

Abraham Lincoln Grows Frustrated with his Generals **<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>**

On January 9, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln informed General of the Army George McClellan that he was becoming exasperated with the two senior generals in the Western theatre, Don Carlos Buell and Henry Halleck. Lincoln was anxious for movement by the Union forces in the west and had requested of both generals their plans for immediate action. Neither general had responded.

Military action in the west was crucial for the overall Union strategy of subduing the South. The so-called Anaconda Plan was devised by former General of the Army Winfield Scott and called for an eastern naval blockade to be coupled with an advance down the Mississippi River that would cut the Confederacy in two. Union armies would then close in and slowly strangle the rebellion much like the notorious South American snake attacking its prey. Writing to Halleck and Buell, Lincoln had stressed the importance of attacking the Confederates “with superior forces and different points, at the same time.”

Several days after Lincoln’s message to McClellan, the president convened his Cabinet along with top-ranking generals to discuss to talk about the status of the plan. McClellan, who had been extremely ill for several weeks, showed up to the meeting to Lincoln’s surprise. Some have speculated that the general, hearing about Lincoln’s frustration and this impromptu meeting, had dragged himself from his bed to the meeting to assure that he would not be replaced. In any case, McClellan was noncommittal about

his plans in the West or elsewhere and apparently was somewhat miffed that politicians were becoming involved in military strategy.

Earlier on this same day, January 13, 1862, Lincoln had met with the Cabinet alone and had announced a significant change in high level staffing. Two days prior, Lincoln had accepted the resignation of Secretary of War Simon Cameron. Cameron, a wealthy Pennsylvania banker, had been a long-time U.S. Senator and a rival of Lincoln for the 1860 Republican Presidential nomination. During the year of his service at Secretary of War, there were numerous allegations of corruption within the War Department. Pennsylvania congressman Thaddeus Stevens was so appalled Cameron's behavior that he told Lincoln, damning Cameron with faint praise: "I don't believe he would steal a red-hot stove." When Cameron demanded that Stevens apologize, Stevens told Lincoln "I believe I told you he would not steal a red-hot stove. I now take that back." Cameron himself was somewhat famous for his comment that "An honest politician is one who, when he is bought, stays bought."

Lincoln had accepted Cameron's resignation and immediately tried to limit any further damage by Cameron by appointing him as Minister to Russia. At his morning meeting, Lincoln informed his Cabinet that Cameron would be replaced as Secretary of War by Edwin M. Stanton. Stanton, who had been Attorney General under President James Buchanan, would prove to be much more effective in persecuting the war than Cameron. But he would eventually become even more controversial than Cameron due to his aggressive persecution of those who he deemed traitorous to the Union cause. A close friend of McClellan, Stanton would turn out to be one of the most prominent figures for the duration of the war.

