began to regard himself not as a subordinate to Lincoln and Winfield Scott, but rather their master. “I receive letter after letter, have conversation after conversation, calling on me to save the nation, alluding to the presidency,” he wrote to his wife and friends, revealing his inflated sense of self-importance. “By some strange operation of magic, I have become the power of the land. God has placed a great work in my hands. I was called to it; my previous life seems to have been directed to this great end.”

Writing to relatives and peers that Lincoln was an “idiot” and characterizing Scott as “a perfect imbecile,” McClellan confided that if the “old general cannot be taken out of my path, I will resign and let the administration take care of itself.” He needn’t have worried. On November 1, 1861, Scott, having tired of the young general’s constant attempts to undermine his authority, resigned as head of the Union’s armies. Shortly after, McClellan took his place. When Lincoln warned his new general in chief of the “enormous labor upon you,” McClellan arrogantly replied, “I can do it all.”

The Union offensive was perilously delayed when in December McClellan became seriously ill with typhoid. As public pressure for Union action grew Lincoln became increasingly impatient with him. On January 6, 1862, he called a special cabinet meeting with several generals and the members of the Committee on the Conduct of the War.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase (1808–1873) defended McClellan, insisting he was “the best man for the command” and that, “if his sickness had not prevented” him from launching an offensive, he would “by this time, have satisfied everybody in the country of his efficiency and capacity.” Lincoln deferred to Chase’s judgment and retained McClellan.

In March 1862 McClellan finally took to the field to direct the largest campaign of the war: an advance on the Confederate capital at Richmond by way of the peninsula between the James and York Rivers. His plan was sound but he lacked the stamina and courage to direct it. Remembering the lessons of Sevastopol, he began siege operations at Yorktown which allowed Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston (1807–1891) to move in reinforcements. Although Johnston had only 41,000 men, McClellan estimated the Confederate general’s troop strength at 150,000 and used this as a reason for delay until Lincoln agreed to send reinforcements that would give

Henry B. Cromwell’s 1864 sheet music, entitled “McClellan is the Man,” intended to boost the Democratic presidential candidate’s chances for election. It did not. Lincoln, the incumbent, won reelection by 55 percent.

him a total of 200,000 troops. After Johnston withdrew, McClellan followed, fighting his way to within sight of the Confederate capital. He then stopped. Once again, he overestimated the strength of the enemy and requested additional troops. Lincoln acquiesced, but still there was no movement. “Suppose a man whose profession it is to understand military matters is asked how long it will take him and what

he requires to accomplish certain things,” he confided to an administration official. “And when he has had all he asked and the time comes, he does nothing.”

McClellan relied on Allan Pinkerton (1819–1884) of the famous Pinkerton National Detective Agency for his military intelligence. Pinkerton stoked the general’s fears by overestimating the number of enemy troops. Instead of challenging the intelligence, the Union general, intimidated by the notion of the South’s military superiority, simply accepted the inflated troop estimates to avoid the terrible moment of truth that a major engagement would bring. That he seldom went anywhere near the actual fighting only made matters worse, bringing into question whether he possessed the intrepidity necessary to command an army. His constant delays, as well as his failure to keep the administration informed of his plans, prompted Lincoln to suspend him from command of all the armies on March 11, 1862, so that he could concentrate on the Army of the Potomac and the

attack on Richmond. Young Napoleon accepted his demotion without complaint, and assured the president he would “work just as cheerfully as before.” McClellan was also aware that Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton (1814–1869) was scheming to replace him as commander of the Army of the Potomac, going so far as to name a possible successor, Ethan A. Hitchcock (1798–1870), a retired sixty-four-year-old West Pointer. Under the circumstances, McClellan believed it best to hold his tongue.

In April McClellan’s army fought in Virginia at Williamsburg and Hanover Court House. By the end of May, Union soldiers were just six miles away from Richmond. However, Johnston’s army struck back with a massive attack at the Battle of Seven Pines (also known as the Battle of Fair Oaks) on May 31 and June 1, 1862. McClellan managed to survive the attack, principally through confusion in the Confederate army and the actions of his own subordinates. After Lee’s smaller Army of Northern Virginia attacked him in the Seven Days’ Battles in late June, he failed to seize the opportunity to strike at Richmond along the weakly defended south side of the Chickahominy River. Instead, McClellan panicked and retreated to Harrison’s Landing along the James River. Safely entrenched, he began to condemn the War Department, the president, and the secretary of war, blaming them for his defeat. The president finally had had enough. He ordered McClellan to evacuate the peninsula and transfer most of his men to John Pope’s army in northern Virginia. Once again, the spiteful general was slow to act. His delay in sending reinforcements to the embattled

Union forces at the Second Battle of Bull Run, fought August 28–30, yielded another victory to Lee.

Following the Confederate invasion of Maryland in early September 1862, McClellan, despite strong opposition in Congress and in Lincoln’s cabinet, was restored to active command of the Army of the Potomac. Lincoln was reluctant to turn to the obstinate general, but he realized McClellan was the only officer capable of restoring shattered Union morale.

---

In McClellan, lithographers of the period—including the New York publishing firm of Currier and Ives, which published *Majr. Genl. George B. McClellan at the Battle of Antietam, Md. Sept. 17th 1862*—found a popular subject.

---



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

During the Maryland Campaign, McClellan stumbled upon an extraordinary stroke of good fortune. On September 13 one of his corporals, searching an abandoned Confederate encampment near Frederick, discovered a copy of Lee’s orders carefully wrapped around three cigars. The orders, apparently lost by a Southern officer, gave McClellan an understanding of the positioning of Lee’s army. Instead of marching immediately to attack, however, McClellan moved with deliberate caution. As a result, Lee was able to position most of his men in line along Antietam Creek, near Sharpsburg, where the two armies met. McClellan’s attack failed to crush Lee who was heavily outnumbered with his back to the Potomac River. Despite a greatly superior force, the

Union general refused to pursue Lee into Virginia and was reluctant to renew the campaign in the weeks that followed. Instead, believing that he had fought a “masterpiece” at the Battle of Antietam, McClellan continued his dilatory tactics, resorting to constant demands for more troops.

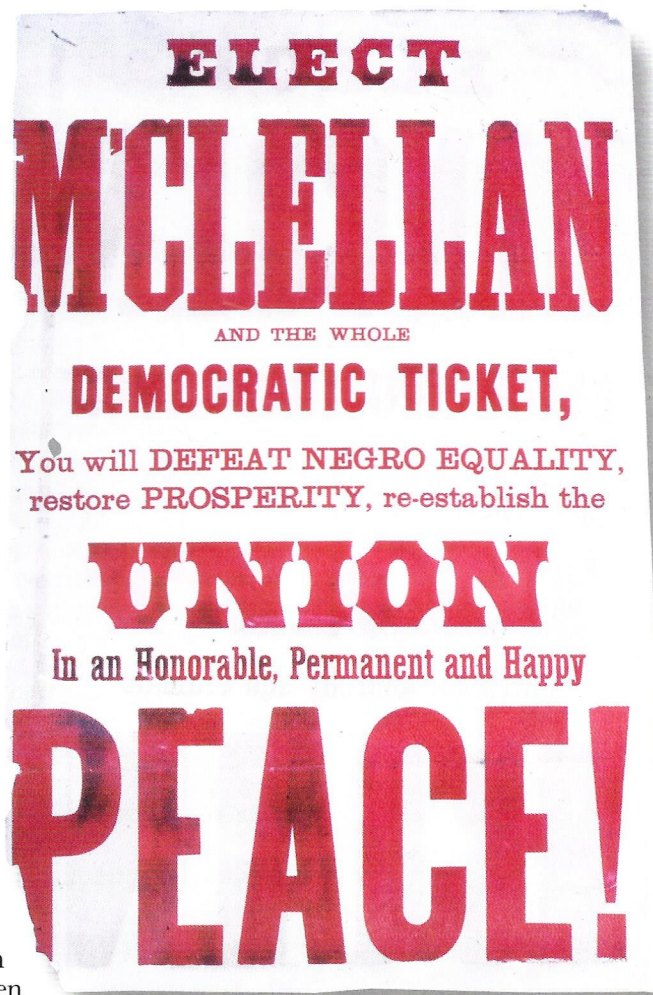
When Lincoln visited the army near Antietam on October 3, he urged McClellan to move against the Confederate army and followed it with the direct order to “cross the Potomac and give battle to the enemy” when he returned to Washington, D.C. Yet again, McClellan did not move, explaining that his advance must be delayed until he could replace worn-out horses. Incensed, the president immediately dispatched a sarcastic telegram: “Will you pardon me for asking what the horses of your army have done since the battle of Antietam that fatigues anything?”



Lincoln's patience finally gave way. On November 5, he relieved McClellan of his command, and replaced him with a reluctant Ambrose E. Burnside (1824–1881), of Rhode Island. "For organizing an army, for preparing an army for the field, for fighting a defensive campaign, I will back General McClellan against any general of modern times," Lincoln told an aide shortly before removing McClellan from his command. "I don't know but of ancient times, either. But I begin to believe that he will never get ready to go forward!"

Stanton ordered McClellan to report to Trenton, New Jersey, for further orders, although none were ever issued. After the Union defeats at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville there were calls to return Young Napoleon to an important command. Even Ulysses S. Grant (1822–1885), appointed general in chief in March 1864, considered the idea. These opportunities were impossible, given the administration's opposition and the knowledge that McClellan posed a potential political threat. In addition, McClellan eliminated the possibility of his return by writing a report of his final campaign that accused the administration of undercutting him and denying him necessary reinforcements. The War Department was reluctant to publish the report because, just after completing it in October 1863, McClellan openly declared his intention to run for the presidency as a Democrat.

In 1864, the Democratic Party nominated McClellan to run against Lincoln for the presidency, but his candidacy was hampered by a split between pro-war and anti-war Democrats. He supported continuation of the war and the restoration of the Union, but the party platform eventually called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and a nego-



MC-200/PA STATE ARCHIVES

General George B. McClellan rejected his party's peace platform. Soldiers cast absentee ballots in 1864 and helped Lincoln win Pennsylvania in his bid for reelection.

tiated settlement with the Confederacy. McClellan was forced to repudiate the platform, which made his campaign inconsistent and difficult. The deep division in the Democratic Party, the unity of the Republicans, and the military successes by Union forces in the fall of 1864 doomed his candidacy. Lincoln won the election easily, with 212 Electoral College votes to McClellan's 21 and a popular vote of 403,000, or 55 percent. While McClellan was highly popular among the troops when he was commander, they voted for Lincoln over him by margins of three to one or higher. Lincoln's share of the vote in the Army of the Potomac was 70 percent.

McClellan captured the vote in only three states. On Election Day, he

resigned his commission in the army and, shortly after, left with his family for Europe where they spent the next four years.

When McClellan returned in 1868 the Democratic Party expressed some interest in again nominating him for president, but when it became clear that Grant would be the Republican candidate, the interest dissolved. Instead, McClellan earned a living as an engineering consultant. In 1877, he was nominated by the Democrats for the governorship of New Jersey, an action that took him by surprise because he had not expressed an interest in the office. He was elected New Jersey's twenty-fourth governor and served one term, from 1878 to 1881. His tenure was marked by careful, conservative executive management and minimal political conflict, after which he retired from politics. His final years were devoted to traveling and writing. He justified his military career in *McClellan's Own Story*, published posthumously in 1887 by Charles

L. Webster and Company, of New York. He died unexpectedly on October 29, 1885, at the age of fifty-eight at Orange, New Jersey, and was buried in Riverview Cemetery in Trenton, New Jersey.

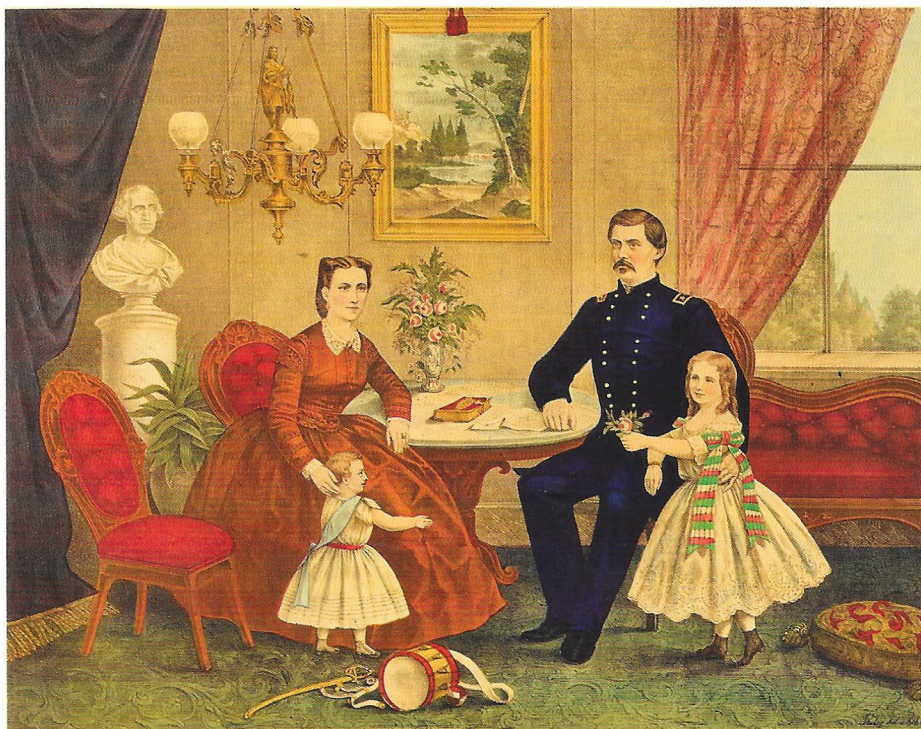
McClellan remains the subject of much controversy among Civil War and military historians. On one hand, he is universally praised for his superb organizational skills and his excellent relations with his troops, who gave him their unquestioned loyalty and referred to him affectionately as "Little Mac." It has also been suggested that his reluctance to enter battle was caused in part by an intense desire to avoid spilling the blood of his own men. On the other hand, some historians claim that McClellan's failure to take the initiative against the enemy cost the Army of the Potomac many decisive victories, which could have ended the war early and spared thousands of soldiers who died in subsequent battles. In addition, McClellan's abrasive personality, egotism, and

tendency towards insubordination resulted in tremendous friction between him and the president, the secretary of war, and the congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War. Excerpts from 250 wartime letters McClellan wrote to his wife published shortly after his death dramatically reveal these unattractive qualities and do not place him in a favorable light. Nonetheless, it is difficult to deny that General George Brinton McClellan played a leading role during the war and, in so doing, earned a place for himself in the annals of United States military history.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Despite his unflattering traits, McClellan played a role in the American Civil War that is still the subject of intense examination by students and scholars of history.



PHMC BUREAU OF THE STATE MUSEUM OF PENNSYLVANIA/PHOTO BY DON GILES

A lithograph entitled *The McClellan Family* (1868) was published by H. Pharazyn, Lombard Street, Philadelphia.

*William C. Kashatus, Paoli, is a frequent contributor to Pennsylvania Heritage. He is the author of a number of widely acclaimed books, including Dapper Dan Flood: The Controversial Life of a Congressional Power Broker (2010), Almost a Dynasty: The Rise and Fall of the 1980 Phillies (2008), and September Swoon: Richie Allen, the '64 Phillies, and Racial Integration (2004).*

## FOR FURTHER READING

Bailey, Ronald H. *Forward to Richmond: McClellan's Peninsular Campaign*. New York: Time-Life Books, 1983.

Goodwin, Doris Kearns. *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005.

McPherson, James M. *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2001.

Rafuse, Ethan S. *McClellan's War: The Failure of Moderation in the Struggle for the Union*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.

Sears, Stephen W. *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1988.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Controversies and Commanders: Dispatches from the Army of the Potomac*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999.

White, Jonathan W. "Supporting the Troops: Soldiers' Right to Vote in Civil War Pennsylvania." *Pennsylvania Heritage*. Winter 2006.

**Books about the American Civil War—including the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission's newly released *Soldiers to Governors: Pennsylvania's Civil War Veterans Who Became State Leaders*—are available for purchase at [www.pabookstore.com](http://www.pabookstore.com).**