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RICE UNIVERSITY

THE DELAFIELD COMMISSION
AND THE AMERICAN MILITARY PROFESSION

by
MATTHEW MOTEN

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

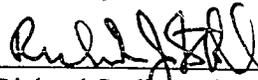
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VOLUME I

THE DELAFIELD COMMISSION AND THE AMERICAN
MILITARY PROFESSION

by

MATTHEW MOTEN

ABSTRACT

The Delafield Commission and the American Military Profession

by

Matthew Moten

The American regular army gained permanence in the early nineteenth century after overcoming numerous social and political obstacles, most notably a strong militia tradition. The War of 1812 and its aftermath established conditions for professional reform. The army now had a mission: to prepare for another seaborne attack from Europe. That sense of purpose allowed the officer corps to grow in collective ability, institutional autonomy, and corporate identity. The army developed an ethic of responsibility to the state. Intellectually, however, officers derived professional expertise primarily from French sources, mainly in military engineering. The U.S. Military Academy reinforced those trends and fostered “a system and habit of thought” in the officer corps. The profession, maturing quickly in other ways, remained intellectually adolescent.

In 1855 Secretary of War Jefferson Davis dispatched Major Richard Delafield, Major Alfred Mordecai, and Captain George B. McClellan to Europe and the Crimean War to seek the newest professional expertise. The Delafield Commission was the most ambitious military observer mission to date, the first sent to observe on-going war. During the year-long tour they traveled throughout Europe and exemplified the characteristic traits of the professional officer corps--corporateness and responsibility.

The Delafield Commission was a milepost in the history of American military professionalism. Most noteworthy were the reports that the commissioners wrote after their return, wherein they published a wealth of information useful to their respective branches. Yet the reports manifest the limits of antebellum professionalization: “a system and habit of thought” circumscribed their efforts. The commissioners demonstrated a narrow particularity that focused attention on technical details. They discarded the army’s francophile paradigm, but quickly replaced it with an equally uncritical adoration of the Russians. They made reform suggestions, but mostly reaffirmed the status quo, especially the felt necessity for preparing for a European invasion. They refused to reach outside parochial branch interests to collaborate on a single report addressing broad issues of military policy and strategy. The mid-nineteenth century army’s best minds were as yet incapable of synthesizing their European observations with their own experiences to create a uniquely American professional expertise.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Six years ago my advisor, Ira Gruber, suggested a comprehensive study of the Delafield Commission as a worthy master's thesis project. Since then, I have spent most of my time in the mid-nineteenth century--at least mentally. I completed the master's thesis and decided to pursue a Ph.D., significantly expanding the scope of my research. In the meantime I have lived in four cities on two continents while following my other career in the military profession. I have received the advice and help of hundreds of people, and I would like to thank them. I cannot do justice to them all, but I can try.

While I was in residence at Rice, the Sam Houston Fellowship of the Scottish Heritage Foundation of Houston enabled me to travel and do further research. With that help I visited the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress and the Special Collections Division of the United States Military Academy Library at West Point. I would like to thank Ms. Judith Sibley at West Point for her expertise and kind attention.

I also thank the members of my master's thesis committee, Professors Ira D. Gruber, John B. Boles, and Harold M. Hyman, and the members of my dissertation committee, Gruber, Boles, and Professor Rick Stoll. With each of them (except Professor Stoll) I have enjoyed a relationship that is as rewarding personally as professionally. At the time of this writing, I have not yet met Professor Stoll, but that is because 8,000 miles separate us. His willingness to read and criticize the work of a scholar he has never met is testament enough for me. I have been a teacher and have read a number of theses, so I can readily appreciate the investment of time and energy each of them has devoted to this work. It will be better for their suggestions.

Several of my colleagues at Rice took time out from their busy schedules to read drafts of the thesis. I would like to thank A. J. Hood, Lynn Lyerly, Matt Taylor, and Sam Watson for their criticism. Moreover, each of them, along with numerous other history graduate students, helped to rebuild a sense of community that had been lost within this program. My association with these colleagues has been most gratifying.

This project would have been impossible were it not for the Jefferson Davis Association at Rice University and the editor of The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Dr. Lynda L. Crist, and co-editor, Dr. Mary S. Dix. Mary and Lynda assisted me with my research in myriad ways. They gave me intellectual room and board in the association offices, a courtesy and convenience that far outstrips anything I ever did in return. Each of them read and commented on every page of the master's thesis, gently and tactfully saving me from some of my more egregious errors. Most importantly, in the years since I left Rice, they have continued to be valued friends and mentors. Their examples of scholarly excellence and humankindness have taught me as much as any course or professor. Mary's retirement last year has left a void in the Rice community that can never be filled.

Next door to them in the offices of the Journal of Southern History labors John B. Boles. I went to Rice to become a military historian. Without the expressed purpose of doing so, John Boles showed me that I would have to become a historian first and specialize later. Then he helped me to do it. There is no brighter or harder working scholar in the entire discipline, and I have profitted immeasurably from his example.

After Rice my family and I moved to West Point, where I was privileged to teach military history for three years. There I worked for some of the finest officers I have ever

known, including Colonel Robert A. Doughty, Colonel James M. Johnson, and Colonel Cole C. Kingseed. All are mentors who set the finest possible example for me, both as scholars and as leaders. Jim Johnson taught me everything I know about teaching, especially during one eventful fall when he and I team-taught a course in American military history to a group of prospective tactical officers. Those officers and the hundreds of cadets who survived my tutelage challenged me daily to question my own paradigm and, I hope, to break free of it.

My tour at West Point also afforded me the opportunity to meet and come to know some of the world's finest historians, including Professor David Chandler (who once strolled by my class, heard our Crimean War role-playing exercise in progress, and assumed character as Sir William Howard Russell reporting from Sebastopol), Professor Edward M. "Mac" Coffman, Professor Joseph Glatthaar (an old friend from Houston), and Professor Carol Reardon. All of them sat with me at different times and discussed my dissertation as if they had no other cares in the world. Professor Richard H. Kohn, a frequent visitor, helped made me to see that the commission was a milepost on this road of professionalization: that I should not try too hard to make it a turning point as well. At that point I began to see the real significance of the Delafield Commission's work.

I was also privileged to spend several days discussing the antebellum officer corps with Professor William B. Skelton. He was a gracious and patient interlocutor, especially since he understood that the *raison d'etre* of my work was to quarrel with a small part of his own. Afterward, he went home, dug out old papers and correspondence, and wrote me several pages in longhand to expand on our conversations.

The willingness of these scholars to exchange views and test new ideas is the strength of this historical profession. Am I honored and challenged to be associated with so many fine minds and spirits.

I made a wealth of lifelong friends at West Point. I was fortunate to arrive there with a group of officers who were incredibly talented and genuinely good people. Several of them gave their attentions to my work, reading parts of the draft and making useful suggestions. Lieutenant Colonel Conrad Crane was a skillful and tactful editor. Major Ty Smith, author of several books on the “old Army,” read my entire master’s thesis and made insightful suggestions for further inquiry. My old friend and West Point roommate twice over, Major Curt King, took time away from his own dissertation and teaching duties to read and comment on the entire draft. No mention of West Point would be complete without thanking the History Department administrative staff, especially Ms. Melissa Mills and Ms. Anne Lamb for their untiring efforts, patience, and good humor.

After West Point, we moved to Kuwait, where I have been advising the Kuwaiti army in its reconstruction after the Gulf War. This experience as an officer in the army that is now the paradigm for the rest of the world has given me useful insights into American officers’ Francophilia before the Civil War. Now the tables are turned and I am helping to build military professionalism abroad. This assignment has also yielded me many friends. Among them, Major Jim Stroup, USMC, has been a patient listener and a willing editor of many drafts of these chapters.

Last summer I was diagnosed with cancer. I was fortunate and am now completely healthy, but my treatment kept me at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center

for three months. Yet what might have been a tragedy turned to good fortune. My sister, Beth Moten, her husband, Alan Reuther, and son, Travis, live in Washington. They redefined hospitality by inviting me into their home for a period of treatment and convalescence that was, at the time, indefinite. I became, quite literally, the uncle who would never leave. Fortunately for me, I felt well enough to research and write and I composed what became Part One in their upstairs office. I cannot thank them enough for their patience, forbearance, and love.

During these several years I have been fortunate to work at a number of libraries and research centers. The United States Military Academy Library was invaluable before, during, and after my stay at West Point. Mr. Alan Aimone, director of the Special Collections Division, is one of those monumental talents whom all researchers come to rely upon. In my conversations with him I always came away with the feeling that he knew much more about the Delafield Commission than I would ever learn. Last summer I also enjoyed using the libraries at Georgetown University, American University, the Library of Congress, the Walter Reed Army Medical Center Library and Computer Center, and the United States Army Armor Center in Fort Knox, Kentucky. I also want to acknowledge the assistance of Ms. Margaret Sherry of the Firestone Library at Princeton University for sharing access to the Delafield Family Collection.

Four people have been constant contributors to this effort, no matter where I have been. Ira D. Gruber has been a mentor since my admissions interview at Rice in 1989. At Rice he was teacher and advisor, and he gave me the opportunity to lead seminars in his course in military history for two semesters. As visiting professor at West Point, he

became a colleague as well. We worked together and occasionally taught one another's classes. He and his wife, Pat, became our close and trusted friends. Through it all, he has been my intellectual conscience. When I first contemplated attending Rice, a former student of Gruber's assured me that he was a taskmaster, but that I would be a better historian and a better person for having known him. That advice was right on both counts. Through the years Professor Gruber has gently criticized and enthusiastically encouraged this work, insisting that it has something important to say about military professionalism. If it does, it is because he has coaxed such a contribution from me.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my wife, Margaret, and our two children, Stephanie Lois and Marshall Douglas. Neither of those children has ever known a time when their father was not engaged in this work. Together we have endured trying times during these years, but our love and mutual respect has drawn us ever closer. Margaret has been stalwart, especially when she patiently listened to me think aloud by the half-hour, only to abandon her when I had come to understand my own ramblings and return to the computer to capture those fleeting thoughts. For their sacrifices, for their patience, for their interruptions, I can only and inadequately say "thank you."

Despite all this good help, errors remain. My inability to capitalize on such assistance is obviously culpable. I accept responsibility for any shortcomings, a small price to pay for my associations with all of these wonderful people.

M. M.
Kuwait City, Kuwait
21 April 1996

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Chapter One

On Military Professionalism

In March 1855 Secretary of War Jefferson Davis asked Major Richard Delafield, Major Alfred Mordecai, and Captain George B. McClellan to cross the Atlantic “for the purpose of obtaining useful information with regard to the military service in general.”¹ That modest request belied the momentous import of the endeavor to come. The three officers left Boston in April and returned just over a year later from a trek of almost twenty thousand miles through the capitals of Europe and the battlefields of the Crimea. Each of the officers then recorded his observations in lengthy and separate treatises published by the United States Congress. Most historians of the nineteenth-century army have found the commission’s efforts worthy of a page or two, but few scholars have studied the subject intensively.² This study aims to remedy that neglect, for the Delafield Commission, but a brief episode in United States Army history, was an important milestone in the development of American military professionalism.

¹ Jefferson Davis to R. Delafield, A. Mordecai, G.B. McClellan, 2 April 1855, in Richard Delafield, The Report on the Art of War in Europe in 1854, 1855, and 1856 (Washington, D.C., 1861), xiii-xiv. Hereinafter cited as Delafield Report.

² Stanley L. Falk included two chapters on the commission in his biography of Alfred Mordecai. Stanley L. Falk, "Soldier-Technologist: Major Alfred Mordecai and the Beginnings of Science in the United States Army" (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., 1959). Arthur T. Frame has recently written the only other monograph: "The U.S. Military Commission to the Crimean War and Its Influence on the U.S. Army before the Civil War" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1993).

To comprehend just how important the Delafield Commission was, one needs to place the commissioners and their efforts in historical context. Delafield, Mordecai, and McClellan were worthy and select representatives of their profession, chosen for their demonstrated abilities. We can see in these officers the best professional judgment the army had to offer, or at least what Secretary Davis felt to be the best. Thus the performance of the Delafield Commission furnishes a useful indicator of the maturity of professional thought in the 1850s.

Twentieth-century writers commonly refer to the 1850s as part of the “antebellum” era. While the term is useful shorthand, it is important to remember that contemporaries did not think of themselves as living in a pre-war era.³ On the international front the decade was a time of relative peace for Americans. Military officers tended to look to Europe as the source of whatever conflict might lie in some uncertain future (despite the existence of real and current conflict on the western frontier), but even they usually did not see war in the offing. Civilian questioning of the need for a standing army contained a certain logic when the threat of major war seemed so remote. In fact, C. Vann Woodward has referred to the entire nineteenth century as an era of “free security” in which American sovereignty was absolute and unthreatened by any external powers.⁴

³ David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861, edited and completed by Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York, 1976), 145-146. Potter argues that historians, with the benefit of hindsight, tend to foreshadow the coming of war too heavily-handedly.

⁴ C. Vann Woodward, "The Age of Reinterpretation," American Historical Review LXVI, (1960): 1-19. Woodward applied the term "age of free security" to all of U.S. history before 1945.

Nevertheless, Americans in the 1850s recognized that they lived in restless times. The decade was a period of intense political strife in the United States due to the moral and ideological conflict over slavery. Momentous upheaval gripped the American frontier, where a majority of officers spent their lives, as settlers of European extraction migrated west, displaced the native American population, and engendered frequent and bloody skirmishes where the two distinct cultures met. But these problems, the slavery question and conflict with Indians, dated back almost to the beginning of European settlement in North America. Although the political strife over slavery was building throughout the decade and becoming more violent with each succeeding crisis, sectional opponents had ample reason to believe that armed conflict would never come to pass. Southerners threatened secession, but no state had ever seceded. Northerners tended to meet each new southern threat with a sense of compromise that made them seem irresolute about preserving the Union. Not until Lincoln's election in 1860 did war seem imminent and even during the winter of the secession crisis political leaders of both sides tried to find a peaceful solution. As John Shy has observed, the Civil War was a historical anomaly that none could have predicted with certitude or accuracy.⁵

The historian must treat these three officers and the army that they represented in the context of their era. As Jefferson Davis once said in reference to the commission, "to

⁵ Potter, 129-130, 516-517; John Shy, "The American Military Experience: History and Learning," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 1 (1971): 210-211.

know the future belongs not to mortal man. . . .”⁶ So we cannot fairly judge them on their inability to predict a future so unprecedented in all its implications as the American Civil War. But it is fair to evaluate the commissioners on their ability to record what they saw. Nor is it unfair to consider them as they considered themselves, as military professionals in the service of their country. And it is both fair and useful to try to determine what this episode--the Crimean Commission and the subsequent publication of their reports--says about the development of military professionalism in America.

But before examining the professional bonafides of these officers, it is necessary to determine just what professionalism is--or was. As an intellectual construct, professionalism is a moving target. Over time and across a range of disciplines now considered to be professions, the definition of terms has grown and changed and the measurement of professionalization has developed more or less apace. The rest of this chapter will treat the development of definitions, terms, and measurements in the historiography of the military profession.

In Military Professionalism and Officership in America Allan R. Millett argues that accepting the military as a profession depends upon a willingness to accept the morality of war and the legitimacy of national government. Those who harbor reservations about society's need for armed forces or who have fears of a powerful standing army are less likely to view military officers as professionals. But as Millett points out:

⁶ Jefferson Davis to Sara Mordecai, 5 October 1855, Alfred Mordecai Papers 4: 615. Hereinafter cited as AMP, e.g., AMP 3: 736; The Papers of Jefferson Davis, vol. V, ed. Lynda L. Crist and Mary S. Dix (Baton Rouge, 1985), 124-5.

Since war and armies antedate the occupation of full-time officership in Western culture, since there is scant historical evidence that the status of officership makes much difference to the incidence of wars and coups, there is merit to military officers' pleas that their status be determined not as part of some argument about civil-military relations or "militarism," but by a non-prescriptive assessment of their skill, their degree of collegial corporateness, and their sense of responsibility to the society they serve, ideally to the point of sacrifice of life.⁷

Note that Millett writes in the language of expertise, corporateness, and responsibility--the canon of distinguishing characteristics of vocations that aspire to the status of professions.

Samuel P. Huntington codified that canon in 1957. In his seminal work on civil-military relations, The Soldier and the State, Huntington defines what he sees as the three fundamental components of professionalism.⁸ The first is a specialized body of knowledge in an essential field of endeavor--expertise. The aspiring professional begins his acquisition of expertise with a broad, liberal education. The profession itself then offers and directs more specialized training to the fledgling. Acquired expertise--knowledge that is intellectual, historical, and expansible--sets the professional apart from the layman and provides universal standards for the measurement of competence within the profession.

The expertise peculiar to the military profession is "the management of violence":

⁷ Allan R. Millett, Military Professionalism and Officership in America (Columbus, Ohio, 1977), 12-13. It is perhaps appropriate that the author confess his own prejudices here. As a serving army officer, I consider myself and my colleagues to be professionals for the reasons that Millett lists here and for considerations of civil-military relations as well.

⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), 8-18. Huntington's definition of professionalism and its applications to the military have become widely accepted among both professional officers and professional historians. The paragraphs that follow summarize Huntington's definition. For a discussion of Huntington's historiographical legacy, see Edward M. Coffman, "The Long Shadow of The Soldier and the State," The Journal of Military History 55, no. 1 (January 1991): 69-82.

organizing, equipping, and training military forces; planning their activities; and directing operations in war and peace.

The possession of professional expertise, argues Huntington, demands the second characteristic of professionalism, responsibility to society. Every professional is a practicing expert, providing an essential service when the client, society, requires it. Competent and educated persons may possess requisite intellectual skills, but they are professional only if they employ their expertise in a context of social responsibility. Further, the profession establishes ethical norms to guide and govern its members. For the military officer, the state represents society and it is to the state that the professional soldier is responsible. Indeed, the state must monopolize the military profession: where officers employ their expertise absent state control, the results are uniformly ruinous to society and the state.

The final professional characteristic that Huntington identifies is a corporate identity as a group apart from laymen. Professionals share common bonds of training, discipline, and proficiency. Professional organizations, whether associations or bureaucracies, codify standards of competence and conduct, establishing the boundary between the profession and those who would aspire to membership without the requisite credentials. The officer corps is a hierarchical, public bureaucracy, wherein obedience to duly constituted authority is a central tenet of professionalism. Huntington argues that officers have fewer nonprofessional contacts than other professionals and that the officer corps often functions as an autonomous social unit. For instance, officers distinguish themselves from the laity with uniforms and insignia of rank.

Having delineated characteristics that apply to all professions, Huntington furnishes specific criteria for measuring the attainment of professionalism in national military systems. He offers the following gauges of measurement: “(1) the requirements for entry into the officer corps; (2) the means of advancement within the officer corps; (3) the character of the military education system; (4) the nature of the military staff system; and (5) the general *esprit* and competence of the officer corps.”⁹

Huntington then posits the timing and the reasons for the development of military professions. Several preconditions of professionalism arose in Western cultures during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, he argues, the most fundamental of which were the growth of population, technology, industry, and urbanity. These advances also created a climate conducive to the development of the nation-state. Competitive nationalism during the era of the French Revolution created concerns for national security. And because democratic nation-states were becoming more prevalent than their dynastic predecessors, Huntington argues, the representative ideal began to replace the aristocratic ideal in the selection of officers. Of course, the popular election of officers was no more compatible with military competence than selecting them on the basis of blue blood. But the representative ideal served to break the noble monopoly on commissions, and resulting institutional crisis forced armies to reconsider the nature of officership and the qualifications for it. The final precondition for professionalism was removing the officer

⁹ Huntington, 20.

corps from politics through the imposition of "a single recognized source of legitimate authority," namely the state.¹⁰

Huntington argues that for several reasons the U.S. Army professionalized later than the armies of other Western nation-states. Military forces are naturally conservative, but the American military was a conservative institution in a liberal society. Before the Civil War the dominant liberal ideology produced two forces that buffeted weaker impulses toward professionalism. Technicism--a Jeffersonian notion that would have obliterated the distinction between soldier and civilian and made every good officer a qualified man of science--and popularism--the representative ideal that came into full bloom in the Jacksonian era--pulled in opposite directions; but both militated against professionalization. Professionalism's only succor came from the more conservative South, where a code of chivalry, an agrarian economy, and an acute sense of vulnerability to Indian attacks and slave uprisings all nurtured a certain militarism.¹¹

Huntington concludes that the American military did not become professional until well after the Civil War, and then only because it had to endure a forced isolation from the rest of American society. Society saw war as unlikely and the military as a drain on the national treasure. Isolated in the frontier West from a more heterogeneous but mostly liberal populace concentrated in the East, an essentially conservative officer corps found

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32-36.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 193-221. Militarism is not synonymous with professionalism and Huntington does not use it as a synonym. In fact, militarism can reflect "motivations incompatible with professional ideals," as it did in the antebellum South. Huntington uses the term to denote an interest in military affairs, a "widespread dissemination of military knowledge and skill," and a belief in a strong military to protect the state.

time to contemplate its purpose and its meaning. Military education began to foster such reflection as it matured in appreciation of military science as a distinct intellectual discipline. The curriculum at West Point became broader and less technical and a system of postgraduate military institutions emerged to nurture professional thinking at more advanced levels. And through the efforts of military reformers such as Emory Upton and, a generation later, Elihu Root, the army matured into a profession.¹²

The Soldier and the State defined military professionalism thoroughly and cogently and thereby created a lexicon for discussion of the subject that subsequent scholars and military professionals have generally accepted. Having established those intellectual parameters, Huntington also drew unambiguous conclusions about the timing and nature of military professionalization in America, to wit, that the U.S. military became professional in the late nineteenth century because of its social and political isolation. The power of that intellectual contribution has been immense. As Edward M. Coffman flatly states, "Anyone seriously interested in American military history has to come to terms with Samuel P. Huntington's The Soldier and the State."¹³

Over the course of two decades following the publication of The Soldier and the State, a number of major works attempted to come to terms with Huntington's conclusions. During that time his thesis bore scholarly scrutiny quite well, and the cumulative result was a historiographical consensus in general agreement with Huntington.

¹² Ibid., 222-269.

¹³ Coffman, "The Long Shadow of The Soldier and the State," 69.

John Hope Franklin argues in The Militant South, 1800-1861 (1956) that a plethora of related social institutions imparted an inherent militancy to southern culture. Not all southerners were violent, but a dominant faction held sway in the generation before the Civil War and gave the South the confidence to steer a political course away from conciliation and toward secession. Franklin induces confusion by failing to distinguish among the terms “militant,” “bellicose,” “violent” and the less pejorative “military,” but his work provided important support for Huntington’s argument about southern militarism.¹⁴

Marcus Cunliffe took both Franklin and Huntington to task in Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775-1865 (1968). In a chapter entitled “A Southern Military Tradition” Cunliffe attacked the argument that the South was any more militant than any other region of the country. In a comparison of military institutions in all parts of the United States, he found little difference among regions in the propensity to support a military school, to raise a regiment of volunteers, or to start a local militia. But, like Huntington, Cunliffe also found powerful forces warring with professionalism. There were large and influential segments of American society that, as much as they might recognize on an intellectual level the need for a trained military force, still harbored deep prejudices against the army in general, professional soldiers in particular, or both. The

¹⁴ John Hope Franklin, The Militant South, 1800-1861 (Cambridge, Mass., 1956). More important than its contribution to this debate was that The Militant South launched one of the earliest assaults on the Dunning school of Civil War and Reconstruction historiography that had long lionized the racist myth of the “Lost Cause.” Huntington notes that Franklin’s book was published too late for use in his work. Huntington, 490.

opera bouffe that was the Battle of First Bull Run served to illustrate the consequences of the policies that such anti-military and anti-professional attitudes shaped.¹⁵

In his History of the United States Army (1967) Russell F. Weigley agrees with Huntington that social and geographical isolation contributed to the development of military professionalism, but he concludes that professionalization began much earlier in the nineteenth century. Weigley argues that the U.S. Military Academy reforms of Sylvanus Thayer and the anti-military consensus of Jacksonian America contributed to the development of a sense of corporateness within the army officer corps well before the Civil War: “the Regular Army was sufficiently isolated to resemble sometimes a monastic order.” But Weigley agrees with Huntington that the profession continued to develop throughout the rest of the century through the effects of recurrent isolation after the Civil War and the efforts of individual reformers such as General William T. Sherman, Lieutenant Colonel Emory Upton, and Major General John M. Schofield.¹⁶

The 1970s brought an attempt on the part of some historians to end a long estrangement of military history from the broader discipline. They began to bring the methodologies of other types of historical research to the writing of a “new” military history. In this regard Huntington, a social scientist, was clearly ahead of historiographical trends. In his aforementioned pamphlet, Military Professionalism and Officership in America (1977), Allan R. Millett reviews a broad range of scholarship on the entire

¹⁵ Marcus Cunliffe, Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775-1865 (Boston, 1968).

¹⁶ Russell F. Weigley, History of the United States Army (New York, 1967), 157, 272-292.

phenomenon of professionalization and discusses the military within that context. He argues that societal prejudices against military professionals and the popular idea of an officer corps that resembled the amateurish British model inhibited the development of military professionalism prior to 1861. But the Civil War served as a catalyst when it “killed some six hundred thousand American military amateurs and the concept of amateurism. . . . Between the Civil War and World War I, the Army officer corps became an institutionalized profession.”¹⁷ So despite the fact that he is painting on a broader canvas, Millett still supports Huntington after twenty years of scholarly debate.

The first dissent from the Huntington thesis began in 1980 when two authors challenged the idea that the nineteenth-century army was isolated from the rest of American society. In his work on the army’s role in civil disorders in the late nineteenth century, Jerry M. Cooper attacks the isolation concept, concluding that there was little difference in social attitudes between officers and civilian professionals. High-ranking officers and business leaders shared similar backgrounds and maintained close relations. Moreover, growing military professionalism mirrored similar trends in the rest of society: “the hierarchical, bureaucratic structure of the service and efforts within the institution to emphasize professional specialization resembled similar developments in the maturing corporate economy.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Millett, 16-17.

¹⁸ Jerry M. Cooper, The Army and Civil Disorder: Federal Military Intervention in Labor Disputes, 1877-1900. (Westport, Conn., 1980), 247; Coffman, “The Long Shadow of The Soldier and the State,” 75-76.

An even more direct attack came with John M. Gates's article, "The Alleged Isolation of US Army Officers in the 19th Century." Gates acknowledges the influence of Huntington's work, which was so pervasive that it "soon became the accepted wisdom of an entire generation of military historians." The problem, argues Gates, is that "the notion of isolation has become a cliché, passed on uncritically from writer to writer." With a careful study of official reports, Gates refutes the notion that officers were isolated physically, socially, or intellectually. Contrary to Huntington's view that the vast majority served most of their careers on the frontier, Gates shows that officers' assignments frequently kept them in urban areas, close to their civilian counterparts. Furthermore, "officers became involved in their civilian surroundings more than was required by the circumstances of their assignments." For these and other reasons, officers came to reflect the intellectual trends of civil society, specifically that phenomenon known as progressivism: "If anything, they often behaved not just as any civilians, but as the most progressive of the nation's leaders, and they earned the praise of many American reformers for their work." Gates refers to the turn-of-the-century American officer corps as "Progressives in Uniform."¹⁹

"Simply put," Gates concludes, "Huntington is wrong." American officers were not isolated and the causes of their professionalization need to be found elsewhere. But it is worth noting that while both Gates and Cooper contest Huntington's explanation of

¹⁹ John M. Gates, "The Alleged Isolation of US Army Officers in the Late 19th Century," *Parameters X*, (September 1980): 32-45. Specific quotations may be found on pages 38, 32, 35, 42, and 39.

military professionalization, they still agree with him on the timing: the army became professional in the closing decades of the nineteenth century.²⁰

By 1985 when Edward M. Coffman published his landmark institutional history, The Old Army, the historiographical revision to Huntington's argument seemed to be the new consensus. Without referring to John Gates's work, Coffman agreed that the late nineteenth century officer corps shared the attitudes and values of the emerging new middle class. Before the Civil War, the dispersion of the army through hundreds of tiny outposts, a lack of professional thought and training, and the general pressure of Jacksonian egalitarianism against any social group with specialized skills inhibited the growth of military professionalism. Despite the efforts of a number of exceptional officers, the army remained a professional hodge-podge. Moreover, the army's defining mission since the end of the Revolution had been the military conquest of the frontier to allow westward migration to proceed in greater safety. After three decades that had produced the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the end of the Indian Wars--episodes that had left the military with little institutional energy to devote to intellectual pursuits--the army of the 1880s found itself without a mission.

Why should the government maintain an army and its officer corps once the Indian Wars had come to an end? The officers who answered that question simply followed the example of professionals in other fields. For as a scholar recently pointed out, "The culture of professionalism tended to cultivate an atmosphere of constant crisis--emergency--in which

²⁰ Gates, 42, 42-45.

practitioners both created work for themselves and reinforced their authority by intimidating clients.”²¹

U.S. Army commanding general William Tecumseh Sherman answered the question by quoting former Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, who in 1820 had argued that the mission of the peacetime army should be to educate officers, train men, and organize the army so that “at the commencement of hostilities” they would be prepared for war.

Sherman, like Calhoun before him, attempted to “cultivate an atmosphere of constant crisis” to justify the continuing need for an army. And if there were a need for an army, it followed that that army needed an educated officer corps. Through the leadership of Sherman, Emory Upton, William B. Hazen, John M. Schofield, and others, the army went to school. As a result, “[d]uring the last three decades of the nineteenth century, professionalism emerged within the army.”²²

The antebellum officer corps, then, had had numerous stimuli toward professionalism, but too many obstacles had stood in the way. So Huntington was half-right, said the new consensus: the army officer corps did become professional in the late nineteenth century. But they did so because they identified with and were part of wider cultural trends (that many historians identify under the rubric of “progressivism”), not, as

²¹ Edward M. Coffman, The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898 (New York, 1986), 286. Coffman is quoting Burton J. Bledstein, The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America (New York, 1976), 100. Harold Perkin makes much the same point in The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880 (London, 1989). He argues that professionals have a dilemma because their property is not tangible but intellectual. Therefore, the value of a professional's product depends upon convincing society of its worth and maintaining a sense of its scarcity. See Chapter 1, "The Meaning of Professional Society."

²² Coffman, The Old Army, 103, 215-216, 269-286, 269.

Huntington had argued, because they were a group apart. Officers were not conservatives bucking a tide of liberalism who developed professional institutions only because of their social, political, and intellectual exile. The army officer corps was part of a growing middle class that was erecting professional standards, establishing objective means of maintaining them, and convincing society of the worth of their service.

If Huntington were wrong about the causes of professionalism, could he have been wrong about the timing as well? In the 1970s William B. Skelton began publishing articles on the social composition and political attitudes of the antebellum officer corps. Like Gates, Cooper, and Coffman he found it useful to locate the officer corps within a broader social context and to compare the military to other occupations that were becoming professional. In 1992 Skelton's career of scholarship culminated in the masterly An American Profession of Arms, this generation's correction to The Soldier and the State.²³

Skelton reminds us that many civil occupations were professionalizing in the first half of the nineteenth century. He argues that Huntington was wrong not only about the reasons for professionalization, but about the timing as well. His argument rests upon a definition of professionalism that is similar to Huntington's, but more specific and detailed.

²³ Skelton's articles include: "Army Officers' Attitudes towards Indians, 1830-1860," Pacific Northwest Quarterly 67(July 1976): 113-124; "The Commanding General and the Problem of Command in the United States Army, 1821-1841," Military Affairs 34 (December 1970): 117-122; "Officers and Politicians: The Origins of Army Politics in the United States before the Civil War," Armed Forces and Society 6 (Fall 1979): 22-48; "Professionalization in the U.S. Army Officer Corps during the Age of Jackson," Armed Forces and Society 1 (Summer 1975): 443-471; "Social Roots of the Military Profession: The Officer Corps of America's First Peacetime Army, 1784-1789," Journal of Military History 54 (October 1990): 435-452. William B. Skelton, An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861 (Lawrence, Kansas, 1992).

He borrows the bulk of it from Millett, who says that professional attributes usually include the following:

(1) the occupation is a full-time and stable job, serving continuing societal needs; (2) the occupation is regarded as a lifelong calling by the practitioners, who identify themselves personally with their job subculture; (3) the occupation is organized to control performance standards and recruitment; (4) the occupation requires formal, theoretical education; (5) the occupation has a service orientation in which loyalty to standards of competence and loyalty to clients' needs are paramount; and (6) the occupation is granted a great deal of collective autonomy by the society it serves, presumably because the practitioners have proven their high ethical standards and trustworthiness.²⁴

Skelton adds important elaboration to Millett's criteria:

An intellectual component is central to a professional orientation: a claim to the exclusive control of a body of specialized knowledge essential to the fulfillment of an important social need. Moreover, a professional culture is in a sense democratic, emphasizing merit--the mastery of the profession's esoteric skills, as defined and certified by one's colleagues--rather than wealth, family, or social class as the primary determinant of status.²⁵

The Millett and Skelton definition is no radical departure from Huntington. In fact, its particulars closely resemble Huntington's definition along with the five criteria he uses to measure the attainment of military professionalism. Their one significant addition is the idea that professionals look upon their vocation as one of lifelong service, although one could infer long-term commitment from Huntington's concept of corporateness.

²⁴ Millett, 2.

²⁵ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 88. The phrase "democratic, emphasizing merit" is somewhat confusing. Huntington contrasts aristocratic, representative, and meritocratic ideals. Simply put with respect to the selection of officers, the aristocratic ideal would grant commissions only to noblemen, while the representative ideal would provide for the popular election of officers. Neither of those processes is likely to reward objectively measured merit, although the latter is certainly "democratic." Contra Skelton, I would argue that a professional culture is meritocratic, not democratic.

With this system of measurement Skelton finds that “[b]etween the Revolution and the Civil War, a military profession emerged for the first time in America.” More specifically, he argues that the United States Army began to professionalize in the Jacksonian era. Skelton finds precious few manifestations of military professionalism in the early national period, but between the War of 1812 and the Civil War the officer corps quietly developed a professional ethic. The stimuli that prompted and molded this evolution arose both within and without the army. The most important institutional factors included, at the highest levels, the fortunate elevation of several dynamic leaders to positions of influence and, more broadly, changes in the demographic makeup and educational preparation of the officer corps. Skelton also argues that the army professionalized in response to factors extant in American society, such as burgeoning nationalism, economic growth, and democratic egalitarianism. Those trends did not always prod institutions unambiguously toward professionalization, but the general trend for the military was in the same direction as other institutions responding to the same stimuli--toward institutional permanence and stability. In other words, unlike Huntington, Skelton concludes that as the military profession defined itself, it developed along with, not in isolation from, broader society.²⁶

An American Profession of Arms is both a collective biography and an analysis of the culture and *mentalité* of the officer corps. Skelton finds that by 1861 a stable profession had emerged. The army had a well-defined sense of its responsibility. The

²⁶ Ibid., xiii, 110-119.

officer-corps subculture emphasized long-term service and a considerable continuity of membership. Permanent institutions provided formal training and administrative efficiency. The profession developed internal cohesion and “officers came to share a ‘military mind’--a complex of ideas about their collective role.” Skelton does not underestimate reforms that took place later in the century, but he argues that they became possible only after the development of the military profession in the Jacksonian Era.²⁷

All of the arguments outlined above, especially the Huntington, Gates, and Skelton theses, warrant considerable admiration from students of the military profession.

Huntington pioneered scholarship in this area and defined the parameters of the debate. His strong arguments on the professionalization of the American military stood unchallenged for the better part of a generation. Then Gates boldly corrected the notion of a military in isolation from society, arguing that the U.S. Army reformed as part of a larger social trend towards professionalism in a number of occupations. Skelton continued the revision, but went even further, contending that the army was professionalizing well before the Civil War in response to both internal and external stimuli. It developed a collective sense of responsibility as an apolitical instrument of national policy. The officer corps grew more demographically and educationally homogeneous, and thereby produced a sense of corporate cohesion. And the army built a system of professional institutions that fostered military expertise. Skelton’s work now stands as the new consensus.²⁸

²⁷ *Ibid.*, xiii-xvi, 359-362.

²⁸ Part One will focus on and explicate the Skelton thesis as a means of providing social and political context for the story of the Delafield Commission.

Given this new historiographical context, the Delafield Commission to Europe and the Crimean War furnishes an important case study in the development of American military professionalism. It can serve as a vehicle for exploring a number of historical questions. How did professionalism develop in the Jacksonian Era? What factors influenced that development? How far had professionalization, especially the development of military expertise, progressed by 1855? Why did Jefferson Davis send a commission to Europe to learn about the art of war? What professional connections existed between the United States Army and European military establishments? Why did Davis select these particular men? How accurately did they represent the professional attainments of their contemporaries? How did the commissioners' backgrounds shape their approach to the mission? What did they intend to accomplish? What do their experiences during a year of travel and observation tell us about the profession? What did the commission learn and what did they overlook? What factors influenced the commission in the writing of their reports? What do their reports tell us about the "military mind" of the American officer corps of that day? What contributions did the reports make to professional military expertise? How did the commission's reports affect the subsequent development of military professionalism? What effect do the answers to these questions have on the debate about the timing and nature of professionalization?

The Development of American Military Professionalism

When Richard Delafield, Alfred Mordecai, and George McClellan converged on Washington in April, 1855, they arrived sharing a certain outlook on the world and their places in it. Each of them had been trained and socialized to understand their roles as officers and the collective mission of the army. By 1855 that army had achieved a high degree of regularity in the way it recruited and developed officers. Moreover, the army had carved for itself a place in the fabric of American government and society that the public broadly accepted and supported. That comfortable station was a long distance from the beginnings of the military in the newly independent nation, when fear and distrust of standing armies was an article of faith.

The transformation from a time of utter loathing of standing armies to the point when the nation supported a professional military establishment was a slow evolution of thought and practice. As Americans labored to solve problems of governance they kept returning to a crucial issue--what is the proper role of military force in a democracy? In the beginning Americans had to grapple with the even more fundamental question of whether they would suffer government from abroad or demand to govern themselves. Having decided upon self-government and having been forced to fight a revolution to establish their republic, they soon found that every question of governance was in some sense affected by problems of national security--protecting the shores and the frontiers, preparing for wars against hostile nations, providing the power to deter or suppress

internal uprisings--and that these problems led inexorably to issues of civil-military relations. Regretfully Americans parted with a reliance upon traditional militia. Grudgingly they accepted the need for regular forces. Haltingly they built one army after another until a second military crisis, the War of 1812, threatened the nation's existence.

That exigency and the initial weakness of the country's response to it spurred reforms necessary for developing a professional force. For the first time the army had more than an existence; it had a mission: to prepare for yet another seaborne attack from Europe. Over the ensuing decades that sense of purpose allowed the officer corps to grow in collective ability, institutional autonomy, and corporate identity. The army developed an ethic of responsibility as an apolitical instrument of national policy.

Conversely, the successful conclusion of the War of 1812 won for America the relative safety to concentrate on internal development and westward expansion. The threat from Europe was remote and the government could safely neglect its defenses for a while. Yet the need for a constabulary army to protect western settlers was real. And the demand for engineers to build roads, dig canals, dredge harbors, and lay rails was acute and persistent. Dutifully, the army answered its client's call and even excelled at tasks that military strategy defined as secondary, but national need pronounced essential. Moreover, by preparing its officers to build the national infrastructure, the army reinforced a trend that equated military engineering and military science. It neglected to develop purely military expertise. As a result, the army officer corps, maturing quickly in other ways, remained intellectually adolescent.

Delafield, Mordecai, and McClellan came of age in that era.

Chapter Two
The Evolution of an American Army:
From Militia to Regulars

What a society gets in its armed forces is exactly what it asks for, no more and no less. What it asks for tends to be a reflection of what it is. When a country looks at its fighting forces it is looking in a mirror; if the mirror is a true one the face that it sees there will be its own.

--Sir John Hackett¹

During the course of two centuries American thought about the nature of military forces in a democracy underwent a slow evolution. Colonial America owed its existence to a strong militia tradition that was as much a social and political phenomenon as a military one. By the late eighteenth century, hatred of “standing armies,” an inchoate term that subsumed the concepts of regular forces and of professional officership, had become axiomatic in America. Then the American Revolution provided a cogent argument that a polity aspiring to be a sovereign nation needed a regular force ready at its command. Nevertheless, militiamen served well enough in the war for upholders of the old system to advocate its retention. Following the war, nationalist leaders, including General Washington, labored to overcome the still widely held if poorly articulated antipathy toward “standing armies.” These leaders argued that volunteers were superior to militia, then gradually demonstrated the need for a sovereign nation to maintain a regular army in

¹ Sir John W. Hackett, *The Profession of Arms* (Washington, 1986), 34. Originally delivered as The 1962 Lee Knowles Lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge.

peacetime. They wrote their ideas into the Constitution, which codified the parameters of civil-military relations in the new democracy. For the rest of the eighteenth century the militia withered while Federalist leaders built the peacetime army into an American institution. The Federalist party spent itself in accomplishing that task, and yielded control of government and the army to Jefferson and the Republicans. For a dozen years Republicans allowed the army to live, but neglected it at the same time. By the beginning of the War of 1812 the army's weakness left the nation vulnerable to invasion. The army was a permanent fixture, but it was proving inadequate to the task for which it existed, primarily because professional military institutions had not yet developed.

Suspicion of military establishments had deep roots in America. Colonists had lived with and sometimes fought beside British regulars for most of their history. Their fears of British soldiers in particular, but all regulars in general, stemmed from several points of contention that arose during this long history, especially during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). One issue was that colonists disliked paying taxes to maintain the British army in North America. Colonists further resented the imposition of housing British soldiers. In both instances, the British view was that these were small prices indeed for the guaranty of colonial security. Another affront was what Americans perceived as the regulars' high-handed behavior toward both civilians and colonial militiamen during the Seven Years' War. Especially galling was a regulation granting broad preference of rank to British officers over their provincial counterparts. Compounding that indignity was the growing but mistaken colonial belief that British

regulars were incapable of fighting effectively in North American terrain, certainly against Indians, and that in that regard American militia was militarily superior. The continued presence of the British army after the end of the Seven Years' War and the requirements for colonists to house them and pay taxes to maintain them reinforced the earlier discontents during the two decades that followed.²

Colonial leaders also nourished philosophical misgivings about "standing armies." Throughout most of colonial history the British had maintained a regular force in North America. In the minds of many colonists, the stereotypical "redcoat" was a conscript from the lower rungs of the economic and social ladder who had been dragooned into service while under the influence of strong drink or stern magistrates. Beside that caricature stood the colonial militiaman, the "minuteman," an upstanding member of the community contributing to the local economy, but ready at a moment's notice to defend his home and neighbors. Thus the "standing army" had become a scorned British tradition, just as the "minuteman" had become a cherished American legend.

Nevertheless, Americans were not above borrowing from the mother country to make a point. As the colonial rebellion struggled to find its voice, British "Whig" or "Country" thought offered a political ideology that stressed a loathing of concentrated power. "Country" thought was solicitous of individual rights, hostile to government, pessimistic about the future, and suspicious of political corruption as an inevitable by-

² Douglas Edward Leach, Arms for Empire: A Military History of the British Colonies in North America, 1607-1763 (New York, 1973), passim; Fred Anderson, A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War (Chapel Hill, 1984), 65-141.

product of centralized authority. The most important instrument of that power and the greatest threat to the liberty of a free people was the standing army. Polemicists recited a roll of once-free states that had come under the thrall of despotism because, as the writers saw it, they had relaxed their guard against military tyrants; conversely, other states, such as England itself, had resisted such chains through vigilance and virtue.³

In one sense it was logically consistent for “Country” dissenters to couple military power with strong centralized government--recent history had shown that one did not grow without the other.⁴ But the principal flaw in these arguments was that no one clearly defined the term, “standing army.” In eighteenth-century rhetoric an opponent of military forces might inveigh against Caesar’s Legions and Cromwell’s New Model Army in the same breath. But the nation-states of Europe all fielded regular forces, armies of sundry sizes and qualities as various as the polities and cultures of the states they defended. Yet “Country” thinkers made no such distinctions. Any permanent force, regardless of its leadership, its purpose, its organization, or its composition, was a natural and implacable enemy to freedom. And, they argued, the only reliable guarantors of public security and

³ Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 22-93. Great Britain managed to maintain both a regular army and individual freedoms by keeping its forces abroad building a colonial empire.

⁴ A number of works discuss this phenomenon. National economic power, military might, and centralized bureaucratic administration seemed to mature almost simultaneously. Put simply, when states recognized great wealth they then began to tax it for the purposes of sustaining an army to protect it. See William H. McNeill, The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000 (Chicago, 1982), 117-184; Paul Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000 (New York, 1987), passim, especially 73-139. John Brewer, The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688-1783 (Oxford, 1989) thoroughly treats the British example.

individual liberties were locally recruited militia, a force of citizen-soldiers who would return to husband their crops when danger had passed.⁵

By the beginning of the American Revolution, therefore, hatred of “standing armies” was both familiar and time-honored. Furthermore, American distrust of regular soldiers had roots in both political philosophy and in collective experience. Revolutionary war served only to reinforce such beliefs. Every “redcoat” insult against a colonist became a depredation; every American success a legendary victory. Yet militia champions had to deal with one nagging problem--their heroes were notoriously unreliable.

The militia record in the Revolution was one of tardiness, indiscipline, and desertion. American commanders often found that they could not rely upon militia units to muster or deploy when ordered. When they did arrive, the militia were often understrength and undertrained. As Washington lamented to Congress in December 1776,

Militia, may, possibly, do it for a little while; but in a little while also, the Militia of those States which have been frequently called upon will not turn out at all or with so much reluctance and sloth as to amount to the same thing. . . . [They] come in you cannot tell how, go, you cannot tell when; and act, you cannot tell where; consume your Provisions, exhaust your Stores, and leave you at last in a critical moment.⁶

⁵ Richard H. Kohn, Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment, 1783-1802 (New York, 1975), 1-9; Ira D. Gruber, “Limited War in Western Europe, 1714-1763,” in Warfare in the Western World, Vol. I: Military Operations from 1600 to 1871, Ed. Robert A. Doughty and Ira D. Gruber (Lexington, Mass., 1996), 63-102. Cited hereinafter as Warfare in the Western World.

⁶ George Washington to the President of Congress, 20 December 1776, John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., The Writings of George Washington (39 vols., Washington, 1931-1944), 6: 402-403. Hereinafter cited as Writings.

Taking orders from national commanders whom they had not elected rankled with militia soldiers and officers, just as it had during their earlier service alongside the British. The “contractual” relationship that obtained between militia officers and men hardly served to affirm the discipline that Continental leaders felt necessary to conduct operations in the field. Most distressing was the militia habit of deserting when they were needed most. The problem was bad enough when individual desertions mounted, but still worse when entire units, having determined that their enlistments were fulfilled, being disgusted with their treatment, or simply wanting to return home to tend their crops, left their sister units and erstwhile commanders scrambling to fill their positions in the line.⁷

Early in the war militia units did enjoy some successes and participated in some battlefield victories. Militia were always most effective when used in their own localities. In the first months after the outbreak of war, militia helped guarantee the patriots’ hold on government in every colony. As a result, loyalists surrendered the initiative and rarely regained it. Arriving British regulars found a hostile countryside wherever they essayed to travel. On the battlefield proper, militia victories at Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill inflated both the “minuteman” legend and the myth of British incompetence. But British bungling in these instances should have received the onus for “redcoat” defeats. Royal commanders surrendered tactical advantages that put the colonists in the best positions

⁷ See Anderson, 167-195, for a discussion of this “contractual” relationship. Charles Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783 (New York, 1979), 56-70.

possible for units with so little training, discipline, and leadership. Without these benefits the fame of militiamen's prowess would almost certainly have been diminished.⁸

As the war dragged on, necessity forced Continental officers to search for or create conditions that would hide militiamen's shortcomings while accentuating their strengths. Militia units participated in most battles, but their presence owed more to Congress's failure to sustain the Continental Army than to their own prowess. Had the Continental Army been better supported, Washington and his generals would never have been forced to rely on the services of the militia. Still, militiamen performed quite well when raiding small outposts or harassing British supply lines, tasks wherein inspiration and woodsman's skills were more important than formal military training and discipline. A case in point was in the southern theater, where the British all but destroyed the Continental Army in 1780. The British endeavored to incite loyalists to reassert royal government, but they precipitated civil war. The ensuing guerrilla struggle presented a forum for militiamen's strengths.

When American generals found it necessary to risk a large engagement with the enemy, they learned to use Continentals and militia together, reinforcing the formers' numbers and masking the latter's liabilities. An instructive example is the Battle of

⁸ Don Higginbotham, "The American Militia: A Traditional Institution with Revolutionary Responsibilities," in Don Higginbotham, ed., Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War: Selected Essays (Westport, Conn., 1978), 83-103; Gruber, "The War for American Independence, 1775-1783: The People at War," in Warfare in the Western World, 131-135. The return march from Lexington and Concord allowed New England militia to harass British soldiers running a gauntlet of fire aimed at them from cover and hiding. At Bunker Hill, the militia had the protection of prepared bulwarks behind which to defend against a frontal assault.

Cowpens, where Daniel Morgan placed his 720 militia troops in depth in two lines forward of his 320 Continentals. Recognizing their limitations, Morgan asked only that the local soldiers fire two rounds at the advancing British before falling back through the Continentals. Most complied, and when the British pursued the retreating militiamen, American regulars received them with devastating volleys. While the battle ended in American victory, it showed how little American regulars had learned to expect from the militia. But it also demonstrated the ingenuity of Continental leaders in blending skilled and unskilled soldiers in any way necessary to win this people's war.⁹

Still, relying on the militia was an unpleasant necessity. Most revolutionaries, while despising the idea of a standing army, nonetheless recognized the need for a regular force to fight the British. Indeed, Charles Royster has argued that

“[w]e handicap our understanding of this experiment [the creation of the Continental Army] if we identify commitment to the army with one group of revolutionaries and suspicion of it with another. . . . [M]ost revolutionaries held both sets of attitudes during the war, and the experiment took shape according to the outcome of this internal conflict.”¹⁰

So despite their misgivings most revolutionary Americans were willing to accept a standing, regular force if that were necessary to win independence.

But if there were to be a standing army, revolutionaries insisted that it comprise citizen-soldiers. As a result, early in the war Continental soldiers were regulars in name

⁹ Gruber, “The War for American Independence, 1775-1783: The People at War,” 131-170; Paul David Nelson, “Citizen Soldiers or Regulars: The Views of American General Officers on the Military Establishment, 1775-1781,” in *Military Affairs* 43 (October 1979): 126-132.

¹⁰ Royster, 38.

only, recent volunteers serving under one-year enlistments. They had little training, poor discipline, indifferent leadership, and haphazard logistical support. But an ideological and religious belief in the justice and righteousness of their cause motivated the revolutionaries. In the first year of the war all soldiers--militia and Continentals alike--held such convictions and believed that victory was certain and imminent. Long-term service and Prussian-style drilling were therefore unnecessary.¹¹

Continental experiences in the first years of the war, with notable exceptions, were a string of defeats and embarrassments. The Continentals' loss of New York came on the heels of legendary militia victories at Lexington and Concord. Failure was sobering. Soldiers began to fathom the realities of campaign hardship and battlefield defeat. Enthusiasm was not enough to sustain long-term commitment to soldiering and making war. The ideal of the citizen-soldier gave way to an understanding of the need for training, discipline, and long service.¹²

Surprise victories at Trenton and Princeton during the winter of 1776-77 and the strategic success at Saratoga in the fall of 1777 provided enough of a boost in morale and confidence to keep the army from collapsing. They also demonstrated the worth of perseverance and the bonding power of shared hardship. Paradoxically, these successes revived public hope for victory that quickly devolved into widespread belief in the certainty of it. People saw no more need for sustained sacrifice when the war seemed all

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3-83.

¹² *Ibid.*, 54-96.

but won. In consequence, public support for the army flagged. Men were unwilling to enlist and Washington had tremendous trials in getting logistical help from Congress.¹³

As if to vindicate colonists' beliefs in divine providence, the bitter winter encampment at Valley Forge furnished a powerful example to soldiers about persevering in the face of hardship and public neglect. The army emerged from the disease, hunger, cold, and nakedness of the winter to find better support and, importantly, quality training in the spring. Baron von Steuben built upon the voluntarism that created the army and the willingness to sacrifice that had kept it together. The Prussian demanded that officers lead by example and demonstrate tactical competence. He further expected them to attend to their soldiers' health, hygiene, clothing, and feeding. Bonds between soldiers and officers increased along with confidence and readiness. Martial discipline and competence began to replace patriotic fervor and religious belief in a just cause as the obvious keys to victory. New skills became badges of revolutionary virtue that were better than the old and simple reliance on courage, because the skills would remain when courage failed. The articulation of tactical and administrative skills, combined with the idea that leadership might be developed through training, were the first stirrings of professional military expertise in the United States.¹⁴

Wartime hardship forced the Continentals to elaborate a system of military administration. Sometimes they improvised; more often they borrowed from European

¹³ *Ibid.*, 96-126.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 190-254.

example. Like the British, officers drew stark, hierarchical distinctions between themselves and their men, and imposed a strict regime of military discipline. Moreover, the army began to articulate a central organization, with specialized staff functions and a separation between the staff and the line. Through these evolutions, officers began to exhibit a nascent corporate cohesion.¹⁵

Over time, the Continentals began to think of themselves as a regular force, a national army, whose discipline and sacrifice showed what was best in American patriotism. The enlisted ranks became more committed, too. Over the course of the war, Washington convinced Congress that the army's stability depended upon longer enlistments. Indeed, Continental soldiers began to see themselves--members of an institution so long hated and feared, a standing army--as more representative of the ideals of the revolution than the civilian populace that had supported them so haphazardly. Thus, they had also begun to manifest a sense of professional responsibility, even to a nation that seemed not to deserve such dutiful loyalty.¹⁶

In the final years of the Revolution the Continentals enjoyed no triumphal march to inevitable victory, but they continued to prove their worth to the Revolution. The Continental Army surrendered at Charleston in 1780, suffering the loss of the most important southern port and a garrison of almost 3,400 men. The regulars mutinied in

¹⁵ William B. Skelton, An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861 (Lawrence, Kansas, 1992), 4.

¹⁶ Royster, 227-230, 295-330.

1780 and 1781, not just because they had not been paid, but because they felt an unworthy and corrupt public was unwilling to pay taxes to support them. As we have already seen, when the Continentals had success against the British in the South, they did so by augmenting their numbers with militia and often by using tactics well suited to an irregular force. But the army remained in the field and continued to frustrate British strategic designs. They won by not losing and continuing to fight. At Monmouth Court House in 1778, and later in the South at Cowpens and Guilford Court House, Continentals displayed the steady discipline and rigorous training of regulars. At war's end, the Continental Army was a proper regular force that marched from New York to Virginia to exploit British weakness at Yorktown.¹⁷

The end of the Revolutionary War provided no definitive answer to the controversial "militia-versus-regulars" issue. Through the course of the war, both had shown themselves to be necessary, but neither had been effective by itself. The terms of the debate had moved to recognize the usefulness of regulars, a significant discursive step from the traditional hatred of "standing armies." But the militia's stock had hardly fallen in the public estimation as legends abounded of their valor in combat. Furthermore, a belief in militia was an old, important, and useful component of American political philosophy. Local defense, the thinking went, could only be guaranteed by a community of men who shared a universal military obligation. Commitment to that communal covenant had long been the price of honorable citizenship. To destroy that bond was to

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 295-330.

recast the nature of social and political connections throughout the nation. On the other side, Continental officers promoted the regular army. They claimed credit for winning American independence, pointing to their steadfastness in hardship, their hard-won competence, and, therefore, their superior revolutionary virtue. But civilians and militiamen, who suffered by such comparisons, discounted the officers' claims, forgot their own recent neglect and fecklessness, and quickly disbanded the Continental Army.¹⁸

After the war, an unpleasant episode known as the Newburgh Conspiracy raised the spectre once again of the danger of standing armies. A small cabal of Continental officers smeared the army with scandal. Nursing legitimate grievances over months of unpaid salary and the likelihood that a promised pension would die in the Continental Congress, General Horatio Gates and a number of others intrigued with a cohort of legislators to threaten a military coup. Washington discovered their plot with the help of more level-headed Congressmen and officers and defused the attempt before it was well begun. Even without Washington's interference the scheme had little chance of success. Most evidence indicates that the conspiracy was never intended to be more than a threat to coerce favorable legislative action. Nevertheless, the episode furnished opponents of "standing armies" precisely the kind of evidence they needed to argue that the new nation would be safer without a permanent military force to menace the government and the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 331-368.

people. Competent they might be, the thinking went, but men who made their living only by the sword could never be selflessly loyal and responsible to the people.¹⁹

But the more important legacy of the Newburgh Conspiracy lies in what did not happen. Continental officers did not revolt, did not threaten legitimate government. “Once civilian control is violated,” as Richard Kohn has argued, “even by the most halting attempt, a certain purity is irretrievably lost. The bond of trust between the military and society at large evaporates.” At Newburgh the intriguing officers faltered in execution because of Washington’s deft and eloquent intervention, but also because they refused to forfeit their stations as patriots. They were loyal, and if most of them were not of the ruling social stratum, they certainly had ties to it. The democratic tradition of civilian control of the military was already strong. The conspiring officers had too much invested in that system to be agents of its destruction. They rejected a breach with society and, thereby, set a happy precedent: America’s first national army refused to interfere in the operations of government or to disobey their civilian superiors.²⁰

The Continental Army disbanded in 1783 except for a token force in a couple of small garrisons. The military that Congress raised under the the Articles of Confederation to respond to frontier troubles during the 1780s was neither regular nor militia. The army was poorly organized and weakly led; nascent professionalism withered. The soldiers often went unpaid and without adequate supplies. Needless to say, the army was

¹⁹ Kohn, Eagle and Sword, 17-39; Royster, 331-341.

²⁰ Kohn, Eagle and Sword, 38-39; Royster, 337-338.

ineffectual and it came to symbolize all that was wrong with the government under the Articles of Confederation. The need for change became more and more apparent.²¹

Some members of Congress in 1783 recognized that the Confederation would have to reorganize its defenses if it hoped to survive. Congress, now long in the habit of turning to General Washington in moments of crisis, asked his advice on how to build a new military force. Washington, in turn, put the question to a half-dozen of his most trusted advisers, most of them veterans of the Continental Army. These men, including Henry Knox and the Baron von Steuben, welcomed the opportunity and responded rapidly. Washington compiled and edited their replies in his "Sentiments on a Peace Establishment," which called for four principal reforms: a small, regular army, a well organized militia, a web of strategically placed arsenals and magazines to support the force, and a military school system. He was quite specific about the arrangement of frontier outposts "to awe the Indians, protect our Trade, prevent the encroachment of our Neighbours. . . , and guard us at least from surprises." He admitted that "a large standing Army in time of Peace hath ever been considered dangerous to the liberties of a Country, yet a few Troops, under certain circumstances, are not only safe, but indispensibly necessary." Having declared himself on that controversy, Washington prescribed how the new army might be recruited, organized, and deployed. He then continued to expound with equal specificity on the establishment of the militia, which was to be based upon the principles of national uniformity and universal military service for able-bodied males.

²¹ Kohn, Eagle and Sword, 54-72.

Significantly, he also called for the founding of a military academy, or perhaps more than one. He spoke of the need “to preserve the knowledge which has been acquired thro’ the various Stages of a long and arduous service,” presumably the Revolution just finished. A military school to train “a Corps of able Engineers and expert Artillerists” was necessary “unless we intend to let the Science become extinct.” Washington was thus one of the first and certainly the most influential of Revolutionary leaders to advocate professional military education. Taken altogether, Washington’s “Sentiments” were for a national military establishment that would be vibrant enough in peacetime to enable rapid expansion in time of war.²²

Washington submitted his report to his friend and protégé, Congressman Alexander Hamilton. But Hamilton and his colleagues who had commissioned the study were a minority in Congress. Their opponents, fearful of central authority and jealous of their states’ prerogatives, rejected what they perceived as nationalist militarism. Even though Hamilton “watered down” Washington’s “Sentiments” as he pushed to enact military legislation, Congress would have none of it. They rejected vesting any national military institution with the precedent of law. Despite this immediate setback, Washington’s ideas gained lasting significance. The “Sentiments” comprised the military policy platform for what would become the Federalist party. These ideas framed political debate for the rest of the century, during which their particulars slowly came to fruition.²³

²² George Washington, “Sentiments on a Peace Establishment,” in Writings, 26: 374-398.

²³ Kohn, Eagle and Sword, 47-53.

In time the weakness of the Confederation provided impetus for changing the structure of the national government. The pressures of a dynamic frontier gave the Confederation no respite during the next several years. Indeed, in 1786 Shays's Rebellion in western Massachusetts demonstrated the new nation's impotence: not only was it vulnerable to insurrection, but the very militia that was supposed to maintain order had joined the mob in large numbers. Shays's Rebellion focused attention on the general ineffectiveness of the Confederation's defense apparatus. The capacity for a small band of men to rebel against the center raised the spectre of many dangers. Single states might sue for independence. European powers, still building empires to the west and scenting disunion, might attempt to divide and conquer. The frontier threat from Indians would only increase in such circumstances. And the long Atlantic coastline gave ample opportunity to seaborne invaders. The Articles of Confederation were unequal to the task of guaranteeing the nation's sovereignty and that fact had become clear to a broad majority of Americans. A new and stronger form of government was necessary.²⁴

At the beginning of the 1787 Constitutional Convention Governor Edmund Randolph of Virginia offered a new plan of national government. He noted three general deficiencies in the Articles of Confederation that cried out for correction:

1. Congress unable to prevent war
2. Not able to support war

²⁴ Richard H. Kohn, "The Constitution and National Security: The Intent of the Framers," in Richard H. Kohn, ed. The United States Military under the Constitution of the United States, 1789-1989 (New York, 1991), 63-69, 74-75.

3. Not able to prevent internal sedition or rebellion. . . .²⁵

Given the widespread fears of Indian attack and European aggression, the generally accepted idea that war was a natural state in the affairs of man, and the historical knowledge that no republic had ever survived, inadequate national security was of paramount concern to the men meeting in Philadelphia. The trick was to grant enough authority to the central government to solve the problems Randolph raised without allowing the government itself to become a tyrant.²⁶

As the Convention began, the obvious and acknowledged weaknesses of the Confederation and the widespread and natural fears of the public helped build broad consensus for a national, peacetime, military establishment. But this lack of serious controversy surrounding a proposal that had been anathema for decades owed much to the fact that the Convention assembled in disproportionate share men of a nationalist bent, many of whom had served as officers in the Continental Army. Most of these leaders had formed their world views as young men in that first truly national institution. A corporate spirit, perhaps nostalgic at this point, blended with a continuing sense of responsibility for which they had bled. These men had seen and suffered from the feebleness of weak central government and had learned the importance of discounting sectional interests in

²⁵ Gunning Bedford, Notes on Debates, 29 May 1787, James H. Hutson, ed., Supplement to Max Farrand's The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787 (New Haven and London, 1987), 27, as quoted in Kohn, "The Constitution and National Security," 64.

²⁶ Kohn, "The Constitution and National Security," 63-69.

favor of the national good. Through their collective influence, the new Constitution came to reflect those imperatives.²⁷

The first of Randolph's concerns was the inability of the nation to prevent war. To address that weakness the framers unequivocally vested the authority "to raise and support Armies" in the Congress of the United States. Nothing restricted this power to wartime: Congress could raise a peacetime force and prepare it for future conflict. Moreover, Congress had the explicit authority to raise taxes and spend Federal monies to that end. Interestingly, the next clause limits the use of such funds: Congress has the power "to raise and support Armies, but no Appropriation of Money to that Use shall be for a longer Term than two Years."²⁸ This compromise effectively reconciled the need for a regular army with the long-standing popular fear of one. The founders ensured that Congress could maintain control over the army through the power of the purse, while, for the first time Americans clearly endorsed the need for a national, peacetime military force.

Congress has other powers that advance the ability to provide a military force. Having raised the army, Congress can also write regulations to govern it, build forts and

²⁷Kohn, Eagle and Sword, 74-81; Royster, 359. Kohn argues that the positions of the first two major political parties, the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists, later Republicans, crystallized during the Convention debates. Federalist policy, like Washington's "Sentiments," embodied preparedness in peacetime through a regular army centrally controlled. The Anti-Federalist position, although not nearly as coherent as their opponents', emphasized the geographic security that the Atlantic afforded to the nation and tended to put its trust in citizen-soldiers, specifically militia. Kohn, Eagle and Sword, 86-87.

²⁸The next clause, "To provide and maintain a Navy;" contains no temporal or fiscal constraints. Navies, unlike armies, were not held to be potential menaces to liberty, and therefore, demanded less jealous diligence on the part of their masters.

arsenals to support it, and mobilize the militia to augment it. The Constitution addresses these matters in broad outline, leaving it to future Congresses to provide details.

The executive and the legislature share responsibility for providing leadership for the army. The president holds the power to commission officers of the United States, including military officers, but only “by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate.” This provision divides the loyalty of military officers between the president, who appoints them, and the Senate, which approves the appointment. Although this split power did not work to depoliticize the military in the beginning, it was a tool of considerable potential power to foster an apolitical officer corps.

By codifying the authority to build a military force in peacetime, the Constitution took the first steps toward deterring war. But if deterrence happened to fail, the government had to be competent to prosecute the conflict, or in Randolph’s phrase, “to support war.” The first measure in that direction recognized that wartime power would naturally tend to accrue to the executive. The framers wanted to make the president competent to lead during crises. The Constitution invests in the presidency the office of “Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States and of the Military of the several States, when called into actual Service of the United States.” Thus the army, created and governed by congressional legislation, answers directly to the elected head of the republic. The president may order the army to do as he sees fit, but only so long as Congress continues to appropriate monies to finance the executive’s goals. The Constitution thereby creates civilian control of the military and provides for effective

command. But it also guards against despotism, by allowing Congress, if it deems it necessary, to limit the scope of the commander-in-chief's action.²⁹

In keeping with the notion of an energetic executive checked by a strong legislature, the Constitution grants Congress authority to declare war. Originally, the authors had thought to give Congress power "to make war," but quickly determined on the more restrictive wording. The framers knew that governmental powers would surely swell in time of war and that it would naturally be an executive function to exercise most of those powers. Of all the divisions of power in the Constitution, the capacity to make war was most important. Congress would decide when to go to war and the president would then direct the ensuing action. But no single person or body would be able "to make war." Moreover, by vesting Congress with power to declare war, the framers sought to guarantee that any such future decision would enjoy wide popular support.³⁰

The Constitution made long strides toward solving the first two problems that Edmund Randolph had found with the Articles of Confederation. Congress could raise, support, and govern the army. The president could effectively command it and commission officers to lead its elements--with both powers being subject to the continuing approval of the legislature. And Congress could determine when to declare war, leaving

²⁹ Samuel Huntington has argued that splitting military loyalty between the Congress and the president actually works to defeat civilian control of the military. When Congress and the president disagree, military leaders with a duty to answer to both branches can be and have been drawn into political battles, sometimes giving the appearance and sometimes demonstrating the reality of *partisanship*. Huntington, 163-192.

³⁰ Kohn, "The Constitution and National Security," 79.

executive control of the wartime army to the commander-in-chief, yet retaining the ability to check that authority through the power of the purse.

Randolph's third criticism of the Confederation was that Congress was unable "to prevent internal sedition or rebellion." Certainly the abovementioned clauses aimed at preventing war and supporting the army in time of war could be turned to good advantage in quelling internal unrest. Moreover, the Constitution tackles the issue head-on when in Article IV it declares, "The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government, . . ." and promises to protect the states "against domestic Violence." In such an emergency, Congress may also suspend the writ of habeas corpus--an extraordinary power granted only "when in Cases of Rebellion or Invasion the public Safety may require it."

In such exigencies the forces closest to the conflict and presumably capable of responding most quickly would often be the militia. But the memory of Shays's Rebellion, when members of the militia had been part of the insurrection, was still fresh in the minds of the framers. Nationalists in the Convention argued that the central government must exercise control over all military forces, including the militia. Otherwise there was no guarantee that state militias would be responsive, effective, or perhaps even loyal to the national government in time of crisis.

The framers took several measures to assure central control of the militia. To begin, the states would have to have "the Consent of Congress" before they could maintain military forces and they were forbidden to "engage in War, unless actually invaded, or in such imminent Danger as will admit of no delay." Moreover, to guarantee

further the loyalty of the states, all state officials, like all national officials, were required to swear an oath to support the United States Constitution. If states did raise military forces, Congress had further power

To provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions;

To provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining, the Militia, and for governing such Part of them as may be employed in the Service of the United States,

but--and this reservation is most critical--

reserving to the States respectively, the Appointment of the Officers, and the Authority of training the Militia according to the discipline prescribed by Congress.

In other words, Congress would write the rules, but state-appointed officers would interpret and enforce them as they saw fit.³¹

These clauses evolved through debate in the Constitutional Convention and represent a compromise from the nationalist position that would have provided for still greater Federal control and discipline of the militia. That accommodation to the concerns of those who still feared standing armies was politically essential for ratification. It sensibly recognized the continuing importance of the militia as a socio-political institution. Yet the compromise, by allowing the states to train the militia and to name their own officers, was enough to make those forces ineffectual. The experience of the Revolution and the years under the Articles of Confederation had shown, at least in the minds of

³¹ When the militia were called into Federal service, they would fall under command of the president as commander-in-chief.

nationalists, that the militia needed uniform training, regulation, and discipline. They needed better organization and consistent supply and inspection of clothing, arms, and equipment. Sharing the discipline of militia between the Federal Government and the states meant that Congress could write regulations that the states were free to interpret so liberally as to ignore them altogether. In the years following ratification, because of the degree of control left to the states, the militia system remained no system at all, with no uniformity of standards and no certain reliability in time of crisis. Time and again national leaders opted to forego calling the militia, finding it more efficacious to rely upon volunteers or regulars. The result was to replace the covenant that had made militia service central to the social and political life of American colonies with a new compact guaranteeing that the Federal government would “provide for the common defence.”³²

The Constitution provides for a regular army and the means to make it effective without being a danger to the nation. As it does in most other matters, the Constitution carefully divides military power between the branches of government, in this case between the executive and the legislative, and between the Federal Government and the states. Conceding the need for a regular army, the framers wisely induced institutional tensions to ensure that no entity could gain unfettered control of the sword. These “checks and balances,” by making military forces less dangerous to the people they were meant to

³² Even this lax control of the militia was enough to arouse the suspicions of the Constitution’s opponents. The Second Amendment in the Bill of Rights was in fact an attempt to secure the continued existence and importance of the militia as a counterweight to despotic central government: “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”

protect, not only made for better government, but also effectively answered the political opponents of ratification.

The compromise struck in the Constitution dividing control of the militia between the Federal Government and the states postponed action on an issue that demanded resolution--the nature and structure of the national defense establishment. Under the Constitution, the people could choose to base their defense in a national army, a militia system, or a combination of the two. The controversy did not stay submerged for long.

During the 1790s, the first full decade under the new Constitution, military problems for the new republic ran the gamut from frontier unrest to the Whiskey Rebellion to the so-called Quasi-war with France. The government raised several armies of volunteers with little continuity from one to the next. The Federalists, who had articulated the need and described the architecture of a national military establishment, struggled to emplace that structure as they dealt with each crisis in turn. Incrementally their efforts paid off. After the turn of the century consensus on military issues had become so thorough that the bitterest political opponent of the Federalists, President Jefferson, completed the vision put forth in Washington's "Sentiments on a Peace Establishment" by creating a national military academy.

In 1790 Secretary of War Henry Knox, who had held the analogous position in the Confederation and had tried to reform the militia then, submitted an ambitious plan to Congress. Knox planned to create three classes of men whose liability for military service would have been based on their ages. All would have been obligated to serve in a national

organization that provided arms and equipment and saw to all discipline and training. The system, roundly criticized for its unabashed nationalism and its expected cost, failed of passage in Congress.³³

The military policy debate received new emphasis from military embarrassments. Indians in the Northwest Territory defeated General Josiah Harmar's force of regulars and militia in December, 1790. A year later Governor Arthur St. Clair, commanding a similar force, suffered an even more lopsided loss. In response Congress produced the Uniform Militia Act of 1792, a piece of legislation so weak that it did more harm than good to the cause of militia reform. It provided for no increased training, no uniformity of organization or equipment, and no classing by age. Moreover, there were no methods for enforcing the few provisions the act did contain. Most observers agreed that the 1792 law was a failure. By default, the Federal Government found itself relying more upon nationally recruited volunteers than upon a militia that it could neither train nor trust.³⁴

At the same time Washington began to reorganize the Federal military establishment. Recognizing that the Harmar and St. Clair expeditions had demonstrated weakness in the regulars as well as the militia, Washington raised the Legion, a combined arms army consisting of four tactically flexible sublegions. Concurrently, Secretary Knox began to establish the Department of War, rationalizing the mundane procedures of administration and accounting so crucial to developing bureaucratic professionalism.

³³ Kohn, Eagle and Sword, 128-134.

³⁴ Ibid., 91-134; Russell F. Weigley, History of the United States Army (London, 1967), 90-92.

Against his better judgment, the president named the mercurial “Mad” Anthony Wayne to command the Legion. What Knox did with his clerks, Wayne did with the army, training it in the rigorous and disciplined traditions of von Steuben. The successful battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794 vindicated his efforts. Yet with Wayne’s victory the Indian threat receded and Congress debated reducing or eliminating the regular force. Washington, repeating many of the elements previously put forth in his “Sentiments,” argued persuasively for a permanent standing army. Congress subsequently reduced the force, but the regular army remained as an institution. For many years thereafter the army’s size fluctuated wildly with changing perceptions of the threats to national security, but no one, including the Republican party, any longer questioned the need for a permanent military.³⁵

In 1798 the Quasi-war with France forced President John Adams to raise another large regular force. Into the bargain came another attempt at wholesale military reform and a poisonous politicization of the officer corps that threatened to wreck the embryonic institution. The Federal Government authorized recruitment of an additional 10,000 men in response to French provocations. Adams coaxed George Washington out of retirement to command this “new army,” but Washington allowed day-to-day administration and real power to reside with Inspector General Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton, a staunch Federalist and implacable foe of Adams, sought both to reform the military and to bend it to his will. He turned his enormous creative energy toward a thorough bureaucratic

³⁵ Kohn, Eagle and Sword, 91-127, 139-189; Weigley, History, 92-93; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 6-7.

reform of the army, promulgating tactics and regulations for all aspects of the service. But even while Hamilton attempted to build a solid institutional structure in the army, he also fought openly with Adams over the commissioning of officers. This rift had two important consequences. One was to infest the officer corps with a political partisanship that almost destroyed the army. Hamilton's insistence upon commissioning only loyal Federalists, and only those who were loyal to him, undermined public confidence in the Federal military. Hamilton sought to use the army for political ends and he conceivably entertained active intimidation of the government.³⁶ Adams forestalled a crisis by coming to terms with France, thereby obviating the need for a large military force. The second result was a fatal split within the Federalist party over military policy. Adams saved the army from taking on a political role that might have poisoned public trust for generations, but he destroyed his party and his presidency. When Thomas Jefferson won the election of 1800, the party that had articulated a vision of a national military establishment and brought it to fruition left power and never returned.³⁷

Having vanquished the Federalist party, Republican presidents acquiesced to its military policy. In his inaugural address President Jefferson still paid homage to the militia, but carefully qualified their importance: "a well-disciplined militia, our best reliance

³⁶ Dumas Malone, Jefferson and His Time (6 vols., Boston, 1948-1981), Volume 3, Jefferson and the Ordeal of Liberty (Boston, 1962), 415, 427-428.

³⁷ Edward M. Coffman, The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898 (New York, 1986), 3; Kohn, Eagle and Sword, 193-273; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 95-98; Weigley, History, 99-104.

in peace, and for the first moments of war, till regulars may relieve them.” Now administrations of both parties had made a permanent military force a matter of policy. The Republicans mostly neglected the army and kept it as small as possible; but, significantly, they allowed it to continue as a permanent institution. They simultaneously assigned it myriad responsibilities: policing the frontiers, mediating between Indians and white settlers, exercising civil-military government in parts of the west, and constructing seacoast fortifications. The assignment dearest to Jefferson was the army’s exploration of the western territories of his Louisiana Purchase.³⁸

Jefferson hoped to obliterate the distinction between civil and military while still satisfying the need for national defense. Every man, in his vision, would have been a potential volunteer soldier and every college graduate trained for military leadership. But failing to achieve this utopian goal, he agreed in 1802 to the founding of a national military academy at West Point, which was, ironically, the capstone achievement of Federalist military policy enunciated by Washington two decades before. Military education, so essential to establishing professionalism, had begun in America. Jefferson probably hoped that the academy would produce learned and public-spirited men who could move easily between civil and military life. He succeeded in founding an institution that would soon be renowned for its engineering curriculum, rather than as a school of war. But for the first decade of its existence the academy was a “foundling,” in Superintendent Jonathan

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 104-112.

Williams's words, "barely existing among the mountains." Its influence on the army and its officer corps was negligible.³⁹

For the first dozen years of the nineteenth century, the army fared little better than its academy, languishing under Republican indifference. The Republicans had inherited the institutions of a competent military establishment--a war department, coherent military units, logistical and administrative staffs, a hierarchical rank structure. Yet Jefferson and Madison usually ignored the army, and their neglect allowed the infant military bureaucracy to become complex and cumbersome. The threat of war from the Napoleonic conflicts in Europe intruded from time to time, occasionally causing Republicans to ask for increases in the army's size. Congress granted parts of these requests, but recruiting was invariably slow. In 1812 wartime levies expanded the force to over 60,000 men, giving the regular army its largest size during the nineteenth century. Still, the army was poorly prepared for the War of 1812.⁴⁰

Military leadership was abysmal. Aging generals and blundering politicians commanded, and none of them imparted order to the system. At the outbreak of war army generals, most of whom were Revolutionary War veterans, averaged sixty years of age. These men were spread over nine military districts of sometimes overlapping jurisdiction and none commanded the whole. The confused command structure or the

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 104-108. Obviously the Union Army in the Civil War was incomparably larger, but most of those soldiers were in volunteer regiments, not regular army units.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 109-116, 120-121.

infirmity of the military leadership may have contributed to Secretary of War John Armstrong's attempt to command in person near Detroit, to the detriment of both tactics (micromanaged) and strategy (neglected). Whatever his reasons, the results were embarrassing and unfortunately representative of American fortunes during the first two years of the war. By August 1814 two American armies had surrendered in the field and the British had seized Washington.⁴¹

Nevertheless, by the time of their second major war Americans had moved some considerable distance in their thinking about national defense. In the colonial era the "minuteman" had been the symbol of military virtue, contrasting starkly with both oppressive British officers and underclass "Redcoat" soldiers. But war against these same British regulars soon showed that a national, regular army was necessary to gain independence. Nevertheless, the militia, unreliable though they often were, had exhibited their worth in raids and guerrilla fighting, especially in their own backyards. At war's end, an abortive coup again raised doubts about the wisdom of relying on a standing army. Shortly thereafter the Continental Army disbanded.

In the years that followed, the weakness of the Confederation gave rise to a new ideology that put its faith in strong institutions of government and national defense. Its adherents, the Federalists, pursued their agenda in the Constitutional Convention and

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 117-122; William B. Skelton, "High Army Leadership in the Era of the War of 1812: The Making and Remaking of the Officer Corps." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 3d Series, LI (April 1994): 264-265.

wrote provisions for a permanent peacetime force into the framework of the new government. Still, they could not mute desires for a state-based militia and neither could they codify means to make the militia more reliable. Time and again through the 1790s the militia proved ineffective and feckless. Federalist administrations relied more and more upon a series of new armies and volunteer soldiers. At the turn of the century when Republicans gained power, the Federalist policy was an accomplished fact and the regular army a permanent institution. But while they could no longer kill the army, Republican presidents weakened it through years of neglect. The War of 1812 showed how ineffective the army had become. Wartime failure might have given rise to a renewed call for a national defense based upon the militia, but the terms of the debate had long since moved too far for anyone to make that proposal seriously. America had a regular army and was going to keep it.

But America did not yet have a professional army. Merely maintaining a force on active duty did not make it effective. As yet the nation had not seen the need for competent, educated leadership of its military forces. Moreover, it periodically had seen evidence of the dangers posed by “men on horseback.” But the War of 1812 provided stark evidence of the folly of retaining a weak regular force. In the years following the war, the nation and the army invested in the institutional reforms necessary to foster military professionalism. As a result, during the Jacksonian Era the army officer corps became a distinct corporate body with a clear sense of its responsibility to the nation.

Chapter Three

“A Band of Brothers”

In the century that elapsed between the Seven Years' War and the Civil War an American military establishment emerged. By the mid-nineteenth century regular forces guarded the coastlines, patrolled the western frontier, fought the Indians, administered unorganized territories, and projected military power abroad. From a hatred of standing armies and complete reliance on militia for local defense, Americans had come to accept and support a permanent, regular army as necessary for national security.

As that transformation occurred the leadership of military forces in America also developed. Social standing within the community was the primary determinant of officership in the colonial era and even during the American Revolution. But as the American army became more sophisticated and complex, the demands placed upon its officers grew apace. Slowly, American officers responded to these challenges by becoming progressively more professional, first as exceptional individuals and later as a corporate body.

A turning point in this history came during the War of 1812. The first two years of the conflict exposed weaknesses that leaders inside the army and out then sought to correct. These efforts at reform built upon foundations that the army had established in the early national period and on changes that had recently taken place at West Point. But the reforms begun in the wake of those first two disastrous years of the War of 1812

opened a new chapter and truly began the process of professionalization.

By the 1850s there was a high degree of regularity in the selection, education, and advancement of officers. Americans accepted the officer corps as a permanent and trustworthy institution. Officers saw themselves as following a calling and expected to devote most of their productive lives to military careers. The officer corps had worked out its role as an apolitical instrument of national policy subordinate to civil authority. Thus, in terms of corporateness and responsibility the army officer corps had matured as a profession by the mid-1850s.

Professionalism assumes an acceptance of division of labor. In his *Wealth of Nations* (1776), Adam Smith described the productive gains to be made by articulating the discrete tasks of any manufacturing process and then delegating each one to specific workers to perform them repetitively. The effect was electrifying. In much the same way as he had explicated divisions of labor in the making of pins, Smith later articulated “the first duty of the sovereign, that of protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies.” As societies grow more complex, Smith argued, advancing from groupings of “hunters” to “shepherds” and then “husbandmen,” to become “artificers” and, finally “manufacturers,” it becomes less and less feasible for men to quit their work to become soldiers without visiting economic hardship upon themselves and society. In more advanced economies, then it becomes more efficient for the sovereign to

employ some men permanently as soldiers. A regular and professional army is necessary in a state that hopes to sustain industrial modernization.¹

The art of war, however, as it is certainly the noblest of all arts, so in the progress of improvement it necessarily becomes one of the most complicated among them. The state of the mechanical, as well as of some other arts with which it is necessarily connected, determines the degree of perfection to which it is capable of being carried at any particular time. But in order to carry it to this degree of perfection, it is necessary that it should become the sole or principal occupation of a particular class of citizens, and the division of labour is as necessary for the improvement of this, as of every other art. Into other arts the division of labour is naturally introduced by the prudence of individuals, who find that they promote their private interest better by confining themselves to a particular trade, than by exercising a great number. But it is the wisdom of the state only which can render the trade of a soldier a particular trade separate and distinct from all others. A private citizen who, in time of profound peace, and without any particular encouragement from the publick, should spend the greater part of his time in military exercises, might, no doubt, both improve himself very much in them, and amuse himself very well; but he would certainly not promote his own interest. It is the wisdom of the state only which can render it for his interest to give up the greater part of his time to this particular occupation: and states have not always had this wisdom, even when their circumstances had become such that the preservation of their existence required that they should have it.²

In order to free workers and managers for commerce and industry from the need to leave their work to answer the militia's call, the sovereign had to entrust some men permanently with the state's security, that is, to divide the labor between soldiers and civilians.³

¹ Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (2 vols., London, 1776), II, Book V, 291-313.

² Ibid., 298-299.

³ See also Edward M. Earle, "Adam Smith, Alexander Hamilton, Friedrich List: The Economic Foundations of Military Power," in The Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to Hitler Edward M.

During the early modern era military reforms in the Netherlands, Sweden, and England had begun to recognize merit, training, and skill, rather than noble birth alone, as prerequisites to officership. Especially important were the reforms in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries of Maurice of Nassau, whose efforts ushered in a military revolution that marked the dawn of modern warfare. This era commenced with transforming advances in shoulder-fired gunpowder weapons. Even more important were organizational changes, including the separation of military rank from social class and tying military competence to education in the art and science of war. Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden successfully built his army upon Maurice's principles. Frederick II of Prussia owed intellectual debts to both Gustavus and Maurice. He commissioned sons of Junker noblemen and made them competent officers through rigorous tactical exercises. Yet none of these armies was able to sustain its processes of professionalization indefinitely.⁴

The French army developed a high degree of military expertise during the eighteenth century. The master engineer and war minister Vauban created a system of border defenses and, in the process, synthesized military engineering practices into a science. After Frederick the Great defeated the French army at Rossbach in 1757, a

Earle, ed., (Princeton, 1943), 124-127.

⁴ See Michael Roberts, "The Military Revolution" in Essays in Swedish History, (Minneapolis, 1967), 195-225, Geoffrey Parker, The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800 (Cambridge, UK, 1988), and Russell F. Weigley, The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Battle from Breitenfeld to Waterloo (Bloomington, 1991), 9-15. Weigley argues that military professionalism began with the Dutch and Maurice of Nassau in the late sixteenth century. However, his standard of professionalism is not as rigorous as the Huntington model or the Millett-Skelton definition, both of which I will use in this study.

number of French thinkers turned their attentions to military reform, among them Gribeauval, who developed a light and mobile system of artillery, and Guibert, who first conceived the division as a tactical formation and foresaw the need for large popular armies. Still, aristocrats, untutored in their craft, monopolized French commissions during the ancien regime, at least in non-technical branches. Military science and education concentrated in the skills of artillery and engineering, branches that were open to artisans.

The tumult of the Napoleonic wars induced the first sustained progress toward military professionalism. The French Revolution and Napoleon's subsequent rise to power separated the officer corps from the aristocracy, but replaced them with non-professional qualifications such as courage, elan, revolutionary fervor, and personal favor with the Emperor. Nonetheless, as revolutionary rhetoric might have predicted, French armies stimulated reform in the citadel of the ancien regime--Prussia. Napoleon delivered a crushing blow to Frederician dogma on the battlefield at Jena-Auerstadt, and the pursuit that followed destroyed the Prussian army. Military professionalism then received its first impetus from liberal Prussian reformers, seeking to rebuild the army and the state, who recognized that they could not rely upon the fortuitous ascendance of some military genius to defeat the French emperor. Instead, they reasoned, Prussia needed to find some system for harnessing and enhancing the capabilities of its people. Aided by the confluence of necessary political and societal conditions--the growth of population, technology, industry, urbanity, and nationalism--Gerhard von Scharnhorst and a coterie of followers established

standards for entry and advancement in the Prussian officer corps, tied to a rigorous educational system, and exemplified by a general staff system for controlling the army as a whole and its several field commands. These reforms displaced Frederick the Great's commissioning system, which had ossified since his day to the point that Junker boys were elevated to officership without regard to their intellectual capacity or military potential and retained on duty without further training. The reform efforts paid dividends in the defeats of Napoleon in 1813, 1814, and 1815. Scharnhorst and his disciples, including the military historian and theorist, Karl von Clausewitz, all fell from favor by 1819, but many of their reforms remained.⁵ The Prussian army stayed well ahead of its European and American contemporaries in professional development for almost a century.⁶

The Revolutionary War bequeathed a number of traditions that set the American army apart from its European counterparts. First, the American military never established a tradition of aristocratic monopoly on officers' commissions. Early colonial militiamen had elected their leaders. Later, provincial governors began to appoint officers, which power they exercised in consultation with community elders. The Continental Army

⁵ Gordon A. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945 (Oxford, 1955), 76-81. Before his death, even Frederick had allowed training to decay. After his passing, his successors in the Prussian army rested on remembered glory: rather than building on burgeoning professionalism, they allowed his ideas to become sacred dogma.

⁶ Some of the conditions that Huntington defines as necessary for the development of professionalism were less evident in Prussia than elsewhere in Europe--industry in England, for example. Two additional conditions, the growth of democracy and the notion that an officer owes his loyalty to the state rather than to his sovereign, did not occur in Germany until after World War I. Indeed, those conditions did not take root until after World War II. Huntington, 30-53.

further centralized the commissioning process in order to select leaders of good social standing. To be sure, Continental leaders preferred to commission men of high social standing. Officers tried to mimic traditions of European nobility in their dress and behavior and in an exaggerated emphasis on personal honor and physical courage. But American soldiers gave little respect to pretentious officers and, as Charles Royster has put it, "the revolutionaries did not have enough gentlemen to go around." By default, the officer corps became more egalitarian than those of Europe.⁷

Yet popular American antipathy toward regular armies and career soldiers retarded the growth of military specialization. Militia and citizen-soldier traditions resonated culturally and politically. After the Revolution, civilians and militiamen successfully competed with regulars of the Continental Army in laying claim to Revolutionary virtue and taking credit for national independence. On another level, this political division was between localists and nationalists who were also arguing about the locus of power in the new republic. During the government under the Articles of Confederation, experience began to demonstrate that the nation could not rely on local militia to guarantee national defense. Former Continental officers formed the nucleus of a group of nationalist leaders

⁷ Douglas E. Leach, Arms for Empire: A Military History of the British Colonies in North America, 1607-1763 (New York, 1973), 1-41; Fred Anderson, A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War (Chapel Hill, NC, 1984), 26-62, 167-195; Marcus Cunliffe, Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775-1865 (Boston, 1968), 20-22.; Charles Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and the American Character, 1775-1783 (New York, 1979), 86-88; William B. Skelton, An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861 (Lawrence, Kansas, 1992), 12-13; William B. Skelton, "Professionalization of the U.S. Army Officer Corps During the Age of Jackson," Armed Forces and Society I (Summer 1975): 444-447.

who, over the course of two decades, formed the Federalist party and articulated the necessity for a regular army. They were, however, less insistent on the need for a professional officer corps.⁸

In early nineteenth-century America the preconditions for a professional military were still in their infancy. American nationalism was healthy but not yet mature: Americans still identified with their own states as much or more than with the entire nation. Population was growing, but vast expanses of western territory invited migration and retarded urbanity. Cities in America expanded slower than those in Europe and, consequently, failed to accumulate the populace and the pool of surplus labor necessary for industry to grow. So the societal and political conditions that induced professionalism in Europe developed more slowly in America. Moreover, the early republic had not, like Prussia, suffered the catalyst of catastrophic defeat to prod military reform.⁹

Prior to the War of 1812 two national characteristics particularly affected the army--a widespread distrust of centralized power and a penchant for institutional experimentation. Federalist leaders had to struggle against the fears of localists in order to maintain a permanent army. The Federalists succeeded and Americans slowly accepted the existence of a peacetime force, just as they acceded to other national institutions of

⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), 163-169.

⁹ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 89.

government. During this period there was not one army, but a series of armies with different organizations and systems of command. The size of the army fluctuated wildly, increasing with threats on the frontier or war scares from abroad and decreasing when fears subsided or political winds shifted. The army's most pronounced trait during this period was its fundamental instability of size and organization.¹⁰

Several attempts to strengthen the army showed signs of promise, but all eventually failed for a common reason: they neglected to institutionalize methods that would promote professional corporateness, responsibility, and expertise. Instead, each initiative depended upon the talents and energies of one dynamic leader.

Anthony Wayne took firm command of the American Legion in 1792, rigorously training and disciplining his officers and men. By 1794 the Legion had such confidence and ability that it decisively avenged the tragic, embarrassing losses of Harmar and St. Clair earlier in the decade. But Wayne developed no enduring system for educating, training, and socializing his officers. He expected them to learn their craft from their fellow officers and by reading the Rules and Articles of War and von Steuben's "Blue Book," the army's standard guide for tactics, discipline, and administration. When Wayne died in 1796, his reforms of the army died with him, because he left behind no system to perpetuate professional attainment.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., 3-11.

¹¹ Ibid., 38-39, 90-93; Russell F. Weigley, History of the United States Army (New York, 1967), 92-94.

Two years later, the Quasi-war with France brought about another army expansion and an opportunity for Alexander Hamilton, the inspector general, to transform the organization into a “classic, European standing army.” With prodigious energy and an ideological affinity with Adam Smith, Hamilton sought to remake the army, structurally and systemically. He worked to rationalize supply services, pay scales, regimental structures, and staff procedures. He appointed a network of assistant inspectors general to help oversee his reforms. With a team of veteran officers Hamilton rewrote army tactical doctrine. And he drafted legislation to form a system of military schools for the general education and specific training of officers. Taken altogether, these reforms aimed at creating a well articulated body of professional expertise. If successful, Hamilton might today be known as the “Father of the American Army.”

But Hamilton simultaneously schemed to build an officer corps whose corporateness and responsibility were both based in political partisanship, rather than objective standards of merit and service to the state. His attempts to commission only Federalists who were personally loyal to him made his motives suspect to a wide spectrum of political leaders. His enemies feared that he wanted a national army capable not only of defending against a European foe, but also a potent offensive force for invading Mexico or Canada. Even worse, Hamilton was clearly capable of using his “standing army” to intimidate his political foes through heavy-handed enforcement of the Alien and Sedition Acts. Such suspicions clouded every proposal associated with his name, including his

administrative improvements and his system of military schools. The Quasi-war abated, a political rift between Hamilton and President Adams ended in the latter's defeat for re-election, and the Democratic-Republicans demolished Hamilton's partisan officer corps, destroying with it all the reforms and initiatives that might have done much to improve professional expertise.¹²

A part of Hamilton's program to foster expertise was his ambition to establish national military education. A robust military school could have strengthened the army by providing a steady and reliable source of commissioned officers. The notion had been around since the Revolution and many leaders had advanced variations of it, most notably Washington in his "Sentiments on a Peace Establishment." In 1794 Congress authorized a corps of artillerists and engineers and provided books and equipment for their instruction. This fledgling school limped along for a number of years, suffering from poor leadership, indiscipline, and lack of a clear mission. Hamilton tried to expand the concept, hoping to add a "fundamental school" for all cadets, who would matriculate to separate schools for the infantry and cavalry, for artillery and engineers, and for the navy. Hamilton's association with it killed the idea. Yet two years after that ambitious plan died in Congress, Thomas Jefferson and the Democratic-Republicans, now securely in power,

¹² Earle, 129-136; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 23, 95-98; Weigley, History, 99-104; Richard H. Kohn, Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment, 1783-1802 (New York, 1975), 193-273; Dumas Malone, Jefferson and His Time, (6 vols., Boston, 1948-1981), Volume 3, Jefferson and the Ordeal of Liberty (Boston, 1962), 415, 427-428.

passed a bill that both decreased the size of the army and created a military academy at West Point.

The guiding force of the new military academy and superintendent for most of its first decade was Jonathan Williams, a nephew of Benjamin Franklin and renowned scientist in his own right. Williams had lived and studied with Franklin in Paris for many years, absorbing the ideas of the Enlightenment. He brought to his stewardship no experience as a soldier, but a domineering personality and a clear vision of what the school should produce: “our officers are to be men of science.” Williams, army chief engineer as well as academy superintendent, aimed to educate men for the corps of engineers who would be nationally respected for their scientific achievements. Toward that end, he also founded the United States Military Philosophical Society, an organization for promoting military science, which, to Williams, meant military engineering. The society boasted an impressive membership including presidents, governors, congressmen, U.S. Supreme Court justices, and scientists. Jefferson, Eli Whitney, and Robert Fulton were among the members, as were all cadets and the academy faculty. Indeed, the society seems to have imparted most of the cadets’ intellectual stimulation. The academy and the society flourished or foundered with the intensity of Williams’s attention. His occasional extended absences threatened the existence of both. When he resigned in 1813, the society collapsed. The military academy, having just escaped death by the administration’s

neglect in 1811, suffered again for want of leadership through the War of 1812.¹³

Each of these important endeavors--Wayne's Legion, Hamilton's reorganization, and Williams's military academy--fell short in part because it depended too heavily on the abilities of a single leader. Indeed, the lack of military professionalism in the early republic stemmed from a lack of institutional standards for leadership. In the absence of such standards the army could not expect the next officer to be as qualified as his predecessor. The effectiveness of each military office depended largely upon the particular abilities and personality of its incumbent. A vicious cycle ensued, for the resulting organizational instability limited the army's capacity for nurturing professional traits. The army made notable progress during its first thirty-odd years. But the conditions of military life and the army's institutional fragility combined to hinder professional development of professional characteristics, especially corporate cohesion, responsibility, and long-term commitment to service. The early national officer corps was not yet professional.

Long-term commitment to service was problematic for army officers of the early republic because long-term service was so difficult to achieve. Officers did not consider theirs to be full-time jobs for the good reason that experience argued otherwise. Most often periods out of uniform punctuated stints of military service. Hiatuses occurred for

¹³ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 97-105; Weigley, History, 104-108; Edward M. Coffman, The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898 (New York, 1986), 38-39; Larry R. Donnithorne, "The Founding of West Point: Seeking the National Purposes in the First Federal Institution in Higher Education," (unpublished paper, West Point, NY, undated), 4, 11-12.

several reasons. Large expansions and contractions of the army naturally brought increases and decreases in the size of the officer corps. Between 1784 and 1815 there were five general expansions and an equal number of reductions in force. Many officers rode these ebbs and flows into and out of military service. Some of those who managed to survive cutbacks resigned in frustration with military life. Many died of disease in the unhealthy climates of the frontier. A few were dismissed by orders of ubiquitous courts-martial or resigned to avoid such embarrassment. However officers left the army, it was difficult for them to think of their service as stable and enduring. The general consequence of all this coming and going was that most officers logically thought of themselves as part-time soldiers, part-time civilians.¹⁴

Since most felt that their officership was not a full-time job, they could hardly have been following a life-long calling. Many officers, especially those commissioned directly to high rank, had little intention of long service in the army. Secretary of War Henry Dearborn complained in 1803 that many officers looked upon "a military commission as a convenience, and that when military duty in any degree interferes with private concerns, the service is no longer an object worthy of attention." Thus, patterns of service discouraged professional corporateness and responsibility.¹⁵

But even if officers had inclinations to long and exclusive military service,

¹⁴ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 34-35, 59-67.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

circumstances of army life worked against them and against the growth of a professional community. Meagre salaries gave them little opportunity to pretend to a certain middle-class respectability that most other professionals tried to attain. Many augmented their incomes with civil offices and private enterprise. Such pursuits tended to make officers identify with local communities as much or more than they did with their brother officers. Local allegiances were all the stronger for the army's dispersion over thousands of miles into dozens of small constabulary posts, most of which had complements of fewer than one hundred men. So, given that the population of the officer ranks fluctuated so unpredictably, and that time, distance, and economic concerns exerted centrifugal forces on the officer corps, it was nearly impossible for an already unstable group to develop a professional sub-culture.¹⁶

Several social factors also prevented the rise of corporate cohesion. One source of trouble was the heterogeneity of the officer corps, both socially and geographically. Commissions were well distributed throughout the country and studies of their fathers' occupations show that new officers came from all walks of life. Differences in background made it hard for officers to bond together absent some common and effective socialization process. Again, the army was widely dispersed and it rarely assembled in one place in significant numbers so that all officers could share similar experiences. The Military Academy might have provided such experiences, but it was as yet too small and

¹⁶ Ibid., 14-16, 39-46.

its graduates too junior to affect the entire army.¹⁷

Moreover, the officers of the early republic were an exceptionally quarrelsome lot. European armies, aristocratic bastions of contentious individualism centering on a code of personal honor, served as models for the behavior of American officers. The central feature of this code was dueling, which law and regulation prohibited, but which common practice condoned. Countless duels took place during the period; so many, in fact, that even if an officer had never been involved directly in a duel, he certainly must have been aware that honor might require him to answer a challenge to single combat at any time. When not dueling, officers were often busy with seemingly endless courts-martial, either as plaintiffs, defendants, trial counsel, or members of the board. In many cases officers effectively sued one another through the military justice system. The frequency, length, and triviality of many of these hearings must have made dueling seem a less burdensome method of settling disputes.¹⁸

In addition to social and economic considerations, political spoils systems hampered the growth of professional corporateness and responsibility. Before 1787 governors appointed officers in rough proportion to their states' contributions to the small army. Thereafter, the Constitution reserved commissioning authority to the president, but, again, Washington's secretary of war apportioned new army commissions equitably

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 39, 54-55.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 50-59; Coffman, 32-34.

among the states, filling one company with Rhode Islanders, another with South Carolinians, and so on. This practice helped garner political support for the military, but it diminished the War Department's ability to recruit and promote officers on the basis of merit. Corporate cohesion suffered, and officers' loyalties remained with their states, diminishing a sense of responsibility to the Federal government.¹⁹

During the Quasi-war with France, Alexander Hamilton politicized the process in a partisan way, attempting to exclude Republicans from the officer corps. Despite his conflict with Hamilton, President Adams went a step further when, on his last day in office he nominated for commissions 87 men, a number amounting to one-third of the officer corps. Since most of these nominees were Federalists, Senate approval of their candidacies meant that the officer corps continued to be a Federalist bastion even under a Republican administration. Thus, while the Federalists shifted the commissioning process from the states to the central government, their system was so bitterly partisan that it hindered the growth of professional responsibility and corporateness.²⁰

In contrast the Jeffersonians seem to have paid little attention to army politics at first. Jefferson reduced the size of the army and kept it small for most of his tenure, so he had little opportunity to affect the composition of the officer corps. The Republicans continued a Federalist policy of promoting officers according to seniority. The concurrent

¹⁹ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 15-18.

²⁰ Ibid., 23-25, 72-73.

absence of a performance evaluation system or a retirement system tended to stifle the aspirations of talented officers. Still, the officer corps grew to accept the seniority system for its fairness. But then in army expansions of 1808 and 1812, Republicans seized opportunities to appoint their partisans to newly created senior positions, eroding both the Federalist hold on the officer corps and the seniority system. Throughout the period, the officer corps had little control over the composition of its membership and could enforce no standards of performance. The procedures for recruiting officers, promoting them, and eliminating them from the service were actions external to the army, inherently political, and, therefore, inimical to the growth of professional corporateness and responsibility.²¹

That lack of institutional autonomy reflected a sense of distrust that many Americans still had for the army. In a telling remark, Jefferson's Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin expressed his disdain:

The distribution of our little army to distant garrisons where hardly any other inhabitant is to be found is the most eligible arrangement of that perhaps necessary evil that can be contrived. But I never want to see the face of one in our cities and intermixed with the people.²²

Gallatin's comment shows two conflicting attitudes--an acceptance of the army's permanence and profound disgust with both the institution and its members. But if Republicans, who had reason to mistrust the officer corps after its politicization in the

²¹ *Ibid.*, 25-29, 48-50, 74; Coffman, 8-12.

²² Coffman, 38.

Adams Administration, hoped to isolate the army from the public, they were disappointed.

No clear line separated soldiers and civilians. The circumstances of army life dictated that officers associate closely with local communities and fostered an identification with them. Officers knew that their military tenure was likely to be short. Conversely, social and political elites could reasonably expect to be commissioned as high-ranking officers during the next war scare. Moreover, the practice of distributing commissions with geographic balance and political patronage in mind made the officer corps a national institution that was politically sensitive. William Skelton has described this phenomenon as the “interpenetration” of military and political life.²³

The army’s role as a frontier constabulary force in the early national period demanded close interaction with the public. Officers frequently acted as military governors or civil administrators on the frontier. They had to regulate Indian-white relations and to intervene in disputes among settlers. Their functions were often quasi-diplomatic and quasi-judicial. They usually had little guidance and less training for these roles. Mutual suspicion between the military and civilians in the territories was probably inevitable. When officers made mistakes or acted in bad faith--the most egregious example is the Burr conspiracy, in which a number of officers, including the army’s senior general, James Wilkinson, schemed with the vice president to conquer a Southwestern empire--civilian mistrust and suspicion reinforced a governmental tendency toward

²³ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 30-32, 68-71, 86; Coffman, 6-12.

withholding institutional autonomy from the officer corps.²⁴

In his Memoirs, Winfield Scott made the following assessment of the officer corps appointed during the expansion of 1808:

It may, however, be safely said that many of the appointments were positively bad, and a majority of the remainder indifferent. Party spirit of that day knew no bounds, and, of course, was blind to policy. Federalists were almost entirely excluded from selection, though great numbers were eager for the field, and in New England and some other States, there were but very few educated Republicans. Hence the selections consisted mainly of coarse and ignorant men. In the other States, where there was no lack of educated men in the dominant party, the appointments consisted, generally, of swaggerers, dependants, decayed gentlemen, and others--"fit for nothing else," which always turned out *utterly unfit for any military purpose whatever*.²⁵

Scott probably exaggerated in his generalization and he listed many exceptions by name.

But the officer corps of the early republic, despite valiant reform efforts from some of its leaders, manifested few elements of military professionalism. The War of 1812 exposed

²⁴ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 68-86; Coffman, 34-39.

²⁵ Winfield Scott, Memoirs of Lieut.-General Winfield Scott, LL.D. . . . (2 vols., New York, 1864) I, 34-35, 36n. Italics are Scott's. On the preceding pages, Scott had rendered glowing biographical sketches of 27 officers who were exceptions to his rule, although not all were of the class of 1808. Scott, I, 31-34. He continued: "These were the men, who, on the return of peace, became the 'unscarred braggarts of the war,' a heavy burden to the Government, and, as beggars, to the country. Such were the results of Mr. Jefferson's low estimate of, or rather contempt for, the military character, the consequence of the old hostility between him and the principal officers who achieved our independence. In 1808 the West Point Academy had graduated but few cadets--nearly all of whom are specially mentioned above as meritorious; for a booby sent thither, say at the age of 16, 17, or even 19--and there are many such in every new batch--is, in his term of four years, duly manipulated, and in most cases, polished, pointed, and sent to a regiment with a head on his shoulders; whereas, if a booby be at once made a commissioned officer, the odds are great that he will live and die a booby. How infinitely unwise, then, in a republic, to trust its safety and honor in battles, in a critical war like that impending over us in 1808, to imbeciles and ignoramuses!" Scott, I, 35-36.

these deficiencies in army leadership.

The decade surrounding the War of 1812 was one of tumult and reform in America. Before the war the country was a loose confederation of states self-consciously experimenting with political and governmental structures, including the army. After the Treaty of Ghent Americans exulted in a new nationalism and an “era of good feeling.” But to their credit, Americans did not allow themselves to end the war simply by celebrating. A common understanding of how nearly the country had come to losing its “second war of independence” fostered a setting that forced leaders to enact reforms and allowed those changes to take root.

The conditions necessary for developing military professionalism, absent in the early republic, began to arise in Jacksonian America. Political factionalism between Federalists and Democratic-Republicans had been a bitter contest in which neither side had conceded the legitimacy of the other party’s opposition or sometimes even its existence. In the 1820s and 1830s Americans began to view political partisanship as a healthy and natural part of democracy. As a result, parties in the minority no longer feared their opponents’ control of military forces by as a danger to themselves or the nation. Military issues, which had been central to political strife before the war, became less important as consensus grew about the necessity for a permanent army and its role within the state.²⁶

²⁶ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 116-117, 296-297.

A post-war economic boom also helped produce an atmosphere of change. The American economy enjoyed a period of expansion that lasted, with minor lapses, for over sixty years. Prosperity encouraged entrepreneurs armed with new technologies to attempt bold commercial ventures. Immigrants swelled eastern cities, providing a ready labor force to meet the needs of growing industries. And an enormous tide of westward migration began in earnest, contributing to a pervasive sense of social mobility. Every aspect of American life seemed to be in flux. Yet while the times were exhilarating, they also made people look for ways to establish order and stability in their lives and in their institutions.²⁷

Within the army that search for order resulted in the first lasting steps toward military professionalism. Military reformers undertook three complex and interrelated endeavors necessary to build a professional army. They rationalized army operations and staff procedures. They developed a coherent system for recruiting, educating, and socializing officers. And they developed a new mission for the army that made the first two reforms indispensable.

For all of Winfield Scott's misgivings about his colleagues, he ignored an important fact: they had posted an impressive wartime record of achievement. It was true that they had joined the army under a cloud as recipients of political patronage in which the president and secretary of war delegated the commissioning of officers to Republican

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

members of Congress. But by war's end, they were seasoned veterans with years of experience in training soldiers and leading them in combat.²⁸

These officers bought that experience dearly. The first two years of the war passed in unremitting disaster and embarrassment. Americans lost one battle after another. The army could never fill its ranks. Much of New England, mostly Federalists opposing the administration, refused to support the war effort. Failures of every type, but especially those of military leadership, plagued American arms. The army had to improve: the nation's existence depended on it.²⁹

In disaster the government sought quick fixes. Congress expanded the army in several acts between 1812 and 1814 to an authorized strength of 62,674 officers and men, comprising some fifty-seven regiments. Authorizing new regiments was not the same as filling them, but it was a start. To control this new army Congress enacted a provision for a general staff in the War Department. This collection of officers was not a general staff in the modern sense, but it was the first recognition in legislation of the need to divide the labor of administering a military establishment among specialists.³⁰

The truly effective solution to the army's problems occurred quite naturally during

²⁸ William B. Skelton, "High Army Leadership in the Era of the War of 1812: The Making and Remaking of the Officer Corps," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 3d Series, LI (April 1994): 253-274.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 258.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 254.

the course of the war. At the end of 1812, for example, eleven of fourteen general officers were Revolutionary War veterans, most of whom had seen no active service since 1783 and whose age and infirmity imparted a pervasive lethargy to the army. But as the army lost, it learned. Officers gained experience. Incompetents failed and left the active theaters of war. Most significant were the promotion lists of 1813 and 1814. Among the new general officers were such notables as Zebulon Pike, William Henry Harrison, Andrew Jackson, Zachary Taylor, and Winfield Scott. These men showed youth and vigor in command. Their military competence emanated from hard years of trial and defeat. Their eventual victory fostered a pride in achievement born of perseverance that made them exemplars of a new military ethos. By 1816 the seven remaining generals, a group that furnished the most senior army leaders for the next forty-five years, averaged just thirty-seven years of age. Professional corporateness now gained a solid footing in the army that it never again lost.³¹

The Battles of Chippewa and Lundy's Lane exemplify the improved state the regular army during the latter part of the war. Major General Jacob Brown and Brigadier General Winfield Scott, both newly promoted, led a force of veteran officers and recent recruits. Brown ordered Scott to establish a camp of instruction to train the new soldiers. Scott and his officers drilled and disciplined the army unrelentingly. Their efforts paid off. Near Niagara Falls on 5 July 1814 they led the two-brigade force against a slightly larger

³¹ *Ibid.*, 253-279; Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 110-114; Weigley, *History*, 123.

army of British regulars. Chippewa marked the first time in the war that American regulars stood in open battle with British regulars without the benefit of entrenchments. The Americans inflicted greater casualties than they sustained and held the field at day's end. A few weeks later, the larger Battle of Lundy's Lane yielded similar results.

Most of the victorious officers were commissioned in the expansions of 1808 and 1812, those groups whose qualifications Scott would later condemn. But Scott could not have trained raw enlisted men so thoroughly and so well without this cadre of veterans. When the British commander at Chippewa looked at his enemy and exclaimed, "Those are regulars, by God!" the compliment was genuine and accurate. American officers had made it so. The example of this success later bore fruit in its influence on post-war military policy that gave the army a new mission--to be prepared for the next war.³²

The return of peace might have threatened professional gains had the Madison Administration not taken steps to preserve corporate strengths. After the war Congress reduced the army to twelve thousand men. Although this figure was still well above pre-war levels, the army found it necessary to release 80 percent of serving officers. During this reduction commanders submitted evaluations on all officers to a board of generals that reviewed every record. President Madison instructed the panel to retain only those "who

³² Weigley, *History*, 119-132; Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 113-114; Skelton, "High Army Leadership," 269-270; Skelton, "Professionalization," 448; William B. Skelton, "The Commanding General and the Problem of Command in the United States Army, 1821-1841," *Military Affairs* XXXIV (December 1970): 117.

are at this time competent to engage an enemy on the field of battle.” The board took its charge to retain quality leaders seriously, selecting officers without regard for politics or state of origin. The result was the first systematic merit selection process in army history, a crucial step toward establishing a standard of performance for a professional officer corps. The officers who remained on duty possessed not only proven ability, but an enviable esprit de corps, born of their wartime memories of having persevered through tremendous adversity. In the years to come they provided leadership for thorough reform of all aspects of army operations and organizations.³³

Equally important to the growth of professionalization was a series of reforms at the United States Military Academy. USMA graduates had little impact on the course of the war: there were only 89 graduates by 1812 and the 65 still on duty were junior officers, many in the corps of engineers. For most of its first decade the academy had a tiny student body and only a few instructors. But legislation during military buildups in 1808 and 1812 increased the authorized number of cadets to 150 and 250, respectively. The 1812 act mandated entrance requirements, the granting of degrees, annual military training, the hiring of more professors, and an appropriation for a library and other buildings. That legislation saved the academy from likely extinction, given that only a handful of cadets and instructors remained at West Point in 1811 and 1812.³⁴

³³ Skelton, "High Army Leadership," 271-274; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 114-116; Coffman, 43-44.

³⁴ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 102; Aloysius A. Norton, A History of the United States

More significant still was the appointment of Sylvanus Thayer as USMA superintendent in 1817. Thayer, a Dartmouth and West Point graduate and an army engineer, had prepared well for his assignment. In one of the first and most important military observer missions to Europe--a precursor to the Delafield Commission--Thayer and Brevet Colonel William McRee had spent a year in France studying military educational methods. Shortly after their return, President Monroe named Thayer superintendent. A serious and energetic leader, Thayer brought to his stewardship a broad vision for the academy and a recognition of the need for thorough change. During his sixteen-year tenure he rationalized administration, promulgated regulations, enforced discipline, and established a standard curriculum. The following chapter will discuss West Point and Thayer's reforms in greater detail. For the moment it suffices to note that the Thayer era was crucial to professionalization because the academy began to furnish the army with a steady source of junior officers who possessed an excellent education and four years of socialization into the officer corps sub-culture. West Point began to do what Anthony Wayne had not done with his junior officers--to stimulate and perpetuate corporateness, responsibility, and, to a lesser degree, expertise within the officer corps.³⁵

The army also benefited from strong political leadership after the war. The

Military Academy Library (Wayne, New Jersey, 1986), 8-9; Coffman, 41; Weigley, History, 144-145; The Public Statutes at Large of the United States of America (Boston, 1850), Vol. 2, 720.

³⁵ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 122-125; Norton, 10-11; Weigley, History, 144-146.

wartime officer corps provided leadership for these reforms, but the driving intellect behind them was Secretary of War John C. Calhoun (1817-1825). Frustrated with military unpreparedness when the war began, Calhoun explicitly sought to professionalize the army. Using rhetoric familiar to readers of Adam Smith, Calhoun justified maintaining a large, peacetime force on the basis of growing national wealth, population, and geographic size. He achieved an ideological shift within the Democratic-Republican party, which became strongly committed to a permanent, regular army for the first time, resolving that long-standing rift over military policy into a national consensus. With that acceptance, political agreement on the army's role and organization became much simpler to obtain.³⁶

Calhoun quickly attained a reputation as an energetic administrator. He first tackled army finances and reduced unsettled war debts from \$45 million to just \$3 million. Concerned about his ability to control the widely dispersed army, he established a headquarters in Washington and moved several staffs into one central location. In addition to those offices, Calhoun developed several others in what became known as the bureau system, an organizational ancestor of the modern general staff. These bureaus--adjutant and inspector general, subsistence, engineering, quartermaster, paymaster, medical, and ordnance--handled army personnel and logistics administration. To govern their activities and those of the entire army, Calhoun assigned Winfield Scott the task of

³⁶ Lawrence D. Cress, Citizens in Arms: The Army and the Militia in American Society to the War of 1812 (Chapel Hill, NC, 1982), 172-177; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 116-117.

writing comprehensive new regulations. Congress first approved Scott's regulations in 1820, but they grew and evolved through numerous editions and guided army business for several decades. Calhoun's final organizational reform was the appointment of a commanding general of the army in 1821. That office suffered a controversial existence because of administrative and Constitutional questions about the powers of the head of the army vis-a-vis the president and the secretary of war. But a single military commander continued lead the army for the rest of the nineteenth century.³⁷

Calhoun constructed his most enduring legacy in response to congressional pressure to make further cuts in military strength. Asked to give his opinion on how to reduce the force, Calhoun propounded his "expansible army" concept, the most comprehensive restatement of military policy since Washington's rationale for a peacetime army in 1796. Calhoun took the opportunity to explain "the general principles on which it is conceived our military peace establishment ought to be organized." He noted that it was no longer necessary to justify a permanent army, since that issue was no longer in question. He also argued that the army's role as a frontier constabulary and coastal defense was still important, but now secondary to a continuing obligation of preparing for war. "War is an art," he wrote, "to attain perfection in which, much time and experience, particularly for the officers, are necessary."³⁸

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 120-122; Weigley, *History*, 133-135, 138; Skelton, "Commanding General," 117-118; Skelton, "Professionalization," 448-450.

³⁸ John C. Calhoun, "Report on the Reduction of the Army, communicated to the House of

Calhoun proposed maintaining a peacetime force that would facilitate a rapid transition to war.

To give such an organization, the leading principles in its formation ought to be, that, at the commencement of hostilities, there should be nothing either to new model or to create. The only difference, consequently, between the peace and the war formation of the army, ought to be in the increased magnitude of the latter. . . .³⁹

His reorganization of the army staff, already near completion when he wrote this message in 1820, accomplished one-half of that end. The peacetime staff should have had no difficulty continuing its operations into war. The line regiments, on the other hand, would have to expand and do so quickly. Calhoun's plan was to retain a cadre of officers in command of undermanned units that would then expand in wartime to full strength.

At the commencement of war, an adequate number of experienced officers is of greater importance than that of disciplined troops, even were it possible to have the latter without the former; for it is not difficult to form, in a short time, well-disciplined troops, by experienced officers,--but the reverse is impossible.⁴⁰

Calhoun's proposal to Congress failed to pass in the form he requested, but a weakened form of the measure became law in 1821. Nevertheless, the ideas he put forth were both novel in American military policy and destined to have lasting effect: while Congress did

Representatives, December 12th, 1820," in The Works of John C. Calhoun, Richard C. Crallé, ed., (6 vols., New York, 1855), V, 80-93. Quotations on pp. 80, 82.

³⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 92.

not explicitly endorse the cadre concept, future legislation conformed to the principle. Calhoun explicitly recognized that military officership was a full-time job. Guarding the coastline or the western frontier was an important task, but they clearly took second place to the fundamental duty of military leaders in peacetime--preparing for future war. Leading soldiers was a calling that demanded thorough education and dedication to continual hard work in the science of training men and commanding them in combat.⁴¹

The army of 1821 bore little resemblance to its pre-war progenitor. The new staff and line organization gave it a coherent structure. Veterans of the War of 1812 furnished a seasoned cadre for future mobilization. West Point had become a reliable source of competent junior officers. Also in 1821 a board of engineers described, for the first time, a comprehensive strategic plan of defense against foreign invasion, integrating the resources of the navy, the army, the militia, and the seacoast defenses. Most important, the army now had a clear vision of its purpose--to prepare for war.⁴²

A rich irony attended the success of Calhoun and the army reformers. Just when they established the army's *raison d'etre*, the nation and the world embarked on a century of relative tranquillity. The Treaty of Ghent coincided with the Concert of Europe in 1815, beginning four decades of almost undisturbed peace, followed by several more that

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 80-93; Weigley, *History*, 163; Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 126-129.

⁴² Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 125.

were relatively serene in the context of modern history. One historian has termed this century in American history an “era of free security.” Indeed, after the War of 1812 the United States avoided another foreign attack until 1941. The army was preparing for a European invasion that never came.⁴³

Yet in the Jacksonian Era the army officer corps built most, but not all, of a professional structure on the foundations laid by Calhoun and the army reformers. The principal forms of this system were the officer corps’ articulation of its institutional role, the growth of a professional sub-culture, and an organizational autonomy that allowed the army largely to govern itself. These evolutions fostered the maturation of professional corporateness and responsibility.

Yet during the forty years following Calhoun’s reforms, the army followed two disparate paths. One part of the army never stopped preparing for war with a European foe and the other part rarely stopped fighting the Indians in North America. For the first group--the growing general staff and particularly the “scientific corps”--the corps of engineers, the corps of topographical engineers, and the ordnance corps--these were indeed years of peace and an opportunity to develop a flourishing profession. The second group--the line officers in the infantry, cavalry, and artillery--endured stultifying years of constabulary duty unpredictably punctuated by terrifying days in combat. Thus, while corporateness fully developed, competing sub-groups also defined themselves within the

⁴³ C. Vann Woodward, “The Age of Reinterpretation,” American Historical Review LXVI (1960): 1-19.

officer corps community.⁴⁴

To be sure, these generalizations were not valid for every officer. In fact, staff and line officers had much in common--certainly more in common with each other than either had with civilians. But the staff-line dichotomy usefully illustrates differences in the pace of professionalization within the army, especially in the accumulation and development of professional expertise, which is the focus of the next chapter.

The most fundamental change that affected officer corporateness was a new-found stability. Army expansions and contractions before the War of 1812 had dashed officers' hopes for long careers of steady advancement. Furthermore, military salaries were such that officers had often supplemented their incomes with other offices or private pursuits.

After the 1821 army reduction a number of factors fostered stability. The officer corps grew slowly and steadily, creating a long-term demand for officers. In 1860 the army register contained the names of 1,108 officers, a figure just over double the 1821 total of 540. As the corps grew, officers began to serve longer. In 1797 the average career had spanned just 10 years and only one officer in eight served as long as 20 years. In contrast, the majority of antebellum officers served for over 20 years and the average

⁴⁴ During this same period, the militia system, which President Jackson still took pains to call "the bulwark of our defense," collapsed into a laughable hodge-podge of outlandishly costumed social clubs. The absence of both a near and credible threat and an enforceable system of discipline and training destroyed the already ailing structure. Weigley, *History*, 156-157; Cunliffe, 177-212; John K. Mahon, "A Board of Officers Considers the Condition of the Militia in 1826," *Military Affairs* XV (Summer 1951): 85-94.

career length was over 22 years. Resignation rates, except for one period during the 1830s, stayed below 4 percent per year. Indeed, most officers died while still on active duty, although that statistic reflects the lack of a retirement system and the prevalence of disease as much as a commitment to service. Army salaries became more generous, allowing officers to become more comfortable, though never affluent. The notion of officership as a part-time or insecure job began to disappear. An army commission offered social and financial security that most were reluctant to sacrifice.⁴⁵

West Point became another source of corporate stability. During the early 1820s the number of graduates grew as the number of available commissions shrank with the army reduction. As a result, the academy could easily fill every spot and did so for 40 years, except during wartime expansions and in certain specialty branches. West Pointers began to dominate the junior officer ranks and, later, the field grades. Comprising less than 15 percent of the officer corps in 1817, academy graduates accounted for 64 percent by 1830 and 76 percent in 1860. Concomitantly, West Pointers began filling all branches of the army. Over the course of several years the executive branch relinquished to Congressmen the power to appoint cadets. Congressional appointment not only gave West Point a new set of political allies in Washington; it also broadened the corps of cadets geographically and politically.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 131-136, 181-183, 190-192, 200-202, 212-217; Coffman, 50-53, 99.

⁴⁶ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 137-142; Coffman, 45-47; James L. Morrison, Jr., "The

Yet delegating to members of Congress authority to appoint cadets did not harm corporateness and responsibility, as the decentralized commissioning process had done during the Confederation. The reason was a phenomenon, sometimes called socialization, that bound West Pointers together through shared experience. Graduates brought to the officer corps not just a common education, but a four-year immersion into a unique military environment. Under Thayer's firm hand, West Point became a demanding milieu of discipline, competition, and pressure. Regulations governed every aspect of cadet life. Military drill consumed countless hours of cadets' lives. Plebes endured mindless harrassment and hazing at the hands of upperclass tormenters, who were, in turn, pursued and punished by junior officers. Oral and written examinations determined entrance to the corps of cadets, advancement to each successive stage of cadetship every six months, and final matriculation from the academy. The threat of failure was real indeed, as attrition rates fluctuated between one-third and two-thirds of each class. The academy board of visitors frequently attended examinations, so failing could mean not just instant expulsion, but also public humiliation. The stress was almost unbearable, but shared hardship is unparalleled as an emotional adhesive, and feelings of relief and pride in achievement attended each success:

My troubles are over for a while. I have been examined both in Philosophy and Chemistry. I did not miss in either, which was much better luck than I expected to have. I am most heartily glad that the dreaded thing is over. I

Best School in the World": West Point, the Pre-Civil War Years, 1833-1866 (Kent, Ohio, 1986), 15; Skelton, "Professionalization," 450-456, Weigley, History, 169.

feel now like a free man. For the last 5 or 6 weeks I have done nothing but study from morning till night, every day in the week, now I have nothing to do, but to sleep and grow fat.⁴⁷

Every graduate accumulated a congeries of shared memories that bound him to his alma mater and all his brothers.⁴⁸

The West Point experience accomplished a number of goals for the graduates, the army, and the nation. The academy nationalized the officer corps by bringing together boys from every state and both political parties. Then, it gave cadets long and continuous exposure to a professional military ethos. All graduates absorbed that value system to one degree or another. The academy forged friendships with classmates and fellow graduates and fostered loyalties to West Point and the army. On a more mundane but still important level, West Point taught young men how to be junior officers by exposing them to a military environment, with its routine of discipline and administration. Finally, the academy gave its graduates a set of shared experiences and a sense of accomplishment. It made them unique. One graduate articulated his pride in his alma mater:

If there is a means stronger than any other of cementing the union of the States, and of perpetuating our government, it is the national Military Academy at West Point. To this institution young gentlemen are sent from all sections of the Union. They come together with all their sectional prejudices, habits, and knowledge. . . . Their former habits, manners, and prejudices soon become extinct. They form a new character, a national character, which is no where else formed in the country. . . . They are at an

⁴⁷ Cadet Life before the Mexican War, Sidney Forman, ed. (West Point, 1945), 17.

⁴⁸ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 172-179; Coffman, 46-49; Cadet Life before the Mexican War, passim.

age when impressions are deep and will long continue. The attachments of personal friendship there made will be lasting. They become a band of brothers. . . .⁴⁹

The resulting esprit de corps was invaluable in developing a corporate identity and a sense of national responsibility.

The West Point fraternity came to dominate the officer corps, imparting its sense of values and its folkways. Other men also entered the antebellum officer corps, but direct commissioning of civilians and enlisted men became rare. Most direct accessions occurred during discrete periods--the Seminole War, the Mexican War, and the army expansion in the 1850s. Most of these officers underwent some form of commissioning examination, and those tests became more rigorous as time went along. For example, beginning in 1832 ever more rigorous screening processes governed selection of army medical officers. President Polk politicized the selection process during the Mexican War in ways reminiscent of Adams, Jefferson, and Madison, but during the rest of the era, directly commissioned officers took some form of competency examination, eroding the influence of patronage and enhancing professional corporateness.⁵⁰

As the officer corps became more stable and homogeneous, it began to develop a sense of its corporate self. Officers not only saw themselves becoming more and more

⁴⁹ James Dalliba, Improvements in the Military Establishment of the United States (Troy, NY, 1822), 9, as quoted in Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 178. Captain Dalliba graduated from the USMA in 1811.

⁵⁰ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 137, 142-153; Coffman, 52-58; Cunliffe, 264-267.

alike, they saw themselves becoming more and more different from civilians. The USMA appointment process gathered cadets from both political parties and all regions of the country. Four years at West Point then levelled their differences, made graduates more national and less local in their world views, and dampened their political partisanship.⁵¹

Officers came to disdain politics and politicians. Partly, these attitudes reflected elitism: army officers were learning to prize objective standards of merit, even while antebellum politicians began appealing to the desires of an expanded electorate--elites referred to the democratic "mob." On another level, officers' political aloofness manifested the removal of military issues from partisan competition. Even more important was a new-found legitimacy in politics itself. In other words, political parties and candidates engaged in fair arguments with reasonable differences of opinion about what was best for the nation, and neither side questioned the need for a strong regular army. In consequence, officers comfortably distanced themselves from party politics and began to draw a line between the military and political world. Despite the high profiles of several soldier-presidents and presidential candidates, the reality is that only a small percentage of officers ever entered the political arena.⁵²

Regular officers were not completely divorced from the political world; nor were

⁵¹ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 172-179; Dalliba, 9; Coffman, 56, 92-96.

⁵² Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 282, 296-297; Coffman, 87-92; Cunliffe, 287-334; Weigley, History, 189.

they completely selfless. They frequently lobbied politicians for personal promotion and for service or branch interests. Letters and memoirs abound with references to correspondence and meetings between officers and civil government officials. The high concentration of officers in Washington and the relatively small size of the federal government combined to throw officers and politicians together socially and professionally. The seniority system made promotions painfully slow, but the steady growth of the army provided occasions for officers to bound ahead of contemporaries by joining a new regiment or a new branch of service. A letter or personal visit by a congressman to the president or secretary of war was a powerful weapon for an applicant, and one frequently employed. Likewise, officers of particular branches, especially the corps of engineers, sought to influence officials in promotion of their specialties. Officers favored no party in these dealings, and no party stood apart by showing unusual favor toward them. Officers were in, but not of, the political milieu.⁵³

Self-identity involves determining who one is and who one is not. If officers were not politicians, they were also not civilian frontiersmen, militiamen, or volunteers. Regulars disliked the latter two groups for their lack of professionalism and envied them for their rapid promotions and seemingly undeserved glory during the Mexican War. Officers on constabulary duty, which included the majority of line officers for most of their careers, distrusted the civilians whom they were required to regulate in their roles as civil

⁵³ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 282-297; Coffman, 82-84, 87-92.

administrators in western territories. While mediating between Indians and white settlers or enforcing trade laws, army officers sensed that civilians were often unscrupulous and not above exploiting the army for personal gain. Yet, despite their feelings, officers posted an impressive historical record of fairness and impartiality in the performance of onerous duty.⁵⁴

A sense of duty, a feeling of responsibility to carry out national policy, became central to officers' corporate identity. In distancing themselves from politicians and civilians and withdrawing from partisan politics, they accepted the primacy of civilian governmental leadership--civil control of the military. The army became apolitical--an objective tool for accomplishing public policy. In a sense, officers came to see themselves above the vulgar, democratic fray, always ready to serve the Constitution and the current tenants of political offices, regardless of party. Their stalwart professionalism, they felt, was a bulwark against the incompetence and corruption of politicians. Reminiscent of the feelings of Continental officers at the end of the Revolution, these attitudes were both patriotic and elitist. Nonetheless, this service ethic was essential to the healthy development of civil-military relations and military professionalism.⁵⁵

Second Lieutenant Ulysses S. Grant, who marched into Mexico in 1846, was justifiably proud of that professionalism:

⁵⁴ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 297-304; Coffman, 70-78.

⁵⁵ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 284, 297, 332, 335-338.

Every officer, from the highest to the lowest, was educated in his profession, not at West Point necessarily, but in the camp, in garrison, and many of them in the Indian Wars. . . . A better army, man for man, probably never faced an enemy than the one commanded by General Taylor in the earliest two engagements of the Mexican War.⁵⁶

The army officer corps proved its mettle in the war with Mexico. Having prepared for a defensive war, the United States invaded its southern neighbor and, surprisingly, soon dominated the conflict. Despite long supply lines, inferior numbers, and tenuous political support for the war, American forces mounted an amphibious operation against Vera Cruz that culminated in the capture of Mexico City six months later. Those officers who had shown such promise in the War of 1812 now audaciously led the army in a bold strategy admirably executed. The effort was not flawless, but the U.S. Army defeated the Mexican forces so decisively that finding a viable government with whom to discuss terms of surrender was one of the principal difficulties of the war. For a time, the United States armed forces seemed invincible.⁵⁷

Yet the army's headquarters in Washington had proven inadequate to the task of coordinating a war, especially one so far away. Winfield Scott, the brightest young officer to emerge from the War of 1812, now commanding general of the army, was an able administrator; but due to the independence, intransigence, and incompetence of the War

⁵⁶ Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant, E.B. Long, ed. Introduction by William S. McFeely. (New York, 1982), 84.

⁵⁷ For the history of this conflict see K. Jack Bauer, The Mexican War, 1846-1848 (New York, 1974).

Department's several bureaus, he was forced to become a one-man general staff. Scott advised the president, composed war plans, estimated logistical demands, and supervised the execution of preparations for war. When he left to go to Mexico and command the army in person, the War Department lost all sense of organization. The saving grace in Washington was President Polk's personal ability and his willingness to set the constitutional precedent of an active, wartime commander-in-chief.⁵⁸

War Department bureaus were ineffective partly because their chiefs traditionally were superannuated officers serving for life, due to lack of a retirement system. Moreover, the bureau chiefs, for all their years of service, had no professional schooling in the skills of army administration--they had learned on the job. They had little if any wartime experience supporting an army, for most Indian campaigns had been too brief, their locations too remote, and the forces conducting them too small to have required much support or direction from Washington. Without relevant education or experience, the War Department bureaus' record after Scott's departure for Mexico was one of slipshod logistical planning, misdirected effort, wasted time and money, and profiteering by ambitious suppliers. As events played out, the problems were not debilitating, but largely because of Scott's ability to improvise and subsist off the Mexican economy and Polk's personal involvement in the details of military administration. The army suffered

⁵⁸ Weigley, *History*, 178-179; Bauer, 73-74; Huntington, 185.

for want of youth and professionalism in its senior staff.⁵⁹

Still, the American forces had won a resounding victory. And if there was little to cheer in the senior levels of the army, Winfield Scott gave a large measure of credit to the younger, professional class of officers who had graduated from West Point:

I give it as my fixed opinion that but for our graduated cadets the war between the United States and Mexico might, and probably would, have lasted some four or five years, with, in its first half, more defeats than victories falling to our share, whereas in two campaigns we conquered a great country and a peace without the loss of a single battle or skirmish.⁶⁰

The Mexican War was the triumph of an army that had begun to master military skills at the lower end of the professional spectrum. The junior officer corps had proved itself capable, resourceful, and courageous. West Pointers commanded both regular and volunteer units. Engineers provided invaluable reconnaissance, prepared fortifications, and acted as Scott's general staff in the field. The artillery proved its value in each battle. Moreover, the "expansible army" concept seemed to work. As Grant remembered,

The volunteers . . . were . . . without drill or discipline at the start. They were associated with so many disciplined men and professionally educated officers, that when they went into engagements it was with a confidence they would not have felt otherwise. They became soldiers themselves almost at once.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Weigley, History, 179-181.

⁶⁰ Letter from Winfield Scott dated July 25, 1860, in "Report of the Commission Appointed Under the eighth section of the act of Congress of June 21, 1860, to examine into the organization, system of discipline, and course of instruction of the United States Military Academy at West Point," dated December 13 1860 Senate Miscellaneous Documents, 34th Congress, 2d Session, No. 3, (Washington, 1861), 176. Cited hereinafter as Davis Commission Report.

⁶¹ Grant, 84.

The legacy of the Mexican War was to remove any lingering doubts about the efficacy of maintaining a regular army.

Still, the inability of the general staff bureaus to support the forces in Mexico was indicative of a cultural divide within the army. As the army became a permanent force taking on numerous diverse tasks, divisions of labor among its various branches became pronounced. Differences among the branches were at once stabilizing and divisive. As careers became longer and more predictable, officers came to identify not only with the army, but also with the part of the army where they spent most of their lives--their own branches. Moreover, the pattern of one's life depended heavily upon one's branch. Combat arms, or line, officers constituted the bulk of the officer corps and spent most of their careers in the constabulary in small, widely dispersed garrisons. They spent their days with small units of soldiers, patrolling frontiers, protecting Indians and whites from one another, and providing government where there had been none before.⁶²

General staff officers, a large and growing minority of the officer corps, had more varied lives than line officers. Some of them were seconded line officers serving in regimental headquarters as adjutants. These positions and others like them were hiatuses from careers in the line. Permanent general staff officers, whether serving on bureaus in

⁶² Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 297-347; Coffman, 58-87; Weigley, History, 157-62; Thomas T. Smith, "West Point and the Indian Wars, 1802-1891," Military History of the West 24 (Spring 1994): 24-26.

Washington or elsewhere, were more or less divorced from the rest of the army, depending on the nature of their duties. Ordnance officers, quartermasters, subsistence officers, and engineers supervising fortification construction performed duties that carried them away from the line and gave them great autonomy and responsibility. Frequently, line officers served in staff bureaus on detached service, a practice that left frontier units short-handed and exacerbated tensions between staff and line. Still farther removed from the line army were those whose duties were not strictly military: paymasters, medical officers, topographical engineers, and engineers engaged in civil works.⁶³

Ordnance officers, engineers, and topographical engineers formed what was called the "scientific corps." Unlike the other general staff branches, these were not engaged strictly in matters of administration and logistics. The intellectual requirements and attainments of these officers were higher than in the rest of the army, a point underscored by the fact that they ordinarily joined their branches after graduation at the tops of their West Point classes.⁶⁴

The corps of engineers was the envy of the army. Their role in building coastal defenses was central to national defense strategy. Moreover, they had choice assignments, spending much of their time on the East coast building coastal forts and lighthouses,

⁶³ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 221-230; Coffman, 54-56.

⁶⁴ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 232; James L. Morrison, Jr., "The Best School", 8-9; Forest G. Hill, Roads, Railways, and Waterways: The Army Engineers and Early Transportation (Norman, Okla., 1957), 206.

improving harbors, and erecting bridges. Occasionally they ventured west to supervise construction of roads, railroads, and canals. Engineers enjoyed tremendous responsibility and prestige, often managing large civilian work forces and vast sums of money. The typical engineer spent little time with regular army soldiers, unless he was building a fort that happened to be occupied at the time. Richard Delafield, for instance, spent 48 years in the army building roads and forts, inspecting harbor defenses, and superintending the United States Military Academy. His exposures to the line army were but brief episodes in a long, distinguished career.⁶⁵

The duties of the topographical engineers, or “topogs,” often overlapped with the corps of engineers, with each branch performing tasks that strictly belonged to the other (the engineers absorbed the topogs in 1863). When on proper missions, however, topogs engaged mainly in civil works. Routine work included surveying roads, canals, and railroads. Their duties as cartographers led to challenging expeditions of exploration in the uncharted West, searching for paths across the continent and mapping boundaries, coastlines, and roads as they went. As one example of the overlap between engineers and topogs, Lieutenant George McClellan, an engineer, twice made surveying expeditions, once to find a transcontinental railroad route through the Cascades and again to chart the area that is now the Panhandle of Texas.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 225-230; Morrison, 8-9, 40; Weigley, History, 163-167.

⁶⁶ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 228-229; Morrison, 8-9; Weigley, History, 166-167; Coffman, 56.

Alfred Mordecai was commissioned from West Point in the corps of engineers, but he transferred to ordnance in the branch expansion of 1832. Ordnance officers commanded arsenals, superintended armories, inspected weapons contractors for quality control, and tested new types of weapons. Mordecai held all of these positions, as well as sitting on the important Ordnance Board, which, over the course of many years, developed a new system of artillery for the army.⁶⁷

The creation and expansion of the ordnance corps partially redressed the demotion of the artillery when the 1802 legislation founding the military academy linked the school to the corps of engineers. Until that time engineering and artillery had both been considered scientific branches. They were also closely related, inasmuch as artillery was as essential to fortifications as were the engineers who built them. The creation of the ordnance corps recognized advancements in gun technology and the science of metallurgy. A series of ordnance boards during the Jacksonian era put this science into practice. Artillery, as a branch, remained a part of the line, not the scientific corps, although it was accorded a status as first among equals within the line army.

The institutional roles of the various parts of the army were quite different and these differences fostered rivalries between the staff and the line. No professional jealousy was more intense than that felt by line soldiers toward the corps of engineers. For the line

⁶⁷ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 225-227; Morrison, 10.

officer, the basic fact of existence was frontier duty, despite the stated primacy in military policy of preparing for European war. Calhoun had pronounced the constabulary role secondary and had stipulated that considerations of it should not impinge on the manning and structure of the army. The engineers, on the other hand, were the branch beneficiary of Calhoun's established priorities. Calhoun had established a *raison d'etre* for the regular force, but, since it stood upon a concept of preparedness for war with a European foe to be fought at the water's edge from coastal fortifications, it applied more to the engineers than to the rest of the army. Far from being mere technicians, as they had been in eighteenth-century armies, American engineers became a *corps d'elite*. They had composed the first comprehensive statement of national strategic defense. Not surprisingly, it relied heavily on engineering expertise for the building of seacoast fortifications and a national transportation infrastructure. The corps of engineers labored assiduously and successfully to keep that conception of national defense foremost in the minds of political decisionmakers.⁶⁸

Such antipathies were both indicative of and detrimental to professionalism. No rift would have existed if officers had not developed the high degree of professional expertise that demanded allowed such divisions of labor. The feud between the ordnance corps--responsible for the testing and manufacture of field pieces--and the artillery--tactical employers of that product--is a case in point. On the other hand, rivalries within

⁶⁸ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 235-236, 291-293, 297-347; Calhoun, *Works*, V, 82.

the army, by their very nature, hampered the growth of corporate cohesion--they divided the officer corps from one another and encouraged them to work at cross-purposes.⁶⁹

Through the efforts of West Point superintendents and the heads of staff bureaus, and by the imprimatur of national military policy, the scientific corps, especially the corps of engineers, became an elite body of officers. Their duties were often more challenging, their postings were usually more pleasant, and even their compensations were more generous than their comrades in the line. Line officers, who saw themselves fighting, dying, and otherwise wasting away in service on the frontier, were understandably envious of engineers and other staff officers. Line officers felt undervalued for their contributions, and they probably were. The resultant rivalry between staff and line was harmful to corporate unity. Indeed, if policy had not changed so that West Point graduates were commissioned in all branches, it is conceivable that the corps of engineers and USMA might have seceded from the army, becoming a separate service altogether. They did not, but the elitism of a growing portion of the officer corps helps explain a divergent development of professional expertise between the staff and the line.

Still, the army officer corps had made tremendous strides in the Jacksonian Era, especially in the areas of professional responsibility and corporateness. The early national officer corps was hardly a corps at all, and its lack of professional attainment showed in the first two years of the War of 1812. In the wake of that debacle, however, a number of

⁶⁹ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 232-237.

salutary events coincided to promote military professionalism. A cadre of excellent leaders emerged from the war to lead the army in peacetime. An energetic secretary of war rationalized the War Department and gave the army a permanent mission: to prepare for war. And a national military academy emerged from its doldrums to become a vibrant instrument for socializing its graduates into a cohesive body of officers and imparting to them a system of values at whose center was an ethic of selfless duty to country. There were differences in the officer corps because of a high degree of specialization. Nonetheless the American military profession had become a “band of brothers.”

Chapter Four

“A System and Habit of Thought”

“An intellectual component is central to a professional orientation: a claim to the exclusive control of a body of specialized knowledge essential to the fulfillment of an important social need.”

William B. Skelton
An American Profession of Arms

In his masterly trilogy, The Americans, Daniel J. Boorstin explores a continuing theme: that Americans innovated because they had no other choice. They had to live by their wits in order to survive. Frequently they had no recourse to European precedent and had to invent new methods. On the growth of American manufacturing, Boorstin writes:

The system, which later was to have the look of grand invention and bold discovery, began in the casual experiments of men unencumbered by century-accumulated skills and intricate social regulations. If the American Factory System was a triumph of organization and of cooperation, it was also a triumph of naivete, for its essence was a loosening of habits and of ways of thinking. Ignorance and “backwardness” had kept Americans out of the old grooves. Important innovations were made simply because Americans did not know any better.¹

When they had an example from the Old World, usually England, Americans chose to edit the text. They found that social or legal constraints common and accepted on the other side of the Atlantic could not apply in America, where survival, often in a literal and physical sense, depended upon being able to move, to adapt, to improvise. Boorstin

¹ Daniel J. Boorstin, The Americans: The National Experience (New York, 1965), 21. See also Daniel J. Boorstin, The Americans: The Colonial Experience (New York, 1958) Chapter 26, “Knowledge Comes Naturally,” 159-163.

relates countless telling instances in law, government, medicine, religion, and business, wherein Americans, of necessity and often in ignorance, fashioned and invented ways of solving problems that opened new horizons and possibilities for future endeavors.

Nowhere was the need for adaptation greater than in the military sphere. Colonists improvised a system that was familiar to them from England, the obligation to universal military service in a community militia. Militia service became an American institution in the seventeenth century, coupled as it was with a fear and hatred of standing armies. The militia served each colony relatively well when employed for the purpose of local defense. Every man was a soldier when emergency demanded and every one returned to the plow or the blacksmith shop as soon as peace would allow. But when the colonies decided to unite and to become a nation, militias were incompetent to defend the greater polity. Domestic and frontier crises in the years following independence reinforced the validity of that conclusion. The militia had outlived its usefulness in a military sense. An American institution had run its course: another innovation was needed.

For many years the new nation capriciously experimented with a regular army. The Constitution enumerated powers for maintaining and controlling a permanent force in peacetime, but the necessity for a "standing army" remained a divisive issue in national politics. By the dawn of the nineteenth century a consensus emerged in favor of a regular army, but the size, quality and purpose of that force remained in question until the War of 1812--a crisis-cum-catalyst for national defense reform. The most notable and long-lived response to that stimulus was the development of a professional officer corps to lead the army. Over the course of several decades the officer corps grew into a corporate body

with a distinct sub-culture and an ethos centered on a collective sense of duty to the state. The focus of that responsibility was preparation for future wars. Clearly, given the army's recent wartime record, changes in military education and training were in order. New military ideas required new thinking about armies and tactics and strategy.

Yet who was willing to devote careful and rigorous study to military subjects when every man was supposed to be capable of soldiering as a matter of simple manhood and citizenship? Generals were born, the thinking went, not made. Simply to suggest that martial prowess was susceptible to improvement through the quiet perusal of books was to risk ridicule, for “[n]o rule, no study, or application, however assiduous, no experience, however long, can teach this part; it is the effect of genius alone.”²

Nonetheless in the first half of the nineteenth century American soldiers labored valiantly to build an intellectual foundation for their profession. Their efforts tended in two directions. They sought professional credibility in France, where Napoleon had brought unprecedented honor and glory to the military during his twenty-year career of conquest. And they cultivated an expertise in military and civil engineering that bore fruit in public acclaim and national service. Unfortunately, both lines of inquiry were borrowings from the Old World that stifled home-grown innovation and experiment of the

² Henry Lloyd, The History of the Late War in Germany (2 vols., London, 1781), II, xxi, as quoted in Samuel P. Huntington, The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), 30; Dennis Hart Mahan, Advanced Guard, Out-Post, and the Detachment Service of Troops, with the Essential Principles of Strategy, and Grand Tactics for the Use of Officers of the Militia and Volunteers (New York, 1864), 321-323. Hereinafter cited as Out-Post (1864).

kind that Boorstin might have celebrated and, more important, of the kind that the military needed in order to flourish professionally.

The principal conduit for military thinking was the United States Military Academy. As the Academy developed its own special and well-respected pedagogy, the “West Point experience” began to have an immense influence upon the direction of American military professionalization. As West Point graduates began to dominate the officer corps, the Academy furnished a homogeneity that helped to build the professional army and allowed it to generate systems of self-government needed to establish order, discipline, and rationality. Indeed, by mid-century the officer corps had made worthy marks in military leadership during the Mexican War, where the demands of the profession are greatest, and in military and civil engineering, where national need had beckoned them to build the country.

West Point aimed to train cadets to think as engineers--to gather information and to solve problems quickly--and it rewarded those who performed well with commissions in the scientific corps of the army. Those skills were invaluable for constructing fortifications and improving harbors. The country also found them quite useful for building roads and canals and railways. An army engineer’s life was one of challenge and accomplishment in important national enterprises--providing a coastal defense and developing a national infrastructure--but not in strictly military endeavors.

The frontier army, where the majority of officers lived and worked, suffered from a number of restraints on professional thinking. Service on the frontier was an obstacle to scholarly pursuits. There were few opportunities for professional reading or intellectual

discourse. Moreover, line officers developed a rough, anti-intellectual bias that equated military education with engineering, and purely military skills, especially leadership, with hard experience. Thus, newly commissioned West Pointers in the line found their intellectual efforts doubly unrewarding. Inferior performance at West Point had kept them from the most prestigious branches and choicest billets in the army. Then, when they arrived on the frontier, subalterns found their engineering educations of little value in daily dealings with Indians, frontiersmen, and their fellow soldiers. Indeed, they were likely to be told that frontier soldiering was a craft impervious to book-learning.

The intellectual component of the antebellum military profession was thrice flawed. An overreliance on French sources stifled innovation. Then the Military Academy perpetuated that dependence and compounded it by concentrating on military and civil engineering as the only military science worthy of study. Finally, the nation and the army rewarded achievement in endeavors more civilian than military, more staff than line. As a result, the intellects that evolved in the army allowed the profession to develop only so far. The products of such minds would be more deductive than inductive, more derivative than analytical, more formulaic than creative. When the profession needed men to concentrate on high-level problems of military policy and strategy, few were equal to the task.

This chapter will explore the ways in which American officers sought to build a body of specialized military knowledge--expertise. The first section will examine the articulation of a need for professional expertise and how that process eventually established a national military academy. Then we will study the founding of the United States Military Academy, its purposes, its curriculum, and its development into an

institution with many constituencies. This section will show how and why West Point intended its graduates to acquire a unique “system and habit of thought” on their way to becoming engineers. The final section will examine the effects of West Point, its graduates, and other army institutions on the corpus of military expertise that developed over forty years. It will assess the influence of that “system and habit of thought” on the intellectual milieu of the antebellum army.

Professionalism assumes that the practitioner must attain some special expertise. That assumption was foreign to most eighteenth-century minds, especially in regard to military officers. Military leadership was a calling for gentlemen. Great captains were “heaven-born generals,” possessed of a “natural genius.” To be sure, the greatest eighteenth-century commander, Frederick the Great, would have argued that training and plenty of it were essential to military leadership. But many influential military writers of the day--Saxe, Guibert, and Lloyd--believed that only noblemen of superior, innate ability had the capacity for successful military command. Just as clearly, many gentlemen did not possess such capabilities, as their battlefield failures attested. But an unchallenged consensus held that none but a gentleman could aspire to lead men in war: aristocratic birth was a necessary but not sufficient condition of officership.³

³ Huntington, 30; George W. Cullum, “Preface to the First Edition,” (1868) in George W. Cullum, Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy (3 vols., Boston, 1891) III, 6 (Cited hereinafter as Register.); Thomas E. Griess, “Dennis Hart Mahan: West Point Professor and Advocate of Military Professionalism, 1830-1871,” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1968), 321-323.

That tradition eroded slightly as military engineering and artillery became more complex endeavors. Gentlemen could not be expected to devote the time necessary to master the mundane and technical details of these specialties. Military commanders, although they might not have put it in such terms, were admitting the need for a division of labor, at least insofar as it was necessary to carry out such unglamorous, but admittedly essential, tasks. So artillerists and engineers slowly became specialists in most armies. They were a class apart and not considered as equals by aristocratic line commanders.⁴

As commanding general of the Continental Army Washington had tried to reserve commissions to those of gentle birth. He failed, not for want of trying, but for want of gentlemen. He doubtless would also have preferred to commission only Americans, but a dearth of home-grown military expertise, especially in artillery and engineering, forced him to accept European officers. A desire to sever that dependence guided Washington when he called for a military academy in his "Sentiments on a Peace Establishment."

Until a more perfect system of education can be adopted, I would propose that provision should be made at some Post or Posts where the principal Engineers and Artillerists should be stationed, for instructing a number of young Gentlemen in the Theory of the Art of War, particularly in all those branches of service which belong to the Artillery and Engineering Departments.⁵

⁴ Christopher Duffy discusses the advanced specialization and professionalization among engineers in The Fortress in the Age of Vauban and Frederick the Great, 1660-1789 (London, 1985). He argues that as engineering became more arcane, its skills became all but unattainable to line officers. Professionalized engineers became separatists, arrogant in their expertise. Over time, aristocratic field commanders, line officers all, relegated engineering to a secondary role in warfare.

⁵ George Washington, "Sentiments on a Peace Establishment," in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., The Writings of George Washington (39 vols., Washington, 1931-1944), 26: 396-7. Hereinafter cited as Writings.

Washington asserted that he wanted to preserve the science of war, but he also wanted to wean the army from foreign military experts.

Several proposals for military education arose in the following years. President Washington frequently called for an academy: in his fifth annual address to Congress he recommended affording officers “an opportunity for the study of those branches of the Military art which can scarcely ever be attained by practice alone.”⁶ In response Congress authorized a corps of artillerists and engineers in 1794. The school that opened at West Point was a precursor to the future military academy founded later on the same spot, but the early institution emphasized training rather than broader education. It enjoyed little success due to weak leadership, indiscipline, and a lack of instructors. There were no qualified Americans and the administration could not find and hire enough French officers to keep the school going. Obviously, Washington’s concerns about American dependence upon foreign military expertise were well-founded.⁷

Some suggested several schools to train officers for all branches of the army. Alexander Hamilton’s proposal to revive military education included four schools, a “Fundamental School” for all prospective officers and more advanced training schools for

⁶ *Ibid.*, 33: 166. Washington delivered this address on 3 December, 1793.

⁷ Sidney Forman, *The Educational Objectives of the U.S. Military Academy* (West Point, NY, 1951), 3-4; Theodore J. Crackel, *The Illustrated History of West Point* (New York, 1991), 60-66; “Extract of a letter from the Secretary of War to the Hon. Samuel Sewall, Chairman of the Committee of Defence, &c., dated June 28, 1798,” Exhibit B in “Reorganization of the Army,” Report communicated to Congress by President Adams on December 31, 1798, *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States. Military Affairs* (7 vols., Washington, 1832-1861), 1: 129 (Cited hereinafter as *ASPMA.*); Larry R. Donnithorne, “The Founding of West Point: Seeking the National Purposes in the First Federal Institution in Higher Education,” (unpublished paper, West Point, NY, undated), 3-5.

artillerists and engineers, cavalymen and infantrymen, and naval officers. This departure from the narrow construction of military science as pertaining primarily to artillery and engineering got little support from Congress. The earlier paradigm remained intact.⁸

Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson were bitter political enemies, the standard bearers of opposing ideologies that differed not just on the course but on the very nature of American democracy. So it is ironic, to say the least, that Jefferson drafted and signed the legislation that codified both the new political consensus on the regular army and the crowning achievement of that Federalist dream, a national military academy.

Jefferson had been the voice of American anti-militarism and anti-elitism in the Washington cabinet. He loathed the notion of a standing army and opposed the founding of a military school. Why, then, did he acquiesce as president? Jefferson's motives for establishing a military academy have vexed historians primarily because he, normally so prolific a writer, was all but silent on the subject.⁹ Scholars have interpreted his apparent inconsistency in various ways. Jefferson might have recognized the inevitability of a military academy and sought to co-opt the idea for his own purposes. He conceived of defense by a nation in arms and wished to obliterate the distinction between civil and military. He was attempting to compromise with a growing popular acceptance of the need for a standing army by attempting to create a populace of citizen-soldiers, to the

⁸ Crackel, 67; "Military Academy, and Reorganization of the Army," Report communicated to Congress by President Adams on January 14, 1800, *ASPMA* 1: 133; "Military Academy, communicated to the House of Representatives, February 13, 1800, by Secretary of War James McHenry," *ASPMA* 1: 142-144.

⁹ William B. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1991), 99; Crackel, 66.

point of advocating that military science be part of all university curricula. Also, as an enemy of elites, Jefferson might have favored a military academy and the teaching of military science in other universities as a way to dilute the influence of Revolutionary War officers and their descendants in the army. In the same vein, Jefferson was possibly reacting to the politicization of the officer corps under Adams and Hamilton: the academy might have seemed a means to “Republicanize” the officer corps. Moreover, by admitting boys from all social stations, almost without regard to their academic records, the Academy could have a levelling effect on the officer corps and break the grip of elite Federalists on the military.¹⁰ So the academy might have had three results attractive to Jefferson--reducing the influence of militarism, elitism, and Federalism.

Aside from those negative motives--in the sense of trying to prevent an unwanted outcome--Jefferson might also have held positive aspirations for the academy. As one of America’s foremost men of science, he had long advocated a national scientific university. Specifically, Jefferson was an advocate of education with a practical purpose, as opposed to studying the classics, the traditional means of educating gentlemen. Perhaps, lacking congressional support for that enterprise, the president decided to take what was politically feasible, a military academy, and turn it into a national academy of science. Likewise, seeing no need for a military elite, Jefferson, president of an expanding nation,

¹⁰ Morrison, 2; Crackel, 71-75; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 98-99.

could see a need for engineers. Hence he established an army corps of engineers that was legislatively synonymous with the new military academy.¹¹

A noteworthy aspect of the 1802 act was that it omitted artillery from the clauses establishing the Military Academy. Earlier proposals for a military academy and the earlier incarnations of West Point had included artillery with engineers. In 1802 the artillery became a distinct entity separate from the engineers and without its own educational institution. The practical effect of that separation was to elevate the corps of engineers to elite status and to equate military engineering with military science. Military education became synonymous with an engineering curriculum. Perhaps unwittingly, Jefferson sowed the seeds for a peculiarly American brand of professional military expertise.¹²

Jefferson's intent, elusive as it is to the historian, is also less important in this analysis than the consequences of actions that he and others took during the school's founding and subsequent development into an institution with many constituencies.

¹¹ James Rainey, "The Establishment of the United States Military Academy: The Motives and Objectives of President Jefferson," (paper presented to the American Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia, 14-15 April 1989), 30-39; Stephen E. Ambrose, Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point (Baltimore, 1966), 18; Crackel, 72.

¹² Crackel, 79-80. Samuel P. Huntington blames Jefferson's philosophy for fostering a general retardation of military professionalism through a phenomenon he calls "technicism." Jefferson long denied the need for a regular army, preferring to rely on the militia for defense. He wanted to obliterate any distinction between the civil and military spheres. Jefferson, Huntington argues, "desired to turn the nation into an armed camp." To proliferate military service was to demand universal military training. Jefferson wanted every college to educate students in military science. "Quantitatively," argues Huntington, "military force was indistinguishable from the whole of society; qualitatively, military science was indistinguishable from the whole of science." Hence officers tended to acquire technical skills, especially at West Point, that made them "more engineering-minded than military-minded." And they had closer ties to civilians with similar skills than to other officers who did not. Huntington, 195-203.

Americans borrowed from Europeans the ideas for a national university and for a national military college. But they altered both ideas--in this instance combining them. The resulting institution, the United States Military Academy, was neither and both. Boorstin has argued that the United States never had a national university and that American higher education is the envy of the world for the lack. But one could also argue that West Point was in some sense intended to fill that role. Even more clearly West Point was meant to be a national military school. To some extent, the Military Academy filled both roles and failed, at least in part, at filling them. Dependent upon federal funding, and, therefore, the goodwill of the electorate, for its very existence, West Point had to play many roles to satisfy many constituencies.

By tying the Military Academy so closely with the corps of engineers--the legislation made the two synonymous--the 1802 act also intertwined their futures and purposes. Jefferson's naming of Jonathan Williams as first superintendent compounded that decision. The nephew and long-time assistant of Benjamin Franklin, Williams had worked and studied under his uncle in Paris for many years. A graduate of Harvard, he was a scientist and an engineer with a detailed understanding of l'Ecole Polytechnique, the French school of military engineering. Jefferson made Williams, a man with no military experience, chief of engineers and superintendent of the Military Academy.¹³ Williams took the conflation of his two roles quite seriously:

¹³ Crackel, 79-80; Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 99-101; Cullum, III, 477-486; *The Public Statutes at Large of the United States of America* (Boston, 1850). Vol. 2, 137. (Hereinafter cited as 2 *Stat.L.*) Jefferson and Williams had been personally acquainted since their days together in Paris in 1784.

The Corps of Engineers and Military Academy were so closely connected by the peace establishment of 1802 as to identify them as one, of which West Point was made the permanent station. By the strict literal construction of this law, it was a school for the science of an engineer, and for the use of engineers alone. . .¹⁴

An enthusiastic booster of both his institutions, Williams saw USMA's purpose as providing officers for his corps of engineers, which would, in turn, become an educated elite within the military and the nation:

[N]ever lose sight of our leading *star*, which is not a little mathematical school, but a great national establishment to turn out characters which, in the course of time, shall equal any in Europe. . . . We must always bear it in mind that our officers are to be men of science, and such as will by their acquirements be entitled to the notice of learned societies.¹⁵

Logically, then, given his standpoint, he agreed with Jefferson that the curriculum at West Point should not reflect the prevailing educational trend of studying the classics. Instead West Point taught cadets courses in drawing, mathematics, engineering, and the language of European science--French.

Williams was brilliant, but his frequent absences on inspection tours as chief of engineers and an unfortunate tendency to resign during fits of pique caused the Academy to suffer from want of leadership. When he was present he tended to expend his energy pursuing less worthy goals, such as administrative disputes over command and the relocation of the Academy to Washington. Moreover, Williams's dogged insistence on

¹⁴ Cullum, Register III, 554. Cullum quotes a letter of unknown date from Williams to Congressman Peter B. Porter. Williams goes on to lament: "but the interpretation of the law has constituted it a school for the instruction of all cadets of the army." He asks for more professors "[t]o effect the latter purpose."

¹⁵ Ibid., 488.

training engineers hampered the Academy's ability to affect the rest of the army. Yet Williams's boosterism for the corps of engineers helped to overturn the elitist prejudices of the pre-professional army. No longer could line officers consider themselves superior to the engineers. One reason was that growing American egalitarianism was beginning to defeat such snobbishness. But Williams was not after social levelling within the officer corps. He surpassed societal trends and succeeded in creating a new elite--a *corps du genie*. He lobbied aggressively to secure their status. If he did not begin the rivalry between staff and line in the army, he certainly inflamed it.¹⁶

Under Williams's tenure West Point made a modest start as a Military Academy, but, predictably, it showed more promise as an engineering school. Despite his bias, when the War of 1812 began half the school's graduates were artilleryists, but the highest graduates were in the corps of engineers, some showing great potential. But the graduates had a negligible impact on the course of the war, partly because they were junior, but more importantly because of their concentration in two technical branches.¹⁷

Williams's final resignation in July, 1812 coincided with the nadir of the Academy's history and its rebirth. Neglect by the Madison Administration and Williams's absence left the Academy with no cadets or instructors for over eighteen months between 1811 and 1813. For all practical purposes the Academy was dead. But an act of Congress in 1812, mostly a response to the war crisis, increased the number of instructors,

¹⁶ Crackel, 82-90; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 99-105.

¹⁷ Rainey, 44-47; Crackel, 74.

raised the strength of the cadet corps to 250, mandated academic and age standards for applicants, and appropriated \$25,000 for improvements at West Point. The legislation also authorized graduates to be commissioned in all branches of the service, giving the Academy a much broader constituency within the army.¹⁸

After early embarrassments during the War of 1812 reform was the order of the day in the army, and West Point was no exception. With the Academy on a firm institutional footing, inasmuch as its public support seemed assured, the opportunity beckoned to examine West Point's purpose and direction. The army and the school debated changing directions; instead, they reinforced prevailing trends.

Joseph G. Swift became superintendent upon Williams's resignation just as the salutary effects of the 1812 legislation offered an opportunity to resuscitate the Academy. Swift felt that the curriculum concentrated too narrowly on engineering. West Point graduates, in his estimation, should have been better prepared for careers that would require them to work with civilian officials and business leaders--some of the best educated men in the country. He wanted to add courses in history, geography, and ethics to give them a broader education, but the demands of the war required him to shorten the course. Improvements would have to wait for more peaceful times.¹⁹

Alden Partridge, an instructor at USMA from 1807 until he succeeded Swift at the end of the war, also felt that the Academy's curriculum overemphasized engineering. He

¹⁸ Crackel, 92-94; 2 Stat.L., 720; Forest G. Hill, Roads, Railways, and Waterways: The Army Engineers and Early Transportation (Norman, Okla., 1957), 14.

¹⁹ Crackel, 93-5.

believed that West Point should provide military training to officers bound for the regular army and the militia, not just the corps of engineers. Unlike Swift, however, he worked against instilling academic rigor into the course of study, preferring a narrower focus on military drill. Arrogating power, he graduated cadets and commissioned them whenever he felt them fit for leadership: Partridge alone judged when a young man had acquired military “genius.” His tenure left the Academy utterly without objective standards to measure cadet performance or potential for military service. Partridge’s insufferable personality, and his dismissal from the Academy on the personal orders of President Monroe, made him a vocal and implacable enemy of West Point for the rest of his life. Significantly, his most frequent criticisms were of the Academy’s overreliance on French expertise and its nearly exclusive concentration on mathematics and engineering.²⁰

In a similar but more constructive vein, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun argued the case for expanding the Academy’s curriculum in a report to Congress in 1820.

The Military Academy has acquired a character and importance which seem not to have been contemplated in its original institution. . . . [I]nstead of being constituted wholly of corps of engineers, as at its original institution and being intended to educate officers exclusively for that corps, it now comprehends within its scheme of education officer[s] of every arm of the service.²¹

²⁰ Marcus Cunliffe, *Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775-1865* (Boston, 1968), 151-156, 257-260; Crackel, 96-103.

²¹ John C. Calhoun, “Report on the Military Academy At West Point, communicated to the House of Representatives, February 25th, 1820,” *ASPMA*, 2: 75-98; *The Works of John C. Calhoun*, Richard C. Crallé, ed. (6 vols., New York, 1855), V, 73-74.

Calhoun's principal contribution to military professionalism was his vision of purpose for the army: to prepare for war. Preparation meant education and training, especially of the officer corps. "Natural genius," if it existed at all, was inadequate qualification for military leadership. Moreover, military education, in order to fulfill its goals, had to benefit every type of officer. All army officers, not just those in the technical branches, needed a thorough education to attain the expertise required to perform their duties. Because of this expanded purpose, Calhoun wanted to remove the Academy from control of the corps of engineers and to make it a school for all officers. Under his plan a West Point education would be "full and complete for officers of infantry," but further education at schools of application and practice would be necessary for artillerists and engineers, their skills being more demanding than the infantry's. The practice of educating all officers grew in the following decades as a greater and greater proportion of the officer corps matriculated from West Point. But Calhoun's idea of adding schools of practice for technical training achieved only marginal success. Moreover, the Academy remained firmly in control of the corps of engineers. The curriculum and, consequently, the nature of American military expertise reflected that hegemony.²²

In 1815 Superintendent Swift had no doubt as to where to obtain the latest and best ideas on military education:

An extended organization of the Military Academy was proposed, and to that effect I recommended that two of our best officers be sent to Europe

²² Weigley, *History*, 145-7, 153; Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 122-3; *Works of Calhoun*, V, 79, 72-80, 54-57.

to examine the works of France etc., and on the Rhine and the low countries. . . .²³

The answers Swift sought were not to be found within the United States or its recently victorious army. American affinity for French military thinking flowed from French assistance during the Revolution, Napoleon's dominance on the battlefields of Europe, American antipathy for the British, and the direct influence of the French on Jefferson and Jonathan Williams. Despite the recent destruction of Napoleon's empire and army, Swift instinctively reacted to a need to improve the Military Academy by dispatching a delegation to Europe and, especially, France, the seat of military expertise. His reaction was typical of American officers. Whether that attitude manifests a feeling of inferiority is an open question. Most Americans would not have confessed to feeling culturally inferior to the French or other Europeans: America was a "City upon a Hill," a grand experiment that the world would one day want to emulate. But American soldiers, desiring to build a profession almost from scratch, looked across the Atlantic to "the sole repository of military science"--France. American military experience, checkered at best, hardly compared to two decades of glorious marches across Europe by citizen armies numbering in the hundred thousands. The French record--hence, the French profession--was demonstrably superior to the American.²⁴

²³ Joseph Gardner Swift, The Memoirs of Gen. Joseph Gardner Swift, LL.D., U.S.A., First Graduate of the United States Military Academy, West Point, Chief Engineer, U.S.A. from 1812 to 1818, H. Ellery, ed. (Worcester, Mass., 1890), 137-138.

²⁴ Hill, 16; R. Ernest Dupuy, Where They Have Trod: The West Point Tradition in American Life (New York, 1940), 138; Aloysius A. Norton, A History of the United States Military Academy Library (Wayne, NJ, 1986), 5-11; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 167.

Most historians have pointed to close professional ties between the American and European military professions as a boon to the former. They argue that American soldiers benefitted from correspondence and association with European, mainly French, officers by becoming part of an international profession. Moreover, by borrowing from the more established armies of Europe, Americans avoided “reinventing the wheel.”²⁵ But following Boorstin’s logic, such an association becomes more a hindrance than a help. Relying upon French expertise, as American soldiers instinctively did, fostered a dependency upon the felt superiority of Old World ideas that stifled intellectual innovation in America.

Major Sylvanus Thayer and Lieutenant Colonel William McRee answered Swift’s summons and sailed for Europe armed with letters of introduction from President Monroe. During two years in France they inspected fortifications at Lille, Cherbourg, and Brest and studied at prestigious l’Ecole Polytechnique and the Engineering and Artillery School at Metz. In addition to a wealth of knowledge, the two engineers made two acquisitions that profoundly influenced the direction of American military education. They purchased and sent back nearly twelve hundred books, almost all in French, on the subjects of mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, geography, military and civil engineering, natural history, military history, and military art and science. These volumes became the foundation of the Military Academy library. Although the library expanded consistently

²⁵ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 238-259; Norton, 5-7; Archer Jones, Civil War Command and Strategy: The Process of Victory and Defeat (New York, 1992), 265-6; William H. Goetzmann, Army Exploration and the American West, 1803-1863 (New Haven, Conn., 1959), 12-17; J. Fred Rippey, Joel R. Poinsett, Versatile American (Durham, NC, 1935), 171.

over the ensuing years, it retained that French dominance for over half a century. Equally important was Thayer's recruitment of a group of French scholars to West Point to teach fencing, drawing, mathematics, engineering, and French. Under Thayer's leadership these men brought "the sole repository of military science" to the Military Academy and there influenced a generation of officers.²⁶

Upon his return from Europe in 1817, Thayer became superintendent at West Point, commencing a new era in military education. Thayer was a Dartmouth and USMA graduate and an engineer in the Jonathan Williams tradition: elitist, intelligent, and dedicated to his branch. He also possessed legendary self-discipline and a leader's vision. His reform of the Military Academy was comprehensive. With Thayer's arrival, as George Cullum later put it, "[t]he wand of the new Carnot waved over all, enducing strength and symmetry from . . . chaos." Cullum's description is doubly apt. Carnot was the war minister who had salvaged the *ancien regime's* military advances and blended them with the spirit of revolutionary France. Thayer would do much the same at West Point, taking ideas half-started by his predecessors and adding them to the methods he had learned abroad at l'Ecole Polytechnique. Moreover, Thayer's, like Carnot's, was a decidedly French military system.²⁷

²⁶ Norton, 10-11; Hill, 14-15, 206; Dale E. Floyd, "U.S. Army Officers in Europe, 1815-1861," in Proceedings of The Citadel Conference on War and Diplomacy, 1977, David H. White and John W. Gordon, eds., (Charleston, SC, 1979), 26; Griess, 71.

²⁷ Cunliffe, 157; Crackel, 121-2.

His most enduring legacy became known as the “Thayer method,” an integrated pedagogical and disciplinary regime that put each cadet under tremendous stress, gave him little time to call his own, and immersed him in a demanding curriculum. The Academy redoubled its emphasis on mathematics, engineering, and science, emulating the French military schools Thayer had visited. Recent notions of expanding the curriculum disappeared. Although some criticized this approach, it was thoroughly in keeping with the intent of producing engineers.

The Thayer method depended upon a system of quantifiable standards. With the faculty’s participation Thayer developed a four-year curriculum that prescribed the courses each cadet would study and master before graduation and commissioning. Professors divided cadets into small sections according to their demonstrated ability, the highest rated students in the first section, and so on. Instructors, able to give close attention to each cadet, taught and tested according to Thayer’s three pedagogical principles:

- I. Every man in every subject.
- II. Every man proficient in everything.
- III. Every man every day.²⁸

In other words, the entire curriculum was compulsory, and not only did each cadet have to master each subject; he had to prove his competence in daily oral and written recitation.

To facilitate this method, West Point pioneered the use of blackboards in the classroom.

²⁸ Charles W. Larned, “The Genius of West Point,” in The Centennial of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, 1802-1902, George W. Cullum, ed. (2 vols. Washington, 1904), I, 476; Sidney Forman, The Educational Objectives of the U.S. Military Academy (West Point, 1951), 8.

Thayer required instructors to submit weekly progress reports on each student. Finally, an order of merit list mathematically tabulated each cadet's standing within his class based upon his academic and disciplinary records. That ranking determined many rewards, most important of which was branch selection upon graduation. These exacting standards stood in stark contrast to the recent nepotism of Alden Partridge.²⁹

Thayer also instilled firm military discipline, another change that set him apart from his lax and popular predecessor. He drafted regulations to govern every aspect of life at West Point and later added a system of demerits that allowed officers to tabulate mathematically just how miscreant a cadet had become. Thayer placed cadets into a military hierarchy based upon their seniority and performance. He organized them into companies and hired a commandant and tactical officers to command them, oversee their military drill and parades, and to supervise another innovation--a summer encampment for military training. Using translated French manuals, tactical officers trained cadets in practical engineering and infantry, cavalry, and artillery tactics. But their instruction was dull and dogmatic in comparison to the path-breaking pedagogy in mathematics and engineering. The disparity gave cadets the unmistakable and correct impression that the school valued engineering more than tactics.³⁰ Still, for the first time West Point essayed to do justice to both terms in its title--it became a military academy.

²⁹ Weigley, History, 145-7; Hill, 15-17; Crackel, 104-5, 114-115.

³⁰ James L. Morrison, "Educating the Civil War Generals: West Point, 1833-1861," Military Affairs XXXVIII (September, 1974): 109-110; Weigley, History, 145-147; Hill, 14-17; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 123-5, 172-3; Crackel, 96-103, 106-110.

Semi-annual examinations took place at the end of each term. Each cadet recited orally in every subject to demonstrate mastery of the entire course. Failure in any test meant almost certain dismissal--Thayer evicted 21 young men in the first examination he conducted. Pomp and ceremony attended the spring examinations each June. Preceded by parades with cadets marching and the band playing, the superintendent escorted the board of visitors to the examination hall to observe each cadet in his trial. George Ticknor, secretary of the 1826 Board of Visitors, painted this scene:

. . . a little before eight o'clock, Thayer puts on his full-dress coat and sword, and when the bugle sounds we are always at Mr. Cozzens's, where Thayer takes off his hat and inquires if the President of the Board is ready to attend at the examination-room; if he is, the Commandant [sic] conducts him to it with great ceremony. If he is not ready, Thayer goes without him; he waits for no man.

In the examination-room Thayer presides at one table, surrounded by the Academic Staff; General [Sam] Houston [president of the Board of Visitors] at the other, surrounded by the Visitors. In front of the last table two enormous blackboards, eight feet by five, are placed on easels; at each of the boards stand two cadets, one answering questions and demonstrating, and the other three preparing the problems that are given to them. In this way, if an examination of sixteen young men lasts four hours on one subject, each of them will have had one hour's public examination on it; and the fact is, that each of the forty cadets in the upper class will tonight have had about five hours' personal examination. While the examination goes on, one person sits between the tables and asks questions, but other members of the Staff and the Board join in the examination frequently, as their interest moves them. The young men have that composure that comes with thoroughness, and unite, to a remarkable degree, ease with respectful manners towards their teachers. . . .³¹

³¹ George Ticknor to his wife, 5 June-12 June 1826, in George Ticknor, Life, Letters, and Journals of George Ticknor, George S. Hillard, ed. (2 vols. Boston, 1876), I, 374. Ticknor, an eminent educator at Harvard and Dartmouth, was a friend of Thayer's and stayed with him in the Superintendent's quarters during the visit. Mr. Cozzens's was the hotel at West Point. Ibid., 372-375.

The spectacle of parade and examination was magnificent, as annual board reports routinely attest. But imagine the mental and emotional stress on each reciting cadet, recognizing that his slightest imperfection reflects discredit not only upon himself, but also upon West Point's public image.³²

Thayer keenly understood the importance of the Academy's image. Without public support the school might have been abolished and, in fact, many critics attempted just that. Thayer was more than an able administrator; he was a skillful political operator, a courtly gentleman and a gracious, cultivated host, whose "voice was low, distinct and very impressive; and when he spoke all present would listen with rapt attention." Thayer put these skills to work for the Academy, annually welcoming the abovementioned board of visitors to inspect West Point during the spring examinations. Distinguished military, academic, and political leaders, "versed in military and other science," and including many of the Academy's critics in Congress, served on the board. Thayer deftly converted them to enthusiastic supporters by putting the school's best foot forward. When congressmen began to gain control of cadet nominations, their seduction was complete: the most virulent attacks on "West Point elitism" fell on deaf ears.³³

Under Thayer, West Point became adept at cultivating important constituencies. The most telling example was the Academy's development as the nation's leading

³² Hill, 15-16; Forman, 8-9; Crackel, 105-115, 121-3; Cunliffe, 158-9; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 173; George S. Pappas, To the Point: The United States Military Academy, 1802-1902 (Westport, Conn., 1993), passim.

³³ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 123-4; Crackel, 118; Weigley, History, 146.

producer of civil engineers. After the War of 1812, the nation enjoyed freedom from immediate international threats and the leisure to explore and expand into its new western territories. America needed engineers:

No other country in the world feels the want of professional character of this kind [engineering] as does the United States; nor is there a nation in the world whose prosperity and improvement so much depends upon the establishment of some system by which this deficiency may be supplied.³⁴

West Point had already begun in earnest to educate military engineers to serve the strategic purpose of building seacoast fortifications and making harbor improvements. Moreover, the 1821 national defense plan, drafted by the Board of Engineers, called for construction of a national transportation infrastructure to facilitate military movements between coastal forts. An expansion of the military engineering mission into civil engineering was simply the next logical step:

If instead of confining the studies to mere military mathematics, the branch of civil engineering were taught, greater public benefits would be derived from this Academy. . . . [T]he science, which may be employed in constructing canals, roads & bridges, is always in demand, and those who possess the same would meet with constant and profitable employment.³⁵

There were no other scientific colleges in the nation at that time. With a slight change in curriculum the Academy could offer to a grateful nation a ready source--indeed, the only source--of civil engineers as builders and explorers. When Congress passed the General Survey Act and the Rivers and Harbors Act, both in 1824, authorizing the use of military

³⁴ Isaac Roberdeau, "Report of the acting chief of the Topographical Bureau" (1822), as quoted in Goetzmann, 9.

³⁵ Rufus King, "Report of the Board of Visitors" (1821), as quoted in Crackel, 116.

engineers on civil projects, USMA came into its own as a national institution. West Point quickly added a civil engineering course to the schedule and dispatched Lieutenant Dennis Hart Mahan to France to study and prepare a textbook on the subject.³⁶ By 1826 the Board of Visitors had expanded the Academy's purpose:

to secure to the country the benefits of a *special school*, where instruction should be given in every arm used in actual service. . . . The instruction is in the art of war, in its widest and most liberal interpretation, embracing the whole of civil engineering necessary to secure an easy communication by land and water between the different parts of a country, and a safe arrangement and construction of its ports. Whatever tends directly to secure this instruction in its best form, is, therefore, essential to such an institution, and whatever else is taught here must be considered subordinate and subservient.³⁷

That report can be read in two ways. Either the art of war had expanded to include “the whole of civil engineering,” or it had contracted to the point that engineering defined military science. Either way, the Military Academy was on a course to produce engineers. And as the peacetime demand for engineers grew, the nation's need for military officers in traditional combat roles diminished.

By devoting more attention to the engineering course, the Academy curriculum necessarily neglected other subjects. West Point had begun as an engineering school, partly because eighteenth-century thinking held that scientific skills--artillery and engineering--were the only military science that needed to be taught. Adding civil

³⁶ Forman, 6-7; Norton, 14-16; Weigley, *History*, 164-167; Edward M. Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898* (New York, 1986), 49-50; Crackel, 116-118; Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 167-9.

³⁷ “Report of the Board of Visitors, June 1826,” *ASPMA*, 3: 382.

engineering further skewed the focus in a scientific direction. The academic curriculum reflected that emphasis: during the antebellum years 71 percent of classroom hours were devoted to mathematics, science, and engineering. Standing in the sciences also weighed heaviest for order-of-merit calculations. Moreover, these courses accounted for an even greater share of academic attrition. The Academy admitted 2,609 boys between 1833 and 1869, and 26.2 percent of them failed at least one course. Scientific courses accounted for almost 90 percent of these failures. Tactics claimed just two cadets.³⁸

A broad education that includes the humanities is now considered crucial to professional development in any field. Calhoun and Swift advocated expanding the academic curriculum in that direction, but to no avail. They were not alone. In 1819 Inspector General John E. Wool suggested adding courses in geography, history, and languages in addition to French. These subjects were especially important for line officers, for military victories

were not achieved by the “rule and compass” or the “measurement of angles.” They were the product of enlarged minds, highly cultivated and improved by a constant survey of human events.³⁹

Despite such admonitions, scientific classes crowded the humanities almost entirely out of the curriculum at West Point. During Thayer’s tenure the Academy chaplain taught a single course to first-class (senior) cadets that encompassed rhetoric, moral science, and political science. There was no other instruction in the liberal arts except drawing and

³⁸ Morrison, “Educating,” 108-9; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 169-172. Morrison has extrapolated these calculations from USMA records from 1833 to 1861.

³⁹ Ibid., 169.

French, and the purpose of those courses was to facilitate the study of engineering. During the next twenty years, although planners tinkered with scheduling, there was little substantive change in the academic program. It was not until 1854 that the curriculum accommodated more courses in the humanities, such as military law and Spanish. That liberalization came about with an expansion of the course of study from four to five years and it occasioned no cutback in the time allotted to scientific courses. Understandably unpopular, the five-year course lasted only until the Civil War, when reversion to the four-year plan axed most of the humanities' gains. Throughout the antebellum era, cadets got little exposure to history, ethics, government, and law--subjects of great practical value to officers serving in quasi-judicial, quasi-executive roles on the frontier, handling morally ambiguous problems.⁴⁰

Whatever its shortcomings, the Academy was a unique educational institution serving a national need. Thayer deserves most of the credit for that achievement: no other superintendent has had such an imprint. Cadet Alfred Mordecai found him "the best qualified, without exception, of any officer of his rank or almost any other in the army; even those who affect to hate are forced to respect him." Chief of Engineers Joseph G. Totten asserted that "no man would be indiscreet enough to take the place after Thayer: it would be as bad as being president of the Royal Society, after Newton."⁴¹

⁴⁰ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 167-172; James L. Morrison, Jr., "The Best School in the World": West Point, the Pre-Civil War Years, 1833-1866 (Kent, Ohio, 1986), 87-125, 160-3. In 1839 third classmen began to receive a catch-all course in rhetoric, English grammar and composition, and geography. Shortly thereafter, the first-class course changed to international and constitutional law, moral philosophy, and logic.

⁴¹ Alfred Mordecai to Solomon Mordecai, 15 March 1821, as quoted in Griess, 75; Ticknor, I, 372-375.

Thayer's most significant organizational legacy was creating his own version of the Royal Society: the USMA academic board. The superintendent presided over this panel, which comprised the commandant and the academic department heads. Together and by majority vote, they governed West Point. Thayer resigned in 1833, but his shadow loomed over his successors. Almost all antebellum superintendents and academic board members had been cadets, faculty members or both during the Thayer era, and they held sway in all major matters, especially curriculum decisions, until after the Civil War. These successors were loath to tinker with the fruit of Thayer's labor and often looked to him for guidance and support. If a superintendent happened to stray from dogma or to assert his authority, the academic board, gaining in power and prestige with each additional year of tenure, thwarted him with dilatory tactics common to legislative bodies. West Point's organizational structure remained unchanged for decades. The math, science, and engineering curriculum became sacrosanct. In fact, Thayer himself lamented that his mark on the Academy had been so profound.⁴²

From 1815 until the Civil War the proportion of West Pointers in the officer corps steadily increased. For most of these decades the figure was over 60 percent and on the eve of secession, USMA graduates comprised seventy-five percent of army officers. In the scientific corps the proportion was much higher still. About 12 percent of each

⁴² Morrison, "The Best School", 37-60; Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 167-8. When Richard Delafield tried to assert his primacy as superintendent, Chief of Engineers Joseph Totten rebuffed him. Delafield wanted to require all members of the academic board to send their correspondence to Totten through the superintendent's office. Totten told Delafield that he wanted the board's unconstrained advice in all matters. Griess, 147-149.

graduating class drew assignments in the scientific corps and these men were invariably at the top of their classes. In 1860 Superintendent Richard Delafield explained the practice of assigning graduating cadets:

5. The arrangement or precedence of corps for assignment of merit at present is: 1st, the corps of engineers; 2d, the topographical engineers; 3d, the ordnance corps; 4th, the artillery; 5th, the infantry; 6th, the dragoons; 7th, the mounted rifles; and, 8th, the cavalry.

6. The duty of the Academic Board is to recommend the cadet for one or more of these corps, as *considered best qualified*, when the cadet is privileged to make his selection therefrom.

7. This system has the effect of allowing the highest in the order of merit to select from the *several corps* of the Army, while the lowest are confined to a few arms, and not permitted to enter the corps first in the prescribed order of precedence. . . .⁴³

Thus the Academy codified a system of preferences. And the scientific corps were not just the Academy's elite: they were also an exclusive elect within the army. Of the 72 men who served in the Corps of Topographical Engineers during its existence, 64 were West Pointers. The percentage was similar in the ordnance corps, but even greater in the Corps of Engineers. During the antebellum era, only one non-graduate of West Point held a commission as an engineer.⁴⁴

To a large degree those elite Academy graduates built nineteenth-century America. Seacoast fortifications and harbor improvements were their exclusive province, but after

⁴³ "Report of the Commission Appointed Under the eighth section of the act of Congress of June 21, 1860, to examine into the organization, system of discipline, and course of instruction of the United States Military Academy at West Point," dated December 13 1860, Senate Miscellaneous Documents, 34th Congress, 2d Session, No. 3, (Washington, 1861), 257. Cited hereinafter as Davis Commission Report.

⁴⁴ Goetzmann, 12; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 172, 232; These figures exclude the paymaster and medical corps.

1824 army engineers oversaw much more. Engineers and topographical engineers explored and charted vast regions of North America. They surveyed national, state, and territorial boundaries and mapped the West. When the nation decided to join the Atlantic and Pacific coasts by rail, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis dispatched engineers and topogs to survey and evaluate four potential routes across the Rockies. In the more settled East the army's contributions were even more in evidence. Robert E. Lee improved navigation on the Mississippi near St. Louis. Montgomery Meigs built the Washington Aqueduct and the dome and wings of the United States Capitol. William McNeill planned the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. Richard Delafield and others surveyed and constructed the National Turnpike into Ohio. Scores of engineers worked on railroad projects and were responsible for most of the rails laid in the nineteenth century.⁴⁵

Working so closely with private enterprise enticed many officers to resign and take more lucrative positions in civil life. One-quarter of former officers in the antebellum era later worked as civil engineers, defections that gave rise to criticism of the Academy and its curriculum. One historian correctly, if somewhat misleadingly, wrote that before the Civil War West Point produced more railroad presidents than generals. The Academy, critics argued, should have instilled a stronger sense of loyalty to the army. It should have educated young men to become line officers rather than engineers. But the Academy was the nation's only source of civil engineers--other engineering schools, often under the

⁴⁵ See Hill, Roads, Railways and Waterways and Goetzmann, Army Exploration and the American West; Weigley, History 164-7.

guidance of West Point graduates, were only beginning. Having carefully cultivated a base of public support, West Point could securely answer these arguments by pointing out that Academy graduates, in or out of uniform, were serving an expressed national need.⁴⁶

Not all who entered the Academy were destined to become engineers. Some cadets could not accept the Thayer system's regimentation--either its discipline or the structured method of learning. Two of America's most creative intellects, Edgar Allen Poe and James McNeill Whistler, enrolled as cadets, but failed to graduate from the Academy. Both boys were constantly in trouble and indiscipline finally caused Poe's dismissal. Whistler, whose father was a graduate of West Point, failed his oral examination in chemistry. In later years he was fond of saying, "If silicon had been a gas, I would have been a major general."⁴⁷

Two future lieutenant generals were mediocre cadets who bridled at strict regulations and scraped by academically. But both boys were gifted artists. Beautiful sketches in the West Point museum still attest to their creative talents. Yet neither William Tecumseh Sherman nor Ulysses S. Grant fared well enough to join the scientific corps, and each took a commission in the line. The minds that conceived the successful strategies and operations of the world's first modern war attracted no special notice at the Military Academy.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Hill, 18-21, 199-201, 209-210; Huntington, 199; Coffman, 49-53; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 217-9.

⁴⁷ Crackel, 110, 140; Ambrose, 155-157.

⁴⁸ Crackel, 129, 143; Griess, 301. If Grant's mental prowess was overlooked, his athleticism was not: he was renowned as an excellent horseman. Crackel, 144.

John Tidball, an 1848 graduate, expressed a feeling of inferiority because he was not an engineer:

We were taught with every breath we drew at West Point the utmost reverence for this [order-of-merit] scale; it becomes a kind of fixture in our minds that the engineers were a species of gods, next to which came the "topogs"--only a grade below the first, but still a grade--they were but demigods. . . . The line was simply the line, whether the horse, foot, or dragoons. . . . For the latter a good, square seat in the saddle was deemed more important than brains. These ideas were ground into our heads with such Jesuitical persistency I do not believe anyone of the old regime ever entirely overcame the influence of it.⁴⁹

Cadets who had not made the grade in West Point's engineering curriculum were denied a reward that the Academy itself had conditioned them to covet--a commission in the corps of engineers. As Delafield put it, "the lowest are confined to a few arms, and not permitted to enter the corps first in the prescribed order of precedence." Mediocrity in the sciences relegated young men to an unscientific life of exile on the western frontier.⁵⁰

Yet it is not the case that these young men had simply not excelled in an atmosphere of academic challenges that focused on engineering. They had fallen victim to a system that had become rigid. The "Thayer system" took on an aura of holy writ and it stopped evolving to meet the needs of the army. Ten years after Thayer's departure, The academic board spelled out the continuing goals of the "Thayer system":

The Academic Board believe that one of the most important objects of the Academy is to subject each cadet . . . to a thorough course of mental as well as military discipline . . . to teach him to reason accurately, and readily to apply right principles to cases of daily occurrence in the life of a soldier.

⁴⁹ Morrison, "Educating," 108.

⁵⁰ Davis Commission Report, 257.

They are satisfied that a strict sense of mathematical and philosophical study . . . is by far the best calculated to bring about this end and that the present scientific course at the Academy--the result of the experience of many years, is, in its main features, such a course. They are aware that many of the cadets will have little occasion to make practical applications of the many mathematical formulae with which they meet, and that they may have passed over many particular problems without thoroughly understanding their meaning in all their points--still, if the course has been carefully taught, the reasoning powers will have been strongly exercised and disciplined, and a system and habit of thought acquired, which are invaluable in the pursuit of any profession, and as desirable for the infantry or dragoon officer as for any other officer in service. . . . The officer whose mind has been thus disciplined . . . will acquire facts and information in whatever station the interests of the service may place him. . . .⁵¹

Approximately one-eighth of each class entered the scientific corps; the remainder became line officers. Yet, after long experience the fathers of the Academy were quite settled on the need for “the present scientific course,” regardless of whether all cadets understood their lessons or found any practical use for them. Two decades earlier John Calhoun had argued that West Point should provide an education “full and complete for officers of infantry,” and that engineers would need to continue their studies at schools of practice. Now the Academy was advocating and accomplishing the opposite--furnishing an engineering education, hoping that even “the infantry or dragoon officer” might benefit.

Still, the flaw was not with the engineering course itself, but the peculiar administration of it. It might have been possible to design a mathematical and scientific curriculum that challenged cadets and encouraged their creativity. Instead, the academic board’s expressed goal was to discipline the minds of their charges to “a system and habit

⁵¹ Staff Records, United States Military Academy, 1818-1875, Volume 3: 197-199. 9 volumes, Archives, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York.

of thought.”⁵² The practice of daily recitations in each course, performed from a rigid military posture in a precise oral format, rewarded discipline and perfection rather than analysis and innovation. Even tactical training emphasized performing “evolutions” strictly by the manual and without deviation or even taking into account the enemy or the nature of surrounding terrain. And the dearth of humanities courses, which might have occasioned debate or at least introduced some ambiguity about the “right answer,” left cadets with few opportunities to challenge received orthodoxy. The academic board persisted in justifying the curriculum on the basis of “mental discipline” despite criticism from line officers, who maintained that their education had not adequately prepared them for frontier duty, and from congressmen, who worried about the numbers of West Pointers resigning their commissions to become highly paid civil engineers. Thayer’s men, protecting Thayer’s creation, proved more than a match for the critics. His reform had become dogma.⁵³

⁵² Morrison, “Educating,” 109-111. Nevertheless the academic board’s manifesto did not set the military academy apart as a reactionary institution. It was, rather, in the norm of thought in higher education, along with Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, to name a few, wherein the purpose of education was to instill character and discipline first, and knowledge second.

Moreover, with its heavy emphasis on engineering, the Military Academy was in the vanguard of educational reform. In the early nineteenth century most colleges saw their purposes as the general education of “gentlemen,” with a focus on the classics of Latin, Greek, literature, and moral philosophy. Following the military academy’s success, many schools began moving toward more “practical” curricula, often hiring West Pointers to establish their engineering programs. The first college in the United States to emphasize technical subjects, West Point was still leading the field half a century later. Morrison, “The Best School”, 106, 111-113.

⁵³ In 1973 an academy professor stated a pedagogical goal that one of his mid-nineteenth century predecessors might as readily have uttered. “It is not so much a knowledge of the subject that you wish to get into the boy, it is the mental training.” A study of the modern military academy finds that the Thayer system, which has changed relatively little during one hundred fifty years, tends to produce officers who are accustomed to coping with stress, quite capable of accomplishing missions, but who are hardly reflective or analytical thinkers. With its intense focus on engineering and military discipline, the study argues, the academy tends to “develop a respect for order, for duly constituted authority, and for rigorous

Despite the technical focus and pedagogical aridity of the course, the Military Academy furnished the most potent impetus toward forming a body of professional military expertise during the Jacksonian era. The only significant military thinkers in the army served on the Academy faculty. Foremost among them was Dennis Hart Mahan.

Mahan, an 1824 West Point graduate, became the Academy's preeminent professor for several decades during and after Thayer's tenure.⁵⁴ When the Academy expanded the curriculum into civil engineering, he sailed for France, staying for four years and inspecting bridges, foundries, harbors, naval bases, and railroads. In 1829-30 he studied at the School of Application for Artillerists and Engineers in Metz, where he cultivated a reverence for both Vauban engineering and Napoleon's art of war. Returning to West Point, Mahan became professor of engineering and wrote a textbook for his course based upon his French study. As a teacher, writer, and theorist, Mahan did more to acquaint American officers with strategic thought than anyone. Yet, his influence reinforced the army's francophilia and its intellectual focus on military engineering.⁵⁵

attention to detail." In this environment a systematic method of problem solving has evolved that, although it goes by many names, is best known as the "engineering approach." This rational process "is not intended to develop critical thinking, but to solve inherently soluble problems." The "engineering approach" is mechanistic, reductionist, and it assumes that there is a correct solution to a given problem. While these observations are from the 1970s, the Thayer system they describe originated and matured in the antebellum era. Joseph Ellis and Robert Moore, School for Soldiers: West Point and the Profession of Arms (New York, 1974), passim and 40, 44, 115-116. It is worth noting that since the publication of this book, the Academy has gone through a wrenching cheating scandal in 1976, followed by a period of intense institutional reform.

⁵⁴ The most comprehensive treatment of Mahan and his influence is Thomas E. Griess, "Dennis Hart Mahan: West Point Professor and Advocate of Professionalism, 1830-1871," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1969).

⁵⁵ Hill, 206-7; Griess, 209-248; Russell F. Weigley, The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy (New York, 1973), 77-91.

For forty years Mahan taught his students the flexible application of military theory to warfare. “No soldier,” he wrote, “who has made himself conversant with the resources of his art, will allow himself to be trammelled by any exclusive system.” Mahan believed that officers should first become masters of their science; then, they could competently apply their understanding to solving each new problem using common sense. He repeated that phrase through his chronically infected sinuses so often that the cadets nicknamed him “Old Cobbon Sense.” But Mahan persisted: the key to his pedagogical philosophy was teaching his subject thoroughly enough for students to obtain mastery. An excellent instructor, inspiring yet demanding, Mahan assigned mountains of homework and required cadets to demonstrate through comprehension of abstruse principles. Mahan would abide no superficiality and he preferred to omit the study of a subject rather than to present it in a hurried or half-hearted fashion. That approach demanded establishing academic priorities, and Mahan, the most respected professor at West Point, had a major influence in setting priorities for the entire Academy.⁵⁶

After Thayer’s departure Mahan became the dominant voice on the academic board and an inveterate protector of the status quo, especially as it affected his own department. Already professor of civil and military engineering, he insisted that the words “and the Art of War” be added to his title. He developed a course, entitled “Military and Civil Engineering and the Science [sometimes the Art] of War,” and convinced the

⁵⁶ Mahan, *Out-Post* (1864), 32-34; Griess, 171-198, 230-233, 244-247, 239-242.

academic board to schedule it in the last two semesters of the four-year program. As a result, Mahan's course became the capstone of the entire curriculum. Everything that cadets had studied seemed but preparation for this year, and matriculation from studying with Mahan resulted, quite literally, in a license to practice the profession of arms. Thus, Mahan's academic priorities resonated throughout the army.⁵⁷

Most of the first term treated civil engineering, architecture, and drafting. The spring session concentrated on permanent and field fortifications, drafting, and "the science of war." The first 74 of the total 80 lessons dwelt on practical engineering subjects, the theoretical and mechanical skills that a fortifications engineer could expect to use in his work.⁵⁸ This emphasis on engineering detail in more than 92 percent of the Academy's capstone course gave cadets a distinctly scientific view of the intellectual requirements of their new profession.

Yet despite his remonstrances against pedagogical superficiality, Mahan devoted only six lessons to the "science of war." In a half-dozen hours he covered "the composition and organization of armies, order of battle, castramentation, reconnaissance, outpost duties, attack, and defense, together with the elements of grand tactics and strategy." These six lessons, over which so much ink has been spilled, were the only lessons in the entire cadet curriculum devoted to any purely military subject above the

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 171-286.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 178-198.

level of artillery practice, equestrian training, or simple line tactics.⁵⁹ However stimulating Mahan's presentation of the material, this fraction of the first-class cadet's curriculum was his only exposure to anything approaching higher-order thinking on military theory. After so much attention to civil engineering, fortifications, and drafting, all of which were meant to prepare young officers to build coastal defenses, it must have been difficult for cadets to grasp the essentially offensive nature of Napoleonic strategy.

Perhaps Mahan's emphasis should not be criticized too severely. After all, French military schools focused their military studies upon artillery and fortification. Indeed, Prussia's was the only army that had expanded its military education to consider questions of a higher order, and there it occurred only at the postgraduate level. At the *Kriegsakademie* in Berlin young officers in competition for coveted positions on the general staff studied international relations, strategy, logistics, and the "philosophy of war."⁶⁰ Already vibrant, this system of education received even greater impetus from the new chief of the general staff in 1857, General Helmuth von Moltke. These beneficiaries of the "era of Prussian reform" would later guide Prussian armies to celebrated, lightning-fast victories against Austria in 1866 and France in 1871.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 209-226; Weigley, *American Way of War*, 77-91; Morrison, "The Best School", 94-96, 153. A generation of officers expressed respect for Mahan and his teachings, but his influence on Civil War generalship has often been overrated. Historians have frequently attributed Mahan's influence to his teachings in this course. Morrison takes to task a phalanx of military historians, most notably T. Harry Williams, who have overestimated the influence of Mahan and, thereby, Jomini, on the leaders of both sides in the Civil War.

⁶⁰ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 168.

In 1842 Mahan started an informal postgraduate program at West Point with the support of the chief of engineers, Colonel Joseph E. Totten. The two-year course later became compulsory for assistant professors of engineering. Mahan expanded the program in the 1850s and invited all members of the Academy faculty to join and participate in what became known as the “Napoleon Club.” Under Mahan’s tutelage, these junior officers prepared papers, drafted fortification designs, and read widely in works of military history and theory, including de Saxe, Guibert, and Jomini. Mahan selected Napoleonic or Frederician campaigns for officers to study in depth. Typically, an officer would take six weeks to research his assignment in the French and English texts in the USMA library. He would then write a thesis and deliver a lecture to his fellow club members. For example, Lieutenant George McClellan presented a paper on Napoleon’s Wagram Campaign of 1809 and another on the 1812 Campaign into Russia. The young officers took quite seriously the opportunity to study operations and strategy, often finding it a more stimulating pursuit than their teaching duties. Recognizing the army’s lack of a formal postgraduate educational system, Totten considered the assignment of promising young officers to the Academy to be “a privilege of infinite value to the Army.” He was right-- few officers contributed their writings to the army’s small body of professional expertise, but among those who did, most were engineers who had been Mahanian disciples, many of them former members of the Napoleon Club.⁶¹ Yet while the club surely broadened the intellectual horizons of its members well beyond the mathematical and engineering

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 247; Coffman, 98; Crackel, 137; Griess, 158-163, 236-238, 350.

curriculum they had studied as cadets and the stultifying mental life of their fellow officers serving on the frontier, it hardly compared to the formal selection and matriculation system of the *Kriegsakademie*. Moreover, it was wholly dependent upon the leadership and genius of one man.

Mahan published several books, each of which went through several editions, on the subjects of permanent fortifications, military and civil engineering, and military theory. His most significant work was the 1847 publication of his instructor's course notes. This widely respected pamphlet with a lengthy title typical of the nineteenth century became known simply as Out-Post. True to his francophilia, Mahan owed a great deal to Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini, a Swiss veteran of many Napoleonic campaigns and the most noted interpreter of Napoleon's genius of his day. Yet Mahan's work was more than simple translation. Out-Post dealt with strategy and tactics from an American perspective and discussed the problems the United States would face if forced to mobilize for a major war. Mahan frequently held Napoleon up as the exemplar of the highest achievements in strategy. Yet Mahan, the military engineer, instinctively understated the offensive side of Napoleon's genius: "*To do the greatest damage to our enemy with the least exposure to ourselves* is a military axiom lost sight of only by ignorance of the true ends of victory." An element of caution, of defensive-mindedness, runs through Mahan's theory, well befitting the teacher of America's fortifications builders.⁶²

⁶² Mahan, Out-Post (1863), 31 and passim; Weigley, American Way of War, 77-91. Italics are Mahan's.

Mahan, as military theorist, believed in the importance of military history. He stressed that officers must have a broad, historical understanding of their profession:

No one can be said to have thoroughly mastered his art, who has neglected to make himself conversant with its early history; nor, indeed, can any tolerably clear elementary notions, even, be formed of an art, beyond those furnished by the mere technical language, without some historical knowledge of its rise and progress; for this alone can give to the mind those means of comparison, without which everything has to be painfully created anew, to reach perfection only after many cycles of misdirected mental toil.

It is in military history that we are to look for the source of all military science. In it we shall find those exemplifications of failure and success by which alone the truth and value of the rules of strategy can be tested.⁶³

Mahan treated history in his own course as a vehicle to elucidate principles of fortification. Yet he blocked the addition of a course in military history at West Point. Mahan justified his opposition with reasoning from two premises. The first was his aversion to treating any subject summarily. Thorough instruction demanded painstaking attention to a few subjects and those few should be the most important. The rapid advance of technology, the nation's defensive strategy, and the Calhounian mission of professional preparedness dictated, reasoned Mahan, that the Academy concentrate its efforts on a curriculum emphasizing the sciences and engineering. Military history, as important as it was to professional development, was subordinate to more pressing intellectual needs. Mahan's second premise was that *mental discipline* demanded "a strict course of mathematical and philosophical study, with applications to the various branches of military science."

⁶³ Mahan, Out-Post (1864), 217-218, as quoted in Weigley, History, 151.

Moreover, skimming over a course in history would defeat efforts to develop a disciplined mind that was conditioned to hunger for a complete treatment of any subject. Mahan knew that the Academy had too little time to furnish graduates with a complete education in the sciences and the liberal arts. Instead, he hoped that the Academy was developing the minds of its graduates and instilling them with habits of discipline that would impel them to study military history on their own.⁶⁴

Another West Point instructor and Napoleon Club member, Henry W. Halleck, was known as “Old Brains” to his classmates at West Point. Perhaps Mahan’s brightest protégé, he published The Elements of Military Art and Science (1846), the only other American work on military theory before the Civil War. Although some historians have criticized Elements as being wholly derivative of Jomini, it contains several sections that are both original and scholarly. For example, Halleck begins his work with a spirited refutation of a pacifist text on moral science, written by Francis Wayland, a noted clergyman and academic. Wayland had argued that all war was immoral because it was “contrary to the revealed will of God.” Halleck, matching each Biblical quotation with one of his own, presents a cogent defense of just wars. He is unique among antebellum military authors for his treatment of moral philosophy in a work of military theory.⁶⁵

⁶⁴Griess, 239-247; Morrison, “The Best School”, 47-49; Weigley, History, 150-151; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 246-247.

⁶⁵ Henry Wager Halleck, Elements of Military Art and Science or Course of Instruction in Strategy, Fortification, and Tactics of Battles &c.; Embracing the Duties of Staff, Infantry, Cavalry, Artillery, and Engineers. Adapted to the Use of Volunteers and Militia (New York, 1846), 7-32. Cited hereinafter as Elements.

Having justified the subject of his treatise, Halleck turns to more strictly professional matters. Here, in a discussion of strategy, logistics, and tactics, he relies on Jomini for his interpretation of Napoleonic genius, but the text is more than simple translation. Halleck repeats the Jominian maxim: "Strategy is defined to be the art of directing masses on decisive points, or the hostile movements of armies beyond the range of each other's cannon." But unlike Jomini, who advocated the strategic offensive, Halleck stressed the value of the defensive and fortifications. Although Napoleon had expressed his strategic genius most forcefully through the offensive, his exploits were only possible because of the Vauban system of fortifications that saved France during the Revolution, and later served as a basis from which "she subdued every country on the continent that was not thus fortified." These ideas, certainly more congenial to the American engineer than Jomini's strategic emphasis, came from Halleck's reading of the Archduke Charles, Napoleon's worthy Austrian opponent. If these discussions are derivative, they are at least synthetic.⁶⁶

Halleck finds his own voice even more clearly when he treats the subject of "military polity." Halleck argues that warfare must conform to the political, cultural, and geographic nature of the state. He attributes the successes and failures of several European powers to their relative abilities to bring military policy in line with their own conditions. These ideas move well beyond Jomini and are almost Clausewitzian, both in

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 37, 35-60, 77; Russell F. Weigley, "American Strategy from Its Beginnings through the First World War," in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, Peter Paret, ed., with the collaboration of Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert (Princeton, 1986), 416-417.

their appeal to military history and in the argument for a congruence between policy and strategy. Indeed, Halleck seems to have been the first American writer to have read Clausewitz, praising the Prussian theorist in his bibliographies and using Clausewitzian terms when discussing generalship.⁶⁷

This discussion of national differences seems intended as preamble to the rest of the book, which treats contemporary American military problems. Halleck thoroughly prescribes organizations for the army and its several branches, first rehearsing the history of each subject. Although his historical discussions are frequently pedantic, Halleck deserves credit for the attempt at appealing to military history as an example from which soldiers might learn. This work is thoughtful, original--and conservative.

For the purpose of Elements seems to be a justification of the 1821 Engineer Board strategy for seacoast defenses. While he is discussing the differences among nations in terms of "military polity," he is preparing to demonstrate that American problems are indeed unique. Halleck, a West Point-educated engineer, advocates completion and expansion of the coastal fortifications system that had been national policy for a quarter century. He builds a formidable argument that, while the width of the Atlantic was America's greatest safety, the length of the coastline was its most dangerous liability. It was, therefore, incumbent upon the nation to recognize her unique position and to defend herself accordingly. Given his premise, Halleck's logic was impeccable, and

⁶⁷ Ibid., 135-153. Halleck cites Clausewitz in bibliographies at the ends of several chapters. He clearly prefers Jomini, but notes that Clausewitz, among others, "may be read with great advantage." Halleck, 59-60.

his concentration through the rest of Elements on the prosaic matters of practical engineering is both practical and useful.

Halleck integrated this thinking into a conceptual model of warfare:

As thus defined, the military art may be divided into four distinct branches, viz.: 1st. *Strategy*; 2d. Fortification, or *Engineering*; 3d. *Logistics*; 4th. *Tactics*. Several general treatises on this art add another branch, called *The Polity of War*, or the relations of war with the affairs of state.⁶⁸

The very act of thinking in such terms, of creating such a construct, represents an inductive mental capability almost unmatched among his contemporaries, certainly in America. His inclusion of politico-military relations demonstrates a level of intellectual insight beyond most theorists, Clausewitz excepted, and perhaps inimical to most soldiers who preferred to see themselves separated from political matters. Yet the construct appears foreign to modern professionals accustomed to thinking of warfare in a hierarchy of strategy, operations, and tactics. But Halleck's divisions are not horizontal; indeed they are not truly divisions at all. Instead, they are interconnected *branches* of the military art. Halleck's conclusion is that American professionals would do well to devote most of their energies to the engineering branch.

Toward that end, Halleck concludes his treatise with a stirring defense of military professionalism. He extols the virtues of West Point and its proven curriculum, again appealing to historical examples from Ancient Rome through modern Europe and America to demonstrate the value of military education. He condemns the practice of directly commissioning civilians into the military, suggesting that one might as well entrust one's

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 37. Italics are Halleck's.

surgery or lawsuits to amateurs as one's battles. But the importance of military education was not merely in having a force ready for the morrow. Instead, it rested "upon the absolute necessity of having in the country a body of men who shall devote themselves to the cultivation of military science."⁶⁹

Halleck and Mahan stood foremost among that body of men, but even among military professionals they were almost alone. They were exceptional in the antebellum officer corps--gifted scholars who turned their attentions to military theory. Moreover, they were engineers who broadened their horizons beyond the scope of their own branch. Each argued that military art and science were discrete intellectual disciplines rooted in an understanding of military history and requiring the dedicated study of professionals for their mastery. Their works represent the apogee of West Point's contribution to the intellectual component of military professionalism before the Civil War. Still, even their contributions were limited. Their conceptual elevation of military engineering hampered a fuller understanding of warfare. They were not trapped by West Point's "system and habit of thought," but their range of vision was bounded by West Point's constricted definition of military expertise.

William B. Skelton has rightly admonished historians not to equate the U.S. Military Academy with military professionalism. However, until the development of

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 378-408, 406; Weigley, *History*, 150-152; Weigley, *American Way of War*, 77-91; Stephen E. Ambrose, *Halleck: Lincoln's Chief of Staff* (Baton Rouge, La., 1962), 3-10.

postgraduate military schools after the Civil War, West Point was the seat of military education and, with rare exceptions, the only place where formal study occurred in the army. So while the Military Academy was not synonymous with the military profession, it was the predominate source of professional expertise. Other influences included military colleges, the army's schools of practice, and borrowing from European armies.⁷⁰

A number of military colleges, self-consciously imitating West Point, sprang up, especially in the South. The Citadel and the Virginia Military Institute were the most notable among many. After his stormy departure from West Point, Alden Partridge continued his career in military education, founding Norwich Academy, among others. Numerous colleges began to offer military training in the antebellum era, but the near-monopoly of West Point on commissions severely limited their impact on the army.⁷¹

The army attempted to enhance military education, but it directed such efforts at the smallest units and most junior officers. The original concept of schools of application arose from the same source as the reforms at West Point: the trip that Sylvanus Thayer and William McRee took to Europe from 1815 to 1817. When Thayer returned to the Military Academy to revamp undergraduate education, McRee took the chair of a board commissioned to develop post-graduate schools. The schools of application were the fruits of McRee's labors.⁷² Calhoun established the first "school of practice" for the

⁷⁰ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, xiv; Forman 10.

⁷¹ John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800-1861* (Cambridge, 1956), passim; Cunliffe, 76-81.

⁷² Thomas S. Grodecki, "Military Observers, 1815-1975," (unpublished paper, U.S. Army Center for Military History, Washington, D.C., 1989), 126; Floyd, 26.

artillery at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, in 1824. An infantry school was founded at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, two years later. Calhoun intended such schools to provide officers with specialized, post-graduate, military education. As an added benefit, the schools would enhance the training and discipline of units stationed there on a rotational basis. Indeed, the commanding general at Jefferson Barracks looked to his school to instill

habits of uniformity and accuracy in the practical routine of service, fresh incitement to the cultivation of military knowledge, emulation and *esprit de corps* among the troops, and mutual conformity and general elevation of individual character among the officers.⁷³

This statement of purpose bears striking resemblance to the abovementioned manifesto of West Point's academic board, though it was written years earlier. The general confined his intent to establishing "habits of uniformity and accuracy," much as the Academy sought to instill "a system and habit of thought." Moreover, Jefferson Barracks aimed to elevate the troops' *esprit* and the officers' moral character, rather than their critical thinking abilities. These were schools of practice, not research universities, and both were defunct by 1834. Several other schools opened for short periods before the Civil War. The effects on units stationed at them were often salutary, but the army could not reach the larger goal of professional education with such inconsistent programs.⁷⁴

The army continued to look to Europe to validate its professional growth. The practice of assigning officers as military attaches at American diplomatic missions abroad

⁷³ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 250.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 248-254.

did not develop until the late nineteenth century. But in 1815 the outbreak of peace in Europe and North America provided the opportunity for the U.S. Army to learn from foreign nations by travelling abroad to study their armies. Winfield Scott began the practice with a junket in Paris. Hundreds of thousands of Allied soldiers were idling in the occupied city when the young American general arrived. Scott “saturated himself with military lore,” touring schools, visiting battlefields, and interviewing former commanders from both sides of the wars. A score of officers followed him to war-weary Europe, including Thayer and McRee.⁷⁵ These trips set a precedent of officers travelling abroad to observe foreign military establishments that continues to the present day.

American officers trekked abroad over 150 times in the antebellum era to gather military information. These military observer missions took several forms, from the narrowly focused to those with much broader charters. Individual officers sometimes took leaves of absence and used them for professional purposes. Occasionally the Secretary of War sent officers abroad to study at military schools, almost invariably in France. Dennis Hart Mahan’s studies at Metz best exemplify this type of trip. Specific branches sometimes dispatched individuals or groups of officers to Europe to gather technical information, most often for the ordnance corps and the corps of engineers. And two commissions travelled with still broader charters intended to affect the entire army--the

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 115; Charles W. Elliott, *Winfield Scott: The Soldier and the Man* (New York, 1937), 197-203; Winfield Scott, *Memoirs of Lieut.-General Scott, LL.D.* . . . (2 vols., New York, 1864), I, 155-174. Scott tweaked the noses of the occupying British army by holding a lavish dinner to commemorate the Battle of New Orleans. Thayer and McRee were in attendance.

abovementioned Thayer-McRee mission of 1815-17 and the Delafield Commission of 1855-56, which is the principal focus of this study.⁷⁶

Army officers manifested laudable professional dedication by traveling to Europe on leave, then using the occasion to observe military practices there. Sometimes they went for reasons of health, but just as often because they simply desired professional development. Leaves of absence account for more than half of all known observer missions. That figure would be higher still, but for the fact that some officers applied for leave, such as Scott and Mahan, and instead received permission to go on official duty. Officers of the scientific corps went on more observer missions than line officers, both absolutely and in proportion to their numbers. Yet infantry, cavalry, dragoon, and artillery officers tended to travel unofficially more often than those in the scientific corps. This tendency reinforces the notion that engineer, topog, and ordnance officers were a favored elite: their expeditions received official imprimatur more frequently perhaps because they were expected to yield more of value to the army than the line officers' trips.

Closely related to these unofficial journeys were officers' excursions to study at European military schools. Thayer, McRee, and Mahan were the most conspicuous among dozens of engineers who visited l'Ecole Polytechnique and the School of Application for Artillery and Engineers at Metz. Cavalrymen and dragoon officers attended the French cavalry school at Saumur. Six young dragoon officers attended the

⁷⁶ Dale E. Floyd, letter to the author, dated 12 January 1995; Grodecki, 2-3. I have done a mathematical analysis of data gathered from Grodecki's and Floyd's works.

1839-40 session, including Philip Kearny and William J. Hardee. Kearny later accompanied French forces to Algeria and fought against the Arabs. Artillery lieutenant Minor Knowlton, who also studied in France, became aide-de-camp to Marshal Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, the French commander in Algeria. Hardee and Philip St. George Cooke, who later studied at Saumur, returned from the experience to write new tactics from translated French manuals.⁷⁷

Some of the most productive observer missions, at least in a technical sense, were those directed by branch chiefs specifically for the purpose of gathering technical and scientific data. Officers undertook these expeditions with well-defined goals of obtaining information. For example, the ordnance corps, with help from the artillery, sustained a focused effort throughout the antebellum era to learn from the Europeans as they wrestled with developing a practical, effective system of artillery. A series of ordnance boards, attempting to derive a system of calibres and types of field, garrison, and coast artillery pieces, dispatched officers on four separate occasions to inspect European systems. The workhorse member of the ordnance boards, Alfred Mordecai, made two treks to Europe in the 1830s and 1840s. He and his fellow ordnance officers traveled through seven northern European nations, visited foundries, schools, iron mines, arsenals, powder mills, and military posts. They gathered voluminous data on the latest advances in metallurgy and gun manufacture, and purchased technical publications, artillery pieces, small arms, and other equipment. Upon their return, these soldier-scientists used engineering methods

⁷⁷ Floyd, 26-28; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 240-1, 255.

they had learned at West Point to devise the most effective artillery system possible. Mordecai became the army's acknowledged expert on artillery systems, as well as their testing and manufacture, publishing Artillery for the Land Service in 1849.⁷⁸

Activist secretaries of war sent the most observers. Calhoun dispatched some early, influential missions, including Thayer-McRee and Mahan. Secretaries Joel R. Poinsett and Jefferson Davis ordered far more than their share of officers abroad. Poinsett was responsible for the most important of the ordnance missions in 1840. Davis, attempting to solve transportation problems in dispersed western outposts, sent Henry C. Wayne to the Middle East to purchase camels, an imaginative experiment that never got a fair trial due to the interference of the Civil War and the advent of the railroad in the West. Davis also dispatched the subjects of this study, Richard Delafield, George B. McClellan, and Alfred Mordecai, to Europe and the Crimea. After the Crimean Commission's return and probably because of its renown in the army, a flood of officers went to Europe during the tenure of Secretary John B. Floyd.⁷⁹

Military observers represented the most exciting intellectual trend in the antebellum army. The travellers tended to be among the army's brightest soldier-scholars,

⁷⁸ Stanley L. Falk, "Artillery for the Land Service: The Development of a System," Military Affairs 28 (Winter 1964): 97-110.

⁷⁹ Floyd, 27; Rippy, 171-179; Odie B. Faulk, The U.S. Army Camel Corps: An Army Experiment (New York, 1976); Jefferson Davis, "Report of the Secretary of War, Communicating in Compliance with a Resolution of the Senate of February 2, 1857, Information Respecting the Purchase of Camels for the Purposes of Military Transportation." Senate Executive Document, 34th Congress, 3d Session, No. 62 (Washington, 1862). Wayne made two expeditions in the mid-1850s. Lieutenant David Dixon Porter, USN, and Mr. Henry Heap traveled with Wayne.

usually of the scientific corps. Frequently, officers returning from Europe added materially to the stock of military knowledge with a new system of tactics or memoirs of their observations. Winfield Scott, William J. Hardee, and Philip St. George Cooke all produced translations of French tactical manuals after their expeditions. European sojourns stirred Mahan and Halleck to creative, if not entirely original, work in military theory. A series of ordnance officers gathered data in Europe that allowed them to engineer a new answer to a complex materiel problem. The Ordnance Boards proved more than capable of generating intellectual inquiry into weaponry and metallurgy. These boards were models of propriety and the scientific method--just the sort of men West Point meant to produce: engineers who could solve problems.⁸⁰ Most productive of all, Sylvanus Thayer's two years in France inspired him to forge educational reforms at West Point that made it the nation's predominate source of both military officers and civil engineers for half a century.

The opportunity to rub elbows with foreign professionals broadened the corporate horizons of the officer corps. Yet American visitors certainly absorbed the bad with the good. Observer missions shared several telling characteristics that were indicative of the intellectual adolescence of the American army. Already steeped in French traditions, they tended to be fulsome in their praise and uncritical in their judgments of French practices. U.S. Army observers went to France to gather information, not to criticize it. After Mahan arrived in France he lamented the American army was "not at this time reaping the

⁸⁰ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 248; Skelton, "Professionalization," 457-459.

advantages of the labors of the most scientific and intelligent corps in the world, the French Corps of Engineering and Artillery.” The trend became so pronounced that even the American public seemed to share the army’s francophilia. In 1840 *The Savannah Republican* announced:

We believe that nearly every corps of our army is represented abroad by one or more officers who are instructed to ascertain all the late improvements in the corresponding departments of the French army.⁸¹

The “late improvements” that American officers sought tended not only to be French, but also more concrete than abstract. Trained in habits of mind as West Point engineers, they often saw their purpose as searching for new data to help them solve problems using familiar formulae. Ordnance officers focused on the latest artillery pieces and gun carriages; engineers on construction projects. Line officers frequently returned home with French texts that they translated, usually without substantive alteration, and published as American doctrine. By uncritically accepting French ideas, the American profession amassed a body of professional knowledge, but without the analytical processes necessary to build real expertise. At worst, military observer missions institutionalized a habit of learning from foreign observation that allowed American officers to neglect and discourage home-grown innovation. If, as Boorstin argues, “[i]gnorance and ‘backwardness’ had kept Americans out of the old grooves,” French expertise kept army officers from blazing new trails.⁸²

⁸¹ Floyd, 27; *Army and Navy Chronicle* X (26 Nov 1840): 346.

⁸² Skelton, “Professionalization,” 457-458.

These other influences on the corpus of professional military expertise--fledgling military colleges, schools of practice, and military observer missions--shared two things in common. They were far less important than the West Point experience and its impact on an ever-growing portion of the officer corps. And they tended to buttress the intellectual trends that the Academy promoted.

Most West Point graduates who went to the line army arrived to find that their profession did not reward intellectual endeavor. Line officers felt that their engineering education was of little value. Having posted indifferent academic records, they had not received assignments in the scientific corps, where their educations would have been directly relevant. Tactical training mattered on the frontier, but at West Point it was uninspired and mechanistic, and often emphasized the physical more than the mental. Line officers often felt that tactical training, while specialized and important, was a practical and not an intellectual skill. Thus, since academic effort had not paid off at West Point, and scholarly attainment was not rewarded on the frontier, the logical conclusion was that military service and warfare were impervious to intellectual exploration.⁸³ As Captain Thomas Williams, an 1857 USMA graduate, put it:

The Professors at West Point, are intent only about magnifying themselves thro' a show of science; they do not care, or do not reflect that a little algebra, a little chemistry, a little mathematics, a little astronomy, in the head of a young man who has *little* aptitude for either, only addle his brains; & when crammed into him at the expense of manly military exercises, & the practical field duty of an officer are fatal to his usefulness;

⁸³ Hill, 206; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 167-172; Griess, 22-26; Thomas T. Smith, "West Point and the Indian Wars 1802-1891," Military History of the West 24 (Spring 1994): 35. The minority of line officers who were not West Pointers were almost uniformly less educated than the academy graduates. Presumably, then, they were even less cerebral.

& the infusion of such young men into the army is fatal to the instruction, energy & soldierly effectiveness[,] feeling & tone of the army.⁸⁴

Many frontier officers manifested a pervasive anti-intellectualism, disdain to read or to learn about their craft through any means other than experience. Engendered by the Academy's curriculum and system of rewards and punishments, a notion existed that a career as an engineer required a lifetime of continual study, but that an infantryman needed only manliness and courage. That attitude differed little from eighteenth-century beliefs in the "natural genius" of "heaven-born generals," except that the standard had changed from nobility to machismo. During the Second Seminole War, Secretary Poinsett asked Dennis Hart Mahan for his views on examination standards for candidates for direct commissions in the infantry and cavalry. Mahan recommended that the board of review be strict on the applicants, even though, as line officers "their acquirements. . . need not, certainly, be of a very high order." Line officers absorbed such assessments of their mental capabilities and translated them into patterns of behavior that positively discouraged the life of the mind. An 1860 committee reviewing operations at the Military Academy thought the problem significant enough to canvass graduates, asking whether they "generally pursue[d] their professional studies after entering their respective corps?" Eight responding officers replied unanimously in the negative.⁸⁵ Infantry Lieutenant A.M. McCook's reply was typical:

⁸⁴ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 169.

⁸⁵ Griess, 144; Davis Commission Report, 83, 86, 88, 101, 108, 173-174, 190, 208.

I have never known, during my eight years' service of a single instance of an officer studying theoretically his profession, (when away from West Point,) after graduating. They are usually scattered by single companies, and if concentrated are in the field on campaigns in pursuit of Indians, and in consequence, cannot have recourse to books.⁸⁶

For McCook, the Plains were an inhospitable place, where isolation and danger prevented scholarly pursuits. But Major Theophilus H. Holmes was less charitable about the causes of the lack of studiousness:

I think the sudden transition from the highest state of mental tension to one of perfect inactivity, which occurs in most cases on the graduation of a cadet, is exceedingly injurious, leaving a void that is too often filled up with an undue gratification of the licentious passions, or else by the trashy literature with which our country is flooded, and which is not less injurious to the mind than the other is to the morals.⁸⁷

Others, less eloquent but perhaps more perceptive, blamed the want of study on a lack of professional incentive. Officers advanced by seniority rather than merit, and the absence of a retirement system meant that many could and did stay on active duty well past infirmity and senility. Young officers, waiting decades for promotion, felt ambition ebbing away. Whatever the causes, line officers rarely pursued professional studies. Obviously, Mahan's hope that an Academy education would discipline the graduate's mind to a lifetime of professional study was no match for the harsh realities of the Plains. A rebellious, anti-intellectual sub-culture arose on the frontier.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 173-4.

In consequence, the line army neglected systematic treatment of military problems--studies of tactics, operations, strategy, and civil-military relations. When officers wrote on professional military subjects, they often reverted to well established trends, such as francophilia. Tactical manuals furnish a telling case study. After his visit to France in 1815, Winfield Scott borrowed heavily from the french to write a handbook on infantry tactics. He revised the pamphlet twice in the next twenty years, basing the third edition on recent French modifications. Lieutenant Colonel Pierce Darrow's Cavalry Tactics conformed as closely as possible to Scott's work. In 1828 Lieutenant Daniel Tyler returned from an observer mission with the startling intelligence that the British had perfected a system of artillery materiel and tactics superior to the French. He clinched his argument by noting that the French had admitted as much and were copying the British. American artillerymen rushed to follow suit.⁸⁸ In the 1840s and 1850s changes in American tactics often occurred as a result of an officer's studies in France, especially the cavalry school at Saumur. Such derivation moved Brigadier General Edmund P. Gaines, in a comment that is at once anti-intellectual and insightful about the causes of it, to express his disgust

with officers who have never seen the flash of an Enemy's Cannon--who have acquired distinction only in the mazes of French Books, with only that imperfect knowledge of the French language which is better adapted to the Quackery of Charlatans, than the common-sense science of war.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Weigley, History, 170-2; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 240, 254-5; Falk, 99.

⁸⁹ Skelton, "Professionalization," 459.

As Gaines's remarks suggest, not only were most military works intellectually derivative, but they were widely known to be so. Gaines even implies that many officers used French manuals that had not even been translated, not to mention modified for an American army. Every West Point cadet studied French for two years and the overwhelming majority of the USMA library's holdings were in French, so most officers were conditioned to looking toward the French for information. By and large, military writers satisfied themselves with collecting and publishing information gathered from French sources. More important, this derivation stifled their own empirical research and created an intellectual climate wherein it was acceptable to publish pilfered professional material without the benefit of further analysis, synthesis, or, sometimes, even attribution.

Gathering data to solve a problem is an essential step in engineering methodology—and another trait well established in West Point graduates. Yet many officers trained in the approach never got beyond it when attempting to work through problems of military doctrine. Instead, they tended to compile as much data as possible and express it, without interpretation, in a readable form. In 1825 Captain Trueman Cross published a compendium of legislation concerning the army, the first of many such collections, including one edited by Alfred Mordecai. But collected works of legislation or tactical manuals that were little more than translations of French works hardly constituted a professional renaissance.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Weigley, 151-152, 170-171; Morrison, 18; Skelton, "Professionalization," 452.

Developing a body of professional expertise demanded creative thinking and rigorous analysis based upon both personal experience and scholarly research. Collecting doctrinal manuals from Europe and compiling digests of military legislation were necessary tasks--they could have provided the initial foundation for military expertise. But American combat officers were not yet ready to take the next steps: digesting that collected information, reflecting on their own military experiences, analyzing failures and successes, and creating a new American military theory and doctrine that was useful in an American context. Yet nothing stimulated line officers to essay new thinking. Brigadier General Joseph E. Johnston offered a gentle suggestion for the Academy:

One of the important objects of education is to give habits of judicious reading. The present academic course is not calculated to do so. The abstruse sciences, to which the time of the cadet is mainly devoted can, in after life, interest none whose pursuits do not require their frequent application, and therefore officers of the Army generally do not retain their school habits. The time given to mathematical studies seems to me too great. A portion of it might, with great advantage, be applied to military history--the most useful of studies for a young soldier--giving professional knowledge, a taste for reading, and high ambition.⁹¹

He might have added that careful study in military history might have stimulated young officers to begin the kind of synthesis needed to evolve an American military theory. Yet after four years of scientific education at West Point, where they had not performed particularly well, where tactical drill was decidedly secondary, and where military history was not taught, most graduates were losing their "habits." The Academy's scientific

⁹¹ Davis Commission Report, 190.

course was failing in its goal of disciplining young officers to “a system and habit of thought.” In turn, those men were not tackling the army’s more abstract problems.

An example of intellectual lethargy was the army’s failure to remedy the poor general staff work in Washington during the Mexican War. The army bureaus, led by aged colonels with life tenure, proved hopelessly inadequate to the task of supporting the expeditionary forces in Mexico. Of necessity Winfield Scott became a one-man general staff. Developed in and comfortable with peacetime, the bureaus had no mobilization plans or pre-arranged procedures to furnish administrative and logistical assistance to an expanded wartime army. Even if they had, the presumption that the nation would fight a strategically defensive war would have ill-prepared the bureaus to support invasion forces. Yet even if it were impossible to solve staff inadequacies during the war, the manifest flaws ought to have provoked introspection and reform after the army had “conquered a peace.” Yet the bureau chiefs, with several Academy graduates among them, were guilty of both poor bureaucratic performance during the war and a lack of investigation afterward. To be fair, none of them had had any specialized preparation for their work other than on-the-job training. The Military Academy and the schools of practice focused on the education and training of junior officers. Yet even after the wartime failures there was no impetus toward developing doctrine for large-scale operations and support and no attempt to train officers in high-level staffwork. An efficient general staff is a hallmark of an intellectually mature military profession. The army bureaus did not measure up.

A further sign of professional immaturity was the army’s inability or unwillingness to solve or even systematically to address the fundamental doctrinal problem of their era--

how to fight Indians. The fixation on things French did not end with translating their manuals and aping their traditions. The army, in accordance with the 1821 Engineer Board strategy, devoted most of its training effort to preparation for war with a European foe. Despite conflict with Indians that dated back to the first European migration to North America, neither West Point nor the schools of practice offered training for frontier warfare. As a matter of policy, frontier service was a distraction from their most important mission--preparedness for future war with Europeans. Moreover, officers viewed Indian fighting as dangerous, frustrating, and morally disturbing. It was beneath their dignity--real warfare, real military art and science, involved strategic objectives, fixed fortifications, regular armies, and maps overdrawn with precise, Jominian diagrams describing the relations among them all. On the frontier territorial objectives were meaningless, outposts were miniscule, and armies were pitifully small. No self-respecting officer would dignify such innocuous operations with the name military art. To raise them still further by studying them as military theory was ridiculous--professional "slumming," to coin a twentieth-century phrase. As a result, each new unit and soldier deployed to the West had to learn the best methods for survival against the Indian foe by experience and the transmission of soldierly "folkways."⁹²

⁹² Robert M. Utley, Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848-1865, (New York, 1967), 57; Morrison, "The Best School", 97; James L. Morrison, Jr., "Military Education and Strategic Thought, 1846-1861," in Against All Enemies: Interpretations of American History from the Colonial Times to the Present, Kenneth J. Hagan and William R. Roberts, eds. (New York, 1986), 125; Griess, 306-307; Smith, 24-55. Dennis Hart Mahan devoted but a single lesson in his capstone course to the tactics of Indian fighting.

The Second Seminole War (1836-42) in Florida furnishes the most poignant example of professional neglect of this peculiarly American problem. The war in Florida was a nineteenth-century Vietnam. Government policy was ambiguous, military strategy confused, and the army's mission unclear. Despite overwhelming numerical superiority the army withdrew from Florida after seven frustrating years without achieving the ostensible objective of removing the Seminoles. The conflict was all the more trying because harsh climatic conditions made yellow fever a much greater danger than combat. Moreover, the army's set-piece, European-style warfare was ineffective against the Seminoles' guerrilla tactics. Some officers experimented with their enemies' unorthodox methods. Guerrilla war by its very nature is militarily difficult and morally ambiguous. Officers in Florida received public censure for incompetence when they failed and for "uncivilized" methods when they succeeded. It is no coincidence that the resignation rate of officers, steady at 4 percent and below for most the antebellum period, rose sharply at the beginning of the Second Seminole War to 17 percent of the officer corps. From a professional point of view, it is equally appalling that few officers wrote publicly of their experiences and that army doctrine all but ignored the problems of guerrilla warfare. They seemed to prefer simply to forget Florida.⁹³

When officers did write about their experiences and concerns they sometimes published them in military journals that came into vogue in during the 1830s and 1840s.

⁹³ Weigley, *American Way of War*, 67-70; Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 318-321, 216-217; John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842* (Gainesville, Fla., 1967), 140-143, 150-167, 321-327; Francis Paul Prucha, *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783-1846* (London, 1969), 269-306.

Periodicals such as the Military and Naval Magazine of the United States, the Army and Navy Chronicle, and the Military Magazine attempted to provide a forum for the officer corps to stimulate debate and foster a sense of community. These journals published reports on the Seminole War, the Texas Revolution, the French war in Algeria, and featured pieces on technological innovations. More often they covered news of officers' promotions, transfers, marriages, resignations, and deaths. None of them survived more than seven years, partly because officers at army posts tended to share a single subscription: readership may have been high, but revenues were low. Moreover, the hoped-for professional debate rarely occurred, most notably on the topic of warfare against native Americans. There was little discussion of the army's role in civil-military relations, despite the army's broad experience with frontier civil administration. And aside from blasting anti-military politicians, letters and articles rarely touched on the military's role in politics. There was no theoretical definition of a military-political nexus beyond an inchoate consensus that officers should distance themselves from partisanship. Military journals left few intellectual marks.⁹⁴

After these media had died out, official reports printed in the War Department or by order of Congress provided a substitute. The Delafield Commission reports were some of the best of this genre. Whatever the venue, these works were more technical than

⁹⁴ Military Periodicals: United States and Selected International Journals and Newspapers, Michael E. Unsworth, ed. (New York, 1990), xiii-xv, 57-60, 130-131, 168-9, 215, 301-304.

theoretical, more descriptive than prescriptive, and they compare unfavorably to modern professional journals or even those of the late nineteenth century.⁹⁵

The army strayed from the path that Boorstin mapped for the development of a peculiarly American genius. Instead, it seems to have followed a paradigm for the transmission of professional knowledge articulated by historian Dixon Ryan Fox in 1927:

The major phenomena of the transit are well illustrated Four stages are discerned: first, when the foreign practitioners of the specialty are received by the pioneer community; second, when the native youth go to the old country to attend upon instruction; third, when institutions of the special learning are established in the new land, though still dependent on the metropolis for the equipment of their teachers; fourth, when the institutions have sufficiently developed to maintain themselves.⁹⁶

While not perfectly linear in progression, Fox's four stages are readily apparent in the American army. European officers joined Continental forces during the Revolution, providing much needed expertise. Von Steuben, Lafayette, Duportail, and Kosciuszko stood foremost among dozens. Jonathan Williams, Sylvanus Thayer, William McRee, and Dennis Hart Mahan were in the vanguard of the second phase: "native youth go[ing] to the old country to attend upon instruction." Military observer missions continued this search for expertise abroad. West Point's founding with a majority of French instructors marks the beginning of the third stage. Thayer's recruitment of more Frenchmen for the faculty continued the Academy's intellectual dependence for a brief period. But as

⁹⁵ Skelton, "Professionalization," 458-459; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 257.

⁹⁶ Dixon Ryan Fox, "Civilization in Transit," American Historical Review XXXII (1927): 753-768. Quotation on 754.

Thayer's reforms bore fruit in the 1820s and 1830s, West Point began to produce its own instructors, although its curriculum remained highly derivative of the French.

But in following the Fox progression rather than the Boorstin model, the army and the Academy developed a peculiar brand of military expertise and a restricted view of intellectual endeavor in general.

West Point's Thayer system, which produced the military minds of the antebellum era, had its roots in the eighteenth-century equation of military engineering with military science. Few gainsaid the foreign-born assertion that the purpose of military education should be to develop expertise with fortifications--their construction, their defense, and their reduction. Americans called for a military academy because they feared that a native dearth of such knowledge imperiled the nation and forced it to rely too heavily on foreigners for its security. The foreigners that they relied upon were, with few exceptions, Frenchmen. So the founders of the new academy naturally and gratefully reached across the Atlantic to their former allies for instructors, for books--for a system.

Thayer completed importing that system and interlaced its features with the moribund form of the existing Academy. Soon West Point was annually producing an admirable crop of officers and skilled military engineers. When the nation needed engineers for non-military purposes, the Academy was ready to oblige. With the country's appreciation, the Academy rewarded its brightest graduates each year with assignments in the corps of engineers, the topographic corps, and the ordnance corps, so that the best minds in the army became not troop leaders, but scientists and engineers. The subsequent concentration of talent on civil projects for building the national infrastructure was a

worthy and necessary expenditure, but it diverted the army's most precious resource, its trained leadership, from military purposes. The able scientific corps solved problems, but it devoted little energy to studying strictly military issues.

Yet the overwhelming majority of graduates went into the line army, where the growing strength of their numbers soon made them predominant. These men entered the frontier army because they were mediocre scientists. West Point's scientific curriculum, with its exacting discipline and competitive pressures, had exposed them to a system that they had imperfectly understood. Still, four years of mental practice had programmed them with "habits of thought." These included a ready acceptance of things French and a resentful sense of intellectual inferiority to their brothers in the scientific corps. The great bulk of line officers, dispersed in hundreds of small garrisons, bored, often drunk, and wasting away in intellectual isolation, had little incentive to pursue professional studies. Promoted strictly on the basis of seniority rather than merit in an officer corps that had no retirement system, they recognized that intellectual attainment counted for nothing toward their professional advancement. Having had little academic preparation for their military responsibilities and no reward for mental industry while on the frontier, line officers developed an anti-intellectualism that viewed their operations as being impervious to intellectual endeavor. As a result, most of the army's corpus of professional knowledge remained derivative, little analyzed by the daily practitioners of the art, and unimproved by the benefit of their collective experience. While the army's brightest minds were using "a system and habit of thought" to solve immediate, concrete, and civil problems, the long-term and abstract issues of military policy, strategy and tactics went begging.

Still, by the 1850s America possessed the best educated officer corps in the world. Whatever their faults, the overwhelming majority of the army officer corps had graduated from one of the nation's most prestigious institutions. And the fact that so many of them had been immersed in a unique military environment that prized survival, competition, and achievement, made them the world's most homogeneous military elite as well.⁹⁷ That the same institution produced the engineers that built much of the nation's infrastructure is an impressive historic feat.

Like all American endeavors, the army had the opportunity that Boorstin describes: to invent itself without the hindrance of foreign example. But for a complex of reasons, the men who established military education in America decided to import, rather than create, a body of professional expertise. West Point became a repository of French military engineering thought. It became the best engineering school in the country and the natural source of civil engineers for a building nation. Yet that focus prevented it from fostering professional thought on military matters. Moreover, the pedagogical philosophy that so highly valued mental discipline actively discouraged the freedom and flexibility of mind necessary to grapple with ambiguity, whether in theory or on the battlefield. In an analysis of command failures in the Civil War, James L. Morrison concludes:

If, in fact, there is a single culprit which should bear the blame for unimaginative and inept generalship, it may be the total West Point environment which stressed strict adherence to texts and regulations, and produced a mechanistic approach to human problems. Recent work in educational psychology supports the claim that academic environments have a definite effect on students' personalities. It seems logical to suggest,

⁹⁷ Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 139.

therefore, that the strategic and tactical failures so typical of the Civil War stemmed less from following abstract principles per se, than from a lack of the mental flexibility necessary to modify those principles to fit the situation at hand. Mahan may indeed have preached “cobbon sense”; the question is whether the West Point environment fostered or discouraged it.⁹⁸

Mahan’s concept of “cobbon sense” depended upon mastery of an esoteric body of knowledge, then applying that facility to the solution of problems. But this “mechanistic approach” assumed that there was a correct solution in any given situation. Officers fighting Indians on the Plains, or other West Pointers in the Civil War, found that not all problems were inherently soluble.

Since the colonial era when most viewed a “standing army” as a danger to liberty, the United States had come to accept a professional force that it trusted as an apolitical instrument of national policy. Since the War of 1812 officership had become a full-time, long-term, and stable job. Through West Point’s socialization process and its virtual monopoly on new commissions, the officer corps had developed a distinct identity based in objective standards of merit and a shared sense of duty to the state. As a result, the nation granted the army considerable autonomy for its self-government. Although specialization within the army was so well articulated that competition among branches sometimes became divisive, the army officer corps was a stable institution. In terms of responsibility and corporateness, by the mid-1850s the profession was mature.

⁹⁸ Morrison, 153.

But the state of professional expertise was another matter. Although John C. Calhoun had pronounced a compelling rationale for professional study and education--the need to prepare for future war--a congeries of influences both pushed and pulled the development of American military expertise in a peculiar direction. Early national leaders looked upon military engineering as a discipline synonymous with military science and lobbied for a national military academy to provide it. A dearth of native talent led Americans to look to France for engineering expertise. Sylvanus Thayer compounded that trend when he reformed the Military Academy and enhanced the curriculum so that West Point became the premier engineering school in the nation.

National needs pulled developing professional expertise further in a direction more civilian than military. Thomas Jefferson had intended West Point's engineers to serve the nation both in and out of uniform. Then, when peace following the War of 1812 furnished an opportunity for the nation to grow and prosper; the Military Academy answered an acute need by providing the engineers to build the nation's infrastructure and its seacoast defenses. The brightest West Pointers went into the scientific corps to serve their nation.

Yet strictly military expertise fell victim to this very success. Though the majority of each class was destined for the line army, they received an engineering education just the same. Academically unprepared for their roles in the West, line officers developed an anti-intellectual view of their craft as a calling impervious to scholarly exploration. As a result, most neglected to think or write critically about their work.

Moreover, the Thayer system that produced these men became a pedagogical dogma at West Point. The Academy conditioned its graduates to "a system and habit of

thought” through an educational process that was often rigid, unimaginative, and inflexible. This system prized deductive over inductive reasoning: it rewarded correct solutions to problems rather than thinking that expanded understanding. It employed and valued knowledge that was more derivative than analytical; thus, translations of French texts filled the library rather than works of scholarly synthesis. And it fostered thought that was more formulaic than creative. Most professional works in the Jacksonian Era were compilations of data rather than essays of new theory.

Thus, the growth of antebellum military expertise suffered from many impediments. It remained largely dependent upon French sources. It was wedded to a narrow view of military science as military engineering. The profession rewarded intellectual pursuits that were more civilian than military. And its predominate educational institution produced new minds through a system that fostered a constricted and mechanistic view of scholarly endeavor. The corpus of specialized military knowledge existed within boundaries that hampered its growth.

The peculiar brand of military expertise that issued from West Point, governed by its “system and habit of thought,” established restrictive parameters for the development of new knowledge. When one sought the best minds in the army, one could expect to find officers who were masters at gathering detailed information and solving complex problems. Those men would not, however, be adept at the more vexing mental tasks of synthesis, evaluation, and creation.



VOLUME II

THE DELAFIELD COMMISSION AND THE AMERICAN
MILITARY PROFESSION

by

MATTHEW MOTEN

Part Two

The Delafield Commission

In 1855 the U.S. Army had a civilian chief who was both a former officer and a graduate of West Point. Jefferson Davis was the first military professional to serve as secretary of war. His keen understanding of military problems impelled him to seek solutions to problems that had gone unaddressed for decades. True to his institutional heritage, Davis assumed that the answers to his questions lay across the Atlantic, and he selected and dispatched a trio of officers to Europe and “the seat of war” in the Crimea.

The officers he selected stood at the top of their profession. All had graduated from West Point with a commission in the corps of engineers. Richard Delafield was one of the army’s most respected engineers. Alfred Mordecai had transferred to the ordnance corps early in his career and had become renowned as a soldier-scientist for his work in gun technology. George McClellan, younger by a generation, had earned an enviable combat record as an engineer in Mexico, and had just won a captaincy in a newly formed cavalry regiment when Davis called him to Washington. Yet if Davis intended the commission to represent the entire army and its interests, he ended by choosing three officers closely identified with the scientific corps. If Davis, a former infantry officer, expected them to find answers to the frontier army’s problems, he virtually ensured--through his selections, his instructions, and his choice of destinations--that they would continue to look for methods for defeating a European invader.

The Delafield Commission made a year-long “grand tour” through Europe, visiting the major powers, their capitals, and their armies. The trip became as much a diplomatic as a military mission, because Davis gave them a high profile as official representatives of the United States Government. Along the way the commissioners manifested the professional traits of corporateness and responsibility that were now characteristic of the officer corps--a self-identity distinct from civilians, an antipathy for politicians and diplomats, and a strong sense of duty to the army and the nation.

Yet this mission, sent to expand professional expertise, demonstrated how much its members were products of a “system and habit of thought.” The beginning of their journey showed promise: they discarded the army’s typical francophilia when their observations of the French made them suspect that bias. Yet they quickly replaced it with an equally uncritical adoration of the Russians. Thus, what might have been a positive professional development confirmed the army’s intellectual immaturity through the work of its hand-picked representatives. Moreover, their need for a perfect paradigm for the American army to emulate betrayed a sense of inferiority, a professional insecurity.

Even so, the Delafield Commission completed its tour with a wealth of new information on the state of the art of war in Europe. Although diplomatic delays kept them from reaching the Crimea before the war was practically over, they learned a great deal from their travels around the battlefield about the increased magnitude of warfare. Their tour through the rest of Europe showed them how grandly those nations were spending to arm for the next war. Thus, the commission returned with the conviction that

little had truly changed: the United States was vulnerable to a European invasion, and 179
preparing for that contingency was of the utmost national importance.

Chapter Five

Jefferson Davis and The Commission:

“A Tour of Many Miles and Many Months”

Had young Jefferson Davis chosen to pursue a life that would prepare him to become secretary of war one day, he could hardly have followed a better course. He enrolled at West Point in 1824 as the Thayer era was in full bloom. A mediocre student and sometimes a rebellious one, he still managed to graduate in 1828 with a commission in the infantry. With the dubious benefit of an engineer's education, he embarked on a line officer's career. He spent long years on the frontier dealing with the problems of settlers and learning the ways of Indians. Davis liked soldiering, but the dull routine of army life depressed him, and he took extended retreats to his Mississippi home to ponder his future. Like many on the frontier, Davis was chronically ill, and illness led him toward an ugly incident that ended his service in the regular army. Accused of malingering and insubordination by his commanding officer (the former charge was specious, the latter was probably true), Davis faced a court-martial. The tribunal exonerated him, but with wounded pride Lieutenant Davis resigned his commission in 1835.¹ If his military career thus far did not qualify him well as a future secretary of war, it furnished him a wealth of experiences characteristic of the antebellum regular officer. At the end of eleven years in uniform, Davis knew soldiers and officers, West Point and the frontier. He appreciated

¹ William C. Davis, Jefferson Davis: The Man and His Hour (New York, 1991), 19-77.

the hardships of military life, the suffering of illness, and the pettiness of dissension.

Jefferson Davis understood the army.

When the Mexican War broke out a decade later, Davis, now a planter, attorney, and congressman, experienced another American military tradition--volunteer soldiering. The state of Mississippi conferred upon him a colonelcy and command of a volunteer regiment. With his West Point education and years of service in the infantry, Davis was probably the best qualified man in the state for the job. He proved himself a combat leader at the Battle of Buena Vista, where he formed his Mississippians and the remnants of two Indiana regiments into a defensive "V" formation, breaking a Mexican cavalry charge that threatened to envelop the left flank of the American army. Now a war hero of national acclaim, Davis returned home to Mississippi in triumph. The grateful state legislature elected him to the United States Senate, where the soldier-politician became chairman of the Military Affairs Committee, a post that allowed him to view the army from a still broader perspective. In 1853, President Franklin Pierce, a fellow volunteer and Mexican War veteran, nominated his friend to be secretary of war. Davis was the first West Pointer and the first military professional ever to hold the post.²

The breadth of his experience, combined with tremendous intellectual energy, gave Davis the confidence to tackle the most demanding issues. Upon assuming office, he assessed his department's capabilities and the roles that the public expected it to fill and found a broad discrepancy between the two. Davis recognized that the army's mission had changed in the generation since his predecessor and political mentor, John C.

² Davis, 78-222; Henry Knox was a major general, but he was a product of a pre-professional era.

Calhoun, had enacted his reforms. Preparing the coastline to defend against European invasion was still essential, but for years the bulk of the army had been actively engaged on the frontier fighting Indians and protecting settlers. Davis began each annual report to the president by describing actions on the western frontier, detailing major troop movements and combat operations in the Nebraska Territory and Oregon. The order of preference was more than symbolic: Davis made clear, contra Calhoun, his intention to equip and organize the army with frontier priorities foremost in mind.³

Davis challenged the army's strategy for fighting Indians. The army's eighteenth-century defensive mentality, reinforced by the engineering curriculum at West Point that taught every cadet to revere the science of fortification, produced a "war of posts" on the western frontier. Scattered in a series of small outposts, the army ineffectively attempted to protect each new settlement from Indian attacks. Methodically and mathematically, Davis argued that the army in 1853 was too small, significantly smaller--in proportion to the national population, the length of the frontier, and the size of the hostile threat--than even the pitiable pre-war constabulary of 1808. He demanded an increase in army strength and he got it. By 1855 the addition of four new regiments, two of infantry and two of cavalry, made the army half again as large as the day he took office.⁴

Yet even those increases were inadequate to maintain the existing strategy. As Davis warned, "With an army three times as great as ours, it would be impossible so to

³Jefferson Davis to Franklin Pierce, 4 December 1854, in Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers, and Speeches, Dunbar Rowland, ed. (10 vols., Jackson, Miss., 1923), II, 292-305, 389-395, 552-556). Hereinafter cited as Rowland, II.

⁴ Rowland, II, 295-305, 393-395, 552-553.

guard all points of our extended frontier as entirely to prevent Indian depredations.” He determined to adopt an offensive strategy to achieve an “exhibition of power adequate to punish” Indian attackers. The first step was to concentrate frontier forces in larger and fewer garrisons. Small posts had been bad policy--harmful to discipline and training, and inefficient and expensive to the government. Mostly, they had derived from and contributed to ineffective strategy. Larger forces deploying from major garrisons could gain the initiative in the fight against the Indians. They could sustain themselves in the field longer, “overawe” smaller forces of Indians, and even control Indian homes and families while the warriors were away. Davis’s ideas were a step toward modern warfare, toward total war. But political resistance from frontier communities that stood to lose their military protection blocked these changes. Still, Davis created five large, new departments and encouraged their commanders to concentrate forces as they saw fit.⁵

Historian Robert M. Utley credits Davis’s strategic vision:

He . . . thought imaginatively about this unorthodox kind of war and stimulated a productive debate over whether fixed posts or roving columns held the best promise of quelling or preventing Indian outbreaks. Never before or afterward did military planning so thoughtfully address the strategy and tactics of Indian warfare.⁶

Such intellectual creativity seems to contravene our earlier image of the frontier officer, which Davis had been, as unwilling if not incapable of constructive thought about his profession. Yet it is not difficult to imagine an energetic Lieutenant Davis chafing under

⁵ Davis, 235; Rowland, II, 295-6.

⁶ Robert M. Utley, “Introduction,” in *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, Volume V, Lynda L. Crist and Mary S. Dix, Eds. (Baton Rouge, 1985), vii.

constraints imposed by an uninspired captain, later resigning rather than enduring further insult. A decade later the frustrated lieutenant had risen to colonel of volunteers, and quick, unorthodox professional thinking made him a national hero and a United States Senator. Unlike most frontier officers, Davis had been rewarded for creativity, and he determined to continue to think originally about professional military problems.

One campaign that seemed to arouse his passion involved improving the lives of officers and soldiers. Year after year Davis demanded better pay for the men of the army and relief for their widows and orphans. He composed lengthy briefs to show how the military standard of living had fallen in comparison to the rest of society. He also hoped to improve morale in the officer corps through reform of the promotion system. The complicated system of brevet promotions and differential rank between staff and line had caused continual and unnecessary tension in the army and Davis meant to change them both. Just as important for morale and perhaps more so for service effectiveness was creating a retirement system. Far too many aged officers remained on the army rolls well past infirmity, degrading the vigor of senior leadership and killing the hopes of junior officers for advancement. Yet these proposals languished in Congress.⁷

Drafting a retired list would have had a dramatic effect on the army staff, where few faces had changed since the bureaus' lackluster performance of the Mexican War. The bureaus provided a constant irritant to Davis, and by the end of his second year in office he was proposing a sweeping reorganization. The centerpiece of his plan was a wholesale reduction of permanent staff assignments, replacing them with officers on

⁷ Rowland, II, 305-6, 395-400, 408, 557-558.

temporary detached duty from line regiments. Davis thought that new blood would reverse some bureaucratic ossification and foster a better understanding between the staff and the line. This plan again manifested the thinking of a former line officer, one who had suffered the consequences of poor staff work. Yet, as with many of his reforms, Davis had only limited success in obtaining necessary congressional action.⁸

Davis had a better impression of the scientific corps, neither disdaining the elite branches nor showing any lingering jealousy, as one might expect from a former infantry officer. Indeed, he referred to the corps of engineers in one annual report as “the most elevated branch of military science,” and recommended to the president that they be extended the privilege to command, a cherished goal of engineers since the Jefferson Administration.⁹ Most significantly, Davis argued persuasively for funding to complete the seacoast fortifications program, appealing to current European example:

On the sea-board, in advance of populous cities and important harbors, [coastal fortifications] are designed to arrest the progress of hostile fleets, and force the invader to abandon his attack, or disembark his troops, and pursue his attack by land. The capacity of sea-coast defenses to effect this object against the most powerful armaments that have ever been placed afloat, is amply demonstrated by the results of the late military operations in the Black sea [sic] and the Baltic.¹⁰

Those operations were part of the Crimean War, which Davis was watching with growing interest. He used the results of war in Europe to provide evidence to support his argument for funding of the long delayed fortifications program in the United States. The

⁸ Davis, 224-7; Rowland, II, 400-408, 557-558.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 405.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 410.

coastal defense system, the crown jewel of national strategy since Calhoun's day and the engineers' *raison d'etre*, had suffered in various stages of construction for over three decades. Davis got Congress to appropriate monies to finish the job.¹¹

The secretary likewise valued the expertise of the ordnance corps, especially in that time of rapid technological change. When some in Congress proposed contracting with private firms for the manufacture of all military weapons, Davis argued against them. He insisted that private enterprises would not keep the national interest in mind as did Federal armories run by ordnance officers. In fact, he wanted to open a new armory in the West. Davis trusted, admired, and needed these army scientists. A range and accuracy revolution was underway with improved rifled weapons and the ordnance corps kept him abreast of European technological advances in both artillery and infantry weapons. Davis, in turn, reported to the president on several types of rifled arms, including both muzzle- and breech-loading designs. It was "almost certain that smooth-bored arms [would] be superseded as a military weapon," but he preferred to proceed slowly, giving ordnance officers time to experiment. He also wanted to weigh "the experience of the present war in Europe"--another reference to war in the Crimea.¹²

Davis's intentions for the scientific corps were all of a piece--he wanted these officers to serve a national purpose, preferably a strictly military one. Since 1824, when Congress had first allowed army engineers to work on civil projects, the practice had expanded continually. River and harbor improvements had become "the richest pork

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 308-10, 409.

¹² *Ibid.*, 326-330, 410-411; Utley, in *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, V, v-viii.

barrel in each session of Congress.” Davis tried to stop this custom, citing legal difficulties that local projects caused for the department, and by more strictly accounting for improvements funds. He pointedly suggested that states be charged tonnage duties for local river and harbor improvements until the projects had paid for themselves. Davis was a conscientious guardian of the Federal purse, but he also wanted to return the corps of engineers to purposes of more national benefit.¹³

For example, Davis was keenly interested in rail transportation and the possibilities it offered both for national economic advancement and for military logistics. Railroads promised to solve the army’s myriad problems with supplying itself over extended lines of communication. Davis sponsored four explorations across the western frontier to chart possible railroad routes to the Pacific. He kept a close watch on the progress of these surveys and actively promoted the future transcontinental railroad with other government officials. Other engineering projects that aroused his enthusiasm included the expansion and remodeling of the U.S. Capitol building and the construction of an aqueduct for the City of Washington, both aims suitably national in purpose.¹⁴

Yet, for all his admiration, Davis also sought efficiencies within the scientific corps, economies those officers greatly resented. He sought to combine the topogs and the engineers, finding it ludicrous that they should

be divided into two corps, with a nominal distinction of engineers and topographical engineers, though their acquirements, capability [sic], and duties are so entirely alike, that it has been found necessary to adopt an arbitrary rule assigning to each a part of the duties of both.¹⁵

¹³ *Ibid.*, viii; Rowland, II, 321-325, 414-415, 564.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 310-320, 330-332, 416-417, 565-570.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 556.

Neither of the army's two most elite branches favored surrendering its autonomy and they fought the proposal successfully for another decade. Davis also proposed trimming the ordnance corps. He would have eliminated junior officer ranks in ordnance, making up the shortfall with rotations of line officers, presumably from artillery regiments. Again, the goal was to promote communication within the army and to reduce waste, but branch opposition thwarted his plans.¹⁶ Yet in both proposals one can see the hand of the former infantry officer finally getting his chance to reform the system.

Perhaps the actions Davis took with respect to West Point best demonstrate his attitudes toward his stewardship of the army. Not surprisingly, Davis was a long-time champion of military professionalism. Yet he believed that the Academy's educational focus was too narrow. When the academic board, meaning to assuage critics, put forth a half-hearted suggestion to expand the curriculum to add courses in the humanities, Davis seized the opportunity. He supported the expansion, because

the study of the scientific and military branches included in the [current] course leaves little time for the acquisition of that knowledge of international law, of language, and of literature, demanded by the interests of the service.¹⁷

Davis was questioning West Point's hallowed "system and habit of thought." He believed the Academy needed to provide a broader basis of expertise, to equip officers with skills valuable on the frontier--a facility with Spanish, an ability to analyze questions of law, and a capacity for writing clear reports, "the channels through which deeds most illustrating

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 405-406.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 307.

[the] country's history are transmitted to other people and to other times." Still, Davis desired only to add to the curriculum without "subtracting something from the thorough scientific course." Rather than reforming the Thayer system, he grafted new requirements onto it. He approved a new five-year curriculum, attempting to improve military education in ways that his experience told him frontier officers needed. Thus, he obeyed his line-officer instincts, but maintained respect for the "scientific course" and the institution itself. The extra year's study went into effect in 1854 and comprised subjects in history, geography, military law, Spanish, and English as well as further military training.¹⁸

Jefferson Davis embraced change. He meant to broaden the horizons of professional expertise. He recognized that territorial expansion and technological advancement demanded new thinking about national defense. While he had shown a capacity for original thought, he was eager to learn from others: "Happily we may profit by the experience of others without suffering the evils that attend the practical solution of such problems." When Davis's predecessors had expressed such sentiments, they had assumed that France was the "sole repository of military science" and the natural destination for anyone hoping to "profit by the experience of others." Davis, however, officially praised the efforts of the British and the Prussians, as well as the French, in enterprises such as staff reform and tactical innovations. In keeping with such broadmindedness Davis sent numerous officers abroad on military observer missions. But

¹⁸ The five-year program proved almost universally unpopular among cadets and faculty alike. The Academy reverted to a four-year course in 1861. James L. Morrison, Jr., "The Best School in the World": West Point, the Pre-Civil War Years, 1833-1866 (Kent, Ohio, 1986) 114-125. Rowland, II, 307-8, 409, 561. Later, Davis recommended removing the Academy from the exclusive control of the corps of engineers.

in a change from long-established habit, these officers did not concentrate on the subjects of civil and military engineering or gun design, most of them were not from the scientific corps, and they did not restrict themselves to France. Henry Wayne visited the Middle East in search of camels to furnish another potential answer to the frontier army's transportation problems. In the tactical realm, Davis was certain that the advent of rifled weapons would change the battlefield irrevocably. He believed that distinctions within the mounted arms--dragoons, cavalry, and mounted riflemen--would soon become nonsensical and ought to be discarded. Likewise the terms "heavy" and "light" infantry would become meaningless when all foot soldiers were armed with rifles. Davis noted that the Prussian army had converted to a system of light infantry decades earlier, "even before the adoption of the new arms." The United States could learn from them the systems

used by light troops in other countries, that complete light infantry or rifle tactics might be introduced into our service, with such improvements as the experience of other armies has shown to be valuable.¹⁹

Accordingly, several officers traveled to Great Britain, France, and Prussia to evaluate changes in cavalry and infantry tactics. Healthy professional debate and revisions of tactical manuals issued from these foreign expeditions.²⁰

But possibilities for a still broader mission beckoned. The most promising laboratory for military experiment emerged in the Crimea in 1854.²¹ The Congress of Vienna had established a balance of power among the great states of Europe; yet for

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 412.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 400-402, 407, 410-412, 320-321, 560-561; William B. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1991), 240-241.

²¹For a history of the Crimean War see John Curtiss, *Russia's Crimean War* (Durham, N.C., 1979), or Andrew D. Lambert, *The Crimean War: British grand strategy, 1853-1856* (Manchester, UK, 1990).

decades they had jockeyed for strategic advantage in the Near East. By the 1850s Turkish weakness threatened to allow the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, creating a power vacuum and inviting diplomatic controversy and military struggle. Into the void stepped Russia and France, vying for control of holy places in the Levant. The major results of this contest were Russia's increasing isolation from the rest of Europe and British anxiety over control of the Straits of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus. By 1853 Tsar Nicholas I was pressing, as head of the Orthodox Church, for greater religious control over Orthodox clergy in the Ottoman Empire. The Turks, with British and French backing, refused the tsar's demands as an affront to their political sovereignty. Despite Austrian efforts to quiet tensions, the Ottoman Empire declared war on the Russians in late 1853, confident of British and French support. Russia bested the Turks in the naval battle of Sinope, enflaming war fever in London and Paris. Diplomatic efforts collapsed in late March 1854, bringing France and Britain into the war.

When France and Britain joined the conflict, the focus of action soon gravitated to the Crimean peninsula.²² In order to make the Straits secure, the Allies had to neutralize Russian naval power on the Black Sea. Since Sebastopol was the Russian navy's most important port, the Allies decided to attack there. On 7 September 1854 the Allies landed unopposed at Eupatoria, forty-eight miles north of Sebastopol. For the next two months, they fought the Russians at the Alma River, at Balaklava--famous for the charges of the Light and Heavy Brigades--and at Inkerman. But the focus of action was the port city of Sebastopol. There, the Russians built admirable defenses, and settled in for a lengthy

²² The only other theater of operations was in the Baltic, where a British fleet menaced the Russian coast of Russia throughout the war without attacking.

siege. The Allies shifted their lines of communication to the ports of Balaklava and Kamiesch, where they pioneered the use of steam-driven ships to transport and resupply their armies. The stage was set for a long war.

Like most of his officers, Jefferson Davis maintained a keen professional interest in the Crimean War. Accounts of the military action frequently appeared in American newspapers and Davis posted the armies' movements on a large map mounted on his office wall. A Bostonian friend in London sent Davis battle reports and technical information concerning the performance of artillery and logistical systems in the Crimea. Another correspondent kept the secretary abreast of diplomatic maneuvers incident to the war. In his annual report of December 1854, Davis frequently referred to European armies and their solutions to military problems. He was especially interested in technological changes during the war.²³

Davis began planning to dispatch a commission to Europe in early 1855. On 30 March he sent orders to three of the army's most respected officers: "Repair to this city without delay & report to the Adjutant General."²⁴

Davis left no record of his thoughts while selecting officers for the commission, but he seems to have deliberated with characteristic thoroughness before settling on his

²³George Sumner to Jefferson Davis, 6 October 1854, Rowland, II, 380; Davis, 233; George Sumner to Jefferson Davis, 10 November 1854, Davis Papers, Transylvania University, Lexington, Kentucky; George Sumner to Jefferson Davis, 1 March 1855, Rowland, II, 444-445; Edward B. Buchanan to Jefferson Davis 3 May 1855, Davis Papers, Transylvania University, Lexington, Kentucky; Annual Report to the President, Rowland, II, 409-410.

²⁴Samuel Cooper to George B. McClellan, 30 March 1855, The Papers of George Brinton McClellan, Sr., Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, microfilm reel no. 3, frame 253. (Hereinafter cited as GBMP, e.g., GBMP 3: 253.)

choices. In late March 1855 he extended an offer to his old friend, Colonel John K. F. Mansfield: "If you are in condition for a tour of many miles and many months and beyond seas, I would be glad to see you at your earliest convenience."²⁵ Mansfield's reply is no longer extant, but he must have demurred. His record commended him for a plum assignment. Second in his West Point class of 1822, he had advanced to the rank of captain of engineers when the Mexican War broke out. Mansfield had served with great distinction as General Zachary Taylor's chief engineer, receiving brevet promotions "for gallant and meritorious conduct" at Fort Brown, Buena Vista, and Monterrey. In 1853 Davis, who had served with Mansfield under Taylor in the war, had promoted him colonel and inspector general of the army. Mansfield was serving in that capacity when he received Davis's request.²⁶

Davis probably also invited Robert E. Lee to join the commission. Just after their departure, one of the commissioner's wives gossiped to her husband that "Colonel Lee is in Washington and regrets exceedingly that he did not go with you. Mrs. Arch. Campbell told me that he would have liked it better than any other duty."²⁷ That Lee may have been disappointed at missing the journey is not proof that he had been invited, but he surely

²⁵ Jefferson Davis to John King Fenno Mansfield, 23 March 1855, Middlesex Co. Historical Society, Middletown, Conn.

²⁶ Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. VI, Dumas Malone, Editor (New York, 1933), 257. Hereinafter cited as DAB: Register of Graduates and Former Cadets of the United States Military Academy (West Point, 1990), 249. Hereinafter cited as Register. Mansfield later commanded XII Corps in the Army of the Potomac under McClellan. He died of wounds at Antietam, 18 September 1862.

²⁷ Sara Mordecai to Alfred Mordecai, 20 April 1855, Alfred Mordecai Papers, Volume 3, 736, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress. Hereinafter cited as AMP, e.g., AMP 3: 736. Mordecai's letters to his wife were usually written over a period of days while he waited for the next outbound steamer to depart. Therefore, citations to his letters will note the inclusive dates of their composition.

knew of the mission and its purpose. Another well-respected engineer, Lee had been the brightest star in a constellation of officers on Winfield Scott's staff in the Mexican War. In March 1855 he had just left the superintendency of the Military Academy to take a commission as lieutenant colonel of the Second Cavalry Regiment, a move from the scientific corps to the line army that opened future possibilities for high-level command. An expression of regret at missing this opportunity from a soldier of Lee's stature and potential indicates the perceived importance of this expedition among the officer corps.

The three officers Davis selected were of the same high caliber as Lee and Mansfield. Eldest and senior among them was Major Richard Delafield.²⁸ The son of an English immigrant, Delafield was born in New York City on 1 September 1798. He entered West Point in 1814, witnessed the beginnings of the Thayer era, and graduated in four years at the head of his class. As valedictorian, Delafield received a coveted commission in the corps of engineers.

Delafield began a military career that made him one of the most experienced and best respected engineers in the army. In his first posting he spent a year with a team surveying the northern boundary of the United States. From there he proceeded to Virginia where he began to develop the expertise for which he would gain renown--in coastal fortifications. Delafield spent five years building Forts Monroe and Calhoun at the mouth of the James River near Norfolk and Hampton Roads. In 1824 he moved to the Mississippi, where for six years he commanded the defenses at Plaquemine Bend,

²⁸ Biographical data for Richard Delafield from Register, 247; George W. Cullum, Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy, Vol. I (3 vols., Boston, 1891), 182-186; Lynda L. Crist, "Richard Delafield (1798-1873)", in Encyclopedia USA (July 1990); Morrison, 39-43.

conducted surveys of the Delta region, and directed improvements of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. In recognition of his work, he became superintending engineer for construction of the Cumberland Road, one of the first national highways. For six years he headed that project while simultaneously building and improving the defenses and harbors on the Delaware River and Bay. In 1833 he married Harriet Baldwin Covington, his lifelong companion and mother of their five children.

Delafield became superintendent of the Military Academy in 1838, only five years after the legendary Thayer had left. Being tapped for the assignment was a high honor, but attempting to fill Thayer's shoes was a thankless and often frustrating task. The superintendent filled many roles at the Academy. He commanded the garrison at West Point and was responsible for efficient administration of the post and the welfare and discipline of its officers and men. He also presided over the academic board, but he was only first among equals. Since department heads had begun to serve longer and longer terms, the superintendent had little power over them. The academic board reached decisions by majority vote and rarely took direction from the superintendent who, they all knew, would be assigned elsewhere in a few years. During Delafield's tenure, Dennis Hart Mahan solidified his informal leadership of the board, and Chief Engineer Totten ratified the power of that body in governing the Academy.²⁹

Stifled by institutional barriers, the energetic, even bustling Delafield found innovative ways to make his imprint on West Point. Misfortune allowed him to put his engineering experience to work. Shortly before his arrival, fire had razed the Academy

²⁹ Griess, 147-149; Morrison, 37-60.

building, home of the headquarters, the library, and several academic departments. Delafield took charge of plans to renovate and began consulting architects: the engineer was in his element. Soon another fire in the cadet barracks aroused concern about safety in all Academy buildings. Delafield broadened the scope of his inquiry to devise a complete architectural system "suited to the wants of the institution." For the next several years he studied designs, appointed committees, and redrew the map of the Military Academy grounds. His engineers designed the beautiful "Chain Battery" walk on the banks of the Hudson, still a haven for love-struck cadets. More significantly, Delafield is responsible for the general appearance of the modern Military Academy. His system, which erected many individual structures, inaugurated the Tudor-Gothic style that gives West Point its stark, gray aspect. He also reordered the placement of buildings. Prior to his arrival, a haphazard siting of structures had cluttered over one-third of West Point's Plain, the broad, green fairway where cadets drilled and encamped and visitors enjoyed a thrilling vista north along the Hudson valley. Over several years, Delafield's design replaced obstructing buildings with structures along the periphery, restoring to the Plain a pastoral centrality in the life of the Academy. The overall effect--a verdant grassland flanked by granite edifices that seemed to have emanated from the rocky highlands beyond--was one of majestic, martial permanence.³⁰

A product of the Thayer system, Delafield exercised a conservative oversight of the corps of cadets. The engineer found little cause to tinker with the scientific curriculum. Although he advocated adding courses in geography and history, his only

³⁰ Crackel, 126-135; Griess, 168-169.

notable change was to introduce horses into cavalry and light artillery instruction. Instead, Delafield focused his energy on restoring part of the system that had declined--standards of discipline. He felt that his predecessor, Rene De Russy, had not maintained decorum among the corps of cadets. Delafield began to set matters right, punishing violations of the regulations with such a heavy hand that one cadet felt he "deprived cadets of all the amusements and recreation he possibly could."³¹ He economized by scrimping on clothing for cadets, seeing to it that their arrears to the Academy tailor were as small as possible. Plebes were not allowed to purchase expensive overcoats before they had passed their examinations in January, no matter how cold it was in December. The superintendent's control of cadets' lives extended even to the style of their breeches. Delafield ordered that the corps be issued "flyfront" trousers, rather than the old side-button style. Ladies of the post were scandalized and Mrs. Delafield informed her husband that "cadets thus dressed should not come in person to the house."³²

George W. Cullum, an 1833 Academy graduate and historian, tended toward hagiography when describing West Point's leaders, but even he admitted that

Major Delafield . . . was not a popular superintendent. The young are over restive under restraint, and even the elder members of his command, while freely admitting his superior administrative abilities, did not take kindly to the iron rule of his arbitrary will.³³

Delafield insisted that department heads take on a full teaching load, just as regulations stipulated. Most were not doing so, and Delafield required a written explanation from

³¹ Morrison, 40.

³² *Ibid.*, 40-41; Crackel, 131.

³³ Cullum, I, 183.

each delinquent chairman for every infraction he discovered. The professors, led by Mahan, naturally bristled at this affront to their autonomy. Mahan compared Delafield's order to an insistence that a regimental colonel also command one of the companies. Delafield saw his action as ensuring that every officer put in a full day's work. When Delafield had arrived at West Point, Mahan had assessed him as an officer of "clearsightedness, promptitude with a due degree of caution and zeal and a determination to examine everything with his own eyes."³⁴ But the clash over professors' teaching damaged their good relations for decades. Delafield used similar measures--Mahan called them "arbitrary methods"--to coerce compliance with another regulation requiring officers to attend Sunday chapel services. Yet he could also be reasonable and fair, listening to appeals of disciplinary judgments and suggestions for improving Academy procedures. But most cadets and officers disliked the stern superintendent. It was impossible, for example, to recruit enough members for a self-sustaining officers' mess while Delafield remained at West Point. The junior officers refused to join the club if it meant volunteering to dine with the superintendent. When he departed in 1845, an Irish janitor observed that "there was many a dry eye at the dock."³⁵

³⁴ Griess, 157-158; Morrison, 42. Delafield and Mahan were long-time rivals for control of the Academy, although they sought similar goals. Delafield opposed Mahan's development of the post-graduate course that later became the Napoleon Club. He fought its focus on military history and campaign analysis rather than practical engineering work. Delafield seems to have harbored some resentment of Mahan's contacts outside the Academy, especially his relationship with Delafield's immediate superior, Chief Engineer Joseph Totten. In an 1844 letter to Totten, Delafield even disparaged Mahan's credentials: "[W]e reflect that he has never had an opportunity of learning from actual observation and inspection the results of civil engineering in this country." Griess, 186, 190, 148-149, 161-163, 205-206.

³⁵ Morrison, 37-42; Crackel, 130-131, 136.

For the next eight years Delafield served as superintending engineer of the fortifications of New York harbor. He built Fort Richmond on Staten Island and oversaw improvements on the Hudson River. During this period he garnered several professional honors, including membership on the prestigious Army Board of Engineers, a credit to his expertise in seacoast and harbor defenses. His service and experience gained him a reputation as one of the foremost defenders of the 1821 Engineer Board strategy based upon the system of coastal forts.³⁶ He was chief engineer of the Department of Texas in 1853 and 1854, and returned to New York a few months before his summons to serve on the Crimean commission.

Delafield was more than qualified to lead this mission to Europe. In addition to being senior among the group, Delafield enjoyed the greatest prestige of the three because of his recent tour as superintendent. Seven years at West Point had given him invaluable experience in the practice of military command with all of the lonely responsibility that went with it. Although he was an authoritarian and unpopular for it, Delafield had made an enviable reputation in the army through broad and distinguished experience as an engineer. He had traveled over much of the country and had been involved with some of the most critical tasks of building national infrastructure and defenses in American history. Moreover, he was expert in the construction of coastal fortifications, an aspect of the national defense system that was crucial to its strategic design. Observing a war that had become the siege of a port city was an excellent assignment for a man of his talents.

³⁶ Cullum, I, 183.

At the age of fifteen, Alfred Mordecai made his first ocean voyage and became seasick. For a young man with many transatlantic crossings in his future, this chronic hazard of sea travel would prove quite a handicap indeed. He was sailing from his home in Virginia to West Point, where he hoped to enter as a member of the class of 1823. Foreseeing the possibility of motion sickness, his brother had given him "some claret wine which I tried to drink, & the experiment gave me such a disgust for that beverage that it was many years afterwards before I could taste it again." It was an inauspicious beginning to a distinguished career.³⁷

Born to Jacob and Rebecca Mordecai on 3 January 1804 in Warrenton, North Carolina, Alfred was the ninth of fourteen children. Jacob Mordecai had been a merchant in Warrenton until business failure forced him to open a school for girls in 1809 to make ends meet. Alfred received an extraordinarily thorough classical education while sitting alongside the girls in his father's Female Academy. The school prospered as well and so did the adult Mordecai children, several of whom became prominent in education, law, medicine, and business. With their help Jacob Mordecai felt secure enough to retire in 1819, but he needed to find a school that could continue his bright young son's education:

At this time the reform of the Military Academy at West Point had begun, under the able government of John C. Calhoun, Secretary of War, & admirable organization instituted by Major Thayer, consequently the academy was becoming generally known & it occurred [sic] to my father to try to procure me an appointment of Cadet-- These appointments were not

³⁷ Biographical data on Mordecai from Stanley L. Falk, "Soldier-Technologist: Major Alfred Mordecai and the Beginnings of Science in the United States Army," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., 1959); John H. B. Latrobe, "In Memory of Major Mordecai," undated pamphlet, AMP; *DAB*, Vol. VII, 153-4; Cullum, I, 299-301; Alfred Mordecai, "The Life of Alfred Mordecai as Related by Himself," James A. Padgett, Ed., *North Carolina Historical Review* XXII (January 1945): 58-108. The quotation is in Mordecai, 74.

yet in great demand, & mine was easily obtained through the kind & influential interposition of Mr. Nathaniel Macon the late speaker of the House of Representatives in Congress, & then United States Senator from our State. . . .³⁸

Alfred Mordecai was thus among the first young men who, by their use of political influence, began tying the Academy and the army officer corps to the official establishment in Washington.

Despite the recent travails of the sea voyage, the Academy's entrance examination posed little challenge for Mordecai, and he passed easily. Alfred continued his academic excellence at West Point, where he found his courses and the military training enjoyable. He loved everything about the Academy, and he performed at the top of his class in almost every subject. During his third year Colonel Thayer appointed him "acting Assistant Professor of Mathematics."

This appointment carrying with it increased pay, exemption from military duties (drills &c) & from inspector's visits to my room, rendered my situation at the academy even easier than before, & as pleasant as it was possible to be-- I was permitted to join the special mass of twelve cadets who were boarded by the Widow Thompson. . . . Regarded with favor by the officers of the academy, & well received in my visits to their families on Saturday evenings, & having pleasant associates among my companions, the time passed rapidly away. . . .³⁹

Mordecai was student-teacher to the lower classes, an honor and responsibility given only to the best students both to recognize achievement and to alleviate a shortage of instructors. This distinction is all the more impressive in light of the Academy's attrition

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

rate. Of the eighty-six young men who entered in 1819, only thirty-five graduated four years later. Mordecai stood first among them.

His high academic standing earned him the only commission given that year in the corps of engineers. Second Lieutenant Mordecai remained at West Point as acting assistant professor of natural and experimental philosophy, a further indication of the faculty's high regard for his scholarship and its desperate need for instructors. Mordecai stayed two more years at the Military Academy, becoming assistant professor of engineering in the second year. Dennis Hart Mahan, friend and fellow cadet, junior by a year, succeeded Mordecai in both teaching positions.⁴⁰

Mordecai moved in 1825 to Hampton Roads, Virginia, where he, like Delafield before him, served as assistant engineer at Forts Monroe and Calhoun. After so many years in academe, he hoped the assignment would let him pursue his "main object, that of gaining experience and useful knowledge in my profession." But army routine, even in the vaunted corps of engineers, defeated his best intentions. He later admitted, "My time has been principally devoted to the pursuit of such pleasures as circumstances permit . . . horseraces, dancing, drinking eggnog, eating good dinners. . . ." ⁴¹ He also spent time in nearby Washington, learning his way around the government and hobnobbing with generals and senators. Despite his self-deprecation, Mordecai was a fine officer and a gifted engineer. Whether through exemplary performance or skillful politics, Mordecai found himself in 1828 assistant to the chief of engineers--yet another plum assignment.⁴²

⁴⁰ Griess, 118.

⁴¹ Coffman, 98-99.

⁴² Mordecai, 85-86.

Yet for all his obvious talent, Mordecai was still a second lieutenant five years after his commissioning. The army had no retirement system, so a junior officer had few prospects for promotion unless a superior in his branch should decide to resign or happen to die. Therefore, when an army reorganization in 1832 expanded the ordnance corps, Mordecai immediately applied for a captaincy. Despite stiff competition among officers throughout the army (including J.K.F. Mansfield), Second Lieutenant Mordecai became a captain of ordnance on 1 June 1832, the only engineer so honored. The ordnance corps was less prestigious than the engineers, but it was, if anything, more purely scientific.

His first duty in this new capacity, however, was to serve as military assistant to Secretary of War Lewis Cass. Cass was the first among eleven secretaries of war with whom Mordecai enjoyed close relations. He traveled with Cass to his home in Michigan where, under the secretary's direction, he wrote the first of many military treatises. A Digest of Laws Relating to the Military Establishment of the United States was a compilation of federal legislation pertaining to the army and the Department of War. Mordecai impressed the secretary as an officer who would think for himself and forthrightly express his opinion. After one trying day among less able men, Cass greeted his assistant with, "I am always glad to see you, Mr. Mordecai; for you never come with your finger in your mouth."⁴³ Upon completing the Digest, Mordecai returned to Washington and took command of the arsenal there on the first day of 1833.

In September of that year Mordecai took a year's leave of absence and sailed to Europe--not for relaxation, but for professional edification. He toured military schools,

⁴³ Ibid., 99.

fortresses, and arsenals in England, France, Belgium, Prussia, Switzerland, and Italy. He stopped at French military schools, including St. Cyr and l'Ecole Polytechnique. Before returning he bought technical books and samples of ordnance for the War Department. (On the way home, he endured forty days of seasickness.)

In the fall of 1834 Mordecai assumed command of the Frankford Arsenal near Philadelphia. For the first time, he was a practicing scientist, testing weapons and gunpowder. For the next three decades Mordecai dedicated himself to his science, gaining renown for his expertise in both metallurgy and chemistry. He found the work time-consuming and sometimes tedious, but he recognized its importance and pursued it with diligence. Philadelphia soon provided diversions, however, for there he met and married Sara Hays. Mordecai travelled often over the more than half-century of their marriage, and he unfailingly recorded his thoughts and observations in long letters home to "my dear Sara." A wealth of correspondence between the two attests that their marriage was a lifelong friendship and romance, focused on the welfare of their children, and founded upon mutual respect. Mordecai's letters home unfailingly manifest the value he placed in Sara's abilities, prudence, and judgment. Moreover, his correspondence brings to life the playful nature of his personality. He enjoyed a drink, a joke, and an evening on the town as much as anyone, and he seemed to slow little with age. Mordecai possessed a joy in life and a love of humanity that must have made him an exceptional husband and, for our purposes, a delightful travelling companion.

A brief word is in order about Mordecai's Judaism. He was among the very few Jews in the officer corps, and his religion was no secret. Yet he professed never to have

suffered from prejudice. He was proud that his father had managed well in a small, southern community although the Mordecais were the only Jewish family in the region. Alfred noted that, as if “by some sort of silent consent,” the subject of his religion never came up in his conversations with fellow cadets and officers.⁴⁴ This tacit acceptance was due in part to Mordecai’s accomodating attitude. For example, at West Point he had marched uncomplainingly with the rest of the corps of cadets to mandatory Protestant chapel services every Sunday morning.

Neither I nor any one else objected, in my time, to sitting there whilst good Mr. Picton, the Chaplain, uttered his Presbyterian Prayers & dull Sermons; although there were no doubt many, besides myself, who did not concur with him--I confess that, especially after I had the opportunity, as Asst Profr. to go alone to the chapel, & choose a corner seat, I often indulged in a nap there, or read some book which I could smuggle in my pocket. . . .⁴⁵

Mordecai never tried to hide his religion, but he never flaunted it either. He knew how to get along with people, and his spiritual life was no exception to the rule.

Secretary Cass rewarded Mordecai’s efforts at Frankford Arsenal with an appointment to the Ordnance and Artillery Board. The organization of the army’s artillery had been the subject of contentious debate since the founding of the republic. The bronze artillery pieces of the American Revolution had become obsolete by the turn of the century because of a need for greater firepower and mobility on the western frontier. In 1800 Secretary of War Henry Dearborn had reassessed the artillery inventory with an eye toward remedying this deficiency. Since bronze weapons required large amounts of copper and tin, both in short supply in the United States, Dearborn had decided that future

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 67, 83.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

artillery weapons should be made of cast iron, readily available from American furnaces. Over subsequent years several committees vainly attempted to standardize the calibre, weight, shapes, and dimensions of artillery pieces. More vexing was the unreliability of “mottled iron,” or common cast-iron weapons. For example, in 1837 twenty-one of eight-six cast-iron six-pounder guns exploded during testing--a failure rate of 24 percent--and these results were not considered extraordinary. Army manuals dictated rejection of a manufactured lot of weapons only if more than one-quarter failed acceptance tests.⁴⁶

In 1835 Secretary Cass created the Ordnance and Artillery Board to reorganize the army's field artillery inventory into a uniform system, standardizing the number and types of weapons in each battery. At the board's request Mordecai designed an artillery organization using only five types of bronze field pieces. The board recommended Mordecai's proposal to the secretary, and he concurred. But the system proved too simple for the myriad requirements of field service. Within a few years, several new weapons came into the inventory (including the exploding six-pounders mentioned above), returning the field artillery to its old disorganization.⁴⁷

To resolve this problem, Secretary of War Joel Poinsett created another committee, the Ordnance Board, in 1839, and Mordecai was on it. He was by then assistant to the chief of ordnance, but, more importantly, his previous experience made him indispensable; he served on the Ordnance Board until the end of his career. This panel

⁴⁶ James C. Hazlett, Edwin Olmstead, M. Hume Parks, Field Artillery Weapons of the Civil War (2d ed., Newark, 1988), 26-27; Stanley L. Falk, “Artillery for the Land Service: The Development of a System,” Military Affairs 28 (Winter 1964): 97-110.

⁴⁷ Hazlett, et al., 26-27; Falk, 97-110.

carried forward the work of its predecessors, but it had a more permanent charter.

Poinsett directed the committee to resolve the bronze versus cast iron question once and for all. Not surprisingly, American iron founders used their influence in favor of cast iron weapons. Poinsett undoubtedly felt political pressure, but he wanted to make the system of artillery and ordnance supplies uniform and susceptible to industrial standardization.

The board had not progressed far in its deliberations when Poinsett decided to send a delegation to Europe to study improvements in artillery. The junior members of the board, Major R.L. Baker, Captain Benjamin Huger, and Captain Mordecai, accompanied a former major of ordnance, William Wade, on a nine-month tour of England, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Germany, Belgium, and France. They observed military maneuvers and inspected numerous forts, foundries, and arsenals. The commission purchased hundreds of technical books and an immense volume of ordnance supplies and equipment. Back in Washington, the officers convinced the Ordnance Board to accept bronze for the manufacture of all artillery pieces. Poinsett approved. This twenty-four-weapon system included six calibres of guns, five howitzers, five mortars, and two columbiads.⁴⁸ Mordecai later published Artillery for the United States Land Service, which explained the new system of artillery and the reasons for the board's decisions.

Mordecai wrote prolifically on professional subjects. In 1841 he published the Ordnance Manual, which codified standards and procedures for testing, inspection, contracting, and procurement of weapons throughout the army. He published the Report of Experiments on Gunpowder in 1845, based on his own scientific work at Washington

⁴⁸ A columbiad was a long-barreled muzzle-loader, thick behind the trunnions and designed for high-angle fire.

Arsenal with the ballistic pendulum, a new device for measuring projectile velocity and, thereby, the explosiveness of gunpowder. Mordecai produced the Second Report of Experiments on Gunpowder in 1849 and an updated edition of the Ordnance Manual in 1850. Three years later both the American Philosophical Society and the American Association for the Advancement of Science offered him membership in recognition of his many scientific achievements.

Mordecai had been assigned to Washington Arsenal in 1842, and he remained there for most of the next fourteen years. When Congress failed to provide the customary civilian Board of Visitors to the Military Academy for 1843-1844, the secretary appointed Mordecai to a special board composed of military officers, affording him an opportunity to return to his alma mater for an inspection tour. At other times he stayed busy commanding the arsenal, conducting experiments, and writing treatises. He received a brevet promotion to major for his work in the production of weaponry and ammunition during the Mexican War. Secretary Davis sent him on a diplomatically sensitive mission to Mexico in 1853, where he investigated a \$500,000 indemnity claim for damages to a silver mine, alleged to have been caused by the invading U.S. Army. Mordecai's thorough investigation proved the claim fraudulent.

Mordecai's record of achievement marked him as one of the most accomplished officers in the army. A prolific writer, acclaimed scientist, and member of professional societies and responsible committees, Mordecai was something of a "renaissance man" and eminently well suited for a commission to Europe. His two previous trips gave him invaluable perspective. Moreover, Mordecai had a respected record in two distinct types

of intellectual endeavor, one rather common in the army, the other quite rare. He was an inveterate compiler of data, from Ordnance Board decisions to Federal legislation. Thus, like most military writers, he had contributed to the growing corpus of professional knowledge simply by gathering, ordering, and publishing information that was extant but relatively inaccessible. More notable was Mordecai's talent and experience as a practicing scientist whose expertise lay in military fields of inquiry, the metallurgy of cannon manufacture and the chemistry of gunpowder production. No officer in the army was better qualified to investigate the technical aspects of foreign weaponry.

On 31 December 1854 Mordecai received a regular commission as major of ordnance after nearly twenty-three years as a captain. Three months later he was again in Washington reviewing army regulations, when Jefferson Davis summoned him.

Twenty-eight-year-old George Brinton McClellan had been a captain of cavalry for less than a month when he received his telegram.⁴⁹ Yet despite his youth, he had already developed a solid reputation in the army. Born in Philadelphia on 3 December 1826 (Delafield was then twenty-eight; Mordecai, twenty-three), McClellan was the third of George and Elizabeth Brinton McClellan's five children. His father was a surgeon, specializing in ophthalmology, and he founded the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. The elder McClellan headed the school's faculty, edited a medical journal, and wrote extensively on surgery. He was a complex man--intelligent, ambitious, and bellicose--and seems to have passed on many of his personal traits to his middle son. The

⁴⁹ Biographical data on McClellan from *DAB*, Vol. VI, 581-585; *Register*, 270; Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon* (New York, 1988).

McClellans insisted on providing their children with a first-rate, classical education. From private schools and private tutors young George gained a broad familiarity with history and a fluency in French and Latin. McClellan acquired foreign languages effortlessly, a mark of his extraordinary intellect. At eleven he enrolled in the University of Pennsylvania preparatory academy, entering the university itself two years later. An affinity for the military impelled him to seek an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy, which he quickly received. In the summer of 1842 McClellan, at fifteen, was the youngest of 142 plebes to arrive on the Plain at West Point, where Richard Delafield presided as superintendent. The curriculum rarely challenged the precocious boy and he consistently stood near the head of his class. In his final year he studied “Military and Civil Engineering and the Science of War” under the tutelage of Dennis Hart Mahan. The brilliant professor became McClellan’s mentor and life-long friend.

The Mexican War was beginning when McClellan graduated second among fifty-eight in the class of 1846 and became a brevet second lieutenant in the corps of engineers. He was proud of his new profession and brimmed with enthusiasm at the prospect of war:

Hip! Hip! Hurrah! War at last sure enough! Aint it glorious! . . . Well, it appears that our wishes have at last been gratified & we shall soon have the intense satisfaction of fighting the crowd--musquitoes & Mexicans &c. . . . You have no idea in what a state of excitement we have been here.⁵⁰

Shortly after graduation, he joined a newly formed company of sappers and miners at West Point. After a few months’ training, they sailed for Brazos Santiago, near the mouth

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

of the Rio Grande. In January 1847 McClellan's company led a column that marched 400 miles from Matamoros to Tampico to join General Winfield Scott in preparation for a landing at Vera Cruz. On that march the young subaltern developed a love for soldiering and a hatred of volunteers. He became a professional chauvinist, disdainingly directly commissioned "mustang" officers. A few days of wartime experience were sufficient to convince him that no citizen could "become a good officer without years of training."⁵¹

McClellan landed with the first troops ashore at Vera Cruz. The Mexicans failed to contest the American landing, a blunder that allowed Scott to gain a beachhead and besiege the city. McClellan was junior among ten engineers directing the siege, including Joseph G. Totten and Robert E. Lee. Scott placed great responsibility in the hands of his senior engineers, calling them his "little cabinet" and using them as a sort of forerunner to a general staff. Junior engineers, McClellan included, helped emplace artillery batteries, acted as aides-de-camp, and performed reconnaissance duty as the "eyes and ears" of the commanding general. At Vera Cruz McClellan came under fire repeatedly and earned Totten's praise for the valuable information his scouting furnished to General Scott.⁵²

As Scott followed Cortes's ancient invasion route toward Mexico City, McClellan gained the martial glory he sought. At Contreras, he had two horses shot from under him. Later that afternoon, engineer McClellan stepped forward to command first a section, then an entire battery of artillery after their officers had fallen wounded. He won a mention in dispatches and a brevet promotion for his actions at Contreras and at Churubusco the

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 13-17.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 17-19.

following day. Brigadier General Persifor F. Smith lauded McClellan: "Nothing seemed . . . too bold to be undertaken or too difficult to be executed. . . ." The next month at Chapultepec McClellan assisted Lee in emplacing artillery batteries and later led engineers fighting as infantry in the assault on Mexico City. This final battle of the war earned him a second brevet, this time to captain.⁵³

McClellan feared peacetime service would be a trial of boredom after the thrill of combat. Yet the capture of Mexico City brought a welcome respite: eight lazy, luxurious months of occupation duty before he returned to West Point in 1848. There he served nominally as an assistant professor of engineering, though his actual duties were with his company. He clashed often with Delafield's successor as superintendent, Captain Henry Brewerton, over many issues of prerogative. In a telling contrast with Mordecai, McClellan protested the rule mandating attendance at chapel services, and he pointedly absented himself to provoke a controversy. Yet his military responsibilities were not taxing, and he found time to translate a French manual on bayonet exercise and to test it with his company. In 1852 the army officially adopted the manual.

McClellan also enjoyed membership in Mahan's Napoleon Club, a group of young officers who met regularly and presented papers on military campaigns. He wrote two lengthy papers for the Club, one on the Battle of Wagram and another on Napoleon's 1812 Campaign into Russia. He profited intellectually and professionally from this association with Mahan and his fellow officers in postgraduate study. He exulted in his writing: "I have been working hard at it," he said of one essay, ". . . & the ink was hardly

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 19-24.

dry on the last part when it was read. . . . I've been so intently occupied with the one subject, that I have thought of but little else." Unlike most of his army colleagues, McClellan, stimulated by his work with the Napoleon Club, continued to read military history for his own professional development. Mahan was so impressed with his abilities that when McClellan resigned his commission a few years later, the professor wrote directly to the secretary of war, urging him to coax the young man back into "service in any grade however possible."⁵⁴

For the next few years McClellan travelled the continent from one responsible assignment to the next. Typical of the antebellum army, he moved easily between duties suitable for either an engineer or a topog. He left West Point in June 1851 for Fort Delaware, an island bastion forty miles downriver from Philadelphia, where he worked as an assistant engineer constructing the fort. The pace of activity was slow enough that he taught himself German in his spare time, again showing his facility with languages. The following winter he joined his future father-in-law, Captain Randolph B. Marcy, at Fort Smith, Arkansas, for an expedition to explore the Red River. McClellan was second-in-command and chief engineer of the seventy-five man party. They followed the river to its sources and explored Palo Duro Canyon in the Texas Panhandle. Marcy, perhaps the only superior who ever enjoyed a cordial relationship with McClellan, named a small tributary "McClellan's Creek."

When he returned to Fort Smith in July, McClellan received orders to report to General Persifor F. Smith, commander of the Military Department of Texas. He served as

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 28-31; Griess, 332.

Smith's chief engineer and accompanied him on an inspection tour of the frontier posts of the command. In October the army chief of engineers directed McClellan to make a survey of rivers and harbors on the Texas coast. It was an ambitious project, and McClellan handled his first independent command well. He completed the project in April 1853 and received another choice assignment--deputy commander of a survey team seeking a railway route from Puget Sound to St. Paul, Minnesota. McClellan's independent charge was the western half of that exploration, from the coast through the Cascade Mountains. Governor Isaac Stevens of the Washington Territory was in overall command of the survey team and led the party that explored westward from St. Paul. Prefiguring his later performance with the Army of the Potomac, McClellan displayed a caution in his reconnaissance that displeased Stevens. Due to bad weather, McClellan stopped short and left unexplored several excellent passes through the Cascades. Nevertheless, he departed the Northwest with his reputation intact and arrived back in Washington, D.C. in April 1854.

McClellan's standing was so good, in fact, that he shortly enjoyed the personal attention of the secretary of war, Jefferson Davis. Davis hand-picked him for a secret mission to survey the Dominican Republic's harbors for a suitable American naval port. McClellan reported back to his patron that Samana Bay on the island's northern coast would give the United States a Caribbean base to rival the British Royal Navy's in Jamaica. The secretary was pleased with his work--McClellan's star was on the rise. Davis gave him another assignment that kept the first lieutenant (he had received a regular

army promotion while in the Cascades) under his direct supervision. McClellan collected data on the costs and construction of the nation's established railroads.

As part of his reform and reorganization of the army, Davis had convinced Congress to create four new regiments, two infantry and two cavalry. For hundreds of officers with prospects of slow promotion, the new units were a professional godsend. Competition for commissions in the regiments was fierce, and Davis received hundreds of letters from commission-seekers and their supporters, including McClellan. When the new regiments were officially organized on March 3, 1855, McClellan became a captain of cavalry. He had not yet left to join his new outfit when the adjutant general beckoned him back to Washington.

Because of his later prominence as commander of the Union armies, biographers have paid much more attention to McClellan than the other commissioners. Two historians, Stephen W. Sears and Joseph T. Glatthaar, have recently analyzed his complex character in some depth. Sears's well-documented biography allows McClellan to damn himself with his own words time and time again. During the Civil War McClellan considered himself a larger-than-life savior of the Union, called by God to lead the great crusade. At that lofty height he would not suffer the fools who too frequently failed to understand his plans or refused to support him adequately. Throughout his career McClellan was incapable of maintaining amicable relations with his superiors. He was mentally inflexible and given to self-deceptions that defied logic.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Sears, *passim*.

Glatthaar has noted all these qualities and posited a cause for them--paranoid personality disorder with narcissistic tendencies. Admitting the dangers of psychiatric diagnosis at a century's distance, Glatthaar nonetheless musters formidable evidence from McClellan's life to show a pattern of mistrustfulness, an inability to delegate, an acute desire to dominate others, and trends of irrationality and self-deception--all characteristic of paranoia. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders also defines narcissistic personality disorder as consisting of "grandiosity, lack of empathy, and hypersensitivity to the evaluation of others." McClellan's consistent behavior, especially during the Civil War, when his life was best documented, showed narcissistic tendencies. Once again, no respectable psychiatrist would attempt to diagnose a mental disorder without examining the patient, but a consistent body of documentary evidence, much of it in McClellan's own hand, makes Glatthaar's analytical framework useful.⁵⁶

To read at length in McClellan's correspondence is to develop a healthy dislike for the man. He possessed a brilliant mind capable of quick study and the retention of incredible stores of information. But he was also brash, arrogant, petulant, and rude. He was repeatedly disrespectful of Delafield and especially Mordecai, two men whom he should have held in high esteem out of deference to their age, experience, and professional achievements. Instead, by his own admission, he offered them sundry slights and rebuffs, which they both seem to have been too gentlemanly to return.

⁵⁶ Joseph T. Glatthaar, Partners in Command: The Relationships Between Leaders in the Civil War (New York, 1994), 237-242.

Another quirk seems hardly worthy of mention, were it not so strange. McClellan was involved in an on-again, off-again romance with the woman he would soon marry, Mary Ellen Marcy, daughter of the aforementioned Randolph Marcy and his wife, Mary. During the tour in Europe, McClellan maintained a regular correspondence with Mrs. Marcy, often pouring out his feelings for her daughter. But, in over a year abroad, he never once exchanged a letter with the object of his affections.

These three well-respected officers came together in Washington in early April 1855. There is no evidence that the officers knew each other well prior to their selection. Certainly McClellan and Delafield were acquainted from the examination room, since Delafield was superintendent during the first three years of McClellan's cadetship. Also, Mordecai had served on the Academy's board of visitors during the winter of 1843-1844, near the end of Delafield's tenure at West Point. The two elder officers had certainly crossed paths then. Mordecai and McClellan had probably never met, unless by chance while Mordecai was inspecting the Academy that year. Still, the army officer corps was a small fraternity and the scientific corps was smaller yet. All three men were or had been engineers; they travelled in the same circles and had scores of mutual friends and associates. They would have known a great deal about one another by reputation.

Davis's choices are interesting for the branches they represented. Davis probably meant the commission to represent three major groups within the army, namely the engineers, the line army, and the artillery and ordnance corps. If it were his intention to select qualified men to observe European armies in three broad divisions of military

technology, his choice of an engineer, a cavalryman, and an ordnance officer made sense. Moreover, it indicates a broader outlook toward military observer missions than many of his predecessors had taken, inasmuch as he included a line officer with members of the scientific corps. Yet it is interesting that Davis, a former line officer himself, chose three men and probably considered two others who had all been members of the *corps d'elite*. Mordecai found it "worthy of remark" that "all those named," including Mansfield and Lee, "had belonged to the Corps of Engineers." If McClellan's berth were indeed the "line-army seat" on the commission, then not only was it filled by an engineer who had transferred to cavalry only days earlier, but it had likely been offered to Lee, who fit the same description. Perhaps Davis's choices demonstrate the pervasiveness of the intellectual bias in the army that held up the engineers as a cohort of demigods.⁵⁷

However Jefferson Davis went about selecting the commission, he ended by choosing men whose records of achievement and experience made them among the most respected officers in the army. If McClellan's achievements seem thin by comparison, one should recall that he was a generation younger than his fellows. On the eve of their departure Delafield was 57, Mordecai 51; McClellan had just turned 28. Yet he was the only combat veteran among them, and had amassed an impressive record of service in responsible positions for an officer so junior. Delafield, the senior commissioner, was both a former chief of their alma mater and a respected engineer who had overseen some of the most important projects that the army had ever undertaken. Mordecai, with two tours of Europe and a lifetime of empirical research to his credit, brought a worldly sense of

⁵⁷ Mordecai, 104.

perspective and a trained scientific eye that had been recognized by the most prestigious professional societies in the country.

Yet for all of their diversity, their similarities were more striking. Each of the commissioners was steeped in the educational traditions at West Point and conditioned by its “system and habit of thought.” Delafield had been a cadet at the start Thayer’s reforms of the Military Academy. Later, as superintendent, he worked to resurrect those parts of his predecessor’s tradition that he thought had been neglected. When Mordecai had entered the Academy, the reforms were in full bloom. He then served on the faculty under Thayer and helped administer the vaunted system. Though Thayer had long since departed when McClellan entered West Point, his methods had achieved the standing of holy writ, guiding and governing every facet of a young cadet’s life. Each of these men, then, had received rigorous training in the engineering curriculum of the Thayer regime. Indeed, each had graduated at or near the top of his Academy class and won a commission in the elite corps of engineers. One may presume, since they flourished under the system, that they had also absorbed the mental discipline, the exacting precision, the attention to detail, and the facility for deductive reasoning that the “system and habit of thought” was intended to inculcate.

Did the Thayer system circumscribe their intellectual horizons as well? The system could demand tremendous focus and mental discipline, but it also stifled creativity, inductive reasoning, and higher-level thought. Indeed, by 1855 military expertise in the U.S. Army, largely a product of West Point and West Pointers, was moribund, Davis’s efforts notwithstanding. Professional thought focused narrowly on military engineering,

which it derived uncritically from translated French sources. The profession itself rewarded its practitioners for pursuits in civil engineering much more readily than hard service on the frontier. Line officers rebelled by adopting an anti-intellectualism that viewed their craft as impervious to scholarly penetration. And West Point, the profession's predominate educational institution, fostered a peculiarly mechanistic approach to intellectual endeavor, imparting to its graduates "a system and habit of thought." A complex of rigid boundaries restricted the growth of the army's corpus of professional expertise.

The Delafield Commission, as it came to be known, represented the first two generations of an American officer corps that thought of itself as a profession. These men had absorbed the corporate ethic and the sense of national responsibility that marked the mid-century officer corps. Indeed, they were the cream of that crop. But for all of their achievement, they also represented a particular dearth of experience and capability that plagued the American army. The U.S. Army had performed poorly in the Mexican War in the areas of strategic and logistical planning because no officer had ever engaged in such endeavors at that high level. The army had gained a victory largely due to the genius of Winfield Scott. For other reasons, the army had simply neglected to articulate a doctrine for warfare on the frontier, where it had been operating almost continually for decades. The Delafield Commission suffered from the same handicap as the Mexican War and frontier officer corps--a lack of experience in high-level planning, coordination, and execution of operations and a lack of focus on maneuver warfare. They had never seen war that involved steam-powered ships, railroads, telegraphs, or large numbers of artillery

pieces and rifled small arms. Their ability to observe warfare in the throes of such technological change, to observe it at the highest intellectual level, and to draw prescriptive conclusions for the army was, with the benefit of hindsight, questionable.

But their ability to observe the military establishments of Europe and the combatants in the Crimea with diligence, care, and precise attention to detail was beyond question. If the task was to examine and record the facts as they saw them, these West Point-trained engineers were the best that the army had to offer.

And that is precisely what Jefferson Davis asked them to do.

Chapter Six

“Through the Meshes of Diplomacy”

The Delafield Commission was to be the most significant military observer mission in at least fifteen years. The Ordnance Board trips, of which Mordecai had been a member, had produced far-reaching change and rationalization of the army's artillery system, but their work was technically specialized and affected only one arm of service. The Thayer-McRee mission and Dennis Hart Mahan's four-year sojourn both resulted in important and salutary reforms in military education, but they, too, were limited in scope: their effects were primarily felt at West Point. This mission was broader--meant to encompass the range of military science and to traverse the whole of Europe, rather than concentrating on France. Moreover, for the first time, this commission was to travel to an active theater of war.

In some ways the Delafield Commission became as much a diplomatic mission as a military one. In order to secure permission to observe the soldiers, fortresses, and equipment of the armies of Europe, the commission had first to earn the trust of myriad officials in each country they visited. That imperative was especially true for the belligerent nations who would grant the all-important permits to visit the armies in the field. In the course of their travels, the Delafield Commissioners found that the skills of diplomacy were much easier to criticize than to master. Bureaucratic obstacles--unforeseen, unavoidable, and badly negotiated--very nearly scuttled the mission.

The three officers hastily assembled in Washington during the first week in April 1855. Although their summons was cryptic, they discovered soon enough what Jefferson Davis had in store for them. During an interview in his War Department office on 5 April he explained that he had personally chosen the three of them to travel to Europe on a fact-finding mission. The four men discussed the mission and Davis probably spelled out his expectations in some detail. Sadly, however, no record of their conversation has survived. Yet the written order he gave them that day was quite clear:

GENTLEMEN: You have been selected to form a commission to visit Europe for the purpose of obtaining useful 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.¹

Davis followed this preamble with a detailed list of “subjects to which it is peculiarly desirable to direct your attention.” To wit:

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 of transporting the sick and wounded.

The kind of clothing and camp equipment used for service in the

¹ Jefferson Davis to R. Delafield, A. Mordecai, G.B. McClellan, 2 April 1855, in Richard Delafield, The Report on the Art of War in Europe in 1854, 1855, and 1856 (Washington, 1860), v. Hereinafter cited as Delafield Report.

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 specific arms and equipments used by cavalry of all kinds will claim your particular attention.

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 British 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, & c.

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.²

Davis's request was thorough, perhaps too thorough. That list of particulars was to guide the commissioners travel and observations in Europe for the coming year, and it affected their work preparing reports of their journey for quite some time beyond. The specificity of Davis's instructions is both an indication of the intellectual progress of the American military and a telling sign of how far it had yet to go.

This precision in communication was characteristic of Davis's management style. For example, the thoroughness of his reports to the President stands in marked contrast to

² Ibid.

those of his predecessors as secretary of war. Part of the reason for such painstaking care was Davis's education at West Point, where the intent of the curriculum had been to discipline his mind.³ Moreover, in this instance Davis was writing to West Point-trained engineers who were also disciplined to a "system and habit of thought" and long accustomed to such precise and detailed language. Thus, not only was such particularity characteristic of Jefferson Davis, but also of his three commissioners. By extension, since USMA graduates by this time constituted a large majority of the officer corps, this type of detailed communication would also have been well understood, probably expected, and possibly even desired by officers receiving instructions from their superiors.

That observation is not meant to criticize any one of Davis's requests as trivial, but such a listing of items, in no order of priority, could tend to trivialize the whole. However important some of the instructions might have been, he took the risk of constricting the commissioners' fields of vision by overloading them with detail. In other words, an observer asked to examine a particular set of items might, in an earnest attempt to fulfill his superior's expectations, fail to see other matters of greater import that lay outside his defined purview. There is nothing to distinguish the significance between, for example, "the nature and efficiency of ordnance and ammunition" and "the kind of clothing and camp equipage used for service in the field." Davis's instructions gave the commission no direction for establishing a priority of effort.

³ USMA Academic Board report, 1843, Staff Records, United States Military Academy, 1818-1875, Volume 3: 197-199. 9 volumes. Archives, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York.

Moreover, the wording of the various requests is restrictive, seeming to demand specific factual observations rather than broader, more thoughtful conceptualization. In other words, Davis asked for information rather than analysis. Two examples will suffice. Asking the commission to obtain information on “the organization of armies and of departments for furnishing supplies of all kinds to the troops, especially in field service. . .” is quite different from asking them to analyze and criticize the logistical systems of the various armies. Instead of asking the officers to evaluate tactics in the Crimea, Davis desired to know “the practical advantages and disadvantages attending the use of various kinds of rifle arms which have been lately introduced extensively in European warfare.” His requests favored the limited and the particular over the broad and the conceptual.

Another risk of such specificity is that Davis might have omitted certain matters of import. Accustomed to having all the particulars spelled out for them, the observers might then fail to give attention to important subjects that the secretary had not addressed. In his instructions Davis neglected to ask specifically about the uses of telegraphy, railroads, and steam engines, although he did make twelve other detailed requests. Those omissions carried the risk that the commissioners might not take the initiative to investigate matters without specific orders from Davis.

Further, inasmuch as the commissioners had been selected as representatives of their branches and came to see themselves in that light, particularity reinforced the profession’s tendency toward fragmented efforts. Line officers and engineers rarely

thought about one another's daily tasks; even less did they try to conceive an integrated science of war that fused their different capabilities. A list of specific requests for information might have validated each commissioner's preference for narrowly dividing the labor of observation and reporting. Consequently, each might focus only on those matters that affected his branch or area of expertise, rather than thinking about the whole. In much the same way that army bureau chiefs failed to work together as a cohesive staff, the commissioners might neglect this opportunity to synthesize their various experiences and talents with their joint observations to create new thinking about warfare.

Furthermore, Davis did not ask the commission to address two areas of higher analysis: he did not grant them license to think broadly about warfare. First, he did not ask them to analyze European strategy or to criticize American strategy in light of what they learned about potential European foes. Further, despite his own interest in American civil-military relations, he did not ask the commission to study politico-military dialogue in Europe. In general, strict compliance with Davis's instructions would have required the commission to do little more than gather data, studying no sophisticated questions of national policy, military theory, or strategy.

Davis's detailed instructions for their travel, while not quite as restrictive as his other requests, hinted at the delicacy of their mission. The commissioners were to travel to the Crimea as soon as possible "for the purpose of observing active operations in that quarter." Davis suggested that they enter Allied lines first, then cross into the Russian

camp in besieged Sebastopol. From there they could proceed to St. Petersburg in order to inspect operations in the Baltic. He asked that they tour military facilities in Russia, Prussia, Austria, France, and England on their return trip. Wherever they went, they were to present themselves to local army commanders “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.” He wanted them to return to Washington by 1 November 1855, but made allowances for an extension should circumstances warrant. Davis recognized that the commissioners needed some latitude in arranging their travel, giving them leave to alter their plans based on “the state of affairs existing on your arrival in Europe and the information you may acquire there.” In closing, he placed his reliance “on your judgment and discretion to conduct your movements 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.”⁴ That final sentence, as much an assurance of his confidence as an admonition, became the hardest to follow of all his instructions.

Near the end of his letter of instruction Davis asked the commissioners for periodic reports on “the progress of your journey, and remarks on the subjects within the scope of your instructions which you may wish to communicate.” For that reason, he directed Delafield, as the senior officer, to write as the need arose; the other officers were to

⁴ Delafield Report, v-vi.

correspond only through Delafield, "according to military usage and regulations."

When they returned to the United States, he expected them to give "a full account of your expedition, and the information you may obtain"

The secretary appointed Mordecai treasurer for the commission, furnished him with funds, and advised him to buy "new books, drawings, and patterns of arms and equipments" of military value as he saw fit. Davis asked Secretary of State William L. Marcy to write a letter of introduction to the State Department's bankers in London, the famous Baring Brothers and Co., Ltd., so that Mordecai might make use of their services. Marcy further provided letters to U.S. ambassadors in Europe asking them to assist the commission in every way possible.⁵

Davis also asked the ambassadors from England, France, Russia, Prussia, and Austria to provide the commission with letters of introduction to their governments. To facilitate this request, Secretary and Mrs. Davis hosted a dinner in their home for the diplomats and the commissioners. A few army generals were also present, including Chief Engineer Joseph G. Totten, Quartermaster General Thomas S. Jesup, and the army's commanding general, Lieutenant General Winfield Scott. The presence of these high-ranking officers at the send-off dinner may indicate the importance they attached to the commission. On the other hand, Scott's inclusion seems peculiar, for he was Davis's

⁵ Jefferson Davis to William L. Marcy, 4 April 1855, National Archives Microfilm No. 179, roll 145, frame 24. Baring Brothers also acted as a conduit for correspondence and was more efficient than any other channel the commissioners used, including the U.S. diplomatic network. W.L. Marcy to "Diplomatic and Consular Agents," 3 April 1855, GBMP 44: 489.

nemesis in a personal and Constitutional power struggle. The two men were in the midst of a letter-writing war, and later the publication of their correspondence brought well-deserved embarrassment and discredit to both of them.⁶ Yet in her account of the evening Varina Davis made no mention of fireworks between the general and her husband.

Instead, she dwelt on the personal qualities of the commissioners, finding them all to be perfect exemplars of the military profession. Though she was doubtless unaware of it, her descriptive language was almost a paraphrase of the Military Academy academic board's goal: instilling "a system and habit of thought" in its graduates. For example, Major Mordecai "was a Hebrew, . . . his mind was versatile, at times even playful, but his habits of thought were of the most serious problems, and so perfectly systematized as to make everything evolved from his fecund mind available for the use of mankind." Delafield, the former Academy superintendent, was "an alert soldierly man with much of scientific acquirement, but a curt manner." Mrs. Davis found Captain McClellan "quite young; and [he] looked younger than he really was from an inveterate habit of blushing when suddenly addressed; [he] gave us a most favorable impression." McClellan turned

⁶ Samuel P. Huntington has called the feud between Davis and Winfield Scott "one of the most vitriolic exchanges ever to enliven American public administration." The origins of the dispute were embarrassingly trivial, but the resolution of the controversy directly affected the Constitutional relationship among the president, the secretary of war, and the commanding general of the army. Confusion over the place of the commanding general in the civil-military hierarchy had festered through a number of legal and administrative changes since the founding of the republic, and it continued for another half-century after the Scott-Davis contretemps. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), 210; William B. Skelton, "The Commanding General and the Problem of Command in the United States Army, 1821-1841," *Military Affairs* 34, No. 4 (December 1970): 117-122.

“a fine rosy purple” when General Scott loudly lectured him on the proper ways to cook terrapin and to chase buffalo. Apparently, the West Point engineer, just newly minted a cavalryman, found Scott’s frontier anecdotes unseemly dinner fare. Despite McClellan’s embarrassment, the dinner was a social success.⁷

The evening seemed to bear diplomatic fruit as well. The ministers of Austria, Russia, and Prussia quickly furnished letters of introduction, sending them directly to the War Department. The British ambassador also obliged, after a fashion, by forwarding a sealed letter to Lord Clarendon, the British foreign secretary. But the French minister was even less forthcoming. Davis complained that:

before replying to my request for letters of introduction, [he] addressed me a note asking whether our officers were to go to the camp and army of the Allies and to no other place whatever. Upon my replying that I wished their observations to be as wide as the field of active operations, he sent me a sealed letter of introduction to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of his Government. The distrust and apprehension which was exhibited, was so little called for by the character of the Officers, the position of our Government, and the present state of military science as certainly to make no favorable impression on me.⁸

The trepidation of the French seems to have two possible explanations. They might simply have been generally cautious about security because they were at war. On the

⁷ Varina Davis, Jefferson Davis: Ex-President of the Confederate States of America, Vol. I (New York, 1890), 535-7. Varina Davis’s mention of Mordecai’s religion is not unique although it is rather benign. She condescendingly found him an “Israelite without guile” and an example of “how that race had furnished the highest type of manhood.” McClellan occasionally used an antisemitic slur, but never specifically directed at Mordecai and always within the privacy of his letters home. Mordecai himself never mentioned that antisemitism troubled him; nor did any of his correspondents.

⁸ Jefferson Davis to James Buchanan, 9 April 1855, James Buchanan Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

other hand, there might have been a lingering distrust of the United States following the publication of the Ostend Manifesto. On 18 October 1854, the U.S. ambassadors to Spain, France, and England had met at Ostend, Belgium to discuss diplomatic maneuvers to force Spain to sell Cuba to the United States. They signed a document, which unfortunately became public, suggesting that if Spain refused to sell, the United States should “detach that island” by force. The Ostend Manifesto, unseen and unapproved in Washington, gave evidence of American bellicosity that alarmed and angered many Europeans.⁹ Whatever the reason, French reluctance to assist the commission became a constant irritant and an endless source of delay and distraction.

Nevertheless, armed with Davis’s instructions and sundry letters meant to ease their progress, the three officers set out for Boston, where they embarked on their journey across the Atlantic. In the short time since their appointment word of their mission had begun to circulate through the army. Delafield received a letter from an army surgeon in New York requesting specific information on military medical practices in Europe. Mordecai’s companion on a previous European tour, Benjamin Huger, hurried to Boston to see them off, but arrived too late. Someone Mordecai described only as an “ordnance person” tried to contact him in Washington, presumably to discuss their mission. He also missed the commission, followed them to Europe, and caught up with them in Paris.¹⁰

⁹ This issue also caused controversy in America, where the certainty of Cuba’s becoming a slave state, should it join the Union, stirred sectional tensions. Pierre Soule, U.S. minister to Spain and the driving force behind the conference, lost his position over the affair. See David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861 (New York, 1976), 190-193, 195.

¹⁰ Richard Satterlee to Richard Delafield, 9 April 1855, Delafield Collection, U.S. Military Academy.

Excited and optimistic about their journey, the officers were also keenly aware of the great responsibility they bore. Indeed, this delegation travelled with a charter broader than any military observer mission since the practice had begun in 1815. However restrictive Davis's language might have been, the task he gave these three officers ranged over the length and breadth of military science as it was then understood in America. Earlier missions had gone abroad to investigate military education, methods of engineering, or gun technology, but the Delafield Commission sailed that April to study European armies in war and peace. McClellan spoke for all of them, saying that he felt flattered by his place on the commission and would "try to do it credit."¹¹

They sailed from Boston aboard the steamer *Asia* on Wednesday, 11 April 1855.

The trio arrived in Liverpool eleven days later after a passage that McClellan found "short, smooth & pleasant." Poor Mordecai, however, rarely left *terra firma* without some ill effects. Grateful for a quick voyage and favorable winds that made for smooth seas, he was happy that "on this one I had much less than the usual amount of suffering . . . [B]ut you know nothing can render a sea voyage even tolerable to me." In his nausea Mordecai found fellow passenger Horace Greeley, editor of the New York *Tribune*, "a noted but I cannot say a distinguished person."¹²

West Point, New York; Benjamin Huger to Sara Mordecai, 20 April 1855, AMP 3: 732; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-16 May 1855, AMP 1: 120.

¹¹ George B. McClellan to Ellen Marcy, 6 April 1855 [marked incorrectly "1856"], GBMP 44: 596.

¹² George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 22 April 1855, GBMP 3: 262; Alfred Mordecai to Sara

The commissioners traveled to London the next day with an eye toward quickly arranging permission to visit the British forces in the Crimea. The British had recently installed a telegraph linking field headquarters in Balaklava with the war ministry at Whitehall, so information about military operations was very current. "The telegraphic communication with Balaklava is just completed," wrote McClellan, "so that the headquarters of Lord Raglan [British commander in the Crimea] are not far removed (in point of time) from the Horse Guards--what a wonderful achievement that is." There was little news from the front, but a ten-day bombardment of Sebastopol "indicates that affairs in the Crimea are approaching a conclusion, the nature of which we may be in time to see." Britons were excited that day over the arrival of Napoleon III in London, who had broadly hinted that he might go to the Crimea as generalissimo of the allied forces. Delafield surmised that "important operations [in the Crimea] may therefore be deferred until his arrival."¹³

On the advice of James Buchanan, American ambassador to the Court of St. James's and future President of the United States, the three officers called upon the foreign secretary on 27 April. Lord Clarendon received them kindly enough, but informed

Mordecai, 22 April 1855, AMP 1: 106.

¹³ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22 April 1855, AMP 1: 106; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 22 April 1855, GBMP 3: 262; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 27 April 1855, GBMP 3: 270. Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 27 April 1855, National Archives Microfilm No. 567, Roll 513, frame 524. Because this particular roll of microfilm figures so heavily in Delafield's documentation of the commission's travels, it will hereinafter be cited by the shorthand, "DC," for Delafield Correspondence.

them that diplomatic etiquette placed demands on them they had not expected: they were to be presented to the Queen. McClellan complained:

[W]e are to be presented next Wednesday if still here (as there seems every prospect that we shall be) & I must be in full tog--it seems to be a great humbug to go to all this trouble for one glance at a Queen. . . . The mere fact of having been presented gives one much more consideration.¹⁴

Waiting for the wheels of the diplomatic bureaucracy to turn, they remained in London longer than they desired, the first of many such delays.

Their presentation to the queen and interviews with the American ambassador and British foreign secretary were just the first of many close associations with high dignitaries in Europe. During their year-long “grand tour,” the commissioners were frequently in the company of heads of state, ministers of government, and other luminaries. This rubbing of elbows, both officially and socially, indicates a number of things about this commission, its purpose, and the American officer corps. The fact that they were representatives of the United States Government obviously carried some weight in Europe for them to gain entrance at so many portals of power: these Americans traveled nowhere unnoticed.

Their reactions to their lofty surroundings tell a great deal about the commissioners’ sense of corporateness--their self-identity as professional soldiers. The tone of their correspondence suggests that they expected to interact with high officials--the dinner at Secretary Davis’s home was an example. The evening had been a pleasant

¹⁴ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 27 April 1855, DC 524; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 May 1855, DC 527; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 27 April 1855, GBMP 3: 270.

and welcome diversion, but not an extraordinary occasion. Their letters sometimes betray an air of excitement at meeting a head of state, but just as often such occasions simply seem to have interfered with more pressing business. McClellan found it “a great humbug” to don his dress uniform simply to meet Queen Victoria. The officers surely enjoyed themselves at numerous social occasions in several European capitals, but although they moved comfortably among the ruling elites of Europe and the United States, they seem to have been aware that they were temporarily *in*, but not permanently *of* those circles. From their letters one grasps an inchoate separateness from the politicians, diplomats, and crowned heads with whom they had so much contact. Each of them, at one time or another, confided to his correspondents candid evaluations and stinging criticisms of officials of various stations. The Americans seem to have had a thorough disdain for the pretensions of the well-heeled. Partly, these sentiments might have stemmed from simple American egalitarianism; yet the commissioners, and especially McClellan, occasionally voiced a certain social elitism themselves. More likely their attitudes manifested a sense of otherness, a feeling of professional corporateness. Indeed, these soldiers enjoyed true fraternity only in the company of other military officers. That camaraderie among officers and otherness from civilian officials indicates a strong sense of professional identity.

Lord Clarendon had granted them permission to tour military facilities throughout Britain. They observed a new type of naval vessel at a shipyard in Blackwall--“Steam Batteries with Iron Shields.” European navies had begun experiments in ship construction

that were defying ancient naval traditions. New keels had been laid in British ports for ships that would have steam engines as well as sails. Moreover, the advent of rifled artillery had demanded better protection, spurring builders to attach heavy iron sheets to the wooden hulls. "Floating batteries . . .," Mordecai reported, "think of a vessel covered all over with an iron coat of mail 4 inches thick!" Design problems had yet to be worked out: the iron attachments added tremendously to the weight of the ships, making them slow, unwieldy, and unseaworthy on the open ocean. Delafield dispatched a special memo to Davis describing the construction and deficiencies of these forerunners of American ironclads. Later, in his official trip report, Delafield went into greater detail, noting that the "time may come when we must combat similar devices."¹⁵

The officers also visited the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich, where they witnessed tests of the giant "Lancaster gun" about which Davis had specifically inquired. The Lancaster, a sixty-eight-pounder, was a rifled cannon with an elliptical bore. Reports from the Crimea indicated that the gun was not living up to its promise, and the commission found confirmation of that news at Woolwich. "The English officers say that [the Lancaster guns] are humbugs," gossiped McClellan. The ammunition was too expensive and the guns themselves were prone to burst. Mordecai and Delafield later analyzed the Lancaster in detail in their official reports.¹⁶

¹⁵ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 May 1855, DC 536, 539-41; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 28 April-4 May 1855, AMP 1: 108. Delafield Report, 168.

¹⁶ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 2 May 1855, GBMP 3: 273; Delafield Report, 9, 26; Alfred Mordecai, Military Commission to Europe in 1855 and 1856 (Washington, 1860), 65, 110-111. Hereinafter cited as Mordecai Report.

A fortnight in England furnished time for some relaxation and attention to “housekeeping” affairs. Delafield hired a Mr. Fischer, who was fluent in several European tongues, as travelling valet to accompany them on their journey. They dined with Sir John Burgoyne, who had just returned from the Crimea, where he had been serving as chief engineer to Lord Raglan. Later, they listened to a lecture on operations in the Crimea. Their travels took them to various attractions, including an opera, a zoo, and a House of Commons debate among Palmerston, Disraeli, Gladstone, and others. Gladstone was “the only handsome & ready speaker,” noted Mordecai; Disraeli was “so round-shouldered as to be almost hump-backed & very awkward.”¹⁷

The Americans were dismayed to hear British opinions about their forces in the Crimea. After several interviews, lectures, and parliamentary debates, McClellan described the consensus in London:

You would be surprised (& we have been shocked and disgusted) to hear the manner in which Englishmen (from Lord Clarendon down) abuse the operations of their Army. . . . They freely talk of their Army (the Allies) being driven out of the Crimea & estimate the cost at over 20,000 men obliged to capitulate.¹⁸

Those opinions were not limited to civilians. British soldiers, even general officers, anticipated defeat. If the Lancaster guns were “humbugs,” British soldiers were decidedly

¹⁷ George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 27 April 1855, GBMP 3: 270; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 2 May 1855, GBMP 3: 273; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 28 April–4 May 1855, AMP 1: 108-111.

¹⁸ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 2 May 1855, GBMP 3: 273.

worse. One general, who had just returned from the war, “was so severe upon his own people that we took up arms in their defense.”¹⁹

British pessimism stemmed from an embarrassing reversal of their military fortunes. After initial battlefield successes, the British had experienced enormous difficulties, most of them caused by mismanagement. The Duke of Wellington, hero of Waterloo, had dominated the army from various positions of power until his death in 1852. His conservative influence forestalled reform, and for decades the British army had progressed hardly at all. The professionalization that had occurred in Prussia, France, and the United States, to name a few, was virtually unknown in the British army. Moreover, government funding of the army had grown miserly during several decades of peace. In consequence, Her Majesty’s forces were unprepared for their biggest test since 1815.

Most of the army’s troubles stemmed from high-level incompetence. Tactical mistakes, like the ill-fated charge of the Light Brigade, were magnificent blunders, but the army could recover from those. More important were the strategic and logistical errors. For example, there was never any good strategic purpose for besieging Sebastopol at all. The Allies would have served themselves better by defeating the Russians in the field as quickly as possible, as they showed every capability of doing. Furthermore, if a siege were necessary, it confounded many observers that the Allies should have taken such a circuitous route about it, switching from one side of the peninsula to the other, and

¹⁹ George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 29 April 1855, GBMP 44: 498.

allowing the Russians to maintain a line of communications to the north for the ease of feeding and reinforcing the garrison. The Allies could have stayed on the Alma, astride the Russian artery to their homeland, and forced them to fight on Allied terms.

The reason most often given for these moves was that the British needed the port of Balaklava to support its siege of Sebastopol. Yet when the siege began, the logistical incompetence of the British began to manifest itself in earnest. Ships lay at anchor for weeks waiting to be unloaded. Soldiers went without food, clothing, and shelter in increasingly bitter winter weather. Poor field sanitation gave rise to dysentery and cholera, and soon enough, disease was claiming far more lives than the Russians.

Unfortunately for Her Majesty's Government, The London *Times* dispatched a brilliant young man to report directly from the Crimea. Taking advantage of newfound speed afforded by both telegraph and steamship, William Howard Russell invented a new journalistic *genre*, war correspondence. He captured the feeling of the war in elegant, moving prose that he dispatched to his editors in record time. Russell exposed the incompetence of the generals and the suffering of the troops. He lauded the herculean efforts of Florence Nightingale and her nurses as they succeeded in healing the sick and wounded when the British army could not. Lord Aberdeen's government fell in the wake of the ensuing scandal. The new prime minister, Lord Palmerston, accepted a commission of inquiry to investigate the failures of the military and began setting matters to right.²⁰

²⁰ Lawrence James, Crimea, 1854-1856: The War with Russia from Contemporary Photographs (New York, 1981), 17-39; William H. Russell, Russell's Dispatches from the Crimea, 1854-1856, Nicolas Bentley, ed. (New York, 1966).

The Americans found it “disgraceful, shamefully so--the manner in which all these people . . . abuse the gallant fellows in the Crimea.” Yet as they wandered around London and its environs, they were encountering a necessary and fruitful debate over military reform and modernization that had been long postponed, a public discussion that often sounded shrill and disloyal to foreign ears.²¹

The time they spent in London together allowed the officers to become better acquainted, but some friction began to develop. The acerbic McClellan concluded that his companions were “two fogies”:

Dicky is all right, but the other is sometimes very provoking--this infernal business of raising objections which cannot be supported merely for the purpose of making objection--Good Lord deliver us from all such. I keep very quiet & and generally end by having my own way--but have to do a little internal cussing by way of solace.²²

McClellan’s complaining revealed both the stresses of travel and quirks in his own personality. The generation separating him from his fellow officers partially explains his frustrations. The captain may have urged the majors to attempt activities they felt beyond their physical stamina. But his criticisms centered on Mordecai:

Of my two friends, one gives me nothing but trouble--he is a confirmed old fogie--raising objection to everything that Delafield & I propose--hemming & hawing at everything--he may once have been a good officer--but he is altogether too old & worthless now . . .²³

²¹ George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 29 April 1855, GBMP 44: 498.

²² George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 2 May 1855, GBMP 3: 273.

²³ George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 29 April 1855, GBMP 44: 498.

Another source of McClellan's grouching might have been Mordecai's hold on the commission's pursestrings. Perhaps the dutiful major was reluctant to spend as freely as McClellan would have wished, "raising objection to everything that Delafield & I propose." One scholar has suggested that the tension among the officers was not dysfunctional and may even have had some salutary effects: the more mature and experienced officers provided needed judgment, while the energetic captain spurred his seniors to greater exertions than they might otherwise have undertaken.²⁴ But if the tension was as yet harmless, it would become less benign later in the trip and thereafter.

Despite McClellan's misgivings their audience with the queen seems to have paid off. For a while there was even discussion with British officials of the officers' accompanying Napoleon III to the Crimea when he took command as "generalissimo." As it turned out, the emperor decided not to go to the Crimea. Still, the commissioners, having attended to their diplomatic duties, received permission from the Foreign Office to go to the Crimea without restriction: "the honor and character of American officers was a guarantee sufficient to justify it." Lord Clarendon was most courteous, acceded to every request, and gave them letters of introduction to Lord Raglan and Sir Edmund Lyons, commander of the British fleet in the Black Sea. Ambassador Buchanan seems to have been of little help to the commission in securing their aims, despite his promises to assist.

²⁴ Falk, "Soldier-Technologist," 436.

In light of French recalcitrance, Jefferson Davis had sent him a personal request to guide the officers through what appeared to be a potential diplomatic minefield. For reasons unexplained Buchanan ignored all entreaties to bring the power of his office to bear on the commission's behalf and left the trio with a most unfavorable impression. Still, the trip to London was successful, and they left for Paris on 6 May.²⁵

Delafield, Mordecai, McClellan, and their valet embarked from Dover for the voyage across the English Channel to Calais. Even this short trip was "not without a touch of the old man of the sea" for Mordecai. After a pleasant night on the coast at Calais they boarded a train to Paris and arrived on the seventh.²⁶

The next morning the officers called on Ambassador John Y. Mason, who had just returned from Nice where he had been convalescing after a stroke. As with Ambassador Buchanan, the officers criticized Mason's performance in their private correspondence. Their willingness to do so indicates that they, like most officers, shared a general disdain for politicians. By mid-century officers had come to view themselves as separate from partisan politics. They saw the military as a politically neutral instrument of state policy. At the same time they came to consider politicians as adversaries who were generally

²⁵ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 May 1855, DC 535; Jefferson Davis to James Buchanan, 9 April 1855, James Buchanan Papers Historical Society of Pennsylvania; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 2 May 1855, GBMP 3: 273.

²⁶ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 8-10 May 1855, AMP 1: 116; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 10 May 1855, DC 447.

hostile to the military and whose competence and motives were suspect.²⁷

On another level, the Delafield Commission might not have perceived American diplomats as politicians, but simply as fellow government officials in a rival bureaucracy, the foreign service. The process of developing professional corporateness includes defining who the members of the group are, but it also involves determining who they are not. Clearly not included would be other officials who might try to lay claim to the same scarce resources as one's own profession. In the case of diplomats and military officers in the mid-nineteenth century, the most likely bone of contention would have been over the presumed competence to conduct American foreign policy. The army saw its primary mission as preparedness for a war with a European power. The diplomats that these officers had met seemed to have been actively engaged in stirring up just such a conflict through a maladroit, "loose-cannon" style of diplomacy--both Buchanan and Mason had signed the Ostend Manifesto. There is no hint in the correspondence that the officers had any desire to conduct foreign policy themselves, but they felt more than qualified to criticize the performance of the American ministers. Such professional rivalry seems to have lain at the heart of McClellan's critique:

Our country is peculiarly unfortunate in its Diplomatic representatives abroad as far as we have yet seen--Mr. Buchanan is in bad odour in London & takes no interest in his duty. Mr. Mason has no influence or consideration here, but tries his best. The publication of that d---d Ostend conference has brought about a beautiful state of affairs--the minister of any insignificant little German or South American country has more

²⁷ William B. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1992), 282-297.

influence than ours.²⁸

On the other hand, the commissioners' criticisms might have stemmed from the seeming inability of American diplomats to assist them in accomplishing their mission, hence the complaint about a lack of influence. Mason's ill health was partially to blame for what the commissioners felt was the poor quality of American representation in France. In addition, the French foreign minister had just resigned and no other French officials would help the Americans. Mason prevailed upon them to postpone traveling to the Crimea until after they had had an opportunity to speak with the new minister about their goals. The commissioners, frustrated and embarrassed at their predicament, delayed leaving for over two weeks while a new foreign minister took office and then traveled to and from London for a conference. They did not even have permission to visit the military facilities around Paris while they waited. "I am afraid," Mordecai confessed, "that the Secy of War & our mil[itary] friends will think that our operations partake of the languor of those of the Allies, & indeed such is the fact, for we are waiting on their movements, not in the field, but in the Cabinet."²⁹

With time on their hands and no opportunity to tour military facilities, the

²⁸ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 22 May 1855, GBMP 3: 293; Mordecai echoed this sentiment and added that Ambassador Dodge in Spain was also a source of embarrassment. "I feel very much ashamed and annoyed at being mixed up with them." Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 26-28 May 1855, AMP 1: 125.

²⁹ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 10 May 1855, DC 447; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 17 May 1855, DC 527; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-17 May 1855, AMP 1: 121; George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 21 May 1855, GBMP 44: 506.

commission accomplished little. McClellan thought it “hardly proper that officers in our position should submit to all the delay these Frenchmen choose to impose.” Mordecai worried that they were spending too much money for too little gain. They had to content themselves with small victories, such as sending military books back to Washington. They also discovered that the Allies were preserving meat and vegetables for transport to their troops in the Crimea. Delafield shipped Davis a specimen of this dessicated food, which the U.S. Army later tested and adopted.³⁰

To occupy their time they found numerous diversions. Mordecai, veteran of two European tours, acted as guide for his friends as they toured the sights of Paris--the Louvre, the Champs Elysées, the national Exposition, and Versailles. They went to museums, plays, and operas; all the commissioners seem to have been well versed in the arts. “You see what horrible labor & exposure we are subjected to, for our county’s good,” joked Mordecai to Sara. They admired Parisian women and commented on their beauty in their letters home. Mordecai pushed the bounds of matrimonial discretion when he candidly reported to his distant wife on a trip to the opera. Despite his appreciation of the performance, he said, “For my part, I believe I was barbarian enough to be more pleased at the twinkling of the girls’ legs in the ballet, than at all the music.”³¹

³⁰ George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 21 May 1855, GBMP 44: 506; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-17 May 1855, AMP 1: 121; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 17 May 1855, DC 527; Delafield Report, 90.

³¹ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 8-10 May 1855, AMP 1: 114-117; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-12 May 1855, AMP 1: 118; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-16 May 1855, AMP 1: 119-121; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 18-24 May 1855, AMP 1: 122-123.

The officers spent quieter evenings with former President Martin Van Buren, who was lodging at their hotel during a long vacation in Europe. Van Buren, who had recently suffered the loss of his son, sought out the company of the American officers on the floor above. "And how," boasted Mordecai, "do you suppose I spent last evening in Paris[?] Playing whist with Martin Van Buren at a franc a game! He sent us up word that if any of us were whist players he would be glad to see us." Whist games became regular occasions, and the officers developed a close bond with the lonely former president.³²

Despite the frustration over their delays the officers seem to have gotten along with one another rather well in Paris. This perception probably owes much to a lack of commentary from McClellan on the subject, but even he seems to have enjoyed their outings and evenings with Van Buren. Mordecai pronounced their relations "perfectly harmonious & we are almost always together." Delafield was a man of "good taste and . . . great characteristic," and McClellan "very quick and intelligent. The best eye & organ of locality I almost ever saw."³³

Personal harmony was a great help in coping with the frustration of their diplomatic quandary. Finally, on 24 May Ambassador Mason secured them an appointment with the new foreign minister, Count Walewsky, son of Napoleon I.

³² Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 8-10 May 1855, AMP 1: 117; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 18-24 May 1855, AMP 1: 122; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-9 June 1855, AMP 1: 126; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 22 May 1855, GBMP 3: 293; John Niven, Martin Van Buren: The Romantic Age of American Politics (New York, 1983), 600-604.

³³ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 8-10 May 1855, AMP 1: 114; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-17 May 1855, AMP 1: 121.

Unfortunately, Walewsky informed them that, while he would allow them to visit French works in the Crimea, they must pledge not to visit any Russian camps thereafter. When Delafield explained that they needed to view the defenders as well as the attackers, the Count, who would cause trouble throughout the journey, curtly informed him that the permission was a courtesy and could be withdrawn without giving any reason. The commissioners declined Walewsky's offer and made ready to leave Paris.³⁴

But where would they go? They had expected to travel from Paris to Marseilles, and then directly to the Crimea; but given their troubles with the French, they deemed it more prudent to secure Russian permission to visit their side first. They might have attempted to go to Sebastopol without permission, trusting to luck and the decency of fellow soldiers to grant them safe passage through the lines. But that route was blocked: Davis's orders bound them to follow the diplomatic route. He had instructed them to seek "such authority and facilities as [local officials] may be pleased to grant." They were on an official trip and had to conduct themselves so "as to give no reasonable ground for suspicion or offense." Having treated with the French at one level, they could not in good faith ignore those discussions to negotiate with the generals in the Crimea. They decided to go to Berlin and seek Russian guidance about the best route into Sebastopol.³⁵

Before they could leave, however, Emperor Napoleon III invited them to a

³⁴ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 27 May 1855, DC 543.

³⁵ Ibid.

reception on Sunday, 27 May. This unexpected appointment delayed their departure three more days. Moreover, the commissioners would have preferred not to see the emperor at all. They expressed contempt for the formality, just as they had done with Queen Victoria, because they thought the meeting useless. After their meeting with Count Walewsky they could see no purpose in another interview, especially a ceremonial one. They thoroughly disregarded the gesture's diplomatic value.

As fate would have it, the emperor canceled the reception on Sunday due to the arrival of a royal visitor--"some d--d King of Portugal or other (as McClellan says)," wrote Mordecai. The appointment was rescheduled for Monday afternoon, when the emperor received the impatient commissioners. McClellan was clearly peeved: Napoleon was "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." The emperor failed to live up to Mordecai's martial expectations as well. "Nothing worth mentioning," he scrawled to his wife, "a little talk with the Emperor."³⁶ Usually more charitable than his young colleague, Mordecai seems to have been comparing notes with him on this occasion:

Then there was nothing imposing in the appearance of the principal character. The Emperor was in a General's uniform, but no more to compare with my beau ideal Nicholas I than I to Hercules--a dull stolid looking & rather awkward man. . . . It is surprising that a man of such dull aspect as the Emperor can be capable of such energetic and great things as

³⁶ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 18-24 May 1855, AMP 1: 123; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 12 May 1855, GBMP 3: 283; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 26-28 May 1855, AMP 1: 125; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-9 June 1855, AMP 1: 126.

he has done. . . .³⁷

These remarks on the emperor's appearance and character reflect the commissioners' disappointment and impatience with the French in general. The normal francophilia of these American soldiers, nurtured through years of education and training, sustained quite a shock during these three weeks. The commissioners felt that not only had their hosts insulted and trifled with them, but that the French had seemed, surprisingly, less than surehanded and confident. They questioned French competence. The government's refusal to allow the commission to tour military posts while waiting in Paris was both professionally discourteous and overly cautious. For the rest of their journey the Americans looked at the French with a new skepticism, replacing a tendency to worship uncritically at the shrine of Gallic military prowess. Now, after observing the low morale of the British and enduring the slights of the French, the trio were ready to broaden their search "into the military systems of the principal nations of Europe."

They returned from the Tuilleries, packed hurriedly, and spent a final night playing whist with President Van Buren, "who will be quite at a loss, he says, without us." Early the next morning they boarded a first class rail coach bound for Prussia. The German express darted more than three hundred miles each day. They raced through Chateau-Thierry, Metz, and Saarbruck on Wednesday; through Neustadt, Frankfurt, Giessen, and

³⁷ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-17 May 1855, AMP 1: 121. Nicholas I was the Russian tsar.

Marburg, on Thursday; then Eisenach, Gotha, Erfurt, Weimar, Halle, Dessau, and, finally, Berlin on Friday, 1 June. Fantastic speed was only half the thrill: they felt marvelously pampered in their opulent railcar berths. “You may have some idea of the hardships we are undergoing in the cause of military science,” quipped Mordecai.³⁸

The next morning they called upon the U.S. ambassador in Prussia, Peter D. Vroom, who was much more helpful than his counterparts in France and England. Vroom took them directly to the Russian ambassador, who had anticipated their request and gave them letters for the Russian governor in Warsaw. This meeting was their first contact with the other side in the conflict, and the Russians worked hard to make a favorable impression on them. The Russian minister assured them that they had authority from his government to go to the Crimea, and that the Polish governor would expedite their journey. Vroom also escorted them to see the Prussian foreign minister, Baron von Manteuffel, who proved most pleasant, courteous, and helpful. He extended them permission to visit all military installations in Prussia. The good reception buoyed the trio’s spirits. Because the most recent news from the Crimea seemed to warrant no hurrying, and because there was no more sensible course of action, they elected to go to Warsaw and tour the area there, with its reportedly large garrisons of Russian troops. From Warsaw they would travel to Kiev and down the Dnieper to the Crimea. The commissioners left Berlin after an efficient and productive weekend--a welcome change

³⁸ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-9 June 1855, AMP 1: 126; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 3 June 1855, DC 548.

from wasted weeks in London and Paris.³⁹

Even during this brief visit, the engineers were alert for opportunities to advance their profession. Mordecai found a man in Berlin whom he recommended that Captain Montgomery Meigs “import. . . from here with the next lot of German immigrants, & set him at work on the Capitol.” Meigs was the army engineer whom Davis had hand-picked to supervise the renovation and completion of the U.S. Capitol. This anecdote attests to the sense of corporateness and collective responsibility that the commissioners shared with the entire army officer corps.⁴⁰

They boarded a train on 4 June and proceeded toward Warsaw. At the Polish frontier border guards stopped the train and searched their belongings. “We thought the search very superfluous,” Mordecai grouched, “as they ought to be too glad if a person should carry anything into their miserable country.” After two days’ travel they arrived in Warsaw, where they donned their military uniforms, “which we expect to wear pretty constantly in Russia.” Because the Russian empire was more autocratic than the rest of Europe, the officers felt a display of military authority was in order. The next day they called “at several police and governors’ offices, as is the custom in this country.” Russian officials closely observed their passage across the vast frontier: “we are under a more rigid surveillance than heretofore.”⁴¹

³⁹ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-9 June 1855, AMP 1: 128, 138; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 3 June 1855, DC 548; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 10 June 1855, DC 552; George B. McClellan to Mary McClellan, 2 June 1855, GBMP 3: 300.

⁴⁰ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-9 June 1855, AMP 1: 129.

⁴¹ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-9 June 1855, AMP 1: 130, 136.

The most important official in Warsaw was the Russian governor, Marshal Prince I.F. Paskievich, a famous soldier and former foe of Napoleon. Unfortunately, he was on a hunting trip when they arrived, and an assistant could not grant any of their requests without the marshal's approval. Yet when he returned two days later, the commissioners noted a marked difference between the marshal and most of the diplomats they had met before. Paskievich treated them most graciously, offered his assistance, and appointed an officer to escort them. Professional corporateness became international: the American officers identified with the marshal as a fellow soldier. Further, they revered him as an authentic hero: "he has done more, fought more battles, occupied more exalted positions than any General now living." McClellan was especially taken with him:

He is a fine old soldier as I ever saw--no vanity, no pomposity (heaven forgive me--I was about to say "Scott-osity"! . . . bears his years well I was so fortunate as to sit opposite the Marshal at table, & as he was very talkative and gracious had an excellent opportunity of bringing him out--he talks very well, & his manner to all around him is most pleasant.⁴²

Mordecai told the marshal that he had received a letter from his wife, Sara, that had been only eighteen days in transit from Washington, "which struck him very forcibly as an annihilation of time and space." Their dinner with Paskievich left Mordecai rating him as "the most distinguished soldier now in Europe."⁴³

The marshal extended them numerous courtesies, including the privileges of his

⁴² George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 10 July 1855, GBMP 44: 516. The brash Captain McClellan was referring to Winfield Scott, commanding general of the U.S. Army and his erstwhile dinner companion.

⁴³ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 12-13 June 1855, AMP 1: 140-141.

official box at the opera that night, after which Mordecai cautioned his wife not to “believe all the stories McClellan will tell you about my behavior to the opera girls.”

During the next few days, their escort officer took them to see the fortress at Modlin, a review of Cossack cavalry held in their honor, and a military hospital in Warsaw.

Mordecai was so enthusiastic with the quality of their welcome in Warsaw that he asked Sara to show his letter to Secretary Davis and to let him and the Russian minister know how well they had been treated.⁴⁴

Despite their pleasure at the excellent reception, they were still disappointed at their lack of progress or accomplishment. Aside from the thousand-man regiment of Cossack cavalry that had paraded for them and “perform[ed] feats with carbines, pistols and horses worthy of a circus,” the commissioners found no large bodies of troops near Warsaw as they had been led to believe. Worse yet, Marshal Paskievich regretfully informed them that, despite the Russian ambassador’s assurances in Berlin, he had no authority to send them to the Crimea. Unfortunately, he told them, they would have to go to St. Petersburg for that.⁴⁵

To make matters worse, the commissioners learned that the Allies had made a successful attack on Sebastopol. The attack had actually taken place on 7 June, four days

⁴⁴ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-9 June 1855, AMP 1: 131; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 10 June 1855, DC 552; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 7 June 1855, GBMP 3: 307, 312; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 12-13 June 1855, AMP 1: 140-143.

⁴⁵ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 12-13 June 1855, AMP 1: 143; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 10 June 1855, DC 552.

earlier, when Allied forces had taken positions known as the Quarries and the Mamelon, south and southeast of Sebastopol.⁴⁶ McClellan began to fear the worst--that their mission might be embarrassed:

Have just heard from an officer that, late yesterday, important news came from Sebastopol--That the French had carried their redoubts to the south of the town. . . . I begin to fear that decisive events may take place before we can get there--so unfortunate have we been in our unavoidable detentions. . . . What a horrible affair this wholesale slaughter at Sebastopol is! It makes one feel sad to think of it.⁴⁷

There was "the consolation . . . that it was not in our power to alter the turn that matters have taken. The worst is that very much will be expected from us on our return--& it will be devilish hard to fulfill the expectations." The young captain was especially concerned about his reputation and suffering the ignominy of having missed the war they had been sent to observe. He seemed to fear accusations of incompetence or, worse yet, cowardice: "[B]ut I do not despair & will get to Sebastopol & under fire there if I die the next minute. I would rather lose an arm than return without seeing that siege."⁴⁸

Delafield was more sanguine, but he, too, was disappointed. There was also a hint of resentment as he informed Davis that Paskievich "could not give us authority to go from here directly to the Crimea. . . . Our passports are of no more avail than that given to any traveler. . . . The course now left us, is to proceed to St. Petersburg." Although

⁴⁶ W. Baring Pemberton, *Battles of the Crimean War* (New York, 1962), 188-9.

⁴⁷ George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 12 June 1855, GBMP 3: 315.

⁴⁸ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 7 June 1855, GBMP 3: 307, 312; George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 7 June 1855, GBMP 44: 509; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 10 June 1855, DC 552.

Delafield presented his decision to continue pressing east rather than to the Crimea as the only available option, the commission had another choice. In the official report he rendered after their return, Delafield discussed their predicament:

Although much profitable information was obtained at Warsaw and Modlin, the great object of the Commission had not yet been entered upon; both France and Russia interposing unexplained difficulties, through the meshes of diplomacy, all of which could have been avoided by going, as many civilians had done and continued to do, direct to Sebastopol, *via* Constantinople. This course was, however, denied to the Commission, from the very fact of being in a national capacity for public purposes, which could only be recognized and sanctioned through the formula of diplomacy. The probability of witnessing a bombardment of the works of Cronstadt [sic] by the allied fleet, and other great military events in that quarter, together with the fact of our instructions requiring a study and examination of these important sea-coast defenses, in some measure compensated for the disappointment experienced in not going direct to Sebastopol.⁴⁹

In London the commission had hoped for a chance to go straight to the Crimea in the company of Napoleon acting as “generalissimo.” The opportunity had not materialized. Later, in Paris, the commissioners had thought they would go south to Marseilles, and then sail to Constantinople and on to Balaklava. Diplomats had forced them to alter their course. Now, in Warsaw, their “national capacity” dictated that they continue on to St. Petersburg. The commission would greatly have preferred to forsake “the formula of diplomacy.” Yet Davis’s instructions, along with their letters of introduction, constrained their actions. Without such diplomatic help, they might already have been in the Crimea. Had Delafield taken some license at this stage and elected for them to travel as private

⁴⁹ Delafield Report, ix.

citizens to Constantinople and on to the Crimea, the commission might have accomplished its “great object” with more dispatch. Yet he obviously felt bound by the covenant that Davis’s orders and their passports imposed to continue on the diplomatic course. Neither McClellan nor Mordecai seems to have questioned Delafield’s decision to go to Russia at the time, but subsequent delays and their consequences would soon cause dissension within the commission. They left Warsaw on 13 June, continuing their struggle “through the meshes of diplomacy.”

For the first time on their journey, they were forced to cover a long distance by horse-drawn coach. The macadamized road between Warsaw and St. Petersburg was new and well-tended, but nonetheless 783 miles long. A six-day trek across the Russian steppes offered little diversion save an occasional landmark and two pleasant Russian princesses who were their travelling companions. “We crossed the Niemen, the frontier of Russia,” mused Mordecai, “within a few days of the date when Napoleon crossed it, with the grand army, in 1812. I hope we shall be more fortunate than he and that the American forces will get out of the country before the 13th Decr.”⁵⁰

One disquieting episode reflected the brutal nature of Russian society. One day along the road a serf’s wagon and horse “got foul of one of our horses and hurt him.” The conductor of the Americans’ coach collared and beat the peasant and commandeered his

⁵⁰ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 21 June 1855, DC 511; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 20-21 June 1855, AMP 1: 144-5.

horse to replace the wounded animal. On both knees and pressing his forehead to the ground, the serf begged the conductor not to take his horse. The conductor relented, but not before satisfying himself with another beating of the poor man, who declined to resist. Mordecai was aghast and compared the Russian social system with American slavery:

“Such a scene could hardly have occurred among the meanest [N]egroes.”⁵¹

The comparison was all the more poignant because it struck so close to home for Mordecai. Mordecai did not mention whether the victim in the story above was Jewish, but many peasants he saw on this leg of the trek certainly were:

The wide extended fields without fences or division lines; the long rows of peasant houses, or huts, like the [N]egro quarters in our great southern plantations; the filth and bad odors about the post stations and dwellings; the cringing manners of the people; the debased and abject look of the crowds of poor (or rich) Jews . . .--all these present strong contrasts to the thriving and comparatively free countries we have so lately seen.⁵²

Those contrasts clearly extended as well to the living conditions of the majority of white Americans. The large groups of peasants working in the Russian fields looked “very much like our gangs of Negroes, or the peons in Mexico.” These comparisons, explicitly drawn here by Mordecai, cannot have allowed him to escape musing on his own condition as a member of a religious minority. The parenthetical amendment, “(or rich) Jews,” might have been just such a reflection.

The three officers arrived at St. Petersburg on 19 June and called on U.S.

⁵¹ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 20-21 June 1855, AMP 1: 144-5.

⁵² Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 6 June 1855, AMP 1: 130-139, as quoted in Falk, “Soldier-Technologist,” 439-440.

Ambassador Thomas H. Seymour the next morning. He promised them his assistance and arranged an appointment with Foreign Minister Nesselrode on the 25th. Seymour escorted them to this meeting, at which they presented their requests to tour military facilities in Russia and to visit Sebastopol. Nesselrode, “a small but hale looking man of 75 years,” was polite and promised to help.⁵³

The commission continued to rub elbows with Europe’s ruling elite. By imperial invitation they attended a military review on the Champs de Mars. They sat next to Prince Dalgouroucki, Russian minister of war, who greeted them heartily and promptly assigned them a military escort for their stay in Russia, a Lieutenant Colonel Obrescoff. At the end of the review, “[t]he troops being drawn up on three sides of a square, [Dalgouroucki] conducted us to the center, the Emperor’s station.” There he presented them to Tsar Alexander II, “a tall, large figure, [with] a pleasing physiognomy & a very courteous manner,” who received them warmly and invited them to visit the naval base at Kronstadt at their leisure. Tsar Alexander, who had recently succeeded his father, Nicholas I, was “every inch a king” and clearly the military and royal superior of Napoleon III. The tsar closed the interview “with a declaration on his part of the hope the United States and Russia would continue always at peace and in friendship.” The commissioners reveled in this martial display, and immediately began comparing the Russians favorably with the

⁵³ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 27 June 1855, DC 517; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22-26 June 1855, AMP 1: 150.

Allies. The contrast with their reception in France could not have been more striking.⁵⁴

Nonetheless, one aspect of the visit was similar to matters in London and Paris-- the speed of bureaucratic decisionmaking. Official responsibility for their requests to travel to the Crimea devolved upon a functionary in the war ministry. The delegation delivered their requests to him in writing on 3 July and renewed their entreaties on the 6th and the 10th. The wheels of Russian government ground slowly, despite assurances from the highest authority in the land. Once again, they found themselves in diplomatic limbo, "uncertain how long we may remain in the country or in what direction we shall leave it." As Delafield put it, "the vexatious annoyance of procrastination could but be felt by the members of the Commission."⁵⁵

Meanwhile, the commissioners busied themselves with visits to various installations, and their initially favorable impression bloomed into unexpected respect for the Russian military. Indeed, by the end of their time in Russia they seem to have replaced their francophilia with an equally robust russophilia. Taking advantage of the emperor's invitation, they toured Kronstadt on several occasions. Russian officers guided them

⁵⁴ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 27 June 1855, DC 517; Delafield Report, x; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 4 July 1855, GBMP 3: 334; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22-26 June 1855, AMP 1: 151; Kronstadt was an island garrison just off the Baltic coast from St. Petersburg that was being threatened by a blockading British fleet.

⁵⁵ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 12 July 1855, DC 556; William L. Marcy to Jefferson Davis, 20 June 1855, National Archives Microfilm No. 221, Roll 175, frame 309; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 6 July-11 July 1855, AMP 2: 159; Delafield Report, x.

through walking inspections from within and seaborne tours from without. They sailed around the island despite the presence of the blockading British fleet just a few miles away. The delegation also attended several reviews, each as impressive as the first, and visited arsenals and military schools. They were greatly impressed with Russian soldiers, especially the training and development of officers. Delafield felt Russia was blessed with an excellent commissioning system. "In all that we have seen of these schools," wrote Mordecai, "we have been delighted with them, as great instruments of civilization & improvement in this vast Empire." Russian military hospitals were so efficiently run that the usually critical McClellan declared that "it is impossible to obtain greater neatness, cleanliness & comfort for men." In fact, the entire Russian army was superior because they "always speak as brave soldiers & gentlemen should in regard to such matters [the war news in the Crimea]--the contrast in this matter with the Allies' manner of talking is much in favor of the Russians." The commission thought the Russian military so professional and powerful that it should have had no fear of the Allies. After the commission's experiences in England and France, these comparisons are not surprising. Unfortunately for the Russians, their relative evaluation was sadly inaccurate.⁵⁶

Almost everywhere they found the Russians helpful, courteous, and forthcoming. One exception came on a trip to Krasnoe Selo, the tsar's dacha. Sixteen miles from St.

⁵⁶ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 27 June 1855, DC 517; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 12 July 1855, DC 556; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22-28 June 1855, AMP 1: 148-151; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22-24 July 1855, AMP 2: 165; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 4 July 1855, GBMP 3: 304; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 12 July 1855, GBMP 3: 315.

Petersburg, Krasnoe Selo's grounds were a temporary camp for some fifty thousand infantry and artillery soldiers. The commanding general there refused them entry despite a written pass from the ministry of war. "We reckon the Emperor will be mighty mad when he hears of our trip," predicted Mordecai. Four days later they returned after Obrescoff had remonstrated with officials in St. Petersburg. On the second visit the Russians gladly invited them to inspect every part of the camp. "We neither called upon nor saw the General who refused permission to visit the camp on the 11th."⁵⁷

Obrescoff, aide-de-camp to the minister of war, was a gracious and well-connected host. He conducted them to every military establishment imaginable and ensured that they received "red carpet" treatment. The Americans' uniforms, adorned as they were with large epaulettes, made Obrescoff's job easier since the Russians often mistook gray-haired Mordecai and Delafield for generals. One day Obrescoff decided to have some fun with his guests. He introduced the two majors to the students at a naval school as Admiral Napier, commander of the British Baltic fleet, and Lord Raglan, commander of British forces in the Crimea. The spectacle of these eminent "captives" produced a sensation at the school. The American officers became quite fond of Obrescoff and even had a group portrait taken with him. This daguerreotype is the only extant visual record of the Delafield Commission.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 12 July 1855, DC 556; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 18 July 1855, DC 563.

⁵⁸ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 June-4 July 1855, AMP 2: 154; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 6 July-11 July 1855, AMP 2: 156-158.

According to McClellan, tensions among the commissioners increased in Russia. He was ill during part of their stay, so he may have been more vitriolic than usual:

Pshaw--I wish that "wet blanket" [Mordecai] would keep out of my room, I shall be in the dumps for the rest of the evening. One of my old majors is the most perfect damper upon anything like good humor that I ever saw in my life --the very sight of him gives me the blue devils, & my only pleasure is to break out occasionally & give him a piece of my mind, or get up a small quarrel. But old Dicky is a comparative trump--I get on very well with him--the other one is always discontented, always finding fault, always looking at the black side of things & ever despondent.⁵⁹

Although McClellan considered Mordecai a "wet blanket," the major's own correspondence manifested a brighter outlook than McClellan's. While McClellan was growling that "thus far the annoyance has far exceeded the pleasure [on the journey]," Mordecai described the same circumstances as "little more than a pleasure trip." Both lamented a lack of real accomplishment, but their tones are remarkably different. McClellan complained continually in his letters home--about their delays, his companions, or American diplomats. He even sulked when the two majors received mail more regularly than he. Mordecai, on the other hand, was a careful and enthusiastic observer of nature and the human condition. For example, in Moscow he extolled the beauty of the view from Sparrow Hills, where he counted "442 domes & steeples which could be distinguished from that one point!" Napoleon himself had made his first surveillance of the city from that vista. Delafield, for his part, made few personal observations and his remarks seem more guarded and circumspect, probably because most of his surviving

⁵⁹ George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 10 July 1855, GBMP 44: 516.

letters were official reports to Davis. At any rate, McClellan's and Mordecai's letters leave room for debate about who was the "wet blanket."⁶⁰

Partly, the strained relations among them owed something to real concerns about the success of their mission. On 19 July the officers embarked on an eight-day excursion to Moscow, an eight-hundred mile round trip by train. Obrescuff escorted them to numerous arsenals, schools, and hospitals. They visited the Kremlin and toured its arsenal and treasury, filled with "the richest souvenirs of the sovereigns of Russia." Once again, the journey impressed them with the efficacy of Russian government. Yet the decision to travel to Moscow was peculiar, coming as it did after the war ministry had informed them that they could not go to Sebastopol. The tsar had granted almost all other American requests, but in deference to the wishes of Prince Gorchakov, newly appointed Russian commander in the Crimea, Alexander refused the commissioners permission to enter the besieged city.⁶¹ Since the main purpose of going to St. Petersburg had been securing that permission, the commission might have considered leaving Russia immediately and hastening to the Crimea to visit only the Allied side.

Yet the war news that they received in Russia still did not seem to dictate any haste. The Russian populace was quite confident about the course of the war and the

⁶⁰ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 June-4 July 1855, AMP 2: 154; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 7 June 1855, GBMP 3: 307, 312; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22-28 June 1855, AMP 1: 150; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22-24 July, AMP 2: 164, 169.

⁶¹ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 18 July 1855, DC 563; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 16 August 1855, DC 571. For similar reasons the tsar denied permission to visit Ravel and Sweaborg.

commissioners' observations of the Russian military led them to conclude that it was superior in every way to the Allies. Four days after the fact, the Americans learned that the Russians had repulsed Allied assaults on the Redan and the Malakov, small but tactically critical fortresses outside Sebastopol, on 18 June. Although the details were sketchy, the city seemed secure for the present. Even if it were not, there was still plenty of war left to see. As one Russian official assured Mordecai, "If the Allies should take Sebastopol & get possession of the Crimea . . . it is only then that the war will begin for us, in a serious manner." Given confidence in the Russian army, their knowledge of the war situation, and the improbability of returning to Russia after going to the Crimea, visiting Moscow in July seemed prudent to the commissioners.⁶²

The commission's infatuation with the Russians was a mixture of gratitude at their good reception and a professional appreciation for what they perceived as military effectiveness. The Russians won over the Americans with courtesy, respect, and camaraderie. That hospitality was all the more conspicuous for the contrast with the arrogance and rudeness of the French. Moreover, the Russians gave the commission guided tours of spotless places that the Americans already associated with military professionalism--schools, fortresses, and arsenals. What better way to gain the admiration of three West Point engineers, one of whom was a cannon expert? The Russians put forth

⁶² Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 21 June 1855, DC 513; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 4 July 1855, GBMP 3: 334; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 20-21 June 1855, AMP 1: 147; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22-28 June 1855, AMP 1: 148; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 18 July 1855, DC 563; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 June-4 July 1855, AMP 2: 152.

every effort to impress their visitors and the trouble paid off.⁶³

The commission betrayed the intellectual immaturity and professional insecurity of the American army in the speed with which they substituted one paradigm for another. They had arrived in Europe sharing their army's uncritical admiration for the French. However, upon finding flaws, they were unable to accept French imperfection without mentally casting the entire military establishment aside. Professionally insecure, they had a void to fill. They needed a new model to emulate, and they quickly found it in Russia. They leaped at the prospect of a new military power, especially one that might avenge their disappointment at French fallibility by proving it decisively on the battlefield. They began viewing the Russians with the same adoration they had recently reserved for their enemy. Unable to evaluate each army objectively, accepting the good and the bad where they found it, the commissioners demonstrated intellectual immaturity. They demanded absolute perfection in their model army. That the Americans needed a model at all confirmed their professional insecurity.

They wanted a new model so badly that they failed to scrutinize suspect information. In that autocratic state, unpleasant news seems to have been suppressed. Mordecai explained,

⁶³ Laurence W. Mazzeno has argued that while the United States was officially neutral in the war, American public sentiment was decidedly pro-Russian. French, British, and Russian attitudes toward the U.S., reflected their perceptions of American preferences. Laurence W. Mazzeno, "Major Richard Delafield and the US Military Mission to the Crimean War," *Joint Perspectives I* (Winter 1981): 78-79. Arthur Frame has carried that argument a step further, asserting that the commissioners reflected American biases in their preferences for the Russians. Arthur T. Frame, "The U.S. Military Commission to the Crimean War and Its Influence on the U.S. Army before the Civil War" (unpub. Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1993), 79-110, 167-181.

We hear a little talk about Sebastopol; but except the meagre Russian despatches which are copied into our papers, we get no information of what is going on there, & since we left England we have been much less informed of the Events & details of the war than we were at home.⁶⁴

There was no telegraphic link between Sebastopol and St. Petersburg (as there was between London and the Crimea), and news from the war front was not nearly as fresh. The Allied assaults on the Mamelon and the Redan are a case in point: the information was both dated and incomplete. Aboard a steamer enroute to Kronstadt, the Americans had overheard a conversation, and thus “[i]t was only by accident . . . that we heard of the important check and repulse which the allies met with last Monday in an assault of Sebastopol.” Upon inquiring further, they could get no details. Later, at Kronstadt, the commissioners climbed a windmill perched upon a hill to get a view of the Baltic:

To our surprise the picture was enriched by a prospect, rather distant, of the British fleet, which we had not heard of. It seems they came up the evening before & anchored off the place, 37 vessels we understood, some of them between the island & the shore furthest from us; & there they lay, just as quietly as if it had been for a pleasure promenade.⁶⁵

There had been no word on shore of the presence of the British fleet despite a telegraph line to the island. The Russians might have been suppressing the information to avoid alarming the populace. On the other hand, the distribution of information might simply have been less efficient in Russia than elsewhere. Yet this general ignorance of the military situation caused Mordecai to marvel:

Imagine the possibility of such a state of apathy, one must call it, in a

⁶⁴ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 20-21 June 1855, AMP 1: 144.

⁶⁵ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 22-28 June 1855, AMP 1: 148.

country engaged in a great war, & compare it with the excitement, the incessant publication of bulletins, not only in the city itself but all over the Union, if an enemy's fleet was anchored in the outer harbor of New York.⁶⁶

McClellan pointedly disagreed with his colleague: the Russians were sanguine and confident, not apathetic.⁶⁷ Whatever the case, an imperfect picture of events in the Crimea led the commission to postpone their departure from Russia: they could and should stay longer because there was so much of worth to see, and the gallant Russians would never fall to the ungentlemanly Allies. Furthermore, other informational biases probably affected their favorable evaluations of the Russian military. Having Lieutenant Colonel Obrescöff to guide them was handy and useful, but as official escort he served a second purpose: Obrescöff ensured that the Russian military put its best foot forward for the visiting Americans. Blemishes were polished; unpleasantness suppressed.

Even so, as they returned to St. Petersburg and prepared to leave Russia, the commissioners became concerned. News of their travels had begun to appear in U.S. newspapers, as they learned in the mail from home. One article had it that the officers were in Russia to offer their swords in service to the tsar. Another revealed some of the diplomatic problems they had had with the French. A third reported that the delegation had not obtained Russian permission to visit Sebastopol. McClellan and Mordecai cautioned their friends and families to keep their letters in strictest confidence, lest a

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 4 July 1855, GBMP 3: 334.

“leak” jeopardize their mission. Moreover, the two junior members seemed to worry that the pace of their travel would cause them to miss important events in the Crimea. In that concern was a hint of censure of Delafield’s decisionmaking. The assaults on the Mamelon and the Redan seemed spectacular events in a war that had become a protracted siege: they might well be the last significant operations of the war. Mordecai confided to Sara that he was “in a very bad humor that we should have missed seeing the very operations to which our attention was most especially directed.” He hoped that “the Sec’y of War will have approved of our course, tho’ I know that he will be chagrined at the disappointment.” And what of Davis? Why did he not correspond with the commission? “I looked with some expectation of seeing in your letter some remark from the Sec’y of War relative to our doings in Paris, but was disappointed. Do you never hear of his saying anything about us?”⁶⁸

Delafield informed Davis that they would travel from St. Petersburg through northern Prussia, touring fortresses there, and then go to Berlin. From Berlin they would continue on to Vienna and Trieste and then sail to Constantinople and, finally, to the Crimea. The others feared this circuitous route would cause them to miss important events. Their fears would be borne out.⁶⁹

On 20 August 1855 Mordecai flaunted “military usage and regulations,” and

⁶⁸ Undated newspaper clippings, AMP 3: 748, and in AMP Box 1, a collection of loose papers; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 18 July 1855, GBMP 3: 362; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 June-4 July 1855, AMP 2: 152; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-18 July 1855, AMP 2: 163.

⁶⁹ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 9-12 September 1855, AMP 2: 193.

bypassed Delafield to send a personal letter to Davis:

We have not been fortunate enough to obtain permission to see some of the most interesting military positions in Russia which were mentioned in your instructions. Although regretting this . . . disappointment, which I know you will feel, that we were not in the Crimea during the important operations. . . I think that our visit to Russia has been far from fruitless.⁷⁰

The commission now believed that they understood the Russian army, a large and excellent force, drilled, obedient, and constantly ready for war. Mordecai enclosed a map that showed the positions of all Russian troops and the troop strengths at each of these locations. But as he continued to expound on the reasons their mission should not be considered a failure, he betrayed a growing feeling that he was beginning to doubt his own argument. "The news just received of the operations of the fleet at Sweaborg make me regret still more than [sic] we could not go there to verify the results."⁷¹ In a letter to Sara of the same date, Mordecai admitted being:

quite anxious to know how the Sec'y of War takes the answer we got at St. Petersburg. . . . I wish you would speak a little more about what is said of us at home, not the idle stories & newspaper reports, but what people about you who have sense seem to think & expect. We hear that a good deal of interest is felt & inquiries made. . . .⁷²

Mordecai need not have worried about Davis's assessment of their progress. Sara

⁷⁰ Alfred Mordecai to Jefferson Davis, 20 August 1855, DC 601. Davis had directed that all correspondence "be forwarded, according to military usage and regulations, through the senior officer present." Delafield Report, vi.

⁷¹ Ibid. On 9-10 August 1855 a combined French-English fleet bombarded Sweaborg, ruining it as a naval base. Lambert, 281-295.

⁷² Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 26 July-29 August 1855, AMP 2: 184-5.

Mordecai had been lending her husband's letters to the secretary (at least those that did not dwell on the talents of "opera girls").⁷³ Davis appreciated her gesture and was careful to compliment the officers to Mrs. Mordecai. Moreover, he expressed approval of the decisions the commissioners had made, remarks that she happily passed on to her husband. Sara reported a rumor that Davis believed the commission would somehow be able to overcome Tsar Alexander's misgivings and gain admission to Sebastopol after all, "but how or why he deludes himself with this belief I know not." Even more flattering was the news that the president was interested in their mission. "I went . . . to the President's last week," Sara recounted, "Mr. Pierce said he had seen a few of them [your letters]; Mr. Davis had shown him, & that they were very interesting." Mordecai was relieved to find that the commission still enjoyed good standing at home.⁷⁴

A matter of much greater concern, had the commissioners known it, was their evaluation of the Russian military. The news they had received from the Crimea while in

⁷³ "I think it was unnecessary for you to have concealed from the Sec'y what I said about the opera girls at Warsaw; I am sure he would not have misunderstood or thought amiss of it." Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 26 July-29 August 1855, AMP 2: 173.

⁷⁴ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 26 July-29 August 1855, AMP 2: 173, 189; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 13-15 September 1855, AMP 2: 194; Jefferson Davis to Sara Mordecai, 9 July 1855, AMP 3: 739; Sara Mordecai to Alfred Mordecai, 16 August 1855, AMP 3: 741; Sara Mordecai to Alfred Mordecai, 15 November 1855, AMP 3: 773. Sara's letter reveals something different to the historian than it did to her husband. The wife of an army major was visiting the White House and conversing with the president. The episode demonstrates that Washington in 1855 was a large, southern town, not yet a city, and that the residents were an intimate community, even if some of them were unusually well known. More interesting for this study of the army is the social intercourse between an officer's wife and both the secretary of war and the president. Sara Morecai's continuing dialogue with Davis and her invitation to the White House show that the military and their families were not isolated from the broader society or even the highest reaches of the political elite. In his return letter, Mordecai did not even bother to remark on Sara's visit to the White House.

Russia had revealed little of the truth. In fact, the Russian situation was bad and getting worse. The besieged Russian soldiers were near starvation and almost without hope. Moreover, the large Russian army that the commission had inspected (perhaps 1.4 million men strong on paper) had tremendous difficulty mobilizing and transporting adequate troops to the Crimea. Some of the best units had remained in the north against the possibility of an attack through the Baltic Sea, or in the west watching the borders with Prussia and Austria. Thus, the commissioners had seen the best of the Russian army and had been spared the worst. The very worst was that the Crimean War was to be a catastrophic defeat for Russia and a clarion call for military and social reform. The Delafield Commission had remarked upon the orderliness and discipline of the Russian army and society, admiring qualities that their "system and habit of thought" had conditioned them to revere. Almost in the next breath they had complained of oppressive autocracy and the savaging of a serf. Yet they failed to connect these disparate observations as opposite sides of the same coin. The tsar maintained a large army to prevent uprisings within the country and to discourage revolutions in the rest of Europe that he feared might spread like a contagion into Russia. The vast Russian army's spit-and-polish hid the oppressive social conditions that made such a force necessary.⁷⁵ Later, the Russian collapse in Sebastopol caught the commissioners completely by surprise.

The three officers left St. Petersburg by horse-drawn coach on 2 August en route

⁷⁵ William C. Fuller, Jr., Strategy and Power in Russia, 1600-1914 (New York, 1992), 219-285.

to northern Prussia, arriving at Konigsberg six days later. The trip was less pleasant than other legs of their trek, wrote McClellan in a personally revealing passage, especially when “a few of the springs of our coach broke down under the Majors & I could not help grinning with delight to look at their faces when we could stop at a post house. I was in the front part & quite comfortable--with my usual good luck!” The trio toured Konigsberg’s fortress, then under construction, and enjoyed professional camaraderie with Prussian officers for three days before continuing their journey by train. Pleasant hours in company with the Prussians moved Mordecai to extol “the sort of freemasonry which exists among Mil[itary] Men, and the easy and frank footing on which our intercourse with each other is immediately placed.”⁷⁶ Their affinity for fellow soldiers, even foreigners, stands in remarkable contrast to their evaluations of diplomats, even Americans. Again, their sense of professional corporateness had easily traversed national frontiers.

For another fortnight they traveled through Danzig, Posen, Swinemunde, and Schwedt, visiting fortresses, coast defenses and a cavalry school. The notes Delafield took on this leg of the trip later figured heavily in his official report on coastal defenses.⁷⁷

On 25 August the delegation arrived in Berlin, called again on Ambassador Vroom, and, unfortunately, returned to the tedious task of awaiting the maneuvers of diplomats. From Berlin Delafield wrote to Ambassador Mason asking him again to

⁷⁶ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 September 1855, DC 577; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 19 August 1855, GBMP 3: 385; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 26 July-29 August 1855, AMP 2: 177; Delafield Report, xix.

⁷⁷ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 26 July-29 August 1855, AMP 2: 177; Delafield Report, xix.

intercede with the French foreign ministry on their behalf. In Paris the Americans had declined French permission to enter their lines in the Crimea, because Count Walewsky had coupled the favor with intolerable restrictions--namely, that the Americans promise not to cross over to the Russian side after visiting the French. At the time the commissioners had found that offer both insulting and confining. Now, since the Russian refusal to allow them to visit Sebastopol made the French restrictions moot, Delafield recanted the refusal and renewed their request to the French government. Mason met with Count Walewsky and wrote back that the delgation could expect some word from the French soon. But the progress of the mails was slow, and the commissioners tarried two weeks in Prussia for Walewsky's reply. They eventually left Berlin without it.⁷⁸

While waiting, the commission had little to occupy their time in the Prussian capital. Despite having received earlier permission to tour military works in Berlin "on making known our wishes," the commission languished several days even after presenting the foreign minister with a formal request. Mordecai and McClellan passed the time by taking daily lessons in German. The trio did some sightseeing, bought military books, attended the opera, and endured crowds of Germans who assembled to gape at their uniforms. Yet the period wore on their nerves, mostly because they were worried about

⁷⁸ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 September 1855, DC 577; John Y. Mason to Delafield, Mordecai and McClellan, 2 September 1855, Richard Delafield Collection, United States Military Academy Library, West Point, New York. Hereinafter cited as Delafield Collection; Count Walewsky to John Y. Mason, 17 September 1855, Delafield Collection; John Y. Mason to Count Walewsky, 18 September 1855, Delafield Collection; Count Walewsky to Marshal Pelissier, 22 September 1855, Delafield Collection; Delafield Report, xix.

accomplishing the primary task of seeing operations in the Crimea. McClellan complained of waiting on his “miserable companions mak[ing] up their minds as to what they will do to day.” Only after a plea to the minister of war did they receive an answer to their requests. They received permission to tour eleven military establishments in Berlin and nearby Spandau, but not an arsenal making the new needle gun, which the Prussians preferred to keep secret. They then toured Prussian military facilities for another week.⁷⁹

From Berlin, Delafield assessed their progress and informed Davis of their plans:

From the recent events in the Crimea and the active preparations on the side of the allies it seems probable that some great crisis may occur near Sebastopol before the setting in of the winter. We shall therefore make every effort to reach Constantinople at the earliest possible moment.⁸⁰

Yet a month had passed since they had left St. Petersburg on a tour of north-central Europe. McClellan was frustrated, noting on 4 September that they were “[s]till in Berlin—only a few days longer, I hope, as events are threatening a crisis in the Crimea & we are anxious to lose no time in getting there.” The crisis occurred much sooner than either of them imagined. Four days later the French mounted an assault and siezed the Malakof, the central and all-important bastion. Their success forced the Russians to evacuate the southern side of Sebastopol and withdraw to the north side of the bay.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 September 1855, DC 577; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 3 June 1855, DC 548; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 26 July-29 August 1855, AMP 2: 189; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 4 September 1855, AMP 2: 190; George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 26 August 1855, GBMP 44: 528; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 4 September 1855, GBMP 3: 398.

⁸⁰ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 September 1855, DC 577.

⁸¹ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 4 September 1855, GBMP 3: 398; Curtiss, 450-459.

For all practical purposes, the Crimean War had ended.

Now the commission's internal rift began to manifest itself in earnest. This time, McClellan blamed both his colleagues for the apparent failure:

We have just heard of the capture of Malakoff & regret that we could not have been there sooner. . . . I fear that the slip I feared between the cup & the lip has occurred & that we are too late. We can however, push on and try it. But these d---d old fogies!! I hope that I may never be tied to two corpses again--it is a hell upon earth--but thank heaven can't last forever.⁸²

Mordecai, for once, was as agitated as McClellan. In a trembling hand that betrayed the intensity of his emotion, he wrote Sara:

The news received here last night of the destruction of Sebastopol & its abandonment by the Russians completes my dissatisfaction with respect to the course of our operations. It seems ridiculous and will be thought so at home, that we should have come to Europe for the purpose of seeing the siege operations, should have been here during all the interesting events that have taken place thru this summer & should have witnessed none of them. I can only say that the delays which have taken place on our journey, since our refusal by the Russian Government, have not been with my consent. We are ready to leave here to-day for Dresden & Vienna & I hope we may still be able to see the results of the operations in the Crimea, if not their progress.⁸³

He did not mention Delafield by name. But the usually correct Mordecai nevertheless clearly condemned the decisions of his senior officer to tour fortresses in Europe when

⁸² George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 9 September 1855, GBMP 3: 404.

⁸³ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 9-12 September, AMP 2: 193. Sara Mordecai replied that she deeply regretted their missing "the terrible conflict," and reported that she had "not heard any blame or censure fall upon you for not being at Sebastopol." She feared that Davis would regret their absence, but she did not know his mind. She had refrained from her usual practice of showing Davis her letters from Mordecai, partly because of Mordecai's criticism of Delafield. Alfred later congratulated her on her discretion. Sara Mordecai to Alfred Mordecai, 30 September 1855, AMP 3: 757-8; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 4-12 November 1855, AMP 2: 234.

they might have been hurrying south. Both Mordecai and McClellan feared the failure of their mission, the embarrassment of returning home having failed, and the prospect of the long and fruitless journey that still lay ahead, whatever course they were to take. Criticism of Delafield seems more credible in this instance than it did in Russia. The commissioners fully expected to return to western Europe on the way back to the United States. The tempo of military events in the Crimea had accelerated considerably since they had been in Prussia, and the commissioners had felt a need for haste. Notwithstanding their concern, they spent two weeks on the Baltic and in northern Prussia, and two more in Berlin waiting for word from Walesky and touring installations that they could have inspected after their return from the war. The pace of nineteenth-century travel was slow, but the circumstances seem to have warranted more urgency.

Finally, the commission left Berlin on 12 September, traveling through Dresden and Prague on the way to Vienna. Mordecai was still “sadly disappointed. . . owing to unaccountable official delays and bad management,” but he pleasantly recounted visits to an armory, an arsenal, a military school, a military museum, and a performance of the opera during two days in Dresden (“The ‘opera girls’ were very modest in their movements.”) He even regretted missing an opportunity to view the Dresden artworks due to the temporary closure of the gallery. Perhaps they had decided that speed was no longer essential after the Russian evacuation of southern Sebastopol.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 13-17 September 1855, AMP 2: 194-197.

They arrived in Vienna on 16 September and called on U.S. Minister Henry R. Jackson the next day. Jackson received permission from the foreign minister, Count Buol von Schauenstein, for the American officers to visit Austrian military establishments upon their return from the Crimea. During two days in Vienna the delegation saw the Vienna Arsenal, the royal palace of Schloss Schonbrunn, and the Napoleonic battlefields of Essling and Wagram. Near Wagram they came to a river tributary not shown on the map. McClellan, author of a lengthy treatise on the battle for the Napoleon Club, took command and guided them to the appropriate location, impressing his brother officers with both his knowledge of military history and his keen sense of terrain. The outing did them all good and McClellan again dared to hope that they would see "some active operations in the direction of the Tchernaya or the north side of the bay."⁸⁵

Two reports that Delafield wrote to Davis during this time have not survived. Fortunately, one of the few extant personal letters that Delafield wrote to his family was from this part of the journey. It bears quoting at some length:

The Austrian Government has been very prompt in giving us authority to examine their works. To day we called on their dignitaries to offer our acknowledgments for the favors, and to say we would accept them on returning from the Crimea, where we are hastening, ere it be too late to see the great works and labors performed by both allies and Russians in and about Sebastopol.

I feel satisfied we can now see to far greater advantage and profit the military and engineering art, than we properly could by confining our observations to either one side or the other. Now [that Sebastopol has

⁸⁵ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 13-17 September 1855, AMP 2: 198-200; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 17-21 September 1855, AMP 2: 201; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 14-19 September 1855, GBMP 3: 409.

fallen] we can see what each side has done and deliberately examine it. And it is by no means certain that we shall not see as much of the strife of the combattants [sic] as we desire. Nothing has yet appeared to indicate the Course of the Allies since becoming possessed of the City and South Side. Yet we feel anxious to be there especially as the season is becoming late, and the most interesting moments for observation and study of the works and doings for the last twelve months may slip thro' our fingers. Hence we are off to-morrow via Trieste by Rail Road, thro' Laybach, thence on Friday in a steamer for Constantinople, where we cannot arrive sooner than the ninth day.⁸⁶

Delafield seems to have been sensitive to his colleagues' criticisms. Although it is unclear that they voiced their concerns to him directly, it is reasonable to surmise that they discussed their plans. Rationalizing his earlier decisions, Delafield made a strained and contradictory argument. In the first place, he spoke as a caricature of the engineer that he was, suggesting that the study of siege warfare would be much more congenial now that all that unpleasant fighting had stopped. Then, in the next sentence, he hoped that they might still "see as much of the strife of the combattants [sic] as we desire," although the opportunity to see a respectable battle had clearly passed. The first conjecture was specious; the second contradicted the first. As leader of the commission, Delafield here showed signs of self-doubt and even seemed to deny reality.

"My own opinion," declared Mordecai, "is that the time for us to go to the Crimea is past but my opinion does not prevail, & I go, not unwillingly. . . ." Despite his misgivings, the officers departed Vienna by rail, following Delafield's itinerary to the sea.

⁸⁶ Richard Delafield to "My Dear Sue," his daughter, Susan Parish Delafield, 18 September 1855, Box 132, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

The three engineers were on a busman's holiday as they marveled at the progressing construction of the magnificent Semmering railroad, winding its way through the Austrian Alps and bearing them safely past deadly precipices and breath-taking vistas en route to the Adriatic. They reached the port city of Trieste on 20 September and prepared for the last leg of their eastward trek.⁸⁷

The commission embarked on their voyage to Constantinople with no more diplomatic ammunition than the permits Lord Clarendon had issued them during their stay in London. The attempt to gain entrance to Russian lines had failed in St. Petersburg. They had as yet received no reply to their renewed requests for French permits. As it turned out, the news from Count Walewsky was good: the commissioners would be allowed to enter French lines. But the officers were ignorant of the foreign minister's decision. They left Trieste not knowing how they would be received by the French army, but, as Delafield put it, "trusting to the courtesy of Marshal Pelissier [the French commander] for the facilities we might find necessary in the French camp."⁸⁸

"You can readily anticipate the principal occurrences of a sea voyage of which I am the narrator," grumbled Mordecai. After a beautiful departure from Trieste aboard the steamer *Adria* on 21 September, the wind had changed to give them rough seas.

⁸⁷ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 17-21 September 1855, AMP 2: 202-207; Delafield Report, xxi.

⁸⁸ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 September 1855, DC 577; John Y. Mason to Delafield, Mordecai and McClellan, 2 September 1855, Delafield Collection; Count Walewsky to John Y. Mason, 17 September 1855, Delafield Collection; John Y. Mason to Count Walewsky, 18 September 1855, Delafield Collection; Count Walewsky to Marshal Pelissier, 22 September 1855, Delafield Collection; Delafield Report, xix.

Mordecai stayed in his berth for two days until he was “able to go & lie about on deck.” They sailed out of the Adriatic and around the Peloponnesus, enjoying better weather as they went. The steamer put in at the ports of Corfu and Piraeus, but due to a quarantine against cholera the commissioners were not allowed to go ashore. The Turks imposed no quarantine, thus the officers had a brief stay on land at Smyrna after a week at sea. They arrived at Constantinople on 30 September, and cheered their landfall, but were disappointed by the long-awaited vista: “we all agreed that the scene before us by no means obliterated the recollection of Moscow.”⁸⁹

Though Constantinople was not the beautiful sight the trio expected, it was nonetheless an exotic city, at once primitive and cosmopolitan. Sara Mordecai, mindful of her husband’s reports about European opera girls, was “dying to hear what you think of the beautiful Turkish women--mind you are not to be a Turk, because you are in Turkey.” Mordecai and McClellan rode through teeming masses in dust-choked streets to visit the local attractions. Both were most impressed with a performance of “whirling dervishes,” whose athletic feats were as astounding as those of the Cossack cavalry. But Mordecai found them “a most melancholy & degrading exhibition of absurd superstition.” Poor weather, unrelenting poverty, and crowded conditions combined to give the officers an unpleasant impression of the city.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 21-27 September 1855, AMP 2: 208; Alfred Mordecai to Laura Mordecai, 28-30 September 1855, AMP 2: 212-215.

⁹⁰ Sara Mordecai to Alfred Mordecai, 24 October 1855, AMP 3: 761; Alfred Mordecai to Laura Mordecai, 28-30 September 1855, AMP 2: 216; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 30 September 1855, GBMP 3: 419.

As was their custom and duty, the delegation called upon United States officials in Turkey, mostly as a matter of courtesy. The secretary of legation escorted them to call on Reshid Mustapha pasha, the Seraskier, or minister of war. He invited them to smoke pipes seven feet long and to drink strong Turkish coffee. Only McClellan was in the habit of smoking; the rest of them "took small whiffs and blew great clouds. . . . The effect of this 'Indian' reception was very much impaired by the European costume which the official people & their servants all adopted, in place of their own savage magnificence." From there they proceeded to the Sublime Porte and called on Ali Pasha, the Grand Vizier, and repeated the pipe-smoking exercise. Although they had met the two most powerful men in Turkey, the visits were entirely ceremonial.⁹¹

There was little of military significance in Constantinople to interest the commission. On two occasions they travelled to the English hospital in Scutari, just outside Constantinople, where "Miss Nightingale & her lady nurses have carried on their operations." They delayed departure for the Crimea to await word from Ambassador Mason and the French, which had still not caught up to them. Delafield wrote Davis that they would remain in Constantinople until 3 October, at which time they would sail for Balaklava and deal with the French military independently. As it turned out, they waited until 6 October, when the Royal Navy offered them passage on the steamer, *Prince of*

⁹¹ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 3-6 October 1855, AMP 2: 219-220.

Arabs. There was still no word from the French.⁹²

The commissioners were anxious to know Davis's feelings after they had missed the grand assault. Delafield tried to reassure the secretary on the success of their mission: "It appears that nothing of interest has occurred at Sebastopol since the evacuation of the Southern side, & there can scarcely be a doubt [sic] but we shall be there in ample time for the next step of the campaign." Though Davis did not communicate with them directly, he comforted Sara Mordecai when returning one of Alfred's letters.

It would have been most unreasonable in me to have been dissatisfied [sic] with the officers for pursuing the course which seemed most likely to succeed when it was adopted. There are few men who might with more propriety be held responsible for any ignorance of the past than Major Mordecai, but to know the future belongs not to mortal man and over nothing is there a more impenetrable veil than the politics of modern Europe. Foiled in the attempt to witness the attack and defence of Sebastopol, they may yet see the great scene of the campaign and in reviewing the operations before the Tower gather all which will contribute to our military knowledge as effectually as if no delay had occurred.⁹³

Davis penned those magnanimous sentiments only a day before the delegation left Constantinople. Weeks passed before they learned of his approval. Still, as they began crossing the Black Sea, they hoped for success in their mission "to the seat of war."⁹⁴

After six months of travel, they had little to show for their efforts. Their frustration, although owing partly to embarrassment, was born of a highly developed sense

⁹² Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 3-6 October 1855, AMP 2: 222; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis (written in McClellan's hand), 1 October 1855, DC 584.

⁹³ Jefferson Davis to Sara Mordecai, 5 October 1855, AMP 4: 615; The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 5, 124-5.

⁹⁴ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis (in McClellan's hand), 1 October 1855, DC 584.

of duty. The commissioners felt a heavy responsibility to their nation to provide the fullest possible account of events in the war. They had been diligent enough, following every reasonable lead that promised to get them to the Crimea. Yet they faced only delays and disappointments. They had made the most their time by visiting as many interesting sights as possible and gathering useful information wherever they went. Most gratifying was the pleasant "freemasonry" they felt with fellow soldiers, especially the Russians, who acted so gallantly. The commissioners had found that their self-identity as military professionals, their sense of corporateness, transcended nationality. But they had made little progress against diplomatic obstacles that often diverted them from their objective. These professional soldiers, finally on their way to a war that had already ended, were frustrated in "the meshes of diplomacy."

Chapter Seven

“A Purely Professional View”

When the commissioners left Boston in April 1855, the Crimean War had already resolved itself into little more than a siege. The strategic focus on the Crimea stemmed from the need for each side to control the port city of Sebastopol. The Russians, in order to exert influence over the Turks, required a naval base on the Black Sea. Conversely, the Allies needed to neutralize the Russian Black Sea fleet to protect the weak Ottoman Empire and maintain the balance of power in Europe. The Russians had to retain Sebastopol and the Allies had to take it.¹

The Allies landed at Eupatoria in September, 1855, more than a year before the commission arrived in the theater. After a short build-up of forces, the Allies successfully attacked the Russians at the River Alma, but sustained heavy losses. Had they pursued, the Allies might have defeated the Russian army in the field and ended the war. But they paused for three days, a delay that allowed the Russians to fall back on Sebastopol and begin improving its fortifications. The Allies, who had never intended to prosecute a siege, now had an unpleasant choice to make: whether to invest the city from the north or

¹ This summary of the Crimean War is a synthesis of numerous sources. They include: Winston S. Churchill, *The Great Democracies* (New York, 1958), 63-79; John Curtiss, *Russia's Crimean War* (Durham, N.C., 1979); William C. Fuller, Jr., *Strategy and Power in Russia, 1600-1914* (New York, 1992), 219-285; Edward B. Hamley, *The Story of the Campaign of Sebastopol, Written in the Camp* (New York, 1968. Originally published in Blackwood's Magazine, 1855); Hamley, *The War in the Crimea* (London, 1900); Lawrence James, *Crimea, 1854-56: The war with Russia from contemporary photographs* (London, 1981); Andrew D. Lambert, *The Crimean War: British grand strategy, 1853-1856* (Manchester, UK, 1990); John Sweetman, *Balaclava 1854 and the Charge of the Light Brigade* (London, 1990).

the south. Near the southern end of the Crimea on a small peninsula jutting westward into the Black Sea, Sebastopol stood astride a large bay at the mouth of the River Tchernaya. The city was divided in two: suburbs and landward defenses were on the north side of the bay; port facilities, the anchored Russian fleet, and more suburbs and defenses were on the south. Recognizing that they would have to besiege the city, the Allies elected to make a "flank march" from the north of Sebastopol, near their encampment on the Alma, to the southern side. Their thinking was that the rugged country in the south would provide better cover for the siege, and that Balaclava and Kamiesch offered needed ports to supply a protracted operation. The Allies possessed a formidable, steam-driven merchant fleet and had achieved naval supremacy in the Black Sea, so securing ports should have been tantamount to logistical self-sufficiency.²

In the meantime, the main Russian army, leaving a substantial garrison behind, evacuated Sebastopol in order to harrass the Allies and to keep open the line of communications to the peninsular land bridge at Perekop and homeward toward Russia proper. Operationally, the Allies had to accomplish three tasks: they had to secure ports to support the armies; they had to occupy positions to bombard Sebastopol in preparation for a decisive assault; and they had to keep the port, the besiegers, and the supply lines between them secure from the harrassing Russian army in the field. The Russian imperative was simply to thwart the Allied aims and to defend Sebastopol.

² Naval supremacy also obviated the necessity to take Sebastopol or to fight at all. Lord Raglan, faced with a formidable task and an outbreak of cholera in his army, had serious misgivings about the entire campaign. But British domestic politics pushed in the direction of war. James, 17-26; Sweetman, 6-17.

Between the end of September and the middle of November 1854, the opposing forces had fought several minor skirmishes and two major engagements at Balaklava and Inkerman. These battles occurred as the Russians attempted to dislodge the besieging Allies and to destroy their bases on the sea. Typically, these field actions began with a large Russian attack that failed to carry its objective. An Allied counterattack would drive back the Russian advance and there would be heavy casualties on both sides. The Russian repulse at the Battle of Inkerman on 5 November 1854 essentially ended Russian hopes of destroying the Allied bases. These matters stood five months later when Delafield, Mordecai, and McClellan sailed for Europe the following April.

Both sides used the time to develop siegeworks. The Russians sank ships to block the mouth of the bay, dismounted naval guns for use on land, and constructed admirable southern defenses, including several forts and redoubts, under the able direction of engineer Colonel E.I. Todleben. The Allies entrenched themselves and began advancing parallels toward the Russian lines in classic Vauban fashion. The French operated from a base at Kamiesch; the British from Balaklava. In almost every aspect of operations, the French performed better than the British, much to the dismay of William Howard Russell's appalled readership.

With naval supremacy, the Allies' seaborne lines of communication were secure and unencumbered. Moreover, for the first time in the history of warfare, steam-driven shipping played a major role. As a result, Allied logistical potential was almost unlimited. With that security, the Allies worked to improve their positions and their means of supplying the troops. The French, situated on the west of the line around Sebastopol and

nearest the Black Sea, supported themselves effortlessly from their ports, which were close to the front and easily accessible by land and sea.

The British situation at Balaklava was another matter. Balaklava was a bottleneck. The port was protected from the sea, but altogether too small to accommodate large numbers of arriving ships or to transfer the enormous volume of supplies inland to the army. Maneuvering within the harbor was difficult and hazardous, and there were but 600 yards of waterfront for unloading cargo. Unloading and transport of supplies were painfully slow. Once on the ground, supplies had to wind their way up a steep gorge to a small village, then turn west up another incline and traverse four miles to reach the front of British troops. For many months, no one thought to lay a railway to improve this overland route. Then, on 14 November, a fierce storm wrecked 21 ships waiting to enter the protection of Balaklava harbor, perilously reducing British supplies of food, fodder, clothing, and tentage just at the onset of winter. British troops were soon starving and dying of disease within a few miles of the port. W.H. Russell's most damning dispatches dealt with the unnecessary misery caused by British logistical incompetence. Yet the political firestorm in London that felled the Aberdeen government and created a commission to investigate military malfeasance happily ignited reform in the Crimea. The British built a railway from Balaklava to the front. A mercifully short winter allowed the army to escape much greater suffering. At last, the army developed port administration procedures and disciplines that made men, animals, and supplies move with dispatch to their appointed destinations.

The Russians, too, had problems, and theirs were more debilitating than the

Allies'. Because of a weak strategic position, inferior weapons, and outmoded tactics, the Russian army was unable to profit from the advantages of fighting a defensive war. The Russians boasted of an army of over one million men. Yet the threats from the British navy in the Baltic and the Austrian army in the west kept them from deploying anything like that number to the Crimea. Moreover, because the Allies commanded the sea, every Russian soldier had to march hundreds of miles to reach the peninsula. The Russian army commandeered over 100,000 ox-driven peasant carts to deliver supplies, but they were never able to match the capacity of the Allied fleets.³ As a result, by the spring of 1855 the Russian army was outnumbered and undersupplied. They suffered the want of food, clothing, and ammunition. In addition, Russian infantry armed with smooth-bore muskets found themselves facing Allied riflemen, who thereby had a tremendous tactical advantage in range and accuracy of fire. Furthermore, the goose-step drilling that had so impressed the commissioners on the parade ground at St. Petersburg was of little value on the battlefield or in the siege lines.

By the spring of 1855 the Allies had achieved their first two goals: the ports were secure and their troops were free to pursue the siege well supplied and in relative safety. Operations around the periphery of Sebastopol involved Allied attempts to reduce or

³ In fact, the Russian supply columns had trouble supplying themselves. In the empty steppeland, there was little forage for the draft animals. Thus the carts had to carry fodder for the animals to eat along the way. G. Perjés has shown the impossibility of a large army attempting to carry its own provisions with animal-driven wagons over a long distance. By the time the Russians, or any such army, reaches its destination, the mathematics of logistics dictate that they will starve. G. Perjés, "Army Provisioning, Logistics, and Strategy in the Second Half of the 17th Century," *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 16 (1970): 1-52; William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago, 1982), 230.

capture Russian forts and redoubts. The Russian defenses south of the harbor described an arc anchored at the water's edge on both ends. A long inlet, called Southern Bay, protruded south for two miles, further dividing the city and the Russian garrison. Forts and redoubts surrounded the city with this inlet more or less at their center. As the Allied logistical situation began to improve, allowing them to supply and reinforce themselves until they outnumbered the Russians, their attempts to reduce these outlying bastions commenced in earnest. In April the Allies began an eight-day bombardment of Russian defenses, one of many long artillery exchanges that eventually destroyed the city and port of Sebastopol. In early June another mammoth artillery effort preceded the attack and capture of the Quarries and the Mamelon, two small fortifications outermost along Russian lines. News of this attack had given the commissioners their first indication that they might not get to the Crimea in time to observe active operations. Less than two weeks later, after another brutal bombardment, the Allies failed in their attempts to take two key positions. In poorly coordinated attacks, the British were repulsed at the Redan; the French at the Malakof. Learning of this Russian success had bolstered the commissioners' growing faith in Russian arms, convincing them to remain in Russia and make an excursion to Moscow rather than hurrying to the Crimea.

The next major operation proved to be the last. After several more bombardments over three months' time, the Allies attacked the Redan and the Malakof again. Although the British again failed to take the Redan, the French captured the main prize and the linchpin of Russian defenses. When the Malakof fell, the Russians found their defense of the south side untenable and withdrew across the harbor during the night. Hearing this

news in Berlin, McClellan had snarled that “the slip I feared between the cup & the lip” had occurred, and that their mission was now a failure. He was essentially correct in his assessment that they would have no opportunity to witness further operations. Little happened in the Crimea from 8 September until the peace agreement the next year.

Concluding that their mission was a failure was another matter. To be sure, the commission’s delays en route had caused them to miss invaluable opportunities of seeing the Allied assaults on the Russian lines and even an open-field engagement in August in which the Russians had again attacked and been driven back, this time along the River Tchernaya. Never before had an American observer mission witnessed belligerents in combat. The Delafield Commission had had that chance and missed it. But the siege of Sebastopol and the artillery duel--the war’s salient novel characteristic--were still on-going. Furthermore, to the practiced eye there is much to be gleaned from viewing a battlefield, even an old one, and even more from observing an army engaged in routine operations in the field.

Moreover, the commissioners placed too great an emphasis on their trip to the Crimea. They looked upon it as the “great object” of their journey, everything else being less important. Historians have adopted that accent, often referring to the delegation as the “Crimean Commission.” But their trip was much more than a frustrating attempt to get to the Crimea. It was a mission to obtain information about “the military service in general,” and to observe the recent changes in “the military systems of the principal nations of Europe.” The commissioners had already traveled far and seen much of great value and they would continue to do so even after they had left the theater of war. The

entire trip expanded their horizons and furnished an unprecedented opportunity for them to enlighten the American military profession.

At the same time, unfortunately, the rest of their journey reinforced new biases--against the Allies, in favor of the Russians--and the old "system and habit of thought."

The commission boarded the *Prince of Arabs* on Saturday, 6 October 1855.

McClellan playfully described their preparations to cross the Black Sea:

We take all our camp equipments & c--not to mention a cook & a groom in addition to our courier--so we will have quite a little army of our own--almost as large as the "English contingent"--for so I hear the French designate the English Army."⁴

After more than a year at war disparagement of the British forces had become an international joke. McClellan may have been writing in jest, but the commissioners were taking everything they needed to subsist on their own, just in case the stories they had heard of British incompetence proved to be true.

They reached Balaklava early on the morning of 8 October after a two-day crossing that even Mordecai found pleasant. The crowded harbor was so busy that their steamer had to wait until evening before unloading its cargo. The docks were a scene of apparent confusion as men, supplies, and animals of all kinds milled about. But in the past year the British had made great strides toward organizing the harbor facilities. The railway from Balaklava to the siege lines methodically conveyed supplies up the steep

⁴ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 30 September 1855, GBMP 3: 419.

gorge, past the village of Kadikoi, and up the incline of the Chersonese Uplands to Sebastopol. Somehow, order emerged from chaos.⁵

While waiting for their gear the commissioners disembarked. McClellan “hired a ghost of a pony” and hurried off to report their arrival at British headquarters. Mordecai and Delafield decided to explore “the curious little place and its environs.” In the harbor town busy shops gave the aura and appearance of a bustling European city. They climbed a hill to the east that dominated the port and afforded a panoramic view of the Black Sea, the harbor, and all the battlefields of the war except Sebastopol itself, which lay obscured beyond a ridgeline.⁶ Below them in Balaklava:

the rows of houses are crowded full of carts, wagons & pack mules, loading or waiting to be loaded with supplies for the camps, & driven by people of many nations; turbaned Turks, jet black Nubians, dirty Irish, jaunty looking Sardinians & mustachioed Frenchmen in their eternal red trousers and forage caps.⁷

To the north lay the South and North Valleys, scenes of the Battle of Balaklava--“the thin red line” and the charges of the Heavy and Light Brigades. Farther still were the Fedioukine Heights to the northeast and the Chersonese Uplands to the northwest, behind which lay besieged Sebastopol. “The country on all sides as far as the eye can reach is covered with white tents,” described Mordecai, “among which you can see dark masses of

⁵ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-12 October 1855, AMP 2: 224.

⁶ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 12 October 1855, GBMP 3: 431; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-12 October 1855, AMP 2: 224.

⁷ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-12 October 1855, AMP 2: 224.

men, horses & artillery, & we begin to realize that we have reached the seat of war.”⁸

McClellan returned in the company of aides-de-camp leading extra horses personally sent by British commanding general Sir James Simpson to conduct the commissioners to their quarters. Their new home was at Cathcart’s Hill, high on the Chersonese Uplands overlooking Sebastopol, “the great point of observation for lookers-on during the siege & from which the whole field of operations is spread out before you.” A quartermaster provided them with a hut, a stove, cots, and provisions, “so you see us quite magnificent.”⁹ Simpson, “a tall gentlemanly looking man, with very white hair & a quiet manner,” had succeeded to the British command upon Lord Raglan’s death in June. He invited them to dinner shortly after they arrived and “promised to do all that he could.” He was as good as his word, furnishing officers to escort the Americans wherever they cared to go. The commissioners got on famously with British soldiers, attending British reviews and worship services and dining with Simpson on one other occasion.¹⁰

The morning after they had settled in the commissioners got down to business. They toured the battiefields daily and seem to have worked harder during this part of their

⁸ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-12 October 1855, AMP 2: 224.

⁹ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-12 October 1855, AMP 2: 224-226. Generals and correspondents used Cathcart’s Hill as a vantage point during the important operations of the siege. See William H. Russell, Russell’s Dispatches from the Crimea, 1854-1856, Nicolas Bentley, ed. (New York, 1966).

¹⁰ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-12 October 1855, AMP 2: 226; journal entries, 14, 20 October 1855, AMP 7; dinner invitation to George B. McClellan from “LtCol Chapman”, 18 October 1855, GBMP 3: 454; invitation to a “review of a brigade of Chasseurs d’Afrique” and breakfast afterward with General Morris, 18 October 1855, GBMP 3: 455. General La Marmora, commanding the Sardinian forces, also provided the delegation with an officer escort during visits to his camps. Richard Delafield, Report on the Art of War in Europe in 1854, 1855, and 1856 (Washington, 1860), xi. Hereinafter cited as Delafield Report.

trip than at any other time. McClellan later apologized to his brother for not writing more, saying that he “was really too busy whilst in the Crimea to do more the ‘scrawl’ the few lines I sent you. Hard at work all day--either walking or riding many miles & then making up notes at night--or dining with some of our kind English friends.” Mordecai was invigorated: “The daily exercise of riding 12 or 15 miles over this rough country keeps both body & mind in excellent condition.” They toured the works in and around Sebastopol on both sides of the line. The officers ranged over every battlefield in the theater--Inkerman, Tchernaya, Traktir Bridge, and Balaklava--trying to imagine, with the help of their escorts’ narration, how the battles had developed.¹¹

The principal image they formed was of utter ruin. “Sebastopol is knocked into a cocked hat,” concluded McClellan after his first ride through the city, “& you cannot imagine the scene of devastation it presents.” Mordecai was astounded at “such a scene of ruin and destruction. . . in place of what was lately a beautiful city.” The city and port were demolished. Delafield and McClellan both imagined that Pompeii after the ancient volcanic eruption must have looked similar to the scenes they were witnessing:¹²

Sebastopol, a short year since a beautiful and flourishing city is now a mass of ruins--not one house is uninjured, not one habitable, few have any fragment of a roof, & not one solitary inhabitant is left. As you walk through its lonely streets you feel still more lonely when reminded of the

¹¹ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-20 October 1855, AMP 2: 228; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452; Journal entries: 13 October, 18 October, 23 October 1855, AMP 7.

¹² George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 12 October 1855, GBMP 3: 431; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-12 October 1855, AMP 2: 227; Richard Delafield to Susan Parish Delafield, 13 November 1855, Delafield Family Papers, Box 132, Firestone Library, Princeton University; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452.

cause by the shot & fragments of shells everywhere scattered about. The few sentinels warning you that this, that, or the other is a dangerous place--or by a spiteful shell or two from the north side bursting in unpleasant proximity to your valuable person.¹³

Sebastopol writhed in filth. Cats, dogs, and rats had been the only living creatures to greet the Allies when they entered. The "smell of mortality" enveloped the broken city.

"[B]lood-stained ruins alone were left to the victors as the fruits of this siege."¹⁴

Outside the city the three engineers saw in vivid and gruesome detail the aftermath of the year-long siege--just the kind of war they had been trained to fight since their days as cadets at West Point. But observing the genuine article was an emotional and instructive experience:

In the Malakoff [sic], the Redan, &c the scene is different, altho' much of the same kind--You see at a glance what a bloody & determined strife was there enacted, & are half surprised that you do not still see in heaps around you the dead bodies of the gallant French & brave English, & the thrice heroic Russians. The earth everywhere ploughed & reploughed up by shot & shell--exploded magazines--ruined traverses--broken guns, disabled carriages--charred timber--uniforms & accoutrements, all torn and bloody--bayonets bent-in-giving the last desperate thrust--caps, alike of Zouave & Russian militia, with the ragged ball hole showing all too clearly why they were there unclaimed--& last of all the new low mounds & unpleasant odor telling a sad tale of poor fellows brought to an untimely end & buried where they fell. . . .¹⁵

Mordecai called the scenes "extraordinary," "bewildering," and "incredible." The officers

¹³ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452. McClellan seems not to have known that the Russians had evacuated the city of its inhabitants at the beginning of the siege. James, 30.

¹⁴ Delafield Report, 47.

¹⁵ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452.

sensed that they were at the site of a watershed event in the history of warfare. “It was really an epoch in one’s life time to walk through the remains of that ruined city,” wrote McClellan. “The impression it made upon me can never be erased.”¹⁶

Artillery was the most evident agent of destruction. Sebastopol lay in ruins because of the unprecedented volume of artillery fire that the Allies had used in their bombardments. In that sense, the Crimea gave mankind its first glimpse at modern war-- these barrages were rehearsals for static battles to follow in major wars until they reached their peak of destructive force across the trenches of World War I. Rifled artillery afforded gunners greater ranges, better accuracy, and, hence, more destructive power. Yet the most salient quality of artillery in the Crimea was its quantity. The Russians had concentrated most of their army’s guns in Sebastopol. Then, having scuttled and sunk seven ships to block the harbor, they removed their guns and placed them in the defenses. Delafield accounted for more than 500 Russian guns protecting Sebastopol--a figure that is more impressive given the Russian inability to reinforce themselves over their long overland line of communication.¹⁷

On the other side, ocean-going steamships enabled Allied navies to supply guns and ammunition to the armies quickly and continuously over the course of the war. By the time the commissioners arrived, the Allied numerical advantage in artillery was overwhelming. The British alone sent over 900 guns to the Crimea, some 250 of which

¹⁶ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11 October 1855, AMP 2: 227; George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 14 January 1856, GBMP 44: 563.

¹⁷ Delafield Report, 36-38.

were still in action against Sebastopol at the end of the siege. The French had dispatched almost 1,700 guns by the end of the war. If one adds naval guns, much less effective in the siege, the totals are still higher. On the day the Malakov fell, the French engineer estimated that the Allies mounted 700 guns against the Russians' 800.¹⁸ As a result, the commissioners saw amazing scenes of past artillery battles, which had "left scarcely a foot of ground that is not ploughed with shot & shells, or even now covered with fragments of these missiles. . . ." Spent shot lay everywhere, not only in and about Sebastopol, but on the surrounding battiefields as well. "In the 'valley of death' in one place our horses actually walked over a pavement of Russian cannon balls laid as close as the paving stones in the street before your door & and this not done by hand." As Mordecai reported, "The English alone, who occupied but a small part of the works of attack, have used more than 250,000 cannon balls!" During the final bombardment prior to taking the Malakov, the Allies fired 52,000 rounds in a single day. According to Delafield, the total Allied expenditure of "shot and shell" during the war neared 2.4 million.¹⁹

Exchanges of artillery were the only continuing combat, but they were incessant.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 54-56. Delafield did not reconcile the 200-gun disparity between his count of Russian artillery and the French engineer's. It is not unusual, however, for a soldier to overestimate the enemy's capability.

¹⁹ Curtiss, 448; McNeill, 230-231; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-12 October 1855, AMP 2: 226-7; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-20 October 1855, AMP 2: 229. McClellan used the same metaphor to describe the scene: "The amount of shot scattered over the ground around the approaches surpasses belief. In the 'valley of death,' I have literally ridden over a pavement of shot." George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 12 October 1855, GBMP 3: 431.

McClellan noted that the French and Russians kept up a “pretty constant interchange of compliments.” Mordecai reported that, even in this time of relative quiet, “They must have fired almost every minute from each side, for several hours. . . at least 500 or 600 shots a day.” He pronounced it “a great waste of good ammunition.”²⁰ On their first ride into Sebastopol McClellan achieved his ambition of coming under fire:

As there were 5 of us mounted in company, the Russians seemed to think us a mark worth shooting at. So some few shells burst near enough to remind me a little of Vera Cruz. Thank heaven that I shall not return without having been under fire, even if it were a trifling matter indeed.²¹

That episode, much as it satisfied McClellan, was not the closest they came to injury. During one excursion a mine exploded nearby, killing five Frenchmen and showing “that death was still latent beneath the ground already so gorged with victims.”²²

The other major technological advance in weaponry was the production and widespread use of rifled small arms. In the Crimean War some soldiers on both sides had rifles, the difference being that most Allied soldiers had them and most Russians did not. The “minie” ball and several other kinds of rifle projectiles had recently been introduced, making rifles easier to reload. Now the rifle-bearing infantryman had a tremendous advantage in range--several hundred yards--and accuracy over his more primitive opponent without giving away anything in rate of fire. Delafield found five different types

²⁰ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 12 October 1855, GBMP 3: 431; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-20 October 1855, AMP 2: 228-9.

²¹ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 12 October 1855, GBMP 3: 431.

²² George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452.

of rifle balls on walks around the trenches of Sebastopol and the battlefield at Inkerman. Mordecai later detailed in his report some of the effects of rifled small arms, noting the extraordinary measures the troops took to protect themselves, including rope mantelets covering gun embrasures. He and McClellan also mentioned the covered forward positions of Russian riflemen harrasing the besiegers, which the Allies respectfully named "rifle pits." Likewise, Delafield detailed the laborious process of pushing forward trenches under the increased threat of both rifle and artillery fire.²³

Yet the full import of these weapons seems to have escaped the commissioners. Unable to witness a true battle, they could not observe the power of rifled weaponry in the hands of well-drilled infantry. For example, in his journal, Mordecai recorded impressions of the new British weapons while in the battle area:

Nearly all the troops furnished with these muskets [Enfields]. . . . From Col. Kennedy--Enfield musket much improved as to range, accuracy & effect. trouble found with the ball at first from want of accuracy in making those with iron culots liable to be separated in two. new ball adopted for them with wooden plug, not rec'd out here, but said to be perfectly satisfactory in practice. firing 300 rounds without failing & ranging even 1500 yards.²⁴

Mordecai's description of these lethal British weapons was the detached and dispassionate report of a scientist. He clearly understood the advantages of rifled weapons in both a

²³ Delafield Report, 4, 57; Alfred Mordecai, Military Commission to Europe in 1855 and 1856, Report of Major Alfred Mordecai of the Ordnance Department (Washington, 1860), 176. Hereinafter cited as Mordecai Report; George B. McClellan, Report of the Secretary of War communicating the Report of Captain George B. McClellan, One of the Officers Sent to the Seat of War in Europe in 1855 and 1856 (Washington, 1857), 16-22. Hereinafter cited as McClellan Report.

²⁴ Alfred Mordecai, journal entry, 11 October 1855, AMP 7.

technical and a military sense. Later, in his report, he discussed at length the advantages and disadvantages of various weapons and principles. But neither he nor his companions saw formations of infantry or cavalry suffer incomprehensible casualties in incredibly brief periods from facing an enemy firing “minié” balls. Neither his contemporaneous notes nor his official report betrayed the emotion one would have felt having seen rifled weapons fired in battle. Mordecai found a range of fifteen hundred yards worthy of note, since the standard smoothbore musket was ineffective beyond two hundred yards, but the fact excited no awe or fear in him. Rifled small arms were shortly to effect a transformation of infantry tactics, but the commissioners gave no indication of expecting such a radical change to occur.²⁵

The commission did observe one important tactical effect of these advances in both artillery and small arms--the grander scale of entrenchments. The siegeworks and defenses of Sebastopol were reminiscent of eighteenth-century warfare, but, at the same time, strangely new: “[T]he most extraordinary & bewildering sight is that of the Russian works of defence & those of the Allied attack. Such vast labors, to be executed under the incessant fire of artillery. . . are almost incredible when strewn out before your eyes.”²⁶ “At every step,” wrote Mordecai, “my admiration for the wonderful defence of the Russians is increased by seeing the evidence of great skill & labor in the construction of their works & great perseverance in their defence.” That labor was the burden of

²⁵ Mordecai Report, 157-227. Chapter Eight will discuss the commissioners’ reports and the conclusions they did and did not draw in greater detail.

²⁶ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-12 October 1855, AMP 2: 227.

necessity, soldiers dug in from a rational fear for their lives and in spite of the most unpleasant circumstances. “Why,” declared Mordecai, “the very plague of vermin would have driven out almost any other garrison.”²⁷ McClellan proved the truth of that observation when he unwisely elected to inspect a Russian bunker:

How Rusky lived in his bombproofs I can't imagine. . . . I went into one on one occasion & merely remained a moment. Just long enough to see the interior arrangements & general dimensions (for I had been forwarned of consequences & jocosely remarked “I'll go one flea on it anyhow.”[D]) When I came up to Mother Earth, my pants were literally black with the wretches.²⁸

The delegation spent the next several nights “in sanguinary contest with the fleas.”²⁹

Fleas were a passing discomfiture for the commission, but they were only one among many disagreeable aspects of daily life for soldiers on both sides of the siege. The continuous danger from artillery fire was the most nerve-wracking nuisance. Hence the name “bombproof” for the Russian shelters. Yet the Allies were no less vulnerable. Their parallels were months in the digging--a tedious, dangerous attempt to get close enough to the Russian bastions to try a final assault. That assault itself was a risky undertaking due to the menace of rifled musket fire. Indeed, McClellan determined that the French had succeeded and the British had failed in their offensives because the French had brought their parallels within 50 yards of the Malakov, while the British had dug no closer than

²⁷ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-20 October 1855, AMP 2: 230.

²⁸ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452.

²⁹ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 11-12 October 1855, AMP 2: 227; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-20 October 1855, AMP 2: 230; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 2: 452.

280 yards from the Redan. Although he did not specifically attribute the attackers' difficulty to rifled musketry, he noted that the British "storming column passed over that distance of uncovered ground perfectly exposed to whatever fire could be brought to bear." That exposure and poor "order & discipline" cost the British their objective.³⁰

The thickness of fleas on McClellan's trousers suggests why disease, not rifle and artillery fire, caused most deaths in the Crimea. Military camps of that day were unhealthy places at best; but British logistical troubles exacerbated the problem. W.H. Russell had aroused the British public partly by describing needless suffering from disease brought on by military incompetence. Despite his claims that a steady regimen of exercise on horseback had insured his good health, Mordecai fell ill on 22 October. Within four days he was well enough to inform Sara "that since last I wrote, I have been suffering with the disease of the camp, of all camps. Nothing like cholera, however." The proper major was too gentlemanly to name his malady while it persisted for a fortnight. Once back in Constantinople and again on his feet, he confessed that he had been suffering from bilious diarrhea, "not overcome as readily as I hoped." Indeed, the disease immobilized Mordecai for the remainder of their stay in Sebastopol, forcing the other officers to make special arrangements for his overland transportation to the port at Balaklava. For a day or two, the major convalesced at a British field hospital, attended by Florence Nightingale, who had done so much to remedy the conditions Russell had reported. She was "a lady with a

³⁰ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-20 October 1855, AMP 2: 230; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452.

very pleasant & good face--still young--pretty. . . . Her manner very modest & ladylike." While visiting the hospital, Delafield thanked her as "an American soldier. . . for the beneficial influence she had awakened in behalf of the medical branch of my profession." He later made special mention of her work in his report.³¹

Not surprisingly, given their consistent treatment of the commissioners, the French were less than hospitable. Three days after their arrival the trio called on Marshal Pelissier, the French commander, but were told that he was not available. General Martimprey, the marshal's chief of staff, gave them "printed permits, to visit the French trenches & Sebastopol, that are granted to all unsuspected persons." After a fortnight in the Crimea, the delegation received the long-awaited response from Count Walewsky, granting them permission to visit the French works. However, Delafield angrily reported,

the terms on which the permission to visit the French Army in the Crimea was to be granted were quite essentially changed. . . . You will observe, sir, the wide difference between an engagement not to visit "the Russian camp in the Crimea," & one prohibiting us from at any time hereafter visiting any dependency of Russia. . . .

In addition to the circumstances just mentioned a more important fact came to our knowledge while in the Crimea--viz: that the very same permission we had asked was granted by the authorities in the Crimea to many people, & even to officers of our own service (Maj Wayne, Capt Porter & Mr Heap of the Army) without any conditions being imposed.

In view of these conditions we determined not to present the letter to Marshal Pelissier, & did not enter any of the French camps after we received it on 25th Octr. . . . [W]e consider ourselves as bound in good faith to carry out our original understanding not to visit the Russian Camps in the Crimea--but nothing further.³²

³¹ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 21-26 October 1855, AMP 2: 232; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 4 November 1855, AMP 2: 234; Patrick Fraser to Florence Nightingale, 29 October 1855, AMP 3: 766; George B. McClellan, journal entries, 28 and 30 October 1855, GBMP 76: 596-597; Delafield Report, 61, 68, 75, 273.

³² Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis (in McClellan's hand), 5 November 1855, DC 586. Jefferson

Delafield had had his fill of this diplomatic errand. Davis had sent him and his brother officers chasing about Europe, requiring them to treat with diplomats, pay calls on ministers of government, and bow before monarchs. Now, after all that, any “unsuspected person” could obtain permission to visit French camps for the asking. Still worse, the French government continued to offend and embarrass them. It was too much to bear. The commissioners dutifully paid perfunctory calls at French headquarters, but they never saw Pelissier. They had productive interviews with his engineer, which were probably of as much value and more interest to Delafield than a talk with the commander himself. Moreover, the commissioners hardly needed French assistance. Their British escorts showed them everything worth seeing on both sides of the siege lines. Still, the insult rankled, both personally and professionally. Delafield assured his sister that “the American Officers and your dear brother are not to be made the tools of any of this folly or nonsense.”³³

As insulted as they were, the commissioners tried to give the French their due. In his analysis of the assaults on the Redan and the Malakov, McClellan showed a grudging

Davis had placed Major Henry C. Wayne at the head of a commission “for importing camels for ‘Army transportation and for other military purposes.’” The Delafield Commission met Wayne and company in Constantinople and again in the Crimea. Porter and Heap were officers of the navy, not the army, as McClellan said. Jefferson Davis, Cconstitutionalist: His Letters, Papers, and Speeches, Dunbar Rowland, ed. (10 vols., Jackson, Miss., 1923), II, 461; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 30 September 1855, GBMP 3: 419; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-20 October 1855, AMP 2: 230; Delafield Report, xii-xiii; Richard Delafield to Susan Parish Delafield, 13 November 1855, Box 132, Delafield Family Papers, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

³³ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis (in McClellan’s hand), 5 October 1855, DC 586.

respect for the French:

In many points of view the French trenches are beyond criticism--no labor was spared & their direction good--in some places they were excavated to the depth of 6 feet in the solid rock--so fixed were they in the principle of affording all possible cover to the men. Their batteries were beautifully made--many of them as handsome as they could be in the school of practice--all that science and untiring industry could effect seems to have been done by them.³⁴

The French had pushed their parallels to within fifty yards of the Malakov. Then, having carefully observed the Russian defensive shifts change precisely at noon each day, the French surprised their enemy with an assault at that most vulnerable moment.³⁵

The British, on the other hand, received a great deal of criticism despite their kind treatment of the commissioners. Under circumstances almost identical to the French, they had failed to dig their parallels close enough to the Redan to provide adequate protection:

the ground was very rocky it is true--but not more so than in many parts of the French approaches. In no instance of bad ground did the English trenches afford good cover like those of the French--they contented themselves with shallow insufficient trenches--perhaps they could not make their men work--I know no other excuse that can be given--tho' they do not assign this reason.³⁶

As a result, the British began their attack dangerously far away from the Redan, and the assaulting infantry paid the bill in the killing ground.

For their part, the "thrice heroic Russians" managed to defend against the Allies'

³⁴ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452.

³⁵ *Ibid.*; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 12 October 1855, GBMP 3: 431; McClellan Report, 20-21.

³⁶ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 12 October 1855, GBMP 3: 431.

superior numbers for longer than anyone could have expected, wrote McClellan.

Always outnumbered, always undersupplied, the Russians' skill and courage enabled them to hold out when lesser men should have surrendered. McClellan's affinity for the Russians had given way to boosterism. The natural advantages of the defense, now magnified by the weight of rifled muskets and heavy artillery, seem not to have registered with McClellan.³⁷

The commissioners left the Crimea with three general impressions. The first was that the scale of warfare had changed significantly. The use of steamships had transformed logistics--many times the former numbers of men, horses, and guns could move to and subsist in a distant theater of war. The dedication of national attention and treasure to military preparedness in Europe was astonishingly immense. Thus, the military capacity of the nations of Europe was alarming.

In addition to military capability, the Allies also seemed to harbor hostile intent. Clearly on their way to victory in the Crimea, the Allies were no friends of the United States, probably because of lingering concerns over the Ostend Manifesto. It took no great feat of imagination to foresee a provocation that would ignite British or French antipathy. The Allies, therefore, possessed the ability and might easily combine it with the intent to attack America.

The first two impressions, in combination with another Crimean observation, led the commissioners to a final conclusion. The Russians had held out in Sebastopol for

³⁷ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452; McClellan Report, 5-24.

many months behind their stout seacoast forts. The likely threat to American coasts demanded that the nation “gird up its loins” and finish the coastal fortification program that had progressed by fits and starts for over three decades. Taken altogether, the inescapable conclusion reinforced the army’s long-standing strategic aims.³⁸

The United States needed to prepare for war against a European enemy.

The delegation boarded the British steamer *Brandon* in crowded Balaklava harbor on 31 October. One can only imagine the already-ill Mordecai’s misery as they loitered two days at anchor before departing. The steamer put in at Constantinople on 4 November and the Americans prepared for the long trek home.³⁹

While in Constantinople awaiting the departure of the next steamer, the delegation engaged in less than their usual amount of sightseeing. A reflective mood seems to have captured them. They were taking stock of their situation, assessing their achievements, and trying to guess how they would be perceived at home. They toured a Turkish arsenal and the Sultana’s palace, but mostly they rested and caught up on their correspondence.

The commissioners’ evaluations of their accomplishments varied. Not surprisingly, Mordecai’s assessment of the journey to the Crimea was grim. “I regret the whole Expedition as a ridiculous failure & most heartily wish that I had not been connected with

³⁸ McClellan Report, 23-24; Delafield Report, 1-3; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452.

³⁹ Alfred Mordecai, journal entries, 31 October, 2 November, 4 November 1855, AMP 7; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 4 November 1855, AMP 2: 234; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 November 1855, DC 586.

it.” Mordecai may be forgiven this outburst in consideration of his illness. There is no question that he received less benefit from the tour of the war zone than his companions. McClellan, on the other hand, had satisfied his desires to see the battlefields and had filled notebooks with his impressions. He had been in his element in the war zone and pronounced himself changed by his experiences. Delafield, for his part, sent Davis two letters on the subject of the Crimea. One was an unofficial appraisal of the military situation. (He expected the Allies to settle in for the winter; the Russians could still hold out in Sebastopol.) The other, an official report of their progress, dwelt on diplomatic travails with the French and then offered a carefully worded assessment:

Notwithstanding this disappointment our opportunities for collecting information with regard to the siege & the present condition of Allied armies were such as to fully repay the trouble of reaching the Crimea.⁴⁰

Delafield “believed that as a general rule the information contemplated in our instructions has been procured to a useful extent.”⁴¹

There is a curious aspect to Delafield’s letters to Davis of 5 November 1855: McClellan wrote them. A comparison of the handwriting in other letters that both men had written shows clearly that McClellan penned and Delafield signed both the official and unofficial missives to Davis. Neither man made mention of this arrangement elsewhere, so it is impossible to know why McClellan took up the task or how much the two collaborated in the composition. One can surmise that they must have agreed in the

⁴⁰ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis (in McClellan’s hand), 5 November 1855, DC 586.

⁴¹ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 4 November 1855, AMP 2: 235; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis (in McClellan’s hand), “Unofficial,” 5 November 1855, DC 589.

generally positive assessments the letters make about their trip and in the decision to inform Davis in detail about French insults to the mission. The commission had been slighted in its capacity as an official delegation of the United States Government, and the commissioners were informing the secretary of war of those discourtesies.⁴²

In private correspondence also written during their stay in Constantinople, both men fumed about French arrogance. Delafield noted that they had received their official permits only a short time before they left the Crimea, “altho’ they were in the French post office for eleven days.” He railed about Pelissier’s refusal to receive them, the French government’s changing the terms of their permission, “the most pointed manner” in which the French had “demanded our words of honour to the agreement,” and the final insult-- that other Americans travelling without benefit of diplomatic assistance were given the run of the battlefield “and were not called up for any pledge or promise of any kind.” He hinted that the Ostend Manifesto was still a sticking point:

Eugenie and Soule may have had no little to do in creating unpleasant and angry feelings and diplomats are such queer beings there is no calculating what little things and little springs they have to play upon to suit their purposes, and when the feelings of the Lady Empress are brot [sic] into play no one can say to what it may lead.⁴³

Eugenie was Empress of the French; Soule the former U.S. ambassador to Spain and the primary force behind the Ostend Manifesto. Delafield’s implication was not that the two

⁴² Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis (in McClellan’s hand), 5 November 1855, DC 586; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis (in McClellan’s hand), “Unofficial,” 5 November 1855, DC 589.

⁴³ Richard Delafield to Susan Parish Delafield, 13 November 1855, Box 132, Delafield Family Papers, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

were in cahoots, but that Soule's reckless diplomacy had aroused the empress to agitate against American interests.

McClellan was even more angry than Delafield. He was still a Russian enthusiast and believed that they might yet prevail. Indeed, they were "in a stronger position than when they held the southern side." Moreover, he wanted them to win:

I hope sincerely that the Allies may yet receive a sound thrashing--for while in a personal manner I admire the English officers & have received the kindest hospitality from them, still I can see that strong possibility of the alliance being turned against us if they succeed in whipping Russia without exhausting themselves. I am no alarmist, but I sincerely believe that with the feeling that exists against our nation in many parts of Europe, especially France, that we should be setting our house in order--increasing our navy & our army--girding up our loins for a strife that may involve our prospect for years & years to come. Heaven grant that no such ruin as that of Sebastopol may overtake any of our cities. . . .⁴⁴

While the commissioners had taken great pains to maintain their diplomatic neutrality, that same effort had left them feeling anything but neutral in a personal sense. They had taken sides, especially McClellan, and they were Russian supporters. More important, they were convinced of Allied military prowess and wary of Allied hostility. That war machine, they thought, could easily redirect its lethal potential toward the United States, especially if America appeared unprepared.

From Constantinople Delafield also sent Davis a number of photographs of Sebastopol and the surrounding area. Photography was a relatively new phenomenon, one of the most fascinating technological advances of the age. The Crimean War was the first conflict to be extensively photographed and the images amazed viewers everywhere.

⁴⁴ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452.

Delafield also sent “drawings” of war scenes to his wife, assuring her that, because they were photographs, they were “truthful to a line.” The commissioners carried with them still more photographic images of the Crimea and delighted audiences throughout the rest of their European trip. Delafield included many photos in his official report.⁴⁵

The commissioners were tired and a bit depressed after leaving the Crimea. The principal purpose of their journey was behind them, and they had real doubts about their accomplishments. Before them lay a depressingly long trip home. Yet the rest of their tour in Europe held promise, as they themselves should have known. They had postponed many tours and inspections en route to the Crimea, preferring to save them until time would not pressure them to hurry. Now, with more leisure, they could make more thorough visits to the peacetime military establishments of Europe.

After two weeks in Constantinople awaiting passage, they elected to return to Vienna by way of the scenic and historic Danube. Boarding the *Persia*, they departed Constantinople on 13 November. What ensued was “a chapter of accidents & a series of mishaps that are almost enough to form a second *Odyssey* [sic].”⁴⁶

“The unsteadiness of my hand is due to long confinement on shipboard,” grumbled

⁴⁵ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 11 November 1855, DC 593; Richard Delafield to Susan Parish Delafield, 13 November 1855, Box 132, Delafield Family Papers, Firestone Library, Princeton University; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-10 January 1856, AMP 2: 264. Two Britons, Roger Fenton and James Robertson, made separate trips to the Crimea expressly for the purpose of photographing the war. In all probability, the commissioners purchased copies of one or both of their works. James, 7-16.

⁴⁶ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 11 November 1855, DC 593; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 11 November 1855, GBMP 3: 466; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 18 December 1855, GBMP 3: 472; Alfred Mordecai, journal entry, 13 November 1855, AMP 7.

Mordecai. They had traveled as far as Varna on the Black Sea coast when the steam engine's cylinder cracked. Together with three or four hundred Turks, they lay at anchor and awaited the arrival of another steamer. A week passed before the steamer *Arciduco Ludivoco* arrived. They boarded her and continued as far as Silistria at the mouth of the Danube only to discover that the vessel's draft was too deep for the shallow river. Turning about, they arrived back where they had started in Constantinople on 29 November, over two weeks after they had departed. Mordecai alone found a small consolation on this misadventure. "The sea was rough & I suffered as usual from seasickness; but it had the effect of completely curing me of the illness I had previously." Indeed, the inveterate landlubber felt the "voyage seemed to season me to the sea."⁴⁷

The trio left Constantinople once again on 3 December aboard the *Egypto*, this time retracing the path that had brought them to the Crimea. The quarantine that had kept them shipbound in September was still in effect, although they again went ashore briefly at Smyrna. Mordecai was feeling well enough to wax poetic about his plight: "I have not suffered much from seasickness; altho' in the domain of Neptune & Aelous, I could not escape without doing homage to their power." A relatively uneventful, ten-day voyage deposited them back at Trieste. By 16 December they had returned to Vienna, marveling once again on their journey at the Alpine scenery and the masterpiece of engineering that

⁴⁷ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 November-17 December 1855, AMP 2: 242; Alfred Mordecai, journal entries, 13-29 November 1855, AMP 7; George B. McClellan to Arthur McClellan, 22 December 1855, GBMP 3: 483; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 18 December 1855, GBMP 3: 472; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 3 December 1855, DC 598.

was the Semmering railroad.⁴⁸

Austria had much to offer the weary trio. Having earlier postponed touring Austria's military establishments, they had plenty to command their attention on this return trip. And with the festive Christmas season fast approaching, Vienna promised to be an attractive venue for needed relaxation.

During the following month they found the Austrians exceptionally forthcoming and hospitable.

Nowhere [wrote McClellan] have all our requests been so promptly complied with--nowhere have all things been so freely thrown open to us--nowhere has more trouble been taken to show us everything. Everything we have asked for. . . has been promptly furnished.⁴⁹

They filled their days with visits to barracks, hospitals, and riding schools for artillery and cavalry. The new year found them in Wiener Neustadt at the Austrian military academy where they became acquainted with the academic buildings, the cadets, and the curriculum. Nearby was a huge new academy for engineers and artillery, whose facade was six hundred yards long.

There, McClellan found made an enlightening discovery:

very valuable information in relation to the Austrian system of saps. . . much better than the others & so simple that I think myself a great fool for not having thought of it myself when engaged in such things. . . it shows the effect of routine upon the mind--the thing I allude to is after all not new--but consists in adapting as the rule what others have made the exceptional case.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 November-17 December 1855, AMP 2: 243-246; Alfred Mordecai, journal entries, 3-16 December 1855, AMP 7.

⁴⁹ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 29 December 1855, GBMP 3: 492.

⁵⁰ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 1 January 1856, GBMP 3: 500; McClellan Report, 35.

McClellan's discovery was rather esoteric. The Austrians had a more efficient and faster method of constructing saps, or trenches, in which the sappers acted together as part of an "assembly line," rather than as individuals. Yet those engineers unwittingly validated the worth of the entire journey to Europe for McClellan. The commission's charter had called for them to find new ways of doing things. Here, McClellan had found a new way. It is interesting that he recorded this observation after his return from the Crimea. He and his companions had seen the aftermath of the densest concentration of destructive power to that point in history. That experience had helped to combat "the effect of routine upon the mind." McClellan would "return from my travels with wider & clearer ideas, & kinder feelings towards the old world, than I had when I started." He was beginning to see that, despite their many disappointments, he still had a grand opportunity for expanding the body of professional expertise in America.⁵¹

The most fascinating site they visited in Austria was the immense Vienna Arsenal, which took them five days to tour. "[T]he vastness of the military preparations, collected in one spot, is perfectly bewildering." The Viennese threw open the works of this arms laboratory, discussing technical details of gunpowder and metallurgy to Mordecai's delight. The ordnance major's journal contains twenty-three pages of sketches and

⁵¹ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 19-24 December 1855, AMP 2: 250-2; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 25-30 December 1855, AMP 2: 254-6; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-10 January 1856, AMP 2: 258-9; Alfred Mordecai, journal entries, 16 December 1855-11 January 1856, AMP 7; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 10 January 1856, DC 610; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 29 December 1856, GBMP 3: 492.

technical notes from these visits, an indication that the commissioners had indeed divided the labors of observation. Manufacturers in the arsenal developed small arms and artillery pieces for field, siege, garrison, and seacoast. The complex also housed some six thousand troops and was so constructed as to be a formidable garrison. The architects of the arsenal happily furnished the Americans a “duplicate set of some 15 elegant photographs, very expensive, & refused to take anything for them.”⁵²

Although their official schedule kept them busy, the officers were immediately caught up in the social circles of diplomatic Vienna. Through the good offices of the affable Henry Jackson, U.S. ambassador to Austria, the trio soon befriended Count Buol von Schauenstein, the Austrian foreign minister. Between these two diplomats, the delegation seldom had a night’s rest during the busy Christmas social season. As usual, the opera was among the attractions that enticed them. Mordecai was either tiring after his long journey or was becoming more discrete as the road led him home: “But you may be sorry to hear that even the opera girls begin to pall on my taste;” he teased Sara, “& I felt inclined to say, with Hamlet; ‘man delights not me, nor woman neither.’” Still, plenty of men and women made valiant attempts to entertain the American trio. They attended receptions, dinners, and a wedding, rubbing elbows with the nobility of Austria and such international notables as Prince Gorchakov, Russian minister to Vienna. Gorchakov, wrote McClellan, continuing their critique of diplomats and his infatuation with the

⁵² Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 19-24 December 1855, AMP 2: 250-1; Alfred Mordecai, journal entries, 19-20 December 1855, AMP 7; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 10 January 1856, DC 610; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 29 December 1855, GBMP 3: 492. Those photos were included in the Delafield Report.

Russians, “was about the first of that class of men, professional diplomatists, whom I have met with, that has an honest, loud laugh & talks out freely.” That assessment was surely unfair to Ambassador Jackson, who had been so helpful to them. Mordecai had pronounced Jackson “certainly one of the most voluble men I have ever seen, & he has made us laugh for an hour at some passages in his diplomatic life here. . . .” Jackson, who performed admirably in introducing the commission to official Vienna, was falsely modest when he professed to be “perfectly astonished at the attentions bestowed upon us.”⁵³

The highlight of their stay in the capital was a court ball on 9 January 1856 where they were presented to the Emperor Franz Josef and the charming and strikingly beautiful Empress Elizabeth. Franz Josef “took more than usual notice of us--had something to say to each of us--knew where we had been & c & c.” He even complimented them on the photographs of Sebastopol, “which have attracted great attention here.” They left Vienna with “unalloyed satisfaction with the treatment which we have received. . . from the Emperor to the court officials.” In fact, their reception in Austria spoiled them for the rest of the trip. Before leaving on 13 January they took farewell cards to their new friends, including Buol. “We did not think it necessary to extend this civility to Frank,” quipped Mordecai, “since he had not sent us a written card for his ‘picayune’ ball.”⁵⁴

⁵³ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 29 December 1855, GBMP 3: 492; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 25-30 December 1855, AMP 2: 254-256; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 19-24 December 1855, AMP 2: 250-253; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 1 January 1856, GBMP 3: 500; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 13-17 September 1855, AMP 2: 200.

⁵⁴ George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 9 January 1856, GBMP 3: 510; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 1-10 January 1856, AMP 2: 258-264; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 13-19 January 1856, AMP 2: 256.

Leaving Vienna, the delegation accelerated their pace, mainly because there was less need to consult with government officials on the return trip. They returned to Trieste by the same rails that had borne them twice before, beginning a seven-week trek through central and western Europe. First they toured Venice, Verona, Mantua, Milan, and Genoa. The military works and sights of Venice consumed almost a week. Elsewhere, the delegation tarried no longer than a couple of days. Their daily rounds continued to include fortresses, hospitals, and arsenals, while the nights brought opera, theater, and formal dinners. In Verona their most gracious host was ninety-year-old Marshal Count Radetzky, an old foe of Napoleon, perhaps the most talented Austrian general of the 1809 campaign. The marshal continued to extend the Austrian hospitality the Americans had come to expect while in Vienna, showing them the extensive works of the city, a fortified garrison of one hundred thousand men.⁵⁵

Predictably and abruptly, the tone changed when the delegation crossed into France. At first the French seemed simply subdued in comparison to the Austrians. But as the officers traveled from Nice to Belfort, the people, especially the military, began to appear almost hostile to them. "We have found almost everything less agreeable in France than elsewhere," Mordecai wrote, "worse roads, worse inns, worse attendance, less politeness & attention on the part of officials (none at all indeed) & so far a less interesting country." Authorities frequently refused to honor permits the commission had received

⁵⁵ Alfred Mordecai, journal entries, 11-29 January 1856, AMP 7; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 7-19 January 1856, AMP 2:262-268; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 21-30 January 1856, AMP 2: 270-276; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 17 February 1856, DC 617; George B. McClellan to Arthur McClellan, 21 January 1856, GBMP 3: 524; David G. Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (New York, 1966), 666.

from the French war ministry. When they did admit the delegation, French officials provided inadequate guides or none at all. These insults stood in stark and immediate contrast with Austrian hospitality, and the commission's miserable impression of Gallic soldiery continued to grow.⁵⁶

At Strasbourg matters began to improve. Crossing into Prussia, the commission again found itself in helpful and courteous hands. They sailed down the Rhine, touring the works at Rastadt and Coblenz, guided by proper escorts. When their authority for touring at Coblenz did not permit them to inspect the entire fortress, the commandant promptly wired Berlin for more extensive permission, which he just as quickly received.⁵⁷

In the ancient arms-making city of Liège, the Belgians showed them a cannon foundry, an armory, and numerous small arms factories. In response to British war demand, Liège had produced 562,000 small arms in 1854 alone. The trio traveled by rail to Brussels, from which McClellan and Delafield took a day trip to the battlefield at Waterloo. Mordecai, concentrating on ordnance matters, stayed behind to visit another arsenal, where he met a Colonel Bowman "of the Belgian artillery, an officer of great ability well known to me by reputation & who was 'very glad to meet Major Mordecai

⁵⁶ Alfred Mordecai, journal entries, 31 January-10 February 1856, AMP 7; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 31 January-4 February 1856, AMP 2: 278; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 7-12 February 1856, AMP 2: 280-281; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-19 February 1856, AMP 2: 285-289; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 18 February 1856, GBMP 3: 540; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 17 February 1856, DC 617.

⁵⁷ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-19 February 1856, AMP 2: 287-289; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 20-27 February 1856, AMP 2: 290-292; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 March 1856, DC 623.

whose name is also well known in Belgium!”⁵⁸

On 2 March the delegation returned to Paris, where tensions with the French immediately resumed. The marshal commanding the local garrison offered them the run of the city, but no guide, “so we must find our own way & introduce ourselves everywhere,” grumbled Mordecai, “This is what he calls ‘furnishing us with all the necessary facilities to visit the mil[itar]y establishments, & c.’”⁵⁹

Yet the commissioners’ concerns were more substantial than simple umbrage at bad manners. Evidence began accumulating from a variety of sources to indicate that the United States might be in danger of attack. The Allies had amassed a sizeable sea and land force that, while it had its hands full fighting the Russians, was more than equal to the task. Indeed, when the American officers arrived back in Paris, a peace conference was in session in the French capital, a compelling reminder of the prowess of Allied arms. There were rumors prior to their arrival that the French or the English or both, flushed with victory over Russia, would like to continue their aggrandizement in an aggressive war against the United States while the armies and fleets were in fighting trim.⁶⁰

McClellan had been concerned about the prospect of war with England

⁵⁸ McNeill, 235; Delafield Report, xv; Mordecai Report, 98-101; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 20-27 February 1856, AMP 2: 292; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 February-5 March 1856, AMP 2: 294-295; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 March 1856, DC 623.

⁵⁹ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 February-5 March 1856, AMP 2: 295; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 March 1856, DC 623.

⁶⁰ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 11 November 1855, GBMP 3: 466; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 18 December 1855, GBMP 3: 472; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 February-5 March 1856, AMP 2: 296; J.H. Dillon to George B. McClellan, 19 January 1856, GBMP 44: 567.

throughout their journey. The Ostend Manifesto had provoked Europeans, and McClellan was fearful that the British, in particular, wanted war with the United States. His observations in the Crimea convinced him of their abilities. He wrote frequently on the return trip through Europe of his worries, hoping that the Allies “will keep hands off of us.” On a personal level he had enjoyed his contact with British officers in the Crimea, but he could “see that strong possibility of the alliance being turned against us if they succeed in whipping Russia without exhausting themselves.” Now a peace conference in Paris was about to conclude with a Russian defeat, and the Allies were stronger than ever.⁶¹

In February McClellan received a confidential communication from an English friend that aroused his suspicions, perhaps even his paranoia. J.H. Dillon confessed that he hoped, “in the interests of Peace, for one more year of war.” England had amassed an enormous arsenal and possessed the fleet to transport it. Unscrupulous politicians on both sides of the Atlantic were privately spoiling for war to advance their own ends. Another year of war, reasoned Dillon, would exhaust the British army and depress the British people. “I fear, in the event of peace with Russia, the temptation to employ the enormous fleet that will be suddenly set at liberty may be too much for our discretion.” McClellan was alarmed. On 18 February he informed his mother that “[t]he probability of war with England begins to look so strong that it is almost time to think of getting across the ocean

⁶¹ George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 11 November 1855, GBMP 3: 466; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 18 December 1855, GBMP 3: 472; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 5 November 1855, GBMP 3: 452.

before it breaks out & stops communication.”⁶²

That same day he poured out seven foolscap pages of “a military sermon” to an old family friend, Senator John M. Clayton. In this extraordinary document, McClellan alerted the senator and former secretary of state to the danger that powerful England posed to the unprepared United States.⁶³ Convinced that the threat from England was real, he set forth detailed descriptions of how a British force might attack:

What is there to prevent an English army from landing on Long Island, exactly where they landed in the revolution, & marching, over ground every foot of which they know, upon Brooklyn to destroy the Navy Yard before the alarm can be fairly heard in Union Square?⁶⁴

It was equally possible that the British might attack from Canada or almost anywhere along the Atlantic coast. America had too little artillery and too little ammunition and powder. The system of seacoast fortifications was in an abysmal state: “there are important anchorages on our coast. . . in which a hostile fleet may rest at its ease without there being a gun to disturb them.” The United States was unprepared “in comparison with the means now at the disposal of England,” which was “in a better condition than she ever before was to strike, against us, a rapid & heavy blow.” The American army comprised only 15,000 men, “scattered literally to the four winds of heaven--not a regiment of Infantry or Cavalry east of the Mississippi River.” In the exigency of a British

⁶² J.H. Dillon to George B. McClellan, 19 January 1856, GBMP 44: 567; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 18 February 1856, GBMP 3: 540.

⁶³ George B. McClellan to “My dear little one,” 4 March 1856, GBMP 3: 557; George B. McClellan to John M. Clayton, 18 February 1856, GBMP 3: 548-556.

⁶⁴ George B. McClellan to John M. Clayton, 18 February 1856, GBMP 3: 548-556.

offensive on the Atlantic coast, the army could never respond in time. Having explained the dilemma in detail, McClellan, the professional officer, delivered the grave conclusion in a single-sentence paragraph:

“The militia, then, would be our only reliance.”

Noting that such a dire warning needed no explanation, McClellan then went on for two pages explaining the limitations of militia.⁶⁵

He proposed a number of reforms urgently needed if the nation were to be prepared for war. Generally,

To repel the attack of such a fleet, we must possess artillery of the heaviest calibre & longest range known in modern warfare, well trained cannoneers to use them, & good protection to shelter men & guns from the effect of the fire of the fleet. To repulse & defeat that army, should it cross our frontier, or land upon our coast, we need at least an equal force of equally good troops.⁶⁶

McClellan’s ideas were a combination of the new and the old. He had learned in the Crimea that the United States was sadly behind the times in artillery, especially heavy guns. The army needed “a much larger number of 8” & 10” guns than we now have. . . . Appropriate money, at once, for these guns, & carriages, shot, shells & powder.” Yet those heavy guns were necessary for arming the old system of seacoast fortifications. Congress needed to finish the program of construction and allocate funds to buy land and construct forts at sites along the coast that current plans left unprotected. Still, his

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

European observations bolstered his proposal: “every nation in Europe has been, & is now, busily employed in the construction of fortifications--so indispensable do these military nations regard them.”⁶⁷

He continued on to recommend numerous other expenditures, improvements, and reforms. He urged buying “the new small arms, & field artillery,” although he gave the purchase of these weapons, soon to become so important in the American Civil War, less emphasis than fortifications and coast artillery. He suggested that the navy acquire more gunboats, steamers, supplies of material and ammunition, “& do not overlook the iron sheathed floating batteries.”⁶⁸

The peroration of his sermon was a plea for professionalism. Returning to the topic of land forces, he argued that Congress needed to rely more exclusively on the regular army and govern it effectively. In time of war, the nation should raise regiments of regulars, not volunteers. Artillery would benefit by a return to schools of practice. The system of commissioning and brevets required reform, “so as to make it as little liable to abuse as possible.” West Point was performing admirably; it wanted only expansion:

In any contingency, increase the diffusion of military knowledge through the country by increasing the number of Cadets at West Point--if more are graduated than are required for the army in time of peace, send back the excess into civil life. They will not be the worst citizens we have.⁶⁹

Securing the nation from foreign aggression demanded preparation. Being prepared

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

required a willingness for young men to train and dedicate their productive lives to service. Militia and volunteers were not equal to the demands of modern warfare. McClellan had begun his letter by saying, "I wish to lay before you a purely professional view of our condition." That is precisely what he did.

He ended by reaffirming his professional bonafides, pointing with pride to his service on the commission:

The views I have expressed have been matured & strengthened by the very favorable opportunities I have enjoyed, during the past year, of examining the military preparations & establishments of the great powers of Europe. The great object of our being sent to Europe, was to compare our own condition with theirs. I would be wanting in my duty to my country did I not say what I think, when it may be of service.⁷⁰

In writing to a senator, McClellan was pursuing no partisan political agenda. Instead, like many officers, he was taking advantage of close ties to the political elite to advance a service interest. In his mind, however, McClellan was rising above even service parochialism: he was fulfilling his professional responsibility to the nation.⁷¹

Mordecai explicitly disagreed with McClellan's dire warnings about a war with

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Concluding, he reminded Clayton of their long relationship: "All that I have written to you here is done confidentially--for I feel that as you were my father's friend, & have always shown a warm interest in me, I can speak unreservedly to you, without the slightest danger of being misunderstood as to my motives, & that you will. . . at least bestow some reflection & inquiry upon what I say. If you deem this letter worthy of consideration, I would be glad if you will--as far as you sense of propriety will allow--not produce it as the cause of your actions, but base whatever inquiry or action you may think fitting, as upon your own reflections--for I am not ambitious of notoriety, & always carefully avoid it." McClellan was most fortunate that Clayton kept his letter confidential. Jefferson Davis, stickler for protocol, would assuredly have looked askance at an officer's correspondence with a senator on such matters. Yet McClellan's familiarity with a United States Senator--in terms of both the ties of friendship to which he alluded and his willingness to offer unsolicited advice--is further evidence that the army officer corps was not so isolated from society or the ruling elite as many historians have argued. Ibid.

England. Delafield never mentioned the matter. But both men agreed with the general diagnosis and prescription: war with a European power was indeed possible and the United States needed to improve its defenses immediately. Later in the trip, McClellan himself admitted that his concerns about war with England might have been premature.⁷²

The prospects of war with France seemed more threatening. Given their continuing unpleasant reception and the fact that their visiting permits were frequently spurned, the officers returned to Ambassador Mason for assistance. He arranged an appointment for them with Marshal Vaillant, the French minister of war who had issued their permits. During the ensuing interview Vaillant professed not to remember that he had personally given the Americans permission to visit French facilities. He rudely refused to give the commission certain drawings of artillery pieces, though the United States had already extended the French the same courtesy. He even suggested that an armed clash between French and American forces was imminent: "We are ready to fight! Don't you know that?" The minister closed the extraordinary interview by extending his hand and saying, "Until we begin to fire our guns, I wish you good day."⁷³

Despite their troubles, the commission found some Frenchmen helpful. In addition to visiting forts, schools, and hospitals "without any guide but our own knowledge," they

⁷² Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 20-27 February 1856, AMP 2: 290; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 17 February 1856, DC 617; George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 26 March 1856, GBMP 44: 589.

⁷³ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 7-13 March 1856, AMP 2: 299; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 April 1856, DC 689. I am indebted to Dr. Lynda L. Crist, editor of The Papers of Jefferson Davis, for her translation of Delafield's handwritten rendering of Vaillant's French. Jefferson Davis asked the secretary of state to investigate "the rude & offensive treatment of the commission by the French Minister of War." Jefferson Davis to William L. Marcy, 22 April 1856, DC 695.

passed two days in company with Captain Claude Minié, inventor of the type of ammunition that bore his name. McClellan also went, by invitation, to the cavalry school at Saumur, spending four days there under the instruction of Monsieur Baucher, who had developed an innovative method of equitation, or horsemanship, training for cavalry. Baucher offered to extend the course to a full month of individual instruction. Focusing now on his role as the commission's cavalryman, McClellan asked the War Department for permission to stay behind to attend the school, but returned to travel with his companions while he awaited word.⁷⁴

However, in his only letter to the commission while they were abroad Davis suggested that they expedite their travels.

I have received your letter dated at Vienna the 10th ultimo and all your previous dispatches. I am gratified to hear of the extensive opportunities you and your companions have enjoyed of inspecting works and articles of professional interest, and am anxious for your return so soon as you shall have completed the further examinations which you may deem necessary.⁷⁵

The commissioners were, after all, several months past 1 November 1855, the return date proposed in their original instructions. Nevertheless, Davis clearly gave them the latitude to do what they considered necessary to complete their mission. The secretary's letter

⁷⁴ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 7-13 March 1856, AMP 2: 298-299; Charles Radzinski to Jefferson Davis, 8 October 1855, GBMP 3: 437; Samuel Cooper to George B. McClellan, 24 January 1856, GBMP 3: 532; George B. McClellan to Samuel Cooper, 3 March 1856, GBMP 44: 577; George B. McClellan to Samuel Cooper, 4 March 1856, GBMP 3: 562; George B. McClellan to "My dear little one," 4 March 1856, GBMP 3: 557; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 5 March 1856, DC 623; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 April 1856, DC 689. This record of correspondence shows that McClellan got the idea to visit Saumur from the War Department. A U.S. Army lieutenant wrote to Jefferson Davis suggesting that the commission visit the school. Cooper forwarded the request to McClellan. After McClellan had visited, he asked to extend his stay in Europe in order to take more extensive instruction.

⁷⁵ Jefferson Davis to Richard Delafield, 9 February 1856, DC 615.

“has determined me [McClellan] to return with the others.” They decided not to stay much longer in France and England, “as we have received to-day from the Secy. of War a sort of reminder that we are to return ‘when we have finished.’” The interview with Vaillant a few days later confirmed this decision.⁷⁶

“I have never felt any regret at leaving Paris. . . how charming a place it ought to be,” lamented Mordecai. They went first to Cherbourg, where they had surprisingly little difficulty. The fortress chief of staff lent them a barge to tour “the works in the harbor, which are on the greatest scale of any operations of the kind.” After three days in Cherbourg the delegation continued on to Le Havre and crossed the Channel that night, arriving in London on 24 March.⁷⁷

The following day the commission called on Buchanan’s successor as U.S. ambassador to Britain, George M. Dallas, former vice-president of the United States. They asked him to request the permits necessary for them to tour numerous military facilities they had not seen the previous year. Dallas agreed to intercede with the prime minister, Lord Palmerston. Little had changed to speed British bureaucrats since their first stop. Though rumors of impending war with Britain had abated, the delegation still felt badly treated by the slow maneuverings of British government. The commissioners waited

⁷⁶ George B. McClellan to “My dear little one,” 4 March 1856, GBMP 3: 557; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 February-5 March 1856, AMP 2: 296; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 7-13 March 1856, AMP 2: 299; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 April 1856, DC 689.

⁷⁷ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-19 March 1856, AMP 2: 301; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 21-28 March 1856, AMP 2: 302; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 April 1856, DC 689.

over two weeks for the permits.⁷⁸

In the interim they amused themselves in various ways. As usual the theater and opera claimed several of their evenings. McClellan and Mordecai, who seemed to be getting on somewhat better, went to Madame Toussaud's wax museum. All three took in the London zoo, the natural history museum, and the fabulous Crystal Palace in Sydenham. Delafield and McClellan even managed a quick excursion to Edinburgh.⁷⁹

The commission had arranged passage from Liverpool when their permits arrived. With scarcely a week before departure, they raced to see all they could. They hurried to see the Enfield arms factory, newly outfitted with American machinery, then "flew up to Manchester" to see another machine shop there. They traveled to the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich, but were denied entrance for lack of proper authorization. Authorities resolved the problem, and the delegation returned to receive a guided tour the next day. They visited two shipyards, but declined an invitation to a "grand naval review" at Portsmouth, scheduled to occur after their departure. In Liverpool they found "several pretty letters from high authorities, who appeared to have waked up just too late, offering facilities to see various places, & c."⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 April 1856, DC 689; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 21-28 March 1856, AMP 2: 303; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 29 February-5 March 1856, AMP 2: 296; George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 26 March 1856, GBMP 44: 589; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-18 April 1856, AMP 2: 315.

⁷⁹ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 21-28 March, AMP 2: 303; Alfred Mordecai to Laura Mordecai, 2 April 1856, AMP 2: 309; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 4 April 1856, GBMP 3: 567; George B. McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 10 April 1856, GBMP 3: 568.

⁸⁰ After the British bureaucracy decided to entertain the commission, doors flew open across the country. But the delegation was out of time. Delafield Report, xvi; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 4 April 1856, DC 689; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 23 May 1856, National Archives Microfilm No. 567,

The delegation boarded the steamer *Persia* for the final leg of their nearly twenty-thousand-mile journey on 19 April. The transatlantic crossing afforded an opportunity for quiet reflection on their tour abroad--the give-and-take with diplomats, the "freemasonry" they had enjoyed with fellow soldiers, their visits to peacetime military establishments, and their observations of the modern battlefield. The commissioners had discarded professional obeisance to all things French, but had replaced it with a worship of the Russians. They had started out to see a war, were disappointed when it dwindled away to almost nothing before they arrived, then were heartened somewhat at the chance to observe so much of the war zone. They watched one war end, and thought they might see another begin. It was that second, future war with a foreign power that captured their attentions as they headed home. They needed to record their experiences to help the nation prepare for that challenge. They took "a purely professional view" of that task.

Nine days' sailing brought them to New York harbor, where the long-suffering Mordecai noted: "Our voyage has combined all the favorable circumstances that might render it agreeable. . . but, unhappily, nothing affords me a dispensation from the horrors of seasickness." Back again on dry land, he found his way home to Philadelphia for dinner the next night, 29 April 1856, just over a year after departing from Boston.⁸¹

roll 536, frames 167-188; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 14-18 April 1856, AMP 2: 315-316; Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 30 March-2 April 1856, AMP 2: 306-308.

⁸¹ Alfred Mordecai to Sara Mordecai, 28-29 April 1856, AMP 2: 321.

Part Three

The Delafield Commission and the American Military Profession

The Delafield Commission was a milepost in the history of American military professionalism. Jefferson Davis had entrusted it with broader responsibility than any of its predecessors, making it the most ambitious military observer mission the U.S. Army had ever undertaken. The commissioners had been far and seen much and in two key respects, even if they had done nothing else, they charted new territory. They did not focus exclusively or even mainly on the military establishments of France. French military thought had been the paradigm for the American army (and several others) since the days of Napoleon. As part of a broader program of reform Davis dispatched this trio of officers to explore more diverse sources of military expertise.

In addition to studying several European armies the Delafield Commission sought to learn from a new source--the observation of warfare itself. Never before had American officers traveled abroad with the expressed purpose of watching foreign armies conduct battle. Although the war was almost over when they arrived in the Crimea, the Americans saw exchanges of gunfire and closely inspected fresh battlefields and siegeworks.

But if the commissioners had left it at that, if they had done nothing more following their return home, this would be a story hardly worth the telling. The value of their journey was not the education it gave to these men, although they learned a great deal. The most noteworthy products of the Delafield Commission were the reports that

each commissioner wrote and published after their return. Jefferson Davis and the army officer corps eagerly anticipated these reports and expected them to be important to the army's future. As one officer wrote to McClellan, "the results of your expedition should be put into print as soon as practicable, for the benefit of the Army. . . ."¹

Through these reports each commissioner showed that he was worthy of the trust that Jefferson Davis had placed in him. Each officer meticulously and faithfully detailed answers to Davis's particular questions. They breached the French paradigm and found information of considerable value in all the nations they visited. And even though they had reached the Crimea too late to observe the active stages of the war, they gleaned much worthwhile data from their observations of the battlefields, siegeworks, and armies.

The commissioners also showed the strengths of the American army in their manifestation of professional responsibility and corporateness. Dedicated to putting their experiences into print and yearning to improve the army, they demonstrated how highly they valued the trust they carried on behalf of their brother officers. Their desire to "impart information to the profession" and to improve the nation's defenses illustrates their serious acceptance of their responsibility as military professionals.

Yet the reports and the process of producing them also show the limits of professionalization in the antebellum army. Individually the commissioners meticulously collected useful information, made insightful connections, and reached thoughtful conclusions of real use to the future of the army. As representatives of their respective branches they presented the state of European military science in accessible form. Yet

¹ Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 21 March 1856, GBMP 44: 582.

when they attempted to reach beyond the scope of their instructions or above the technical and the mechanistic, they showed how “a system and habit of thought” circumscribed their efforts. Even as they discarded decades-old Francophilia, they replaced it with another model that was just as intellectually confining. When they made recommendations for reform, they often reaffirmed the status quo. They refused to reach across the parochial branch boundaries to collaborate on a single report that might have ranged across the interests of the entire army and essayed into higher-level issues of military policy and strategy. Collectively, the reports show that at this stage of the institution’s development the army’s best minds were incapable of synthesizing their European observations with their own experiences to create a uniquely American professional expertise.

Chapter Eight

“To Impart Information to the Profession”

After a few days' rest from their journey, the commissioners met with Jefferson Davis in Washington to discuss the trip and procedures for preparing their reports. Davis gave them regulations to govern their work. The commission would establish an office in Washington, holding its meetings and storing all books, maps, and other materials there. Delafield and McClellan, desiring to work close to their homes after the long trip abroad, took leave and set up offices in New York and Philadelphia, respectively. (Continuing his old animosity, McClellan privately confessed an aversion to working with Mordecai, whose home was in Washington.) Delafield and McClellan asked to be officially assigned to their homes so that they might receive commutation, or compensation for their travel to and from Washington. Davis resisted. In late June McClellan returned to “that den of thieves,” as he described the capital, and met with Davis again:

finally I became tired of awaiting the movements & guiding myself by the opinion of some of my elderly associates [Delafield] & sagely determined to paddle my own little canoe, to beard the lion in his den & the Davis in his hall. So I made a desperate assault on Jeff & found out what I ought to have had sense enough to know before. That is, that if I had gone to him at once I would have been spared a vast amount of annoyance. For after a conversation of about 2 minutes he told me to do just as I pleased--that all he desired was that I should do my work as rapidly & as well as I could--& that I might make my nest in Phila. or anywhere else I pleased. . . .¹

¹ George B. McClellan to Mary Marcy, 24 June 1856, GBMP 3: 600.

McClellan's conclusion was self-delusion; Davis had not changed his position at all. He still refused to grant commutation, but agreed to allow them to work wherever they felt comfortable so long as their official headquarters and library remained in Washington.² Yet McClellan's disparagement of Davis, in addition to providing yet another insight into his character, presaged a rift between the two that soon led to McClellan's resignation.

Davis's decision also allowed Delafield to remain in New York. As chief of the commission, he readily determined that there would be little need for the commissioners to meet frequently to discuss their work. Each member would stay close to home and write his report on the subjects he felt most confident to address. Given their different interests and branches of the army, he reasoned, it was likely that there would be little duplication of effort. There was no formal written agreement about a division of labor, just as there had been none prior to their journey. In general, however, Delafield concentrated on engineering matters, Mordecai on ordnance and artillery, and McClellan on cavalry. Each might cover the interstices of military expertise--and that informal division left many of them--as his observations, inclinations, and abilities allowed. Delafield felt there was no need for collaboration or determining a majority viewpoint on any matter:³

² *The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 6, 1856-1860* Ed. Lynda Lasswell Crist and Mary Seaton Dix (Baton Rouge, 1989), xlv; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 29 April 1856, DC 630; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 16 May 1856, DC 632; Jefferson Davis to Richard Delafield, 20 May 1856, DC 636; Richard Delafield to George B. McClellan, 28 May 1856, GBMP 3: 584; Richard Delafield to George B. McClellan, 30 May 1856, GBMP 3: 587; George B. McClellan to Richard Delafield, 9 June 1856, Delafield Collection; George B. McClellan to Jefferson Davis, 19 June 1856, GBMP 3: 598; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 23 June 1856, National Archives Microfilm No. 221, roll 178, frames 129-31; Jefferson Davis to Richard Delafield, 23 June 1856, Delafield Collection, United States Military Academy Library.

³ Richard Delafield to George B. McClellan, 28 May 1856, GBMP 3: 584.

If we differ better that our views be stated and the observed facts with them. . . . Hence I say, work away--write what in your judgement [sic] is calculated to impart information to the profession. And each of us doing the same our brother officers will be the more instructed to learn what each of us thought and how each saw the same things in a different light.⁴

And so, they worked away, each in his own area of interest, each at his own pace.

Delafield and McClellan corresponded regularly and probably compared notes as the latter's report was nearing completion. McClellan heard little from Mordecai, whom he facetiously termed his "amiable friend," and was "content to remain in blessed ignorance of his doings and thoughts." When it later appeared that Mordecai and McClellan were traversing the same ground--to their mutual displeasure--a letter-writing skirmish ensued. Still, their personal differences were not dysfunctional to their individual projects. Yet the separation and lack of collaboration deprived the writers of one another's thoughts and recollections, and denied them the opportunity of producing a joint work.⁵

McClellan worked faster than the two majors because he was allowed to focus entirely on his report. Delafield and Mordecai both quickly received other assignments that required much attention. Delafield first resumed command of the New York harbor defenses, then in September 1856 returned to West Point for a second tour as superintendent of the Military Academy. The War Department tasked Mordecai once again with revising the army's regulations. That assignment was barely completed in

⁴ Richard Delafield to George B. McClellan, 21 July 1856, GBMP 4: 019.

⁵ Alfred Mordecai to George B. McClellan, 6 September 1856, GBMP 5: 027; George B. McClellan to Richard Delafield, 15 September 1856, Delafield Collection, United States Military Academy Library; Richard Delafield to George B. McClellan, 21 July 1856, GBMP 4: 019.

February 1857 when he assumed command of Watervliet Arsenal in Troy, New York, the army's principal arsenal of construction. As a result, McClellan finished his work in January 1857, while the majors did not complete their reports until much later: Mordecai in March 1858 and Delafield in November 1860.⁶

As we begin to analyze these reports it is worthwhile to remind ourselves of the context of their trip and the charter under which they sailed. As we noted in Chapter Six, Jefferson Davis dispatched the commission with a detailed list of instructions to guide their travel and their observations. His directions to coordinate with American diplomats, to request all necessary authority for their actions from each government involved, and "to conduct your movements in such a manner as to give no reasonable ground for suspicion or offense" materially affected the course of their journey. Indeed, as Delafield put it, "the meshes of diplomacy" ensnared the commission so long that they were unable to reach the Crimea during the active operations of the war.⁷

Moreover, the list of particulars to which Davis directed the commissioners' attention served as a guide for all their observations and was the most important influence on the composition and structure of their reports. Comparing that list to the commission's

⁶ Richard Delafield to George B. McClellan, 28 May 1856, GBMP 3: 584; Register, 247; Stanley L. Falk, "Soldier-Technologist: Major Alfred Mordecai and the Beginnings of Science in the United States Army" (unpublished dissertation, Georgetown University, 1959), 492-493; George B. McClellan to Jefferson Davis, 24 January 1857, National Archives Microfilm No. 567, roll 563, frame 74; Alfred Mordecai, Military Commission to Europe in 1855 and 1856, Report of Major Alfred Mordecai of the Ordnance Department (Washington, 1860), 1. Hereinafter cited as Mordecai Report; Richard Delafield, Report on the Art of War in Europe in 1854, 1855, and 1856 (Washington, 1860), xxiv. Hereinafter cited as Delafield Report.

⁷ Delafield Report, vi, ix.

reports, one finds painstaking attention to satisfying Davis's requests. As we shall see in the analysis of the individual reports, one or more of the commissioners addressed each of the secretary's specific questions in considerable detail.

In fact, Davis's initial instructions, which assigned specific areas of inquiry, might have exacerbated another problem--a tendency to concentrate on technical matters almost to the exclusion of higher-level thinking. Davis's detailed questions, coupled with the composition of the commission, probably caused them mentally to divide the labors of observation, and hence of reporting, among themselves according to their branches. There is no record that they ever considered jointly writing a single report. That was an opportunity missed. Working separately and writing on matters assigned individually, each commissioner focused on his own task and matters of import in his own branch. As a result, when he did take a broader perspective and attempt to survey the army or the art of war, he did so from a parochial viewpoint. If the commissioners had followed Davis's wishes and worked in one office, they might have seen some utility in writing one report rather than three. If so, it is also possible that the synergy of their joint effort would have given rise to new insights into their observations. Working together, the commissioners might have seen the task as more than simply "imparting information to the profession." Their discussions might have allowed them to make new connections. They might have stimulated each other to think outside their own branches. They might have fostered new thinking and created new expertise. Working together, they might have viewed the larger picture from three viewpoints, jointly seeing the entirety in depth and in all its dimensions.

There were other influences on the commissioners and their writing. Within the U.S. Army the importance of the commission and its work was an article of faith. While the three were still in Europe officers from almost every branch sent them requests for technical information about European military practices. Richard Satterlee, an army surgeon, suggested they investigate battlefield medical support, especially the construction and use of field ambulances and the management of hospitals and medical supplies. He was also anxious to know about “grades of medical officers: How do they rank and work together?” Lieutenant Charles Radziminski desired to know more on the subject of French cavalry training. His letter seems to have prompted the War Department to send McClellan to Saumur. Joseph E. Johnston was likewise interested in cavalry: had McClellan “seen any cavalry barracks like those occupied by our dragoons in Mexico? Two stories--men above--Stables below--I wish we had such.” Ordnance chief Colonel Henry K. Craig suggested that Mordecai inquire into a Briton’s offer to sell the secret of an “asphixiant shell.” Some requests spurred fruitful inquiry; some came to nought. But the officer corps’ interest in the commission’s work indicates a pervasive thirst for technical information that reinforced the commissioners’ tendency toward particularity.⁸

Satisfying that need meant reducing the commissioners’ observations to paper and publishing the results. At least three officers recognized the importance of these reports not by asking for information, but by advancing their own pet schemes for inclusion.

⁸ Richard Satterlee to Richard Delafield, 9 April 1855, Delafield Collection, United States Military Academy Library; Charles Radziminski to Jefferson Davis, 8 October 1855, GBMP 3: 437; Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 2 December 1855, GBMP 44: 545; Henry K. Craig to Jefferson Davis, 22 March 1856, National Archives Microfilm No. 221, roll 167, frame 76.

These men might have published their own manuals, but they felt that their ideas would carry more professional weight coming from the pen of a Crimean commissioner. John A. Burn fired suggestions at McClellan about artillery organization, perhaps unmindful that Mordecai was his proper target. Dabney H. Maury twice offered advice to McClellan concerning cavalry and mounted infantry tactics. The most persistent and eventually influential petitioner was McClellan's friend, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph E. Johnston. Johnston was second-in-command of the First Cavalry, the new regiment in which McClellan had received his captaincy just before leaving for Europe. After a year in the cavalry, Johnston had concluded that the new branch desperately needed its own doctrine and that McClellan was in the best position to provide it. In a series of letters he peppered the young captain with ideas and urged him to stay in Philadelphia and write: "My hopes of U.S. Cavalry are in your efforts--so bestir yourself."⁹

Johnston and McClellan had a close friendship, so Johnston might have felt more license than most officers to give advice. Still, his and others' attempts to influence the commissioners in their travels and later in their writing raises the question of the Delafield Commission's perceived importance. Why did they write? Who were their intended

⁹ John A. Burn to George B. McClellan, 1 August 1856, GBMP 4: 008; D. H. Maury to George B. McClellan, 2 December 1856, GBMP 4: 081; D. H. Maury to George B. McClellan, 29 December 1856, GBMP 45: 036; George B. McClellan, Report of the Secretary of War communicating the Report of Captain George B. McClellan, One of the Officers Sent to the Seat of War in Europe in 1855 and 1856 (Washington, 1857), 116-200, 295-489. Hereinafter cited as McClellan Report; Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 30 March 1856, GBMP 44: 593; Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 13 April 1856, GBMP 44: 599; Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 10 August 1856, GBMP 4: 010; Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 2 January 1856, GBMP 45: 044.

audiences? How much influence did they expect to have? What did they hope to accomplish through their writings?

The commissioners knew that their views had enormous potential to influence the army's future. They clearly had Davis's ear: he had avidly followed their travel and had quickly scheduled a meeting after they returned. Moreover, Davis made clear that he desired their reports to be printed as soon as possible. As William Skelton has argued, by the 1850s official publications had replaced military journals as outlets for professional thought and new ideas. The commissioners knew that the Federal government would publish their work and that their potential readership would be broad indeed.¹⁰

An indication of the importance that Davis attached to the reports came in his request to Delafield in late 1856 that the commissioners give synopses of their findings to him for inclusion in his annual message to the president.¹¹ None of the commissioners had yet rendered a completed report, so Davis asked Delafield for advice on how to treat the delegation's journey in his message. Davis's 1857 annual report clearly reveals how greatly the commission's work had influenced him. In it he briefly chronicled the travels of the commission and praised those nations that were particularly helpful to the commissioners, damning by omission the French government. He also strongly encouraged the improvement of American seacoast defenses:

¹⁰ William B. Skelton, An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861 (Lawrence, Kansas, 1992), 257-259.

¹¹ Jefferson Davis to Richard Delafield, 6 November 1856, Delafield Collection, United States Military Academy Library.

The failure of the formidable naval armaments of the allies against the fortified places in the Black sea [sic] and the Baltic would seem to show conclusively that properly constructed fortifications are a sure reliance against the most formidable fleets; whilst these operations, at the same time, exhibit the ability with which a maritime nation may, from a condition of profound peace, fit out expeditions of great magnitude to operate on a distant enemy.¹²

This warning came directly from the Delafield Commission. They had acquired a concern in the Crimea that continued to grow through the rest of their trip. The United States was no longer immune, if it ever had been, from the threat of attack from Europe.

Industrialization had magnified the engines of war. Britain or France might easily cross the Atlantic with a steam-driven armada and land military forces in North America just as they had done at Eupatoria. It was, therefore, incumbent upon the United States to buttress the citadels of defense. Both Delafield and McClellan later expressed these admonitions even more forcefully in their own reports.¹³

Davis's emphasis on the commissioner's findings--even before the reports had been completed, much less published--clearly demonstrated how much influence the commission was likely to have. Thus, as they wrote, they knew that they would reach a potentially large and varied audience. Their likely readership ranged from the president and members of Congress to officers and men of the regular army and the militia.

The variety of that potential audience led the commissioners to draft their reports with two general ideas in mind. First, each commissioner tried to give as complete and

¹² The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 6, 77.

¹³ The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 6, 77-79; Richard Delafield to George B. McClellan, 10 November 1856, GBMP 4: 060; Richard Delafield to Jefferson Davis, 12 November 1856, Jefferson Davis Papers, Transylvania University, Lexington, Kentucky, KS #271.

objective a presentation of his observations as possible. Each obviously felt it his responsibility to render the facts as he saw them so that army officers, Congressmen, and other interested readers might have the benefit of clear, detailed, and extensive information about the organization and structure of the military establishments of Europe. In this regard, each commissioner demonstrated how seriously he took his professional responsibility to his branch, the army, and to the nation. Yet having rendered that objective service, each commissioner--McClellan and Delafield more so than Mordecai--also attempted to influence future decisionmaking at three levels. They sought to affect weapons, methods, and tactics employed in their own branches. To a lesser degree, they attempted to influence the organization and training of the entire army, although this theme is less apparent because they generally argued for the status quo. Delafield clearly had these audiences in mind during his writing, noting that the commissioners' task was "to impart information to the profession" for the instruction of "our brother officers."¹⁴

At the highest level, McClellan and Delafield also sought to influence national military policy and strategy by alerting their readers to the danger that great powers such as Britain and France posed to American security. Again, however, their arguments reinforced the status quo, or at least the American system of seacoast defenses as it was planned. Their themes, directed at Congress and the electorate, strongly urged the nation to complete the coastal fortifications system.

¹⁴ Richard Delafield to George B. McClellan, 21 July 1856, GBMP 4: 019.

The traits necessary for building military professionalism appear clearly in the commissioners' reports. A sense of responsibility to the army and the nation is both implicit and explicit in their writing: these officers had been given a trust and they labored long, well, and dutifully to fulfill it. A feeling of fraternity with their "brother officers" shows in the language they used and the general sense that each report has that their fellow professionals were the most likely beneficiaries of their work. Furthering professional expertise was the *raison d'être* of the commission and its reports. The technical detail in each report makes it a resource for the specialist. Indeed, the recourse to mathematical formulae and technical jargon frequently make the books rather dry reading, useful only to those who had an immediate need for such data. They are, in some ways, reference books for the professional, catalogues of military expertise as it was known in Europe in the mid-1850s. Yet while advancing the development of expertise--"imparting information to the profession"--the commissioners tended to focus on the particular rather than the general, to promote parochial branch interests rather than army-wide or strategic concerns, and to resort to the use of European paradigms rather than developing new American thought.

None of the reports fits that description better than Mordecai's, which is an encyclopedia of artillery and ordnance science in Europe. Little information of technical value escaped his critical and perceptive eye.

As manager of the commission's Washington offices, Mordecai was also librarian, caring for the hundreds of books, papers, maps, and sketches the delegation had sent back

from Europe. He included a complete list of these materials in his report, arranging the material from each nation alphabetically. He catalogued a great number of tactical manuals and technical treatises, but far fewer theoretical works on the art of war. To be fair, there were far fewer works of military theory to collect. Moreover, most officers were acquainted with military theorists, such as Jomini, so there would have been no need to collect their works. However, the American army was unfamiliar with Carl von Clausewitz's Vom Kriege. If the commissioners came in contact with that seminal work, they failed to acquire a copy of it.¹⁵

The long first part of Mordecai's report illustrated military organizations of the Europe's major powers. This chapter was the bone of contention between Mordecai and McClellan, because they both wrote on the subject. McClellan was much more thorough than Mordecai in his treatment of the Russian army, but otherwise their observations were similar. Mordecai's description of each army's organization, administration, staff structure, schools, and personnel systems set the tone for the entire work--objective, detailed, and prosaic. He discussed the structures of organizations rather than the ways they worked. He rarely ventured an opinion either in praise or criticism, and his recommendations were rarer still.¹⁶

Mordecai reviewed the operations at Sebastopol with special attention to artillery. He found that there had been little innovation to improve the quality of artillery during the

¹⁵ Mordecai Report, 5-12.

¹⁶ Ibid., 13-59.

siege. Instead, “the immense quantity of these armaments, and the unexampled proportion of guns of large caliber” distinguished the Crimean War from all previous sieges. “Perfect immunity from attack at home, the undisturbed command of the seas, and the possession of heavily-armed ships and transports” had allowed the Allies to bring more than two thousand artillery pieces to bear on the garrison of Sebastopol. Upon entering the city’s south side the Allies had found some four thousand pieces of ordnance that the Russians had been unable to take with them during the evacuation. The destruction wrought by this unprecedented quantity of artillery was the truly remarkable aspect of the conflict.¹⁷

Most of Mordecai’s report was a technical recital of the most recent developments in ordnance in the nations of Europe. A chapter dealt with the arsenals of ordnance construction in the various countries, with special attention to the grand Vienna Arsenal. Other sections treated such subjects as “fuzes for common shells,” “shrapnel shells or spherical case shot,” and “cannon of large caliber.” In each chapter Mordecai methodically traced the recent history of his subject, then discussed current inventories of weapons in each country and the experiments that each had most recently conducted.¹⁸

If no innovations had improved artillery in the Crimea, it was not for want of scientific endeavor. The most exciting experiments in weapons technology over the past two decades had involved rifled barrels for both artillery and small arms. Jefferson Davis had specifically asked the commission to investigate advances in rifled cannon, and

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 61-68, 61. Not all of the Allied artillery was present and serviceable at the same time.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 89-108, 153-155, 147-151, 117-119.

especially the British Lancaster gun. As we have already seen, the commissioners were unimpressed with the 68-pounder Lancaster--McClellan called them "humbugs"--because they were inaccurate and prone to burst after embarrassingly little use. No metal had yet been forged that was strong enough to withstand the explosive force necessary to propel so large a projectile through a rifled barrel. Experiments in rifled artillery were continuing in England, Sweden, the United States, and Prussia, but it was impossible to predict success for any of them as yet.¹⁹

Mordecai illustrated another novelty that came to be known as a "monster gun" in the United States. "Monster guns" were mortars or guns of ten, twelve, or even thirteen inches in diameter that hurled projectiles of enormous weight. But there were several problems: exorbitant cost, difficulty of transport, and building them strong enough to withstand the explosive charge of firing such huge shells. Mordecai briefly described European experiments with "monster guns" in his report, but was not enamored of them. When he returned to duty with the Ordnance Board he discouraged American moves toward large caliber artillery.²⁰

The final two chapters of the report were among the most interesting. One covered small arms in general and the other was a translation of a German pamphlet on rifled small arms. Mordecai noted that most European infantrymen still carried smooth-bores, but "anticipated that, in the course of a few years, all these troops will be supplied

¹⁹ Delafield Report, v; George B. McClellan to John McClellan, 2 May 1855, GBMP 3: 273; Mordecai Report, 109-115.

²⁰ Mordecai Report, 117-119.

with rifled arms.”²¹ The question was what type of rifle they would carry. Events in the Crimea had pointed to the advent of the age of rifled small arms:

[T]he protracted siege at Sebastopol served to develop the importance of these arms of long range, as an auxiliary, in both the attack and the defense of places. In proof of this, it is only necessary to refer to the extraordinary means used by the besiegers and besieged to protect their gunners from rifle-shots, which could be fired with sufficient precision to enter an embrasure at 500 or 600 yards, and which were effective at even a much greater distance; or to mention the annoyance and loss caused to the besiegers by Russian riflemen posted in the little advanced entrenchments, commonly called “rifle pits.”²²

These extraordinary measures for protecting artillerists consisted first of digging the gun into the earth as far as practicable for firing, then draping a rope mantelet, or shield, above the gun to cover the embrasure, cutting a small space to allow passage of the gun. A circular muff attached to the gun barrel protected the remaining open space. Yet for all this effort, soldiers understood that the mantelet provided protection only against small arms fire, not against artillery.²³

As a scientist Mordecai understood the technical significance of rifled small arms. He included a German captain’s detailed history of the subject, which minutely discussed the experiments of armies and inventors from all over Europe. In an introduction to that essay, Mordecai cogently described the difficulties involved in manufacturing rifled weapons to be accurate at long ranges, safe to fire, and easy to load. “The problem to be

²¹ *Ibid.*, 156-232, 172.

²² *Ibid.*, 176.

²³ *Ibid.*, 64.

solved,” explained Mordecai, “preparatory to the general adoption of the rifle, was to contrive a method of combining the faculty of easy and quick loading with the close fitting of the ball, which is requisite to give it the rifle motion imparted by the spiral grooves in the barrel.” Four general principles were then in use, each of which seemed satisfactory, but none of which had emerged as clearly superior to the others:

1. The use of the patch around the ball, to fill the grooves and destroy the windage.
2. Loading at the breech.
3. Expanding the ball in the barrel by means of the rammer.
4. Expanding or “upsetting” the ball by action of the powder.²⁴

Developing a satisfactory breech-loader had been an object of scientific inquiry for centuries, because such a weapon would be easy to load. The mechanical problem that had yet to be solved, however, was how to seal the breech once the weapon was loaded, thus keeping the explosive force necessary to propel the projectile through the barrel from escaping and blowing up in the firer’s face. The “system of Minié” was then the most popular muzzle-loading system. The “minié ball” contained an iron conical cup in its base that expanded the grooved sides of the projectile to engage the rifled grooves of the barrel as the ball was simultaneously being propelled forward. Mordecai depicted several weapons designed on the “system of Minié” and the general principle of “upsetting” the lead of a grooved ball. Even though the U.S. Army had settled on the “system of Minié” by the time of his writing, Mordecai the scientist urged patience:

Although great progress has undoubtedly been made of late years in the improvement of military fire-arms, both in Europe and America, the matter

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

may still be considered to be in a transition state; and prudence would therefore dictate to us to proceed, as cautiously as circumstances permit, with our changes; until our own experience, or that of others, with arms in actual service, shall have satisfactorily demonstrated the superiority of some one method of altering the existing arms and ammunition.²⁵

This admonition appeared on the last page of Mordecai's own text, exclusive of the German captain's essay. It captures the spirit of his report--cautious, prudent, wedded to the scientific method. Mordecai compressed an extraordinary amount of data into his pages. He seems to have expected ordnance officers and weapons manufacturers to use his report as a reference work. He manifested a scientist's detachment, an abhorrence of biasing the results of an experiment in progress. In almost every instance he refrained from stating opinions, much less making recommendations about which weapons the U.S. Army ought to employ.

For example, he saw rifled muskets as only an "auxiliary" weapon. His observation of techniques for protection against riflemen in dugouts newly coined as "rifle-pits" did not lead him to call for revising infantry tactics. Because most soldiers in the Crimea had carried ordinary smooth-bore muskets, the war "did not allow a full trial of the effect of the new [rifled] arms, and of their influence on the tactics of armies." Mordecai had seen the effects of rifles only in static defense and did not fully grasp their potential to change maneuver warfare. Moreover, because he confined his role to the

²⁵ Ibid., 176.

study of ordnance and artillery, it is unlikely that Mordecai would have advocated tactical reform even if he had believed it necessary.²⁶

Yet when the evidence justified making a scientific conclusion, and when he was safely within his sphere of expertise, Mordecai spoke his mind. In answer to another of Davis's specific inquiries, Mordecai set aside a special chapter for "New Systems of Field Artillery." Therein he introduced in the United States the most important technological development to come from any of the commissioners' reports. The French had developed a lighter, and consequently more mobile, version of a twelve-pounder gun. They designated the new piece "canon-obusier," or gun-howitzer, because it could fire ammunition--shot, shell, or canister--intended for either guns or howitzers. It was more rugged and durable than the twelve-pounder howitzer and had greater capability than the old eight-pounder, solid-shot firing gun. It combined the best of both weapons without the limitations of either, allowing the French army to do away with all other types of artillery. Employing a versatile gun of a single caliber also simplified ammunition resupply, reducing an almost crippling logistical burden. "The great advantages that will attend this extreme simplification of field artillery," he argued in a passage remarkable for its difference in tone, "must be obvious to every one who reflects on the inconveniences of the present complex system of pieces varying in kind and caliber." When Mordecai had written Artillery for the United States Land Service in 1849, he had been explaining a *simpler* twenty-four-weapon system of artillery, including six calibers of guns, five

²⁶ Ibid., 176.

howitzers, five mortars, and two columbiads. As he was writing the Crimean report, U.S. artillery still comprised five kinds of guns and howitzers, as well as mortars and columbiads. Having been intimately involved with these questions for a quarter century, Mordecai certainly found the gun-howitzer's advantages obvious. Noting that the rest of Europe was following France's lead, he explicitly recommended that the United States begin testing the gun-howitzer. In fact, as he noted in his report, the Ordnance Board was already at work on the project. Mordecai guided the new weapon through its tests, and the U.S. Army accepted the piece as the "light 12-pounder gun, Model of 1857." It soon went by the moniker "Napoleon," so called in honor of Napoleon III, who had championed its development in France. The "Napoleon" made the army's six-pounder guns and twelve-pounder howitzers obsolete and became the most effective artillery piece on both sides of the Civil War.²⁷

Another innovation that resulted directly from Mordecai's advocacy was the use of wrought-iron carriages for fixed artillery. Since 1839 the United States Army had used wooden carriages for its garrison guns. Wood tended to warp or rot in the weather over long periods, rendering the carriages unserviceable. The Russians and Prussians had solved this problem with wrought-iron carriages, though they were heavy and expensive. Mordecai, drawing on his experience commanding American arsenals, predicted "that with the facilities we have for shaping rolled iron for building purposes, a less cumbrous and

²⁷ Mordecai Report, 141-145; Hazlett, et al., 28-29, 88-108; Falk, 488-492; Howitzers were artillery weapons that bridged the gap between high-muzzle-velocity, flat trajectory guns and high-angle firing mortars. They were intended to lob explosive or incendiary projectiles into troop formations or fortifications. The "Napoleon" combined the capabilities of gun and howitzer.

more economical method of applying that material to the construction of gun carriages will be devised.” The Ordnance Board, of which Mordecai was now the most influential member, authorized tests of wrought-iron carriages. The army adopted a lighter version of the European system before the Civil War.²⁸

When Mordecai wrote of “the facilities *we* have,” he was speaking of the United States, and more specifically of the American military-industrial partnership for gun manufacture. Ordnance officers had a close relationship with the armaments industry, although through the good offices of the Ordnance Board, the tie appears to have been a proper rather than a cozily corrupt one. The ordnance corps itself managed two major arsenals for armaments construction, so they understood the weapons-making business in all its complexity. So it was with some considerable pride that he noted in his chapter entitled “Arsenals of Construction” that European gun manufacturers were borrowing American technology. At the enormous Vienna Arsenal, which had impressed them so much, workers made small arms using a machine of Samuel Colt’s patent. In Great Britain the Woolwich arsenal made cannon primers and percussion caps for small arms with American machines. Most satisfying of all, when the British determined to build a large government arsenal to replace the private manufacture of small arms, they had sent a military observer mission to the United States to study the Ordnance Department. As a direct result, “the names of ‘Ames,’ of Chicopee, Massachusetts, and ‘Robbins & Lawrence,’ of Windsor, Vermont, &c., are accordingly to be read on most of the machines

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 121-128, 122; Falk, “Soldier-Technologist,” 484-485.

at Enfield Armory, which are constructed in a style highly creditable to the skill of our workmen.” At the time of his writing, Russian officers were in the United States attempting to procure American rifle-making machinery. On the other hand, when Americans thought to borrow technology from Europe, they soon found it unnecessary: the United States had been ready to purchase French machines for rifling barrels, “but before the receipt of them, a machine was got up, under the direction of Major Hagner, of the Ordnance Department, for performing the same work in a more expeditious manner.” Everywhere he went, Mordecai found machines and methods for weapons manufacture that were either similar or inferior to their American counterparts. He hardly bothered to disguise his satisfaction with the reputation his chosen profession enjoyed among fellow military technologists in Europe.²⁹

The major theme in Mordecai’s report was implicit--the importance of scientific detachment and integrity. By removing his own preferences, if indeed he had them, from the bulk of his work, Mordecai accomplished a number objectives. He lent credibility to the vast array of data that he presented for the use of other soldiers, scientists, and manufacturers. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a more painstaking and comprehensive survey of weaponry of the day. Moreover, by sparingly offering approbation, he made his few recommendations count all the more. The army readily adopted wrought-iron carriages and the “Napoleon.” The integrity of his observations served as a quiet advertisement of

²⁹ Falk, “Soldier-Technologist,” 242-285; Mordecai Report, 89-108, 159.

professional excellence, not just his own--though that was manifest--but also of the ordnance corps and the American military, scientific, and manufacturing communities.

George McClellan rarely suffered the pain of repressed opinion. His report to the secretary of war, later published as The Armies of Europe, abounds with his views on the good and the bad in Europe, and the ought and ought not in America. The strength of those views and the manner in which he sought to impose them eventually led to his resignation from the army. Moreover, the circumstances surrounding his writing engaged McClellan's ego in ways that exaggerated the intellectual impetus he was already following. If anything, McClellan became more Russophile, more parochial, and more professionally chauvinistic as he wrote.

While still in Europe, McClellan began receiving long, encouraging letters from his friend and mentor, Joseph E. Johnston. From his post with the First Cavalry in the midst of Kansas' sectional violence, Johnston expounded on his dissatisfaction with affairs in the regiment and in the United States Cavalry in general. He advised McClellan not to rush his return to the regiment:

The result of your expedition should be put into print as soon as practicable, for the benefit of the Army, & you must of course attend to what pertains to cavalry. . . . So take advantage of your interviews with the Sec. in Washington to impress upon him the necessity of something more reliable, for the management of horses and horsemen, than the knowledge & intelligence of superior officers, which at present are very unreliable. We are without cavalry regulations and must have them--or we shall never have cavalry. This regiment has not begun to be so yet--& can not until we have a system to control its head. You have yet to learn how

ignorant a man can keep himself who relies, for knowledge, upon experience, & yet never observes or remembers.³⁰

The principal source of Johnston's distress was his commanding officer, Colonel Edwin V. Sumner. The regiment had no useful tactical manual, and Sumner, who seems to have been slothful and unimaginative, gave his troops little useful guidance for their training. In Johnston's opinion, senior officers like Sumner would allow the cavalry to wither and die if something were not done to codify professional standards. The cavalry, like most of the line army, wanted professional expertise.

Johnston, like McClellan, was a relative newcomer to the mounted arm, having transferred when the new regiments were formed in 1855. He was keen to develop tactical doctrine that would distinguish cavalry from infantry, dragoons, and mounted riflemen. Johnston hoped that McClellan would avail himself

of the influence your tour must give, to bring about some improvements in our cavalry service, to procure the adoption of a system which will compel com[mandin]g off[ice]rs to attend to the individual instruction of their men & have them taught, I mean, to manage their horses & arms. The old infantry notion exists here--that to make a decent appearance on dress parade is the only object of instruction. We want, too, regulations for stable service to protect horses from the effects of the ignorance or indifference or sen[io]r off[ice]rs to their welfare. Our only chance of reform is in the influence you may have. You will be much disappointed when you see the 1st Cavalry--perhaps regret that you remember the appearance of Polish lancers or Cossacks of the Guard. Our men have not been taught to use their arms, & their best instruction in riding has been in watering their horses.³¹

³⁰ Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 21 March 1856, GBMP 44: 582. Interestingly, Sumner, despite Johnston's criticism of him, had been sent on a military observer mission himself in 1854 and had collected information on British and French cavalry. Dale E. Floyd, "U.S. Army Officers in Europe, 1815-1861," in David H. White and John W. Gordon, eds., Proceedings of the Citadel Conference on War and Diplomacy 1977, (Charleston, SC, 1979), 27; Skelton, An American Profession of Arms, 241.

³¹ Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 30 March 1856, GBMP 44:593.

Johnston was clearly disgusted with what he saw of the cavalry. He wanted to give the branch a strong foundation through systematic training, energetic leadership, and first-rate soldiers. He readily apprehended that McClellan, already a protégé of Davis's, would return to the United States in a position of potentially vast influence. He counseled his young friend to concentrate his efforts on writing his report, developing a new doctrine, and lobbying Davis for its adoption. Although McClellan did not act on all of his friend's suggestions, Johnston clearly influenced him in many details and in the general impression that the cavalry sorely needed a written doctrine. As Johnston later put it, "My hopes of U.S. Cavalry are in your efforts--so bestir yourself."³²

Once he had settled in Philadelphia, McClellan stirred. Though he would eventually cover other subjects, he initially concentrated on the subject of cavalry, and Russian cavalry in particular. Having discarded the French army as a model, McClellan was now firmly loyal to his new paradigm. He intended to model American cavalry on the Cossacks he had seen the previous summer. With his gift for acquiring languages, McClellan began to teach himself Russian. In a few months time he had mastered the language and translated Russian army regulations and a manual of cavalry tactics. Before long he was at work on regulations and tactics for the United States Cavalry.

³² Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 30 March 1856, GBMP 44: 593; Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 13 April 1856, GBMP 44: 599; Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 10 August 1856, GBMP 4: 010.

During the spring and summer of 1856, McClellan continued his correspondence with Johnston, conferring with him on the state of the regiment and the branch and exchanging ideas for reform. At about the same time, McClellan began to proffer suggestions to Davis about the training and organization of cavalry. So recently an engineer, he became a thoroughly parochial cavalryman. McClellan developed the idea that Davis must appoint a board of cavalry officers, something like the Ordnance Board, to develop tactics, regulations, and organizations for the branch. Johnston tried to dissuade him from this notion:

. . . there is no telling what would be done by such as would surely be detailed--even if you succeeded in getting me on them, we should be out-voted by people anxious to prove that professional knowledge belongs only to those who have been drawing dragoon pay for twenty years--very slight evidence, if my observation is to be relied upon. Our only chance, I think, is in your doing the work yourself, & referring it to the Sec. of War, on the ground that he, an old cavalry officer, can decide better than boards.³³

Nevertheless, as McClellan continued his work on the Russian cavalry, he persisted in pressing for a cavalry board to ratify his work. Writing to Davis "unofficially," McClellan took "advantage of the situation in which I am at present placed to lay . . . before you without further apology" a number of "matters relating to my arm of service, concerning which I can scarcely say all that I would wish to in an official communication." He detailed a number of suggestions relating to tactics and regulations that he felt the cavalry desperately needed. Then, incorporating Johnston's ideas, he returned to his

³³ Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 10 August 1856, GBMP 4:010.

recommendation for a cavalry board. The problem with such a panel, he admitted, was that he doubted

whether a Board can be had, entirely free from the spirit of infantry routine, fully imbued with cavalry feeling, & thoroughly conversant with the qualities that cavalry ought to possess, unless it be taken mainly from the grade of Captains. . . . I must be candid enough to say that unless the Board is composed entirely of cavalry officers, & of such men as those I have mentioned, I could look for no beneficial results from their labors; our senior cavalry officers, like those of their grade in other arms of service, are too generally averse to changes of any kind, & none but cavalry officers can be competent to frame regulations and tactics for the gov't of cavalry.³⁴

This strong opinion was the reason McClellan made his letter “unofficial.” He also reported that he had “progressed considerably in adapting the Russian Regulations for cavalry in the field,” and was ready to submit them to the cavalry board immediately.³⁵

Davis disagreed with McClellan’s suggestion for a board of officers, thinking it would be too slow. Through his Adjutant General, Samuel Cooper, Davis asked McClellan to confer with Brevet Lieutenant Colonel William F. Hardee, then the commandant at West Point, and to use the Military Academy’s facilities for tactical experiments as necessary. At any rate, Davis wanted McClellan to get on with producing his report: “The Secretary is particularly anxious that the work on Cavalry should be completed at as early a day as practicable, and that all other matters you may have in hand

³⁴ George B. McClellan to Jefferson Davis, 28 October 1856, GBMP 4: 041.

³⁵ Ibid.

should give place to it.” Yet if Davis had taken umbrage at McClellan’s oppugning the competence of his superiors in the branch, Cooper did not say so.³⁶

McClellan, whose ego was never far from his position on any issue, became incensed. Davis had firmly rejected his suggestions and put the captain in his place. Through Cooper, he had told McClellan to get back to work and to seek the assistance of one of those senior cavalry officers whom McClellan and Johnston perceived to be the principal causes of the problem. McClellan angrily and rashly replied:

I fear that I did not express with perfect clearness my meaning in reference to the manner of devising a . . . system for cavalry. When I said that such a system should be made by “cavalry officers,” I meant, by that expression, to speak of officers who had actually served a sufficient time with cavalry to know its wants & appreciate its defects, & to a Board composed officers of high rank I intended to allude to those whose “experience” is useless, to men who knew but little of their peculiar arm in the beginning, & have now in the course of years caught its true spirit. I do not belong to the first category, & Col. Hardee certainly does not to the second. . . . [I]t is true that I have a certain amount of irregular mounted service on the frontiers, but I cannot pretend to be what I consider a “Cavalry officer.” . . . As things now are our cavalry is at the mercy of individual com[man]d[er]s, & it is full time that things should be reduced to a system. We cannot progress, & make the cavalry what it ought to be without it.³⁷

McClellan had wanted his friend Joseph E. Johnston to head the cavalry board. Now there was to be no board, no input from Johnston, and, if senior officers like Sumner and Hardee were to take the lead, no system for cavalry.

Cooper swiftly and curtly replied:

³⁶ Samuel Cooper to George B. McClellan, 6 November 1856, GBMP 4: 054.

³⁷ George B. McClellan to Samuel Cooper, 14 November 1856, GBMP 4: 062. Hardee had also been on a military observer mission: he studied at Saumur in 1840–42. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 241–243; Floyd, 27.

Sir:

By direction of the Secretary of War you will please repair to this city with as little delay as practicable and report in person at the War Department.³⁸

In an attached note Cooper explained that Davis wanted to “discuss the serious subjects you have brought up in your letter of the 14th inst.” McClellan had overstepped his bounds, and he was being called to account by the Secretary of War.³⁹

McClellan took the train to Washington and met with Davis. There is no record of their discussion. On 26 November 1856, McClellan tendered his resignation from the army, “with the request that it may take effect on the 15th Jany. 1857, by which date my report will be completed.”⁴⁰

It is a tribute to McClellan’s sense of professional responsibility that he postponed his resignation long enough to finish his report. Indeed, though Davis had sternly rebuffed him, McClellan labored furiously to put his notes and translations in order.

As Davis desired, he concentrated his efforts on cavalry, comparing the European mounted services to one another and all of them to the Americans. He made separate

³⁸ Samuel Cooper to George B. McClellan, 17 November 1856, GBMP 4: 064.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ George B. McClellan to Samuel Cooper, 26 November 1856, GBMP 4: 078; Jefferson Davis to George B. McClellan, 27 November 1856, The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol 6, xlvi. When McClellan resigned his commission, Joseph E. Johnston wrote a poignant letter expressing the personal loss he felt: “there is no one left in the regiment or army to take your place. I wish I was young enough to resign, too.” Johnston seems to have had almost a fatherly love for the young captain. The relationship between these two men is most intriguing because they would, within six years, face each other in battle as commanders of large armies in the Seven Days’ Battles. Joseph E. Johnston to George B. McClellan, 2 January 1856, GBMP 45: 044.

studies of cavalry in Prussia, Austria, France, England, and Sardinia; yet his matter-of-fact tone suggests that all of these were pro forma.

His real interest was in the Russians. He focused attention and lavished unstinting praise on the Russian army and especially its cavalry, partly because “there is, perhaps, no European service of which so little is known by the officers of our army.” But the principal attraction for studying the Russians was

the great perfection to which military science has been carried in the schools and special corps; the intelligence, skill, and courage they have so often evinced, both in attack and defence,—all these considerations render a detailed study of the Russian system of war both profitable and interesting.⁴¹

For one hundred forty pages he illustrated and lauded the Russian army’s organization, recruiting, equipment, tactics, and methods of training—from the composition of the grand staff of the emperor to detailed sketches of deployed battalions. He had found a new paradigm to replace the French.

The reports on cavalry and the Russian army comprised the bulk of his report to the secretary of war, but McClellan also prepared less detailed sketches of European engineer and infantry troops. The result was a highly technical portrait of those branches of the European armies, including descriptions of their organizations, tactics, training, recruiting practices, equipment, arms, barracks, rations and uniforms, complete with diagrams and plates. Yet unlike Mordecai, McClellan gave more than a dispassionate

⁴¹ McClellan Report, 61.

recital. He frequently offered his opinions on the best systems, equipments, or methods he had seen during his tour abroad.⁴²

These reports on the European armies seem to have been prelude to the primary purpose of McClellan's work: his "Report on the United States Cavalry" and his "Regulations and Instructions for the Field Service of Cavalry in Time of War." Presumably, if McClellan had been successful in establishing the cavalry board, documents like these might have been the fruits of its labor. In that case they quite probably would also have become official doctrine of the U.S. Army. Instead, he justified including these additions to his work by saying that the nature of American service was quite different from any in Europe. Therefore, "we ought not to follow blindly any one system, but should endeavor to select the good features, and engraft them upon a system of our own." These pages were McClellan's essay at developing an American system, a distilled body of professional cavalry expertise for the U.S. Army.⁴³

He began his report on the U.S. Cavalry by arguing that its organization should consider three things: "1st, the nature of its service against the Indians; 2d, its employment against a civilized enemy invading our territory; 3d, its service in an offensive war, carried on against our neighbors." Each of those considerations is remarkable as an intellectual departure. In fact, the very notion of developing a doctrine for cavalry was novel, given the anti-intellectual traditions of frontier service. McClellan was arguing that the army

⁴² George B. McClellan to Richard Delafield, 9 June 1856, Delafield Collection; George B. McClellan to Jefferson Davis, 31 December 1856, GBMP 4: 092; McClellan Report, passim.

⁴³ McClellan Report, 277.

should forthrightly discuss and plan methods to fight Indians, rather than simply relying on “folkways,” or, as he and Johnston derisively put it, “experience” as their guide. Likewise, doctrinal consideration of the use of cavalry in continental defense was a novelty, since most military thinking had considered that to be a role for engineers and coast artillery. Supporting coastal defense with mobile combat forces had long been an afterthought. Finally, even though the nation’s last major conflict had been a strategic offensive, it was unusual to say the least for an American officer formally and abstractly to contemplate invading a neighbor.⁴⁴

At any rate, all three considerations led McClellan to the conclusion that the army should develop only light cavalry, “as heavy cavalry would be worse than useless for our purposes.” Cavalry squadrons were to be mobile and imbued with the idea that their strength was in the “spurs and sabre.” He proposed an organization for cavalry units that kept them small and agile. In capital letters that left no mistake in his intent he wrote: “The FORMATION OUGHT TO BE IN ONE RANK, as covering the greatest extent of ground, admitting the most rapid movements, and bringing every man to bear to the greatest advantage. . . .”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ McClellan Report, 277-280. McClellan mentioned that “the instruction in two lines should be provided for.” Edward Hagerman has interpreted this to mean that his Regulations “espoused conventional two-rank tactics.” But McClellan’s explicit statement clearly contradicts Hagerman’s conclusion. McClellan thought the fundamental tactical formation should be a single rank, a point that he made even more clearly in his “unofficial” letter to Jefferson Davis. George B. McClellan to Jefferson Davis, 28 October 1856, GBMP 4: 041. See Edward Hagerman, The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare: Ideas, Organization, and Field Command (Bloomington, Indiana, 1988), 57.

Developing this light and agile cavalry demanded rigorous training. Toward that end, McClellan recommended establishing a school at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, to train all cavalry officers, non-commissioned officers, and men. McClellan explained in broad outline the subjects to be taught. He also included a veterinary school, which, like the cavalry school itself, was to be modeled along French lines. Despite his infatuation with the Russians, the French Cavalry School at Saumur was still “the most perfect and extensive institution of the kind in Europe,--perhaps the only one really deserving the title.” He also advocated using French texts for instruction, “as they can readily be adapted to our own purposes, until experience enables us to have others of our own.”⁴⁶

McClellan also urged the adoption of new cavalry equipment. He advocated arming these light cavalrymen with a light sabre, a revolver, and a pistol-carbine or a longer, rifled carbine. First, he recommended a new cavalry sabre:

Ours are too heavy and badly balanced; so bad are they, that many of our cavalry officers are disposed upon the sabre as an useless weapon. As this is without doubt [sic] the true weapon of cavalry, too much pains cannot be bestowed upon its manufacture.⁴⁷

The army tested but did not adopt McClellan’s proposed model. However, in 1861 it did accept another light sabre.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ McClellan Report, 259, 259-269, 281.

⁴⁷ George B. McClellan to Jefferson Davis, 3 October 1856, GBMP 4: 023, endorsed and approved, Jefferson Davis, 4 November 1856.

⁴⁸ Randy Steffen, The Horse Soldier, 1776-1943, Vol. II (Norman, OK, 1978), 70-71.

McClellan also made a detailed proposal for a new type of saddle and horse equipment based on a Prussian cavalry saddle of Hungarian design. McClellan asked that he be allowed to modify the design, oversee its construction, and offer it to the army for adoption. Davis agreed. The army tested McClellan's saddle in the West along with several other new designs. A board of cavalry officers, empaneled too late to satisfy McClellan's other wishes, reviewed the tests in January 1859 and selected his saddle as the army standard. Mounted soldiers rode McClellan saddles until tanks finally replaced the horse cavalry in 1943.⁴⁹

Finally, McClellan advocated appointment of a general of cavalry, "whose duty it would be to inspect the troops of the arm, watch over their interests, and secure uniformity in the service." His headquarters would be at Jefferson Barracks, from which he and his aides de camp might make numerous inspection tours in the West. McClellan knew the value of a branch chief, as the engineers, topogs, and ordnance corps had, to guard the service's interests. Yet he missed the essence of the position's role when he averred that the cavalry chief "should never be located in Washington."⁵⁰

"Report on the United States Cavalry" was actually little more than an introductory letter for McClellan's cavalry regulations. Despite his admonition against following any one system blindly, McClellan published the Russian manual as a new doctrine for the United States, which he had translated, having

⁴⁹ George B. McClellan to Jefferson Davis, 3 October 1856, GBMP 4: 023, endorsed and approved, Jefferson Davis, 4 November 1856; Steffen, 53-63.

⁵⁰ McClellan Report, 279-280.

endeavored to adapt them to our own organization, preserving the original arrangement, and adding only a few minor details suggested by the recollections of former reading & of service in the field. It is more than probable that they will be found to fill an important gap in our military literature, and they are undoubtedly based upon true military principles.⁵¹

Yet McClellan seems to have given little thought to those principles, as the “Regulations” seem very little adapted for service in the United States. Despite his prescription of three considerations--Indian fighting, continental defense, and offensive expeditions--for the development of American cavalry, there is no reference to any problems those operations might pose, nor is there any attempt to resolve such issues. McClellan appears to have translated this manual almost directly from the Russian. There is little that seems unique to American conditions or directed at satisfying the demands of those considerations. For example, a footnote to the chapter entitled “Of the Duties of Hunters, Friendly Indians, etc., at the Outposts” reads: “This chapter is taken from one in the Russian regulations, relating to the duty of Cossacks at the outposts.”⁵² It appears that McClellan simply exchanged “Indians” for “Cossacks” in his translation, much as he equated American and Russian light cavalry in the rest of the text. Perhaps McClellan was engaging in no false modesty when he demanded a board of cavalry officers to bring forth a doctrine: his own ability, albeit a considerable one, seems to have been limited to translation.

The “Regulations” divide into three parts, the first two of which constitute the bulk of the text. Part I purports to treat “movements of troops in the vicinity of the enemy,”

⁵¹ George B. McClellan to Jefferson Davis, 31 December 1856, GMBP 4: 092.

⁵² McClellan Report, 328-329 , 284-356.

but it deals with march formations and the duties of various unit members on the march, paying little attention to the role of cavalry in actual combat. Part II covers methods for maintaining the security of the unit, including outposts and patrols. Only in Part III does McClellan treat the role of cavalry in reconnaissance, where it would prove so useful in the Civil War. Indeed, he declared that “the strength of cavalry is in the ‘spurs and sabre,’” meaning the cavalry charge, a belief consistent with his assertion that the sabre was “the true weapon of cavalry.”⁵³

The army never officially adopted McClellan’s “Regulations,” but because of its wide distribution with the rest of his report and his own later eminence, the manual received great attention. McClellan’s principal tactical contribution was his advocacy of light cavalry, especially the use of a single-rank formation, which Philip St. George Cooke also included in his semi-official tactical manual in 1861. Cooke intended the single rank to eliminate the confusion caused when two successive, galloping ranks became intermingled in contact with the enemy. More significant still was the very notion of developing cavalry doctrine, of giving the branch objective training standards.⁵⁴

Perhaps the most intriguing part of the entire report is its introduction, wherein McClellan critiqued the armies and their generalship in the Crimea, and distilled the lessons of the war for his American audience. Nowhere was his Russophilia and his

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 280-281.

⁵⁴ Stephen Z. Starr, *The Union Cavalry in the Civil War*. Vol. 1 (Baton Rouge, 1979), 19; Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson, *Attack and Die: Civil War Tactics and the Southern Heritage* (University, Alabama, 1982), 62-68. Cooke specifically credited McClellan’s work in his own cavalry manual: U.S. War Department, *Cavalry Tactics* (Washington, 1862, 2 vols.), I, 2.

professional chauvinism more in evidence. Rather than praising the Allied victory, McClellan asked why the siege of Sebastopol took so long. His answer lay explicitly in the skill of the Russians and the faults of the Allies. Among the latter he listed Allied unpreparedness for the war, the “slow and blundering” nature of Allied commanders, the initial confusion that reigned over British logistics, and a want of discipline among the British as they prosecuted the siege.⁵⁵

In contrast, McClellan marveled at Russian achievements: “it was a source of astonishment that such gigantic results could have been achieved with such paltry means.” Although the Russians had initially blundered by placing an admiral, Prince Menshikov, in command of the Russian land forces, they more than recovered that error by naming Colonel of Engineers E. I. Totleben to construct the defenses of Sebastopol. Totleben had made especially good use of limited time to occupy and reinforce the most important points in the area, or what military professionals would today call “key terrain.” McClellan noted that the Russian lines were not perfect, but that was because they had been constructed in great haste and under constant Allied fire. Nevertheless, the resulting defenses had held off a superior enemy for a year. Totleben had established a brilliant reputation: “His labor and their results will be handed down in history as the most triumphant and enduring monument of the value of fortifications, and his name must ever be placed in the first rank of military engineers.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 8, 18-19.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 7, 16-18.

Still, continued McClellan in his praise of the Russians, all of Totleben's brilliance would have been useless "without the skilful artillery and heroic infantry." Russian valor had no equal in military history: "The siege of Sebastopol called forth the most magnificent defence of fortifications that has ever yet occurred." And when, after many months of preparation, the Allies finally overwhelmed the Russian defenses, the stealthy withdrawal to the north side of the bay was the "finest operation of the war" and "a masterpiece of its kind."⁵⁷

Nevertheless, McClellan, like Mordecai and Delafield, insisted that the Crimean War manifested nothing new in warfare other than minor novelties, such as the rope mantelets that Mordecai discussed. There were no new systems of fortifications: "The plain truth is that these defences were simple temporary fortifications of rather greater dimensions than usual, and that not a single new principle of engineering was there developed." McClellan rebutted the "popular fallacy" that temporary fortifications had proven superior to permanent ones at Sebastopol. In fact, the Russian defenses proved quite the opposite, argued McClellan. The temporary Russian works "were attacked as field works never were before, and were defended as field works had never been defended." The Russians' ability to hold out so long was less a tribute to the earthworks than to the valor of Russian soldiers.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 16, 21-22.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

Yet in making so much of Russian courage and soldierly virtue, in lauding Russian character so lavishly in support of his new paradigm, McClellan missed an important aspect of warfare that was indeed changing. He saw that the intensity of both attack and defense were unprecedented, but by attributing the cause to valor, he failed to see the transforming effects of so great a quantity of artillery and the importance of rifled small arms. In several instances he mentioned artillery fire without drawing special attention to it and his discussions of several battles that occurred in the open field made no direct mention of soldiers' rifled weapons. He did describe the Russians' use of "the famous rifle pits," concluding that they "contributed very materially towards impeding the progress of the approaches." Yet his emphasis was on the pits themselves, rather than on the rifles within them. McClellan failed to understand the effects that rifled muskets were having on tactics.⁵⁹

At the end of a brief history of the operations in the Crimea, McClellan offered general advice to his country based on what he saw as the lessons of that war. The permanent defenses of Sebastopol had proved "fully equal to the purpose" of defeating the Allied fleet. Only after a long and determined siege with their land forces did the Allies reduce Sebastopol. Indeed, the siege of Sebastopol would have failed in the age of sail; the steamer had enabled the Allies to move and support a far larger army than the Russians had expected to face. Now that same capability posed a threat to American shores. Thus,

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-23, 16. Only a very few Russian skirmishers carried rifled weapons, but those few weapons were most effective. *Mordecai Report*, 157-158.

the United States was wise to have a system of coastal defenses and should work to improve and complete them: “our cities and harbors must be fortified, and those fortifications must be provided with guns, ammunition, and instructed artillerists.”⁶⁰

Yet McClellan also concluded that a determined and effective invader might bypass American coastal defenses. In that exigency, “it is not enough to trust to the number of brave but undisciplined men that we can bring to bear.” Yet individual valor alone would not defeat a modern European army. Courage

must be rendered manageable by discipline, and directed by that consummate and mechanical military skill which can only be acquired by a course of education instituted for the special purpose, and by long habit.⁶¹

McClellan had little faith in the abilities of officers commissioned directly from civilian life: such men had no military education and certainly had no “long habit.” His service with volunteers in Mexico had established his belief in the necessity of professional training for military leaders. In the Crimea the contrast between the ineffective Admiral Menshikov and the professional engineer, Colonel Totleben, provided reinforcing evidence. The latter possessed, as the former did not, a “consummate and mechanical military skill.” The United States needed a professional army, albeit a small one, of a high proportion of officers and non-commissioned officers so that it could expand quickly to train recruits in time of war. McClellan’s observations in Europe and the Crimean War had led him to

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

redouble his support for the Calhounian status quo--an expansible regular army led by a cadre of educated professionals.⁶²

In a "Letter to the Secretary of War" that introduced his report, Delafield also dismissed the idea that novel technologies were changing the nature of warfare:

The contest that commenced, in 1854, between the principal military and naval powers of Europe, gave rise, during its progress, to the belief that the art of war had undergone some material changes since the days of Napoleon and Wellington. . . .

On examination, this change will be found mainly in the increased magnitude of the engines of war, and the perfection to which they have been brought by the unceasing application of talent and skill to their improvement, accomplished by the accuracy and rapidity of workmanship by the machinery of the arsenals of the present day, and that few new principles have been introduced with much success in the late contest.⁶³

But the absence of novelty did not mean that the United States had nothing to learn. In fact, Delafield warned, the United States had a great deal to fear. The "engines of war" had grown because of unremitting competition among the nations of Europe: "As one power increases its military efficiency, whether by the invention of a new weapon, or by men and fortresses, the neighboring nations, as a means of self-preservation, are compelled to do likewise." As a result, military prowess claimed an ever-increasing share of national treasure, a tendency that Europeans felt powerless to stop, even though they understood that they were impoverishing themselves.⁶⁴

⁶² Ibid., 23.

⁶³ Delafield Report, 1.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 1-2.

Moreover, European nations had found that they needed highly proficient officers in order to manage these great and growing armies. As a result, “the military profession is not only indispensable. . . , but . . . first in importance in the estimation of the sovereign power, taking rank and receiving honors, the highest gift of the monarch to bestow upon a subject.” The nobility and monarchy of Europe were receiving military educations. The emperors of Russia, France, and Austria were “unquestionably highly educated statesmen and soldiers.” Those competent leaders understood the art of war.⁶⁵

They likewise understood politics, and could discern for themselves that America’s free and democratic government was a threat to their monarchies. “It must not be surprising then that we can have NO FRIENDS POLITICALLY in the governing powers of the Eastern World.” Before long, he warned, those nations would surely recognize that American growth “endangers their prosperity.”⁶⁶

Thus the nations of Europe had large armies with competent commanders and ready navies to transport them across the Atlantic for an invasion. Jealousy and apprehension of American democracy and prosperity furnished a potential motive for one or more of them to launch an attack. And the United States was not ready:

Our resources are unquestionably great, and equal to several of the powers of Europe combined, but our preparation in material, equipment, knowledge of the art of war, and other means of defense, is as limited and inefficient, as theirs is powerful and always ready.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

In particular the United States was vulnerable in three essential areas: military knowledge and education, coastal defenses, and artillery.

The most prominent theme in Delafield's report was an unrelenting admonition for the United States to get its military house in order. His intended audience in that regard were the nation's highest political authorities. Delafield marveled at the enormous sums that the nations of Europe had expended to build large armies and to fortify themselves against attack. Heretofore, the United States had simply been fortunate that the powers of Europe had not seen fit to attack. The nation had the raw resources necessary to make itself secure from invasion, but it had so far lacked the popular will to muster those assets.

Viewing the subject in all its bearings, I am more impressed than ever with our comparative want of preparation and military knowledge in the country, and that the Secretary of War will do a great good service to the nation by increasing the materiel and munitions, means of defense, and the diffusion of military information in every possible way that our institutions will permit, without creating any more of a standing army than the growth of the country calls for, preparatory to that great struggle which sooner or later may be forced upon us, and to resist which, with our present means, we are comparatively unprepared.⁶⁸

All of the reports warn the United States to prepare for war, but none more powerfully, cogently, and comprehensively than Delafield's. His purpose was to preach for preparedness. Delafield knew that he possessed, for the moment, a platform from which to make his voice heard, and he meant to use it.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁹ Laurence W. Mazzeno, "Major Richard Delafield and the US Military Mission to the Crimean War" *Joint Perspectives* (Winter 1981), 80-81; [Secretary of War] John B. Floyd to the President of the Senate, 11 May 1858, *The New American State Papers, Military Affairs, Vol. 14, Institutional and Military Society Ecology* Ed. B.F. Cooling (Wilmington, Delaware, 1979), 460-461. Floyd asked Congress to

Through his report Delafield became the leading proponent for his branch in its quest to complete and improve the coastal defense system. First begun in 1821 with a recommendation for 50 forts, the proposed system had grown, with the acquisition of new territory and with the engineers' expansion of the number of ports that seemed strategically critical, to a list of 186 coastal works in 1851. But adding to the list did not necessarily guarantee more federal funds to construct forts. As a result, a principal occupation of many engineers was defending the program and urging its completion. Opposing the engineers were the navy, who argued that they could protect more coastline more effectively and less expensively. Many army line officers also dissented, advocating use of the new rail system in combination with state militias and a small regular army to create a mobile force that could react to invasions quickly.⁷⁰ Delafield had been countering these arguments for most of his career. His assignments as superintending engineer at New York harbor and as superintendent at West Point had given him great prominence in the debate. Now as chief of the commission that bore his name, he became the preeminent advocate of coastal fortifications. As Delafield carried forth his argument for national preparedness, he saw himself advancing the professional interests of the army. Yet as he explained the particulars of how the nation should prepare itself, he was first promoting the interests of the corps of engineers.

publish the Delafield and Mordecai reports. He also noted that the demand for McClellan's report had been so great that another printing of 1,000 copies was in order.

⁷⁰ Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms*, 243-247.

Woven through these “political” arguments, were themes directed at a professional audience. Delafield followed three general lines of thought. Most prominent was his explanation of the art and science of military engineering and fortification. Delafield wrote on the subject of his expertise with remarkable precision and confident authority. Through most of his report he clearly intended to instruct his reader, who, in this instance, was most likely a practicing engineer or an engineering student, perhaps at West Point. When he ventured beyond military engineering to report on other observations, he frequently catalogued technical data for other military professionals. A final theme that runs through his work is the general idea that the that the French no longer had a monopoly on military innovations. The American army needed to broaden its professional inquiry to encompass the whole of Europe. Thus, as he advanced a “political” argument--that the United States needed to improve its system of military education--Delafield materially contributed to that effort by expanding the body of professional expertise.

Delafield devoted most of his report to military engineering. He described the fortifications he had toured in Europe, paying special attention to seacoast and harbor defenses. With a touch of hubris he opined, “On this subject we have less to learn from the Europeans than of any other part of the art of war.” Still, he depicted many forts in precise enough detail that a professional engineer could easily replicate them. His purpose seems to have been to show Congress that the Europeans were indeed defending

themselves properly. If they were not more advanced in professional expertise, they had certainly outpaced America in the will to defend themselves.⁷¹

He illustrated that point with special attention to the defenses at Sebastopol, Cronstadt, and Cherbourg, the three fortresses he considered most important in Europe. At Cronstadt, he noted, the Russian people had serenely lived near the menace of an anchored enemy fleet for months. Their calm was born of well-placed confidence in the strength of the Cronstadt defenses. “It is in our power,” he encouraged, “to inspire our citizens with like confidence, and our enemy with like respect for our strength and power of resistance. It is only for the people and Congress to will it *in time*.” Proper seacoast fortifications at Sebastopol had withstood the most powerful fleet in the world, but were finally overwhelmed from the landward side by the enemy army. Thus the efficacy of seacoast defenses was evident by example. Yet the United States was unnecessarily vulnerable because the totality of its entire seacoast defensive system was not as well-armed and maintained as the port of Sebastopol alone.⁷²

Delafield continued on to the “Theory and Practice of Modern Systems of Fortification,” wherein he discussed the principal European schools of engineering thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This essay was both a history of engineering trends and an assessment of the current state of the art. This section, like Mordecai’s treatment of ordnance, was an informed work of scholarly synthesis. Yet also like

⁷¹ Delafield Report, 24.

⁷² Ibid., 18-58, 122-168, 55, 36 (*Italics Delafield’s*).

Mordecai, Delafield relied heavily on the translated work of a European, in this case a Spanish engineer. The Spaniard's principal argument was that the French had no monopoly on the science of engineering and fortification, especially since Vauban's death. The German states had developed a comprehensive fortifications system that was generally accepted in Europe as superior to French models, upon which there had been so many variations that it was now difficult to define them as a cogent system. Delafield advocated that the United States follow the German school in future plans.⁷³

Delafield also touched on matters beyond engineering and fortifications. In plain language Delafield affirmed what Mordecai and McClellan had already said. The use of large-caliber artillery, or "monster guns," and rifled small arms had become "the settled policy and practice of all the military powers of Europe." Delafield commented on the effects of rifled and breech-loading weapons, the Napoleon, rifled field artillery, and fixed gun carriages, though in less detail than Mordecai. He generally arrived at the same conclusions as his fellow commissioner, except on the efficacy of large caliber artillery. Unlike Mordecai, Delafield felt that eight- and ten-inch guns were effective and ought to be introduced in the United States coast artillery. This difference of opinion perfectly illustrates the army's highly developed branch loyalties. Delafield viewed the problem from the perspective of an engineer constructing seacoast defenses, while Mordecai looked at the huge weapons with the critical eye of a scientist and arsenal commander.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 176-247. Vauban (1633-1707), marshal of France, military engineer, and royal adviser, was the master of fortification and siegecraft in his day. His designs for the defense of France were sacrosanct long after his death.

Each was defending the parochial interests of his branch. Delafield aimed at the rapid improvement and completion of the coastal defense system, while Mordecai sought to protect the scientific integrity of the weapons-testing process.⁷⁴

Delafield also surveyed numerous aspects of logistics in the Crimea and in the military establishments of Europe. Among the subjects he covered in detail were military medicine, including hospitals (wherein he praised Florence Nightingale's "commanding influence" on military medicine), hospital ships, and ambulances. Brief essays ranged over the subjects of tentage, food storage and preparation (specifically the new process of canning desiccated food), military barracks for infantry and cavalry, and, of course, arsenals, of which the Vienna Arsenal was the finest.⁷⁵

Delafield realized the import of steam engines in military transportation. He detailed the use of steamships for the transport of men, equipment, and horses from France and England to the Black Sea, without which the Allies could not have hoped to fight the war. And he made the only mention in any of the reports of railroad steam engines used by the British to move thousands of tons of supplies from Balaklava harbor up the hill to the army camped before Sebastopol. The Allies could not have supported their troops from the home countries if not for railroads to take supplies to the ports. But this first use of the railroad "in the presence of an enemy" was just as crucial to the British logistical effort in the Crimea.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 5-18.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 58-97, 248-277. For references to Nightingale see 61, 68, 75, 273.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 97-107, 58.

The use of electricity was another novelty in the art of war. The telegraph connected the armies to their capitals and the officers found it most useful in conveying to their governments their needs, but more of a nuisance when those governments also used the device to transmit orders “that more circumstantial information, only to be gained in the presence of the enemy, would have shown to be highly inexpedient.” The English also communicated by telegraph between headquarters, trenches, and depots. Explosives benefited from electricity as much as did communication. The Allies employed voltaic batteries to detonate mines at Sebastopol. The abovementioned Spanish engineer’s work described the newer uses of electricity with explosives, complete with numerous plates, figures, and formulae.⁷⁷

As we have already seen, “floating batteries sheathed in wrought iron” had greatly impressed the commissioners. Delafield’s report was not the first mention of ironclads in the United States, but it was notable for its detailed treatment of the subject. Delafield described the arms, armament, construction, and crews of English and French ships, integrating several drawings into the text.⁷⁸

One of the most striking aspects of Delafield’s report is its beauty. All of the reports rely to a large degree on drawings and figures. But Delafield also illustrated his text with hundreds of vividly detailed sketches of fortresses, maps of battlefields, architectural designs, and photographs of the devastated city and harbor of Sebastopol.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 110-122.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 168-176.

Throughout his report Delafield provided practical information for heeding his warning that the United States needed to prepare for war if it intended to enjoy peace. The commission had learned during its year abroad that the powers of Europe had constantly to beware of one another's military strength. European nations were impoverishing themselves in apprehension of each other. And, Delafield argued, because the United States' form of government posed a threat to the ruling order in Europe, American shores were vulnerable. Although the nation possessed tremendous resources, it was unprepared to defend against an offensive that several European nations were capable of launching.⁷⁹

Observation is a troublesome task. Eyewitnesses to a given event are likely to relate versions of the occurrence that vary widely in substance from one another, yet each will swear that his is the truth. Observing combat, with all its confusion and danger, is more difficult still. And attempting to glean insights from a recent battlefield, as the Delafield Commission did, is a daunting assignment indeed.

Many people have stood in the midst of battle and failed to perceive the true nature of events going on around them. Indeed, that lack of perspicacity is common. Clausewitz concluded that a metaphysical fog descends over battle that is impenetrable to almost all

⁷⁹ Ibid., 1-3.

observers. Only the most gifted, those possessed of a certain *coup d'oeil*, or mental insight, can see through that fog to glimpse the truth.⁸⁰

Historian Jay Luvaas has analyzed the difficulties involved with observing battle during the American Civil War. Several European armies sent observers to the war with missions very similar to the Delafield Commission's. Time and again trained soldiers who witnessed destruction and carnage in the Civil War failed to comprehend the same lessons that had eluded Delafield, Mordecai, and McClellan in the Crimea. Instead, observers tended to confirm their preconceptions--they saw what they expected to see.⁸¹

The same phenomenon occurred in the Crimea, even among the participants. It is interesting to read the works of General Sir Edward B. Hamley, an observer of the Civil War and, more importantly for our purposes, a combatant in the Crimea. In The War in the Crimea, first published in 1891, Hamley described how British forces had overwhelmed Russian formations of superior numbers at the Battle of Inkerman:

This was a moral effect; but there was also a material cause conducing to the result. The Russian riflemen, as we soon had reason to know, were armed with a weapon quite equal to our Minié; but the mass of the infantry still wielded a musket not superior to the old Brown Bess firelock, which the Minié had replaced, whereas our troops, except those of the Fourth Division, had the rifle. Therefore, long before a Russian column had got near enough to make its fire tell, it began to suffer from a fire that was very destructive, not only because of the longer range and more effective aim,

⁸⁰ Carl von Clausewitz, On War. Edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Introductory Essays by Peter Paret, Michael Howard, and Bernard Brodie. With a Commentary by Bernard Brodie. (Princeton, 1976), 102, 117-118, 140, 577-578.

⁸¹ Jay Luvaas, The Military Legacy of the Civil War: The European Inheritance (Chicago, 1959), 231-233.

but because the bullets were propelled with a force capable of sending them through more than one man's body.⁸²

He left no room for doubt about the superiority of British rifled arms. However, in The Story of the Campaign of Sebastopol, written in 1855, then-Lieutenant Colonel Hamley had devoted two chapters to the Battle of Inkerman without referring to the rifle. It was only in hindsight and with information about both sides of the conflict that he was able to analyze the effects of rifled weapons.⁸³

The Delafield Commission also failed to discern the importance of rifled small arms on tactical warfare. As we have seen, McClellan's critique of the defenses of Sebastopol gave credit to the valor and discipline of Russian soldiers without a word in praise of their weapons. Summarizing the Crimean campaign, he made several recommendations for the improvement of the American army, never mentioning rifled weapons. The commission saw only the results of battle in the Crimea, not the battles themselves. They observed the bombproofs, trenches, and rifle-pits. They knew of the greater range and accuracy of rifled small arms. But possessing facts about battle and weaponry is a far cry from witnessing combat. Perhaps McClellan's desire not to leave the Crimea without coming under fire was not so frivolous and quixotic as it seems. The commissioners did not and could not have grasped the import of rifled weapons based upon second-hand reports and

⁸² Edward B. Hamley, The War in the Crimea (London, 1900), 146. Hamley goes on to say that, regardless of such devastating fire, the Russians, "once launched upon their career, ought by their mere impetus to have everywhere penetrated our line. . . ." The Russians were poorly led, but even with the benefit of hindsight, Hamley underestimated the effect of rifled weapons.

⁸³ Edward B. Hamley, The Story of the Campaign of Sebastopol. Written in the Camp (New York, 1968) (originally published in Blackwood's Magazine, 1855), 81-110.

inspections of old battlefields. Yet even had they arrived in the Crimea in time witness the siege or one of the maneuver battles, it is unlikely that they would have been more perceptive than Lieutenant Colonel Hamley.⁸⁴

Although not an eyewitness to the Crimean War, Baron Henri de Jomini, the most respected military theorist and writer of the day, likewise missed the significance of technological changes on tactics. Writing in 1862, Jomini ridiculed the idea that any transformation was occurring in warfare:

Will the adoption of the rifled small arms and improved balls bring about any important changes in the formation for battle and the now recognized principles of tactics? . . . Will whole armies be employed as skirmishers. . . ? . . . Will battles become mere duels with the rifle. . . ? . . . What military man will reply in the affirmative?⁸⁵

The Crimean War, then six years past, had furnished no evidence to satisfy Jomini that traditional infantry formations needed change. He also dismissed the notion that the advances in artillery were significant:

The heroic events that have occurred near Sebastopol have not produced the slightest change in my opinion. This gigantic contest between two vast intrenched camps, occupied by entire armies and mounting two thousand guns of the largest caliber, is an event without precedent, which will have no equal in the future; for the circumstances which produced it cannot occur again.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ McWhiney and Jamieson, 57. Edward Hagerman argues that McClellan did comprehend the import of rifled small arms upon tactics, but McClellan never credited Allied rifles with the superiority over Russian muskets that now seems apparent. He credited Russian soldiers, not the rifled weapons of a few skirmishers in rifle-pits, with a stiff defense of Sebastopol. See Hagerman, 33, and McClellan Report, 24-5, 32-3.

⁸⁵ Baron Henri de Jomini, The Art of War, A New Edition, with Appendices and Maps. Trans. Capt. G.H. Mendell and Lieut. W.P. Craighill (Philadelphia, 1862), 355, 355-360.

⁸⁶ Jomini, 347.

Of course, as Jomini was writing, the United States was manufacturing the guns that would soon reproduce those “heroic events” on a grander scale at Petersburg.

Luvaas notes that there were exceptions, a few perceptive observers who looked beyond the boundaries of their own experience and training. These men saw through the fog of war and grasped the distinctness of modern combat, only to see their conclusions go unread or unheeded, for the bloody lessons of the Civil War had to be relearned during the First World War. In the main, however, military observers with better opportunities to analyze the conditions of combat in the United States than the commission ever had in the Crimea also failed to draw proper conclusions.⁸⁷

Fairness demands that we bear in mind the difficulties that attend the observation of combat as we analyze the Delafield Commission’s achievements and shortcomings. When we fault the commission for what they failed to see or perceive, we should not hold them to a standard of clairvoyance. As Davis said to Sara Mordecai, “[T]o know the future belongs not to mortal man.” The commissioners came back from Europe with an understanding that they were meant to help their nation prepare for modern warfare. But they were writing in the post-Crimean War era and warned of a threat from overseas. They had never heard the term “antebellum” and could neither have predicted the Civil War nor have anticipated the all military transformations that came with it.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Luvaas, 231-233.

⁸⁸ Jefferson Davis to Sara Mordecai, The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 5, 124.

For example, at this historical remove one might correctly note that the commissioners had seen the telegraph and the railroad in military use for the first time without foreseeing the revolutionary effects each innovation would soon have on warfare. The telegraph tied Whitehall to the battle front, obliterating the distance in time between policy makers and tactical commanders. The railroad was important for getting men, horses, and materiel to British and French ports. Moreover, the British made their rail lines serve them at the tactical level by moving supplies the few miles from Balaklava to the camps on the Chersonese Uplands. These were important advances and Delafield mentioned them in his report. But the military applications of both telegraph and railroad were vastly different in the Crimean War than in the Civil War a few years later. During the Crimean War those means of communication and transportation were rather limited and direct, in the sense of going from a single point to another. The nature of the Civil War, which employed millions of men over half a continent, meant that telegraph and rail allowed presidents and generals to communicate their thoughts and dispatch armies within and between large theaters of war with amazing speed. The Crimean War had provided no such test, and the commission had no reason to believe that any future European invasion of the United States would do so either.

Some historians have held the commission to the unrealistic standard of clairvoyance. A frequent charge is that they missed the significance of a phenomenon that was under their noses, the Prussian general staff. In a few paragraphs Mordecai passed over the hallmarks of Prussian professionalism, the organization of the general staff and the methods of selecting and training general staff officers. Neither Delafield nor

McClellan even made mention of the Prussian general staff. Edward Hagerman has suggested that these oversights resulted from theoretical blind spots, especially on McClellan's part, stemming from "an American ideological aversion to the centralized and permanent military organization necessary to make the staff system work." Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones argue that the technically educated officers were too interested in mechanistic detail to digest "the most important new military development then on the European continent."⁸⁹ James D. Hittle, in his study of the development of the military staff, makes perhaps the most colorful and damning criticism. The commission, he explains:

went into minute detail on various types of weapons, fortifications, and even had diagrams of the manner in which hammocks were slung aboard troop transports and drawings of cavalry stables. . . .

Out of the mass of data pertaining to the material things of war there is not one brief discussion of the great Prussian staff system, which was perhaps the most important military development on the European continent. It was probably an accurate, but not altogether flattering commentary on the state of American military intellect that the investigation of the Delafield Commission was almost entirely devoted to the materialistic aspects of war. Had the members of this commission spent less time analyzing the methods of hanging hammocks aboard ship and used it for delving into the organization and educational system of the Prussian staff, American military thought might easily have progressed at a much quicker pace during the remainder of the century.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Mordecai Report, 30-1, 33-5; Hagerman 22, 33-34; Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, How the North Won: A Military History of the Civil War (Chicago, 1983), 107.

⁹⁰ James Donald Hittle, The Military Staff: Its History and Development (Harrisburg, Pa., 1961), 189. Hittle mistakenly thought that the commissioners had collaborated on a single report and that they jointly produced McClellan's Art of War in Europe. Thus, he was unaware of Mordecai's treatment of the Prussians. Still, his criticisms merit discussion because the commission certainly did not recognize the Prussian general staff for the transforming organization that it would become.

Although there is evidence that the American officer corps shared a national aversion to a standing army, Delafield and McClellan both emphasized in their reports the necessity for the United States to prepare itself against an attack from Europe. They called for better training and dissemination of professional military information. McClellan specifically argued for a more professional officer corps. Indeed, it would have been in his self-interest for the U.S. Army to institute a general staff program wherein the brightest young officers were singled out for the most rewarding positions and rapid promotion.

The commission overlooked the Prussian general staff for a number of reasons. In the first place, they never talked to the chief of the general staff or visited the *Kriegsakademie*. Even if they had done so, none of the commissioners had ever served at a level high enough to appreciate the complexities of general field command. Moreover, they were also steeped in the tradition's of the army's bureau system, wherein each chief ruled a semi-autonomous fiefdom rather than cooperating as a member of an integrated staff. But the principal reason for the commission's oversight was that the Prussian general staff had not yet proven itself. The Prussians had yet to begin dominating Europe militarily. That group of reforming officers who had inspired the Prussian military enlightenment--Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, and Clausewitz--were all dead and politically discredited. The general who would bring the general staff to maturity, Helmuth von Moltke, became its chief only in 1857, a year after the delegation had returned to the United States. Moreover, Prussia was still in political turmoil in the 1850s and did not yet project the military confidence of a nation to be emulated in matters so fundamental. This is not to say that a general staff system would not have benefitted the United States. A

vigorous program might even have borne fruit during the Civil War. But it is too harsh to criticize the commission for failure to recognize the future of a concept that had yet to establish itself in the present.⁹¹

Other historians have been less critical. Peter S. Michie, an early McClellan biographer, gushed over the reception that The Armies of Europe enjoyed within the army. William Skelton has called the commission the most ambitious observer mission of the antebellum era and praised the thoroughness of the reports. Marcus Cunliffe has placed the commission within the heritage of military professionalism that had arisen in the past several decades. Russell Weigley has also lauded the commission: “The visit was an outstanding success. The three commissioners were intelligent, perceptive, and thoroughly imbued with the new professional outlook; and each of them . . . presented a report that ranks as a landmark in the new American military literature.”⁹²

Weigley’s assessment is on the mark: the great legacy of the Crimean commission was the corpus of professional knowledge it yielded--the reports themselves. McClellan submitted his volume first, and Congress authorized the printing of five thousand copies of it, one thousand specifically for War Department use. In 1861, when McClellan had achieved much greater fame, Lippincott republished his report as The Armies of Europe

⁹¹ Walter Goerlitz, History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York, 1954), 69-77.

⁹² Peter S. Michie, General McClellan (New York, 1901), 41; Skelton, 241; Marcus Cunliffe, Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775-1865 (Boston, 1968), 174; Weigley, 191; He continues: “All three reports reflected the West Point emphasis upon military engineering in perhaps excessive degree, but each writer had something important to say about his specialty as well: Delafield, fortification; Mordecai, artillery; and McClellan, cavalry.”

and his Regulations and Instructions for the Field Service of the U.S. Cavalry in Time of War in a separate volume. In 1860 the U.S. Senate published ten thousand copies of the Delafield and Mordecai reports. Not to be outdone, the House of Representatives printed twenty thousand more the next year.⁹³

Immediately upon publication each report became the most current and useful text in its field of military science. Mordecai's volume served as a sourcebook on artillery and small arms during the Civil War, useful because both sides used vast quantities of European arms. The Federal government even tried to halt distribution of the Delafield report for fear that its valuable descriptions of advancements in military engineering would aid the South. Construction of southern fortifications during the war indicates that the fear was well founded. And, as we have seen, McClellan's Regulations were influential in the development of cavalry doctrine.⁹⁴

The commission's work also had some impact on the curriculum at West Point. By 1860 an extract from McClellan's report had become a text in Dennis Hart Mahan's first-class course in "Military Engineering and the Art of War" and, ironically enough, in a tactics course taught by the commandant of cadets, William J. Hardee.⁹⁵

⁹³ U.S. Government Publications, U.S. Serial Set No. 916, 35th Congress, Special Session Senate, Senate Executive Document 1, 4-14 March 1857, 3; U.S. Government Publications, U.S. Serial Set No. 1037, 36th Congress, 1st Session Senate, Senate Executive Documents 59 and 60.

⁹⁴ Falk, "Soldier-Technologist," 477-480.

⁹⁵ Official Register of the Officers and Cadets of the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York (West Point, 1860), 17-18.

Another influence was more direct. In 1860 a committee headed by Senator Jefferson Davis went to West Point as a sort of extraordinary Board of Visitors. They sent questions to all three commissioners to gain their advice on modifying the program. Delafield, whose views as superintendent were most important, and Mordecai both appeared before the committee and submitted written testimony. No record of McClellan's views entered the official record, although he had earlier written to Mahan his opinion that the course in military engineering at West Point was "better than any of those pursued in the European schools I visited." Delafield and Mordecai held similar views about the entire Academy program. They offered conservative recommendations, and both favored the old four-year program to Davis's pet project, a new five-year experiment. Mordecai disapproved of a new course in Spanish, offered to assist those line officers headed for the Southwest. He argued that cadets would gain little acquaintance with conversational Spanish and would lose time more profitably spent studying French, the language of military science. Delafield recommended that control of the curriculum reside more firmly with the administration at West Point, and less with the Department of War and Congress. Mordecai and Delafield seem to have disagreed on only one point. Predictably, Delafield felt the superintendency should continue a corps of engineers monopoly, while Mordecai felt that the post should be opened to all officers of the scientific corps. The Davis Commission sided with Mordecai on that issue, but recommended that the Academy continue its five-year program. In language that recalled the Delafield Commission's reports, the panel argued that the United States should not

reduce its "standard of military education at the moment when many of the great States of Europe, profiting by experience, are endeavoring to raise it."⁹⁶

Gauging the effects of any written work on the minds of its audience is problematic. Because the Delafield Commission reports were published and distributed so widely, one can surmise that most army officers were aware of them. Yet the advent of the Civil War so soon after their publication probably limited the time and attention most officers gave to professional reading. Evidence of the reports' direct impact on officers' thinking is rare, although one such gem is a recollection of U. S. Grant's. He noted in his Memoirs that shortly after assuming command of the 21st Illinois in 1861, he sat down to read the first chapter of Hardee's Tactics, a subject he had found difficult while a cadet at West Point. Grant tried to put his reading into practice with his regiment the next day:

I soon saw that if I attempted to follow the lesson I had studied I would have to clear away some of the houses and garden fences to make room. I perceived at once, however, that Hardee's tactics--a mere translation from the French with Hardee's name attached--was nothing more than common sense and the progress of the age applied to Scott's system. . . . I do not believe that the officers of the regiment ever discovered that I had never studied the tactics that I used.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ George B. McClellan to Dennis Hart Mahan, 10 May 1858, GBMP 5: 048; "Report of the Commission Appointed Under the eighth section of the act of Congress of June 21, 1860, to examine into the organization, system of discipline, and course of instruction of the United States Military Academy at West Point," dated December 13 1860, Senate Miscellaneous Documents, 34th Congress, 2d Session, No. 3, (Washington, 1861), 74-75, 77-78, 130-132, 148-155, 250-286, 308-312, 337, 11.

⁹⁷ Ulysses S. Grant, Memoirs and Selected Letters; Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant, Selected Letters, 1839-1865, Mary D. McFeely and William S. McFeely, eds. (New York, 1990), 166-167. Hardee was the same officer with whom McClellan had refused to work in 1856.

But shortly after he relegated Hardee to the depths of his footlocker, Grant wrote a letter to his wife Julia: "If you have an opportunity I wish you would send me McClellands [sic] report of battles in the Crimea. You will find it about the house." Grant obviously valued McClellan's ideas much more highly than Hardee's, and considered them worthy of his valuable time as he prepared for war.⁹⁸

However much or little officers read their reports, the commissioners were successful if measured by the standard of material additions to the army inventory and organization. They introduced several innovations although none, save perhaps the "Napoleon," were transforming advances. Delafield returned with a knowledge of desiccated food, the care and transport of the wounded, and the embryonic military uses of the railroad and telegraph. McClellan developed the last saddle the U.S. Cavalry would ever need.⁹⁹ Mordecai could claim credit for renovating garrison artillery gun carriages, replacing rotting wood with wrought iron. But his report had the greatest impact on the Civil War because it introduced the "Napoleon" gun-howitzer.

The commissioners meticulously answered the particulars of Davis's instructions, but they also went beyond his charter in several ways. Both Delafield and McClellan offered brief histories of the Crimean War, scholarly exercises that Davis had not required. These essays became vehicles for the officers to offer their criticisms and praises of

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 166-167, 966.

⁹⁹ Luvaas, 96. A French observer saw Union horses with McClellan saddles just back from raids that "were all thin, mostly broken-down in front. . . with some broken knees." But none of the horses had a saddle rub. The Frenchman took a McClellan saddle back to Europe for use in the French cavalry.

military operations in the war and to prescribe for the United States by extrapolating lessons learned. In McClellan's case, his prescription was quite specific. He ended his work with his "Report on the United States Cavalry" and his cavalry regulations, the first of several such essays by cavalry officers and an influence on all its successors. His work later had wider notice because of his Civil War celebrity, but the officers who tried to develop cavalry doctrine before the war had looked upon McClellan's regulations as a valuable source. Davis had directed the commission to study American arms, but had not expected them to produce specific doctrine for the American service.

More important than immediate applications was the intellectual example the reports set for an immature profession. The commissioners had done their homework, assiduously collecting information from all over Europe. American military literature had too often been little more than the uncritical translation of foreign, usually French, texts. Grant complained specifically of such pilfering in Hardee's case. All three commissioners expressed the same professional dismay in their reports, criticizing America's lionization of all things French. Coming from officers educated in the army's Francophile tradition, those criticisms marked a startling departure in American military thought. The presentation of their findings to the public, but especially to their fellow officers, constituted a quantum jump in the accumulation of specialized knowledge essential to the development of expertise, a *sine qua non* of professionalism.

But accumulation is not creation.

The Delafield Commission was a milepost in the history of American military professionalism. Its work both reflected the influences of the past and indicated the route

the profession might take in the future. But the milepost does not mark a significant bend in the road. Like their predecessors, the commissioners manifested traits--a preference for the particular over the general, a tendency toward branch parochialism, and an affinity for foreign paradigms--that tended to limit the development of professional knowledge.

Delafield expressed his intention "to impart information to the profession," and so he did.

But he and his fellow officers were not yet ready to create expertise.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion:

The Delafield Commission and the American Military Profession

The central purpose of this study is not to praise or criticize the Delafield Commission. It is, instead, to locate the commission and its work in the history of military professionalism. Once one understands that the coming of the Civil War limited the effect of the commission's reports, the futility of looking for the commission's influence on the profession becomes manifest. The only other historian to study the commission in depth, Arthur T. Frame, has examined its contributions to the army. He found them to be primarily material, and we have little disagreement on their substance. But Frame has not looked at the commission in the context of military professionalism.

This work posits the idea that the Delafield Commission was a milepost in the history of military professionalism, especially in the development of an American military expertise. Issuing from the pens of three of the most talented men then in uniform, the commissioners' reports well reflect the intellectual state of the U.S. Army in the mid-nineteenth century. Advancing that argument, this study has carried on an implicit conversation with William B. Skelton's An American Profession of Arms, the most important study of military professionalism in a generation. Skelton argues that the U.S. Army developed into a profession in the years between the War of 1812 and the Civil War. The officer corps became a coherent body with recognized standards for entrance

and advancement. The army gained a sense of purpose as an apolitical instrument of national policy. And the institution developed a body of expertise, the possession of which marked the practitioners as professionals.

Through this study of the Delafield Commission, an ambitious professional undertaking at the end of that period, I have endeavored to show that while the American military profession had indeed developed a sense of national responsibility and a well articulated corporate identity, it was still adolescent in its intellectual component. The army officer corps was as yet incapable of generating a vibrant, comprehensive body of expertise to serve all of the profession's needs.

Part One examined the growth of the American army and the development of military professionalism. It explored the evolution of a regular army from early American militia traditions and the concomitant development of the officer corps. It analyzed the steady growth of professional responsibility among officers after the War of 1812. During the next four decades the officer corps, while it carved out a clear sense of itself as a corporate body separate from civilians, also displayed internal rifts among its various branches, especially between the line army and the scientific corps. Part One concluded that, by the 1850s, the intellectual component of the American military profession suffered from three major flaws: an overreliance on French expertise, an almost exclusive concentration on engineering as the only military science worthy of study, and the rewarding of achievement in endeavors more civilian than military, more staff than line. As a result, military thinking during the period was more deductive than inductive, more derivative than analytical, more formulaic than creative. Most important, such thought

poorly prepared military professionals for high-level command and staff work, and gave them no education or experience in the problems of military policy, civil-military relations, or strategy.

Part Two explored the purposes and experiences of the Delafield Commission. The very act of sending a commission to Europe was a positive step in overcoming all three flaws in the corpus of professional expertise. Davis's charter and the questions he gave them focused on military problems, not civil engineering, to further his plans for reforming the army. His particulars ranged over technical topics throughout the field of military science, not just the building of coastal forts. Moreover, the makeup of the commission showed that he was interested in line as well as staff matters, although the three men he chose had spent their careers in the scientific corps. By choosing a cavalry and an ordnance officer, Davis demonstrated that he intended to broaden the army's intellectual perspectives from its exclusive focus on military engineering. And he dispatched the commission to all the major powers of Europe, not just France, and charged it to examine both sides in the war.

Brimming with excitement but fully aware of their professional responsibility, the commissioners sailed for Europe hoping to arrange quick passage to the Crimea. Unfortunately, they became entangled in the "meshes of diplomacy" and spent six frustrating months winding their way through Europe. French boorishness helped them to challenge the traditional Francophile paradigm. Conversely, a much better reception by an apparently more disciplined army in St. Petersburg convinced them that Russian arms offered a paradigm superior to the vaunted French. Still, all their European travel availed

them little in terms of promised access to the battlefield. While they were treating with diplomats, the commission missed the war. Nonetheless, when they arrived in the Crimea they saw all that they might have desired, short of actual combat. What they saw reinforced their preconceptions: an army protecting a besieged seacoast fortress had held off a well-supplied seaborne invader for months. Moreover, those same invaders seemed both able and inclined to mount a similar offensive against the United States. Returning through Europe, they continued their observations of fortresses, arsenals, and armies. Along the way Delafield seemed to concentrate more and more on his field of engineering, Mordecai on ordnance, and McClellan on cavalry. They arrived home with vast stores of data on European military science and a keen sense of their responsibility for imparting that information to the profession.

Yet the commission's conduct of its trip and the process of writing its reports demonstrated how much these officers were formed by West Point's "system and habit of thought." The academy had educated them heavily in mathematics and engineering. Their subsequent training as engineers had further conditioned them to reason deductively from a set of accepted principles and formulae in order to solve problems. They were less adept at inductive reasoning--starting from specifics and analyzing information to develop new theories, principles, or formulae of their own.

These men, like most of their contemporaries, were accustomed to borrowing professional expertise from abroad. For most of the antebellum period the almost exclusive source of that knowledge was France, and the U.S. Army accepted the French notion that military engineering and military science were virtual synonyms. Thus, most

American military thought was at best derivative. Few officers attempted to reason inductively toward a truly American school of military thought.

In sum, then, the Delafield Commission reflected intellectual traits, common in the antebellum officer corps, that constrained the development of professional expertise. They preferred the particular over the general. They treated tactics, not strategy; weapons, not warfare. They focused on mechanistic detail rather than broad concepts.

The Delafield Commission manifested that particularity in all three reports. For example, Delafield provided detailed descriptions of dozens of European forts, numbers and types of cannons employed, and methods of designing ambulances and shelters. Mordecai described manning requirements for each European army and the design specifications for artillery pieces, rifled muskets, and arsenals. McClellan, too, focused on specifics in his discussions of European armies, engineers, and cavalry organizations.

That excessive attention to minutiae, or as James D. Hittle put it, “analyzing the methods of hanging hammocks aboard ship,” did indeed prevent their addressing larger issues. While the commissioners detailed structures of military organizations, they neglected analysis of how those bodies operated and made decisions. They paid no attention to the way staffs interacted and directed military operations. Although Delafield and McClellan discussed military operations in their brief histories of the war, their attention remained on tactical issues and siege operations. They rarely touched on strategy, and then only to advance pet schemes in the United States, specifically the coastal fortifications program.

Particularity bolstered other tendencies. In conjunction with professional rivalries within the officer corps, it fostered parochialism. Officers manifested stronger identities with their respective branches than with the entire army. That phenomenon was widespread in the officer corps, inculcated at West Point and reinforced through assignment and promotion processes throughout an officer's career.

The commissioners shared and reflected that parochialism. Indeed, the structure of the commission and its process of preparing the reports promoted it. Davis selected the commissioners to represent the engineers, the ordnance and artillery, and the line army, specifically cavalry. The commissioners divided the labor of answering Davis's questions along those functional lines, although there was some overlap as they wrote their reports. But that overlap was accidental and caused by the commissioners' decision to work separately and write individual reports. It was also unwanted, and occasionally the commissioners quarreled over subject-matter "turf." As a result, their reports tended to emphasize branch interests over the interests of the broader profession.

Thus, the parochial approach that all three commissioners took toward their reporting stemmed from their assignments as representatives of their branches on the commission. Davis's instructions to them, detailed as they were, gave the commissioners a useful tool for dividing the labor of reporting their observations along those functional lines. Then, the commissioners' decisions to work separately as they wrote, decisions compounded by the assignment of Delafield and Mordecai to other duties, exaggerated the individualism of their reports. Delafield saw this isolation as a scholarly virtue, as it gave their readers the advantage of seeing their differences of opinion.

Through his writing Delafield attained pre-eminence as defender of the 1821 Engineer Board strategy for coastal defense. Essaying into strategy, he found potential antagonists in Europe who justified the corps of engineers' emphasis on coastal fortifications. Despite the magnified "engines of war" in the Crimea, there was nothing new to challenge the engineers' thirty-five-year-old program. Delafield became the epitome of the professional engineer defending the *raison d'etre* of his branch. His arguments seem broad, and in his mind, they probably were. But they reinforced the entirely defensive construction of the army, the status quo since the days of Calhoun.

McClellan's report provides an interesting case study in parochialism. He had just left the corps of engineers to become a captain of cavalry. In his report he treated two main areas: the organizations of engineer and cavalry troops. Making a personal transition, McClellan was identifying with the old branch and the new. McClellan, cast in his new role as a cavalryman, plunged into it with an engineer's "system and habit of thought"--the need to validate his branch intellectually through a written doctrine and the need to protect it against other branches through bureaucratic means.

Mordecai, as his biographer Stanley L. Falk has ably shown, had come to see himself as a soldier-technologist. In a thorough study of European ordnance, artillery, and manufacturing, he found innovations worthy of importation. But as a scientist who urged cautious experimentation, he frequently determined that American expertise in his field was the professional equal if not superior to the Europeans. Mostly, he saw his role as a collector of data, which he meticulously compiled as he had done so often in the past.

All three reports were highly technical and written for the specialist. Only occasionally would they rise to a higher plane of thought, because “a system and habit of thought” had conditioned them to see their profession from a more constricted view.

With such narrow vision they were incapable, individually and collectively, of thinking of the U.S. Army as a complex entity--a broad public institution with a strategic role as a flexible instrument of policy. Each saw his part, but not the whole. McClellan chose to advocate an offensive doctrine for cavalry. Mordecai concentrated on equipping the army with weapons and on defending the objective testing process that guaranteed the best possible quality in those weapons. Delafield focused on fortifying and defending critical points along the coastline. None articulated a means for developing both an offensive and a defensive military capability. None expressed a need for a general staff to replace the bureau system.

Particularity fostered another trait in the army: an affinity for paradigms. Because the officer corps were collectively averse to broad conceptualization, but were nonetheless occasionally in need of systems and theory, they depended upon accepted models to answer that deficiency. For over four decades the source of those paradigms was the French army, nurtured through West Point's educational tradition.

But Davis's decision to dispatch a commission to Europe and the Crimean War clearly signaled his intent to break with traditional Francophilia. He meant for the commission to study military establishments throughout Europe and to gather useful information wherever it might be found. True to his desires, the commission jettisoned the Francophile paradigm soon after they arrived in Europe. Their writing shows how far they

had departed from slavish obeisance to French thinking. Each of them specifically advocated casting the net wider in search of military expertise.

Yet there were two problems with the reaction against Francophilia. The first was that it was a reaction. The petulance that all three manifested toward the French clouded their judgment. The commission felt insulted, and they clearly had a right to be offended by boorish French treatment. But bad French manners seem to have given rise to a bias against French competence. Each commissioner preached the values of an international diversity of professional ideas while recommending less emphasis on French thinking, but one cannot help wondering whether anger and embarrassment triggered the commissioners' change of mind.

A second problem was their ready acceptance of a new national army as paradigm for professional development in the United States. Within days of leaving France, both literally and figuratively, they developed an almost uncritical affinity for the Russians. Far from practicing professional internationalism, the commissioners extolled the noble bearing, discipline, and courage of Russian officers and soldiers. McClellan was most enamored of the Russian army, as he demonstrated by learning the language, translating Russian cavalry regulations, and presenting them as new doctrine for the U.S. Cavalry. The commissioners, especially McClellan, seemed too harshly critical of the Allies and all too forgiving of Russian shortcomings, such as the unpleasant fact that they lost a war fought in their own territory. Moreover, the commissioners had chosen an unfortunate model: the Russian army and the nation itself were on the verge of collapse, and indeed,

perforce went into a period of thorough social reform as a direct result of problems that became manifest in the Crimean War.¹

Yet a larger issue is the very fact that the commission was searching for a foreign paradigm as a basis for American expertise.² They were as yet unwilling and perhaps incapable of analyzing the information they had gathered abroad and synthesizing it with the American experience to create new military expertise. For example, it is not as damning that they failed to see and copy the Prussian general staff, as that they were incapable of arriving at a similar solution in the absence of a model. Had they been more creative and less derivative, they might have realized that, with their unique perspective on the state of the military art in all of Europe, they were in a unique position to survey the whole, to select the good and reject the bad. They might have seized an opportunity to prescribe for the United States a coherent approach to strategy, a military organization structured to support it, a general staff system for controlling the army, and an integrated system of military education and training for the officer corps.

Indeed, captive to “a system and habit of thought,” they resisted a method that might have allowed them to break through old paradigms, to renounce parochialism, and

¹ Arthur T. Frame has focused his attention on the commissioners' affinity for the Russians. He argues that the officers were following an American trend of seeing in Russia a kindred culture, another nation with continental responsibilities and vast frontiers. If America and Russia were not natural allies, they shared common enemies. Frame cites evidence of Russian sympathy in the American press and public opinion, but he only infers a connection between these feelings and the commissioners' affection for the Russians. Arthur T. Frame, “The U.S. Military Commission to the Crimean War and Its Influence on the U.S. Army before the Civil War” (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1993), 60-115, 292-296.

² Lesser examples of paradigm seeking include Delafield's use of a Spanish engineer's treatise on European engineering systems and Mordecai's inclusion of a German officer's pamphlet on rifled small arms. All three instances represent the relatively uncritical use of others' professional work as a basis for American expertise.

to rise above particularity. They refused to work together on a single, comprehensive report of their journey, choosing instead to repair to their homes and write in isolation. Separately, they settled into comfortable habits. Together, they might have created a new type of thought, pulling together information they had collected from all over Europe and throughout the spectrum of military art and science. At the very least they might have stimulated one another to new thinking about parochial concerns.

The absence of collaboration contributed to producing fragmented reports. Davis's original charter furnished a structure for their trip and their observations; it later provided a convenient method for dividing their labor. Thus, while each volume contains a wealth of information in remarkable detail, none reads as a book with a unitary theme. The fragmentary results mirror Mordecai's earlier compendiae of laws, regulations, and systems, each compiled simply for the sake of having all relevant data between the covers of a single book. To be sure, Delafield pursued his preparedness argument, just as McClellan beat the drum for cavalry doctrine, but these agendas failed to govern the entire works. Still less did the reports taken together represent a unified work in three volumes. Their styles and purposes are too disparate.

The commissioners' reluctance to work together on a single report stemmed from more than homesickness and their personal antipathies. The lack of collaboration reflects the "system and habit of thought": the professional rivalries between the line army and the scientific corps. It mirrors the segregated purposes and thinking of the bureau system. For example, when McClellan proposed naming a chief of cavalry, he recommended placing him in imperial isolation at Jefferson Barracks rather than integrating him with the

other bureaus in Washington. Such a solution would have exacerbated the problems with army staff coordination. The commissioners actively resisted the act of collaboration that might have fostered the synergy necessary for analytical and synthetic thinking about the larger picture--civil-military relations, army organization, an integrated strategy that could answer for both offensive and defensive political goals.

In a telling passage, McClellan called for greater professionalism in the officer corps, arguing that volunteers could never acquire the requisite "mechanical military skill," which could only be gained through education and "long habit." Each of the commissioners advocated military education, but these were simply calls for continuing the "Thayer system" as it existed. Given the opportunity to advise on reforming West Point, they counseled conservatism. Likewise, given a chance to recommend military policy, the commissioners returned to the Calhounian status quo. They were comfortable with their paradigms. They were captive to "a system and habit of thought."

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