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**ULYSSES S. GRANT:
THE ARCHITECT OF VICTORY
IN THE U.S. CIVIL WAR**

BY

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ULYSSES S. GRANT

THE ARCHITECT OF VICTORY IN THE U. S. CIVIL WAR

by

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ABSTRACT

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Ulysses S. Grant began his military service in 1839 when he entered the U.S. Military Academy. Upon graduation in 1843, he was assigned to an infantry regiment that was destined for duty in the Mexican War. Grant participated in most of the major Mexican War campaigns and after the War would continue on active duty until 1854. Ten years later, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, Commander in Chief of the Union Army, would conceive and orchestrate the Campaign that ended the Civil War. The purpose of this study was to explore Grant's development as a military leader by researching his personal correspondence. His understanding of national strategy and the operational level of war was the focus of the paper. In addition, Carl Von Clausewitz's concept of "military genius" was used to analyze Grant's military intellect. The study revealed that he possessed a sharp military intellect based on common sense and that his understanding of national strategy and the operational art is worthy of study by all military professionals.

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When he was faced by a problem, he could look at it in an eminently common-sense way, and in so detached and unselfish a manner, that throughout his life he seems to have been quite oblivious of his genius; for common sense is genius and of no common order. ¹

J.F.C. Fuller

INTRODUCTION

Captain Ulysses S. Grant resigned from the Regular Army in 1854. Although he graduated from West Point and had served in the Mexican War, his military record before the Civil War was not extraordinary.

Following his resignation from the Army, six years of personal business failure led him to seek his father's help. He did this reluctantly, but needed stable employment to provide for his family. The help was provided and in 1860 Grant went to Galena, Illinois to become a clerk in one of his father's leather stores. If the Civil War had not interrupted his new career, it is not inconceivable that Grant would have remained in Galena for the rest of his life.

Was he an ordinary man who happened to be at the right place and time in history? Perhaps, but he would accomplish what no other Union officer could do. Through his generalship, the Confederate Army was brought to its knees and Grant would become president of the United States because of his success.

The purpose of this study is to explore Grant's development as a strategic leader. Strategy, at the national and operational levels of war will be the focus, but Grant's military intellect

will also be explored.

Strategy is "defined as the art and science of employing the armed forces of a nation to secure the objectives of national policy by the application of force, or the threat of force". Col(Ret.) Arthur F. Lykke describes strategy in terms of "ends" (objectives), "ways" (concepts), and "means" (resources) in his article, Toward an Understanding of Military Strategy. These three pillars are the supports of Col. Lykke's "strategy stool".² National strategy forms the framework for the conduct of military operations. The "ends" or objectives of these operations must support achievement of national goals.

It is difficult to differentiate between the two levels of strategy, national and operational, but it is clear that there is a difference as illustrated by the outcome of the Civil War. David Jablonsky writes in his monograph Why is Strategy Difficult? that "the South lost because its strategic means did not match its strategic ends and ways". He goes on to say that "no amount of operational finesse on the part of the South's great captains could compensate for the superior industrial strength and manpower that the North could deploy".³

It is difficult to understand how the South lost when they won such great victories in the eastern theater during the first part of the war. However, operational victory led to strategic defeat for the South because operations were not conducted in support of national strategy. To what degree did Grant's grasp of strategy contribute to the Southern defeat? Part of the answer can be

found in Grant's writings.

At the operational level of war, strategy is translated into military operations aimed at achieving strategic objectives. The campaign is the centerpiece of the operational level of war and an effort will be made to measure Grant's campaigns against modern concepts of campaign planning. In 1988, the Strategic Studies Institute of the Army War College published a report on Campaign Planning. The report was based on extensive research of the operational art as currently practiced by major unified, allied and Army headquarters. Seven principles or "Tenets of a Campaign Plan" were presented in the report. These principles are:

- + A campaign plan provides broad concepts of operations and sustainment to achieve strategic military objectives in a theater of war and theater of operations; the basis for all other planning.
- + A campaign plan provides an orderly schedule of strategic military decisions--displays the commander's intent.
- + A campaign plan orients on the enemy's center of gravity.
- + A campaign plan phases a series of related major operations.
- + A campaign plan composes subordinate forces and designates command relationships.
- + A campaign plan provides operational direction and tasks to subordinates.
- + A campaign plan synchronizes air, land, and sea efforts into a cohesive and synergistic whole; joint in nature.⁴

At the operational level of war, the question to be answered is did Grant's operations conform to these principles.

The term military genius is often used to describe great

captains in history. It refers to the martial skill of the leader and implies intellectual superiority. In his book, On War, Carl Von Clausewitz devotes an entire chapter to the subject of military genius. Because Clausewitz is considered to be a leading military theorist, his thoughts on military genius will be used as a framework for analyzing Grant's intellectual powers. Clausewitz' ideas will be used in analyzing some of Grant's thoughts on strategy.

One approach to this study would be to analyze the works of military historians who have tried to interpret a leader's behavior from a historical perspective. An example of the pitfall in this approach is found in a letter from Liddell Hart to J.F.C. Fuller in which Liddell Hart criticizes Fuller's book on the "Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant". Liddell Hart states: "I think that you ascribe to Grant a subtlety and range of vision which is Fulleresque but which is in contrast to the very picture you paint of Grant's normal character." This appears to be a legitimate criticism because Fuller rarely finds fault with Grant and gives Grant credit for having the visionary powers of a psychic.

A second approach would be to study the memoirs of the leader. The problem here is that these works are normally written well after events have occurred and much can change in the writer's interpretation of events. In the case of Grant's Memoirs, they were written twenty years after the end of the Civil War and he was dying when he wrote them.

The approach taken in this paper is to examine Grant's thoughts as expressed in his personal papers written before and during the Civil War. It is believed that these writings will provide a true indication of what was in the mind of the leader without the bias of time or historical interpretation.

Direct quotes from Grant's writings will be used frequently. Unfortunately, Grant's spelling and grammar skills do not always match his military prowess. His spelling errors will be annotated when caught, however, grammar mistakes were not corrected.

BIOGRAPHICAL BRIEF

Ulysses S. Grant was born in Point Pleasant Ohio on 27 April 1822. Grant's father, Jesse, was a leather merchant and life at home was considered "comfortable". In his Memoirs, he states his distaste for his father's business, however, he seemed to enjoy agricultural work and anything that involved horses.

Grant tells us that his father did not have the opportunity to attend school as a youth. However, he recognized the importance of education and ensured that Ulysses would have the opportunity that he didn't. His father's emphasis on education would lead to Grant's acceptance at West Point in 1839.

Grant considers his life before West Point to be ordinary; however, one aspect of his early life may shed some light on his success as a military leader in the Western Theater of War.

Grant travelled more than the average youth as he was growing up. He speaks of trips to Cincinnati, Louisville, Chillicothe

and Toledo. Most of his early life was spent in Georgetown, Ohio, but he also resided for some time in Maysville, Kentucky. His trip to West Point in 1839 is particularly significant because it involved travel by steamer, canal and railroad.

Upon graduation from West Point, Grant would greatly expand his horizons with trips up and down the Mississippi River by steamer. He wrote with delight to Mrs. Bailey, a friend of the family, about one such trip that took him from St Louis to New Orleans in 1844. There is little doubt that these early travel experiences through the river region and his exposure to the modes of transportation that were so important in the conduct of the Mississippi River Campaign were extremely valuable to him in 1861 when the Western Campaign began.

Grant entered West Point with little enthusiasm and he really had little interest in a military education or in a career in the military. A letter to Julia written in July 1861 shows that his attitude did not change over the years. "You ask if I should not like to go in the regular army. I should not. I want to bring my children up to useful employment, and in the army the chance is poor".⁵ However, West Point did offer him a chance to succeed in life. As he wrote to his cousin McKinsty Griffith in 1839, "The fact is if a man graduates here he safe fer[sic] life."⁶

This quote says much about Ulysses S. Grant. For though he was in a prestigious institution that had produced great men, he was not in search of fame. During the Civil War, his humble nature

would help him to avoid the political confrontations that hurt the effectiveness of other Union generals.

J.F.C. Fuller hints at this aspect of Grant's character in the opening quote, but a letter written on October 25, 1861 to his sister provides some insight into his thinking on Army politics. Grant responded to a request to find jobs for friends of the family. He told his sister that: "I do not want to be importuned for places. I have none to give and want to be placed under no obligation to anyone." He also wrote: "I want always to be in a condition to do my duty without partiality, favor or affection."⁷ Grant's letters frequently reflect his disdain for the role played by politics in the selection and assignment of officers.

Grant graduated from West Point ranked twenty third in the Class of 1843. He was generally an average student, but what is most surprising is his disinterest in military study. In his Memoirs, Grant tells us of the ease of mathematics and of his pleasure in reading the novels of Bulwer, Cooper, Marryat, Scott and Washington Irving.⁸ Perhaps his exceptional writing skill can be traced to this early penchant for reading. However, he did not join the Napoleon Club "of which George G. McClellan was an enthusiastic member"⁹, and he rarely, if ever, mentions Antoine Jomini or any other military strategist in his writings.

The theories of Antoine-Henri-Jomini should have had great influence on Grant. His principles were taught at West Point while Grant was a cadet and Henry W. Halleck, Grant's immediate superior for most of the war, wrote the Elements of Military Art

and Science (1846) "which is essentially a translation of Jomini".¹⁰

Why did Jomini fail to impress Grant? James M. Mcpherson makes a keen observation in his book Battle Cry of Freedom when he states that "many Jominian "principles" were common-sense ideas hardly original with Jomini". Mcpherson also hints at Grant's lack of interest in military study when he tells us that Grant claims to have never read Jomini.¹¹

Grant's love of novels may have exposed him to some military thinking, however. In March of 1843 he wrote to the publishing firm of Messrs Carey and Hart to inquire about two novels he had ordered: "Charles O'Malley, The Irish Dragoon" and "The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer", both written by Charles Lever. These novels were about military life in the Napoleonic era.¹²

Few associate Grant with artistic talent in the traditional sense, but he was an accomplished painter. This talent emerged while at West Point and several of his paintings are included in his personal papers. The viewer is struck by the detail of his work and his ability to capture the essence of his surroundings or canvas. Grant the General would prove equally capable of grasping the essence of a military situation.

In the opening quote, Fuller remarks on Grant's common sense. The essence of the quote is that this was Grant's most remarkable trait and the key to his success. Is it then surprising that Grant was the president of the West Point Dialectic Society in 1843? The dictionary defines dialectic as: "the process or art

of reasoning correctly". A translation might be the study of "common sense".

In 1843, Grant was assigned to the 4th Infantry Regiment stationed at Jefferson Barracks, St Louis. Here he would fall in love with the sister of his West Point roommate, Julia Dent. They were married in 1848 at the conclusion of a four year courtship which spanned the Mexican War. Throughout courtship, the two were together only briefly and it is surprising that the relationship endured.

Grant's relentless pursuit of his relationship with Julia, provides evidence of another aspect of his character, determination. In his Memoirs, Grant tells the story of an attempt to see her that was almost foiled by a swollen river. He did see Julia on this occasion even though he had to cross the river at some risk to his personal safety. In speaking of this event, Grant stated that: "One of my superstitions had always been when I started to go anywhere, or to do anything, not to turn back or stop until the thing intended was accomplished."¹³ Grant tells us of this personal trait; his actions throughout the Civil War provide credibility to his self assessment.

Grant's first choice for duty in the regular army was the dragoons, which is not surprising given his love of horses. The first disappointment was his assignment to an infantry regiment. When the Mexican War began, he was serving in this regiment. Disappointment would soon strike again and Grant was forced to assume quartermaster duties for the regiment. During the

Mexican War he wrote: "I am doing the duties of Commissary and Quarter Master so that during the siege I had but little to do except to see to having the Pork and Beans rolled about."¹⁴ To his chagrin, he would continue to serve in this capacity for the duration of his regular army career.

Although he had no desire to be a logistician, he learned the business and brought respect for this aspect of military operations to the Civil War. Throughout the war, Grant provides his subordinates with detailed logistical instructions. However, it is his understanding of logistics at the national strategy level that is truly significant.

His regular army service after the Mexican War was quite routine. In addition to performing his duties as quartermaster, he frequently attempted to augment his income through personal business ventures. These attempts often failed because he placed too much trust in his partners.

Without additional income, he was forced to live separated from his family. The separation was extremely hard on him and was the primary reason for his departure from the regular army. It is suspected that Grant's problem with alcohol can also be traced to this period in his life. His military service ended in California and he returned to New York virtually broke.

Grant would try to put his life back together, but with little success. At one point during this period he was forced to sell firewood on the streets of St. Louis to provide for his family. Failures at agriculture and real estate led him back to his

father's leather business, a move he had desperately tried to avoid.

Would he have made it in Galena? Based on his record as a businessman, it is hard to imagine that Grant would have found success in the civilian world. However, the War broke in 1861 and the State of Illinois was faced with the problem of organizing and training troops for the Union. Ulysses S. Grant was the right person for this job and he was soon employed by the Governor to muster new units.

The fact that Grant obtained a command within months of the outbreak of the war is no surprise. Leaders with military experience were rare so it was only a matter of time before he would be sought for a command position. The only question was at what level would he begin.

This question was answered in June of 1861 when he assumed command of the 21st Illinois Regiment as a Colonel. Exceptional performance in organizing and training the Regiment resulted in a promotion to Brigadier General and the new General was immediately given command of the Military District located in Cairo, Illinois. From Cairo he would begin to demonstrate that he could win.

ORIGIN OF MILITARY INTELLECT

Grant's combat experience began in Chorpus Christi, Texas in the Mexican War. It was this war that would most influence his

understanding of military operations.

Soon after arrival in Chorpus Christi, Grant wrote to Julia Dent about an impending attack. "Evry[sic] working man was turned out and an intrenchment[sic] began and continued for about a week and then abandoned."¹⁵

This flurry of activity did not impress Grant. The command reacted to rumor of an approaching army and an attack never came. Grant leaves the impression in his letter that he felt a little foolish because of this action. During the Civil War Grant would frequently discount information such as this, especially when the information indicated that his force would be placed in great danger. His ability to detect exaggeration was uncanny and may be linked to this early experience.

A letter to Julia dated March 29, 1846 describes another incident on the Colorado River. General Taylor is in command of about 3000 troops and is beginning to engage Mexican forces. The Mexican troops were drawn up on the opposite side of the river and forbid General Taylor from crossing. Grant implies that the strength of the Mexican force was sufficient to defend the river. Taylor gave the Mexican commander 15 minutes to withdraw or be fired upon, but no battle was fought because the Mexican force retired without a shot fired.¹⁶ In short, the mere threat of force was sufficient to win this engagement.

Sun Tzu, acknowledged as an important military theorist, writes in The Art Of War that "to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill".¹⁷ He would have considered the

action on the Colorado River to be a great victory for General Taylor. Grant learned that a determined commander sometimes does not have to fight to achieve an objective.

A month later, Grant again wrote to Julia about the enemy's lack of appetite for fighting. "Evry[sic] thing looks beligerent[sic] to a spectator but I believe there will be no fight. The Mexicans are busily engaged in throwing up fortifications on their side and we are engaged the same way on ours. Occationally[sic] they make a threa[t] but as yet their threats have all ended in bombast."¹⁸ Grant's observation in this letter indicates that he learned not to mistake enemy rhetoric for will to act.

In May 1846 action replaced rhetoric in the Mexican War and General Taylor fought and won two battles. In a letter to Julia written on May 11, 1846, Grant makes two observations about the battles.

The first observation deals with the relative strength of the two armies and hints at Grant's respect for discipline and training. "After two hard fought battles against a force far superior to our own in numbers, Gen. Taylor has got possession of the Enemy's camp",¹⁹ he wrote. This comment was followed by a more specific assessment of the enemy's strength. "Morning come and we found that the enemy had retreated under cover of the night. So ended the battle of the 8th of May. The enemy numbered three to our one besides we had a large waggon[sic] train to guard."²⁰

Grant had noticed a pattern that would repeat itself throughout the War. Although smaller in number, the American Army continually defeated or drove off the Mexican enemy. From this experience Grant learned the value of a well trained and disciplined force.

Evidence of his concern for discipline during the Civil War is found in a letter to Captain Speed Butler, the Assistant Adjutant General for his higher command. He wrote from a camp in Jefferson City, Missouri: "I am not fortifying here at all. With the picket guard and other duty coming upon the men of this command there is but little time left for drilling. Drill and discipline is more necessary for the men than fortifications."²¹ Later the Civil War, Grant published a general order to his command on discipline. "Discipline cannot be maintained where the officers do not command respect and such conduct cannot insure it. In this military District Discipline shall be maintained even if it is at the expense of the commission of all officers who stand in way of attaining that end."²²

Further evidence of Grant's respect for the value of discipline is contained in a letter dated August 22, 1847. "There is no force in Mexico that can resist this army. To fight is to conquer. The Mexicans fight well for a while, but they do not hold out. They fight and simply quit. Poor fellows; if they were well drilled, well fed, and well paid, no doubt they would fight and persist in it."²³ Discipline was instilled in Cadet Grant at West Point. It was in Mexico that he learned the value

of discipline in a military unit.

As previously noted, it was Grant's skill in disciplining regimental size units that brought him to the attention of those who would promote him to general.

Grant's remarks to Julia are also important in understanding his operational philosophy. General Taylor acted, even when the numerical odds were against him. Grant displayed a similar penchant for action during the Civil War. While his counterparts in the east were often paralyzed by the slightest hint of adverse conditions, Grant pressed the enemy whenever possible. His capture of Paducah, Kentucky before Confederate forces could reach the city was the first in a series of operations in which Grant just acted more quickly than the enemy. The capture of Paducah was also the first step in Grant's scheme to gain control of river lines of communication.

The second observation deals with the effect of frontal assaults on Mexican troops. He continued to tell Julia about the battles in May 1846 and again raises the issue of relative strength. "When we advanced to about six miles we found that the enemy had taken up a new position in the midst of a dense wood, and as we have since learned they had received a reinforcement equal to our whole numbers." In addition, Grant made this observation on the battle.

Our men [con]tinued to advance and did advance in spite of [their] shots, to the very mouths of the cannon and[d] killed and took prisoner the Mexicans with them,"....."General Lavega, who is a prisoner in our camp has said that he has fought against several

different nations but ours are the first that he ever saw who would charge up to the very mouths of cannon.²⁴

The lesson learned from this experience did not serve Grant well in the Civil War. The frontal assaults executed by General Taylor's force against poorly trained Mexicans would not produce the same results against Confederate Soldiers. Two factors limited the effectiveness of this tactic.

The use of the Minie ball in the Civil War changed the value of the frontal assault. It increased the range of the rifleman such that the assaulting force could be reduced by a defender before the attacker reached the defensive line. Grant was slow to realize the impact of this technological change, but many Civil War leaders shared this fault.

He became aware of the second factor early in the Civil War. The simple fact is that the Mexicans never displayed the tenacity in battle that Confederate forces did in the Civil War. The force ratios that defeated the Mexicans would not rarely be effective against stubborn Southern defenses.

Grant's personal courage in battle is a matter of historical record. Reports of his actions at Belmont, Fort Donelson, and Shiloh speak of his calm demeanor under fire. Bravery was an essential trait for Civil War leaders and those that lacked this trait were soon replaced. Grant's exposure to fire in the Mexican War gave him an edge over those that would "see the elephant" for the first time in the Civil War. He expressed his thoughts on the subject in the letter to Julia dated May 11, 1846

"There is no great sport", he admitted, "in having bullets flying about one in every direction but I find they have less horror when among them than when in anticipation." ²⁵

More about Grant's development is found in letters written after the Battle of Vera Cruz. At the conclusion of the battle, Grant wrote a letter to Julia dated April 3, 1847. In this letter, he demonstrates an understanding of strategy at the operational level of war.

"Genl Scott has taken the key to their whole country and the force that Garrisoned this place are all prisoners of war on their parole not to fight during the war."²⁶ he wrote. The phrase "the key to their whole country" is interesting because in less than six months the Mexican Army was defeated and Grant's assessment had proven correct. His ability to recognize key strategic locations would again be demonstrated in the Civil War.

The Battle for Vera Cruz was a critical event in Grant's development because it was here that he first participated in a cooperative effort between army and naval forces. Although naval gun fire was not mentioned, the invading Americans were transported by sea. Grant's enthusiasm for joint operations during the Civil War may have originated with this experience.

On 17 April 1847, the battle of Cerro Gordo was fought. This is an important battle because it may have influenced Grant's approach to strategy in the Civil War. Sun Tzu writes "The expert approaches his objective indirectly. By selection of a devious and distant route he may march a thousand li without

opposition and take the enemy unaware".²⁷ Grant comes to the same conclusion concerning the merit of the indirect approach and records his thoughts in a letter to Julia dated April 24, 1847.

On the morning of the 17th our army met them at a pass called Cierra[sic] Gorda[sic] a mountain pass which to look at one would suppose impregnable. The road passes between mountains of rock the tops of which were all fortified and well armed with artillery....Behind this was a peak of the mountains much higher than all the others and commanded them so that the Enemy calculated that even if the Americans should succeed in taking all the other hights[sic], from this one they could fire upon us and be out of reach themselves. But they were disappointed. Gen. Twiggs' Division worked its way around with a great deel[sic] of laibor[sic] and made the attack in the rear. With some loss on our side and great loss on the part of the Enemy this highest point was taken and soon the White Flag of the enemy was seen to float.²⁸

Another letter dated August 22, 1847 to an unknown addressee provides further evidence of Grant's respect for the "indirect approach". In this letter he wrote about the closing battles of the campaign to capture Mexico City.

I have tried to study the plan of campaign which the army has pursued since we entered the Valley of Mexico, and in view of the great strength of the positions we have encountered and carried by storm, I am wondering whether there is not some other route by which the city could be captured, without meeting such formidable obstructions, and at such great losses.²⁹

The common sense nature of Grant's observations should not be overlooked. Given the circumstances in the Mexican War, a small force could not afford to engage in attrition warfare. It is significant that a young officer had the presence of mind to question the strategy of an operation that resulted in victory.

Concern for proper ethical behavior was displayed in the same

letter. "If I should criticize, it would be contrary to military ethics, therefore I do not."³⁰ This character trait was displayed in the Civil War and kept Grant out of trouble with his superiors, at least when compared to some of his contemporaries.

Grant's letters about the Mexico Valley Campaign do not specifically address the subject of logistics, but William S. McFeely makes an important observation in his book, Grant, A Biography. McFeely writes about Scott's rapid movement from Vera Cruz to Mexico City. "The effectiveness of this risky maneuver--of moving swiftly, unencumbered by supply lines--was not lost on Grant, who was to do the same thing in the Vicksburg Campaign and, later, when he encouraged Sherman to leave Atlanta and head for the sea."³¹

On May 25, 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed ending the Mexican War and Grant's exposure to large scale military operations before the Civil War. Only one other event would add significantly to his military experience.

In 1852, Grant was reassigned from New York to California. He travelled by Steamer from Governor's Island in New York, through the Panama Canal, to the West Coast. Because of this and previous experiences with steamer travel, it is not surprising that these vessels played such an important role in the Western Campaign.

On the whole, Grant's post Mexican War service was characterized by disillusionment. Although he and his wife were together for brief periods after their marriage in 1848, the

reassignment to California would impose a two year separation. The depth of Grant's feeling for Julia can be sensed in a letter written to her during the Mexican War. "I begin to believe like some author has said, -that there are just two places in this world -One is where a person's intended is, and the other is where she is not. At one of these places I was always very happy and hope ere long to return, at the other I feel much discontent." he wrote.³² The sensitive side of Grant's character never receives much attention, but letters to his family are filled with expressions of emotion such as that expressed here.

Growing discontent was expressed in a letter to Julia dated August 20, 1852. "For my part I feel that I could quit the Army today and in one year go home with enough to make us comfortable on Gravouis[sic], all our life."³³ he wrote. Approximately two years after this letter was written loneliness forced Grant to resign and his military service was over until the Civil War began.

An analysis of letters written during the six year period that began with his resignation from the Army and ended with the outbreak of the Civil War provides no evidence of military development. However, it is possible that his personal failures in the civilian world made him more determined to succeed as a military leader when the Civil War presented him with the opportunity to do so.

Upon resuming military duties, Grant began to learn once again. A letter written while in command of his regiment

provides evidence of the renewed development.

As previously stated, Grant was reputed to be disinterested in the study of military art. It is possible, however, that the urgency of his new situation triggered some interest. Shortly after taking command of his regiment, Grant wrote to Julia:

"If you have an opportunity, I wish you would send me McClellands[sic] report of battles in the Crimea. You will find it about the house."³⁴ The impact of this document on Grant's thinking is unknown, but is worth further study.

On July 17, 1861 an incident would occur near Palmyra on the Salt River that would greatly influence Grant's thinking for the remainder of the war. Although the subject is not recorded in his letters at the time the event occurred, Grant clearly describes the circumstances in his Memoirs. The event occurred when Grant's regiment was sent out to confront Col Tom Harris and his 1200 secessionists. The regiment moved to the attack and this is what occurred:

As we approached the brow of the hill from which it was expected we could see Harris' camp, and possibly find his men ready formed to meet us, my heart kept getting higher and higher until it felt to me as though it was in my throat. I would have given anything then to have been back in Illinois, but I had not the moral courage to halt and consider what to do; I kept right on. When we reached a point from which the valley below was in full view I halted. The place where Harris had been encamped a few days before was still there and the marks of a recent encampment were plainly visible, but the troops were gone. My heart resumed its place. It occurred to me at once that Harris had been as much afraid of me as I had been of him. This was a view of the question I had never taken before; but it was one I never forgot afterwards. From that event to the close of the war, I never experienced trepidation upon confronting an enemy, though I always felt more or less

anxiety. I never forgot that he had as much reason to fear my forces as I had his. The lesson was valuable.³⁵

This event is not unlike that which occurred on the Colorado River during the Mexican War and it is clear that Grant learned the value of initiative and determination in military operations from these experiences. This is one of the characteristics that made Grant so different from the string of Union commanders who failed to end the Rebellion.

ON STRATEGY

To bring a war, or one of its campaigns to a successful close requires a thorough grasp of national policy. On that level strategy and policy coalesce: The Commander in Chief is simultaneously a statesman.³⁶

CLAUSEWITZ

The purpose of this section is to examine Grant's understanding of national strategy.

Clausewitz tells us that the military commander must embrace national policy or risk strategic defeat because military objectives do not support national strategy. This point was also discussed in the introduction.

The South's primary policy objective was to obtain independence from the North. To achieve their objective, the South attempted to defend all territory from invasion. The notion that all southern territory could be defended against the numerically superior and highly industrialized North made this a defective strategy from the start. Finite resources in men and

material caused an imbalance in "ends" and "means".

Protection of the Capitol in Richmond was the priority for Confederate leadership and Lee's string of victories against the Northern invaders were brilliant operational victories. However, Lee bankrupted the national strategy by making two costly invasions into the North.

In the Western Theater, an economy of force approach was taken to win support of border states and to protect vital rail and river lines of communication. To achieve this the South attempted to hold a defensive line from Columbus, Missouri, through Forts Henry and Donelson, to Bowling Green, Kentucky. Raids against Union forces were conducted throughout the border states of Missouri and Kentucky, but defense of the line of operations was the priority.

The rebellion's only real chance for success was to end the War by breaking Northern will to fight. If Lee had been successful in the Maryland Campaign, formal recognition of the Confederacy by Britain and France may have followed. Intervention in any form by one or both of these powers could have prolonged the struggle and increased the strain on Northern public support of the War.

Although slavery appeared to be a central issue, preservation of the Union was the North's national policy objective. J.F.C. Fuller states that Lincoln "detested slavery, but he did not allow this personal feeling to obscure his policy, which was to save the Union no matter what the cost."³⁷

Grant' political preference was different than the President's but on national policy they agreed. His feelings on the subject were recorded in a letter to Julia's father dated April 16, 1861.

The times are indee[d] startling but now is the time, particularly in the border Slave states, for men to prove their love of country. I know it is hard for men to apparently work with the Republican party but now all party distinctions should be lost sight of and evry[sic] true patriot be for maintaining the integrity of the glorious old Stars & Stripes, the Constitution and the Union.³⁸

In the same letter, Grant discusses the role of slavery in the conflict. President Lincoln said that "a house divided against itself cannot stand and that the government of the United States can not endure permanently, half slave and half free". Grant also sees the end of slavery, but not on moral grounds. The letter to Julia's father continued:

In all this I can but see the doom of Slavery. The North do not want, nor will they want, to interfere with the institution. But they will refuse for all time to give it protection unless the South shall return soon to their allegiance, and then too this disturbance will give such an impetus to the production of their staple, cotton, in other parts of the world that they can never recover the control of the market again for that commodity. This will reduce the value of negroes so much that they will never be worth fighting over again.³⁹

J.F.C. Fuller writes that "The grand tactical idea of the North was to lay the entire Confederacy under siege, and slowly strangle it to death." He goes on to say that "its full meaning was not understood until Grant became general-in-chief."⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the Confederate victory at the First Battle of Bull Run in July 1861 diverted focus and the protection of

Washington, D.C. became an equal priority.

Jomini's influence on military strategy in the Civil War should not be overlooked. In Makers of Modern Strategy, it is written that "Jomini, like the theorists of the eighteenth century, regarded warfare largely as a matter of winning territory."⁴¹ The South's preoccupation with defending territory can be traced to his teachings. But even more striking, is the North's organization of forces in the West. Military districts were created with the mission of defending Union territory and loyal citizens who lived in border states. Finding and defeating enemy armies was not a priority. Through Grant's perseverance the fight would be taken to the South.

Within this overall strategic context, the capture of Richmond and the liberation of East Tennessee became the north's immediate objectives. Grant, however, knew as early as June 1861 that control of the Mississippi deserved equal priority. Evidence of this is found in a letter written to Julia: "Of course the plans of the Administration are not known outside of their own circle but it looks to me as if the determination was strong to take possession of Eastern Virginia and Memphis Tennessee this Summer."⁴²

Two years later President Lincoln would also understand the strategic significance of the Mississippi River and again he and Grant were in agreement. Lincoln commented to a White House visitor: "See what a lot of land these fellows hold, of which Vicksburg is the key...Let us get Vicksburg and all that country

is ours. The War can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket."⁴³

There is evidence that Grant understood the "grand tactical idea" from the start. Although he made a gross error in estimating the length of the coming war, he immediately recognized that cutting off Southern ports was an important part of Northern strategy. In a letter to his father on May 6, 1861 he speculated:

My own opinion is that this War will be but of short duration. The Administration has acted most prudently and sagaciously so far in not bringing on a conflict before it had its forces fully martialled. When they do strike our thoroughly loyal states will be fully protected and a few decisive victories in some of the southern ports will send the secession army howling and the leaders in the rebellion will flee the country."⁴⁴

Depriving the enemy of resources to support the war effort became the underlying principle of all of Grant's operations. His concern for this principle can be seen at all levels of war, from tactics to grand strategy.

In September 1861, Grant took command of the Southeast Missouri District. In addition to protecting loyal citizens in Missouri, he controlled access to the Missouri River. In an order to Colonel John Cook, one of his subordinate commanders, he wrote: "All Boats passing your Post not recognized as in the employ of the Government will be hailed and brought to, papers examined and if necessary cargo. Every thing must be done to prevent the Enemy receiving supplies."⁴⁵ In another letter to Captain Chauncey McKeever, Assistant Adjutant General for the

Western Department, Grant recommends: "that trade with S.E. Mo. should be cut off. The enemy are enabled to get valuable supplies by that route".⁴⁶

The capture of Paducah showed that Grant had a vision of how to achieve the strategic aim. He decided to march on Paducah because of information received from Charles D. Arnaud, a Union spy. As Grant reported later, "A point through which many valuable supplies were obtained, for the Southern Army, was cut off by this move, and a large quantity of provisions, leather &c. supposed to be for the use of the Southern Army captured."⁴⁷ It is noteworthy that Paducah fell without a shot fired, not unlike Taylor's victory in Mexico twenty years before.

Control of the Mississippi River would split the Confederacy. In addition to free movement of Union supplies along the River, the South would be deprived of critical resources from the Confederate states west of the River. Lincoln and Grant agreed upon this, but Grant was willing to take this concept a step further. In a letter to Major General Steele dated April 11, 1863, he stated his intent.

The Rebellion has assumed that shape now that it can only terminate by the complete subjugation of the South or the overthrow of the Government it is our duty therefore to use every means to weaken the enemy by destroying their means of cultivating their field, and in every other way possible.⁴⁸

Once Union forces gained control of territory in the West, Grant would impose trade restrictions to further restrict enemy resources. He was constantly under great pressure from Northern

businessmen who wanted to get rich. The South was desperate for U.S. currency and loyalty to the Union cause was not sufficient to stop unscrupulous men. After the victory at Vicksburg, the Honorable S.P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, wrote to Grant and requested that the trade ban be lifted from the lower Mississippi Valley. Grant replied: "My experiance[sic] in West Tennessee has convinced me that any trade whatever with the rebellious states is weakening to us of at least Thirty three per cent of our force." He goes on to say: "The people in the Mississippi Valley are now nearly subjugated. Keep trade out for but a few months and I doubt not but that the work of subjugation will be so complete that trade can be opened freely with the states of Arkansas, La. & Mississippi."⁴⁹

The examples discussed above are examples of Grant's common sense approach to achieving the strategic objective. His "ways" and "means" were balanced with the objective and he remained focused. However, in a letter to William P. Mellen, a special agent of the Treasury Department sent to investigate corruption in the sale of cotton, Grant demonstrates that he possessed a depth of understanding that goes beyond mere common sense.

More than half the cotton now in the South, is the property of the so called Confederate States. This of all other will find its way to market, and will be sold by actual agents of the so called Confederate Government, for their benefit. Thus while we are making much efforts to close their Ports, we will be opening a better market for them. Our money being always worth a known price in New York City, will have a commercial value in Europe. This will enable the South to Ship at much less risk the means of exchanging for imported articles, than by sending the bulky article of Cotton.⁵⁰

A final piece of evidence shows that Grant focused on the enemy's logistics. On April 4, 1864 he wrote to Sherman: "You I propose to move against Johnston's Army, to break it up and to get into the interior of the enemy's country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their War resources."⁵¹

Selection of military objectives that would support the national strategy was clearly one of Grant's strengths as a military commander. He was to prove equally adept at managing the three legged strategy "stool".

A letter written to Julia from the Cairo District in September 1861 demonstrates Grant's grasp of the relationship between "ends", "ways" and "means". He tells Julia: "All is quiet here now. How long it will remain so is impossible to tell. If I had troops enough not long. My force I look upon as sufficient to hold this place but not sufficient to make an aggressive movement against the large force now occupying Columbus."⁵²

The challenge in the Western Theater was to retain control of captured territory, to protect friendly lines of communications and to continue the advance into Confederate territory. All this had to be done with a finite number of troops because the Western Theater was not the Nation's priority. Retaining control of captured territory was critical to Grant because it denied the enemy access to critical resources.

Grant expressed his frustration to his Congressional Representative, the Honorable E.B. Washburn in January 1863. In a letter to the Congressman, Grant discusses Sherman's first

attempt to capture Vicksburg. In this attempt, Sherman is supposed to link up with General Nathaniel Banks who is moving by river from New Orleans. Grant would like to reinforce Sherman, but can not. He tells Washburn: "I could not reinforce from here in time, and too much territory would be exposed by doing it if I could."⁵³ The capture of Vicksburg would have to wait.

Possibly the best example of Grant's balancing of "ends", "ways", and "means" is the Vicksburg Campaign. His initial concept for capture of the City was not to attack from the South as he eventually did, but to capture Haines Bluff to the North of the City and turn the Confederate right flank. Conditions of the Yazoo River, and lack of sufficient force to overwhelm Confederate defenders forced him to abandon this approach.

The idea of going south of the city presented a new set of problems, the most severe being the logistics of the operation. Knowing that he could not transport sufficient supplies with his force, Grant decided to break free of his supply base and live off the land. He had seen this done before in Mexico. This approach was deemed too risky by many, including Sherman. The reason that Grant was willing to take this risk may have been to satisfy another important element of strategy, public opinion. The Northern people were clamoring for action.

Clausewitz wrote that "the spirit and other moral qualities of an army, a general or a government, the temper of the population of the theater of war, the moral effects of victory or defeat-all these vary greatly. They can moreover influence our objective

and situation in very different ways.⁵⁴ Grant seemed to understand this idea better than most.

Although his focus was on the need to cut off supplies to the enemy, he also knew that protecting the loyal population in the border states was critical. In a letter to one of his subordinate commanders, Grant wrote: "Whilst we wish to keep every thing from the enemy, it is our duty to alleviate, the hardships, consequent upon a state of war, of our Union friends in the border states as far as practicable."⁵⁵

In line with this thought, Grant established very clear rules on obtaining supplies from the local area. He told one subordinate, "you are particularly enjoined to allow no foraging by your men. It is demoralizing in the extreme and is apt to make open enemies where they would not otherwise exist."⁵⁶ This respect for personal property did not apply to enemy sympathizers.

Initially, Grant would not have considered public opinion in the North as a legitimate target of Confederate strategy. He told his father and others that the war would be short. Even in September 1861, almost six months after the conflict began, Grant still believed that an easy victory would be achieved.

He expressed his opinion in a letter to his sister, Mary Grant. "The rebel force numerically is much stronger than ours, but the difference is more than made up by having truth and justice on our side, whilst on the other they are cheered on by falsehood and deception."⁵⁷ It is highly possible that Grant was

using the Mexican War as a frame of reference for assessing Southern fortitude.

Just over a year later, Grant had changed his mind. Southern victories in the East and determined opposition ended his hopes for a short war and a new concern for public opinion at home emerged. These thoughts were expressed in a letter to Mary dated December 15, 1862.

I am extended now like a Peninsula into an enemies country with a large Army depending for their daily bread upon keeping open a line or rail-road running one hundred & ninety miles through an enemy's country, or at least through territory occupied by a people terribly embittered and hostile to us. With all of this I suffer the mortification of seeing myself attacked right and left by people at home professing patriotism and love of country who never heard the whistle of a hostile bullet.⁵⁸

Within four more months, Grant would consider public opinion routinely in the planning stage of an operation. Evidence of this is found in a letter to MG Sherman in which Sherman proposes a demonstration up the Yazoo River.

The effect of a heavy demonstration in that direction would be good, so far as the enemy are concerned, but I am loth[sic] to order it, because it would be hard, to make our own troops understand that only a demonstration was intended, and our people at home would characterize it as a repulse.⁵⁹

Only a few examples of Grant's concern for public opinion are presented; however the frequency of his comments on the subject, indicate that he and Clausewitz would agree on the importance of the issue. Although the press was not kind to him on occasion, Grant knew that it represented a potent force. With that in

mind, he treated reporters well and optimized their impact on his operations. His favorite subordinate, General Sherman, was not quite as enamored with the press and Grant often had to intercede in feuds between these two parties.

Ulysses S. Grant did not write about military strategy nor does it appear that he was interested in studying the subject. In the Civil War, however, there is no one who understood strategic concepts as well as he did.

THE OPERATIONAL ART

Grant's ability to discipline and train soldiers led to his promotion to General; however, his performance at the tactical level was not strong. His first battle at Belmont was considered a tactical failure; most historians agree that he was surprised at Shiloh and the battles of the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, and Cold harbor resulted in high casualties.

If true that Grant was not a good tactical leader it is also irrelevant because he functioned primarily at the operational level of war after the battle of Belmont. The purpose of this section is to examine Grant's campaigns in the West to determine why he was so successful.

In the introduction it was stated that the "Tenets" of a campaign plan will be used to assess Grant's performance. In addition, the principle of deception will be discussed because Grant rarely planned an operation without specifically including a deception scheme.

Unity of effort is a principle of war and will also receive special treatment. The tenet which deals with composition of subordinate forces and designation of command relationships may include the principle, but it is so important in understanding Grant that it too will be treated separately.

Grant's first battle was at Belmont, Missouri and the outcome of the battle has long been the subject of debate. As noted above, some feel it was a tactical failure. However, based on evidence contained in Grant's letters, the battle can only be considered an operational success.

Belmont, Missouri is located just across the Mississippi River from Columbus, Kentucky. Columbus was a Confederate stronghold on the South's main defensive line and its capture would force the South to give up a large amount of territory.

Grant did not have sufficient force to attack Columbus, but the Commander of the Western Department ordered him to make a demonstration against the City. Grant would use this opportunity to deliver a moral blow to the South.

Grant reported the results of the battle to Seth Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General in Washington, D.C., in a letter dated November 20, 1861. In the letter, he relates his plan of operation.

On the evening of the 6th...I left this place...to make a reconnoissance[sic] towards Columbus. The object of the expedition was to prevent the enemy from sending out reinforcements to Price's Army in Mo. and also from cutting off two small Columns that I had been directed to send out, from this place, and Cape Girardeau, in pursuit of Jeff. Thompson. Knowing that Columbus was

strongly garrisoned I asked Gen. Smith, Comd.g. at Paducah Ky. to make demonstrations in the same direction....I also sent a small force on the Kentucky side with orders not to advance nearer than...some twelve miles from Columbus.⁶⁰

The immediate result of the Belmont attack was that Confederate forces were nearly driven out of Belmont into the River, however, a counterattack from Columbus forced Grant to retire.

The concept of this operation was described to each of the Commanders who would take a part in the operation. Although a broad statement of logistics was not included, the theater plan was to supply Union forces by river. Evidence of Grant's plan for supplies is included in a letter to his congressman, the Honorable E.G. Washburn. He told Washburn in a letter dated November 20, 1861 that he believed "that Cairo should be the Headquarters of the Department called upon to act South...Because supplies can reach here from all the cheap markets of the West more cheaply than any other point near where they are to be consumed."⁶¹ In another letter, written about the same time, Grant recommends the use of barges to transport soldiers, to provide winter quarters and to store supplies.⁶²

The commander's intent was clearly stated in Grant's letter to the Paducah commander who would make the demonstration. Grant wrote on November 5, 1861 to General C.F. Smith: "The principle point to gain is to prevent the enemy from sending a force to fall in the rear of those now out from this command." No one would argue that Grant's purpose was served.

It is difficult to determine a center of gravity for the

Belmont operation in isolation. However, in another letter to Washington written after the battle, Grant speaks of results. He writes: "The City of Memphis was thrown into mourning for the dead & wounded taken there. Great apprehension is said to have prevailed lest the blow should be followed up with an attack upon them."⁶³ Remember Grant's experience during the Mexican War, where limited application of force often reaped great results. Grant's assessment may have been correct, because the enemy completely abandoned the camp in Belmont after the battle.

Probably the most significant aspect of this battle in terms of the "tenets" is Grant's cooperation with and use of the navy. Although gunboats were used to capture Paducah, this was the first operation in which troops travelled by steamers that were protected by gunboats. In addition, the gunboats provided fire support for the land operation once troops were landed. The cooperation of army and navy elements in this battle set the tone for the rest of the Western Campaign.

This battle also provides an example of Grant's belief in deception. Not one, but two demonstrations were launched against Columbus to hide the true intent of the Belmont attack.

It is not clear whether or not Grant envisioned the next move to be made after Belmont. However, the battle must be considered an operational success because it accomplished everything that the planner set out to do, and more. Grant's plan appears to adhere to all campaign plan "tenets", except for specification of the next phase.

The command relationship between Grant and two Western Department commanders was not good. Generals Fremont and Halleck were unwilling to risk advances into the South, but Grant was impatient to move. Soon after Belmont, Grant recommended the next major operation in the Western Theater, but it took the support of Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote to get his plans approved.

Foote and Grant determined that it was feasible to attack the center of the Confederate defensive line at Forts Henry and Donelson employing tactics similar to those used at Belmont. What did they hope to achieve by taking the Forts? The intent of this operation was identified in a letter to Major General Halleck written on January 29, 1862.

In view of the large force now concentrating in this District and the present feasibility of the plan I would respectfully suggest the propriety of subduing Fort Henry, near the Ky. & Tennessee line, and holding the position. If this is not done soon there is but little doubt but that the defences[sic] on both the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers will be materially strengthened. From Fort Henry it will be easy to operate either on the Cumberland, (only twelve miles distant) Memphis or Columbus. It will besides have a moral effect upon our troops to advance them towards the rebel states.⁶⁴

Although Fort Henry was the immediate target of the operation, Grant hints at phases of the Campaign to be pursued after the Fort was captured, for Fort Donelson was located only twelve miles away on the Cumberland River.

Field Order Number 1, dated February 5, 1862 was issued by Grant for the Fort Henry attack. The level of detail in the order demonstrates that Grant is maturing as an operational

planner. Portions of the order are presented here.

The 1st Division, Gen. J.A. McClernand, Comd.g, will move at 11 O'Clock, a.m. tomorrow under the guidance of Lieut. Col. McPherson and take a position on the roads from Fort Henry to Fort Donaldson[sic] and Dover.

It will be the special duty of this command to prevent all reinforcements to Fort Henry, or escape from it. Also to be held in readiness to charge and take Fort Henry, by storm, promptly, on the receipt of orders.

Two Brigades of the 2d Division, Gen. C.F. Smith Commanding, will start, at the same hour, from the West Bank of the river, and take and occupy the heights commanding Fort Henry.

This point will be held by so much Artillery as can be made available, and such other troops as...may be necessary for its protection.

The 3d Brigade, 2d Division, will advance up the East bank of the Tennessee river, as fast as it can be securely done, and be in readiness to charge upon the Fort or to move to the support of the 1st Division, as may be necessary.

All of the forces on the West Bank of the river, not required to hold the heights commanding Fort Henry, will return to their transports...

[paragraph omitted]

The troops will move with two days rations of bread and meat in their haversacks.

One company of the 2d Division, armed with rifles, will be ordered to report to Flag officer Foote as sharpshooters on board the Gunboats.⁶⁶

In conjunction with the Field Order, Grant issued General Orders No. 7 dated February 1, 1862. The order provided rules of engagement for the operation. A sample from this order reads: "No firing, except when ordered by proper authority will be allowed."⁶⁶

In Field Order Number 1, Grant provides his subordinates with a concept of operation and supply guidance. He provides specific times for elements to move and clearly states what each subordinate is intended to accomplish.

The center of gravity for this operation is not clearly stated in Grant's correspondence; however, two points are worth considering.

First, Grant knew the commanders who defended both Forts Henry and Donelson and he was frequently critical of one of them. An example is found in a letter in which he explains a decision not to employ entrenchments because he does not want a "Pillow notoriety"⁶⁷. Although Grant rarely criticized fellow soldiers, Pillow's performance in the Mexican War had left a lasting impression on Grant. Given his knowledge of their leadership, Grant doubted that either Fort would offer other than token resistance.

The second point is about Grant's vision of proposed operations. Before the Belmont attack, Grant told Fremont that "I am of opinion that if a demonstration was made from Paducah towards Union City supported by two columns on the Kentucky side from here[sic]. The Gun Boats and a force moving upon Belmont the enemy would be forced to leave Columbus leaving behind their heavy ordnance."⁶⁸ The Confederates left Belmont as a result of that attack, but remained in Columbus. It is possible that Grant knew that the capture of the forts, Henry and Donelson, would accomplish what Belmont did not. If this is true he had correctly identified the Confederate center of gravity because upon capture of the forts, the South withdrew from Columbus, Nashville, and Bowling Green without a fight.

Another aspect of the order that shows Grant's development is

the clear statement of tasks to each subordinate element. In addition, commanders for each of the subordinate elements were specifically appointed. The Fort Henry order shows considerable sophistication in this regard.

Finally, Fort Henry was truly a joint effort. The Navy played the lead role and with naval gunfire alone forced the fort to surrender. However, troops were in position to storm the fort if necessary.

Similar orders were issued for the attack on Fort Donelson. This time however, the Navy attempted to defeat the fort's defenders but was driven off. Grant's soldiers would have to win the fight at Fort Donelson, but again, the use of Navy assets in the battle displayed a growing confidence in this type of operation.

When compared to the campaign plan "tenets", Grant's campaign to take the two forts gets high marks.

Grant wanted to make an immediate advance after the seizing the forts, but politics stripped his "means" to do so. In a letter to Julia dated in February, Grant wrote: "I have done a good job at Forts Henry and Donelson but I am being so much crippled in my resources that I very much fear that I shall not be able to advance so rapidly as I would like."⁶⁹

Within three months, however, Grant was on the move again towards the railroads at Corinth, Mississippi. His confidence was up and he once again envisioned the end of the War. In a letter to Julia dated March 22, 1862, Grant wrote: "Soon I think

the public may look for important news. If we are successful all along the line, I mean McClellan in the East, Buell & myself in the middle and Pope, Steel & Curtis in the West *secesh* will be about dead. We will be successful."⁷⁰ His estimate was nearly three years off, and a near reversal at Shiloh would show him that the War was not quite over. The comment also shows his understanding of the entire Theater of War.

In the battle of Shiloh two armies, Grant's and Buell's would cooperate. Cooperation of this sort was rare in the Western Theater so this point is significant. The fact that the Union prevailed in the battle despite the severe defeat suffered on the first day tells us much about Grant's strength as a leader, but little about his operational skill.

An important relationship would emerge as a result of Shiloh for it was here that Grant and Sherman would begin to respect each other. In a letter to Julia dated after the battle, Grant wrote: "Although Gen. Sherman has been made a Maj. Gen. by the battle of Shiloh I have never done half justice by him. With green troops he was my standby during that trying day of Sunday, ... He kept his Division in place all day, and aided materially in keeping those to his right and left in place."⁷¹

Grant's regard for Sherman would continue to grow as the War progressed and the Union cause would benefit from the merging of two great talents.

After the battle of Shiloh, Corinth fell without a fight and Memphis would soon follow. Union forces filled the vacuum left

when Confederate forces departed, but the burden of guarding newly occupied territory would slow the advance. Vicksburg would be Grant's next objective, but over a year would pass before it was captured.

On May 1, 1862, Grant assumed command of the Army of the Tennessee. As implied above, however, the new commander was frustrated because he could not advance. He wrote to Halleck: "As situated now with no more troops, I can do nothing but defend my positions and I do not feel at liberty to abandon any of them without first consulting your."⁷² He goes on to recommend that some points be abandoned and that some railroads be destroyed in an effort to free troops for other operations.

The lack of coordination of Union armies in the West provided an additional source of frustration. Grant expressed this frustration in the same letter to Halleck. "You have never suggested to me any plan of operations in this Department and as I do not know anything of those of commanders to my right and left. I have none therefore that is not independent of all others than those under my immediate command."⁷³ Grant would ensure that this was not the case when he became commander in chief.

The most significant aspect of the letter referenced above is that it contains initial thoughts on the capture of Vicksburg. "With small reinforcements at Memphis I think I would be able to move down the Mississippi Central road and cause the evacuation of Vicksburg and be able to capture or destroy all the boats in

the Yazoo River."⁷⁴ In December 1862, Grant attempted this.

The first attempt to capture Vicksburg consisted of a joint operation to transport Sherman's Corps by river to just north of Vicksburg while Grant travelled overland towards Jackson, Mississippi located 30 miles to the east of Vicksburg. Sherman would assault to the front while Grant attacked the rear of Vicksburg. Admiral Porter provided troop transports and gun boat escorts for the trip. This attempt failed when Grant's supply line was interdicted by Confederate raiders and Sherman was repulsed in front of Vicksburg.

For approximately the next three months, Grant experimented with digging canals through the bayous in across from Vicksburg. He may not have believed in these efforts, but Lincoln had suggested the concept and Grant was not one to argue with the President. At the very least, this activity occupied the mind of the enemy Commander, General Pemberton and satisfied the public's demand for action. Some historians suggest that it also kept Union troops in good physical condition for action in the Spring.

To capture Vicksburg, Grant was determined to apply the lessons learned in Mexico Valley and at Fort Donelson. He knew that naval gunfire would not reduce the fort and a direct assault with troops would cost many lives even if successful. In January 1863, Grant began to think about attacking from the south side of the city. Evidence of this is found in a letter to Halleck that states: "What may be necessary to reduce the place I do not yet know but since the late rains think our troops must get below the

city to be used effectively."⁷⁵

In another letter to Halleck Grant writes about a conversation with Sherman, Admiral Porter, and Gen McClernand. He states "that the work of reducing Vicksburg is one of time and will require a large force at the final struggle." In the same letter he talks about turning the enemy's flank to the north (via Yazoo River) to get behind the entrenchments that protect Vicksburg. He states: "the enemy would be compelled to come out and give us an open field fight or submit to having all his communications cut off and be left to starve out."⁷⁶ For Grant the center of gravity at Vicksburg was clearly the enemy force, however Grant seems to focus his ideas on cutting the enemy's supply lines.

In this letter Grant also requests that the four departments in the West be combined into one under one commander. It is surprising that the high command in Washington did not realize that unity of effort is so important.

Although Grant was thinking about the southern approach to the city, it is probably the support of another commander that led to the decision to pursue the move. General Nathaniel Banks was seeking aid from Grant to capture Port Hudson, south of Vicksburg. Grant discussed the operation with Admirals Farragut and Porter late in March 1863. The issue centered around the use of Lake Providence and Bayou Macon as possible routes to the south. The Confederate guns of Vicksburg prevented movement on the Mississippi River. Convinced that this was feasible, it became the course of action adopted to conduct the attack against

Vicksburg.

Deception was a key feature of Grant's Campaign plan. To distract the enemy, Grant sent Col Grierson's cavalry to attack lines of communication to the east of Vicksburg. In a letter to Halleck he reports the results of the operation. "To use the expression of my informant "Grierson has knocked the heart our of the state.""⁷⁷

In addition to Grierson's raid, Sherman made a demonstration on the Yazoo River. As stated earlier, Grant was hesitant to order the demonstration, but it did become part of his plan.

The main attack consisted of a two corps attack launched from the south of Vicksburg. Union troops began the attack from the west side of the Mississippi River. Hidden from view, they marched past the batteries at Vicksburg and were ferried across the river in steamers.

An attack plan dated April 27, 1863 contained the following elements: (1) Navy gunboats were to attack and silence enemy batteries on the eastern shore. (2) MG Mclernand's corp was to land at the "first promontory brought into view" and to take possession of the commanding point. Once in control of key terrain, McClernand was to concentrate his corps and prepare to defend. (3) Contingency instructions for alternate landing sites were also included in the order.⁷⁸

What truly made this operation unique, however, was Grant's concept of logistics. The essence of the concept is reflected in a letter written to Sherman and dated May 9, 1863. Grant wrote:

"I do not calculate upon the possibility of supplying the Army with full rations from Grand Gulf. I know it will be impossible without constructing additional roads. What I do expect however is to get up what rations of hard bread, coffee & salt we can and make the country furnish the balance."⁷⁹ Even Sherman balked at the idea of breaking loose from the supply base, but Grant had seen it done in Mexico Valley and it would work here.

It could be said that Grant had reached full maturity as a joint officer in this campaign. The Navy participated fully in the operation by protecting transport and supply ships and by providing naval gunfire support.

Grant succeeded in cutting off the enemy's line of communication between Jackson, Mississippi and Vicksburg, but it would take roughly two months of siege to reduce the fort. On July 3, 1863, Grant demanded the unconditional surrender of the City. At the very least, Grant adhered to all of the campaign plan "tenets". In fact, use of Vicksburg as the model in campaign planning might be appropriate.

Grant's continued frustration with the lack of guidance from Washington, D.C. can be sensed in a letter written dated July 26, 1863. Eager to move again, Grant comments: "I am anxiously waiting for some general plan of operations from Washington. It is important that the troops of different Departments should act in concert. Hence the necessity of general instructions coming from one head."⁸⁰

The victory at Vicksburg impressed President Lincoln and he

began to correspond directly with Grant. In one such letter, he suggested that operations be conducted in Texas to counter the potential of Mexican intervention in that state. Grant's response was:

After the fall of Vicksburg I did incline very much to an immediate move on Mobile. I believed then the place could be taken with but little effort, and the rivers debouching there, in our possession, we would have such a base to operate[sic] from on the very center of the Confederacy as would make them abandon entirely the states bound West by the Miss. I see however the importance of a movement into Texas just at this time.²¹

Grant would continue to plan operations against Mobile, but could not get approval commence the operation.

The next significant battle of the War, the Battle of Chickamauga, occurred on September 19, 1863. The Confederates severely defeated the Union Army commanded by MG Rosecrans. As a result, Union forces retreated to Chattanooga, Tennessee and Rosecrans was replaced by Grant.

Grant faced two challenges in Chattanooga. One the enemy to his front and two, a very restrictive supply line. In addition, another Union Army under the command of MG Burnside was threatened by southern armies to the northeast of Chattanooga.

What is most impressive about Grant's performance in Chattanooga is the speed with which he stabilized a very bad situation. The supply line was opened almost immediately and an operation planned to relieve the pressure to Grant's front and on Burnside.

Grant's intent for the operation is reflected in a letter to Burnside dated November 7, 1863. "I have ordered an immediate move from here to carry Missionary Ridge and to threaten or

attack the Railroad between Cleveland and Dalton. This must have the effect to draw the enemy back from your Western front."⁸²

The operation was successful, Southern forces were pushed back from Chattanooga and Burnside was able to hold Knoxville.

It was not long before Grant began to think about his next operation. His thoughts on the subject are reflected in a letter dated December 1, 1863 to MG McPherson, one of his corps commanders:

So far as the authorities at Washington are concerned I think they expect nothing of us but to make ourselves comfortable this Winter and to get ready for moving in the Spring. I do not feel satisfied though giving the rebels so much time for reorganizing, nor in keeping so large a force idle. If permitted to do so, and I think there is no doubt but I will be, I want to make the line of the Tennessee secure, then organize a force to go by water to Pascagoula from which to operate against Mobile and the interior of Alabama & Georgia.⁸³

Grant wrote another letter on the same day to Sherman. The letter is important because his intentions for the final campaign of the Civil War are reflected.

When you start upon your return to this place, after it is known that East Tennessee is cleared of all formidable bodies of the enemy, if you deem it atal[sic] feasible[sic] start a Cavalry expedition to strike through into South Carolina to destroy their East & West roads. A force going in this way should move without transportation and live entirely upon the Country. They ought to do all the harm to the roads they can, burn stores accumulated along them, and take all the good horses they find.⁸⁴

Within a year, Sherman would conduct the operation envisioned by Grant in this letter.

The Wilderness Campaign is beyond the scope of this study,

however it is important to examine his thoughts on ending the War. In a letter to Halleck written on January 19, 1864, Grant provides a very specific plan for the final Campaign of the War. The letter is lengthy, but must be presented in its entirety because it demonstrates the level of maturity that Grant has reached in the operational level of war.

I would respectfully suggest whether an abandonment of all previously attempted lines to Richmond is not advisable, and in line[sic] of these one be taken further South. I would suggest Raleigh North Carolina as the objective point and Suffolk as the starting point. Raleigh once secured I would make New Bern the base of supplies until Wilmington is secured. A moving force of sixty thousand men would probably be required to start on such an expedition. This force would not have to be increased unless Lee should withdraw from his present position. In that case the necessity for so large a force on the Potomoc would not exist.

A force moving from Suffolk would destroy first all the roads about Weldon, or even as far north as Hicksford. From Weldon to Raleigh they would scarcely meet with serious opposition. Once there the most interior line of rail way still left to the enemy, in fact the only one they would then have, would be so threatened as to force him to use a large portion of his army in guarding it. This would virtually force an evacuation of Virginia and indirectly East Tennessee.

It would throw our Armies into new fields where they could partially live upon the country and would reduce the stores of the enemy.

It would cause thousands of the North Carolina troops to desert and return to their homes.

It would give us possession of many Negroes who are now indirectly aiding the rebellion.

It would draw the enemy from Campaigns of their own choosing, and for which they are prepared, to new lines of operations never expected to become necessary.

It would effectually blockade Wilmington, the port now of more value to the enemy than all the balance of their sea coast.

It would enable operations to commence at once by removing the war to a more southern climate instead of months of inactivity in winter quarters.⁸⁵

This letter is the final piece of evidence that will be offered to demonstrate Grant's skill in the operational art. In addition to laying out clear concepts of operation and sustainment, he has considered the cause and effect relationships of his proposal. It is difficult to determine if he had identified an enemy center of gravity, but his comments on the blockade of Wilmington show that his focus is still on the enemy's source of supply.

Grant refined the essence of this plan into a set of instructions given to each of his major subordinate commanders. Each order established the commander's intent, described the intended phases of the operation and assigned resources to each subordinate commander. In addition, Grant carefully explained what each subordinate command was doing in relation to others.

The War did not end quickly, but it is difficult to imagine a Confederate victory under any circumstances given the strength of Grant's campaign plan.

MILITARY GENIUS

Carl Von Clausewitz devotes an entire chapter to the subject of military genius in his book, "On War". In this chapter, he discusses the character traits that are common to great military leaders.

Courage is one of the attributes discussed. Clausewitz believes that two kinds of courage are important, personal and moral. Grant possessed both to a high degree.

The press attacked Grant with charges of cowardice after the battles of Belmont and Shiloh. Nothing could be further from the truth. Grant's display of courage at Belmont won him the respect of his soldiers. At Shiloh, his heroic conduct turned a potential catastrophe into a Union victory. As previously discussed, in the Civil War if a leader did not possess this type of courage they would not lead very long for either side.

Moral courage is that courage required to make the tough decisions; the decisions on which lives depend. Grant's decision to attack Fort Donelson is an instance in which he displayed this type of courage. The weather was terrible, roads bordered on being impassable and Grant did not possess all the force he desired to attack the fort. However, he knew that giving the enemy more time would only strengthen the defenses his soldiers would face. His decision paid off.

He also had the moral courage to trust his subordinates. In many of his letters, Grant told a subordinate: "Having all confidence in your skill and discretion, I do not want to cripple you by instructions, but simply give you the objects of the expedition and leave you to execute them."⁶ Other words were used, but the meaning was the same. In most cases, this helped to bond Grant to his subordinates and vice versa.

Grant's physical strength did not appear to be extraordinary

and he often speaks of illness in his writings. There is little doubt that, on occasion, alcohol was the source of his problem. However, when he needed strength he was able to summon it.

Just before the battle of Chattanooga, Grant was injured while on a trip to New Orleans. He was thrown from a horse and could not walk for some time. However, when ordered to Chattanooga, he made a physically demanding trip that ended in a two to three day long horse ride to the City. Once there, he immediately wrote instructions for the operation that would relieve Confederate pressure in the Theater.

Clausewitz describes "strength of mind" and "strength of character" as the "ability to keep one's head at times of exceptional stress and violent emotion".⁸⁷ He also speaks of "staunchness" and "endurance". "Strength of mind" and "staunchness" refer to the ability to react to an immediate crisis, while "endurance" refers to the ability to sustain one's efforts through a period of extreme crisis. Grant displayed all of these characteristics throughout the War.

Many examples could be used to show that Grant possessed these attributes, but the battle of Shiloh is considered to be the best. Exceptional "staunchness" was displayed on the first day of the battle when a surprise attack almost drove Grant's command into the Tennessee River. Despite severe casualties, Grant absorbed this blow and by nightfall was planning a counterattack. To say that Grant remained calm amidst crisis would be an understatement. His calm demeanor during the battle provided an

example for his soldiers and their leaders and by the end of the day the situation stabilized. It is amazing that he was able to concoct a defense while engaged in a fight for life.

Generals Lee, McClellan, and Meade all foundered after great battles. None of these generals was capable of following up a victory or pursuing an advantage. After the first day of battle at Shiloh, Grant could have consolidated his defense and licked his wounds. He did neither, and on the next day he launched a counterattack that broke the enemy. Mental and physical exhaustion should have been the result of the first day's battle, but Grant's endurance level was not ordinary. His relentless pursuit of an objective would become one of his hallmarks.

Ulysses S. Grant was a man of action during the Civil War. Although he was accused of dragging his feet on several occasions during the Civil War, there was usually a pretty good reason for the inactivity. Grant understood the need to balance "ends", "ways" and "means" and most staging operations were confused with inactivity. He also understood the impact of weather on military operations.

Energy is an important attribute for the military leader according to Clausewitz. In a letter dated October 20, 1861, Grant wrote to Julia: "What I want is to advance."⁸⁸ The comment was made before the attack on Belmont and is an early example of Grant's urge to act. He would make similar comments to Julia and others throughout the war. However, his actions during the War provide the best evidence of Grant's energy.

The victory at Fort Donelson came within days of the capture of Fort Henry. The prudent course of action would have been to wait for optimum conditions; Grant chose to act.

The battle of Chattanooga provides the best example of Grant's penchant for action. Union forces in the City were starving and faced a sizeable Confederate Force on the opposite side of the Tennessee River. Within days of his arrival, Grant initiated action to restore the supply line and to attack the Confederate force. Both actions were successful.

If a hierarchy of characteristics were developed by Clausewitz he would probably place possession of an "inner light" at the top of the list. Clausewitz uses the French term, *coup d'oeil* in explaining the characteristic. He wrote:

If the mind is to emerge unscathed from the relentless struggle with the unforeseen, two qualities are indispensable: first, an intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmerings of the inner light which leads to truth; and second, the courage to follow this faint light wherever it may lead.⁸⁹

What is most remarkable about Grant is that he seemed to understand military operations at the strategic and operational levels of war with equal clarity. Once he determined a plan of operation, virtually nothing could stop him from achieving the intended objective.

His ability to predict enemy intentions was extraordinary. Early in the War, Grant wrote to Captain Chauncey McKeever, Fremont's Assistant Adjutant, concerning enemy activity in Kentucky. He wrote: "They talk boldly of making an attack upon

Paducah by the 15th of this month. My own impression however is that they are fortifying strongly and preparing to resist a formidable attack and have but little idea of risking anything upon a forward movement."⁹⁰ He would often make this type of prediction, and he was usually right.

Grant rarely spent much time worrying about what the enemy was going to do. Instead, he determined what the enemy was most likely to do and planned accordingly. For example, in a letter to Halleck dated September 10, 1862, Grant wrote: "Everything threatens an attack here but my fear is that it is to cover some other movement. It may have been instituted to prevent sending reinforcements to Wright or to cover a movement on New Orleans by Van Dorn or to the East on Genl Buell. Should there be an attack I will be ready."⁹¹ The letter concerns enemy intentions in the vicinity of Corinth. Grant has assessed the enemy's capabilities and is prepared to act no matter what the enemy does.

At the strategic level, Grant knew how to end the Civil War and his operations were aimed at this goal even during the Western Campaign. At the operational level, he sensed enemy intentions and weaknesses, developed plans to exploit the weakness and then executed with determination.

It is doubtful that Clausewitz would give Ulysses S. Grant anything but high marks for all the attributes discussed and he would probably marvel at Grant's "inner light". It would be interesting to speculate on what Clausewitz would have written

about Grant. He seems to be describing him and his operations in On War.

CONCLUSIONS

The opening quote by J.F.C. Fuller is about Grant's common sense. In the Reader's Digest Family Word Finder, native reason, good sense, good judgement and basic intelligence are phrases proposed as synonyms for the term common sense.

Jomini and Sun Tzu are often criticized for their theories on war because their ideas are considered to be nothing more than common sense. Grant clearly demonstrated the practical approach to war that is described by both of these military intellectuals and thus could be found guilty of J.F.C. Fuller's charge.

However, there is more to Grant's success than just common sense. The Word Finder also offers this quote by Samuel Taylor Coleridge: "Common sense in an uncommon degree is what the world calls wisdom." Wisdom seems to be the more appropriate term to describe Grant's military intellect.

It is doubtful that he was born with great intellect, and he did not demonstrate great military wisdom early in his career. However, Grant learned from each operation he participated in and he was not afraid to try things that had not been tried before. Each lesson was carried forward and was applied to subsequent operations, usually with great success.

The most impressive aspect of his intellect, however, was his "inner light". His confidence in assessing enemy strengths and intentions kept his operations on course and he never suffered a major reverse. Did he have visionary powers? Probably not, but he must be credited with exceptional judgement.

The level of casualties suffered by Grant in some of his operations would not be tolerated today and it is not proposed that he was without fault. The decisions made in the Wilderness, Spotsylvania and Cold Harbor battles cost the Union dearly in lives and these losses probably could have been avoided. However, the Union could afford the losses while the South could not and Grant knew it.

Herein lies Grant's greatest strength, he understood the nuances of strategy at all levels of war and the relationships between each level. He also understood the relationship between strategy and national policy. Other courses of action could have reduced the casualties in the Eastern Campaign, however, time was becoming critical. The North was weary of the war and Grant knew it. It was time to press the enemy until they surrendered. This he did.

Ulysses S. Grant will never be touted as a great strategic thinker and this is not surprising because his understanding of strategy was based more on common sense than intellectual power. However, to the student of strategy, the study of Grant's campaigns is a must if the application of strategy is to be fully understood.

ENDNOTES

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- ²³Simon, Vol 1, p. 144.
- ²⁴Ibid.
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- ²⁷Tzu, p. 41.
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- ³⁵Grant, pg. 127.
- ³⁶Clausewitz, Carl Von. On War, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 111.
- ³⁷Fuller, pp. 80-81.
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⁴⁸Simon, Vol 8, p. 49.

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- ⁸⁷Clausewitz, p. 105.
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