

Lincoln Issues War Order Number One
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On Monday January 27, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln's frustration with the lack of progress shown by his generals in prosecuting the war led to his taking a very unusual step. He issued General War Order No. 1, which read:

Executive Mansion,

Washington, January 27, 186

Ordered that the 22nd. day of February 1862, be the day for a general movement of the Land and Naval forces of the United States against the insurgent forces.

That especially --

The Army at & about, Fortress Monroe.

The Army of the Potomac.

The Army of Western Virginia

The Army near Munfordsville, Ky.

The Army and Flotilla at Cairo.

And a Naval force in the Gulf of Mexico, be ready for a movement on that day.

That all other forces, both Land and Naval, with their respective commanders, obey existing orders, for the time, and be ready to obey additional orders when duly given.

That the Heads of Departments, and especially the Secretaries of War and of the Navy, with all their subordinates; and the General-in-Chief, with all other commanders and subordinates, of Land and Naval forces, will severally be held to their strict and full responsibilities, for the prompt execution of this order.

Lincoln had grown weary with excuses and delays and he was now demanding action. He thought it crucial that the Confederacy be attacked hard at different points simultaneously. Attacks occurring at the same time would prevent the Confederates making use of their shorter interior lines to reinforce stressed locations. Since the Battle of Bull Run six months earlier, Union forces had made nothing but disjointed and ineffective probes at the Confederate lines.

Lincoln was especially frustrated with General of the Army George McClellan, who refused to divulge his overall strategy for prosecution of the war or for moving the Army of the Potomac, under his direct supervision. However, Lincoln needed to proceed carefully with McClellan as he had many friends and supporters in Washington. In addition, he had done a fine job building strong defenses around the city since Bull Run and had also whipped the rag tag Union army there into a fine fighting force. Several days after issuing the General War Order, Lincoln added a second order aimed at McClellan himself. Special War Order No. 1 read:

Ordered, That all the disposable force of the Army of the Potomac, after providing safely for the defense of Washington, be formed into an expedition for the immediate object of seizing and occupying a point upon the railroad southwestward of what is known as Manassas Junction; all details to be in the discretion of the General in Chief, and the expedition to move before or on the 22d day of February next.

A. LINCOLN.

While Lincoln's general order did prompt immediate action in the West, it would be some time before the president would see any movement by McClellan or his Army of the Potomac. It would be well past Lincoln's February 22nd deadline before he would see movement of Union forces toward Richmond.

