STRATEGY
RESEARCH
PROJECT

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any of its agencies. This document may not be released for open publication until it has been cleared by the appropriate military service or government agency.

ULYSSES S. GRANT: A STRATEGIC LEADER

BY

DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 2

LIEUTENANT COLONEL HENRY W. SUCHTING III
United States Army

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A:
Approved for public release.
Distribution is unlimited

19960610 071

USAWC CLASS OF 1996

U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE BARRACKS, PA 17013-5050

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Henry W. Suchting, III

TITLE: The Ulysses S. Grant: A Strategic Leader

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 15 April 1996 PAGES: 25 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

With the increased emphasis that is currently being placed upon strategic thinking, it is appropriate to reexamine past U.S. leaders to determine their proficiency in this skill. This study focuses on the strategic thinking of General Ulysses S. Grant as a military leader. Specifically addressed are his national strategic vision, his operational (battlefield) vision, and his personal leadership style. This study argues that Grant was "state of the art" in each of these arenas. Diverse sources provide a view of his possession and mastery of the several layers of what we would dub strategy. The section on national strategic thinking furnishes a glimpse of his ability to see, well beyond most of his contemporaries, the connectivity between battlefield results and national destiny. The segment covering operational vision demonstrates Grant's key role in the advancement of operational art. The final portion, concentrating on his leadership style, displays a more personal view of Grant.

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

ULYSSES S. GRANT: A STRATEGIC LEADER

by

Lieutenant Colonel Henry W. Suchting, III
United States Army

Chaplain (Colonel) John W. Brinsfield
Project Advisor

U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any of its agencies. This document may not be released for open publication until it has been cleared by the appropriate military service or government agency.

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Henry W. Suchting, III

TITLE: The Ulysses S. Grant: A Strategic Leader

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 15 April 1996 PAGES: 25 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

With the increased emphasis that is currently being placed upon strategic thinking, it is appropriate to reexamine past U.S. leaders to determine their proficiency in this skill. This study focuses on the strategic thinking of General Ulysses S. Grant as a military leader. Specifically addressed are his national strategic vision, his operational (battlefield) vision, and his personal leadership style. This study argues that Grant was "state of the art" in each of these arenas. Diverse sources provide a view of his possession and mastery of the several layers of what we would dub strategy. The section on national strategic thinking furnishes a glimpse of his ability to see, well beyond most of his contemporaries, the connectivity between battlefield results and national destiny. The segment covering operational vision demonstrates Grant's key role in the advancement of operational art. The final portion, concentrating on his leadership style, displays a more personal view of Grant.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration Number & Name	Page
Figure 1 - Frontal Assault	9
Figure 2 - Tactical Turning Movement	9
Figure 3 - Strategic Turning Movement	10
Figure 4 - Logistics Raiding Strategy	13
Figure 5 - Interior Lines of Communication	16
Figure 6 - Simultaneous Advance	17

This Page Intentionally Left Blank

> "The elections of 1862 had gone against the party which was for the prosecution of the war to save the Union...At this time the North had become very much discouraged... There was nothing left to be done but to go forward to a decisive victory."
>
> Ulysses S. Grant's thoughts, circa winter 1862-63.[1]

It has been more than 130 years since the American Civil War. During this span, there have been generations of "armchair" historians who have accepted various myths pertaining to that national tragedy as truth without necessarily penetrating the array of literature that belies such myths. One such piece of American folklore is that the Union produced no significant strategic leaders, but that victory became assured through the sheer weight of Northern industrial output. While it is unarguable that the Union did have an advantage in its industries, that subject will be left for others to contemplate. Instead, the focus of this study will concern one of the Union leaders, General Ulysses S. Grant. The question that is to be answered by this research is: Did General Grant demonstrate the attributes of the strategic leader? To properly answer this question, one must presuppose some basic knowledge of the concept of strategic leadership and then attempt to marry this with the first hand accounts and expert analyses of Grant's campaigns. After taking advantage of a wide range of such evidence, it is my thesis that General Ulysses S. Grant was one of the finest strategic leaders that this country has ever produced.

To narrow the breadth of this critical look at one of our historical figures, the period to be studied will include the period of the Civil War (1861-1865) along with any pertinent developmental life experiences that occurred prior to that time. That is to say, the period of the Grant Presidency will not be considered. Likewise, the various potential elements of strategic leadership will be narrowed to primarily three elements that could be almost universally accepted as candidates for sub-elements of strategic leadership by a military commander. These are, in order of their presentation, as follows. First, did Ulysses Grant demonstrate national strategic

thought and leadership? In other words, did his actions show a leader who understood the Clausewitzian concept "...that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means?"[2] Second, did Grant use strategic thought and leadership in the conduct of his battlefield campaigns? Put in modern parlance, was he adept at the operational level of warfare? Third, did Ulysses S. Grant soldier in a strategic manner? Did his demeanor, personality, example, and ethical standards prove to be appropriate for a strategic leader of his forces? After scrutinizing a variety of documents ranging from expert analyses, to quotes from his strategic level peers, to his own thoughts from his memoirs, it is clear that Grant was a champion in every one of these categories.

NATIONAL STRATEGIC VISION

To assert that General Grant did demonstrate national strategic thought and leadership encompasses a great deal of substance which can be imperfectly compared to the question: Did he see the big picture (nationally) and act accordingly? Before answering that question, it is interesting to consider the resources that our nation now expends to properly train its senior military leaders on such subjects. As a minimum, a General Officer has been through a one-year Command and General Staff Officer Course as a Major and a one-year War College Course as a Colonel (or Lieutenant Colonel). In the rapid expansion of the U.S. Army of 1861, the West Point trained, Mexican War veteran, Grant, signed (back) up from his civilian pursuits and immediately became a Colonel, Regimental Commander. So, clearly he didn't have the opportunity of our modern day strategists. However, in two very distinct ways, Grant proved himself to be a master in this field: First, he demonstrated a crystal-clear vision of the connection between his actions on the battlefield and the politics of his day. Second, he possessed perhaps the most elusive of all strategic "gifts", the ability to know what to do next. For even though a leader

who is a solid executor of orders may be valuable, a leader who has the "sixth sense" to know what to do next is like gold.

An extreme simplification of the moods of the North and South at the outbreak of the war is that they both hoped for a quick victory, with volunteer enlistments in the North initially set for periods as short as 3 months. As the reality of the duration of the war set in, the South remained outwardly as a political monolith, with everyone on the "team". As the secessionist "nation", the South was on the defensive, hoping to outlast Northern "aggression" and the coercion to remain in the Union. In the North, it was a far different matter. Although most people understood the cause to be just, as the cost mounted, there were many who felt that the war wasn't worth it. So, while President Lincoln prosecuted the war, other elements threatened to change the political agenda (as well as possibly the next President when the elections occurred) to one of accommodation with the South. So, despite the obvious industrial and population advantage, when the first year of the war went by with more Union failures than successes, the strategic advantage seemed to be shifting to the Confederacy. This corresponds loosely to the U.S. homefront being the Union's center of gravity similar to the way the Vietnamese exploited this strategic element one hundred years later. It was into this environment that Grant ascended to a position to where he could play at the national strategic level.

When Grant wrote his memoirs, he covered the Mexican War of the 1840s, where he served as a Lieutenant, prior to his discussion of the Civil War. Clearly, this was a formative time for him. His recollection of that earlier war was that: "The Mexican War was a political war, and the administration conducting it desired to make party capital out of it."[3] Speaking of General Winfield Scott, he also recollected: "...nothing so popularizes a candidate for high civil positions as military victories."[4] With this as a backdrop, Grant had several early Civil War successes at

such western campaigns as Forts Henry and Donelson, which guarded the Tennessee and the Cumberland Rivers, was promoted to Major General and commanded at the mixed success of Shiloh. His army, which after the piecemeal reinforcing of others (by higher authority) had dwindled to 50,000 men, was centered on the town of Corinth, in northern Mississippi, and Grant was contemplating the possibility of his being pushed back. Strategically, his memoirs record these thoughts:

> If I too should be driven back, the Ohio River would become the line dividing the belligerents west of the Alleghenies, while at the east the line was already farther north than when hostilities commenced at the opening of the war.... To say at the end of the second year of the war the line dividing the contestants at the east was pushed north of Maryland, a State that had not seceded, and at the west beyond Kentucky, another state which had been always loyal, would have been discouraging indeed. As it was, many loyal people despaired in the fall of 1862 of ever saving the Union.[5]

So, Grant, the new Major General, understood the rapidly diminishing support of the cause in the north. When a few months later he was presented with the dilemma of either attacking the nearly impregnable Confederate fortress at Vicksburg by coming south along the east bank of the Mississippi River - or retreating several hundred miles, building up his base of supplies and attacking in a loop from the east to west - Grant chose neither. Instead, he took the more risky action of traversing the Mississippi River twice. Once to get to the western shore, traveling down that shore, and crossing back below Vicksburg, disengaging his army from its supply lines and attacking Vicksburg from the South. When he discussed this plan with his trusted subordinate, General William T. Sherman, Sherman tried to talk him out of it:

> He told Grant that, in going into the enemy's country with a large river behind him and an enemy holding strongly fortified points above and below, he was voluntarily assuming a position for the attainment of which the enemy would be glad to spend a year of maneuver. He then urged that the army be sent back to Memphis to attack Vicksburg from the north. Grant told him that the country was discouraged by the lack of military success; that voluntary enlistments had ceased throughout most of the North; that a withdrawal to Memphis would greatly discourage the people; that the immediate problem was to achieve a decisive victory; that no progress was being made in any other field; and that he and his army must go on.[6]

Considering the politics of 1862-1863, it is a small wonder that upon the surrender of Vicksburg on the 4th of July 1863, President Lincoln, himself, wrote a note to Grant saying that he had doubted his strategy throughout the campaign and now wished "to make the personal acknowledgment that you were right, and I was wrong."[7] These vignettes simply show that in Grant, the Union had a leader who, although concerned with his campaigns in the western areas, thought nationally and strategically. He truly could see the big picture. What was worse for his enemies, General Grant was a tenacious commander. His greatest strategic skill, however may have been his capability to see what was just over the horizon.

The critical ability to figure out what to do next is an elusive trait and as such it will be hereby presented as a separate train of thought. Therefore, the war chronology will repeat as this thread will be followed starting in 1861. Grant was, at the time, a Brigadier General in command of the District of Southeast Missouri. This district encompassed all of the territory south of St. Louis, in Missouri as well as all southern Illinois. This period in the late summer of 1861 was characterized by a jockeying for position by both Confederate and Union forces as both were mobilizing their volunteers. With troops that had not seen action before, Grant headquartered his unit at Cairo, Ill and instantly sized up the strategic situation. Hearing that Confederate Units were about to

occupy Paducah, Kentucky, at the mouth of the Tennessee River, he sent two unanswered dispatches to Department Headquarters (his boss was General Fremont) saying that he was going to occupy Paducah before the Confederates could get there. This was what we would perhaps call a real "CNN moment" today, in other words, a decision by a relatively low level leader having potential national strategic significance. The situation was just that critical because the neutrality of Kentucky was a political issue, and the U.S. government didn't want to do anything that would cause the Confederate sympathizers in the state to gain advantage and possibly cause secession. That, notwithstanding the fact that the Confederates had already taken two towns in the state, Columbus and Hickman. So, in Grant's own words, "I again telegraphed to department headquarters that I should start for Paducah that night unless I received further orders. Hearing nothing, we started before midnight...."[8] So, yes he took Paducah and then had the audacity to write to the Kentucky legislature, telling them what he was doing and the legislature approved his actions. None of us "Monday morning quarterbacks" would be surprised to find out that his expedition to Paducah had been (belatedly) approved by higher headquarters, but that he was reprimanded for his correspondence with the politicians of Kentucky. The strategic scorecard on this little scenario shows two great gains for the Union. At the battlefield level, the North now had control of a key node along the Tennessee River from which to project its forces into the heart of the Confederacy. From the national level, his dalliance with the Kentucky legislature soon led to a firm position by that state's leaders to remain in the Union.

Next, only a few months later, Grant saw another great opportunity. The Confederate Forts Henry and Donelson were only some 11 miles apart, but each of them commanded a strategic waterway. Fort Henry protected the Tennessee River which, if it could be captured would allow for potential exploitation of this navigable river all the way south to Muscle Shoals, Alabama.

Fort Donelson, besides providing some mutual defense with the nearby Fort Henry, commanded the Cumberland River, providing a gateway to Nashville, eastern Kentucky, and significant rail connections. As he says about a discussion that he had with General Smith, a subordinate:

> This report of Smith's confirmed views I had previously held, that the true line of operations for us was up the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers. With us there, the enemy would be compelled to fall back on the east and west entirely out of the state of Kentucky.[9]

Realizing this, General Grant takes his plan of attack to General Halleck, who by this time had replaced General Fremont. Unfortunately, he was rebuffed. In an early example of jointness, he now discussed his plan with U.S. Navy Flag-Officer Foote, who agreed with him strongly enough that they then sent off similar dispatches to request permission to take Fort Henry. This time the request was approved. After taking Fort Henry, he understood the strategic value of timing when he stated in his memoirs, that:

> I was very impatient to get to Fort Donelson because I knew the importance of the place to the enemy and supposed he would reinforce it rapidly. I felt that 15,000 men on the 8th would be more effective than 50,000 a month later.[10]

So, what did his immediate commander think of this seemingly obvious next course of action? "General Halleck did not approve or disapprove of my going to Fort Donelson."[11] Once again, we have Grant, the junior-level General taking the risks and winning big for the Union. This brings us to February 1862 when Ulysses Grant was promoted to the grade of Major General. Looking back on the feelings that he had at that time, he was again caught up in the issue of what should have been done next. For in this case, things didn't go the best way, in Grant's opinion:

> My opinion was and still is that immediately after the fall of Fort Donelson the way was opened to the National forces all over the South-west without much resistance. If one general who would have taken responsibility had been in command of all the troops west of the Alleghenies, he could have marched to Chattanooga, Corinth, Memphis and Vicksburg with the troops we had then, and as volunteering was going on rapidly over the North there would soon have been force enough at all these centres to operate offensively against any body of the enemy that might be found near them. ...the acquisition of rebellious territory would have promoted volunteering,....On the other hand, there were tens of thousands of strong able-bodied men still at their homes in the South-western States, who had not gone into the Confederate army in February, 1862, and who had no particular desire to go. If our lines had been extended to protect their homes, many of them never would have gone....Time was given the enemy to collect armies and fortify his new positions.....[12]

This entry from Grant's memoirs is rich in strategic thought. It contains several lessons for both national and military (operational) leaders. Containing "could have beens" which might be dismissed by an ordinary person's rewriting of history, Grant renders it credible based upon his extraordinary ability to pick the correct course on so many other decisions. Essentially, he says that at the national level, timing was very critical. Had the North fully followed up on the victories at Forts Henry and Donelson, the resultant territorial gains would have pacified a great region, the sons of which would then have been unavailable for later recruitment and service in combat against the Union. At the operational level, this time afforded to the enemy allowed for the reinforcement of numerous positions, many of which would be later won at a great cost in blood. Finally, Grant is also saying that a unified commander in the West could have made this happen, but at the time, the Union had a rather fragmented Departmental system, with many responsible where one would have been better. Modesty apparently prevents Grant from saying that he should have been that one commander. That too would come, but only after some more time for his true genius to be recognized.

Numerous further examples of Grant's ability to visualize what to do next could be cited. He suggested to the general-in-chief (Halleck) in October, 1862, a "forward movement against Vicksburg."[13] He also became one of the primary authors of the strategy of simultaneous advances against the enemy. These and others strategies are discussed to some degree at other points throughout this paper, so this discussion will be truncated, here with what should be a sufficient working of this section. In summary, General Ulysses S. Grant displayed an uncanny skill at seeing the big picture in a national strategic sense and had the further gift of being able to translate that into answering the question: What do we do next? Not surprisingly, a subordinate who has these capabilities rises quickly. When they are soldiers and they prove themselves to be correspondingly adept at battlefield (operational) strategy, they are quickly rewarded with greater responsibility. The next section deals with just this kind of battlefield acumen.

OPERATIONAL VISION

As an operational level commander and strategist, General Grant had few peers. To develop this theme, a brief introduction of the tactics of the day are in order. With the increased range, accuracy and rate of fire that small arms of the mid-19th century made possible, entrenched defensive forces had a great advantage. The Frontal Assault depicted below (Figure 1) frequently resulted in horrendous casualties to the assaulting force. To cope with this, a tactical turning

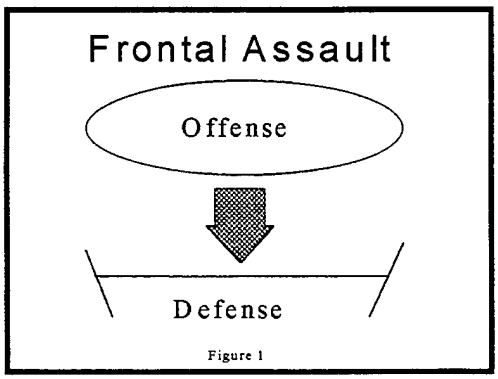


Figure 1

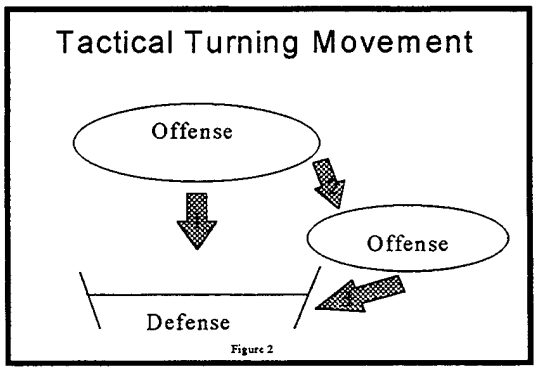


Figure 2

movement (Figure 2) evolved, with mixed success. This tactical response saw the offensive force "turning the corner" and thereby avoiding the teeth of the defense. This maneuver wasn't always so successful because the defense usually planned for such a turn and soldiers drilled so that they could smoothly reset with their front in a new direction. This was basic tactics of the day. What separated the basic leaders from the more accomplished ones was the introduction of the strategic turning movement. In this maneuver (Figure 3) the offense

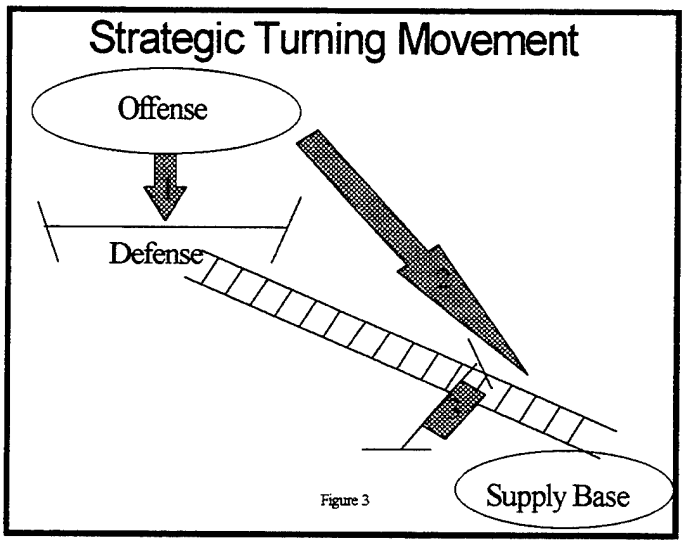


Figure 3

avoided the defensive front lines altogether and struck a deep blow to the enemies source of logistics. This could be a railroad, a waterway or a road over which wagons could bring supplies from a nearby city. Now the physics of the offense-defense were turned upside down. As one can easily see in this crude depiction, the defense must now get up out of their prepared positions to fight their way back through the offense's hastily prepared defensive lines in order to clear a path to their source of food (for humans as well as horses) and ammunition. No plan being

perfect, such a maneuver, if not performed correctly, could result in the offensive forces cutting themselves off from their own supplies. Grant, of course hadn't invented this strategy; in fact he witnessed it in action when campaigning with General Taylor in Mexico (while Grant was a Lieutenant). In his memoirs he talks of the time when Taylor's troops took the Saltillo Road leading near Monterey. He says, "With this road in our possession, the enemy would be cut off from receiving further supplies, if not from all communication with the interior."[14] Such a maneuver during the Civil War had an even more significant effect, with the increased logistical requirements associated with bigger armies. At Vicksburg, as previously mentioned, Grant performed this strategy brilliantly, avoiding the enemy's main defenses and severing the city's supply lines. Furthermore, it was a gutsy move, since Grant voluntarily cut himself off from his own supply lines. By living off of the land, Grant rediscovered an art that had been the underpinning for all armies since antiquity, but had become lost in just the last two hundred years prior to the Civil War. In the great logistical work, Supplying War, Martin Van Creveld states it quite clearly:

> From time immemorial the problem had been solved simply by having the troops take whatever they required. More or less well organized plunder was the rule rather than the exception. By the early seventeenth century, however, this time honored 'system' would no longer work. The size of armies was now too large for it to be successful.[15]

So, it is almost humorous when Grant relates his discovery of how troops could live off of the land. When he knowingly severed his supply lines in order to defeat in detail two Confederate armies and besiege Vicksburg, he wrote:

> Up to this time it had been regarded as an axiom in war that large bodies of troops must operate from a base of supplies which they always covered and guarded in all forward movements.....The stock was bountiful, but still it gave me no idea of the possibility of supplying a moving column in an enemy's country from the country itself. [16]

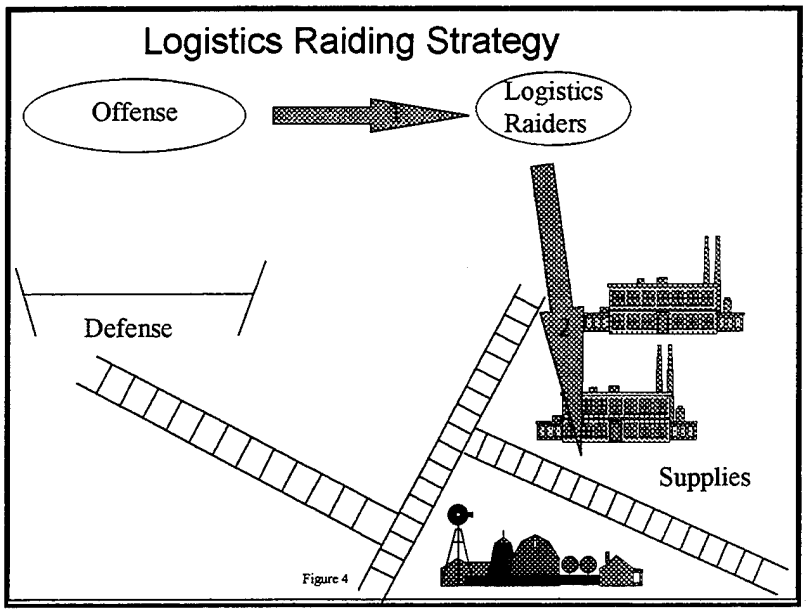
Clearly, Grant understood the concepts of the Strategic Turning Movement and the risks and potential rewards of living off the enemy's land, but after Vicksburg his real genius ignited. Collaborating with General Sherman, a subordinate, and at times with President Lincoln, he took the operational art to new levels. The first of these new areas was the logistics raid. He came upon this as a major strategy via a minor set back of his own, a path of knowledge for many of history's greatest strategists. As briefly discussed in the previous section on National Strategic Vision, Grant achieved some early success at Forts Henry and Donelson then prepared himself for actions that would ultimately target Vicksburg. Unexpectedly, Confederate raids by Forrest and Van Dorn so significantly destroyed the railroads that were supplying Grant's army that he had to retreat.

> With his communications in ruins and in a country already foraged by the retreating Confederates, Grant withdrew. Again, by use of only a few men, the Confederate raiding logistic strategy had defeated the advance of 40,000 men.[17]

The wise officer would learn from this episode, and Grant did. In his subsequent actions, Grant simply expanded this concept and made it work at the continental level. Now, his whole strategy would change drastically. When he reflected back upon 1862, Grant said:

> I gave up all idea of saving the Union except by complete conquest. Up to that time it had been the policy of our army, certainly of that portion commanded by me, to protect the property of the citizens whose territory was invaded, without regard to their sentiments, whether Union or Secession. After this, however, I regarded it as humane to both sides to protect the persons of those found at their homes, but to consume everything that could be used to support or supply armies.[18]

A simple diagram of this concept is at Figure 4.



Essentially, the raid had been used to effect by others (and Grant, himself) before. Now, however, the scope of these raids grew to monstrous proportions and the raiding party roamed around in the enemy's heartland with impunity. While actually avoiding enemy forces, the raiders destroyed factories and transport capabilities. At first, Grant's concept of a raid was this kind of action:

> ...The men would take no transportation, living entirely on the country, damaging the roads as much as possible, burning Confederate supply depots and taking all of the good horses they found. They need not return to Tennessee; if they reached the Federal lines anywhere along the Carolina coast all would be well. Grant did not think more than 1,200 or 1,500 cavalrymen need make the trip, because "they do not go to fight but to avoid fighting if possible.[19]

However, as this kind of strategy grew to its logical conclusion in the fertile mind of Ulysses Grant, he began to plan for ever greater logistical raiding. Witness the campaign plan that he visualized for 1864:

> The plan Grant evolved for 1864 envisioned three gigantic raids aimed at destroying the transportation and supply system that supported the principle rebel armies.....As a result of these raids, every Confederate state east of the Mississippi would lose its rail connections to the others, two major rebel ports would fall, and the raiders, in addition to living at the enemy's expense and taking much livestock, would wreck many foundries and mills important to the war effort....Grant's main strategy no longer had much dependence on combat, because raiders pursuing a logistic strategy avoided hostile armies in order to destroy depots, factories, and bridges.[20]

For a leader to conduct this kind of raiding, Grant had to look no further than his trusted General Sherman. The results of Sherman's raid on Meridian in February, 1864, are typical for their collaboration:

> He had neither sought nor fought any battle. In spite of his advance deep into enemy country, he made no effort to occupy more of the South. But he accomplished the objectives of the logistic strategy by raiding rather than conquest. Aiming primarily at crippling the railroads, he had destroyed 115 miles of railroad, 61 bridges, and 20 locomotives. In the process, he had lived off of the country and made a swath of desolation 50 miles broad across the state of Mississippi....[21]

Grant fully realized that he had the perfect "Lieutenant" in General Sherman. It has been said that: "Sherman had brilliantly executed the raiding strategy he and Grant had devised."[22] But, if it was such a good strategy, why didn't the logistics raiding strategy win the war for Grant and the Union? In Civil War Command and Strategy, the author, Archer Jones, asserts that:

> Although Grant's logistic raiding strategy has never received much recognition because it failed to win the war, it would have, had the war lasted long enough. And its political by-product, the intimidation engendered by his raids and their psychological effect as symbols of defeat, made a powerful contribution to inducing the South to give up its quest for independence before Grants strategy could have its decisive military effect.[23]

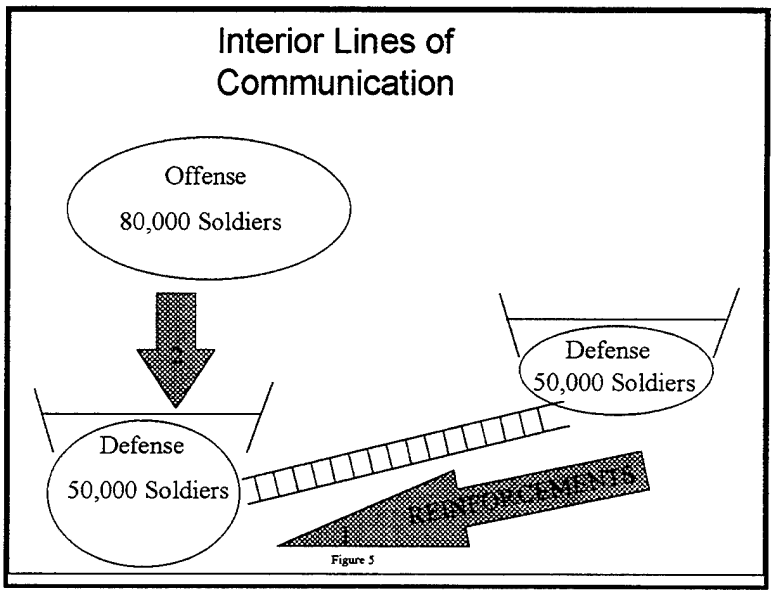
This particular quotation brings up the second component of the logistics raiding strategy that may have actually been more important than the simple act of exhausting the enemy armies, in terms of supply. This is the political and psychological factors of having the Union armies rambling about the south with impunity, as if to say to the Confederate citizens, "Your armies might be fighting us to a stalemate in Virginia, but they cannot stop us from going anywhere we want throughout your heartland." Another view of this concept that we would call "out of the box thinking" is:

> He wanted to turn the war upside down. The Confederacy's only chance to win was to make war on a continental basis, and if the Federals seized Atlanta and held the interior of North Carolina the Confederacy could not fight that way.....Richmond would die on the vine, and the spangled dream of a southern empire would die with it, if the Federal armies got at the heartland.[24]

In summary, General Grant gradually developed the raid into a new form of war. This collaboration with Sherman wasn't his only contribution to the art of strategy. That other major contribution would come in consonance with his boss, President Abraham Lincoln.

Those Civil War buffs who like to concentrate their dissection of the war on Southern dash and leadership and northern determination and industry miss out on a couple of interesting angles with regard to national war strategies. The preeminence of the defense at the tactical level is accepted as a Confederate advantage (except when the South went into nearly suicidal frontal assaults, such as Pickett's charge), but there was a Confederate strategic advantage, as well. This was the advantage of interior lines. The railroad and telegraph made this advantage even more

pronounced. Here is a brief scenario where this advantage could be brought to bear. With two armies of 50,000 men a few hundred miles apart, an attacking enemy of 80,000 would seem to have an advantage by isolating one of these forces. However, the telegraph and railroad allow for instant transmission of information and quick movement of troops to allow an 80-50 disadvantage turn into a 100-80 advantage. See Figure 5:



There would be no easy solution to this strategic disadvantage for the Union. However, Lincoln and General Grant both believed that the "concentration in space" advantage inherent in the side with interior lines could be overcome by "concentration in time" by a simultaneous advance by the offensive force. This is depicted at Figure 6:

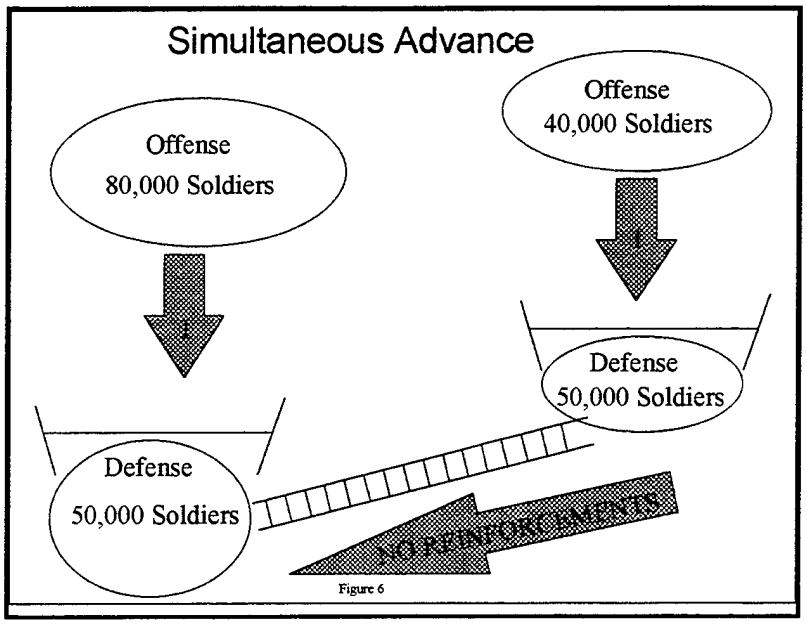


Figure 6

Since this simple construct calls for more attacking soldiers, a nation must actually have more, and this was indeed the case for the North during the Civil War. To Grant, this made more sense than using huge numbers of troops to guard ever lengthening supply lines. Here is Sherman's rendition of the guidance the commanders received just before Grant moved east to be the commander of all U.S. forces.

> ....we were with Grant he outlined in a general way his plan of campaign - that every army should move against the enemy, so that Lee and Johnson could not detach any of their command to reinforce the others. He said, 'I will try to keep Lee from sending any force to Johnson,' but he said to Sherman, 'If he does, I will send you two men where he sends one.'[25]

After assuming command, Grant and President Lincoln had a meeting where Lincoln approved Grant's grand strategy, although it will always be arguable as to who invented the plan. For the campaigns which much later led to the ultimate Union victory, the plans were:

> Every army had orders to advance in early May. No longer could Confederates use interior lines to counter sporadic offenses. Every army would perform some role in the grand offensive.[26]

How well did this concept of simultaneous advance work? Although for the horrendous body counts on both sides not quick enough, however it did finally succeed. As General Sherman's expert analysis has it:

> Yet ever onward by the left flank, he crossed the James River and penned Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia within the intrenchments of Richmond and Petersburg for ten long months on the pure defensive, to remain almost passive observers of local events, while Grant's other armies were absolutely annihilating the Southern Confederacy.[27]

The success of this strategy was perhaps lost in the heavy attrition on both sides in the last year of the war, at such places as Cold Harbor, Virginia. Nonetheless, General Grant's simultaneous advances finally closed the door on the Confederacy.

In terms of battlefield strategy, General Grant had few peers. From his clear understanding and application of the operational turning movement, to his rediscovery of the ability of armies to live off of the land, Grant proved himself to be at the Bachelors and Masters Degree level of operational warfare. Further, in his refinement and exploitation of the logistical raid and successful application of the simultaneous advance, General Grant became one of the few Doctorate level strategists of his era. Next, we will consider Grant's leadership style to determine whether or not it fits the mold of a strategic thinker.

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP STYLE

Although history shows us that there are numerous leadership styles that "work", enabling the possessor to accomplish his strategic mission, it may be possible to make certain judgments about

a leader's style. This question will be pursued as a consideration of whether or not the leader soldiered in a strategic manner. Put another way, "was his character consistent with his position and responsibility?" As observers, we may not know of any one style that will work, but we can spot from a "hundred yards" a style that will not work. After a study of U.S. Grant, we can conclude with certainty that he had a style and character consistent with strategic level leadership for the U.S. Army of the mid-nineteenth century. This segment is presented in a character trait sequence, therefore it follows no particular time-line or chronology. Seeking the very "roots" of his leadership style, it skips back, as necessary, to display formative incidents and accounts covering the entire period of his military service.

Accounts of Grant in action describe a man who was courteous and respectful to both superiors and subordinates, spoke softly and never swore, wrote clear and understandable orders, and encouraged his trusted "lieutenants" to take appropriate initiative in his absence. Sounds like a figure cut out of a field manual on leadership, doesn't it? Even more so when one considers that these attributes fit so neatly into the fabric of the egalitarian, yet moral, American self-portrait. A few examples of these elements of style and character follow.

The great work entitled The Mask of Command provides a thumbnail of Grant, the leader:

> He was quiet in speech, though he had an impressively resonant voice, undemonstrative in manner, indiscriminatingly courteous to all callers, and a listener rather than a talker. He would not tolerate gossip or backbiting, choked whispers into silence, never swore, though he was surrounded by profanes, was careful not to chide a subordinate in public and in general tried to command by encouragement rather than reproof.[28]

To anyone who has ever been in the military, or for that matter anyone who has had a job, this sounds like the ideal boss. Further:

> ....he addressed subordinates by their military rank. His despatches to them were usually signed, 'respectfully' or 'your obedient servant'. He was equally courteous in his dealings with superiors, civilian and military.[29]

Here we have described a brilliant, strategic leader who knows the next move to make, both at the national level and on the battlefield, who still takes the time to be civil and decent to his subordinates. When he communicated in writing, according to General Meade's chief of staff, he was crystal clear and succinct:

> ... there is one striking feature of Grant's orders; no matter how hurriedly he may write them on the field, no one ever has the slightest doubt as to their meaning, or even has to read them over a second time to understand them.[30]

Perhaps just as critical as all of these strong suits was Grant's concept of what we would call today, operating within the commander's intent. This is a force multiplier, for no matter how much energy a leader possesses, he simply cannot be everywhere on the battlefield, at once. However, with subordinates entrusted and empowered to take a tactical or strategic plan and then execute it in accordance with the actual opportunities existent at the time, the potential reach of the commander is virtually unlimited. In more detail is the following discourse between Grant and one of his aides:

> I want you to discuss with me freely from time to time the details of the orders given for the conduct of a battle, and learn my views as fully as possible as to what course should be pursued in all the contingencies which may arise. I expect to send you to all the critical points of the lines to keep me promptly alerted of what is taking place, and in cases of great emergency, when new dispositions have to be made on the instant, or it becomes to reinforce one command by sending to its aid troops from another, and there is no time to communicate with headquarters, I want you to explain my views to commanders and to urge immediate action, looking to co-operation, without waiting for specific orders from me.[31]

This is the intimate portrait of General Grant. How does it relate to the way he thought? That the following passage from his memoirs rings of honesty and a total lack of self aggrandizement creates a historical value that goes beyond the wisdom of the words, themselves. Witness his recollection of his first instance, during the Mexican War, of being fired upon:

> ...but for myself, a young second lieutenant who had never heard a hostile gun before, I felt sorry that I had enlisted. A great many men, when they smell battle afar off, chafe to get into the fray. When they say so themselves they generally fail to convince their hearers that they are as anxious as they would like to make believe, and as they approach danger they become more subdued. This rule is not universal, for I have known a few men who were always aching for a fight when there was no enemy near, who were as good as their word when the battle did come. But the number of such men is small.[32]

Another wry observation from Grant's memoirs that displays his ability to see through phony leaders and cowards is the following:

> It did seem to me, in my early army days, that too many of the older officers, when they came to command posts, made it a study to think what orders they could publish to annoy their subordinates and render them uncomfortable. I noticed, however, a few years later, when the Mexican war broke out, that they were possessed of disabilities which entirely incapacitated them for active field service. They had the moral courage to proclaim it, too. They were right ; but they did not always give their disease the right name.[33]

Accounts such as these from his memoirs give us a glimpse of a strategic leader who sees through false people and who knows, by experience, what war is all about. A truly strategic leader would probably also have the ability to make accurate judgments about enemy, as well as subordinate, leaders. Here again, Grant excels. When contemplating action against Fort Donelson, he states:

> I had known General Pillow in Mexico, and judged that with any force, no matter how small, I could march up to within gunshot of any intrenchments he was given to hold.[34]

On the other hand, his account of how he dealt with his own subordinate, General Sherman, displays for us his understanding of his own leaders, a strategic leader ability of equal importance.

> In thus moving along the line, however, I never deemed it important to stay long with Sherman. Although his troops were then under fire for the first time, their commander, by his constant presence with them, inspired a confidence in officers and men that enabled them to render services on that bloody-field worthy of the best of veterans.[35]

Understanding the attributes of a subordinate commander of a different ilk, General Grant spoke of his doubt of the "fitness" of General McClernand. When his doubts were borne out, General Grant had to personally take command of the Vicksburg campaign, since McClernand outranked all other Union generals in that command, except Grant. When General Grant arrived:

> General McClernand took exception in a most characteristic way-for him. His correspondence with me on the subject was more in the nature of a reprimand than a protest. It was highly insubordinate, but I overlooked it, as I believed, for the good of the service.[36]

Again, this passage is rich with character exposing information. It shows that Grant had the strategic insight to take over instead of leaving a critical mission to an incapable subordinate. It reveals that Grant was not so full of himself that he couldn't take some heat from a subordinate without overreacting. Finally, in the continuation of this quote, it reveals that Grant was thinking strategically in not taking action against the well connected (politically) McClernand. One more time, it was for "the good of the service."

In sum, this brief snapshot of Grant's style and character provides us with an outline of a perfect American strategic leader. This style would not have been appropriate for the armies of Europe, at that time, but it was ideally suited to the USA. Maybe the best testimony to his having a style and character consistent with a strategic leader is the way he looked to the average, junior soldier:

> 'He confines himself', reported the New York World correspondent from the Vicksburg army, 'to saying and doing as little as possible before his men. No Napoleonic displays, no ostentation, no speech, no superfluous flummery.'...'His soldiers for their part', reported Galway of the New York Times, 'do not salute him, they only watch him, and with a certain sort of familiar reverence. [They] observe him coming and, rising to their feet, gather on each side of the way to see him pass.'[37]

The purpose of this effort was to examine an American historical leader, Ulysses S. Grant, to determine if he fit the bill as a strategic leader. He was dissected in terms of his demonstrated ability to see the "big picture", in other words, strategy at the national level. Next, he was examined to determine whether or not he possessed the requisite traits of the battlefield strategist. Finally, he was placed under the microscope to ascertain his strategic caliber, in terms of style and character. In each of these venues, U.S. Grant came out with flying colors. His record, with overwhelming evidence, is strong on each of these elements. Surely, Grant's record during the Civil War is one of the best examples of strategic leadership in our nation's history.

This Page Intentionally Left Blank

ENDNOTES

[1] Ulysses S. Grant, The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant (New York: Konecky & Konecky), 262-263.
[2] Carl Von Clausewitz, On War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 87
[3] Grant, 74.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., 240.
[6] Clarence Edward Macartney, Grant and His Generals (New York: The McBride Company, 1953), 281.
[7] Gabor S. Boritt, Lincoln's Generals (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 178
[8] Grant, 158.
[9] Ibid., 169.
[10] Ibid., 175.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 188.
[13] Ibid., 248.
[14] Ibid., 67.
[15] Martin Van Creveld, Supplying War (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7.
[16] Grant, 251.
[17] Archer Jones, Civil War Command and Strategy (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 105.
[18] Grant, 218.
[19] Bruce Catton, Grant Takes Command (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 94.
[20] Jones, 183.
[21] Ibid., 186.
[22] Ibid., 217
[23] Ibid., 230.
[24] Catton, 102.
[25] Ibid., 138.
[26] Boritt, 168.
[27] Battles and Leaders of the Civil War (Secaucus: Castle, 1982), 249.
[28] John Keegan, The Mask of Command (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 204.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., 200.
[31] Ibid., 198.
[32] Grant, 58.
[33] Ibid, 32.
[34] Ibid., 173.
[35] Ibid., 203.
[36] Ibid., 261.
[37] Keegan, 208.

This Page Intentionally Left Blank

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Battles and Leaders of the Civil War Secaucus: Castle, 1982
Boritt, Gabor S. Lincoln's Generals New York: Oxford University Press, 1994
Catton, Bruce Grant Takes Command Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969
Clausewitz, Carl Von On War Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976
Grant, Ulysses S. The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant New York: Konecky & Konecky
Grant, Ulysses S., 3rd Ulysses S. Grant, Warrior and Statesman New York: William Morrow & Company,1969
Jones, Archer Civil War Command and Strategy New York: The Free Press, 1992
Keegan, John The Mask of Command New York: Penguin Books, 1987
Macartney, Clarence Edward Grant and His Generals New York: The McBride Company, 1953
McFeely, William S. Grant New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981
Marshall-Cornwall, James Grant as Military Commander New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1970
Phillips, Donald T. Lincoln on Leadership New York: Warner Books, 1992
Van Creveld, Martin Supplying War Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994
Woodward, William E. Meet General Grant United States: Horace Liveright, 1928