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The Peninsula Campaign of 1862

Yorktown to the Seven Days

Volume Two



Edited by William J. Miller

The Peninsula Campaign of 1862:
Yorktown to the Seven Days

Essays on the American Civil War

Volume Two

Series Editor
William J. Miller

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Series Editor
William J. Miller

The Peninsula Campaign of 1862:
Yorktown to the Seven Days, Volume Two

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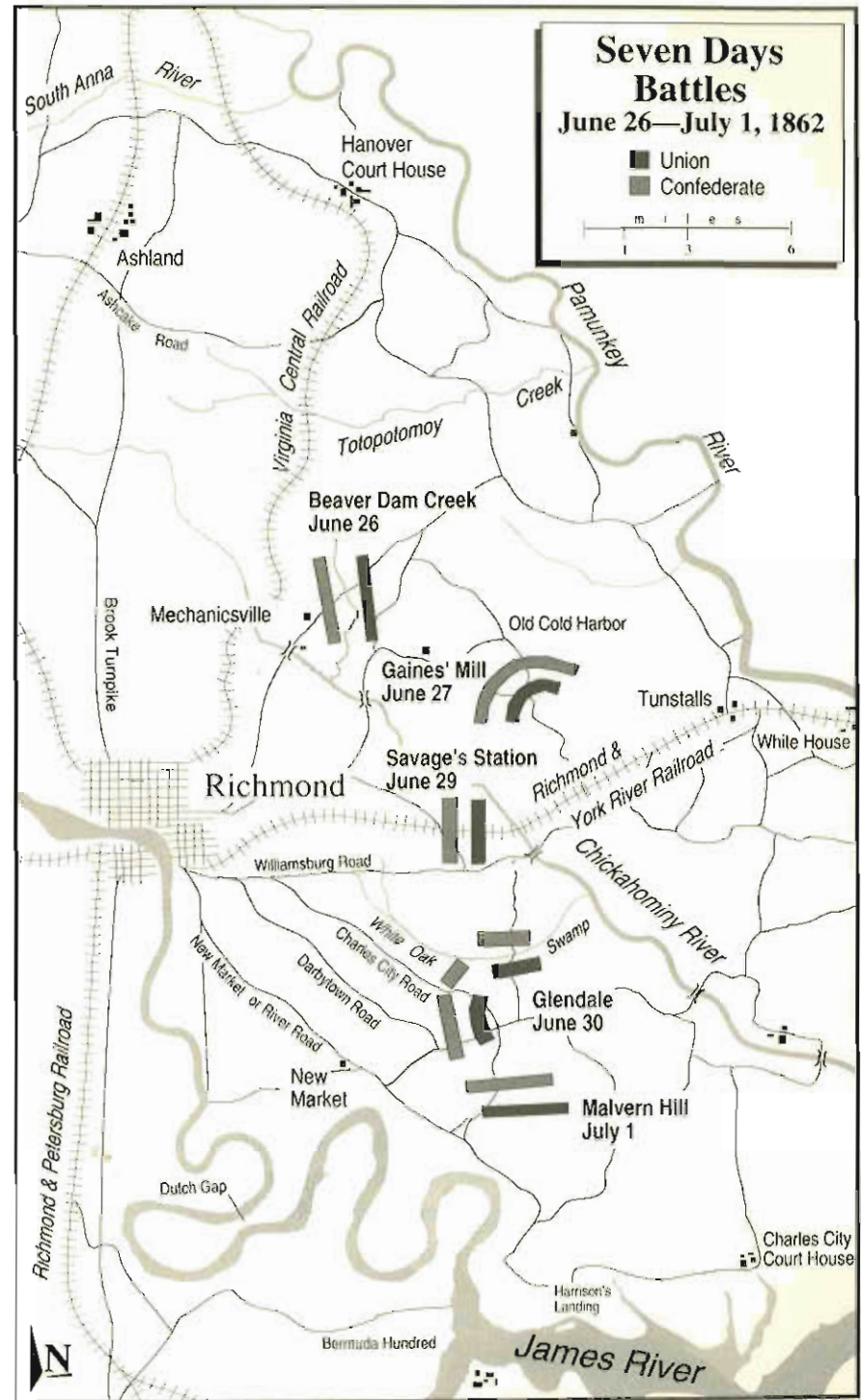
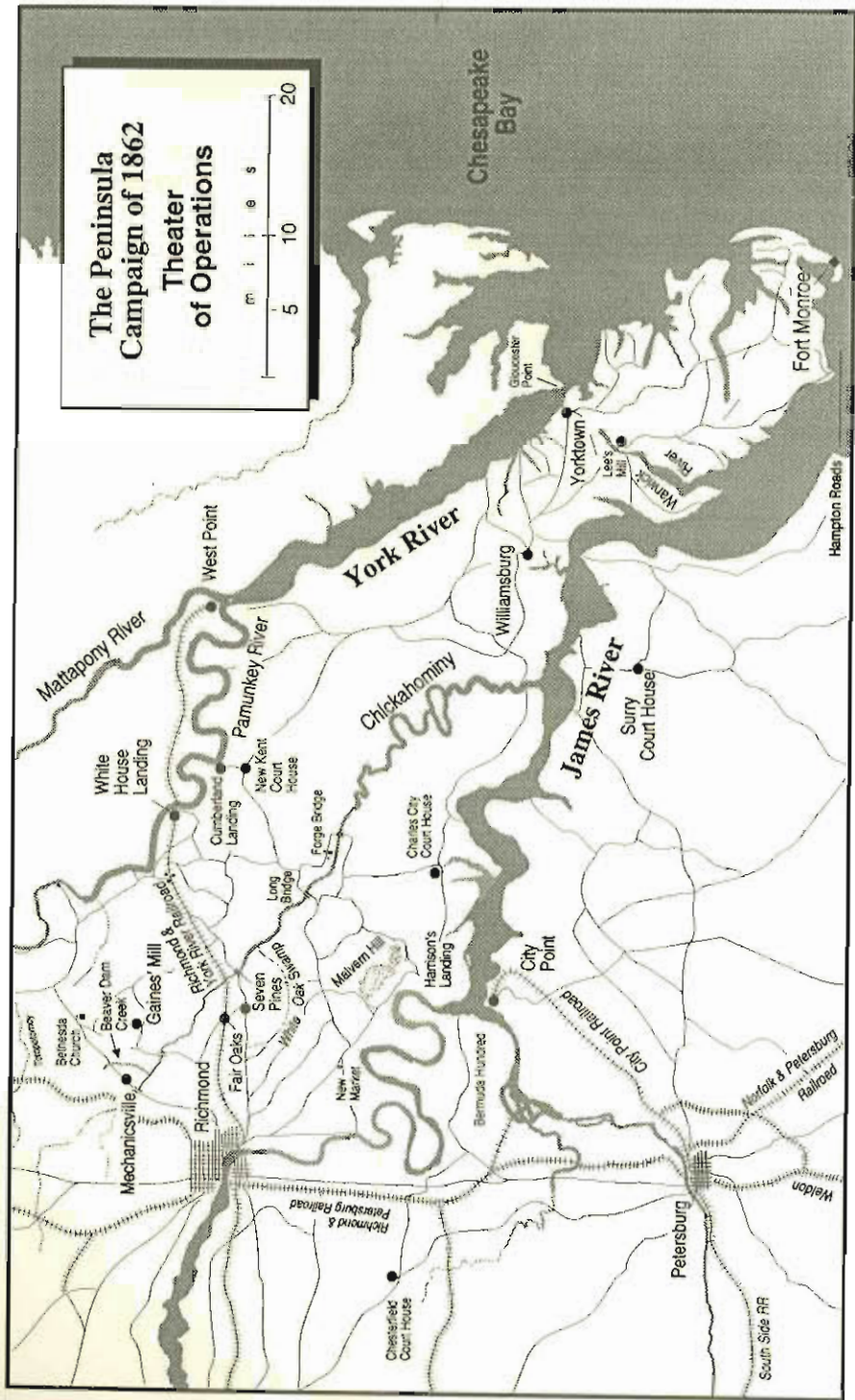


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Publisher's Preface

i

*Prelude to the Seven Days: The Battle of Slash Church
(Hanover Court House), May 27, 1862*

Robert E. L. Krick

1

*Down the Peninsula with Richard Ewell:
Capt. Campbell Brown's Memoirs of the Seven Days Battles*

edited by Terry Jones

41

*Military Advisor to Stanton and Lincoln:
Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs
and the Peninsula Campaign, January–August, 1862*

Carmen Brissette Grayson

73

*Joseph B. Kershaw's South Carolina Brigade
in the Battle of Savage's Station*

Mac Wyckoff

111

*"Scarcely any Parallel in History": Logistics, Friction
and McClellan's Strategy for the Peninsula Campaign*

William J. Miller

129

*"The Merits of This Officer Will Not Go Unrewarded":
William R. J. Pegram & the Purcell Battery in the Seven Days*

Peter S. Carmichael

191

Index

209

List of Maps & Photos

Peninsula Campaign, Area of Operations	frontis
Seven Days Battles	frontis

Prelude to the Seven Days: The Battle of Slash Church, May 27, 1862

Area Map: Slash Church	5
Brig. Gen. Lawrence O'Bryan Branch	6
Brig. Gen. Fitz John Porter	6
Battle of Slash Church, May 27, 1862 — Map 1	12
Battle of Slash Church, May 27, 1862 — Map 2	15
View of the Kinney House	18
Intersection of the New Bridge and Ashcake Roads	18
Battle of Slash Church, May 27, 1862 — Map 3	21
Men of 17th New York and Captured Howitzer	30

Down the Peninsula with Richard Ewell: Capt. Campbell Brown's Memoirs of the Seven Days Campaign

Captain Campbell Brown	42
Facsimile of Sketch from Brown's Memoirs	48
The Battle of Gaines' Mill	55

Military Advisor to Stanton and Lincoln: Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs and the Peninsula Campaign, January—August, 1862

Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs	79
---	----

continued

List of Maps & Photos (continued)

Joseph B. Kershaw's South Carolina Brigade in the Battle of Savage's Station

Joseph Brevard Kershaw	113
Brig. Gen. Edwin Sumner	120
Battle of Savage's Station	122

"Scarcely any Parallel in History": Logistics, Friction and McClellan's Strategy for the Peninsula Campaign

Theater Map, Virginia	133
A Portion of Federal Army Encampment at Cumberland Landing, May 1862	147
Area of Operations — White House Landing to Richmond	148
Quartermaster Transports at White House Landing	152
Stewart Van Vliet	179
Rufus Ingalls	181
Charles Green Sawtelle	183
Henry Francis Clarke	186
Charles P. Kingsbury	187

"The Merits of This Officer Will Not Go Unrewarded": William R. J. Pegram & the Purcell Artillery in the Seven Days

William Ransom Johnson Pegram	195
Purcell Artillery at Mechanicsburg	198
Purcell Artillery at Malvern Hill	204

Publisher's Preface

In his introduction to the first volume of this series, editor William J. Miller wrote that George B. McClellan's 1862 effort to capture Richmond "was one of the most monumental campaigns of the war. From the Federal perspective, the Peninsula Campaign was the most complex and ambitious operation of the war to that point, as well as the most expensive. . . . For the Confederacy, the Peninsula Campaign was the greatest crisis the young government would face in the first three years of the war."

It remains somewhat of a mystery that, in the literature on the war, a campaign of the magnitude of the Peninsula Campaign has historically taken a back seat to many smaller-scale operations with fewer battles. There are innumerable, and important reasons why—as students of the Civil War—we should be drawn to the study of this complex military and political drama, and *The Peninsula Campaign of 1862: Yorktown to the Seven Days* continues to explore those reasons in greater depth than has previously been attempted.

This collection of essays marks the second volume in the ongoing *Campaign Chronicles* series examining events on the Virginia peninsula in the spring and summer of 1862. Essays in this assemblage include detailed looks at some of the prominent personalities associated with George B. McClellan's movement against the Confederate capital, two of the battles in which they participated, and the logistical problems with which they grappled. From the under-studied fighting at Slash Church in Hanover County, to the climactic showdown a month later at Malvern

Hill; from Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs to the Confederacy's "boy artilleryman," Willie Pegram, the six articles brought together here add significant new information to the growing body of work on this largely overlooked campaign.

Leading off this volume is "Prelude to the Seven Days: the Battle of Slash Church (Hanover Court House)" by Richmond historian Robert E. L. Krick. Nervous about the vulnerable right flank of the Army of the Potomac, McClellan dispatched a division under Fitz John Porter to eliminate the threat posed by assorted Confederate forces in upper Hanover County, which included a brigade of North Carolinians. On May 27, 1862, Porter's men crashed into a regiment of Carolinians near the home of Dr. Thomas H. Kinney, and the carnage was underway. Krick chronicles the events of that sanguinary afternoon in a cogent and compelling narrative highlighted with precise maps and modern views of the battlefield. "Slash Church," Krick writes, "magnified many times is Sharpsburg, Gettysburg, or Gaines' Mill. While those encounters consumed thousands of men, featured vast hordes of combatants, and produced far-reaching strategic ramifications, they were not much different from Slash Church to the farmers and factory workers doing the shooting."

Terry Jones, assistant professor of history at Northeast Louisiana University and author of *Lee's Tigers: The Louisiana Infantry in the Army of Northern Virginia*, contributed the second selection in this volume, an outstanding excerpt from the memoirs of Campbell Brown, assistant adjutant general to Maj. Gen. Richard S. Ewell. As his memoirs illustrate, Brown was a highly educated, keenly observant, and well-spoken witness to the participation of "Stonewall" Jackson's column in The Seven Days Battles. Enhanced by Jones' generously informative and pertinent annotations, Campbell Brown's recollections of the campaign provide us with an unusually unique on-the-scene perspective of events from Beaver Dam Creek to Malvern Hill.

Professor Carmen Grayson of Williamsburg, Virginia, rendered exceptional service in the study of this campaign with the contribution of her essay, "Military Advisor to Lincoln and Stanton: Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs." Even long-time students of the war will be surprised to learn of Meigs' substantial influence with Lincoln

and Secretary of War Stanton during the critical operations on the peninsula. Among other things, Meigs directed the Union's initial responses to Stonewall Jackson's Shenandoah Valley Campaign; was instrumental in the disposition of Irvin McDowell's corps; signed Stanton's name to official orders without the secretary's knowledge; and played a large role in Lincoln's decision to evacuate the Army of the Potomac from the peninsula after the Seven Days fighting had ended. Grayson adroitly reports on these events and others with an insightful analysis which ultimately conveys to the reader a still clearer picture of an exceedingly complicated campaign.

Following Grayson's contribution is Mac Wyckoff's "Our Loss Was Great: Joseph B. Kershaw's South Carolina Brigade in the Battle of Savage's Station." Wyckoff, a National Park Service historian for the past 15 years—the last seven years at Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania NMP—delivers a fast-paced, blow-by-blow account of the service rendered by Brig. Gen. Joseph Brevard Kershaw and his brigade of South Carolinians at the June 29 Battle of Savage's Station. After Lee's sledgehammer attacks on the right of McClellan's army at Mechanicsville and Gaines' Mill caused "Little Mac" to begin a hasty but guarded flight for the protection of his James River gunboats, Lee instructed "Prince John" Magruder—to whose command Kershaw's brigade belonged—to interdict the Federal "change of base." Wyckoff presents the ensuing battle on a solid foundation of disparate primary sources, focusing in detail on the valiant efforts and grievous suffering of the four South Carolina regiments under Kershaw's able command.

Series editor William Miller, in "Scarcely any Parallel in History: Logistics, Friction, and McClellan's Strategy for the Peninsula Campaign" examines, from a broader perspective, the premises upon which the Federal campaign for Richmond were based, the unhappy alliance between McClellan's headquarters and Washington, and most importantly, the specific logistical demands of feeding, supplying, and efficiently moving more than 100,000 soldiers in a country ill-suited for such large-scale operations. That the officers of the Federal quartermaster department succeeded as well as they did in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles—and yet go virtually overlooked and unnamed in the vast sea of books on the war—suggests that most us,

however well read, have a weak understanding of one of the most important aspects of *any* campaign. Miller, in brilliant fashion, has taken a big step toward remedying that oversight. "While there might have been good logisticians who were bad generals," Miller tells us, "it is unlikely that there were good generals who were bad logisticians."

Completing this volume is a gripping look at a young artillery officer who for the Confederacy became the personification of daring and courage, William R. J. Pegram. In "The Merits of this Officer Will Not Go Unrewarded: William R. J. Pegram & the Purcell Battery in the Seven Days," Peter S. Carmichael, author of the forthcoming *Lee's Young Artillerist: William R. J. Pegram* (Lexington, 1995), delivers a compelling account of the all-but-suicidal service of Pegram and the Purcell Artillery in The Seven Days Battles. As Carmichael points out, not only did the Seven Days set the stage for "unnecessarily high standards for acceptable losses in later battles," it also "served as an intensive, week-long seminar in tactics" in the early stages of the war. One lesson, learned the hard way, was the brutal efficiency of artillery on the tactical defensive. Compounding the problem for the Confederates was their habit of dispersing batteries to separate commands throughout the army. Consequently, the Southern artillery battery worked more or less alone against the mass fire of the enemy. Carmichael's essay on Pegram and the Purcell Battery is the story of brave men doing dangerous work. Before Mechanicsville, Pegram counted 80 to 90 men in his command. During three engagements of The Seven Days Battles, at least 57 of those men were killed or wounded.

These essays, it is hoped, along with many others in subsequent volumes, will help provide a fuller understanding of this colossal—and colossally important—campaign.

Volume Two

Carmen Brissette Grayson

Carmen Grayson holds degrees from Georgetown University and Johns Hopkins University, and a doctorate from the University of Virginia. Dr. Grayson is a professor of history at Hampton University, Hampton, Virginia, and resides in Williamsburg on the Virginia peninsula.

Military Advisor to Stanton and Lincoln:

Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs
and the Peninsula Campaign, January-August 1862

Throughout the winter of 1861 and into the spring of 1862, President Abraham Lincoln struggled to find **professional military advice**. His general-in-chief, the young, energetic and charismatic Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, built a formidable army and designed a comprehensive plan he thought could end the war, but Lincoln and the general communicated poorly, and the Federal secretary of war, Edwin M. Stanton, came to dislike McClellan personally. The two politicians and the general often felt themselves working at cross purposes. Lincoln, facing unprecedented military and strategic questions for which his background as a country lawyer did not prepare him, needed professional assistance.

Lincoln admitted to Maj. Gen. Ethan Allen Hitchcock, whom he sought to recruit as an adviser, that he “had no military knowledge” though he held the presidential powers of commander-in-chief.¹ Stanton, conceding that he “was not a military man,” likewise felt it “very

¹ Ethan Allen Hitchcock, *Fifty Years in Camp and Field: Diary of Major-General Ethan Allen Hitchcock*. U. S. A., edited by W. A. Croffut (New York, 1909), pp. 439, 437-448. Article II, Section 2, Paragraph 3 of the United States Constitution grants to the president the supreme military power in just 35 words: “The President shall be commander in chief of the Army and the Navy of the United States, and of the militia of the several states, when called into the actual service of the United States. . . .”

extraordinary" that he could find "no military man to give opinions" on military subjects.² The commander-in-chief, however, did not lead the troops into battle nor did the secretary of war, who acted as the president's deputy in directing the war. The man who did take the field did so as general-in-chief but without clear legal authority. General Winfield Scott filled the position until November 1, 1861, when General McClellan replaced him.

Lincoln bowed to intense Republican pressure and relieved McClellan, a Democrat, as general-in-chief on March 11, 1862, restricting his authority to the Army of the Potomac. The president and Stanton tried to function as their own high command, and this attempt by two lawyers to assume the duties of general-in-chief caused much of the disarray in Union policy from March to July 1862—the crucial period during which McClellan waged his Peninsula Campaign. The problems of the president and the secretary of war left them "hungry for competent military leaders."³ Eventually, their search led them to a professional military man of intelligence who was willing to freely offer advice: Brig. Gen. Montgomery Cunningham Meigs, quartermaster general of the U.S. Army.

Maj. Gen. Carl Schurz, a Republican, once accused Lincoln of contributing to their party's electoral losses because he had appointed Democratic generals. The president retorted: "It so happened that very few of our friends had a military education or were of the profession of arms." He concluded by reminding Schurz that the question at issue seemed to be ". . . whether the war should be conducted on military knowledge, or on political affinity, only that our own friends . . . seemed to think that such a question was inadmissible."⁴

² George C. Gorham, *Life and Public Services of Edwin M. Stanton*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1899), vol. 2, p. 429. Hitchcock, *Fifty Years in Camp and Field*, p. 442.

³ Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, "The War Board, the Basis of the United States First General Staff," *Military Affairs*, vol. 1 (February 1982), p. 1.

⁴ Roy P. Basler, ed. *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 8 vols. (New Brunswick, 1953), vol. 5, pp. 494-495.

Perceived both as one of the administration's "friends" and "of the profession of arms," Meigs proved to be an exception to the president's generalization. The quartermaster general, an 1836 West Point graduate, had spent his entire career as an army construction engineer and was highly regarded for his building of the Washington aqueduct and the extension of the United States Capitol. A protégé of Sen. (later Secretary of State) William H. Seward, Meigs enjoyed a reputation for competence and probity. Indeed, Lincoln's secretary of the navy, Gideon Welles, thought that Seward relied more heavily on Meigs than he did on Lincoln in military matters.⁵ Meigs, for his part, considered the secretary of state as the only "man of worth" in Lincoln's cabinet.⁶ Meigs did not bring battlefield or command experience to his role of adviser, but his intelligence and political loyalty led Lincoln and Stanton to depend on his military advice with its West Point imprimatur. From the crisis over protecting the Federal forts in the Confederacy in March-April 1861 to the withdrawal of the Army of the Potomac from near Richmond in August 1862, the 45-year-old army captain-of-engineers-cum-brigadier moved in Washington's highest military councils and exerted influence disproportionate to his experience and training.

Army regulations required the quartermaster general's department to provide: the quarters and transportation of the army; storage and transportation for all army supplies; army clothing; camp and garrison equipment; cavalry and artillery horses; fuel; forage; straw; material for bedding, and stationery.⁷

⁵ "[Seward] had great confidence in Meigs on all occasions, and deferred to him more than to his superior, in all matters of a military nature." Gideon Welles, *The Diary of Gideon Welles*, 3 vols. (New York, 1911), vol. 1, p. 62.

⁶ Meigs to father, Dr. Charles Meigs, August 10, 1861, in Montgomery Cunningham Meigs Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C., Addendum, container 22, microfilm reel 4. Hereinafter cited as Meigs Papers. All Meigs' letters to his father are in containers 22 and 23, reels 4 and 5 by date, unless otherwise noted.

⁷ *Revised Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1861* (Philadelphia, 1861), p. 159, cited in Russell F. Weigley, *Quartermaster General of the Union Army: A Biography of M.C. Meigs* (New York, 1959), pp. 218-219.

A job description of the duties Meigs actually performed would have showed that he frequently acted outside the sphere of his responsibilities as quartermaster general. For example, Meigs: directed the Union war department's first responses to Maj. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's campaign initiated on May 23 in the Shenandoah Valley; drew up and signed the secretary of war's name to orders without the secretary's knowledge; drafted military orders to Maj. Gen. Irvin McDowell and McClellan for the president and secretary of war; advised the chief executive on the disposition of the Army of the Potomac in July; analyzed the military consequences of the emancipation of the slaves for the secretary of war's annual report; and sent secret instructions to a corps commander for launching a surprise attack on Richmond.⁸

Probably at no other time in the war did Meigs wield as much power at the White House as during the Peninsula Campaign, and the extent of his influence during that period is best illustrated by his roles in three events: the deployment of McDowell's 35,000-man corps in April and May; the response to the first reports of Jackson's Valley Campaign in May; and the removal of the Army of the Potomac from its base on the James River in July. In terms of influence at the White House and war department, the quartermaster general enjoyed unchallenged preeminence among the army bureau chiefs in Washington.

⁸ Draft of Meigs' *Annual Report of the Quartermaster General for the Year 1862*, a portion of the *Annual Report of the Secretary of War* (November 28, 1862) in Meigs Papers, container 30, "Correspondence, Military Orders" file "August-December, 1864 and Undated." All items are in container 30 unless otherwise noted. "Report of the Secretary of War," December 1, 1862 in *Message of the President of the United States to the Two Houses of Congress at the Commencement of the Third Session of the Thirty-Seventh Congress, IV* (Washington, 1862), pp. 3-19. Meigs' personal views were sometimes too strong for the administration. On freeing slaves, he wrote, "Emancipation to the black man & slavery to his white master-It will be after all but a righteous retribution when this is brought about. . . ." Meigs to "Sister Nannie," September 22, 1862, Meigs Papers. In his draft, Meigs had called for the "permanent occupation and cultivation of the [Confederacy]," noted the administration's intention to "reduce the [Confederate] leaders to poverty," and to arm freed blacks. These views were omitted in the report. Meigs' portion begins on page 17 from "Rightly ordered. . ." to page 19, "By striking down this system. . ." See also Meigs to Erasmus D. Keyes, November 18, 1862, Meigs Papers.

1861 Prelude: From the Federal Forts to Bull Run

Two events indicate how quickly Meigs rose to influence. In August 1860, President James Buchanan reprimanded the captain for a breach in military discipline. The captain of engineers had by-passed his superior, Secretary of War John B. Floyd, complaining of some matter directly to the president, who scolded Meigs and reminded him that military procedures "separated subaltern and the commander-in-chief." Only eight months later, Meigs had gained the confidence and trust of the new president of the United States. In April 1861, Abraham Lincoln chose Meigs to draft orders-for the president's signature-for an expedition to relieve Fort Pickens, off Pensacola Bay, Florida.⁹

Disagreement over what to do about Fort Sumter in South Carolina and Fort Pickens divided Lincoln's Cabinet. Both garrisons needed reinforcements and supplies, but Union attempts to deliver the men and matériel risked war. Ready to take that chance, Postmaster General Montgomery Blair supported an expedition to Sumter. Secretary of State Seward, averse to rescuing Sumter, pressed instead for an expedition to Fort Pickens. After a late-night cabinet meeting on March 28, the administration resolved to resupply both forts.

The following day, Seward brought Meigs to the White House to reassure the commander-in-chief. "The President talked freely with me," wrote Meigs, and when Lincoln asked if Fort Pickens could be held, Meigs answered: "certainly."¹⁰ At a second conference on March 31, Lincoln gave him command of the Fort Pickens relief effort, and by April 23 Meigs' expedition succeeded in delivering to the Federal fort 1,100 troops and supplies enough for six months. Fort Sumter, however,

⁹ President James Buchanan bluntly warned Meigs that the latter's dispute with Secretary of War John B. Floyd over public works contracts did not justify violating military discipline. The president did not want to find himself in "a direct and sometimes an unbecoming and angry correspondence with any subaltern in the Army who might feel himself aggrieved by one of his superiors." Buchanan to Meigs, August 13, 1860, Meigs Papers.

¹⁰ Montgomery C. Meigs, "The Relations of President Lincoln and Secretary Stanton to the Military Commanders in the Civil War," *American Historical Review*, 26(1920-1921), p. 299.

fell April 13, and, as Meigs steamed back to Washington, the Civil War had entered its second week.

Meigs had predicted to Lt. Col. Erasmus D. Keyes, his partner in the Pickens enterprise, that they could expect a "reward" if they rescued Pickens. Meigs later noted that in this "first expedition against the Rebellion," he and Keyes had been "successful in saving that fort for the United States."¹¹ Meigs seemed ambivalent about suggestions that he might command an army: "Too much rests upon success & I might fail," he acknowledged. "If I succeeded I should do good to my country[,] if I failed I might ruin it. Such things should be forced upon men not sought."¹² But Meigs was quite willing to offer advice, and the president seemed to be always anxious for it. Lincoln asked opinions of Meigs that spring, and the soldier made a positive impression upon those who heard him. "All member of cabinet received me kindly and cordially," Meigs wrote to his father in early May, "[they] seem pleased at the result & ask of me advice even on subjects upon which I have to tell them I am ignorant-Calling on the President I find myself talking to nearly a full cabinet."¹³ The administration promoted Meigs to brigadier general and appointed him quartermaster general of the Union army on June 13, just five weeks before the North's confrontation with Confederate forces at the Battle of First Manassas.¹⁴

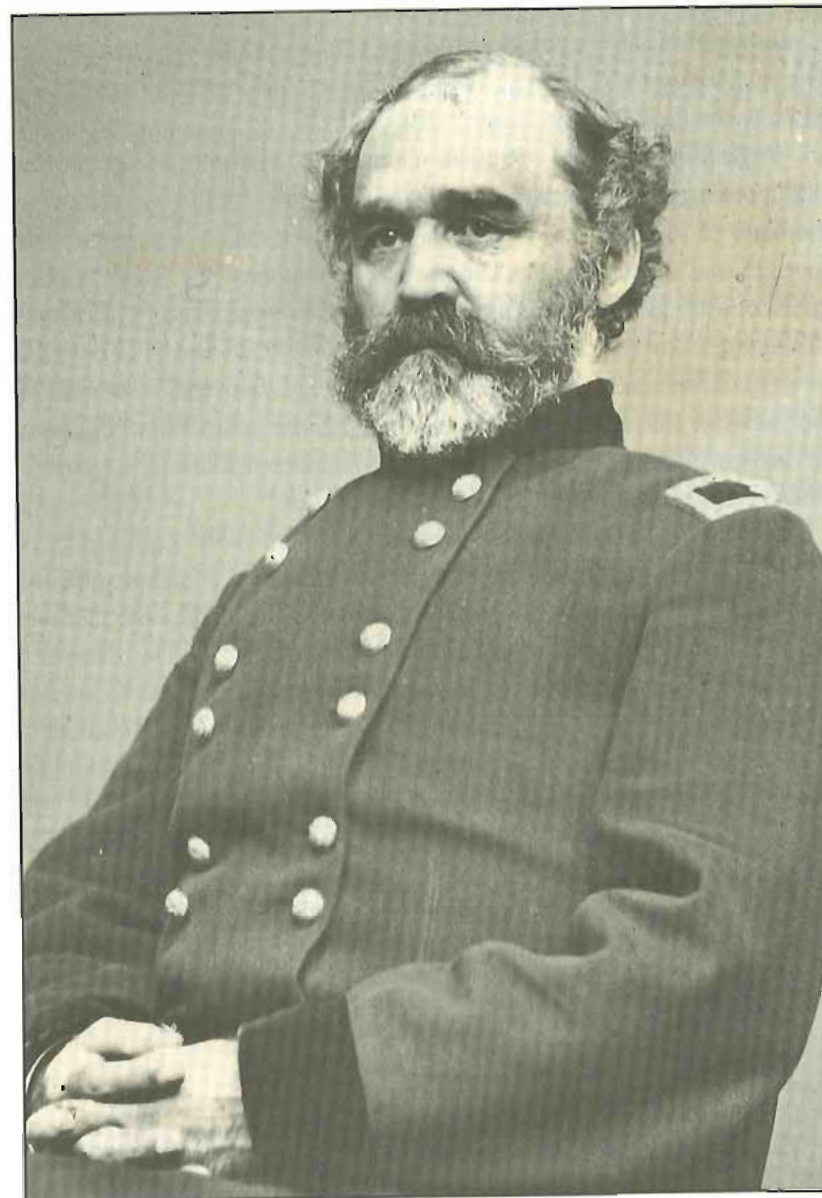
Meigs estimated that his new position as quartermaster general carried real power in the army and influence on the war even if it did not

¹¹ Meigs Journal, April 1, 1861, longhand copy in John G. Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C. Keyes to Meigs, May 3, 1861, Meigs Papers; Meigs Pocket Diary, April 6, 1863, microfilm reels 1 and 2, Meigs Papers.

¹² Meigs to father, October 8, 1862, Meigs Papers. *x 1861*

¹³ Meigs to father, May 6, 1861, Meigs Papers.

¹⁴ According to Meigs, "[T]he Pred't & several cabinet ministers wished me there [in the quartermaster post] but there has been much opposition." Lincoln sent for the captain after dinner on June 12 "to say that he had been for some time trying to make me Q. M. Genl. That he did not know whether I knew this or not." Meigs to father, June 12, 1861, Meigs Papers. As late as August 7, Keyes awaited promotion. "It will mortify me to death to be set back below some of the new brigadiers," he confided to Meigs. Later in the month, he was made a brigadier general of volunteers. Keyes to Meigs, August 7, 1861; Ezra Warner, *Generals in Blue*, (Baton Rouge, 1964), p. 264.



Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs

entail the highest military rank. Major generals commanded army corps, the lieutenant general commanded the whole army, he noted, but he would provide the means by which to supply and move those armies. The quartermaster general's command, he wrote, "extends from the Atlantic to the Pacific[,] the Lakes to the Gulf."¹⁵

Reflecting profound optimism about Union strength, Meigs prophesied a month before the Battle of First Manassas: "[O]ne good battle & the back of the rebellion is broken."¹⁶ Lincoln called war councils on June 25 and 29 to plan the Union offensive against the South and the quartermaster general had a significant voice in these plans. On July 21, Confederate forces routed the Union army. A relationship of ease and trust had developed between Lincoln and Meigs since their first meeting the previous March, so at 3 a.m. on July 22, the quartermaster general, having just returned from observing the Manassas battlefield, went to the White House for a "long talk" with the president.¹⁷

First Manassas precipitated personnel changes in the high command and in the administration. Later on the same day that Meigs had had his "long talk" with Lincoln, the president ordered McClellan, who had won two victories in western Virginia, to take command of the Department of the Potomac and organize a Union army to move against the Confederates in Virginia. McClellan arrived on July 26 and by November 1, when he replaced the aging Scott as general-in-chief, he had molded unorganized regiments into the formidable Army of the Potomac. On January 13, 1862, Lincoln named Stanton to replace the incompetent secretary of war, Simon Cameron, with whom Meigs had worked harmoniously.¹⁸ Meigs believed that he had Cameron's "confidence &

¹⁵ Meigs to father, June 12, 1861, Meigs Papers.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, July 18, 1861, Meigs Papers.

¹⁷ Meigs Journal, July 22, 1861, Nicolay Papers.

¹⁸ Cameron opposed Meigs' promotion to QM Gen. "I did not want Meigs in the QM Gen Dept.," he confessed, "but now he is there I can't spare him." Meigs to father, July 30, 1861, Meigs Papers. Meigs—even as a colonel—also drew up orders for the secretary's signature and in at least one case authored an extensive letter to Sec. of the Navy Gideon Welles from Cameron. Cameron, "Secret and Confidential" letter to Gideon Welles, May 29, 1861; Cameron order to Meigs, May 30, 1862, Addendum, container 29, microfilm reel 12, Meigs Papers.

affection," but concluded that his superior "wishes to do right but he is not up to his high assignment."¹⁹ Stanton, by contrast, quickly mastered his post. Meigs' relations with the new secretary, and with Lincoln and McClellan, formed a significant part of the complex situation in the Union's high command between March and August 1862.

Meigs and the High Command

Meigs had the confidence of Seward and Lincoln and would form a strong working relationship with Stanton, but he found little common ground with fellow West Pointer McClellan. One of their early encounters began cordially enough, when, within a week of the commanding general's arrival, the quartermaster general told McClellan that "he stood where Washington stood when he was first in command of the revolutionary armies & that if he will do his part as well he will make as great a name."²⁰ By winter, relations had cooled. On December 27, 1861, the quartermaster general went to the halls of Congress to testify before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War that he had had little to do with commander of the Army of the Potomac. He knew nothing of the general-in-chief's intentions. "My opinion has not been asked, and I have not been consulted," he said. "I do not complain." McClellan had once invited Meigs to come and talk over the commander's plans. "I went to his house one evening," Meigs later explained, "but he was out. I have not gone again, for I supposed that when he wanted me he would send for me. That time, I suppose, has not come yet."²¹

Nevertheless, two months later, the two generals met on friendly terms in Stanton's office where Meigs found himself, "always talking confidentially" with McClellan, and he was pleased to discover that "we

¹⁹ Meigs to father, July 30, 1861, Meigs Papers.

²⁰ Meigs to father, July 30, 1861, Meigs Papers. ? *only not then*

²¹ Meigs' testimony before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War on December 27, 1861, *Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War*, Part 1: Army of the Potomac (Washington, D.C., 1863), p. 154.

seem always to agree upon most points as I propose and discuss with him."²² The meeting left a generally positive impression on the quartermaster general: "It is pleasant to see him . . . selfconfident, cheerful & pleasant. This confidence in himself is so evident, so simple & natural without any appearance of conceit. . . that I must believe as my wishes & hopes are that it is well founded. He does not consult."²³

In contrast, Lincoln did seek Meigs for advice.²⁴ On Friday, January 10 a "much depressed" Lincoln came to him, Meigs wrote later, and "in great distress" pleaded: "General, what shall I do? The people are impatient; Chase²⁵ has no money and he tells me he can raise no more; the General of the Army has typhoid fever.²⁶ The bottom is out of the tub. What shall I do?"²⁷ Meigs suggested that the president call a council of military advisers, which Lincoln did that same day. This session was followed by a White House meeting the next Sunday, which McClellan and Meigs both attended. Also present were Seward, Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase, Blair, McDowell, Brig. Gen. William B. Franklin and Lincoln.²⁸

The same group reconvened at the White House Monday afternoon, January 13. Although the quartermaster general had secretly testified before a congressional committee 16 days earlier that a coolness existed between him and McClellan, at this meeting Meigs assumed an almost avuncular role, moving his chair alongside the younger man, urging him

²² Meigs to father, February 11, 1862, Meigs Papers.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ The quartermaster general maintained that the president had consulted only him during the difficult time of early January 1862, but that statement is patently incorrect. Meigs, "The Relations of President Lincoln," p. 239.

²⁵ Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase.

²⁶ Typhoid had immobilized McClellan since December 20.

²⁷ Meigs, "The Relations of President Lincoln," pp. 302, 292.

²⁸ Six months earlier, Meigs had characterized McDowell stringently: "McDowell appointed. . . through the influence of Mr. Chase is not a great man. No one in the army would have selected him as the first officer to be made a general. A good, brave, commonplace, fat man." Meigs to father, July 30, 1861, Meigs Papers.

to reveal his strategy to those assembled. McClellan, who had earlier outlined his plans to Chase and who on the previous day had explained his intentions to Lincoln "in a general and casual way," worried that further discussion would compromise the strategy.²⁹ He offered to reveal his aims to those assembled if the president would commit his request to writing and if Lincoln "assumed the responsibility of the results."³⁰ This Lincoln did not do and, according to Meigs, the president "yielded in despair to his wilful [sic] General."³¹

Lincoln showed his willingness to listen to Meigs again on March 1, 1862 when the quartermaster showed up unexpectedly at the White House to deliver a memo. The president was in conference with Welles when an aide announced Meigs. The messenger returned to the general with the Lincoln's reply: "General Meigs is it? He never comes without he has something to say worth hearing. I will see him surely." Meigs asked his father: "That's a desired reputation to have at headquarters, is it not?"³²

Eight days later, Meigs again found himself conferring with Lincoln and other administration officials. The ironclad *C.S.S. Virginia* had sunk two U. S. ships in Hampton Roads and seemed invulnerable against the Federal Navy's return fire. Seward summoned Meigs out of church to the White House. The quartermaster arrived to find secretaries Seward, Stanton and Welles and the superintendent of telegraph already gathered. Lincoln soon entered with Cmdr. John A. Dahlgren, commander of the Washington Navy Yard. Meigs later recorded his views of the council, which corroborated Welles' account. Both described Stanton's state of extreme anxiety and used almost the same words to record Stanton's remarks. In Welles' judgment, the quartermaster was "in full sympathy with Stanton in all his fears and predictions." Meigs, wrote

²⁹ Ibid., 292-293. George B. McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story* (New York, 1887), p. 156.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 158.

³¹ Meigs, "The Relations of President Lincoln," p. 293.

³² Meigs to father, March 2, 1862, Meigs Papers.

Welles, did not have information on which to base a judgment so that he was unable "to allay panic or tranquilize the government officials."³³

Meigs' resonance to Stanton's outlook increased in the months leading up to operations on the Peninsula.

The close personal and professional relationship between the two men began as early as Monday, February 10, 1862, at a time when Stanton kept a punishing schedule. Meigs arrived in Stanton's office shortly after the secretary had returned from a conference with Lincoln, who had conducted little other business that day because his son, Willie, lay seriously ill.³⁴ At the start of what turned out to be a four-hour visit, the secretary of war lay collapsed on his sofa, too sick to discuss business with the quartermaster, who urged him to go home. Stanton confessed that he was not physically able to do so. Meigs summoned a Dr. Wheeler "of the Navy" who happened to be near. The doctor administered ammonia and valinium to the prostrate secretary, and put ice to his head and hot bricks to his feet. For two or three hours after these ministrations, the secretary remained in his office, "coughing violently" and convulsively and thanking Meigs for his attention. Three hours into the visit, Stanton told Meigs that only "at this moment" did he see Meigs' face and recognize him. "Yet," Meigs observed, Stanton "seemed not to know that he had done so" throughout the visit.³⁵

Stanton's collapse did not puzzle Meigs. The new secretary had had a "narrow escape" because he kept an exhausting schedule. Even during his four-hour ordeal, the secretary of war signed a paper for Lincoln's private secretary and tried to talk briefly with Vice President Hannibal Hamlin, Seward and McClellan. Whenever Stanton tried to speak, he found he could not, and "the ammonia & valinium were again administered." Two days earlier, the secretary had received members of Con-

³³ Meigs to father, March 9, 1862, Meigs Papers; Welles, *Diary*, p. 64, 62.

³⁴ C. Percy Powell, *Lincoln Day by Day: A Chronology, 1809-1865*, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1960), vol. 3, p. 94.

³⁵ Meigs to father, February 11, 1862, Meigs Papers. Meigs' phrasing is awkward. He apparently means that Stanton had recognized Meigs throughout the visit but later seemed not to realize that he had known all along who was nursing him.

gress all day, worked through Sunday and gone to bed at 3 a.m. Monday. For an hour or two later that morning, he had seen "this crowd of citizens who each had his special object to gain." Such a schedule, said Meigs "is exhausting to the brain[,] to the life force—I find it so with myself and I have had a pretty long trial of it—I need more sleep than ever before." Stanton first came to the office with "explosive energy so conspicuous" and indulged in many "fulminations," Meigs noted, but "though full of energy & pluck & art & keenness—he may overwork himself & with fatal results."³⁶

One of the projects to which Stanton would devote prodigious labor was replacing McClellan. The president's War Order No. 3, which the Cabinet approved and the president endorsed on the evening of March 11, removed McClellan as general-in-chief. Stanton's frantic search for military guidance had begun earlier that day when he had visited the hotel room of 63-year-old General Hitchcock, who was retired and ill. Stanton begged him to accept a position as military adviser to the administration. He promised Hitchcock "any legislation" the general might want if he would accept the post. Stanton went so far as to offer command of the Army of the Potomac to Hitchcock.³⁷ Hitchcock declined, and the secretary of war turned to Meigs for military counsel.

With the spring offensive about to begin and still lacking a general-in-chief, Lincoln and Stanton became the Union's *de facto* high command. The two lawyers sought confidence in drawing closer to Meigs. On March 12, the secretary of war "surprised" the quartermaster general by summoning him to his office "immediately." The meeting produced three significant results: (1) the formation of the War Board—a military council made up of army bureau chiefs; (2) the strengthening of close ties between the two men, neither of whom supported McClellan's strat-

³⁶ *Ibid.*; Meigs to father, July 29, 1862, Meigs Papers.

³⁷ Hitchcock, *Fifty Years in Camp and Field*, p. 438-439. Just, 48 hours after Stanton's attempt to lure the reluctant Hitchcock to serve as military adviser, Confederate President Jefferson Davis, likewise in need of military guidance, charged Gen. Robert E. Lee with conduct of military affairs in the armies of the Confederacy. Frank J. Welcher, *The Union Army, 1861-1865* (Bloomington, 1989), p. 797.

egy; and (3) the assignment to Meigs of special responsibility for the army's move to the Peninsula.³⁸

When Meigs arrived in Stanton's office, he found Brig. Gen. James W. Ripley, the Army's chief of ordnance, with the secretary. According to Meigs, Stanton "informed us that he desired to have a council every day at 11 a.m. of the chiefs of Bureaux in which the general conduct of the war and of the War Dept should be discussed."³⁹ Later, after Ripley had left the room, the conversation turned immediately to army politics and the fate of General McClellan:

Stanton: General you saw an order in the *Intelligencer*.

Meigs: Yes sir.

Stanton: What do you think of it?

Meigs: I think it is right. Gen. McClellan at the head of 200,000 men actively operating in the field is not physically able to attend to, to think even of this operation & requirements of other commands. . . . No man away from headquarters with 200,000 men under his immediate direction can do this & Gen. McClellan ought not to have such responsibility & should I think be glad to be relieved of it.⁴⁰

The secretary of war approved of Meigs' observations and sought much closer ties with him. Stanton:

replied in substance that he wished to place himself fully in communication with me, that he had the fullest confidence in my ability in my patriotism & that he said this to show me that he wished as far as one man could to another to place himself along side of me to ask my counsel and assistance in carrying out the great work to which he knows we are both devoted. He was also pleased to say that he had

³⁸ Meigs, "Memorandum," March 12, 1862, pp. 1-4, Meigs Papers.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2. The order relieving McClellan as general-in-chief had been printed in newspapers, which is how McClellan himself learned of his fate.

observed all & that he had more confidence in me in these regards than in any other man in the army.⁴¹

Stanton's strong endorsement heartened Meigs to petition the secretary for an increase in the quartermaster general's staff to relieve him from the pressure of time-consuming details. The secretary agreed and went even further, telling Meigs that he was to consider the assistant secretary of war, shipping executive John Tucker, under his orders and, if necessary, to assign him a room in the quartermaster general's office, then in the Winder Building, a block away from the war department.

Though Tucker, who had assumed his post on January 29, did an excellent job of gathering transports for the Peninsula, Stanton held a low opinion of his office work. The quartermaster general knew as well as he did, confided Stanton, "that the most trusted agents needed attendance." Meigs, thus, must consider the Peninsula "expeditions" as "particularly" under his "watch & supervision."⁴²

An early Stanton biographer judged that Meigs acted as "Stanton's main support" in certain respects.⁴³ Meigs, one of the secretary's "faithful lieutenants," acted closely with Stanton as a political ally, professional colleague and personal friend.⁴⁴ The relationship survived confrontations during which the professional soldier disagreed on military points with the notoriously intimidating Stanton. At least three times during War Board meetings Meigs challenged the secretary's simplistic judgments. Stanton once stated that "If our men would only be cool, and watch their chance" they could disable the *C.S.S. Virginia* just by hitting the ironclad in a vulnerable part. Meigs quickly pointed to the difficulty of "looking out of a blind port-hole, to aim the gun so as to strike the vessel the moment her side should be exposed, and it would

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4. The quartermaster general concluded his account of the meeting with Stanton thus: "I think I have precisely given in this memorandum the full measure of his confidence in my ability as expressed by him."

⁴³ Frank A. Flower, *Edwin McMasters Stanton* (New York, 1905), p. 294.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 293.