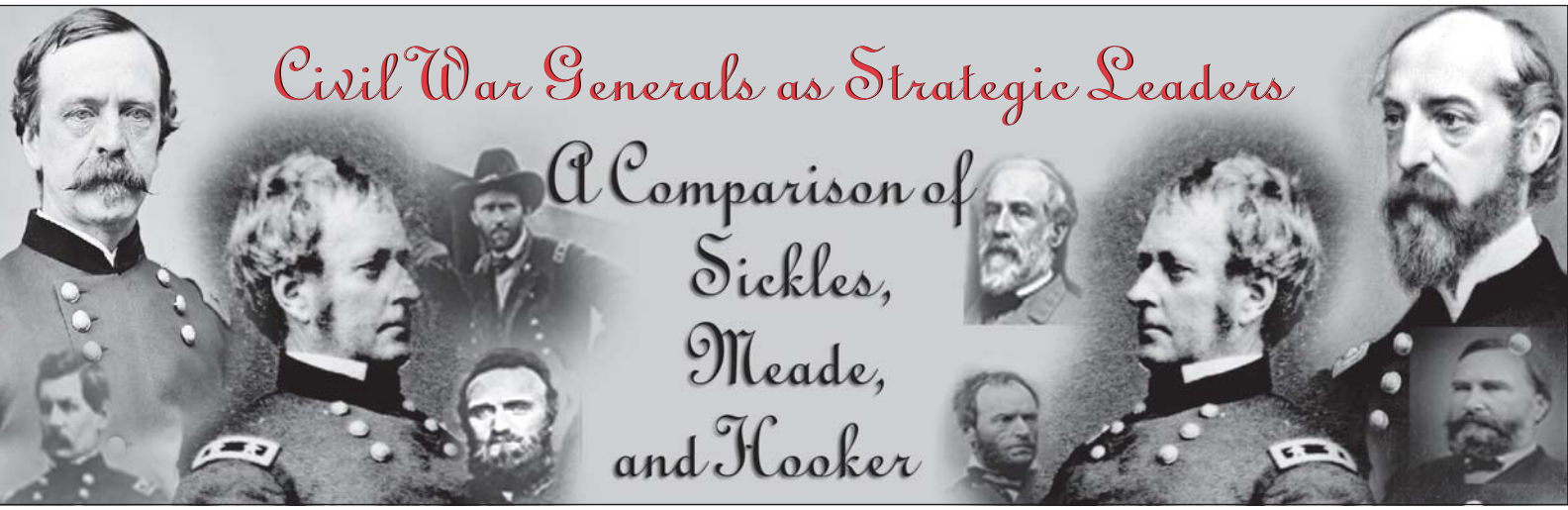


By Dr. Richard Swain

A longer version of this article was submitted toward the requirements of a Master of Strategic Studies degree at the United States Army War College in April 2005. The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or positions of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

The strategic leadership tasks listed in Field Manual (FM) 22-100, *Army Leadership*, are really broad concepts. (The same concepts also are in FM 6-22, *Army Leadership*, which replaced FM 22-100 in October 2006.)[1] This article will consider the following broad strategic leadership tasks:

- Provide vision
- Shape the culture
- Manage joint, combined, and interagency relationships
- Manage national-level relationships
- Represent the organization
- Lead
- Manage change

Do these concepts apply to the past as well as the future? A valid concept is defined as *"an abstract or symbolic tag that attempts to capture the essence of reality. The 'concept' is later converted into variables to be measured."*[2] These strategic leadership tasks can be used to analyze the leadership of past Army leaders. They enable students of strategy to "capture the essence of reality," to look back and compare leaders, and thus gain insights into our own strategic leadership. This article compares the performance of three Union Army generals as strategic leaders in the Civil War: Major Generals Daniel E. Sickles, George G. Meade, and Joseph Hooker.

These strategic leadership tasks are doctrinally relevant to contemporary warfare, especially the strategic challenge of managing joint, combined, and interagency relationships. For the Army of the Potomac, interagency relationships were different, but no less important. The connection between current doctrine and historical situations may be tenuous, but it can also yield worthwhile insights into issues of strategic leadership.

Provide Vision

"The strategic leader's vision provides the ultimate sense of purpose, direction, and motivation for everyone in the organization. It is at once the starting point for developing specific goals and plans, a yardstick for measuring what the organization accomplishes, and a check on organizational values. Ordinarily, a strategic leader's vision for the organization may have a time horizon of years, or even decades. In combat, the horizon is much closer, but strategic leaders still focus far beyond the immediate actions."[3]

The time horizon for Sickles, Meade, and Hooker extended over weeks and months, not years. During the Civil War, general officers were wounded and killed at a rate 50 percent greater than that of ordinary Soldiers. Therefore, the ability to provide vision over the long term was limited. Even so, each leader provided some vision to his command. Sickles was in command of the 3d Corps of the Army of the Potomac from February to July 1863; Meade had command of the Army of the Potomac from 28 June 1863 until 27 June 1865; and Hooker had from January to June 1863 to provide the Army of the Potomac his vision.

Sickles' pragmatic approach and political acumen far outmatched those of others in the Army. The clique of West Point officers considered him a "political general," given

command despite his lack of experience. This determination of amateur and professional Soldier was quite flimsy, since corps and army command was unknown to the senior leaders in the Civil War. The only officer with experience in corps or army command was Major General Winfield Scott; however, Scott had commanded fewer than 12,000 men in Mexico. Sickles' 3d Corps fielded 11,924 Soldiers on 2 July 1863, down from the 39,000 at the beginning of the war. An example of Sickles' vision can be seen in his first meeting with President Abraham Lincoln. Sickles was frustrated in his efforts to raise his regiment in 1861, since the Republican governor of New York refused to muster in Sickles' Democratic volunteers. Sickles then went to Washington and presented his argument to President Lincoln and Secretary of War Simon Cameron, who agreed to a new category of Soldiers—United States Volunteers. Sickles outmaneuvered the governor of New York and was given a commission. He was also the only amateur who stayed in the Army at the close of hostilities, serving as the ambassador to Spain during President Ulysses S. Grant's administration.

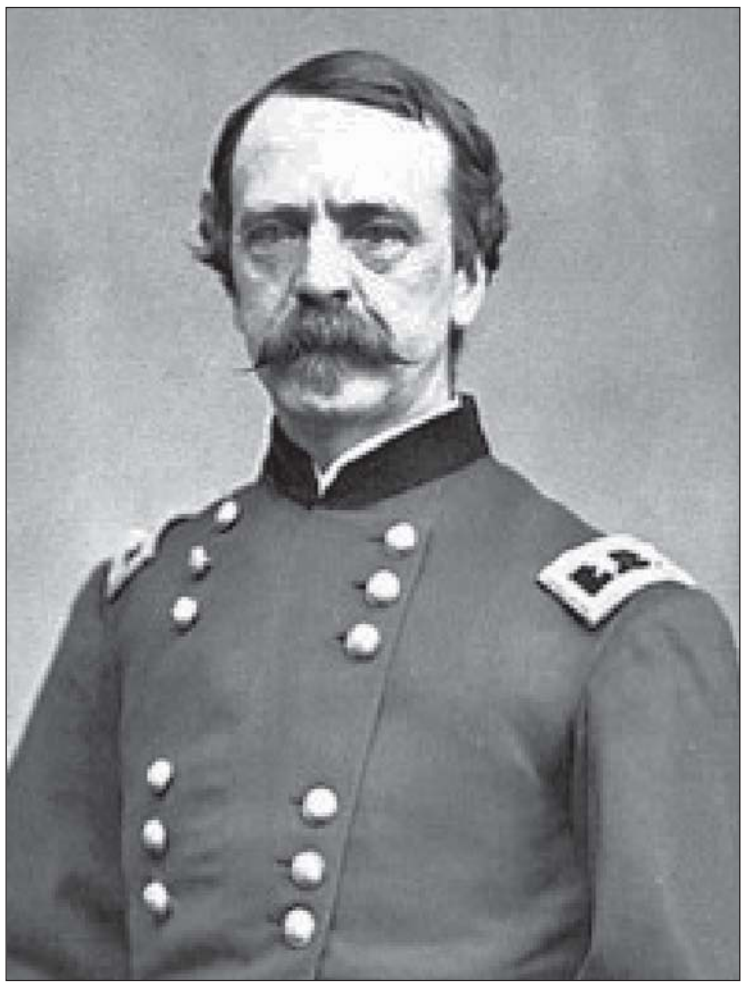
Meade's vision for the Army could be seen in his trust in a subordinate. Meade gave command of one wing of the Army to Major General John Reynolds, who had been captured at the same Battle of Glendale, Virginia, in which Meade was severely wounded. Reynolds returned to the Army after his parole, and Meade entrusted him (a fellow Pennsylvanian) with half of the Army of the Potomac. With only three days in command before Gettysburg, Meade was Lincoln's second choice to command the Army. Reynolds had been Lincoln's first choice, but he turned Lincoln down because of the untenable command relationship between the Army and the White House. In the preceding three years, the Army of the Potomac had four commanders—Brigadier General Irvin McDowell and Major Generals George McClellan, Ambrose Burnside, and Joseph Hooker. The level of trust between the commander in chief and his generals was low.

Meade was thrust into a command that he felt obligated to assume. The order to take command reached him at 0300 as the Army of the Potomac was on the move, tracking the second invasion of the North by the Army of Northern Virginia. Meade's decision to entrust a subordinate changed the direction of senior leader relationships in the Army of the Potomac. This provided a sense of direction, purpose, and motivation for the Army.

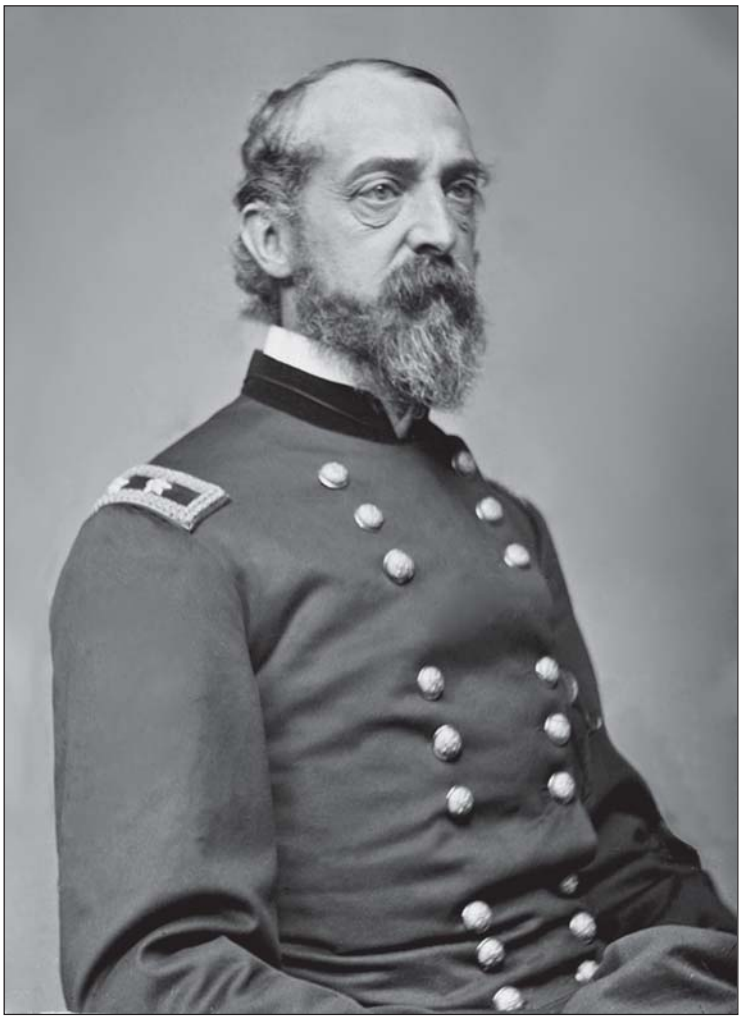
Meade's strategic vision was simply to eject the invaders from his home state. The victory message he sent to the Army of the Potomac after Gettysburg included a phrase about removing the invaders from "our soil." But Lincoln was absolutely aghast at the phrase and reprimanded Meade; Lincoln believed that "our soil" should refer to all the soil, both Confederate and Union. Meade's oversight revealed his lack of strategic vision regarding national objectives and goals. He was misrepresented in the press because of his treatment of journalists in his headquarters. He regarded them as a hindrance to his goals, rather than a means of reinforcing the national goals of the war.

"Sickles' pragmatic approach and political acumen far outmatched those of others in the Army."

Hooker is described in biographies as a braggart, a drinker, and a womanizer who rewarded his friends with high command. One of his initial moves was to place Sickles in command of the 3d Corps, an appointment that overlooked the more senior Major General Oliver Howard. But why would Hooker promote Sickles over Howard? The character of the two men could not have been more different. Howard was a devout Christian who prayed over his men and passed out religious tracts in the hospital. Sickles was a pragmatic, hard-drinking womanizer who fit into Hooker's command climate and vision. Hooker



Major General Daniel E. Sickles



Major General George G. Meade

gave Howard command of the 11th Corps after the resignation of Major General Franz Sigel, who was upset at Hooker's promotion over him. The 11th Corps was made up of mostly hard-drinking German immigrants who had escaped religious oppression back home. Hooker may have intended to put the priggish Howard in a no-win situation by making him the leader of such a rowdy corps. Certainly morale in the corps suffered, which could explain the 11th Corps debacle at Chancellorsville. Hooker seemed to lack vision in placing senior leaders in these commands.

Shape the Culture

"Strategic leaders inspire great effort. To mold morale and motivate the entire Army, strategic leaders cultivate a challenging, supportive, and respectful environment for Soldiers and [Department of the Army] civilians to operate in. An institution with a history has a mature, well-established culture—a shared set of values and assumptions that members hold about it. At the same time, large and complex institutions like the Army are diverse; they have many subcultures, such as those that exist in the civilian and reserve components, heavy and light forces, and special operations forces. Gender, ethnic, religious, occupational, and regional differences also define groups within the force."[4] Sickles, Meade, and Hooker were all challenged to shape strong cultures in their commands.

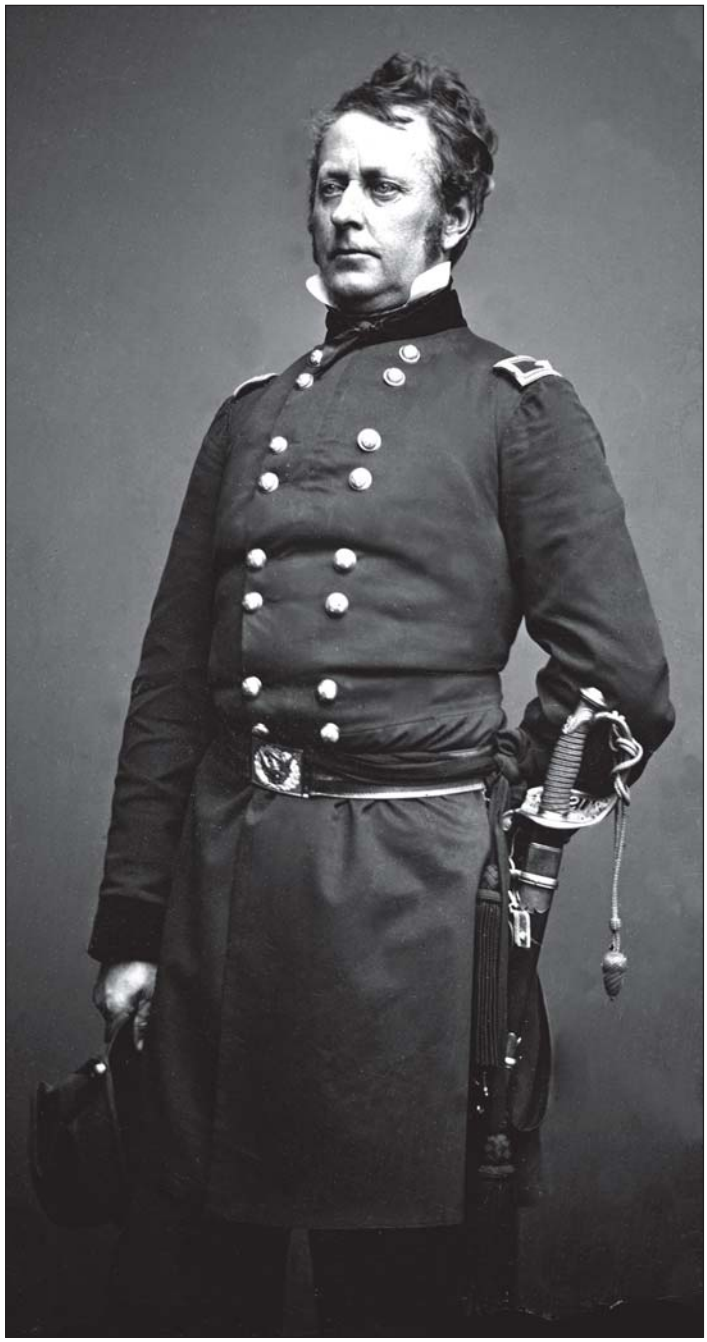
Sickles was well respected by his men. Decisive and brave, he could shape and motivate his portion of the Army. However, he was quick to blame others for failure. He believed his actions on the second day at Gettysburg won the battle. He was evacuated to the rear after his leg was amputated by an artillery round in the vicinity of the Peach Orchard, and he quickly gave the press his account of his corps's action. He then preempted critics and used his influence in Congress and in the press to undercut Meade. Sickles' account to the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War directly countered Meade's account of the Battle of Gettysburg. The West Point clique regarded Sickles as a loose cannon. Major General Henry Halleck's statement sums up the opinion of the West Point clique that political generals were "simply murder" and responsible for Union failures in the beginning of the war. Congress was critical of the West Pointers' efforts to blame nonprofessional Soldiers for the Army's poor performance. Instead, Congress and the newspapers placed the blame on the incompetence of the West Pointers. The ensuing culture of animosity between the militia officer corps and the Regular Army officer corps is still evident to this day. After the war, the dominance of either the militia system or the professional army would shape Army culture. Sickles was a charismatic, pragmatic political operator, but an amateur Soldier in the eyes of the West Point officers. His apparent success made the argument more difficult. Could a political figure lead a corps or division just as readily as a trained professional officer? Sickles proved that a charismatic political leader could.

Meade shaped the culture of the Army of the Potomac by his victory at Gettysburg. He had gained a reputation for being short-tempered and obstinate with junior officers and superiors alike, and he especially disdained civilians and newspapermen.[5] He believed that militia officers were incapable of leading corps and armies, and the testimony he gave to the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War undercut Sickles' assertions and corrected misrepresentations of the facts of the Battle of Gettysburg. Meade's reputation was sullied by his testimony, but he retained the confidence of the commander, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant. Grant's confidence in Meade and in the culture that he had created was probably one reason that Grant left him in command of the Army of the Potomac.

> "Meade shaped the culture of the Army of the Potomac by his victory at Gettysburg."

Hooker shaped a culture of political backstabbing. He undercut each of his commanders, yet he was able to create a positive relationship with Congress and the media. He supplied the media with information that would damage senior officers. The charges of insubordination that Burnside brought against Hooker after the Battle of Fredericksburg were most likely true. However, Lincoln relieved Burnside and placed Hooker in command of the Army of the Potomac, due in part to Hooker's political ability. Hooker believed in cronyism, and the system gave him loyal subordinates; however, it overlooked the professional skills and abilities of men who were not cronies. Hooker also shaped a culture of mistrust between himself and headquarters. Lincoln placed Halleck over Hooker, which probably led to Hooker's resignation. The message traffic between Hooker, Halleck, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, and Lincoln—leading up to Hooker's resignation—offers an example of individuals talking past each other. Hooker could have shaped a culture that supported the administration if he had accepted Lincoln's invitation to meet on 13 June 1863. The meeting might have strengthened Hooker's relationship with the commander in chief before Lee's invasion. The rejection of Lincoln's request to meet seems to have sealed Hooker's fate.

"Hooker was confident in his ability to do a better job than those assigned to the command before him..."



Major General Joseph Hooker

Manage Joint, Combined, and Interagency Relationships

"Strategic leaders oversee the relationship between their organizations, as part of the nation's total defense force, and the national policy apparatus. They use their knowledge of how things work at the national and international levels to influence opinion and build consensus for the organization's missions, gathering support of diverse players to achieve their vision."[6] These Civil War leaders did not effectively establish the relationship between their organizations and the rest of the nation's total defense force.

Sickles did not build consensus within his corps. He ignored the advice of subordinates, peers, and superiors on the second day of Gettysburg, when he moved his corps into an exposed position—contrary to Meade's orders—and put the entire Army of the Potomac at risk. Sickles had no knowledge of how his action affected the total defense force, and his actions at Gettysburg exemplify poor strategic leadership. However, his actions after the war to make Gettysburg a national battlefield memorial offer a positive example of strategic leadership. His quest for battlefield preservation left a legacy that supports our nation's defense to this day.

Meade did build consensus among his senior officers around midnight of the first day of Gettysburg in the decision to stay and fight. However, he did not manage joint, combined, and interagency relationships very well. He failed to recognize the strategic objective of pursuing and destroying the Army of Northern Virginia after the battle and did not understand the strategic significance of trapping Lee's army north of the Potomac River. He did not recognize the relationship between his organization and the nation's total defense.

Hooker did not understand his comprehensive role as the commanding general of the Army of the Potomac and used the historical precedents of Burnside and McClellan to determine his role. He viewed his position as we now see a combatant commander—such as the commander of the United States European Command or the United States Central Command—with a direct reporting responsibility to the Secretary of Defense and the President. After the Battle of Chancellorsville, Hooker was subordinate to Halleck. The following message specified his subordinate position:

WASHINGTON, June 16, 1863—10 p.m.

Major General Hooker:

To remove all misunderstanding, I now place you in the strict military relation to General Halleck of a commander of one of the armies to the general-in-chief of all the armies. I have not intended differently, but as it seems to be differently understood, I shall direct him to give you orders and you to obey them.

A. Lincoln

Hooker found this command relationship unacceptable, which resulted in his request for resignation.

Manage National-Level Relationships

"Strategic leaders identify military conditions necessary to satisfy political ends desired by America's civilian leadership. They must synchronize the efforts of the Army with those of the other services and government agencies to attain those conditions and achieve the end state envisioned by America's political leaders. To operate on the world stage, often in conjunction with allies, strategic leaders call on their international perspective and relationships with policy makers in other countries."[7] These Civil War leaders had little need to act on the world stage. However, they did have an obligation to meet the end state envisioned by America's political leaders.

Sickles was committed to the cause of suppressing the rebellion. His motivation may be seen as consistent with his self-aggrandizement. He needed a way to restart his political career after his murder of Barton Key, which resulted from Key's affair with Sickles' young wife. The temporary insanity defense so adeptly presented by his lawyer, future Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, saved Sickles from the gallows. But his forgiveness of his unfaithful wife outraged his political base. He needed to resurrect his political fortunes, and the war thrust him back into the limelight. He was able to operate on the national and international levels. His relationship with Lincoln, Stanton, Grant, and the Congress served him well through the war and beyond. He may have been a scoundrel acting only for his own benefit, but that does not necessarily detract from the service he performed for his nation.

Meade was a professional Soldier who placed Pennsylvania first and had difficulty pursuing the political ends desired by civilian leadership. Although he was obstinate with seniors, he accomplished difficult missions. His units were the only ones that broke the Confederate line at Fredericksburg, and he was the trusted second in command to Hooker at Antietam. Meade commanded the corps after Hooker was wounded at Antietam; however, Meade—the professional, no-nonsense Soldier—had a difficult time understanding the strategic intent of President Lincoln after the Battle of Gettysburg and failed to pursue and destroy the Army of Northern Virginia as Lincoln desperately desired.

Hooker was confident in his ability to do a better job than those assigned to the command before him, and he bragged that he could do it better than anyone else. This overconfidence spelled disaster for him at Chancellorsville, where he was unable to accomplish the ends designated by the political leadership. He did not seem to have a political affiliation, and Lincoln saw his nonpartisanship as an advantage when placing him in command. Perhaps after the debacles of McClellan and Burnside, Lincoln saw in this braggart someone who could bring about a victory. Some would say that Lincoln had few other choices in January 1863. McClellan had "the slows," and Burnside orchestrated the disaster at Fredericksburg. Hooker had bragged that he could whip "Bobby" Lee, but he was unable to carry out his boasts and achieve the end state envisioned by America's political leaders.

Represent the Organization

"Whether by nuance or overt presentation, strategic leaders vigorously and constantly represent who the Army is, what it's doing, and where it's going. The audience is the Army itself, as well as the rest of the world. There's an especially powerful responsibility to explain things to the American people, who support their Army with money and lives. Whether working with other branches of government, federal agencies, the media, other militaries, the other services, or their own organizations, strategic leaders rely increasingly on writing and public speaking (conferences and press briefings) to reinforce the Army's central messages. Because so much of this communication is directed at outside agencies, strategic leaders avoid parochial language and remain sensitive to the Army's image."[8] These Civil War leaders provide a message about the Army in the past. They present an image of a professional force being created in a republic that distrusted a standing military. These officers vigorously represented the Army to the nation.

Sickles exemplifies the long-term representation of the sacrifices that Union Soldiers made. He headed up the monument commission that preserved and honored the sacrifices of those who died in the conflict and was instrumental in preserving the Gettysburg battlefield. When Sickles was asked about a monument to himself, he replied that the entire battlefield was a monument to him. In many ways, that is an accurate statement. Sickles did provide a strategic representation of the Army to us and to our posterity.

Meade represented the Army well as the hero of Gettysburg. He continued to command the Army of the Potomac until the

end of the war. He reinforced the Army's central message that a professional Army was needed by the nation and was promoted to the Regular Army rank of major general. Actions taken by Grant assured control of the Army to the professional Soldiers after the war, but Meade did not explain the Army story to civilians or newspapers since he had no patience with them.

Hooker is known to have structured the Army into separate corps with recognizable insignias, enabling it to join units from different states into cohesive, recognizable corps. His efforts were communicated within the Army and helped enhance its morale. His boasting and bravado provided the Army with confidence in its ability to defeat the Army of Northern Virginia. Even if the bravado was false, it communicated the confidence that the commanding general had in the Army he commanded. Hooker instilled considerable pride in the Army.

Lead and Manage Change

"Strategic leaders deal with change by being proactive, not reactive. They anticipate change even as they shield their organizations from unimportant and bothersome influences; they use the 'change-drivers' of technology, education, doctrine, equipment, and organization to control the direction and pace of change. Many agencies and corporations have 'futures' groups charged with thinking about tomorrow; strategic leaders and their advisory teams are the Army's 'futures people'."[9] These Civil War strategic leaders were caught by changing technology—especially the introduction of the rifled musket—that was not accompanied by the requisite change in doctrine and organization. The rifled musket provided a technology that challenged all the paradigms that these leaders believed, yet they remained wedded to the Napoleonic doctrine of warfare. Rather than dealing with the change by being proactive, they were reactive, and by the end of the war the era of trench warfare had begun. It was a solution forced on the strategic leaders in response to the withering lethality of a new weapon.

Conclusion

Sickles, Meade, and Hooker successfully carried out some of the strategic leadership tasks. It may be unfair to judge these 19th century leaders by a modern standard of strategic leadership tasks, because the atmosphere and environment in which they served were much different. During the Civil War, the Army was a small regular force filled out with militia. The professional West Pointers were both the heroes and heels of the war. In the beginning, Congress blamed the state of readiness on the nearest target—the professional Army. However, the Congress, whose responsibility is to provide for the common defense, was a major reason for those failures. Sickles, Meade, and Hooker offer interesting contrasts among strategic leaders. A pragmatic politician, an obstinate professional Soldier, and a backstabbing braggart all had an impact on what our Army became. We can learn from both the positive and negative examples of past strategic leaders such as these. Above all, we learn that strategic leadership is a difficult and complex enterprise.

Dr. Swain is the Director of Quality Assurance for Training at the United States Army Maneuver Support Center, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. He holds a graduate certificate in instructional design for online learning from Capella University; a master's in educational administration from the University of North Carolina–Charlotte; a master's in military science from the Army War College at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and a doctorate of philosophy in education.

Title banner by Dr. Richard Swain.

Endnotes

[1] Field Manual 22-100, *Army Leadership*, 31 August 1999, pp. 7-8; accessed 23 April 2005.

[2] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Program Evaluation Glossary," 2004; available from <*http://www.epa.gov/evaluate/glossary/c-esd.htm*>; accessed 23 April 2005.

[3] FM 22-100, pp. 7-8.

[4] Ibid. pp. 7-17

[5] John Heiser "Voices of Battle: Gettysburg," 1998; available from <*http://www.nps.gov/gett/getttour/sidebar/meadebio.htm*>; accessed 23 April 2005.

[6] FM 22-100, pp. 7-19.

[7] Ibid. pp. 7-17.

[8] Ibid. pp. 7-15.

[9] Ibid. pp. 7-24.

Bibliography

Beatie, Russel. *The Army of the Potomac: Birth of Command.* Volume 1. 5 vols. Cambridge: DaCapo Press, 2002.

Boritt, Gabor S. *Lincoln's Generals*, ed. Gabor S. Boritt, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Field Manual 22-100, *Army Leadership*, United States Army, 31 August 1999, accessed 23 April 2005.

Goss, Thomas J. *The War Within the Union High Command: Politics and Generalship During the Civil War.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003.

Heiser, John "Voices of Battle – Gettysburg," 1998; available from <*http://www.nps.gov/gett/getttour/sidebar/meadebio.htm*>; accessed 23 April 2005.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Program Evaluation Glossary," 2004; available from <*http://www.epa.gov/evaluate/glossary/c-esd.htm*>; accessed 23 April 2005.

Williams, T. Harry. *Lincoln and His Generals.* New York: Random House, 1952.