

Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*

### 1. Roots of a Policy

Cites the first Union policy—to deal w/ the civilian population in the South with extreme leniency. Cite Shakespeare's *Henry V*, p. 8. ]

Another factor was the belief (he calls it myth) that the rebellion was carried off by the minority—the Slave Power. That most southerners were dedicated Unionists and in short time would rise up and oppose the fire-eaters.

1. Too, there was the conservative sentiment and strong feeling that any destructive war would likely unleash a slave rebellion. A race war that no one in the Lincoln administration wanted to be responsible for at the outset.

Notes that even the Radicals in the Rep. Party wanted a war of conciliation a first. They were reluctant to call for a war without mercy against the entire population of the South. They were for destruction of rebel armies and seizure of cities but not a war against the civilian population (if it could be avoided).

2. Then there was the ambiguity of the nation's own history. Revolution was the seedbed of the nation's own independence. This right was enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. Did it not hold for the South in 1861? Rejected at the visceral level but at the rational level it had a pull. It was more comfortable to believe that the South was in the hands of a dark conspiracy carried out by a small but powerful clique of planter class (The Slave Power) against the general wishes of the majority of the southern people. In this sense the Union's war aim of restoring the Union was cast in the form of a liberation of the common people of the South and not an act of military coercion and counterevolution.

The whole issue of sanctity of property was debated by officials and lawmakers in the North. This included the right or the practice of confiscation of property by armies foraging off the land of the invaded people.

3. What was the US historical experience with this practice? G makes the following ] points.

- G calls this the third factor in the early policy of conciliatory war. *a good example not to avoid*
- Federal commanders called upon three historic examples: the War for
- Independence, (the Napoleonic wars) and the war with Mexico. Each seemed to supply the argument against a hard war policy and to concentrate the war on the battlefields and not to disrupt the civilian population.

There were exceptions to these recalled and referenced historic examples. G cites the colonists war of attrition against the Amerindians. Also true that during the Civil War the Union treated Indians in the West to a war of extermination. (See Josephy book

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on this); also the case of the treatment of the Sioux in 1862 Minnesota uprising. (See Schulz book on this).

Concludes chpt. Taken together, the perception of the rebellion's nature, the status of the laws of war (European views/Vattel), and the historic inheritance all reinforced an initial belief that Southern civilians should not be subjected to the direct burdens of war. The widespread opinion that a slaveholding aristocracy had engineered secession made attacks on Southern yeoman seem unwise and counterproductive. The historic of the American Revolution, the Napoleonic wars, and the Mexican War made such attacks seem unnecessary.

Yet beneath the surface, each of these factors had a darker, less encouraging message. This mild policy made sense only if a majority of southerners were devoted or passive Unionist; if the laws of war could operate if only the need for foraging in the South when Union armies invaded still held up; and if military victory could be achieved exclusively on the battlefield. One by one the actual course of the CW challenged each of these notions.

## 2. Conciliation & Its Challenges

This enlightened policy of limited or conciliatory war held up for the first 15 months of the struggle. Two challenges came from Missouri fighting and from the ranks of Billy Yank in the field.

Begins w/ examination of General Scott's go-slow conciliatory policy as reflected in his Anaconda Plan. See appropriate pages. Then the division within the AL Cabinet over this policy choice. Blair was for more direct and immediate action. G gives the impression that after Sumter there was clear division in the press, among the populace, and within the Cabinet.

AL decided on the Blair thesis, that the best way to encourage Southern Unionist sentiment was to launch an immediate offensive. The offensive against Manassas ended in the Bull Run disaster. This ended any promise of Scott's Anaconda Plan that would have required two years to bring results if results were to be had. Bull Run spurred Southern nationalism and unified the cause of the Confederacy.

Remarks on the Union activities in Missouri where they treated the civilians in a fashion that did not square w/ the idea of a conciliatory war. (Review if necessary).

G shifts to the "View from the Ranks" next.

It was the ordinary soldier and his disdain for the policy of conciliation that was the

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strongest factor in the failure of the conciliatory policy to remain in effect.

- Soldiers indulged in foraging because they were cold, hungry, and regarded the rules as ridiculous.
- They wanted hot meals and nothing was better for a fire than fence rails.
- While they may not have been hostile to the occupied southerners those being occupied were hostile to them. Even when they were guarding the property of certain southerners they were jeered and treated in a hostile manner. After all they were invaders of the Southern homeland.
- Soldiers in a “foreign” land let all scruples and good behavior go by the boards.
- They also resented the “rip offs” that Southerners charged them for foods and other necessities. They resented this since they were of the opinion that they had been sent South to “liberate” the common folks from the machinations of the slaveholders, etc.

It was a chemistry that did not work because it could not work in cold reality.

### 3. Early Occupations

The weight of this Chpt. Deals with the first 15 months of the war and the general Union success particularly in the West. But the Union also had successes in the East in the Carolinas and especially with the break-away West Virginia. In total effect it appeared as though the conciliatory policy was working. Reports from the field from Union generals in these occupied Confederate areas like West Virginia, in North Carolina, around Port Royal, Tennessee (Nashville), etc. all resonated with the same message that southerners were whipped and were anxious to see the war come to an end. Of course after 15 months the Union had only occupied a small section of the South. . . . All eyes turned on McClellan and his campaign to take Richmond.

G will see the failure of the Peninsula Campaign as a turning point and the abandonment of the policy of conciliation.

### 4. Conciliation Abandoned

Couples the failure of McClellan’s Peninsula Campaign w/ the passage of the Confiscation Act and the Second Confiscation Act by Congress and signing of these by AL. The Confiscation acts were really not seen originally as war measures per se but as the first offensives against slavery by Radical sponsors.

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The passage of the Confiscation Acts was clearly noted by commanders in the field as the end of the conciliation policy.

SHAPE of the new course begins to emerge > Compae McClellan's Harrison's Landing letter to Lincoln with Pope's General Order No. 5.

Conciliation: A Postmortem

G looks at the several theories about the conciliation policy and its abandonment.

In passing he notes that Grant's view expressed in memoirs that Shiloh was his personal turning point does not square w/ what he as writing at the time. It was a postwar assertion only. The matter was that as late as spring of 1862 there was good reason why Union commanders in the field were convinced that the South was on its last legs. Then came the collapse of the Richmond Campaign.

G's view is that McClellan's failure in from of Richmond triggered the collapse of the conciliatory policy because it dramatically increased the other pressures already at work: the Radicals who wanted to expand the war's goals (eliminate slavery), the troops who had never embraced the policy from the get-go, and most importantly Northern civilians, who saw a seemingly imminent triumph disappear into a stalemate whose duration no one could predict.

Of course, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation wrote offically the finis of the policy of mild war.

5 War in Earnest

General comments about the escalation of war in earnest or toward a remorseless struggle. After spring of 1862 and the collapse of the eastern "On to Richmond" campaign and w/ Lincoln calling up additional 300,000 men. These new men showed none of the reserve about foraging, vandalism, and freelancing that was true of troops who had been in the field from the first and conditioned by early policy of soft war. These newcomers were ready to tear up Old Dixie. They had been fed on the Northern press calls now for an end of the kid gloves war. The gloves had to come off, etc.

Notes that Grant and Sherman were alarmed by the extent of freelancing among their western troops. They were anxious that this thieving and destruction not only was antagonizing the locals but was bad for morale. Measures were taken to punish those who were out of control.

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## 6. Emancipation: Touchstone of Hard War

Lays out the well known actions of Butler, Fremont, and Hunter. Suggests that their premature emancipations because they opposed slavery and for political reasons—to make points with the congressional Radicals. None saw any military advantage in freeing slaves.

While AL moved toward an EM policy it was not as a result of any pressure from generals in the field. Most senior officers regarded any policy on slavery as the prerogative of the executive while they privately were of the opinion that freedom of slaves would be an inconvenience at best. . . They were willing to wait upon Lincoln to act.

Push for Emancipation

Nature of AL's go slow policy.

March 1862 AL recommended the passage of a joint resolution promising federal compensation to any state willing to begin emancipation.

March 1862 the Congress passed law that forbade Union troops to honor the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 (finally declared inoperable in 1864)

A few weeks later AL signed into law a statute ending slavery in the D of C.; added stronger provisions to policing of the slave trade; and made provisions for the education of black children in the D of C. Clearly L had an anti-slavery agenda that was separate from the war.

After the Peninsular campaign failed, Congress in July passed the Second Confiscation Act. AL appealed again to leaders in the loyal slave-holding border states without any positive results.

Now he started thinking about emancipation of slavery by an executive order.

Note that the July 1862 passage of the Militia Act authorized the president to organize blacks and use them "for any military or naval service for which they may be found competent." Blacks had been used clandestinely by General Lane in the Missouri wars by this time. (Was AL aware of this?)

Covers the traditional ground on the WH thinking about the issuance of the EP>

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Why did AL press for the EP.

- Not because of anticipated military advantages
- Lincoln saw chance to strike at the institution; it was clear that it was at the heart of the war and a crucial asset of the Confederacy
- Lincoln no longer concerned about the reaction of the border states. Union soldiers in Maryland, Kentucky, and other loyal border states would prevent any disaster reaction by them to the EP. Lincoln had grown contemptuous of border states politicians by this time.

\*Not a majority but a significant number of Northerners seemed ready to see the war change its nature.

Equally clear that after 15 months of war that Union troops in the South had come to see slavery up close and recognized its importance to the Confederate war effort.

- Still there was a great indisposition to see blacks serving any great military purpose at the time; great questions as to whether they would be useful in a combat role.

The point G makes about the EP was that quintessentially it was the touchstone of Northern resolve to smash the slaveholding aristocracy that had spawned the secession and the war. It sounded the message unmistakably that the Lincoln administration would crush the rebellion by any means necessary.

*Here is the Reunite and  
Violent we have to be careful to  
Avoid in the 1st year.*

## 7. From Pragmatism to Hard War

Deals with the onset of hard hand of war beginning in documentable ways in 1863. Especially true or exclusively true in the West. Notes Vicksburg campaign and related actions by Sherman and Grant.

### Strategy of Raids

Early examples are cited. Sherman's Meridian campaign in Mississippi was a dress rehearsal.

Grant's thinking was based on the recognition that the tried strategy of war of attrition or annihilation was not possible. It was not possible in Civil War to annihilate the enemy's army because it was too large. The initial plan of occupying the enemy's territory was not workable because of the size of the South. Grant saw that the only strategy that could prove successful was to coordinate Union attacks to pin down the Confederates so they could not shift troops from one site of a Union offensive to another. More important insight was not to stress taking strategic cities, etc. but to engage the enemy and to destroy his base for

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G makes the point that Union troops w/ Sherman destroyed generally what they were ordered to destroy. There as little or no "rapine." What they destroyed and foraged liberally were usually the holdings of the planter class (and those homes that were vacated, too). They did little more than what the Confederate impressment troops did to make life difficult to impossible for the civilian population of the South.

All this changed once they entered the Palmetto. What happened in South Carolina was unique. He makes point that the troops w/ Sherman that carried out this destruction were not brutes. They were young men from good families with values not totally on holiday as they moved through the South. What they did in South Carolina they could have done in Georgia and North Carolina had they a mind to. G uses the term "directed severity."

#### 9. Gestures of Mercy, Pillars of Fire

Notes that the military history of the war by those who fought it is strangely mute or understated about the hard hand of war. There seemed to be no appreciation that a line had been crossed with the Union's war against the South's civilian population or war against the economic infrastructure. Most of the postwar memoirs by Grant, Sherman, Sheridan dwelled on maneuvering and battlefield accounts with little stress on the meaning of hard war.

Yet the climatic years of 1864-65 became the stuff of writings of those Southern civilians who found themselves in harm's way.

G makes the point that the Union's first policy of conciliation was ultimately a wise one. Especially given the fact that the impression that most Southerners were Union loyalists. . . . And the recognition that the South was not a monolith but was pocked with enclaves of Union sympathizers. Any thing short of the initial conciliatory policy would have been deeply wrongheaded.

The hope for success w/ the soft policy came to an end with McClellan's failure before Richmond. After Richmond that Southern morale shot up after the defeats of the first 15 months. Now it was time for the South to launch its own counteroffensive through 1862 into 1863.

G ends with a defense of the Union soldier. He rejects the view that Sherman was the progenitor of "total war." He argues that the South had reason to perpetrate this myth of the Union soldier as the modern Attila. In fact, he argues that restraint rather than indifference between the enemy soldier and armies and the civilian [ population was the reality. THIS SECTION IS WORTH REVIEW