

**THE PENINSULAR CAMPAIGN AND
ITS ANTECEDENTS, AS DEVELOPED
BY THE REPORT OF MAJ. GEN.
GEO. B. MCCLELLAN, AND OTHER
PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS, PP. 4-96**

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The Peninsular Campaign and Its Antecedents, as Developed by the Report of Maj. Gen. Geo. B. McClellan, and Other Published Documents, pp. 4-96 by J. G. Barnard

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REPORT OF MAJ-GEN. GEO. B. McCLELLAN,

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John Grace BY
J. G. BARNARD,

LEUTENANT-COLONEL OF ENGINEERS AND BRIGADIER-GENERAL OF VOLUNTEERS, AND
CHIEF ENGINEER IN THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC FROM ITS ORGANIZA-
TION TO THE CLOSE OF THE PENINSULAR CAMPAIGN.

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nation to carry the struggle to a successful issue, but because, for the time, the power of the nation was partially paralyzed. Yet there never was a moment when the public safety, and the safety of the common cause more urgently demanded the exertion of all the nation's strength. Why, then, did men doubt? Where was the origin of this paralysis? It was in the charge, audaciously made, impudently persisted in, that to the blunders and incapacity of the Administration, all our disasters were due; that, with such incapacity at the head of affairs, our resources, though they were poured forth like water, would, like water, too, be spilt on the ground. Men will sacrifice much in great emergencies, but they never *will* give their lives or their money merely that such treasures may be ignorantly or wantonly wasted.

“Had McClellan but had *his* way, had *he* not been interfered with, had not his army been reduced and taken away from him, and his movements in a thousand ways hampered and balked, had he, in short, had the sole control of military affairs, all would have been different. Richmond would have been ours, the rebellion would have been subdued, and, instead of disaster and prolonged war, a triumphant peace might have been our happier lot.” To such charges against the administration which had raised him to his position, and which, through the President, had ever showed him unwearied kindness, and given him all the confidence it *could* give, Gen. McClellan lent the full weight of his name and reputation. Throwing himself into the arms of a *party* bitterly hostile to that administration, associated with men who loaded the agents of the Government with reproach, and among whom were some so insensible to the honor of the country and the sacredness of the cause as to court foreign mediation and to meditate a disgraceful and humiliating peace, (1) to *him*, and to the erroneous ideas disseminated

concerning *his* capacity, merits and agency, the paralysis of doubt was due, as it was to him were justly ascribable the disasters which brought our military affairs to so low an ebb.

The administration, thus denounced, was, for better or worse, the constituted agency through which the war, if it were to be carried on at all, *must* be conducted. *That* fact could not be altered. The men who weakened the arm of the nation's sole war-making power, just to that degree endangered the nation's cause. Therefore the question of Gen. McClellan's responsibility for our disasters ceased to be a mere abstract question about which men might differ without prejudice to the public interests; it became a national question, and one of vast import.

It was under such circumstances that, in writing an official report, at the request of Gen. McClellan himself, of the engineering operations of the Army of the Potomac, I deemed it my duty to state what I believed to be the sources of failure of the campaign of the Peninsula. The opinions therein written down were no afterthoughts. Six months before I had formed them, and when I spoke at all, (which I did not do openly,) *expressed them*. I had formed them painfully, reluctantly, at a period when political questions had not become involved with this subject, and no such causes existed to influence, in any manner, my judgment. It was at a period when for Gen. McClellan I entertained the warmest personal regard—a feeling which I distinctly and sincerely expressed in writing on leaving him in August, 1862. With no man have I ever, with a more absolute freedom from any other feeling than one of personal kindness, been so long closely associated, and if, at any moment, there seemed to me to exist some slight grounds for complaint, they were never such as to be remembered, or to have any abiding place in my breast.

But there are cases in which personal feelings must be allowed little weight. The destinies of nations cannot be trifled with, and in all that affects them, convictions of truth *must* be uttered. The Report of the engineering operations of the Army of the Potomac, and the statements of these pages, are the utterances I am constrained to make.

The review which follows was first prepared as a magazine article. It has not been thought necessary to alter the phraseology, though another form of publication is adopted.

J. G. B.

THE PENINSULAR CAMPAIGN.

GEN. McCLELLAN had been called to the command of the Army of the Potomac with an unanimity of feeling and lavish bestowal of confidence, which stand almost alone in our history. The army looking upon Gen. Scott as past the age of further active service, and upon most of the officers of rank as superannuated or otherwise incapable of meeting such an emergency, hailed the advent of a new chief, whose juvenile promise, whose thorough military education, and whose already extended reputation, seemed to give assurance of precisely the one thing needed—a capable *leader*.

Under such circumstances, neither the nation, nor the administration, nor the army, were disposed to exercise—nor *did* they exercise—undue pressure. Every indulgence was extended to one upon whom so heavy a responsibility had been laid, for the acknowledged difficulties of the situation, and for his own inexperience and want of preparation.

Now, had Gen. McClellan been a Napoleon, with the prestige of a hundred victories—or even a Scott—old in the regard of the people—old in experience of war even upon a comparatively limited scale, but rejuvenated in years—had he been either of these—he might with propriety, if he thought the case demanded it, have drawn heavily upon the indulgence so freely extended. Being neither, it was impor-

tant that he should make the lightest possible draft; that, at the very earliest moment, he should *do* something to confirm, continue and justify the nation's confidence. Of all Gen. McClellan's faults and incapacities, nothing—not even his irresolution and mismanagement in face of the enemy, nor his inability ever, in any case, to *act* when the time came—furnishes a clearer proof of the lack of those qualities which make a great general or a great statesman, than his failure to do this.

Let it be granted that it was not best to make any great movement till the winter of 1861-'62 had wholly passed away, (though there were the strongest political reasons against such delay,) yet Gen. McClellan should have been aware that, unless his prestige, through these long months, should be supported by *some* deeds, he would find himself virtually destitute of the power to carry out his own plans when the moment proper for such a movement should arrive; and so it happened. But, after six long months of omission, he added to his imprudence the positive folly of making an extravagant and senseless draft upon that confidence of the administration and the public, which in the beginning had been so generously given him, but which he had so lightly permitted to be, in a measure, "lost."

Grant, again, that the lower Chesapeake *was* the true line of approach to Richmond, and the sole route by which to attain results of such magnitude as Gen. McClellan predicted from its adoption, yet, it was nevertheless true that this route was strongly disapproved by the President, and by many whose judgment carried great influence, and that it involved, in the minds of not a few, great danger to the Capital. Yet, in the face of all this, Gen. McClellan, who had never furnished any adequate evidence of his ability to plan or execute a great campaign, persisted in carrying off his army, at enormous expense, to a distant point, leaving that enemy, to whom he attributes a force of no less than one hundred and fifty thousand men, "well disciplined and under able leaders," confronting Washington, with nothing but the garrison of the place, and its very imperfect system of forti-