

**THE LOST DISPATCHES**  
OF  
**GENERAL GEORGE B. McCLELLAN**



A BONUS STORY FOR  
THE MAN, THE MYTH, THE LEGEND  
BY  
CHRIS ORCUTT

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*On April 12, 2011—the sesquicentennial of the start of the Civil War—in a bricked-up Trenton, New Jersey wall safe, a cache of lost letters, telegrams and military dispatches from George B. McClellan, Union Major-General, was discovered. Historians had hoped this new evidence would exonerate the General of 150-year-old accusations of self-deception, jealousy, finger-pointing, paranoia, pomposity, overcautiousness, insubordination, and gross incompetence. Authored from when he took command of all Union forces in 1861, through his Peninsular Campaign of 1862, until relieved of command late that fall, these lost documents are remarkably revealing. It is believed that President Lincoln and Secretary of War Stanton, as well as McClellan’s devoted wife, suppressed these documents so as not to alarm the nation.*



My Present Location: WASHINGTON, July 29, 1861

My Darling Nelly<sup>1</sup>,

Of a modern Major-General, I am the very model. My that has a pleasant ring to it! Once I have saved the Union from this notorious Rebel uprising, I shall commission a play about myself &<sup>2</sup> make the writer include that line in my character’s soliloquy.

The Army I have inherited is in a dreadful state: depressed, slouching & shoeless after their defeat at Bull Run. To remedy the situation I am planning a

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<sup>1</sup> McClellan’s wife, Mary Ellen.

<sup>2</sup> McClellan had a inexplicable love of ampersands, using them instead of the word “and” in all correspondence.

fierce campaign of recruitment, drill & crisp new uniforms—not to mention several morale-raising parades.

I regret that I must cut this letter short, as I have a Council of War with Old Fuss n' Feathers & the Original Gorrilla [sic].<sup>3</sup> Tomorrow's moon shall not bathe your cheek before I write again.

Lovingly yours,

The General



NEW YORK, NY, November 20, 1861

Hon. Simon Cameron, SECRETARY OF WAR:<sup>4</sup>

I wire you from New York, where I am attending to urgent personal business before the spring campaign gets underway. My recent promotion to General-in-Chief & Commander of the Army of the Potomac leaves me little free time for the minutiae of Life. Would you inquire with the Quartermaster General about something? I am still waiting for my new calling cards & stationary [sic], not to mention the brass plate for my Headquarters office door.—Geo. B. McClellan, General-in-Chief, Major-General, Commanding, Army of the Potomac.



WASHINGTON, February 4, 1862

To His Excellency the PRESIDENT:

I recently heard of the King of Siam's offer of war Elephants to the Union Army & of your declining the offer. I beg you, Sir, to reconsider, as I am certain

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<sup>3</sup> General-in-Chief Winfield Scott and President Abraham Lincoln.

<sup>4</sup> This message was translated from an original telegraph tape. In all likelihood, the War Department telegrapher was embarrassed by the message and therefore never bothered to transcribe it.

that a herd of armor-plated, stampeding Elephants at the head of this advancing army would cause mass panic in the Rebels' ranks & bring about their mass surrender. In the meantime they could be used to entertain the troops between engagements, & after the Grand Decisive Battle, the surviving elephants could be sold to P.T. Barnum.

Mr. President, I think the King's elephants could prove to be veritable manna from Heaven. Please reply at your soonest. If here when operations begin, I could use them.<sup>5</sup>

In response to your laundry-list of questions regarding my battle plan for the Peninsula, allow me to say that not only is my plan better than your Overland idea, it will prove to be twice the fun.

Your obedient servant,

Geo. B. McClellan, General-in-Chief, Major-General, Commanding, Army of the Potomac



WASHINGTON, March 12, 1862

Mr. PRESIDENT:

I have been in a morass of melancholy since yesterday when I read your "Special" War Order No. 3 relieving me of my position as General-in-Chief. I do not understand. Do you not recall when I said I could do it all? Because I can, you know. This is humiliating. The press are already doing cartwheels over it. I wish you would reconsider. Command of the Army of the Potomac by itself seems so small now.

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<sup>5</sup> This sentence is a dangling modifier. It is unclear whether the General meant "If *the elephants* are here..." or "If *I* am here..."; however, given his use of the objective case pronoun "them," as well as his habit of remaining stationary, it is likely that he meant the following: "If [the elephants are] here when operations begin, I could use them."

Respectfully,

Geo. B. McClellan, ~~General-in-Chief~~, Major-General, Commanding, Army  
of the Potomac



FORT MONROE, VA, April 2, 1862

Hon. E.M. Stanton, SECRETARY OF WAR:

The armada has landed. I plan to stay aboard my flagship for a couple of days before proceeding inland. Need a good shave, & onboard will likely be my last hot bath for some time. Please relate the above to the President as I have resolved not to speak with him for a while. —Geo. B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding.



THE PENINSULA, April 3, 1862

To the Brooks Brothers Company, Broadway, New York, NY

Dear Messrs. Brooks:

This morning I received your parcel of March 20—the express shipment of the gold epaulets & sabre sash for my Full Dress Uniform. They are *abominable*. You will recall that last November I suspended my reorganizing operations for the Army of the Potomac & ventured north to New York City in one of the Gunboats at my disposal, so as to be properly fitted by your firm, which I had always viewed as a maker of the highest quality dress garments for Very Important Gentlemen, such as myself. I am now persuaded of the opinion that your team of tailors is actually a tribe of troglodytes.

Let us consider the sash. Not only is the sash 13-&-one-quarter inches too long, draping across my nethers like a savage's loincloth, but there are sixty-seven strands of gold fringe on each end, rendering each strand wispy &

effeminate. This, after I expressly specified no more than forty-six strands & no fewer than forty-four. The sash, my dear Sirs, is useless to me, altho' given its hyperbolic length, I may keep it; if capture by the Rebels were ever imminent, I should prefer to hang myself with it, rather than be caught dead wearing it.

Whereas President Lincoln will be reviewing the Army (at a time & location yet to be disclosed), I insist that with all possible haste you tailor a new sash & epaulets to my specifications & place them on the New York–Washington Special Train, which is at the disposal of the Army General Staff. One of my 11 orderlies or 19 aides-de-camp will meet your courier at the station & conduct the goods by gunboat to our secret location on the Peninsula. Please confirm by telegraph. If the line is busy, keep trying.

Inasmuch as you value me as a continued Brooks Brothers customer, & inasmuch as you value continued contracts with the United States War Department as the official vendor of uniform accoutrements & splendiferies for the Army General Staff, do *not* fail me.

Upbraidingly yours,

George B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding



SOMEWHERE ON THE PENINSULA, April 5, 1862

To his Excellency the PRESIDENT:

We are settling in quite comfortably here on the Peninsula, altho' it is unpredictably rainy & the air miasmically steamy. The Corps of Engineers did a marvelous job of razing a swath through the woods & swamps, & building a corduroy road with felled trees stretching from Fort Monroe to our secret encampment miles inland.

There is much unique flora & fauna in this country. Knowing your

appreciation of novelties, Sir, enclosed with this dispatch you will find a most singular butterfly—its wings, as you will note, are the precise colors of our flag, albeit in a far more sage configuration, owing to the Divine Wisdom of our most Heavenly Creator. I consider this beautiful insect to be an omen, a sign from Providence that our cause is just & has His blessing. As you see, my Adjutant-General went to great pains to secure the live butterfly (*without* a proper net) & gently insert it in this bottle; however, being ignorant as to what the creature eats, we contained it without sustenance, so it has likely perished during the journey to Washington.

Your obedient servant,

George B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding



OUTSIDE OF YORKTOWN, VA, April 7, 1862

Mr. PRESIDENT:

In my last dispatch, I neglected to inform you as to the Army's activity, so here it is:

The force we are facing is considerable, & I would be traitorous if I did not apprise you of this fact. Yesterday I observed through a break in the trees a continual stream of gray uniforms pouring into their camp, & my forward observers, including Mr. Pinkerton, confirmed this steady flow of men. This deluge continued all day, so I should estimate we have at least 200,000 men in front of us—twice my number. Perforce, more troops for this army are needed. *A lot* more.

Altho' the Rebels are camped less than two miles distant, there have been no actual engagements as yet. There have been skirmishes, however. Yesterday evening, just as the gloaming enveloped the countryside & the mourning doves

began to coo, shots rang out from our center. I immediately sent out a rider to ascertain their cause. Returning, he reported that a dozen or so Rebels had been captured. When questioned they admitted that their paltry attack was completely unsanctioned; the Rebel band was simply bored, they said.

Clearly, my strategy of amassing an Army in close proximity to the Rebels & then unnerving them by simply waiting here is working. I am increasingly convinced that excellent Union entrenchments and a few splendid marches will be enough to make the enemy throw down their arms, thus preventing further bloodshed.

The Rebel captives also contended that their force around Yorktown is tiny & that it only *seems* large. They claim that their commander, General John B. Magruder, has been marching the same troops in circles in sight of my observers, so as to give the impression of a massive army. This, of course, is a false subterfuge.<sup>6</sup> The Rebel soldiers have no doubt been instructed to tell us this lie if captured, hoping to lure my Army to its total destruction. Well, nice try, Rebels, but McC isn't falling for it.

As I am sure it is clear to a man of your wisdom, Mr. President, my campaign of seeming inaction is not without its reasons. The great ancient Chinese warlord, Sun Tzu (Sun Soo) wrote that all war is based on deception. It is my intention to deceive the Rebels into a sense of false security, much like a fly in a tavern. By seeing this Army behaving in such a quiet, unobtrusive & conciliatory manner, our Confederate neighbors will not expect an all-out assault when the right time comes. And it is coming soon, I assure you. As soon

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<sup>6</sup> No, it's true: Magruder's force totaled about 11,000; McClellan's, 110-120,000. Knowing he was outnumbered 10 to 1, Magruder, an amateur theater impresario, put his theatrical bent to good use by parading the same troops endlessly in front of McClellan's observers. This *ad hoc* maneuver delayed McClellan for weeks, causing him to entrench his men and begin an unnecessary siege of Yorktown.



as we have overwhelming superiority of men & matériel, we will swat the enemy just as an annoyed tavern-keep would swat said fly.

I must attend to my afternoon inspection of the lines, Mr. President, so I beg leave of you.

Your obedient servant,

George B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding



OUTSIDE YORKTOWN, VA, April 8, 1862

Hon. E.M. Stanton, SECRETARY OF WAR:

A brief cable to alert you that I have ordered the building of fortifications for a siege of Yorktown. As you may know, I am a great fan of the siege. We shall have marvelous moats, truculent trenches, ravaging ramparts, and winning wooden obstructions! Clearly, the enemy forgets that the great George Washington trapped Cornwallis here, & by siege compelled his surrender. I require the siege guns with the 200-pound shells to drive them out of there. Throw in a couple dozen of the 13-inch seacoast mortars as well. Must attend to preparations. My God, is there anything as thrilling as a good siege?! —Geo. B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding



THE PENINSULA, April 12, 1862

To the E. & H. T. Anthony Studios, 501 Broadway, New York, NY  
Messrs. Anthony:

You will recall that last November I visited your studios & you took some 200 photos of me. Please forward a print of the "stereoview" picture of me in my field uniform (No. 6278) to Highgate & White, Architects, Chicago, Ill. Time is of the essence. You may send it on the New York–Chicago Army

Special Train. Present this telegram as your ticket. Good for 7 days, non-transferrable. I am depending upon you. —Geo. B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding.



THE PENINSULA, April 12, 1862

To: Highgate & White, Architects, Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen:

I should like to retain your firm for the design & construction of a house. I require accommodations more befitting a man of my station, said accommodations also serving as my Head Quarters here at my secret location here on the Peninsula.

I leave the actual design to your firm; however, the house must include certain features. These are non-negotiable:

1. The house must be portable. By "portable," I mean that it could either be dragged on a giant sledge by ten to twelve teams of mules, or it can be disassembled, moved on train flatcars & reassembled at a new location in a matter of hours.
2. The first floor must include a giant Map Room, with a map of the entire United States (including those states in Rebellion) printed on the floor & surrounded by rails, & long shuffleboard sticks with which to maneuver scale models of our Armies. There must also be a bar with gleaming brass rails, a walk-in humidor with compartments for each officer's personal cigars, & a telegrapher's nook.
3. The bannister post at the foot of the stairs should be a carved image of my head (for some sense of depth, use forthcoming "stereoview" photo from the E. & H. T. Anthony Studios of New York). Mahogany would be ideal;

oak is acceptable.

These are my only requirements, gentlemen. Please remit the invoice to E.M. Stanton, Secretary of War.

Cordially Yours,

George B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding, Army of the Potomac

P.S.: I need it here next Tuesday.

P.P.S.: All further correspondence, including the house, may be shipped to my newly opened Post Office. Please note, my address has changed: The General, P.O. Box 1, Secret Location, The Peninsula, Virginia.



YORKTOWN SIEGEWORKS, VA, April 15, 1862

Hon. E.M. Stanton, SECRETARY OF WAR:

Send whiskey (the good stuff). Orderlies' and Adjutant-General's nerves are shot. Otherwise all is fine. —Geo. B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding.



YORKTOWN, VA, May 4, 1862

To his Excellency the PRESIDENT:

I have taken Yorktown with nary a shot. My batteries were about to open fire when it was discovered that Magruder & his men abandoned the place last night. Can you believe it? In addition to some excellent fried chicken in their HQ, they left several "Quaker Guns"<sup>7</sup> behind, clearly trying to convince me they were poorly armed so I would attempt direct assaults against their future

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<sup>7</sup> Logs attached to wheels, designed to resemble cannon from a distance.

positions. Silly Rebels. Next stop, Williamsburg. Wish me luck. —Geo. B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding.



WILLIAMSBURG, VA, May 6, 1862

To the PRESIDENT of the United States:

Williamsburg is ours! We did a number on the place, but it serves the Rebels right. In the years since Virginia luminaries like Washington & Jefferson graced these streets, they have turned this place into a Colonial theme park. The ticket prices are outrageous! If you do not think it a waste of good ordnance, am seriously considering blowing up the entire town. This is too good a revenue stream for the Confederacy. Please advise Yea or Nay on the blow-up plan. — Geo. B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding.



HEADQUARTERS, ARMY OF THE POTOMAC, May 16, 1862.

To General A.P. Hill, Army of Northern Virginia

Sir:

My contacts at Tiffany & Co. of Fifth Avenue in New York City inform me that a Southern gentleman known only as “A.P.” ordered a cameo to be delivered to one Mary Ellen Marcy. That woman, Sir, is my wife.

I warn you, if you attempt to court Mary Ellen again, after you played the game and lost, I shall be forced to call you out.<sup>8</sup> Yes, a *duel*. I have agents intercepting the mail, and your “gift” will be readdressed from me to Mrs.

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<sup>8</sup> Before the war, A.P. Hill had asked for beautiful Mary Ellen Marcy’s hand, but her father objected to the match. Hill had no money, was only a lieutenant, and on top of everything else he was a Southerner. But when George McClellan, then a vice-president of the Illinois Central Railroad, proposed to Mary Ellen, Mr. Marcy pushed her to marry him. According to legend, A.P. Hill never forgot that McClellan stole Mary Ellen. Anytime his forces were near McClellan’s—which, during the Peninsular Campaign, was often—they fought vociferously.

Lincoln.

Do not try me, Sir,

G.B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding, Army of the Potomac



THE PENINSULA, May 17, 1862

Dearest Nelly, my Little Presbyterian<sup>9</sup>,

I see the News papers have begun to refer to me deridingly as “The Virginia Creeper” because of my careful, measured progress up the Peninsula. These “war correspondents”—these hollow, unpatriotic snipes—are useless. They are my sworn enemies.

What they fail to grasp is that one of the definitions of the infinitive “to creep” is this: “to sneak up behind someone or without someone’s knowledge,” which is exactly what I am attempting to do with this moving city of over 100,000 men & 14,000 animals. It is by no means easy.

If these ridglings<sup>10</sup> wish to be pedantic, directing their insipid attack instead on the noun “creeper,” then I proffer this definition: “any of various tools or implements designed to assist a man, animal, or machine to advance or climb.” As Colonel Smithers, my geometry professor at West Point, said daily, “*Quod erat demonstrandum.*”

My dear, sweet Nelly, I hope always to shield you from the seething, burning rage in my heart that wishes these men ground into dust, doused in turpentine & set aflame. I will do my best to remain Christian towards them & the legions of other detractors conspiring against me.

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<sup>9</sup> One of his pet names for Mary Ellen. Yeah, we know—weird.

<sup>10</sup> An antiquated term in today’s horseless age: “a male animal in which one or both testes have not descended into the scrotum.”

Stay well. I hope your tulips are beginning to blossom—the pink ones.  
They are a delight.

Most affectionately,  
The General



RICHMOND'S DOORSTEP, May 20, 1862

Mr. PRESIDENT:

I am dictating this wire from *U.S.A.S.S.* (United States Air Ship Supreme) *Envisage*, a gaseous ball-loon [sic] that comprises the latest technological innovation in our fight against Rebel terrorism [sic]. We are most fortunate that I had the imagination & foresight to realize the value of Professor Thaddeus Lowe's Ball-loon [sic] Corps as an instrument for obtaining intelligence against the enemy.<sup>11</sup> From this great height, with a spyglass, our reconnaissance officers can see in a 50-mile radius on a clear day. Today, Mr. President, if you were to run up to the White House roof & wave a flag, I would probably be able to see you too.

After a mishap yesterday, the Ship has been better secured. The rope broke during my first trip aloft, casting me, Professor Lowe & the telegrapher to the wind. Rebel cavalry (J.E.B. Stuart) took chase as we sailed toward Richmond, some 8 miles distant. With their left flank suddenly exposed, I scribbled a hasty order, fastened it to a sandbag & tossed it down to our own men in pursuit. The commander of Battery D walloped their flank with the new 200-pounders Secretary Stanton sent. Those are some sweet guns, Sir.

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<sup>11</sup> This is patently false. McClellan, along with most of the Union generals, initially did not see the value in aerial reconnaissance balloons. In fact, it was President Lincoln who, on June 17, 1861, received the first aerial telegraph message from Lowe, and in late July (after Bull Run), hired Lowe to "begin at once."

Looking out at the Rebel front now. The encampments seem to be for a force of 70,000, but Mr. Pinkerton assures me that the Rebels of necessity sleep 8 to a tent instead of 2, putting their total force at no less than 280,000. I must have 150,000 reinforcements immediately.

Rebel artillery firing at our craft. Must descend.

—G. B. McC., Maj.-Gen., Cmdng.



THE PENINSULA, May 25, 1862

My Darling Nelly,

Your General misses you. He yearns to see you—you as bewitchingly beatific as the Sirens who so throbbingly tempted great Odysseus with their song. Indeed, whenever the General receives one of your violet-scented letters, with your sweet voice so clear & piquant, he requires one of his eleven orderlies lash him to his bed-posts so he will not crash the ship of his illustrious military career upon the perilous rocks of impropriety. As your revivifying & mesmeric words wash over him, all of him stiffens & he strains at the bonds which keep him here, at his secret location on the Peninsula.

The General wishes you to know that only a cause as grand as the restoration of this great Union could possibly impel him to continued separation from you. He dreams of the day when he can again brush your luxuriant hair & delicately varnish your tender toenails.

With *deepest* affection,

The General



NEAR RICHMOND, VA, June 1, 1862

Mr. PRESIDENT:

I regret your recently receiving a letter meant for my wife & ask for your understanding in this matter. Surely as a man who was away from home often as a young lawyer, you can appreciate the strong sentiments that motivated my missive.

In military action, my artillery commanders report our having lobbed no fewer than a hundred of the 200-pounders at General Joseph Johnston's forces yesterday. My aides & I are in disagreement as to what the fight should be named: the "Battle of Seven Pines" or "Fair Oaks." Which do you prefer, Mr. President? I prefer "Seven Pines" myself.

It seems Johnston was badly wounded & carried from the field. As you may know, Sir, he was a mentor of mine during the Mexican War, so I am rather saddened at this news. If Davis is smart, he'll put Lee in there, but I've got Lee's number.<sup>12</sup>

Your obedient servant,

Geo. B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding.



A LITTLE CLOSER TO RICHMOND, VA, June 3, 1862

Mr. PRESIDENT:

As you probably know, my early service was in the Corps of Engineers—training that I put to some use yesterday against the Enemy. I designed & supervised the construction of an enormous, oxen-powered air-propellor, or fan, to blow the savory smells of our hickory-smoked bacon across the Enemy's front. As you can imagine, Sir, bacon is the coin of the realm in these parts. My most ingenious Fan will no doubt have the effect of surrender *en masse* that I

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<sup>12</sup> Robert E. Lee was put in command of the Army of Northern Virginia from this point until the end of the war, and McClellan *didn't* have his number.



have always presaged. Yet, the tactic gives me a twinge of guilt as some of my West Point comrades are over there, & the thought of their subsisting on nothing but salt pork & corn pone makes me ill. However, from the moment you put me in command of this great Army, I have used all means at my disposal to put an end to this insurrection, & teasing the Rebels with mouth-watering fare is one of them.

Also, Mr. President, I take offense to your recent denial of my request for reinforcements. As justification for your denial, you cited the 121,800 who were “present for duty” at the start of this campaign; however, as the following chart clearly shows, that number is terribly inaccurate; as a military term, “present for duty” means squat. To wit,

<b>Total number of officers and soldiers “present for duty” at start of Peninsula Campaign (approx.)</b>	<b>121,800</b>
Deduct men in jail	4,200
Deduct unarmed & unequipped men	6,340
Deduct men eating meals (various)	25,002
Deduct non-fighting men (cooks, priests, farriers, orchestra, photographers, ball-loon inflaters, paymasters, telegraphers, theatre troupes, tap-dancers, other)	15,208
Deduct men too drunk or hung-over to fight	33,124
Deduct cavalry (no idea where they are most of the time)	17,006
Deduct men with recently lost limbs who need naps	5,087
Deduct men with sloppy uniforms (or missing buttons)	9,264
Deduct men posing for photographs	2,433

Deduct men who are "otherwise engaged"	2,700
<b>ACTUAL NUMBER OF MEN AVAILABLE FOR FIGHTING</b>	<b>1,436</b>

Little activity on the lines this week. Two skirmishes & some random shots by our own troops at late-returning northbound geese.

Your obedient servant,

Geo. B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding

P.S.: You grew up poor, Mr. President; what *is* corn pone anyway? I need to know!



HEADQUARTERS, ARMY OF THE POTOMAC, June 6, 1862.

To General A.P. Hill, Army of Northern Virginia

Sir:

Be advised—one of my agents intercepted your cameo before it could reach its intended recipient. I find your recent denial of this affair highly amusing, given the inscription on the piece, which reads, "Nelly—I am forever yours, A.P." This engraving making it impossible to re-gift it to Mrs. Lincoln, by my order the cameo was hurled into the Potomac. Any other "gifts" will suffer the same fate.

Make no more attempts to correspond with Mrs. *McClellan*. If I chance upon you in battle, Sir, I will have your hide.

—George McClellan



THE PENINSULA, June 9, 1862

Dearest Nelly,

My love, I hope this telegram finds you in good health & spirits. We are to make a move soon, so I am pressed for time. Just know that I am well & thinking of you. Also, could you please send my whale bone mustache comb with all possible haste? I expect the Original Gorrilla [sic] to make a surprize [sic] inspection any day now, & my normally manicured mustache resembles a swamp thicket. With all possible love—The General.



THE PENINSULA, June 16, 1862

To the Boston & Vienna Piano Company, Ltd., Boston, Mass.

Gentlemen:

As you are no doubt aware, since reports of the exploits of the Army of the Potomac have been laudatory & copious, I am the Commander of this grand assemblage of men. In this capacity, besides endeavoring to field the bravest fighting force, & besides developing strategies to smite the Rebel forces with the least possible damage to this Army (which I now hold quite dear), I have taken it upon myself to inspire, motivate & extend the cultural education of my soldiers through music. This is where your company can be of great service to the Union.

I am looking to acquire a new grand piano forte for the Army. Our last one sunk in a bog, rendering it unplayable. You may ship the piano here (send a full-time piano tuner with the instrument; Army travel wreaks havoc on pianoes [sic]) & remit the invoice to Mr. Stanton, Secretary of War.

Yours,

George B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding



NEAR RICHMOND, VA, June 22, 1862

Hon. E.M. Stanton, SECRETARY OF WAR:

My sentries, spies & other forward observers inform me that we are facing an entrenched Rebel force around Richmond of no less than 350,000 men. I now require 250,000 reinforcements. Thanks! —Geo. B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding.



NEAR RICHMOND, VA, June 23, 1862

Mr. PRESIDENT::

I received your recent & rather curt wire in which you expressed exasperation over my seeming inaction. As I have noted countless times, Sir, my experience as a professional soldier, if nothing else, has taught me this: Constant marching on muddy roads among the horseflies, & bloodying the troops' uniforms in battle, erodes morale. If you will but be patient with me, Sir, I know you will find me to be in the right. —Geo. B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding.



GAINES' MILL, VA, June 27, 1862

Hon. E.M. Stanton, SECRETARY OF WAR:

Under fierce attack by Lee's forces. Earlier enemy troop estimates grossly inaccurate. I have once again employed Mr. Pinkerton in the surreptitious acquisition of some most alarming data. New intelligence now indicates that we face a Rebel army of 900,000. This is a catastrophe! All northern males, of whatever age (the old ones can rip train tickets), should be sent immediately from Boston, New York City, Philadelphia & Chicago. If my calculations are correct, this measure would give me an army of 1,073,632 men. —Geo. B.

McClellan, Major-General, Commanding.



SAVAGES [sic] STATION, VA, June 29, 1862

Hon. E.M. Stanton, SECRETARY OF WAR:

Add to my previous list all males from second-tier cities including Baltimore, Springfield (Ill.), Buffalo, Hartford & Providence. Bolstering our forces from all of the aforementioned cities will give me an army of one & one-half million men. That should do the trick. P.S.: Send coffee. We're almost out. —Geo. B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding.



TURKEY BRIDGE, VA, June 30, 1862

Hon. E.M. Stanton, SECRETARY OF WAR:

Another day of desperate fighting. We are hard pressed by superior numbers that seem to be coming from all directions. I fear I shall be forced to abandon my material to save my men under cover of the gunboats. Load all of the aforementioned city-dwellers onto barges & float them to Fort Monroe—fast! Meanwhile, I'll try to save the army. —Geo. B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding.



TURKEY BRIDGE, VA, June 30, 1862

Hon. E.M. Stanton, SECRETARY OF WAR:

Almost forgot. Send more gunboats. —Geo. B. McClellan, Major-General, Commanding.



HARRISON'S LANDING (STILL ON THE PENINSULA), VA, July 10,

1862

Dear Nelly,

I apologize for neglecting to write the past two days, but the Great Baboon arrived unannounced on the 8<sup>th</sup> & I was forced to play host. He condescended to offer me, *George B. McClellan*, suggestions on strategy & tactics, to which I was sorely tempted to reply, "Did you graduate from West Point second in your class, *too*, Mr. President?" However, I held my tongue & instead handed him as he left a blistering letter on the politics of the War (see how *you* like it, Abe), which he had the temerity to read in my presence, whereupon he folded it up & said two words: "All right." He then returned to Washington.

You know what I loathe most about the man? That *stupid* stove-pipe hat. As if he isn't tall enough already! And gnarly! The man is the indubitable offspring of a gorrilla [sic] and a telegraph pole. I shall write you again when I have calmed down from his intrusion.

With affection,

The General



THE PENINSULA, VA, July 12, 1862

To His Supreme Excellency the PRESIDENT:

Halleck? Halleck! You made HALLECK the new General-in-Chief? I would rather you installed General Lee in the position than that useless chrome-dome! The only thing Halleck is remotely good for is sharpening pencils, and even at that he is wanting. I believe you will regret this decision & wish you had kept McClellan in the post. —Geo. B. McClellan, Major-General.



STILL ON THE PENINSULA, August 5, 1862.

Dearest Nelly,

Well, the Great Baboon, through “Old S--t for Brains,”<sup>13</sup> has made his worst mistake yet—stripping me of my beloved Army of the Potomac, the Army *I* built, and giving it to that unmitigated chunk of driftwood, Pope.<sup>14</sup> At his suggestion, no doubt, they have given the force the *brilliant* new name of “the Army of Virginia.” Pope is such an idiot, my darling, that if he ever gets an order from [Sec. of War] Stanton to destroy “the Army of *Northern* Virginia,” he will ignore the adjective & direct his men to shoot each other, or themselves. I give him a month.<sup>15</sup>

I would resign were I not certain that the Gorrilla [sic], his zookeeper<sup>16</sup> and that horse-dung Halleck will eventually beg me to resume command. Oh, but if only so many Good Men did not have to die before these incompetents woke up and faced facts: that George B. McClellan is the best general they’ve got!

I have come under some scrutiny recently for my “questionable behavior” during the Battle of Malvern Hill, when I retired to one of the gunboats. Unfortunately, the duties of my position often require me to remain in the rear—an awful thing.

I must admit to showing a false countenance to the men, my dear, for while my heart smolders over this cruel and idiotic slight, I continue to exude an optimistic and indomitable air. In fact, this morning one of my aides said he

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<sup>13</sup> A shockingly rare expletive and a pejorative play on Halleck’s nickname: “Old Brains.”

<sup>14</sup> General John Pope.

<sup>15</sup> On this point McClellan was remarkably prescient. Pope was appointed to command of the Army of Virginia on July 26, 1862, lost a couple of key battles (including Second Bull Run or Second Manassas), and by early September most of his forces were put back under McClellan’s command.

<sup>16</sup> Secretary of War Stanton.

was distressed at the Army losing "its head and constant champion," to which I replied with a rather smart retort: "I shall return."

Ah, but the silver lining in this is that we shall soon see a lot more of each other! Ready the household, my Love; the General is coming home.

Yours,

Brinton<sup>17</sup>



SOME FARM IN MARYLAND, September 13, 1862

Nelly,

The General is back! Keep this under your bonnet, but I now have in my possession a document that, if genuine, could bring this war to a rapid & decisive close in a matter of days! It is Lee's "Special Orders No. 191," in which he spells out every detail of his battle plan for Maryland.<sup>18</sup> I have him now!

Do not fear for me & please do not neglect to dust my sabre scabbard—the one above the fireplace!

Faithfully yours,

The General



MARYLAND COUNTRYSIDE, September 14, 1862

Nelly,

Last night I gave serious thought to the windfall of Lee's plans. It occurred to me that it must be one of Lee's attempted psych-outs. The plans were

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<sup>17</sup> McClellan's middle name. His using it displays a rare vulnerability.

<sup>18</sup> The order, drafted on or around September 9, 1862, gave specific details of the movements of the Army of Northern Virginia during the beginning of its invasion of Maryland. The most important piece of intelligence to be gleaned from the document was that Lee had divided his army, rendering the separate parts vulnerable.



wrapped around three cigars of Cuban origin & excellent quality, almost like bait for a bear trap. Undoubtedly the crafty old man drafted these bogus plans, which I am now going to ignore.

It is a delightful Injun Summer<sup>19</sup> here in the Maryland countryside. The foliage is marvelous. I wish you were here. I hope to have the Rebels mopped up in a couple of days, acquire Lee's surrender & come home to you victorious, darling. Pray for our noble Army.

With affection,

The General



ANTIETAM CREEK, MD, October 3, 1862

Dearest Nelly,

Well, the President came out to visit, and even though I managed to wrangle a victory for the Union<sup>20</sup> against impossible odds, I am fairly certain that he is planning to replace me. He keeps nagging me about when I am going to get the Army "moving again." But the men are exhausted, and so am I. Will write again later. Need to see off the Baboon and take a nap.

Affectionately,

The General



SALEM, VA, November 10, 1862

Nelly,

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<sup>19</sup> Indian Summer.

<sup>20</sup> The "victory" was a Pyrrhic one at best. In fact, the final day of the battle—September 17, 1862—proved to be the bloodiest single day of fighting in American history: the Union had 12,401 casualties with 2,108 dead; Confederate casualties were 10,318 with 1,546 dead. Over 25,000 Americans killed, maimed or wounded.

As you know from my previous correspondence, they took my beloved Army of the Potomac away from me. I have effectively been kicked out of the Army. I have no command now.

It is of mild condolence that my acquaintance, Burnside<sup>21</sup>, was given the command. Let him try; maybe those ridiculous whiskers of his can win the war for us.

As I rode away, there were cheers from the men all along the line. Of course my detractors will claim the men were cheering because I was leaving; but if you could have seen the unrestrained joy in their faces & heard the hoarseness in their cheers, you would know, as I do, that their love is genuine.

I will see you soon.

With Love,

George



*For the rest of his life, George B. McClellan was revered by many veterans of the Army of the Potomac. Even his legions of critics were forced to agree that he had organized and built the Army, and that without his efforts the Army would likely have been decimated in any engagements following First Bull Run (or First Manassas). On October 29, 1885, aged 58, McClellan died unexpectedly of a heart attack. His final words were, "I feel easy now. Thank you."*

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<sup>21</sup> Major-General Ambrose Burnside.