

January 1994

ECHOES

Gen. George B. McClellan: A Biographical Sketch

By Rick Kubiak

George Brinton McClellan, who took over command of the Union's Army of the Potomac five days after the disastrous 1861 defeat at Bull Run, was born in Philadelphia Dec. 3, 1826 to well-to-do parents.

Specifics on McClellan

Rick Kubiak, a member of the Round Table, who wrote the accompanying generalized biography of McClellan, will be the speaker at the January meeting of the Round Table at noon Friday, Jan. 28 in the Downtown Club, 2120 Kern Street, Fresno.

He will offer details about McClellan not included in the biography in his talk entitled: "Exploring the myth and misconceptions of the military life of Gen. George B. McClellan."

Kubiak is a long-time Civil War buff who regularly writes articles for this newsletter, and who twice before has been the speaker at Round Table luncheons.

Luncheon checks (\$10) as reservations should be made out to The Downtown Club and mailed before Jan. 26 to: Civil War Round Table, 8665 N. Cedar, No. 112, Fresno, Ca. 93720.

His father was a medical doctor, specializing in ophthalmology, who founded the Jefferson Medical College and became the head of its faculty. His mother, Elizabeth Brinton, came from a leading Philadelphia family. She saw

to it that her children (five, including George), had the best education Philadelphia could offer.

Gen. McClellan said in his memoirs that before he entered West Point he had received an excellent classical education, was well read in history and a good French scholar. At the age of 13 he entered the University of Pennsylvania intending to pursue a career in law, but after two years changed his goal to the military. In 1842 his father wrote to the Secretary of War asking for his son's appointment to West Point. After some delay, George McClellan, at the age of 15 1/2 (with an age waiver) was admitted to the military academy.

He was graduated from West Point in the summer of 1846. He was in first place academically and second place overall in a class of 59 cadets. That class contributed 20 full rank generals to the Union and Confederate armies, including his roommate and good friend Ambrose Powell Hill, and also Thomas

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McClellan (Continued)

at Bull Run (First Manassas) was decisive in Lincoln's selecting him as commander-in-chief of the Army of the Potomac in August 1861 and general-in-chief of the armies of the United States on Nov. 1, 1861 upon the retirement of General Scott. At the age of 35, McClellan became the head of the greatest military establishment ever assembled in the United States up to that time.

He arrived in Washington five days after the defeat of the Union Army at Bull Run. He brought order to the army, restored discipline, and won the respect of his men, who referred to him as "Little Mac."

In the spring of 1862, under orders from Lincoln and Secretary of War Stanton, McClellan began the Peninsula Campaign although he protested that his men were not ready and the weather was not right. When Stanton ordered McClellan to send 40,000 men back to protect Washington, McClellan again protested strenuously, arguing that he needed even more men since he was facing larger armies.

McClellan's overestimates of the size of the Confederate forces came from Allen Pinkerton, a federal spy, who firmly believed his count of the Confederate soldiers was correct.

During the Peninsula Campaign, McClellan was for the most part victorious in every battle between Williamsburg and Malvern Hill, including the Battle of Seven Pines and the subsequent battles of the Seven Days. During this time he was constantly at odds with Lincoln and Stanton over their unwillingness to send reinforcements.

While McClellan was attempting to capture Richmond, Lincoln replaced him as general-in-chief

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GAR Tombstones

C.W.R.T. member Max Hayden reports there are 29 tombstones in the G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic) section of Fresno's Mountain View Cemetery.

The labels or names on the tombstones (as best Hayden can decipher them) are: H.H. Pugh, Henry Roemer, Henry's Wife (no other identification), J.W. Calvin, Able Rowe, Corp. Bernard Aring, W. Ede, A.N. Redfield, Smith, Thos. Swan, Jose Gonzales; Hinson, F.D. McGuire, John Fletcher, W.M. Clark, Aaron Noble, R.H. Abbott, E.G. Ackerman, Joe R. Bruce, C.P. Brown, Capt. G.T. Porter, J.W. Adams, J.F. Noble, Corp. C.W. Burt, J. N. Harris, W.A. Mount, Daniel B. Sadler, Wm. T. Rice, and Sergt. Geo. W. Hayden. Each former soldier's tombstone lists his unit. Most served with Midwestern state regiments. Only Ede, Gonzales, McGuire and Noble served with California units.

with Henry Halleck. Lincoln, concerned with what he called McClellan's "slows," gave command of the army to General John Pope. Pope's efforts ended in failure at the Second Battle of Bull Run and Lincoln asked McClellan to resume command of the Army of the Potomac. McClellan accepted and once again brought order out of chaos.

In September 1862 Robert E. Lee moved his troops into Maryland and on Sept. 17, 1862 the Battle of Antietam (Sharpsburg) was fought, the bloodiest one-day battle of the entire war. When the battle ended, 4,710 men lay dead, 18,440 wounded and 3,043 were missing, McClellan had fought Lee's smaller forces to a draw. Lee stopped his offensive and moved his army back across the Potomac River into Virginia.

After Antietam, McClellan refused to move against Lee until what he considered serious short ages of equipment and horses could be resupplied. Lincoln's Administration grew increasingly impatient with McClellan and on Nov. 7, 1862 Stanton ordered McClellan to turn over the Army of the Potomac

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McClellan (Continued)

to General Ambrose Burnside. He returned to his home in Trenton, N.J. to await further orders, which never came.

In 1864 McClellan was nominated for President of the United States by the Democratic Party on a "peace at any price" platform. McClellan rejected this platform saying the reunion of the North and the South had to be a precondition for any peace settlement with the Confederacy.

"Anything else," he declared, "and I could not look into the faces of my gallant comrades of the Army and Navy who have survived so many bloody battles, and tell them that their labors and the sacrifices of so many of our slain and wounded brethren had not been in vain."

McClellan's nomination expressed his stand on ending the fighting. Lincoln stood for a peace settlement with a reunion of the North and the South and the abolition of slavery. If the election had been held in the summer McClellan might have won, but in September 1864 Atlanta fell to General William Tecumseh Sherman; Admiral David G. Farragut had been victorious at Mobile Bay and General Phil

Dues reminder

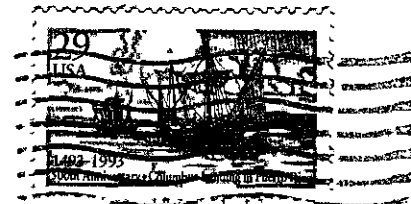
Annual dues, which include the newsletter, are \$25 of which \$5 goes to battlefield preservation. Newsletter subscriptions are \$10. Checks should be made out to C.W.R.T. and mailed to Tim Johnson, 8665 N. Cedar Ave. #112, Fresno, CA. 93720.

Sheridan's forces soundly defeated Confederate General Jubal Early's troops in the Shenandoah Valley.

Lincoln's policies seemed vindicated. McClellan carried only the electoral votes of New Jersey, Delaware and Kentucky. He resigned his army commission on election day. Fourteen years later, McClellan was elected governor of New Jersey for a three-year-term. He died of heart failure Oct. 29, 1885 and is buried in Trenton, N.J.

Sources used: "Generals in Blue," by Ezra J. Warner; "Historical Times Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Civil War," edited by Patricia Faust; "The Mexican War-Diary of George B. McClellan," edited by William Starr Myers; "George B. McClellan, the Young Napoleon," by Steven W. Sears; "The Gentleman and the Tiger, the Autobiography of George B. McClellan Jr.," edited by Harold Syrett.

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