



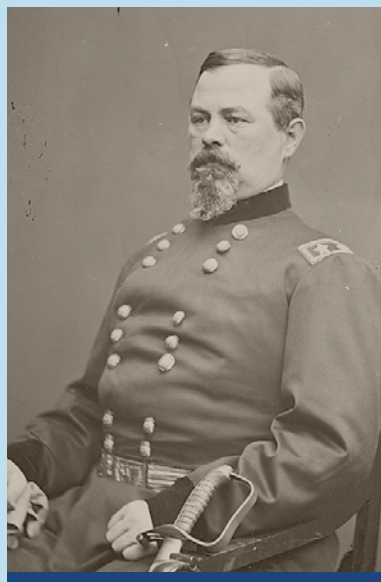
Antietam, Md. President Lincoln and Gen. George B. McClellan in the general's tent, Library of Congress

Lincoln and His Generals

A profile of the Union Commanders in the Civil War
by James H. Hillestad

As fate would have it, the leaders of the North and the South during the American Civil War were both born in Kentucky, and both had military careers. Davis, a graduate of West Point, served in the U.S. Army and fought in the Mexican War. He was appointed Secretary of War by President Franklin Pierce in 1853.

Lincoln's military experience was limited to a brief stint in the Black Hawk war of the 1830s. But Lincoln was a diligent and conscientious scholar and became a student of military tactics. Without a West Point education, he had fuller mastery of military strategy than any of his generals,



ABOVE
General George
McClellan, No.17927

LEFT
Portrait of Maj. Gen.
Irwin McDowell,
Library of Congress

or for that matter, Davis. While Union generals repeatedly focused on taking the Confederate capital at Richmond, Lincoln focused on cornering and defeating the Confederate army.

Historian Gabor Boritt noted that "the most unsettling facet of Lincoln's military policy was the drastic rate at which federal commanders were replaced. On the eastern front, for example, in a period of two years he removed the general in charge an unprecedented seven times."

In fact, Lincoln kept changing commanders until he found men whose vision of Union strategy and inclination to act paralleled his own. After General Irwin McDowell's

President Abraham Lincoln No.2, No.31219



LEFT
Portrait of Brig. Gen.
John Pope, officer
of the Federal Army,
Library of Congress

defeat at First Bull Run in July 1861, Lincoln called George McClellan to Washington and gave him command of what would soon be known as the Army of the Potomac. Hailed as the "young Napoleon," McClellan soon proved to be a disappointment. He was unwilling to take an aggressive approach and missed several opportunities to crush his enemy in the early stages of the war.

At a meeting on January 20, 1862, which McClellan did not attend, Lincoln famously expressed his exasperation to his top generals, by saying "If George McClellan does not want to use the army, I would like to borrow it for a time."

McClellan's indecisive conduct of the Peninsula Campaign (March - July 1862) led to the elevation of John Pope.

Pope's prominence was short lived, as he was soundly beaten in the Second Battle of Bull Run in August 1862.



BELOW
Portrait of Maj. Gen.
Ambrose E. Burnside,
Library of Congress



ABOVE
Union General
"Fighting Joe" Hooker,
No.31171



RIGHT
Union General
George Meade,
No.31067

McClellan was then given back his command, only to disappoint Lincoln again, at the battle of Antietam, when he failed to follow up and destroy the outnumbered rebel army.

After repeated, futile attempts by Lincoln to get McClellan to seize the initiative, McClellan was relieved of command. Said Lincoln on the occasion, "He is an admirable engineer but he seems to have a special talent for a stationary engine."

McClellan was succeeded by Ambrose Everett Burnside. Burnside insisted that he was unfit to replace McClellan as commander of the Army of the Potomac and proved himself to be right. Burnside presided over one of the North's worst defeats the following month, at the Battle of

*Referred to by his men as
a "damned google-eyed
old snapping turtle"*

Fredericksburg and was replaced by Joseph "Fightin' Joe" Hooker in January 1863.

Hooker planned a bold assault on Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, but at the critical moment, lost his nerve at the Battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863. Lincoln removed him on June 28 and turned over command to George Meade, three days before the Battle of Gettysburg.

Referred to by his men as a "damned google-eyed old snapping turtle," Meade won a decisive victory at Gettysburg, but like

McClellan at Antietam, he failed to pursue the retreating Confederates aggressively.

Disappointed in Meade's performance, Lincoln promoted Ulysses S. Grant to lieutenant general in charge of all Union forces. He was subsequently made general-in-chief.

Grant was a simple man of complex instincts, dedicated to doing one thing and only one thing and that was winning the war. When some doubted his choice, Lincoln said "I need this man. He fights!" Eastern Yankees curious about the secret of this western general's success thought they saw the answer in his unpretentious but resolute manner. He possessed "a clear blue eye" and "an expression as if he had determined to drive his head through a brick wall, and was about to do it."

On April 9, 1865 at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, Grant offered Lee generous terms of surrender, which were accepted.

The Civil War was over. 



Union General U.S. Grant, No.31079

Jim Hillestad is a frequent contributor to The Standard and is proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum. His museum, containing more than 35,000 figures and a large collection of militaria, is located in the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania. For directions and hours, call him at 570 629-7227 or visit his website: www.the-toy-soldier.com