

GENERAL GRANT, FORT DONELSON AND "OLD BRAINS"

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For over two and one half years, one of President Lincoln's major problems was his search for one man who could and would serve as General in Chief of the armies of the United States.

Every schoolboy knows that General U. S. Grant was finally selected to fill that responsible position and ultimately led the North to victory; but what is not generally known is the fact that Grant was almost hounded out of the service even as his foot was on the bottom rung of the ladder to success.

The time was mid-winter 1861-62. In April, 75,000 enthusiastic young volunteers had marched forth from their Northern homes in a holiday spirit believing that the war would be of short duration. Their term of enlistment was ninety days — just long enough to take a little trip, see something of the country, have a bit of excitement, perhaps pick up a few extra dollars, and still get back home in time for the harvest. However, that rosy optimism had been rudely shattered by the unexpected Confederate victory at Bull Run.

A new and mightier army had been called up; but in spite of the outpouring of men and money, the war still continued to drag on. Ten long, dreary months had passed without a single substantial Northern victory. Now, with affairs at a standstill on all fronts, the folks back home, the press, politicians, and official Washington were all clamoring for action — decisive action to end the war, to bring the boys back home, and to put an end to the ever-mounting expenditure of tax money. One eminent historian has very aptly called the time, "The Period of Impatience."¹ Northern morale was low — very, very low.

On the so-called "Western Front," the Confederates under General Albert Sidney Johnston had established a defensive line across the state of Kentucky extending from Columbus, on the Mississippi River, eastward through Forts Henry and Donelson, Bowling Green, Somerset to Cumberland Gap. Their line of outposts was along the Green River — a scant seventy miles from Louisville. General Johnston's headquarters was at Bowling Green and his supply bases at Nashville and Memphis, Tennessee. *The Confederates had the advantage of a unified command.*

This was lacking on the Union side, because, for some strange reason, the state of Kentucky had been split between *two* Northern Depart-

ments. That part of Kentucky lying *west of the Cumberland River* was in the Department of the Missouri, which was commanded by Major General Henry W. Halleck from his headquarters in far-off St. Louis. That part of Kentucky *east of the Cumberland River* was in the Department of the Ohio which was commanded by Brigadier General Don Carlos Buell, who maintained his headquarters in Louisville. Each of these two departments was an *independent command* — entirely separate one from the other. Each commander reported directly to Washington and received his orders directly from the same place.

The troops in the Cairo-Paducah-Smithland area were commanded by Brigadier General U. S. Grant who belonged to Halleck's command. The main part of Buell's force was deployed in the area between Louisville and the Green River with small concentrations in the valley of the Big Sandy and in Southeastern Kentucky. At Cairo, there was a fleet of Federal gunboats under command of Commodore Foote of the U. S. Navy.²

But before going into the Fort Donelson campaign, it would be well to devote a few minutes to a brief study of the geography of the theater of operations.

The most important features from a strategical standpoint are the Ohio, the Mississippi, the Tennessee, and the Cumberland rivers — all great natural highways leading to the heart of the enemy-held territory. The Tennessee River was navigable for flat-bottomed boats as far up as Muscle Shoals; the Cumberland to a point well above Nashville. To the east, we have the rugged, tree-covered Cumberland Mountains forming a formidable natural barrier between the East and the West and passable only at a few points — the most important pass being Cumberland Gap. There were very few hard surfaced roads in the area; the majority of the highways being ordinary, country, dirt roads — good enough in summer; but almost impassable in winter or in rainy weather. The Memphis and Charleston Railroad ran eastward from Memphis through Northern Mississippi and Alabama to Chattanooga where it connected with the Eastern Tennessee and Georgia which ran up a valley of the Cumberlands to Virginia. These two lines enabled the Confederates to transfer troops rapidly and expeditiously between the Eastern and Western theaters. Also, from Chattanooga, the Georgia Central ran to Atlanta and points in the Southeast beyond. From Louisville, we have the L. & N. running south through Bowling Green to Nashville. There it connected with the Nashville and Chattanooga. From Columbus, on the Mississippi, the Mobile and Ohio ran south through Corinth to the Gulf. Then cutting across these two north and south lines, we have the Memphis and Ohio from Memphis to Bowling Green.³

You can thus readily see that just as long as the Confederates could hold their defensive line across Kentucky, they not only blocked the upper Mississippi, Tennessee, and Cumberland rivers, but they also protected this vast railroad network which insured their ability to rapidly shift troops from one point to another *on interior lines of communications*. This advantage was worth many, many divisions to the hard-pressed Confederacy.

At this stage of the war, the Union army had no such thing as a General Staff to plan, co-ordinate, and supervise the activities of the various departments. Each department commander planned his own campaigns, and jealously kept those plans to himself. General McClellan in Washington was presumed to have over-all command of the armies, but he was wearing two hats; being also in active command of the Army of the Potomac in Virginia. What was needed was a strong, active General-in-Chief; one with nothing else to do but to issue positive orders and to see that they were carried out; to knock a few heads together when necessary, and to relieve the General who could not, or would not, carry out orders, or who placed his own personal interests above those of the Nation.

Both General Buell and General Halleck had been given the directive to drive the Confederates out of Kentucky and to occupy Eastern Tennessee where a strong Union sentiment was being ruthlessly suppressed. Both Generals had been directed to carefully co-ordinate and co-operate in all of their plans and movements.⁴

However, General Halleck displayed little interest in the liberation of Tennessee. According to him, he had his hands full in Missouri and Arkansas which, *in his estimation*, were of far greater importance.⁵ In reality, he resented any suggestion from an outside source especially when it might require him to co-operate with or subordinate himself to anyone else.

Halleck resented McClellan as commander-in-chief. He was jealous of Buell. He mistrusted everyone except himself and therefore had a hard time delegating responsibility. Ambitious, aloof, cold, and haughty, he had an exalted opinion of his own ability and intelligence. Although he had graduated from the U. S. Military Academy in 1839, he had had no combat service in the war with Mexico. Never, until now, had he commanded a large body of troops. However, shortly after the Mexican War, he had taken an extended leave of absence in Europe. There, he had toured the Napoleonic battlefields and inspected the various European armies. Returning to the States, he wrote a book: *The Elements of Military Art and Science*. He also translated from the French numerous military articles and Jomini's *Life of Napoleon*. His literary activities soon made him famous throughout the regular

army and he gloried in the nick-name "Old Brains," which his fellow officers bestowed upon him. He not only gloried in the name; but as time passed, he actually convinced himself that he had an absolute monopoly on that commodity.

Halleck resigned from the army in 1854 as a Captain and returned to the service in 1861 as a Major General of Volunteers, skipping the intermediate grades of Major, Lieutenant-Colonel, Colonel, and Brigadier General and outranking all his West Point classmates who had remained in the service. His nick-name accompanied him on his return to the army.

"Old Brains" established his headquarters in St. Louis, far from the active front, and there spent his time poring over maps and studying the voluminous reports which he required from his field commanders. As long as papers flowed smoothly from "In" to "Out" baskets and as long as the top of his desk was clear, everything was under control. He burned up the telegraph wires urging his commanders to greater activity while at the same time cautioning them against rashness. Like a teacher lecturing a child, he replied to Lincoln's telegram urging an invasion of Tennessee with a lecture on the art of war and he branded the idea "poor strategy" and "Madness."⁶

Buell, on the other hand, presented a plan for a joint operation. He suggested that while Halleck advanced up the Tennessee River with 20,000 men supported by the gunboats from Cairo, he (Buell) would advance south along the line of the L. & N. Railroad against Bowling Green and Nashville. This pincer movement, he contended, would break the center of the Confederate line, leave the forces at Columbus and Cumberland Gap up in the air and ultimately force the evacuation of those two strong points.

"Old Brains" objected to Buell's plan. He claimed that he did not have sufficient troops or competent commanders for such a move. *However*, if the President insisted upon such a movement, the only sure way to guarantee success would be to place Buell's Army of the Ohio under his (Halleck's) command. He would then deploy a small part of it as a containing force in front of Bowling Green and then make a massive move up the Cumberland River with the bulk of the two combined armies. Halleck wanted a one-man show with Halleck as the man.⁷ He was angling for supreme command in the west and the obstacle was Buell. Undoubtedly, the command would go to which ever General won the first decisive victory.⁸

Lincoln and McClellan, however, rejected both plans and held to their original proposal that Buell should invade Eastern Tennessee through Cumberland Gap while Halleck contained the Confederate army in the west to prevent its moving into Kentucky while Buell

was marching eastward. Of course, this plan cast "Old Brains" in a minor role — a role beneath the dignity and superior talents of the great self-appointed master of war. He voiced his strenuous objections.

Lincoln's and McClellan's plan, however, did have considerable merit. It would not only liberate Eastern Tennessee, but it would also cut the line of the Eastern Tennessee and Georgia Railroad and prevent the transfer of Confederate troops from the West to Virginia where McClellan was about to launch an offensive against Richmond. Further, Buell's presence in Eastern Tennessee might even necessitate the withdrawal of troops from the Richmond front to contain and prevent him from joining McClellan in a pincer movement against Richmond. To my knowledge, this was the first effort to co-ordinate the activities of the commands in the East and West.

The plan, however, did have one big weakness—a most serious one — in that it involved the supply and maintenance of Buell's army by animal-drawn transportation. Even if Buell had had the necessary transportation, the 200 miles of winding, unimproved dirt roads presented an insurmountable problem for at this time of year rains and melting snows had rendered the roads impassable for all but the lightest of vehicles. Buell made this point clear; but upon being overruled, he — like the good soldier he was — requisitioned more transportation and threw Wood's division into the task of repairing, widening, and corduroying the roads he would have to use in advancing towards Cumberland Gap. At the same time, he kept his troops so disposed that he could move against Bowling Green if and when such permission were granted. In moving against Bowling Green, he could use the L. & N. Railroad as a supply line and be absolutely independent of bad roads and inclement weather.

While all this debate had been going on, Grant at Cairo had discovered through personal reconnaissance and spies that Fort Henry was not the mighty Gibraltar depicted by the Southern Press. He therefore drew up a plan of campaign and sought and obtained permission to visit General Halleck's Headquarters at St. Louis. There, to quote General Grant: —

"I was received with so little cordiality that I perhaps stated the object of my plan with far less clearness than I might have done. I had not uttered many sentences before I was cut short, as if my plan was preposterous. I returned to Cairo much crestfallen."⁹

But Grant was not one to be easily discouraged. He enlisted the support of Commodore Foote and General C. P. Smith, known to be one of Halleck's favorites. Grant again presented his request to be allowed to move against Fort Henry. Two days later, the unpredictable Halleck

issued the order. Only after the order had been issued, did he notify Washington adding: —

"I respectfully request that the state of Tennessee be added to my command." ¹⁰

He could thus preclude Buell to whom he telegraphed:

"I have ordered an advance of our troops on Fort Henry and Dover. It will be made immediately." ¹¹

That may have been Halleck's idea of co-ordination and co-operation, but it hardly complied with the spirit of Lincoln's oft-repeated admonition.

Grant's expedition started February 2nd. Four of Foote's iron clads followed by three gunboats escorted the nine river steamers carrying about half of Grant's command. The transports unloaded the soldiers about three miles below Fort Henry and returned to Paducah to pick up the balance of Grant's command.

It was not until the 5th that the entire command was assembled and ready to move against the fort; however, on account of the lateness of the hour, the advance was postponed until the next morning. While Grant was assembling his men and even before a single shot had been fired, "Old Brains" in far away St. Louis was beginning to panic. The book said that an attacking force should outnumber an entrenched foe five to one and he was worried lest he had sent a boy to do a man's work. Even though he had brusquely told Buell that his co-operation was not needed, he now telegraphed him on the 5th:

"Can't you make a diversion in my favor by threatening Bowling Green?" ¹²

To General McClellan in Washington:

"It is reported that 10,000 have left Bowling Green by railroad to reinforce Henry. Can't you send me some infantry regiments from Ohio?" ¹³

Ohio was to be in Buell's department.

"Old Brains" also wired Mr. Thomas Scott, the Assistant Secretary of War, who at the time was in the field with Buell:

"Send me all the reinforcements you can as I wish to cut the enemy's line before Beauregard arrives." ¹⁴

This last telegram was based upon "reliable information" that General Beauregard had left Virginia with *fifteen regiments*. As it turned out, Beauregard *did* arrive, but with a personal staff of fifteen officers instead of fifteen regiments. Halleck's reliable informant had made a slight error of only 14,985 men in reporting the force.

The Union attack got off at 11:00 a.m. on the morning of the 6th, but Grant's infantry bogged down in the mud along the river and were forced to detour over winding roads on higher ground. The Navy continued on. Fort Henry had been poorly located and its river batteries were completely inundated by the flooded river; water also stood two feet deep in some parts of the main fort. Only eleven of its guns were operative and all but two of them were inferior to the heavy guns of the fleet. Realizing the hopelessness of his position, General Tilghman, the Confederate commander, ordered the garrison of some 2,500 men to save itself by retreating to the protection of Fort Donelson eleven miles to the east. The General and seventy selected gunners remained behind to cover the withdrawal.

Bravely exchanging shot for shot with the fleet, the unequal duel lasted for almost two hours. Every ship was struck at least 30 times, but their sloping armor deflected the shells of the fort's light guns. One lucky shot did penetrate the casemate of the Essex, burst inside the engine room and the vessel floated helplessly down stream and out of action. Finally, with the safety of the retreating garrison assured and with only four guns operating, Tilghman struck his colors. Grant's infantry arrived in front of the fort just in time to see Tilghman rowing out to the flagship to surrender to the Navy.

Grant ordered Foote to send a gunboat up the river to destroy the railroad bridge of the Memphis and Ohio so as to isolate the Confederate command at Columbus. He then wired Halleck the news of the Fort's surrender and his intention to move against Fort Donelson. "Old Brains" triumphantly wired Washington of *HIS* great victory and ignoring Grant, congratulated Foote with a warmth which reflected his growing irritation with Grant.¹⁵

While all this had been going on, Buell's advance against Bowling Green had finally been authorized and was well under way.

Commodore Foote informed Grant that it would take several days to repair the heavy damage done by the Confederate guns and at least three more to transfer the fleet from the Tennessee to the Cumberland before Fort Donelson. Thus while Grant is salvaging the captured supplies, while Foote is repairing his gun boats, and while "Old Brains" in St. Louis is gracefully receiving the plaudits of the public, let us examine the defenses of Fort Donelson — Grant's next objective.

Fort Donelson was located on a high bluff some one hundred feet above the water on the west bank of the Cumberland River. The irregular, bastioned parapets of the main fort enclosed an area of about 20 acres which contained the rude huts of the garrison. Just below the fort, a shelf had been cut into the bluff to accommodate a strong battery of heavy guns which commanded the river approach to the north. The

Cumberland River and flooded Hickman Creek provided perfect barriers to the east and north. Indian Creek on the south constituted a formidable obstacle in that direction. Thus the fort was vulnerable to attack only from the west; and, there the Confederates had constructed a strong line of entrenchments along the ridge which paralleled the river.¹⁶

General Floyd, a former U. S. Army officer and Secretary of War under President Buchanan, commanded the fort which was garrisoned by some 17,000 men. In addition to the 12 heavy guns bearing down river, he had eight batteries (48 guns) of light artillery. General Simon Bolivar Buckner commanded the north half of the entrenchments; General Pillow, the south.

General Grant left Fort Henry early on the morning of February 12th. His force consisted of the divisions of Generals C. P. Smith and McClelland. It was a beautiful, warm spring-like day; the little enemy resistance was easily brushed aside and as the day grew warmer, Grant's men began to feel the weight of their heavy packs. To lighten their loads, they first threw away their heavy overcoats and then their blankets.

Arriving in front of Fort Donelson, Grant deployed his troops along a ridge parallel to that occupied by the Confederates entrenchments — Smith on the left; McClelland on the right. It turned bitterly cold that night and the men regretted their foolishness in throwing away their coats and blankets.

The next day (13th) General Lewis Wallace arrived with his division and some 2,000 extra men of a Kansas brigade which had come to Fort Henry in response to Halleck's S.O.S. This brought Grant's force up to about 25,000 men. Smith and McClelland moved over in the direction of their outer flanks making room for Wallace to deploy between them. The Union line now extended completely around the fortifications and the village of Dover. That night there was a heavy sleet which turned to snow and the troops spent another terrible night of suffering while waiting for the fleet to put in its appearance.

But back in Cairo, Commodore Foote was having his trouble. A deeply religious man, he finally decided that if he couldn't speed up the work of the meticulous mechanics, he could at least fortify his men spiritually. (Many of them were army men who had been sentenced by court martial to serve on the gunboats for breaches of discipline.) Marching them en masse to Church, he was not in the least dismayed when he found that the Parson was ill. The doughty old Salt boarded the pulpit and proceeded to conduct the service. He chose for his text: — "Be Ye of good cheer. Let not your hearts be troubled. Ye believe in

God; believe Ye also in me." ¹⁷ That night, about thirty of the rascals took off for parts unknown.

The fleet finally arrived before Fort Donelson on the night of the 13th and attacked the next day about 3:00 p.m. The plan of action was for Grant's infantry to hold the enemy within its fortifications while the fleet reduced the water batteries and ran past the fort to a point above Dover where its guns could enfilade the enemy lines and effectively support the infantry attack.

However, the guns at Fort Donelson were heavier, better placed, and better served than those at Fort Henry. In the duel which followed, two of the ironclads had their steering gear shot away; Foote's flagship was severely damaged and Foote himself badly wounded. The fleet was forced to retire. An icy sleet began falling about dusk, and Grant's men suffered through another terrible night in the open.

Inside the fort, the Confederate high command decided that it was hopeless to try to hold out against the invading force and make plans to fight its way out of the fort and fall back on Bowling Green. Floyd, therefore, issued orders for Pillow's division to attack and throw back the Union right. Buckner was ordered to leave enough of his men in his entrenchments on the Confederate right to give them the appearance of being occupied and to form the bulk of his division in support of Pillow's attack. When Pillow had thrown back the Union right, Buckner was to take over and hold the breach open while Pillow disengaged his men and put them on the road to Bowling Green. Buckner was then to disengage and form the rear guard for the retreat.

The attack, launched at daybreak the next morning (15th) caught McClernand's men completely off guard. Grant had gone down the river the night before to confer with the wounded Foote. Before leaving, he had specifically cautioned his division commanders to do nothing which might bring on a general engagement during his absence. Wallace, on McClernand's left, therefore refrained from committing his men until McClernand's men had been thrown back to the Wynn Ferry Road. Then only, did he throw in Thayer's brigade which succeeded in stopping the threatened rout. However, the Union right had been thrown back sufficiently to open the Confederate line of retreat.

But at this point, General Floyd noticed a forward movement from the Union left. Losing his head, he ordered Buckner to return to his entrenchments to meet the attack. Buckner protested, but was forced to obey orders.

The movement which Floyd had noticed had been occasioned by Grant's arrival on the field. Quickly sizing up the situation, he ordered Smith to attack frontally and galloped off to the right where he personally took command and ordered a counter attack. By night-

fall, the Confederates had been driven back to their original positions and the escape route closed. On the left, Smith had carried the outer line of entrenchments and had gained a lodgement on high ground from which his guns could sweep the inner works on the morrow.

The rain which had fallen intermittently all day, now turned to a mixture of sleet and snow. The suffering of the men (Union and Confederate alike) was indescribable especially that of the wounded lying between the lines.

That night, in the old tavern of Dover village, the Confederate commanders met in council and decided that surrender was the only course left. Forrest, the cavalryman protested. He had been out snooping around and had discovered that although the Dover-Nashville road was under four feet of water for a short distance south of town, it was still possible for the garrison to escape. He offered his services as a guide. But the Army Surgeon intervened arguing that it would be absolutely fatal to expose the tired men to icy water. In the end, the council decided to surrender the fort.

After that momentous decision, General Floyd immediately passed the command to General Pillow stating that because of an indictment for malfeasance of office while he was Buchanan's Secretary of War, he could ill afford to be captured. General Pillow, who just a few days prior had delivered a stirring address to the men urging them to make "Liberty or Death" their battle cry, now suddenly decided that he preferred Liberty. He turned the command over to the next senior — General Simon Bolivar Buckner.

Buckner, the gallant Kentucky Cavalier, refusing to desert his men, sadly sat down and penned a note to Grant proposing an armistice for the discussion of terms of surrender. While Buckner waited for a reply from Grant, Forrest returned to the bivouac of his men; quietly ordered them to saddle up and with each rider carrying a shivering infantryman behind his saddle, silently moved off into the darkness. Although the water was belly deep on the horses, the entire column escaped undetected.

General Floyd commandeered a river steamer which had just arrived with ammunition and 400 recruits from Nashville. He unloaded the unfortunate newcomers and detailing a Mississippi regiment to hold the vessel against all comers, hurried off to his area to pick up his brigade of Virginians. Returning with them, he loaded them on board, cast off the lines and steamed away to liberty leaving the abandoned Mississippians howling in rage. Poor old Pillow and his aide escaped in a leaky rowboat.¹⁸

Grant's historic reply: — "No terms but an immediate and unconditional surrender can be accepted. I propose to move immediately

upon your works" — left Buckner with no room for discussion and parley. The surrender was informal and without ceremony — so informal that hundreds of Confederates, taking advantage of the fraternization which followed, walked unchallenged through the lines to freedom. As it was, Grant shipped over 14,000 prisoners to Northern prison camps. He captured over 20,000 stands of small arms, 48 pieces of light artillery, 17 heavy guns, over 4,000 horses and mules and hundreds of tons of ammunition, commissary, and general supplies.¹⁹ Grant's loss in killed, wounded, and missing was about 3,000 while that of the Confederates was about 2,000.

The capture of Forts Henry and Donelson broke the center of the Confederate line and forced them to withdraw all their troops from Kentucky. The evacuation of Columbus opened the Mississippi River as far down as Vicksburg. Buell's pressure on Johnston at Nashville forced the latter to abandon his plans for a stand at that place and he retired to Murfreesboro.

But most important, Grant's victory bolstered the sagging spirits of the North, brought him from obscurity and started him on his climb to supreme command. To plagiarize from K. P. Williams, Lincoln, at long last "had found a General." But in finding him, he almost lost him through a vicious chain of circumstances.

For even as Grant telegraphed Halleck a report of his victory, a score or more of newspaper correspondents with the army filed glowing reports to their respective publishers. Brashly ignoring protocol and customs of the service which prescribed that the senior commander was entitled to credit (or hell) for the actions of his subordinates, the correspondents all ignored Halleck, the brain, and sang the praises of Grant, the fighting general. This rankled the sensitive, ambitious Halleck in far off St. Louis. He could not ignore Grant because of what he had done, so he tried to divert credit to himself and others.²⁰ He wired McClellan:

"Make Buell, Grant and Pope Major Generals of Volunteers and give me command in the West. I ask this for Forts Henry and Donelson."²¹

However, Halleck's recommendation was unnecessary because a jubilant Congress had already promoted Grant to Major General on the strength of the first news flash. For the next few days, "Old Brains" was so busy with his paper work that he was unable to find time to thank Grant for his services. He telegraphed McClellan again:

"Brigadier General C. P. Smith by his coolness and bravery at Fort Donelson, when the battle was against us, turned the tide and carried the enemy's works. Make him a Major General. You cant find a better one. Honor him for this victory and the whole Country will applaud."²²

Then, the Governor of Iowa had to be thanked:

"The Second Iowa Infantry proved themselves the bravest of the brave. They had the honor of leading the column which entered Fort Donelson." ²³

(Governors — especially when they are friendly to the administration — are mighty handy folks to have on one's side when one is seeking favors in Washington.)

General Hunter had sent Thayer's Brigade from Kansas. He had to be thanked:

"To you more than any other man in this department are we indebted for our success at Donelson. In my straits for troops to reinforce Grant, I appealed to you. You responded nobly and generously, placing your forces at my disposal. This enabled us to win the victory. Receive my most heartfelt thank." ²⁴

Finally, three days after the battle, Halleck's paper work had been reduced to a point where he had time to publish a stiff formal order in the St. Louis papers thanking Grant and Foote for their services — and urging them to greater activity. "Victory and Glory await the brave." ²⁵

Although common sense and the principles of war dictated a prompt pursuit and destruction of Johnston's broken and retreating army, "Old Brains" was too busy shadow boxing with a wild fantasy which he had distilled from wild rumors. The Confederates (according to him) were about to reinforce Columbus from Louisiana preparatory to an all-out invasion of Missouri and Illinois. He therefore recalled the fleet from Donelson to Cairo and kept Grant busy doing nothing for ten long days while he burned up the wires in all directions calling for reinforcements. (Had he but known it, Columbus was already being evacuated.) Contacting Buell, he pathetically pleaded:

"I am terribly pushed. Help me and I will help you. Hunter has acted nobly, generously, bravely. Without his aid, I would have failed before Donelson. Honor to him. We came within an ace of being defeated. If the fragments which I sent down there had not reached there Saturday, we should have been done in. * * * You and McClellan did not appreciate the strait I have been in." ²⁶

"Old Brains" then offered to transfer Grant to another area if only Buell would join him and take command of the troops in the field.

In desperation, he wired McClellan on February 20th:

"I *must* have command of the Armies in the West. Hesitation and delay are losing us the golden opportunity. Lay this before the President and Secretary of War. *May I assume Command?* Answer quickly." ²⁷

By this time, McClellan was beginning to get exasperated and he replied:

"Buell at Bowling Green knows more of the state of affairs than you

in St. Louis. I do not see that Buell can not control his own line. I shall not lay your request before the Secretary." ²⁸

McClellan then requested a report of affairs to include the position of Halleck's troops and those of the enemy. Affronted by this logical request, "Old Brains" fired back:

"Certainly you do not expect to get information from me which I can not obtain myself. I have worked hard for months, issuing order after order for returns, but the Officers of this department are so negligent or ignorant of their duties that I find it impossible to obtain returns till long after they cease to be of any use." ²⁹

Down at Fort Donelson, Grant was eager to press the advantage gained. In announcing his victory to Halleck, he had added:

"Unless orders to the contrary are received, I will take Clarksville the 21st and Nashville about March 1st"

Grant waited several days and then taking the absence of orders to the contrary as assent for his proposed movement, he ordered General Smith to move against Clarksville. Smith discovered that Clarksville had been abandoned. Grant, thereupon, took several key members of his staff and went to Nashville to confer with General Buell. Now, this was a normal — a sensible thing to do. In today's army, such action is "S.O.P." ³⁰ A commander *must* have liaison, an understanding with and the co-operation of the commanders of friendly troops on his flanks especially when there is over-lapping jurisdiction.

Upon hearing of Smith's expedition to Clarksville and Grant's visit to Nashville, "Old Brains" hit the ceiling and immediately telegraphed McClellan:

"I have had no communication with Grant for more than a week. He left his command without my authority and went to Nashville. His army, seems to be as much demoralized by the victory at Fort Donelson as was that of the Potomac by the defeat at Bull Run. It is hard to censor a successful General immediately after a victory, but I think that he richly deserves it. I can get no returns, no reports, no information of any kind from him. Satisfied with his victory, he sits down and enjoys it without regard to the future. I am worn out and tired with this neglect and inefficiency. C. P. Smith is almost the only Officer equal to the emergency." ³¹

Thus taken in, McClellan replied:

"* * * Generals must observe discipline as well as private soldiers. Do not hesitate to arrest him at once if the good of the service requires it, and place C. P. Smith in command. You are at liberty to regard this as a positive order, if it will smooth the way." ³²

The very next day, Halleck relieved Grant of command and replaced him with General Smith; explaining to McClellan:

"A Rumor" (Note the word) "A rumor has just reached me that since the taking of Fort Donelson, Grant has resumed his former bad habits. If so, it will account for his neglect of my oft repeated orders. I do not deem it expedient to arrest him at present, but I have placed General Smith in command of the expedition up the Tennessee."³³

Lincoln, an astute lawyer, upon hearing of Grant's demotion, immediately demanded a full, complete, and accurate report naming the times, places, and circumstances of Grant's alleged indiscretions. He wanted *facts not rumors*. "Old Brains" back-watered and weakly tried to explain:

"General Grant has made proper explanation. He acted from a praiseworthy, although mistaken zeal for the public service, in going to Nashville. I recommend that no further notice be taken of it. There never has been a lack of military subordination on the part of General Grant and his failure to make returns has been explained as resulting from the failure of Colonels of Regiments to report to him, and partially from the interruption of telegraphic communication. All these irregularities have been corrected."³⁴

"Old Brains" restored Grant to command; explaining that he had been forced to take the action he had because of orders from Washington. Grant accepted the explanation and withdrew his request to be relieved from duty. General Grant never learned that Halleck had instigated, and had been responsible for the entire affair until years afterwards when he was writing his Memoirs and uncovered Halleck's incriminating telegrams in the War Department files.³⁵

Thus, Lincoln came very close to losing a great General — a great General who was destined to lead the Nation to victory.

In closing, I sincerely hope that my remarks have not offended any kinsman of General Halleck who by chance may be in the audience.

If so, I humbly apologize. But *honestly*, poor "Old Brains" couldn't help being the way he was. He was born that way and living in those turbulent, dog-eat-dog days, as he did, improved neither his nature nor disposition. He has been gone from this vale of tears, trials, and tribulations for many, many years.

Let us hope now in his rear echelon headquarters in Valhalla (that haven of all great warriors) that the papers are flowing smoothly from "in" to "out" baskets; let us hope that the daily reports and returns are arriving on time and, above all, let us hope that his Western Union Credit Card is still in good standing. PAX VOBISCUM!

FOOTNOTES

¹ Gray, *The Hidden Civil War*.

² Steele, *American Campaigns*, Vol. 1, p. 150.

³ U.S. War Department, Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies.

⁴ All correspondence between the President and General McClellan with Generals Buell and Halleck during the period November, 1861 and February, 1862 fairly teems with admonitions for the necessity of co-operation and co-ordination between the two departments. See U.S. War Department's Official Records of the Union Confederate and Armies, especially Vol. IV, Ser. I, p. 342; Vol. VII, Ser. 1, pp. 524, 526, 539 and 652.

⁵ U.S. War Dept. Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. (Hereafter referred to as "O.R.") Vol. VII, Ser. 1, p. 532.

⁶ *Passim*. Especially Catto, *Mr. Lincoln's Army*; Hanson, *The Civil War*; Steele, *American Campaigns*; Foote, *The Civil War*; Howe, *Civil War Times*; and Lewis, *Sherman, the Fighting Prophet*.

⁷ Foote, *The Civil War*, p. 181.

⁸ Lewis, *Sherman, the Fighting Prophet*, p. 209.

⁹ Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*. Vol. 1, p. 287.

¹⁰ O. R., Vol. VII, Ser. 1, p. 571.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 574.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 583.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 583-584.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 585.

¹⁵ Hanson, *The Civil War*, p. 112.

¹⁶ Stickles, *Simon Bolivar Buckner*, pp. 127-130.

¹⁷ Foote, *The Civil War*, p. 201.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

¹⁹ O. R., Vol. VII, Ser. 1, p. 625.

²⁰ Hanson, *The Civil War*, p. 120.

²¹ O. R., Vol. VII, Ser. 1, p. 628.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 637.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 635.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 636.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 639.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 632.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 641.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 645.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 647.

³⁰ "S.O.P."—Standard Operational Procedure.

³¹ O. R., Vol. VII, Ser. 1, p. 679.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 680.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 682.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 683.

³⁵ Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, Vol. 1, p. 328.