

THE FIRST UNITED STATES ARMY OBSERVERS OF MILITARY  
CONFLICTS IN POST NAPOLEONIC EUROPE (1855-1871)

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General Studies

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

THE FIRST UNITED STATES ARMY OBSERVERS OF MILITARY CONFLICT IN POST NAPOLEONIC EUROPE (1855-1871), by Major Jesse Lee Harden, 70 pages.

During the period of 1855-1871, the United States Army commissioned two formal observations of foreign conflict: the Delafield commission to the Crimean War and the Sheridan expedition to the Franco-Prussian War. The first U.S. Army observers of foreign military conflict, both groups were poised to improve the Army much by observing the great military contemporaries of their time. Several observations and recommendations would bear fruit for the U.S. Army; however, many seemingly simple observations and recommendations were not made by the commission.

The Delafield commission and Sheridan expedition to Europe were appropriate and deliberate strides towards the professionalization of the United States Army. Their influence on the Army is discussed in the details of this report.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The period after the War of 1812 and before the Mexican-American War in 1846 was a time of seclusion from potentially belligerent European powers that has been aptly dubbed by scholars as an “era of free security” for the United States.<sup>1</sup> While this period was a time of relative peace for the continent of Europe no longer threatened by Napoleon, it was a fragile peace maintained with an enormous investment of human and economic capital. For the geographically secluded United States, this period of isolation allowed essential economic and industrial growth as the United States dove into the industrial revolution without the requisite investment of blood and treasure required of European nations maintaining their own levels of peace and defense. The economic and industrial growth of the United States during this era of free security fueled expansive increases in all sectors of American life to include the professionalism of the American military.

After the War of 1812, one of the most popular methods for the professional development of United States military officers was the observation of the prominent foreign militaries of the time, primarily of France, Prussia, and Britain. Two circumstances of sanctioned travel were established for military officers, the first being travel at government expense for officers of the “Scientific Corps”—engineers,

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<sup>1</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Age of Reinterpretation* (Washington, DC, Service Center for Teachers of History, 1961), accessed 4 December 2014, <https://www.questia.com/read/11879652/the-age-of-reinterpretation>; Robert A. Doughty, Ira D. Gruber, Roy K. Flint, Mark Grimsley, George C. Herring, Donald D. Howard, John A. Lynn, and Willhelmson Murray, *Warfare in the Western World*, vol. 1 (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1996), 308.



topographic, and ordnance officers specifically.<sup>2</sup> The second circumstance for approved travel of Army officers was for line officers of the infantry, cavalry, dragoon and artillery branches to travel at their expense to pursue observer duties of European contemporaries. Prior to the Civil War, approximately 110 officers of the United States Army had traveled to Europe in one of these official statuses.<sup>3</sup>

An early beneficiary of this budding concept of professional development through foreign military observation was the expedition of Major Sylvanus Thayer to France in 1815. Thayer, fluent in French and a self-studied apostle of Napoleon, arrived in France on 12 July 1815, less than a month after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo.<sup>4</sup> A veteran of the War of 1812, Thayer was a graduate of both Dartmouth and West Point that spent over two years studying at the Ecole Polytechnique and the Engineering and Artillery school of the French Army at Metz (1815-1817). Thayer developed deep and rich bond with the French military system and its academy system during his observation years. When charged with the subsequent duty of serving as the superintendent of the United States Military Academy in 1817, Thayer purchased over 1,200 textbooks predominantly written in French ranging in topics from mathematics and philosophy to topography and military history that would become the basis of the West Point library. Additionally, Thayer enlisted French instructors to return with him to augment the teaching staff and

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<sup>2</sup> Tom Frame, *The US Military Commission to the Crimean War and Its Influence On the US Army Before the American Civil War* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1993), 117-119.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>4</sup> George Fielding Eliot, *Sylvanus Thayer of West Point* (New York: Julian Messner, 1959), 102.

instruct cadets in fencing, drawing, mathematics, engineering, as well as French.<sup>5</sup>

Thayer's introduction of the academic method of instruction taught in Metz is referred to as the Thayer method of instruction and is still used to this day at West Point. The Thayer method developed by Thayer's observations in France is considered one of the greatest injections of academics and military professionalism at West Point, earning Thayer the endearing title of "Father of the Military Academy" as is prominently inscribed on his statue at West Point.<sup>6</sup>

Five later graduates of the United States Military Academy (and Lieutenant General Philip Sheridan) would follow the example of this institutional father and travel to Europe to observe their military contemporaries while granted the exceptional benefit of being the first observers of foreign militaries during conflict. These officers were able to observe two remarkable conflicts of Europe with unprecedented opportunities to professionally improve themselves and the United States Army. Both observances were conducted at times of significant military and technological innovation that would alter warfare.

Captain George McClellan, as well as Majors Richard Delafield and Alfred Mordecai composed the Delafield commission to Crimea (1855-1856) during a time of significant technological innovation when the American military might was considered dubious at best by most European contemporaries. Whereas Lieutenant General Sheridan

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew Moten, *The Delafield Commission and the American Military Profession* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Company, 1996), 123.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins Press, 1966), 66; James Robbins, *Last In Their Class: Custer, Pickett and the Goats of West Point* (New York: Encounter Books, 2006), 4; Eliot, 121.

and Lieutenant Colonel James Forsyth conducted an observer expedition to the Franco-Prussia War (1870-1871) after personally serving with distinction in the American Civil War and earning a legendary reputation among European peers as the ideal cavalryman and ferocious Indian fighter.

Understanding that these two observer expeditions were poised to capture so much under very different circumstances, this thesis will answer the primary research question: why did the observations of the Delafield commission to the Crimea War (1855-1856) and Lieutenant General Sheridan's expedition to the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) have little to no influence on the United States Army?

The second chapter of this thesis is devoted to the Delafield commission to the Crimea with a detailed discussion of its membership and the results of their touring of various militaries of Europe. The second chapter will conclude with the findings and recommendations of the commission and will resolve more specific questions in regards to the Delafield commission: what were the goals of the Delafield commission to Crimea? What specific recommendations were made by the Delafield commission to the United States Army? Were any of these recommendations followed by the United States Army?

The third chapter is focused on the Sheridan expedition to the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. The chapter will discuss the details of the expedition and the observations made by Sheridan. Similar to the second chapter, this work will attempt to answer the specific questions of Sheridan's expedition: what were the goals of Sheridan's expedition to the Franco-Prussian War? What recommendations were made by Sheridan's

expedition to the United States Army? Were any of the recommendations made by Sheridan followed by the United States Army?

The fourth and final chapter of this thesis is dedicated to compare and contrast the two expeditions in an effort to better understand why these two expeditions poised to achieve so much have remained relatively forgotten. The work will include the primary lessons learned by studying the example of the Delafield commission and Sheridan's expedition to the Franco-Prussian War. In closing, this chapter will recommend other possibilities for further research for those wanting to continue the comparison of the expeditions.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE DELAFIELD COMMISSION TO THE CRIMEAN WAR

The Delafield commission was a three-man expedition of Army officers charged by Secretary of War Jefferson Davis in April 1855 to observe the foreign military forces of the Crimean War with respect to four broad categories: materiel, improvement of means of sustainment and logistics, fortifications and siege warfare, and medical improvement.<sup>7</sup> The first sanctioned observation of a foreign military conflict, the Delafield commission was an unprecedented attempt at modernizing the United States Army.

In 1853, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis took office during a time of significant change for the United States and its military. The recent victory of the United States over Mexico in 1848 led to the greatest land increase for the United States since the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. From the conclusion of the Mexican War until Secretary Davis's assumption of duty in 1853, the United States gained control of over one million square miles of land and assumed its present continental shape. The Oregon Treaty with Great

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Delafield, *Report on the Art of War in Europe 1854, 1855, 1856* (Washington, DC: G. W. Bowan, 1860), accessed 28 September 2014, <https://archive.org/details/reportonartofwar00unit>, v-vi. As noted by Dr. Frame in his *The US Military Commission to the Crimean War*, almost half of the specific observations ordered by Secretary Davis were in potential preparation against risk of seaborne invasions, to include coastal logistics and defense and imply his concern for the threat of a seaborne invasion from contemporary European invaders in conflict of the Monroe Doctrine. Hindsight proves that Davis's concern of a European invader of North American shores during this era of history was not unfounded with the political ramifications of the Ostend Manifesto unfolding in Europe at the time, the future invasion of Napoleon III into Mexico (1861-1867), subsequent propping of the short-lived Hapsburg monarchy in Mexico (1864-1867), as well as the British and American troop placements during the border dispute of the Peugeot Sound leading to the theatrical albeit underwhelming Pig War (1859). See Appendix A and Frame, 151.

Britain in 1846 resulted in United States' ownership of the Oregon Territory along the 49th parallel and increased the migration of adventurous pioneers along the famous 2,200-mile Oregon Trail.

Meanwhile, the American Southwest was secured by the United States if only in name with the annexation of Texas (1845) and the Treaties of Cahuenga (1847) and Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) and the subsequent Gadsen purchase (1853).<sup>8</sup> With the dynamic increase in the size of the United States burgeoned a migration of pioneers spirited by President Polk's dream of Manifest Destiny and the prospect of finding gold. A conservative count of over 296,000 pioneers attempted the various trails westward after the initiation of the California Gold Rush of 1849 including over 45,000 initial Mormon pioneers choosing to seek religious solace in the desert and salt flats of the recently acquired Utah territory.<sup>9</sup>

With the significant increase of migrating populations into the American western frontier arose two sobering responsibilities for the United States government: first, to secure the population from natural and native threats; and second, to facilitate citizen migrations by surveying and improving the terrain through the professional application of science and engineering. In addition to these domestic security concerns for the United

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Legacy of Conflict* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 43-59.

<sup>9</sup> John David Unruh, *The Plains Across: the Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-60* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1979), 118-119. Unruh's overland statistics capture that 18,000 emigrants attempted the trails westward from 1840-1848 averaging a little over 2,200 emigrants per year. After the California Gold Rush of 1849, emigration westward increased over 1,100 percent with over 296,000 emigrants traveling west from 1849-1860 with an average of over 26,900 emigrants traveling per year.

States, the technological innovation of steamships and railroads allowed an unprecedented capability for belligerent nations to move their respective militaries and minimized the defensive value afforded by the nautical separation from American shores to the European continent.

Faced with equipping the American military for these profound responsibilities, Secretary Davis was forced to balance his efforts for the pressing need to modernize the post-war Army of the United States into a small and flexible constabulary land force to contend with the many challenges of the expanding frontier while also preparing appropriate defenses against a potential seaborne invasion from Europe. It was in these conditions that Secretary Davis tasked three of his ablest military officers to observe the European armies waging war in the battlefields of Crimea.

The commission traveled approximately 20,000 miles in 383 days in a circuitous tour of eight European countries utilizing all means of available travel to include steam ship, railroad, and carriage. While touring dozens of fortifications and defenses, arsenals and hospitals throughout Europe, the members met with royal dignitaries of Great Britain, France, Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and Austria. Ultimately, the commission spent thirty days in St. Petersburg observing the Baltic front of the Crimea War (19 June 1855-19 July 1855) and a mere twenty-three days in the Crimea, arriving during the latter portions of the allied siege of Russian forces at Sevastopol (8 October 1855-31 October 1855). Before returning to the United States on 29 April 1856, the commission collected over 300 tomes of various European militaries, twenty-four maps of various European

locations and fortifications and several rifles, muskets and sabers as well as various other uniform items from European militaries.<sup>10</sup>

The namesake of the commission, Major Richard Delafield was the oldest member at fifty-seven years old and the only non-combat veteran. Delafield graduated as valedictorian of the West Point class of 1818, the first class to graduate under Superintendent Thayer. Delafield was a successful Corps of Engineers officer with various engineering accolades under his belt to include the construction of Forts Monroe and Calhoun at the maritime entrance to Norfolk, Virginia.<sup>11</sup> Delafield assumed the position of superintendent West Point from 1838-1845 where he was remembered by cadets as a notoriously strict disciplinarian and earned the moniker “Dicky the Punster” for his overuse of sarcastic puns while chastising cadets.<sup>12</sup> When he received the War Department telegram in April of 1855, Major Delafield was constructing coastal defenses of New York harbor and Fort Richmond on Staten Island.<sup>13</sup>

The second member of the commission was fifty-one year old Major Alfred Mordecai of the ordnance branch. The valedictorian of the West Point class of 1823, Mordecai was commissioned as an engineer officer in the Corps of Engineers and a renowned scholar and scientist. At the time of the Delafield commission, Mordecai was

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<sup>10</sup> Alfred Mordecai, “*Military Commission to Europe in 1855 and 1856: Report of Major Alfred Mordecai, Ordnance Corps* (Washington, DC: Bowman, 1861), 5-12, accessed 28 September 2014, <https://archive.org/details/militarycommiss00goog>.

<sup>11</sup> The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, *The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: A History* (Washington, DC: Army Corps of Engineers Office of History, 2008), 284.

<sup>12</sup> Ambrose, 126; Robbins, 56-57.

<sup>13</sup> The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, *The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*, 284.



considered one of the foremost authorities of ordinance and artillery in the United States Army with the 1849 publishing of his *Artillery for the United States Land Services as Devised and Arranged by the Ordnance Board with Plates*.<sup>14</sup> Commanding the Washington Arsenal during the Mexican War, Mordecai had traveled to Europe as a foreign observer twice before the expedition to the Crimea.<sup>15</sup> Recently promoted, Mordecai had recently returned from Mexico after investigating indemnity claims from the Mexican War for Secretary Davis.<sup>16</sup> In addition to his promotion, Mordecai was awarded command of the Washington Arsenal.

The last member of the commission was twenty-eight year old Captain George Brinton McClellan. Born into wealth and class as the son of a successful surgeon and graduating second in his class of 1846, he was commissioned into the Corps of Engineers.<sup>17</sup> McClellan was recognized as an ambitious young officer that distinguished himself under fire during the Mexican War while working as a combat engineer for General Winfield Scott.<sup>18</sup> Preceding the Delafield commission, McClellan surveyed the potential of a railroad line between St. Paul and the Puget Sound and developed his

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<sup>14</sup> Alfred Mordecai, *Artillery for the United States Land Service as Devised and Arranged by the Ordnance Board with Plates* (Washington, DC: J and G. S. Gideon, Printers, 1849), accessed 28 September 2014, <https://archive.org/details/artilleryforunit00unitrich>.

<sup>15</sup> Frame, 138.

<sup>16</sup> Moten, 208. The fraudulent indemnity claim was for \$500 million in damage for a silver mine allegedly damaged by invading U.S. soldiers. Mordecai disproved the claim during his investigation.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas W. Cutter, ed., *The Mexican War Diary and Correspondence of George B. McClellan* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

ambitious reputation among his superiors. McClellan's good reputation and merit paid off with a transfer out of the Corps of Engineers into the cavalry branch of the army with a promising potential for promotion.

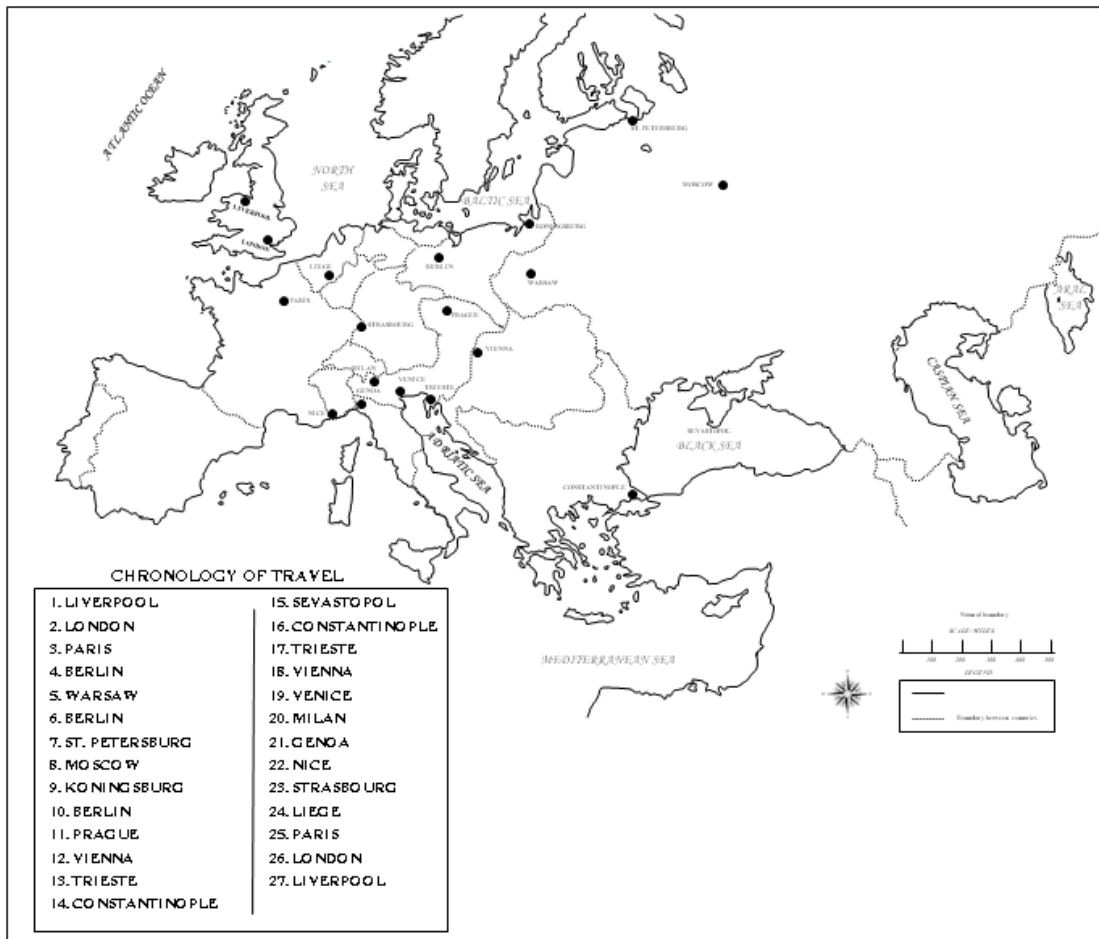


Figure 1. Map of Europe During the Delafield Commission to the Crimea War, 1855-1866 with Chronology of Travel

*Source:* Created by author.

Leaving Boston, Massachusetts on 11 April 1855, the commission arrived in Liverpool, England on 22 April 1855. Charged with diplomatically securing their route to

the Crimea, the Delafield commission would have been hard pressed to choose a more difficult time to wade into the diplomatic oceans of European politics. The expedition began less than six months after the release of the Ostend Manifesto that recommended the United States intimidate a weakened Spain with war in exchange for the annexation of Cuba.<sup>19</sup> The controversial document had detrimental diplomatic consequences to European relations with the United States as it threatened not only to erode the continental balance of power but increased the southern United States' claim on slave bearing territories in stark contrast to the progressive abolitionist stances of France and England. The circumstance was further aggravated by the fact that the three primary writers of the manifesto were the influential American ministers of the European countries most adversely affected by the dynamics of the Manifesto: John Young Mason, Minister to France, James Buchanan, Minister to England and Pierre Soule, Minister to Spain.

Arriving in England, the observers were forced to request through Buchanan and Mason for British and French approval for the expedition to enter and tour Allied lines within the Crimea.<sup>20</sup> While granted approval by British authorities, the commission received no response from the French government, demonstrating the degree of disfavor Mason's actions drew from the French government and foreshadowing the disharmonious

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<sup>19</sup> Gavin B. Henderson, "Southern Designs on Cuba, 1854-1857 and Some European Opinions," *The Journal of Southern History* 5, no. 3 (August 1939): 373-375, accessed 3 May 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/2191501?uid=2134&uid=2491784563&uid=3739600&uid=2&uid=70&uid=3&uid=2491784553&uid=3739256&uid=60&sid=21106683406923>.

<sup>20</sup> Frame, 158.

and generally negligent relationship that would plague the commission by the French government.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the diplomatic quagmire that the commission found itself, it was a common belief among the observers that the French military was the superior military force of the conflict and duty absolutely required the commission to observe the French. The observers dutifully traveled to Paris to solicit French government approval in person, arriving in Paris on 7 May 1855 without authorization to tour French military facilities. After two weeks of waiting the commission was given the sole French government response they would receive during its yearlong expedition and granted conditional approval for entry into and touring of French lines in the Crimea contingent on the commission not touring Russian camps afterwards.<sup>22</sup>

Unwilling to accept the French conditions without first consulting with Russian authorities, the Delafield commission declined the offered terms and left Paris enroute to the closest Russian government officials at Berlin.<sup>23</sup> The observers sought approval of Russian government officials at Berlin and Warsaw only to learn that the appropriate level of approval for the commission to observe Russian lines rested with the Russian royal family itself.<sup>24</sup> On 19 June 1855, the observers arrived at St. Petersburg via stagecoach and were received by Russian royalty, meeting both the Russian Minister of War, Prince Vasily Andreyevich Dolgorukov and Tsar Alexander II during a military

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<sup>21</sup> Frame, 159.

<sup>22</sup> Moten, 160.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Moten, 254; Frame, 165; Delafield, ix.

commissioning ceremony for graduating cadets of the local military academy.<sup>25</sup> The American observers were given access to tour the Russian island fortress and naval yards of nearby Kronstadt in the Baltic Sea, which was under British blockade at the time and provided the commission their first opportunity to observe combat operations during their expedition. In addition, the observers were able to tour the Kremlin and various military arsenals and hospitals in Moscow. During the hospitable settings provided by the Russian royalty, the commission continued to press Tsar Alexander for permission to push forward into the Crimea but were met with polite refusals to their request.<sup>26</sup> Recognizing that they would not be granted a request to observe Russian lines by Tsar Alexander, the frustrated commission boarded a return carriage to Prussia on August 2, 1855.

On 8 August 1855, the commission arrived in Konigsberg, Prussia and renewed its appeal to French authorities for permission to enter Crimea and observe French lines. While awaiting for a response, the observers spent several weeks touring various fortresses, arsenals, and defenses in Prussia but were never granted a response from French officials. On 12 September 1855, the commission abandoned hope for a French

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<sup>25</sup> Moten, 259; Frame, 175. Alexander II succeeded the throne on 5 March 1855, after pneumonia claimed his father Nicholas I after his military review of troops without wearing a coat in -23 degree winter weather. Nicolas refused to report his declining health causing a reeling shock among his unknowing followers and loyalists, many of whom were fighting in the Crimea. The untimely loss of the Russian head of state was a mere three months before the commission's arrival in St. Petersburg. See Orlando Figes, *The Crimean War: A History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2010), 321-322.

<sup>26</sup> Moten, 264; Frame, 174. Assigned a military escort, Lieutenant Colonel Obrescöff, the aid-de-camp to the minister of war, the commission was escorted to the various military sites in St. Petersburg and Moscow for over a month while the royal family conferred with General Mikhail Gorchakov, the recently appointed commander in the Crimea. Ultimately, the general declined the request, more than likely wanting to minimize foreign observation of the difficult circumstances in which the Russian military in the Crimea found itself at the time.

response and began traveling to Constantinople to seek entry into the Crimea via Ottoman lines. Along the way, the observers toured museums, arsenals, and armories in Dresden and Vienna, as well as touring the Napoleonic battlefields of Aspern-Essling and Wagram before arriving in Constantinople on 30 September 1855 by way of the seaport of Trieste.

Upon arrival in Constantinople, the commission ceremonially met the Ottoman minister of war and the grand vizier of the Ottoman court but were refrained from entering Crimea from Ottoman lines.<sup>27</sup> On 6 October 1855, relying on the letters of authorization addressed to Lord Raglan that the commission received from the British government in April, the commission received passage through the Black Sea to Balaklava on a British Royal Navy steamer, *Prince of Arabs* and finally arrived in Crimea on 8 October 1855.<sup>28</sup>

Three days after arrival to Sevastapol, the commission officially requested an audience with the French commander at Sevastopol, Marshal Pelissier, which was never honored by Pelissier.<sup>29</sup> After several weeks, the commission would eventually be granted printed permits to view French works by the marshal's Chief of Staff, General Marimpry, however even this grace was perceived by the commission as another slight as the permits rested in the French post office for eleven days before their delivery to the observers.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Moten, 282; Frame, 182.

<sup>28</sup> Moten, 283; Frame, 182.

<sup>29</sup> Moten, 304; Frame, 193.

<sup>30</sup> Moten, 310.

The commission toured British and a few French trench lines as well as hospitals and abandoned Russian works while recording their findings. The scene of the siege was shocking to the members of the commission with most buildings and homes destroyed by artillery and naval barrage and the majority of civilian non-combatants gone due to the destruction. Delafield wrote “a few cats, dogs, and rats were the only living creatures found in the place” and described the demolished city as “blood-stained ruins alone were left to the victors as the fruits of this siege.”<sup>31</sup>

On 22 October 1855, Mordecai contracted a painful and dangerous bout of dysentery from the battlefield conditions surrounding the commission that required immediate medical evacuation and care, effectively ending the commission’s combat observations at Sevastopol.<sup>32</sup> On 31 October 1855, the commission boarded a British steamer to Constantinople and began a six-month journey back to the United States by traveling through central Europe and the United Kingdom.<sup>33</sup> The commission traveled through Austria, meeting Austrian Emperor Franz Josef before entering Belgium and touring the Waterloo battlefield and sailing to the United Kingdom. The commission arrived in New York on 29 April 1856, 180 days later than the requested end date set by Secretary Davis in his initial letter to the commission members.

Upon completion of the expedition, the commission did not submit a single consolidated report but rather three separate and voluminous reports, individually

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<sup>31</sup> Delafield, 47.

<sup>32</sup> Moten, 303. While convalescing in a British field hospital at Scutari, Mordecai was attended by none other than Florence Nightingale herself. See Delafield, 75.

<sup>33</sup> Moten, 315; Frame, 193-194.

prepared by each of the members of the commission at their follow-on assignments and submitted several years after the conclusion of the mission. McClellan submitted first in January 1857 with his 499-page *Armies of Europe* before resigning to pursue businesses ventures in American railroad construction. Mordecai's 232-page *Military Commission to Europe* was submitted next in March of 1858 while he worked at the War Department. Lastly, Delafield's 287-page *Report on the Art of War in Europe* was completed while he was superintendent of West Point and finally submitted in November 1861, four years after Secretary Davis left the War Department, and seven months after the first shots of the American Civil War were fired at Fort Sumter.

The language, themes, and observations of each the submitted reports are disparate and indicative of the personalities and professional interests of the author. Despite being assigned very specific topics of observation by Secretary Davis, the three members of the commission generally reported on parochial interests that impacted their respective branches within the army and therefore provided little differentiation in opinion. As such, some of the specific topics requested by Secretary Davis were not addressed by any of the members of the commission as the topic did not impact the branches of the commission members.

Mordecai's report consists of almost 200 pages of matter-of-fact, meticulous scientific observations and data on the small arms, cannons, and artillery encountered by the commission to include the minie bullet utilized by French and British troops and the Napoleon cannon. Devoid of opinion and analysis, Mordecai gives detailed data and descriptions of the observed composition and strength of the armies of Russia, Prussia, Austria, France, and Great Britain. For example, Mordecai dedicated half a page of his



report to describing the composition of the Prussian general staff with an explanation that it was divided into four sections of business yet he offers no detail on how the staff operated or the difference of the staff from other militaries other than the number of sheer number of officers and bureaus.<sup>34</sup>

Additionally, Mordecai includes over thirty pages of detailed hand drawn sketches of various small arms, artillery pieces, and tools. Lastly, Mordecai concludes his report with an English translation of *Rifled Infantry Arms: A Brief Description of the Modern System of Small Arms* by Captain J. Schon of the Royal Saxon Infantry dated 1850.<sup>35</sup> Schon's well written work captured the results of several comparisons of the different types of European firearms and ordnances of the time in regards to range, accuracy, penetration, elevation, etc. Schon's empirical data of arms comparisons in concert with Mordecai's esoteric observations provided overwhelming scientific data to inform the professional members of the ordnance branch on how to best modernize American small arms and artillery with rifled ammunition and barrels yet provided very little utility to readers outside of this small group of professionals and academics.

Conversely, Delafield's later submission lacked Mordecai's scientific detachment and included much more conjecture and opinion as exemplified by his writing about rifled arms and ammunition. Delafield recognized the value of rifled arms and ammunition in application on the European battlefield and prioritized it as one of the first topics to discuss in his report while correctly speculating the eventuality of rifled arms acceptance by the American Army:

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<sup>34</sup> Mordecai, *Military Commission to Europe*, 30.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 225-232.

A greatly increased range, with precision of fire, is secured to the European armies by the introduction of the Minie rifle, which is decidedly better for military purposes than the old pattern, as it can be loaded with greater facility and ease. This accuracy of fire at long ranges is only to be obtained by great elevations, measured by a movable sight or hausse, without which many of its advantages would be lost . . . It thus appears there is a wide field open for the study of our infantry officers in the form and shape of the ball best suited to the rifle for our service, and that the Secretary of War may promote the interest of this arm of our service by calling the attention of the infantry officers to this as yet unsettled desideratum, the best form and size of the rifle ball.<sup>36</sup>

Conversely, Delafield bemoans the innovation of the breech loading Prussian needle gun rifle observed by the commission, recommending to the reader complete disregard of the potential innovation:

Celerity and rapidity of fire are the main points aimed at by the many inventors and advocates of this modification of the musket. We know that with the present weapons hundreds of rounds of ammunition are fired without producing any effect and probably not one shot in a thousand rounds issued to the soldier ever does execution. The late contest, as well as all previous wars, establishes this waste of cartridges. It is steadiness and aim at the object by the soldier that must be secured, a principle at variance with rapidity and celerity.”<sup>37</sup>

Delafield’s arguably unqualified opinion on the combat requirements for American infantry reflected one of the Napoleonic maxims of his day espoused on the battlefields and in Delafield’s West Point classrooms: that steadfast discipline in the face of fire would award victory. A minimal evolution of the sixteen century European “battle culture of forbearance,” this maxim would shroud western military doctrine and thought until the beginning of the twentieth century and the advent of combined arms warfare during World War I.<sup>38</sup> Eclipsed by the Napoleonic doctrine of Delafield’s day, military

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<sup>36</sup> Delafield, 8.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray, *The Dynamics of Military Revolution* (Cambridge, UK: The Cambridge University Press, 2003), 45.

innovation was never imagined to be able to trump the discipline and sacrifice required of soldiers on the battlefield.

Not dissimilar from the parochial writings of the other members of the commission, McClellan's writings are framed mainly for use by cavalry readers with almost 200 pages of cavalry observations in the work. Despite his neophyte status, McClellan tied both opinions, recommendations, and analysis into his detailed observations. Concluding McClellan's work is a seven-page recommendation of various changes in the composition and disposition of U.S. Army cavalry forces based on his observations in Europe and the Crimean. A sober recommendation made by McClellan's was to utilize light cavalry regiments in constabulary locations to deal with native American threats while armed with "the sabre[sic], . . . the revolver, and the pistol-carbine, or else a rifled weapon . . . ," a prophetic description of the antebellum disposition of cavalry along the American frontier.<sup>39</sup> Not one to mince words, McClellan informed the reader of his opinion of other forms of cavalry in this the U.S. Army setting: "heavy cavalry would be worse than useless for our purposes, and that we need only light cavalry, in the true and strictest sense of the term."<sup>40</sup>

Despite the untimely submittal of the observers' reports in such close proximity to the American Civil War; it would be a disingenuous claim to state that the commission

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<sup>39</sup> George McClellan, *The Armies of Europe: Comprising Descriptions In Detail of the Military System of England, France, Russia, Prussia, Austria and Sardinia, Adopting their Advantages to All Arms of the United States Service: Embodying the Report of Observations in Europe During the Crimean War. A Military Commission from the United States Government, In 1855-1856* (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1861), 386, accessed 28 September 2014, <https://archive.org/details/armieseuropecom00mclgoog>.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

had no effect on the United States Army. While Mordecai's meticulous observations on the minie bullet and the Napoleon cannon did not introduce the innovative developments to the ordnance corps, it reaffirmed the worth of the innovations on the European battlefield.<sup>41</sup> Mordecai's report furthered the development and fielding of this technology prior to the American Civil War, where the devastating effects were witnessed throughout Civil War battlefields.<sup>42</sup> While Delafield's untimely submission went largely unnoticed by preoccupied Army leadership fighting the rebellion, McClellan's report can easily be linked to the most change. McClellan's report was submitted just before

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<sup>41</sup> Mordecai, *Military Commission to Europe*, 145; Michael Bonura, *Under the Shadow of Napoleon: French Influence on the American Way of Warfare from the War of 1812 to the Outbreak of WWII* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 114-115. With his work submitted a year after the Model 1857 was introduced into the United States arsenal, Mordecai writes that the development of test twelve-pound cannons was ongoing prior to his departure to the Crimea but was significantly shaped by his observations of the many European twelve-pound cannons in circulation. Ultimately, the United States Army's light twelve-pounder gun, Model 1857 was a lighter version of cannon used by the French and yet heavier when compared to the version used by the Russian and Saxon armies of the time. Similarly the minie ball was already in use by the Army in 1855, prior to Mordecai's departure for the Crimea. See John Bilby, *Civil War Firearms: Their Historical Background and Tactical Use* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 1996), 51.

<sup>42</sup> J. Julian Chisolm, *Manual of Military Surgery for the Use of Surgeons in the Confederate States Army*, 3rd ed. (Columbia, SC: Evans and Cogswell Printers, 1864), 119, 159, accessed 3 November 2014, <https://archive.org/details/manualofmilita00chis>. Civil War field surgeon Dr. Chisolm shared his medical experience of the devastating effects of the minie rifle that was essentially the same as those used by some English and French during the Crimean War. Detailing the minie ball as a "conical ball" in his work, Dr. Chisolm wrote that the damage of minie rifles was magnitudes greater in severity and penetration to smooth ball counterparts and "necessitating more frequent amputations and resections[sic]." Dr. Chisolm astutely observed that smoothbore rounds were significantly underpowered in comparison to the minie rifle and wrote that the minie balls "produce extensive destruction, but seldom bury themselves" and "at times seen to pass through the bodies of two men and lodge in that of a third" whereas the much less penetrating smoothbore counterpart "which is turned by every little obstacle," i.e. bone, cartilage and internal organs.

Colonel Philip St. George Cooke's review of cavalry doctrine in 1861.<sup>43</sup> In addition, the M1859 McClellan saddle was adopted by the United States Army prior to the American Civil War and used by cavalry of both the United States and Confederate States of America.<sup>44</sup> The saddle was adopted directly from McClellan's observations of a Hungarian saddle used by Prussian, Russian and Austrian cavalry forces and is still in use by the Army to this day, albeit ceremonially.<sup>45</sup>

So while the Delafield commission was able to influence change to the United States Army, the question must be asked was that change appropriate for the numbers of observations made by the commission? This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4 of this work, as will the observations made by the Lieutenant General Phil Sheridan and his expedition to the Franco-Prussian War as discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>43</sup> Philip St. George Cooke, *Cavalry Tactics Volume II: Evolutions of a Regiment and of the Line* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), accessed 2 May 2015, <https://archive.org/details/cavalrytactics00deptgoog>. While Cooke's manual is much more a basic manual for the conduct of cavalry training and the execution of small cavalry formations, it is very likely that McClellan's report influenced Cooke's doctrinal review due to the timing of McClellan's report and the limited number of source materials for Cooke to use in his revision.

<sup>44</sup> Randy Steffen, *The Horse Soldier, 1776-1943: The United States Cavalryman, His Uniforms, Arms, Accoutrements, and Equipments Volume II: The Frontiers, the Mexican War, the Civil War, the Indian Wars 1850-1880* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 59; Mordecai, *Military Commission to Europe*, 11. In January of 1859, Colonel Cooke led the selection panel that recommended acceptance of the M1859 McClellan saddle by the War Department.

<sup>45</sup> McClellan, 200, 301, 323-235.

## CHAPTER 3

### SHERIDAN'S EXPEDITION TO THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR

Berlin, 30 June 1878

I regard Sheridan as not only one of the great soldiers of our war, but one of the great soldiers of the world - as a man who is fit for the highest commands. No better General ever lived than Sheridan.

—President U.S. Grant, conversation with Otto von Bismarck,  
quoted in U.S. Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*

The Sheridan expedition to the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) was a two-man observation led by Lieutenant General Philip Henry Sheridan and accompanied by his adjutant, Colonel James Forsyth. Sheridan's expedition was the United States Army's first observation of foreign military conflict after the United States Civil War and employed the highest-ranking observer. Both were on paid leave for a little over a year, leaving the United States in August of 1870 and returning in September of 1871.

Accompanying Sheridan to Prussia was Colonel James W. Forsyth, a fellow Ohioan and West Pointer of the class of 1856. Of future infamy as the commander of the 7th Cavalry at Wounded Knee, Forsyth began his military career as an infantry officer and second in command to then Captain George E. Pickett while stationed on the San Juan Islands in the Oregon territory during the "Pig War" of 1859.<sup>46</sup> During the Civil

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<sup>46</sup> Robbins, 174; *Army Navy Register, Army Navy Airforce and Defense Times*, "Obituary: MG Forsyth," *Army Navy Register, Army Navy Airforce and Defense Times* 20 (3 November 1906): 3, accessed 7 April 2015, [https://books.google.com/books?id=2k0-AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA307&lpq=PA307&dq=%22james+w+forsyth%22+obituary+1906&source=bl&ots=eHST9X47C7&sig=wPGmVcDMudVhaJF5JaRHZeHKsw&hl=en&sa=X&ei=\\_8QjVYveD4vEsAWF0IDYBQ&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAzgK#v=onepage&q=%22james%20w%20forsyth%22%20obituary%201906&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=2k0-AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA307&lpq=PA307&dq=%22james+w+forsyth%22+obituary+1906&source=bl&ots=eHST9X47C7&sig=wPGmVcDMudVhaJF5JaRHZeHKsw&hl=en&sa=X&ei=_8QjVYveD4vEsAWF0IDYBQ&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAzgK#v=onepage&q=%22james%20w%20forsyth%22%20obituary%201906&f=false). In an extraordinary irony shared by many during the war, Forsyth would lead Union troops at Five Forks in April 1865 contributing to the defeat of his former company commander, then Major

War, Forsyth became a cavalry officer and was brevetted due to bravery from the rank of major through brigadier general.<sup>47</sup> Depicted as one of Sheridan's most loyal staff members and aides during the Civil War, Forsyth had been McClellan's inspector general during the Peninsula and Antietam campaigns before accepting Sheridan's offer to serve as his chief of staff in 1863.<sup>48</sup> Earning a brevet general rank in the volunteer army, Forsyth served as both a staff officer and subordinate commander to Sheridan. Forsyth continued to serve the general faithfully from 1863 until 1878.<sup>49</sup>

Sheridan was thirty-nine years old when he sailed for Europe and enjoyed a much more storied career than his aide. A West Point graduate of the class of 1852, his teachers and some peers considered Sheridan a mediocre cadet at best. Sheridan managed to graduate thirty-four out of a class of fifty-two but only after being held back a year for fist fighting at drill with the cadet officer of the day after Sheridan threatened to run him through with a bayonet.<sup>50</sup> At five feet five inches, his slight stature earned him the moniker Little Phil during his cadet years, a handle that followed him through his career, albeit usually spoken behind his back at risk of incurring Little Phil's wrath. Despite his misgivings as a cadet, the limitations of his build, and his initial commission as an

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General Pickett. He was brevetted to the rank of colonel for bravery at the battle. See also Robbins, 439.

<sup>47</sup> *Army Navy Register*, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Andrew Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and His Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 153.

<sup>49</sup> Frank Burr and Richard Hinton, *The Life of General Philip H. Sheridan* (Providence, RI: J. A. and R. A. Reid, 1888), 350.

<sup>50</sup> Burr and Hinton, 32; O'Connor, 36.

infantry officer, Sheridan displayed magnificent horsemanship and cavalry prowess that he continued to refine at his first postings in Texas, California, and the Oregon territory.<sup>51</sup>

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Sheridan rose from the rank of captain to major general, albeit with a slow start. In September 1861, Sheridan was assigned to various quartermaster positions primarily under General Henry Halleck.<sup>52</sup> Sheridan's intelligence and meticulous nature caught the attention of superiors to include then Major General William T. Sherman.<sup>53</sup> Sheridan would be promoted to colonel of the cavalry and assume command of the 2nd Michigan Cavalry in May 1862 just before his victory at Boonville, Mississippi. He led the 11th Division at Perryville, Kentucky before gaining command of the cavalry corps of the Army of the Potomac.<sup>54</sup> Sheridan's audacious nature and desire to use cavalry in unorthodox manners put him at odds with his superior Major General George Gordon Meade.<sup>55</sup> In May 1864, Sheridan commanded the

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<sup>51</sup> Burr and Hinton, 32-41.

<sup>52</sup> Hutton, 12.

<sup>53</sup> Roy J. R. Morris, *Sheridan: the Life and Wars of General Phil Sheridan* (New York: Vintage Civil War Library, 1992), 58-59. At his promotion, Sheridan is quoted saying "I thank you for your good wishes, but I want no higher honor. I am now a colonel of cavalry, and have all the rank I want or expect." Burr and Hinton, 49.

<sup>54</sup> Morris, 86.

<sup>55</sup> Horace Porter, *Campaigning with Grant* (New York: The Century Co., 1897), 84, accessed 4 April 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/campaigningwith00unkngoog#page/n120/mode/2up>. Meade's traditional but perhaps conservative approach to cavalry was primarily defensive in regards to securing lines of supply and the execution of picket duty with cavalry used offensively in limited support of infantry attacks on the battlefield. At odds with Meade and frustrated after Meade's mismanagement of his cavalry at Spotsylvania during the Wilderness Campaign, Sheridan argued with Meade passionately and candidly for a more aggressive use of cavalry including leading his cavalry to destroy J.E.B. Stuart's opposing cavalry forces. See Hutton, 14.



mounted raid on Yellow Tavern during the Overland Campaign that mortally wounded Sheridan's arch nemesis, the storied Confederate cavalry commander Major General J.E.B. Stuart. Later that year, Sheridan smashed the veteran Confederate cavalry corps of Lieutenant General Jubal Early at Cedar Creek and arguably established himself as the supreme cavalry master of either side of the war.<sup>56</sup>

Sheridan's successes in 1864 guaranteed a reputation among superiors and peers on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line as an aggressive and competent cavalry commander; however, it was a success purchased by the use of heavy-handed tactics unprecedented in the war at this point.<sup>57</sup> With these tactics, Sheridan earned an additional reputation of being a hard man willing to do whatever it took to accomplish the mission

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<sup>56</sup> Hutton, 19. Hutton goes so far as stating that Sheridan was the premier Union combat leader, combining artillery, infantry, and cavalry unparalleled by his Union peers as well as employing scouts and spies in a manner that allowed him to be the best informed Union commander. Sheridan was meticulous in planning however adaptive enough to capitalize on opportunities and gamble on appropriate risks that arose on the battlefield.

<sup>57</sup> Doughty et al., 443; Morris, 208. When ordered into the valley, General Grant ordered Sheridan to destroy the valley so completely that a crow flying over it would have to carry its own food for lack of forage to which Sheridan proved to be a fast study. In September of 1864, Sheridan ordered his men to conduct Grant's recommended scorched earth tactics in the Shenandoah while defending against Early's veteran cavalry corps. Referred to as the "breadbasket of the Confederacy," one of the most agriculturally productive regions in the United States at the time was reduced to cinder and ash in what was sullenly remembered as the "Burning" by local survivors and foreshadowed Sherman's infamous March to the Sea two months later. Sheridan likened the valley to a desert after his desolation. Over 2,000 barns and seventy mills filled with the fall harvest were destroyed while over 400 square miles of Virginia farmland and agrarian industry were burned leaving Early's converging forces with virtually nothing to forage and establishing the conditions for Early's defeat at Cedar Creek. See O'Connor, 215.

assigned to him. The ultimate champion for Sheridan, Grant has often been quoted as saying “Sheridan never failed.”<sup>58</sup>

During Reconstruction, Major General Sheridan was appointed as the commander of the Military District of the Southwest and sent to Texas to deal with both domestic and external threats to the recently reunited country. In addition to Sheridan having to deal with the widespread racial tension occurring throughout the emancipated South, the diversion of the war allowed Napoleon III of France to violate the Monroe Doctrine in an attempt to force a regime change in nearby Mexico.<sup>59</sup> Sheridan quickly postured forces along the border to counter the growing French presence and readied his forces for war against the upstart government until Maximilian’s death by firing squad by rival government forces in 1867.

In September 1867, Sheridan was assigned to command of the Army’s Department of the Missouri. Headquartered at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, the command was charged with mitigating the escalating Native American threat in the volatile areas of the Indian Territory, Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, and the Territory of Wyoming. It was while in command of the Department of Missouri that Sheridan made his infamous quip “The only good Indians I ever saw were dead” that has been historically misremembered

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<sup>58</sup> Burr and Hinton, 424. Grant and Sheridan’s relationship was described by Grant’s military secretary and biographer Adam Badeau as a relationship founded on admiration and grown through achievement. See Hutton, 19.

<sup>59</sup> Hutton, 21-22. With the assistance of 40,000 French troops Napoleon III propped a Hapsburg monarch in Mexico, Austrian Archduke Maximilian, in the hopes of securing Mexican silver mines as well as increasing his ever shrinking balance of power in Europe with an overseas ally. Both Grant and Sheridan viewed Napoleon’s upstart government as not just a powder keg but as an extension of the Confederate spirit.

in American urban legend as “The only good Indian is a dead Indian.”<sup>60</sup> Upon accepting his new post, Sheridan earned a new reputation as a ruthless Indian fighter as he utilized similar heavy-handed tactics against the Native American threat on the plains of the Indian Territory as he did against the Confederates of the Shenandoah.<sup>61</sup> After one attack on Indian camps led by Sheridan’s subordinate prodigy Colonel George Custer, opponents to Sheridan’s Indian policy pressed him about the morality of the attack to which Sheridan responded “If a [Indian] village is attacked [by subordinate soldiers] and women and children killed, the responsibility is not with the soldiers but with the people whose crimes necessitated the attack.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Edward Ellis, *The History of Our Country* (Philadelphia, PA: The History Company, 1909), 1483, accessed 31 March 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/historyofourcoun06elli#page/1482/mode/2up>. The misquote is often used to castigate Sheridan and typecast him as a bigot against all Indians. However when posted in present day Washington during his early years, Sheridan was extremely intimate with Sidnayoh, the daughter of Chief Quately of the Willamette Valley Klickitat. Living with her for several years, arguably this was the most intimate relationship he had until he married Irene Rucker in 1875 at the age of forty-four. See Morris, 37.

<sup>61</sup> David D. Smits, “The Frontier Army and the Destruction of the Buffalo: 1865-1883,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 317, accessed 28 March 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/971110?sid=21106351669383&uid=2&uid=3739256&uid=3739600&uid=4>. Similar to his Shenandoah campaign strategy, Sheridan recognized the strategic link between warring factions and their food source, in this case the roving American bison herds. Under Sheridan it became the unofficial policy for army troops to conduct wholesale slaughter of the bison herd in order to pacify and control the American Indian threat by forcing them to become reliant on United States Army forces for food.

<sup>62</sup> Hutton, 185. Sheridan’s heavy handed tactics were best displayed during the Battle of Washita River in November 1868, a punitive action ordered by Sheridan in response to recent Indians raids onto settlements near the Indian Territory Reservation. Colonel George Armstrong Custer in command of the 7th Cavalry of Little Bighorn infamy was ordered by Sheridan to conduct a forty-mile forced march through a snowstorm onto the reservation in order to conduct a pre-dawn raid on the winter camp of Cheyenne Chief Black Kettle. The troopers of the 7th opened fire onto the sleeping camp, indiscriminately shooting combatants and non-combatants alike to include women,

In 1869 with U.S. Grant's election to the presidency, General Sherman replaced Grant as the General of the U.S. Army. Sherman proposed Sheridan for promotion to lieutenant general and appointment as his successor to be commander of the Military Division of the Missouri.<sup>63</sup> Headquartered in Chicago, Sheridan now commanded all army actions between the Gulf of Mexico and Canadian border and the Missouri River west to the Rocky Mountains.<sup>64</sup>

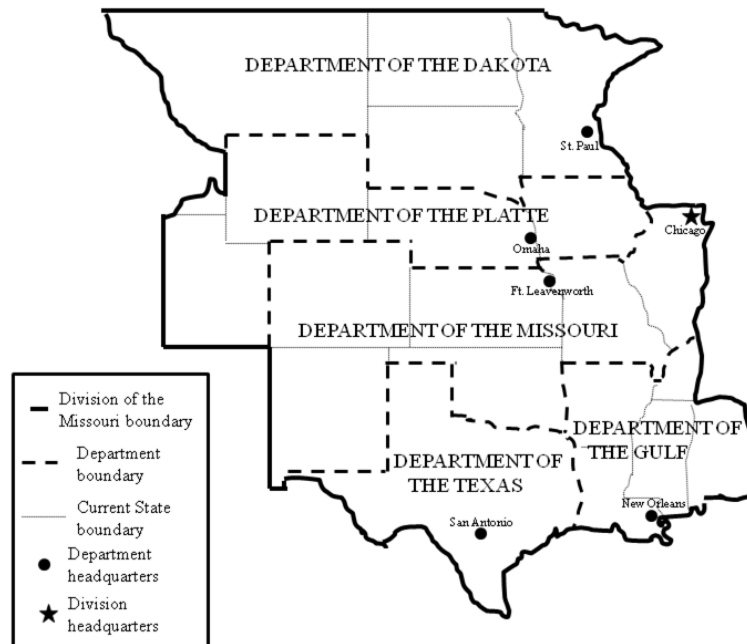


Figure 2. Division of the Missouri, 1869-1883

*Source:* Created by author.

children and elderly. Chief Black Kettle was a survivor of the Sand Creek Massacre and was later found in the river shot in the back. See Hutton 67-69.

<sup>63</sup> Hutton, 115-116. Sheridan was chosen for promotion over several of his former commanders to include Halleck and Meade as well as Sherman's close friend and West Point roommate, George Thomas.

<sup>64</sup> Burr and Hinton, 349.

In May 1870 while touring military posts in the Montana territory, Lieutenant General Philip H. Sheridan received news dispatches that the brewing conflict between France and Prussia was no longer a possibility but rather a clear inevitability. Recognizing an opportunity to observe modern war in Europe, Sheridan requested of President Grant and General Sherman to observe both nations in order to confirm the military capabilities of the major armies of the European continent. Sheridan trekked cross-country to Chicago to receive permission from his superiors for him to observe the Franco-Prussian War as the latest conflict of continental wills. With a glowing review from President Grant in hand, Sheridan set off for the old continent (see Appendix B).

Arriving in Europe in August, Sheridan and Forsyth moved quickly towards the front lines of the conflict at Pont-a-Musson near Metz, arriving on the back of a hay wagon.<sup>65</sup> The pair arrived at the Prussian headquarters on 17 August at Pont-a-Musson on the eve of the battle of Gravelotte. The bloody battles between Point-a-Musson and Gravelotte ultimately caused over 16,000 French and 17,000 Prussian casualties.<sup>66</sup> At the Prussian headquarters, Sheridan was formally introduced by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck to Prussian King Willhelm I as well as the Prussian Chief of the General Staff Helmuth von Moltke.<sup>67</sup> Accepted as a royal guest, Sheridan was invited to witness the

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<sup>65</sup> P. H. Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of P.H. Sheridan*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles L. Webster and Co., 1888), 363; O'Connor, 309.

<sup>66</sup> Geoffrey Parker, *The Cambridge History of Warfare* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 246.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 366. The Prussian King received Sheridan warmly, giving him a written pass granting Sheridan and Forsyth free reign throughout his army and inviting Sheridan to move with his headquarters. Sheridan and Forsyth would generally move independently throughout Prussia and France, but spent a considerable amount of time traveling and bivouacking with Chancellor Bismarck.

next day's battle from the heights of the imperial headquarters.<sup>68</sup> From August through October 1871, Sheridan generally traveled with Count Bismarck's headquarters as the army maneuvered against Napoleon III's shattered forces. Sheridan wrote that he observed the battles surrounding Sedan and personally witnessed the surrender of Napoleon III at Sedan.<sup>69</sup>

As the Prussian Army began closing on Paris for what seemed to be a protracted siege in October 1871, Sheridan lost interest in observation and left the front lines to pursue personal travel through peaceful parts of Europe. As Prussian forces conducted siege preparations at Meaux on 14 October, Sheridan confirmed a tentative timeline with Count Bismarck for the assault of Paris and began a tour of present day Belgium, Austria, Hungary, Turkey, Greece, Sicily, and Italy.<sup>70</sup>

While traveling, Sheridan met with royal dignitaries in most of these countries and spent the majority of the time touring cultural and recreational sites rather than military facilities and formations. Sheridan's tour of Europe was a time of personal appreciation of the European countryside rather than a professional tour devoted to comparing contemporary military capabilities and facilities. This is evidenced by the fact that Sheridan wrote of attending a single military review during the travels while in the

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<sup>68</sup> Sheridan, 367.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 400, 406. In correspondence from the French government, Sheridan was denied by Napoleon III himself to view the conflict from the French side. "His Majesty would have been happy to make an exception in favor of a soldier so illustrious but it has been decided on controlling considerations that no foreign officer shall be admitted to headquarters." Ulysses S. Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, vol. 20 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), 216.

<sup>70</sup> Sheridan, 429-443.

Ottoman Empire and dedicating a single sentence of description. Conversely, Sheridan devoted an entire page in his memoirs to his review of the Sultan's harem as it passed by him earlier that same day.<sup>71</sup>

Receiving news of the capitulation of French forces in Paris, Sheridan and Forsyth hastened back to Versailles arriving in March of 1871.<sup>72</sup> Sheridan extended his congratulations to the victorious Prussian leadership and then quickly left Prussia enroute to the United States but not without first touring England, Ireland, and Scotland to presumably partake in more recreational and cultural pursuits as no military pursuits are captured in his memoirs. After being gone a little over a year, Sheridan returned to his command in Chicago in the fall of 1871.<sup>73</sup>

Sheridan wrote to President Grant only once during the expedition, dated 23 September 1871 after the Battle of Sedan and Napoleon III's surrender (see Appendix C). This sole correspondence is the most referenced in regards to Sheridan's expedition to the Franco-Prussian War although it was written almost six months before the war would end and almost a month before Sheridan would cease his observations and begin his European tour. Comparing the conditions of Prussian and French forces to those endured by President Grant and Sheridan in their shared campaigns of the Civil War, Sheridan wrote that his expectations of the European forces was eclipsed by their many errors. "[I]

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 433-434.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 444.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 453.

have had my imagination clipped, in seeing these battles of many of the errors it had run into in its conception of what might be expected of the trained troops of Europe.”<sup>74</sup>

Two significant observations are made by Sheridan in his correspondence to President Grant. The first observation was a change in the doctrine of how Prussian soldiers fought: “the scattered condition while engaged . . . the men engaged on both sides were so scattered that it looked like thousands of men engaged in a deadly skirmish without any regard to lines, or formations . . . These battle were of this style of fighting, Commencing [sic] at long range & [sic] might be called progressive fighting”<sup>75</sup> Sheridan was observing the effects of decentralized Prussian infantry tactics on the battlefield as small platoon sized units armed with Prussian needle guns executed offensive movements against larger massed French forces. The superior weapons and decentralized tactics of the Prussians overwhelmed the concentrated French lines and displayed what Sheridan could only comprehend as chaos. The “progressive fighting” Sheridan described dubiously in his correspondence to Grant was the next evolution of light infantry tactics and foreshadowed how units would fight in the next great continental fight: small unit maneuver leveraging fire and maneuver to overwhelm and destroy the enemy forces versus the Napoleonic era doctrine of concentrated mass against the decisive point.<sup>76</sup>

The second and more startling observation made by Sheridan is in the conclusion of the presidential correspondence: “There are a hundred things in which they are behind us. The staff departments are poorly organized; the quartermaster’s department very

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<sup>74</sup> Grant, 216-217.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Sheridan, 453.



wretched, etc., etc.”<sup>77</sup> Understanding that Sheridan was unable to observe the French staff per Napoleon III’s mandate and that Sheridan traveled with the royal headquarters and Bismarck’s staff throughout the majority of his observations it is apparent that Sheridan is describing the Prussian general staff as poorly organized. This observation completely contradicts the future observations of Lieutenant Colonel Emory Upton upon his return from Europe in 1878. Upton championed for the U.S. Army to adopt professional military standards similar to the Prussian military as well as emulating the Prussian staff system due to its increased efficiencies and focus on the merit and professionalism of staff members versus the bureaucratic inertia and cronyism and nepotism used in the composition of U.S. general staffs, not including the staffs of Sheridan’s career.<sup>78</sup>

In his correspondence to Grant, Sheridan demonstrated respect for the bravery, tenacity, and discipline of the individual Prussian soldier as well as recognizing their relative young age and nationalistic spirit. In Sheridan’s memoirs published eighteen years after the exhibition, Sheridan anchors his compliment of Prussian military success on the blunders of French forces and notes how much more fitting the French countryside was for foraging armies not forced to conduct hard camps or conduct forced marches like he was required in the Wilderness campaign.<sup>79</sup> “I can but leave to conjecture how the

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<sup>77</sup> Grant, 216-217.

<sup>78</sup> Hutton, 141. Sheridan employed his brother as a staff member during the Civil War, a common practice. Additionally in February 1882, Sheridan was involved in the forced retirement of Quartermaster General Meigs in order to replace him with Sheridan’s own father-in-law, Colonel D. H. Rucker. Rucker would only serve in the position for ten days before voluntarily retiring.

<sup>79</sup> It is unknown how much of Sheridan’s memoirs published in 1888 were composed from his recollection of events versus from personal correspondence. The great Chicago fire of October 1871 consumed the Military Division of the Missouri

Germans would have got along on bottomless roads—often none at all—through the swamps and quicksands of northern Virginia, from the Wilderness to Petersburg, and from Chattanooga to Atlanta and the sea.”<sup>80</sup> Similarly, upon his return to the United States, Sheridan was reported to say that “in spite of the magnificent machinery and administrative perfection of the German Army, they would never know what real fighting was until they should meet in a popular war American or British soldiers.”<sup>81</sup> Comments made by Sheridan to his former subordinate Custer soon after his return to the United States also reinforce that Sheridan’s personal opinion of Prussian military forces did not match his crafted and diplomatic opinion depicted in correspondence to Grant. “Custer, you with that 3rd Division could have captured King Willhelm six times over.”<sup>82</sup>

In his memoirs, Sheridan depicts the battle of Gravelotte as clearly being carried by the 400,000 Prussian Army but not without many mistakes being made by both sides, most notably the negligent use of Prussian cavalry during the battle as ordered by General Karl Friedrich Steinmetz.<sup>83</sup> When asked his thoughts of the battle by Count Bismarck,

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headquarters, destroying all of the division’s paperwork as well as Sheridan’s personal and professional paperwork. Sheridan went to great lengths to try and recreate the lost paperwork to include employing two clerks to duplicate correspondence and reports sent to others. See Hutton, 410-411.

<sup>80</sup> Sheridan, 451.

<sup>81</sup> Burr and Hinton, 355.

<sup>82</sup> Marguerite Merington, *The Custer Story: The Life and Intimate Letters of General George A. Custer and His Wife Elizabeth* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 239.

<sup>83</sup> Sheridan, 372-373. During a stall in the battle of Gravelotte, Steinmetz ordered a cavalry assault off a ridge into a dug-in French artillery position on the opposing ridgeline. The exposed cavalry was unable to secure the far French ridgeline and

Sheridan was diplomatic in displaying his dissatisfaction of the use of Prussian cavalry more than likely due to Bismarck being a regimental commander of Prussian cuirassiers: “Your infantry is the best in the world; but it was wrong of your generals to advance your cavalry as they did.”<sup>84</sup>

Other written sources prove that the Prussians did not hold a monopoly on the misuse of cavalry forces in Sheridan’s opinion. George W. Smalley of the *New York Tribune* was standing with Sheridan at Sedan as French commanders ordered a regiment of cuirassiers to assault a Prussian infantry position:

The French cuirassiers are going to charge them!” cried Sheridan. The [Prussian] infantry received the [French] cuirassiers with a crushing ‘quick fire’ at about one hundred yards’ distance, loading and firing with extreme rapidity, and shooting with unflinching precision into the dense French squadrons. The effect was startling. Over went horses and men in numbers, in masses, in hundreds; and the regiment of proud French cuirassiers went hurriedly back in disorder; went back faster than it came; went back scarcely a regiment in strength, and not at all a regiment in form.<sup>85</sup>

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decimated by the dug-in artillery. Sheridan wrote in his memoirs that he was stunned that King Willhelm did not fire the general on the spot for his grievous error.

<sup>84</sup> Moritz Busch, *Bismarck in the Franco-German War, 1870-1871*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1879), 98.

<sup>85</sup> Burr and Hinton, 351-352; *New York Tribune*, “GEN. SHERIDAN: The Prussian and French Soldiers Inferior to Americans--The Remington Rifle Superior to the Chassepot or the Needle-Gun,” *New York Tribune*, 6 September 1870, 5, accessed 1 March 2015, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1870-10-05/ed-1/seq-1/#date1=1870&index=5&date2=1871&searchType=advanced&language=&sequence=0&lccn=sn83030213&lccn=sn83030212&lccn=sn83030214&words=Prussia+Sheridan&proxdistance=5&state=&rows=20&ortext=&proxtext=&phrasertext=&andtext=sheridan+prussia&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1>.

The French would charge the Prussian infantry twice more with cavalry in what Smalley likens as “A Little Balaclava Business.”<sup>86</sup> Smalley recorded that Sheridan said he never saw anything so reckless and foolish. “It was sheer murder.”<sup>87</sup>

Sheridan makes no attempt for diplomacy in corresponding his disdain for French forces in his letter to Grant: “generally speaking, the French soldiers have not fought well . . . I must confess to having seen some of the ‘tallest’ running at Sedan I have ever witnessed . . . all attempts to make the men stand seemed to be unavailing.”<sup>88</sup> Sheridan proposed in his letter that French tactical incompetence was potentially due to a lack of confidence among French soldiers in their military and government leadership. Sheridan writes, “all of my boyhood’s fancies of the soldiers of the great Napoleon have been dissipated, or else the soldiers of the ‘Little Corporal’ have lost their *élan* in the pampered parade soldiers of the ‘Man of Destiny.’”<sup>89</sup>

Sheridan concludes his letter to Grant with a less than glowing review of both European armies:

[I] have seen much of great interest, and especially have been able to observe the difference between the European battles and those of our own country. I have not found the difference very great, but that difference is to the credit of our country. There is nothing to be learned here professionally, and it is a satisfaction to learn that such is the case. There is much, however, which Europeans could learn from us, - the use of rifle pits - the use of cavalry, which they do not use well; for instance, there is a line of communication from here to Germany exposed to the

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<sup>86</sup> Burr and Hinton, 351-352.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Grant, 216-217.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

whole of the south of France, with scarcely a soldier on the whole line, and it has never been touched. There are a hundred things in which they are behind us.<sup>90</sup>

Sheridan similarly noted in his memoirs that he witnessed “no new military principles developed, whether of strategy or grand tactics, the movements of the different armies and corps being dictated and governed by the same general laws that have so long obtained, simplicity of combination and manoeuvre [sic], and the concentration of a numerically superior force at the vital point.”<sup>91</sup> Also penned in his memoirs is a more telling verse: “Of course I found a great deal to interest and instruct me, yet nowadays war is pretty much the same everywhere, and this one offered no marked exception to my previous experiences.”<sup>92</sup> A 5 October report of the *New York Tribune* also captures similar sentiment from these other records of Sheridan’s opinion of his European contemporaries:

Sheridan, states that he has witnessed all the battles at the beginning of the war, and that he was present at the surrender of Napoleon. Gen. Sheridan reports that the Prussian army is well organized and equipped, but expresses a positive opinion that neither the French nor the Prussian soldiers are equal to our own in point of intelligence, skill and arms. Our Remington breech-loader, he says is far superior to the Chassepot or the needle gun.<sup>93</sup>

With no additional correspondence written about the journey until the publication of Sheridan’s memoirs in 1888 it can only be assumed that Sheridan’s initial impression in September sent to Grant held. Both France and Prussia were prone to grievous errors, were technologically behind in regard to basic arms and generally lacking behind the

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<sup>90</sup> O’Connor, 309.

<sup>91</sup> Sheridan, 451-452.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 447.

<sup>93</sup> *New York Tribune*, “GEN. SHERIDAN,” 5.

Union Army of Sheridan's memory. Yet Prussia continued to expand and refine its military base of power for decades while the United States continued to shrink its military power base. Many countries, to include the United States, would adopt many aspects of the Prussian military system that dated well before Sheridan's expedition in stark contrast of his observation and recommendations to the contrary.<sup>94</sup> Regardless of Prussian military competency at the time of the Franco-Prussian War, one cannot help but wonder less than forty years after he left Prussia how surprised Lieutenant General Sheridan would be of the military accomplishments and superiority of the Prussian progeny that he discounted.

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<sup>94</sup> Doughty, 458. One of the most significant advocates for professional military education mimicking the Prussian system of advance military schools and *Kriegsakademie* or war college was Lieutenant Colonel Emory Upton. Upton toured Europe and Asia after Sheridan's return and posted over fifty pages of recommended change for the United States Army when he published his report in 1878. Emory Upton, *Armies of Asia and Europe: Embracing Official Reports on the Armies of Japan, China, India, Persia, Italy, Russia, Austria, Germany, France, and England* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968).

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION: LESSONS OF THE FIRST ARMY OBSERVERS OF FOREIGN MILITARY CONFLICT

In order to best leverage what insights can be gained from the first army observers of foreign conflicts, due diligence requires a comparison of the similarities and contrast of the differences between the two expeditions in order to identify successful trends or conversely patterns of required change. This comparison helps in recognizing the three principle lessons learned by the Delafield commission and the Sheridan expedition.

As discussed in the introductions of chapters 2 and 3, the members of the Delafield commission and Sheridan's expedition were West Point graduates that served as junior officers in the Corps of Engineers and were career regular officers in the United States Army. As a product of their education and military culture of the time, the observers of both expeditions were devoted to the Napoleonic doctrine and maxims of the era that suited them well in their careers and shaped their reality for the conduct of warfare into a universal concept that meshed well with their European contemporaries.

Perhaps the most profound similarity between both expeditions was the mutual disdain among the American observers for Napoleon III and his government. Although fifteen years apart, both expeditions shared very little support in the execution of their mission from Napoleon III's government and incurred almost insurmountable friction as they fell prey to French royal and bureaucratic whims. When the Delafield commission was ordered to appear at his court in Paris in May 1855, Mordecai and McClellan were less than impressed with Napoleon III. McClellan described the royal nephew as "a stolid stupid looking man not showing the remotest sign in his face of the ability which he

undoubtedly possesses -- nothing of the royal in his bearing -- nothing of the Bonaparte in his appearance.” Mordecai was more forgiving, albeit indifferent in his correspondence of the event: “Nothing worth mentioning . . . a little talk with the Emperor.”<sup>95</sup>

Likewise, Sheridan was no fan of the emperor, never forgetting Napoleon III’s failed attempt of establishing the Hapsburg monarchy in Mexico during the American Civil War in his barbed reference of the emperor as the “Little Corporal.”<sup>96</sup> In addition, Sheridan shared in his memoirs that his mentor and leader, President U.S. Grant shared this disdain for Napoleon III as “utmost contempt for Louis Napoleon, and had always denounced him as a usurper and a charlatan.”<sup>97</sup>

The expeditions’ shared disdain for the French was exacerbated when both groups were charged with diplomatically securing their passage to and from war. While Lieutenant General Sheridan had very little problem in securing his passage with the Prussia royalty and leadership, the lower ranked Delafield commission was not so lucky with most of their host countries. In addition to the widening gap between the expeditions and the French government, this diplomatic burden introduced an additional consequence as the American observers were routinely treated and entertained by the ruling classes

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<sup>95</sup> Frame, 249.

<sup>96</sup> Grant, 216-217.

<sup>97</sup> Sheridan, 359; Carl Coke Rister, *Border Command: General Phil Sheridan in the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1944), 12-22. One of the last things discussed between the Grant and Sheridan before the expedition left the United States was Grant being pleased by Sheridan’s choice to observe the war strictly from the Prussian side.



and royalty of nineteenth century Europe.<sup>98</sup> Stephen Ambrose aptly describes Prussia in the period of both expeditions as “the army with a state” and astutely observed that the professional officers in most European countries in post-feudal Europe enjoyed membership in a microcosmic society that was essentially a substitute for the nobility class of feudal Europe.<sup>99</sup> As both expeditions toured the European countryside, the observers were welcomed by military peers into these microcosms of contemporary nobility. In these circumstances, the ruling elite and royalty were able to closely control what was demonstrated to the American observers who eventually developed biases towards their more gracious and seemingly magnanimous hosts.<sup>100</sup> The many social obligations shaped experiences of the commission contrary to reality. As such, both

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<sup>98</sup> In January of 1872, Sheridan would prove that this microcosm of society was not isolated to the European continent as he entertained the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia (Czar Alexander II’s son) during a spectacular buffalo hunt outside of Fort Laramie in present day Wyoming. Escorted by the 2nd Cavalry Regiment including the regimental band and two additional companies of infantry, Sheridan led the hunt for Romanov with Buffalo Bill Cody and Lieutenant Colonel Custer in tow and as well as a hundred Brule Sioux warriors under Spotted Tail asked to join the hunt to demonstrate Indian hunting methods with bows and lance as well as to entertain the party with an war dance and powwow. Many of these same Brule Sioux would join with Crazy Horse against Custer at his infamous last stand a little more than four years later. Morris writes in *Sheridan: the Life and Wars* that as much as half of Sheridan’s army forces were involved in the planning, setup and execution of this event to include scouting the buffalo, stocking supplies, establishing routes and conducting link ups with various military, civilian and Brule forces. See Morris, 339-341; Hutton, 213-216.

<sup>99</sup> Ambrose, 1.

<sup>100</sup> Moten, 268. When describing this phenomenon and the role of the Delafield commission’s Russian escort Dr. Moten aptly describes that they ensured “blemishes were polished; unpleasantness suppressed.” A strong case can be made that the Delafield commission toured as many opera houses and art museums as they did arsenals and fortifications. Similiarly, Sheridan spends more time depicting his grand hunt of stag and boar on the palace grounds of the King of Venice than in his eyewitness account of Napoleon III’s surrender to Bismarck at Sedan. See Sheridan, 438-442.

commissions became less inclined to recognize the deficiencies of their favored hosts (Russians for the Delafield commission and Prussians for Sheridan's expedition) and became even more disenfranchised with the French government and military for its refusal to treat them in kind.<sup>101</sup>

The differences between expeditions are as important to detail as the similarities discussed above. The first difference is in regards to the mindset of the observers during their observation. Despite any biases or disdain felt for any of the nations combating in the Crimea, the Delafield commission attempted to view conflict from the perspective of all sides and solicited the authorization and approval of all sides in an attempt to observe as much as possible, to include from the impassive and ambivalent French. Charged with modernizing the antiquated and under equipped United States Army, the Delafield commission assumed a professional mindset of *tabula rasa*, attempting to observe all perspectives of conflict and recording in details all matters of tactical, material, technical, and procedural. For the Delafield observers, generally there was no such thing as a wrong way or right way for the observed nations to execute whatever action was being observed. The only importance was in recording the way that the nation executed the action and allowing readers to analyze if the action would be beneficial. As a product, the commission produced three detailed reports of over a thousand pages of limited analysis.

Conversely, Sheridan never committed himself to try to understand the perspective of the French side of the Franco-Prussian War at all and was fundamentally opposed to assuming the *tabula rasa* mindset used by the Delafield commission during

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<sup>101</sup> Frame, 293-296. Dr. Frame, wrote that the grand reception received by the Delafield commission in Warsaw and St. Petersburg resulted in a "Russophile" commission.

their observation. Having attained success in the bloody battlefields of the American Civil War, Sheridan was convinced that victory could only be achieved in the same manner. In Sheridan's mind, there was only one way to conduct war and that was his way, the right way. Whereas the Delafield commission would record all manners of fighting and innovation and allow the reader to analyze and determine the worth of each detail, the opinionated Sheridan conducted the analysis while observing and only reported what he deemed worthwhile and completely neglected everything else. A victim of his success and experience, generally Sheridan was suspicious of any fighting methods that differed from his experiences of war. This is best exemplified with Sheridan's dubious report of the "progressive fighting" of the Prussian infantry, in which Sheridan is recording the initial evolution from Napoleonic tactics as Prussian infantry begin executing rudimentary combined arms maneuver tactics foreshadowing what would become the required doctrinal norm in World War I.<sup>102</sup>

After spending over a year in Europe, Sheridan never submitted a report on his observations outside of his single page letter to Grant in September of 1870 with the personal reassurance that "I found a great deal to interest and instruct me, yet nowadays war is pretty much the same everywhere, and this one offered no marked exception to my previous experiences."<sup>103</sup> The record of Sheridan's expeditions rests in limited passages in his memoirs written almost twenty years after the fact and quite possibly influenced by hindsight or in piecing together the limited correspondence from Sheridan to others.

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<sup>102</sup> Grant, 216-217.

<sup>103</sup> Sheridan, 447.

While Sheridan refrained from reporting his observations and missed the opportunity of improving the U.S. Army, the Delafield commission was guilty of a similarly egregious charge. Despite being given very specific instructions and specific questions to answer by Secretary of War Davis, the commission did an amazing job at using these questions as a baseline for their observations and reporting without actually answering many of the questions assigned. Despite the hundreds of pages of the commission members' reports, each of the members reported on areas that addressed their parochial branch needs and neglected to answer Secretary Davis's questions or report on those areas that did not intersect with their professional or personal interests. This answering around the questions and reporting around the instructions delegated to them by the Secretary of War lead to unprofessional gaps in the reports and becomes even more telling when paired with the tardiness of the members' submissions. The first report completed by McClellan in January of 1857 was submitted as Secretary of War Davis was leaving office and almost a year after the commission's return while the last report of the commission submitted by Delafield will be almost four years after the expedition's return.

Additionally, while many failed observations can be mentioned for both the Sheridan expedition and the Delafield commission, most of them can be tied to the most significant failed observation shared by the expeditions: the impending evolution of Napoleonic doctrine to accommodate for emerging battlefield innovation and technology. Both parties recognized and detailed improved technology and innovation, however neither expedition was able to conceptualize that technological innovation could revolutionize their doctrinal foundation. The Delafield commission mistakenly regarded

military innovation only as an evolutionary step in supporting the continued execution of Napoleonic doctrine and maxims. While Sheridan's experiences in the American Civil War allowed him to better understand the tactical effects of technological innovation on the battlefield, he also viewed technological innovation as supportive to the execution of Napoleon doctrine and failed to recognize the winds of change as they blew upon him.

Examples of these missed observations and opportunities abound. Great detail is made in the composition and disposition of troops for the armies that the Delafield commission observed however no reports were made on conscription and recruiting methods for the various armies and its effects on the morale of the soldiers. Sheridan complained that the Prussian "staff departments are poorly organized" without articulating why and contradicting the prophetic efforts of future army reformer Lieutenant Colonel Emory Upton that would witness the Prussian staff system and advocate for the army to begin immediate emulation.<sup>104</sup> Lastly, McClellan's final report begins with a chronological assessment of the Crimean conflict that is written as if he had witnessed the events first hand.<sup>105</sup> At best, McClellan gained second hand reports for the events of the conflicts from the soldiers he encountered during his twenty-five days in Sevastopol and most likely McClellan's chronology and context was founded on the unprecedented newspaper coverage of the war due to the introduction of electric telegraph wires during the conflict and the emergence of war correspondence on the frontlines. Even though members of both commissions relied on newspaper reports to

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<sup>104</sup> Grant, 216-217.

<sup>105</sup> McClellan, 9-35.

maintain a pulse on the conflict, none of the completed reports discussed the benefits of its use and the potential of information operations during conflict.

A proposed explanation for some of these missed observations is found in Colonel (Retired) Matt Moten's *The Delafield Commission and the American Military Profession* which premised that the commission's common West Point engineering background and its forced scientific "system of habit and thought" trained the commission members to think inductively rather than deductively and caused them to detail much but analyze little.<sup>106</sup> Accordingly, this very specific manner for prescribed thinking shackled even the best of the army's professional body into a specific manner of thinking that prevented the commission from recognizing and recommending much more significant observations during the expedition.<sup>107</sup>

While several other missed observations and opportunities could be listed, this focus on what was missed is relatively minor compared to the many observations made by the expeditions and would ultimately be disingenuous. After all, the Delafield commission included many observations in their reports that might have proven of significant value if submitted prior to the army becoming consumed with waging war against the Confederates. For example, the observers recognized and reported the significance of steamship and railroad travel and valued the importance of electric telegraph wire. They also detailed the importance of coastal artillery and trench defenses and rifle pits. Without recognizing that the technology could revolutionize Napoleonic

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<sup>106</sup> Moten, 175-176.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 400.

doctrine, the observers detailed the tactical importance of the minie ball in rifled weapons and prophesized its widespread use in the army.

Upon understanding the similarities, differences, and some of the failed observations of the two expeditions, three principals emerge as lessons learned for future observers of foreign military conflict looking to the Delafield commission and Sheridan expedition as models: conduct objective and neutral observation, execute detailed and appropriate analysis, and submit a timely and complete report.

Neutral military observers acting solely in an observation role should remain as objective as possible in their observation of foreign military actions and innovations. Neutral observation will not only help to limit bias and favoritism the observer might share but will also prevent the observer from potentially contaminating the observed actions or innovation. As an example, many historians have linked Prussian heavy-handedness while dealing with French guerrilla *francs-tireurs* in the Franco-Prussia War to a provocative comment made by Sheridan to Chancellor Bismarck that “the proper strategy consists in inflicting as telling blows as possible upon the enemy’s army, and then in causing the inhabitants so much suffering that they must long for peace, and force their Government to demand it. The people must be left nothing but their eyes to weep with over the war.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Busch, 171. The personal servant to Chancellor Bismarck, Busch documented in his private journal that in Reims on 8 September 1870, Sheridan sat at a dinner hosted by Bismarck and attended by a few other members of the Prussian social scene. During the course of the evening a guest mentioned the shared frustration of the recent run-ins of guerrilla forces and remarked that peasants should refrain from participating in war for their own safety in an effort for war to be conducted in a more humane manner. Sheridan responded with his point of view. Bush ends the journal entry with the comment: “Somewhat heartless it seems to me, but perhaps worth of consideration.” Bush later

Once neutral and unbiased observation has occurred by a foreign military observer, it is just as important for the observer to provide thoughtful analysis of the observed action or innovation in both current and future context. Observers must refrain from merely detailing action and innovation and turning the report into a laboratory record that works hard at not providing readers context or purpose and devoid of analysis as was most often the case with Mordecai's report. Arguably more important, the observer must also articulate subjective analysis and refrain from merely opinionating or conducting baseless speculation as witnessed in the writings of all the observers except for Mordecai.

The last principle learned from the expeditions is that observers must submit a complete and timely report. All of the reports were completed at future duty stations years after the completion of the expeditions and well after the expiration of value for some of the observations made. Despite this, a significant amount of primary information for both of the commissions is derived from diary entries and personal correspondence made by the observers during their travels. While the members of the commission had ample time to maintain personal correspondence chronicling some of their observations as well as their many social duties, none of the members were able to provide a detailed report of findings until several years after the fact or never in the case of Sheridan. This observation is made not to judge or demonize but to demonstrate that conditions more

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writes that Bismarck apparently took more than consideration of Sheridan's strategy of weeping peasants. On 2 October 1871 at a teatime social Bismarck referred back to Sheridan's observation at the Reims dinner party when pontificating on the worsening *francs-tireur* threat stating "maybe it is as it should be . . . the more Frenchmen suffered from the war the greater would be the number of those who long for peace, whatever our conditions might be." See Busch, 223.



than likely existed for reports to be made while the observations were fresh and of more value to the army and while less affected by the bias of the observer. The expeditions did not recognize the need for timely and complete reports otherwise the very capable officers of these expeditions would have done so.

Further research for these commissions would best include future expeditions into comparison, namely Lieutenant Colonel Emory Upton's expedition to Europe and Asia soon after Sheridan's return. In addition, a future researcher might find utility in comparing the reports and narratives of the Delafield commission to the Wayne expedition exploring the use of camels by the Ottomans for Secretary Davis that also circulated into the Crimea as the Delafield commission was preparing to leave. Also of significant benefit to the development of the United States Army in the post Napoleonic period was the observation mission of Sylvanus Thayer to France in 1815 mentioned in the introduction. Thayer's mission would provide an excellent model of study for successful change in the observer missions of the period.

Both the Delafield commission to the Crimean War and the Sheridan expedition to the Franco-Prussian War were worthy attempts by the United States government to professionalize the United States Army. The Delafield commission was able to provide some beneficial and enduring changes in the modernization of the United States Army prior to the American Civil War while ultimately the Sheridan expedition did little other than promote the United States Army to European military contemporaries, especially to the prominent powers of the emerging unified German state. While neither expedition provided radical change to the United States Army, both expeditions established a baseline for foreign observation of military conflict for future officers to continue to

expand upon and refine during the next few decades in a period of increased professionalism and eventual doctrinal reform.

## APPENDIX A

### SECRETARY DAVIS' LETTER TO DELAFIELD COMMISSION MEMBERS<sup>109</sup>

War Department, Washington, 2 April 1855

Gentlemen:

You have been selected to form a commission to visit Europe, for the purpose of obtaining information with regard to the military service in general, and especially the practical working of the changes which have been introduced of late years into the military systems of the principal nations of Europe.

Some of the subjects to which it is peculiarly desirable to direct your attention may be indicated as follows:

The organization of armies and of the departments for furnishing supplies of all kinds to the troops, especially in field service. The manner of distributing supplies.

The fitting up of vessels for transporting men and horses, and the arrangements for embarking and disembarking them.

The medical and hospital arrangements, both in permanent hospitals and in the field. The kind of ambulances or other means used for transporting the sick and wounded.

The kind of clothing and camp equipage used for service in the field.

The kinds of arms, ammunition, and accouterments used in equipping troops for the various branches of service, and their adaptation to the purposes intended. In this respect, the arms and equipments of cavalry of all kinds will claim your particular attention.

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<sup>109</sup> Delafield, v-vi.

The practical advantages and disadvantages attending the use of the various kinds of rifle arms which have been lately introduced extensively in European warfare.

The nature and efficiency of ordnance and ammunition employed for field and siege operations, and the practical effect of the late changes partially made in the French field artillery.

The construction of permanent fortifications, the arrangement of new systems of sea-coast and land defenses, and the kinds of ordnance used in the armament of them—the Lancaster gun, and other rifle cannon, if any are used.

The composition of trains for siege operations, the kind and quantity of ordnance, the engineering operations of a siege in all its branches, both of attack and defense.

The composition of bridge trains, kinds of boats, wagons, etc.

The construction of casemated forts, and the effects produced on them in attacks by land and water. The use of camels for transportation, and their adaptation to cold and mountainous countries.

To accomplish the objects of your expedition most effectually in the shortest time, it appears to be advisable that you should proceed as soon as possible to the theater of war in the Crimea, for the purpose of observing the active operations in that quarter. You will then present yourselves to the commanders of the several armies and request from them such authority and facilities as they may be pleased to grant for enabling you to make the necessary observations and inquiries.

You may find it practicable to enter Sebastopol [sic] and to proceed through Russia to St. Petersburg, with the view of visiting the works and seeing the operations which may be carried on in the Baltic. Should it not be possible or advisable to enter

Russia in this way, you may be able to accomplish the same object by passing through Austria and Prussia. In returning from Russia, you will have an opportunity of seeing the military establishments of Prussia, Austria, France, and England.

The arrangements of your journey must be regulated in a general measure by the state of affairs existing on your arrival in Europe and the information you may acquire there.

Letters are herewith furnished to you for our Ministers in Europe, requesting them to afford you the aid in their power in accomplishing the objects of your mission.

Funds for defraying the expenses of your journey are placed in the hands of Major Mordecai, who will disburse and account for them. You are authorized to use a portion of those funds in purchasing for this department new books, drawings, and patterns of arms and equipments, which you may consider of sufficient value in our service to warrant the expenditure.

Reserving until your return to the United States a full account of your expedition and the information you may obtain, you will report to the Secretary of War from time to time, as opportunity may offer, the progress of your journey, and remarks on the subjects within the scope of your instructions which you may wish to communicate.

All correspondence of this kind, proceeding either from the commission jointly or from any member of it, will be forwarded, according to military usage and regulations, through the senior officer present.

It is desirable that you should return home by the 1st of November, 1855. If you should find it essential for effecting the objects of your mission in a satisfactory manner

to remain longer than that time, you will report the circumstances, so as to give time for an answer, in due season.

Reliance is placed on your judgment and discretion to conduct your movement in such a manner as to give no reasonable ground for suspicion or offense to the military or other government authorities with whom you may have intercourse.

Very respectfully,  
your obedient servant,

JEFFERSON DAVIS,  
*Secretary of War*

## APPENDIX B

### PRESIDENT GRANT'S LETTER OF ENDORSEMENT FOR LTG SHERIDAN

Long Branch, N. J., 25 July 1870

Lieutenant-General P. H. Sheridan, of the United States Army, is authorized to visit Europe, to return at his own pleasure, unless otherwise ordered. He is commended to the good offices of all representatives of this Government whom he may meet abroad. To citizens and representatives of other Governments I introduce General Sheridan as one of the most skillful, brave and deserving soldiers developed by the great struggle through which the United States Government has just passed. Attention paid him will be duly appreciated by the country he has served so faithfully and efficiently. - U. S. Grant.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Grant, 216.

## APPENDIX C

### LTG SHERIDAN'S LETTER TO PRESIDENT GRANT

Rheims, France 13 September 1870<sup>111</sup>

MY DEAR GENERAL GRANT: The capture of the Emperor Napoleon and McMahan's army at Sedan on the 1st of September has thrown France into a chaos which even embarrasses the Prussian authorities. It seems to a quiet observer as though Prussia had done too much. Whom to negotiate with, whom to hold responsible in the final settlement, are becoming grave questions, and one cannot see what will be the result. I was present at the battles of Beaumont, Gravelotte, and Sedan, and have had my imagination clipped, in seeing these battles of many of the errors it had run into in its conception of what might be expected of the trained troops of Europe.

There was about the same percentage of sneaks or runaways, and the general conditions of the battles were about the same as our own. One thing was especially noticeable - the scattered condition of the men in going into battle, and their scattered condition while engaged. At Gravelotte, Beaumont and Sedan, the men engaged on both sides were so scattered that it looked like thousands of men engaged in a deadly skirmish without any regard to lines or formation. These battles were of this style of fighting, commencing at long range, and might be called progressive fighting, closing at night by the French always giving up their position or being driven from it in this way by the Prussians. The latter had their own strategy up to the Moselle, and it was good and successful. After that river was reached, the French made the strategy for the Prussians,

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<sup>111</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *The Paper of Ulysses S. Grant: Volume XX* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press), 216-217.



and it was more successful than their own. The Prussian soldiers are very good, brave fellows, all young, scarcely a man over twenty-seven in the first levies. They had gone into each battle with the determination to win. It is especially noticeable, also, that the Prussians have attacked the French wherever they have found them, let the numbers be great or small, and, so far as I have been able to see, though the grand tactics of bringing on the engagements have been good, yet the battles have been won by the good square fighting of the men and junior officers. It is true the Prussians have been two to one, except in one of the battles before Metz - that of the 16th of August; still the French have had the advantage of very strong positions.

Generally speaking, the French soldiers have not fought well. It may be because the poor fellows had been discouraged by the trap into which commander had led them, but I must confess to having seen some of the "tallest" running at Sedan I have ever witnessed, especially on the left of the French position - all attempts to make the men stand seemed to be unavailing. So disgraceful was this that it caused the French cavalry to make three or four gallant but foolish charges, as if it were to show that there was at least some manhood left in a mounted French soldier.

I am disgusted; all of my boyhood's fancies of the soldiers of the great Napoleon have been dissipated, or else the soldiers of the "Little Corporal" have lost their *élan* in the pampered parade soldiers of the "Man of Destiny."

The Prussians will settle, I think, by making the line of the Moselle the German line, taking in Metz and Strasburg, and the expenses of the war.

I have been most kindly received by the King and Count Bismarck and all the officers at the headquarters of the Prussian Army - have seen much of great interest, and

especially have been able to observe the difference between the European battles and those of our own country. I have not found the difference very great, but that difference is to the credit of our country. There is nothing to be learned here professionally, and it is a satisfaction to learn that such is the case.

There is much, however, which Europeans could learn from us, - the use of rifle pits - the use of cavalry, which they do not use well; for instance, there is a line of communication from here to Germany exposed to the whole of the south of France, with scarcely a soldier on the whole line, and it has never been touched. There are a hundred things in which they are behind us. The staff departments are poorly organized; the quartermaster's department very wretched, etc., etc.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

P.H. Sheridan, *Lieutenant-General*

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