Fossildom, Old Fogeyism, and Red Tape

For many years, Simon Cameron has been considered a perfect example of the politico of the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹ The type is familiar to us all—corrupt, self-seeking, parochial, they entered the American political scene shortly after the larger-than-life figures of the “Golden Age” had departed and quickly made what had been an honorable trade into something little better than the oldest profession.

A major element in making Cameron almost the epitome of this unattractive crowd was his behavior as Lincoln’s first Secretary of War. Every historian and Civil War “buff” seems to breathe a sigh of relief when the Pennsylvania politician resigns from the War Department early in 1862 and scurries off to his new post as Minister to Russia. Somehow it is distasteful to have to think of our great President and the Northern cause being sullied by association with this corrupt creature.

But there are certain unanswered questions about Simon Cameron as Secretary of War. No one has ever produced evidence that he was corrupt.² And recent historians have begun to question the ability of anyone to bring order and efficiency to the mobilization of the North.³ It may well be that Cameron’s reputation has stood in the way of an objective appraisal of his conduct as Secretary of War. Perhaps it would be productive to restudy Cameron and the War Department, this time placing Cameron a little to the side and concentrating instead on the War Department itself. Just what were the problems

¹ See, for example, Matthew Josephson, The Politicos, 1865–1886 (New York, 1938), 73, 77.
² James Ford Rhodes, History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 . . . 1877 (New York, 1910), III, 574, stated that he had such evidence, but failed to produce it.
faced by the department? How capable was it of solving these problems? How has the War Department handled other mobilizations? With approximate answers to these questions it may be that we can assess more soundly the relative merits and shortcomings of Simon Cameron and the War Department.

Physically, the main building of the 1861 War Department has been described as a "miserable tenement." The institution within was in little better condition. The President was, of course, the Commander in Chief. The Secretary of War was appointed by the President to command, equip, and supply the Army. In a somewhat ambiguous position under the President and the Secretary of War was the General of the Army whose job it was to see to "the efficiency, discipline, and conduct of the troops." Because the relationship of the General to the Secretary and the President was not clearly defined, there tended to be conflict between the President's two subordinates.

The Secretary of War and the General of the Army were handicapped in performing their tasks by lack of personnel. The General had only his personal aides and secretaries to serve him. The Secretary of War was helped by a Chief Clerk and seven subordinate clerks. There was no Assistant Secretary of War.

Eleven bureaus took care of the various duties of the War Department. These bureaus were directed by military officers who had reached their positions by reason of seniority and who, like the General of the Army, remained in office until death, courtmartial, or voluntary resignation removed them. The Army lacked a retired list,
however, so officers seldom accepted the last alternative. Since the bureau chiefs and line officers did not exchange positions, the bureau heads tended to be unaware of the problems of the fighting forces. Furthermore, the bureaus were independent of each other and reported directly to the Secretary of War. They were out of touch with each other as well as the fighting men, for there was no institutional device for co-ordinating the activities of the various departments.

To assist them in their duties the Secretary of War and bureau heads had, excluding the Chief Clerk, sixty-five civilian clerks. The clerks, like their chiefs, tended to remain in office for years, despite the patronage system. In all, the Department employed, in various capacities, 341 civilians who were scattered all over the country.

This number was not adequate, even before the war, to perform all the tasks of the Department efficiently. Yet Congress did not authorize an increase in personnel until some months after the outbreak of the war, and for Cameron’s entire term in office the War Department was understaffed.

In part, the inability of the War Department to function efficiently even in peacetime was due to the red tape and leisurely routine which encumbered it. The methods used for the conduct of business were not conducive to rapid action. Letters were, perforce, written in longhand and either copied by letterpress or by hand. Some of the incoming communications were also copied into letter books. As a result, many messages were answered only after long delay or, in some cases, not at all.

Because a majority of the clerks remained after the change in administrations, the traditional practices continued despite the

10 Kreidberg and Henry, 85, 88; White, 193.
12 Register of Officers (1859), 102–104.
13 White, 355–357.
14 Register of Officers (1859), 102–108.
15 Meneely, 27.
16 Ibid., 199–201; Nevins, War for the Union, I, 194.
17 Meneely, 26–27.
18 Register of Officers (1859), 102–104; Register of Officers (1861), 101–104. Of the total of ninety-four members of the department in Washington in 1859, fifty-eight were still with the department in 1861.
press of wartime. As one observer remarked trenchantly, "the moment you attack one bureau, it becomes personal to all fossildom."19 "Fossildom," "old fogeistism," red tape, and routine were, in fact, the besetting evils of the War Department. They would not be exorcised without difficulty, pain, and, most important of all, the passage of time. The needs of wartime would, after a seemingly long period, finally force changes, but at first, old bureau chiefs and their clerks would resist any variation in time-honored practices.

Age was a prime factor in determining the conservative approach of the bureau chiefs. Largely old men, they naturally tended to favor accustomed procedures. When the war broke out, their average age was sixty-four and a half, and six of them were seventy years old or older. Five bureau heads had been in their posts since before the Mexican War, and one, the Commissary General, had held his place since 1818. Only death, in September, 1861, could remove him from it.20

Outlook, even when age was not a factor, paralyzed the bureau heads. Lorenzo Thomas, the Adjutant General, was only fifty-six when war came, and James Ripley, the chief of Ordinance, was hardly senile at sixty-six.21 Nevertheless, both men were products of a system which stressed method over speed. They were unable to adapt to a revolutionary situation when the time came, but they could not be gotten rid of.22

Andrew Carnegie, who served under Cameron for a time, correctly described the bureau heads (and he included General of the Army Winfield Scott in this evaluation) when he wrote, "They were seemingly one and all martinets who had passed the age of usefulness. Days would pass before a decision could be obtained upon matters

19 "My idea is to attack from this distance, the system of seniority rather than to make personal attacks upon individuals. . . . The real trouble is that so many of the bureaus of the government have degenerated into mere receptacles for files of red tape, that the moment you attack one, it becomes personal to all fossildom, and arrays it against changes." J. J. Forbes to F. L. Olmsted, Dec. 12, 1861, quoted in Sarah Forbes Hughes, ed., Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes (Boston, 1899), I, 269.

20 Kreidberg and Henry, 86-87.


22 When Cameron left office, Francis P. Blair, Sr., tried to prevent his departure. He reported, "I thought if Ripley & Thomas were to make way to younger aspirants, it might suffice." Blair to Cameron, Jan. 30, 1862, Simon Cameron Papers, Library of Congress.
which required prompt action. There was scarcely a young active officer at the head of an important office. . . . Long years of peace had fossilized the services.\textsuperscript{23}

The regular army was in little better shape than the bureaucracy. It, too, was small and scattered all over the country. And even when the war began it could not all be rushed to Washington since the Indians still had to be controlled.\textsuperscript{24}

Both the army and the bureaus were placed in a state of flux by secession. Bureau heads, their clerks, and line officers resigned to go South as the Confederacy became a fact, and the loyalty of some of those who remained was open to question.\textsuperscript{25} The army lost 313, about one-third, of its officers to the South. Among those who departed were some of the best: Adjutant General Samuel Cooper, resigned to fill the same post for the Confederates; Joseph E. Johnston, the Quartermaster General, left, as did Lee, Kirby-Smith, and Albert Sydney Johnston. Enlisted men were lost as well. Few deserted to the South, but 1,100, more than seven per cent of the army, were captured in Texas after Sumter fell.\textsuperscript{26}

If the army was ill-prepared for war, the militia, on which the government could theoretically depend in crises, was in even worse condition. It was, with the exception of a few units, ill-equipped, unorganized, and untrained.\textsuperscript{27}

These, then, were the poor instruments with which Simon Cameron had to begin the prosecution of a large-scale war. Though the North had men, money, and industrial capacity, they were not organized for war, and the War Department which would have to mobilize them was a badly officered, out-dated bureaucracy, while the army and the militia, which would have to bear the brunt of the conflict until the North could be molded for a major war, were almost useless.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie} (Boston, 1920), 103.
\textsuperscript{24} Kreidberg and Henry, 88.
\textsuperscript{25} See, for example, Philip W. Rice to Cameron, Apr. 12, 1861, Cameron Papers, questioning the loyalty of Lorenzo Thomas; Benjamin P. Thomas and Harold Hyman, \textit{Stanton, The Life and Times of Lincoln's Secretary of War} (New York, 1962), 163, also on the loyalty of Thomas.
\textsuperscript{26} Kreidberg and Henry, 89.
\textsuperscript{27} Reports from the states on the size of their militia dated, on the average, from 1853. Delaware's last report had been filed in 1827. Some states drew arms for their militia, but the budget for militia arms in 1860 was the same as it had been in 1808. \textit{Ibid.}, 90–91; Meneely, 23–25, 50.
Union men were not, however, aware of all these facts, and thus failures in the prosecution of the war produced a great outpouring of criticism. Overoptimism met with failure. The resultant bitterness produced cries for the removal of those responsible. Lincoln, Secretary of State Seward, Secretary of the Navy Welles, and Cameron were all targets of abuse, but Cameron is the only one who has continued to be attacked by historians.28

From the start, Cameron's position in the War Department was weak. Though his business success with railroads, canals, banks, insurance companies, newspapers, and real estate (which had made him a millionaire) seemed to indicate administrative skill, this was more than offset by his political reputation. His opportunistic pursuit of political power and his rumored corrupt use of money to further his ambitions, made him extremely vulnerable to criticism. When he was mentioned for a cabinet post, the attack was so bitter that he had little reputation left by the time he became Secretary of War.29 Thus Cameron easily became the scapegoat for Union failures despite the fact that due to the nature of the War Department and American society there were bound to be mistakes and scandals. In other words, his reputation as a venal politician gave, and continues to give, a strong gloss of credibility to all the charges leveled against him.

During his term in office, and for a long time thereafter, Cameron was accused of wielding the patronage axe lustily and favoring his Pennsylvania friends excessively.30 This has been done by historians even though they realized that the Republican Party was a con-

28 Criticism of Cameron became vocal and bitter with the defeat at Bull Run. See T. Daugherty to Cameron, July 26, 1861, Abraham Sheldon to Cameron, July 27, 1861, and many other letters at the same time, all in the Cameron papers.

29 Harry E. Pratt, "Simon Cameron's fight for a Place in Lincoln's Cabinet," Bulletin of the Abraham Lincoln Association, 49 (September, 1937), 3-11, contains the most complete version of Cameron's battle for a cabinet post. Willard L. King, Lincoln's Manager, David Davis (Cambridge, 1960), 162 ff., supplements this account and corrects it at certain points. Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Lincoln (New York, 1951), II, 440-443, is a generally accurate shorter description of the fight which includes Cameron's own account of his meeting with Lincoln in Springfield. See also, Brooks M. Kelley, "A Machine is Born; Simon Cameron and Pennsylvania, 1862-1873" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1961), 31-41.

glomerate of highly dissimilar groups with very different aims and that "public jobs wisely distributed were the cement" which had to be used "to hold the Republican party together."

This charge has been made, furthermore, because there has been no real attempt to assess the extent to which Cameron played the spoils game. His appointment of a political follower as his Chief Clerk has been singled out for criticism, despite the knowledge that all the other cabinet members selected friends or family as their assistants. And the fact that this man was soon replaced has been ignored. Much more important, it has not been noted that Cameron removed a smaller percentage of his employees in Washington than did Chase or Seward.

In the department as a whole, many were removed from office, as under the prevailing system was to be expected. But in the most important posts, the departmental clerkships, fewer than half were displaced and, even more significantly, the top clerk was a new man in only one bureau. Thus the department continued to suffer from old fogeyism; failures were not due to an inexperienced staff.

31 Ibid., 10.
32 Ibid., 54-57; Meneely, 108.
33 Sanderson, the Chief Clerk, seems to have left, possibly because of ill-health, sometime in May. J. P. Sanderson to Cameron, May 24, 1861, Cameron Papers. By July, James Lesley, Jr., was Chief Clerk. The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, D. C., 1899), Series III, vol. 1, 328, hereinafter cited as O. R.; Register of Officers (1861), 101.
34 Carman and Luthin, 55. Had Carman and Luthin checked the Register of Officers, 1859 and 1861, they would have discovered that while Cameron's department had lost through death, voluntary departure, and the spoils system, thirty-six of its ninety-four employees in Washington, only thirteen of thirty-three remained in the State Department and 151 out of 374 in the Treasury.
35 Outside of Washington, Cameron seems to have made almost a clean sweep of departmental employees. Register of Officers (1859, 1861). Cameron, it should be remembered, did not have a free hand here. He could not ignore the wishes of local politicians without being deluged with criticism.
36 Comparing the Register of Officers of 1859 and 1861, we find that of the seven clerks directly under Cameron, only two were removed, while the top three clerks (by salary and order of listing) remained the same. The Adjutant General lost two of his ten clerks, one by death. The Quartermaster General's bureau was hard hit; of the thirteen original clerks (temporary and regular) only four remained the same in September, 1861. One of these, however, was the head clerk. Of those who left, one was discontinued in 1860, two were from Virginia, one from Maryland, three from the District of Columbia, and one transferred to the Bureau of Engineers. The Subsistence Office lost two of its six clerks. The Paymaster General lost five of his seven clerks. One of the five had resigned Dec. 31, 1860. In the Surgeon Gen-
Cameron's enemies charged that he favored friends and Pennsylvanians when he gave out commissions. Concerning his preference for friends, there is no reliable information. As far as Pennsylvanians were concerned, it is possible to say, categorically, that favoritism was not excessive. In September, 1861, the army had 173 officers from Pennsylvania in the bureaus or, above the rank of colonel, in the army. At the same time, New York had 176. Thus Pennsylvania had slightly more than its just share of high officers, but not a surprisingly large amount.

Though evidence is lacking with which to judge the large number of appointments that Cameron made as the department grew under wartime pressures, it seems safe to accept Allan Nevins' conclusion that Cameron was no more of a spoilsman than some of the other cabinet members. Actually, Secretary of the Treasury Chase, as he pursued his consuming ambition to be President, may have been the greatest spoilsman of them all.

While making the many patronage appointments which were necessitated by secession, the spoils system, and war, Simon Cameron had to raise, equip, and supply an army. In his performance of these tasks he has been strongly criticized, not only for the way he did them, but also for his failure to draw up long-range plans. The

eral's office only one clerk was changed out of three. Two clerks left of the five in the Engineers Office. One of these had died. The Bureau of Topographical Engineers lost only one clerk, a South Carolinian, of its five, while the Ordnance Department lost five of its eight clerks. This was the only bureau to have an inexperienced head clerk. The second clerk, however, was an old employee. By September, 1861, therefore, the department had lost only twenty-six of the sixty-four clerks it had employed in 1859. For changes in the department to the end of 1860 see U. S. Senate, Thirty-sixth Congress, Second Session, Senate Executive Documents, document No. 12.

37 Carman and Luthin, 152. No doubt the disgruntled often made unjust charges against Cameron. See, for example, F. Stansbury Haydon, Aeronautics in the Union and Confederate Armies (Baltimore, 1941), I, 63.
38 Register of Officers (1861), 114-127.
39 Nevins, War for the Union, I, 227.
40 Carman and Luthin, 58, 231. For Chase's friendship to the Camerons in patronage matters, see Chase to Cameron, June 23, 1862, Cameron Papers; James D. Cameron to Chase, Apr. 6, 1863, Salmon P. Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Chase to Simon Cameron, May 14, 1863, Cameron Papers.
41 Nevins, War for the Union, I, 227: "and worst of all, he was totally unable to plan." In the evaluation of Cameron in the War Department, much weight has been placed on Nicolay's memorandum which was in an envelope marked "Conversation with the President, October 2d." Here Nicolay noted, among other things, "Cameron utterly ignorant and regardless of
truth is, however, that we actually have little information about his aims. Unlike some of the other department heads, Cameron kept no diary in which he recorded his thoughts and beliefs, so this conclusion has to be based on the testimony of his numerous and vocal enemies, and on observing the War Department in action. These are not, however, very dependable criteria upon which to base a conclusion that Cameron had no plans. The War Department, as we have seen, was not equipped, either in numbers of personnel or their outlook and procedures, to cope with a massive war effort. Any of Cameron's intentions was bound to collapse in such a situation. And the chaos that was unavoidable in the first months of the war was certain to give the impression that the Secretary of War had no plans at all.

On purely military matters, we know that Cameron tended to follow the advice of the army officers. He felt strongly his lack of martial knowledge and, like Lincoln, read military books to make up that deficiency. But until he did so, he felt that he had to take their advice. It took time for the civilian leaders, Lincoln included, to realize that the counsel of the established military men was largely useless.

Cameron depended on General Scott and others in his evaluation of the situation at Fort Sumter. We have no dependable record of what the Secretary of War suggested after the fort was fired upon. He said, and one witness later supported this claim, that he had

the course of things [.]" "Cameron [.] Selfish and openly discourteous to the President [.] Obnoxious to the country [.] Incapable of either organizing details or conceiving and advising general plans." Quoted in full in Helen Nicolay, *Lincoln's Secretary: A biography of John G. Nicolay* (New York, 1949), 125-126. Historians have tended to accept this note as evidence of what Lincoln said to Nicolay (see, for example, Nevins, *War for the Union*, I, 396), but it seems very possible that it actually records what Nicolay said to the President. It does not sound like Lincoln. He paid little attention to discourtesy, as we know from his relations with McClellan; see Tyler Dennett, *Lincoln and The Civil War in the Diaries and Letters of John Hay* (New York, 1939), 34-35. Nor, in fact, does it sound much like the smooth, polished Cameron.

42 Ganoe, 251; Adam Gurowski in his *Diary, from March 4, 1861 to November 12, 1862* (Boston, 1862), 117, reports: "In a conversation with Cameron [November, 1861], I warned against bestowing such powers on McClellan. 'What shall we do?' was Cameron's answer; 'neither the President nor I know anything about military matters.'" 43 John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln. A History* (New York, 1890), III, 387; Meneely, 87; O.R., I, i, 196-198. This dependence on Scott is not surprising. He was held in awesome respect despite his age and infirmity. Furthermore, if any progress was to be made in the war, Cameron and Scott had to co-operate. For the opinion of Scott, see Margaret Leech, *Reveille in Washington, 1860-1865* (New York, 1941), 2.
recommended calling 500,000 men immediately, instituting a close blockade of the South, capturing Charleston and New Orleans, and freeing all the slaves who would desert their masters and join the Union Army.\textsuperscript{44}

The Secretary of War was in advance of most of his cabinet colleagues in recommending confiscation of slaves and their use as soldiers.\textsuperscript{45} If he also urged raising an army of 500,000 men, he was well ahead of General Scott and many cabinet members.\textsuperscript{46} But if he did not, at first, propose these things; if he failed to see the need for a huge army, great quantities of arms, and enormous amounts of supplies; if, in fact, he only reacted to the crisis as it worsened, then he was only as much of a failure as Lincoln and most other department heads.\textsuperscript{47} It took time for them to realize the size of their tasks. After they recognized the problem, realistic plans began to emerge and order began to appear out of chaos.

With or without plans an army had to be recruited, trained, equipped, and supplied. In performing all of these duties, the War Department was hampered by traditional practices and the shortcomings of departmental personnel and organization. Furthermore, the Federal system and the simplicity and lack of organization of the North made the War Department's job even more difficult.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{44} James R. Gilmore, \textit{Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War} (Boston, 1898), 23-24, related long after the event that he and Robert J. Walker saw Cameron shortly after the cabinet meeting where war plans were discussed. The Secretary told them that he had made these proposals. Many years later, Cameron repeated this claim to L. D. Ingersoll. L. D. Ingersoll, \textit{A History of the War Department of the United States} (Washington, D. C., 1879), 525.

\textsuperscript{45} Cameron supported Butler's handling of the slaves, Fremont's proclamation, and Cochrane's speech recommending arming the slaves. He drafted instructions for General T. W. Sherman which would have allowed him to use the slaves who came within his lines as soldiers, and he spoke in the cabinet in November for arming the slaves. He did all of these things prior to his more famous suggestion in his 1861 annual report. Cameron to Butler, May 30, 1861, \textit{O.R.}, III, i, 243; Nevins, \textit{War for the Union}, I, 334, 397-399; Howard K. Beale, ed., "The Diary of Edward Bates, 1859-1866," \textit{Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the year 1930} (Washington, D. C., 1933), IV, 203.

\textsuperscript{46} Meneely, 101; Nevins, \textit{War for the Union}, I, 150-154.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{48} Nevins clearly points out the problems the government faced due to its weaknesses, the formlessness and "libertarian bent" of society, the lack of "principles and precedents," of "efficient business administrators," and "industrial, commercial, financial, [and] professional" organizations. As he so well says, "'Organization' is a key word, and from one point of view the transformation of an unorganized nation into an organized nation was the key process of the Civil War." \textit{Ibid.}, 243.
In order to raise troops, the War Department was forced to turn to the state governors for aid. For one reason, this was the way troops had been raised in the past; for another, the department lacked the administrative staff to do the job itself; and for a third, the governors would have protested against any attempt to change the system and thus lessen their powers.\(^{49}\)

At first, recruiting was somewhat chaotic. The Adjutant General was slow to send out quotas to the states.\(^{50}\) Even worse, governors raised more men than were called for and then insisted that the War Department take them, without considering the conjoined problems of equipping and supplying the new troops.\(^{61}\) After the first few months, however, the department was calling for all the men the governors could send and gradually bringing order to recruiting.\(^{62}\) To begin with, Cameron stopped individuals from raising regiments independently of the governors—an unfortunate method of acquiring men which both Lincoln and Cameron had unwisely encouraged earlier in the war.\(^{53}\) Then, in perhaps his most important act as Secretary of War, Cameron formed a whole new recruiting organization.\(^{54}\) On December 3, 1861, a replacement system was set up which took recruiting out of the hands of the governors and placed it under the direct control of the War Department. By it, volunteers would have been found to keep units in the field up to full strength. No longer would old, experienced regiments have faded away due to the attrition of battle casualties, disease, desertion, and the lack of any

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\(^{49}\) Troops were raised by the governors in the Mexican War and again in the Spanish-American War. Kreidberg and Henry, 75, 155. Gov. Edwin D. Morgan did, in fact, protest when recruiting was transferred to the War Department in December, 1861. Morgan to Cameron, Dec. 24, 1861, O.R., III, i, 758-759; Nevins, *War for the Union*, I, 229.

\(^{50}\) Cameron informed Gov. Oliver P. Morton and others that the Adjutant General would soon let them know the quotas due from their states. Cameron to Morton, May 7, 1861, O.R., III, i, 170-171. The quotas were not prescribed until May 14, 15, and 16. *Ibid.*, III, i, 202-204.

\(^{61}\) See, for example, O. P. Morton to Cameron, Apr. 23, 1861, *ibid.*, 102-103. Morton enlisted 2,000 men for state service for one year, but when need for them had passed he tried to get the federal government to take them. Robert Dale Owen to Cameron, July 20, 1861, *ibid.*, 339, 340. On the eagerness of the governors and the great outpouring of men, see Meneely, 144-145, 148; Nevins, *War for the Union*, I, 173-174.

\(^{52}\) *Ibid.*, 231.


\(^{54}\) *Ibid.*, 722-723
method by which to refill their depleted ranks. Unfortunately, this sensible plan was scarcely tried. Edwin M. Stanton, Cameron's successor as Secretary, in perhaps the prime blunder of the war, abolished the replacement plan and ceased all recruiting on April 3, 1862, just as the spring offensives of McClellan and Grant were getting under way. Though Cameron had many shortcomings as Secretary of War he never, after the early days of the conflict, underestimated the need for men. Because its life was short, and its actual significance to the Union small, historians have given Cameron little credit for this wise plan. It could have been a major contribution to the war effort.

Cameron has been criticized not only for the way he raised troops, but also for the way he used the regulars. He should, we are told, have merged them with the volunteers, thus providing trained men as leaven for the mass of untrained volunteers. There is good reason to doubt whether this application of John C. Calhoun's plan to expand the army by using the regulars as cadre for the volunteers would have been much help. The number of professionals was so small and the number of volunteers so large, that the regular army men would have been spread too thin to do much good. It would, perhaps, have assisted the training of the new soldiers if regular army officers had commanded them, though even here it may be wondered if the officer corps was not too small to be very effective. But in this case, as in others, Cameron followed the advice of General Scott and the practice of the Mexican War and kept the regular army separate from the volunteers.

Raising troops was the easiest of Cameron's many tasks. It was much more difficult to furnish the new men with arms, uniforms, and

55 Nevins, War for the Union, I, 229–230.
56 Kreidberg and Henry, 102; Nevins, War for the Union, II, 63; Thomas and Hyman, 201. Though Thomas and Hyman try to find some good in this move, it actually resulted in placing recruiting back on the same basis as it had been before the replacement plan. The governors were in control again.
59 Meneely, 195–196; Kreidberg and Henry, 97. "The regular army was used approximately as it was used in both world wars, when existing regular divisions were completed and others formed." Kenneth P. Williams, Lincoln Finds a General (New York, 1949), I, 399.
other supplies. Probably because the War Department lacked the personnel to cope with this enormous job, the Secretary suggested to some of the governors that they should equip the men they brought into service. Under the circumstances, this was probably a wise decision, but Cameron has been much criticized for it since the existence of many buyers bidding against each other in a seller's market created high prices.

Even if the War Department had had the personnel to perform these functions, it is doubtful that the Secretary of War could have stopped the governors from purchasing various necessities. Some state executives began buying military supplies even before Sumter was fired upon. They would, no doubt, have objected strenuously to any attempt to curb them during the early days of the conflict before the War Department supply system was operating efficiently. In fact, even when Cameron tried to prevent further state purchases in the fall of 1861, he was not entirely successful.

Throughout that first year of Civil War, the governors were zealous in pushing the war effort and jealous of their powers. They and their agents deluged the War Department with messages. On the whole, these were intelligent and important, but they undoubtedly helped to clog the wheels of the already overstrained administrative machinery. They called for arms and equipment constantly.

60 "There was simply nothing else to be done. Competition among the states and between the states and the Federal government in bidding for contracts might and did lead to a squandering of public funds, but federal administrative facilities would not permit the Washington government to assume the entire task." Weigley, 184; Cameron to O. P. Morton, Apr. 26, 1861, O.R., III, i, 115-116.

61 Meneely, 115; Fred A. Shannon, The Organization and Administration of the Union Army, 1861-1865 (Cleveland, 1928), I, 54-55.


63 Kenneth M. Stampp, Indiana Politics during the Civil War (Indianapolis, 1949), 110. In Chapter 6, Stampp perceptively analyzes state mobilization and the relationship between the state and federal governments.

64 Meneely, 102, 114, 144-145, 153-154.

65 The flood of messages and the replies may be found in O.R., III, i.

66 Morton's letters and telegrams are particularly interesting. He continually bombarded the department with requests for arms and equipment, insisted that the government take more men from Indiana, and pleaded for cannons with which to defend the Ohio river border of the state. In some annoyance over the Governor's many demands for arms, Cameron informed him that only 4,683 men had been called for from Indiana, while 9,500 arms of all kinds had been sent to the state. Cameron to Morton, May 3, 1861, ibid., 149-150.
quarreled over the appointment of officers for the troops. They tried
to control the men even after they had gone into federal service. All
in all, though the governors were very useful during the early days
of the war, they were a severe trial to Cameron, McClellan, and the
War Department in general.\footnote{Meneely, 154-155; Bruce Catton, Grant Moves South (Boston, 1960), 114, touches upon
the problems McClellan had with the governors. Like the War Department, the governors had
problems with corruption. Stampp, 112; Stanton Ling Davis, Pennsylvania Politics (Cleveland,
1935), 182-188. Perhaps Morton’s experiences with state mobilization caused him, despite his
problems with the War Department, to write to Cameron, “It is a leading feature in the policy
of the opponents of the war to charge corruption against every man engaged in its prosecution
and to break down the confidence of the people in those who carry it on.” “Allow me to add
in conclusion that the vigor and success with which your department has been administered
commands my unqualified approbation.” Morton to Cameron, Jan. 13, 1862, Cameron Papers.}

The resignation of General Joseph E. Johnston shortly after the
outbreak of war was one reason the War Department performed its
quartermaster functions poorly early in the conflict.\footnote{Johnston did not resign until Apr. 22, 1861. His hesitancy severely handicapped the
department during a critical period, for while he agonized over his personal decision, he “gave
information with evident reluctance, or delayed altogether.” M. H. Cobb, “Reminiscences of
Washington in 1861,” Cameron Papers.}

An efficient, capable replacement was not found until June.\footnote{Montgomery C. Meigs took office, June 13, 1861, but his appointment was back-dated
to May 15, 1861. Kreidberg and Henry, 86; Weigley, 165. Cameron opposed the appointment
of Meigs, probably because of his close association with Seward and the Pickens expedition.
For Cameron’s attitude toward Meigs, see Diary of Gideon Welles (Boston, 1911), I, 38;
Weigley, 163. Weigley believes Cameron was afraid to appoint Meigs because “certain of the
operations of his department were—well, perhaps somewhat irregular. . . .” I can find no
evidence to support this assertion.}

Nevertheless, even before Montgomery C. Meigs took office as Quartermaster General, the
worst mistakes were being overcome. The troops had uniforms and
were sheltered and supplied.\footnote{Major Ebenezer Sibley was acting Quartermaster General. Weigley, 237.}

Never did the nation come “close to complete collapse in the field of logistics,” as it did in 1917.\footnote{Kreidberg and Henry, 310. Yet, when World War I began, “the United States was in
better shape than it had been in 1861.” Ibid., 241.}

Meigs was a superior bureau chief,\footnote{Ibid., 166.}
but even he could not bring complete order to the quartermaster department. The system of
supply was weak, with individual quartermasters taking care of
many of the needs of their units, and with the Quartermaster
General often acting only as an overseer.\(^{74}\) Throughout the war, Meigs' staff remained inadequate, inspectors continued to be inept, and extravagance never ceased.\(^{76}\) Despite the bureau's many failings, however, by December, 1861, General McDowell could say: "There never was an army in the world that began to be supplied as well as ours."\(^{76}\)

As in World War I when the calling up of units of the national army had to be delayed due to the failure of the Quartermaster's bureau, the administrative machine could not supply the needs of the great outpouring of men immediately.\(^{77}\) The fault was not Cameron's for he gave the very capable Meigs every support;\(^{78}\) the fault lay in the fact that it took time to build the organization which could handle these great demands.

The major indictment of the conduct of the supply system was made by the House Committee on Government Contracts.\(^{79}\) The nearly 3,000 pages of testimony taken by that committee have furnished historians with large amounts of ammunition for their criticisms of Cameron. This report, and the testimony which accompanies it, have not been handled with the caution they deserve, however, for the aim of the committee was to "get" Cameron.\(^{80}\) To make certain it succeeded, it never called the Secretary of War to testify in his own behalf. Under similar circumstances during World War I, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker was able to calm the Congressional sleuths with his testimony.\(^{81}\)

The Committee's investigation hardly proved that Cameron was a bad Secretary of War. Very little of what was discovered reflected directly on Cameron. By far the largest part criticized the Quarter-

\(^{74}\) Weigley, 221.
\(^{75}\) Ibid., 203, 214.
\(^{76}\) Thirty-seventh Congress, Third Session, Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, I, 139, quoted in ibid., 205-206.
\(^{77}\) Kreidberg and Henry, 320-321.
\(^{78}\) Weigley, 217.
\(^{80}\) T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and the Radicals (Madison, 1960), 27-28, 37. Due to our recent experiences with Congressional investigating committees, modern historians will, no doubt, be less likely to accept the conclusions of these committees without supporting evidence.
\(^{81}\) Frederick Palmer, Newton D. Baker: America at War (New York, 1931), ii, 80-81.
master's bureau. It is true, of course, that as top man Cameron was responsible, but his errors were largely of omission rather than commission.

The House group specifically condemned Cameron for his appointment of men from outside the department to undertake certain jobs. They attacked his selection of Alexander Cummings to acquire supplies in New York shortly after war broke out. Cummings made some unwise purchases and wasted a not very large amount of money, but his errors seem to have been honest ones. His activities compare very favorably with the evidence the committee produced which indicated that the Secretary of the Navy's brother-in-law, George Morgan, who was appointed at the same time as Cummings, had made $95,000 in five months at the job Welles selected for him.

The Committee members also condemned Cameron's appointment of John Tucker to purchase ships for the War Department. They felt Tucker was completely inept. Historians have accepted this charge and used it to support their attacks on Cameron without noting that Stanton was so unimpressed by the Congressmen's revelations that he appointed Tucker an Assistant Secretary of War.

The investigators spent much of their time trying to prove that Cameron's appointment of Thomas A. Scott of the Pennsylvania Railroad as Assistant Secretary of War was a grievous error. Historians now feel that this was Cameron's best appointment and that Scott did much to improve the operations of the War Department. It may be wondered if Scott might not, given time, have assisted Cameron to create a really excellent war machine, just as Gustavus Fox aided the Secretary of the Navy.

Cameron was also accused of directing the use of the Northern Central Railroad (in which he and his family had invested and

82 "Report of the Committee on Government Contracts," II, ii, xv. There is a clear similarity between these appointments and the use of various civilians in World War I. "The official mind was hesitant as it faced the crisis. The non-official, not knowing enough of red-tape to be bound by it, stumbled over what it ignored, yet became a continuous prod upon Government action." Frederic L. Paxson, America at War, 1917-1918 (Boston, 1939), 117-118.
84 Ibid., II, iv-v; Meneely, 267; Ingersoll, 345.
which his son-in-law ran) for the transportation of troops to profit himself and his relatives. Weber, in his history of the northern railroads during the Civil War, clearly shows, however, that there were numerous good reasons for using the road and, furthermore, that its profits were higher during 1862 than they were when Cameron headed the War Department.  

Historians now dismiss the Committee's criticisms of the operations of Meigs' quartermaster bureau. They realize that there were many extenuating circumstances which the committee failed to take into account in their investigations. Strangely, while they discount this evidence, they continue to accept the Committee's disapproval of Cameron. Yet a close study of the voluminous testimony only reveals that Cameron and the department were forced by the lack of personnel, the need for speed, and the general stress of war, to resort to many new practices; as a result, numerous mistakes were made.

The most severely attacked of all aspects of Cameron's administration of the War Department was its performance in supplying arms. The problems here were much the same as the other difficulties faced by the department. There was a shortage of good arms to begin with; there was a lack of places to make new ones; there was a failure, at first, to realize the seriousness of the situation; there was doubt and conflict and confusion about how long the war would last and how many men would be enlisted; the head of the ordnance bureau, Ripley Van Winkle, as he was nicknamed, was slow, methodical, and insistent on excessively rigid inspection. As late as June 8, 1861, Ripley calmly reported to Cameron that though there

86 "Report of the Committee on Government Contracts," II, xv; Thomas Weber, The Northern Railroads in the Civil War, 1861--1865 (New York, 1952), 54. Weber notes that the net earnings of the road in 1865 were more than the gross earnings in 1861.

87 Weigley, 198ff.

88 Mainly, the committee criticized the War Department's purchase of supplies by private contract without public bidding, the placing of contracts by quartermasters with middlemen, and the use by Cameron of special agents. In each case, necessity or ease was the reason for the action. Though the committee was quite right in its anger over the corruption that did exist, much of its criticism was picayune and it completely failed to credit the department's accomplishments. It is interesting to note that many of the practices the committee disliked were followed during World War I. See Paxson.

89 See U.S. Senate, Thirty-seventh Congress, Second Session, Senate Executive Documents, "Report of the Committee on Ordnance and Ordnance Stores."
were many shortages, they could be made up by purchase from
government armories or private establishments.\footnote{Ibid., 343ff.}

Cameron must bear part of the blame for the failure to remedy
the arms problem more quickly. He hesitated to buy equipment
overseas because he feared a foreign war might interrupt its supply,
and because he believed that home manufacturers should be encour-
age\footnote{Nevins, \textit{War for the Union}, 352.} aged.\footnote{Kreidberg and Henry, 322.}
This reasoning, though clearly faulty, was better than that
of the War College in 1917 which declared, "Dependence upon
another nation for our arms and ammunition is contrary to the
independent spirit of our people."\footnote{Nevins, \textit{War for the Union}, I, 345, 351; the failure of contractors to fulfill their commit-
ments is noted in Cameron to Herman Boker, Nov. 25, 1861 (copy), Cameron Papers. Even
as late as January, 1862, doubts were expressed about the ability of manufacturers to deliver
on contracts, Wm. L. Helfenstein to Cameron, Jan. 15, 1862, \textit{ibid}.}

Even after the War Department began energetically to attempt
to solve the arms shortage, it made many mistakes. There was, at
first, the disorder and lack of system we have seen in other areas.
Exorbitant prices were paid under the pressure of need and due to an
uncertainty about costs. Finally, because of an all-out push for arms
and due to Cameron's shrewd doubts about the ability of suppliers to
deliver on contracts, too many weapons were ordered.\footnote{Nevins, \textit{War for the Union}, I, 350; Meneely, 262-263.}

Despite the problems and mistakes—and these are the most
important facts of all—the army was armed, an attempt was made
to stop state purchasing, loopholes were left in contracts so they
could be, and ultimately were adjusted, and "before the end of 1861
War Department contracts had been standardized and a good inspec-
tion service created."\footnote{Nevins, \textit{War for the Union}, 352.}
On the whole, historians no longer accuse Cameron of corruption in the War Department or excessive use of the patronage system. They do say of him that he was "flustered, inexact, forgetful, [and] had no ability to organize an efficient War Department." These charges merely echo Cameron's critics and overstate the understandable failures of the War Department. They ignore entirely the impressive attainments of the department while it was under Cameron's leadership. They further ignore the testimony of such men as Secretary of the Treasury Chase, who wrote, late in December, 1861, "if he [Cameron] had been left to administer his own department, without interference and with only the support and aid which he himself desired, I am confident there would have been comparatively little complaint." Among others, Chase is supported by Andrew Carnegie, who stated in his Autobiography, "the wonder to me is that order was so soon evolved from . . . chaos. . . ."

It is true that Cameron was not as hard-driving, efficient, or as ruthless, as Stanton. Nevertheless, Cameron handed Stanton a much more efficient organization than he had inherited. Stanton pressed for action more strongly, enlarged the department's building, and added to its personnel. He interfered with his bureau chiefs more, for, like Lincoln, Cameron tended to drive his subordinates with a loose rein. And not only did Cameron give them more freedom than Stanton, but he was more loyal to them as well. He protected them from attacks by Congress, while Stanton sacrificed them. Stanton made no major changes in the War Department

96 Nevins, War for the Union, I, 227.
96 Ibid.
98 Autobiography, 103. And see Governor Morton's comment in footnote 67.
99 On Stanton as Secretary of War, see Thomas and Hyman, 143ff.
100 Nevins, War for the Union, I, 410.
101 Weigley, 217.
102 "I am compelled to acknowledge the strict propriety of your non-interference in matters, which by your showing (I readily perceive) comes immediately under the cognizance of bureaus; and that you cannot interfere with them in the performance of their duties—whilst you hold them to a strict accountability." Wm. Coventry H. Waddel to Cameron, Dec. 7, 1861, Cameron Papers.
103 In his loyalty to his men, Cameron was, in one way, less a politician than Stanton. Whereas Cameron shielded his subordinates from the committee investigating disloyalty, Stanton fired a few to satisfy Congress. And while Cameron protected General Stone of the Ball's Bluff debacle from the witch-hunting Committee on the Conduct of the War, Stanton helped to persecute him. Thomas and Hyman, 147–148; Meneely, 321.
except for his blunder in destroying Cameron’s replacement system. The major changes, the difficult shakedown period, had been overseen by Cameron.

In the end, the only way we can, with justice, evaluate Cameron’s performance as Secretary of War is to consider what he had done. In two and a half months, he increased the army more than ten times. In eight and a half months it was enlarged more than thirty-five times from 16,367 men to 575,917. In the comparable period during World War I, the army did not quite triple in size, and in World War II it took a year to enlarge it slightly over four times.

In addition to overseeing this explosive growth, Cameron saw that the men were equipped and supplied perhaps better than any army in history up to that time. He did all this without the guidance of a mobilization plan and, for the first four months, with a grossly understaffed bureaucracy. Throughout Cameron’s term in office the department lacked sufficient men and was short of money because Chase either would not or could not provide enough. Yet, despite all this, an army existed by 1862 which Bruce Catton believes might, if properly used, have won the war that year. That there were errors, confusion, and delays was natural. As Kenneth P. Williams declared when analyzing the War Department’s achievement in his monumental Lincoln Finds A General: “No one who has had anything to do with a mobilization will be surprised either at the confusion or at what seemed at the time to be agonizing delays.”

While Cameron directed the department in its performance of these complicated tasks, he introduced various innovations. The revolutionary recruiting system he originated has been mentioned. He also appointed, early in the war, Dorothea Dix to helporganize

104 Thomas and Hyman, 143ff.
105 Frederick Phisterer, Statistical Record of the Armies of the United States (New York, 1883), 62.
106 Weigley, 204.
107 Ibid., 205; Kreidberg and Henry, 90; Nevins, War for the Union, I, 194.
108 Thomas and Hyman, 125. For the Department’s problems with Chase, see Meigs to E. D. Morgan, Oct. 10, 1861, O.R., III, i, 566–569; Meigs to Col. D. H. Vinton, Nov. 16, 1861, ibid., 649.
109 Bruce Catton, This Hallowed Ground: The Story of the Union Side of the Civil War (Garden City, N. Y., 1956), 128.
110 Williams, I, 120.
military hospitals and supply nurses for them. Shortly thereafter he ordered the creation of the Sanitary Commission. In December, he approved the formation of the very helpful United States Christian Association. He also favored the use of balloons by the Army and set up the Balloon Corps. And as Secretary, he began military control of the railroads and telegraphs.

Altogether Simon Cameron's achievements as Secretary of War compare very favorably with the performance of other cabinet members. At the Treasury, Chase was only beginning to show promise. The Navy Department was heavily criticized at the time, though it had not been pushed as hard by the pressure of events as the War Department. Not until late June, for example, did the Navy really begin to study the question of how best to defeat the Confederates.

Despite Cameron's achievements, he had to leave the War Department. Though Lincoln was loath to let him go, the criticisms of Cameron had ended his usefulness as Secretary of War. The generals had won no battles, so his accomplishments were not recognized.

111 Meneely, 132.
112 William Quentin Maxwell, *Lincoln's Fifth Wheel: The Political History of the United States Sanitary Commission* (New York, 1956), 7-8. When Cameron left the War Department, Bellows was sorry to see him go because Cameron "had taken pride in the commission as one of his own creations." *Ibid.*, 117. George Strong was pleased by his departure and happy over the appointment of Stanton. Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas, eds., *The Diary of George Templeton Strong* (New York, 1952), III, 203. The Sanitary Commission was soon to find that it had been very well off under Cameron. By May, 1862, "Sanitary influence at the War Department lay dead," and "Stanton's detestation of the extra-legal crew burned for all the world to see." Maxwell, 143.
113 Meneely, 134.
114 Maxwell, 87, 226-227.
115 Meneely, 128.
117 Bruce Catton, *Terrible Swift Sword* (Garden City, N. Y., 1963), 93.
118 Welles, *Diary*, I, 58.
119 Cameron urged his generals to move, but nothing happened. As he wrote to General T. W. Sherman, "I am constrained to believe that all the operations of our army have been too much delayed and there has been too great a desire to avoid responsibility rather than to force the enemy into early action. The fact seems to be overlooked that while we are preparing our enemy is also engaged in preparation, and that being in his own country, he can do so much more rapidly than ourselves." Cameron to Sherman, Dec. 26, 1861, Cameron Papers. Out in the Middle West, General Grant also realized that nothing could be gained by waiting, but he was not able to move forward until after Cameron resigned. Had he won his victories at Forts Henry and Donelson earlier, Cameron's position in the War Department would have been greatly strengthened. Catton, *Grant Moves South*, 72.
Distrust and dislike of him were weakening the administration and undermining the war effort. Cameron intimated to the President that he would like a foreign mission, so he was sent off as Minister to Russia, when that place became available, and Edwin M. Stanton became the new Secretary of War.\textsuperscript{120}

Simon Cameron left the post of Secretary of War feeling that "no man ever served with more disinterested integrity than I did, and I am sure in the end all will say so."\textsuperscript{121} So far, of course, this has not been the case. Most historians have stressed the mistakes and scandals which occurred during his administration and they have tended to hold him personally responsible for them. As we have seen, this judgment is probably somewhat less than just. Though Cameron was scarcely a great Secretary of War, and probably not even a very good one, he did accomplish a great deal. We must not blame him for failures that may well have been due to the nature of the War Department, the government, and the people of the North. It may be that chaos naturally accompanies mobilization in our society. Order may be an abnormal state in these circumstances. To accomplish the great tasks of a major mobilization requires revolutionary means and this, almost by definition, produces disorder. Stressing order and efficiency in such a situation, on the other hand, might slow down the speed with which preparedness is achieved.

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\textsuperscript{120} Nicolay and Hay, V, 128. \\
\textsuperscript{121} Nevins, \textit{War for the Union}, I, 409.