"I Only Knew What Was in My Mind"

Ulysses S. Grant and the Meaning of Appomattox

JOAN WAUGH

“I only knew what was in my mind,” Ulysses S. Grant said, describing his feelings as he sat down to write out the terms of surrender at Appomattox Court House in Virginia on April 9, 1865.1 Somehow, that sentence makes it sound so simple. It was not. This essay highlights the meaning of the military surrender at Appomattox largely from the perspective of the top northern general, Grant, but also complicates and contextualizes Grant’s famous remark. Twice before Appomattox, Grant accepted the surrender of a major Confederate force—at Fort Donelson, Tennessee, in 1862 and at Vicksburg, Mississippi, in 1863. In those two campaigns, Grant was relentless in pursuing victory, but once secured, he also displayed magnanimity, anticipating the more celebrated generosity of the 1865 surrender.

It is vital to point out that surrender has multiple meanings.2 In the context of the Civil War, a military or a political surrender is defined as giving up something valuable—a fortress, an army, a defined territory, a country, a set of demands—to an enemy. It can also mean something beautiful, tender, or forgiving. It can mean surrendering to a lover, or surrendering a soul to God, it can mean a surrender of individual selfishness to a greater good. “Surrender”’s multiple meanings were present at Donelson, Vicksburg, and, especially, Appomattox. All three places were at once sites of memory. Within the epic story of the Civil War, it was the surrender at Appomattox that attained mythic status as the ultimate symbol of reunion and reconciliation.3

Ulysses S. Grant’s conviction that the Union was going to be preserved is what guided and sustained his military policy, including surrender, throughout the war. He developed a broad national perspective on the means as well as the end of the rebellion. Vitally concerned with seeking out and destroying an enemy, he was also keenly aware of what kind of conditions—military and political—would lay a solid foundation for reunion. As the conflict progressed, Grant’s notable gestures toward conciliation united his and President Abraham Lincoln’s desire for peace with the former Confederacy while insisting that the people of the rebellious states swear a loyalty oath to the United States and accept emancipation. To recover surrender’s different meanings and suggest some of the consequences for a nation torn asunder, Grant’s three military surrenders are situated within the progress of the war for their suggestive relationship to conciliation and reunion. By the end, Grant’s statement—“I only knew what was in my mind”—will be placed in an even more compelling perspective, revealing the richly textured nature of military surrender during the American Civil War.

UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER AT FORT DONELSON, FEBRUARY 16, 1862

Early Union strategy in the western theater targeted two vital forts protecting Confederate territory. On February 6, 1862, Grant and naval officer Andrew Hull Foote bore down on the smaller of the two, Fort Henry, situated on the east bank of the Tennessee River just south of the Kentucky border. Foote’s gunboats arrived before Grant and his infantry, providing the firepower that led to the surrender of the fort. Foote demanded “unconditional surrender” and sent two of his subordinates to accept Gen. Lloyd Tilghman’s ceremonial sword, a common feature of surrender ceremonies.

Most of the Confederate infantry escaped capture by moving on the road to nearby Fort Donelson, where they awaited the expected Federal assault.4 After some delay, Grant’s troops, supported by the ironclads, attacked the more strategically important and strongly defended Fort Donelson on the Tennessee side of the Cumberland River. Sharp fighting in freezing weather gave the Rebels expectation of winning the battle, but mismanagement and disagreement between the leading southern officers led to the fort’s two senior Confederate commanders—Generals John B. Floyd and Gideon J. Pillow—abandoning the scene of carnage and destruction, leaving Gen. Simon Buckner, the third-ranking officer, in charge.

As Federal forces pressed their advantage, the overwhelmed Buckner sent General Grant a letter requesting that the Union commander declare an armistice and, following that, hold a conference in which the two men would appoint representatives to discuss terms for Donelson’s surrender. Before responding, Grant discussed Buckner’s letter with one of his division commanders, Brig. Gen. Charles P. Smith. Grant had been a student of Smith’s at West Point and valued his opinion greatly. Smith advised
his younger colleague: “No terms with the damned rebels.” The result is famous. General Grant’s swift and terse reply: “Yours of this date proposing Armistice and appointment of Commissioners to settle terms of Capitulation is just received. No terms except unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted. I propose to move immediately upon your works,” electrified the northern public, but a helpless Buckner condemned it as “ungenerous and unchivalrous.”

Buckner, whom Grant had known before the war, really had no choice but to accept. What made the military surrender at Donelson unconditional? An unconditional surrender is, most obviously, surrender without condition; it means that no guarantees are given to the losing army. When Grant refused Buckner’s initial request for a meeting to discuss terms, instead proposing “to move immediately upon your works,” the surrender became unconditional.7

U. S. Grant had no need to consult a textbook to learn how to conduct his first surrender. The rules were based on a mixture of law, custom, chivalry, and logistical and practical circumstances.4 Thus, while Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck’s (who was Grant’s senior commander at the time) commentary on the subject was available, Grant apparently relied on the common knowledge acquired from his former army career, as well as from the advice of other officers. For example, all soldiers knew that officers carrying a white flag of truce should be escorted safely through the lines, while white flags fluttering in the front lines of an enemy indicated surrender. The appearance of a white flag was usually followed by a meeting arranged between the two commanders with or without their subordinates, with the meeting’s outcome including the writing out and acceptance of surrender terms. Flexibility was a key feature of surrenders in the American Civil War, giving a wide berth to commanders in the field. Grant demonstrated this flexibility with his deliberately conciliatory gestures at Donelson.

In fact, the Confederate surrender at Fort Donelson set up a rough template for Grant’s much bigger ones to follow, with aggressive military movements followed by deliberately sympathetic gestures. Riding to Buckner’s headquarters through lines of Confederate soldiers, Grant and his staff dismounted at the Dover Hotel, a two-story wood building situated on the riverfront. There, he found one of his generals, Lew Wallace, already seated at a table, sharing an amiable breakfast with Buckner. After some preliminary pleasantness, even jokes, between the two commanders, Grant got down to business. He allowed Rebel officers to keep their side-arms and their personal luggage. He also dispensed with any notion of a formal surrender of the Confederate garrison of approximately fifteen thousand soldiers, the largest surrender in U.S. history up to that time. Grant believed that this formality—a ceremony that would feature a lowering of the flag and Buckner or a designated aide handing over his ceremonial sword—served no purpose but to humiliate. He explained, “The surrender is now a fact. We have the fort, the men, the guns. Why should we go through vain forms and mortify and injure the spirit of brave men, who, after, all are our own countrymen.”9

Grant’s last few words are worth a second look. “Our own countrymen” reflected his belief, shared by the majority of northerners, that southerners were engaged in a “rebellion,” not a war between nations. Once the conflict ended, the eleven Rebel states would be returned to their proper relationship within the United States. President Lincoln had already articulated a national strategy that set the terms for a “conditional surrender.” In other words, in February 1862 it was a still limited war that held out the distinct possibility that the two sections could be reconciled with “the Union as it was” (with slavery intact) and with a minimum of bitterness and destruction. Indeed, the scene unfolding around Fort Donelson, Tennessee, partly validated that hopeful expectation. Not only were the officers who served together in the “old army” engaging on friendly terms, but numerous Union and Confederate soldiers could be seen milling about, exchanging conversation, while
bargaining food for trinkets. There were other, less encouraging scenes as well. Jubilant Union troops engaged in the looting of Confederate campsites in a defiant rejection of Grant’s orders.10

Grant commanded his soldiers not to act disrespectfully toward Confederates who were on their way to northern prison camps. The fate of the captives at Donelson posed a logistical challenge for him and would prove to be a vexing part of the aftermath of any surrender, large or small, during the conflict. At the beginning of the war, the entire United States Army numbered sixteen thousand; on one day in early 1862, nearly as many surrendered. Nothing in the experience of the current generation of military leaders prepared them for the growing flood of prisoners during the Civil War. At first, the logistics were handled simply. Captives were informally exchanged on the authority of field commanders, going to designated camps to await their freedom. When exchange was not immediately possible, soldiers were provided with paroles, pieces of paper signed by soldiers that allowed them to go home or to a specified place in enemy territory, as long as they promised not to take up arms again. As the war progressed, this “gentlemanly” arrangement, based on an honor system for prisoners, proved unworkable. A formal agreement between Union and Confederate authorities, called the Dix-Hill cartel, was signed in July 1862. The cartel held until disputes over the treatment of black soldiers ended the agreement in mid-1863.11

At Donelson, however, Grant was still operating under the informal customs and practical concerns of the early war. The meeting at the Dover Hotel hammered out the details of the surrender, including arrangements for the treatment of injured soldiers and the transport of the men taken as prisoners.12 Severe weather conditions combined with understaffing to make the logistics a badly handled nightmare. In an unusual move, Grant accepted Buckner’s offer of the latter’s own staff to aid in the brisk movement of prisoners on the steamboats. If there was to be a next time, Grant determined, it would be different. “I fear they will prove an elephant,” he declared, writing that he preferred “the policy of paroling all prisoners hereafter and taking a receipt for them from the commanding officer so that exchanges may be made properly.”13 As Buckner prepared himself and some of his troops to leave for the prison camps on a special steamer, Grant offered to lend money to his former comrade, stating, “Buckner, you are, I know, separated from your people, and perhaps you need funds. My purse is at your disposal.”14 Buckner declined but long remembered the gesture. Just before they parted, he asked Grant to witness his farewell address. Grant stood by quietly as Buckner spoke to his men, praising the kindness and respect shown to them by the Union commander.15

The consequences of the capture of Fort Donelson were profound and reverberated throughout the nation. Grant’s demand for an unconditional surrender, the removal from the fighting theater of a corps-size number of enemy troops, and the capture of tons of valuable foodstuffs and a large amount of weaponry made him the first great military hero of the Union. It also raised morale at a very critical time. The Federal effort had little to show for the first ten months of the conflict. Indeed, its minor battle gains were more than offset by defeats at Bull Run and Ball’s Bluff in the summer and fall of 1861. Victory, however, seemed on the horizon with an impending campaign to capture the Confederate capital of Richmond led by Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan. The capture of Fort Donelson raised the expectation that, in tandem with a possible win in the eastern theater, the war might be concluded by spring.

The unexpected success at Donelson immediately added to the exultation felt by the northern people who did not expect good news from the relatively ignored far reaches of the western theater. Soon, the results of the surrender showed how important that theater was to be in the war’s outcome. The Rebel line in the West had been demolished. Confederate retreat brought Kentucky and middle Tennessee securely within Federal control, including the prize of Tennessee’s prosperous capital, Nashville, followed shortly by the falls of Memphis and New Orleans. That half of Tennessee was now under U.S. authority meant that possible volunteers to the enemy army were either delayed or stopped. And as Union forces moved to secure their control of Confederate territory, they disrupted railroad lines, destroyed property, and liberated slaves. Numerous guerrilla bands, often supported by the local citizens, sprang up to harass the northern occupiers.16 Attentive observers from both sides could see the rough outlines of a reconstruction policy emerging from the military rule of Grant and Sherman in Memphis and western Tennessee and Gen. Benjamin E. Butler in New Orleans. The commanders struggled to reestablish Federal authority over a largely hostile population previewing the difficulties of a forced reunion, rendering the optimism that infused Grant’s Donelson surrender a distant memory.

“LESS DANGEROUS FOES”: VICKSBURG, JULY 4, 1863

The hope for victory by spring or summer of 1862 had long since faded by July 4, 1863, the date of Grant’s second surrender agreement signed at Vicksburg, Mississippi. The capacity on both sides to bear rising military casualties and civilian suffering dashed the expectations of peace held earlier. The costly Federal victory at the battle of Shiloh, Tennessee, in April
1862 convinced many northerners that the Confederates, despite defeat and sacrifices, were not going to give up their desire for independence. Southerners were similarly convinced. The results of McClellan’s disastrous Peninsula campaign ended with the rise of Gen. Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia. Their victory at Second Bull Run in late August 1862 capped a remarkable turnaround for the Confederates. True, those devastating Federal losses brought widespread demoralization but no peace settlement with their enemy.

The incomplete Union win at Antietam near Sharpsburg, Maryland, on September 17, 1862, guaranteed further bloodshed, adding emancipation as a military measure and also holding enormous implications for the waging of the war, as well as for reunion and reconstruction with the rebellious states. Emancipation expanded a limited war into one whose outcome was a national strategy of unconditional surrender. Now the aim of the United States was the destruction of the southern social and economic system based on slavery.

In the western theater, the Federal goal of securing the length of the Mississippi River was accomplished with U. S. Grant’s 1862–63 campaign to capture Vicksburg, a small city perched on bluffs high atop the river. The heavily fortified city also contained within its borders a sizeable Confederate army, commanded by Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton. Grant’s early attempts to secure the Mississippi for the United States ended in abject failure. In late spring and early summer 1863, he put a successful plan in action, combining both naval and infantry forces to encircle and capture Vicksburg. After a series of smashing victories, including the capture of Mississippi’s capital city, Jackson, Grant’s forces besieged Vicksburg for six weeks, from late May throughout the month of June and the first few days of July. The ensuing surrender exhibited the deliberate gestures toward reunion and reconciliation found at Donelson but also revealed a much greater bitterness, mirroring the terribly destructive military operations of the middle war.

By July 1, Pemberton realized that he must either capitulate or evacuate. Since the latter option was deemed impossible without annihilation of his army, he sent a letter out under a white flag of truce that reached Grant on the morning of July 3. Pemberton’s communiqué was delivered by his aide, Maj. Gen. John S. Bowen, a former acquaintance of Grant’s. Like Buckner, General Pemberton requested an armistice, followed by the appointment of six commissioners (three on each side) who would meet to discuss the details of capitulation. “I make this proposition to save the further effusion of blood,” he claimed, “which must otherwise be shed to a frightful extent, feeling myself fully able to maintain my position for a yet indefinite period.” Grant, who stated that he had no interest in appointing commissioners, swatted away Pemberton’s bluff, adding, “The useless effusion of blood you propose stopping by this course can be ended at any time you may choose, by an unconditional surrender of the city and the garrison. . . . I have no terms other than those indicated above.” Softening his harsh tone, he added, “Men who have shown such endurance and courage as those now in Vicksburg will always challenge the respect of an adversary, and I can assure you will be treated with all the respect due to prisoners of war.”

The stalemate was broken when Bowen persuaded Grant to visit Pemberton at 3:00 that afternoon. Pemberton arrived dressed in full uniform, meeting Grant, in field dress, between the lines of the two armies. Their short exchange failed, with Grant repeating his terms of unconditional surrender, leading Pemberton to say huffily, “I can assure you, sir, you will bury many more of your men before you will enter Vicksburg.”

The relative ease with which the Donelson surrender was dispatched must have seemed very distant to Grant. Here, standing in the Mississippi summer heat seventeen months later, the stakes of surrender were even higher, as both men knew full well that the loss of Vicksburg would be a catastrophe for the South.

Stymied, Grant and Pemberton moved aside to let appointed representatives discuss the matters at hand. The two commanders conversed, at first standing and then seated on the grass, as thousands of their soldiers watched intently. Significantly, once Grant agreed to appoint representatives, he had acceded to one of Pemberton’s requests and opened the door, perhaps, to further concessions. Despite having come to no agreement by afternoon’s end, Grant promised Pemberton that he would send a response that evening. Later, at headquarters Grant called his corps and division commanders to a meeting that he described as the closest thing to a “council of war” he ever countenanced.

They nearly unanimously advised conditional surrender, so Grant reframed a surrender agreement that, contrary to his reputation, would not be “unconditional.” His letter to Pemberton offering parole instead of incarceration was sent to Confederate headquarters, and a few hours later, Pemberton accepted. The official surrender would take place on the morning of July 4.

The agreement made sense, fitting the reality of Vicksburg’s situation. Reluctant to launch a wasteful assault on the city, Grant also did not want to send thousands of Rebels to northern prison camps. This way, he could send valuable federal units to bolster other Union armies rather than guarding prisoners. “Had I insisted upon an unconditional surrender,” he explained, “there would have been over thirty thousand men to transport
So, instead, the whole Confederate garrison was paroled. This meant that the prisoners would go free if they promised not to reenter the war until exchanged for Union prisoners. In his memoirs, Grant described his perspective at the time. “Pemberton’s army was largely composed of men whose homes were in the South-west,” he declared. “I knew many of them were tired of the war and would get home just as soon as they could. A large number of them had voluntarily come into our lines during the siege, and requested to be sent north where they could get employment until the war was over and they could go to their homes.” Thus, it came to be that the general who after Donelson was nicknamed “Unconditional Surrender” did not insist on surrender without conditions at Vicksburg. The final agreement included demands that the Confederates stack their arms and regular soldiers could keep their personal clothing while officers were allowed to keep their sidearms, their personal belongings, and one horse. In addition, the surrender document made provisions for generous rations to be distributed, as well as details regarding the care and treatment of the seriously wounded.

Beginning at 8:00 a.m., a division of the victorious army marched into Vicksburg and, within minutes, planted the national flag on the courthouse building. The Union celebration was even greater given that it was Independence Day. A little later, the defeated army marched out of Vicksburg, officially prisoners of war. Rations were quickly distributed to the hungry southern soldiers and townspeople. Grant ordered his troops to suppress their cheers, and one soldier from Louisiana expressed his appreciation that “no word of exultation was uttered to irritate the feelings of the prisoners,” while a Confederate chaplain called the behavior of the victors “respectful and considerate.” Grant remembered happily that “the men of the two armies fraternized as if they had been fighting for the same cause.” A private from Illinois described a common scene: “The Union soldier pumping the rebel and giving him in return for the information hard tack and bacon.”

In truth, many of the Federal soldiers were stunned and sickened by the poor condition of both soldiers and civilians and the destruction their own cannons wrought on the formerly thriving and pretty river town. Never to recover its prewar prosperity, Vicksburg did not openly celebrate the Fourth of July again until well into the twentieth century. Bitterness pervaded all subsequent negotiations between the two sides, marking a change from the relatively friendly atmosphere at Donelson. Pemberton and his officers notably shunned Grant when he briefly met them in Vicksburg, and later meetings with Gen. James B. McPherson, whom Grant left to supervise the occupation, were similarly frosty. The Vicksburg surrender and its aftermath, as with Donelson, offered instances of generosity between enemies, a recognition that these enemies may be countrymen again, a celebration of victory and the desolation of defeat.

Grant, anticipating a reprimand for his terms, sent a message to Henry Halleck, “The enemy surrendered this morning. The only terms allowed is their parole as prisoners of war. This I regard as a great advantage to use at this moment. It saves, probably several days in the capture and leaves troops and transports ready for immediate service.” After, he heard the expected criticism for his decision. Halleck penned a fretful letter from his Washington office, expressing the concerns of many: “I fear your paroling the prisoners at Vicksburg, without actual delivery to a proper agent as required by the seventh article of the cartel, may be construed into an absolute release, and that the men will immediately be placed in the ranks of the enemy.” Would these soldiers, some asked, return to take up arms against the United States? Grant dismissed those worries, claiming that many, if not the majority of prisoners, wished to avoid war altogether and that their possible escape was “precisely what I expected and hoped that they would do.” Although many did return to

Figure 2
the battlefield, a sizable number did not. Grant asserted, “I knew many of them were tired of the war and would get home just as soon as they could.” He further elaborated the ideas behind his Vicksburg surrender policy: “The men had behaved so well that I did not want to humiliate them. I believed that consideration for their feelings would make them less dangerous foes during the continuance of hostilities, and better citizens after the war was over.”

No fault-finding of Grant’s generous surrender policy came from his commander in chief. After hearing of Vicksburg’s fall, Lincoln wrote a letter to Grant, stating: “I do not remember that you and I ever met personally, I write this now as a grateful acknowledgment for the almost inestimable service you have done the country.” At both Port Donelson and Vicksburg, Grant combined devastating military victories with sensible and even sensitive surrender policies, pointing toward reunion of the two warring countries, providing an important insight into Grant’s evolving strategy, explicitly uniting military goals and political aims.

Vicksburg’s capture accomplished three important goals. It secured Union control of the Mississippi River, split the Confederacy in half, and delivered a devastating blow to southern morale. On July 9, Port Hudson, the last remaining Confederate fort on the river, fell to Union forces. “The Father of Waters,” President Lincoln proclaimed, “again goes unvexed to the seas.” The campaign came at a large cost, with Confederate casualties (since late March) numbering 9,091 and Union casualties 10,142. The total loss of men and property captured by the Federals from a reeling Confederacy still retains the power to astound. General Pemberton surrendered 2,166 officers, 27,230 enlisted men, 172 cannons, 50,000 rifles, 38,000 artillery shells, 58,000 pounds of black powder, 60,000 long arms, 350,000 pounds of percussion, and 600,000 rounds of ammunition. But that was not all. Despite the almost starvation diet endured by the population of Vicksburg during the siege, Federal records show that 38,668 pounds of bacon, 5,000 bushels of peas, 51,241 pounds of rice, 92,234 pounds of sugar, and 428,000 pounds of salt were confiscated. Before, during, and after the campaign, Federal troops marching, fighting, and occupying destroyed large parts of the Magnolia State, including burning of houses, businesses, and crops.

While Grant’s victory over Vicksburg never secured the lofty place in Civil War history accorded to the Union success at Gettysburg on July 3, 1863, there is an argument to be made for the greater importance of the former. Maj. Gen. George G. Meade’s victory did not remove a significant fighting force from the battlefields. General Lee’s army, defeated and discouraged, survived to fight another day. In the western theater, successful Union campaigns were bringing more and more southern territory—in Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas—under northern military control. President Lincoln seized on the opportunity to reinstate loyal civilian governments as soon as possible and demonstrate to southerners that the United States would be forgiving in welcoming back the seceded states. Before announcing his policy, he solicited advice from many places. On Lincoln’s behalf, in the summer of 1863, Henry Halleck sent letters to Grant, Sherman, and other top commanders asking for their thoughts on reconstruction. As Halleck explained, “the president . . . is disposed to receive the advice of our generals who have been in these States, and know more of their condition than gassy politicians in Congress.”

Grant responded, advising that the government should make every effort to fill the depleted ranks of men, and “to be prepared to meet and destroy their armies whenever found.” When defeated, he counseled reconciliation, “with terms held out, that by accepting, they could receive the protection of our laws.” From Grant’s viewpoint, there were many in Louisiana (one of Lincoln’s first targets for reconstruction) who held “a very fine feeling . . . towards the Union.” Additional pro-unionist sentiment in Tennessee, North Carolina, and other southern states made Grant express some optimism for reunion.

The Union commander held no illusions, however, about the huge challenges that the war’s destruction—including slavery’s demise—would bring to reconstruction. He had witnessed the liberation of thousands of slaves in Mississippi and had been deeply involved in overseeing policy for the troubled transition from slavery to freedom. Then too, he actively supported the creation of black regiments, leaving several such units near Vicksburg for the occupation. “The people of the North need not quarrel over the institution of Slavery,” he assured his congressman and political supporter, Elihu B. Washburne. “What Vice President Stevens acknowledges the corner stone of the Confederacy is already knocked out. Slavery is . . . dead and cannot be resurrected. It would take a standing Army to maintain slavery in the South if we were to make peace to-day guaranteeing to the South all their former constitutional privileges. . . . As anxious as I am to see peace reestablished I would not therefore be willing to see any settlement[1] until this question is forever settled.” Slavery might be “dead,” but reunion now could not be established without including provisions for the freed men and women, complicating an already difficult situation. Union power was growing, raising expectations for victory, but exactly how peace would come, and what kind of peace it would be, was still far from clear.
Vicksburg’s most important outcome was embodied in Lincoln’s words upon hearing of the great western victory: “Grant is my man, and I am his, the rest of the war.” Grant was quickly promoted to major general in the regular army and appointed head of the Military Division of Mississippi. His next task was at least as daunting as Vicksburg: rescuing the trapped Federal forces in the important city of Chattanooga, Tennessee. By the fall of 1863, Grant had reopened the city’s supply lines, relieved the starving soldiers, and ordered attacks on the strong Confederate positions on Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge. The ensuing Union victory in late November secured Chattanooga, Knoxville, and eastern Tennessee, leaving the Confederate western military command in ruins. At that point, Grant emerged as the most successful Union general of the Civil War. The victories at Fort Donelson, Shiloh, Vicksburg, and Chattanooga elevated his generalship far above any competitor’s. Lincoln wanted to appoint him the commander in chief of the Union armies but hesitated, concerned that the popular Grant might have presidential ambitions for 1864.

Grant’s convincing expressions of disinterest in running for the highest office soon reached Lincoln’s ears, reassuring him. Indeed, Grant and Lincoln, who had never met, would come to enjoy an unusually close relationship. While Lincoln developed skills in military strategy that guided his ultimate political goal of saving the Union, Grant developed the political skills that complimented his military abilities toward the same goal. Grant accepted without question the president’s constitutional role as commander in chief of the war. During those critical months between the end of Vicksburg and winter 1864, Grant was in constant contact with both President Lincoln and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, meeting with the latter on the morning of October 18, 1863, to discuss his plans for the western theater. In short, Grant accepted that military decisions must be made within a political context and that the ultimate power for determining strategy lay with his civilian superiors. For his part, Lincoln decided that he had found the general who would lead the country to victory. On March 9, 1864, the newly appointed Lieutenant General Grant accepted command of all the Union armies in an elaborate White House ceremony, cementing his growing reputation as the symbol of Union military victory.

As Lincoln requested, Grant devised a plan for the spring and summer campaign of 1864 that, with a few adjustments, met with his president’s approval. Grant’s plan involved the movement of all Union armies at the same time to attack and defeat the Confederates. He stressed his desire to defeat the Army of Northern Virginia while directing major campaigns in Georgia, Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, and Louisiana. The plan drew Lincoln’s warm support, lending credence to John Y. Simon’s wise appraisal of the two men’s relationship: “Grant and Lincoln reassured each other of good intentions by maintaining separate spheres of authority.” They would not always agree, of course, and a few times in the next year Lincoln expressed frustration with the Union armies’ lack of military success. He traveled twice to Grant’s headquarters at City Point, Virginia, during summer 1864 (June 20 and July 31) to discuss military strategy. But as Lincoln reminded Stanton on one such occasion of disappointment: “You and I, Mr. Stanton, have been trying to boss this job, and we have not succeeded very well with it. We have sent across the mountains for Mr. Grant . . . to relieve us, and I think we had better leave him alone to do as he pleases.” In spring 1864, the northern nation’s hopes were raised for a quick end to the war. Unfortunately, once again winning took longer than expected.

The battles of the six-week Overland campaign witnessed Ulysses S. Grant’s and Robert E. Lee’s armies fighting to bloody stalemate across Virginia. During this campaign, the possibilities of ending the war through a negotiated peace, rather than a military surrender, drew Grant into a more complicated relationship with Lincoln. For example, Grant played a role in facilitating the so-called Hampton Roads conference. A dangerously large peace movement in some parts of the Confederacy had prompted Jefferson Davis to authorize three commissioners—Vice President Alexander H. Stephens, Senator Robert M. T. Hunter of Virginia, and Assistant Secretary of War John A. Campbell—to speak with Union authorities. On their way to Washington City, Grant met with the three delegates at his headquarters in City Point, Virginia, without any explicit authority to do so.

Ascertaining that their demands were too inflexible, Grant persuaded the trio to temper their proposals in order to ensure the most favorable reception. Taking his advice, the Confederate commissioners secured a hearing with Lincoln and Secretary of State William H. Seward in January 1865. The Hampton Roads conference foundered over Davis’s refusal to bend on the issue of Confederate independence. Davis argued, “We are fighting for Independence,—and that, or extermination we will have.” For his part, Lincoln insisted on reunion and emancipation, keeping to his position on unconditional surrender. Both presidents demanded of each other unacceptable terms; neither appeared to be serious about peace negotiations in the diplomatic arena.

Grant’s deft role in facilitating the meeting demonstrated the fine lines that existed among politics, diplomacy, and the military. Still, Lincoln and Stanton made clear to Grant that his job was not to negotiate the
conditions of peace. Both were worried that a military surrender would somehow usurp the president’s control over reconstruction policy. Lincoln waged a hard war but desired a soft peace. General Grant was to deliver the former while the president wanted to deliver the latter.

As late 1864 passed into 1865, Union victory seemed increasingly imminent despite the Confederate leadership’s refusal to give up. Under Grant’s direction, the work of crushing southern morale, destroying the country’s capability to sustain itself and defeating various armies was rapidly bringing the rebellion to its knees. In the midst of this exciting but uncertain stage, a surprising proposal from General Lee landed on Grant’s desk. In mid-March, Lee invited Grant to broker a general peace agreement. The two commanders had been discussing issues regarding civilian prisoners when Lee sent a message asking about “the possibility of arriving at a satisfactory adjustment of the present unhappy difficulties by means of a military convention.” Grant appreciated that the proposal was exactly what Lincoln feared; he telegraphed to Washington immediately requesting advice. Within hours, he received a rather strongly worded response from Edwin Stanton (dictated by Lincoln): “The President directs me to say to you that he wishes you to have no conference with Gen. Lee unless it be for the capitulation of Lee’s army, or on solely minor and purely military matters.” Just in case Grant did not understand the first part of the letter, Stanton added for extra effect, “He instructs me to say that you are not to decide, discuss, or confer upon any political questions: such questions the President holds in his own hands; and will submit them to no military conferences or conventions—mean time you are to press to the utmost, your military advantages.”

Grant’s swift reply to Lee fulfilled his president’s instructions: “I have no authority to accede to your proposition for a conference on the subject proposed. Such authority is vested in the President of the United States alone.”

On March 20, 1865, General Grant invited President Lincoln to visit him at City Point for a few days. In a meeting with Grant, General Sherman, and Adm. David Porter aboard the River Queen, Lincoln discussed at length and in some depth what the terms of a military surrender should entail and articulated his own ideas about reconstruction: “Let them surrender and go home…. I say, give them the most liberal and honorable terms.” Although the details of the meeting remain closed to outsiders, Sherman’s and Porter’s later accounts stressed that Lincoln urged generous terms so that “they won’t take up arms again.” Most of all, Lincoln was reported to have said, “I want no one punished; treat them liberally all around. We want those people to return to their allegiance to the Union and submit to the laws.” Historians have assumed, quite reasonably, that Lincoln, while expressing his desire for a harmonious reunion, also insisted that two demands be made of the soon-to-be former Confederates—they accept emancipation (although the place of freed people in a newly reunited nation was evidently not discussed) and swear a loyalty oath to the United States. Together, these demands represented an unconditional surrender of the Confederacy to the United States.

Momentous decisions had to be made, and soon, but so much was going to be determined by circumstances. Lincoln played his reconstruction cards close to the vest because he did not want to be pinned down by a rigidly defined position. Once again, Lincoln and Stanton made clear to Grant that his job was not to negotiate the conditions of peace. What Grant could do was negotiate the surrender of Lee’s army. Whenever and wherever that surrender was to take place, site unknown, it was going to be the surrender of one army to another. Lincoln repeated his position to Grant: “I will deal with political questions and negotiate for peace. Your job is to fight.”
“THE WAR IS OVER”: APPOMATTOX, APRIL 9, 1865

The Appomattox campaign, which began on March 25, 1865, marked the end of the Confederacy. The Union’s destruction of the Rebels’ last supply line on April 1 quickly resulted in the falls of Petersburg and Richmond. Grant’s cavalry and infantry cut off Lee’s remaining escape routes. On April 6, the third anniversary of Shiloh, a further disaster was inflicted at Sayler’s Creek. On the evening of April 7, Grant consulted with his commanders regarding what all agreed was a desperate situation for Confederates. Grant remarked, “I have a great mind to summon Lee to surrender.” He sent this note to Lee: “The result of the last week must convince you of the hopelessness of further resistance on the part of the Army of Northern Virginia in this struggle. I feel that it is so, and regard it as my duty to shift the responsibility of any further effusion of blood by asking of you the surrender of that portion of the C.S. Army known as the Army of Northern Va.”

Lee replied, asking Grant to outline his proposed surrender, and received from the Union general this note on April 8: “I would say that peace being my great desire there is but one condition I would insist upon, namely: that the men and officers surrendered shall be disqualified for taking up arms again, against the Government of the United States, until properly exchanged.” Lee responded that the terms were exactly the same as earlier indicated in his letter of April 8: “Men and officers who surrendered shall be paroled and could not take up arms again until exchanged properly. The arms and supplies were to be turned over as captured property.” Grant observed his counterpart’s face during this conversation, later remembering, “What General Lee’s feelings were I do not know. As he was a man of much dignity, I only knew what was in my mind.”

The headache disappeared. At 11:00, they stopped to rest. Grant’s headache was still raging. While so resting, one of Gen. George Gordon Meade’s aides rode toward them at a fast clip. In his hand was a sealed envelope containing Lee’s reply to Grant’s most recent communiqué sent off early that morning. The general read the message without commenting. He handed it to his aide John A. Rawlins, asking him to read it out loud: “General: I therefore request an interview at the most convenient time and place as you may designate, to discuss the terms of the surrender of this army in accordance with your offer to have such an interview contained in your letter of yesterday.”

The two commanders engaged in an awkward exchange about their service in the Mexican War, with Lee bringing the conversation up short by asking for the terms of surrender. What would they be, he wondered. Grant responded that the terms were exactly the same as earlier indicated in his letter of April 8: “Men and officers who surrendered were to be paroled and could not take up arms again until exchanged properly. The arms and supplies were to be turned over as captured property,” Grant observed his counterpart’s face during this conversation, later remembering, “What General Lee’s feelings were I do not know. As he was a man of much dignity,
with an impassive face, it was impossible to say whether he felt inwardly glad that the end had finally come, or felt sad over the result, and was too manly to show it.\textsuperscript{56} For his part, Lee appeared satisfied with Grant’s description of his terms. Perhaps he was relieved that the dreaded phrase “unconditional surrender” was not uttered. Lee asked Grant to write out the terms of the surrender. Grant agreed and waited while his military secretary, Lieutenant Colonel Parker, brought over a small oval table and his manifold order book (a tablet prepared with carbon paper for \{3\} copies).

Puffing on a cigar, Grant prepared to write. “When I put my pen to the paper,” he recalled of this moment, “I did not know the first word that I should make use of in writing the terms. I only knew what was in my mind, and I wished to express it clearly, so that there could be no mistake about it.” And there was no mistake. Acutely aware of Lincoln’s desire for leniency, which was his too, Grant rejected any fancy flourishes for a straightforward simple explanation of the process by which the officers and men of the Army of Northern Virginia would stack their arms and record their paroles. “As I wrote on,” Grant explained, “the thought occurred to me that the officers had their own private horses and effects, which were important to them, but of no value to us; also that it would be an unnecessary humiliation to call upon them to deliver their side arms.” So then, these items were to be excluded from the weapons and property to be turned over to the federal forces. Also excluded would be a request for Lee’s ceremonial sword as a trophy of war. In the meeting, Grant did not ask for, nor did Lee offer his sword. No need to inflict that extra humiliation. And then, there was the final part of Grant’s letter to Lee.

The famous last sentence, which historian Bruce Catton described as “one of the great sentences of American history,” is as follows.\textsuperscript{50} “This done each officer and man will be allowed to return to their homes, not to be disturbed by United States authority so long as they observe their parole and the laws in force where they may reside.”\textsuperscript{50} The sentence guaranteed a secure future for all Confederate soldiers, including the highest military officials, such as Robert E. Lee. It was profoundly important in ending the war and shaping the peace to follow. It also sprang from Lincoln’s remarks on the River Queen: “Let them surrender and go home,” as well as from the theology of forgiveness so beautifully expressed in the last paragraph of his Second Inaugural, “With malice toward none; with charity for all.”\textsuperscript{50} Parker at his side, Grant looked at his handiwork and made a few corrections, and then it was Lee’s turn to review it. Lee noted that the second page omitted the word “exchange” in discussing parole, and he fixed it. When Lee came to read the end, he looked up and remarked, “This will have a very happy effect upon my army.” Lee had one more request. Would Grant consider letting the enlisted men keep their animals for spring farming? Grant agreed, prompting Lee to say, “It will be very gratifying, and will do much toward conciliating our people.”\textsuperscript{56}

Lee then returned the order book to Grant, who in turn ordered an ink copy be drawn up. Lee wrote out a letter accepting the terms, which also had to be copied. As these documents were prepared, Grant introduced Lee of the staff officers and generals who had crowded into the small room. The two men discussed prisoners, and Grant agreed to provide rations for twenty-five thousand men. Just before 4:00 P.M., Lee and Grant parted ways. They shook hands, and the ex-Confederate commander left the house and called for his horse. When Lee mounted, Grant lifted his hat in salute, as did the other Union officers present. After returning their gesture, Lee rode slowly back to his headquarters. The comments of two Confederate soldiers made at the time show an appreciative response to the terms and the tone of the surrender conducted by Grant. “When we learned that we should be paroled,” this cannoneer recorded, “and go to our homes unmolested, the relief was unbounded. . . . [T]he favorable and entirely unexpected terms of surrender wonderfully restored our souls.” Another grudgingly remarked, “I am forced to admit that the Federal officers and troops conducted themselves with singular propriety throughout this time . . . [and northern officers] came without parade, and departed without uncourteous reference to our misfortune.”\textsuperscript{64}

Important for Reconstruction’s future, Robert E. Lee immediately declared his support for Appomattox. “General Grant has acted with magnanimity,” he remarked to his supporters. Lee’s public position was laid out in a letter he wrote in August 1865. “I believe it to be the duty of every one to unite in the restoration of the country and the reestablishment of peace and harmony,” he declared. “All should unite in honest efforts to obliterate the effects of war, and to restore the blessing of peace.”\textsuperscript{66} Critics of the terms who regularly and loudly called for Lee’s arrest and trial as a traitor were stopped by U. S. Grant, who stoutly defended his Appomattox surrender, which granted protection to both privates and generals alike. Many years later, Grant said, “I had made certain terms with Lee—the best and only terms. If I had told him and his army that their liberty would be invaded, that they would be open to arrest, trial and execution for treason, Lee would never have surrendered, and we should have lost many lives in destroying him.” He added, “Now my terms of surrender were according to military law; to the instructions of Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Stanton, and so long as Lee was observing his parole I would never consent to his arrest.”\textsuperscript{66} Grant’s immense prestige as a military hero guaranteed the terms would stand.
“i only knew what was in my mind”

Other ex-Confederate officers, downcast and bitter in defeat, took care to record the magnanimity of the occasion. Colonel Marshall, Lee’s chief of artillery in the First Corps and his military secretary, described the surrender: “There was no theatrical display about it... It was the simplest, plainest, and most thoroughly devoid of any attempt at effect, that you can imagine.” Lee’s aide, Gen. Porter Alexander, earlier had urged him to “take to the woods” because “the men had a right to ask that they be spared the humiliation of asking terms of Grant, only to be told that U. S. ‘Unconditional Surrender’ Grant would live up to the name he had earned at Fort Donelson and Vicksburg.”

Making his own gesture toward reconciliation, Lee rejected guerrilla warfare, telling Alexander, “The only proper & dignified course for me would be to surrender myself & take the consequences for my action.” And much later, Alexander portrayed the surrender in this way: “General Grant’s conduct toward us in the whole matter is worthy of the very highest praise and indicates a great and broad and generous mind. For all time it will be a good thing for the whole United States, that of all the federal generals, it fell to Grant to receive the surrender of Lee.”

Grant left the scene and rode to headquarters. News of the surrender spread quickly through the Union camps. Soon, northern soldiers were cheering and a hundred-gun salute commenced. Grant ordered a stop to the celebration: “The War is over. The rebels are our countrymen again, and the best sign of rejoicing after the victory will be to abstain from all demonstrations in the field.” He also remarked that he “felt like anything rather than rejoicing.” Almost as an afterthought, Grant telegraphed Stanton, informing him, “General Lee surrendered the army of Northern Virginia this afternoon on terms proposed by myself.”

Grant left the scene and rode to headquarters. News of the surrender spread quickly through the Union camps. Soon, northern soldiers were cheering and a hundred-gun salute commenced. Grant ordered a stop to the celebration: “The War is over. The rebels are our countrymen again, and the best sign of rejoicing after the victory will be to abstain from all demonstrations in the field.” He also remarked that he “felt like anything rather than rejoicing.” Almost as an afterthought, Grant telegraphed Stanton, informing him, “General Lee surrendered the army of Northern Virginia this afternoon on terms proposed by myself.”

The meeting between Grant and Lee at Appomattox Court House, Virginia on April 9, 1865, Palm Sunday, is considered the end of the Civil War. The deeply Christian northern nation exulted in, and commemorated, the connection between what they deemed two sacred occasions.

In reality, it was not exactly the end, as several more Confederate armies surrendered in the coming weeks, with President Andrew Johnson officially declaring the end a year later. It is important to be precise. Grant’s surrender terms were only offered to the Army of Northern Virginia. As stated earlier, the U.S. government did not recognize an entity described as a Confederate “nation” but insisted on preserving the fiction that the southern states were only temporarily in rebellion. As such, no peace negotiations could be held with insurrectionists, and all remaining Rebel field armies surrendered individually but, importantly, using the Appomattox surrender as their model.

After meeting with Lee briefly the next morning, Grant traveled to Washington, D.C., deliberately missing the formal ceremony of the laying down of arms (as did Lee, who remained in camp), which occurred on April 12. With Grant’s restraint in mind, Gen. Joshua L. Chamberlain conducted the ceremony featuring a notable demonstration of forgiveness and reconciliation. “On our part,” wrote Chamberlain, “not a sound of trumpet more, nor roll of drums; not a cheer nor word nor whisper of vain-glorying, ... but an awed stillness rather, and breath-holding, as if it were the passing of the dead!” And when the Union’s hero did get to Washington City, Lincoln expressed his unqualified approval of the terms

"Louis Guillaume, The Surrender of General Lee to General Grant, 1867 (Library of Congress)."
Grant had given Lee. The northern population celebrated—although approval of the Appomattox agreement was not nearly as widespread as is usually portrayed in the history books.

Grant’s surrender terms provoked controversy, stronger in force than Vicksburg’s by far. From the perspective of many people in the North—who in April 1865 were talking of traitors, treason trials, and hanging—the agreement seemed ludicrously generous. Two examples illustrate the disapproving tone. An editorial in the New York Times groused, “It was very evident that a large number of our citizens would have been better satisfied if Grant had not allowed Lee and his men their parole, and a New York Tribune correspondent described the terms as “regarded with disgust and unqualified indignation by large numbers of the most sensible and loyal and influential citizens in this region.”

In the short term, Lincoln’s steadfast determination to stand behind Grant’s agreement checked these feelings of revenge. Officially general in chief of the army of the United States, U. S. Grant was expected to play a large role in the coming reconstruction. He was keenly aware of that hatred for the South expressed within the northern press and by some politicians reflected a sizable public sentiment that could easily be turned toward retribution. Writing to his wife, Julia, from the defeated region, he observed: “The suffering that must exist in the South next year, even with the war ending now, will be beyond conception. People who talk of further retaliation and punishment, except of political leaders, either do not conceive of the suffering endured already or they are heartless and unfeeling and wish to stay at home, out of danger, whilst the punishment is being inflicted.”

Only a few weeks later, the emotions Abraham Lincoln’s April 15, 1865, assassination prompted a firestorm of controversy over William T. Sherman’s terms of surrender for Gen. Joseph E. Johnston’s army in North Carolina. On April 21, Grant received Sherman’s dispatch from New Bern informing him of the details of the surrender agreement. Grant realized instantly that Sherman did exactly what Grant had been warned to not do—he had arranged a general treaty of peace covering not just the army but the terms upon which separate southern states could be readmitted to the Union. Here, Sherman’s document allowed for Confederates to take weapons to their state arsenals, said that the United States would recognize the authority of the state governments, and potentially guaranteed citizens’ political and property rights. Grant quickly brought the document to the attention of President Andrew Johnson and Secretary Stanton, who disavowed it. At Grant’s suggestion, the two approved his trip to North Carolina, where he diplomatically and expeditiously persuaded Sherman to resubmit the surrender along the lines of Appomattox. In the wake of the uproar, Grant’s surrender agreement (which also went beyond a purely military surrender) appeared restrained and reasonable in comparison to Sherman’s. Indeed, despite misgivings, the overwhelming evidence suggests that the majority of loyal citizens came to celebrate and conflate the Appomattox peace terms with the securing of Union victory.

April 9, 1865, was surely the apogee of Ulysses S. Grant’s military career, cementing his reputation as a magnanimous warrior as well as foreshadowing his role in the Johnson administration and his two terms as president overseeing reconstruction policy. No word was more important than “magnanimous” in describing the Union general and no myth more central to understanding the ending of the Civil War and the beginning of reconstruction and reunion then that of the surrender of Lee’s army at Appomattox. Simply put, the surrender reigns as one of the supremely perfect moments of American national history. After a bloody, bitter war, two brilliant but stunningly different commanders—one tall and perfectly attired figure in a new gray uniform, ceremonial sword by his side, the other a plain unpretentious figure born in humble circumstances, uniform sloppy and mud-splattered—who met and forged the nation anew.

Grant’s terms at Appomattox arose out of his war experience, particularly at Fort Donelson and Vicksburg, and through his conversations with Lincoln at City Point and elsewhere. The last part of the simple document represented something he had given a lot of thought to, expressed in a concentrated form: “This done each officer and man will be allowed to return to their homes, not to be disturbed by United States authority so long as they observe their parole and the laws in force where they may reside.” It revealed his view that when the war was over there should be no vindictive policy toward the enemy; it revealed his agreement with Lincoln that favored clemency and generosity; it revealed his belief that reconstruction would not, and should not, be simply an “indulgence in revenge.”

Grant’s 1865 surrender document, then, was not a product of a fleeting moment suggested by the statement “I only knew what was in my mind” but reflected actions committed and policies formulated in the battlefield, and conversations held with the highest political authorities throughout the war. Grant’s sentiment and his judgment joined him firmly with his president’s vision of a reconstruction policy conducted with as little rancor as possible. Here, Grant’s final sentence made the military surrender into a peace agreement that might set the stage for true reconciliation, if not in the near future, as so many hoped for in April 1865, than sometime within a few generations. In short, Grant’s terms offered peace and reconciliation to those who would embrace it. Because the final part packed so much punch, some have pointed out that Grant intruded into political
reconstruction by defining the conditions and consequences of the parole he was offering in the terms to the soldiers of the major Confederate army in the field. And they are right. Exceeding his instructions, Grant made a promise that rightfully belonged to another but was rendered so perfectly that his president lodged no complaint.

Reconstruction and its discontents were in the future for the Union commander who had accepted the cruelties of a hard war, who had waged that hard war without any illusion that victory could be achieved without fighting, who had borne the personal responsibility of inflicting immense sacrifice on the part of both soldiers and civilians, and who also never forgot the ultimate goal of restoring a peaceful Union. Until the day he died, Grant believed that on April 9, 1865, he had produced a surrender document worthy of the sacrifices of his men in the war.

Can Americans today still admire the generous spirit of reconciliation exhibited at Fort Donelson, Vicksburg, and Appomattox even while allowing for the realities of a viciously fought war and the turbulent, tragic, difficult, and disappointing era that followed? My answer is yes, if the long perspective is adopted. The Union held, but the scars of the awful Civil War were too deep to heal quickly or easily. The Union held, and that turned out to be the realized and recognized achievement for a majority of northerners, while the promise of emancipation would remain “an unfinished revolution” for the freed people. The challenge of building a new society in the South that included both black and white people proved nearly impossible. Between the white people of North and South, there would be reconstruction and reunion, but precious little genuine harmony, accord, respect, and reconciliation. What there was came out of the Appomattox surrender agreement, which secured the United States for all time, and within time, enough reconciliation. The complex nature of surrender during the Civil War, encompassing hatred and love, despair and hope, bitterness and forgiveness can somehow be summed up in one deceptively simple sentence, “I only knew what was in my mind.”

NOTES
I would like to thank Bill Blair and the anonymous readers for the journal for their perceptive criticism.


2. One of the primary definitions of the verb surrender is “to give up (something) out of one’s own possession or power into that of another who has or asserts a claim to it; to yield on demand or compulsion; esp. (MIL) to give up the possession of (a fortress, town, territory, etc.) to an enemy or assailant. The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 2:244.


4. For a thorough examination of this campaign, see Benjamin Franklin Cooling, Forts Henry and Donelson: The Key to the Confederate Heartland (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003).

5. As quoted in Smith, Grant, 162.


9. As quoted in Smith, Grant, 164. For a thorough discussion of the battle and the surrender, see Steven E. Woodworth, Nothing but Victory: The Army of the Tennessee, 1861–1865 (New York: Knopf, 2005), 94–120.


11. “Prisoners of War” in Revised United States Army Regulations of 1861 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1863), 523–24. For general treatments, see James M. McPherson,
“I only knew what was in my mind” 333


12. The numbers of prisoners taken at Fort Donelson vary between twelve thousand and fifteen thousand, but Grant recorded that rations were issued to 14,623 Donelson captives. Grant, Personal Memoirs, 1:314. Cooling, “Campaign for Fort Donelson,” 40.


14. A grateful Grant remembered Buckner’s similar generosity when he needed funds after his resignation from the United States Army in 1854. Quotation from “Campaign for Fort Donelson,” 44.


18. USG to John Pemberton, July 3, 1863, in Grant, Papers, 8:455.

19. As quoted in Ballard, Vicksburg, 397.

20. Grant, Personal Memoirs, 1:560 [can you change the page number to 560?].

21. Ibid., 561.

22. Ibid.


24. Quotations from Woodworth, Nothing but Victory, 453.


26. Quotation from Woodworth, Nothing but Victory, 453.


31. Ibid., 569.

32. As quoted in Bruce Catton, Grant Moves South (1960; repr., Boston: Little, Brown, 1988), 476.


34. Abraham Lincoln to James C. Conkling, August 26, 1863, ibid., 407.

35. Ballard, Vicksburg, 398.


42. The most recent assessment of Lincoln’s military leadership is James M. McPherson, Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief (New York: Penguin, 2008).

43. General Orders No. 1, in Grant, Papers, 9:296–97. Stanton visited to confer with Grant and officially gave him the command of the Military Division of the Mississippi. The next face-to-face meeting between Grant and Stanton occurred in March 1864 in Washington, D.C.


45. As quoted in Bruce Catton, Grant Takes Command (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1969), 139.

46. Davis made this statement to two northern visitors who visited him in Richmond in July 1864, hoping to persuade him to come to a peace conference with Lincoln. Quotation from William J. Cooper Jr., Jefferson Davis, American (New York: Knopf, 2000), 488.


48. R. E. Lee to USG, March 2, 1865, Grant, Papers, 14:99.

49. E. M. Stanton to USG, March 3, 1865, ibid., 91; see also Brooks Simpson, Ulysses S. Grant, 410–11.

50. USG to R. E. Lee, March 4, 1865, Grant, Papers, 14:98.

51. Quotations from Donald, Lincoln, 574.


53. U. S. Grant to Gen. R. E. Lee, April 7, 1865, Grant, Papers, 14:361.
Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington,” reprinted in Grant, those prisoners,” adding, “I believe it is conceded by everybody that I had that right. I had that right, as Military Commander, to arrange terms of surrender, which should protect the lives of them [Lee and his soldiers] no political priveleges [sic] that his terms prevented guerrilla warfare, reminding his questioners that he “gave

The major feeling sweeping through the diminished ranks of Lee’s army was relief that the war was over. An interpretation of the surrender that stresses the Confederate point of view can be found in Marvel, Lee’s Last Retreat, 182–99.

Lee’s private doubts about Reconstruction were never revealed in public. Emory M. Thomas, Robert E. Lee: A Biography (New York: Norton, 1995), 380–92. Lee and Grant had one more personal encounter. A newly elected President Grant extended an invitation to Lee visit in the White House. No record of the details of the ensuing meeting was ever published or recorded; it was described as “restrained but respectful.” William M. S. Rasmussen and Robert S. Tilton, Lee and Grant (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society in association with D. Giles Limited, London, 2007), 233.

Lee took the amnesty oath on October 2, 1865. His subsequent application for an official pardon caused controversy, and many in the north opposed it, including President Andrew Johnson, who advocated Lee’s arrest. However, when Johnson issued his general amnesty, Lee’s worries regarding arrest ended. On July 18, 1867, Grant was called upon to defend his leniency toward Lee and other high-ranking Confederate military officers before the Judiciary Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives in the hearings regarding the impeachment of President Johnson. At this venue, Grant explained that his terms prevented guerrilla warfare, reminding his questioners that he “gave them [Lee and his soldiers] no political priveleges [sic], but that I had a right, as Military Commander, to arrange terms of surrender, which should protect the lives of those prisoners,” adding, “I believe it is conceded by everybody that I had that right. I know Mr. Lincoln conceded it at the time.” “Testimony of Grant before the Judiciary Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington,” reprinted in Grant, Papers, 17:325.


On April 14, Grant was the center of attention at a cabinet meeting. According to David Donald, Lincoln “beamed” when Grant described his terms as “I told them to go back to their homes and families, and they would not be molested, if they did nothing more.” Donald, Lincoln, 592. Simpson, Ulysses S. Grant, 442.

Support of Lincoln’s “easy” or moderate Reconstruction Policy issued in December 1863 divided the Republican Party. Lincoln’s Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction gave pardons to all Confederates who pledged loyalty to the Union and accepted emancipation. Although the majority of Republicans supported Lincoln’s version, many Radical Republicans—Senators Charles Sumner and Benjamin Wade, Representatives Thaddeus Stevens and George Julian—opposed it for many reasons, including viewing Lincoln’s attempt to control reconstruction an unconstitutional reach of the executive branch into the prerogatives of the legislative. Eric Foner, Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877 (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 35–50.

As quoted in Simpson, Ulysses S. Grant, 441.

John R. Neff, Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005) and Sean A. Scott, A Visitaton of God: Northern Civilians Interpret the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) explore a range of northern responses to the ending of the war.

USG to Julia Dent Grant, April 25, 1865, Grant, Papers, 14:433.


For the importance of Appomattox for Grant’s reputation and memory, see Waugh, U. S. Grant, esp. chaps. 4–5.

U. S. Grant to Gen. R. E. Lee, April 9, 1865, Grant, Papers, 14:373-74.

This phrase is taken from the title of Eric Foner’s Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution.