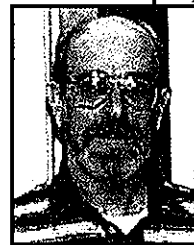


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THE WITTENBERG HISTORY JOURNAL



**DEDICATED TO:
DR. E. CHARLES CHATFIELD
DR. ROBERT S. CUTLER
DR. RICHARD T. ORTQUIST**



**WITTENBERG UNIVERSITY
SPRINGFIELD, OHIO**

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Volume XXVIII

Spring 1999

Dedicated to...



E. Charles Chatfield, Jr.

H. Orth Hirt Professor of History, is a noted scholar of historic peace and anti-war movements. His teaching fields include methodology, the Vietnam War, and U.S. progressive, urban, and foreign policy history. Chatfield took his turn to chair the Department and he directed Wittenberg's International Education program for a decade. Indeed, he has traveled throughout Europe, and in Russia, India, and Mexico, whether delivering professional papers or directing study abroad.

Chatfield's books include *For Peace and Justice: Pacifism in America, 1914-1941*, which won the 1972 publication award of the Ohio Academy of History, *An*

American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era, which he completed

for the late Charles DeBenedetti and won the 1991 Kuehl Prize, and *The American Peace Movement: Ideals and Activism* which was rated a 1992 outstanding academic book by Choice. He has also written several dozen journal articles, and introductions, prefaces, and chapters of books. His most interesting scholarly experience, though, was to co-direct a project by Russian and U.S. historians that resulted in the collaborative volume, *Peace/Mir: An Anthology of Historic Alternatives to War*. Chatfield earned his B.A. degree from Monmouth College and his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Vanderbilt University, joining the Wittenberg faculty in 1961.



Robert S. Cutler

Associate Professor of History, specializes in teaching medieval and ancient history. He has delivered papers to professional meetings on Carolingian history and the Italian policy of Louis the Pious. Former Chair of the Department, he has held a post-doctoral interdisciplinary internship in the humanities at Pennsylvania State University. He participated in two National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminars, one at Harvard University, the other at the University of Tennessee.

Cutler received his B.S. degree from Purdue University and his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Michigan State University. He came to Wittenberg in 1968.



Richard T. Ortquist

Professor of History, teaches courses on the survey of U. S. history, U.S. history since 1945, American constitutional history, and American business history. His publications have dealt with Depression Politics in Michigan, unemployment and relief in Michigan during the Hoover years, and tax crisis and politics in early-Depression Michigan. Ortquist is author of *Depression Politics in Michigan*. His

many professional papers and lectures have examined Depression politics in Michigan, Wilber M. Brucker and the Michigan Republican Party, Michigan Democrats in the wake of 1932, 20th-century right-wing movements, Washington-Moscow detente, and unemployment and relief during the Great Depression. Ortquist has been a visiting lecturer in history at Eastern Michigan University and has served as Associate Dean of the College, Associate Provost, and Acting Vice President for Academic Affairs. He was granted the B.A. degree by Hope College and the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees by the University of Michigan. He joined the Wittenberg faculty in 1964.

Editor's Note:

The 1999 History Journal contains works representing a broad range of subject matters. These exemplary papers were all written by Wittenberg students and submitted to the staff for review. We would like to thank all of those students who submitted papers. It was difficult to pick only a few, but we enjoyed reading each one of them! Thanks also needs to be extended to the Wittenberg History Department for spreading the word about the journal to their classes.

We owe a special thanks to department secretary, Margaret DeButy, and our retiring advisor, Dr. Chatfield for all of their advice, support, and guidance.. We also would like to give a warm welcome to Dr. Protor. These persons, as well as our staff, have made the 1999 journal a reality. We hope that you find enjoyment in this year's journal and appreciate the support we have received from the Wittenberg Community!

*Pari Perkins
Jennifer Duplaga
Bob Rickey*

The Hartje Papers

The Martha and Robert G. Hartje Award is awarded to a Senior in the spring semester every year. The History Department determines three finalists who write a 600-800 word narrative historical essay dealing with a historical event or figure. The finalists must have a 2.7 GPA and have completed six history courses. The winner is awarded \$400 at a spring semester History Colloquium and all three entries are included in the History Journal.

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1998-1999 Staff**

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Address correspondence to:

Editor
The Wittenberg History Journal
History Department
Wittenberg University
Post Office Box 720
Springfield, Ohio 45501

Reclaiming Tradition: American Indian Female Involvement in the Red Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s

Beth Lytle
Wittenberg Class of 2000

The Cheyenne people have been quoted as saying, “[N]o people is broken until the heart of its women is on the ground. Then they are broken. Then they will die.”¹ From the moment the first settlers arrived on the American continent until present day, the native tribes and peoples who inhabited that land have struggled for their very existence, both literally and culturally. Many lost, but many succeeded. Those who won and those who continue to wage their war have found a valuable weapon in what, until the advent of the women’s movement in the latter half of the twentieth century, would have appeared to the white invaders to be an unlikely source—their women. The women have refused to give up, have refused to let their hearts be thrown on the ground, and have refused to let their people die. Through the political turmoil and cultural rejuvenation that characterized the American Indian² society of the 1960s and 1970s, women not only participated in the background, but led the way, supporting their activism with roles and values retained from their heritage.

Upon contact with the indigenous peoples of the New World, European settlers, so accustomed to their “civilized” societies in which the male figure of the household held supreme power over the family *and* its dealings in the public sphere, applied their standards to the natives they encountered in America. The new inhabitants quickly learned enough of the natives’ ways to realize that the work of men and women were separate, that women not only tended to the children and other “domestic” concerns, but were responsible for the cultivation of crops in many tribes, while the men seemingly had few obligations beyond hunting and organizing tribal affairs. White

society stereotyped native women as the “workhorses” of the tribes. What the colonizers missed, however, was the immense power that females actually retained.

While it is true that masculine and feminine duties were seen distinct, they were *the* authority in their respective areas. As it has been stated,

Although males might have monopolized public roles and positions of authority, important decisions were also determined in the private sphere; there-fore, the reality of power was often very different from its public manifestation. Realizing the importance of private power is critical to understand-ing Indian cultural systems because—in general— Indian women exercised almost complete control over the home, the children, and the belongings inside the home.³

Women might not have held positions on the council (though in some tribes they did), and they might not have galloped off on a horse with a war party (though they sometimes did this, too), but they were the “decision-makers” in family affairs, indirect influences on the actions of the governing body.

The status of women in American Indian societies, in general, has undergone tremendous change over the past four centuries. Where they once had an important, if not public, voice in tribal affairs, where they were at one time regarded as equal, if not superior, to men, where they were held in high esteem for their ability to give life to the next generation, native American females were then silenced and subjugated to their male counterparts with the imposition of European customs and religion. Christianity, in all its forms, did much to damage women’s equality in American Indian society. Traditional

religions often put women in the forefront, as humans' creator; Christianity, rather, imposed "a patriarchal male god."⁴ When tribes were forced onto reservations and restricted from hunting, the male began to take over his counterpart's role as cultivator. The men quickly became the sole providers for their families, and, as contact with whites increased, slowly assumed women's positions as the major influence on family life. The conflict between Indian and white traditions resulted in "a breakdown of the complementary nature of male-female relations and a general increase in Indian male dominance and control over Indian women."⁵

It was not until the 1950s, over three hundred years since the clash between the two cultures began in North America, that women undertook the reclamation of the power they had traditionally possessed. As the United States government instituted policies aimed at the termination of native tribes—in effect, disassembling their independent governments and integrating their peoples into mainstream American society—the resolve of many indigenous peoples, men and women, to avoid such a fate strengthened. Their struggle became known as the Red Power movement, and during the 1970s gave birth to several organizations dedicated to the triumph of political and cultural survival.

The famous names and faces of the movement shared many ideals and dreams for their people. But more than their aspirations united them. Leonard Peltier, Dennis Banks, Russell Means, Clyde and Vernon Bellecourt, Leonard Crow Dog, Richard Oakes, Clyde Warrior, and Vine Deloria, Jr. were the leaders on whom the cameras were focused during the siege of Wounded Knee in 1973; articles and interviews centered around them during the occupation of Alcatraz Island four years earlier. And they were all men. As far as the traditionally ignorant American public was concerned, native women were what they had always been—"inferior to the noble male." As a result, the American populace largely overlooked female involvement in the Red Power movement. But they *were* there. They organized survival schools in Wounded Knee and Alcatraz, brandished homemade weapons at

the takeover of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., were top officers in many of the early organizations, and died for their involvement.⁶

When a group of Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) employees, together with various tribal representatives, formed the first pan-Indian organization in 1944, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), Helen Peterson, a Sioux, was appointed executive director. In following years, two other women became national officers—Georgeann Robinson (Osage) as vice president, and Helen Mitchell (Quinalt) as secretary. In addition, females held three regional vice presidencies—Elsie Ricklefs of the Hoopa Valley Tribe, Agnes Savilla of the Mohave, and Alvina Grey Bear of the Standing Rock Sioux. Seventeen years after the emergence of NCAI, a group of ten college students, five of whom were women, created a second organization—the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC). Additionally, females controlled two of the three top officer positions; Shirley Witt (Mohawk) was appointed first vice president, and Joan Noble (Ute) was appointed second vice president.⁷

Females hardly limited their involvement to "safe" office work, however. The occupation of Alcatraz Island by Indians of All Tribes (largely a student organization) furthered their commitment to the Red Power movement.⁸ Madonna Gilbert ran a survival school for nine months, as entire families became involved and their children needed to continue their education⁹; Stella Leach, "a registered Indian nurse," helped to operate a medical support unit; Grace Thorpe was in charge of public relations, until "she bumped heads with the island council and left."¹⁰ LaNada Boyer became an outspoken advocate of American Indian rights; she organized a press conference, interviewed with the Leftist journal *Ramparts*¹¹, and visited with actress Jane Fonda, who consequently arranged an appearance on the "Dick Cavett Show" for Boyer. When the siege ended in the arrival of federal marshals on 11 June 1971, all fifteen people on the island were arrested, of whom four were women and five were children.

Women again raised their voices when, in 1973, a particularly odious leader of the Oglala Sioux, Richard "Dicky" Wilson, was brought up

on charges by three members of the tribal council and then managed to postpone his impeachment hearings. Nearly three hundred demonstrators protested in front of the BIA building in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, almost all of whom were women and children. United States marshals, called in to protect the area, taunted the group

with a boast that revived memories of braggart officers like Custer: "Us seventy-five marshals could whip you three hundred Indians very easily." It got the women mad and they marched up to the marshals. "They wouldn't lay a hand on us," said one of the women. "But if they tried...we were willing to fight."¹²

It would eventually come down to that. In February of 1973, hardly a month after the demonstration, members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) seized the small town of Wounded Knee. Women were not only there, they put their lives in danger for the principles and demands set forth during the conflict. They were arrested as they left the area, often detained for weeks without the allowance of a phone call or opportunity for legal counsel. They took up rifles during firefights between those holding the hamlet and the federal law enforcement (and later the military) brought in to "liberate" it. Mary Brave Bird arrived to support AIM's action when she was only seventeen, and nine months pregnant. Her son Pedro was born during an exchange of gunfire, with both their lives in danger. Brave Bird left Wounded Knee while the occupation was still in full force, and was jailed on several charges, though she had been given assurance on entering "the Knee" that she was allowed free entry and exit. Authorities later released her without major incident.¹³

The most publicized case of female involvement in the American Indian Movement ended more tragically than that of Mary Brave Bird and her son. Anna Mae Aquash, a Micmac Indian born and raised in Nova Scotia, relocated to the United States and became embroiled in the American Indian struggle. She, too, was an occupant of Wounded Knee, and it is widely believed that the FBI suspected she had seen the murder of two of its agents while there. Three years later, in February of 1976, she was found

dead on the Pine Ridge reservation. What happened following her discovery has led her friends and relatives to believe the federal government or someone connected to it, was behind her murder:

After an examination of her remains, a BIA-hired pathologist announced that she had died of natural causes—probably exposure. Later, her body was exhumed, and independent pathologist discovered in her head a .32-caliber bullet, which had been fired from a gun placed at the back of her neck, execution style. When the BIA's pathologist was questioned, he retorted, "A little bullet isn't hard to overlook."¹⁴

Anna Mae's murderer was never found, although the FBI recently reopened the case in light of new evidence.

Given the extent of American Indian female activism during the 1960s and 1970s, a case could be made that they were heavily influenced by the women's rights movement during that time, that they took cues from the white women who were raising their voices to protest sexual inequality in society. That assumption would be misguided. American women in the feminist movement demanded their individual rights as females, not their collective rights as an ethnic group. They asserted themselves to break free of traditional society, they did not struggle to return to it as American Indian women did. Their main enemy was sexism, not racism. And theirs was not a question of survival. In the words of Paula Gunn Allen, American Indian activist and author: "American Indian women struggle on every front for the survival of our children, our people, our self-respect, or value systems, and our way of life."¹⁵ Additionally, the majority culture that the feminist movement challenged so directly would not be destroyed if women lost their battle; even if they won, most of its aspects would still be retained. Indigenous women fought to save their traditions, to reclaim their ancestral land, and to assert their identities as *Indians*, not women:

Many [American Indian] women express strong opposition to those who would alter our life supports, steal our tribal lands, colonize our cultures and cultural expressions, and revise our very identities. We must strive to maintain tribal status; we

must make certain that the tribes continue to be legally recognized entities, sovereign nations within the larger United States, and we must wage this struggle in many ways.... We are doing all that we can as mothers and grandmothers; as family members and tribal members; as professionals, workers, artists, shamans, leaders, chiefs, speakers, writers, and organizers, we daily demonstrate that we have no intention of disappearing, of being silent, or of quietly acquiescing in our extinction.¹⁶

American Indian women in their traditional roles were the guardians of the culture; they were responsible for passing on customs and beliefs to their children. Though their participation in armed conflict certainly was not typical of their ancestors, they were fulfilling their duty. They were, through their participation, both voicing their anger at the corruption of their ancient ways of life and demanding a return to them. Author Nancy Shoemaker arrives at the same conclusion: "...[N]ative women actively, creatively, and often successfully resisted marginality....[T]hey sought alternatives and created a new understanding of their roles by merging traditional beliefs with cultural innovation."¹⁷ That "cultural innovation" in the Red Power movement was to utilize methods of protest that white men would understand—violence and political action—in order to keep their traditions alive.

This is not to say that American Indian females did not experience the sexism that the mainstream movement struggled against. It existed on the reservations and it flourished in Red Power organizations. It was present during the Alcatraz takeover and throughout the existence of the American Indian Movement. But this sexism was learned from the chauvinistic culture of European white men; "[t]hey have learned the white man's ways of talking down to women and regarding their position as inferior." In the context of traditional society, the status of American Indian women at the advent of the Red Power movement did not make sense. They have, however, continually insisted that survival of the tribes and preservation of their culture are of primary concern, rather than focus their attention solely on changing their position.

Madonna Gilbert, co-director of We Will Remember Survival School near the Pine Ridge Reservation, agrees: "In [white] culture you have lots of problems with men. Maybe we do too, but we don't have time to worry about sexism. We worry about survival."

A few scholars have pushed to distinguish American Indian feminism from the mainstream women's movement, to set boundaries between actions aimed to help tribes in general and actions aimed to elevate the status of indigenous women. However, few, if any, divisions can be made between the two. Women held much more power in their traditional societies than they did at the time the pan-Indian organizations were launched. By involving themselves in efforts to return to a culture long disregarded and protect the rights of their people women began to reclaim their status.

Buffy Sainte-Marie, a North American Indian singer, once said, "Our women are the cement of our culture. Our women are our warriors."¹⁸ The actions of Mary Brave Bird, the words of Paula Gunn Allen, and the sacrifice of Anna Mae Aquash are evidence enough for her claim. If the Cheyenne are correct, their people survive because of them—because they risked their lives and loved ones to perpetuate tradition, and, through it, to restore their power.

Whether American Indian sexism exists, it is not the issue for these women. Of utmost importance is the continuation of an ancient way of life. The activism they engaged in during the 1960s and 1970s, the struggle they became embroiled in, was a way for these women, as the guardians of their culture, to continue and return to roles long abandoned, but not forgotten.

End Notes

¹ Paula Gunn Allen, "Stealing the Thunder," in *The Sacred Hoop* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 267.

² An overwhelming majority of native writers, speakers, and activists use the term 'American Indian' to identify indigenous peoples in general, rather than the often-used 'Native American.' They argue, perhaps rightly so, that every person born on the American continent is a native, and therefore the American Indians are not seen as a separate ethnic group. Furthermore, it is commonly held that 'Indian' is a corruption of the Spanish term *en Dios*, or "in God," which elevates their self-perception to one of a holy people.

³ Theresa D. LaFramboise, Anneliese M. Heyle, and Emily J. Ozer, "Changing and Diverse Roles of Women in American Indian Cultures," *Sex Roles* 22, nos. 7/8 (1990): 461.

⁴ Beatrice Medicine, "Indian Women: Tribal Identity as Status Quo," in *Woman's Nature: Rationalizations of Inequality*, Athene Series, ed. Marian Lowe and Ruth Hubbard (New York: Permagon Press, 1983), 69.

⁵ LaFramboise, Heyle, and Ozer, "Changing and Diverse Roles," 461.

⁶ Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians* (New York: Friendship Press, 1945), 39-40; quoted in Beatrice Medicine, "Indian Women: Tribal Identity as Status Quo," in *Woman's Nature: Rationalizations of Inequality*, Athene Series, ed. Marian Lowe and Ruth Hubbard (New York: Permagon Press, 1983), 69.

⁷ Stan Steiner, "The Changing Woman," in *The New Indians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 223.

⁸ The island of Alcatraz was seized to protest its sale to a public utility company; under a nineteenth-century treaty, any land relinquished by the federal government was to be turned over to native peoples.

⁹ Survival schools were initiated in Minneapolis-St. Paul, when the American Indian Movement began. They are institutions for Indian children who dislike or who cannot perform in public schools. In addition to regular lessons, the students are taught traditional Indian culture.

¹⁰ LaNada Boyer, "Reflections of Alcatraz," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 18, no. 4 (1994), 81.

¹¹ The title of the article was "Better Red than Dead," referring to a desire to preserve American Indian culture. It was later used by the U.S. government as support for their claim that the Red Power organizations were supported by the Soviet government, and AIM's main priority was to spread communism to America.

¹² Alvin M. Josephy, "The Sioux Will Rise Again," in *Now That the Buffalo's Gone: A Study of Today's American Indians* (New York: Knopf and Random House, 1982), 246.

¹³ Mary Brave Bird and Richard Erdoes, "Backtracking," in *Ohitika Woman* (New York: Grove Press, 1993), passim.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹⁵ Paula Gunn Allen, "Angry Women are Building: Issues and Struggles Facing American Indian Women Today," in *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 190.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁷ Nancy Shoemaker, "Introduction," in *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women*, comp. and ed. Nancy Shoemaker (New York: Routledge, 1995), 20.

¹⁸ Buffy Sainte-Marie quoted in Susan Braudy in "We Will Remember," p. 78.

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Sakurakai: A Failed Attempt at Military Government

*by Pari Perkins
Wittenberg Class of 1999*

A beautiful cherry blossom is in bloom for only a few short days in Japan before a wind sweeps through and carries it away. In one sense, this is a beautiful sight, yet in the pre-war 1930s the cherry blossom stood for something radically different and much less peaceful. One of the many ultra-nationalist groups to spring into life during this time took the cherry blossom as their symbol. The members of this organization choose this flower because its short time in bloom "reminded the Japanese of the essence of the samurai code—the readiness to die at a moment's notice, if need be."¹ This is the favorable light with which the members of the Sakurakai viewed themselves. However, the cherry blossom is apt for another reason as well. Just as the flower does not remain on its bough for long, the Cherry Blossom Society was not long lived, lasting only from 1930 to 1931. In that time, the Sakurakai suffered from one failure after another. It was their goal to replace Japan's government with a militaristic government. However, due to organizational factors, miscommunications, and plan defects, the Sakurakai were bound to fail in achieving this goal on Japanese soil. Occasionally, the government would grant the ultra-nationalists a concession as a way of appeasing them, but in the end, they did not have the lasting impact for which they had hoped. After a little over a year of activity, its leaders were arrested and the rest of the group was dissolved. From this point on, their activities were fragmented and members often joined with other, more successful right-wing organizations.

Official membership into the Sakurakai was limited to active officers with a rank of lieutenant colonel and below with a concern for national reorganization. Another qualification

was that members could not have a private problem which they hoped to vindicate through the organization.² The group was started with a mere ten field-grade officers and never surpassed more than one-hundred members. However, members were drawn from many different areas of service such as the War Ministry (9), military police headquarters, the general staff (29), and a few different army schools (40). The leader of the Sakurakai, Lieutenant Colonel Hashimoto Kingoro, the chief of the Russian Section of the Army General Staff, had connections outside of the Sakurakai which he often consorted with. Akamatsu Katsumaro and Tadokoro Teruaki served as his left-wing connections.³ His right-wing, civilian ally was Okawa Shumei. Outside of the Army, Hashimoto looked to Seiyokai, who was in the Navy and also the leader of the Stars and Ocean Society.⁴ As necessary as this outside help was, it was the junior rank serving officers who were vital. These were the officers who had access to the weapons needed to carry out any of planned disturbances. After all, how valuable is a group that threatens to use violence when they do not have the weapons needed to back up their threat?

Intelligence Chief Tatekawa organized the Sakurakai originally as a debating society whose purpose was to "promote political awareness among field-grade officers."⁵ The organization gained legitimacy when War Minister Ugaki bestowed upon them his recognition of their meetings as study groups.⁶ However, one member of the Sakurakai recalls that, "The original meetings invariably degenerated into rambling discussions about the desirability of a Showa restoration. . . ."⁷ At one of the meetings, Hashimoto drew upon the example

the Young Turk Movement to illustrate to the members how officers can effectively renovate a country. The specifics of most of the plans discussed during meetings of the Sakurakai were not kept in any records. What is known is that the topic of many of the conversations concerned the depression the world was experiencing and its affects on the economic, social, and political problems in Japan.

Through all of the vague concepts and varying ideas of the Sakurakai, the primary goal which everyone agreed on was the Showa Restoration, or the imperial way. Even this concept varied in meaning. Some individuals felt that all Japan really needed was to morally regenerate itself. Extremists, such as the Sakurakai, held a far different view. They insisted on "a military dictatorship, in which the Emperor in fact, if not in name, would be no more than a sacred puppet."⁸ Basically, the Sakurakai only wanted to use the Emperor as a figurehead to legitimize their actual intentions to eliminate Parliamentary political parties and establish a military government. The big businesses (zaibatsu) were also targets for the ultra-nationalists since the military government they planned to establish would prepare Japan economically and ideologically for war. These conclusions were reached after Tatekawa decided to examine Japan from the inside for a change and report the findings in the 1930 "Inspection of General Circumstances" which summarized the problems as,

Corrupt political parties and cartels were interposing a fogged filter between the pure executive light of the Emperor and his moths of men in the regiments and on the farms. To remove this blemish and 'perfect the national structure' a Showa Isshin or Hirohito Restoration must be carried out which would convert Japan into a 'National Defense State' that would be 'mobilized for total war'.⁹

It was the Sakurakai's job to make enough noise about the subject that business magnates and politicians would feel threatened into coming up with money for the national defense plan, their other alternative was to force the magnates and politicians to succumb to total mobilization. Other factors that sparked discontent within the military that would lead them to want to take these drastic measures were Prime Minister

Hamaguchi's disarmament policy, the Minseito cabinet's moderate China policy, the Anti-Japanese movements in China and Manchuria, the growing capabilities of the Soviet Maritime Army, and finally, the London Naval Treaty which gave Japan the bad end of the deal concerning armaments.¹⁰ The Diet had opted to agree to the treaty in an effort to advance peace rather than get picky over details.¹¹

Along with differing opinions on precisely what the goals of the society were and who they should target, there were also disagreements on what the best way to achieve the Showa Restoration might be. As a result, the Sakurakai developed three factions. The first, and most influential believed that the old must be destroyed, by force if necessary, before the new can be put in place. The second faction felt that careful planning could avoid the problems associated with destruction. This fairly tame group from the military did not receive a great many supporters. The last group was comprised of opportunists and supporters who wanted to reap the rewards but preferred to stay neutral in how to go about attaining the goals.¹² With a group that never totaled over one-hundred members, a three way split in opinion on how to achieve such a lofty undertaking made the odds that any one plan would work became drastically lower from the start.

One cause for the dysfunctional attempts to take over the government can be traced back to the educational system itself. The Military Academy and the War College officers were trained differently, resulting in differing perspectives of how to handle various situations. Officers who graduated from the Military Academy had an understanding of basic tactical skills, the administrative system of the army, and warrior ethics. However, it was these officers' counterparts at the War College that went on to get high commanding positions and jobs in the general staff and war ministry. This caused tension between officers from both schools. Even the officers from within the War College sometimes had contempt for their peers since only a small number of elites were selected to work in central headquarters. Consequently, officers who worked in the war ministry were sensitive to economic and political factors while those in the general staff used reason, strategy,

and intelligence to approach problems.¹³ The differences in approach coupled with the contempt that members from these different areas had for one another, make it is easy to see why it was hard for the Sakurakai to have just one specific goal and agree on a way to make it a success, considering that the group was comprised of members from all of these divisions.

Had it not been for the traditional Japanese doctrine that was taught at these schools, the Sakurakai might never have found a disturbance in the system so wrong that they felt the need to fight for it. Combat ideology, combining the divine myth of the emperor and the warrior ideology of dying for the emperor had been ingrained into soldiers minds for decades. After awhile, it became hard to separate the two. Hence, the officer corps in the 1930s held mystical beliefs about the divine qualities of the Imperial institution and felt, therefore, obliged to remain loyal to the Emperor.¹⁴ As Japan came to be dominated by businessmen and political parties and the Emperor's power diminished, these officers viewed the army as the only remaining source of traditional social, ethical, and political values. War Minister Ugaki Issei pushed the army over the edge when he attempted to reorganize the army in the 1920s. Foreign doctrines would not be tolerated in the army, "the Emperor's most trusted servant."¹⁵ Therefore, the officers decided to take actions which led to a series of failures and embarrassments.

The Sakurakai's first major attempt at a coup d'etat became known as the March Incident. Five months previous to this botched scheme, in November of 1930, the editor of the right-wing periodical, *Japan and the Japanese*, foreshadowed that, "things may start to happen from now on."¹⁶ Sure enough, an independent patriotic youth shot and killed Prime Minister Hamaguchi, thus setting the stage for the Sakurakai. Hashimoto and his civilian accomplice, Okawa Shumei, hatched a three part plan to take over the government. The first part of the plan centered around an anti-labor legislation protest rally that was to take place outside of the Diet in early March to prevent the introduction of the Labor Union Act and the Labor Disputes Control Act.¹⁷ The rally was to

turn into a riot and the rioters would then attempt to storm the Diet, surround the prime minister's residency, the Minseitō party building, and the Seiyūkai party building. Next, specifically selected army units would cordon off these buildings and the radio station. Finally, high ranking officers would enter the Diet and try to convince them to declare martial law with General Ugaki as the leader. The expected outcome that the officers hoped for was a voluntary dissolution of the Diet and an end to the unpopular political parties.

Unfortunately, their plan did not have the solid support it needed to succeed. Before the plan could even get off of the ground, the army needed the support of the laborers since it was their rally that would create the scene and allow the military to step in. However, the majority of the people involved in the labor movement were suspicious of the military officers and utterly opposed to coup d'etats as a means of national reform.¹⁸ Therefore, it was Okawa's duty to provide the mobs and the weapons to be used in the coup. Hashimoto provided training grenades to make the crowds appear more threatening than they were in actuality.

The first serious problem that Hashimoto ran into was financing the operation. Okawa needed money and explosives to do his part in staging the mob riots. Hashimoto expected to use funds from the secret service, but the amount that he attained from this source was not enough to cover expenses. Okawa received 200,000 yen from Marquis Tokugawa Yoshichika, a nationalist sympathizer. In return, Tokugawa was promised the position of Minister of the Imperial Household if the coup d'etat succeeded.¹⁹ Another Sakurakai participant, Major Sato Kotoku sought money from the Mitsui zaibatsu. He claimed the money was needed for national purposes, meaning the coup d'etat. The zaibatsu had actually begun the practice of loaning money to the same right-wing organizations that sought to destroy them as a way of buying the lives of their top executives. When the coup was called off, Sato returned the full amount of money to Mitsui.²⁰

The next big set back involved General Ugaki. He was a key person that the nationalists needed in their corner if things were to go as planned. The officers played on Ugaki's

vanity to draw him into the scheme. They convinced him that the Emperor Hirohito was tired of the corrupt politicians and would favor a military coup to restore national integrity. Ugaki would naturally be the Emperor's choice as the military *genro* due to his loyalty to the Hirohito. However, the officers reiterated time and time again that the emperor was not to be involved in the plot. This made Ugaki suspicious of the Sakurakai's true motives. Yet at the same time that the officers were trying to cajole Ugaki into participating in their scheme, they did not fully trust him and therefore drew up a decoy plan as well as the original. It was the bogus plan, giving the impression that the Sakurakai was "a relatively innocuous society, holding very restrained and moderate opinions," that Ugaki agreed to. Most likely, it was when Ugaki learned of their true intentions and after the supposed date of the march on the Diet had passed that he finally withdrew his support. The conspirators continued to act like the real action was coming in the near future,²¹ but Ugaki had had enough.

Since he withdrew his support before the plan could be set into motion, the army failed to discredit him. Their purpose in offering him a position of leadership in the new government was to make him out to be disloyal to the Emperor. Why would the army want to do this? The answer is simple, it was Ugaki that oversaw tremendous cuts in the army budget. However, instead of being discharged from the army, Hirohito placed Ugaki in the honorable post of governor-general of Korea. A possible explanation as to why Hirohito was lenient on Ugaki could be that the Emperor had some knowledge of the plot ahead of time. Marquis Kido and Count Makino, members of the Emperor's loyal court, had played a part in manipulating Ugaki into the plan in the first place, yet they did not want to risk their own careers and lose the Emperor's trust, so they may have confided in him their knowledge of what was to take place. Hirohito, realizing that Ugaki had been set-up, choose not to punish him harshly.²²

After Ugaki withdrew his support, Hashimoto's own partner, Okawa blackmailed the Sakurakai. He moved the grenades he had to an undisclosed location and demanded

money to pay off members of the Black Dragon who had participated in a token demonstration. If he was not paid, he threatened to reveal the conspirators' plans. As a result, he paid off his bills and still had money remaining to spend in geisha houses. Despite this blackmail operation, Hashimoto continued to conspire with Okawa on future events.²³

The Sakurakai's second big coup d'état plan came in October of the same year. Ideas for this plot were derived at the Golden Dragon teahouse. Amidst drinking contests, Colonel Hashimoto and Major Cho Isamu also competed to write operational coup novels. Major Cho's plan won the competition. He wrote,

Our objectives are to attack the prime minister's residence and kill Wakatsuki and his ministers during a Cabinet conference; to seize Metropolitan Police headquarters; to occupy the War Ministry and General Staff Headquarters; to punish various good-for-nothings in the Army and the bureaucracy; to establish a new government with Lieutenant General Araki Sadao [the senior officer of the Strike-North Faction] as prime minister, [Panay-sinker] Hashimoto as home minister, [Peerless Pimp] Tatekawa as foreign minister, [master plotter] Okawa as finance minister, [the blood-thirsty Major] Cho Isamu as Metropolitan Police chief, and Rear Admiral Kobayashi Shosaburo [the commander of the Misty Lagoon Air Station] as Navy minister.²⁴

Politicians and army men alike heard of this joke and by mid October, rumblings of a plot could be heard. This plan for a second coup was a supposed "... domestic extension of the Kwantung Army's actions in Manchuria."²⁵

Due to the senior officer's reluctance to participate in the March Incident, Hashimoto and his co-conspirators realized that they had to use force with the army leaders as well as the government. Still, Hashimoto lacked the backing of many high ranking officers. This coup, he realized, had to be more violent and do more damage than the previous one had planned to do. The end objective remained the same: declare martial law. However, the means of getting there changed. The Cabinet would be hit with an air strike, after which a guards division would be called in to get control over the confusion. Among the persons slated for arrest were politicians, financial magnates,

palace advisers, and a few key figures of the privileged class. The War Ministry would then be isolated until martial law could be declared and a reform cabinet established.²⁶

Once again, the Sakurakai ran into problems in their plan before it could even be set into motion. Lieutenant General Araki Sadao, the chosen leader of the new government, seemed to not have known about these plans for him until right before the plot was to unfold. Instead of being greedy, like Ugaki, Araki informed Hashimoto and Cho that he had no intention of following through with the plans and that, "It is almost inconceivable that I should have to come here in military uniform to a place where you are drinking sake in order to admonish you in this sort of matter."²⁷ With that said, he went on to explain to the conspirators the procedure which their disciplining would follow. On 18 October 1931, eleven officers involved in the plot were detained and Hashimoto and Cho were put under house arrest at the Golden Dragon. The October Incident became yet another failure for the ultra-national Sakurakai.

The failure of this coup proved devastating to the Sakurakai. The Young Officers, who were desperately needed to lead the troops if the group were to ever attain their goal, felt isolated and betrayed by the senior officers of the Sakurakai. It was believed that Okawa Shumei revealed the details of the plan to Makino Nobuaki, the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, thus causing their arrest. After World War II, Lieutenant Okura Eiichi, leader of the Young Officer's movement revealed that, "The October Incident was the parting line between us, the Young Officers, and the central headquarters faction. It was then that we realized that we had to rely on ourselves and achieve our goals by our own efforts. . . ." ²⁸ Another Young Officer, Isobe, explained that the difference between the Sakurakai and the Young Officers is that the former wanted to increase the power of the General Staff and reform Japan by decree, while the latter wanted to unite the Army through a Restoration and awaken the people of Japan. Isobe took things one step further by comparing the senior officers of the army to authoritarian Germany, saying, "These men once used to ape the Army of the Kaiser; now they are imitating Hitler. No wonder we

young officers can find no common language with them."²⁹ With the loss of the Young Officers, the Sakurakai seemed to lose any remaining chance at taking over Japan's government.

Ironically, Emperor Hirohito actually benefited from this botched attempt to take over his government. First, he continued to reign as Emperor. Since he had fathered no male heirs up to this point, the Emperor left open the gate to his younger brother, Prince Chichibu to take the throne. Prince Chichibu supported the nationalists and was involved, although in what capacity it is not known, in the October plot. Actually, it is the prince's involvement which saved the plot from being exposed at an even earlier date than it was. Also, the October plot caused Emperor Hirohito enough embarrassment that the League of Nations decided to hold off on its condemnation of Japan concerning her actions in Manchuria because the League did not want to make the militant groups any more upset than they already were.³⁰

The Sakurakai and other ultra-nationalist groups did gain a few small victories to counter balance their immense failures. First, the Wakatsuki Cabinet, which they wanted to bomb as part of the October plot, ended up resigning in December of 1931 because it could not restrain the Army in Manchuria. Also, as an attempt to appease Army extremists in Japan and abroad, Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi appointed General Araki to the position of War Minister. Throughout the life of the Sakurakai, the government was very tolerant of their activities and offered extremely lenient punishments in light of the violent and disruptive plans the Sakurakai had intended to carry out. Basically, the only disciplining the Sakurakai received was an order to disband and its ring leaders were separated from each other.

Hashimoto and other members did achieve some success in Manchuria. However their attempts to set the stage for military activity abroad in March and to capitalize on their successes in Manchuria at home met with defeat. In fact, nothing ever became of their plans at all. Among the contributing factors within the Army itself which led to failure to bring about a Showa Restoration were the

various ideals drilled into officers at the War College and the Military Academy, the imperial myth which clouded the officers' minds on the feasibility of their goal, factions within the Sakurakai, and vague, varying ideas concerning their true purpose. These problems merely prevented the organization from being as solid as it needed to be in order to follow one clear path to their goal. Although there were problems between the members of the organization, it was the failure to think plans through carefully that ultimately brought them down. Had they thought clearly about General Ugaki, they might have realized that he could turn on them as soon as he found out the truth. All of their plans hinged on keeping secrets from each other and manipulating leaders with false ideas in order to achieve their support, only to lose it when time for the event came so near

that they had to explain what was really going to happen. Knowing that the support of the Young Officers was necessary, the senior officers should have been more careful not to alienate them as well. Amidst all of the defects in their plans, the Sakurakai can only be thankful that they were enough of a threat to cause the government to make a few concessions in order to appease them. Without these concessions, the Sakurakai would not have had any internal effect on Japan at all. Throughout World War II Prime Minister Tojo continued to keep an eye on various members of the Sakurakai who were thought to have joined forces with other, more successful ultra-nationalist groups.³¹ However, the embarrassment of the March Incident and the October Incident were enough to prevent any more serious attempts by the Sakurakai to take control of the government.

End Notes

¹ Richard Storry, *The Double Patriots: A Study of Japanese Nationalism* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1957) 54.

² *Ibid.*, 55.

³ Ben-Ami Shillony, *Revolt in Japan: The Young Officers and the February 26, 1936 Incident* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), 69.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷ James B. Crowley, *Japan's Quest For Autonomy: National Security and Foreign Policy 1930-1938* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), 94.

⁸ W. G. Beasley, *The Modern History of Japan* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 240.

⁹ David Bergamini, *Japan's Imperial Conspiracy* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1971), 395.

¹⁰ Crowley, 82.

¹¹ "Britain Will Retain Her Naval Program," *New York Times*, 4 March 1931, p. 15.

¹² Storry, 55.

¹³ Crowley, 83-5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁶ Edward Behr, *Hirohito: Behind the Myth* (New York: Villard Books, 1989), 83.

¹⁷ "Proletarians Plan Big Demonstration," *The Japan Times and Mail*, 3 March 1931, p. 2.

¹⁸ Shillony, 69-70.

¹⁹ Storry, 60.

²⁰ Shillony, 83.

²¹ March 20, 1931 was the planned date.

²² Behr, 85-8.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Bergamini, 446.

²⁵ W. G. Beasley, *The Rise of Modern Japan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 179.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 244.

²⁷ Bergamini, 447.

²⁸ Shillony, 29.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁰ Behr, 102-3.

³¹ Edwin P. Hoyt, *Warlord Tojo Against the World* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarborough House, 1993), 80.

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Lincoln, McClellan, and the Peninsula Campaign

*by Jason Schelle
Wittenberg Class of 2000*

By 24 May 1862, Gen. George Brinton McClellan, commanding the Union Army of the Potomac, had forced his way up the Virginia Peninsula, a stretch of land between the York and the James Rivers. He had moved past the Confederate stronghold at Yorktown, marched through seas of mud, and was now within a few miles of Richmond.¹ His army was considerably smaller than he had envisioned it; before the whole force had landed at Fort Monroe, on the tip of the Peninsula, President Abraham Lincoln had removed first a division and then a whole corps from his command.² Extremely discouraged by this reduction of almost 60,000 troops, and fearing that he opposed an enemy almost twice his size, McClellan had repeatedly petitioned Washington for reinforcements.³ In response, he had been informed on 18 May that Irvin McDowell's First Corps would be sent to him overland from Fredericksburg.⁴ But now, on the 24th, Lincoln had telegraphed that, due to Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's victories in the Shenandoah Valley, McDowell was being sent north in an attempt to trap Jackson.⁵ McClellan, resigning himself to making "the best use of the forces at [his] disposal,"⁶ acquiesced to the order. Only two days later, though, he was again requesting additional troops.⁷

The campaign that McClellan originally envisioned was not even supposed to take place on the Peninsula. Instead, he had favored landing his 100,000 man army at Urbana, on the southern bank of the Rappahannock River, and quickly marching it to Richmond.⁸ The withdrawal of the Rebel force from Centreville and Manassass to the Richmond area on 9 March made this move impracticable, though. McClellan settled for landing at Fort Monroe and marching up the Peninsula, a move he regarded

as "less brilliant."⁹ In many respects, then, the Young Napoleon's (a name derived initially from the country's faith in McClellan's military skill and his resemblance to the short French general) plans had been frustrated from the start, and Lincoln's telegram stating that McDowell would not be joining him must have only highlighted this fact to the general.

In fact, by the conclusion of the campaign, with the Army of the Potomac being withdrawn from the banks of the James in defeat, McClellan had already settled on an explanation for the many setbacks and frustrations he had experienced: he and his army had "fallen victims to the stupidity & wickedness at Washington which have done their best to sacrifice as noble an Army as ever marched to battle."¹⁰

Only McClellan's most ardent admirers have fallen behind this assessment of why the Peninsula Campaign failed. The almost impossible supposition chiefly implicates Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and Lincoln.¹¹ Outrageous as his claim may be, though, it should not be believed that the Lincoln administration was free from contributing to the failure of the Peninsula Campaign. As commander in chief, Lincoln ordered and oversaw military directives which were politically and militarily sound by themselves, but were unwise when considered in the context of the campaign on the Peninsula. Although General McClellan must still bear much of the blame for the campaign's failure, some of Lincoln's actions should be considered as contributing factors.

Lincoln's Actions

Though generally regarded as a great war president, several of Lincoln's orders

immediately before and during the Peninsula Campaign were imprudent or unwise. His Washington Birthday Order of 27 January 1862, for example, directed that there be "a general movement" of all Union forces against the Rebels on or by 22 February.¹² Conditions such as weather, supplies, and the general condition of the troops were not taken into account. In McClellan's case, the order would have forced him to campaign in the deep mud of a Virginia winter and spring with a garrisoned enemy in front of him at Centreville and Manassas.¹³ However, this order was more a response to McClellan's unwillingness to attack the Rebel army at Centreville and Manassas, and in the end it was suspended in regard to him. Having finally been given a sufficient prod, McClellan made his own recommendations for a campaign against the Rebels.¹⁴

That campaign, the eventual Peninsula Campaign, was approved with the understanding that a series of orders be carried out beforehand, one of which appeared in the President's General War Order No. 3 of 8 March. The order called for the capture of the Rebel batteries on the Potomac between Washington and the Chesapeake Bay.¹⁵ Extensive campaigning was never required to carry it out, however, since on 9 March, the very next day, it was learned that the Rebels had evacuated their works at Centreville and Manassas, exposing the batteries on the Potomac. If attempted, however, the attack would have indicated to Joseph E. Johnston, then the Rebel commander, that the Federals were planning a flanking attack somewhere along the Chesapeake Bay or Virginia coast.¹⁶

Up to this time Lincoln's major military decisions, while being foolish, had not, for whatever reasons, hurt the North's cause. On 31 March, however, Lincoln, as he related to McClellan, "felt constrained" to remove Louis Blenker's division of 10,000 men from the Army of the Potomac.¹⁷ Blenker was ordered to join General John Fremont, commander of the new Mountain Department, west of the Shenandoah Valley. Correctly guessing that McClellan would be upset over his reduced force, Lincoln tried to assure him that if he could understand the full circumstances then he would acquiesce to the order.¹⁸ Those circumstances, basically,

were that Fremont, the first Republican candidate for President and an intrepid explorer, had just been removed from a command in the West and radical factions in the Republican party were pressing Lincoln to strengthen Fremont's next command.¹⁹

Regardless of political considerations, Fremont's troops were adequate to hold and protect the Mountain Department without Blenker. Also, the size of the Rebel army, at this time, was known only by the estimates that McClellan gave, and those estimates put it at least 100,000 strong.²⁰ With the main Federal army leaving the safety of the capital to attack this supposedly huge force, and Fremont already with, as T. Harry Williams points out, "more than enough troops,"²¹ Lincoln should have turned a deaf ear to the political considerations of the Pathfinder and maintained McClellan.

Sending Blenker to Fremont only deprived the Army of the Potomac of 10,000 men. Washington's Birthday Order and the order against the Rebel batteries on the Potomac were, because of outside influences, of little real consequence. However, these orders all demonstrated Lincoln's lack of military understanding; he did not fully understand the logistical difficulties of a campaign, nor did he possess the ability to comprehend the full effects a military move would have on an enemy. The third order, Blenker's removal, was carried out, and its repercussions were far reaching. It showed again that Lincoln could not fully grasp the consequences of a single order in the broader theater, and it signaled a "splintering-off" of McClellan's forces.²² Even more importantly, the order, along with the two previous ones, probably sowed the seed in McClellan's mind that the administration was against him. That seed would eventually grow into the conviction that the administration was filled with "traitors who are willing to sacrifice the country . . . for personal spite & personal aims."²³

These orders all occurred before McClellan had even left for the Peninsula. On 4 April, after two days on the Peninsula, McClellan learned that McDowell's corps of approximately 40,000 had been detached from his army to further protect Washington.²⁴ The reasoning behind this action will be dealt with later, at this point it is sufficient to say that McClellan regarded it

as “the most infamous thing that history has recorded”²⁵ and maintained a continuous call for troops.²⁶ On 18 May, Stanton telegraphed that McDowell, stationed at Fredericksburg, had been ordered to march south towards Richmond, always keeping Washington covered.

However, on 23 May Stonewall Jackson attacked a Union force under Nathaniel Banks at Front Royal in the Shenandoah Valley and succeeded in driving him north down the Valley toward Winchester. In lieu of this new development, Lincoln countermanded Stanton’s order for McDowell to join McClellan and sent him into the Valley to trap Jackson.²⁷ Fremont, then at Franklin, West Virginia, was ordered east to help.²⁸ By itself, the strategy was a good one; the positioning of Fremont and McDowell squarely in Jackson’s line of retreat clearly demonstrated that the Lincoln administration’s military reasoning had improved since its unwise orders earlier.

The argument can be made, however, that McDowell’s presence in the Valley was unnecessary and that his corps would have been better used with McClellan. Lincoln, of course, hoped to use McDowell to destroy Jackson but he ignored several important factors. First, as McDowell himself pointed out, the First Corps, stationed at Fredericksburg, was “entirely beyond helping distance of General Banks.”²⁹ Second, McDowell’s line of advance into the Valley was longer than Jackson’s line of retreat out of it.³⁰ Plus, Jackson had the advantage of falling back upon his communications and supply line; McDowell and Fremont were forced to constantly extend and protect theirs. With a full understanding of these considerations McDowell urged Lincoln that he be allowed to join McClellan.³¹

McDowell wished to join McClellan because he believed that the junction of their forces would cause the “reduction of Richmond.”³² McClellan agreed with this belief: “I now felt confident that we would on his [McDowell’s] arrival be sufficiently strong to overpower the large army confronting us.”³³ Many historians believe, however, that Lincoln made the best use of McDowell.³⁴ It should be noted, though, that they do so not because Jackson was a legitimate threat in the Valley. Rather, they argue that McClellan, instead of attacking, would only

have cried out for more reinforcements if McDowell had joined him.³⁵ The argument is a valid one; the Young Napoleon had, by this time, displayed an amazing ability to completely misjudge his opponent’s strength. But while there is no clear evidence that McClellan would have used McDowell immediately against the Rebels, there is no proof that he would not have.

In the end, the best argument for McDowell’s advance to the Peninsula is that if it would not have prompted McClellan to action, it at least would have complicated Gen. Robert E. Lee’s actions; Lee realized the importance of “diverting the army of McDowell at Fredericksburg from uniting with that of McClellan.”³⁶ Thus, when Lincoln ordered McDowell to the Valley he unwittingly helped Lee, who was anxious to “relieve the pressure at Fredericksburg.”³⁷

While McClellan’s and McDowell’s combined force of over 140,000³⁸ would not have ensured the fall of Richmond, it at least is plausible to say that it would have complicated Lee’s plans; he may have still been able to take advantage of the Young Napoleon’s fears of a superior enemy, but he would have found it much harder to drive the enlarged and joined Federal army away from Richmond in retreat. Lincoln, either not considering the effect reinforcements would have on McClellan or not being aware of the effect, obviously felt justified in sending McDowell after Jackson. However, with most of his generals arguing that Jackson was only trying to draw McDowell away from McClellan,³⁹ Lincoln should have realized that the First Corps could do infinitely more good outside Richmond. In denying McDowell, Lincoln, who believed “to the last [of McClellan] that if he could once ‘get him started’ he would then handle the army well and do great things with it,”⁴⁰ passed up his best chance to give McClellan the confidence he needed to sustain the campaign.

McClellan’s Actions

By the middle of April McClellan had his army engaged in a siege outside Yorktown and considered himself lucky to be away from Washington, “that sink of iniquity.”⁴¹ The Lincoln administration’s mistakes were clearly evident to McClellan: the removal of Blenker’s

and McDowell's forces "was a fatal error."⁴² Upon landing at Fort Monroe, however, McClellan began a series of his own mistakes that would eventually outmatch any damage Lincoln had done to the Peninsula Campaign.

That campaign, in and of itself, was a bone of contention between Lincoln and McClellan. Worried about the safety of Washington, concerned about a safe line of retreat if McClellan were to be defeated, and influenced by generals in McClellan's own army,⁴³ Lincoln had urged an overland march to Richmond from Manassas.⁴⁴ McClellan argued strongly for the flanking movement, however, prophesying a "most brilliant result."⁴⁵

Pleased to at least have a plan of attack from his general, Lincoln agreed to McClellan's proposal under three conditions: that Manassas Junction be held with enough troops to prevent the Rebels from acquiring it; that Washington be left "entirely secure;" and that the remainder of the army be employed in pursuit of the Rebels.⁴⁶ It was the second point—the safety of Washington—that was to have the most influence over McClellan and the campaign.

Lincoln and Stanton had determined, after consulting with McClellan's corps commanders, that 40,000 men be left to defend the capital.⁴⁷ In compliance with this order, on 1 April, right before leaving for Fort Monroe, McClellan gave General Lorenzo Thomas his final report to the Secretary of War—a report that detailed over 70,000 troops for Washington's defence.⁴⁸ A problem soon arose in how McClellan had counted the available troops, though. Under close examination Lincoln and Stanton found that part of the covering force was stationed in the Shenandoah Valley, about eighty miles away.⁴⁹ McClellan had also performed several numerical tricks in determining the number of troops in and around Washington, such as counting some brigades twice and including a force of 3,500 recruits who were still under training. Additionally, General Wadsworth, commanding the Washington defenses, stated that the 19,022 troops he did have for duty were "imperfectly disciplined [and] . . . disorganized."⁵⁰

With this information, Lincoln decided that his order to leave Washington "entirely secure . . . had been neglected;"⁵¹ consequently, he

ordered McDowell, on 4 April, to be detached from McClellan's command and to command the new Department of the Rappahannock which was charged with the protection of Washington.⁵² Although McClellan was responsible for McDowell's removal, he chalked the order up as more proof of the administration's deceit,⁵³ and complained that he was "incapable of continuing operations which had been begun."⁵⁴ He had intended for McDowell to sail up the York, disembark north of Yorktown, and attack the Rebel stronghold in the rear.⁵⁵ Without McDowell, he abandoned his flanking maneuver and quickly concluded that he had no choice but to siege Yorktown.⁵⁶

The conclusion to siege because of McDowell's absence was faulty because the Yorktown defenders initially numbered only about 11,000 men.⁵⁷ McClellan actually arrived on the Peninsula believing there to be no more than 20,000 defenders⁵⁸ and predicting a rapid advance,⁵⁹ but soon changed his mind when reports of a "large force . . . [in] formidable" works reached him.⁶⁰ Actually, the Confederate commander, General John Magruder, a man of theatrical talents, had put on a convincing, if hollow, show of force for McClellan's benefit. Countermarching his men up and down the Confederate works and showing a bold confidence in firing on any Union troops who presented themselves, Magruder soon had McClellan convinced that a frontal assault would be inviting disaster and that a siege was necessary.⁶¹ Moreover, McClellan never ordered an assault to test the strength of Yorktown even though there was, as General John Barnard, chief engineer of the army, stated in 1864, a gap in the Yorktown defense in which "there was nothing whatever."⁶² McClellan denied ever having been informed by Barnard that there was a noticeable gap in the Rebel's defense.⁶³ This excuse for starting a month long siege skirts the fact that McClellan never tested the defenses, however, and was merely an attempt to "shield himself behind the opinions . . . of his staff . . ."⁶⁴

To McClellan, losing McDowell "frustrated all [his] plans for impending operations,"⁶⁵ and only strengthened his main fallacy—his absolute belief that he always was fighting a numerically superior, if not overwhelming, enemy.

McDowell's absence, in his mind, only increased the already drastic odds against which he fought. It was this belief that originally kept him from attacking the Rebels at Centreville⁶⁶ and allowed the Rebels time to reinforce Yorktown effectively. As McClellan pushed his way slowly towards Richmond, the enemy grew ever larger in his mind. At the evacuation of Yorktown they were "from 100,000 to 120,00;" on 25 June, the start of the Seven Days, the Rebels had ballooned to 200, 000.⁶⁷ Confederate records show that the Rebel strength at Yorktown was, around 30 April, just under 56, 000 total men.⁶⁸ While less clear, it is generally believed that at the start of the Seven Days Lee commanded about 85, 000 men.⁶⁹ In contrast, the Army of the Potomac, on 20 June, had a little over 105, 000 men present for duty.⁷⁰

The huge discrepancy between how many troops McClellan believed the Rebels to have and their actual number had no truly adverse effect until, with McClellan halted only a few miles outside Richmond and straddling both sides of the Chickahominy, Lee decided to end the stalemate. McClellan had, since approaching Richmond from the Chickahominy in early May, stationed part of his army north of the river and the rest of it south of the river. On the eve of the Seven Days, 24 June, John Fitz Porter's Fifth Corps of about 35, 000 men was on the northern side of the Chickahominy near Mechanicsville, about six miles northeast of Richmond. Porter's position was precarious; his corps was the lone Federal force north of the Chickahominy and a sudden flood might break contact with the rest of the army on the southern bank. McClellan was aware of Porter's vulnerability, but he claimed that an 18 May order directing him to extend his right flank north of Richmond for McDowell's advance had not been revoked with McDowell's march into the Valley, only suspended.⁷¹ While this was technically true, it should have been clear by the end of June that McDowell would not be coming.

Lee was just as aware of Porter's hazardous position as McClellan was. Betting heavily on his opponent's extreme caution, Lee marched the majority of his force, about 60, 000 men, north of the Chickahominy to attack Porter on 26 June.⁷² While this battle, the Battle of

Mechanicsville, was being fought, General Magruder and his force of about 25, 000 troops south of the river held the main Rebel entrenchments between Richmond and the rest of the Union Army,⁷³ approximately 70, 000 strong.⁷⁴ As at Yorktown, Magruder, countermarching men and having officers shout orders to nonexistent brigades,⁷⁵ kept McClellan at bay. He did not, however, convince two division commanders in General Samuel Heintzelman's corps: Joseph Hooker and Philip Kearny.⁷⁶ Hooker and Kearny found their way into McClellan's headquarters and reported that their two divisions could march into Richmond virtually unopposed. They demanded permission to make the march, if for nothing else than to release the 14, 000 Union prisoners in Richmond. Unconvinced, McClellan sent the two indignant generals back to their lines and ordered a general retreat.⁷⁷

McClellan and his supporters have said that Magruder's works were too strong to assault.⁷⁸ This excuse is reminiscent of McClellan's quick acceptance of the belief that the Yorktown defenses were too formidable. And in both cases there was immediate evidence (Barnard in the case of Yorktown and Hooker and Kearny for Magruder) that the Rebel defenses were not as strong as McClellan believed them to be. In fact, the strongest defense Lee had during the campaign was probably McClellan's imagination.

Convinced then, that Porter's corps had been attacked by superior numbers while his southern force had been held at bay by equally superior numbers, McClellan set his mind to a retreat to the James River.⁷⁹ Once this decision had been made nothing, even victory, would sway him from it. The first task was to get Porter's corps south of the Chickahominy and started on the way to the James. To this end, Generals Edwin Sumner, William Franklin, and Heintzelman fought a rear guard battle on 29 June to allow the rest of the Union Army and its immense supply train time to retreat. This battle, fought south of the Chickahominy around Savage's Station, was a misguided and confused fight. The Rebels lacked coordination and the Federals lacked a definite commander, McClellan busying himself with moving the supply train south to the James.⁸⁰ Sumner was

the senior officer and assumed command, beating the Rebels back and then refusing to resume the retreat rather than “leave a victorious field”.⁸¹ An aide sent to McClellan explained the victory, but McClellan, again not listening to his subordinates, refused to halt the retreat.⁸²

In the case of Savage’s Station, McClellan may have been right in continuing the retreat. His men were spread out between the Station and the James⁸³ and “greatly exhausted.”⁸⁴ More importantly, the Rebels, who had not attacked with their full strength, were only beaten back, not defeated.⁸⁵ However, on the last day of the Seven Days, 1 July, McClellan did pass up a chance to regain the initiative.⁸⁶ Lee had trailed the Union retreat to Malvern Hill, a wide hill just to the north of the James River. Atop it, McClellan had placed Porter’s, Heintzelman’s and Sumner’s corps along with most of the army’s artillery.⁸⁷ Lee charged, but he was never able to coordinate all of his men into a unified attack and his army was, in McClellan’s words, “thoroughly beaten, with great slaughter.”⁸⁸ Porter sent a note to McClellan with “the hope that our withdrawal had ended and that we should hold the ground we now occupied. . . .”⁸⁹ McClellan had already decided to carry the retreat to Harrison’s Landing, though,⁹⁰ as at Savage’s Station, he was not present at the battle, making it easy for him to assume defeat.⁹¹

History has handed George McClellan the relatively sole responsibility for the failure of the Peninsula Campaign, perhaps because his mistakes are not only better documented than Lincoln’s, but the consequences are easier to see. Yorktown’s month long siege did not just waste time, it allowed the Rebels the time to prepare for McClellan’s eventual advance and to bring in as many reinforcements as possible.⁹² Comparably, the danger in straddling the Chickahominy could not be lost on anyone when Lee, fully exploiting the situation it created, hurled two-thirds of his army on

McClellan’s weak flank. And the anger over missed opportunities, epitomized in Kearny’s angry outburst at McClellan after learning that the general would not allow Hooker and himself to attack Richmond,⁹³ is not easily forgotten.

Lincoln, perhaps shielded in martyrdom, has fared much better. Few argue that he should not have detained McDowell to protect the capital, but those that support his decision to then send McDowell into the Valley do not take into consideration, as Lincoln himself failed to do, the larger theater of war. McDowell would have added 40,000 to the Army of the Potomac, and if this substantial reinforcement would not have been enough to induce McClellan to attack immediately, as many argue,⁹⁴ it at least would have complicated Lee’s plans and probably given McClellan confidence enough to repel the Rebel attack without feeling the need for a retreat. Certain other orders, such as the removal of Blenker’s division and the insistence of removing the Potomac batteries, are relatively ignored, the political considerations or plain impracticability behind them merely glossed over as isolated mistakes of an inexperienced war president.⁹⁵

George McClellan, ready to see danger in a vastly superior Rebel army or a government of “abolitionists & other scoundrels,”⁹⁶ did not view them as isolated. If the orders removing Blenker and McDowell from his command proved to him that the Lincoln administration was against him, than the Washington Birthday Order and the directive against the Potomac batteries laid the seed of doubt and mistrust in his mind. Illogical though it may be to use McClellan’s paranoia as a justification for the campaign’s failure, Lincoln’s orders did do more than simply complicate the Young Napoleon’s plans or deny him troops. His orders nurtured the seed until McClellan’s doubts about “the rascals”⁹⁷ grew into an almost consuming hatred for “men I despise from the bottom of my heart.”⁹⁸

End Notes

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- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ War Department, *War Of Rebellion*, I 11 III, 192.
- ⁸ War Department, *The War Of The Rebellion: A Compilation Of The Official Records Of The Union And Confederate Armies series I vol. 5* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1884. Reprint, Harrisburg, PA.: Historical Times, Inc., 1985), 45.
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- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 364.
- ¹² War Department, *War Of Rebellion*, I 5, 41.
- ¹³ Warren W. Hassler, Jr., *General George B. McClellan Shield of the Union* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 53.
- ¹⁴ War Department, *War Of Rebellion*, I 5, 42-5.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.
- ¹⁶ Hassler, *Shield of the Union*, 63-4.
- ¹⁷ War Department, *War Of Rebellion*, I 5, 58.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals* (New York: Knopf, 1952), 77.
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- ²⁵ McClellan, *Own Story*, 308.
- ²⁶ War Department, *War Of Rebellion*, I 11 I, 26-7.
- ²⁷ War Department, *The War Of The Rebellion: A Compilation Of The Official Records Of The Union And Confederate Armies series I vol. 12 pt. III* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1884. Reprint, Harrisburg, PA.: Historical Times, Inc., 1985), 219.
- ²⁸ War Department, *War Of Rebellion*, I 12 I, 643.
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- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
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- ³³ McClellan, *Own Story*, 351.
- ³⁴ Williams, T., *Lincoln and Generals*, 103. and Stephen W. Sears *George B. McClellan The Young Napoleon* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1988), 191.
- ³⁵ Williams, T., *Lincoln and Generals*, 103.
- ³⁶ Lee, 6 March 1863, quoted in Clifford Dowdey and Louis H. Manarin, ed., *The Wartime Papers Of R. E. Lee* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1961), 211.
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- ³⁸ War Department, *War Of Rebellion*, I 11 III, 238. and War Department, *War Of Rebellion*, I 12 III, 214.
- ³⁹ Sears, *Civil War Papers*, 276. and War Department, *War Of Rebellion*, I 12 III, 220.
- ⁴⁰ John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln A History* vol. 5, (New York: The Century Co., 1890), 172.
- ⁴¹ McClellan, *Own Story*, 306.

- ⁴² War Department, *War Of Rebellion*, I 11 I, 10.
- ⁴³ Williams, T. , *Lincoln and Generals*, 56.
- ⁴⁴ War Department, *War Of Rebellion*, I 5, 41-2.
- ⁴⁵ McClellan, *Own Story*, 235.
- ⁴⁶ War Department, *War Of Rebellion*, I 5, 56.
- ⁴⁷ War Department, *War Of Rebellion*, I 11 III, 58.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.* , 59-60.
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- ⁵¹ War Department, *War Of Rebellion*, I 11 I, 15.
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- ⁶⁶ Sears, *The Young Napoleon*, 130.
- ⁶⁷ War Department, *War Of Rebellion*, I 11 I, 51.
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Prisoners of Torment: Inmate Life in Soviet Forced Labor Camps

by Sarah Lanzel
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A poster pervasively displayed in the U.S.S.R. declared "The Soviet Government does not punish; it reforms."¹ The meaning of reform in the Soviet Republics was vastly different from the equivalent concept in other nations. Beginning with Vladimir I. Lenin, the Bolsheviks advocated labor as a way to effectively rehabilitate or reform criminals. After working for the good of the state, dissidents should have learned the value of communism and the benefits of living in communist society.

Unfortunately, this ideal went unfulfilled. Joseph Stalin firmly established a military regime in which he was venerated and citizens lived in terror. He presided over his empire through the secret police who were the representatives of the legal system in this era. Between 1934 and 1946, the secret police were officially called the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs or the NKVD. The camps to which the NKVD's prisoners were sentenced are commonly referred to as Gulags, which is an inaccurate term since GULag is the acronym of the Russian equivalent for Main Administration of Camps.² Statistics concerning the GULag system were falsified by Stalin's regime so it will never be known for sure how many people were convicts in these establishments, although it may be close to 8.8 million.³ These vile institutions located in

remote areas of the country (refer to the map in the Appendix) were places where already shell-shocked inmates were further brutalized in the name of justice.

Justice in the Soviet Union was synonymous with internal security. In the communist system there was no place for the ideas or opinions of other political groups. Totalitarianism was employed by Stalin and his regime to ensure that the citizens would be loyal to the government. Purges were also undertaken inside the system to eliminate the great leader's enemies within the governmental structure.⁴ The purged officials, along with the multitudes of



Michael Jakobson. *Origins of the Gulag: The Soviet Prison Camp 1917-1937* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 1993), 130.

convicted citizens, were sent to forced labor camps.

The convicts sent to these prison camps were the instruments of the economic production of the complexes. Each of the labor camps was assigned to produce a certain quantity of a raw material, based on its location, for the Soviet government. The most famous complex, Kolyma, was established for mining gold in the taiga region (in the Arctic). Naum Jasny best sums up the cycles of arrests that fed these institutions: "In short, the stream of those in need of 'correction' does not dry up."⁵ It is those who were corrected that experienced the dark side of the government. The prisons and forced labor camps of the Soviet Union were

purposefully designed and facilitated by the administration in such a way that inmates were traumatized.

The degradation of the accused began with interrogation. Before being questioned, the person under arrest was believed to be guilty. A prisoner undergoing an uneventful interrogation would be deprived of sleep for the duration, lied to about the facts of their case, and threatened with harm to their loved ones upon failure to confess. Other methods of persuasion common in the accounts of this experience were being made to stand for days at a time, sitting in one position on a chair for prolonged periods, beatings, and starvation. All of these things were ordered by thoughtful interrogators, who committed further atrocities when prisoners still failed to confess. One such method was to lock the prisoner in an airtight cell and bake him until blood came out of his pores, after which he was removed on a stretcher to sign his confession.⁶ There is also documentation of the use of electric shock torture to cause the accused to admit to his sins.⁷ Additional horrific means of torture were reported as well. The inescapable question of whether or not those in positions of power condoned these actions can be answered with a resounding YES! "As for torture, Stalin personally gave orders for it to be used, just as the deadly routine in the camps was organized on his direct orders."⁸

Life in the camps themselves was miserable for the convicts, but it is obvious that interrogators set out to traumatize the inmates before they reached their destinations. The prison experience neatly complimented the month-long interrogation ordeal. Cells varied in size, but were invariably overcrowded. This was true of every cell, just as it was common for prisoners to receive one bathroom visit and two bread rations daily. Since the small windows in cells were barred, very little light was available. As a result, the guards responded by leaving a light bulb burning twenty-four hours a day. Their reasoning was partly due to a desire to torture the prisoners, and partly so they could look through a peep-hole and see the inmates at any time. Natural light and fresh air were provided by a daily walk outdoors that lasted between fifteen and forty-five minutes.⁹ Though the prisons described above were miserable and

terrifying residences, some of them were a worse torment than others. In the Lefortovo prison, Avraham Shifrin occupied a cell in which green mold covered the walls and five inches of mud and water stood on the floor.¹⁰ Prison conditions such as these were devastating to the convicts, who were kept there awaiting the end of their interrogations, sentences, transportation to a camp, or death.

Prisoners transported to forced labor camps were severely traumatized by the system, and the physical conditions of the camps themselves were deplorable. Victor Kravchenko best describes the barracks, or living quarters for the inmates.

The thick odor of stale sweat and squashed bedbugs made me slightly nauseous. Very little daylight filtered in through the dirty barred windows. Several small electric bulbs hung from the ceiling, but they were not burning now. The barracks were so cold our breath was visible¹¹

One cause of the stench was the lack of bathing opportunities for prisoners. This was less of a concern for them though, than the reality that their barracks either had a wood stove or were unheated. Inmates slept packed together like sardines on the top bunk to avoid freezing, since even barracks with stoves were unbearably cold. There were no blankets, so convicts slept in their clothes. In many camps the clothes were state-issued. These included underwear, a long-sleeved waistcoat, summer blouse, and wadded trousers for the wintertime. There were no sturdy leather shoes and the flimsy cloth footwear available to prisoners deteriorated quickly. The state issue outfit became rags in short order as well.¹²

Inmates were denied their basic needs further in the distribution of sustenance. Sources agree that a three hundred gram diet, as opposed to the normal seven hundred grams is starvation rations. Prisoners who failed to meet the incredibly demanding work quota were punished with this quantity of food. Those sent to punishment cells also received this amount. Naturally, the meager rations created a desperation for food within the ranks of prisoners. Starvation drove the convict to obtain additional food at any cost. One way to obtain rations was to cause a non-fatal injury by self-

mutilation. Dimitri Panin's punishment cell mate employed such a method. "What he now did, however spectacular it may seem to a newcomer, was nothing out of the ordinary to the hardened prison guards who usually treated it as a joke. Lom took a rusty nail and drove it through his scrotum into the edge of the bunk, thus impaling himself there."¹³ Injuries entitled the prisoner to additional rations, so an infection or illness preventing work would not develop. Methods such as Lom's worked for this purpose. Such self-mutilations, horrific as they may be, ensured the survival of starving inmates. If this avenue was not an option, the convicts would steal food from one another.

Harsh working conditions also prompted desperate and violent measures. It is impossible to understand why a prisoner would cut off his own finger or hand to avoid working unless the conditions of the situation were known.¹⁴ Whether the job was motivating other prisoners,¹⁵ or slaving away mining gold, there were quotas.

Meeting the quota (determined by the overseer in a particular camp), or failing to meet it, was literally a life or death situation. As previously mentioned, failure meant the receipt of starvation rations. Inability to achieve the acceptable level of production warranted abuse from fellow convicts and the guards in charge of the team. Other prisoners randomly assaulted inmates who failed in this capacity.¹⁶

Assault and abuse from guards was particularly bad. Inmates could be brutalized by guards for almost any reason, and beatings for collapsing during the work day seemed like a good idea to them. For example, a person who fell under the weight of a log in a logging camp would be beaten.¹⁷ In other camps the convicts were beaten while they

worked.¹⁸ Guards found that the expression of opinions from prisoners was also a good excuse for brutalizing him.¹⁹ Other humiliations by guards were enacted during inspections by doctors and daily searches. The prisoners were certainly naked, especially in the dead of winter. Punishments, unlike the humiliation of searches, were distributed for behavior and work performance. These could range from the previously discussed punishment cells and beatings to things like forcing the convict to stand naked on a tree stump while he was eaten alive by the mosquitoes.²⁰ In one instance, a prisoner insulted a guard. The outcome of his offhand comment was that the guard had him tied naked to a tree infested with poisonous gnats. As the story goes, the bloated corpse was removed from the tree several hours after the prisoner's screams ceased.²¹ The guards would also shoot inmates for events that could be construed as escape attempts. Those in charge of the prisoners were given bonuses for catching or eliminating escapees in some camps. In order to earn their bonuses or leave, some of the guards would provoke incidents. Avraham "Shifrin" witnessed a guard calling a prisoner to come to him—and when the prisoner crossed the flag line he shot him down.²² This was not unusual. Obviously, the death and traumatization of the prisoner was not of concern to these people. In most cases, corpses were not buried during the winter, but in the spring by other convicts.²³

Inmates did not have a high regard for each other's existences. The social situation in the camps' centers were based on two main groups—the common criminals and everyone else. In most cases the criminal faction was comprised of the murderers, rapists, thieves, and other offenders worked with the camp



Michael Jakobson. Origins of the Gulag: The Soviet Prison Camp 1917-1934. (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 1993), 129.

administrators. Criminals ran the show in the barracks and whatever they wanted they got. Political prisoners were considered by this faction to be enemies. As a result, “. . . starving and terrorised [sic] politicals found their inadequate rations, their meagre[sic] clothing, and their lives constantly at the mercy of capricious and consciousnessless thugs to whom murder meant little, theft less.”²⁴ Barbara Armonas, a former political prisoner, reflected on how she had once been beaten up by a criminal. A friend wisely advised her not to make her life impossible by getting the convict in trouble.²⁵ Unfortunately, these brutalizations and thefts were commonplace in forced labor institutions. Even through the tiny window this account provides, it is difficult to conceive of how these human beings could carry out the extreme violence exemplified by Victor Kravchenko’s impressions of the prisoners.

These were not men but the obscene shadows of men, repulsive-looking caricatures of human beings in rags and tatters. They were all bearded, with wasted bodies, dragging their feet through the mud in the last stages of deadly fatigue.²⁶

Some of the inmates that lived in the prison camps ultimately survived their tortures long enough to be released. After years of starvation and abuse, these men and women experienced culture shock upon being released into mainstream Russian society. For the newly released prisoner, small things that most people took for granted became difficult to accept. It

seemed strange to them that they did not have lice and could wear knit underwear. Another consequence of camp life was insatiable gluttony. Consistent starvation caused newly released prisoners to react to food the same in freedom as they had as slaves of the state. In other words, they ate whatever they could get their hands on.²⁷ Adjusting to the world outside camp was difficult, but living in it was a test of endurance and strength. It was extremely difficult for a released prisoner to get a job. This was the result of the intense fear of employers, who could have been arrested for consorting with an enemy of the state. To complicate things, and further torture prisoners, many of those released were not allowed to return home, or were released into exile.²⁸

Survivors of this experience were the prisoners traumatized and demoralized by the Soviet government’s forced labor experience. The world will never know how many of these people with their memories still reside in Russia amongst their tormentors. There has been no equivalent of the Nuremberg Trials to punish perpetrators for these atrocities. What the world has been left by their victims, are a handful of testimonies; memoirs such as those written by Dimitri Panin and Barbara Armonas, as well as testimonies such as Avraham Shifrin’s, illustrate for us the torment of life in prison camps. The people sentenced to these camps, the dead as well as the survivors, are the unacknowledged symbols of the system of brutality run by the Soviet regime.

End Notes

¹ Michael Jakobson, *Origins of the Gulag: The Soviet Prison Camp System 1917-1934* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 1993), 113.

² *Ibid.*, xiii.

³ Steven Rosefielde, "Incriminating Evidence: Excess Deaths and Forced Labour Under Stalin: A Final Reply to Critics," *Soviet Studies* 39.2 (1987): 303.

⁴ Merle Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 354-356.

⁵ Naum Jasny, "Labor and Output in Soviet Concentration Camps," *The Journal of Political Economy* LIX.5 (Oct. 1951): 419.

⁶ Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago vol. I*, trans. by Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1973), 98.

⁷ Anton Antonov-Ovseyenko, *The Time of Stalin: Portrait of Tyranny* (Cincinnati: Harper and Row, 1983), 158.

⁸ *Ibid.*

- ⁹ Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, 480.
- ¹⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws, *U.S.S.R. Labor Camps*, 93rd Congress, 1st session, 1 February 1985, 7-8.
- ¹¹ Victor Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom: The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), 338.
- ¹² David J. Dallin and Boris I. Nicolaevsky, *Forced Labor in Soviet Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), 11.
- ¹³ Dimitri Panin, *The Notebooks of Sologdin*, trans. John Moore (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976), 156.
- ¹⁴ Congress, *U.S.S.R. Labor Camps*, 22.
- ¹⁵ Robert Conquest, *Kolyma: The Arctic Death Camps* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 54.
- ¹⁶ Varlam Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, trans. by John Glad (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980), 58.
- ¹⁷ Albert Konrad Herling, *The Soviet Slave Empire* (New York: Wilfred Funk, Inc. 1951), 29-30.
- ¹⁸ Conquest, *Kolyma*, 127.
- ¹⁹ Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, 148-149.
- ²⁰ Panin, *The Notebooks of Sologdin*, 50.
- ²¹ Congress, *U.S.S.R. Forced Labor Camps*, 20.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Conquest, *Kolyma*, 54-55.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 79.
- ²⁵ Barbara Armonas, *Leave Your Tears in Moscow*, as told to A.L. Nasvytis (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1961), 128.
- ²⁶ Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom*, 161.
- ²⁷ Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, 197-198, 208, 220.
- ²⁸ Dallin and Nicolaevsky, *Forced Labor in Soviet Russia*, 21-22, 98.

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Liberator or Oppressor? An Inquiry on the Memsahib's Relationship With Her Ayah.

by Françoise Labrique
Wittenberg Class of 1999

The *memsahibs*, the “masters’ women,” first came to the British colony of India in the nineteenth century as the wives and companions of British men in India.¹ One of the *memsahib's* duties in the colony was the supervision of the servants, an important job that needed “both brain and heart.”² Many British women who came to India felt both a need to maintain racial superiority over the local people but also a “burden” of uplifting the status of Indian women.³ I will explore this relationship between the *memsahib* and her *ayah* from the mid-1800s to the turn of the century.

The *ayah* was the female servant, and depending on the household, she was either the children’s nurse or the *memsahib's* attendant. Not many Anglo-Indian⁴ households hired *ayahs* because the majority of Indian servants were men. A handbook written for British women in India, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper & Cook*, gives a detailed description of the *ayah's* duties and explains when she should bring the *memsahib* tea, what to say and ask and in exactly what order to do her daily chores. The *ayah*, sometimes, was not only the personal attendant to the *memsahib* but also responsible for serving her mistress’ guests.⁵ *Ayahs*, whose primary job was that of a children’s nurse, had a great deal of responsibility and the *memsahibs* were advised to put their faith in the *ayah*.

Some British women did not approve of households hiring *ayahs*. In her account of a boarding school for Christian girls, Mary Carpenter, a missionary educator, explains how “In England, such girls would be...intended for domestic service...however, that such can rarely be the case in India...it would not...be safe for a young girl to be placed as a servant in the family.” Since many households employed

mostly men as domestic servants, Carpenter expresses a fear that the young *ayah* would become a victim of these Indian male servants’ sexual desires. She suggests that it would be better to marry these girls off at the age of fifteen to male converts so they could use their skills as housewives.⁶ Although female servants in England found themselves in a similar situation, often being the only woman, perhaps there was a fear that the Indian *ayah* was more defenseless and childlike compared to her British counterpart. This concern that reformers express toward Indian women illustrates how although they, in many ways, wanted to uplift and educate Indian girls, they still found it important to maintain some structured British hierarchy. For many British women, they believed that the main reason for educating Indian women was to prepare them for a life of Victorian domesticity.⁷

Many *memsahib's* descriptions of *ayahs* show a mixture of respect and condescension toward these women. One account explains that *ayahs* are “singularly kind, injudicious, patient and thoughtless in their care of children,” but reminds the *memsahib* that they lack the high level of common sense possessed by the British.⁸ However, in her autobiography, Flora Annie Steel, the wife of a British official, shares a touching experience with Fazli, her *ayah*. When Steel had to leave her six-month-old daughter to the care of a friend, Fazli consoled her mistress with words that “struck deep into my heart.” She told her, “You leave her in God’s care, memsahib.” Steel perhaps felt a sense of shame in her attitude toward Indians when she wrote of this experience, “And these are the people we dub heathen!”⁹ This statement acknowledges

one of the many contradictions in colonial values. Steel could see that Fazli was not an inferior savage, yet in all her other accounts about servants, she describes the need for the *memsahib* to assert her control.

There are many sources describing the sexual threat ("black peril") of local male servants to the *memsahib*, which posed the danger of disrupting the social distance that maintained colonial society.¹⁰ Some British women however, felt threatened by their husband's relations with Indian women.¹¹ Although Indian women's sexuality is not mentioned as an issue when hiring *ayahs*, perhaps the threat was there for the *memsahib*. In her autobiography, Steel expressed a concern that Muslim women in *pardah* (seclusion) were "inevitably over-obsessed with sex" and she also advised against the hiring of Muslim women because of their laziness. Because of her concern with these women's sexuality, laziness may not have been the only reason not to hire Muslim *ayahs*. However, some women may have felt relief at the idea of their husbands having sexual relations with local women. Pregnancy and childbirth were very dangerous in the colonies and anything that could cut back on the *memsahib's* chances of getting pregnant may have been accepted.

Some *memsahibs* also felt threatened by their *ayahs* who took care of their children. Although some *ayahs* were accused of simply spoiling the children, one *memsahib* wrote in 1929: "You can have very little idea of the enormous grip which the average...*ayah* gets on a child even when the mother is about most of the time."¹³ It was usually the *ayah* who did the majority of the child-care for British children. Indian *ayahs*, because of their inferior position in the colonial hierarchy, were not in any position to discipline or punish their masters' children. Thus, it was not uncommon for British children to keep fonder memories of their kind and loving *ayahs* than of their mothers. Also, since the children spent so much time with their *ayah*, they would hear many Indian stories and would often learn to speak Indian languages before learning English. This would cause difficulties in maintaining British superiority especially as children began to absorb the culture which their parents deemed inferior.

For many British women, Indian servants were usually the only interaction they had with the indigenous people. According to historian Margaret Strobel, it was through the servants that the *memsahib* based her view on Indian life and culture.¹⁵ Most husbands felt a need to protect their wives from the "uncivilized" Indian culture, thus preventing the *memsahibs* from leaving the secure confines of the Anglo-Indian community. This isolation resulted commonly in boredom and frustrations expressed primarily toward the servants and their inability to behave like their civilized rulers.

Memsahibs, outside the home, had no real control or power within the Raj. Although they were members of the ruling class, British women were ultimately still subservient to their husbands. In an effort to keep up appearances of having power, *memsahibs* used whatever tools they could to demean and humiliate the Indians they came in contact with, including treating their adult servants as children.

According to *The Complete Indian Housekeeper & Cook*, an Indian servant is not a savage, but "a child in everything save age and should be treated as a child; that is to say, kindly but with the greatest firmness." It advises that the *memsahib* use a "system of rewards and punishments" to encourage her servants to work properly. A dose of castor oil is suggested as an adequate punishment for a misbehaving adult servant.¹⁶ This condescending attitude illustrates another way for the *memsahibs* to maintain the proper racial hierarchy within their homes.

One of the primary concerns of the *memsahib* was regarding the Indian's lack of personal hygiene. One Englishwoman claimed that "the worst charges brought against native servants are uncleanness and a propensity to petty thefts and lies..."¹⁷ Therefore, it was crucial to the *Memsahib* that she never let her guard down, lest "neglect on the part of the mistress, results in the servants falling into their old habits with the inherited conservation of dirt."¹⁸ She was also responsible for providing a clean living environment for the servants while teaching them how to apply British standards of hygiene to their own lives.

The *memsahib* also had to gain an understanding of India's caste system in order to

work around the restrictions it posed on servants' duties. The duties of each servant differed according to their caste. For example, a cook could not clean and a duster could not sweep. These limitations often led to households with as many as sixty servants. Instead of lessening the burdens of housekeeping, sometimes the *mem sahib* may have found herself overwhelmed by the duties of supervising the plethora of servants.¹⁹ Although there was the option of hiring Muslim servants for whom, technically, there was no problem of caste,²⁰ some households preferred to avoid these servants for the sexual threat, which was mentioned earlier.

In order to give "intelligible orders to her servants," the *mem sahib* was sometimes expected to learn the local language.²¹ That some British women felt obliged to learn the local language is interesting because they learned the language for different reasons than their children did. British children who learned Bengali or Hindi from their *ayahs* did so to enjoy hearing Indian folktales or to play with their *ayah's* children; their mothers, on the other hand, used their knowledge of the local tongue as a tool for asserting control over their servants, and also perhaps to alleviate their boredom.

Many *mem sahibs* showed, through their writings, the juxtaposition between their feminism and racism. While some made efforts to promote Indian women's education and supported the suffrage movement, they also believed in maintaining the hierarchy of the Raj wherein Indians were inferior. There was an "absolute necessity," Flora Steel wrote in her autobiography, "for high-handed dignity in dealing with those who for thousands of years have been accustomed to it. They love it. It appeals to them...."²²

Other feminists and reformers supported the education of Indian women in an effort to encourage them "to establish households in which Victorian domesticity would prevail."²³ Although not blatantly racist, this kind of attitude illustrates how the *mem sahibs* believed in the superiority of their British lifestyle. With these attitudes, it seems unclear whether the colonizers believed that some Indians could be

taught to be like the British and uplift themselves to the status of their rulers, or if Indians were inherently inferior and teaching them British morals would only succeed in making them slightly better off.

Other *mem sahibs* did not feel the same burden to help the unfortunate Indian women that other British women felt. According to them, Indian women were quite resourceful and happy in their position: "That a sweeper woman should always be a sweeper woman, and should marry a sweeper or some equivalently low-caste man, seems to them even as a decree of nature which it were useless to overthrow . . . I do not think that the working woman of the East is in such bad case when set beside her European sisters."²⁴ This sort of opinion may have been more the exception than the rule because of the colonial nature of having to assert that the ruling power is superior and is somehow "saving" the colonized peoples from their own culture.

In their view that Indian women led wretched lives, many *mem sahibs* often forgot that legally and socially, they were not really as independent as they believed themselves to be. Some *mem sahibs* believed that in England, a woman was treated as "a human being of equal rights with man; mistress of her own sex," who had control over her body and could make independent reproductive decisions.²⁵ Whether or not this was actually true for some British women, perhaps it made them feel better about their own inferior position to feel pity for the Indian women whom they viewed as less fortunate.

In her relationship with the *ayah*, perhaps the only Indian woman she communicated with, the *mem sahib* may have felt that her concerns of not being her husband's equal in the politics of the Raj were small compared to what she believed her servant's position in Indian society was. Not only could she do her part in "helping" maintain the colonial power structure in the private sphere, but the *mem sahib* could also work at focusing some of her efforts on improving her Indian "sisters'" pitiable lives. Both attitudes, although seemingly contradictory, may have been the most useful coping mechanism of the *mem sahib*.

End Notes

- ¹ Margaret MacMillan, *Women of the Raj* (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1988), 7.
- ² Flora Annie Steel, *The Complete Indian Housekeeper & Cook* (London: William Heineman, 1907), 7.
- ³ Antoinette Burton, "The White Woman's Burden: British Feminists and 'The Indian Woman,' 1865-1895," in *Western Women and Imperialism*, ed. Nupur Chaudhri and Margaret Strobel (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 137.
- ⁴ For the purpose of this study, the term "Anglo-Indians" is used to refer to the British in India. Later, around 1881, it was used as a term to describe those of mixed British and Indian descent. MacMillan, 43.
- ⁵ Steel, *Complete Indian Housekeeper & Cook*, 86.
- ⁶ Mary Carpenter, "Surat, Bombay and Poona, 1868," in *The Queen's Daughter: An Anthology of Victorian Feminist Writings on India 1857-1900*, edited by Penelope Tuson (Berkshire: Ithaca Press, 1995), 80.
- ⁷ Barbara N. Ramusack, "Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India, 1865-1945," in *Western Women and Imperialism*, ed. Nupur Chaudhri and Margaret Strobel (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 123.
- ⁸ Steel, *Complete Indian Housekeeper & Cook*, 85.
- ⁹ Flora Annie Steel, *Garden of Fidelity Being the Autobiography of Flora Annie Steel, 1847-1929* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1929), 53.
- ¹⁰ Margaret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 24.
- ¹¹ Strobel, 4.
- ¹² Steel, *Garden of Fidelity*, 121.
- ¹³ Janice N. Brownfoot, "Memsahibs in Malaya: A Study of European Wives in a British Colony and Protectorate 1900-1940," in *The Incorporated Wife*, edited by Hillary Callan and Shirley Ardenner (Worcester: Billing & Sons Limited), 198.
- ¹⁴ MacMillan, 137-38.
- ¹⁵ Strobel, 22.
- ¹⁶ Steel, *Complete Indian Housekeeper & Cook*, 3.
- ¹⁷ Maud Diver, *The Englishwoman in India* (London: W. Blackwood & Sons, 1909); quoted in Dennis Kincaid, *British Social Life in India 1608-1937* (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1938), 247.
- ¹⁸ Steel, *Complete Indian Housekeeper & Cook*, 2.
- ¹⁹ Mary Ann Lind, *The Compassionate Memsahibs: Welfare Activities of British Women in India, 1900-1947*. (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1988), 23.
- ²⁰ However, the Hindu caste system "had spilled over into India's other religious groups," including Islam. MacMillan, 38.
- ²¹ Steel, *Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*, 2.
- ²² Steel, *Garden of Fidelity*, 133.
- ²³ Ramusack, 123.
- ²⁴ Mary Billington, "Women in India" in *The Queen's Daughter: An Anthology of Victorian Feminist Writings on India 1857-1900*, edited by Penelope Tuson (Berkshire: Ithaca Press, 1995), 317.
- ²⁵ Flora Annie Steel, *India: Painted by Mortimer Menpes*, Described by Flora Annie Steel (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1905; reprint, Delhi: Neeraj Publishing House, 1982), 156.

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Peace or Trouble: The Demise of William Paul

*by Bob Rickey
Wittenberg Class of 1999
Hartje Award*

"I am an innocent man as I shall answer to my God."¹ These were the last words spoken by William Paul, the last man executed by hanging in the state of Ohio. Paul was executed on 29 April 1896, less than two years after he was convicted of murdering his father-in-law. Paul's crime was described by local reports as a murder "most diabolical in its conception and hideous in its execution, disclosing in the murderer most depraved brutal instincts."² The events leading up to the murder were catalysts for small town gossip. Rumors of an incestuous relationship, an illegitimate pregnancy, and familial conflict created a whirlwind of controversy surrounding the conviction and execution of William Paul.

William Paul, one of seven sons born to James and Sallie Paul, was born in 1861 and raised in Brown County, a rural area bordering the Ohio River in southern Ohio. Paul married Frances Yockey, the daughter of a local farmer named Joseph Yockey. Living with William and Frances was her younger sister Anna Yockey. Anna, fifteen years of age, became pregnant during the summer of 1893, and William Paul was accused of being the father.³ Subsequently Paul began to receive "white-cap notices," which were bundles of switches and threatening letters used to intimidate persons who were believed to have committed immoral acts.⁴ The increasing tension over the situation forced Paul to travel to Kentucky, where he stayed for an undisclosed amount of time. Upon learning that the "white-cap notices" were sent by a neighbor named Henry Swearingen, Paul obtained a pistol and made threats against both Swearingen and Joseph Yockey.⁵

Paul returned to Ohio in July, 1894 and was seen in the vicinity of Joseph Yockey's house on

the evening of 14 July. A resident saw Paul walking towards Yockey's residence around eight o'clock that evening, carrying a bundle of clothes and brandishing his pistol. The resident, named Spencer Spears, related that Paul was agitated and proclaimed that "he would not go to the penitentiary and would not be arrested."⁶ Paul then continued on to his father-in-law's house, where he stopped about one hundred and fifty yards short of the property and removed his shoes and socks. Three of Joseph Yockey's sons stated that as they were about to turn their work horses out to the pasture around nine o'clock, they saw William Paul standing by the chimney of the house carrying a pistol. The sons retreated to the back of the house and Joseph Yockey met Paul at the front door. Frances, who had moved back into her father's house, also confronted Paul at the door and, seeing the pistol, begged him leave. Paul exclaimed, "It is either peace or trouble," and fired at Yockey, the pistol flash so close to Yockey that his clothes caught fire.⁷ Yockey was killed instantly, the bullet passing from his lower back through his heart and right lung and exiting his right shoulder blade.

Paul then fled to the wilderness, where he stayed until after Yockey's funeral. He then surrendered to local authorities and was tried and convicted for the murder of Joseph Yockey. He was sent to the Ohio Penitentiary Annex on 8 April 1895. After a little more than a year at the annex, Paul was hanged on 29 April 1896. Paul's calm demeanor immediately before his execution prompted one writer to compare him to the stoic Indian characters of a James Fenimore Cooper novel.⁸ When told that the governor would not stay his execution, Paul replied, "If the Governor of the state of Ohio

wants to bear the everlasting stain of hanging an innocent man, I can meet death bravely.”⁹ Only when the death sentence was read aloud did Paul convey a sense of desperation. Still, after the pronouncement of the death warrant Paul loudly proclaimed, “I am ready to meet death. It seems strange to me, however, that they should hang an innocent man. The murderer of Mr. Yockey is still at large.”¹⁰ Then, after his final declaration of innocence in the eyes of his God, William Paul fell to his death.

Whether Paul committed the murder was a source of controversy. Speculation surrounded the crime, and many local inhabitants seriously doubted that Paul killed Yockey.¹¹ Paul argued that Yockey was accidentally shot by one of his sons during a fight that ensued on the evening of 14 July. Others questioned the legitimacy of the claims that William Paul was the father of Anna Yockey’s child. These conjectures, however, were insufficient in keeping William Paul from becoming the last man hanged in the Ohio Penitentiary.

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Public Defender (West Union, Ohio)

End Notes

¹ *Public Defender*, (West Union, Ohio), 30 April 1896.

² *Ibid.*

³ The word “pregnant” was not used in newspaper reports concerning the crime. Instead, Anna was described as being “ruined,” or “in a delicate condition.”

⁴ H. M. Fogle, *The Palace of Death, or The Ohio Penitentiary Annex* (Columbus: privately printed, 1908), 131-2.

⁵ *Public Defender*, (West Union, Ohio), 22 July 1894.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Fogle, *Palace of Death*, 133.

⁹ *Public Defender*, (West Union, Ohio), 30 April 1896.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Fogle, *Palace of Death*, 132.

The German Turkey Shoot: the Heroics of Alvin C. York

*by Michelle Hardman
Wittenberg Class of 1999
Hartje Award*

Pressing himself chest first into the mud, Corporal Alvin York stared uphill at the nests of German machine guns which had just cut down six of his fellow soldiers. Three others had been wounded, including the officer in charge, Sergeant Bernard Early. Only eight doughboys remained from the suicide mission that had begun earlier that morning, October 8, 1918.¹ Sergeant Early and three squads already depleted due to earlier casualties had been sent to outflank the German machine guns that were raining leaden fire down upon the "All American" 82d Division.² They had managed to advance one and a half miles under the protection of the dense Argonne Forest in western France before happening upon two German medics, who fled to sound the alarm at the sight of the Americans.³ Early and his men followed in hasty pursuit, dodging trees and branches and leaping the banks of a small stream before breaking through the underbrush into a clearing. There, lounging about in their shirtsleeves, eating breakfast, and generally unprepared for an attack, were twenty members of the German 210th Reserve Infantry.⁴ The Germans, being surrounded by the armed Americans, quickly surrendered, but dropped to the ground in unison an instant before machine gun fire tore through the clearing and the still upright Americans. One American soldier, who had been to the left of the rest, dove between two bushes and edged his way to a clear view of the machine guns just forty yards uphill.⁵

This soldier was none other than Tennessee born Alvin York, a sharpshooter who had learned his skill "teching off" turkey and squirrel in the backwoods of the Cumberland Mountains. At a range of forty yards, the same distance between him and the firing Germans,

he could plug ten rifle bullets into a space no larger than that of a man's thumbnail.⁶ As a lull came in the fire, York went on the offensive.

When the Germans raised their heads from the pits to access the situation, York rolled into a sitting position and "... 'teched off' Germans with his Enfield rifle the way he had so often killed turkeys back home; only now the stakes were bigger and, to York's delight, so were the targets."⁷ The soldiers who escaped York's first round of shots, dove back into their nests and released a burst of waist-level machine gunfire. Fear of hitting the German prisoners still prone on the ground forced them to raise their heads out of the pits in order to sight York. Every time one attempted to take aim, he got an American bullet in his head, courtesy of the Tennessee corporal.

By this time the Germans had realized two things. One, they were dealing with a lone man and two, bullets were not working. In a desperate effort, six of their men crept through the bushes on the left of York, fixed bayonets to their rifles and charged.⁸ They knew his cartridge contained only five rounds and reasoned that at least one of them should be able to reach him. Unfortunately, while shooting his rifle, York had kept his .45 Colt automatic dangling from a finger of his right hand.⁹ He raised his pistol as the Germans charged and, using his off-hand, once more drew upon his hunting background. When shooting a group of turkeys, he always shot in the order of last to first, thus keeping the turkeys unaware of what was happening behind them. He reasoned his only threat was if the Germans stopped charging and fired a volley, so he shot them, last to first, killing them all before they had advanced more than ten yards. They "...

squealed just like stuck pigs."¹⁰

At this point, with his gun hot in his hands and his ammo running low, York shouted for the Germans to surrender just as a bullet flew past his ear. Lieutenant Vollmer, one of the prisoners still pressed to the ground, had pulled his pistol and fired it empty. Every shot missed York.¹¹ Realizing that they were beaten, Vollmer shouted to York that he would surrender his men, and, with York's automatic leveled at his head, he did so. One man ignored Vollmer and threw a grenade, which missed York and injured instead one of the German prisoners York shot and killed the offending soldier.¹² The other Germans, witnessing this and all of the previous events, stood up and

surrendered. As York lined the prisoners up by twos, Vollmer asked just how many Americans were with him. He replied "a-plenty;" actually only seven remained alive.¹³

Using the Germans as human shields, York and the other seven proceeded to march down the hill, back toward the American line. On their way they encountered several more German machine gun nests, all of whom surrendered and joined the ranks of the prisoners. Near the foot of the hill, they met up with an American patrol, who escorted them back to safety, where Brigadier General Lindsay would later say, "Well, York, I hear you have captured the whole damned German army," to which York would reply, "I only had 132."¹⁴

End Notes

¹ Sam K. Cowan, *Sergeant York and His People* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1922), 25.

² David D. Lee, *Sergeant York: An American Hero* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 28, 33.

³ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵ Cowan, *York and His People*, 24-5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷ Lee, *An American Hero*, 35.

⁸ Alvin C. York, *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*, ed. Tom Skeyhill (New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Company, Inc., 1928), 228.

⁹ Lee, *An American Hero*, 35.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹² Tom Skeyhill, *Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1930), 213.

¹³ York, *The Story of His Life*, 231.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

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“A Pioneer of Hindoo Enlightenment”: Ram Mohan Roy’s Influence on the Abolition of Sati, 1829.

by Françoise Labrique
Wittenberg Class of 1999
Hartje Award

Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) was regarded by both his fellow Indians and by the British officials as one of “the most remarkable Indians...who might well be called the father of modern India.”¹ Roy’s persistent questioning of idolatry and religious superstition enabled him to challenge the religious validity of the Hindu rite of sati.² Roy’s argument that sati was not a religious duty for Hindu widows provided the British, who were concerned with maintaining religious toleration within the Empire, with a justification for abolishing this rite.

When Roy’s older brother, Jagmohan, died in 1811, his widow committed sati. Her death left Roy with the determination to end sati.³ Upon his arrival in Calcutta several years later, Ram Mohan Roy became active in social and educational reforms. He was a staunch supporter of British education and wrote several essays against polygamy and the treatment of women within Hinduism. His 1818 essay, *A Conference Between An Advocate For and An Opponent of Burning Widows Alive*, was a dialogue that illustrated Roy’s views and the irrational arguments of the supporters of sati. Fourteen months later, Roy published a more detailed *A Second Conference*. Taking the position of the “Opponent” to sati in this dialogue with an “Advocate” who argues that women lack the capability of true faith and “are burned in order to prevent them from going astray...”, Roy argued that “if we enumerate... women...as hav[ing] been deceived by men, and such men as deceived by women, I presume that the number of the deceived women would be found ten times greater than that of the betrayed men.”⁴ In this second essay, Roy delved deeper into arguments over scriptural detail and women’s place in Hindu society.

Although Roy abhorred the act of sati, his views on how to rid India of this rite differed greatly from those of the British. When Lord William Bentinck, the Governor-General of India, came to Calcutta in 1828 with the determination to abolish sati, he mistakenly looked to Ram Mohan Roy, an “enlightened native,” for support.⁵ Bentinck, unlike his predecessors who were concerned they would provoke religious upheaval through government intervention against sati, wanted to bring abolition through legislation. Roy, on the other hand, supported a more discreet approach. He suggested to Bentinck that the “practice might be suppressed quietly and unobservedly by increasing the difficulty and by the indirect agency of the police.”⁶ Roy’s concerns about British legislation is expressed in Bentinck’s 8 November 1829 Minute:

He apprehended that any public enactment would give rise to general apprehension; that the reasoning would be: ‘While the English were contending for power they deemed it politic to allow universal toleration and to respect our religion, but having obtained the supremacy their first act is a violation of their profession, and the next will probably be, like the Muhammadan conquerors, to force upon us their own religion.’⁷

Ram Mohan Roy was concerned that once the British interfered with sati by passing legislation, there would be no stopping them from interfering with all other aspects of Indian religious and social life. He opposed British missionary work in India and angered many Christians with his writings on Jesus.⁸ Roy was caught in a complicated web of conflicting opinions regarding sati. Like the majority of the British officials in India, Roy

abhorred the practice and wished to see it abolished. However, he was suspicious that British government officials and missionaries would eventually lose all respect for religious toleration and convert India to Christianity. Roy's campaign against sati "aroused the wrath of his countrymen."⁹ He not only accused Hinduism of superstition and exposing its women "to every misery,"¹⁰ but he was also viewed by many Indians as a British puppet. Christians and Hindus publicly denounced Ram Mohan Roy as a heretic and atheist.¹¹ One Indian writer even described him as a "fellow who has lost his own religion and can't find another."¹² He died in 1833 in England,

"deserted by everyone except two or three Scotch friends."¹³ Roy who was a lover of India and a proponent of women's rights in Hinduism¹⁴ was not credited with influencing the British decision to abolish sati by historians and scholars until the turn of the century, although some scholars such as Harry Field wrote that it was "not Hindu humanity but British legislation which ended suttee."¹⁵ Edward Thompson, in his book *Suttee* barely mentions Roy's contribution to the abolition, claiming "the credit is almost entirely personality, and it is Bentinck's."¹⁶ Ram Mohan Roy disrupted British India through his questioning of the practice of sati and was the catalyst that led to its abolition.

End Notes

¹ Rustom Pestonji Masani, *Britain in India: An Account of British Rule in the Indian Subcontinent* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 52.

² Sati (Suttee), the act of self-immolation whereby a Hindu widow voluntarily burns herself on her husband's funeral pyre. For further works exploring sati and British civilizing works: Arund Sharma, Ajit Ray, Alak Heib and Katherine K. Young, ed., *Sati: Historical and Phenomenological Essays* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988); V.N. Datta, *Sati: A Historical, Social and Philosophical Enquiry into the Hindu Rite of Widow Burning* (New Delhi: Mandrar Publications, 1988).

³ The validity of this story has been questioned by some scholars such as V.N. Datta, *Sati: A Historical, Social and Philosophical Enquiry into the Hindu Rite of Widow Burning* (New Delhi: Mandrar Publications, 1988), 120. This has also been supported by Cromwell S. Crawford, *Ram Mohan Roy: Social, Political and Religious Reform in 19th Century India* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1987), 105. who claims: "the fiery death of his sister-in-law...forged in him a determination to save all the sisters of his land from this unworthy rite."

⁴ Sophia Dobson Collet, ed., *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy* (London: Harold Collet, 1900), 34.

⁵ Lord William Bentinck, "Minute." in *Lord William Bentinck*, ed. Demetrius Boulger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 101.

⁶ "Minute," 101.

⁷ "Minute," 100.

⁸ Collet, *The Life and Letters*, 37. In 1820, Roy wrote *Precepts of Jesus and Appeal to the Christian Public* and the next year, *Second Appeal to the Christian Public*, which questioned the morals of some Old Testament stories and the divinity of Christ.

⁹ V.N. Datta, *Sati* (New Delhi: Mandrar Publications, 1988), 127.

¹⁰ Collet, *The Life and Letters*, 35.

¹¹ Jogendra Ghosh, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy* (Calcutta: Oriental Press, 1885-1887), 285.

¹² Ghosh, *The English Works*, 287.

¹³ Brojendranath Banerjee, *Raja Rammohun Roy: Mission to England* (Calcutta, 1976), XII.

¹⁴ Roy focused his arguments against sati by defending the innocent women affected by the practice. The British, on the other hand, viewed sati as an act that violated all human decency.

¹⁵ Harry Field, *After Mother India* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), 106.

¹⁶ Edward Thompson, *Suttee* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1928), 77-78.

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