JAMES MCPHERSON
LINCOLN'S DILEMMA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

James McPherson
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SPEAKER 1:
Jim McPherson interview, take one. Marker.

The crisis Lincoln faces at Ft. Sumter

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

Well, when Lincoln was inaugurated on March 4th, 1861, seven slave states had already seceded from the Union. They had met in Montgomery, Alabama and had formed the Confederate States of America and had established their government. At the same time the Southern states, as they had seceded, had seized federal property within their boundaries. U.S. mints, forts, if they had forts, and other federal property, but there were still four forts in the possession of the United States Army in the seven seceded states. Two of them are in the Florida keys, so they were off of the mainland, but one was in

Pensacola, Florida – Fort Pickens – and the other was in Charleston Harbor, Fort Sumter, and all of the attention and controversy and pressure focused on Fort Sumter. South Carolina was the first state to secede. It was the most gung-ho Confederate state and the army troops that had been occupying one of the forts in Charleston Harbor, on the day after Christmas had moved to the unfinished Fort Sumter in the middle of the Harbor.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

So there were about 90 United States troops in Fort Sumter, and they were surrounded by a couple of thousand of volunteers from South Carolina that had already been incorporated into the Confederate army. So the question was what would the new incoming administration, the Lincoln administration, do about Fort Sumter? The newly organized Confederate government demanded that the army troops withdraw from Sumter because the new government of the Confederate States of America claimed all of the forts that were part of their new nation. Whereas Abraham Lincoln and his administration insisted that this was the United States property. He had pledged in his inaugural address to maintain control of all the United States property that they had control of in the seceded states, and Fort Sumter was by far the most important, both symbolically, and I think substantively.

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

In addition to the crisis that was facing Lincoln in the South and in Charleston, he was faced with a division of opinion and a potential division of

authority within his own administration. His secretary of state, William H. Seward, who considered himself really the leader of Lincoln's own party and described himself and was described in the newspapers as the premier of the administration. He had far more political experience and more national prominence before 1861 than Lincoln had.

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

And Seward was what you might call a conciliator, in facing the crisis of secession. He wanted to maintain calm, maintain the status quo in the hope that the Southern States, the Southern people would come to their senses if conflict did not break out. And so he was in favor of withdrawing the troops from Fort Sumter as a gesture of conciliation, as a way of maintaining some kind of calm in the hope that there would be what he called a voluntary reconstruction of the Union.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

But at the same time, other members of the Lincoln administration and much of public opinion in the North demanded that the United States flag continue to fly over Fort Sumter, that the United States government and the army maintain its legitimate possession of the fort. Lincoln was inclined in that direction himself. But many of several members of his cabinet in addition to Seward, were inclined toward withdrawing in order to maintain the peace, and the tension over that question, "should we keep the soldiers in the fort

and maintain the symbol of sovereignty? Or should we withdraw in the interest of maintaining peace?"

JAMES MCPHERSON:

The pressure was so great that Lincoln was losing sleep over it. One day when he tried to get up in the morning, he actually collapsed as a consequence of this pressure. If he decided to maintain the troops in Fort Sumter, he would have to resupply them, because the commander of the fort had already informed him that they could only hold out for another 10 or 15 days, when Lincoln came into office, before they would have to withdraw because of lack of food and lack of supplies.

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

Lincoln finally came up with a solution. He decided that he would notify the authorities in South Carolina and General Beauregard, who was commander of the Confederate troops down there, that he would send in ships with supplies, "food for hungry men," as he put it, and would not try to reinforce the fort unless the rescue mission and the fort itself were fired on by the Confederates. He notified them so that they would know what was coming. Basically what he said to Jefferson Davis was, "Heads I win and tails you lose," because if Jefferson Davis decided to attack the fort or their supply mission, they would be firing on without provocation on people who were just bringing food to hungry men. But if he withdrew from the Fort as Lincoln

demanded, or if he did not fire on the rescue mission, then Lincoln would have won an important symbolic victory.

Lincoln's early days as Commander-in-Chief

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

Lincoln of course was very inexperienced as commander-in-chief or as President of the United States. And so he was feeling his way gradually to a solution to this problem. And coming up with this, which was I think in many ways of stroke of genius, showed the promise of the kind of commanding presence that he would have. He was growing into the job, but he was doing so with a kind of surefooted process at the very beginning of going into that job.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

If a war was going to come, he wanted to come with the other side firing the first shot, because he knew that that would rally Northern support to his cause. On the other hand, if he fired the first shot or if he openly provoked the other side into firing the first shot, then it would leave the North divided because the Northern people were divided on what to do, as well as Lincoln's administration being divided on what to do. If the Confederates fell into what was really Lincoln's trap, they would unite the North.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

They did fall into the trap. Jefferson Davis sent orders to General Beauregard to fire on the fort before their supply mission got there and force its surrender. So on April 12th, Confederate guns did fire. The ships bringing the supplies were detained outside the harbor by a storm, which had stirred up the currents and made it impossible for them to get in, so that the fort had to endure 33 hours of bombardment, outgunned by the other side, outmanned by the other side, and was forced to surrender after those 33 hours and lower the flag.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

And the response in the North was all that Lincoln could have wanted, could have anticipated. It united the North with a kind of, as the French would call it, rage militaire, rage against these arrogant secessionists who fired on the American flag and fired on American soldiers. And when Lincoln, a day after the surrender of the Fort, issued a call for 75,000 militia to suppress combinations too strong to be suppressed by the ordinary course of judicial proceedings. That's how Lincoln put it. The North responded with great enthusiasm and great support almost immediately. And more than those 75,000 troops were raised almost immediately.

Mobilizing the Union Army

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

Lincoln had to create an army almost from scratch. The entire manpower of the United States Army in 1861 was 16,000 men, a tiny army for a country of 32 million people and 3 million square miles. The United States had always counted on raising a volunteer army after the war started, that had happened in the Mexican War, it had happened in the war of 1812. And of course it had happened back in the Revolution as well. So Lincoln's first recourse was to the United States militia, the state militias. And under the 1795 militia law, the president of the United States could call state militia into the federal forces for 90 days in an emergency, either an invasion or a domestic emergency. And it was under that law that Lincoln issued his call for 75,000 state militia with each state having a quota on April 15th, 1861. But of course they could serve for only 90 days under the 1795 law. Lincoln soon realized that that was not going to be enough, and using his own authority as Commander-in-Chief, Congress was not in session.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Lincoln did issue a call for Congress to come into session on July 4th, 1861, but this was April, 1861. And so he used what he considered to be his executive authority as commander-in-chief to call for some 40,000 3-year volunteers to supplement these 75,000 militia. And he also increased the size of the regular army again by executive action. It was unclear whether he had the constitutional power to do so, but this was the first of several occasions during the course of the war when Lincoln vastly expanded the power of the president under what he considered to be his war powers as

commander-in-chief in time of war, to take executive actions prior to any congressional authorization to do that. So he did that as early as May, 1861 by increasing the size of the regular army and by calling the three-year volunteers into what became called the Union Volunteer Army.

The Anaconda Plan

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

Everybody in 1861, Lincoln included, anticipated a short one. And that was of the Confederates, as well as the Northern people. They expected that one or two major battles and the other side would give up. Well, of course, that turned out to be totally wrong. The question was what kind of a strategy would the Lincoln administration come up with? Lincoln didn't have a clear idea of what the strategy ought to be. His first idea was that he would try to regain control of the federal property in the South, especially the forts that had been seized by the Confederacy, but whether or not that would be enough to win the war quickly became a question. And his General-in-Chief, Winfield Scott, whose war experiences went all the way back to the war of 1812, where he had been a junior officer, he'd been general-in-chief of the United States Army for more than a decade by 1861, he had been the principal general who had won the Mexican War from 1846 to 1848.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

He came up with what the newspapers labeled the Anaconda Plan, which was to take several months to train a professional or near-professional army, impose a Naval blockade on the Confederacy to prevent supplies coming in from abroad, and then to send this semi-professional army down the Mississippi river to gain control of the interior of the Confederacy and major cities like New Orleans and Memphis and so on. And this squeezing, that's why it was called the Anaconda Plan after that python-type snake that squeezed its prey to death, it would squeeze the Confederacy under a naval blockade and an army blockade, gaining control of the Mississippi River Valley, and force them to surrender without the violent, hard, destructive war that Winfield Scott, who was a Virginian, even though he remained loyal to the Union, didn't want this war to evolve into what Lincoln later called a violent remorseless revolutionary conflict. So the Anaconda plan was a plan for a limited war to persuade, not so much force, but to persuade the Confederate States to rejoin the Union.

The Confederate capital of Richmond, VA

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

Richmond was not the original capital of the Confederacy. Montgomery, Alabama had been the capital. Virginia did not secede until after the war had started at Fort Sumter. And in May of 1861, when Virginia had seceded, the

city and the state government of Virginia invited the Confederate government to make its capital in Richmond, rather than in Montgomery, which in 1861 was really just a small town. Whereas Richmond was a substantial city, and the Confederate government responded favorably, in part because they wanted to cement Virginia's loyalty to the Confederacy. There was a substantial majority of Virginians who were actually Unionists. And so there was a lot of deference toward Virginia and the Confederate government decided to accept the invitation to make the capital in Richmond.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

And once they did so, Richmond being only a hundred miles from Washington, that made the state of Virginia, and those hundred miles between Washington and Richmond, potentially the main location of military operations, because once that happened, the Anaconda plan evolved into the next stage, which was to capture the Confederate capital, assuming that once they did so the Confederacy would surrender.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

So that's what gave Richmond such importance. In addition to Richmond being a major industrial city, one of the most important manufacturing cities in what was not an industrial nation, the Confederacy, in 1861, the first seven Confederate states that went out had less than 10% of the industrial capacity of the United States. With the addition of Virginia and Tennessee, as well as North Carolina and Arkansas, all four of which seceded after Fort Sumter when Lincoln called for a militia to suppress this rebellion, that increased the

manpower and the military and industrial capacity of the Confederacy, and that made Richmond and Virginia the most important location of the Confederacy in terms of generating the resources necessary to wage war.

The First Battle at Bull Run

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

Once Richmond became the center – the location of the Confederate government, and once Union strategy focused on the capture of the Capital of the Confederacy, the new Union army is still only half trained, moved into Virginia, first stop occupied Alexandria, right across the Potomac River from Washington, and then decided to invade the rest of Virginia with the goal of capturing Richmond. So in July, 1861, an army consisting partly of these 90-day militia and partly of the new three-year volunteers that Lincoln had called for under his executive authority as Commander-in-Chief, moved down from Washington toward Manassas, which was an important railroad junction, which would be the first step toward the capture of Richmond in the middle of July, 1861. The Confederates moved their defense behind a rather small and sluggish stream called Bull Run near Manassas, Virginia, about 25 miles Southwest of Washington and 75 or 80 miles North of Richmond.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

The Confederate army was actually two armies that came together at Richmond, one of them under Beauregard with about 20,000 men and the other one under Joseph Johnston, which had been in the Shenandoah Valley but when the Union army approached Manassas used what military analysts would call interior lines to move by rail to enforce Beauregard's army near Manassas. And so the two armies were about equal size, about 35,000 in the Union army, and about 32,000 in the Confederate army that clashed on a very hot Sunday, July 21st, 1861. The temperature was in the nineties during the course of that fateful Sunday afternoon. The Union army, rather than crossing Bull Run at the principal bridge, marched around to the west and crossed at a ford, Sudley Springs Ford, to attack the Confederate flank on the morning of July 21st, 1861. And they didn't quite catch the Confederates napping.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

They had detected this flank movement by the Union forces and had rushed troops to meet it. But they did gain an advantage initially over the Confederacy by attacking them in the flank and managed to drive the Confederates on that flank back across a couple of streams and a couple of hills where the Confederates made a stand on what was called Henry House Hill in the course of the afternoon. And at first it looked like the Union forces would be victorious despite the somewhat piecemeal nature of their assaults, because they did continue to push the Confederates back. They managed to kill a couple of Confederate generals, General Bartow and General Bee, but the Confederates under Thomas Jonathan Jackson stood fast as one Confederate officer like a stone wall, giving Jackson the nickname he carried

for the rest of his life, Stonewall Jackson, and they managed to hold Henry House Hill long enough for Confederate reinforcements.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

One brigade of them, four regiments that just arrived on the train at Manassas Junction from their initial position in the Shenandoah Valley, showing the advantage of interior lines using rail transportation, which was basically almost the first time in history in which rail transportation had such a significant strategic impact and tactical impact on military operation and battle. And with these reinforcements, in late afternoon, the Confederates managed to counterattack and given the exhaustion of the Union forces, the exceeding heat of the afternoon temperature in the nineties, these fresher Confederate troops counterattacking created a panic in the Union army between about four and five o'clock in the afternoon, and converted what had been a partially successful attack earlier in the day into a retreat that turned into a rout.

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

And the Confederates drove the Union forces back across Bull Run in a panicked and chaotic retreat, and the Union army, inexperienced, all of them raw troops basically, who had never been in action before with the exception of some from the regular army who had fought out on the frontier against Indians, but this was not the same kind of fighting, in disorganization and retreat all the way back to Washington. So that first battle not only prevented

the capture of Richmond, which had been the strategic goal of the Union invasion, but pumped up Confederate morale hugely and convinced many in the South that the war was virtually over.

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

Everybody on July 21st was aware that the battle was impending and a lot of citizens, including political leaders – congressmen, senators – came out from Washington to a position on a Hill, a couple of miles from Bull Run where they brought their picnic lunches. It was really extraordinary. And to watch the battle, they couldn't see any of the battle. They could hear it, but this was a significant indication of the degree to which the people in 1861 had no idea of what kind of a war this was going to be. They thought it would be like a picnic. They could go out and watch it.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

And when the Union forces retreated in disorganized fashion, across Bull Run, they became mixed up with a lot of these civilians. A Union artillery battery was disabled at a bridge across a little creek called Cub Run. And that increased the chaos. And one congressman from New York, a guy named Albert Ely, he had come out to watch the battle, he was actually captured by the Confederates and sent to Libby prison in Richmond. Other congressmen or senators tried to rally the Union army, becoming kind of volunteer officers, but they were more or less run over by the panic-stricken retreating Union soldiers.

Lincoln's response to the defeat at Bull Run

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

Lincoln was at first of course, shocked and surprised and depressed by this, but he recovered quickly. He stayed up all night, sent out orders for other reinforcements to come to Washington, expressed a determination to double down on the war effort. The next day, under Lincoln's leadership, Congress passed legislation to recruit 500,000 new three-year volunteers. And three days later, on I think July 25th, passed a second bill calling for another 500,000.

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

Within four days of the defeat at Bull Run, both the president and Congress had expressed their determination to double down on this war effort. And Lincoln also sent orders to General George B. McClellan, who had won a number of minor battles in Western Virginia, helping to pave the way toward the creation of West Virginia as a new Union state in the Western one-third of the Confederate state of Virginia. McClellan had been the only Union general so far to win what amounted to really skirmishes rather than major battles, but that had given him a major reputation. And he was called to Washington to reorganize and organize this new large Union army to regain the momentum that had been lost at Bull Run.

George B. McClellan

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

McClellan had a charismatic personality. He was only 34 years old, but he had graduated second in his class at West Point. He had made a good record as a young officer in the Mexican War in 1846. He had risen quickly in the peace time pre-war army. General Winfield Scott had sent him as an observer for the United States army to the Crimean war in Europe, in the middle 1850s, but further promotion in the peacetime army of the 1850s was very slow and McClellan resigned from the army to take a job as a engineer on the Midwestern railroad, and then was later appointed president of another Midwestern railroad. So he had already achieved success in two spheres of American life in the United States Army and in business by the age of 34, in 1861. And to top that off, he had achieved some success in June and early July in Western Virginia.

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

So he emerged almost overnight as a kind of man on a white horse. Although I think his horse was not literally white to take command of the defeated Union army. And was an overnight hero to the American people. And it went to his head I think. He wrote to his wife and said everybody was deferring to him, the General-in-Chief, Winfield Scott, the President, the Congress, it looked

like he was the Messiah to save the Union army. And that went to his head, I think. And he came into conflict over time with General Scott as a competitor for the foremost general. General Scott of course was a General-in-Chief of the United States army and McClellan was the commander of his principal military force. But the two of them became competitors for status and power within the military establishment.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

McClellan was a wonderful organizer and administrator and a trainer. He could train troops. He could inspire them. He became very popular with the army, but what he couldn't do was fight. McClellan was a perfectionist. He was never willing to take this army into action until every last button was on every last uniform. And McClellan had a major defect in his personality as a commander too that did not become immediately evident. Although was pretty soon became evident to Lincoln and that was, he was afraid to take risks. He was afraid to fail. And if you're afraid to fail, you won't take risks. If you're afraid to fail, you won't risk failure.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

And that was the chief personality defect that undercut all of the sterling qualities that McClellan had. His charismatic personality, his administrative ability, his organizing ability, his capacity to inspire troops and to train them to a professional edge of skill. But he was it's almost as if he had built up this wonderful machine, but was afraid to run the machine for fear it might break. Break down.

Lincoln as Commander in Chief

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

Lincoln's whole life had been one of self-education. He had only spent what he called a total of one year in school by littles – by a month here a month there. And the blab schools of the frontier Indiana when he was growing up. So he was self-taught as a lawyer. He was self-taught. He taught himself Euclidean geometry for mental exercise. When he became president, his only political experience had been two years as a Congressman, a dozen years before. He had to learn everything from scratch. And that was true of his duties as commander in chief, too. So at first he basically deferred to Winfield Scott, this experienced and successful general who had 40 years of experience in the United States army. And he deferred too, to McClellan when McClellan became commander of the Army of the Potomac, but both of them disappointed him.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

And so Lincoln, whose whole career had been one of teaching himself what was necessary for him to know as a lawyer and as a politician and as a President of the United States also realized he would have to teach himself what he needed to know as commander in chief of the Union armies. And so starting in the fall of 1861, according to one of his private secretaries, John Hay, he began borrowing books on military strategy, military history, from the

Library of Congress and burning the midnight oil, literally. Boning up on this. And he rather soon became convinced that given his determination, given his experience as an autodidact, he could learn what was strategically important for him to know as commander in chief.

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

And he did so. He evolved a strategy that made use of the greater military manpower and industrial capacity of the North to win this war by attacking on all fronts simultaneously, which would prevent the Confederacy from using its interior lines and its railroad network, skimpy as that railroad network was, to move troops from one theater to another, in order to reinforce where the fighting was hottest Lincoln realized that the North should use its superior manpower and resources to access attack simultaneously everywhere.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

And so that became his determination, his strategy in 1862 to attack in the Mississippi Valley and the Tennessee River Valley and Virginia, blockade to attack the coast of North Carolina and South Carolina and Georgia. Lincoln evolved that strategy over time. And it became the strategy that ultimately won the war for the Union.

The Peninsula Campaign

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

Well, the Peninsula Campaign came about in Virginia in the spring and summer of 1862 because of McClellan's plan not to invade Virginia directly from the north, which had been the campaign that had eventuated in the Battle of Bull Run, but to take the Union Army down the coast of Virginia, to the James River and to the peninsula formed by the James River on the south and the York River on the north using the naval power of the Union forces to invade and capture Richmond, moving up from the Yorktown area southeast of Richmond using those two rivers, the York and the James River on it to protect his flanks. So Lincoln was skeptical about that. He wanted to confront the Virginians directly over land, which would shield Washington from the danger of a raid that might threaten Washington when McClellan took his army all the way southeast of Richmond.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

But McClellan in effect, talked Lincoln into giving his approval to the Peninsula campaign. So long as McClellan left behind a sufficient number of troops to defend Washington, when McClellan did not leave behind what Lincoln considered to be a sufficient number of troops to defend Washington, he was quite angry with McClellan and then he detached one large corps from McClellan's army destined for the peninsula to remain south of Washington instead, which McClellan later used as an excuse for his failure in the Peninsula campaign that Lincoln had withheld troops from him.

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

So McClellan takes 110,000 troops to the Fortress Monroe of Virginia. Lands them. Begins a siege to capture Yorktown, which also disappointed Lincoln because he has expected McClellan to use his great numerical superiority to attack immediately rather than to delay a month. It would siege warfare to defend North Yorktown. And it was the first example of that defect in McClellan's generalship, his reluctance to take risks. And as part of that reluctance to take risks, he always overestimated the size and strength of the enemy army.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Initially the Confederates had only 12 or 15,000 troops at the tip of the Virginia peninsula. And McClellan was there with 40 or 50,000 troops, eventually building up to over 100,000 and McClellan overestimated the number of troops he faced instead of attacking and overrunning them, which he clearly could have done. He settled down for a month-long siege of Yorktown. And that became the first example of repeated instances when McClellan overestimated the size of the enemy army, underestimated his own strength and used that as an excuse not to attack and to give the initiative to the other side.

McClellan's reluctance

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

McClellan had appointed Allan Pinkerton the famous Chicago detective as his intelligence chief and Pinkerton sent agents into the Confederacy, had spies in Richmond and in other parts of Virginia. And he would send back reports to McClellan that the Confederates had X and Y number of regiments under arms in Virginia. And since the theoretical strength on paper of a regiment was 1,000 men, both Pinkerton and McClellan would assume that that meant that the Confederates had the number of regiments times 1,000 men underarms. Well, McClellan should have known from the experience of his own army that regiments are never at full strength. There are always attachments, there are always men in the hospital sick. And the average regiment was half a thousand men, but that became the source of part of his overestimation of the Confederate forces.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

And the other part of it was his maybe subconscious wish to believe that the Confederate army was super strong, because that would mean he wouldn't have to attack because he was afraid of attacking. He was afraid of failing. And the consequence of these two factors meant that McClellan felt he was facing 200,000 men in the Confederate army – 200,000 – when the actual strength of the Confederates first under Joseph Johnston, and then under Robert E. Lee after Johnston was wounded at the beginning of June in the Battle of Seven Pines that Lee had at most 90,000 men. So McClellan more than doubled. And

that was typical of every campaign McClellan fought. He would always double his estimate of the size of the Confederate army.

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

So that was the source of his entire strategy in the Peninsula campaign. Initially he brought the Yorktown defenses under siege rather than attacking. Then when the Confederates retreated almost to the outskirts of Richmond and McClellan followed them up, he sat there and planned for a siege of Richmond rather than attacking the Confederates. And that gave over the initiative to Robert E. Lee, after he took command of the army of Northern Virginia, following Johnston's wounding and it was Lee who initiated the Seven Days Battles that were at the core of the Peninsula campaign and resulted in successfully defending Richmond and driving McClellan's army all the way down to Harrison's Landing on the James River and the last days of June and the first day of July of 1862.

The Peninsula Campaign

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

Well, Lincoln followed the campaign very closely from telegraphic dispatches from McClellan, and reports from other officers. He even went down personally with Secretary of War Stanton and Secretary of the Treasury

Chase at the beginning of May to visit the army and to try to goose McClellan into advancing because Lincoln had become so impatient with the siege of Yorktown that had been going on for a month at the beginning of May and early April. Lincoln had sent a forceful letter to McClellan saying I think you had better attack soon, but McClellan delayed, said that the defenses of the Confederacy were too strong, et cetera, et cetera. And Lincoln became quite disillusioned with McClellan and after the Confederates withdrew toward Richmond, just to escape the bombardment of the Yorktown defenses that McClellan was finally ready at the beginning of May to impose. Lincoln continued to send orders to McClellan to not delay any longer, to attack.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

McClellan began to resent these admonitions from Lincoln. He continued to plea for reinforcements because he believed he was outnumbered by the Confederates. Lincoln continued to send him messages saying, in effect, you've got 110,000 men. We think here that you're over estimating the Confederate forces and Lincoln's Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs had tried to analyze the Confederate numbers and had come up with a pretty accurate figure that the Confederates probably had only 80 or 90,000 men. And so Lincoln didn't believe these reports that were coming from McClellan that he was outnumbered. He was growing impatient with McClellan. When the Confederates finally launched their counterattack and McClellan didn't quite go to pieces, but he became partially panic stricken because this seemed to fulfill the prophecy that he had made, that he was outnumbered by the Confederates, who would soon use their superiority to attack him.

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

They did attack him, even though they were outnumbered and McClellan decided to retreat. He called it a change of base from Yorktown to the James River, but it was basically a retreat in the face of these Confederate attacks, even though fighting on the defensive the Union forces in the Seven Days Battle, this fighting retreat across the peninsula from the York River to the James River, imposed almost twice as many casualties on the Confederates as they suffered themselves. But again, McClellan in his own mind was defeated. His army wasn't defeated, but he was defeated and he sent panic messages to Washington. And one of them saying that in effect, you've done your best to sacrifice this army by not sending him reinforcements. Well a shocked telegrapher in the army telegraph office when he read that, removed that sentence from McClellan's message to Stanton and Lincoln, because you don't talk that way to a president of the United States.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

There were many previous occasions back in November of 1861, when McClellan was still training that army, Lincoln and Secretary of State Seward had come to see him in his residence in the evening, wanting to talk to him, McClellan was out to a wedding. He came home from that wedding, his butler or whatever major domo ran his household, informed him that the president and the secretary of state were waiting to see him and McClellan walked upstairs, went to bed and didn't even see the president of the United States.

Privately he was making derogatory comments about Lincoln and about other members of the cabinet, he called Lincoln a gorilla privately. He basically showed almost no deference publicly or privately to the President of the United States and the commander in chief of the army that he was supposedly serving.

The Second Battle of Bull Run and McClellan's insubordination

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JAMES MCPHERSON:

Well, in July, 1862 Lincoln had called general Henry Halleck from his command in the west where Union armies had been successful in gaining control of the Tennessee and Cumberland River Valleys and most of the Mississippi River Valley had called him to Washington as general in chief. Which caused resentment in McClellan's mind because he considered himself superior to Halleck. He didn't get along with Halleck, but now Halleck was over him in the hierarchy of the Union army. One of the first things Halleck did was to go to the peninsula in Virginia and under Lincoln's orders, decide whether McClellan's army ought to be withdrawn from the peninsula because the campaign had failed or should be reinforced for another effort to capture Richmond from that direction. Halleck did go to the peninsula. McClellan told him if he could be reinforced by 50,000 troops he would renew the campaign against Richmond.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Halleck went back to Washington and managed to scrape together 30,000 troops and said he would reinforce McClellan with 30,000 troops but McClellan in the meantime had decided he would need 100,000 troops in order to start the campaign again, because he was still outnumbered by those 200,000 phantom Confederates. And so Halleck said, forget it. I'm going to withdraw you to reinforce General Pope. John Pope, who had been successful in a western campaign in the Mississippi River Valley had been brought east to Virginia to command the troops that had been left behind to defend Washington when McClellan went to the peninsula, about 50,000 men. McClellan was ordered to withdraw from the peninsula and reinforce John Pope in the vicinity of Washington for a renewed campaign against the Confederacy now based in the Washington, Alexandria area, rather than the peninsula. And McClellan dragged his feet.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

He opposed this. He had nothing but contempt for John Pope and resented the fact that he was being ordered to reinforce Pope where he would presumably come under the command of Pope. He demanded to know whether outranking Pope, he would be able to overtake the command of Pope's army, as well as the army of the Potomac, dragged his feet about withdrawing from the peninsula. And when he neared Washington with the first two army corps, withdrawn from the peninsula to reinforce Pope, Pope had already become engaged in the Second Battle of Bull Run on August 29th

and 30th in the same vicinity of where the first battle had taken place 13 months earlier.

00:54:40:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

And even though he was under direct orders from Halleck to go quickly to Pope's support 25 miles from Washington, McClellan literally disobeyed these orders. No question about that. He came up with excuses about why he couldn't do it, why he should really stay in the defenses of Washington in case the Confederates evaded Pope and managed to come around his flank and threaten Washington. But Lincoln was outraged by this. And so were other members of the cabinet. Stanton wanted to cashier McClellan. Chase said he even should be shot. Gideon Wells, the Secretary of the Navy, was in favor of removing McClellan from command. Lincoln told his cabinet, told his private secretary, John Hay, that McClellan's behavior was unacceptable and disgraceful. He wanted Pope defeated, Lincoln said. Well, why not remove him from command? Because most of the cabinet wanted to remove McClellan from command. Well, Lincoln realized that McClellan, despite his disobedience, despite his failures, still had the support of the troops of the army. Still had the support, true, also of the Democratic party in the north. McClellan was a political Democrat. Lincoln was concerned about retaining Democratic support for the war effort. He knew that if he removed McClellan from command, he might face almost a mutiny in the army and he would face political revolt by elements of the Democratic party.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

And so he made the very difficult decision, a decision that I'm sure left him almost in despair. In fact, he basically told his cabinet that he was in despair about this, but he felt he had no choice. That McClellan had the army with him. And so he left McClellan in command, gave him a command of Pope's troops too, and ordered McClellan to defend Washington from any threat. And once Lee invaded Maryland in what became known as the Antietam campaign ordered McAllen to take the army and go after Lee and try to win a victory. And drive the Confederates out of Maryland.

Lincoln's path to emancipation policy

00:57:01:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Well, in the first year or so of the war, the Union goal was to restore the Union. To restore – to bring it back to the way it had been before secession, before the war began. That meant among other things minimizing the destruction in the South, because that would militate against restoration. And it meant above all, not acting against slavery. From the beginning of the war almost, Lincoln was under two kinds of pressure concerning the issue of slavery. One came from what we might call the left, the more radical wing of the Republican party, the abolitionists in the North, that because slavery had brought on this war because the Confederacy was fighting to defend slavery because there never could be peace in the United States and a real union of

the people and states. If slavery continued to undermine the institutions of the United States, that he ought to make this a war against slavery. At the same time from the Democratic party, from the border states, he was under pressure not to move against slavery. And after all, the argument went, it was because of the northern hostility to slavery that the South had seceded in the first place. So if you want to bring the South back, you can't act against slavery because that's why they left.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Well, Lincoln also believed that it was unconstitutional to act against slavery, that the United States government had no power over slavery in the states. Now they argument was beginning to be made. And Lincoln was also beginning to think in this kind of direction that under his war powers as commander in chief, while he could not attack the entire institution of slavery, he still did have those war powers to seize enemy property, being used to wage war against the United States.

01:00:11:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

And of course, slaves were enemy property. And slaves sustained the Confederate economy and the Confederate war effort through their labor. So he was beginning to move in that direction under pressure from leading Republicans who made that argument. But the main problem was: how are you going to restore the Union? Well, until I would say June of 1862, after the failure of McClellan's Peninsula campaign. Until then Lincoln was in favor of

what we might call a soft war. That is, we will defeat the enemy armies, but we will conciliate the Southern people in order to bring them back into the Union on a kind of voluntary basis. We'll win this war, but we won't destroy the enemy. But the failure of that policy, of that strategy– and that's the kind of war that McClellan believed in too. Yeah. And he's telling Lincoln, don't move against slavery. This should not be a war to destroy enemy property, it should only be a war to defeat enemy armies. When that didn't work, Lincoln was in the process of being converted to what historians now call "hard war." The only way we're going to restore this Union is to destroy the Confederacy. The only way we're going to knit the country back together again, on the basis of the institutions of the founding fathers, on the basis of the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution, is to get rid of slavery.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Lincoln's moving in that direction. And he actually makes the decision in July of 1862, after Congress has passed the Second Confiscation Act, confiscating the property, including slaves, of those who could be convicted of supporting the Confederacy. He decides that he would issue an emancipation proclamation, based on his war powers to seize enemy property being used to wage war against the United States.

01:02:53:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Such a proclamation would only apply to the States that were at war with the United States, it would not apply to border States, it would not apply to any

Confederate States that decided to come back into the Union. But it would apply in the States that were at war with the United States. Secretary of State Seward convinces Lincoln that it would be a bad time in August of 1862, after the defeats and the peninsula campaign, after the defeat at Second Bull Run, at a time when things were going badly for the North, this would look like, Seward called it, "a shriek on the retreat " – that it would be futile to issue an emancipation proclamation.

A preliminary Emancipation Proclamation

01:03:47:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

When the army of Northern Virginia invades Maryland in September of 1862 and when McClellan actually takes the initiative and attacks them along Antietam Creek near the village of Sharpsburg, on September 17, 1862, and inflicts a strategic, if not a tactical defeat on the Confederates, because Lee decides to withdraw across the Potomac for having failed in his effort to bring Maryland into the Confederacy to bring foreign recognition of the Confederacy, Lincoln decides to consider Antietam the victory that he had been waiting for to issue the Emancipation Proclamation.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

So he issues a preliminary proclamation saying that in all States that are still at war with the United States on January 1st, 1863, he will use his powers as

Commander in Chief to seize enemy property being used to wage war against the United States. That was his legitimate rationale – war powers – to confiscate slave property. But go beyond the step of confiscation and to free that property, to declare freedom. And so he issues a preliminary proclamation. Confederate States are still at war with the United States on January 1, 1863, and he issues the final proclamation, which changes the nature of the war. It changes what's at stake in this war.

The Battle of Antietam

01:05:44:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

When Lee invades Maryland in September, 1862, he realizes that he must capture Harper's Ferry, which was occupied by about 12,000, 13,000 Union troops, who would be on his flank and in his rear, and threatening him as he was invading Maryland, and really intended to move toward Pennsylvania. So he issues a special orders number 191 to several different units in the Confederate army, to move to capture the Union Garrison at Harper's Ferry, before Lee can continue to move North in this invasion. One copy of those special orders number 191 were lost by an unknown Confederate courier or Confederate officer. We don't know who it was, nobody ever confessed to losing them wrapped around three cigars. The three cigars were probably intended as a gift to General D.H. Hill, because it was the copy of the orders to General D.H. Hill that were lost.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

By a one in a million chance, the copy of the special orders number 191 wrapped around the three cigars were found by a Union Corporal and Union Sergeant in a field near Frederick, Maryland, where they had been lost. They gave McClellan all of Lee's plans for separating his army into three parts, part of it to capture Harpers Ferry, part of it to defend the gaps in the South mountain range, and part of it to be as a reserve to reinforce one or the other. And so McClellan is given this windfall, such as no general, the exact plans of the enemy. McClellan is slow to respond for reasons that are understandable. In addition to his native caution, he needed to confirm whether the actual status of the Confederate army was the same as ordered in those special orders, because it was now three or four days later. And so he sends out his cavalry scouts to find out where the different parts of the Confederate army are. And then on September 14th, fights his way through the gaps in South Mountain, defended by divided Confederate forces, and threatens to capture or destroy the rest of the Confederate army on the North side of the Potomac River, on the Maryland side of the Potomac River.

01:08:45:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Lee first believes that he needs to retreat quickly, to avoid destruction, to abandon the campaign, this ambitious campaign. But when he gets word from Stonewall Jackson that Harpers Ferry is about to surrender to him, and that Jackson can then come to Sharpsburg and reunite the Confederate army, Lee decides to stay in Maryland and continue his campaign. So he sets up a

defensive perimeter behind Antietam Creek, on high ground near the village of Sharpsburg, and awaits reinforcements from Jackson, and from the other troops that had been at Harper's Ferry, and had captured Harper's Ferry before continuing his campaign to Hagerstown and maybe into Pennsylvania. Having won the battles of South Mountain on September 14th, McClellan informs Lincoln that he has won these wonderful battles, they were really small battles. And Lincoln sends back a congratulatory message saying, "wonderful, now destroy the rebel army if possible." Those were Lincoln's actual words.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

So McClellan knows that he's under orders. In effect he realizes that if he fails again, he's done. So he attacks the Confederate defenders at Sharpsburg, between the Antietam Creek and Sharpsburg, in a battle that goes through three phases. McClellan first attacks the Confederate left flank, in what became known as the west woods, and the east woods, and the cornfield places on the Maryland farmers, that were totally anonymous until the fighting took place there. And then he attacks the Confederate center, along what became known as Bloody Lane, the Sunken Road. And then the Confederate left at Antietam Creek, after crossing what became known as Burnside's Bridge.

01:11:11:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

But the trouble with that is that these attacks were piecemeal. Early morning in the west woods and the east woods, mid day at the Sunken Road, and mid-afternoon to late afternoon near Burnside's Bridge and along Antietam Creek. And Lee is able to use the piecemeal attacks to send reinforcements from a quiet part of the battlefield, on this one-day battlefield, to reinforce the fighting. And McClellan also believes, again, that he's outnumbered. McClellan actually has about 80,000 men at Antietam, and Lee has no more than 40,000. So McClellan outnumbers him two to one. McClellan believes that Lee has 110,000 men, and that he is therefore outnumbered.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

So instead of following up the initial successes on the Union right, and the Union center against the Confederate left and Confederate center, he withholds his reserves because he fears that Lee has all these reserves that he's going to send in against him. So despite McClellan taking the initiative and being the attacking force at Antietam, he keeps fearing a counter attack, and therefore does not use his superior numbers and his initial success to exploit those successes.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

And in the end, Antietam turns out to be a drawn battle. Lee holds the position pretty much that he had at the beginning of the day. Burnside has managed to get his troops across Antietam Creek, and the Southern part of the battlefield. But that's about the only territorial success of the Union forces at Antietam. And Lee remains in place for the next day, before finally deciding

not to take any further risks, and to retreat back across the Potomac River to Virginia on September 19th. And so that becomes a strategic victory because Lee retreats. But it could have been a far greater victory, because the Confederate army lives to fight another day. In fact, several other days.

01:13:54:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Antietam was the single bloodiest day in American history. Twice as many people were killed on September 17, 1862 as were killed on September 11, 2001. 6,000 soldiers in one day were killed or mortally wounded at Antietam, about 3,000 on each side. The level and intensity of the fighting was greater there than any time previous in the war. Subsequent battles, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, would be as violent and as lethal as Antietam. But up until that time Antietam was the most lethal battle of the Civil War, and it remains today the single greatest single day death toll in American history.

Robert E. Lee's reasons for marching north before the Battle of Gettysburg

01:15:00:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Lee decided to invade Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863, for two or three different reasons. One was, I think, what we might call overconfidence. The Confederates had won major victories at Fredericksburg and at

Chancellorsville. But those two victories, while pumping up Confederate morale, dampening Northern morale, had not led to any major strategic consequences for the Confederacy. They had not forced the Lincoln administration to sue for peace or to begin peace negotiations. They had not persuaded the European countries to offer diplomatic recognition to the Confederacy. They had not led to any kind of collapse of the Northern will to continue fighting this war.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

And because they had been major Confederate victories, but had not led to strategic consequences, Lee decided he needed to use those victories as a springboard to achieve those major strategic consequences. Which he was confident he could do if he invaded Pennsylvania, and won yet another smashing victory on the scale of Chancellorsville. That surely this would force the Lincoln administration to sue for peace. Surely this would bring European recognition and perhaps assistance to the Confederacy. So that's reason number one.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Reason number two was that the Confederates were suffering defeats in the Western theater. Grant had begun, and was in the process of successfully prosecuting his Vicksburg campaign. Which would of course result in the surrender of 30,000 Confederate troops at Vicksburg on July 4, 1863. And while that had not yet happened, it was looking increasingly like it was going to happen. That would turn out to be a major, major Confederate strategic

defeat. And Lee was hoping that by invading Pennsylvania, he maybe would force the Union army to loosen its grips on Vicksburg. It was wishful thinking, but sometimes when you are looking for reasons to do something you want to do for other reasons, you engage in wishful thinking.

01:17:48:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

And the third reason was the rich Pennsylvania countryside, rich agricultural area, could be used to sustain the Confederate army. Virginia was fought over, Confederate soldiers were suffering from short rations. Confederate horses and mules were suffering from a lack of forage. Let's invade this rich Pennsylvania countryside and seize supplies. So in part, the Gettysburg campaign was a massive raid to seize cattle, horses, wheat, oats, flour, livestock, meat to feed the Confederate armies. So Lee crosses the Potomac River.

Lincoln appoints Gordon Meade

01:18:48:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

General Hooker, who has been the commander of the army of the Potomac for the last three or four months since replacing General Burnside in January, 1863, follows him North. Complaining to Lincoln, feuding with General in Chief Halleck. And Lincoln finally gets fed up with Hooker, who he says

sounds like McClellan. By overestimating the Confederate threat, by underestimating his own numbers in this campaign, and appoints George Gordon Meade, who was a kind of consensus favorite of the other Union Corps Commanders, to replace Hooker as Commander of the Army of the Potomac.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

On June 28, which turns out to be virtually the eve of the Battle of Gettysburg, Meade's orders are to shield Washington and Baltimore from this Confederate invasion, but also to go after the Confederate army. So Meade was faced with a decision on how is he going to accomplish these orders? He decides to set up a defensive position on the South bank, a small river called Pipes Creek in Maryland. But events outstrip that plan, when his advance cavalry units searching for the Confederate army in the Pennsylvania countryside, and a couple of infantry corps stationed near the Pennsylvania, Maryland border, encounter the Confederate invaders on July 1, 1863.

The Battle of Gettysburg - Day 1

01:20:48:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Gettysburg was what military analysts called an encounter battle. Neither commanding general, neither Lee nor Meade planned to fight at Gettysburg. That battle developed there because it was at the center of a road network

that made it possible for both armies to reinforce the troops that initially conflicted, just by running into each other on the morning of July 1, 1863. And the battle built up from this initial encounter.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Both sides, General Reynolds, who was commanding, and General Buford, who was commanding the Union cavalry at Gettysburg, and General Reynolds commanding the first infantry Corps, that first initially encountered the Confederates. And Henry Heath, commanding the Confederate division that ran into these troops on the morning of July 1st at Gettysburg, sent couriers pounding down the roads, asking for reinforcements, because they had run into the enemy at Gettysburg.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

And so both sides, ironically Union forces coming up from the South, and Confederates forces coming in from the west, northwest, and north. Because that's the way the armies were disposed in late June and early July, 1863. And so the battle built up. On July 1st the Confederates managed to get about 29,000 of the 75,000 troops in this invasion to Gettysburg. The Union forces managed to get about 22,000 troops to Gettysburg.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

In the morning the Union troops are quite successful in stopping the initial Confederate attacks. But in the afternoon, the Confederates were building up their reinforcements coming in from the North and the west, managed to

drive the Union forces through the town of Gettysburg and back to Cemetery Hill and Culp's Hill. And win the tactical victory on July 1st.

The Battle of Gettysburg - Day 2

01:23:09:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

On the morning of July 2, more troops from both sides have arrived. So that by July 2nd, the Confederates probably have about 65,000 men in the course of the day at Gettysburg, and the Union forces have been built up to by the afternoon of July 2nd, to maybe 75,000. Still some troops on the way from both sides who don't get there until late afternoon or evening on July 2nd.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

But the fighting on July 2nd consists of repeated Confederate attacks on such iconic places as the Wheat Field, Devil's Den, Little Round Top, Cemetery Ridge, Culp's Hill, where the Union manages to hold on to all of these positions, except the Peach Orchard, another iconic place, Peach Orchard and the Wheat Field. But they hold onto the two keys on the left flank of the Union forces, at Little Round Top, and the right flank at Culp's Hill.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

The limited tactical successes of the Confederates at both Culp's Hill and the Peach Orchard in the Wheat Field on July 2nd, convince Lee that one more

push, one more attack. Now with Pickett's division, which had not fought on the first two days and had come as the final reinforcements of the Confederate attacking the Union center, would break through the Union center and result in that smashing victory that Lee had hoped for, had anticipated in the invasion of Pennsylvania.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

The key to the mentality of Lee and Meade at Gettysburg is on the one hand Lee's overconfidence, which feeds an over-ambitious tactical plan. And Meade's defensive-mindedness, which feeds a skill in plugging holes of the various parts of the battle. Especially on July 2nd and on July 3rd at Cemetery Ridge, the famous Copse of Trees.

01:25:57:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

The Union had two factors with the Union defensive position. They are defending high ground, Little Round Top, Cemetery Ridge, Cemetery Hill, Culp's Hill in a fish hook pattern. That fish hook pattern gives them interior lines. The barb of the fish hook on Culp's Hill is only about two miles from the shank of the fish hook at Little Round Top. And troops can be shifted from one flank to another very quickly, defending high ground on both flanks.

The Confederates have exterior lines. From their left flank, facing Culp's Hill. To their right flank, facing Little Round Top, is about seven miles. And they have to go all the way around the outside of that fish hook, in order to reinforce one flank or any part of the line, by another flank or another part of

the line. So the key to the Union defensive position, and to the success of defending that defensive position on both July 2nd and July 3rd, is not only their defending the high ground, but they have interior lines.

The Battle of Gettysburg - Day 3

01:27:28:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

The Copse of Trees was the aiming point that Lee established for what is now called the Pickett Pettigrew assault, because Johnston Pettigrew was in command of about as many troops as Pickett was, among the 13,000 troops of the Confederacy that carried out that attack. That was at the center of the Union line on Cemetery Ridge. It was a point that Confederate artillery barrage that was to soften up the Union defensive position for the infantry attack, was the aiming point.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

The Confederates, about 1:00pm in the afternoon on July 3rd, let loose with about 140, maybe 150 guns, artillery cannon, against the Union center bracketed by the Copse of Trees on the right and another landmark, a group of kind of an orchard and farm houses, about maybe 800 yards to the north of that. The intention here was to pulverize the Union defensive position, so that when infantry attack came, they would have a walkover. Lee didn't necessarily really expect to walkover, but he did expect that the destruction–

sort of like in World War I, it would precede all of the infantry attacks by a heavy artillery barrage. That was the idea Lee had on July 3rd at Gettysburg.

So they launched this artillery barrage, it goes on for well over an hour. Unbeknownst to Lee and to the Confederate artillery commanders, most of the Confederate shells started going long, too far. All of the smoke from the Union artillery firing back and the Confederate, this was before smokeless gunpowder. Because Union artillery was firing back at the Confederate artillery, the Confederates did not realize that most of their shots were going two or three hundred yards beyond the principal Union line on Cemetery Ridge.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

So the Confederate artillery barrage did much less damage than Lee had anticipated and hoped for. When the infantry finally went forward, about 2:45pm in the afternoon, in almost parade ground order. As they moved out from the woods and crossed the open three quarters of a mile of farm fields, pasture, wheat fields, corn fields, Union artillery began bursting among the advancing Confederate infantry. As they got closer and closer to the Union line, the Union artillery switched over to canister, which is like a huge sawed-off shotgun.

01:30:55:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

And as they got within a couple hundred yards, crossing the Emmitsburg Road, Union infantry behind stone walls, behind hastily thrown up trench

lines, concentrated on the front of maybe 300 or 400 yards wide, near that Copse of Trees. And basically wiped out all three of Pickett's Brigade Commanders, 14 of his 15 regimental commanders were killed or wounded. It was the highest percentage of Pettigrew's troops, mostly North Carolinians were killed or wounded.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

At least 50% of all the Confederate soldiers who went forward were killed, wounded, or captured. 29 battle flags, regimental battle flags, Confederate battle flags were captured. The largest harvest of enemy flags, and it's the greatest disgrace a regiment can suffer, to have its colors captured. 29 regimental colors were captured. It was the greatest Confederate tactical disaster of the war, and of course, that night, Lee made the decision to retreat, his whole campaign having been a failure. The Confederates in the Battle of Gettysburg itself suffered probably some 24,000 casualties and in the retreat, maybe another 4,000 casualties.

The significance of Lee's defeat at Gettysburg

01:32:56:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Well, it was the last major offensive operation of the Confederate army of Northern Virginia. It struck a heavy blow to Confederate morale, especially in

combination with the simultaneous, on July 4th, surrender at Vicksburg. It pumped up Union morale significantly.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

So the morale equation, which is important, Napoleon had said that morale is the most important factor in war, and I think you could make that case for the Battle of Gettysburg and its consequences for both Northern and Southern morale. Not only morale on the armies, but morale on the homefront. You can make the argument, even though the war lasted for almost two more years after Gettysburg, that it was the major turning point where the Confederates, who had been on a roll through the winter and spring of 1863, were now suffering from defeat. Desertion rates went up in the Confederate army, especially among North Carolina troops and some Virginia troops. Now the momentum had shifted from the Confederacy to the Union forces after the 4th of July 1863, and even though the war went on for almost two more years, that shifted morale in momentum, and in morale was, I think, decisive in the long run.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Well it punctured an aura of invincibility, not only in Lee, but in the army he commanded. I think the Confederates had marched, the Confederate soldier, the common soldier had marched into Pennsylvania thinking that his army was invincible. Lee thought his army was invincible. He actually said that in remarks to General Hood, one of his senior division commanders. He said,

"This army is invincible. It will march. It will go anywhere and do anything if properly led."

01:35:20:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Well, they lost some of their leaders in the Battle of Gettysburg. Hood went down. He came back, he went down. A lot of other Confederate commanders were killed or mortally wounded. Pickett's morale went into a steep decline. That was true for a lot of other Confederate officers as well. They no longer believed themselves invincible, and Lee, I think, realized that from now on, he was going to have to fight with his back to the wall, at least metaphorically, if not literally.

The Confederates' safe retreat after Gettysburg

01:36:10:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Lincoln hoped that the Union victory at Gettysburg would have the kind of strategic consequences that Lee had hoped for in invading Pennsylvania in the first place. That is, that if Meade could follow up this tactical victory with a pursuit that would prevent the Confederates from getting back across the Potomac River free of further damage, that in combination with the surrender of Vicksburg, which he received news within days of the Battle of Gettysburg, it would mean an end to the war.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

That two of the three principal Confederate armies, the one captured at Vicksburg and the one that was defeated at Gettysburg, if Meade could follow it up and do what Grant had been able to do at Gettysburg, it would end the war. It would make it impossible for the Confederates to continue fighting. So Lincoln has General Halleck, General-in-Chief, send a series of messages to Meade to pursue Lee with vigor, attack him again before he can get over the Potomac River. Days of heavy rain that took place after the Battle of Gettysburg had put the Potomac River almost at flood stage, and Union cavalry had captured the Confederate pontoon bridge.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

So the Confederates were trapped for 10 days north of the Potomac River without being able to get safely back to Virginia. During those 10 days, Lincoln sends message after message trying to get Meade to move more quickly to attack. Meade actually takes a vote of his core commanders and senior commanders, and they vote against attacking the strong defensive position the Confederates had set up at Williamsport, Maryland on July 11th to defend their people building a new pontoon bridge across the Potomac and waiting for the river to go down so they can get back. Meade sends word back to Lincoln that he will attack the next day unless something happens, and Lincoln, who had become a cynic about these professions of first McClellan, and then now Meade being ready to attack unless something happens to forestall it, said, "Well, something is bound to happen to prevent the attack," and that's what did happen.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

When Meade finally went forward on a probing attack on the morning of July 14th to see whether he could carry out the attack and see whether the Confederates were still in a strong defensive position north of the Potomac River, he found nothing but a rear guard. Overnight and in the early morning of July 13th and 14th, the Confederates had finally gotten the new pontoon bridge built, and that was at a place called Falling Waters about three miles south of the main defensive position of the Confederates, and they had gotten across that bridge, and at the other position, they'd gotten across a ford. The river had gone on just enough so that they could wade to cross it on a ford, the river was up to their armpits. So they got away, and Lincoln was profoundly, I think it's fair to say that he was really depressed by this news, and he sat down and wrote a letter to Meade saying, in effect, "You've missed a great chance of the war. You let Lee get away. We had a chance to finish up this war, and you've punted."

01:40:35:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

This is basically the message that Lincoln wrote in this letter to Meade. When Lincoln read over the letter, he realized that if he sent it, Meade would submit his resignation, that this was too much, so Lincoln, which was not untypical for him, decided not to send the letter, and filed it away in his papers, but Meade knew that he was in the doghouse with Lincoln. He offered to resign anyhow, and Lincoln refused to accept the resignation. Lincoln never really changed his mind about Meade's missed opportunity, and when Grant finally

came east in the spring of 1864 to become the new General-in-Chief and made his headquarters with the Army of the Potomac, Lincoln was not unwilling to see Grant, in effect, supersede Meade, because Grant was not only General-in-Chief, but in effect, Commander of the Army of the Potomac, because he made his headquarters with the Army of the Potomac, and Meade was subject to his orders.

Ulysses S. Grant

01:42:09:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Well Grant, who was an obscure figure at the beginning of the war, first achieved prominence by his capture of Fort Donelson and Fort Henry in February 1862, and after stumbling a bit, but nevertheless winning the Battle of Shiloh in April 1862, Grant then had more successes in later 1862, and in the Vicksburg campaign, which captured Vicksburg in July 1863. Those stumbles by Grant at Shiloh and in the early stages of the Vicksburg campaign, and persistent rumors that Grant was drunk on several occasions, that he had been a failure in his earlier career, and he was a failure again, put a lot of pressure on Lincoln in the spring of 1862, and the summer of 1862, and again in the winter and early spring of 1863, when things didn't seem to be going so well for Grant, to get rid of him.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

But Lincoln saw something in Grant that he never saw in McClellan, that he didn't see in Meade, that he didn't see in his other generals. A determination, a willingness to fight, a willingness to take risks, a willingness to follow up on victories, a willingness to do what his other generals would not do, a willingness to face failure and to surmount failure.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

So Grant remained in Lincoln's good graces through the entire war, through thick and thin, through success and failure, because of these personal qualities of Grant, which Lincoln saw, which he recognized, and which he, against frequent recommendations by others to get rid of Grant, saw through all of those things and stuck with Grant. I think it was the partnership of Lincoln and Grant, and, of course, on the military level, of Lincoln and Sherman that ultimately won the war for the North.

01:44:54:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Lincoln once sent a message to Grant. This was during the Petersburg campaign. Grant had sent a message to Lincoln saying that he was going to stay with the siege of Petersburg, and Lincoln responded to him by saying, "That's exactly right. Hold on with a bulldog grip, and gnaw, and chew until you overcome." That is exactly Grant's idea of strategy to win this war. Hold on with a bulldog grip, and chew, and choke. At another time, talking about Grant's confrontation of the army of Northern Virginia at Petersburg, and having them basically in the grip that they could not get away, at the same

time that Sherman was marching through Georgia and then through South Carolina and destroying Confederate resources, Lincoln said that, "Grant has the bear by the leg while Sherman takes off its hide." That was Lincoln's way of describing the war-winning strategy in 1864 and 1865.

Grant and the Wilderness Campaign

01:46:26:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

When the Union army crossed the Rapidan River on May 4th, 1864, in what came to be known as the Overland Campaign, they entered an area of scrub woods, and scrub oak, and pine woods called the Wilderness of Virginia. Limited visibility. Armies can't operate there, and they came to grips with each other, the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia in this area. It was a two day battle, heavy fighting. The leaves, and leaf mold and pine needles on the forest floor were set afire by shells, explosion, heavy fighting, heavy casualties. Grant repeatedly attacked, but failed to break through. In the late afternoon of the second day, actually twice on the second day of May 6th, 1864, Confederates counterattacked, and inflicted heavy casualties on the Army of the Potomac. This was the same area where the Battle of Chancellorsville had taken place exactly one year earlier.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

After the Battle of Chancellorsville, General Hooker had retreated, had given up, retreated back across the Rappahannock River. After the Battle of the Wilderness, which seemed to be as much of a Union failure, at first, as the Battle of Chancellorsville had been, most of the officers and men in the Army of the Potomac expected Grant to order a retreat back across the Rapidan or Rappahannock River. When they got orders to move on the evening of May 7th, everybody expected that this was to be a move back across the river, but when, instead, they turned south and moved towards Spotsylvania Courthouse, where the next major phase of the Overland Campaign, and the next bloody and brutal battle took place, they actually broke out in cheers and song, because they now realized that they had a commander who didn't know the word defeat, who did not know the word retreat.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Even though the Battle of the Wilderness was not a Union victory, it may even be interpreted as a Confederate victory, Grant didn't take it as a defeat. Grant did not view any single battle, like the Wilderness, or Spotsylvania, or Cold Harbor, as decisive. He did not think in terms of a battle, he thought in terms of the campaign. The important thing was the campaign. The important thing was not tactical victory or tactical defeat, but strategic victory or strategic defeat.

01:49:28:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

So while it took 11 months, from May 1864 to April 1865 and involved many Union tactical defeats during that course, this campaign was a strategic victory, because Grant never regarded tactical defeats as being decisive. What was really decisive was to get the surrender, and therefore the destruction, of the Confederate Army and its ability to keep fighting the resistance.

The end of the Civil War

01:50:05:00

James McPherson:

So when in April 1865 the Confederates realized that they had to abandon their lines at Petersburg and Richmond and retreat to try to join up with Johnston's army in North Carolina to continue fighting, and Grant raced to pursue and to try to get ahead of the Confederates and prevent their movement down to North Carolina, to join with Johnston to continue the war, the two armies confronted each other when the Union forces beat the Confederates to Appomattox, blocked their further retreat, and Lee recognized that the jig was up. He had no more cards in his hand and he said, "I would rather do anything else, but I must go meet with General Grant and surrender this army." He realized that the Confederacy could no longer continue this war, and he opposed carrying on the war as a guerilla resistance against the Northern armies, because he realized that that would destroy everything in the South.

Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House

01:51:38:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

On the morning of April 9th, the Confederates tried a breakout attack to continue their retreat southward from Appomattox Courthouse, but they found two Union Army Corps standing in their way, and they realized that they could no longer carry on the fight. So they sent out a white flag and sent a message. Lee and Grant had been exchanging messages for the past two or three days, written messages, Grant telling Lee, "You must realize that you can't continue the fight, and to avoid the further effusion of blood, I think you should surrender the Army of Northern Virginia." Lee resists this with a couple of written responses to Grant, but now he realizes that he doesn't have any choice but surrender. so he sends another note to Grant offering to meet him to surrender his army.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

They select the large house of Wilmer McLean, who ironically, his first plantation had been at Bull Run back in July 1861. Because he realized that much of the war would take place in that part of Virginia, he decided to move to a quiet sector of Virginia, which was Appomattox. The war came to his living room on April 9th, 1865, when Grant met with Lee to arrange the terms. At first, Lee arrived, dressed in his dress uniform with his best sword, and its scabbard, and Grant, who had had to ride cross country to get to Appomattox, because he had been in a different part of the battlefield area,

got there with his muddy boots. Lee offered him his sword, but Grant said, "Forget it. I'm not interested in your sword," and Grant and Lee chatted over old times when they were both in the United States Army and fought in Mexico, helped to capture Mexico City. It looked like this conversation about old times might go on for a while. Lee said, "Well, maybe we ought to take care of the business that we are here for."

JAMES MCPHERSON:

So Grant sat down and wrote out his terms of surrender, which were basically that the Confederates would turn in all their arms and would sign paroles not to take up arms until formally paroled under the parole agreement that had been in effect since 1862. Take up arms again. Basically, it was a surrender document, but it was called a parole document. Lee said to him, "Well, these terms are acceptable. They're very generous." Grant further said that, "As long as the soldiers who signed their paroles in the surrender, go home and remain at peace, they will not suffer any further punishment by the United States government." When, months later, the Johnson administration, after Lincoln had been assassinated, wanted to try Lee for treason, Grant threatened to resign, because he said that would be a violation of the parole terms, which said that as long as they do not take up arms against the Union, they will suffer no further punishment from the United States government and the United States Army.

01:55:41:00

JAMES MCPHERSON:

Lee said, "In our army, the members of the cavalry and the artillery own their own horses. They're not government-issue horses. I see you'd say nothing about allowing them to keep their horses." Grant said, "Well, that's not in the surrender document, but I will allow every man who claims to own a horse to take it home so he can begin farming again and bring about the revival of the Southern economy and the maintenance of peace between the United States and the Southern people." So the document was one very generous in its surrender terms, and it was the first step toward actually bringing comity again between the two sides which had fought this most bitter war against each other.

JAMES MCPHERSON:

The war had begun as a war to restore the Union, and Union war strategy had begun with the idea of reconciliation between the North and South so that the Union could be restored, the two sides could be reunited and could proceed with good will toward a better future. Over time, that had evolved into a war to destroy the Confederacy, to destroy the old South, but now the policy swung back toward reconciliation, toward restoring the union, and the surrender document at Appomattox was the first step toward that reconciliation, toward that reuniting of the two sides that had fought this most bitter war, but now we're looking forward to a better country to build back better, if you will, in a peaceful and restored union.

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