

THIS WAS THE CIVIL WAR

Gen. McClellan Removed

By MERTON T. AKERS
UPI Correspondent

The commander of the Army of the Potomac sat alone in his tent near Warrenton, Va., the night of Nov. 7, 1862, writing a letter to his wife.

The time was near midnight. Outside an early snowstorm blew through the camps of his Union army.

"Suddenly some one knocked on the tentpole, and upon my invitation to enter, there appeared Burnside and Buckingham, both looking very solemn," Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan wrote years later.

"I received them kindly and commenced conversation upon general subjects in the most unconcerned manner possible.

"After a few moments Buckingham said to Burnside: 'Well, general, I think we had better tell General McClellan the object of our visit.'"

"I very pleasantly said that I should be glad to learn it. Whereupon Buckingham handed me the two orders of which he was the bearer."

Burnside Appointed
One order removed McClellan from command of the Army of the Potomac. The other appointed Burnside in his place.

"I saw them both — especially Buckingham — were watching me most intently while I opened and read the

orders. I read the orders with a smile, immediately turned to Burnside, and said:

"Well, Burnside, I turn the command over to you."

With no more formality than that McClellan, one of the most controversial men of his time, was removed, never to serve in the Union army again.

When Maj. Gen. Ambrose Everett Burnside and Brig. Gen. Catharinus Putnam Buckingham, a special duty officer in the War Department, went back out in the snowstorm, McClellan alone again, turned to finish the letter to his wife.

"They have made a great mistake," he wrote.

"Alas, for my poor country."

Only 38 Words

The published War Department directive removing McClellan and directing him to go to Trenton, N. J., to await "further orders" which never came, contained only 38 words but behind it lay a massive controversy among his friends and enemies, with President Lincoln squarely in the middle.

Actually McClellan had run out his military string and Lincoln had little choice except to remove him.

He had spent more than seven months reorganizing the Army of the Potomac after the first battle of Bull Run

(Manassas) without moving against the enemy hardly more than a long cannon shot away. He had vacillated before Yorktown, Va., at the start of the Peninsula campaign. He had missed the opportunity of capturing Richmond before the Confederate army was assembled. He had lost the Seven Day's battles but saved his army. He had dragged his feet sending troops to Maj. Gen. John Pope at the second battle of Bull Run. He had missed a chance few generals ever get to crush Gen. Robert E. Lee's army at Antietam by not throwing in his fresh troops on the second day and not pursuing Lee promptly. He had dabbled in politics (he made no bones about being a Democrat) and pointedly told Lincoln how to run the war.

Prodded for Action

With almost infinite patience Lincoln had prodded McClellan for action and hardly ever succeeded. Now patience gave way to action as McClellan's army had moved south so belatedly that Lee had interposed his forces between the Army of the Potomac and Richmond.

Men differed then as now as to the merits of McClellan's removal with the majority on Lincoln's side.

Allan Nevins, one of the foremost Civil War historians, has written of McClellan:



REMOVED—It was near midnight and snowing on Nov. 7, 1862, when "Little Mac," Gen. George B. McClellan, received word at Warrenton, Va., that President Lincoln had removed him from command of the Army of the Potomac. McClellan had run out his military string—he would never serve as a Union commander again. Lincoln had little choice but to remove the controversial general. He had constantly prodded McClellan to move, but to no avail. McClellan, who had lost the Tidewater Peninsula, was endangering the entire Union effort with his vacillation, and Lincoln had to move. McClellan is shown in a pen and ink sketch from the Library of Congress collection.

"Behind the mask of seeming serenity and self-confidence, however, lay a great deal of self-distrust; behind the apparent energy, dynamism and boldness lay caution and timidity."

Kenneth P. Williams, author of the five-volume "Lincoln Finds A General," said:

"McClellan was not a real general. McClellan was not even a disciplined, truthful soldier. McClellan was merely an attractive but vain and unstable man, with considerable military knowledge, who sat on a horse well and wanted to be president."

Gen. Jacob D. Cox, who served under McClellan in West Virginia, said of him during that campaign:

"There was the same overestimate of the enemy, the

same tendency to interpret unfavorably the sights and sounds in front, the same hesitancy to throw in his whole force."

Confederate General Lee: "He is an able general but a very cautious one."

Bade Farewell

On Nov. 10 McClellan bade an impressive farewell to his army.

A private in the 118th Pennsylvania Volunteers wrote of the last review:

"As General McClellan passed . . . whole regiments broke and flocked around him, and with tears and entreaties besought him not to leave them. . . . Indeed, it was thought at one time there would be mutiny but by a word he calmed the tumult. . . . (Thomas F.) Meagher's Irish brigade . . . cast their colors in the dust for him to ride over, but,

of course, he made them take them up again."

Of that scene McClellan wrote to his wife:

"I never before had to exercise so much self control."

McClellan went to New Jersey by the way of Washington, leaving the capital without fanfare.

Almost exactly a year before, he had bade goodbye to Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott when the old general retired. McClellan had written to his wife that night:

"It may be that at some distant day I, too, shall totter away from Washington, a worn out soldier. Should I ever become vainglorious and ambitious, remind me of that spectacle."

Harper's weekly described Burnside, the new commander, as "a very handsome man. Tall and stout, with a flashing eye and a sonorous voice. He looks the very beau ideal of a soldier."

Headed Regiment

Burnside was 39 at the time. Born in a log cabin in Liberty, Ind., he learned to be a tailor early in life but his father managed an appointment to West Point for him where he studied with McClellan and Stonewall Jack-

son, among other Civil War figures.

When war broke out he headed a Rhode Island regiment and was among the first troops to arrive in Washington when the capital was cut off soon after Sumter.

He had led a successful expedition against Roanoke Island early in the war. By the time of Antietam he was a corps commander but McClellan blamed him for being slow to attack that day and their close friendship was strained thereafter.

Burnside, a distinctive man, has come down in history largely because of his magnificent mutton chop whiskers, still called burnside.

Lincoln expected him to act where McClellan had delayed. Burnside would — disastrously.

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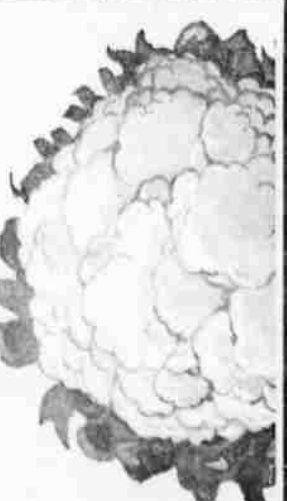
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