

TVCWRT Civil War Tutorial, Part VI: Victory Is Decided, 1864, Politics, *By Emil Posey*

As 1864 dawned, the war ground on, but with an increasingly different tone, a different tenor. There were many battles yet to be fought before the end, much blood yet to be shed, but it was becoming clear that militarily the North was overpowering the South. The South was coming to realize that victory, if it was to be had, lay in the political realm, not on the battlefield. The strain showed in the Confederate leadership. The Confederate Congress and state governors increasingly at odds with President Davis. The strain was felt in the North, as well. Political intrigue was still strong, and President Lincoln worried about achieving a second term. And therein lay the key. While the executive and legislative branches on both sides continued to do what they did, the central political event of the year would be the US presidential election. It would determine the outcome of the war.

The Executive Branches

There were three changes in President Lincoln's cabinet in 1864. On September 4 of the year, President Lincoln appointed former Ohio Governor William Dennison, Jr. as Postmaster General, replacing Montgomery Blair; and on December 2, he appointed James Speed, a Republican active in Kentucky state politics, as Attorney General, replacing Edwin Bates. The more significant cabinet change had occurred earlier, on June 30, when President Lincoln accepted the resignation of Salmon Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, and appointed William Fessenden in his place on July 1. Chase, too, was a former Governor of Ohio (Dennison's predecessor). He had been an effective Treasury Secretary but had an insatiable desire for high office. Throughout his term as Treasury Secretary, Chase exploited his position to build up political support for another run at the presidency in 1864 (having contended for the Republican nomination in 1860).¹ More about this later.

An important appointment outside the cabinet occurred on March 10. President Lincoln had approved Maj. General Ulysses S. Grant's promotion to Lieutenant General the day before and on March 10 appointed him General-in-Chief of the Armies of the United States.² With this appointment, the arc of the war changed. Among other benefits of Grant in this new position, he developed the first coherent and ultimately successful grand strategy for militarily defeating the South.

There were two changes in President Davis' cabinet as well. One January 2, 1864, Wade Keyes of Alabama resigned his post as Attorney General and was replaced by George Davis (no relation), Confederate States Senator from North Carolina. As the Confederate Supreme Court was never created, there was little for the Attorney General to do other than attend cabinet deliberations and to draft legal guidance for other cabinet members. Also, Christopher Memminger of South Carolina resigned as Secretary of the Treasury on July 18 and was replaced by South Carolina businessman, blockade runner and former South Carolina state legislator George Trenholm. Both AG Davis and Secretary Trenholm served in their cabinet positions until the Confederate government dissolved in April 1865.

Relations with the Press

On the morning of May 18, 1864, a forged proclamation, ostensibly signed by President Lincoln the day before, was published in the *New York World* and in *The Journal of Commerce*. The bogus proclamation named "a day of fasting, humiliation and prayer,"

called for 400,000 fresh troops, and proposed to raise by an "immediate and peremptory draft" whatever quotas were not furnished on the day specified. President Lincoln was incensed and responded that same day with an order to Maj. General John A. Dix, Army commander at New York, "forthwith to arrest and imprison ... the editors, proprietors, and publishers of the aforesaid newspapers ... until they can be brought to trial ... [and] also take possession by military force of the printing establishments of the New York World and Journal of Commerce, and hold the same until further orders, and prohibit any further publication therefrom."³

This was not the first time press reporting had been at odds with the White House. The press culture in the North during this period was quite partisan, even more so than today. There were Democratic newspapers (e.g., the *New York World*, mentioned above, and the *Philadelphia Evening Journal*) and Republican newspapers (e.g., *The New York Tribune* and the *Chicago Daily Tribune*), and they interpreted events military and political differently. There were two tensions operating at the same time. There was the overarching fear that the government would crack down as the newspaper editors walk the thin line between dissent and what the Administration and the military regards as treason. There was also a fine line between first reports (scoops, or "breaking news") and giving *aid and comfort* to the enemy with a report that shouldn't be published.

President Lincoln often censored and suppressed (shutdown) journalists and newspapers whose views did not accord with his policies or prosecution of the war. He justified these practices as being one which saved lives by shortening the war by not raising the spirits of those who opposed the Union. Reporters were treated differently depending on how they reported from the battlefield, and some editors were even jailed for their anti-administration views. Press crackdowns occurred throughout the war, one as late as January 1865.⁴ He sometimes even brought charges of treason.⁵

Censorship was not limited to the President. Senior military commanders (Maj. Generals Grant, Sherman, and Meade for example) often felt bedeviled and compromised by press coverage and took aggressive steps to curtail it. President Lincoln believed "...when an office in any department finds that a newspaper is pursuing a course calculated to embarrass his operations and stir up sedition and tumult, he has the right to lay hands upon it and suppress it, but in no other case."

On the other hand, President Lincoln was careful to cultivate northern editors as he approached reelection in 1864. He favored friendly newspapers and their editors with advertising contracts and printing contracts. They also received federal patronage jobs. Such appointments included, for example, John Bigelow of the *New York Evening Post*, as a diplomat in Paris; Thomas McElrath, *New York Tribune*, as appraiser at the New York customhouse; David Pierson Holloway, *Richmond [Indiana] Palladium*, as commissioner of patents; John Locke Scripps, *Chicago Daily Tribune* (and also the first biographer of President Lincoln), as postmaster in Chicago; James Watson Webb, *New York Courier and Enquirer*, as minister to Brazil; and John Dougherty Defrees, *Indianapolis Atlas*, as superintendent of public printing. In the fall of 1864, President Lincoln hinted at the possibility of other appointments, including Postmaster General for Horace Greeley, *New York Tribune*, and Minister to France for James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald*.⁶

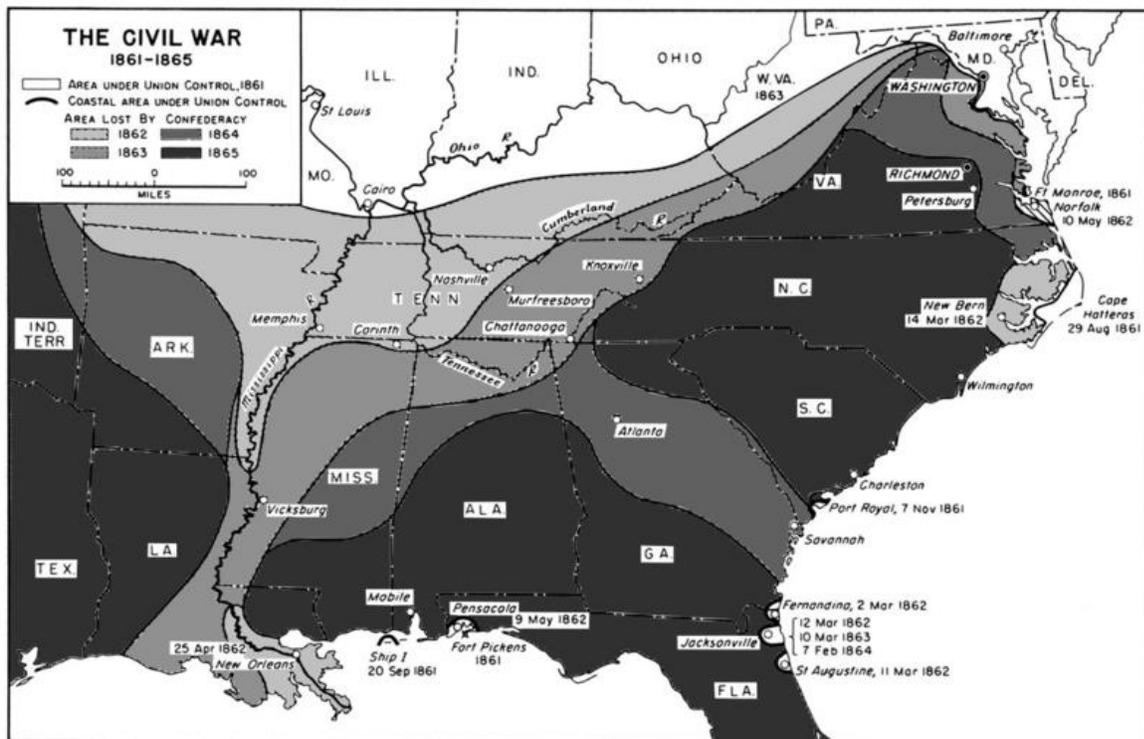
Confederate journals also printed news that they should not have, but Confederate censorship was informal and erratic. The essence of it was stated by Secretary of War George Randolph in May 1862.

"A more rigid censorship should be established by the papers themselves... It is the ardent wish of the Department that this revolution may be successfully closed without the suppression of one single newspaper in

the Confederate States, and that our experience may be able to challenge comparison with our enemy.”

The Confederate government’s less formal approach did not mean that Confederate restrictions were less effective. As historian Clement Eaton pointed out, "Southern papers ... were less flagrant offenders in publishing military news than Northern papers, probably because they did not have the large number of war correspondents that the Northern newspapers had." Moreover, there was a lack of trained correspondents in the South. When one was present at a battle, his stories were carried by many newspapers.⁷

By the end of 1863, Union forces controlled virtually the whole of the Mississippi River basin down to the Gulf of Mexico, splitting the Confederacy in half. It also controlled northeastern Virginia and various coastal enclaves in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida. While some of these areas were still contested and would be scene of significant battles in the coming year, by the end of 1864 Union control had expanded farther.



File: Civil war 1861-1865.png - Wikimedia Commons

Among other negative impacts to the Confederacy, the loss of ground was making state governors restive. From the beginning, the success of the Confederate cause depended to a large extent on the ability of President Davis and the various governors to work together. President Davis’s leadership and management traits made this difficult, though. He lacked an appreciation of human nature, was neither a skilled politician nor statesman, and was an inveterate micro-manager. Moreover, he failed to unify the population. These caused several of the governors (in addition to many in the Confederate Congress as well as in the general population) to lose confidence in him. Overlaying this with the Confederacy’s underlying political philosophy of a weak central government and strong states’ rights made President Davis’s control challenges even more difficult. As the war progressed and governors became more fearful of Union

incursions and resenting President Davis' prioritizing the Confederacy over the states, cooperation degenerated even further. The Confederacy needed a strong national leader. President Davis did not fit that need.

A survey of the war governors by Arthur G. Daniel, provides a good snapshot of their relationship to the Confederate government.⁸

- Virginia had two governors, John Letcher and William Smith, both of whom cooperated with the administration on practically all major issues. Keep in mind that Richmond was the capital of the Confederacy, and Virginia itself was a principal theater of war.
- John W. Ellis, Henry T. Clarke, and Zebulon B. Vance served the state of North Carolina. Vance was the most important of the three, and his chief fault was that his great desire to serve his state caused him to lose sight of the paramount needs of the Confederacy.
- South Carolina had three governors: Francis W. Pickens, Milledge L. Bonham, and Andrew C. Margrath. None was considered either outstanding foes or supporters of President Davis, although Pickens and Bonham did quarrel with him over several different issues.
- John Milton was Florida's only chief executive, and he faithfully supported the Administration all during the war.
- Georgia's Joseph E. Brown was considered by many to be one of the most effective enemies of the central government. Perhaps more than any other governor, he placed the immediate interests of his state above the needs of the Confederacy. Georgia was the scene of much military campaigning from 1863 through the end of the war.
- Andrew B. Moore was governor of Alabama when the state withdrew from the Union, and he was followed by John G. Shorter and Thomas W. Watts. Shorter was generally considered friendly to the confederate government, while Watts opposed several important Davis policies.
- Mississippi's three governors, John J. Pettis, Jacob Thompson, and Charles Clark could generally be expected to place state rights above the needs of the Richmond government.
- The central government could seldom count on the support of Thomas More, although Louisiana's other governors, Michael Hahn, Henry W. Alan, and James M. Wells, served the Confederacy to the best of their ability.
- Texas's three governors were Edward Clark, Francis R. Lubbock, and Pendleton Murrah. Lubbock was one of the President's strongest supporters and Murrah one of his outstanding foes.
- Henry M. Rector, Harris Flanigan, and Isaac Murphy were Arkansas's governors, while Tennessee was served by Isham G. Harris and Andrew Johnson. Early invasions of these states made it impossible for their governors to offer much aid or hindrance to the confederate cause; however, Governor Rector was a leading critic of the Administration during the early months of the war.

The Legislative Branches

The 38th United States Congress' second session began March 4, 1864. The Senate had a Republican majority, and the House of Representatives had a Republican plurality. Elections for the 39th United States Congress were held on November 8, 1864, with its first session to begin March 4, 1865. This election will be discussed in Part 7, *Combat Ends, 1865*.

Major Legislation

The **Coinage Act of 1864** was passed on April 22. One of eight coinage acts in our history thus far, it changed the composition of the one-cent coin and authorized the minting of the two-cent coin.⁹

On June 30, the Yosemite Valley Grant Act transferred from federal to state ownership the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of giant sequoia trees. This opened the valley to settlement and commercial exploitation.¹⁰

Thoughts in Congress began looking forward to what would become known as Reconstruction – issues such as how to integrate Confederate states back into the Union and what to do with the huge number of former slaves that by then would have been freed. The former was addressed by the Wade-Davis Bill, passed by both houses on July 2, 1864. It intended to guarantee a republican form of government to those States proposed for Reconstruction whose governments have been usurped or overthrown. It made re-admittance to the Union for former Confederate states contingent on a majority in each ex-Confederate state to take the Ironclad Oath, an individual oath to the effect they had never in the past supported the Confederacy. The intent was to prevent political activity of ex-Confederate soldiers and supporters.

The bill was in opposition, though, to President Lincoln's more lenient Ten-Percent Plan, by which states in rebellion could be reintegrated into the Union when 10% of the 1860 vote count from that state had taken an oath of allegiance to the US and pledged to abide by Emancipation. Voters could then elect delegates to draft revised state constitutions and establish new state governments. All Southerners except for high-ranking Confederate army officers and government officials would be granted a full pardon. President Lincoln guaranteed Southerners that he would protect their private property, though not their slaves. By 1864, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Arkansas had established fully functioning Unionist governments. This policy was meant to shorten the war by offering a moderate peace plan. It was also intended to further his emancipation policy by insisting that the new governments abolish slavery. President Lincoln vetoed the Wade-Hampton bill via pocket-veto.

States admitted and territories organized

October 31, eight days before the presidential election, Nevada became the 36th state in the Union, despite lacking the minimum requisite 60,000 residents in order to become a state. (At the time Nevada's population was little more than 10,000.) Statehood had been rushed to the date of October 31 to help President Lincoln's reelection and post-Civil War Republican dominance in Congress as Nevada's mining-based economy tied it to the more industrialized North.¹¹ As it turned out, however, President Lincoln and the Republicans won the election handily and did not need Nevada's help.

Territories

On May 26, 1864, the Montana Territory was organized in part out of the existing Idaho Territory and in part out of the Nebraska Territory and the Dakota Territory.

Second Confederate States Congress¹²

Elections to the Confederate States Congress had been held from May to November 1863, during what had been intended to be the first of two midterms within President Davis' six-year term. The number of Congressmen in the House of Representatives who

openly opposed the policies of President Davis increased from 26 to 41 out of 106, while the number of anti-administration Senators went from 11 to 12. The proadministration Senators thus had only a narrow majority of 2 with 14 out of the 26 seats in the Confederate Senate. The Second Confederate States Congress would be seated on May 2, 1864.¹³

In its earliest months, under the pressure of wartime emergency, the Confederate Congress had granted President Jefferson Davis most of what he requested. By the time the Second Confederate Congress convened in 1864, however, serious military reverses had reawakened long-simmering political divisions. Factors such as former party affiliations, earlier levels of commitment to secession, and whether Union forces were occupying their respective states became increasingly evident in members' voting behavior. Deepening divisions among Confederate senators and representatives made it almost impossible for them to legislate constructively.¹⁴ President Davis was able to command a majority for his policies only through the continued support of representatives and senators from the states of the upper South, which were under control of the Federal army and consequently unable to hold new elections.¹⁵

When the Second Confederate Congress convened in Richmond on May 2 for its first session, many Southerners had come to believe that the Confederacy would be unable to attain its independence. During 1863, Confederate armies had suffered decisive defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg (July), in the Shenandoah Valley (October), and at Lookout Mountain-Missionary Ridge (late November). The Confederate states had been divided into two parts when Federal forces established control of the Mississippi River. Grant had assumed command of the Union armies, and Union armies in Virginia and Georgia were poised to begin final, coordinated offensives that would end the war.

On the diplomatic front, France and Great Britain had declined to officially recognize the independence of the Confederate States of America. The two countries had, however, maintained their economic ties with the Confederacy by declaring their neutrality in the conflict, a position usually applied to two warring nations rather than to a domestic rebellion within a single nation. Still, the likelihood of foreign financial or material aid seemed small.

On the home front, shortages of food, goods, and forage; unpopular taxation, financial regulations, and conscription and impressment laws; and the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus had led to doubts in some parts of the South that President Davis's leadership was capable of carrying the war to a successful conclusion. Never-ending casualties stemming from combat and disease had deluged many families and communities, leading many otherwise patriotic citizens to question the wisdom of war as a means of obtaining Southern independence.

The results of the 1863 elections for the Second Congress reflected this growing unease among the voters, particularly in North Carolina and Georgia. In the Second Congress, 47 of the 107 House members were first-time representatives; in the Senate, 3 of its 26 members were newly elected. Twenty of the newly-elected House members and the three new Senators held views that reflected the concerns of many voters that Southern independence would not be realized. They joined four or five incumbent House members and four sitting senators who shared their concerns. Together they constituted a loosely knit peace coalition whose members believed the time had arrived for the Confederacy to initiate peace negotiations with the Lincoln Administration. Their position on the need for peace negotiations would receive little support, though, and they were viewed with suspicion by President Davis, their congressional colleagues, and the general public.¹⁶

The Judicial Branches

President Lincoln appointed five Justices to the United States Supreme Court during his time in office. When he assumed the presidency in 1861 the Court already had one vacancy. However, Justice John McLean soon died (April 4, 1861), and Justice John Archibald Campbell of Alabama resigned (April 30, 1861) to join the Confederacy. President Lincoln did not fill these positions until 1862, when he nominated Noah Swayne, Samuel Miller, and David Davis. In 1863 Stephen Johnson Field of California became the tenth Justice after Congress expanded the Court in 1863. When Chief Justice Roger Taney died in 1864, Lincoln appointed Salmon P. Chase, his former Treasury Secretary, to succeed him.¹⁷

There were two major US Supreme Court cases that arose on the issue of the trial of civilians in wartime: *Ex parte Vallandigham* (1864) and *Ex parte Milligan* (1866). We will address *Milligan* in Part 8 of this series.¹⁸

As to *Ex parte Vallandigham* (1864), in 1863 soldiers arrested Senator Clement L. Vallandigham (D, OH-1) for violating Army orders against public expressions of Confederate sympathies. In an incendiary speech at Mount Vernon, he had denounced the war and the Administration at home and in Congress. He was tried before a military tribunal headed by General Ambrose Burnside and found guilty. President Lincoln banished Vallandigham to rebel territory. He returned and appealed the action in the Supreme Court. On January 22, 1864, the justices heard arguments for and against granting certiorari. The question before the Court was whether the military proceedings were constitutional. On February 15, 1864, the Court issued its ruling refusing to address Vallandigham's main argument that the military tribunal lacked jurisdiction to try him. Instead, the Court held it was only authorized to take appeals as regulated by Congress, and Congress had never authorized them to take an appeal from a military tribunal. Accordingly, they denied Vallandigham's appeal for lack of jurisdiction.

The Presidential Election of 1864

The split in the Democratic Party dated back to 1860, albeit it had been brewing for a while before that. It split first along sectional lines – Southern Democrats that supported John Cabell Breckinridge for president that year, and Northern Democrats that supported Stephen Arnold Douglas. The Northern Democrats, in turn, split into two factions. On the one side were the Peace Democrats – the so-called Copperheads – who wanted an end to the war via a negotiated peace at any cost. The other faction was the War Democrats. They rejected the policies of the Copperheads. They generally supported the policies of President Lincoln and demanded a more aggressive policy toward the Confederacy. The split led the two factions to support different candidates in the state elections in Ohio in 1862 (one of the key issues in that election was racial equality) and had become even more pronounced by 1864.

Recognizing the War Democrats' importance in the upcoming election, in May the Republican Party changed its name for the national ticket to the National Union Party. On June 9, under its new moniker, the party nominated the incumbent, the "former Republican" President Lincoln, for President and the "former War Democrat", Andrew Johnson, for Vice President, displacing the incumbent, VP Hannibal Hamlin of Maine. This switch allowed many War Democrats to support President Lincoln's reelection while avoiding the "Republican" ticket.¹⁹

It is hard for many to believe today that President Lincoln's reelection had been in doubt, but as late as August, as battlefield losses continued to mount, President Lincoln

himself despaired. He could see the possibility of losing to a candidate who would seek a negotiated peace with the Confederacy. On August 23, he wrote a memo to his cabinet, folded it into an envelope, and asked his cabinet members to sign the envelope without reading the memo. It became known as the Blind Memorandum.

Executive Mansion

Washington, Aug. 23, 1864.

This morning, as for some days past, it seems exceedingly probable that this Administration will not be re-elected. Then it will be my duty to so co-operate with the President elect, as to save the Union between the election and the inauguration; as he will have secured his election on such ground that he can not possibly save it afterwards.

LINCOLN

The Peace Democrats' national convention began on August 29 in Chicago. The party platform contained a plank terming the war of failure and calling for an armistice without preconditions. The next day, August 30, they chose as their nominee Maj. General George Brinton McClellan, President Lincoln's colossally self-centered, vain, and self-assured former commander of the Army of the Potomac and still on active duty, without significant opposition. For good measure, they nominated "Copperhead" Representative George Hunt Pendleton (D, OH-1) as his running mate.

Few presidential candidates have been so severely handicapped by the convention that nominated them. McClellan rejected the peace plank, believing that the precondition for peace between North and South must be reunion – "The existence of more than one government over the region which once owned our flag is incompatible with the peace, the power, and the happiness of the people." If reunion could not be achieved by negotiation, then the war must continue until victory is achieved. This was based not only on principle but also on his awareness of political realities. The Chicago platform would lose him the states of New York and Pennsylvania, which between them contained half the electoral votes needed for victory in November. He was unable to reconcile these two disparate positions.²⁰

President Lincoln understood that his chances of reelection in November hinged on military success in the war, now in its fourth year and dragging on longer than either side had expected. By the summer of 1864, Grant had settled in for a prolonged siege against the Confederates near Petersburg, Virginia, and Sherman made slow progress toward Atlanta. Confederate General Jubal Anderson Early, meanwhile, had led his troops to the gates of Washington in July (at one point during which a curious President Lincoln, visiting the front lines, exposed himself to enemy fire). The war effort seemed to be stalling for the Union, and many in the public blamed President Lincoln.²¹

The political news for President Lincoln was no brighter. Republican insider Thurlow Weed told him in mid-August 1864 that "his re-election was an impossibility." Republican party chairman Henry J. Raymond expressed much the same sentiment to the President on August 22, urging him to consider sending a commission to meet with President Davis to offer peace terms "on the sole condition of acknowledging the supremacy of the Constitution," leaving the question of slavery to be resolved later.²² Note that when President Lincoln signed his "Blind Memorandum", he did not yet *know* who his principal opponent would be (although he expected it to be someone powerful enough to upset the incumbent) or details of that party's platform.

There were other reasons, as well. First, the country had not elected an incumbent president for a second term since Andrew Jackson in 1832 — nine presidents in a row had served just one term. Also, his embrace of emancipation was still a problem for many Northern voters. Irish immigrants in the eastern cities and the Southern-born

settlers of the northwestern states were especially hostile to African Americans and, therefore, to emancipation. Moreover, many other Northerners had become tired and disaffected as the war dragged on interminably.²³

On the other hand, some Republicans even questioned why the Union would have an election at all. President Lincoln made sure that a democratic election happened, even during wartime, whatever the cost -- even though he was sure he would lose.

The South was well aware of Union discontent. Many felt that if the Southern armies could hold out until the election, negotiations for Northern recognition of Confederate independence might begin. This changed on September 2, when Sherman seized Atlanta and later in the month when Sheridan defeated Early in the Shenandoah Valley. Those battlefield successes were extensively covered by Northern newspapers and significantly boosted Northern morale. With Atlanta firmly in Union hands and threats to Washington from the Valley finally curtailed, the war effort had turned decidedly in the North's favor.

The election was followed closely by leaders in the South. University of Virginia Professor Elizabeth R. Varon categorizes them in two camps. The first was the "Peace Camp" (also dubbed the Confederate Copperheads"), led by VP Alexander Stephens. Putting a lot of hope in the Copperhead "Peace Democrats", they believed a McClellan victory would lead to a negotiated settlement that would leave the Confederacy more or less intact or, if there was to be reunion, it would be on the South's terms. They thought his chances were good for essentially the same reasons that President Lincoln worried. The second was a "Hardliner Camp", led by President Davis himself. They rejected the "Peace Camp" perspective, believing instead in victory at any cost. In fact, their core belief was only that battlefield victory and political machinations would win Southern independence.²⁴

There was another large bloc of voters that President Lincoln counted on (ironically, as did those, North and South, that pinned their hopes on McClellan and his continuing popularity within the Union army) -- something over one million eligible voters under arms away from home. It was to this end that Secretary of War Edwin McMasters Stanton proposed to create an absentee voting system. He agreed with President Lincoln that a democratic society fighting for its life should include all the legal voters who wished to vote. Of course, no one knew just how soldiers and sailors would vote, particularly when under the stress of combat field conditions. Moreover, no one knew how to manage absentee voting on this scale, what effect military voting might have on President Lincoln's reelection, or even how the soldiers and sailors felt about whether they should vote or not. He pressed on, though, and instituted a system that was ultimately left up to the states to regulate but allowed soldiers and sailors deployed away from home to vote in their local, state and federal elections. Since the war was going to extend through the election of 1864, states were faced with the question of whether they should deny suffrage to their soldiers away from home fighting to preserve the Union.²⁵

As of 1862, only Wisconsin had laws allowing men to vote somewhere other than their local district. Another nineteen states would change their laws, and some even their state constitutions, to allow soldiers to vote while away, either at a field station in their military encampment (think of ballot boxes today) or by mail. Everyone else had to be tethered to their local polling place.

This abrupt change in voting laws created a maelstrom in the 1864 election. It was a bold initiative, being the first time that soldiers in the field under wartime conditions could vote. Suddenly, soldiers and sailors with experience could comment on the candidates' war performances. As it turned out, the experiment in absentee voting worked despite difficulties inherent in developing the methods to make it work, worries of potential fraud, and the opposition of the Democratic Party. (The only states that

failed to pass legislation allowing absentee voting were states in which the state legislation was controlled by Democrats. Ironically, the Democrats were hoping many of the soldiers had retained their loyalty to their former commander, McClellan, and would vote for him.) About 150,000 soldiers and sailors in the field could avail themselves of absentee voting; many, however, were able to return home to vote.²⁶

Two months later, on November 8, President Lincoln won the popular vote that eluded him in his first election with a 411,428 margin over McClellan – 2,213,665 to 1,802,237. This included 78% of the military's vote and 55% of the popular vote. He won the electoral college by 212 to 21, a devastating electoral victory (only Kentucky, Delaware, and New Jersey going for McClellan), and the Republicans won three-fourths of Congress. President Lincoln even won areas of the Confederacy occupied by the Union Army that allowed citizens to vote. A second term and the power to conclude the war were now firmly in his hands.²⁷ As captured by Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Seldom in history was so much staked on a popular vote – I suppose never in history.”²⁸

It was a more complete Republican victory than the Copperheads (and most of the South) expected. Safely re-elected and having the public mandate he felt he needed to carry the war through to its end, President Lincoln brought the Blind Memorandum with him to the next cabinet meeting on November 11. He finally read its contents to the cabinet, reminding them it was written “when as yet we had no adversary, and seemed to have no friends.”²⁹

Had McClellan been elected, one can only wonder what direction the United States would have taken.

To what extent would the Copperheads have pursued a negotiated settlement? In all likelihood, President Lincoln, along with Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan, would have done everything they could to defeat the Confederate Army by the time of McClellan's inauguration in March 1865. How and for how long would the Confederacy have hung on hoping for succor? As it happened, President Lincoln's reelection, his margin decisive as it was, sealed the Confederacy's fate. The outcome of the war was no longer in doubt; all hope was gone. President Davis would not or could not see it, though, so the war ground on even though continued resistance was but a waste of blood and bullets. In the North, plans for reunion – Reconstruction, as it were – rose to the fore.

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Postscript: On November 15, just a week after the election, Maj. General Sherman began his slashing offensive in Georgia, what came to be known as Sherman's March to the Sea. On December 21 his army reached the sea and occupied Savannah. In a telegram to Washington, he offered the city to President Lincoln as a Christmas gift. A fitting capstone for the year. The end of the Confederacy was imminent.

Notes

¹ *Reelecting Lincoln: The Battle for the 1864 Presidency*, John C. Waugh; New York: Crown Publishers, 1997; 34-37.

² [Ulysses S. Grant | American Battlefield Trust \(battlefields.org\)](#). Grant became only the third to hold this three-star rank. The first was George Washington. Winfield Scott, the most important general officer in the US military between the retirement of Andrew Jackson in 1821 and the onset of the Civil War in 1861, was the second, albeit it was but a brevet rank.

³ *Lincoln and the Power of the Press: The War for Public Opinion*, Harold Holzer; New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2014; 489-494. See [THE FORGED PROCLAMATION.; PUBLIC EXCITEMENT AND INDIGNATION. Suppression of the World and Journal of Commerce. MILITARY SEIZURE OF THEIR OFFICES. Three Thousand Five Hundred Dollars Reward for the Forger. MILITARY OCCUPATION OF THE WORLD AND JOURNAL OF COMMERCE OFFICES. THE REWARDS OFFERED. ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD.](#) - *The New York*

[Times \(nytimes.com\)](#) for a full-text copy of the forged proclamation, and full-text copy of the President's order to Dix at [Executive Order—Arrest and Imprisonment of Irresponsible Newspaper Reporters and Editors | The American Presidency Project \(ucsb.edu\)](#).

⁴ Harold Holzer, "Lincoln and the Power of the Press", question and answer portion, C-SPAN American History TV, June 20, 2015.

⁵ For example, when General Lee launched his invasion into Pennsylvania, some thought his route was charted by reading the daily reports about Union positions published in the Philadelphia papers. In response, on June 26, federal grand jurors and Washington brought against William Harding, the editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer, for treason, for printing "information concerning the army movements to the aid and comfort of those engaged in rebellion against the United States." But news continued to leak. Lee learned that General J. E. B. Stuart had failed to obey orders to join his invasion force only by reading detailed reports about Stuart's ride around the federal army in the Baltimore and New York papers. Holzer, [Lincoln and the Power of the Press](#), 432-433.

⁶ [Presidents and the Media: Lincoln and Press Censorship During the Civil War: potus geeks — LiveJournal](#). Also see Holzer, [Lincoln and the Power of the Press](#), 273-275 et al.

⁷ "The Rebel Press: Six Selected Confederate Newspapers Report Civil War Battles", Henry Gabler; *The College of William & Mary*, 1971; 69-74

⁸ "Jefferson Davis and the Confederate Governors," Arthur Gordon Daniel; *North Texas State College, Denton, Texas*, 1959; 81-83.

⁹ The Director of the US Mint developed the designs for these coins for final approval of Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase. The phrase "In God We Trust" first appeared on the 1864 two-cent coin. An Act of Congress, passed on March 3, 1865, allowed the Mint Director, with the Secretary's approval, to place the phrase on all gold and silver coins that "shall admit the inscription thereon." In 1956, In God We Trust replaced E Pluribus Unum ("Out of Many, One") as the national motto. All currency was printed and minted with the new motto. [History of 'In God We Trust' \(treasury.gov\)](#)

¹⁰ Naturalist John Muir and others subsequently became alarmed about excessive exploitation of the area. Their efforts helped establish Yosemite National Park in 1890. Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove were added to the national park on June 11, 1906, under President Theodore Roosevelt, essentially reversing the ownership transfer occasioned by the Yosemite Valley Grant Act of 1864.

¹¹ The territorial governor, James Warren Nye, had become frustrated that previous attempts to send the constitution via overland mail and by sea had failed, so on October 26 the full text was sent by telegraph at a cost of \$4,303.27 – the costliest telegraph on file at the time for a single dispatch, equivalent to \$71,205.38 in 2020. Finally, the response from Washington came on October 31, 1864: "The pain is over, the child is born, Nevada this day was admitted into the Union".

¹² There were three Confederate Congresses: Provisional (with five Sessions), First (with four Sessions), and Second (with two Sessions). The Second Congress met in Richmond: First Session: May 2 – March 18, 1864.; Second Session: November 7, 1864 – March 18, 1865. [Confederate States Congress - Wikipedia](#)

¹³ [1863 Confederate States House of Representatives elections - Wikipedia](#) and [2nd Confederate States Congress - Wikipedia](#)

¹⁴ [U.S. Senate: Creating a Confederate Senate](#)

¹⁵ [United States - Secession and the politics of the Civil War, 1860–65 | Britannica](#)

¹⁶ "True Friends of the Confederacy", John R. Hildebrand; *The Smithfield Review*, Volume 21, 2017, [The Smithfield Review Volume 21, 2017, Hildebrand \(vt.edu\)](#)

¹⁷ From 1801 until 1864 – some sixty-three years – there had been only two Chief Justices, John Marshall, appointed January 27, 1801, and, some 35 years later, Roger B. Taney, appointed March 28, 1836. During this time, there were 15 Presidents (John Adams (2) through and including Abraham Lincoln (16)). Chief Justice Chase, appointed December 15, 1864, would be the third. He would remain so until his death on May 7, 1873.

¹⁸ For a comprehensive discussion of these cases, see [Opposing Lincoln: Clement L. Vallandigham, Presidential Power, and the Legal Battle over Dissent in Wartime](#), Thomas C. Mackey; Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2020; chapters 4 and 5.

¹⁹ Getting back to Chase, he had sought the Republican nomination back in 1860. At the Republican National Convention that year, he received 49 votes on the first ballot but had little support outside of Ohio. Lincoln won the nomination, and Chase supported him in the campaign. Chase explored challenging President Lincoln's reelection for the Republican Party nomination again in 1864 but could not get any traction within the party. Chase resigned his cabinet position on June 30. Despite the political challenge, President Lincoln nominated him to be Chief Justice of the Supreme Court on December 6; he was confirmed by the Senate that same day.

²⁰ *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860-1865*, Stephen W. Sears, ed.; New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989; 588-596 – particularly McClellan's September 4, 1864, letter to the Democratic Nomination Committee acknowledging his nomination and his September 8 letter to same accepting his nomination.

²¹ Erin Allen, "Abraham Lincoln's 'Blind Memorandum'", *Library of Congress Blog*, August 21, 2014, [Abraham Lincoln's "Blind Memorandum" | Library of Congress Blog \(loc.gov\)](#). For an interesting analysis of the Blind Memorandum, its context and meaning, see Meg Thompson, "1864 Presidential Election", C-SPAN American History TV, August 16, 2014.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ [United States - Secession and the politics of the Civil War, 1860-65 | Britannica](#)

²⁴ Elizabeth Varon, "Confederate View of 1864 Presidential Election", C-SPAN American History TV, November 8, 2014. Note that VP Stephens, never close to President Davis, became so disenchanted with him that he spent the last two years at his home in Georgia, vehemently disagreeing with the President's wartime decisions but not resigning his post.

²⁵ Thompson, "1864 Presidential Election", C-SPAN American History TV, *ibid.*

²⁶ Thompson, "1864 Presidential Election", C-SPAN American History TV, *ibid.*

²⁷ Waugh, 354; also Blake Stilwell, "How Absentee Voting for US Troops Won the Civil War and Ended Slavery", *Military.com*; at [How Absentee Voting for US Troops Won the Civil War and Ended Slavery | Military.com](#). The presidential contest of 1864 was the last role McClellan would play in the Civil War. On Election Day, he resigned his army commission, and said good-bye to politics. In January 1865, some three months before the war concluded, he sailed with his family for Europe. He would not return to the United States for 3½ years. Waugh, 356.

²⁸ Letter to Mr. George P. Bradford, November 1864.

²⁹ Allen, *Library of Congress*, *ibid.* See, also, Waugh, 360.